

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

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by

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May 2014

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

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Cornell University 2014

This study of the Qur'ān 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 Qur'ān 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 Qur'ānic data, without recourse to its early Muslim mediations, attempts to elucidate how the Qur'ān'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 Qur'ān'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 Qur'ān'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 *dīn*—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*.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Hamza Mahmood was born in Rawalpindi, Pakistan and attended the City School in Islamabad and in Karachi. His Bachelor's degree is in Linguistics, with honors, from Binghamton University. He majored in Diachronic Linguistics, Arabic Language and French Literature, with a minor in Translation Theory. He received his Master's and Doctoral degrees in Near Eastern Studies from Cornell University. His graduate research program was unified by an interest in the emergence and expression of religio-communal ideologies among monotheistic groups in the late ancient Near East. His program of study focused on three evidentiary domains: (1) the Qur'an and early Muslim exegesis, (2) the early Arabic historiographical corpus and (3) late Midrashic Literature and the Targumim. His current research focuses on the thematic, structural and linguistic make-up of the Qur'ān, the development of early Muslim historiography and the late ancient discursive sectarian context of Early Islam. His primary research languages include Qur'ānic and Classical Arabic, Biblical and Mishnaic Hebrew, Talmudic and Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Syriac, Ge'ez and Judeo-Arabic. After completing his graduate course work, he served as a Doctoral Fellow with the Mellon-Sawyer Qur'ān Seminar project at the University of Notre Dame. In Fall 2013, he joined the faculty of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization at the University of Washington as Assistant Professor of Classical Arabic and Early Islam. He teaches undergraduate and graduate courses on Late Antiquity, Near Eastern Civilizations, Muslim intellectual and religious history and Classical Arabic.

To my parents, Lubna Zahid and Zahid Mahmood

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge and thank my advisor Dr. David S. Powers whose careful guidance and thoughtful counsel has been integral to my development and success as a student and as a researcher. I thank him for his patient and attentive mentorship these past five years. I thank the three members of my doctoral committee: Dr. Ross Brann, for his incredible warmth and support, Dr. Gabriel S. Reynolds for his contagious energy and intelligence and Dr. Shawkat M. Toorawa for his deep wisdom and affection. I owe all of them an enormous debt of gratitude and consider myself quite fortunate to have them as teachers and mentors.

I would like to thank the faculty at NES whose support and guidance were instrumental in my doctoral training, in particular Dr. Munther Younes, Dr. Lauren Monroe and Dr. Kim Haines-Eitzen. I wish to thank our two incredible administrators Julie Graham and Chris Capalongo whose care and support ensured my progress and success. Last, but not least, I thank my dear colleagues Adam Bursi, Sarah Pearce and Dustin Nash whose camaraderie and friendship greatly enriched my graduate career and who continue to be a source of guidance and encouragement for me. It has truly been a privilege and honor to spend these years at the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Cornell University. I will look back at this time with great fondness.

I thank my colleagues and friends at the Mellon-Sawyer Qur'ān Seminar project at the University of Notre Dame, Dr. Mehdi Azaiez, Dr. Tommaso Tesei, Dr. Mun'im Sirry, whose support, guidance and friendship saw me through the final months of writing this dissertation. I would also like to thank my colleagues and friends at the

University of Washington, Dr. Joel Walker, Dr. Selim Kürü and Dr. Michael V. Pérez, who have taken me under their wing and have eased my transition into the next chapter of my life and career.

I thank my dear friends Jeannette A. Estruth, Yasir Asad, Zia Rabb, Sadiq Siddiqui, Gagan Sidhu, Sanjay Dharmavaram, Mukti Mangharam and Faisal Alam whose guidance, affection and humor are essential ingredients to my every success. I owe a debt of gratitude to my closest comrade Julian Gantt whose encouragement fuels my work and whose logistical and intellectual support has made this dissertation possible.

I express my deep gratitude to my family the MehRs for their guidance, their love and their faith. In the face of many great adversities, they have been a refuge and a safe-harbor and I fully share this achievement with them. I thank my dear grandfather Zafarullah Farooqi and my elders in Pakistan for their prayers and good wishes. I thank my brother Waleed Mahmood who has always been and continues to be my greatest role model. I thank him for his resilience, his strong sense of duty and for being the glue that holds everyone and everything in my life together. Lastly, I thank my parents, my mother Lubna Zahid and my father Zahid Mahmood. Their deep sense of wonder, curiosity and adventure, their unshakable dignity and their unwavering love are my foundations. This thesis is as much their success as it is mine and it is to them that I dedicate my work.



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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 Qur’ān 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 Qur’ānic text necessitates reducing some of its formal intricacies. Therefore, for the purposes of this thesis, I limit most of my analysis of the Qur’ān’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 Qur’ānic discourse and anticipates future study of the development of communal ideology in early Muslim thought. Large sections of the sura - the longest in the Qur’ān – 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 ja‘alnākum ummat<sup>an</sup> wasat<sup>an</sup> li-takūnū šuhada’a ‘ala l-nās wa-yakūna l-rasūlu ‘alaykum šahīd<sup>an</sup>* (v.143). This verse, arguably one of the Qur’ān’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 (*ja 'alnāḱum*)? 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-ladīna amanū*, *banī isrā'īl*, *ummah*, *ahlu l-kitāb*, *qawm mūsa*, 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,<sup>1</sup> Mannheim<sup>2</sup> and Van Dijk,<sup>3</sup> for whom it refers to the conceptual frameworks that underpin social cognition and order. In these

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<sup>1</sup> Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Carol Cosman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Idem, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. W.

<sup>2</sup> Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, trans. Louis Wirth (Whitefish: Kessinger Publishing, 2008) and Idem, *Structures of Thinking*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro and Shierry W. Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Teun Van Dijk, *Text and Context: Explorations in the Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse* (London: Longman, 1977); Idem, *Discourse Studies* (London: Sage Publications, 1997); Idem, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), and Idem, *Society and Discourse: How Social Contexts Influence Text and Talk* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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.”<sup>4</sup>

Inasmuch as there is no such thing as an *individual* ideology, my analysis of Q BĀQARAH 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—6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 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’ānic 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-allāhi wa-huwa muḥsin<sup>um</sup> fa-lahu ajruhu ‘inda rabbihi wa-lā ḥawf<sup>um</sup> ‘alayhim wa-lā hum yaḥzinūn* (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-ladīna amanū wa-l-ladīna hādū wa-l-naṣārā wa-l-ṣābi ‘īn [...] lā ḥawf<sup>um</sup> ‘alayhim wa-lā hum yaḥzinūn* (v.62). One of the aims of this thesis is to distinguish such

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<sup>4</sup> Stuart Hall, *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publishing, 1996), 26.

situational, contextually bound *expressions* of communal ideology from the communal ideology itself, which is by its nature context free.<sup>5</sup> 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."<sup>6</sup>

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."<sup>7</sup> 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).<sup>8</sup> Building from this theory, the Qur'ān's communal ideology can be represented simply as a series of questions that form the basis of its communalism:

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<sup>5</sup> For more on coherence and consistency in ideological systems, see *ibid.*, 90-93.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

<sup>7</sup> Van Dijk, *Ideology*, 49.

<sup>8</sup> *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”<sup>9</sup> rather than atrophy or misreadings. The core methodological flaw that has constrained and misdirected analysis of Biblical narrative in the Qur’ān is the presumption that the text of the Hebrew Bible constitutes its *Vorlage*. Scholarly interventions on Qur’ānic narrative thus generally neglect, or consider as secondary, Late Antique Jewish mediations of Biblical narratives, as preserved in liturgy, haggadah and the targumim. This disregard for the particular contours of Late Antique Jewish interpretive thought creates a problematically ahistorical and oversimplified image of the Qur’ān’s polemical stance vis-à-vis the biblical narratives, even though the Qur’ān itself clearly alludes to a dynamic interpretive environment: *qālati l-yahūd laysati l-naṣāra ‘ala šay<sup>’in</sup> wa-qālati l-naṣāra laysati l-yahūdu ‘ala šay<sup>’in</sup> wa-hum yatlūna l-kitāba* (Q2:113).<sup>10</sup>

My goal in this thesis is to also break from the dependency / borrowing model that limits the study of elements in the Qur’ānic text to simply positing their external sources, with no further analysis. I will therefore not treat the Qur’ān’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.<sup>11</sup> I begin by explaining my method of reading the sura.

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<sup>9</sup> Nicolai Sinai, Angelika Neuwirth and Michael Marx, eds., *The Qur’ān in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 4.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the *interpretive* context and quality of Qur’ānic language, see Wansbrough, *Qur’ānic Studies*, 99-102.

<sup>11</sup> For an overview of methodological approaches in the analysis of Biblical narrative material in the Qur’ān, see Walid Saleh, “In Search of a Comprehensible Qur’ān,”

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.”<sup>12</sup> 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—7<sup>th</sup> century southwest Arabia and a textual vestige of an ideological discourse radically different from that of its earliest mediators—8<sup>th</sup> century Iraq and Syria. An accurate

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*Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 5 (2003), 143-162. Also see Gabriel Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext* (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> 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'ānic 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 dālika 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."<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup>

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 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 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 dālika 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<sup>um</sup>* (cf. Q14:24, Q16:75, Q29:29, Q66:10), the Qur'ān

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<sup>13</sup> Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> 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 taqūlū li-man yuqṭalu fī sabīli allāhi amwāt<sup>um</sup> bal alḥyā<sup>um</sup>* (v. 154).

alludes to the *estranging* effect of its language upon its listeners: *inna hāda illa siḥr<sup>un</sup> mubīn<sup>un</sup>* (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).<sup>15</sup>

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 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> 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

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<sup>15</sup> For brief discussion of Estrangement as a concept in literary theory, see Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 3-6, 86 and 121.

‘implied reader.’<sup>16</sup> 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.”<sup>17</sup> An utterance such as *wa-id faraqnā 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 Qur’ān’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-ida qīla lahum lā tufsidū fī l-arḍi qālū innamā nahnu muṣliḥūn alā innahum humu l-mufsidūn*

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<sup>16</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *Der Implizite Leser: Kommunikationsformen des Romans von Bunyan* (Munich : Fink, 1994). Also see *Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

<sup>17</sup> Eagleton, *Literary Theory*, 73.

*wa-lākin lā yaš‘urūn* (vv. 11-12) does not offer any explanation of the communal terms *mufsidūn* and *muslihūn*, 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 *ida 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, *ulā’ika ‘alā hud<sup>an</sup> min rabbihim wa-ulā’ika humu l-muflihūn* (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.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See Mustansir Mir, “The Qur’anic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes and Characters,” *The Muslim World*, 76 (1986), 1-15; G. A. Rendsburg, “Literary Structures in the Qur’anic and

Introduced formulaically by the particle *id*, or a morphology of the root *ḍ.k.r.*, the short narrative-citation is a ubiquitous feature of Qurʾānic 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 Qurʾān'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.

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Biblical Stories of Joseph," *The Muslim World* 78 (1998), 118-120, and Angelika Neuwirth, "Form and Structure in the Qurʾān," in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* (Leiden, Boston and Cologne: E.J. Brill, 2001), 2:245-266.

My analysis of narrative-citations in Q BAQARAH 2 leans heavily on the theoretical works of Gérard Genette<sup>19</sup> and William Labov.<sup>20</sup> Genette, whose structuralist approach has been elaborated recently by Mieke Bal,<sup>21</sup> builds on Lévi-Strauss' pioneering work on myth.<sup>22</sup> 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 Qur'ān 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 Qur'ānic 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<sup>an</sup>* (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

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<sup>19</sup> Gérard Genette, *Nouveau Discours Du Récit* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983); idem, *Narrative Discourse Revisited* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) and idem, *Fiction & Diction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> William Labov, "Narrative analysis," in *Essays on the Verbal and Visual Arts*, ed. J. Helm (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), 12-44; idem, "Speech Actions and Reactions in Personal Narrative," in *Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk*, ed. D. Tannen (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1981), 217-247, and idem, "Some Further Steps in Narrative Analysis," *Journal of Narrative and Life History* 7 (1997): 395-415.

<sup>21</sup> Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).

<sup>22</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Myth and Meaning* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979).

command, Adam and Eve forfeit their right to divine sustenance and are commanded to descend into the world from the garden, *ihbiṭū minhā jamī<sup>can</sup>* (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.<sup>23</sup> 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,"<sup>24</sup> as well as functional, "it identifies two functions of narrative, the referential and the evaluative."<sup>25</sup> 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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<sup>23</sup> Ayaz Afsar has applied the Labovian model to a selection of Qur'ānic narratives. See "A Discourse and Linguistic Approach to Biblical and Qur'ānic Narrative," *Islamic Studies* 45 (2006): 493-517.

<sup>24</sup> Labov, "Narrative Analysis," 13.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



whereas that for the story of Israel's descent later in the sura is the vocative clause *yā banī isrāʾīl* (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 *yā ayyuhā l-ladīna āmanū* or *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."<sup>26</sup> 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."<sup>27</sup> Most scholars choose to retain the canonical division of the Qur'ān into Meccan (short) and Medinan (longer) parts. While the historicity of the traditional narratives accompanying the Qur'ān has been questioned and re-evaluated, the

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 13.

<sup>27</sup> Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1970), 74.

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.”<sup>28</sup>

Despite this conventional perspective, several contemporary scholars have attempted to describe the structure of Q BAQARAH 2, the Qur’ān’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-20<sup>th</sup> century thinker Amin A. Islahi. In his magnum opus in Urdu, *Tadabbure Quran*,<sup>29</sup> Islahi develops his mentor Farahi’s theory of *nāzm*—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 hitāb*) and narrative (*tazkore*), Islahi divides the sura into a series of six thematic sections (*matalib*):

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<sup>28</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, “Vom Rezitationstext über die Liturgie zum Kanon,” in *The Qur’an as Text*, ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 98.

<sup>29</sup> Amin Islahi, *Tadabbure-Qurān* (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 2006), 74-80. Islahi’s primary influence is his mentor Farahi, who wrote *Nizāmu l-Qur’ān*, translated by Islahi into Urdu as *Majmu’ate Tafasīre Farāhi*, tr. Amin Ahsan Islahi (Lahore: Īnjumāne huddam al-Qur’ān, 1973).

§1 - Exordium (*təmhīde sūrah*): vv. 1-39

§1.1 - Definitions of believers and non-believers

§1.2 – Adam’s vice-regency (*ḥilafəte adəm*) and Satan’s opposition (*muḥalifəte iblīs*)

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

§2.1 - Proselytism (*davəte haqq*)

§2.2 – Israelite breaking of the covenant (*ēhdšiknī*) and moral decline (*duniapərəstī*)

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

§3.1 - Abraham’s construction of the Ka‘ba (*tamīre kaba*)

§3.2 – Founding of a distinct community (*qəyyāme ummāte muslima*)

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

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

§5 – The Ka‘ba as axis of Community (*mərkəze milləte ibrahīmī*): vv. 243-283

§5.1 Jewish freeing *Qibla* from the Philistines (*fələstīnionse azadīe qiblae yəhūd*)

§5.2 Muslim freeing *Qibla* from the Qurayš (*qurēšionse azadīe qiblae musəlmanan*)

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

Islahi contends that the *umūd* 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.<sup>30</sup> Like Islahi, Robinson determines the internal structure of the sura by paying close attention to the "dynamics of Qur'ānic discourse."<sup>31</sup> 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:

§1 – Prologue: vv. 1-39

§2 – Criticism of the Children of Israel: 40-121

§3 – The Abrahamic Legacy: vv. 122-152

§4 – Legislation to the New Nation: vv. 153-242

§5 – The struggle to liberate the Ka'ba: vv. 243-283

§6 – Epilogue: vv. 284-286.

