ADAPTATIONS AND INNOVATIONS

Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature from the Early Middle Ages to the Late Twentieth Century, Dedicated to Professor Joel L. Kraemer

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ISLAMIC RETELLINGS OF BIBLICAL HISTORY

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1 Introduction

The present study will explore aspects of biblical history as retold in Islamic sources, with a view to revealing the manner in which the retold history acquired local Arabian links. The study will be based on the analysis of traditions circulated during the first period of Islamic history, which is the period in which the great Islamic conquests outside of Arabia became an established fact. This fact provided the background for a universalized historical perception of the origins of Islam. The believers became convinced that their success on the battlefield reflected a divine global scheme in which Islam had played the pivotal role since the very beginning of human history. In fact, Islam came to see itself as the most authentic representative of a universal, supranational religion that has formed an inborn component of humankind since the first moment of Creation. This provided the basis for the Islamic self-legitimacy that was needed for the polemics with Jews and Christians[1].

On the literary level, one notices the presence of Jewish and Christian elements in the historical concepts that the Muslims formed for themselves. This must have been one of the crucial results of the contact with the older Jewish and Christian cultures, into which the young Islamic society was brought after the Islamic conquests. As noted elsewhere[2], the Muslims sought in the monotheistic precedent of their new non-Muslim cohabitants a messianic model upon which they could construct their own identity. Thus, they came to see in themselves a nation (*umma*) chosen by God to fulfill a sacred goal in world history. These concepts must have infiltrated into Islamic society through the countless non-Arab converts.

[1] For general observations on the relation between legitimacy and narratives about the past, see F. M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: the Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing*, (Princeton: Darwin Press 1998), pp. 112-22. And see further, F. Rosenthal, "The Influence of the Biblical Tradition on Muslim Historiography", in B. Lewis *et al.* (eds.), *Historians of the Middle East,* (London: Oxford University Press 1962), pp. 35-45; A. al-Azmeh, "Chronophagous Discourse: a Study of Clerico-Legal Appropriation of the World in an Islamic tradition," in F. E. Reynolds and D. Tracy (eds.), *Religion and Practical Reason: New Essays in the Comparative Philosophy of Religions*,(Albany: State University of New York Press 1994), pp. 163-208.

[2] Uri Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'ān*, (Princeton: Darwin Press 1999), pp. 11-35.

Islamic historical writing evolved mainly through the Islamization of the existing Jewish and Christian historical narratives as preserved in biblical and post biblical sources. All phases of biblical history, from the antediluvian age to the Israelite one, were turned into stages of a sacred history culminating in Muḥammad. The biblical Adam, Noah and Abraham became Muslims in the retold biblical history, and the Jewish and Christian prophets, too, became links in a chain of successive revelations that was preordained to terminate in Muḥammad, the "Seal" of the prophets.

But the link that was established between Islam and world history always included local elements, which preserved the Arabian aspects of the communal Islamic self-image[3]. The present study is dedicated to the analysis of some of these aspects. Arabian elements are noticed not merely in those phases of history in which Muḥammad himself was active, but rather in far earlier stages of history, in fact, already in the very beginning of the biblical history of humankind.

The Muslims connected their local Arabian history to biblical history in two major ways: geographically and genealogically.

2 The Geographical Linkage

The geographical linkage found expression in the stations of the Arabian pilgrimage to Mecca[4], which came to be associated with various stages of biblical history. Israelite prophets, like Moses and others, were linked to these places in traditions describing their pilgrimage to Mecca[5], and similar links were produced to the pre-Israelite stage of biblical history. This emerges in traditions about Adam and Eve[6], in which the first humans were connected to Arabia by means of some linguistic manipulations. For example, one of the stations of the Meccan pilgrimage is called Muzdalifa. The verb *izdalafa* means to draw near, and traditions were circulated saying that after Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, they met and drew near each other (*izdalafā*) in this place. Thus, the name Muzdalifa commemorates their reunion here. Moreover, Adam and Eve are said to have renewed

[3] For the impact of the Arabian consciousness as reflected in Islamic scholarship, and mainly in the context of the Shuʿūbiyya, see already I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies (Muhammedanische Studien)*, ed. and trans. S.M. Stern and C.R. Barber, 2 vols. (London: G. Allen and Unwin 1967-71), vol. I, p.164ff. For further aspects see S. Bashear, *Arabs and Others in Early Islam*, (Princeton: Darwin Press 1997).

[4] A recent study of the Islamic pilgrimage is F.E. Peters, *The Hajj: the Muslim Pilgrimage to Mecca and the Holy Places*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1994).

[5] Rubin, *Between Bible and Qur'ān*, pp. 36-44.

