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THE EVOLUTION AND USES
OF THE STORIES OF THE PROPHETS

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All of the illustrations in this volume are taken from the program of paintings included in University of Michigan Library manuscript Isl. Ms. 386, a sixteenth-century copy of Hadikatü's-süada (Garden of the Felicitous) *of the poet* Fuẓūlī (d. 963/1556). *On this text, see the contribution of Gottfried Hagen to this volume; on the Michigan manuscript, see that of Evyn Kropf.*

حضرت خلیلک بر مسیح قی نسیه ذبح اسمعیل درکه بان
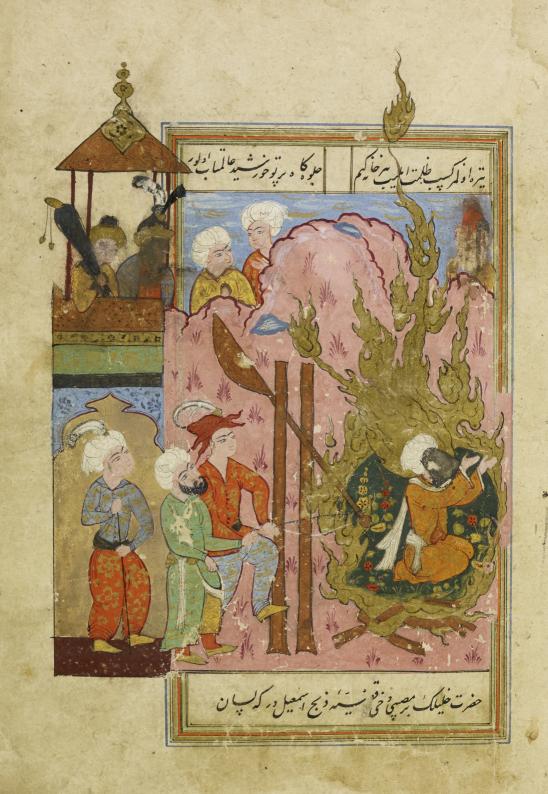
Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ as Genre and Discourse: From the Qurʾān to Elijah Muhammad

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with Marianna Klar and Roberto Tottoli

Abstract

The study of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, the Islamic tales of the prophets, has a distinguished pedigree in the Western academy, but much work remains to be done in the field. Although there have been numerous studies of individual prophetic figures over the last few decades, focused studies of specific works in the literary genre of *qiṣaṣ* have generally been lacking. Moreover, many studies of prophetic narratives tend to privilege exegetical works over other literary sources, including works in the genre of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* itself. Despite the apparent contradiction, however, I would argue that the broad dissemination of *qiṣaṣ*-type material throughout different genres suggests that *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* is better approached as a form of discourse reflecting specific ideological purposes, in particular the appropriation of the biblical tradition and positioning of Muḥammad, the Qurʾān, and Islam as the natural culmination of the Israelite prophetic legacy. As the field develops, clear desiderata remain to be addressed, such as the incorporation of Shi'i, postclassical, and modern reflections on the prophets into the discussion, as well as the full integration of different genres and types of material, for example visual culture, into the field. All of these expressions are tied together by the common aim of shaping the portrayal of these figures in ways that reflect the diverse understandings of Islam among particular authors and communities.

Introduction: Defining the field and its object of study

The study of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, the Islamic tales of the prophets, has a well-established pedigree in the Western academy. This issue of *Mizan: Journal for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations* coincides with the fiftieth anniversary of Tilman Nagel's 1967 thesis "Die Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ: Ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte," a ground-breaking contribution that has played a seminal role in the modern study of the subject.[1] The papers we present here were originally delivered at a conference convened in Naples in fall 2015 in anticipation of this important occasion, "Islamic Stories of the Prophets: Semantics, Discourse, and Genre" (October 14–15, 2015).

Nagel's work provided a solid foundation for future research, but it is one that subsequent scholars have built upon somewhat irregularly, and much work remains to be done. Unfortunately, the study of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ per se* has not flourished in the last couple of decades with quite the same vigor as the study of Qurʾān and *tafsīr*, though the study of *qiṣaṣ* has surely benefitted, at least indirectly, from the extremely energetic expansion of both of those fields in recent years. In this introduction, we seek to evaluate the state of the field of *qiṣaṣ* studies, locate the individual contributions to the issue in it, and point the way forward to possible future trajectories of development.[2]

Nagel's thesis discusses the ancient roots of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* among early traditionists, as well as highlighting important literary works in which this early (or allegedly early) material is gathered. He goes on to delineate the literary genre of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* proper, discussing major works carrying this title or something similar such as *mubtadaʾ*, *badʾ al-khalq*, and so forth. Here he draws an interesting distinction between more scholarly representatives of the genre and texts of a more "popular" nature; this distinction has been particularly influential on many subsequent discussions of the material.[3]

Nagel's thesis represents the first attempt to delineate the contours of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* both as a genre and a broader tradition in a serious and methodical way. However, his work could not have been undertaken

without that of a number of significant predecessors that helped pave the way before him, enabling his more systematic approach. Lidzbarski's pioneering thesis of 1893 has limited impact today due to being written in Latin, but exerted a significant impact on the fledgling field in its day; the emphasis here, as in many other studies of the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, is on cataloguing influences; the breadth of the sources adduced, not only in Arabic and Hebrew but also Syriac and Ethiopic (thus directing attention to medieval Christian as well as Jewish comparanda for Islamic *qiṣaṣ* traditions), is noteworthy.[4] Despite its evident shortcomings as a critical edition, Eisenberg's publication of the major *qiṣaṣ* of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Kisāʾī (ca. 6th/12th c.) in 1922–1923, the subject of his doctoral dissertation of 1898, allowed this important work to gain a significant scholarly audience.[5] Though its flaws are evident today, Sidersky's study *Les Origines des Légendes Musulmanes* was noteworthy in its time for making a serious and wide-ranging attempt to untangle the densely intertwined threads of Qurʾān, midrash, and later Islamic tradition as presented not only in *tafsīr* but in the chronicle of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and the *qiṣaṣ* collections of Kisāʾī and Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035).[6] This is to say nothing of the numerous works published since the time of Abraham Geiger (d. 1874) specifically focusing upon the Jewish and Christian "influences" on the Qurʾān, which of necessity contain much speculation on the background and parallels to the narratives concerning the biblical prophets in scripture. Here pride of place must certainly go to two titanically important works of German scholarship, Josef Horovitz's *Koranische Untersuchungen* and Heinrich Speyer's *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Koran*, arguably the most important contributions to the field inaugurated by Geiger's 1832 *Preisschrift* "Was hat Mohamed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?"[7]

Nagel's thesis has shaped the contemporary study of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* in numerous ways. Perhaps the most obvious and explicit contribution his work made was to draw greater attention to critical works of the *qiṣaṣ* genre such as those of Thaʿlabī and Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī (d. 454/1062). It is important to note, however, that this focus on classic specimens of

the genre was balanced by Nagel's keen appreciation of the larger tradition that crystallized in the specific works that constituted that genre, a point we will take up again momentarily. As noted above, Nagel—and other scholars who addressed the subject soon after the publication of his thesis—examined discrete texts carrying the title of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* or the like.[8] They considered such questions as how this literary genre related to others, how it coalesced out of other fields such as *ḥadīth*, exegesis, and historiography, and other issues of a literary-historical nature. Despite the decades of interest in this field that preceded Nagel, he and his contemporaries still had significant work to do of a fundamentally bibliographic and prosopographic nature, to say nothing of striving to conceptualize the field and represent this material's true significance in Islamic culture adequately.

As Nagel explicitly notes in the address he has contributed to this journal issue ("Achieving an Islamic Interpretation of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*"), when he originally embarked upon his research on *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, he rapidly ascertained that what was most necessary was not a simple cataloging of traditions "borrowed" and adapted from Jewish and Christian sources and subsequently transmitted in the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* literature, but rather a deeper understanding of what is properly "Islamic" about the Islamic tales of the prophets in the first place.[9] That there are larger implications of *qiṣaṣ* as a realm of interest to Muslim traditionists and authors, particularly of a political or ideological nature, is a point that is perhaps too easily lost. When speaking of "biblical" prophets in Islamic tradition (a subject taken up most often vis-à-vis the Qurʾān, the foundation of the tradition), the tendency to catalogue "borrowings" and discern "influences" without adopting a more nuanced understanding of processes of adaptation and reinterpretation sometimes still predominates.

The difficulties involved in approaching and characterizing this material, and for that matter defining or circumscribing *qiṣaṣ* as an object of study, become evident when we examine scholarship that actually investigates the portrayal of specific prophetic figures in Islamic tradition.[10] Many of these figures have been subjects of significant scholarly

treatments. These inquiries almost always start by examining the qurʾānic basis of Islamic understandings of the figure or figures in question, a natural place to begin given the foundational role of the Qurʾān in shaping Muslim understandings of the pre-Islamic prophets.[11] They then typically proceed to explore biblical, Jewish, and Christian parallels, precursors, and "influences," often laying particular emphasis on one or another body of late antique literature as a likely or possible vector through which older themes, concepts, and images were transmitted. Finally, they survey, with greater or lesser degrees of comprehensiveness, what Muslim traditionists and authors said and the narratives they transmitted about the figure in question. The precursors to the Qurʾān and the *Nachleben* of themes and narrative complexes in later Muslim literature may receive greater or lesser emphasis depending on the inclination of the author or the purpose of the study; understandably enough, some scholars gravitate more to the Qurʾān as the foundation of the tradition, while others orient themselves forward in looking at the development of the prophets in Islamic literature and tradition.

There have been a number of exemplary studies on specific figures over the decades since Nagel's work, though they have been few and far between. Likewise, it is worth noting that over the last twenty years many new editions of *qiṣaṣ* works have appeared, although they have yet to have a significant impact on scholarship.[12]

Studies focusing on prophetic figures in Islam range from antediluvian history (Schöck on Adam, Bork-Qaysieh on Cain and Abel, and Awn and Bodman on Satan/Iblis), to the era of the patriarchs (Firestone and Lowin on Abraham), to that of the Exodus (Wheeler on Moses), the Israelite monarchy and the time of the prophets (Mohammed on David, Lassner on Solomon and Sheba, and Déclais on David, Isaiah, and Job) and finally Jesus (Lawson, Khalidi, and numerous others).[13] These studies may focus on one episode from the life of a specific prophet or on their portrayal more broadly. Most of them draw on a range of material, though often privileging classic historical or especially exegetical sources (e.g., Ṭabarī).

Observing this broad pattern, we might note that if one wanted to

write a diachronic study of narratives about a specific prophetic figure in Islam, there are at least a dozen major texts one could readily consult to get an overview of what Muslims have said, written, and thought about Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus, and the like. Yet the core texts in which one would seek this material—at least if one were inclined to follow established scholarly precedent—are certainly not all works commonly recognized as being in the genre of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ per se*; in fact, usually very few of them are. The most wide-ranging works on the biblical prophets in Islam will certainly incorporate material from classic works in the genre, though these works appear as only part of the literary corpus upon which they draw. Actual works in the genre are seldom if ever given pride of place, and scholarly treatments with a particular emphasis on exegesis may omit them from the discussion completely.

Thus, upon reflection, the selective reliance of the scholarly literature on the prophets in Islam on *qiṣaṣ* texts appears peculiar: there is a whole corpus of sources explicitly devoted to the tales of the prophets in Islam that scholarly investigations of prophets in Islam tend to underutilize or avoid entirely. Likewise, despite the decades since Nagel's work, the study of the genre of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ per se* has been rather overlooked. Marianna Klar's *Interpreting al-Thaʿlabī's* Tales of the Prophets*: Temptation, Responsibility and Loss* remains the only monograph-level study of Thaʿlabī's literary strategies in his *qiṣaṣ*, considering both the author's signal concerns and comparing his material with that collected in a variety of other sources.[14] While Kisāʾī's work remains neglected in this regard, at least the production of new translations of his *qiṣaṣ*, as with those of the *ʿArāʾis* of Thaʿlabī, may serve to enable a broader audience to access the text and delve into its riches.[15]

What this trend in scholarship points to is the rather anomalous nature of the *qiṣaṣ* genre as a whole and the ambiguous relationship it has with the larger literary evidence for Islamic understandings and portrayals of the prophets. Many important texts in the history of the genre are simply no longer extant, and even printed editions may not be widely available. Other important sources of *qiṣaṣ* material—in fact, some of those most commonly cited as such sources, such as the *tafsīr* and

chronicle of Ṭabarī—are not entitled *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* or structured around the succession of prophets at all, but rather represent other literary genres in which significant amounts of such material are found, especially exegesis and history.[16]

The preference given to exegetical literature in studies of this sort—which, as noted above, is often entirely explicit—is understandable given the centrality of the Qurʾān in establishing the Muslim view of various prophetic figures.[17] It seems likely that many narratives about the prophets were generated in explanation of and expansion upon the Qurʾān's numerous references to these characters. Further, since the time in which scholars such as Nagel, Pauliny, and Vajda first discussed this material, there has been a tendency to see the roots of *qiṣaṣ* as anchored in the sermons and predispositions of the *quṣṣāṣ* or preachers of the early Islamic milieu, with their preaching and storytelling consisting largely of elaboration upon qurʾānic stories.[18]

As Thaʿlabī himself noted in the introduction to his *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, the *qiṣaṣ* of the Qurʾān were meant as edification and admonition for Muḥammad and his followers.[19] Not only was *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* built on the foundation of *qiṣaṣ al-Qurʾān*, but it is clear that qurʾānic paradigms, a parenetic approach to history, informed much historical reflection in the early Islamic community.[20] Historiography as well as *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* may thus be seen as an essentially para-qurʾānic enterprise, as is plainly evident from the amount of material on the pre-Islamic prophets and their communities found in major chronicles.[21]

The presupposition that much *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* was actually derived from *tafsīr* explains the prominent, even predominant, tendency to turn to commentary literature as providing the main literary corpus of first resort in modern studies on biblical prophets in Islamic literature. Further, unsurprisingly, classical Sunni sources are privileged as exemplars of that literature, as they are in studies of Islamic exegesis more generally. Many other sources of importance have thus been sidelined in contemporary scholarship, particularly *adab* works, minor or local histories, and numerous genres of Shi'i texts. This is to say nothing of the general neglect of a variety of post-classical works, excluded or dismissed because

they are supposedly derivative, despite containing unique traditions or novel perspectives on older material.

Among commonly cited works in studies of this sort, Thaʿlabī and Kisāʾī are undoubtedly the representatives of the *qiṣaṣ* genre cited most often.[22] Admittedly, students and scholars of *qiṣaṣ* do not have ready recourse to a particularly sizeable corpus of classical texts as exemplars of the genre, which serves to reinforce the predisposition to draw upon *tafsīr*, a genre in which works are vastly more abundant. Even so, there may be other contributing factors to the underemployment of other *qiṣaṣ* works in studies of particular prophets—or discussions of the larger genre—such as the perception that these sources are late, "popular," or contain nothing substantial that is not found in the exegetical literature or in the classic works of Kisāʾī and Thaʿlabī.

Further, and even more striking, is the lack of serious extended investigations of these canonical works, as already noted. It was long ago postulated by Nagel that Thaʿlabī's *qiṣaṣ* is the more 'orthodox' and scholarly distillation of this material while Kisāʾī's work—still of uncertain provenance—represents a more popular presentation of it. Whether or not this is true, the relationship of these works to their milieus, to other textual-traditional strands, and to each other (and in Thaʿlabī's case, the relationship between his *tafsīr* and *qiṣaṣ*) are all areas of inquiry that remain ripe for exploration.

The corpus of works making up the *qiṣaṣ* genre often seems to be in something of a state of disarray, with important texts only partially extant or recoverable only through later quotations. The preeminent example is the *Kitāb al-Mubtadaʾ* of Ibn Isḥāq (d. 767), which, though originally the first text in a tripartite cycle of works, was probably the first solidly dateable collection of *qiṣaṣ* material. A kind of English reconstruction of the text on the basis of later citations of Ibn Isḥāq's transmitted material has been available for almost thirty years in the guise of Gordon Newby's *The Making of the Last Prophet*; the reception of this work has been mixed due to ambivalence about Newby's overconfidence in recovering Ibn Isḥāq's material from later sources.[23] Other important texts are unpublished, such as the early and apparently influential work

of Isḥāq b. Bishr, extant in only one partial manuscript and so still conspicuously underutilized because of its inaccessibility; a critical edition of this work is a clear desideratum.[24] Some other works of significance have been published in scholarly editions, but are relatively inaccessible and so underemployed. This is the case with the works of ʿUmārah b. Wathīmah (d. 902) and Ṭarafī.[25] Likewise, despite being published twenty years ago, the major *qiṣaṣ* work of Rabghūzī (d. after 710/1331) remains known only to specialists, no doubt due to its relatively late date and its relatively obscure linguistic background, being one of few surviving witnesses to Khwarezmian Turkish.[26]

It is surely ironic that in the modern Islamic world, the two most widely available *qiṣaṣ* texts stand in many ways at totally opposite ends of the ideological spectrum of Sunnism. Thaʿlabī's *ʿArāʾis al-majālis* is regularly reprinted and has long been a very successful and widely disseminated representative of the *qiṣaṣ* genre, despite the fact that the *tafsīr* of Thaʿlabī has historically been sidelined by Sunnis.[27] Meanwhile, the other widely available exemplar of the genre—probably more readily available than even Thaʿlabī's text, repeatedly republished as well as being translated into other languages—is, in fact, a highly problematic representative of it. This is the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* of Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), which was produced during the modern period by extracting the relevant material from his world chronicle, *Al-Bidāyah waʾl-nihāyah.* One is struck by the fact that this popular *qiṣaṣ* is an artificial text derived from the work of an author whose view of the *qiṣaṣ* tradition was very often ambivalent, if not explicitly censorious, due to its purported function as a vehicle for *isrāʾīliyyāt.*[28]

What may we conclude from all this? It is obviously important that the trend towards publication of early, classical, and post-classical works in the genre should continue, and there is clearly a need for accessible editions and translations. The production of critical editions and translations is a form of scholarly activity that is perhaps less popular than it once was, likely because it seems to seldom be appreciated or rewarded adequately by academic institutions. However, advances in digital text representation and publication counterbalance this to some degree.

Further, the translation of works in a variety of genres of Arabic and other Islamicate literatures is currently undergoing something of a renaissance in English-speaking countries at least, judging by the number of important series in which such translations are being regularly produced. At any rate, simply making more texts of the *qiṣaṣ* genre available will greatly increase the likelihood of their being incorporated into scholarly discussions and perhaps even attract dissertation- or monograph-level attention.

There is a broader conclusion to be drawn from all this, however. The unusual nature of our canon of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* works, the distribution of relevant material across genres, and the general *modus operandi* of major scholarship on prophetic figures demonstrates, in a salutary way, the arbitrariness of the genre itself and its blurry boundaries. That is, without a significant corpus of exempla in the genre *per se*, but with a corpus of ancillary works that actually seem to provide a great deal of material relevant to the historical development of traditions about the prophets in Islam, we must recognize that *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* is only misleadingly or imperfectly characterized as a genre at all. It might more accurately be characterized as a discourse—one that has particular characteristics and reflects certain ideological tendencies, but far surpasses the bounds of any specific literary genre in which it is manifest, including that of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* itself.[29] This brings us full circle back to Nagel's thesis, in which—as noted before—we see a dynamic tension between *qiṣaṣ* as a genre and *qiṣaṣ* as a broader tradition.

A clear parallel to this is found in late antique Christian reflection on and use of the figures of the Israelite prophets. To understand how the biblical prophets were conceived and memorialized in Christian culture in this period, we would have recourse to material from numerous genres, including—and especially—biblical commentary and hagiography. There are precursors and parallels to actual *qiṣaṣ* works in late antique and medieval Christian culture, e.g., the Byzantine *Lives of the Prophets*, but to understand the larger narrative, discursive, and ideological parameters of Christian appropriation of these Israelite figures, we would have to go far beyond the bounds of texts like this one that were speci-

fically devoted to them.[30] This, we would argue, is the way in which Islamic tales of the prophets should similarly be approached, conceptualized as a discourse as well as a genre or discrete corpus.

The origins and ideology of qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ: *the case of Ibn Isḥāq*

Ibn Isḥāq's *Kitāb al-Mubtadaʾ*, arguably the earliest text that can be called a work of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, demonstrates the importance of a nuanced understanding of what *qiṣaṣ* is both as a genre and as a discourse right at the inception of the tradition. Ibn Isḥāq did not set out to write a *qiṣaṣ* work for its own sake, out of purely literary or antiquarian interest.[31] Rather, Ibn Isḥāq collected traditions on the prophets and incorporated them into a text that was part of a larger tripartite structure reflecting a complex historiographic, ideological, and religious agenda. Ibn Isḥāq is typically credited as the author of the first major biography of Muḥammad, but his intention was more ambitious. The extant version of his *Al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah*, known primarily through the recension of Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833), incorporates material from two of the three parts of Ibn Isḥāq's *magnum opus*, the initiation of the Prophet's mission in Mecca (the *mabʿath*) and the raids and military campaigns that established the early Islamic state under his leadership (the *maghāzī*).

Ibn Hishām's edition of Ibn Isḥāq's work omits the third component of this programmatic work, the section (or possibly originally discrete work) called the *mubtadaʾ*, which appears to have been a prologue to the life of Muḥammad consisting of episodes from the lives of the pre-Islamic prophets.[32] These episodes both foreshadowed elements of Muḥammad's life and mission and established that mission as the final link in a chain of divine guidance going back to Adam, validating Islam through a vivid portrayal of the continuity of Muḥammad's mission with Israelite precursors in particular.[33]

By excising the *mubtadaʾ* from what became the most authoritative account of the life of the Prophet, Ibn Hishām quite arguably severed the *Sīrah* from the context that endowed it with its most significant meaning in the early Islamic milieu. As the work of Wansbrough demonstrates,

prophetic biography was critical in embedding the emergence of Islam in a larger hierohistorical schema or *Heilsgeschichte*, as the central event in the divinely ordained unfolding of human history.[34] By prefacing the account of the mission of Muḥammad with accounts of his prophetic precursors, particularly Israelite precursors, Ibn Isḥāq was deliberately and overtly appropriating biblical history as part of the sequence of events culminating in the revelation of the Qurʾān and the emergence of the Muslim *ummah.* Augmenting the basic perspective already adumbrated in the Qurʾān itself, this approach further naturalized the idea that Islam, rather than Judaism or Christianity, was the teleological endpoint of God's long history of interaction with humanity, particularly as anchored in and mediated through revelation.

As Newby has shown, this new hierohistorical scheme was in direct competition with those of Jews and Christians. The supersessionist gesture of appropriating previous dispensations as parts of Islam's own history actually served to assimilate a well-established mode through which Christians approached history themselves; it also decisively reduced both Judaism and Christianity to mere prologues to the revelation of Islam.[35] Viewed this way, the broader *qiṣaṣ* tradition is the complement to the tradition of Muslim critique of Judaism and the Bible surveyed in Adang's magisterial study of the topic.[36] Polemic, criticism, and gestures of delegitimation are explicit in the latter, but only implicit in the former.

Ibn Isḥāq's students and transmitters edited his work down into a more manageable size, thus shearing the *mubtadaʾ* from its original context.[37] However, other authors and traditionists continued the work of collecting and arranging material on this subject, keeping Ibn Isḥāq's supersessionist vision alive. For example, it is worth noting that the unpublished *Qiṣaṣ al-Qurʾān* of Abūʾl-Ḥasan al-Hayṣam b. Muḥammad al-Būshanjī (d. 467/1075) of Nishapur presents episodes from the lives of the pre-Islamic prophets in sequence in the first part of the book and then an account of the life of Muḥammad in the second. Structurally speaking, this is the equivalent of Ibn Isḥāq's *Al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah* in condensed form.[38] If we recall the ideological implications of the *mubtadaʾ*

not just as a work but as an historiographic concept—based fundament-ally on the premise that the history of the Israelite prophets points ineluctably forward to the coming of Muḥammad and Islam—the ideo-logical nature of the discourse on *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* becomes transparent even when the linkages between the pre-Islamic prophets and Muḥam-mad, the Seal of the Prophets and final messenger, remain only implicit.[39]

At its core, *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* represents the transformation of the literary artifacts and symbols of an older culture. Once reflecting that older culture's distinctive historical context, dispositions, and concerns, this material was subsequently appropriated, transmitted, translated, preserved, augmented, and ultimately reoriented and transformed as it was assimilated to a new culture's historical context, dispositions, and concerns. Thus, in some sense, the place of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* in formative Islam may be thought to be analogous to that of the Greek classics in imperial Rome.[40] Just as the literary remains of classical Greek culture became a significant part of Roman culture and a fundamental part of Roman self-presentation, self-conception, and political legitimation, so too did the literary remains of the *ahl al-kitāb*, the Israelite cultural legacy as received and reinterpreted by both Jews and Christians, become a significant part of the culture of Islam and a fundamental part of Muslim self-presentation, self-conception, and political legitimation. Despite this integral dependence and thoroughgoing debt, Rome systematically demolished and absorbed many of the Greek polities in which what became the classical tradition had originally flourished; likewise, under similar circumstances, the early Islamic polity conquered, subordinated, and absorbed the Jewish and Christian communities that originally furnished Islam with many of its basic cultural components.

The Romans positioned themselves as the heirs to the Greeks both through narratives of continuity and succession (e.g., the *Aeneid*) and through direct assimilation of Greek traditions and literature, incorpor-ating them as their own patrimony. As an imperial culture, the caliphate expressed itself as the successor to the Prophet, but also articulated literary forms like *qiṣaṣ* that ultimately positioned Islam as the successor to Israel. This was accomplished in part by mimicking a similar discourse

in imperial Christianity through which the legacy of Israel was selectively constructed and represented in such a way as to appropriate the patriarchs, prophets, and kings as symbolic forebears while disinheriting the Jews as rival claimants to that legacy.

Thus, the corpus of traditions we might label *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* represents the literary remains of this process of transference and assimilation, as they often consist of Arabized and Islamicized versions of *kitābī* narratives of the prophets. More to the point, however, *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* is also an enduring testimony to the central animating concept that enabled the establishment of Islamic dominion over Jews and Christians—the basis of the claim of succession that presented the caliphate as the vehicle for the new dispensation that would replace Judaism and Christianity, giving religious and cultural meaning to what would otherwise have been a mere military takeover, with one occupying elite simply exchanged for another.

It is clear that *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* is at least partially modeled upon and appropriates a Christian historical habitus with significant precursors in authors like Eusebius, who makes some of the earliest ideologically coherent statements valorizing Christian empire as inheritor of the legacy not only of Christ but of the Israelite kingdoms and prophetic tradition, building on older Christian articulations of the Old Testament as proto-Christian truth.[41] Common to both imperial Christianity and Islam is the deliberate attempt to present the patriarchs and kings of Israel as prophets and sources of guidance (that is, *imāms*) while dismissing the Jews as marginal, heretical, and irrelevant.

Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ *and* qiṣaṣ al-Qurʾān

This adaptation of a critical instrument of supersession from Christianity was not initiated by early Islamic traditionists or authors like Ibn Isḥāq (although the question of his particular familiarity with Christian culture has yet to be thoroughly explored). Rather, the adaptation of this supersessionist tool occurs already in the Qurʾān, and so one might say that the attempt to appropriate the legacy of Israel and reorient

the prophetic and covenantal legacy so that it culminates with a new community with roots in Arabia occurred at the time of the foundation of Islam itself. As has often been remarked, the Qurʾān most typically employs the literary technique of reducing narratives about the pre-Islamic prophets to their most basic outlines, compressing and condensing them so as to conform to a basic template that makes the parallels between their missions and that of the qurʾānic prophet evident, though usually implicit.

An obvious example is Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ (Q 26), which presents accounts of the major events associated with the missions of qurʾānic-biblical prophets like Moses, Noah, and Lot alongside similar events linked to the careers of messengers sent to ʿĀd, Thamūd, and the 'forest-dwellers.' The chapter is rigorously schematic, with many of the particularities of the prophetic narratives as known from pre-Islamic biblical tradition stripped away and the episodes boiled down to their essence. The individuality of particular prophets, the idiosyncrasies of their portrayals, are irrelevant in the larger hierohistorical scheme constructed by the qurʾānic author.

One's conception of the relationship between the schematized proto-*qiṣaṣ al-Qurʾān* and the Qurʾān's revelatory context depends upon one's perspective regarding the problem of the historical Muḥammad. For the early Orientalists, it was natural to read qurʾānic references to the missions of the biblical prophets as admonitions to the Prophet's opponents and messages of consolation to Muhammad and his followers. The dominant hermeneutic brought to these qurʾānic stories was thus biographical: the thematic choices reflected in qurʾānic retellings are determined by specific events in the life of the community or the Prophet himself.

This approach fell out of fashion for a number of reasons, especially due to the advent of revisionism: insofar as scholars came to have serious doubts that Islamic tradition had conserved and transmitted much information that could be judged to be accurate and reliable in modern historical terms, this skepticism also called into question the appropriateness of using *sīrah* as an exegetical tool for explaining and contex-

tualizing references in the Qurʾān.[42] This applies not only to actual
historical events to which the Qurʾān supposedly alludes, but also the
larger biographical frame that would allow one to infer the deeper
significance of the particular narrative choices that inform qurʾānic
retellings of episodes from the lives of the pre-Islamic prophets. That is,
discerning echoes of the mission of Muḥammad in narrations of events
in the lives of Abraham or Moses or Jesus becomes an uncertain enterprise
if one is skeptical that the Qurʾān actually refers to events in the mission
of Muḥammad as we know them from Islamic tradition.

Despite the fact that such skepticism has now become reflexive in
many quarters in the contemporary study of the Qurʾān, a hermeneutic
of reading Qurʾān through the lens of prophetic biography has recently
been revived. An important forerunner of this tendency is Walid Saleh's
2006 article on the story of Saul in Q Baqarah 2:246–253, which demon-
strates quite convincingly that the pericope should be read in the context
of the Prophet's need to motivate his community to take up arms after
the *hijrah*.[43] More substantially, Tilman Nagel's magisterial *Mohammed:
Leben und Legende* represents a deliberate attempt to return to the sources
for the life of the Prophet and, after subjecting them to particular types
of critical scrutiny, employ them to recover important aspects of the
mission of Muḥammad as recounted in those sources as historically
reliable.[44] Nagel thus proposes to rehabilitate the type of historicizing
interpretation of the Qurʾān pioneered by Theodor Nöldeke over a century
and a half ago. His contribution to this issue makes his approach plainly
apparent (albeit in miniature), reading the qurʾānic portrayals of Abra-
ham, Noah, Moses and so forth as—in his own words—"a mirror reflecting
the biography of Muhammad."[45]

Strikingly, Nagel's approach has in particular drawn the criticism
of a number of scholars, though they themselves have sought to reha-
bilitate at least part of the early Islamic tradition and advocate for a more
positivistic outlook, at least relative to the revisionist approach.[46] Clearly
not all scholars will be willing to embrace Nagel's direct and unambivalent
correlation of qurʾānic passages on the biblical prophets with episodes

from Muḥammad's life as known from the *sīrah* tradition. However, this biographical hermeneutic has the great virtue of allowing us to construe the underlying messages of qurʾānic recollections of the prophets in a meaningful way, permitting a coherent explanation of why these stories were recounted in the Qurʾān and what imperatives drove their reshaping in line with particular thematic patterns. That is, the particular narrative choices that inform the *qiṣaṣ* of the Qurʾān often seem so idiosyncratic, so personal, that reading them as messages of consolation to the individual conveying them to his fledgling community, or perhaps as warnings to his enemies, seems not only like a plausible, but in some sense the most logical and efficient, explanation for those choices. It is perhaps easier to believe that these prophetic narratives were crafted to conform to the experience of the historical prophet who related them than that the major details of the *sīrah* were fabricated to conform to the literary pattern that provides a template for the condensed narratives found in Sūrah 26 and elsewhere—though both scenarios remain feasible.

The Qurʾān represents a watershed moment in the larger intercommunal history of prophetic narratives. It canonizes a set of narrative presentations with complex and varying relationships to older biblical, Jewish, and Christian discourse and establishes a new foundation for interpretation of both specific details of these narratives and their overarching meaning. *Pace* Geiger, the base text underlying these prophetic narratives presupposed by the Qurʾān is—except in very few cases—neither the canonical Bible nor a closed canon of rabbinic literature, but rather an older and rather diffuse discourse, the broader biblical-Israelite tradition as it was constituted by a variety of scriptural and parascriptural formations in a number of different languages extant during the centuries leading up to the rise of Islam.

If the Qurʾān assimilated older prophetic traditions by boiling them down to their essence, to their mere "bones," then the most characteristic aspect of the subsequent *qiṣaṣ* discourse is the tendency to restore flesh to those bones again by tapping into a fascinatingly heterogeneous

body of material—by swathing them in what an older generation of scholars casually, but problematically, termed *isrāʾīliyyāt*.[47]

Sometimes Muslim authors and transmitters of *qiṣaṣ* restored features from Jewish and Christian precursors in elaborating a skeletal qurʾānic narrative back into a fully fleshed-out body. At other times, they constructed accounts that do not hearken back to pre-Islamic precursors at all, but rather represent something new and distinctive. In still other cases, authors of *qiṣaṣ* narratives did not engage with the Qurʾān directly but rather chose to sidestep the qurʾānic account, the details of which they may have seen—however paradoxically—as unnecessary to the story they wished to tell. All of these forms must be considered as important parts of the broader *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* tradition.[48]

'Islamization' and diversity: the case of Shiʾi approaches to qiṣaṣ

In all their dazzling, kaleidoscopic variety, whether they build faithfully upon the qurʾānic presentation of a prophetic tale, are deeply engaged with ("influenced by") older *kitābī* precursors, or take their narratives in wholly new directions, one thing unites all *qiṣaṣ* narratives. Regardless of their relationship to what came before, in the eyes of their Muslim authors and transmitters, *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* are meaningfully Islamic, deliberately crafted in a meaningfully Islamic way, intended to convey what to their authors were distinctively Islamic truths. These narratives are always formed by—and viewed by their audience through the lens of—values, belief structures, literary forms, and political, social, and religious concerns inspired at their foundation by the Qurʾān, but decisively shaped by later developments in the evolution of Muslim society and community.

Later *qiṣaṣ* works often stand in the same relationship to older received materials as the Qurʾān had—reshaping those materials and subordinating them to a new framework, through a process we might call 'Islamization.' But while we must acknowledge that an Islamic veneer is always placed over these stories as they are presented in new, distinctively Muslim, contexts, there is of course not *one* such mode of presen-

tation, but rather a variety. To define *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* simply as the result of 'Islamization,' a reorientation of older material on the prophets in keeping with a set of identifiably Islamic values, traits, and cultural markers, presents a pitfall, in that we may be misled into implying that there is one monolithic set of such values, traits, and markers that all Muslims would recognize and see as authoritative.

This is surely fallacious. Rather, Islamization occurs through a dialogical process in which the particular significance of a story is determined in relationship to the specific concerns and predispositions of a particular audience—which are then shaped in turn, we might infer, by that story and the values it is tailored to communicate. We learn about an author's conception of Islam by how they reframe and reshape stories, but that conception is of course not static or universal, because the priorities of every Muslim author and audience are different. We must thus keep in mind that Islamization is not a single, uniform process, but rather takes a variety of forms and aims at a variety of purposes; *qiṣaṣ* traditions thus represent and reflect the diverse Islams that give rise to them.[49]

This insight becomes particularly clear when we consider Shi'i versions and uses of *qiṣaṣ* narratives. Shi'i contributions to the shaping of distinctive Islamic conceptions of the biblical-Israelite prophets have historically been underappreciated. This is partially due simply to the overall neglect of Shi'ism as an integral part of the study of Islam in the West.[50] But it is also due to the absence of a widely known major exemplar of the *qiṣaṣ* genre exhibiting a particularly Shi'i outlook.[51] This is strange, however, since, as Rubin argued long ago in his classic discussion in "Prophets and Progenitors," the impetus to collect and adapt stories of the pre-Islamic prophets first arose among the Shi'ah because of their interest in portraying those prophets essentially as precursors to their *imām*s.

It is also strange given that there are several lengthy and sophisticated works of Twelver and Isma'ili provenance that contain a significant amount of material on the prophets that have generally been excluded from discussions of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*. For example, Rubin's original

article of 1979 relies extensively on material from Khargushī's *Sharaf al-muṣṭafā*, an important eleventh century work on Muḥammad and the foreshadowing of his mission reflecting a distinctly Shi'i perspective. Despite the fact that Rubin and other scholars drew some attention to this work decades ago, it has seldom been studied, as it was long available only in a handful of manuscripts and in an edition produced as a Ph.D. thesis at the University of Exeter in 1986.[52]

An "imāmocentric" approach to prophetic precursors thus appears to have deeply impacted the *qiṣaṣ* tradition at an early date. Arguably, the emphasis on such themes by Shi'ah planted the seeds through which narratives about the prophets' impeccability, or the transmission of a divine prophetic light across the generations, came to full fruition as widely disseminated motifs commonly linked to *qiṣaṣ* narratives in a variety of Muslim literatures.

The particular sectarian concerns of Shi'i authors were writ large in recastings or recontextualizations of prophetic narratives in numerous contexts, and not only during the tradition's formative period. Gottfried Hagen's contribution to this issue ("Salvation and Suffering in Ottoman Stories of the Prophets") demonstrates vividly how Ottoman authors could present radically different understandings of prophetic history, focusing in particular on the pessimistic perspective of the Shi'i author Fuẓūlī. For Fuẓūlī, the lives of the prophets and *imām*s were characterized by suffering and struggle, the travails of the Alids and their faithful followers being foreshadowed by those of various prophetic precursors and their *shīʿah*s. For all, history was inevitably a vale of tears, and in Fuẓūlī's view, according to Hagen, salvation for the Shi'ah represented at its core a full, existentially transformative realization and acceptance of this fact. This perspective differs sharply from that of the Qur'ān, which uses the stories of the prophets primarily as symbolic validation of the mission of the prophet through whom it was revealed, and in which the prophets certainly face challenges and disappointments (as Muḥammad himself did, as some might argue) but are ultimately vindicated before the evildoers who resist and reject them.

Another example is discussed in the contribution of George Warner

("Buddha or Yūdhāsaf? Images of the Hidden Imām in al-Ṣadūq's *Kamāl al-dīn*"), which demonstrates a rather different type of Shiʾi approach to prophetic history as outlined by the pioneering Twelver scholar Ibn Bābawayh, commonly known as al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq. In Ṣadūq's work, *qiṣaṣ* accounts are deliberately framed so as to vindicate the emergent Imami doctrine of occultation. The text is significant not only for the explicit way in which prophetic narratives are shaped for specific dogmatic purposes, but also for the variety of complementary material Ṣadūq draws into his work. As Warner argues, the material on the Hidden Imām in the text interacts with and relates to that on the biblical/qurʾānic prophets in complex and intriguing ways, as well as being implicitly validated (on a narrative if not doctrinal level) through its parallels with legendary material Ṣadūq includes in his work, most conspicuously a well-known Islamicized cycle of narratives about the Buddha.

Shiʾi approaches to *qiṣaṣ* tend to be transparently sectarian, and so present us with prophetic accounts in which the purpose and effects of narrating *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*—of a particular literary use of the biblical-qurʾānic prophets—are explicit, or at least conspicuous, because of their overtly political nature. In light of their evident value to the field in making the means and ends of Islamization abundantly clear, it is striking that Shiʾi materials have long been understudied in the scholarly literature on *qiṣaṣ*, for example the numerous works of Ismaʾili *taʾwīl* that often invoke prophetic accounts as foreshadowing the lives of the *imāms*.[53]

However, it is important to recognize that *all* recastings and reinterpretations of *qiṣaṣ*, from the Qurʾān down to today, are in fact 'sectarian' on some level. Not only is it the case that all articulations of Islam are legitimate *prima facie* regardless of their acceptability to representatives of other articulations, and that no single form can be privileged as normative or 'original' above others; rather, more to the point, specific perspectives on questions of typically 'sectarian' concern such as authority, identity, and communal belonging are always present, whether they are writ large or rather tend to be explored only implicitly. Thus, any Muslim community's reshaping of older narratives and repurposing of prophetic figures as symbols can be thought of as 'Islamization,' but

this can only occur through aligning them with that community's ideas and attitudes about those questions of sectarian concern, which almost inevitably differ from those of other Muslim communities in important ways.

Thus, Sunni *qiṣaṣ* is no less sectarian than Shi'i *qiṣaṣ* in this regard, though the politico-communal implications of the former are perhaps harder to detect because we tend to naturalize the Sunni perspective as universal, essentially or typically 'Islamic.' The exegeses of qur'ānic narratives about the prophets by spokesmen of the Shi'ah or other 'sectarian' formations like the Nation of Islam are perhaps more explicitly presentist than that of other groups, or more closely attuned to specifically minoritarian issues, but *all* Muslim engagement with these pre-Islamic figures and the implications of their missions to Israel or other communities is on some level informed by the current concerns of the interpreter and their time. This is simply an extension of the contemporizing impulse already latent in the qur'ānic presentation of these figures.

The development of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā*ʾ is thus most accurately described as the history of complex processes of Islamization of prophetic narratives, usually drawing on a variety of predecessors, but with the caveat that Islamization can mean rather different things depending upon the context in which portrayals are framed, even upon the particular outlook and idiosyncrasies of the author in question.

Intertwined genres and the future of the field

Returning to the question of genre, due to the rootedness of *qiṣaṣ* in the Qur'ān, much material was obviously generated in the course of scriptural exegesis. The development of said material often followed complex and winding paths. Thus, as Carol Bakhos' contribution to this issue ("A Migrating Motif: Abraham and his Adversaries in *Jubilees* and al-Kisā'ī") shows, a significant transformation, even transference, of tropes and themes between accounts of episodes in the lives of the prophets occurred in the course of the tradition's evolution. As part of

an ongoing circulation of motifs first attested in Second Temple litera-
ture, these motifs appear in both Jewish and Islamic sources over a thou-
sand years later, adapted to new cultural settings and sometimes trans-
muted so that only distant, but still discernible, echoes of the originals
remain. This, Bakhos argues, is the case with the portrayal of an arch-
enemy of Abraham who appears in the guise of the diabolical antagonist
Mastemah in *Jubilees*, resonant a millennium later in the characterization
of Nimrod in the *qiṣaṣ* of Kisāʾī.

Notably, cross-fertilization between genres appears to have contin-
ued well after the coalescence of what became the classic literary forms
dominant in Islamic culture. Exegetical, historiographic, *ḥadīth*-based,
and belle-lettristic *qiṣaṣ* material did not remain confined to those genres
but flowed freely between them. Helen Blatherwick's contribution to
this issue ("Solomon Legends in *Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan*") focuses on the
prophetic legends in the popular epic *Sīrat Sayf dhī Yazan*, replete with
allusions to classic themes and scenarios from *qiṣaṣ* accounts of the
prophet-king Solomon; in the articulation of a new literary-legendary
account of the exploits of this Yemenite king, this popular *sīrah* exploits
the stock of material on Solomon that its audience likely took for granted
as common knowledge to provide an evocative subtext to its own narra-
tive.

As mentioned previously, communal boundaries were sometimes
as porous as genre boundaries. Shari Lowin's discussion of what appear
to be complementary allusions to a specific element from the story of
Joseph in two poems from al-Andalus, one Muslim and one Jewish ("The
Cloak of Joseph: A *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* Image in an Arabic and a Hebrew Poem
of Desire"), indicates not only that *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* could provide subtle,
rich layers of meaning in a variety of literary forms, but also that these
layers of meaning were the common property of, and accessible to,
authors in the Islamicate milieu regardless of their specific religious
identity or communal affiliation.

The Blatherwick and Lowin articles remind us that just as an
overemphasis on *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* as a specific genre rather than a broader
discourse has perhaps limited the field, so too has the exaggerated

interest in *qiṣaṣ* narratives as articulated in the exegesis of the Qurʾān to the detriment of explorations of prophetic themes and motifs as elaborated in other literary corpora. One of the most open frontiers of *qiṣaṣ* studies is thus surely the examination of the pre-Islamic prophets and their manifold significations in philosophy and theology, *adab* (especially post-classical literary arts in Persian and Turkish), the visual arts, and other realms of Muslim meaning-making.[54]

There is some precedent for a broader, more encompassing approach. The privileging of the exegetical over other areas colors much significant early Orientalist interest in *qiṣaṣ* material as primarily manifest in Qurʾān and *tafsīr*, from classic works in the field—for example Marracci, Geiger, Weil, and Speyer—all the way up to the present day—e.g., Wheeler and Reynolds.[55] But other trajectories have at times been manifest in scholarship, however. For example, in d'Herbelot's once-influential but now generally neglected *Bibliothèque Orientale*, the presentations of biblical figures in Islamic guise are undoubtedly informed by *tafsīr* materials (e.g., the commentary of Ḥusayn Wāʿiẓ Kāshifī, perhaps d'Herbelot's main touchstone for the Qurʾān and its interpretation), but they are also at times inflected by the author's familiarity with Persian literature and seemingly more 'folkloric' sources.[56]

As noted above, the gradual but steady progress in the appearance of works in new editions, mainly produced in the Islamic world and of varying quality, has as yet had only a modest impact in stimulating the growth of new approaches and focal points in research on *qiṣaṣ*. Clearly much remains to be done in realizing the potential gains from interdisciplinary approaches to the subject. For example, a number of publications in art history over the last twenty-five years have demonstrated that the pre-Islamic prophets were extensively depicted in the pictorial arts of Islam over a very long period of time, but this material has only just begun to be catalogued, let alone marshaled in the study of the larger *qiṣaṣ* tradition.[57] These publications present valuable visual resources awaiting broader analysis and integration with literary evidence. An interdisciplinary and integrative approach that made use of both visual and literary materials would be particularly beneficial because the ideo-

logically charged nature of visual depictions tends to be rather conspicuous, especially given their commissioning by and production for royal patrons. Visual materials pertaining to the pre-Islamic prophets thus provide us with vivid examples of a specific type of Islamization of biblical figures; the function of these figures as symbolic touchstones for religio-political legitimacy is usually rather overt.[58]

This journal issue aims to make a small contribution to advancing the field by showcasing new research in *qiṣaṣ* studies. The articles featured here demonstrate that current scholarship on *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* adopts a variety of disciplinary perspectives, reflects diverse concerns, and approaches the broader *qiṣaṣ* tradition in all its breadth and nuance, particularly focusing on the overlooked aspects of that tradition. Many of these articles discuss material from the post-classical period, especially historically neglected material from Shiʾi literature, popular epic, and modern literary settings. As the contributions of Ayşe Polat ("The Human Jesus: A Debate in the Ottoman Press") and Herbert Berg ("Elijah Muhammad's Prophets: From the White Adam to the Black Jesuses") show, significant reflection on and uses of *qiṣaṣ* in the twentieth century may occur in surprising contexts, expressing the unique concerns of their eras and originating communities, and may bear little or no resemblance to the classical articulations of their subject. In fact, in both of these cases, in the late Ottoman milieu of the early twentieth century and the African American milieu some decades later, not only do the authors elaborating new forms of *qiṣaṣ* largely or wholly neglect classical sources pertinent to their themes, but the Qurʾān itself may be largely or entirely absent from the debate. And yet, the result of reflection on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus by Turkish modernists or the main spokesman of the American Nation of Islam is meaning-making through the prophets that is characteristically, vibrantly, indisputably Islamic, and so quintessentially part of the *qiṣaṣ* tradition.

The future growth of the field may lead to such a degree of diffusion of approach and subject matter as to challenge the whole presupposition that there even *is* a field of *qiṣaṣ* studies, although it is clear what all the articles in this issue at least have in common. All prioritize the question

of what is distinctively Islamic in various Muslim reinterpretations of *qiṣaṣ* narratives over that of sources or influences; most of the articles here simply do not address the question of origins or precursors at all. In this sense, they epitomize the idea that *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* is not really about 'biblical prophets in Islam' or even 'biblical-qurʾānic prophets' but rather simply *Islamic* prophets—with the meaning of "Islamic" varying enormously from author to author and context to context.

In the end, this brings us back full circle to the work of Nagel we commemorate and celebrate here, in that his pioneering work on *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* as a genre originally aimed (and has continued to aim) at discerning what was or has been distinctively Islamic about the Islamic stories of the prophets. This journal issue hopefully makes clear that the question of how Muslims have articulated specifically Islamic expressions and forms of meaning through the stories of the prophets is of perennial relevance, from the Qurʾān down to the modern era, and that *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, as genre and discourse, is of significant value for examining conceptions of Islam itself in a vast diversity of Muslim communities and traditions.

Notes

All digital content cited in this article was last accessed via the URLs provided in the notes below on October 21, 2020.

1. Tilman Nagel, "Die Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ: Ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte" (Ph.D. diss., Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1967).

2. For a survey of recent trends in the field as regards the discovery and publication of primary sources, see Roberto Tottoli, "New Sources and Recent Editions of *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* Works and Literature," in Raif Georges Khoury, Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, and María Jesús Viguera Molins (eds.), *Legendaria medievalia: En honor de Conceptión Castillo Castillo* (Cordoba: Ediciones El Almendro, 2011), 525–539.

3. Cf. e.g., Ján Pauliny, "Some Remarks on the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* Works in Arabic Literature," trans. Michael Bonner, in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *The Qurʾan: Formative Interpretation* (Formation of the Classical Islamic World 25; Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 1999), 313–326; W. M. Thackston (ed. and trans.), *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'i* (Library of Classical Arabic Literature 2; Boston: Twayne, 1978), xi–xxvi.

4. Mark Lidzbarski, *De Propheticis, quae dicuntur, legendis arabicis* (Leipzig, 1893).

5. Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Kisāʾī, *Vita Prophetarum auctore Muhammad ben Abdallah al-Kisa'i*, ed. Isaac Eisenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1923).

6. D. Sidersky, *Les Origines des Légendes Musulmanes dans le Coran et dans les vies des prophètes* (Paris: Librarie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1933).

7. Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1926); Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Koran* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961); Abraham Geiger, "Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?" (Bonn, 1833).

8. These terms appear to have been largely interchangeable in the early tradition, as evidenced by the fact that the titles of works in the genre were mutable; e.g., Kisāʾī's text apparently circulated as *Kitab Badʾ al-khalq* as well as *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, and *Mubtadaʾ* was still known as a title

for works or sections of works dealing with the stories of the prophets.

9. Tilman Nagel, "How to Achieve an Islamic Interpretation of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*: On the Prophetic Stories of the Qurʾān."

10. For an indispensable overview of the tradition, see Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond: Curzon, 2002). A representative selection of material organized sequentially according to the chronological order of the prophets (thus mimicking an actual *qiṣaṣ* work) is Brannon M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran: An Introduction to the Quran and Muslim Exegesis* (London: Continuum, 2002).

11. For example, it is commonly observed that Moses is the figure most frequently mentioned in the Qurʾān, referred to over a hundred times, with hundreds of verses dedicated to recounting his story and various episodes pertaining to the Exodus and the revelation of the Torah. Narratives pertaining to the pre-Islamic prophets comprise at least a quarter of the Qurʾān overall, possibly more.

12. See Tottoli, "New Sources," 526–528 on the example of the new Arabic editions of Kisāʾī.

13. Cornelia Schöck, *Adam im Islam: Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Sunna* (Islamkundliche Untersuchungen 168; Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1993); Waltraud Bork-Qaysieh, *Die Geschichte von Kain und Abel (Hābil wa-Qābil) in der sunnitisch-islamischen Überlieferung: Untersuchungen von Beispielen aus verschiedenen Literaturwerken unter Berücksichtigung ihres Einflusses auf den Volksglauben* (Islamkundliche Untersuchungen 169; Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1993); Peter J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology* (Studies in the History of Religion [Supplements to Numen] 44; Leiden: Brill, 1993); Whitney S. Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblīs: Narrative Theology in the Qurʾan* (Harvard Theological Studies 62; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990); Shari L. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives* (Islamic History and Civilization Studies and Texts 65; Leiden: Brill, 2006); Brannon M. Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002); Khaleel Mohammed, *David in the Muslim Tradition:*

The Bathsheba Affair (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015); Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Jean-Louis Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans* (Paris: Cerf, 1999); idem, *Un récit musulman sur Isaïe* (Paris: Verf, 2001); idem, *Les premiers musulmans face à la tradition biblique: trois récits sur Job* (Paris: Harmattan, 1996); Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qurʾan: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford: OneWorld, 2009); Tarif Khalidi, *The Islamic Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

14. M. O. Klar, *Interpreting al-Thaʿlabī's* Tales of the Prophets: *Temptation, Responsibility and Loss* (London: Routledge, 2009). We might also mention the work of the Israeli scholars Tamari and Koch in editing and translating the *ʿAjāʾib al-malakūt* attributed to Kisāʾī, a work collecting popular traditions on cosmology and eschatology and so related to *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*. It should be noted, however, that the editors' highly idiosyncratic conjectures about the author and the transmission of the work (viz., that Kisāʾī was a convert from Judaism or a "Muslim-Jew" following a syncretic faith whose links to Judaism were suppressed in the subsequent redaction of his work) is far outside the consensus and would not be accepted by scholars in the mainstream. See the extensive (and highly opaque) comments in the introduction of Kisāʾī, *Kitāb ʿAjāʾib al-malakūt*, ed. and trans. Shmuel Tamari and Yoel Koch (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005).

15. For English and German translations of Thaʿlabī, see: *ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ, or, 'Lives of the Prophets' as recounted by Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī*, trans. William M. Brinner (Studies in Arabic Literature 24; Brill, 2002) and *Islamische Erzählungen von Propheten und Gottesmännern:* Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ *oder ʿArāʾis al-maġālis von Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm aṯ-Ṯaʿlabī*, trans. H. Busse (Diskurse der Arabistik 9; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006). Thackston's older translation of Kisāʾī into English, as well as Ján Pauliny's partial translation into Czech (*Abú al-Hasan al-Kisái, Kniha o počiatku a konci a rozprávania o prorokoch, Islámske mýty a legendy* [Bratislava: Tatran, 1980])

are now complemented by that of Aviva Schussman into Hebrew: see *Sipurei ha-nevi'im me'et Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allah al-Kisa'i* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2013).

16. Most of the relevant *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* material from Ṭabarī's chronicle is available in English in the first three volumes of the Bibliotheca Persica translation of the work. See *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume I: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989); *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume II: Prophets and Patriarchs*, trans. William Brinner (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1987); *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume III: The Children of Israel*, trans. William Brinner (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991). Additionally, although only the first volume of the planned translation of Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* into English has ever appeared, that volume spans much of Sūrat al-Baqarah and thus contains significant material pertaining to *qiṣaṣ*. See *The Commentary on the Qur'ān by Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī*, trans. Alan Cooper (London: Oxford University Press, 1987).

17. The aforementioned work of Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, exemplifies the underlying tensions that inform scholarly approaches to this material. Despite its explicit presentation as primarily oriented towards exegetical material, Wheeler draws on an impressive breadth of sources for the traditions cited therein, at least judging from the list of works utilized in the anthology that he provides at the end of the book. However, frustratingly, the individual traditions Wheeler cites are sourced, but he arbitrarily assigns said traditions either to authors of compilations or to major authorities to whom traditions are attributed, and in the case of the latter, no indication of the actual literary source is given. The exegetical-commentary structure thus dominates the work, and the reader is given little indication of the variety of literary contexts and frameworks in which this material was actually deployed.

18. See Johann Pedersen, "The Criticism of the Islamic Preacher," *Die Welt des Islams* 2 (1953): 215–231; Schwartz's introductory comments in Abū'l-Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ibn al-Jawzī's Kitāb quṣṣāṣ wa'l-mudhakkirīn*, trans. Merlin Swartz (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1971); and

Lyall Armstrong, *The* Quṣṣāṣ *of Early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2017). There has been relatively little attempt to investigate the milieu in which this material was first generated more closely or to rethink the paradigm through which we conceptualize its origins. On the former point, see Raif Georges Khoury, "Story, Wisdom, and Spirituality: Yemen as the Hub between the Persian, Arabic and Biblical Traditions," in Johann P. Arnason, Armando Salvatore, and Georg Stauth (eds.), *Islam in Process: Historical and Civilizational Perspectives* (Yearbook of the Sociology of Islam 7; Bielefeld: Transcript, 2006), 190–219. On the latter, see Michael Pregill, "Isrāʾīliyyāt, Myth, and Pseudepigraphy: Wahb b. Munabbih and the Early Islamic Versions of the Fall of Adam and Eve," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 215–284.

19. As has often been remarked, Thaʿlabī's *qiṣaṣ* begins with an elaboration of the various *ḥikmah*s ("wisdoms") that explain why Muslims should seek to learn and reflect on *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*; the second *ḥikmah* is that the earlier prophets provide a paradigm for understanding Muḥammad himself and the significance of his mission. See Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, trans. Brinner, 4; *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ al-musammā ʿArāʾis al-majālis* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1985), 2–3.

20. Here we might note the striking phenomenon of the emergence of an actual genre of books entitled *qiṣaṣ al-Qurʾān* in the twentieth century, modern works of a Salafi tendency that attempt to discard the traditional accretions (especially the so-called *isrāʾīliyyāt*) in the literature on the prophets so as to present the supposedly most authoritative and authentically Islamic portrayals of their missions and exploits. This is complemented by modern works that, while retaining the title *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, systematically and explicitly subject the traditional material on the topic to significant criticism, again in pursuit of obtaining pure and reliable accounts rooted in the Qurʾān; foremost among these is ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Najjār, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-ʿUlūm, 1932). On Najjār's work in the context of Egyptian intellectuals' attempt to reconfigure Islamic tradition for a modern, literate audience, see Israel Gershoni, "Reconstructing Tradition: Islam, Modernity, and National Identity in the Egyptian Intellectual Discourse, 1930–1952," in Moshe Zuckermann

(ed.), *Ethnizität, Moderne und Enttraditionalisierung* (Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte 30; Tel Aviv: Wallstein Verlag, 2002), 156–211. Cf. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, 175–188 on modernist approaches to *qiṣaṣ*.

21. On the impact of such qurʾānic conceptions as covenant, sin and punishment, and messianic redemption on Islamic historiography, see R. Stephen Humphreys, "Qurʾanic Myth and Narrative Structure in Early Islamic Historiography," in F. M. Clover and R. S. Humphreys (eds.), *Tradition and Innovation in Late Antiquity* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 271–292 and Tayeb El-Hibri, *Parable and Politics in Early Islamic History: The Rashidun Caliphs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

22. As noted by Tottoli ("New Sources," 526–528) two new editions of Kisāʾī's work—the first printed editions from the Arab world—have appeared, one in 1998 and one in 2008. Neither of these seems as yet to have had much of an impact or supplanted scholars' reliance on the much older and often deficient edition of Eisenberg.

23. Gordon Darnell Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muḥammad* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989). See Newby's comments in the introduction to the work (1–25), in which his assumptions about the original shape, sequence, and purpose of the work are laid out. See also the review of Lawrence I. Conrad, "Recovering Lost Texts: Some Methodological Issues," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113 (1993): 258–263, calling Newby's methodology into question to such a severe degree that he expresses doubt as to whether Newby's result could possibly resemble Ibn Isḥāq's original *Kitāb al-Mubtadaʾ*—"a perhaps vexed concept in any case" (250) —at all.

24. The Bodleian manuscript of Isḥāq b. Bishr is integral to two seminal articles by Kister on *qiṣaṣ* themes: M. J. Kister, "Legends in *tafsir* and *hadith* Literature: The Creation of Ādam and Related Stories," in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 82–114; idem, "Ādam: A Study of Some Legends in *Tafsīr* and *Ḥadīṯ* Literature," *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993): 113–174.

25. ʿUmārah b. Wathīmah al-Fārisī, *Les légendes prophétiques dans*

l'Islam depuis le Ier jusqu'au IIIe siècle de l'Hégire. Kitāb badʾ al-ḫalq wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ. Avec édition critique du texte, ed. R. G. Khoury (Codices Arabici Antiqui 3; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1978); Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī, *The Stories of the Prophets by Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī*, ed. Roberto Tottoli (Islamkundliche Untersuchungen Band 253; Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2003).

26. That is, a rarely attested form of written Turkish that marked the transition from Karakhanid to Chagataic as one of the dominant forms of Turkish in the region in the early Mongol period. See al-Rabghūzī, *The Stories of the Prophets. Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ: An Eastern Turkish Version*, ed. by H. E. Boeschoten and J. O'Kane (2nd ed.; 2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2015).

27. Saleh contends that Thaʿlabī's marginalization was due to the perception that he was a crypto-Shi'i, though the rationale that he was an unreliable transmitter of *ḥadīth* is often cited in works criticizing him. See Walid Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical* Tafsīr *Tradition: The Qurʾān Commentary of al-Thaʿlabī* (d. 427/1035) (Leiden: Brill, 2004), e.g., 216–221 on Ibn Taymiyyah's engineering of Thaʿlabī's rejection from the orthodox Sunni fold, leading to the tenuous position he occupies today, at least among Salafi scholars of *tafsīr* and tradition.

28. On the *isrāʾīliyyāt* problem, see below. The oldest printed editions of Ibn Kathīr's *qiṣaṣ* seem to go back to the 1960s, but little is known of the circumstances of its production. A recent presentation of Ibn Kathīr's material on the prophets in English appears to be a revised version of the *qiṣaṣ* in circulation in Arabic, produced by going back to the *Bidāyah* and re-extracting the material so as to emphasize the most authentic *ḥadīth* and exclude even more *isrāʾīliyyāt*: Ibn Kathīr, *Life and Times of the Messengers, Taken from* Al-Bidayah wan-Nihayah (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers, 1428/2007).

29. The term "discourse" is often bandied about without much critical reflection upon its significance or implications. Here I invoke it to signify a mode of communication, a way of talking about things through a well-established set of symbols that reflects, evokes, and reinforces specific constructions of authority. This is essentially the conception of discourse established in Lincoln's robust investigations of

the symbolic language of religious and quasi-religious ritual; see, e.g., Bruce Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

30. The Byzantine *Lives*, seldom if ever considered as a forerunner to *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, is available in a still-serviceable translation by Torrey: *The* Lives of the Prophets: *Greek Text and Translation*, trans. Charles Cutler Torrey (Journal of Biblical Literature Monograph Series 1; Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1946). Torrey's approach to the text reflects the conventional belief that it is by and large a Jewish work of first-century Palestine, but the more recent evaluation of Satran is that the text as currently extant must be considered a late antique Christian document. See David Satran, *Biblical Prophets in Byzantine Palestine: Reassessing the* Lives of the Prophets (Leiden: Brill, 1994).

31. Note that some traditionists roughly contemporary with Ibn Isḥāq do seem to have had more purely antiquarian motivations for collecting material pertaining to the prophets, typically in conjunction with a specific *topos* such as wisdom traditions or a particular geographical arena such as the Yemen. See, e.g., the (putatively fictitious or pseudepigraphic) *Akhbār Yaman* of ʿAbīd b. Sharyah: Elise W. Crosby, *The History, Poetry, and Genealogy of the Yemen: The Akhbar of Abid b. Sharya Al-Jurhumi* (Gorgias Dissertations 24, Arabic and Islamic Studies 1; Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2007).

32. The term *mubtadaʾ* may be translated "prologue," "foreshadowing," or "precursor" (Newby even suggests "Genesis,") which the *mabʿath* ("prophetic commission" or "sending-forth") and *maghāzī* ("raids" or "campaigns") follow.

33. See Uri Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shīʿa Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 41–65.

34. John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History*, foreword, translations, and expanded notes by Gerald Hawting (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2006 [1978]). See also Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 14; Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1998), 149–159 on the emergence of prophetic themes

as a specific form of historical reflection in the emergent Muslim community.

35. This conception of the supersessionist ideology that informs the *mubtadaʾ* is most clearly articulated in Gordon D. Newby, "Text and Territory: Jewish-Muslim Relations 632–750 CE," in Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astren (eds.), *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication and Interaction: Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 83–95, in which he draws attention to the parallels between Ibn Isḥāq's *sīrah* and the post-Islamic midrashic work *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer* as rival expressions of prophetic history, the latter reflecting Jewish resistance to appropriation. On the continuity of Christian habitus, especially polemical and supersessionist models of history, with the Qurʾān and early Islam, see David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2013), Ch. 4.

36. Camilla Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible: From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm* (Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science 22; Leiden: Brill, 1996).

37. Ibn Isḥāq's supersessionist vision was probably foreshadowed by the work of previous generations of exegetes and traditionists, who at least implicitly had a similar conception of the material they collected on the theme of Muḥammad's precursors, but Ibn Isḥāq's extended narration of prophetic history, drawing direct parallels between the Israelite prophets and Muḥammad, likely represents the first mature literary statement on this subject. Cf. Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims, A Textual Analysis* (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 5; Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995) on elements in the biography of Muḥammad constructed to validate his mission by presenting it as a parallel to or fulfillment of biblical prophecy.

38. The main manuscript witnesses to this work are housed in collections in Berlin and Princeton; the latter is now available digitally (Princeton Digital Library of Islamic Manuscripts no. 49y, http://arks.princeton.edu/ark:/88435/dn39x159x). Schöck, *Adam im Islam*, seems to have made pioneering use of both this work and that of ʿUmārah b.

Wathīmah in the edition by Khoury. As Hagen notes, similar to al-Hayṣam b. Muḥammad's work, later Persian and Turkish works also present episodes from the lives of the pre-Islamic prophets and Muḥammad in the same volume, making explicit the larger hierohistorical scheme that motivated collection of *qiṣaṣ* material originally but had over time become only implicit in classical Arabic sources.

39. *Qiṣaṣ/mubtadaʾ* materials were not always cleanly stripped out of the *sīrah* and *maghāzī* traditions; see the *Kitāb al-Maghāzī* of Maʿmar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770), which includes a narrative about Solomon building the Temple in Jerusalem by enlisting the service of demons, obviously out of place if one conceives of a collection of *maghāzī* traditions as being exclusively dedicated to the military campaigns of the early *ummah* led by Muhammad. See Maʿmar b. Rāshid, *The Expeditions: An Early Biography of Muḥammad*, trans. Sean W. Anthony (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 172–175. Notably, this account is preceded by another about the qurʾānic *ahl al-kahf* or 'People of the Cave' (166–171). Note also that El-Hibri, Parable and Politics, argues that qurʾānic *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* provided the template for all later historiography, including the master narrative of caliphal history (grounded in what he terms "parabolic narrations"), but that this connection became blurry over time as other genres of historical writing and conceptions of the past gained currency.

40. I owe the germ of this observation to Walid Saleh, who made this point during conversation at the concluding session of the Naples conference.

41. The earliest such revision of Israel's salvation is undoubtedly Stephen's famous speech in Acts 7.

42. For a convenient overview of revisionism's implications for the study of the Qurʾān, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext* (London: Routledge, 2010), Ch. 1; for the history of the proto-Islamic period, see Andreas Görke, "Prospects and Limits in the Study of the Historical Muḥammad," in Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers (eds.), *The Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 138–151.

