THE QUR’ĀN’S COMMUNAL IDEOLOGY: RHETORIC AND REPRESENTATION IN SCRIPTURE AND EARLY HISTORIOGRAPHY

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by
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This study of the Qurʾān is grounded in both linguistic and literary approaches, adapted to account for the text’s particularities. The crucial underlying assumption of this thesis is that the Qurʾān constitutes a closed text—one with a distinct pre-classical context, a unique literary logic, and an evolving, albeit coherent, internal ideology. In this study, the synchronic investigation of Qurʾānic data, without recourse to its early Muslim mediations, attempts to elucidate how the Qurʾān’s polemical program is contingent on various late ancient Near Eastern discourses on communal election and soteriological legitimacy. A secondary part of this work addresses diachronic questions about the development of a Muslim communal consciousness as represented in early historiography. These early parenthetical literatures mediate the Qurʾān’s multivalent concept of the salvific community (ummah) into novel statements of communal boundary-making.

The textual focus of this thesis is a complex cluster of verses at the heart of the second sura, the Ummah Pericope: Q2:104–152. This pericope, which forms a distinct thematic and formal unit within the sura, is the Qurʾān’s most explicit expression of communalism, as expressed through the original category ummah. The pericope is comprised of a series of polemical engagements with interlocutors along three broad
and overlapping modalities of communal consciousness and boundary-making. It presents the *ummah* as a juridical entity: individuals or groups constitute an *ummah* when they adhere to the *din*—an ahistorical category with permeable boundaries; as a prophetological entity: individuals or groups constitute an *ummah* when they are direct or vicarious recipients of *nubuwwa*—a semi-historical category with somewhat permeable boundaries and as a genealogical entity: individuals or groups constitute an *ummah* when they share patrimony—a historical category with impermeable boundaries. This thesis’ study of the Ummah Pericope, and more broadly the second sura, shows that the Qur’ān’s polemical negotiations of various late ancient communal theologies cannot be reduced to any single supersessionary statement. Rather, the Qur’ān’s polemical program is made up of a heterogeneous set of codes that subvert, contest, co-opt and re-appropriate aspects of late ancient Jewish and Christian sectarian discourses into an emergent ideological agenda, anticipating the formation of a distinct salvific community—an *ummah*. 
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To my parents, Lubna Zahid and Zahid Mahmood
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CHAPTER 1

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

“We made you a community” (Q2:143)

Although the terms community and ideology appear frequently in studies of the Qurʾān and early Islam, their use remains inexact and their conceptual utility largely unexamined. Both terms denote complex sets of social and historical phenomenon that defy very precise definition. Thus, I introduce this thesis by describing my use of these terms, whose coupling: communal ideology, delineates its central object of inquiry. A clear and cogent reading of the complex Qurʾānic text necessitates reducing some of its formal intricacies. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, I limit most of my analysis of the Qurʾān’s communal ideology to the redactionally determined unit, Q BAQARAH 2. Narrowing the evidentiary domain to this sura allows for a more focused study of elements in Qurʾānic discourse and anticipates future study of the development of communal ideology in early Muslim thought. Large sections of the sura - the longest in the Qurʾān – feature as scriptural backdrops for traditional accounts of communal strife between the Meccan émigrés and the Medinan Jews. A fuller picture of the ideological underpinnings of this text offers points of reference against which we can gauge the mediatory and refractory effects of early Muslim exegesis and chart the development of early Muslim communal thought.

My study of Q BAQARAH 2 in this thesis pivots around the verse at its center, kaḍālika jaʿalnākum ummatun wasatun li-takūnū šuhada’ā ʿala l-nās wa-yakūna l-rasūlu ʿalaykum šahīda (v.143). This verse, arguably one of the Qurʾān’s most explicit
statements of communalism, motivates a set of principal questions about the text’s embedded communalism. What predications (kaḍālika) produce a community (ummah) of individual actors (jaʿalnākum)? How and why is this group set apart from humanity (al-nās)? How is prophecy (al-rasūl) implicated in the emergence of this community?

These basic questions carry us into the realm of ideology in that the verse itself offers no defense of this complex proposition. It presents its components as natural and coherent. My aim, to put it simply, is to reconstruct the ideological context in which this particular expression of communalism made sense. In order to do so, I denaturalize the notion of community that underpins Qur’ānic expressions such as al-laḍīna amanū, banī isrāʾīl, ummah, ahlu l-kitāb, qawm mūsā, and re-approach this notion as conceptually variable in the text and historically contingent on its discursive environment, the late ancient Near East.

The term ideology typically connotes a system that conceals power-relations or creates a false consciousness in the service of a particular (class) order. However, my use of this term leans on its usage by Durkheim,¹ Mannheim² and Van Dijk,³ for whom it refers to the conceptual frameworks that underpin social cognition and order. In these

works, ideology is the “frameworks—the language, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation—which different...social groups deploy in order to make sense of, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.”

Inasmuch as there is no such thing as an individual ideology, my analysis of Q BAQARAH 2 is not an attempt to excavate some immutable authorial intent from the text but rather it is to explore aspects of the subliminal discursive and epistemological structures that made the sura’s expressions of communalism legible to its earliest audiences—6th and 7th century Near Eastern monotheists.

In basic ontological terms, communalism is the ideology that creates or promotes cohesion among various social actors and, as such, the notion can be applied to a very broad range of societal impulses. Qur’anic communalism pertains foremost to the text’s conceptualization of a collective dimension to salvation and damnation. The text’s addressee-community and its mythic and contemporaneous communal interlocutors are salvific entities vying for space in the divine economy of faḍl (grace, election, preference).

Parts of the text exhibit a supra-communal tendency, where there is an attempt to coordinate various sectarian interests into a broad salvific domain, man aslama wajhahu li-ālāhi wa-huwa muḥsin fa-lahu ajruhu ʿinda rabbīhi wa-lā ḥawfʿin ʿalayhim wa-lāhu yahzinūn (v. 112) Other elements in the text indicate an intra-communal outlook where the text recognizes the existence of multiple soteriologically viable yet distinct communities, inna l-laṣīna amanā wa-l-laṣīna hādū wa-l-naṣārā wa-l-ṣābiʿin [...] lā ḥawfʿin ʿalayhim wa-lāhum yahzinūn (v.62). One of the aims of this thesis is to distinguish such

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situational, contextually bound *expressions* of communal ideology from the communal ideology itself, which is by its nature context free. The text’s communal ideology is the cognitive framework that allows for such ostensibly heterogeneous statements to appear congruous and coherent. Thus, by using the term ideology, I do not reference a rational system based on true or false propositions but rather the manner in which the text orders and represents its complex and dynamic social world: “The criterion is not truth but relevance. In other words...we may say we need a pragmatics of use of ideology rather than a semantics of truth.”

Furthermore, in this study of communalism, my use of the concept of ideology does not denote deliberate manipulation or the obscuring of reality but rather, as Van Dijk describes, “A bit like the axioms of formal systems, ideologies consist of those general and abstract beliefs, shared by a group, that control or organize the more specific knowledge and opinions of a group.” My work relies heavily on Van Dijk’s theory of ideology, which is a triangulation of a social group’s cognition (internal organization), society (politics, culture, history) and discourse (socially situated communication). Building from this theory, the Qur’an’s communal ideology can be represented simply as a series of questions that form the basis of its communalism:

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5 For more on coherence and consistency in ideological systems, see ibid., 90-93.
6 Ibid., 141.
7 Van Dijk, *Ideology*, 49.
8 Ibid., 118.
i. Membership: Who is in the community? Who is able to enter it?
ii. Activities: What do its members do? What is expected of them?
iii. Aims: Why do these members do what they do and believe what they believe?
iv. Norms: How does the community evaluate itself and others?
v. Position: Who are its opponents? Who is like its members and who is unlike them?

These questions represent the ideological coordinates that define the various social groups that the Qur’ānic text addresses and engages. The text’s communal orientation towards the group it calls the banū isrā’īl, or the naṣāra, or the mu ‘minūn, or others, can be represented as answers to these questions. These sets of answers then cumulatively give way to a fuller picture of the text’s communal ideology. The chapters of this thesis focus on these questions, with particular attention to the question of membership manifested through the permeability and impermeability of communal boundaries.

My analysis of Qur’ānic material in the next three chapters is grounded primarily in a literary critical approach adapted to account for the scripture’s formal and thematic particularities. The crucial underlying assumption is that the Qur’ān constitutes a text—one with a distinct historical context, a literary logic and an evolving, albeit coherent, internal ideology. My discussion of the Qur’ān’s communal proselytism and polemic relies on these synchronic considerations without recourse to the exegetical and historiographical corpus (post 11/632). In this manner, I hope to elucidate how Qur’ānic discourse is contingent on Late Antique sectarian discourses on communalism. Its divergences from these discourses, as expressed most transparently in its narrative-citations, a focal point of this study, are “functionally meaningful
transformations”⁹ rather than atrophy or misreadings. The core methodological flaw that has constrained and misdirected analysis of Biblical narrative in the Qurʾān is the presumption that the text of the Hebrew Bible constitutes its Vorlage. Scholarly interventions on Qurʾānic narrative thus generally neglect, or consider as secondary, Late Antique Jewish mediations of Biblical narratives, as preserved in liturgy, haggadiah and the targumim. This disregard for the particular contours of Late Antique Jewish interpretive thought creates a problematically ahistorical and oversimplified image of the Qurʾān’s polemical stance vis-à-vis the biblical narratives, even though the Qurʾān itself clearly alludes to a dynamic interpretive environment: qālati l-yahūd laysati l-naṣāra ‘ala šayʾin wa-qālati l-naṣāra laysati l-yahūdu ‘ala šayʾin wa-hum yatlūna l-kitāba (Q2:113).¹⁰

My goal in this thesis is to also break from the dependency/borrowing model that limits the study of elements in the Qurʾānic text to simply positing their external sources, with no further analysis. I will therefore not treat the Qurʾān’s narrative divergences and idiosyncrasies, as misreadings of some Biblical or extra-Biblical original, as is often the operative assumption, but rather as expressions of an emergent and distinct ideological agenda that is engaged with these other texts and that ought to be studied on its own terms.¹¹ I begin by explaining my method of reading the sura.

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¹⁰ For more on the interpretive context and quality of Qurʾānic language, see Wansbrough, Qurʾānic Studies, 99-102.
¹¹ For an overview of methodological approaches in the analysis of Biblical narrative material in the Qurʾān, see Walid Saleh, “In Search of a Comprehensible Qurʾān,”
A hermeneutically conscious reading of Q BAQARAH 2 cannot rely simply on a linear movement across this long and complex text or on a cumulative impression of its various components. Rather, as with other complex texts, “our initial speculations generate a frame of reference within which to interpret what comes next, but what comes next may retrospectively transform our original understanding, highlighting some features and backgrounding others.”

This thesis presents one such focused reading of Q BAQARAH 2, a comprehensive analysis of which would require several volumes. The next three chapters are case studies that focus on elements in the text’s program of community formation. Here, I lay out a broad framework for analysis of the sura’s expression of a proto-Islamic communal ideology. I do so by first describing my approach to Q BAQARAH 2 as an ideological text, i.e. one that has literary logic and intentionality. I then summarize and synthesize the conclusions of contemporary scholarship on the central themes and internal structure of the sura, proposing my own structural scheme for the purposes here. Lastly, I highlight a salient feature in the sura’s expression of communalism—the dyadic pairing of insiders and outsiders.

1.1 Reading Q BAQARA 2

Q BAQARAH 2 is a discursive artifact of a particular historical context—7th century southwest Arabia and a textual vestige of an ideological discourse radically different from that of its earliest mediators—8th century Iraq and Syria. An accurate

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12 Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 77.
reconstruction of the sura’s pre-classical ideology imposes the methodological constraint of approaching the text on its own terms, without recourse, however minor, to post-facto historiographical or exegetical mediations in the classical tradition. Such a self-contained reading of Q BAQARAH 2 requires interpretation, which in turn necessitates privileging certain aspects of the sura and de-emphasizing others. My interpretation of Q BAQARAH 2 privileges the literary syntax of the text, in other words, my reading is attuned to the sura’s formal structure and the arrangement of its language, from the smallest unit (particles) to the largest (pericopes).

My analysis in the next three chapters pays close attention to this literary syntax in order to resurrect a precursory reception of the text, one that predates and is distinct from its myriad subsequent readings and renderings. By precursory reception, I mean the effects and affects of the text in the mind of either its hypothetical (proto-Muslim) final redactor or its hypothetical first reader. This approach attempts to liberate the Qur’anic text’s earliest recipients / readers / listeners from a passive status to one of agents who are implicated in the text and its meaning. The object thus is not to extract some innate or immutable meaning from the sura itself, but rather to reconstruct a contextually-probable perception of its meaning by its pre-classical recipients / readers / listeners.

In order to reconstruct this precursory reception, I rely on literary critical methods: I pay close attention to the mechanisms of the sura’s language—the relationships, patterns, recurrences, dependencies and anomalies in the arrangement of its various terms and expressions. Unlike the Hebrew Bible, the literary character of the Qur’ān has been neither firmly established nor evaluated on its own terms. My argument for taking a literary critical approach to Q BAQARAH 2 is simple: the sura is a literary text, and
thus suitable for literary analysis, inasmuch as literariness is a deformation of ordinary language. The sura’s use of literary devices like rhythm, rhyme, and meter and its strategic deployment of imagery, narrative and exhortation cumulatively have an estranging effect on its recipients / readers / listeners. For example, the statement, *alif-lām-mīm ḍālika l-kitābu lā rayba fīhi* (vv.1-2) makes us acutely and immediately aware of language. In other words, Q BAQARAH 2’s language calls attention to itself and thus, in my estimation, can be treated as literary and thus ideological. This manner of speech forces its recipients into “a dramatic awareness of language, refreshes habitual responses and renders objects more perceptible.”13 It is this estrangement, the need to grapple with the sura’s language in a strenuous and conscious manner that makes the ideology contained within this language vivid and palpable.14

The estranging effect of Q BAQARAH 2’s language i.e. its literariness, is not however an essential property. It is estranging or deformative only when set against a normative linguistic background. Given how little we know about the actual spoken language of 6th and 7th century southwest Arabia, it is hard to establish whether or not Qur’ānic language is strange. We must entertain the possibility that the earliest readers of the sura actually uttered statements like *alif-lām-mīm ḍālika l-kitābu lā rayba fīhi* in ordinary speech. The Qur’ānic text itself however provides sufficient reason to believe that such was not the case. Aside from calling attention to its use of literary devices, such as the clause: *ḍaraba allāhu maṭal* (cf. Q14:24, Q16:75, Q29:29, Q66:10), the Qur’ān

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14 By estrangement I mean features that are implicit in the language. However, Qur’ānic discourse also explicitly disconfirms its recipients’ conventional assumptions by violating normative perceptions, e.g. *lā taqālū li-man yuqṭalū fī sabīlī allāhi amwātun bal aḥyā* (v. 154).
alludes to the *estranging* effect of its language upon its listeners: *inna āda illa sihr mubīn* (cf. Q27:13, Q34:43, Q37:15, Q43:30, Q46:7, Q54:2). Furthermore, the text refers to the polyvalence of its utterances (Q3:7) and the aesthetic quality of its expression (cf. Q5:83, Q19:58; Q17:109). The *estranging* effect of Qur’ānic language is not brought into question by the text’s claims that its language is clear (*mubīn*). Literary estrangement does not imply the obscuring of the signified (the meaning), but rather the fronting of the signifier (the linguistic form).¹⁵

My reconstructions of the *precursory reception* of Q BAQARAH 2 in the next three chapters are however far from purely phenomenological, that is to say, I do not bracket away the sura’s historical or social context, in an attempt to dislodge some absolute or immutable meaning. The interpretations of the sura that I propose in this thesis are anchored in a concern for historical plausibility. Thus, although I treat the Qur’ānic text on its own, my readings are contingent on an understanding of the text’s earliest discursive context: Late Antique Near Eastern monotheistic discourse. Inasmuch as all readings are *productive*, I attempt in this thesis to *reproduce* a reading of Q BAQARAH 2 that is attuned to communal language and imagery found among monotheists in and around 6th and 7th century Arabia.

The sura’s *reception* is not however an entirely external aspect. It is a constitutive element of the text and is encoded in its language. This is what Iser has called the

¹⁵ For brief discussion of Estrangement as a concept in literary theory, see Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 3-6, 86 and 121.
‘implied reader.’ The sura’s language intimates and anticipates its potential audience(s), as Eagleton notes, ‘‘Consumption’ in literary as in any other kind of production is part of the process of production itself.’ An utterance such as *wa-*id *faraqna bikumu l-baḥra fa-anjaynākum* (v. 50) gestures to a particular reader—one who grasps the semantic subtleties of an *id*-clause and the causal relationship between the parting of an unnamed sea and the salvation of an unnamed addressee. Our reconstruction of this proto-Islamic reader is thus not entirely conjectural. To the contrary, if we wish to systematically piece together an image of the Qurʾān’s encoded audience, we stand on firm ground even if we limit ourselves to the text itself. Even with just v.50 as evidence, we can posit that the sura’s implied audience has soteriological interests and is familiar with biblical imagery.

In addition to having an encoded *reader*, the text also has embedded subject positions. As a discursive artifact, its very arrangement and construction offers us a limited set of ‘positions’ from which we can approach its language. In other words, the text exercises a certain degree of determinacy on our reading of it. It is for this reason that, despite the span of fourteen centuries and its treatment in vastly different cultural spheres, the sura’s myriad *receptions* are not fractured into a thousand discordant interpretive trajectories. Divergent readings, even at sectarian apogees, do not breach the subject positions embedded in the text itself. Thus, even though the utterance, *wa-*id *a qīla lahum lā tufsidū fī l-arḍī qālā innā naḥnu muṣliḥūn alā innahum humu l-mufsīdūn*

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wa-lākin lā yaš‘ūrūn (vv. 11-12) does not offer any explanation of the communal terms mufsīdūn and musliḥūn, which thereby remain ‘open’ to commentary, the very structure of the language signals that they are antonyms, and that, from the speaker’s perspective, the former is charged negatively and the latter positively. Beyond the verse itself, the ʿida qīla lahum formula signals that the subsequent claim is false and/or will be challenged by the speaker’s unequivocal and emphatic truth-claim (cf. e.g. Q2:13, Q2:170, Q4:61, Q5:104, Q16:24, Q25:60). The reader knows that the collective-referent (hum) here is distinct from collective-referent (hum) only six verses prior, ʿūlāʾika ʿalā hudāwa min rabbihim wa-ūlāʾika humu l-mufliḥūn (v. 5). These positions are embedded in the language itself and are thus effectively immutable—they function internally much like historiographical exegesis (asbābu l-nuzūl) functions externally in fixing interpretive parameters for scriptural utterances.

To understand and interpret the sura thus means grasping how its language is oriented towards its audience, which in turn necessitates working through the text’s polyvalent, sometimes conflicting, subject positions. Sensitivity to these subject positions allows me to draw conclusions about the intended effect of the sura’s language, the underlying assumptions of its rhetoric, what kind of utterances it deems useful or appropriate and what kind of imagery it considers potent or poignant. A rhetorical element that offers rich insights in this regard, which is the focus of my analysis in the thesis, is the narrative-citation. Here, the sura’s tone, its rhetorical maneuvers, its stylistic tactics and its imagery are particularly conspicuous and conducive to more detailed treatment.¹⁸

Introduced formulaically by the particle *id*, or a morphology of the root *d.k.r.*, the short narrative-citation is a ubiquitous feature of Qur’ānic rhetoric. The academic study of these fragments is often limited to juxtapositions with perceived biblical or extra-biblical *vorlages*, and their analysis is often limited to the extent and type of atrophy the material has undergone. Although these citations may seem like *improviso* or accidental to their larger contexts, they are in fact clear vantage points from which we can gauge the text’s ideological maneuverings. The re-reading and re-inscription of the Hebrew Bible’s core repertoire of narratives in the service of emergent sectarian agendas is a widely attested phenomenon in late ancient Jewish and Christian writings. The narrative-citations of Q BAQARAH 2 signal the text’s participation in this contemporaneous sectarian discourse and are an expression of its exegetical agency.

The Qur’ān’s use of narrative however differs from contemporaneous sources in a significant way. Narrative fragments in the suras have a cumulative rather than episodic effect. The fragments appear as citations, buttressing the discursive *move* of the passage and are almost never the *move* in and of itself. The best way to understand the literary function of the fragments is to not extricate them from their context nor group them together with other versions of (ostensibly) the same story, but rather to evaluate each citation within its specific textual circumstance.

My analysis of narrative citations in Q BAQARAH 2 leans heavily on the theoretical works of Gérard Genette¹⁹ and William Labov.²⁰ Genette, whose structuralist approach has been elaborated recently by Mieke Bal,²¹ builds on Lévi-Strauss′ pioneering work on myth.²² He argues that myths are like language in that they are composed of individual mythemes that take on meaning only when they appear in relations and combinations with other units in specific ways. These combinations and relations in the Qurʾān are governed by a kind of grammar that underpins the production of meaning in the text. Genette′s division of narrative into discrete structural elements guides my analysis of Qurʾānic narratives. In the next three chapters, I pay close attention to the arrangement and re-arrangement of mythemes to understand the ideological move encapsulated in each narrative citation. For instance, following their refusal of divine sustenance, Moses commands Israel to descend from Sinai into Egypt, ihbiṭū misr’an (v. 61). This narrative citation is a recurrent mytheme: descent from a higher state into a baser state after defying God. This citation is not an atrophied inversion of an element from the Exodus narrative, but rather the occurrence of a mytheme that also appears elsewhere in the sura. Following their defiance of God’s


command, Adam and Eve forfeit their right to divine sustenance and are commanded to descend into the world from the garden, *ihbiṭā minhā jamīʿ* (v. 38). Moses’ command to Israel, the archetypal in-group, thus echoes God’s command to Adam and Eve, the archetypal insiders.

Whereas Genette’s theories provide an approach to the structural elements of Qur’ānic narrative, Labov’s work on narrative offers tools to look at their content and affect. Labov describes his model as having the advantage of being both formal, “it is based upon recurrent patterns characteristic of narrative from the clause level to the complete simple narrative,” as well as functional, “it identifies two functions of narrative, the referential and the evaluative.” By referential, he means the sequential ordering of information, to establish cause and effect, and by evaluative, he means the elements of a narrative that draw attention to its point or agenda. Although I do not explicitly reference Labov’s method in my analysis of narrative-citations in Q BAQARAH 2, his division of short narratives into formal and functional segments thoroughly shapes my reading and interpretation. For example, one of the principle formal elements in the Labovian model is the orientation—the statements or words that provide the audience with a background required to understand the narrative. The orientation often has an evaluative function in that it reveals the narrator’s attitude towards the narrative. Thus, returning to the same pair of narratives referenced above, the orientation of the story of Adam’s descent is the vocative clause *yā ayyuhā l-nās* (v. 21)

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25 Ibid.
whereas that for the story of Israel’s descent later in the sura is the vocative clause \( \text{yā banī isrāʾil} \) (v.47). These orientations are evaluative in that they inform us about the narrator’s agenda with these narratives. We would likely read these narratives differently if their orientations were other vocative clauses such as \( \text{yā ayyuhā l-ładīna āmanū} \) or \( \text{yā ayyuhā l-kāfirūn} \).

My use of Genette and Labov’s methods to analyze narratives rests on the assumption that Q BAQARAH 2’s narrative citations are legitimate objects of literary investigation, by which I mean “minutely discriminating attention to the artful use of language, to the shifting play of ideas, conventions, tone, sound, imagery, syntax, narrative viewpoint, compositional units, and much else.”\(^{26}\) This manner of investigation leads us to greater familiarity with the underlying ideological system that governs the sura’s production of meaning.

1.2 The Structure of BAQARAH 2

The internal structure and thematic arrangement of long suras, such as Q BAQARAH 2, poses a challenge to the field of Qur’ānic studies, which currently has a broad consensus that “the distinctness of the[ir] separate pieces… is more obvious than their unity.”\(^{27}\) Most scholars choose to retain the canonical division of the Qurʾān into Meccan (short) and Medinan (longer) parts. While the historicity of the traditional narratives accompanying the Qurʾān has been questioned and re-evaluated, the


division of its suras into two discrete formal and temporal categories is still considered useful and relevant in scholarly analysis. Even staunch proponents of the internal thematic cohesion and structure of suras, such as Angelika Neuwirth, consider the Medinan suras to be arbitrary compilations of disparate material, “langen Suren weist keine durchsichtigen Kompositionsschemata mehr auf; sie fungieren trotz konventioneller Einleitung als ’Sammel-körbe’ für isolierte Versgruppen zu sämtlichen klassischen Suren-Topoi.”

Despite this conventional perspective, several contemporary scholars have attempted to describe the structure of Q BAQARAH 2, the Qurʾān’s longest sura. Although they use vastly different methods in their analysis, these scholars arrive at remarkably similar conclusions about the internal make-up of the text. The earliest such attempt appears in the works of the mid-20th century thinker Amin A. Islahi. In his magnum opus in Urdu, Tādabbure Qurān, Islahi develops his mentor Farahi’s theory of nazm—logical arrangement, applying it to each Meccan and Medinan sura. He ascribes an umūd—thematic axis—to each chapter around which the sura’s main concepts are arranged. By paying particular attention to formal features of Q BAQARAH 2, such as the use of vocative clauses (jumlae ḥitāb) and narrative (tāzkare), Islahi divides the sura into a series of six thematic sections (matalib):  

§1 - Exordium (təmhiđe sūrah): vv. 1-39

§1.1 - Definitions of believers and non-believers

§1.2 – Adam’s vice-regency (ḥilafate adam) and Satan’s opposition (muḥalifate iblīs)

§2 – Address to the Jews (yəḥūdionse ḥitab): vv. 40-121

§2.1 - Proselytism (dawāte haqq)

§2.2 – Israelite breaking of the covenant (ēḥdšiknī) and moral decline (duniaparəstī)

§3 – Abrahamic Exempla (sərguzište ibrahīm): vv. 122-162

§3.1 - Abraham’s construction of the Kaʿba (tamīre kaba)

§3.2 – Founding of a distinct community (qayyāme umməte muslima)

§3.3 – Prophecy among Abraham’s progeny (buisāte rəsūl)

§4 – Legislation (ēhkam o qəvanīn): vv. 163-242

§5 – The Kaʿba as axis of Community (mərkāze milləte ibrahīmī): vv. 243-283

§5.1 Jewish freeing Qibla from the Philistines (fələştinionse azadie qiblæ yəḥūd)

§5.2 Muslim freeing Qibla from the Qurayš (qurēşionse azadie qiblæ musəlmanan)

§6 – Conclusion (ḥatmae sūrah): vv. 243-286

Islahi contends that the umād of Q BAQARAH 2 is belief in prophecy (īmān bi-l-risāla). The purpose of the sura’s various sections is to present this belief as inextricable from the belief in God (īmān bi-allāh) and as a fundamental aspect of true righteousness. According to Islahi, belief in Muhammad’s prophecy is the crux of proselytism and polemic in the sura: the text of Q BAQARAH 2 is itself the prophecy whereby the Abrahamic heritage is purged of innovation and corruption thereby facilitating the emergence of a renewed prophetic community, the Muslim ummah. Neal Robinson is
heavily influenced by Islahi’s work in his analysis of the Q BAQARAH 2.\textsuperscript{30} Like Islahi, Robinson determines the internal structure of the sura by paying close attention to the “dynamics of Qur’ānic discourse.”\textsuperscript{31} He divides the sura along shifts in the text’s implied speaker(s) and listener(s) and thereby produces a structure that is virtually identical to that of Islahi:

\begin{itemize}
  \item §1 – Prologue: vv. 1-39
  \item §2 – Criticism of the Children of Israel: 40-121
  \item §3 – The Abrahamic Legacy: vv. 122-152
  \item §4 – Legislation to the New Nation: vv. 153-242
  \item §5 – The struggle to liberate the Ka‘ba: vv. 243-283
  \item §6 – Epilogue: vv. 284-286.
\end{itemize}

A. H. Matthias Zahniser\textsuperscript{32} also maps the internal structure of the sura along the appearance of formulas of address since they "represent interruptions in the flow of the discourse and can help in discerning transitions between major units."\textsuperscript{33} Nearly each unit in Zahniser’s arrangement is an inclusio formed by a formula of address and a wrap-up unit which, “functions at the verse-group level the way a rhyme clause functions for many verses.”\textsuperscript{34} Unlike Islahi and Robinson, Zahniser describes his own

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{30}Neal Robinson, \textit{Discovering the Qur’ān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text} (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 196-224.
  \item \textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 224.
  \item \textsuperscript{33}Ibid., 31.
  \item \textsuperscript{34}Ibid., 32.
\end{itemize}
explanation of the sura’s structure as heuristic tool for future scholarship, since “the procedures I am using for analysis are recursive, that is, capable of yielding different valid results for different analysts.”35 About the longer suras, such as Q BAQARAH 2, he notes that they present “the analyst with a more expository and excursive discourse and feature a greater abundance of parenthetical passages and a looser and more ambiguous structure than their Meccan counterparts.”36 His arrangement of the sura is similar in many respects to those of Islahi and Robinson:

§1 – The Prologue: vv. 1-39
§2 – Islam for the People of the Book: vv. 40-152
   §2.1 – Children of Israel: vv. 40-121
   §2.2 – Unite: vv. 122-152
§3 – Transitional Hinge: vv. 153-162
§4 – Law and Liberation
   §4.1 - Communal Guidance: vv. 163-242
   §4.2 – Free Ka‘ba: vv. 243-283
§5 – The Epilogue: vv. 284-286

In Zahniser’s reading, the thematic link that binds the sequence of inclusios is the interplay between prophecy and the emergence of a distinct community. This insight has been developed by David E. Smith, who proposes that the theme of prophetic authority is the point of departure to which the sura returns in a cyclical fashion.37 In Smith’s estimation, these returns signal discrete sections in the sura, which is

36 Ibid., 26.
“structured by thematic repetition, specifically with regard to the revelatory author of the Qurʾān itself vis-à-vis previous scriptures...the claim of divine revelation that comes through Muhammad is the beginning of the thematic cycles.”

