# "THE FOREMOST OF BELIEVERS:"

## The Egyptians in the Qur'ān, Islamic Exegesis, and Extra-Canonical Texts

Submitted by Michael D. Calabria, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arab and Islamic Studies, December 2014.



I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

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## Abstract

From the perspective of the Hebrew Bible the Egyptians represented the quintessential "other" to the Israelites - lascivious, idolatrous, tyrannical, hostile and murderous. The biblical characterization of the Egyptians may be explained by the historical context in which early Israel emerged, a context in which Egypt represented a political, military and cultural threat to Israel's survival and distinctiveness, and in which the Israelites came to regard themselves as a *covenanted* people, in a unique and exclusive relationship with their God. This biblical perspective was inherited to some extent by the early Christian community, which according to the apostle Paul has been grafted into Israel's salvation history, and thus continued to associate the Egyptians with idolatry and base morality.

The Islamic assessment of the ancient Egyptians, as presented particularly by the Qur'ān, extra-canonical works and commentaries, and how it compares to biblical and extra-biblical views, is the subject of this study. Drawing on distinctions of covenanted and missionary identities as described in Anthony Smith's *Chosen Peoples* (2003), this thesis hypothesizes that the Qur'ān and Islamic tradition with their pronounced *missionary* thrust present a rather different image of the "other," particularly the Egyptians, given the historical context in which Islam emerged.

This study presents a unique examination of the Egyptians in the Qur'ān and extra-canonical texts as related through their encounters with the prophets Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf, Mūsā and 'Īsā. It combines a detailed exegetical and *intertextual* study of revelant Qur'ānic verses with an analysis of extra-canonical texts such as the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* and traditions such as are found in al-Ṭabarī's *al-Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk.* Moreover, this thesis addresses historical, Egyptological and archaeological issues, and how the Qur'ānic portrayals of the Egyptians in particular reflect the concerns and values of the early *ummah*, a community of believers which not only struggled to survive the hostilities of the Quraysh, but which sought to bring them and others to faith in the God of Ibrāhīm.

**Contents**

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There are a number of individuals who have made my postgraduate studies and this thesis possible, and thus deserve my sincere thanks: Father John O'Connor, OFM and Father Dominic Monti, OFM, the former Provincial and Vicar-provincial of the Franciscan Province of the Most Holy Name, and the members of the Provincial Council who gave their permission for me to undertake doctoral studies, and the friars who supported this endeavor; Sr. Margaret Carney, OSF, President of St. Bonaventure University, New York, who generously granted me a leave of absence during which much of my research and writing was completed; and Michelle Siemietkowski, Director of Residential Ministry, Georgetown University, who gave me with the opportunity to live and minister at Georgetown while completing this thesis.

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Many decades ago, Egyptologist Hans Goedicke (1926-2015) mentored me as an undergraduate in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Johns Hopkins University. He remains the one individual who has exerted the greatest influence on my scholarly endeavors, most especially the careful and critical reading of ancient Egyptians texts, skills that have proved invaluable in my subsequent studies of the Hebrew Bible, New Testament and Qur'ān. He was, moreover, the person who first set my feet upon Egyptian soil, a land and a people who have profoundly affected the course of my life for over thirty years.

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**Notes on Dates, Spelling, Abbvreviations, Translations and Citations**

Dates for the reigns of Egyptian rulers are taken from: Aidan Dodson and Dylan Hilton's *The Complete Royal Families of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2004). Since throughout this study I refer to people, events and eras before and *after* the advent of Islam, I have opted not to use *hijri* dates, and for clarity use BCE and CE to designate dates before and within the Common Era.

I have used standard American spelling for the English text. For Arabic, I have utilized the transliteration system of *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: Brill), now into its third edition. This applies also to proper names except in the most common of cases, such as Muhammad, which I render without diacritics.

In referencing the Qur'ān, I use the traditional names of the *sūras,* as this is how they are known to most Muslims, followed by the number assigned to the *sūra,* used more commonly by non-Muslims, and then the *āya*. For example, *Yūsuf* 12.21 signifies *Sūrat Yūsuf,* the twelfth *sūra* of the Qur' ān, verse twenty-one. Throughout, I have used the numbering of *sūras* and *āyāt* of the Egyptian edition (1925).

In preparing my own translations of the Qur'ānic texts that form the basis of this study, I have consulted a number of Eglish translations of the Qur'ān, especially 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān,* 10th ed. (Beltsville: Amana, 2001), as well as: Ahmed Ali, *Al-Qur'ān: a Contemporary Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University, 2001); S.V. Mir Ahmed Ali, *The Holy Koran Interpreted* (Lake Mary, FL: United Muslim Foundation, 2005); A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qurān* (Bristol: Book Foundation, 2003); N.J. Dawood, *The Koran* (London: Penguin, 2006); and Alan Jones, *The Qur'ān* (Cambridge: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2007).

In my translations, I use "God" instead of *Allāh* so as to convey continuity with the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures and Traditions, while acknowledging the theological differences expressed by the texts, and the arguments of those authors who prefer using *Allāh.*

For bibliographic citations I have utilized the conventions provided by Joseph Gibaldi's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, Fifth Edition*.

## Chapter I - Introduction: The Biblical Perspective and Its Legacy

In 30 BCE, Cleopatra VII (r. 51-30 BCE), ancient Egypt's last independent ruler (albeit Greek by bloodline), died – apparently by suicide - some three thousand years after Egypt's first kings ascended the throne of the Two Lands.[1] Thereafter, Egypt, the last of the Hellenistic empires, was absorbed into the Roman empire of Gaius Octavian, soon to become Caesar Augustus (r. 30 BCE-14 CE). Perhaps some thirty years after the emperor's death, Mark the Evangelist was preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the streets and synagogues of Alexandria which boasted the largest diaspora community in the ancient Near East. By the fifth century CE, the growing Christian population had abandoned the ancient scripts (hieroglyphs, hieratic and demotic), and by the second half of the sixth century, had converted the last of Egypt's functioning temples – the Temple of Isis on the island of Philae – into a church. A century later, in 639-640 CE, 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ led a Muslim army into Egypt, then a disaffected province of the Byzantine Empire. Egypt subsequently became part of the various Islamic caliphates (Umayyad, Abbasid, Fatimid, and Ayyubid) and empires (Mamluk and Ottoman) until the Twentieth Century when in 1922 it became a nominally independent state, and 1952 when it became a truly sovereign nation.

In spite of the more than two millennia since the demise of pharaonic civilization, interest in ancient Egyptian civilization has not waned. In 2010, some 14.73 million tourists travelled to Egypt, which was an increase of 17.5% from the previous year.[2] Even without travelling to Egypt, many westerners are regularly exposed to pharaonic history and culture in the numerous art exhibitions that regularly appear in museums in the United States, Canada and Europe. Since

[1] From earliest times, Egypt was understood to comprise two lands: Upper Egypt (the Nile Valley) and Lower Egypt (the Nile Delta).
[2] *Egypt Independent,* 18 March 2014: http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/egypt-tourism-increased-175-percent-2010. Political turmoil and social unrest since 2011 has adversely affected the tourist industry.

1961 when treasures from the tomb of Tutankhamun first were exhibited outside Egypt until the present, millions of people from Europe and the Americas have gazed upon the king's artifacts without setting foot in Egypt. Westerners need not wait, however, for Egyptian artifacts to arrive on loan as the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Italy each boast several museums with major collections of Egyptian antiquities, as well as many other smaller collections. At universities around the world, students pursue advanced degrees in Egyptology, pouring over hieroglyphic, hieratic, demotic and Coptic inscriptions, and using grammars and dictionaries for the ancient scripts. At least a score of academic journals are devoted to research in Egyptology.[3] Blackwell, Routledge, Thames and Hudson, Cambridge, Oxford, and many other university presses in Europe and the United States regularly publish significant monographs on ancient Egyptian history and culture.

That such a wealth of information on ancient Egypt is now available to even the non-specialist is remarkable given that much of what we currently know about the ancient Egyptians is, for the most part, the result of merely two hundred years of scholarship. As an academic discipline, Egyptology may be said to have been born during the years 1799-1801 when Napoleon undertook an expedition to Egypt to secure it as a bulwark against the British Empire in the East.[4] The academic aspect of this expedition, represented by the presence and activities of over 150 astronomers, mathematicians, naturalists, physicists, doctors, chemists, engineers,

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[3] E.g. *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l'Égypte* (Cairo), *Chronique d'Egypte* (Brussels), *Göttinger Miszellen* (Göttingen), *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* (New York), *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* (London), *Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities* (Toronto), *Revue d'Egyptologie* (Leuven), *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* (Hamburg), *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* (Leipzig and Berlin), etc.

[4] Several contemporary accounts of the French presence in Egypt were written by Egyptian chronicler 'Abd al-Rahman al-Jabartī (1753-1825). These are: *Tārīkh muddat al-Faransīs bi Miṣr* ("The History of the French Period in Egypt"); *Maẓhar al-taqdīs bi-zawāl dawlat al-Faransīs* ("The Manifestation of Holiness: the End of French Rule"); and a section in *Ajā'ib al-āthār fīl-tarajīm wal-Akhbār* ("The Marvelous Compositions of Biographies and Chronicles").

botanists and artists, has received much attention in recent years due to the tremendous impact it had on European academia in the Nineteenth Century.[5] The subsequent publication of the monumental *Déscription de l'Égypte* (1809-1829) and the decipherment of hieroglyphs in 1822 by Jean François Champollion resurrected pharaonic civilization after two thousand years, and inestimably affected the study of history, religion, language, literature, art and architecture in the West.[6]

Prior to Napoleon's expedition, and the publications that resulted from it, those in the West had few sources of real information about the ancient Egyptians. Scholars might have turned to the *Aegyptiaca,* a history of pharaonic Egypt written by Manetho, an Egyptian priest of the third century BCE, fragments of which were transmitted by the Jewish historian Josephus (first century CE), and Christian authors Sextus Julius Africanus (third century CE), Eusebius of Caesarea (fourth century CE) and George Syncellos (eighth century CE).[7] Other sources included Herodotus' *The Histories*, Book Two of which contains information he gleaned during his journey to Egypt ca. 450 BCE;[8] the *Bibliotheca Historica* of Diodorus Siculus, of which Book One concerns Egypt which he visited in first century BCE;[9] Strabo's *Geographica*, the

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[5] E.g., Nina Burleigh, *Mirage: Napoleon's Scientists and the Unveiling of Egypt* (New York: Harper, 2007). In 2009 a major exhibit at the Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris and the Musée des Beaux Arts, Arras explored the cultural dimensions and impact of the Egyptian campaign: *Bonaparte et l'Égypte: Feu et Lumières* (Paris: Institute du Monde Arabe, 2008). Recent monographs on the French invasion of Egypt include: Robert Solé's *Bonaparte à la Conquête de l'Égypte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006); Juan Cole's *Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); and Paul Strathern's *Napoleon in Egypt* (New York: Bantam, 2008).
[6] The original twenty volumes of the *Déscription de l'Égypte* have been condensed into a single, modern edition and published in 1994 by Benedikt Taschen Verlag, Köln. Recent accounts of Champollion's deciphering of Egyptian hieroglyphs include: Lesley and Roy Adkins' *The Keys of Egypt: the Obsession to Decipher Egyptian Hieroglyphs* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000) and Daniel Meyerson's *The Linguist and the Emperor: Napoleon and Champollion's Quest to Decipher the Rosetta Stone* (New York: Ballantine, 2004).
[7] Manetho, *Aegyptiaca*, ed. and trans. W.G. Wadell, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1940).
[8] Herodotus*, The Histories,* trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt, rev. A.R. Burn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1954).
[9] Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History,* Volume I, Books 1-2.34, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1933).

seventeenth volume of which concerns Egypt (ca. 30 BCE);[10] and finally Plutarch's *Moralia* (first century CE), Book Five of which contains an extensive discussion of the Egyptian deities Isis and Osiris, verifying information first conveyed by Manetho.[11]

Apart from these few sources (of varying degrees of accuracy and value), which were moreover available only to scholars with access to the Greek or Latin manuscripts, the principal source of information on the ancient Egyptians for most people in the West from Late Antiquity until the Nineteenth Century CE was the Bible. For millennia, the Bible has shaped how Jews and Christians regard the ancient Egyptians even as modern scholarship continues to challenge biblical perspectives. Likewise, the Muslim view of the ancient Egyptians has been shaped by the Qur'ān, as well as by the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, and subsequent commentaries (*tafāsīr*) and stories of the prophets (*Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*). The Islamic assessment of the ancient Egyptians, as presented particularly by the Qur'ān, extra-canonical works and commentaries, and how it compares to biblical and extra-biblical views, is the subject of this study. The choice of Egyptians as the subject of this investigation may seem an arbitrary one. It derives from my training in Egyptology and subsequent studies in theology and scripture, as well as a desire to understand and explain how the ancient Egyptians, who have given us the earliest religious texts in the world, and whose political and cultural influence in the ancient Near East and Classical World has been inestimable, became the popular archetype of all that is base and unholy.

For readers of the Bible, there is no dearth of references to Egypt. In the Hebrew Bible alone, there are 711 explicit references to Egypt or Egyptians. The Philistines and Babylonians

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[10] Strabo, *Geography, Volume VIII, Book 17 and General Index*, trans. Horace Leonard Jones, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1932).
[11] Plutarch*, Moralia, Volume V, Isis and Osiris*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library (London, 1936).

constitute a distant second and third with 296 and 287 references respectively.[12] While a thorough analysis of these references would require a separate and lengthy study, a survey is included here to illustrate the basic biblical posture vis-à-vis the Egyptians before turning to the Qur'ān and Islamic sources.[13] Egypt and Egyptians are mentioned in all five books of the Pentateuch; the first eight books of the *Nevi'im* (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel), as well as seven of the twelve minor prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Haggai and Zechariah); and eight books from the *Kethuvim* (Psalms, Proverbs, Lamentations, Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, First and Second Chronicles).[14]

**The Pentateuch.** In Genesis, the most numerous references to Egyptians are found in the stories of Abraham and Sara in Egypt (12.10-20); Hagar, the Egyptian maidservant of Sara and mother of Ishmael (Gen. 16 and 21); and the Joseph story (Gen. 37; 39-50), which is set almost entirely in Egypt. These texts generally express a "fundamental ambivalence"[15] about Egypt as a land of fertility, prosperity and security, but one also associated with slavery, cruelty, deception, lust, sickness, death and divine retribution. More detailed analyses of these narratives will be found in subsequent sections of this study where they are compared with Islamic versions.

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[12] These counts are based on the Masoretic Text of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia,* the most widely used edition by biblical scholars, and the basis for F.V. Greifenhagen's counting of ethnic designations in the Hebrew Bible. For a breakdown of the occurrences of "Egypt/Egyptians" and other ethnic designations in the Hebrew Bible, see his *Egypt on the Pentateuch's Ideological Map: Constructing Biblical Israel's Identity*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 361 (London: Sheffield, 2002) 272-6.

[13] No comprehensive treatment of Egypt in the Hebrew Bible exists. For a partial study, see Griefenhagen cited above. See also: John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997).

[14] Unless otherwise noted, all citations to the Hebrew Scriptures are from: *The Jewish Study Bible*, featuring the Jewish Publication Society Tanakh translation, Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). This edition presents the Hebrew canon in its traditional order (*Torah, Nevi'im* and *Kethuvim*) and nomenclature, and was produced by the collaboration of biblical scholars with rabbis from the three largest branches of American Judaism.

[15] Greifenhagen 28.

The book of Exodus is, of course, replete with references to Egypt: 180 compared to the 100 references in Genesis.[16] The majority of those references (153) appear in the first fifteen chapters in which the Egyptians enslave the Israelites, oppress them, drown their sons, are repeatedly punished with plagues sent from God (including the death of their firstborn), stripped of their wealth, and drowned in the sea. Even after the Israelites had passed through the sea, left the Egyptian dead on the shore, and sung their triumphant hymn of praise to the LORD[17] (Ex. 15), references to Egypt in the book of Exodus persist, albeit less frequently, with twenty-seven additional references from chapters sixteen through forty. As the Israelites wander in the parched and rugged expanse of Sinai, they look back nostalgically to their former home in fertile expanse of the Egyptian Delta, even as they are reminded that God delivered them from Egypt - "the house of bondage" (בית עבדים), a refrain that is repeated ten more times in the books of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Jeremiah and Micah. Likewise, they are reminded that they were "strangers in Egypt" (Ex. 22.20 and 23.9) - a phrase repeated three more times in Leviticus and Deuteronomy (Lev. 19.34; Deut. 10.19; 23.8). Taken as a whole, the numerous references to Egypt in Exodus and throughout the Hebrew Scriptures serve to show Egypt as "the major 'other' over against which the unique and distinct identity of Israel is constructed by contrast."[18] Egypt is all that Israel is not, neither to be emulated nor imitated.

The references to Egypt in the book of Leviticus continue make this point. The Israelites are warned not to "copy the (sexual) practices of the land of Egypt" (Lev. 18.1-3), suggesting

[16] Greifenhagen 274. Historical issues regarding the Exodus will be explored in detail in the corresponding section on the Muslim sources.
[17] As is common in both Jewish and Christian translations of the Hebrew Scriptures, I have opted *not* to use the divine name written YHWH when it appears in the text, but instead use "LORD" in its place.
[18] Greifenhagen 157.

that sexual behavior there is aberrant and in violation of God's laws.[19] In time, Egypt became the symbol of illicit desire and passion, fueled by the stories of Pharaoh's lusting after Sara (Gen. 12.14-15), the attempted seduction of Joseph by Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39.7-12), and Ezekiel's sexually charged castigations (see below). As a land steeped in idolatry, Egypt likewise represents infidelity (to Israel's God). Leviticus illustrates the punishment for blasphemy with a story of a man of mixed Egyptian-Israelite parentage who quarreled publicly with a (pure) Israelite. During the altercation, the man of mixed heritage "pronounced the Name (of the LORD) in blasphemy," and is thus condemned to death by stoning for his crime (Lev. 24.10-23). Even though born of an Israelite mother and a member of the Exodus community, the man's Egyptian heritage seemingly taints his ability to be a faithful servant of Israel's God and adherent of God's laws. The example suggests that the issue is not simply one of blasphemy but of ethnic purity, which demands that the community be purged of Egyptian blood. Philo would later explain that the man had disregarded the Jewish teachings of his mother and had "inclined to the Egyptian impiety [of his father], being seized with admiration for the ungodly practices of the men of that nation."[20]

Moreover, the Hebrew Scriptures tell us that the LORD initially consecrated Israel's firstborn to Himself when He struck down Egypt's firstborn (Num. 8.17), an episode that is recounted in Num. 33.3-4. The LORD punished Israelites who dared to pine for the plentiful food and drink of Egypt with death from plague (Num. 14.37) and poisonous *seraph* serpents (Num. 21.6). Egypt had so tainted the people with idolatry and disobedience that ultimately the LORD permitted none of the Israelites who had lived in Egypt to enter the Promised Land – save

[19] This warning could *possibly* refer to brother-sister marriages practiced occasionally (and exclusively) by Egyptian royalty since vv. 6-18 refer to incestuous relationships.
[20] *The Complete Works of Philo,* trans. C.D. Yonge (N.p.: Hendrickson, 1993) 508.

for Caleb and Joshua (Num. 14.22-24, 29-35) who remained loyal to Israel's God. Six times Deuteronomy refers to Egypt as "the house of bondage" (5.6; 6.12; 7.8; 8.14; 13.6, 11), and another six times reminds the Israelites that they were "slaves in Egypt" (Deut. 5.15; 6.21; 15.15; 16.12; 24.18; 24.22). The text adds another painful and unique reminder of Israel's bondage in Egypt by calling it: "that iron blast furnace" (Deut. 4.20), an epithet that is repeated in 1 Kings 8.51 and Jer. 11.4, and which conjures up visions of intense heat and relentless blows of the hammer.[21] Moreover, Deuteronomy adds that Egypt is place of "dreadful diseases," of which the Israelites will be free but with which God will afflict their enemies (Deut. 7.15). Yet, if the Israelites do not obey the LORD, He will strike them "with the Egyptian inflammation, with hemorrhoids, boil-scars, and itch," from which they will not recover (Deut. 28.27), and will inflict upon them "all of the diseases Egypt" (Deut. 28.60). Egypt is compared unfavorably with the land to which God is leading them because agriculture in Egypt requires labor (irrigation) whereas the fields of the Promised Land are watered by the rains of heaven (Deut. 11.10-11). Referring to Egypt, the LORD explicitly warns the Israelites: "You must not go back that way again" (Deut. 17.16), and threatens them with a forceful return to Egypt should they not obey his law. Quite paradoxically and inexplicitly, amid this constant refrain of *Egyptophobic* comments, the Israelites are told: "You shall not abhor an Egyptian, for you were a stranger in his land. Children born to them may be admitted into the congregation of the LORD in the third generation" (Deut. 23.8-9)[22] – a rare instance where Egyptians are given preferential treatment among Israel's foreign neighbors.

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[21] Greifenhagen (189) takes this designation in a more positive sense: as iron is made stronger in the smelting process, so too is Israel strengthened in the crucible of Egypt. While theologically plausible, it is difficult to imagine the Israelites making positive associations with the intense heat and repeated hammering of the smelting process.
[22] Brueggemann explains: "Apparently Egypt is here remembered simply as the host country of the ancestors and not as an abuser. The memory of 'sojourn' opens Israel to a more liminal perception of its past and a more open

We may thus conclude, as far as the Pentateuch is concerned, that the overall attitude towards Egypt and the Egyptians is unquestionably and overwhelmingly negative. The obvious question is why? Is the biblical account of Israel's oppression in Egypt and subsequent Exodus, sufficient to explain the persistence of negative images throughout the Pentateuch? How then might we explain the negative references to Egypt in Genesis that 'precede' the story of the Exodus? How one answers these questions depends on the historical context in which the texts were written or, at the very least, redacted and given their final form. Before proceeding to examine the other references to Egypt and the Egyptians in the Hebrew Scriptures, it is helpful to briefly address these questions.

Given the anachronisms, inconsistencies, contradictions, repetitions, and diverse theologies in and among the books of the Pentateuch, it has long been assumed that the texts comprise the works of several different authors that were combined and redacted at some point. The debates over the composition of the Pentateuch need not concern us here, for whether one holds to the four strands of the *documentary hypothesis,*[23] to Rendtorff's six *tradition-complexes*,[24] or to another theory, it is widely accepted that the Pentateuch did not achieve its final form until the Post-exilic Period as there are clear references to an exile (in Babylon) and a return from exile.[25] Greifenhagen has suggested that the anti-Egyptian tone of the Pentateuch may be explained within the context of the period 450-350 BCE in which the Egyptians were

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posture towards its present. It need not label people enemies forever." (*Deuteronomy*, Nashville: Abindgon, 2001, 229.

[23] E.W. Nicholson maintains that, the documentary hypothesis remains "the most coherent and plausible that has yet been argued" in: "Pentateuchal Research," *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, E. Fahlbusch et al., eds. (Eerdmans and Brill, 2005) v. 4, 135.

[24] These are: 1) primeval history; 2) patriarchal history; 3) the bondage-exodus complex; 4) wilderness traditions; 5) the Sinai complex; and 6) settlement in the land. *Das überlieferungsgeschichtliche Problem des Pentateuch* ("The Problem of the Transmission of the Pentateuch"), John J. Scullion, trans. JSOTSup, 89 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1977).

[25] At least one study has claimed to prove the single authorship of Genesis by means of a computer analysis: Yehuda, Thomas Radday et al., *An Authorship Study in Computer-Assisted Statistical Linguistics* (Analecta Biblica No. 903, Vol. 20, 1985).

rebelling against the Persian Empire in attempts to secure their independence. The Jewish religious establishment and redactors of the Scriptures may have been eager to encourage and demonstrate Jewish allegiance to their Persian overlords, as well as convince the Jewish mercenaries serving the Persians in Egypt not to give aid to the Egyptians in their rebellions.[26]

**The Deuteronomistic History.** Even though completed and redacted as late as the Persian Period, the book of Deuteronomy and the books comprising the Deuteronomistic History – i.e. Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and 1 and 2 Kings – are generally believed to have originated with the reign of Josiah, King of Judah (640-609 BCE), a period in which the Egyptian kings of the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty (672-525 BCE) aided the waning Assyrian Empire. References to Egypt must then be viewed within the contexts of pre- and post-exilic events. Each of these books of the Deuteronomistic history contains ubiquitous references to Israel's Captivity in Egypt and the Exodus, and thus perpetuates the negative views of Egypt. Without providing any context, the second book of Samuel (23.20-21) tells of a brave soldier named Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, who performed many great deeds, including killing a Goliath-like Egyptian – "a huge man" – an act of valor for which he was named the head of David's bodyguard. The vanquishing of an Egyptian, the quintessential enemy of Israel, was deemed a feat of bravery worthy of repeating in 1 Chronicles 11.22-23.

Egypt figures prominently in the stories of Israel's kings, almost always to Israel's detriment. In the first and second books of Kings, Egypt is a constant thorn in the side of the Israelite kingdom. Although Solomon was said to have married the daughter of Pharaoh (1 Kgs. 3.1), she seems to be implicated with his other foreign wives who turned his heart to other gods (1 Kgs. 11.4-5). The Egyptian court became a sanctuary for the opponents of Israel's kings as in

[26] Greifenhagen 233ff.

the case of Hadad, an adversary of David's and Solomon's (1 Kgs. 11.14-22) who married into the Egyptian royal family. Likewise, Jeroboam son of Nebat, who fled from Solomon's service found refuge in Egypt under King "Shishak" (Shoshenq I, ca. 948-927 BCE) until he returned to Israel after the death of Solomon, became king of the northern kingdom, and then instituted the idolatrous cults of two golden calves at Bethel and Dan (1 Kgs. 12.26-30) – undoubtedly an Egyptian influence - at least in the minds of the biblical authors.[27] This same Shishak, who had sheltered an Israelite traitor, attacked the kingdom of Solomon's son Rehoboam (928-911 BCE), and looted the Temple (1 Kgs. 14.25-26), an event repeated in 2 Chron. 8-9.[28]

Even when faced with the threat of Assyrian conquest, alliances with Egypt were to be avoided as they were regarded as betraying faith and trust in Israel's God, and thus resulted in tragic consequences for the Israelites. Thus, when Hoshea, King of Israel (732-722 BCE), entered into secret negotiations with "King So of Egypt," the Assyrians unleashed their wrath against Samaria and the kingdom of Israel is destroyed (2 Kgs. 17.1-6),[29] an event which is interpreted as God's punishment (2 Kgs. 17.7). When the Assyrians besieged Jerusalem, Sennacherib taunted Hezekiah (ca. 715-687 BCE) for depending upon the Egyptians:

> You rely, of all things, on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which enters and punctures the palm of anyone who leans on it! That's what Pharaoh King of Egypt is like to all who rely on him. (2 Kgs. 18.21; c.f. Is. 36.6)

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[27] Contacts between Egypt and the Kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon, are explored in: Paul S. Ash, *David, Solomon and Egypt: a Reassessment.* Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 297, (Sheffield, 1999); and John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997) 159-171.
[28] Currid 172-202.
[29] There was no Egyptian Pharaoh named *So*. For a discussion of identifications past and present, see: John Day, "The Problem of 'So, King of Egypt' in 2 Kings XVII 4," *Vetus Testamentum,* Vol. 42, Fasc. 3 (Jul., 1992): 289-301.

When Josiah, King of Judah (639-609 BCE), attempted to stop the Egyptian advance to aid Assyria against the Babylonians, Pharaoh Nekau II (610-595 BCE) slew him in battle at Megiddo (2 Kings 23.29; c.f. 2 Chron. 35.20-24), imprisoned his son Jehoahaz, and exacted tribute from Josiah's other son Jehoiakim (608-598 BCE) whom Nekau had installed upon the throne (2 Kings 23.33-35; c.f. 2 Chron. 36.3-4). Yet, in spite of all the trouble that relations with the Egyptians presented, when threatened with an invasion from Babylonia, "all the people, young and old, and the officers of the troops set out and went to Egypt because they were afraid of the Chaldeans" (2 Kgs. 25.26). Egypt proved itself irresistible even as Israel's prophets railed against it.

**Prophets.** Several of Israel's prophets lived during the period of Israel and Judah's struggle with the Assyrians in which the Egyptians played a part. Exhorting Israel to seek God's aid, and not that of the Egyptians, Hosea writes of how the LORD called Israel "My son, ever since Egypt" (Hos. 11.1) reminding the people that the LORD has been "your God ever since the land of Egypt" (Hos. 12.10; 13.4), and twice He complained that they will return to Egypt for assistance (Hos. 9.3; 11.5) in spite of having delivered them from Egypt. Three times Amos reminds Israel that the LORD brought them up from the land of Egypt (Amos 2.10; 3.1; 9.7), and that He punished Israel with pestilence "in the manner of Egypt" (Amos 4.10). Several chapters of the book of Isaiah are particularly concerned with Egypt. Chapter 19, the oracle on Egypt, vividly describes the turmoil that shall overcome the Egyptians - civil war, tyranny, drought, and fear - "because the Lord of Hosts will raise His hand against them" (Is. 19.16). This is followed by a truly remarkable passage, however, in which the restoration, and indeed salvation, of Egypt is assured:

> In that day, there shall be an altar to the LORD inside the land of Egypt and a pillar to the LORD at its border. They shall serve as a symbol and reminder of the LORD of Hosts in the land of Egypt, so that when [the Egyptians] cry out to the LORD against oppressors, He will send them a savior and champion to deliver them. For the LORD will make Himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians shall acknowledge the LORD in that day, and they shall serve [Him] with sacrifice and oblation and shall make vows to the LORD and fulfill them. The LORD will first afflict and then heal the Egyptians; when they turn back to the LORD, He will respond to their entreaties and heal them…and then the Egyptians together with the Assyrians shall serve [the LORD]. In that day, Israel shall be a third partner with Egypt and Assyria as a blessing on earth; for the LORD of Hosts will bless them, saying, "Blessed be My people Egypt, My handiwork Assyria, and My very own Israel. (Is. 19.19-25)[30]

In spite of other universalistic passages in Deutero-Isaiah, the idea that the Egyptians would worship Israel's God and thus be blessed was so inconceivable that when the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, 19.23 was rendered as: "The Egyptians shall *serve the Assyrians*," rather than: "The Egyptians *together with* [-אֶת] the Assyrians shall serve [the LORD]." Likewise, in the LXX the blessing of Egypt along with Israel in 19.25 became: "Blessed be my people [i.e. Israelites] *in* Egypt." In the Middle Ages, the Hebrew text of 19.25 in which Israel is but one of three ostensibly equal nations, continued to trouble rabbinic commentators such that Rashi (1040-1105 CE) explained that God was not blessing the Egyptians, but rather: "Israel, whom I chose for Myself as a people when they were in Egypt."[31]

In the first seven verses of Isaiah 30, Israel is sternly admonished against an alliance with the Egyptians against the Assyrians as it will only bring shame, regret and disgrace. Likewise in Chapter 31, Israel's dependence on Egyptian horses and chariots proves "they [the Israelites] have not turned to the Holy One of Israel, they have not sought the LORD" (31.1). Isaiah 36 uses the image of Egypt as a "splintered reed" that is repeated in 2 Kings 18.21 and Ez. 29.6-7: "You

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[30] Some regard this passage as a post-exilic addition, e.g. J.F.A. Sawyer, "'Blessed Be My People Egypt' (Isaiah 19.25): the Context and Meaning of a Remarkable Passage," *A Word in Season*, *Fs. W. McKane*, ed. J.D. Martin, P.R. Davies, JSOT Supp. 42, 1986, 57-71.

[31] Available at: //www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/15950/showrashi/true.

are relying on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which enters and punctures the palm of anyone who leans on it. That's what Pharaoh King of Egypt is like to all who rely on him" (Is. 36.6).

In the book of Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah, the LORD brings His case against Israel, and presents their deliverance from slavery in Egypt as evidence of His fidelity: "In fact, I brought you up from the land of Egypt; I redeemed you from the house of bondage" (6.4). The prophet Nahum vividly described the downfall of Assyria, which he likens to the calamity that befell Egypt:

> Were you [Nineveh] any better than No-Amon (i.e. Thebes)…? She [Egypt] went into captivity. Her babes, too, were dashed in pieces at every street corner. Lots were cast for her honored men, and all her nobles were bound in chains. (Micah 3.8-10)

As with the pre-Exilic prophets, Jeremiah warned the people about taking refuge from the Babylonians in Egypt: "What, then, is the good of your going to Egypt to drink the waters of the Nile" (Jer. 2.18)…You shall be put to shame through Egypt just as you were put to shame through Assyria" (2.36). Like the author of Deuteronomy 4.20, Jeremiah refers to Egypt as the "iron blast furnace" (11.4). As the Babylonians lay siege to Jerusalem, the prophet counseled King Zedekiah not to depend upon Pharaoh's help (37.7-8). The most explicit and urgent warning about Egypt, however, comes in Chapter 42:

> If you turn your faces toward Egypt, and you go and sojourn there, the sword that you fear shall overtake you there, in the land of Egypt, and the famine you worry over shall follow at your heels in Egypt, too; and there you shall die…As My anger and wrath were poured out upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so will my wrath be poured out on you if you go to Egypt. You shall become an execration of woe, a curse and a mockery...The Lord has spoken against you, O remnant of Judah! Do not go to Egypt!" (Jer. 42. 15-19)

In spite of the prophet's vigorous remonstrations, the Babylonian threat proved too much for the people of Judah, causing them to flee to Egypt, taking the prophet along with them. With the Babylonian king as His instrument of destruction, Israel's God declared war against Egypt's gods: "And I will set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt; he [Nebuchadrezzar] will burn them down and carry them off" (43.12). Jeremiah's vivid warning of Chapter 42 is reiterated and expanded, and comprises all of Chapter 44. Chapter 46 begins the oracles against the nations, the first of which concerns Egypt and Pharaoh Nekau:

> I will inflict punishment on [the god] Amun of No [i.e. Thebes] and on Pharaoh – on Egypt, her gods, and her kings – on Pharaoh and all who rely on him. I will deliver them into the hands of those who seek to kill them, into the hands of King Nebuchadrezzar of Babylon and into the hands of his subjects. (46.25-26)

Unlike Isaiah's mellifluent vision of an Egypt saved, restored, healed and blessed (19.19-25), Jeremiah tersely describes Egypt's future: "But afterward she shall be inhabited again as in former days, declares the LORD" (Jer. 46.26).

As Jeremiah is the most significant voice of the Babylonian Period, so is Ezekiel the most prominent voice of the exilic period. His language, describing the relationship of Judah and Israel with the Egyptians, is some of the most graphic in all the Hebrew Scriptures. Jerusalem, the prophet says, "played the whore with your neighbors, the lustful Egyptians – you multiplied your harlotries to anger Me" (Ezek. 16.26). The events of Israel's Oppression and Exodus are recounted in Chapter 20 to illustrate God's salvific act in the midst of Israel's recalcitrance. In Chapter 23 Ezekiel uses the image of two whoring sisters, called Oholah and Oholibah, to signify Samaria and Jerusalem, Israel and Judah. Oholah "did not give up whoring she had begun with the Egyptians; for they had lain with her in her youth, and they had handled her virgin nipples, and had poured out their lust upon her" (23.8). Likewise, Oholibah, "in her youth she

had played the whore in the land of Egypt; she lusted for concubinage with them, whose members were like those of asses and whose emissions were like those of stallions" (23.20). Although the prophet's intent is to excoriate Israel and Judah, the Egyptians are considered complicit partners in their illicit, unfaithful and shameful acts. Four chapters of Ezekiel - chapters 29, 30, 31 and 32 - comprise oracles against the Egyptians. Ezekiel reiterates the Isaiah's image of Egypt as the broken reed: "When they grasped you with the hand, you would splinter, and would all their shoulders, and when they leaned on you, you would break, and make all their loins unsteady" (29.7). The Lord God will bring utter ruin to the land of Egypt and will disperse the Egyptians among the nations not unlike the scattering of Israel. Although Egypt's fortunes will be restored after a period of forty years (conjuring up images of Israel's wanderings in the desert), Egypt will nevertheless remain "the lowliest of all Kingdoms," and "shall have no dominion over the nations" (29.15). In Chapter 30, the prophet tells of Egypt's impending destruction at the hands of the Babylonians, here the instrument of God's wrath: "A day of the Lord is near…a sword shall pierce Egypt…And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he lifts it against the land of Egypt (30.1-26)." In Chapter 31, Pharaoh of Egypt is likened to a fallen cedar of Lebanon who "shall be brought down with the trees of Eden to the lowest part of the netherworld" and who "shall lie among the uncircumcised and those slain by the sword (31.18)."[32] Again in Chapter 32, the prophet is exhorted to prophesy to Pharaoh:

> O mortal, intone a dirge over Pharaoh king of Egypt. Say to him: O great beast among the nations, you are doomed! ...I will cast your carcass upon the hills and fill the valleys with your rotting flesh. I will drench the earth with your oozing blood upon the hills…The sword of the king of Babylon shall come upon you…When I lay the land of

[32] Since the Egyptians practiced circumcision, and abhorred uncircumcised enemies as much as the Israelites, this remark is particularly stinging.

> Egypt waste, when the land is emptied of [the life] that filled it, when I strike down all its inhabitants. And they shall know that I am the LORD. (Ezek. 32.2-15)

**Post-Exilic Texts.** With the Persian defeat of the Babylonians (539 BCE), the end of the Exile (538 BCE) and the subsequent conquest of Egypt by Cambyses II in 525 BCE, the political map of the ancient Near East had changed. A Persian king now ruled as Egypt's pharaoh. Deutero-Isaiah explains this turn of events as God ransoming Israel from captivity in Babylon by giving Egypt to the Persians (Is. 43.3), a clear indication of the Egyptians' inferior worth vis-à-vis the Israelites. Jews served the Persians as mercenaries in Egypt, particularly at the military colony at Elephantine on Egypt's southern border that had boasted a temple to Israel's God since the seventh century. This temple became a symbol of Jewish collaboration with the Persians and was attacked and destroyed by the Egyptians in 410 BCE as they fought to free themselves of the Persians and their Jewish mercenaries.[33] The Hebrew Scriptures reflect Egyptian-Jewish tensions in this period. The prophet Joel (ca. 400-350 BCE) spoke of God laying waste to Egypt "because of the outrage to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed the blood of the innocent" (4.19). Haggai assured the people that the LORD was still in their midst as He had promised them when they came out of Egypt (2.5). Zechariah wrote of the LORD's intention to gather His people from all the nations, including Egypt (10.10), and bring them to worship in Jerusalem, threatening punishment for the nations whose (Jewish) communities do not come (14.17-19). The book of Ezra, concerned with preserving the homogeneity of the Jewish community, lists the Egyptians among the foreign peoples with whom Israel was not to intermarry (in seeming contradiction to what had been stated in Deut. 23.8-9; see above), and whose "abhorrent [sexual] practices" Jews were to reject (9.1-2). Nehemiah (Ch. 9) relates an occasion in which the Levites

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[33] Joseph Mélèze Modrezejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: from Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 39-40; Peter Schäfer, *Judeophobia: Attitudes toward the Jews in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1997) 121-4.

had gathered the Israelites to do penance, recounting for them Israel's history, including familiar reminders of their affliction in Egypt and how God punished "Pharaoh, all his servants, and all the people of his land" (9.10).

Given the post-exilic priestly concern with ethnic purity, it is interesting (if not a little surprising) to find among two Egyptians listed in the genealogies of Israel and Judah in 1 Chronicles (ca. 375-325 BCE): an otherwise unknown slave named Jarha, who was married to the daughter of Seshan and fathered Attai (2.34-35); and Bithiah, Pharaoh's daughter who had drawn Moses from the Nile, and had who married Mered and born him sons (4.18). References to Israel's Captivity in Egypt and Exodus, already seen in the books of Samuel and Kings, are reiterated in First and Second Chronicles, including those in David's prayer of 1 Chr. 17.21 (=2 Sam. 7.23); in Solomon's dedication of the Temple of 2 Chr. 6.5 (=1 Kings 8.16); and in the LORD's warning to Solomon of 2 Chr. 7.22 (=1 Kings 9.9). In Daniel, perhaps the latest book in the Hebrew Bible, there is a final reference to the Exodus in Daniel's penitential prayer:

> Now, O Lord our God – You who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, winning fame for Yourself to this very day – we have sinned, we have acted wickedly." (Dan. 9.15)

**Psalms and Proverbs.** Determining the dates of the psalms has been an elusive, if not impossible, task. Psalms that contain clear historical references (e.g. destruction of the Northern Kingdom, Exile, etc.) may be very generally dated, although later redactions and additions occurred as with other biblical texts. Nine psalms refer to Egypt or the Egyptians: 68, 78, 80, 81, 105, 106, 114, 135 and 136.[34] All but one (68) contains references to the Exodus, and Psalm 105 also includes references to the Joseph story. Some of the more significant references appear in Psalm 78, the second longest of all psalms, which serves to teach and inspire its hearers with

[34] I follow the numbering of the Psalms as given in *The Jewish Study Bible.*

"lessons of the past (vs. 3)." Verses 12-31 evoke Exodus events from the plagues sent against the Egyptians to the feeding of the Israelites in the desert. References to the God's punishment of the Egyptians are vividly reprised in vv. 43-54, e.g.:

> He inflicted His burning anger upon them, wrath, indignation, trouble, a band of deadly messengers.
>
> He cleared a path for His anger; He did not stop short of slaying them, but gave them over to pestilence.
>
> He struck every first-born in Egypt, the first fruits of their vigor in the tents of Ham. (Ps. 78. 49-51)

Like Psalm 78, Psalms 105 and 106 are generally classified as "historical psalms," in that they evoke significant events in Israel's history, and may be postexilic in date.[35] References to Joseph in Egypt – unique in the Psalter - and the Exodus comprise almost half of the verses of Psalm 105. Whereas Psalm 105 focuses on God's salvific acts in Israel's past, Psalm 106 stresses the sins of Israel's past, most especially Israel's recalcitrance following the Exodus. Psalms 135 and 136 (known as the "Great Hallel") are particularly significant in Jewish liturgy as they form part of the *Shacharit*, the prayers for the morning of the Sabbath and festivals. Both vividly evoke the God's smiting of the Egyptians:

> 135.8-9: He struck down the first-born of Egypt, man and beast alike; He sent signs and portents against Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants.
>
> 136.10, 15: Who struck Egypt through their first-born, His steadfast love is eternal…who hurled Pharaoh and his army into the Sea of Reeds, His steadfast love is eternal.

The Book of Proverbs contains a single reference to Egypt, and associates Egypt, not with slavery, but with illicit passion, an association that will be made repeatedly by subsequent Jewish and Christian commentators. In chapter seven, a father warns his son about the dangers of street

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[35] *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown et al. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990) 544; *Jewish Study Bible* 1401.

women who seduce young men with words such as: "I have decked my couch with covers of dyed Egyptian linen; I have sprinkled my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon…" (7.16-17). Egyptian linen was, of course, renowned throughout the ancient world for its fine quality, but its mention here along with the harlot's bed perpetuates the association of Egypt with lust and illicit sex as in the Genesis account of Abraham and Sarah in Egypt and the Joseph story, as well as in Jeremiah and Ezekiel. After oppression and slavery, lust became the second most prevalent image associated with Egypt.

**The New Testament.** New Testament references to Egypt are quite few in comparison to the Hebrew Bible. They express some ambivalence as the early (Gentile) Christian community was grafted onto Israel's sacred history, and yet was exhorted by Paul to break free of Jewish law. Of the four Gospels, only Matthew contains the account of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt.[36] The purpose of the pericope was not to comment on the Egyptians, but rather to draw parallels between the story of the Jesus and that of Joseph who went down into Egypt, but even more so with Moses, such that Jesus is to be regarded as the new Moses and the fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy (11.1): "Out of Egypt I have called My son.[37] In spite of its associations with slavery from Israel's past, Egypt serves here as a safe haven for the Holy Family.

In Acts 7, Stephen preaches to the Sanhedrin before whom he has been brought, and recounts the Joseph story and the Exodus. Although Pharaoh's oppression of the Israelites is detailed, his main purpose is to remind his audience of God's salvific acts and Israel's transgressions, culminating with Jesus' crucifixion. Stephen actually acknowledges the benefits that Moses reaped from his Egyptian upbringing: "Moses was instructed in all the wisdom of the

[36] Several non-canonical works also include accounts of the flight into Egypt. These are discussed in Chapter VI below titled "'Īsā and the Egyptians."
[37] Raymond Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (NY: Doubleday, 1979) 214 ff.; D.C. Allison, *The New Moses: a Matthean Typlogy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

Egyptians and was powerful in his words and deeds" (7.22).[38] As slavery and lust are the most common negative associations made with Egypt, wisdom and knowledge are the most positive.

Paul's Letter to the Galatians is addressed to a Gentile community in central Anatolia, a church that seems to have fallen under the influence of Jewish Christians who preached adherence to Jewish law as necessary for justification. Paul vigorously chastises the Galatian on this account (3.1). To further prove his point, Paul crafts an elaborate (but not entirely convincing) allegory using the figures of Abraham's wives, Sara and Hagar (the Egyptian). Sara, a *freeborn* woman, is mother of those Christians who are *free* of the confinements of Jewish law (and what the Galatians should be). Hagar, on the other hand, was a s*lave* woman, and symbolizes Sinai and the covenant of the law, and thus mother of those Christians still bound by Jewish law in Jerusalem. An Egyptian slave, from the "house of slavery," personifies enslavement to the Law of Moses. Although Paul describes Sinai as "a mountain in Arabia," the figure of Hagar is clearly Egyptian as recorded in Genesis. Just as Sara had demanded that Abraham drive out Hagar and Ishmael, so too does Paul exhort the Galatians (and any other Christian community) to drive out those who would remain enslaved by the law. The people of the new covenant, the true sons and daughters of Abraham and Sara (i.e. the Christian community) must drive out the bastard slave children of Hagar the Egyptian, i.e. Judaizing Christians.

The Letter to the Hebrews evokes Israel's oppression in Egypt and Exodus in several instances. In attempt to show that Jesus is superior to Moses, the author stresses the rebellious and sinful nature of those whom Moses had led out of Egypt (3.16). He cites Jeremiah 31:31-34 which refers to the former covenant "made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to

[38] Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the New Testament are from the New Revised Standard Version.

lead them forth from the land of Egypt" (8.9). He recounts the patriarchs, including a brief mention of Joseph, and then speaks of Moses and the Exodus (11.23-30). The Letter of Jude reminds readers that the "Lord who once saved a people from the land of Egypt later destroyed those who did not believe" (5). Finally, in the Book of Revelation (11.8), we read of two faithful witnesses killed by the beast and whose "dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that is prophetically called 'Sodom' and 'Egypt,' where also their Lord was crucified." Here the name 'Egypt' serves as a derogatory pseudonym for Jerusalem, synonymous with 'Sodom,' the most wicked of cities.

**Egypt and the Egyptians beyond the Bible.** While Egypt comes to symbolize all that the Jewish and Christian Scriptures deemed sinful – idolatry, apostasy, oppression, tyranny, cruelty, lust, power, and unbridled wealth – ironically Egypt played a significant and positive role in the history of the Jewish and Christian communities. In spite of their former loyalty to the Persians, Jews adapted well to Hellenism, and served in Alexander the Great's army and those of his Ptolemaic successors in Egypt as they had those of Cambyses, Darius and Xerxes. Large numbers of Jews came to Egypt during the reign of Ptolemy I (310-282 BCE). According to the Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities* XX, 1), during a campaign in Palestine (ca. 311 BCE), Ptolemy seized Jerusalem and took "a great many" captives from Judea and Samaria, and brought them back to Egypt where he settled them in garrisons. He granted to them equal privileges with the Greeks, thus attracting other Jews to Egypt, "who, of their own accord, came to Egypt, attracted by the goodness of the soil, and the liberality of Ptolemy" (*Antiquities,* XII, 1.9).

Ptolemy II is credited with liberating the Jews still held captive from his father's reign, and bringing Jewish scholars to Alexandria to undertake the translation of the Hebrew Bible into

Greek. As long as Palestine was under Ptolemaic rule there was a constant flow of Jews into Egypt. Additional migration of Jews to Egypt occurred when Palestinians Jews were subjected to persecution under the Seleucid kings of Syria, especially during the reign of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (ca. 167-164 BCE). In time, Egypt became home to the most significant *diaspora* community in the Hellenistic, and later Roman, world. The earliest synagogue for which we have evidence (ca. 225 BCE) was at Schedia, located fourteen miles from Alexandria. An inscription from the site records: "On behalf of King Ptolemy [III] and Queen Berenice his sister and wife and their children, the Jews [dedicated] this house of prayer."[39] The Egyptian Jewish population continued to thrive such that by the first century CE they perhaps represented a much as a third of Alexandria's population.[40]

It was probably within Alexandria's Jewish community that Christianity made its first appearance in Egypt. In his *Ecclesiastical History* (2.16), Eusebius wrote that the apostle Mark was sent to Egypt to proclaim the Gospel, and established the first churches in Alexandria. An apocryphal text of the late fourth or early fifth century titled the *Acts of Mark* describes in detail Mark's mission and martyrdom in Alexandria.[41] The Christian Scriptures are, however, silent on this matter, and tell us very little about the emergence of the Church in Egypt. That the Gospel had spread to Alexandria by Paul's time is suggested in Acts 18.24-25, which speaks of Jewish-Christian named Apollos, "a native of Alexandria." When the Jews of Egypt and Cyrenaica revolted against Roman rule in 115 CE, the population of Alexandrian Jews was decimated, and undoubtedly the Jewish-Christian community as well. The earliest manuscript evidence for

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[39] Modrzejewski 88.
[40] Michael Grant, *The Jews under Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1976) 225.
[41] Stephen J. Davis, *The Early Coptic Papacy: the Egyptian Church and Its Leadership in Late Antiquity* (Cairo: American University, 2004) 10 f.

Christianity in Egypt – including the oldest known fragment of the New Testament[42] - comes not from Alexandria, but from Middle and Upper Egypt, and suggests that a Gentile Church emerged in the second century as successor to the early Alexandrian Jewish-Christian community.

Alexandria soon resumed its position as center of the Egyptian Church as evidenced by its renowned catechetical school that was established there in the late second-early third century CE in spite of several periods of persecution in the third and fourth centuries. Whereas the Alexandrian patriarchs had played significant roles in defining "orthodox" Christology during the Arian and Nestorian controversies (3rd-5th centuries CE), it is with the "monophysite" controversy that the Egyptian Church found itself at odds with Constantinople and Rome. Ostensibly a theological dispute over the nature of Christ, it developed into an ecclesiological contest that came to a head at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE, resulting in a schism between the Egyptian Church and that of Rome and Constantinople, and thus the emergence of the Coptic Orthodox Church.[43]

While the Christian scriptures lack the ubiquitous references to Israel's affliction in Egypt seen in the Hebrew Bible, the Captivity and Exodus nevertheless became part of the Christian story. Origen used the enslavement of the Israelites in Egypt as a metaphor for his own community's enslavement to sin: "When we were also in Egypt, I mean in the errors of this world and in the darkness of ignorance, we then did the works of the devil in lusts and desires of the flesh." Likewise, Augustine wrote that through baptism into Christ "[w]e have been led out of Egypt where we were serving the devil as a pharaoh, where we were doing works of clay amid earthly desires." Gregory of Nazianzus expressed his desire "to depart from this Egypt, the heavy

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[42] This is Papyrus Rylands 457 that dates from ca. 125 CE, and contains a fragment of the Gospel of John.
[43] Davis 81 ff.; Leo Donald Davis, *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1983) 170-206.

and dark Egypt of this life, and to be freed from the clay and bricks that held us in bondage and to pass over to the land of promise."[44] Ambrose wrote that Moses would not have killed the Egyptian (Ex. 2.11-14) had he "first destroyed in himself the Egypt of spiritual wickedness."[45] Isidore of Seville explained that the death of Egypt's firstborn in the Tenth Plague (Ex. 11.1-10) signified the destruction of "the principalities and powers and the rulers of this world of darkness."[46] Jerome addressed his flock as if they themselves had been delivered from Egypt: "We who have left Pharaoh, let us call upon the help of the Lord so that the Egyptian king may be drowned in the baptism of those who believe."[47] It was not only Israel's Exodus, however, that spoke to Christian authors. Christian writers such as Tertullian, Bede, and Isidore of Seville understood Isaiah's pronouncements against Egypt (Is. 19.1-15) to refer to the whole sinful world, such that the civil unrest prophesied for the Egyptians is interpreted anew as "a struggle between proponents of the [Christian] faith and its enemies."[48] Ephrem the Syrian understands Jeremiah's warnings about Egypt's impending ruin as referring to "the destruction of the worship of demons and idols" which was completed when Christ came into Egypt.[49]

For centuries, Christians have continued to use "Egypt" and "Pharaoh" as symbols for all that is evil in the world. This has been particularly true within the context of North American history. The Pilgrims of Plymouth, for example, referred to King James (r.1603-1625) as "Pharaoh" when they departed for Holland in 1608. When they set sail for North America, William Bradford, their leader, compared their deliverance from oppression to that of "Moses

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[44] *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, ed. Joseph T. Lienhard, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001) 3.
[45] *Ancient Christian Commentary: Exodus*, 7.
[46] *Ancient Christian Commentary: Exodus*, 54.
[47] *Ancient Christian Commentary: Exodus*, 80.
[48] Quoted in: *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Isaiah 1-39,* ed. Steven A. McKinon, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004) 136, 140.
[49] Quoted in: *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Jeremiah, Lamentations*, ed. Dean I. Wenthe (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009) 240-241.

and the Israelites when they went out of Egypt."[50] In *Common Sense* (1776) Thomas Paine likened the struggle of the American colonists against the tyranny of George III (r. 1760-1820) to that of the Israelites against Pharaoh:

> No man was a warmer wisher for reconciliation than myself, before the fatal nineteenth of April, 1775 (Massacre at Lexington), but the moment the event of that day was made known, I rejected the hardened, sullen tempered Pharaoh of England for ever; and disdain the wretch, that with the pretended title of Father of his people, can unfeelingly hear of their slaughter, and composedly sleep with their blood upon his soul.[51]

After the American colonies declared their independence (1776), the Continental Congress asked Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson to design a new seal for the United States. The image they submitted depicted Moses and the Israelites, having passed through the Sea, looking on as Pharaoh and his chariots sink beneath the waves. (It took two more committees and another six years to come up with the bald eagle design.). References to the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt were frequently employed by preachers of the colonial period. Between 1760 and 1805, the most frequently cited book in America was Deuteronomy. In 1777, Nicholas Street, referring to Deut. 8.2, preached: "Now we are in the wilderness, i.e. in a state of trouble and difficulty, Egyptians pursuing us, to overtake and reduce us."[52]

Like the colonists, African-American slaves came to identify their task masters with the Egyptians, as evidenced by spirituals such as "Didn't Ole Pharaoh Get Lost [in the Red Sea], "Turn Back Pharaoh's Army," "I Am Bound for the Promised Land," and perhaps the most well-known "Go Down Moses," the refrain of which implores Israel's prophet: "Go down, Moses / Way down in Egypt Land / Tell ol' Pharaoh / Let my people go."[53] Harriet Beecher Stowe

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[50] Bruce Feiler, *America's Prophet: How the Story of Moses Shaped America* (New York: Harper, 2009) 8.
[51] www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/milestones/commonsense/text.html
[52] Feiler 92-3.
[53] Feiler 125.

(1811-1896) used references to the Exodus in her abolitionist speeches, and nearly half of sermons preached after Lincoln's assassination (1865) compared him to Moses.[54] Ironically, southerners such as Reverend Benjamin Palmer (1818-1902) likened the Confederate states to the tribes of Israel, and Lincoln to the Pharaoh of Israel's oppression: "Eleven tribes sought to go forth in peace from the house of political bondage, but the heart of our modern Pharaoh is hardened, that he will not let Israel go."[55]

In the mid-twentieth century, American film director Cecil B. DeMille (1881-1959) used the biblical confrontation between the ancient Egyptians and Israelites as an explicit metaphor for the conflict between communism and democracy in his 1956 remake of *The Ten Commandments.*[56] In the same year, at the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) preached in New York City, declaring: "Many years ago the Negro was thrown into the Egypt of segregation. For years it looked like he would never get out of this Egypt…There were always those pharaohs with hardened hearts, who, despite the cries of many a Moses refused to let these people go."[57]

For Jews around the world, the negative associations with Egypt as exemplified by Israel's Oppression and Exodus are reiterated in the weekly recitation of the "Great Hallel" (Ps. 136) on the morning of the Sabbath, as well as in the annual celebration of the Passover. During the *Seder,* Jews dramatically recount the oppression of the Israelites at the hands of the Egyptians and the Exodus, and recite from the *Haggadah* passages such as this:

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[54] Feiler 171.
[55] Feiler 159.
[56] *The Autobiography of Cecil B. DeMille,* ed. Donald Hayne (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1959) 411; Scott Eyman, *Empire of Dreams: the Epic Life of Cecil B. DeMille* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010) 473.
[57] Feiler 245.

> We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and the L-rd, our G-d, took us out from there with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm. If the Holy One, blessed be He, had not taken our fathers out of Egypt, then we, our children and our children's children would have remained enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt. Even if all of us were wise, all of us understanding, all of us knowing the Torah, we would still be obligated to discuss the exodus from Egypt; and everyone who discusses the exodus from Egypt at length is praiseworthy.[58]

In 1946, survivors of the Nazi concentration camps published a *Haggadah* to be used at *Seder*. A large letter *bet* in the text was augmented with illustrations in the horizontal parts of the letter. In the upper part, Egypt's pyramids were drawn, and in the lower part, the barbed-wire fences, fires, crematoria smokestacks and guard towers of a Nazi concentration camp. The letter enclosed a sentence written in Hebrew: "In every generation one should regard oneself as though he had come out of Egypt."[59] The Nazis were thus the latest incarnation of the Egyptians.

**The Qur'ān and Islam.** While the ubiquitous and overwhelmingly negative references to Egyptians in the Jewish Scriptures and traditions (inherited to some extent by the Christian tradition) may be explained by the historical interaction of Israel with the Egyptians during the monarchical period, as well as in the post-exilic period when the Scriptures were redacted, as well as by the Israelite/Jewish sense of *covenantal distinctiveness*, depictions of the Egyptians in the Qur'ān are not as easily explained. By the time of Islam's advent in the eighth-century CE, Egypt of the Pharaohs had long ceased to exist. For seven hundred years, it had ceased to be an independent political power, and throughout the years of the Qur'ān's revelation to Muhammad it had remained a province of the Byzantine Empire. Thus, the early Muslim community (*ummah*) did not emerge in the shadow of an Egyptian empire, neither did it suffer from

[58] www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/pesach_cdo/aid/1737/jewish/Maggid.htm
[59] Feiler 294-5.

enslavement or conquest at the hands of the Egyptians, nor did its (final) Prophet preach against Egypt or predict its destruction at the hand of God.