43. Walid A. Saleh, "'What If You Refuse, When Ordered to Fight?': King Saul (Ṭālūt) in the Qurʾān and Post-Quranic Literature," in Carl S. Ehrlich in association with Marsha C. White (eds.), *Saul in Story and Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 261–283, 261. As Saleh succinctly puts it, the Saul pericope is "a stark instance of a nascent religious community's subordinating to its own ideological needs the religious-political history it considers to be its predecessor"; I would add only that it is just as accurate to say that here, as elsewhere in the *qiṣaṣ*, we see a later community actually *constructing* an older religious-political history as its predecessor.

44. Tilman Nagel, *Mohammed: Leben und Legende* (Munich: Oldenbourg Wissenschaftsverlag, 2008).

45. Idem, "On the Prophetic Stories of the Qurʾān."

46. The basis of the critique, by and large, seems to have more to do with Nagel's lack of engagement with contemporary attempts to articulate a reliable form of tradition criticism (except, perhaps, to dismiss them) than with his desire to rehabilitate positivism in general. See Gregor Schoeler, T*he Biography of Muḥammad: Nature and Authenticity*, trans. Uwe Vagelpohl and ed. James E. Montgomery (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 10–13 and "Grundsätzliches zu Tilman Nagels Monographie *Mohammad. Leben und Legende,*" *Asiatische Studien/Études asiatiques* 65 (2011): 193–209. Nagel's more recent replies to Schoeler's criticisms have yielded a wider field of rejoinders. See Tilman Nagel, "'Authentizität' in der Leben-Mohammed-Forschung," *Arabica* 60 (2013): 516–568; Gregor Schoeler, "Tilman Nagels '"Authentizität" in der Leben-Mohammed-Forschung.' Eine Antwort," *Asiatische Studien/Études asiatiques* 68 (2014): 469–496; and Andreas Görke and Harald Motzki, "Tilman Nagels Kritik an der Isnad-cum-matn-Analyse. Eine Replik," *Asiatische Studien/Études asiatiques* 68 (2014): 497–518. Gottfried Hagen's evaluation of Nagel's work on the life of Muḥammad is rather more positive: see "The Imagined and the Historical Muḥammad," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129 (2009): 97–111.

47. On the problem of the *isrāʾīliyyāt* and contemporary attempts to reorient scholarly approaches to the phenomenon, see Norman Calder,

"*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham," in G. R. Hawting and A. A. Shareef (eds.), *Approaches to the Qurʾān* (London: Routledge, 1993), 101–140; Roberto Tottoli, "Origin and Use of the Term *Isrāʾīliyyāt* in Muslim Literature," *Arabica* 46 (1999): 193–210; Pregill, "*Isrāʾīliyyāt*, Myth, and Pseudepigraphy"; idem, "*Isrāʾīliyyāt*," *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its Reception*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009–), s.v. (2016).

48. In still other cases, Jews and Christians may articulate narratives of prophetic figures that betray particular familiarity with either qurʾānic or Islamic accounts, possibly eschewing reference to the Bible or ancillary literature in the process of assimilating the particular recastings of the dominant Islamicate culture back into their literary heritage, translating it into a new linguistic, literary, and cultural register. Such Jewish and Christian *qiṣaṣ* must be considered a significant part of the tradition, though it is seldom viewed this way or integrated into scholarly conversations. Among the sources cited here, Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather*, is the conspicuous exception to this tendency.

49. At the same time, as the recent methodological intervention of Shahab Ahmed makes clear, scholars' recognition that there are and always have been 'Islams in the plural' does not mean they should capitulate entirely in the effort to define and describe what Islam has meant to Muslim subjects across time and space—for whom Islam surely means something in particular. See Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 129–152.

50. Despite its virtues, the aforementioned study of Ahmed is a particularly alarming example of the casual and pervasive marginalization of Shiʾism in scholarship.

51. A handful of Shiʾi *qiṣaṣ* works in Arabic have been published or are available in manuscript: see Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, 167–168; ibid., "New Sources," 529–530.

52. D. S. Abd Al-Rahman, "A Critical Edition of *Kitab Sharaf Al-Mustafa* by Abu Saʾd Abd al-Malik b. Abi Uthman b. Muhammad al-Kharkushi" (University of Exeter, 1986). The major manuscript witnesses are located

in Istanbul, Tübingen, and London. The printed edition of 2003 (Mecca/Beirut) does not seem to be widely available, though electronic versions appear to be circulating digitally.

53. On Fatimid *taʾwīl*, see now David Hollenberg, *Beyond the Qurʾān: Early Ismāʿīlī Taʾwīl and the Secrets of the Prophets* (Columbia, NC: University of South Carolina Press, 2016).

54. See the treatment of the *Kitāb al-Khuṭab waʾl-mawāʿiẓ of Abū ʿUbayd al-Khuzāʿī* (d. 224/838), an early literary work structured around pious exhortations attributed to various prophets, in Andrew Rippin, "The Place of the Qur'an in the 'Sermons and Exhortations' of Abū ʿUbayd," in Nuha Alshaar (ed.), *The Qur'an and* Adab: *The Shaping of Literary Traditions in Classical Islam* (Qur'anic Studies Series 16; Oxford and London: Oxford University Press in association with The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2017), 219–237. As Rippin notes at the beginning of the article, in this text different types of literary material that would subsequently form the basis of different genres appear together; here, under the encompassing rubric of *adab*, *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* seems to represent only one modality in which material pertaining to the prophets is articulated. Note also the deliberate eclecticism of Klar, *Interpreting al-Thaʿlabī's* Tales of the Prophets, which brings traditions in his work into conversation with comparanda from a wide variety of contemporary Muslim sources, including *Sīrat Sayf b. Dhī Yazan*, al-Qushayrī, al-Masʿūdī, al-Ghazālī, and the mirror for princes *Baḥr al-favāʾid*.

55. *Alcorani textus universus ex correctioribus Arabum exemplaribus summa fide* [et al.], trans. Ludovico Marracci (Padua, 1698); Abraham Geiger, *Was Hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume Aufgenommen. Eine von der Königl. Preussischen Rheinuniversität Gekrönte Preisschrift* (Bonn: F. Baaden, 1834), translated into English as *Judaism and Islám. A Prize Essay*, trans. F.M. Young (Vepery [Madras]: M.D.C.S.P.C.K. Press, 1898); Gustav Weil, *Biblische Legenden der Muselmänner. Aus Arabischen Quellen Zusammen-getragen und mit Judischen Sagen Verglichen* (Frankfurt a.M.: J. Rütten, 1845), translated into English as *The Bible, the Koran, and the Talmud: Or, Biblical Legends of the Mussulmans* (Harper's New Miscellany 15; New York: Harper, 1846); Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Koran*; Wheeler, *Prophets in the*

Quran; Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext.*

56. E.g., note d'Herbelot's discussion of the Golden Calf episode, in which the animate Calf is associated with Khiḍr, a linkage that is not only not found in Kāshifī, but in fact is not attested in any other source. Barthelmy d'Herbelot, *Bibliothèque Orientale, ou Dictionnaire Universel, contenant generalement tout ce qui regarde la connoissance des peuples de l'Orient, Lleurs histoires et traditions veritables* (Maestricht: J. E. Dufour & P. Roux, 1776 [1697]), 648.

57. See Na'ama Brosh with Rachel Milstein, *Biblical Stories in Islamic Painting* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1991); Rachel Milstein, Karin Rühr-danz, and Barbara Schmitz, *Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1999); Naama Brosh, *Kunst als Brücke: Biblische Geschichten in der Kunst des Orients* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 2004); and Rachel Milstein, *La Bible dans l'art islamique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2005). A significant amount of material pertaining to *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* is also in evidence in Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağci (eds.), *Falnama: The Book of Omens* (Washington: Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2010).

58. An analogy with the much better-studied *Shāhnāmeh* tradition may be apt. The appropriation and reinterpretation of Persian tradition by various royal patrons has been subjected to trenchant critique. For example, Grabar and Blair's classic treatment of the Great Mongol *Shāhnāmeh* demonstrates how the Ilkhans positioned themselves as the natural heirs to the legacy of Iranian antiquity through subtle visual strategies: see Oleg Grabar and Sheila Blair, *Epic Images and Contemporary History: The Illustrations of the Great Mongol Shahnama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). No single study comprehensively addresses Muslim identity-making through visual representation of Israelite history; the studies of Milstein and others cited above provide an indispensable starting point, though much work remains to be done.

نشاط تا ملنبه بلایی آسمعیلدن کچورب واول قربانی ذبح چالوب

Achieving an Islamic Interpretation
of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*

Tilman Nagel

Editor's Note

This is a lightly edited version of the keynote address Professor Nagel originally intended to deliver at the conference "Islamic Stories of the Prophets: Semantics, Discourse, and Genre" (Università degli Studi di Napoli L'Orientale, Naples, October 14–15, 2015). Although he was unable to attend the conference, he has graciously granted us permission to include the paper as part of this issue of *Mizan: Journal for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations*.

Preliminary remarks

Some fifty years ago, one of my teachers, Professor Otto Spies, proposed that I write a doctoral dissertation on Wahb b. Munabbih and his part in the dissemination of the so-called *isrāʾīliyyāt* in early Islamic literature and thought. Professor Spies himself had published a number of papers on literary motifs of Oriental origin and their reception in European storytelling. I am afraid he had something like that in mind when he spoke about Wahb b. Munabbih. But as soon as I had collected some hundreds of quotations of Wahb's alleged contributions to the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, I began to feel uneasy as I became suspicious about the core of the subject.

Of course it turned out to be quite simple to detect the origins of most of the stories that Wahb had transferred from presumably Jewish (and Christian) sources into an Arab-Islamic context. I remember very well the seven volumes of Ginzberg's *The Legends of the Jews*, which did not move from my desk for almost one year. Perhaps a meticulously elaborated catalogue of Wahb's statements regarding the history of the pre-Islamic prophets and a carefully compiled list of the probable or even possible sources quoted by Wahb might have met the expectations of Professor Spies. But would all this work result in a real, measurable contribution to knowledge? And if so, what could be concluded from it with respect to the history of early Islamic thought? I apprehended that the intended study would not answer these crucial questions.

From the point of view of cultural history (*Kulturgeschichte*), which was predominant in German research on Islam in those days, a catalogue of parallels between the Jewish legends and the materials handed down by Wahb to Muslim storytellers could be considered a sufficient result of such research. Yet in this regard, a result like this would not surpass the findings of Lidzbarski in his thesis published in 1893, *De propheticis quae dicuntur legendis arabicis*.[1]

In Lidzbarski's short study, the author outlines the methods of identifying the origins of the materials presented in the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, and gives some examples of how these materials became amalgamated with the stories told in the Qurʾān, which in the Muslim view, of course, passed for the 'original' versions. Nevertheless, due to the inconsistency of many of these versions, a great deal of the material deriving from outside was readily assimilated to the stock of qurʾānic stories. From this process, a specific literary genre came into being, the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*.

As a simple catalogue of parallels would add nothing fundamentally new to Lidzbarski's work, I decided to reorient my project: I no longer took much interest in particular stories and their presumably Jewish or Christian elements, but tried to describe the development of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* as a specific type of Arab-Islamic literature.

The qurʾānic qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ *as a mirror reflecting the biography of Muḥammad*

Working on the literary history of the legends of the prophets in Islam, I came across some interesting information about a manuscript preserved in Alexandria. Its title was "The Stories of the Virtuous" (*Qiṣaṣ al-akhyār*), and Wahb b. Munabbih was credited with its authorship. After a long time, I succeeded in obtaining a microfilm copy. When I started to study it, I felt it necessary to pay much more attention to the specifically Islamic religious message of the contents; otherwise it might be impossible to find a firm grounding from whence to achieve a satisfactory interpretation of the substance of these "stories of the virtuous."

For instance, as in the Bible, there are two reports here concerning the creation of Adam and Eve. What does that mean?[2] According to this manuscript, the transmission of the light of prophecy and the purity of Muḥammad's descent are prominent in the legends that Wahb is alleged to have told. These are essential subjects in the Sufi literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but I was not aware of that fact at that time.[3] Seeking only the Jewish and Christian sources of Wahb's material would not do justice to the matter of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* as a subject of cultural history, I knew for sure; however, becoming more and more involved in research on the political history of the early centuries of Islam after I had finished my doctoral thesis, I no longer worried about that.

It was during my work on the history of the Abbasids that I began investigating different passages of the Qurʾān pertaining to the *ahl al-bayt.* The meaning of this expression, and its changing in accordance with the political ambitions of the groups who would use it, led me to perceive that many stories Muḥammad tells about his predecessors do not intend to inform the audience about their lives. In fact, these stories sometimes do not speak of anything else but the experiences of Muḥammad himself. He makes use of those biblical materials just in order to draw attention to those dramatic situations in which he finds himself, in which he considers himself to be captive to a unique fate.

Let us have a look at Sūrat Nūḥ (71): *Indeed, We sent Noah to his people (saying), "Warn your people before there comes to them a painful punishment"* (vs. 1). Noah obeyed the Lord's order, but his people did not take his admonitions seriously. He complained of his failure: *"My Lord, indeed I invited my people (to truth) night and day. But my invitation did not increase them but in flight"* (vss. 5–6); *"Then I invited them publicly. Then I announced to them and also (confided) to them secretly"* (vs. 9) that it was necessary to be thankful to Allāh, the Creator. "But they did not accept what I said to them; *because of their sins they were drowned and then put into the Fire"* (vs. 25). *And Noah said, "My Lord, do not leave upon the earth an inhabitant from among the disbelievers! My Lord, forgive me and my parents and whoever enters my house as a believer... And do not increase the wrongdoers except in destruction"* (vs. 26, 28).

It is obvious that this *sūrah* does not actually relate the story of Noah and how he came to escape from being drowned in the Flood. Muḥammad seems to be sure that those people who are listening to him know everything about that. Muḥammad appeals to the audience to think about his message and then to arrive at the conclusion that it is high time to give up paganism and to become converts to the true religion. As for the research on the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* this would mean that it is—at least to a great extent—futile to look for the passages in the Bible or in other Jewish and Christian sources the Qurʾān might refer to in this or in that way. One should rather concentrate on elucidating the personal background which induces Muḥammad to recount a certain legend. In the early Arabic biographies on the Prophet there are many useful references that might be taken up for tackling this subject.

For instance, it is well known that in the last years before he had to leave Mecca, Muḥammad began to consider himself the reborn Abraham. Sūrah 2, which was revealed one and a half year after the *hijrah*, tells us that Abraham, after having built the Kaʿbah, implores Allāh,

> *"Our Lord, accept this from us!... Our Lord, and make us people who turn their faces to You (i.e., Muslims) and make from our descendants a Muslim nation! Show us our rites and accept our repentance... Our*

> *Lord, and send among them a messenger from themselves who will recite to them Your verses and teach them the Book and wisdom and who will purify them"* (Q Baqarah 2:127–129).

In fact, it is not Abraham who is speaking here. Nevertheless, this passage of Sūrah 2 will be preserved and repeated in the later *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*. It remains an element of the Islamic legends about Abraham, though it is not derived from Jewish origins, but sheds light on Muḥammad's self-interpretation in a certain situation during his career. I shall return to this point later on.

The life of Moses as told in the Qurʾān is a further interesting example of Muḥammad's use of biblical material. In this case, it is less obvious that Muḥammad deviates substantially from the traditional plot in order to insert his personal distress into the original story. In Q Aʿrāf 7:104–105, we are told that Moses is sent to Pharaoh and his people. Moses boldly addresses the tyrant with these words: *"I am a messenger from the Lord of the worlds. I am obliged not to say about Allāh but the truth. I have come to you with clear evidence from your Lord, so send with me the Children of Israel!"* Moses has been entitled by Allāh to produce some convincing miraculous signs that will make the disbelievers understand that Moses speaks the truth. For instance, he throws the staff he has in his hand to the ground and immediately it turns into a serpent. Frightened by this marvel, the eminent ones among Pharaoh's entourage say, *"Indeed, this is a magician, who wants to expel you from your land"* (Q 7:110).

In the Qurʾān, one comes across sufficient evidence for the Meccans' view that the messages Muḥammad announces to them consist of pure magic (e.g., Q 46:7). Furthermore, Muḥammad's Meccan enemies are said to be members of the council (*al-malāʾ*) of the city. In Q 7:109, it is Pharaoh's council (also *al-malāʾ*) that warns against the bad intentions of Moses. As is confirmed by Muslim sources and by research on the chronology of the revelations, Sūrah 7 was revealed about two years before Muḥammad's expulsion from Mecca. He had tried to find effective support in Ta'if, but these plans came to nothing. At the same time, he had succeeded in reestablishing his connections with the Medinan clan

of Khazraj. His grandfather ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib (d. 578) had passed his childhood there, and Muḥammad himself had visited his Khazrajite relatives when he was a boy. Now, as is well documented in the sources, he made contacts with some Medinan pilgrims, mostly of Khazrajite origin, who promised to change their way of life according to the prescriptions Allāh stipulates in the Qurʾān. Actually Sūrah 7 has to be read in consideration of these events.

The crucial question Muḥammad confronted the Meccans with in those days was whether they were ready to compromise with him concerning a reform of the pilgrims' rites. Muḥammad demanded a fundamental change in accordance with monotheism, and the Meccans for their part could not agree to that, because it would have meant the breakdown of the complicated system of tribal relations upon which Mecca depended, for better or for worse.

In consideration of these circumstances, Pharaoh and his people were quite right in being suspicious of the intentions of Moses and of the consequences which might result from his message. Who will hold his own in Mecca? This question is the main subject in Sūrah 7. In its first part, Muḥammad relates the stories of Noah, Hūd, and Ṣāliḥ; their peoples finally had been punished for their disbelief. Then Muḥammad turns to Lot; his people proposed to expel Lot, their prophet, from the city, and a similar situation arose, when Shuʿayb summoned the inhabitants of Midian to give up their pagan rites.

Then follows the comparatively detailed report on Moses and Pharaoh, which demonstrates the same question: who will hold his own in Mecca? In Q 7:123, Muḥammad makes Pharaoh point to the sensitiveness this question has already attained in Mecca at that moment; Pharaoh reproaches his followers for sympathizing with Moses: *"You believed in him, before I gave you permission. Indeed, this is a conspiracy"* to expel the people from the city. The Egyptians do not rebel against Pharaoh, they even bear the punishments Allāh inflicts upon them, and finally their troops are drowned in the Red Sea. In Q 7:137, Allāh sums up what has been discussed in detail and repeats His promise: *And We caused the people*

who had been oppressed, to inherit the eastern regions of the land and the western ones, which We had blessed...

What is the result of this fugitive glance at some of the qurʾānic *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*? They must not be interpreted as somewhat incomplete and clumsy repetitions of biblical legends, which were well known among the Jews and Christians of Late Antiquity. Instead of looking for the origins of the *qiṣaṣ* exclusively, one has to examine very carefully *how* Muḥammad makes use of this material. How did he refer to it in order to explain to his audience the role he felt himself authorized to play in Mecca? How did he tell the stories about Noah, Moses, Abraham, et al. to make sure that the Meccans understood the uniqueness of his mission, and might become willing to believe in Allāh and to subscribe to the fundamental political and social changes that would be concomitant to the acceptance of this belief? And last but not least, how were the legends made instrumental in instilling the fear of divine punishment to such an extent that disbelief would be abandoned? There is clear evidence in the Qurʾān showing that the Meccan pagans did not bother too much about his drastic warning. *"Stories told by the forefathers,"* they used to object (e.g., Q 6:25); stories that would not frighten them, because they never came true.

It is from such objections that we may infer the intentions Muḥammad must have had in mind when he appropriated the legends of his predecessors to himself. As for the research on the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* as an important part of Islamic literature, one is led to the problem of whether these special features of the qurʾānic *qiṣaṣ* are preserved in the different types of commentaries on the Qurʾān and in the books dealing with the *qiṣaṣ* that are written later on. May we not expect that these features become less obvious under the influence of the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, which must need wipe out the traits that had specifically indicated Muḥammad's personal fate?

The qurʾānic qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ *as reflecting a fundamental change in the religious tenets of Late Antiquity*

The difference between the meaning of the legends in their Jewish or Christian contexts and their new meaning with respect to Muḥammad's life on the one hand and the problem of the survival of this difference in the Islamic *qiṣaṣ* on the other should be considered as a subject of major interest. It does not pertain only to the *qiṣaṣ* as such, but also to the Muslim conceptions of the Prophet and his place in the cosmos, which is continuously created by Allāh. This remark leads us to a further question which touches upon the position of Islam within the religious history of Late Antiquity.

I shall tackle this problem by quoting a short passage from the Hebrew Bible. In Genesis 2:19 one reads, *And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl in the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof.*[4] Let us now have a look at Sūrah 2—called Sūrat al-Baqarah, the chapter of the cow. Allāh announces, *"I will make a vicegerent upon the earth"* (vs. 30). This divine intention rouses the objections of the angels, who ask, *"Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?"* (cont'd.) Allāh refuses to accept the angels' fear by referring to His superior wisdom: *"I know what you do not know"* (cont'd.) Sūrah 2 continues,

> *And He taught Adam the names—all of them. Then He showed (the created beings) to the angels and said, "Inform Me of the names of these, if you are truthful!" They answered, "Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us."* (Q Baqarah 2:31–32)

Then Adam informs the angels of the names he has just been taught by Allāh (vs. 33).

The difference between the text of the Hebrew Bible and the Qurʾān is striking. In the Bible, Adam is requested to look at the created beings and to find for each of them a suitable name without any assistance. In

the Qurʾān, the angels bear witness to the belief that created beings are neither entitled nor able to carry out anything of their own account. Working on the Islamic conception of Abraham some decades ago, I came across some treatises Philo of Alexandria wrote about major subjects dealt with in the Pentateuch. Studying these treatises, one is puzzled by the discovery that Philo shares important topics with the Qurʾān, whereas the meaning of these topics seems to be quite different in both sources.

As for the creation of Adam, Philo says in *De opificio mundi* that God presented all animals to Adam, for He wanted to know how Adam would name them. Of course God did not have any doubt about this, because He knows everything. Yet He was aware of the fact that He had endowed Adam with reason, which would make man capable of independent deliberation. God had endowed man with reason because He, the Creator, did not want to be responsible for evil and mischief together with man. For this reason, God examined Adam as a teacher would do, instigating the intellectual power of his pupil.[5]

Keeping these two versions in mind, we now turn to Abraham again. Recall that Abraham became the outstanding personage in the Qurʾān during the last years of the Prophet's stay in Mecca. In Sūrat al-Anʿām, which goes back to that time, Muḥammad gives a detailed report on Allāh's designating Abraham to be His messenger.

The story is well known; I can tell it in a few words. Abraham severely criticizes his father Azar for worshipping idols instead of the One Lord. Looking at the sky, Abraham is guided to relevant and sound arguments that would enable him to defend his monotheistic faith. Abraham observes a star and supposes it to be the Lord, but when it sets, he becomes sure that it could not be the Creator, because He does not cease to exist, but rather continues his work. Beholding the moon and thereafter the sun, Abraham knew from experience that they, too, were not identical with the Lord. In this moment he turns his face towards the One who creates everything, and he denounces paganism. He abhors associating idols with the Lord any longer, and by refusing to do so he has become a *ḥanīf*, a man who is devoted to the Creator exclusively (Q Anʿām 6:74–79).

At first sight one could infer from this report that it is Abraham himself who finds his way to monotheism. But this is not true. The observation of the phenomena of created nature will not guide man to believe in the oneness to God. *"If He does not guide me, I shall remain one of the disbelievers,"* Abraham admits (vs. 77). Paganism is disbelief because Allāh does not authorize polytheistic rites, we learn from the discussions Abraham has with his people (vs. 81). Monotheism is the true religion, because Allāh has authorized Abraham to proclaim it. Seeing the star, the moon, and the sun set is "*the evidence We granted Abraham for refuting the error of his people*, according to what Allāh says in verse 83. These words refer to Q 6:75, where He has declared, *In this way, We demonstrate to Abraham dominion over heaven and earth, and We wished that he be one of those who are certain (about that).*

This story was of course not invented by Muḥammad. He might have learned about it from Christian hymns, which must have been very famous in Arabia at that time. The original texts were composed in Byzantine Greek or in Syriac. But the contents of those hymns were translated into Arabic, too, and were disseminated by orators and poets, who used to label themselves as *ḥanīf*s. Umayyah b. Abī'l-Ṣalṭ (d. *ca.* 630) was the most outstanding personage among them. Muḥammad himself probably was accused of receiving part of the Qurʾān from that milieu, a charge he rejected by pointing to the undeniable fact that the Qurʾān was a pure Arabic text (Q 16:103). During the last years he passed in Mecca he had to underline the Arabic features of the *sūrah*s revealed to him by Allāh.[6]

As for Abraham's knowledge of the Lord, we again go back to Philo of Alexandria, who exerts paramount influence on early Christian scholarship. There are two treatises Philo wrote on Abraham. One of them is quoted under the Latin title, *De migratione Abrahami*. There Philo describes Abraham's journey from the land of the Chaldaeans to Haran and afterwards from there to Canaan. This migration is interpreted by Philo as an ascent from confessing a pagan idea of God to purified monotheism. The Chaldaeans had been famous for their thorough knowledge

of astrology, Philo asserts. They considered the stars to be the powers that rule the universe. There was nothing to allot good or evil to man besides the celestial bodies, they supposed.

Having left Chaldaea meant that Abraham forsook that erroneous doctrine in order to search for truth. He went to Haran, a place that according to Philo led Abraham to turn the object of his reflection from the material universe into the interior of his mind. Philo argues that as a place-name Haran derives from the Hebrew word *hor*, which means cave or (figuratively) the eye-socket. Knowing God no longer depends on knowing the material world as such, but requires one to uncover good or evil as inhering in every phenomenal thing of this world and as exerting good or bad influence on every human being. In Haran, Abraham recognizes that it is man's spirituality that guides him to true monotheism and makes him disposed to depart to Canaan, the place of the final knowledge of God, which is related to the moral decisions man has to make between good and evil. In the second treatise on Abraham, *De Abrahamo*, Philo gives an abridged version of that story, but he does not leave any doubt as to the gist of it: whosoever wants to know the Lord, has to find his way out of the Chaldaea of material perception, and then he has to set himself at liberty in the Haranian cave in order to reach true spiritual perception.[7]

Comparing Philo's treatises with Sūrah 6, one realizes that Muḥammad only tells us about the first part of Abraham's migration, when he leaves Chaldaea. Furthermore, in the Qurʾān, it is underlined that it is Allāh who guides Abraham and that Abraham's reflections count for nothing, if their result is not authorized by Allāh. Knowledge of the Lord cannot be achieved by man's own initiative.

This causes us to look back at the report on Adam's creation in Sūrah 2. It was not Adam who wanted to specify the names of the created beings before the angels; rather, he was taught all of them when Allāh initiated the proceedings of the scene. Abraham's being guided to the true knowledge of the Creator and Adam's being taught the names of everything point to the same fundamental idea: Allāh is the single, solitary

power in the universe and its only guiding force. His will and decree come true, and all human actions take place independently of any ethical intentions man might conceive.

In accordance with this conception of monotheism, Abraham has to leave Chaldaea, but he does not have to continue his migration. Having realized that the celestial bodies are nothing more than created beings, Abraham turns his face to Allāh exclusively, as we are told in Q 6:79. He does so because he is a *ḥanīf*, who does not associate created beings with Allāh. In Sūrah 2, which again is entitled "The Cow," we learn that Abraham and his son build the Ka'bah, the most important sanctuary on earth, where man is summoned to repeat that ritual gesture of turning one's face exclusively to Allāh in order to testify before Him that He is the only independent power in the universe—in short, to prove to be a Muslim (see Q 2:124–129; cf. Q 4:125). Jews and Christians would dispute among each other as to who might claim to be the true believers; one should tell them that the true believers are those who turn their faces to Allāh and to no one else (Q 2:112).

Why is the *sūrah* which declares Islam to be the only valid religion entitled "The Cow"? Trying to answer this question allows us to elucidate the distinctive features of nascent Islam within the religious world of Late Antiquity. One day, Allāh ordered the Jews to sacrifice a cow. The Jews reacted reluctantly, and it was only when Allāh had repeated His order to Moses that they were ready to obey. "They had come near to refuse (the sacrifice)" (Q 2:71). The *ḥanīf*s were sure that Allāh had become angry with the Jews and the Christians and therefore had cursed them. For that reason, the *ḥanīf*s were in search of a ritual which was suitable for their monotheism—especially because their rite must include the sacrifice of animals, they used to assert.[8] In Q Ḥajj 22:34–36, Muḥammad announces that animals adorned for being sacrificed belong to the objects (*al-shaʿāʾir*) used in Islamic worship.

The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity, Guy Stroumsa, the distinguished specialist in religious history, called his book on belief and ritual during the first centuries of the Christian era.[9] It is Christianity which promoted the sublimation or spiritualization of animal

sacrifices. The Byzantine Emperor Constans II, who reigned from 641 to 668, prohibited public animal sacrifices. This instance must be sufficient to shed some light on the background of the qurʾānic text and on the meager, yet instructive, source material on the *ḥanīf*s. They were pagans; this is the literal meaning of the word, which is of Syriac origin, and the Christians would consider them as pagans, though the *ḥanīf*s had been under monotheistic influence for an uncertain period of time.

The *ḥanīf*s themselves wanted to preserve some pristine rites, but they were yearning for a revelation which would assure them their deity approved of the ritual. They also were convinced that faith was not a matter of confession but a matter of birth. This conception became fundamental in Islam. Everybody is Muslim by birth, because it is Allāh who makes him grow in his mother's womb, and it is due to his parents' bad influence that he might convert to Judaism or Christianity.[10] Muslims do not *confess* that there is no God but Allāh, they *bear witness* to that fact, following a pattern initiated by Allāh, who Himself bears witness to the one and overwhelming truth that He is the single independent power in the universe that is permanently created by Him (Q 3:18).

Conclusion

The influence this dogma and its corollaries exerted on the qurʾānic conception of the history of the prophets is of paramount importance, as has been explained concerning Adam and Abraham. Combined with Muḥammad's practice to feel his own fate expressed in the biographies of his predecessors, this dogma of God's ongoing engagement with His creation functions as the formative element of the qurʾānic *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*.

Let me give you one more example. In the Christian hymns on Joseph, for instance in that one composed by Romanos Melodos, he is praised as the hero of chastity. Due to this characteristic, he passes for one of the personages anticipating Jesus. In Sūrat Yūsuf, the framework of the story is preserved, but it is Allāh who encourages Joseph in the decisive moment to keep to his purity; if Allāh had not done so, Joseph would have been seduced (Q Yūsuf 12:24, cf. 12:52). As for the relationship

of this story to Muḥammad's life, one has to regard verse 92, which implies that reconciliation with the Meccan disbelievers is possible: *"You shall not be reprimanded,"* Joseph says to his brothers, when they have come to Egypt and confess that they had done wrong.

In my opinion, in further research on the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, both the dogma of nascent Islam and the Prophet's use of the stories should be taken into consideration. In doing so, one will be guided to a firm foundation on which the history of the Islamic *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* can be erected. I am sure that this can only be done in close relationship with an analysis of the development of the theological conceptions of Islam on the one hand and with sufficient knowledge of the changing Muslim interpretations of the message of Muḥammad on the other. To sum up, I propose to accord the history of religious thought its fair share in research on the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*. Finally, there is a question which has to be kept in mind all the time: do the specific features Muḥammad conferred on his versions of the legends survive the influx of the *isrāʾīliyyāt* or are they drowned in it?

Notes

1. Mark Lidzbarski, *De Propheticis, quae dicuntur, legendis arabicis* (Leipzig, 1893).

2. Tilman Nagel, "Die Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ: Ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte" (Ph.D. diss., Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1967), 168.

3. See for instance Abdullah Bosnevi, *Le traité Abdi Efendi al-Bosnawi: Matâli al-nûr al-sunnî al-munbîʾ an tahârat nasab al-nabî al-arabî*, ed. Josef Dreher (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 2013), 55–68.

4. King James Version.

5. Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Koran* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1961), 53.

6. The Meccans hoped to unveil his ignorance by confronting him with legends of Iranian origin. The leading clans had close relations with Ctesiphon at that time. Muḥammad answered with the stories he tells in Sūrah 18, and presumably with the story of Joseph, which he added to the Qurʾān in Medina (cf. Tilman Nagel, *Medinenische Einschübe in mekkanischen Suren* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995], 35ff.).

7. For more details, see my contribution to the Festschrift for Martin Tamcke, "Juden, Christen und Muslime. Religionsgeschichtliche Betrachtungen," in Sidney H. Griffith and Sven Grebenstein (eds.), *Christsein in der islamischen Welt: Festschrift für Martin Tamcke zum 60 Geburtstag* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2015), 39–63.

8. Tilman Nagel, *Mohammed: Leben und Legende* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2008), 145, 290–296, 976ff.; idem, *Mohammed: Zwanzig Kapitel über den Propheten der Muslime* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2010), 79–82, 93–95 and French translation with introduction by Jean-Marc Tétaz, *Mahomet: Histoire d'un Arabe, invention d'un Prophète* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2012), 95–98, 109–112.

9. Guy Stroumsa, *The End of Sacrifice: Religious Transformations in Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

10. See A. J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la Tradition Musulmane* (8 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 1936–1988), 7.110 (s.v. *ḥawwada*).

اكا موافقت قلم لم جبرائيل ندى يا يعقوب البكت بكا كك للملائكه

يعقوب ندى يا جبرائيل بسه لم نعم محران يا بيلم

A Migrating Motif:
Abraham and his Adversaries in *Jubilees* and al-Kisāʾī

Carol Bakhos

Abstract

Rabbinic literature is often the starting point for those interested in locating intertexts and establishing relationships between Jewish and Islamic literature. Second Temple literature, however, echoes not only in medieval Jewish texts, but also in Islamic stories about the prophets. Moreover, the worldview underlying al-Kisāʾī's *Tales of the Prophets* is reminiscent of the distinct ordering of the world and the forces of evil depicted in *Jubilees.* This article makes a modest attempt to contribute to the complicated subject of the relationship between ancient Jewish sources and medieval Islamic literature. In light of broader considerations of the transmission of tropes, motifs, and traditions across geographic, religious, and temporal lines, an examination of the episode of Abraham and the birds in both *Jubilees* and Kisāʾī within the context of the broader battle between God and an evil force calls attention to how aspects of Second Temple literature reverberate many centuries later, even if faintly. While we do not want to draw a straight line between Mastema in *Jubilees* and Kisāʾī's portrayal of Nimrod, the latter presents us with an opportunity to entertain how compatible literary elements and images combined over time to tell the story of Abraham's victory over the forces of evil, and to assess the *qiṣaṣ* genre with respect to its theological framework and worldview, as well as relative to other forms of scriptural expansion.

Introduction

Comparisons are often made between haggadic literature and Islamic stories found in the *ḥadīth* and *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā*.[1] Given that at times narratives expand and characters are fleshed out in a similar fashion, it is difficult to avoid making such comparisons and discussing the relationship between Jewish and Islamic sources.[2] Efforts to forge a relationship—in whichever way this relationship is conceived—between Jewish and Muslim extra-scriptural narrative expansions have mainly focused on rabbinic material found in midrashic corpora and the Talmuds.

The relationship between early Jewish pseudepigraphic works and late rabbinic and early medieval literature continues to captivate scholarly attention, and for good reason. How does one account for the appearance of the literary building blocks of Second Temple literature in later Jewish and Christian sources? For example, how did the author of *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer* have access to pseudepigraphic works? Or perhaps we should ask, did the author have access to pseudepigraphic works? If so, in what language were they transmitted? Hebrew or Aramaic? Greek or Latin? Were they transmitted by way of Semitic translations of later recensions? As John Reeves asks, did works like *1 Enoch, Jubilees*, and the *Testament of Levi*

> re-enter Jewish intellectual life after a long hiatus, due to a fortuitous manuscript discovery or a simple borrowing of intriguing material from neighboring religious communities? Is it possible to trace a continuous 'paper trail' leading from Second Temple scribal circles down to the learned haggadists and interpreters of medieval Judaism?[3]

Moreover, can such evidence possibly lead to Islamic circles?[4]

In light of the dissemination of Jewish pseudepigraphic works in the medieval period, we should consider more capacious comparisons that include pre- and para-rabbinic material. As a gesture toward the

endeavor to explore how Second Temple literature echoes in medieval works, what follows is a preliminary literary analysis that compares the role the birds trope plays in the story of Abraham and his adversaries in Jubilees, a second-century BCE work that purports to be God's revelation to Moses on Mount Sinai, and in Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Kisāʾī's *Tales of the Prophets.* I hope my broader examination of the story of Abraham's encounter with an adversary, Mastema in *Jubilees* and Nimrod in Kisāʾī, will serve as a case study for interrogating the ways in which literary elements migrated across geographic and temporal lines, and the role they play in shaping the reception of scriptural narratives. The purpose here is not to locate a point of origination, but rather to detect resonances between Jewish and Islamic narratives over a broad span of time.

We will first assess the ways in which Abraham's arch-nemesis Nimrod functions as an anti-hero similar to the angel Mastema in *Jubilees*. We will then turn to two episodes involving Abraham and birds and examine their respective roles within each narrative arc. In *Jubilees*, whole birds are sent away and scattered; in Kisāʾī, severed, scattered pieces of birds are made whole. In both instances, however, the story functions to give expression to Abraham's power over a malevolent figure who challenges God's omnipotence. Both bird episodes, moreover, function to interpret a scriptural verse.

This analysis of how each episode functions in stories about Abraham's battle against an enemy will not demonstrate a direct relationship between these works—although that is not entirely inconceivable. Rather, it will highlight the literary parallels and distinctions that might, even modestly, contribute to our assessment of the *qiṣaṣ* genre with respect to its theological framework and worldview, as well as its relationship to other forms of scriptural expansion.

The *qiṣaṣ* al-anbiyāʾ *genre*

The Islamic tales of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*) are stories about the lives of the prophets of the Qurʾān. They flesh out the qurʾānic narrative with all kinds of fascinating and fantastical details about the

prophets' character traits and episodes in their lives. Many of the motifs and tropes employed in these accounts are also found in Christian and Jewish literature; some even date back to antiquity. Like other para-scriptural texts, these stories help shape one's knowledge and impression of figures such as Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Moses, and Jesus, so much so that often our common understanding of the prophets, as well as other characters in the prophets' narratives (for example Sarah, Mary, or Iblis), is actually a conflation of details gleaned from the Qurʾān itself and extra-scriptural sources such as the tales.

Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ also refers to a genre of literature and not just to a specific *qiṣṣah* (story). Furthermore, while one finds these stories in *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* collections, the stories appear in other genres of literature such as *tafsīr* (qurʾānic exegesis) and *taʾrīkh* (historiography). The different renditions disseminated widely across genres attest to their popularity and function in fleshing out the Islamic metanarrative and fostering theological and moral teachings of the Qurʾān. To be sure, some plots, characterizations, tropes, and motifs may have been in widespread circulation centuries before the composition of the Qurʾān, and were quite familiar to Jews and Christians. The manner in which elements of these stories were synthesized is therefore all the more important for understanding the role these stories played in the Islamic tradition of the medieval period, and how they relate to similar stories in Jewish and Christian literary traditions.

Narrative embellishments and adaptations are part and parcel of how stories maintain their cultural purchase and staying power throughout the centuries. This is certainly the case when taking into account the vast literary circulatory system of the Near East that includes not only accounts of biblical and qurʾānic heroes, but also their antagonists. Advances in the study of ancient Judaism, as well as early Christian and Islamic literature, have clearly demonstrated the ways in which stories in written and oral form migrated throughout the Near East. In the process, they were expanded and embellished to suit the desires and needs of those transmitting tales for purposes of edification

and entertainment.

Narrators (*quṣṣāṣ*; sing. *qāṣṣ*) were respected figures in early Islamic society, serving not only to recite the Qurʾān, but also to expound it in an effort to stir the piety of listeners and impart moral lessons. While the storytellers garnered esteem and respect during the early Islamic period, over time the liberties they took and excessive embellishments they made tarnished their reputations. Yet despite their marginalization, even today within the realm of popular culture, the stories themselves continue to ignite the imagination and interest of readers.[5]

The collection of tales of Kisāʾī stands out as one of the most popular medieval collections.[6] It narrates the adventures and miraculous works of the prophets, and in some instances their escape from imminent danger as well as their victorious battles against the forces of evil. Such is the case of the episode of Abraham's encounters with Nimrod (Namrūd). The story takes qurʾānic episodes about Abraham's clashes with non-believers and relates his powerful victory over Nimrod.

In the Qurʾān, Abraham has to contend with the idol worshippers around him who cast him into the fire, but he lacks a specific antagonist.[7] Adam is challenged by Satan, and Moses by Pharaoh, but Abraham has no evil counterpart mentioned by name. In Sūrat al-Baqarah, however, reference is made to an arrogant, blaspheming ruler who confronts Abraham and contends that he, not God, has power over life and death:

> [Prophet,] have you not considered the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord, because God had given him kingship? When Abraham said, "My Lord is the one who gives life and death," he said, "I give life and death." Abraham said, "Indeed, God brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west." The disbeliever was stupefied. God does not guide the wrongdoers. (Q Baqarah 2:258)[8]

Who is the leader who claims to be equal to Abraham's Lord? Although the Qurʾān does not identify him, extra-qurʾānic tales and exegetical

traditions not only give him a name—Nimrod—but also recount his wickedness in horrifying detail.

Abraham, Mastema, and the birds in Jubilees

The name of Mastema, a personification of evil, means "loathing," "hating," and most probably is derived from the Hebrew verbal root *s-ṭ-m*, meaning "to despise, to harbor hostility, enmity."[9] He is the chief angel of loathing, *sar mastema*, accorded a higher status than the other spirits. Mastema, referred to as Satan in *Jubilees* 10:11, leads the forces of evil in the world, and, like Satan in Job, negotiates with God.

Mastema plays a central role in *Jubilees*, in a work that, through its retelling of the story of Genesis and Exodus, focuses on the restoration of Israel. At every turn, his attempts to test faith in God, that is, to take Israel off its course toward restoration, are met with defeat. Whether tempting Abraham to disobey God's command to sacrifice Isaac or conniving during the Israelites' exodus from Egypt, Mastema is God's nemesis. He tempts humans to commit idolatry (Jub. 11:4–6), prompts God to command Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (17:16), and, on Moses' way down to Egypt, he threatens Moses's life (48:9–10 and 12). In short, on the playing field where good and evil battle for human souls, Mastema, the ruler of the evil realm, is God's quintessential archenemy.[10]

Let us look at a specific example that we will revisit when we examine Nimrod's encounters with Abraham in Kisāʾī. Just after the birth of Abraham's father, Terah, Mastema sends ravens to devour all the seed before it could be plowed:

> Then Prince Mastema sent ravens and birds to eat the seed which would be planted in the ground and to destroy the land in order to rob mankind of their labors. Before they plowed in the seed, the ravens would pick (it) from the surface of the ground... The years began to be unfruitful due to the birds. They would eat all the fruit of the trees from the orchards. (Jub. 11:11–13)

The story continues with the announcement of Abraham's birth and his awareness of the idolatry around him:

> The child began to realize the errors of the earth—that everyone was going astray after the statues and after impurity. His father taught him the art of writing. When he was two weeks of years [i.e., fourteen years old], he separated himself from his father in order not to worship idols with him. He began to pray to the creator of all that it might not fall to his share to go astray after impurity and wickedness" (Jub. 16-17).

Abraham would go out with everyone during the sowing season "to guard the seed from the ravens... "

> As a cloud of ravens came to eat the seed, Abram would run at them before they could settle on the ground. He would shout at them... and would say: "Do not come down; return to the place from which you came!" And they returned. That day he did (this) to the cloud of ravens seventy times. Not a single raven remained in any of the fields where Abram was. All who were with him in any of the fields would see him shouting: then all of the ravens returned (to their place). His reputation grew large throughout the entire land of the Chaldaeans. All who were planting seed came to him in this year, and he kept going with them until the seedtime came to an end. (Jub. 11:19–21)[11]

Even though there is no mention of Genesis 15:11, it seems that the story embellishes this verse: "When the birds of prey descended upon the pieces, Abram drove them away." In this chapter of Genesis, in a formalized ceremony, God affirms his promise to Abraham of land, nation, and blessing (cf. Genesis 12). He commands Abram (his name at the time) to do the following: "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young bird" (Gen 15:9). When Abram brought them, he cut them in half, placing them

opposite each other, but he did not "cut up the bird" (Gen 15:10). It is at this moment that "birds of prey descended upon the pieces, Abram drove them away" (Gen 15:11).

Jubilees introduces Abraham (Abram) as pious and unlike the people around him. He proves himself a leader and saves the people from famine. His fame was known throughout the land of the Chaldaeans. Abraham prays to the creator of all and in a sense is rewarded by being endowed with the power to ward off the birds. Mastema poses a challenge that Abraham, who turns to God, is able to overcome. As we will see shortly, there are parallels, despite obvious differences, between this episode in Abraham's life as depicted in *Jubilees* and that in Kisāʾī.

Classical rabbinic literature says very little if anything about Genesis 15:11. *Genesis Rabbah* 44.16, for example, mentions that Abraham drove the birds of prey away, and generations of Jews to follow will merit from Abraham's pious act. The rabbis do not interpret the verse as one of the trials Abraham faces.[12] However, the passage in *Jubilees* elaborates upon the biblical narrative and amplifies Abraham's prowess in warding off the birds, not only once, but seventy times in one day! Although it is not listed in the seven trials Abraham faces listed in *Jubilees* (Jub. 17:17–18), by thwarting Mastema, Abraham nonetheless displays his obedience and worthiness to cut a covenant with God.[13]

In later Jewish traditions there is no parallel to this passage in *Jubilees*, but as Sebastian Brock demonstrates, it has a curious variant that is preserved in Syriac sources (viz., the *Catena Severi* and the letter of James of Edessa to John of Litarba)[14] Brock argues that the schema of the Syriac form of the tradition is, in fact, anterior to the basis of the pattern in *Jubilees*, and in *Jubilees* it serves to introduce Abraham as the inventor of the plow. Whereas in the Syriac texts the ravens are sent by God as punishment for idolatry, in *Jubilees* they are sent by Mastema. Like the Aqedah (the "binding of Isaac") in *Jubilees*, which is initiated not by God but by Mastema, here too Mastema functions as a foil. The birds episode is presented as Mastema's opposition to God which Abraham meets successfully.[15]

Jubilees depicts a world in which, as Segal describes it, "heavenly forces and earthly nations are divided in a seemingly dualistic system... the evil divine powers rule over the wicked people, while the good forces govern the righteous."[16] Abraham is portrayed as one who disavows idolatry, turns to God, and fights against Mastema, the leader of the forces of evil. Genesis 15:11 may be the scriptural occasion for this narrative amplification, although reference to the covenantal ritual is explicitly lacking. Be that as it may, the story in *Jubilees* depicts Abraham as heroically foiling Mastema's attempt to disrupt the agrarian cycle, threaten humanity, and challenge God's authority. The birds episode functions as a trope for Abraham's power as well as piety.

Nimrod in Second Temple and rabbinic sources

In the book of Genesis, Nimrod is the son of Cush, and is a mighty hunter. Whereas the Bible tells us hardly anything about Nimrod, post-biblical traditions amplify and develop his character. Pieter Van der Horst maintains that Philo of Alexandria is the earliest post-biblical writer who connects the *gibborim*, the offspring of the sons of God who mate with humans in Genesis 6:4, to Nimrod, who is called a *gibbor* (one who is powerful) in Genesis 10:8–9.[17] According to Philo's commentary on Genesis 6:4 (*On Giants*, 65–66), Nimrod is an example of the sons of the earth who succumb to the nature of the flesh instead of being governed by reason. He writes: "For the lawgiver says, 'he began to be a giant on the earth' (Gen 10:8), and his name means desertion." Philo, moreover, provides an etymology for his name: "desertion." We find this notion in other traditions that explain his name from the Hebrew *marad*, "to rebel" against God, and in this sense we detect Philo's notion of Nimrod as one who deserts God.

Perhaps the earliest attestation of Abraham's encounter with Nimrod is found in Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, a work dated to the second half of the first century CE. Chapter 5 of this work opens with the statement that the sons of Ham made Nimrod their leader, and chapter

6 develops the story between Abraham and Nimrod. The leaders of the tribes of Shem, Ham, and Japheth plan to build a tower in Babel; however, twelve men refuse to participate out of devotion to the Lord. Abraham, one of the twelve, is locked up with the others, and is then cast into a fire.[18] As van der Horst notes, we cannot be certain whether Pseudo-Philo is the originator of the fire motif, nor can we claim that the confrontation between Abraham and Nimrod was widespread at the time since it is absent in Josephus.[19]

Rabbinic traditions associate Nimrod with Amraphel, a king mentioned in Genesis 14, and depict him as leading a worldwide rebellion against God, and as ordering that Abraham be thrown into a fiery furnace. In *Genesis Rabbah* 42:4, Amraphel is known also as Nimrod because he incited the world to rebel (*himrid*, a play on his name, *nimrod*). According to the Babylonian Talmud (b. *Pesaḥim* 94b), Nebuchadnezzar is a descendant of Nimrod.[20] Elsewhere in the Talmud (b. *Ḥagigah* 53b) he is associated with the Tower of Babel (or "Temple of Nimrod"),[21] and other rabbinic sources refer to Nimrod casting Abraham into the fire.[22] *Leviticus Rabbah* 27:5 and *Ecclesiastes Rabbah* 3:18 mention that Nimrod pursued Abraham. *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 2:27 refers to Abraham's encounter with Amraphel, his arrest, and his trial by fire.[23]

Throughout the medieval period, Nimrod was depicted as a giant who built the tower of Babel, and his image as God's archenemy grew in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic circles. Van der Horst writes:

> Haggada in which Nimrod is mentioned explicitly is found for the first time in the first century CE. But since we know from *Jubilees*, from Pseudo-Eupolemus, and from Philo the epic poet, that already in the second century BCE there was Abraham haggada in which a connection had been made between Abraham and the giants, and between the tower of Babel and Abraham, it is hardly thinkable that the Nimrod connection was made only two centuries later.[24]

He continues by considering that one of the earliest factors that

contributed to this process was "the circumstance that the biblical text called Nimrod a *gibbor/gigas*, using the same word as in Genesis 6:4 for the offspring of the rebelling sons of God."[25]

I would also suggest the possibility that the more fully developed Nimrod resonates with Mastema, who asks God (Jub. 10:8–9) to leave under his domain some of the giants, that is, the Nephilim of Genesis 6:4. While one is hard pressed to regard Mastema as a prototype, one cannot ignore factors that evoke comparison, namely that both are leaders of wicked forces that clash against Abraham in a series of challenges, one of which involves birds. The figure of Nimrod as portrayed in Kisāʾī's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* helps us to draw that comparison.

Abraham, Nimrod, and the birds in the tales of the prophets

In Islamic literature, Nimrod and Pharoah symbolize the boastful, arrogant ruler.[26] In Kisāʾī's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, Nimrod is a tyrant, a giant (*jabbār* in Arabic). He is the unrelenting force of evil that keeps humanity from righteousness. He builds a palace, slays the first-born male, and dies after a gnat enters his brain and gnaws at it for four hundred years. That he dies from a gnat entering his nostril and gnawing on his brain is found in many Islamic tales about him, and parallels the well-known story of the demise of Titus in rabbinic sources.[27]

Islamic collections of the tales of the prophets do not all include the same stories, and renditions differ from collection to collection despite common threads. For example, the depictions of Nimrod of Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035) and Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) include tales of the building of the tower of Babel not found in Kisāʾī, but as noted earlier, Nimrod is identified in rabbinic sources with the tower .28 Kisāʾī's characterization of Nimrod, however, is rather elaborate, and his rendition of Nimrod's battle against Abraham is one of the most captivating tales among the collections.29 His Nimrod takes on a similar function as Mastema in *Jubilees*—the primary force of evil that relentlessly attempts to keep humanity from righteousness. One specific element of the story

as Kisāʾī frames it resonates with Mastema's attempts to wage war against God: the episode of Abraham with birds. Indeed, while in rabbinic literature Nimrod is portrayed in opposition to God, the appearance of the episode of Abraham and the birds within Kisāʾī's larger Nimrod account actually parallels that of the narrative of Mastema thwarting God and Abraham vanquishing his enemy in *Jubilees.*

To be sure, unlike Mastema who is an angel, a leader of wicked spirits, Kisāʾī depicts Nimrod as human, although one born accursed. When his mother delivered him at birth, "a thin serpent came out of her womb and entered the boy's nose." When she took him into the wilderness to a shepherd to raise him, even the cattle would not go near the boy. The "black, flat-nosed boy" was suckled by a tigress.[30] When he grew up, he became a highway robber, plundered towns and cities, stole from people, and took women captive.[31] Iblis (Satan) teaches him the sciences of sorcery and soothsaying. He deems himself the creator of all and expects humans to worship him. He distributes food to his subjects, dismissing, however, without supply those who refuse to confess his supremacy over the God of Abraham.

Kisāʾī's story of Abraham and Nimrod is relatively long and elaborate. Nimrod asks Abraham to follow his religion and worship him, but Abraham refuses, thus setting off a series of contests between Nimrod and Abraham. The story expands upon the qurʾānic passage in Surat al-Baqarah:

> [Prophet,] have you not considered the one who argued with Abraham about his Lord, because God had given him kingship? When Abraham said, "My Lord is the one who gives life and death," he said, "I give life and death." Abraham said, "Indeed God brings up the sun from the east, so bring it up from the west." The disbeliever was stupefied. God does not guide the wrongdoers. Or take the one who passed by a ruined town. He said, "How will God give this [town] life when it has died?"… And when Abraham said, "My Lord, show me how You give life to the dead," He said, "Do you not believe, then?" "Yes," said

Abraham, "but just to put my heart at rest." So God said, "Take four birds and train them to come back to you. Then place them on separate hilltops, call them back, and they will immediately come back to you; know that God is all powerful and wise." (Q 2:258–260)

The Qurʾān identifies neither the disbeliever nor the passerby. Moreover, there is no context given for Abraham's request to God for an explanation of the resurrection.

In Kisāʾī, the qurʾānic passage is contextualized within the broader battle between Nimrod and Abraham. Nimrod boldly asserts that his kingdom is greater than God's; a debate as to who has greater power ensues. Nimrod's competition for sovereignty even extends to the non-human realm. A beautiful cow proclaims, "Enemy of God, were I given leave by my Lord, I would gore you so that afterwards you would never be able to eat again!"[32] He kills the cow but God restores it to life.

The story continues: "Abraham turned and saw a slave-girl in the palace. She was nursing Nimrod's small daughter. Suddenly the girl leapt from her mother's lap, faced Nimrod and said, 'Father, this is God's prophet Abraham.' And Nimrod ordered her cut to pieces."[33] This is in contrast to God who resurrects the dead, which is mentioned several times in Abraham's encounters with Nimrod, but also throughout the work as a whole. Within this battle of words and deeds we read:

[Abraham said:] "Verily God is not incapable of anything; he is capable of all things." "What do you know of His power?" asked Nimrod. "*My Lord is the one who giveth life, and killeth,*" (Q 2:258) said Abraham. "I give life, and kill," said Nimrod. "How can you do that?" asked Abraham. "I set free from prison men sentenced to death, and I kill men not sentenced to die." "My Lord does not give life or cause death thus," said Abraham. "He quickens the dead and He causes death to the living yet kills them not. But, O Nimrod, god bringeth the sun from the east, now do thou bring it from the west." Whereupon Nimrod was

confounded. Then Abraham called upon his Lord and said, "*O Lord, show me how thou wilt raise the dead*" (Q 2:260).

Kisāʾī adds colorful detail to God's commands to Abraham to take four birds and bring them back to him:

> Abraham took a white cock, a black raven, a green dove, and a peacock, killed them, cut off their heads, mixed up the blood and feathers, and scattered their flesh on four mountain tops. He then called them, and the heads went out of his hands, each returned to its own body, saying, "There is no god but God; Abraham is God's apostle to Nimrod and his people."[34]

The qurʾānic verses are here given a context, namely the contest between Nimrod and Abraham. The cut-up birds coming back to life, in the context of Abraham's ordeal, is reminiscent of Abraham ordering the ravens in Jubilees to return to the place from which they came after Mastema sent them to eat the seed.[35] In that account, Abraham develops such a reputation for his ability to ward off the birds that everyone planting seed would seek his assistance. Abraham is victorious over both Mastema and Nimrod.

In both instances, Abraham demonstrates the power of God over evil. The story of the birds appears in the context of Mastema's attempts to defy and defeat God by starving humans, thus bringing about their demise, whereas in Kisāʾī's *Tales of the Prophets*, the story of the birds serves as evidence of the all-powerful God who gives life and brings the dead to life. It is one more victory in Abraham's campaign against Nimrod, and idolatry in general. Despite the differences not only in the stories, but also in what happens to the birds in each narrative, the motif of Abraham and the birds plays a similar function in both stories of his victory over evil.

Kisāʾī's Nimrod is a full-blown nemesis, who unremittingly wages war against Abraham's God, whereas in Thaʿlabī's text, by contrast, Nimrod recognizes God's greatness. There, after Abraham succeeds in

walking through the fire into which he was cast, Nimrod announces his desire to sacrifice four thousand cows to God. Abraham tells him that God will not accept his offering unless he abandons his religion, which Nimrod claims he cannot do. He nonetheless slaughters the cattle, forbids anyone to harm Abraham, and proclaims, "How excellent is the Lord, your Lord, Abraham."[36] It is true that in this collection of tales, Nimrod suffers for the entire period of his rule—four hundred years—from the gnawing gnat in his brain. The inclusion of this proclamation of the excellence of the Lord of Abraham, however, attenuates the depiction of Nimrod as the archvillain of God that we find in Kisāʾī. Similarly, in Ṭabarī's History, Nimrod acknowledges the greatness of Abraham's God.

The *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* in general provide ample details that embellish Nimrod's role as God's archrival. Nimrod was Abraham's contemporary, and pretended to have the power to give and take life. Nimrod claims to have created humans and given them sustenance. There is no doubt that Kisāʾī had many stories about Abraham and his battles against idolatry at his disposal, as well as depictions of Nimrod. The contextualization of Abraham's restoration of the cut birds within his battle with Nimrod echoes, albeit rather faintly, the use of the birds in *Jubilees* to demonstrate Abraham's piety. Abraham and Mastema and Abraham and Nimrod battle against each other in the cosmic war between God and the forces of evil.

Conclusion

Rabbinic literature is often the starting point for those interested in locating intertexts and establishing relationships between Jewish and Islamic literature, but rabbinic depictions of characters are rarely if ever so colorful. Moreover, a world that is divided into good and evil, angels and demons, and God and his opponents is rather foreign to the rabbinic literature. To be sure, there are indeed rebellious, evil-intentioned figures who defy God, but this dualism that we find in the Qurʾān and *Jubilees* as well as apocalyptic literature is not characteristic of rabbinic literature in general.[37] The literary framing of *Jubilees*, as well as its *Weltanschauung*, resonates in the tales of the prophets generally and in Kisāʾī's *Qiṣaṣ*

specifically, so much so that it is worthwhile to compare these antagonists in *Jubilees* and Kisāʾī, as opposed to comparing Kisāʾī's Nimrod to the portrayal found in haggadic texts. However, our comparison is not just between Mastema and Nimrod, but between the role the birds incident plays in each.

This raises an exceedingly complicated question: to what extent was *Jubilees* "present" in medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim circles? The extent to which and the means by which stories in Jubilees were familiar to early medieval audiences are matters that continue to occupy the attention of scholars of medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literature.

In her "Sipurei ha-Nevi'im ba-Masoret ha-Muslemit" ("Stories of the Prophets in the Muslim Tradition"), Aviva Schussman maintains that there are similarities between Kisāʾī's *Tales* and *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (*PRE*).[38] It is debated among scholars whether the author of *PRE* was familiar with *Jubilees*, but for our purposes we might say that both works, Kisāʾī's *Tales* and *PRE*, seem to be familiar with the themes and traditions of *Jubilees*. After all, *PRE* is a product of the early Islamic milieu and issues from the same cultural environment as the earliest *qiṣaṣ* traditions.[39] This is suggestive and requires further investigation; however, it does point to the possibility that *Jubilees* traditions were disseminated in the medieval period, namely in the early Islamic milieu.

Moreover, in his article "The 'Prince Mastema' in a Karaite Work," Yoram Erder examines a Karaite commentary, that of Yefet ben Eli, on Exodus 32:4, in which Yefet claims that the Sadducees believed in a figure he calls Prince Mastema.[40] Erder suggests that the Karaites could have learned about this figure from such works as *Jubilees*.[41] This is not to claim that al-Kisāʾī had *Jubilees* at his disposal, but rather to raise an awareness of the possibility that Mastema was more popular in medieval literature than our classic rabbinic texts suggest and that this personification of evil was refashioned in the fanciful tales of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, in particular that of Kisāʾī.

The connections between *Jubilees* and Islamic literature have yet to be fully explored. Although details of a complex network of Near

Eastern stories, maxims, prayers, inter alia, remain sketchy, a comparison of the figures of Mastema and Nimrod affords us an opportunity to appreciate the centrality of the role of arch villain in *Jubilees* and Kisāʾī's *Tales of the Prophets.* The differences between Mastema and Nimrod are stark, even as both function as similar foils in the retelling of the victory of God's righteous servant Abraham over the forces of evil. What is noteworthy is how the episode with Abraham and the birds is embedded into this larger narrative.

Again, this is not to suggest that al-Kisāʾī was directly familiar with *Jubilees*, nor that the only model for Kisāʾī's Nimrod is Mastema. In light of broader considerations of the transmission of tropes, motifs and traditions across geographic, religious, and temporal lines, an examination of the depiction of the episode of Abraham and the birds within the context of the broader battle between God and an evil force calls attention to how aspects of Second Temple literature reverberate many centuries later, even if only faintly. While we do not want to draw a straight line between Mastema and Nimrod, Kisāʾī's portrayal of Nimrod does present us with an opportunity to recognize how compatible literary elements and images combined over time to tell the story of Abraham's victory over the forces of evil.

Appendix

For a general discussion of the relationship between Jewish and Muslim exegetical sources, see Michael E. Pregill, "The Hebrew Bible and the Quran: The Problem of the Jewish 'Influence' on Islam," *Religion Compass* 1 (2007): 643–659; Carol Bakhos, *The Family of Abraham: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Interpretations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 22–25; and Shari L. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 33–38. In "Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qur'ān," in John C. Reeves (ed.), *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2003), 43–60, Reeves argues that reading the Qur'ān along with other Muslim literature can throw interpretive light on the Bible and its reception in such works as Jewish pseudepigrapha and midrash.

Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), explores the relationship between Jewish interpretations of the Bible and Muslim exegesis of the Qur'ān in his focused study of Abraham-Ishmael traditions. Also, Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), looks at the Queen of Sheba accounts from what he terms the "Islamicizing" of Jewish cultural artifacts. For Lassner, Muslim allusions to the Bible are understood as purposeful and the absorption and transmission of Jewish artifacts intentional. He also locates the use of Jewish sources within a polemical context of the Jews' rejection of the Prophet Muḥammad in Medina. For a discussion of their work, see Brannon M. Wheeler, *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 3–6.

Indeed, scholarship of recent decades rejects the notion of "borrowing" in favor of a more complex notion of intertextuality; not only does it attribute intentionality to the absorption of late antique Jewish, Christian, and Greco-Roman sources, but it also recognizes the symbiotic relationship of self-definition between Jews and Christians,

Christians and Muslims, and Muslims and Jews. An excellent example of cross-cultural intertextuality is evidenced in a Judeo-Arabic retelling of the story of Joseph entitled *The Story of Our Master Joseph the Righteous*, which interweaves elements from both Jewish and Islamic cultures. For a detailed analysis, see Marc. S. Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations between Judaism and Islam* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2006).

See also Steven Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995). Focusing on the period from the eighth through the tenth centuries, Wasserstrom analyzes the concept of creative symbiosis by looking at the Judeo-Isma'ili interchange and the ways in which Jews and Muslims shared the imaginative world of apocalypse, as well as the intellectual world of philosophy. In the same vein as Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Judaism and Islam: Some Aspects of Mutual Cultural Influences," in her *Some Aspects of Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 72–89, passim, Wasserstrom notes, "I would emphasize that the debtor-creditor model of influence and borrowing must be abandoned in favor of the dialectical analysis of intercivilizational and interreligious process" (11).

Notes

1. This is a significantly revised, more fully developed version of my article "Transmitting Early Jewish Literature: The Case of Jubilees in Medieval Jewish and Islamic Sources," in Christine Hayes, Tzvi Novick, and Michal Bar-Asher Siegal (eds.), *The Faces of Torah: Studies in the Texts and Contexts of Ancient Judaism in Honor of Steven Fraade* (Journal of Ancient Judaism Supplements 22; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2017). I want to thank the anonymous readers for helpful comments.

2. For references to scholarship on the relationship between Jewish and Muslim exegetical sources, see the Appendix.

3. John C. Reeves, "Exploring the Afterlife of Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Medieval Near Eastern Religious Traditions: Some Initial Soundings," *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Period* 30 (1999): 148–177, 148–149. For discussions of the development and transmission of Second Temple literature and medieval Jewish sources, see Fred Astren, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Medieval Jewish Studies: Methods and Problems," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 8 (2001): 105–123; Martha Himmelfarb, "R. Moses the Preacher and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs," *AJS Review* 9 (1984): 55–78; eadem, "Some Echoes of Jubilees in Medieval Hebrew Literature," in John C. Reeves (ed.), *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 115–141; and eadem, *Between Temple and Torah: Essays on Priests, Scribes and Visionaries in the Second Temple Period and Beyond* (Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 151; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013), and more recently, Martha Himmelfarb, "Medieval Jewish Knowledge of Second Temple Texts and Traditions" [forthcoming] and Rachel Adelman, *The Return of the Repressed: Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer and the Pseudepigrapha* (Leiden: Brill, 2009). For a good examination of how Christian writers served as facilitators for the transmission of earlier Jewish sources, see Annette Yoshiko Reed, "From Asael and Šemiḥazah to Uzzah, Azzah, and Azael: 3 Enoch 5 (par. 7–8) and Jewish Reception-History of 1 Enoch," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 8 (2001): 105–136, who argues that the Semihazah and Azael tradition may have made its way into later Jewish exegetical traditions via Christian chronographers.

4. In his essay, "Islam and the Qumran Sect," Chaim Rabin argues that it is highly probable that Muḥammad's Jewish contacts before going to Medina were "heretical, anti-Rabbinic Jews" and that "a number of terminological and ideological details suggest the Qumran sect" (*Qumran Studies* [New York: Schocken Books, 1957], 128). See more recently Patricia Crone, "The Book of Watchers in the Qurʾān," in Haggai Ben-Shammai, Shaul Shaked, and Sarah Stroumsa (eds.), *Exchange and Transmission across Cultural Boundaries: Philosophy, Mysticism and Science in the Mediterranean World* (*Proceedings of an International Workshop in Memory of Shlomo Pines* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 2013), 16–51 and John C. Reeves, "Some Parascriptural Dimensions of the 'Tale of Hārūt wa-Mārūt'," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 135 (2015): 817–842.

