The life of Muhammad and the Quran: the case of Muhammad’s hijra
THE LIFE OF MUḤAMMAD AND THE QURʾĀN: THE CASE OF MUḤAMMAD’S HIJRA∗

Uri Rubin
Tel Aviv University

1 Introduction

In my The Eye of the Beholder,1 the literary status of the Qurʾān in Muḥammad’s biography (ṣīra) has been touched upon, and an assessment of the relationship between the Qurʾānic and the non-Qurʾānic layers in the ṣīra has been attempted. I have argued that the Qurʾānic element in the ṣīra cannot be regarded as the primary origin of the entire narrative framework of the traditions in which it is found. It rather became part of the ṣīra in a process of “Qurʾānization,” i.e., the incorporation of Qurʾānic elements into the basic non-Qurʾānic narrative framework of the traditions.2

Some reviewers of The Eye of the Beholder found it difficult to accept the observations about the secondary status of the Qurʾānic material in the ṣīra, and insisted on its primary position as an origin of all the traditions in which it is found. Thus, for example, Wim Raven3 re-examined the analysis of the story of the Satanic Verses4 in which allusion is made to Qurʾānic passages, such as 17:73–75. He has wondered “Why would not Q 17:73–75 have been the starting-point of the whole episode, with its key word iftātana, a golden opportunity for every story-teller?”

The same logic led Raven to state that the description of the events that took place on the eve of Muḥammad’s hijra to Medina (not discussed in The Eye of the Beholder) “are elaborations of Q 8:30.” He adds that “at least about this particular narrative it is obvious that it was generated by the Koran.”5 Similarly, the traditions describing Muḥammad’s first revelation, in which allusion is

∗I am grateful to L. Conrad and M. Lecker for their invaluable comments on a previous version of this article. Special thanks are due to H. Motzki for a merciless yet most beneficial criticism of that version. It goes without saying that they bear no responsibility for whatever faults and flaws that may have remained in the present version.

5Raven, p. 427.
made to Qur'an 96:1-5 (iqra’ bi-smi rabbika...) were taken by Gregor Schoeler, in his review of *The Eye of the Beholder,* as indicating that the entire story developed out of 96:1-5. He observes that the traditions in which this passage does not appear represent a shortened version of the same.

In a more general manner, Marco Schöller insists that in the *sira* there is "an evolutionary process that is rooted in exegesis."7

The assumption that the Qur'an is the origin of many *sira* episodes is anchored in the widely current view of western scholars who, since the days of H. Lammens, have repeated the view that one of the main functions of the *sira* was to provide the Qur'an with exegesis. More specifically, the *sira* was designed to provide the *asbāb al-nuzūl,* i.e., the "circumstances of revelation" of the Qur'an. This view has never been abandoned, as is clear, for example, from the comments of Gerald Hawting on *The Eye of the Beholder.* Hawting insists that traditions in which allusion is made to Qur'an 2:898 represent "attempts to supply an interpretation of Qur'an 2:89...." Hawting observes further that "The reports turn an anonymous and ambiguous text into a specific historical incident relating to Muḥammad and in that way supply an interpretation of the verse." Summing up his views, Hawting explicitly declares: "...that a large proportion of the earliest *sira* material available to us (notably in the various recensions of the work of Ibn Isḥāq) is exegetical in origin seems clear."9

The view that considerable parts of the *sira* are the result of an exegetical mechanism was often brought up to diminish the historical value of the *sira.* The clearest manifestation of this attitude is perhaps provided in the writings of Patricia Crone. In her *Meccan Trade,* for example, she states: "It is not generally appreciated how much of our information on the rise of Islam, including that on Meccan trade, is derived from exegesis of the Qur'an, nor is it generally admitted that such information is of dubious historical value."10 More recently, in her review of Michael Lecker's *Muslims, Jews and Pagans,*11 Crone discusses traditions dealing with the "Mosque of opposition" (*masjid al-dīrār*) which is also alluded to in the Qur'an (9:107). She states that "as usual, the tradition claims to know what the scripture is talking about."12 This means that for Crone the *sira* passages about *masjid al-dīrār* came into existence in the realm of Qur'an exegesis. To illustrate the exegetical nature of the traditions, Crone compares the Qur'an to photographs in newspapers with empty speech bubbles which readers fill in as they like.13 More specifically, in trying to refute the historical value of the story about *masjid al-dīrār,* Crone insists that "the outline

---

8 Discussed in *The Eye of the Beholder,* pp. 29, 228–29.
12 Ibid., 182.
13 Ibid., 184.
has a strong claim to Quranicity," which is supposed to be a slightly scornful pun on Lecker's insistence that the story has "a strong claim for historicity."

Crone's attitude has already met with objection, for example by R.S. Faiser, without, however, offering a systematical reconsideration of the status of the Qurʾān in the sīra.

Qurʾānic exegesis was considered the main power not only behind large portions of Muhammad's sīra but also behind the stories about other prophets, generally known as qiṣṣa al-anbiyāʾ. For example, Franz Rosenthal has declared: "Historical, or pseudo-historical, material centering around Biblical events and personalities gained the right of entry into Islam through the Qurʾān and its interpretation." Moreover, Rosenthal adds that "The original text of the Bible may have been a matter of little concern for the earliest historians, not so much because access to it may have been rather difficult, but because they were less interested in historical accuracy than in making a coherent whole of the fragmentary Qurʾānic narrative by whatever means they could lay their hands on."

The aim of the present study is not to defend the historical value of the sīra (which is not discussed here) but rather to show that not everything that looks to the above scholars like exegesis is indeed exegesis.

The following study will concentrate on an episode from the Medinan period of Muhammad, thus carrying on the work started in The Eye of the Beholder, which is dedicated to the Meccan period of Muhammad's life. The episode selected for the present discussion is one that seems at first sight as a typical case of exegetical expansion of the Qurʾān.

The episode is the one in which the Prophet and a companion of his are in a cave after having left their hometown. In the Qurʾān this episode is merely alluded to without any specific details; these can only be found in the sīra. One could discern in the sīra version of the cave story a typical case of exegetic expansion of an ambiguous Qurʾānic passage. At least this is how the above scholars would certainly explain it.

But is this really the case? Was the sīra cave story really generated by the Qurʾān? That this is not so will become clear from a closer comparison between the Qurʾānic cave passage and the sīra cave story. Let us begin with the Qurʾān.

---

14Ibid., p. 182.
18Ibid., p. 42.
2 The Qur'ānic Cave Passage

In Qur'ān 9:40 we read:

If you do not help him, yet God has helped him already, when the unbelievers drove him out as the second of two (thānī ithnayn), when the two were in the cave, when he said to his companion: “Sorrow not, surely God is with us.” Then God sent down on him His Shechina, and aided him with legions you did not see. And he made the word of the unbelievers the lowest, and God’s word is the uppermost...