Israel's "history" as related in the Hebrew Scriptures is characterized by the struggle to survive politically amid the great empires of ancient Near East while remaining culturally and religiously distinct, a struggle in which Egypt represents the quintessential "other." In contrast, the early history of the Islamic community is one of struggle by the *ummah* to survive the hostile actions of the Quraysh, the Meccans and their Jewish allies such as the Banū Qurayẓa and Banū Naḍīr. The Sassanid and Byzantine Empires (including Egypt) only became significant for the *ummah* after the death of Muhammad, in the period of the *Rāshidūn* when Islam was carried beyond the Arabian Peninsula. By the time Egypt was incorporated into the Islamic Empire in 641 CE, the Qur'ān had been completely revealed and was already on the road towards canonization, unlike the Hebrew Bible that took take many hundred years to be revealed and written, redacted and canonized. Egypt's relation with the early Islamic world is thus markedly different from the tumultuous relationship it had with ancient Israel.

While the Qur'ān lacks the prophetic invectives against the Egyptians as found among the books of the Hebrew prophets, it is not entirely unconcerned with the Egyptians as it relates the stories of God's prophets and saving acts of past eras. *Sūrat Yūsuf* narrates the story of Joseph in Egypt, and speaks of the Egyptian who bought Joseph (the biblical Potiphar; Ar. *Qiṭfīr*, etc. see below), his wife (Ar., Rā'īl or Zulaykha), other unnamed Egyptian ladies, a witness, Joseph's prison mates, the king of Egypt, his ministers, and a messenger. The story of Israel's captivity in Egypt and subsequent Exodus is repeatedly mentioned in the Qur'ān – in twenty-six *sūras*, to be precise, comprising some three hundred *āya* that speak of Pharaoh, his wife, an official named Hāmān, Pharaoh's ministers, his magicians, his people, and a believer. A detailed

exegesis of these texts that refer to Egyptians and how they have been interpreted by selected *mufassirīn* forms the core of the present study. The sojourn of Abraham and Sara in Egypt as told in Genesis 12.10-20 is not mentioned in the Qur'ān, nor the flight of the Holy Family into Egypt as recorded in the Gospel of Matthew 2.13-18. Muslim versions of these narratives are found, however, in the different versions of the "Stories of the Prophets" (*Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*), apocryphal accounts that draw upon oral tradition, folklore and, in some cases, biblical material. These, too, will be discussed in order to augment the images of the Egyptians presented in the Qur'ān and selected *tafsīr*.

Scholarly treatments of principal figures in the Qur'ān are not lacking. Particular attention has been given to the prophets as well as to Jews and Christians as a whole. Likewise, much attention has been given to those stories shared by the Bible and the Qur'ān (Creation, Exodus, Annunciation, etc.). Few, if any, have treated to any great extent the Qur'ānic depiction of the Egyptians – either as individuals or as a people. Neither have the *tafāsīr* or *aḥadīth* been explored in this regard. Likewise, most treatments of works such as the various *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* have focused on the prophets themselves, rather than on the secondary characters such as the Egyptians who lacked immediate relevance to the *ummah.* Nevertheless, the travails of Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf, Mūsā, and 'Īsā among the Egyptians as related in the Qur'ān or extra-canonical texts provided vivid parallels to the struggles the *ummah* experienced with Quraysh and their allies. Moreover, the Egyptians who were said to have submitted to the one God through the efforts of the prophets demonstrated that idolaters and enemies of the *ummah* might be brought to faith.

Since Islam's early history with Byzantine Egypt is so vastly different than that of ancient Israel's interaction with Pharaonic Egypt – i.e. it posed no threat to the early *ummah* and quickly became part of the *dār al-Islām* - we may expect that the Qur'ānic and extra-Qur'ānic references

to the Egyptians to have a different tone from the biblical and extra-biblical texts, but if so, how do they differ? Do they share stories, attitudes, or prejudices? Moreover, what do the classic and contemporary authors of *tafāsīr* say about the Egyptians? Are their views of the Egyptians influenced by the historical and political events of their day such as the biblical authors had been? What perspectives and insights have *ṣūfī* authors offered on this subject? Ultimately, the question to be asked is: what do references to the Egyptians in the Qur'ān, selected *tafsīr* and extra-canonical texts reveal about Islamic attitudes towards those ostensibly outside the community of believers such that even Pharaoh's magicians could declare: *kunna awwal al-mu'minīn* – "We are the foremost of the believers!" (*al-Shu'arā'* 26.51) – a statement that stands in stark contrast to the general and persistent condemnation of the Egyptians in the Hebrew Bible. What is the basis for inclusion in the community of believers, and how do the Qur'ānic and Islamic attitudes compare with the Biblical and Jewish traditions in this regard?

**Theoretical Basis.** In his monograph titled *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity,* Anthony Smith explored the religious foundations of nationalism that had been largely overlooked by scholars such as Elie Kedourie who sought nationalism's origins in the secularism of the Enlightenment.[60] According to Smith, some national identities are based in part on a *myth of ethnic election*, a belief that a particular people have been singled out for special purposes by, and stand in unique relation to the divine.[61] Such myths may be expressed in terms of *covenant* or *mission*. Covenanted people "tend to turn inwards, away from the profane world in their dedication to, and witness of, the true faith and the sacred duty of obedience to God's commands."[62] This, of course, describes well the biblical representation of the Israelites (as

[60] Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003) 9ff.
[61] Smith, *Chosen Peoples* 48.
[62] Smith, *Chosen Peoples* 95.

ultimately redacted) who stand apart from other nations, are discouraged, if not categorically forbidden, from intermarrying with neighboring peoples, are characterized by cultic purity, and possess a unique, exclusive relationship with God. In additional to historical considerations discussed above, this understanding of the Israelites as a *covenanted people* helps to explain, I believe, the biblical depictions of the Egyptians as the quintessential "other:" they are the ungodly, the impure, and the unchaste. They are to be avoided at all costs, and killed if necessary. Even Israel's prophets, some of who espoused ideas of universalism and integral rather than cultic purity, were not completely free of such prejudices.

Missionary peoples, says Smith, are "equally dedicated to what they see as the true faith and the word of God, but seek to expand into and transform the world, by example, persuasion, or force, or a combination of these," with leaders and institutions "bent on entering and converting the profane or heathen world – through missionary activities, or conquest…their goal being nothing less than the submission of the profane world to the deity and its sanctification through the salvation of souls."[63] Although Smith is concerned almost exclusively with Judeo-Christian traditions, his use of the word "submission" is fortuitous as his description of missionary peoples fits the Islamic community (*ummah*) well. Rather than separating themselves from other peoples, Muslims were to exhort Jews, Christians, and polytheists to submit to the will and word of God as (ultimately) revealed in the Qur'ān. In time Islam became a movement that encouraged conversion and embraced peoples of every race, ethnicity and culture. It was to find new believers among those who did not yet believe. Islam's *missionary* character is, I believe, reflected in the Qur'ān's more nuanced depiction of the Egyptians, a people that is not to be condemned as a whole, but is to be *missionized* as were all people. Smith is quick to point out,

[63] Smith, *Chosen Peoples* 95.

however, that "the distinction between missionary and covenanted peoples is one of degree only" and that "at different periods of their history, chosen people of all kinds can be found to oscillate between these two tendencies."[64] As shown in this study, Islamic traditions regarding the Egyptians, Qur'ānic and extra-Qur'ānic, as well as its theologians and exegetes, classical and modern, while tending to reflect a missionary impetus, are not entirely free of covenantal influences, particularly in times when the survival and integrity of the *ummah* is believed to be threatened due to religious, political, cultural or military aggression from without.

We propose to apply Smith's characterization of missionary (and convenanted) peoples to the Muslim community (*ummah*) first by undertaking a detailed linguistic and intertextual analysis of references to the Egyptians in the Qur'ān. We will examine the words used to describe them and those attributed to them, as well as the actions and behaviors ascribed to them. The Qur'ānic texts will be supplemented with a selection of *tafsīr* (classical, modern and contemporary), and extra-canonical sources, especially several versions of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*. The *asbāb al-nazūl* ("occasions of the revelation") will be considered in order to correlate the Qur'ānic references to the Egyptians with the experiences of the early *ummah* wherever possible. Throughout this study, the Islamic material will be contrasted and compared to Jewish and Christian Scriptures and extra-canonical texts that also speak of the Egyptians. Information and perspectives derived from Egyptological and archaeological studies and sources will also be considered. Although the Qur'ān is *not* overall interested in historical detail, exegetes and historians, both classical and modern, as well as the authors of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā',* have endeavored to fix the Qur'ānic narratives within a historical context to lend them greater veracity, not unlike the *aggadic* texts attempt the same *vis-à-vis* the Hebrew Bible. While such attempts generally

[64] Smith, *Chosen Peoples* 95-96.

have not been successful, modern Egyptological and archaeological perspectives can in some cases help to understand, interpret and clarify the texts, or even add another dimension to them.

**Exegetical Approaches.** In this analysis I will use critical methods of scriptural interpretation that have been applied to the Hebrew Bible and New Testament beginning with the likes of English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and French theologian Richard Simon (1638-1712).[65] While English Deism and French rationalism produced scholars who utilized historical and literary analysis in their study of Scripture, especially the Pentateuch, the development of modern biblical criticism, particularly with regard to the Hebrew Bible, is, however, largely due to German scholars such as Johann Salamo Semler (1725-1791) who is widely regarded as the founder of modern biblical criticism.[66] In his *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canons* (1771-1775), Semler concluded that, "the biblical books were written by human authors with the language and in the idiom of their specific culture,"[67] distinguishing the divine truths of the Bible from the written word that expresses them. By identifying different theological traditions in the Hebrew Scriptures, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn's (1753-1827) *Einleitung ins Alte Testament* (Leipzig, 1780-3) and Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette's (1780-1849) *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Halle, 1806-7) laid the foundation for Julius Wellhausen's (1844-1918) *documentary hypothesis*, a cornerstone for the development of source criticism in the Twentieth Century. Likewise the critical study of the New Testament is associated with the University of Tübingen, and the works of Ferdinand

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[65] For historical overviews on the emergence and development of modern biblical criticism, see: Alexa Suelzer and John S. Kselman, "Modern Old Testament Criticism," and John S. Kselman and Ronald D. Witherup, "Modern New Testament Criticism," in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Prentice Hall, 1968) 1113-1145.

[66] G.T. Sheppard and A.C. Thiselton, "Biblical Interpretation in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Dictionary of Modern Biblical Interpreters* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 2007) 53. Semler had, in fact, translated Simon's work into German.

[67] H. Rollmann, H. "Semler, Johann Salamo (1725-1791)," *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters,* ed. Donald K. McKim (Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2007) 911.

Christian Baur (1792-1860) and his student David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874), best known for his *Das Leben Jesu* (1835-36) in which he attempted to separate the Gospels' historical fact from the mythical.[68] This work, translated into English by Georg Eliot in 1846 did much to introduce German biblical criticism in England.

The influence of German theology, philosophy and historical scholarship on the English Church is particularly evident in the Broad Church movement of the Nineteenth Century, a diverse group of liberally minded Anglicans who were united by their critical approach to both doctrine and Scripture, and by their belief in the freedom of inquiry. The Broad Church perspective was presented in a collection of papers published under the title *Essays and Reviews* in 1860 that generated considerable controversy. The essayists concluded that theology, including the study of Scripture, must be subject to the same rigorous critical analysis as other academic disciplines, and that philosophical, scientific, historical and literary investigations must be applied to theology and Scripture. The leadership of the Anglican Church on the whole vigorously rejected such a position, trying its proponents before ecclesiastical courts, depriving them of their academic positions, and hindering their advancement in Church leadership and academe.

By the end of the Nineteenth Century, however, the views expressed by the Broad Churchmen had become more widely accepted in the Anglican Church. The Catholic Church, however, continued to regard "higher criticism" with suspicion deeming it "inept," and likely to "open the door to many evil consequences,"[69] until the promulgation of the encyclical *Divino*

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[68] Later Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976) would also advocate "demythologizing" the New Testament, but not to deconstruct faith as Strauss had attempted, but rather to make it more believable. See Bultmann's *Neues Testament und Mythologie* (1941).

[69] Providentissimus Deus, Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on the Study of Holy Scripture (1893).

*Afflante Spiritu* in 1943 by Pope Pius XII. The Church henceforth embraced textual criticism, advocating the aid of history, archaeology, ethnology, literature and other disciplines "to make better known the mentality of the ancient writers, as well as their manner and art of reasoning, narrating and writing" (40). This position was articulated further at the Second Vatican Council in *Dei Verbum, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* (1965) which recognized that because "God speaks in Sacred Scripture through men in human fashion," it was incumbent upon the exegete to consider literary forms (e.g. historical, prophetic, poetic, etc.) in determining the meaning which the sacred writer intended to express "in accordance with the situation of his time and culture" (3.12). Most recently, in 1993 the Pontifical Biblical Commission deemed the historical-critical method as "indispensable" for the scientific study of ancient texts, citing the ancient origins of the method as evidenced by the commentaries of Origen, Jerome and Augustine. Moreover, the proper understanding of Scripture as the inspired Word of God, expressed in human language by authors of limited capacities and resources, actually *requires* the use of the historical-critical method.[70]

While the historical-critical method is now widely accepted and utilized by Catholic and mainstream Protestant Scripture scholars, its use by Islamic scholars in Qur'ānic studies is much less widespread, and indeed far more controversial. As this study primarily comprises an analysis of passages from the Qur'ān, the use of hermeneutics in this context requires some explanation and indeed justification. The intellectual fervor of the Nineteenth Century that embraced the sciences, history, archaeology, linguistics, theology and biblical studies was not confined to Western Europe. The Middle East also saw an intellectual awakening – termed *al-Nahḍa* ("the

[70] Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Biblical Commission's Document "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church:" Text and Commentary* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Instituto Biblico, 1995) 26, 104.

awakening") – in part a consequence of European colonialism, and in part a reaction against it.[71] Whereas in the European context, theological inquiry was but one aspect of a broader intellectual movement ignited to some extent by the Napoleonic expedition to Egypt (see above), in the Middle East Islamic reform was at the center of this cultural renaissance. The underlying assumption of reformers such as Rifā'a al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801-1873), Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (1839-1897) and Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905) was that the subjugation of the Islamic world by European powers was in no small part due to an antiquated understanding of the faith which was inadequate to address the challenges of the modern world. This required a new hermeneutic with which to approach the Qur'ān.

As European scholars raised questions about the historicity of the Bible and the various literary forms it comprised, so too did Islamic scholars such as Muhammad 'Abduh with regard to the Qur'ān. It has been said that 'Abduh's most important contribution to Qur'anic studies was his insistence that "the Qur'an is not meant to be a book of history nor a book of science; it is a book of guidance."[72] Qur'ānic stories might be based on historical events, but their purpose was not to provide historical knowledge but rather "are intended to serve ethical, spiritual and religious purposes."[73] 'Abduh had in effect re-opened a theological debate dating back to the reign of the caliph Ma'mūn (d. 833 CE) that pertained to the Qur'ān. Whereas followers of jurist and theologian Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 800 CE) maintained that the Qur'ān was the Speech of God, uncreated and eternal, the *Mu'tazilīs* maintained that only God is uncreated and eternal, and therefore the Qur'ān cannot be so. Although Ma'mūn imposed the *mu'tazilī* position during his

[71] Albert Hourani, *Islamic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: University Press, 1983).
[72] Nasr Abū Zayd, *Reforming Islamic Thought: a Critical Historical Analysis* (Amsterdam: University Press, 2006) 32.
[73] Abū Zayd, *Reforming* 32.

reign by means of a *miḥna* (inquisition), after his death the Ḥanbali position was reaffirmed and in time became the orthodox position maintained until this day.

'Abduh's views were not widely accepted in his day, although they served as a foundation for Islamic scholars of the Twentieth Century to apply historical and literary criticism to the study of the Qur'an, among them Amīn al-Khūlī (1895-1966), Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalafallāh (1916-98), Fazlur Rahman (1919-1988), Muḥammad Arkoun (1928-2010), and Naṣr Ḥamīd Abū Zayd (1943-2010).[74] These *neo-Mu'tazilīs* have suffered professionally and personally for their views, not unlike England's Broad Churchmen in the Nineteenth Century. Most infamous is the case of Abū Zayd, a professor of Arabic at Cairo University, who was publicly denounced from the pulpit and charged with apostasy by the Cairo Court of Appeals in 1995 which resulted in the forcible annulment of his marriage against his will and that of his wife. A self-proclaimed *mu'tazilī*, Abū Zayd maintained the position that "religious texts though divine and revealed by God, are historically determined and culturally constructed,"[75] a conclusion quite similar to that articulated by Protestant theologian Johann Salamo Semler in the late-Eighteenth Century, and by the Catholic Church in *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and *Dei Verbum* (see above). As Abū Zayd describes in his autobiography:

> My basic argument about the Qur'an is that in order to make Islamic thought relevant, the human dimension of the Qur'an needs to be reconsidered. Placing the Qur'an firmly within history does not imply that the origins of the Qur'an are human. I believe that the Qur'an to be a divine text revealed from God to the Prophet Muhammad through the

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[74] For an overview, see Massimo Campanini, *The Qur'an: Modern Muslim Interpretations* (London: Routledge, 2011), and: Marco DeMichelis, "New-Mu'tazilite Thelogy in the Contemporary Age: the Relationship between Reason, History and Tradition," *Oriente Moderno* 90 (2010): 411-426.

[75] Naṣr Abū Zayd, "The Dilemma of the Literary Approach to the Qur'an," *Alif,* no. 23 (2003): 34-35.

> mediation of the archangel Gabriel. That revelation took place through the use of language – a language (Arabic) rooted in a historical context.[76]

The centuries-long struggle in the Christian World to accept the historical-critical method and a *humanistic hermeneutic* of the Bible - by which I mean the recognition of a human element in the process by which divine revelation becomes a canonical text - which gained widespread acceptance in both mainstream Protestant congregations and the Catholic Church in the early- to mid-Twentieth century, is still experienced in the much of the Islamic World today. While noting the long history of intellectual engagement by Muslim scholars with the Qur'ān, Mona Siddiqui has noted: "Muslims are forgetting that intellectualism is itself a pious exercise and that faith and intellectualism are not mutually exclusive."[77] It is in this spirit that the following study is offered.

[76] Naṣr Abū Zayd with Esther R. Nelson, *Voice of an Exile: Reflections on Islam* (Westport: Praeger, 2004) 57.
[77] Mona Siddiqui, *How to Read the Qur'an* (2007; London: Granta, 2014) 103.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Survey

There is no single source, classical or contemporary, that specifically or exclusively addresses Qur'ānic references to the Egyptians, how the tradition interprets these passages, or what anthropological or theological implications they might have since, as explained above, they are not central to the Qur'ānic story but play peripheral roles, although often to great effect. Closely related to the study undertaken here is Okasha el Daly's *Egyptology: the Missing Millennium – Ancient Egypt in Medieval Arabic Writings*.[78] Bypassing the Qur'ān and exegetical literature, El Daly instead examines a variety of Arab sources concerning ancient Egypt that were written in the period between the Arab and Ottoman conquests (ca. 640-1517 CE), including travel accounts, linguistic treatises, chronicles, and treasure-hunting manuals. Such sources show that medieval Muslims, far from dismissing pre-Islamic Egypt as *jahiliyya*, took a keen interest in pharaonic monuments, history, government, language, 'science' and religion based on the information that available to them. Although we might presume that Muslims would have scorned the ancients on account of their idolatry, remarkably the anonymous author of a text titled *Akhbār al-Zamān* ("The Chronicles of Time"), dated between the tenth- and twelfth-centuries CE, saw beyond ancient Egypt's polytheistic practices to an underlying monotheism, claiming that the ancient Egyptians:

> believe in the Oneness of God, and their praise of functionary mediums (like stars), does not affect their Creator for they glorify these mediums to worship God and get nearer to him as do the Indians, the Arabs and many other nations.[79]

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[78] London: UCL, 2005.

[79] Quoted by el Daly 83. *Akhbār al-Zamān* describes the Creation and the countries to which Adam and his descendants travelled. More than half of the work that amounts to some 200 pages is devoted to Egypt. It was translated into French by the orientalist Baron Carra de Vaux under the title *L'Abrégé des Merveilles Traduit de l'Arabe d'après les Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1898). French Egyptologist Gaston Maspero (1846-1916) reviewed De Vaux's section on Egypt in *Journal des Savants* (1899) 69-86, 154-72, 277-78. The content of the text is given little appreciation in a review by J.B. Andrews in *Folkore* 10, 2 (1899), 229-231. For theories regarding the possible identity of the author of the *Akhbār,* see el Daly 170-171.

Other authors identified the Egyptian god Thoth (the Greco-Roman Hermes Trismegistus) with the Qur'ānic prophet Idrīs[80] and held Egyptian science in great esteem, claiming that ancient Egypt "was the destination for students of science and scholars of exact science in order that they sharpen their brains, intellect and intuition."[81]

Initially, says El Daly, Muslim regard for Egypt would have been based on the Egyptian identity of Hājar, the mother of Ismāʿīl, and that of Maryam, the Coptic concubine of the Prophet Muhammad, as well as *aḥadīth* in which Muhammad spoke of Egypt, e.g.: "Blessing (*al-baraka*) was divided into ten parts, nine for Egypt and one part for all the lands. This will always be manifest in Egypt more than in all other lands."[82] By contrast, Muslim *religious* scholars, both classical and contemporary, have not been as interested in or enthusiastic about the ancient Egyptians. More concerned with the central figures of the Qur'ān, they generally mention the Egyptians only as they relate to the prophets, and then usually negatively given the prominence of the Exodus story in the Qur'ān as it is in the Hebrew Bible.

Jane Dammen McAuliffe's *Qur'ānic Christians: an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge, 1991) presents a model for analyzing Qur'ānic references to a particular group of people and has served as something of a model for this study of Qur'ānic Egyptians. In her study of Qur'ānic references to Christians, McAuliffe introduces a selection of the *tafāsīr* she consulted for her analysis. Then, taking a one *āya* or a few at a time that refer to Christians, she

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That the author of the text proposed a fundamentally monotheistic character of ancient Egyptian religion is significant. His comments have been echoed centuries later in the debate among Egyptologists since the 19th-Century concerning whether the ancient Egyptian religion was fundamentally monotheistic or polytheistic. For a summary of the debate, see: Claude Traunecker, *The Gods of Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell, 2001) 9-11; Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003) 36-39; and most recently: Jan Assmann, *From Akhenaten to Moses: Ancient Egypt and Religious Change* (Cairo: AUC, 2014).

[80] Kevin van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford, 2009).

[81] Al-Nuwairi (d. 1331) quoting Ibn Zulaq (d. 997) in: El Daly 109.

[82] Quoted by El Daly 18.

analyzes and summarizes what exegetes have said about the particular passages. Brannon M. Wheeler takes a similar approach in his *Prophets in the Qur'an: an Introduction to the Qur'an and Muslim Exegesis* (London: Continuum, 2002), in which he gathers Qur'ānic references to the various prophets into individual chapters and then provides relevant excerpts from numerous *tafāsīr, aḥadīth,* and *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* ("Stories of the Prophets, see below), but without offering his own commentary, analysis or conclusions. Egyptians are occasionally mentioned in the sources he cites, but again they are not the focus of his anthology.

**Classical Sources**

Modern and contemporary discussions are limited in both number and relevance for this for this study. Classical *tafāsīr* and especially *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā* provide much more pertinent material, and are the foundational sources for my investigations after the Qur'ān. Anyone who desires to provide an analysis of Islamic exegesis on any subject, group of people or individual is confronted, as were McAuliffe and Wheeler, with a vast body of *tafsīr* literature spanning over thirteen centuries, written principally in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Urdu.[83] Clearly, any Qur'ānic scholar who utilizes *tafāsīr* for purposes of a topical study, such as this one, must be selective. As McAuliffe wrote in her study of Christians in the Qur'ān, "Inevitably some principle of selection must govern the choice of those works to be examined and discussed."[84] In addition to considerations of date and language of composition, there are sectarian perspectives

[83] For general discussions of *tafsīr,* see: Adnan Demircan and Rifat Atay, "*Tafsir* in Early Islam," *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia*, Oliver Leaman, ed. (London: Routledge, 2006) 624-31; Andrew Rippin, "*Tafsir," Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilization and Religion*, Ian Richard Netton, ed. (London: Routledge, 2008) 633-35; Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians: an Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (Cambridge, 1991) 13-36 ("Text and Tafsīr"); Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Schools of Qur'anic Exegesis: Genesis and Development* (London: Routledge, 2010); Herbert Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: the Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000); Norman Calder, "*Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," in *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993) 101-140.
[84] *Qur'ānic Christians,* 37.

that should be acknowledged and addressed. *Sunnī* exegesis differs from that of the *Shī'ī* who utilize only those traditions transmitted by the prophet Muhammad and the *imāms*. Moreover, the *Shī'ī* maintain that the Qur'an has an inner or esoteric dimension (*baṭin*) in addition to the outer or exoteric (*ẓāhir*).[85] Islamic exegetical and theological perspectives do not always or neatly fall into categories of *sunnī* and *shī'ī,* however. The rationalist *mu'tazilī* (and Neo-*mu'tazilī*) exegete not only gives "reason (*'aql*) a role in understanding divine truth alongside revelation (s*har'*)," but indeed places reason before revelation.[86] There is the contemplative *ṣūfī* who, like the *shī'ī*, strives to move beyond the *ẓāhir* to the *baṭin*, not by depending on *imāms*, but by means of an "unveiling" (*kashf*) of the heart and mind of the interpreter.[87] For each chapter of this study which focuses on the interactions of a specific prophet – Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf, Mūsā and 'Īsā - with the Egyptians, I have consulted several different *tafāsīr, qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā* and other sources which reflect a variety of perspectives: *sunnī, mu'tazilī, ṣūfī*, and *shi'ī,* many of them "classical" while others are modern or contemporary. In truth, while classical and contemporary *tafāsīr* are useful for clarifying words, concepts and meaning of specific *āyāt,* they each have limited value for developing an overall Islamic view of the Egyptians as they are generally focused on the central figures of the Qur'ān – i.e. the prophets and their messages. Not all such works have been consistently useful for each chapter, and thus each chapter has its own unique sources to augment the sometimes minimal and redundant remarks made by *mufassirūn* with unique contributions to the topic at hand.

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[85] Diana Steigerwald, "Twelver Shī'ī *Ta'wīl*," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān,* ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 376, 381.
[86] Richard C. Martin *et al*., *Defenders of Reason in Islam: Mu'tazilism from Medieval School to Modern Symbol* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1997) 16, 27.
[87] Alan Godlas, "Ṣūfism," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān,* ed. Andrew Rippin (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) 350f.

The primary *sunnī tafsīr* consulted for this study is that of Abu Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (839-923 CE). It has been said that his *tafsīr* "is arguably the single most important repository of 'orthodox' Sunni understanding(s) of the Qur'ān in the first three centuries of Islam,"[88] and "has served as a major authority for more than a thousand years of Qur'ānic exegesis."[89] Although biographical details about this Qur'ānic exegete, *ḥadīth s*cholar, and historian have been published elsewhere, I include some basic information here.[90] Al-Ṭabarī was born during the caliphate of al-Mu'tasim (r. 833-842 CE) in the city of Amūl in the region on the southern coast of the Caspian Sea known as Tabaristan. Although not from a wealthy family, he was sufficiently financially independent to travel extensively for purposes of study. At age twelve he travelled to Rey (now part of present-day Tehran), and after five years moved on to Baghdad expecting to study with Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (780-855), the founder of the school of *fiqh* that bears his name, but arrived to find that the theologian was recently died. (Ironically, it was later the followers of Ibn Ḥanbal who violently opposed al-Ṭabarī, accusing him of Shi'ī sympathies.) After several years in Basra, Kufa, and again in Baghdad, he undertook travels in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt where he arrived in 867 CE. He spent the last some twenty years of his life in Baghdad where he lived, taught and wrote until his death in 923 CE.

His highly regarded *tafsīr* is officially titled *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*[91] ("The Comprehensive Clarification of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān"), and was completed

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[88] Berg, *Development* 122.
[89] McAuliffe 44.
[90] Extensive biographical information on al-Ṭabarī can be found in the general introduction to *The History of al-Ṭabarī* published by the State University of New York Press, volume I (1989), Franz Rosenthal, trans. Briefer treatments include: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'ānic Christians,* 38-45; Andrew Rippin, "Al-Tabari," *Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilization and Religion*, 632; Peter G. Riddell, "Al-Tabari," *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia*, 622-23; E.L. Daniel, "Al-Ṭabarī," *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 750-751.
[91] I use the edition published in fifteen volumes by Dar al-Fikr (Beirut), 2005. (Hereafter referred to as Ṭabarī's, *Tafsīr*.)

sometime between 896 and 903 CE.[92] As might be expected from a *ḥadīth* scholar, the work is characterized particularly by the vast number of exegetical *ḥadīth* that the author incorporates, even those with which he differed. This is particularly evident in contemporary editions that consecutively number each *ḥadīth* cited by al-Ṭabarī such that in a 2005 edition the total reaches 29,684. The value of al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* is not, however, merely in the comprehensive body of authorities and opinions that he cites from the first three centuries of Islam, but also in his own interpretations which he generally introduces simply with: "Abu Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr says…"[93] His overall assessments of the various authorities cited are introduced with: "The correct view is…" (*al-ṣawāb min al-qūl*)[94] or "The most correct view is…" (*'ūla hadhahi al-aqwāl bi al-ṣawāb*).[95]

In addition to al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr,* I have made extensive use of his *Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk* ("History of the Messengers and the Kings"), which incorporates much of the same material found in works more properly called *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā* (see below). Perhaps even more than his *tafsīr,* Ṭabarī is known for this monumental chronicle of history from the Creation to the year 915 CE.[96] The work is prized in the Muslim world among both Sunnis and Shī'ī, and saw early translations into Persian and Turkish. According to Fatimid historian al-Musabbiḥi (977-1029), the caliph al-'Azīz (r. 975-996) spent one hundred dinars to purchase a copy of *Ta'rīkh* only to find that his library already contained more than twenty copies, including one in Ṭabarī's own hand.[97] In the West, the existence of *Ta'rīkh* has been known since the late-17th century when B. d'Herbelot (1625-95) included a description of it in his *Bibliothèque Orientale* (1697).

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[92] FranzRosenthal, "The Life and Works of al-Ṭabarī" in: *The History of al-Ṭabarī,* I, 106.
[93] See the beginning of *Sūrat Yūsuf*, for example (4749).
[94] Following the comments on *Yūsuf* 12.63, for example (4868).
[95] See the conclusion of remarks on *Yūsuf* 12.19, for example.
[96] Beirut: Dār al-Fikr lil-Ṭibā'ah wa-al-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2002 (13 volumes). This work has been published in English in 38 volumes as *The History of al-Ṭabarī* (State University of New York Press, 1989-2007).
[97] Franz Rosenthal, "General Introduction," in: *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume I,* 141.

The *Tafsīr,* on the other hand, became known in Europe only with the publication of Otto Loth's article "Ṭabarī's Korankommentar"[98] in 1881 as the *History* was being published in Leiden (1879-1901).

Since *Ta'rīkh* is a 'historical' work, albeit one not divorced from revelation and religion, it contains a vast of amount of material not found in the Qur'ān, including stories drawn from Jewish and Christian sources as seen in the earliest examples of the *qiṣaṣ* such as the stories of Abraham's sojourn in Egypt recounted in the Book of Genesis (12.10-20) and Jesus' flight into Egypt related in the Gospel of Matthew (3.13-15). Even in the accounts of Ibrāhīm and Mūsā in Egypt, al-Ṭabarī does not simply reiterate what was written in the Qur'ān, but supplements the Qur'ānic material with the traditions drawn from and transmitted by the Companions, jurists, exegetes, and historians as he had done in his *Tafsīr.*

Al-Ṭabarī had intended to study in Baghdad under the tutelage of Ibn Ḥanbal but, as mentioned above, the latter had died before the young student arrived in that city. Like his intended master, al-Ṭabarī opposed the *mu'tazilī* doctrines that were propagated under caliphs al-Ma'mūn (r. 813-833 CE), al-Mu'tasim (r. 833-842 CE) and al-Wāthiq (r. 842-847 CE).[99] A *mu'tazilī* perspective in this study is represented by the *tafsīr* of Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī (1075-1144 CE). Titled *Al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq ghawamiḍ al-tanzīl*,

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[98] O. Loth, "Ṭabarī's Korankommentar," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 35 (1881): 588-628.

[99] Briefly, the *mu'tazilī* begin with the principle of *tawḥīd*, the oneness of Allāh, as do indeed all Muslims. They differ from other *sunnī*, however, in the implications of this principle, maintaining that the Divine attributes (*al-ṣifāt*) are not distinct from Allāh, as that would contradict *tawḥīd.* Thus, neither can the Qur'ān be eternal and uncreated for that would imply duality. For additional discussion, see: Gavin Picken, "Mu'tazilism," in *Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilization and Religion*, 472-3; W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: an Extended Survey*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1985) 106-109; and Martin *et al*., *Defenders of Reason in Islam.*

"The Unveiling of the Realities of the Mysteries of Revelation,"[100] it has been said that Zamakhsharī's commentary "has, arguably, had an importance second only to Ṭabarī's."[101]

Few details are actually known about his life.[102] He was born in Zamakhshar, in the region of Khwārazm (eastern Persia) that was predominantly *mu'tazilī*. Khwārazm had become a center of learning due to the efforts of Niẓām al-Mulk (1018-1092 CE), the vizier of Malik Shah as-Saljūqi (r. 1072-1092 CE), who had established many institutions for higher learning. In his childhood his father brought him to Jurjāniyya, the capital of Khwārazm, where he would spend much of life. Notably, he became a student of Abū-Muḍar Maḥmūd b. Jarīr al-Ḍabbī al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1114 CE) who introduced the *mu'tazilī* doctrine to Khwārazm. Subsequent studies took him to Bukhara, Samarkand and Baghdad. Although he composed poems honoring Saljūq dignitaries and sultans, he failed to secure an official position, perhaps due to his affiliation with the Mu'tazilīs. At age forty-three, he became ill and experienced a vision and a kind of conversion, vowing not to aspire to a government post, but to devote his life to writing and teaching. Having performed the *ḥajj* seven times and spending a total of five years in Mecca, he earned the *laqab, Jār Allāh*, the "Neighbor of God," by which he is commonly known.

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[100] Published in two volumes, Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 2008. In his study of *al-Kashshāf*, Andrew Lane attempts to put to rest what he refers to as "the myth that the *Kashshāf* is a 'Mu'tazilite commentary,' and argues that "it would even be difficult to define what a 'Mu'tazilite commentary' actually is." (*A Traditional Mu'tazilite Qur'an Commentary: the Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī* (Leiden: Brill, 2006, 229). McAuliffe (52) agrees that "there is very little that is obviously Mu'tazilī" in *al-Kashshāf* pertaining to the verses she examined, yet she nevertheless refers to it as "arguably the most famous example" of *Mu'tazilī* commentary (53). Hamza et al. remark that al-Zamakhsharī's "Mu'tazilī theological affiliation is quite clear in his interpretation of key verses with anthropomorphisms" (*An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries,* Vol.1, Oxford, 2008, 35). It is beyond the scope of this study to prove or disprove the Mu'tazilī character in a*l-Kashshāf* in general or argue what constitutes a Mu'tazilī commentary. Given al-Zamakhsharī's reputation as a Mu'tazilī as well as the prominence of his commentary, I deemed it appropriate to utilize it for this study as an example of a *tafsīr* with a particular theological perspective.

[101] Feras Hamza et al., eds., *An Anthology of Qur'anic Commentaries,* Vol.1 (Oxford, 2008) 35.

[102] Biographical information can found in: Lane, *A Traditional Mu'tazilite Qur'an Commentary;* D.A. Aigus, "Some Bio-Bibliographical Notes on Abū 'l-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn 'Umar al-Zamakhsharī," *Al-'Arabiyya* 15 (1982): 108-130; Lupi Ibrahim, "Az-Zamakhshari: His Life and Works," *Islamic Studies* 19.2 (1980): 95-110; McAuliffe, 49-54; Andrew Rippin, "al-Zamakhshari," *Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilization and Religion,* 696; W. Madelung, "al-Zamakhsharī, Abu'l Qāsim Maḥmud b. 'Umar," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Edited by: P. Bearman; , Th. Bianquis; , C.E. Bosworth; , E. van Donzel; and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill, 2011. Brill Online.

It was probably during his second stay to Mecca (1132 CE) that he wrote *al-Kashshāf* that he completed in 1134. Although al-Zamkhsharī was openly *mu'tazilī*, this did not harm his reputation to any great extent nor did it impede the popularity of his commentary.[103] As Lane notes, based on the number of manuscripts (843) and indications of where there were copied, "there never came a time when the *Kashshāf* was not being copied and read somewhere" in the Muslim world.[104] *Al-Kashshāf* is considered to be one of the most significant examples of *al-tafsīr bil-ra'y,* that is, exegesis by opinion or reason, in contrast to *al-tafsīr bil-riwayah* (or *bil-ma'thūr*), exegesis that relies on transmission of *ḥadīth*, of which al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* is considered the pinnacle. It is not that al-Zamakhsharī eschews traditional exegesis entirely; as Lane notes "his incorporation of Muslim traditions into his commentary is far from insignificant."[105] He refrains from using *isnād* (the chain of *ḥadīth* transmission), however, and cites his sources infrequently, relying particularly on the works of early commentators Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 722 CE), al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (642-728 CE), and al-Suddī (d. 745 CE), as well as poets, grammarians and lexicographers reflecting his own scholarly interests and high regard for the Arabic language.

Al-Zamakhsharī's *al-Kashshāf* served as the foundation for a *tafsīr* written by 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar al-Baiḍāwī (d. 1282/91? CE), titled *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl,* "The Lights of Revelation and the Secrets of Interpretation," the best-known work of this prolific Persian which has been well-regarded in the Islamic world.[106] Al-Baiḍāwī's attention to linguistic detail and his

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[103] Al-Bayḍāwī (1286-1293 CE) famously criticized al-Zamakhsharī's work, however, in his *Anwār al-Tanzīl,* as did Ibn al-Munayyir (d. 1284) in his *Kitāb al-Intiṣāf min al-Kashshāf.*
[104] Lane 60-61.
[105] Lane 175.
[106] *Tafsīr al-Bayḍāwī, al-musammá Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl / ta'līf Nāṣir al-Dīn Abī Sa'īd 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar ibn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī al-Bayḍāwī*, 2 vols (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmīyah, 1999). I have made particular use of: *Baiḍāwī's Commentary on Sūrah 12 of the Qur'ān*. A.F.L. Beeston, trans. Oxford: Clarendon, 1963. Subsquent citations to al-Bayḍāwī's commentary are to Beeston's edition.

consideration of variant readings are particularly noteworthy.[107] His commentary on *Sūrat Yūsuf* provided another classical perspective for the discussion in Chapter Four of this study.

Another *tafsīr* consulted for the chapter on Yūsuf and the Egyptians represents a (modern) Shi'ī perspective. Titled *Al-Mizān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* ("The Balance in the Interpretation of the Qur'ān"), it was written by the Iranian philosopher and theologian Muhammad Husayn Ṭabātabā'ī (1903-1981 CE).[108] He was born in Tabrīz where he was educated in Arabic and the religious sciences before undertaking studies at the Shī'ī University of Najaf at age twenty. He mastered the field of jurisprudence (*fiqh*), but decided to pursue studies in mathematics and Islamic philosophy. Moreover, he became a student of *'ilm-i ḥuḍūrī* – "immediate science" that is, unmediated or direct knowledge acquired through mystical experience. He returned to Tabriz in 1934 where he attracted a small group of disciples, and then moved to Qum in 1945 in the wake of the Second World War and Soviet occupation. In addition to being home of the shrine of Fatima, the highly venerated sister of imām 'Ali al-Riḍā (d. 816 CE), Qum boasts the largest theological college in Iran (est. 1920).[109] In Qum he focused on teaching Qur'ānic commentary, and Islamic philosophy and theosophy, attracting hundreds of students. For many years he met regularly with French Islamic scholar Henry Corbin (1903-1978) along with Seyyed Hossein Nasr (b. 1933) who served as translator in their discussions of comparative mysticism.[110] Ṭabātabā'ī's commentary is a monumental work in Arabic comprising

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[107] Peter G. Riddell, "al-Baydawi," *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia,* ed. Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 2006) 116-118.
[108] Al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Al-Mizān fī Tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: al-Aalami, 1972).
[109] Janet Starkey, "Qumm," *Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilization and Religion*, ed. Ian Richard Netton (London: Routledge, 2008) 531-2.
[110] Nasr provided the most biographical information on Ṭabātabā'ī in his introduction to the English translation of Ṭabātabā'ī's book *Shī'ah dar islām* (*Shi'ite Islam,* Albany: SUNY Press, 2nd ed. 1977).

twenty volumes, each of about four hundred pages.[111] While he includes some *ḥadīth* in a discreet section at the end of each discussion, as McAuliffe has observed, much of the commentary consists of Ṭabātabā'ī's own thoughts that frequently "develop into lengthy discourses on the moral implications to be elicited from the passage."[112]

A more controversial modern *mufassir* whose work I refer to occasionally is Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966), a significant figure in the Muslim Brotherhood who was imprisoned and ultimately executed during Gamāl 'Abd el-Nāṣir's regime. He is perhaps best known for his short 1964-book *Ma'alim fī al-Ṭarīq* ("Milestones" or "Signposts on the Road"), which became the manifesto for Islamists in the Twentieth Century. His true *magnum opus*, however, is his six-volume commentary on the Qur'ān titled *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* ("In the Shade of the Qur'ān"),[113] and from which *Ma'alim* was later excerpted. I refer to it occasionally in Chapter Four to include another modern perspective, particularly an Egyptian one given the focus of this study, and a commentator with a distinct social and political agenda.[114] Not infrequently, Quṭb's remarks about the Qur'ānic Egyptians are influenced by his experience of modern, corrupt and despotic Egyptians.

I also occasional made use of the *tafsīr* authored by Ismā'īl Ibn Kathīr (1301-73 CE) who likewise is not without controversy due to his polemical assessments of some previous *mufassirūn* and their works.[115] It is precisely his frequent departure from the intellectual tradition and unequivocal exegesis that has fostered his popularity among Islamists in recent decades. I have considered Ibn Kathīr's opinions in this study because he does occasionally provide an

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[111] Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lami lil-Maṭbū'āt, 1394/1974. For a description of the features of *al-Mizān* and a survey of the contents of each volume, see: Abu al-Qassim Razzaqi, "An Introduction to the al-Mizan," at: www.quran.org.uk/articles/ieb_quran_almizan.htm.
[112] McAuliffe 88. For additional observations on Ṭabātabā'ī's exegetical characteristics and methodology, see Massimo Campianini, *The Qur'an: Modern Muslim Interpretations* 21-26.
[113] *Fī ẓilāl al-Qur'ān*, 6 vols. (al-Qāhirah ; Bayrūt : Dār al-Shurūq, 2009).
[114] James Toth, *Sayyid Qutb: the Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual* (Oxford: University Press, 2013).
[115] Norman Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr."

unique interpretation of the relevant texts that differs from his predecessors, and makes interesting remarks about the Egyptians that are worthy of consideration. I have also made occasional use of his *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, a genre that was an essential part of this study.

As the *aḥādīth* serve as a companion to the Qur'an especially with regard to *sunna* and s*harī'a*, so do the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā*, or stories of the prophets, supplement *tafsīr* literature. These works comprise lengthy narratives on the lives of biblical/qur'ānic prophets drawn from the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*, as well as Jewish and Christian scriptures, both canonical and apocryphal.[116] As the *qiṣaṣ* relate the lives of the prophets, they consequently also furnish us with material on the Egyptians with whom the prophets interacted. Thus, several different versions of the *qiṣaṣ* will serve as principal resources for this study.

This genre proved to be very popular and there exist many different versions in various languages. [117] Given that many of the *āyāt* in the Qur'an concerning the prophets are succinct, one can understand the human desire for more narrative. Works of this genre appear quite early in the Islamic era, as evidenced by a work of Wahb b. Munabbih (d. ca. 728/732 CE) most often referred to as *Kitāb al-mubtada' wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* ("The book of the beginning and the stories

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[116] Generally speaking, traditions incorporated into the *qiṣaṣ* that have their origins (or were believed to have their origins) in the Hebrew Scriptures and *Aggadah* are termed *Isrā'īliyyāt.* Used first by Mas'ūdī (d.345/956), the term took on a decidedly pejorative connotation in the writings of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr. (For the various uses of this term over the centuries, see: Robert Tottoli, "Origin and Use of the Term *Isrā'īliyyāt* in Muslim Literature," *Arabica* 46, 2 (1999), 193-210); and İsmail Albayrak, "Re-evaluating the Notion of *Isra'iliyyat,*" *D.E.Ü. İlayiyat Fakültesi Dergisi, Sayı XIII-XIV*, İzmir 2001, ss. 69-88. In this study I consider the Jewish traditions solely for purposes of comparing them to the Islamic material concerning the Egyptians, not to prove (or disprove) the transmission of stories from one tradition to the other. For the *aggadic* stories, see Rabbi Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, four vols. (1909); reprinted 2008, Forgotten Books; Vol. 5 (Index), Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1998.

[117] Principal works on this genre include: T. Nagel, *Die Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā': Ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte* (Bonn, 1967); and Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond: Curzon, 2002). Briefer overviews include: "Sources and Figures" in Marianne Klar's *Interpreting al-Thaʿlabī's Tales of the Prophets: Temptation, Responsibility and Loss* (London: Routledge, 2009) 9-15; Ján Pauliny, "Some Remarks on the *Qiṣaṣ al-'Anbiyā' Works in Arabic Literature,"* in Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Qur'an: Formative Interpetation*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999) 313-326; and the introduction to William M. Brinner's translation of al-Thaʿlabī's *'Arāis al-Majālis fī Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā' or "Lives of the Prophets"* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), xviii-xxiv. All subsequent citations to al-Thaʿlabī's *Qiṣaṣ* are to Brinner's edition.

of the prophets") in later sources. From excerpts preserved in subsequent works, it is apparent that Wahb freely incorporated material from Jewish and Christian texts without controversy. A century later, the *Mubtada' al-dunyā wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* ("The beginning of the world and stories of the prophets") of Abū Khadhaifa Isḥaq b. Bishr (d. 821 CE) appeared, followed by *Bad' al-khalq wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* ("The beginning of creation and the stories of the prophets") usually attributed to Wathīma ibn Mūsa al-Farisī (d. 851) rather this son 'Umāra (d. 902). As indicated by their similar titles, many of the works of this genre cover that the same basic content; they begin with the story of the Creation and Adam, the first of the prophets, and then continue chronologically with the stories of the (patriarchs and) prophets of the Hebrew Bible, the "Arab" prophets of the Qur'ān (e.g. Hūd and Ṣaliḥ), and the prophets of the New Testament (e.g Zakariyyā (Zechariah), Yaḥya, (John the Baptist), and 'Īsā (Jesus).

Among the most representative and most popular works of this genre is *'Arāis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* ("The Brides of Sessions about the Tales of the Prophets") by the exegete Abū Isḥaq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrahīm al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427 AH/1035 CE). Al-Thaʿlabī was born in the city of Nishapur in Khorasan (northeastern Persia) in the mid-late tenth century, a city strategically located on the Silk Road, and which emerged as an important political, commercial and cultural center in the mid-tenth century CE. W. Saleh describes it as "a point of conference for all the doctrinal currents of Islam at that time," including "Ḥanafīs, Shāfī'īs, Ash'arīs, Mu'tazilīs, Karrāmīs, Ṣūfīs, and various Shī'ī sects."[118] The diversity of sectarian movements in the city is reflected in his (still unpublished) *tafsīr* titled *Al-Kashf wa-al-bayān 'an tafsīr al-Qur'ān* ("The Unveiling and Clarification on the Interpretation of the Qur'ān.") Although al-Thaʿlabī was sunnī, his commentary is "riddled with pro-'Alī traditions which the Shī'īs

[118] Walid A. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: the Qur'ān Commentary of al-Tha'labī* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 27.

triumphantly brandished before the eyes of the Sunnīs."[119] Moreover, his commentary is "unique in the medieval tradition in consciously incorporating a mystical level of interpretation, besides the linguistic and tradition-based ones."[120]

It is his later *Qiṣaṣ al-'Anbiyā'*, however, that not only endures but, judging from the number of manuscript copies, has had a widespread popular appeal through the ages. There are numerous modern editions of the work, with translations into Persian Turkish, Tatar, Italian, French, English and German, although no critical edition yet exists.[121] Al-Thaʿlabī's work covers the history of the world from the Creation to the birth of the Prophet Muḥammad, and comprises forty-six biographies of varying length that consist primarily of material that he had gleaned from countless authorities commenting on more or less the same basic stories. His concern, remarks Klar, was "evidently not for textual criticism…but for comprehensiveness (he tends to quote more variants of each episode than any other author within this genre) and narrative cohesion."[122] This 'comprehensiveness' is precisely what drew criticism from Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), Ibn Kathīr's teacher who wrote that al-Thaʿlabī was incapable of discerning good *ḥadīth* from bad.[123] On the other hand, Ibn Kathīr (1300-73 CE), repeatedly cites al-Thaʿlabī's *Qiṣaṣ* in his own popular work[124] on the prophets to which I shall also have occasion to refer.

Quite different from both al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rikh* and al-Thaʿlabī's *Qiṣaṣ* with their extensive documentation and ubiquitous *isnād* is the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* of al-Kisā'ī.[125] The precise identity

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[119] Saleh 40.
[120] Saleh 65.
[121] Klar, *Interpreting al-Tha'labī's Tales* 2-4. She notes that there are "at least 42 catalogued manuscripts of the text" (2).
[122] Marianna Klar, "Stories of the Prophets," in Andrew Rippin, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān,* (Chichester: Blackwell, 2009) 346. See also: Klar, *Interpreting al-Tha'labī's Tales of the Prophets* cited above.
[123] Klar, "Stories of the Prophets" 347.
[124] *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm,* four volumes, Beirut: al-Maktab al-'Aṣṣrya, 1428 AH / 2007 CE.
[125] Arabic text: *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā',* ed. Isaac Eisenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1922-23); English translation by Wheeler M. Thackston, Jr., *Tales of the Prophets - Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā* (Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 1997) xxiv. Subsequent citations to al-Kisā'ī's *Qiṣaṣ* are to Wheeler's edition.

of the author and the date his work are uncertain as none of the Muslim biographical or historical sources contain any references to him.[126] Also attributed to him is a work on cosmology titled *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*, which belongs to a genre that first emerged in the 12th century. Moreover, the earliest extent manuscript copy of the *Qiṣaṣ*, (located in the British Museum) is dated to 1220.[127] Thus, a Twelfth-century date for the author is not unreasonable.

Al-Kisā'ī's *Qiṣaṣ* is not undocumented, but he names relatively few sources, citing Ka'ab al-Aḥbār (d. ca. 652-5), Ibn 'Abbās (d. 687), and Wahb b. Munabbih most often, and refrains completely from using *isnād.* Much of his material is left unattributed perhaps because it belongs more to the world of folklore rather than to the core of the faith as it contains some rather fantastic tales "basically designed for popular entertainment."[128] Like Thaʿlabī and other authors of *qiṣaṣ*, however, he too begins with the Creation and concludes with the story of Jesus, son of Mary.

A non-Arabic version of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* is represented here by that of Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Rabghūzī, born sometime in the second half of the 13th century CE in Transoxiana (Western Turkestan), who wrote in Eastern Turkish.[129] All that can be said with certainty about the author is that he was a Turk by ethnicity and a judge by profession who was invited by the Mongol prince Toq Buqa in 1309-10 CE to compose his own version of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* which he completed within a year. Al-Rabghūzī himself notes that the genre was very popular, but that some of the versions circulating in his day were faulty, unsound and repetitious.[130] Although he

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[126] The 17th-century Ottoman bibliographer, Ḥajji Khalīfa, alone identifies the author as 'Alī ibn Hamza al-Kisā'ī, an eighth-century grammarian and *Qur'ān* scholar although the manuscripts of the *Qiṣaṣ* generally identify the author as Muhammad ibn 'Abdallah al-Kisā'ī (W.M. Brinner, "al-Kisā'ī," *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, 453; Tottoli 152).
[127] Klar, *Interpreting al-Tha'labī's Tales* 11.
[128] Thackston, *Tales* 14.
[129] Al-Rabghūzī, *The Stories of the Prophets: Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā' – an Eastern Turkish Version,* ed. H.E. Boeschoten et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1995). Subsequent citations to al-Rabghūzī's *Qiṣaṣ* are to Boeschoten's edition.
[130] Al-Rabghūzī xix.

incorporates known *ḥadīth* material, he also seems to have made use of Turkish sources unknown to us, thus rendering this a unique version of the *qiṣaṣ*.

Ibn ʻArabī's (1164-1240 CE) *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* ("Bezels of Wisdom")[131] is something of an anomaly in the genre of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā',* as we might expect from *al-Shaykh al-akbar*. In fact, most scholarly treatments do not include this work in this genre.[132] Indeed there is justification in this as Ibn ʻArabī does not assemble references from the Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and other sources in order to relate the lives of the prophets. In many ways, this *ṣūfī* work defies categorization, and only superficially bears some resemblance to *qiṣaṣ.* Each of the twenty-seven chapters of *Fuṣūṣ* does bear the name of one of the prophets, but it is combined with a particular aspect of God's wisdom, which the particular prophet reveals. Chapter five of his work, for example, is titled: "The Wisdom of Rapturous Love in the Word of Abraham;" Chapter nine, "The Wisdom of Light in the Word of Joseph;" Chapter fifteen, "The Wisdom of Prophecy in the Word of Jesus;" Chapter twenty-five, "The Wisdom of Eminence in the Word of Moses," etc. Using the image of a finger ring, Ibn ʻArabī envisions each prophet as a bezel or setting into which a gemstone of each kind of divine wisdom is set.[133] Most chapters, however, actually have little to say about the prophet whose name the title bears and instead focus on the particular form of divine wisdom. For the purposes of this study, however, the chapter bearing Moses' name is particularly relevant due to its references to Pharaoh. As will be discussed in detail below, contrary to what he had written previously in his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah* ("The Meccan Revelations"),[134] Ibn ʻArabī here suggests that Pharaoh's last-minute conversion (*Yūnus* 10.90) was accepted by God and was therefore saved from hellfire. This has generated a considerable amount of controversy over the

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[131] Arabic text: Edited by A. ʻAfīfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 1946); translated into English by R.W.J. Austin as: *The Bezels of Wisdom* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980).
[132] See for example Tottoli, Klar, Brinner, Pauliny, etc.
[133] Austin, *Bezels of Wisdom,* "Introduction," 16.
[134] Cairo, 4 vols., 1329 AH.

centuries, revealing a great deal about Muslim attitudes towards this most notorious of all Egyptians appearing in the Qur'an,[135] as well as ideas of repentance, conversion, and mercy.

Another *ṣūfī* source relevant for this study is the poem *Yūsuf and Zulaikha,*[136] one of the seven poems in the *Haft Awrang,* or "Seven Thrones," of the Persian poet and scholar 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jamī (1414-1492 CE). *Yūsuf and Zulaikha*, which alone comprises over 25,000 couplets, is one of three allegorical romances in the collection, the others being *Salaman and Absal* and *Layla and Majnun*. Jamī was a *pir* (master) and *murshid* (leader) of the Naqshabandiyya order[137] in Herat, the capital of the Timurid Dynasty (1370-1506 CE), and a principle interpreter of Ibn 'Arabī's works. Jamī's work is particularly famous for the beautifully illustrated edition commissioned by the Safavid prince Sultan Ibrahim Mirza (1540-1577 CE), commonly known as "the Freer Jami."[138] Jamī uses the Qur'ānic story of the insatiable desire of al-'Azīz's (Potiphar's) wife (Zulaykha) for Yūsuf (*Yūsuf* 23-53) as the basis for an allegory that expresses the desire of the soul for the divine. Although Zulaykha is not technically an Egyptian in Jamī's poem (having come from a land to the west, i.e. Mauretania), he nevertheless wrote

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[135] Modern discussions of this controversy include: Denis Gril, "Le Personnage Coranique de Pharaon d'après L'Interpretation d'Ibn 'Arabi," *Annales Islamologiques* 14 (1978), 37-57; Carl W. Ernst, "Controversies over Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ*: the Faith of Pharaoh," *Islamic Culture* 59 (1985), 259-66; Alexander D. Knysh, "The Problem of 'Pharaoh's Faith,'" in his *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: the Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999), 158-161; Eric Ormsby, "The Faith of Pharaoh: a Disputed Question in Islamic Theology," *Studia Islamica* 98/99 (2004), 5-28. In a 2009 dissertation, Amer Latif considered Pharaoh from Rūmī's perspective in "Qur'anic Narrative and Sufi Hermeneutics: Rūmī's Interpretaions of Pharaoh's Character," (Stony Brook University, New York, May 2009).

[136] Hakim Nuruddin Abdurrahman Jamī, *Yusuf and Zulaikha*, trans. David Pendlebury (London: Octagon, 2009). Subsequent citations to Jamī's *Yusuf and Zulaikha* are to Pendlebury's edition.

[137] Named after Khwājah Bahā' al-Dīn Muḥammad Naqshband (1317-1389), the order was first established in Central Asia, and then spread eastward to India and westward to Persia and the Arab world. See: K.A. Nizami, "The Naqshbandiyyah Order," in *Islamic Spirituality I: Manifestations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1997) 162-193.

[138] Marianna Shreve Simpson, *Persian Poetry, Painting and Patronage: Illustrations in a Sixteenth-Century Masterpiece* (New Haven: Yale, 1998).

that she was molded out of Egypt's clay[139] and she is usually regarded as an Egyptian in the tradition.

This selection of *tafsīr, qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* and other texts is admittedly electic, but given the small amount of substantive commentary on the Egyptians generally found in each source, one is compelled to "forage" about for relevant and unique material. Casting the net more widely might result in more material or even different conclusions, but I think this is doubtful given the secondary roles played by the Egyptians overall in the texts vis-à-vis the prophets. If the Egyptians do not occupy the same ubiquituous and sinister role in the Islamic texts as they do in the Biblical and *aggadic* texts, they nevertheless often represent vivid examples of individual faithful believers, or unbelievers who come to faith through repentance and conversion.

**Modern Studies**

In spite of the almost complete dearth of material that specifically or solely concerns Qur'ānic Egyptians, as scholarship in gender studies has grown in recent decades so has interest in Qur'ānic women, including somce of the Egyptian women included in this study. Feminist scholars thus have shown particular interest in Zulaykha due to the attitudes towards female sexuality that are expressed by both the Qur'ānic text and its exegetes. Thus, Barbara Freyer Stowasser devotes a brief chapter to Zulaykha in *Women in the Qur'an, Traditions and Interpretation* (Oxford, 1994). Stowasser also includes a brief discussion of Asiya, Moses' Egyptian foster-mother (and Pharaoh's wife) in a chapter on women in the life of Moses (Chapter 5). Shalom Goldman discusses Zulyakha more extensively for purposes of comparison in *The Wiles of Women, the Wiles of Men: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in Ancient Near Eastern, Jewish and Islamic Folklore* (State University of New York Press, 1995). In both works,

[139] Jāmī 27.