5. For a comprehensive analysis of the storytellers, see Lyall Armstrong, *The Quṣṣāṣ of Early Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

6. The earliest extant manuscript is from the thirteenth century. The identity of the author and the dating of the work is, however, problematic. See Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2002), 151–155.

7. *Genesis Rabbah* 38:13 identifies Nimrod as the one who casts Abraham into the fire.

8. I have translated qurʾānic passages in consultation with several English translations: Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Koran* (New York: Everyman's Library, 1992 [1930]), and A. J. Arberry, *The Qur'an Interpreted: A Translation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956; repr. 1996).

9. James Kugel, *A Walk through Jubilees: Studies in the Book of Jubilees and the World of its Creation* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 83, and Adelman, *The Return of the Repressed*, 60, n. 35. For discussion of Jubilees, see Michael Segal, *The Book of Jubilees: Rewritten Bible, Redaction, Ideology and Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2007) and Kugel, *A Walk through Jubilees.*

10. For a discussion of an inconsistency between chapter 48, which recounts the role Mastema played in derailing God's plans to free the Israelites from Egypt, and chapter 49, where we read how "the forces of Mastema were sent to kill every firstborn in Egypt," see Segal, *The Book*

of Jubilees, 214–228, and Kugel, *A Walk through Jubilees*, 229–230.

11. Translation from James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees: A Translation* (Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 511; Scriptores Aethiopic 88; Louvain: Peeters, 1989). Scholars have asserted that the passage responds to Mesopotamian traditions dealing with the origin of the seed-plow. For a detailed discussion of the parallels between Genesis 15:11 and *Jubilees* 11, as well as an excellent treatment of the function of the ravens episode in *Jubilees*, see Andrew Teeter, "On 'Exegetical Function' in Rewritten Scripture: Inner-Biblical Exegesis and the Abram/Ravens Narrative in Jubilees," *Harvard Theological Review* 106 (2013): 373–402.

12. Most lists of Abraham's trials enumerate ten, and seem to date to the second century BCE. Ten tests are mentioned in Mishnah, *Avot* 4:3 and *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan* 33, in addition to *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer* 26. See Scott B. Noegel, "Abraham's Ten Trials and a Biblical Numerical Convention," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 31 (2003): 73–83 and Lewis Barth, "The Lection for the Second Day of Rosh Hashanah: A Homily Containing Ten Trials of Abraham," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 58 (1987): 1–48 [Hebrew]. See also Jo Milgrom, *The Akedah: A Primary Symbol in Jewish Thought and Art* (Berkeley: The Bibal Press, 1988).

13. For a discussion of extra-scriptural sources that understand Genesis 15:12–16 as a test, see James Kugel, *The Bible as it Was* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 168–170.

14. Sebastian P. Brock, "Abraham and the Ravens: A Syriac Counterpart to Jubilees 11–12 and Its Implications," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 9 (1978): 135–152.

15. Michael P. Knowles, "Abram and the Birds in Jubilees 11: A Subtext for the Parable of the Sower?", *New Testament Studies* 41 (1995): 145–151, views the episode as an expansion of the biblical narrative (possibly inspired by Genesis 15:11) that not only restores the agricultural cycle in the Noahide covenant but also serves to demonstrate Abraham's success in averting Mastema's endeavors to rob humans of the fruits of their toil. James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Sheffield: Sheffield, 2001), 46–47, also maintains that Abraham's chasing the birds might be

related to Genesis 15:11. See also Michael Stone, *Armenian Apocrypha Relating to Abraham* (Early Judaism and its Literature 37; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 18–20, who analyzes the motif as found in Armenian apocryphal literature. Scholars have also made connections between the episode in *Jubilees* and the apocryphal *Epistle of Jeremiah.* Drawing on the connection Klaus Berger makes in a lengthy footnote to his translation of Jubilees, *Das Buch der Jubiläen* (Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit 2.3; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1981), 388, n. 11e, between *Jubilees* and the *Epistle of Jeremiah*, Cory Crawford argues that the epistle may have been in existence before Jubilees. For an alternative point of view, see Teeter, "On 'Exegetical Function' in Rewritten Scripture," 383–384, who asserts the dependence of *Jubilees* on the *Epistle of Jeremiah* to be tenuous.

16. Segal, *The Book of Jubilees*, 101. As he notes, there is no room for pure dualism in a monotheistic religion, since God is in charge of all forces in the world.

17. Karel van der Toorn and Pieter van der Horst, "Nimrod before and after the Bible," *Harvard Theological Review* (1990): 1–29, 18. Genesis 6:4 refers to the *gibborim*, "the heroes of old, the men of renown," which is not necessarily bad, and in fact conveys a positive connotation; however, the next verse mentions the wickedness of humanity. Thus, exegetes link the two verses and interpret *gibborim* negatively. For examples, see Kugel, *The Bible as it Was*, 110–112.

18. For a discussion of this story in Pseudo-Philo, see my *The Family of Abraham*, 91–93.

19. Van der Toorn and van der Horst, "Nimrod before and after the Bible," 20.

20. b. *Ḥagigah* 13a notes that he is the grandson of Nimrod.

21. Josephus also refers to Nimrod as inciting the people against God and to build a tower in defiance; see *Jewish Antiquities* 1.113–114.

22. *Genesis Rabbah* 38:13; b. *Eruvin* 53a; b. *Pesaḥim* 118a; and *Song of Songs Rabbah* 8:10. *Leviticus Rabbah* states that Nimrod sentenced Abraham to be burned.

23. In *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 2:27, the ministering angels intervene

on Abraham's behalf by alerting God to the fact that Amraphel was about to sentence Abraham to death, but God rescues Abraham from the fire.

24. Van der Toorn and van der Horst, "Nimrod before and after the Bible," 28–29.

25. Ibid., 29.

26. Max Grünbaum, *Neue Beitrage zur Semitischen Sagenkunde* (Leiden: Brill, 1893), 52.

27. See Shari L. Lowin, "Narratives of Villainy: Titus, Nebuchad-nezzar, and Nimrod in the *ḥadīth* and *midrash aggadah*," in Paul M. Cobb (ed.), *The Lineaments of Islam: Studies in Honor of Fred McGraw Donner* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 261–296, 266–274.

28. For an English translation of Abraham's confrontation with Nimrod in Thaʿlabī, see *ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ, or 'Lives of the Prophets' as Recounted by Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī*, trans. William M. Brinner (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 124–133, and for an English translation of Ṭabarī, see *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume II: Prophets and Patriarchs*, trans. William M. Brinner (New York: SUNY Press, 1987). We read in Ṭabarī:

> Then God sent a wind that flung the top of Nimrod's tower into the sea. The rest of the building then collapsed and fell down on them, knocking over their houses. Nimrod was gripped by a shudder when the tower fell and, because of the fear, the tongues of the people became confused and they spoke in seventy-three languages. Therefore, the place was named Babel, because the languages became confused (*tabalbala*) therein. That is His word, "The roof fell down over them from above, and punishment came upon them from somewhere they did not suspect ([Q] 16:26)."

> Ṭabarī, *History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume II*, trans. Brinner, 163.

29. See, for example, Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulay-mān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Maḥmūd Shiḥātah (5 vols.; Cairo: Al-Hayʾah al-

Miṣriyyah al-ʿĀmmah li'l-Kitāb, 1979–1989): 3.613; Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* (Cairo: Sharikat Maktabat wa-Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awlādihi, 1954), 17.45; ibid., *Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk* (Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901); Ahmad b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ al-musammā ʿArāʾis al-majālis* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Anwār al-Muḥammadiyyah, n.d.), 93; Abūʾl-Fidāʾ Ismāʿīl Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, n.d.), 12.33. For a more extensive list of additional sources, see Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather*, 262 n. 3.

30. Philo refers to Nimrod as an Ethiopian since he is the son of Cush. This depiction of Nimrod is found in later Jewish sources. Genesis Rabbah 42:4 also refers to Nimrod as a Cushite (Ethiopian).

31. Quoted material taken from *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisāʾī*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Boston: Twayne, 1978). I use Isaac Eisenberg's edition in *Vita Prophetarum auctore Muḥammed ben ʿAbdallāh al-Kisaʾi ex codicibus, qui in Monaco, Bonna, Lugd. Batav., Lipsia et Gothana asservantur*, ed. Isaac Eisenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1922).

32. *Tales of the Prophets*, trans. Thackston, 142.

33. Ibid.

34. *Tales of the Prophets*, trans. Thackston, 142–143.

35. The episode also conjures up the image of Jesus bringing clay birds back to life, found in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* and Q 5:110, an association that Tzvi Novick astutely noted in a private correspondence. I am most grateful to him for drawing my attention to these connections and associations. To be sure, the episode conjures up more than one association. On the motif of ravens returning to their place, see Tzvi Novick, "Scripture as Rhetor: A Study in Early Rabbinic Midrash," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 82–83 (2011–2012), 37–59, 43 n. 20. For a discussion of the connection between Genesis 15 and the ravens episode in *Jubilees*, see VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees*, 46–47 and Knowles, "Abram and the Birds."

36. Ṭabarī, *History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume II*, trans. Brinner, 134.

37. For a discussion of Nimrod in ancient and late antique Jewish texts, see van der Toorn and van der Horst, "Nimrod before and after the

Bible."

38. Aviva Schussman, "Sipurei ha-Nevi'im ba-Masoret ha-Muslemit [Stories of the Prophets in the Muslim Tradition]" (Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University, 1981).

39. Many scholars have explored *PRE*'s Islamic milieu, as well as compared motifs and narratives found in *PRE* and Islamic sources. See, for example, B. Heller, "Muhammedanisches und Antimuhammedanisches in den Pirke Rabbi Eliezer," *Monatsschrift für die Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judenthums* 33 (1925): 47–54; J. Heinemann, *Aggadot ve-Toldotehen: Aspaqlariyat ha-Folqlor* (Tel Aviv: Don, 1975), 220–225; Aviva Schussman, "Abraham's Visits to Ishmael—the Jewish Origin and Orientation" [Heb.], *Tarbiz* 49 (1980): 325–345; Gordon D. Newby, "Text and Territory: Jewish-Muslim Relations 632–750 CE," in Benjamin H. Hary, John Hayes, and Fred Astren (eds.), *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communications and Interactions* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 83–95; Adelman, The Return of the Repressed; and Michael E. Pregill, "Some Reflections on Borrowing, Influence, and the Entwining of Jewish and Islamic Traditions; or, What the Image of a Calf Might Do," in Majid Daneshgar and Walid Saleh (eds.), *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 164–197.

40. Yoram Erder, "The 'Prince Mastema' in a Karaite Work" [Heb.], *Meghillot: Studies in the Dead Sea Scrolls* 1 (2003): 243–246.

41. Ibid.

تالیف ایدب یعلیم ایدنی روایت ک ک زرک ک زکر مانک نرق نبار بک
کو یقت حضرت عرردن ندکلدی ک ای زکر یا یو حکم مطاع

بنو مد زرکر مثالم اولنی اولربک اسمک جرماده بنو بذن مجوا دلی نفس مقر قر
عاشقم دیرین ملای عشقذاه دلمه آه ایذیب اسپره رکدن کاه یمه

Buddha or Yūdhāsaf?
Images of the Hidden Imām in al-Ṣadūq's *Kamāl al-dīn*

George Warner

Abstract

This article is an exploration of how a fourth/tenth-century Muslim author makes ingenious use of radically extra-canonical and unusual narratives for the defense of serious theology. The theology in question is the occultation of the Twelfth Imām, a defining tenet of Twelver Shi'ism. The extra-canonical narratives, meanwhile, include a selection of Arabic stories about the Buddha. The study explores how the unexpected appearance of these stories in the text, al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq's *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-niʿmah*, reflects and responds to the epistemological challenges facing its author, and how, far from being a peripheral curiosity, they constitute part of a highly developed authorial strategy.

Introduction

This paper presents a study of one of the earliest Twelver Shi'i works on the occultation of the Twelfth Imām, *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-niʿmah* ("The Perfection of Religion and the Completion of Blessing," hereafter *Kamāl al-dīn*) by Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Mūsā b. Bābawayh (d. 381/991), more commonly known as Ibn Bābawayh or by the honorific al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (hereafter Ṣadūq).[1] We will examine how scholars like Ṣadūq struggled in this early period to prove that the occultation had indeed taken place, and how in *Kamāl al-dīn*, he attempts an extraordinary solution to this problem. *Kamāl al-dīn* is distinguished, among other things, by the many unusual texts it contains, both those directly concerning the Twelfth Imām and others, most notably a considerable volume of stories about the Buddha. While these stories themselves have been subject to several studies, this has not been accompanied by any interrogation of the use to which Ṣadūq puts them.[2] It is this that we shall investigate here—how Ṣadūq harnesses such material to address pivotal epistemological challenges facing the nascent Twelver Shi'i community in the aftermath of the vanishing of the *imām*.

Changing history

Changing history in the Abbasid intellectual milieu was no easy task. Donner has described the considerable unanimity with which the early Islamic historical tradition agreed upon a narrative of Islam's origins, and how writers in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries were thus constrained from any attempt to generate new narratives by a redoubtable body of widely known earlier material.[3] Even though sectarian disputes often pivoted on conflicting accounts of Islam's origins—most crucially, of course, regarding who was or was not the legitimate successor to the Prophet—this did not, on the whole, result in widely divergent accounts. Differences were instead largely contended on the basis of different interpretations of the same events.

Nowhere is this more visible than in Shi'i polemical endeavors. As sectarian identities solidified over the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, the Shi'i view of history stood in increasing contrast with that of Sunnis. Imami Shi'i beliefs in ʿAlī's inherent, total superiority were predicated on a narrative of betrayal and frustration, in which many of the companions and caliphs whom Sunnis held to be righteous were denounced as having reneged on the Prophet's final commands. What we find in practice, however, is that Shi'is of Ṣadūq's day had very little leeway to challenge the sequence of events accepted by other groups if they aspired to any kind of broad credibility. We do find Shi'i accounts offering a radically transformed narrative, such as reports that the Prophet's ghost had visited Abū Bakr after his inception of the caliphate, demanding that he relinquish the office to ʿAlī, only to be dissuaded by ʿUmar, who convinced him that this visitation from beyond the grave was merely witchcraft brought about by ʿAlī.[4] Such unapologetically history-altering texts, however, were of little use outside the very small portion of the population who accepted them. Instead, polemics with the majority had to be constructed around events like the Prophet's speech at Ghadīr Khumm or the gathering beneath Fāṭimah's cloak, the historical reality of which was broadly accepted.[5] What was contested were the details and the interpretations, even the exact meanings of the words spoken, rather than whether or not major events had actually occurred.[6]

This state of relative conformance to the historical consensus was to be put to the test by the occultation of the Twelfth Imām. Throughout the third/ninth century and much of the second/eighth, the Imami Shi'ah had been defined first and foremost by their contention that God could not, in his justice, expect humankind to abide by his will and so attain Paradise (or be forever damned for failing to do so) without providing them at all times with an infallible guide, an *imām*, the proof (*ḥujjah*) of God's will who was forever on hand to tell them exactly what that will was. The Imami Shi'ah identified a line of such *imām*s stretching back to the Prophet, beginning with ʿAlī and his two sons, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥus-

ayn, and then a patrilineal line of succession through Ḥusayn's descen-
dants, each *imām* having named a successor from among his sons.

In the year 260/874, however, the eleventh *imām* al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī
died, ostensibly without a male heir. This precipitated a serious crisis;
Imami sources describe the aftermath of this death as "the time of per-
plexity (*ḥayrah*)." A number of competing solutions emerged to explain
or negate this catastrophic discontinuity, among them the claim that
Imām ʿAskarī was to be succeeded by his brother, and the claim that
there was simply no further need for an *imām*. By far the most successful
in the long run, however, was the doctrine of a twelfth, hidden *imām*.
Imām ʿAskarī, this doctrine declared, had in fact had a son, but this son
had been kept in concealment in the face of persecution. Following his
father's death, this hidden son was now the Twelfth Imām, who would
remain in this state of hiddenness (*ghaybah*) until, at last, he returned
at the end of time as the messianic *qāʾim* to overthrow the Abbasids,
bring deliverance to his followers, and restore justice to the world.[7]

So it was that Imami authors who wished to uphold this doctrine
were confronted with the difficult task of affirming an alternative history,
narrating the birth, infancy, and continued existence of a Twelfth Imām
who most of the Muslim community at large did not even acknowledge
had ever been born. The contention concerned not only the question of
whether such events as the *imām*'s birth, survival, and indeed his pursuit
by Abbasid agents had taken place, but also many inherently miraculous
elements, most notably the *imām*'s sustained total concealment from
enemies and followers alike and, increasingly, his indefinite longevity.[8]

The burden of proof was thus a formidable one, and if these Imami
scholars were going to be successful in their task they were going to
need evidence. Unsurprisingly, then, by the middle of the fourth/tenth
century we find an abundance of narrated reports circulating among
the Imami Shi'ah purporting to prove that the Hidden Imām did, indeed,
exist: reports of those who had seen him with his father as an infant,
reports of those who, against all odds, had encountered him after his
concealment on a dark night in a lonely place, as well as reports in which

previous *imām*s prophesied his existence and circumstances in some detail.

A prodigious body of such reports is already present in the *Al-Kāfī* of al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941).[9] *Al-Kāfī* is an encyclopedic work composed almost entirely of compiled *aḥādīth* with very little commentary from Kulaynī himself, and therefore, while his substantial corpus of textual proofs of the Hidden Imām bears witness to the availability and even popularity of such reports among Imami scholarly circles, we have little explicit indication of how Kulaynī expected his reader to respond to them.[10] If, meanwhile, we look to the Imami works on the occultation in the later decades of the fourth/tenth century, we find consistent expression of the concern that, abundant as these proof-texts might be, they are falling distressingly short of attaining credibility beyond Imami circles. Al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022) writes at the start of the chapter on the Twelfth Imām in his *Al-Irshād* that although he does supply the reader with a selection of eyewitness accounts of the Hidden Imām's birth, these are not a necessary proof of his existence. Instead, he declares that certainty in this matter is to be attained not by textual proof but by reasoned theological arguments.[11]

A little earlier, Nuʿmānī's (d. 360/971) *Al-Ghaybah*, though a very different work, exhibits a more emphatic reluctance to rely on these would-be-proof-texts. Unlike Mufīd, Nuʿmānī's downplaying of such material is not couched in terms of a methodological shift from text to reason. His proofs continue to be grounded in narrations, but he specifically excludes all texts containing eyewitness testimonies to the Hidden Imām's existence, even those witnessing the doctrinal necessity that is the *imām*'s designation (*naṣṣ*) by his father (texts Nuʿmānī's teacher, Kulaynī, narrates in abundance). His work instead relies only on texts in which previous *imām*s and the Prophet himself prophesy the advent and occultation of the Twelfth Imām. Significantly, Nuʿmānī is careful to assert that many of these texts are drawn from Sunni sources.[12]

Such texts inevitably fall short of the details found in the reports of those who claimed to have met the Hidden Imām, Nuʿmānī's collected

prophecies being largely restricted to vaguer assertions regarding the number of the *imām*s or the rather more distant matter of what will happen when the *imām* returns from his occultation.[13] What Nuʿmānī profits from this expurgation, however, is a broader acceptability among non-Imamis; Muḥammad's foretelling of twelve successors is, after all, to be found in no less unassailably Sunni a source than al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*. The strategy was an enduring one, and is further to be found in the works of two students of Ṣadūq, the *Kifāyat al-athar* of ʿAlī b. Muḥammad al-Khazzāz (d. ca. 420/1030) and the *Muqtaḍab al-athar* of Aḥmad b. ʿAyyāsh al-Jawharī (d. 401/1012). Both of these authors set themselves the task of proving that the Prophet was to be succeeded by twelve *imām*s using only Sunni *aḥādīth*, thereby once again marginalizing the transparently Imami corpus surrounding the Hidden Imām himself and the details of his disappearance.

All these Imami scholars thus exhibit a similar disquiet with the ostensibly invaluable resource of eyewitness testimonies to the Twelfth Imām's existence, a sentiment that sends them in search of alternative strategies of argument that may carry more weight with their non-Imami opponents. No matter how many accounts there were to narrate bearing detailed witness to the circumstances of the Twelfth Imām's birth, investiture, and concealment, these, like the story of Abū Bakr and the ghost of the Prophet, were of no use if they remained implausible to the other groups by whom the Imamis were surrounded. History (or rather the accepted version of history), these scholars knew well, was not so easily changed.[14]

It is in this context that Ṣadūq writes *Kamāl al-dīn*. *Kamāl al-dīn* may be counted alongside these other works of the later fourth/tenth century (that is, about one hundred years after the beginning of the *imām*'s occultation) in that it seeks to address this disquiet with the proof-texts for the occultation, but it stands quite apart from other Imami writings of the time in terms of how it does so. Ṣadūq tells us in his introduction how he was commanded by none other than the Hidden Imām himself (visiting in a dream) to pen a work on how his occultation was prefigured in the careers of previous prophets.[15] Though the book does draw on

proofs shared with his contemporaries, adducing the theological necessity for an *imām*, previous *imām*s' predictions of the occultation of the Twelfth and so on, the bulk of it is spent, as the *imām* commanded, demonstrating that the apparently bizarre defining doctrine of the Imami Shi'ah—that the necessary *imām* of the Muslims, the one true successor to Muḥammad, is guiding his community from a state of inaccessible hiddenness—is not some weird idiosyncrasy of a fringe group, but rather a recurrence of a necessary phenomenon that can be observed time and again in the long history of God's many revelations to His creation.

If Moses can be hidden from his *shī'ah*, so, too, can the Twelfth Imām. If Noah can live for a thousand years, so, too, can the Twelfth Imām.[16] Occultation and revelation, *Kamāl al-dīn* aims to show, have always gone hand in hand, with scarcely a prophet setting out to teach his people without at some point along the way being hidden from them, that they might, paradoxically, be better informed of God's will. Similarly, just as these prophets eventually returned from hiding to deliver their final message, so, too, will the Hidden Imām at last return as the savior of the Shi'ah. The argument does not exclude the Imami narrations concerning the Hidden Imām, but seeks an alternative means of validating them, relying not on the credibility or otherwise of the texts' sources but on their resonance with a broader salvific narrative that Ṣadūq draws on the wider *ḥadīth* corpus to construct.[17]

Vanishing prophets

Before setting out to illustrate this phenomenon at length, Ṣadūq presents a number of *aḥādīth* to underscore the value of the exercise. Though twice he describes his objective in very modest terms as being "to move [the occultation of the Twelfth Imām] from the realm of the impossible to the realm of the possible" *(min ḥadd al-maḥālah ilā ḥadd al-jawāz)*, he makes sustained efforts to present the book's demonstrations as rather more forceful.[18] Of greatest significance in this regard is his adducing of the Prophet's reported statement that, "Whatsoever has befallen previous communities shall befall my community also."[19] The

very bedrock of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s mechanisms of proof, this *ḥadīth* confirms not that stories of previous prophets can merely show that the occultation is possible, but that they constitute a guarantee that it will happen —that it *must* happen. If previous communities experienced a prolonged absence of their *imām*, then the Muslim community, too, is destined by these words of Muḥammad to undergo a similar experience. The vanishing of the Twelfth Imām is thus moved from the impossible to the inevitable.[20]

It is on this basis that *Kamāl al-dīn* begins (following a long introduction in which Ṣadūq puts certain theological issues to rest) with a veritable history of prophecy from more or less the beginning of time. Marvelous stories of God's chosen and their adventures are presented in chronological order, starting with Idrīs (identified as a son of Adam), and proceeding through Noah, Ṣāliḥ, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, and Jesus up to Muḥammad himself. Though the protagonists of these stories are familiar, as often as not the events described are less so: we read about Noah's flood and about Joseph's longing to be reunited with his father Jacob, but we also read about Abraham's encounter in the desert with a mysterious old man from beyond the sea and about the hidden island on which Jesus's loyal followers were secreted after his ascension to safeguard his religion, where they were provided with honey to eat by bees borne to them across the sea on the backs of jellyfish. The narratives are filled with the dramatic unfolding of the divine will, with marvels and wonders, and with suspense and vindication.[21]

Both in presentation and in substance, this extensive collection of stories is thoroughly subjected to Ṣadūq's stated objectives. No story passes in which it is not clear to the reader that the prophet-protagonist has not undergone some form of concealment that is portentously analogous to the present occultation of the *imām*, though exactly what may constitute an occultation varies considerably from text to text. A prophet may be hidden, like the Twelfth Imām, for fear of persecution, such as when the infant Abraham is hidden from the depredations of Nimrod, who has heard tell of the child to be born who will spell his downfall.[22] In other instances, however, more benign episodes in a prophet's life

will be appropriated for the occultation paradigm, such as Moses's adoption by Pharaoh's daughter (and thus his subsequent absence from his mother and the Israelites), Joseph's years in Egypt apart from his grieving father, and even Solomon's remaining closeted with a new wife![23]

Ṣadūq's instructive voice aids the process when an event is perhaps less obviously an exemplar of occultation, both by his expressly framing the stories as tales of occultation and occasionally by his inserting commentary to identify the key elements of correspondence between a given prophet's story and that of the Hidden Imām. The diction of the accounts themselves also sets them firmly within Ṣadūq's desired frame of reference. The word *ghaybah* (occultation) itself and its cognates are a recurrent presence in the stories, as are stock Imami terms such as *rujūʿ* (returning), *khurūj* (emergence) and *ẓuhūr* (reappearance) as descriptors of the different protagonists' return from their occultations. Moreover, the occultations themselves are regularly enriched with further details that can only resonate deafeningly with the Imami reader. Prophets will console their followers with the promise of a future *qāʾim* who will one day come to relieve them (this being neatly identified with the next prophet in the sequence of chapters: Idrīs foretells the appearance of Noah, Noah tells of Hūd, and so on); the expected figure will often be identified as a young man (*ghulām*) like the *qāʾim* himself; many a loyal *shīʿah* accompanies prophets and awaits (*intiẓār*) their return from occultation, even while their faith and resilience are sorely tested. We hear how when prophets do return, many lack the purity of heart to recognize them; sometimes there is a *faqīh* to whom they may turn for guidance in the prophet's absence; prophets leave legatees (*waṣī*) after them; those who seek a sign of the hidden *ḥujjah* may yet be granted one if they persevere.

The corpus is a remarkable one and it is to be regretted that, pending new texts coming to light, we know little about its sources. Nonetheless, the quantity of these *aḥādīth* and the pervasive presence of Shi'i motifs within them indicates a number of important things about this group of texts and Ṣadūq's use thereof. Excluding the unlikely explanation of massive forgery on Ṣadūq's part, in the late fourth/tenth century there

clearly already existed a prodigious array of *qiṣaṣ* material that is steeped in unmistakably Imami concepts and language. This tells us in turn that there was by this time an established interest among Imamis in identifying and imagining precedent for the current soteriological status quo in the vast literature of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*.[24]

There does, in fact, survive another Imami text from the period in which stories of the prophets are used extensively in a similar manner, in the form of Pseudo-Masʿūdī's *Ithbāt al-waṣiyyah*. Here, too, is a work which prefaces accounts of the Hidden Imām with accounts of earlier prophets in which an Imami coloring, including many a motif of the occultation, is clearly evident (though the focus here is less on the Twelfth Imām than on creating a sustained narrative from Adam to the present). Unfortunately, the dating and provenance of the work remain uncertain. Indeed, its similarity to *Kamāl al-dīn* is a not-insignificant component of its probable dating to the fourth/tenth century, such that to adduce it as evidence for the study of Ṣadūq's text risks becoming circular. The text's *asānīd* certainly argue for a date no earlier than the first half of the fourth/tenth century, but their presence is patchy, and it is quite possible that the work is a composite. The component of the work concerning the Twelfth Imām cannot, of course, predate the turn of the fourth/tenth century. If nothing else, the book certainly attests to a circulation of Imami-influenced *qiṣaṣ* material around the time of Ṣadūq's writing *Kamāl al-dīn*.[25]

The presence of these texts is significant in its indication that *Kamāl al-dīn*'s endeavor was not entirely unprecedented in Imami literature.[26] This in turn suggests what we shall develop in detail below: that the simple exercise of presenting these stories of previous prophets and their occultations is not, contrary to Ṣadūq's account of the book's origins, the full extent of his ambitions in *Kamāl al-dīn*.

The Vanished Imām

Having given us this survey of occultations past, Ṣadūq moves to the present occultation of the Hidden Imām, with which the former are

to be compared. He first supplies a voluminous body of reports that document the foretellings of the Twelfth Imām's finality and occultation supplied by the eleven previous *imām*s, Muḥammad, Fāṭimah, and God. These are then followed by an extensive collection of eyewitness accounts of the *imām*'s existence, narrating direct encounters as well as the receipt of letters from the *imām*. These are the very reports that we have seen other Imami writers of the period treat with such circumspection, but Ṣadūq here embraces this rich corpus in all its improbable details (adducing more material than is found in *Al-Kāfī*), for these same details have now been prefigured and legitimized by his stories of the prophets. Resonances appear everywhere: the journey of one Abū Saʿd Ghānim the Indian across a landscape of hostile Sunnis (and occasional, secretive custodians of the truth) to his eventual meeting with the Twelfth Imām mirrors that of Salmān the Persian as he set out, defying his Zoroastrian parents, to seek Muḥammad.[27] Several stories appear of believers who, often when on pilgrimage, encounter a mysterious companion whom they only later discover to be their *imām*; these are reminiscent of the story of King Solomon's new parents-in-law, dining unsuspectingly with their daughter's new husband only to learn at the end, confronted with a climactic display of the prophet-king's magical powers, that they are in the presence of Solomon himself.[28] In the more ominous image of the *imām* seen by the emissary al-ʿAmrī at Mecca, clinging to the Kaʾbah's cover and crying, "O God avenge me upon my enemies," we find an echo of the prophet Idrīs, who Ṣadūq tells us remained embittered in his cave, refusing to ask God to relieve the drought afflicting the people who rejected his message.[29]

One might be forgiven for thinking that at the close of these narratives of the Twelfth Imām Ṣadūq's work is done. If *Kamāl al-dīn* set out to affirm the portentous equivalences between past prophets and the present Hidden Imām, these have now been abundantly illustrated. It therefore comes as a surprise to find that when the curtain falls on the last of Ṣadūq's stories of encounters with the Hidden Imām, there still remains a great deal of *Kamāl al-dīn* left to read. Across what amounts to approximately the last third of the book, Ṣadūq presents us with an expanse of

material that in various ways goes beyond his original remit, embodied in the earlier sections described above, of illustrating the Hidden Imām's predecessors in occultation among previous prophets. Some of what follows offers doctrinal clarifications regarding the earlier material (such as the permissibility or impermissibility of naming the Twelfth Imām), but in the main it comprises reports offering more stories—stories about neither *imām*s nor prophets.

Longevity and implausibility

The most substantial group of these stories to be presented is that concerning the *muᶜammarūn*—the extraordinarily long-lived—a rubric under which Ṣadūq explicitly groups them.[30] This is a subject matter that is of clear pertinence to the truth of the Hidden Imām. Ṣadūq is writing *Kamāl al-dīn* perhaps over one hundred years after the death of Imam ᶜAskarī, and thus faces the ever more urgent imperative to justify the Imamis' waiting for the Hidden Imām to reappear—reappear indeed as a young and warlike leader of men—now that he has remained hidden for longer than a normal human lifespan.[31] What better way to rebut such objections than to remind doubters of the many individuals in human history who have lived for hundreds of years? Ṣadūq presents a formidable corpus here, enumerating almost fifty individuals who are said to have enjoyed vast lifespans, many of which make the Twelfth Imām's one hundred-odd years look decidedly pedestrian by comparison. "Whatsoever has befallen previous communities..."

Things are not so simple, however, for these texts are clearly of a very different sort to those containing the stories of the prophets and then of the *imām* with which the book has been concerned up until this point. Ṣadūq's *muᶜammarūn* are for the most part figures from the lore of pre-Islamic Arabia, figures who are more familiar from the pages of wisdom literature,[32] wherein the image of the exceptionally long-lived patriarch is closely tied to the sage counsels that his many years entitle him to impart (more often than not in verse), counsels that may exhort

the young to piety or lament the fatigue and futility of time's passing.[33] It is entirely in this familiar guise that they appear in *Kamāl al-dīn*; although Ṣadūq, as we shall see, draws particular focus to their age (his most diminutive entries noting only the name of an individual and their fabled lifespan), often he will supplement this information with the same mix of anecdotes, aphorisms, and verses that accompany *muʿammarūn* in other literary contexts.[34] The *muʿammarūn* stories are a colorful assemblage as presented in *Kamāl al-dīn*, their world-weary Arab sages accompanied by treasure seekers finding prophecies inscribed in subterranean vaults and hubristic kings building magnificent, impossible palaces in the desert.

This new set of protagonists has clear theological implications. After all, according to the terms of Ṣadūq's own arguments, the capacity of previous prophets to authoritatively prefigure the career of the Twelfth Imām is substantially rooted in their status as prophets ("a *sunnah* from Moses," etc.), a status that these ancient Arabs do not share.[35] These issues with their subject matter, meanwhile, feed into a broader range of generic questions regarding the texts themselves, texts that are more familiar as curiosities of poetry or genealogy than as components of serious theological debate. Most significant is the question of their sources. Most are supplied without *asānīd*, with others being even more dubiously sourced, one text purporting to have been found written on a rock near Alexandria and another even being quoted from a damaged text such that the story breaks off mid-narrative (frustratingly, just as the speaker is about to explain the difference between various types of jinn).[36] As such, they must contrast starkly with Ṣadūq's presentation of the *ḥadīth* of the *imām*s. Not only are the great majority of these supplied with an *isnād* going back to an infallible source, as is usual with *ḥadīth* literature, but Ṣadūq is repeatedly at pains to assert the textual integrity of the *imām*s' reported words as he narrates them in *Kamāl al-dīn.* Indeed, a claim he fiercely reasserts throughout the book is that so irrefutably densely transmitted (*mutawātir*) are the *aḥādīth* proving the occultation that whosoever denies their validity is implicitly denying the validity of

textual proof as a whole, rejecting as they do so the very foundation of belief in prophecy and revelation and reducing themselves to the level of the Brahmins.[37]

It is therefore no surprise to find Ṣadūq framing the stories of the *mu'ammarūn* with a very different sort of argument. The long lives described here are not, as Noah's was earlier in the book, presented as a guarantee that, having occurred then, they must reoccur now. Instead, Ṣadūq strikes a much more polemical tone, introducing these accounts as examples of the kinds of farfetched things that other groups believe in, even as they have the gall to reject the Imami belief in the Hidden Imām.[38] "They believe," Ṣadūq objects regarding one such narrative, "that that gazelle's dung endured in excess of five hundred years, unchanged by either rain or wind, or by the passing of days, nights and years by it; yet they do not believe that the *qāʾim* from Muḥammad's house shall endure until he rides out with the sword!"[39] The *mu'ammarūn* stories thus function not so much as proof-texts as *anti*-proof-texts, the very opposite of the *imāms*' authentic and indubitable testimony, a carnival of the implausible that illuminates the absurd hypocrisy of Ṣadūq's opponents.

The less-than-certain provenance of these texts thus works to Ṣadūq's advantage, further signaling the weakness of these fanciful tales in comparison with his proof-texts. Ṣadūq also employs a number of measures to identify these narrations not just as unreliable but as enemy property, narrated by non-Imamis from non-Imami sources.[40] Discussing "the Old Man of the Maghrib" Abū Dunyā, Ṣadūq notes that "it is not even now confirmed among them that he has died."[41] The focus is entirely on these opponents' beliefs regarding Abū Dunyā, with no indication given of what view Ṣadūq or his fellows might make of this. When telling the story of King Shaddād, who lived for nine hundred years and built the city of Iram, Ṣadūq goes to some length to altericize the story, telling how no less a non-Shi'i than Muʿāwiyah b. Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680) learns of the place, summons the man who claims to have seen it, and asks Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. 32/653) to corroborate his account.[42] Ṣadūq is clear that the disreputable sources of these texts only add to their narrators' hubris, asking incredulously how people can believe stories of warring serpents

and Quixotic kings from mere scholars, but not confirmation of the occultation spoken by God's prophet or his *imāms*.[43]

The *muʿammarūn* texts here appear as a continuation of Ṣadūq's efforts to rehabilitate the proof-texts for the occultation, efforts that do not much dwell on the details of these proof texts' sources but instead seek validation by less conventional means. Ṣadūq has first bolstered them by illustrating the binding precedent of earlier chapters of prophetic history; now he takes to task those who refuse to believe in them by reviewing absurdities to be found in more accepted texts. *Kamāl al-dīn* thus develops a polemic based on a set of rigorous, hierarchical, and dichotomous taxonomies between the book's different corpora: the supremely reliable *aḥādīth* attesting to the Twelfth Imām and his occultation are opposed to the laughably apocryphal and fanciful narrations of other groups and their authorities. The stories in these non-Imami narrations, meanwhile, implausible and absurd as they are, are also opposed to the momentous precedent of the stories of the prophets, every detail of which is a potential indicator of the present reality of the Hidden Imām. The plausible is opposed to the implausible, the authentic to the spurious, the sacred and binding to the insignificant and extraneous. Together these taxonomies all labor to verify as fact the events of the Hidden Imām's birth, investiture, disappearance, and eventual return.

Even as Ṣadūq works to qualitatively differentiate his different corpora, however, they still end up looking remarkably similar. Of course, that the stories of the Hidden Imām and the stories of the prophets should look similar is entirely the point, but by no means is this the sum of the correspondences, resonances, and echoes that continue to appear across *Kamāl al-dīn*'s stringent divisions.

The *muʿammarūn* texts, we have seen, are grouped on the basis of their shared testament to non-Imamis' unwitting and/or hypocritical acceptance of one aspect of the doctrine of the Hidden Imām, his preternaturally long life in occultation. In this respect, then, we expect to see parallels between these texts, anti-proof-texts as they are, and the proof-texts of earlier chapters. But it is not only in the long lives of the prota-

gonists that such parallels appear. In one story, for instance, Khumāra-wayh b. Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn (d. 282/896) seeks to plunder the treasure of the pyramids, whereupon he encounters an inscription in Greek that none can read.[44] He is advised by a wise man from among the people that the only man with the knowledge to decode the text is a three hundred-year-old bishop who lives in Ethiopia (here the eponymous *muʿammar*). The bishop is too old to make the journey north, and so the king resorts to an exchange of letters. Eventually the bishop reveals that the inscription instructs that none will be able to open the treasury until the *qāʾim* from the house of Muḥammad comes to claim it.[45] Rather than being just another example of others' belief in the possibility of abnormal longevity, here is a story which shares several pivotal motifs with the doctrine of the Hidden Imām. Apart from the bishop's prodigious age, not only do we see a direct assertion of the truth of the returning *qāʾim* at the story's climax, but we find, too, the necessity to seek knowledge from an absent, pious authority, and indeed the need to do so through letters on account of that authority's remaining at a distance. After constant reiterations of these images and of their high significance across hundreds of pages, it is quite inconceivable that they remain there by accident.

Neither is this an isolated incidence; rather, such diverse reflections of the Hidden Imām continue to recur across the *muʿammarūn* texts. We read that Abū Dunyā, the Old Man of the Maghrib, was last seen retiring to his native land to await the coming of the *mahdī*.[46] As well as living for hundreds of years, Ḥabābah al-Wālibiyyah is also identified as the custodian of the mysterious pebble on which each successive *imām* will leave his imprint, a recurring proof-text in defenses of the Twelfth Imām.[47] Just as believers may, Emmaus-like, meet an unidentified stranger on the road who eventually turns out to be the Hidden Imām who rewards them for their pious conduct, so the white snake that ʿAbīd b. Sharyah rescues turns out to be a benevolent jinn in disguise.[48] Ṣadūq is clearly showing his reader a great deal more in these texts than examples of his opponents' belief in extreme longevity, and as he does so, the resonances multiply between corpora he has striven to separate.

These resonances are even more conspicuous when they concern the very details he lambasts as absurd. Regarding a narration telling of the magical city of Iram, he is conspicuously eager to stress the implausible quality of the tale, himself straying into hyperbole as he decries the story "of a place like unto Paradise itself" hidden somewhere on earth, a comparison which the reports he cites do not themselves make (though Iram's splendor is certainly emphasized).[49] Yet this fantastical tale exhibits unmistakable parallels with Ṣadūq's earlier accounts of the Hidden Imām. Iram is a jewel-encrusted city in the middle of the desert, upon which the narrator stumbles whilst searching for his lost camel. In an earlier section, meanwhile, we read how a *shaykh* of the Banū Rāshid in Ḥamdān, having become stranded from his caravan on the way to Mecca, put his trust in God and wandered on foot, eventually finding himself in a green oasis, in the midst of which was a glittering citadel rising like a sword from the grass. Upon entering he was told by attending servants that God intended a blessing for him, and was led behind a veil to where there sat a young man above whose head was suspended a sword. The man announced himself as the *qāʾim* of the house of Muḥammad, who would rise up with this sword at the end of time to fill the world with justice. At the story's end, the lost pilgrim from Ḥamdān falls on his face in reverence, but the *imām* kindly raises him up and sends him on his way home with a purse full of gold.[50] Whatever is highlighted as absurd credulity in the story of Iram, the reader is meanwhile asked to meet with pious acceptance when it concerns the Hidden Imām himself.

These sustained, diverse echoes of the imām's image across *Kamāl al-dīn*'s internal divisions have serious implications for Ṣadūq's arguments. What is significant here is not merely that his vociferously opposed corpora have a great deal in common but that they have more in common than Ṣadūq seems ready to admit, and that their similarities can be found along the very axes about which he is keen to differentiate them. He states that he does not rely on the *muʿammarūn* texts and their like to prove the Hidden Imām's validity, rather he relies on the authentic *aḥādīth* of the *imāms*; yet we find so much material in the *muʿammarūn* stories' anti-proof-texts that looks suspiciously like proof. Even if the

sages and kings in these tales are not prophets, it is a determinedly cynical reader who can wade through the stories of almost fifty such long-lived men and women (alongside one or two vultures) and not find the continued survival of the Twelfth Imām a little more palatable, let alone all the other elements of the *imām*'s occultation and return that these non-Imami texts seem to affirm. Though Ṣadūq instead presents these texts only as examples of his opponents' folly, when the reader encounters within them what appear to be the exact same set of images of vanished authority figures and pious expectation that Ṣadūq accords such probative importance in the stories of the prophets, that reader may well suspect that they are, in fact, fulfilling the same function. Such an eventuality, of course, might in turn lead to the accusation that Ṣadūq is, indeed, relying on these less-substantiated texts, and so to the catastrophic implication that the *imām*s' *aḥādīth* are not the self-sufficient proof he claims them to be.

No less precarious are Ṣadūq's insistences that his anti-proof-texts are evidently less plausible than his proof texts. His contemporaries show that it is quite possible to create a sanitized corpus of testaments to the Hidden Imām's existence, one that could be easily contrasted (as Ṣadūq aims to do) with such florid details as talking wolves and exploding dung. The essential elements of the Twelfth Imām's story are, after all, few: he needs to have been born, he needs to live a long time, he needs to be concealed, and he needs to return without his absence having brought about an epistemological catastrophe. Instead of this, however, Ṣadūq includes stories of the Twelfth Imām that easily rival the *muʿammarūn* texts in terms of the wonders they describe. In so doing, even as he protests at his opponents' denying the Hidden Imām whilst believing in eccentric apocrypha, he courts the readerly rebuttal that the accounts of the Twelfth Imām's occultation (and of the ancient prophets in whose careers it is prefigured) are in fact every bit as ridiculous as Kaʿb al-Aḥbār's tales of Abū Dunyā and then some. As well as details that threaten only Ṣadūq's asserted hierarchy of plausibility, *Kamāl al-dīn* also includes material that specifically threatens Imami orthodoxies, such as the suggestion that there could be times when there

was no *ḥujjah* on earth, a report suggesting that the Hidden Imām has a brother called Mūsā who resides with him in occultation, and another stating that Zaynab bt. ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 62/681) assumed the mantle of *ḥujjah* after the death of her brother Ḥusayn (in contrast to the by then thoroughly accepted Imami view that asserts a continuation of patrilineal male *imām*s in the person of Ḥusayn's son).[51]

It seems that Ṣadūq is guilty of inexplicable self-sabotage, his unending compiler's permissiveness towards the weird and wonderful, be it jellyfish being ridden by bees, the quest for the water of life, or birds with the power of speech, placing *Kamāl al-dīn*'s vital taxonomies under precarious and unnecessary stress. As well as threatening Ṣadūq's stated objectives within *Kamāl al-dīn*, this also sits at odds with a defining element of Ṣadūq's career visible across his works: the increasing pressure to bend his traditionist position to the Muʾtazilite rationalism that held sway over much of the Buwayhid intellectual world.[52] His largest surviving work to deal with theological questions, *Al-Tawḥīd*, introduces itself explicitly as a rebuttal to accusations that the *imām*s' *ḥadīth* contain theological heresies, while his *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* is dedicated to al-Ṣāḥib b. ʿAbbād (d. 385/995), the ardently Muʾtazilite vizier who is reported to have banished Ṣadūq from Rayy for excessive traditionism (before or after the composition of *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, we cannot tell).[53] Both works correspondingly contain prominent chapters detailing the *imām*s' wisdom on the subject of God's unity and justice (*al-tawḥīd waʾl-ʿadl*), the central tenets of Muʾtazilite doctrine.[54] Such looming censure is near at hand in *Kamāl al-dīn*, such as the passages in the book's introduction cited from the Imami theologian Ibn Qibah al-Rāzī (d. before 319/931) that explicitly deny such 'excesses' as the belief that the *imām* has knowledge of the unseen, a denial that Ṣadūq repeatedly flouts with abandon elsewhere in the book.[55]

We might conclude that Ṣadūq is simply overreaching himself, his eagerness to ply his readers with ever more images of occultation, no matter how bizarre their details or dubious their source, directly conflicting with his simultaneous desire to affirm the probative sovereignty of the *imām*s' *ḥadīth*, both projects thus falling victim to his attempt to

combine them. To so conclude, however, may be to underestimate Ṣadūq. While we could attribute *Kamāl al-dīn*'s conflicting jumble of proofs to a lack of authorial self-control, to do so risks neglecting the potential advantages of such a strategy. Not only do the *muʿammarūn* texts and others like them offer Ṣadūq possibilities that *aḥādīth* do not, but he has much to profit, too, from fostering overlaps between the content of his different corpora, even as he must meanwhile (perhaps a little disingen-uously) assert their stark qualitative separation. To explore these poten-tial advantages to what could otherwise be mistaken for ineptitude, we move now to *Kamāl al-dīn*'s last and most bewildering set of narratives, those purporting to concern the Buddha.

Bilawhar and Yūdhāsaf

The *muʿammarūn* texts are followed by perhaps the most intriguing part of *Kamāl al-dīn*, indeed what was until recently the only part of the book to receive sustained discussion in Western scholarship.[56] This is a set of stories concerning an Indian prince named Yūdhāsaf (or Būdāsf), better known in English as the Buddha.[57] Together the stories are of a considerable length, comprising some seventy pages in printed editions and thus around 10 percent of *Kamāl al-dīn* as a whole, and are moreover conspicuously placed as the last substantial component of the book before its closing miscellanies (*nawādir*). Though a number of studies have drawn on Ṣadūq's texts to reconstruct what was known of the Buddha in Abbasid literature and the sources thereof (*Kamāl al-dīn* is particularly remarkable in this regard for preserving what appear to be several stories of the Buddha not known in any other source), very little attention is paid to the question of Ṣadūq's own interest in the stories.[58] What did an Imami *faqīh*, in a discussion of the most troublesome of doctrinal questions, have to gain from narrating such tales, let alone at such length?

Following our previous analysis, we must also ask how these Yūdhā-saf stories fit into the puzzling dynamics at work between *Kamāl al-dīn*'s assembled corpora. In many ways, this new batch of thoroughly extra-canonical material figures similarly in the book's workings to the *muʿam-*

marūn texts it follows. In other ways, however, these stories are quite distinct, contributing new registers to *Kamāl al-dīn*'s mix of proofs even as they beg new explanations regarding why Ṣadūq has included them.

Ṣadūq appears to supply a ready answer to this last question. At the close of the Yūdhāsaf stories, he states that he has included such texts not as proof of his arguments but only as a lure to the curious reader, attracting their attention with engaging tales of magic and derring-do in the hope that, thus engrossed, they will feel compelled to read on, perusing the rest of the book and so becoming educated in the truth of the Hidden Imām.[59] There is undoubtedly some truth to this. In other writings we frequently find Ṣadūq mixing material of direct doctrinal and polemical import with miscellaneous items that may grab the less committed reader's attention, such as explorations of why pregnancy interrupts menstruation and why corpses weep.[60] The Yūdhāsaf stories, meanwhile, are certainly as alluring a bait as could be wished for. If, however, we examine these texts closely in the context of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s stated objectives, we are driven to suspect that this given reason is not the sum of Ṣadūq's motives; rather Yūdhāsaf and his exploits are part of the same probative continuum of motifs that stretches across *Kamāl al-dīn*.

The story begins when the mighty but thoroughly impious king of India is confronted by a lone sage who seeks to change his ways, and who tells him the story of one Yūdhāsaf with that aim. This story, in turn, is that of the youthful Yūdhāsaf, a sheltered prince and the son of another, more graphically impious king, a king who has banished all men of religion from his kingdom on pain of execution. So many were burned to death in this pogrom that the land of India remained ablaze for an entire year. Prince Yūdhāsaf, meanwhile, undergoes the proverbial realization of change and mortality familiar from Buddhist literature, stealing out of the palace into the real world, where he sees before him the shocking realities of decay and death from which he had been protected. Cast into doubt, he seeks the means of answering his mortal dilemma, and learns of the men of religion who once roamed the land but whom the king has driven into hiding, whom he dearly wishes now to find and consult. The wise man of God, Bilawhar, residing in another country, hears of the

prince's plight, and travels in disguise to find him and teach him. They meet in secret and begin Yūdhāsaf's education, an education which consists largely of Bilawhar telling the prince improving stories, some of which contain characters who themselves tell stories in turn. For seventy pages we are transported into a maelstrom of parables and aphorisms, narratives and metanarratives, a world where men of God are forever struggling to spread the faith in the face of despotic, idolatrous rulers, whose depredations often compel them to do their work in secret.

It is clear that, far from being only a Shahrzadesque narrative bait to keep untrustworthy readers interested, the Yūdhāsaf stories are deeply embedded in the contentions that Ṣadūq has been making in the earlier parts of the book. It is dominated by the same motifs that dominate Ṣadūq's selection of stories of the prophets and, indeed, the *muʿammarūn* stories. We see the custodians of religion driven into hiding by unholy tyrants; we see the pious quest of the faithful to learn their teachings in their enforced absence. Like the stories of the prophets, the Yūdhāsaf stories are further linked to the master-narrative of the Twelfth Imām not only by motifs of plot but also by the staple vocabulary of Imami literature on the subject, regularly employing terms like *imām*, *khurūj*, and, of course, *ghaybah*.

So far Ṣadūq's presentation of the Yūdhāsaf stories is very reminiscent of how he treats the *muʿammarūn* stories, complete with the same apparent contradictions. Once again we find a set of material, the utility of which for *Kamāl al-dīn*'s central contention is evident, but just as evident is Ṣadūq's determination to distance himself from that utility. Once again we find Ṣadūq anxious to reaffirm that he needs only the *imām*s' *ḥadīth* to prove his points, and that these other texts are of a thoroughly secondary (or tertiary) importance. Where Ṣadūq narrates stories of the prophets, the parallels between the Hidden Imām and prophets like Joseph and Abraham are often vociferously pointed out to the reader, but such guiding interventions are quite absent from the Yūdhāsaf stories, their many resonances with the occultation of the *imām* remaining implicit for the reader to find.

In two ways, however, the Yūdhāsaf narratives appear the greater oddity. The first is the different reason supplied for their inclusion. Ṣadūq does not suggest that these are governed by the same rubric of anti-proof under which he included the *muʿammarūn* texts, instead having us believe that Yūdhāsaf is there solely to entertain (a claim that their clear probative value renders all the more implausible). This is all the more noteworthy in combination with the second distinguishing feature of the Yūdhāsaf stories: their alterity. We have seen how Ṣadūq emphasizes that the *muʿammarūn* stories are of a less verifiable quality than the *aḥādīth* of the *imām*s, but with the Yūdhāsaf stories we arrive in even less canonical territory. Though the *muʿammarūn* stories contain their share of unsourced texts and improbable legends, they still in the main deal with matter which is very local, both geographically and epistemologically: the long-lived Arabs whom Ṣadūq lists include figures to whom are attributed familiar poems and to whom tribes trace their genealogies. While the events they describe are often filled with wonders and perhaps unfamiliar for it, they are nonetheless accompanied by Ṣadūq's energetic attempts to situate them as the property of the Imamis' accustomed opponents, narrated by their authorities and written in their books. With Yūdhāsaf, however, we have moved to a very different register, a place of the exotic, the unknown and the quite unverifiable, once upon a time and far, far away.

> I have heard that there was once a king amongst the kings of India. His soldiers were many, his kingdom was large, he was held in dread by his people and was victorious over his enemies. But he was also possessed of great desire for the pleasures of this world, its delights and its diversions, and so was ruled and swayed by his passions. For him, the most beloved and trusted of men was he who flattered him and lauded his opinions, while the most despised and doubted was he who neglected his commands and bade him do otherwise than he wished.[61]

The even more fabulous, altericized register inhabited by these narratives in some ways heralds a proportional escalation of the risk of their inclusion. If Ṣadūq is nervous of being seen to rely on *isnād*-devoid wisdom literature like the *muʿammarūn* stories, this can only be exacerbated when it comes to a text like the Yūdhāsaf stories that has minimal, if any, claim to authority. This heightened risk in turn intensifies the puzzle of why Ṣadūq includes so hazardous a text and on such a scale.

Conversely, we see in this same otherness that distinguishes the Yūdhāsaf stories in *Kamāl al-dīn* the beginnings of their utility. They are extraneous to the known, to the knowable, and thus extraneous to the verifiable, and this allows them to function with certain freedoms and flexibilities that are not possible for Ṣadūq's other texts. The stories told in his other texts, be they about recent historical figures like Khumāra-wayh b. Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn or more distant individuals like Luqmān or even Dhū'l-Qarnayn, must confine their images of occultation to certain frameworks of who these figures are known to be and the exploits in which they are known to participate, even though these may include such wondrous details as bejeweled citadels and adventures beneath pyramids. The setting of India,[62] by contrast, removes us to a context that is utterly distant, non-Abrahamic, and unverifiable.[63]

In such a setting, Ṣadūq's images of the Twelfth Imām can now appear on an altogether grander scale. The hidden *imām*s who appear in the Yūdhāsaf stories are persecuted not by their fellow Muslims over disputes of legitimacy, but by wicked, idolatrous tyrants, monstrous kings who give no pretense of piety but condemn entire religions to be burned to death. Their persecution is justified not by theological minutiae but by the charge of piety itself, the teachings for which they are hounded none other than the essential truths of God's oneness and power and of man's frailty.[64] As for the one who seeks the hidden figure of guidance, the humble believers of the stories of the Twelfth Imām, now it is the young, heroic prince, setting out to seek adventure and to restore just rule to the land, perhaps encountering one or two fair maidens in towers as he does so.[65] This is the story of the Twelfth Imām not merely corroborated but reinvigorated and writ large, a story that the Yūdhāsaf stories

are able to create precisely because of their apocryphal nature.

Even as he presents these most dramatic illustrations of the reality of occultation as a pervasive, perennial phenomenon of human experience, we have seen how Ṣadūq is anxious to distance himself from any open reliance on these texts for probative value, fearful that to do so would be a fatal blow to his arguments' credibility. Rather, all that is offered here is tacit similarity, the stories relying only on the reader's imagination to form the associations that they facilitate. Ṣadūq ensures that this imaginative leap will indeed occur by a simple process of accumulation, enacting countless reiterations of his key motifs across the length of *Kamāl al-dīn*, from Nimrod's pursuit of Abraham, to Pharaoh's pursuit of Moses, to the Abbasids' pursuit of the Hidden Imām, to the awful king of India's murderous designs, ever reinforcing them in the reader's mind such that they become unmissable.

This cumulative instruction of the reader's imagination in turn engenders powerful assertions of equivalence and truth that draw on something more profound, more visceral than the textual-critical authenticity that had proved so elusive to Imami proponents of the occultation. The Hidden Imām, these stories declare, *is* the wandering, pious sage whom the true of heart must seek out. His disappearance *is* the necessary flight from tyrannical, bloody persecution. The Imami believer *is* the heroic young prince. The Abbasid caliph, meanwhile, *is* the genocidal, unbelieving oppressor, the enemy of religion itself. Much of this is achieved by the grand scale of the Yūdhāsaf stories, but much, too, is accomplished by a strategic shrinking of certain of *Kamāl al-dīn*'s leitmotifs. While Imami scholars equivocate endlessly on the exact reason for God's concealment of the *imām* and what this entails for his community,[66] in the Yūdhāsaf stories things are simpler, the men of God hiding for fear of persecution, not as a result of some inscrutable divine act. They are not miraculously concealed, only hidden in another country, and if needs must they can return to answer the virtuous quest of the young prince. The *mysterium tremendum* of the occultation is, at the last, lessened here, the *imām*'s inscrutable hiddenness incorporated into the older, the more recognizable, indeed the qurʾānic and indelibly Shiʿi

paradigm of the enlightened few fleeing the tyrannical, misguided majority. The soteriological rupture of the *imām*'s hiddenness, meanwhile, becomes mollified into no less familiar a motif than the young man setting out to seek his fortune.

Ṣadūq thus attempts to raise the image of the Hidden Imām to the level of myth and archetype, rendered truth by its intrinsic human drama that may resonate with fundamental motifs of storytelling. This device that we see at its clearest here in the Yūdhāsaf stories in turn sheds invaluable light on the curious, apparently counter-productive fixation with the outlandish and the apocryphal that Ṣadūq has exhibited throughout the *Kamāl al-dīn*. While he could present theologically water-tight accounts of the *imām*'s occultation and those of previous prophets, to do so would be to severely impoverish this parallel engine of proof by myth. The latter requires both quantity and quality; Ṣadūq may convey a certain amount through sheer weight of repetition, but he appreciates the need for the memorable, the extraordinary, the dramatic, and the fabulous. What the image of Idrīs rebuked by God for sulking, the image of Salmān wandering a *ḥujjah*-deprived world, and, indeed, the image of Alexander encountering little furry people with mismatched ears may cost in terms of credibility, Ṣadūq gambles they will recuperate by further engrossing the reader in his seething intertext of shared motifs.[67] If his material is rich enough, he paradoxically attains a measure of deniability —he can state outright that he does not rely on these texts, trusting their message will penetrate regardless.[68]

Kamāl al-dīn is unusual amongst other writings on the Twelfth Imām by Ṣadūq's contemporaries in that it does not avoid or talk down the narrated testaments to the Twelfth Imām's existence but asserts their indubitable probative force. Nonetheless, we have seen how Ṣadūq is painfully aware of these texts' limits in the face of a cynical, unbelieving majority. In parallel to *Kamāl al-dīn*'s declared goal, he therefore pursues a broader, more ambitious project: to compensate for these proof-texts' lack of textual-critical credibility by drawing instead on a resource which he perceives them to have in abundance—the sheer compelling drama of the stories they tell. Rather than create a sanitized account of the

occultation, he embraces all that is unstable and eccentric in the corpora available to him, committing to accounts that his less intrepid fellow scholars dared not go near and embedding them in an eternal drama of absent authority, in the hope of imagining a Hidden Imām who is simply too enticing a story not to believe in. It is a daring and ingenious strategy that reaches its culmination in the last, long flight of fancy provided by Yūdhāsaf and his adventures.[69]

Notes

1. In terms of extant writings, *Kamāl al-dīn* is probably the third oldest substantial Imami treatment of the subject of the Hidden Imām to survive. Ṣadūq's father, ʿAlī b. Bābawayh (Ibn Bābawayh the Elder, d. 329/941) leaves a treatise entitled *Al-Imāmah waʾl-tabṣirah min al-ḥayrah* ("The Imāmate and Clarity from Perplexity") (Qom: Madrasat al-Imām al-Mahdī, 1985) which presents itself as a discussion of the occultation in its brief introduction, but the text that follows, as we have it, does not discuss the Twelfth Imām. (This is almost certainly due to its being incomplete. We need look no further than *Kamāl al-dīn* to read the substantial body of *aḥādīth* concerning the Twelfth Imām that are narrated from Ibn Bābawayh the Elder.) Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Kulaynī's (d. 329/941) *Al-Kāfī* (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyyah, 1388 [1968]) and Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Nuʿmānī's (d. 360/971) *Al-Ghaybah* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī liʾl-Maṭbūʿāt, 2013), both substantial discussions from earlier in the century, as well as Pseudo-Masʿūdī's *Ithbāt al-waṣiyyah* (which cannot be dated with certainty due to its unknown provenance), will be discussed below.

2. See note 58 below.

3. See Fred Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginning of Islamic Historical Writing* (Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 14; Princeton: Darwin Press, 1998), 286–287.

4. See Pseudo-Masʿūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ, 1988), 155.

5. See Maria Massi Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 33–48.

6. Stewart provides a valuable theorization of the situation of Imamis (specifically with regard to Imami legal thought) in his formulation of the three options historically available to the Imami Shi'ah as a minority: conformance to consensus, rejection of consensus, or adoption of consensus. It was conformance to consensus that dominated the Imami experience of the Buwayhid period, and it is this same conformance to consensus that we see dominating Imami attitudes to history at that

time. See Devin Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shiite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998), 1–109.

7. The earliest account of these disputes is found in the early Imami doxography of al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā al-Nawbakhtī (d. ca. 300–310/912–922), *Firaq al-Shīʿah* (Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat al-Dawlah, 1931), 79–94. For the authoritative overview of the disputes surrounding Imam ʿAskarī's death and succession, see Hossein Modarressi, *Crisis and Consolidation in the Formative Period of Shiʿite Islam: Abū Jaʿfar Ibn Qiba Al-Rāzī and His Contribution to Imāmite Shīʿite Thought* (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1993), 3–105.

8. This imperative to defend the occultation occurred in the context of a much broader pressure felt by the Imami Shi'ah under the new circumstances of Buwayhid rule. The increased public acceptance of Imamis in this period allowed greater interaction between them and the non-Shi'i majority, increasing the need for Imami scholars to have ready mechanisms to defend and justify their doctrines in the face of their adversaries. See Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy*, 1–69 and *passim*. Regarding the inherently contentious nature of attributing miracles to the imāms, see note 55 below.

9. See Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, 1.328–343, 514–535.

10. What can be noted is that *Al-Kāfī* presents itself as an encyclopedia for the Imami faithful. In the introduction (5–9), Kulaynī addresses the book to an unnamed interlocutor who seeks the guidance of the *imām*s, rather than setting out to defend the book's contents against a more hostile readership (though this does not mean he was not mindful of the possibility of such a readership encountering the work). Ibn al-Nadīm (d. 385/995), meanwhile, writing a few decades later, does not appear to know of Kulaynī's *Al-Kāfī*, giving no mention of him in his *Fihrist*, further indicating that the book had yet to reach a readership beyond those of similar persuasions to those of Kulaynī himself (though he seems to have been an Imami, Ibn al-Nadīm's interests lay very much in the realm of philosophy rather than traditionalism, as was not uncommon among Imamis in the Buwayhid period).

11. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Mufīd, *Al-Irshād* (Beirut: Mu'as-

sasat Āl al-Bayt li-Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, 2008), 2.342–343.

12. E.g., Nuʿmānī, *Al-Ghaybah*, 65–74.

13. Accounts of the apocalyptic events that will accompany the *imām*'s reappearance function to prove the all-important contention that this has not happened yet, bolstering the claim that the *imām* is, indeed, still in occultation and not to be identified with the claimants of other sects, most notably the Fatimids. See Nuʿmānī, *Al-Ghaybah*, 179, 240–245.

14. Though the details of Imami *isnād* criticism in the earlier fourth/tenth century are little known, it can certainly be observed that the asānīd of the texts pertaining to the Twelfth Imām in *Al-Kāfī* (and indeed in *Kamāl al-dīn*) are in many cases self-evidently problematic, most obviously in cases wherein the original narrator (and thus the witness to the Imām's existence) is unnamed. See, e.g., Kulaynī, *Al-Kāfī*, 1.514, no. 2; 519, no. 8; 522, no. 17; and 523, no. 19. Cf. Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī Ibn Bābawayh (Ṣadūq), *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-niʿmah*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar Ghaffārī (Qom: Muʾassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1429 [2008]), 463–464, nos. 1 and 4.

15. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 33–34. For an examination of the possible significance of this origin-story of *Kamāl al-dīn*, see Roy Vilozny, "What Makes a Religion Perfect? Al-Ṣadūq's *Kamāl al-dīn* Revisited," in M. A. Amir-Moezzi et al. (eds.), *L'Ésotérisme shi'ite: ses racines et ses prolongements* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 473-491, 477–480.

16. A similar, though less concerted, argument is deployed by Nuʿmānī, who evokes the examples (employed extensively by Ṣadūq) of Joseph's remaining unrecognized by his brothers in Egypt and Moses' concealment from Pharaoh as an infant to justify the Hidden Imām's concealment. See Nuʿmānī, *Al-Ghaybah*, 101, 111, 116–117.

17. The desire to find parallels between the lives of the *imām*s and those of the prophets has been widely observed as a characteristic of Imami Shi'i literature in particular. See Judith Loebenstein, "Miracles in Šīʿī Thought: A Case Study of the Miracles Attributed to Imām Gaʿfar al-Ṣādiq," *Arabica* 50 (2003): 199–244, 235–237, and 241–242; Matthew Pierce, *Twelve Infallible Men: The Imams and the Making of Shi'ism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 92, 108–109, 120, 130–132, 144–146; Khalid

Sindawi, "The Donkey of the Prophet in the Shīʿite Tradition," *Al-Masāq: Journal of the Medieval Mediterranean* 18 (2006): 87-98; idem, "Noah and Noah's Ark as the Primordial Model of Shiʿism in Shiʿite Literature," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* (n.s.) 1 (2006): 29–48.

18. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 111, 157.

19. Also adduced repeatedly are a set of *aḥādīth* in which the Twelfth Imām is foretold as exhibiting a *sunnah* from one or more previous prophets (many of which involve concealment), for example Moses's concealed birth or Muḥammad's use of the sword. See, e.g., Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 58, 176–177, and 184.

20. It is worthy of comment that Ṣadūq elects to seek this precedent in the lives of the prophets rather than those of previous *imām*s. Pierce has studied the extensive commonalities that appear across biographies of different *imām*s in Imami literature from the Buwayhid period onward, such that *imām*s' births, martyrdoms, and so on conform to largely interchangeable types, while Buckley identifies a similar process in *ḥadīth* dating back to the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries: Ron P. Buckley, "The Morphology and Significance of Some Imāmī Shīʿite Traditions," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 52 (2007): 301–334. For more on the presence of such motifs in *Kamāl al-dīn*, see below. In *Al-Kāfī*, meanwhile, Kulaynī's chapters on occultation include *aḥādīth* wherein earlier *imām*s, primarily al-Ṣādiq, discuss their own states of hiddenness (as well as foretelling that of the Twelfth Imām) (e.g., *Al-Kāfī*, 1.333–334, no. 2).