[6] Cf. C. Schöck, "Adam and Eve", *EQ* (=*Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*), (Leiden: E.J. Brill 2001-6), vol. I, pp. 22-26. and see also M.J. Kister, "Ādam: A Study of Some Legends in *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* Literature", *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), pp. 113-174.

their acquaintance with each other (*taʿārafā*) in this area, and hence the name ʿArafa, which stands for another important station of the pilgrimage[7]. Likewise, Adam and Eve are said to have come together (*ijtamaʿā*) here, and hence the form *Jamʿ* which is another name for Muzdalifa. All these midrashic maneuvers are contained in a tradition of Ibn al-Kalbī (d. 204/819)[8].

The geographical linkage was also achieved in a straightforward manner in a tradition saying that when Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise they landed in Mecca, Adam on the sacred hill named al-Ṣafāʾ, and Eve on its twin, the hill named al-Marwa[9].

ʿArafa, one of the most notable stations of the pilgrimage, acquired a special position in the life of Adam. This is attested to in a tradition relating that in this place God made a comprehensive covenant[10] with all the future descendants of Adam, till the final generation of the days to come, in which all of humanity took it upon themselves to recognize God as the Lord of all. The covenant is mentioned in a Qurʾānic verse[11], and in the traditions recorded in Qurʾān exegesis it is stated that the covenant was made in ʿArafa, and more specifically, in a place there named Naʿmān[12].

The sacred Black Stone[13] which is attached to the southeastern corner of the Kaʿba, also gained a history going back to Adam's days. It is related that Adam brought it down from heaven to earth, when it was still white as snow. Along with it, Adam brought down the rod of Moses which was made of the myrtle of Paradise[14]. Another version relates that when the stone was brought down it was made of a shining diamond which later lost its luster and became black due to the impurity of the pilgrims who touched it[15].

Thus Adam and Eve were made into the first pilgrims to Mecca, and the Arabian pilgrimage gained roots in the very beginning of human history. This implies that the Arabian pilgrimage represents the fundamental monotheism that was inherent in humankind since its creation.

The origin of the Kaʿba itself was projected back to Adam's time in a tradition relating that God sent this shrine down to Adam, to provide him with

[7] See R.G. Khoury, "ʿArafāt", *EQ*, vol. I, pp.145-46.

[8] Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. M. Ibrāhīm, 10 vols. Repr. (Cairo: Dār al-maʿārif 1987) (ed. M.J. De Goeje *et al.* 15 vols. [Leiden: E.J. Brill 1879-1901]), vol. I, pp. 121-22 (vol. I, p. 120). See also *ibid.*, p. 133 (p. 133).

[9] ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī (Ps.-), *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya lil-imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib*, (Beirut: Dār al-aḍwāʾ 1998), p. 18.

[10] See G. Böwering, "Covenant", *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 464-67.

[11] Qurʾān 7:172-73.

[12] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. I, p. 134 (vol. I, p. 134).

[13] On which see Peters, *Pilgrimage*, 14-15.

[14] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol.I, p. 127 (vol. I, p. 126).

[15] *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 133 (vol. I, pp. 132-33).

a place of worship[16]. Alternately, it was related that Adam himself built the Kaʿba with the aid of the angels, in a sacred territory "opposite" (*bi-ḥiyāl*) God's Throne. The Kaʿba was built with stones taken from five mountains: Mount Sinai, the Mount of Olives, Mount Lebanon, al-Jūdī (= Ararat), and Ḥirāʾ (in Mecca). The latter provided the foundations of the Kaʿba[17].

It is evident that we have here an Islamized, or rather, Arabicized version of Jewish patterns pertaining to the primordial origin of the Temple in Jerusalem[18]. Our traditions are designed to assert the superiority of the Arabian Mecca over the Jewish Jerusalem, which is also evident from the fact that these traditions are associated with a Qurʾānic verse (3:96) stating that the House at Bakka was the first to be established for humankind. The Muslim exegetes are sure that Bakka is Mecca and that the Kaʿba was established 40 years before the temple of Jerusalem[19].

3 Genealogy: the Table of the Nations

The genealogical link between Arabian and biblical histories comes out in traditions in which names of heroes figuring in Arabian pre-Islamic epics are incorporated into the biblical genealogy of the generations from Adam to Abraham.

Such a link was gained, to begin with, for Hūd, the righteous prophet who lived amidst the sinners of ʿĀd, an extinct people known to us mainly from the Qurʾān[20]. The Qurʾān mentions Hūd's community together with Thamūd, the extinct community of the prophet Ṣāliḥ. Islamic tradition has located Hūd deep in the past of ancient extinct nations whom God destroyed because of their sins. Hūd himself is said to have found shelter in Mecca[21]. The story of Hūd is related by Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/768), a famous biographer of Muḥammad who flourished in the beginning of the second Islamic era. His work is based on very early historiographical sources, including traditions which were circulated by Jewish converts to Islam. Ibn

[16] *Ibid.*, vcl. I, p. 123 (vol. I, p. 122).

[17] *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 124 (vol. I, p. 123).