Using thematic rather than formal criteria, Smith’s arrangement diverges sharply from that of his predecessors. He proposes forty distinct sections in the sura, which can be condensed into four major thematic divisions:

§1 – Establishment of Authority of the Qurʾān and Muḥammad: vv. 2-39
§2 – Failure of the Children of Israel: vv. 40 – 118
§3 – Authority through the appropriation of the Abrahamic tradition: vv. 119-167
§4 – Basic Islamic Legislation: vv. 168 – 284

Smith’s strong arguments are weakened by his extensive reliance on the exegetical corpus, a trend that continues with Raymond K. Farrin who frequently cites the classic historiographical tradition to provide context for the various sections of Q BAQARAH 2. In order to determine these sections, he applies Mary Douglas’ theory of ring-composition and finds that the sura is composed of a series of sections in which

38 Ibid., 121.
40 Ibid., 19.
the beginning and end has a direct formal or thematic correspondence. Farrin places the units into nine concentric layers, which are arranged “to give special emphasis to the pivotal central point.”

This central element is the formation of a distinct community with a distinct qibla:

§1 – Introduction: vv. 1-20
§2 – Exhortation to People (unspecified): vv. 21-39
§3 – Address to Children of Israel: vv. 40-103
§4 – Polemic against Jews and Christians: vv. 104-141
§5 – Qibla-shift and community formation: vv. 142-152
§6 – Polemic against the Non-Believers: vv. 153-177
§7 – Legislation: vv. 178-253
§8 – Exhortation to the Believers: vv. 254-284
§9 – Conclusion: vv. 285-286

Nevin R. El-Tahry’s recent doctoral dissertation is the most extensive study of the internal structure of Q BAQARAH 2. El-Tahry relies heavily on literary theory and Biblical Studies to map out the text’s internal organization and thematic arrangement. She argues that the sura is “a whole compositional unit,” and she relies on rhetorical


Douglas, Thinking in Circles, 10.


Tahry, “Textual Integrity,” ii.
repetition to delineate the sura’s units. Like Farrin, she concludes that the basic structure of the text is chiastic. El-Tahry cites Islahi’s concept of *nazm* and *umūd* and suggests that the axial theme of the sura is prophetic guidance, which is signaled through the *leitwort*: *hudā*. Following the occurrence of this *leitwort*, she shows that the sura is comprised of three sections, each of which is made up of three elements: Test, Instruction and Narrative. These elements are arranged in a chiasmus stretching the entire length of the text, appearing in order of size from smallest to largest:

§1 – General Introduction: vv. 1-39
  §1.1 – Classification of humanity into three groups (Test)
  §1.2 – Direct address to humankind (Instruction)
  §1.3 – Story of Adam and Eve (Narrative)
§2 – The Children of Israel: vv. 40-123
  §2.1 – Present instructions for the Children of Israel (Instruction)
  §2.2 – Past interactions between them and the Deity (Narrative)
  §2.3 – Present interaction with the Muslim community (Test)
§3 – The Emerging Muslim Nation: vv. 124–286
  §3.1 - Abrahamic Origins (Narrative)
  §3.2 – Legislation for the New Nation (Instructions)
  §3.3 – Testing of Faith (Test)

The works of Amin Islahi (1980), Neal Robinson (1996), A. H. M. Zahniser (2000), David Smith (2001), Raymond Farrin (2010) and Nevin El-Tahry (2010) structure the text of Q BAQARAH 2 in remarkably similar ways. This body of scholarship on the sura suggests that the issue of thematic coherence and internal structure in the Qur’ān’s longer suras needs further study. The scholars all agree that community-formation and
prophetic knowledge are key themes in the text. The recurrence of these themes indicates that the sura is a discursive artifact of a stage in the community’s development in which allegiance to the prophetic movement became the decisive requirement for membership in the emergent in-group. In this regard, Q BAQARAH 2 is one of the Qur’ān’s clearest and most developed expressions of *gemeindebildungs*—community formation and education.

My proposed structure for Q BAQARAH 2 relies on two formal features: the appearance of vocative formulae, such as *yā ayyuhā l-ldīna āmanā*, which signal discursive breaks in the text, and the appearance of *leitworten*, which serve as conceptual tags that organize the sura’s various themes. This latter term I borrow from Martin Buber, who in his work on verbal repetition in the Pentateuch argues that the occurrence of key words, *leitworten*, is neither arbitrary nor accidental, “Die maßhafte Wiederholung, der inneren Rhythmik des Textes entsprechend, vielmehr ihr enströmend, ist wohl überhaupt das stärkste unter allen Mitteln, einen Sinncharakter kundzutun, ohne ihn vorzutragen.” Building on Buber’s arguments, Christopher Rowe, in his study of the *leitwort κύριος* in the Gospel of Luke, argues that the concept of *leitworten*, “suggests subtlety and variation in recurrence, a coherence that resists immediate comprehension but is discernible nonetheless.” Relying on these two formal elements as general guides, my structuring of Q BAQARAH 2 pays close attention to the thematic connections within the text. In this regard I find Daniel

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46 Christopher Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 199.
Madigan’s observation to be particularly enlightening: “New readings are generated not simply by analysis, that is, by breaking down the text. Rather they result from catalysis, that is, by establishing new links and relations among the elements of the text itself and with the context in which it is read.”47 I have organized the structural components into three larger units after the introduction of themes, in increasing order of size: (i) Polemic, where the soteriological potency of superseded salvific communities is challenged; (ii) Declaration, where the soteriological potency of the emergent salvific community is asserted and (iii) Enactment, where the juridical boundaries of the emergent salvific community are established:

§1 INTRODUCTION

   §1.1 – The Dyadic Pair: vv. 1-20

§2 POLEMIC

   §2.1 – Dyadic Pair in Origins of Man: vv. 21-39

   §2.2 – Dyadic Pair in Origin of Israel: vv. 40-103

§3 DECLARATION

   §3.1 – The Ummah Pericope: vv. 104-151

   §3.2 – Re-Introduction of the Dyadic Pair: vv. 152-177

§4 ENACTMENT

   §4.1 – Legislation: vv. 178-284

   §4.2 – Communal Prayer: vv. 285-286

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1.3 The Dyadic Pair

Q BAQARAH 2’s program of community formation rests on the construction of a communal boundary, described by Fredrick Barth as an *attitudinal* dichotomization between the insider and the outsider. The definition and redefinition of this soteriological perimeter produces a differential and oppositional dyadic pair: the Self (saved) and the Other (unsaved). The two components of this pair emerge in the text as “inseparable, socially constructed categories subject continuously to challenge and revision.” The text’s representation of this pair, in shifting language and contexts, lays out the addressees’ communal boundary. The fundamental point of differentiation between the insider and the outsider is access to prophetic knowledge—*ḥudā*. At the outset, the sura introduces its own discourse as *ḥudā* li-ʾl-*muttaqīn*. Members of the in-group, al-*muttaqūn*, are described as having distinct belief, *yuʾminūna bi-l-ḡaybi* (v. 3); *yuʾminūna bi-mā unzila ilayka wa-mā unzila min qablīka* (v. 4); *bi-l-ʾāḥirati hum yūqinūn* (v. 4), distinct ritual, *yuqīmūna l-ṣalātā* (v. 3) and distinct social practice, *mimmā razaqāhum yunfiqūn* (v. 3). The definition of the insider is terse in form and sparse in content, and, notably, makes no mention of monotheism. The definition concludes by folding back onto the incipit, *ulāʾika ʿalā ḥudā* min rabbihim, and stating clearly the soteriological consequences of communal membership, *ulāʾika humu l-mufliḥūn* (v.5). Thus, the opening verses of Q BAQARAH 2 present a tripartite schema of salvation: (i) immanent discourse as *ḥudā* (ii) communal-insider as recipient of *ḥudā* (iii) salvation as consequence of *ḥudā*. (cf. Q31:1-5)

The brief definition of the communal insider is followed by a fourteen-verse definition of the outsider, *al-laḏīna kafarū* (v. 6). This emphasis on the outsider is expected, for as Armstrong explains, "groups tend to define themselves not by reference to their own characteristics but by exclusion."\(^{50}\) Outsiders not only do not have access to *hudā*, but are in fact incapable of receiving it: ḥatama allāhu ʿalā qulūbihim (v. 7). This inability to receive prophetic knowledge precludes them from membership in the insider-community, sawāʾun ʿalayhim a-anḍartahum am lam tunḍirhum lā yuʾminun (v. 6), and this preclusion has a soteriological consequence: lahum ʿaḍābunʿ azimun (vv. 7 and 10). The statements and perceptions of these outsiders are systematically inverted in the Qurʾānic ripostes: yuhādiʿāna allāha: mā yuhādiʿāna illā anfusahum (v. 9); qālā a-nuʾminu kamā āmana l-sufahāʾu: alā innahum humu l-sufahāʾu (v. 13); wa-ṭa ṣila lahum lā tuṭsidā... qālā innama nāḥnu muṣliḥīn: alā innahum humu l-muṭsidūn (v. 13) etc.

The definition of the dyadic pair at the outset of Q BAQARAH 2 is repeated and incrementally elaborated throughout the sura. The binary opposition between the insider and outsider is embedded into the structure of the text and appears at each rhetorical level in the form of paired terms (e.g. *muṣliḥūn : muṭsidūn*), phrases (*al-laḏīna āmanū : al-laḏīna kafarū*), verses (e.g. v. 81 : v. 82) and entire passages (e.g. vv. 1-5 : vv. 6-20). The sura’s recurrent allusions to the dyadic pair define and redefine the communal boundary around the addressee-community. At times the pair appears in attitudinal or soteriological descriptions, amma l-laḏīna āmanū fa-yaʿlamūna annahu l-ḥaqq wa-ammā l-laḏīna kafarū fa-yaqālūna māda arāda allāhu bi-hāḍā (v.26); man kasaba sayyiʿatūn wa-aḥṭat bihi ḥāṭiʿatuhu fa-ulāʾika aṣḥābū l-nārī wa-l-laḏīna āmanū wa-ʿamīlū l-ṣāliḥīti ulāʾika aṣḥābū

In other cases, this binary opposition appears in imperatives to the Qurʾān’s prophetic addressee: *fa-ttaqū l-nāra... uʿiddat li-l-kāfirīn wa baṣṣirī l-laḏīna āmanū... lahum jannātu* (vv. 23-24). This binary opposition permeates the language and structure of the sura and any reference to one component of the pair anticipates a parallel allusion to the other, *aallāhu waliyu l-laḏīna āmanū yuḥrijuhum mina l-zulūmātī ilā l-nūr wa-l-laḏīna kafarā awliyā’uhum ʿl-tāḏūt yuḥrijīnahum mina l-nūr ilā l-zulūmātī* (v. 257). References to the dyadic pair become more elaborate as the sura progresses—terse depictions give way to more complex definitions of communal insiders and outsiders. These definitions appear in formulaic and easily recognizable forms. For instance, one set of definitions of the communal insider is tagged with a soteriological formula, *lā ḥawfūn ‘alayhim wa-lā hum yahzanūn* (vv. 38, 62, 112, 262, 274, 277):

v. 38: *man tabiʿa hudāya fa-lā ḥawfūn ‘alayhim wa-lā hum yahzanūn*

v. 112 *man aslama wajhahu li-llāhi wa-huwa muḥsinūn fa-lahu ajruhu ʿinda rabbihī wa-lā ḥawfūn ‘alayhim wa-lā hum yahzanūn*

v. 227 *al-laḏīna āmanū wa-ʿamīli l-ṣaḥīḥīti wa-aqāmu l-ṣalāta wa-āṭū l-zakāta fa-lahu ajruhu ʿinda rabbihī wa-lā ḥawfūn ‘alayhim wa-lā hum yahzanūn*

This progression from simpler to more complex definitions indicates a compositional logic that expresses an increasingly exclusionary tendency. This development is also evident in the text’s increasingly broad and generalized definitions of the communal outsider, which serve the dual function of identifying not only non-members but also members whose allegiance is suspect: *yaqūlū āmanna bi-l-llāhi wa-l-yawmī l-aḥirī wa-mā hum bi-muʿminīn* (v. 8 cf. vv. 2-5). Such verses, which later came to be historicized as references to the munāfiqūn at Medina, offer some clues about the social context of the sura. At this stage of the community’s development the real danger is not those who are self-evidently outsiders but rather those who falsely claim
membership in the in-group. The sura portrays such sedition as worse than open hostility. The effect of such statements is the tightening of communal boundaries in which the allegiance of ostensible insiders is not free from question. They indicate a social context of polemic rather than proselytism. We can posit that the addressee-community, having attained a degree of internal stability, is adopting an increasingly exclusive orientation by weeding out dissent or heterodoxy.

The existence of superseded salvific communities complicates the sura’s depiction of the dyadic pair. The communal boundary runs through these salvific communities, including some of their members in the salvific fold: inna l-laṣṭaḥāna ʾamanū wa-l-laṣṭaḥāna hādū wa-l-naṣārā wa-l-ṣābiʿin [...] lā ḥawf ʿalayhim wa-lāhum yahzânūn (v.62) and excluding others: qālū lan tamassanā l-nāru illa ayyāmān maʿdūdat, qul a-ttahaḍṭum ʿinda allāhi ʿahdān (v. 80). The soteriological liminality of these communities is expressed in part by the consistent use of qualifying clauses, kāna faṭqūn minhum yasmaʿin kalāma allāhi ṭumma yuḥarrifīnahu (v. 75); kullama ʿahadū ʿahdān nabaḍahu faṭqūn minhum (v. 100); mā yawaddu l-laṣṭaḥāna kafarū min ahli l-kitāb [...] an yunazzala ʿalaykum min ḥayrīn (vv. 105-106); inna faṭqūn minhum la-yaktamūna l-ḥaqq wa-hum yaʿlamūn (v. 146). These qualifications indicate a reluctance to make a blanket soteriological pronouncement on the pre-existing salvific communities, all the while disputing their claims to soteriological exclusivism: qālū lan yadhula l-jannata illa man kāna hūdān aw naṣāra tilka ammāniyyūhum (v. 111). Unlike those outsiders (al-laṣṭaḥāna kafarū) who are incapable of receiving hudā, these communal interlocutors are potential insiders. They are exhorted to return to the salvific fold: iyyāya fa-rhabūn (v. 40) and to become part of the insider community in dogma: fa-ttaqūn (v. 42), and in practice: aqīmū l-ṣalāh wa-ʿtū l-zakāh (v. 43).
Access to hudā is the constitutive criterion of the dyadic pairing in Q BAQARAH 2 and a fundamental component of the sura’s communal ideology. The term itself is a *leitwort*, “a particularly important key-word which indicates and delimits a relatively independent and distinct conceptual sphere [...] within the larger whole of vocabulary.” 51 As a *leitwort*, the term hudā is at the center of a conceptual domain of vocabulary comprising a set of key words that include lexemes produced by the roots ‘.l.m, n.b, ḍ, n.‘.m and f.ḍ.l. The procurement of prophetic knowledge, of hudā, guarantees a place in the divine economy of grace (ni‘mah and faḍl). In this regard, Israel’s access to hudā, its heritage of prophecy, bestows upon it a unique soteriological status, expressed in the statement yā banī isrā‘īla ʾdkurū ni‘matiya l-latī anʿamtu ʿalaykum (v. 40) and twice repeated in an expanded form, yā banī isrā‘īla ʾdkurū ni‘matiya l-latī anʿamtu ʿalaykum wa-inni faḍḍaltukum ʿalā ʾl-ʾālamīn (v. 47 and 123). This status rests on Israel’s unique and exclusive access to prophetic knowledge: kāna farīqūn minhum yasmaʿūn kalāma allāhi (v. 75); qālū nuʿmina bi-mā unzila ʿalaynā (v. 91). Such statements in the sura set the Israelites apart from the Qur‘ān’s general addresses who ostensibly have had no prior access to prophecy: tunḍira qawmūn mā unḍīra ābāʾuhum (Q36:2-6).

Jewish knowledge is a recurrent trope in Q BAQARAH 2 and in this regard the sura blurs the distinction between the mythic Israelites and its contemporary interlocutors, muṣaddiqūn li-mā maʿakum (v. 41); antum tatlūna l-kitāba (v. 44); la-qad ʿalimtum (v. 65); jaʿalnāhā naktūn li-mā bayna yadayhā wa-mā ḫalfahā (v. 66); lammā jaʿahum mā ʿaraftū (v. 89). Statements referring or addressed to the Jewish interlocutors conclude with formulas such as antum taʿlamūn (v. 42); hum yaʿlamūn (v. 75); antum tanzurūn (v v.

50, 55), *antum tašhadūn* (v. 74), which diverge from typical concluding formula that highlight the interlocutor’s ignorance such as *lā yašʿarūn* (v. 12) and *lā yaʿlamūn* (v. 13). Unlike the general outsiders (*al-laqtīna kafārū*) the text excludes some members of the Jewish community not on account of their inability to receive prophetic knowledge but rather their rejection or subversion of it: *iḏ aḥadna mtāqakum [...] *tumma tawallaytum min baʿda dālika* (v. 64); *iḏ qāla mūsā li-qawmihi [...] *tumma qasat qulābukum min baʿda dālika* (v. 74); *iḏ aḥadnā mithāqa baṇī ʿisrāʾīl [...] *tumma tawallaytum* (v. 83). The text highlights specific instances of *hudā* that are inverted by the Jewish interlocutors, *lā tasfikāna dimāʿakum : tumma [...] taqtulūna anfusakum* (v. 84-85); *lā tuḥrijūn anfusakum : wa-tuḥrijīnā fāriqūn minkum* (v. 84-85). This is coupled with frequent depictions of the Jews as killers of prophets,⁵² the ultimate sign of hostility and resistance to *hudā*, and thus cause for exclusion from the salvific fold: *dālika bi-annahum kānū yakfurūna bi-āyāti allāhi wa-yaqtulūna l-nabīyyīn bi-ġayri l-ḥaqqī dālika bi-mā ʿasaw wa-kānū yāʿtadūn* (v. 61); *a-fā kullamā jāʿakum rasūlūn [...] stakbartum, fāriqūn kadḫabtum wa-fāriqūn taqtulūn* (v. 87); *wa-lamma jāʿahum ma ʿarafa [...] kafārū bihi* (v. 88 cf. vv. 96-97).⁵³ Given the centrality of prophetic knowledge in *Q Baqarah 2*’s program of community formation, this charge of Jewish resistance and hostility to prophecy is best understood as an attack on this interlocutor’s integrity as a soteriologically viable community. In this context, the sura repeatedly alludes to key moments in the etiological narratives of Israel in which the community receives prophecy at Sinai: *aḥadnā mithāqaḵum wa-rafaʿnā faqwakumu l-tūṣa [...] dḵurū mā fihi laʿallakum tattaqān* (v. 63). These narrative-citations of Israel’s

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⁵² For discussion, see Gabriel Reynolds, “On the Qurʾan and the Theme of Jews as ‘Killers of the Prophets,’” *al-Bayān* 10 (2012), 9-34.
⁵³ Cf. vv. 87, 89, 90, 91, 97, 98, 101
communal origins strongly echo the narrative of human origin in the sura. In both etiologies, the advent of hudā determines the dyadic pair.

The narrative of human origin is couched within an inclusio that begins with a formula of address to humanity: yā ayyuhā l-nāsu ʿbudū rabbakum l-laḍī ḥalaqakum wa-l-laḍīna min qablikum (v. 21). The narrative comprises a series of dialogical exchanges between God and the angels, highlighting the uniqueness of Adam in creation. With Adam as the prototypical insider, the dyadic pair is introduced into the narrative with the presence of the prototypical outsider, ʿiblīs, whose eventual expulsion from the in-group appears in explicitly communal terms: kāna mina l-kāfirīn (v. 34). Adam’s disobedience also temporarily renders him an outsider: takūnā mina l-ẓālimīn (v. 35). This disobedience, at the behest of the outsider, becomes the reason for the fall: azallahumā l-šayṭānu ʿanḥā fa-ḥrajahumā mimmā kānā fīhi (v. 36), which leads to the perpetuation of the dyadic pair on earth, baʿḍukum li-baʿḍīn ʿadāwān (v. 36). This descent is then followed by repentance and the redemptive forgiveness of God (v. 37). The concluding verses of the narrative contain the didactic core of the narrative in a statement that establishes the dyadic pair as contingent on the reception of prophetic knowledge: yaʿtiyannakum minnī hudā ʿan man tabīʿa ḥudāya fa-lā ḥawfān ʿalayhim wa-l-lā hum yahzanūn wa-l-laḍīna kafarū wa-kaḍḏabū bi-āyatinā ulāʾika aṣḥābu l-nāri hum fīhā ḥālidūn (vv. 38-39).

Much like the narrative of human origin, the narrative-citations of Israel’s communal origin also begin with a formula of address to the Israelites reminding them of their unique heritage of grace: yā banī isrāʾīla ʿil ġkurū niʿmatiya l-latī anʿamtu ʿalaykum wa-innī faḍḍaltukum ʿalā l-ʿālamīn (v. 47). This formula leads into a sequence of
narratives (vv. 49-62; vv. 63-72; vv. 73-103) that are bracketed by id clauses referencing key moments in Israel’s communal genesis—the exodus from Egypt and the covenant at Sinai: id najjaynākum min ʿāli firʿāwn (v. 49); id faraqnā bikumu l-bahra fa-anjaynākum (v. 50); id waʿadnā Mūsā ʿarbāʿina laylatān (v. 51); id aḥaḍnā mīthāqakum (vv. 63, 64); id aḥaḍnā mīthāqa baṇi ʾisrāʿīla (v. 83). Each of the three narratives in this inclusio redeploy

themes from the narrative of human origin in an elaborated manner. These themes include the boundlessness of divine sustenance: kulā minhā rağdān ḥaytū šīʾtumā (v.35) : kulā minhā ḥaytū šīʾtum rağdān (v. 57); the forfeiting of this sustenance for something baser; the physical descent into a baser state: ihbitū baʿḏukum l-baʿḏin ʿuduwān wa-lakum fi l-arḍi mustaqarrān wa-matāreamble ilā ħiin (v. 36) : ihbitū miṣrān fa-in lakum mā saʾaltum wa-ḍuribat ʿalayhimu l-ḍillatu wa-l-maskanatu wa-bāʿa bi-ḍadān mina allāh (v.61); the advent of prophetic knowledge: aʿtiyanakum minnī hudān fa-man tabiʿa hudāya (v. 37) : ātaynā mūsā l-kitāba wa-l-furqān laʾallakum tahtadūn. (v. 53) and divine forgiveness after error: fa-takūnā min l-zālimān […] fa-tāba ʿalayhim (vv. 35-37) : antum zālimān tumma ʿafāwān ʿankum (v. 50-51) and fa-tāba ʿalayhi ᵃʾinnahu huwa l-tawwābu l-raḥīm (v. 37) : fa-tāba ʿalaykum innahu huwa l-tawwābu l-raḥīm (v.54).

The thematic resonance between the two etiological narratives can be summarized as follows: (i) the rejection of dependence on the divinity; (ii) the descent into a baser state as a moment of origin; (iii) forgiveness after error and (iv) the advent of hudā as criterion for the dyadic pair. Thus, the narrative of the communal origins of Israel, the archetypal in-group, appears as a retelling of the narrative of the origin of Adam, the archetypal insider. By way of these two etiological narratives, the sura’s construction of the dyadic pair is retrojected back into the mythic past, to the origins of man and community as salvific entities.
The origins narrative of humanity: \( yā \ ayyuhā \ l-nās \) (v. 21) and that for the mythic insider community: \( yā \ banī \ isrā'īl \) (v. 47), frame the origins narrative of the addressee-community: \( yā \ ayyuhā \ l-lağīna \ aманū \) (v. 104). This vocative clause signals the beginning of a forty-seven verse inclusio that I call the ummah pericope. The pericope pivots around a declaration of communal origin: \( kaḍālika \ ja ‘alnākum \ ummat\textsuperscript{un} \ wasat\textsuperscript{un} \) (v. 143) and concludes with the advent of \( ḥudā \) in the community: \( kamā \ arsalnā \ fikum \ rasūl\textsuperscript{un} \ minkum \) (v. 151). The ummah pericope is comprised of three sections that restate, in a condensed manner, the three main sections of the sura, which I mentioned in my structuring of the text.\(^{54}\) The first section—polemic—contests soteriological exclusivism; the second—declaration—proclaims the existence of a new salvific fold and the third—enactment—establishes a sectarian symbol that solidifies this proclamation.

