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1 *Introduction*

In my *The Eye of the Beholder*,[1] the literary status of the Qur'ān in Muḥammad's biography (*sīra*) has been touched upon, and an assessment of the relationship between the Qur'ānic and the non-Qur'ānic layers in the *sīra* has been attempted. I have argued that the Qur'ānic element in the *sīra* 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 *sīra* in a process of "Qur'ānization," i.e., the incorporation of Qur'ānic elements into the basic non-Qur'ānic 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 Qur'ānic material in the *sīra*, and insisted on its primary position as an origin of all the traditions in which it is found. Thus, for example, Wim Raven[3] re-examined the analysis of the story of the Satanic Verses[4] in which allusion is made to Qur'ānic 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 *iftatana*, 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.

[1]Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims* (Princeton, 1995).

[2]Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, pp. 226–33.

[3]Wim Raven, "The Biography of the Prophet and its Scriptural Basis," in *Story-Telling in the Framework of Non-Fictional Arabic Literature*, Stefan Leder, ed. (Wiesbaden, 1998), p. 430.

[4]Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, pp. 156–66.

[5]Raven, p. 427.

made to Qur'ān 96:1-5 (*iqra' bi-smi rabbika...*) were taken by Gregor Schoeler, in his review of *The Eye of the Beholder*,[6] 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 *sīra* there is "an evolutionary process that is rooted in exegesis."[7]

The assumption that the Qur'ān is the origin of many *sīra* 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 *sīra* was to provide the Qur'ān with exegesis. More specifically, the *sīra* was designed to provide the *asbāb al-nuzūl*, i.e., the "circumstances of revelation" of the Qur'ān. 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'ān 2:89[8] represent "attempts to supply an interpretation of Qur'ān 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 *sīra* 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 *sīra* are the result of an exegetical mechanism was often brought up to diminish the historical value of the *sīra*. 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'ān, 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-ḍirār*) which is also alluded to in the Qur'ān (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 *sīra* passages about *masjid al-ḍirār* came into existence in the realm of Qur'ān exegesis. To illustrate the exegetical nature of the traditions, Crone compares the Qur'ān 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-ḍirār*, Crone insists that "the outline

[6] *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes [WZKM]* 88 (1998): 221–22.

[7] Marco Schöller, "*Sīra* and *Tafsīr*: Muḥammad al-Kalbī on the Jews of Medina," in *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources*, Harald Motzki, ed. (Leiden, 2000),p. 42, with note 89, where he disagrees with *The Eye of the Beholder*.

[8] Discussed in *The Eye of the Beholder*, pp. 29, 228–29.

[9] G. R. Hawting, Review of Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1997): 128.

[10] Patricia Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton, 1987), p. 204.

[11] *Journal of Semitic Studies* 42 (1997): 182–85.

[12] Ibid., 182.

[13] Ibid., 184.

has a strong claim to Quranicity,"[14] which is supposed to be a slightly scornful pun on Lecker's insistence that the story has "a strong claim for historicity."[15]

Crone's attitude has already met with objection, for example by R.S. Faiser,[16] without, however, offering a systematical reconsideration of the status of the Qur'ān in the *sīra*.

Qur'ānic exegesis was considered the main power not only behind large portions of Muḥammad's *sīra* but also behind the stories about other prophets, generally known as *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*. For example, Franz Rosenthal has declared:[17] "Historical, or pseudo-historical, material centering around Biblical events and personalities gained the right of entry into Islam through the Qur'ān 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 Qur'ānic narrative by whatever means they could lay their hands on."[18]

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 Muḥammad, thus carrying on the work started in *The Eye of the Beholder*, which is dedicated to the Meccan period of Muḥammad'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 Qur'ān.

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 Qur'ān 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 Qur'ānic 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 Qur'ān? That this is not so will become clear from a closer comparison between the Qur'ānic cave passage and the *sīra* cave story. Let us begin with the Qur'ān.

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[14]Ibid., p. 182.

[15]Michael Lecker, *Muslims, Jews and Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina* (Leiden, 1995), p. 75.

[16]Rizwi S. Faiser, "Muhammad and the Medinan Jews: A Comparison of the texts of Ibn Ishaq's *Kitāb Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* with al-Waqidi's *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 28 (1996): 482–83.