A. H. Matthias Zahniser<sup>32</sup> 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."<sup>33</sup> 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."<sup>34</sup> Unlike Islahi and Robinson, Zahniser describes his own

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<sup>30</sup> Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'ān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 196-224.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>32</sup> A. H. Matthias Zahniser, "Major Transitions and Thematic Borders in Two Long Sūrahs: *al-BAQARAH* and *al-Nisā'*," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. Issa Boullata (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 26-55.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

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."<sup>35</sup> 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."<sup>36</sup> 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.<sup>37</sup> In Smith's estimation, these returns signal discrete sections in the sura, which is

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>37</sup> David E. Smith, "The Structure of *al-Baqara*," *The Muslim World* 91 (2001): 121-136

“structured by thematic repetition, specifically with regard to the revelatory author of the Qur’ān itself vis-à-vis previous scriptures...the claim of divine revelation that comes through Muḥammad is the beginning of the thematic cycles.”<sup>38</sup> 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 Qur’ān 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<sup>39</sup> who frequently cites the classic historiographical tradition to provide context for the various sections of Q BAQARAH 2.<sup>40</sup> In order to determine these sections, he applies Mary Douglas’ theory of ring-composition<sup>41</sup> and finds that the sura is composed of a series of sections in which

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>39</sup> Raymond K. Farrin, “*Sūrat al-Baqarah: A Structural Analysis*,” *The Muslim World* 100 (2010): 17-32.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>41</sup> Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). Ring composition in the Qur’ān has been studied recently by several scholars. See Michel Cuypers, *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sūrah of the Qur’an* (Miami: Convivium, 2009) and idem, “Structures Rhétoriques dans le Coran,” *Mélanges de l’Institut dominicain d’Études Orientales* 22 (1986): 107-195; Mustansir Mir, “The Qur’anic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes, and Characters,” *The Muslim World* 76 (1986): 1-15; A. H. Mathias Zahniser, “Sūrah as Guidance and Exhortation: The

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.”<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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,”<sup>44</sup> and she relies on rhetorical

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Composition of *Sūrat al-Nisā’*,” in *Humanism, Culture and Language in the Near East: Studies in Honor of Georg Krotkoff* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 71-85; and Neal Robinson, “Hands Outstretched: Towards a Re-Reading of *Sūrat al-Mā’ida*,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 3:1 (2001): 1-19.

<sup>42</sup> Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> Nevin Reda El-Tahry, “Textual Integrity and Coherence in the Qur’an: Repetition and Narrative Structure in *Sūrat al-Baqarah*.” PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010.

<sup>44</sup> 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 *nāzm* 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-ladīna āmanū*, 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."<sup>45</sup> 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."<sup>46</sup> 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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<sup>45</sup> Martin Buber, "Leitwortstil in der Erzählung des Pentateuchs," in *Werke: Zweiter Band: Schriften zur Bibel* (München: Kösel Verlag, 1964), 1131.

<sup>46</sup> 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."<sup>47</sup> 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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<sup>47</sup> Daniel Madigan, *The Qur'ān's Self Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), xiii.

### 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.<sup>48</sup> 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."<sup>49</sup> 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—*hudā*. At the outset, the sura introduces its own discourse as *hudā<sup>m</sup> li-l-muttaqīn*. Members of the in-group, *al-muttaqūn*, are described as having distinct belief, *yu 'minūna bi-l-ġaybi* (v. 3); *yu 'minūna bi-mā unzila ilayka wa-mā unzila min qablika* (v. 4); *bi-l-āḥirati hum yūqinūn* (v. 4), distinct ritual, *yuqīmūna l-ṣalāta* (v. 3) and distinct social practice, *mimmā razaqnāhum 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, *ulā 'ika 'alā hudā<sup>m</sup> min rabbihim*, and stating clearly the soteriological consequences of communal membership, *ulā 'ika humu l-mufliḥūn* (v.5). Thus, the opening verses of Q BAQARAH 2 present a tripartite schema of salvation: (i) immanent discourse as *hudā* (ii) communal-insider as recipient of *hudā* (iii) salvation as consequence of *hudā*. (cf. Q31:1-5)

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<sup>48</sup> Frederick Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 15.

<sup>49</sup> Saul Olyan, *Rites and Ritual* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 63.

The brief definition of the communal insider is followed by a fourteen-verse definition of the outsider, *al-ladīna 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."<sup>50</sup> Outsiders not only do not have access to *hudā*, but are in fact incapable of receiving it: *ḥatama allāhu ‘alā qulūbihim* (v.7). This inability to receive prophetic knowledge precludes them from membership in the insider-community, *sawā’<sup>unn</sup> ‘alayhim a-andartahum am lam tundirhum lā yu’minun* (v.6), and this preclusion has a soteriological consequence: *lahum ‘aḏāb<sup>unn</sup> ‘azīm<sup>unn</sup>* (vv. 7 and 10). The statements and perceptions of these outsiders are systematically inverted in the Qur’ānic ripostes: *yuhādī ‘ūna allāha : mā yuhādī ‘ūna illā anfusahum* (v. 9); *qālū a-nu’minu kamā āmana l-sufahā’u : alā innahum humu l-sufahā’u* (v. 13); *wa-ida qīla lahum lā tufsidū... qālū innama naḥnu muṣliḥūn : alā innahum humu l-mufsidūn* (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 a each rhetorical level in the form of paired terms (e.g. *muṣliḥūn : mufsidūn*), phrases (*al-ladīna āmanū : al-ladīna 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-ladīna āmanū fa-ya‘lamūna annahu l-ḥaqq wa-ammā l-ladīna kafarū fa-yaqūlūna māda arāda allāhu bi-hādā* (v.26); *man kasaba sayyi’at<sup>am</sup> wa-aḥāṭat bihi ḥaṭi’atuhu fa-ulā’ika aṣḥābu l-nāri wa-l-ladīna āmanū wa-‘amilū l-ṣāliḥāti ulā’ika aṣḥābu*

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<sup>50</sup> John Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1982), 5.

*l-jannati* (vv. 81-82). In other cases, this binary opposition appears in imperatives to the Qur'ān's prophetic addressee: *fa-ttaqū l-nāra... u 'iddat li-l-kāfirīn wa bašširi l-ladīna āmanū... lahum jannāt<sup>m</sup>* (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-ladīna āmanū yuhrijuhum mina l-ẓulumāti ilā l-nūr wa-l-ladīna kafarū awwaliyā'uhumu l-tāġūt yuhrijūnahum mina l-nūr ilā l-ẓulumāti* (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 ḥawf<sup>m</sup> 'alayhim wa-lā hum yaḥzanūn* (vv. 38, 62, 112, 262, 274, 277):

v.38: *man tabi 'a hudāya fa-lā ḥawf<sup>m</sup> 'alayhim wa-lā hum yaḥzanūn*

v. 112 *man aslama wajhahu li-llāhi wa-huwa muḥsin<sup>m</sup> fa-lahu ajruhu 'inda rabbihi wa-lā ḥawf<sup>m</sup> 'alayhim wa-lā hum yaḥzanūn*

v. 227 *al-ladīna āmanū wa- 'amilū l-ṣāliḥāti wa-aqāmu l-ṣalāta wa-ātū l-zakāta fa-lahu ajruhu 'inda rabbihi wa-lā ḥawf<sup>m</sup> 'alayhim wa-lā hum yaḥzanūn*

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-yawmi l-āḥiri wa-mā hum bi-mu' minīn* (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-ladīna āmanū wa-l-ladīna hādū wa-l-naṣārā wa-l-ṣābi'īn [...] lā ḥawf<sup>an</sup> 'alayhim wa-lā hum yaḥzanūn* (v.62) and excluding others: *qālū lan tamassanā l-nāru illa ayyām<sup>an</sup> ma'dūdat<sup>an</sup>, qul a-ttaḥadtum 'inda allāhi 'ahd<sup>an</sup>* (v. 80). The soteriological liminality of these communities is expressed in part by the consistent use of qualifying clauses, *kāna farīq<sup>un</sup> minhum yasma'ūn kalāma allāhi tumma yuḥarrifūnahu* (v. 75); *kullama 'ahadū 'ahd<sup>an</sup> nabaḍahu farīq<sup>un</sup> minhum* (v. 100); *mā yawaddu l-ladīna kafarū min ahli l-kitāb [...] an yunazzala 'alaykum min ḥayr<sup>in</sup>* (vv. 105-106); *inna farīq<sup>un</sup> minhum la-yaktamūna l-ḥaqqā wa-hum ya'lamūn* (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 yadhūla l-jannata illā man kāna hūd<sup>an</sup> aw naṣāra tilka ammāniyyuhum* (v. 111). Unlike those outsiders (*al-ladīna 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-ātū 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."<sup>51</sup> 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. ' , n. ' .m and f.ḏ.l. The procurement of prophetic knowledge, of *hudā*, guarantees a place in the divine economy of grace (*ni 'mah* and *faḏl*). 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 ḏkurū ni 'matiya l-lati an 'amtu 'alaykum* (v. 40) and twice repeated in an expanded form, *yā banī isrā'īla ḏkurū ni 'matiya l-lati an 'amtu 'alaykum wa-inni faḏḏaltukum 'alā l- 'ālamīn* (v. 47 and 123). This status rests on Israel's unique and exclusive access to prophetic knowledge: *kāna farīq<sup>mn</sup> minhum yasma 'ūn kalāma allāhi* (v. 75); *qālū nu 'mina bi-mā unzila 'alaynā* (v. 91). Such statements in the sura set the Israelites apart from the Qur'ān's general addressees who ostensibly have had no prior access to prophecy: *tundira qawm<sup>mn</sup> mā undira ābā'uhum* (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, *muṣaddiq<sup>mn</sup> li-mā ma 'akum* (v. 41); *antum tatlūna l-kitāba* (v. 44); *la-qad 'alimtum* (v. 65); *ja 'alnāhā nakāl<sup>mn</sup> li-mā bayna yadayhā wa-mā ḥalfahā* (v.66); *lammā jā'ahum mā 'arafū* (v. 89). Statements referring or addressed to the Jewish interlocutors conclude with formulas such as *antum ta 'lamūn* (v. 42); *hum ya 'lamūn* (v. 75); *antum tanzurūn* (vv.

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<sup>51</sup> Toshohiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 29.

50, 55), *antum tašhadūn* (v. 74), which diverge from typical concluding formula that highlight the interlocutor's ignorance such as *lā yaš'arūn* (v. 12) and *lā ya'lamūn* (v. 13).

Unlike the general outsiders (*al-ladīna kafarū*) 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: *id aḥadnā mīthāqakum [...] tumma tawallaytum min ba'da dālika* (v. 64); *id qāla mūsā li-qawmihi [...] tumma qasat qulūbukum min ba'da dālika* (v. 74); *id aḥadnā mīthāqa banī isrā'īl [...] tumma tawallaytum* (v. 83). The text highlights specific instances of *hudā* that are inverted by the Jewish interlocutors, *lā tasfikūna dimā'akum : tumma [...] taqtulūna anfusakum* (v. 84-85); *lā tuḥrijūn anfusakum : wa-tuḥrijūna farīq<sup>am</sup> minkum* (v. 84-85). This is coupled with frequent depictions of the Jews as killers of prophets,<sup>52</sup> 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-ḡayri l-ḥaqqi dālika bi-mā 'aṣaw wa-kānū ya'tadūn* (v. 61); *a-fa-kullamā jā'akum rasūl<sup>am</sup> [...] stakbartum, farīq<sup>am</sup> kaḍḍabtum wa-farīq<sup>am</sup> taqtulūn* (v. 87); *wa-lamma jā'ahum ma 'arafū [...] kafarū bihi* (v. 88 cf. vv. 96-97).<sup>53</sup> 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 mīthāqakum wa-rafa'nā fawqakumu l-tūra [...] ḍkurū mā fīhi la'allakum tattaqūn* (v. 63). These narrative-citations of Israel's

<sup>52</sup> For discussion, see Gabriel Reynolds, "On the Qur'an and the Theme of Jews as 'Killers of the Prophets,'" *al-Bayān* 10 (2012), 9-34.

<sup>53</sup> 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 ‘budū rabbakumu l-ladī ḥalaqakum wa-l-ladīna 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, *iblis*, 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-zālimīn* (v. 35). This disobedience, at the behest of the outsider, becomes the reason for the fall: *azallahumā l-ṣayṭānu ‘anhā fa-aḥrajahumā mimma kānā fihi* (v. 36), which leads to the perpetuation of the dyadic pair on earth, *ba‘ḍukum li-ba‘ḍin ‘adūw<sup>um</sup>* (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: *ya ‘tīyannakum minnī hud<sup>um</sup> fa-man tabi‘a hudāya fa-lā ḥawf<sup>um</sup> ‘alayhim wa-lā hum yaḥzanūn wa-l-ladīna kafarū wa-kaddabū bi-āyātina ulā’ika aṣḥābu l-nāri hum fihā ḥalidūn* (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 isrā’īla ḍkurū nī ‘matiya l-latī an‘amtu ‘alaykum wa-innī faḍḍaltukum ‘alā l-‘ālamīn* (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 āli firʿawn* (v. 49); *id faraqnā bikumu l-baḥra fa-anjaynākum* (v. 50); *id wāʿadnā Mūsā ʿarbā ʿīna laylat<sup>m</sup>* (v. 51); *id aḥadnā mīthāqakum* (vv. 63, 64); *id aḥadnā mīthāqa banī isrāʿīla* (v. 83). Each of the three narratives in this *inclusio* redeploys mythemes from the narrative of human origin in an elaborated manner. These mythemes include the boundlessness of divine sustenance: *kulā minhā raġd<sup>m</sup> ḥaytu šīʿtumā* (v.35) : *kulū minhā ḥaytu šīʿtum raġd<sup>m</sup>* (v. 57); the forfeiting of this sustenance for something baser; the physical descent into a baser state: *ihbiṭū baʿḍukum li-baʿḍ<sup>in</sup> ʿuduww<sup>m</sup> wa-lakum fī l-arḍi mustaqarr<sup>m</sup> wa-matā<sup>m</sup> ʿilā hīn* (v. 36) : *ihbiṭū miṣr<sup>m</sup> fa-in lakum mā saʿaltum wa-ḍuribat ʿalayhimu l-dillatu wa-l-maskanatu wa-bāʿū bi-ġadb<sup>in</sup> mina allāh* (v.61); the advent of prophetic knowledge: *aʿtiyannakum minnī hud<sup>m</sup> fa-man tabiʿa hudāya* (v. 37) : *ātaynā mūsā l-kitāba wa-l-furqān laʿallakum tahtadūn.* (v. 53) and divine forgiveness after error: *fa-takūnā mina l-ẓālimīn [...] fa-tāba ʿalayhim* (vv. 35-37) : *antum ẓālimūn ṭumma ʿafawnā ʿankum* (v. 50-51) and *fa-tāba ʿalayhi ʿinnahu 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 isrāʾīl* (v.47), frame the origins narrative of the addressee-community: *yā ayyuhā l-ladīna amanu* (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: *kadālika ja ʿalnākum ummat<sup>an</sup> wasat<sup>an</sup>* (v. 143) and concludes with the advent of *hudā* in the community: *kamā arsalnā fīkum rasūl<sup>un</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> 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-ladīna āmanū*, (v. 104) which is followed by the dyadic pairing, *wa-li-l-kāfirīn ʿadāb<sup>un</sup> ʿalīm<sup>un</sup>*. 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-ladīna kafarū min ahli l-kitāb wa-lā l-mušrikūn an yunazzala ʿalaykum min ḥayr<sup>in</sup> min rabbikum* (v. 105). The advent of *hudā* among the insider community incurs the envy of former elect communities: *wadda kaṭīr<sup>un</sup> min ahli l-kitāb law yaruddūnakum min baʿd imānikum kuffār<sup>an</sup> ḥasad<sup>an</sup> min ʿinda 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-allāhu yaḥtaṣṣu bi-raḥmatihī man yašāʾu wa-allāhu du-l-faḍl* (v. 105). In this context, the following verse: *mā nansaḥu min āyat<sup>in</sup> aw nunsihā naʾti bi-*

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<sup>54</sup> See p. 15 above.

*ḥayr<sup>in</sup> minhā aw miṭliḥā* (v. 106) is perhaps better read as a statement of communal supersession rather than textual abrogation, as it is later understood.