Stowasser and Goldman discuss Zulaykha (and Asiya) foremost *as women* in order to draw conclusions about Islamic attitudes towards women and sexuality. Similarly, Merguerian and Najmabadi examine Islamic attitudes towards female sexuality and love in their study of *Surat Yūsuf* and its commentators.[140] My discussion and analysis of the Qur'ānic texts, Islamic exegesis and traditions that refer to these women (and others) differs from these earlier studies in as much as I approach the Qur'ānic characters first and foremost of all as *Egyptians*, regardless of gender, to discern what the Qur'ān and its commentators suggest about this people as a whole (and by extension other non-Muslim peoples, both pre- or post-Islamic).

As *Sūrat Yūsuf* is one of the most discussed *sūras* of the Qur'ān for reasons described below, Yūsuf's Egyptian would-be-seductress is among the most mentioned of Qur'ānic Egyptians, along with her husband, Yūsuf's master, al-'Azīz (Potiphar of Genesis), in more contemporary works. A.-L. de Prémare's, *Joseph et Muhammad, Le Chapitre 12 du Coran: Étude et Textuelle* (Aix en Provence, 1989) devotes a portion of his study to an analysis of the prophet's interaction with women as described in Genesis, Midrash and the Qur'an,[141] but does not speak to their Egyptian identity (nor that of the men in the story, for that matter). John Kaltner provides an extended comparative exegesis in his *Inquiring of Joseph: Getting to Know a Biblical Character through the Qur'an* (Liturgical Press, 2003) as does Louay Fatoohi in *The Prophet Joseph in the Qur'an, the Bible and History* (Luna Plena, 2007) in which he draws from a number of classical *tafsīr*. While Fatoohi's discussion may be helpful for understanding the Qur'anic narrative, the historical portion of his study, in which he tries to locate Joseph in history, is very problematic and does not reflect modern historical and biblical criticism. Donald

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[140] Gayane Karen Merguerian and Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Zulaykha and Yusuf: Whose 'Best Story,'" *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 29, 4 (Nov. 1997): 485-508.
[141] "Le Prophete et les Femmes," 55-81.

B. Redford provides a more competent Egyptological analysis of the Joseph story in his *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50).*[142]

Several important and briefer studies discuss *Sūrat Yūsuf* utilizing the techniques of literary criticism that have been applied to the study of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. Mustansir Mir[143] was the first to clearly demonstrate how the tensions created in the first half of the story (4-44) are resolved in reverse order (45-100), a literary-rhetorical device he describes as *al-laff wa'l-nashr 'alā 'l-'aks* ("involution and evolution in reverse"), otherwise known as a *chiasm*. He notes parallels in the plot, the use of dramatic devices, and distinguishes several themes. Finally, he examines characters including the Egyptian Potiphar and his wife. He describes Potiphar as fair-minded, possessing a keen mind, good-hearted, "whose failings are mostly of a passive type" and who allows himself be dominated by his wife. By contrast (and with slightly sexist overtones), Mir describes Potiphar's wife as lascivious, self-confident, strong-headed, vengeful and aggressive. In a stereotypical fashion he likewise disparages the Egyptian nobility in general noting "the lengths to which the Egyptian nobility could go in flaunting debauchery." It is such prejudices and anachronisms, classicial and contemporary, that this study addresses.

Muḥammad Adel Haleem devoted a chapter to *Sūrat Yūsuf* in his book *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style,*[144] comparing it to the Genesis account. He notes particularly the differences in function and style in the respective texts. He observes that whereas the lengthy and

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[142] Supplements to Vetus Testamentum, Vol. XX (Brill, 1970).

[143] "The Qur'anic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes, and Characters," *The Muslim World,* 76, 1 (Jan. 1986), 1-15. He provides numerous examples of literary devices in the Qur'ān in his article: "The Qur'ān As Literature" *Renaissance*, 2000, Volume 10, No. 5. (Available on line at: www.islamic-awareness.org/ Quran/ Q_Studies/ Mirliter.html). There he uses Moses encounter with Pharaoh as an example of dramatic dialogue.

[144] London: I.B. Tauris, 1999, 138-157. The same discussion was published previously in: *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 1.2 (Dec. 1990): 171-191.

detailed narrative of Joseph in Genesis continues the story of the patriarchs as part of the national history of the Israelites, the terser story of Yūsuf in the Qur'an is foremost the story of a prophet meant as "a guide and mercy to people who believe" (12.111). Focusing on the dialogues between the various characters in the Qur'anic Joseph story, A.H. Johns[145] distinguishes eleven *acts* in the *sūra* (subdivided into scenes, in some cases), a form that differs from the chiastic structure proposed by Mir and supported by Rendsburg.[146] His analysis of the words and phrases employed in the dialogues is particularly helpful in drawing conclusions about the characterization of the Egyptians in the *sūra*, and will be discussed below further. Yet another perspective is offered by Angelika Neuwirth[147] who, following Horovitz[148] and von Blachère,[149] divided the *sūra* into three main sections (*Hauptteile*), with section 2 further divided into three parts (*Teile*).

Modern Arabic commentaries on *Sūrat Yūsuf* include those by Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Zayd Ṭūsī[150]; Mu'īn al-Dīn Farāhī Hiravī[151]; Aḥmad Māhir and Maḥmūd al-Baqarī[152]; Aḥmad Nawfal;[153] and Zahia Dajani.[154] An interesting text pertinent to this study is a 19th-Century Judeo-Arabic manuscript from Cairo titled *The Story of Our Master Joseph the*

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[145] "The Quranic Presentation of the Joseph Story: Naturalistic or Formulaic Language?" in: *Approaches to the Qur'ān*, ed. G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993) 37-70. This article develops his earlier study in which he had divided the sura into twenty scenes. C.f. A.H. Johns, "Joseph in the Qur'ān: Dramatic Dialogue, Human Emotion and Prophetic Wisdom," *Islamochristiana* 7 (1981): 29-55.
[146] Gary Rendsburg, "Literary Structures in the Qur'anic and Biblical Stories of Joseph," *The Muslim World*, 78 (1988): 119.
[147] "Zur Struktur der *Yūsuf*-Sure," *Studien aus Arabistik und Semitistik*, ed. Werner Diem and Stefan Wild (Wiesbaden: Harrossowitz, 1980) 123-152.
[148] J. Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin, 1926).
[149] R. Blachère, *Le Coran: Traduction selon un essai de reclassement des sourates* (Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve, 1947-1950).
[150] *Tafsīr-i surah-i: al-sittīn al-jāmi' liltā'if al-basātīn,* ed. Muhammad Rawshan (Tehran, 1977).
[151] *Ḥadā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq dar tafsīr surah-i Yūsuf*, ed. Sayyid Ja'far Sajjādī (Tehran, 1985).
[152] *Yūsuf fi al-Qur'ān* (Beirut: 1984).
[153] *Sūra Yūsuf: Dirāsāt Taḥlīlīya* (Amman, 1989).
[154] Yūsuf fī al-Qur'ān al-karīm wa-al-Tawrāh (Bayrūt : Dār al-Taqrīb bayna al-Madhāhib al-Islāmīyah, 1994).

*Righteous.*[155] Apparently written for a Jewish audience, it consists of a retelling of the biblical story of Joseph but one that is heavily influenced by Islamic sources, specifically the Qur'ān and *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, as well as Islamic culture and tradition. Thus, it represents a "remarkable test case for the study of the intersection of Jewish and Islamic cultures through the nexus of a text."[156] This lengthy tale, comprising seventy-seven pages in English translation, fifty-eight of which concern Joseph's sojourn in Egypt, contains a wealth of references to the Egyptians, and thus provides many interesting points of comparison with the Qur'ānic and exegetical material examined here.

Brannon Wheeler's *Moses in the Quran and Islamic Exegesis* (Routledge, 2002) might have been potentially relevant for my discussion of Mūsā and the Egyptians, but Wheeler's title is deceiving as his book focuses entirely on *Sūrat al-Kahf* 18.60-82 and *al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.21-28 neither of which concerns the Egyptians. In addition to his above-mentioned study of *Sūrat Yūsuf,* Fatoohi (with Shetha al-Dargazelli) turned his attention to the Exodus story as recorded in the Hebrew and Islamic Scriptures, but once again ran into serious problems trying to fix the Exodus in history with rather unsatisfactory results.[157] More critical studies of the Exodus account from the perspectives of archaeology and Egyptology include: *Exodus: the Egyptian Evidence*, ed. Ernest S. Frerichs and Leonard Lesko (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1997); *The Origin of Early Israel – Current Debate: Biblical, Historical and Archaeological Perspectives* (Beer-Sheva, v. 12), ed. Shmuel Ahituv and Eliezer D. Oren, (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 1998); Bruce Halpern's article "The Exodus from Egypt: Myth or Reality?;"[158] and

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[155] Marc S. Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations between Judaism and Islam* (Detroit: Wayne State, 2006).
[156] Bernstein 47.
[157] *The Mystery of Israel in Ancient Egypt* (Birmingham: Luna Plena, 2008).
[158] In: *The Rise of Ancient Israel* (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992) 87-113.

William Dever's, *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From*? (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).[159]

There have been numerous studies of Jesus in the Qur'ān and Islamic tradition, of course, in both monographs and journal articles. More recent book-length treatments in English include: Neil Robinson's *Christ in Islam and Christianity* (SUNY, 1991); Geoffrey Parrinder's *Jesus in the Qur'ān* (Oneworld, 1995); Kenneth Cragg's *Jesus and the Muslim: an Exploration* (Oneworld, 1999); Tarif Khalidi's *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Harvard, 2001); Muḥammad 'Ata ur-Rahīm's and Aḥmad Thomson's *Jesus: Prophet of Islam* (Rev. ed. Tahrike Tarsile, 2002); Hüseyin İlker Çinar's, *Maria und Jesus im Islam* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007) A.H. Mathias Zahniser's *The Mission and Death of Jesus in Islam and Christianity* (Orbis, 2008); Todd Lawson's *The Crucifixion and the Qur'ān* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009); Oddbjørn Leirvik's *Images of Jesus Christ in Islam* (2nd. Ed Continuum, 2010); Mona Siddiqui's *Christians, Muslims and Jesus* (Yale, 2013); Martin Bauschke's *Der Sohn Marias: Jesus im Koran* (Darmstadt: Lambert Schneider, 2013); and most recently Zeki Saritoprak's *Islam's Jesus* (University Press of Florida, 2014).[160] None of these, however, treats at length Islamic traditions regarding 'Īsā in Egypt, if mentioned at all.

Finally, each of the following chapters includes references to modern works of history, archaeology, and Egyptology. My purpose is neither to prove nor disprove the historical veracity of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions of the accounts of Abraham, Joseph, Moses and Jesus in Egypt, but to simply indicate the numerous difficulties scholars encounter in attempting to place

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[159]For an alternative interpretation of the archaeological material for both the Joseph and Exodus stories, see: James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: the Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford, 1997). See the discussion in Chapter Five.

[160] Mention should also be made of Mahmoud Ayoub's substantial discussions about the Islamic Jesus in: *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue by Mahmoud Ayoub,* ed. Irfan A. Omar (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2007), 111-183.

these stories into a specific historical context. The lack of detail in the Qur'ānic accounts – e.g. names of people and places - especially when compared to their parallels in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, strongly suggests that the primary value for the hearer of the text is not in its degree of historical authenticity but in its moral and sacred truths. As Naṣr Abū Zayd wrote commenting on the work of Ṭaha Ḥusayn (1889-1973), "Religious text might relay a historical incident…but the text is not meant to reflect an accurate historical incident. *Stories have meaning beyond the text*."[161] The historical identity of the pharaohs and other Egyptians in the stories of Abraham, Joseph, and Moses is not my central concern here, although I do consider Islamic traditions and *qiṣaṣ* about them as the texts occassionally reveal something about the authors, their aims, perspectives, prejudices and the eras in which they were writing. My focus, however, is not as much on the historical but on the overall assessment of the Egyptians, their character, their faith or lack thereof as conveyed by the Qur'ān and extra-canonical literature, and how this reflects Islam's *missionary* character in contrast to the *covenantal* identity cultivated in Judaism, and the implications for inclusion in- or exlusion from the respective communities of believers.

Classical *mufassirūn*, authors of the various *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ,* as well as modern commentators have attempted to furnish more details about such encounters than what the Qur'ān provides, but due to the lack of corroborating historical texts, their efforts sometimes digress into folklore, if not fantasy. In the process they may include anachronisms that I will not hesitate to expose, particularly when they reflect attitudes toward the ancient Egyptians who are the focus of this study. Given that the stories of the prophets and the Egyptians with whom they interacted do not appear in the Qur'ān in a chronological narrative, and that such accounts are

[161] *Voice of an Exile* 52. For a similar view, see: Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'ān: Towards a Contemporary Approach* (London: Routledge, 2006) 95. (My emphasis)

dispersed throughout numerous sūras, I have adopted the traditional (biblical) sequence as also found in the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ,* and thus begin with Ibrāhīm, the first prophet according to Islamic tradition (but not the Qur'ān) said to have had travelled to Egypt.

# Chapter 3 - Ibrāhīm and the Egyptians

## Introduction

In this chapter I will summarize the biblical and extra-biblical accounts of Ibrāhīm and Sāra[162] in Egypt, comment on the purposes they serve, and then examine the Islamic versions of this story, particularly those written by the authors named in the literature survey of the previous chapter, in order to assess their characterization of the Egyptians. This constitutes an original approach to the Islamic texts that have not been studied from this perspective. Since the early Twentieth-Century works of James George Frazer (1854-1941) and Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932),[163] it has become common (if not occasionally controversial) for scholars of comparative religion and biblical criticism to speak of folkloric elements in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. This approach has also been applied more recently to the Qurʿān.[164] Contemporary scholars use the terms "folk story" (Ger., *Sagen*) or "legend" to denote a particular genre of biblical narrative, ostensibly based on oral traditions, and characterized by multiple versions and variations of the same story.[165] Moreover, the plots of such legends generally unfold in a similar fashion, by presenting a realistic dilemma for a central character "until the denouement or narrative climax in a supernatural event, almost always the direct intervention of a divine force that acts decisively in favor of the story's hero."[166] Often the plot follows a five-stage structure (sometimes referred to as a "pediment") which comprises an exposition which sets the scene, a

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[162] Throughout this study, whenever referring to the biblical figures in an Islamic context, I will use the Arabic form of their names, i.e. Ibrāhīm in lieu of Abraham, Yūsuf in lieu of Joseph, etc. to distinguish their Islamic characterization from the biblical one.

[163] J.G. Frazer, *Folklore in the Old Testament* (1918); Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis übersetzt und erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1901); *Das Märchen im Alten Testament* (4th ed.; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1921). For discussion, see: M.J. Bass, "Gunkel, Hermann," *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, 499-503.

[164] Alan Dundes, *Fables of the Ancients?: Folklore in the Qur'an* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

[165] Alan Dundes, *Holy Writ as Oral Lit: the Bible as Folklore* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999) 5 ff.

[166] Eli Yassif, *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning,* trans. Jacqueline S. Teitelbaum (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999) 16. See also: Claus Westermann's introduction to the patriarchal narratives in: *Genesis 12-36* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 44 ff.

complication or dilemma, the climax reflecting a change in the course of events, the unraveling or resolution of the dilemma, and an ending.[167] This aptly describes the accounts of Abraham in Egypt – both in the Hebrew versions (biblical and extra-canonical) and in the Islamic renderings that I discuss below. Treating the narrative as folklore or legend neither denies or confirms its historicity, but obviates the many archaeological and historical problems that the texts present in the form in which they have come down to us which make it impossible to assign it a specific historical context.[168] It is in a sense more fruitful to consider how these folk stories or legends and their different versions and variations reflect the culture and concerns of the time during which they were written down, and of particular interest for this study, what images they present of the ancient Egyptians.

Adhering to the biblical chronology of the patriarchs that is echoed by Islamic sources, we find that Abraham/Ibrāhīm was the first of the patriarchs/prophets who is said to have had significant contact with the Egyptians, although Egypt and Egyptians are mentioned in earlier contexts. In his discussion of the Creation in his *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, Al-Thaʿlabī enumerates the seven regions of the earth mentioned in the Qur'ān, ranked according to their special qualities, with Egypt ranking fourth after the lands of Mecca, Medina and Syria, due especially to its

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[167] Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001) 47 ff.

[168] Genesis does not provide information that might allow us to place Abraham's story in an historical era. By adding up the regnal years for the kings of Judah (430) as given in the Books of Kings, the 480 years said to have elapsed between the Exodus and the dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6.1), the alleged 430 years of Israel's captivity (Ex. 12.40), and the lengths of the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as given in Genesis, one can conjecture Abraham's sojourn in Egypt as having occurred sometime between 2141 BCE and 2116 BCE, corresponding to Egypt's Tenth Dynasty of Herakleopolis (2160-2040 BCE). That calculation presents numerous historical problems, however. See: Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: University Press, 1992) 257 ff. Moreover, there is a complete lack of corroborating archaeological evidence from Egypt for the entire patriarchal period. We must therefore conclude with Westermann that, "it is not possible to mark off and compute a particular time as 'the patriarchal period'" (*Genesis 12-36*, 74). See also: John Van Seters, *Abraham in History and Tradition* (New Haven: Yale, 1975) 104 ff.

significance in the story of the Prophet Yūsuf.[169] Moreover, he includes a tradition related by al-Tirmidhī (d. 883/893) in which ʻAbdullāh b. Salām (d. 42 AH) asked Muhammad how God created Adam. Muhammad replied:

> He created Adam's head and forehead from the soil of the Kaʻbah; his chest and back from Jerusalem; his thighs from the earth of Yemen; *his legs from the earth of Egypt*; his feet from the earth of the Hejaz, his right hand from the earth of the East, and his left hand from the earth of the West.[170]

Here again Egypt occupies a noteworthy fourth position after Mecca (signified by the Kaʻbah), Jerusalem, and Yemen, possibly alluding to Egypt's early incorporation into the Islamic realm after Arabia, Yemen and Syria-Palestine. Jewish *agggadic* traditions (see below) similarly hold that the dust from which Adam was created was taken from the four corners of the earth, although Egypt is not specifically mentioned.[171] In the Hebrew Bible, Egypt (*Mizraim*) is first mentioned in Genesis 10.6 and 10.13 among the nations descended from Noah's son Ham. Al-Ṭabarī recounts several traditions in his *Ta'rīkh* that explain the origins of the Egyptians as: the offspring of Qūṭ b. Ḥām and his wife Bakht;[172] or the descendants of ʻImlīq b. Lud b. Shem b. Noah – which includes "the peoples of the East…of the Hijāz, of Syria and of Egypt."[173] In addition, he states that the pharaohs of Egypt specifically are descendants of Arpachshad b. Shem b. Noah along with "the prophets and apostles and the Best of Mankind (i.e. Muḥammad) and all the Arabs" [174] - a rather lofty pedigree for pagan rulers and a claim that may reflect al-Ṭabarī's time spent in Egypt and genuine regard for the Egyptians.

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[169] Al-Thaʻlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* 18-19.
[170] Al-Thaʻlabī 45 (my emphasis).
[171] Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews,* I/II, 39-40.
[172] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 212.
[173] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 213.
[174] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 216.

In truth, however, both Jewish and Islamic texts have little to say about Egypt or the Egyptians until Abraham's story is recounted. In the Hebrew Scriptures, Abram (later Abraham) appears suddenly near the end of Genesis 11, mentioned briefly in the account of his father Terah who, we are told, took his son (Abram), his grandson Lot (the son of his deceased son Haran), and Abram's wife Sarai from Ur in Lower Mesopotamia to Haran in Upper Mesopotamia where they settled (Gen. 11:27-32). Abraham, his wives (Sara and Hagar) and sons (Isaac and Ishmael) are henceforth the central characters in chapters twelve through twenty-five. In Genesis 12, God promises to make a great nation from Abraham and his descendants, and tells him to leave Haran for Canaan. When a famine occurs in Canaan, Abraham and Sarah flee to Egypt. The travails of Abraham and Sara in Egypt are described succinctly in Gen. 12.10-20. This episode is not found at all in the Qur'ān for reasons explored below, but it does appear in extra-Qur'ānic sources and thus provides an initial glimpse into how the ancient Egyptians were viewed by some Muslim authors in comparison and contrast to the biblical account.

References to Ibrāhīm are scattered throughout much of the Qur'an, from *Sūrat al-Baqara* 2.133 to *Sūrat al-A'lā* 87.19, one of the earliest of the Meccan sūras,[175] and the fourteenth sūra bears his name. He is a prophet who receives revelation from God (*al-Nisā* 4.163*; al-Ḥadīd* 57.26), is called the "friend (*khalīl*) of God" (*al-Nisā* 4.125) and *hanīf* (*al-Baqarah* 2.135; *Āl 'Imrān* 3.67, 95, etc.).[176] Above all, he combats idolatry, castigating his own father and his own people, and smashing their idols (*al-An'ām* 6.74; *Maryam* 19.41-50; *al-Anbiyā'* 21.52-70, etc.). As in the Biblical account (Gen. 12.1), the Qur'ān relates that: Ibrāhīm

[175] In the standard Egyptian edition (1925), it is placed eighth in chronological order (Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an,* 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2003) 72.
[176] For discussions on the significance of the term *hanīf*, see: Nevad Kahteran, "Hanif" in *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia,* 242-4; and Edward D.A. Hulmes, "Hanif," *Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilization and Religion*, 213-14.

heeded God's command to journey to a new land (*al-Anbiyā'* 21.71; *al-'Ankabūt* 29.26); God established a covenant (Ar. *'ahd*) with him and his descendants (Gen. 12.2-3; 15.17-21; *al-Baqarah* 2.124-5); Ibrāhīm built an altar/shrine to God (Gen. 12.7-8; *al-Baqarah* 2.127; *Ibrāhīm* 14.37); fathered Ishmael and Isaac (Gen. 16 and 21; *al-Baqarah* 2.132-133); was told by Divine Messengers that Sāra would bear a son, and that God would destroy Sodom and Gomorrah - "the people of Lūṭ" (Gen. 18; *Hūd* 11.69-76; *al-Ḥijr* 15.51-60; *al-'Ankabūt* 29.31-32; *al-Dhārīyāt* 51.24-34); and that he was tested by God who asked him to sacrifice his son (Gen. 22; *al-Ṣaffāt* 37.101-107).

**The Biblical Account of Abraham and Sara in Egypt.**

Other than the passing references to Egypt in Genesis 10.6-13, the story of Abraham, Sara and Pharaoh[177] is the first major reference to Egypt and Egyptians in the Hebrew Scriptures. Although the journey to Egypt was undertaken so that Abraham and Sara might escape the famine in Canaan (a motif repeated in Gen. 42-43 where Jacob sends his sons to Egypt to procure grain), it was not to be without peril. Abraham (still Abram here) is concerned from the outset that his wife's beauty will attract the attention of the Egyptians, and that they will kill him so as to abduct her. Before crossing into Egypt, he therefore instructs her to say that she is his sister "so that it may go well with me on your account and my life may be spared for your sake" (12.13).[178] Sara (still Sarai here) does indeed attract the attention of the Egyptians, and she is

[177] See above n. 168 for historical difficulties in identifying Pharaoh.
[178] Abraham's lie presented problems for biblical authors. Hence the assertion in Gen. 20.12 that she is in truth his half-sister. The taboo of consanguineous marriages, however, generated various explanations in rabbinic exegesis. See: Reuven Firestone, "Prophethood, marriageable consanguinity, and text: the problem of Abraham and Sarah's kinship relationship and the response of Jewish and Islamic Exegesis," *Jewish Quarterly Review,* 83.3/4 (January-April 1993): 331-347.

brought to the palace of (an unnamed) *pharaoh* – the first biblical occurrence of this title.[179] Although his wife has been abducted, Abraham benefits from the arrangement as he is given slaves and flocks of animals. While he is apparently content with the state of affairs – he makes no protest – Abraham's God (יהוה) is not, and strikes Pharaoh and his household with severe plagues, ostensibly to protect Sara's virtue. Somehow – we are not told how - Pharaoh comes to understand the reason for his afflictions, and summons Abraham to court. Upbraiding Abraham for not telling him the truth, Pharaoh returns Sara to him, and orders them to depart. Abraham, along with Sara and Lot (who is not mentioned in 12.10-20) leaves Egypt for the Negev, taking the riches he had acquired in Egypt with him (13.1). The same basic story is repeated, albeit in a more detailed fashion, in Gen. 20.1-18 where Sara attracts the attention of Abimelech, the Philistine king of Gerar, and again in Gen. 26.1-11 where it concerns Isaac's wife Rebekah and Abimelech. In his analysis of the three stories, Van Seters considers the account in Gen. 12.10-20 the oldest form the story, "appearing very much in its primitive folktale form," with Gen. 20.1-18 as a "fairly consistent revision of the first story," and 26.1-11 as a "literary conflation of both the other stories."[180] From a folkloristic perspective, these are three versions of a single basic tale, each one "told be a different storyteller in the course of a new and independent creative process and for different ends."[181]

The story of Abraham and Sara's encounter with Pharaoh is related more succinctly than the episode with Abimelech, which is almost double in length. The most significant difference in the two versions is that God (here אלהים) reveals to Abimelech in a dream the wrong he has

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[179] The Hebrew word פרעה comes from the ancient Egyptian *per-ʿa* ("great house"), which originally designated the royal palace, but from the New Kingdom (ca. 1550-1069 BCE) onwards was used to refer to the king himself.
[180] Van Seters, *Abraham* 183. For other analyses of this pericope and extensive bibliography, see: James Hoffmeier, "The Wives' Tales in Genesis 12, 20 & 26 and the Covenants at Beersheba," *Tyndale Bulletin* 43.1 (1992): 81-100; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36*, 159-168; Howard Wallace, "On Account of Sarai, Gen. 12:10-13:1," *Australian Biblical Review* 44 (1996): 32-41.
[181] Yassif 16.

committed by seizing Sara, and his imminent punishment unless he returns her to Abraham (Gen. 20.3-7). God's wanton treatment of Pharaoh is not repeated against Abimelech. God actually admits Abimelech's innocence in this version: "Yes, I know you did this with a blameless heart" (vs. 6). Moreover, while Abraham was silent before Pharaoh, here he clearly explains the reasons for lying to Abimelech. Having received gifts of herds, slaves, and silver pieces from Abimelech, Abraham then prays to God to restore the king, his wife and maidservants to health. There was no such consideration for Pharaoh in Gen. 12.10-20. We do not know for certain how he discovered the truth about Sara's relationship to Abraham. He received no nighttime vision from God, nor did he receive an explanation from Abraham for the deception. Neither Pharaoh nor his people were explicitly released from their afflictions, and he abruptly ordered Abraham and Sara out of Egypt. The portrayal of Pharaoh and the Egyptians therefore is quite negative.

Van Seters (following Hermann Gunkel) concludes that this story:

> corresponds rather closely to a folktale model. It contains an obvious narrative structure and other compositional characteristics well suited to popular storytelling. There is little adaption of the story to the Abraham tradition as a whole, either in terms of its internal content or in terms of its connections with its present literary context.[182]

Nahum Sarna writes that the story emphasizes "God's direct, protective intervention – just at the moment when all human resources have failed and it appears that the divine promises are to be aborted."[183] The story involving Pharaoh serves an additional, perhaps greater, purpose, however when viewed in the context of the entire Pentateuch. Several elements of Gen. 12.10-20 indicate that it is meant to foreshadow the Exodus.[184] Pharaoh's abduction of Sara prefigures the enslavement of Israel. God afflicts Pharaoh and the Egyptians with plagues to secure Sara's

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[182] Van Seters, *Abraham* 170-171.
[183] Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989) 94.
[184] Gordon Wenham, *World Bible Commentary: Genesis 1-15* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987) 290-2.

freedom just as he will similarly, although more dramatically, in the Exodus story in order to realize Israel's release from bondage. Pharaoh expels Abraham and Sara from Egypt using the same verb – *shalah* (שלח) that appears in Exodus 11.1 in the account of the tenth plague, and in Exodus 12.32 when Pharaoh orders the Israelites to leave.[185] Finally, Abraham departs in Gen. 13.1 with "all that belonged to him," including livestock, silver and gold, just as the Israelites did when they left Egypt (Ex. 12.32, 35-36).

In addition to setting the stage for the coming oppression of the Israelites and their Exodus from Egypt, this story is the first instance (at least in the sequence of the Pentateuch) in which the Egyptians are portrayed as sexually voracious. As discussed in the introduction, this becomes a recurring motif in the Hebrew Scriptures, undoubtedly born out of the complex historical-political relations between the two nations in the first millennium BCE, in which Egypt was viewed as a power that seduced, violated and shamed Israel before God.[186] In the next story in Genesis set in Egypt, Joseph is the recipient of unwelcome sexual advances of Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39). Taken as a whole, the story of Abraham and Sara in Egypt displays the characteristics of a people who regard themselves as *covenanted*, as described by Smith (see Introduction): the Egyptians are a threat to Abraham and Sara (God's people); God acts against Pharaoh and the Egyptians to preserve Sara's (and thus Israel's) purity and secure her release; and Abraham and Sara leave Egypt behind.

**Extra-biblical Versions.**

In spite of the brevity of the biblical account and its presumed insignificance overall (it is not mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible or in the New Testament), the story of Abraham

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[185] *Genesis - Berit Olam,* ed. David W. Citter (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2003) 92.
[186] For historical and political relations between ancient Egypt and Israel, see: Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*.

and Sara in Egypt was retold in several extra-biblical works, exhibiting variations and additions to the story as we would expect of a folktale that originated in oral tradition and continued to evolve and change even after the story was incorporated into Genesis. In his *Antiquities of the Jews* (Book 1, Ch. 8), the Jewish historian Josephus (37 – ca. 100 CE) recounts the episode while embellishing it. He speaks of the "madness of the Egyptians with regard to women"[187] and writes that Pharaoh "was preparing to enjoy her [Sara]; but God put a stop to his unjust inclinations."[188] As in the biblical account, Abraham goes down into Egypt to escape the famine in Canaan, but Josephus added that Abraham had an additional purpose: "to become an auditor of their priests, and to know what they said concerning the gods…to convert them into a better way, if his own notions proved the truest." This depiction of Abraham as the prophet who attempts to turn idolaters to faith in the one God is thus similar to his characterization in the Qur'an (*al-An'ām* 6.74; *Maryam* 19.41-50; *al-Anbiyā'* 21.52-70, etc.). Ironically, the Egyptian (pagan) priests are depicted here as *learned* men, perhaps an attempt by Josephus to foster good will between Jews and Egyptians as both suffered a decline in rights and privileges in Roman-occupied Egypt.[189] The priests are thus able to determine that Pharaoh's afflictions are a manifestation of "the wrath of God," visited upon him due to his advances on Sara. After Pharaoh learns from Sara the truth of her identity, he not only bestows a gift of money on Abraham, but invites him to confer with "the most learned among the Egyptians; from which conversation, his virtue and his reputation became more conspicuous than they had been before." Abraham not only seems to have brought (some of) them to faith, but taught them arithmetic and astronomy. This tradition of Abraham

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[187] In truth, Egyptian didactic literature of all periods warn men about approaching women: "A thousand men are turned away from their good; a short moment like a dream, then death comes for having known them" (The Instructions of Ptahhotep, 18); "Beware of a woman who is a stranger, one not known in her town; don't stare at her when she goes by; do not know her carnally" (The Instructions of Any). For complete translations, see: Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, Volumes 1 and 2* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973-1976).
[188] *Josephus: Complete Works,* trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1974) 33.
[189] Modrzejewski, 161 ff.; John M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora: from Alexander to Trajan, 323 BCE-117 CE* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) 48 ff.

instructing the Egyptians, both in matters of faith and science, survives in *aggadic* texts (see below). Such enhancements to the biblical account reflect a Judaism less concerned with *covenantal* separation, as described by Smith, but rather express a *missionary* impulse consistent with Hellenistic Judaism in which Jews integrated into the larger cultural milieu of the ancient Near East. This is consistent with Smith's observation that chosen peoples often oscillate between covenanted and missionary tendencies (see Introduction).

Another version of this story, possibly from the same period or earlier,[190] is found in the Aramaic *Genesis Apocryphon* (columns nineteen and twenty), one of the so-called "Dead Sea Scrolls."[191] According to this version of the story, after crossing into Egypt, Abraham has a dream which he understands as a warning about the Egyptians, and therefore asks Sara to conceal her identity as his wife from them. Several years later, three Egyptian nobles, bearing gifts, come to Abraham seeking "kindness, wisdom and truth" – and thus recognized him as a wisdom figure as in Josephus' account. When Sara is taken to Pharaoh's court, it is Abraham who prays fervently to God to act against Pharaoh and his household, and thereby spare his wife's virtue. As Pharaoh's magicians and physicians are unable to heal Pharaoh of the illness inflicted upon him, Abraham's intercession is requested. It is only after Sara is released, however, that Abraham lays hands on Pharaoh and releases him from the plague. Abraham, Sara and *Lot* (who does not figure in Genesis 12.10-20) depart with flocks and other wealth given by Pharaoh, as well as Hagar who is mentioned only by name without any other identification. Lot, too, we are told, took for himself a "wife from among the daughters [of Egypt]." This version,

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[190] E.Y. Kutscher, "Dating the Language of the Genesis Apocryphon," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76, 4 (1957): 288-292.

[191] For discussion and translation, see: Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave I: a Commentary*, 2nd rev. ed. (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1971); and Sidnie White Crawford, *Rewriting Scripture in Second Temple Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) 105-129.

too, highlights the weakness of Pharaoh's magicians before Abraham's God, and provides an explicit Exodus analogy: God's prophets prevail against Pharaoh and his people, and Sara (personifying Israel) must be set free in order to relieve Pharaoh (=Egypt) from the plagues.

Also among the Dead Sea Scrolls were at least fourteen copies of the *Book of Jubilees*, written in Hebrew, which until their discovery in the Twentieth Century had been known only from Ge'ez versions of the fifteenth- and sixteenth centuries, as well as scattered quotations in Greek, Syriac and Latin by early Christian writers.[192] Scholarly consensus dates the composition of the text to the middle of the second century BCE (ca. 170-150), and it thus appears to be earlier than both Josephus' work and the *Genesis Apocryphon.* The text claims to have been revealed to Moses when he went up on Mount Sinai to receive God's law and commandments. In content, it comprises a retelling of the Book of Genesis and chapters 1-14 of Exodus. The thirteenth chapter of *Jubilees* includes quite a succinct account of Abraham and Sara in Egypt. As in the later *Genesis Apocryphon*, we are told that they had resided in Egypt for several years before Pharaoh took Sara to his palace, but there is no mention, however, of the plot to conceal Sara's true identity and no confrontation between Abraham and Pharaoh. In fact, there is no dialogue at all. As in the other versions of the story, God afflicts Pharaoh and his people with plagues, and Abraham acquires considerable wealth from the Egyptians (as does Lot). The terse account concludes with Pharaoh returning Sara to Abraham, and his sending them out of Egypt as in the Genesis account.

Other Jewish sources for the sojourn of Abraham and Sara in Egypt include those designated as *Aggadah,* that is, stories, folklore, legends, homiletical and exegetical materials

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[192] Crawford 60-83. For a translation of the text, see: *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament,* trans. R.H. Charles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913). Available online at: The Wesley Center Online: The Book Of (www.wesley.nnu.edu).

found in Talmudic-Midrashic literature that is not legal in nature (*halakha*), dating from approximately 400 CE to 1200 CE.[193] In the early years of the Twentieth Century, Rabbi Louis Ginzberg compiled these various traditions, and formed them into a single narrative titled *The Legends of the Jews*.[194] This material, in particular, finds resonances in Islamic sources. As in Josephus' account, *aggadic* sources relate that Abraham entered Egypt, not only to find relief from the famine in Canaan but: "to become acquainted there with the wisdom of the priests and, if necessary, give them instruction in the truth."[195] Abraham is clearly concerned about the licentious nature of the Egyptians and attempts to hide Sara in a chest, but she is discovered as they cross into Egypt. In contrast to the Genesis account, the story assumes a more explicitly religious character as indicated by Abraham's and Sara's prayers in which they plead to God for her release (as we will see in the Islamic versions), and by the appearance of the angel Gabriel who assures her that God has heard her prayer. Pharaoh is clearly physically desirous of Sara, but he is also apparently in *love* with her, and intends to make her his wife, providing her with all kinds of wealth, even to the point of giving his own daughter, Hagar, to her as a servant. Nevertheless, when he attempts to touch Sarah, the angel Gabriel strikes his hand, even as Sara intercedes with the archangel so that Pharaoh had enough time to recover between blows. Moreover, Pharaoh and his household, as well as "the very walls of his house and his bed," were afflicted with leprosy so that he was not able to approach Sarah.

The connection with the Exodus is made particularly explicit in that the ailment was sent upon Pharaoh and his court on the night of the fifteenth of the month of Nisan, "the same night wherein God visited the Egyptians in a later time in order to redeem Israel, the descendants of

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[193] Shari L. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).
[194] Reprinted by Forgotten Books, 2008.
[195] Ginzberg, I/II, 148.

Sara."[196] As with Josephus, the Egyptian priests help Pharaoh identify the cause of his affliction, which Sarah confirms. Pharaoh thereupon returns Sarah to Abraham "pure and untouched" and, as in the biblical and other versions, bestows on them wealth before they depart for Canaan. In the a*ggadic* accounts, too, Abraham is said to have taught the Egyptians astronomy and astrology, a tradition that goes back to Josephus at least, and reflects a more *missionary* perspective.

**Christian Sources.**

Christian authors who commented on the story of Abraham and Sara's sojourn in Egypt adopted the *covenantal* perspective of the Genesis account, and show little interest in redeeming the Egyptians in any way. Ambrose (ca. 337/40-397 CE) turned the story into a morality tale extolling the virtues of chastity: "There came a famine, and so he (Abraham) went to Egypt. He knew that in Egypt the dissipation of youth was widespread, characterized by lust, impudent desires and unrestrained passions."[197] Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306-373) clearly draws the analogy to the Exodus: "The entire house of Pharaoh was struck down by Sarah's deliverance. So too would all Egypt be struck down by the deliverance of her descendants."[198] For John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407 CE), Sara's escape from the clutches of Pharaoh had more universal significance, demonstrating divine action amid human travails: "Such, you see, God's providence always is, marvelous and surprising. Whenever things are given up as hopeless by human beings, then he personally gives evidence of his invincible power in every circumstance."[199] Medieval depictions of Abraham, Sara and Pharaoh are found in copies of the so-called *Bible moralisée,* paraphrased Bibles of the thirteenth century copiously illustrated for the purpose of – as the modern

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[196] Ginzberg, I/II, 148.
[197] "On Abraham" quoted in: *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Genesis 12-50,* ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002) 8-10.
[198] "Commentary on Genesis" (9.3) quoted in: *Genesis 12-50,* 9.
[199] "Homilies on Genesis" (32.22) quoted in: *Genesis 12-50*, 10.

appellation suggests – moralizing. One such copy contains scenes of Abraham, Sara and Lot entering Egypt, Pharaoh paying for Sara, Pharaoh afflicted with plagues, and Abraham, Sara and Lot leaving Egypt.[200]

**Ibrāhīm in Egypt: Islamic Sources.**

Having explored Jewish and Christian accounts of Abraham and Sara in Egypt, and how the story was understood within the saga of Israel's redemption, we now turn to the Qur'ān and extra-Qur'ānic sources to address our primary questions: if there are differences in how the Islamic tradition has depicted and viewed the Egyptians. Whereas the peregrinations of Abraham and Sara are detailed in Genesis 12-25, the *hijra* of Ibrāhīm is mentioned only briefly and vaguely in the Qur'ān in a few *āyāt*:

> "And I (Ibrāhīm) will turn away from you (people) and from what you invoke besides God…" (*Maryam* 19.48)
>
> "He (Ibrāhīm) said: 'I am going to my Lord. He will guide me." (a*l-Ṣāffāt* 37.99)

And most explicitly:

> "And We delivered him (Ibrāhīm) and Lūṭ to the land which We blessed for all the world." (*al-Anbiyā'* 21.71)[201]

Since the *āyāt* immediately preceding 21.71 (i.e. 21.68-70) are traditionally understood to describe Ibrāhīm's ordeal of fire at the hands of Namrūd (a king who ruled from Babylon), the majority of exegetes have understood "the land" (*al-arḍ*) in 21.71 to refer to (Greater) Syria, the next stop on Ibrāhīm's journeys (according to the biblical itinerary). Moreover, the phrase "the

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[200] MS. Bodl. 270b.

[201] In *al-'Ankabūt* 29.26 Lūṭ says: "I am going to my Lord for He is Mighty (a*l-'Azīz*) and Wise (a*l-Ḥakīm*). It is also possible to take these as Ibrāhīm's words since he is the immediate antecedent: "And Lūṭ believed in him (i.e. Ibrāhīm)…"

land which We blessed" is a phrase that also appears in 21.81where the land is mentioned in conjunction with Solomon, and thus refers to Palestine – i.e. part of (Greater) Syria. Al-Thaʿlabī explains that 21.71 refers to Syria:

> whose blessing is that He sent most of the prophets on missions there. It is the Holy Land, the land of the gathering (for the Day of Judgment) and of Resurrection. In it Jesus, son of Mary, will descend, and therein God will destroy the Anti-Christ at the gate of Lydda. It is a fertile land of many trees, rivers, and fruits, and life is good therein for both rich and poor.[202]

Likewise, of the ten traditions al-Ṭabarī cites in his *Tafsīr* to explicate this *āya*, most speak only of Syria (*al-Shām*) as Ibrāhīm's destination. Only one mentions Egypt in this context:

> According to Ibn Humayd – Salamah – Ibn Ishaq: Ibrahim set out for his Lord, and Lut set out with him, and he married Sara, the daughter of his (paternal) uncle, and he took her with him, fleeing on account of his faith, and the safety to worship his Lord, until he came to Harran, and dwelled there as God had willed it. Then he set out until he reached Egypt. Then he left Egypt for Syria.[203]

Al-Zamakhsharī specifies that Ibrahīm was delivered from Iraq to Syria (*al-Shām*).[204] For *ṣūfī* exegete al-Qashanī, however, Ibrahīm's journey is not a physical journey at all but a metaphysical transition from *fanāʾ* (the annihilation of individual consciousness) to *baqāʾ* (subsistence in God).[205] Al-Ṭabāṭabāʿi also understands *al-ʿarḍ* of 21.71 to refer to Syria.[206]

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[202] *Qiṣaṣ* 135.
[203] *Tafsīr,* v. 10, 6046 (no. 18638). It may be significant that Ibn Isḥaq (d. 150/767) to whom this tradition is traced studied in Alexandria where he would have had exposure and access to biblical traditions.
[204] Al-Zamakhsharī, *Tafsīr al-Kashāf* (Beirut, 2008) II, 95.
[205] *Tafsīr Ibn ʿArabī* (Beirut, 2002) I, 378. For a classical interpretation of the concepts of *fanāʾ* and *baqāʾ* see: ʿAbd al-Karīm ibn Hawāzin al-Qushayrī (d. 1074), *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya fī al-Tasawwuf* (Cairo: 1966) with partial translation in: Michael Sell's *Early Islamic Mysticism* (New York: Paulist, 1996) 119-121. For modern discussions see: Eric Geoffrey, *Introduction to Sufism: the Inner Path of Islam*, trans. Roger Gaetani (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2010) 14-15; Ian Richard Netton, *Sufi Ritual: the Parallel Universe* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000) 176-8; and Netton, *Islam, Christianity and the Mystic Journey: a Comparative Exploration* (Edinburgh University Press, 2011) 63, 68, 75-6, 92-3.
[206] Al-Ṭabāṭabāʿī, *Al-Mizān,* v. 14, 303, 307.

With no explicit reference in the Qur'ān to Ibrāhīm's and Sāra's Egyptian sojourn, and with so few exegetes mentioning it in the context of *al-Anbiyā'* 21.71, it is surprising that the story has nevertheless become an accepted part of the Islamic tradition and continues to be related on Islamic websites.[207] In his study of Ibrahīm and Ismā'īl in Islamic exegesis, Firestone identified twenty-eight traditions (*aḥadīth*) which relate a version of the story of Ibrahīm, Sāra and Pharaoh or the tyrannical king of some land.[208] Of these, sixteen are full narratives, and half of these are attributed to Abū Hurayra (d. ca. 678 CE). None of the eight traditions attributed to him, however, specify a geographical locus for the story. The other eight traditions which provide a narrative are established on the authority of al-Suddī ,[209] Ka'b al-Aḥbār,[210] Abū Sa'īd,[211] two with unspecified sources ("some scholars"), and three without any *isnād* at all.[212] Of those eight, six traditions identify "the tyrant" (*jabbār*) as a pharaoh of Egypt. The other two traditions indicate King Namrūd or King Zadok (*Ṣadūq*) of Jordan as the offender. Other than a locus for the story specified in some versions (i.e. those not attributed to Abū Hurayra), there are relatively minor differences in their details.[213] These traditions were altered and expanded like the biblical and extra-biblical versions of the folktale, and incorporated into texts such as: al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh,* and *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* of al-Tha'labī and al-Rabghūzī which are discussed below.

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[207] "The Story of Abraham (part 5 of 7): the Gifting of Hagar and Her Plight," www.islamreligion.com/articles/296/. The same article appears at: www.ansab.com/vb//archive/index.php/t-47568.html. This article is rife with erroneous comments and includes elements without any foundation in Muslim sources.

[208] Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: the Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), Ch. 4 "The Tyrant," 31-38.

[209] Ismā'īl ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Suddī (d. 127/744), cited by al-Ṭabarī.

[210] A Yemenite Jew who converted to Islam (638 CE), cited by al-Kisā'ī and often cited in *ḥadīth* and stories of the prophets for his knowledge of biblical and extra-biblical material.

[211] Cited by Ibn Kathīr.

[212] Firestone, *Journeys* 33.

[213] Firestone details the variations (*Journeys* 31-38). They need not be repeated here.

**Al-Ṭabarī.**

In his *Ta'rīkh*, al-Ṭabarī identifies the pharaoh who ruled Egypt during Ibrahīm's sojourn as: Sinān b. 'Alwān b. 'Ubayd b. 'Uwayj, calling him "the first Pharaoh" as is claimed (without naming him) in the *aggadic* sources as well.[214] According to the Yemenites, says al-Ṭabarī, this Sinān was appointed ruler over Egypt by his brother Ḍaḥḥāk, associated by some with Nimrūd. Al- Ṭabarī tells the story of Ibrahīm, Sāra and Pharaoh (or simply "the tyrant") with two principal narratives, one originating with al-Suddī, and the other with Abū Hurayra. These I will briefly summarize and note their differences.

According to the al-Suddī account, Ibrāhīm was compelled to leave Harran on account of his faith in the one God, and fled to Egypt accompanied by Lūṭ and his Sāra. Thus, the biblical reason given for Abraham's journey to Egypt – i.e. famine – is here replaced by his desire to practice his faith in safety as in *al-Anbiyā'* 21.51-71 where Ibrāhīm is compelled to flee after confronting his own people on account of their idolatry, a theme that seems to reflect the plight of Muhammad and the early Muslims community culminating in the *Hijra*.[215] Having learned of Sāra's goodness and beauty, Pharaoh sends a message to Ibrāhīm enquiring of her identity. As in the biblical account, fearing for his life, Ibrāhīm identifies her as his sister. Pharaoh requests that Ibrāhīm send Sāra to him, and Ibrāhīm acquiesces. When Pharaoh tries to touch her, however, his arm is immobilized (more similar to the blows delivered by Gabriel in the *aggadic* sources than the plagues of Genesis 12.17), and pleads with Sāra: "Pray to God to release me! By God, I

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[214] *Ta'rīkh,* 202; Ginzberg, I/II, 148. Al-Ṭabarī also explains: "From the descendants of Arpachshad [the son of Noah's son Shem] came the prophets and apostles and the Best of Mankind [Muhammad] and all the Arabs and the *Pharaohs of Egypt*" (*Ta'rīkh* 216, my emphasis). Elsewhere, he says that the Pharaohs came from the Amalekites, and that Ham b. Noah begat *Mizrayim* [i.e. Egypt] who begat the Copts and Berbers (217). He also cites a tradition that says: "Put b. Ham b. Noah married Bakht…and it is said that she bore him the Copts" (212).

[215] The Qur'ān speaks of *al-ladhīn hājarū* and *al-muhājirūn: al-Naḥl* 16.41, 110; *al-Ḥajj* 22.58; *al-Nūr* 24.22; *al-Ḥashr* 59.8-10.

shall not cast suspicion on you. I shall indeed be good to you."[216] Sāra prays to God to release his arm if he is being truthful. God releases Pharaoh's arm and sends Sāra back to Ibrāhīm, along with Hājar, "a Coptic [i.e. Egyptian] slave-girl of his." While Pharaoh is clearly driven by his desire for Sāra as in the biblical and extra-biblical accounts, and thus fits the stereotype of a lustful Egyptian, this version related by al-Ṭabarī adds an interesting element hitherto unnoticed by scholars: Pharaoh seems to recognize the power of (the one) God. He entreats Sāra to pray to God, and although he does not pray himself, he does swear an oath by God that he will not hurt her. Moreover, his truthful nature is proven in that he is relieved of his paralysis.

The second principal version of the story in al-Ṭabarī's *Taʾrīkh*, attributed to Abū Hurayrah (and allegedly to the Prophet Muḥammad),[217] however, leaves us no doubt that Sāra's suitor (*not* identified as Pharaoh in this version) is an unbeliever. This account begins with the often-repeated tradition that Ibrāhīm lied only three times in his lifetime: when he said to his father and other idolaters, "I am sick" (37.89); when he denied having smashed idols (21.58-63); and when he told the tyrant-king that Sāra was his sister. Ibrāhīm justifies the lie to Sāra, however, in this version, explaining: "You are my sister in God for in all this land there are no Muslims[218] except ourselves." This is a clear indication that no people of faith are to be found among the Egyptians.

Although Ibrāhīm delivers her to the tyrant, he prays for God's intervention. Three times the tyrant attempts to touch her, but each time he is seized with paralysis. As in the previous version, he requests of Sāra: "Pray to God and I will not harm you," and each time she prays, he is released from his paralysis. Frightened by what transpired, the tyrant finally summons a

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[216] *Ta'rīkh* 267.
[217] *Ta'rīkh* 268 ff.
[218] Or "believers" as in *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukharī* (no. 3358)*, The Translation of the Meanings of Saḥīḥ Bukharī,* trans. Muhammad Muhsin Khan (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1997).

servant to take Sāra away, calling her a "devil," and gives her Hājar as her servant. (According to at least one tradition, when Abū Hurayra related the story, he exclaimed at this point: "This is your mother, O Arabs!"[219]). Returning to Ibrāhīm, Sāra explains: "God has protected me from the plot of the libertine (*kayd al-fājir*)."[220] Even though the tyrant seems to recognize the power and sovereignty of God as evidenced by his request for Sāra's prayers, he is nevertheless identified ultimately by Sara as an "unbeliever" (*kāfir*); thus confirming Ibrāhīm's previous remark that he and Sara were the only Muslims in the land.

The story continues briefly with an account attributed to Ibn Isḥāq in which Sāra gives Hājar to Ibrāhīm so that he might have a son, as is told is Gen. 16.1-4 and 15. Before continuing the narrative of Ibrāhīm's journeys beyond Egypt, al-Ṭabarī cites a tradition traced back to the Prophet Muḥammad himself: "When you conquer Egypt, treat its people well, for they are kin (to you) and deserve protection."[221] When Ibn Isḥāq asked al-Zuhrī[222] to clarify what was their kinship that the Prophet mentioned, al-Zuhrī answered: "Hājar, the mother of Ismāʿīl, was one of them [i.e. Egyptians]." Thus, while the story of Ibrāhīm and Sāra dramatizes the trials they endured at the hands of Pharaoh, nevertheless it also establishes a fundamental relationship between the children of Ibrāhīm (i.e. Israelites and Arabs) with the Egyptians through Hājar.

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[219] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 269. Literally, "O sons of the water of heaven" (*banī mā' al-samā'*)

[220] *Ṣaḥīḥ Bukharī* uses *kāfir* ("unbeliever") here (no. 3358). *Kayd* is a word of particular significance in *Sūrat Yūsuf.* See the discussion in Chapter 4.

[221] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 270. Al-Ṭabarī (*Ta'rīkh,* 2585) relates that when the Muslims invaded Egypt, the commander 'Amr ibn al-'Asī urged the Copts to assist them against the Byzantines on the grounds of the kinship that existed between the Copts and Arabs through Hājar. The Copts were not convinced. Muhammad's words regarding the Copts exist in several versions. Alfred Butler remarks: "The story as here given is not very clear, It usually takes another form, viz. that Muhammad on his death-bed said three times, 'Take charge of the men with curly hair'; then swooned away. When he recovered they asked his meaning, and he said, 'The Copts of Egypt are our uncles and our brothers-in-law. They shall be your allies against your enemy and your helpers in your religion.' When asked, 'How shall they be our helpers in religion?' Muhammad answered, 'They shall relieve you of the cares of this world, so that you shall be at leisure for religious worship.' See his: *The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Last Thirty Years of the Roman Dominion,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978) 436, n. 2.

[222] Muhammad ibn Muslim al-Zuhrī (d. 742 CE), a *ḥadīth* scholar.

**Al-Thaʿlabī.**

Also drawing upon traditions attributed to Ibn Isḥāq, Al-Thaʿlabī likewise relates that Ibrāhīm travelled to Egypt after leaving Ḥarrān. (The reader will recall that of all the traditions al-Ṭabarī had cited in his *Tafsīr* to explicate *al-Anbiyā'* 21.71*,* only Ibn Isḥāq had mentioned Egypt in the context of the *āya*). Like al-Ṭabarī, he writes that Egypt was ruled at the time by "one of the first Pharaohs."[223] Thereafter, however, al-Thaʿlabī consistently refers to the ruler of Egypt simply as "the tyrant." This initial use of the term "pharaoh" and subsequent use of "tyrant" is the first indication that al-Thaʿlabī utilized the two principal versions related by al-Ṭabarī[224] – i.e. those of al-Suddī and Abū Hurayra (see above) – to produce one harmonized account. Rather than introducing new material, al-Thaʿlabī's contribution is principally in the melding of the two principal versions. His account progresses as in the versions already cited, with Ibrāhīm justifying his lie about his relationship to Sāra on the basis of their faith: "For you are indeed my sister in the book of God, and in this land, there is no other Muslim beside me and you" (as in Abū Hurayra's version related by al-Ṭabarī). Ibrāhīm prays after delivering Sāra to the tyrant/king (Abū Hurayra); the tyrant/king is afflicted once (al-Suddī), but al-Thaʿlabī quickly adds that: "according to certain authoritative accounts this repeated itself three times" (as in the Abū Hurayra versions). Sāra entreats God to release the tyrant/king from his paralysis if he is telling the truth (al-Suddī); the tyrant/king returns Sāra to Ibrāhīm and gives her Hājar, "a Coptic slave-girl" (al-Suddī); upon her return, Sāra interrupts Ibrāhīm at prayer explaining that

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[223] In the chapter on Lūṭ, al-Thaʿlabī provides the name of the Pharaoh whom Ibrāhīm, Sara, (and Lūṭ) encountered there: "Sinān b. ʻArān b. ʻUbayd b. ʻAwj b. ʻImlāq b. Lūd b. Shem son of Noah" (*Qiṣaṣ,*175), which differs somewhat from the name provided by al-Ṭabarī. Notice also that this Pharaoh is traced back to Shem b. Noah as al-Ṭabarī had claimed of all the pharaohs.

[224] Tottoli remarks: "Among the sources utilized [by al-Thaʿlabī], the first position belongs without a doubt to al-Ṭabarī of whom al-Thaʿlabī had at his disposition universal history and Qur'ānic commentary, which he made extensive use of, even if he did not give precise indications of the use being made of that source." See his: *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'ān and Muslim Literature* (Richmond: Curzon, 2002) 148.

she has been saved from "the adulterer" and has received Hājar as a servant (Abū Hurayra). Al-Thaʿlabī then follows al-Ṭabarī almost verbatim:[225] he relates the tradition that Abū Hurayra said regarding Hājar: "This is your mother, children of the water of Heaven." He repeats the account of Sāra giving Hājar to Ibrāhīm credited by al-Ṭabarī to Ibn Isḥāq, but here given anonymously. Finally, he includes the tradition of Muhammad's admonition to be kind to the Egyptians, and al-Zuhrī's clarification (via Ibn Isḥāq) that "Hājar, the mother of Ishmael, was one of them."[226] As with al-Ṭabarī, by repeating this tradition al-Thaʿlabī implies that in spite of Pharaoh's wrongdoing, there can be no fundamental conflict with the Egyptians as a whole.

**Al-Kisā'i.**

Based on the authority of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. ca. 652/5), al-Kisā'i moves the story of Ibrāhīm, Sāra and the Pharaoh to Jordan with a king named Zadok who is identified as the father of Hājar. It is therefore not relevant to this discussion of portrayals of Egyptians in Islamic exegesis and literature. Why the story is moved to Jordan is unknown. It appears to be neither a biblical variation nor an *aggadic* one.

**Al-Rabghūzī.**

Al-Rabghūzī retains the Egyptian element of the story albeit in a somewhat ambiguous fashion. At the conclusion of his account of Ibrāhīm and Namrūd, al-Rabghūzī relates that "a person named Dhū l-ʿArsh ascended the throne as king."[227] It is he who will ardently desire Sāra. While Namrūd's realm does not seem to include Egypt, Dhū l-ʿArsh identifies himself to Ibrāhīm as "king of Egypt," as he boasts of his wealth. At least one modern writer on Islam

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[225] Tottoli remarks further: "Many passages in the history of al-Ṭabarī and the stories of the prophets of al-Thaʿlabī are identical" (*Biblical Prophets*, 161, n.27).
[226] Al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArā'is al-Majālis* 137.
[227] More completely as: Dhū l-ʿArsh b. Ṣarūq al-Ḥimyarī.

refers to Dhū l-ʿArsh simply as "the Egyptian Pharaoh"[228] Yet, later in al-Rabghūzī's account, Dhū l-ʿArsh is also called "the king of Ḥarrān."[229] When he learns the truth about Sāra's identity, Dhū l-ʿArsh tries to convince Ibrāhīm to stay with him by magnamimously offering him the kingship of Egypt, and offers Sāra a crown that "represents seven years' taxes from Egypt." After Ibrāhīm leaves Egypt, the narrative continues with an episode that occurred when Dhū l-ʿArsh was travelling (from Ḥarrān) *to* Egypt. Taken as a whole, we may conclude then that Dhū l-ʿArsh (whose name simply means "the possessor of the throne") was the king of vast empire that stretched from Ḥarrān in Upper Mesopotamia (south-eastern Turkey) to Egypt.