The first section (vv. 104-121) of the ummah pericope begins with the vocative formula clause \( yā \ ayyuhā \ l-lağīna \ āmanū, \) (v. 104) which is followed by the dyadic pairing, \( wa-li-l-kāfirīn \ ‘adāb\textsuperscript{un} \ ‘alīm\textsuperscript{un}. \) It portrays encounters between the insiders and the outsiders. An aspect of this portrayal, organized around the leitwort \( wadda, \) highlights the inner psyche of the exclusionary outsiders: \( mā \ yawaddu \ l-lağīna \ kafarū \ min \ ahli \ l-kitāb \ wa-lā \ l-muṣrikūn \ an \ yunazzala ‘alaykum \ min ḥayr\textsuperscript{un} \ min \ rabbikum \) (v. 105). The advent of \( ḥudā \) among the insider community incurs the envy of former elect communities: \( wadda \ kaṭīr\textsuperscript{un} \ min \ ahli \ l-kitāb \ law \ yaruddānakum \ min \ ba’id ṣimanikum \ kuffār\textsuperscript{un} \ ḥasād\textsuperscript{un} \) min ‘inda \( anfusihim \) (v. 109). The sura responds that election is not limited and that this new dispensation supersedes or is concomitant with the old and is thereby equally or more eligible for privileged status: \( wa-allāhū \ yaḥtaṣṣu \ bi-raḥmatihi \ man \ yāṣā’u \ wa-allāhū \ ḍu-l-faḍl \) (v. 105). In this context, the following verse: \( mā \ nansalū \ min \ āyat\textsuperscript{un} \ aw \ nunsiḥā \ na’ti \ bī-

\(^{54}\) See p. 15 above.
Another aspect of this encounter between the insider and outsider, is the opponent’s open engagement with the addressee-community: ʿqālū lan yadhūla l-jannata illa man kānā ĥūdʾ aw naṣāra (v. 111) and lan tarḍā ʿanka l-yahūd wa-lā l-naṣāra ḥattā tattabiʿa millatahum (v. 120). The text rebuts the opponent’s soteriological exclusivism by way of ripostes as man-clauses, which mirror the concluding statement of the narrative of human origins, man tabiʿa hudāya fā-lā ĥawfʾ aw la-hum yaḥzanān (v. 38). In the ummah pericope, one of these typical ripostes cites correct dogma: man aslama wajhahu li-allāhī, and correct acts: wa-huwa muḥsinʾ, as the sole criteria for salvation. This section of the pericope polemicizes not only against the exclusionary statements directed at its addressee community, but also against the soteriological rivalry among its interlocutors: ʿqālati l-yahūd laysati l-naṣāra ʿalā šayʾin wa ʿqālati l-naṣāra laysati l-yahūd ʿalā šayʾin. (v. 113) and innamā hum fī šiqāq sa-yakfikahumu allāhu (v. 137). The text cites this rivalry as symptomatic of the degeneration of the previous prophetic communities, kaḍālika qāla l-laḏīna lā yaʾlamūna miṭla qaṭwlihim (v. 113), thereby attacking their salvific potency. The fundamental criterion for salvation, access to hudā, is stated in broad and universal terms, inna hudā allāhi huwa l-hudā (v. 120). The salvation of members of the previous prophetic communities is thus contingent on their correct adherence to the hudā they have received, al-laḏīna ataynāhumu l-kitāba yatānahu ḥaqqa tilāwatihi ulāʾika yuʾminūna bihi wa-man yakfur bihi ulāʾika humu l-ḥāsirūn (v. 121).

The second section (vv. 122-141) of the ummah pericope begins with another vocative clause: yā banī isrāʾīlaḏkurū niʿmatiya l-latī anʿamtu ʿalaykum wa-annī
This section comprises three narratives of Abraham’s election as the prototypical insider. Each of these narratives pivots on a caveat highlighting the impermanency of communal election and the permeability of salvific boundaries. The first narrative depicts Abraham not only as the Jewish, but an imām for all humanity: innī jāʾiluka li-l-nās ʾimānī (v. 124). Abraham’s question about the elect status of his progeny: qāla wa-min ḏurriyātī, leads into a caveat: lā yanišu ʿahdī l-ẓalīmīn (v. 124). The second narrative depicts the Abrahamic sanctuary in universal terms: jaʿalnā l-bayta maṭābatu li-l-nās wa-amanī (v.125). Here, again, Abraham does not pray for his progeny but rather for the land and its people: rabbī jʿal ḥāḏā baladan aman wa-ruzq ahlahu (v. 126). Abraham qualifies the beneficiaries of divine grace: man ʿāmana minhum bi-Allāhī wa-l-yawmī l-ḥāri and the text adds another dyadic caveat: wa-man kafara fa-umattiʾu qālin ʾumma aḏarruhu ilā ʿaḏābi l-nār (v. 126). The third narrative, about the construction of the sanctuary, makes a statement about the soteriological privilege of genealogy by way of Abraham’s prayer: rabbāna wa-jʿalnā muslimayni laka wa-min ḏurriyyatinā ummatān muslimān laka (v. 128). This prayer however ties membership in the in-group with the reception of prophetic knowledge, rabbāna wa-bʾat fihim rusūla ʾ (v.129) Abraham’s heritage is presented as the broad and universalistic criterion for being an insider, man yarqibu ʿan millati ʾibrāhīma illā man safiha nafsahu. It is only his example that is elect and soteriologically potent, la-qad išṭaflānu fi-l-duniya wa-innahu fi-l-ḥārati la-mina l-sālihīn (v. 130).

The third section (vv. 142-152) of the ummah pericope comprises the qibla-shifting verses, which begin with a prolepsis: sa-yaqūlu ʾl-sufahāʾu mina l-nās mā wallāhum ʿan qiblatihim l-latī kānā ʿalayhā. (v. 142). The rebuttals are all universalistic in nature: qul li-Allāhi l-maṣriqu wa-l-maġribu (v. 142 cf. v. 115). The establishment of this distinct
sectarian symbol, a new qibla, leads into the pivotal verse, kaḍālika jaʿalnākum ummat wasat li-takānū ṣuhadāʾa ʿalā l-nās wa-yakūna l-rasālu ʿalaykum šahīd (v. 143). This expression of separatism is not tied to any geography or genealogy, but rather to allegiance to prophetic knowledge itself: li-na ʿlama man yattabiʿu l-rasāla mimman yanqalibu ʿalā ʿaqabayhi wa-in kānat la-kabīrat illā ʿalā l-laḏīna hāda allāhu (v. 143). The establishment of a distinct qibla signals the emergence of a distinct community: wa-la-in atayta l-laḏīna ātu l-kitāba bi-kullī āyatī mā tābiʿa qiblataka wa-mā anta bi-tābiʿin qiblatahum mā ba ʿduhum bi-tābiʿin qiblata baʿdī (v. 144). The new sanctuary is a physical manifestation of the addressee community’s supersession and the advent of a new salvific paradigm: li-kūlitin wijhat huwa muwallihā fa-stabiqū l-ḥayrāti aynā-mā takānū yaʾti bikumu allāhu jamīʿ (v. 148). The pericope concludes by highlighting the soteriology potency of the emergent community, symbolized by its distinct sanctuary: li-utimma niʿmati ʿalaykum wa-laʿallakum tahtadān (v. 150). With the arrival of prophetic knowledge, the addressee-community is now suitable for divine election: kamā arsalnā fikum rasal minkum yatlu ʿalaykum ā yatīnā wa-yuzakkākum wa-yuʿallimukumu l-kitāba wa-l-ḥikmāta wa-yaʿallimukum mā lam takānū taʿlamūn (v. 151).

The concluding sections of Q BAQARAH 2, after the ummah pericope, reintroduce the dyadic pair, describing the insiders and the outsiders through a series of juxtaposed statements, ulāʾika ʿalayhim šalawāt min rabbihim wa-rahmat wa-ulāʾika humu l-muhtadān (v. 157) : ulāʾika yalʾanhumu allāhu wa-yalʾanhumu l-lāʾinūn (v. 159). These sections contain lengthy juridical passages, in the form of prescriptions marked by the formula kutiba ʿalaykum (vv. 178, 180, 183, 216) and as answers to questions introduced by the formula yasʿalūnaka ʿan (vv. 189, 215, 217, 219, 220). Mirroring the mytheme of dietary restriction in the etiological narratives, these sections also detail
dietary restrictions on the emergent community. The expounding of legislation is an expressive strategy that asserts the stability of the emergent communal boundaries. They contain the most elaborate definition of the communal insider, the longest man-clause in the sura: *man ʾāmana bi-ʾallāhi wa-l-yawmi l-ḥajirati wa-l-malāʾikati wa-l-kitābi wa-l-nabīyyīna [...] wa-aqāma l-ṣalāta wa-ʾāta l-zakāta wa-mūfīna bi-ʿahdihim iḍa ʿahdū wa-ṣābirīna ft l-baʿṣāʾi wa-l-ḍarrāʾi wa-ḥīna l-baʾsi* (v. 177). This definition ends with the phrase, *ulāʾika llaḏīna šadaqū wa-ulāʾika humu l-muttaqūn* (v. 177), which refers back to the declarative statement that introduces the text as *HUDū li-l-muttaqūn* (v. 2).

Expressions of communalism in Q BAQARA 2 suggest that a compositional logic underpins this complex text. The sura introduces the dyadic pair and incrementally expands and elaborates on this binary opposition, revisiting the key concept of *hudā*. Moreover, the text starts by describing the communal insider, the recipient of *hudā*, from an entirely external perspective, e.g. *ulāʾika ʿalā HUDū min rabbihim wa-ulāʾika humu l-muflīḥūn* (v. 5). Verses in the middle of sura shift from this 3rd person to the 2nd person, engaging directly with the communal insider, e.g. *utimma niʿmati ʿalaykum wa-laʿallakum taḥtaḏūn* (v. 150). At its conclusion, the sura shifts to the 1st person, thereby bringing its task of community-formation to fruition by embodying the communal insider: *rabbanā lā tuʿahdīnā in nasīnā aw ahṭānā rabbanā lā taḥmil ʿalaynā ʿiṣrūm kamā ḫamaltahu ʿalā l-ḥadīna min qablīnā rabbanā lā tuḥmilnā mā lā ṭaqata lanī bihi wa-ʿafu ʿannū wa-ḡfir lanī wa-ḥamnā anta mawlānā fa-nṣurnā ʿalā qawmi l-kāfirīn* (v. 286).
1.4 Overview

In this chapter, I have laid out a general framework for inquiry into Q BAQARAH 2’s expressions of communalism. I have done so by first explaining my reading of the sura as a text with a literary logic and intentionality. I have attempted to synthesize the conclusions of current scholarship on the central themes and the formal structure of the sura and propose my own scheme for organizing its various components, including the *ummah* pericope (Q2:104-151), a focal point in this thesis. Lastly, I have explored in greater detail a salient feature in the communal language of the text—the dyadic pairing of insiders (the saved) and outsiders (the damned).

In Chapter 2, I argue that the phrase *ṣibgata allāhi*, “the Dye of God,” (Q2:138) at the heart of the *ummah* pericope is a metaphoric reference to a ubiquitous boundary-crossing ritual in Late Antiquity—baptism. The sura’s reference to this rite of incorporation provides insights into the text’s construction of the boundary that divides humanity into discrete salvific categories. In this chapter, I look at recent textual discoveries that evidence an etymological link between the Qur’ānic term *ṣibgata* and contemporaneous Christian Aramaic terminology for baptism. I survey the widespread usage of *dye* metaphors in late ancient sectarian rhetoric on communal boundary-crossing. I explain how the sura reworks this metaphor into an apologetics of universalism that asserts the supersession of its addressee-community over previous salvific communities. Lastly, I look at how early exegetes recast the baptismal metaphor as a reference to *fitra* (primordial nature) or *ġusl* (ritual immersion) thereby distancing the Christian referent and re-presenting the term as an allusion to distinctly Islamic doctrine and practice.
Chapter 3 is a focused study of the Qur’ānic communal appellation, “the Children of Israel.” In this chapter I explore how, in its program of community formation, the text of Q BAQARAH 2 simultaneously contests and co-opts the authenticating communal lineage and legacy of its Jewish interlocutors whom it calls the Children of Israel. In this regard, I examine the ummah pericope’s parallel depiction of Ishmael and Israel as heirs of Abraham. I argue that by re-introducing Ishmael into the sacred genealogies of Genesis, the Qur’ān contests and diverges from key aspects of Late Antique Judaic doctrines of election, while, in its concurrent references to Israel’s death-bed bequest to his progeny, it appropriates other equally significant aspects of this same doctrinal framework to buttress its emergent communal ideology.

In Chapter 4, I look closely at the conceptual intersection between prophecy and community in the ummah pericope and in the Qur’ānic text more broadly. I present a diachronic case study of the Jonah narrative-cycle in the Qur’ān, tracing its development into its Islamic, i.e. early historiographical, rendering(s). I argue that the indeterminate communal purview of Jonah’s prophetic mission explains why his figure and narrative, to the exclusion of all other Biblical prophets, finds substantial mention in the Qur’ānic text. Jonah’s anguished excursion to the Ninevites—a community well-outside the spatial and genealogical boundaries of Israel—is a typological precursor to the communally indeterminate mission of the text’s prophetic addressee. I explore how the Qur’ān’s adaptation of this prophetological type is elaborated in classical historiographical reports about Muhammad’s mission to the Ṭaqaffs. These exegetical reworkings of the Jonah narrative mark stages of development in early Muslim (re-)conceptualizations of soteriological communalism.
I conclude with Chapter 6, a brief summary of the important points of each chapter and the thesis’ general conclusions about the Qur’ān’s communal ideology.

1.5 Notes on Translation and Transliteration

Translations from Arabic, Aramaic, Syriac, Hebrew, Persian and Urdu are mine, unless stated otherwise. Citations from German and French secondary sources are in their original languages.

i. Arabic:

\[
\text{ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هَٰذَا الْمَبْتَقِينَ}
\]

\[
\text{ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هَٰذَا الْمَبْتَقِينَ}
\]
ii. Hebrew and Aramaic

בראשית בראש אלוהים את השמים ואת הארץ

iii. Syriac and Christian-Aramaic

کتاب د-ئیدعه د-یوشع مسیح برهم د-دواود
iv. Urdu and Persian

All transliterations are phonetic:

اژ کتابچہ پیش لفظ گلستان سعدی شیرازی

Urdu: az kitabčae peš-lafze gulistane sadī šerazī

Persian: az ketabčeye pīš-ləfze golestane sadī šīrazī
CHAPTER 2

BAPTISMAL METAPHOR AS COMMUNAL RHETORIC

“The dyeing of God!” (Q2:138)

The dyadic pairing of the communal insider and the outsider in Q BAQARAH 2 pivots on a complex semiotics of boundary-making. The text’s communal language inscribes and describes a conceptual perimeter dividing the saved (muflīhūn) and the unsaved (ẓālimūn). The dimensions of this soteriological precinct are embedded in the sura’s programmatic use of vocative clauses: yā ayyuhā l-laḏīna āmanū; yā banī isrāʾīl, pronouns: nahnu; hum; antum and concluding formulae: ulāʿika humu l-muflīhūn; ulāʿika humu l-ḥāsirūn. At times this boundary is expressed in theological terms as the limits of God, whose breach signals expulsion from the salvific community, man yataʿadda ḥudūda allāhi fa-ʿulāʿika humu l-ẓālimūn (v. 229, also see v. 187 and v. 230), while in other cases the boundary is intimated rhetorically through declarative statements in the voice of the addressee-community, nahnu lahu muslimūn (v.137); nahnu lahu ʿābidūn (v.138); nahnu lahu muḥlisūn (v. 139). In Chapter 2, I proposed that it is this conceptual boundary, and not the content it encloses, that is central to understanding the Qurʾān’s communal ideology and its program of Gemeindebildungs. Whereas the specific features of the insider-community shift radically in the Qurʾānic text, the group identity of the addressee-community remains intact due to the stability of the dyadic pairing. Thus, the theological, cultural, linguistic and political characteristics taken on by the insider-community in the post-Qurʾānic era are entirely extrinsic to the existence and the persistence of a Muslim identity. In other words, this communal identity rests firmly on
the scripture’s construction of a soteriological boundary around the *ummaḥ*, rather than on any intrinsic ethnic, doctrinal or cultural characteristics of the *ummaḥ*’s members.55

Barth argues that the construction and maintenance of the communal boundary does not “depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but... entails social processes... of incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership.”56 In this chapter, I analyze the phrase “the dyeing of God” (Q2:138) at the heart of the *ummaḥ*-pericope, a metaphoric reference to a ubiquitous ritual process of communal incorporation in Late Antiquity—the rite of baptism. Q BAQARAH 2’s reference to this ritual enactment of boundary-crossing lends insight into the *ummaḥ*-pericope’s construction of the boundary that divides humankind into discrete salvific categories. I state my conclusions up front: recent textual discoveries evidence an etymological link between the Qurʾānic term *ṣībgata* and contemporaneous Christian-Aramaic terminology for baptism; the linguistic connection is supported by evidence of widespread usage of dyeing metaphors in late ancient sectarian rhetoric on boundary-crossing; the Qurʾān reworks the metaphor into an


apologetics of universalism, thereby asserting that its addressee-community supersedes previous salvific communities; early exegetes read the baptismal metaphor as a reference to fitraḥ (primordial nature) or ḡusl (ritual immersion), thereby distancing the Christian referent and re-presenting the term as an allusion to distinctly Islamic doctrine and practice.

My diachronic study of the scriptural term ṣibqata allāhi, from its late ancient to early Islamic readings, leans heavily on Izutsu’s semantic analysis of Qur’ānic vocabulary, which he refer to as Weltanschauungslehre—a structural study of the text’s world-view through a systematic analysis of cultural concepts crystallized in its linguistic forms. Izutsu’s central observation is that these forms do not exist in isolation and are not frozen but “are closely interdependent and derive their concrete meanings precisely from the entire system of relations... They constitute ultimately... an extremely complex and complicated network of conceptual associations.” He calls this network the semantic Gestalt. While Izutsu establishes the Qur’ānic text as the first Gestalt of scriptural vocabulary, I extend this referential sphere to include all discursive artifacts in the text’s temporal and spatial context: the heteroglossic sectarian milieu of the late ancient Near East.

58 Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 12.
2.1 The Term and the Metaphor

According to Toorawa’s classification of hapaxes in the Qurʾān, ṣibgah is a unique word—the root ș.b.ğ only once in this morphology, “The ṣibgah of God! Who surpasses God in ṣibgah?” (Q2:138) and once in another, “A tree sprouts from Mount Sinai, secreting oil and ṣibg to those who partake” (Q23:19).\(^59\) The images conjured by these two occurrences of the root attracted a great deal of exegetical attention in the early period and generated myriad interpretive renderings.\(^60\) The basic semantics of the root ș.b.ğ were universally understood to denote dyeing and the root appears to have been in active use in the early period in the form of multiple lexemes, “the dye (ṣibg); the dyer (ṣabbāğ) and the agent (ṣibgah) whereby clothes are dyed (yuṣbiğ) and colored.”\(^61\) Terms produced from the root appear in recorded idiom and jāhilī poetry as well as in various aḥādīt and aḥbār:\(^62\) “Ali found Fāṭima wearing dyed clothes (tiyāb’uṣ șābīg’un) during Hajj,”\(^63\) “Ibn ʿUmar used to dye (kāna yuṣbiğu) his robes with saffron”\(^64\) and “I saw the messenger of God dye (ṣabaqa) with yellow coloring so I too would love to dye (aṣbiğu)


\(^61\) Muḥammad Ibn Manẓūr, Lisānū l-ʻArab (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ, 1988), 515.

\(^62\) For a complete list of aḥādīt and aḥbār on dyeing, see A. J. Wensinck, Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 243-244.

\(^63\) Ibn Manẓūr, Lisānū l-ʻArab, 515.

\(^64\) Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Nisāʾī, Sunanu l-Nisāʾī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ, 1980), 30.
with it.”65 It also appears in juridical writings, “There is no fault upon a man who assumes the ritual state (ihrām) with dyed cloth (ṭawb al mašbūḏ),”66 as well as in popular adages, “The greatest of liars are the dyers (ṣābiğūn) and the goldsmiths.”67

Major modern translations of the Qur’ān68—rudimentary critical engagements with the text’s vocabulary—render ṣibğata allāhi as the dyeing or dye of God. An exception in the Persian tradition is Foladænd, who diverges from the proverbial translation “rænge ḥoda” (the color of God) and renders the phrase “negargariye ḥoda” (the design of God). Among Turkish translations, Yüksel breaks from the literal “Allah’n boyasi” (God’s dyeing) and translates the verse as “Allah’in sistemi” (God’s system), while in the German tradition, Rassoul renders it, “Weisung Allahs” (God’s Instruction). Among French translators, Hamidullah suggests “religion d’Allah” while Blanchère attempts to coordinate his renderings of ṣibğata allāhi in Q2:138 and ṣibğ in Q23:30, producing: “L’onction de Dieu! Mais qui, mieux que Dieu, peut donner l’onction?”69 These exceptions attempt to explain the metaphor and are heavily influenced by classical exegetical discussions of its referent. The classical lexicographical

68 These include all major modern Azeri, Bangla, Dutch, French, German, Hausa, Hindi, Persian, Pashto, Russian, Sindhi, Spanish, Swahili, Turkish, Urdu and Uzbek translations.
69 Blachère explains that this onction is the “allure procurée par Dieu à l’homme converti au Monothéisme d’Abraham” Régis Blachère, Introduction au Coran (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1977), 767.
tradition has several theories about the metaphoric meaning of this root in scripture. Ibn Manzūr’s (d. 1350) lexicographical entry condenses these theories into four main connotative possibilities. He qualifies the first two semantic postulates as weak (daʿīf) and the latter two as sound (jayyad). The latter two form the basis of most exegetical expansions on the verse:

**THE LISĀNU L-ʿARAB OF IBN MANZŪR**

“(i) The Christians called their immersion of their children in water ʿṣibg... so ʾṣibg is this immersion... the dimmī immerses his offspring into Judaism or into Christianity: a ʾṣibgah in a loathsome manner.

(ii) It is God’s command to Muhammad. It is circumcision. Abraham circumcised himself and this is ʾṣibgah.

(iii) Its plain meaning is the coloring of clothes, but it is perhaps not so; instead the referent is vinegar or oil or some kind of seasoning... in other words, the improvement of something’s condition.

(iv) The original meaning of ṣābgh in Bedouin speech is transformation, so the ʾṣibg of cloth is the transformation of its color and the change in its condition to blackness, redness or yellowness.”

The first two postulates, baptism and circumcision, are conceptual associations carried over from an earlier *Gestalt*. The semantic link between the metaphor and these referents is unclear to the early lexicographers, some of whom posit that the baptismal
water was colored or that the dyeing refers to the color of the blood of circumcision. The association of śibḡ with baptism and circumcision, which appears in numerous classical exegetical texts, is refuted categorically by several modern Arabists. Bell, like Blanchère, attempts to coordinate the two scriptural occurrences of the root and translates the term as “savour,” stating that it could not possibly refer to any sacrament or ritual.70 Watt elaborates further, saying that while the term “could possibly mean that God gives a man a certain color when he serves him, it is better to regard its interpretation as uncertain… it is doubtful if there is any reference to Christian baptism.”71 Bell and Watt each supplement their respective arguments against the term’s association with baptism by pointing out that the classical Arabic term for baptism is maʿmūdiyyah, a calque on the Syriac term maʿmūdiṭa. In his treatment of the scriptural phrase, James Bellamy goes a step further and argues that śibḡata allāhi is a lexical corruption, which he suggests should be jettisoned to “produce a text as near as possible to the original.”72 Like Bell and Watt before him, he explicitly rejects the exegetical tradition’s suggestion that śibḡata allāhi is a metaphoric reference to Christian baptism:

72 James Bellamy, “Textual Criticism of the Koran,” Journal of the American Oriental Society 121, no. 1 (2001), 2. Bellamy’s criteria for lexical corruptions is that they should lack good sense and/or must be transmitted in more than one form and/or must be designated by traditional lexicographers as dialectical or foreign.
I believe the exegetes were far off track. It is to me inconceivable that one should find in the Koran the name of a Christian sacrament used even metaphorically for Islam or *Imān*. The whole idea runs counter to the general attitude toward Christianity and Judaism in the Koran, and is so disturbing that the word practically announces itself as a mistake!\cite{Bellamy:1993b}

Bellamy theorizes various paleographic distortions that might have produced the erroneous term. He proposes that it be emended to make greater contextual sense and to bring it into “harmony with the style of the Koran.”\cite{Bellamy:1993b} Citing the inexplicable accusative declination of the term *ṣibṭa*, he contends that the term does not belong to the widespread secondary order of errors, wherein multiple readings of the same consonantal skeleton were preserved, but rather to an earlier layer of errors that was present “in the tradition before the new recension was undertaken.”\cite{Bellamy:1993a} He then re-dots the consonantal skeleton صنعه to produce the emended terms *ṣanīʿah* (صنعية), which he translates as *favor*\cite{Bellamy:1993a} and *kifāyah* (كفاية), sufficiency, which, he explains, was distorted when the scribe mistook the kufic *kāf*, *fā* and a nub indicating the long *alif*, as a *ṣad*. In Bellamy’s view, “both ‘favor’ and ‘sufficiency’ are stylistically better in this position than any of the other meanings proposed” by the exegetical tradition, foremost among

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Bellamy, “Textual Criticism,” 2.}
\footnote{Ibid., 2.}
\footnote{Bellamy, “Some Proposed Emendations,” 570. He writes, “This emendation can be effected without altering the *rasm* at all if we assume that the original *sād* did not have the little nub on the left—this is often omitted in MSS — but that the next copyist took the *nūn* to be the nub.”}
\end{footnotes}
them baptism. His argument rests on the contention that no such lexeme for baptism existed in the Qur’ānic milieu and that such a metaphor makes little semantic sense in the broader context of the passage or the world-view of the text.

Unlike Bell, Watt and Bellamy, Arthur Jeffery lends more credence to the classical lexicographic and exegetical tradition and posits that the root s.b.ğ may have been an early import from the Aramaic root s.b.ʿ, “to repeatedly dip or to dye.” Jeffery’s argument is strongly corroborated by a recently published collection of Aramaic gospel fragments in the Christian-Palestinian dialect. The editor of the volumes notes that these fragments add “several interesting lexicographical and linguistic features to our knowledge of this Western Aramaic dialect. Significantly, several unusual… lexemes which were considered to be either doubtful or corrupt are now included in this edition.” The cognate root s.b.ʿ produces all the lexemes referencing the rite of baptism in the fourteen codices that comprise the two volumes. These southern Palestinian texts, which date from the 5th to the 8th century, are not only evidence that the root s.b.ʿ was a widely used referent for baptism in the temporal and spatial context of the Qur’ānic text, but also prove that the conventional term maʿmūdīta was not used universally among Christian communities in the area:

77 Ibid., 570.
78 Christa Müller-Kessler and Michael Sokoloff, A Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic IIA (Groningen: STYX Publications, 1998). All these are from the Codex Climaci Rescriptus 1, which is an original Bible manuscript and differs considerably from both the Greek Textus Receptus and the Peshitta texts.
John was baptizing (mašbeʾ) in the wilderness, preaching the baptism (maštāʾi) of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. The entire land of Judea came down to him and all the sons of Jerusalem, and they were all baptized (maštabʾin) by him in the Jordan... ‘I have baptized (ašbʾet) you in water but he will baptize (yašbeʾ) you in the Holy Spirit.’ At that time, the lord Jesus came from Nazreth of Galilee and was baptized (ašbeʾ) in the Jordan river by John.

Similarly, fragments from the Christian Aramaic epistles of Paul from this period also do not contain any lexemes from the conventional root ʿm.d but rather only ones produced from s.b. e.g. “All of you are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. All of you who were baptized in Christ (bə-mšīḥā ʾistabeʾton) are clothed in Christ” (Gal. 3:26 -27). Further evidence for the ubiquity of this root is found in the surviving fragments from the Palestinian Aramaic translation of the Catechesis of Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem (d. 387), which contain eight occurrences of the root s.b. in relation to baptism, and none of ʿm.d. The widespread occurrence of this root in these documents suggests that the cognate Arabic root š.b.ḡ was available as a referent for baptism in the heteroglossic communities of the Arabian Peninsula at the time of the Qurʾān.