[17]Franz Rosenthal, "The Influence of the Biblical Tradition on Muslim Historiography," in *Historians of the Middle East*, Bernard Lewis et al., eds., (London, 1962), p. 40.

[18]Ibid., 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" (*lā 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.
[20] Qur'ān 9:26.
[21] Qur'ān 3:124–25.

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'ānic 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'ānic prophet the same threat is repeated in 17:76. Moreover, the expulsion of the Qur'ānic prophet is considered an accomplished fact, as indicated in 47:13 where "your city which has expelled you" is mentioned.

3 *The Sīra*

3.1 *Flight from Mecca*

In the various versions of the *sīra* cave story, the element of expulsion is missing, and instead we have an element of concealment which is missing from the Qur'ān, but serves as the main axis of the *sīra* 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'ānic cave passage the Prophet and his companion are refugees, in the *sīra* they are fugitives. This crucial gap between the Qur'ān and the *sīra* rules out the possibility that the entire *sīra* cave story was drawn from the Qur'ānic cave passage.

3.1.1 *Concealment*

The situation of flight, which underlies all the *sīra* 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 *sīra* and are entirely absent from the Qur'ān.

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-Kalbī (Muḥammad b. al-Sā'ib, Kūfan d. 146/763) ← Abū Ṣāliḥ (Bādhām, *mawlā* of Umm Hāni') ←

[22]The messengers in general: 14:13; Shu'ayb: 7:88; Lot: 7:82; 26:167; 27:56.

[23]The story about this plot is recounted in association with Qur'ān 8:30, and deserves a separate analysis.

Ibn ʿAbbās.[24] Muḥammad 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, Muḥammad prays: "O God, make them blind, so that they will not see us" (*allāhumma ʿammi ʿannā abṣārahum*). 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 ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827) with the *isnād*: Maʿmar b. Rāshid (Baṣran/Yemeni, d. 154/771) ← ʿUthmān al-Jazarī ← Miqsam b. Bujra [Najda] (Meccan d. 101/720).[25] 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 Muṣʿab al-Makkī who quotes several Companions.[26] Concerning the tree, it is related that it hid Muḥammad 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).[27] In another version it is the spider again that conceals them from the urinating person (Umayya b. Khalaf).[28]

3.1.2 *Pursuit: Surāqa*

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 Surāqa b. Mālik, of the tribe of Mudlij and a confederate of the Quraysh. He reportedly went after Muḥammad, 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-Zuhrī (Medinan d. 124/742) on the authority of Surāqa's nephew, Surāqa succeeds in spotting Muḥammad outside Mecca, but as his horse is going at a good pace, it stumbles and throws Surāqa off its back. This happens several times, and each time he consults his divining arrows (*qidāḥ*), and out comes the arrow he does not want, advising him to do the Prophet no harm. But Surāqa 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

[24] Fākihī, vol. 4, pp. 80–81 (no. 2412).

[25] ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 5, p. 389. See also Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 1, p. 348.

[26] E.g. ʿAbd al-Razzāq, vol. 5, p. 389; Ibn Saʿd, vol. 1, pp. 228–29; Fākihī, vol. 4, pp. 82–83 (nos. 2416–17.); Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 481–82; *Kashf al-astār*, vol. 2, no. 1741; Qiwām al-Sunna, *Dalā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 659–60 (no. 83); Abū Nuʿaym, *Dalā'il*, vol. 2, p. 325 (no. 229).

[27] Fākihī, vol. 4, p. 83 (no. 2417).

[28] Balādhurī, *Ashrāf*, vol. 1, p. 308.

legs out of the ground, smoke arises like a sandstorm. When Surāqa 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 Isḥāq (d. 150/768),[29] and recurs in several compilations, including canonical *ḥadīth* collections.[30]

These events are designed to bring out Muḥammad's successful escape from his persecutors, and Surāqa's failure to catch up with him is shaped in a miraculous way that implies Muḥammad's divine protection. More specifically, the theme of the divining arrows is usually associated with idol worship, especially of Hubal,[31] and in our context it implies that even pagan religious authorities succumbed to Muḥammad and recognized his immunity.