[18] For the tension between the sanctity of Jerusalem and Mecca in Islam see e.g. G.R. Hawting, "'The Origins of the Muslim Sanctuary at Mecca", in G.H.A. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press 1982), pp. 23-47, 203-210; M.J. Kister, "Sanctity Joint and Divided: On Holy Places in the Islamic Tradition", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 20 (1996), pp. 18-65; A. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic Worship: Holy Places, Ceremonies, Pilgrimage*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill 1999).

[19] Cf. U. Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light–Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad", *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), p. 97, n. 79.

[20] See R. Tottoli, "ʿĀd", *EQ*, vol. I, pp. 21-22; P. M. Cobb, "Hūd", *EQ*, vol. II, pp. 462-63.

[21] Masʿūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, p. 38.

Isḥāq's account was recorded by al-Ṭabarī in his well-known historical compilation[22]. Ibn Isḥāq also states that Hūd and Ṣāliḥ were the only prophets between Noah and Abraham[23]. Thus, Arabian heroes gained a place among biblical forefathers.

More specifically, Hūd's name was linked to the biblical Table of the Nations[24]. This Table contains a detailed list of the races and nations that were formed after the Deluge, and Hūd's name was linked to Eber (in Arabic: ʿĀbir), one of Shem's descendants and the ancestor of the Hebrews. The link to this ancestor was facilitated by the fact that Hūd in Arabic means "Jews". That Hūd was identified with the biblical Eber is indicated in a tradition quoted by al-Ṭabarī from an unidentified source[25]. In fact, already the Qur'ān places Hūd and Ṣāliḥ immediately after Noah[26].

Apart from individual persons, whole tribal units were also linked to the biblical genealogy, thus affirming the Arabian links of the biblical Table of the Nations. Ibn Isḥāq[27] tells us that the biblical Lud, the son of Shem, begot a son named Ṭasm[28], as well as a son named ʿImlīq, the ancestor of the Amalekites, and that the descendants of these two sons settled in the Mashriq, ʿUmān, Ḥijāz, Syria and Egypt. Ibn Isḥāq goes on to recount names of tribes and leaders that were born to the biblical Lud, who lived in Arabia in remote pre-Islamic times. One of them is al-Arqam, whom Ibn Isḥāq describes as "king of the Ḥijāz" who resided in Taymā'. Further on, Ibn Isḥāq mentions a person named Umaym whose descendants were destroyed by God and only a few of them survived. As for Ṭasm, Ibn Isḥāq goes on to say that his children lived in the region of the Yamāma (eastern Arabia). Ibn Isḥāq defines all these clans as an ethnic Arabian group in contrast to another branch of the sons of the biblical Lud whom he describes as Persian-speaking peoples.

It is thus clear that Islamic historiography anchored the Arabian past in the universal biblical past by adding Arab links to the original biblical genealogy. It should be noted that in Jewish post-biblical genealogies, as recorded for example in the *Book of Jubilees* (Chapters 8-9), the sons of Lud lack any Arabian touch[29], not to mention the fact that in the original Table of the Nations Lud has no children whatsoever[30].

[22] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. I, pp. 219-24 (vol. I, pp. 235-41).
[23] *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 234 (vol. I, p. 254).
[24] Genesis 10.
[25] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. I, p. 216 (vol. I, p. 231). See also A.J. Wensinck – Ch. Pellat, "Hūd", *EI*², vol. III, pp. 537-38.
[26] Qur'ān 7:59-79; 11:25-68; 26:105-159; 54:9-31.
[27] Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, vol. I, pp. 203-204 (vol. I, p. 214).
[28] See W.P. Heinrichs,"Ṭasm", *EI*², vol. X, pp. 359-60.
[29] Jubilees 9:6.
[30] Genesis 10:22.

As for Amalek, who according to Ibn Isḥāq was also one of Lud's children, he does appear in the Bible, but with no relationship to Lud. He is rather the son of Esau[31].

Another son of Shem, according to the Table of the Nations, is Aram[32]. In the *Book of Jubilees*[33], his territory lacks any Arabian links, but not so in Ibn Isḥāq. Here the list of Aram's descendants includes several Arabian links, namely ʿĀd, Thamūd and Jadīs[34]. Ibn Isḥāq defines these peoples as indigenous Arabs (*ʿarab ʿāriba*), saying that their mother tongue was Arabic. He distinguishes them from the children of Ishmael who are called *al-ʿarab al-mutaʿarriba*, "Arabicized" Arabs, because the latter only learnt Arabic when they settled among the indigenous Arabs.

4 Ishmael

The ancestors included in the Table of the Nations provide the Arabian past with links to the remotest world history, but a more immediate connection was offered by Ishmael, son of Abraham and half-brother of Isaac[35]. The Ishmaelite links are geographical as well as genealogical.