While it is possible the author was merely conflating the various accounts of Sāra and the Tyrant (as told thrice in Genesis), it is also possible that al-Rabghūzī was drawing upon a tradition cited by al-Ṭabarī which said that the king who desired Sara was appointed ruler of Egypt by his brother Ḍaḥḥāk, whom some identified with Namrūd. It is unlikely that al-Rabghūzī had any real knowledge of ancient Egyptian history, but was perhaps drawing from his own historical context – i.e. the early fourteenth century, and was evoking a contemporary empire that also reached from Upper Mesopotamia to Egypt – that is, the Baḥrīyya Mamlūk Sultanate (1250-1382), the powerful rival of his Mongol patrons, which ruled a vast area that comprised Egypt, Nubia, Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia. As discussed below, al-Rabghūzī had a specific purpose in writing his *Qiṣaṣ* and may have thus tailored his account of Ibrāhīm in Egypt to speak to his Mongol audience by alluding to the people and events of his own day rather than the ancient past with which the Mongols would have been unfamiliar.

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[228] Afnan H. Fatani, "Hajar" in: *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia,* 236. Depending soley on Rabghūzī's account, he writes of Hājar: "When her father (the King of Maghreb) was killed by the Egyptian Pharaoh Dhu l-ʿarsh, she was captured and taken away." This is often repeated in popular accounts on the Internet without attribution.
[229] Al-Rabghūzī 114.

Al-Rabghūzī relates that Ibrāhīm left the land of Namrūd with Sāra, Lot and "two true believers," suggesting that this *hijra* was undertaken for purposes of religious freedom, a motif we have already noted above appears in the Qur'ān and in a tradition related by al-Ṭabarī attributed to al-Suddī. Similar to what we find in the *aggadic* accounts, al-Rabghūzī depicts Ibrāhīm as anticipating problems with the officials at the border (between Canaan and Egypt presumably) and therefore attempts (unsuccessfully) to conceal Sāra inside a chest. Although "very taken with women,"[230] the king acts respectfully towards his guests from the outset, honoring Ibrāhīm and seating him at his side. When Ibrāhīm claims that Sāra is his sister, al-Rabghūzī offers an explanation, as had previous accounts: "He said this in the sense that a true believer is a brother or sister to a fellow true believer."[231] Although Dhū l-ʿArsh offers Ibrāhīm the wealth of Egypt in exchange for Sāra, Ibrāhīm says that she must consent to the king's proposal since she is of age. Continuing to act honorably, the king sits Ibrāhīm on a throne as he entreats Sāra, promising to give her "brother" (Ibrāhīm) a thousand female slaves if she consents, but she remains silent. Drawing upon a tradition also found in al-Thaʿlabī's account, the angel Jibrīl appears, and allows Ibrāhīm to observe Sāra from afar in order to quiet his fears.[232] When she continues to weep in the king's presence, covering her face with her hands, he becomes impatient and pulls her hands away to reveal her face. Ibrāhīm, seeing these events from afar, prays "My God, show your power to this *unbeliever*," at which point the king's arms wither.

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[230] Al-Rabghūzī 110.
[231] Al-Rabghūzī 112.
[232] Al-Thaʿlabī writes: "Certain accounts tell us that God removed the veil separating Abraham and Sara so that he could observe her from the time she would go out until she would come back to him, as a sign of regard for her and to reassure Abraham" (136). Al-Rabghūzī writes: "The prophet Abraham was very jealous. While his mind was occupied with Sarahm Gabriel came and <lifted the veils> between Abraham and Sara with his wings" (112). N.B. The translation by Boeschoten, O'Kane and Vandame translated the bracketed phrase as: "covered the space," but this was corrected in the review by Robert Dankoff, *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 117, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1997): 119.

When an earthquake occurs,[233] the king finally questions Sāra about the strange events that have befallen him. In a sharp retort she explains that these things have happened because he is an *unbeliever* and that his real affront is not against her, but against Ibrāhīm, God's Messenger, and her husband. The king calls Ibrāhīm back and humbly throws himself at his feet, asking the Prophet to tell him about his God. In an eloquent speech, Ibrāhīm tells him of the omnipotence of the one God, drawing upon passages from the Qur'an:

> My God is the One [112.1] who has created the seven spheres of heaven and the seven layers of earth [65.12]. His magnificence extends higher than any outer limit and He wields power beneath the earth [2.255]. He has always existed and He will always exist [112.2]. He has no comrade, no companion, no equal, no peer and no partner [17.111]. He was not born from anyone; no one has been born from Him [112.3]. He does not resemble created beings [112.4]. He has done as He pleased, and He will do as He pleases [14.27]. He causes the living to die and beings the dead to life [2.28]. He Himself will never die. Everything is in His power; He is Lord of all things [4.126; 40.7].[234]

The king, who had been worshipping the star Venus, now understands that Ibrāhīm's god is the sole God of all creation. This is clearly an allusion to Ibrāhīm's own epiphany as related in *Al-An'ām* 6.76 when, having observed the impermanence of celestial bodies understood they are not God but *creations of* God: "When the night covered him, he saw a star and said: 'This is my Lord.' But when it set, he said: 'I do not love those that set.'" In a remarkable turn of events that has gone unnoticed by commentators, the king becomes a *believer*, uttering the words of a modified *shahāda*: "There is no god but God, and I bear witness that you are Ibrāhīm, the messenger of God." Though the king is willing to give his throne to Ibrāhīm and become his servant if he stays with him, Ibrāhīm heeds the instructions of the angel Jibrīl and departs.

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[233] An allusion to the Day of Judgment as in *Al-Ḥajj* 22.1: "O people! Fear (*ataqū*) your Lord for the trembling *(zalzalah*) of the hour will be an awesome thing;" and *Al-Zalzalah* 99.1-8: "When the Earth is shaken to its foundations…on that day the people will proceed separately to be shown their deeds…"
[234] Al-Rabghūzī 113-114.

Al-Rabghūzī introduces several elements into his account that are not seen in other Islamic versions of the story. Even before Ibrāhīm tries to pass Sāra off as his sister, he attempts to conceal her in a chest, which, as noted above, is also seen in the *aggadic* accounts. It is doubtful that al-Rabghūzī would have encountered Jews in any significant way in his homeland of Transoxiana, and thus we may rule out direct "borrowing." What is more likely is that this detail was simply part of the general Abrahamic lore in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic Near East from which authors of all three traditions drew freely. As Firestone remarked:

> The striking exegetical similarities call attention to the probablility that, at least in the early period of Islam – from the second quarter of the seventh century to the first quarter or more of the eighth century – when the styles and standards of Islamic exegesis were established, Muslims scholars shared a realm of religious discourse with their Jewish colleagues. The paucity of direct historical evidence, of course, precludes drawing more than tentative conclusions about the nature and extent of this discourse, but the striking literary and exegetical parallels…add more support to the view that Islamic tradition did not evolve independently of Jewish influence.[235]

Al-Rabghūzī's *Qiṣaṣ* indicates that Muslims and Jews continued to draw from the same font of tradition for many more centuries.

It is the portrayal of the (Egyptian) king Dhū l-ʿArsh, however, that sets al-Rabghūzī's account apart from the others, whether Islamic, biblical or extra-biblical. The king is consistently depicted in a more positive light. He treats Ibrāhīm with honor, seating him on a throne next to him, and respects Sāra's right to consent, rather than simply having his way with her. He objects to her accusation that he forced himself upon her, declaring: "I have never taken anything from anybody by force." After she castigates him for his idolatry, he wants to hear about the God they worship, and most remarkably, after hearing Ibrāhīm preach, the king sees the folly of his own star-worship and declares his belief in the God of Ibrāhīm and Sāra. Since the king's conversion is such an unusual and noteworthy element, it is worthwhile to consider why al-Rabghūzī

[235] Firestone, "Prophethood," 346.

introduced it. It is possible, of course, that it is merely a logical extension of a tradition dating back as far as Josephus that Abraham brought some Egyptians to faith during his time there (see above). It is also possible, however, that this element serves a more immediate purpose within the historical context of al-Rabghūzī's work. As noted in the previous chapter, al-Rabghūzī had been invited by the Mongol prince Toq Buqa to compose his own version of the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* in 1309 which was completed a year later. At this time, al-Rabghūzī's homeland of Transoxiana was under the rule of the Chaghatai khanate, whose leaders had only gradually relinquished their shamanist practices in favor of Islam.[236] Chaghatai (1227-42), the second son of Chingiz Khan, had been quite hostile towards Muslims and their practices.[237] Yesü Möngke (1246-51), the fifth son of Chaghatai, was more positively disposed towards Islam, but the first Chaghatai ruler to convert was Mubārak Shāh (1266), who was overthrown in less than a year. Al-Rabghuzi's work coincides with the ascension of Esen Buqa (1309-18) whose reign marks the beginning of the ascendancy of Islam, although it could not yet be considered the state religion. It seems likely, therefore, that the story of an honorable pagan king who converts to Islam was intended to serve as an example and inspiration to the Chaghatai elite. One can imagine al-Rabghūzī catechizing his Mongols patrons using the very words used by Ibrāhīm to describe God to Dhū lʿ-Arsh. Just as Dhū l-ʿArsh came to believe in the God of Ibrāhīm, perhaps so would the Chaghatai. That Dhū l-ʿArsh's empire corresponds to that of the Mamluks may also be meant as a subtle reminder to the Mongols that their wealthy and powerful nemesis to the west was Muslim, and that it would be advantageous for the Chaghatai to convert as well. The Ilkhanate Mongols, whose realm directly abutted Mamluk Mesopotamia also had only just begun to Islamicize, beginning with Maḥmūd Ghazan (r. 1295-1304).

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[236] See the introduction to Al-Rabghūzī's *The Stories of the Prophets,* v. 1, *xvii-xix.*
[237] J.J. Saunders, *The History of the Mongol Conquests* (London: Routledge, 1971) 74.

There is also the possibility that al-Rabghūzī, in his efforts to facilitate the *Islamization* of the Chaghatai, based his depiction of Dhū l-ʿArsh on someone quite specific, namely Al-Adil Kitbugha, the tenth Mamluk sultan (r. 1294-96) who, as his appellations *al-Turkī al-Mughlī* indicate, was actually of Turkish-Mongol extraction and soldier in the army of Hülegü (r. 1256-65). Captured at the First Battle of Homs in 1260, Kitbugha entered the ranks of the Mamluks in Egypt under Qalawun (r. 1279-90), when he would have been compelled to convert to Islam. In time he rose to become the regent and *de facto* ruler of Egypt during the minority of Sultan al-Nasir Muhammad (1st reign, 1293-94) whom he deposed after one just one year of reign. Kitbugha ruled only two years before being overthrown himself in 1296.[238] As the (Mamluk) ruler of a vast empire centered in Egypt, albeit of Turkish-Mongol origins, Kitbugha, a convert, who died in Hamā in 1297 not long before al-Rabghūzī began writing (ca. 1309), may have provided a suitable model for the character of Dhū l-ʿArsh. These possible historical connections between al-Rabghūzī's depiction of Dhū l-ʿArsh and the Mamluks have gone unnoticed by scholars to date.

Another unique element that al-Rabghūzī introduces concerns Hājar's identity and ancestry. Whereas in traditions cited by al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī and others, Hājar is clearly identified as "a Coptic (i.e. Egyptian) slave-girl," al-Rabghūzī identifies her as the daughter of the King of Maghreb after whose death at the hand of Dhū l-ʿArsh, she was taken to Egypt. Moreover, in the court of Dhū l-ʿArsh, she was no mere servant but "the mistress of all the female slaves," who "knew everything about his wealth and possessions," and carried the keys to the king's treasury. Completing her pedigree, al-Rabghūzī says that she is descended from the

[238] Robert Irwin, *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: the Early Mamluk Sultanate 1250-1382* (ACLS Humanities E-Book, 2008).

prophet Ṣāliḥ.[239] As with the conversion of the king, I believe this enhanced ancestry for Hājar serves al-Rabghūzī's aim of converting the Mongol elite. By elevating Hājar from a mere slave-girl to that of a princess and descendant of a prophet, al-Rabghūzī also elevates the status of the (Arab) Muslims who are descended from Hājar through Ismāʿīl. Mongols who converted to Islam, then, were not joining the ranks of the slaves, but of royalty and prophets![240] It is moreover possible that Franciscan and Dominican missionaries among the Mongols were disparaging Hājar in their efforts to steer them away from Islam and convert them to Christianity.[241]

**Conclusions**

In the history of the patriarchs and prophets of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, Abraham/Ibrāhīm occupies a unique position as "father" around whom all three communities gather as sons and daughters either by descent or by faith, albeit with different understandings of his role in those respective communities.[242] Within these respective traditions, the story of Abraham in Egypt is told, serving in this study as an initial narrative for assessing overall attitudes towards the Egyptians. The basic story is told three times in Genesis, of which one is

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[239] Ṣāliḥ was the prophet to the Thamūd people (*al-Aʿrāf* 7.73-79; *Hūd* 11.61-66; *al-Shuʿarā* 26.141-159; *al-Naml* 27.45-53; *al-Qamar* 54.23-31; *al-Shams* 91.11-15), usually identified with the Nabataeans of northwest Arabia. His story is also told in the various versions of the *Stories of the Prophets*.

[240] St. Paul had used a similar device in his letter to Galatians where, in a forced allegory, he equates Hagar, the mother of Ishmael, with slavery (to the law revealed at Sinai) and Sara, the mother of Isaac, with freedom (from the law): "Therefore, brothers, we are children not of the slave woman but of the freeborn woman" (Gal. 4.31).

[241] Pope Innocent IV dispatched mendicant missionaries to the Mongols in 1245. Nestorian Christians had been present in the eastern steppe since at least the eighth century, however. Sartaq (d. 1256), a khan of the Golden Horde, was reputed to be a Christian. See: Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221-1410* (Harlow: Pearson, 2005) 44-45, 87 ff., 175-177, 256-279. For Christian writers on Hagar, see: John L. Thompson, *Writing the Words: Women of the Old Testament among Biblical Commentators from Philo through the Reformation* (Oxford: University Press, 2001) 17-99.

[242] The notion of the "Abrahamic faiths" has not gone unchallenged. See for example, Jon D. Levenson, "The Idea of Abrahamic Religions: a Qualified Dissent," *Jewish Review of Books,* no. 1 (Spring 2010), www.jewishreviewofbooks.com/publications/detail/the-idea-of-abrahamic-religions-a-qualified-dissent; and Patrick J. Ryan, "The Faith of Abraham: Bond or Barrier," *Origins* v. 41, no. 5 (June 9, 2011): 65-74.

specifically set in Egypt. In its plot structure and variations, it exhibits many characteristics of what biblical scholars have termed a folk story. In spite of its relative insignificance in the Hebrew Scriptures (after Genesis 12 it is never referred to again in the Hebrew Bible), the story of Abraham, Sara and Pharaoh proved to be an enduring narrative, reiterated and expanded in ancient Jewish apocryphal and *aggadic* texts, exegeted and reinterpreted by Christian authors, illustrated by Christian artists, and retold and rewritten by Muslim *mufassirūn* and *muḥaddithūn*. In the Jewish tradition, it develops from a simple story of divine intervention (set in various locales) on behalf of God's covenanted people into an ominous foreshadowing of Israel's captivity in and Exodus from Egypt. Christians did not fail to see the connection to the Exodus but saw particular relevance in it as an example of God's victory in the face of adversity, not unlike the Passion and Resurrection of Christ. As John Chrysostom preached:

> Do you see, dearly beloved, the magnitude of the benefit coming from his (Abraham's) trials? Do you see the greatness of the reward for his endurance? Do you see man and wife, advanced in age though they were, giving evidence of so much good sense, so much courage, so much affection for one another, such a bond of love? Let us all imitate this and never become dispirited or consider the onset of tribulations to be a mark of abandonment on God's part or an index of scorn. Rather, let us treat it as the clearest demonstration of God's providential care for us.[243]

But how might we explain the presence and endurance of this story in the Muslim tradition when there is not a single explicit reference or allusion to it in the Qur'an? Clearly, as Firestone has observed, the Islamic story of Ibrāhīm and Sara in Egypt derives from the biblical tradition. He posited two reasons why the story was repeatedly retold in Islamic sources:

> To begin with, once the genealogical connection with Hagar was established in the Islamic period, the Abū Hurayra version became an authoritative vehicle for establishing the origin of the matriarchy of the northern Arabs. The second reason is that

[243] "Homilies on Genesis" (32.22) quoted in: *Genesis 12-50*, 10-11.

> the story was simply a good source for much-needed information about Abraham, the first Muslim.[244]

While it is true that the various Islamic versions of the story generally end by explaining that Pharaoh gave Hājar to Sara for a maidservant - something the Bible never states explicitly - Hājar is nevertheless more like the punctuation mark in the Islamic accounts rather than a central character. Her entrance in the Islamic versions of the story marks the end of Ibrāhīm's Egyptian sojourn. The exclamation of Abū Hurayra – "This is your mother, O Arabs!" – so often repeated, is more like a footnote in the various accounts rather than the point of the story.

As to Firestone's second point, that the tale helps satisfy the need for more information about Ibrāhīm, this is certainly true and helps to explain the numerous *ḥadīth* concerning the prophets and the multiple versions of the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*. There are, however, other elements to the story that I believe would have made it particularly attractive to Muslim audiences. Coming as it does after the stories of Ibrāhīm's conflict with Namrūd, and with his own idolatrous people (in al-Ṭabarī's and al-Thaʿlabī's accounts), Ibrāhīm's flight into Egypt confirms his identity as a religious fugitive (*muhājir*) – the prototype for all Muslims. His journey is not to escape famine, as in the Genesis story, but religious persecution and opposition, and thus particularly reminiscent of the *hijra* experienced by the early Muslim community at the hands of the Quraysh. As both al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī wrote, and as was suggested by al-Rabghūzī, Ibrāhīm left Ḥarrān as a religious *fugitive* and travelled to Egypt. Each Muslim was/is therefore to identify with him, as well as Sāra and Lūṭ. Moreover, the triumph of Ibrāhīm and Sāra over the Egyptian king, a *kāfir* and *mushrik,* was the triumph of believers over non-believers, of good over evil. Rather than specifically foreshadowing the Exodus as it had in the

[244] Firestone, *Journeys* 38.

Hebrew Bible, the sojourn of Ibrāhīm and Sāra in Egypt reminds Muslims of their own *hijra,* their own journey from oppression to religious freedom, and their victory over idolaters and unbelievers. In this sense, the significance Muslims attach to the story as a tale of liberation from tyranny and oppression, which mirrors their historical experience as victims of the Quraysh in Mecca, runs parallel to the Jewish understanding of the story as prefiguring Exodus and the deliverance of the Israelites from physical and religious bondage. Since many Islamic versions of the story begin with an explanation of Ibrāhīm's three lies, clearly one of the primary concerns of the story was to provide a reason for this prophet's one lie which, although not mentioned in the Qur'an, persisted in Islamic tradition due to the endurance of the biblical story in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic culture of the Mediterranean and Middle East. Moreover, since some versions of the story inject the element of Sāra's unflagging obedience to Ibrāhīm and the honor bestowed upon her by God because of her behavior, the tale may have also served secondarily to convey a model of the pure and devoted Muslim wife.

Having considered biblical and extra-biblical accounts, and having examined the Islamic variations, additions and interpretations, and the reasons and purposes for such, we return to our primary question: what does this tale convey about Muslim attitudes towards the ancient Egyptians as represented by extra-Qur'ānic sources? Certainly most of the versions of the story we have examined convey negative assessments of Pharaoh, who is the only Egyptian that has any dimension in this tale. He is consistently portrayed as someone driven by his passion and desire to possess Sāra sexually, and as tyrannical and idolatrous, a view of the Egyptians encountered frequently in the Hebrew Scriptures that reflects *covenantal c*oncerns of distinctiveness, separation and purity. At the same time, however, some of the Islamic accounts introduce *a missionary* element also seen in a*ggadic* versions: Pharaoh's acknowledgement of

the omnipotence of Sāra's God, and his request that she pray to God on his behalf. This highlights Sāra's faith and thus confirms Ibrāhīm's assertion that they were the only two Muslims in the land. Rather than being a simple matter of one tradition borrowing from another, the motifs common to Jewish and Muslim accounts may be explained by a shared body of folklore in the medieval Jewish and Islamic world. Al-Rabghūzī took Pharaoh's admission of God's power to the next logical conclusion: he asks Ibrāhīm to teach him about this God, and is thereby moved to conversion. Pharaoh becomes *muslim.*[245] This unique element in al-Rabghūzī's account reflects *missionary* concerns of inclusion and conversion, perhaps introduced to inspire the Chaghatai Mongols to abandon their idolatrous ways and submit to the God of Ibrāhīm, as did Pharaoh. Al-Rabghūzī may have purposely alluded to real-life story of Kitbugha, a Turkic-Mongol, who became a Mamluk (and therefore Muslim) and subsequently sultan of a vast empire, however briefly. By introducing the conversion of Pharaoh into his account of Ibrāhīm and Sāra, al-Rabghūzī perhaps alludes also to the Qur'ānic Pharaoh of the Exodus who made a dramatic declaration of faith as the waters of the sea engulfed him (*Yūnus* 10.90 – see below Chapter 5 – IV.D.2).

Besides Pharaoh, the other significant Egyptian encountered in the story of Ibrāhīm and Sāra in Egypt is, of course, Hājar, who makes but a brief appearance without any real significance at this point in the accounts. She is simply introduced as a kind of parting gift from Pharaoh to Sāra, a token sign of his munificence. In the traditions ascribed to Abu Hurayra, however, she serves as important link between the Egyptian people and the Arabs, exclaiming of her: "This is your mother, O Arabs!" Moreover, it is the figure of Hājar the Egyptian that induced al-Ṭabarī to repeat the Prophet's admonition to protect the Egyptians "for they are kin

[245] I use *muslim* (lower case) here to designate someone who submitted to the God of Abraham before the revelation of the Qur'ān to the Prophet Muhammad.

(to you)." As the story of Ibrāhīm unfolds in the Qur'ān, al-Ṭabarī's *Tarīkh,* and the *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, Hājar has a greater role to play as the mother of Ismāʿīl. Muslims who perform the rites of the *ḥajj* follow in her footsteps as much as those of Ibrāhīm. As Iranian author ʻAli Sharīʿatī (1933-77) remarked:

> All of the hajj is joined to the memory of Hagar. And *hijrah* or migration, the greatest deed, the greatest command is derived from the word *hajar.* And *muhajir* or migrator, the greatest Divine-like human being, a Hagar-like person. And what is migration? A Hagar-like deed.[246]

When performing *ṭawwāf,* pilgrims pass *hijr Ismā'īl,* a low, semi-circular wall adjacent to the *Ka'ba* that is also referred to as "the skirt of Hājar," demarcating the area where Hājar raised Ismāʿīl. She is buried near the third pillar of the *Ka'ba.* Pilgrims run the course between Safa and Marwa as Hājar did as she desperately searched for water to quench Ismāʿīl's thirst, and they drink from the waters of Zamzam as Hājar and Ismāʿīl did. Sharīʿatī says to the Muslims performing the *Ḥajj*:

> Here you are Hagar. A woman from a despised and lowly African race. A female slave…this slave woman is addressed by God, is the mother of great Prophets of God, Messengers of God and manifestation of the most magnificent and dearest values which God creates.[247]

In recounting the many traditions regarding Ibrahīm's sacrifice of his son (identified as either Isḥāq or Ismā'īl), al-Ṭabarī cites one version in which Iblīs informs Hājar that Ibrāhīm has gone to sacrifice Ismā'īl, hoping she will stop her husband's obedience to God's command. Her faith remains steadfast and her response exemplary, however, as she explains to him what *Islām* means: "If his Lord commanded him to do it, then one should surrender to the command of

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[246] Ali Shariati, *Hajj: Reflections on its Rituals,* trans. Laleh Bakhtiar (Albuquerque: Abjad, 1992) 81.
[247] *Hajj* 100.

God."[248] Hājar is not, however, discussed at length in the extra-Qurʿanic texts nor is she specifically mentioned in the Qurʿān, and thus her story adds little to this analysis of Islamic attitudes towards the Egyptians. Al-Ṭabarī succinctly ends her story thusly: "At length death came to Hājar as it comes to all people…"[249]

To continue this analysis of how the Islamic texts and traditions represent the Egyptians, I now turn to the account of Yūsuf's sojourn in Egypt where he, like Sāra, attracted unwelcome attention from the Egyptians. In contrast to the Islamic versions of Ibrāhīm's sojourn in Egypt which were told exclusively in extra-Qur'ānic works, the story of Yūsuf and the Egyptians is recounted at length in the twelfth *sūra* of the Qur'ān as well as in numerous *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, poetry and painting. Together these sources add considerable dimension to Islamic attitudes towards the Egyptians.

[248] *Ta'rīkh* 304.
[249] *Ta'rīkh* 281.

# Chapter 4 - Yūsuf and the Egyptians

## Introduction

Whereas the Islamic material for Ibrāhīm and Sāra's sojourn in Egypt is quite limited given the lack of Qur'ānic references, the story of Yūsuf in Egypt is quite another matter due first and foremost of all to *Sūrat Yūsuf.* As has often been echoed in both classical and contemporary commentaries, *Sūrat Yūsuf*, the twelfth sūra, is esteemed as "the best/most beautiful of stories" in the Qur'ān (12.3). This is in no small part due to its unique characteristics. It has been observed that it is "one of the most complete and tightly knit chapters in the Qur'ān,"[250] the longest single narrative in the Qur'ān,[251] and it is the most complete account of a prophet's life related in the Qur'ān.[252] Moreover, *Sūrat Yūsuf* is second only to the Qur'ān's Exodus accounts with regard to the number of references to Egyptians, and thus forms a significant part of this study. Thirty-seven of the sura's 111 *āya*, that is, a third of the *sūra*, concern Yūsuf's interactions with Egyptians.[253] Specifically, these Egyptians are: the official who bought Yūsuf (the biblical Potiphar), and who is referred to by his title *al-'Azīz*; the official's wife who attempted to seduce Yūsuf (12.23); a "witness" from her household (12.26-27); "ladies in the city" (12.30-33, 50-51); two men who were with Yūsuf in prison (12.36-42); the king of Egypt (12.43-54); his officials (*mala',* 12.43-44); and a messenger, who is referred to but who says nothing in the text (12.50). The words in *āya* 74-75 may also be ascribed to Egyptians based on context, although the speakers are not explicitly identified as such. Although there have been many studies of the *sūra* (several of them referenced in this chapter), *none* have

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[250] Merguerian and Najmabadi 485.
[251] Kaltner xiii. Kaltner is not entirely correct in calling it "the only one of the book's 114 chapters that comprises a single narrative." *Sūrat Nūḥ* (71) also comprises a single, albeit much shorter, narrative.
[252] Ibrahim Abu Salem, "Joseph in the Qur'an: Glimpses from the Story of a Prophet," *Joseph in the Three Monotheistic Faiths* (Jerusalem: Passia, 2002) 22.
[253] In Genesis, 103 verses of 419 verses (chapters 37-50) concern Joseph and the Egyptians – that is, a fourth of the total account.

focused on the Egyptians in the story as a whole, but have focused particularly on Yūsuf's interaction with the wife of his master. The *sūra* has thus often been interpreted through the lens of gender relations rather than relations between Israelites and Egyptians.

According to tradition, *Sūrat Yūsuf* was revealed in the late Meccan period when Muhammad was facing considerable opposition, if not death, at the hands of the Quraysh. Indeed, the story of Yūsuf's ill treatment at the hands of his brothers presented a timely parallel to Muḥammad's persecution by the members of his own tribe.[254] The revelation of *Sūrat Yūsuf* is closely connected to that of the sūras *Yūnus* (10), *Hūd* (11), *al-Ra'd* (13), *Ibrāhīm* (14), and *al-Ḥijr* (15) all of which relate the opposition experienced by the prophets who gave their names to the sūras (except for *al-Ra'd* – "The Thunder"- which speaks of *al-rusul* in general), as well as the hostility displayed towards Mūsā, Nūḥ, Ṣāliḥ, Shuʿayb and Muhammad. *Sūrat Yūsuf* likewise may be dated to the period in which Muhammad was negotiating with the Banū Khazraj and Aws of Yathrib (Medina) for the migration (*hijra*) of the Muslim community there. Just as Yūsuf rose to a position of authority in Egypt after being mistreated and cast out by his brothers, so does Muhammad become the religious and civil authority in Medina after escaping the persecution of the Quraysh. Sayyid Quṭb, perhaps reflecting upon his own difficulties with the Nāṣir regime, remarked in his commentary on the sūra: "Indeed the way I think about the sūra gives me the feeling that it carries a subtle hint that the Muslims will be made to leave Mecca to settle somewhere else, where they will enjoy power and achieve victory."[255] The similarities between the plights of Yūsuf and Muhammad were already apparent to the early Muslim

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[254] M.S. Stern, "Muhammad and Joseph: a Study of Koranic Narrative," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 44, 3 (July 1985): 193-204. Parallels between Yūsuf and Muhammad's plights are explored below further. The typological function of the *sūra* is also discussed by Joseph Witztum, "Joseph among the Ishmaelites: Q 12 in Light of Syriac Sources," *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān (The Qur'ān in its Historical Context 2)* (London: Routledge, 2011) 445-447; and Todd Lawson, "Typological Figuration and the Meaning of 'Spiritual': the Qur'anic Story of Joseph," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 132.2 (2012): 221-244.

[255] *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān,* v. 4, 1950; *In the Shade of the Qur'ān (Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān)* trans. Adil Salahi (Islamic Foundation, 2004) v. 10, 4.

community. Ibn Hishām relates that when Abū Sufyān realized that he and his supporters would no longer be able to resist the Muslim conquest of Mecca, ʻAlī advised him to "approach the Prophet directly, face to face, and use the same words as Yūsuf's brothers spoke to him when they recognized him…Abū Sufyān did as he was advised and the Prophet answered with the same answer Prophet Yūsuf gave to his brothers: 'No blame shall be attached to you this day. May God forgive you. He is indeed the Most Merciful.'"[256]

It has been noted that *Sūrat Yūsuf* bears many of the literary characteristics of a classic novel including the contrast between major and minor characters, suspense, surprise, love, dialogue, conflict and symbolism.[257] ʻAbdullah Yūsuf ʻAlī reasoned that the *sūra* has enduring appeal because it is "full of human vicissitudes, and has therefore deservedly appealed to men and women of all classes."[258] On the other hand, the *Khawārij* rejected the *sūra*, unable to accept that God could have related such a "story of passion" (*qiṣṣat al-ʻishq*).[259] Classically, the sura is divided into twelve sections (*rukū'*): 1)*ʻayāt* 1-6; 2) 6-20; 3) 21-29; 4) 30-35; 5) 36-42; 6) 43-49; 7) 50-57; 8) 58-68; 9) 69-79; 10) 80-93; 11) 94-104; 12) 105-111. On literary and stylistic grounds Carl Ernst has noted a tripartite division to the *sūras* of the middle and later Meccan period, in which the first and third parts comprise parallel sections that "praise God, list virtues and vices, debate unbelievers, and affirm the revelation," while the second part "is typically a narrative of prophecy and struggle that highlights the crucial choices facing the messenger's

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[256] Ibn Hishām, *Sīrah al-Nabawīyah,* as cited in: Adil Salahi, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet,* rev. ed. (Markfield: Islamic Foundation, 2002) 615-616. An alternative account relates that Muhammad spoke these words to the Meccans after cleansing the Ka'aba. (C.f. Martin Lings, *Muhammad: His life Based on the Earliest Sources.* 2nd ed. (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2006) 314.
[257] Mojtaba Rahmandoost, "The Stories of the Qur'an: a Study of Qur'anic Narrative," *European Journal of Scientific Research*, v. 40, no. 4 (2010): 569-579 (http://www.eurojournals.com/ejsr.htm).
[258] *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* 544.
[259] "Khāridjites." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill Online, 2012.

audience."[260] In his analysis of the narrative, Mir posited that the *sūra* is structured such that "major tensions are created in roughly the first half of the story" (*āya* 4-44), which are then resolved in reverse order (*āya* 45-101), a structure he called "involution and evolution in reverse."[261] This structure may be illustrated in the following fashion:

A. Joseph's dream (4-6)
    B. The brother's plot against Joseph (7-22)
        C. Potiphar's wife's attempt to seduce Joseph (23-29)
            D. A similar attempt by the Egyptian ladies (30-34)
                E. Joseph's imprisonment (35-42)
                F. The king's dream (43-44)
                F'. The king's dream interpreted (45-49)
                E.' Joseph's release from prison (50)
            D'. Confession of the Egyptian ladies (51a)
        C'. Confession of Potiphar's wife (51b-57)
    B'. The brothers learn their lesson (58-99)
A'. Fulfillment of Joseph's dream (100-101)

Rendsburg terms this a *palistrophe*, "a rhetorical device that builds an entire story based on chiastic structure."[262] To this structure may be added the "bookends" of the introductory verses (1-3) and the concluding verses (102-111) which serve to "frame the tale and to place it in a general Qur'anic context."[263] This is accomplished particularly in the use of the word *qaṣaṣ* in *āya* 3 and then again in 111:

> 3: We do relate to you the most beautiful of *stories*, in that We reveal to you this Qur'an; and before this you were among the heedless.
>
> 111: Surely there are in their [the prophets'] *stories* instruction for men of understanding…

[260] Carl Ernst, *How to Read the Qur'an* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2011) 105-106. Ernst cites Angelika Neuwirth's *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 2nd ed., (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007) 106.
[261] Mir, "The Qur'anic Story of Joseph" 2.
[262] Rendsburg, "Literary Structures" 119.
[263] Rendsburg, "Literary Structures" 119.

It has not generally been noted that "the heedless" (*al-ghāfilīn*) mentioned at the beginning of the sūra stand in contrast to the "men of understanding" (*'ūlai al-'albāb*) at the end of the sūra, perhaps to mirror the hearer's own journey from unbelief to belief. Within this over-arching structure of the story, however, there is yet another discernible unit, namely, the part of the narrative that focuses specifically on Yūsuf's encounter with the Egyptians (as distinguished from his fraternal dilemma). The limits of this pericope are clearly delineated, not only by the changes in scene or principal figures, but also by the use of the phrase w*a kadhālikā makkannā li-Yūsuf fi al-'arḍi* ("And thus we established Yūsuf in the land") at the beginning and end of the pericope: in *āya* 21: "And thus We established Yūsuf in the land that We might teach him the interpretation of events (*aḥādīth*)…," and then again in *āya* 56: "And thus We established Yūsuf in the land that he might take from it when he pleased…"

This chapter presents a detailed study of *Sūrat Yūsuf* 12.21-57 which relate Yūsuf's interactions with the Egyptians from his arrival in Egypt as a slave until his appointment by the king as overseer of Egypt's granaries. It is thus within these thirty-seven *āya* that we get a sustained view of several Egyptians from the Qur'ān's perspective. This analysis combines a *linguistic exegesis*[264] by examining significant words, phrases and concepts, and *intertextual study*[265] that adddresses their use elsewhere in the Qurʿān, in order to determine what the *āyāt* reveal about attitudes towards the Egyptians (and by extension, other non-Muslims), and how they reflect the *missionary* character of the Qur'ān in contrast to the *covenantal* emphasis of the Hebrew Bible. This exegesis is supplemented with material from classical *qiṣaṣ.* More contemporary sources discussed in the literature survey are consulted, specifically as they relate to the Egyptians in the text. My approach is that which I articulated in the general introduction to

[264] For linguistic exegesis and the Qur'ān, see: Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Theological Approaches to Qur'anic Exegesis: a Practical Comparative-Contrastive Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2012) 83-142.
[265] Afnan H. Fatani, "Aya," *The Qur'an: an Encylopedia,* 92-93.

this study – i.e. the historical-critical method and a *humanistic hermeneutic* such as that employed by Naṣr Ḥamīd Abū Zayd and others discussed above in the literature survey. I will also provide my own assessment and analysis in order to explicate the view of Egyptians in this *sūra*, which no author, classical or contemporary, has provided in any comprehensive fashion. I will demonstrate that the Qur'ānic depiction of the Egyptians, as well as that presented in the *qiṣaṣ*, is more complex and nuanced than that presented in the biblical material, while exhibiting many parallels with *aggadic* material. Moreover, my analysis will show that the depiction of the Egyptians in *Sūrat Yūsuf* reflect a *missionary* perspective as articulated by Smith rather than *covenantal* concerns which predominate in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Appendix I, I have provided my own translation[266] of *Sūrat Yūsuf* 12.21-57, incorporating the findings of this chapter.

**Historical Considerations.** Although the historicity of the Qurʿān's accounts of the prophets in Egypt is not the primary concern of this study, but rather what the texts reflect about the Egyptians, a few words may be said about the story of Yūsuf from a historical and archaeological perspective. As noted in the previous chapter regarding the story of Ibrāhīm in Egypt, correlating events related in the patriarchal narratives of Genesis with Egyptian history has proved impossible as there is a general lack of corroborating archaeological evidence, in addition to the numerous historical problems presented by the biblical chronology. That being said, the prominence of the Joseph story in Genesis and the vividness with which it is told had led many over the centuries to attempt to place Joseph within Egyptian history. Among them was James Ussher (1581-1656) who, having calculated that the world was created in 4004 BCE, proceeded to date Joseph's lifetime as 1745-1635 BCE, accepting the 110-year lifespan accorded

[266] For the purpose of translation throughout this study, I have used the Arabic text of the Qur'ān provided in the 10th edition of 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī's *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* (Beltsville: Amana, 2001).

him in Genesis 50.22, and the year of his entrance into Egypt as 1728 BCE.[267] Although dates within Egyptian history would not be accurately calculated until after the decipherment of hieroglyphs and Egyptian historical texts in the Nineteenth-century, Ussher had unwittingly placed Joseph's sojourn in Egypt at the end of the Middle Kingdom (2055-1650 BCE), shortly before the appearance of the *Hyksos* ("the rulers of foreign lands"), a Semitic people from coastal Lebanon who managed to establish themselves as rulers over Lower Egypt and southern Palestine (ca. 1650-1550 BCE).[268]

In the Twentieth-century, biblical archaeologist William Foxwell Albright (1891-1971), noting the West Semitic names of the Hyksos kings (such as *Ya'qub-har*) hastily concluded that "an intimate connection between the Hebrew settlement in Egypt and the Hyksos conquest may be considered certain," while admitting to "the almost complete lack of Egyptian historical inscriptions during the whole of Hyksos age."[269] Among contemporary Egyptologists, Kenneth Kitchen continues to maintain the historical setting for the Joseph story in the Hyksos Period.[270] Like Albright before him, Biblical archaeologist James Hoffmeier defends the historicity of the Joseph story while admitting however, that "there is no direct evidence for the Hebrew Joseph being an official in the Egyptian court."[271]Among modern Muslim commentators Sayyid Quṭb [272]

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[267] Bernhard Lang, *Joseph in Egypt: a Cultural Icon from Grotius to Goethe* (New Haven: Yale, 2009) 253-255.
[268] For more on the *Hyksos*, see: Toby Wilkinson, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010) 188ff.; Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 126 ff.; Janine Borriau, "The Second Intermediate Period," *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Ian Shaw (Oxford: University Press, 2000) 185 ff.; Donald Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, 98ff.
[269] W.F. Albright, *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra: an Historical Survey* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 10-11.
[270] Kenneth Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006) 343 ff.
[271] James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* 97-98. Mention also should be made of Egyptian author Ahmed Osman who identifies the biblical Joseph with Yuyu, the father-in-law of Amenhotep III (ca. 1388-1348 BCE) in his *Stranger in the Valley of the Kings* (Harpercollins, 1988) and *The Hebrew Pharaohs of Egypt: the Secret Lineage of the Patriarch Joseph* (Bear and Company, 2003). While Kitchen and Hoffmeier's views are debated in scholarly circles, Osman's views are generally rejected as unfounded and unscholarly.
[272] *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān,* v. 4, 1959-1960; *In the Shade of the Qur'ān – Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān,* v. 10, 21-23; Hugh S. Galford, "Sayyid Qutb and the Qur'anic Story of Joseph: a Commentary for Today," *Muslim-Jewish Encounters,*

accepts the Hyksos setting as do contemporary Qur'ān commentators Louay Fatoohi[273] and 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī.[274] Quṭb incorrectly held that the nomadic Hyksos had learned monotheism from Yūsuf's ancestors and that it was the Egyptian pharaohs who sought to reinstate idolatrous practices and persecuted the Israelites. Archaeologists have demonstrated, however, that the Hyksos worshipped both Canaanite and Egyptian deities.[275]

The attempt to connect the biblical Joseph with the Hyksos period (or with any other historical era) has been largely abandoned by contemporary scholars of Egyptian history,[276] however. As Modrzejewski succinctly states: "Biblical Egypt and Egyptological Egypt have few points in common, and the few they have are debatable ones."[277] Redford, while acknowledging some *egyptianizing* elements in the Genesis account, including personal names, considers such details anachronistic.[278] Ultimately, he concludes that the Joseph story is a "novella" composed sometime during the seventh or sixth century B.C.E., maintaining that there is no reason to believe it has any basis in fact, and "to read it as history is quite wrongheaded."[279] Not surprisingly, Redford's conclusions are shared by archaeologist Israel Finkelstein who generally eschews the Hebrew Bible for reconstructing Israel's past.[280] Even the more traditionalist biblical

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*Intellectual Traditions and Modern Politics*, ed. Ronald L. Nettler and Suha Taji-Farouki (Amsterdam: Harwood, 1998) 54-55.

[273] Louay Fatoohi, *The Prophet Joseph*, 208.

[274] 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* n. 1655.

[275] Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel* 116-118.

[276] Joseph is not mentioned in recent scholarly histories such as: Toby Wilkinson, *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt*; Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of Ancient* Egypt; and *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt*.

[277] Joseph MélèModrzejewski, *The Jews of Egypt,* 5.

[278] Donald B. Redford, "Joseph," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: University Press, 2001) v. 1, 209.

[279] Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* 422-429. Cf. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*. More recently, Van Seters concluded that the Joseph saga "was an independent story of northern provenance in the late monarchy that combined the Jacob traditions to the questions of the origins of the sojourn in Egypt. This entertaining and edifying story, like a Greek drama, was taken up by J in his larger historiography of the Patriarchs and used as a bridge to the Exodus." See his: "The Joseph Story: Some Basic Observations" in: *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford*. Ed. Gary N. Knoppers and Antoine Hirsch (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 388.

[280] Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed* (New York: Touchstone, 2001), 67.

archaeologist William Dever, who sharply disagrees with Finkelstein's biblical minimalistic approach, concludes that: "the Joseph Cycle as it now stands may be largely fiction."[281]

My specific reason for raising the historical issue is that various classical *mufassirūn* consistently *historicize* the story of Yūsuf in Egypt from the outset by supplying the name of the king of Egypt, although the Qurʿān, like the Bible, does not. Thus, al-Ṭabarī tells us:

> At that time the king was al-Rayyān b. al-Walīd, a man of Amalekite stock, according to the account relayed through Ibn Ḥumayd – Salamah – Ibn Ishāq. Another account gives the full name of the king and Pharaoh of Egypt at that time was al-Rayyān b. al-Walīd b. Tharwan b. Arāshah b. Qārān b. 'Amr b. 'Imlaq b. Lud b. Shem b. Noah.[282]

Al-Thaʿlabī repeats this information verbatim,[283] while al-Baiḍāwī refers to him simply as: "Rayyān ibn al-Walīd the Amalekite," adding:

> But according to another account he was the Pharaoh of Moses, and lived 400 years; this is based on the Quranic statement [about Moses' Pharaoh], "Joseph came to you previously with clear signs." The commonly accepted view is that Moses' Pharaoh was one of the descendants of Joseph's Pharaoh, and [that] the verse [just cited] is an example of descendants being addressed in [terms appropriate to] their ancestors' circumstances."[284]

Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rabghūzī both identify the Pharaoh of Mūsā's age as the *son* of al-Rayyān.[285]

The identification of al-Rayyān as an Amalekite (i.e. a Levantine people descended from Esau according to Gen. 36.15-16) is an interesting detail since it suggests a period in Egyptian history when non-Egyptians ruled the land, such as the Hyksos era which has been favored by traditionalists for the setting of the Joseph story, as noted above. Thus, Muslim traditions could

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[281] William G. Dever, *Who Were the Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003) 230.
[282] *Ta'rīkh* 378.
[283] Tha'labi, *Qiṣaṣ,* 196.
[284] Baīḍāwī 12.
[285] *Al-Kashshāf* v. 2, 335; al-Rabghūzī 270.

lend credence to claims of a historical Joseph even though no Egyptologist or biblical archaeologist has mentioned the Islamic texts in their arguments. Neither does Fatoohi, who argues for the Hyksos setting, seem to be aware of the alleged Amalekite identity of Yūsuf's king.[286] Those who date Yūsuf's sojourn in Egypt to the Hyksos period argue that these Semitic rulers would be more receptive to the migration of Jacob (Yaʿqūb) and his sons, and would be more likely to promote a non-Egyptian to a position of authority. According to a tradition which al-Ṭabarī attributes to Ibn Isḥāq,[287] however, the Egyptians and all the pharaohs are descended from ʻImlīq, the progenitor of the Amalekites, as are all the peoples of the East, those of ʻOmān and Baḥrayn, of the Ḥijāz, Canaan and Syria. Thus, while al-Rayyān is called an "Amalekite," he shares a common ancestry with the Egyptians for they are all essentially *Arabs* in Islamic tradition. Al-Ṭabarī calls the Amalekites *al-ʻarab al-ʻāribah* – "the authentic Arabs."[288] In truth, however, the ancient Egyptians were not ethnically Arabs. They, like their language, have been classed as "Afro-Asiatic" or *Hamito-Semitic,* meaning that they shared physical, cultural and linguistic traits with both African peoples and those of the Asiatic ancient Near East. In fact, the ancient Egyptians looked upon their Asiatic neighbors of Syria-Palestine with disdain, often referring to them contemptuously as "sand-dwellers" (*ḥryw-š'y*)[289] and "vile" (*ẖs*).[290] Along with the Nubians (to the south), Asiatics are repeatedly depicted as Egypt's principal enemies.[291] By (incorrectly) claiming the Egyptians are descended from the Amalekites and therefore true *Arabs,* Muslim historians homogenized the ever-expanding ethnically and culturally diverse *ummah.* This is in stark contrast to the ethos expressed in the Hebrew Bible, which emphasizes

[286] Fatoohi, *The Prophet Joseph* 208 ff.
[287] *Ta'rīkh* 213.
[288] *Ta'rīkh* 219.
[289] R.O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1962) 262.
[290] Faulkner 204.
[291] Among the items from the tomb of Tutankhamun, for example, Asiatics and Nubians are depicted as bound or slain on the soles of the king's sandals, a gold plaque, walking sticks, chariots, shields, a painted chest, and footstool. C.f. T.G.H. James, *Tutankhamun* (Vercelli: Metrobooks, 2000), 195, 257, 270-277, 291-4.

the cultural distinctiveness and ethnic purity of Jews, such that the Book of Ezra forbids intermarriage with non-Jews (Ezra 9) as a sign of Israel's fidelity to God. This is another example of hows the *covenantal* focus of the Jewish Scriptures results in the community turning away from other peoples while the *missionary* character of Islam seeks to bring others into the faithful fold.

Al-Rabghūzī also calls Yūsuf's king Rayyān, albeit providing a slightly different genealogy and al-Kisā'ī simply calls him Rayyān b. Walīd.[292] Andalusian geographer and historian Ibn Saʿīd al-Maghribī (1213-86) mentions al-Rayyān b. al-Walīd as the builder of Egyptian obelisks.[293] Egyptian historian Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 871 CE), whom al-Ṭabarī cites in his work, also names al-Rayyān b. al-Walīd in his *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-akhbāruhā,* describing the king as Yūsuf's friend (*ṣāḥib*). [294] In addition to the Islamic texts which historicize Yūsuf's stay in Egypt, two geographic features in Egypt memorialize the tradition of his presence there: the *Baḥr Yūsuf*, a "canalized river"[295] which tradition associates with Yūsuf's famine-relief efforts, and the *Wadī al-Rayyān,* southwest of Egypt's Fayoum, which is apparently named for the king whom Yūsuf served.[296]

The frequent occurrence of Rayyān's name in Islamic exegetical works is particularly curious, as it is unknown in *aggadic* texts, and is thus unique to Islamic tradition although overlooked by most scholars. Al-Ṭabarī attributes the tradition that first names the king to Ibn Ishāq (d. 767). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Ibn Ishāq was the only *mufassir* cited by al-Ṭabarī who specifically mentioned Egypt in the context of Ibrāhīm's journeys as related in *Al-*

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[292] Al-Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ* 177.
[293] Haarmann, U.. " Misalla." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill Online, 2012.
[294] Arabic text published as: *The History of the Conquest if Egypt, North Africa and Spain Known as the Futūḥ Miṣr of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam,* ed. Charles Torrey (1922; Reprint, Gorgias Press, 2002) 13.
[295] R. Neil Hewison, *The Fayoum: History and Guide* (Cairo: American University, 2001) 2.
[296] If the name is read as *al-wādi al-rayyān* it could signify "the well-watered *wādi*" and thus part of Yūsuf's works in Egypt to alleviate the famine. See the discussion of *al-rayyān* below.

*Anbiyā'* 21.71. If al-Ṭabarī is correct in attributing the tradition of al-Rayyān's name to Ibn Ishāq, it is indeed possible that Ibn Ishāq may have acquired such details as these during the time he studied in Egypt.[297] Commenting on the survey of Egyptian churches and monasteries written by "Abū Ṣāliḥ the Armenian" in the early thirteenth-century, B.T.A. Evetts commented:

> It is impossible at the present day to say whence the names of the ancient Pharaohs found in Arab writers were derived; none of them seems to be known to Muhammad in the Qur'ān. The names seem to have been borrowed by later writers from Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, who was himself indebted to Ibn Isḥāq.[298]

Still, the consistent and insistent references to Rayyān by *mufassirūn* beg an explanation, although none has been provided in the exegetical literature. The word ريان means "well-watered" (or irrigated), and while it does appear as a personal name, within the context of the Yūsuf story I believe that it may have originally signified *the land of Egypt* itself rather than the personal name of an Egyptian king. In other words, what was originally *mālik al-rayyān* – "King of the Well-Watered [Land], i.e. Egypt – in time became *al-mālik ('ismuhu) al-rayyān*: "The King (named) al-Rayyān." It is, moreover, possible that *al-rayyān* is intended to be the Arabic equivalent of the ancient Egyptian phrase *ta-meri* ( ) , a term used to refer to Egypt which literally means "the cultivated land." It is written with the hieroglyphic phonogram *mer* ( ) depicting a hoe, and signifying not only cultivated land but also a body of water – i.e. land that is *irrigated*.[299] Although Arab writers did not have any direct knowledge of ancient

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[297] Al-Ṭabarī, too, studied in Egypt.

[298] Al-Armanī Abū Ṣāliḥ, *The Churches and Monasteries of Egypt and Some Neighboring Countries*, trans. B.T.A. Evetts (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969) 55-56, n. 1.

[299] Egypt as *ta-meri* is illustrated particularly by the scene on the so-called "Scorpion macehead" in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (E.3632). The scene inscribed on the macehead depicts the king (called "Scorpion," c. 3000 BCE) standing on the bank of an irrigation canal wielding a hoe (*mr*) ready to open the waterway. See: P.R.S. Moorey, *Ancient Egypt*, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 1992) 13, and Wilkinson, *Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt* 47-48.

Egyptian, the words *ta* and *meri* survive in Coptic and could have been learned by Ibn Isḥāq during his time in Egypt. [300]

Particularly significant for this study is the comment al-Ṭabarī makes after naming al-Rayyān: "It has been said that before this king died he became a *believer* and follower of Yūsuf's religion, and that he died when Yūsuf was still alive."[301] This, too, is repeated by al-Thaʿlabī.[302] Al-Zamakhsharī similarly notes that al-Rayyān "believed in Yūsuf"[303] and al-Rabghūzī writes that the king "marveled at the omnipotence of God, the Almighty Judge, and hearing the news about Yūsuf, he was amazed."[304] This tradition of the king as a believer is often repeated in Islamic exegetical sources and could have possibly been inspired by Pharaoh's words to his servants in Gen. 41.38: "Can we find anyone like this – one in whom is the spirit of God?;" and to Joseph in 41.39: "Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you." Yet, it is noteworthy that in spite of Pharaoh's speech in Genesis, Jewish tradition does *not* speak of him as someone who came to true faith. This element is thus unique to Islamic tradition and, I would suggest, a significant difference in how the Jewish and Islamic traditions understand the Joseph/Yūsuf story and Joseph's/Yūsuf's role among the Egyptians. This is developed further below.

Al-Ṭabarī contrasts the faithful al-Rayyān with his successor, Qābūs b. Muṣʿab b. Muʿāwiyah b. Numayr b. al-Salwās b. Qārān b. ʻAmr b. ʻImlāq b. Lud b. Shem b. Noah whom he describes as "an infidel, and when Yūsuf invited him to Islam he refused to accept it."[305] This

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[300] W.E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford, 1962). I have not been able to determine, however, if the phrase *ta-mri* is used in the Coptic period as a designation for Egypt.
[301] *Ta'rīkh* 378.
[302] *Qiṣaṣ* 196.
[303] *Al-Kashshāf* v. 2, 335.
[304] Al-Rabghūzī 188-89.
[305] *Ta'rīkh* 378.

is also repeated by exegetes (e.g. al-Thaʿlabī[306] and al-Zamakhsharī[307]). As is the case with al-Rayyān b. Walīd, there is no historical or archaeological evidence for the existence of Qābūs b. Muṣʿab. He seems to personify *kufr* (unbelief) in contrast to al-Rayyān who signifies *īmān* (belief). Providing such a contrast is consistent with the style of the Qur'ān, which frequently juxtaposes opposites. Thus, those who seek gain are companions of the fire, while those who believe and work righteousness are companions of the Garden (*al-Baqarah* 2.81-82); those who believe fight in the way of God, while those who disbelieve fight in the way of Shaiṭān (*al-Nisā'* 4.76); on the Day of Judgement some faces will be humbled and will enter the blazing fire, while other faces that day will be joyful and enter the Garden (a*l-Ghāshīyah* 88.2-10); those who believe are companions of the right hand, and those who disbelieve are the companions of the left hand (*al-Balad* 17-19); for the charitable God will prepare for them the path to bliss, but for the miser God prepares the path to misery (*al-Layl* 92.5-10), etc. The king and his faith are discussed below further within the context of *Sūrat Yūsuf.*

**Profiting (and Propheting) the Egyptians**.

Like the biblical account, according to the Qur'ān Yūsuf's engagement with the Egyptians begins with his arrival in Egypt (*Miṣr*), having been sold into slavery by his brothers to caravan traders, identified in *tafāsīr* and *qiṣaṣ* as Midianites (*madyan*), the nomads of the Sinai (12.21).[308] The name *Miṣr* is explicitly used five times in the Qur'an (*al-Baqarah* 2.61; *al Yūnus* 10.87; *Yūsuf* 12.21 and 99; and *al-Zukhruf* 43.51). It is an ancient name appearing in the Hebrew

[306] Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ* 196.
[307] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf,* v. 2, 335.
[308] The Qur'ān does not identify the traders who brought Yūsuf into Egypt. The biblical account refers to the merchants as both Ishmaelites (Gen. 37.25) and Midianites (Gen. 37.28). The Qur'ān speaks of the *madyan* as the people to whom the prophet Shu'ayb was sent. See: *al-A'rāf* 7.85-93; *al-Tawbah* 9.70; *Hūd* 11.84-95, etc. Al-Thaʿlabī (*Qiṣaṣ,* 194), al-Baīḍāwī (*Commentary,* 11), and al-Zamakhsharī (*al-Kashshāf*, v. 2, 334) identify the traders as Midianites.

Scriptures as *miṣrayim*, but is also found in Ugaritic (*msrm*), Phoenician (*msrym*), Egyptian Aramaic (*msryn*), Syriac (*mesrem*), Akkadian (*Musur/Musru/Misri*), and Old Persian (*Mudraya*), and may originally signify "border or region."[309] Ultimately, the name may be of ancient Egyptian origin, derived from the word *mḏr,* "walled in."[310] Egypt is implicitly mentioned in other verses (*al-A'rāf* 7.127, 129; *Yūsuf* 12:56, 80; *al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.4, 6, 19) where it is referred to simply as "the land" (*al-'arḍ*).[311] The use of *Miṣr* in *Sūrat Yūsuf* is neither the first in terms of order of revelation nor in terms of the current order of *sūras* in the Qur'ān. The earliest use of the name in order of revelation is probably *Yūnus* 10.87 (in the context of the Exodus), followed by those in *Yūsuf* 12.21 and 99, *al-Zukhruf* 43.51 (Exodus), and a*l-Baqarah* 2.61 (Exodus), using the "standard Egyptian chronology."[312] Thus, in terms of the revelation of the Qur'ān, the Meccans would have heard of the sojourn of the Israelites in Egypt *before* that of Yūsuf's.

The abduction and enslavement of Yūsuf at the hand of his brothers apparently presented something of a theological conundrum perhaps calling into question God's ability to thwart evil and protect his prophets. Thus, *āya* 19 attempts to assure its listeners of God's omnipotence and omniscience: "And God knows well all that they do" (*w'Allāh 'alīm bi-mā ya'malūn*).[313] Elsewhere, the Qur'ān does acknowledge that prophets have been persecuted and even killed,

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[309] *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* ed. G. Johannes Botterweck et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) v. 8, 520, s.v. מצרים *miṣrayim;* Okasha El Daly, *Egyptology* 23; Isaac Hanson, "Egypt," in *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* (Leiden: Brill, 2002) v. 2, 10-11.

[310] Faulkner, *Concise Dictionary* 123.

[311] Hanson 10-11. The ancient Egyptians generally referred to their land as *ḳmt,* literally, "the Black Land" on account of the dark soil.

[312] Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an* 72-73. Some have taken *miṣran* (2.61) to mean "any town," but the context of the passage in which the Israelites are complaining to Moses about their lack of food strongly suggests Egypt: "He [Moses] said: '

[313] Likewise, the Qur'ān counsels believers to be patient in their understanding of life's travails. In *Surat al-Kahf* (18.65-82), God's omniscience, and obedience and submission to God's order are key themes. Mūsā is perplexed by a series of seemingly uncharitable and hurtful acts wrought by an unnamed servant of God (identified by the tradition as al-Khidr). The servant of God ultimately explains his actions while chastising Mūsā for his lack of patience (*ṣabr*) in waiting to understand the larger context for these events. For an analysis, see Ian Netton, "Towards a Modern Tafsīr of Sūrat al-Kahf: Structure and Semiotics," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*, v. 2, no. 1 (2000): 67-87.

while assuring its listeners that God's wrath will be upon the perpetrators.[314] Al-Thaʿlabī relates a tradition, which attributes Yūsuf's difficulties to a *faux pas* Ibrāhīm made in Egypt:

> Some say that Joseph was made a slave and was sold by his brothers because when Abraham once returned from his travels to Egypt, the poor of the land and the slaves escorted him, walking a distance of four *parasangs* out of veneration for him but he failed to dismount for them. Therefore God revealed to him: 'Because you failed to dismount for my servants who were walking alongside you barefoot, I shall punish you by letting one of your descendants be sold into this land.[315]

Al-Rabghūzī also felt it necessary to explain why God had permitted that Yūsuf be sold into slavery. He relates that one day Yūsuf boasted of his beauty after gazing upon his reflection in a mirror: "With such beauty if I were to become a slave, who could afford my price?" Yūsuf's brothers "showed what value it has if someone feels pride in his own beauty. That was God's wisdom in having him sold."[316] Likewise, the Hebrew Scriptures may also indicate some discomfort with Joseph's fate, assuring the reader three times in Gen. 13 that: "the LORD was with him."