3.1.3 *Surāqa and Satan*

The fact that Surāqa 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 Surāqa and tries to assist them against Muḥammad, but eventually turns on his heels, realizing that God and the angels are on Muḥammad's side.[32]

It is also significant that Surāqa was known as *azabb* ("hairy").[33] This is the same nickname by which Satan is called by the Prophet when the former discloses to the Meccans that the Anṣār have pledged allegiance to Muḥammad in the ʿAqaba, and are about to wage war on them.[34] In a Shīʿī version of the cave story itself Surāqa is explicitly called "Shayṭān."[35]

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

[29] Ibn Hishām, vol. 2, p. 134.

[30] ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 5, pp. 393–94; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 4, pp. 175–76; Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, pp. 76–77 (63:45); *Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 7; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 14, no. 6280; Ṭabarānī, *Kabīr*, vol. 7, nos. 6601–6603; Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 486–87, 488; Abū Nuʿaym, *Dalā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 332–33 (no. 236). See also Ibn Abī Zayd, p. 268.

[31] E.g. Ibn Hishām, vol. 1, p. 160.

[32] Ibn Hishām, vol. 2, pp. 318-19, with reference to Qur'ān 8:48.

[33] Suhaylī, *Rawḍ*, vol. 2, p. 233; Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 3, p. 42; ʿĀṣimī, *Samṭ al-nujūm*, vol. 1, p. 354.

[34] Ibn Hishām, vol. 2, p. 90.

[35] See *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 19, p. 75.

have always been the one remembered as Muḥammad's companion in the cave. The fact that the *sīra* alone has preserved Abū Bakr's name while the Qur'ān 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 Qur'ān as the Word of God.

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

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

But the Shīʿī 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.[36]

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 Ḍabba b. Miḥṣan al-ʿAnazī (Baṣran), would stand up and say: "Why don't you mention his comrade who preceded him?," meaning Abū Bakr the Ṣiddīq. Then he would sit down. Ḍabba 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 Ḍabba appeared before him, the caliph started to abuse him. But when he heard that Ḍabba'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 Ḍabba:

[36]Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 112.

"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 Ḍabba about the night on which Abū Bakr and Muḥammad 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 Muḥammad b. Sīrīn (Baṣran, 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-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (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 (Meccan, 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 Muḥammad's closest friend, in whom the Prophet confided

[37] Khargūshī, MS Tübingen, fol. 24a-25a. Abridged version: Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 476–77.

[38] *Mustadrak*, vol. 3, p. 5. And see another setting in which Ḍabba b. Miḥṣan is the one who prefers 'Umar to Abū Bakr: Ibn 'Asākir (*Mukhtaṣar*), vol. 13, pp. 54–55.

[39] Ibn Hishām, vol. 2, p. 130.

[40] Fākihī, vol. 4, p. 83 (no. 2417).

[41] Ibid., vol. 4, p. 79 (no. 2410). See also Ibn Abī Shayba, vol. 14, no. 18466.

[42] Fākihī, vol. 4, p. 79 (no. 2411).

[43] Khargūshī, 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 ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr who quotes his aunt ʿÂ'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 (ʿAbdallāh), daughter (Asmāʾ) and client (ʿĀmir b. Fuhayra).

It is significant that in all the available versions of ʿUrwa'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.[44] This tradition gained entrance into some canonical *ḥadīth* collections.[45]

3.3 *ʿAlī*

Further versions seem to betray a Shīʿī tampering with the cave story, which was designed to shift the glory from Abū Bakr to ʿAlī. One such version, for which the *isnād* is (conveniently enough) not provided, was recorded by al-Ṭabarī.[46] In this version it is ʿAlī 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, ʿAlī 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, ʿAlī, 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 ʿAlī instead. A version of a similar import is available with the *isnād*: al-Kalbī (Kūfan d. 146/763) ← Abū Ṣāliḥ (Bādhām, *mawlā* of Umm Hāniʾ) ← Ibn

[44]Ibn Hishām, vol. 2, pp. 128–30; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 5, pp. 388–89, 390–92; Ibn Saʿd, vol. 3, pp. 172–73; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 6, p. 198; Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 2, pp. 375–77 (I, 1235–37); 377–79 (I, 1237–40) (Ibn Isḥāq); Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, vol. 2, pp. 473–75 (Ibn Isḥāq); Abū Nuʿaym, *Dalāʾil*, no. 230. See also Ibn Abī Zayd, pp. 266–67; Balādhurī, *Ashrāf*, vol. 1, p. 307 (without *isnād*).