On the geographical level, Ishmael's name was associated with the history of various holy sites near Mecca, which serve as stations in the Arabian pilgrimage to Mecca. Ishmael's presence in Arabia was made possible by means of a remolding of a passage in Genesis 21, in which Hagar and Ishmael are cast out on the behest of Sara and wander in the wilderness of Beer Sheba. They soon run out of water, Ishmael is about to die, and thereupon an angel appears and reveals to them a well of water. Thus they are saved and the boy grows up and dwells in the wilderness of Paran. Islamic tradition locates these events in Arabia, and the well which saved Ishmael's life is identified with Zamzam, the sacred well near the Kaʿba[36].

As we have seen above, Ishmael is not considered to be an indigenous Arab; indeed, some versions of the story of Hagar and Ishmael describe the transformation of Ishmael's Hebrew identity into an Arab one. It is related that when Ishmael and his mother were looking for water in the Meccan

[31] Genesis 36:12.

[32] Genesis 10:22.

[33] Jubilees 9:5.

[34] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. I, p. 204 (vol. I, pp. 214-15).

[35] On Ishmael and the Islamic tradition see R. Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: the Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis*, (Albany: State University of New York Press 1990); F.Millar, "Hagar, Ishmael, Josephus and the Origins of Islam", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 44 (1993), pp. 23-45.

[36] C. C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam*, repr. New York: Jewish Institute of Religion Press 1967 (with an introduction by Franz Rosenthal), p. 84. See also G.R. Hawting, "The Disappearance and Rediscovery of Zamzam and the 'Well of the Kaʿba'", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 43 (1980), pp. 44-54.

wilderness, Hagar discovered the well that was produced by the angel Gabriel. She called her son in Hebrew to approach the water, but at that moment the boy forgot his Hebrew and answered his mother in Arabic. Ishmael was thus the first person to speak Arabic in his own generation[37]. This miraculous shift from Hebrew to Arabic means that the latter language replaces Hebrew as the new Holy Tongue.

Most significant also is Ishmael's role as a genealogical link connecting the local Arab tribes to biblical genealogy. To begin with, Ibn Isḥāq reproduces the names of Ishmael's twelve sons as listed in the Bible[38], and he adds the name of their mother, which is missing from the Bible. She is al-Sayyida bint Muḍāḍ of the tribe of Jurhum. This tribe is believed to have been dominant near Mecca, and thus Ishmael's sons gain direct genealogical links to Arabia[39].

Above all, the first two names on the list of Ishmael's twelve sons, Nebajoth and Kedar, were turned into ancestors of none other than the Prophet Muḥammad himself. The names of these two brothers interchange in the various versions of Muḥammad's pedigree. One of the earliest versions is that of Ibn Isḥāq in which Muḥammad's lineage is connected to Ishmael through Nebajoth. It begins with ʿAbdallāh, Muḥammad's father, and ends with Adam[40]. Nebajoth figures in Ibn Isḥāq's list as the father of an Arab ancestor named Yashjub.

Various genealogists circulated other versions[41], and in one of them the Arabian pedigree is traced back to Ishmael through Kedar. This is a tradition of Ibn al-Kalbī, the celebrated genealogist[42], as preserved by Ibn Saʿd[43]. It is confined to the remote ancestors of the Quraysh, Muḥammad's tribe. Their list begins with Maʿadd ibn ʿAdnān ibn Udad, and contains 37 names linking Maʿadd's grandfather to Kedar. Some of the names are biblical, such as Uz the son of Aram, who is here the grandson of Kedar. Uz has thus been removed from his original biblical generation as specified in the Table of the Nations[44] to a later Arabian one. Such a shift shows that the Muslim genealogists looked desperately for names with which to bridge the enormous gap separating the immediate ancestors of the Quraysh from

[37] Masʿūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, p. 44.

[38] Genesis 25:13-15.

[39] Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. I, p. 314 (vol I, pp. 351-52).

[40] ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. M. al-Saqqā *et.al.*, 4 vols. repr., (Beirut: Dār iḥyāʾ al-turāth al-ʿarabī 1971), vol. I, pp. 1-3.

[41] See Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. II, pp. 271-76 (vol. I, pp. 1112-22). Cf. Rubin, "Pre-Existence", p. 67 n. 1.

[42] See about him M.J. Kister and M. Plessner. "Notes on Caskel's Ǧamharat an-nasab", *Oriens* 25-26 (1976), pp. 48-68 [repr. in M.J. Kister, *Society and Religion From Jāhiliyya to Islam*, (Aldershot: Variorum CS 327 1990), III].

[43] Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt*, 8 vols., (Beirut 1960), vol. I, p. 56.

[44] Genesis 10:23.

Ishmael. Other biblical names that were located between Ishmael and the ancestors of the Quraysh occur in the above list of Ibn Isḥāq; note especially Nahor and his father Terah, the latter being specified as Nebajoth's great grandson[45]. The same pair of names recurs on Ibn Isḥāq's list in their original biblical location, as Abraham's ancestors.

