

NOAH’S BOAT AND OTHER MISSED OPPORTUNITIES (2019 IQSA PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS)

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Abstract

This essay addresses the ways in which several of the most popular English translations of the Qur’ān treat cases in which the text draws on key biblical concepts and vocabulary. It suggests that when determining how such passages ought to be translated, one must take into account not only the meaning that fits the passage generally but also the extent to which the text reflects an intention to invoke, modify, alter, or ignore biblical precedent. In a number of cases, it is argued, many English translations adopt an anti-biblicizing translation, often a literal rendition, such as reference to the “ship” of Noah, that obscures the connection of the qur’ānic passage with biblical tradition. The adoption of a biblicizing translation, such as referring to Noah’s “ark” instead, would in many cases render tangible a connection with biblical texts that was originally intended.

Introduction

It is not surprising to claim that the Qur’ān is closely related to biblical tradition and that particular aspects of qur’ānic language are related to biblical language. A cursory reading of the Qur’ān is enough to show this, and any interested reader may find it out from a number of accessible secondary works. The majority of the characters that appear in the Qur’ān appear in the Bible. The biblical figures Moses and Abraham appear more frequently than any other figures in the text, and both are presented as models for the prophetic mission of Muḥammad. Judging on the basis of narrative prominence, one may argue that the hero of the Qur’ān is, in fact, Moses. The qur’ānic conceptions of creation, the flood, prophecy, sin, the eternal soul, angels, Satan, judgement, paradise, and hell all have obvious connections with biblical tradition. Key qur’ānic terms such as *jahannam* (“hell”) and *al-ṭūr* (“the mountain,” namely, Sinai) derive ultimately from Hebrew and Ar-

amaic or Syriac scriptural terms. Nevertheless, even specialists in Qur'ānic and Islamic Studies, both those who underestimate the indebtedness of the Qur'ān to biblical tradition and those who embrace it wholeheartedly and perhaps even exaggerate it in certain cases—let alone lay readers—often fail to see the forest for the trees. Much Qur'ānic Studies scholarship appears to dance around certain basic issues without stating the obvious, and related to this set of blind spots regarding the relation of qur'ānic to biblical material is the failure of some, many, or most English translations to capture the biblical valences of particular qur'ānic terms.

All translators of the Qur'ān repeatedly face the following issue: when a qur'ānic term is related in some fashion to salvation history and to earlier texts or concepts in the Jewish and Christian traditions, to what extent should the translator make those connections obvious in the English rendition? Translators have grappled with this problem in different ways, often unsuccessfully, in my view. Such translations may have occurred through lack of insight or limited background knowledge. They are certainly facilitated by recourse to qur'ānic commentaries that ignore biblical references. They may have resulted from an active desire to maintain a distance between the Qur'ān and the Bible, whether on the part of Muslim translators seeking to uphold the superiority of the Qur'ān and Islam to other scriptures and religions or on the part of Jewish and Christian translators seeking to protect biblical tradition from outside encroachment. In the following remarks, I address several examples in which, in my view, at least a few and sometimes most or all of the English translations fail to convey a biblical allusion or invocation that was intended in the text.

“Noah’s Ship” (I)

fa-anjaynāhu wa-aṣḥāba 'l-safīnati wa-ja'alnāhā āyatan li'l-'ālamīn

And We rescued him and those with him in the ship, and made of it a portent for the peoples. (Q 29:15)¹

1. This essay draws on a limited number of translations of the Qur'ān into English. I could have cited dozens more English translations, not to mention translations of the Qur'ān into French, German, Italian, Spanish, and other European languages, but that would not have changed the overall point, since they all share, *grosso modo*, the same issues that are raised here, only varying in degree. The English translations I will cite include the following: Richard Bell (trans.), *The Qur'ān, Translated, with a Critical Re-arrangement of the Surahs* (2 vols; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937–1939); Marmaduke Pickthall (trans.), *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992); Abdullah Yusuf Ali (trans.), *The Holy Qur'ān: Text, Translation and*

Thus, Marmaduke Pickthall renders the conclusion to a brief account of Noah and the flood in *Sūrat al-ʿAnkabūt* (Q 29). Arthur John Arberry and Alan Jones render the verse in similar fashion:

Yet We delivered him, and those who were in the ship, and appointed it for a sign unto all beings. (Arberry)

We rescued him and those [with him] in the ship, which We made a sign for created beings. (Jones)

All three translators render the Arabic term *safīnah* here as “ship.” One might wonder how they justified their choice of the term “ship” instead of “ark,” which one would expect in a retelling of Noah’s story. These translators may have been influenced by the fact that the terms used to designate Noah’s ark in the *Qurʾān* also refer to ordinary ships. For example, the ordinary boat in the story of Moses’s mysterious teacher in *Sūrat al-Kahf* is also designated as a *safīnah* (Q 18:71.79). Similarly, while Noah’s vessel is most frequently termed *al-fulk* in the *Qurʾān* (Q 7:64, 10:73, 11:37.38, 23:27, 26:119, 36:41), the same word, *fulk*, is used for other types of boats in several other verses (e.g., Q 2:164, 14:32). Perhaps on this account, Pickthall chose to render Noah’s *fulk*, as well as *safīnah*, throughout as “ship.” One could also argue that this situation contrasts with that found in the Bible, since the common word for “ship” or “boat” is *ʿoniyyâ* (e.g., Prov 30:19, Jonah 1:3.4), while, in contrast, Noah’s ark is designated by a distinct term, *tēbâ*. Keeping the English rendering consistent across the two categories of Noah’s vessel and of other ordinary vessels might signal to the audience a distinct difference from the biblical presentation.

While the translations of Pickthall, Arberry, and Jones are in a sense technically correct, because the word *safīnah* does mean “ship” and the vessel portrayed in Q 29:15 certainly has the basic features of a ship, I consider them tactical blunders. There is something disturbing about this rendition of the verse, because the ship in question is clearly Noah’s ark, the same one that appears in Genesis. To call it otherwise somehow does violence to the story, as if to drive a wedge between the *qurʾānic* and the biblical version of the story. In this particular case, many other translators did not choose

Commentary, new revised ed. (Brentwood: Amana Corporation, 1989); M. H. Shakir (trans.), *Qurʾān: The Translation* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qurʾān, 1993); Arthur John Arberry (trans.), *The Koran Interpreted* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1955); Alan Jones (trans.), *The Qurʾān* (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007); M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (trans.), *The Qurʾān: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Tarif Khalidi (trans.), *The Qurʾān* (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

the path adopted by Pickthall, Arberry, and Jones, and instead translated *safīnah* as “ark.”

But We saved him and the companions of the Ark, and We made the (Ark) a Sign for all peoples! (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

We saved him and those with him on the Ark. We made this a sign for all people. (Muhammad Abdel Haleem)

But him We saved, as also the passengers in the Ark, making it a wonder to mankind. (Tarif Khalidi)

In my view, these translations are more satisfying because they render transparent the connection of this particular passage with the biblical story of Noah’s ark and the flood.

In order to decide which translation is preferable, one must consider the intention behind the qur’ānic passages in question. Is the scene in which Noah and his companions are saved supposed to recall the biblical story of Noah’s ark, is it intended to highlight a significant distinction between the two accounts, or is it purposefully ignoring the biblical account? In my view, the answer to this question is obvious: this scene is intended to recall its biblical counterpart, as many other passages do. This does not mean that such recall is always intended or that contrasts are not intended in other cases. Translating *safīnah* or *fulk* as “ark” is therefore preferable by far, on the grounds that it makes the intended connection all the more obvious, rather than obscuring or concealing it.

Noah’s ark is an inspiring symbol in the Qur’ān and in Islamic literature generally. For example, a recently published work on Shāfi’ī law bears the title *Safīnat al-najāh fī mā yajibu ‘alā ’l-‘abd li-mawlāh*, “The Ark of Salvation, on the Obligations of the Worshiper to His Lord.”² This title, like hundreds of others throughout Islamic history, invokes the symbol of Noah’s ark as an indication that the book is indispensable for the reader’s religious instruction and soteriological needs. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350) authored *al-Kāfiyah al-shāfiyah*, “The Curative and Sufficient Treatise,” a theological treatise in which he championed orthodox Islamic theology, that of the “true monotheists” (*muwaḥḥidūn*), against the heretical theology of “anthropomorphists” (*mushabbihūn*), meaning extreme literalists, and “nullifiers” (*mu‘aṭṭilūn*), meaning the Mu‘tazilīs, who in his opinion did not give God’s attributes their full due. In it he wrote, “the nullifier has fallen

2. Sālīm b. Samīr al-Ḥaḍramī, *Safīnat al-najāh fī mā yajibu ‘alā ’l-‘abd li-mawlāh* (Jedda: Dār al-Minhāj, 2009).

behind and has missed the ark of salvation, but the true monotheist has embarked on Noah's ark."³ This fourteenth-century author is taking up a common trope that likens "the saved sect" (*al-firqah al-nājiyah*), the one sect that has adopted the correct doctrine—of the seventy-two into which Islam was predicted to divide in a famous *ḥadīth* report—with the passengers on Noah's ark.

Another large set of examples related to the doctrinal use of Noah's ark is provided by Shī'ī tradition. Shī'īs regularly refer to the Imams as Noah's ark—the point being that the believer can only hope for salvation if he or she pledges allegiance to the Imam of the age. They often cite the *ḥadīth* report, "The likeness of my descendants (*ahl baytī*) is that of Noah's ark (*safīnat nūḥ*): whoever embarks on it will be saved, and whoever fails to do so will be drowned."⁴ The Shī'ī comparison of their own sect with Noah's ark is a fundamental feature of their theology.⁵ It resembles the Christian comparison of the Church to Noah's ark, also ubiquitous, occurring perhaps most famously in the papal bull of Boniface VIII (1294–1303), *Unam sanctam* (1302).⁶ And with the symbol of Noah's ark is associated the principle, parallel to Shī'ī doctrine of the Imamate, of *nulla salus extra ecclesiam*, "there is no being saved outside the church." Without engaging in a grand tour of medieval Islamic theology, one may recognize that the image of Noah's ark, in the Qur'ān and in ideas inspired by the Qur'ān throughout Islamic culture, carries with it the same sorts of symbolic value that it does in Jewish and Christian tradition. And while these are obviously post-qur'ānic

3. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *al-Kāfiyah al-shāfiyah fī 'l-intiṣār li'l-firqah al-nājiyah* (4 vols.; Mecca: Dār 'Ālam al-Fawā'id, 1428 AH), 1.46–47.

4. Muḥsin al-Amin, *al-Shī'ah bayn al-ḥaqā'iq wa'l-awḥām: Naqd al-Washī'ah* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-ʿAlamī, 1983), 30; Ibn Qutaybah, *Uyūn al-akḥbār*, ed. Yūsuf ʿAlī Ṭawīl (4 vols.; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 2009), 1.310. The report occurs in many variant versions.

5. Khalid Sindawi, "Noah and Noah's Ark as the Primordial Model of Shī'ism in Shī'ite Literature," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* (n.s.) 1 (2006): 29–48.

6. For the Latin text, see Wilhelm Römer, *Die Bulle unam sanctam* (Schaffhausen: Johannes Bachmann, 1889). For the English translation, see Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom with History and Critical Notes*, vol. 2: *The Greek and Latin Creeds, with Translations* (New York: Harper Brothers, 1919), 605–607. For historical and theological context, see Don Louis Tosti, *History of Pope Boniface VIII and His Times, with Notes and Documentary Evidence*, trans. Eugene J. Donnelly (New York: Christian Press Association Publishing Company, 1911), 349–356; Walter Ullmann, "Boniface VIII and His Contemporary Scholarship," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 27 (1976): 58–87; R. M. Johannessen, "Cardinal Jean Lemoine and the Authorship of the Glosses to Unam Sanctam," *Bulletin of Medieval Canon Law* 33 (1988): 33–42.

examples, this particular symbolic use of Noah's ark is in keeping with and inspired by the Qur'an's presentation. In Noah's story as in many other cases in the qur'anic punishment stories, a tiny group of believers are saved, while those who did not embark on the ark are annihilated (cf. Q al-Shu'arā' 26). There is thus a very compelling reason to make that connection apparent when one is translating the Qur'an into English.

This is not to say that no significant differences exist between the qur'anic and the biblical versions of Noah's story (or between the qur'anic and biblical versions of many other stories). In fact, a quite radical difference is associated with the denouement of the two versions, which seem to be diametrically opposed. Both accounts end with prominent reference to a sign from the Almighty, but whereas the sign of the rainbow in the biblical account signals God's promise that He will never again destroy the world by flood, in the qur'anic account God leaves the ark as a sign to indicate that He will continue to annihilate future peoples who reject the teachings and warnings of their prophets. The point here, though, is that the role the ark plays in saving Noah and his companions is parallel and similar in the Bible and the Qur'an, and thus a biblicizing translation, calling attention to that similarity, is entirely appropriate. Noah's ark is the sole means available of escaping all-encompassing destruction, and this is as true of the qur'anic version of the story as it is of the biblical version. The ark is no ordinary ship.

Questions of Etymology, Influence, and Translation

Deciding how to translate qur'anic terms that resonate with biblical texts is not a simple matter, and it is tied to general views of the extent of biblical influence on the Qur'an and views of etymology and borrowing. The question of the existence of foreign vocabulary in the Qur'an is an old one, both in Islamic letters and in Western scholarship. Medieval Muslim scholars realized that a number of terms in the Qur'an were related to Hebrew, Aramaic/Syriac, Persian, Greek, Latin, South Arabian, and Ethiopic words. They were conscious that this was potentially problematic for two reasons. First, it opened up the possibility that the Qur'an contained borrowings from Jewish and Christian texts, and secondly, it threatened to contradict the explicit text of the Qur'an, which states in several passages that it is *qur'ānan 'arabiyyan*, "an Arabic Qur'an" (Q 12:2, 20:113, 39:28, 41:3, 42:7, 43:3). The main argument put forward by medieval Muslim commentators was that, even if some qur'anic words were related to foreign etyma, they had been assimilated into Arabic before the Qur'an was revealed and so,

since they were *bona fide* Arabic words, the Qur'ān's characterization of itself as an Arabic Qur'ān could not be impugned.

In the European tradition of Qur'ānic Studies, the investigation of foreign words in the Qur'ān and biblical influence on Islam's sacred text have been strongly linked.⁷ However, it must be recognized that the matter is a bit tricky, in part because the main biblical languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac are Semitic languages that have many cognates in common with Arabic. It is thus possible that certain Qur'ānic words are similar to corresponding words in the Bible simply because they derive from the same original etymon in proto-Western Semitic and were not borrowed into the Qur'ān from biblical texts. This is obviously the case for numbers, basic kinship terms, the words for day, night, year, the sun, and so on. Less obvious, perhaps, is the term *hajj*, designating the pilgrimage to Mecca in the Qur'ān (Q 2:189–197, 22:27), which phonetically resembles the Hebrew word *ḥag* (“festival” or “feast day”; e.g., Exod 10:9 and 12:14, Num 28:17). This is not a borrowing from the Hebrew Bible or from other texts in Jewish tradition but rather, in all likelihood, already designated a religious ritual of some sort in proto-West Semitic. That original etymon came eventually to designate pilgrimage in Arabic and a religious festival in Hebrew. Similarly, Arabic *salām* (“peace”) and Hebrew *šālôm* (“peace”) occur as greetings in the Qur'ān (e.g., Q 4:94, 6:54, 7:46, 10:10, 13:24) and the Hebrew Bible (Gen 43:23, Judg 6:23, Dan 10:19), respectively.⁸ It seems likely that this is not a case of the borrowing of biblical texts or concepts into the Qur'ān. Rather, *salām* and *šālôm* have a common origin in proto-Western Semitic. *Salām* (“peace”) was probably already a standard form of greeting in the ancestral language, and the usage lived on in the daughter languages.