[45]Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, pp. 75–76 (63:45). See also Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 14, nos. 6277, 6279, vol. 15, no. 6868.

[46]Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 2, p. 374 (I, 1234).

ʿAbbās.[47] Moreover, a later Shīʿī version claims that after being interrogated by the Quraysh, ʿAlī waited till the next night, and then went to the cave together with Khadīja's son Hind b. Abī Hāla, and they both joined Muḥammad there. The Prophet put ʿAlī in charge of his affairs in Mecca and ordered him to return and act there on his behalf.[48]

The same tendency to turn ʿAlī into the major hero in the events that took place on the eve of Muḥammad'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.[49] 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 ʿAlī 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.[50]

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 Qurʾān exegesis.

4 *Qurʾān into* sīra

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

The secondary status of the Qurʾān in the *sīra* cave story can easily be demonstrated. As seen above, some of the non-Qurʾānic versions were circulated by ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr. Their non-Qurʾānic 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 Qurʾān. This version is focused on the heroic role played by Abū Bakr in Muḥammad's *hijra*, and is innocent of any Qurʾānic 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 Qurʾān." Al-Ṭabarī has recorded it in his *Taʾrīkh*[51] as well as in his *Tafsīr* on Qurʾān 9:40.[52] This gloss is the only indication that the same event is mentioned in the Qurʾān as well.

Other versions contain more substantial Qurʾānic materials, and mainly some key phrases that were gleaned from the Qurʾān and built into the *sīra* versions.

[47] Fākihī, vol. 4, pp. 80–81 (no. 2412).

[48] *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 19, p. 62 (no. 18).

[49] M.J. Kister, "On the Papyrus of Wahb b. Munabbih," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 37 (1974): 564–71.

[50] Ibn ʿAsākir (*Mukhtaṣar*), vol. 13, p. 56.

[51] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. 2, p. 376 (I, 1236). See also Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, vol. 2, p. 466; Abū Nuʿaym, *Dalāʾil*, vol. 2, p. 328 (no. 232).

[52] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 10, p. 96.

They, like al-Ṭabarī's gloss, belong to the secondary layers of the story, not to its basic non-Qur'ānic core. They were drawn from the Qur'ān into the *sīra* in a process that was designed to furnish the story of Muḥammad's life with a sacred Qur'ānic touch.

4.1 *The* lā taḥzan *Phrase*

The most conspicuous key phrase that was gleaned from the Qur'ānic cave passage and built into the *sīra* narrative, is the *lā taḥzan* 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 *lā taḥzan* phrase is designed to ensure him that there is no such danger.

The *lā taḥzan* phrase appears, to begin with, in a further version about the sinking of Surāqa's horse into the ground. It is related on the authority of al-Barā' b. ʿĀzib (Medinan/Kūfan 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 Muḥammad 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, Surāqa 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." Muḥammad said: "Sorrow not, surely God is with us." When Surāqa 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 Surāqa, upon which the legs of Surāqa's horse sank into the ground.

This version of the story is widely current,[53] and gained access into some canonical *ḥadīth* compilations.

In another version (the one related by ʿUmar in praise of Abū Bakr), the *lā taḥzan* phrase has been interpolated into a different stage of the story, when Muḥammad 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 ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr) in which the Prophet utters the *lā taḥzan* phrase when Abū Bakr

[53]Ibn Saʿd, vol. 4, pp. 365-66; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 1, pp. 2–3; Ibn Abī Shayba, vol. 14, no. 18459; Marwazī, *Musnad Abī Bakr*, nos. 62, 65; Abū Yaʿlā, *Musnad*, vol. 1, no. 116; Khargūshī, MS Tübingen, fols. 25a-b (no. 1463); Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 483–85; Qiwām al-Sunna, *Dalā'il*, vol. 22, pp. 548–50 (no. 57); Abū Nuʿaym, *Dalā'il*, vol. 2, pp. 329–30 (no. 234).