As for Ibn al-Kalbī, it is significant that he does not identify his source for the names linking Maʿadd ibn ʿAdnān ibn Udad to Nebajoth. He only says that "an informant told it to me on the authority of my father, but I did not hear it (directly) from him."[46] One suspects that Ibn al-Kalbī's obscure informant is a Jew; this is confirmed by yet another account, in which Ibn al-Kalbī discloses the origin of the genealogical list bridging the gap between Maʿadd ibn ʿAdnān and Ishmael. He tells us that a Jew of the people of Tadmur (Palmyra) who embraced Islam and was well versed in Hebrew scriptures used to say that the most accurate genealogy of Maʿadd ibn ʿAdnān had been recorded by Jeremiah's secretary, Baruch the son of Neriah. Ibn al-Kalbī adds that the Arab names on his own list are very similar to those recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that they were "translated" (*turjimat*) from the Hebrew[47]. Ibn al-Kalbī also informs us–again from an unidentified source–that Maʿadd lived in the time of Jesus[48].

It follows that non-Muslim converts were only too glad to supply religious information to their Arab partners, but the latter used their materials for particularistic purposes, namely, to link the distinctive Arabian origins of Islam to the biblical past.

But Muslims were not always happy with all the genealogical data that came from Jewish origins. Their aversion to this information soon grew to the degree that traditions were circulated in which it was claimed that the Prophet himself, when recounting his own genealogy, never went beyond the name of ʿAdnān ibn Maʿadd ibn Udad. The Prophet used to stop there, saying that the genealogists have lied concerning the rest of the pedigree (*kadhaba l-nassābūn*). The Prophet also adduced a Qurʾānic passage (25:38) that was understood in the sense that many generations who lived before ʿĀd and Thamūd had perished and sank into oblivion (...*wa-qurūnan bayna dhālika kathīran*)[49]. This tradition about the Prophet was circulated by Ibn al-Kalbī's father (Muḥammad ibn al-Sāʾib, Kūfan d. 146/763) on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās[50]. Al-Kalbī himself, so his son Ibn al-Kalbī tells us,

[45] But in Genesis 11:24 Nahor is Terah's father.

[46] Ibn Saʿd, vol. I, p. 56.

[47] *Ibid.*, I, 57. See also Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, vol. II, pp. 272-73 (vol. I, pp. 1115-16). And see already Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, vol. I, p. 165.

[48] Ibn Saʿd, vol. I, p. 57.

[49] According to Ibn Masʿūd, this verse speaks about "ʿĀd and Thamūd and those beyond them, whom only God knows, and the genealogists have lied." See Ibn Saʿd, vol. I, p. 56.

[50] Ibn Saʿd, vol. I, p. 56.

took this tradition seriously, and he too stopped recounting the full list of names joining ʿAdnān to Ishmael[51]. Several more traditions asserting the dubious nature of the genealogical data beyond ʿAdnān were circulated on the authority of ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr, and others[52].

However, whatever the intermediary links, every one agreed that Muḥammad's pedigree traces to Ishmael, and those who did not rely on the full lists, simply recounted them from Muḥammad till Maʿadd, then resumed the delineation from Ishmael up to Adam. Such cautious practice was recommended by Ibn Saʿd to his readers[53].

5 Arabian Authority: The Light of Muḥammad

The Arab descendants of Ishmael as listed in the Islamic genealogical lists soon acquired a prophetic status of their own which overshadowed the biblical prophets who succeeded Abraham. This is reflected mainly in the fact that the Arab figures replaced the biblical prophets as models of authority, which were used to legitimize the claims of certain Islamic dynasties[54]. Originally, the models were based on the precedent of the Israelite prophets who were taken to represent a divinely chosen pedigree. The Umayyads, for example, claimed that the Israelite prophets possessed a divine legacy which Muḥammad inherited from them, and in due course it was passed on to the Umayyad caliphs.[55]

The Shīʿīs too know of an unchanging divine legacy, or a divine light, that transmigrates through the generations from Adam to Muḥammad. On its way, it passes through the Israelite prophets who forward it to Muḥammad, and from him it reaches the *imāms*[56].

In some versions the successive legacy is identified with Muḥammad's own pre-existent entity. This is the case in a tradition recorded by Ibn Saʿd, which attributes to Muḥammad the following statement[57]:

[51] *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 56.

[52] *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 58. See also Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, vol. I, p. 166.

[53] Ibn Saʿd, vol. I, pp. 57-58.

[54] Cf. M.J. Kister, "Social and Religious Concepts of Authority in Islam", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18 (1994), pp. 84-127.

[55] See P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986); U. Rubin, "Prophets and Caliphs: the Biblical Foundations of the Umayyad Authority," in H. Berg, (ed.), *Method and Theology in the Study of Islamic origins*, (Leiden: Brill 2003), pp. 73-99.

[56] For details see U. Rubin, "Prophets and Progenitors", *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 1 (1979), pp. 41-65, *passim*.

[57] Ibn Saʿd, I, 25. Cf. Rubin, "Pre-Existence", 71-72. The *isnād*: ʿAmr ibn Abī ʿAmr [= Maysara, a *mawlā* of al-Muṭṭalib ibn ʿAbdallāh] Medinan d. 144/761) ← Saʿīd al-Maqburī (Medinan d. 123/741) ← Abū Hurayra ← Prophet.