On its own, this etymological link is insufficient proof that the *dyeing of God* metaphor in the Qur’ān is indeed a reference to the ritual of baptism. In the words of Izutsu, even if we can establish a possible etymology of the root itself, this “can only furnish us with a clue as to the basic meaning of a word.”\(^{83}\) Basic meaning, the object of most semantic analysis of Qur’ānic vocabulary, is, in Izutsu’s mind, a purely theoretical postulate with no real utility since “words are all complex social and cultural phenomena, and in the world of reality even a single word cannot be found, whose concrete meaning is covered completely by what I call basic meaning.”\(^{84}\) He proposes that semantic analysis of Qur’ānic terminology and phraseology should seek to uncover *relational* meanings, by which he means not an intrinsic or immutable meaning of linguistic forms, but rather the meaning produced by its place within a wider network of conceptual associations. Thus, having established an etymological link between *ṣibgata allāhi* and a contemporaneous Palestinian-Aramaic term for baptism *ṣeb‘ată*, I now turn to establish the relational meaning of the *dyeing* metaphor in language about baptism in the Qur’ān’s semantic Gestalt.

Sidney Griffith makes a strong case for the existence of “a vibrant, oral Christian culture in Arabic reflecting in translation the religious diction of the Greek” at the time of the Qur’ān in the late 6th and early 7th centuries. These communities, Griffith explains, had access to the Patristic heritage through Greek and “traces of this diction seem to have survived even within the Qur’ān itself.”\(^{85}\) It is important to note that, in the

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\(^{83}\) Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 24.

\(^{84}\) Ibid., 23-24.

\(^{85}\) Sidney Griffith, “Christians and Christianity,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, edited by Jane McAuliffe, Brill Online, 2013,
classical era, the Greek verbs for immersion, *baptizō* and *baptō*, were frequently used to denote dyeing, as Plato explains in the Republic (4.429), “dyers [bapheis], when they want to color [bapsai] wool... they immerse it [baptousi] and that which becomes colored [baphen] through this manner of immersion [baphē], washing cannot take away.” In Koiné Greek, Ferguson explains, this “secondary meaning took over to such an extent that βάπτω [baptō] could be used for ‘dye’ whatever the means employed i.e. immersion or otherwise.”

Thus, the Septuagint describes the dyed turbans of the Chaldean men (ṣrûkê ṭbûlîm) in Ezek. 23:15 as *tiarai baptai* while Josephus refers to Herod’s dyed hair as *baptemenō* (*The Jewish War*, 1.490).

The conceptual association between the verb *baptizō* and dyeing was carried over into its technical usage by the early Christians to denote the conversion ritual of immersion—the sacrament of baptism. While most pre-Vulgate Latin authors render the Greek verbs as *immergo*, *mergo* or *baptizo*, major Patristic writers find the term *tingo* (to dye, to color, to imbue) to be a more accurate rendering of the original Greek. Among them is the prolific Tertullian (d. 220 C.E), whose treatise “De Baptisma” is the earliest detailed description of the sacrament.

Here Tertullian uses the term *tingo* interchangeably with the Greek calque *bapto* (Cap.11): “Christ says, ‘I have to be...

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baptized \textit{(tingui)} with a baptism \textit{(baptismo)}, but he had already been baptized \textit{(tinctus fuisset)}.” In several passages, he prefers the term \textit{tingo} exclusively, “The Lord came and did not baptize \textit{(tinxit)}... he baptized not \textit{(non tinguerebat)} but rather his disciples did, as if John had announced that he would baptize \textit{(tincturum)} by his own hands. He will baptize \textit{(tinguet)} you, that is, ye shall be baptized \textit{(tinguemini)} by him.” This alternative rendering continues to appear even after the promulgation of the Vulgate, which uses only \textit{immergo} and \textit{bapto}. In Europe, Ambrose (d. 397), a chief proponent of repeated baptism, describes the ritual at length, using the dye metaphor (De Fide, 1.867), “It is not by one infusion of a fleece that a precious dye shines forth, but first the fleece is tinged with an inferior color, afterwards by repeated dyeing the natural appearance is effaced and is changed by a different color, and thus a dye as of a fuller washing.” In North Africa, Augustine (d. 430) and Quodvultdeus (d. 450) frequently use words for dyeing in references to the sacrament: “The martyrs are baptized \textit{(tinguntur)} a first time in the blood of Christ and are baptized again \textit{(retincti)} in their own.” (Book of Promises 2.2.3)

The conceptual association between the sacrament of baptism and the action of dyeing travels from Greek into the Christian languages of the Near East. For instance, the Coptic Gospel of Phillip (ca. 350) discovered at Nag Hammadi contains this passage about the ritual of baptism:
God is a dyer. Just as good dyes, which are called 'true,' perish along with the things dyed in them, this is the way it is with whose whom God has dyed. Since his dyes are immortal, they are made immortal through his colors. God baptizes those whom he baptizes in water.

The multivalence of the Greek verb *baptizō* explains why the Syriac verb for the ritual, 'amada, denotes immersion or plunging while the contemporaneous Palestinian-Aramaic term, ṣabaʿa, denotes dyeing or coloring. Given the ubiquity of the latter connotation, it is likely that while some 6th century Christian communities in the Arabian Peninsula used verbs for immersion to denote the rite of baptism, others used verbs for dyeing. This semantic duality in Arabic is evidenced by the fact that whereas Classical Arabic adopts the Syriac calque *maʿmūdiyyah*, with the Arabic cognate roots ġ.m.s or ġ.m.d (to immerse, to plunge) as its primary term for baptism, many Arab-Christian communities in the pre-modern and modern eras refer to John the Baptist as Yahyā al-Ṣabbāḡ, John the Dyer. The connotative link between dye and the ritual of baptism also yields a more cogent rendering of verse Q23:20: “A tree sprouts from Mount Sinai, secreting the duhn, [it is] a dye for those who partake [of it].” The exegetical

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88 I would like to thank Prof. Michael Williams at the University of Washington for his assistance with this translation. For discussion of the dyeing motif in this text, see Charron Régine and Louis Painchaud, “God is a Dyer: The Background and Significance of a Puzzling Motif in the Coptic Gospel According to Phillip,” *Muséon* 114 (2001), 41-50. Also see Hugo Laundhaug, *Images of Rebirth. Cognitive Poetics and Transformational Soteriology in the Gospel of Philip and the Exegesis on the Soul* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).
tradition and all modern translations understand the paired terms, *duhn* and *ṣibḡ* as references to seasoning on food. It is more likely, given the explicitly allegorical nature of the language, that the verse is another baptismal metaphor. The term *duhn* appears widely in Palestinian-Aramaic and Syriac sources as the referent for the chrism, and the verse may be an allusion to contemporaneous Christian imagery about the Tree of Life emitting the chrism whereby the baptized (i.e. the saved) are anointed.⁸⁹

In this section, I established the etymological and connotative possibility that *ṣibḡata allāhi* is a metaphoric reference to the rite of baptism. I now turn to explore the place of this verse (Q2:138) in the larger polemical agenda of the *ummah*-pericope and its function in the communal program of the sura.

### 2.2 The Textual Context

The *ṣibḡah*-verse appears in a series of seven verses (Q2:134-141) at the center of the *ummah*-pericope. The verses appear as an *inclusio* set apart by the formula: *tilka ummat*⁹⁰ *qad ḫalat* (Q2:134, 141), which I discuss at length in Chapter 4. The verses within the unit are arranged in a concentric composition where the central element, the *ṣibḡah*-verse, is interposed between a thematic chiasm: abc/x/cba.⁹⁰ The elements of this

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⁹⁰ On ring-composition and the internal structure of suras, see Salwa El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qurʾān: Relevance, Coherence and Structure* (London: Routledge, 2006); Mary Douglass, *Thinking in Circles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Michel
chiasm are introduced by a counter-discursive statement,\textsuperscript{91} “They say, ‘Become Jews or [become] Christian to be guided!” The seven-verse unit comprises a sequence of polemical statements that rebut the communal interlocutors’ proselytism and implicit soteriological exclusivism. The communal agenda of the unit is highlighted by the recurrence of a formula that features three different insider appellations: 

\begin{itemize}
  \item \text{nāḥnu lahu muslimān} (submitted-ones);
  \item \text{nāḥnu lahu ʿābidān} (worshippers, slaves) and
  \item \text{nāḥnu lahu muḥlisān} (sincere-ones);
\end{itemize}


| A1 | “This is a nation, it has passed…” | </p> |<p>“</p> |
|-----|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| B1 | They say, ‘Become Jews or [become] Christians to be guided!’ Say, ‘Nay, the milla of Abraham, a hanif and not a mušrik.’ Say, ‘We believe in God and what was revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the Tribes and what came to Moses and Jesus, and what came to the prophets. We do not distinguish between any of them. <To Him we are Muslimūn.> | وقالوا كونوا هوداو أو نصارى تهتدوا قل بل ملّة إبراهيم حنيفا وما كان من المشركين. قولوا أمنا بالله وما أنزل إلينا وما أنزل إلى إبراهيم وإسماعيل وإسحاق وبعقوب والأنسباء وما أُتى موسى وعيسى وما أُتى النبيون من ربهم لا نفرق بين أحد منهم <بليغ> |<p>و</p>|
| C1 | If they believe in a manner similar to how you believe, then they too are guided, but if they reject it, indeed they are [already] in schism… | فإن آمنوا بمثل ما آمنت به فقد اهتدوا وإن تولوا فإنما هم في شقاق… |<p>و</p>|
| X | The dyeing of God! And who surpasses God in dyeing? <To Him we are ‘Ābidūn.> | صبغة الله ومن أحسن من الله صبغة <بليغ> |<p>و</p>|
| C2 | Say, ‘Will you fight us on the matter of God? While He is your Lord just as He is ours. Our deeds are upon us and your deeds are upon you. <To Him we are Muḫlisūn.> | قل أنتحجونا في الله وهو رَننا ورَنكم ولنا أعمالنا ولكم أعمالكم <بليغ> |<p>و</p>|
| B2 | Or do you claim that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes were Jews, or that they were Christians?...Who is more oppressive than the one who limits [access to] a testament of God that he has? | أم تقولون إن إبراهيم وإسماعيل وإسحاق وبعقوب والأنسباء كانوا هوداو أو نصارى... فمن أظلم من كتم شهادة عنده من الله... |<p>و</p>|
| A2 | This is a nation, it has passed…” | تلك آمة قد خلت…” |<p>و</p>|

Q BAQARAH 2:134-141
The proselytizing statement at the outset of the unit echoes the interlocutor’s exclusive salvific claims elsewhere in the *ummah*-pericope, “They say, ‘None will enter Paradise except one who is Jewish or [the others say] one who is Christian’” (Q2:111) and “Neither the Jews, nor the Christians, will ever approve of you unless you adhere to their *milla*.” (Q2:120) Element [B] rebuts this soteriological exclusivism with an apologetics of inclusion or universalism. It begins by citing the addressee-community’s allegiance to the *milla* of Abraham: the supra-communal paragon of salvation:92 “Say, ‘Nay! [we adhere to] the *milla* of Abraham: a ḥanīf and not a mušrik.” This twofold description of the patriarch appears recurrently in the Qurʾānic text, in one instance in Abraham’s own voice (Q6:79), in another in the voice of the Qurʾān’s prophetic addressee (Q:10:105). It always appears in the explicit context of intra-communal polemic and its subtext is clear: Abraham constitutes community in and of himself and can thus be claimed by no one and everyone, “For Abraham was [himself] a nation, one obedient to God—a ḥanīf; and not a mušrik.” (Q16:120). It is Abraham’s quality as a ḥanīf and a non-mušrik that makes adherence to his *milla* feasible for the Qurʾān’s addressee-community: “follow the *milla* of Abraham—a ḥanīf; and not a mušrik.” (Q3:95)

According to the conventional understanding, the Qurʾānic term ḥanīf refers to an ethical monotheist. The description “a ḥanīf and not a mušrik” is typically read as a hendiadys in which both terms denote the same concept i.e. a ḥanīf is one who is not a mušrik or, conversely, a mušrik is one who is not a ḥanīf. This understanding of these paired terms rests firmly on classical Muslim historiography and its portrayal of Arab pagans (*mušrikūn*) and indigenous monotheists (*ḥunafāʾ*) in Muhammad’s Mecca. The

portrayal of Arab paganism, or idolatry, has been questioned by Gerald Hawting who presents a strong case that the Qurʾānic term *mušrikân* is in fact a hyperbolic polemical reference to Trinitarian Christians.\(^93\) Similarly, Francois de Blois and others have argued that the term ḥanīf is a calque on the Syriac ḥanpā, denoting gentile.\(^94\) Synthesizing these two propositions, I propose that the formulaic description of Abraham as “a ḥanīf and not a *mušrik*” is not a hendiadys denoting the same concept (monotheism) but rather an explicit refutation of Abraham’s *Jewishness* and *Christianness*:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{(a)} & \quad mā kāna ibrāhīmu & \neq & & \text{(a)} & \quad wa-lākin kāna \\
\text{Abraham was neither} & & & & \text{Rather, he was} \\
\text{(b)} & \quad yahūdiyyan & \neq & & \text{(b)} & \quad ḥanīfan musliman \\
\text{Jewish} & & & & \text{a gentile, who has submitted} \\
\text{(c)} & \quad (wa)-lā naṣrāniyyan & \neq & & \text{(c)} & \quad (wa)-mā kāna mina l-*mušrikīn* \\
\text{nor neither Christian} & & & & \text{and not a Trinitarian.}
\end{align*}
\]

An alternatively viable rendering of the formula could thus be, “Say, ‘God has certainly led me to an established path, an upright religion: the way of Abraham, who was neither a Jew nor a Christian.’” (Q6:161, also see: Q22:31). The Qurʾān’s typological presentation of Abraham as supra-communal, a “ḥanīf and not a *mušrik*,” is a direct response to the interlocutor’s summons to convert to Judaism or Christianity. This

\(^93\) Gerald Hawting, *The idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1999

presentation of the patriarch in many ways resembles Paul’s use of his figure in the epistles, “We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness. Under what circumstances was it credited? ...It was not after [his circumcision], but before.” (Rom 4:10) In demonstrating Abraham’s righteousness before the covenantal act of circumcision i.e. as a gentile, Paul extends the potential of salvation to those beyond the ritual and genealogical fold of Israel. Element [B] co-opts this language of Christian supersession over Judaism, and deploys it against Christianity as well, “And he was not a Christian.” (v.135) The passage then subordinates all the patriarchs of Genesis to this logic,95 “Do you claim that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes were Jews, or that they were Christians?” (v.140). The polemic is strengthened by an apologetics of universalism in regards to prophecy. The Qurʾān’s addressee-community is commanded to announce their fidelity to all prophetic figures (“we do not distinguish between any of them” v. 136) and the text accuses the communal interlocutors of limiting access to prophetic guidance i.e. access to the salvific fold, “Who could be more oppressive than those who restrict [access to] a testament (šahāda) of God, that he has (‘indahu)?”

Element [C] is a distilled repetition of the apologetics in element [B], “Will you fight us on the matter of God, while He is your Lord just as He is ours?” The interlocutors are invited to guidance if they “believe in a manner similar (miṣli mā) to how you believe” (v.137), which, given the context, is indiscriminate adherence to all prophetic dispensations, including the one that is operating through the text. Their

95 On the Qurʾān’s representation of the patriarchs in the context of community-building, see generally Kenneth Cragg, The Event of the Qurʾān: Islam in its scripture. (London: Unwin Brothers Limited), 140-166.
reluctance is critiqued as a symptom of an intrinsic deficiency in their faith-communities: discord and sectarianism, “indeed, they are [already] in schism” (v. 137). Element [C] responds to the proselytism by polemically deploying the trope of Jewish-Christian schism, an important element in the supersessionary apologetic of the *ummah* pericope, “The Jews say, ‘the Christians are baseless!’ and the Christians say, ‘the Jews are baseless!’ even though they all pore over the [same] scripture!” (Q2:113). These verses assert the salvific potency of the addressee-community by stressing its inclusive or universalistic outlook. The text juxtaposes this portrayal with a hyperbolic portrayal of the exclusive communalism of the superseded communities.

The supersessionary apologetic of these verses explains the purpose of the central element [x] in the passage—the baptismal metaphor. As Sachedina and others have noted, “assertions about Islam superseding Christianity and Judaism... entered Muslim circles through Christian debates about Christianity having superseded Judaism.” The passage’s evocation of Abraham is an example of the Qur’ān’s adoption of a well-attested Christian tactic of supersession against its communal-interlocutors. Similarly, the passage’s reference to baptism co-opts another recurrent polemical topos in late ancient Christian anti-Judaic writings and redeploy its as its own assertion of communal supersession.

References to baptism are frequent in early Christian articulations of soteriological supersession over Judaism, “I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.” (John 3:5). In fact, in the 5th

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and 6th centuries, baptism (or repeat-baptism) is one of the few rituals practiced universally across the myriad Christian denominations of the Near East and is a key symbol in Christian soteriology. Meant to symbolically offset the Jewish rite of circumcision, the sacrament of baptism polices the soteriological boundary around the insider community. In his commentary on the Gospel of John, for example, Origen (d. 254 C.E) explains: “Not only the soul is called to salvation but also the body itself -- the instrument used for the soul’s activities. It is fitting that the body also be sanctified by what the divine teaching calls the bath of regeneration.” (6.33) The sacrament is the key to salvation, one available to gentiles, and it features prominently in anti-Judaic polemic in Late Antiquity. For example, in Pseudo-Cyprian’s polemical treatise “Against the Jews” (10.79-82):

It follows, therefore, that Israel is rebuked by the hand laid on at the baptismal bath... Those learn who at one time taught; they heed orders who once commanded; they are baptized (tinguntur) [into Christianity] who once used to baptize (baptizabant) [into Judaism]... Thus the Lord wanted the Gentiles to flourish! You see to what extent Christ has loved you?

A similar passage appears in Quodvultdeus’ treatise “Against the Jews” (19.16), where he argues that it is through baptism, not pedigree, that one acquires the gift of divine election. In his “Testimonies Against the Jews,” Cyprian (d. 258 C.E) writes, “By this alone the Jews can receive pardon of their sins, if they wash away the blood of Christ slain, through his Baptism and [thereby] coming into his church.” (1.24) Thus, it is not the immersion itself that confers salvation, but rather the inward acknowledgement of its referent—the absolutionary sacrifice of Christ. It is this reference, and this reference alone, that makes the sacrament soteriologically potent.

97 Ferguson, Baptism in the Early Church: History, 163
Numerous Christian polemicists thus argue that Jewish immersion (tavīla) was salvifically useless since it was not an act of spiritual purity through faith in Christ but rather an act of corporeal purity.\(^9^8\) It is the former, Paul argues, that brings one into the elect fold, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ... If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Gal 3:27-29) Patristic writers such as Origen and Tertullian write extensively about the futility of baptism not done in the name of Christ, for the truly saved, “take on the dye (tinguerent) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, for we are dyed (tinguimur) not once but thrice.” (De Poenit, 1.100)

Against the backdrop of this pervasive late ancient rhetoric, the polemical move in the Qur’ānic verse becomes evident, “The dyeing of God! Who surpasses God in dyeing?” Similar to elements [B] and [C], the central element (v. 138) of this verse sequence is also a polemically reworked presentation of a recurrent symbol in contemporaneous Christian supersessionist discourse. By calling for a baptism whose referent is God, “while He is our Lord just as He is yours,” (v. 139) the verse enhances the passage’s apologetic of inclusivity and is thus a polemical strike against the perceived communal exclusivism of the Jewish and Christian interlocutors.

The phonetic profile of the term ˈṣibyaːta/ may offer further clues to the polemic articulated here. This profile is traditionally understood as an accusative declension, even though the term is not the object of any verb.\(^9^9\) The exegetes explain

\(^9^9\) In his exegetical expansion on Q2:138 in tafsīr zād al-masīr, Ibn al-Jawzī reports an alternate nominative reading, ṣibghatu allāhi.
this declension as a rhetorical resonance (badal) of a key-term in the passage: millata (Q2:135); as the object of an implied imperative such as ittabiʿū; or as a rare emphatic form (maṣdar mutaʾakkid). I suggest a simpler possibility—the aural shape /ˈsɪbyaːtə/ is a phonetic echo of the Christian-Palestinian Aramaic emphatic substantive for baptism, ʾibyaːtə:/ or its plural form ʾibyaːtəː:/ As such, the term functions both as an aural and an allegorical calque on the technical term for the ritual among Christians. The phrase /ˈsɪbyaːtə lːaːhi/ is likely a polemical parody of contemporaneous Christian liturgical formulae about baptism in the name of Christ: /ˈsɪbəːtəː dəːˈjesuːːs moːˈʃiːːaː/:.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰It has been suggested by several Qurʾānic researchers that the sabians were a kind of Mandaean sect or another Judeo-Christian sect, such as the Elchaistes, whose identifying ritual was repeat and frequent baptism. Early Arabic chronicles often referred to such sects in the Near East as the bathers (al-muğṭasila). Ibn Nadīm explains that the bathers are “the ṣabiʿūn of the [Mesopotamian] marshes. They ritually immerse themselves and their founder is known as al-ḥasaī (Elchasai).” Ibn al-Nadīm, Al-Fihrist (Beirut: Maktabat Ḥayyat, 1966), 811. This suggests to me that the Qurʾānic root ṣ.b.ʿ is related to the root ṣ.b.ʿ, the eastern Aramaic cognate of ṣ.b.ʿ and the Mandaic verb for immersion. Thus, the communal term ṣābiʿūn in the Qurʾān simply means the Baptists. See De Blois, “Naṣrānī (Naζωροιος) and ḥanīf (εθνικός),” 27, and M. P. Roncaglia, "Element Ebionites et Elkaistes dans le Coran," in Proche Orient Chrétien (1971): 101 - 126. Rocanglia concludes from his extensive study of references to Christian theology and practice in the Qurʾān, “nous croyons qu’on peut dorénavant diriger le recherche: découvrir dans le Coran le cristallisation d’une forme arabisée du Judéo-Christianisme qui, reçu dans sa phase ébionite et elkésaïte, était déjà entré dans le mouvement dialectique des idées religieuses qui débouchèrent dans l’Islam.” Also see Hans-Joachim, Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums (Tübingen: Mohr, 1949) and Carsten Colpe, Das Siegel Der Propheten: Historische Beziehungen Zwischen Judentum, Judenchristentum, Heidentum Und Frühem Islam (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1990).
The Qur’ān’s polemically reworked version of the Aramaic expression, and the Greek metaphor, does not mean that the phrase ṣibģata allāhi in the text is anomalous or foreign. Rather, as Isutzu explains, Qur’ānic vocabulary is “a large semantic field, and as such it is an organized totality, a self-sufficient system... into which all words, whatever, their origin have been integrated with an entirely new systematic interpretation.”101 The specific polemic encapsulated in the expression ṣibģata allāhi would have been perceptible to certain audiences and imperceptible to others, but the superssionary tone of the passage, and the verse, would have been recognized universally. It is this supersessionary tone that guides exegesis on the verse in the post-Qur’ānic era. In the post-scriptural Gestalten, a host of new conceptual associations emerge around the term, which adapt the baptismal metaphor to the distinctly Islamic notion of fitrah (primordial nature) or the distinctly Muslim practice of ġusl (ritual immersion).

2.3 Development of the Image

The emergence of an Arab-Muslim polity in the Near East brings with it an array of different systems of thought: theology, political theory, linguistics, philosophy, mysticism, jurisprudence. “Each of these cultural products of Islam,” explains Izutsu, “developed its own conceptual system, i.e. its own vocabulary.”102 The linguistic forms of the Muslim scripture, a discursive artifact of Late Antiquity, moves through these vastly different semantic spheres, taking on new valences and shedding old

102 Ibid., 45.
The networks of conceptual associations that coalesce around scriptural language serve the radically different doctrinal needs of the developing polity and the emergent religio-cultural hegemony called Islam. Here, the Qurʾān’s communal vocabulary, terms such ummah, muslim, ḥanīf and muṣrik, acquire their classical, markedly post-Qurʾānic, relational meanings while their pre-classical, i.e. Qurʾānic, significances slowly fade away. During this period of semantic transition, Wansbrough explains, “the literary uses, and hence communal functions, of scripture might be isolated as four: polemical, liturgical, didactic and juridical, in descending order of importance and (approximate) chronological order of appearance.”

The polemical and liturgical functions of ʂibğata ʿallāhi outlined earlier thus give way to didactic and juridical readings in the early Muslim period.

In the earliest exegetical layers, ʂibğata ʿallāhi is understood as an allegory for the recently stabilized classical religio-communal identity, Islam. Muqāṭil b. Sulaymān (d. 767) explains that ʂibğah is a synonym for the religion. “The verse means, ‘follow our religion (dīn) for there is no religion but our religion.’” Already in the taṣfīr of Mujahid b. Jabr (d. 722) however another interpretive trajectory becomes more prominent, namely that ʂibğah is fitrah, the primordial pre-communal pre-revelatory state of humanity that is referenced in the Qurʾān, “Set your faces to the law (dīn) as gentiles, [for such is] the God-given primordial nature (fitrah), the one upon which God predisposed (faṭara) humankind. Do not change this God-given nature (ḥalq), such is the upright law.” (Q30:30) The supersessionary tone of the passage is accentuated since fitrah is equated directly with ʿislām, as Ṭabari (d. 923) explains, “[ʂibğah] is that upon

103 John Wansbrough, Qurʾānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), xxii.
which God predisposed (fatara) mankind and... [thus the verse means,] we follow the God-given nature; the nature in which he predisposed his creation, which is the upright religion (dīn).” Qurṭubī (d. 1273) further elucidates that sībḡah is “fitrah, which is the origin of all created beings, which is the state (ḥāl) of submission (islām).”

The universalistic concept of fitrah is thus conflated with the exclusive communal category Islām, the apologetic of inclusion in the Qurʾānic passage is essentially muted as it is no longer doctrinally viable or polemically useful. The early exegetical tradition thus seamlessly transforms the phrase sībḡata allāhi from an expression of soteriological inclusivity into an unequivocal statement of soteriological exclusivity—a return to fitrah i.e. islām, is the only way to salvation.

The exegetical tradition attempts to coordinate these readings with the dyeing metaphor. Qurṭubī explains that Islam “is called sībḡah metaphorically (istiʿāratm) and allegorically (majāzm) since it expresses its effect and imprint upon the believer.” Māwardī (d. 1058) explains that the impression of Islam upon the believer “is like the expression (ẓuhūr) of dye on cloth.” Similarly, Ibn Kaṭīr (d. 1373) notes that dye signifies the permanence of Islam, since “dye becomes intrinsic (yajʿalu lāzimn) to the cloth itself.” The conceptual association between dyeing and baptism is never entirely erased. Most classical exegetes seem aware, at least cursorily, of a link between the image of dye and the Christian sacrament, and several identify it explicitly by its Classical Arabic name, the maʿmūdiya.