This Qur'ānic passage describes divine aid extended to the Prophet as well as to an unnamed companion of his, when they were both in “the cave,” after the unbelievers “drove him out.” The situation here is one of banishment and isolation, as the Prophet is accompanied by one person only, i.e., he is “the second of two” (thānī ithnayn). The companion is grieved by the isolation and lack of assistance, and the Prophet attempts to set his mind at rest by telling him “do not sorrow” (la taḥzan), and by ensuring him that God is with them. Apart from this verbal encouragement, God sends down His Shechina and aids them with His invisible legions. The Arabic form of Shechina is sakīna, a word that could be associated with the Arabic root s-k-n which denotes “tranquillity.” This means that the sakīna is meant here as a measure of encouragement. The location of the scene, a “cave,” indicates a state of expulsion and desolation.

2.1 Invisible Legions

The idea of divine aid extended through invisible legions (junūd), i.e., angels, recurs in some other Qur'ānic passages dealing with God’s help (naṣr) during battle. This applies to the battle of the “parties” (al-aḥzāb),19 and of Ḥunayn.20 In these two cases the theme of the invisible legions is designed to bring out a crucial aspect of the sacred Islamic history, namely that the Islamic military thrust represents a holy war waged in the name of God. Concerning Badr, fighting angels are mentioned explicitly, instead of “invisible legions.”21

The context of the Qur'ānic cave story is also military, like the passages about the “parties” and Ḥunayn. It is preceded by a passage (9:38–39) that deplores the refusal of some people to assist the Prophet in battle, and the cave passage itself states that God will aid His prophet instead of them, as He already did in the past, when the Prophet was in the cave, etc. The cave passage concludes with the statement that God made the “word” of the unbelievers “inferior”; this means that He defeated them.

In sum, the Qur'ānic version is focused on the act of God, and mainly on His aid in battle. The cave passage is designed to illustrate the divine military

19 Qur'ān 33:9.
help which is ensured for the isolated and cast-out Prophet in compensation for the human help denied him.

2.2 Expulsion

In the Qur’anic cave passage the basic situation is one of expulsion. This is indicated in the words: “...when the unbelievers drove him out....” This means that the Prophet as well as his companion are refugees for whom the cave is a substitute for their lost home.

The idea of the Prophet’s expulsion is not unique to the cave passage. An explicit threat of premeditated banishment recurs concerning several prophets,22 and concerning the Qur’anic prophet the same threat is repeated in 17:76. Moreover, the expulsion of the Qur’anic prophet is considered an accomplished fact, as indicated in 47:13 where “your city which has expelled you” is mentioned.

3 The Sîra

3.1 Flight from Mecca

In the various versions of the sîra cave story, the element of expulsion is missing, and instead we have an element of concealment which is missing from the Qur’ân, but serves as the main axis of the sîra plot. Here the Prophet steals out of Mecca on his own volition, not before God Himself allows him to; when the Quraysh find out about his premeditated departure, they send people to search for him with the intention of bringing him back. All this takes place following a secret decision taken by the Quraysh to kill the Prophet in his sleep.23 In short, while in the Qur’anic cave passage the Prophet and his companion are refugees, in the sîra they are fugitives. This crucial gap between the Qur’ân and the sîra rules out the possibility that the entire sîra cave story was drawn from the Qur’anic cave passage.

3.1.1 Concealment

The situation of flight, which underlies all the sîra versions of the cave story, is brought out by detailed descriptions of Muḥammad’s concealment on the one hand, and of his chase by the Meccans on the other. All these elements are unique to the sîra and are entirely absent from the Qur’ân.

As for the element of concealment, it is designed to ensure Muḥammad’s successful escape from death. But the manner in which concealment is achieved is not consistent. In some versions it is concealment by blindness. One of the traditions about it was circulated with the isnād al-Kalbî (Muḥammad b. al-Sā‘îb, Kūfan d. 146/763) ← Abu Ṣâliḥ (Bādhām, mawla of Umm Hāni) ←

23The story about this plot is recounted in association with Qur’ân 8:30, and deserves a separate analysis.
Ibn ‘Abbas. Muhammad is in the cave with his companion, and the men sent by the Quraysh in pursuit are standing outside. In the part relevant to our case, Muhammad prays: “O God, make them blind, so that they will not see us” (اللَّهُمَّ أَمِينَِّ نََّكَفَرُ اَبْسَرُاهُم). The persecutors turn right and left around the cave, but God conceals the cave from them.

More prevalent are the versions in which concealment is achieved by means of some living creatures. They change the model of concealment by blindness into concealment by objects; this makes the concealment more effective as it occurs as soon as the two fugitives enter the cave, and renders it more miraculous.

In these widely current versions, it is related that God sent a spider to weave its web over the opening of the cave in which the Prophet and his companion were hiding. This suggested to the searching people that no one had entered the cave for years. One such version was recorded by ‘Abd al-Razzaq (d. 211/827) with the isnād: Ma‘mar b. Rāshid (Baṣra/Yemen, d. 154/771) ← Uthmān al-Jazari ← Miqsam b. Bu‘ra [Najda] (Meccan d. 101/720). The same impression was given also by two pigeons that built their nests there, and by a tree that covered the two fugitives. This is related mainly in a tradition of one Abū Mūs‘ab al-Makki who quotes several Companions. Concerning the tree, it is related that it hid Muhammad and his companion so effectively, that even one of the Quraysh who stood under it urinating, did not notice them (hence he felt free to expose himself). In another version it is the spider again that conceals them from the urinating person (Umayya b. Khalaf).

3.1.2 Pursuit: Surāqā

The element of flight, which underlies the sīra version of the cave story, entailed detailed descriptions of the pursuit which was initiated by the Quraysh.

A prominent figure among those who went to search for Muḥammad and his companion is Surāqā b. Mālik, of the tribe of Mudlij and a confederate of the Quraysh. He reportedly went after Muhammad, hoping to be rewarded by the Meccans, who had offered a hundred camels to anyone who would bring Muḥammad back. In a tradition of al-Zuhri (Medinan d. 124/742) on the authority of Surāqā’s nephew, Surāqā succeeds in spotting Muḥammad outside Mecca, but as his horse is going at a good pace, it stumbles and throws Surāqā off its back. This happens several times, and each time he consults his divining arrows (qidāh), and out comes the arrow he does not want, advising him to do the Prophet no harm. But Surāqā is too anxious to win the reward for Muḥammad and rides on in pursuit of him, but stumbles again. At last the horse not only stumbles, but its forelegs go into the ground. Then as it gets its
legs out of the ground, smoke arises like a sandstorm. When Suraqa sees this, he is finally convinced that the Prophet is protected against him and will have the upper hand. The tradition was recorded by Ibn Isḥaq (d. 150/768), and recurs in several compilations, including canonical hadith collections.