> I was brought forth from amongst the best generations of the sons of Adam, generation after generation, until I was brought forth from the generation in which I live.
> *Bu'ithtu min khayri qurūni banī Ādama qarnan fa-qarnan ḥattā bu'ithtu mina l-qarni lladhī kuntu fīhi.*

Goldziher[58] has already pointed out that this tradition speaks about the same prophet, i.e. the pre-existent Muḥammad, who has appeared among humans, generation after generation (*qarnan fa-qarnan*), until at last he arose as Muḥammad. This means that according to Goldziher, this tradition sees in the corporeal Muḥammad a prophet who has received his prophetic sparkle from the prophets of previous generations. This may well be the case, but Muslim scholars interpreted the tradition in an entirely different way[59]. Al-Qasṭallānī (d. 923/1517), for example, says that the tradition deals with Muḥammad's transmigration[60] in the loins of the ancestors, from one ancestor to another and from one generation to the other, until he emerged in the generation in which he lived. Al-Qasṭallānī goes on to say that this means that Muḥammad first transmigrated through the loins of the children of Ishmael, then through the Kināna (a subdivision of the children of Ishmael to which the Quraysh belonged) to the Quraysh, and finally to Hāshim (Muḥammad's own clan)[61].

In other words, al-Qasṭallānī's commentary excludes the Jewish and Christian prophets from the line of transmission, and instead reads into the tradition a particularistic concept seeing in Muḥammad's Arab ancestors (all of whom descending from Ishmael) links in a chain of a divine hereditary legacy. In this manner, the line of Muḥammad's Arab ancestors has become the channel through which Muḥammad the man inherited his prophetic essence. Consequently, the Arab ancestors have replaced the Israelite prophets as his spiritual and prophetic archetypes.

Al-Qasṭallānī's explanation was inspired, in part, by numerous other traditions praising Muḥammad's Arab forefathers as virtuous persons belonging to a chosen pedigree, whose mission was to bear in their loins the pre-existent Muḥammad and give birth to him in due course. The traditions highlight not only the purity of their race but also their religious integrity, which is said to have been focused on the uncontaminated religion of Abraham. As such, they are often described as *ḥanīf*s, i.e. monotheists ad-

[58] I. Goldziher, "Neuplatonische und gnostische Elemente im Ḥadīṯ", *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und vervandte Gebiete* 22 (1909), p. 340.

[59] For which see also Rubin, "Pre-Existence", p. 72 n. 27.

[60] In Arabic: *taqallub*, a term gleaned from Qur'ān 26:219 which was interpreted as though dealing with the transmigration of the pre-existent Muḥammad through the loins of his forefathers.

[61] Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Qasṭallānī, *Irshād al-sārī li-sharḥ. ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 10 vols., (Cairo 1305/1887), vol. VI, p. 31.

hering to the religion of Abraham. The Muslims were requested to honor the memory of these ancestors, as is indicated, for example, in the following instruction that was attributed to the Prophet: "Do not curse Maʿadd, for he adhered to the *ḥanīfiyya* of Abraham."[62]

Some traditions describe emblems of Abrahamic authority that were transmitted among the Arab ancestors of the Quraysh, from generation to generation. For example, it is related that Hāshim had in his possession the bow (*qaws*) of Ishmael, which had come down to him from his own forefathers, the descendants of Ishmael. Hāshim bequeathed the bow to ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib his son, grandfather of Muḥammad, together with other objects, such as the banner (*liwāʾ*) of his forefather Nizār, and put him in charge of the affairs of the pilgrims coming to Mecca[63]. The entire authority of the Quraysh as custodians of the Kaʿba was based on the perception that they were keeping an Abrahamic legacy. This is indicated in a tradition relating that the Arabs used to say: "The Quraysh carried out for us the religious duties which Ishmael entrusted us with."[64] Overall it was reported that the Quraysh preserved many elements of the law (*sharīʿa*) of Abraham and therefore they used to circumcise their children and perform the rites of the pilgrimage, observe various rules of purification, etc.[65]

The most exalted aspect of the role of the Arab ancestors as links in a chosen pedigree, which was the origin of the Islamic revelation, is represented in their function as bearers of what is known as *Nūr Muḥammad*: "The Light of Muḥammad." This is the luminous representation of the preexistent Muḥammad that wanders through the loins of the ancestors. The traditions describe in detail the course of its transmission from Ishmael to Muḥammad, as well as its arrival to Ishmael from his own biblical forefathers since Adam[66]. The Israelite prophets, i.e. the descendants of Isaac, are totally excluded from the course of this Light which goes from Abraham to Ishmael, and from then on remains confined to a purely Arabian chain of transmission, till Muḥammad. The Muslim prophet thus inherits his prophetic power from his own Arabian ancestors and not from the Israelite prophets.