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There is however discomfort with the ostensibly positive appearance of a Christian sacrament in the Qurʾān and the exegetes adapt it to the more familiar, more distinctly Muslim, ritual practices of boundary-crossing: circumcision and ġusl.105 Baġawī (d. 1122) hypothesizes that “what is intended here is circumcision for it dyes its recipient in blood.” Ṭabarī also finds circumcision to be a more natural referent and writes that “Abraham circumcised and ṣibḥah is therefore that which occurs in circumcision.” He mentions Christian baptism but explains that this practice is a distortion of the “immersion that cleanses ritual impurity (ḡusli l-janāba) among the people of Islam.” Zamaḥšarī’s (d. 1144) exegesis of the verse is a typical example of how the late ancient conceptual association is adapted to a classical Muslim perspective and its emphasis on purification (taḥfīr):

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105 ṣ.b.’, the Eastern Aramaic cognate of ṣ.b.‘, appears in early Muslim historiographical and exegetical sources as a term for conversion. Accounts of the conversion of ʿUmar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb feature this verb prominently, which, in classical Arabic, means ‘to imitate a child.’ Ibn Išḥāq reports, “[Nuʿaym b. ʿAbdullāh l-ʿAdawī] said: Verily your sister and brother-in-law have converted (qad ṣabawā) and left the religion which I too was upon…” As news of ʿUmar’s conversion spreads through Mecca, a pagan enters the sanctuary and announces, “O people of Qurayš, ʿUmar has converted! (qad ṣabā).” What is noteworthy is the references to ʿUmar’s immersion (ḡusl) before his conversion in these accounts. Such communal memory indicates that some kind of baptism was practiced among the earliest Muslims. The eastern Aramaic term denoting baptism, ṣabaʿa, eventually took on the more general meaning of conversion. Thus, early account of conversion are replete with references to immersion: “On the authority of Abū Hurayra, when Ṭūmāma b. al-Hanafi became Muslim, the Prophet took him to Abū Ṭalḥaʾ’s enclosure and instructed him to immerse himself (yaqtasil), so he immersed himself and then prayed two units of prayer. Thereafter, the Prophet announced publically ‘Your companion has entered Islām.’” Ibn Hišām, al-Sīrah, vol. 4, 187.
The dyeing of God is an emphatic verbal noun in the accusative... It is from [the root] š.b.ġ just as jalsah is from [the root] j.l.s. It is the existential condition of dye, and the meaning is the purification of God, for faith purifies the souls.

Its origin is that the Christians used to immerse their children into yellow-colored water, called the maʿmūdiyyah. When one of them did so with his child, he would say, ‘Now he has become a true Christian!’ The Muslims were therefore commanded to say to them [the Christians]: ‘We believe in God and God has dyed us with a dyeing of [true] faith; there is nothing similar to our dye, and he has purified us with it, there is nothing similar to our purification.

Zamaḥšarī thus recasts the specific referent of the metaphor, baptism, as an abstract referent, purity (tahārah), a rendering that is far more conducive to classical readings of the verse as an allusion to fitrah, ḡusl or ḥitān. This semantic shift reflects the emergence of purity as a key element in post-Qur’ānic conceptualizations of the communal boundary around the ummah. As Marion Katz explains, “The theme of ritual purity is associated not only with the unstained devotion of the individual believer, but with the pristine integrity of the believing community, particularly the community mobilized in defense of the religion.”

In this chapter, I presented a diachronic case study of the phrase “the dyeing of God” (Q2:138) from its appearance in scripture to its renderings by classical exegetes. Based on philological evidence, I proposed that the Qur’ānic term ṣībḡata is etymologically linked to the Palestinian-Aramaic term for baptism, ṣebʿatā. I supplemented this linguistic evidence by presenting a brief survey of the use of the dyeing metaphor by late ancient Christian writers on baptism. I then analyzed the textual context of the verse, highlighting the cogency of the baptismal metaphor in the passage’s apologetic of salvific inclusivity. I showed that the textual unit appropriates Christian supersessionist imagery, such as the figure of Abraham, and puts it into the service of the ummah-pericope’s polemical program. Lastly, I showed that this apologetic is inverted by classical exegetes who recast the phrase ṣībḡa ḥallāhī as an assertion of the exclusive soteriological potency of Islam. In the post-Qur’ānic era, the prelocutionary declaration of faith, the šahādah, becomes the primary ritual act of boundary-crossing into the ummah. The rituals of baptism (ǧusl al-istislām) and circumcision (ḥitān), each alluded to in scripture and referenced widely in early historiography, continue to be practiced universally among Muslims but are de-ritualized as soteriologically inconsequential acts of corporeal purity (ṭahārah).

CHAPTER 3

LINEAGE AS COMMUNAL REPRESENTATION

“O Children of Israel!” (Q2:122)

According to the prosopographer Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), when Ṣafiyya bint Huyayy, a freed Naṣirī war-captive, joins Muhammad’s household as his wife, she is met with antipathy from her Qurašī counterparts. “Another one of the Jews!” declares ʿĀʾiša, another of Muhammad’s wives, at the arrival in Medina of Ṣafiyya’s bridal entourage, comprised of women from the recently capitulated Jewish fortress at Ḥaybar. ʿĀʾiša, being of noble descent, does not take her abasement lightly and protests to Muhammad, who suggests a retort citing her priestly lineage, “Why don’t you just say to them: My father is Aaron! My uncle is Moses!” In line with this ḥadīth, Ibn Saʿd opens his prosopographical entry on Ṣafiyya with a lineage that stretches through eleven ostensibly Arab generations to “the children of Israel, from the tribe of

107 She was a member of the Banū Naṣīr, one of the three main Jewish tribes settled in and around Yaṭrib. According to traditional account, the tribe was exiled in 4/625 and confronted in battle at Ḥaybar in 8/629.


Aaron b. Amram.” The attribution of a scriptural lineage to this figure is symptomatic of a wider tendency in the early historiographical corpus, most notably articulated in Ibn Hišām’s (d. 218/833) prolegomenon to the Sīra wherein he grafts Muhammad’s genealogy to Abraham’s. In this chapter, I will study the Qur’ānic articulations of these sacred genealogies in order to highlight certain aspects of this antecedent scriptural trope. My focus remains on Q2 broadly and the ummah pericope (Q2:104-144) specifically, which is the Qur’ān’s most explicit expression of Gemeindebildung—the emergence of a distinct communal consciousness through an original category, the ummah.

The specific aim of this chapter is to explore how, in its program of community formation, the Qur’ānic text simultaneously contests and appropriates the authenticating lineage and legacy of its Jewish interlocutors—the Children of Israel. In this regard, I will examine the ummah pericope’s parallel depiction of Ishmael and


Jacob-Israel as heirs of Abraham. By re-introducing Ishmael into the sacred genealogies of Genesis, the Qur’ān contests and diverges from key aspects of Late Antique Judaic doctrine(s) of election, while, in its concurrent references to Jacob-Israel’s bequest, it appropriates other equally significant aspects of this same doctrinal framework to buttress its emergent communal ideology. Whereas in the previous chapter, the focus was on the *permeability* of communal boundaries and their ahistoricity, in this chapter I shall explore the notion of a genealogical community—one that by its very nature has impermeable boundaries (with the exceptions of marriage and adoption)\(^{114}\) and one that is grounded firmly in a historical outlook.

### 3.1 Genealogy as Communal Boundary

The Qur’ānic appellation “Children of Israel” [*banū isrāʾīl*] typically denotes the ancient Israelites.\(^{115}\) The term appears most often in narrative citations from the Book of Exodus that highlight the triumphs and failures of the ancient Israelites, “Certainly, we have saved [*najjaynā*] the children of Israel from humiliating torment... certainly, We chose them [*iḥtarnāhum*], knowingly, over the worlds” (Q44:31-32). In the *ummah* pericope this appellation appears in a novel, vocative, context—as a designation for the


\(^{115}\) See e.g. Q2:246-52; Q17:2-8 and Q61:6.
Qurʾān’s actual Jewish interlocutors, indicating that the text conceives of this communal addressee not only as a religious faction but also as a genealogical category. This representation is in line with the Midrashic corpus, which frequently adopts the social metaphor of family to describe the Jewish people(s). Nonetheless, the Qurʾān is idiosyncratic in its usage of this uniquely pentateuchal appellation [bānē yišrāʾēl] which, in contemporaneous Near Eastern sectarian discourse, is displaced entirely by the typological designation “Israel.”

The Qurʾān’s designation then is not just an intimation of the Jewish interlocutors’ mythic past, but also an acknowledgement of their continued existence as a filial group—heirs to the salvific estate of their eponymous ancestor Jacob-Israel: “They are the ones whom God favored from the Children of Adam... from the Children of Abraham and of Israel, from among those whom We guided and chose” (Q19:57). The filial designation echoes the Midrashic notion that between Israel and the nations, as Neusner notes, “The point of differentiation comes with paternity, hence the enormous weight placed on [patriarchal] election... by reason of descent from the patriarchs, Israel forms a distinct entity.”

Genealogical descent from the three Israelite patriarchs thus acts as the impermeable communal boundary around the insider community.

116 Q2:122, cf. Q2:40 and Q2:47. The text’s typical designation for its Jewish interlocutors is the sectarian term, “people of scripture” [ahlū l-kitāb].


118 In his monograph on conversion in Late Antique Judaism, Porten notes, “An essential element of an ethnic group is its members’ perception of their sharing a common ancestry. This lineage need not be biological or genetic, for there can be ‘culturally determined’ genealogical lines through which all the members of an ethnic
Qur’ānic eulogies of the three patriarchs\textsuperscript{119} feature strong elective language:

“Commemorate Our servants: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, foremost in strength and vision. We set them apart \textit{[ahlaṣnāhum]} for a purpose: the commemoration of the realm. They are, for Us, of the Elect \textit{[al-muṣṭafīn]}, the Excellent \textit{[al-ahyār]}. ” (Q 38:45-47). The text’s discursive references to the characteristics, deeds and sayings of the Israelite patriarchs (in a style reminiscent of the 

\textit{Pirqē Āvôt} of the Mishna or the \textit{Brit ha-Āvôt} at Qumran), demonstrate a “primitivist” orientation in that they define ideals by alluding to a (mythic) past.\textsuperscript{120} Such statements are a marked departure from the Qur’ān’s prevailing attitude toward legacy, which regards the interlocutor’s recourse to ancient values, or precedent, as resistance and opposition to the new dispensation. This attitude is articulated most often in a polemical topos, which Wansbrough calls the \textit{faith of the fathers} formula:\textsuperscript{121} “They say, ‘We would rather follow what we know from our ancestors!’ Their ancestors, however, did not comprehend a thing” (Q2:170). The conceit of this topos is inverted when the addressees are Jews. Their ancestral precedents group trace their ethnicity. Thus, the Israelites’ claim that they all share a common father, Jacob, need not be biologically correct; it need be only ‘culturally’ recognized. In either case, this ‘biological unity’ would set the Israelites off from other groups of people, to whom they attributed different ancestors.” Gary Porten, \textit{Stranger within your Gates} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6.

\textsuperscript{119} Late Antique Jewish references to the Fathers \textit{[ha- Āvôt]} typically denote only Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. See Berakot 16B and Sifre Deut. 94.

\textsuperscript{120} For a detailed discussion of various sectarian “orientations” in the Qur’ān, see Wansbrough, \textit{The Sectarian Milieu}, 54-59.

\textsuperscript{121} See Wansbrough, \textit{The Sectarian Milieu}, 43. See e.g. Q5:104; Q7:28, Q34:43, Q43:22-24. The \textit{faith of the fathers} topos also appears in prophetic stories about Noah (Q7:70); Moses (Q10:78); Šāliḥ (Q11:62 and Q14:10); Šu‘ayb (Q11:87); and even Abraham himself (Q26:76-77 and Q21:54).
anticipate the new dispensation and procure divine grace:¹²² “I have followed the way of my ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—it was not our custom to associate anything with God, such is God’s grace [faḍl] upon us…” (Q 12:38). The text adopts a unique relationship with this communal actor, the Jews, on account of their uniquely favored ancestry.

This ancestral heritage of grace is consummated in the Household of Jacob—in the Children of Israel—“In such a way has the Lord set you apart [yajtabīka]...and brought to fruition [yutmimma] His blessing upon you and upon the House [al] of Jacob” (Q 12:6; see also Q 19:6). It is then by allusion to this particular patrimony that the Qurʾān petitions its Jewish interlocutors in the ummah pericope, “O Children of Israel! Recall My favor [niʿmatī] wherewith I have favored you—and [recall] that I have preferred you [faḍḍaltukum] among all.” (Q2:122). The implicit acknowledgement of this genealogical entity’s unique place in the divine economy is preceded however by a pointed polemical claim regarding the nature of divine grace/election: “Those who refute [you] from the People of Scripture, and the Associators,¹²³ do not like it that any [such] goodness come down to all of you from your Lord. But God will elect [yaḥtaṣṣu] through His compassion whomsoever he wills, for God is possessed of Mighty Grace” (Q2:105; see also Q2:251; Q5:53 and Q57:29). This polemical overture sets an ideological


framework wherein the ummah pericope manipulates genealogical narratives of Israelite origins in the Bible to renegotiate prevailing Late Antique notions of communal election and soteriological legitimacy.

In the interpretive context of Late Antiquity, the patriarchal narratives of Genesis are not simply hero-epics, but providential blueprints for religio-national entities and communities. The protagonists are no longer simply *dramatis personae* but rather communal typologies—archetypes of confessional / sectarian *insiders* (or conversely, *outsiders*): “Are you saying that Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes were Jews? Or [that they were] Christians?” (Q2:140). A notable and early example of this is Paul’s allegory of Hagar and Sarah (Rom. 4:16-24; Rom. 9:6-18 and Gal. 4:21-31), which extracts a polemically potent theological paradigm from the narrative, inverting the genealogical construct to make Paul’s community the children of Sarah (i.e. of the promise/faith) and the object of his polemic, the Jews and Judaizers, the children of Hagar (i.e. of the flesh/law). Such confrontations, both internal (sectarian) and external (inter-confessional), lie at the very heart of Late Antique aggadah. The Tannaitic and the Amoraic sages frequently revisit the core repertoire of genealogical narratives in Genesis to produce readings that reassert Israel’s enduring holiness over its ideological rivals.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ For example, “In like manner, Israel and the nations have a controversy, these say ‘for our sake was the world created’ and these say, ‘for our sake.’ Israel, say [to them] the hour will come and you will see.” Gen. Rab. 83. For an overview of Late Antique midrashim that contain direct responses to Christian polemics, see M. Aberbach, “The Golden Calf Episode in Postbiblical Jewish Literature,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 39 (1968): 91-116; Marc Hirshman, *Rivalry of Genius: Jewish and Christian Biblical Interpretation in Late Antiquity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996) 1-10; A. Marmorstein,
“He appeared to the Children of Esau, the wicked, and He said to them, ‘Will you accept the Torah?’ They said to Him, ‘What is written in it?’ He said to them: Do not kill! (Ex. 20:13) They said, ‘This is the heritage that our Father bequeathed to us, as it is said: You shall live by the sword (Ex 27:40)...’ And so He came toward Israel... all of them opened their mouths and they said: All that the Lord said, we shall do and we shall hear! (Ex. 24:7)”

The aggadist articulates here a formidable polemic against the entity prefigured in the Children of Esau > the Edomites > the Romans > the Christians, by recasting Esau’s blessing as a teleological constraint on his progeny. As Yuval explains, this exegetical involvement with “the question of who is chosen and who is rejected, who is ‘Jacob’ and who is ‘Esau,’ reflects a process of self-definition as well as, ipso facto, a definition of the other,” that is one of the fundamental interpretive objectives in Late Antique intra-monotheistic polemics and apologia. Such communal identity politics


125 For more information on this text, see Günter Stemberger, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1996), 226-57.

126 See Kaminisky, Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 15 and 185.

127 Yuval, Two Nations in Your Womb, 1.
over the sacred genealogies of Genesis underpins the Qurʾān’s biblical paratext and attention to this feature can allow us to make more acute observations about the text’s communal program. Angelika Neuwirth’s recent study of Q3:33-34 is a promising step in this direction. Reframing the Qurʾān’s references to the “House of Amrām” in contemporaneous sectarian discourse, she uncovers the polemical move underlying the Qurʾān’s construction of the Christian holy family to offset the centrality of the Abrahamic, i.e. Jewish, one. The Qurʾān’s portrayal of Abraham as a ḥanīf—the archetypal gentile monotheist—has been studied in the preceding chapter on juridical communalism and permeable ritual boundaries. In this chapter, I parse the ummah pericope’s polemical negotiations of Late Antique constructs of impermeable genealogical boundaries and filial communalism. I turn my attention here to the figures of Ishmael and Jacob-Israel, arguing that their presentation in the sura is not simply that of moral paragons but rather as religio-communal typologies. The cluster of verses in the heart of the ummah pericope expand on the emergent notions of Abraham’s mīlla, i.e. speech, creed, way, manner, heritage and the dīn i.e. the law, or perhaps, the (correct) modus vivendi. The “choseness” of the patriarch is subtly refracted away from his personage and reconstituted in his mīlla or dīn, which is surrender/the one who surrenders (islām/muslim)—a proleptic allusion to the communal terms Islam/Muslim:

128 “Indeed, God chose Adam and Noah and the House of Abraham and the House of Amram among all others. They are descendants of each other, and God is the Hearer, the Knower.” (Q3:33-34)

[Recall] Abraham raised the foundations of the house, and Ishmael [too]. [He said] Our Lord, make us surrender to you and [make] from our progeny an ummah surrendered to you... Who [then] would abandon the way of Abraham, except one who has deluded himself? Indeed, We elected him in the world, and surely he is of the righteous in the afterlife. [Recall] when his lord said to him, 'Surrender!' he said, 'I surrender to the Lord of the Worlds!' Abraham bequeathed this to his progeny, and Jacob [too. He said] 'O my Children! God has elected for you the dīn, die not except that you surrendered!'

This passage is comprised of narrative material introduced by the formulaic citational particle (id). Here then is a critical observation: when the Qurʾān subordinates biblical personages, and their narratives, to its own internal logic and theological agenda, they appear not as (contested) interpretations but rather as (contested) memories. These narrations, embodied in the broad scriptural rubric of dīkr i.e. memory, commemoration, are conveyed to the Qurʾān’s prophetic addressee by way of revelation, e.g. “We narrate to you the most excellent narrative, by way of our revelation to you, in this recitation—for before [this revelation] you were unaware [of it]” (Q12:3). The Qurʾān’s narratives are thus not interpretations [taʿwil] of traditional narratives but rather revealed memories, truth-claims [ḥaqq] in and of themselves: “We
narrate to you their story, in truth!” (Q18:13). This particular feature of the Qurʾānic narrative is thus better understood not as a muting of its parabolic potential but rather as a rebuttal to the interlocutor’s formulaic accusation that the prophet is simply recounting old mythologies: “They say, ‘These are fables of the ancients [asāṭir al-‘awwalīn] that he has had [someone] write down for him...’ Say! ‘This has been revealed to me by the one who knows the mysteries of the heavens and the earth’” (Q25:5). As is made clear in the ummah pericope, the conflation of revealed memory and correctly interpreted / read scripture (i.e. the Bible) gives a particular polemical valence to prophetic kerygmata: “We have sent you [O prophet] with truth... the Jews and the Christians will not be pleased with you until you adhere to their milla, so say ‘Verily, God’s guidance (i.e. revelation) is [true] guidance.’ And [guided also are] those to whom We gave scripture, who [still] read it in a truthful reading...” (Q2:121, see also Q2:146). Furthermore, the deployment of Biblical narrative as revealed memory, rather than interpretation, organically appropriates all of Israelite history into the emergent communal salvation-history (heilsgeschichte).

Saleh, “In Search of a Comprehensible Qurʾān,” 155, writes: “The Qurʾān takes a polemical position vis-à-vis earlier scriptures and posits itself as presenting the ‘true’ story. Clearly, then, the Qurʾān is not obliged to repeat slavishly the contents of Judeo-Christian scriptures in its retelling of them. What the Qurʾān gives us is its own interpretation of the significance of previous scriptures. What we need to ascertain, therefore, is how this material is used and transformed to suit the Qurʾān’s aims and purposes. The Qurʾān has a vision of what the salvific history of monotheism means and what its truth-value is and, in presenting biblical material, it refashioned and transformed it to construct a new edifice.”

In this frame, the passage’s conjuring of Ishmael’s construction of the Meccan Shrine and the deathbed bequest of Jacob (cf. Gen. 47:28-49) are symptoms of a programmatic shift toward the imminent expression of *gemeindebildung* (Q2:143), foreshadowed explicitly by the proleptic use of the term *muslim* in both citations. What we have is a structural parallelism—an Abrahamic action, echoed by an heir, followed by a speech-act regarding surrendered (*muslim*) progeny:

v. 127: ...Abraham raised the foundations of the House, and Ishmael [did so]—
  ‘Our Lord… [make] out of our offspring, a surrendered (*muslim*) ummah…’

v. 132: ...Abraham bequeathed this to his progeny, and Jacob [did so]—
  'My children!... Don’t die unless you are surrendered (*muslims*)!’

The conspicuous parallelism between Ishmael and Jacob is noteworthy. The first element, Ishmael as the heir of Abraham and thus the progenitor of “Muslims,” has attracted considerable scholarly attention as the principal proof text for the “arabization” hypothesis (see immediately below). I will critique this hypothesis, its assumptions and its implications, and present an alternative, more hermeneutically grounded and contextually tenable reading of the polemic articulated through the personage of Ishmael. The second element, Jacob-Israel as the heir of Abraham and progenitor of “Muslims,” has received no scholarly attention, in large part, because it destabilizes the “arabization” hypothesis. I will thus resituate this element in the context of Late Antique Rabbinic polemical discourses in order to elucidate how it serves the Qur’ān’s emergent communal ideology.
3.2. Reconsidering the Qur’ān’s Ethnic Communalism

The general framework of the “arabization” hypothesis has not changed much since the works of Nöldeke (d. 1930) and Hurgronje (d. 1936), and can be summarized as follows: at the outset of his career, in Mecca, Muhammad models himself after Moses, but in Medina he abandons the Mosaic paradigm, having become disillusioned with the resident Jewish tribes who refuse to acknowledge his prophecy. His disaffection with the Jewish tribes is manifested in the scripture’s references to Abraham’s paternity of Ishmael—cast as the progenitor of Arabs in certain contemporaneous Jewish sources. The Qur’ān’s adaptation of the Hagar narrative-cycle into its native context signals a rupture in Muhammad’s prophetic program—the so-called “break with the Jews.” The text’s preamble to the proclamation of a new community—the ummah pericope under analysis here—is thus a reorientation from a “Judaic” outlook to an “Arab” one, an internal shift actualized externally in the establishment of a new, native qibla (direction of prayer) i.e. the Ka’ba in Mecca.

My reservations about this hypothesis stem from a general apprehension about the status of evidence in the study of scriptural polemics, in that “evidence only counts

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as evidence and is recognized as such in relation to a potential narrative.” I attempt to approach Qur’anic text from a more strict hermeneutic perspective, severed from subsequent historiographical mediations which are the product of an ex post facto narrative, namely, the narratives of Muhammad’s encounters with Meccan Pagans and Medinan Jews. Early historiographical writing is then parenthetical to scripture and engages with it exegetically. The classic prophetic narrative—the Muhammadan saga—that frames the Qur’anic text, is inevitably shaped by the later doctrinal anxieties and ideological exigencies of a self-avowed Arab polity, where the ethnic designation “Arab” and its genealogical underpinnings stabilize and take on particular valences. Here, the space and legacy of the Qur’ān’s Children of Israel come to antithetically mirror an emergent self-image firmly grounded in a pronounced ethno-national orientation, i.e. arabness. These later readings then mediate the Qur’ān’s otherwise fractured rhetoric on ancestry, genealogy and ethnos into new, coherent statements of ethno-national boundary-making that are markedly exegetical and, thus, markedly post-Qur’ānic. It is this exegesis that motivates Ibn Hišām’s fronting of an Ishmaelite ancestry for Muhammad, in an extended discussion of the ancient Arabs in his prolegomenon to the Ṣīra. It is also this exegesis that motivates Ibn Saʿd’s attribution

137 Ibn Hišām, Al-Ṣīrah al-Nabawiyya, 17-120.
of a Levite lineage to Ṣafiyya bt. Ḥuyayy, Muhammad’s Jewish wife, all the while recognizing her descent from the Arab-proselyte tribe of Banū Naẓīr.

The most immediate methodological implication of the “arabization” hypothesis is that it divides the scripture into two discrete, theologically divergent, moments—the Meccan Qur’ān and the Medinan Qur’ān, a classification that again takes us into the domain of canonization and classical exegesis. This periodization of scripture affects tremendously our understanding of its communal program because textual elements deemed anomalous to their purported period’s larger polemical agenda are jettisoned from analysis as non-sequiturs. Since the patriarchal depiction of Jacob-Israel in the ummah pericope is incongruous with the perceived “arabizing” motive of the larger passage, it has been regarded as entirely inconsequential to the passage’s implicit polemic and its communal agenda.138

If we reevaluate the passage about Ishmael’s construction of the Ka‘ba based strictly on scriptural evidence, it becomes clear that, although his indigeneity may have otherwise been an accepted fact among the Qur’ān’s audience(s),139 Ishmael’s “arabness” is not the polemical crux of the passage. The qibla-shifting verses, the culmination of the “arabization”, are actually devoid of any nativizing language or

139 See Carol Bakhos, Ishmael on the Border: Rabbinic Portrayals of the First Arab (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006), 85-123.
allusions (Q2:125 and 127). In fact, the qibla-shift occurs in explicitly non-particularistic language.\textsuperscript{140} “The east and the west are of God, so wherever you turn, there will be the countenance of God” (Q2:142). There is no rudimentary native/non-native dichotomy established, but rather the act is attributed to divine prerogative, based on prophetic desire, “We have seen you lift your face toward the heavens—behold! We are orienting you to a qibla dear to you, so turn [yourselves] to the Sanctuary-Mosque” (Q2:144).

The “arabization” hypothesis also encourages a simplistic conception of the Qur’ān’s ethnic milieu. In order for a communal program based on an ethnic formulation to stand, one must prove that the Qur’ān’s Jewish and Christian interlocutors identified as non-natives i.e. ethnic outsiders vis-à-vis the pagans. Such a postulate, for which there is no supporting evidence of any kind in the Qur’ānic text, plainly contradicts the evidence we do have on assimilated Jewish, Judaizing and Christian communities in and around Arabia in Late Antiquity.\textsuperscript{141} Even the classical Islamic sources depict two out of Medina’s three Jewish tribes as ethnically “Arab”, and the third as thoroughly “Arabized” (mustaʿrab). In fact, the Qur’ān itself explicitly refers to Jewish and Christian proselytism in its local setting, implying that ethnic insiders or “natives” took on these religio-communal appellations, “They say, ‘Convert to

\textsuperscript{140}Rahman, \textit{Major Themes in the Qur’ān}, 148, writes: “The Prophet could have kept Jerusalem as the qibla while disowning the Jews, just as he kept his Prophetic link with the Biblical prophetic tradition but disowned the Jews as true representatives of that tradition. We must, therefore, seek the real answer in something else, and that is the neutrality of the Meccan shrine in the religion of Islam.”

Judaism!’ or [the others say], ‘to Christianity!’…” (Q2:135). The natural question then is, how effective would community formation grounded in ethnic polemic be where the object of the polemic, the ‘outsider,’ identifies as a member of the same ethnic identity?