There are, however, intermediate cases, in which similar terms may be signs of borrowing even though they happen to be cognate words. The words for cucumbers—Arabic *qiththā'*, Hebrew *qiššū'ā'*—and onions—Arabic *baṣal*, Hebrew *bāṣāl*—are obvious cognates that derive from an ancient, common origin in the Semitic language tree. One should not suppose that these words owe their existence in the Arabic lexicon to the fact that they

7. Josef Horowitz, “Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 2 (1925): 145–227, 208–209; Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* (Leiden: Brill, 2007 [1938]); D. S. Margoliouth, “Some Additions to Professor Jeffery's *Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*,” *JRAS* 71 (1939): 53–61; Andrew Rippin, “Foreign Vocabulary,” *EQ*, s.v. (2002). For a historical overview of this topic, see the works of Jeffery and Rippin cited here.

8. Irene Lande, *Formelhafte Wendungen der Umgangssprache im Alten Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1949), especially “Die Grüssformel,” pp. 2–12.

have been imported into the Qurʾān from biblical Hebrew. It is nevertheless clear that the single verse that includes these words in the Qurʾān, “And recall when you said, ‘O Moses, we can never endure one kind of food, so call upon your Lord to bring forth for us from the earth its green herbs and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions’” (Q al-Baqarah 2:61), is closely related to a particular biblical passage, Num 11:4–5. That text reads, “The rabble who were among them had greedy desires; and also the sons of Israel wept again and said, ‘Who will give us meat to eat? We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers (*haqqiṣṣuʾim*), melons, leeks, onions (*habbaṣālīm*), and garlic.” Comparison of the two texts show that, while they differ somewhat in terms of both content and order, the Arabic text is clearly a version of the biblical statement, including these prominent cognates. Another mixed example is that of the *mathal*, which has most often been translated as “parable” in Qurʾānic Studies, even though it also designates “proverb, comparison, exemplum” in the text, in addition to “parable.” *Mathal* is cognate with Hebrew *māšāl*, which has a similarly wide range of meanings, and both presumably go back to the proto-West Semitic **mathal*, which, in all likelihood, originally meant “proverb.” Even though parables were important in both Jewish and Christian tradition before the advent of Islam, the term *mathal* cannot be a borrowing from Hebrew *māšāl*, since it would not have contained a *-th-* in that case; instead, proto-Semitic *-th-* remained *-th-* in Arabic but changed to *-ṣ-* in Hebrew. However, even if this is true, the Qurʾānic parables may have been influenced to some degree by rabbinic parables or the parables of Jesus.

In other cases, however, certain foreign terms in the Qurʾān clearly derive from biblical tradition and have been borrowed along with more or less their same, original meanings. So, for example, *al-asbāt* refers in the Qurʾān to the “tribes,” that is, the twelve tribes of Israel (Q 2:136.140, 3:84, 4:163, 7:160). This word derives from the Hebrew *šəbāṭīm*, “tribes,” and is obviously distinct from the ordinary Arabic word for tribe, *qabīlah*. The word *al-ṭūr* is used in the Qurʾān to refer to Mount Sinai (Q 2:63.93, 4:154, 19:52, 20:80, 23:20, 28:29.46, 52:1, 95:2). It derives from Aramaic *ṭūrā* (“the mountain”), and it is substituted instead of the ordinary word for mountain in Arabic, *jabal*, or Hebrew *har*. After *al-nār*, “the fire,” the most frequently used term for hell in the Qurʾān is *jahannam*, which derives ultimately from *gêʾ [ben-] hinnōm* (“the Valley of [the Son of] Hinnom”; Jer 7:31 and 19:2–6).⁹ In these and other cases, there is little to suggest that these words were simply cog-

9. It has been suggested that the Arabic term derives indirectly from Hebrew

nates that had been passed down the Semitic language tree or that they had been borrowed into Arabic long before the Qur'ān was produced. It seems clear that they derive from biblical or other Jewish and Christian texts.

However, one must exercise caution in interpreting such terms, for certain borrowed words may be used in entirely different senses. As Walid Saleh has explained, the field of Qur'ānic Studies is plagued by a collection of bad interpretive habits that he labels “the etymological fallacy.” The fallacy includes, first, the assumption that whenever the Muslim exegetes do not agree on the meaning of a Qur'ānic term, then it must derive from a foreign term. The second assumption is that whenever a foreign etymon has been identified, the interpretive problem has been completely solved. Saleh points out that neither of these assumptions is warranted and that the procedure is flawed, especially because it does not take into account the meanings of the terms in the contexts in which they occur. Among a number of examples, he cites the term *ḥanīf*, which, many scholars agree, is related to the Syriac *ḥanpā* (“heathen”), but which obviously has a positive and quite distinct meaning in the Qur'ān. On the basis of the Qur'ānic evidence, for example, the term *ḥanīf* “reflects a notion of basic religious impulse in humanity towards dedication to the one God.” The point is that understanding the term *ḥanīf* as meaning “heathen” does not at all explain its correct meaning in the Qur'ān. This entire discussion is directly relevant to the topic addressed here because most of the “foreign” terms identified in such investigations are related to biblical and post-biblical Jewish and Christian traditions. Having identified a particular Qur'ānic term as being related in some fashion to Jewish and Christian texts, one may not assume that it is being used with the same or even with a similar meaning, without examining carefully the contexts in which it occurs.¹⁰ Even if the term is clearly related to a biblical precedent, the Qur'ānic text may be recognizing, accentuating, playing down, modifying, distorting, or even completely ignoring a term's biblical origin. Knowing the original usage, or an earlier us-

through Gə'əz. Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, 57–58, 105–106, 206–207.

10. Walid A. Saleh, “The Etymological Fallacy and Qur'anic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity,” in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (eds.), *The Qur'ān in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 649–698, esp. 659; Andrew Rippin, “RḤMNN and the Ḥanīfs,” in Wael B. Hallaq and Donald P. Little (eds.), *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 153–168, esp. 161. On etymology and interpretation of the Qur'ān, see also Ghassan El Masri, *The Semantics of Qur'anic Language: al-Āḥira* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 7–50.

age, of a word does not guarantee that one understands its later usage. For example, “manufactured” decidedly does not now mean “made by hand,” even though that was the original sense.¹¹

The anti-biblicizing or alienating rendering of the references to Noah’s vessel is emblematic of the practice of many qur’ānic translators with regard to elements of biblical tradition that are invoked in the Qur’ān. They regularly opt for a literal translation, often the most common sense of the word in question. They may not have noticed that the word could be rendered otherwise. They may have neglected or overlooked the connection of particular vocabulary with the Bible, something that could be due to lack of familiarity with certain aspects of the biblical tradition. Alternatively, they may have decided to avoid a particular translation out of an intention to create some distance between the Qur’ān and the Bible. This type of translation practice occurs from both directions: Muslim translators may strive to separate the Qur’ān from the Bible so that the text does not appear derivative and so that Islam as a whole maintains a more distinct profile. Jewish and Christian translators may strive to make the Qur’ān appear more distinct and distant from biblical tradition and similarly may stress Islam’s distance from Judaism and Christianity. In either scenario, translators may have ideological biases or goals behind their overall approach, using the distinctive nature of Islam to argue for its superiority on the one hand and its inferiority—or at least its failure to merit inclusion with the other “Abrahamic” faiths—on the other hand.

This strategy of division is taken to an extreme when *allāh*, the Arabic term for the biblical God, is not translated as God, but left in transliterated Arabic form, a practice that is quite common. For example, a revised version of Yusuf Ali’s Qur’ān translation was produced in 1989 by Amana Publications with official backing of the government of Saudi Arabia. One of the striking features of this version was that all of Yusuf Ali’s mentions of “God” were corrected, so to speak, to “Allah.”¹² In a typical answer to the question whether the name *allāh* can be translated, one pundit in a Kuwaiti newspaper argues that, since the names of God are known by direct designation in scripture (*tawqīf*), translations must therefore take into account the original contexts in which they occur and the meanings intended in those contexts. He argues that use of the English word “God”

11. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “The True Meaning of Scripture: An Empirical Historian’s Nonreductionist Interpretation of the Qur’an,” *IJMES* 11 (1980): 487–505, esp. 501.

12. Bruce Lawrence, *Who Is Allah?* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 174.

can conjure up worshipped beings other than Allah, whose definitions and characteristics do not correspond to those of Allah. In his view, the God that the Christians worship is not the single and singular being worshipped by Muslims, by which he apparently—and typically—refers to the Christian Trinity. Therefore, the word *allāh* in foreign language translations should either be retained in the Arabic script or presented as “Allah” in Roman letters.¹³ Some Christian authors make the same argument from the other side. Even if one sets aside alarmist evangelical polemics such as *Allah, God of the Moon: Why We Should Fear the Islamic Cult*,¹⁴ somewhat more careful writers such as the Catholic theologian Felix Körner argue that one must not assume that *allāh* can be translated as “God” on account of the different theological understandings attached to those terms in Christianity and Islam.¹⁵ Despite the obvious importance of Judaism for a discussion of this topic, it is interesting to note that it is framed, on both sides, primarily as a conflict between Christian and Islamic theology.

A similar difference of opinion may be seen with regard to the translation of biblical personal names that occur in the Qurʾān. Perhaps the most consistent of the popular English translations in this regard, Muhammad Habib Shakir’s translation keeps all of the names of biblical characters in their Arabic forms, using “Ibrahim” instead of “Abraham,” “Musa” instead of “Moses,” “Yusuf” instead of “Joseph,” and so on, as if to suggest to Jewish or Christian readers: Don’t think that *our* Ibrahim and *our* Musa are the same as *your* Abraham and *your* Moses. Similarly, Michel Lagarde’s decision to retain the Arabic forms of biblical names in his translation of al-Suyūṭī’s substantial manual of the Qurʾānic sciences, *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qurʾān*, apparently reflects a similar view, that Ibrahim and Abraham cannot, in fact, be considered the same character on account of differences in interpretation between the Bible and the Qurʾān.¹⁶ With regard both to *allāh* and to the Ar-

13. Nāẓim al-Misbāh, “Lafẓ al-jalālah,” *Jarīdat al-Anbāʾ* (Kuwait), May 3, 2013, <https://www.alanba.com.kw/ar/kuwait-news/islamic-faith/378850/03-05-2013>.

14. Steve Preston, *Allah, God of the Moon: Why We Should Fear the Islamic Cult* (Scott Valley: Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, 2014).

15. Felix Körner, “JHWH, Gott, Allāh: drei Namen für dieselbe Wirklichkeit?” *Theologisch-praktische Quartalschrift* 158 (2010): 31–38; idem, “Der Gott Israels, Jesu und Muḥammads? Trinitätstheologie als Regula im interreligiösen Gespräch,” *Gregorianum* 92 (2011): 139–158; Klaus von Stosch, “Does Allah Translate ‘God’? Translating Concepts between Religions,” in Michael P. De Jonge and Christiane Tietz (eds.), *Translating Religion: What Is Lost and Gained?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), 123–136.

16. Michel Lagarde (trans.), *Le parfait manuel des sciences coraniques: al-Itqān fi*

abic names of biblical figures, however, there are inconsistencies in translation practices. Pickthall's translation uses both "Allah" and "God" frequently, and the logic behind the alternation is not clear. Many translations, such as that of Pickthall, regularly give the ordinary English versions of most biblical names, such as "Noah," "Moses," "Abraham," "Lot," and so on while at the same time retaining the Arabic form "Imrān" without rendering it as "Amram," the ordinary English version of the name of Moses's father.

While theological considerations clearly play a part in qur'ānic translation practices regarding the name of God and the biblical personal names, I do not believe that they are the major deciding factor in the other examples examined here. In most cases, the translators are choosing the most common literal translation for a term that has biblical associations, so it may be that they simply were unaware of the connection. Most instances in which I argue that the translations fail to emphasize the biblical valences of terms are simply cases of a type of inertia. With regard to most of the examples examined here, translators have tended to follow the interpretive choices of earlier translators or common usage in secondary scholarship in Islamic Studies. This tradition has been influenced ultimately both by Muslim commentaries on the Qur'ān and by Western scholarship in Islamic Studies generally. The examples presented suffice to indicate that there is no simple divide with regard to the treatment of biblical allusions in the Qur'ān between Muslims and Christians, conservatives or liberals, traditionalists or modernists, nor is it the case that some translators consistently capture all the biblical allusions, while others consistently miss or conceal them. The point is, rather, that even translators whom one might expect to be favorably disposed to a biblicalizing rendition often miss the opportunity, for whatever reason, to employ such a translation. In the end, many of these cases are simply the consequence of following the tradition of earlier Qur'ān translations. Whatever the cause of the adoption of anti-biblical or alienating translations, in many cases they go against both the letter and the spirit of the qur'ānic text.

Several aspects of Western Qur'ānic Studies' historical development may have contributed to the neglect of biblical valences in Qur'ān translations into English and the European languages. Some of the blame lies with the lack of attention to the relationship between the Qur'ān and the biblical tradition that was a by-product of a general slump in Qur'ānic Studies in the mid-late twentieth century. One cause of this was the break-up of the

ʿulūm al-Qur'ān *de Ġalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī* (849/1445–911/1505) (2 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2018).

critical mass of Qur'ānic Studies scholars in Germany following the rise of the Nazi party. In addition, Qur'ānic Studies early on developed distinct silos or sub-genres of scholarship, such that discussions of the relationship of the Qur'ān and the Bible tended to be excluded from general introductions to the Qur'ān. The topic was absent from Gustav Weil's *Historisch-Kritische Einleitung in den Koran* (1844), Nöldeke's influential *Geschichte des Qorans* (1860 and 1909–1930), and Régis Blachère's *Introduction au Coran* (1947, 1959). Richard Bell included a short discussion of the topic in his *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (1953), but Montgomery Watt effectively edited it out of his revised version of Bell's work, published 1970, because he felt that discussion of the topic would offend Muslims and work against cordial Christian-Muslim dialogue. In the field of religious studies in the latter half of the twentieth century, many scholars interested in the Qur'ān were influenced by the ideas of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who argued that, in order to take non-Christian religions seriously, scholars in religious studies needed to examine non-Christian scriptures such as the Qur'ān with particular attention to the ways in which Muslims have understood the text over the centuries. One practical consequence of his ideas was to shift attention of scholars whose interests lay in Islamic scripture from the Qur'ānic text to *tafsīr*.¹⁷ Moreover, most translations of the Qur'ān have not been undertaken by experts in Qur'ānic Studies, but by scholars in other fields, such as literature, history, and philosophy, who did not incorporate advances in Qur'ānic Studies into their translations. It is difficult to assign particular translation decisions to any of these factors, but they all worked to downplay attention to the influence of biblical texts on the Qur'ān. In the end, as mentioned, the main factor for the persistence of anti-biblicizing, or non-biblicizing, translations may simply be inertia in the history of Qur'ān translation, in which the common practice of many who have undertaken new translations has

17. Nicolai Sinai and Angelika Neuwirth, "Introduction," in Neuwirth, Sinai, and Marx, *The Qur'ān in Context*, 1–24, 5–6; Devin J. Stewart, "Reflections on the State of the Art in Western Qur'anic Studies," in Carol Bakhos and Michael Cook (eds.), *Islam and Its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 4–68; Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorans* (Göttingen: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1860); Régis Blachère, *Introduction au Coran* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve, 1947 [2nd ed., 1959]); Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1953); Richard Bell and William Montgomery Watt, *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān*, completely revised and enlarged (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970); Smith, "The True Meaning of Scripture." I hope to address this topic in more detail in a future study.

been simply to adopt one of the earlier translations as a basis and modify it in some respects.