The exclusion of the Israelite prophets from the course of *Nūr Muḥammad* is explicitly described in traditions recorded by al-Khargūshī (d. 406/1015) in his *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā*. One of these traditions describes the transi-

[62] Rubin, "Pre-Existence", 71-78.

[63] Abū Saʿd ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Abī ʿUthmān al-Khargūshī, *Sharaf al-nabiyy*, MS Br. Lib., Or. 3014, fol. 14a [ed. Nabīl al-Ghamrī, 6 vols., (Mecca 2003), vol. I, 336].

[64] Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muḥabbar*. ed. I. Lichtenstaedter, Hyderabad: Dāʾirat al-maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniyya 1942, repr. Beirut, n.d., p. 264. Quoted in M.J. Kister, "Mecca and Tamīm", *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 8 (1965), p. 128.

[65] Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-buldān*, 5 vols. (Beirut 1957), vol. V, p. 184 (s.v. "Makka").

[66] Rubin, "Pre-Existence", pp. 83-98.

tion of the Light from Abraham on, saying that Ishmael (and not Isaac) was the one who inherited it from Abraham, and from Ishmael the Light reached Ishmael's son, Kedar. Moreover, the latter is said to have married numerous wives from the children of Isaac but none bore him a child. Eventually an angel appeared to Kedar and told him that he must marry a woman of Arab descent, because only she would bear him a son who shall inherit from him the Muḥammadan Light[67].

Furthermore, the Light of Muḥammad which was possessed by Kedar is considered equal in prophetic importance to the Ark of the Covenant (in Arabic: *tābūt*), the most precious symbol of Israelite prophethood. Islamic tradition describes the course of the ark's transmission from Adam to Abraham and thence to the Israelite prophets[68]. In Khargūshī's version, however, Abraham is said to have bequeathed the Ark to Ishmael (and not to Isaac), and Ishmael forwarded it to Kedar his son. The sons of Isaac requested that the Ark be returned to them, claiming that only prophets ought to hold it. Kedar refused to part with the Ark and even tried to open it but failed to do so because he was not a prophet. Eventually an angel appeared to Kedar telling him to hand the Ark over to Jacob. Kedar carried the Ark from Arabia to the Land of Canaan, where he entrusted it to Jacob, and the latter bequeathed it to his children, the Israelite prophets[69]. The most significant element in this story is the assertion that in spite of losing the Ark to the Israelites, Kedar retained in his body the Light of Muḥammad, and Jacob himself is said to have praised him for having this Light. Jacob is said to have emphasized that the Light is only supposed to dwell in pure Arabian men and women, and congratulated Kedar on the son that was about to be born to him in Arabia out of that Light. He even told Kedar that the Prophet Muḥammad would eventually emerge from the same Light. This implies that the Light of Muḥammad is equivalent to the Israelite Ark and ensures for the Arab ancestors a prophetic eminence identical to that embodied in the Ark.

Thus, by means of the concept of *Nūr Muḥammad*, the origins of Islam have been detached from the Jewish and Christian line of transmission and have been anchored in the pure and noble Arabian pedigree of the Prophet.

6 Farazdaq

When did the Arabian origins of Islam become part of biblical history as retold in Islam? A clue is provided in the poetry of al-Farazdaq (d. 112/

[67] Khargūshī, fols. 10a-10b [ed. al-Ghamrī, vol. I, pp. 313-14].

[68] See U. Rubin, "Tradition in Transformation: the Ark of the Covenant and the Golden Calf in Biblical and Islamic Historiography," *Oriens* 36 (2001), pp. 196-214.

[69] Khargūshī, fol. 10b-11b [ed. al-Ghamrī, vol. I, pp. 314-15]. See also Mas'ūdī, *Ithbāt al-waṣiyya*, pp. 104-106; Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ. al-anbiyā'*. (= *'Arā'is al-majālis*, Beirut n.d.), pp. 236-37.

730) who flourished in the Umayyad period. His verses already betray a developed awareness and pride of the divine legacy of the pre-Islamic ancestors of the Quraysh. The pre-Islamic Arabian legacy which Farazdaq praises revolves around the central places of worship in the Ḥijāz, and above all the Kaʿba in Mecca. This sanctuary is closely associated in his mind with the universal legacy of Abraham, to which, in his perception, the Muslims are the direct heirs. They have inherited it from Abraham through the Arabian children of Ishmael, the ancestors of the Quraysh. Abraham's name appears in this context in the following verse in which Farazdaq proudly declares[70]:

> We have inherited from the friend (*khalīl*) of God a House/ suitable for prayer and purification
> It is the House towards which from every direction / the dead in the graves are directed.
> *Warithnā ʿan khalīli llāhi baytan yaṭību li-l-ṣalāti wa-li-l-ṭuhūri*
> *Huwa l-baytu lladhī min kulli wajhin ilayhi wujūhu aṣḥābi al-qubūri*

By "We" Farazdaq seems to refer to his own tribe, the Tamīm, who were deeply involved in the rites of the Kaʿba in pre-Islamic times[71]. But his pride has now gained a communal Islamic context, because the Kaʿba has become the destination of every believer, and all graves, as he says, are directed towards it. The key words here are "We inherited" (*warithnā*) which implies the idea of a divine legacy being handed down since Abraham.