In his *Qīṣaṣ al-'Anbiyā',* Ibn Kathīr explained that God knew all of what Yūsuf's brothers had done, but did not alter events because in this God demonstrated "great wisdom, foresight and mercy for the people of Egypt" (*al-ḥikmah al-'aẓīmah wa al-qadr al-sābiq w'al-raḥmah bi-'ahl miṣr)*, and that "God would profit them through him in this world and the next" (*nafaʿauhum Allāh bihi fi dunyā-ihum w' 'ukhrā-ihum*).[317] Ibn Kathīr chose his words carefully in this context, although it has gone unnoticed by commentators: he uses the verb *nafʿa* ("to profit") to describe Yūsuf's impact on the Egyptians perhaps deliberately to echo the remark made by Yūsuf's Egyptian master in *āya* 21 - *'asā an yanafʿa-nā*: "Perhaps he will profit us."

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[314] E.g. 2.87; 2.91; 3.21; 3.181; 4.155; 5.70.
[315] *Qiṣaṣ* 195.
[316] Al-Rabghūzī, v. 2, 182.
[317] *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* 227.

God had certainly profited the Egyptians in this world by sending Yūsuf who interpreted the king's dream, thereby allotting them sufficient time to prepare for the coming famine according to Yūsuf's directions. What does Ibn Kathīr mean, however, by stating that God will profit the Egyptians in the next world? Surely he is not implying that God profits polytheists/idolaters (*mushrikūn/īn*) and unbelievers (*kafirūn/īn*) for the Qur'ān says: "God does not forgive that (anything) be associated with Him…(*al-Nisā'* 4.116)," and "The end of unbelievers is the fire" (*al-Ra'd* 13.35). His comment, I would argue, must therefore imply that at least *some* Egyptians became believers as a result of Yūsuf's presence among them, and that they enjoyed God's favor in the Hereafter as a result of their faith. The Qur'ān suggests as much in the reference to the "believer" (*mu'min*) among Pharaoh's people (*al-Ghāfir* 40.28) in the Exodus account, who reminded his own people of Yūsuf's presence among them: "And indeed Yūsuf came to you before with signs, but you did not cease doubting that which he brought you (*al-Ghāfir* 40.34)."[318]

We might conclude from the presence of the "believer" at the time of the Exodus that Yūsuf had made converts during his years in Egypt before the birth of Mūsā. In addition to interpreting dreams, Yūsuf had preached the One God to his fellow (Egyptian) prison inmates (*āyāt* 37-40), and seems to have made converts (see discussion below). Yūsuf may very well then be regarded, not only as a prophet to his own people, but perhaps even more so *to the Egyptians*, as implied by Ibn Kathīr's remarks. Yūsuf role as prophet to the Egyptians has generally been overlooked by commentators as evidenced by Noegel's and Wheeler's curious remark: "The story of Joseph does not easily conform to the story of other prophets in the Quran. Joseph is not sent as a prophet to a particular people, nor does he proclaim a particular

[318] See in Chapter V for a discussion of the "believer" in the Qur'ān's Exodus accounts.

message."[319] It seems clear, however, that Yūsuf was sent as prophet *to the Egyptians* and that his message is that of every prophet: abandon idolatry and submit to the One God (see discussion of 12.36-42 below). The *sūra* itself and exegetes imply that it was God's will that Yūsuf be taken (or sent) to Egypt wherein he preached the One God. As is written in *Yūnus* 10.47: "And to every people there is (sent) a messenger;" and in *Al-Anbiyā'* 21.25: "We did not send before you a messenger except to reveal to him that there is no god but I, so worship (me)." Thus, whereas in Genesis, the story of Joseph does not serve any significant *theological* purpose, but serves primarily to explain Israel's presence in Egypt and prefigure its oppression there, the story of Yūsuf in Egypt as related in the Qur'ān further illustrates God's intention that *all people* would receive the message of His prophets and worship Him alone. This is another clear example of the Qur'ān's *missionary* perspective as contrasted to the *covenantal* emphasis of the Hebrew Bible.

**Al-'Azīz.** Yūsuf's Egyptian master is the first Egyptian in *Sūrat Yūsuf* to be considered here. Like all the Egyptians in *Sūrat Yūsuf*, and indeed like most of the individuals referred to in the Qur'ān who are not prophets or notorious villains (e.g. Hāmān in the Exodus accounts), the Egyptian who bought Yūsuf is not named in the Qur'ān. He is of course known to us from the biblical account as *Potiphar* (Heb. פּוֹטִיפַר), generally believed to be an abbreviated form of the Egyptian name *Pa-di-pa-R'* ( ), meaning "He-whom-(the god) Re-gives."[320] In Islamic tradition he is most commonly called *Qiṭfīr,* most likely a corruption of *Fiṭfīr.* Other forms of the name include *Qaṭafīr, Qiṭfīn, Qiṭ'īn, Qiṭṭīn,* and *Iṭfīr*.[321] He bears the patronymic name Ibn Ruhayb (var. Ibn Ruḥayb or Ibn Rūḥīt). In *āya* 30, he is identified as *al-'Azīz*, "the Noble (Great or Mighty) One," probably intended to denote an honorific title rather than a

[319] Scott B. Noegel and Brannon Wheeler, *The A to Z of Prophets in Islam and Judaism* (Lanham: Scarecrow, 2010) 175.
[320] Currid 74-82.
[321] B. Heller, "*Qiṭfīr,*" Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition (Brill, 2010), Brill Online.

specific office,[322] and actually a good rendering in Arabic of the ancient Egyptian word *wer* (  ) – i.e. "great one,"[323] a generic term for an official, and synonymous with the Hebrew *sārīs* (סריס).[324] That *al-ʻAzīz* is a title and form of address is further indicated in *āya* 78 and 88, where Yūsuf's brothers address him as such after his elevation by the Egyptian king. Al-Ṭabarī cites traditions in his *Tafsīr* and in his *Ta'rīkh* that al-ʻAzīz was in charge of the Egyptian treasury, as does al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍawī.[325] Al-Thaʿlabī identifies him as "the ruler of Egypt and its vicinity, in charge of all the grain storehouses of the Great King,"[326] the office to which Yūsuf would later be appointed (*āya* 55). Al-Kisāʾī refers to Qiṭfīr simply as the husband of Zulaykhā, Yūsuf's seductress, with no title or office,[327] and al-Rabghūzī calls him the king's counselor and minister, or secretary.[328]

The biblical Potiphar never speaks a word in the course of the Genesis account. By contrast, when we first encounter Yūsuf's Egyptian master in the *sūra*, he exhorts his wife to honor or provide for (*akrimī*) Yūsuf who is an orphan in Egypt. The use of the verb *karama* ("to honor or be generous") suggests that the Egyptian regards Yūsuf not merely as a slave, but someone whom he considers adopting (see below). His act of hospitality and generosity towards Yūsuf stands in stark contrast to the charge levied against the people of Mecca in *Sūrat al-Fajr*

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[322] ʻAbdullah Yūsuf ʻAli, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* 555 n. 1677.
[323] Faulkner, *Concise Dictionary* 64.
[324] Some have argued that Potiphar was actually a "eunuch" based on the renderings in the Septuagint, Vulgate and Old Syriac. The *Midrash* also considers him a eunuch. As John Currid argues, however, *sārīs* only acquires the meaning "eunuch" secondarily, sometime in the first millennium BCE, and is used to connote "eunuch" in late Hebrew literature, whereas in the Pentateuch the term simply signifies "a general category of high-ranking leaders in government." Perhaps the most convincing argument against Potiphar's "disability" is that evidence for eunuchs in ancient Egypt is negligible (Currid, 77-80). See discussion below for Islamic views of al-ʻAzīz's sexuality.
[325] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* v. 7, 4778; *Ta'rīkh,* 378; Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf,* v. 2, 335; Bayḍāwī, 12. In Genesis 39.1, Potiphar is called *sārīs pare'ōh* and *śar haṭṭabbāḥīm*, often translated as an "officer of the Pharaoh" and "the chief of the guards," but elude precise definition. C.f. Currid, 74-82.
[326] Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ* 196.
[327] Al-Kisāʾī, *Qiṣaṣ* 174 f.;
[328] Al-Rabghūzī, v. 1, 189 and 198.

89.17 -"But you do not honor (*lā tukrimūn*) the orphan!" - illustrating the Qur'ān's appeal to care for the orphan:

> Say: whatever you spend that is good, is for parents, relatives, orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer. And whatever you do that is good, God well knows it. (*Al-Baqarah* 2.215)
>
> Do not oppress the orphan. (*al-Layl* 92.9)
>
> Do you see the one who denies the faith? It is he who repels the orphan. (*al-Mā'ūn* 107.1-2)

As used by al-'Azīz, the verb *karama* is, I believe, particularly significant from a theological perspective although it goes unnoticed by exegetes. God is above all the One who "honored the sons of Adam" – *karramnā banī 'Adam* (*al-Isrā'* 17.70) and is munificent (*al-Naml* 27.40), *al-Karīm* being among the beautiful names of God (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*).[329] Indeed, Iblīs' principal complaint to God is that He honored (*karramta*) humanity above him (*al-Isrā'* 17.62). Al-'Azīz, who is not explicitly a believer here, nevertheless responds to God's honoring of humanity by instructing his wife to honor and provide for Yūsuf. As I will demonstrate, al-'Azīz consistently exhibits qualities that most properly and perfectly are attributed to God. Even his title, *al-'Azīz*, evokes one of the beautiful names by which God is known.[330] Yūsuf, as the servant of (both) al-'Azīz and God, thus becomes *'abd al-'Azīz* (cf. *ayā* 24 where Yūsuf is referred to as "one of our servants.")

The use of the word *mathwā*, "abode or dwelling" in al-'Azīz's instructions to his wife is also noteworthy. The word occurs soon again in 12.23, where it is used by Yūsuf (*'innahu rabbī 'aḥsana mathwāya*). While in both of these cases *mathwā* has a positive connotation, in the rest of the Qur'ān, it is almost always used in negative contexts to refer to the "abode" of Hell:

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[329] Al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God: al-Maqṣad ak-asnā fī sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā,* trans. David Burrell and Nazih Daher (Cambridge: Islamic Text Society, 1995) 113-14.
[330] Al-Ghazālī 65-66.

> Soon shall we cast terror into the hearts of the unbelievers, for that they joined companions with God, for which He had sent no authority; their home will be the Fire; and evil is the *abode* of the wrongdoers! (*Āl ʻImrān* 3.151)
>
> So enter the gates the Hell to dwell therein. Thus evil indeed is the *abode* of the ignorant. (*al-Naḥl* 16.29)
>
> And who does more wrong than he who invents a lie against God or rejects the truth when it reaches him? Is there not an *abode* in Hell for the unbelievers? (*al-ʻAnkabūt* 29.68)

The use of *mathwā* in a more positive context might imply that al-ʻAzīz is trying to make a bad situation (Yūsuf's slavery = Hell) *better*; or perhaps the use of *mathwā* alludes to the difficulties that Yūsuf will face in his master's house.

The words used by al-ʻAzīz to express the potential benefit of Yūsuf's presence and his possible adoption as son (*yanfaʼana ʻaw nattakhidhahu waladan*) are exactly those used by the wife of Pharaoh in *al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.9 where she convinces her husband to spare the child Mūsā's life. The repetition of this phrase establishes an interesting (and frequently overlooked) parallel between the two guardians (al-ʻAzīz and Pharaoh's wife) of God's prophets (Yūsuf and Mūsā). Just as Pharaoh's wife is counted among the best of women (besides Khadīja, Faṭima, ʻĀʼishah, and Maryam), al-Ṭabarī cites the tradition (also repeated by al-Thaʿlabī, Bayḍāwī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Rabghūzī and al-Zamakhsharī) that Qiṭfīr (*al-ʻAzīz*) was one of the three "sharpest" (*afras*) - i.e. most intuitive) of people along with Abū Bakr, and the (Midianite) woman who asked her father (Jethro/Shuʼayb) to employ Mūsā.[331] Similar words are used in an account of Muhammad's infancy by his wet-nurse Halīmah, and thus strengthens the connection between Muhammad and Yūsuf, as well as Mūsā (see next chapter):

[331] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr,* v. 7, 4779; al-Thaʼlabi, *Qiṣaṣ*, 197; Bayḍāwī, 13; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr,* v. 2, 124; al-Rabghūzī, 198; al-Zamakhsharī, v. 2, 335.

> Every woman in the party was able to obtain to nurse except me. When we were about to set out on our journey back home, I said to my husband: "I hate to be the only one to go back empty-handed. I am going to take that orphan." He said: "It is a good idea. *God may bring us blessings through him*."[332]

Above all, it is God who is *al-Nāfi'*, "The Beneficent" above all.[333] By stating *yanfa'anā* – "He will benefit us" - al-'Azīz demonstrates his ability to recognize this divine quality reflected by Yūsuf just as Pharaoh's wife sees it in Mūsā. The use of the verb *nafa'a* in an Egyptian context is noteworthy, if not ironic, since it is used elsewhere in the Qur'ān repeatedly to indicate the *lack* of benefit associated with polytheism:

> Say: Shall we call on besides God that which neither *benefits* us nor harms us? (*al-An'ām* 6.71)
>
> They worship besides God that which neither harms them nor *benefits* them. (*Yūnus* 10.18)
>
> Say: Do not call on besides God that which neither *benefits* you nor harms you. (*Yūnus* 10.106)
>
> (Abraham) said: "Do you worship besides God that which neither *benefits* you nor harms you?" (*al-Anbiyā'* 21.66)
>
> They call on besides God that which neither harms them nor *benefits* them. (*al-Ḥajj* 22.12)
>
> And they worship besides God that which neither *benefits* them nor harms them. (*al-Furqān* 25.55)

As noted above, *wa kadhālika makkan-nā li-Yūsuf fi al-'arḍi* ("And thus We established Yūsuf in the land.") marks the beginning of the section of the *sūra* that deals specifically with

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[332] Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *'Uyūn al-Athār* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīdah, 1977) v. 1, 42. The translation (with my emphasis) is a modified version of: Adil Salahi, *Muhammad* 25.
[333] Al-Ghazālī 144-5.

Yūsuf's sojourn among the Egyptians. Among the interpretations, Bayḍāwī suggests that in a fuller sense this phrase signifies: "We have established the love of Yūsuf in the heart of al-ʻAzīz…" or: "We have delivered Yūsuf and made al-ʻAzīz to favour him."[334] Although there is nothing in Bayḍāwī's commentary that suggests an erotic attraction, other *mufassirūn* do imply that Qiṭfīr was homosexual. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, reports a tradition from Ibn Isḥāq that "Potiphar was a man who did not have intercourse with women, though his wife Rāʻīl was beautiful and tender, and had property and possessions."[335] This is repeated by al-Thaʻlabī.[336] Similarly, according to Jewish *midrash,* Potiphar was "chief of the eunuchs" and "had secured possession of the handsome youth for a lewd purpose, but the angel Jibrīl mutilated him in such a manner that he could not accomplish it."[337] Al-Kisā'ī says that Qiṭfīr was impotent because he was prideful.[338]

Other sources, however, more consistent with the Qur'ānic account, present a far more positive image of Qiṭfīr as man of *faith* in addition to being "sharp" (i.e. intuitive). Al-Rabghūzī writes that Qiṭfīr was so struck by Yūsuf's beauty "created by God, the almighty Judge" that he fell from his horse, "bent down double before Yūsuf and was about to prostrate himself in the direction of the *qibla,* intending to kiss the ground," until his ward stopped him insisting: "I am not the one who should be worshipped; prostration before me is not proper."[339] Moreover, says Al-Rabghūzī, Qiṭfīr "was a true believer and [the Egyptian] king Rayyān knew of his creed. Qiṭfīr had told him: 'I will look after your business, but don't hinder me in my faith."[340] Thus, by

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[334] Baīḍāwī 13.
[335] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 379. C.f. his *Tafsīr* v. 7, 4779.
[336] al-Thaʻlabī *Qiṣaṣ,* 197.
[337] Ginzberg, I/II, 309.
[338] Al-Kisā'ī 180.
[339] Al-Rabghūzī 189.
[340] Al-Rabghūzī 189 and 198. This is a curious remark since al-Rabghūzī had earlier indicated that al-Rayyān "marveled at the omnipotence of God, the almighty Judge" (188-9).

al-Rabghūzī's standards, Qiṭfīr was *Muslim*. Al-Rabghūzī's anecdotes aside, it is natural to draw this conclusion given the kindness al-'Azīz exhibited towards Yūsuf and the theologically poignant language he uses in *āya* 21. Further possible indications of al-'Azīz's faith are discussed below. The Genesis account may also hint at Potipahr's belief in (Israel's) God as it says Potiphar "saw that the LORD was with him" (Gen. 39.3). Ultimately, however, he believes his wife's lie about Joseph's aggression towards her, and thus the *Aggadah* ascribes no genuine faith to Potiphar but portray him as cruel and idolatrous.[341]

Reassuring its hearers, *āya* 21 concludes: *W'Allāh ghālib 'ala 'amrihi wa lākinnā 'akthar al-nās la ya'lamūn* – "And God is Master over His decrees but most people do not know." Commenting on these words, al-Qushayrī (d. 1074 CE) remarked that:

> God wanted Yūsuf to be in the well…and He wanted Yūsuf on the king's throne…and He wanted Yūsuf to be a slave to those who bought him from the caravan, and God wanted him to be the *'Azīz* of Egypt, and it was as God wanted.[342]

*Akthar al-nās* is an expression however, used often in the Qur'ān to refer to humanity in general.[343] In 12.40 this phrase appears a second time when Yūsuf uses it to refer *implicitly* to the Egyptians (and other polytheists) when preaching to the two men in prison (see below). In the Qur'ān's accounts of the Exodus, the phrase refers specifically to the Egyptians (*al-A'rāf* 7.131: *lā 'akthara**hum** lā ya'lamūn*), and in *al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.13 to possibly the Israelites *or* the Egyptians. One also finds a variation of this phrase - "There are many who do not believe" – in *Hūd* 11.17, for example. Thus, the use of this phrase in 12.21 at the beginning of the section on Yūsuf and the Egyptians is perhaps making a point about the Egyptians lack of understanding about the one true God. It is appears a third time in *Sūrat Yūsuf* in a more general sense in 12.68.

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[341] Ginzberg, I/II, 308-9, 318.
[342] *Laṭā'if al-'Ishārāt* v. 2, 72.
[343] 6.37; 7.187; 8.34; 10.55; 16.38, 75; 27.61; 30.6, 30; 31.25; 34.36; 39.29, 49; 40.57; 44.39; 45.26; 52.47.

**The Wife of al-ʻAzīz.** The second Egyptian to be considered in this chapter is the wife of Yūsuf's master. Like her husband, the wife of al-ʻAzīz is unnamed in the Qur'ān.[344] Al-Ṭabarī (citing Ibn Isḥāq) and al-Thaʿlabī call her Rāʿīl bint Rʿā'īl (or Ruʿyā'īl), and other sources calling her Bakkā bint Fayūsh.[345] Al-Baydāwī gives her name as Rāʿīl, or Zulaykhā, the name that appears in the *aggadic* literature,[346] and the name by which she is most commonly known in the Islamic tradition, and others, and most famously in Persian poetry such as Jāmī's *Yūsuf and Zulaykha*, and Turkish literature including al-Rabghūzī's *Qiṣaṣ*.[347]

In contrast to the kindness and generosity that characterize Yūsuf's Egyptian master from the beginning, it is inordinate desire that characterizes the wife of al-ʻAzīz.[348] The verb *rāwada* – "to desire or seduce" is used consistently in the *sūra* whenever she appears. It marks the beginning of her interaction with the adult Yūsuf in 12.23. It is used again when Yūsuf defends himself against her accusations in *āya* 26, when the ladies of the city speak of her in *āya* 30, and when she admits her attempt to seduce him in *āya* 32. Once Yūsuf enters prison, the use of the word ceases along with references to his would-be seductress until *āya* 51, when the king questions the ladies of the city and al-ʻAzīz's wife about their unseemly behavior. On a moral and legal level, her attempt to seduce Yūsuf is clearly *ḥarām*, and she will consequently become an archetype of the wayward woman whose sexuality is volatile and capricious, and likely to

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[344] The only Egyptian in the Qur'ān mentioned by name is Hāmān, Pharaoh's minister in the Exodus accounts (see the next chapter on Mūsā and the Egyptians). Maryam is the only *woman* specifically mentioned by name in the Qur'ān.

[345] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* v. 7, 4778; Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ* 197.

[346] Ginzberg, I/II, 312 ff.

[347] Al-Baīḍawī 13; Ibn ʻAbbas, *Tafsīr*, Mokrane Guezzou, trans. (www.altafsir.com); *Tafsīr al-Jalalayn*, trans. Aisha Bewley (London: Dar Al Taqwa, 2007) 498 ff.; al-Kisā'ī, 173 ff. For a list of the many Persian and Turkish poetic and literary accounts of Yūsuf and Zualykha, see: J.T.P. de Bruijn and Barbara Flemming, "Yūsuf and Zulaykhā." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition, Brill Online; Al-Rabghūzī 186 ff.

[348] Although it is common for some exegetes to refer to her as "Zulaykhā," I will refer to her simply as "Al-Azīz's wife" within the context of the Qur'ān in order to avoid conflating her Scriptural character with the literary one. When discussing the content of various version of the *Qiṣaṣ*, I will refer to her by the name given her by the author, usually Zulaykhā.

lead good and faithful men astray.[349] Viewed through the lens of Ṣūfism, however, such as that of Jāmī, Zulaykhā's desire (*al-irāda*) for Yūsuf will be likened to an intensely passionate longing (*ishq*)[350] of the soul for God, a spiritual allegory like the story of *Laila and Magnūn*.[351] The "redemption" of Zulaykhā (al-'Azīz's wife) is discussed further below.

The expression in 12.23 *rāwadat-hu…min nafsi-hi* – "She desired (to seduce) him from himself" - is particularly noteworthy as it expresses the depth and the gravity of her desire for Yūsuf. In the Qur'ān, *nafs* generally denotes the self or the soul, distinguished from the *rūḥ* - the animating spirit that which was breathed (*nafakh*) into Adam – i.e. humanity (*al-Ḥijr* 15.29) - and Maryam (*al-Anbiyā'* 21.91) in order to create 'Isā.[352] Thus, al-'Azīz's wife is attempting to lure Yūsuf into something that is not consistent with his character, his person – i.e. his *nafs.* Al-Zamakhsharī likens her to a crook (*mukhādi'*) who betrays his friend, overcomes him, and then steals his very self (*nafs*).[353] From a Ṣūfī perspective, however, the wife of al-'Azīz is actually engaged in a struggle to control her own *nafs*, specifically *al-nafs al-'ammāra*, or "lower self" of she speaks in 12.53 (see below). In his *Risala,* al-Qushayrī begins his chapter on the "Opposition to the Self and Remembering its Failings" (*mukhalafāt al-nafs wa dhikr 'uyūbihā*) by citing *al-Nāzi'āt* 79.40: "And for he who feared standing before his Lord and restrained the *nafs* from passion, the Garden is his abode." He then quotes a *ḥadīth,* "Following desire turns one away from God, and limitless expectation makes one forget the afterlife," and remarks: "Know

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[349] Merguerian and Najmabadi 485-508.
[350] Yanis Eshots, "*Ishq,"*in: *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia,* 310-314.
[351] Annemarie Schimmel, *My Soul is a Woman: the Feminine in Islam,* trans. Susan H. Ray (New York: Continuum, 1997) 22-23, 60-68, 115-117; Ali Asghar Seyed-Gohrab, *Laylī and Majnūn: Love, Madness and Mystic Longing in Niẓāmī's Epic Romance* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).
[352] Maha el-Kaisy Friemuth, "*Nafs* and *Ruh*," *Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilization and Religion,* 476-77; Oliver Leaman, "*Nafs*," *The Qur'ān: an Encyclopedia,* 435-41; Th. Emil Homerin, "Soul." *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān, Second Edition*. (Brill Online, 2012); Calverley, E.E. and Netton, I.R. " Nafs." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. (Brill Online, 2012).
[353] *Al-Kashshāf* v. 2, 337.

therefore, that opposing the self is the beginning of worship."[354] Rather than simply being condemned as a sinner, the wife of al-'Azīz serves as an example for novices who must overcome their own desires and subdue *al-nafs al-'ammāra* that it may ultimately become a *nafs muṭma'inna,* the self at peace.[355]

Aside from the historical issues discussed above, given the ancient Egyptian setting of the attempted seduction of Yūsuf, it is worth considering what *rāwadat-hu…min nafsi-hi* would have meant within the context of ancient Egyptian thought, if anything. The Islamic concept of *nafs* as "self" as related in the Qur'ān is actually similar to what the ancient Egyptians referred to as the *ba.* According to Egyptian belief, the *ba,* "the element of individualism" or "existential essence,"[356] remained inextricably linked with a person throughout one's life, but at death separated from the body and flew to celestial realms; hence its depiction as a bird with the human head of the individual to whom it belonged.[357] That being said, in moments of great stress, it was possible to become separated from one's *ba*, figuratively speaking, that is. In the ancient Egyptian *Story of a Sinuhe*, the protagonist returns to his homeland after several decades and is summoned before the king. Overcome with awe and emotion, he says: "My *ba* was gone, my limbs trembled; my heart was not in my body, I did not know life from death."[358] In other words, he just was not him*self*! Had Yūsuf succumbed to the desires of al-'Azīz's wife, he would have been *min nafsi-hi* – i.e. not himself.

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[354] Al-Qushayrī, *Principles of Sufism,* trans. B.R. von Schlegell (Oneonta: Mizan, 1990) 95.
[355] Sufia Uddin, "Mystical Journey or Misogynist Assault: al-Quyshari's Interpretation of Zulaykha's Attempted Seduction of Yusuf," *Journal for Islamic Studies* 21 (2001): 113-135.
[356] Hans Goedicke, *The Report about the Dispute of a Man with His Ba: Papyrus Berlin 3024* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1970), 29. Cf. Louis V. Zabkar, *A Study of the Ba Concept in Ancient Egypt* (Chicago, 1968); James P. Allen, "Ba" *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*; Jan Assman, *Death and Salvation in Ancient Egypt* (Ithaca: Cornell, 2005) 90-96.

[357] Copies of the Egyptian "Book of the Dead" contain numerous depictions of the *ba* alighting on the mummy of the deceased and flying from the tomb. See: R.O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead,* ed. Carol Andrews (Rev. ed., New York: Macmillan, 1985) 85-91.
[358] Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, I,* 231.

The invitation al-ʻAzīz's wife makes to Yūsuf in 12.23 – *hayta laka* ("Now come [to me]") – is as brief, although perhaps not as graphic, as the Hebrew text in Gen. 39.7: שׁכבה עמי ("Lie with me!"), and "contrasts with Joseph's carefully structured reply, rejecting her advances."[359] Many Muslim exegetes equate *hayta laka* with the more suggestive *tahayya't laka* ("Get ready!") or *halumma laka* ("Come on!").[360] Yūsuf's response to her is poignantly couched in *religious* terms: *ma'ādha Allāh* – "God forbid!" He uses this same expression later in 12.79 in the exchange with his brothers over the fate of Benjamin. In both cases he is faced with the possibility of performing a wrongful act: engaging in illicit sexual relations with his master's wife, or holding one of his brother's accountable for the property allegedly taken by Benjamin. This exact phrase is not used elsewhere in the Qur'ān. The connection between *āya* 23 and 79 is also demonstrated by the use of the word *al-ẓālimūn* – "those who do wrong:"

> "God forbid!...Truly the wrongdoers do not succeed" (12.23)
> "God forbid!...Indeed we would be wrongdoers" (12.79)

There is some ambiguity around the identity of the "lord" (*rabb*) Yūsuf speaks of when he exclaims in protest to her advances: *'innhu rabbī 'ahsana mathwāya* - "Truly, He is my Lord. He made good my dwelling place." Many classical and contemporary exegetes and authors of the *Qiṣaṣ* have simply taken this as a reference to Yūsuf's Egyptian master, the husband of his seductress (*zawj al-marāh*), offering *sayyidī* (also "my lord") as a synonym for *rabbī*[361] so as not to be confused with God. This interpretation is based on similarities in al-ʻAzīz's words to his wife in 12.21 - *akrimī mathwāhu* - to those of Yūsuf in 12.23: *aḥsana mathwāya*. Although Bayḍawī also believes *rabbī* signifies Yūsuf's Egyptian master, he also observes that:

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[359] Johns, "The Qur'anic Presentation of the Joseph Story," 48.
[360] Al-Ṭabarī v. 7, 207-209. Cf. al-Rabghūzī 204.
[361] Al-Ṭabarī and the various exegetes his cites (*Tafsīr*, v. 7, 4786). C.f.: al-Thaʻlabī 197; al-Zamakhsharī v. 2, 335-6; al-Rabghuzi 204. Cf. Muhammad al-Ghazālī, *A Thematic Commentary on the Qur'an* (International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2000) 238.

> Others take the pronoun [which is the subject of *aḥsana*] as referring to God, i.e. "My Creator has made for me a fine dwelling by inclining Qiṭfīr's heart towards me, so I will not disobey Him [by sinning].[362]

Al-Qushayrī, for example, unequivocally states that Yūsuf is referring to "his true Lord" (*rabbihi al-ḥaqq*) and the "Lord of Truth" (*maulāya al-ḥaqq*) who rescued him from the well and created a great space for him in the heart of al-'Azīz.[363]

Some modern and contemporary commentators such as Mawdūdī (1903-1979), Kaltner and Fatoohi[364] also believe *rabb* refers to God in this context, as do I for the reasons they have articulated and which I will briefly summarize here. Following the initial request of Yūsuf's Egyptian master to his wife in 12.21 to take care of the boy, the text shifts to speak of God's role in establishing Yūsuf in Egypt to teach him the interpretation of stories (or dreams), and of God's omnipotence and omniscience. *Āya* 22 speaks of God endowing Yūsuf with wisdom and knowledge. Then in 12.23 Yūsuf resists the woman's advances with another explicit reference to God: *ma'ādha Allāh*. The subsequent reference to "my lord" is then more likely to refer to God as the one who *aḥsana mathwāya* – "made good my dwelling place." This would reflect Yūsuf's understanding (as a prophet) that God controls his fate, not his Egyptian master. Moreover and most significantly, all others occurrences of the word *rabb* in the sūra by Yūsuf refer to God (*āyāt* 6, 23, 24, 33, 34, 37, 50, 100 and 101). Genesis 39 makes for an interesting comparison since although Joseph's response to the woman *primarily* concerns his master Potiphar, he nevertheless concludes with a reference to sinning against *God*:

> Look, with me here, my master gives no thought to anything in the house, and all that he own he has placed in my hands. He wields no more authority in this this house than I, and

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[362] Baīḍawī 14.
[363] Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt,* 2nd ed. (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2007) v. 2, 73.
[364] Sayyid Abdul A'lā Mawdūdī, *Toward an Understanding of the Qur'ān: Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*, trans. Zafar Ishaq Ansarī (Leicester: Islamic Foundation, 1993) v. 4, 161; Kaltner, 33-34; Louay Fatoohi, *Joseph* 75-76.

> he has withheld nothing from me except yourself, since you are his wife. How then could I do this most wicked thing, and sin against God? (Gen. 39.8-9)

Similarly, as mentioned above, Yūsuf concludes his objection to the woman's advances with a reference to the "wrongdoers" (*al-ẓālimūn*). This word, ubiquitous in the Qur'ān, signifies those who act contrary to religious faith and law, ignoring God's signs and prophets. A few examples will suffice:

> 2.254: The non-believers (*al-kāfirūn*) are wrong doers.
>
> 14.42: Do not think that God is unmindful of what the wrong doers do.
>
> 16.113: And a messenger came to them from among themselves, but they accused him of lying, so punishment seized them for they are wrong doers.
>
> 29.49: But here are clear signs in the hearts of those granted knowledge; and those who reject Our signs are but wrong doers.

Thus, Yūsuf regards the proposed adulterous union, not merely as an insult to the master of the house who provided him with a home, but rather as a sin against *God* (as in Genesis) who, as described in *Yūsuf* 12.21-22, established him in Egypt, taught him, and gave him wisdom and knowledge. The advances of his master's wife seem especially egregious in light of Yūsuf's explicit mention of his "Lord" (referring to God), but as Kaltner points out, she "may be assuming that he is referring to her husband, and so it would be a mistake to interpret her persistence in going after Joseph as somehow a rejection of his faith in Allah."[365] In the case of 12.23, the ambiguity of *rabbī* is ultimately artful as it may allow us to receive the text on two levels, a literal or mundane level – i.e. al-'Azīz has provided and cared for Yūsuf – and on a theological level – i.e. it is God who has saved Yūsuf from his brothers' schemes and placed him

[365] Kaltner 34.

in the care of al-ʻAzīz. As discussed above, from his initial words to his wife, al-ʻAzīz's character reflects the virtues of honor and generosity that are most proper to God.

Even more than mere desire for Yūsuf, *āya* 24 says that al-ʻAzīz's wife – was "preoccupied with him" (*hammat bi-hi*) – we might say "smitten with him – and that he was "smitten with her" as well, although he was saved from wrongdoing by a sign from God (*burhān Allāh*). Al-Ṭabarī cites numerous traditions that interpret the *burhān* to have been a vision of Yaʿqūb, also found in the *Aggadah*[366] but lacking in the Genesis account. Alternatively, the vision is said to have been of the king or even Qiṭfīr; or a voice that called to him, warning Yūsuf that if he committed this sin, he would be like a bird without feathers, unable to fly. Other traditions say that Yūsuf saw the *āya* of *Sūrat al-Isrā'* 17.32: "Nor come near adultery (*zinā*) for it is a shameful act and a road to evil;"[367] or "And indeed there are protectors over you" (*al-Infiṭār* 82.10), "Whatever you are doing…We watch you…" (*Yūnus* 10.61), and "Who is He who watches over every soul (and) what it does?" (*al-Ra'd* 13.33).[368] Yūsuf's vision is also described in the *Aggadah* where it is said that he saw his mother Rachel and his aunt Leah as well as Jacob.[369] Al-Thaʿlabī cites a tradition found in the *Aggadah* in which al-ʻAzīz's wife covers an idol with a cloth before attempting to have intercourse with Yūsuf, ashamed to have the deity see them. This brings Yūsuf the insight he needed: "Are you ashamed before one who neither hears, nor sees, nor understands? Should not I rather be ashamed before Him who created all things and knows all things?"[370] Al-Rabghūzī repeats this story in addition to those traditions related by al-Ṭabarī.[371] The similarities between the *Aggadah* and Islamic traditions here are noteworthy.

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[366] Ginzberg, I/II, 316.
[367] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* v. 7, 4792-4798.
[368] Al-Zamakhsharī offers yet another: "And beware the day on which you return to God" (*al-Baqara* 2.281).
[369] Ginzberg, I/II, 316.
[370] Ginzberg, I/II, 313; al-Thaʿlabī 202.
[371] Al-Rabghūzī 208.

In interpreting the next sequence of events, i.e. Yūsuf's race to the door with al-'Azīz's wife and the tearing of his shirt, Fatoohi proposes that the wife of al-'Azīz *deliberately* tore Yūsuf's shirt "to prevent him from leaving, as he would not have left the house half-naked.[372] This argument is implausible for several reasons. The first problem is with the common translation of *qamīṣ* as "shirt" which conjures up images of western attire. Ancient Egyptian male attire did not include a separate, detachable garment that only covered the upper body unless *qamīṣ* refers to a shawl of some kind, or more likely a tunic.[373] A simple kilt wrapped around the waist was the common attire in all periods for men of all social classes including kings, whether engaged in sacred rituals or more mundane tasks. Within the context of ancient Egyptian culture, a bare-chested man would thus hardly be considered "half-naked."[374] Fatoohi's supposition that a bare-chested Yūsuf would have been "half-naked" reflects the cultural mores of the modern (Islamic) Middle East rather than those of the ancient world. Moreover, the text itself suggests that as she raced to the door with Yūsuf, she grabbed him from behind (*min dubur*) and tore his shirt (or tunic) unintentionally. Her intention was, we may assume, to engage in sexual intercourse with Yūsuf in secret without arousing her husband's suspicion. To deliberately tear his garment intentionally would have given the both of them away.

Upon reaching the door, Yūsuf and the woman are confronted by her husband, al-'Azīz. Her words to him reveal the depth of her deceptive nature. Apparently without offering any words of explanation to her husband, she immediately demands that Yūsuf be punished. She herself concludes that it is fitting that he should suffer imprisonment (*yusjan*) or *'adhābun 'alīm*,

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[372] Fatoohi, *Joesph,* 82-83. Overall, Fatoohi sees a much more conniving seductress than is indicated in the texts as will be seen subsequently.
[373] Genesis 39.12-18 uses the Hebrew word בגד , which could refer to any kind of garment.
[374] *Egypt's Golden Age: the Art of Living in the New Kingdom, 1558-1085 B.C.* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1982), 170 ff. Long, diaphanous tunics that reached to the calves or ankles, and worn in combination with a short kilt, became common in the New Kingdom, particularly among the upper classes. I presume that this is what is meant by *qamīṣ* in *'ayā* 25. It would also indicate that Yūsuf was well attired by al-'Azīz.

literally "a punishment of pain." The later is an expression commonly used in the Qur'ān to denote punishment, particularly that to be exacted upon the sinful in the afterlife:

> 2.174: Those who conceal what God has revealed of the Book, and trade it for a meager profit, will take into their stomachs nothing but fire; and God will not address them on the Day of Resurrection, nor purify them, for theirs is a painful punishment.[375]

It thus seems that the wife of al-'Azīz is recommending eternal as well as temporal punishment (prison) for him! In essence, she is asking her husband – i.e. "her lord" (the word used here is *sayyid* not *rabb* as Yūsuf had used in 12.23)[376] – to condemn Yūsuf to a fiery Hell – an image shared by the ancient Egyptians,[377] Christians and Muslims. Al-Tha'labī explains "the painful punishment" refers to flogging,[378] the punishment prescribed for *zinā* (adultery/fornication) in *Sūrat al-Nūr* 24.2. This was not however the punishment for adultery in ancient Egypt where marriage did not have the same formal legal or religious status that it does in later Judeo-Christian-Islamic culture, although it was a social contract. Thus, cases of marital infidelity might be referred to court, which would grant a divorce and demand financial remuneration for the wronged spouse, but not apparently mete out any corporal punishment.[379] Adultery was, however, considered a serious moral offense for which one would have to answer in the *next* life (see below).

**"The Witness".** The next Egyptian in *Sūrat Yūsuf* to be considered in this study I shall refer to simply as "the witness." Whereas in the biblical account, the mere accusation made

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[375] C.f. 2.104, 178; 3.21, 77, 177, 188; 5.36, 73, 94; etc.
[376] Commenting on this verse, al-Qushayrī says: "It did not say "their (dual) lord" because Yūsuf is truly free and al-'Azīz was not his Lord." (*Laṭā'if* v. 2, 75).
[377] For ancient Egyptian representations of infernal punishment, see Erik Hornung, *The Valley of the Kings: Horizons of Eternity* (New York: Timken, 1990) 160-164.
[378] Al-Tha'labī 201.
[379] Gay Robins, *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1993) 67-72. There is one instance recorded in which a father, concerned about his daughter's future, asks that his prospective son-in-law sign an oath in which he promises not to *abandon* the woman upon pain of "one hundred blows." See: Lynn Meskell, *Private Life in New Kingdom Egypt* (Princeton, 2002), 101. Note, however, that the precise issue is one of *abandonment* rather than infidelity.

against Joseph is sufficient for Potiphar to imprison him without any opportunity to defend himself, the *Aggadah* relates that the eleven-month old child of Potiphar and his wife attested to Joseph's innocence. She is identified as Zulaykha's (adopted) daughter Asenath, who later became Joseph's wife (Gen. 41.50).[380] Similarly, the Qurʿān speaks of someone in 12.26-27, ostensibly an Egyptian who is designated simply as *shāhid* and who interceded on Yūsuf's behalf. Exegetes have offered various suggestions for the identity of this unnamed "witness." Al-Ṭabarī provides most of the traditions in his *tafsīr* including a wise man, a bearded man, a man from the king's entourage, a man from Qiṭfīr's family, and the most often repeated tradition and the one favored by al-Ṭabarī: a babe in the cradle (*sibyān fī al-mahd*) which, it is worth noting, is also found in the *Aggadah*. This is based on a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet Muhammad says that there were four who spoke as babes in the cradle: Yūsuf's witness; the son of the hairdresser of Pharaoh's daughter; the companion of Juraij; and ʻĪsā, the son of Maryam.[381] Thus, the "witness" is the second Egyptian in Yūsuf's story who bears a unique distinction, in addition to al-ʻAzīz being among the "sharpest" (see above). It has been suggested that al-Ṭabarī deliberately meant to draw a parallel between the story of ʻĪsā's defense of Mary's chastity (*Maryam* 19.30), and that of the "witness" who defends Yūsuf's reputation.[382] Al-Thaʿlabī reports the tradition ascribed to al-Suddī said that the witness was a paternal cousin (*ibn ʻamm*) of Rā'īl who was sitting with her husband at the door and he spoke the verdict as told by God."[383] Al-Rabghūzī expands the story of the infant witness providing unique details such as the babe was born of

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[380] Ginzberg, I/II, 318 and 331. For more on Asenath, see discussion below.
[381] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* v. 7, 4800-4803. In his *Ta'rīkh*, however, al-Ṭabarī identified the witness only as a cousin of Rāʿīl (i.e. al-ʻAzīz's wife). The *ḥadīth* about the babe in the cradle is repeated by Baīḍawī, al-Tha'labī, al-Kisā'ī et al. The story of the hairdresser of Pharaoh's daughter is treated in the chapter on Mūsā and the Egyptians. The story of Juraij comes from the *ḥadīth*. He was a man of prayer who was falsely accused of fathering a child out of wedlock. It was the infant itself who correctly identified his father as a shepherd (*Saḥīḥ Bukhārī*, no. 3436). The story of ʻĪsā speaking as an infant "in the cradle" appears in the Qur'ān: 3.46; 5.110; 19.29-33.
[382] Merguerian and Najmabadi 493.
[383] Al-Thaʻlabī 201. Al-Zamakhsharī also offers this identification for the witness among others (2, 339).

Zulaykha's slave girl Ṭalḥām; when Qiṭfīr accused Yūsuf, the babe beckoned to the indignant husband: "Draw near to me; surely there is happiness for you in my words."[384]

Whatever the identity of this "witness," he (or she) cannot be called a witness in the true legal sense of the word since he did not actually *witness* anything other than perhaps Yūsuf hurriedly attempting to exit the room in which the wife of al-'Azīz also had been; but there were no witnesses to what had actually transpired behind the locked doors.[385] Moreover, in the instances in which the Qur'ān speaks of someone who provides testimony for or against another in the legal sense, it generally uses the verbal adjective[386] *shahīd* (dual, *shahīdīn*; pl. *shuhadā'*) for a witness to a contract (*al-Baqara* 2.282) and to verify accusations of *zinā* (24.4, 13) – not the active participle *shāhid* (pl. *shuhūd*), as in 12.26. God is frequently referred to as *shahīd* (not *shāhid*) in His role as Judge:

> Say: 'O People of the Book! Why do you disbelieve the clear signs of God, and God is Witness to what you do?' (*Āl 'Imrān* 3.98)
>
> Say: 'What is the best thing in evidence?' Say: 'God is Witness between me and you.' (*al-An'ām* 6.19)
>
> God will judge between them on the Day of Judgment, for God over all things is Witness. (*al-Ḥajj* 22.17)

On the other hand, the Qur'ān uses *shāhid* (pl. *shuhūd, 'ashhād, shāhidīn*), as in 12.26 – as opposed to *shahīd* – particularly to refer to someone who witnesses to the *faith*, e.g.:

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[384] Al-Rabghūzī 212.

[385] As later revealed in the Medinan sūra *al-Nūr,* Islamic law requires four witnesses (24.4) to prove adultery or at the very least an oath from the offended husband sworn four times over (24.6). Moreover, those witnesses must have actually seen penetration occur. (See: Kecia Ali, *Sexual Ethics and Islam: Feminist Reflections on Qur'an, Haith and Jurisprudence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006) 62f.; Judith E. Tucker, *Women, Family, and Gender in Islamic Law* (Cambridge, 2008) 186. Needless to say, there have been many abuses of these standards, particularly in contemporary cases. See: Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009) 334.

[386] Wolfdietrich Fischer, *A Grammar of Classical Arabic,* 3rd rev. ed., trans. Jonathan Rogers (New Have: Yale, 2002) ¶ 201.1. This form is used to when someone possesses a quality as "permanent and inseparable nature of his personality and expresses a constant repetition and manifestation of the attribute." See: Abdul Mannān Omar, *The Dictonary of the Holy Qur'ān* (Hockessin: Noor Foundation, 2003) 5-A.

> Say: 'Do you see that if this [teaching] is from God and you do not believe it, and a *witness* from the Children of Israel testify to its similarity and has believed, while you are arrogant, surely God does not guide the wrongdoers.' (46.10)
>
> O Prophet! Truly We have sent you [Muhammad] as a *witness* and a bearer of good news and a warner. (33.45; c.f. 48.8)
>
> We have sent to you a messenger, a *witness* on your behalf, even as We sent a messenger to Pharaoh. (73.15)

God not only exhorts humanity to bear witness (*ashhadū*) but, is Himself "among the witnesses" (*ana ma'akum min ash-shāhidīn* – 3.81) for He and His angels witness above all there is no god but He (3.18). Muhammad is called *shāhidan* (33.35; 48.8; 73.15), and the term is used virtually synonymously with *mu'min:*

> And when they listen to the revelation revealed to the Messenger, you will see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize (it) as the Truth, and say: "Our Lord, we believe, so record us with the witnesses (*shāhidīn*)." (5.83; c.f. 3.53)

In the *ḥadīth* cited above, the witness of 12.26 is mentioned along with three *believers* - the son of the hairdresser of Pharaoh's daughter, the companion of Juraij, and 'Īsā - suggesting we are to perhaps regard the "witness" as a *believer* as well. He speaks up ostensibly to defend Yūsuf whose innocence seems assured. Thus, we may conclude that this individual is designated *shāhid* because he is truly *a believer and witness to the faith* of Yūsuf, one of God's prophets. Given that the witness is described as *min ahli-ha* – i.e. from her family or household – perhaps we are to understand that he became a believer through his contact with Yūsuf. This distinction between *shāhid* and *shahīd* has not been noted by exegetes, classical or contemporary, who seem more interested in identifying who this *shāhid* is, rather than what *shāhid* precisely means within the context of 12.26-27.[387] Although the *shāhid* is mentioned only briefly in *Sūrat Yūsuf,*

[387] Amongst modern exegetes, for example, Fatoohi argues that the verb *shahida* "undoubtedly refers to the role of that person giving 'his testimony' on the implications and significance of the way the shirt was torn" (254), but does

nevertheless the existence of a "witness" to the faith – i.e. a believer – among the Egyptians reflects the Qur'ān's *missionary* quality. Believers are to be found (or made) among all peoples, and faith has very little to do with ethnicity.

**Egyptian Exhortations (12.28-29)**. The vast majority of classical exegetes and authors of *Qiṣaṣ*, including al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rabghūzī, al-Kisā'ī, as well as modern commentators and translators attribute the speech in 12.28-29 to al-'Azīz:

> So when he saw that his (Yūsuf's) tunic was torn from behind, he (al-'Azīz) said: "Surely it is a deception of yours (fem. pl). Truly your (fem. pl) deception is great! O Yūsuf, turn away from this, and (you, woman), ask forgiveness for your offense for you have been a sinner.

Since the subject of the verb *ra'ā* ("saw") is ambiguous, for sake of clarity N.J. Dawood translated *āya* 28 as: "And when *her husband* saw that Joseph's shirt was rent from behind…"[388] Ibn 'Abbas, however, believed that 12.28-29 continue the s*hāhid*'s speech.[389] Fatoohi also attributes these verses to the *shāhid*.[390] This is certainly possible since the *shāhid* is the most explicit antecedent, although one could argue that al-'Azīz is implicitly addressed by the *shāhid* in *āya* 26 and thus could also be the antecedent for the one who speaks in 12.28-29. If these are the words of the *shāhid*, then al-'Azīz had nothing to say during this entire ordeal with his wife. This is possible of course as in the biblical account where Potiphar is afforded no direct speech at all. Moreover, if 12.28-29 are the words of the *shāhid*, it was he who pronounced the guilt of al-'Azīz's wife, rather than al-'Azīz himself, which seems unlikely. As the text has come down to us, it is not possible to determine with absolute certainty to whom the pronouncements of 12.28-29 belong but, as will be shown, I conclude that they should be attributed to al-'Azīz.

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not see the ostensibly *religious* connotation of *shāhid* in this context. Kaltner says simply that "the witness comes forward abd proposes a way of getting at the truth" (*Inquiring of Joseph*, 34).

[388] N.J. Dawood.

[389] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* v. 7, 4804.

[390] Fatoohi, *Joseph,* 85 ff.

The content of 12.28-29 is substantial theologically. The gravity of *āya* 28 in particular has even led some exegetes to identify them as God's (direct) speech![391] The use of the word *kayd* ("deception") in 12.28 is particularly significant. As John Kaltner has pointed out,[392] its use relates the scheming of al-'Aziz's wife to the plotting of Yūsuf's brothers as the same word is used by Yaʿqūb in 12.5: "(Yaʿqūb) said: 'My son, do not relate your vision to your brothers lest they plot deception (*kayd*) against you. Surely Satan is to humanity a clear enemy.'" Furthermore, the gravity of the word *kayd* is shown in Yaʿqūb's attributing it to Satan. In *al-Nisā'* 4.76, *kayd* is again attributed to Satan: "Fight the friends of Satan; surely the deception of Satan is weak." In *al-Anfāl* 8.18, *kayd* is associated with the "unbelievers" (*al-kāfirīn*). It is used in 12.33-34 (see below) when Yūsuf implores God to save him from the deception of the ladies of the city; in 12.50 (see below) when the King confronts the ladies; and again in 12.52 in association with the "false ones" (*al-khā'inīn*). *Kayd* is associated with other Egyptians in the Qur'ān, namely, with Pharaoh's magician (*sāḥir*) from the Exodus story (*Ṭā Hā* 20.69), and with Pharaoh himself (*Ghāfir* 40.37). As been pointed out, however,[393] God is even said to possess *kayd* – in which case it may be translated as "plan" as in 12.76: "Thus we did plan (*kid-na*) for Yūsuf; and in *al-'Arāf* 7.182-3: "Those who belie our signs, We will gradually bring them around to what they do not know, and give them respite for my plan is sure."

The use of the feminine plural (*kunna*) in 12.28 is somewhat puzzling since only the wife of al-'Azīz is ostensibly being chastised in this instance. The presence of this pronoun in association with *kayd* has been used by *mufassirūn* throughout the centuries to justify a negative assessment of women and female sexuality in general. As Bayḍāwī writes: "The plural pronoun

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[391] Merguerian and Najmabadi 502.
[392] Kaltner 35.
[393] Shalom Goldman, *The Wiles of Women, The Wiles of Men: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in Ancient Near Eastern, Jewish, and Islamic Folklore* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995) 48.

is addressed to her [al-'Azīz's wife] and those like her, or to women as a whole."[394] Rabghūzī wrote:

> It has been related: Life cannot exist without a woman, and yet with a woman there is no peace. She is clearly trouble. She cannot belong to a man without causing trouble. She brought trouble upon Joseph"; and: "What is that makes women's cunning great; what is it that makes Satan's cunning weak? Answer: Satan's cunning is veiled, and becomes weak. The cunning of woman is out in the open, and becomes great…when a woman undertakes her tricks, Satan comes to her assistance, and thus she is strengthened.[395]

Kaltner[396] believes this remark anticipates 12.30-31 involving the "ladies of the city" who are also smitten with Yūsuf, and of whose *kayd* Yūsuf speaks in *āya* 33. Mustansir Mir, who attributes the verse to al-'Azīz, posits that the Egyptian is generalizing about women in protest against his wife's domineering attitude, a view suggested by Zamakhsharī: "he was led about by her hand (*zimāmuhu fī yadihā*)."[397] None of these suggestions seem convincing, however, and I thus I conclude that the use of *kunna* in 12.28 remains anomalous.[398]

*Āya* 29 continues the speech of 12.28 and thus is attributed by most exegetes to al-'Azīz. To Yūsuf, he says: *a'riḍ 'an hādhā* – "Turn away from this." This is traditionally interpreted as al-'Azīz imploring Yūsuf not to speak further of the incident so that neither his Egyptian master nor the woman suffers further embarrassment; but the choice of words continue to signify a much deeper meaning. Elsewhere in the Qur'ān, believers are exhorted to "turn away" (*a'riḍ*) from the hypocrites (*munāfiqīn*), as in *al-Nisā'* 4.63 and 81," from the idolaters (*mushrikīn*) in *al-An'ām* 6.106, and from the ignorant (*jāhilīn*) in *al-A'rāf* 7.199. By his choice of words al-'Azīz implies that his wife is all of these things: a hypocrite, an idolatrous unbeliever, and ignorant.

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[394] Baīḍāwī 17.
[395] Rabghūzī 211, 213-14.
[396] Kaltner 42.
[397] Mir 14-15; Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf* v. 2, 319.
[398] Perhaps the feminine plural pronoun *kunna* ("your") is simply used in 12.18 in a formal sense to signify the singular feminine just the masculine plural *kum* is used to signify the masculine singular in certain contexts.

He then turns his attention to her, saying: *'astaghfirī li-dhanbiki* – "Ask forgiveness for your offense." The *theological* significance of this imperative has gone unnoticed by most commentators, but is expressed elsewhere in the Qur'ān where it is addressed to believers in general:

> Be patient for the promise of God is true; and *ask forgiveness for your offense*, and celebrate the praise of your Lord in the evening and in the morning. (*al-Mu'min* 40.55)
>
> Know that there is no god but God, and *ask forgiveness for your offense*…(*Muḥammad* 47.19)

More specifically, humanity is exhorted to "seek the forgiveness" of God (*al-Baqarah* 2.199; *al-Nisā'* 4.106; and *Hūd* 11.3). It is, moreover, a *prophetic utterance* used by the Prophet Hūd to exhort the people of 'Ad, (11.52), by Ṣāliḥ to the Thamūd people (11.61), Shu'ayb to the Maydan people (11.90), as well as by Nūḥ and Muhammad to their respective peoples (*Nūḥ* 71.10; *Fuṣṣilat* 41.6). Although al-'Azīz (or the *shāhid* if *āya* 29 is to be ascribed to him) does not use the word *Allāh* or *Rabb*, it could be said that he is nevertheless speaking *prophetically*, or as a believer would. In other words, al-'Azīz appears to be a *monotheist* here, as the tradition maintains (see above). The woman is not merely, then, enjoined to ask forgiveness of her husband as Fatoohi suggests;[399] the implication is that she is to ask forgiveness of *God* for her actions. We have already seen how the use of the word *kayd* in this *sūra* connects the deception of Yūsuf's brothers to that of al-'Azīz's wife. There is yet another connection made in *āya* 97-98 when the brothers entreat Ya'qūb to ask God's forgiveness for them: *'istaghfir la-na dhunūbana 'innā kunnā khāTi'aīn* – the same charge made against al-'Azīz's wife in 12.29.

Like Yūsuf's brothers, the woman is identified (ostensibly) by her husband as a sinner: *innaki kunti min al-khāṭi'īn*. Other Egyptians are identified in the Qur'ān as sinners, namely

[399] Fatoohi, *Joseph* 86.

"Pharaoh and those who proceeded him" (*al-Ḥāqqah* 69.9), and "Pharaoh, Hāmām, and their troops" (*al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.8). Once again the choice of words has *religious* or theological import. As Kaltner has observed, the prominent words in this verse - *istaghfara, dhanb,* and *khaṭi'* - "are all terms primarily used describe violations of the divine will and the means by which one can overcome them in order to regain a proper relationship with God."[400] By contrast, Fatoohi incorrectly claims that there is "no indication that they [the words] carried any religious connotations," or "did not involve any religious advice."[401]

Ibn Kathīr clearly understood this verse in religious terms, and explained that al-ʻAzīz:

> ordered his wife to seek forgiveness for her offense which arose from her, and to turn in repentance (*al-tawbah*) to her Lord, for if the servant turns in repentance (*tāb*) to God, God will turn to him (in forgiveness).[402]

Ibn Kathīr then makes a remarkable statement regarding the faith of the Egyptians that escaped the attention of commentators:

> Even though the people of Egypt worshipped idols, they knew that the one who forgives sins or punishes for it is God alone and He has no partner in this. And this is why her husband said to her to seek forgiveness, and excused her in some respects.[403]

His claim that the Egyptians were essentially monotheists was shared by the anonymous author of the tenth-century (?) text *Akhbār al-Zamān* discussed above (see "Literature Survey"). That this work was known among medieval Arab scholars is attested by Abū Jaʻfār al-Idrīsī (d. 1251), who cited *Akhbār al-Zamān* in his own work on the pyramids titled *Anwār 'Ulwiyy al-Ajrām fī al-Kashf 'an Asrār al-Ahrām*.[404] Likewise, the physician and historian ʻAbd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī (d. 1231) acknowledged the idolatrous practices of the ancient Egyptians, but believed that they

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[400] Kaltner 35.
[401] Fatoohi, *Joseph* 86.
[402] Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ* 231.
[403] Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ* 231.
[404] Arabic text published with German introduction and discussion by Ulrich Hartmann as: *Das Pyramidenbuch des Abū Ǧa'far al-Idrīsī* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1991).

had originally been monotheists, "elevating God beyond any logical or physical reach or comprehension, let alone depiction."[405] It is quite possible that Ibn Kathīr was familiar with such writings, or that he had simply arrived at his conclusions by means of his own exegesis of *Sūrat Yūsuf*.

Rabghūzī also suggested a more overtly religious meaning to al-'Azīz's words: "Potiphar taught good manners to Joseph and taught *repentance* to Zulaykhā."[406] Moreover, al-'Azīz speaks to his wife as a *monotheist* would*:* "Oh Zulaykhā, if you have been weak and have let yourself be despoiled of your heart, repent so that God may forgive you." With the conclusion of 12.29 al-'Azīz vanishes from the story of Yūsuf. We will assess his overall image as presented in the Qur'ān and *qiṣaṣ* in the conclusion of this study.