I contend that the polemic embodied in Ishmael is not one of ethnic re-orientation but rather an important and more fundamental ideological shift—a move from a sectarian outlook (farāq), which attempts to sublimate sectarian divergences and coordinate various partisan interests into a unified theological perspective, to a radically different communal outlook (ummah), which concedes the existence of divergent soteriologically viable communities that are concurrently elect or favored.142

This ideological shift is a marked divergence from contemporaneous Late Antique Jewish and Christian elective theologies, which were firmly grounded in a “zero-sum” paradigm,143 namely an essential (and ideal) insider-outsider dichotomy between contrasting pairs—Israel : the Nations | the Jews : the Gentiles | the Christians : the Heathens | the Elect : the Unelect | the Saved : the Damned and so on. It is this essential dichotomy that the Late Antique polemicists and apologists rearticulate through the sibling rivalries of Genesis, thus fashioning fundamentally diametric typologies: Cain contra Abel, Isaac contra Ishmael, Jacob contra Esau and so forth. The Qurʾān’s introduction of Ishmael as insider in addition to, not to the exclusion of, Isaac, thus subverts the key aspect of this theological system—the essential dichotomy. The Qurʾān does not claim for its addressee-community the appellation of new or true Isaac, or new or true Israel, but rather creates the possibility of concurrent (communal)

142 On the Qurʾān’s shifting communal outlook see further a hypothesis presented by Fazlur Rahman in Major Themes in the Qurʾan, 133-143.
143 Firestone, “Is there a notion of ‘divine election’ in the Qurʾān,” 407.
legitimacy by charting out a liminal space in the soteriological terrain, between the wholly saved and the wholly damned. This space is occupied by the righteous among the superseded monotheistic communities: “Those who believe [take this covenant] and those who became Jews, and those who are Christians and the Sabians—whosoever believed in God and the final day, and did good deeds, theirs is their merit with their lord. They need not fear for they shall not grieve” (Q2:62). This formula, which highlights the soteriological potency of multiple contiguous dispensations, appears in the ummah pericope in an explicit rebuttal to soteriological exclusivism: “They say, ‘None shall enter paradise except one who is Jewish! Or [the others say] ‘one who is Christian!’ This is simply their interpretation. Say, present your evidence if you are indeed truthful. For, in truth, [simply] anyone who concedes his countenance to God and is a doer of good shall find his reward with the Lord. They need not fear for they shall not grieve” (2:111-112). The Qurʾān’s concession to the existence of multiple soteriologically viable communities is expressed clearly in the language surrounding the qibla-shift: “[There is] for each [community] a direction that it will face. So compete [instead] in goodness” (Q2:148).

A hermeneutically conscious reading of the text must be careful not to anachronistically superimpose a modern ethos of “plurality” and “tolerance” onto these verses. We must understand them as an essentially polemical move that attempts to undermine, and thus destabilize, a base concept in the interlocutors’ communal

144 Cf. Wansbrough, The Sectarian Milieu, 42: “The Qibla controversy reflects a topos much older than the history of the Muslim community. Its appearance here is not unexpected, the direction in which prayer was performed was not merely a ritual nicety but a sectarian emblem.” See also Uri Rubin, “The Direction of Prayer in Islam: On the History of a Conflict between Rituals,” Historia 6 (2000), 5-29 (in Hebrew).
ideology. A more thorough evaluation of these and other such statements can allow us to create a fuller and more accurate picture of Qur’ānic supersessionism, which diverges sharply from contemporaneous Christian expressions of communal supersession.

In sum, the first element in the parallelism, highlighting Ishmael’s descent from Abraham, is not an empty assertion of ethnic communalism but rather a token of separatism, signaling a programmatic shift in the scripture’s communal ideology. In re-appropriating Ishmael, the text abandons its sectarian outlook, which privileges confessional unity resting on an essential insider-outsider dichotomy, and moves toward an entirely different theological paradigm—one of concurrent election. Ishmael does not embody a polemically motivated nativist claim. Rather his existence in the text, alongside Isaac, is an ontological comment on election itself.

3.3. Jacob’s Bequest

The Qur’ān’s polemical program against its Jewish interlocutors follows, in some respects, the trajectories found in early Christian polemic and apologia. A significant distinction, however, lies in the fact that, although the Qur’ān appropriates Israelite communal memory into its own emergent salvation-history, at no point does the text claim that its own emergent addressee-community is Israel, or true Israel. The Qur’ān’s polemical negotiation of Israelite communal lineage and legacy cannot be distilled into
a single supersessionary statement. Rather, it is comprised of a complex set of subtle subversions, contestations and re-appropriations that create certain tensions in the text. The filial-appellation—Children of Israel—is in itself one such tension, in that it acknowledges the Jewish community as descended from elect stock. The term itself, a cultural code, reveals something about the ideological lexicon of both the speaker and the audience, namely, that pedigree is important. Furthermore, if we consider the ummah pericope’s citation of Abraham’s supplication for prophecy among his progeny (Q2:129) and its realization (Q2:151), then we must add that pedigree has consequence. To understand the second element of the aforementioned parallelism, namely Jacob-Israel as the heir of Abraham and progenitor of “Muslims,” we then must first understand the consequences of his patrimony in the Qurʾān’s Late Antique context. I return here to the aggadic expansion on Ex. 18, in the Melḥiltä of R. Ishmael (see above) wherein all the nations of the world are bound by their progenitor’s bequest and legacy. The text reflects a key aspect of Rabbinic cosmology in Late Antiquity—the notion of vicariously acquired merit and demerit on account of one’s communal

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146 In the ummah pericope, Abraham’s prayer for prophecy among his progeny in Q2:129 is realized in Q2:151. For a detailed discussion of prophecy as a consequence of pedigree, see Powers, Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men, 50–57.
ancestors. This notion is represented most transparently in the doctrine of zakût ābot: “Patriarchal Merits” or “Ancestral Acquittal.”

The notion of a collective and supra-generational dimension to reward and punishment has its firm roots in the Hebrew Bible. In the Rabbinic corpus, as the doctrine of Patriarchal Merits, this notion takes on explicitly polemical valences in the face of ideological contenders, primarily Christian and Gnostic sects. Thus, it no longer pertains to conceptualizations of divine justice, but rather to conceptualizations of Israel’s communal election—the Jewish peoples’ enduring, unchallengeable place in the divine economy. The doctrine is thus not a legal or individual fact, but rather an expression of a national consciousness grounded in historic continuity. In essence, having inherited the merit of their ancestors—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—the Jewish people were, and will remain, uniquely favored before God:

AGGĂDÂT BƏREȘİT149 10-B

Joyous are those progenies whose ancestors have merit, for their merit remains for them (viz., the progeny). Joyous are Israel, for the merit of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob remains for them. With their [ancestral] merit did the Holy One, אשריהם הבנים שיש זכות לאבותם שזכות עמידת להן אשרי ישראל שזכות אברהם יצחק יעקב הוא ברוך הקדוש היה בהם בClinton: היה הקדוש בזקוד הזר


148 See e.g. Ex. 20.5-6, 32:13, 34:7; Deut: 4:37, 11:13-17; Lev. 26:42; Lam. 5:7; II Chron. 6:42.

149 This is a relatively late homiletic Midrash, possibly from the early Geonic (7th century) period.
blessed be He, save them. For when they were in Egypt, what is written? God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. (Ex. 2:24) And when they came out [of Egypt], they came out on account of their [ancestral] merit, as it is said, He remembered his sacred word, and Abraham, his servant, so he brought out his people with rejoicing, his chosen-ones with gladness (Ps. 105:42-43)... So [it is] in each and every generation.”

The doctrine of Patriarchal Merits thus became an integral component of Late Antique Jewish communal ideology and featured prominently in exegetical expansions on episodes from the books of Genesis and Exodus—the founding myths of Israel. When the targumist recounts Moses’ series of curses upon the disobedient (Deut. 28) he adds an exemplum where the Israelite ancestors protest the burden of these curses upon their progeny. They are comforted then by a voice from the sky: “Fear not! Even if the merits of these [living] generations fall short, your merits will never end, nor will the covenant I made with you ever be dissolved—these will protect them [i.e. your progeny]” (Pseudo-Jonathan, Deut. 28:15). The soteriological consequences of Patriarchal Merits extended beyond history and became a key component of Rabbinic

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150 For other examples of the salvific role of the doctrine of Patriarchal Merits in Israelite history, see e.g.: Mek. Pisha. 16:165-68; Siprê Deut. 8:1; Gen. Rab 23:6, 55:8, 74:12, 76:5, 84:5, 87:8; Ex. Rab. 2:4, 15:4,10; 31:2, Lev. Rab. 34:8; Pesîq. Rabbati 10:9; Deut. Rab 2:23.

eschatology. Here the term zakūt took on the meaning of acquittal: on account of their patriarchs’ merit, the Rabbis demonstrated, God would withhold judgment against the nation as a whole.\textsuperscript{152} If the community called up its Patriarchal Merits, these would intercede for it before God. Just the merits acquired by Abraham, through his trials, would suffice to acquit his progeny and guarantee their salvation.\textsuperscript{153} In this discursive context, the polemical subtexts of the ummah pericope’s treatment of Israelite genealogy, and its implications for communalism, become clearer.

Q BAQARAH 2:122-124

"O Children of Israel! Recall my favor wherewith I favored you, for indeed I preferred you among all. Fear the Day when no soul shall benefit another soul, in any matter—no acquittal will be accepted from it, and no intercession will benefit it. They will not be aided! [For, recall] when his Lord tried Abraham by words, and he perfected them, He said, ‘I make you an imām for humanity’ He [Abraham] said, ‘And my progeny [too]?’ He said, ‘My promise shall not include the wrongdoers.’"

\textsuperscript{152} For soteriological implications of Patriarchal Merits, see e.g. Gen. Rab. 63:1; Ex. Rab 44:5; Lev. Rab. 29:6-7; Deut. Rab. 3:15; Song Rab. 1:2. For the role of Patriarchal Merits in liturgy on atonement, see Tos. Šab. 55A.

\textsuperscript{153} See Mišnê Abot 5:3 and Pesîq. Rab Kah. 23:8.
This cluster of verses is a clear expression against the doctrine of Patriarchal Merits, which appears in other permutations elsewhere in the Qurʾān.\textsuperscript{154} It follows a clear acknowledgement of Jewish communal election as a filial group, but explicitly rebuts the possibility of vicarious merit or intercession. It continues on to a reference to the trials of Abraham, a moment generating copious ancestral merits in aggadah, but inserts a pointed polemical caveat into God’s promise to his progeny, “My promise shall not include the wrongdoers.” (cf. Gen. 22:1-18 and Gal. 3:16-18). A subsequent cluster of verses, which again opens with a clear contestation of Jewish communal ideology, refers to the Israelite ancestors as an *ummaḥ*, an independent community:

\textbf{Q BAQARAH 2:139-141}

“Or, do you all say that Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes were in fact Jews or Christians? Say [o prophet,] ‘Are you better informed, or is God? Who could be more unjust than the one who conceals a testament he has from God? God is not unaware of what you are doing. This is an *ummaḥ*, it has passed—what it acquired [in merit, belongs] to it and what you acquired [in merit, belongs] to you. You will not be questioned based on what they used to do.’”

\textsuperscript{154} For other Qurʾānic rebuttals of the notion of vicarious merits, see e.g. Q2:281; Q3:23-25, 33, 161; Q4:111-112; Q6:7,157; Q14:51; Q30:41, 74 and Q40:170. See also, for a rebuttal of the notion of vicarious demerits or imputed sin, Q7:172–175.
The concluding statement clarifies the larger polemical move—by deeming the patriarchs an *ummah* unto themselves, one that has passed, these verses alienate the Jewish interlocutors from the meritorious heritage of their ancestors.\(^{155}\) The reference to Christians in this context reveals another tension—the sacred genealogies of Genesis not only served as the etiological narratives of the Jewish people, they were also appropriated fully into various Christian theologies as antecedent confessional typologies. This infringement presented the aggadists with a theological challenge within their cosmological system. If the Christians were, as they maintained, the Children of Esau, in other words the grandchildren of Isaac and great-grandchildren of Abraham, then did they also not equally inherit the abundant merits of their righteous ancestors Isaac and Abraham?

The aggadists found an elegant solution to this challenge in the personage of Jacob-Israel, in whom all the polemics of Christianity were silenced. As Marmorstein explains, “It is no good to argue that Abraham had two sons. We, the descendants of Jacob, say the Aggadists are the bearers of Abraham’s inheritance of righteousness and justice.”\(^{156}\) Countless aggadic expansions, even from the Tannaitic era, reiterate the notion that since Abraham and Isaac produced blemished [*pāšāl*] offspring, their patrimony alone did confer imputed righteousness. It was only Jacob-Israel who produced progeny worthy [*kāšēr*] of this accrued heritage of grace.\(^{157}\) It was only Jacob’s patrimony, and not that of Abraham or Isaac, that ultimately mattered:

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\(^{155}\) On the *ummah*-ness of the Israelite patriarchs, see also Q23:35-53.

\(^{156}\) Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of Merits in Old Rabbinic Literature*, 141.

\(^{157}\) “Jacob’s bed was sound (*šlīma*), for all his sons were righteous (*ṣādiqīm*).” (Lev. Rab. 36).
“[It is] like the king who had a field, and gave it to tenants. The tenants began to take and steal [from] it, [so] he took it from them, and gave it to their children [but] they started being more wicked than the predecessors, [so] he took it from them and gave it to the grandchildren, [but] they were yet more wicked than the predecessors. A son was born to them [who] said to them, ‘Get out from [what is] mine! No more can you be here! Give me my portion that I may sell it.

Thus, when Abraham, our father, came to the world, the imperfection of Ishmael, and the sons of Keturah, came forth from him. Our father Isaac came to the world, and the imperfection of Esau, the princes of Edom, came forth from him—they returned to being more wicked than the predecessors. When Jacob came, no imperfection came forth from him, rather all his children were born as worthy as he, as it is said, *Jacob is a perfect man.* (Gen. 25:27)”

This *mašal*, a clear polemic against the Christian parable of the wicked tenants (cf. Mt. 21:33-46, Lk. 20:9-19: Mk. 12:1-12),\(^{158}\) deploys the recurrent trope of Jacob producing *kâšer* offspring, which, as Bakhos explains, “is nothing short of an attempt to define abstractly the concept of Israel as ritually proper, ideal.”\(^{159}\) Jacob, the aggadists

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\(^{159}\) Bakhos, *Ishmael on the Border*, 59.
argued, was “the chosen one of the Patriarchs” (Gen. Rab. 76:1) who uniquely bequeathed the Abrahamic promise and heritage to his progeny. Aggadic texts, particularly those from the Amoraic era, frequently allude to Jacob’s unique merit at key moments of the Israelite epic: “R. Yoḥanan said, In the Torah, in the Prophets, in the Writings, we found, that Israel did not cross the Jordan [into the promised land] except by the merits of Jacob” (Gen. Rab. 77:5). The consequence of these merits extended beyond history into the sphere of eschatology: “God said to Israel, ‘My children, if you wish to be acquitted in my court, recall before me the merit of your fathers and I shall forgive you’ and this refers to Jacob” (Lev. Rab. 29:6). Again, it is important to note that such statements do not pertain to the rabbinic theology of divine justice and order but rather to their communal ideology.  

It is the Aggadic Jacob whom we encounter in the Qur’ān and not the artful, morally ambiguous character of Genesis. The Qur’ānic Jacob, like his Aggadic counterpart, is devoid of all the imperfections that define his character in Genesis (Gen. 25:29-34, 27:14-41). Here, he is wholly righteous (Q21:72-73)—he does not deceive his father but is rather distinguished by his “truthful tongue” (Q:19:50). He is an expression of God’s special [nāfilāt] grace to Abraham (Q21:72, cf. Jub. 19:15-18, 22:11-30) and is from among the “the Elect, the Excellent” (Q38:47). It is the aggadic context, not the Biblical subtext, that provides a proper frame for understanding the polemical move

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160 See Gen. Rab 76; Lev. Rabbah 36; Tanḥ. Tol. 4; Aggadath Bereishit 64, 130 etc. For an overview of specific merits attributed to Jacob, see Louis Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews: Volume 1 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 256 n.35.
161 For a discussion of the elective subtext of Jacob’s morally ambiguous character in Genesis, see Yuval, Two Nations in your Womb, 57. Also see Yair Zakovitch, Jacob: Unexpected Patriarch (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).
articulated in Qurʾān’s recollection of Jacob’s death. This reference alludes not to the conclusion of the patriarchal narratives of Genesis, but rather to the opening of the national epic in Exodus; not to the death of a figure but to the founding of a communal category. The Babylonian Talmud references this key etiological moment in a lengthy halakhic discussion on Rabbinic Judaism’s most important communal doxology—the šīʿa yisrāʾēl:

PESAHĪM 56 - A

R. Śimʿon b. Laqīš taught, saying and Jacob called upon his children and said, gather [so] I shall tell you (Gen. 49:1). Jacob sought to reveal to his sons the end of days for the presence was departing from him—He said, God forbid that there be in my bed [i.e. progeny] an imperfect-one, like Abraham, from whom Ishmael came forth, and my father Isaac, from whom Esau came forth.

His sons said to him, Hear O Israel! the Lord is our God, the Lord is One! (Deut. 6:4) They said, Just as there is none in your heart but One, there is none in our heart but One. At this time Jacob, our father, opened [his mouth] and said Blessed be the name of glory and kingdom of eternity. (Deut. 32:3)

In this frame-narrative, Jacob-Israel’s death-bed exchange with his progeny produces the šīʿa whereby, a later aggadist explains, “Just as the Holy-One creates

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worlds, your father makes a world.” (Gen. Rab. 98). As Israel, the patriarch, dies, Israel, the community, emerges by the prelocutionary recitation of the šōma. It is in juxtaposition with this etiological narrative that the ideological move underlying the Qurʾān’s recollection of Jacob’s deathbed bequest comes to the fore:

Q BAQARAH 2:133-134

“Were you all witnesses when death came to Jacob? [Recall] when he said to his children, What will you worship after me? They said, your God and the God of your fathers, of Abraham, of Ishmael and of Isaac, one God and we surrender to him. This is an ummah, it has passed—what it acquired [in merit, belongs] to it and what you acquired [in merit, belongs] to you. You will not be questioned based on what they used to do."

The Qurʾān’s nachdichtung of Jacob’s death is framed as contested memory: Did the interlocutors witness the death of their eponymous ancestor? In the Qurʾān’s revelatory recollection, the twelve sons of Jacob proclaim themselves as being ones who have surrender—muslimūn, a deliberate anachronism anticipating the subsequent proclamation of a muslim ummah. The polemical topos of the patriarchs being a void or terminated ummah is then re-deployed to alienate the interlocutors from their mythic communal legacy. Furthermore, Ishmael appears in the sacred genealogy as Jacob’s father, alongside Isaac, thereby subverting the essential insider-outsider dichotomy

163 For a discussion of the šōma’s role in Rabbinic elective theology, see Kaminsky, Yet I Loved Jacob, 226.

164 For other occurrences of this formula, reminiscent of ēlohē ābôtēnu, see, Q2:133; Q26:26; Q:37:126; Q44:7.
underlying contemporaneous communal ideologies. The Qurʾān’s recollection of Jacob’s bequest is thus not a severely atrophied or misread borrowing from Genesis (cf. Gen. 48:21-50:2), but rather an ideologically meaningful and polemically potent reworking of biblical material. The subtly altered retelling of Jacob’s bequest adopts this key episode in Late Antique Jewish salvation history about the communal origins of Israel into the etiology of the emergent insider-community—the Muslims. Jacob bequeaths monotheism to his progeny and by way of this doctrinal bequest the text’s insider-addressees are (also) the elect patriarch’s true heirs.

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The ummah pericope’s usage of the communal appellation banū isrāʾīl for its Jewish interlocutors fuses their mythic past with their continued existence as a genealogically-bound entity. This conflation of past and present is in tension with the scriptural concept of ʿibra, the notion that disobedient nations are turned to legend, “Whenever a nation denied its messenger... we transformed them into mythologies [ahādīṯ], so distant [from you] are the unbelieving peoples!” (Q23:44) The Qurʾān cites narratives from Exodus as an ʿibra to its audience (see Q12:111) but, unlike other mythic peoples, the communal protagonists of these narratives—the Children of Israel—are recast as the text’s present interlocutors. Such a link between the mythic past and discursive present allows the Qurʾānic text to engage polemically with these ideological rivals over the sacred heritage of the Israelite patriarchs and to co-opt these privileged genealogies into its own etiology of salvific communalism. In this chapter, I have shown that the ummah pericope’s polemical negotiations of Late Antique Rabbinic communal
ideology cannot be reduced to a single supersessionary statement. Rather, the text’s communal supersessionism rests on a heterogeneous set of codes that subvert, contest, co-opt and re-appropriate various contemporaneous notions of filial communalism into its emergent communal ideology, which anticipates the formation of a new salvific community—a *muslim ummah*.

This polemical program of communal supersession continues into the post-Qur’ānic era, where shifting polemical and ideological exigencies led the early Muslim haggadists to embed hybrid scriptural genealogies into narratives of communal origin. In the early historiographical corpus, the scriptural Children of Israel are *historicized* as the Jewish tribes of Medina, namely the Banū Qurayzah, the Banū Naẓīr and the Banū Qaynuqā‘. The soteriologically potent ancestry of the Medinan tribes is co-opted into the Muhammadan saga by way of the intra-communal marriage mentioned at the outset. Muhammad’s marriage into the Aaronid line by way of Šafiyya bt. Ḥuyayy is a symbolic rupture in the *impermeable* communal boundary around the elect progeny of Jacob. Concurrently titled the ‘mother’ of the believers (*umm al-muʿminīn*) and the ‘daughter’ of Aaron (*bint hārūn*), Šafiyya is a genealogical nexus that recasts the *insider* community i.e. the Muslims, as the figurative progeny of Jacob-Israel.
CHAPTER 4

PROPHECY AND COMMUNITY

“A Prophet From Among You” (Q2:151)

Q BAQARAH 2 presents salvation both as an event—a prophetic proclamation, and as a process—a soteriological community. This dual formulation creates a dialectic in the text whereby each salvific community produces / warrants a prophet and each prophet produces / warrants a salvific community. The inextricability of ‘prophecy’ from ‘community’ is apparent in the ummah-verse itself, kaḍālika jaʿalnākum ummahann wasaṭīnī li-takūnū šuhada’a ‘alā l-nāsi wa-yakūnu l-rasūlu ‘alaykum šahīdīn (Q2:143), where the prophet’s function (šahīda) in his community is replicated in the community’s function in humanity (cf. mamleket kohānim in Ex. 19:6; basileion herateuma in 1 Pet. 2:9). Here, I further excavate this intersection between the event and the process of salvation, which lies at the core of the Q BAQARAH 2’s communal ideology.

In this chapter, I present a diachronic case study of the Jonah narrative-cycle, tracing its development from its proto-Islamic (Qur’ānic) form to its Islamic (early historiographical) rendering(s). I argue that the indeterminate communal purview of Jonah’s prophetic mission, the exceptional permutation of the aforementioned

165 The term ‘salvation’ (and by extension ‘salvific’ and ‘soteriological’) denote Qur’ānic lexemes related to the terms falāh, nijah, iḥlās etc. The term ‘prophecy’ (the salvific event) denotes lexemes derived from īrsāl, tanzīl, nabīwvah, bašārah, inḍār, hudā, šahīda and other terms denoting a revelatory event at a particular moment in time. The term ‘community’ (the salvific process) denotes ahl, qaʿwm, ummah and other terms or phrases such as al-laḍīna āmanū denoting a salvifically implicated group that exists and / or develops across time.
“intersection” between the event and process of salvation, explains why his figure and narrative, to the exclusion of all other Biblical prophets, finds substantial mention in the Qur’ānic text. Jonah’s anguished excursion to the Ninevites—a community well outside the spatial and genealogical boundaries of Israel—is a typological precursor to the communally indeterminate mission of the text’s prophetic addressee. The Qur’ān’s cooption of this prophetological type is elaborated in classical historiographical reports about Muhammad’s mission to the Ṭaqafīs. These reports, which appear as early as the Sīrah, serve the exegetical function of providing parabolic glosses on the Qur’ān’s (problematic) depiction of Jonah. Moreover, their reworkings in the early period (pre-Ṭabarī) mark stages of development in early Muslim (re-)conceptualizations of soteriological communalism.

The dialectic between prophecy and community is apparent in the etiological statement in the Ummah pericope concerning communalism: kāna l-nās ummatan wāhidatan fa-ba‘ata allāhu l-nabīyīna wa-mubašširīna wa-mundirīna wa-anzalāna l-humū l-kitāba bi-l-ḥaqiq li-yahkuma bayna l-nāsī fīmā ḫtalafū fīhi... wa-allāhu yahdī man yašā ‘u ilā širātīn mustaqīmīn (Q2:213). The revelatory event simultaneously precedes / causes (fa-ba‘ata) and succeeds / responds to (li-yahkuma) humankind’s rupture into multiple communities. Several verses reflect and elaborate the former notion: the salvific event of prophecy produces the salvific process of a soteriological community. This etiology, as

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166 By this I mean the numerous prophetic figures of the Hebrew Bible’s eight prophetic books. The only partial exception to this is the unnamed prophetic figure in Q2:246-248, who could be Samuel.

167 See Ch. 2 for detailed discussion on the communal purview of the Qur’ān’s prophetic addressee.
The following passage illustrates, brings together the customary *topoi* of prophecy with the recurrent formulae of communalism:

**Q AL-IMRAN 3:102-104**

“His prophet is among you, so whoever clings firmly to God has found guidance to the established path. O those who believe... do not die unless you are *Muslims*.168 Cling to the rope of God, unified! Do not disperse! Commemorate the favor of God upon you all, for you all were strangers and He fused your hearts together, and you became kin through His grace... A community shall emerge from you all—those who call to goodness, enjoining beneficence and opposing iniquity—such shall be the saved!”

The community is thus not a natural or necessary fact but one that emerges, inorganically, through divine intervention (*bi-ni‘matih*), from the event of prophecy. The community is, in effect, the process whereby the soteriological function of prophecy is replicated and augmented as the ummah-verse shows.169 In turn, this extension of prophetic praxis creates a fiction of kinship, *in tābū wa-aqānu l-ṣalāta wa-ātū l-zakāta fa-iḥwānukum fi-l-dīn* (Q9:11). In addition to truncating and superseding all ‘natural’ affinities, *lā tattāhidū ābabakum wa-iḥwānakum awliyā‘a* (Q9:23, see also Q70:12 and

168 See Ch. 4 for detailed discussion on this communal formula.

169 In several exegetical treatises, Q3:104: *la-takun minkum ummat*un *yad‘ūna ila l-ḥayri wa-ya‘murāna bi-l-ma‘rūfi*, is cited as an endorsement for an elite class of jurists. The concluding clause *wa-ālā‘ika humu l-muflihān* would seem to indicate that this is a general statement, cf. Q3:110 and Q3:114.
Q80:34), this fictional kinship persists beyond the natural realm into the afterlife, ḥāwān in ʿala surur in mutaqābilin (Q15:47). The process (community) is thus sometimes designated by the event (prophecy) that spurs it, e.g. min qawmi mūsa (Q7:159, see also 7:148, 28:76 etc). These statements establish a particular causal schema: prophecy → community, whereby the soteriological community is produced by the revelatory event and is an extension of it: kuntum ḥayra ummat in ʿurrijat lī-l-nāsi taʿmarūna bi-l-maʾrūfi wa-tanhawna ʿanī l-munkar wa-tuʾminūna bi-allāhi (Q3:110). This causality, namely “the emergence of a nation out of tribal groups sharing a theophany”, becomes one of the central themes of Muslim salvation history.