Another aspect of this encounter between the insider and outsider, is the opponent's open engagement with the addressee-community: *qālū lan yadhūla l-jannata illa man kāna hūd<sup>m</sup> aw naṣāra* (v. 111) and *lan tarḍā 'anka l-yahūd wa-lā l-naṣāra ḥattā tattabi 'a 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 tabi 'a hudāya fa-lā ḥawf<sup>m</sup> 'alayhim wa la-hum yaḥzanūn* (v. 38). In the *ummah* pericope, one of these typical ripostes cites correct dogma: *man aslama wajhahu li-allāhi*, and correct acts: *wa-huwa muḥsin<sup>m</sup>*, 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: *qālātī l-yahūd laysatī l-naṣāra 'alā šay<sup>in</sup> wa qālātī l-naṣāra laysatī l-yahūd 'alā šay<sup>in</sup>*. (v. 113) and *innamā hum fī šiqāq<sup>in</sup> sa-yakfīkahumu allāhu* (v. 137). The text cites this rivalry as symptomatic of the degeneration of the previous prophetic communities, *kaḍālika qāla l-laḍīna lā ya 'lamūna miṭla qawlihim* (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-laḍīna ataynāhumu l-kitāba yatlūnahu ḥaqqā tilāwatīhi ulā 'ika yu 'minūna bihi wa-man yakfur bihi ulā 'ika humu l-ḥāsirūn* (v. 121).

The second section (vv. 122-141) of the *ummah* pericope begins with another vocative clause: *yā banī isrā'īla ḍkurū nī 'matīya l-latī an 'amtu 'alaykum wa-annī*

*faḍḍaltukum ‘alā l-‘ālamīn* (v. 122). 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 jā‘iluka li-l-nās imām<sup>an</sup>* (v. 124). Abraham’s question about the elect status of his progeny: *qāla wa-min ḍurriyatī*, leads into a caveat: *lā yanālu ‘ahdi l-ẓālimīn* (v. 124). The second narrative depicts the Abrahamic sanctuary in universal terms: *ja‘alnā l-bayta maṭābat<sup>an</sup> li-l-nās wa-aman<sup>an</sup>* (v.125). Here, again, Abraham does not pray for his progeny but rather for the land and its people: *rabbī j‘al hādā balad<sup>an</sup> aman<sup>an</sup> wa-rzuq ahlahu* (v. 126). Abraham qualifies the beneficiaries of divine grace: *man āmana minhum bi-allāhi wa-l-yawmi l-āḥiri* and the text adds another dyadic caveat: *wa-man kafara fa-umatti’uhu qalīl<sup>an</sup> tumma aḍṭarruhu ilā ‘adābi 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: *rabbānā wa-j‘alnā muslimayni laka wa-min ḍurriyyatinā ummat<sup>an</sup> muslimat<sup>an</sup> laka* (v. 128). This prayer however ties membership in the in-group with the reception of prophetic knowledge, *rabbānā wa-b’at fihim rusūl<sup>un</sup>* (v.129) Abraham’s heritage is presented as the broad and universalistic criterion for being an insider, *man yarḡibu ‘an millati ibrahīma illā man safiha nafsahu*. It is only his example that is elect and soteriologically potent, *la-qad iṣṭafaynāhu fi-l-dunyā wa-innahu fi-l-āḥirati la-mina l-ṣāliḥīn* (v. 130).

The third section (vv. 142-152) of the *ummah* pericope comprises the *qibla*-shifting verses, which begin with a prolepsis: *sa-yaqūlu l-sufahā’u mina l-nās mā wallāhum ‘an qiblatihimi l-latī kānū ‘alayhā*. (v. 142). The rebuttals are all universalistic in nature: *qul li-allāhi l-mašriqu wa-l-maḡribu* (v. 142 cf. v. 115). The establishment of this distinct

sectarian symbol, a new *qibla*, leads into the pivotal verse, *kaḍālika ja ‘alnākum ummat<sup>an</sup> wasaṭ<sup>an</sup> li-takūnū šuhadā’a ‘alā l-nās wa-yakūna l-rasūlu ‘alaykum šahīd<sup>an</sup>* (v. 143). This expression of separatism is not tied to any geography or genealogy, but rather to allegiance to prophetic knowledge itself: *li-na ‘lama man yattabi ‘u l-rasūla mimman yanqalibu ‘alā ‘aqabayhi wa-in kānat la-kabīrat<sup>an</sup> illā ‘alā l-ladīna hāda allāhu* (v. 143). The establishment of a distinct *qibla* signals the emergence of a distinct community: *wa-la-in atayta l-ladīna ūtu l-kitāba bi-kulli āyat<sup>in</sup> mā tābi ‘ū qiblataka wa-mā anta bi-tābi<sup>cin</sup> qiblatahum mā ba ‘duhum bi-tābi<sup>cin</sup> qiblata ba ‘d<sup>in</sup>* (v. 144). The new sanctuary is a physical manifestation of the addressee community’s supersession and the advent of a new salvific paradigm: *li-kull<sup>in</sup> wijhat<sup>un</sup> huwa muwallihā fa-stabiqū l-ḥayrāti aynā-mā takūnū ya’ti bikumu allāhu jamī<sup>can</sup>* (v. 148). The pericope concludes by highlighting the soteriology potency of the emergent community, symbolized by its distinct sanctuary: *li-utimma ni ‘matī ‘alaykum wa-la ‘allakum tahtadūn* (v. 150). With the arrival of prophetic knowledge, the addressee-community is now suitable for divine election: *kamā arsalnā fikum rasūl<sup>un</sup> minkum yatlu ‘alaykum āyātina wa-yuzakkikum wa-yu ‘allimukum l-kitāba wa-l-ḥikmāta wa-yu ‘allimukum mā lam takūnū ta ‘lamūn* (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, *ulā’ika ‘alayhim ṣalawāt<sup>un</sup> min rabbihim wa-raḥmat<sup>un</sup> wa-ulā’ika humu l-muhtadūn* (v. 157) : *ulā’ika yal ‘anuhumu allāhu wa-yal ‘anhumu l-lā ‘inūn* (v. 159). These sections contain lengthy juridical passages, in the form of prescriptions marked by the formula *kutiba ‘alaykum* (vv. 178, 180, 183, 216) and as answers to questions introduced by the formula *yas ‘alūnaka ‘an* (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 āmana bi-allāhi wa-l-yawmi l-āḥirati wa-l-malā'ikati wa-l-kitābi wa-l-nabiyyīna [...] wa-aqāma l-ṣalāta wa-āta l-zakāta wa-mūfūna bi-‘ahdihim ida ‘āhadū wa-ṣābirīna fī l-ba’sā’i wa-l-ḍarrā’i wa-ḥīna l-ba’si* (v. 177). This definition ends with the phrase, *ulā’ika lladīna ṣadaqū wa-ulā’ika humu l-muttaqūn* (v.177), which refers back to the declarative statement that introduces the text as *hud<sup>an</sup> li-l-muttaqīn* (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. *ulā’ika ‘alā hud<sup>an</sup> min rabbihim wa-ulā’ika humu l-muflīḥūn* (v. 5). Verses in the middle of sura shift from this 3<sup>rd</sup> person to the 2<sup>nd</sup> person, engaging directly with the communal insider, e.g. *utimma ni‘mati ‘alaykum wa-la‘allakum tahtadūn* (v. 150). At its conclusion, the sura shifts to the 1<sup>st</sup> person, thereby bringing its task of community-formation to fruition by embodying the communal insider: *rabbānā lā tu’ahidnā in nasīnā aw aḥṭānā rabbānā lā taḥmil ‘alaynā ‘iṣr<sup>an</sup> kamā ḥamaltahu ‘alā l-ladīna min qablinā rabbānā lā tuḥmilnā mā lā ṭāqata lanā bihi wa-‘afu ‘annā wa-ḡfir lanā wa-rḥamnā anta mawlanā fa-nṣurnā ‘alā 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 *fiṭra* (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.



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 Ṭaqafīs. 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:

ذلك الكتاب لا ريب فيه هدى للمتقين = *ḏālika l-kitābu lā rayba fihi hud<sup>an</sup> li-l-muttaqīn*

ء	ب	ت	ث	ج	ح	خ	د	ذ	ر	ز	س	ش	ص	ض	ط	ظ	ع	غ	ف	ق	ك	ل	م	ن	هـ	و	ي
ʾ	b	t	ṭ	j	ḥ	ḫ	d	ḏ	r	z	s	š	ṣ	ḍ	ṭ	ẓ	ʿ	ġ	f	q	k	l	m	n	h	w	y

دَ	دَا	دَو	دَي	دُ	دُو	دِ	دِي	دَأ	دُ	دِ	دَ
da	dā	daw	day	du	dū	dī	dī	dā	dū	dī	dā

ii. Hebrew and Aramaic

בראשית ברא אלהים את השמים ואת הארץ = *barêšît bārā 'ēlōhîm 'êt ha-šāmayim wə-'êt hā-'āreš*

א	ב	ג	ד	ה	ו	ז	ח	ט	י	כ	ל	מ	נ	ס	ע	פ	צ	ק	ר	ש	ש	ת
ʾ	b	g	d	h	w	z	ḥ	ṭ	y	k	l	m	n	s	ʿ	p	ṣ	q	r	ś	š	t

בֿ	בֿ	בֿ	בֿה	בֿ	בֿ	בֿי/בֿי	בֿ	בֿי	בֿ	וֿ	בֿ	וֿ	בֿ	בֿ	בֿ	בֿ	בֿ	בֿ	בֿ	בֿ	בֿ	בֿ
bə	ba	bā	bâ	be	bē	bê	bi/bī	bî	bo	bô	bu/bū	bû	bö	bă	bě	bě						

iii. Syriac and Christian-Aramaic

ܬܒܐ ܕܝܠܕܘܬܗ ܕܐܝܫܘܼ ܡܫܝܗܐ ܒܪܗ ܕܐܕܐܘܝܕ = *ktābā d-īlūduteh dā-yešū ʿ māsīhā breh dā-dawīd*

ܐ	ܒ	ܓ	ܕ	ܗ	ܘ	ܙ	ܚ	ܛ	ܝ	ܠ	ܡ	ܢ	ܣ	ܥ	ܦ	ܨ	ܩ	ܪ	ܫ	ܬ	
ʾ	b	g	d	h	w	z	ḥ	ṭ	r	k	l	m	n	s	ʿ	p	ṣ	q	r	š	t

ܐܘܐ	ܐܘܒ	ܐܘܓ	ܐܘܕ	ܐܘܗ	ܐܘܘ	ܐܘܝ	ܐܘܠ	ܐܘܡ	ܐܘܢ	ܐܘܣ	ܐܘܥ	ܐܘܦ	ܐܘܨ	ܐܘܩ	ܐܘܪ	ܐܘܫ	ܐܘܬ
bə	ba	bā	be	bi	bī	bu	bū	baʷ	bay	bāy	bīw						

iv. Urdu and Persian

All transliterations are phonetic:

از کتابچہ پیش لفظِ گلستانِ سعدی شیرازی

Urdu: *æz kitabčæ peš-ləfze gulistane sadī šerazī*

Persian: *æz ketabčeye pīš-læfze 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 (*muflihūn*) and the unsaved (*ẓālimūn*). The dimensions of this soteriological precinct are embedded in the sura's programmatic use of vocative clauses: *yā ayyuhā l-ladīna āmanū*; *yā banī isrā'īl*, pronouns: *naḥnu*; *hum*; *antum* and concluding formulae: *ulā'ika humu l-muflihūn*; *ulā'ika 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 yata'adda ḥudūda allāhi fa-'ulā'ika 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, *naḥnu lahu muslimūn* (v.137); *naḥnu lahu 'ābidūn* (v.138); *naḥnu lahu muḥliṣūn* (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 Qur'ān's communal ideology and its program of *Gemeindebildungs*. Whereas the specific features of the insider-community shift radically in the Qur'ānic 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-Qur'ānic 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 *ummah*, rather than on any intrinsic ethnic, doctrinal or cultural characteristics of the *ummah*'s members.<sup>55</sup>

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.”<sup>56</sup> In this chapter, I analyze the phrase “the dyeing of God” (Q2:138) at the heart of the *ummah*-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 *ummah*-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 Qur'ānic term *ṣibgata* 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 Qur'ān reworks the metaphor into an

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<sup>55</sup> On communal boundaries and communal identity, see further John Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Fredrick Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference* (Bergen, Universitetsforlaget, 1969), 9-38; Shaye Cohen, *The Beginning of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); idem., “Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 82 (1989): 13-33; Christine Hayes, *Gentile Impurities and Jewish Identities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Saul Olyan, *Rites and Rank* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000) and Gary Porten, *The Stranger Within Your Gates* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>56</sup> Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, 9.

apologetics of universalism, thereby asserting that its addressee-community supersedes previous salvific communities; early exegetes read the baptismal metaphor as a reference to *fiṭrah* (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 *ṣibḡata allāhi*, from its late ancient to early Islamic readings, leans heavily on Izutsu's semantic analysis of Qur'ānic vocabulary, which he refers to as *Weltanschauungslehre*—a structural study of the text's world-view through a systematic analysis of cultural concepts crystallized in its linguistic forms.<sup>57</sup> 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.”<sup>58</sup> 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.

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<sup>57</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran: Semantics of the Koranic Weltanschauung* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1964), 11.

<sup>58</sup> Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 12.

## 2.1 The Term and the Metaphor

According to Toorawa's classification of hapaxes in the Qur'ān, *ṣibḡah* is a *unique word*—the root *ṣ.b.ġ* only once in this morphology, “The *ṣibḡah* of God! Who surpasses God in *ṣibḡah*?” (Q2:138) and once in another, “A tree sprouts from Mount Sinai, secreting oil and *ṣibḡ* to those who partake” (Q23:19).<sup>59</sup> 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.<sup>60</sup> The basic semantics of the root *ṣ.b.ġ* 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 (*ṣibḡ*); the dyer (*ṣabbāḡ*) and the agent (*ṣibḡah*) whereby clothes are dyed (*yusḡibū*) and colored.”<sup>61</sup> Terms produced from the root appear in recorded idiom and *jāhili* poetry as well as in various *aḥādīṭ* and *aḥbār*.<sup>62</sup> “‘Alī found Fāṭima wearing dyed clothes (*ṭiyāb<sup>an</sup> ṣābiḡ<sup>an</sup>*) during Hajj,”<sup>63</sup> “Ibn ‘Umar used to dye (*kāna yusḡibū*) his robes with saffron”<sup>64</sup> and “I saw the messenger of God dye (*ṣabaḡa*) with yellow coloring so I too would love to dye (*aṣḡibū*)

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<sup>59</sup> See Shawkat M. Toorawa, “Hapaxes in the Qur'ān: Identifying and Cataloguing Lone Words (and Loan Words),” in *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context 2*, ed. Gabriel S. Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2011), 193-246.

<sup>60</sup> For more on the term *ṣibḡah*, see Sean Anthony, “Further Notes on the Word *Ṣibgha* in Qur'an 2:138,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 59 (forthcoming).

<sup>61</sup> Muḥammad Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisānu l-‘Arab* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā', 1988), 515.

<sup>62</sup> For a complete list of *aḥādīṭ* and *aḥbār* on dyeing, see A. J. Wensinck, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 243-244.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisānu l-‘Arab*, 515.

<sup>64</sup> Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Nisā'ī, *Sunanu l-Nisā'ī* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā', 1980), 30.



with it.”<sup>65</sup> It also appears in juridical writings, “There is no fault upon a man who assumes the ritual state (*iḥrām*) with dyed cloth (*tawb<sup>in</sup> maṣbūḡ<sup>in</sup>*),”<sup>66</sup> as well as in popular adages, “The greatest of liars are the dyers (*ṣābiḡūn*) and the goldsmiths.”<sup>67</sup>

Major modern translations of the Qur’ān<sup>68</sup>—rudimentary critical engagements with the text’s vocabulary—render *ṣibḡata allāhi* as the dyeing or dye of God. An exception in the Persian tradition is Foladænd, who diverges from the proverbial translation “*rænge ḡoda*” (the color of God) and renders the phrase “*negargariye ḡoda*” (the design of God). Among Turkish translations, Yüksel breaks from the literal “Allah’ın boyası” (God’s dyeing) and translates the verse as “Allah’ın 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 *ṣibḡata allāhi* in Q2:138 and *ṣibḡ* in Q23:30, producing: “L’onction de Dieu! Mais qui, mieux que Dieu, peut donner l’onction?”<sup>69</sup> These exceptions attempt to explain the metaphor and are heavily influenced by classical exegetical discussions of its referent. The classical lexicographical

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<sup>65</sup> Muḥammad b. Ismā‘īl al-Buḡārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Buḡārī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Lubnānī, 1986), 4:13.

<sup>66</sup> Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad* (Riyadh: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1985), 2:426.