These events are designed to bring out Muhammad’s successful escape from his persecutors, and Suraqa’s failure to catch up with him is shaped in a miraculous way that implies Muhammad’s divine protection. More specifically, the theme of the divining arrows is usually associated with idol worship, especially of Hubal, and in our context it implies that even pagan religious authorities succumbed to Muhammad and recognized his immunity.

3.1.3 Suraqa and Satan

The fact that Suraqa of all people was chosen by Muslim tradition for the abortive pursuit of the Prophet, seems to indicate that he was a prototype of the conspiring enemy whose schemes are baffled by divine powers. As such, he came to be associated with Satan, as is indicated in the role assigned to him in the battle of Badr. Here Satan appears to the unbelievers in the form of Suraqa and tries to assist them against Muhammad, but eventually turns on his heels, realizing that God and the angels are on Muhammad’s side.

It is also significant that Suraqa was known as azabb (“hairy”). This is the same nickname by which Satan is called by the Prophet when the former discloses to the Meccans that the Ansār have pledged allegiance to Muhammad in the Ḥāqaba, and are about to wage war on them. In a Shi‘i version of the cave story itself Suraqa is explicitly called “Shayṭān.”

All the above elements of flight, pursuit and concealment are non-Qur’ānic in origin and stand in clear contrast to the basic situation of the Qur’ānic cave passage, which is focused on expulsion, not flight. Therefore the Qur’ān cannot be regarded as the ultimate origin of these sīra elements.

3.2 The Companion: Abū Bakr

While in the Qur’ān the companion of the Prophet in the cave is anonymous, the sīra provides him with a name: Abū Bakr. Here again the name has not emerged in the context of exegesis, in which case other alternative names would have probably been suggested, but they are non-existent. Abū Bakr’s name does not originate in exegesis, but rather in Islamic collective memory. He seems to

---

35See Bihār al-anwār, vol. 19, p. 75.
have always been the one remembered as Muhammad's companion in the cave. The fact that the *sīra* alone has preserved Abū Bakr's name while the Qurʾān has not, is symptomatic of the essential difference between the two corpora. Specific names and circumstances are relevant to the *sīra* as historiography, not to the Qurʾān as the Word of God.

The *sīra*, however, is concerned not merely with Abū Bakr's name but rather with his role as Muhammad's only companion in the cave, and here we come to the political factor in the evolution of Muhammad's biography.

The political context of Abū Bakr's image is actually well known. He was the first caliph after Muhammad, and the need to preserve his name as the Prophet's closest companion arose no doubt as a result of the Shiʿī challenge. As is well known, ʿAli's supporters never recognized Abū Bakr's position as the first caliph after Muhammad, and traditions praising Abū Bakr as Muhammad's most intimate companion were surely designed to justify his position as Muhammad's first successor.

But the Shiʿī challenge was not the only, and perhaps not even the primary reason for the circulation of traditions recounting the virtues of Abū Bakr. Another, more immediate reason was that Abū Bakr had been succeeded as caliph by one ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. The latter's reputation as an illustrious leader almost eclipsed the memory of Abū Bakr who, compared with his great successor, looked pale and insignificant to the point of his name being occasionally omitted from the list of caliphs.

This was the reason why some groups who were anxious to preserve for Abū Bakr his place in the Islamic communal memory made every effort to circulate his virtues in the form of traditions. They not only tried to reconstruct the memory of Abū Bakr but also to reduce ʿUmar's reputation to more reasonable proportions. This kind of exertion is clearly reflected in a report in which the *sīra* cave story has been adduced to confirm Abū Bakr's elevated status. The report is related on the authority of Maymūn b. Mihrān (Jazarī d. 116/734), and is about the Companion Abū Mūsā al-Ashʿarī (d. ca. 42–53/662–73). It is related that when Abū Mūsā was governor of Baṣra, he used to deliver the ritual sermon every Friday, and open it with a prayer for the Prophet's wellbeing, and then would pray for ʿUmar. Each time he did this, a man named ʿAbbās b. Miḥṣan al-ʿAnazī (Baṣrān), would stand up and say: "Why don't you mention his comrade who preceded him?", meaning Abū Bakr the ʿSiddīq. Then he would sit down. ʿAbbās repeated this on several occasions [which means that Abū Mūsā persisted in ignoring Abū Bakr], until at last Abū Mūsā wrote to ʿUmar in Medina about this nagging person, telling the caliph that he used to defame them (i.e. himself and ʿUmar). ʿUmar summoned the troublemaker to Medina, and when ʿAbbās appeared before him, the caliph started to abuse him. But when he heard that ʿAbbās's only crime was that he had asked the governor Abū Mūsā why he had been ignoring Abū Bakr in the Friday sermon, the caliph was overwhelmed with remorse and burst into tears. Then he said to ʿAbbās:

"By God, you are better guided than he is [i.e., Abū Mūsā], and more correct. By God, one night and one day (in the life) of Abū Bakr are better than the entire life of 'Umar and his family. Let me tell you about Abū Bakr's night and day."

Then 'Umar started to tell Dabba about the night on which Abū Bakr and Muhammad set out for the cave, and went on telling him about the day on which 'Umar tried to advise Abū Bakr how to treat the people of the ridda. 'Umar's advice was to treat them gently, to which Abū Bakr responded harshly, accusing 'Umar of being a coward (khawwār), and insisting that they can only be subdued by force.37

The same episode in which 'Umar adduces the cave story to illustrate Abū Bakr's superiority over himself is also available with an isnād leading to Muḥam-mad b. Sīrīn (Baṣra, d. 110/728).38 Thus 'Umar has been made to relate a story depriving himself of all his basic merits as a courageous warrior as well as a divinely inspired leader, while reserving these merits for Abū Bakr alone.

The story about 'Umar reveals the political—rather than exegetical—context of the sīra cave story. The political need to maintain Abū Bakr's reputation was the driving power behind the evolution of the story, and this is reflected in many ways. To begin with, several versions praise Abū Bakr's utter devotion to the Prophet and his self-denial facing the dangers in the cave. Thus Ibn Hishām adduces a tradition of al-Hasan al- Başrī (d. 110/728) relating that the Prophet and Abū Bakr arrived at the cave during the night, and Abū Bakr entered it first and passed his hands all over the walls of the cave, to make sure that no beasts of pray or snakes were in it.39 In a more detailed version of the same account, Abū Bakr says that if there were any creature there, he would rather have himself bitten than the Prophet.40 In a tradition of Ibn Abī Mulayka (Mecca, d. 117/735) it is added that there was indeed a hole of a snake in the cave, and Abū Bakr blocked it with his heel, lest the snake should come out and bite the Prophet.41

The Prophet himself is said to have told 'Ā'isha, Abū Bakr's daughter, about her father's heroic undertakings in the cave. In contrast to himself, who was unused to roughness and suffering, and whose feet started to bleed as soon as he climbed the mountain towards the cave, Abū Bakr's legs became like two rocks, and he blocked the hole of the snake with his heel all night long.42 In other similar versions, it is added that Abū Bakr carried the Prophet on his shoulders until they reached the cave.43

Abū Bakr's glory stems not only from his heroic devotion to the Prophet, but also from his being Muhammad's closest friend, in whom the Prophet confided.