Ṣadūq's choice of focus might be explained by his seeking a non-Imami audience (for whom the precedent of the *imām*s would mean little). This is not how he presents the book, however. In his introduction, he describes motivation stemming from the bewilderment of the Imami faithful with regard to the occultation (33), and later opines that discussions of the Twelfth Imām are pointless if one's interlocutor does not already accept the necessity of an *imām* (74). A better explanation might simply be that an established literature of "lives of the *imām*s" had yet to emerge. The earliest datable text of this type we have is Mufīd's *Al-Irshād*. Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Sharīf al-Raḍī (d. 406/1015), Mufīd's student, is still to be found introducing his unfinished *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-aʾimmah* as a

book about the births, deaths, deeds, and virtues of the Twelve Imāms as though such a work were a novelty: al-Raḍī, *Khaṣāʾiṣ al-aʾimmah* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī liʾl-Maṭbūʿāt, 1986), 23–25. While Pierce's study includes two texts (Pseudo-Masʿūdī's *Ithbāt al-waṣiyyah* and the *Dalāʾil al-aʾimmah* attributed to Muḥammad b. Jarīr b. Rustam al-Ṭabarī) that are notionally before Mufīd, both of these are, as he acknowledges, of deeply uncertain provenance (Pierce, *Twelve Infallible Men*, 22–25).

21. See Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 158–232 (the first twenty-one chapters of the book). For a case study of the significance of one such story to *Kamāl al-dīn*'s overall objectives see Kyoko Yoshida, "Qiṣaṣ Contribution to the Theory of Ghayba in Twelver Shīʿism," *Orient* 44 (2009): 91-104.

22. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 169–171.

23. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 173–176, 180, and 189–190.

24. See note 17 above.

25. For discussions of the book's provenance (albeit rather more focused on the fact that Masʿūdī probably did not write it rather than on who did) see Charles Pellat, "Masʿūdī et l'Imāmisme," in R. Brunschwig (ed.), *Le Shîʾisme Imâmite: Colloque de Strasbourg (6-9 mai 1968)* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970), 69–90; Tarif Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Masʿūdī* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975) 136–142.

26. As *Kamāl al-dīn*'s own title illustrates, there is no way to positively identify such other works on the subject as may have existed from the bibliographical record alone. Yoshida notes in his discussion of *Kamāl al-dīn* that stories about al-Khiḍr, at least, appear in Shiʾi literature in the mid-fourth/tenth century, a contention for which he cites Franke who, in turn, cites *Kamāl al-dīn* as the earliest example (Yoshida, "Qiṣaṣ Contribution to the Theory of Ghayba in Twelver Shīʿism," 94; Patrick Franke, *Begegnung mit Khidr: Quellenstudien zum Imaginären im traditionellen Islam* [Stuttgart: Steiner, 2000], 11).

27. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 194–198 and 465–468.

28. Ibid., 189–190; 380, no. 34; 385, no. 49; and 468, nos. 7 and 8.

29. Ibid., 158–164; 468, no. 10.

30. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 559–604. These are preceded a few chapters previously by a much smaller group of *aḥādīth* which describe the longevity of the prophets and their communities (549–551).

31. While this question no doubt became more vexed as the occultation approached its centenary, it is interesting to note that already in Nuʿmānī we see the assertion that the imām is going to be gone for a very long time. See Nuʿmānī, *Al-Ghaybah*, 137.

32. Al-Ṣadūq is not alone in putting the *muʿammarūn* to legal or theological use. Juynboll has examined how in the second/eighth century *ḥadīth* transmitters would have recourse to (supposedly or actually) exceptionally long-lived transmitters to join otherwise problematically distant links in an *isnād*. See G. H. A. Juynboll, "The Role of *Muʿammrūn* in the Early Development of the *Isnād*," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 81 (1991): 155–175.

33. For an examination of Muslim traditions regarding the long-lived and giant-sized peoples of ages past and their significance in the wider Middle Eastern context and beyond, see Brannon Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden: Ritual, Relics and Territory in Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 99–122.

34. The most significant extant example of this literature (first edited by Ignaz Goldziher [Leiden, 1899]) is the *Kitāb al-Muʿammarīn* of Abū Ḥātim Sahl b. Muḥammad al-Sijistānī (d. 255/869). Ṣadūq shares a great deal of material with Sijistānī and is very probably using him as a source. He refers to a *Kitāb al-Muʿammarīn* in which he finds much of his material but does not name Sijistānī. It is also possible that the books shared a common source or that Ṣadūq was getting Sijistānī's material secondhand.

35. Though *aḥādīth* linking the Twelfth Imām's occultation to the precedent of specific prophets clearly have no bearing on the *muʿammarūn*, the case of Ṣadūq's more general proof-text, "whatsoever has befallen previous communities shall befall my community," is less clear-cut. Ṣadūq forcefully evokes this *ḥadīth* in the context of the *muʿammarūn* stories in a rebuke to his detractors (*Kamāl al-dīn*, 601), but as we shall

see, he is elsewhere eager to assert that the *muʿammarūn* stories are not to be relied on as positive proof in the way that the stories of the prophets are.

36. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 575 and 581.

37. Ibid., 34, 85, 113–114, 117, 134, etc. For a discussion of this role of the Brahmins (*barāhimah*) in Islamic thought as trope for monotheists who reject all Abrahamic prophets (among other characteristics attributed to them), see Norman Calder, "The Barāhima: Literary Construct and Historical Reality," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 57 (1994): 40–51.

38. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 578, 581, etc.

39. Ibid., 558–559.

40. Ibid., 601.

41. Ibid., 564.

42. Ibid., 578–581. Kaʿb is, in fact, one of the figures whom Ṣadūq singles out as narrators of the improbable whom the Imamis' opponents inexplicably believe while rejecting the Hidden Imām. Ibid., 557.

43. Ibid., 556–559 and 601.

44. The printed text of *Kamāl al-dīn* renders the name Ḥammādawayh, however Khumārawayh b. Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn, ruler of Egypt (r. 270/884–282/896), is clearly meant.

45. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 588–590.

46. Ibid., 573.

47. Ibid., 562–564.

48. Ibid., 574–575.

49. Ibid., 578. Tellingly, Ṣadūq inserts no such objection earlier on in *Kamāl al-dīn* when Alexander at the end of his wanderings comes across a land in which descendants of Moses's people are living in a perfect society, with whom Alexander elects to dwell for the rest of his days. See ibid., 433–435.

50. Ibid., 480–481.

51. Ibid., 169, 474–476, and 528.

52. That Ṣadūq felt this pressure has long been documented; more than one recent scholar has read concessions to Muʿtazilism in his theo-

logical writings. See Martin J. McDermott, *The Theology of Al-Shaikh Al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022)* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq Éditeurs, 1978), 341–342 and Wilferd Madelung, "Imāmism and Muʿtazilite Theology," in Brunschwig (ed.), *Le Shîʾisme Imâmite*, 13–30, 19–20.

53. Ibn Bābawayh (Ṣadūq), *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī liʾl-Maṭbūʿāt, 2006), 166–167.

54. Idem, *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā* (Qom: Manshūrāt Dhawī al-Qurbā, 1427 [2006]), 1.105–138; idem, *Al-Tawḥīd*, 103–104.

55. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 140. Their attribution of miracles to the imāms was an ongoing source of controversy for the Imami Shiʾah, provoking near-unanimous censure from other groups. See Loebenstein, "Miracles in Šīʿī Thought," 202–211.

56. Recently *Kamāl al-dīn* has been better served with studies on diverse aspects of the work having been provided by Mohammad ʿAlī Amir-Moezzi, "A Contribution on the Typology of Encounters with the Hidden Imām," in ibid., *The Spirituality of Shiʾi Islam: Beliefs and Practices* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 431–460; Vilozny, "What Makes a Religion Perfect?"; and Yoshida, "Qiṣaṣ Contribution to the Theory of Ghayba in Twelver Shīʿism."

57. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 603–667. On the question of Yūdhāsaf/Būdāsf/Buddha's name, see note 69 below.

58. Daniel Gimaret produced a translation and edition of *Kitāb Bilawhar wa Būdāsf* (Paris: Librairie Droz, 1972), based on a manuscript of *Kamāl al-dīn* and other Arabic exemplars of the story. S. M. Stern and Sophie Walzer give a translation and analysis of those stories in the text that are unknown in any Buddhist source: *Three Unknown Buddhist Stories in an Arabic Version* (Oxford: Cassirer, 1971). Zeina Matar examines an instance of continued interest in the text in later Shiʾi writings: "The Buddha Legend: A Footnote from an Arabic Source," *Oriens* 32 (1990): 440–442. For an analysis of the potential sources of the text in *Kamāl al-dīn*, see F. de Blois, "On the Sources of the Barlaam Romance, or How Buddha Became a Christian Saint," in Christiane Reck, Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, and Dieter Weber (eds.), *Literarische Stoffe und ihre Gestaltung in mitteliranischer Zeit Kolloquium anlässlich des 70. Geburtstages von Werner*

Sundermann (Wiesbaden: Ludwig Reichert, 2009), 7–25.

59. This concern that the reader be kept entertained and interested, and, indeed, that they might be so interested as to be coaxed into reading something improving despite themselves, is a familiar one in Abbasid literature, an extensive study of which is provided by G. J. H. van Gelder, "Mixtures of Jest and Earnest in Classical Arabic Literature: Part I," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 23 (1992): 83–108, 95–106; and idem, "Mixtures of Jest and Earnest in Classical Arabic Literature. Part II," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 23 (1992): 169–90, 169–172.

60. See Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Mūsā b. Bābawayh (Ṣadūq), *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ* (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī li'l-Maṭbūʿāt, 2007), 282–283 and 296.

61. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 603. Interestingly, in some manuscripts, "I have heard" is prefixed by a short *isnād* of mostly unknown sources, while in others this is omitted.

62. India is often to be found playing the role of the exotic other in Abbasid literature. This receives abundant illustration in the *ʿAjāʾib al-hind* of Buzurg b. Shahriyār (d. 342/954) (Jabil: Dār wa-Maktabat Bībliyūn, 2009), whose exotic tales must represent a much more widespread popular literature along similar lines now lost to us. This imaginative habit is meanwhile tellingly rebuffed in a work that set out to correct it: Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, in the introduction to his *Taḥqīq mā li'l-Hind*, vents not a little frustration at people's credulity with regard to this subject matter: *Kitāb al-Bīrūnī fī Taḥqīq mā li'l-Hind min maqūlah maqbūlah fī'l-ʿaql aw mardhūlah* (Qom: Intishārāt-i Bīdār, 1418 [1997]), 1–6. Al-Sayrāfī similarly is anxious to distinguish his account of the region from the common currency of sailors' tales; see James E. Montgomery and Tim Mackintosh-Smith (trans.), *Two Arabic Travel Books* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 132–133.

63. We should note that, as we saw above, it is the example of the Indian Brahmins and their extraordinary, unapologetically foreign, total rejection of the Abrahamic model of prophecy that is presented in *Kamāl al-dīn* as the dreadful eventual consequence of Ṣadūq's opponents' rejection of his proof-texts.

64. It is worth noting that Ṣadūq is elsewhere quite clear that even such essential truths as these cannot become known without the guidance of a *ḥujjah*. See *Al-Tawḥīd*, 314–321.

65. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 659.

66. In *Kamāl al-dīn* itself we see Ṣadūq offer a number of answers to this question. See 507–508, nos. 7–10. For an examination of the significance of Ṣadūq's given reasons and how they interrelate with Kamāl al-dīn's chronicled stories of the prophets, see Vilozny, "What Makes a Religion Perfect?," 487–490.

67. Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn*, 430–431. In other works, Ṣadūq steps in with commentary to clarify reports in which a prophet appears less than perfect to bring it in line with the Imami belief in prophetic infallibility, but not here. See, e.g., idem, *Al-Tawḥīd*, 128.

68. The presence of pervasive, continuing motifs and narrative patterns in Imami *ḥadīth* literature and in particular in texts concerning the lives of the *imāms* has received attention from a number of scholars. Pierce has explored how these patterns develop in collective biographies of the *imāms* in the Buwayhid period and after, while Buckley identifies a similar dynamic in individual *aḥādīth* as they are narrated as early as the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries. Both scholars examine the phenomenon from a diachronic perspective, analyzing the role of these recurring narratives in the ongoing creation of a shared Imami Shi'i cultural memory (see also Rainer Brunner, "The Role of Ḥadīth as Cultural Memory in Shī'ī History," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 30 [2005]: 318–360). While elements of Ṣadūq's motif-building may certainly be seen as part of just such a process, what we have also seen here in *Kamāl al-dīn* is how a single author at a particular historical moment can actively undertake to shape and exploit the narrative resonances of his material to very specific ends. As such, Ṣadūq's endeavors have much in common with what Bray observes within Ibn 'Abd Rabbihi's (d. 328/940) writing (from which study the use of the term 'myth' is borrowed): Julia Bray, "Abbasid Myth and the Human Act," in Philip F. Kennedy (ed.), *On Fiction and Adab in Medieval Arabic* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 1–49.

69. Unlike the son of Aḥmad b. Ṭūlūn, the Bodhisattva from whose

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title the word Yūdhāsaf ultimately derives is a long way from any histo-
rical memory that Ṣadūq might be party to. Yūdhāsaf becomes Josephat
in European context, a figure of legend with similarly little connection
to any self-consciously Buddhist context. Although other Arabic versions
of the story are nearer the mark in their location of diacritics with *Būdāsf*
(as followed by Gimaret), and though we have no way of knowing whether
the shift from *b* to *y* comes from Ṣadūq or a later scribe, to correct the
text would be to impose a quite fictitious notion that Ṣadūq or the scribe
was somehow mistaken in giving the name Yūdhāsaf to the protagonist
of this text's wondrous adventures, when in fact Yūdhāsaf is perfectly
named to perform the task intended for him. It seems judicious, then,
to leave him as he is.

اشرف قریش جمع اولدن اول کلماتی استماع ایتدکه موهوم اولوب ارتفاع اثی
دولت اسلام ایدن اندیشه قلوب حضرت رسولک قتلکه نبیل بغلدیلر

وابو طالبه بنا ید حدیال وقتال تدیر او طالب او نی نبو هاشمی وبخو

The Cloak of Joseph:
A *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* Image in an Arabic and a Hebrew Poem of Desire

Shari Lowin

Abstract

This study analyzes the use of a *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* narrative in two secular homoerotic poems of desire (*ʿishq*) written by religious authority figures in Muslim Spain, one in Arabic and one in Hebrew. In the Arabic poem, by the Cordoban jurist Ibn Ḥazm (384–456/994–1064), the lover compares the scent of the clothes of his absent beloved to a *qiṣaṣ* account in which the scent of the prophet Joseph's cloak miraculously heals his grieving father's blindness. Since a similar narrative appears in the Qurʾān, this study analyzes why Ibn Ḥazm chose the *qiṣaṣ* version over the qurʾānic account and what messages about human love and desire Ibn Ḥazm's poem thereby sends. The Hebrew poem, by Ibn Ḥazm's one-time friend Samuel ha-Nagid (993–1055), uses a similar reference to the cloak of Joseph, despite the fact that the frame-narrative appears in neither the Bible nor rabbinic literature. This study argues that Samuel may have borrowed the image from Ibn Ḥazm but that in doing so, his poem sends an entirely different message about love and lovers.

Introduction

When one studies the "stories of the prophets" in Islamic tradition, one usually looks for them in their expected milieu, the exegetical literature or the collections of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* materials. However, religious literature relating to the interpretation of the Qurʾān is not the only setting in which such narratives appear. Rather, as we will see, such accounts and their attendant imagery were so entrenched in Islamic society, in Muslim Andalusia in particular, that we find *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* materials appearing even in secular poems of desire, in which they are used to subversive ends. Perhaps more surprisingly, in one case an Islamic *qiṣaṣ* motif has slipped across confessional bounds and asserted itself in a secular Hebrew desire poem by a Spanish Jewish poet. Such is the situation regarding the motif of the cloak of the forefather Joseph and its startling appearance in both a homoerotic poem by the Ẓāhirī scholar Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. Saʿīd b. Ḥazm (384–456/994–1064) and in a heteroerotic poem by the Jewish scholar, general, and statesman, Samuel the Nagid (also known as Samuel b. Naghrela, 993–1055/6 CE).

ʿIshq poetry in medieval Spain

The poems of both Ibn Ḥazm and Samuel the Nagid belong to a genre of secular poetry hailing from Islamic Spain known in Arabic as poems of *ʿishq* and in Hebrew as *shirat ḥesheq*. In such poems, the poet speaks as a human being engaged in a passionate relationship with another human being. In truth, they are poems of desire rather than of romantic love. This distinction between types of love can be found in the work of earlier Muslim scholars. For example, the litterateur, prose writer, and theologian Abū ʿUthman ʿAmr b. Baḥr al-Kinānī al-Baṣrī, known as al-Jāḥiẓ (d. 155/868), differentiated between *ʿishq* and another category of love with which it is sometimes incorrectly confused, *ḥubb*. Jāḥiẓ explains *ḥubb* as sentimental love, the type of love one feels for one's family, or for God. While *ḥubb* constitutes the first stage of *ʿishq*, he writes, *ʿishq* requires both a sense of *hawā* (passion) and a physical

component, sexual attraction. While *ḥubb* lacks the sexual component, sex constitutes the very defining characteristic of *ʿishq*.[1] Sexuality and eroticism stand as key components of *ʿishq* poems as well.

While this category of poetry attained great heights in Muslim Spain, it was not wholly invented there. Rather, Andalusian *ʿishq* poems drew from eastern Arabic forms that predated it, mainly ʿUdhrite love poetry, named for the South Arabian tribe from which many of the earliest poets in this genre came. In the pre-Islamic era, love poetry was not an entirely independent poetic form, but rather appeared usually as part of the long ode-like *qaṣīdah*. These long mono-rhymed poems of often elaborate meter valorized the concerns and ideals of the pre-Islamic Bedouin society in which they developed. The poems celebrated and praised Arab bravery in war, Arab generosity, and frequently described battlefield or pastoral scenes. Love lyrics appeared as the *nasīb*, the amatory prelude to the poems. With the Islamic conquests and the Islamization of the Arabian Peninsula, especially under the Umayyad caliphate, the poems underwent Islamization as well; Islamic values replaced the pagan standards, and an urban focus replaced pastoral scenarios. Love poems that incorporated the themes of ʿUdhrite love then developed independently of the long *qaṣīdah.*

The Andalusian form of these love poems reflect many of the values visible in ʿUdhrite predecessors. Known also as pessimistic love poetry or chaste love poetry, ʿUdhrite love poetry presents readers with a highly conventionalized form that frequently speaks of lovers yearning for union with the beloved without any real hope of physical realization. The poems describe the beloved in physical terms, describing the body rather than the character. The beloveds' bodies themselves are also presented in conventionalized terminology—dark-haired, dark-eyed, with a shape that resembles a date-palm—so that it can sometimes seem there is but one beloved behind a great majority of the poems. The poems speak of the horrific suffering inflicted on the lover by their forced separation from the beloved, and of the cruelty of the beloved who knows of the lover's suffering but seems either uninterested in alleviating it or actively interested in extending it. Due to this cruelty or apathy, the

beloveds' bodies are also often described as weapons causing grave pain to the lover both up close and at a distance: fingers stab, eyes ensnare, breasts poke like arrows, sprouting beards prick like thorns.[2] In adapting ʿUdhrite poems, the Andalusian love poets—both Muslim and Jewish— preserve many of these conventions. However, in at least two ways, Andalusian poets were not quite as forlorn as their ʿUdhrite predecessors. While they suffered in their beloved's absence, the poets from Spain often sound as if they are recalling actualized physical intimacy which they hoped to re-create or, in some cases, as if they were describing an episode of physical intimacy as it unfolded. Additionally, ʿUdhrite poets were apt to die from their love-suffering; Andalusian poets met their deaths far less often.

Perhaps somewhat surprisingly given the sexualized nature of *ʿishq* poetry, qurʾānic imagery and storylines not infrequently find their way into the Arabic poems. Such religious references form an updated version of a pre-Islamic convention in which pre-Islamic Arabic poets incorporated figures and themes from Arabic literary tradition and history into their poems. When secular poetry writing came to Islamic Spain, the Muslim poets added or replaced these with qurʾānic and Islamic historical or religious figures. When Andalusian Jews began writing Hebrew poetry on the same model, they replaced the Muslim imagery with allusions to the Bible and midrash.[3] For both the pre-Islamic and the Andalusian Muslim poets, incorporating such figures and story-lines into their desire poems was also a way of playing with their audiences. As Ross Brann writes, both Muslim and Jewish poets incorporated sacred imagery and language into their secular poems in order "to create the false impression of irreverence, and thereby entertain the audience (or reader)."[4]

What is particularly interesting about this irreverent use of scripture is that it appears especially frequently in the secular desire poems of religious authority figures, men otherwise the most concerned with upholding the sacredness of religion and in promulgating its ideals and values. Thus, when such scholars of religion plunder their sacred texts in order to flesh out their heterosexually- and homosexually-charged desire poems, it begs our further attention, for in many cases, these

scholar-poets use scripture as more than just poetic ornamentation. As we will see in one short example by Ibn Ḥazm, *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* referents can sometimes serve to sacralize what is an otherwise scandalous romantic attachment.

Ibn Ḥazm and the Cloak of Joseph

Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Aḥmad b. Ḥazm (385–456/994–1064) hailed from a wealthy and learned Cordoban family who trained him in all the arts important to a well-educated medieval Spanish Muslim. He studied Arabic grammar, literature, lexicography, and rhetoric, as well as qurʾānic exegesis, theology, and *fiqh* (jurisprudence). Ibn Ḥazm grew to be an illustrious theologian, educator, legal authority, and poet. He wrote treatises on Islamic law, on *ḥadīth*, and even on other religious traditions, though the latter were mostly attacks against these faiths. Eventually, Ibn Ḥazm rose to head the Andalusian Ẓāhiri madhhab, which focused on a literalist reading of the Qurʾān.[5]

Well before his shift to Ẓāhirism, sometime around the year 414–415/1024, when he was in his late twenties, Ibn Ḥazm composed a thirty-chapter treatise on human love known as *Ṭawq al-ḥamāmah* (*The Dove's Neck-Ring*). In this treatise, Ibn Ḥazm discusses the nature, causes, and aspects of love, behaviors in which lovers engage, and misfortunes that befall human lovers. He often illustrates these principles, which he discusses in prose form, with poetic compositions of his own creation.

In the chapter entitled "On Contentment" (*al-qunūʾ*), Ibn Ḥazm discusses the behavior of lovers who, separated from their beloveds, seek contentment in the physical objects that had once been in contact with them. In order to illustrate this point, Ibn Ḥazm cites a poem he himself composed. In this poem, he incorporates an example of such contentment-seeking by lovers, an example provided by God Himself.[6]

> When I was prevented from being near to my master
> And he insisted on avoiding me and did not treat me justly,
> I began to content myself with his dress,[7]

Or was contented with something he had touched;
Thus Jacob, the prophet of true guidance,[8]
When the grief for Joseph caused him suffering,
Smelled the tunic[9] which came from him,
And he was blind and from it got well.[10]

This touching poem conforms to the accepted styles and tropes of Andalusian *ʿishq* poetry in numerous ways. Most obviously, the poem opens with the tragic tale of two lovers who, in typical Andalusian fashion, are prevented from actualizing their union with one another. While the lover suffers from this enforced alienation, as a good Andalusian lover should, the beloved sadistically worsens his pain by avoiding him and generally treating him with unjust and unearned cruelty (line 2). Such cruel behavior is not particular to this poem's beloved; rather, Andalusian beloveds were well-known for their harsh reactions to their lovers' anguish. Despite such cruelty, the poem's lover remains faithful to his beloved (lines 3–4), embodying yet another well-known Andalusian trope. For the Andalusians, if a lover even appeared to be able to move on from his declared beloved, he might be accused of never having been in love in the first place.[11]

Passion for the missing beloved usually resulted in physical pain on the part of Andalusian lovers. Their hearts burned, their insides were set aflame, they grew violently ill with grief and passion, they lost so much weight that, as Naṣr b. Aḥmad wrote, a ring that used to be too small for the lover's finger now serves as his belt.[12] Although Ibn Ḥazm's lover does not mention his anguish outright, in comparing himself to Jacob—famously blinded by grief over his missing son Joseph—the lover drives home this point effectively.

While the use of religious heroes and storylines in secular poetry was not unusual, as already discussed, we ought to take note of the fact that here Ibn Ḥazm draws a comparison between a same-sex couple and two prophetic scriptural characters who are not only *not* erotically entangled with one another, but are father and son.[13] In order to understand the full effect of this scriptural reference, let us briefly review the

narrative of Jacob and Joseph as it appears in Sūrah 12 of the Qurʾān, Sūrat Yūsuf.

According to this "most beautiful of stories" (Q Yūsuf 12:3), the sons of the prophet Jacob grow jealous of the favoritism their father shows to their brother Joseph and "his brother," and so they conspire to rid themselves of Joseph.[14] They grab him, throw him into a well, and dip his shirt (*qamīṣ*), which they had apparently stripped from him, into "false blood," thereby manipulating their father into thinking Joseph has been eaten by a wolf (see page 62). Joseph is then picked up by a caravan; sold to a man in Egypt; accused of raping the man's wife; exonerated; brought before the town's women to show off his beauty; sent to jail, where he meets some jailed dreamers; tells their future; interprets the king's dream; gets out of jail; and eventually rises to become vizier in Egypt, in charge of the store-houses. Famine strikes Joseph's homeland and his brothers are forced to come to Egypt in search of sustenance. Because they do not recognize him, Joseph manages to play with them sadistically for a bit (first he accuses them of being thieves, and then holds one of the brothers hostage until his "stolen" item is returned).

In the meantime, Jacob, back at home, has never ceased grieving for his lost son whom he does *not* believe is dead. His incessant crying for Joseph ultimately leads him to go blind (v. 84). Back in Egypt, Joseph eventually reveals himself to Jacob's sons as their missing brother, and arranges to send word to his father that he is still alive. He sends Jacob his shirt (*qamīṣ*) with instructions to the messenger to place it over Jacob's eyes, saying, "He [Jacob] will regain [his] sight" (v. 93, *yaʾti baṣīr*). As soon as the caravan leaves Egypt, Jacob—back home—announces that although his sons may once again accuse him of being a fool, he has suddenly detected Joseph's scent wafting toward him (v. 94). The "bearer of good news" subsequently arrives and casts the shirt over Jacob's face, and Jacob miraculously regains his sight (v. 96).[15] The family then travels en masse to Egypt and father and son are joyfully reunited (v. 97–100).

As we can see, the overall themes of this qurʾānic account dovetail quite nicely with the themes of our Andalusian *ʿishq* poem. In both we

find a moving tale of love between two people who are separated by forces beyond their control. We hear of the pathos of yearning and of the suffering caused by such unrealized love. We learn of the healing caused by not forgetting the missed beloved, of the redemptive value of loyalty. Thus, at first glance, Ibn Ḥazm's use of this seemingly inappropriate scriptural referent (Jacob and Joseph are father and son and not *ʿishq* lovers, after all) appears to serve as a good illustration of the greater point he is trying to make about lovers, their faithfulness, and the methods they employ to soothe themselves in their moments of despair and distress.

Yet, if we look carefully at both the poem and the scriptural account, we notice that the poem's presentation of the Jacob-Joseph narrative deviates in one small but very important way from the Qurʾān's version. According to the poem, Jacob's grief-induced blindness is cured when he *smells* the tunic that came from Joseph (*shamma qamīṣ*). However, this is not what we find in the Qurʾān itself.

In the Qurʾān, smelling and vision-restoration constitute two *separate* miracles, one leading up to the other but not actually causing it. The olfactory miracle occurs in verse 94, where as soon as Joseph's caravan sets out from Egypt, Jacob suddenly detects the aroma of his long-lost son wafting toward him. While the aroma confirms to Jacob what he has believed all along (v. 17–18), that Joseph is *not* dead, it does not actually cure Jacob of his illness. In fact, the only result of this olfactory miracle is that Jacob's family continues to consider him crazy, an accusation they have been lobbing at him since Joseph disappeared and Jacob first refused to accept his death (v. 95). Jacob's sight returns two significant steps later. First the messenger sent by Joseph with his cloak reaches Jacob and then, as per instruction from Joseph, he throws the cloak over Jacob's face. Only after *both* of these actions have been completed does Jacob regain his sight (v. 96). Unlike in Ibn Ḥazm's poem which emphasizes the cloak's healing smell, in the Qurʾān it is physical contact with the tunic that cures Jacob's blindness.

While one might be inclined to think that Ibn Ḥazm here presents us with a brand new reading of the qurʾānic account of Joseph's cloak, in

which he shifts its power from the physical object itself to its aroma, in reality we find the shift from touch to smell in the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* literature. According to Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035), Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Kisāʾī (*ca.* fifth/eleventh c.), and Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī (d. 453–4/1062, citing Isḥāq b. Bishr [d. 206/821]), when Joseph was stripped and thrown into the well, he called to his brothers to return some clothing to him, pleading with them not to leave him to die naked.[16] The brothers callously refused, replying that if Joseph wanted something he should request it of the sun, moon, and stars of his dream.[17] Now, relate these sources, when Abraham was thrown into the fiery furnace prepared for him by the evil king Nimrod, he too had been stripped naked. So God sent the angel Gabriel to him to dress him in a shirt. Significantly, this was not just any shirt, but one that was made of the silk of Paradise. Abraham's son Isaac inherited this shirt when Abraham died, and Jacob inherited it from Isaac when Isaac died. Jacob took the shirt and placed it in an amulet which he then hung around Joseph's neck.[18] When Joseph was thrown naked into the pit, an angel—some say Gabriel, some say this was God Himself—came to him, took the shirt out of the amulet and clothed Joseph in it.[19] This was the shirt he was wearing on the trip with the Ishmaelite caravan and this was what he was wearing when he entered Egypt. And *this* was the shirt, made from the silk of Paradise, which Joseph later sent back to Jacob with instructions to the messenger to place it over his father's face.[20]

Importantly, in these accounts, this shirt is said to have had a unique and powerful scent. According to Thaʿlabī, after Joseph sent the shirt-bearing messenger on his way, the wind asked for and received permission from God to bring the scent of Joseph to Jacob before the messenger arrived. However, the wind did not blow on Joseph himself in order to release Joseph's scent. Rather, Thaʿlabī, Ṭarafī, and Kisāʾī report, the wind shook out Joseph's shirt and carried that scent to his father.[21] Ibn ʿAbbās, as cited by Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), notes that when the caravan left Egypt, the smell of Joseph's shirt reached Jacob before the shirt itself did, even though it had to travel a distance of about eight days.[22] Lest we think that the odor that reached Jacob was

the smell of Joseph's body, embedded in his cloak, Thaʿlabī and Ṭarafī explain that the shirt, created in Paradise, smelled of Paradise.[23] Thaʿlabī and Ṭarafī also cite al-Ḍaḥḥāk and al-Suddī, who note that the shirt, inherited from Abraham, was woven in Paradise and had the scent of Paradise.[24]

In comparing the lover's self-soothing by looking at the clothing of his absent beloved to the image of Jacob's blindness being cured by the smell of Joseph, Ibn Ḥazm has employed a *qiṣaṣ* motif. On one level, this should not strike us as a puzzling move. The *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* accounts provide readers with many colorful exegetical and narrative motifs and, since Muslim poets drew from the entire corpus of Islamic literature, more than a few of these appear in Andalusian Arabic poetry. At the same time, however, we must remember that the Qurʾān provides a clear description and sequence of events for this account. Why then does the scholar Ibn Ḥazm choose the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* version, one which seems to contradict the Qurʾān, over the Qurʾān's authoritative version? Indeed, Ibn Ḥazm appears to consciously blur the lines between the two corpora regarding this narrative. As he writes in his introduction to this poem, the soul of a man who possesses something of his beloved feels satisfied even if the result is no more than "what God specified for us regarding Jacob's getting his sight back when he smelled the shirt of Joseph."[25] As noted, only in the *qiṣaṣ* accounts does Jacob actually smell the shirt.

Our question becomes even more thought-provoking when we realize that the behavior of the poem's lover does *not* actually parallel that of the extra-scriptural Jacob to whom he is compared any more than that of the qurʾānic Jacob, to whom he is not. Just as the poem's lover does not touch his beloved's clothing (as the Jacob of the Qurʾān does), so too does he not smell his beloved's clothing (as the Jacob of the *qiṣaṣ* does). Rather, he simply *looks* at the abandoned item from a distance, without otherwise engaging it. Nykl's English translation obscures this important detail and allows the reader to imagine that the lover has in fact snuggled up to the shirt. He translates: "I began to content myself with his dress, / or was contented with something he had touched."[26]

However, the Arabic original clearly indicates something that Nykl has omitted: *ṣirtu bi-ibṣārī athwābahu aw baʿḍ mā qad massahu aktafī*. A more accurate, though less poetic, translation would read: "I contented myself with looking at his clothes or at something that he had touched." In Ibn Ḥazm's original, the lover *looks*, without touching, and without inhaling. Given that the lover does not perform the same act as either the *qiṣaṣ* Jacob or the qurʾānic Jacob, is there any benefit in Ibn Ḥazm's comparing him to an image from the former over one from the more authoritative latter?

Indeed there is. The incorporation of the *qiṣaṣ* reference alone transmits a message about romantic love that is both potent and subversive. In truth, on one level, the linking of the beloved's *qamīṣ* to either the qurʾānic or the *qiṣaṣ qamīṣ* results in the same message: human love is salvific. Just as the cloak of Joseph, in either rendition, cured Jacob of his grief-induced blindness, so the cloak of the beloved will cure the lover of the misery and depression that eats away at the lover's soul. However, the comparison with the *qiṣaṣ* image takes this lesson one step further: it implies that the love between humans is not only redemptive but is, at its core, *divine*. After all, according to the *qiṣaṣ*, the shirt that miraculously returns Jacob's sight was created by God in Paradise, woven through with the scent of Paradise, imbued with God's powers in Paradise, and sent down to humanity by God from Paradise.

In the Qurʾān, by contrast, God plays no outright role in this particular part of the story. In Q 12, Joseph sends his shirt to his father without God's instruction to do so, and without God's say-so he tells the messenger that the shirt will perform a healing miracle, one normally attributed to God's powers alone.[27] So too when the miraculous healing takes place (v. 96), the Qurʾān records it with no mention of God. The *qiṣaṣ* accounts restore God to the narrative through the mechanism of the shirt. In comparing the beloved's shirt to *this* shirt, the divine shirt of the *qiṣaṣ*, the poem's male lover implies that his male beloved's shirt too has divinely sanctioned, or divinely given, salvific powers.[28]

A qiṣaṣ *Image in a Hebrew Poem of Spain*

     Ibn Ḥazm's poem is not the only *ʿishq* poem written by a religious scholar of Andalusia to incorporate the motif of salvation transmitted through the aroma of the beloved's clothing. Nor does the motif appear only in Arabic poems authored by Muslims. It also appears in a Hebrew poem written by Ibn Ḥazm's contemporary and one-time friend, the Jewish scholar, military vizier of Granada, and poet Samuel the Nagid.[29] In his *Diwān*, Samuel includes the following poem.[30]

> My love, will you free a gazelle that fell in a pit?
> Just send him the scent of your outfit.
> Is it red paint that reddens your lips?
> Is it fawns' blood smeared on your cheeks?
> Make love to your lover, reward him with love—
> Take my spirit and soul as your price.
> My heart, pierced by both your eyes, will rise from the dead
> With your necklace—or even with one bead![31]

     Like Ibn Ḥazm's poem, in many ways this poem follows well the conventions of Andalusian *ʿishq* poetry. The lover and the beloved are separated from one another as usual, with the continued alienation caused by the beloved herself who, having thrown the lover in a pit, makes no move to extricate him from his captivity.[32] The beloved appears with rosy cheeks and rosy lips (line 2) and the lover cannot tell from what: is the beloved innocently wearing lipstick (*bi-mei adamim*, "red-tinted waters")? Or has she, in line with the trope of the beloved as cruel and murderous, rouged her face with the blood of conquered lovers? The lover attempts to negotiate his freedom, begging her to send him salvation (line 1) and bartering with his life (another trope, line 3). However, these negotiations appear to fail. Unwilling to be completely defeated, the lover remains stereotypically loyal to his beloved, reassuring himself (and her?) that although all seems lost, it is not the end (line 4); if with one look from her eyes she tears his heart asunder, referencing the trope

of the beloved's dangerous body (and, in particular, the eyes), it will continue to live as one of the beads on her necklace. Tova Rosen has explained this image by suggesting that the lover sees the beloved as a huntress extraordinaire, wearing the hearts of conquered lovers on a chain around her neck as trophies and thus allowing them to remain living, in a sense.[33]

As in Ibn Ḥazm's poem, a scriptural reference underlies the Hebrew poem, in good Andalusian form. While it may not be as obvious in the Hebrew as in the Arabic, to those familiar with biblical narratives and biblical vocabulary, the reference leaps off the page in the poem's third and fourth words, *bor shvi*, the pit of captivity in which the lover languishes. Above this *bor* stands the one responsible for the captive's incarceration, one who is smeared with animal blood. For readers of the Bible, the vocabulary choice of *bor*, as a pit that holds a person captive, with the attacker looming nearby, and smeared animal blood in the visual field, hints loudly at one very famous story, the same one referenced in Ibn Ḥazm's poem: the account of Joseph and his brothers. Genesis 37 tells of the brothers' jealousy of the favoritism shown by Jacob for his eleventh son, of their stripping Joseph of his clothes, throwing him into a waterless pit (v. 24), selling him to a passing caravan, smearing his coat with kid's blood (v. 31), and then allowing their father to believe that a wild animal had killed his beloved child (v. 32–33), after which he grieves inconsolably. Significantly and famously, the word *bor*, as the pit of Joseph's captivity, appears six times in eight verses in the Genesis account (37:22–29).

As with Ibn Ḥazm's identification of the lover with the scriptural hero, in Samuel's poem the subtle identification of the lover with the captive Joseph, alone and suffering, emphasizes the pathos of the lonely lover's situation. Both are thrown into a pit by those who should love and protect them the most (brothers and beloved). And in both cases, this cruel treatment is carried out completely unjustly.

While the opening image of the pit's captive clearly recalls the biblical Joseph in his captivity, the image in the second hemistich, in which the captive calls for a message of redemption to be sent from the beloved's clothing, seems out of place. It does *not* belong to the biblical

Jacob-Joseph narrative, neither to its beginning nor its end. Indeed, the Bible does record that Jacob and Joseph are eventually reunited and that the reunion provides the previously grief-stricken Jacob with much relief. As Gen 45:27 reports, "And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them; and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived."[34] Unlike in the Qurʾān, this relief from sorrow and heartache is not caused by any garment of Joseph's. Rather, Jacob's spirit is revived by the *news* that Joseph lives and now rules over Egypt and by the *sight* of the carriages that Joseph sent to his father to bring him to see his long-lost son (Gen 45: 26–27).

The motif of a salvifically scented cloak does not appear to have been one of the more common tropes of Andalusian Hebrew poetry either. This is not to say that scent makes no appearance in these poems, for it does. But as in the biblical Song of Songs from which the Andalusian Hebrew poems frequently draw love imagery, when this motif appears, it is almost always the scent of the beloved him- or herself (rather than his or her clothes) that is under discussion.[35]

Nor can we attribute this image to the rabbinic tradition. Following the lead of the Bible, no rabbinic text from before the rise of Islam (indeed, no Jewish text I could find) mentions a cloak at all in the account of Joseph revealing himself to Jacob. Rather, *Genesis Rabbah* (ca. fifth c. CE) and *Midrash Tanḥuma* (ca. fifth c. CE) both understand that it was the wagons that Joseph sent to his father that revitalized him.[36] Playing on the Hebrew word for wagons, ʿ*agalot*, both texts explain that Jacob recalled that he and Joseph had been studying the biblical text of ʿ*eglah* ʿ*arufah* (the heifer whose neck was broken) when Joseph disappeared, a fact only the two of them would know.[37] Thus, when Jacob saw that Joseph (and not Pharaoh) had sent ʿ*agalot* for him, he understood that Joseph was truly alive and his spirit was revived.[38]

Only beginning in the eleventh century do we find Jewish narratives that attribute significance to an item of Joseph's clothing other than the multi-colored tunic which had earlier caused his brothers' envy and hatred. The accounts are remarkably similar to those in the *qiṣaṣ*. For

example, according to the medieval *Midrash ʿAsarah Harugei Malchut*[39] and to the twelfth/thirteenth century Tosafists preserved in *Sefer Hadar Zekeinim*, when Joseph was stripped naked and thrown into the pit (Gen 37:23–24), God took pity on him that he not be paraded around in such a state. Now Joseph wore an amulet around his neck, relate these accounts.[40] So God sent an angel—in one version Gabriel, in the other Rafael—who drew a cloak out of the amulet, or turned the amulet into a cloak, and dressed Joseph in it.[41] The Jewish sources then diverge from the *qiṣaṣ* accounts that connect this cloak back to Abraham, or attribute its origins to Paradise, or imbue it with healing powers. Instead, these later rabbinic texts maintain that when the brothers drew Joseph up from the pit to hand him over to the Ishmaelites, they could not help but notice that he was somehow now clothed. Oddly, they did not stop to wonder how that happened or what it might mean. Instead, they demanded that the Ishmaelites pay extra for the cloak since, after all, the cloak had not been included in the original bill of sale, only a naked boy.[42]

Given all of this, it seems possible that the trope of the salvation-bearing-cloak-aroma entered Samuel's Hebrew poem under the influence of the Muslim Andalusian Arabic poetry-writing milieu. As has been shown here, while the image does appear in the *qiṣaṣ* literature, it cannot be found in biblical, midrashic, or Andalusian Hebrew poetic literature. Perhaps Samuel knew the image from Ibn Ḥazm's *qiṣaṣ*-inflected poem, which utilized the very same scriptural story. Indeed, not only were both men from Cordoba, and only one year apart in age, but they knew one another personally and even considered one another friends for a time. This we know from Ibn Ḥazm's own testimony in his *Fiṣāl fī'l-milal wa'l-ahwāʾ wa'l-niḥal*, where he later reports on their first meeting in 404–5/1014 in Malaga, when both were in their early twenties.[43] Writing with the perspective of time, Ibn Ḥazm refers to the young man who later became the poet, writer, biblical scholar, philosopher, military vizier of Granada, and leader (a.k.a., the Nagid) of the Jewish community as "the most learned and best polemicist" of the Jews.[44] It stands to reason that Samuel the Nagid, who mastered Arabic as well as Hebrew poetry, may have been familiar with Ibn Ḥazm's poetic treatise *Ṭawq al-ḥamāmah*,

written only a few years after their first meeting. Indeed, David Wasser-
stein has suggested that Samuel the Nagid and his family may have been
far more immersed in Arabic culture than scholarship has previously
suspected.[45] It seems plausible that the *qiṣaṣ* trope of a salvifically-scented
cloak of Joseph's entered into the shared Muslim-Jewish cultural space
of Muslim Spain where, thanks to the emotional potency of the image,
it was employed by ʿishq poets of both religions alike.

Conclusion

While Ibn Ḥazm's subtle use of the *qiṣaṣ* rather than qurʾānic
material in his poem initially seemed somewhat of a mystery, we now
understand better the need for such a move. In drawing a parallel
between the cloak of Joseph that heals his father's blindness and the
beloved's garment that dispels the lover's anguish, Ibn Ḥazm's lover
teaches his readers a lesson about the power of human love. Namely, for
Ibn Ḥazm and his poem's lover, it is redemptive and salvific. In employing
the cloak as depicted in the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, which emphasize the gar-
ment's paradisiacal origin and nature, Ibn Ḥazm's poem more sacri-
legiously implies that both human loves—that of scriptural father for
son and of lover for beloved—are sanctioned and protected by the Divine.
Interestingly, so powerful was the *qiṣaṣ*'s image of the aromatic salvation-
bearing cloak that it may have broken through the religious boundary-
lines of Islam and Judaism and found a surprising new home in a similarly
Joseph-inflected Hebrew poem by Ibn Ḥazm's Jewish contemporary,
Samuel the Nagid.

While Samuel the Nagid employs the parallel biblical account as
well as the *qiṣaṣ* image of a salvation-bearing scented garment, he does
so to a different end than does his Muslim counterpart. Significantly, our
two poets focus on the diametrically opposite ends of the scriptural tale.
As we see, Samuel the Nagid's poem engages the earlier part of the nar-
rative, when Joseph is first attacked and isolated from his father, and
identifies the lover with the suffering and abused son. Ibn Ḥazm's poem
references the latter part of the account, identifying the lover with the

mourning father and spotlighting the miraculous moment in which Jacob and his beloved Joseph are joyfully and salvifically reconnected. This dissimilar focus results in differing poetic messages. While Ibn Ḥazm's poem ends on a note of hope and redemption, the Hebrew poem can lay no such claim to the same. Although the biblical Joseph does eventually find redemption from his pit of despair and reconnects with his beloved father, the Hebrew poem chooses not to focus on this theme. In the Hebrew poem, the scented garment can bring only news, not redemption itself. And even that does not actually happen. Instead, Samuel's poem dwells on the continued suffering of the lover who even in death remains loyal to his murderous huntress beloved, as any good Andalusian lover must.

Notes

All digital content cited in this article was last accessed via the URLs provided in the notes below on August 6, 2021.

1. See Charles Pellat (trans. and ed.), *The Life and Works of Jāḥiẓ*, trans. from the French by D. M. Hawke (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 263ff.

2. There are many in-depth studies of ʿUdhrite poetry and its influence on Andalusian Arabic poetry. See, e.g., G. E. von Grunebaum (ed.), *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1973); Arie Schippers, *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition: Arabic Themes in Hebrew Andalusian Poetry* (Leiden: Brill, 1994); and Salma Jayyusi, "Umayyad Poetry," in A. F. L. Beeston et al. (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 387–432. An overview can be found in Shari L. Lowin, *Arabic and Hebrew Love Poems in al-Andalus* (London: Routledge, 2014), 1–21.

3. Part of the reason behind the Jewish adaption of this practice relates to the ʿarabiyyah-shuʿūbiyyah controversy of medieval Spain. For an overview, see Lowin, *Arabic and Hebrew Love Poems*, 11–13. More in-depth discussions can be found in Nehemiah Allony, "The Reaction of Moses Ibn Ezra to ʿArabiyya," *Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies* 3 (1975): 19–40 and Norman Roth, "Jewish Reactions to the ʿArabiyya and the Renaissance of Hebrew in Spain," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 28 (1983): 63–84.

4. Ross Brann, "How Can My Heart Be in the East? Intertextual Irony in Judah Ha-Levi," in B. H. Hary, J. L. Hayes, and F. Astren (eds.), *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 365–380, 374.

5. Biographies of Ibn Ḥazm abound. One impressive recent in-depth collection of articles about him is Camilla Adang, Maribel Fierro, and Sabine Schmidtke (eds.), *Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba: The Life and Works of a Contro-*

versial Thinker (Leiden: Brill, 2013). Camilla Adang has authored numerous articles on different aspects of Ibn Ḥazm's life and scholarly oeuvre, including in the just-mentioned volume. Some scholars have maintained that the Ẓāhiri school was never that important to Islamic theology in general or in Andalusia in particular. In discussing Ibn Ḥazm's ejection from the Great Mosque in Cordoba, Adang suggests otherwise. See her "Restoring the Prophetic Authority, Rejecting *Taqlid*: Ibn Ḥazm's 'Epistle to the One Who Shouts from Afar,'" in Daphna Ephrat and Meir Hatina (eds.), *Religious Knowledge, Authority and Charisma: Islamic and Jewish Perspectives* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2014), 50–63. See also Adang, "Ẓāhirīs of Almohad Times," in María Luisa Ávila and Maribel Fierro (eds.), B*iografías Almohades II* (Madrid-Granada: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2000), 413–479.

6. Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *Tauḳ al-ḥamâma*, ed. D. K. Pétrof (St. Petersburg and Leiden: Brill, 1914), 90.

7. The accuracy of the translation of this line will be discussed further on.

8. Meaning, a prophet rightly guided by God.

9. Although Nykl translates this with the definite article ("the tunic"), the literal translation of the Arabic is "a tunic." See the next note.

10. The English translation is largely by A. R. Nykl, in his *A Book Containing the Risāla Known as the Dove's Neck Ring about Love and Lovers Composed by Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī* (Paris: Libraire Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1931), 138–139. While Nykl's translations refer to the beloved in the feminine form ("mistress" "she," "her"), the Arabic consistently presents the beloved in the masculine (e.g., *sayyidī*, "my master"). Early scholars and translators often tried to avoid admitting that the religious poets of Islamic and Jewish Andalusia wrote poems to male beloveds, and the translators were known to shift the beloved's gender in their translations. Sometimes the claim was made that the poets intended a female beloved but used the male pronoun out of modesty concerns, a valid explanation in some cases, but not all. See Charles Pellat, "Liwāṭ," in Arno Schmitt and Jehoeda Sofer (eds.), *Sexuality*

and Eroticism among Males in Moslem Societies (New York: The Haworth Press, 1992), 151-168. 157. I have altered the translation to reflect the Arabic use of the masculine.

11. In one Arabic poem, a female beloved accuses her lover of lying about his love for her because he has enough strength to declare his love to her. A true lover, she scolds, would be too sick to do so. See Raymond Scheindlin, "Ibn Gabirol's Religious Poetry and Sufi Poetry," *Sefarad* 54 (1994): 109–141, 113–114.

12. See Schippers, *Spanish Hebrew Poetry and the Arabic Literary Tradition*, 169.

13. As noted above, the use of a masculine pronoun to refer to the beloved does not always indicate a male beloved; Andalusian poets did sometimes employ the masculine when referring to a female. In our case, however, there is nothing in the poem or in the text that precedes or follows it that indicates we should read the beloved as female. In fact, the very next love story that Ibn Ḥazm relates concerns a same-sex male couple, a situation reflected in the accompanying poem. Thus we see that not all of Ibn Ḥazm's male beloveds should be read as female. Indeed, Adang has argued convincingly that while Ibn Ḥazm remained unfailingly against actualized homoerotic sexual contact, he was not averse to recognizing and speaking positively of emotional attachment and even sexual attraction between men. See Camilla Adang, "Love between Men in *Ṭawq al-Ḥamāma*," in Cristina de la Puente (ed.), *Identidades Marginales* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2003), 111–145.

14. Although the Qurʾān does not state so outright, it is obvious that the meaning here is that Joseph and "his brother" come from the same mother while the rest of the brothers are half-brothers, as recorded in Genesis 29–30, 35:22-26.

15. While the Bible does not describe Jacob as blind or Joseph as having healed him, John Macdonald suggests that Gen 46:4 may be the source for this qurʾānic element. In this verse, God tells Jacob in a dream that "Joseph will place his hand upon your eyes." See John Macdonald, "Joseph in the Qurʾān and Muslim Commentary," *Muslim World* 46 (1956): 113–131, 207–224. While this in an interesting hypothesis, the connection

between the two would be stronger if one could point to a pre-Islamic reading of Genesis 46:4 that teaches something along those lines. Macdonald does not. Additionally, if *any* biblical element can be said to have influenced the qurʾānic motif of Jacob's blindness and Joseph's curing him, it seems more likely to be found in the story of Isaac. Genesis 27:1 relates that in his old age, Isaac went blind. Jacob (and his mother Rachel) took advantage of this in order to trick Isaac into giving Jacob the blessing of the elder son (Jacob was the younger). When Jacob, dressed as Esau, entered his father's presence, Isaac was unsure which son stood before him; the man's voice sounded like Jacob's but his arms were hairy like Esau's. In verse 26, Isaac asks his son to step forward and then sniffs him. Recognizing the scent as that of the outdoorsy Esau, Isaac determines that the son before him is the "correct" one—Esau—and blesses him with the first-born's blessing (v. 27ff). Like the qurʾānic Joseph whose shirt and its scent restored his father's sight, the scent of Isaac's son thus restored Isaac's sight, though in this case "sight" is metaphorical rather than physical.

16. See Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ al-musammā ʿArāʾis al-majālis* (Egypt: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1374/1954), 79–80; Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Kisāʾī, *Vita Prophetarum auctore Muhammad ben Abdallah al-Kisa'i*, ed. Isaac Eisenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1923), 158–159; Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī, *The Stories of the Prophets by Ibn Muṭarrif al-Ṭarafī*, ed. Roberto Tottoli (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2003), 99, no. 265 and 121, no. 319. This account is also found in the commentary of al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286). See ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿUmar al-Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1988), ad 12:15 (1.478) and 93 (1.495). In a slightly earlier pericope, Thaʿlabī maintains that Joseph's shirt, the one stripped off him by his brothers, had been passed down from Adam, who had received it in the garden of Eden. When the brothers brought it to Jacob, after dipping it in animal blood, Jacob recognized it. See Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 79. For more on Adam's garment, see Stephen D. Ricks, "The Garment of Adam in Jewish, Muslim, and Christian Tradition," in Hary et al, *Judaism and Islam*, 203–225.

17. Q 12:4.

18. According to Thaʿlabī (*Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 79) and Ṭarafī (*Stories of the Prophets*, 121, no. 319), Jacob did so to protect Joseph from the evil eye. We find a subtle reference to this story in the *tafsīr* of Ibn ʿAbbās which, while not preserving the entire narrative, does explain that the shirt that Joseph sent to Jacob was from Paradise. See Muḥammad b. Yaʿqūb al-Fīrūzabādī, *Tanwīr al-miqbās min tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* (Egypt: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1370/1951), 153. While some maintain that this text was written by Ibn ʿAbbās (d. ca. 68/687–688) and others by al-Fīrūzabādī (d. 817/1414), Andrew Rippin argues that the more likely author is al-Dīnawarī (d. 308/920). See Andrew Rippin, "*Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* and Criteria for Dating *Tafsīr* Texts," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18 (1994): 38–83. Others disagree. For example, Josef van Ess maintains that the text, of undetermined date and authorship, dates to before the end of the ninth century. See his *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert des Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 1.300–302. See also Harald Motzki, "Dating the So-Called *Tafsir Ibn ʿAbbas*: Some Additional Remarks," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 31 (2006): 147–163.

19. The handing down of artifacts from prophet to prophet as a testament of prophetic succession appears not infrequently in the Islamic tradition. The most famous example concerns ʿAlī's sword Dhū'l-Faqār, said to have been brought from Paradise by Adam and handed down through all the prophets to Muḥammad, then to ʿAlī. On this and other such traditions, see Uri Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors in the Early Shīʿa Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979): 41–65. Majid Daneshgar has undertaken a more recent and quite varied study of the traditions relating to ʿAlī's sword in his "A Sword That Becomes a Word (Part One): Supplication to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib and Dhū'l-Faqār," *Mizan*, January 9, 2017 (https://mizanproject.org/a-sword-that-becomes-a-word-part-1/) and "A Sword That Becomes a Word (Part Two): The Supplication to ʿAlī in a Malay Manuscript," *Mizan*, February 8, 2017 (https://mizanproject.org/a-sword-that-becomes-a-word-part-2/).

20. According to Ṭarafī (*Stories of the Prophets*, 121–122, no. 319), Joseph did this on Gabriel's advice. The *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* and the *tafsīr* texts

do not stand in complete agreement regarding the number of shirts involved in the Joseph narrative. For example, Bayḍāwī (1.478 *ad* Q 12:15) remains uncertain as to whether the shirt Joseph sent to Jacob was the shirt he was then wearing or was the one that had been in the amulet.

21. Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 135–138; Kisāʾī, *Vita Prophetarum*, 176. See also ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿanī (d. 211/827), *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muṣṭafā Muslim Muḥammad (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1989), 1.2.329 and Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr*, 1.495 *ad* Q 12:94. Ṭarafī notes that the shirt smelled of Paradise but he does not state that the wind asked for shaking-out-smell permission (*Stories of the Prophets*, 121–122, no. 319). While the wind's request is recorded by Ṭabarī, he does not mention that the wind shook the cloak. Rather, in this version, the wind seems to simply blow Joseph's odor, without specifying if it came from Joseph himself or from his clothing. See Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden: Brill, 1879-1901), 1.407–409.

22. See Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* (Egypt: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1373/1954), 13.57-58 *ad* Q 12:94. Note that Ṭabarī here cites numerous ḥadīth reports, all traced back to Ibn ʿAbbās.

23. Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 138.

24. Combining touch and smell, these commentators also note that when this paradisaically-scented garment touched an ailing or afflicted person, they would be restored to health. See Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 96 and Ṭarafī, *Stories of the Prophets*, 121, no. 319. Kisāʾī (*Vita Prophetarum*, 156–157) records five miraculous items that Joseph inherited from Abraham: the turban of prophethood, the coat of friendship, the girdle of victory and contentment, the ring of prophethood, and the staff of light. The theme of the paradisiacal shirt which clothed Joseph in the pit and then healed Jacob's blindness appears to have taken hold in the Muslim popular imagination as well, for we find it in an anonymous Egyptian thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Arabic poetic rendition of the Joseph story. See R. Y. Ebied and M. J. L. Young (eds. and trans.), *The Story of Joseph in Arabic Verse* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), lines 152ff. and 419ff.

25. *mā naṣṣa allāh taʿālā ʿalaynā min irtidād yaʿqūb baṣīran ḥīna shamma qamīṣ yūsuf* (Pétrof, *Tauḳ al-ḥamâma*, 90).

26. See above, note 10.

27. As Jesus reports in Q Āl ʿImrān 3:49, although he will heal the sick he will do so only with God's permission.

28. In his *What is Islam?*, Shahab Ahmed discusses whether the theme of erotic love, present in Sufi poetry and prose as well as in other genres of Islamic literature, is in fact "Islamic." Ahmed maintains (46) that the "self-evident historical commonplaceness and centrality of the *madhhab-i ʿishq* at the heart of the mainstream" of Muslim practices, discourses, and "self-constructions" shows that it is. See Ahmed, *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), esp. 32–46.

29. For more on Samuel the Nagid's life and biography, see A. M. Habermann, "Samuel Ha-Nagid," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (New York: Keter, 1972), s.v.

30. Dov Jarden (ed.), *Divan Shmuel ha-Nagid. Ben Tehillim* (Jerusalem: Hebrew Union College Press, 1966), 297, no. 161. Ḥaim Schirmann presents a slightly different version of line 3, which barely changes the meaning. See his *Ha-Shira ha-ʿIvrit be-Sefarad u-be-Provens* (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1954), 1.153, no. 4.

31. Translation by Tova Rosen in her *Unveiling Eve: Reading Gender in Medieval Hebrew Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 40. The fourth line is difficult in Hebrew, as it is in English. See the following paragraph for an explication.

32. Unlike in Ibn Ḥazm's poem, the beloved here is clearly identified as female. The first word, *raʿeyah* ("beloved"), by which the poet addresses the beloved directly, is the feminine form. All the subsequent verbs that speak of the beloved's behavior are likewise addressed to the second person feminine.

33. Tova Rosen, *Tzed ha-Tzviyyah: Qeriyah Migdarit be-Safrut ha-ʿIvrit mi-Yimei ha-Beinayim* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2006), 60.

34. Midrashic sources express rabbinic discomfort with this biblical line. What does it mean to say that Jacob's spirit was revived when, they point out, he hadn't been dead? According to *Midrash Tanḥuma* (ca. fifth c. CE), *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (ca. eighth c. CE), and *Targum Pseudo-Jona-*

than (ca. seventh-eighth c. CE), the verse means that the spirit of pro-phecy returned to him. Jacob had lost it when his sons banded together to take an oath to conceal from him what had happened to Joseph, on pain of excommunication, and had included God in the oath-ban as well. (The inclusion of God in the ban explains why God kept Jacob in the dark all these years.) See *Midrash Tanḥuma* (Jerusalem: Hotsaʾat Levin-Epstein, 5729 [1968/9]), *Vayeshev* 2; *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer* (Jerusalem: Eshkol, 5733 [1973], ch. 38; and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, trans., annotation, and intro. Michael Maher (T & T Clark: Edinburgh, 1992) *ad* Gen 45:27.

35. Two exceptions to this rule do appear in the Song of Songs. Song 4:11 relates: "Thy lips, O my bride, drop honey—honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon." Psalm 45:9 also mentions scented garments: "Myrrh, and aloes, and cassia are all thy garments; out of ivory palaces stringed instruments have made thee glad." Unlike in the poem, these are not smells that deliver messages.

36. The dates of these midrashic texts and those that follow refer to the conventional dates of final redaction. The midrashic texts tend to include much earlier materials but the compilations themselves remained open to changes for centuries.

37. Deuteronomy 21:1–9.

38. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (46:17) offers a cryptic alternative to how Jacob learned the truth. According to this text, Seraḥ, the daughter of Asher, gently delivered the news to her father, for which she was rewarded by entering into Paradise alive. A later text developed in order to flesh out the details. According to *Sefer ha-Yashar*, Joseph and his brothers worried that the startling news regarding Joseph might shock Jacob to death. So the brothers commissioned Seraḥ the daughter of Asher to play a lyre before her grandfather and sing gently to him, "Joseph my uncle did not die, he lives and rules all the land of Egypt." When Jacob sensed the truth of her words, joy filled his heart and the spirit of God rested on him. See *Sefer ha-Yashar ʿal ha-Torah* (Berlin: Binyamin Hertz, 1923), *Vayigash* 14. While this text is often said to date to the eleventh or twelfth century, Joseph Dan sees it as much later, composed only in the beginning of the sixteenth century. See H. L. Strack

and Günter Stemberger (eds.), *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. Markus Bockmuehl (2nd ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 339–340; Joseph Dan, *Ha-Sippur ha-ʿIvri bi-Yemei ha-Benayim: ʿIyyunim be-Toldotav* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), 137f.; and the introduction to *Sefer ha-Yashar*, ed. Joseph Dan (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 1986).

There is one pre-Islamic midrash that speaks of a smell wafting from a patriarch's clothing. In a discussion of Genesis 27, *Genesis Rabbah* tries to explain how it was that when Isaac smelled the clothes worn by a younger Jacob impersonating his hunter brother Esau, he blessed him rather than vomiting from the stench of goat. A tradition found in *Genesis Rabbah* maintains that Jacob himself smelled like Paradise and this aroma overtook the nastier animal odor. Esau, by contrast, smelled like Gehenna. See *Midrash Rabbah ha-Mevoʾar* (Jerusalem: Mechon ha-Midrash ha-Me-voʾar, 5744 [1983]), *Bereshit* [Genesis] 65:22. This does not present a convincing source for our poem's salvifically-scented cloak. First of all, the odor here belongs to the wrong patriarch (Jacob, not Joseph). Secondly, unlike in Joseph's case, Jacob's clothing smells awful; the paradisiacal scent comes from Jacob himself. Thirdly, unlike in the poem, no one is held captive in this biblical account and thus neither aroma (neither of Jacob nor of his clothes) sends forth any messages, let alone messages of salvation or healing. Indeed, the blind Isaac remains blind.

39. Also known as *Midrash Eleh Ezkerah*.

40. The accounts do not explain why the brothers allow the naked Joseph to hold on to this necklace.

41. In the *qiṣaṣ*, Joseph's amulet and the cloak contained in it come from Abraham, who received it from God. The idea of a miraculous neck-lace worn by a forefather appears also in a much earlier Jewish source, the Babylonian Talmud (ca. sixth c. CE). In *Baba Batra* 16b, Rabbi Shimʿon bar Yoḥai teaches that Abraham had a precious gem that he wore on a necklace around his neck; whenever a sick person would look upon it, they would be immediately healed. When Abraham died, God suspended the stone in the orb of the sun. Unlike in the *qiṣaṣ* and in the medieval Jewish texts, the Talmud does not understand this necklace as capable
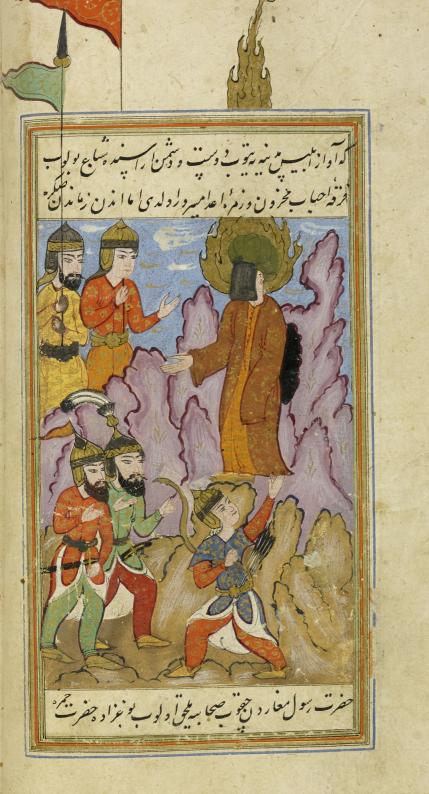
of containing a garment, nor does it trace Joseph's necklace back to Abraham.

The idea of a protective amulet appears in a fascinating midrashic account regarding Joseph's eventual wife, Asenath the daughter of Potiphar (Gen 41:45). The rabbis were troubled by the idea that the righteous Joseph would marry and father children with the non-Israelite daughter of a pagan Egyptian. Thus, according to the *ca.* eighth century *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, Asenath was actually the daughter of Jacob's daughter Dinah, conceived as a result of Dinah's rape by Shechem (Gen 34). When Asenath was born, her mother's brothers wanted to kill her because they feared the shame she, the product of sexual impropriety, would bring the family. Jacob took a gold tag, wrote the name of God on it, hung it around Asenath's neck and sent her on her way. Now, this was all part of God's plan, says the midrash, and so the angel Michael descended and led Asenath to Egypt to the house of Potiphar, who raised her. When Joseph later came to Egypt, he married her. See *Pirqei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. 38. The idea that Asenath was born to Dinah but was raised by Potiphar appears in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen 41:45.

42. *Midrash ʿAsarah Harugei Malchut*, in Adolph Jellinek (ed.), *Bet ha-Midrasch* (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrmann, 1938), 6.20; *Sefer Hadar Zeqeinim* (Livorno, 5700 [1939–1940]; reprint, Jerusalem: 5723 [1962]), 16b–17a. The *ca.* eleventh century *Song of Songs Rabbah* relates that when Joseph was sold, the scent of his clothes spread out all along the road to Egypt and throughout Egypt such that the daughters of the kings would come out to see him. See *Midrasch Schir ha-Schirim*, ed. L. Grünhut (Jerusalem, 5657 [1897]), *parasha aleph*, 3.