[54]Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il*, vol. 2, p. 477. See also Ibn ʿAsākir (*Mukhtaṣar*), vol. 13, p. 55.

is overtaken by anxiety and fear (*al-hamm wa-l-khawf*) while hearing people's voices outside the cave.[55] This is the only available version in which the sending down of the Shechina is also mentioned: it is sent down to sooth Abū Bakr following Muḥammad's prayer. However, the celestial legions are not mentioned even here.

The Shīʿīs, on their part, did not fail to make the most of Abū Bakr's fear as implied in the Prophet's need to tell him the *lā taḥzan* phrase. For them this meant that Abū Bakr was a coward deserving contempt instead of respect, and a convenient access to their detailed arguments is provided in Shīʿī exegesis on Qur'ān 9:40. Absurdly enough, however, the Shīʿī writers insisted that the Shechina did not descend on the anxious Abū Bakr (to encourage him), but rather on the Prophet, which means that the term *sakīna* was understood by them in the sense of divine inspiration.[56] The Shīʿī obsession with Abū 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 Abū Bakr and caused him to cry.[57]

On a more general level it should be noted that the interpolation of the *lā taḥzan* phrase into the *sīra* cave story does not go well with the element of concealment that is prevalent in the other *sīra* versions, because with effective concealment (by the spider etc.) there is no cause for alarm, let alone for telling Abū Bakr not to worry. This is another indication as to the secondary status of the Qur'ān in the *sīra*. This is also indicated by the fact that the location of the *lā taḥzan* phrase changes. Once it is part of the Surāqa 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 *lā taḥzan* 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 *lā taḥzan* phrase occurs in these versions after, and in spite of, the effective concealment. This is the case in a tradition recorded by Abū Bakr al-Marwazī (d. 292/905) in his *Musnad Abī Bakr*.[58] The *isnād* is traced back to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), and the events are as follows: the Prophet and Abū 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 Abū Bakr guards him. Now Abū Bakr cries and says that something evil is going to happen to Muḥammad, at which point the Prophet tells him: *lā taḥzan*, 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 Abū Bakr's fear

[55] Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il*, vol. 2, p. 478. The *isnād*: Ibn Lahī'a ← Abū l-Aswad ← 'Urwa. See also Tirmidhī, *Tuḥfa*, vol. 8, p. 494 (in the comments, from 'Urwa's *Maghāzī*).

[56] For a detailed survey of the Shīʿī views on this see Meir M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī Shiism* (Leiden, 1999), pp. 84, 102–103. For the Sunnī pro-Abū Bakr reaction, see Suhaylī, *Rawḍ*, vol. 2, pp. 232–33; 'Āṣimī, *Samṭ al-nujūm*, vol. 1, pp. 347–48.

[57] 'Āṣimī, *Samṭ al-nujūm*, vol. 1, p. 346.

[58] Marwazī, *Musnad Abī Bakr*, no. 73; Shāmī, vol. 3, p. 341 (from al-Marwazī).

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 *lā taḥzan*, 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-Fākihī in his *Akhbār Makka*, which was already mentioned above.[59] 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: *lā taḥzan*, 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 *lā taḥzan* 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 ʿAbbās) the angels bring down water from Paradise for the thirsty Abū Bakr.[60] 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 Nuʿaym (d. 430/1039) on the authority of Asmāʾ, Abū Bakr's daughter. In it, the angels hide the fugitives with their wings from a man urinating nearby.[61] The same task of hiding the Prophet and diverting the chasing infidels from the cave has been assigned to the angels in Shīʿī sources as well.[62]

[59] Fākihī, vol. 4, pp. 80–81 (no. 2412).

[60] Ibn ʿAsākir (*Mukhtaṣar*), vol. 13, p. 70; Suyūṭī, *Khaṣāʾiṣ*, vol. 1, pp. 463–64 (Ibn ʿAsākir); ʿĀṣimī, *Samṭ al-nujūm*, vol. 1, p. 346.

[61] Shāmī, vol. 3, p. 342 (from Abū Nuʿaym).