38Mustadrak, vol. 3, p. 5. And see another setting in which Dabba b. Miḥṣan is the one who prefers 'Umar to Abū Bakr: Ibn 'Asākir (Mukhtasar), vol. 13, pp. 54–55.
40Fākihī, vol. 4, p. 83 (no. 2417).
41Ibid., vol. 4, p. 79 (no. 2410). See also Ibn Abī Shayba, vol. 14, no. 18466.
42Fākihī, vol. 4, p. 79 (no. 2411).
43Khargūshi, MS Br. Lib., fol. 101b (no. 638); idem, MS Tübingen, fol. 24a (no. 1461).
when preparing himself for the *hijra*. This comes out in traditions relating that Muḥammad set out stealthily for the cave from Abū Bakr’s own house. The most prevalent in this group is the one of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr who quotes his aunt ‘A’isha, Abū Bakr’s daughter. It is related here that the Prophet used to visit Abū Bakr every day, and once he came at an unusual hour and disclosed to Abū Bakr the secret of his planned *hijra* and that he was taking him along. This is the point at which Abū Bakr becomes the Prophet’s companion in the cave story. The tradition also contains details as to the camels prepared by Abū Bakr for the journey and the name of the guide hired by him. Their safe arrival at the cave is also stated, as well as the help extended to them by Abū Bakr’s son (‘Abdallāh), daughter (Asmā’) and client (‘Amīr b. Fuhayra).

It is significant that in all the available versions of ‘Urwa’s report no mention is made of the above elements of concealment (either by blindness or by objects), and the role of Abū Bakr and his household in Muḥammad’s secret flight is the sole focus of attention. This tradition gained entrance into some canonical *ḥadīth* collections.

3.3 ‘Alī

Further versions seem to betray a Shi‘i tampering with the cave story, which was designed to shift the glory from Abū Bakr to ‘Alī. One such version, for which the *isnād* is (conveniently enough) not provided, was recorded by al-Ṭabarī. In this version it is ‘Alī who discloses to Abū Bakr that Muḥammad has set out for the cave, which eliminates the possibility that the Prophet ever confided in Abū Bakr. Moreover, ‘Alī advises Abū Bakr to join Muḥammad in the cave, if he has any business with him, but when Abū Bakr catches up with the Prophet on the road, the Prophet does not recognize him in the darkness, and thinks he is one of the unbelievers chasing him. So the Prophet increases his pace, his sandal strap snaps and he skins his big toe on a rock. It bleeds profusely, and the Prophet walks even faster, until at last Abū Bakr succeeds in making the Prophet recognize him. Thus Abū Bakr is not only mistaken for an unbeliever, but is also the one on whose account the Prophet is injured. But this is not the end of the story. The tradition goes on to tell us that meanwhile, ‘Alī, who stayed in Mecca, was interrogated by the Quraysh about Muḥammad’s whereabouts, but disclosed nothing; Quraysh tortured him, but to no avail. Thus the heroic part was taken away from Abū Bakr and entrusted to ‘Alī instead. A version of a similar import is available with the *isnād*: al-Kalbī (Kūfān d. 146/763) → Abū Šāliḥ (Bādhām, *mawlā* of Umm Hāni’) → Ibn

---


Moreover, a later Shi‘i version claims that after being interrogated by the Quraysh, ‘Ali waited till the next night, and then went to the cave together with Khadija’s son Hind b. Abi Hala, and they both joined Muhammad there. The Prophet put ‘Ali in charge of his affairs in Mecca and ordered him to return and act there on his behalf.

The same tendency to turn ‘Ali into the major hero in the events that took place on the eve of Muhammad’s hijra is evident in numerous other versions that were already surveyed by M.J. Kister, so there is no need to go into them here.

All the Sunnī supporters of Abū Bakr could do was to circulate versions trying to regain Abū Bakr’s lost glory for him. This effort is reflected, for example, in a tradition attributing to none other than ‘Ali the statement that when the Quraysh came to kill the Prophet, he let Abū Bakr accompany him to the cave, because Abū Bakr was the only one in whom he trusted.

All these versions and counter-versions reflect the struggle for authority in early Islamic society, an authority that is based on heroism, devotion and above all on the assumed confidence of the Prophet. Their evolution has nothing to do with Qur’ān exegesis.

4 Qur’ān into sīra

The above discussion has demonstrated the non-Qur’ānic framework of the sīra cave story, which is essentially different from the Qur’ānic one, as well as the non-exegetical context of the evolution of the sīra story. This leads to the conclusion that the Qur’ānic materials, which are nevertheless found in several versions of the sīra cave story, stem from a secondary stage in which Qur’ānic materials started to infiltrate into the sīra.

The secondary status of the Qur’ān in the sīra cave story can easily be demonstrated. As seen above, some of the non-Qur’ānic versions were circulated by ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr. Their non-Qur’ānic nature is the reason why al-Ṭabarī found it necessary to add a gloss into one of them, so as to link it to the Qur’ān. This version is focused on the heroic role played by Abū Bakr in Muhammad’s hijra, and is innocent of any Qur’ānic touch. However, in al-Ṭabarī’s rendering, when the cave is mentioned, the following gloss appears: “This is the cave that God mentioned in the Quran.” Al-Ṭabarī has recorded it in his Ta’rīkh as well as in his Tafsir on Qur’ān 9:40. This gloss is the only indication that the same event is mentioned in the Qur’ān as well.

Other versions contain more substantial Qur’ānic materials, and mainly some key phrases that were gleaned from the Qur’ān and built into the sīra versions.

47Fakihī, vol. 4, pp. 80-81 (no. 2412).
50Ibn ‘Asikir (Mukhtasar), vol. 13, p. 56.
52Ṭabarī, Tafsīr, vol. 10, p. 90.
They, like al-Tabari’s gloss, belong to the secondary layers of the story, not to its basic non-Qur’anic core. They were drawn from the Qur’ān into the sīra in a process that was designed to furnish the story of Muhammad’s life with a sacred Qur’anic touch.