This schema however is only a partial picture of how the event and process of salvation intersect in the Qurʾān, for we find in the text its exact inversion: the community does not emerge from prophecy, prophecy emerges from community. Thus, whereas the former schema subordinates the process to the event, this schema reverses the causality—the nation exists prior to, and independently of, its prophet. Thus, as stated above, we find in the text instances in which the prophet’s name designates a community, qārūn kāna min qawmi mūsa (Q28:76) i.e. the Israelites, but we also find other instances in which the community’s name designates a prophet, wa-dkur ahā ʿād in āḍara qawmahu (Q46:21) i.e. Hūd. Reinforcing this latter schema is the frequent use of kinship terms as designations for prophetic figures, ilā ʿād in ahāhum hūd in (Q11:50, see also Q26:124); laqad arsalnā ilā tamād in ahāhum sāliḥ in (Q27:45, see also Q7:73, Q11:61 and Q26:142); ilā madyana ahāhum šuʿayb in (Q7:85, Q11:84, Q29:36); īḍ qāla lahum ahāhum nūh in (Q26:106, 161), etc. Such statements construe the community as natural, i.e. preexisting

independently of the revelatory event: *qāla mūsa li-qawmihi yā qawmi ākūrū niʿmata allāhi ʿalaykum id jaʿala fiḵum anbīyāʾa* (Q:5:20, see also Q:2:54, 60, 67; Q:7:128; Q:61:5).\(^{171}\) The text contains numerous aphoristic formulations highlighting a prophet’s membership in a pre-existing community: *mā ārsalnā min rasūlīn illa bi-lisānī qawmiyi* (Q:14:4) and *laqad jaʿahum rasūlīn minhum* (Q:16:113) etc. These recurrent formulations led Wansbrough to theorize an ‘ethnic orientation’ in Islamic prophetology.\(^{172}\) Much like the former schema [i.e. prophecy → community], this schema not only underpins specific instances (e.g. Moses and the Israelites) but also is generalized to a broad conceptualization of how the event and process of salvation intersect. Prophecy, as a conceptual abstraction, is contingent upon the (pre-)existence of a community *li-kulli qawmin hāḍa* (Q:13:7). Such general axioms frequently precede statements about the specific task of the Qurʾān’s prophetic addressee in his preexisting community, *nāḥīha ilayka mā kunta taʿlamuhā anta wa-lā qawmuka min qabli hāḍā* (Q:11:49, see also Q:6:66 and Q:7:145).

In sum, there is a basic conceptual tension in the text between schematic statements like *kaḍālika jaʿalnākum ummatīn* (Q:2:143) and *kuntum ḥayra ummatīn uḥrijat li-l-nās* (Q:3:110), in which the soteriological community emerges from, and is determined by, a revelatory event at a particular moment in time,\(^{173}\) and statements in which revelation emerges from and is determined by a preexistent soteriological community as in, *nazaʿnā min kullī ummatīn ʾṣahīda* (Q:28:75, cf.Q:2:143); *in min ummatīn illā ḥalā fiha*

\(^{171}\) For more examples, see Q:7:80, Q:10:71, Q:27:54, Q:27:123, Q:29:28, Q:29:16.


\(^{173}\) This includes scriptural utterances as revelatory events in and of themselves, without any prophetic actors or intermediaries.
In order to reconcile the schema: \( fikum \) rasulu\(\)h\(\)u…fa-asbah\(\)tum bi-ni ‘matihi il\(\)w\(\)\(\) ān‘ (Q3:102-104) [prophecy \(\rightarrow\) community] with its inversion: \( innaka \) la-mina l-mursal\(\)īn…li-tun\(\)d\(\)ra qaw\(\)m\(\)ā\(\) mā an\(\)d\(\)ara ābā’uh\(\)um (Q36:3-6) [community \(\rightarrow\) prophecy], I return to the dialectic stated at the outset: in the Qur’ān, the soteriological event of prophecy simultaneously produces and is produced by the soteriological process of community. This Qur’ānic dialectic underpins, ontologically and formally, classical Muslim prophetology and communal ideology and produces the classical Muslim repertoire of prophets, which includes the figure of Jonah.

### 4.1. Jonah in the Qur’ānic Milieu

Set in the reign of Jeroboam II (~8\textsuperscript{th} century B.C.E), the peculiar biblical story of Jonah spurred myriad interpretive elaborations in the Qur’ān’s Late Antique context. The Jonah narrative cycle became a scriptural contestation ground for competing ideological agendas. The story pivots around a series of inattendus—a reluctant prophet ignores and flees revelation (Jon. 1:1-3); the divinity marshals a great sea-storm directed against his person specifically (Jon. 1:4–16); a whale swallows and then accommodates this unwilling prophet in its belly until he relents (Jon. 1.17-2.10); the community that epitomizes wickedness suddenly, and inexplicably, turns to genuine repentance (Jon. 3.1–4); the reluctant prophet then anguishes over his own success (Jon. 3:5–10) and God instructs him on the nature of compassion through the death of a gourd-vine (Jon. 4:1-

\[174\] cf. ke\(\)š-em še-ha ’m\(\)îd me\(\)l\(\)k\(\)îm w\(\)e-hok\(\)m\(\)ām w\(\)e-n\(\)a\(\)b\(\)’îm le\(\)z \(\)i\(\)sr\(\)ā’ el ka\(\)k ha ’mi\(\)d le\(\)z ‘avôdê kokâbîm (Num. Rab. 20:1).
11). Given the peculiarity of this story, it is puzzling that, in addition to being the only named Israelite prophet in the Qur’ān, Jonah is also the only figure from the Hebrew Bible’s eight prophetic books whose narrative is recounted in detail by in the text:

Q SAFFAT 37:139-148

“Jonah too was from the prophetic-emissaries. [Recall] when he fled [from revelation] to the laden ship where he drew his lot, and was cast off. The whale then swallowed him, for he was culpable. Had he not been one of those who glorify, he would have tarried in its gut until the day of resurrection! We flung him onto the wasteland, while he agonized and We caused a gourd tree175 to grow over him [for shade]. Then, We sent him off to prophesy to a hundred thousand, or even more, who then believed and so we gave them respite until their time.”

Although the complete biblical narrative cannot be gleaned from this and other Qur’ānic citations, the Qur’ān’s rendition references the key plot elements of each chapter in the biblical story: Jonah’s evasion of God’s command and escape on the ship (Jon. 1); the casting of lots and his being swallowed by the whale (Jon. 2); his prophesy to the hundred thousand Ninevites (Jon. 3) and the shady gourd-plant (Jon. 4). Unlike the Qur’ān’s heavily reworked presentations of Biblical figures such as Moses,

Abraham and David, the text’s depiction of Jonah is uncharacteristically faithful to its biblical *vorlage*. The allusive nature of the narrative-citations on Jonah, the fact that central plot elements, such as his culpability and anguish, are never explained, and the use of epithets like *ṣāhibu l-hūt* and *ḏu l-nūn* are all indications that the Qur’ān’s audience was thoroughly familiar with the story of Jonah—an anguished Hebrew prophet who evades God’s command to prophesy to another community, Nineveh, the quintessential outsiders, by boarding a ship in the opposite direction. The Qur’ān alludes to what follows in another narrative-citation:

Q ANBIYA 21:85-88

“İshmael, Idrīs and Dhu-l-Kifl are all among the forbearing whom I have entered into my mercy, for they are righteous, as was Jonah. [Recall] when he left in frustration, supposing that We will not overpower him, but then he cried out from the depths: ‘There is no God but You! Exalted! Indeed, I was wrong!’ So, we answered him and alleviated his anguish.”

The passage reiterates Jonah’s culpability and depicts the prophetic emissary as insolent (*ẓanna an lan naqdīra ‘alayhi*). These elements of the Qur’ānic narrative posed a significant challenge to the post-Qur’ānic prophetological doctrine of infallibility (*ʿismah*), but the text’s charges would not have perturbed its late ancient audience.

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The list of figures with whom Jonah is grouped here intimates the central theme of his biblical narrative and the motivations behind his incriminating course of action. The logic underpinning this grouping (Jonah, Ishmael, Idrīs and Dū l-Kifl) becomes evident when we supplement it with a more extensive hagiographical catalog (Q6:85-87) where the figure appears.\footnote{Cf. Q4:163} The passage organizes each key Qur’ānic figure along explicit communal categories. The first list (v. 83-4) includes all the key figures from the Israelite epic in the Hebrew Bible i.e. the patriarchs (notably excluding Ishmael, cf. Q2:133, 136, 140; Q3:84; Q4:163 etc), Moses, Aaron and the Israelite kings. The next list (v. 85) mentions four New Testament figures central to late ancient Christian salvation history: Zachary, Jesus, John and Elijah.

The final list, ismāʾīla wa-l-yasaʿa wa-yūnusa wa-lūṭ al-ʿalamīn (v.86) groups Jonah again with Ishmael, along with Lot and Eliseus. The common denominator in this list is evident: these four biblical figures, unlike the previous fourteen, occupy communally liminal spaces in late ancient readings of the bible. While Ishmael and Lot are close kin of Abraham, their narratives hinge on their displacement to lands beyond the boundaries of Israel and their lives among outsiders. Similarly, the narrative climax of Eliseus’ prophetic career is his conversion and baptism of an outsider, the Aramean general Naaman, to the God of Israel (2 Kings 5, cf. Luke 4:27). I contend that the communal purview of Jonah’s mission to prophesy to a people outside the fold of Israel—as signaled by his placement in these lists—is the principal reason behind his appearance in the Qur’ān. Although classical exegetes afforded no attention to the arrangement of these lists, the communal schema underlying them would have been transparent to a late antique audience well-versed in the Bible. Not\footnote{Cf. Q4:163}
only were Eliseus and Jonah beatified in eastern Christianities as pre-Christ evangelists to the gentiles, but also their narratives in the Hebrew Bible were textual focal points in intra-monotheistic polemics and apologetics over the boundaries of the insider community. The text finds in Jonah an archetype for its prophetic-addresssee whose mission also straddles the communal boundary between the historically saved community (the Jews: the Israelites), and the emergent one (the Believers: the Gentiles). The aforementioned hagiographical catalog thus concludes with this statement, ḏālika ḥudā allāhi yahdī bihi ḫan yašāʾū min ʿibādihi...ūlāʾika l-laḏīna ātaynāhumu... l-nubūwah fa-in yakfur bihā ḫaʾalāʾī fa-qaḍ wakkalnā bihā qaumā" laysā bihā


180 For detailed discussion of classical depictions of Muhammad as a prophet to gentiles, see Ch. 3 and also see Uri Rubin, The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as viewed by the Early Muslims (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1995), 24-27.
bi-kāfirīn (Q6:88-89), highlighting the communal indeterminacy or universality of prophetic guidance and the possibility for any community to procure it.

The Qurʾān’s numerous references to the narrative and figure of Jonah signal the text’s participation in late ancient sectarian discourse over proselytism and universalism. As early as the first century, Hellenistic Jewish writers like Josephus and Philo cited the story of Jonah as a scriptural example of Jewish universalism, to counteract the frequent Roman anti-Semitic charge of misoxenos-bios, Jewish hatred or suspicion of outsiders. In the more immediate spatial and temporal context of the Qurʾān, the communal subtext of the book of Jonah became an oft-cited point of reference in polemics between Rabbinic Judaism and late antique eastern Christianities. For the aggadists, Jonah’s anguish stood as a clear counterpoint to Christian cooption of his story into arguments in favor of prophecy (i.e. proselytism) among gentiles. The prophet’s anguish, the aggadists contended, emanated from his love for the elect community, Israel, and his legitimate ideological distress over saving those outside the chosen fold from divine retribution. An early articulation of this perspective is found in the Tannaitic era halakhic treatise of Rabbi Ishmael, where Jonah’s example is cited in a broader discussion about the boundaries of prophecy:

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181 For discussion of the anti-Semitic charge of Jewish hatred of outsiders, see Peter Schäfer, Judeophobia: Attitudes towards the Jews in the Ancient Worlds (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1998), 1-34.


183 See J.T. Sanh. 11:5; Ber. 2:2-3 and 9:1; Tan. 2:9 and Gen. R. 5:5.

184 For more information on this text, see Günter Stemberger, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1996), 226-57.
Before the land of Israel was chosen, all lands were suitable for revelation, but once the land of Israel was chosen, all other lands became unfit [for it]... You may think, ‘I know of prophets to whom revelation came outside the land of Israel.’ Indeed prophecy came to them [i.e. the Israelites] outside the land, but this was solely on account of their patriarchal merits... Thus, you come to learn that God’s presence is never revealed outside the land of Israel, as it says, And Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from before God (Jon. 1:2), [but] could he actually flee from before the Lord?... No, rather, Jonah said [to himself], I will take myself outside the land [of Israel], a place where God’s presence is not revealed. [Right now] the gentiles are more inclined to repentance [in response to my prophesying], which will undermine [the holiness of] Israel... R. Nathan says, ‘Jonah only departed in order to kill himself in the sea’...Thus, in every place you discover, that the patriarchs and the prophets gave their lives for the sake of Israel.

Jonah’s (suicidal) anguish is recast by the aggadist as an expression of Israel’s holiness. This interpretive trajectory features prominently in the Palestinian Talmud, a

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185 The aggadist refers here to Rachel’s lament in Jer. 31:15. The argument is that on account of her merits as a progenitor of Israel, and God’s promise to her that her progeny will return from exile, the Israelites continue to receive prophecy while in Babylon. Cf. Gen. R. 71:3.
text actively engaged in anti-Christian polemic: “Jonah said, ‘I know that these gentiles are inclined to repentance – if I go and prophesy to them, they might repent and then the Holy One will come and inflict punishment on Israel [who have not yet repented] so what shall I do? I shall evade [the revelation]!’

The text is acutely aware of Christian appropriations of the Jonah narrative and, in opposition to Christian emphasis on the genuineness of the gentile Ninevites’ transformation: tayuṭā hwet e-šrīrā (Ephrem Sermo II.1.97), the Talmud reiterates that the repentance of the Ninevites was entirely fraudulent: tešūvā šel remiyō ’asū’ânašē niñeweh (J.T. Taan 2.1). Such rebuttals of Christian readings continue to appear widely, well into the 5th and 6th centuries, in aggadic midrashim, such as in the Pesiqtā of Rab Kahana where the Ninevites’ almost excessive repentance is recast as a mimicry of genuine repentance and thus a farce (24.83).

Jonah’s presentation as a pre-Christ evangelist to a gentile nation appears fairly early on in Christian writings, and his narrative is framed as such in the writings of Clement, Justin Martyr, Origen, Jerome, Augustine and Prudentius and continues to appear so in the patristic writings of Cyril of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, Gregory of

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186 J.T. Sanh. 11:5.
187 For an overview of the impact of Christian polemics on Jewish readings of Jonah, see Sherwood, A Biblical Text and its Afterlives, 106-107. It is important to note that in the Babylonian Talmud, a text removed from the Christian anti-Jewish polemics in Palestine and the Levant, the Ninevites’ repentance is cast as a role model for Jewish repentance.
188 For more information on this text, see Stemberger, Talmud and Midrash, 291-296.
Nazianzus, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Theodore of Mopsuestia.190 In the Late Antique Syriac tradition, the *memre* of Ephrem191 contain a lengthy retelling of the Jonah narrative. Ephrem recasts the story as a polemic against Israelite election and as a biblical foreshadowing of the eventual soteriological supremacy of gentile communities (Christians) over the descendants of Abraham (Jews):192

MEMRA II.1.903–912

“[Jonah] triumphed among the Ninevites, and upon the children of Abraham, he wept. He saw that the seed of Canaan was wise while the seed of Jacob was deranged. He saw that the gentiles had [truly] circumcised their hearts, while the circumcised had hardened theirs. He saw [in Nineveh] that the Sabbaths were not kept but the commandments were observed, and so, without the Sabbath there was redemption and without circumcision there was salvation.”

In Ephrem’s recounting of the Jonah narrative, he attempts a conceptual inversion of ‘Israel’ similar to Paul’s allegory of Sarah and Hagar.193 Jonah’s anguish does not emanate from his reluctance to prophesy to gentiles, as in rabbinic writings, but rather from his embarrassment over the wickedness of his own people, the

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190 For an overview of the use of the Jonah narrative in late antique Christian Greek and Latin traditions to demonstrate the supersession of gentiles over Israel, see Shepherdson, “Interpreting the Ninvites’ Repentance”, 255.
192 Also see Memra II.1.7-10, 21-22, 33-34.
Israelites. Towards the end of the homily the Ninevites wish to go to the land of promise to see their prophetic savior’s people, but Jonah, fearful that the Ninevites will discover the waywardness of the Israelites and lose their faith, attempts to dissuade them by saying that an uncircumcised nation may not enter the land. The Ninevites heed Jonah’s instruction by perching themselves on mountains outside the land to observe its denizens from afar:

MEMRA II.I.1807-1808

“The Ninevites were horrified by what they saw there... [They said] ‘These people are arrogant on account of their name for they are known as the children of the righteous. They are satisfied only in being called the Sons of Jacob... they consider themselves the righteous progeny, on account of Abraham – only, because they have the title ‘Israel’ upon them. Such is their arrogance, that they are circumcised... although their ways do not resemble those of the [true] offspring of Abraham.’”

The works of the other Syriac fathers, Jacob of Serugh and Narsai, include similar polemical retellings of the Jonah narrative that offset Israel’s place in the divine economy and emphasize the salvific supersession gentile nations. This late antique eastern Christian reading of the Jonah narrative aptly contextualizes the appearance of

194 For the charge of idolatry against the Jews, cf. Q4:51
195 See Jacob of Serug, Homiliae Selectae (Paris, 1908), 368–490.
196 See Alphonso Mingana, Homiliae et Carmina (Mosul, 1905), 134–149.
the story in the Qur’ān. As has been already noted by Jeffrey and Reynolds, the Christian subtext of the Qur’ānic Jonah is evidenced strongly by the form of his name yūnus which indicates the Greek inflection iōnas (יונָץ) via the Christian Aramaic yūnis (יוניס) or the Ethiopic yūnas (ወንስ).

The Jonah narrative-citations in the Qur’ān are not simply exhortations to repentance. Retellings of any other of the Hebrew Bible’s numerous prophetic books would have served such an agenda with equal effect. The fact that Jonah is the only prophetic figure whose narrative is mentioned in the Qur’ān is explained best if we take into account Jewish and Christian readings of the story in late antiquity. Conventional readings of Q10, a Sura named after Jonah, cast the Qur’ān’s brief citation of his narrative as a general call for repentance. When framed within the context of late antique readings, the same passage and its citation of the Jonah narrative betrays a more pointed comment on the place of prophecy i.e. divine guidance among ‘outsiders’:

Q YUNUS 10:84-109

“Moses said, ‘O my people, if you believe in God then trust him, if you truly are Muslims... We brought the Israelites through the sea, while Pharaoh with his hosts pursued them, in oppression and aggression, until he began to drown he said, ‘I believe that there is no God but the one in whom the Israelites believe, for I [too] am a Muslim!...So, now, We will save you—your body—so that you may become a sign to those who come after you... Why then has no city come to believe so...”

its belief may benefit it, except the nation of Jonah! When they believed, We averted from them the torment of disgrace in this worldly life and gave them respite until their time. For had your Lord willed, all who are upon the earth would have believed in complete unity – will you compel humankind until they believe? Follow what has been revealed to you, and be patient until God decides.

Diverging sharply from late antique Jewish and Christian readings of Exodus (cf. Exodus 13:17-14:29), in the Qur‘ānic retelling, Pharaoh himself—the quintessential outsider, much like the Ninevites—repents, converts and takes on the insider appellation Muslim, and is consequently saved by God. Pharaoh’s conversion frames the Ninevites’ repentance, which, as Reynolds notes, “runs contrary to the standard Qur‘ānic topos of prophetic history, according to which the prophet calls his people to repent lest God punish them; the people refuse to believe and God destroys them.”198 These verses thus are not simply a broad call for repentance, as they are understood by classical exegetes. The Qur‘ān’s allusion to Nineveh is an elaboration on the dogmatic position taken with the conversion and salvation of Pharaoh, namely, the ability of anyone to enter the salvific community by way of prophetic guidance and divine will. This point is reiterated by the subsequent statement, law šā‘a rabbuka la-āmana man fi l-ardi kulluhum jamī‘an (cf. Q5:48, Q6:35). The references to Pharaoh and the Ninevites serve as a prologue to a pair of prophetic proclamations to the new dispensation, each introduced by the supra-communal vocative formula, qul yā ayyuhā l-nās (Q10:104, 108).

4.2. Jonah in Early Muslim Haggadah

The concluding passage of Q JONAH 10 is one of the three places where the Qurʾān’s prophetic addressee is commanded to patiently wait for the decision of God, two of which feature a direct reference to Jonah. The exhortation in Q QALAM 68 is the sole instance where the text’s prophetic addressee is explicitly commanded not to follow the example of a biblical forbear:

Q QALAM 68: 48-50

“Be patient for your lord’s decision. Be not like Jonah, when he cried out in [similar] despair! Were it not for the favor of God reaching him! [Ultimately] he was flung onto the wasteland while [still] a reprobate. But his lord elected him and made him one of the reformers.”

The imperative form ašbir is an elemental example of Qurʾānic deutungsbedurftigkeit, in that the linguistic form draws interpretive attention. Furthermore, as Wansbrough notes, “the incorporation of Biblical imagery entailed… the Deutungsbedurftigkeit characteristic of sacred language. From the moment of its utterance the word of God required exegesis… The forms generated by that process and the hermeneutical principles from which they were derived varied with the needs of the community.”¹⁹⁹ The need to associate the vocative utterance with a historical subject, to whom the antonomastic reference to Jonah would be legible, was met by one of the earliest forms of systematic scriptural interpretation: narrative exegesis or haggadah.

¹⁹⁹ Wansbrough, Qurʾānic Studies, 118.
This form produced and/or limited the significance(s) of such scriptural utterances by situating them within the spatial and temporal context of the Muhammadan saga. In coordinating the exhortation aṣbir with a specific cause / occasion (sabab) in the life of Muhammad, a narrative nexus emerged whereby the two distinct prophetic dramas were conflated: the figure of Muhammad was recast within a Biblical (Jonaic) typology of prophecy and, simultaneously, the figure of Jonah was harmonized with emergent Muslim (Muhammadan) prophetological paradigms. At the heart of this haggadic fusion is the motif of prophetic anguish, borne of communal displacement and the divine command to be patient. This motif, which rests on a narrative parallelism, is an exegetical device, “whose function could be described as ‘prognostic’ that is, designed to adapt the topoi of Biblical salvation history to the mission of the Arabian prophet.”

The biblical topos of prophetic anguish—Jonah’s anguish among the Ninivites—is thus adopted and replayed in Muslim haggadah as Muhammad’s anguish among the Taqafis.

The typological use of Jonaic anguish is well-attested in late ancient and early medieval Christian writings. As Sherword notes, Jonah’s story becomes an “accommodating receptacle for Christ’s truth and Christ’s sufferings. Jonah’s outline begins to melt; he loses his own voice and script and outline and becomes a ventriloquist for Christ. And as the Old Testament narrative is… consumed by the New, emphasis is redistributed, and elements of the Old Testament text are lost.”

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200 Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 89.
historiography similarly\textsuperscript{203} appropriates the Jonaic typology and reproduces it through
the personage of Muhammad by \textit{haggadic} parable, where “scriptural allusions are
implicit...exhibiting diction and imagery but not verbatim text of the canon.”\textsuperscript{204}
Comparing Qur’\’\'anic material on Jonah to classical interlinear (i.e. \textit{halakhic}, masoretic
and rhetorical) exegesis, Zilio-Grandi argues, “du fait des anomalies que la figure de
Jonas comporte dès son précédent biblique, les auteurs musulmans ne parviennent
jamais à résoudre la question de cette figure.”\textsuperscript{205} She concludes that the exegetical
tradition fails to “traduire les informations fragmentaires, fournies par le Coran, en une
forme pleinement islamique.”\textsuperscript{206} Although we may concede this partially, with due
reservation about the category ‘pleinement islamique’, in the earliest form of scriptural
interpretation, \textit{haggadah}, we find a thoroughly refashioned and \textit{islamicized} re-
presentation of Jonah.\textsuperscript{207}

We can trace the development of the historicizing of Qur’\’\'anic utterances\textsuperscript{208} on
Jonah through three concatenated historiographical works: Ibn Hišām’s (d. 213/833)
redaction of the Prophetic Biography of Ibn Iṣḥāq, \textit{al-sīrah l-nabawiyyatu} [\textit{Sīrah}];\textsuperscript{209}

\textsuperscript{203} Compare however the explicitly supersessionary statement, “One greater than Jonah
has come” (Mt. 12:41, Lk. 23:32) and the oft-cited \textit{ḥadīt}, “None may say that I am greater
than Jonah.” The \textit{ḥadīt} is perhaps another example of early attempts to exculpate Jonah
from the Qur’\’\'anic charges of insolence.
\textsuperscript{204} Wansbrough, \textit{Sectarian Milieu}, 2.
\textsuperscript{205} Zilio-Grandi, “Jonas, un prophète biblique dans l’islam,” 309.
\textsuperscript{206} Ibid., 283.
\textsuperscript{207} Wansbrough, \textit{Qur’\’\'anic Studies}, 122-148.
\textsuperscript{208} Wansbrough, \textit{Sectarian Milieu}, ix.
\textsuperscript{209} Muhammad ʻAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, \textit{al-Sīrah al-Nabawīya}. 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar
Sader, 2005).
Suhaylī’s (d. 581 / 1185) extensive commentary on Ibn Hišām’s redaction, *al-*rawd *al-*unuf fi ʿṣarḥī l-strati l-nabawīyyah [Ṣarḥi] and Taʿlabī’s (d. 427 / 1035) compendium of prophetic narratives: ‘arāʾisu l-majālis fi qīṣaṣi l-anbīyaʾi [Qīṣaṣ] Literary analysis of this material “reveals what seems to be the essential role of historiography, namely, the unceasing reinterpretation of scripture.” In retelling the story of Jonah through the paradigmatic prophetic saga of Muhammad, these historiographical works cumulatively harmonize the Qurʾān’s presentation of Jonah’s mission to the Ninevites with the emergent ideological frameworks of the early confessional community. As the communal boundaries functional in the Qurʾānic milieu e.g. Israel | Gentile, become irrelevant or radically transformed in the post-Qurʾānic context e.g. Monotheist | Pagan, the communal *otherness* of the Ninevites, the thematic crux of Jonah’s prophetic narrative in the late antique readings and the prime reason for its appearance in the Qurʾānic text, is jettisoned entirely.

The Ṣīrah reports that in the tenth year of Muhammad’s prophecy, rejected by his Qurašī kinsmen, the Meccan prophet ventures to the foreign city of Ṭāʿif, to urge its resident Ṭaqafīs to repent from their idolatry and accept monotheism. The Ṭaqafī nobility, custodians of the cultic shrine of Allāt, reject Muhammad’s call to one god and order their slaves to chase him into a vineyard outside the city walls. Here, the dejected and wounded Muhammad encounters ʿAddās, a Ninevite, who consoles the anguished prophet and then attests to the veracity of his message. This episode signals the

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212 Wansbrough, *Qurʾānic Studies*, 43.
culmination of the ‘year of sorrows’ and is a prelude to Muhammad’s night journey, a climactic moment in the Sīrah’s account of the ummah’s genesis. The Ṭā’īf excursion is comprised of an elemental narrative scheme underpinning several Sīrah episodes: (i) exile / escape from one’s own community; (ii) the enumeration of the basic tenets of the monotheism and (iii) external recognition of the new dispensation. A crucial and well-studied Sīrah episode that rests on this narrative scheme is Jaʿfar’s exchange with the Negus of Abyssinia, after the first migration.213 The episode is not furnished with a chain of transmission and, based on content and form, belongs to what Sellheim calls the Sīrah’s Grundschichte, namely the foundational layer of material set in a localized Hejazi environment.214 The Ṭaqafīs are portrayed explicitly as outsiders, whereas material from later layers (particularly the zweite schichte i.e. the Abbasid dynastic layer) portrays them as integral insiders (ʿarab) vis-à-vis the ‘ajam.