“God’s House” (II)

Bayt is the ordinary word for house in Arabic, though it can take on senses such as “room,” “tent,” “spiderweb,” “beehive,” and a host of others. In one set of passages in the Qur’ān, this term is used to refer to the Ka‘bah, the rectangular building that was Mecca’s main shrine before the advent of Islam and later the focus of daily Islamic prayer. In these verses, English translations most often render the term as “house.” However, I suggest that it means “temple” in this context and that it ought to be translated as such. The most common word for temple in the Semitic languages is in fact *bayt*, and this usage presumably goes back to proto-Semitic. The Akkadian cognate *bītu*, for example, means “house, dwelling, temple, sanctuary, palace, region, household, family, property,” and the genitive construct *bīt ili*, literally, “house of god,” is a standard Akkadian term for “temple.” In Hebrew, the temple in Jerusalem is *bêt hammiqdāš*, literally, “the house of holiness” (2 Chr 36:17), which becomes *bayt al-maqdis* in Arabic, though that term does not occur in the Qur’ān. Significantly, the biblical text also refers to the temple in Jerusalem as *bêt YHWH*, “the house of Yahweh” (e.g., 1 Kgs 3:1, 2 Kgs 24:13). The term “the house of God” (*bêt hā’ēlōhīm*), a label that corresponds closely to *bayt allāh* in the Qur’ān, is used to refer to the tabernacle at Shiloh (Judg 18:31).

Use of the term *bīt/bêt/bayt* to mean “temple” obviously originates in an analogy between a human master’s house and the house of a god. The divinity lives in this house, which is recognized as his or her special property. Like the owner of a mundane estate, he or she has servants who run the household, clean the rooms, tend the grounds, prepare and serve meals, and entertain, pamper, and flatter their master or mistress. The emphasis on God’s transcendence in later Jewish and Christian tradition and in the Qur’ān made such analogies between house and temple less obvious, apt, and doctrinally acceptable. In modern English, the close connection between an ordinary house and a temple is mainly lost. One can still refer to a center of worship as a house of God, with the difference that one is not signaling that He actually resides at that address. Despite the existence of that turn of phrase, when the Ka‘bah is referred to as a “house” in English, this fails to carry the weight of veneration that the designation “temple” does.

Muslims do not pray towards Mecca because it is the native town of the Prophet, but rather because it is the location of a biblical temple. The early

Muslims originally prayed toward Jerusalem on the grounds that it was the site of Solomon's temple. When it was revealed in the Qur'an that the Ka'bah had been built by Abraham and Ishmael but subsequently corrupted by Arab pagans, this was connected with the idea that it had originally been consecrated as a temple to the biblical God.¹⁸ The Prophet Muḥammad's mission was framed in part as a project to restore Abraham's temple to its original purpose. Moreover, the Ka'bah was the first temple, since Abraham lived centuries before Solomon, whose grand monument was actually the second temple. As Angelika Neuwirth puts it succinctly: "Mecca is thus 'the first temple of God.'"¹⁹ This understanding is clear from Q Āl 'Imrān 3:96: *inna awwala baytin wuḍi'a li'l-nāsi la'lladhī bi-bakkata* ("The first temple erected for mankind is certainly that at Bakkah"), Bakkah being understood as an alternative designation of Mecca. Since the Ka'bah is portrayed as a precursor of other biblical temples, the many references to the Ka'bah as a "house" (Q 2:125.127.158, 3:96, 5:2.97, 8:35, 14:37, 22:26, 106:3) should preferably be rendered as "temple." Accordingly, the epithet *al-bayt al-ḥarām* (Q al-Mā'idah 5:97) should be "the sacred temple" or "the inviolable temple," and the epithet *al-bayt al-'atīq* (Q al-Ḥajj 22:29.33) should be "the ancient temple."

The view that *bayt* in qur'ānic usage means "temple" has been rejected by at least one investigator in the field of Qur'ānic Studies, on the basis of what is, in my view, an ultimately unconvincing argument. In *Le Seigneur des tribus: L'Islam de Mahomet*, Jacqueline Chabbi undertakes an analysis of the rise of Islam that concentrates on its setting in the geography of the Ḥijāz and in tribal society of the time. This attempt to emphasize the Arabian background of Islam and the Qur'an is an important corrective to the works of Wansbrough and other scholars who treat both as related entirely to biblical traditions and downplay or completely ignore the influence of pre-Islamic Arabian pagan religion. At the same time, an exclusive emphasis on the Arabian background risks downplaying the strategies of adopting biblical history as the central framework of qur'ānic salvation history and of rejecting certain pre-Islamic Arabian concepts such as the poetic virtues of extravagant generosity, violence, and pride and loyalties based primarily on solidarities of clan and tribe that clearly play an important role in the Qur'an and in the early Islamic movement. In one chapter of her work, Chabbi describes the physical space of Mecca, addressing, among

18. Gerald R. Hawting, "Ka'ba," *EQ*, s.v. (2003); Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*, trans. Samuel Wilder (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 398–402.

19. Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 401.

other things, the nature of the Ka‘bah. She argues that the Ka‘bah was not a temple, suggesting that the term *bayt* in Arabic differs considerably from its Hebrew counterpart in that *bayt* is much less concrete in conception, because it means “tent” or any place where one spends the night. She argues that in it were combined two conceptions, neither of which corresponds to that of a temple: a sacred enclosure and a betyl or sacred stone in which the power of the divinity was concentrated. Neither is an actual building.²⁰ This argument is based on certain important observations, such as the fact that the Ka‘bah is associated with a betyl, the black stone that is embedded in its wall, and that the term *bayt* was applied to sacred stones—betyl derives from *bet el* (“a house of god”)—which were conceived of as receptacles for the powers of particular gods. It is also an argument from silence: Chabbi is reluctant to term the Ka‘bah a temple not only because she is engaged throughout her work in downplaying the connections of Islam and the Qur‘ān with biblical tradition and correspondingly emphasizing the distinct Arabian tradition but also because little information has been preserved about what used to occur inside the Ka‘bah, suggesting that all the important ritual activity, and primarily circumambulation, took place *around* the Ka‘bah. This ignores a number of reports about the idols that were housed inside the Ka‘bah, such as a statue of the god Hubal, along with other decorations, such as paintings of Mary and Jesus, Abraham and Ishmael.²¹ Even if those accounts are apocryphal, it is not unreasonable to suppose the use of the interior of the Ka‘bah for ritual activity on the basis of analogy with other shrines and scattered hints in Islamic literature such as Hishām b. al-Kalbī’s (d. c. 206/821) *Kitāb al-Aṣnām*.²² Crucial, also, is the recognition that, whatever the pre-Islamic notions of the Ka‘bah were, it was transformed in the Qur‘ān and early Islamic tradition and reinterpreted as a biblical temple dedicated to the worship of the one God.

“The Disasters” (III)

The term *al-mu’tafikāt* occurs three times in the Qur‘ān, in all cases in a list of earlier rebellious peoples who were punished through God’s wrath. The singular form *al-mu’tafikah* appears once (Q al-Najm 53:53), and the

20. Jacqueline Chabbi, *Le Seigneur des tribus: L’Islam de Mahomet* (Paris: Éditions Noesis, 1997), 31–55, esp. 36–39, 51.

21. G. R. D. King, “The Paintings of the Pre-Islamic Ka‘ba,” *Muqarnas* 21 (2004): 219–229.

22. Hishām b. al-Kalbī, *The Book of Idols*, trans. Nabih Amin Faris (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), passim.

plural form *al-mu'tafikāt* twice (Q 9:70, 69:9). In Q 53:53, *al-mu'tafikah* occurs immediately after reports of God's destruction of 'Ād, Thamūd, and Noah's people (Q 53:50–52). In Sūrat al-Ḥāqqah, *al-mu'tafikāt* occurs after a description of the destruction of Thamūd and 'Ād (Q 69:4–8). It is mentioned along with “Pharaoh and those before him” (Q 69:9–10), suggesting that they represent one of the communities that were destroyed before the time of Moses and Pharaoh. In Q al-Tawbah 9:70, *al-mu'tafikāt* occurs in a list of annihilated communities, after mention of the folk of Noah, 'Ād, Thamūd, the folk of Abraham, and the dwellers of Midian. In all cases, then, the term occurs together with names of earlier peoples who were destroyed by God, and so likely refers to a parallel, historical people who were subjected to God's wrath.

With regard to form, the word *mu'tafikah* is an active participle of form VIII, from the root combination ^ʿ-f-k. It thus appears, at first glance, to be related to the term *ifk* (“lying, deception”; Q 24:11.12, 25:4, 29:17, 31:43, 37:86.151, 46:11.28) and *affāk* (“inveterate liar”; Q 26:222, 45:7), but these cognates do not appear to give an appropriate meaning for the contexts in which *al-mu'tafikah* and *al-mu'tafikāt* occur. Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall renders the term variously in his translation. In Q 53:53, he interprets *al-mu'tafikah* as a proper noun, refraining from translating it: “And Al-Mu'tafikah He destroyed.” In Q 69:9 he translates it as “the communities that were destroyed”: “And Pharaoh and those before him, and the communities that were destroyed, brought error.” In Q 9:70, he translates the term as “the disasters”: “Hath not the fame of those before them reached them—the folk of Noah, A'ad, Thamud, the folk of Abraham, the dwellers of Midian and the disasters (which befell them)?” First, these are three distinct translations for as many verses, and while that might be required in other circumstances, it appears that the three contexts here do not differ considerably, and a single rendition would have been appropriate. Secondly, “disasters” is certainly wrong, for the context does not suggest that *al-mu'tafikāt* are the means by which the nations of the past that appear earlier in the verse were destroyed. Rather, the fact that they occur in a list along with various destroyed nations of the past, parallel with them, suggests that the term must refer to another destroyed nation.

Scholars of Qur'ānic Studies have long recognized that *al-mu'tafikah/al-mu'tafikāt* derives ultimately from biblical Hebrew and that it refers to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham Geiger did not address the term in his 1833 work, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*, but Aloys Sprenger suggested that *al-mu'tafikah/al-mu'tafikāt* derives from rabbinic uses of the verb *h-p-k* (“to overthrow”) to describe the act by which

God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.²³ Hartwig Hirschfeld suggested that *al-mu'tafikah* derives from the Hebrew noun *mahpēkâ* (“the overthrow”), a term used to describe the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.²⁴ Josef Horovitz suggested that the *al-mu'tafikah/al-mu'tafikāt* derives from Aramaic *mahpektā* in the Targums or *hafektā* or other nominal forms, arguing that it was assimilated by being couched in the form of a participle of the form-VIII Arabic verb.²⁵ Heinrich Speyer and Arthur Jeffery mentioned these interpretations without, however, endorsing them explicitly, and Jeffery pointed out that the term is “certainly Arabic in its form.”²⁶ Richard Bell viewed the derivation from Hebrew *mahpēkâ* proposed by Hirschfeld probable,²⁷ and Paret accepted it as established.²⁸ Overall, a compelling case can be made that *al-mu'tafikah/al-mu'tafikāt* derive ultimately from Hebrew *mahpēkâ*, perhaps through Aramaic.²⁹

In the Bible, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah is not simply an etiological account explaining the desolation of the southern plain of the Dead Sea; it also serves as an exemplum of divine punishment for sin and disobedience. It is used in later biblical accounts in a typological fashion, serving as the model or analogue for Babylon, Edom, Jerusalem, or other cities, suggesting that the present corruption of society would, if it continued,

23. Aloys Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Mohammad: Nach bisher größtentheils unbenutzten Quellen* (3 vols.; Berlin: Nicolai'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1861–1865), 1.492.

24. Hartwig Hirschfeld, *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Korân* (Leipzig: Otto Schulze, 1886), 37.

25. Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1926), 13–14; idem, “Proper Names,” 187–188.

26. Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Gräfenhainichen: Schulze, 1931 [late 1930s]), 156; Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ân*, 274.

27. Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'ân*, 124.

28. Rudi Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1980), 207.

29. The exact process by which *mahpēkâ* or *mahpektā* ended up as *al-mu'tafikah/al-mu'tafikāt* in Arabic by being modified and adapted to the particular Arabic participial pattern *mufta'ilah* and the reason for this occurrence remain unclear. Despite the phonetic similarity, there is a certain semantic discrepancy of shift between the two forms, since *mahpēkâ* refers to God's act of destruction, whereas *al-mu'tafikah/al-mu'tafikāt* evidently refer to the cities that were destroyed. The common Arabic nominal pattern *maf'alah* would match Hebrew *mahpēkâ* more closely in form. Perhaps that form was not favored because it usually serves as a noun of place and the intention was to create a cognate form that would ostensibly describe the cities that were destroyed.

cause the city in question to meet the same fate that Sodom and Gomorrah had met centuries earlier. It is joined suggestively in various passages of the New Testament with Noah's flood and the plagues inflicted on the Egyptians as examples of the dire consequences of disobedience to God (e.g., Luke 17:26–32, Rev 11:8). This typological usage continues to appear in later Jewish and Christian literature.

Sodom and Gomorrah are regularly invoked in the Hebrew Bible, especially by the later prophets, most often to make analogical arguments about contemporary society in Jerusalem. The prophet Isaiah addresses his audience as follows (Isa 1:9–10):

Unless the Lord Almighty had left us some survivors, we would have become like Sodom, we would have been like Gomorrah. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah!

Here Isaiah refers metaphorically to the rulers and the people of the kingdom of Israel as the rulers of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah, making the point that their general sinfulness would have caused their doom had it not been for a small group of the righteous who continued to exist within the community, upholding correct behavior and thus averting disaster. Ezekiel also uses an analogical argument to denounce his contemporaries, inhabitants of the southern kingdom of Judah (Ezek 16:46–48):

Your older sister was Samaria, who lived to the north of you with her daughters; and your younger sister, who lived to the south of you with her daughters, was Sodom. You not only followed their ways and copied their detestable practices, but in all your ways you soon became more depraved than they. As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, your sister Sodom and her daughters never did what you and your daughters have done.

The message is that the cities of Judah are even more sinful than Sodom and its counterparts, the implication being that they risk an analogous destruction. Jeremiah makes a similar comparison of the city of Jerusalem (Jer 23:14):

I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem a horrible thing: They commit adultery and walk in lies; they strengthen also the hands of evildoers, that none doth return from his wickedness. They are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah.