4.1 The la tahzan Phrase

The most conspicuous key phrase that was gleaned from the Qur’anic cave passage and built into the sīra narrative, is the la tahzan phrase. In the Qur’ān it is embedded in the context of expulsion and isolation and designed to ensure the companion of God’s aid, but in the sīra it has been embedded in the context of flight. Abū Bakr’s fear is caused by the danger of being found by the Meccans who have come to search for them, and the la tahzan phrase is designed to ensure him that there is no such danger.

The la tahzan phrase appears, to begin with, in a further version about the sinking of Surāqā’s horse into the ground. It is related on the authority of al-Bara’ b. ‘Azib (Medinan/Kūfān Companion d. 72/691), and in it Abū Bakr tells the story in the first person. It begins with a prolonged description of how Abū Bakr took good care of the Prophet on their way to Medina, how he found Muhammad a convenient cool place to take a nap there at noon, and how he provided him with milk when he got up. As they proceeded, Surāqā b. Mālik caught up with them riding on his horse. Abū Bakr saw him and said to the Prophet: “The searching people have caught up with us.” Muhammad said: “Sorrow not, surely God is with us.” When Surāqā drew closer, and was at a distance of only one or two lances, Abū Bakr said: “The searching party has caught up with us, O Messenger of God,” and burst into tears. The Prophet asked him why he was crying, and Abū Bakr said: “By God, I am not crying for myself, but for you.” Then the Prophet prayed to God, asking to be protected against Surāqā, upon which the legs of Surāqā’s horse sank into the ground.

This version of the story is widely current,53 and gained access into some canonical hadith compilations.

In another version (the one related by ‘Umar in praise of Abū Bakr), the la tahzan phrase has been interpolated into a different stage of the story, when Muhammad and Abū Bakr are within the cave. The latter notices a hole in the wall of the cave, inserts his leg to block it so that no snakes can emerge and bite the Prophet, but his own heel is indeed bitten and his eyes become full of tears. Seeing him like this, the Prophet says to him without knowing the cause of his suffering: “Sorrow not, surely God is with us.”54

Less flattering for Abū Bakr is the following version (again of ‘Urwa b. al-Zubayr) in which the Prophet utters the la tahzan phrase when Abū Bakr

---


is overtaken by anxiety and fear (*al-hamm wa-l-khawf*) while hearing people's voices outside the cave. This is the only available version in which the sending down of the Shechina is also mentioned: it is sent down to soothe Abu Bakr following Muhammad's prayer. However, the celestial legions are not mentioned even here.

The Shi'is, on their part, did not fail to make the most of Abu Bakr's fear as implied in the Prophet's need to tell him the *la tahzans* phrase. For them this meant that Abu Bakr was a coward deserving contempt instead of respect, and a convenient access to their detailed arguments is provided in Shi'i exegesis on Qur'an 9:40. Absurdly enough, however, the Shi'i writers insisted that the Shechina did not descend on the anxious Abu Bakr (to encourage him), but rather on the Prophet, which means that the term *sakina* was understood by them in the sense of divine inspiration. The Shi'i obsession with Abu Bakr's conduct in the cave was such that some of them used to hang special signs on their clothes to commemorate the snakes that had bitten Abu Bakr and caused him to cry.

On a more general level it should be noted that the interpolation of the *la tahzans* phrase into the *sira* cave story does not go well with the element of concealment that is prevalent in the other *sira* versions, because with effective concealment (by the spider etc.) there is no cause for alarm, let alone for telling Abu Bakr not to worry. This is another indication as to the secondary status of the Qur'an in the *sira*. This is also indicated by the fact that the location of the *la tahzans* phrase changes. Once it is part of the Suraqa scene, which is also extant without it, and once it is part of the events within the cave, which are described without it elsewhere.

Nevertheless, harmonizing versions were eventually circulated, in which the *la tahzans* phrase occurs side by side with the element of concealment. The two components have been mixed together in a sequence that interrupts the inner logic of the events: encouragement by means of the *la tahzans* phrase occurs in these versions after, and in spite of, the effective concealment. This is the case in a tradition recorded by Abu Bakr al-Marwazi (d. 292/905) in his *Musnad Abi Bakr*. The *isnad* is traced back to al-Hasan al-Basri (d. 110/728), and the events are as follows: the Prophet and Abu Bakr enter the cave, the spider conceals them with its web, the Quraysh arrive to search for the two, notice the web and deduce that no one has entered the cave. Meanwhile the Prophet is praying and Abu Bakr guards him. Now Abu Bakr cries and says that something evil is going to happen to Muhammad, at which point the Prophet tells him: *la tahzans*, etc. The tradition was obviously produced by a secondary combination of the two separate elements, concealment by objects and encouragement by words. The result is untenable, because there is no reason for Abu Bakr's fear

---

55Bayhaqi', *Dala'il*, vol. 2, p. 478. The *isnad*: Ibn Lahira ← Abu l-Aswad ← 'Urwa. See also Tirmidhi, *Tehfa*, vol. 8, p. 494 (in the comments, from 'Urwa's *Maghazi*).


once the spider has played its part. But the result was also unavoidable, because if one wished to combine the theme of the spider with the theme of la taḥżan, this was the only possible sequence. The spider must act before the Quraysh arrive, and Abū Bakr can only be afraid after the Quraysh arrive. Thus the urge to combine all the originally independent elements into a harmonized sequence, so characteristic of later Islamic generations, superseded simple logic.

The same mixed sequence is provided in a tradition recorded by al-Fākhrī in his Akhbār Makka, which was already mentioned above. The mixture includes concealment by blindness, and the various elements are arranged as follows: at first the Qur'ānic cave passage is quoted, which means that the subsequent text is adduced as its exegesis. The Prophet sets out for the cave, Abū Bakr follows him, Muḥammad mistakes him for the enemy (see above), and eventually they enter the cave together. The Quraysh arrive to search for them, the Prophet prays to God to strike them with blindness, Abū Bakr is afraid, the Prophet tells him: la taḥżan, the Quraysh are blind and cannot find the cave. The logic here is slightly better, because although Abū Bakr is afraid in spite of Muḥammad’s prayer, the Quraysh become blind only after the Prophet tells him not to sorrow, so that there was still some reason for Abū Bakr’s fear.

These mixed versions do not change the basic observation that the Qur'ānic la taḥżan phrase is alien to the basic sīra elements of concealment, and hence altogether secondary within the textual structure of the sīra cave story.

4.2 Invisible Legions

Invisible legions are mentioned in the Qur'ān only where their function is to aid the believers in battle. For this reason, no task was found for them in the early versions of the sīra cave story, in which flight and hiding is the main axis.