43. Ibn Ḥazm would have been nineteen or twenty, and Samuel a year older.

44. As cited by José Miguel Puerta Vílchez in his "Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī ibn Ḥazm: A Biographical Sketch," in Adang et al. (eds.), *Ibn Ḥazm of Cordoba*, 1–24, 8. According to Ibn Ḥazm, at this meeting, they engaged in a polemic about the accuracy of the Bible. Later in life, Ibn Ḥazm penned a vitriolic text basically attacking Samuel in response for a work he

believed Samuel wrote attacking the Qurʾān. Sarah Stroumsa has shown that Samuel was not the author of this text, which was really a compilation of quotations from the *Kitāb al-Dāmigh* by the ninth-century Muslim heretic Ibn al-Rāwandi. See Stroumsa, "From Muslim Heresy to Jewish-Muslim Poetics: Ibn al-Rāwandi's *Kitāb al-Dāmigh*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 (1987): 767–772. See also Theodore Pulcini, *Exegesis as Polemical Discourse: Ibn Ḥazm on Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).

45. See David J. Wasserstein, "Samuel ibn Naghrīla and Islamic Historiography in al-Andalus," *Al-Qanṭara* 14 (1993): 109–125, esp. 121.

كه آواز ابلیس پس به یتوبه دوست و دشمن اسپنده شباع بولوب
فرقه اصحاب نخزون و زمره اعدا میه وارد لدی ما اندن زماندن ظکر

حضرت رسول مغار دن چقوب صحابه ملحی بلوب ویغزاد حضرت جیر

Solomon Legends in *Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan*

Helen Blatherwick

Abstract

Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan is a premodern popular epic set in legendary prehistory that tells the story of how the Yemenite king Sayf leads his people on an exodus to the (then unpopulated) lands of Egypt, where he diverts the river Nile and founds a proto-Islamic Egyptian kingdom, then embarks on a military campaign to conquer the realms of humans and jinn in the name of Islam. As with much Arabic popular literature, this *sīrah* uses intertextual reference to other stories as a device through which to convey characterization, theme, and meaning, and reference to the legends of the prophets plays a key role. Intertextual references to the prophet Solomon and his relationship with Bilqīs, the Queen of Sheba, occur throughout the text in the form of various heroic heirlooms, tales related by various characters within the *sīrah*, motifs, and structural and thematic material. This article explores some of the associations that audience familiarity with various Solomon pretexts brings to *Sīrat Sayf*. By focusing primarily on two particular episodes in which the Solomon intertext plays a key role, it discusses how the *sīrah* uses intertextual reference to this Islamic legend corpus as a device to inform its own plot and thematic subtext, and to what end.

Introduction

Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan ("The Adventures of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan") is a late-medieval Egyptian popular epic that recounts the story of the life and adventures of King Sayf b. Dhī Yazan, son of the Yemenite king Dhū Yazan.[1] Set against the background of a war with the king of Ḥabash,[2] Sayf Arʿad, it tells the story of how Sayf b. Dhī Yazan (henceforth "Sayf") leads his people into Egypt, diverts the Nile to its current course, and then goes on to conquer the realms of men and jinn in the name of Islam. Set in legendary pre-Islamic time, it rewrites history to present Egypt as born out of a "reverse exodus" led by a proto-Islamic, Yemeni king.[3] As is common in Arabic popular literature, *Sīrat Sayf* draws much of its material from a pool of popular and folkloric story patterns, motifs, and tropes, which are pieced together in a unique way so as to tell its story. It also makes intertextual reference to stories, legends, and other narratives in ways that enrich the thematic subtext and convey meaning. From this perspective, references to the Islamic *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* ("tales of the prophets") play a significant role in the text. Not only do they anchor the proto-Islamic world of *Sīrat Sayf* in Islamic legendary world history, but the associations they bring into the text also nuance the characterization of *Sīrat Sayf*'s main protagonists and help to create subtextual and thematic complexity.

This article investigates a number of direct references made to legends about the prophet Solomon within *Sīrat Sayf* in order to explore how this particular *sīrah* uses the "Solomon" intertext and to what end.[4] It focuses primarily on two particular episodes in the *sīrah*, during both of which stories about Solomon and the Queen of Sheba are recounted by characters within the text. After introducing these stories in the first section of this article, the second section assesses the intertextual relevance of the Islamic Solomon legend to *Sīrat Sayf*. It analyses how these stories, and the episodes in which they are embedded, relate to the Solomon legends as found in premodern *qiṣaṣ* sources, and how *Sīrat Sayf* uses intertextual reference to Solomon legends to express its own thematic agenda. In a previous study, I have argued that *Sayf* is, at its core, a dis-

cussion of kingship, fitness to rule, and the importance to society of keeping the forces of order and chaos in balance, and that it expresses this struggle largely through the literary use of gender (according to which, broadly speaking, the female embodies the forces of chaos, and the male the forces of order).[5] The use of intertextual reference to other narratives is a key element of this discussion. The final section explores the intertextual relevance of the Ethiopian story of Solomon, Bilqīs, and their son Menelik found in the *Kəbrä Nägäst* to the *Sayf* text.

The prophetic intertext in *Sayf* tends to take one of three basic forms. First, there are accidental, or optional, intertextual associations. These are created when, either consciously or unconsciously, storytellers incorporate a variety of tale patterns, themes, and motifs which, however commonly found in Arabic popular texts, have strong associations with various *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* or the *Sīrah nabawiyyah*, the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. For example, Sayf's overall character trajectory has notable echoes of the character trajectory of the Prophet Muḥammad as recounted in the orthodox Sunni *sīrah* tradition. To mention just a few correspondences: both Sayf and Muḥammad rely on foster mothers during their infancy and are subsequently brought up by foster fathers; both discover their heroic identity and destiny through encounters with cave-dwelling ascetics; in both cases the first person they convert is their wife (Muḥammad's first convert to Islam was Khadījah, his first wife, whilst Sayf's first convert is Nāhid, who later becomes his second wife). At a more global level, both Sayf and Muḥammad lead their people on a *hijrah* (emigration), are lawgivers to their respective communities, and engage in expansionist conquests in the name of Islam. Because Muḥammad is the ultimate Islamicate hero, and his heroic pattern is one that is echoed in a great many other narratives, it is impossible to categorically state whether these parallels exist because the narrator/author of *Sīrat Sayf* was deliberately referencing Muḥammad's life story, or if the similarities between the two heroes exist simply because Muḥammad's heroic progression expresses the ultimate Islamic heroic pattern.[6]

In addition to these accidental references, *Sīrat Sayf* contains a number of direct (or obligatory) intertextual references to legends and

tales about prophets and religious figures that are recounted to one character by another. These stories (or pretexts[7]) are often ostensibly told to explain the presence of a particularly significant relic or occurrence. For instance, in the introductory section of *Sīrat Sayf*, which sets the stage and relates how Sayf's father (Dhū Yazan) and his mother (Qamariyyah) met and married, Dhū Yazan stumbles across the Ka'bah during a military expedition. As he marvels at the sight before his eyes, his learned vizier Yathrib, who has read predictions of the coming of Muḥammad and Islam from his reading of ancient books, tells him the story of the Ka'bah's creation and related tales about Adam and Noah.[8]

These recounted tales often also serve a more significant purpose, acting as literary devices that inform plot, characterization, theme, and meaning. For example, the story of Noah's cursing of his son Ham found in Noah legends is told repeatedly by various characters to one another throughout the *sīrah*, where it is accompanied by predictions that Sayf will be the one to implement the curse, that the descendants of Ham would be the slaves of the descendants of Shem.[9] The story of Noah's curse thus functions as a narrative device that drives the entire plot of the *sīrah*: when the Ḥabashī king, Sayf Arʿad, learns of Dhū Yazan's existence he is warned by his advisors that one of his line will bring about the curse and take his throne, and the Ḥabashī's subsequent determination to avert the implementation of the curse and destroy Sayf underlies the events of the entire *sīrah*.

Finally, the names of prophets are associated with various magical weapons or talismanic objects discovered by the *sīrah*'s heroes. Such relics act as "emblems of identification," and are devices by which the nature and character of the hero are denoted to the audience.[10] In *Sīrat Sayf*, Sayf inherits two swords. The first, the sword of Shem, is left to him by Shem, Noah's son, in the early stages of the *sīrah*. It is later supplanted by the sword of Āṣaf, which is left to Sayf by Āṣaf b. Barakhyā, Solomon's vizier, who created it expressly with Sayf's future needs in mind.[11] The sword of Āṣaf is a mighty weapon which has been enchanted by Āṣaf to protect its bearer against attack by the jinn. Not only this, but it can kill

any type of jinn, and can also be used to test the sincerity of conquered converts: when laid upon the neck of an unbeliever it slices off his head or wounds him horribly, but a true Muslim remains unharmed.[12]

Solomon stories in Sīrat Sayf

    Sīrat Sayf falls naturally into four parts (see the structural diagram on p. 166): (i) a short introduction in which Dhū Yazan leads his people out of Yemen and founds Madīnat al-Ḥamrāʾ ("The Red City") in Ḥabash, unwittingly triggering a war with the Ḥabashī king; (ii) the "Qamariyyah section," which relates Sayf's birth and childhood, and his conflict with his mother for the throne after his father's untimely death; (iii) the "Wedding Quest" section, in which the Ḥabashīs destroy Madīnat al-Ḥamrāʾ and Sayf leads his people to Egypt, diverts the Nile, and founds the city of Miṣr (Cairo); and (iv) the "Hunt" section, in which the (now) Egyptians go on the offensive, defeat the Ḥabashī king, Sayf Arʿad, and chase his advisors, the evil magicians Saqardīs and Saqardiyūn, through the human world and the realms of the jinn, conquering and/or converting every people they meet.[13]

    The Solomon intertext is entirely absent from the first of the main sections of *Sīrat Sayf*, which references stories of the more ancient patriarchal founding fathers such as Adam, Noah, and Abraham, but it plays a key role in the second section, the Wedding Quest section. This section contains a plethora of references to Solomonic legend, but there are two particular, related episodes in which Solomon is referenced that will be addressed here. The first occurs at the beginning of the Wedding Quest section, and occurs as part of its frame story, the problematic betrothal and marriage of two of Sayf's closest companions, ʿĀqiṣah and ʿAyrūḍ.[14] The second occurs in the middle of the Wedding Quest section, at the beginning of the Nile Diversion subsection that comprises the central climax of the section and the *sīrah* overall.

Structural Diagram of the Plot of *Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan*
by Section and Subsection

Introduction (Dhū Yazan stories) (vol. 1:1–28)   **Introduction**

Sayf's birth, childhood and upbringing (vol. 1:28–66)   **Qamariyya**
Sayf's bridal quest's for Shāma's hand (vol. 1:67–192)   **section**
Sayf and Qamariyya's power struggle (vol. 1:192–530)
      Death of Qamariyya (vol. 1:522)

Sayf's quest to the City of Women (vol. 1:530 – vol. 2:167)

Sayf's quest to Solomon's Treasury (vol. 2:179–441)
Sayf's encounters with the al-Thurayyā' cousins I (vol. 2:442–489)
Miṣr's adventures (vol. 3:19–65)   **Wedding Quest**
Damar's adventures (vol. 3:67–114)   **section**
Sayf and the al-Thurayyā' cousins II (vol. 3:114–163)
Nasr's adventures (vol. 3:163–202)
The diversion of the Nile (vol. 3:205–259)
The marriage of ʿĀqiṣa and ʿAyrūd (vol. 3:260–394)

Visit to Treasury of al-Halīlja / ʿUfāsha's quests (vol. 3: 394–432)

Expedition to al-Dūr (vol. 3:432 – vol. 4:110)
      Death of Sayf Arʿad (vol. 4:103)   **Hunt**
Expedition to the Seven Climes (vol. 4:110–394)   **Section**
Expedition to the Qāf Mountains (vol. 4:395–444)
      Conquest of the world achieved (vol. 4:412)
      Death of Saqardīs and Saqardiyūn (vol. 4:444)

Sayf's retirement to the Muqaṭṭam Hills (vol. 4:444–455)   **Epilogue**

NB. The narrative generally follows a linear temporal structure, but sections marked on the left hand margin (in the Wedding Quest section) occur in parallel.

    Notable events are in italics. The overall structure can be read as incorporating a loose ring structure (in which the 'diversion of the Nile' subsection serves as a central climax), which exists in parallel with a linear structure (for which the death of Saqardīs and Saqardiyūn serves as the final plot point).

Episode 1: The frame story of the Wedding Quest section

The Wedding Quest section takes as its frame story the betrothal and marriage of two of Sayf's closes allies, Sayf's jinn milk-sister, ʿĀqiṣah, and his jinn servant and friend, ʿAyrūḍ. The section begins when ʿĀqiṣah, determined to extricate herself from an unwanted marriage to ʿAyrūḍ (to whom she has been promised by Sayf), requests Bilqīs's bridal clothes from the treasury of Solomon as her dowry:

> Sayf b. Dhī Yazan said, "ʿĀqiṣah, tell me what you request," and she replied, "I ask of ʿAyrūḍ the crown, the diadem, the belt, and the bejeweled wedding dress which the Lady Bilqīs wore when she married the prophet Solomon, son of David. If he is capable of bringing me these things, I will be forever in his service, and I will be his bedfellow and hear and obey."[15]

The entire court is shocked and dismayed by this request, as it is well known that the treasury is closely guarded by a fearsome contingent of jinn, appointed by the great king himself, who are under orders to eliminate any would-be intruders. Despite all their efforts to dissuade her, ʿĀqiṣah remains adamant that she will not marry without these gifts and, amid much lamentation, ʿAyrūḍ departs on his quest to the treasury, only to be captured and cruelly tortured by the jinn as soon as he arrives. When Sayf realizes that ʿAyrūḍ is in trouble, he sets out to rescue both him and the dowry. After many diverting adventures *en route*, he eventually reaches the mountain on which the treasury is situated, where he finds an enchanted pool containing magical brass fish:[16]

> Sayf continued on his way until he found [the pool he had been told to look out for]. He gazed at it, and saw that in it were fish made of red, yellow, and white brass, which were frolicking in the water like normal fish. King Sayf was astonished by this, and exclaimed, "God is indeed Almighty!" He said to himself, "I wonder if this was done by magical means, or if Almighty God

did this?" He was still considering this, and marveling at [the fish] when a stranger approached...[17]

After greeting the stranger, Sayf asks him about the fish, and the stranger tells him:

> "The Prophet Solomon, when he married the Lady Bilqīs, was deeply in love with her and built a castle for her over the treasury [raised up] on forty pillars of white and red marble. He labored on this castle until it enchanted everyone who looked upon it. And when he had finished building it and decorating it, the Lady Bilqīs said to her husband, the prophet Solomon, 'Sir, the decoration of this castle is not complete. To be finished, it needs a marble fountain at its center, full of flowing water, so that one can stroll around it.'"

The stranger goes on to tell Sayf of how Solomon agreed to this demand, and ordered the jinn to build the fountain, and created a pleasure garden around it, full of all kinds of birds and animals. The jinn were set to work operating the pumping mechanism that kept the water flowing, but the task was so arduous that they began to die. The king of the jinn then went to Solomon and told him that only a particular jinn, al-Raḥaṭ al-Aswad ("the Black Gobbler"), was strong enough to work the pump. On hearing this, Solomon sent his vizier, Āṣaf b. Barakhyā, to al-Raḥaṭ with a letter summoning him to his presence.

One day, after al-Raḥaṭ had been put to work, Bilqīs and Solomon were sitting by the fountain and she asked him to fill the fountain with fish, but told him that she would like the fish to be made of silver, gold, brass, and other precious metals. Solomon ordered al-Raḥaṭ to make the fish, and after he had done so, jinn were sent inside them to animate them so that they moved like real fish. However, Bilqīs was not satisfied by this, and asked that the fish be made truly alive, able to mate and breed. Solomon immediately prayed to God, his request was answered, and the fish came to life. Solomon was so awestruck by this that he

enchanted the fountain with powerful enchantments to ensure that the fish would always remain there and no one could either drink or take anything from it. Finally, he appointed the stranger, Shaybūb, as its guardian to watch over it for all time.

After listening to this story, Sayf spends the night by the enchanted pool resting. When he finally makes it to the treasury, he discovers that his arrival has been prophesied by Bilqīs. Aware of Sayf's future need of her wedding robes, she has left instructions with the jinn guardians of the treasury that he should be helped in his quest:

> [The guardians' leader] Kayhūb told him, "If you speak the truth [about who you are], then your desires will be fulfilled without obstacle, for when the Lady Bilqīs placed these garments in the treasury, she entrusted us with their care and told us, 'Protect these garments until a stranger comes to you, travelling far from his lands and people. You will find him short and pale skinned, and he will have a green mole on his right cheek and be girded with various swords. He will tell you that his name is Sayf b. Tubbaʿ b. Ḥassān, and his lineage goes back to the Ḥimyarites. Give him the gown, for I bequeath it to him as it is the finest thing that I own in the treasury.' I asked her, 'My Lady, how will we know if he is honest or lies?,' and she told me, 'When the time has come, and this young man comes here, bring him to the door of the treasury and tell him to recite his lineage. If it is truly him the doors will open for him, and he is the rightful owner, but if the door does not open for him, know, Kayhūb, that he is a liar, so kill him and bury him in the ground.'"[18]

Once the dress and crown have been retrieved and ʿAyrūḍ rescued, the two companions set out on their return journey. On the way, they stop again at the enchanted pool and Shayhūb temporarily lifts the enchantment to allow ʿAyrūḍ to heal his wounds by drinking from it, as its waters have magical healing powers. ʿĀqiṣah, who is still determined

not to marry ʿAyrūḍ, turns up several times as they begin their homeward journey to argue with Sayf about her proposed marriage and demand he hand over the robes and crown to her. On one occasion she goes so far as to steal the sword of Āṣaf from him, and throws it into the sea when he will not give way to her demands.[19] Sayf and ʿAyrūḍ are sidetracked by many adventures on their homewards journey, but when they do eventually reach home with her dowry, ʿĀqiṣah is still unimpressed. She flounces off to her parents' home in the Qāf mountains, saying that she refuses to marry a slave and an incompetent who has to be rescued.[20]

The theme of ʿĀqiṣah and ʿAyrūḍ's marriage takes a back seat following the quest to Solomon's Treasury while the *sīrah* moves on to recount the adventures of Sayf and his sons Ḍamar, Miṣr, and Naṣr for the next two hundred and fifty pages. Sayf is captured and imprisoned by an evil queen, al-Thurayyā al-Zurqāʾ, who transforms him into a bird and keeps him in a cage, while his sons are each abducted by jinn on the orders of an evil magician and abandoned in faraway lands. Eventually, Sayf's sons all make their way home, and Sayf himself is rescued and reunited with his family and his people. However, in his absence, the Ḥabashīs have sent an army against Madīnat al-Ḥamrāʾ and the Yemenites have been forced to flee their city, which was then razed to the ground. Homeless, Sayf makes the decision to lead his people out into the arid wastes of Egypt—then a waterless desert inhabited by only a few magicians—on an exodus to find a new home.

On arriving at an oasis, Sayf decides to settle his people there. However, word soon spreads and as more and more people arrive and their numbers put pressure on the existing supplies of water, Sayf is reminded by his advisors of the predictions that he will divert the course of the Nile. The ensuing subsection, the Diversion of the Nile, is both the climax of the Wedding Quest section and the central climax of the whole *sīrah*,[21] and is followed by a long subsection in which the narrative focus returns to ʿĀqiṣah and ʿAyrūḍ's betrothal. Despite the fulfilment of ʿĀqiṣah's dowry demand at the beginning of the Wedding Quest section, she remains stubbornly opposed to her marriage, in the face of all efforts to persuade her, until ʿAyrūḍ proves himself to her as a worthy suitor.

Their eventual marriage closes the frame story and marks the end of the Wedding Quest section.

Episode 2: The Diversion of the Nile

The Solomon intertext is clearly integral to the frame story of the Wedding Quest section. In addition to this, it plays a role in the Nile Diversion subsection. In order to divert the Nile, Sayf needs seven magical items: the Book of the History of the Nile, the sword of Āṣaf, the emerald horse Barq al-Barūq al-Yāqūtī, the pick of Yāfith b. Nūḥ (Japheth), the talisman of Kūsh b. Kinʿān, the talisman of al-Khīlijān and al-Khīlikhān, and al-Rahaṭ al-Aswad.[22] Sayf already has most of these, but is told by his advisors that he must locate and enslave the black jinn, al-Rahaṭ, as only he is strong enough to carve out the course for the new river with Japeth's pick. Sayf appears to have forgotten the story he was told about al-Rahaṭ at the beginning of the section, when he came across the pool of enchanted fish during his quest to Solomon's Treasury, and asks his advisors who this al-Rahaṭ is and where he can be found. In response, the sorceress ʿĀqilah, one of Sayf's senior advisors, tells Sayf the strange tale of how al-Rahaṭ came to be imprisoned by Solomon as punishment for having the audacity to fall in love with Bilqīs. As we will see below, her account includes a slightly different version of the fish story.

The inclusion of ʿĀqilah's story at this point of *Sīrat Sayf* serves to bring Solomonic associations into the text at this critical, climactic point of the text. These associations are pertinent partly because at this point in the narrative Sayf has embarked on a massive building project: the establishment of the new capital city of Miṣr which necessitates the diversion of the river Nile. The king is reliant on the labor of his jinn servants for both of these undertakings, just as Solomon was reliant on jinn to build the Temple of Jerusalem.[23] However, the Solomon/Bilqīs intertext brought into the text at this point plays a more complex role than simply providing connotations of divinely-sanctioned building. The story ʿĀqilah tells here is much more detailed, and much longer than the previous account, and contains a notably different account of the way

in which the enchanted fish are brought to life. This more developed account resonates intertextually with the events and themes of the Nile Diversion subsection in various ways. It is also significant that *Sīrat Sayf* is here making internal intertextual reference to itself by repeating the fish story at this particular point: the reintroduction of this relatively small anecdote at the beginning of the Nile Diversion subsection reminds the reader of past events, and of the plot device of ʿAyrūḍ and ʿĀqiṣa's betrothal, thereby bringing the subtextual, thematic symbolism of their relationship back into play.

According to the version of this story told by ʿĀqilah, after their marriage, Bilqīs asked Solomon to build her a castle on pillars, which he dutifully did. The end result was truly amazing: built of bricks of gold, silver, and precious metals, it had a central fountain forty feet high and forty feet deep. Bilqīs, however, was not quite satisfied, and asked for some fish for the fountain. Solomon ordered his jinn to fetch some fish, but Bilqīs rejected these as being too commonplace, and asked for some special fish that were not to be found anywhere else, and which were to be made of gold and silver. Solomon had the jinn make four fish, two of gold and two of silver, and these were placed in the fountain.

However, when Bilqīs inspected the fountain she was disappointed that the new fish didn't move and asked Solomon to make them behave like real fish. Solomon acquiesced, and ordered some jinn to enter the fish and animate them. Bilqīs, still unsatisfied, informed her husband that what she really wanted was fish that actually seemed to be alive and were capable of breeding, rather than fish possessed by jinn. Solomon, after agonizing over the possibility that this essentially fatuous request might well call down divine wrath upon his head, prayed to God to perform this miracle for him. Rather than immediately granting his request, as He did in the previous version of this story, in ʿĀqilah's variant God's response to Solomon's prayer is to send down the angel Gabriel with the message that his request would be granted on one condition: that everyone present truthfully state their most secret jealousy.

No sooner had he [Solomon] ceased praying than the angel
Gabriel descended, and said to him, "Prophet of God, your Lord
bids you peace and says, 'Know that there are four fish and that
four of you are present. Each of you must reveal your secret
envy (*ḥasad*) and speak of their inner resentment (*mā fī qalbihi
min al-kamad*), so that you will become aware of [the secrets]
harbored among you. For each of you who is truthful—and God
knows if you speak truly—I will bring one fish to life.'"[24]

The vizier Āṣaf, Āṣaf's father, Solomon, and Bilqīs were all present,
and confessed in turn. As they did so each fish was miraculously brought
to life. Āṣaf's father admitted that he was jealous of his son's knowledge
of the sciences and the magical power of books, while Āṣaf confessed that
he envied his master, Solomon, because while he himself had to struggle
for 121 years to attain his wisdom and knowledge, God gave Solomon
knowledge and the Ring of Power, which gave him dominion over men
and jinn. It then emerged that Solomon's secret envy was of the power
Bilqīs had over him:

> Lord Solomon said, "As for me, I envy my wife Bilqīs, and the
> reason for this is that God has given me power over the multi-
> tudes of His creation, and rendered [even] those with wisdom
> and knowledge subject to my rule, but this Bilqīs rules over me.
> Men follow my command, but I follow hers."[25]

Bilqīs's envy, we then discover, was of the virile power of young men:

> The Lady Bilqīs said, "Of all men, I secretly envy those whose
> cheeks are soft like mine, and whose cocks are as thick and
> strong as my forearm, who burrow and slam, and who are not
> hampered by any illness or affliction. This is what pleases me,
> and there is nothing better: I don't desire anything else, nor will
> I accept it!"[26]

Despite the miraculous fish, however, the queen's demands were not at an end: she next requested that her husband arrange that the water level in the fountain remained constant and never fell. After consulting with Āṣaf, Solomon ordered the jinn to make a pump so as to ensure the water supply. Unfortunately, as the castle was high up on a mountain, and the water source far away, every day some of the jinn working the pump died of exhaustion. The jinn sent a delegation to complain to Solomon, who again consulted Āṣaf. The vizier told him of al-Rahaṭ, a mighty *mārid*[27] who would be able to work the pump alone, so Solomon captured him and put him to work. Al-Rahaṭ, finding himself trapped inside the column which housed the pumping mechanism, resigned himself to his fate.

Soon afterwards Bilqīs decided to inspect the pumping mechanism, curious to see how it worked, and al-Rahaṭ, not realizing who she was, instantly fell in love with her. The next day, as coincidence would have it, Āṣaf and Solomon also visited him and the *mārid* asked if he might marry the beautiful woman he had met the day before. Solomon initially agreed, but when he found out that the woman in question was Bilqīs, he was overcome with rage, and was only prevented from killing al-Rahaṭ when Āṣaf intervened and told him that the *mārid* would be needed by King Sayf in future times:

> The prophet became enraged when he realized that [the object of al-Rahaṭ's desire] was his wife, and he wanted to stamp his seal on [Rahaṭ's] forehead so that he might perish from the inscription on the ring, but the vizier said to him, "Have patience, O Prophet, soon a *tubbaʿī* king will be born who will populate the land after destruction and death, and this al-Rahaṭ will carry the pick of Japheth, the son of the prophet Noah, and with it will cleave through the cataracts, destroying them, and the waters will flow through them and carry the river Nile through the farthest reaches of the land. This king will be called Sayf. Carving through the rapids and the cataracts will be

difficult for him, and he will not be able to achieve it without al-Rahaṭ."[28]

Upon hearing this, Solomon relented and sent al-Rahaṭ to another palace, where he was imprisoned inside a pillar of iron to await the coming of the Yemenite king.

Sīrat Sayf *and Islamic Solomon legends*

It is immediately apparent that the episodes described above both refer to one aspect of the Solomon legend, his relationship with the Queen of Sheba (and this holds true for most of the references to Solomonic legend made in this variant of *Sīrat Sayf*). A vast collection of tales has been built up around the figure of Solomon over time in the Islamic tradition. However, there is thematic coherence to these tales, many of which demonstrate Solomon's great wisdom, often through his ability to discern the difference between outward appearance (*zāhir*) and inner reality (*bāṭin*). In most major works in which the tales of the prophets are collected, the Solomon legend is given coherence by a number of core episodes which tend to appear in an accepted order, as in all of the *qiṣaṣ* accounts I have consulted here. These core episodes provide a basic narrative framework, on which is hung a host of other anecdotes that vary widely between collections.[29]

The Solomon legend consists, then, of anecdotes describing the wealth, wisdom, and judgment of Solomon, his magnificent throne, his God-given power over animals, the jinn, and the winds (which he uses to transport his vast army through the air), and his military prowess. There is also a corpus of animal tales that elaborate on Solomon's wisdom and humility.[30] Examples of these often preface the three more established stories of the Solomon cycle. The first of these is the story of Solomon and Bilqīs, the Queen of Sheba, in which the queen visits Solomon at his request, the two test each other's wisdom, and Bilqīs finally admits Solomon's superiority and submits to him.[31] This is usually followed by the

story of Solomon and Jaradah, in which God causes Solomon to tempo-
rarily lose his throne and ring of power to a jinn, Ṣakhr, as punishment
for allowing one of his wives, Jaradah, to commit idolatry.[32] The final
episode is the account of Solomon supervising the building of the Temple
of Jerusalem, during the course of which he dies, but remains leaning on
his staff so that the jinn, who are terrified of his wrath, continue their
work.[33] The core Islamic Solomon legend can thus be defined as consisting
of four specific elements: (i) initial stories demonstrating the king's
wisdom and might, (ii) his battle of wits with the Queen of Sheba, (iii)
the loss of his throne to the jinn Ṣakhr, and (iv) the account of his death
whilst building the Temple.

It is immediately clear that the Solomon stories told within *Sīrat
Sayf* summarized above do not reproduce material from the Solomon
legend discourse as found in the major *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* works. In contrast,
the story of Noah's cursing of Ham, which is told repeatedly by various
characters in the early stages of the *sīrah*, is clearly the same story as told
in the canonical *qiṣaṣ* collections. The stories told about Solomon and
Bilqīs in *Sīrat Sayf* are conceptually linked to the stories found in the *qiṣaṣ*,
but they are not stories that are familiar to us from these accounts.

Having said that, although *Sīrat Sayf* does not replicate Solomon
material found in the written *qiṣaṣ* collections, it is evident that without
familiarity with the wider Solomon intertext much of the import of the
Solomon stories told in *Sayf* would be lost. For example, the story about
the enchanting of the fish and the imprisonment of al-Rahaṭ recounted
in the *sīrah* by ʿĀqilah becomes more complex and meaningful if one is
aware of the story of Solomon and Bilqīs's power struggle as told in the
mainstream *qiṣaṣ* tradition. Familiarity with the "Solomon" pretext of
the story of Bilqīs's journey to see the prophet-king and their battle of
wits, in which Solomon seeks the submission of the queen, nuances how
we read the interaction between Solomon and Bilqīs in *Sīrat Sayf*. Likewise,
when ʿĀqiṣah hurls Sayf's sword into the sea, her action becomes more
threatening because she is associated with the Solomon intertext in such
a way that it resonates of the theft of Solomon's ring of power, which is
likewise thrown into the sea, by Ṣakhr. The narrator/author is playing

with their audience's knowledge of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* and manipulating the legend corpus for their own ends; they are twisting the story so that it becomes a vehicle for the themes that are being discussed in the *sīrah*, but they are also apparently making up (or at least making use of) a Solomon story that exists outside the Islamic legend corpus as it is found in the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*. So, why does the *sīrah* only draw on Solomon during the middle section, the Wedding Quest section, and why does it make reference to only specific aspects of the Solomon legend, and in such an indirect way?

The answer to this is, I think, that the aspects of the Solomon legend that the *sīrah* is referencing here through the "new" stories it tells perfectly encapsulate the exploration of the themes of order and chaos that is being undertaken in the *sīrah.* Although it is a popular work of entertainment that relates Sayf's personal heroic journey, at its core lies a discussion of kingship and the ability to rule. The first section of the *sīrah*, the Qamariyyah section, addresses the personal passage of Sayf from infant to king, his struggle to wrest his throne from the illegitimate and disastrous rule of his mother, and the beginning of a new, Islamic social order. The Wedding Quest section then describes Sayf's eventually successful struggle for the wisdom and experience to control the forces that his ascent to the throne has set in motion, and the development of his social group into the beginnings of a stable, settled nation. In the final section, Sayf channels potentially destructive, aggressive, chaotic forces and externalizes them, unleashing his Muslim army onto the outside world, and bringing it into his new, Islamic order. The *sīrah* is fundamentally a tripartite discussion of the forces that govern society and how to control and manipulate them, and it does this to a great extent through using narrative episodes that address this through gender, in which (in the worldview of the *sīrah*) the forces of patriarchal, potentially stifling and stagnating, order are balanced against the forces of female innovative chaos and change.[34] These forces are both necessary elements of society, but must be balanced so as to avoid either stagnation on the one hand, or a descent into anarchy on the other.

The underlying issue addressed in the Wedding Quest section of

Sīrat Sayf in which the Solomon references occur is thus Sayf's gradual realization of the necessary qualities of a good leader and his growing ability to recognize and manipulate the forces of order and chaos to achieve a balance essential for peace and stability. In its use of the Solomon intertext to inform this subtext, *Sīrat Sayf* chooses its points of reference very carefully. The story of Solomon and Bilqīs, on one level—the Islamic stereotype of the perfect royal couple—is one that can be read as exploring the optimum balance of the forces of (male) order and (female) chaos through gender.[35] This goes some way towards explaining why Solomon and Bilqīs are presented in *Sīrat Sayf* as husband and wife—the power struggle in their personal, marital relationship reflects the wider issue of societal power dynamics addressed in this section of the *sīrah*. This is a theme that is also explored through stories about Sayf's own problematic marriages, with which the Solomon/Bilqīs intertext also resonates. Likewise, the characterization of the terrifying and threatening jinn al-Raḥaṭ al-Aswad, coupled with his association with the figures of Solomon and Bilqīs, creates parallels between al-Raḥaṭ and Ṣakhr, both of whom threaten to bring chaos and undermine the social fabric.

The Solomon-Bilqīs intertext is, therefore, being used to reflect general themes that are explored in the text. The section begins by introducing the frame story of the betrothal of ʿĀqiṣah and ʿAyrūḍ, which kicks off Sayf's quest to Solomon's Treasury. It reaches its plot climax in the subsection describing how the Muslims establish a settled society in Egypt and divert the Nile, and culminates in the marriage of ʿĀqiṣah and ʿAyrūḍ. The frame story of ʿĀqiṣah and ʿAyrūḍ's betrothal and marriage, which rests on the Solomon/Bilqīs intertext, can be seen to have a fundamentally cosmic significance as a metaphor for the tensions within the Muslim social group.

The Solomon intertext in the Wedding Quest frame story

The Solomon intertext is first introduced at the very beginning of the Wedding Quest section via the dowry quest for Bilqīs's crown and

wedding robes, heroic heirlooms which themselves are symbols that encapsulate the basic elements of the gender and power struggle of the legendary romance. The crown, like the throne that plays such a symbolic role in the Solomon legend, is an obvious symbol of power and sovereignty. *Sīrat Sayf*'s use of the motif of Bilqīs's wedding robes can clearly be read as symbolizing the maintenance of the natural order through the institution of marriage, given its connection with the figure of the Queen of Sheba who, as Lassner points out, has "two unnatural failings: she spurns the natural state of marriage and obeisance to man."[36] In addition to the connotations of the heirlooms themselves, their introduction into the text as objects of a dowry quest brings to the text of *Sayf* immediate echoes of the riddles set to Solomon by the Queen of Sheba, another kind of marital test.

Coincidentally, ʿĀqiṣah's demand for these objects also marks the point of the *sīrah* at which her persona undergoes a sudden and drastic change. Throughout the Qamariyyah section, she plays the role of Sayf's protective and loyal supernatural helper, but from this point onwards, like the Queen of Sheba, she takes on chaotic and dangerous characteristics which must be neutralized through marriage in order to prevent the destruction of the natural order.[37] The significance of the motifs of the crown and wedding dress is thus two-dimensional. On the one hand, the presence of two such symbols of male power and female subjugation to the patriarchy draws on the theme of the beneficial union of order and chaos. However, the fact that these symbols are connected primarily with the figures of Bilqīs and ʿĀqiṣah (for whom the crown and gown are a precondition of marriage), both powerful, potentially chaotic figures in their own right, speaks to the related theme of the potential danger of unchecked female power, the actualization of which is a threat to the fabric of the patriarchal universe of the *sīrah*. The juxtaposition of these two themes informs the audience that this marriage will only be achieved with great difficulty.

Thus, the device of ʿĀqiṣah's dowry demand at the beginning of the Wedding Quest section does not just introduce the motifs of Bilqīs's crown and wedding robes, but also acts as a plot facilitator: it launches

Sayf on a quest to save ʿAyrūḍ, and so provides a rationale for the action itself. In addition, by creating intertextual associations between Bilqīs and ʿĀqiṣah, it helps to establish a new set of audience expectations of ʿĀqiṣah's behavior and character, and also of the subtextual theme of this second section of the *sīrah*, Sayf's struggle to achieve a metaphorical marriage of order and chaos. It hints at the action to come, indicating that ʿĀqiṣah, like Bilqīs, must be incorporated into the natural order, and that this will be done through her marriage to ʿAyrūḍ.

Having said that, it is clear that the use of the Bilqīs intertext to inform the relationship between ʿAyrūḍ and ʿĀqiṣah is not simply an end in itself, but rather the means by which Sayf's struggle to achieve a meta-phorical marriage of order and chaos is highlighted. Throughout this section, ʿAyrūḍ appears as little more than Sayf's creature or alter ego, often seeming to be simply a pawn in the conflict between Sayf and ʿĀqiṣah. This creates an ambience in which Sayf, in the guise of helper or companion, is perceived as the dominant male character. The spurned lover's quest to the treasury is first and foremost a plot device that facilitates Sayf's own journey and, as such, is given the bare minimum of narrative attention.[38] Instead, we follow Sayf on *his* journey to the treasury and, when he finally arrives, he discovers that *his* need of the dress and crown, rather than ʿAyrūḍ's, has been anticipated and that the queen has actually left instructions with the treasury's guardians to help him retrieve them. (The device by which Sayf gains entry to the treasury, the recitation of his lineage, serves to further identify him rather than ʿAyrūḍ with the quest, as does Bilqīs's reference to the fact that Sayf will arrive at Solomon's Treasury "girded with swords" in her conversation with the treasury's guardian, which brings the sword of Āṣaf back into intertextual play.[39])

This association of Sayf rather than ʿAyrūḍ with the Solomonic subtext is strengthened as the section continues. Soon after the wedding robes and crown have been retrieved from the treasury, they are stolen from ʿAyrūḍ by another jinn, only to be found again by Sayf later on in the section, during an episode in which he is held captive by the nefarious and hideously ugly al-Thurayyā al-Zurqāʾ who has fallen in love with

him. Furthermore, it is at this point, almost simultaneously to ʿAyrūḍ's loss of the wedding robes, that Sayf loses Āṣaf's sword when ʿĀqiṣah, furious with him for his support of her unwanted suitor, steals it from him in a fit of pique and flings it into the sea. This episode creates inter-textual links between Sayf's loss of the sword and Solomon's loss of his ring of power, which was cast into the waters by another jinn, al-Ṣakhr (and, as noted above, at this point in the *sīrah*, ʿĀqiṣah has taken on chaotic, threatening aspects to her character which echo those of al-Ṣakhr in the Solomon legend).[40] The Solomon intertext is more explicitly drawn upon when the sword later turns up in the hands of a jinn who is patiently awaiting Sayf, perched on a large stone column planted in the middle of the sea, provided by Āṣaf in anticipation of Sayf's future hour of need:

> On the eighth day [of drifting in his boat, lost in the sea, Sayf] saw a tall pillar of stone in front of him, rising from the shore, and on top of it was a tall tower which emanated a dazzling light. Sayf's boat was drawn towards it, by God's will, and when he drew near to it there was someone sitting at the top of the pillar, calling out, "Welcome, King Sayf b. Dhī Yazan." With that, King Sayf turned towards him and shouted to him, "How do you know me?"

> "O King, I have never met you before, but I have a rendezvous with you, and you with me, settled a long time since," came the reply.

> "How can that be?" Sayf asked. The stranger replied, "The reason is a strange and happy one. Āṣaf b. Barakhyā, the vizier of Lord Solomon, had made a sword of Yemeni steel and enchanted it against the jinn, and inscribed it with talismanic charms and proofs. He knew that it was destined, after a long time, to be possessed by a man called Sayf b. Dhī Yazan of *tubbaʿī* descent, and this person is you, O King of the Age. When

he discovered this, he created the sword in your name, and God's prophet Solomon said to him, 'I know that it is inevitable that the sword will fall in the sea because of enmity and strife.' And after he realized this, he ordered the jinn to bring this pillar from Jabal Marmar[41]... [and when it was built Solomon instructed me to wait on this pillar, and commanded my brother to bring me the sword when it was cast into the sea], then instructed me, 'When you see a man approaching this place, travelling in a wooden boat filled with fruit, know that this is the predicted king, so greet him kindly and tell him that he is surely the rightful owner of the sword...'"[42]

Despite the fulfilment of ʿĀqiṣah's dowry demand early on in the Wedding Quest section, she remains stubbornly opposed to marrying ʿAyrūḍ in the face of all efforts to persuade her. Their troubled courtship takes a back seat for most of the Wedding Quest section, but is brought back into the forefront in its final stages, after the Nile has successfully been diverted. Even though Sayf breaks the talisman that controls ʿAyrūḍ and crowns him as a king, ʿĀqiṣah continues to resist the marriage. She sets her betrothed several more trials designed to bring him to a premature end in an attempt to extricate herself from the situation. Eventually, she demands that he defeat a mighty *mārid*, called al-Samīdhaʿ, in single combat. When al-Samīdhaʿ (who has by now met ʿĀqiṣah and fallen in love with her himself, much like al-Rahaṭ before him) enters the battlefield and sees how comparatively puny and pathetic his opponent is, he laughs in ʿAyrūḍ's face. But, against all the odds, ʿAyrūḍ prevails and ʿĀqiṣah undergoes an abrupt change of heart and now refuses to marry anyone but him.

Al-Samīdhaʿ is, we are told, one of two fearsome jinn who were imprisoned by Solomon within pillars of stone in Bilqīs's palaces (the other one being al-Rahaṭ, who, in a repetition of his doomed love for Bilqīs, fell in love with ʿĀqiṣah earlier on in *Sīrat Sayf*, with a similarly hopeless outcome). Al-Samīdhaʿ can be read as a multiplication of al-Rahaṭ, like whom he embodies the destructive aspect of chaos.[43] His

defeat by ʿAyrūḍ mirrors his previous subjugation by Solomon, who had literally imprisoned him in the fabric of which his society was built. In *Sīrat Sayf*, the defeat of al-Samīdhaʿ facilitates the marriage of ʿĀqiṣah, likewise symbolic of the incorporation and subjugation of the forces of innovative chaos.

ʿAyrūḍ and ʿĀqiṣah's eventual marriage marks the end of the Wedding Quest section, and the beginning of the final section of the narrative, the Hunt for Saqardīs and Saqardiyūn, in the course of which the entire world is incorporated into Sayf's Islamic empire. From this point onwards, the Solomon-Bilqīs intertext, which reflects and informs both the characterization of Sayf and the main themes of *Sīrat Sayf*'s middle section, disappears from the story, as does the character of ʿĀqiṣah. The diversion of the Nile is one of the major plot points of the *sīrah*, and signals the final achievement of a unified social unit by the hero. This is undoubtedly why ʿAyrūḍ and ʿĀqiṣah's marriage does not take place earlier: it is not until this is achieved that their symbolically loaded marriage can take place.

The Solomon intertext and the story of the enchanted fish

As in the case of the Treasury Quest frame story, the story of the enchanted fish and the imprisonment of al-Rahaṭ told by ʿĀqilah clearly refers to the same gender-based discussion of order and chaos that is being explored in the Solomon legend. Again, there are a number of direct equivalences between the events of Solomon's time, as outlined by ʿĀqilah in the story, and this part of *Sayf*. Not only is the premise for al-Rahaṭ's enslavement the same, the diversion of water, but the *mārid* falls in love with ʿĀqiṣah as he previously did with Bilqīs. Just as in ʿĀqilah's story Solomon is faced with a series of increasingly impudent demands made by Bilqīs, Sayf is subjected to a list of marital demands made by his jinn foster sister. In both cases, the king is forced to walk a tightrope between appeasing and incorporating the forces of chaos, and unleashing them in their most destructive aspect: Bilqīs and ʿĀqiṣah must be appeased and the threatening, chaotic jinns Ṣakhr, al-Rahaṭ, and al-

Samīdhaʿ must be bested. Both the significance of this and the general narrative tension in *Sīrat Sayf* are heightened by the repeated intertextual reminders, through the persona of al-Rahaṭ, and after him al-Samīdhaʿ, of the story told by ʿĀqilah of the brass fish in which Solomon must risk incurring the wrath of God in order to please his wife.

In addition to reiterating the themes of appearance versus reality and the quest for wisdom, the repetition of the fish story at this point in the text brings a sense of continuity and internal intertextual association into *Sīrat Sayf*.[44] The point at which ʿĀqilah tells Sayf the second story of the brass fish and al-Rahaṭ occurs when the narrative is returning to focus on Sayf himself, having been interrupted by the adventures of his sons, which have a different thematic agenda. The inclusion of the story of the fish at this point is an internal intertextual reference to Sayf's quest to Solomon's treasury at the very beginning of the section, as well as to the fish story told to him by Shaybūb while he rested near the enchanted pool. It functions as a device through which the audience is reminded of all the themes that the Bilqīs intertext has previously been used to highlight, allowing the narrator to quickly re-establish his subtextual thematic base.

It would appear that the story of the enchanted fish is one that is integral to other recensions of *Sīrat Sayf*. In a recent study of female characters in manuscript versions of *Sīrat Sayf*, Zuzana Gažáková describes a slightly different version, which occurs right at the beginning of her primary manuscript, MS 4592, Cairo, Dār al-Kutub:

> Commentaries related to gender discourse appear as soon as the *sīrah* starts, with a short narration about Queen Bilqīs and King Sulaymān which is loosely incorporated into its opening. When Bilqīs asks Sulaymān to build a castle of remarkable beauty for her, he complains that: "This is a typical women's feature—to ask men to perform tasks they are unable to fulfil and then to tell each other that a man is able to do everything" (*hādha min ǧumlat ṭabāyiʿ an-nisāʾ annahum yaṭlubū min ar-riǧāl mā yaʿǧizū ʿanhu wa yaqulna li baʿḍihinna inna 'r-raǧul ʿala kull shayʾ qadīr*).

After that, Sulaymān openly says that he will fulfil her wish if she grants him sexual intercourse. Bilqīs agrees to this, and he engages in the construction of a castle with an enchanted lake inside full of golden fish. In order to make them come alive, both of them are requested to be sincere with each other. Bilqīs insists that Sulaymān take the first turn, and she emphasizes his masculine power and authority; this was apparently the right moment for the storyteller to stimulate the largely male audience: "You are superior. Men are truly superior to women in all aspects and situations" (*anta mutaqaddim faʾinna ʾr-riǧāl mutaqaddimūn ʿala ʾn-nisāʾ fī sāʾir al-umūr wa ʾl-ḥālāt*). The story finishes with the mutual recognition that if they could each enjoy younger partners, they would prefer them instead of each other's company.[45]

This is intriguing, not just because it is interesting to find this particular story told in other *Sayf* texts, but because it is used in a very different place in the text and seems to have some significant differences to the story as told in *Sayf*. The major themes of a *sīrah* are laid out in its introductory pages, so the inclusion of this story right at the beginning of MS 4592 gives a good indication that the Solomon/Bilqīs intertext plays an important role in at least one other variant of *Sayf*. There are also clear similarities in the way that both stories use sex and humor to explore issues of gender and power, which seems to indicate that the intertext is being used in the same way. However, the characterization of Solomon's somewhat dismissive attitude to his wife, and Bilqīs's apparently willing self-subordination to the patriarchy, seem to indicate a fundamental difference in how the manuscript story conceptualizes and thematically uses gender-related power structures.

Sīrat Sayf *and the* Kəbrä Nägäst

Further to the thematic use of gender to discuss issues relating to kingship and social order discussed above, there may well be another

reason that the Bilqīs intertext plays such a significant role, and this reflects the dialogic nature of the text. As has been mentioned by Bridget Connelly, the *sīrah* genre is fundamentally concerned with the anxieties of the social unit and that unit's struggle to maintain its integrity.[46] The text primarily functions as a forum for discussing this, in which different, often conflicting, voices are able to coexist. It is evident that *Sīrat Sayf* references the Solomon intertext in a very specific way, through the figure of Bilqīs, the Queen of Sheba, who is consistently presented in the context of her marriage to Solomon. The stories recounted about her all figure her as Solomon's wife, and Sayf's quest to Solomon's Treasury, in which she has left her wedding robes and crown for him as heroic heirlooms, looms large in the narrative and provides the framework for the entire second section. The Islamic Solomon intertext serves partly as a device through which to discuss Sayf's fitness to rule, his Solomonic qualities, but there is a tension in the identification of Sayf as a descendent of both Solomon and Bilqīs. Throughout the *sīrah*, Sayf is described in terms of his patrilineal ancestry: his identity is defined by his being his father's son; he frequently recites his lineage, which follows his forefathers back through the male line to Shem, Noah's son; and all his heroic heirlooms are inherited from male donor figures. Against this background, the link that the text creates between Sayf and Bilqīs by presenting him as de facto heir to her treasury runs against the grain. It may be no coincidence that the *Kəbrä Nägäst*, the Ethiopian national epic, relates the story of the descent of the Ethiopian kings from a son born to Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

The *Kəbrä Nägäst* opens with very brief introductory outlines of the history of the early prophets and the creation of the Ark of the Covenant. These are followed by a lengthy account of the story of King Solomon's building of the Temple of Jerusalem and the Queen of Sheba's visit, during which Solomon conceives a child with her.[47] During her return journey to Ethiopia, the queen gives birth to a son, Menelik.[48] As the boy grows up, he begins to ask about his father, and when he reaches the age of twenty-two, the queen sends him to Jerusalem to visit Solomon. Solomon wants to appoint Menelik as his heir, but Menelik wishes to

return to his mother's country. Eventually, Solomon relents, and sends him back to Ethiopia after anointing him as King of Ethiopia, accompanied by the firstborn sons of his nobles. However, Menelik's companions are loath to leave without the Ark and hatch a plan to steal it. The plan is clearly met with divine approval as the Angel of God assists them in their venture. When Solomon discovers this outrage, he sets off in hot pursuit, but eventually realizes that the Ark has been lost to him through God's will. He laments bitterly, but is consoled by the Spirit of Prophecy, and returns to Jerusalem at peace with the knowledge that the Ark has passed to his firstborn son. Menelik returns to Ethiopia as an anointed king, bearing with him the Ark of the Covenant, and founds a dynasty, in what has, coincidentally, also been described as a "reverse exodus."[49]

The *Kǝbrä Nägäst* is another story of the foundation of a divinely-sanctioned dynasty bringing the light of true faith into the world which, like *Sīrat Sayf*, seems to have reached recognizable form as a national epic sometime between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries (although it is thought to have been in circulation possibly as early as the first century AD in some form, and there were certainly Coptic versions of related stories in circulation in the seventh century). The Ethiopian Queen of Sheba has received very little literary attention,[50] but several scholars have commented on the clear relationship between the opening of the *Kǝbrä Nägäst* and a Coptic Egyptian version of the story of Bilqīs's visit to Solomon written in Arabic.[51] According to Fabrizio Pennacchietti, the African and later Latin Christian accounts of the encounter between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba differ substantially from the Jewish and Muslim narratives in that they dispense with two elements of the story: the role of the jinn in helping Solomon to build the Temple and the riddles that characterize the Islamic accounts of the meeting of Solomon and the queen. Instead, the story "is firmly grafted on to what may be called the pearl of Christian tales, the so-called 'Legend of the wood of the Cross.'"[52]

In the Coptic account summarized by Pennacchietti, Solomon needs to acquire a strong tool to cut the blocks of stone needed to build the Temple. He orders the capture of a *rukh* chick, "a fabulous bird of enor-

mous size," which is placed under an upturned copper cauldron in the courtyard of his palace. The *rukh*'s mother, determined to free him, brings a tree trunk from the Garden of Eden, and drops it onto the cauldron, which breaks. The *rukh*s escape, and Solomon uses the tree trunk to break up the stones for the Temple—when they are touched by the trunk, they simply break into the required size. Meanwhile, Solomon is told that the Queen of Sheba has arrived in the city to visit him, and that she has a "monstrous leg like the hoof of a goat." He orders the esplanade of the Temple flooded, so that the queen will have to raise her skirts when she walks across it to his throne. However, as she wades through the water, her leg is touched by the tree trunk, which happens to be floating past, and is immediately transformed into a perfect human leg. The tree trunk is later placed in the Temple and adorned with silver, which is, in later times, used to produce the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas for his betrayal of Jesus, while the cross of Christ is carved from the tree trunk.

Although the Coptic legend ends here, the *Kəbrä Nägäst* continues the story, recounting how, when the Queen of Sheba decided to return to her own lands, Solomon (who has four hundred queens and six hundred concubines) resorts to trickery to bed her before she leaves. He gives a feast in her honor at which "with wise intent Solomon sent to her meats which would make her thirsty, and drinks that were mingled with vinegar, and fish and dishes made with pepper."[53] Once the feast is over, and everyone else has left, he persuades her to stay the night there with him. The queen asks him to swear that he will not take her by force if she does so, and Solomon gives her his word, as long as she gives him her word that she will not "take by force anything that is in my house."[54] He orders a servant to leave a bowl of water in the room and when, extremely thirsty during the night, the queen goes to drink it, he tells her she has broken her oath, thereby freeing him from his, and refuses to let her drink unless she agrees to let him have his way with her. As they sleep later, Solomon has a portentous dream, and gives the queen one of his rings, to remember him by and as a token of recognition in case she bears him a son.

The Coptic and *Kəbrä Nägäst* accounts do thus, arguably, retain the

basic tropes of magical or miraculous building found in the *qiṣaṣ* versions of the Solomon legend (the jinn are replaced by the miraculous tree trunk in the Coptic account, but this is not included in the *Kəbrä Nägäst*), and of trickery (the riddles which lead to the queen's submission to Solomon are replaced by the seduction by trickery), but they are very different stories. However, the way that the Solomon pretext is referenced in *Sīrat Sayf* seems to indicate that the *Kəbrä Nägäst*, or *Kəbrä Nägäst*-type stories, of the Queen of Sheba are incorporated into its intertextual pantheon. This suggestion is based on two things: the fact that the references in *Sīrat Sayf* are to a postmarital relationship of Solomon and Bilqīs, and the fact that the *sīrah* establishes a relationship between Sayf and Bilqīs, as well as Sayf and Solomon.

The fact that the major tendency in *Sīrat Sayf* is to refer to Solomon legends in the context of a post-marital relationship with Bilqīs, rather than through the premarital wisdom-test encounter of Solomon and Bilqīs as found in the *qiṣaṣ*, is intriguing. The major theme of qurʾānic references to the Solomon legend is the battle of wits between the prophet and the non-believer, and the demonstration of the superior, God-given knowledge of Solomon in comparison to Bilqīs who, however intelligent and erudite she may be, and however capable a queen to her people, cannot hope to win out against him. Bilqīs's part in the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* likewise focuses on this encounter, and she disappears from the legend with Solomon's victory. However, what we see in *Sīrat Sayf* is that, although the theme of the test of wits is maintained in the stories it tells about Solomon and Bilqīs, she appears exclusively as Solomon's wife following the encounter that is the focus of her role in the Qurʾān and *qiṣaṣ*. There is a clear difference between the Queen of Sheba's role in *Sīrat Sayf* and in the *Kəbrä Nägäst*, in that Solomon and Bilqīs are by no means man and wife in the Ethiopian account (this is made very clear by the fact that the queen is seduced against her will, by unscrupulous trickery). However, *Sīrat Sayf*'s reliance on a characterization of Solomon and Bilqīs as man and wife who leave an inheritance to Sayf has correspondences to their roles in the *Kəbrä Nägäst*, in which, although not married, their primary narrative function is as parents of Menelik, the

founder of a dynasty of kings and the bringer of the true religion to Ethiopia.

There is also a shift of emphasis away from Solomon and onto Bilqīs in the intertextual references *Sīrat Sayf* makes to Solomonic legend that is characteristic of the Ethiopian story.[55] It is from Bilqīs that Sayf inherits the crown and wedding robes needed to fulfill ʿĀqiṣah's dowry quest, and it is because of al-Rahaṭ's love for Bilqīs that he ends up imprisoned by Solomon, conveniently trapped and waiting for Sayf to liberate him to help divert the Nile. One might expect Sayf to have inherited Solomon's ring or throne, for example, given that these are motifs that are inextricably associated with Solomon in Islamic legend, rather than Bilqīs's robes and crown and Āṣaf's sword. However, the focus in *Sayf* on Bilqīs as the wife who must be appeased in the stories of the enchanted fish is striking because she is so clearly portrayed as the partner with more power in their marriage. Thus Sayf, through his connection with Bilqīs in the Wedding Quest section, in which he is the heir to whom Bilqīs leaves her talismanic treasures, might very well be identified with the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba's son Menelik by those who know the *Kǝbrä Nägäst* and associated stories.

This potential identification of Sayf with Menelik is intriguing because Menelik can be seen as reflecting Ethiopian notions of sacred kingship in much the same way as I have identified Sayf's persona as embodying ancient Egyptian ideas of kingship elsewhere.[56] This identification brings another dimension to Sayf's characterization, which in turn informs the discussion of kingship that is a core concern of the *sīrah*. Furthermore, it adds an interesting nuance to the issue of Sayf's literary legitimacy as king and founder of his dynasty, given that by the end of the *sīrah* Sayf becomes the ruler of Ḥabash, the major enemy of the Egyptian Yemenites, who are defeated and incorporated into Sayf's empire in the final stages of the narrative. In terms of the story that *Sīrat Sayf* is telling, the text can be read as creating a tension between the legitimacy of Sayf Arʿad's claim to the Ḥabashī throne and Sayf's. This is because, if Sayf can be identified with Menelik, when he defeats the Ḥabashī king Sayf Arʿad and takes his throne he is, in one sense, claiming

his legitimate birthright.[57]

　This aspect of Sayf's characterization can also be read into his parentage: Sayf is always described as his father's son, but his mother, Qamariyyah, is an African concubine who was sent to Dhū Yazan as a gift from Sayf Arʿad.[58] Identity is very much informed by parentage in popular epics, and Sayf's mother brings an "African" dimension to his persona. Although he is always identified in the text as a Yemenite descendent of the Ḥimyarite kings, he is actually a descendent of both Ham and Shem, half African and half Arab.[59] Despite the fact that there is an obvious tension between Sayf as Islamic progenitor and Menelik as a Christian one, the identification between these two at the level of their shared characterization as founding rulers who bring the light of the true faith to the world is one that is cross-cultural. It can be read as reflecting the essentially inclusive worldview of *Sīrat Sayf*, and the underlying idea of the brotherhood of man which is a key theme of the text.

　In terms of intertextual consistency, the preeminent role of the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba in the *Kəbrä Nägäst* also ties in neatly with the focus on the figure of Bilqīs in Middle Eastern, and specifically Yemeni and Egyptian, premodern popular histories and literature, in which figures such as Bilqīs and Zenobia can be read as vehicles through which issues of social order and chaos are discussed. Given the significance of the Queen of Sheba in terms of Ethiopian culture and literature, as well as Yemeni tradition, not to mention the nature of the heirlooms involved, it does not seem farfetched to read into this the intertextual existence of a broader level of dialogue on social and cultural frictions and assimilation which works at a more regional level, encompassing South Arabia, Ḥabash, and Egypt.[60] Although these three geographic areas have long been separate political entities, they have a history of trade and cultural links.[61] What is more, the fluctuating borders of Ḥabash have incorporated large swathes of South Arabia and Egypt at various times. In fact, *Sīrat Sayf* is rooted in the historical actuality of territorial conflicts between Ḥabash and Ḥimyar in the Arabian Peninsula, as well reflecting the later, medieval tensions between Egypt and Ḥabash.[62]

Conclusion

To conclude, the references *Sīrat Sayf* makes to the Solomon legend are nuanced and complex. It is easy to say that Sayf and Solomon have basic characteristics in common, and these undoubtedly do explain the presence of references to Solomon in the *sīrah*. The Wedding Quest section of *Sīrat Sayf* is especially concerned with the control of the jinn, the building of palaces and cities, and the diversion of the river Nile. Given Solomon's unique status in Islamic popular culture as the ultimate prophet-king, and the popularity of stories about him, it might seem unremarkable that he would be an intertextual presence in a *sīrah* about another Islamic world-king, and the implicit identification of the two characters is certainly a narrative device that is employed to enhance Sayf's heroic status. It builds on the oft-repeated predictions of Sayf's destiny as world ruler made in the text, paving the way for the climactic third section in which the Muslims embark on an inexorable march throughout any still unconquered earthly lands and into the realms of the jinn.

However, the *sīrah* goes far beyond just bringing in heroic heirlooms and Solomonic motifs to inform Sayf's characterization. It manipulates the Solomon legend and plays with the audience's assumed knowledge of the narrative to inform its own themes. It seems to create new Solomon stories for the ends of its own plot, and to generate narrative tensions. Perhaps most importantly, it seems to be using the Solomon legend as a dialogic device through which to speak to (and for) not just an Islamic, Egyptian audience, but also a Christian and Ethiopian one. (Without looking at more examples of specifically Egyptian Christian religious legends it is impossible to make any more concrete arguments on this aspect of the text's intertextual dialogue, but it would be extremely surprising if the Egyptian Coptic intertext did not play a large role).

As Michael Jackson has recently commented, storytelling fulfils several functions. It is a way that we "recount and rework events that happened to us," but we also tell stories to share experiences, to affirm our identity, and to transform our sense of who we are.[63] Story-

telling has a cathartic function that helps us to come to terms with and make sense of traumatic events, loss, and hardship. Communally authored narratives such as *Sīrat Sayf* do this by allowing space within themselves for multiple voices to exist, often voices with diametrically opposed views. These narratives are not univocal, but are dialogic discussions of issues such as cultural identity and are a way of airing and reconciling different truths. The identification of Sayf with both the Islamic Solomon and the Ethiopian Queen of Sheba informs his heroic character and the story of his own personal quest. However, it also makes him a more universal hero and opens up the narrative experience to a more diverse audience. It is one of many similar uses of intertextual references made in *Sīrat Sayf* that allow it to be a space in which issues surrounding identity and society can be explored and negotiated. At the same time, it works to convey one of the central themes of the *sīrah*, the role of Sayf b. Dhī Yazan as the world king who brings an inclusive message of Islamic unity to the worlds of humans and jinn.

Notes

1. This article is based on a paper presented at the conference "Islamic Stories of The Prophets: Semantics, Discourse, and Genre" held in Naples, October 14–15, 2015. I would like to thank the organizers, Marianna Klar, Michael Pregill, and Roberto Tottoli, for giving me the opportunity to present, and the Mizan Project and the Rector and Dipartimento Asia, Africa e Mediterraneo of the University of Naples L'Orientale for their generous funding and hospitality. This article is based in material from my recently published monograph, *Prophets, Gods and Kings in Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan: An Intertextual Reading of an Egyptian Popular Epic* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), but this has been revised, refocused, and expanded, including the addition of material on Ethiopian Queen of Sheba stories. I would also like to thank Wendy Belcher and the anonymous reviewers for their comments on an earlier draft of this article.

2. Medieval Arabic writers often use the term Ḥabash loosely to refer to sub-Saharan Africa, but, strictly speaking, Ḥabash was the designation for a region situated in modern-day Ethiopia and Eritrea. Its fluctuating borders sometimes incorporated parts of modern-day Egypt, and sometimes parts of the Arabian Peninsula (see E. Ullendorff, J.S. Trimingham, C.F. Beckingham, and W. Montgomery Watt, "Ḥaba<u>sh</u>, Ḥaba<u>sh</u>a" in *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1954 –2005), s.v., and El Amin Abdel Karim Ahmed, "Habasha, Abyssinia and Ethiopia: Some Notes Concerning a Country's Names and Images," in *University of Khartoum Annual Conference of Postgraduate Studies and Scientific Research: Humanities and Educational Studies February 2013, Conference Proceedings Volume One* (Khartoum: n.p., 2013), 399–415). It is the latter designation that is clearly intended in *Sīrat Sayf.*

3. Aboubakr Chraïbi has argued, based on his reading of a sixteenth-century manuscript, that the story of Sayf's journey into Egypt is informed by the Moses legend, hence he uses the term "reverse exodus." See Aboubakr Chraïbi, "Le roman de *Sayf ibn dî Yazan*: sources, structure et argumentation," *Studia Islamica* 84 (1996): 113–134.

See also Blatherwick, *Prophets, Gods and Kings*, 110–116.

4. The *sīrah* genre is one in which narratives are inherently fluid, which means that there is no one definitive version of the text. The different extant manuscript variants adhere to a main plot and structure, and tend to maintain consistency in the initial stages of the story, but can diverge greatly in plot and detail within this overall framework, especially in the later stages of the narrative. The version of *Sīrat Sayf* discussed in this article is the widely available four-volume printed edition *Sīrat al-malik Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan fāris al-Yaman* (4 vols, Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Thaqāfiyyah, 1407 [1986]). This is a reprint of the Būlāq edition, first published in 1294 [1877].

5. See n. 35 and n. 37 below, and also Blatherwick, *Prophets, Gods and Kings*, 39–40, 44–49, and 51.

6. An interesting discussion on similar premises that explores the structural and thematic similarities between American stories of the outlaw Jesse James and the New Testament accounts of the life of Jesus can be found in Robert Paul Seesengood and Jennifer L. Koosed, "Crossing Outlaws: The Life and Times of Jesse James and Jesus of Nazareth," in Roberta Sterman Sabbath (ed.), *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament, and Qur'an as Literature and Culture* (Biblical Interpretation Series 98; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 361–371.

7. I use the term 'pretext' here rather than 'hypotext' as I am not positing a direct link between two specific texts, but a more general reliance on the intertextual nexus of legends and associations that surround figures such as the Islamic prophets.

8. See *Sīrat Sayf*, 1.9–10.

9. For the variant of the Ham story as told in *Sīrat Sayf*, see 1.49. Noah's curse is more usually referred to as "the curse of Ham," but the *sīrah* consistently refers to it as "Noah's curse." For more on the curse in *Sīrat Sayf*, see Blatherwick, *Prophets, Gods and Kings*, 81–87 and 251–253, and M. O. Klar, *Interpreting al-Thaʿlabī's* Tales of the Prophets: *Temptation, Responsibility and Loss* (London: Routledge, 2009), 178 and 183–184. For the curse in the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, see ibid., 151–155 and 171–176. And for the curse in general, see Roland Boer and Ibrahim

Abraham, "Noah's Nakedness: Islam, Race and the Fantasy of the Christian West" in Sabbath (ed.), *Sacred Tropes*, 461–473; David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Gordon D. Newby, "The Drowned Son: Midrash and Midrash Making in the Qur'an and Tafsīr," in W. M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions: Papers Presented at the Institute for Islamic-Judaic Studies* (2 vols. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 2.19–32.

10. "Narrative and iconographic conventions link nearly all the great heroes with some specific emblems of identity. One of the several types of emblem is the heirloom, a kind of heroic hand-me-down" (John Renard, *Islam and the Heroic Image: Themes in Literature and the Visual Arts* [Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993], 141; see 140–145 for his discussion of such emblems).