The course of Abraham's legacy is strictly genealogical and goes through Ishmael, as is indicated in another verse in which Farazdaq states: "Our father is the friend of God and (so is) the son of His friend" (*abūnā khalīlu llāhi wa-ibnu khalīlihi*)[72]. This is an allusion to Abraham and Ishmael his son, forefathers of the community to which Farazdaq belongs.

In fact, elsewhere Farazdaq mentions explicitly several of the Arabian ancestors in close association with Abraham's legacy. This legacy was continued through the Umayyad caliphs, whom he praises in many of his verses. In some of the verses, Farazdaq mentions the forefather Luʾayy ibn Ghālib, as well as the heritage of Abraham, which the latter handed down to his posterity of the Quraysh, containing "every treasure and prophetic scripture"[73].

It is significant that Farazdaq's Mecca and the Kaʿba are not associated with any other prophet except Abraham, which seems, perhaps, to indicate that the traditions about Adam and Mecca, for example, are the result of a secondary elaboration on the initial Abrahamic kernel of the Arabian pilgrimage.

[70] Hammām ibn Ghālib al-Farazdaq, *Dīwān* (2 vols. Beirut 1960), vol. I, p. 283:9-10.
[71] See Kister, "Mecca and Tamīm", *passim*.
[72] Farazdaq, *Dīwān*, vol. II, p. 274:4.
[73] *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 282:4-5.

7 The Qur'ānic Evidence

Finally, one wonders whether the Qur'ānic retellings of biblical history already contain Arabian links.

To begin with, Bedouins (*a'rāb*) are treated in the Qur'ān with considerable contempt[74], and the only Arabian pride that is evinced in the Qur'ān is the linguistic one. The Qur'ān stresses repeatedly that the tongue of this scripture is clear Arabic[75].

As for the Quraysh, they are anything but virtuous, in fact they are treated as unbelievers who have to be admonished and called to repent (106:1-4).

As for the religious message of the Qur'ānic prophet, nowhere in the Qur'ān is there any hint that Muḥammad's prophethood is related to any Arabian prophetic precedent. His prophetic mission is strictly and exclusively related to the legacy of the Israelite prophets, as is stated for example in 4:163:

> We have revealed to you (our word) in the same way as We have revealed (it) to Noah and to the prophets after him, and as We revealed (it) to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes (of Israel), and Jesus and Job and Jonas, and Aaron and Solomon. We gave Psalms to David.

It is noteworthy that Abraham and Ishmael are entirely related here to the Israelite line of biblical prophets, and lack any Arabian link. All this seems to indicate that the Qur'ān preserves here a very early stage in the evolution of the Islamic self-image, when the basic model of Islam was still closely associated with the Israelite monotheistic legacy.

However, Abraham and Ishmael do appear in other verses in what seems to be an Arabian context. Thus in 14:35-41 the Qur'ān clearly associates the Holy House of God, i.e. the Ka'ba, with the posterity of Abraham, as well as with Abraham himself, who lodges his descendants close to that House. In 2:124-28, Abraham is accompanied by his son Ishmael, and God commands them to purify the House for worshippers frequenting it, and performing the rites there. Abraham and Ishmael raise up the "foundations of the House". Afterwards Abraham prays to God, asking him to show him the holy rites, and to send among his seed a messenger, who is the Qur'ānic Prophet (2:128-129).

This interchange of the Qur'ānic Abraham between the Israelite and the Arabian contexts–which is also indicated in some other Qur'ānic passages dealing with the Meccan pilgrimage–was noticed by Islamicists long ago, and already Snouck Hurgronje described it systematically[76]. For most mod-

[74] E.g. Qur'ān 9:97, 101.
[75] E.g. Qur'ān 16:103, etc.
[76] For details see R. Paret, "Abraham", *EI*², pp. 980-1.

ern scholars this was indicative of a change in Muḥammad's policy, who, following what is known as the "break with the Jews" of Medina, supposedly decided to dissociate himself from Jewish legacy and concentrate on the Arabian one. But this can only be accepted if one takes for granted the authenticity of the Qur'ān as a collection of prophetic revelations of the historical Muḥammad. On the other hand, in light of serious doubts that younger scholars have raised in this respect[77], one can no longer be sure what was the exact history of the Qur'ān. It is therefore equally feasible to assume that the Arabian oriented layers of the Qur'ān are the product of post Muḥammadan authors guided by a particularistic urge to highlight the Arabian origins of Islam.

[77] E.g. H.C. Graf Von Bothmer, K.H. Ohlig, and G.R. Puin, "Neue Wege der Koranforschung", *Magazin Forschung* 1 (1999), pp. 33-46.