But in some very late versions angels do appear which indicates a secondary interpolation of this Qur'ānic element into the sīra cave story. Their task, however, was changed from its usual Qur'ānic one (aid in battle) and was adapted to the specific circumstances of the cave.

In one tradition (of Ibn ‘Abbās) the angels bring down water from Paradise for the thirsty Abū Bakr. In another tradition their task is to conceal the fugitives, and thus they are linked to the main core of the sīra narrative of the cave story. This is the case in a tradition recorded by Abū Nu‘aym (d. 430/1039) on the authority of Asmā’, Abū Bakr’s daughter. In it, the angels hide the fugitives with their wings from a man urinating nearby. The same task of hiding the Prophet and diverting the chasing infidels from the cave has been assigned to the angels in Shi‘ī sources as well.

---

59 Fākhrī, vol. 4, pp. 80–81 (no. 2412).
4.3 Thānī ithnayn

The thānī ithnayn (“second of the two”) phrase is designed in the Qurʾān to bring out the situation of isolation: one person only accompanies the cast-out Prophet. In the sūra, however, it has been embedded in Muḥammad’s encouraging address to Abū Bakr, in which he discloses to him the presence of God as third in their company.

Such an address appears in a version in which it replaces the lā taḥṣān phrase. Here Abū Bakr is afraid that the searching people are about to discover them if they only look down at their legs, and the Prophet says: “Quick, what do you think (is the power) of two persons whose third one is God.” This version is related with the isnād of Ḥammām b. Yahyā (Baṣrān d. 163/780) ← Thābit al-Bunānī (Baṣrān d. 123/741) ← Anas b. Mālik, and is widely current.63 It also appears in canonical hadith.64

But the thānī ithnayn phrase has a further history. It was eventually shifted from Muḥammad to Abū Bakr and became an honorary title indicating Abū Bakr’s intimacy to Muḥammad. More specifically, it was taken as predicting Abū Bakr’s becoming Muḥammad’s first successor as caliph, i.e., second to Muḥammad as head of the Islamic state.

This specific significance of the title comes out for the first time in the poetry of the Umayyad poet al-Farazdaq. He praises an Umayyad caliph (al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik) as heir to the legacy (wasīyat) of Abū Bakr, whom he describes as “the second of the two after Muḥammad.”65 Abū Bakr features here as a model for the Umayyads in their own capacity as Muḥammad’s successors.

The title thānī ithnayn is also used in a verse ascribed to an earlier poet, Ḥassān b. Thābit, a contemporary of Muḥammad.66 It is also used in a widely current version of ‘Umar’s address during the discussions concerning the nomination of Muḥammad’s successor which took place in the saqīfa (“courtyard”) of Banū Saʿīda. Al-Zuhri relates on the authority of Anas b. Mālik that ‘Umar ordered the believers to pledge allegiance to Abū Bakr because he is Muḥammad’s companion and thānī ithnayn.67 This tradition also occurs on other occasions as Abū Bakr’s laudatory title.68

---


64 Bukhārī, Sahih, vol. 5, 4 (62:2), vol. 6, p. 83 (65, Sūra 9); Muslim, vol. 7, p. 108 (44, Bāb min fadā’il Abī Bakr); Tirmīdhī, Tuhfa, vol. 8, no. 5094 (44, Sūra 9). See also Ibn Hībīb, Sahih, vol. 15, no. 6278, vol. 15, no. 6869.


68 For example, in a lengthy story related by Ṣāliḥ al-Aslāmi. See Ahmad b. Ḥanbal, Musnad, vol. 4, p. 58.
5. From *sira* to Exegesis

To sum up the status of the Qur'ānic elements in the *sira* cave story, it is clear that their place in the narration is ever changing, as well as incompatible with the *sira* elements of concealment, which indicates that they are not firmly established within the hard core of the story. Hence they must be part of an over-layer that was designed to provide the *sira* with a Qur'ānic anchor.

This anchor eventually turned the *sira* into an origin of exegesis, because once the Qur'ān was anchored in a concrete framework of *sira* events, exegetes could recycle the relevant *sira* stories as part of their efforts to provide the Qur'ān with circumstantial background. Therefore the *sira* versions that contained phrases from the Qur'ānic cave passage could be recycled as exegesis on the same Qur'ānic passage from which they had been extracted. Al-Ṭabarî, for example, has recorded in his *Tafsîr* several such versions as exegesis on the Qur'ānic cave passage.69

One can easily trace the currency of the same versions in other available *Tafsîr* compilations, where they are used mainly for explicating the circumstances in which the *la taḥzân* phrase was uttered. For example, in the *Tafsîr* of Muqāṭîl b. Sulaymân (d. 150/768), one of the earliest available *Tafsîr* compilations, the *la taḥzân* phrase is said to have been uttered by the Prophet, when Abū Bakr said to him: “I am but one person, and if you are killed, this community (*umma*) will perish.”70 Thus a respectable “national” or “patriotic” touch has been added to Abū Bakr’s otherwise undignified fear. Muqāṭîl goes on to relate that after telling Abū Bakr not to sorrow, the Prophet prayed to God to strike the searching people with blindness.

As for the invisible legions, Muqāṭîl detaches them from the cave scene and says that they stand for the angels who fought for the Muslims at Badr, etc. It again indicates that this element was of no use to the early Islamic tradition as regards the cave story.

In later compilations, however, direct exegesis was employed to link the unseen legions of Qur'ān 9:40 to the cave scene. It was stated accordingly that God sent the angels down to the cave and they brought to the Prophet the good tidings that he was about to defeat his enemies. This cheered him up and gave him power to persevere.71

5.1 Evidence from Futūḥ

The observation that the Qur'ān only forms an over-layer in the *sira* means that the literary status of the Qur'ān in the *sira* is quite the same as its status in other types of historiography, especially the futūḥ traditions. These are traditions that describe the Islamic conquests outside of Arabia, and here again we are confronted with Qur'ānic allusions. No one will claim that the traditions

---

69 *Ṭabarî, Tafsîr*, vol. 10, p. 96.
70 *Muqāṭîl, Tafsîr*, vol. 2, p. 171.
containing these materials were created to provide the Qur'ān with an interpretation, because the stories do not even pertain to Muhammad's time. The late Albrecht Noth already discussed some such traditions, for example those describing the battle of Dhāt al-Šawāri against the Byzantines. This took place in 35/656, and Noth\textsuperscript{72} rightly observes that the description of the battle has been provided with what he calls an outer framework consisting of two Qur'ānic verses (2:249; 30:2) which were believed to contain a prophecy about the military fate of the Byzantines. Noth also observes the presence of Qur'ānic materials in texts of treaties,\textsuperscript{73} and no one will claim on account of these materials that the treaties were generated by the Qur'ān.