11. See *Sīrat Sayf*, 1.225–234 and 2.256–269, respectively.

12. For example, "King Sayf b. Dhī Yazan drew the sword of Āṣaf b. Barakhyā, and said to the sorcerer al-Shāhiq, 'Take this sword, kiss it, and place against the back of your neck (lit. *ʿalā raʾsik*). If your faith is sound it will cause you no pain and you will not be wounded, and what you have said [about your conversion to Islam] is true. But if it is otherwise, you will die'" (*Sīrat Sayf*, 3.131).

13. More detailed summaries of *Sīrat Sayf* can be found in Blatherwick, *Prophets, Gods and Kings*, 26–51, and Malcolm Lyons, *The Arabian Epic* (3 vols.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 586–641. Rudi Paret has also provided a summary of the *sīrah*, along with historical background and comprehensive name and place indices (Rudi Paret, *Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī Jazan: Ein arabischer Volksroman* [Hannover: Orient-Buchhandlung Heinz Lafaire, 1924]). This has recently been translated into English by Gisela Seidensticker-Brikay as *Siirat Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan: An Arabic Folk Epic* (Maiduguri: University of Maiduguri, 2006). The first section of the *sīrah*, the Qamariyyah section, has been translated by Lena Jayyusi as *The Adventures of Sayf Ben Dhi Yazan, An Arab Folk Epic* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996). For an overview of scholarship on *Sīrat Sayf*, see Blatherwick, *Prophets, Gods*

and Kings, 4–6, and Zuzana Gažáková, "Remarks on Arab Scholarship in the Arabic Popular *Sīra* and the *Sīrat Sayf Ibn Ḏī Yazan*," *Asian and African Studies* 14 (2005): 187–195.

14. "A frame story may be defined as a narrative whole composed of two distinct but connected parts: a story, or stories, told by a character or several characters in another story of lesser dimensions and subordinate interest, which thus encloses the former as a frame encloses a picture" (Mia Gerhardt, *The Art of Storytelling: A Literary Study of the Thousand and One Nights* [Leiden: Brill, 1963], 395. See 395–416 for her full discussion of frame stories).

15. *Sīrat Sayf*, 2.185–186.

16. For the story of the creation of these fish, see *Sīrat Sayf*, 2.405–408. The motif of Solomon building palaces for Bilqīs is a common one in Middle Eastern popular literature; see, for example, W. Montgomery Watt, "The Queen of Sheba in Islamic Tradition," in James Pritchard (ed.), *Solomon and Sheba* (London: Phaidon, 1974), 85–103.

17. *Sīrat Sayf*, 2.405.

18. *Sīrat Sayf*, 2.411.

19. Ibid., 2.431.

20. The text has *jabal qāf*, which is normally translated as Mount Qāf. *Jabal qāf* can either refer to a single mountain, a range of mountains that encircle the world, or a range of mountains in the Caucasus (often associated with Gog and Magog). It is clear from the text that here it is conceived of as a range of mountains rather than a single peak, and it seems to be consistently used in *Sīrat Sayf* to refer to a mythical realm which is the home of the jinn. For more on the *jabal qāf*, see Daniel G. Prior, "Travels of Mount Qāf: From Legend to 42° 0' N 79° 51' E," *Oriente Moderno* 89 (2009): 425–444.

21. It is possible to read two structures at work in *Sīrat Sayf*. The first is a linear structure, while the second is a loose ring structure with a central climax. See Blatherwick, *Prophets, Gods and Kings*, 25 and 52–53.

22. See *Sīrat Sayf*, 3.222. Several of these objects can be described as prophetic emblems of identification: the sword of Āṣaf, the emerald

horse Barq al-Barūq al-Yāqūtī (the name of which calls to mind the Prophet Muḥammad's horse, al-Burāq), the pick of Yāfith b. Nūḥ (Japheth), the talisman of Kūsh b. Kinʿān (who is one of the sons of Ham according to Islamic tradition), and al-Rahaṭ al-Aswad.

23. See below, n. 33.

24. *Sīrat Sayf*, 3.225.

25. *Sīrat Sayf*, 3.226.

26. *Sīrat Sayf*, 3.226.

27. A *mārid* is a particularly powerful and malevolent type of jinn.

28. *Sīrat Sayf*, 3.228–229.

29. The various accounts consulted here are:

(i) ʿUmārah b. Wathīmah's *Kitāb Badʾ al-khalq wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, for which see: Raif Georges Khoury (ed.), *Les légendes prophétiques dans l'Islam depuis le Iᵉʳ jusqu'au IIIᵉ siècle de l'Hégire. Kitāb bad' al-ḫalq wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ. Avec édition critique du texte*, ed. R. G. Khoury (Codices Arabici Antiqui 3; Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1978), 102–180.

(ii) Al-Thaʿlabī's *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, for which see: Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī al-Nīsābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ al-musammā ʿArāʾis al-majālis* (Beirut: al-Maktabah al-Thaqā-fiyyah, n.d.), 257–293. This is available in English translation, for which see *ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ, or 'Lives of the Prophets' as Recounted by Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī*, trans. William M. Brinner (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 482–548.

iii) Al-Kisāʾī's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, which is available in three printed editions (based on different manuscripts): (1) *Vita Prophetarum auctore Muḥammed ben ʿAbdallāh al-Kisaʾi ex codicibus, qui in Monaco, Bonna, Lugd. Batav., Lipsia et Gothana asservantur*, ed. Isaac Eisenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1923), 267–299; (2) *Badʾ al-khalq wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ li'l-Kisāʾī*, ed. al-Ṭāhir b. Sālmah (Tunis: Dār Nuqūsh ʿArabiyyah, 1998), 336–360; and (3) *Qiṣaṣ wa-mawālid al-anbiyāʾ*, ed. Khālid Shibl (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiy-yah, 2008), 279–304. Al-Kisāʾī's collection is available in English trans-lation, for which see: *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisāʾī*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Boston: Twayne, 1978), 288–320 (this is a translation of

the Eisenberg edition).

iv) Ibn Kathīr's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, for which see: ʿImād al-Dīn Abū'l-Fidā Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, ed. ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd Abū'l-Khayr, Muḥammad Wahbī Sulaymān, and Maʿrūf Muṣṭafā Zurayq (Beirut: Dār al-Khayr li'l-Ṭibāʿah wa'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzīʿ, 1417 [1998]), 440–467.

v) ʿAlī b. al-Ḥasan Ibn ʿAsākir's *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, for which see: *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. ʿUmar b. Gharamah al-ʿAmrawī and ʿAlī Shīrī (80 vols.; Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1995–2001), 22.230–299.

vi) Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh al-umam wa'l-mulūk*, for which see: *Tārīkh al-umam wa'l-mulūk* (6 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, n.d.), 1.287–296. This is available in English translation, for which see: *The History of al-Ṭabarī, an Annotated Translation. Volume III: The Children of Israel,* trans. William M. Brinner (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 152–175.

30. That is to say, tales in which Solomon interacts with animals. The story of Solomon's encounter with the king of the ants, for example, and his slaughter of his horses, are two of the most well-known examples of such stories.

31. The various accounts of this story differ in many details, but it can briefly be summarized as follows. One day, when Solomon is out on an expedition, he sends a hoopoe to look for water. The hoopoe comes across the palace of Bilqīs, a wise, powerful, and just queen who rules over Yemen and is half human and half jinn. The hoopoe is delayed by this encounter and only escapes Solomon's wrath by telling him of the existence of Bilqīs. Solomon sends the hoopoe back to her palace with a letter demanding her immediate submission and threatening her with destruction if this is withheld. In reply, Bilqīs sends an envoy to Solomon with gifts and several tests, so that she might establish whether he is, in fact, more powerful and wiser than she. Solomon passes these initial tests, so Bilqīs herself visits him to discover the extent of his might and wisdom. Solomon has her throne, which she has had securely locked away, magically transported to his court and orders the jinn to build a castle for him to receive Bilqīs in. The jinn fear that Solomon might marry Bilqīs, whom they have heard

is half jinn, because they would be enslaved to his descendants if Solomon were to have a son who was part jinn. Having heard that Bilqīs has cloven feet and exceptionally hairy legs as a result of her jinn heredity, they build a palace with a polished floor that shines like water in the hope that she will raise her skirts when she crosses the floor, thereby revealing her legs and dampening Solomon's ardor. When Bilqīs arrives, Solomon shows her throne to her and asks if it is indeed hers, to which Bilqīs replies, wisely, that it appears to be. She is, however, tricked by the glass floor when she goes to cross it, raising her skirts to reveal hairy but human ankles. When she realizes that she has been bested, she surrenders to Solomon, who orders her legs depilated. The various accounts diverge on the ending: some have Bilqīs return to her home, some have Solomon marry her to one of his vassals, and some have Solomon and Bilqīs marry. For more on the Solomon and Bilqīs story, see Jamal Elias, "Prophecy, Power and Propriety: The Encounter of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 11 (2009): 55–72; Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); Watt, "The Queen of Sheba in Islamic Tradition"; and James Pritchard (ed.), *Solomon and Sheba* (London: Phaidon, 1974).

32. Solomon is cast out, unrecognized and reviled, to wander his lands for forty days, a duration equal to the period of time Jaradah practiced idolatry in his palace. In the meantime, Ṣakhr takes on Solomon's appearance and rules in his stead, causing consternation with his unusual and un-Islamic behavior. After the forty days are up, Ṣakhr flies off and drops Solomon's Ring of Power into the sea, where it is swallowed by a fish. The fish is caught by a fisherman and given to Solomon to eat, whereupon he finds the ring, returns to court, and is recognized. Solomon's first act on regaining his throne is to have Ṣakhr imprisoned in stone for the rest of time.

33. During his reign, Solomon sets the jinn to building the Temple of Jerusalem. Every day, he visits the Temple to supervise the

building. Unfortunately, before the building is completed, Solomon dies, but his soul leaves his body so gently that he remains standing, propped up by his wooden staff, for an entire year. During this time everyone thinks he is still alive, and the jinn continue to work day and night, terrified of incurring his wrath. When the Temple is finished, the prophet's body finally falls to the floor, his staff having been eaten away by a single worm.

    34. See Blatherwick, *Prophets, Gods and Kings*, 44–49; see also 39–40. This reading of the *sīrah*'s subtext is based in the theories outlined by René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977). His general thesis is that any society is a delicate balance of the essentially conflicting forces of order (which confers the benefit of stability, but if allowed to run unchecked, leads to stagnation and decay) and those of chaos (which can lead to anarchy, but if harnessed can provide innovation and renaissance). These forces do not exist in harmony, but rub against each other, creating tensions which build up and eventually boil over, and are exorcised through the symbolic sacrifice of a surrogate within the socio-cultural group. This symbolic act of sacrifice allows the status quo to change to incorporate a new concept of the old (order) and the new (chaos). Although Girard is talking about how this is expressed through religion and religious mythology, his ideas can be seen to hold true in a more general context, and the concept of the 'old' versus the 'new' is very similar to that of the 'self' (or 'us') versus the 'other' (or 'them'), which he also addresses. Girard also notes that this conflict often finds narrative expression through the erosion of 'difference,' often, as here in *Sīrat Sayf*, in terms of male and female behavioral gender boundaries, and through sexual metaphor. Clearly, this order-chaos subtext can be read at a personal level as well as a societal one.

    35. On this see Elias, "Prophecy, Power and Propriety."

    36. Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 77.

    37. In general terms, the *sīrah*, like much popular and folk narrative, is a genre in which female sexuality is only acceptable, and

controllable, when governed by men within the lawful bounds of marriage. The overall assumption of the genre appears to be that the female role is characterized by deference to one's masculine betters. Within these limits, there does seem to be room for proactive and independent women who are not perceived as usurping the masculine role, but rather complement it, as long as they limit their ambitions to the Islamic cause and are obedient to their male superiors. Women tend to represent the forces of chaos, the alien "other" that stands outside and threatens to disrupt the conscious (rational) order which, when properly harnessed by the (male) forces of order, is essential for the well-being of the universe as a whole. This sense of female danger-ousness is often found in folklore, especially in this kind of narrative where the audience and narrator can be assumed to be predominantly male: "The epic world is essentially a male world: performance is normally both by and for men, and epic attitudes towards sexuality consequently reflect men's attitudes. The pattern which emerges from the narratives reveals a powerful sexual fear; women as mothers are strong and courageous, as are many sisters and wives; celibate women and widows are dangerous and often destructive" (John Smith, "Scapegoats of the Gods: The Ideology of the Indian Epics," in Stuart H. Blackburn, Peter J. Claus, Joyce B. Flueckiger, and Susan S. Wadley [eds.], *Oral Epics in India* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988], 176–194, 188). In this respect *Sīrat Sayf* is similar to folk-lore the world over. What makes its approach to gender issues inter-esting is the central role this conceit plays in the narrative: in *Sayf*, woman is an essential force that must be assimilated rather than con-quered. For more on female gender roles in the *sīrah*s, see Blather-wick, *Prophets, Gods and Kings*, 57–61; Bridget Connelly, *Arab Folk Epic and Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Gažáková, "Major Female Characters in the *Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan*," in Zuzana Gažáková and Jaroslav Drobný (eds.), *Arabic and Islamic Studies in Honour of Ján Pauliny* (Bratislava: Comenius University in Bratislava, 2016), 87–111; Remke Kruk, *The Warrior Women of Islam* (London, New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014); eadem, "The Princess Maymūnah: Maiden,

Mother, Monster," *Oriente Moderno* 22 (2003): 425–442; eadem, "Warrior Women in Arabic Popular Romance: Qannasa bint Muzahim and Other Valiant Ladies: Part 1," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 24 (1993): 213–229; eadem, "Warrior Women in Arabic Popular Romance: Qannasa bint Muzahim and Other Valiant Ladies: Part 2," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 25 (1994): 16–33; and eadem, "The Bold and the Beautiful: Women and *fitna* in the *Sīrat Dhāt al-Ḥimma*: The Story of Nūra," in Gavin R. Hambly (ed.), *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage and Piety* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), 99–116.

38. See *Sīrat Sayf*, 2.191–194.

39. The requirement that Sayf recite his lineage (*nasab*) to gain access to enchanted buildings, magical weapons and talismans, and be recognized by those awaiting his arrival, is a common trope in the *sīrah*. As well as enhancing his status as the awaited hero, the recitation of the *nasab* is, in itself, a metaphorical assertion of order.

40. See *Sīrat Sayf*, 2.430–431.

41. A mountain in Yemen near Sana'a; *marmar* generally refers to white marble or alabaster.

42. *Sīrat Sayf*, 2.436.

43. Character multiplication is a compositional tool, generally recognized as universal in oral narrative, according to which allies, enemies, and lovers are (surprisingly!) multiplied. The application of this tool on a vast scale to minor characters is a means by which the heroic status of primary characters can be enhanced. It can be used to provide the narrative with ever increasing opportunities for expansion—for example, as here, by replicating the enemy when the previous one gets killed off.

44. See Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Other Peoples' Myths: The Cave of Echoes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 76–82, for a discussion of the symbolism of fish in mythology. She posits the idea that fish, because of their total 'otherness' (as opposed to more 'understandable' animals such as horses or dogs), often symbolize spiritual knowledge or the quest for spiritual knowledge: to be able to understand the fish is to be able to understand the other.

45. Zuzana Gažáková, "Major Female Characters," 90–91. According to Gažáková, her analysis is "almost exclusively based on the MS 4592 from Cairo, Dār al-Kutub, entitled *Sīrat Sayf li Abī 'l-Maʿālī*, 631f. in 2 volumes (316f., 315f.), s.a. (source manuscript)" but "short references are also made to MS 13524 in eighteen small volumes also from Cairenese Dār al-kutub and to MS We. 643 from the State Library in Berlin, titled *Al-Awwal min al-malik Sayf min ibtidāʾ Nūḥ ʿalayhi 's-salām*, 62f., s.a." (89).

46. "The fear of strangers and fear of the out-group, anxiety about the unknown, is very real in the oral traditional cultures which maintain and generate the *sīrah* tradition. Their history... is one of invasion and boundary transgression, conquest, and penetration by one foreign political power after another" (Connelly, *Arab Folk Epic*, 225).

47. For translations of the story of the Queen of Sheba and Solomon in the *Kəbrä Nägäst*, see E. A. Wallis Budge (trans.), *The Queen of Sheba and Her Only Son Menyelek (Kəbra Nagast)* (Cambridge, Ontario: In Parentheses Publications, 2000), and C. Bezold, *Kebra Nagast. Die Herrlichkeit der Könige* (Munich: K.B. Akademie de Wissenschaften, 1905). See also Edward Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 131–145; David Allan Hubbard, "The Literary Sources of the *Kebra Nagast*" (St. Andrews: University of St. Andrews, 1956), 278–399; and the more recent Wendy Laura Belcher, "African Rewritings of the Jewish and Islamic Solomonic Tradition: The Triumph of the Queen of Sheba in the Ethiopian Fourteenth-Century Text *Kəbrä Nägäst*," in Sabbath (ed.), *Sacred Tropes*, 441–459.

48. Bayna-Leḥkem in Budge's translation.

49. Belcher, "African Rewritings," 453–454.

50. Although this is soon to be at least partially redressed, as Wendy Belcher is currently working on a study on the African Christian Queen of Sheba (*The Black Queen of Sheba: A Global History of an African Idea* [forthcoming]), as well as a new translation of the *Kəbrä Nägäst*, co-authored with Michael Kleiner.

51. Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible*, 141; André Caquot, "La Reine

de Saba et le bois de la croix," *Annales d'Éthiopie* 1 (1955): 137–147, 137ff.; and Fabrizio A. Pennacchietti, *Three Mirrors for Two Biblical Ladies: Susanna and the Queen of Sheba in the Eyes of Jews, Christians, and Muslims* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 91–93. His account of the narrative is based on that given by Bezold in *Kebra Nagast*, xlii–lx. Bezold thinks that the Coptic legend relies on the *Kəbrä Nägäst*, but Pennacchieti is of the opinion that it predates it. Ullendorff also mentions a second Coptic version of the story, which he says "offers little of special interest."

52. Pennacchietti, *Three Mirrors for Two Biblical Ladies*, 91.

53. Budge, *Kebra Nagast*, 29.

54. Budge, *Kebra Nagast*, 30.

55. "In turning to the Ethiopian version, we become at once conscious of a fundamental change of atmosphere: the emphasis is no longer on Solomon and his wisdom but on the Queen of Sheba and her nobility; no longer is Solomon exposed to the wiles of the seductress, Lilith, the earthy demon, but he himself assumes the role of seducer…" (Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible*, 139).

56. See Blatherwick, *Prophets, Gods and Kings*, Ch. 3 and Ch. 5. On notions of sacred kingship in Ethiopia, see Carlo Conti Rossini, "La regalità sacra in Abissinia e nei regni dell'Africa centrale ed occidentale," *Studi e materiali do storia delle religioni* 21 (1948): 12–31; André Caquot, "La royauté sacrale en Éthiopie," *Annales d'Éthiopie* 2 (1957): 205–218; and Eike Haberland, *Untersuchungen zum äthiopischen Königtum* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965). Conti Rossini and Caquot relate the Ethiopian conceptualization of kinship to ideas held in the ancient Near East, but Haberland sees it as reflecting African ideas of kingship as discussed in, for example, Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948). *Sīrat Sayf* also seems to retain some traces of these African ideas.

57. The ideas of Sayf as invader and legitimate ruler existing in tension with one another is a conceptualization of kingship that has also been found in ancient Egyptian *Chaosbeschreibung* texts: the king

is legitimate by divine will, and is a god on earth, but if he is defeated by a foreign enemy, then must this foreign enemy also not be ruler by divine will and a god on earth? For more on this see Blatherwick, *Prophets, Gods and Kings*, 199–202; John Dillery, "Cambyses and the Egyptian *Chaosbeschreibung* Tradition," *Classical Quarterly* 55 (2005): 387–406; Antonio Loprieno, "The 'King's Novel'" in Antonio Loprieno (ed.), *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 277–295; and David Frankfurter, *Elijah in Upper Egypt* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 159–194.

58. This is especially relevant given that Qamariyyah is not always African—in some other variants, for example, she is a Persian princess. See Gažáková, "Major Female Characters," 92.

59. See Blatherwick, *Prophets, Gods and Kings*, 285–286. On the principle of character splitting and its ramifications for characterization, see Brenda Beck, "Core Triangles in the Folk Epics of India" in Blackburn et al. (eds.), *Oral Epics in India*, 155–175.

60. On Bilqīs in Southern Arabian legendary history, see Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997); Belcher, "African Rewritings"; and Elias, "Prophecy, Power and Propriety." Toy briefly discusses the geographical spread of her story and the possibility of the existence of a South Arabian/Ethiopian oikotype in C. H. Toy, "The Queen of Sheba," *Journal of American Folklore* 20 (1907): 207–212, 211–212.

61. See G. W. Bowersock, *The Throne of Adulis: Red Sea Wars on the Eve of Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); idem, *The Crucible of Islam* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2017), esp. Ch. 4; and Ullendorff, *Ethiopia and the Bible*, 15–30, for the religious, cultural, and political interactions of these areas.

62. The *sīrah* is believed to have developed from stories about the historical figure of the Yemenite Ḥimyarite ruler Sayf b. Dhī Yazan, also known as Abū Murrah or Mādhikarib, who fought against the Ḥabashī presence in the Arabian Peninsula in the late sixth century CE. The general consensus among Persian and Arab historians is that the historical Sayf was a vassal of the Persian ruler Khosrau Anu-

shwirān, who ruled between 531 and 579 CE, and his campaign against the Ḥabashīs is generally dated to sometime around 570 CE. See, for example, Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1.439–449, translated in *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume V: The Sāsānids, the Byzantines, the Lakhmids, and Yemen*, trans. C.E. Bosworth (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 236–252; Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-nabawiyyah li-Abī Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām al-Maʿāfirī* (4 vols. in 2; Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1415 [1994]), 1.67–73, translated in *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Isḥāq's [sic] Sīrat Rasūl Allāh*, trans. A. Guillaume (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 30ff.; and idem, *Kitāb al-Tijān fi mulūk Ḥimyar* (Sana'a: Markaz al-Dirāsāt wa'l-Abḥāth al-Yamaniyyah, 1347 [1928]), 317–323. These and other historical accounts are discussed in Giovanni Canova, "Sayf b. Dhī Yazan: History and Saga," in Sabine Dorpmueller (ed.), *Fictionalizing the Past: Historical Characters in Arabic Popular Epic* (Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 206; Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 95–105; Zuzana Gažáková, "The Legendary Ḥimyarite Origin of Some African Dynasties and Tribes: A Case Study of Sīrat Sayf B. Dī Yazan," in Viera Pawliková-Vilhanová and Seyni Moumouni (eds.), *Voices of Africa's Pasts* (Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2014), 61–77, 61–66; and H. T. Norris, "The Ḥimyaritic Tihāma (1): Evidence for a Multi-Racial Society in Pre-Islamic and Early Islamic Arabia," *Abbay* 9 (1978): 101–122, 104–106. The frame story of the war between Sayf's proto-Muslims and Ḥabash also reflects medieval political tensions. See H. T. Norris, "Sayf b. Dī Yazan and the Book of the History of the Nile," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 7 (1989): 125–151, 127–132 and Gažáková, "The Legendary Ḥimyarite Origin," 66–68.

63. Michael Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Variations on a Theme by Hannah Arendt* (2nd ed.; Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013), 17.

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Salvation and Suffering
in Ottoman Stories of the Prophets

Gottfried Hagen

Abstract

The cycles of revelation, community reception, and redemption embodied by the prophets of Islam form the substance of Islamic salvation history, a literary form that has not received due attention in comparison to the didactic and homiletic dimensions of the tales of the prophets. This article suggests that salvation history is an almost infinitely malleable material that functions in different ways in different political and intellectual contexts, and can be harnessed to provide vastly different messages. Focusing on examples from Ottoman Turkish literature, this point is made through a close reading of the relevant section of Fużūlī's martyrology, *Garden of the Felicitous*, in contrast with works by Ramażānzāde Meḥmed Paşa, Süleymān Çelebi, and Veysī. Where some salvation histories present an optimistic trajectory through political history, or an unfailing promise of divine grace, others find only violence and injustice, and a human condition determined by suffering.

Introduction: Salvation history and stories of the prophets

The Islamic genre of the stories of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*) derives from narrative exegesis of the various references to biblical and Arabian prophets in the Qurʾān. As is well known, the Qurʾān mentions biblical and non-biblical prophets in many instances, but only in exceptional cases (e.g., Sūrat Yūsuf) does it contain detailed narratives about these figures. The Qurʾān evokes those prophetic predecessors of Muḥammad in order to draw comparisons with his own experience, and to call attention to the fact that those earlier prophets essentially preached the same message of salvation.

Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ narratives fill in the narrative gaps, expanding the allusive references of the Qurʾān into full-fledged stories as collections of moral and mythical tales. Just as the references to the earlier prophets reflect the fundamental situation of public preaching, these expanded stories presumably initially took shape in the process of delivering public sermons to a pious audience, translating the essential teachings of Islam into narrative form.[1] The Arabic classics of the genre like the work of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035) and the corpus attributed to Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Kisāʾī (twelfth century or later), as well as the Turkic version by Nāṣiruddīn Rabghūzī (completed 1311) are all chronologically arranged, establishing coherence through the sequence of the prophets.[2] Their structure, however, is atomistic, which is to say that each section, conceived and narrated as an *exemplum* originally in the context of a sermon, can essentially stand on its own. Each of them proves its theological or moral point regardless of a larger chronological context, independent of the sections preceding or following it, and other than chronology, a logical connection between subsequent episodes is often missing.

In this article, I would like to present a different type of deployment of the stories of the prophets, one that emphasizes coherence and builds on the narrative that emerges from the *sequence* of prophets itself. This narrative, in its trajectory of change from one prophet to the other, the continuity of the message of salvation and redemption, and the reception

this message receives from humanity, forms the material of Islamic salvation history as conceived by these authors. I investigate examples of Islamic salvation history found in Ottoman Turkish texts in order to explore the societal function of the stories of the prophets. It is my contention that this function is not in any significant way determined by the historical material itself, but that the genre is almost infinitely malleable vis-à-vis the spiritual and worldly concerns of the pious, embodied by authors and audience.

However, since the term 'salvation history' is not well established in Islamic Studies, a brief exposition of its heuristic utility is in order. As a premodern form of interpreting the world through history, salvation history "denotes the apparently meaningful sequence of human-divine relationships or the apparently purposeful sequence of divine actions."[3] Its origins go back to the historical dimension of the Old Testament: "According to the prophets, God is following a plan as he guides human history: history is salvation history, determined by his 'predestination,' and as such intelligible as a coherent whole. It shall lead to the messianic kingdom of justice and peace which will encompass all peoples as worshippers of Jahwe."[4] Evidently, such an understanding of history as a series of divine acts can apply not only to Jewish and Christian, but also to Muslim narratives, especially regarding the time from creation to the conclusion and culmination of revelation, the time of the Prophet Muḥammad.

When modern methodical historical inquiry began to probe the eventually inevitable discrepancy between "the immutable word of God v. the empirical data of historical change,"[5] Christian theologians became increasingly uncomfortable with the concept of salvation history, to the point where they radically discarded the idea of a congruency of historical and theological truth.[6] It became clear that salvation history was not a particular set of events separate from, or to be extracted from, secular history. Instead, in the conclusion of his study of the quest for the historical Abraham, Thompson famously stated: "Salvation history is not an historical account of saving events open to the study of the historian. Salvation history did not happen; it is a literary form which has its own

historical context."[7] This literary character then opens the genre, including its Islamic manifestations, up to a literary analysis.

In his pioneering study of the 'biography' of the Prophet Muḥammad in its oldest extant texts, John Wansbrough identified three themes as foundational for any kind of salvation history: *nomos*, the law; *numen*, the encounter with the divine and the communication of divine words; and *ecclesia*, the community.[8] We will see in the course of this article that these themes carry importance beyond the narrations of the life of Muḥammad in Islamic versions of salvation history, and that they are essential for the sequence of the stories of the prophets in particular.

Suffice to recall here that Ibn Isḥāq's "Life of Muḥammad," one of the texts at the core of Wansbrough's endeavor, had originally been part of a larger history. Its first part, which does not survive as a coherent text, was the *Kitāb al-Mubtadaʾ*, which narrated the line of prophets from Adam leading up to Muḥammad.[9] Wansbrough also formulated a more precise understanding of the relationship between history and theology when he asserted that from the perspective of the believer, the essence of salvation history, and the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad (*sīrah*) in particular, lies in the "historical reading of theology." Yet he conceded that for the genre that narrates the subsequent period (*maghāzī*), the opposite may be more accurate: a "theological reading of history."[10] For the genre at issue here, the stories of the prophets, I suggest that the two perspectives occur side by side: in the most basic form, as *exempla*, the components of the narratives constitute historicized demonstrations of theological truth, but as manifesting a progression in time, they also demonstrate the theological significance of that history.[11]

Just as important for our purposes, however, is the second part of Thompson's statement which emphasizes the significance of context. One of the central points of this article will be to inquire in which contexts stories of the prophets were written or narrated, and in which way these narrations were shaped by, and responded to, the societal concerns of authors, narrators, and audiences. Thompson made the fundamental point that salvation history was about the past only inasmuch as this past held a promise for the future:

> The promise itself arises out of an understanding of the present which is attributed to the past and recreates it as meaningful. The expression of this faith finds its condensation in an historical form which sees the past as promise. But this expression is not itself a writing of history, nor is it really about the past, but it is about the present hope. Out of the experience of the present, new possibilities of the past emerge, and these new possibilities are expressed typologically in terms of promise and fulfillment. Reflection on the present as fulfillment recreates the past as promise, which reflection itself becomes promise of a future hope.[12]

It is my intention in this article to flesh out this statement, by identifying the hopes and expectations which authors and readers found in the stories of the prophets as a form of salvation history in a specific historical context. I will make the case that the subject matter of prophetic history does not by itself determine the salvific meaning superimposed on this history by different authors. Instead, the texts selected for this article diverge radically from each other in terms of the trajectories they construct, and the hopes they derive from these histories. They show that Islamic thinkers have handled the interpenetration of theology and history, operating with radically different concepts of history and salvation, and constructing their very own promise of a trajectory towards salvation on the basis of the stories of the prophets.

The texts discussed in this article mainly belong to the Ottoman classical and postclassical periods, meaning the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and are written in Turkish.[13] I will not restrict myself to texts that conform to the genre of the stories of the prophets as it came into its own in Arabic literature, but will study works from different genres that are clearly informed by it, as they evoke the sequence of the prophets. My main focus will be the sequence of the prophets in Fużūlī's martyrology, *Garden of the Felicitous*, as an example of a rich and complex theological engagement with history and the human condition. In order to contextualize it, I will first briefly discuss two texts which present an

essentially optimistic trajectory of history: Ramażānzāde Meḥmed Çelebi's world history extrapolates a future of stability and prosperity, while Süleymān Çelebi celebrates the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad as the actual realization of salvation. I will then follow with another, more pessimistic text, Veysī's critique of government as inevitably marred by violence and bloodshed, before turning to Fuẓūlī.

Civilizational perfection as eschatology: Ramażānzāde Çelebi

A bureaucrat of the Ottoman classical age, Ramażānzāde Meḥmed Çelebi (d. 979/1571) wrote a concise and, in informational terms, highly unoriginal but widely-read world history entitled *Lives of the Great Prophets and Reigns of the Noble Caliphs and Deeds of the Ottomans* (*Siyer-i enbiyā-i ʿiẓām ve aḥvāl-i khulefā-i kirām ve menāqib-i Āl-i ʿOs̠mān*), which, as the title suggests, begins with the earliest prophet, Adam, and leads through the biblical and Islamic prophets; then proceeds to the history of the Islamic caliphate to the post-Mongol kingdoms of the Middle East; then ends with the most recent and most perfect dispensation, the Ottoman Empire. In his history of the prophets, which in terms of the overall proportion of the work takes up little more than an extended introduction, Ramażānzāde is most likely drawing, directly or indirectly, on the famous universal history of Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) to construct a narrative of progression at several levels.

Salvation history here is first of all revelation history, the successive perfection of the *nomos* that proceeds from one prophet to the next, as an ever more perfect form of scripture is revealed, culminating in Muḥammad's receiving the Qurʾān. This progression is paralleled in material terms by the series of buildings erected by prophets in the place of the Kaʿbah, from earliest times to the current building attributed to Abraham. At the same time, the community also undergoes a process of civilizational perfection, as prophets introduce technologies like agriculture (Adam), building houses and mining (Mihlāʾīl, in the fourth generation after Adam), writing (Enoch/Idrīs), or carpentry (Noah).[14]

Ramażānzāde also highlights the role of many prophets as kings, of whom Solomon (Süleymān), the biblical namesake of the sultan of his own time, is the most important. He thus turns the focus back to *nomos* as the foundation of social order, an order that is, significantly, continued beyond the age of the prophets and the caliphs. There is a distinctly descending arc after the period of the Prophet Muḥammad through the Abbasid caliphs to the Mamluks, whom Ramażānzāde treats as kings, but then with the Ottomans there is a new ascent to a perfect restoration, culminating in the reign of Süleymān I (r. 1520–1566). Süleymān fashioned himself as the king of the end of time and messiah, and Ramażānzāde certainly was aware of this eschatological dimension of Ottoman imperial ideology, which may implicitly underpin his placement of the Ottomans in salvation history.[15]

In explicit terms, however, Ramażānzāde remains more conventional. While his eulogies on Süleymān frequently play with the notion of God's shadow, thus evoking an old trope for the caliph, this title appears more as an afterthought.[16] Praise for the sultan as a poet (which Süleymān I clearly was) allows the historian to use the sultan's writing poetry (*naẓm*, lit. "ordering," i.e., of words) as a metaphor for ordering the world (*niẓām*). Thus, continuity between the series of prophets and the series of kings after them is furnished by the law, which was constituted through the former and is implemented by the latter. Salvation history in this case records an experience of legal statehood as civilization, the promise of which is reconstructed through the series of prophets, and (in a most optimistic move) projected forward as promise of a legal framework of communal order established or restored with divine approval, which was visible to everyone in the Ottoman victories over infidels and heretics.

Light as grace: Süleymān Çelebi

The actual event of revelation, the theme of *numen* (in Wansbrough's terminology), barely figures in Ramażānzāde's account. It does,

however, appear in other genres that take up narratives of the prophets, where it is frequently expressed in the imagery of light.

In the discourse of revelation and salvation, light is a primordial substance from which the Prophet Muḥammad was fashioned prior to creation. A light indicative of prophethood also appeared, according to widely narrated legends based on *ḥadīth*, on the forehead of prophets, and was passed on from generation to generation (since all prophets form one unified tree of descent).[17] This light finally appeared on the forehead of ʿAbd Allāh, the father of Muḥammad; then on that of Muḥammad's mother once she was pregnant with him; and finally on that of the newborn Muḥammad, continuing to shine there throughout his life.[18]

In this form, the light myth is, for instance, narrated in the opening section of a popular Egyptian *sīrah* attributed to an elusive author named Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Bakrī (twelfth century?)—popular both in the sense that it was very widely known and beloved, and in the sense that it appealed to the taste of the wider population (in fact, prominent medieval scholars railed against what they saw as superstitions and inaccuracies in this work, but were not able to stop its dissemination).[19] This work was translated and much expanded by a blind poet named Muṣṭafā Ḍarīr at the court of the Mamluk Sultan Barqūq (r. 1382–1389 and 1390–1399), to become the earliest narrative of *sīrah* in Anatolian Turkish.[20]

In this and similar manifestations of the light myth, it is striking that the light does not symbolize the revelation sent to every prophet, as might be assumed, but rather another phenomenon that complements, or even eclipses, the revelation. As the prophetic light makes the bearer an "enlightened" or charismatic figure, the vessel of a numinous presence, the verbalized divine truth as *nomos* becomes secondary, and the immediate contact with, and subsequently the veneration of, the bearer of the light emerges as the true way to salvation. The event of the prophetic mission to humanity takes precedence over the content of the mission, and embracing the messenger in specific cultic settings assures salvation. In fact, it does so in even safer ways than complete submission to the legal order established by the prophet would do, since human nature is

too weak to ever achieve perfect obedience to the law, meaning that in principle, every human is a sinner and deserves damnation.[21]

Salvation history in this form narrates the trajectory of the salvific light until it becomes fully and definitely manifest in the person of Muḥammad as redeemer. This is the message, in the Ottoman context, of one the most popular Turkish literary works of all time, Süleymān Çelebi's poem celebrating the birth of Muḥammad, officially entitled *Vesīletü n-necāt* (*The Means of Salvation*), but commonly known simply as *Mevlid* (from Arabic *mawlid*, "birth"). Süleymān Çelebi's poem is dated 1409, almost contemporary with that of Ḍarīr, and probably inspired in part by Ḍarīr's narrative of the event of Muḥammad's birth. It stands at the beginning of an almost immeasurably vast Ottoman *mevlid* literature, as it circulated in thousands of copies and variants, to the point where reconstruction of an "original" is futile. It also gave rise to hundreds of imitations, contrafactions,[22] and rewritings, from the fifteenth to the twentieth century.[23]

No matter what the details of individual works may be, the entire genre in Turkish is predicated on delivering the promise of salvation by means of an extremely condensed form of salvation history, which proceeds through the following essential stages: creation of the Prophet Muḥammad as first act of all creation; the transmission of the prophetic light through the lineage of the prophets from Adam to Muḥammad; Muḥammad's birth; Muḥammad's ascension to heaven (the *miʿrāj*, the actual culmination of his prophethood in the encounter with the divine); and Muḥammad's final illness and death.[24] Like Ramaẓānzāde's account of communal history, the individualized message for the lovers of the Prophet is essentially optimistic, because it holds out a promise of salvation that is manifested in a few key events, one that is practically impossible to miss because it requires nothing but love for the Prophet, which is the most natural emotion possible given his perfection and his rank with God.[25]

Struggling with violence and injustice: Veysī

I would like to use the rest of this article to discuss the other side of the coin, that is, versions of salvation history that negate the optimism, serenity, and joy that pervade the examples discussed so far. A profound ambivalence about the moral perils of political power was part of Ottoman elite culture from early on.[26] Glorification of conquests and victories on the battlefield was juxtaposed with constant concerns about the impossibility of justice and the inevitability of violence. Skepticism about the possibility of justice in this world is a leitmotif in the mirror-for-princes genre, which in the Ottoman context primarily draw on Persianate models going back to the Seljuq period (eleventh and twelfth centuries). The rejection of state violence is most palpable in the reactions of observers to the violent succession struggles in the Ottoman dynasty enshrined in the so-called "Law of Fratricide," which legitimized the killing of rival contenders for the throne by the victorious successor.[27]

Still, even in this well-established discourse of skepticism, the scathing denouncement of worldly power by the poet, stylist, and jurist Üveys b. Meḥmed (d. 1037/1628), known as Veysī, stands out. In the vast Ottoman literature of political advice, Veysī's *Dream Book* (Ḫābnāme) is unusual due to its format, style, and moral rigor.[28] Where most advice books, or mirrors-for-princes, deal with the problems of the imperial household and various state institutions, Veysī framed his critique and advice as a (fictitious) dream narrative in which he saw the sultan of the time, Aḥmed I (r. 1603–1617), to whom the work is also dedicated, in conversation with Alexander the Great (Iskandar Dhū'l-Qarnayn or İskender), who in Islamic literature and mythology embodies the idealized combination of prophetic inspiration and imperial rule.[29]

Veysī claims that he had wanted to confront the sultan with his grievances about the lack of order, and then had this dream—an elegant twist to avoid faulting the sultan for problems, while giving him moral advice. When Aḥmed complains to him about the trouble of governing justly in a disrupted world order, Alexander responds by asking: "When has that world that you say is in ruins today ever been populous and

prosperous (*maʿmūr ve abādān*)?" He then enumerates to Aḥmed dozens of historical examples from Adam to the present, each culminating in the same rhetorical question, driving home the point that the world order that according to Aḥmed had been lost (incidentally, the same order that Ramāẕānzāde had extolled) never really existed.[30] Instead, the sultan, and by extension Veysī, hears from Alexander that the human experience in the world has never been anything but oppression and suffering.

What is interesting for our topic is that some of the perennial misery Alexander summons happened under the watch of prophets, such as the flood of Noah, which killed innumerable people. In other cases, violence targeted prophets like Abraham, who was persecuted by Nimrod (Nimrūd) and thrown into a blazing fire, or Zechariah (Zakariyāʾ), who hid in a hollow tree trunk when fleeing persecution and ended up being sawed in half when his hiding place was discovered and cut down (see page 90). Other prophets also became victims of violence of unbelievers and tyrants; the humiliation Muḥammad experienced at the hand of the pagan Meccans is well known. In Veysī's brief (and highly selective) retelling, prophets suffer, like all human beings, from violence caused by human greed and weakness. This suffering begins with Cain's (Qābil) murder of his brother Abel (Hābil), which functions in this history almost like an "original sin," indicating that it is caused by man, and keeping man in his place to maintain social order is what the sultan is concerned about. By contrast, the suffering of Job (Ayyūb), which, as we know also from the Bible, was caused by Satan, is of little relevance for Veysī's inverted salvation history. Moreover, different from our last example below, suffering is indisputably evil, and lacks, as told here, any potential to reform the sufferer, and thus any redemptive meaning.

The benign order established through the law and upheld by caliphs and sultans in Ramaẕānzāde's history all but vanishes here, leaving the individual powerless and victimized, while the sultan—and this is the final point in Veysī's treatise—has no choice but to try to dispense justice as best as he can, knowing that he will fail most of the time. This means that the theme of salvation history is present largely in negated form,

because the history told is not driven by divine intervention, but by human decisions; history is not a record of communal progression towards salvation, but rather the arena in which the individual (and the sultan in particular) tries to win salvation, with only slim chance of success.

Sufi and Shiʾi poetics in Ottoman Iraq: Fuẕūlī

In contrast to the human fallibility that causes the crises and suffering addressed by Veysī, in the last and most complex example to be discussed in this article, the suffering of prophets and believers is first and foremost ordained by God. This example takes us to yet another genre, the martyrology, which commemorates the martyrdom of al-Ḥusayn b. Abī Ṭālib, grandson of the Prophet Muḥammad, the third imām of Shiʾi Islam, in the battle of Karbalāʾ on the tenth of Muḥarram of the Muslim year 61 (680 CE). Throughout the Shiʾi parts of the Islamic world, rituals of commemoration and mourning for the *Imām* are held on this day, called ʿĀshūrāʾ, also recognized as a day of fasting by some Sunnis since the time of the Prophet. Besides processions and the staging of passion plays, the recitation of poems or narratives plays an important part in these events, such that a typical martyrology (often called *maqtal*, "killing," i.e., of Ḥusayn) is divided into ten chapters, to be recited during the ten days of Muḥarram leading up to the commemoration of the catastrophe.[31] The death of Ḥusayn at Karbalāʾ is nothing less than the cosmic, axial event of Shiʾi salvation history, as Mahmoud Ayoub has shown in his pioneering study, to which we will return below.

The martyrology I wish to focus on for this article is Fuẕūlī's *Garden of the Felicitous* (Ḥadīqatü s-suʿadā), by the poet Muḥammad b. Sulaymān, known as Fuẕūlī (d. 963/1556), an Iraqi of Turkmen descent, widely admired as one of the luminaries of classical Ottoman poetry, and a perfect exemplar of the cosmopolitan literary and religious culture which Shahab Ahmed has described as the "Balkans-to-Bengal Complex."[32] The work in question is a free translation or re-rendering of a work by Wāʿiẕ-i Kāshifī (d. 910/1504), who wrote in Persian under the patronage of the

Timurid sultan of Herat.[33] Both works consist of ten chapters, the first of which recounts the sufferings of the earlier prophets, and the second the humiliations and violence against Muḥammad from his tribe, the Quraysh.[34] Kāshifī's *Meadows of the Felicitous* (*Rawẓatu s-suʿadāʾ*) betrays his eloquence as well as his erudition, although it is free of the technical trappings of Islamic scholarship, and Fuẓūlī maintained those characteristics in his translation.

Fuẓūlī, who wrote poetry in Arabic and Persian besides Turkish (with a distinct regional inflection), spent all his life in Iraq—in Baghdad, where he saw the region's conquest by the Ottomans under Süleymān I in 1534; in Najaf, where he served at the shrine of ʿAlī; and in Karbalāʾ, where he died in 1556. He thus inhabited a geography shaped by a strong Shi'i presence, most importantly the shrines of Najaf and Karbalāʾ, where the martyred *imām*s of Shi'i Islam were buried and are venerated to this day.

Since our main interest is in ideas and texts circulating in Ottoman society, Fuẓūlī's dependence on earlier models and supposed lack of originality should not concern us. At the same time, his influence is hard to overstate. Hundreds of manuscripts and several printed editions of the *Garden of the Felicitous* exist, attesting to unbroken success from the time of the author onward into the twentieth century. It is noteworthy that his Shi'i context and his own possible inclinations did not prevent the author from seeking patronage from the Ottoman sultan, who was at that time fashioning himself as the champion of Sunni Islam.[35] The veneration of the family and descendants of Muḥammad, including ʿAlī, Ḥasan, Ḥusayn, that is, the *ahl al-bayt*, is shared across sectarian boundaries, which explains why historians have not found a conclusive way of identifying Fuẓūlī (or his predecessor Kāshifī, for that matter) as unambiguously Shi'ite.[36]

All this should caution us as modern readers not to project sectarian boundaries between Sunnis and Shi'ites back uncritically; while such a divide mattered politically between the Ottomans and Safavid Iran, Fuẓūlī's case demonstrates that it mattered less in the search for a particular type of religiosity in which suffering takes on central significance.

This religiosity cuts across the legal and doctrinal distinctions which are maintained in the analytical and argumentative discourse of Islamic scholarship.[37] Instead, Fuẓūlī, like Kāshifī, chose the evocative and associative language of poetry to capture the experiential, emotional dimension of the event of Karbalāʾ; the fact that many manuscript copies are illustrated equally speaks to this aspect.[38]

Poetry is, after all, the primary language of the mystic, and the religiosity in point here can arguably be called mystical because it is so centered on an emotional (and specifically, tragic and horrifying) experience that is not accessible to rational discourse. In Ottoman classical literature, which was heavily informed by Persianate models, poetic language does more than expand the emotional range of expression; it enables the author to establish semantic connections intra- and intertextually through a canonical repertoire of metaphors, and to insert a layer of meanings which are not explicitly articulated in the text, but evident to the educated reader.[39] Fuẓūlī was a master of this technique, which he used to the fullest account in a praise poem for the Prophet Muḥammad that is known as the *Water Ode* (*Ṣu Qaṣīdesi*).

In this poem, Fuẓūlī ran through every variant of the metaphors of water and fire to express his burning desire for the Prophet, but the unspoken subtext, never mentioned explicitly, is the battle of Karbalāʾ, where the believers under Ḥusayn were cut off from water and suffered thirst for several days, until the last survivors surrendered.[40] For our text, we may look at the way Fuẓūlī deployed the metaphor of the rose to describe the prophet Joseph, which may appear obvious given Joseph's physical beauty. But there is more: Joseph's pleas with his brothers "open the rose of compassion in Judah"; later the bloody stains of his shirt presented to his father are rose-colored. As he escapes the pursuit of Pharaoh's wife Zulaikha, Joseph's torn garment is compared to the crack in the rose-bud through which the petals become visible; the image of the rose in the garden captures both his status among his brothers and at the court of Pharaoh. At the same time, no Ottoman reader worth his salt would have missed the fact that the rose is a favorite symbol for the Prophet Muḥammad.[41] It pertains to him because of his beauty, but also

because its scent compares to the spread of the divine message; there is also an immediate connection between the rose and the figure of the cup-bearer who serves the intoxicating drink of divine love. None other than Fuẓūlī has mustered every possible variant of the rose metaphor in an ode to Sultan Süleymān, known as the *Rose Ode* (*Gül Qaṣīdesi*).[42] Thus, the metaphor serves to suggest here an essential likeness between Joseph and Muḥammad that is at the core of his work. In another instance, his treacherous brothers threw Joseph, who was "the crown jewel of their felicity, into the dust of humiliation like a turban is thrown down in an act of mourning."[43] Here the image not only poignantly illustrates the outrageous injustice and humiliation done to Joseph, but the image of the turban in the dust also evokes the mourning incumbent on the faithful reader in commemorating Joseph and the martyrs of Karbalāʾ.

Joseph, Muḥammad, and the theology of affliction in Fuẓūlī

Fuẓūlī consistently describes this world as the 'House of Sorrows' (*bayt al-aḥzān*), a term that resonates widely in Shi'ite pious literature.[44] Another favorite term is 'Prison of Affliction' (*zindān-i belā*); Joseph uses it for the pit into which his brothers threw him, but it also stands for the world at large, indicating the inescapable and violent nature of suffering, which affects every pious person in this world.[45] This suffering becomes the yardstick of righteousness, as in the saying "greater affliction is the result of deeper devotion" (*aʿẓam al-balāʾ maʿa aʿẓam al-walāʾ*).[46] Affliction brings out devotion in the way in which fire purifies gold (*al-balāʾ li'l-walāʾ ka'l-lahab li'l-dhahab*), and the plant of fidelity in the garden of earthly existence flourishes under the rain of affliction.[47]

Fuẓūlī opens his work with an exegesis of Q Baqarah 2:155–156: "Surely We will try you with something of fear and hunger, and diminution of goods and lives and fruits; yet give thou good tidings unto the patient, who, when they are visited by an affliction, say, 'Surely we belong to God, and to Him we return.'"[48] Based on this verse, Fuẓūlī develops a kind of typology of afflictions, to include fear of this and other-worldly punishment; physical deprivation through ascetic exercises or as result

of need; material poverty as result of war; physical decline due to age or illness; and also, under the category of 'fruits,' deprivation of offspring.[49] It is noteworthy that all these kinds of suffering relate to the body, and to social contexts, but do not include afflictions of doubt or spiritual struggles of the kind familiar in Christian hagiography from Augustine onwards. Physical pain and oppression by the powers that be are the most important categories of suffering that appear throughout Fużūlī's account of the earlier prophets in his first two chapters: persecution by infidel kings (Pharaoh, Nimrod), captivity, hunger, thirst, and eventually death, but also rejection by the community (Job, Muḥammad) are most prominent; poverty becomes a prominent theme in the life of Fāṭimah in the last chapter.[50] The most severe of them, however, is the death of offspring, an affliction that has an obvious emotional side, but also a social aspect, since offspring assures a man's standing in society. This is the affliction that links Jacob to Muḥammad.[51]

As is well known, the "Story of Joseph" (*qiṣṣat yūsuf*) is the only extensive narrative about a biblical prophet in the Qurʾān, where it forms the twelfth sūrah. It comes to no surprise, therefore, that this narrative is also by far the most detailed in the *Garden of the Felicitous*, but it is remarkable that it is framed as the "Story of Jacob," i.e., Joseph's father, rather than that of Joseph himself. Fużūlī opens this section with an anecdote about Muḥammad, who is joyfully watching his two grand-children, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, at play. This idyllic scene of familial bliss is interrupted by the appearance of the angel Gabriel, who first inquires about Muḥammad's love for the children, and, when he has ascertained that he loves both equally, informs him that both will die a violent death, one from poison, the other in battle. Moreover, both will die, pure and innocent, at the hands of Muḥammad's unfaithful community (*ümmet-i bī-vefā*). Seeing Muḥammad's despair at this terrible news, Gabriel reveals Sūrah 12, which begins "We will relate to thee the fairest of stories" (Q 12:3), as a consolation, to demonstrate that Muḥammad is not the only prophet to suffer in this way, that is, to be deprived of his offspring.

Thus, different from what the genre of martyrology and the focus on the drama of Karbalāʾ may suggest, the suffering narrated here is not

so much that of Joseph, or of Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, but rather that of their father or grandfather respectively. This shift of focus may appear cruel or cynical to the modern reader, but needs to be taken seriously in the context of the social logic of premodern societies. It remains to be investigated if this shift from the *imām*s as the actual martyrs back to Muḥammad as the target also implies a subtle form of de-Shi'itization of the genre, given the fact that Shi'ite Islam has often been accused of giving greater importance to ʿAlī and the *imām*s than to the Prophet himself. In any case, Fuẓūlī never oversteps the boundaries of Sunni doctrine; he explicitly states that Muḥammad is the most noble messenger exactly because he suffered from the Quraysh and from the lowly ones of his community what no other prophet has ever suffered.[52]

Suffering and salvation history

The connection which is thus established between Muḥammad and one of the previous prophets illuminates the concept of salvation history in the logic of Fuẓūlī's (and probably Kāshifī's) martyrologies. Ayoub remarks:

> Before Karbalāʾ, from Adam onward, the prophets are said to have participated in the sorrows of Muḥammad and his vice-gerents, and especially in the martyrdom of his grandson, Ḥusayn, in two ways. Each was told of it, and thus shared in the grief of the Holy Family; and in a small way, directly or indirectly, each tasted some of the pain or sorrow that is associated with the sacred spot of Karbalāʾ.[53]

In fact, beyond the poetic connections made through the shared metaphors, as discussed above, Fuẓūlī comments in multiple instances how the experience of a prophet foreshadows the cosmic catastrophe that is Karbalāʾ. Reminders are always present, e.g., the ark of Noah shakes when it passes over the spot of Karbalāʾ. When Joseph is tortured by his brothers, and they pour the drink his father has given them for

him on the ground to mock him, Fużūlī remarks: "Just the same way, at Karbalāʾ some damned ones diverted the fresh water of the Euphrates, which was licit to all creation, away from the family of the Prophet, and while the path of right guidance was obvious, they went down the road of error."[54] In his despair, Joseph prays to God for help, invoking how Abraham was rescued from the fire of Nimrod and Noah escaped the flood.

In short, throughout the stories of the prophets as narrated in this work, author and protagonists refer to both earlier and later examples. In the quote above, Ayoub suggests that there was foreknowledge of Karbalāʾ among the earlier prophets. He also quotes a *ḥadīth* that identifies a period of corruption in the history of mankind, beginning with the martyrdom of Abel and ending with the martyrdom of Ḥusayn.[55] In putting it this way, Ayoub still assumes a history that develops towards, and culminates in, Karbalāʾ, although he cautions that "sacred history belongs not to material or calendar time."[56] I have given only a minuscule fraction of Fużūlī's weaving together of images and incidents, yet they should suffice to support my argument that he goes further than such a sacred history: Fużūlī collapses all events of salvation history into one another, so that they all become one, present at all times and everywhere —that is, Karbalāʾ.

There is, of course, an external chronology in the events Fużūlī narrates, but there is no past or future in any meaningful sense in the significance of the events. Muḥammad receives a "true report" (*ḫaber-i vāqiʿ*) of Ḥusayn's martyrdom—as if it had already happened.[57] This obsolescence of chronological time in God's knowledge was, as Erich Auerbach pointed out, fully developed by Augustine: "What does foreknowledge mean if not the knowledge of things to come? What are things to come to God who transcends all times?"[58] From here Auerbach developed the concept of "*figura*" which suggests that in the salvation history of late antique and medieval Christianity, an event or person can prefigure another, and while they remain distinct, the former receives its full meaning from the fact that it will achieve fulfillment only in the latter. In our case, then, every instance in Fużūlī's salvation history, every suffering of an earlier prophet 'prefigures' Karbalāʾ, such that the resul-

ting sense of time conforms to what was, which Auerbach characterizes as "omnitemporality" (*Jederzeitlichkeit*).[59]

History thus occurs between prefiguration and fulfillment, but the prefigured event is always already present in the prefiguration; in other words, history is nothing but the path to the external manifestation. Arguably, then, there is no history as an account of actual change, only one of actualization. The suffering inflicted on the prophets and on the pious is an ontological condition, as expressed in the example of Adam, who was created from clay "kneaded with the water of pain and grief."[60] This condition is not subject to change, although God may vary the degrees, as he did in the story of Job, who experienced multiple calamities over time. Needless to say, there is no factor of human choice, as all this 'history' is divinely preordained. To what degree Karbalāʾ is the axial event of salvation history can be gleaned from the fact that the apocalypse is mentioned primarily as the instance where the martyrs are avenged by the Messiah.[61]

If there is no history in this Fuẓūlīan version of salvation history, is there salvation? If we think of salvation in the Christian sense, as used in the original sense of salvation history, then the answer should be no. The theme of Fuẓūlī's martyrology is not an eschatological event of salvation beyond the chronology of history; by the same token, the cosmic catastrophe of Karbalāʾ is not the transformative event of redemption in the way the death of Christ on the cross atones for the original sin according to Christian theology. Ayoub entitled his pioneering study *Redemptive Suffering*, but despite his resort to biblical terminology, he distinguishes the concept from a Christian interpretation: "Redemption is used here in the broadest sense to mean the healing of existence or the fulfillment of human life... This fulfillment through suffering is what this study will call redemption."[62]

Ayoub's statement that "suffering... must be regarded as an evil power of negation and destruction" seems to resonate with the fact that at one point in Fuẓūlī's work, it is explained as divine punishment. In the opening of the section on Jacob, the author briefly entertains the idea that Jacob was afflicted as he was because when he let his beloved

son Joseph depart, he commended him to his oldest brother rather than to God, an obvious breach of the concept of trust in God (*tevekkül*).[63] More generally, however, the suffering of the prophets is, as stated before, a measure of their proximity to God; moreover, it is a sign of God's love (*maḥabbet*) for his servants, from the prophets through the saints down to the ordinary believers. In Sufi thought, with which Fuẓūlī is mostly aligned, this is because of the good things it teaches humanity, and the blessings that the sufferer receives as alleviation, and because of the reward received for patience.[64]

Because it originates from God, as a sign of his love, the true believer should not wish to end their suffering, but rather to embrace it and to perpetuate it. The model is Abraham, who actually wished to sacrifice his son, not in order to demonstrate his obedience to God's command, but in order to share in the grief of Muḥammad over the martyrs of Karbalāʾ.[65] Fuẓūlī has God declare that "the reward for your grief over the innocent victim of Karbalāʾ is greater than that for your sacrificing your son."[66] This last statement, then, extends the logic of embracing suffering from the prophets to the ordinary believer, and at the same time explains the purpose of Fuẓūlī's text. If the sharing of grief over the martyred *imām* is the most sublime form of suffering, then the ideal form in which to do so is the commemoration through rituals of mourning and the performance of texts like Fuẓūlī's, in pious gatherings or as individual reading.[67] This way, at one level, the individual follows the example of the saints and prophets, but also atones for being part of the "faithless community" (*ümmet-i bī-vefā*) that is guilty of all the cruelty against the prophets. Their guilt is manifest in Fāṭimah's appearance at the gathering of the souls on Judgment Day, donning the insignia of her murdered sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. But the Prophet will instead ask her to intercede on behalf of those in the community who have shed tears on behalf of the martyrs of Karbalāʾ.[68]

Redemption thus does not lie in overcoming suffering, just as the effect of the narrative is not intended to be cathartic: rather it lies in the conscious immersion in perpetual awareness of its origins and its meaning as a sign of unchanging divine love, and yet, somewhat paradoxically, in

this same immersion lies the hope of the believer for salvation in the hereafter.[69] The suffering of the prophets thus leads to a new answer to the question of theodicy as posed by the mystics; as behooves a mystic, among whom we have counted Fuẓūlī, the response is not grounded in theological and philosophical reasoning, but points to practices of devotion and piety. These devotional practices are not individual ones, obviously, but to be performed together, as the foundation of a community united in suffering. Of the three themes of salvation history identified by Wansbrough, which we quoted at the beginning, it is the theme of *ecclesia* that is most salient in these stories.[70]

Conclusion

What, then, can the examples given in this article tell us about the function of stories of the prophets as Islamic salvation histories? We have seen how all four Ottoman authors we have discussed here deal with the material provided by the classical collections (and other sources) in a rather selective manner, to arrive at rather diverging ways to make these stories meaningful. While all of these texts were received and disseminated by the elite of the empire, taken together, they paint a complex picture of engagement with the world that is far from homogenous, and is not simply determined by the sociopolitical context of the Ottoman Empire at large. All authors construct specific dynamics across history. These may be progressions towards a perfect social order, or the assurance of salvation through divine grace expressed in the mission of the Muḥammadan light, or, by contrast, the cycles of human greed and folly ever repeating themselves in the struggle for power, or, in our last example, the presence of suffering as an essential aspect of the human condition, which cannot be overcome, but rather can only be embraced.

The reader may have noticed that in their selective treatment of the material, Veysī and Fuẓūlī in particular barely ever mention the essential events of prophethood, that is, the revelation of the various scriptures. It would be foolish, however, to assume that these events did not matter for them. Both wrote for a highly educated audience, and

could easily take the essential facts of revelation history, together with knowledge of scripture and essentials of exegesis, for granted. All the texts examined here are part of a literary system, contributing to and drawing from a broader discourse about "God, world, and man," and cannot be understood in isolation.[71] While they are all part of Ottoman literature, they cannot be construed as a collective articulation of Ottoman imperial ideology. Nor can each of their distinct ideas, their specific interpretations of the stories of the prophets, easily be mapped onto specific periods of history or specific social and intellectual groups.

Although the search for imperial patronage may have motivated Fuẓūlī or Ramaẓānzāde, authors' relationships to political power appear conflicted and contradictory, to the point where the political is either ignored (by Süleymān Çelebi) or rejected (by Veysī, at least at first glance). It may be true that Ramaẓānzāde's history reflects the view of history of the time with its teleology towards a sultan-messiah. Veysī's trenchant critique of Ottoman politics clearly targets his own time, although this critique resonated, probably with different nuances, for many generations after. Süleymān Çelebi's promise of salvation may have originated early in the fifteenth century, but it was meaningful to the pious for centuries, offering them hope and joy in their lives.

In the same way, Fuẓūlī may have initially written the *Garden of the Felicitous* in order to seek the patronage of the Ottoman sultans, and make the Ottoman elite aware of the sacred landscape of newly conquered Iraq with its shrines of the *imām*s. This same work, however, also resonated with thousands of later readers because it was able to provide them with meaning for their own experience in life. For instance, it almost achieved the rank of a sacred text among the Bektashi dervishes, who cultivated, often rightly so, a self-image of the systematically oppressed by a majoritarian Sunni orthodoxy.[72] Which hardship, injustice, or deprivation it was that these Bektashis and other readers brought to the text is impossible to say, but it is safe to suggest that Fuẓūlī helped them to relate the stories of the prophets to their own experiences in life, while they may, in other situations, have resorted to the *Mevlid*, or thought about contemporary politics with Veysī and Ramaẓānzāde. Thus, the promises for the

future, of which Thompson spoke as the deeper concern of salvation history, could be exceedingly different, not only because experiences were different, but because the pious were able to see different purposes and different meanings in them.

Ottoman society was never homogenous, but neither were its numerous subcultures neatly separated from one another; rather than a mosaic consisting of discrete monochromatic stones, the watercolor—with its blending and the relativity of contrast and hue—may be the more appropriate metaphor for its intellectual and religious life. Ottoman culture deserves to be appreciated in its entirety and complexity. Rather than seeking to neatly isolate specific subgroups with their ideas and ideologies, historians should embrace the challenge posed by their mixture and the resulting frequent contradictions, an element that is, as Shahab Ahmed has so aptly demonstrated, "essentially" Islamic, but also simply (though not trivially) human.[73]

Notes

All digital content cited in this article was last accessed via the URLs provided in the notes below on August 16, 2021.

1. Marc Vandamme, "Rabghuzi's Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā', Reconsidered in the Light of Western Medieval Studies: Narrationes Vel Exempla," in Hendrik Boeschoten (ed.), *De Turcicis Aliisque Rebus. Commentarii Henry Hofman dedicati* (Utrecht: Instituut voor Oosterse Talen en Culturen, 1992); Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature* (Richmond: Curzon, 2002); Tilman Nagel, "Die Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā': Ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1967).

2. Marianna Klar, *Interpreting al-Tha'labī's* Tales of the Prophets: *Temptation, Responsibility and Loss* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2009); Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Kisāʾī, *Tales of the Prophets*, trans. Wheeler M. Thackston (Chicago: Kazi, 1997 [1978]); Nosiruddin al-Rabghūzī, *The Stories of the Prophets: Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ: An Eastern Turkish Version*, ed. H. E. Boeschoten, M. Vandamme, and S. Tezcan (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

3. Alfons Weiser, "Heilsgeschichte I. Biblisch-theologisch," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (3rd ed.; Freiburg: Herder, 1993–2001), s.v. (1995).

4. Michael Landmann, "Geschichte/Geschichtsschreibung/ Geschichtsphilosophie X: Geschichtsphilosophie," *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1976–2004), s.v. (1984).

5. John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 140.

6. Friedrich Mildenberger, "Salvation History," *Religion Past and Present* (https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/religion-past-and-present/salvation-history-COM_09533).

7. Thomas L. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives: The Quest for the Historical Abraham* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1974), 328, as quoted by Andrew Rippin, "Literary Analysis of *Qur'ān, Tafsīr,* and *Sīra.* The Methodologies of John Wansbrough," in Richard C. Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press,

1985), 151–163, 155.

8. Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 131.

9. See the reconstruction attempt by Gordon D. Newby, *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muḥammad* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), and the fierce criticism by Lawrence I. Conrad, "Recovering Lost Texts: Some Methodological Issues. Review of: *The Making of the Last Prophet: A Reconstruction of the Earliest Biography of Muḥammad* by Gordon Darnell Newby," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113 (1993), 258–263.

10. Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 148f. An analogous convergence of biblical narrative and history was not a given in Christian contexts either, but occurred in the Middle Ages, especially from the twelfth century onwards; Odilo Engels, "Geschichte III. Begriffsverständnis im Mittelalter," *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Studienausgabe, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 2004), s.v.

11. See also Gottfried Hagen, "From Haggadic Exegesis to Myth: Popular Stories of the Prophets in Islam," in Roberta Sabbath (ed.), *Sacred Tropes: Tanakh, New Testament and Qur'an as Literature and Culture* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 301–316.

12. Thompson, *The Historicity of the Patriarchal Narratives*, 329.

13. I am using the term 'Ottoman Turkish' for the literary language that was constitutive of the Ottoman elite, and 'Anatolian Turkish' for the branch of Turkish used in Asia Minor, of which Ottoman is a special subset.

14. Meḥmed Pasha Ramaẓānzāde, *Siyer-i enbiyā-i ʿiẓām ve aḥvāl-i khulefā-i kirām ve menāqib-i Āl-i ʿOs̱mān* (Constantinople: Ṭabḫāne-i ʿĀmire, 1279 [1862–1863]), 13–22; see also Hagen, "From Haggadic Exegesis to Myth," 309.

15. Cornell Fleischer, "Mahdi and Millennium: Messianic Dimensions in the Development of Ottoman Imperial Ideology," in Kemal Çiçek (ed.), *The Great Ottoman Turkish Civilization* (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 2000), 42–54.

16. Ramaẓānzāde, *Siyer-i enbiyā-i ʿiẓām*, 229.

17. Authors who deployed the light myth did not seem overly concerned with the break between Jesus as the penultimate and Muḥammad as the last prophet.

18. These essential elements of the light myth have been masterfully studied, together with several others, by Uri Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light: Aspects of the *Nūr Muḥammad*," Israel Oriental Studies 5 (1975): 62–119. On light in the Qurʾān, see also Jamal J. Elias, "Light," *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), s.v.