<sup>67</sup> Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1863), 1648.

<sup>68</sup> These include all major modern Azeri, Bangla, Dutch, French, German, Hausa, Hindi, Persian, Pashto, Russian, Sindhi, Spanish, Swahili, Turkish, Urdu and Uzbek translations.

<sup>69</sup> Blanchère explains that this onction is the “allure procurée par Dieu à l’homme converti au Monothéisme d’Abraham” Régis Blanchère, *Introduction au Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1977), 767.

tradition has several theories about the metaphoric meaning of this root in scripture. Ibn Manẓūr's (d. 1350) lexicographical entry condenses these theories into four main connotative possibilities. He qualifies the first two semantic postulates as weak (*daʿif*) 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 MANẒŪR

- «(i) The Christians called their immersion of their children in water *ṣibġ*... so *ṣibġ* is this immersion... the *ḍimmī* immerses his offspring into Judaism or into Christianity: a *ṣibġah* in a loathsome manner.
- « سَمَتِ النَّصَارَى غَمْسَهُمْ أَوْلَادَهُمْ فِي الْمَاءِ صَبْغًا... وَالصَّبْغُ الْغَمْسُ... صَبْغُ الذِّمِّي وَلَدَهُ فِي الْيَهُودِيَّةِ أَوْ النَّصْرَانِيَّةِ صَبْغَةً قَبِيحَةً.
- (ii) It is God's command to Muhammad. It is circumcision. Abraham circumcised himself and this is *ṣibġah*.
- هِيَ الَّتِي أَمَرَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى بِهَا مُحَمَّدًا... هِيَ الْخِتَانَةُ. اخْتَنَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ... فِيهِ الصَّبْغَةُ.
- (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.
- فَظَاهِرُهُ أَنَّهُ الَّذِي تَلَوَّنَ بِهِ الثِّيَابُ وَلَيْسَ كَذَلِكَ بَلِ الْمُرَادُ بِهِ الْخَلُّ وَالزَّيْتُ وَنَحْوُهُمَا مِنَ الْإِدَامِ... أَيِ حَسْنِ حَالِهِ.
- (iv) The original meaning of *ṣabġ* in Bedouin speech is transformation, so the *ṣibġ* of cloth is the transformation of its color and the change in its condition to blackness, redness or yellowness."
- أَصْلُ الصَّبْغِ فِي كَلَامِ الْعَرَبِ التَّغْيِيرُ وَمِنْهُ صَبِغَ الثَّوْبَ إِذَا غَيَّرَ لَوْنَهُ وَأُزِيلَ عَنْ حَالِهِ إِلَى حَالٍ سَوَادٍ أَوْ حُمْرَةٍ أَوْ صُفْرَةٍ «

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 *ṣibġ* 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.<sup>70</sup> 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.”<sup>71</sup> 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 *maʿmūdīta*. In his treatment of the scriptural phrase, James Bellamy goes a step further and argues that *ṣibġata allāhi* is a lexical corruption, which he suggests should be jettisoned to “produce a text as near as possible to the original.”<sup>72</sup> Like Bell and Watt before him, he explicitly rejects the exegetical tradition’s suggestion that *ṣibġata allāhi* is a metaphoric reference to Christian baptism:

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<sup>70</sup> Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qurʾān* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1953), 31.

<sup>71</sup> Montgomery Watt, *Companion to the Qurʾān* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1967), 29.

<sup>72</sup> 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!<sup>73</sup>

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.”<sup>74</sup> Citing the inexplicable accusative declination of the term *ṣibḡata*, 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.”<sup>75</sup> He then re-dots the consonantal skeleton *صبعه* to produce the emended terms *ṣanī‘ah* (صنيعة), which he translates as *favor*<sup>76</sup> 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

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<sup>73</sup> James Bellamy, “Some Proposed Emendations to the Text of the Koran,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, no. 4 (1993), 563.

<sup>74</sup> Bellamy, “Textual Criticism,” 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>76</sup> 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.”

them baptism.<sup>77</sup> 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 *ṣ.b.ġ* may have been an early import from the Aramaic root *ṣ.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.<sup>78</sup> 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.”<sup>79</sup> The cognate root *ṣ.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 5<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> century, are not only evidence that the root *ṣ.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 *ma ʿmūdīta* was not used universally among Christian communities in the area:

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 570.

<sup>78</sup> 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.

<sup>79</sup> Christa Müller-Kessler and Michael Sokoloff, *A Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic V: The Catechism of Cyril of Jerusalem in the Palestinian Aramaic Version* (Groningen, STYX Publications, 1993), 3.

John was baptizing (*mašbe*<sup>٥</sup>) in the wilderness, preaching the baptism (*mašbū*<sup>٦</sup>) 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 (*maštāb*<sup>٧</sup>) by him in the Jordan... 'I have baptized (*ašb*<sup>٨</sup>*et*) you in water but he will baptize (*yašbe*<sup>٩</sup>) you in the Holy Spirit.' At that time, the lord Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized (*ašbe*<sup>١٠</sup>) 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-mšîḥā ištabeʿton*) are clothed in Christ” (Gal. 3:26 -27).<sup>81</sup> Further evidence for the ubiquity of this root is found in the surviving fragments from the Palestinian Aramaic translation of the Catechesis of Cyril,<sup>82</sup> 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 *ṣ.b.ġ* was available as a referent for baptism in the heteroglossic communities of the Arabian Peninsula at the time of the Qurʾān.

<sup>80</sup> Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff, *Christian Palestinian Aramaic IIA*, 76-77.

<sup>81</sup> Christa Müller-Kessler and Michael Sokoloff, *A Corpus of Christian Palestinian Aramaic IIB* (Groningen, STYX Publications, 1998), 126.

<sup>82</sup> Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff, *The Catechism of Cyril of Jerusalem in the Palestinian Aramaic Version*, 7-208.

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.”<sup>83</sup> 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.”<sup>84</sup> 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 *ṣibġata allāhi* and a contemporaneous Palestinian-Aramaic term for baptism *ṣeb'atā*, 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 6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> 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.”<sup>85</sup> It is important to note that, in the

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<sup>83</sup> Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 24.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 23-24.

<sup>85</sup> Sidney Griffith, “Christians and Christianity,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, 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.”<sup>86</sup> Thus, the Septuagint describes the dyed turbans of the Chaldean men (*śarûkê ṭabûlîm*) in Ezek. 23:15 as *tiarai baptai* while Josephus refers to Herod’s dyed hair as *baptomenō* (*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.<sup>87</sup> Here Tertullian uses the term *tingo* interchangeably with the Greek calque *bapto* (Cap.11): “Christ says, ‘I have to be

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[http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/christians-and-christianity-COM\\_00033](http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-the-quran/christians-and-christianity-COM_00033). See also idem, *The Beginnings of Christian Theology in Arabic: Muslim-Christian Encounters in the Early Islamic Period* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002) and Jane McAuliffe, *Qur’ānic Christians* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 93.

<sup>86</sup> Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2009), 43.

<sup>87</sup> For a detailed discussion of Tertullian’s use of *tingo*, see James Dale, *Christic Baptism and Patristic Baptism*, (Phillipsburg, P&R Publishing, 1995), 609-614.



baptized (*tingui*) with a baptism (*baptismo*), but he had already been baptized (*tinctus fuisset*).” In several passages, he prefers the term *tingo* exclusively, “The Lord came and did not baptize (*tinxit*)... he baptized not (*non tinguebat*) but rather his disciples did, as if John had announced that he would baptize (*tinctorum*) by his own hands. He will baptize (*tinguet*) you, that is, ye shall be baptized (*tinguemini*) by him.” This alternative rendering continues to appear even after the promulgation of the Vulgate, which uses only *immergo* and *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 (*tinguntur*) a first time in the blood of Christ and are baptized again (*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:

THE GOSPEL OF PHILLIP II.61:12-20<sup>88</sup>

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 those whom God has dyed. Since his dyes are immortal, they are made immortal through his colors. God baptizes those whom he baptizes in water.

ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΟΥΖΙΤ ΠΕ ΝΗΕ ΝΝΩ2Ε  
ΕΤΝΑΝΟΥΟΥ 4ΑΥΜΟΥΤΕ ΕΡΟΥ Ε  
ΝΑΛΖΗΝΟΝ 4ΑΥ ΜΟΥ ΜΝ  
ΝΕΝΤΑΥΩ2Ε ΘΡΑΙ Ν62ΤΟΥ ΤΑ ΕΙ  
ΤΕ ΉΕ ΝΝΕΝΤΑΠΝΟΥΤΕ Θ2ΟΥ Ε  
ΠΕΙΔ2 ΘΝ ΝΑΤΜΟΥ ΝΕ ΝΕ3Ω2Ε  
4ΑΥ Ρ ΑΤΜΟΥ ΕΒΟΛ ΘΙΤΟΟΤ3  
ΝΝΕ3ΠΑ6ΡΕ ΠΝΟΥΤΕ ΔΕ  
ΡΒΑΠΤΙΖΕ ΝΝΕΤ3ΡΒΑΠΤΙ ΖΕ  
ΜΜΟΥ ΘΝ ΟΥΜΟΥ

The multivalence of the Greek verb *baptizō* explains why the Syriac verb for the ritual, *ʿamada*, denotes immersion or plunging while the contemporaneous Palestinian-Aramaic term, *šabaʿa*, denotes dyeing or coloring. Given the ubiquity of the latter connotation, it is likely that while some 6<sup>th</sup> 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-Šabbāġ*, 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

<sup>88</sup> 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 *šibġ* 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.<sup>89</sup>

In this section, I established the etymological and connotative possibility that *šibġata 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 *šibġah*-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<sup>um</sup> qad ħalat* (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 *šibġah*-verse, is interposed between a thematic chiasm: abc/x/cba.<sup>90</sup> The elements of this

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<sup>89</sup> On this imagery see Geo Widengren, "Réflexions sur le baptême dans la chrétienté syriaque," in *Paganisme, Judaïsme, Christianisme*, ed. André Benoit (Paris: De Boccard, 1978), 347 – 358.

<sup>90</sup> On ring-composition and the internal structure of suras, see Salwa El-Awa, *Textual Relations in the Qur'ān: 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,<sup>91</sup> “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: *naḥnu lahu muslimūn* (submitted-ones); *naḥnu lahu ‘ābidūn* (worshippers, slaves) and *naḥnu lahu muḥliṣūn* (sincere-ones):

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Cuypers, *Le Festin: une Lecture de la Sourate al-Maida* (Paris: Lethielleux, 2007); Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981) and Pierre Crapon de Caprona, *Le Coran: aux sources de la parole oraculaire. Structures rythmiques des sourates mecquoises* (Paris: Publications Orientalistes de France, 1981).

<sup>91</sup> On counter-discourse in the Qur’ān, see further Mehdi Azaiez, “Le Contre-Discours Coranique: Approches d’un Corpus,” in *Les Études Coraniques Aujourd’hui : Méthodes, Enjeux, Débats*, ed. Sabrina Mervin (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 2013).

Q BAQARAH 2:134-141

A <sub>1</sub>	“This is a nation, it has passed...	« تلك أمة قد خلت... »
B <sub>1</sub>	They say, ‘Become Jews or [become] Christians to be guided!’ Say, ‘Nay, the <i>milla</i> of Abraham, a <i>ḥanīf</i> and not a <i>mušrik</i> .’ 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 <i>Muslimūn</i> .>	وقالوا كونوا هودا أو نصارى تهتدوا قل بل ملة إبراهيم حنيفا وما كان من المشركين .قولوا آمنا بالله وما أنزل إلينا وما أنزل إلى إبراهيم وإسماعيل وإسحاق ويعقوب والأسباط وما أوتي موسى وعيسى وما أوتي النبيون من ربهم لا نفرق بين أحد منهم ونحن له مسلمون>
C <sub>1</sub>	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 آمنتم به فقد اهتدوا وإن تولّوا فإنما هم في شقاق...
X	The dyeing of God! And who surpasses God in dyeing? <To Him we are ‘ <i>Ābidūn</i> .>	صبغة الله ومن أحسن من الله صبغة <ونحن له عابدون>
C <sub>2</sub>	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 <i>Muḥliṣūn</i> .>	قل أتحاجوننا في الله وهو ربنا وربكم ولنا أعمالنا ولكم أعمالكم <ونحن له مخلصون>
B <sub>2</sub>	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 ويعقوب والأسباط كانوا هودا أو نصارى... من أظلم ممن كتم شهادة عنده من الله...
A <sub>2</sub>	This is a nation, it has passed...”	تلك أمة قد خلت...

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:<sup>92</sup> "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 Qur'ānic text, in one instance in Abraham's own voice (Q6:79), in another in the voice of the Qur'ān's prophetic addressee (Q10:105). 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 Qur'ān's addressee-community: "follow the *milla* of Abraham—a *ḥanīf*; and not a *mušrik*." (Q3:95)

According to the conventional understanding, the Qur'ānic 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 (*ḥunafā'*) in Muhammad's Mecca. The

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<sup>92</sup> On Abraham in the Qur'ān, see Youakim Moubarac, *Abraham dans le Coran* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1958).

portrayal of Arab paganism, or idolatry, has been questioned by Gerald Hawting who presents a strong case that the Qur’ānic term *mušrikūn* is in fact a hyperbolic polemical reference to Trinitarian Christians.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, Francois de Blois and others have argued that the term *ḥanīf* is a calque on the Syriac *ḥanpā*, denoting gentile.<sup>94</sup> 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*:

(a <sup>1</sup> )	<i>mā kāna ibrahūmu</i>	≠	(a <sup>2</sup> )	<i>wa-lākin kāna</i>
	Abraham was neither			Rather, he was
(b <sup>1</sup> )	<i>yahūdiyyan</i>	≠	(b <sup>2</sup> )	<i>ḥanīfan musliman</i>
	Jewish			a gentile, who has submitted
(c <sup>1</sup> )	<i>(wa)-lā naṣrāniyyan</i>	≠	(c <sup>2</sup> )	<i>(wa)-mā kāna minā l-mušrikīn</i>
	nor neither Christian			and not a Trinitarian.

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 Qur’ān’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

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<sup>93</sup> Gerald Hawting, *The idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1999

<sup>94</sup> Francois De Blois, “Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanīf (ἔθνικός): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 65 (2002): 1-30

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,<sup>95</sup> "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 Qur'ān'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 (*ṣahāda*) of God, that he has (*'indahū*)?"

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 (*miṭli 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

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<sup>95</sup> On the Qur'ān's representation of the patriarchs in the context of community-building, see generally Kenneth Cragg, *The Event of the Qur'ān: 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.”<sup>96</sup> 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 redeploys it 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 5<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 31-32.

and 6<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup> 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 (*intinguuntur*) [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.

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<sup>97</sup> Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History*, 163

Numerous Christian polemicists thus argue that Jewish immersion (*ṭavîlā*) was salvifically useless since it was not an act of spiritual purity through faith in Christ but rather an act of corporeal purity.<sup>98</sup> 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 صِبْغَةٌ / 'ṣibḡaṭa/ 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.<sup>99</sup> The exegetes explain

<sup>98</sup> Jean-Yves Lacoste, *Encyclopedia of Christian theology* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 586.