Here he complains specifically about sinful and evildoing prophets, as well as ordinary inhabitants of Jerusalem, comparing them to the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The catastrophic end of Sodom and Gomorrah came to be known in later strata of the Bible as *hammahpēkâ*, “the overthrowing.” The term *mahpēkâ* derives from the accounts in Gen 19 of God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.³⁰ At several points in the narrative, the text employs forms of the verb “to overthrow” in order to describe God’s act of destruction: “that I will not overthrow (*hāpkî*) the city of which you have spoken” (Gen 19:21), ... “and He overthrew (*wayyahpōk*) those cities, and all the plain ...” (Gen 19:25); “And God sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow (*hahpēkâ*), when He overthrew (*behpōk*) the cities in which Lot dwelt” (Gen 19:29). On account of such uses of derivatives of the tri-consonantal root *h-p-k*, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah—and of the other cities of the plain at the southern end of the Dead Sea—became known as *hammahpēkâ*, “the overthrowing,” as a pithy characterization of the historical event.

Analogical references to Sodom and Gomorrah in later books of the Bible regularly use the term *mahpēkâ* to describe the particular act of their destruction:

And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans’ pride, shall be like God’s overthrow (*kamahpēkat ʾēlōhîm*) of Sodom and Gomorrah. (Isa 13:19)

I have overthrown some of you as when God overthrew (*kamahpēkat ʾēlōhîm*) Sodom and Gomorrah. (Amos 4:11)

As God overthrew (*kamahpēkat ʾēlōhîm*) Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbor cities thereof, the Lord says that no man shall abide there, nor shall any son of man dwell therein. (Jer 50:40)

In all of these cases, the phrase *kamahpēkat* ... (“like the overthrow of ...”) is used regularly to designate the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah while threatening later societies with a comparable fate. It is this usage from which the qur’ānic term for Sodom and Gomorrah apparently derives.

Typological usage ties the qur’ānic *mu’tafikāt* with the biblical *mahpēkâ*. The passages in which the term *al-mu’tafikāt* occurs make similar analogical arguments, holding up the destructions of bygone nations as examples of what will happen to the contemporary audience if they fail to heed the

30. I would like to thank my colleague Shalom Goldman for first pointing this out to me.

warning of the Prophet Muḥammad. It is therefore clear that *al-mu'tafikāt* is related to the biblical *mahpēkâ* ("the overthrowing") and refers to Sodom and Gomorrah, which are never referred to explicitly by those names in the Qur'ān. *Al-mu'tafikāt* must mean, literally, "the overturned cities," referring to God's method of destruction, and the fact that the term is related to *mahpēkâ* has to do with the fact that the Qur'ān is drawing on biblical tradition in framing the entire genre of the punishment stories that play such a prominent role in the text.

The Qur'ān provides some corroboration that *al-mu'tafikāt* is not just etymologically related to the Hebrew terms for biblical destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Several qur'ānic passages make it clear that the qur'ānic understanding of the act of destruction corresponds to the "overthrow" that appears in the Bible. Q 53:53 uses the verb *ahwā* ("cast down, cause to fall") to describe the destruction: *wa'l-mu'tafikata ahwā* ("and He cast down the *mu'tafikah*"; Q 53:53). Two other verses describe the act of destruction using the explicit phrase *ja'alnā 'āliyahā sāfilahā* ("We made its uppermost part its lowermost part" or "We made its high part its low part"; Q 11:82, 15:74). Especially the last two verses go along with the sense of "overthrowing," and this may indicate an understanding that the term *al-mu'tafikāt* was connected with that idea.

In contrast to Pickthall's rendition, some other translations capture the meaning of "overturned" cities found in the Hebrew Bible, and Yusuf Ali refers to Sodom and Gomorrah explicitly once. Thus Yusuf Ali:

Hath not the story reached them of those before them?—The people of Noah, and 'Ād, and Thamūd; the people of Abraham, the men of Midian, and the Cities overthrown. (Q 9:70)

And He destroyed the Overthrown Cities (of Sodom and Gomorrah). (Q 53:53)

And Pharaoh, and those before him, and the Cities Overthrown, committed habitual Sin. (Q 69:9)

And thus Bell:

And the overturned (cities) He cast down. (Q 53:53)

Pharaoh, and those before him, and the overwhelmed (cities) committed fault. (Q 69:9)

Shakir's translation has the following renderings:

Has not the news of those before them come to them; of the people of Nuh and Ad and Samood, and the people of Ibrahim and the dwellers of Madyan and the overthrown cities. (Q 9:70)

And the overthrown cities did He overthrow. (Q 53:53)

And Pharaoh, and those before him, and the Cities Overthrown, committed habitual Sin. (Q 69:9)

Finally, here is Alan Jones:

And he also overthrew the overturned settlements. (Q 53:53)

And Pharaoh and those before him and the overturned settlements brought error. (Q 69:9)

The translations “overturned” or “overthrown,” modifying “cities” or “settlements,” captures quite directly the connection with the biblical image of the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain.

Several other translations render *al-mu'tafikah/al-mu'tafikāt* in somewhat different fashions. Arberry uses “subverted,” which in one sense is synonymous with “overturned”:

Has there not come to you the tidings of those who were before you—the people of Noah, Ad, Thamood, the people of Abraham, the men of Midian and the subverted cities? Their Messengers came to them with the clear signs God would not wrong them, but themselves they wronged. (Q 9:70)

... and the Subverted City He also overthrew. (Q 53:53)

Pharaoh likewise, and those before him, and the Subverted Cities – they committed error. (Q 69:9)

I would prefer “overturned” to “subverted” on the grounds that “subvert” is often understood to mean “undermine,” which would be incorrect here, since the understanding is that the city is being raised up, inverted, and smashed to the ground.

In yet other cases, translators have chosen “overwhelmed” rather than “overturned”:

Has there not come to them the report of those before them, the people of Noah, and ‘Ād and Thamūd, and the people of Abraham, and those of Midian, and the overwhelmed (cities)? (Q 9:70; Richard Bell)

Have they not heard the tidings of those before them: the people of Noah, 'Ād, Thamūd, the people of Abraham, the men of Madyan, and the overwhelmed settlements? (Q 9:70; Jones)

In my view, this particular diction does not fit the context. The use of “overwhelmed” suggests that the cities were flooded or covered over, whereas the biblical *mahpēkâ* appears to describe God’s act of raising them up, inverting them, and smashing them to the ground. Muhammad Abdel Haleem uses the more generic term “ruined cities” to render *al-mu'tafikah/al-mu'tafikāt*:

Have they never heard the stories about their predecessors, the peoples of Noah, 'Ad, Thamud, Abraham, Midian, and the ruined cities? (Q 9:70)

... that it was He who brought down the ruined cities. (Q 53:53)

Pharaoh, too, and those before him, and the ruined cities: these people committed grave sins. (Q 69:9)

While this translation certainly fits in with the general logic of the punishment stories, in which nations of the past are in fact ruined, this translation is less than ideal. First, it breaks or conceals the connection with biblical diction, and secondly, it obscures one of the crucial features of the punishment stories. The annihilations of past nations occur in specific ways. One realizes from the beginning of these accounts that those who disobey God and reject the Prophet will inevitably meet their fate and be destroyed, but the particular mode of destruction visited upon them is a point of acute interest: Noah’s people are destroyed by a flood, 'Ād by a wind, and Sodom and Gomorrah by being overturned. Abdel Haleem’s generic reference to ruination thus removes a key element of the story.

“The Burning Tree” (IV)

The scene in which God selects Moses to be his prophet is well known from the Book of Exodus, and it is generally known by reference to its most striking element, “the burning bush” (Exod 3:1 – 4:17). It is a crucial scene in the Hebrew Bible, for it recounts God’s commission of Moses as a prophet, whereby he is assigned the task of confronting Pharaoh and rescuing the Hebrews from oppression. It stands as a model for prophecy in general, and it presents God speaking directly to a human prophet, stressing the intimate contact between Moses and God and at the same time the overpowering presence of the Lord on hallowed ground. It provides the archetype of pro-

phetic miracles—the snake turning into a staff and Moses’s hand turning white—through which the legitimacy of prophecy is established.

Versions of this scene in which God commissions Moses as his messenger to Pharaoh occur in five qur’ānic passages of varying length (Q 19:51–53, 20:9–48, 26:10–16, 27:7–12, 28:29–35). The scene is crucial in the same ways, and for the same reasons, as it is in the Bible. Three of the five passages refer explicitly to the fire that attracts Moses’s attention (Q 20:9–11, 27:7–8, 28:29–30). A notable difference is that whereas in Exodus Moses goes to investigate the fire in the wilderness out of curiosity, because the bush is not being consumed by the fire, in the Qur’ān he goes in order to fetch a firebrand or live ember for his family (*ahl*)—probably meaning here his wife—evidently to help start their own fire to cook a meal (Q 20:9, 27:7, 28:29). All three passages imply that some sort of wood is burning, but only one, Q al-Qaṣaṣ 28:30, refers explicitly to the burning bush. Given the close connection of these passages with the events portrayed in Exod 3–4, it is surprising that most translations of the Qur’ān into English refer to a “tree” that burns, and not a bush. To refer to “the burning tree” is to make the scene somehow strange and unfamiliar, as if it referred to a forest fire and not to one of the most striking and dramatic scenes of God’s presence in the Hebrew Bible.

At the outset, it is worth pointing out that “bush” is a perfectly fine translation of the word that occurs in the qur’ānic text, Arabic *shajarah*. *Shajarah* is indeed rendered commonly as “tree,” and this is certainly the first sense that appears in the dictionary. However, the Arabic term may refer to leafy plants that vary greatly in size. For example, Q al-Ṣāffāt 37:147 depicts Jonah being cast up on the seashore, where he is protected by a gourd vine (*shajarah min yaqīn*) that grows over him to conceal his body from the view. The context indicates that the “tree” in question is a plant that grows low to the ground. *Shajarah* can thus be translated as “bush” while adhering closely to the original text and without doing any violence to it, but this option is rarely taken in English translations of the Qur’ān.

Some of the widely used English Qur’ān translations render Q 28:30 as follows:

And when he reached it, he was called from the right side of the valley in the blessed field, from the tree: “O Moses! Lo! I, even I, am Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.” (Pickthall)

But when he came to the (Fire), a voice was heard from the right bank of the valley, from a tree in hallowed ground: “O Moses! Verily I am Allah, the Lord of the Worlds.” (Yusuf Ali)

But when he reached it, a voice called out to him from the right-hand side of the valley, from a tree on the blessed ground: "Moses, I am God, the Lord of the Worlds." (Abdel Haleem)

When he came to it, a voice cried from the right of the watercourse, in the sacred hollow, coming from the tree: "Moses, I am God, the Lord of all Being." (Arberry)

Arriving at the fire, a voice called out to him from the right side of the valley, at a blessed spot, and coming from the tree: "O Moses, it is I, God, Lord of the Worlds." (Khalidi)

All of these examples use the term tree to refer to what is evidently the burning bush. Only a few translators whose translations I have examined use "bush." Richard Bell has the following:

When he came to it, a voice called to him from the right-hand bank of the wādi, in the blessed vale, out of the bush: "O Moses, lo, I am Allah, Lord of the worlds."

Muhammad Habib Shakir, though he in many other cases shows a tendency to avoid biblical vocabulary, renders this passage as follows:

And when he came to it, a voice was uttered from the right side of the valley in the blessed spot of the bush, saying: O Musa! Surely I am Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

In my view, the translations of Bell and Shakir are in this respect superior to the others, since they preserve the critical term "bush" as the exact site of Moses's direct encounter with God.

In this case, the qur'ānic text certainly does not evince a strategy of separating this scene from its biblical forerunner, despite some obvious differences between the two accounts, including the fact that the Hebrew text uses the term *hassāneh*, "the bush" (Exod 3:2.3), and not *hā'ēš*, the common Hebrew word for "tree," and the fact that the scene opens with a statement that *the angel of the Lord*, that is, the angel of Yahweh, appeared to Moses in the flames coming out of the midst of a bush (Exod 3:2), whereas in the Qur'ān there is no mention of an angel. The general equivalence of the scenes and the role they play in establishing Moses's prophecy and setting up his later confrontation with Pharaoh are clear, and this equivalence is corroborated by many other more specific correspondences. For example, God's statement to Moses in Exod 3:14, *'ehyeh 'āšer 'ehyeh* ("I am that I am"), is certainly reflected in the Qur'ān's emphatic statement *innī anā 'llāhu rabbu 'l-ālamīn* ("I, indeed I, am God, Lord of the Worlds"; Q 28:30). The

emblematic nature of this scene is made poignant by the Islamic tradition's assignment to Moses of the epithet *kalīm allāh* ("the one to whom God spoke") on the basis of their interaction in this scene and by several other verses that refer to it, such as Q 28:44: "You [Muḥammad] were not present on the western side of the mountain when We gave Our command to Moses: you were not there." Insisting on translating the term *shajarah* here as "tree" rather than "bush" obscures the invocation of the scene in Exodus that is obviously intended.

"The Chest of Tranquility" (V)

The ark of the covenant appears prominently in Q 2:248, in the course of an account of the exploits of Saul (Arabic *ṭālūt*). The verse features a prophet who arose after the time of Moses and who corresponds to Samuel but is unnamed in the text.³¹ The qur'ānic passage presents in a few verses, Q 2:246–251, a highly condensed version of the events recounted in 1 Sam 4–17. The verse of interest for the present discussion occurs after the prophet, again, presumably Samuel, has appointed Saul king of the Israelites (Q 2:247; cf. 1 Sam 10:24–25, 11:14 – 12:4). In Q 2:248, the unnamed prophet promises the Israelites future victory over their enemies. This is followed by a description of one of Saul's military campaigns, before the momentous battle in which David defeats Goliath, sealing Israel's victory over the Philistines (Q 2:250–251; cf. 1 Sam 17).³² Shakir translates the key verse as follows:

And the prophet said to them: "Surely the sign of His kingdom is, that there shall come to you *the chest* in which there is *tranquility* from your Lord and residue of the relics of what the children of Musa and the children of Haroun have left, the angels bearing it; most surely there is a sign in this for those who believe."

31. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 364–371.

32. In Q 2:249, Saul is described as forbidding the Israelites from drinking from a river when they cross it. Some scholars have argued that this scene is based on an erroneous conflation of the story of Gideon with the story of Saul's campaign, which differs at this point. Saul ill-advisedly makes the members of the army swear that they will not eat, and as a result they become weak. The temptation is honey in a forest, and not the river water. Neal Robinson and Walid Saleh, however, have argued that such quibbles miss the point of the qur'ānic story. See Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 217–218; Walid Saleh, "In Search of a Comprehensible Qur'ān: A Survey of Some Recent Scholarly Works," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* 5 (2003): 143–162, 155–157.