Muhammad’s escape to the city of Ṭā’īf falls at a pivotal point in the Sīrah. It follows the consecutive deaths of Ḥadija and Abū Ṭālib, without whose patronage and protection Muhammad becomes vulnerable to the abuses and attacks of his community. The Sīrah recounts a series of episodes where Muhammad is injured physically by his kinsmen who are not only incredulous of his prophecy but also enraged by his preaching among the lower echelons of their society.215 Anguished and in despair, Muhammad heads for the mountain town of Ṭā’īf and manages to reach three members of the Ṭaqaft nobility. Each noble rejects Muhammad’s message and ridicules his claims

213 See Ibid., 42.
215 On the trope of a prophet’s rejection by his own community, cf. Deut. 18:18; Matt. 5:12; Lk. 6:23.
to prophethood: “Did God not find a better one than you to send?”

says one. “If you are a prophet, you are far too important for me to talk to,”

says another. Concerned that his community, the Qurayš, will consider his dealings with the foreign tribe of Ṭaqīf as treacherous, he asks the noble to keep his visit a secret. They refuse and rile up a “mob of louts and slaves” to pelt him with rocks and chase him out of the town and into the orchard of his Qurašī kinsman ‘Utba b. Rabī’a, who owns property in Ṭāʾif. In the orchard, the prophet takes refuge under the shade of a grapevine. Overcome with anguish, he says a psalm-like prayer, “O God! I complain to you about my powerlessness, my poverty and my lowliness before these people. O most compassionate one, you are the Lord of the weak and so you are my Lord. To whom will you confide me? To these foreigners who are hostile to me? To these adversaries who have complete authority over me?”

‘Utba b. Rabīʿah listens to his injured kinsman’s anguished supplication from a distance and is moved. He sends his young Christian slave, ‘Addās, to console Muhammad with a platter of grapes from the orchard:

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217 Ibid.
218 Ibid., 37.
219 Ibid.
And so ‘Addās did. He greeted him and placed the grapes before the messenger of God. Then, he said to him, “Eat some.” When the prophet extended his hand to take some, he said, “In the name of God.” ‘Addās looked closely at his face and said, “By God, the people of this land would never say such a thing.” The apostle asked him, “What are your origins, O ‘Addās? What is your religion?” He said, “I am a Christian, and I am a man from among the people of Nineveh.” The prophet said, “From the city of the righteous man Jonah, the son of Mattai!” ‘Addās said: “How could you know of him here?” The prophet said, “He was my brother, for he was a prophet of God and I am a prophet.” Then ‘Addās leaned over to the prophet and kissed his forehead… 

Following this exchange, Muhammad journeys back towards Mecca pausing in the valley of Naḥla, where the Jinns of Niṣibīn hear him reciting the Qur’ān, repent and accept monotheism en masse. Numerous retellings of the Ṭaʿif excursion, such as that of Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) specify that the repentant Jinns were in fact from Nineveh. Muhammad then reenters the sanctuary precincts of Mecca under the protection of a...
Quraši, Muṭ‘im b. Ḍiy and “his community opposed him even more viciously, apart from a few lower-class people who continued to believe in him.”

It is my contention that the Sīrah’s Ṭā’if excursion is an early Nachdichtung of the Jonah story. It is a parabolic gloss on the Qurʿān’s presentation of the Biblical prophet’s anguished mission to Nineveh, as signaled explicitly by its climax: an anguished Muhammad’s consolation by a Ninevite. In addition to the salient theme of prophetic anguish, the striking similarities between multiple narrative details in the two accounts cannot be discounted as coincidental or inconsequential. Divergences between certain aspects of the two accounts would suggest that the Ṭā’if excursion was not entirely fashioned from the scriptural account of Jonah but was more likely harmonized with it, through the circular process described by Maghen; “the more Muhammad’s genuine career began to recall what had been handed down about [the Biblical prophet], the more tempting it became to borrow from the latter in order to embellish the former; the more the Muhammadan epic was enriched by such borrowing, the more it grew to resemble the [Biblical], and so on.” Shared mythemes between the two accounts can be arranged as follows:

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223 Ibn Hišām, al-Sīrah II, 36.

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Prophetological *Nachdichtungs*, such as the Ṭāʾif excursion, are quite commonplace in the *Sīrah*. Much like the Mosaic and Davidic subtexts of numerous *Sīrah* episodes, the figure of Jonah also constitutes a typology whereby the memory, myth and message of the Qur’ānic prophetic-addressee is historicized by the early Muslims.\(^{226}\) Wansbrough notes broadly that from the point of view of literary analysis,

\(^{225}\) 2 Kings 14.

\(^{226}\) “Establishment of a historical connection between revelation and its recipient was… not simply a corollary of canonization. In the preceding pages it has been argued that the historical portrait of the Arabian prophet conforms to a pattern composed partly of the Qur’ānic data on prophethood, in character emphatically Mosaic, and partly on the motifs drawn from a narrative tradition typically associated with men of God.” Wansbrough, *Qur’ānic Studies*, 78.
“It can be argued that the principal difference between the text of scripture and the Muhammadan evangelium lies merely in the canonical status of the former. Thematic and exemplary treatment of prophethood in the Qur’an was reformulated in the evangelium as the personal history of Muhammad.” 227 These reformulations based on scriptural typologies are in no way accidental nor are they obscured by the early historiographers. The presence of a Ninevite among the Ṭaqafīs in the Ṭā’īf episode draws attention to the scriptural subtext. This detail is conspicuous and functions as a legitimizing nexus between the emergent prophetic figure of Muhammad and a widely-known biblical antecedent: his experience is the relived experience of his predecessors. With the Ṭā’īf episode, the Sīrah appropriates anguish, a legitimate and legitimating topos of late antique prophetology, highlighted in retellings of Moses’ destruction of the tablets, 228 Jeremiah’s lament, 229 Job’s speeches 230 and, most importantly, the Jonah story. Through the reformulation of such scriptural topoi, the figure of Muhammad becomes the culmination of his prophetic forbears’ narratives. These figural ‘retellings’ permeate even the most mundane aspects of Muhammad’s communal memory. An illustrative example is the widely circulated hadīt on Muhammad’s partiality to gourds, in which asks ‘Ā’iša to put more of the vegetable in his meals as “they strengthen the anguished heart.” When she asks him why, he clarifies, “They are from the plant of my brother, Jonah.” 231

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227 Ibid., 65.
228 Ex. 32:19
229 Jer. 15:10–18
230 Job 23–24.
4.3. Jonah Reimagined

Muhammad’s encounter with the Ninevite at Ṭāʾif reframes the entire episode as a prolonged attestation narrative. Muhammad is not only *reliving* the experiences of his prophetic forbear, anguishing among foreigners, but also, as ‘Addās corroborates, he has unique (prophetic) knowledge of their customs, i.e. the *basmala*. The *Ṣarḥ* of Suhaylī (d. 581 / 1185) adds another detail in the exchange between ‘Addās and Muhammad, indicating that the haggadists knew well the communal subtext of the scriptural story. During the exchange in the orchard, when ‘Addās hears Muhammad utter the name Jonah, he exclaims, “By God when I left Nineveh, there were merely ten people left who still remembered Jonah. From where did you hear about him? You are just a gentile from a nation of gentiles!” In the *Ṣirah*, ‘Addās then returns to his incredulous pagan master ‘Utbā b. Rabīʿah, testifying that Muhammad is a true prophet, “O master, there is none finer in these lands than he. He said things to me that only a prophet could know!” The *Ṣarḥ* develops this testimonial aspect of the Ṭāʾif excursion by supplementing the *Ṣirah* report with a lengthy biographical entry on the Ninevite.

The entry, simply entitled *ḥabar ṣaddās*, is comprised of three reports. The first places ‘Addās in the company of the *Ṣirah*’s two other Christian attesters: Bahīra, the monk and Ḥadīja’s cousin, Waraqa b. Nawfal. In the report, perplexed by Muhammad’s encounter with Gabriel at Ḥira, Ḥadīja seeks the counsel of the monk and her cousin, both of whom testify that Muhammad’s visions are truly prophetic. Ḥadīja then returns to Mecca to “the slave of ‘Utbā b. Rabī‘ah, ‘Addās, who had knowledge of scripture.

She asked him about Gabriel and he said, ‘O Lady of the Qurayš - Holy! Holy! Finally the time has come for the name Gabriel to be known in these lands!’ 234 ‘Addās’ role as a prototypical Christian attester has been detached from the Ṭāʾif excursion and retrojected onto an earlier point in Muhammad’s prophetic mission. The second report projects the attestation to a much later point, the battle of Badr in the second year of the hijra. Here, the Ninevite refuses to fight alongside his pagan masters, declaring that Muhammad is truly a prophet. The Šarḥ notes that, “some [reports] say that ‘Addās returned [to Mecca] and did not witness Badr, while other say that he did and was killed there.” 235

The third report in the Šarḥ’s biographical supplement on ‘Addās ostensibly has nothing to do with the Ninevite’s life, but is a clear illustration of how, through haggadic exegesis “the essentially anonymous references of the text of revelation were carefully related to the… figure of the Arabian prophet.” 236 The report parabolically glosses the Qur’ān’s exhortation to its prophetic-addresssee to remain patient and not follow the example of Jonah, ḥārib li-ḥukmi rabbika wa-lā takun ka-ṣāhibi l-ḥūt (Q68:48). The rhetorical and halakhic exegetes Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150 /767), Ṭabarī (d. 310 /923), Ṭabarānī (d. 360 /970) and later Qurtubī (d. 671/1273) and Ibn Kaṭīr (d. 774/1373) all set the circumstances (asbāb) of these verses as Muhammad’s own experience of heightened anguish following the injuries and abuse (aḍā) he suffered after the deaths of Abū Ṭālib

234 Suhaylt, al-Šarḥ, 56.
235 Ibid.
236 Wansbrough, Qur’anic Studies, 57.
and Ḥadīja, the prelude to the Ṭa‘īf excursion. Ṭabarī explains, “The Exalted is saying to his prophet: O Muhammad! Go through with what your Lord has commanded [viz., prophesying] and do not let their invalidation of you, and their injuring you, deter you from imparting what you must impart!” Zamaḥšarī (d. 538/1143) and Rāżī (d. 606/1209) contextualize these verses explicitly in the Ṭa‘īf episode, “The question [of concern] is: What were the circumstances of such a revelation? The answer is, as it is reported, that [this is from when] he [Muhammad] called upon Ṭaqīf.” This context brings full circle the exegetical task of haggadah. In giving scriptural utterances context, their significance and meaning is mediated. The Šarḥ’s third supplementary report in the biographical entry on ‘Addās contextualizes these verses on Jonah with an anecdote lifted from the hadīṭ compendium of Buḥārī (d. 256 / 870):

BUḤĀRĪ 54: 454

ʿĀʾiša reported to him [ʿUrwa] that she said to the Prophet, ‘Did you experience a day more difficult than ṬUḥud?’ He responded, Indeed I have suffered from your people [the Qurayš] what I have suffered, but worse yet is the day of adversity when I presented myself to ʿAbd al-Kulāl (the Ṭaqāfī chieftain) and he did not respond to me with what I had hoped. So I departed, dejected and grief-stricken, and I did not

237 Some exegetes also include another tradition that attributes these verses to the battle of ṬUḥud.


In several subsequent retellings of Muhammad’s prophetic mission to the Taqafis, including that of Ibn Katîr, this hadîth appears in the body of the Tâ’îf narrative itself. This anecdote is Muhammad’s enactment of the Qur’ân’s exhortation to be patient and to be unlike Jonah. The contextualizing of these verses casts his figure as the recipient of this theophany and the executor of its task.\(^{240}\)

Though ostensibly a parabolic parallel, the Tâ’îf narrative is actually a subtle inversion of the Jonah story. Whereas in the scriptural story the Ninevites’ eagerness to repent is matched by Jonah’s reluctance to save them, in the Tâ’îf episode, Muhammad’s desperate attempts to convert the Taqafis are matched by their refusal to repent. It is this latter haggadic narrative, not its scriptural precursor, that fashions the

\(^{240}\) Wansbrough, Sectarian Milieu, 50.
Jonah of classical Islam. In scripture, Jonah is anguished by the repentance of the Ninevites and angered when God does not punish them.241 Muhammad’s anguish emanates from the Ṭaqaff’s rejection of his message. The aforementioned hadīth thus does more than simply draw a parallel between the two prophetic dramas – it conflates their stories in a way that brings the biblical prophet more in line with the emergent Muslim prophetological schema and its central doctrine of prophetic infallibility.

Such reformulations are not homogenous through the haggadic corpus. The Qur’ān refers to two instances of Jonah’s anguish: his anguished flight from Nineveh and his anguish over the death of the gourd-vine.242 While both instances of anguish are cast as reprehensible in the text, the former is glossed by haggadah i.e. the Sirah’s Ṭā’if excursion, while the latter is not.243 The following passage from Rāzī’s (d. 606 / 1209) exegesis on Q21:87 shows how the un-glossed instance remains largely unmediated in the Islamic tradition:

241 Jon. 4.
242 Ibid.
243 "La question que redoute chaque exégète est évidemment celle de l’impiété possible de Jonas qui, atteignant le sommet de l’ignorance, alors qu’il est prophète, et donc un élu en matière de connaissance, aurait douté du caractère inexorable du Décret, voire de la Puissance, en professant une incapacité de Dieu au lieu de Sa capacité absolue. " (Zilio-Grandi, "Jonas, un prophète biblique dans l’islam," 297).
God caused a gourd vine to grow over him. He [Jonah] derived shade from it, and ate of its fruit until he was rejuvenated. Then the earth devoured it, and it collapsed from its fruit and Jonah was anguished, so it was said to him, ‘O Jonah! Are you anguished over a plant and yet you are not anguished by a hundred thousand or more, although you have not gone to them, nor have you sought their salvation?’

Rāzī’s depiction of the prophet’s anguish is entirely in line with the biblical narrative (Jon. 4) and the exegete makes no effort to exculpate him of his reprehensible actions. Exegetes however go to great lengths to explain Jonah’s anguish during his mission to Nineveh—an instance of anguish associated strongly with the relived prophetic experience of Muhammad at Ṭa’if. In the Qiṣṣa of Ṭa’labī, Jonah “departed from his people in anger towards his Lord, when He averted His wrath from them, after having promised it. This is because Jonah hated being among people who tried to prove their falsehood, and he did not know the reason for God’s having removed His punishment, so he went out in anger.”

Thus, in the classical tradition, Jonah’s frustration is caused by the Ninevites’ refusal to heed his prophetic call, just as Muhammad is anguished by the Taqafīs’ refusal to heed his. The Qiṣṣa diverge from the Qur’ānic (and Biblical) telling, which depicts the Ninevites as repentant converts (Q10:98 and Q37:148), completely inverting this crucial plot detail, “God sent Jonah, son of Mattai, to his people when he was thirty years old, and he dwelt among them for

244 Ṭa’labī, Qiṣṣa, 683.
thirty-three years, summoning them to God, but none of them believed.”

It is this reimagining of Jonah’s prophetic mission that pervades Muslim hagiographical literature on the scriptural figure. Jonah’s mission bears a striking resemblance to Muhammad’s mission to Ṭāʾif and is effectively an inversion of the scriptural narrative.

But this is not all. The most fundamental aspect of the Jonah story, namely the communal otherness of the Ninevites is also erased in the Muslim reimagining of Jonah, concomitant with the fading away of the foreignness of the Ṭaqafīs already in the later layers (schichte) of the Sīrah. In his gloss on Q68:48, Muqāṭil writes, “‘Be not like the one of the whale!’ that is, like Jonah, the son of Amittai from the people of Nineveh” while Qurṭūbī writes, “‘Jonah…collapsed under his peoples’ refusal and left them in anguish.’”

Thus, becoming more and more Muhammad-like, Jonah, the communally displaced Hebrew prophet anguishing over his mission to the gentiles, is entirely transformed into a gentile Ninevite himself. On Jonah’s communal origins, the Qīṣāṣ summarizes, “Jonah was a pious man who devoted himself to the service of God among his people in the mountain town of Nineveh.”

It is unfathomable that Mesopotamian and Persian Muslims authors did not know that Nineveh was situated in the flat river-plains of Mosul. Nineveh’s description as a mountain town is emblematic of how the Jonah narrative is entirely refracted through the lens of Muhammad’s excursion to the mountain town of Ṭāʾif. Furthermore, the Qīṣāṣ introduces an Addās-like character in the Jonah narrative. When the prophet departs from Nineveh, anguished over the

245 Ibid.
247 Qurṭūbī ad Q11:218–219.
248 Ṭaʿlabī, Qīṣāṣ, 680.
refusal of its people, he encounters a young Ninevite believer in a pasture: “Jonah said, ‘From where do you come, my lad?’ The boy replied, ‘I am from the people of Jonah.’ So he said to the boy, ‘When you return to Nineveh, tell the people that you have met Jonah.’”

Jonah summons the valley, the tree and the sheep to testify that he is a true prophet and the young man, much like ‘Addās returning to his master, returns to his king in Nineveh and attempts to convince him of Jonah’s veracity. There are no late ancient precursors to this anecdote and I propose that it is a narrative echo of Muhammad’s encounter with ‘Addās outside Ṭāʾif.

In sum, whereas in the Sīrah the figure of Muhammad reenacts the scriptural story of Jonah at Nineveh, in the Qiṣṣ, it is Jonah who reenacts the haggadic story of Muhammad at Ṭāʾif. Due to what Wansbrough calls the “primacy of the narratio” in the classical Muslim tradition, the scriptural content, the Qur’ānic Jonah, is entirely obscured by its haggadic framing in texts like the Sīrah, the Šarḥ and the Qiṣṣ. As Wansbrough notes, “Narrative structure… absent in the text of scripture, emerged in the literature of haggadic exegesis… in which the corpus of familiar scripture was being pressed into the service of as yet unfamiliar doctrine.”

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249 Ibid., 687.
250 Ibid.
251 Wansbrough, Qur’anic Studies, 47.
252 Wansbrough, Qur’anic Studies, 20.
The intersection of ‘prophecy’ and ‘community’ is at the core of the Qur’ān’s communal ideology and therefore the text’s prophetology and its exegetical rearticulations are a window into notions of community in the Qur’ānic milieu and among early Muslims. The diachronic study here of tellings and retellings of the Jonah narrative in scripture and early haggadah highlight various discrete stages in the development this early Muslim religio-communal consciousness.

Engaged fully with late antique interpretive discourses on the biblical narrative, the Qur’ānic text deploys the figure of Jonah as a pointed statement about the communal indeterminacy of prophetic guidance and thus the universal possibility of salvation. The communally liminal prophetic figure of Jonah appears as a typological precursor to the text’s prophetic-addressee whose mission straddles the boundary between pre-existing soteriological communities and an emergent one. Early Muslim exegetes retell the story of Jonah’s anguished mission to the Ninevites through Muhammad’s anguished mission to the Ṭaqaffīs. This parabolic haggadah creates a narrative nexus whereby the two prophetic dramas are conflated—Muhammad becomes Jonah and Jonah becomes Muhammad. In turn, the most crucial plot detail in the scriptural narrative, namely the communal otherness of the repentant Ninevites, fades and gives way to a re-imagined, thoroughly islamicized, Jonah who is himself a Ninevite and whose anguish emanates from his community’s refusal to repent.

This dramatic reformulation is possible in part due to the Qur’ānic dialectic between ‘prophecy’ and ‘community’ that underpins, ontologically and formally, early Muslim prophetology. The position of each prophet vis-à-vis each community is thus manipulated with great ease. The Islamic figure of Jonah is a composite between his
scriptural depiction, where his prophecy produces a new soteriological community outside the fold of Israel, qawm yūnus (Q10:98), and his re-imagining through the Muhammadan paradigm, where an unguided community procures prophecy through divine grace, kānū yaʿbudūna l-aṣnāma fa-baʿaṭa allāhu ilayhim yūnusa bi-amri bi-l-tawḥīd (Qiṣaṣ, 366). Tracing the interplay of these schematic arrangements in scripture and in early Muslim writing allows us to periodize proto- and early Muslim communal thought, from its origins in the intensely polemical late antique context of the Qurʾān to its fruition in the hegemonic religio-communal setting(s) of exegetical texts like the Ṣīrah, the Šarḥ and the Qiṣaṣ.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis I addressed the question of communal ideology in the Qur’ān, through a focused study of communal rhetoric and representation in the text of scripture and in its earliest textual mediators, primarily historiography. The focus in the chapters has been the manner in which the Q BAQARA 2 constructs the communal boundary – permeable or impermeable. As such, this thesis can be perhaps described as an investigation of proto- and early Muslim thought about the fundamental ideological coordinates of a group identity and consciousness. This ideology is what produces the classical concepts of ummah as well as difference, that become foundational for Muslim soteriology as well as history, and are tied fundamentally to Qur’ānic notions of salvation and supersession. My analysis of the Qur’ān relied on literary critical methods, building on the premise that it constitutes a text with a distinct social and historical context and a literary logic and intentionality.

In Chapter 1, I laid out a framework for ordering and understanding communalism expressed in the text of Q BAQARA 2. I explained out a general framework for inquiry into Q BAQARA 2’s expressions of communalism. I do so by first explaining my reading of the sura as a text with a literary logic and intentionality. I synthesize the conclusions of current scholarship on the central themes and the formal structure of the sura and propose my own scheme for organizing its various components, including the ummah pericope (Q2:104-151), a focal point in this thesis. Lastly, I explore in greater detail a salient feature in the communal language of the text—the dyadic pairing of insiders (the saved) and outsiders (the damned). Q
BAQARA 2 is a discursive artifact of a particular historical context—6th century southwest Arabia, and a textual vestige of an ideological discourse radically different from that of its earliest mediators—8th century Iraq and Syria. An accurate reconstruction of the sura’s pre-classical ideology imposes the methodological constraints of approaching the text on its own terms, without recourse, however minor, to post-facto historiographical or exegetical mediations in the classical tradition. Such a self-contained reading of Q BAQARA 2 requires interpretation which in turn necessitates privileging certain aspects of the sura and de-emphasizing others. My interpretation of Q BAQARA 2 privileges the literary syntax of the text, in other words, my reading is attuned to the sura’s formal structure and the arrangement of its language, from the smallest unit (particles) to the largest (pericopes). This manner of investigation leads us to greater familiarity with the underlying ideological system that govern the sura’s production of meaning. The works of Amin Islahi (1980), Neal Robinson (1996), A. H. M. Zahniser (2000), David Smith (2001), Raymond Farrin (2010) and Nevin El-Tahry (2010) structure the text of Q BAQARA 2 in remarkably similar ways. This body of scholarship on the sura suggests that the issue of thematic coherence and internal structure in the Qurʾān’s longer suras needs further study. The scholars all agree that community-formation and prophetic knowledge are key themes in the text. The recurrence of these theme indicates that the sura is a discursive artifact from a stage in the community’s development where allegiance to the prophetic movement became the decisive requirement for membership in the emergent in-group. In this regard, Q BAQARA 2 is one of the Qurʾān’s clearest and most developed expressions of gemeindebildungs—community formation and education. My proposed structure for Q BAQARA 2 relies on two formal features: the appearance of vocative formulae, such as yā ayyuhā l-laḏīna amanu, which signal discursive breaks in the text, and the appearance
of *leitworten*, which serve as conceptual tags that organize the sura’s various themes. Q BAQARA 2’s program of community formation rests on the construction of a communal boundary, described by Fredrick Barth as an *attitudinal* dichotomization between the insider and the outsider. The definition and redefinition of this soteriological perimeter produces a differential and oppositional dyadic pair: the Self (saved) and the Other (unsaved). The two components of this pair emerge in the text

In Chapter 2, I explored an aspect of the Q BAQARA 2’s communal rhetoric through a diachronic case study of the baptismal metaphor “the dyeing of God” (Q2:138) from its origin in scripture to its renderings in early exegesis. I proposed that the Qur’ānic term *ṣibğata* is etymologically linked to the Palestinian-Aramaic term for baptism, *ṣebʿatā*, and I supplemented this linguistic evidence with a survey of the appearance of dyeing metaphor in late ancient Christian writings on baptism. Analyzing the textual context of the verse in the sura, I showed the metaphor’s place in the passage’s apologetic of salvific inclusivity. I showed that the *inclusio* appropriates Christian supersessionist imagery, such as the biblical figure of Abraham, into the larger polemical move of the passage. I then showed how this universalistic apologetic is inverted by classical exegetes who recast the phrase *ṣibğata allāhi* as an assertion of exclusive communalism. In the classical era, where the *šahāda*, becomes the primary ritual act of boundary-crossing into the *ummah*, a baptismal ritual (*gusl al-istislām*) alluded to in scripture and referenced widely in early historiography, continues to be practiced universally among Muslims but is de-ritualized as soteriologically inconsequential acts of corporeal purity (*ṭahāra*).

In Chapter 3, I focused on the ummah-pericope’s usage of the communal appellation banū isrāʾīl for its Jewish interlocutors, which sets these interlocutors apart as a genealogical entity and creates a link between their mythic past and present. I showed that this link allows the Qurʾānic text to engage polemically with these ideological rivals over the sacred heritage of the Israelite patriarchs and to co-opt these privileged genealogies into its own etiology of salvific communalism. In this chapter, I showed that the ummah-pericope’s polemical negotiations of Late Antique Rabbinic communal ideology cannot be reduced to a single supersessionary statement. Rather, the text’s communal supersessionism rests on a heterogeneous set of codes that subvert, contest, co-opt and re-appropriate various contemporaneous notions of filial communalism into its emergent communal ideology, which anticipates the formation of a new salvific community—a muslim ummah.

In Chapter 4, I showed how the Qurʾānic text is engaged fully with late antique interpretive discourses on the biblical narrative, the Qurʾānic text deploys the figure of Jonah as a pointed statement about the communal indeterminacy of prophetic guidance and thus the universal possibility of salvation. The communally liminal prophetic figure of Jonah appears as a typological precursor to the text’s prophetic-addressee whose mission straddles the boundary between pre-existing soteriological communities and an emergent one. I showed that early Muslim historians retell the story of Jonah’s anguished mission to the Ninevites through Muhammad’s anguished mission to the Taqafs. This parabolic haggadah creates a narrative nexus whereby the two prophetic dramas are conflated—Muhammad becomes Jonah and Jonah becomes Muhammad. In turn, the most crucial plot detail in the scriptural narrative, namely the communal otherness of the repentant Ninevites, fades and gives way to a re-imagined, thoroughly
Islamicized, Jonah who is himself a Ninevite and whose anguish emanates from his community’s refusal to repent. I argued this dramatic reformulation is possible in part due to the Qur’ānic dialectic between ‘prophecy’ and ‘community’ that underpins, ontologically and formally, early Muslim prophetology. The position of each prophet vis-à-vis each community is thus manipulated with great ease. The Islamic figure of Jonah is a composite between his scriptural depiction, where his prophecy produces a new soteriological community outside the fold of Israel, and his re-imagining through the Muhammadan paradigm, where an unguided community procures prophecy through divine grace.


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