**<u>The Ladies in the City.</u>** We continue to consider the depictions of Egyptians in *Sūrat Yūsuf* with "the ladies in the city" (12.30). Like the episode of the "witness" in 12.26-27, the Qur'ān and *Aggadah* both relate a scene featuring "the ladies in the city," which is however absent from Genesis.[407] The phrase "the ladies in the city" (*niswatun fī l-madīnati*) presents some grammatical issues. Bayḍāwī explains that *fī l-madīnati* is: "an adverbial expression of place dependent on 'said,' i.e. 'the women disseminated the tale in Egypt'; or else an attributive expression dependent on 'women.'"[408] I have opted for the latter as I understand *niswatun fī l-madīnati* to designate a certain group or class of women rather than where they chose to speak about the incident involving al-'Azīz's wife and Yūsuf.

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[405] From his: *Al-Ifadah wa Al-I'tibar fī al-'Umūr al-Mushahada wa al-Ḥawadith al-Mu'ayanah bi-Arḍ Miṣr* ("Observations and Reflections on Things Seen and Events Witnessed in the Land of Egypt") quoted in: El-Daly, 83.
[406] Rabghūzī 214 (my emphasis).
[407] For a discussion of the *aggadic* materials and how they may relate to the Qur'ān, see: James L Kugel's chapter, "The Assembly of Ladies," in his: *In Potiphar's House: the Interpretive Life of Biblical Texts* (New YorK: Harper Collins, 1990) 28-65. Kugel concludes that the Qur'ānic account is dependent upon the *Midrash ha-Gadol*, the primary Jewish source for the story of the women, which originated in Yemen.
[408] Baīḍāwī 17.

There are four other instances in the Qur'ān in which the word *madīnah* specifically refers to an Egyptian city: *al-A'rāf* 7.123 where Pharaoh accuses his magicians of plotting in "the city" to drive its people out; and in *al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.15, 18 and 20 which form part of the story of Mūsā and the Egyptian whom he slew in "the city."[409] In these contexts, *madīnah* refers to some unknown (Egyptian) locale, or perhaps even to Egypt in general. In his *tafsīr*[410] and *ta'rīkh*[411] al-Ṭabarī refers to the city as *madīnat miṣr* by which he could possibly mean Cairo. Even before the Fatimids established *al-Qāhirah* as the residence of the imam-caliph in 969 CE, the Arabic name for Egypt, *Miṣr* had been used to refer to the city as a whole since the time of the Arab Conquest of Egypt (640-42 CE).[412] Even if al-Ṭabarī is referring to Cairo, it is an unlikely setting for the Yūsuf story, however, whether one regards it in the historical or literary sense since the area of Cairo (on the eastern bank of the Nile) does not appear to have had any significant settlement until the Roman period when a fortress was built on the eastern bank of the Nile in the area known later as *Miṣr al-qadīmah* ("Old Cairo"). A more plausible location would be the ancient city of Memphis on the western bank of the Nile, which served as an administrative capital throughout the pharaonic period, and whose ancient name *ḥwt-ka-Ptaḥ* was ultimately rendered by the Greeks as Αἴγυπτος which came to designate the whole country. It therefore seems possible that *al-madīnah* in *'ayā* 30 refers to Egypt as a whole (as it could in the other instances cited), and that *niswatun fī l-madīnati* thus connotes, somewhat hyperbolically, "(all) the women in/of Egypt," as is the case in the *Aggadah*.[413]

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[409] *Madīnah* is also used in the Qur'ān to refer to Lūṭ's city (Sodom), the city of the seven sleepers (Ephesus or Amman) as in a*l-Kahf* 18.19, or to *madīna(t al-nabī)* – i.e. Yathrib – as in *al-Tawbah* 9.101 and 120.
[410] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* v. 7, 4805.
[411] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 383.
[412] André Raymond, *Cairo*, trans. William Wood (Cambridge: Harvard, 2000) 11 and 107.
[413] Ginzberg, I/II, 314.

Since the Qur'ān speaks only very generally about these women, exegetes and commentators have offered several possibilities for more precise identifications. Ibn 'Abbās says that there were four women: the wife of the king's cupbearer, the wife of the king's head of prison, the wife of the king's cook and the wife of the man in charge of the king's stable.[414] Thaʿlabī named five: the wife of the cup-bearer, the wife of the baker, the wife of the master of the inkwell, the wife of the prison-master, and the wife of the chamberlain. Al-Kisā'ī gives the women a more aristocratic status, identifying them as "the wives of the chief scribe, the vizier, the exchequer, the chief of the secretariat and all the wives of high office-holders,"[415] whereas al-Rabghūzī proposes a more heterogeneous group: the minister's wife, the chamberlain's wife, the treasurer's wife, the cupbearer's wife, the groom's wife, and the wife of the cook.[416]

Although from the outset of this chapter I have been referring to Yūsuf's Egyptian master, "the one from Egypt who bought him" (12.21), as *al-'Azīz*, he is not designated as such until 12.30, an *āya* which concerns his wife and the other women more than it does him. As Fatoohi has noted, the use of the present tense – *turāwidu* – indicates that the wife of al-'Azīz is still pursuing Yūsuf in spite of the reprimand she received from her husband.[417] The ladies likewise recognize the extent of the attraction to Yūsuf as they reiterate *'an nafsihi* as in 12.23. The expression *shaghafa-ha* ("He struck her deeply with love") is unique to this verse and is not found elsewhere in the Qur'ān. It is most commonly explained by the numerous exegetes cited by al-Ṭabarī[418] as *dakhala ḥubbuhu fī shaghāfihā*: "His love entered into her innermost heart," or *baṭana bi-hā ḥubban* – "a (kind of) love entered inside of her." In the phrase *shaghafa-ha,* the wife of al-'Azīz is the object of the verb, implying (at least according to some interpretations)

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[414] Available at: www.altafsir.com.
[415] Al-Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ* 176.
[416] Rabghūzī 214.
[417] Fatoohi, *Joseph,* 88.
[418] *Tafsir al-Jalalayn,* trans. Aisha Bewley (London: Dar Al Taqwa, 2007) 499; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* v. 7, 4805-4809.

that *she* is Yūsuf's helpless victim, overwhelmed by his beauty and overcome with desire for him. This unbridled passionate love is termed *'ishq* in Arabic. Although this word does not appear in the Qur'ān, it is used by some commentators to describe the feelings of al-'Azīz's wife towards Yūsuf, which further serves as a metaphor for an individual's love for God. Thus, "[i]n the Ṣūfī tradition, the wife of al-'Azīz is regarded as an epitome of worshippers of beauty, contemplating the divine beauty in its earthly manifestations."[419] This interpretation will aid in the metamorphosis of this woman from crafty seductress to faithful devotee, as memorialized in the Jāmī's epic poem "Yūsuf and Zulaykha" (see below).

In contrast to the word *'ishq* which does not appear in the Qur'ān, the phrase – *fī ḍalālin mubīnin* – "in clear error" is a commonly used expression. In *Sūrat Yūsuf*, it appears in *āya* 8 when Yūsuf's brothers criticize their father for loving him (and Benjamin) more than them: *inna abānā la-fī ḍalālin mubīnin* – "Surely our father is in clear error." As noted by one scholar: "This is a neat, ironical touch, for as applied to Jacob the words are false, but applied to her [al-'Azīz's wife] they are true."[420] Ibrāhīm makes this charge against his father for worshipping idols (*Al-An'ām* 6.74), but it is also used frequently to refer to those who are ignorant of or who reject God, His message, signs, prophets, etc.:

> How clearly they will hear and see (on) the Day that they come before Us! But the wrong doers today are in *clear error*. (19.38)
>
> Such is God's creation; so show me what those besides Him have created. No, the wrong doers are in *clear error*. (31.11)
> Say: 'He is the Most Compassionate. We have believed in Him, and on Him is our trust. You will know who is the one in *clear error*.' (67.29)

Even though the women clearly recognized the wrong-doing of al-'Azīz's wife by using a phrase (*fī ḍalālin mubīnin*) with religious significance, Fatoohi does not attribute their objections

[419] Eshots, "*'Ishq*" 310-414.
[420] Johns, "Joseph in the Qur'ān," 49.

to any religious sensibility or even to an objection over adulterous behavior, but merely to their disapproval of the woman pursuing a servant or slave – i.e. someone below her class. This, in his opinion, demonstrates "that [ancient Egyptian] society had very low moral standards."[421] Such a remark reflects a commonly held belief that all ancient cultures were *jāhilīyya,* i.e. steeped in ignorance and devoid of morality. It must be noted, however, that the ancient Egyptians regarded deceit, slander and adultery as serious moral offenses. This is clearly demonstrated by Chapter 125 of the "Book of the Dead" in which the deceased, in the Hall of Judgment, claims not to have committed any one of forty-two immoral or sinful actions, among them: not slandering a servant to his master, not telling lies, and not committing adultery.[422] Moreover, the seriousness with which the Egyptians considered adultery is demonstrated in the so-called *Story of the Two Brothers*, well known for its similarity to the Joseph story.[423] In that tale the younger of two brothers, named Bata, is falsely accused of sexually assaulting the wife of his older brother Anpu. When Anpu learns that his wife actually attempted to seduce his younger brother, Anpu kills her and throws her remains to the dogs. The reaction of the women in *Sūrat Yūsuf* to the illicit actions of al-'Azīz's wife speaks to their moral character - at least up until the point when they too are unwittingly captivated by Yūsuf's beauty. From the perspective of the *Aggadah*, they are not only *un*critical of the woman's behavior, but are guilty of aiding and abetting her plans to seduce Yūsuf.[424] Likewise, al-Tha'labi wrote that the women said to Joseph: "Obey your mistress."[425]

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[421] Fatoohi, *Joseph,* 88.
[422] *The Book of the Dead or Going Forth By Day*, Thomas George Allen, trans. Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization, no. 37 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1974), 97-98.
[423] Susan Tower Hollis, *The Ancient Egyptian "Tale of the Two Brothers:" the Oldest Fairy Tale in the World* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990) 16 ff.
[424] Ginzberg, I/II, 315.
[425] Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ* 203.

Many exegetes have assessed the women of the city negatively due to the use of the phrase *makri-hinna* ("their mischief") in 12.31. Al-Thaʿlabī cites Ibn Isḥāq who claimed that the women "plotted to trick her into letting them see Yūsuf, of whose great beauty they had heard so much."[426] Bayḍāwī likewise suggests that "it was their object of her showing Yūsuf to them."[427] Indeed *makri-hinna* does imply negative motives on their part, but in 12.30 they had correctly identified the error of the woman's ways. It seems incongruous that at this point, having just pointed out her sin, they would in turn begin plotting their own seduction. Although Yūsuf later speaks of *kayd-hunna* ('their plotting") in 12.33, he is probably referring to their reactions *after* they saw him (12.31). When they are later summoned before the king, they swear to their innocence (12.51). The word *makara* has both positive and negative connotations in the Qur'ān. While it is frequently used to denote the deceitful plots of unbelievers, *makara* may also refer to God's own counter plans:

> 3.54: And they [the unbelievers] plotted (*makarū*), and God planned (*makara*), and God is the best of those who plan (*al-mākirīn*).
>
> 10.21: When We made humanity taste mercy after adversity had touched them, and behold, they plotted against Our signs. Say: "God plans more swiftly!" Surely Our Messengers record what you plot.
>
> 13.42: Those before them [unbelievers] surely plotted (*makarū*); but in all things God is the Planner *(al-Makr)*.
>
> 27.50: They plotted and they plotted (*makarū wa makarū*), but We planned (too); they plotted but sensed nothing.

It is thus likely that *makri-hinna* in 12.31 refers, not to the womens' plot to seduce Yūsuf, but rather their plans to (righteously) expose the actions of al-'Azīz's wife. *Āya* 30 says quite clearly that the women had recognized her behavior as immoral, without any indication that they were

[426] Al-Thaʿlabī 202.
[427] Baīḍāwī 18.

plotting to see or seduce Yūsuf themselves. The suggestion by exegetes that they had ulterior motives at this point by talking about al-Azīz's wife's improper behavior may be an interpretation of Yūsuf's later remarks in *āya* 33, or perhaps reflects a fundamental mistrust of women in general.

Nevertheless, when the women finally see Yūsuf at the banquet prepared by their friend, they can do nothing but extol him (*akbarna-hu*). They are so overwhelmed by the youth's presence that they inadvertently cut their hands with knives provided them by al-Azīz's wife (for cutting their fruit or some other food, according to many exegetes). This scene is similarly recounted in the *Aggadah*,[428] again illustrating the number of similarities in the texts. Some Muslim exegetes have made a connection between the bleeding of the women's hands with spontaneous menstruation brought on by excessive sexual stimulation, again reflecting a certain fear or mistrust of women's sexuality. Thus, in his commentary Bayḍāwī offers an interpretation that *akbarnahu* (usually understood as "they extolled him") could mean "they menstruated because of him out of the violence of their lust.[429] Al-Kisā'ī likewise suggests their bleeding connotes a sexual response: "When the women saw him, they lauded him and sullied themselves on the spot out of passion for him and cut their hands as they were slicing the citrons…"[430] Their comments may have been influenced by the *Aggadah* which describes how the blood "flowed down and stained their garments,"[431] thus signifying menstruation.

Without overly (and unnecessarily) sexualizing the scene, it is apparent that the women are quite struck by Yūsuf's appearance. When they behold him (*fa-lamma ra'yna-hu*), they cry out in the name of God: *ḥāsha lillāhi* – "God preserve us!" – a phrase they use again in 12.51 in

[428] Ginzberg, I/II, 314; Kugel, 28-65.
[429] Baīḍāwī 18-19. See also, Merguerian and Najmabandi 489.
[430] Al-Kisā'ī 176.
[431] Ginzberg, I/II, 314.

their exchange with the king. Many exegetes cited by al-Ṭabarī equate the phrase with *maʿādh Allāh* – "God save (me)." The mention of *Allāh* by the ostensibly polytheistic Egyptian women is puzzling, however, and noteworthy, although overlooked by classical exegetes. Fatoohi suggests that *ḥāsha lillāhi* may be understood "metaphorically" because of its popular usage which does not necessarily express belief in God. Alternatively he suggests that it may reflect some distorted belief in God such as that of pre-Islamic Arabs.[432] Given that the Qur'ān is a *theological* text, I do not believe *ḥāsha lillāhi* should be understood "metaphorically" regardless of how the expression has come to be used in contemporary common parlance. Rather, I believe that the phrase expresses true belief *of some kind*. The question is: what belief does it express in this context? It was not unusual for the ancient Egyptians to refer in general terms to "God/god" without specifying the name of a deity. This is particularly evident in Egyptian wisdom texts. *The Instruction to King Merikare*, for example, composed sometime during the First Intermediate Period (ca. 2175-1975 BCE), includes statements such as:

> Work for God, he will work for you also…
> God thinks of him who works for him…
> Well-tended is mankind – God's cattle…
> God knows every name…[433]

In *The Instruction of Amenemope* (ca. 1295-1069 BCE), we read adages such as:

> Better is poverty in the hand of God than wealth in the storehouse…
>
> Guard your tongue from harmful speech,
> Then you will be loved by others.
> You will find your place in the house of God,
> You will share in the offerings of your Lord…
>
> The heart of a man is a gift of God,

[432] Fatoohi, *Joseph,* 90-91.
[433] Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, v. I*, 106.

> Beware of neglecting it…
>
> Man is clay and straw,
> God is his builder…
> Happy is he who reaches the west [i.e. the land of the dead],
> When he is safe in the hand of God.[434]

What the Egyptians authors meant when they wrote of *God* (or a *god*) has been much debated and would require a much longer discussion beyond the scope of this study.[435] Erik Hornung has explained that the use of the generic term for "god" (*nṯr*) in these texts allows the reader to understand whichever deity they prefer.[436] More recent studies have demonstrated, however, that from the earliest times Egyptian religious texts have shown a propensity for speaking about a single transcendent *God* who manifests himself in a plurality of other gods.[437] Thus, while the "ladies in the city" may not be *pure* monotheists in the Judeo-Christian and Muslim sense, their invocation of *Allāh* does appear to reflect some concept of the One God. Rather than representing a "distorted image" of God, as claimed by Fatoohi, the women's words may, as Sayyid Quṭb wrote, indicate that there were traces of the belief in *tawḥīd* (the oneness of God) in this former age.[438] Al-Rabghūzī implies the ladies are monotheists (of some kind) as suggested by the poem they recite while gazing at Yūsuf:

> Verily, the crescent moon which our Creator has raised
> In the sky is visible today at our neighbor's…
>
> He is from the family of Jacob. Verily, time and time again God has given him
> Superiority…[439]

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[434] Lichtheim, *v. II,* 152-3, 160. There are many references to "God" throughout the text.
[435] See references in the "Literature Survey," n. 1.
[436] Erik Hornung's *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: the One and the Many,* John Baines, trans. (Ithaca: Cornell, 1982) 57 ff.
[437] James P. Allen, *Genesis in Egypt: the Philosophy of Ancient Egyptian Creation Accounts* (Yale: University Press, 1988); Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lorton (Ithaca: Cornell, 2001) and *From Akhenaten to Moses*, 10-24.
[438] Qutb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān* v. 4, 1984.
[439] Al-Rabghūzī 216-17.

In Jāmī's epic poem *Yūsuf and Zulaykha*, Yūsuf sees that the women are idolatresses, however, and, as a prophet, preaches the One God to them throughout the night until they convert and make the profession of faith. When Zulaykha returns in the morning, she finds all their fingers "plying rosary beads, all tongues proclaiming the one true God."[440] As mentioned above in the discussion about al-'Azīz's remarks in 12.29, Ibn Kathīr also believed that the ancient Egyptians had some belief in the oneness of God, as did the anonymous author of *Akhbār al-Zamān* (see above).

Equally intriguing is the ladies' use of the world *malak* ("angel") to describe Yūsuf, which is also overlooked by most exegetes. It is generally understood that the ladies are likening Yūsuf's extraordinary beauty to that of an angel. Yet, if these women follow the religious traditions of ancient Egypt, their reference to an "angel" appears anachronistic as the Egyptians did not hold a belief in angels *per se* as they are conceived in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions. It is true that many Egyptian deities, many of them female, are portrayed with wings, and that this iconography might have ultimately influenced later Jewish, Christian and Muslim angelology; but the Egyptians understood divine intermediaries to be *deities* nevertheless. There were greater or less deities based on the extent of their cult or mythological significance, but the Egyptians did not conceive of beings of a special nature between the human and the divine (other than the Egyptian king, that is, who was a unique combination of both). Some Medieval Arab authors believed depictions of Egyptian deities to represent angels. Thus, al-Baghdādī wrote that the Egyptians "can even go so far as depicting their god surrounded by angels."[441]

If we consider the text from an ancient Egyptian perspective, the ladies would have thought Yūsuf a *god* rather than an angel; yet, the word used in 12.31 is *malak,* not *ilāh*, and thus

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[440] Jāmī, *Yusuf and Zulaikha,* 73-74.
[441] El-Daly 83.

the allusion is puzzling given the ostensibly Egyptian context. Rather than simply discounting their words as Qur'ānic anachronisms, it could be the case that the ladies, as true believers, invoke the name of God (*ḥashā lillāhi*) *and* mention angels, were it not for Yūsuf's reproaching them in *āya* 33 (see below). Al-Rabghūzī offers an alternative reading of the text which could solve the seemingly anachronistic reference to an angel (in an ancient Egyptian context). In such a reading the *shīn* in *bashar* ("mortal") – in *mā hādhā bashran,* "This is no mortal" - is read with *kasra* rendering it *bashir* ("bearer of glad tidings"),[442] and the *lām* of *malak* ("angel") is read with *kasra* rendering it *malik* ("king"). Then the line may be translated as: "This is not a bearer of glad tidings (i.e. an average human), but a noble king."[443] The contrast the ladies make then is not between a human and an angel, but between a common messenger and a king. This makes better sense from the Egyptian perspective, but this reading has not found acceptance among exegetes. This interpretation may have some basis in Jewish tradition. Although the likening of Joseph to an angel is absent from *aggadic* accounts, there is a manuscript which relates how the women "all arose and kissed him on his head and said to him, 'Kingship, oh lad, befits you well.'"[444] The possible connection between the *aggadic* and other Jewish texts with the Qur'ān in this regard has not been hitherto noted.

There is yet another possible explanation which does not require a change in the voweling of *malak* in 12.31, and is which is original to this study. It has been noted that translators of Greek texts into Arabic commonly rendered the word "gods" (θεοί) as "angels" (*malā'ika*).[445] This is also the case when al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048) undertook translations of Sanskrit

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[442] Al-Ṭabarī also mentions this variant, but rejects it (*Tafsīr,* v. 7, 4819).
[443] Al-Rabghūzī 218.
[444] Kugel 38.
[445] Shlomo Pines and Tuvia Gelbum, "Al-Bīrūnī's Arabic version of Patanjali's *Yogasūtra*: a Translation of his First Chapter and a Comparison with Related Sanskrit Texts," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29 (1966): 307, n. 37.

texts into Arabic; thus *deva* (gods) is also rendered as *malā'ika.*[446] This is *not* to suggest that the Qur'ān is an Arabic translation of another text, but that perhaps in the revelation of 12.31, the word *malak* is used is connote (a) *god* such as conceived by the ancients. While the word *ilāh* appears quite frequently in the Qur'ān, when used to refer to *a god* it is used *negatively* in contrast to *the God* – i.e. *lā ilāha ilā Allāh* (e.g. 47.19). It is never used in a "neutral" sense as required in the ladies' speech of 12.31 when they are ostensibly commenting on Yūsuf's extraordinary appearance. Thus, in a departure from the traditional understanding of 12.31, I conclude here that when the ladies refer to Yūsuf as *malak*, they are actually calling Yūsuf a "god" rather than an "angel," an explanation that is consistent with the ancient Egyptian setting of the story, and removes the issue of textual anachronisms or variant voweling.

Given the ladies' ecstatic reaction to Yūsuf, the wife of al-'Azīz attempts to justify her own behavior to them, confessing to them the very accusation he had made against her in 12.26. Once again she threatens Yūsuf with imprisonment as she had in *āya* 25 when she was caught in her attempt to seduce him. She uses the word *al-ṣāghirīn* – literally, "the small ones" to refer to the company among whom Yūsuf is about to find himself. It is a word used by God in *Al-A'rāf* 7.13 when He expels Iblīs for not bowing down to Adam: "Get down…Get out for you are among the *small ones.*" It is also used to refer to Pharaoh's magicians who were outwitted by Moses (7.119): "So they were defeated there and then, and were made to look *small*." It is thus a particularly harsh condemnation of Yūsuf on her part not easily conveyed by translation.

Yūsuf's consistent use of the third person feminine plural in 12.33-34 – as in *yad'ūnanī* ("they summon me"), *kaydhunna (*"their plot") *,* and *ilayhinna* ("to them") - is just as puzzling as it was when used by al-'Azīz (or the Witness) in 12.28. It forces us to conclude that Yūsuf

[446] Carl W. Ernst, "The Limits of Universalism in Islamic Thought: the Case of Indian Religions," *Muslim World* 101 (Jan. 2011): 3.

understood the ladies' remarks in 12.31 to connote carnal desire such as that expressed by al-'Azīz's wife. In al-Kisā'ī's version of the story, the ladies had exclaimed: "He is a temptation to all who see him!"[447] Later, in 12.51, the King also accuses the women of *kayd*, although they steadfastly deny the charge with an oath (see below). Al-Rabghūzī relates Yūsuf's exasperation when he discovered the ladies' intentions: "My God, up until this moment there was one; now six other women have in as well. They are seven; I'm one. What am I to do?" Al-Rabghūzī also cites a tradition claiming that the women wanted Yūsuf imprisoned so that they could keep him away from the wife of al-'Azīz, and see him whenever they wished![448]

The verb *da'ū,* as in *yad'ūnanī* ("to call upon or summon") while used frequently in the Qur'ān - has particular poignancy in this context. Most properly it is used in reference to invoking God (*al-A'rāf* 7.189; *al-Ra'd* 13.36; *al-'Ankabūt* 29.65; *al-Rūm* 30.33; *Luqmān* 31.32; *al-Jinn* 72.20, etc.). It may also be used when a prophet summons his people to God (*Yūsuf* 12.108; *Nūḥ* 71.5, 7 and 8). In a negative sense, however, *Shaiṭān* calls to humanity to lead them astray (*Ibrāhīm* 14.22), and humanity in turn calls upon him and false gods (*al-Nisā* 4.117; *Yūnus* 10.66; *Maryam* 19.48; *al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.64, etc.). In 12.33, the ladies seemingly *summon* Yūsuf to something so terrible (illicit sexual activity we may infer from the context) that he prefers prison to acquiescing. Once again Fatoohi takes the opportunity to make the groundless comment that "[Egyptian] society was in a low moral state to the extent that it was common for married women, or at least those from the upper class to have lovers."[449] Mawdūdī also saw this as evidence of "the moral degeneration of the upper classes of Egyptian society."[450] The Egyptian moral code as reflected by religious texts has already been noted above. Modern exegetes seem

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[447] Al-Kisā'ī 176.
[448] Al-Rabghūzī 219-220.
[449] Fatoohi, *Joseph,* 92.
[450] Mawdūdī, *Tafhim* v. 4, 167.

more likely to read the moral corruption and decay of their own times into the texts than classical *mufassirūn* are want to do.

Yūsuf's fear is that if he acquiesced to the ladies' invitation, he would become one of the *jāhilīn*, a term used to the Qur'ān signifying those who are ignorant of true faith (e.g. *al-Baqarah* 2.67; *al-An'ām* 6.35; *al-A'rāf* 7.199; *al-Furqān* 25.63). Yūsuf also uses the word *jāhilūn* when addressing his brothers in *āya* 89, thereby continuing to draw the parallel between his brothers and the women. Both his brothers and the women are guilty of *kayd* (see above) and both are thus *jāhilūn/īn.* The divine epithets *al-Samī'* (The Hearing) *al-'Alīm* (The Knowing) that appear in *'ayā* 34 are often used in the Qur'ān to emphasize God's omniscience within the context of adversity and opposition perpetrated by unbelievers, doubters, and hypocrites.[451] This is the case in 12.34 where Yūsuf speaks of the ladies' *kayd.* Ibn 'Abbas remarked that in this *āya* these epithets signify that God is "Hearer of the ladies' talk and Knower of their scheming."[452]

In contrast to 12.33-34, the instigators of the action in *āya* 35 are (collectively) *masculine* and, we may assume, refers to some Egyptians involved in Yūsuf's dilemma: *thumma bada la-**hum** min ba'di mā **ra'aū** al-āyāti la**yasjununna-**hu ḥattā ḥīnin:* "Then it became clear to them after they had seen the signs to imprison him for the time being." The antecedent for *hum* is unclear, however. We may safely assume that whomever *hum* refers to, they are also the subject of the two verbs which is likewise unclear, however. Many exegetes and authors, classical and modern, have hastily identified al-'Azīz as the one principally responsible for imprisoning Yūsuf, believing him unable or unwilling to stand up to the demands of his guilty wife so that she might save face.[453] This perpetuates the image of al-'Azīz as weak and effete, although the

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[451] E.g. *al-Mā'idah* 5.76; *al-An'ām* 6.13 and 113; *al-A'rāf* 7.200; *al-Anfāl* 8.17 and 53.
[452] Ibn 'Abbas, *Tafsīr* 12.34 (www.altafsir.com).
[453] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh,* 385 and *Tafsīr*, v. 7, 4822-4823; al-Tha'labī, 203; Bayḍāwī, 21; al-Zamakhsharī, v. 2, 345; al-Kisā'ī 176-177; Fatoohi, 94. The a*ggadic* accounts likewise hold Potiphar responsible (Ginzberg, I/II, 319).

text does not support this. Moreover, the "signs" that "they" observed are also not specified, although various traditions suggest Yūsuf's torn shirt and the women's cut hands.[454] If "they" had seen the very signs which proved Yūsuf' innocence, why then imprison him? Moreover, the guilt of al-'Azīz's wife had already been established (12.28-29), and she herself had confessed her actions to the ladies in the city (12.32). Kaltner suggests that al-'Azīz's wife, and possibly al-Azīz himself and others "are guilty of misreading the signs," and therefore "personify those who are unable to inquire of the story and arrive at an understanding of its deeper meaning."[455] It is possible, of course, for people to respond to signs with disbelief:

> Those who do not believe Our Signs, We shall consign to the Fire (*al-Nisā'* 4.56)
>
> And when they see a sign, they make fun. (*al-Ṣaffāt* 37.14)
>
> And if they see a sign, they turn away, and say: "This is transient magic." (*al-Qamar* 54.2)

There is nothing in 12.35, however, that says "they" disbelieved, mocked or turned away from the signs, although one might argue that the imprisonment of Yūsuf is evidence of this. The phrase – *bada la-hum* ("It became clear to them") occurs elsewhere in the Qur'ān and often signifies that wrongdoers are suddenly faced with the *truth* of their sins – *sayyi'āt* (*al-An'ām* 6.28; *al-Zumar* 39.47-48; *al-Jāthīyah* 45.33), and evokes the story of Adam and Eve when their own shame (*sau'a*) became apparent to them – *badat la-humā* – after they had eaten from the forbidden tree (*al-A'rāf* 7.22; *Ṭā Hā* 20.121). We may therefore likewise conclude that the unnamed individuals of 12.35 came to some sort of awareness of their wrongdoing, anticipating the confession of al-Azīz's wife to the king in 12.51. They imprison Yūsuf, I would argue, not because they are still in error or because they have misread the Signs; but rather because they actually *see* in the signs that this is the will of God, ordered by God who heard Yūsuf's prayer

[454] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* v. 7, 4823.
[455] Kaltner 51-52.

(12.33-34). Yūsuf's imprisonment is intended to save him from temptation (by his own admission), and set in place the conditions whereby he will become *al-'Azīz* himself (12.78). This interpretation is more consistent with what was stated at the beginning of Yūsuf's sojourn in Egypt: "And God is the Master of His decrees, but most people do not know (it)" (12.21).

**The Egyptian Prisoners.**

To continue this study of the Egyptians in the Qur'ān and Islamic exegesis, we turn to 12.36-42 where we are introduced to two more Egyptians, prisoners to whom Yusūf preaches and whose dreams he interprets.[456] As in the biblical account, based on the content of their dreams, these two prisoners are traditionally understood in Islamic tradition to be the king's steward or cup bearer, and the king's baker, or more generically, the servants who were in charge of the king's food and drink.[457] Al-Ṭabarī gives the baker's name as Majlath[458] or Maḥlab,[459] and that of the cupbearer as Nabū, while al-Thaʿlabī gives them as Mujlib and Bayūṣ,[460] al-Kisā'ī as Ghalib and Abruha,[461] and al-Rabghūzī as Mujlib (or Shabhāqum) and Bayūḍ.[462] The Genesis account indicates that they had given "offense to their lord, the king of Egypt," and thus "Pharaoh was angry with his two officers" (Gen. 40.1-2). Although, like the Qurʿān, the biblical account is silent on the precise nature of their crimes, the *aggadic* texts explain that the servants had planned "to do violence to the daughter of Pharaoh," and had conspired to poison the king

[456] For a study of the significance of dreams in the *sūra* according to Persian ṣūfī *tafsīr*, see: Mohammed J. Mahallati, "The Significance of Dreams and Dream Interpretation in the Qur'an: Two Sufi Commentaries on *Sūrat Yūsuf*" in: *Dreaming Across Boundaries*, ed. Louise Marlow (Cambridge: Harvard, 2008) 153-178.
[457] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* v. 7, 4824-25; *Ta'rīkh* 386-7; al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ* 203; Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* 345, *et al*.
[458] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* v. 7 4824.
[459] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 387.
[460] Al-Thaʿlabī 203.
[461] Al-Kisā'ī 177.
[462] Al-Rabghūzī 222.

himself."[463] Likewise, al-Ṭabarī relates the tradition from al-Suddī that the two servants had tried to poison the king,[464] which is repeated by al-Thaʿlabī[465] and Bayḍāwī.[466] The same tradition further impugns the character of the two servants by claiming they did not actually have dreams, but had merely pretended in order to test Yūsuf.[467] Al-Thaʿlabī relates a tradition in which in the two servants declare their love for Yūsuf when they see him, but he rebuffs them explaining that "anyone who had loved me brought me nothing but misfortune," citing the examples of his paternal aunt, father and master's wife as examples of injurious love.[468]

Al-Rabghūzī claims anachronistically that an envoy of the king of Byzantium (sic!) hired the two servants to assassinate the king of Egypt. By setting this episode of the Yūsuf story in an era of political tensions between Byzantium and Egypt, I believe al-Rabghūzī may have been alluding to the events of the reigns of the Emperor Michael Palaeologus (r. 1259-82) and Mamluk Sultan Baybars (r. 1260-1277). Concerned with another Latin conquest of Constantinople, Michael had cultivated relations with Baybars, but had also secretly concluded a treaty with Hülegü, the Mongol enemy of the Mamluks. When Baybar's envoys arrived at the Byzantine court (1263-4), Michael detained them in order to preserve peace with Hülegü, thereby compromising relations between Cairo and Constantinople.[469] As seen above in the discussion of Ibrāhīm in Egypt, al-Rabghūzī seems to have drawn from Mongol and Mamluk history when writing his *Qiṣaṣ*.

In addition to their "dreams" – or perhaps more precisely "visions" since they use the verb *ra'ā* rather than *ḥalama* – the two servants *see* that Yūsuf is one of those who do good

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[463] Ginzberg, I/II 320.
[464] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 386.
[465] Al-Thaʿlabī 203.
[466] Baīḍāwī 21.
[467] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 386-387. This is repeated in al-Rabghūzī's account.
[468] Al-Thaʿlabī 204.
[469] Reuven Amitai-Preiss, *Mongols and Mamluks: the Mamluk-Īlkhānid War, 1260-1281* (Cambridge, 1995) 91-94.

(*muḥsinīn*), a confirmation of what had been said of him in 12.22. Yet, they are not true believers as Yūsuf's subsequent *khuṭbah* to them makes clear in a sweeping indictment of the Egyptian people as a whole. He describes them as a people who "do not believe in God and are unbelievers (*kāfirūn*) in the Hereafter," two essential elements of true faith (*al-Baqarah* 2.62; *al-Mā'idah* 5.69, etc.). The contrast between their lack of (true) faith and his own, the faith of Ibrāhīm, Isḥāq, and Yaʿqūb, is seen in the parallel phrases of 12.37-38:

> *Innī taraktu millat qawm lā yu'minūn* ("**I reject the faith of a people** that does not believe…"
>
> *Wa atabaʿtu millat ābā'ī* ("**I follow the faith of my fathers**…")

The ancient Egyptians were not atheists, of course. Herodotus famously remarked: "They are religious to excess, beyond any other nation in the world,"[470] and the sheer number of religious texts, structures and artifacts that have been preserved are evidence of a highly developed belief system. As polytheists, however, they did not believe in the *one* God (of Ibrāhīm and Yūsuf) and had not heeded God's command to worship none but Him (12.40). The accusation that the Egyptians did not believe in the Hereafter is somewhat more curious since their elaborate funerary preparations clearly demonstrate not only a fervent belief in the Afterlife, but also a belief in a final judgment (as particularly described and illustrated in Chapter 125 of the *Book of the Dead*[471]) and eternal punishment for the wicked which is graphically depicted on the walls of royal tombs.[472] In accusing the Egyptians of not believing in the Hereafter, Yūsuf is perhaps drawing a distinction between Egyptian notions of the Afterlife and those of true believers as he does concerning Egyptian beliefs in gods versus God. It is difficult, however, not to see in

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[470] *The Histories,* (Book 2, 37), trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt, rev. A.R. Burns (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972).
[471] Faulkner, *Book of the Dead* 28-34.
[472] Erik Hornung, *The Valley of the Kings* 149-164.

Yūsuf's explicit criticism of the ancient Egyptians an *implicit* criticism of the Quraysh and others who rejected Muhammad's message. As Johns has noted:

> Joseph's speech is not directed exclusively to the two fellow prisoners within the story. He addresses them in the dual [12.37], but as he makes his points, he addresses a wider audience, and the verbs are in the plural form [12.40]. The plurality indicates not simply the prisoners and their associates, but the unbelieving, ungrateful contemporaries of Muhammad to whom and for whose benefit the story is being recited.[473]

Thus, Yūsuf's words to his prison companions are echoed in the words the Prophet Muhammad was commanded to preach to his people:

> Say: "God speaks the Truth, so *follow the faith of Ibrāhīm* a monotheist (*ḥanīf*). He was not one of the polytheists (*mushrikīn*). (*Āl 'Imrān* 3.95)
>
> And who is better in religion than the one who submits himself to God and does good, and *follows the faith of Ibrāhīm* a monotheist…(*al-Nisā'* 4.125)
>
> So We revealed to you: *follow the faith of Ibrāhīm* a monotheist. He was not one of the polytheists. (*al-Naḥl* 16.123)

While exhorting his companions to embrace the faith of Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf laments that: "Most people do not give thanks" (*akthar al-nās lā yashkurūn*) and that: "Most people do not know" (*akthar al-nās lā yaʿlamūn*). Ibn 'Abbās understands these phrases to refer specifically to the people of Egypt, but the ingratitude and ignorance of humanity in general is a ubiquitous criticism in the Qur'ān.[474] In 12.68 *akthar al-nās lā yaʿlamūn* certainly refers to Yūsuf's brothers as is probably the case in 12.21 as well.

Yūsuf's essential message of *tawḥīd* – the oneness of God – is further emphasized in 12.39 by his use of the divine names *al-Wāḥid* ("the One") and a*l-Qahhār* ("the Supreme"), epithets which are frequently coupled and which often appear in other contexts in which *shirk* is refuted:

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[473] Johns, "Joseph in the Qur'ān," 52.
[474] Ingratitude: 2.243; 7.17; 10.60; 27.73; 40.61; Ignorance: 7.187; 16.38; 30.6; 30.30; 34.28; 34.35; 40.57; 45.26, etc. as well as 12.21 and 12.68.

> Say: "Who is Lord of the Heavens and the Earth?" Say: "It is God." Say: "Do you take protectors other than Him who do not have power to do good or harm to themselves?" Say: "Are the blind equal to those who see? Or is the darkness equal to the light?" Or do they create for God partners who have created as He has created so that the creation is similar to them? Say: "God is the Creator of everything, and He is the One and the Supreme." (*al-Raʿd* 13.16)

Yūsuf's reproach of the Egyptians, that they worship only names (of gods) which they and their fathers created, "for which God sent no authority" (12.40), is repeated in the Prophet Hūd's words to the people of Thamūd (*al-Aʿrāf* 7.71), and in Muhammad's rebuke of the Meccans for their worship of Lāt, 'Uzza and Manāt (*al-Najm* 53.23). This supports what I have proposed previously in the discussion of 12.21, namely, that Yūsuf is to be understood as a prophet *to the Egyptians* whom he exhorts to embrace worship of the One God just as every prophet preached to a particular people: "We did not send a messenger before you except without revealing to him that there is no god but Me, so worship (Me)" (*al-'Anbiyā* 21.25). Although Yūsuf's criticisms are stern, his aim is not to condemn them, but *to bring them to true faith*, consistent with the Qur'ān's *missionary* character and in contrast to the more exclusivist *covenantal* character of the Hebrew Scriptures. One of Yūsuf's fellow prisoners will apparently come to faith (see below).

As in Genesis 40, Yūsuf predicts that only one of the prisoners (the cup bearer) will be restored to his position as the king's servant, while the other will be executed. In this context (12.41), the verb *yuṣlabu* may not refer to *crucifixion* in the sense of being tied or nailed to a *cross* as traditionally understood and translated. This would be an anachronism since crucifixion was not a means of execution used by the ancient Egyptians. The *jadhr* (*ṣ-l-b*) connotes "hardness" or "rigidity," and does not originally have any connection with the cross or crucifixion as it became known in the Roman and Christian world. More accurately, particularly in this context, it probably refers to impaling or affixing a victim to an upright stake, post or tree

such that the condemned might be seen by others (for purposes of generating fear and intimidation), and the body exposed to the elements and animals, depriving the person of a proper burial. This is what is described in Genesis 40.19, which says specifically that the pharaoh will hang (תלה) the prisoner on a tree (cf. 40.22). Impaling as punishment is known from ancient Egypt as demonstrated by the phrase *rdi ḥr tp-ḫt* – "to put to the stake" - which is written with a determinative depicting an impaled body.[475]

Consistent with the biblical narrative (Gen. 40.14), Yūsuf asks the prisoner whose dream he interpreted favorably to mention Yūsuf's name to the king, but the servant forgets to do so, as the Qurʿān explains, because "Shaiṭān made him forget" (12.42).[476] According to the Qur'ān, it is Shaiṭān's purpose to distract humanity, causing them to forget God:

> He said: "Because You have mislead me, I will wait for them on the straight path. Then I will come at them from their front and back, and from their right and left. You will not find most of them grateful. (*al-Aʿrāf* 7.17)
>
> Shaiṭān has gotten the better of them, and so made them forget the remembrance of God…(*al-Mujādilah* 58.19)

Here Shaiṭān is successful in leading the Egyptian astray but only *temporarily* for he does eventually remember Yūsuf (12.45 – see below). It should be noted that, based on a tradition attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, numerous exegetes have considered Yūsuf's request for the king's help to be unworthy of a Prophet as it betrays a trust in God, and this reason he "lingered in prison for some years."[477]

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[475] M.S.M. Saifullah, Elias Karim and 'Abdullah David, "Crucifixion or 'Crucifiction' in Ancient Egypt?" *Islamic Awareness*, January 2009: www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Contrad/External/crucify.html.

[476] This is not the first mention of Shaiṭān in the *surah*. In *'ayā* 5, Yaʿqūb had warned his son: "Shaiṭān is a sure enemy to humanity."[476] Neither will it be the last mention of Shaiṭān in the *surah* for Yūsuf remarks in *'ayā* 100 that: "Shaiṭān has incited (evil) between me and my brothers."

[477] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 388; al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ* 206-7; Baīḍāwī 24-25; al-Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ* 177; al-Rabghūzī, *Qiṣaṣ* 225.

**The King and His Officials.**

Still more Egyptians to be considered appear in 12.43-49 in which the king of Egypt known traditionally as *al-Rayyān* (see discussion above) makes his first appearance along with his officials (*mala'*). The king had been mentioned in 12.42 when Yūsuf requested one of the prisoners to remember him to his lord (*rabb*) once the servant returned to the king's service. In the biblical account, the king is called *pharaoh*, but the Qur'ān uses this term only to refer to the Egyptian king of the Exodus story, a distinction maintained in *tafsīr* literature. The ruler of Egypt in *Sūrat Yūsuf* is referred to simply as *al-malik*. As in Genesis, the king summons his advisers (*al-mala'*) to assist in the interpretation of his visions, which are much more succinctly described than those of Gen. 41.

The word *mala'* is used in *al-Baqarah* 2.246 to refer to the leaders of the Israelites in the period prior to the establishment of the monarchy. They are unflatteringly depicted as they promise to fight in the cause of God, but then turn back and then object to the selection of Ṭālūt (Saul) as king (2.247). In *al-Aʿrāf* 7.60-64, *al-mala'* refers to the leaders in the time of Nūḥ who rejected him,[478] and in 7.66 it designates the "leaders of the unbelievers" among the ʿĀd people who oppose the Prophet Hūd. The term also refers to Pharaoh's advisers in the Exodus accounts (26.34; 28.20; 28.38), and the Meccans who refused to believe in the message revealed to Muhammad (38.6). Thus, the very use of the word *mala'* in 12.43 connotes people who reject God's prophets, although this has gone unnoticed by commentators. Only twice in the Qurʿān (37.8 and 38.69) is the term used in a positive sense to refer to the *heavenly* court (*al-mala' al-aʿlā*) rather than an earthly one.

[478] Cf. 11.27, 11.38 and 23.24.

The negative depiction of the king's *mala'* continues in 12.44. They respond to the king's request to interpret his visions with the phrase *aḍghāthu aḥlāmin* – "(this is) a confusion of dreams" – a phrase also uttered by Muhammad's opponents to ridicule the revelations he had received (*al-Anbiyā'* 21.5). As the Egyptian courtiers failed to see Yūsuf's as God's prophet, so the Quraysh and others refused to recognize Muhammad as such. This is yet another element in *Sūrat Yūsuf* that draws a parallel between Yūsuf and Muhammad. Moreover, the king's *mala'* themselves admit to their ignorance (*ma naḥnu bi-ta'wīl al-aḥlām bi-'ālimīn*) and thus unwittingly place themselves among those "who do not know" (12.21, 40 and 68). In al-Rabghūzī's account, the king is so enraged by their inadequacies that he executes several of them and exiled the others.[479] Likewise, in the a*ggadic* literature, the king sends his inept councilors to the gallows, but then relents.[480]

As in the biblical narrative, the servant who was released from prison and returned to the king's service eventually remembers Yūsuf to the king, in spite of Shaiṭān's efforts to cause him to forget Yūsuf completely (12.42). Whereas in the Genesis account, however, pharaoh immediately sends for Joseph once he learns of him, in the Qurʿānic account the servant is sent by the king to speak with Yūsuf to ask for his interpretation of the king's dream "so that people may know" (12.46). Yūsuf's role as Prophet is to bring the Egyptians to knowledge and worship of the one God, and his ability to interpret dreams is merely the means of gaining their trust and recognition. The servant is clearly on the right path to belief as he greets Yūsuf with the epithet *al-ṣadīq*, having recognized the Prophet as a person of truth and sincerity, a term used elsewhere to describe Ibrāhīm (*Maryam* 19.41). Yūsuf then proceeds to interpret the king's dream similar to what is described in Gen. 41.25-32: seven years of abundance, symbolized by the seven fat cows

[479] *Qiṣaṣ* 227.
[480] Ginzberg, I/II, 325.

and seven green ears of corn, will be followed by seven hard years (*sabʿa shidād*), symbolized by the lean cows and withered corn. The Qurʿānic account of Yūsuf's interpretation includes an element, however, not found in Genesis or in the *Aggadah*: following the seven years of famine, a period of prosperity will return to Egypt "in which the people will be helped (with rain) and in which they will press (grapes)" (12.49). Egypt is therefore not left in want, but is restored to its former verdant state. It is an interesting and not insignificant difference, and expresses, I believe, a fundamental element of Islamic theology, anthropology and ecology, that is, God does not leave His creation dead, neither the land nor its inhabitants:

> Behold! In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and day; in the sailing of the ships on the sea by which humanity prospers; in the rain which God sends down from heaven, and gives life by means of it to the earth after its death…are signs for a people who are wise. (*al-Baqarah* 2.164)
>
> How can you reject faith in God, for you were dead and He gave you life. Then he will cause you to die, and then give you life, and then to Him will you return. (*al-Baqarah* 2.28)

Moreover, the connection between the restoration of life to an arid land and the resurrection of the dead is made clear repeatedly:

> It is He who sends the winds like heralds bearing the news of His Mercy when they have conveyed the heavy-laden clouds. We drive them to a land that is dead, make the rain fall on it, and bring forth all kinds of fruit. Likewise, We will raise the dead so that you might remember. (*al-Aʿrāf* 7.57)
>
> O humanity! If you are in doubt about the Resurrection…you see the land lifeless, but when We send down rain upon it, it stirs and swells, and brings forth plants of every splendid kind. It is so because God is the Truth, and it is He who gives life to the dead, and it is He who has power over all things. (*al-Ḥajj* 22.5-6)
>
> Consider the evidence of God's mercy, how He gives life to the land after its death; so likewise He gives life to the dead and He has power over all things. (a*l-Rūm* 30.50)

> And among His signs, you see the land laid low, but when We send down rain upon it, it stirs and swells, truly it is He who gives it life, and gives life to the dead, for He has power over all things. (*Fuṣṣilat* 41.39)

> And we send down blessed rain from heaven and bring forth from it gardens and grain for harvest…as sustenance for the servants (of God), We give life to a dead land; likewise the Resurrection. (*Qāf* 50.9-11)

Given the Egyptian setting of *Sūrat Yūsuf*, it is worth noting that the frequent association in the Qurʿān between land, which is restored to fecundity, and the resurrection of the dead also constitutes a significant element in ancient Egyptian religion. From the earliest times, the annual inundation of the Nile was associated with the resurrection of the god Osiris.[481] In the *Coffin Texts*, a corpus of funerary inscriptions from the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055-1650 BCE), the deceased prays to become barley:

> I am the plant of life which comes forth from Osiris [god of the dead] which grows upon the ribs of Osiris, which allows the people to live…I live as corn, the life of the living…I am life appearing from Osiris.[482]

This connection is concretely made in the so-called "Osiris beds," an example of which was found in the tomb of Tutankhamun, comprising an oblong box in the shape of Osiris which was filled with soil and planted with grain. The germination of the grain symbolized the resurrection of the god.[483] In *Sūrat Yūsuf* it is also possible that the renewal of Egypt after the famine is intended to mirror the Prophet's own fate whose time in prison may be likened to a time of famine, and whose later elevation by the Egyptian king mirrors the rebirth of the land. Just as Egypt does not remain barren, neither does Yūsuf languish in prison indefinitely.

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[481] Jan Assmann, *Death and Salvation* 356-363.
[482] Quoted in: R.T. Rundle Clark, *Myth and Symbol in Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1959) 118-119.
[483] Howard Carter, *The Tomb of Tutankhamen* (London: Sphere, 1972) 175. There also so-called "corn mummies" which serve a similar purpose. See: Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson, *British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: American University, 1996) 72.

**<u>The King, the Ladies, and al-'Azīz's Wife</u>**

*Āyāt* 43-49 of *Sūrat Yūsuf* comprise the center of the *sūra*'s palistrophic structure (see above). Hereafter, events parallel those, which unfolded in the previous *āyāt*. The subsequent reappearance of "the women of the city" and the wife of al-'Azīz completes the picture of the Egyptians which we have seen develop thus far. Having apparently heard Yūsuf's interpretation of his dream through his servant, the king who is duly impressed now orders a *messenger* (perhaps the same servant who had been in prison with Yūsuf) to bring Yūsuf into the king's presence. Yūsuf refuses, however, until his innocence is established by "the women of the city" who knew of the inappropriate behavior of al-'Azīz's wife, and yet were themselves awestruck by the youth (12.30-31). Once again Yūsuf accuses them of *kayd* as he had in 12.33 (and as was reiterated in *āya* 34), perhaps because they knew of her illicit behavior and her threat to imprison him unless he complied (12.32). The king is apparently aware of much of what has happened as his question to the women assumes their wrong-doing: *mā khaṭbukunna i<u>dh</u> rāwadtunna Yūsuf ʿan nafsihi* ("What happened when you attempted to seduce Yūsuf away from his own self?"). The reoccurrence of the verb *rāwada* immediately recalls the events in 12.23 ff. and artfully anticipates the return of al-'Azīz's wife. The women respond to the king's accusation with the same intensity as when they first saw Yūsuf - *ḥāsha li-llahi*: "God preserve us!" The expression initially served to express the women's awe at seeing Yūsuf whom they likened to an angel or "god" (see above). In 12.51, the women utter the expression again when the king questions them about Yūsuf. Here, too, I believe *ḥāsha li-llahi* serves to emphatically express their feelings about Yūsuf's noble character, to which they add that they "know not anything evil about

him."[484] Although they had been unwittingly smitten with him, they attested to his innocence throughout the ordeal, first in 12.30 and again in 12.51.

Then in a dramatic display of true humility, the wife of al-'Azīz, , finally comes forward to admit her guilt, confess to her attempted seduction of Yūsuf, and attest to his righteousness after he has languished in prison for several years. Her confession of attempting to seduce Yūsuf – *anā rāwadtuhu Yūsuf 'an nafsihi* ("I was the one who wanted to seduce Yūsuf from his own self") - parallels exactly Yūsuf's earlier accusation against her: *hiyya rāwadatnī 'an nafsī* (12.26). This display of repentance is completely unique to the Qur'ān without parallel in Genesis or in the *aggadic* literature. Her confession anticipates that of Yūsuf's brothers (12.91), but more profoundly it serves to illustrate perhaps the most essential theme of the entire *sūra* - the ultimate triumph of truth and faith over falsehood and lies: "And say: 'Truth has come and falsehood has perished, for falsehood is bound to perish'" (*al-Isrā'* 17.81), and the vindication of God's prophets who had been treated as liars (12.110). Few exegetes, however, have given this moment in the story much consideration or reflection, being almost exclusively concerned with Yūsuf's vindication. Al-Rabghūzī, who included an extensive section in his *Qiṣaṣ* describing her confession, relates:

> Zulaikhā said three true things. First: *"Now the truth must come to light."* Second: *"It was I who sought to seduce him."* Third, she said: *"He has told the truth."* Because of these utterances three blessings accrued to her. She was a stranger; she became close. She was despicable; she became noble. She was an old woman; she became young again.[485]

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[484] Among exegetes, both past and present, Fatoohi (*Joseph,* 119-121) alone believes the women are attempting to exonerate themselves rather than Yūsuf. He understands their response to mean that they are not guilty of any wrong-doing, and disagrees that the king is more interested in Yūsuf's reaction to their seduction attempt rather than the women's part in the incident. I would maintain, however, that the king's sole purpose in questioning the women (whose one he assumes) is to ascertain Yūsuf's character as the interpreter of the king's dreams.

[485] *Qiṣaṣ* 230.

The confession of al-ʻAzīz's wife might have garnered more attention from exegetes had they included 12.52-53 as her part of her repentance; but the identity of the speaker in these *āyāt* is far from clear and scholars continue to debate the issue. Certainly the majority of exegetes, past and present (including al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī, al-Bayḍawī, al-Zamakhsharī, al-Qushayrī, al-Rabghūzī, and al-Ṭabaṭabaʿī, believe these *āyāt* are Yūsuf's words. As Yūsuf was still in prison (not being released until 12.54), they suggest that he spoke to the king's messenger, and declared his innocence to al-ʻAzīz (implicitly the subject of *li-**ya**ʿlama* and the object of *lam akhun**hu***) while assuming part of the blame for the incident. Moreover, these *āyāt* have been attributed to Yūsuf on the basis of the explicit *theological* content – i.e. the reference to *Allāh*, and *Rabbī* ("my Lord"), which Yūsuf used previously to refer to his God (cf. 12.23, 33, and 37). Among modern exegetes and translators, John Kaltner, A.H. Johns and S.V. Mir Ahmed follow this traditional interpretation.[486]

Others, however, such as Ibn Kathīr and more recently A.J. Arberry,[487] Sayyid Quṭb,[488] ʻAbdullah Yūsuf ʻAlī[489] and Louay Fatoohi,[490] have understood *āya* 52-53 to be a continuation of the confession of al-ʻAzīz's wife. This interpretation is posited for several reasons. They argue, as do I, that having just heard her words in 12.51, it appears unnecessarily awkward to have Yūsuf's speech intrude here, especially since he is not yet on the scene but still in prison. Moreover, neither 12.52 nor 53 is introduced by *qāl* which would indicate a change to a male speaker, and thus, both *āya* 52 and 53 seem to depend upon the *qālat imra't al-ʻAzīz* in *āya* 51. The question then arises as to whom is the wife of al-ʻAzīz is referring in *li-**ya**ʿlama* and *lam akhun**hu***? Ibn Kathīr believes she is referring to her husband thereby assuring him that she had

[486] Kaltner 66; Johns, "Quranic Presentation," 54; Mir 12.
[487] A.J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* 259-60.
[488] Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qur'ān,* v. 4, 2004.
[489] ʻAbdullah Yūsuf ʻAlī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* 564, n. 1712.
[490] Fatoohi, *Joseph* 122ff.

actually not been unfaithful. As Fatoohi has argued, however, due to the counsel of the "Witness" (12.26-27), al-'Azīz had already determined that his wife and Yūsuf had not engaged in an illicit act,[491] and thus concludes along with Arberry, Quṭb and Yūsuf 'Alī that the woman is referring to *Yūsuf*, and is apparently assuring him that she has not *slandered* him behind his back. From a grammatical perspective, she has not referred to her husband in her admission of 12.51, and thus the immediate antecedent of the third person masculine pronouns of 12.52 is Yūsuf.

*Āya* 52 ends with a statement made by al-'Azīz's wife indicating that she has not only confessed her crime and is truly repentant, but that she has become a *believer*: "God does not guide the scheme of the perfidious." The word *al-khā'nīn* is used only three times in the Qurʿān (4.105; 8.58 and 12.52). Its use in *al-Anfāl* 8.58 closely parallels that in *Sūrat Yūsuf*: "For God does not *love* the perfidious." The rejection of *al-khā'nīn* referred to in 8.58 is preceded by references to "the hypocrites" *(al-munāfiqūn*) and "the people of Pharaoh and those before them" who rejected and belied God's signs. Ironically, in 12.52 it is al-'Azīz's wife, an Egyptian, who now admonishes her own people.

In 12.53 she continues to humbly admit her wrongdoing, attributing it to the soul, which "incites one to evil." This is *al-nafs al-ammārah*, or "lower self" which was discussed above in the context of 12.23. Al-Qushayrī cites this passage in his *Risala* in the chapter on the "Opposition to the Self and Remembering its Failings," but attributes it to Yūsuf. Al-'Azīz's wife appeals to God's mercy calling Him *al-Ghafūr al-Raḥīm* – "Oft-Forgiving and Most Merciful" - two divine epithets that are particularly appropriate within the context of this *sūra,* which emphasizes repentance and forgiveness. In 12.29 al-'Azīz had enjoined her to seek forgiveness (*'astaghfiri*) for her sin. After Yūsuf's brothers admit their guilt, he says to them: "God will forgive you for He is the Most Merciful of those who show mercy (12.92). The

[491] Fatoohi, *Joseph* 122.

brothers return to their father imploring him: "Ask for us forgiveness for our sins, for we were sinners" (12.97), to which he responds: "I will ask my Lord forgiveness for you for he is *al-Ghafūr al-Raḥīm.*" *Al-Ghafūr* is a ubiquitous designation for God in the Qurʿān, appearing 101 times. [492]

The argument that 12.52-53 continues the speech of al-ʻAzīz's wife may also be made by comparing the Qur'ānic and extra-Qur'ānic accounts with a pre-Islamic text called *Joseph and Aseneth*. This is discussed at length below. If the speaker in *āyāt* 52-53 may indeed be identified as the wife of al-ʻAzīz, we have a noteworthy example of an Egyptian who came to believe in the God of Ibrāhīm due to the influence of the prophet Yūsuf. The wife of al-ʻAzīz may therefore be likened to Bilqīs, the name by which the Queen of Sabā' is known. *Sūrat al-Naml* 27.23-44 relates the story of the queen who worshipped the sun in addition to Allāh but who, through her contact with the prophet Sulaymān, submitted to the worship of Allāh alone.[493] Although the majority of exegetes have not regarded *āyāt* 52-53 as the words of al-ʻAzīz's wife, nevertheless Islamic tradition, particularly that of the *ṣūfīs*, has regarded her as an inspiring example of conversion, faith and holy longing, recounting her story in numerous literary works, particularly in Persian and Turkish,[494] the most renowned being Jami's poem *Yūsuf and Zulaykha*, and the numerous artistic renderings of her story.[495]

After the wife of al-ʻAzīz makes her dramatic confession and faithful contrition, the king once again orders that Yūsuf be brought to him. As has been noted,[496] unlike Genesis, the Qurʿān

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[492] Related epithets are *al-Ghāfir* (simply,"the Forgiver") used once in the *sūra* by the same name (*ayā* 3), and *al-Ghaffār* ("Most-Forgiving"), which appears five times (20.82; 38.66; 39.5; 40.42; 71.10).