[62] *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 19, pp. 34, 51, 77.

4.3 *Thānī Ithnayn*

The *thānī ithnayn* ("second of the two") phrase is designed in the Qur'ān to bring out the situation of isolation: one person only accompanies the cast-out Prophet. In the *sīra*, 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 taḥzan* 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: "Quiet, what do you think (is the power) of two persons whose third one is God." This version is related with the *isnād* of Hammām b. Yaḥyā (Baṣran d. 163/780) ← Thābit al-Bunānī (Baṣran d. 123/741) ← Anas b. Mālik, and is widely current.[63] It also appears in canonical *ḥadīth*.[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. ʿAbd al-Malik) as heir to the legacy (*waṣiyya*) 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 ʿUmar's address during the discussions concerning the nomination of Muḥammad's successor which took place in the *saqīfa* ("courtyard") of Banū Sāʿida. Al-Zuhrī relates on the authority of Anas b. Mālik that ʿUmar 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]

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[63] Ibn Saʿd, vol. 3, 173–74; Ibn Abī Shayba, vol. 14, no. 18462; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 1, p. 4; Abū Yaʿlā, *Musnad*, vol. 1, nos. 66, 67; Marwazī, *Musnad Abī Bakr*, nos. 71, 72; Bukhārī, *Taʾrīkh ṣaghīr*, vol. 1, 58; Fākihī, vol. 4, p. 81 (no. 2413); Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil*, vol. 2, pp. 480–81; Abū Nuʿaym, *Dalāʾil*, no. 231.

[64] Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 5, 4 (62:2), vol. 6, p. 83 (65, Sūra 9); Muslim, vol. 7, p. 108 (44, *Bāb min faḍāʾil Abī Bakr*); Tirmidhī, *Tuḥfa*, vol. 8, no. 5094 (44, Sūra 9). See also Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 15, no. 6278, vol. 15, no. 6869.

[65] Farazdaq, vol. 1, p. 78:13.

[66] Ibn Saʿd, vol. 3, p. 174; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Mukhtaṣar*, vol. 13, p. 57. The verse is not included in Ḥassān's *Dīwān*. See editor's note in Ḥassān, *Dīwān*, p. 125 (no. 32).

[67] Ibn Hishām, vol. 4I, p. 311; Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 5, no. 9756; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 15, no. 6875. See also the version of Nubayṭ b. Sharīṭ (Kūfan) ← Sālim b. ʿUbayd (Kūfan Companion), in Nasāʾī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā*, vol. 5, no. 8109 (76:1), vol. 6, no. 11219 (82:168).

[68] For example, in a lengthy story related by Rabīʿa al-Aslamī. See Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 4, p. 58.

5 *From* sīra *to Exegesis*

To sum up the status of the Qur'ānic elements in the *sīra* cave story, it is clear that their place in the narration is ever changing, as well as incompatible with the *sīra* 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 *sīra* with a Qur'ānic anchor.

This anchor eventually turned the *sīra* into an origin of exegesis, because once the Qur'ān was anchored in a concrete framework of *sīra* events, exegetes could recycle the relevant *sīra* stories as part of their efforts to provide the Qur'ān with circumstantial background. Therefore the *sīra* 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-Ṭabarī, for example, has recorded in his *Tafsīr* 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 *Tafsīr* compilations, where they are used mainly for explicating the circumstances in which the *lā taḥzan* phrase was uttered. For example, in the *Tafsīr* of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/768), one of the earliest available *Tafsīr* compilations, the *lā taḥzan* 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. Muqātil 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, Muqātil 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 *sīra* means that the literary status of the Qur'ān in the *sīra* 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] Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 10, p. 96.
[70] Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 171.
[71] Suhaylī, *Rawḍ*, vol. 2, 232; 'Āṣimī, *Samṭ al-nujūm*, vol. 1, p. 347.

containing these materials were created to provide the Qur'ān with an interpretation, because the stories do not even pertain to Muḥammad's time. The late Albrecht Noth already discussed some such traditions, for example those describing the battle of Dhāt al-Ṣawārī against the Byzantines. This took place in 35/656, and Noth[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,[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

[72] Albrecht Noth and Lawrence I. Conrad, *The Early Islamic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study*, Trans. Michael Bonner (Princeton, 1994), pp. 203–204.