<sup>99</sup> In his exegetical expansion on Q2:138 in *tafsīr zād al-masīr*, Ibn al-Jawzī reports an alternate nominative reading, *ṣibḡatu 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 *ittabi‘ū*; or as a rare emphatic form (*maṣdar muta‘akkid*). I suggest a simpler possibility—the aural shape /‘sʕibyaṭa/ is a phonetic echo of the Christian-Palestinian Aramaic emphatic substantive for baptism, ܥܒܬܐ /‘sʕebṣəṭa:/ or its plural form ܥܒܬܐܢ /‘sʕebṣəṭaː/. As such, the term functions both as an aural and an allegorical calque on the technical term for the ritual among Christians. The phrase /‘sʕibyaṭa l:a:hi/ is likely a polemical parody of contemporaneous Christian liturgical formulae about baptism in the name of Christ: /‘sʕebṣəṭa: də-‘jesu:s mə‘ṣi:ḥa:/.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> It has been suggested by several Qur’ānic 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-muḡtasila*). Ibn Nadīm explains that the *bathers* are “the *ṣabi’ūn* 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 Qur’ānic root *ṣ.b.ḡ* is related to the root *ṣ.b.ʿ*, the eastern Aramaic cognate of *ṣ.b.‘* and the Mandaic verb for immersion. Thus, the communal term *ṣābi’ūn* in the Qur’ān simply means the Baptists. See De Blois, “Naṣrānī (Ναζωραῖος) and ḥanīf (ἐθνικός),” 27, and M. P. Roncaglia, “Element Ebionites et Elchaistes dans le Coran,” in *Proche Orient Chrétien* (1971): 101 - 126. Roncaglia concludes from his extensive study of references to Christian theology and practice in the Qur’ān, “nous croyons qu’on peut dorénavant diriger le recherche: découvrir dans le Coran la 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 *ṣibgata 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."<sup>101</sup> The specific polemic encapsulated in the expression *ṣibgata allāhi* would have been perceptible to certain audiences and imperceptible to others, but the supersessionary 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 *fiṭrah* (primordial nature) or the distinctly Muslim practice of *ḡusl* (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."<sup>102</sup> 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

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<sup>101</sup> Izutsu, *God and Man in the Koran*, 40.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

connotations. 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 Qur'ān's communal vocabulary, terms such *ummah*, *muslim*, *ḥanīf* and *mušrik*, acquire their classical, markedly post-Qur'ānic, *relational* meanings while their pre-classical, i.e. Qur'ānic, 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."<sup>103</sup> The polemical and liturgical functions of *ṣibgata allāhi* outlined earlier thus give way to didactic and juridical readings in the early Muslim period.

In the earliest exegetical layers, *ṣibgata allāhi* is understood as an allegory for the recently stabilized classical religio-communal identity, *Islam*. Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 767) explains that *ṣibgah* is a synonym for the religion. "The verse means, 'follow our religion (*dīn*) for there is no religion but our religion.'" Already in the *tafsīr* of Mujahid b. Jabr (d. 722) however another interpretive trajectory becomes more prominent, namely that *ṣibgah* is *fiṭrah*, the primordial pre-communal pre-revelatory state of humanity that is referenced in the Qur'ān, "Set your faces to the *law* (*dīn*) as gentiles, [for such is] the God-given primordial nature (*fiṭrah*), 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 *fiṭrah* is equated directly with *islām*, as Ṭabari (d. 923) explains, "[*ṣibgah*] is that upon

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<sup>103</sup> John Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), xxii.

which God predisposed (*faṭara*) 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 *ṣibḡah* is “*fiṭrah*, which is the origin of all created beings, which is the state (*ḥāl*) of submission (*islām*).”<sup>104</sup> The universalistic concept of *fiṭrah* is thus conflated with the exclusive communal category *Islām*, the apologetic of inclusion in the Qur’ānic passage is essentially muted as it is no longer doctrinally viable or polemically useful. The early exegetical tradition thus seamlessly transforms the phrase *ṣibḡata allāhi* from an expression of soteriological inclusivity into an unequivocal statement of soteriological exclusivity—a return to *fiṭrah* 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 *ṣibḡah* metaphorically (*isti‘ārat<sup>an</sup>*) and allegorically (*majāz<sup>an</sup>*) 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 (*yaj’alu lāzim<sup>an</sup>*) 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 *ma’mūdīya*.

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<sup>104</sup> On *fiṭrah* as an explanation for boundary crossing, see further: Kathryn Kueny, “Abraham’s Test: Islamic Male Circumcision as Anti/ Ante-Covenantal Practice,” in *Bible and Qur’ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. John Reeves (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 161-182.

There is however discomfort with the ostensibly positive appearance of a Christian sacrament in the Qur'ān and the exegetes adapt it to the more familiar, more distinctly Muslim, ritual practices of boundary-crossing: circumcision and *ḡusl*.<sup>105</sup> Baḡawī (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 *ṣibḡah* 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.” Zamaḡṣarī'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 (*taḥṭīr*):

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<sup>105</sup> *ṣ.b. ʿ*, the Eastern Aramaic cognate of *ṣ.b. ʿ*, 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 Iṣḥāq 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 Qurayṣ, 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 Ṭumāma b. al-Ḥanaḡī became Muslim, the Prophet took him to Abū Talḡā's enclosure and instructed him to immerse himself (*yaḡṭasil*), so he immersed himself and then prayed two units of prayer. Thereafter, the Prophet announced publically ‘Your companion has entered Islām.’” Ibn Hiṣām, *al-Sīrah*, vol. 4, 187.



The *dyeing of God* is an emphatic verbal noun in the accusative... It is from [the root] *ṣ.b.ğ* 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.

« سَمَتَ صِبْغَةَ اللَّهِ مَصْدَرٌ مُؤَكَّدٌ  
مَنْتَصِبٌ ... وَهِيَ مِنْ صَبَغَ، كَالْجَلْسَةِ  
مِنْ جَلَسَ، وَهِيَ الْحَالَةُ الَّتِي يَقَعُ عَلَيْهَا  
الصَّبْغُ وَالْمَعْنَى تَطْهِيرُ اللَّهِ، لِأَنَّ الْإِيمَانَ  
يَطْهَرُ النُّفُوسَ.

Its origin is that the Christians used to immerse their children into yellow-colored water, called the *ma'mūdiyyah*. 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.

وَالْأَصْلُ فِيهِ أَنَّ النَّصَارَى كَانُوا يَغْمِسُونَ  
أَوْلَادَهُمْ فِي مَاءٍ أَصْفَرٍ يَسْمُونَهُ الْمَعْمُودِيَّةَ  
وَيَقُولُونَ: هُوَ تَطْهِيرٌ لَهُمْ، وَإِذَا فَعَلَ  
الْوَاحِدُ مِنْهُمْ بَوْلَدَهُ ذَلِكَ قَالَ: الْآنَ صَارَ  
نَصْرَانِيًّا حَقًّا، فَأَمَرَ الْمُسْلِمُونَ بِأَنْ يَقُولُوا  
لَهُمْ: قُولُوا ءَامَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَصَبَغَنَا اللَّهُ  
بِالْإِيمَانِ صِبْغَةً لَا مِثْلَ صَبِغَتِنَا، وَطَهَّرَنَا  
بِهِ تَطْهِيرًا لَا مِثْلَ تَطْهِيرِنَا»

Zamaḥṣarī thus recasts the specific referent of the metaphor, baptism, as an abstract referent, purity (*ṭahārah*), a rendering that is far more conducive to classical readings of the verse as an allusion to *fiṭrah*, *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 *ummaḥ*. 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."<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Marion Katz, *Body of Text: the Emergence of the Sunni Law of Ritual Purity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 57.

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 *ṣibġata* is etymologically linked to the Palestinian-Aramaic term for baptism, *ṣeb ‘atā*. 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 *ṣibġata allāhi* as an assertion of the exclusive soteriological potency of Islam. In the post-Qur’ānic era, the prelocutionary declaration of faith, the *ṣahādah*, becomes the primary ritual act of boundary-crossing into the *ummah*. The rituals of baptism (*ġusl 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 Sa‘d (d. 230/845), when Ṣafiyya bint Ḥuyayy, a freed Naẓirī war-captive,<sup>107</sup> joins Muhammad’s household as his wife, she is met with antipathy from her Quraṣī counterparts. “Another one of the Jews!” declares ‘Ā’iṣa, 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.<sup>108</sup> Ṣafiyya, 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!”<sup>109</sup> In line with this *ḥadīth*, Ibn Sa‘d 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

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<sup>107</sup> She was a member of the Banū Naẓīr, 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.

<sup>108</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), 10:122.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 10:123. This *ḥadīth* is quoted in slightly modified form in Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī, *al-Iṣābah fī Tamyiz al-Ṣaḥābah* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kullīyāt al-Azharīyah, 1977), 7:740; and also appears in Tirmidī’s *Ṣaḥīḥ* compendium in a variant that includes a third line, “And my husband is Muḥammad!” See Muḥammad b. ‘Isā al-Tirmidī, *al-Jāmi‘* (Medina: al-Maktaba al-Salafīya, 1967), 3:385.

Aaron b. Amram.”<sup>110</sup> 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.<sup>111</sup> 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,<sup>112</sup> which is the Qur’ān’s most explicit expression of *Gemeindebildung*<sup>113</sup>—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

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<sup>110</sup> “Ṣafiyya bt. Huyayy b. Aḥṭab b. Sa‘yata b. ‘Āmir b. ‘Ubayd b. Ka‘b b. al-Ḥazraj b. Abī Ḥabīb b. al-Naẓīr b. al-Naḥḥām b. Yanḥūm min Banī Isrā’īl min Sibṭ Hārūn b. ‘Imrān.” Ibn Sa‘d, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, 10:116.

<sup>111</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawiyyah* (Beirut: Dar Sader Publishers, 2005), 17-19. cf. Gen. 5; Gen. 11:10-26; Gen. 25:13 and Isa. 60:7.

<sup>112</sup> For a detailed discussion of the *ummah* pericope’s form and content, see Chapter 1. See also David Smith, “The Structure of *al-Baqarah*,” *Muslim World* 91, no. 1 (2001): 121-136; Angelika Neuwirth, “Referentiality and Textuality in *Sūrat al-Ḥijr*: Some Observations on the Qur’ānic ‘Canonical Process’ and the Emergence of Community,” in Issa Boullata, ed., *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 144.

<sup>113</sup> See John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006), 98-129; Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2007), 16-35.

Jacob-Israel as heirs of Abraham. By re-introducing Ishmael into the sacred genealogies of Genesis, the Qurʾān 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)<sup>114</sup> and one that is grounded firmly in a historical outlook.

### 3.1 Genealogy as Communal Boundary

The Qurʾānic appellation “Children of Israel” [*banū isrāʾīl*] typically denotes the ancient Israelites.<sup>115</sup> 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 [*ilhtarnāhum*], knowingly, over the worlds” (Q44:31-32). In the *ummah* pericope this appellation appears in a novel, vocative, context—as a designation for the

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<sup>114</sup> On marriage and adoption in the Qurʾān and early Islam, see Kecia Ali, *Marriage and Slavery in Early Islam*, (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2010) and David S. Powers, *Muhammad is Not the Father of Any of Your Men: The Making of the Last Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

<sup>115</sup> See e.g. Q2:246-52; Q17:2-8 and Q61:6.

Qur'ān's actual Jewish interlocutors,<sup>116</sup> 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 Qur'ān is idiosyncratic in its usage of this uniquely pentateuchal appellation [*bənê yiśrā'el*] which, in contemporaneous Near Eastern sectarian discourse, is displaced entirely by the typological designation "Israel."

The Qur'ān'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."<sup>117</sup> Genealogical descent from the three Israelite patriarchs thus acts as the *impermeable* communal boundary around the insider community.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Q2:122, cf. Q2:40 and Q2:47. The text's typical designation for its Jewish interlocutors is the sectarian term, "people of scripture" [*ahlu l-kitāb*].

<sup>117</sup> Jacob Neusner, *Rabbinic Judaism: A Theological System* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 37.

<sup>118</sup> 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<sup>119</sup> feature strong elective language: “Commemorate Our servants: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, foremost in strength and vision. We set them apart [*ahlaṣṣnāhum*] for a purpose: the commemoration of the realm. They are, for Us, of the Elect [*al-muṣṭafīn*], the Excellent [*al-aḥyār*]” (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 *Pirqê Āvôt* of the Mishna or the *Brīt ha-Āvôt* at Qumran), demonstrate a “primitivist” orientation in that they define ideals by alluding to a (mythic) past.<sup>120</sup> 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 *faith of the fathers* formula:<sup>121</sup> “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

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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, *Stranger within your Gates* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 6.

<sup>119</sup> Late Antique Jewish references to the Fathers [*ha- Āvôt*] typically denote only Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. See Beraḳot 16B and Sifrê Deut. 94.

<sup>120</sup> For a detailed discussion of various sectarian “orientations” in the Qur’ān, see Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 54-59.

<sup>121</sup> See Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu*, 43. See e.g. Q5:104; Q7:28, Q34:43, Q43:22-24. The *faith of the fathers* topos also appears in prophetic stories about Noah (Q7:70); Moses (Q10:78); Ṣāliḥ (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:<sup>122</sup> “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 [*fadl*] 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 [*yajtabika*]...and brought to fruition [*yutimmu*] His blessing upon you and upon the House [*āl*] of Jacob” (Q 12:6; see also Q 19:6). It is then by allusion to this particular patrimony that the Qur’ān petitions its Jewish interlocutors in the *ummah* pericope, “O Children of Israel! Recall My favor [*ni‘matī*] 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,<sup>123</sup> 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

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<sup>122</sup> For an overview of elective theology and vocabulary in the Qur’ān, see Reuven Firestone, “Is there a Notion of ‘Divine Election’ in the Qur’ān,” in *New Perspectives on the Qur’ān*, ed. Gabriel Reynolds (New York: Routledge, 2011), 393-410, and idem, *Who are the Real Chosen People* (Woodstock, Vt.: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2008), 21–52.

<sup>123</sup> For discussion of the Qur’ānic term *mušrikūn* “Associators” as an anti-Trinitarian reference to Christians see Gerald Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 1-20.



framework wherein the *umma* 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.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> 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)’”

» נגלה על בני עשו הרשע  
ואמר להם מקבלים אתם  
עליכם את התורה. אמרו לו  
מה כתיב בה. אמר להם לא  
תרצח. אמרו לו זו היא ירושה  
שהורישנו אבינו שנאמר ועל  
חרבך תחיה.... וכשבא אצל  
ישראל ... פתחו כולם פיהם  
ואמרו כל אשר דבר ה' נעשה  
ונשמע «

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.<sup>126</sup> 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,”<sup>127</sup> that is one of the fundamental interpretive objectives in Late Antique intra-monotheistic polemics and apologia. Such communal identity politics

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“Judaism and Christianity in the Middle of the Third Century,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 10 (1936), 179-224; Israel J. Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb: Perceptions of Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 20-40; and Adiel Schremer, *Brothers Estranged: Christianity, and Jewish Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 29-53.

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

<sup>126</sup> See Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 15 and 185.

<sup>127</sup> Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, 1.

over the sacred genealogies of Genesis underpins the Qur'ān'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.<sup>128</sup> Reframing the Qur'ān's references to the "House of Amrām" in contemporaneous sectarian discourse, she uncovers the polemical move underlying the Qur'ān's construction of the Christian holy family to offset the centrality of the Abrahamic, i.e. Jewish, one.<sup>129</sup> The Qur'ān'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 *milla*, i.e. speech, creed, way, manner, heritage and the *dīn* i.e. the law, or perhaps, the (correct) *modus vivendi*. The "chosenness" of the patriarch is subtly refracted away from his personage and reconstituted in his *milla* or *dīn*, which is surrender / the one who surrenders (*islām / muslim*)—a proleptic allusion to the communal terms Islam / Muslim:

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<sup>128</sup> "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)

<sup>129</sup> Angelika Neuwirth, "The House of Abraham and the House of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority and Exegetical Professionalism," in Neuwirth, Sinai and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, 499-532.

[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!'

«وإذ يرفع إبراهيم القواعد من البيت وإسماعيل... ربنا واجعلنا مسلمين لك ومن ذرّيتنا أمة مسلمة لك...»

ومن يرغب عن ملة إبراهيم إلا من سفه نفسه ولقد اصطفيناه في الدنيا وإنه في الآخرة لمن الصالحين. إذ قال له ربه أسلم قال أسلمت لرب العالمين.

ووصّى بها إبراهيم بنيه ويعقوبُ يا بني إن الله اصطفى لكم الدين فلا تموتنّ إلا وأنتم مسلمون»

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 [*taʾwīl*] of traditional narratives but rather revealed memories, truth-claims [*ḥaqq*] in and of themselves: "We

narrate to you their story, in truth!” (Q18:13).<sup>130</sup> This particular feature of the Qur’ānic 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 [*asāṭīr al-‘awwālīn*] 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).<sup>131</sup> 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*).

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<sup>130</sup> Saleh, “In Search of a Comprehensible Qur’ān,” 155, writes: “The Qur’ān takes a polemical position vis-à-vis earlier scriptures and posits itself as presenting the ‘true’ story. Clearly, then, the Qur’ān is not obliged to repeat slavishly the contents of Judeo-Christian scriptures in its retelling of them. What the Qur’ān 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 Qur’an’s aims and purposes. The Qur’an 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.”