19. Boaz Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 23–24.

20. Gottfried Hagen, "Some Considerations about the Terğüme-i Darir ve taqdimetü z-zahir, based on Manuscripts in German Libraries," *Journal of Turkish Studies/Türklük Bilgisi Araştırmaları* 26 (2002): 323–337. The illustrated manuscript of this text produced for the Ottoman Sultan Murād III (r. 1576–1595) is famous: see Zeren Tanındı, *Siyer-i nebî: İslâm tasvir sanatında Hz. Muhammed'in hayatı* (n.p. [Istanbul?]: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, 1984); Christiane Gruber, "Between Logos (Kalima) and Light (Nūr): Representation of the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Painting," *Muqarnas* 26 (2009): 229–262. On Ḍarīr's main source, Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Bakrī, see Shoshan, *Popular Culture in Medieval Cairo*, 23–39.

21. See the rigid demand for obedience expressed in works like Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ al-Yakhṣubī's *Al-Shifāʾ*, as studied by Tilman Nagel, *Allahs Liebling. Ursprung und Erscheinungsformen des Mohammedglaubens* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2008), 144–192.

22. Arab and Ottoman poets wrote contrafactions (Turkish *naẓīre*, Arabic *muʿāraḍah*) on prominent poems, by using the same rhyme, meter, and imagery as the original, both as a token of admiration, and as poetic one-upmanship. For a prominent example and a detailed analysis of the technique, see Suzanne Stetkevych, *The Mantle Odes: Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muhammad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 151–157 and *passim*.

23. Gottfried Hagen, "Mawlid, Ottoman," in Coeli Fitzpatrick and Adam H. Walker (eds.), *Muhammad in History, Thought, and Culture: An*

Encyclopedia of the Prophet of God (Santa Barbara: ABC Clio, 2014), 369–373, with earlier literature.

24. I am following here the earliest and still most authoritative critical edition, Ahmed Ateş, *Süleyman Çelebi: Vesîletü'n-necât* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1954). Many manuscripts supplement the core as summarized here with additional narratives about the death of Muḥammad's family members and legends about the efficacy of the love for the prophet. For the genre in Arabic as distinct from the Turkish, see Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muḥammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (London: Routledge, 2007).

25. For a sense how Süleymān Çelebi's work came to function within the Ottoman literary system as an omnipresent and universal reflection of Ottoman religiosity, see Hüseyin Vassâf's massive early twentieth-century commentary: Hüseyin Vassâf, *Mevlid Şerhi. Gülzâr-ı Aşk*, ed. Mustafa Tatçı, Musa Yıldız, and Kaplan Üstüner (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 2006).

26. Modern neo-Ottoman nationalism in its idolization of state power has all but erased this ambivalence.

27. See Nicolas Vatin and Gilles Veinstein, *Le Sérail ébranlé. Essai sur les morts, dépositions et avènements des sultans ottomans (XIVe-XIXe siècle)* (Paris: Fayard, 2003), 149–170.

28. The *Ḫābnāme* was printed in Ottoman script several times. I am basing my account on the modern transliteration: Üveys b. Meḥmed Veysī, *Hâb-nâme-i Veysî*, ed. Mustafa Altun (Istanbul: MVT, 2011).

29. On the origins of the Alexander narrative in the Qurʾān (Sūrat al-Kahf) and the literary elaborations of the Alexander Romance in Islam, see A. Abel, "Iskandar Nāma," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1954–2005), s.v.

30. In having Alexander survey all of history, Veysī mirrors an older work called the *Book of Alexander* (*İskender-nāme*) by Aḥmedī (d. 815/1412); see Dimitris J. Kastritsis, "The Alexander Romance and the Rise of the Ottoman Empire," in A. C. S. Peacock and Sara Nur Yıldız (eds.), *Islamic Literature and Intellectual Life in Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Anatolia*
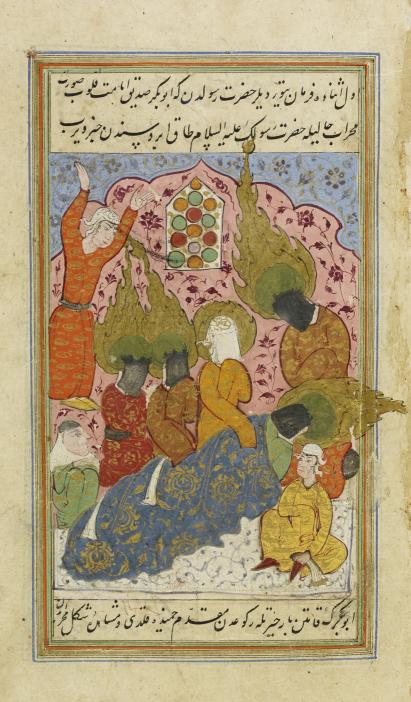
(Würzburg: Ergon, 2016), 243–286.

31. See Şeyma Güngör, "Maktel-i Hüseyin," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1988–2013), s.v., and the seminal study of Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Ashura in Twelver Shi'ism* (Hamburg: De Gruyter, 1978). Sabrina Mervin speaks of a "Karbalāʾ paradigm" in "ʿĀshūrāʾ Rituals, Identity and Politics: A Comparative Approach (Lebanon and India)," in Farhad Daftary and Gurdofarid Miskinzoda (eds.), *The Study of Shi'i Islam: History, Theology, and Law* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014), 507–528. To be sure, *maqtal* literature exists in Sunni contexts as well.

32. Shahab Ahmed, *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015).

33. On Wāʿiẓ-i Kāshifī, see Abbas Amanat, "Meadow of the Martyrs: Kāshifī's Persianization of the Shīʿī Martyrdom Narratives in the Late Timurid Herat," in Farhad Daftary and Joseph W. Meri (eds.), *Culture and Memory in Medieval Islam: Essays in Honour of Wilferd Madelung* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003), 250–275.

34. Chapters 3 through 6 are dedicated to the deaths of Muḥammad, Fāṭimah, ʿAlī, and Ḥusayn's brother al-Ḥasan respectively, while the rest of the work narrates in much detail the events leading up to Karbalāʾ and finally the martyrdom of the *imām* itself. Multiple printed editions are available. I am citing the critical edition by Şeyma Güngör, *Hadikatü's Süeda. Fuzulî* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1987).

35. Halil İnalcık, *Şâir ve Patron. Patrimonyal Devlet ve Sanat Üzerinde Sosyolojik Bir İnceleme* (Ankara: Doğu Batı, 2003).

36. Derin Terzioğlu, referencing Claude Cahen, speaks of a late medieval "Shiitization of Sunni Islam" in "How to Conceptualize Ottoman Sunnitization: A Historiographical Discussion," *Turcica* 44 (2013): 301–338, 307. Amanat, "Meadows of the Martyrs," suggests that the Shi'i Kāshifī practiced dissimulation (*taqiyyah*) in Sunni Herat, but as Kāshifī was serving Sunni patrons and married into a staunchly anti-Shi'i Sufi lineage, the question arises what significance "being actually Shi'i" would retain.

37. For an Ottoman example, see Nabil al-Tikriti, "Kalam in the Service of State: Apostasy Rulings and the Defining of Ottoman Communal

Identity," in Hakan T. Karateke and Maurus Reinkowski (eds.), *Legitimizing the Order: Ottoman Rhetoric of State Power* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 131–149.

38. Rachel Milstein, *Miniature Painting in Ottoman Baghdad* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 1990); Rachel Milstein, Karin Rührdanz, and Barbara Schmitz, *Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyāʾ* (Costa Mesa: Mazda, 1999).

39. My understanding of Ottoman poetics is strongly informed by the work of Walter Andrews, especially *Poetry's Voice, Society's Song: Ottoman Lyric Poetry* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985). İhsan Fazlıoğlu demonstrates the need for close attention to the philosophical dimension of Fuẓūlī's poetry as well: *Fuzulî ne demek istedi? Işk imiş her ne var Âlem'de / İlm bir kıl kîl u kâl imiş ancak* (Istanbul: Papersense, 2014).

40. For a concise commentary, see Mustafa Kara, *Metinlerle Osmanlılarda Tasavvuf ve Tarikatlar* (Bursa: Sır Yayıncılık, 2004), 160–167, and in more detail, Ahmet Attilâ Şentürk, *Osmanlı Şiiri Antolojisi* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2011), 239–275.

41. Annemarie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 24–55.

42. Şentürk, *Osmanlı Şiiri Antolojisi*, 275–292. Joseph is mentioned in verses 8–9, and Muḥammad, whose heart opens under the breath of Gabriel like the rosebud in the wind of spring, in verse 10. Verses 1 and 9 are quoted in Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 47.

43. Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 50.

44. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 23–52.

45. Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 55.

46. Ibid., 52.

47. Ibid., 11.

48. Arberry's translation.

49. Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 9–10.

50. On Fāṭimah's significance as 'Mistress of the House of Sorrows,' see Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering.* Ayoub mentions other examples of poverty in the household of the Prophet (37ff), but they are missing in Fuẓūlī's work.

51. The motif returns with Zechariah's realization that his son John will be killed, just like he himself will be killed (Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 75).

52. Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 13.

53. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 27. It is worth noting that neither Jacob nor Joseph is mentioned among his examples.

54. Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 51, as one example out of many. Note, as another example of the multiple layers of meaning in Fuẓūlī's poetic language, the parallel between the natural course of the river and the path of righteousness.

55. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 27.

56. Ibid., 28.

57. Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 52.

58. *"Quid enim est praescientia nisi scientia futurorum? Quid autem futurum est Deo qui omnia supergreditur tempora?"* in Erich Auerbach, "Figura," in idem, *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur romanischen Philologie* (Bern: Francke, 1967), 71.

59. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis. Dargestellte Wirklichkeit in der abendländischen Literatur* (Bern: Francke, 1959), 188–192; published in English as *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953). Omnitemporality is to be distinguished from extratemporality (*Überzeitlichkeit*). Auerbach distinguishes this typology from allegory and symbolism, because it leaves both figure and fulfillment in place as historical realities. See his "Typological Symbolism in Medieval Literature," in idem, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, 111.

60. Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 19.

61. Ibid., 80–81.

62. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 23.

63. Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 49.

64. Hellmut Ritter, *The Ocean of the Soul: Man, the World, and God in the Stories of Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 239–245. The loss of relatives is specifically mentioned (241ff.)

65 Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 32. Zechariah on the other hand is

reminded by God to stop complaining of the pain of being sawed in half if he does not want to lose his status as prophet: Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 79.

66. Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 42.

67. The poetic quality of Fuẓūlī's and Kāshifī's works lends itself to public recitation, as Amanat documents for Kāshifī's work.

68. Fuẓūlī, *Ḥadīqatu s-suʿadā*, 78.

69. Navid Kermani argues that Shi'i passion plays, which function analogously (theologically speaking), do have a cathartic effect; to what degree this is the intention of the genre remains an open question. See "The Truth of Theatre," in idem, *Between Quran and Kafka. West-Eastern Affinities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 106–127.

70. Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 131.

71. I am borrowing these terms from the apt title of Ritter's book, above.

72. John Kingsley Birge, *The Bektaşi Order of Dervishes* (London: Luzac & Co., 1937), 169.

73. Ahmed, *What is Islam?*

اول ثناء و فرمان بيوزديلديحضرت رسول دن كه ابوبكر صديق امت قلو بصورت

محراب جاليله حضرت رسول عليه السلام طاقي برو بيسند ن خبر ويرب

ابوبكر ك قانين بار خيرتله ركوعد بعد حميد ه وشان من شكل الحمد

The Human Jesus:
A Debate in the Ottoman Press

Ayşe Polat

Abstract

During the first decades of the 20th century, Ottoman Turkish periodicals in Istanbul bore witness not only to great socio-political transformations, but also to vehement religious-intellectual discussions. At the end of 1921, one concrete example of the latter was a disputation concerning the birth, death, and miracles of Jesus between three Ottoman intellectuals, Ömer Rıza Doğrul, Mehmet Ali Ayni, and Milaslı İsmail Hakkı, in the newspaper *Tevhid-i Efkar*. They articulated their overlapping and conflicting arguments by taking into account both Christian missionary understandings and polemics against Islam and a variety of Muslim interpretations of Jesus, past and present, conventional and radical, orthodox and heterodox. While all three grounded the Muslim prophetic narrative about Jesus primarily in the Qurʾān, they disputed about the clarity or ambiguity of the qurʾānic passages about Mary's conception of Jesus, the singularity or multiplicity of meanings embedded in the qurʾānic text regarding Jesus, and rational and figurative explanations at the expense of miraculous and literal ones concerning the qurʾānic Jesus narrative. While the unconventional ideas of Ömer Rıza and M. İsmail Hakkı (for instance the view that Mary conceived Jesus through sexual intercourse) did not become popular, their views disclose the intellectual interactions between Muslim intellectuals across different lands and the role of publications in proliferating them. This Ottoman

newspaper disputation on Jesus also reveals the crucial role played by the modern state in regulating and drawing the limits of public religious ideas and debates, which fell under the strong purview of both the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic. Regardless of their impact, these intellectuals' ideas reflect a strongly rationalized approach to the Qurʾān, emphasizing the direct contact between the individual believer/reader and the divine text and a desire to render the latter understandable through human reason, rational capacities, and experience.

Introduction

Christmas 1921 saw the beginning of a heated debate between Ottoman intellectuals in a series of essays published in one of the longest-running and most renowned Ottoman newspapers, *Tevhid-i Efkar* (*Unity of Ideas*). In contrast to the literal meaning of its name, the newspaper served as the forum in which three Ottoman intellectuals (Ömer Rıza, Mehmet Ali Ayni, and Milaslı İsmail Hakkı) expressed conflicting views on the birth, death, and miracles of Jesus (Turkish İsa; Arabic ʿĪsā). This triangular disputation began with an essay by Ömer Rıza published on December 26, 1921. Mehmet Ali Ayni responded ten days later, also in *Tevhid-i Efkar*, and Ömer Rıza published his own response two days later. In February, Milaslı İsmail Hakkı joined the debate. The dispute between the three ended with Hakkı's piece, but other authors took up the debate.[1] While Ayni's rebuttal of Rıza's thoughts was relatively short, Hakkı wrote a longer essay that shared the basic assertions of Rıza's essay.

Rıza's and Hakkı's interpretations of the qurʾānic Jesus narrative diverged from some of the classical qurʾānic commentaries, as well as from popular Muslim ideas about Jesus (such as his virgin birth and miracles).[2] This article situates these writings in their contemporary political and intellectual milieu, contextualizing this triangular newspaper dispute on Jesus within the larger frames of Muslim debates on

the translatability of the Qurʾān; the clarity or ambiguity of qurʾānic passages; encounters between Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals regarding missionary writings and refutations; and transregional Islamic movements advocating new approaches to tradition within the broader frame of Muslim engagements with the secular modern.

Contemporary intellectual currents such as rationalist and scientific interpretations of miracles that were claimed to be more plausible and harmonious with human understanding substantially shaped the essays on Jesus in *Tevhid-i Efkar*. Rıza and Hakkı argued that Jesus's conception was natural rather than miraculous and that Mary conceived Jesus through sexual intercourse—even if that intercourse was with an angel in the form of a man, or a prophet, or a complete and perfect man. Their essays touched on other elements of the Jesus narrative—his crucifixion, death and resurrection, and miracles—but the crux of the arguments was his birth. It was the celebration of the birth of Jesus that incited the dispute, so it is not hard to grasp the focus on his conception. Yet Jesus's birth was also debated as part of larger deliberations over the role of human reason in understanding the Qurʾān (prophetic narratives as well as other passages), the clarity of qurʾānic passages concerning historical details about prophets' lives, and the presumed ideal nature of the relationship between the human believer and the timeless message of the revelation. In this way, the debate on Jesus's birth also served as the basis for related discussions about his miracles, ranging from his resurrection to the healing of the sick.

This debate took place in a newspaper; that is, it was addressed to a general reading public. The authors were Muslim intellectuals—not Islamic jurists, scholars, or clergy—who engaged questions pertaining to Islam and other contemporary matters and expressed their opinions in the popular press. They did not have vigorous official training in Islamic sciences, but rather had graduated from modern schools. Ömer Rıza (1893–1952) had had some training at Al-Azhar University in Egypt, but even he was primarily a journalist.[3] Mehmet Ali Ayni (1869–1945) was a bureaucrat and a graduate of Ottoman civil-servant training and

taught philosophy and history of religion at Istanbul University.[4] Milaslı İsmail Hakkı (1880–1937) was a medical doctor by profession but engaged religious and social topics beyond his profession.[5] These intellectuals' writings on Islam extended beyond the issue of the Jesus narrative in the Qurʾān.

Their essays on Mary's conception of Jesus only occasionally referred to earlier and contemporary exegeses of these qurʾānic verses. Rather, they were based on their own interpretations of a set of qurʾānic passages they saw as relevant to the Jesus story. Their arguments had consistencies and sound points as well as inconsistencies and weaknesses. Yet these individual readings and understandings, especially in the case of Rıza, were also intended to be conveyed to others, as evident in his choice to publish these articles in a newspaper and later in his Turkish translation of the Qurʾān.[6] Intellectuals such as Ayni and ʿulamāʾ such as İskilipli Mehmet Atıf, as well as Ottoman religious-bureaucratic authorities, were all prompt to challenge Rıza's and Hakkı's arguments, attempting to discredit them and to save the Muslim public from what they saw as their negative influence.[7] All parties considered the press a crucial medium to reach out to the public, influence people, and propagate ideas and opinions.

In this regard, this article, similar to several other studies on modern Islam, emphasizes the critical role played by the press in serving as a medium to express, debate, and proliferate ideas within and across different regions of the Islamic world. However, it also brings to our attention the control and censorship mechanisms the modern state imposed on religious publications. The criticism and censorship mechanisms to which these articles on Jesus were subjected by the Ottoman Islamic print administrative body Tetkik-i Mesahif ve Müellefat-ı Şerʿiyye Meclisi (Council on the Inspection of Printed Qurʾāns and Islamic Religious Publications) are investigated closely. This Islamic print control council served under the Meşihat, which was the bureaucratic office of the Sheikh al-Islam after the nineteenth-century Ottoman administrative reorganization.[8]

The contemporary political and intellectual milieu

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Muslim intellectuals and *ʿulamāʾ* across different regions from North Africa, Central Asia, and South Asia to the Arab world and the Ottoman domains participated in intellectual engagements categorized in scholarly literature as 'reformist' or 'modernist,' in contrast to 'conservative' or 'traditionalist' Islam.[9] Yet we must pay attention to the fact that a wide range of positions were possible in between these two extremes, as well as that those on both sides engaged similar subjects, problems, and issues. Even though the labels 'reformist' and 'traditionalist' are applied based on the answers intellectuals provided to questions, these identifications must be deployed cautiously, keeping their limitations in mind.

The power of modernity and European colonialism forced each Muslim intellectual and scholar to question the existing socioeconomic, legal, institutional, and political establishment and to produce alternative formulations. Muslim discourses on modernity were accompanied by structural transformations of Muslim polities and societies. The development of industrialization and the capitalist mode of production; the predominance of legal-rational bureaucratic authority; the rise of new educational models and the spread of literacy and cultural capital to wider segments of society; and the prevalence of post-Enlightenment conceptions of reason, individuality, and scientific thinking were some of the most basic patterns of modernity, emerging in non-Muslim as well as Muslim domains. Muslim intellectuals and *ʿulamāʾ* took part in these transformations both intellectually as well as practically to "self-strengthen" their states and societies.[10] They responded and reacted to the secular modern as they also constituted and molded it.

In line with the increased differentiation and demarcation of domains under modernity, the public roles of religion were redefined. Categorically defining religion, revising conceptions of different elements of religious thinking and approach, and reassessing the interaction between religion and other domains comprised substantive dimensions

of modernity and Muslim intellectuals' engagements with it. Muslim articulations of the characteristics of modern religion, in particular Islam, involved engaging in debates with both non-Muslim and Muslim, secular and Islamic ideas and interpretations.

The Ottoman periodical dispute on Jesus between the three intellectuals in Istanbul incorporates and reflects these briefly outlined features of the contemporary historical, political, and intellectual milieu. In these essays, as well as in their other publications, these three Ottoman intellectuals addressed Christian missionary or colonizing Orientalist writings, as well as other Muslims' perspectives.[11]

It has been argued that publications by Christian missionaries praising Jesus over Muḥammad, especially in India, encouraged contemporary Muslim intellectuals to cast doubt on Jesus's miracles and virgin birth.[12] The desire to intellectually refute missionary writings and Christian perspectives might have also colored Ottoman intellectuals' writings on Jesus. Both Hakkı and Rıza emphasized that the qurʾānic Jesus narrative is primarily structured to refute Christian doctrinal views, and Rıza stated explicitly in his complete Qurʾān translation that the primary purpose of the Qurʾān is not to supply details about the individual life of Jesus. All details about his birth, including the references to Mary's birth pains, are given, according to Rıza, to refute Christian beliefs, including the idea of Jesus's divinity, and to underline his humanity.[13]

While it is important to take into account the fact that these Muslim intellectuals' engagement with the Jesus narrative was part of a broader effort to distinguish Islamic conceptions of Jesus from those of Christianity and to defend the former in the face of Christian missionary activities, it is equally significant to evaluate their writings in light of their investments in contemporary Muslim, Christian, and secular debates on demarcating the spheres of religion and science, (re)defining the role of reason in religious interpretation, and criticizing irrational and derivative elements of traditional religious thinking. Accordingly, these three Muslim intellectuals' approaches to the qurʾānic Jesus narrative were not only reacting to Christian missionary writings but also actively

engaging in contemporary Muslim and non-Muslim formulations of modern approaches to religion.

This is particularly true for Ömer Rıza, who not only published numerous books and translations, but also actively took the role of a public intellectual aiming to spread what he considered "true Islam." The latter, in his view, necessitated both refuting criticisms raised against Islam as an irrational religion and changing Muslim interpretations that adopted a "miraculous" rather than a "natural" understanding of the qurʾānic text.

Despite arriving at different conclusions, these three Ottoman intellectuals each chose to write and proliferate their views in a popular publication that could reach a wide audience. Each revisited the qurʾānic Jesus narrative through his own reading and interpretation of qurʾānic *sūrah*s. More and more, sacred texts were presumed to be accessible by individual believers without the intermediation of established interpretations and religious scholars. The texts were perceived to be "naturally" open to the individual believer's understanding. However, it was granted that the reader/believer could benefit from other Muslim or non-Muslim explanations at their choice.

It was the understanding of miracles that constituted one major element distinguishing these Ottoman intellectuals' ideas from conventional explanations. Here Rıza and Hakkı criticized and denied several literal understandings of the Jesus narrative in the Qurʾān in accordance with the prevailing criticism of miracles current at the time. Their readings followed a strong tendency in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to seek a rationalist explanation for miracles.[14] Although such approaches existed in the premodern era, providing a rationalist and naturalistic understanding of miracles is not only typical of modern conceptions of religion, but it also appealed to wider circles, as seen in this case by the fact that this three-way dispute took place in a newspaper.

There are striking similarities and continuities concerning the denial of the virgin birth and the figurative understanding of miracles

between Rıza and other prominent names affiliated with modernist or reformist Islamic thought, specifically Muhammad Abduh, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and Mawlana Muhammad Ali. Indeed, both Rıza and those rejecting his interpretation of the qurʾānic Jesus narrative explicitly acknowledged his intellectual debt to Muhammad Ali. Through his intellectual and publication circles, Rıza was already familiar with the works of an earlier generation of Muslim intellectuals that advocated some ideas similar to his. His father-in-law, Mehmet Akif, was a main contributor to the prominent Ottoman Islamic journal *Sırat-ı Müstakim*, which was publishing translations of Abduh and other influential Muslim intellectuals' works. Muhammad Ali was a contemporary of Rıza, and Rıza was not only influenced by his ideas but also wanted to spread them in Turkey, as is evident from his translation of some books by Muhammad Ali, who was formerly affiliated with the Ahmadiyyah movement in India.[15]

The Ahmadiyyah movement emerged in 1889 under the leadership of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in Punjab.[16] The name of the movement is generally considered to derive from the name of the founder, Ghulam Ahmad, yet in Turkish it is also referred to as *Kadiyanilik* due to the town, Qadian (Kadiyan in Turkish), in which it first developed. Following the death of Ghulam Ahmad in 1908, and that of his successor Nur al-Din in 1914, a split occurred within the movement between the Qadiani and Lahori groups due to doctrinal as well as political differences, including the question of whether Ghulam Ahmad was believed to have been a prophet or not.

The Lahori group, led by Mawlana Muhammad Ali (1874–1951), believed Ghulam Ahmad to be only a messiah, or renewer of religion, not a prophet. Moreover, it rejected the presentation of the Ahmadiyyah as a separate sect, even though it still sought to spread the teachings of Ghulam Ahmad to proliferate "true Islam." Muhammad Ali received a modern education and completed a M.A. in law and English literature, and translated Ghulam Ahmad's writings into English.[17] He wrote numerous books on the Qurʾān, Muḥammad and Jesus, and Islamic theology, as well as about the Ahmadiyyah movement itself.[18] Muhammad Ali also showed support for the Ottoman caliphate, penning two pamphlets for

this purpose.[19]

Yet Muhammad Ali was approached with caution by many Sunni Muslims for following Ghulam Ahmad, taking him as the messiah, and adopting elements of modernist thinking, particularly about science. Indeed, Rıza's opponents in Turkey pointed out the parallels between his approach and that of the Ahmadiyyah sect. Even though some of them targeted Rıza's personal habits too, such as his drinking alcohol, and implied that such impiety would also lead him to misunderstand the Qurʾān, their main criticism focused on Rıza's inspiration by the Ahmadiyyah sect, and in particular, Muhammad Ali.[20]

Despite these criticisms, Ömer Rıza translated Muhammad Ali's Qurʾān translation into Turkish under the title *Kur'an'dan İktibaslar* (*Selections from the Holy Quran*) in 1934, the same year as his own translation of the Qurʾān. The book itself is 125 thematic selections from the Qurʾān. Rıza also translated a book by Muhammad Ali that was penned as a refutation of Orientalist claims about the Prophet Muḥammad. Addressing these criticisms, Rıza praised Muhammad Ali. He pointed out that while the Qurʾān had been translated into English by Western scholars, Muhammad Ali was the first great Muslim scholar to produce an English translation of the Qurʾān,[21] that he was no longer affiliated with the Ahmadiyyah movement and was a fully committed Sunni Muslim, and that his works did not contain any elements contradicting Sunni doctrine.[22] But Rıza also denied being influenced by either Muhammad Ali or the Ahmadiyyah movement.[23] However, in his 1934 Qurʾān translation, he stated that he had been influenced by both classical and contemporary exegeses, including those of Muhammad Abduh, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and Muhammad Ali.[24] In the 1947 edition, he directly cited Muhammad Ali's renditions of certain qurʾānic passages.

The conception of the Qurʾān in the Jesus debate, 1: The clarity or ambiguity of qurʾānic passages

On December 26, 1921, taking as his starting point the Christian celebration of Jesus's birth, Rıza questioned whether Jesus had indeed

been born on the twenty-fifth of December.[25] However, his main concern was not the precise historical date but rather the question of whether Jesus's conception and birth involved any miraculous or extraordinary features, distinct from the experience of other human beings. Rıza asserted, "Hazret-i İsa [the revered Jesus] was born like any human being, lived like any other human being, and died like any human being."[26]

While Rıza rejected the idea of a birth and death that defied the laws of nature, Ayni posed a rhetorical question. He asked why, if Rıza's claim was accurate and Jesus' birth was similar to that of any other human being, and in that regard Jesus was just an ordinary human being, individuals had been reflecting on and debating his position as God and/or the son of God for almost two millennia.[27] Although Ayni was not suggesting that Rıza should adopt a Christian perspective on the issue, he used centuries of Christian articulations to hint at the unique nature of Jesus's conception and its complex interpretations.

In the same way, Ayni challenged Rıza by asking on what basis he formulated his theory, because in his view, the Qurʾān definitely affirms that Jesus was conceived by Mary without a father, that is, without sexual intercourse with a male human being. In his words, "We Muslims believe that Jesus was born without a father based on the *explicit* way the Qurʾān reports about it."[28] Thus, in Ayni's view, Muslims believe based on the qurʾānic text that Jesus was born without any sexual intercourse between Mary and another being, human or not, and in this way, his birth was definitely different from that of other human beings. He did not ascribe any divinity to Jesus but still set his conception apart from the experience of the rest of humanity, and according to him, the Qurʾān, the prime Islamic text, narrated and confirmed this extraordinary feature.

Rıza focused on precisely this point in his response, and fervently refuted Ayni's stance on the clarity of the qurʾānic passages. He did not reject Ayni's statement that the Qurʾān must serve as the most basic tool to ground and understand prophetic narratives. However, he proposed just the opposite of Ayni's argument, arguing that "there is not any qurʾānic explicitness (*sarahat-i Kuraniye*)" on the issue of Jesus's birth.[29]

He denied that the qurʾānic narrative was so explicit that his inter-
pretation of the relevant verses contradicted it.

In accordance with one of the most prevalent themes of modern
Islam, Rıza accused Ayni of "blind imitation" (*taklid*)—that is, of under-
standing qurʾānic verses only in terms of established interpretations.
Rıza associated the qurʾānic text's lack of clarity, precision, and certainty
with its openness to multiple interpretations over time, and thus criti-
cized his opponent's following of conventional understandings. In Rıza's
words, Ayni "read [these verses] with a perspective of imitation rather
than examination and interpretation and hence understood [them] as
such" (*tedkik ve tevilden ziyade nazar-ı taklid ile okumuşlar ve öyle anlamış-
lardır*).[30] In contrast, Rıza advocated the close study of the qurʾānic verses
and welcomed new, contemporary, modern interpretations.

M. İsmail Hakkı, the third person to engage in this newspaper
exchange, stated that this "delicate issue" had long occupied his mind,
and argued that qurʾānic verses could be divided into two categories:
those that clearly set out certain aspects of the Jesus narrative, and those
that were intentionally left open to different understandings.[31] It was
not a random choice. Issues that directly engaged fundamentals of Islamic
faith were precisely clarified in the Qurʾān; for instance, on the question
of whether Jesus had divine attributes, Hakkı underlined that the Qurʾān
explicitly denied that Jesus was the son of God, as this would contradict
a pivotal element of the Islamic doctrine of the unity of God (*tawhid*).[32]
However, treatments of inessential components of faith were left impre-
cise because matters such as Mary's pregnancy or Jesus's father did not
impact the prime question of Jesus's divinity. Hakkı asserted that unsub-
stantial components of the Jesus narrative are not detailed in the Qurʾān
so that the revelation remains open to the understanding of each age.[33]

In Hakkı's perspective, this choice of clarity and precision versus
ambiguity and susceptibility to multiple interpretations was not peculiar
to the Jesus narratives in the Qurʾān. Rather, except for matters in which
one must have absolute faith—the five pillars of Islam, belief in God and
His prophets, the revealed books, angels, and the Day of Judgment—the

Qurʾān was open to debate and discussion, and an individual interpreter with a divergent opinion might be mistaken, but that would not jeopardize their faith.[34] Differentiating between the essential elements of the religion and tangential matters, Hakkı allocated the deployment of free, innovative reasoning to the latter and allowed it only for a person who already has faith in the essentials. The individual believer and their interpretation was held higher than the binding consensus (Turkish *icma*; Arabic *ijmāʿ*) and the preceding interpretations of different religious interpreters (Turkish *müctehidler*; Arabic *mujtahids*). In his words, "the way of understanding and viewpoint of an individual who is completely devoted to the true religion can be impeded neither by *müctehidler* nor by the *icma*" (*böyle asıl dine merbutiyeti tam olan bir kimsenin suret-i fehm ve telakkiyesine ne müctehidler ne de icma mani olamaz*).[35] In Hakkı's view, the authoritative consensus was binding only regarding the fundamental elements of the faith.

Accordingly, similar to Rıza and many other modern Muslim intellectuals, Hakkı criticized imitation and limited the binding nature of the views of prominent individual religious scholars and their consensus to the essentials of religion. Individual believers could intervene to draw out the potential meanings embedded in divine revelation, even if their interpretations had not been yet voiced or had previously been refuted by religious scholars. In Hakkı's formulation, revelation embodied a universal truth that was valid for each age and society; however, it was the individual believer's responsibility to instantiate that truth, to decipher its layers of meaning for the present moment. Hakkı argued that such an approach did not contradict established religion and revelation because it was the nature of divine texts—particularly the Qurʾān—to be relevant to every era. "One of the greatest miracles of the Qurʾān," Hakkı contended, is that "it encompasses truths that can be interpreted according to the understanding and conscience of each age" (*Kuran-ı Kerim'in en büyük mucizelerinden birisi de her asrın fehm ve vicdanına göre kâbil-i tefsir hakayiki muhtevi olmasıdır*).[36]

Hakkı's perspective carries a third element of the modern religious inclination, in line with the criticism of imitation and the limited legiti-

macy assigned to the existing binding consensus of religious scholars. This is the call to remove intermediaries between individual believers and the sacred text. Muslims are encouraged to have direct contact with the Qurʾān, and the latter is considered to encompass truth that can be verified, affirmed, and attested according to every contemporary epoch. It is the unique feature of the Qurʾān to include truth the layers of which can be unpacked differently across time and society, and it is the task of individual believers to decipher the meanings in accordance with the period in which they live.

The conception of the Qurʾān in the Jesus debate, 2: The Qurʾān as a printed and translated book

The issue of the multiplicity of meanings in qurʾānic passages is also related to another prominent question of the time, namely the translatability of the Qurʾān into non-Arabic languages. Hakkı engaged in this question, and while serving as a health inspector in Beirut, sought out the opinions of Christian Arabs regarding Arabic and the translatability of the Qurʾān. Based on their articulations of the difficulty of adequately translating the Qurʾān into another language, he contended that rather than individual scholars, a committee should translate the Qurʾān, adding that wherever multiple meanings are embedded in the original verse, the translation should mention all these meanings.[37]

His idea that a committee should translate the Qurʾān so that the translation work can provide a richer, multi-layered account is also evident in his openness to different interpretations of the qurʾānic Jesus verses. Hakkı offered in detail his interpretation of the qurʾānic Jesus passages, but he also emphasized that these were the meanings that came to his own mind, and any Muslim could refute them as long as they had counter-proofs.[38] In this respect, Hakkı's approach differed from that of Rıza, who not only undertook a Qurʾān translation on his own but also presented his understandings in more absolute terms than Hakkı. In their explanations of the qurʾānic Jesus narrative, Hakkı emphasized that the qurʾānic passages were susceptible to varying interpretations more than

Rıza. In Hakkı's view, the qurʾānic text clarified certain elements of Jesus's prophecy, but also weaved the narrative through "indications and hints" (*delalet ve işarat*), leaving the latter open to multiple interpretations in any particular moment in history.[39]

It was not only Hakkı and Rıza that discussed the qurʾānic Jesus narrative in juxtaposition with the issue of Qurʾān translation, rendering the Qurʾān into vernacular languages other than Arabic. Indeed, as Brett Wilson underlines in *Translating the Qur'an in an Age of Nationalism*, the Muslim debates on the translatability of the Qurʾān predate the modern period, but print technology and culture, as well as accompanying changes in religio-political authority and institutions, renewed the significance of Qurʾān translation, making it an essential component of many other influential modern Muslim debates.[40]

Qurʾānic codices were not only officially printed in large numbers in Ottoman lands since the late nineteenth century; the meanings of qurʾānic verses were also being discussed at length in Turkish, in a vernacular language accessible and comprehensible to ordinary readers in periodical publications. As Wilson points out, since the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "Muslims across the globe have embraced printed editions and vernacular renderings of the Qurʾān, transforming the scribal text into a modern book which can be read in virtually any language."[41] As such, while numerous discussions of the translatability and meanings of qurʾānic passages were ongoing, numerous official and unofficial, state-sponsored as well as individual Qurʾān translations were being put forward.[42] The translators did not come only from the ʿulamāʾ class but included Muslim intellectuals, too, and Rıza was one of them. He had some traditional ʿulamāʾ training in Cairo but throughout his life pursued a career as a journalist and a public intellectual, yet undertook a complete Turkish Qurʾān translation. Hakkı, similar to Rıza, was not a religious scholar by profession, but similar to many other intellectuals, columnists, and ordinary readers and authors writing in periodicals about religious matters, he participated in public debates on religion, including how to understand and translate the qurʾānic text—yet, unlike Rıza, he did so while emphasizing the contemporary and individual connections between

believers and the Qurʾān. Hakkı also underscored the necessity of collective efforts, such as creating Qurʾān translation committees.

Although it is crucial to take into account the modern context in which the Qurʾān emerged as a book produced in multiple editions and languages (in which these translations also traveled beyond national boundaries and contributed to shared intellectual trends, such as the connections between Rıza and the Ahmadiyyah), it is equally vital not to underestimate the power and regulatory capacities of the modern state. As underscored in the final section of this article, the modern state, in this case the Ottoman imperial state apparatus, was a crucial actor in overseeing, approving, controlling, rejecting, restricting, or censoring Islamic writings, including qurʾānic passages, in books, booklets, and periodicals.[43] It might not be the case across different Muslim polities, but in both the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic, modern state structures were key agents in overseeing the entire process of Islamic book printing and dissemination, including printed qurʾānic codices and their translations. In this regard, both the Qurʾān as a printed book as well as the Qurʾān as a translated and interpreted text were subject to state approval. The state could face resistance, or fail in its control and censorship efforts; but its role in controlling the spectrum of different Muslim intellectual engagements with the Qurʾān cannot be dismissed.

The conception of the Qurʾān in the Jesus debate, 3: The reasonable or rationalized Qurʾān

As an intellectual matter, at the heart of Ayni, Hakkı, and Rıza's debate lay not only the questions of the Qurʾān's translatability and the clarity versus ambiguity of the qurʾānic passages, but also the related issue of the role of human reason in comprehending and interpreting God's message. If qurʾānic passages conflict, or appear to conflict, with human reason, does this conflict imply an internal contradiction in the divine revelation? In these three intellectuals' disputation, these questions were not discussed in an abstract manner, but were grounded in the

specific, concrete case of the birth of Jesus. Ayni affirmed that it is not easy for the human mind to grasp the unnatural or miraculous nature of the birth of Jesus. However, he also emphasized that human reason or intellect (Turkish *akıl*; Arabic ʿ*aql*) cannot be taken as the sole means of comprehension or of judging the truth and validity of phenomena, and that even though it is hard to grasp or even contrary to human reason, Mary's virgin conception of Jesus needs to be understood as it is (Ayni believed) explicitly narrated in the Qurʾān.[44]

Rıza shared Ayni's belief that rationality is not the exclusive criterion of truth; however, he strongly rejected unnecessary obfuscation of rational matters. He suggested that there was a hierarchy of methods through which one could come to know the truth, and that if a matter could be explained rationally, it would be unwise to seek out irrational explanations. As he put it, is it not "an inappropriate act to attribute to the things that can be comprehended by reason an unreasonable [irrational] character and to modify them into an incomprehensible form?"[45]

Applying this principle for Rıza entailed choosing a more rationalist explanation for Jesus's birth, death, and miracles. Rıza denied the extraordinary nature of the birth and death of Jesus as a way to render the event comprehensible to the human intellect. His advocacy for rendering hard-to-grasp elements understandable through human reason required affiliating the reasonable/rational with the natural, the common, the ordinary, and the non-miraculous—an approach best revealed in his emphasis on the similarity of Jesus's experience (particularly his birth) to that of any other human being, which contested Mary's virgin conception of him.

In what follows, we will examine Rıza's and Hakkı's rationalized approaches to the elements of the Jesus narrative in the Qurʾān at length. We will thus illustrate in detail these two intellectuals' methodological stances regarding the clarity, precision, and translatability of the qurʾānic text, as well as their substantive arguments with respect to these qurʾānic Jesus passages.

Rıza on the qurʾānic Jesus

In his essay in *Tevhid-i Efkar*, Rıza based his ideas on Mary's conception of Jesus primarily on the nineteenth *sūrah* or chapter of the Qurʾān, *Mary* (*Maryam* in Arabic). He focused particularly on verses 16 to 40 and did not cross-reference these verses with other qurʾānic passages. Although these verses contain the most comprehensive account of Jesus and Mary in the Qurʾān,[46] and as such Rıza's focus on them makes sense, it is also true that he excluded other relevant verses. Similarly, Rıza's examination of Jesus's death and miracles focused only on selected verses instead of pursuing an all-inclusive, comparative reading of all the relevant qurʾānic verses.

For example, Rıza did not address Sūrah 3, particularly verses 37 to 45, which contains the longest narrative on Mary and Jesus in the Qurʾān outside Q 19; Q 3:47 (in which Mary expresses her wonder at how she could conceive a child when no one had touched her) is usually taken as one of the strongest pieces of qurʾānic evidence for the virgin, or at least exceptional, conception of Jesus. Likewise, Rıza did not pursue a comparative analysis with Q Taḥrīm 66:12 and Q Anbiyāʾ 21:91, which, similar to Q Maryam 19:17, describe Mary's chastity in juxtaposition with God's spirit. In Q 19:17 the divine voice in the Qurʾān speaks of sending the spirit to Mary, whereas Q 66:12 and Q 21:91 state that God breathed his spirit into her.[47]

Rıza did not explain how his understanding of these verses contributed to or challenged his explanation of Jesus's natural birth. He rather focused on Q 19:17 and on the parallel drawn between the spirit that was sent and its appearance to Mary in the form of a man, thereby identifying the spirit with a human being in order to support his argument that Jesus "was not born without a father" but rather was conceived through this spirit/man. Rıza did not discuss at length the scientific or practical explanation of how a human being comes into existence, and did not use the explicit term "sexual intercourse," but from the overall content of his articles—especially his emphasis on the "naturalness" of Mary's conception, the existence of a father for Jesus, and the similarity

of Jesus's experience to that of any other human being—he clearly implied Jesus's origin through sexual intercourse.

According to Rıza, Jesus's birth and death were neither unnatural (significantly different from other human beings' natural experiences of birth and death) nor unreasonable (incomprehensible by human mind or implausible to human reason). To support this argument, he not only focused on certain qur'ānic passages while ignoring others, but also—even within this selected cluster of verses—chose to attend very closely to certain vocabulary. For instance, for him one of the strongest pieces of evidence for Jesus's natural birth was the word *ghulām* in Q 19:19. Since *ghulām* means young man or boy, Rıza argued, and is used to refer to Jesus, it indicates he was born in a natural way like any other boy.[48] Rıza, however, did not explicate the fact that although *ghulām* means a young boy, and the verse indicates that Jesus was bestowed upon Mary as a son, it does not shed light on whether his conception by Mary was natural or occurred in another manner.

Regarding not only the birth but also the death of Jesus, Rıza focused on certain qur'ānic passages and vocabulary. He argued for the natural death of Jesus, based on Q 3:55, and particularly the word *mutawaffika*, a derivation of *tawaffā* from the root *w-f-y*, meaning "taking back" or "causing to die."[49] Rıza asserted that *mutawaffika* means "to be dead," as it is defined in various qur'ānic exegeses, prophetic sayings (*ḥadīth*), and prominent Arabic dictionaries, and so he concludes that Jesus had a "natural leaving of life."[50] However, he did not discuss the ambiguous meaning embedded in this word, whether it means killing someone or taking someone back and raising him, as the word is followed by the word *warafiʿuka* (whose root is *r-f-ʿ*, that is, "to raise"). He did not refer to other relevant qur'ānic verses such as Q Nisāʾ 4:157–158 that seem (and are interpreted in several commentaries) to explicitly refute Jesus's death on the cross and rather affirm his ascension to the heavens.[51]

Rıza did not account for the fact that some qur'ānic passages seem to affirm and others seem to deny the death of Jesus, nor did he point out the lack of certainty in the Qur'ān's account and the wide room it leaves for speculation.[52] In other words, he contradicted his own method-

ological stance, in which, in response to Ayni, he emphasized that the qurʾānic passages lacked certainty and explicitness. Yet instead of acknowledging the room for different (even contradictory) interpretations, he proposed his reading as one affirmative understanding of the qurʾānic narrative.

In this regard, he followed more closely another of his methodological principles, which was that if a rational explanation can be easily proposed it is unwise to search for irrational explanations, and that Jesus's death, just like his birth, could be explained rationally. When one can easily presume Jesus's natural death, Rıza argued, it is unnecessary to look for other kinds of explanation. In response to Ayni's statement that he found it hard to grasp how, at the crucifixion, Jesus was raised above and a substitute replaced him, Rıza asked why Ayni did not accept Rıza's proposal that Jesus died naturally, which is supported by Q 3:55 of the Qurʾān.[53] Thus, he proposed that Jesus died just like any other human being who comes into the world and then leaves it, and is said to be buried in Kashmir—an idea also proposed by followers of the Ahmadiyyah movement, an Islamic sect in India whose influence on Rıza I discussed previously.[54]

Rıza found evidence for his ideas on Jesus's birth and death not only in qurʾānic phraseology but also in certain extended descriptions in the qurʾānic verses. The Qurʾān's portrayal of Mary's pain in childbirth, especially in Q 19:23–26, provided Rıza one of the strongest pieces of evidence for his argument for a normal birth process. Further, he reasoned that the word *ghulām* for Jesus indicated a naturally born child. Mary's experience, he argued, was similar to the "ordinary conditions of any other woman going through pregnancy and birth."[55] Her birth pains show that "a very ordinary (*pek tabii*) child was arriving in the world," that this incident carried no "extraordinariness" (*fevkaladelik*).[56] Thus, he argued, if Jesus was a *ghulām*, a young boy, and if his birth was like any other, then his conception must have also occurred in the normal human manner.

Rıza did not address at length the question why, if the conception was normal and ordinary, Mary expressed fear of the man-shaped spirit

sent to her (Q 19:18), and even asked explicitly how she could have a son when no man had touched her and she had not been unchaste (Q 19:20)? He argued that her questioning was just a reflection of the pain that she experienced in the last stages of pregnancy and imminent delivery. Mary's question was meaningless for Rıza except to underline the hardship of pregnancy.[57]

In his newspaper essays, Rıza focused primarily on Jesus's birth, based his arguments primarily on Sūrah 19 of the Qurʾān, and focused closely on selected words and passages, ignoring passages that contradicted or weakened his argument and embodied alternative understandings.[58] At the same time, he added interpretive elements that had no explicit basis in the Qurʾān, connecting one idea with another without textual proof. For example, interpreting Q 19:17, he argued that the spirit sent by God to Mary must have appeared to her "in a world of dreams rather than in the physical world."[59] This verse and subsequent ones do not refer to dreams. However, Rıza, possibly drawing on ideas from other exegetical sources, asserted that human beings can see angels in dreams as young men, and since angels can take on human likeness in dreams, this encounter between Mary and the spirit must have occurred in a dream.[60]

In this regard, strikingly, Rıza did not pay attention to the word "spirit" (rūḥ) in the same verse, although it is one of the most evocative words in the Qurʾān.[61] It seems he added dreams as an element to render the encounter between Mary and the spirit more plausible to the human mind, implying that such a hard-to-grasp encounter, even if the spirit appeared in the form of a human being, did not actually occur in the physical world but in the intangible world—and different state of consciousness—of dreams. Rıza argued that Q 19:17–20 can be interpreted as meaning that the spirit was an angel,[62] or an angel in the form of a human being, seen in a dream, or just a human being[63]—but no matter which, the crucial point is the natural conception and birth of Jesus.

Hakkı on the qurʾānic Jesus

Unlike Rıza, M. İsmail Hakkı put the term "spirit" at the center of his understanding of the qurʾānic Jesus narrative and built a significant amount of his argument about Jesus's conception on the usage of this term. He noted that he had studied qurʾānic commentaries and other works to grasp the meaning of the term, but that ultimately, it was the qurʾānic verses themselves that helped him understand its meaning, particularly in the narration of Jesus's birth.[64] Hakkı focused extensively on the words "spirit" and "well-proportioned man" (*basharan sawiyyan*) used in Q 19:17 and contextualized them in the framework of their other occurrences in the Qurʾān.

His ultimate conclusion about the birth of Jesus was no different from Rıza's; that is, he also proposed that Jesus was conceived naturally, like other human beings. However, unlike Rıza, he arrived at this conclusion not through the evidence in Sūrah 19, but by comparing Q 19:17 with other qurʾānic passages about the creation of humankind. In other words, he did not adopt an all-inclusive and comparative method that contrasted different qurʾānic passages on Jesus either. Instead, he rather chose the set of qurʾānic verses about human creation to compare and contrast with those that refer to Jesus. In this respect, Hakkı paid close attention to Q Sajdah 32:7–9, which describes the stages of the creation of humankind from clay and from a lowly fluid, ending with the breathing of spirit into the human being.[65] Comparing Q 19:17 and Q 32:7–9, Hakkı asserted not only that similar words (particularly "spirit") are used in these different passages but also that they recount a similar process of human creation. Hakkı concluded, therefore, that the spirit mentioned in Q 19:17 is the spirit of God, as it is in Q 32:9, and that in this regard, it is just another instance of God breathing his spirit into humankind.[66] Yet, God does not breathe His spirit into every human being, but rather into those who train themselves religiously and are morally suitable to receive his spirit. In other words, what distinguishes Jesus from other human beings is that whereas only some normal adults reach a level

suitable to receive the spirit of God, Jesus arrived at such a condition already as a child.

Hakkı also paid close attention to the notion of *rabbanilik* (the state of being worshippers of God, or recognizing God's lordship) mentioned in Q 3:79.[67] He proposed that *rabbanilik* is a character trait that God bestows upon those who have lived a religious and spiritual or moral life (*diyanet ve maneviyat hayatına nail olmuş kimseler*).[68] He linked this state of worshipping nothing but God with that of receiving the spirit of God as described above, and also connected it to the stages of human creation, as well as to the specific category of human being called the prophet. This high state of being a pure worshipper of God was achieved, according to Hakkı, as a consequence of completing a certain religious and moral development and acquiring the knowledge of God (*marifetullah*).[69] Hakkı did not detail his understanding of prophethood but connected the Qurʾān's narration of the birth of Jesus, the breathing of God's spirit into human beings, and the general state of prophethood (Q 19:17–30, Q 32:7–9, and Q 3:79).

For Hakkı, Mary conceived Jesus through this spirit, which is, in his understanding, the one described in Q 3:79—that is, the one that went through the process of *rabbanilik*. Thus, even though Hakkı asserted that Jesus had a father, he did not arrive at this conclusion through the same reasoning and evidence that Rıza applied. Rather, according to Hakkı, Mary conceived Jesus through a man who had reached a sufficiently high level of knowledge of God to receive God's spirit, possibly a prophet, but certainly a perfect human being (*zat-ı kamil*); Jesus later also achieved such knowledge and received the spirit of God. In this way, Hakkı proposed, the chain of prophets remained connected, forming links between Adam, Jesus, and Muḥammad.[70]

Hakkı argued that God can create things in any way he wants, and it is true that numerous verses attest his creation of man from nothing by simply ordering, "'Be,' and it is," as in Q 3:47 in which God responds to Mary's concern about how she could have a child when no one had touched her. In this regard, although one can presume that God created Jesus without a father, since there is no explicit qurʾānic statement about

the virginity of Mary, he argued, it is more consistent to read the qurʾānic narrative of Jesus's conception with that of other qurʾānic verses, particularly those on spirit that he himself cited.[71] As for these other verses that affirm that God can create things from literally nothing, implying that Mary could conceive a child without sexual intercourse, Hakkı asserted that it is better to interpret them as pointing to the human (as opposed to divine) features of Jesus. That is, similar to Rıza, Hakkı proposed that such qurʾānic passages refuted Christian conceptions of Jesus's divinity.

Literal versus figurative understandings of Jesus's miracles

As much evidence as Rıza and Hakkı could find in the Qurʾān to refute the notion of the miraculous birth of Jesus, doing the same for his miracles remained a challenge. They solved the problem by interpreting the qurʾānic passages in ways that ascribe to them meanings beyond the obvious literal ones. Both Rıza and Hakkı advocated understanding references to Jesus's miracles as figurative rather than literal and deciphering the meanings embedded beneath the surface.

Ayni asked how, if Jesus was born just like any other human being, he could have performed miracles such as healing the sick and making the blind see.[72] Rıza countered that other prophets were credited with miracles without being ascribed a miraculous birth.[73] But at the same time, he advocated against taking the miracles literally. He believed that his figurative interpretation harmonized more with the natural order of things and allowed the human mind to more readily comprehend the events of the narrative.

Thus, for him, when Jesus healed the sick, it was not corporeal sickness they were relieved of but rather moral or spiritual (*manevi*) sickness. What Rıza seems to imply is that it is irrational to believe that Jesus, as a man (even though a prophet), could have a supernatural capacity to heal the physical body, which operates according to the laws of nature. However, he might have the capacity for spiritual or moral healing, as that realm is beyond the rules of nature. In the same way, he

asserted that Jesus would not have been able to bring the dead back to life, and that what qurʾānic references to this (primarily Q 3:49 and Q 5:110) mean is that his mission, similar to that of any other prophet, was "to revive the living, not to resurrect the dead."[74] The people Jesus cured and brought back to life were dead in moral terms, not in the literal sense, as only in the hereafter will the dead be revived by God. In other words, for Rıza, prophets worked in the spiritual domain, contributing to people's moral well-being and reviving their spirits, not curing their physical bodies or bringing the dead to life, which contradict natural laws and appear implausible to human reason.

Rıza also interpreted Q 19:29–30, which seem to describe Jesus talking in the cradle, differently, arguing that they did not refer to Jesus speaking while a newborn.[75] In this case, he did not directly argue that it would be unreasonable, or attribute supernatural powers, to presume that an infant could speak. He rather sought evidence in the Qurʾān, arguing that as Mary is described as returning to her tribe from a distant place to which she had withdrawn (Q 19:22 and 19:27), Jesus must by then have been at least forty days old. He asserted that, although Q 19:29 states that Mary pointed to Jesus and people asked her how they could talk to this child, they meant 'child' not literally, but again figuratively, that is, this child whose infancy they remember. When Jesus said in response, "I am God's servant; God has given me the Book, and made me a Prophet" (Q 19:30), it was not an infant speaking, but Jesus as an adult.[76] Rıza emphasizes that all the verbs in this verse were conjugated in the past tense, not in the future tense; that is, Jesus was not talking as an infant who would in the future be a prophet but rather as a mature person who had already been made a prophet. In support of this argument, Rıza pointed out that in the next verse, Q 19:31, Jesus also cited the religious obligations assigned to him, such as almsgiving and prayer, and since God would not ask an infant to perform such tasks, Jesus must have speaking as an adult, or at least not as an infant. However, Rıza did not answer the question of why, when Mary pointed to the child, people expressed puzzlement at the idea of talking to a child in a cradle (Q 19:29).

Hakkı was more at ease with the idea of Jesus talking as an infant; he found it more acceptable intellectually and less in contradiction with contemporary scientific knowledge. He said that while it was difficult if not impossible to propose scientifically that Mary could conceive Jesus without sexual intercourse, a talking infant might be exceptional but not completely impossible.[77]

State responses to Rıza's Qurʾān interpretation

A crucial aspect of the Ottoman regime was its highly organized and systematic censorship of printed publications. From the mid-nineteenth century onward, the late Ottoman Empire began to develop press codes, legal regulations, and state bodies responsible for inspecting books and periodicals. These state organs had jurisdiction over both religious and non-religious publications, but especially toward the end of the nineteenth century, with the flourishing of the printing of Qurʾān codices as well as articles in the press on Islamic topics, the Ottoman imperial state began to establish stronger control and approval mechanisms for printed religious texts and to assign jurisdiction over such matters to specific state organs.

One such agent was the aforementioned Tetkik-i Mesahif ve Müellefat-ı Şer'iyye (Council on the Inspection of Printed Qurʾāns and Islamic Religious Publications). This council was established in the 1910s by a merger of two separate councils dedicated to inspecting printed qurʾānic codices and Islamic books dating back to 1889. It became the overarching body to oversee the accuracy of printed religious books.[78] The council's jurisdiction was broadened over time to examine not just Islamic books but also articles on Islam in periodicals. At stake was not just the accuracy of printed texts, for instance the orthography of qurʾānic verses, but also the ideas they proposed, which in this case meant the meanings assigned to qurʾānic passages and *ḥadīth*. The essays on Jesus and Mary by Rıza, Ayni, and Hakkı drew the immediate attention of the council.

The council asserted that the second article penned by Rıza, responding to Ayni's response to his first essay, contained articulations "contrary to the shari'ah and truth" (*muğayir-i şeriat ve hakikat*), and that these articles had the potential to "negatively influence [individuals'] Islamic thought(s)" (*efkar-ı İslamiyeye su-i tesir edecek*).[79] In the eyes of the council, being published in a well-known newspaper enabled the authors to spread their interpretation of qurʾānic passages on Jesus to a wide reading public, and to exert an impact that the council identified as negative. The council seemed to use "shari'ah" in this context to denote common or established Islamic interpretations and teachings and "truth" to indicate a broader, more comprehensive veracity, one that might even contain some common elements between Islam and Christianity concerning the miraculous or virginal conception of Jesus. At any rate, what was most crucial for the council was its perception that these writings could have a negative influence on the Muslim public by, for instance, refuting commonly taught elements of the Islamic Jesus narrative.

However, in line with its typical working method, the council did not provide an extensive commentary on Rıza's and Hakkı's interpretations of the Qurʾān. Nor did it write a refutation discrediting their reading of the relevant qurʾānic passages. Rather, the council, similar to its censorship or disapproval of other periodical or book publications, limited its criticism of content only to the potentially negative and harmful influence of these Jesus articles. Again, as in other cases, it underscored the procedural mandate, which obligated every publisher to submit religious articles to the council's approval. In its censorship or disapproval of religious publications, the council offered, only brief, if any, substantive explanation, and the negative influence or harm to Muslim religious understanding was one such short, categorical elucidation. The legal procedure of publishing religious books or articles was emphasized by the council in order to highlight the authority assigned to it in governing and regulating Islamic publications, regardless of judgments made by the council on their content, i.e., whether they were found permissible to be printed or not.[80]

The council reiterated Article 6 in the Printers' Code, which obliged publishers to seek its approval before printing articles pertaining to religion (Islam) or containing qurʾānic verses and *ḥadīth*. The council emphasized that Article 6 applied to periodicals as well as books, and yet the essays about Jesus had been printed in the newspaper *Tevhid-i Efkar* without the council's sanction. It wrote that the Directorate of the Press had informed all those concerned about this regulation and that it had been announced in newspapers as well, and therefore it had great "regret to observe" that some periodicals continued to print "the meaning and translation of qurʾānic verses and *ḥadīth*" without first presenting them to the council.[81]

The council followed up on the issue in correspondence with different state organs, which illustrates the legal ambiguities in state regulations concerning the oversight of press articles as well as the tensions between different state bodies. The council corresponded first with the Meşihat, the highest religious-bureaucratic governmental office under which it operated, so that the latter would write to the Ministry of the Interior to demand further inquiry into the incident. In January 1922, the same month the articles by Rıza and Ayni were printed in *Tevhid-i Efkar*, the Ministry of the Interior, in response to Meşihat, confirmed that it had written to the concerned state offices, including the Directorate of the Press, which announced to the newspapers' administrative offices the decree that all articles with religious content were to be submitted to the council for approval.[82] Yet the Directorate of the Press also indicated that *Tevhid-i Efkar* was not being printed at that time, and its license holder was not in Istanbul—circumstances that might have led to the newspaper's ignorance of the regulation and failure to submit the articles to the council. However, the Directorate also claimed that the legal regulation did not make absolutely clear whether publishers needed the approval of the council before publication (to which the council continuously objected through its emphasis on the Advisory Council of State's clarification of Article 6 in the Printers' Code).[83]

The Press Directorate also emphasized some difficulties that had

arisen because of the dual censorship mechanism that was in force in Istanbul, as the city was occupied by Allied forces after World War I and they established their own press censorship in addition to that of the Ottoman authorities. The Press Directorate gave the example of an incident in which an article had been published in *Tevhid-i Efkar* without the permission of the council but with the approval of the Allied forces' censorship organ.[84]

The Press Directorate's pronouncements on the incident disclose the presence of legal ambiguities, as well as complications and difficulties that emerged from the complex censorship system governing the Istanbul press. In this respect, even though the council emphasized its own jurisdiction in regulating articulations of Islam in newspapers and journals, in practice it was not able to fully enforce its dictates. After the council condemned the publication of Rıza's essay without its approval, Hakkı's piece appeared in the same newspaper only a month later, in February 1922. Hakkı's essay had been submitted for approval, but it was printed in its original form despite the council's disapproval.[85]

The council did not halt its attempts to assert control. Through its efforts, the Advisory Council of State reemphasized the relevance and validity of Article 6 of the Printers' Code for periodicals, asserting that periodicals must submit their contents to the council. Because Hakkı's article had been printed after this clarification, dated January 28, 1922, the council asked the Ministry of the Interior to punish *Tevhid-i Efkar* in order to set an example for other periodicals; the act of printing an article that had been deemed unsuitable, the council asserted, flouted the Ottoman government's authority, as well as that of the caliph himself, and demonstrated contempt for the Meşihat and the Ministry of the Interior.[86]

The Ottoman failure to enforce regulations controlling the content of periodical publications (in this case specifically their religious content) cannot be attributed solely to the political circumstances of dual censorship by the Ottoman and Allied powers. It also reveals a gap between the laws and regulations and their enforcement. While Ottoman authorities,

from the onset of Islamic publishing to the last days of the empire, sought to establish and maintain a fully functioning press control mechanism, intellectuals, scholars, and publishers both observed the censorship laws and sought to escape their control, in an ongoing process of bargaining, implementation, and counter-initiatives.

Some of the Ottoman administrative and legal regulatory mechanisms were maintained in the early decades of the Turkish Republic, which was born in the waning empire's region of Anatolia, and the institutional apparatus that sought to control printed qurʾānic codices was one of them. Yet, both during the long centuries of the Ottoman Empire as well as in the shift from the Ottoman imperial to the Turkish republican period, what the state authorities considered religiously problematic and subject to censorship changed, and despite institutional continuities, the items censored during the late Ottoman and early Turkish republican period were not entirely the same.

In his complete publication of a Turkish translation of the Qurʾān in 1934, Rıza translated the sections from Sūrah 19 on Jesus as he had in the essays printed in *Tevhid-i Efkar* in 1921–1922. In the 1947 edition of the translation, Rıza included a more extended introduction, with five subsections, one of which was devoted to the question of prophetic narratives in the Qurʾān. Unlike in his earlier works, in his discussion of Jesus as a prophet in this 1947 work, he undertook a more comparative and inclusive analysis of different qurʾānic passages. As noted above, he also made more explicit and direct references to the translation of Mawlana Muhammad Ali as well as to Christian sources, primarily the Bible, in this work. In this edition, Rıza elaborated on Jesus's natural death more than he had in his newspaper articles, while he still also emphasized his natural birth.[87] It seems that the Republic-era censorship bodies did not find Rıza's renderings of the qurʾānic Jesus narrative as problematic as the Ottoman Islamic print approval council had. Nonetheless, Rıza's translation and interpretation of the qurʾānic Jesus passages, particularly regarding his birth and death, did not have a long-lasting and major impact on the Turkish religious-intellectual public.

Conclusion

The end of 1921 and the beginning of 1922, during which the three Ottoman intellectuals discussed the qurʾānic Jesus narratives, corresponds to a time of profound political conflict, chaos, and struggle in Istanbul. World War I and its aftermath, the occupation of Istanbul by Allied forces, and the subsequent transition from the Ottoman imperial regime to the Turkish Republic created massive demographic, socioeconomic, and political ruptures. These major changes were carried onto the pages of the newspapers and journals, which went through strong censorship by both the Allied powers as well as Ottoman and Turkish agents.

In the middle of this political turbulence, it seems, Rıza, Ayni, and Hakkı chose to engage in a different set of questions. This is not to suggest that their triangular disputation on Jesus in *Tevhid-i Efkar* was apolitical. On the contrary, although their disputation did not have any direct implications regarding the immediate, paramount political developments concerning state and regime formations, it was part of, and juxtaposed with, several contemporary political matters, ranging from Christian missionary and Orientalist writings on Islam to modern rationalist conceptions of religion.

Moreover, the disputation was an intellectual one, but it was created and circumscribed by material conditions and realities. First, their ideas were expressed in a medium that was made possible by the print technology and culture. These intellectuals reflected on the limits and potentialities of the Qurʾān as a printed and translated book. Muslim intellectual movements in different lands influenced their thoughts. And last but not least, the modern state with its bureaucratic administrative apparatus and legal-rational categories of legitimization had a major impact in regulating and circumscribing the terms of these intellectual discussions.

The triangular disputation did not have a long-lasting legacy in the Turkish intellectual or religio-political scenes; indeed, on the contrary, it remained buried in the pages of *Tevhid-i Efkar* and archival registries. Nor did Rıza's Qurʾān translation have an impact on modern Turkish

exegesis. Rıza's interpretation of the qurʾānic Jesus narrative did not attain a noteworthy popularity among the Turkish Muslim public either during his lifetime or later. However, leaving aside the details of his understanding of the Jesus narrative, particularly his view that Jesus had a natural birth similar to any other human being (that is, Mary conceived Jesus through sexual intercourse), certain premises guiding his interpretation were prominent and influential in the 1920s as well as today.

The most prominent of these premises is a rationalized approach to the qurʾānic passages. Rıza underscored that a hierarchy of measures attesting to truth exists, and reason comes at the top. In other words, for him, the engagements with the Qurʾān and explanations provided in this respect vis-à-vis relevant passages need to be grounded in reason, comprehensible by the human mind, and in harmony with the rational capacities of human beings. Rational and natural were strongly affiliated in Rıza's thinking, and that is why he underscored that Jesus had a natural birth, that is, one that the human mind can understand through the experience of the birth of other human beings. In his view, the qurʾānic narrative lacked details on certain dimensions of the subject, but it did not matter since the divine text could be inexplicit, but not irrational. The emphasis on the Qurʾān's capacity to be understood by human agents promoted a direct connection between individual believers and the text, undermining the authorizing role of religious scholars in line with the prominent tendency of the period to criticize blind imitation. In Hakkı's and Rıza's interpretations, Jesus was humanized, but the point of that debate was not merely to refute Christian ideas on his divinity, but also to rationalize and naturalize Muslims' understanding of qurʾānic themes and narratives.

Notes

1. Milaslı İsmail Hakkı also subsequently published a book on the subject, entitled *Kuran'a Göre Hz. İsa'nın Babası* [*Jesus's Father according to the Qurʾān*) (Istanbul: Ankara Matbaası, 1934.)

2. For a brief, nonpolemical account of the qurʾānic and Islamic tradition's conception of Jesus, see G. C. Anawati, "ʿĪsā," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1954–2005), s.v.