[493] Oliver Leaman, "Bilqis," in: *The Qur'ān: an Encyclopedia*, 120-125; Leaman, "Appearance and Reality in the Qur'an: Bilqis and Zulaykha," *Islâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 10 (2003): 23-37.
[494] de Bruijn and Flemming,"Yūsuf and Zulaykhā."
[495] Naʿama Brosh with Rachel Milstein, *Biblical Stories in Islamic Painting* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1991).
[496] Kaltner 66.

does not contain an extended dialogue between the king and Yūsuf; their connection is immediate and brief. The king extends his beneficence to Yūsuf as quickly as al-ʻAzīz had when Yūsuf entered his service (12.21). That the reader is to draw a parallel between these two events in Yūsuf's life is suggested linguistically by the king's use of *makīn*, assuring Yūsuf that he is now "established" – i.e. secure in the king's service. *Makīn* is an adjectival form derived from the verb *makana* which appears in *āya* 21: "Thus did We establish (*makannā*) Yūsuf in the land," and likewise in 12.56. Thus, by telling Yūsuf he is *makīn*, the king announces and affirms that God's will for Yūsuf, first expressed at the beginning of his Egyptian sojourn, has now been fulfilled. Whereas al-ʻAzīz's generosity towards Yūsuf had been undone by the machinations of his wife, her testimony on behalf of Yūsuf now induces the king to restore Yūsuf's honor and elevate him in rank.

With Yūsuf's appointment as administrator of Egypt's storehouses, the section of the *sūra* that focuses on his interaction with the Egyptians comes to a conclusion (12.55-57), and the action shifts thereafter to his interaction with his brothers who arrive in Egypt in search of grain. These episodes in Yūsuf's story are not disconnected, however, but are linked linguistically. His ascension to a position of authority in Egypt is confirmed with God's pronouncement: *la nuḍī' ajr al-muḥsinīn* "We do not deny the reward of those who do good (12.56)." This echoes what had been said previously in 12.22: "Thus, we reward (*najzi*) those who do good (*al-muḥsinīn*)," and is repeated in *āya* 90, when Yūsuf finally reveals his true identity to his brothers. Finally, as the portion of the *sūra* that deals with the Egyptians concludes in 12.57, the listener is reminded: "The reward (*ajr*) of the Hereafter is best for those who believe and who are conscious (of God)." This poignantly links the experience of Yūsuf's forced entry into Egypt with the *muḥajjirūn* as referenced in *al-Naḥl* 16.41: "And those who migrate in (the way of) God after

suffering injustice, We will provide them with good things in this world, but the reward of the Hereafter is best."

There is no subsequent mention in *Sūrat Yūsuf* (or in any other *sūra*) of the king whom Yūsuf served, the king's officials and messenger, al-'Azīz, his wife, the witness, the women of the city, or any other Egyptian that appeared in 12.21-54. There is a passing reference to a crier (12.70) and Egyptians are the implied speakers in 12.72 and 74, but their speech reveals nothing about their image in the Qurʿān and, thus they are not discussed here. Exegetes and authors of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, as well as poets, have, however, been very interested in the fate of the main Egyptian characters, particularly al-'Azīz's wife as already mentioned above, and have greatly embellished the Qurʿānic account to complete their stories. Al-Ṭabarī tells us that the king dismissed al-'Azīz from his position in order to install Yūsuf, and that upon the death of al-'Azīz, the king married Yūsuf to al-'Azīz's wife (named Rāʿīl in al-Ṭabarī's work).[497] She continues to explain her attempted seduction to Yūsuf, which she now attributes to al-'Azīz's lack of interest in intercourse with women, and Yūsuf's irresistible beauty. The exoneration of her character is completed when Yūsuf discovers that she is in fact a virgin, and in time she bears Yūsuf two sons: Ephraim and Manasseh.

In al-Kisā'ī's version of events, the famine in Egypt renders Zulaykha (as al-'Azīz's wife is most commonly known outside the Qur'ān) an impoverished and aged woman unrecognizable to Yūsuf whose slave she has become. One day she approaches him, praising him and professing her faith in Yūsuf's God: "There is no god but God alone, who has no equal." Once she reveals her identity to him, he marries her and restores her fortune just as God restores her beauty. As in al-Ṭabarī's account, Yūsuf finds her a virgin as her husband had been rendered impotent by his excessive pride.

[497] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 392. This is repeated by al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ* 212.

Al-Rabghūzī also includes an extended account about Zulaykha and Yūsuf in his *Qiṣaṣ, w*hich I briefly summarize here for comparative purposes.[498] Eighteen years after the death of her husband, Zulaykha's love for Yūsuf has increased to the point that her excessive weeping over her unrequited love has resulted in blindness. When she hears that Yūsuf is out hunting one day, she asks her servant to position her on the road along which Yūsuf will pass so that she might call to him. Yūsuf is shocked at her wasted appearance and has her brought to his palace where he enquires about the idol she used to worship. She tells him that she had prayed to the idol to restore her youth, beauty and eyesight, but when her prayers went unanswered she smashed the idol. She then asks Yūsuf to present four petitions to his God on her behalf: that He restore her youth, beauty and eyesight, and a fourth request she will disclose if the other three are fulfilled. When she is returned to her former state, she "immediately embraced the faith and became a true believer."[499] Thus, as with al-Kisā'ī, al-Rabghūzī uses this epilogue to the Qur'ānic story to complete the tale of Zulaykha's conversion.

Now revealing her fourth request, she asks that Yūsuf take her as his wife. He rebuffs her, however, until the angel Jibrīl reveals to Yaʿqūb that it is God's will that Yūsuf marry her. Jibrīl himself conducts the marriage, and the two spend eighteen years together and had seven children: five boys and two girls. Al-Rabghūzī relates a tradition that as Yūsuf's love for Zulaykha increased so did her love for God, worshipping Him day and night such that she forgot about Yūsuf. In an ironic turn of events, Yūsuf becomes the pursuer, and tears her skirt as he tries to grab hold of her.[500] As in the other accounts, Yūsuf finds her a virgin. Many of the elements seen in the accounts composed by al-Ṭabarī, al-Kisā'ī, and particularly al-Rabghūzī are repeated and further embellished in Jāmī's poetic epic, such as: Zulaykha' loss of youth and

[498] Al-Rabghūzī 271-279.
[499] Al-Rabghūzī 273.
[500] This is illustrated in an 18th century Persian manuscript. (See: Brosh and Milstein, *Biblical Stories,* pl. 20.)

beauty due to her unrequited love for Yūsuf; her repentance and conversion; the destruction of her idol; Jibrīl's appearance to confirm the divinely-ordained marriage of Yūsuf to Zulaykha; the restoration of her youth and beauty; and her virginity.

According to Genesis (41.50-52), Joseph did not marry the wife of his former master but an Egyptian woman named Asenath (Gr. *Aseneth*),[501] the daughter of a priest of On (i.e. Heliopolis) named *Potiphera* (פוטיפרע) who is conflated in the Septuagint and Rabbinic tradition with *Potiphar* (פוטיפר). Asenath gives birth to two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, the eponymous ancestors of two tribes of Israel. Some rabbinic traditions apparently concerned with post-Exilic proscriptions against Israelite men marrying foreign women (e.g. Neh. 9.2; 13.23-31) identified Asenath as the daughter born to Dinah after she was violated by Shechem (Gen. 34.2). Carried by the archangel Michael to the borders of Egypt, Asenath was adopted by Potiphar (or Potiphera) and his wife Zulaykha,[502] and as an infant testified to Joseph's innocence, a striking parallel to Islamic traditions regarding the "the witness" in *Sūrat Yūsuf* 12.26-27 (see above).

Although the marriage of Joseph to Asenath amounts to little more than a footnote in Genesis, her story is expanded in the *Aggadah* and a lengthy Greek tale that clearly bears striking similarities to Islamic traditions about Yūsuf and Zulaykha. Much about the text, commonly referred to as *Joseph and Aseneth*, is debated, particularly with regard to its date of composition, provenance, original version, purpose and meaning, and whether the text is Jewish or Christian. Although some scholars believe the text is a Christian work written no earlier than the third or

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[501] The name *Asenath* (אסנת) may be identified as an Egyptian name meaning "Belonging-to-(the goddess) Neith," although Redford suggests that the consonant cluster *n* + *t* may signify the word for the word for "god" (*nūt*$^{e}$) rather than "Neith" (Cf. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel*, 424).

[502] Tamar Kadari, "Asenath: Midrash and Aggadah." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. 1 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. (Viewed on July 1, 2014) <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/asenath-midrash-and-Aggadah>.

fourth century CE,[503] the prevailing consensus is that the text is a product of Hellenistic Judaism, probably composed in Egypt between approximately 100 BCE and 100 CE, and that the longer version of the text is probably the original.[504] Although probably Jewish in origin, the text proved most popular in the Christian world as it survives in sixteen Greek manuscripts from the 10th- to the 19th century CE (with significant textual variations), and translated into Syriac,[505] Armenian, Latin, Serbian Slavonic, Modern Greek, Rumanian and Ethiopian (and perhaps Arabic) totaling some seventy manuscripts.[506] Thus, the text was widely circulated in the pre-Islamic Near East. The story, which exists in longer and shorter versions, falls into two parts of which only the first part has relevance for the Islamic *qiṣaṣ* of Yūsuf and Zulaykha.

The broad outline of part one is as follows: On his travels through Egypt on behalf of Pharaoh, Joseph stops at the house of Pentepheres, a priest of Heliopolis. Pentepheres' daughter is Aseneth, a beautiful, yet haughty virgin of eighteen years, attended by seven virgins. As an Egyptian, she dutifully worships a multitude of gods whose idols fill one of her chambers, and whose names and images were engraved on the jewelry she wore. Pentepheres esteems Joseph highly and wishes Aseneth to marry him, but she rejects the idea of marrying a Canaanite shepherd who allegedly had an illicit affair with his master's wife. Yet, when she sees Joseph she "was strongly cut to the heart" and immediately falls in love with him. Although Joseph strongly

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[503] Ross Shepard Kraemer, *When Aseneth Met Joseph: a Late Antique Tale of the Biblical Patriarch and His Egyptian Wife, Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1998); Rivka Nir, *Joseph and Aseneth: a Christian Book* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2012).

[504] For the various theories and state of research, see especially: Uta Barbara Fink, *Joseph und Aseneth: Revision des griechischen Textes und Edition der zweiten lateinischen Übersetzung* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008); Christoph Burchard, "The Text of *Joseph and Aseneth* Reconsidered," *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 14.2 (2005), 83-96; John J. Collins, *Joseph and Aseneth: Jewish or Christian?*, *Journal for the Study of Pseudepigrapha* 14.2 (2005), 97-112; Edith M. Humphrey, *Joseph and Aseneth* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Randall D. Chestnutt, *From Death to Life Conversion in Joseph and Aseneth*, Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha Supplement Series 16 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

[505] The earliest extant manuscript is actually a Syriac version (first half of the 6th century CE).

[506] Christoph Burchard, "Joseph and Aseneth," 178-179.

rebuffs her due to her idolatry, he utters a prayer asking God to bless her and show her the way to the true faith.

Utterly dismayed by Joseph's rejection of her, Aseneth returns to her chambers where she exchanges her fine clothing and jewelry for a simple black tunic girded with rope. Since Joseph rejected her on account of worshipping idols, she seizes all of them, smashes them to bits, and throws them out of the window along with the sacrifices she had made to them. She spends seven days weeping and fasting, and in lengthy and heartfelt supplications she confesses her sins of idolatry to "the Lord the God of the powerful Joseph, the Most High…a true God, and a living God, and a merciful God, and compassionate and long-suffering and pitiful and gentle" in whom she alone seeks refuge.

Aseneth is then visited by a divine messenger, the chief of the angels, who appears in form of Joseph. He tells her that God has heard her supplications and that she will be "formed anew and alive again," and will become Joseph's bride. To mark her new state, she is given the name "City of Refuge" signifying that because of her many will take refuge with the Lord God, the Most High. At Aseneth's request, the angelic visitor also blesses her seven virgin companions before he departs, ascending to heaven in a chariot of fire. As she prepares for Joseph's return, she notices that her severe penances have marred her face. Washing with pure water drawn from a spring, Aseneth is transformed into a radiant beauty. When he arrives, she explains her repentance and conversion, and recounts the visit of the angel. Joseph asks Pharaoh for Aseneth's hand in marriage and the couple is married with his blessing. Part one of the story concludes with a long penitential psalm prayed by Aseneth. (The second part of the story tells of a plot hatched by Pharaoh's son to abduct Aseneth and is not relevant to this discussion; I will therefore not treat it.)

When Philonenko published the short version of *Joseph and Aseneth* in 1968 (which he believes is the oldest version of the story which was later embellished), he stated unequivocally that the legend of Yūsuf and Zulaykha, especially as told by Jāmī, was obviously inspired by *Joseph and Aseneth*, that the relationship between the two texts is a close one, and that *Joseph and Aseneth* is certainly one of the literary sources for the legend of Yūsuf and Zulaykha.[507] The points of comparison are numerous, not only with Jami's poetical rendering as noted by Philonenko, but also with the various *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* cited above as well as *Sūrat Yūsuf*. The extraordinary beauty of Joseph/Yūsuf and Aseneth/Zulaykha are common elements in *Joseph and Aseneth* and in the Islamic texts. The virginity of both Aseneth and Zulaykha is stressed: Aseneth is said to have been a virgin of *eighteen* years;[508] Al-Rabghūzī tells us that Zulaykha was widowed for *eighteen* years before her reconciliation with Yūsuf who discovers she was still a virgin, and that they were married for *eighteen* years.[509] Both Aseneth and Zulaykha have idols in their chambers.[510] Both women are love struck when they see Joseph/Yūsuf; Aseneth is "strongly cut (to the heart),"[511] which appears to be quite close in meaning to the expression *shaghafa-ha* ("He struck her deeply with love") used in *Yūsuf* 12.30. Both women are rejected, however: Aseneth because of her idolatry and Zulaykha due to her immorality. Aseneth is visited by an angel, who assumes the form of Joseph, while in *Yūsuf* 12.31 the women of the city liken Yūsuf to a "noble angel." Perhaps most significantly, both women repent of their sins: Aseneth for her idolatry; and Zulaykha for her attempted seduction of Yūsuf and falsely accusing him. This repentance is seen not only in the extra-Qurʿānic accounts of Zulaykha, but in *Sūrat Yūsuf* itself (12.51-53, see above). Both women smash their idols to mark their conversion to belief in

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[507] Marc Philonenko, *Joseph et Aséneth: Introduction, Texte Critique, Traduction et Notes* (Leiden: Brill, 1968) 122.
[508] Burchard 203.
[509] Al-Rabghūzī 271 and 275.
[510] Burchard 204; al-Rabghūzī 208.
[511] Philonenko translates the Greek as: "son âme fut pénétrée d'une profonde douleur."

the God of Joseph/Yūsuf.[512] Due to their unrequited love for Joseph/Yūsuf, both women suffer a loss of their beauty and youth that is ultimately restored as a sign of their new life as believers in the one God.[513] The marriages of Aseneth to Joseph and Zulaykha to Yūsuf are said to have been divinely ordained.[514] Finally, both Aseneth and Zulaykha are said to have borne Ephraim and Manasseh.[515]

Given these numerous points of comparison, it is surprising that no studies of *Joseph and Aseneth* subsequent to the brief discussion in Philonenko's publication of the text mention the Qurʿānic or extra-Qurʿanic traditions. It is likewise surprising that no exegesis of Yūsuf traditions in Islam consider the *Joseph and Aseneth* text. This is perhaps due to the fact that Aseneth has virtually no place in Islamic texts, her role as wife of Joseph and mother of Ephraim and Manasseh having been assumed completely by Zulaykha. Perhaps the conflating of Potiphar and Pentepheres in rabbinic traditions led to the conflation of Aseneth and Zulaykha in Islamic traditions. Ibn Kathīr is one of the few Muslim exegetes who mention Aseneth as Yūsuf's wife, but that he married Zulaykha after Qiṭfīr died.[516]

In view of the above comparisons, it seems reasonable to conclude that elements of the *Joseph and Aseneth* story, especially Aseneth's repentance and conversion, found their way into the Islamic traditions of al-ʿAzīz's wife/Zulaykha. The means of transmission is relatively easy to explain as the text was widely disseminated in the Near East in Greek and translated into many other languages, including Syriac, as represented by the earliest extent text dated to the second half of the sixth-century, Armenian, Ethiopian and possibly Arabic. Thus, the text

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[512] Burchard 216; al-Rabghūzī 273.
[513] Burchard 232; al-Rabghūzī 273.
[514] Burchard 227 and 235; al-Rabghūzī 273-4.
[515] Burchard 236; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 392 (where she is called Rāʿīl) et al. While most Muslim exegetes specifically mention Ephraim and Manesseh, al-Rabghūzī does not.
[516] Ibn Kathīr, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* 241.

certainly would have been known among Christians in the Pre-Islamic Near East. If, as many believe, the text is Hellenistic Jewish in origin, then it is likely to have circulated widely (in Greek) among the Diaspora communities of the New East. Moreover, there is much in *Joseph and Aseneth* that would have resonated with Muslims. Aseneth prays to God repeatedly and at length to atone for her sin of idolatry, the most egregious sin according to the Qurʿān (*al-Nisā'* 4.48). Her smashing of the idols would have recalled Ibrāhīm's actions (*al-Anbiyā'* 21.57-58)[517] and Muhammad's cleansing of the Kaʿba. She repeatedly prays: "With you I take refuge, Lord," which is echoed frequently in the Qurʿān, e.g.:

> Say: "O Lord, I take refuge in You from promptings of the Evil Ones. And I seek refuge with You, O Lord, lest they approach me." (*al-Mu'minūn* 23.97-98)
>
> Say: "I seek refuge with the Lord of the Dawn…" (*al-Falaq* 113.1)
>
> Say: "I seek refuge with the Lord of Humanity…" (*al-Nās* 114.1)

Christian communities continued to copy the Greek text of *Joseph and Aseneth* and translate it into Latin, Serbian Slavonic and Rumanian as late as the 18th century even as Muslim authors produced numerous versions of the story of *Yūsuf and Zulaykha* in prose and poetry in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu and other Asian languages. Thus the stories of Aseneth and Zulaykha co-existed in the Mediterranean world, Eastern Europe and the Middle East where they inspired their respective communities with their example of repentance and conversion.

**Conclusions.** In this chapter I have provided a detailed exegesis of *Sūrat Yūsuf* 12.21-57 which concern Yūsuf's life among the Egyptians by drawing upon classical and contemporary *mufassirūn* and the authors of various *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* in order to provide an overall picture of the Egyptians mentioned therein, specifically: al-ʻAzīz, his wife, the "witness," the "women in the city," Yūsuf's prison companions, the king, and his officials. While the basic plot of *Sūrat*

[517] Jami likened Zulaykha to Ibrāhīm when she smashes her idol. Cf. Jamī, *Yusuf and Zulaikha*129.

*Yūsuf* clearly parallels the biblical story of Genesis, the Qur'ānic and extra-Qur'ānic narratives contain other material (scenes and characters) that is also found in the *Aggadah* - e.g. the presence of a "witness" and "women in the city." I have endeavored to show, however, that even when the Islamic accounts share material with Jewish traditions, the language in the Islamic texts is often more explicitly *theological*. Moreover, the Islamic characterization of the Egyptians often differs, particularly with regard to Potiphar/al-'Azīz, his wife (Zulaykha) and the king. I believe these differences in the depiction of the Egyptians reflect the different functions of the Joseph/Yūsuf story within the Jewish and Muslim communities. According to Genesis, when Joseph revealed his true identity to his brothers, he also made known to them God's purpose in sending him into Egypt:

> And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life…God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God: he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over the land of Egypt. (Gen 45.5-8)

Whatever wisdom (or entertainment) the reader is to glean from the various chapters that comprise the narrative, or whatever purpose the story originally served, in the end, the biblical story of Joseph was fitted into the larger narrative of Israel's history. It is more a story of patriarchs than it is of prophets. Although theologically the story conveys to some degree the image of an omniscient and omnipresent God even in the midst of treachery and adversity, as do the Islamic accounts albeit in a much more deliberate fashion, the Joseph story in Genesis *as finally redacted* explains why Israel came into Egypt and sets the scene for the Oppression and Exodus that follow. The Egyptian characters ultimately serve to dramatize the story of Israel alone through their interaction with Joseph who comes to Egypt to subjugate the Egyptians so that his own people might thrive and multiply therein. The connection between the conclusion of

the Joseph story and the beginning of Exodus is made linguistically by the use of the verbs פרה "to be fertile" and רבה "to increase:"[518]

> Thus Israel settled in the country of Egypt, in the region of Goshen; they acquired holdings in it, and were *fertile* and *increased* greatly. (Gen. 47.27)
>
> Joseph died, and all his brothers, and all that generation. But the Israelites were *fertile*; they multiplied and *increased*. (Ex. 1.7)

These two verbs are the very same ones used in the Creation account of Gen. 1.28 ("Be fertile and increase") and the recreation of Gen. 9.1 following the Flood. Thus, what God had commanded in the beginning and renewed with the family of Noah, is reiterated by Joseph, and brought to fulfillment in the Exodus narrative. Likewise, the verb עלה(ה) "to bring up/out" links Joseph (50.24) and the Exodus (Ex. 3.8).[519] While noting that the Joseph story is a wide-ranging and composite work of art, which cannot be considered from one viewpoint only, ultimately von Rad concludes that through redacting it became "the testimony to God's special rule in sacred history."[520] It thus serves to further highlight Israel's special or *covenanted* identity and destiny.

The Qur'ān, on the other hand, does not present a single continuous narrative of Israel's salvation history, and thus *Sūrat Yūsuf* does not serve as an extended prologue to the Exodus. Like Genesis 37/39-50, *Sūrat Yūsuf* comprises two parallel, albeit much terser, plots: Yūsuf's dilemma with his brothers in Canaan is mirrored by his predicament with the wife of al-'Azīz in Egypt. His brothers use his shirt as evidence of his alleged demise, as al-'Azīz's wife uses his torn shirt to accuse him of assault. His brothers throw him into a well as al-'Azīz's wife urges that he be cast into prison. In these, the two narratives are similar. *Sūrat Yūsuf* draws another

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[518] Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 194.

[519] Westermann 210. Von Rad speaks of "the so-called promise to the patriarchs" that gives cohesion to patriarchal narratives. He notes, however, that this was not the original thrust of the Joseph story, but was added when Joseph's tale was added to the stories of the patriarchs (Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology, Volume I: the Theology of Israel's Historical Traditions,* Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001, 167).

[520] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: a Commentary*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 434.

parallel, however, that is lacking in Genesis and the *Aggadah*: al-'Azīz's wife admits her guilt and repents of her actions before the king, and Yūsuf's brothers confess their wrongdoing to him *and* Yaʿqūb. In the Hebrew text, Potiphar's wife never recants her accusation against Joseph, and Joseph's brothers never confess their wrongdoing to Jacob, and only ask their brother's forgiveness *after* Jacob's death, and then only from fear of Joseph's revenge. Once again, however, Joseph overlooks their treachery reiterating that, "God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people as he is doing today (Gen. 50.20). The emphasis is *not* on the brothers' sin and repentance but on the survival of Israel.

By contrast, the core themes of *Sūrat Yūsuf* are the ultimate triumph of truth and faith over lies and falsehood and the vindication of a prophet of God, themes that would have resonated with the Muslim community struggling against the disbelieving and scheming Quraysh. Yūsuf is the central figure, but as *preacher and prophet to the Egyptians* rather than patriarch of the Israelites. As prophet to the Egyptians, he comes to *convert* them not to subjugate them, to bring them to faith rather than to servitude. In the Qur'ān's retelling of the Joseph story, it is *belief* that matters, not blood-ties. While Yūsuf preaches to his fellow prisoners, the biblical Joseph expresses no interest in the religious convictions of the Egyptians. This illustrates well the contrast between the *covenanted* perspective of the Hebrew Scriptures and the *missionary* quality of the Qur'ān. As already noted, the primary purpose of prophets according to the Qur'ān is to bring (all) people to belief in the one God (*Al-Anbiyā'* 21.25). Yūsuf's *khuṭbah* to his fellow prisoners (12.37-40) demonstrates this. Islamic tradition assumes his mission among the Egyptians extended beyond the walls of prison for as al-Kisā'ī wrote, in response to God's command: "Yūsuf ceased not to call the people of Egypt to be faithful until

many of them did believe."[521] With the example of Yūsuf before him, Muhammad is exhorted in the final verses of *Sūrat Yūsuf:* "Say: 'This is my way. I summon you to God based on clear evidence, I and those who follow me; and glory to God for I am not one of the idolaters'" (108).

Thus, *Sūrat Yūsuf*, exegetical texts, and various *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* depict several of the Egyptians associated with Yūsuf as believers. One of them is even called a "witness" (*shāhid*), signifying a witness to the faith rather than in a legal sense. Yūsuf's master al-'Azīz senses that Yūsuf's presence will be beneficial (21) and is therefore esteemed as one of the sharpest (أفرس) of individuals. He exhorts his wayward wife to seek (God's) forgiveness for her sin (29) in words similar to those Yaʿqūb uses when he asks forgiveness for his sons' crimes (98). The women of the city acknowledge the illicit behavior of al-'Azīz's wife (30), invoke the name of God (*ḥāsha li-llāh*) on two occasions (31 and 50), and ultimately attest to Yūsuf's innocence (51). At least one of Yūsuf's prison companions recognizes him as a person of truth and sincerity, greeting him *al-ṣadīq* (46). In much of the exegetical and extra-Qur'ānic literature, the king of Egypt who frees Yūsuf and elevates him to a position of authority is consistently described as a believer. Finally, there is al-'Azīz's wife (Rāʿīl or Zulaykhā). While she initially embodies unrestrained and illicit desire, she ultimately becomes a celebrated icon of conversion, faith and purified love based upon the contrition and piety she displays (51 and possibly 52-53), and perhaps through conflation with Aseneth, the biblical wife of Joseph known especially from the *Aggadah* and the text *Joseph and Aseneth*. For *ṣūfīs* especially, Zulaykha comes to personify the human soul, the *nafs*, "which is purified through constant inner struggle and suffering and can finally return to her Lord as 'the soul at peace."[522] For the Islamic community as a whole, as

[521] Al-Kisā'ī 191.
[522] Schimmel 68.

a non-Arab and repentant convert, "she may also be considered a forerunner of Islam's worldwide *mission* and Egypt's future adherence to Islam."[523]

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When Yūsuf's family at last arrives in Egypt, he welcomes them saying: "Enter Egypt, if God's wills, in security" (12.99). He uses the word *'amin(īn)* as the king had previously (12.54) to assure Yūsuf that he would thrive in Egypt. Israel's security in Egypt would be short-lived, however. Just as many Muslim exegetes and authors acknowledged that Yūsuf's king, al-Rayyān, became a believer, so too did they relate that his successor, Qābūs b. Muṣʿab, was not only an unbeliever, but that he rejected Yūsuf's invitation to believe in God (see above). He ruled as pharaoh until the time of Mūsā's encounter with the Divine on Sinai, and was succeeded by his brother al-Walīd b. Muṣʿab. Whereas al-ʿAzīz's wife was considered by many to be the epitome of licentiousness and deception until her confession (and apparent conversion), al-Walīd, the Pharaoh of the Exodus, embodies for much of the Islamic tradition all that is evil. Even in his court, however, the Prophet Mūsā encounters Egyptians who aspired to be "the foremost of believers."

[523] Walter Wagner, *Opening the Qur'an: Introducing Islam's Holy Book* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008) 263 (my emphasis).

# Chapter 5: Mūsā and the Egyptians

## I. Introduction

Having explored in detail the depiction of the Egyptians in story of Yūsuf as presented in *Sūrat Yūsuf* and various versions of *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, this chapter analyses the references to Egyptians who appear in the accounts of the Exodus of the *banī Isrāʿīl* from Egypt as related in numerous *sūras* of the Qur'ān and *Qiṣaṣ*. These include references to Pharaoh (*firʿawn*), the people of Pharaoh (*āl firʿawn*), his wife (*imra'at*), his ministers (*mala'*) and magicians (*saḥarah*), one of Pharaoh's advisors named Hāmān, an unnamed "believer' (*mu'min*), and perhaps an unnamed messenger as well. Whereas the Qur'ānic narrative of Yūsuf's sojourn among the Egyptians is confined exclusively to *Sūrat Yūsuf* (with the exception of brief references in *al-Anʿām* 6.84 and *Ghāfir* 40.34), the prophet Mūsā's interactions with the Egyptians are recounted and reiterated in twenty-six different *sūras* and approximately 300 *āya.*[524] This requires a somewhat difference approach than that used in the previous chapter, which followed the narrative of *āyāt* 21-57 of *Sūrat Yūsuf* sequentially.

The principal epsiodes in the story of the Oppression of the *banī Isrāʿīl* and their subsequent Exodus from Egypt are related by a few lengthy narrative passages (7.103-141; 20.39-79; 26.10-68; 28.1-42; 40.23-50) which repeat some of the same material, and by numerous other shorter passages which comprise snippets of narrative or exhortative reminders of the fate of Pharaoh and the Egyptians who neglected God's signs. Thus, as the saga of Israel in Egypt generally unfolds in a piecemeal fashion, my first task will be to reconstruct the sequence of events in the Qur'ānic accounts, and briefly compare and contrast this with the

[524] A list of these Qur'ānic references may be found in Appendix II. There are over 300 *āya* referenced in the appendix which includes those subsidiary verses which, although they do not mention the Egyptians specifically, are nevertheless required to complete sentences or thoughts about Egyptians.

biblical account of Exodus 1-14. Then I will consider the *possible* sequence in which these *āyāt* were revealed and under what circumstances were they revealed (*asbāb al-nazūl*) in order to determine the possible significance and meaning they had for the early *ummah.* I will develop a complete character profile for each of the Egyptians or groups of Egyptians in the Qur'ān's Exodus *āyāt* by focusing on significant and recurring words and phrases in the relevant *āyāt*, and compare these characterizations with biblical and *aggadic* material. I will also consider how the Egyptians of the Exodus story have been understood and viewed by *mufassirūn* and authors of *Qiṣaṣ*. As I have stated previously, the historicity of the Qur'ān's accounts of the prophets in Egypt is not the primary concern of this study, but given the prominence of the Exodus story in the Qur'ān and Islamic tradition, as it is in the Jewish as well as Christian traditions, I begin with a brief summary of the contemporary historical and archaeological scholarship on the subject.

* * *

With the notable exception of scholars such as Kenneth Kitchen (Professor Emeritus of Egyptology, University of Liverpool)[525] and James Hoffmeier (Professor of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern History and Archaeology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School),[526] there are relatively few Egyptologists and archaeologists today who accept an historical Exodus of Israelites from Egypt such as that described in the Hebrew Bible (and thus, by extension, the Qur'ān).[527] While it is true that there is both textual and archaeological evidence for Semites in

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[525] *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 241-312; "Egyptians and Hebrews, from Raʿamses to Jericho," in: *The Origin of Early Israel – Current Debate: Biblical, Historical and Archaeological Perspectives,* ed. Shmuel Aḥituv and Eliezer D. Oren (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 1998), 65-134; *Pharaoh Triumphant: the Life and Times of Ramesses II* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1982), 70-71; "Exodus, The," in: *The Anchor Bible Dictionary, V. 2,* ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Toronto, 1992), 700-708.

[526] *Israel in Egypt*.

[527] Historian Joseph Mélèze Modrzejewski carefully remarks that "Egyptology can guarantee the historicity of the sojourn of the Hebrews," [sic] but also admits that it "cannot afford us direct confirmation of the biblical account." (*The Jews of Egypt*, 10.)

Egypt, some of whom (the so-called *'apiru*) were undoubtedly pressed into service or labor for the Egyptian king,[528] as well as some "egyptianizing" elements in the biblical account, especially the name "Moses,"[529] direct evidence from Egyptian sources for a rebellion of slaves, the associated plagues, and an exodus is lacking.[530] Thus, the Exodus is mentioned only briefly in recent histories of ancient Egypt, if at all.[531] Most Egyptologists are willing to concede that an exodus of Semites from Egypt *could* have happened,[532] but that its actual impact on Egypt would have been negligible. Egyptologist Jan Assmann theorizes that the Exodus account is actually a conflation of the Hyksos' sojourn in Egypt (ca. 1650 and 1550 BCE) and the religious revolution of Pharaoh Akhenaten (1352-1336 BCE).[533]

One of the obstacles for scholars attempting to place the Exodus within a historical context is that neither the pharaoh of the Oppression nor of the Exodus is identified by name in the biblical account. This is curious in view of the names of other pharaohs that appear in the Bible's "historical" books, such as Shishak (Sheshonq I, r. 945-924 BCE) in 1 Kings. 14.25-28

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[528] Hoffmeier 52-68.

[529] Hoffmeier 138-142.

[530] It should be noted, however, that Egyptologist Hans Goedicke believes that Speos Artemidos inscription of Hatshepsut (ca. 1473-1458 BCE) refers to the Exodus of the Israelites and the plagues of ash and hail (Ex. 9.8-11 and 23-5), as well as the miracle at the sea (Ex. 14.21). See his *The Speos Artmedidos Inscription of Hatshepsut and Related Discussions* (Oakille: Halgo, 2004) 96-104. There have also been attempts to historicize the Exodus based on naturalistic explanations of the plagues. See, for example: Barbara Sivertsen, *The Parting of the Sea: How Volcanoes, Earthquakes and Plagues Shaped the Story of the Exodus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Siro Igino Trevisanto, *The Plagues of Egypt: Archaeology, History and Science Look at the Bible* (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2005); and Colin J. Humphreys, *The Miracles of the Exodus: a Scientist's Discovery of te Extraordinary Naural Causes of the Biblical Stories* (San Francisco: Harper, 2003).

[531] E.g. *The Oxford History of Ancient* Egypt has no references to the Exodus. Toby Wilkinson mentions it only briefly in his *The Rise and Fall of Ancient Egypt*, 336. Mieroop (*A History of Ancient Egypt*) simply remarks that questions regarding Egypt and the Exodus "are of special importance to students of biblical history, and will remain contentious and unanswerable until further evidence emerges" (254).

[532] E.g. Nicholas Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt*, trans. Ian Shaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 258-259; Christian Desroches Noblecourt, *Ramsès II: la Véritable Histoire* (Paris: Pygmalion, 1996) 248-256; Carol A. Redmount, "Bitter Lives: Israel in and out of Egypt," *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford, 1998) 58-88.

[533] Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: the Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1997); *The Mind of Egypt: History and Meaning in the Time of the Pharaohs*, trans. Andrew Jenkins (New York: Metropolitan, 2002) 283.

and Necho (Nekau II, r. 610-595) in 2 Kg. 23.28-30. According to 1 Kings 6.1, Solomon began to build the House of the Lord in the fourth year of his reign, 480 years after the Israelites had left Egypt. Historians have established Solomon's fourth year as 968 BCE.[534] This would place the Exodus in the year 1448 BCE, during the reign of Thuthmose III (1479-1425 BCE),[535] an indefatigable warrior-king who led no less than seventeen military campaigns into Syria-Palestine, and thus an unlikely historical setting for the Exodus.

Due to the fact that the name of one of the store cities built by the Hebrews is given as *Ramses* (רעמסס) in Ex. 1.11 and Num. 33.3 and 5, it has been long assumed that the Exodus instead occurred during the reign of the Egyptian pharaoh Ramses II (r.1279-1213 BCE). Although he was clearly not the first pharaoh to bear this name, and would in time be followed by *nine* other Ramses, the last of whom reigned from 1099-1069 BCE, Ramses II was undoubtedly the most significant of kings by that name and the most prolific builder among all of Egypt's rulers. It has thus likewise been assumed that the city called *Ramses* in the book of Exodus actually refers to *Pi-Ramses* ("The House of Ramses"), the administrative capital of Ramses II in the eastern Delta, and today identified with modern Tell al-Dabʿa-Qantir. By the time the Exodus accounts were completed and redacted, however, there was some confusion about the city from which the Israelites had departed Egypt. Although the Book of Numbers (33. 3, 5) indicates that the Israelites departed Egypt from the city *Ramses*, Psalm 78 verses 12 and 43 gives the location as "the plain of Zoan," that is Tanis, the capital of Egypt from 1070 to 725 BCE. Adding to the confusion is that when *Pi-Ramses* (Tell al-Dabʿa-Qantir) was abandoned at

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[534] *The Jewish Study Bible*, 683 (note). Ex. 12.40 gives the number of years Israel was enslaved as 430 years and Gen. 15.13 "predicts" a period of 400 years, but neither reference provides another year, regnal or otherwise, that would allow us to calculate a date for the Exodus.

[535] Richard A. Gabriel, *Thuthmose III: the Military Biography of Egypt's Greatest Warrior King* (Washington, DC: Potomac, 2009).

the end of the Ramesside Period due to the shift in the branch of Nile along which it was situated, many of the stone structures and colossal statuary were relocated to Tanis. Thus, before the excavations of Tell al-Dabʿa-Qantir, Tanis appeared as if it had been Ramses II's capital. As Redford observes, the seemingly anachronistic reference to Tanis in the Psalms and other toponyms in the Scriptures suggest that the Exodus account derives from the Saite Period (seventh-sixth centuries BCE).[536] On stylistic grounds, many biblical scholars, too, believe that "main mass of the [Exodus] text is of exilic or early post-exilic origin"[537] even though they may hold to an historical kernel within the text.

Although the use of the name *Ramses* in Ex. 1.11 for one of the cities built by the Hebrews is not insignificant, there is no archaeological evidence that *either directly or unquestionably* ties Ramses II (or any other Egyptian ruler for that matter) to the events described in the Book of Exodus. Authors of monographs on Ramses II seem obliged to refer to the Exodus due to the prominence of the biblical account, while not offering any compelling evidence to associate it with him.[538] While both Kitchen and Hoffmeier are quick to excuse the absence of Pharaoh's name in Exodus as common practice for Egyptians or even theological in

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[536] Redford, *Egypt, Canaan and Israel* 409.

[537] Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period*, *Vol. 1: from the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy*, trans. John Bowden (Louisville: Westminster, 1994), 43. Albertz maintains that: "the Exodus tradition constitutes a collection memory of a liberation from Egypt." See his: "Exodus: Liberation History against Charter Myth," in: *Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition,* ed. Jan Willem Van Heuten and Anton Houtepen (Assen: Royal van Gorcum, 2001), 143. Manfred Görg ("Exodus," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, v. 1, 489-90) like Albertz he holds that the Exodus account comprises "passages of Deuteronomistic and priestly origin from the Babylonian Exile and after the Exile, combined with some possibly pre-Exile material." Moreover, he believes that the "pre-Exile stratum of the *Exodus* tradition seems to have been written with criticism for the kingdoms of Judah and Israel concerning their problematic relations with Egypt." Yet, he also considers Israel's Exodus a "serious possibility."

[538] T.G.H. James, *Ramesses II* (Vercelli: White Star, 2002), 28, 37, 95; Joyce Tyldesley, *Ramesses: Egypt's Greatest Pharaoh* (London: Viking, 2002), 56-7, 187. In her introduction to the catalog for an exhibit on Ramses II, Egyptologist Christiane Desroches Noblecourt wrote that the Exodus most likely took place between years 10 and 18 of Ramses' reign "though, in truth, no Egyptian document alludes to it." (*The Great Pharaoh Ramses and His Time,* Canada Exim, 1985).

intent,[539] they fail to mention (as do all who debate the issue) that the *Aggadah* names both the Pharaoh of the Oppression and of the Exodus, and *neither is called Ramses*; their names are given as *Malol* and his son *Adikam*,[540] neither of which are historical figures according to Egyptian sources, nor are their names Egyptian. The identification of Ramses II as Pharaoh of the Exodus is, in the view of some, supported by the so-called "Israel Stele" of his son and successor Merenptah (r. 1213-1203). Flinders Petrie (1853-1942) discovered this monumental inscription on the west bank of Luxor in 1896. It primarily commemorates Merenptah's victory against the Libyans, but also briefly mentions his defeat of the Canaanite cities Ashkelon, Gezer and Yanoam, as well as a *people* (rather than a place) identified as "Israel," the first historical use of that name.[541] All that we can safely conclude from the inscription, however, is that when Merenptah campaigned into southern Canaan in 1207 BCE, he encountered a group of people collectively identified as "Israel." It does not say where they originally came from or how long they had been in Canaan, or how they relate to the biblical Israelites.

While Egyptian sources neither convincingly prove nor categorically disprove an exodus, the most serious challenge to the historicity of the biblical Exodus actually comes from the archaeological sites of ancient Canaan rather than Egypt. In the early 1990's there were two symposia in the United States that explored the current state of scholarship regarding the Exodus and the emergence of ancient Israel based on historical and archaeological evidence. The first symposium was held in October 1991 at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC.[542] Among the speakers were William Dever, at the time Professor of Near Eastern Archaeology and

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[539] Kitchen, "Egyptians and Hebrews," 105-6; Hoffmeier 109.
[540] Ginzberg, I/II, 441-476.
[541] Mohamed Saleh and Hourig Sourouzian, *The Egyptian Museum Cairo Official Catalog* (München: Prestel-Verlag, 1987) no. 212. For a complete translation, see: Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature, v. 2*, 73-78.
[542] The presented papers were published as: *The Rise of Ancient Israel.*

Anthropology at the University of Arizona in Tucson. Dever, who frequently defends the historical value of biblical texts, and indeed has been a harsh critic of biblical "minimalists" and "revisionists," presented his findings from early Israelite sites in the central hill country of Palestine. On the basis of architectural remains, pottery and inscriptional evidence, he concluded:

> For the most part, the early Israelites were agriculturalists from the fringes of Canaanite society…There is no reason to believe that the majority of the Israelites had been pastoral nomads, much less barbarians sweeping in from the desert. They were displaced Canaanites. For the most part, they came from various elements of Canaanite society who decided to settle the hill-country frontier.[543]

In 1992, Dever was a speaker at a second conference on the Exodus at Brown University. In his paper, "Is There Any Archaeological Evidence for the Exodus?," he once again concluded:

> The implication of the new picture of indigenous Late Bronze Age Canaanite origins for the majority of the early Israelites population is clear. Not only is there no archaeological evidence for an exodus, there is no need to posit such an event. We can account for Israelites origins, historically and archaeologically, without presuming any Egyptian background. As a Syro-Palestinian archaeologist, I regard the historicity of the Exodus as a dead issue, despite this symposium's raising it again.[544]

In a subsequent monograph, Dever wrote: "Indeed, the overwhelming archaeological evidence today of largely indigenous origins for early Israel leaves no room for an exodus from Egypt or a 40-year pilgrimage through the Sinai wilderness."[545] Finally, in a later work, Dever reflected on the significance of the Exodus story in lieu of the historical and archaeological evidence that seems to disprove a literal reading of the biblical text:

> Rather than attempt to defend the factual historicity of the Exodus traditions, I suggest that we must understand the Exodus story precisely as a myth, specifically as "metaphor

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[543] "How to Tell a Canaanite from an Israelite" in: *The Rise of Ancient Israel* 53.
[544] In: *Exodus: the Egyptian Evidence*, ed. Ernest Friedrichs and Leonard Lesko (Winona Lake, IN: Eisebrauns, 1997), 81. Archaeological perspectives on ancient Israel were also presented at an earlier symposium at Tel Aviv University in 1982. Those papers were published as: *Egypt, Israel, Sinai: Archaeological and Historical Relationships in the Biblical Period*, ed. Anson F. Rainey (Tel Aviv University, 1987).
[545] *What did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001) 99.

> for liberation." Instead of demanding to know "what really happened" that might have given rise to the story…, we need to ask what the story meant in ancient times, and what it can mean today.[546]

If I have dwelled on Dever's conclusions, it is because while he generally represents a more "conservative" approach to matters of biblical historicity, i.e. upholding the historical veracity of biblical accounts, on the subject of the Exodus he is in virtual agreement with many of the "minimalists" or "revisionists" that he so often vigorously challenges, particularly Israeli archaeologist Israel Finkelstein. Based on his own findings, Finkelstein too has argued contrary to the book of Exodus that Israel emerged *from within Canaan* rather than out of Egypt, and like Dever remarks that:

> The saga of Israel's Exodus from Egypt is neither historical truth nor literary fiction. It is a powerful expression of memory and hope born in a world in the midst of change…To pin this biblical image down to a single date is to betray the story's deepest meaning."[547]

Faced with the archaeological evidence from Canaan which establishes with some degree of certainty that the majority of early Israelites did not come out of Egypt, biblical scholars can confidently say little more than "*some kind of 'Exodus event'*" has "*some general plausibility*,"[548] "that the broad outlines of the biblical narrative are within the realm of the *possible*,"[549] or "not inherently implausible."[550] Clearly for Jews for whom the Exodus is commemorated not only annually in the Passover *Seder* but recalled in the observance of every *Shabbat*, questions concerning the historicity of the Israelites' liberation from slavery in Egypt are especially significant, as they are for Christians who likewise recall the Exodus annually in the readings and

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[546] *Who Were the Early Israelites and Where Did They Come From?* 233.
[547] Israel Finklestein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed* 70-71.
[548] Graham Davies, "Was there an Exodus?," *In Search of Pre-Exilic Israel*, ed. John Day (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 33 and 36 (my emphasis). See also: Karel on der Toorn, "The Exodus as Charter Myth," and John J. Collins, "The Development of the Exodus Tradition," in: *Religious Identity and the Invention of Tradition*, 126, 145, 148.
[549] Carol Myers, *Exodus* (Cambridge: University Press, 2005), 10 (my emphasis).
[550] Jeffrey H. Tigay, "Exodus," *The Jewish Study Bible*, 104.

rituals of the Easter Vigil, as well as for every oppressed people who have found inspiration and hope in the story of Israel's deliverance from slavery (see introduction). Yet, Finkelstein asserts that when Jews celebrate the Passover:

> We do not deal with the question of whether or not archaeology supports the story of the Exodus. Rather, we praise the beauty of the story and its national and universal values. Liberation from slavery *as a concept* is at stake, not the location of Pithom. In fact, attempts to rationalize stories like this, as many scholars have tried to do in order to "save" the Bible' historicity, are not only sheer folly, but in themselves an act of infidelity.[551]

In his commentary on the Book of Exodus, Jewish biblical scholar Nahum Sarna recognizes the historical and archaeological challenges to the biblical account and concludes: "it must be remembered that the biblical narrative is a theological exposition – a document of faith, not a historiographical record."[552] Echoing Sarna in his commentary on Exodus for the *Interpretation* series written for a Christian audience, Terence Fretheim writes that the primary concerns of the book of Exodus are "theological and kerygmatic," and that even "where the historiographer's judgment may be quite negative, the material does not lose its potential value to speak a word of God across the centuries, in Israel's time or ours."[553] Janzen ignores questions of historicity completely in his volume on Exodus in the *Westminster Bible Companion* series, also written for a Christian audience, choosing instead to read Exodus "as a story" of liberation and redemption, for Israel and for all people.[554]

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[551] Israel Finkelstein and Amihai Mazar, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Debating Archaeology and the History of Early Israel*, ed. Brian B. Schmidt (Ledien: Brill, 2007) 187.
[552] Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991) xiv-xv. Sarna is more aware here of the historical and archaeological issues than in in his earlier work: *Exploring Exodus: the Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1986) in which assumes a Ramesside setting for the Exodus.
[553] Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991) 7-9.
[554] J. Gerald Janzen, *Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997) 1-8.

## II. Historicity and the Exodus in Islam

For centuries Muslim scholars, too, have attempted to locate the Exodus in history, but their efforts have proved no more successful than those of their Jewish and Christian counterparts. Like the Hebrew Scriptures, the Qur'ān does not give the name of the Pharaoh of the Exodus. In addition to naming prophets (and Maryam), the Qur'ān also names a few notorious unbelievers, such as Abū Lahab, the "Father of Flame," the nickname given to Muhammad's uncle 'Abd al-'Uzza b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib who opposed the Prophet and faced a fiery punishment according to *Sūrat al-Lahab* (or: *al-Masad*) 111.[555] The other non-prophetic individuals named in the Qur'ān come from the Exodus story: Pharaoh's minister Hāmān and the Hebrew named Qārūn, both of whom joined Pharaoh in rejecting Mūsā (*al-'Ankabūt* 29.29; *Ghāfir* 40.24). As Pharaoh is the epitome of *kufr* and the most vehement enemy of God's prophets, it is perhaps remarkable that he goes unnamed throughout the Qur'ān as in the Hebrew Bible.

Like the *aggadic* texts of Judaism, however, Islamic *tafāsīr* and *Qiṣaṣ* do name him and provide other biographical details, although they lack historical foundation and appear to be grounded more in folklore than fact. According to al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, after al-Rayyān, the first king whom Yūsuf had served, died, Egypt was ruled by Qābūs b. Muṣʿab b. Muʿāwiyah b. Numayr b. al-Silwās b. Qārān b. 'Amr b. Imlāq b. Lud b. Shem b. Nūḥ. He was Yūsuf's second master and an infidel in contrast to his predecessor. Yūsuf called him to faith but he refused to submit.[556] This is repeated by al-Thaʿlabī.[557] He married Āsiyah bt. Muzāḥim b. 'Ubayd b. al-Rayyān b. al-Walīd. Qābūs was the Pharaoh until the time that Moses was called by God, and thus is to be equated with the Pharaoh of the Oppression (Ex. 2.23).

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[555] Colin Turner, "Abu Lahab," and Oliver Leaman, "Abu Lahab's Significance" in: *The Qur'an: an Encylclopedia*, 9-10; Edward D.A. Hulmes, "Abu Lahab" in: *Encyclopedia of Islamic Civilization and Religion*, 16.
[556] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 378, 412-413, and 444.
[557] Al-Thaʿlabī 278-279.

Qābūs was succeeded by his brother al-Walīd b. Muṣʿab (b. al-Rayyān)[558] who married Āsiyah, his brother's widow. Al-Ṭabarī describes him as "more insolent than Qābūs, more disbelieving, and more boastful."[559] Al-Thaʿlabī calls him Abū l-ʻAbbās b. Walīd etc. with a slightly different patrilineage than that provided by al-Ṭabarī, and describes him as "richer and grander than Qābūs and more imprudent," noting that the Children of Israel "had not a pharaoh more insolent towards God than he, not haughtier in words, nor harder of heart, not long lasting in his reign, not more evil in his rule towards the Children of Israel."[560] While al-Thaʿlabī notes his marriage to Āsiyah, he does not indicate that she was Qābūs' widow.

With al-Kisā'ī and al-Rabghūzī, Pharaoh's identity becomes more colorful and quite criminal. According to al-Kisā'ī, Pharaoh was born to two Amalekite parents in Egypt, Muṣʿab ibn Samīr and his wife Rauba after a long period of childlessness. Muṣʿab had received an omen that foretold of the birth of their son who would be "one of the pillars of Hell!"[561] After Muṣʿab dies, Rauba gives birth to the son whom she named Walīd. The boy grows into a haughty and profligate young man earning him the nickname *ʿAwn-nafsi* – "I can take care of myself" – a phrase uttered when his mother reproached him for his misbehavior, and indicative of the arrogance for which he will later be known. The story provides an inventive and amusing, however erroneous, Arabic etymology for the word *firʿawn* as coming from *farra ʻAwn* – i.e.

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[558] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* 1, 351. The name *al-Walīd* is Arabic (from *walada,* "to give birth") rather than ancient Egyptian, and means simply "the newborn (son)." Phonically, it bears no resemblance to any ancient Egyptian name. The Egyptian equivalent to *al-Walīd* in terms of meaning is *ms* – "son" or "child" derived from the verb *msi* ("to give birth") as in the name: *R'-ms-sw* or *Ramses,* meaning "(The sun-god) Rʿ has born him." It is possible that the name *al-Walīd* in Islamic Exodus accounts echoes, at least in part, the name *Ramses*. The ancient Egyptian word *ms* is, of course, the origin of the name "Moses."
[559] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 444.
[560] Al-Thaʿlabī 279.
[561] Al-Kisā'ī 210.

"Awn fled," describing an incident in which he literally lost his shirt in gambling and ran away naked.[562]

After engaging in some criminal activity and a jail sentence, he finds work with a man and in time inherits the man's fortune, but squanders it gambling. To earn money, he sits at the gate of a cemetery and begs money from people who have come to bury their dead. When he impedes the burial of a royal princess, the reigning king is forced to deal with this shady entrepreneur. To protect himself, Walīd ("Pharaoh") builds a stronghold and hires henchmen. Disturbed by a dream that foretells his downfall, the king wanders out one night without his servants, and is kidnapped and killed by Walīd's henchmen. Walīd enters the palace, seizes the king's crown and ascends the throne as Pharaoh. Ironically, Iblīs is the first one to bow down before him and call him "lord," although he had refused to bow down to Adam (*al-Baqarah* 2.34, etc.).

Rabghūzī's account is a bit confused or perhaps loses something in translation. As seen in the previous chapter, like other authors and exegetes he had written that al-Rayyān became a believer.[563] At the beginning of his chapter on Mūsā, however, we read: "It has been related: Rayyān lived during the time of the prophet Joseph. He went on living up to the time of the prophet Moses. Of all men, he was the most foul." This obviously is in direct contradiction to al-Rabghūzī's earlier remarks and certainly is meant to refer *not* to al-Rayyān, but to *Pharaoh* (of Exodus fame) whose story immediately follows. Al-Rabghūzī does not provide a proper name for Pharaoh, although in his account God instructs Mūsā to address Pharaoh by his *kunya*: Abū al-Walīd.[564] According to al-Rabghūzī, Pharaoh was *not* born in Egypt; rather he hailed from Balkh in Khorasan, left his drought-stricken home, and travelled to Egypt with a man from

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[562] For the etymology of the word *pharaoh,* see Chapter 1: "Ibrāhīm and the Egyptians," n. 20.
[563] Al-Rabghūzī 270.
[564] Al-Rabghūzī 313.

Būshanj[565] named Hāmān, as in the Qur'ān. Other medieval authors also report that Pharaoh was from somewhere in Central Asia. Al-Qurṭubī (1214-73), for example, cites a tradition that Pharaoh "was a Persian, from the people of Iṣṭakhr."[566] In Egypt, Pharaoh and Hāmān are able to amass a small fortune first by snatching expensive turbans off people in the marketplace and then selling them. Similar to al-Kisā'ī's version of events, Pharaoh and Hāmān make money by carrying funeral biers. This attracts the attention of the king who makes Pharaoh his minister due to his shrewd entrepreneurial skills. Through treachery, Pharaoh induces the king's own people to assassinate him. They proclaim Pharaoh their ruler, and he appoints Hāmān as his minister. The fanciful tales told by al-Kisā'ī and al-Rabghūzī appear to be born out of a popular desire to know more about such an infamous character. Both authors highlight Pharaoh's criminal past and his illegitimate claim to Egypt's throne. By focusing particularly on the sinister nature of Pharaoh and Hāmān, and positing a foreign background, perhaps the authors were avoiding a more general condemnation of Egyptians.

More contemporary Muslim commentators have disregarded much of this extra-Qur'ānic material and, like biblical scholars, have turned to archaeological and historical materials in order to prove the veracity of the Exodus account as presented in the Qur'ān. Using much of the same "circumstantial" evidence as those who argue in favor of the biblical account, they too have identified Ramses II as the Pharaoh of the Exodus, but their arguments do not stand up to scholarly scrutiny. Such writers include Louay Fatoohi and Shetha al-Dargazelli, authors of *The*

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[565] Location unknown.

[566] Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (al-Qāhirah : Dār al-Kātib al-ʿArabī, 1967), 1, 383. This is repeated by Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr,* 1, 68. Al-Qurṭubī also mentions Pharaoh's *kunya:* Abū Murrah, i.e. "Father of bitterness." This seems to come from the *Aggadah* which plays on the king's name: "The Israelites called Malol, the king of Egypt, Maror, "Bitterness," because in his days the Egyptians embittered their lives with all manner of rigorous service" (Ginzberg, I/II, 443). In later Persian paintings and illustrated *Qiṣaṣ*, Pharaoh is depicted Persian attire of the period in which the work was produced. For examples, see: Massumeh Farhad et al., *Falnama: the Book of Omens* (Washington, DC: Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, 2009), no. 15; Brosh with Milstein, *Biblical Stories in Islamic Painting*, 88-91.

*Mystery of Israel in Ancient Egypt*, and M.S.M. Saifullah, ‘Abdullah David and Mohammad Ghoniem, who authored a lengthy article titled “The Identification of Pharaoh during the Time of Moses” which appears on the *Islamic Awareness* website and reiterates much of what Fatoohi and al-Dargazelli present. The principal “evidence” they present may be briefly summarized as follows: 1) In contrast to the Bible, the Qur’ān speaks of only one Egyptian ruler whose reign encompasses both the Oppression of Israel and the Exodus; 2) Since only one Pharaoh’s lifetime encompassed both Mūsā’s childhood and adulthood, he must have reigned for a very long time; 3) When the Qur’ān speaks of Pharaoh as the “Lord of *awtād*,” it signifies someone who is a prolific *builder* – not a murderous executioner as traditionally understood (see discussion below); and 4) *Sūrat Yūnus* 10.92 indicates that God saved Pharaoh’s body from the deep even though he was drowned. Since Ramses II ruled for sixty-seven years, longer than any other Pharaoh of the Eighteenth- or Nineteenth-Dynasties, since he was the most prolific of builders, and since his mummy has been discovered, he is in their view undoubtedly the Pharaoh of the Qur’ān. Of course they ignore al-Ṭabarī’s comment mentioned above which concurs with the biblical account that distinguishes the Pharaoh of the Oppression from the Pharaoh of the Exodus. Even if *awtād* does refer to structures of some kind rather than “stakes” (as I also argue below) many Pharaohs of the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Dynasties were responsible for numerous monumental building projects, and the mummies of numerous kings of this period have been recovered. Moreover, they do not consider the archaeological evidence for the emergence of Israel from within a Canaanite context, let alone the textual problems with the biblical account, which also make a historical or literal reading of the Qur’ān questionable at best.