<sup>131</sup> See e.g. Q 6:25; 7:95; 8:31; 16:24; 23:83; 25:5; 27:67-68; 28:36; 46:17; 68:15 and 83:13.

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),<sup>132</sup> 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.<sup>133</sup>

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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<sup>132</sup> Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1961), 146-147; Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje, *Mohammedanism* (London: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), 45. See also Richard Bell and Montgomery Watt, *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970), 22.

<sup>133</sup> The Ka'ba's construction by Abraham is also mentioned twice elsewhere. One reference mentions both Isaac and Ishmael (Q14:39) while the other mentions neither (22:25). Cf. Gen. 13:1–18. For detailed discussion of the *Qibla*-shift in early Islamic exegesis and historiography, see Shoemaker, *Death of a Prophet* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 197–265.

as evidence and is recognized as such in relation to a potential narrative.”<sup>134</sup> I attempt to approach Qur’ānic 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.<sup>135</sup> Early historiographical writing is then parenthetical to scripture and engages with it exegetically. The classic prophetic narrative—the Muhammadan saga—that frames the Qur’ānic 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.<sup>136</sup> 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 *Sīra*.<sup>137</sup> It is also this exegesis that motivates Ibn Sa‘d’s attribution

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<sup>134</sup> Lionel Gossman, “Towards a Rational Historiography,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 79, no. 3 (1989), 26.

<sup>135</sup> See Arent Jan Wensinck, *Muhammad and the Jews of Medina*, trans. Wolfgang Behn (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1975) and Nāṣir al-Sayyad, *Yahūd yaṭrib wa ḥaybar: al-ḡazwāt wa-l-sīrah* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-Thaqāfiyya, 1992).

<sup>136</sup> See Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the coming of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2001), 229-247.

<sup>137</sup> Ibn Hišām, *Al-Sīrah al-Nabawīyya*, 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.<sup>138</sup>

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),<sup>139</sup> 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

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<sup>138</sup> For an overview of the methodological issues underlying Qur'ānic periodization, see also Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes in the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 133-143; Gabriel S. Reynolds, "Le problème de la chronologie du Coran," *Arabica* 58, no. 6 (2011), 477-502; Emmanuelle Stefanidis, "The Qur'an Made Linear: A Study of the *Geschichte des Qorans'* Chronological Reordering," *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 10, no. 2 (2008), 1-22.

<sup>139</sup> 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:<sup>140</sup> “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.<sup>141</sup> Even the classical Islamic sources depict two out of Medina’s three Jewish tribes as ethnically “Arab”, and the third as thoroughly “Arabized” (*musta‘rab*). 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

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<sup>140</sup> Rahman, *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.”

<sup>141</sup> See Gordon Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1988), 24-108, and Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 383-415.

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 (*farīq*), 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.<sup>142</sup>

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,<sup>143</sup> 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 Qur’ān’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 Qur’ān 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)

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<sup>142</sup> On the Qur’ān’s shifting communal outlook see further a hypothesis presented by Fazlur Rahman in *Major Themes in the Qur’an*, 133-143.

<sup>143</sup> Firestone, “Is there a notion of ‘divine election’ in the Qur’ān,” 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 Qur’ān’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).<sup>144</sup>

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

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<sup>144</sup> 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.<sup>145</sup> 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.<sup>146</sup> 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 Qur’ān’s Late Antique context. I return here to the aggadic expansion on Ex. 18, in the *Mehiltā* 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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<sup>145</sup> For discussion of various types of supersessionary schemes in Late Antique Christian theology, see R. Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). Soulen’s tripartite framework is expanded by Blaising, see Craig A. Blaising, “The Future of Israel as a Theological Question,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (2001) 435–50. For a Late Antique Judaism-oriented perspective on Christian supersessionism, see David Novak, “The Covenant in Rabbinic Thought,” in *Two Faiths, One Covenant: Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other*, ed. Eugene B. Korn (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 65–80.

<sup>146</sup> 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 *zākūt āboṭ*: “Patriarchal Merits” or “Ancestral Acquittal.”<sup>147</sup>

The notion of a collective and supra-generational dimension to reward and punishment has its firm roots in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>148</sup> 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:

#### AGGĀDĀT BĒREŠĪT<sup>149</sup> 10 - B

<p>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,</p>	<p>» אשריהם הבנים שיש זכות לאבותם שזכותם עומדת להן. אשריהן ישראל שזכות אברהם יצחק ויעקב עומדת להם בזכותן היה הקדוש ברוך הוא</p>
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<sup>147</sup> For an overview of the doctrine of Patriarchal Merits in Rabbinic theology, see A. Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of Merits in Old Rabbinic Literature* (New York: Ktav Publishing, 1968), 147-171; Jacob Neusner, *Theology of the Oral Torah* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1999), 343-364; S. Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), 170-198.

<sup>148</sup> 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.

<sup>149</sup> This is a relatively late homiletic Midrash, possibly from the early Geonic (7<sup>th</sup> 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.”

מצילן כשהיו במצרים מה כתיב  
 וישמע אלהים את־נאקתם  
 ויזכר אלהים את־בריתו את־  
 אברהם את־יצחק ואת־יעקב  
 וכשיצאו בזכותן יצאו שנאמר  
 כי־זכר את־דבר קדשו את־  
 אברהם עבדו ויוצא עמו בששון  
 ברנה את־בחיריו... כך בכל דור  
 « ודור

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.<sup>150</sup> 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).<sup>151</sup> The soteriological consequences of Patriarchal Merits extended beyond history and became a key component of Rabbinic

<sup>150</sup> 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.

<sup>151</sup> For an extended treatment of Jewish elective theology and anti-Christian and anti-Islamic polemic in the Targums, see C. T. R. Hayward, *Targums and the Transmission of Scripture into Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).



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.<sup>152</sup> 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.<sup>153</sup> 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.

» يا بني إسرائيل اذكروا نعمتي التي أنعمت عليكم وأني فضلتكم على العالمين. واتقوا يوما لا تجزي نفس عن نفس شيئا ولا يُقبل منها عدلٌ ولا تنفعها شفاعَةٌ ولا هم يُنصرون.

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.’”

وإذ ابتلى إبراهيم ربه بكلمات فأتمهنّ قال إني جاعلك للناس إماما قال ومن ذريّتي قال لا ينال عهدي الظالمين.

<sup>152</sup> 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.

<sup>153</sup> 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.<sup>154</sup> 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 *ummah*, an independent community:

#### 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 *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.’”

« أم تقولون إن إبراهيم وإسماعيل وإسحاق ويعقوب والأسباط كانوا يهودا أو نصارى. قل أنتم أعلم أم الله ومن أظلم ممن كتم شهادة عنده من الله وما الله بغافل عما تعملون. تلك أمة قد خلت لها ما كسبت ولكم ما كسبتم ولا تسألون عما كانوا يعملون. »

<sup>154</sup> 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 *umma* unto themselves, one that has passed, these verses alienate the Jewish interlocutors from the meritorious heritage of their ancestors.<sup>155</sup> 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.”<sup>156</sup> Countless aggadic expansions, even from the Tannaitic era, reiterate the notion that since Abraham and Isaac produced blemished [*pāsūl*] offspring, their patrimony alone did confer imputed righteousness. It was only Jacob-Israel who produced progeny worthy [*kāšēr*] of this accrued heritage of grace.<sup>157</sup> It was only Jacob’s patrimony, and not that of Abraham or Isaac, that ultimately mattered:

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<sup>155</sup> On the *umma*-ness of the Israelite patriarchs, see also Q23:35-53.

<sup>156</sup> Marmorstein, *The Doctrine of Merits in Old Rabbinic Literature*, 141.

<sup>157</sup> “Jacob’s bed was sound (*šlīma*), for all his sons were righteous (*ṣadīqīm*).” (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)”

» משל למלך שהיה לו שדה ונתנה לאריסים התחילו האריסים נוטלים וגונבים אותה נטלה מהם ונתנה לבניהם התחילו להיות רעים יותר מן הראשונים נטלה מהם ונתנה לבני בניהם חזרו להיות רעים יותר מן הראשונים. נולד לו בן אמר להם צאו מתוך שלי אי אפשר שתהיו בתוכה תנו לי חלקי שאהיה מכירו. כך כשבא אברהם אבינו לעולם יצא ממנו פסולת ישמעאל ובני קטורה. בא אבינו יצחק לעולם יצא ממנו פסולת עשו אלופי אדום חזרו להיות רעים יותר מן הראשונים. כשבא יעקב לא יצא ממנו פסולת אלא נולדו כל בניו כשרים כמותו, שנאמר וַיַּעֲקֹב אִישׁ תָּם»

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

<sup>158</sup> For more on exegetical contestations between Gospel parables and the Midrashic *māšālīm*, see David Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 189-97.

<sup>159</sup> 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.<sup>160</sup>

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).<sup>161</sup> 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 [*nāḥilat<sup>an</sup>*] 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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<sup>160</sup> 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.

<sup>161</sup> 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 Qur'ān'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 *šma* <sup>6</sup> *yisrā'el*:

PESAḤĪM 56 - A<sup>162</sup>

R. Šim'on 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)

כד דריש רבי שמעון בן לקיש  
דאמר ויקרא יעקב אל בניו  
ויאמר האספו ואגידה לכם  
ביקש יעקב לגלות לבניו קץ  
הימין ונסתלקה ממנו שכינה  
אמר שמא חס ושלוש יש  
במטתי פסול כאברהם שיצא  
ממנו ישמעאל ואבי יצחק  
שיצא ממנו עשו.

אמרו לו בניו שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד אמרו  
כשם שאין בלבך אלא אחד כך  
אין בלבנו אלא אחד באותה  
שעה פתח יעקב אבינו ואמר  
ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם

In this frame-narrative, Jacob-Israel's death-bed exchange with his progeny produces the *šma* whereby, a later aggadist explains, "Just as the Holy-One creates

<sup>162</sup> Repeated with some variations in Gen. Rab. 98:4.

worlds, your father makes a world.” (Gen. Rab. 98).<sup>163</sup> As Israel, the patriarch, dies, Israel, the community, emerges by the prelocutionary recitation of the *šama*. It is in juxtaposition with this etiological narrative that the ideological move underlying the Qur’ān’s recollection of Jacob’s deathbed bequest comes to the fore:

#### Q BAQARAH 2:133-134

<p>“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,<sup>164</sup> of Abraham, of Ishmael and of Isaac, one God and we surrender to him. This is an <i>ummah</i>, 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.”</p>	<p>« أم كنتم شهداء إذ حضر يعقوب الموتُ إذ قال لبنيه ما تعبدون من بعدي قالوا نعبد إلهك وإله آبائك إبراهيم وإسماعيلَ وإسحاقَ إلهاً واحداً ونحن له مسلمون.</p> <p>تلك أمةٌ قد خلتَ لها ما كُسبت ولكم ما كسبتم ولا تُسألون عما كانوا يعملون »</p>
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The Qur’ān’s *nachdichtung* of Jacob’s death is framed as contested memory: Did the interlocutors witness the death of their eponymous ancestor? In the Qur’ān’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

<sup>163</sup> For a discussion of the *šama*’s role in Rabbinic elective theology, see Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 226.

<sup>164</sup> For other occurrences of this formula, reminiscent of *ēlohê ābôtēnu*, see, Q2:133; Q26:26; Q37:126; Q44:7.

underlying contemporaneous communal ideologies. The Qur'ān'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 isrā'īl* 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 [*ahādīt*], so distant [from you] are the unbelieving peoples!" (Q23:44) The Qur'ān 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 Qur'ānic 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 Ṣafiyya 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-mu'minīn*) and the 'daughter' of Aaron (*bint hārūn*), Ṣafiyya 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.<sup>165</sup> 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 ja ‘alnākum ummat<sup>an</sup> wasat<sup>an</sup> li-takūnū šuhada’a ‘alā l-nāsi wa-yakūnu l-rasūlu ‘alaykum šahīd<sup>an</sup>* (Q2:143), where the prophet’s function (*šahāda*) in his community is replicated in the community’s function in humanity (cf. *mamleket kohaṇīm* 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

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<sup>165</sup> The term ‘salvation’ (and by extension ‘salvific’ and ‘soteriological’) denote Qur’ānic lexemes related to the terms *falāḥ*, *nijah*, *iḥlās* etc. The term ‘prophecy’ (the salvific event) denotes lexemes derived from *irsāl*, *tanzīl*, *nabūwwah*, *bašārah*, *indār*, *hudā*, *šahāda* and other terms denoting a revelatory event at a particular moment in time. The term ‘community’ (the salvific process) denotes *ahl*, *qawm*, *ummah* and other terms or phrases such as *al-ladīna 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,<sup>166</sup> 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.<sup>167</sup> 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 ummat<sup>an</sup> wāḥidat<sup>an</sup> fa-ba ‘aṭa allāhu l-nabīyīna wa-mubašširīna wa-munḍirīna wa-anzala ma ‘humu l-kitāba bi-l-ḥaqqi li-yaḥkuma bayna l-nāsi fīmā ḥtalafū fihi... wa-allāhu yahdī man yašā’u ilā širāt<sup>in</sup> mustaqīm<sup>in</sup>* (Q2:213). The revelatory event simultaneously precedes / causes (*fa-ba ‘aṭa*) and succeeds / responds to (*li-yaḥkuma*) 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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<sup>166</sup> 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.

<sup>167</sup> 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

<p>“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 <i>muslims</i>.<sup>168</sup> 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!”</p>	<p>«...فيكم رسوله ومن يعتصم بالله فقد هدي إلى صراط مستقيم. يا أيها الذين آمنوا... لا تموتنّ إلا وأنتم مسلمون واعتصموا بحبل الله جميعا ولا تفرّقوا. واذكروا نعمت الله عليكم إذ كنتم أعداء فألف بين قلوبكم فأصبحتم بنعمته إخوانا... ولتكن منكم أمة يدعون إلى الخير ويأمرون بالمعروف وينهون عن المنكر وأولئك هم المفلحون»</p>
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The community is thus not a natural or necessary fact but one that emerges, inorganically, through divine intervention (*bi-ni‘matihi*), 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.<sup>169</sup> In turn, this extension of prophetic praxis creates a fiction of kinship, *in tābū wa-aqāmu l-ṣalāta wa-ātū l-zakāta fa-iḥwānukum fi-l-dīn* (Q9:11). In addition to truncating and superseding all ‘natural’ affinities, *lā tattahidū ābā’akum wa-iḥwānakum awliyā’a* (Q9:23, see also Q70:12 and

<sup>168</sup> See Ch. 4 for detailed discussion on this communal formula.

<sup>169</sup> In several exegetical treatises, Q3:104: *la-takun minkum ummat<sup>um</sup> yad‘ūna ila l-ḥayri wa-ya‘murūna bi-l-ma‘rūfi*, is cited as an endorsement for an elite class of jurists. The concluding clause *wa-ūlā’ika humu l-muflīḥūn* 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, *ihwān<sup>an</sup>* ‘*ala surur<sup>in</sup>* *mutaqābilīn* (Q15:47). The process (community) is thus sometimes designated by the event (prophecy) that spurs it, e.g. *min qaṭwmi 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<sup>in</sup>* *uḥrijat li-l-nāsi ta’marūna bi-l-ma’rūfi wa-tanḥawna ‘ani l-munkar wa-tu’minūna bi-allāhi* (Q3:110). This causality, namely “the emergence of a nation out of tribal groups sharing a theophany”,<sup>170</sup> 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 Qur’ān, 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 qaṭwmi mūsa* (Q28:76) i.e. the Israelites, but we also find other instances in which the community’s name designates a prophet, *wa-ḍkur aḥā ‘ād<sup>in</sup>* *iḍ andāra qaṭwmahu* (Q46:21) i.e. Hūd. Reinforcing this latter schema is the frequent use of kinship terms as designations for prophetic figures, *ilā ‘ād<sup>in</sup>* *aḥāhum hūd<sup>an</sup>* (Q11:50, see also Q26:124); *laqad arsalnā ilā tamūd<sup>in</sup>* *aḥāhum ṣāliḥ<sup>an</sup>* (Q27:45, see also Q7:73, Q11:61 and Q26:142); *ilā madyana aḥāhum šu ‘ayb<sup>an</sup>* (Q7:85, Q11:84, Q29:36); *iḍ qāla lahum aḥūhum nūḥ<sup>um</sup>* (Q26:106, 161), etc. Such statements construe the community as natural, i.e. preexisting

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<sup>170</sup> John Wansbrough, *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006), 46.

independently of the revelatory event: *qāla mūsa li-qawmihi yā qawmi ḍkurū ni ‘mata allāhi ‘alaykum id ja ‘ala fikum anbīyā ‘a* (Q:5:20, see also Q2:54, 60, 67; Q7:128; Q61:5).<sup>171</sup> The text contains numerous aphoristic formulations highlighting a prophet’s membership in a pre-existing community: *mā arsalnā min rasūl<sup>in</sup> illa bi-lisāni qawmihi* (Q14:4) and *laqad jā’ahum rasūl<sup>um</sup> minhum* (Q16:113) etc. These recurrent formulations led Wansbrough to theorize an ‘ethnic orientation’ in Islamic prophetology.<sup>172</sup> 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 hād<sup>um</sup>* (Q13:7). Such general axioms frequently precede statements about the specific task of the Qur’ān’s prophetic addressee in his preexisting community, *nūḥīha ilayka mā kunta ta‘lamuhā anta wa-lā qawmuka min qabli hādā* (Q11:49, see also Q6:66 and Q7:145).