First, the “chest” here is clearly meant to be the ark of the covenant. The Qur’ānic term for the ark of the covenant is *al-tābūt*, which occurs in this sense only in this verse. In Q 20:39, the word’s only other occurrence in the Qur’ān, *tābūt* refers to the vessel in which Moses’s mother placed him when she set him afloat on the river (cf. Exod 2:3). Geiger identifies *tābūt* as a borrowing from Aramaic *tābūtā* (“ark”), though Nöldeke argues that it derives from Ethiopic *tābōt*. Though the Hebrew in the Bible for “ark of the covenant,” *’ārôn habbārîṭ*, is quite different, the noun *tēbâ*, the same word used for Noah’s ark and the vessel of reeds in which Moses was placed by his mother, a cognate of *tābūt*, is used for the ark of the covenant in the Mishnah.³³ Most other English translations of the Qur’ān capture the connection of the term *tābūt* in this verse with the ark of the covenant, but they regularly fail to capture the biblical allusion to God’s “presence” in the ark, conveyed by the term *shekhinah* in rabbinic Hebrew, which corresponds to Arabic *sakīnah* in the Qur’ānic text. Most English translations of the text render *sakīnah* with a term related to “calm” or “tranquility” instead:

Their prophet said to them, “The sign of his authority will be that the Ark [of the Covenant] will come to you. In it there will be [*the gift of*] *tranquility* from your Lord and relics of the followers of Moses and Aaron, carried by the angels. There is a sign in this for you if you believe.” (Abdel Haleem)

And their Prophet said unto them: Lo! The token of his kingdom is that there shall come unto you the ark wherein is *peace of reassurance* from your Lord, and a remnant of that which the house of Moses and the house of Aaron left behind, the angels bearing it. Lo! Herein shall be a token for you if (in truth) ye are believers. (Pickthall)

Their prophet said to them, “The sign of his sovereignty is that the ark, in which there is *an assurance* from your Lord, will come to you, and a remnant of that which the family of Moses and Aaron left behind, borne by the angels. In that there is a sign for you if you are believers.” (Jones)

And (further) their Prophet said to them: “A sign of his authority is that there shall come to you the Ark [of the Covenant], with (*an assurance*) *therein of security* from your Lord, and the relics left by the family of Moses and the family of Aaron, carried by angels. In this is a Symbol for you if ye indeed have faith.” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali)

33. Theodor Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft* (Strassburg: Trübner, 1910), 49; Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 367–368; Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*, 88–89; Uri Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation: The Ark of the Covenant and the Golden Calf in Biblical and Islamic Historiography,” *Oriens* 36 (2001): 196–214.

All of these translations render *al-tābūt* as “the ark” or “the ark of the covenant.” However, they render the term *sakīnah* “[the gift of] tranquility” (Abdel Haleem); “peace of reassurance” (Pickthall); “an assurance” (Jones); and “(an assurance) therein of security” (Abdullah Yusuf Ali). In doing so, they are in agreement with many commentaries on the Qur’ān, which gloss *sakīnah* as *ṭuma’nīnah* (“reassurance”).³⁴ The meaning “tranquility” derives from one of the main meanings of the triconsonantal root *s-k-n* in Arabic, “to be quiet, calm,” and the translations of “assurance” or “reassurance” derive from a combination of the understanding of this Arabic root and a consideration of the context, probably influenced by commentaries on the verse. In my view, these translations of the term *sakīnah* do not adequately capture the image invoked, which is related to the representation of the ark of the covenant in the Hebrew Bible.

The Qur’ānic term *sakīnah* has long been recognized as a borrowing from Jewish tradition, and the general interpretation of its use in the Qur’ān has followed for the most part the same lines from the beginning. Silvestre de Sacy identified *sakīnah* as a borrowing from Hebrew already in 1829, explaining, “Or qui ne voit que ce n’est autre chose que la *schékina*, שכנה c’est-à-dire la présence de la majesté divine ou, comme s’exprime Moïse, la gloire de Dieu qui, reposant sur le tabernacle, annonçait la présence de la divinité.” He added, “On peut conjecturer, par les deux passages de la surate 48, que Mahomet lui-même attachait à ce mot une idée de calme et de sécurité.”³⁵ Subsequently, Abraham Geiger and many other scholars recognized Hebrew *shekhinah* as the etymon of *sakīnah*.³⁶

34. See, for example, al-Tha’labī, *al-Kashf wa’l-bayān*, ed. Abū Muḥammad Ibn ‘Āshūr (10 vols.; Beirut: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Turāth al-‘Arabī, 2002), 2.213.

35. Silvestre de Sacy, “Lettre de M. le baron Silvestre de Sacy, à M. Garcin de Tassy,” *Journal Asiatique* 4 (1829): 161–179, 177–178.

36. Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (Bonn: F. Baaden, 1833), 54–56; Alfred von Kremer, *Geschichte der herrschenden Ideen des Islams: der Gottesbegriff, die Prophetie und Staatsidee* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1868), 226, n. 2; Siegmund Fraenkel, *De Vocabulis in antiquis Arabum carminibus et in Corano peregrinis* (Leiden: Brill, 1880), 23; Maier (Max) Grünbaum, “Ueber Schem hammephorasch als Nachbildung eines aramäischen Ausdrucks und über sprachliche Nachbildungen überhaupt,” *ZDMG* 39 (1885): 543–616, 581–582; Ignaz Goldziher, “La notion de *Sakīnah* chez les Mohamétans,” *Revue de l’Histoire des religions* 28 (1893): 1–13; idem, *Abhandlungen zur arabischen Philologie* (2 vols.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1896), 1.177–204; Otto Pautz, *Muhammeds Lehre von der Offenbarung* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1898), 251; Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, 24–25; Horowitz, “Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran,” 208–209; Karl Ahrens, “Chrisliches im Qoran: Eine Nachlese,” *ZDMG* 84

The Hebrew term *shekhinah* is a verbal noun meaning “dwelling, occupying” that derives from the verb *shakhan*, *yishkhon* (“to dwell”), just as the triconsonantal root *s-k-n* also means “to dwell, inhabit,” as well as “to be calm” or “to be at rest.” It is used to mean God’s “indwelling,” that is, His “presence” or “aura.” The functional, idiomatic equivalent to the term in Arabic would probably be *ḥaḍrah* or *ḥuḍūr* (“presence”) and not, for example, *sukūn* (“being quiet” or “being at rest”), even though both Hebrew and Arabic attach both general meanings, residence on the one hand and calm, rest, or quiet on the other, to the triconsonantal root combination *sh-k-n/s-k-n*. The history of the term *shekhinah* is complex.³⁷ A number of modern studies focus on *shekhinah* as representing the feminine aspect of the divine, something that became important in mysticism of the medieval kabbalah tradition and that has been emphasized in modern scholarship on account of its potential connections with feminist thought.³⁸ The consen-

(1930): 15–68, 21; Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān*, 174; Reuven Firestone, “Shekhinah,” *EQ*, s.v. (2004); Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation.”

37. J. T. Marshall, “Shekinah,” in J. Hastings (ed.), *A Dictionary of the Bible* (5 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1898–1904), 4.489; Ludwig Blau and Kaufmann Kohler, “Shekinah,” in Isidore Singer (ed.), *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 11 (New York: Funk & Wagnells Company, 1905), 259; Joshua Abelson, *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature* (London: Macmillan 1912); Arnold Goldberg, *Untersuchungen über die Vorstellung von der Shekhinah in der frühen rabbinischen Literatur* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969); Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), esp. ch. 3, 37–65; Gershom Scholem, “*Shekhinah*: The Feminine Element in Divinity,” in Jonathan Chipman (ed.), *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Schocken Books, 1991), 14–96, 293–300; J. Sievers, “‘Where Two or Three ...’: The Rabbinic Concept of Shekhinah and Matthew 18:20,” in E. J. Fisher (ed.), *The Jewish roots of Christian Liturgy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 47–61; Piero Capelli, “Figure e dimensioni della mediazione nell’ebraismo tardoantico e medievale: la voce dai cieli, la ‘Šekinah’ e la Torah orale,” *Ricerche storico-bibliche* 29 (2017): 193–220.

38. Urbach, *The Sages*, esp. ch. 3; Peter Schäfer, *Mirror of His Beauty: Feminine Images of God from the Bible to the Early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Chani Smith, “The Symbol of the Shekhina: The Feminine Side of God,” *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe* 19.1 (1985): 43–46; Rachel Elijor, “Die Entwicklung der weiblichen Dimension Gottes in der mystischen Tradition des Judentums,” in Michaela Feuerstein-Prasser und Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek (eds.), *Die weibliche Seite Gottes* (Hohenems: Bucher Verlag, 2017), 52–65; Moshe Idel, “Die Glieder der ‘Schechina’: Über den Aufstieg des Göttlich-Weiblichen in der Kabbala und seinen Niedergang im akademischen Diskurs der Moderne,” in Eva S. Atlan et al. (eds.), *Die weibliche Seite Gottes: Kunst und Ritual* (Frankfurt: Jüdisches Museum Frankfurt; Bielefeld: Kerber, 2020), 80–114.

sus in biblical scholarship is that the term *shekhinah* first developed as a euphemism in the Targums, the Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible. It is generally understood that the term was used to replace the mention of God in passages that sound too anthropomorphic in the original Hebrew. When confronted with such anthropomorphic passages, the scholars who produced the Targums often referred to the *shekhinah*'s being located somewhere rather than referring to God directly. So, for example, Exod 34:6, "The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,'" is rendered by Onqelos as "The Lord made his presence pass in front of him, and he proclaimed, 'O Lord! O Lord! Compassionate and gracious God, who keeps anger at a distance and abounds in doing true goodness.'"³⁹ Likewise, Exod 34:9, "And he said, 'If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance,'" is rendered as follows: "And he said, 'If now I have found compassion before You, O Lord, let the Presence of the Lord now walk among us; although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our iniquities and our sins, and make us Your possession ...'"⁴⁰ In both of these examples, "the Lord"—i.e., Yahweh in the original Hebrew—has been replaced by "the presence (*shekhinah*) of the Lord" in order to avoid stating that God is simply walking among humans. According to Bernard Grossfeld, the translator of the Targum of Onqelos into English, the term *shekhinah* is used here instead of God because these verses appear to contradict a statement in Exod 33:20 that dictates that no man can survive seeing God directly.⁴¹

The interpretation of *shekhinah* as a euphemism designed to tone down the anthropomorphic implications of some verses in the earliest historical strata of the biblical text is certainly valid, but scholars in Biblical Studies, in my view, have exaggerated the attendant leap between biblical Hebrew and later use of the term *shekhinah*. It is true that the exact term *shekhinah* does not occur in the Hebrew Bible; the first historical attestations are in the Targums and rabbinic Hebrew. The form *pe'ilah* became much more frequent in later Hebrew than it was in the Hebrew Bible; it came to be a standard form of the verbal noun of verbs of the *qal* pattern in rabbinic

39. Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Exodus, Translated, with Apparatus and Notes* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), 96.

40. Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Exodus*, 96.

41. Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Exodus*, 96–97, n. 3. Grossfeld points out that Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan uses the same periphrasis, while the Targum of Neophyti and the Fragmentary Targums (P, V) use "the Glory of His Divine Presence."

Hebrew.⁴² Nevertheless, verbal nouns of this form already occurred in the Bible. An example is *hālîkôt* (“goings, ways, processions”; Ps 68:24, Prov 31:27, Hab 3:6), a plural of *hālîkâ*, which matches *shekhinah* in form. In addition, scholars seem to overlook the key role that cognates of *shekhinah* play in the Book of Exodus. Chief among these is *miškân* (“dwelling place”), the Hebrew term for the tabernacle, the mobile precursor of the temple, whose construction is described in great detail in Exod 25–31 and 35–40.⁴³ The term is obviously based on the conception that God is present in a specific locale; the tabernacle is called “the dwelling place” because God dwells there. This understanding of God’s physical residence is stated explicitly in several passages using perfect verbs: “Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell (*wəšākantî*) among them” (Exod 25:8); “Then I will dwell (*wəšākantî*) among the Israelites and be their God” (Exod 29:45); “And I will dwell (*wəšākantî*) among the sons of Israel” (1 Kgs 6:13). Other similar verses use the active participle: “You shall send away both male and female; you shall send them outside the camp so that they will not defile their camp where I dwell (*šökēn*) in their midst” (Num 5:3); “You shall not defile the land in which you live, in the midst of which I dwell; for I the Lord am dwelling (*šökēn*) in the midst of the sons of Israel” (Num 35:34). The “dweller” was originally the idol of the divinity, who inhabited the tabernacle and the temple generally, and the ark of the covenant specifically. A number of biblical passages, such as the report that the God of the Israelites repeatedly knocked over Dagon, the idol of the Philistines in their temple after they had captured the ark of the covenant, strongly suggest

42. Uri Mor, “The Verbal Noun of the *qal* Stem in Rabbinic Hebrew Traditions and *qēṭlâ/qēṭîlâ* Alternations” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 66 (2015): 79–96. In modern Hebrew, this development became completely regularized.

43. The tabernacle is also termed *hā’ōhel*, “the tent” (e.g., Exod 26:9), *bêt hā’ōhel*, “the house of the tent” (e.g., 1 Chr 9:23), *’ōhel mō’ēd*, “the tent of meeting” (e.g., Exod 33:7), and *bêt YHWH*, “the house of Yahweh” (e.g., Exod 23:19). On the tabernacle in general, see A. R. S. Kennedy, “Tabernacle,” in Hastings, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 4.653–668; Frank M. Cross Jr., “The Tabernacle: A Study from an Archaeological and Historical Approach,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 10 (1947): 45–68; Richard E. Friedman, “The Tabernacle in the Temple,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 43 (1980): 241–248; Victor Hurowitz, “The Priestly Account of Building the Tabernacle,” *JAO* 105 (1985): 21–30; Craig R. Koester, *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1989); Benjamin Sommer, “Conflicting Constructions of Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle,” *Biblical Interpretation* 9 (2001): 41–63; Michael M. Homan, “The Tabernacle and the Temple in Ancient Israel,” *RC* 1 (January 2007): 38–49.

that He assumed the form of a similar idol (1 Sam 5). One could thus argue that the term *shekhinah* was implied already in the text of Exodus, and it is plausible that the instances of the term in later texts were merely recording an earlier, oral usage.⁴⁴

Later strata of the Bible reveal that attempts were made to remove vestiges of idolatry from the religion of the Israelites but that facets of earlier beliefs continued to be relevant nevertheless. Direct references to an idol were for the most part removed—except that the incident of the Golden Calf in Exod 32 appears to be a back-handed admission that the Hebrews used to worship Yahweh as an idol in the form of a calf or cow—but the idea remained that God’s power or presence could be located in a particular place. The divinity at certain times made His presence known, and then He could be sensed by those in the vicinity. Other terms used to describe God’s nebulous presence in the Hebrew Bible are “cloud” (*‘ānān*) and “glory” (*kābôd*; 1 Kgs 8:10–13, 2 Chr 5:13–14 and 7:1–3). When the doctrine of God’s transcendence was adopted in the Israelite religion and mentions of the physical idol were suppressed, the understanding came to be that the ark was associated with God’s aura or presence, envisaged as invisible but nevertheless located or concentrated in a particular area. While it is clear that the qur’ānic term *sakīnah* cannot have derived directly from the Bible and must have come from later Jewish or Christian texts, the concept of God’s presence is not only a post-biblical development.

The term *sakīnah* occurs six times in the qur’ānic text (Q 2:248, 9:26.40, 48:4.18.26). As seen above, the translators render this term regularly in English translations as “tranquility,” “assurance,” or “reassurance,” and this is true not only in Q 2:248, but also in the other verses in which it occurs. However, the other instances do not occur in the midst of biblical narratives, so the connection with the Bible is attenuated. For example, Q 4:84 is translated as follows:

He it is who hath sent down the Assurance in the hearts of the believers, that they may add faith to their faith; To Allah belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth, and Allah hath become knowing, wise. (Bell)

[It is] He who sent down the reassurance into the hearts of the believers that they might add faith to their faith—to God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth; God is Knowing and Wise. (Jones)

44. Indeed, one might even suggest that the term was used as a euphemism for the idol of Yahweh that was written out of descriptions of the ark of the covenant, the tabernacle.