It follows that not only in the sīra but also in the futūḥ traditions the Qur'ān belongs to a secondary layer of the material. This similarity is quite natural because the textual dynamics of the sīra and the futūḥ are basically the same. In both cases we are confronted with a sacred history that had to be furnished with a Qur'ānic framework that would confirm the divine origin of the events described.

6 Conclusion

The above discussion has focused on the thematic affinity between the Qur'ān and the sīra and led to the conclusion that beyond the basic affinity there are differences too crucial to allow for a mere sīra exegetical expansion of the Qur'ān. This leaves us with another possibility, namely that the thematic affinity between the Qur'ān and the sīra originates from a common source, on which both the Qur'ān and the sīra could draw independently of each other, while interpreting it in different manners.

The origin which both the Qur'ān and the sīra seem to be using is the communal memory of the Islamic umma. The communal memory pertains to a series of occurrences that constitute the remembered history of the birth of Islam. By “remembered” history I do not necessarily mean “true” history, because memory is always subjective and changes from one group to another, and the collective memory of even one particular group may change under newly evolving circumstances.

The genesis of the Islamic communal memory dates back to the very beginning of the formation of the Islamic community, i.e., to that stage in which the members of this community became aware that they belonged to a group of significance. This could only happen after the group achieved decisive success, especially military, such as the victory at Badr, which signaled to the group that God was on its side.

Such religious conviction motivated the desire to organize and preserve the history of the community in fixed textual forms, and thus the Qur'ān on the one hand, and the sīra on the other, came into being. Each represented an


\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p. 69.
advanced version of previous experiences that the community remembered and wished to document. In the sīra the believers documented their communal history (derived mainly from oral tradition transmitted among the individuals of the community), and in the Qurʾān they assembled what was remembered and considered the divine revelations of their Prophet.

The different goals of the Qurʾān as scripture and the sīra as history dictated different implications of the Islamic communal memory, and the case of Muḥammad’s departure from Mecca has emerged above as a good example. The Qurʾān on the one hand, and the sīra on the other, are aware of two opposing aspects of Muḥammad’s departure, expulsion (in the Qurʾān), and flight (in the sīra). This means that the basic memory of Muḥammad’s departure from Mecca was interpreted differently when reduced to an organized textual form in different corpuses. The different interpretations are clearly reflected in the distinctive settings of the cave scene. The only common features shared by the Qurʾān and the sīra are the place, a cave, and the time, the Prophet’s departure from his hometown. The presence of a companion with the Prophet in the cave is also a common feature. These common elements seem to have belonged to the Islamic communal memory, but everything else belongs to the specific interpretation of the event by the Qurʾān on the one hand and by the sīra on the other.

It follows that Qurʾān and sīra are essentially independent of each other, and serve different goals. While the Qurʾān is designed to preserve the word of God, the sīra provides the history of the community. Therefore the Qurʾān delivers the cave scene as a didactic Divine address, while the sīra recounts it as a communal history. The Qurʾān as the word of God is shaped in a cryptic and mysterious style which is typical of other well-known sacred scriptures, while the sīra is abundant with specific names and circumstances. This is the reason why the name of the companion is provided only in the sīra and not in the Qurʾān.

7 Biblical Patterns

Literary patterns known from the sacred historical tradition of previous monotheistic cultures were also used for the final textual shaping of the Islamic historical memory. They can be discerned in the Qurʾān as well as in the sīra, which indicates that for both corpuses the sacred world history is continued through the Islamic umma.

7.1 Spider: David

To begin with, the motive of the spider, which helps conceal the fugitives in the sīra version of the cave story, is known from Jewish legends about David. It is related that when David hid from Saul in a cave,74 God sent a spider that wove its web over the opening of the cave and sealed it off. Saul came, and

74Cf. 1 Samuel 24:2–7.
seeing the web, inferred that no one had entered the cave, because otherwise it would have been torn. So he went away. When David came out and saw the spider, he kissed it and blessed it. Even the Muslims themselves noticed this parallelism between David's flight from Saul and Muhammad's cave scene. ‘Aṭā’ al-Khurasānī (Syrian d. 135/753) reportedly stated that the spider wove its net twice, once for David when he ran away from Saul (Ṭalūt), and once for Muhammad when he was in the cave. This type of concealment recurs in traditions about other persons that took place in later periods.

Western scholars have observed long ago that elements from Biblical and post-Biblical stories about David have become part of Muhammad's biography, and in our particular case it indicates again the non-Qur'ānic basis of the sīra. The element of the spider was not generated by the Qur'ān but was rather drawn from the Jewish Davideic legends.

7.2 Exodus

Yet another Biblical model that emerges in the sīra cave story is that of Israel's Exodus from Egypt. As shown elsewhere, Muslim historiographers appropriated this Biblical model as well, and applied various episodes from it to the Islamic conquests outside Arabia. The conquests were thus turned into a legitimate act performed according to a divine scheme. The same model was also read back into Muhammad's own time and emerges in episodes relating to Badr as well as to al-Ḥudaybiyya.

As for the sīra cave story, elements from the Biblical exodus emerge in episodes connected with the persecutors and their failure to catch up with the fugitives. In the Bible, before the Israelites enter the parted sea, some events take place, which prevent the Egyptians from catching up with them. In Exodus 14:19–20 we read:

75 Alef Beth de-Ben Sīra, quoted in Bialik-Ravnizki, Sefer ha-Aggadah (Tel Aviv, 1955), 89a.
77 ‘Āṣimī, Sānt al-nujūm, vol. 1, p. 349.
80 Ibid., pp. 55–99.
81 Exodus 14.
...and the pillar of cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them. And it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel, and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these, so that the one came not near the other all the night.

In this passage a pillar of cloud comes between persecutors and persecuted, and it covers the former with darkness that conceals the persecuted from their eyes.

Misfortune also befalls the chariots of the persecutors, as is stated in Exodus 14:25: “And He took off their chariot wheels, that they drove heavily.”

This is perceived in extra-Biblical tradition in the sense that the wheels of the Egyptian chariots were locked as if bound in chains, or that they refused to turn [because of the mud].

The pillar of cloud and the locking or sinking of the wheels have their parallels in the above tradition about Surâqa’s mount that sinks into the ground, and in the smoke that arises like a sandstorm.

7.3 The Elisha Legends

Several motives were also derived from the Biblical legends about Elisha whose career is described in 2 Kings 2–9. Elisha here possesses supernatural powers that enable him to heal the sick, multiply food for the famished, and even raise the dead. On the “national” front, Elisha ensures for the people of Israel divine salvation in their military clashes with Aram. He is said to have helped the Israelites against the army of Aram by bringing down from heaven celestial cavalries. This takes place several times, and on one occasion, this brings about the flight of the enormous Aramean army. In this particular case the aiding forces are invisible, only their voices are heard:

For the Lord had made the camp of Aram to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, the noise of a great host ... So they arose and fled in the twilight.