[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 Qur'ān they assembled what was remembered and considered the divine revelations of their Prophet.

The different goals of the Qur'ān 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 Qur'ān on the one hand, and the *sīra* on the other, are aware of two opposing aspects of Muḥammad's departure, expulsion (in the Qur'ān), 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 Qur'ān 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 Qur'ān on the one hand and by the *sīra* on the other.

It follows that Qur'ān and *sīra* are essentially independent of each other, and serve different goals. While the Qur'ān is designed to preserve the word of God, the *sīra* provides the history of the community. Therefore the Qur'ān delivers the cave scene as a didactic Divine address, while the *sīra* recounts it as a communal history. The Qur'ān 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 Qur'ān.

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 Qur'ān 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

[74]Cf. 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.[75] Even the Muslims themselves noticed this parallelism between David's flight from Saul and Muḥammad's cave scene. ʿAṭāʾ al-Khurasānī (Syrian d. 135/753) reportedly stated that the spider wove its net twice, once for David when he ran away from Saul (Ṭālūt), and once for Muḥammad when he was in the cave.[76] This type of concealment recurs in traditions about other persons that took place in later periods.[77]

Western scholars have observed long ago that elements from Biblical and post-Biblical stories about David have become part of Muḥammad's biography,[78] and in our particular case it indicates again the non-Qurʾānic basis of the *sīra*. The element of the spider was not generated by the Qurʾān but was rather drawn from the Jewish Davidic 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,[79] 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 Muḥammad's own time and emerges in episodes relating to Badr as well as to al-Ḥudaybiyya.[80]

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[81], the exodus of Israel from Egypt is successful mainly thanks to the parting of the sea. Muslims were indeed aware of the relevance of this event to the *sīra* cave story, and thus, for example, there is a tradition attributed to al-Wāqidī in which the mountain opens up for Muḥammad and he enters the cave. Al-Khargūshī (d. 406/1015) remarks about this that the same happened when the sea was parted for the Israelites.[82]

The parallelism not only comes up in external remarks of scholars but is also embedded in the traditions themselves. 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:

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[75] *Alef Beth de-Ben Sira*, quoted in Bialik-Ravnizki, *Sefer ha-Aggadah* (Tel Aviv, 1955), 89a.

[76] Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya*, vol. 5, p. 197; Shāmī, vol. 3, p. 341 (from Abū Nuʿaym); ʿĀṣimī, *Samṭ al-nujūm*, vol. 1, pp.348–49.

[77] ʿĀṣimī, *Samṭ al-nujūm*, vol. 1, p. 349.

[78] E.g. P. Jensen, "Das Leben Muhammeds und die David-Sage," *Der Islam* 12 (1922): 84-97.

[79] Uri Rubin, *Between Bible and Qurʾān: The Children of Israel and the Islamic Self-Image* (Princeton, 1999), p. 13.

[80] Ibid., pp. 55–99.

[81] Exodus 14.

[82] Khargūshī, Br. Lib., fol. 94a (no. 584). Cf. Ibn Kathīr, *Bidāya*, vol. 3, pp. 182–83.

> ...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].[83]

The pillar of cloud and the locking or sinking of the wheels have their parallels in the above tradition about Surāqa'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.[84] 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:[85]

> 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'ānic theme of divine help extended in battle through invisible legions. As seen above, it occurs not only in the Qur'ānic cave scene but also elsewhere in the Qur'ān, in clearly military contexts. The remembered military success of Muḥammad was thus translated into the act of God.

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[83]Samuel E. Loewenstamm, *The Evolution of the Exodus Tradition*, trans. from the Hebrew by Baruch J. Schwartz (Jerusalem, 1992), pp. 275-276.

[84]On the legends about Elisha, see Alexander Rofé, *The Prophetical Stories: The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible– their Literary Types and History* (Jerusalem, 1988).

[85]2 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

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 *Tafsīr* on Qur'ān 9:40. The Prophet tells his (unnamed) companion in the cave that he sees the ship of Ja'far son of Abū Ṭālib [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 *Ṣiddīq* ("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.

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

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