Again, we see the use of “assurance” or “reassurance.” It is not immediately clear what the connection between *sakīnah* in Q 2:248 and other similar verses would be with the biblical *shekhinah*, and this requires some careful consideration.

In Q 2:248, the *sakīnah* is used in a clearly biblical context, a scene that portrays a battle between the Israelites and the Philistines. It is associated with the ark of the covenant, as it is in the Bible. Furthermore, it is associated closely with battle, as it is in the Bible. In the books of the Hebrew Bible, one of the main functions of the ark of the covenant is to be marched out with the army of the tribes of Israel when they battle their enemies. The ark brings the very presence of God into their host and, on account of the deity’s awesome power, both terrifies the enemy and infuses the army of Israel with the courage and determination to fight and to emerge victorious. 1 Samuel does not include a verse in which Saul utters the statement that appears in Q 2:248, but the ark of the covenant appears prominently in that book. The ark is first retrieved from Shiloh to help the army of Israel in a battle against the Philistines, who are terrified by its presence (1 Sam 4:3–8). Then, it is captured by the Philistines, who hold it for seven months but return it after being plagued by mice and hemorrhoids as a form of divine punishment (1 Sam 4:11–6:18). The return of the ark allows Israel to defeat the Philistines (1 Sam 7:10) and later facilitates another rout of the enemy (1 Sam 14:18–31).⁴⁵

The situation described in Q 2:248 is typical of the contexts in which the ark of the covenant appears in the Bible in general and in the story of Saul in particular. In Q 2:248, the setting also involves the military conflict be-

45. The ark of the covenant is also termed *’ārôn bərīt YHWH*, “the ark of the covenant of Yahweh” (cf. 1 Kgs 6:19); *’ārôn hā-’ēlōhīm*, “the ark of God” (1 and 2 Samuel); and *’ārôn hā-’ēdūt*, “the ark of testimony” (Exod 25:22). On the ark in general, see Gerhard von Rad, “The Tent and the Ark,” in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966), 103–124; T. E. Fretheim, “The Ark in Deuteronomy,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 30 (1968): 1–14; Johann Maier, *Das altisraelitische Ladeheiligtum* (Berlin: Töpelman, 1965); H. Davies, “The Ark of the Covenant,” *Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute* 5 (1966–1967): 30–47; O. Eißfeldt, “Die Lade Jahwes in Geschichtserzählung, Sage und Lied,” *Das Altertum* 14 (1968): 135–145; Joseph Gutmann, “The History of the Ark,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 83 (1971): 22–30; C. L. Seow, “The Designation of the Ark in Priestly Theology,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 8 (1984): 185–198; George W. Coats, “The Ark of the Covenant in Joshua: A Probe into the History of a Tradition,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 9 (1985): 137–157; John Day, “Whatever Happened to the Ark of the Covenant?” in John Day (ed.), *Temple and Worship in Biblical Israel* (London: T&T Clark, 2007): 250–270.

tween Israel and the Philistines. The verse describes the ark of the covenant as a sign of Saul's sovereignty (*mulk*) and does not mention a specific battle. Nevertheless, given that the figure of the king (*malik*) is associated with fighting in v. 247 and that the passage refers to Saul's campaign in v. 249 and ends with David's climactic victory over Goliath in vv. 250–251, it makes sense to interpret the prophet's statement as a promise of future victory. This being the case, one may assume that the *sakīnah* fulfills a much more warlike function than "tranquility" or "reassurance." Like the angels who, according to the Qur'ān, fought alongside the Muslims at the Battle of Badr (Q 3:123–125, 8:9), the *sakīnah* is a physical presence that will enable Saul's forces to overpower their enemies and grant them victory.

In general, scholars in Qur'ānic Studies have reached a consensus that while the term *sakīnah* is connected with the biblical *shekhinah* in Q 2:248, in the other verses in which it appears, its meaning has been conflated with or at least colored by one of the ordinary meanings of the root combination *s-k-n*, namely, *sukūn* ("quiet" or "calm"). Two translators, Bell and Arberry, have chosen to render the biblical allusion palpable in their renditions of Q 2:248. Although in the other instances Bell translates *sakīnah* as "assurance" (Q 9:26.40) or "the Assurance" (Q 48:4.18.26), he does not translate the term in Q 2:248, retaining the term in transliteration as "Sakīna." This is presumably due to the fact that this verse deals directly with the ark of the covenant in the time of Saul, and so *sakīnah* would have to take on a sense more appropriate to that context.

Their prophet said to them: "The sign of his kingship will be that the Ark will come to you containing a Sakīna from your Lord, and a relic of what was left by the family of Moses and the family of Aaron, and the angels will bear it; surely in that is a sign for you if ye are believers."

In a note attached to this verse explaining the word *sakīnah*, Bell writes, "The Hebrew *shekhīna*; in the Qur'ān the word generally has the sense of 'assurance,' but as this is probably the first occasion of its use, it is doubtful if any such sense is attached to it here."⁴⁶ He thus recognizes that *sakīnah* is related to the Hebrew *shekhinah*, but he means to distinguish this verse from the other Qur'ānic verses in which it appears. He does not indicate that the other uses of *sakīnah* in the Qur'ān are unrelated to this one, but he apparently believes that this "foreign" term was used here initially, with something closer to its original meaning, and was then adopted for other uses,

46. Bell, *The Qur'ān Translated*, 1.36, n. 2.

subsequently being assigned the meaning “assurance” on account of the term’s association with cognates such as *sukūn* (“being at rest, quiescent”).

Arberry goes further, but does not really translate, producing a version similar to Bell’s rendition of Q 2:248:

And their Prophet said to them, “The sign of his kingship is that the Ark will come to you, in it a Shechina from your Lord, and a remnant of what the folk of Moses and Aaron’s folk left behind, the angels bearing it. Surely in that shall be a sign for you, if you are believers.”

In all of the verses in which *sakīnah* occurs, Arberry renders the term as “Shechina,” which certainly attempts to capture the connection with the Hebrew. However, one might ask what the sense of “Shechina” is, or whether that word in English conveys any clear sense, whether appropriate to the context or not. In one verse, Arberry presents the term Shechina, as usual, but also provides a gloss:

It is He who sent down the Shechina (tranquility) into the hearts of the believers, that they might add faith to their faith – to God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth; God is All-knowing, All-wise. (Q 48:4)

Here, his use of “tranquility” may be considered a debt to earlier translations, or to the generally understood connection of the root *s-k-n* with calm or silence.

The first question that arises is what translation of *sakīnah* would appropriately capture the invocation of biblical *shekhinah* in Q 2:248. A possible candidate is “God’s overwhelming aura.” The second question is whether those translations can be legitimately applied in the qur’ānic verses that do not involve the ark of the covenant or biblical history. The other five instances of *sakīnah* occur in two *sūrahs*, *Sūrat al-Tawbah* (Q 9) and *Sūrat al-Faḥ* (Q 48), both of which have to do with military confrontation. In my view, the consensus is more or less correct: these latter instances of *sakīnah* are in fact distinct from Q 2:248, and they do appear to have been colored by association with the term *sukūn* (“calm”). In all cases, however, I would argue that the translations “tranquility,” “calm,” “assurance,” or “reassurance,” are insufficient because they do not capture the sense of overwhelming might that allows the forces to defeat their enemy attached to the term *sakīnah*.

Sūrat al-Tawbah is a particularly warlike *sūrah* which begins with an ultimatum to the pagan Meccans. The term *sakīnah* occurs in it twice, in the following verses:

Then God sent His calm (*sakīnatahu*) down to His Messenger and the believers, and He sent down invisible forces (*junūdan lam tarawhā*). He punished the disbelievers—this is what the disbelievers deserve, but God turns in His mercy to whoever He will. God is most forgiving and merciful. (Q 9:26; Abdel Haleem)

Even if you do not help the Prophet, God helped him when the disbelievers drove him out: when the two of them were in the cave, he [Muḥammad] said to his companion, “Do not worry, God is with us,” and God sent His calm (*sakīnatahu*) down to him, aided him with forces invisible to you (*bi-junūdin lam tarawhā*), and spoiled the disbelievers’ plan. God is almighty and wise. (Q 9:40; Abdel Haleem, with adjustments)

In both these verses the imagery is of a battle in which God grants victory to the Prophet and the believers over the disbelievers. The military implications of the term *sakīnah* are demonstrated by the fact that it is parallel to “forces” or “troops” (*junūd*) in both verses: *anzala junūdan lam tarawhā* (“He sent down troops that you did not see”; v. 26) and *ayyadahu bi-junūdin lam tarawhā* (“He supported him with troops that you did not see”; v. 40). Like the invisible troops, God’s *sakīnah* is what made the believers’ victory over their enemies possible. The translation “calm” is thus based mainly on the etymological meaning of the root *s-k-n* and does not entirely fit in the context.

Sūrat al-Faṭḥ (Q 48) reports a victory over the pagan Meccans. It is generally understood to comment on the confrontation that occurred when the Prophet marched to Mecca with his followers with the intention of performing the pilgrimage but was barred by the Meccans. After a standoff, the two sides signed the treaty of al-Ḥudaybiyyah.⁴⁷ The term *sakīnah* occurs three times in the *sūrah*, in the following verses:

It was He who made His tranquility (*sakīnatahu*) descend into the hearts of the believers, to add faith to their faith—the forces of the heavens and earth (*junūdu ’l-samāwāti wa’l-arḍi*) belong to Him; He is all knowing and all wise. (Q 48:4; Abdel Haleem)

¹⁸ God was pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you under the tree: He knew what was in their hearts and so He sent tranquility (*al-sakīnah*) down to them and rewarded them with a speedy triumph (*fathān qarībā*)¹⁹ and with many future gains—God is mighty and wise. (Q 48:18–19; Abdel Haleem)

47. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi‘ al-bayān ‘an ta’wīl āy al-Qur’ān*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (27 vols.; Giza: Dār Hajar, 2001), 21.238–244.

While the disbelievers had fury in their hearts—the fury of ignorance (*ḥamiyyata 'l-jāhiliyyah*)—God sent His tranquility (*sakīnatahu*) down on to His Messenger and the believers and made binding on them [their] promise to obey God, for that was more appropriate and fitting for them. God has full knowledge of all things. (Q 48:26; Abdel Haleem)

Again, military confrontation is prominent in these passages. As in the verses from Sūrat al-Tawbah, Q 48:4 pairs God's *sakīnah* with forces or troops (*junūd*), this time “the troops of the heavens and the earth.” The forces of nature are apparently acting in concert with God's *sakīnah* to bring about the victory of the believers. Q 48:18 refers explicitly to a “swift victory” (*fathān qarībā*) as a consequence of God's sending down the *sakīnah*. There is a slight difference here regarding the location of the *sakīnah*. Verse 4 refers to its descending into the hearts of the believers, something that none of the other verses state. Clearly, in the Bible, the *shekhinah* is located outside the Hebrews, though it has a tremendous effect on their courage and inner resolve or determination, and this appears to be the case in most of the other verses that invoke God's *sakīnah* in the Qur'ān. The fact that it is in the Muslim believers' hearts here suggests that it is somehow conflated with the resolve to do battle with the enemy, and this is corroborated by the fact that the *sakīnah* counters, in effect, the fury of ignorance (*ḥamiyyata 'l-jāhiliyyah*) that appears in Q 48:26, which lies in the hearts of the disbelievers, propelling them to fight for their unjust cause.

One may compare *sakīnah* in such contexts with other passages in which God aids the prophet or believers in a confrontation or conflict. One of the most common terms that appears in such passages is the verb *thabbata*, *yuthabbitu* (“to make firm”): *thabbatnāka* (“We made you firm”; Q 17:74); *nuthabbitu bihi fu'ādaka* (“with which We make your heart firm”; Q 11:120, 25:32); *li-yarbiṭa 'alā qulūbikum wa-yuthabbita bihi 'l-aqdāma* (“in order to bind your hearts and with which to fix your feet firmly”; Q 8:11; cf. Q 2:250, 3:147, 47:7). This act of making firm appears to be portraying in physical terms a figurative, emotional sense—it means to strengthen the resolve of the fighters. A noun that appears in such contexts and that may be interpreted as being closer to *sakīnah* in meaning is *ṣabr*, “patience, endurance.” Just after Q 2:248, the text reads as follows:

²⁴⁹ ... But those who know that they were going to meet their Lord said, “How often a small force has defeated a large army with God's permission! God is with those who are steadfast (*wa'llāhu ma'a 'l-ṣābirīn*).”

²⁵⁰ And when they met Goliath and his warriors, they said, “Our Lord! Pour patience on us, make us stand firm, and help us against the disbelievers.”

Here, the troops that have been fortified by the *sakīnah* are described as “steadfast” (*ṣābirīn*), having patience (*ṣabr*) poured upon them by God, and having their feet (*aqdām*) planted firmly by God. *Sakīnah* must be parallel and in harmony with these meanings.

Overall, *sakīnah* appears in two main contexts involving military confrontations between the forces of the believers and those of the pagan Meccans. In all cases, God’s *sakīnah* aids them to gain victory over their opponents, and in this it is closely parallel to the biblical *shekhinah*. The contexts require a translation that captures the term’s invocation of might, terror, and military prowess; “tranquility,” “calm,” “assurance,” and “reassurance,” are all too mild to convey the appropriate meaning. The translations examined here all appear inadequate in this case. “God’s overwhelming, or awe-inspiring, aura” or a similar translation would better convey the appropriate meaning. If one considers *sakīnah* as parallel in meaning to *ṣabr* in these contexts, then one might suggest not translating them as “tranquility” and “patience,” which are both too passive for the context of a military confrontation. *Ṣabr* might be rendered as “endurance, steadfastness, or the ability to withstand and resist,” and *sakīnah* might be “resolve” or “determination.”

“Jesus, the Messiah” (VI)

A survey of the presentation of Jesus in the Qur’ān reveals an overall strategy to agree with the Christian portrayal of Jesus to a large extent. Jesus’s birth was miraculous. His mother, Mary, was a virgin (Q 3:35–37.42–50, 19:16–33). Jesus performed many miracles, including curing the sick, healing lepers, and bring the dead back to life (Q 3:49, 5:110). Jesus is termed “a word” (*kalimah*) from God (3:39.45, 4:171), something that recalls the opening of the Gospel of John. Jesus is associated with “the Holy Spirit” (*rūḥ al-qudus*; Q 2:87.253, 5:110), recalling the close association of the Holy Spirit with Jesus and the Trinity in Christian doctrine. God “raises him up” (Q 3:55), which recalls the Christian notion of Christ’s resurrection. Of course, there are some differences of portrayal as well, reflecting real theological differences between Islam and Christianity: Jesus is not divine but rather a prophet; he cannot perform miracles of his own accord, for his actions depend on God’s power and permission; and he did not die on the cross but was miraculously rescued by God at the last minute. However, the number and importance of the common features are striking, and they must be recognized as part of an intentional strategy of creating common

ground with Christians. This has broad consequences for the translation of the qur'ānic material related to Jesus.