3. Born in Cairo to a family that had migrated from Anatolia, Ömer Rıza moved to Istanbul in 1915 and married the daughter of one of the most prominent Muslim intellectuals of his time, Mehmet Akif [Ersoy], thereby gaining introductions to important intellectual circles. In addition to his publishing and translation activities, Rıza became a deputy in parliament in 1950, engaged in developing Turkey's relations with other Muslim countries. See Mustafa Uzun, "Ömer Rıza Doğrul," in *Türkiye diyanet vakfı İslam ansiklopedisi (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı*, 1988–2014), 489–492.

4. Ayni was fluent in Arabic, Persian, and French. He worked as a bureaucrat in various positions at the Ministry of Education, held a governorship, and in 1914 started to teach at Istanbul University. See İsmail Arar, "Mehmet Ali Ayni," in *Türkiye diyanet vakfı İslam ansiklopedisi*, 273–275.

5. After graduating from medical school, Hakkı worked as a health inspector in various cities. He was also an engaged public intellectual: he participated in the establishment of Yeşilay (Green Crescent Temperance Society), for instance, and supported the Ottoman-alphabet reform movement. See Müesser Özcan and Naki Bulut, "Tıp dışındaki farklı alanlarda da iz bırakan Muğlalı üç hekim," *Lokman Hekim Journal* 3 (2013): 2–4. See also Resul Çatalbaş, "Milaslı Dr. İsmail Hakkı'nın hayatı, eserleri ve İslam ile ilgili görüşleri," *Artuklu Akademi Dergisi* 1 (2014): 99–129.

6. Rıza published one of the first Turkish translations of the Qurʾān in Latin script during the early Turkish Republic in 1934. He

titled his work *Tanrı'nın buyruğu Kuran-ı Kerim tercüme ve tefsiri* [*The Decree of God: Translation and Exegesis of the Qurʾān*] (Istanbul: Muallim Ahmet Halit Kitaphanesi, 1934; also Istanbul: Akşam Matbaası, 1934).

7. See, for instance, İskipli Mehmet Atıf, "Haml-i Meryem," *Mahfil* 23 (Ramazan 1340 [April/May 1922]): 191–194. While not examined here, it should be pointed out that other essays or booklets on the topic had appeared right before 1922. For instance, see Muhammed Hilmi, *Hz. İsa Aleyhissalam'ın babası var mı?* [*Did Jesus Have a Father?*] (Istanbul: Evkaf-ı İslamiye Matbaası, 1338–1340 [1919–1921]).

8. The council's archival record books examined in this study are currently available at the Meşihat Archive, located in the courtyard of the Istanbul Müftülüğü (Istanbul Muftiship), right by the Süleymaniye Mosque, Istanbul.

9. Although it is not a comprehensive list, the following works on modern Islamic thought may be cited: Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); John Voll, *Islam, Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Essex: Longman, 1982); Daniel Brown, *Rethinking Tradition in Modern Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Charles Kurzman, *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940: A Sourcebook* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

10. Nikki Keddie deploys the concept of "self-strengthening" in her examination of a major modern Muslim intellectual. See Nikki R. Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 42.

11. Brett Wilson emphasizes the impact of Christian missionaries on Muslim translations of the Qurʾān. In his view, the missionaries' "attacks on the Qur'an created a sense of urgency among Muslims to defend their sacred book." See Brett Wilson, *Translating the Qur'an in an Age of Nationalism: Print Culture and Modern Islam in Turkey* (Oxford: Oxford University Press in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2014), 22. It should be noted that Hakkı wrote a booklet specifically to respond to the Anglican Church's questions about Islamic

civilization, underlining the latter's contribution to human civilization.

12. See Jane Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad, "Virgin Mary in Islamic Tradition and Commentary," *Muslim World* 79 (1989): 161-187, 175. In this regard, there is some evidence supporting Haddad and Smith's argument in the Ottoman archival sources, too. Several years before the publication of these essays, in 1915 Tetkik-i Müellefat-ı Şerʿiyye and the Ministry of the Interior targeted pamphlets distributed about miracles and Mary in the Ottoman lands by American missionaries. Even though neither the records of Tetkik-i Müellefat-ı Şerʿiyye nor the archival documents contain much detail about the content of these booklets apart from asserting that they reject the prophethood of Muḥammad and create a negative political influence for the Ottoman caliphate by spreading ideas that confuse Muslim minds, it is plausible to think that some Ottoman scholars wrote essays addressing such missionary publications. Yet without reading these booklets and the works written in response to them, this is still speculative, requiring further research and evidence. See Meşihat Archive, Tetkik-i Müellefat-ı Şerʿiyye Defterleri 5/5, Genel No. 5293 (Nisan 29, 1331 [May 12, 1915]), 18 and Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (Turkish Prime Ministry Ottoman Archive) (BOA) DH.EUM. MTK 80/29 (Nisan 16, 1331 [April 29, 1915]).

13. Rıza, *Kuran-ı Kerim tercüme ve tefsiri* (Istanbul: Akşam Matbaası, 1934), 183.

14. For a comparative examination of the interpretation of miracles in contemporary Islamic and Christian thought, see Isra Yazicioglu, *Understanding the Qur'anic Miracle Stories in the Modern Age* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013). Although not specifically about miracles, for an overall depiction of the religion versus science dilemma among late Ottoman thinkers, see Şükrü Hanioğlu, "Blueprints for a Future Society: Late Ottoman Materialists on Science, Religion, and Art," in Elizabeth Özdalga (ed.), *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005).

15. Rıza's interest in India and Pakistan continued in subsequent years as well, as is evident in the fact that he was elected president of the Turkish-Pakistan Cultural Society in 1950. See Uzun, "Ömer Rıza," 489.

16. See Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Aḥmadiyya," *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (2nd ed.; Brill, 1954–2005), s.v.

17. See Azmi Özcan, "Muhammed Ali Lahuri," in *Türkiye diyanet vakfı İslam ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 1988–2014), 500–502.

18. For a list of Muhammad Ali's publications, see ibid., 501–502.

19. Ibid., 501.

20. Ali Akpınar, "Ömer Rıza Doğrul (1893–1952) ve tefsire katkısı," *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 6 (2002): 17–36, 33–34.

21. Rıza, "Mevlevi Muhammed Ali ve Himmet-i Meşkuresi," *Sebilürreşad* 18, no. 446 (Teşrinievvel 30, 1335 [October 30, 1919]): 44–45. While Muhammad Ali's English translation of the Qurʾān is often considered to be the first complete one undertaken by a Muslim, Azmi Özcan points out that Muhammad Abdulhakim Khan's 1905 translation predates his 1913 one ("Muhammed Ali Lahuri," 501).

22. Cited in Ali Akpınar, "Ömer Rıza," 33.

23. Ibid.

24. Rıza, *Kuran-ı Kerim tercüme*, 924.

25. Ömer Rıza, "Milad-ı İsa aleyhisselam," *Tevhid-i Efkar*, Kanunievvel 26, 1337 [December 26, 1921], 3.

26. Ibid.

27. Mehmet Ali Ayni, "Milad-ı İsa meselesi," *Tevhid-i Efkar*, Kanunisani 4, 1338 [January 4, 1922], 2.

28. Ibid. Emphasis mine.

29. Ömer Rıza, "Milad-ı İsa Meselesi, Ömer Rıza Bey'in Mehmed Ali Ayni Bey'e Cevabı," *Tevhid-i Efkar*, Kanunisani 6, 1338 [January 6, 1922], 3.

30. Ibid.

31. Milaslı İsmail Hakkı, "Haml-i Meryem meselesi," *Tevhid-i Efkar*, Şubat 7, 1338 [February 7, 1922], 3.

32. Ibid.

33. Although Hakkı does not explicitly refer to it, this distinction he draws is similar to the traditional dichotomy set between qurʾānic *muḥkamāt* and *mutashābihāt* verses in which the former are considered to have absolutely precise and clear meanings and the latter to be unspecific, to have the capacity to be interpreted differently, which is derived from Q Āl ʿImrān 3:7.

34. Hakkı, "Haml-i Meryem," 3.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid.

37. See Ercan Şen, "Milaslı İsmail Hakkı'nın (1870–1938) Kur'an tercümesine dair bir risalesi," *Gaziosmanpaşa Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 1 (2013): 261–286, 274–276.

38. Hakkı, "Haml-i Meryem," 3.

39. Ibid.

40. For a brief account of the beginning of the Qurʾān translation debate in the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic, see Wilson, *Translating the Qur'an*, 104–111; also Amit Bein, *Ottoman Ulema, Turkish Republic: Agents of Change and Guardians of Tradition* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 116–123.

41. Wilson, *Translating the Qur'an*, 2; on vernacular commentaries, see 84–111.

42. For translation works in the early Turkish Republic and the subsequent state-sponsored Qurʾān translation project, see ibid., 161–180, 221–245.

43. See Ayşe Polat, "Subject to Approval: Sanction and Censure in Ottoman Istanbul (1889–1923)" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2015).

44. Ayni, "Milad-ı İsa meselesi," 2.

45. Rıza, "Milad-ı İsa meselesi," 3.

46. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an* (Rockport, MA: Oneworld, 1995), 67.

47. In these two almost identical verses, there is only a difference in pronouns, one referring to "her" and the other to "it" respectively, as Q 21:91 says "We breathed into her some of our spirit," and Q 66:12 says "We breathed into it some of our spirit." The pronoun "it" is interpreted as Mary's vagina in some of the commentaries. See Michael Sells, "Spirit," *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* (Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006), s.v. (2005).

48. Rıza, "Milad-ı İsa meselesi," 3.

49. In the original text, Rıza refers to this as verse 54, but the word occurs in verse 55 in some editions of the Qurʾān. For a detailed discussion of the word *tawaffā* in the qurʾānic Jesus narrative, see Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam* (New York: Continuum, 2010), 68.

50. Rıza, "Milad-ı İsa meselesi," 3.

51. Q 4:157 is rendered the same way in multiple translations: "they did not kill him [Jesus], nor did they crucify him, but it appeared so to them."

52. On the topic of the death of Jesus, see Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur'an*, 105–121; Neal Robinson, *Christ in Islam and Christianity: Representation of Jesus in the Qur'an and the Classical Muslim Commentaries* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 117–140 and 180–185; and for a number of Muslim intellectuals' ideas on the crucifixion, see Todd Lawson, *The Crucifixion and the Qur'an: A Study in the History of Muslim Thought* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 115–142.

53. Rıza, "Milad-ı İsa meselesi," 3.

54. Rıza, "Milad-ı İsa aleyhisselam," 3.

55. Rıza, "Milad-ı İsa meselesi," 3.

56. Ibid.

57. Rıza, "Milad-ı İsa aleyhisselam," 3.

58. In his reading of the Jesus story, Rıza did not make any comparative intertextual references to biblical narratives about Jesus. However, only regarding Q 19:32—in which Jesus is ordered to be respectful and dutiful to his mother (no reference appears to his father)—he asserted that this is a qurʾānic response to the Gospel of

Matthew, in which Jesus is by some interpretations portrayed as speaking negatively about his mother. Rıza wrote that the incident is found in Matthew 12:28, but the correct reference might be Matthew 12:46–50. In any case, according to Rıza, the Qurʾān's mention of only Jesus's mother in Q 19:32 has nothing to do with his conception without a father.

59. Rıza, "Milad-ı İsa meselesi," 3.

60. Ibid.

61. For a brief discussion of the notion of spirit in the Qurʾān in terms of its semantic features, see Michael Sells, "Sound, Spirit, and Gender in *Sūrat al-Qadr*," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111 (1991): 239–259.

62. In some of the classical qurʾānic commentaries, the spirit in Q 19:21 is identified with the angel Gabriel, too, and the commentators discuss the ways the angel could approach Mary to conceive the child, which ranges from the idea that the angel blew in "the fold of her covering until the breath reached her womb," to "causing the spirit to enter through her mouth." See Smith and Haddad, "Virgin Mary," 167. Rıza does not provide any details concerning how he thinks the angel physically helped Mary conceive a child.

63. Some of the classical commentators also discuss the issue of how the angel could take the shape of a human being. However, in their view, that angel did not constitute a real man; that is, Mary's purity constitutes of "not having lain with a real man." Smith and Haddad, "Virgin Mary," 168.

64. Hakkı, "Haml-i Meryem meselesi," 3.

65. Similar to Q 3:55 referred above, in the original text in *Tevhid-i Efkar*, Rıza refers to the qurʾānic passage in Sūrah 32 as beginning in verse 6, but in the Cairo edition of the Qurʾān that is standard today, it is verse 7.

66. Hakkı, "Haml-i Meryem meselesi," 3.

67. This verse, which is about prophets in general, is translated as follows by A. J. Arberry: "It belongs not to any mortal that God should give him the Book, the Judgment, the Prophethood, then he

should say to men, 'Be you servants to me apart from God.' Rather, 'Be you masters in that you know the Book, and in that you study'" (*The Qur'an Interpreted: A Translation* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956; repr. 1996]).
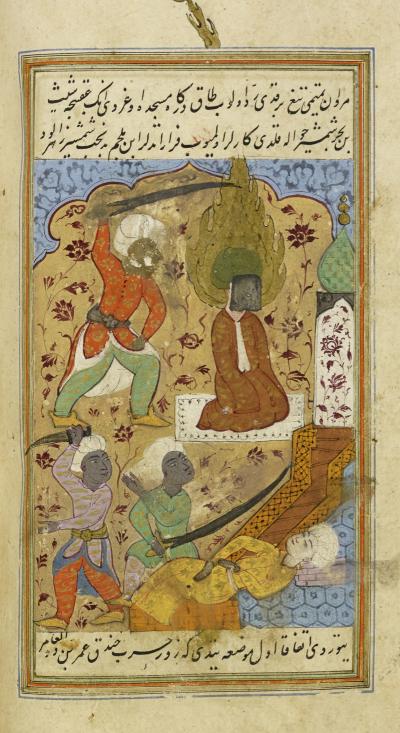
68. Hakkı, "Haml-i Meryem meselesi," 3.

69. Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Ibid.

72. Ayni, "Milad-ı İsa meselesi," 2.

73. Rıza, "Milad-ı İsa meselesi," 3.

74. Ibid.

75. Ibid.

76. A. J. Arberry's translation is used here, but this verse appears almost the same in practically all translations of the Qur'ān into English.

77. Hakkı, "Haml-i Meryem meselesi," 3.

78. See chapter 3 of my dissertation, "Expanding Oversight: Controlling Islamic Books," in "Subject to Approval Sanction and Censure in Ottoman Istanbul (1889–1923)."

79. Meşihat Archive, Tetkik-i Müellefat-ı Şerʿiyye Defterleri 5/5, Genel No: 5293 (Kanunisani 11, 1338 [January 11, 1922]), 180.

80. I should point out that although *Tevhid-i Efkar*, Ömer Rıza, and M. İsmail Hakkı did not submit the essays to the council Tetkik-i Müellefat-ı Şerʿiyye for approval, or submitted them but then printed them despite its disapproval, they complied with the regulation forbidding the use of the full Arabic script of qurʾānic verses and *ḥadīth* in newspapers. In the articles on Jesus in the newspaper *Tevhid-i Efkar*, only translations or shortened Arabic versions of the qurʾānic verses cited appeared.

81. Meşihat Archive, Tetkik-i Müellefat-ı Şerʿiyye Defterleri 5/5, Genel No: 5293 (Kanunisani 11, 1338 [January 11, 1922]), 180.

82. BOA DH.İ.UM 19-19/1-49 (Kanunisani 19, 1338 [January 19, 1922]).

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.

85. Meşihat Archive, Tetkik-i Müellefat-ı Şerʿiyye Defterleri 5/5, Genel No: 5293 (Mart 14, 1338 [March 14, 1922]), 203.

86. Ibid., 183. Also see BOA DH.İUM. E 123/35 (Mart 19, 1338 [March 19, 1922]).

87. Rıza, introduction to *Kuran-ı Kerim'in tercüme*, 181–186.

مروان بنجمی نتغ رقتی ادولی طاق دکا مسجد ا و غروی لک عفصیجه شنت
بج شمشیر جرا لو قلدی کار ادلیوب فرا ادلر ابن جم بجب شمشیر زاهرد

یوزد قی انفاق اول موضعه یدی که زور سرب جنتق عمر بن ذ العابر

Elijah Muhammad's Prophets:
From the White Adam to the Black Jesuses

Herbert Berg

Abstract

Elijah Muhammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam from the mid-1930s until 1975, wrote extensively about Adam, Moses, and Jesus. His *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* bear little resemblance to the older accounts in the Qurʾān and the Bible or to the traditional *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* material. His focus was his racialist mythology into which he placed appropriate racialized versions of Adam, Moses, and Jesus. Although seemingly at odds with biblical and qurʾānic accounts, he constantly cited and alluded to these texts in order to support his novel understanding of them. In so doing, Elijah Muhammad created a modern, nontraditional, and wholly new and independent branch within the genre of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* aimed at mid-twentieth century African Americans.

Introduction

"The prophets of Islam include: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Job, David, Solomon, and Jonah." So far it sounds quite traditional, but in the very next sentence, Elijah Muhammad is quite untraditional: "the people of Islam are the black people, and their numbers are made up of the brown, yellow and red people..."[1] The leader of the Nation of Islam from the mid-1930s until his death in 1975, Elijah Muhammad devoted significant attention to a select few biblical and qurʾānic prophets, particularly Adam, Moses, and Jesus.[2] Yet he felt no need to conform to the older accounts in the Qurʾān and the Bible, nor did he devote the same attention to Muḥammad.[3] Moreover, he seemed unaware of the traditional *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* material. His primary goal was to reinterpret the figures of Adam, Moses, and Jesus to fit his racialist mythology. He self-identified as a Muslim and was well-versed in the Qurʾān, but did not adopt or even adapt much of the Qurʾān's own reinterpretation of these prophets. Although seemingly at odds with biblical and qurʾānic accounts, he constantly cited and alluded to these texts in order to support his novel understanding of them. In so doing, Elijah Muhammad created a modern, nontraditional, and wholly new and independent branch within the genre of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* aimed at mid-twentieth century African Americans.

Racial mythology

Although humanity's origins lie further back, Elijah Muhammad's racial mythology begins 66 (or 60) trillion years ago, when Allah, having failed to unite humanity under one language, sought to destroy them by blasting the original planet into earth and moon. Only the Tribe of Shabazz survived and then settled on the best parts of the earth, the Nile Valley and Mecca where Allah gave them "a thorough knowledge of self and his guidance,"[4] that is, the religion of Islam.[5] The more important history begins 6,600 years ago, with a black but malevolent scientist: Mr. Yakub, the god and maker of the white race.[6]

According to Elijah Muhammad, Yakub's preaching in Mecca led to his exile to an island called Pelan in the Aegean Sea along with his 59,999 followers. Through a perverse 600-year selective breeding program that he set in motion, he "grafted" or created an increasingly lighter and wicked race by controlling who married whom and by killing all the black babies.[7] After 200 years it resulted in a race that was entirely "brown," and after 200 years more, one that was all "yellow or red." And finally, after yet 200 more years, the result was an entirely pale white, blue-eyed race of people who by their very nature were evil. Following Yakub's instructions, this race then returned to the Holy Land of Mecca.[8]

There they tried to gain control of the righteous in Mecca. When the trouble they made led to bloodshed, the king had them rounded up and drove them to Europe.[9]

> They suffered divine chastisement for the first 2,000 years on this continent for their trouble-making and for causing war and bloodshed among the original black people, who had not suffered from wars, exploitation and enslavement before the creation (grafting) of this people by their father, Yakub.[10]

Isolated from the civilized world for 2,000 years and without divine guidance, they became savages, like wild beasts. They went naked, became hairy, ate raw food, and even started walking on all fours and living in caves and tree tops, climbing the latter for protection at night and jumping from one tree to another. As the Qurʾān points out in Sūrat al-Māʾidah 5:60, some were cursed by Allah and turned into swine and apes—in fact a self-inflicted curse when some sought to graft themselves back into being black but succeeding only in producing the gorilla.[11]

So the white race remained until several futile attempts to civilize them began. The religion of Yakub before his fall had been Islam,[12] as it was for all of the black prophets sent to this evil race, the first of whom was Moses, and the last, Jesus.[13] Both warned them to submit to the will of Allah; both failed.[14] Muḥammad's later mission kept them "bottled up" for another 1,000 years, until—with Columbus' voyage in 1492—they

were set free from their European prison.[15] These white devils then sought to dominate the whole world by murdering, pillaging, and raping. Their greatest sin was to enslave members of the original black humanity for 400 years and rob them of their religion, Islam. But their sin, even their existence, would not endure forever. The imminent destruction of these devils was heralded when the Great Mahdi, Allah in person, Mr. Fard Muhammad, came to Detroit in 1930 to find this lost Nation of Islam in the wilderness of America.[16]

Although this myth might seem somewhat far removed from the more familiar accounts of the Islamic prophets, Islam remains central to it. Islam is the only true religion, the original and natural religion of the "Blackman." It is as eternal as black humanity itself, and spiritual, mental, physical, social, and economic freedom from the white devil is only possible by returning to that religion. Christianity, for Elijah Muhammad, "is one of the most perfect black-slave-making religions on our planet."[17] It made blacks worship a false, white god (and so worship the very devils who had enslaved them). Blacks were taught to turn the other cheek in the face of oppression and wait until the next life for justice. Islam, by contrast, offers freedom, justice, and equality now, under the leadership of the true god, Allah, in the person of Wali Fard Muhammad. All this is supported by the Qurʾān and the Bible. Although the Bible is described as a "graveyard" and "poison book,"[18] it is also "a book that was prepared purposely as a warning to us in North America."[19] As for the Qurʾān, it is

> The book that the so-called American Negroes (The Tribe of Shabazz) should own and read, the book that the slavemasters have but have not represented it to their slaves, is a book that will heal their sin-sick souls that were made sick and sorrowful by the slavemasters. This book will open their blinded eyes and open their deaf ears. It will purify them. The name of this book, which makes a distinction between the God of righteous and the God of evil, is: Glorious Holy Qur-an Sharrieff. It is indeed

the Book of Guidance, of Light and Truth, and of Wisdom and Judgement. But the average one should first be taught how to respect such a book, how to understand it, and how to teach it.[20]

Elijah Muhammad also taught, "The Holy Qur'an will live forever. Why? Because it has Truth in it. I will not say it has some Truth in it. It has all Truth in it if you understand."[21] Only he, however, understood these truths in the Bible and the Qur'ān, including the obscured histories and hidden symbolism of its prophets.

Adam

Once Elijah Muhammad wrote that Islam was the "same religion Allah gave to everyone of His Prophets from Adam to Muhammad, the last."[22] However, Adam is not normally counted among the prophets, for Adam is the progenitor of only the white race, who "refused to submit (accept Islam) and for this rejection, he was punished with exile and a death sentence placed upon his race."[23] Elijah Muhammad explained the Adam and Eve stories in the Qur'ān and in Genesis thus:

Let us take a look at the devil's creation from the teachings of the Holy Qur-an. "And when your Lord said to the angels, I am going to place in the earth one who shall rule, the angels said: 'What will Thou place in it such as will make mischief in it and shed blood, we celebrate thy praise and extol Thy holiness.'" (Holy Qur-an Sharrieff 2:30). This devil race has and still is doing just that—making mischief and shedding blood; and the black nation whom they were grafted from (when your Lord said to the angels): "Surely I am going to create a mortal of the essence of black mud fashioned in shape." (Holy Qur-an Sharrieff, 15:28) The essence of black mud (the black nation) mentioned is only symbolic, which actually means the sperm of

the black nation; and they refused to recognize the black nation as their equal though they were made from and by a black scientist (named Yakub)."[24]

As for the "Fall of Humanity," that too refers only to the white race's progenitors. "Adam and Eve (the father and mother of the white race— Yakub is the real name) refused the religion of Islam (peace) because of their nature in which they were made."[25] Elsewhere, he clarifies that the 59,999 "men and women who went with Yakub were the real Adam of the Bible and Qur-an who lost Paradise (the holy land of Arabia)."[26] The punishment of mortality was in fact a prophecy about the imminent contemporary destruction of the race. "Adam and his race refused to submit (accept Islam) and for this rejection, he was punished with exile and a death sentence place upon his race."[27] As for the expulsion from the Garden,

> According to the Bible (Gen 3:20–24), Adam and his wife were the first parents of all people (white race only) and the first sinners. According to the Word of Allah, he was driven from the Garden of Paradise into the hills and caves of West Asia, or as they now call it, 'Europe,' to live his evil life in the West and not in the Holy Land of the East.

The cherubim with the flaming sword were Muslim guards who, for 2,000 years, prevented the Adamic race from returning to Asia to make mischief.[28]

Elijah Muhammad is not entirely consistent with the analogies he draws from the Adam and Eve story, subordinating the scriptural narrative and its figures to his racial mythology in various ways. For example, he also described the serpent, whose "greatest desire is to make the righteous disobey the law of righteousness," as the white race. Moreover,

> The Bible's forbidden tree (Gen. 2:17) was a tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This also tells us that the tree was a person, for trees know nothing! This tree was of knowledge

> [that] was forbidden to Adam and Eve. The only one who this
> tree could be is the devil. After deceiving Adam and his wife, he
> has been called a serpent due to his keen knowledge of tricks
> and acts of slyness, who made his acquaintance with Adam and
> his wife in the absence of the presence of God. Since this is the
> nature of a liar, he can best lie to the people when truth is
> absent.[29]

As a result, the serpent was cursed, and Adam and Eve were driven from
the Garden of Paradise 6,000 years ago, where they continued to try to
cause believers in Allah to fall. In the extended metaphor of the serpent,
the head of the serpent is "the religious leaders of the human beast
serpent."[30] The tree of life, incidentally, is the nation of Islam and the
cherubim protecting the Garden of Eden are Muslims, which he supports
using Q Baqarah 2:36.[31]

Noah and Abraham

Since Adam—as the symbol and progenitor of the white race—can
hardly, therefore, be a prophet of Allah for Elijah Muhammad, his list of
prophets usually begins with Noah and Abraham. Noah is most often
mentioned as one who was mocked and scorned for predicting the immi-
nent punishment of the world (just like Elijah Muhammad was and did),
but was vindicated when mockers and disbelievers were punished.[32] This
interpretative approach sets the pattern for Elijah Muhammad's *qiṣaṣ al-
anbiyāʾ*; they are more about contemporary black-white issues in America
than they are about the past. In this regard, they resemble the more
traditional *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, which are often shaped by the narrative of
Muḥammad's life.

Abraham is mentioned mainly in two contexts: his prayer for a
future prophet and the black stone, both of which are given a contem-
porary racialized twist. Elijah Muhammad concurred with the Qurʾān
that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian.[33] But he took that claim
to mean his descendants are not the Jews nor the Christians. The cove-

nant he made does not, therefore, apply to the Israelites, nor to any whites.[34] Both Abraham and the sacrifice of his son Ishmael are "also a sign of what would take place in the Last Days on finding and returning the lost-found people of Abraham an[d] his son, Ishmael."[35]

The prayer of Abraham for a messenger to be raised from among his descendants in Q 2:129 was much discussed by Elijah Muhammad. He argued that Mecca had seen many messengers, including Abraham and Ishmael. He combined this observation with Q Sajdah 32:3 ("that thou mayest warn a people to whom no warner has come before that they might walk aright"[36]) to argue, "the prayer of Abraham does not refer to the raising up of a prophet in Arabia, but of a prophet among that parti-cular seed or people of his, who must be searched for, located and found, a teacher must be given to them from Allah to teach and warn them of the purpose of Allah and the purpose of the Messenger being raised among them."[37] Abraham, according to Elijah Muhammad, would have been black, and so decidedly not the biological or spiritual progenitor of Jews and Christians. More oddly, however, he also seems to dismiss or ignore the significance of the traditional Muslim claim that Abraham is the ancestor of the Arabs and so the inhabitants of Mecca. What matters to Elijah Muhammad is that he and they are black.

As for the black stone that Abraham is traditionally thought to have set in the Ka'bah when he built it and that Muḥammad helped restore to its position, its importance lies entirely in its symbolism. Abraham was said to have "made a sign with a small, unhewn black stone and set it in the Holy City of Mecca and veiled it over with a black veil which will not be unveiled and destroyed or discarded until he whom the sign represents is returned (the last messenger and his followers)."[38] Jesus, too, spoke of the future messenger represented by that stone in Mark 12:10 as the stone rejected by the builders that became the cornerstone; Jesus' stone and the black stone symbolize the same thing. Moreover, when Muḥam-mad put the black stone back in its place in the Ka'bah, for Elijah Muham-mad this demonstrated that Muḥammad was not the "fulfiller of the sign," "but rather of that which the stone represents"—that is, Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam.[39]

Moses

The figure of Moses has several overlapping elements: Moses' prophecy about a future prophet, Pharaoh as a symbol of white America, and Moses' mission to the white race. Elijah Muhammad often compared himself to Moses. Initially, in 1934, Moses was the one who first prophesied the coming of Fard Muhammad in Deuteronomy 18:18: "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto you, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him."[40] But later this prophecy seems to be redirected to the coming of Elijah Muhammad.

> In Ancient times, Allah, raised Moses to lead the lost people of Israel from the land of the Pharaohs and into the land of their own, and in our time he has raised this humble, devoted and divinely-missioned black man who has opened the only road towards an exit from the holocaust that is descending upon America by Allah in retaliation for the evil it has brought upon the world—particularly upon black mankind.[41]

He even chastised other Muslims who thought the prophecy refers to Muḥammad, for he and the Arabs never suffered slavery.

> The Orthodox Muslims think this refers to... Muhammad of nearly 1400 years ago [that he] was a prophet like Moses.... But they forget that Moses was a man who was raised in a house of bondage under a king who held him and his people in bondage to him and to his false worship of God and religion.... [Muḥammad] does not compare with the prophecy of a man like Moses, for there was no king singled out who opposed Muhammad in Mecca. There was no separation of the Arabs from any slave masters and a destruction of the slave masters.[42]

Thus, he saw African Americans as the Hebrews under Pharaoh, with white America as a modern Pharaoh. Moses' people, like African Americans, did not know the scriptures before their prophet appeared. Pharaoh, like white America, "had them worshipping in his false religion. Therefore, Moses had to preach a new God and a new religion to the Hebrews, and give them a new concept of God and His religion."[43]

Thus the focus of Elijah Muhammad was often as much on Pharaoh and on the Israelites who stubbornly refuse to accept their messenger.

> They will fail and be brought down to disgrace as Pharaoh's magicians and himself were by Allah and Moses, His servant... They felt that shouldn't believe Moses' representation of God by any other name than God Almighty, regardless to Moses' stress upon JEHOVAH as being the God of their Fathers. Pharaoh had not used that name (JEHOVAH), so Israel wouldn't accept it until a showdown between Jehovah and Pharaoh.[44]

When Moses was sent to bring his people out of bondage to independence, they preferred to stay and even to help Pharaoh, and Pharaoh feared their might should the Israelites ever unite. So he plotted to keep them subjected by killing off the male children, just as the American whites encouraged African Americans to use birth control. Elijah Muhammad warned, "They are seeking to destroy our race through our women. Do not let them trick you."[45] Elsewhere he made the analogy explicit: "If today a Moses were in your midst and he said, 'The God of your fathers sent me' and 'the Government of America has deceived you as to the knowledge of God and has you indirectly worshipping yourselves,' wouldn't your reply be the same as the one given to Moses? That is right. You are asking me that."[46] As for his rivals and detractors, they were modern day Korahs—Korah being the leader of the rebellion against Moses in Numbers 16:

> It took the destruction of the people of Korah by Almighty God to make Israel understand that it was God who had appointed

Moses to lead them and that self-made leaders such as Korah would not work in the way of delivering Israel [to] another country. Because Allah had chosen Moses to act as a guide for Israel, and all other self-made leaders would be failures. He sent poisonous and fiery serpents against them to bite and kill those who rebelled. So this is a warning and a sign for us today.[47]

Elijah Muhammad wrote less about a more intriguing and seemingly contradictory narrative about Moses—the portrayal of him as the first prophet to the white race after 2,000 years of exile in Europe. Whites had remained trapped in Europe for these 2,000 years ever since they had been expelled from Mecca. Elijah Muhammad anachronistically had Muslim soldiers armed with swords patrolling the border to "prevent the devils from crossing" during this period.[48] But after 2,000 years of this exile, "Moses according to the Bible and Holy Qur-an, raised the devils up to civilization. Read John 3:15: 'And as Moses lifted up the serpent (the white race) in the wilderness (in Europe) even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.'"[49] When challenged that Judaism was 5,700 years old, and so older than Islam, Elijah Muhammad replied,

The white race including the Jews, are only 6,000 years and they spent 2,000 year[s of] that time in the hills and caves of Europe without any religion or civilization. Only a few of them escaped that punishment and they remained there until the birth of Moses, who was their first prophet or guide to lead them back to civilization and the knowledge of Islam.[50]

During Moses' mission to civilize the white race "to take their place as rulers, as Yakub had intended for them. Musa (Moses) became their God and leader"; he brought them out of the caves, taught them to believe in God, to wear clothes, to cook food, and to use fire. But they were so evil that Moses had to build a ring of fire around him at night. Once they gave him so much trouble that he took dynamite up on the mountainside and killed 300 of them telling them, "Stand there on the edge of this

mountain and you will hear the voice of God... Moses taught the devils that if they would follow him and obey him, Allah would give them a place among the holy people. Most of them believed Moses, just to get out of the caves."[51] Those few who followed him left their caves behind and became the Jews.[52]

The chronology is confusing. It is not clear if these events and those with Pharaoh are related, though Elijah Muhammad usually equates Jews, Hebrews, and Israelites. Moses was said to have spoken Egyptian Arabic,[53] and the Israelites were said to have loved the Egyptians, who were evil and so attacked by fiery serpents. This is quite an odd description given that Egyptians are in Africa and normally described as black by Elijah Muhammad, and all whites would then still have been exiled in Europe. Incidentally, Elijah Muhammad also claimed Nimrod was born as an opponent to Moses' teachings. Thus the teachings of Moses lasted not 2,000 years, but only 1,700, for they were cut short by the 300 years of Nimrod's opposition.[54] Be that as it may, clearly the figure of Moses is subservient to the framework of Elijah Muhammad's racial mythology, and scripture, whether the Bible or the Qurʾān, is read primarily as prophecies about the end times in America.[55]

Jesus

Elijah Muhammad's treatment of Jesus is far more complex than that of Adam or Moses.[56] As he wrote in 1957, in the Bible and the Qurʾān, "you have two Jesus' histories"![57]

> One of the main things that one must learn is to distinguish between the history of Jesus two thousand years ago and the prophecy of the Jesus who is expected to come at the end of the world. What we have as a history of the birth of Jesus 2,000 years ago often proves to be that of the Great Mahdi,[58] the Restorer of the Kingdom of Peace on Earth who came to America in 1930 under the name of Mr. W. D. Fard.[59]

In terms of *qiṣaṣ*, the Jesus of two thousand years ago may be of greater relevance, but not for Elijah Muḥammad, who preferred to focus on the one of the end of the world.

For Elijah Muhammad, this latter Jesus was, of course, Fard Muhammad, but he is not unrelated to the former Jesus. The two are not independent, since most of the biblical and even qurʾānic references to or descriptions of Jesus were reinterpreted symbolically to make them prophecies about Fard Muhammad. According to Elijah Muhammad, "Nearly 75 per cent [of the Bible story of Jesus] is referring to a future Jesus, coming at the end of the white races' time, to resurrect the mentally dead, lost members (so-called Negroes) of the Tribe of Shabazz. This Jesus is now in the world."[60] In particular, Jesus' proclamations about the "Son of Man" were to be understood as prophecies about Fard Muhammad.[61] Even Elijah Muhammad's description of Fard Muhammad's mission drew on the passion of Jesus:

He (MR. FARD MUHAMMAD, God in Person) chose to suffer three and one-half years to show his love for his people, who have suffered over 300 years at the hands of a people who by nature are evil, wicked, and have no good in them. He was persecuted, sent to jail in 1932, and ordered out of Detroit, Mich., May 26, 1933. He came to Chicago in the same year, arrested almost immediately on his arrival and placed behind prison bars. He submitted himself with all humbleness to his persecutors. Each time he was arrested, he sent for me that I may see and learn the price of TRUTH for us, the so-called American Negroes (members of the Asiatic nation). He was well able to save himself from such suffering, but how else was the scripture to be fulfilled?[62]

Elijah Muhammad employed the same technique to deal with references to Jesus in the Qurʾān; they were prophecies about Fard Muhammad. For example, Elijah Muhammad argued that only Fard Muhammad

merited the qurʾānic epithet *masīḥ*, relying on the commentator of his copy of the Qurʾān who had suggested that *masīḥ* (the Arabic cognate of messiah) does not mean "anointed one" but "one who travels much" (apparently based on a false etymology from the Arabic verb *mashā*, "to go").[63] This title obviously did not apply to "the Jesus of two thousand years ago," who traveled only in "the small state called Palestine."

> The Mahdi is a world traveler. He told me that he had traveled the world over and that he had visited North America for 20 years before making himself known to us, his people, whom he came for. He had visited the Isle [sic] of the Pacific, Japan and China, Canada, Alaska, the North Pole, India, Pakistan, all of the Near East and Africa. He had studied the wild life in the jungles of Africa and learned the languages of the birds. He could speak 16 languages and write 10 of them. He visited every inhabited place on the earth and had pictured and extracted the language of the people on Mars and had a knowledge of all life in the universe. He could recite by heart the histories of the world as far back as 150,000 years and knew the beginning and end of all things.[64]

Much time could be spent unpacking this passage, but my point here is that for Elijah Muhammad, biblical and qurʾānic passages about Jesus were first and foremost prophetic references to Fard Muhammad and secondarily (and perhaps only incidentally) references to the "Jesus of two thousand years ago"—just as qurʾānic references to Allah were about Fard Muhammad.

As for the earlier, "historical" Jesus, Elijah Muhammad provided what amounts to a wholly new gospel. In 1957 he wrote a history of Jesus over several weeks in his column "Mr. Muhammad Speaks" in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, once the most widely circulated African-American newspaper. He prefaced his narrative by asserting that Jesus was not the future prophet of Deuteronomy 18:18, nor the child and prince of peace of Isaiah 9:6, nor the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. This new gospel begins with

Mary, whom her father disguised in his clothes and a beard made out of goat hair to protect her from the insults of the white devil as she looked after the livestock. However, after he left to oversee the construction of a mosque, a severe dust storm arose. She called on Joseph, an old man whom she loved, to assist her with the animals. Three months later her father noticed Mary's weight gain, discovered that she had become pregnant by Joseph, and feared that he would have to kill her in accordance with Jewish law.[65]

Joseph, however, was approached by an old prophetess who told him not to deny the child for he "is the one prophesied in the Holy Qur-an as being the last prophet to the Jews." Joseph, it seems, was only willing to claim the child after he was told that his son would become a prophet. She then taught him how to protect the child from the Jews. Though Mary and Joseph had been engaged since childhood, they had not married. Joseph had a wife and six children, the latter of whom Elijah Muhammad thought were the brothers mentioned in Mark 3:31–32. Joseph, however, asked Mary's father permission to take care of her.[66] After the birth of the child, Mary fled on a camel to Egypt, for both Joseph and Mary were not white but "Aboriginal Egyptians," in order to protect herself (as an unwed mother) and Jesus from Jews, who were "his enemies." Among the "black people" of Egypt, he was safe. In his early teens, an old prophet befriended him and taught him, "you are the one who, the Holy Qur-an says, will be the last prophet to the Jews."[67]

After completing his schooling with the old prophet, Jesus returned to the land of the Jews; he made no attempt to teach the Arabs and blacks in Egypt and Africa, for he was never meant to be their prophet—a point Elijah Muhammad emphasized to demonstrate that no African American should follow this Jesus.[68] In Jerusalem, he taught the religion of Islam, but all but a few Jews rejected him. After twenty-two years, Jesus learned that this "infidel race" could not be reformed and they would continue "to do their devilment" for 2,000 more years. So, he decided to sacrifice his life for Islam. So one rainy Saturday morning as he taught under the awning of a store, the Jewish store owner called the authorities because Jesus was interfering with his sales. Two officers were sent to arrest him.

They came hastily because of the $1,500 reward if he were brought in alive, $2,500 if dead. He left with the officer who reached him first, who made him an offer. He was poor with a large family, and since Jesus was planning to give himself up to be killed, why not let him kill him painlessly? Jesus agreed and leaned against a deserted, boarded up storefront with his arms stretched out "like a cross." The officer struck Jesus through the heart. He died so quickly that he remained frozen in that position. He was embalmed and buried in that position too.

> No Christian is allowed to see the body, unless they pay a price of $6,000 and must get a certificate from the Pope of Rome. The tomb is guarded by Muslims. When Christians are allowed to see Jesus' body, they are stripped of their weapons, handcuffed behind their backs, and well-armed Muslim guards take them into the tomb. But, Muslims can go to see his body at any time without charge.[69]

Whether this narrative was merely a product of either Elijah Muhammad's or Fard Muhammad's imagination is unknown. It may well have been influenced by Q Nisāʾ 4:157, "'Verily we killed the Messiah Jesus son of Mary and messenger of God.' They did not kill him nor crucified him. But it was made to appear to them [as though he had been]." Yet Elijah Muhammad did not cite this uniquely apt qurʾānic verse. The intent behind some of the details, particularly Jesus dying in a cross-like posture, is obvious. It is etiological. Moreover, stating that Jesus remains buried in Jerusalem and still under Muslim guard made an equally clear point. The historical Jesus is not coming back; "again, know that Jesus was only a prophet and cannot hear you pray any more than Moses or any other dead prophet."[70] African Americans must not look for salvation from the historical Jesus, but from the contemporary Christ.

Elijah Muhammad's deviations from biblical accounts of Jesus are not surprising, given that he described the Bible as being "translated into English by the enemies of Jesus."[71] And he told African-American Christians, "Your Bible is poison, double-crossing itself." And yet he

stated that he was "not trying to condemn the history of Jesus as being false; but rather [I] am trying to put the meanings and signs, or miracles where they belong."[72] Later he added, "The Bible is very questionable, but it can be, and is now being understood, for God has revealed her hidden secrets to me."[73] This was a remarkably ingenious (if not a wholly novel) tactic, for it allowed Elijah Muhammad to employ the scripture best known by his audience, but make them utterly dependent on him for its correct interpretation. The Qur'ān was another matter, given that it contained "all truth." However, most of that "truth" he simply did not cite. He only focused on Q Mu'minūn 23:50 (repeatedly), which speaks of Jesus and his mother Mary as a sign—which he understood as being a sign for the Jews that their rule and independence had come to an end, but, more importantly and as discussed above, as being "a sign or proto-type of that which is to come."[74]

Having two Jesuses in the Bible and in the Qur'ān gave Elijah Muhammad the freedom to pick and choose which aspects of their accounts were to be interpreted to be distortions about the Jesus of two thousand years ago (who he argued was an irrelevant figure for African Americans, and certainly unworthy of worship) and which were to be interpreted as prophecies about the Jesus of the end of the world. When it came to the Qur'ān, however, Elijah Muhammad could simply ignore that which did not suit his needs—of which his followers were unlikely to be aware. In so doing, he was able to offer African-American Christians a new, contemporary black Jesus to worship in place of the ancient black prophet who should never have been worshipped.

Conclusion

Elijah Muhammad's *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* have a unified message and a coherent arc. The story of the white race begins with the white Adam, and after the failures of the black Moses and black Jesus to reform this devilish race, it ends with the black Christ. Adam, Moses, and Jesus are largely deprived of the context provided by the Bible or the Qur'ān, though Elijah Muhammad picks up some qur'ānic arguments, such as

claiming that Jews and Christians persecuted earlier prophets (just as he was persecuted) and that Islam, as the religion of submission to the will of God, is clearly earlier than the other two.

Whether the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* are read as what really happened or as prophecies, they are always shaped and constrained by the framework of Elijah Muhammad's racial mythology. His main points are, one, that "The white race, by nature, cannot be righteous. Islam was taught to them from Moses to Muhammad, but they were never able to live the life of a Muslim believer and they can't do it today"[75]; and two, that "Moses and Jesus were both examples of what was to come at the end of this world, not the end of Moses' and Jesus' world. Moses' and Jesus' lives were examples of what would take place among the so-called Negro in America."[76] Although at first glance this seems very unusual, this kind of appropriation or colonization of the legends of others for political or ideological functions is not. Yes, his mission was expressed in the biographies of his predecessors, but so was that of Muḥammad in the qurʾānic accounts of Noah, Abraham, and Moses. Likewise, later Muslim communities expressed their identities within *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*. Thus Elijah Muhammad, in terms of methodology, is not really "on the edge" of Islam.

Thus Elijah Muhammad's example is instructive about *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* in general, for it echoes various aspects of the traditional genre. Because Elijah Muhammad's theology is so racialized and so different from the earlier *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, it is obvious how that theology determined what figures and details he focused on and how he altered them. No doubt the same is true for earlier Muslims who produced and worked with this genre. But their stories entered into the acceptable range of understandings of the past; that is, they became part of the consensus. It may not always be as obvious that they too had a theological agenda and a mythic framework within which the stories the pre-Muḥammadan prophets of Islam were reconstructed. Elijah Muhammad's reformulations show just how easily *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* can be made to serve a larger agenda. Thus, *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* have likely always been key to the project of myth-making and social formation in Islam, whether by the Qurʾān or by later Muslims, including Elijah Muhammad.

Notes

1. Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America* (Newport News: United Brothers Communications Systems, 1992 [1965]), 68.

2. For a detailed history of Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, and for an analysis of his formulation of Islam, see Herbert Berg, *Elijah Muhammad and Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

3. For a full discussion of Elijah Muhammad's understanding of Muḥammad and his accomplishments, see Herbert Berg, "Elijah Muhammad's Redeployment of Muhammad: Racialist and Prophetic Interpretations of the Qur'ān," in Nicolet Boekhoff-van der Voort, Kees Versteegh, and Joas Wagemakers (eds.), *Transmission and Dynamics of the Textual Sources of Islam: Essays in Honour of Harald Motzki* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 321–345. It is clear that Elijah Muhammad either was unaware of or had no interest in the *sīrah*.

4. Elijah Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, November 24, 1956, Magazine Section, 2.

5. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, January 5, 1957, Magazine Section, 2.

6. Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 31–32.

7. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, November 8, 1958, 12.

8. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, 10. See also idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 50, July 18, 1959, 14.

9. In an odd etymology, Elijah Muhammad explains that "EU stand for hills and cavesides of that continent and ROPE means a place where that people were bound in." Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 267. Elsewhere, he argued that "this name means a place where people are roped in. This was done to punish the devils for causing trouble in the Holy Land [i.e., Mecca] 6000 years ago." Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, 14.

10. Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 266. It should be noted that Elijah Muhammad often used non-standard grammar and spelling. These have not been corrected in quotations.

11. Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 103–104 and 119–120. Why would Allah permit the existence of this evil race? Here Elijah Muhammad proffers Q Anfāl 7:14, in which Satan asks for, and is granted, a respite until the Day of Resurrection. Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 134.

12. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, January 5, 1957, Magazine Section, 2. See also idem, *The Supreme Wisdom: The Solution to the So-Called Negroes' Problem* (Newport News: The National Newport News and Commentator, 1957), 31.

13. "Moses and Jesus are the most outstanding prophets in the history of the Caucasian race for the past 4,000 years." Idem, "The Day of America's Downfall," *Muhammad Speaks* 4, January 29, 1965, 1.

14. Idem, "What is Islam?" *Muhammad Speaks* 4, May 14, 1965, 9.

15. Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 104; "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, August 18, 1956, Magazine Section, 2. "Since 1492, the people of the white race have been allowed to spread over the face of the earth." Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 267.

> Muhammad, born in the Seventh Century after the death of Jesus, the last sign of that last one coming with Allah (God) in the judgement or end of the devil's rule. Muhammad turned on the light (Islam) in the ancient house (Arab Nation) that had burned low since the time of Ibrahim (Abraham) and cleaned it up for the reception of a much brighter light of the Mahdi (Allah in Person) and His people, which will come from the West out of the house of the infidels.

Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, 10. See also Berg, "Elijah Muhammad's Redeployment of Muhammad," 321–345.

16. Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, 10.

17. Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 70.

18. The Bible is criticized, among other things, for charging God with adultery (with Jesus' mother Mary), Noah and Lot with drunkenness, and Lot with incest. Elijah Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom: Volume Two* (Hampton: U.B. & U.S. Communications Systems, n.d.), 60.

19. Elijah Muhammad continues: "It is not for Jews nor for Greeks. It speaks of none but the Black man of America and his falling away from Islam, our forefather's religion and following after strangers (devils) and their religions. It exhorts them to cease the worship of Idols (Christian God) which our forefathers knew not nor did they fear or regard such gods... The whole contents of the Bible that you have predict the return of us back to Islam and Asia, our home." Muhammad, "A Warning to the Black Man of America," *Final Call to Islam* 1, August 18, 1934, 2. This ambivalence towards the Bible is not unprecedented in Islam, in which the scripture is seen as hopelessly corrupt, but also as a source of some genuine truth and prophecies about the Prophet Muḥammad.

20. Idem, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 50–51; *Message to the Blackman*, 92.

21. Idem, *The Theology of Time*, transcribed by Abass Rassoull (Hampton: U.S. Communications Systems, 1992), 379.

22. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, 10.

23. Ibid. Thus, Elijah Muhammad usually begins his list of prophets with Noah, though his focus is on Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad, each of whom had significant interactions with the devil white race descended from Adam.

24. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, 10. See also his questions to preachers about Adam; "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, October 18, 1958, 14.

25. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, August 10, 1958, 14.

26. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, December 27, 1958, 14.

27. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, January 4, 1958, 10.

28. Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 133.

29. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, November 29, 1958, 12.

30. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, December 6, 1958, 14.

31. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 50, July 11,

1959, 14.

32. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, July 26, 1958, 14; "The Resurrection of our People," *Muhammad Speaks* 4, February 19, 1965, 1.

33. Q Āl ʿImrān 3:67.

34. Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, April 19, 1958, 14.

35. Idem, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 45.

36. *The Holy Qur-an*, trans, Maulvi Muhammad Ali (4th rev. ed.; Lahore: Ahmadiyya Anjuman Ishaat Islam, 1951). Elijah Muhammad cites the first edition of this translation of the Qurʾān almost exclusively; it is thought that this was the edition of the Qurʾān Fard Muhammad had given to him.

37. Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman*, 249.

38. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, August 3, 1957, 10.

39. Ibid. "Moreover, Muhammad's replacing and repairing the sign (the stone) was a sign of the work of the Mahdi, who would, in His day, raise and put into proper place that which the stone now serves as a sign of. Oh, that you would only understand the Scriptures. The Christians think the stone was Jesus. The Muslims think that it represents Muhammad 1,370 years ago... There certainly is a surprise in store for both worlds (Islam and Christianity) in the revealing of this last One." Ibid., 10. As a result, the importance of the black stone should now lessen: "also recognized [as a Muslim] is anyone bowing down and kissing the black stone, which I knew the utmost of the science of it. Not because I felt the black stone was giving me salvation, but because I know what it is there for. It will be removed one of these days soon. Because when a sign has served its purpose, that's all of it." Idem, "Future of American So-Called Negroes...," *Muhammad Speaks* 1, April, 1962, 16.

40. Idem, "A Warning to the Black Man of America," 1–2.

41. Idem, "Editorial," *Muhammad Speaks* 5, September 24, 1965, 1.

42. Idem, "Muslim Prayer Service," *Muhammad Speaks* 4, May 28, 1965, 8.

43. Idem, "Stand Up for True Freedom: We Need Not Have Fear of Future," *Muhammad Speaks* 3, January 31, 1964, 9. See also *The Supreme Wisdom*, 20; *Message to the Blackman*, 251. In hammering the point home, Muhammad states:

> The white man of America is like Pharaoh in Egypt. He, the modern Pharaoh, is trying to control the 22 million so-called American Negroes as Pharaoh did the Israelites in Egypt. The white man's control over the so-called Negro makes them helpless in trying to follow Allah and His servant into a land they call their own and where they can rule themselves as other nations are doing.

Idem, "Protection of the Faithful," *Muhammad Speaks* 3, April 2, 1965, 1.

44. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, December 29, 1956, Magazine Section, 2. See also *Message to the Blackman*, 208.

45. Idem, "Muhammad Speaks," *Muhammad Speaks* 2, January 15, 1963, 9. See also Muhammad, "Truth is the Best Guidance," *Muhammad Speaks* 2, April 15, 1963, 1 and 4.

46. Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 16.

47. Ibid., 28.

48. Ibid., 118.

49. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 49, December 27, 1958, 14.

50. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, January 12, 1957, Magazine Section, 2.

51. Idem, *Message to the Blackman*, 120–121. See also Hatim A. Sahib, "The Nation of Islam" (M.A. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1951), 152–153.

52. Jews are defined by Moses: "Believers in Musa (Moses) and the Torah are referred to as Jews or Hebrews. The Jews or Hebrews believe that Musa (Moses) was a Jew, who brought them the Torah." Muhammad, *The Supreme Wisdom*, 17.

53. "Originally the Torah (Old Testament) was given to Musa (Moses) 2000 B.C., who spoke ancient Egyptian Arabic." Muhammad, "Mr. Muham-

mad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, June 30 1956, 2; *The Supreme Wisdom*, 12. "The law of the Jews, which was given to them by Musa (Moses)." Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, October 19, 1957, 10. See also *Message to the Blackman*, 93–94.

54. It was Nimrod who was born on December 25, not Jesus, who had been born during the first or second week of September according to Elijah Muhammad. Idem, "Christmas!" *Muhammad Speaks* 10, December 25, 1970, 15.

55. Moses is occasionally invoked in other cases. For example, when he argues that resurrection does not mean a physical resurrection but the mental resurrection of the Black Nation, Elijah Muhammad writes, "Moses didn't teach a resurrection of the dead nor did Noah, who was a prophet before Moses." Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, July 7 1956, Magazine Section, 2.

56. For a fuller discussion of Elijah Muhammad's bifurcated Jesus(es), see Herbert Berg, "Elijah Muhammad's Christologies: The 'Historical' Jesus and the Contemporary Christ," in Dawn-Marie Gibson and Herbert Berg (eds.), *New Perspectives on the Nation of Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 174–189, from which some of the material in this section is adapted.

57. Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, October 12, 1957, 10.

58. The use of the title of Mahdi and of Arab names led Josef van Ess to hypothesize a connection between Fard Muhammad and the Druze. He felt that the doctrinal similarities between Fard Muhammad and the Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim were glaring: both were God on earth, both disappeared but promised to return, and both reinterpreted the afterlife. See Josef van Ess, "Drusen und Black Muslims," *Die Welt des Islam* 14 (1973): 203–213. This suggestion is intriguing because there are several other similarities between the Nation of Islam and the Druze, including the deification of an *imām*, rejection of shari'ah, and a symbolic interpretation of the Qur'ān. It seems more likely, however, that Elijah Muhammad's concept of the Mahdi came from Ahmadi literature. See Herbert Berg, *Elijah Muhammad* (Makers of the Muslim World; Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2013), 32–33. Determining exactly how "Mahdi" entered into

the vocabulary of the early Nation of Islam would shed light on the mysteries that still surround Fard Muhammad and the source of the teachings he transmitted to Elijah Muhammad.

59. Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, July 20, 1957, 10. Speaking of the Bible, he wrote, "the second half (the New Testament) was revealed to Isa (Jesus) 2000 year[s] ago (who spoke both Arabic and Hebrew)." Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, June 23, 1956, Magazine Section, 2.

60. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, September 21, 1957, 10.

61. See, for example, idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, January 19, 1957, Magazine Section, 2; "Says So-Called Negro is the Biblical Lost Sheep," *Mr. Muhammad Speaks* 1, Special Edition, 1961, 3. Elijah Muhammad did not identify himself with Jesus, rather he interpreted all qurʾānic verses containing "Messenger of Allah" as references to himself.

62. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, June 23, 1956, 2. A slightly edited version appears also in *The Supreme Wisdom*, 15.

63. Elijah Muhammad came to this lexical *tafsīr* from the translation of the English Qurʾān by Maulvi (Mawlana) Muhammad Ali. In his footnote to Q 3:45 (verse 44 in his edition), Ali states "The literal significance of *Masíḥ* is either *one who travels much* or *one wiped over with some such thing as oil....* Jesus Christ is said to have been so called because *he used to travel much...."* The Holy Qur-an, 154, n. 424.

64. Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, July 20, 1957, 10.

65 Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, August 10, 1957, 10.

66. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, August 17, 1957, 10.

67. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, August 24, 1957, 10. Elijah Muhammad also emphasized, however, "We must not forget that Jesus was not a member of that race. Jesus belonged to the black nation... If Jesus was a member of that race, he would have been a

devil. Again, Jesus would not have declared that the Jews were devils. (John 8:44)." Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, September 21, 1957, 10.

68. Elijah Muhammad was perplexed (and exasperated) that any African Americans were Christians:

> There are any number of scripture[s] in both the Bible and Holy Qur-an [saying] that Jesus was a prophet sent to the House of Israel alone. We have no scripture of him teaching anywhere else but among the Jews. He was not a universal prophet (not sent to the whole world). He made no attempt to teach Arabs nor the blacks of Egypt or Africa. According to the history of his disciples, none of them carried Jesus' name and teachings into the countries of the black nation.

> Paul, one of the greatest preachers and travelers of Jesus' followers made no attempt to teach the black nation; nor travel into their countries. (I just can't see how the so-called Negroes think that he is their Saviour, when he didn't save the Jews to whom he was sent, and he has not saved the so-called Negroes from the slavery of white Americans).

Muhammad, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, August 31, 1957, 10.

69. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, September 7, 1957, 10. Another version of the birth and death of Jesus is available in a 1992 publication: Elijah Muhammad, *The True History of Jesus: Preacher of Freedom, Justice & Equality: Islam* (Chicago: Coalition for the Remembrance of Elijah, 1992). Parts of it are verbatim reproductions of this series of columns, whereas other parts seem derived from earlier accounts. Still others are later paraphrases of the same material. The only unique materials here are about Jesus' sojourn in southern Europe, where he gave his famous Sermon on the Mount, but realized he was too early to preach the message of freedom, justice, and equality.

70. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, November 24, 1956, Magazine Section, 2. There may be an Ahmadi influence here; it seems likely that he was exposed to their literature and he used an Ahmadi translation of the Qurʾān.

71. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, July 27, 1957, 10.

72. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, October 12, 1957, 10.

73. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, November 9, 1957, 10.

74. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, August 3, 1957, 10; "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, October 12, 1957, 10. The signification is even more complex:

> Jesus and his mother were a sign of the so-called Negroes' (the actual lost and found members of a chosen nation) history, among the devils, in the last days of the devlis' [*sic*] time on earth. The birth of Jesus (out of wedlock) was a sign of the spiritual birth of the lost-found so-called Negroes in North America; who are out of their own people and country (out of the wedlock of unity) living and mixing their blood with their real enemies, the devils; without knowledge. Yusuf (Joseph) and Mary's childhood love of each other, at the age of six, and the promises to marry each other when old enough, was a sign of the love of Allah (God) for the lost-found, so-called Negroes, at the end of the devils' time (6,000 years). The visiting of Mary by Joseph, for three days under the cover of darkness, and in the absence of the father, and under the disguise of Mary's father's clothes and Joseph's wearing a goat's beard, was a sign of how Allah (God), who is referred to in the name "Mahdi," would come under disguise Himself, in the flesh and clothes of the devils, for three days (three years), to get to the lost-found so-called Negroes and start them pregnating with the truth through one of them, as a messenger, under a spiritual darkness.

Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 48, September 21, 1957, 10. Elijah Muhammad had no difficulty seeing signs hidden in the Qurʾān and Bible, nor with finding these signs to be polysemous.

75. Idem, "Mr. Muhammad Speaks," *Pittsburgh Courier* 47, December 1, 1956, Magazine Section, 2.

76. And just as Pharaoh plotted against Moses, so contemporary disbelievers plot against the last messenger. Idem, "Memo: From the Desk of Muhammad To: The Original Black People!," *Muhammad Speaks* 3, September 11, 1964, 5. After Malcolm X left the Nation of Islam, he was often described as the chief hypocrite. Minister Louis X (later Louis Farrakhan) compares Malcolm X to the rebel Korah and Judas, who betrayed Moses and Jesus respectively. Louis X, "Boston Minister Tells of Malcolm—Muhammad's Biggest Hypocrite," *Muhammad Speaks* 4, December 4, 1964, 11. Elijah Muhammad also invokes Korah. Muhammad, "Today is the Day in Which the God of Justice (Allah) Is Judging," *Muhammad Speaks* 5, April 22, 1966, 1–2.

رب اشرح لى صدرى ويسر لى امرى واحلل عقدة من لسانى يفقهوا قولى

| احكام عتابنگ بکا اجت قل | يا رب ره عشقده بى شيدا قل |
| اوصاف حبيبكده دلم كو بلم قل | نظر ره صنعكده كوزم مناله قل |

حضرت ملك مشغال مقتد و منعم معظم مكبر عظم سلطانه و نغرش نكبا

واجب الكريم وكلام لازم التعظيمنه ميدان محبت بلاك كردن و ياد يزد

منعطشلرن بوخطاب بسطط ايله سره افه از همشك وكنلك كيعنى مى ش راه

صداقته ثابت قدم دعوسن قليلى واى طريقى وفا ده لافى

استقامت ماور روب شرف اقتا زه طالب اولدر كرچه ار قام صحايف

بزه و ضحده و كيفيت رسوخ صلاح و فسا ده كو زبزه لايح ايا سپنزدحى

معلوم اولنى ايجون سيزى امتحان ايدوب زشتى الحرف برنپته ايله كه اول عذر

يا رغب عبادت ايجون يهم عقوبات اخروى دين يامظهر هبته تسليم و توكل الجون

On Michigan Manuscript Isl. Ms. 386:
Fuẓūlī's *Garden of the Felicitous*

Evyn Kropf

About Michigan Isl. Ms. 386

This issue of *Mizan* dedicated to the Islamic tales of the prophets features a number of images from a manuscript preserved in the University of Michigan Library under the shelfmark Isl. Ms. 386.

The compact volume of beige Persianate paper carries a late sixteenth-century manuscript witness of *Hadikatü's-süada* (*Garden of the Felicitous*), a *maqtal* or martyrology commemorating the suffering of the prophets, particularly the tragedy at Karbalāʾ, by the illustrious Turkish poet Fuẓūlī (d. 963/1556).[1]

The richly ornamented volume has been trimmed and resewn, and is presently bound in a two-piece cover of painted lacquerwork featuring a typical book cover composition of central mandorla and pendants in gold vegetal motifs. This cherished cover is likely not original to the present text block, but rather was produced for another manuscript, specially preserved and reused on this manuscript.

An illuminated headpiece sets off the opening of the text, and features a scalloped golden dome filled with floral-vegetal designs surmounting a cartouche carrying the title and author of the work in white *riqāʿ* script (see page 312).

The text is set in a spacious column of fifteen lines per page—occasionally divided into two columns to set off lines of verse—and written in a refined Ottoman *talik* (i.e. *nastaʿlīq*) that is characteristically serifless with a gentle effect of words descending to the baseline, elon-

gated horizontal strokes, and pointing in distinct dots. Headings and keywords are rubricated or chrysographed and a polychrome frame surrounds the written area.

As with numerous other copies of the work, the manuscript is generously illustrated with thirteen paintings depicting episodes from the text, featuring the prophets and Alid *imām*s who are the work's protagonists:

Abraham catapulted into the fire (p.17)

Abraham about to sacrifice his son (p.25)

Joseph's brothers and the wolf before Jacob (p.48)

Pursuers sawing the tree in which Zechariah is hiding (p.75)

Ḥamzah beats Abū Jahl with his bow (p.92)

The Prophet Muḥammad in battle, likely at Uḥud (p.95)

The Prophet Muḥammad emerging from the cave (p.100)

ʿAlī in battle (p.103)

Death of the Prophet Muḥammad (p.137)

Assassination of ʿAlī (p.244)

Muslim b. ʿAqīl comes out against his attackers at Ṭawʿah's house (p.357)

Duel of Qāsim b. Ḥasan and Azraq at Karbalāʾ (p.481)

Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn preaching in the mosque in exculpation of al-Ḥusayn (p.571)

As is typical, each prophet or *imām* is visually signified by a luminous halo, the flames of which often pierce the boundary of the written area and spill into the margins along with other elements of the composition. A later viewer with more reserved sensibilities toward the depiction of holy persons has added somewhat crude veils over the faces of the prophets.

A colophon at the close of the manuscript indicates that the transcription of the text was completed in Dhū'l-Qaʿdah 1006 AH (June-July 1598 CE). As reflected in the color palette, composition, and amalgamation of Persian and Turkish styles in its painted illustrations, the manuscript may represent yet another of the many illustrated copies of *Hadikatü's-süada* produced in Baghdad during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.[2]

A few former owners' marks and inventory marks shed further light on the manuscript's history. Two rubricated statements appearing at the opening and close of the text indicate that at some stage the manuscript was legally acquired by one Muḥammad Mahdī al-Kāshānī b. Ḥājjī Hidāyat Allāh Daylamqānī. An additional ownership statement on the opening folio was partially lost during the trimming of the text block and provides a terminus post quem of 1088 AH (1677-1678 CE) for this intervention, presumably contemporary with the rebinding. Further, the manuscript bears the inventory mark of Tammaro De Marinis (1878-1969), a Florentine bookseller who supposedly acquired this and several other manuscripts in Istanbul before offering them in a sale that eventually reached the University of Michigan Library in 1924.[3]

Notes

All digital content cited in this article was last accessed via the URLs provided in the notes below on July 28, 2021.

1. See the article of Gottfried Hagen in this volume of *Mizan*, "Salvation and Suffering in Ottoman Stories of the Prophets." On the *maqtal* genre, see Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Ashura in Twelver Shi'ism* (Hamburg: De Gruyter, 1978).

2. See Rachel Milstein, *Miniature Painting in Ottoman Baghdad* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1990).

3. For more on this acquisition, see Evyn Kropf, "Following the peregrinations of Isl. Ms. 350: Part 2, From Istanbul to Ann Arbor" (https://apps.lib.umich.edu/blogs/beyond-reading-room/following-peregrinations-isl-ms-350-part-2-istanbul-ann-arbor).

About the Authors

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Evyn Kropf is a librarian and curator at the University of Michigan Library where she teaches and engages in research on Islamic codicology and manuscript culture alongside her work developing and curating the Library's collections. She obtained her Bachelor's degree in Materials Science and Engineering from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville and her Master's degree in Information Science with a specialization in

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Note on Cover Image

Illustration of the Prophet Muḥammad in battle, probably the Battle of Uḥud. From University of Michigan manuscript Isl. Ms. 386, the *Hadikatü's-süada* (Garden of the Felicitous) of Fuẓūlī (d. 963/1556), p. 95. See the contribution of Evyn Kropf to this volume, "On Michigan Manuscript Isl. Ms. 386: Fuẓūlī's *Garden of the Felicitious*."

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Mizan is dedicated to fostering public scholarship and supporting and promoting research on Muslim societies across the world. We bring a fair, unbiased perspective to bear on current events and contemporary debates concerning all aspects of Islamic history, religion, and culture. We seek to encourage and contribute to informed public discourse by providing academic resources and accessible commentary on subjects of contemporary relevance and abiding significance.

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