In sum, there is a basic conceptual tension in the text between schematic statements like *kaḍālika ja ‘alnākum ummat<sup>um</sup>* (Q2:143) and *kuntum ḥayra ummat<sup>in</sup> uḥrijat li-l-nās* (Q3:110), in which the soteriological community emerges from, and is determined by, a revelatory event at a particular moment in time,<sup>173</sup> and statements in which revelation emerges from and is determined by a preexistent soteriological community as in, *naza ‘nā min kulli ummat<sup>in</sup> šahīd<sup>um</sup>* (Q28:75, cf. Q2:143); *in min ummat<sup>in</sup> illā ḥalā fiha*

<sup>171</sup> For more examples, see Q7:80, Q10:71, Q27:54, Q27:123, Q29:28, Q29:16.

<sup>172</sup> See John Wansbrough, *Qur’ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), 53-58. For more examples, see Q14:4; Q16:103-105; Q18:92-93; Q26:194-199; Q30:21-22; Q41:44; Q46:11-12.

<sup>173</sup> This includes scriptural utterances as revelatory events in and of themselves, without any prophetic actors or intermediaries.

*naḍīr<sup>um</sup>* (Q35:24); *li-kulli ummat<sup>in</sup> rasūl<sup>um</sup>* (Q10:47) etc.<sup>174</sup> In order to reconcile the schema: *fikum rasūluhu...fa-asbaḥtum bi-ni‘matihi ilḥwān<sup>an</sup>* (Q3:102-104) [prophecy → community] with its inversion: *innaka la-mina l-mursalīn...li-tunḍira qawm<sup>an</sup> mā andara ābā’uhum* (Q36:3-6) [community → 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<sup>th</sup> 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-

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<sup>174</sup> cf. *ke-šem še-ha ‘mîd meḥkîm we-ḥokmîm we-nabî’îm le-’isrā’el kak ha ‘mîd le-‘avode kokaḥîm* (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 Qurʾān, 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

<p>“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 tree<sup>175</sup> 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.”</p>	<p>« وإن يونس لمن المرسلين.          إذ أبق إلى الفلك المشحون فساهم          فكان من المدحضين فالتقمه الحوت          وهو مليم. فلولا أنه كان من المسبحين          للبث في بطنه إلى يوم يبعثون فنبذناه          بالعراء وهو سقيم وأنبتنا عليه شجرة          من يقطين.          وأرسلناه إلى مائة ألف أو يزيدون فآمنوا          فمّنعناهم إلى حين »</p>
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Although the complete biblical narrative cannot be gleaned from this and other Qurʾānic citations, the Qurʾān’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 Qurʾān’s heavily reworked presentations of Biblical figures such as Moses,

<sup>175</sup> See Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), 292 where he argues that the term *yaqtīn* is a garbled form of the biblical term *qīqāyon*. For other possible translations of *yaqtīn*, see Gabriel Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and its Biblical Subtext* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 123.



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-ḥūt* and *ḍu l-nūn* are all indications that the Qur'ān's audience was thoroughly familiar with the story of Jonah<sup>176</sup>—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

<p>“Ishmael, 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.”</p>	<p>« وإسماعيل وإدريس وذا الكفل كل من الصابرين وأدخلناهم في رحمتنا إنهم من الصالحين وذا النون إذ ذهب مغاضبا فظن أن لن نقدر عليه فنادى في الظلمات أن لا إله إلا أنت سبحانك إني كنت من الظالمين فاستجبنا له ونجّيناه من الغم »</p>
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The passage reiterates Jonah's culpability and depicts the prophetic emissary as insolent (*ẓanna an lan naqdira 'alayhi*). These elements of the Qur'ānic narrative posed a significant challenge to the post-Qur'ānic prophetological doctrine of infallibility (*‘iṣmah*),<sup>177</sup> but the text's charges would not have perturbed its late ancient audience.

<sup>176</sup> See Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 20-24; and Ida Zilio-Grandi, "Jonas, un prophète biblique dans l'islam," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* (2006), 286.

<sup>177</sup> For detailed discussion of classical exegetical treatment of Jonah's fallibility, see Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 120-126.

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 ʔu l-Kifl) becomes evident when we supplement it with a more extensive hagiographical catalog (Q6:85-87) where the figure appears.<sup>178</sup> The passage organizes each key Qurʾānic 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, *ismāʿīla wa-l-yasaʿa wa-yūnusa wa-lūṭ<sup>an</sup> wa-kulla faḍḍalnā ʿala l-ʿālamīn* (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 Qurʾān. 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

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<sup>178</sup> 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.<sup>179</sup> The text finds in Jonah an archetype for its prophetic-addressee whose mission also straddles the communal boundary between the historically *saved* community (the Jews: the Israelites), and the emergent one (the Believers: the Gentiles:).<sup>180</sup> The aforementioned hagiographical catalog thus concludes with this statement, *ḏālīka huḏā allāhi yahdī bihi man yašāʾu min ʿibādihi...ūlāʾika l-laḏīna ātaynāhumu... l-nubūwwah fa-in yakfur bihā hāʾūlāʾi fa-qad wakkalnā bihā qawm<sup>an</sup> laysū bihā*

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<sup>179</sup> For more on the Jonah narrative in late antique intra-communal polemics, see Robert Kitchen, “Jonah’s Oar: Christian Typology in Jacob of Serug’s Memra 122 on Jonah,” *Hugoye* 11.1 (2008) and *The Old Testament as Authoritative Scripture in the Early Church of the East* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), 51–56; Yvonne Sherwood, *A Biblical Text and its Afterlives: The Survival of Jonah in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17; Christine Shepardson, “Interpreting the Ninivites’ Repentance: Jewish and Christian Exegetes in Late Antique Mesopotamia,” *Hugoye* 14.2 (2011); Beate Ego, “The Repentance of Nineveh in the Story of Jonah and Nahum’s Prophecy of the City’s Destruction: Aggadic Solutions for an Exegetical Problem in the Book of the Twelve,” *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 39 (2000): 243–53 and *Die Heiden: Juden, Christen und das Problem des Fremden*, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 158–76; Elias Bickerman, “Les deux erreurs du prophète Jonas,” *Revue d’Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 45 (1965): 232–64; Eugen Biser, “Zum frühchristlichen Verständnis des Buches Jonas,” *Bibel und Kirche* 17 (1962): 19–21; S.C. Winter, *On the Way to Nineveh* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 238–56 and Yves-Marie Duval, *Le Livre de Jonas dans la Littérature Chrétienne Grecque et Latine* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1973).

<sup>180</sup> 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 Qur'ān'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.<sup>181</sup> In the more immediate spatial and temporal context of the Qur'ān, 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.<sup>182</sup> 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.<sup>183</sup> An early articulation of this perspective is found in the Tannaitic era halakhic treatise of Rabbi Ishmael,<sup>184</sup> where Jonah's example is cited in a broader discussion about the boundaries of prophecy:

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<sup>181</sup> 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.

<sup>182</sup> See 2 Kings 14:25; cf. PRE 10; Tan. Va-Yiqra 8 and Midrash Jonah 96.

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

<sup>184</sup> 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<sup>185</sup>... 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.

ועד שלא נבחרה ארץ ישראל  
היו כל הארצות כשרות  
לדברות משנבחרה ארץ  
ישראל יצאו כל הארצות... אם  
תאמר דן אני את הנביאים  
שנדבר עמהם בחוצה לארץ אף  
על פי שנדבר עמהם בחוצה  
לארץ לא נדבר עמהם אלא  
בזכות אבות... תדע שאין  
השכינה נגלית בחוצה לארץ  
שנאמר וַיִּקַּם יוֹנָה לְבָרַח  
תַּרְשִׁישָׁה מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וְכִי מִלִּפְנֵי  
אֲדוֹנֵי הוּא בּוֹרַח... אלא אמר  
יונה אלך לי בחוצה לארץ  
מקום שאין השכינה נגלית  
שהגוים קרובי תשובה הן שלא  
לחייב את ישראל... רבי נתן  
אומר לא הלך יונה אלא לאבד  
עצמו בים... הא בכל מקום  
אתה מוצא האבות והנביאים  
נתנו נפשם על ישראל.

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

<sup>185</sup> 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]!’”<sup>186</sup> 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: *tayvuṭā hwet ʿšrîrā* (Ephrem Sermo II.1.97), the Talmud reiterates that the repentance of the Ninevites was entirely fraudulent: *tešûvā šel reṁiyoṭ ʿasû ʾānašē niṁneweh* (J.T. Taan 2.1).<sup>187</sup> Such rebuttals of Christian readings continue to appear widely, well into the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries, in aggadic midrashim, such as in the *Pesiqṭā* of Rab Kahana<sup>188</sup> where the Ninevites’ almost excessive repentance is recast as a mimicry of genuine repentance and thus a farce (24.83).<sup>189</sup>

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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<sup>186</sup> J.T. Sanh. 11:5.

<sup>187</sup> 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.

<sup>188</sup> For more information on this text, see Stemberger, *Talmud and Midrash*, 291-296.

<sup>189</sup> B.T. Yer. 6:4 and Ker. 1:1-2.

Nazianzus, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Theodore of Mopsuestia.<sup>190</sup> In the Late Antique Syriac tradition, the *memre* of Ephrem<sup>191</sup> 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):<sup>192</sup>

#### 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.”

« حَتَمَ سِرَا نِيسَا سَحَا وَوَحَا  
جَطَا وَابْنِيسَا سِرَا وَابْنِيسَا وَصَحَا  
سِرَا وَوَحَا وَبَحَصَا أَعْلَمَ سِرَا  
حَصَا وَلَا وَوَحَا حَا سَحَا  
وَحَا فَعَمَ »

سِرَا عَقَا وَلَا مَحَلَّيْ وَوَحَقَبَا  
مَحَلَّيْ سِرَا وَلَا مَحَلَّيْ  
فَعَمَا سِرَا وَلَا مَحَلَّيْ نِيسَا »

In Ephrem’s recounting of the Jonah narrative, he attempts a conceptual inversion of ‘Israel’ similar to Paul’s allegory of Sarah and Hagar.<sup>193</sup> 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

<sup>190</sup> 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 Ninivites’ Repentance”, 255.

<sup>191</sup> Edmund Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Sermones* (Louvain : Sécreteriat du Corpus, 1970). See Memra II.I: *Memra de-Mār Efraim de-‘āl Nineveh we-‘Yonan*. Also see Virg. 47:19–20; Virg. 49:18–19.

<sup>192</sup> Also see Memra II.1.7–10, 21–22, 33–34.

<sup>193</sup> Rom. 4:16–24; Rom. 9:6–18 and Gal. 4:21–31.

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.'" <sup>194</sup>

» نتمنا وچ اهلنا وچ حلا  
 وچ اهلنا... حقهنا سلنا  
 حله وچ وچ حلا اهلنا حله  
 حله وچ اهلنا وچ حله وچ  
 حله... وچ اهلنا وچ حله  
 حله وچ اهلنا وچ حله وچ  
 حله وچ اهلنا وچ حله وچ  
 وچ حله... وچ حله وچ  
 وچ حله وچ حله وچ حله

The works of the other Syriac fathers, Jacob of Serugh<sup>195</sup> and Narsai,<sup>196</sup> 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

<sup>194</sup> For the charge of idolatry against the Jews, cf. Q4:51

<sup>195</sup> See Jacob of Serugh, *Homiliae Selectae* (Paris, 1908), 368–490.

<sup>196</sup> 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,<sup>197</sup> the Christian subtext of the Qur'ānic Jonah is evidenced strongly by the form of his name *yūnus* which indicates the Greek inflection *iōnas* (ἰωνάς) via the Christian Aramaic *yūnis* (ܝܘܢܝܣ) or the Ethiopic *yūnās* (ዮናስ).

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

«قال موسى يا قوم إن كنتم آمنتم بالله فعليه توكلوا إن كنتم مسلمين ...

جاوزنا ببني إسرائيل البحر فأتبعهم فرعون وجنوده بغيا وعدوا حتى إذا أدركه الغرق قال آمنت أنه لا إله إلا الذي آمنت به بنو إسرائيل وأنا من المسلمين... فاليوم ننجيك ببدنك لتكون لمن خلفك آية...

<sup>197</sup> See Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 296 and Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext*, 129.

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.

فلولا كانت قرية آمنت فنفعها إيمانها إلا  
قوم يونس لما آمنوا كشفنا عنهم عذاب  
الخنز في الحياة الدنيا ومتّعناهم إلى  
حين ولو شاء ربك لآمن من في الأرض  
كلهم جميعا أفأنت تكره الناس حتى  
يكونوا مؤمنين ... واتّبع ما يوحى إليك  
واصبر حتى يحكم الله .»

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.”<sup>198</sup> 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 fī l-ardī kulluhum jamī'*<sup>can</sup> (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).

<sup>198</sup> Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext* , 118.

## 4.2. Jonah in Early Muslim *Haggadah*

The concluding passage of Q JONAH 10 is one of the three places where the Qur'ān'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."	« اصبر لحكم ربك ولا تكن كصاحب الحوت إذ نادى وهو مكظوم لولا أن تداركه نعمة من ربه لنبذ بالعراء وهو مذموم. فاجتباه ربه فجعله من الصالحين »
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The imperative form *aṣbir* is an elemental example of Qur'ānic *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."<sup>199</sup> 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*.

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<sup>199</sup> Wansbrough, *Qur'ānic 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 *ašbir* 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.”<sup>200</sup> 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 Taqafīs.<sup>201</sup>

The typological use of Jonaic anguish is well-attested in late ancient and early medieval Christian writings. As Sherwood 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.”<sup>202</sup> Muslim

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<sup>200</sup> Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 89.

<sup>201</sup> For detailed discussion of biblical prophetic topoi in the Qur’ān, see Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’ān* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 136.

<sup>202</sup> Sherwood, *Biblical Text and its Afterlives*, 17.

historiography similarly<sup>203</sup> appropriates the Jonaic typology and reproduces it through the personage of Muhammad by *haggadic* parable, where “scriptural allusions are implicit...exhibiting diction and imagery but not verbatim text of the canon.”<sup>204</sup>

Comparing Qur’ānic material on Jonah to classical interlinear (i.e. *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.”<sup>205</sup> She concludes that the exegetical tradition fails to “traduire les informations fragmentaires, fournies par le Coran, en une forme pleinement islamique.”<sup>206</sup> Although we may concede this partially, with due reservation about the category ‘pleinement islamique’, in the earliest form of scriptural interpretation, *haggadah*, we find a thoroughly refashioned and *islamicized* representation of Jonah.<sup>207</sup>

We can trace the development of the historicizing of Qur’ānic utterances<sup>208</sup> on Jonah through three concatenated historiographical works: Ibn Hišām’s (d. 213/833) redaction of the Prophetic Biography of Ibn Iṣḥāq, *al-sīratu l-nabawīyyatu [Sīrah]*;<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Compare however the explicitly supersessionary statement, “One greater than Jonah has come” (Mt. 12:41, Lk. 23:32) and the oft-cited *ḥadīth*, “None may say that I am greater than Jonah.” The *ḥadīth* is perhaps another example of early attempts to exculpate Jonah from the Qur’ānic charges of insolence.