One qur'ānic term worth considering is that of *al-masīḥ*, “the Messiah,” which is cognate with the Hebrew *hammāšīaḥ*, but which several authors in Qur'ānic Studies have argued derives more directly from the Syriac form, *mšīḥā*.⁴⁸ The Qur'ān applies the epithet *al-masīḥ* (“the Messiah”) to Jesus eleven times (Q 3:45, 4:157.171.172, 5:17.72(twice).75, 9:30.31): three times as *al-masīḥ* “the Messiah” (Q 4:172, 5:72, 9:30), five times as *al-masīḥ ibn Maryam*, “the Messiah son of Mary” (Q 5:17.72(twice).75, 9:31), and three times as *al-masīḥ 'īsā b. maryam*, “the Messiah Jesus son of Mary” (Q 3:45, 4:157.171). The term occurs in the Qur'ān only in connection with Jesus. A major impulse behind the use of this term in the Qur'ān is the intention to agree with Christian usage, and this view is corroborated by other examples such as those mentioned above.

In English translations of the Qur'ān, *al-masīḥ* is usually rendered as “the Messiah,” mainly on the grounds that this is viewed as a literal equivalent. However, in my view, it would be preferable to render it as “Christ” instead. Of course, Christians believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and that is in fact the literal meaning of the term *al-masīḥ*—an obvious cognate and equivalent of the Hebrew *hammāšīaḥ* (“the Messiah”). However, the phrase would take on a different valence in English if the translations consistently rendered *al-masīḥ* as “Christ” and *al-masīḥ 'īsā b. maryam* as “Jesus Christ, son of Mary.” Christ is based on the literal Greek translation of the Hebrew *māšīaḥ* (“anointed”), referring to the practice of anointing the new king of Israel with holy oil in a ritual equivalent to coronation. Because of the fundamental status of Greek in Christian literature and technical terminology, “Jesus Christ” is used as an epithet by Christians speaking in English and the European language far more commonly than is “Jesus, the Messiah.” (This difference falls away in Arabic, because, for Arab-speaking Christians, the two terms are identical, *al-masīḥ*.) As Parrinder points out, in Christian traditions the term “Christ” comes to have the character of a frozen epithet or proper noun, losing some of its connection with the promised Messiah of Jewish tradition, and the use of the term in the Qur'ān appears to re-

48. Siegmund Fraenkel, *De Vocabulis in antiquis Arabum carminibus et in Corano peregrinis* (Leiden: Brill, 1880), 24; Paul de Lagarde, *Übersicht über die im Aramäischen, Arabischen und Hebräischen übliche Bildung der Nomina* (Göttingen: Dieterichsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1889), 93–99; Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 129–130; Alphonse Mingana, “Syriac Influence on the Style of the Kuran,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 11 (1927): 77–98, 85; Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, 265–266.

flect this development.⁴⁹ Christians refer to themselves in English and the other European languages as Christians, and not as Messianists. Christian theological discourse generally refers to the body of Christ and not to the body of the Messiah, and the well-known port city in the state of Texas is *Corpus Christi*, not *Corpus Messiae*. Translating *al-masīḥ* as “Christ” would signal much more directly the intended strategy of agreement with formal Christian usage that lies behind it. Just as the term Christ in English usage loses a large part of its connection with the Jewish concept of the Messiah, so too does *al-masīḥ* in the Qurʾān appear to serve as an honorific title of Jesus, indicating his exalted and revered status in general and not evoking a restoration of the historical monarchy of Israel.

“The Table” (VII)

The fifth *sūrah* of the Qurʾān, *al-Māʾidah*, is often given the title “the Table” in English on the grounds that this is an accurate rendering of the literal meaning of the word. However, like the Arabic word *al-sufrah*, the term *al-māʾidah*, the context suggests, refers not to a piece of furniture but to the table along with the meal typically served upon it. Pickthall endeavors to capture this meaning without straying too far from the underlying Arabic by labeling the *sūrah* “The Table Spread,” Abdel Haleem calls it “the Feast,” and Michel Cuypers’s work devoted to analysis of this *sūrah* terms it “the Banquet.”⁵⁰ An additional issue, though, is that the *sūrah* derives its name from a scene in which God provides a banquet for Jesus’s disciples, after they request, through Jesus, that they might be reassured in their belief (Q 5:111–115). This scene of Jesus and his disciples sharing an extraordinary banquet is a clear invocation of the scene of the Last Supper, which is described in the Gospels and becomes a central event in Christian tradition, serving as the basis for the Eucharist.⁵¹ The question then becomes whether

49. Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qurʾan* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996), 30–33.

50. Michel Cuypers, *Le Festin: Une lecture de la sourate al-Māʾida* (Paris: Lethielleux, 2007); idem, *The Banquet: A Reading of the Fifth Sura of the Qurʾān*, trans. Patricia Kelley (Miami: Convivium Press, 2009).

51. Several scholars have argued instead that this passage invokes John 6 or the agape meal. I am not entirely convinced, for the passage, in my view, suggests an invocation of the image of the Last Supper, which may have been known to the Prophet’s contemporaries. It is also possible that the notions of the Last Supper and the agape meal have been conflated. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 452; Wilhelm Rudolph, *Die Abhängigkeit des Qorans von Judentum und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1922), 81–82; Paret, *Der Koran*, 133; Cuypers, *The Banquet*,

the translation of *al-mā'idah*, either in the passage in which it occurs or in the *sūrah*'s title, ought to signal the connection more forcefully.

This example is not as clear as some of the others presented above. One type of event has been given three quite different interpretations, depending on which religion one assumes as background. From the Jewish point of view, Jesus and his disciples are sharing a meal at the Passover *seder*, the annual commemoration of the liberation of the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt. From the Christian point of view, it is the Last Supper, which serves as the model for celebration of the mass, a reinterpretation of the Passover *seder* in which the meal represents Jesus's flesh and blood, which are sacrificed for the sins of believers. From the Islamic point of view, the banquet is a sign of God's unwavering support of his prophets and their faithful followers, yet another indication of Jesus's favored status, even among prophets. Perhaps the qur'ānic presentation is sufficiently and dramatically different to warrant not closely associating it with Christian views of the Last Supper.

I argue that the connection should be made obvious despite the theological differences between Christian and qur'ānic interpretations. It is clear that whatever theological work the scene at the end of *Sūrat al-Mā'idah* performs, it is intended to invoke the visual image of the Last Supper, which may have been well known to the audience. The disciples' request for the banquet to be *li-awwalinā wa-ākhirinā* ("for the first of us and the last of us"; Q 5:114) suggests the visual image of the disciples lined up in a row, as one sees in paintings of the Last Supper. Again, while this example involves the evocation of a well-known biblical scene, it differs from the others considered above in the extent to which reinterpretation is involved. In this case, to translate the term explicitly as the Last Supper would appear to invoke too strongly the Christian interpretation of the event that has been altered considerably in the Qur'ān. A translation that would capture the intended connection might include reference to Jesus's followers such as "the banquet of Jesus and his disciples." It is certainly not just any table, nor is it just any banquet. The qur'ānic presentation emphasizes the reassurance for the disciples represented by the miracle of the banquet, and not its finality and proximity to Christ's crucifixion.

417–418; A. J. Droge, *The Qur'ān: A New Annotated Translation* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2013), 74, n. 163; Gabriel S. Reynolds, *The Qur'ān and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 217.

“The Book” and “The People of the Book” (VIII)

Much ink has been spilled over the qur’ānic term *kitāb*, which takes on a number of distinct meanings in the sacred text. Geo Widengren, Daniel Madigan, and Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau have discussed it thoroughly, along with other terms that the Qur’ān uses to describe itself.⁵² Nicolai Sinai also treats aspects of the term *kitāb* in a study of qur’ānic self-referentiality.⁵³ Despite this attention, something seems to have escaped the translators of the Qur’ān: one of the prominent denotations of *al-kitāb* in the Qur’ān is simply “the Bible.” Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau comes close to this translation in her study of the Qur’ān’s references to itself when she concludes that the term *kitāb* designates the Qur’ān as an object linked clearly to Judaism and Christianity. It is a scripture that has been revealed “in the Judeo-Christian manner.”⁵⁴ Translators seem to be unaware that, according to William Muir’s 1856 study, *al-kitāb* refers to the Old Testament or to both the Old and New Testaments.⁵⁵

The inherited tradition of Islamic Studies scholarship dictates that *ahl al-kitāb* be rendered “people of the book” or “people of scripture.” Similarly, the phrase *alladhīna ūtū ’l-kitāb* is regularly rendered as “those who have been given the book” or “those who have been given the scripture.” Most translators have simply followed earlier translations in this regard. This usage is based on the idea that *al-kitāb* in the Qur’ān is throughout a general term referring to any member in the category of sacred text or scripture. This view may be justified by recourse to Arabic grammar, according to which the definite article *al-* serves not only to identify something that is known because it has been mentioned earlier in the conversation (in which case it is termed *lām al-‘ahd*, “the *al-* of familiarity”), but also to refer to an entire category (*lām li’sighrāq al-jins*, “the *al-* for encompassing the category”). Thus, in Arabic, one says *al-ḥubb*, “the love,” just as the French say *l’amour*, to refer to “love” in general, while in English the definite article is

52. Geo Widengren, *The Ascension of the Apostle and the Heavenly Book* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1950); Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur’ān’s Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam’s Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); idem, “The Limits of Self-Referentiality in the Qur’ān,” in Stefan Wild (ed.), *Self-Referentiality in the Qur’ān* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 59–69.

53. Nicolai Sinai, “Qur’ānic Self-Referentiality as a Strategy of Self-Authorization,” in Wild, *Self-Referentiality in the Qur’ān*, 103–134.

54. Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même: Vocabulaire et argumentation du discours coranique autoréférentiel* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), esp. 393–397.

55. William Muir, *The Testimony Borne by the Coran to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures* (Agra: Secundra Orphan Press, 1856).

not generally used in this fashion, but it is only deployed when a general term is specified in some fashion, as in “the love of Qays for Laylā” or “the love of a mother for her children.” This usage is also upheld by the Islamic legal tradition, which has included several other religious communities under the protected category of *ahl al-kitāb*, such as Sabians and Zoroastrians. In short, translators have understood the usage of the term *al-kitāb* to refer to the general category of scripture, while I would argue that, in the Qurʾān, *al-kitāb* in many cases refers to a specific book. In grammatical terms, the definite article *al-* in this case is *lām al-ʿahd* and not *lām liʾstighrāq al-jins*; it refers to a known and familiar scripture, and not to the general group of all scriptures.⁵⁶

One hint that something might be amiss with these translations is the Qurʾānic use of *ahl al-kitāb* and the alternative expression *alladhīna ūtū ʾl-kitāb*. Muslims themselves are never described in the Qurʾān as *ahl al-kitāb* (“people of the book” or “people of the scripture”). Neither Muslim exegetes, nor later authors of texts in Islamic law, nor scholars writing in the European tradition of Qurʾānic Studies have argued that the term ever applies to them. However, if *al-kitāb* simply referred to the category of scripture, then this would be a startling fact. Clearly, Muslims have a scripture, and just as clearly, the Qurʾānic text refers to the revelations delivered through the Prophet Muḥammad as belonging to a scripture. This is so even if one limits attention to explicit Qurʾānic evidence and ignores the ubiquitous use of *al-kitāb* in later Islamic legal literature to refer either to the Qurʾān as a substantial scripture or to a specific proof-text from the Qurʾān. As seen above, Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau stresses that *kitāb* in the Qurʾān is meant to designate the Qurʾān as a scripture of the Judeo-Christian type. If *kitāb* is simply the generic label of “scripture,” then why wouldn’t Muslims be included in the category of *ahl al-kitāb*, along with Jews and Christians?

It is important to recognize that the term *ahl al-kitāb* excludes Muslims even when the term *al-kitāb* itself is used in a number of passages to refer unambiguously to the Qurʾān itself (e.g., Q 2:1, 13:1, 14:1). This suggests that the meaning of *al-kitāb* in the term *ahl al-kitāb* is distinct from its meaning when it refers to the Qurʾān. A solution suggests itself in the argument that *al-kitāb* (“the Book”) refers, in many passages, to a specific book. That this is so is corroborated by a passage that uses a parallel turn of phrase which unequivocally refers to a specific scripture, Q 5:47:

56. Mohsen Goudarzi also makes this point in his dissertation, “The Second Coming of the Book: Rethinking Qurʾānic Scripturology and Prophetology” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2018), 20–22.

wa'l-yaḥkum aḥlu 'l-injīli bi-mā anzala 'llāhu fīhi

Let the people of the Gospel judge according to what God has sent down therein.

Ahl al-injīl, “the people of the Gospel,” here designates Christians through reference to their scripture, a specific sacred book. This suggests the possibility that *al-kitāb* as well refers to a specific book, namely, the Bible, and not just a member of the class of scripture in general.

If the term *ahl al-kitāb* refers to both Jews and Christians, and *al-kitāb* refers to a specific, known scripture, and not just to any scripture, it must refer to a sacred book that is shared by Jews and Christians. In some cases, *ahl al-kitāb* may be interpreted as referring to Jews alone, but in others it refers manifestly to both Jews and Christians. Moreover, there is little indication that *ahl al-kitāb* includes any other group besides Jews and Christians. A number of passages that include the term *ahl al-kitāb* refer explicitly either to Jews and Christians or to the Torah and the Gospel. The term *ahl al-kitāb* in Q 5:15 clearly refers both to the Israelites (*banū isrāʾīl*) mentioned in Q 5:12–13 and to the Christians (*al-naṣārā*) mentioned in Q 5:14. Similarly the term *ahl al-kitāb* in Q 5:19 clearly includes both the Jews and the Christians mentioned in the previous verse, Q 5:18. Q 3:65 reads, “O people of the book! Why do you argue about Abraham, while the Torah and the Gospel were not revealed until long after him? Do you not understand?” This verse refers to the people of the book and to the Torah and the Gospel in the same verse. It suggests that Jews and Christians dispute over Abraham, each group arguing that they have a closer relationship to him or a better claim to his legacy. When the verse objects that neither the Torah nor the Gospel were revealed until long after Abraham’s time, the point is that Abraham could have been neither a Jew nor a Christian, on the grounds that Judaism began only with the revelation of the Torah, and Christianity began only with the revelation of the Gospel. It is thus clear that *ahl al-kitāb* means Jews and Christians in this passage, and the book referred to by the term *ahl al-kitāb* corresponds both to the Torah and the Gospel. Arguably, then, *al-kitāb* means “the Bible,” a sacred text that encompasses both Jewish and Christian scripture.

Sūrat al-Māʾidah (Q 5) provides yet more evidence that *al-kitāb* refers to a sacred text including both the Jewish and Christian scriptures. Q 5:65–66 report that God will admit *ahl al-kitāb* to paradise if they believe and fear God. If they observe the teachings of the Torah and the Gospel, they will enjoy providence from above and below. A similar conjunction occurs shortly after this statement in the same passage, in Q 5:68:

Say, "O *ahl al-kitāb*! You have nothing to stand on unless you observe the Torah, the Gospel, and what has been revealed to you from your Lord."

Thus, in this passage, *ahl al-kitāb* are closely associated with both the Torah and the Gospel, which are both mentioned explicitly twice. In all of these cases, the use of the term *ahl al-kitāb* refers to Jews and Christians directly or to those whose sacred texts are the Torah and the Gospel, which evidently amounts to the same thing. These passages tend to justify the post-qur'ānic, historical definition of *ahl al-kitāb* as referring primarily to Jews and Christians, and not to a broader category consisting of any group endowed with a scripture. As argued above, the book mentioned in the designation *ahl al-kitāb* apparently includes both the Torah and the Gospel.