This seems to be the origin of the Qur’ânic theme of divine help extended in battle through invisible legions. As seen above, it occurs not only in the Qur’ânic cave scene but also elsewhere in the Qur’ân, in clearly military contexts. The remembered military success of Muhammad was thus translated into the act of God.

84On the legends about Elisha, see Alexander Rolfe, The Prophetic Stories: The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible—their Literary Types and History (Jerusalem, 1988).
852 Kings 7:6-7.
7.3.1  Encouragement

The specific situation in the cave as described in the Qur‘ān may also have its parallel in the Biblical Elisha legends. In 2 Kings 6:15-18 there is a story that takes place in the city of Dothan after the King of Aram had sent armed forces to arrest Elisha and his servant who have found shelter there. The relevant passage reads:

15: And the servant of the man of God rose early, and went out, and behold, an army surrounded the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him [i.e. to Elisha]: “Alas, my master! what shall we do?”

16. And he answered: “Fear not: for they that are with us are more than they that are with them.”

17. And Elisha prayed, and said: “Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see.” And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and lo and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

18. And when they [i.e., the chariots] came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said: “Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness.” And He smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

The passage contains some elements that are strikingly similar to those of the Qur‘ānic cave story. Elisha’s servant is alarmed because of the enormous army of the enemy, and Elisha tells him not to fear because they have more troops on their side than the enemy has. Then invisible hosts of horses and chariots come down to them.

In the Qur‘ān, too, the Prophet and his companion are alone in their place of shelter, a cave, and the companion is afraid, but the Prophet tells him not to fear because God is with them. Thereupon invisible legions come to their rescue.

It should be noted, however, that in the Biblical setting, Elisha and his companion are in a state of flight, but the Qur‘ān has embedded the discourse between the Prophet and his companion in the context of expulsion. When this discourse was built into the sīra version of the cave story, it was reset in the context of flight.

7.3.2  Blindness

The Elisha legends served as an origin not only for the Qur‘ān, but for the sīra as well. The latter derived from it some further elements which are not found in the Qur‘ān. It is related in the Bible that Elisha prayed to God saying: “Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness. And He smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.” This is a clear element of concealment by
The case of Muḥammad’s hijra

blindness which recurs in some of the above sīra versions in which Muḥammad asks God for the same when hiding in the cave.

Furthermore, in the Bible, before the celestial auxiliaries descend, Elisha prays to God saying: “Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see.” As a result of this, God “opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” Something very similar takes place in the sīra cave story. Muḥammad causes Abū Bakr’s eyes to be opened, and he can see images of people supporting the Prophet. This is related in a unique version recorded in al-Qummī’s Taḥfīz on Qurān 9:40. The Prophet tells his (unnamed) companion in the cave that he sees the ship of Ja’far son of Abū Talib [making its way on a hijra to Abyssinia — U.R.], as well as the Anṣār assembled in their courtyards in Medina. The companion is astonished, and asks: “Can you really see them, O messenger of God?” He says: “Yes,” and then the companion asks to see them too. The Prophet strokes the eyes of the companion with his hand and he sees them. Thereupon the Prophet calls him ǧiddq ("Believer"), which is Abū Bakr’s well-known epithet.86

In this version a parallelism is drawn between Muḥammad’s hijra to Medina and Ja’far’s hijra to Abyssinia, and the vision of the Anṣār predicts their role as Muḥammad’s hosts and helpers in his new place of refuge. With its dependence on Biblical forms and with its political function, it provides yet another demonstration of the non-exegetical dynamics of the sīra. At the same time, its occurrence in a Tafsīr compilation illustrates how sīra was recycled as exegesis.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**


86 Qummī, *Taḥfīz*, vol. 1, p. 289. Other versions add a remark against Abū Bakr to the effect that he was only called ǧiddq because he believed that Muḥammad was a sorcerer. See *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 19, pp. 53 (no. 10), 71 (nos. 22, 23), 88 (no. 40).


———. Sharaf al-nabiyy. MS Tübingen, M. a. VI 12.


CONTENTS

S. Adhami  On the Zurvanism of 'ulamā'-ye Islām I: an encounter with Plato  

S. Shoemaker  Christmas in the Qurʾān: the Qur’ānic account of Jesus' nativity and Palestinian local tradition  

U. Rubin  The life of Muḥammad and the Qurʾān: the case of Muḥammad's hijra  

A. Elad  The beginnings of historical writing by the Arabs: the earliest Syrian writers on the Arab conquests  

W. Madelung  Rabīʿa in the Jāhiliyya and in early Islam  

H. Motzki  The author and his work in the Islamic literature of the first centuries: the case of ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s Muṣannaf  

M. Levy-Rubin  Praise or defamation? On the polemical usage of the term ḥanīf among Christians and Muslims in the Middle Ages  

R. Tottoli  The story of Jesus and the skull in Arabic literature: the emergence and growth of a religious tradition  

E. Francesca  The formation and early development of the Ibāḍī madhhab  

A. Levin  Sibawayhi's attitude to the language of poetry  

O. Kapeliuk  A note on linguistic informants in Sibawayhi's al-Kitāb  

J. Blau  The emergence of the neo-Arabic lingual type  

M. Sharon  W. Diem's review of Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae I: a rejoinder  

W. Diem  Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum Palaestinae (CIAP) II
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Editors</th>
<th>Contributors</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S. Hopkins</td>
<td>Christoph Luxenberg</td>
<td><em>Die Syro-Aramäische Lesart des Koran. Ein Beitrag zur Entschlüsselung der Koransprache</em></td>
<td>377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U. Rubin</td>
<td>Daniel A. Madigan</td>
<td><em>The Qur'ān’s Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture</em></td>
<td>381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U. Rubin</td>
<td>Roberto Tottoli</td>
<td><em>Biblical Prophets in the Qur‘ān and Muslim Literature</em></td>
<td>397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Paoli</td>
<td>Dmitriy Frolov</td>
<td><em>Classical Arabic Verse: History and Theory of Ḍārūḍ</em></td>
<td>400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Stroumsa</td>
<td>David Thomas</td>
<td><em>Syrian Christians under Islam — The First Thousand Years</em></td>
<td>420</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Holes</td>
<td>Alexander Borg</td>
<td><em>The Language of Color in the Mediterranean</em></td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y. Lev</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fāṭimid history and the history of medieval Egypt: a review article</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y. Rappoport</td>
<td>David S. Powers</td>
<td><em>Law, Society and Culture in the Maghrib, 1300–1500</em></td>
<td>435</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>