<sup>204</sup> Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, 2.

<sup>205</sup> Zilio-Grandi, “Jonas, un prophète biblique dans l’islam,” 309.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>207</sup> Wansbrough, *Qur’ānic Studies*, 122-148.

<sup>208</sup> Wansbrough, *Sectarian Milieu*, ix.

<sup>209</sup> Muhammad ‘Abd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīrah al-Nabawīya*. 4 vols. (Beirut: Dar Sader, 2005).

Suhaylī's (d. 581 / 1185) extensive commentary on Ibn Hišām's redaction, *al-rawḍ al-unuf fī šarḥi l-sīrati l-nabawīyyati* [Šarḥ]<sup>210</sup> and Ta'labī's (d. 427 / 1035) compendium of prophetic narratives: *'arā'isu l-majālis fī qīṣaṣi l-anbiyā'i* [Qīṣaṣ]<sup>211</sup>. Literary analysis of this material "reveals what seems to be the essential role of historiography, namely, the unceasing reinterpretation of scripture."<sup>212</sup> In retelling the story of Jonah through the paradigmatic prophetic saga of Muhammad, these historiographical works cumulatively harmonize the Qur'ān'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 Qur'ānic milieu e.g. Israel | Gentile, become irrelevant or radically transformed in the post-Qur'ānic 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 Qur'ānic text, is jettisoned entirely.

The *Sīrah* reports that in the tenth year of Muhammad's prophecy, rejected by his Quraṣī kinsmen, the Meccan prophet ventures to the foreign city of Ṭā'if, 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 'Addās, a Ninevite, who consoles the anguished prophet and then attests to the veracity of his message. This episode signals the

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<sup>210</sup> Aḥmad Ta'labī. *'Ara'is al-Majālis fī Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

<sup>211</sup> 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍu l-unuf fī šarḥi l-sīrati l-nabawīyyah li-ibn Hišām* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīṭa, 1967).

<sup>212</sup> Wansbrough, *Qur'anic 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’if 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 Ja‘far’s exchange with the Negus of Abyssinia, after the first migration.<sup>213</sup> The episode is not furnished with a chain of transmission and, based on content and form, belongs to what Sellheim calls the *Sīrah*’s *Grundsichte*, namely the foundational layer of material set in a localized Hejazi environment.<sup>214</sup> 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* (‘*arab*’) vis-à-vis the ‘*ajam*’.

Muhammad’s escape to the city of Ṭā’if 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.<sup>215</sup> Anguished and in despair, Muhammad heads for the mountain town of Ṭā’if and manages to reach three members of the Ṭaqafī nobility. Each noble rejects Muhammad’s message and ridicules his claims

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<sup>213</sup> See *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>214</sup> Rudolf Sellheim, *Prophet, Chalif und Geschichte: die Muhammad-Biographie des Ibn Ishāq* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 33-91.

<sup>215</sup> 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?”<sup>216</sup> says one. “If you are a prophet, you are far too important for me to talk to,”<sup>217</sup> says another. Concerned that his community, the Qurayš, will consider his dealings with the foreign tribe of Taqīf as treacherous, he asks the noble to keep his visit a secret. They refuse and rile up a “mob of louts and slaves”<sup>218</sup> 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 Ṭā’if. 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?”<sup>219</sup> ‘Utba b. Rabī’ah 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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<sup>216</sup> Ibn Hišām, *al-Sīrah* vol. 2, 36.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>219</sup> 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...<sup>220</sup>

«ففعّل عدّاس، ثم أقبل به حتى وضعه بين يدي رسول الله ثم قال له كل فلما وضع رسول فيه يده ، قال : باسم الله ، ثم أكل ، فنظر عداس في وجهه ، ثم قال : والله إن هذا الكلام ما يقوله أهل هذه البلاد ، فقال له رسول الله: ومن أهل أي البلاد أنت يا عداس ، وما دينك ؟ قال : نصراني ، وأنا رجل من أهل نينوى ، فقال رسول الله: من قرية الرجل الصالح يونس بن متى ، فقال له عداس: وما يدريك ما يونس بن متى ؟ فقال رسول الله ذاك أخي ، كان نبيا وأنا نبي ، فأكب عداس على رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم يقبل رأسه»

Following this exchange, Muhammad journeys back towards Mecca pausing in the valley of Naḥla, where the Jinns of Niṣībīn hear him reciting the Qurʾān, repent and accept monotheism *en masse*.<sup>221</sup> Numerous retellings of the Ṭāʾif excursion, such as that of Qurṭubī (d. 671 / 1273) specify that the repentant Jinns were in fact from Nineveh.<sup>222</sup> Muhammad then reenters the sanctuary precincts of Mecca under the protection of a

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. Q72:1–14

<sup>222</sup> Muḥammad al-Qurṭubī, *Al-jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-qurʾān*, (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Katīb al-ʿArabī, 1967), ad Q72:1.

Quraṣī, Muṭ'im b. 'Adīy and "his community opposed him even more viciously, apart from a few lower-class people who continued to believe in him."<sup>223</sup>

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 Qur'ān'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."<sup>224</sup> Shared mythemes between the two accounts can be arranged as follows:

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<sup>223</sup> Ibn Hišām, *al-Sīrah II*, 36.

<sup>224</sup> Ze'ev Maghen, "Davidic Motifs in the Biography of Muhammad," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 35 (2008), 7.

	MYTHEME	JONAH STORY	SĪRAH EPISODE
i	Rejection by kinsmen as false prophet	Israelites <sup>225</sup>	Qurašīs
ii	Departure from sacred homeland	Jerusalem	Mecca
iii	Excursion to idolatrous foreign city	Nineveh	Ṭāʾif
iv	Anguished psalm-like prayer	In the whale	In the orchard
v	Immediate relief following prayer	Release onto land	ʿAddāsʾ consolation
vi	Revealing true identity to strangers	The Sailors	The Ninevite
vii	Plea to the foreign cityʾs nobility	Ninevite Nobles	Ṭaqafi Chieftains
viii	Temporary shade under a plant	Gourd-vine	Grape-vine
ix	Conversion and repentance <i>en masse</i>	Ninevites	Niṣībīn/Ninevite Jinns
x	Contemplative pause outside the city	East of Nineveh	Valley of Naḥla

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 Qurʾānʾs prophetic-addressee is historicized by the early Muslims.<sup>226</sup> Wansbrough notes broadly that from the point of view of literary analysis,

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<sup>225</sup> 2 Kings 14.

<sup>226</sup> “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 Qurʾānic data on prophethood, in character emphatically Mosaic, and partly on the motifs drawn from a narrative tradition typically associated with men of God.”

Wansbrough, *Qurʾānic 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.”<sup>227</sup> 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 Tāqafīs in the Tā’if 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 Tā’if episode, the *Sīrah* appropriates anguish, a legitimate and legitimating topos of late antique prophetology, highlighted in retellings of Moses’ destruction of the tablets,<sup>228</sup> Jeremiah’s lament,<sup>229</sup> Job’s speeches<sup>230</sup> 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 *ḥadīth* on Muhammad’s partiality to gourds, in which asks ‘Ā’iṣā 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.”<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>228</sup> Ex. 32:19

<sup>229</sup> Jer. 15:10–18

<sup>230</sup> Job 23–24.

<sup>231</sup> Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* (al-Qāhira: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1955).

### 4.3. Jonah Reimagined

Muhammad's encounter with the Ninevite at ʿĪrāq 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 ʿAddās corroborates, he has unique (prophetic) knowledge of their customs, i.e. the *basmala*. The *Šarḥ* of Suhaylī (d. 581 / 1185) adds another detail in the exchange between ʿAddās and Muhammad, indicating that the haggadists knew well the communal subtext of the scriptural story. During the exchange in the orchard, when ʿAddās 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!”<sup>232</sup> In the *Sīrah*, ʿAddās then returns to his incredulous pagan master ʿUtbā 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!”<sup>233</sup> The *Šarḥ* develops this testimonial aspect of the ʿĪrāq excursion by supplementing the *Sīrah* report with a lengthy biographical entry on the Ninevite.

The entry, simply entitled *ḥabar ʿaddās*, is comprised of three reports. The first places ʿAddās in the company of the *Sīrah*'s two other Christian attesters: Baḥīra, 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 ʿUtbā b. Rabīʿah, ʿAddās, who had knowledge of scripture.

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<sup>232</sup> Suhaylī, *al-Šarḥ*, 56.

<sup>233</sup> Ibn Hišām, *al-Sīrah* II, 38.

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!’”<sup>234</sup> ‘Addās’ role as a prototypical Christian *attester* has been detached from the *Ṭā’if* 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.”<sup>235</sup>

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.”<sup>236</sup> The report parabolically glosses the Qur’ān’s exhortation to its prophetic-addressee to remain patient and *not* follow the example of Jonah, *ašbir li-ḥukmi rabbika wa-lā takun ka-ṣāḥibi 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 Qurṭubī (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

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<sup>234</sup> Suhaylī, *al-Šarḥ*, 56.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

<sup>236</sup> Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies*, 57.

and Ḥadija, the prelude to the Ṭāʾif excursion.<sup>237</sup> Ṭabari 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!”<sup>238</sup> Zamaḥṣarī (d. 538/1143) and Rāzī (d. 606/1209) contextualize these verses explicitly in the Ṭāʾif 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.”<sup>239</sup> 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 ʿAddās contextualizes these verses on Jonah with an anecdote lifted from the *ḥadīṭ* compendium of Buḥārī (d. 256 / 870):

BUḤĀRĪ 54: 454

<p>ʿĀʾiṣā reported to him [ʿUrwa] that she said to the Prophet, ‘Did you experience a day more difficult than ʾUḥud?’ 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 Ṭaqafī chieftain) and he did not respond to me with what I had hoped. So I departed, dejected and grief-stricken, and I did not</p>	<p>عائشة حدثته أنها قالت للنبي هل أتى عليك يوم كان أشد من يوم أحد قال لقد لقيت من قومك ما لقيت وكان أشد ما لقيت منهم يوم العقبة إذ عرضت نفسي على عبد كلال فلم يجيني إلى ما أردت فانطلقت وأنا مهموم على وجهي. فلم أستفق إلا وأنا بقرن الثعالب</p>
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<sup>237</sup> Some exegetes also include another tradition that attributes these verses to the battle of ʾUḥud.

<sup>238</sup> Muhammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿu l-bayān ʿan taʾwīli l-qurʾān* (Cairo: ʿĪsā al-Babī l-Ḥalabī, 1954).

<sup>239</sup> Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Bahīyah al-Miṣrīyah, 1934).

regain my composure until when I was at Qarn al-Ta‘lab, I raised my head and there was cloud giving me shade. I looked and saw Gabriel within it, and he called out, ‘God has heard the words of your nation to you and how they have rejected you. The Angel of the Mountains has come forth so that you may command him as you please.’ The Angel of the Mountains called out to me and greeted me with peace and said, ‘O Muhammad, if you wish I will crush them between these two hills!’ The prophet of God, peace and blessings be upon him said, ‘No! I hope that God will bring forth from their progeny a people that will worship God alone and not associate anything with him.’”

فرفعت رأسي فإذا أنا بسحابة قد  
أظلتني فنظرت فإذا فيها جبريل فناداني  
فقال إن الله قد سمع قول قومك لك  
وما ردوا عليك وقد بعث إليك ملك  
الجبال لتأمره بما شئت فيهم فناداني  
ملك الجبال فسلم علي ثم قال يا محمد  
فقال ذلك فيما شئت إن شئت أن  
أطبق عليهم الأخشيين.

فقال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم بل  
أرجو أن يخرج الله من أصلابهم من يعبد  
الله وحده لا يشرك به شيئا.

In several subsequent retellings of Muhammad’s prophetic mission to the Taqafīs, including that of Ibn Kaṭīr, this *ḥadīth* appears in the body of the Ṭā’if narrative itself. This anecdote is Muhammad’s *enactment* of the Qur’ān’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.<sup>240</sup>

Though ostensibly a parabolic parallel, the Ṭā’if 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 Ṭā’if episode, Muhammad’s desperate attempts to convert the Taqafīs are matched by their refusal to repent. It is *this* latter *haggadic* narrative, not its scriptural precursor, that fashions the

<sup>240</sup> 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.<sup>241</sup> Muhammad's anguish emanates from the Tāqafī's rejection of his message. The aforementioned *ḥadīth* 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.<sup>242</sup> While both instances of anguish are cast as reprehensible in the text, the former is glossed by *haggadah* i.e. the *Sīrah*'s Tā'if excursion, while the latter is not.<sup>243</sup> 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:

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<sup>241</sup> Jon. 4.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> "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 fruits 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?’”

« فَأُنْبِتَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى عَلَيْهِ شَجَرَةً مِنْ يَقْطِينٍ يَسْتِظِلُّ بِهَا وَيَأْكُلُ مِنْ ثَمَرِهَا حَتَّى اشْتَدَّ، فَلَمَّا يَبَسَتْ الشَّجَرَةُ حَزَنَ عَلَيْهَا يُونُسُ عَلَيْهِ السَّلَامُ. فَقِيلَ لَهُ: أَتَحْزَنُ عَلَى شَجَرَةٍ وَلَمْ تَحْزَنْ عَلَى مِائَةِ أَلْفٍ أَوْ يَزِيدُونَ، حَيْثُ لَمْ تَذْهَبْ إِلَيْهِمْ وَلَمْ تَطْلُبْ رَاحَتَهُمْ؟ »

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 Ṭā'if. In the *Qīṣaṣ* 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.”<sup>244</sup> 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 Ṭaqafīs' refusal to heed his. The *Qīṣaṣ* 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

<sup>244</sup> Ṭa'labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 683.

thirty-three years, summoning them to God, but none of them believed.”<sup>245</sup> 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 Ṭā’if 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, Muqātil writes, “‘Be not like the one of the whale!’ that is, like Jonah, the son of Amittai *from* the people of Nineveh”<sup>246</sup> while Qurṭubī writes, “‘Jonah...collapsed under *his* peoples’ refusal and left them in anguish.”<sup>247</sup> 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 *Qīṣaṣ* summarizes, “Jonah was a pious man who devoted himself to the service of God among his people in the mountain town of Nineveh.”<sup>248</sup> 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 Ṭā’if. Furthermore, the *Qīṣaṣ* introduces an ‘Addās-like character in the Jonah narrative. When the prophet departs from Nineveh, anguished over the

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid.

<sup>246</sup> Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, (Beirut: Mu’assasatu l-Tārīḥi l-‘Arabī, 2002).

<sup>247</sup> Qurṭubī ad Q11:218–219.

<sup>248</sup> Ṭa’labī, *Qīṣaṣ*, 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.’”<sup>249</sup> 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.<sup>250</sup> 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 Ṭā’if.

In sum, whereas in the *Sīrah* the figure of Muhammad reenacts the scriptural story of Jonah at Nineveh, in the *Qiṣaṣ*, it is Jonah who reenacts the *haggadic* story of Muhammad at Ṭā’if. Due to what Wansbrough calls the “primacy of the *narratio*”<sup>251</sup> 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 *Qiṣaṣ*. 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.”<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 687.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Wansbrough, *Qur’anic Studies*, 47.

<sup>252</sup> 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 re-articulations 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 Ṭāqafīs. 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 ya ‘budūna l-aṣṣnāma fa-ba ‘ata allāhu ilayhim yūnusa bi-amri bi-l-tawḥīd* (*Qīṣaṣ*, 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 Qur’ān to its fruition in the hegemonic religio-communal setting(s) of exegetical texts like the *Sīrah*, the *Šarḥ* and the *Qīṣaṣ*.

## 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. nd 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—6<sup>th</sup> century southwest Arabia, and a textual vestige of an ideological discourse radically different from that of its earliest mediators—8<sup>th</sup> 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 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 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 Qur'ān'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-ladīna 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.<sup>253</sup> 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 *ṣibġata* is etymologically linked to the Palestinian-Aramaic term for baptism, *ṣeb'atā*, 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 *ṣibġata allāhi* as an assertion of exclusive communalism. In the classical era, where the *ṣahāda*, becomes the primary ritual act of boundary-crossing into the *ummah*, a baptismal ritual (*ġusl 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*).

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<sup>253</sup> Frederick Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), 15.

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 ʿIṣfahīs. 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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