If the term *ahl al-kitāb* certainly refers to Jews and Christians, then this suggests that *al-kitāb* is not a generic reference to scripture but a reference to a specific scripture that Jews and Christians are understood to share. It is for this reason above all that I would suggest that *ahl al-kitāb* means "those who possess the Bible" and that *al-kitāb* in certain passages of the Qur'ān means simply "the Bible." This view was anticipated long ago by William Muir, who wrote a work in 1856 titled *The Testimony Borne by the Coran to the Jewish and Christian Scriptures*.⁵⁷ As a colonial official in India, he was struck by local Muslims' habit of disparaging the Bible and characterizing it as corrupt, so he wrote this work in order to present the qur'ānic view of the Jewish and Christian sacred texts and thereby correct his Muslim interlocutors with evidence from their own sacred text. He points out that the Qur'ān throughout exhibits veneration for these texts. The view commonly held by his interlocutors was that the "true" Torah and the "true" Gospel were essentially different from the texts in the possession of the Jews and Christians, but Muir argues that this view is mistaken because the Torah and the Gospel are described in the Qur'ān as what is *ma'ahum* ("with them") or *'indahum* ("in their possession"). Qur'ānic usage does not restrict the terms Torah and Gospel to those texts as they were originally revealed by God.⁵⁸ In his view, the terms *al-kitāb* ("the book"), *kitāb allāh* ("the book of God"), *kalām allāh* ("God's speech"), *al-dhikr* ("the remembrance"), and so on, all refer to the Bible. In his analysis of the verse, "If thou are in doubt regarding that which We have sent down unto thee, then ask those who read the Book (revealed) before thee. Verily the truth hath come unto thee from thy Lord; be not therefore amongst those that doubt" (Q 10:94), he writes about the term *al-kitāb*: "Here, as in many other passages, the word is obviously

57. Muir, *Testimony*.

58. Muir, *Testimony*, 23, 100.

used in its widest sense, and intends the Scripture in use both amongst the Christians and Jews.”⁵⁹ Muir stresses that, according to the Qur’ān, believers are required to believe in the whole of scripture and not simply part of it. The audience is asked, “Do you believe in part of the Book and reject part thereof?” (Q 2:85).⁶⁰ He means to argue that the Book refers to the Bible in the sense of the one body of scripture that is used both by Jews and by Christians.

Examination of the examples presented above suggests that it is not unreasonable to translate *al-kitāb* as “the Bible” in a number of Qur’ānic passages. A clear example occurs in Sūrat al-Baqarah, Q 2:113:

The Jews say, “The Christians have nothing to stand on” and the Christians say, “The Jews have nothing to stand on,” although both recite the Book. ... Surely God will judge between them on the Day of Judgment regarding their dispute.

This verse refers explicitly to both Jews and Christians and states that they both read *al-kitāb* (“the Book”). It is possible to argue that the text means that the members of each group, the Jews on the one hand and the Christians on the other hand, read their own respective scripture. However, the probable meaning intended by the verse is that the book in question is the same book. The logic of the verse requires this: it is surprising that they disagree, because *they recite the same scripture*. Muir agrees with this interpretation of *al-kitāb* here, remarking, “These are the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, in current use among the Jews and Christians.”⁶¹ Another example occurs in Q 6:156: *an taqūlū innamā unzila ’l-kitābu ’alā ṭā’ifatayni min qablinā wa-in kunnā ’an dirāsatihim la-ghāfilīn* (“Lest you say, ‘The Book was only revealed to two communities before us, though we could not grasp what they recited’”). This verse reports that *al-kitāb*, again, apparently a single scripture, was revealed to two communities (*ṭā’i-fatayn*), evidently Jews and Christians, and that they both read or studied that same scripture. The verse does not use the indefinite *kitāb* (“a book” or “a scripture”), one of which was revealed to each community. The point is that the pagan Arabs were arguing that they could not be held accountable to the one God and obligated to accept monotheism because they could not understand the biblical text, which was not in their own language. The revelation of the Qur’ān in Arabic served to invalidate that line of argument.

59. Muir, *Testimony*, 22.

60. Muir, *Testimony*, 50–51, 101.

61. Muir, *Testimony*, 54.

Both these verses suggest that *al-kitāb* refers to a scripture that is shared by the Jews and the Christians, and the most idiomatic way to convey this idea in English is to translate it as “the Bible.” And, if this is the case, then *ahl al-kitāb* should be “the people of the Bible” or “those who possess the Bible,” rather than “the people of the book” or “the people of scripture,” and *alladhīna ūtū ’l-kitāb* should be “those who have been given the Bible.”

Mohsen Goudarzi’s 2018 dissertation focuses on qur’ānic scripturology and in particular on the term *al-kitāb*. He argues that *al-kitāb* is not a general referent to the category of scripture but rather a specific term identifying a particular scripture. He then argues that *al-kitāb* has exactly two major referents, the Torah and the Qur’ān.⁶² I agree with Goudarzi that *al-kitāb* refers to a specific book, but while he limits the term exclusively to two referents, the Torah and the Qur’ān, I would argue that it also refers to the Bible. In some cases, this is conceived of as identical with the Torah, but in others, it must include Christian scripture as well. Goudarzi resolves this potential objection by arguing that, according to the Qur’ān, the Torah is presented as the scripture of the Christians as well, and by relegating the Gospel to a lower status than that of *al-kitāb*.⁶³ My suggestion, agreeing with the interpretation of Muir, is that the term takes on the sense of the Bible that is familiar from Christian usage, referring to the combination of the Old and New Testaments, while also conceding that the term may be used by Jews to refer to their sacred text.

Like the choice to render *allāh* as God, the qur’ānic personal names *ibrāhīm* and *mūsā* as Abraham and Moses, and *al-masīh* as “Christ,” the choice to render *al-kitāb* as “the Bible” would give the reader of an English translation a stronger impression of the direct invocation of Jewish and Christian sacred texts that is in fact intended in the text of the Qur’ān. The use of “scripture” as the translation of the term *al-kitāb* weakens and diffuses that invocation by allowing it to refer to a broader and more nebulous category of sacred texts not necessarily connected with Jewish and Christian tradition.

Conclusion

Some connection between the Qur’ān and the Bible has always been obvious. However, the intimate relation between these sacred texts has often been played down in Islamic tradition in order to stress the uniqueness

62. Goudarzi, “The Second Coming of the Book.”

63. Goudarzi, “The Second Coming of the Book,” 184–240.

and superiority of Islam, stressing its status as a distinct religion from Judaism and Christianity. It has also often been attenuated by non-Muslim writers seeking to exclude Islam from the Judeo-Christian tradition. In yet other cases, translations that fail to capture adequately the Qur'ān's invocations of biblical tradition are simply the product of inertia in the history of Qur'ānic translations, in which translators have simply fallen back on literal renditions or have relied heavily on earlier translations and have not undertaken independent investigations of key Qur'ānic terms. In many cases, the translations have not kept up with developments in Qur'ānic Studies scholarship.

Several examples have been presented here of alienating renditions of Qur'ānic phrases that I believe could be better rendered in a biblicizing manner in translations of the Qur'ān. In my view, current English translations of the Qur'ān obscure the fact that the Qur'ān refers to Jesus explicitly as "Jesus Christ" and refers explicitly to "the Bible" shared by Jews and Christians. In some cases, as with *safīnat nūḥ*, many of the existing translations already adopt the biblicizing form, referring to Noah's ark, and only a few translators have chosen to do otherwise. In other cases, however, such as those of *al-masīḥ*, *al-kitāb*, and *ahl al-kitāb*, the alienating translations are entirely dominant. Even specialists who focus on the Jewish and Christian connections of the Qur'ān rarely entertain the idea that *al-kitāb* in the Qur'ān could simply mean "the Bible"—*that* book in particular.

The extent to which "biblicizing" translations are correct is an issue that confronts every translator of the Qur'ān. When faced with a term that is related in some fashion with biblical language or with Jewish or Christian concepts, the translator must take into account how it is used in the Qur'ānic text and what function it serves. Is it intended to call attention to the similarity between the Qur'ān and the earlier settings in which the term was used, or is the sense modified or reinterpreted? Is the former sense simply ignored altogether? The choice of a biblicizing vs. an alienating translation is not an automatic one. Both Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Walid Saleh have pointed out that simply knowing the origin of a word does not solve the puzzle of its later usage. However, in a number of cases biblicizing translations of particular Qur'ānic terms have been regularly missed or passed over in favor of alienating translations, and these occur in contexts which suggest that the connections with Jewish and Christian material were meant to be understood.

Biblicizing translations may not always be appropriate. As explained above, the term *ḥanīf* is used in the Qur'ān in a way which suggests that it was not intended to invoke the meaning of the Syriac *ḥanpā* ("heretic"),

which may nevertheless have been its etymological source. In his discussion of Qur'anic language, Nöldeke devotes a section to foreign terms that have been used in the Qur'ān in ways that are not true to their original meanings, including *furqān*, *sakīnah*, *zakāh*, *rajīm*, *burhān*, *millah*, and so on, which he gives the heading *Willkürlich und mißverständlich gebrauchte Fremdwörter im Koran* ("foreign words used in an arbitrary and misleading way in the Qur'ān").⁶⁴ He was concerned mainly with historical linguistics rather than theology, but some of these examples may not, in fact, be comparable to that of *hanīf*, for it is often the case that borrowed terms are modified or altered in some respects without losing the connection with the original term. Similarly, Mark Durie has argued that Islam cannot be construed as forming part of the Abrahamic tradition on account of fundamental differences between Qur'anic and Christian theology, despite their apparently shared vocabulary. For a number of terms from biblical tradition that appear in the Qur'ān, including *sakīnah* and *al-masīh*, he argues that while the cognate term figures in the Qur'anic corpus, the profound theological connection with Christian tradition does not.⁶⁵ Regarding the overall implications of the use of *al-masīh* in the Qur'ān, he writes, "There is no Christological 'subtext' in the Qur'an's allusive use of the name *al-masīh* to refer to 'Īsā, for the Qur'ān has a 'Christ' without a Christology. ... *Al-Masīh* of the Qur'ān is to *mashiah* of the Hebrew Bible and *christós* of the New Testament what 'juggernaut' is to Hindi *Jagan-nātha*."⁶⁶ While it is true that there are fundamental differences between the portrayal of Christ in the Qur'ān and Christian Christology, Durie appears to overlook or downplay the fact that the Qur'anic use of the *al-masīh* is meant to recall Christians' use of the term "Christ," concentrating on implied theological differences instead. In my view, his argument, that such examples as this do not represent an organic inheritance of religious ideas but rather perfunctory borrowings that are not signs of a more profound affinity between the religious traditions, is overly rigid. Using the same types of evidence, one could make a similar argument that Christianity does not have a profound affinity with Judaism, or even that the religion of the Hebrews/Israelites/Jesus as evident from different strata from the Hebrew Bible are not indicative of any productive continuity.

It is important to point out here that differences in usage or theology often do not prove a lack of connection, with the consequence that if a biblical term occurs in the Qur'ān, the question is not whether it has the same exact

64. Nöldeke, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft*, 23–30.

65. Mark Durie, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Reflexes: Investigations into the Genesis of a Religion* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), 160–164, 178–179.

66. Durie, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Reflexes*, 163.

meaning or implications but whether its use is intended to invoke biblical precedent or not. For example, it has been observed that the Torah ark in a Jewish synagogue is meant to invoke the ark of the covenant and to conjure up God's presence, as if the Torah were an idol. The two arks are clearly different in their physical forms and literal definitions, but the analogy is nevertheless intended and important in the tradition.⁶⁷ Similarly, the term that devotees of the Islamic mystical traditions adopted for their chants or litanies, *dhikr* ("remembrance"), invokes qur'ānic uses of the term *dhikr* that clearly had very different meanings and referred instead to revelation, message, information, explanation, historical accounts, revealed books, or the Qur'ān.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, the use of the term *dhikr* allows Sufis to invoke and anchor their practice in the Qur'ān, and when reading the qur'ānic command *fa's'alū ahla 'l-dhikri in kuntum lā ta'lamūn* ("So ask the people of remembrance, if you do not know"; Q al-Nahl 16:43) they can argue that this refers to Sufi masters, or as al-Qushayrī (d. 465) puts it, *al-ʿarifūn bi'llāh* ("those who know God").⁶⁹ Even if this reading is demonstrably anachronistic and arguably wrong, it cannot be dismissed as an ordinary misunderstanding, and one cannot say either that *dhikr* is simply an incorrect term for "Sufi chant" or argue that it does not invoke the Qur'ān. For present purposes, the main point is that, just as these terms are meant to conjure up connections with important terms and concepts in earlier religious history, many biblical terms in the Qur'ān are meant to do the same. Pointing out that the qur'ānic terms do not have the same exact referents or connotations does not explain away the intended invocation, just as pointing out that *dhikr* does not mean "Sufi chant" in the Qur'ān does not disprove that Sufis meant to invoke qur'ānic usage by adopting that term.

In *How to Read the Qur'an*, Carl W. Ernst stressed the unfamiliarity of Islam's sacred text to an anglophone audience in whose societies the Qur'ān, in contrast to the King James Bible, has not permeated the language for

67. Jeffrey H. Tigay, "The Torah Scroll and God's Presence," in M. L. Grossman (ed.), *Built by Wisdom, Established by Understanding: Essays on Biblical and Near Eastern Literature in Honor of Adele Berlin* (Bethesda: University Press of Maryland, 2013), 323–340; James W. Watts, "From Ark of the Covenant to Torah Scroll: Ritualizing Israel's Iconic Texts," in Nathan MacDonald (ed.), *Ritual Innovation in the Hebrew Bible and Early Judaism* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 21–34.

68. Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary of Qur'ānic Usage* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 330–331.

69. ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī, *Tafsīr al-Qushayrī al-musammā Laṭāʿif al-ishārāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (3 vols.; Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyyah, 1971), 2.158.

centuries. What I have attempted to show here is that this strangeness is in part the fault of alienating translations which fail to convey the biblical resonances that permeate the text of the Qur'ān. To translate the Qur'ān in ways that capture these resonances, or even to bring them into relief, is not to do violence to Islam's scripture but rather to render tangible to the reader of a translation something that, in many cases, was clearly an intended feature of the original text. This is not a foreign imposition, since the Qur'ān presents itself as a scripture in the biblical tradition and claims explicitly that it has been revealed to confirm earlier scriptures in that tradition, including the Torah and the Gospel. As a consequence, Jewish and Christian salvation history provided the necessary background for and models to be emulated by the nascent Islamic community.

While this investigation has not treated the many translations of the Qur'ān into other European languages, experience indicates that the situation is more or less the same in the existing French, German, and other translations: they, too, regularly engage in what I have described as alienating translations of biblical elements in the text. The only exception, in my view, are the Hebrew translations. Because Hebrew is both cognate with Arabic and also heavily imbued with biblical phraseology, even in its modern form, it is much more difficult to disguise or neglect the biblical valences of the terms and phrases like those that I have cited here. So, for example, translating *bayt* in reference to the Ka'bah into *bet* in modern Hebrew is not like translating it as "house" in English, because Hebrew *bet* already shares with Arabic *bayt* the fundamental meaning of "temple," and appears prominently in the common terms for the temple in Jerusalem, *bêt hammiqdāš* and *bêt ʾēlōhîm*.