As mentioned in the introduction, in the modern period there have been a number of Islamic scholars who have advocated a less literal reading of the Qur’an. Foremost among

them has been Muhammad ‘Abduh who in his *Tafsīr al-Manār* wrote: “We have made it clear on another occasion that the stories that appear in the Qur’ān are intended for exhortation (*al-mau'iẓah*) and reflection (*al-i'tibār*), *not for elucidating history*.”[567] In the Twentieth Century, Egyptian scholars such as Amīn al-Khūlī (1895-1966),[568] Ṭaha Ḥussein (1889-1973),[569] Muḥammad Aḥmad Khalafallāh (1916-98)[570] and Nasr Ḥamīd Abū Zayd (1943-2010)[571] have advocated a more literary approach to Qur’ānic exegesis.[572] Summarizing Ḥussein’s view (and his own), Abū Zayd wrote that although a religious text might relay a historical event, the text is not meant to reflect an accurate historical event: “Stories have meaning beyond the text.”[573] Citing Khalafallah, he wrote: “Studying the Qur’ānic stories as literary narrative – as suggested by the literary approach – makes historical authenticity either irrelevant or rather the wrong question to ask.”[574]

## III. The Exodus as told by the Qur’ān

As reconstructed from the scattered accounts and references in the Qur’ān (without augmenting with biblical material), the story of the *banī Isrā'īl* in Egypt in its broad outline is as follows: An unnamed pharaoh inflicts suffering on the Children of Israel, and slaughters their sons while allowing the female children to live. God tells Mūsā’s mother to put him in a chest and cast him into the sea (or river). Remarkably, the Qur’ān and Exodus use the same word for the vessel into which Mūsā’s/Moses’ mother placed him in order to save his life. The word used

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[567] Muhammad ‘Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-Ḥakīm al-shahīr bi-Tafsīr al-Manār*, *ta’līf Muhammad Rashīd Riḍa* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma‘rifah, 1970) 1, 399 (my emphasis).
[568] *Min hadī al-Qur’ān*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Āmma li’l-Kitāb, 1978.
[569] *Fi al-shi'r al-Jāhilī* (Cairo: Dār al-Nahr, 1995).
[570] *Al-Fann al-Qaṣaṣī fi 'l-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, 4th ed. (Cairo: Mu’assasat al-Intishār al-‘Arabī, 1999).
[571] *Reformation of Islamic Thought; Voice of an Exile; Rethinking the Qur’ān: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics* (Amsterdam: Humanities University Press, 2004).
[572] For an overview, see: Nasr Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought* and Campanini, *The Qur’an: Modern Muslim Interpretations* and Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought*.
[573] Abu Zayd, *Voice of an Exile* 52; Ḥussein, 111-115.
[574] Abu Zayd, *Reformation of Islamic Thought*, 56.

in Ex. 2.3 is *tebat* (תבת) and that in *Surat Ṭā Hā* 20.39 is *tābūt* (تابوت). This word is believed by many to derive from the ancient Egyptian *ḏb3t*.[575] She does so, sending his sister to follow him. Mūsā is taken from the waters by the Egyptians, ostensibly by Pharaoh's wife, who convinces her husband not to kill the child, but raise him as their own. Mūsā's sister leads the Egyptians to his birth mother since he will not suckle from another woman, and so that their mother might be comforted.

One day, after reaching maturity, Mūsā sees an Israelite and an Egyptian fighting. The Israelite asks him for help, and Mūsā ultimately kills the Egyptian. Seeing the gravity of his action, Mūsā asks for God's forgiveness. He remains fearful, however, that he will be apprehended. The next day he comes across the same Israelite whom he had helped previously. Once again he is fighting with an Egyptian and asks Mūsā for help. Although Mūsā recognizes that the Israelite is the instigator, he nevertheless comes to his aid. Just as Mūsā is about to thrash the Egyptian, his victim reminds him of the murder he has already committed. At that moment, someone (ostensibly an Egyptian) rushes in to warn Mūsā that Pharaoh's ministers are looking for him and are planning on executing him.

Mūsā flees to the land of Madyan where he comes to the aid of two women who are apparently prevented from watering their flocks by shepherds. He is received by their (unnamed) father, employed (as a shepherd, we may presume) and married to one of the daughters. Some years later, Mūsā who is with his family near a mountain sees a fire and goes to investigate. When he comes to the fiery tree, God speaks to him. God commands him to cast down his staff which then becomes a snake. God then asks Mūsā to put his hand in his bosom and then withdraw it, which is now white and without blemish. God commands Mūsā to go to Pharaoh to

[575] Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* 138.

demand the end of Israel's affliction. Mūsā is reluctant, however due to his lack of eloquence and his fear that the Egyptians will kill him. God reassures him, and sends his brother Aaron with him.

Mūsā identifies himself to Pharaoh as God's prophet, preaches the one God, and demands that the *banī Isrāʿīl* be allowed to leave Egypt. Pharaoh reminds Mūsā that he was reared among the Egyptians and about his crime for which he fled from Egypt. Refusing to believe Mūsā, Pharaoh demands to know the identity of Mūsā's god. When Mūsā preaches to Pharaoh about the one true God, Pharaoh claims divinity for himself alone and demands a sign as proof. Mūsā casts down his staff before Pharaoh and it becomes a snake. He draws his hand from his bosom and it appears white. Pharaoh, his minister Hāmān and the others remain unconvinced, however, believing Mūsā to be merely a magician of some kind. They plan a competition between Mūsā and Pharaoh's own magicians.

At the competition, the magicians are able to produce a trick which made their staffs and ropes appear to move as snakes, but when Mūsā casts down his staff as before, it becomes a snake once again and swallows up what the magicians had produced. Convinced that Mūsā is indeed a prophet, the magicians prostrate before him and confess their belief. Pharaoh is outraged by their betrayal and threatens them with torture and death, but the magicians remain steadfast in their belief. Pharaoh's ministers urge him to act against Mūsā, and so Pharaoh threatens to kill the Israelite male children. A "believer" among Pharaoh's people preaches to the Egyptians, exhorting them to heed Moses and God's signs.

Pharaoh commands Hāmān (presumably a royal official) to build him a tower so that he may reach heaven and Mūsā's God, even as the "believer" continues to exhort his people. God

punishes the Egyptians with plagues of pestilence, locusts, lice, frogs and blood. The Egyptians implore Mūsā promising to release the Israelites if he asks his God to relent of his punishment. But still they do not heed. God instructs Mūsā to lead his people out of Egypt under the cover of night. Pharaoh rallies his troops and in the morning pursues the Israelites to the sea. God instructs Mūsā to strike the waters with his staff, and thereby splits the sea allowing the Israelites to pass through. Pharaoh and his troops pursue the Israelites, but the waters return and the Egyptians are drowned. Caught unawares, Pharaoh professes his belief in the one God, the God of the *banī Isrā'īl*.[576]

The Qur'ān clearly presents a much more abbreviated account of the Exodus than is found in the Bible as it generally does with other stories it shares in common with the Jewish and Christian Scriptures such as we have already seen with the story of Yūsuf/Joseph. This is because the Qur'ān does not relate these narratives as if they had not been told before. It presents them as "flashbacks" to prophetic history, as *reminders* of what has happened in the past so that people might learn from the mistakes of their ancestors and repent. Thus, the revelation of the Qur'ān itself is *al-Dhikr* i.e. "the Remembrance:"

> They say: 'O you to whom the Remembrance has been revealed, you are surely possessed.'
>
> Truly We have revealed the Remembrance and truly We will be Guardian of it (a*l-Ḥijr* 15.6, 9)

Although the Qur'ān's collective version of events is much briefer than the biblical account, the differences *in details* are for the most part relatively minor and do not radically alter the overall account. Some of these more minor differences are: in *al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.9, the Egyptian woman who

[576] God's victory over Pharaoh and the Egyptians is commemorated on day of *'Āshūrah* (tenth of Muḥarram), and observed by fasting as Jews had done in the days of Muhammad (*Ṣaḥīḥ Bukhārī* 2004 and 3397).

adopts Mūsā is Pharaoh's *wife*, rather than Pharaoh's daughter as in Ex. 2.5. Mūsā fights with two Egyptians apparently (*al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.15-19) rather than an Egyptian *and* a Hebrew (Ex. 2.11-14). When the Qur'ān tells how Mūsā's staff became a snake in Pharaoh's presence (7.107-117; 26.32-45), it is Mūsā who casts down the staff rather than Aaron as in Ex.7.10, and Mūsā does this twice: first before Pharaoh and his ministers, and then again when Pharaoh calls in his magicians to challenge Mūsā's miracle. As in Ex. 4.6-9, when Mūsā encounters the divine presence in the burning bush, God turns Mūsā's hand white (*al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.32), although in the Qur'ān the white hand is "without blemish" (*min ghayr sū'*) whereas in the biblical account the white hand is "leprous" (**מצדעת**). Both the Bible and the Qur'ān indicate that God intends Moses/Mūsā to use this as second sign before Pharaoh (the staff-serpent to be the first), but only in the Qur'ān (*al-Aʿrāf* 7.108; *al-Shuʿarā* 26.33) does Mūsā perform the miracle before Pharaoh. Although Exodus gives vivid accounts of the ten plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians, the Qur'ān mentions just a few without narrative (7.133). The Qur'ān does not mention the Passover although 7.133 may contain an allusion to the tenth plague in which Egypt's firstborn were slain (see discussion below). Whereas in the Book of Exodus (12.31-32) Pharaoh finally relents and urges Moses to lead his people out of Egypt, in the Qur'ān God tells Mūsā to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt under the cover of night. Pharaoh and his troops pursue the Israelites (10.90; 26.52 ff.; 44.23) to the sea as in Ex. 14, but he ultimately declares his belief in the God of the Israelites as the waters overwhelm him. Pharaoh's profession of faith is one of the more significant differences between the biblical and Qur'ānic accounts, and is discussed along with other important differences below.

Of the twenty-six *sūras* that contain references to the Exodus, seventeen make relatively brief remarks about the Egyptians, comprising one to five *āyāt.* Four sūras (10, 43, 44, and 79)

have longer references of 11-18 *āyāt* in length. Five sūras have the lengthiest references to the Egyptians and the Exodus, that is, between 28 and 59 *āyāt.* These are sūras 7, 20, 26, 28, and 40, with the lengthiest narrative comprising the 59 *āyāt* of *Sūrat al-Shu'arā* 26.10-68. The majority of *āyāt* that speak of Pharaoh and or the Egyptians of the Exodus (273 of the approximately 300) are concentrated in *sūras* 7-44 in their canonical ordering.[577] There are no references to the Egyptians and the Exodus beyond *Sūrat al-Fajr* 89.10-14.

The wide distribution of these references to the Egyptians and the Exodus through much of the Qur'ān would perhaps be more revealing if we considered the *sūras* in the *order of their revelation* rather than simply in the final traditional ordering based more or less on the length of the *sūras.* A chronology would possibly allow us to examine the *āyāt* regarding the Egyptians and the Exodus within the historical context of the *ummah*, an approach which not been undertaken before. Gleaning *tafāsīr* and *sīrah* for references to *asbāb al-nazūl* ("occasions of the revelation"), medieval Muslim authors drew up lists of Meccan and Madīnan *sūras* arranging them in the order in which they were traditionally believed to have been revealed. These classical sources provided the basis for the headings in the Egyptian edition of the Qur'ān printed in 1925 that provides a title for each *sūra*, the place where the *sūra* was revealed, and the name of the *sūra* that was revealed before it. As Robinson counsels, however, the standard Egyptian chronology ought not to be regarded as sacrosanct as it was not based on unanimous tradition.[578] A somewhat different chronology was proposed by German orientalist Theodor Nöldeke (1836-1930) in his *Geschichte des Korans* (1860), and subsequently amended by his student Friedrich Zacharias Schwally (1853-1919) in 1909 and 1919, and again later by Gotthelf Bergsträsser and

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[577] The breakdown of references by number of verses is as follows: 1-5 ā*yā* (sūras 2, 3, 8, 11, 14, 17, 23, 29, 38, 50, 51, 54, 66, 69, 73, 85, 89); 11-15 *āyā* (sūras 43, 44, 79); 16-20 *āyā* (sūra 10); 26-30 *āyā* (sūra 40); 36-40 *āyā* (sūra 7); 41-45 *āyā* (sūras 20, 28); 56-60 *āyā* (sūra 26).

[578] Robinson 75 and 92.

Otto Pretzl (1938). Nöldeke accepted the basic distinction between Meccan and Madīnan *sūras*, but subdivided the Meccan *sūras* into three groups (first, second and third Meccan), and considered stylistic elements and content of *sūras* for determining the period and *approximate* order of revelation. Thus, the Nöldeke-Schwally chronology differs from the standard Egyptian one. Both chronologies, however, accept that there have been Meccan insertions in Madīnan *sūras* and Madīnan additions to Meccan *sūras*. As Robinson had expressed caution about the Egyptian chronology, so also does he raise concerns about the Nöldeke-Schwally chronology as "it is based on very little hard-and-fast evidence."[579] Yet, it has gained some degree of acceptance with non-Muslim scholars. In the 1930's Richard Bell went beyond the simple distinction of Meccan and Madīnan *sūras,* arguing for the composite nature of some *sixty* s*ūras* that contained *āyāt* from both Mecca *and* Madīnan periods.[580] In his view, originally separate revelations were combined, and adapted for their new context with additions, insertions, alterations and revisions.[581] This complicates the matter considerably and appears to be something of a Qur'ānic variation of the biblical "documentary hypothesis" (see introduction). The specific merits and defects of these different chronologies (and still many others) and the complexity of establishing such a chronology of the revelation of the *sūras* have been discussed at length elsewhere and need not concern us here.[582] For the purposes of my study, I will base my discussion and analysis in this chapter primarily on the Nöldeke-Schwally chronology (hereafter abbreviated as N) which, as Robinson concludes "that for all its faults…occasionally modified in

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[579] Robinson 80.
[580] Richard Bell, *The Qur'ān: Translated, with a Criticial Re-arrangement of the Surahs,* 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1937-9). Montgomery Watt has adapted Bell's work in his: *Bell's Introduction to the Qur'ān* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1970).
[581] Watt 89-101.
[582] I refer the reader to the following: Gerhard Böwering, "Chronology and the Qur'an," In *Encyclopaedia of the Quran*, v. 1, 316-335; Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 60 ff.; Herbert Berg, "Context: Muḥammad," *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān*, 192-194; Harold Motzki, "Alternative Accounts of the Qur'ān's Formation," *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'ān*, 59-63.

the light of Bell's insights, is a better working hypothesis than the standard Egyptian chronology."[583] It should be stressed that it is a *working hypothesis* and the issue of Qur'ānic chronology is far from resolved.[584] I will, in addition, make occasional use of the Egyptian chronology (hereafter abbreviated as E) for purposes of comparison with Nöldeke-Schwally. In Appendix III, I have provided my translation of the *āyāt* referring to Pharaoh and other Egyptians in the Qur'ān's Exodus accounts, arranged according to the Nöldeke-Schwally chronology. Appendices IV and V show the order of the relevant *sūras* according to both Nöldeke-Schwally and the Standard Egyptian chronologies.

## IV. First Meccan *Sūras:* Pharaoh

Regarding those *sūras* containing references to the Egyptians and the Exodus, N and E agree on which were revealed in Mecca and Medina. Moreover, in both chronologies, *sūras* 2, 8, 3 and 66 are the last four of the twenty-six *sūras* revealed that refer to the Egyptians. If we take the first four *sūras* in both chronologies, we see that N and E have three *sūras* in common, albeit in different order: N – **85**, **73**, 79, **89** and E – **73**, **89**, **85**, 50. Thus, we may conclude with some confidence that 73.15-16, 85.17-20, and 89.10-14 were among the earliest references to the Egyptians and the Exodus that the early Meccan community heard. All three passages are quite brief, consisting of between two and five *āyāt*, and speak specifically of *Pharaoh* as someone who did not believe and was thus severely punished by God. As in the Hebrew Bible, Pharaoh is

[583] Robinson 95. This is reiterated by Carl Ernst in his: *How to Read the Qur'an* 48. With the same caveat, Nicolai Sinai nevertheless contends that: "Nöldeke's chronology can be justified by and large through a convergence of formal, lexical, and thematic considerations, interpreted against a background of a few general assumptions about the life and times of Muhammad." See his: "The Qur'an as Process" in: *The Qur'ān in Context*, ed. Angela Neuwirth et al. (Leiden" Brill, 2011), 408, 416. Although I am using the Nöldeke's chronology as a working hypothesis, I do not accept his (or Schwally's) generally negative assessments of the Qur'ān's style and syntax. (See Afnan H. Fatani, "Language of the Qur'an," *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia*, 357.)

[584] While noting differing hypotheses, Gerhard Böwering remarks that: "Nöldeke's sequencing and its refinements have provided a *rule of thumb* for the approximate chronological order of the sūras" (my emphasis). "Recent Research on the Construction of the Qur'ān," *The Qur'ān in Its Historical Context*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2008) 73.

the most notorious example of an Egyptian in the Qur'ān. Taking the *sūras* in the N-order, *Sūrat al-Burūj* (85) is particularly concerned with the persecution exacted by unbelievers upon the believers and the fate that awaits them: "Those who persecute the male believers and female believers and do not repent, theirs will be the punishment of Hell, theirs will be the punishment of the fire" (85.10). Pharaoh is specifically mentioned (85.18), along with the Thamūd, as an example of an unbeliever (*kufr*) ignorant of God's omnipotence: "Yet, those who disbelieve are in denial; God encompasses (*muḥīṭ*) from behind them (85.20)." *Al-Burūj* thus contains what is most likely the earliest use of the word *fir'awn* in the Qur'ān. As mentioned previously, *fir'awn* is derived from the ancient Egyptian word *per-'a* (  ), which was rendered in Hebrew as פרעה, in Coptic as Π.PPO and in Greek as φαραώ. In the Qur'ān, the word *fir'awn* is used only to designate the ruler of Egypt of the Exodus accounts, unlike the Hebrew Bible where it is used in Genesis also to designate the Egyptian king who desired Sarah (12.15) and the one who freed Joseph (40.2), and to later Egyptian kings (e.g. 1 Kings 3.1; 2 Kings 23.29, etc.) in addition to the king in Exodus. As discussed above, the Egyptian king mentioned in *Sūrat Yūsuf* is referred to *al-malik. Firʿawn* is never written with the definite article *al-* (in contrast to *al-'Azīz* in *Sūrat Yūsuf* which always is), and thus is used almost like a proper name, like Hāmān or Qārūn (see below) rather than a title. In the Hebrew Bible *Pharaoh* likewise lacks the definite article and is often needlessly qualified with the phrase "the king of Egypt" (e.g. Gen. 41.46; Ex. 6.11, etc.).[585]

*Sūrat al-Muzzammil* (73), the second *sūra* to refer to contain a reference to Pharaoh,[586] is directed first to the Prophet Muhammad himself (*āya* 1-14) and then to the people:

> We have sent to you (pl.) a messenger, a witness for you, just as We sent a messenger to Pharaoh. But Pharaoh disobeyed the messenger, so We inflicted on him serious

[585] In Coptic, the "*p*" in the ancient Egyptian phrase *per-'a* was misunderstood to be the definite article Π- (rather than part of the word *per* ("house"), and thus the word appears indefinitely as: PPO.
[586] According to the E-chronology, this *sūra* was the first revealed to mention Pharaoh.

> punishment. Then how, if you disbelieve, will you guard yourselves on a day that makes the young turn old, when the sky is cleaved? His promise will be fulfilled… (73.15-18).

Albeit brief, this passage is significant because already at this early stage in the revelation of the Qur'ān, a parallel is drawn between the Muhammad and Mūsā, between the idolatrous unbelieving Meccans (Quraysh) and Pharaoh, and between the persecutions suffered by the Muslims and the suffering of the *banī Isrāʿīl*. These parallels may explain why the Qur'ān contains more references to Mūsā than any other prophet. The story of a believing people liberated from oppression by God's Messenger would have been comforting to the early Muslim community just as it has for many people throughout the ages seeking freedom from oppression, be it religious or political (see "Introduction"). Just as the story of Ibrāhīm's flight into Egypt to as related in extra-Qur'ānic sources prefigures (or reflects) Muhammad's *hijra* to Medina (see: Chapter 3 - Ibrāhīm and the Egyptians), and Yūsuf's conflict with his brothers prefigures (or relects) Muhammad's conflict with the Quraysh (see: Chapter 4 - Yūsuf and the Egyptians), so too do Mūsā's efforts to bring Pharaoh to faith anticipate (or reflect) Muhammad's mission among the Meccans.

The third of the earliest *sūras* containing references to the Egyptians and the Exodus held in common by N and E is *Sūrat al-Fajr* (89), which N places fourth and E places second. The references are again brief, comprising *āyāt* 10-14. The *sūra* is initially addressed to Muhammad as evidenced by the second person masculine form of the verb (*tara*) and the second person masculine suffix pronoun in *āya* 6: "Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the ʿĀd (people)?" God assures him that the peoples of power and wealth – the ʿĀd, the people of Iram, the Thamūd and Pharaoh - "those who have transgressed in the land and increased depravity in it" - have been severely punished by God. Unlike the ʿĀd, the people of Iram, and the Thamūd, the Egyptians are *not* collectively indicted in the passage; it is Pharaoh who has particularly

transgressed. As already seen in *al-Burūj* and *al-Muzzammil*, Pharaoh is again the one individual who, above all others, epitomizes tyranny and unbelief, and is the prototype for the Quraysh.

In 89.10 Pharaoh is called *dhī* (*dhū*) *al-awtād*, an appellation that also appears later in *Sūrat Ṣād* 38.12 of the second Meccan period. The phrase is sometimes rendered and interpreted in modern translations as: "Lord of Stakes" (Yūsuf 'Alī)[587] or more loosely as: "who impaled his victims upon the stakes" (Dawood),[588] referring to Pharaoh's reputation as a cruel executioner. Others render the phrase as: "he of the tent-pegs" (Arberry)[589] or "of [many] tent poles" (Asad)[590], signifying a person of stability, power and status according to Bedouin standards.[591] Thus, Aḥmed 'Alī[592] renders the phrase simply as: "the mighty Pharaoh." In addition to these two interpretations, Yūsuf 'Alī also suggests that the (tent) stakes could signify a large military camp, thus alluding to Pharaoh's military might.[593] Identifying *awtād* in 89.10 as the stakes upon which Pharaoh impaled his victims is problematic since, chronologically- speaking, there are no explicit references to Pharaoh executing people until 20.70 and 26.49 in the *second* Meccan period, and then later in 7.124 of the third Meccan period. Even in those instances, however, the word *awtād* is never used. The meaning of *awtād* is perhaps best determined within the context of 89.6-11:

> Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the 'Ād of Iram with its columns (*dhāt al-'imād*) the like of which has never been made in the land…And with the Thamūd who hewed out rock in the valley, or Pharaoh, lord of *awtād,* (all of whom) transgressed in the lands.

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[587] *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān.*
[588] *The Koran, Fourth Revised Edition* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974).
[589] *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Touchstone, 1996).
[590] *The Message of the Qur'ān* (Bristol: Book Foundation, 2003).
[591] Cf. Zamakhsharī, 4, 58.
[592] Ahmed Ali, *al-Qur'ān: a Contemporary Translation,* new revised ed. (Princeton: Princeton University, 2001).
[593] *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* n. 4160.

The context suggests that the ʻĀd, Thamūd and Pharaoh all exhibited unbridled power and arrogance through monumental works of some kind but were nevertheless humbled by God. Thus, Pharaoh's *awtād* appear to be analogous to the columns erected by the ʻĀd in Iram and the structures hewed from the mountains by the Thamūd. Rendering *awtād* literally as "tent-pegs" or "stakes" in this context therefore seems unlikely. Something of size and durability, and made of stone would be more fitting. This is also suggested by a reference elsewhere to *awtād* in connection with mountains: "Have We not made the earth a resting place and the mountains *awtād*?" (78.6-7). Yūsuf ʻAlī understood this to mean that the land is like a carpet and the mountains like pegs to fix it firmly,[594] but as I have already stated "tent-pegs" does not fit the context of 89.6-11. The reference to *awtād* along with columns and rock-hewn edifices (89.6-11) and its use as a metaphor for mountains further suggests something of considerable height. Thus, al-Ṭabarī cites traditions that equate *awtād* with arenas (*malāʻib*) or simply as "buildings" (*bunyān*).[595] Citing al-Qurṭubī, Fatoohi and Dargazelli conclude that *awtād s*ignify tall buildings of some kind.[596] More specifically, Joseph Islam identifies a*wtād* with pyramids given their size, and the Qur'ānic association with Pharaoh and with mountains.[597]

Since, however, the word *awtād* in its original sense signifies a stake or peg, a more slender structure, such as a column, is perhaps implied as in the *ʻimād* of 89.7. While it may be tempting to identify *awtād* as pyramids given the word's association with Egyptian kings, the stone columns that supported the roofs of Egyptian temples are far more ubiquitous throughout the Nile Valley. The greatest columned edifice from ancient Egypt is without question the great

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[594] *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* n. 5890.
[595] *Tafsīr*, 12, 7340.
[596] Fatoohi and al-Dargazelli, *The Mystery of Israel* 107-111. The authors insist on identifying Pharaoh as Ramses II due to his prolific building activities.
[597] Joseph Islam, "Pharaoh – Lord of the Stakes or Pyramids?" August 25, 2011. http://quransmessage.com/articles/pharaoh%20-%20lord%20of%20the%20stakes%20or%20pyramids%20FM3.htm.

hypostyle hall of the Temple of Amun at Karnak. Begun by Seti I (1294-1279 BCE) and completed by his son Ramses II (1279-1213 BCE), it boasts 134 massive columns, the twelve center columns reaching a height of 23 meters.[598] Those who would identify the Pharaoh of Exodus with Ramses II could convincingly claim him as the "Lord of *Columns*." Another structure within the Karnak temple complex that may also shed light on the meaning of *awtād* is the so-called "festival hall" constructed by Thuthmose III (1479-1425 BCE). Completely unique to the hall are the twenty central columns that are shaped like *tent pegs*, perhaps evoking the military tents with which this warrior-pharaoh would have been quite familiar while on campaign.[599] I would not go so far as to conclude that these *specific* columns are Pharaoh's *awtād* mentioned in the Qur'ān or that the Qur'ānic Pharaoh is to be identified as Thuthmose III, but only that the word *awtād* perhaps signifies peg-like columns such as in the festival hall.

There is still another possibility that also has not been offered before. If we look for an Egyptian structure that combines height, monumentality, stone construction, and a peg-like appearance, the most likely candidate is an *obelisk*, the monolithic shafts of stone erected in pairs at the entrances to temples, scores of which were raised by Egypt's pharaohs from Aswan to Alexandria to heights of over thirty-two meters and in excess of four-hundred tons, some of which were transported to Rome and Istanbul in ancient times.[600] Their pyramidal tops may have evoked the shape of tent pegs to some observers. If *awtād* actually refers to obelisks, *dhū al-awtād*, rather than connoting Pharaoh's cruelty as an impaler, signifies a ruler who commands the authority and vast resources, especially human labor, required to raise these monoliths,

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[598] Kent Weeks, *The Illustrated Guide to Luxor* (Cairo: AUC, 2005), 78-81; Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Temples of Ancient Egypt* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 157-8.
[599] Weeks 96-99; Wilkinson, *Temples* 159-60.
[600] Labib Habachi, *The Obelisks of Egypt: Skyscrapers of the Past* (New York: Scribner's, 1977); Brian Curran et al., *Obelisk: a History* (Cambridge: MIT, 2009); Susan Sorek, *The Emperors' Needles: Egyptian Obelisks and Rome* (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix, 2010).

although lacking the faith and humility to submit to God. This is Pharaoh's primary character flaw after all.

In N's chronology, the revelation of *Sūrat al-Nāziʿāt* 79 (N31) actually preceded that of *Sūrat al-Fajr* 89 (N35) which I have been discussing. Although E's chronology regards it as a later Meccan *sūra* (E81), there is a good case for N's earlier date because like *Sūrat al-Burūj*, *Sūrat al-Nāziʿāt* contains the phrase: *hal atāka ḥadīthu* – "Has the story reached you?" Two other *sūras* contain this phrase: *Sūrat al-Ghāshīyah* 88.1, which N places directly before *Sūrat al-Fajr* in order of revelation (as N34), and *al-Dhārīyāt* 51.24 (N39). It seems logical to conclude that all four *sūras* (85, 79, 88, and 51) were thus revealed in the early Meccan period. Of the earliest *sūras* containing references to the Egyptians and the Exodus, *al-Nāziʿāt* (79) has the most material: a narrative comprising twelve *āya.* The *sūra'*s focus, as in many of the early Meccan *sūras*,[601] is on the Day of Judgment as seen particularly in *āya* 1-14 and then again in 27-46. In between is a short episode from the Exodus story, which succinctly relates that God summoned Mūsā to Sinai and commanded him to go to Pharaoh "for he has transgressed" (*ṭaghā*). Mūsā is sent to Pharaoh to exhort him to repentance and conversion: "Say: 'Do you want to be purified? And I will guide you to your Lord so that you may fear (Him)'" (18-19). Even though Mūsā shows him a "great sign," Pharaoh refuses to believe (*kadhdhaba*), opposes him (*ʿaṣā*), turns away (*adbara*) and deliberately so (*yasʿaā*), and then proclaims his own divinity to his people. As a result, God punishes him, and makes an example of him in this world and the next. Thus, this episode serves as an *'ibra* – a warning to those who would fear God (*āya* 26) – precisely what Pharaoh, the sole example in the *sūra*, refused to do. As the remainder of the *sūra* makes clear, for those like Pharaoh who transgress (*ṭaghā*) Hellfire will be their abode. The verb *ṭaghā* is especially associated with Pharaoh. We have already encountered the verb

[601] Michael Sells, *Approaching the Qur'ān: the Early Revelations* (Ashland: White Cloud, 1999), 24.

*ṭaghā* in connection with him in 89.11. It is used again regarding Pharaoh in *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* 20.24, 43, and 45 in one of the longest continuous narratives of the Exodus in the Qur'ān. *Ṭaghā* literally means to "exceed limits" and may be understood with regard to Pharaoh to signify his transgressing of bounds with his people as ruler and with God as one called to submit. In 20.81, when the *banī 'Isrāʿīl* are delivered from Egypt, God explicitly warned them *not* to transgress (*lā taṭghaw*). Pharaoh is not alone in exceeding limits, however; humanity does likewise when it sees itself as self-sufficient (*al-'Alaq* 96.6-7). Thus, all individuals may exhibit pharaonic traits from time to time.

In the biblical account, God send Moses to Pharaoh for the sole purpose of freeing the Israelites from their bondage (Ex. 3.9-10). Moses is told to identify God to the Israelites as: "The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Ex. 3.15). To Pharaoh, however, Moses is to identify the Deity simply as "The LORD, *the God of the Hebrews*" (Ex. 3.18; 5.3; 7.16, etc.), as if this God is exclusive to the Israelites and has no relevance to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Pharaoh is simply to *obey* this "God of the Hebrews" and release the people so that they (alone) may worship God. Pharaoh is not invited to become a believer as he is in *al-Nāziʿāt* 79.18-19. In contrast to the Hebrew Bible, in the Qur'ān God is not the exclusive deity of the *banī 'Isrāʿīl*; Mūsā tells Pharaoh that God is "*your* (i.e. Pharaoh's) Lord" as well even if this ruler does not acknowledge Him as such, and instead claims divinity for himself. In *Sūrat Yūsuf* we saw that Yūsuf's prophetic mission was to the Egyptians, and that he preached to his fellow prisoners. Similarly, according to the Qur'ān, Mūsā is explicitly sent *to Pharaoh* (cf. 73.15) "to summon him to the Truth," as al-Ṭabarī commented,[602] i.e. to belief in the one God. From the perspective of the earliest references to the Exodus, if Pharaoh were to submit to God, his evil treatment of the *banī 'Isrāʿīl* would cease – just as the submission of the

[602] *Tafsīr,* v.14, 8658.

Quraysh would end the sufferings of the *ummah.* Mūsā's attempt to bring Pharaoh to faith in (the one) God once again exemplifies the *missionary* character of the Qur'ān in contrast to emphasis on the covenant between the LORD and Israel in the Book of Exodus. Egypt and the Egyptians (and by extension all non-believers) are not simply to be conquered; they are to be invited to *convert*.

Within the first Meccan period of the N-chronology there remain two more *sūras* with brief references to the Pharaoh: *al-Ḥāqqah* 69.9-10 and *al-Dhārīyāt* 51.38-40. In both *al-Ḥāqqah* and *al-Dhārīyāt*, Pharaoh appears (again along with the Thamūd and 'Ād) as an example of someone who opposed (*ʿaṣā*) God's Messenger and was punished – ostensibly also a warning to those who would oppose the Messenger Muhammad, particularly the Quraysh. In 51.39 Pharaoh accuses Mūsā of being "a magician or someone possessed," a charge made against other messengers whom God has sent (*āya* 52) including, we may infer, Muhammad (cf. 38.4; 44.14). Muhammad's opponents are said to be "a people who transgress" (*qawm ṭāghūn*), a charge we have seen is particularly associated with Pharaoh. Thus, the parallel is clear: what Pharaoh was to Mūsā, so are the Quraysh to Muhammad. It should be noted that in these earliest Qur'ānic references to the Exodus story, in contrast to the frequent references to the 'Ād and Thamūd people, the focus is *not* on the Egyptian people, Pharaoh's courtiers, magicians, or troops at this point; it is *Pharaoh* above all who rejects Mūsā and "was deserving of blame" (*mulīm*). Given the parallels we have noted in the conflicts of Mūsā and Muhammad, and the focus on Pharaoh in the early Meccan revelations, it is tempting to identify a specific individual in Muhammad's time that opposed him as Pharaoh did Mūsā. The obvious choice is 'Abd al-'Uzzah b. 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, more commonly known as "Abū Lahab" ("The Father of Flame"), Muhammad's

paternal uncle who was one of the Prophet's most ardent opponents[603] whose fiery punishment is described in *Sūrat al-Lahab* (or *al-Masad*), an early Meccan *sūra* (111) which is third in the N-chronology (sixth in the E-chronology), and thus precedes the *sūras* that refer to Pharaoh. The story of Pharaoh's oppression of the *banī Isrāʿīl* thus was no mere "historical" recollection but of direct relevance and meaning to the early Muslims in Mecca.

## V. Second Meccan *Sūras*

### A. The People of Pharaoh

In N's "Second Meccan" period, there are nine *sūras* with references to the Egyptians and the Exodus, comprising some 140 *āyāt*, including two with lengthy accounts: *Ṭā Hā* 20.24, 39-79 (N55), and *al-Shuʿarā* 26.10-68 (N56). Beginning with *al-Qamar* 54.41-42 (N49) and *al-Dukhān* 44.17-22 (N53), the first two Second Meccan *sūras* that mention the Exodus, there is a shift in tone, undetected by commentators, such that it is not only Pharaoh who bears the blame for rejecting God's Prophet, but also his people (*āl* or *qawm*).[604] Thus, we read (with my emphases):

> And warnings came to *the people of Pharaoh*, but *they* rejected all Our signs, so We afflicted *them* (with) a punishment of the Mighty one, the Powerful. (54.41-42)

> We tried *the people of Pharaoh* before them (i.e. the unbelievers of Muhammad's day). A noble messenger came to them (saying), "Surrender to me the servants of God [i.e. the *banī 'Isrāʿīl*], for I am a true messenger to *you* (pl.). And do not make *yourselves* superior to God for I have come to *you* (pl.) with clear authority. For I have sought refuge with my Lord and *your* (pl.) Lord lest *you* (pl.) stone (me). And if *you* (pl.) do not believe me, then stay away (pl.)." And he called to his Lord: 'These are truly *a sinful people*.' (44.17-22)

Like the earlier Meccan *sūras*, *al-Qamar* (54) concerns the Last Judgment and the necessity of heeding God's signs before that day in order to avoid punishment. Six times in the course of the

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[603] Ali Bahramian and Farzin Negahban, "Abū Lahab," *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, ed. Wilferd Madelung and Farhad Daftary. Brill Online, 2013.

[604] *Āl firʿawn* is used more frequently than *qawm firʿawn* but both are used in second and third Meccan *sūras.*

*sūra* comes the refrain: "Will any take heed?" Among those who rejected God's signs and Messengers and were thus punished were the people of Nūḥ, the 'Ād, the Thamūd, the people of Lūṭ, the *people of Pharaoh* (not only Pharaoh as before), and Muhammad's own people who are asked: "Are your (pl.) unbelievers better than they? (54.43)"

In *al-Dukhān* 44.17-22 Mūsā now speaks to the *people of Pharaoh* to whom he has come as God's messenger, and declares that his Lord is theirs as well, just as he tried to convince Pharaoh in 79.18-19, if they would only humble themselves. Thus, it can be seen that universalism is characteristic of the Qur'ān as early as the second Meccan period – i.e. *Allāh* is *the* one God of all people (whether or not they realize it). By contrast, in the Book of Exodus, Moses refers to the LORD as "the God of the Hebrews," evidence that universalism was *not* original to ancient Israelite religion, but evolved over time.[605] It was not until the time of the Prophet Isaiah (second half of the 8th century BCE) that the LORD was widely recognized as a god/God of gentiles such as the Egyptians:

> In that day, there shall be an altar to the LORD inside the land of Egypt and a pillar to the LORD at its border. They shall serve as a symbol and reminder of the LORD of Hosts in the land of Egypt, so that when they [the Egyptians] cry out to the LORD against oppressors, He will send them a savior and champion to deliver them. For the LORD will make Himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians shall acknowledge the LORD in that day, and they shall serve [Him] with sacrifice and oblation and shall make vows to the LORD ad fulfill them. The LORD will first afflict and then heal the Egyptians; when they turn back to the LORD, He will respond to their entreaties and heal them. (Is. 19.19-22)

[605] Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

In 44.21, Mūsā attempts to defuse a potentially lethal confrontation[606] with the Egyptians who reject him and his message by simply asking them to "stay away" (*aʿtazilūn*). This echoes the irenic approach revealed in *Sūrat al-Kāfirūn* (109):

> Say: "O you who do not believe! I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship. And I will not worship what you worship, nor will you worship what I worship. To you your religion and to me my religion."

Yet, Mūsā declares to his Lord that they are indeed a "sinful people" (*qawm mujrimūn*) perhaps because they continued to reject and threaten him. This is a grave charge. The adjective *mujrimūn/mujrimīn* is used forty-nine times in the Qur'ān, and refers generally to "the sinful," those who will go to the fires of Hell (18.53; 14.49; 54.47-8; 74.41-2), and is synonymous with those who did not believe (*allad<u>dh</u>īn kafarū*), rejected signs (*ka<u>dhdh</u>abū bi-āyāt*), those who are arrogant (*astakbarū*), wrongdoers (*ẓālimīn*) – 7.40-1 – and hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) 9.64-66. It is also used to designate specific groups of sinful people such as the people of Lūṭ (7.84; 15.58; 51.32), the ʻĀd (11.50-52) and the people of Tubbaʿ (44.37), and the Egyptians (44.22; 7. 133; 10.75, and perhaps 10.82 and 28.17).

From the passing mention to Pharaoh and other non-believers in *al-Qāf* 50.13 (N54), we move to two of the longest accounts of Mūsā among the Egyptians: *Ṭā Hā* 20.24, 39-79 (N55), comprising some forty-three *āya*, and *al-Shuʿarā* 26.10-68 (N56) comprising some fifty-nine *āya*. Thus, two of the most extensive accounts of Mūsā and the *banī ʻIsrāʿīl* in Egypt were revealed in the second Meccan period according to N.[607] According to tradition, *Ṭā Hā* was

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[606] The reference to stoning in appears to be an anachronism as there is no evidence for this form of punishment from ancient Egypt. See: A.G. McDowell, "Crime and Punishment" in: *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, v. 1, 315-320; and David Lorton, "The Treatment of Criminals in Ancient Egypt: through the New Kingdom," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 20, 1 (1977): 2-64.

[607] The E-chronology lists *Ṭā Hā* and *al-Shuʿarā* as E45 and E47, and thus also in the middle of the Meccan period.

revealed after the shortly before ‘Umar’s conversion (615/616 CE) when increasing persecution had compelled some Muslims to flee to Abyssinia, and ‘Umar and others were threatening to kill Muhammad. ‘Umar’s reading of the beginning of this *sūra* is said to have caused his conversion.[608] *Al-Shuʿarā* was likewise revealed in this particularly contentious period. As the nascent Muslim community increasingly endured hardship at the hands of Muhammad’s opponents, they would have heard these lengthier Exodus narratives, which related the sufferings endured by the Israelites, but also of their ultimate deliverance by God through his Prophet.

In *Ṭā Hā,* the story of Mūsā begins with *āya* 9 and his epiphany in the sacred valley of Ṭuwā. It is not until *āya* 24 that God directs the reluctant Prophet to go to Pharaoh “for he has transgressed” (*ṭaghā*) – a verb particularly associated with the Egyptian king, as we have seen, and repeated in *āyāt* 43 and 45. *Āyāt* 38-41 comprise a flashback to the infancy of Mūsā when God instructs the child’s mother to cast him adrift on the water from which he will be taken by “an enemy of Mine and an enemy of him,” i.e. Pharaoh. Most frequently, *ʿadūw* (“enemy”) is used to refer to *Shayṭān* as a menace to humanity (e.g. 2.168, 208; 6.142; 7.22; 12.5, etc.). Thus, Pharaoh is, by implication, a serious threat to Mūsā. Even so, God instructs Mūsā to speak to Pharaoh with “gentle words” (*qawl layyin*) with the intention of bringing Pharaoh to understanding and belief (20.44), consistent with what was previously revealed in 79.19. The Exodus account in *al-Shuʿarā* also begins with Mūsā’s divinely ordained mission, but in this case it is not merely Pharaoh to whom he is sent but to “the evil people (*al-qawm al-ẓālimīn*), the people of Pharaoh.” This is yet another indication, first seen in *sūras* 54 and 44, that in the second Meccan period there is a shift in the Exodus accounts from incriminating Pharaoh alone to Pharaoh *and* his people, perhaps reflecting the growing opposition to Muhammad. As in *Sūrat Ṭā Hā*, the point of Mūsā’s mission is not only to gain the release of the *banī ‘Isrāʿīl*, but to bring

[608] Yūsuf ‘Alī, *Qur’ān* 764.

the Egyptians to belief: "Will they not fear?" (26.11 - *a-lā yattaqūn*), the word *taqwā* signifying not fear in the sense of being frightened, but having an awareness and consciousness of God.[609]

Even as Mūsā and Hārūn demand that Pharaoh release the *banī 'Isrā'īl,* they refer to God as "your Lord" (20.47) – i.e. Pharaoh's Lord - as in 79.19, and wish him peace if he but heeds God's word. Likewise, in 26.26, Mūsā, directing his comments to the Egyptians describes God as "*your* (pl.) Lord and the Lord of *your* (pl.) forefathers." Pharaoh, however, does not know or accept the God of Mūsā and Hārūn as evidenced by his question to Mūsā: "Who is *your* (dual) Lord?" (20.49), and "What is the 'Lord of the Worlds?'" (26.23). Although this element is absent from the biblical account, a similar exchange between Moses and Pharaoh is also found in the *Aggadah.*[610] In both the Jewish texts and the Qur'ān, Moses responds by describing God as the omnipotent Creator (cf. 20.50, 52-55 and 26.24). Although the Jewish and Islamic texts differ in word, their content is essentially the same, both evoking natural phenomena as signs of God's omnipotence. When Mūsā speaks of the one God who alone is responsible for creation (20.50), Pharaoh anxiously (or perhaps provocatively) asks him about the (eternal) fate of previous generations (*fa-mā bāl al-qurūn al-ūlā*) who did not worship this God (20.51), an element lacking in both the biblical and *aggadic* accounts. This is the same concern the Quraysh voiced against Muhammad's preaching since it implied that their forefathers had been in error.[611] Indeed, much of the content of Mūsā's *khuṭbah* to Pharaoh would have been appropriate for Muhammad to preach to the Quraysh. In 26.28, for example, Mūsā's remarks are directed, not only to Pharaoh, but also to the people: "If only you (pl.) understood!" Pharaoh's response to Mūsā is complete rejection – *fakadhdhaba wa abā* (20.56): "but he rejected and refused (God's signs)." The verb *abā* ("to refuse/reject") appears once more in this *sūra,* in *āya* 117, where it is

[609] Oliver Leaman, "*Taqwa*," *The Qur'an: an Encyclopedia* 642-644.
[610] Ginzberg, I/II, 499-500.
[611] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 1175.

used to describe Iblīs' response when God orders that he and the angels prostrate themselves before Adam. Twice more in the Qur'ān, in 2.34 and 15.31, when Iblīs' refusal to bow down before Adam is recounted, *abā* is used. Thus, the Qur'ān draws an analogy, overlooked by commentators, between Pharaoh's rejection of God's signs and Iblīs' rejection of God's command. As already seen with the verb *ṭaghā*, *abā* may apply to humanity's rejection of God's Word as it did Pharaoh's: "And indeed We explained to humanity in this Qur'ān every kind of lesson but most of humanity rejected it, except with disbelief (*al-Isrā'* 17.89)."

While Mūsā had been accused of being a magician/sorcerer earlier in 51.39, now Pharaoh also accuses Mūsā of using magic specifically to drive the Egyptians from their land (20.57). Pharaoh's magicians reiterate this charge in 20.63 where Hārūn is accused along with Mūsā as evidenced by the dual forms in the *āya* (e.g. *hādhān, sāhirān, yurīdān*), and is repeated in 26.35 (as well as 7.110 without the element of magic). Since, as already noted, the Quraysh had accused Muhammad of sorcery, it seems likely that they were also afraid of being dispossessed by the Prophet, although this not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'ān or *sīrah* literature. Ironically, it is the Quraysh who would dispossess the Muslims by forcing them to flee Mecca in 622 CE, some seven years after the revelation of *Ṭā Hā*. In addition to Pharaoh's fear of being driven from the land, Pharaoh's magicians express concern in 20.63 that Mūsā and Hārūn want to do away with the customs of the Egyptians (*yadhhabā bi-ṭarīqatikum al-muthlā*). This charge is echoed in al-Ṭabarī's account of the Quraysh's opposition to Muhammad: "When the Quraysh saw that he would not give them any satisfaction, they objected to his departing from their ways (*farāqhum*) and denouncing their gods."[612] In 26.27 Pharaoh denounces Mūsā as a messenger who is possessed (*majnūn*), the same charge that the Quraysh made against Muhammad (37.36). This further demonstrates that in many instances in which Pharaoh and other Egyptians are

[612] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 1174.

mentioned in the Qur'ān as Mūsā's opponents, they may actually represent the Quraysh who opposed Muhammad.

Having challenged Mūsā to a contest, Pharaoh hatches his plot – *jamaʿ kayd* (20.60), and enjoins his magicians to do likewise - *ajmiʿū kaydkum* (20.64).[613] As discussed in the previous chapter, *kayd* (both as a verb and a noun) has particular significance in *Sūrat Yūsuf* where it refers to the schemes of Yūsuf's brothers (12.5), the wife of al-'Azīz (12.28), the ladies of the city (12.33 and 50), and "false ones" (12.52). Although, as noted, God too "plots," i.e. on behalf of Yūsuf (12.76), it generally has a negative or even satanic connotation as Yaʿqūb make clear: *fa-yakīdū la-ka kayd inna al-Shayṭān lil-insān 'adūw mubīn* – "…lest your brothers hatch a plot against you, for Satan is a real enemy to humanity." As these three words - *'adūw, abā,* and *kayd* - are used particularly in reference to Iblīs/Shayṭān, these *āyāt* leave no doubt that Pharaoh is not merely arrogant or tyrannical, but *diabolical*.

**V. B. The Magicians**

The second Meccans *sūras* also introduce Pharaoh's magicians into the Exodus story. Beginning with 20.61, Mūsā now turns to them, sternly warning them, even before their competition begins, not to fabricate lies about God "for the one who fabricates (*iftarā*)[614] [lies] will fail." His admonition closely parallels 10.69 and 16.116 (both third Meccan *sūras*): "those who fabricate lies against God will not prosper," which in both cases is directed to the Meccans in general. It is also related linguistically to a much-repeated phrase in later *sūras*: "Who does more evil than the one who fabricates (*iftarā*) lies against God and rejects his signs?"[615] Thus, it seems that Mūsā's warning to Pharaoh's magicians also pertains to the Quraysh and others who

[613] I take 20.64 to be Pharaoh's words as in 20.57. Both ayāt 63 and 65 are introduced with *qālū* – "They said" – suggesting that the intervening *āya* (64) is spoken by someone else, most probably Pharaoh, as in 26.35 (and 7.110). See discussion below.
[614] *Iftarā* is the third personal masculine singular perfect form VIII of *farā.*
[615] 6.21; 6.93; 6.144; 7.37; 10.17; 11.18; 18.15; 29.68; and 61.7.

rejected Muhammad and the Qur'ān. The same may be said of 20.62 which describes the secret planning of the magicians: *asarū al-najwā* – "they spoke in secret" – a phrase that appears in 21.3 where it is said of those who do evil (*allad̲hīn ẓalimū*). Pharaoh's plotting with his magicians is absent from the biblical and *aggadic* texts. In the Qur'ān, it serves to underscore the confrontation between the Prophet (Mūsā / Muhammad) and those who reject both Messenger and Message (Pharaoh / Quraysh).

Although some second Meccan *sūras* indict "the people of Pharaoh" along with their ruler, it soon becomes clear that *not all* Egyptians are condemned, and that some did indeed come to belief. Such is also the case with Pharaoh's magicians. In Second Meccan *sūras* the contest between Mūsā, Hārūn, and Pharaoh's magicians is recounted in 20.65-69 and 26.38-45 (cf. 7.113 ff.). It is essentially that which is related in Ex. 7.8-13 – i.e. both Pharaoh's magicians and Mūsā turn staves (and ropes as in 20.66 and 26.44) into serpents, but Mūsā's staff swallows up those of the magicians. The biblical version is tersely narrated and the scene ends abruptly with no direct speech from any of the participants. After this dramatic display of God's power over that of Pharaoh and his magicians, the text simply says: "Yet, Pharaoh's heart stiffened and he did not heed then, as the LORD had said" (Ex. 7.13). The narrative then quickly moves on to the first of the ten plagues that are described in detail. The Qur'ānic accounts in s*ūras Ṭā Hā* and *al-S̲hu'arā* (as well as *al-A'rāf*, see below), however, extend the "contest" with a unique and noteworthy but much overlooked element found in neither the biblical nor the *aggadic* texts: the *conversion* of Pharaoh's magicians: "So the magicians were thrown down in prostration, and said: 'We believe in the Lord of Hārūn and Mūsā (20.70),'" or alternatively: "We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Mūsā and Hārūn" (26.47-8). Even when Pharaoh objects and threatens them

with being maimed and impaled, they remain steadfast in their newfound faith, trusting in God's mercy to forgive their sins:

> They said: "We will not prefer you [Pharaoh] to the clear signs that came to us and He who created us. So pronounce whatever judgment you wish for you can only pronounce judgment in this worldly life. For we have come to believe in our Lord that He may forgive us our sins and the magic which you compelled us to do, and God is the Best and the Everlasting." (20.72-3)

Indeed, Pharaoh's threats serve only to strengthen their conviction: they quickly acknowledge "the Lord of Hārūn and Mūsā" as their own Creator (*allādhī faṭaranā*, 20.72) and their Lord (*rabbinā*, 20.73), who has the power to forgive them their sins (*yaghfir lanā khaṭāyānā*, 20.73). Likewise, in 26.50, they recognize their fate rests with God not Pharaoh: "No injury will come to us; to our Lord will we return" (cf. 7.125). This is a declaration of faith worthy of anyone facing religious persecution, and must have inspired and comforted the early Muslims as they suffered at the hands of the Quraysh during the period in which *Ṭā Hā* and *al-Shuʿarā* were revealed. The conversion of the magicians is a remarkable episode in the story of Mūsā and the Egyptians, which culminates in their stunning claim of 26.51: "We only desire that our Lord will forgive us our sins as we are *the foremost of believers* (*awwal al-mu'minīn*)."

The word *awwal* is ambiguous in this context, and could mean "first" in a sequential or chronological sense, or, as I have translated it here (as does Yūsuf 'Alī and Muhammad Asad), "foremost," in the sense of "the most prominent or outstanding." In either case, it is an extraordinary statement. How could Pharaoh's magicians, idolaters up until their contest with Mūsā, who have only just expressed their belief in Mūsā's God, now declare their desire to become *the foremost of believers*, and what do they mean? The simple answer is to take *awwal* in its sequential or chronological sense – i.e. that these Egyptians were the *first* (of their people ostensibly) to believe in the one God. This is how Ibn Kathīr understands the magicians'

claim.[616] The problem with this interpretation, however, as we have already seen, is that Mūsā's mission among the Egyptians was preceded by that of Yūsuf, and that, according to many *mufassirūn,* and as I also have argued, several Egyptians of his day became believers, including al-ʻAzīz, "the Witness," one of Yūsuf's prison mates, the king, al-ʻAzīz's wife and probably her female companions as well. In both the E- and N-chronologies, *Ṭā Hā* and *al-Shu'arā'* were both revealed before *Yūsuf,*[617] and thus the Meccans would have heard of Pharaoh's magicians coming to belief before they learned of Yūsuf's Egyptian converts, but this would hardly justify the claim of the magicians to become the "*first* of believers."

More plausible, perhaps, is the tradition cited by al-Ṭabarī explaining that the magicians were the first Egyptians to believe in *Mūsā* as Prophet and his signs,[618] although the magicians say: "We believe in *the Lord* of Mūsā and Hārūn (or: Lord of the Worlds)." Similarly, al-Zamakhsharī understands that the magicians were the first believers among the people of their time (*min ahl zamānhum*) or the first among Pharaoh's subjects (*min ra'iya firʻawn*).[619] These interpretations are implied in the translations of Arberry, Dawood, Ahmed Ali and Alan Jones. I do not, however, find these qualifications convincing, and perhaps neither did authors of various *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* who clearly seem to avoid mentioning the magicians' claim of aspiring to be *awwal al-mu'minīn* even though they incorporate the magicians' declaration of faith from 20.70 and/or 26.47-48 into their narratives. This is the case with al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh*, and the *Qiṣaṣ* of al-Thaʻlabī, al-Rabghūzī and al-Kisā'ī.[620] Perhaps they found traditional interpretations of 26.51 unsatisfactory, and thus decided to omit it. The situation is complicated by 7.144 (Third Meccan period) where Mūsā in his encounter with God on Sinai after the Exodus from Egypt declares:

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[616] *Tafsir,* v. 3, 314.
[617] *Ṭā Hā* is N55/E45 and *Al-Shu'arā'* is N46/E47, whereas *Yūsuf* is N77/E53.
[618] *Tafsīr,* v. 11, 6561.
[619] *Al-Kashshāf,* 3, 238.
[620] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 474; al-Thaʻlabī, *Qiṣaṣ,* 310; al-Rabghūzī, 329-30; al-Kisā'ī, 229.

"Glory to You! I turn in repentance to You, and I am the *foremost of believers*" (*awwal al-mu'minīn*)," a claim which seemingly ignores the magicians' aspirations, and more significantly, the previous prophets of God. Yūsuf 'Alī more convincingly explains that *first* "means here not the first in time, but most zealous in faith. It has the intensive and not the comparative meaning."[621]

The magicians' aspiration to be "the foremost of believers" is perhaps best understood in tandem with *Sūrat Qāf* which, according to the N-chronology, was revealed in the same period as *Ṭā Hā* and *al-Shu'arā* (N54, 55, and 56 respectively). In 50.12-14, we read:

> Before them [the unbelieving Meccans], the people of Nūḥ disbelieved, (as did) the Companions of the Rass, the Thamūd, the 'Ād, Pharaoh, and the brethren of Lūṭ, the Companions of the Forest, and the people of Tubba'. All (of them) rejected the messengers, and My promise was confirmed.

These *āyāt* indicate that many - if not all – of the different peoples of the ancient world had rejected God's prophets. Pharaoh's magicians, too, had refused to recognize Mūsā as Prophet until they witnessed his signs, resulting in their submission to his God. Their journey from strident disbelief as Pharaoh's subjects to fervent and unshakeable belief is exceptional among their Near Eastern neighbors, and thus they can indeed claim to be (or aspire to become) the "foremost of believers" – i.e. *the most significant of their time* - even if they were not actually the *first* Egyptians to come to belief. The significance of their submission to God also lies in the privileged positions they held in Pharaoh's court, and the attention their conversion would have attracted.

Following their faith-filled statement of 26.51, we hear no more of the magicians in the *sūra,* and the narrative continues with Israel's departure from Egypt. Islamic tradition maintains that these magicians suffered the punishments with which Pharaoh had threatened them (20.71

[621] Yūsuf Alī, *Qur'ān* n. 1104. Cf. 6.14 and 6.163 where Muhammad claims to be *awwal (min) al-muslimīn*.

and 26.49) and died. Al-Ṭabarī cites a tradition attributed to Ibn ʻAbbās: "At the start of the day they were magicians, and at end of the day martyrs."[622] This is repeated by al-Thaʻlabī,[623] al-Rabghūzī,[624] and al-Kisā'ī.[625] Before continuing with the Exodus story, *Sūrat Ṭā Hā* concludes the saga of the magicians with what is considered by most to be a commentary on their conversion,[626] a stern warning to the sinful and a paradisiacal promise to the righteous:

> Truly the one who comes to his Lord as a sinner, for him is Hell in which he shall neither die nor live. And for the one who comes to Him as a believer, who has done righteous deeds, for them are higher realms, Gardens of Paradise beneath which rivers flow, abiding there forever, for such is the lot of the one is purified. (20.74-76)

The conversion of the magicians has assured them a place in paradise. In addition to the versions related in *Ṭā Hā*, the conversion of the magicians is recounted a *third* time in *Sūrat al-A'rāf* 7.120-126, revealed near the end of the third Meccan period. The repetition of the story speaks to its significance. This third version has more in common with 26.46-51 than with 20.70-76, but its conclusion is unique and merits discussion here. Disregarding Pharaoh's threats as in 26.50, the magicians say to him (7.126):

> You exact punishment upon us (for no reason) other than we believed in the signs of our Lord when they came to us. Our Lord, pour out perseverance on us and let us die as those who submit (*muslimīn*).

This is very similar to *al-Mā'idah* 5.59 where Muhammad is directed to announce:

> O People of the Book! Do you exact punishment upon us (for no reason) other than we believed in God and what was revealed to us and what revealed before, and that most of you are depraved?

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[622] *Tafsīr*, v. 9, 5935; *Ta'rīkh* 478.
[623] Al-Thaʻlabī 311. Al-Thaʻlabī names the five who converted: Ṣabūr, Ḥafaẓ, Khiṭaṭ, and Muṣifā.
[624] Al-Rabghūzī 331. Al-Rabghūzī gives the chief magician's name as Simeon (or Yūḥannā), names that are obviously Judeo-Christian.
[625] Al-Kisā'ī 229.
[626] Dawood's translation includes it as part of the magicians' speech.

According both N- and E-chronologies, *al-Mā'idah* is a late Madīnan *sūra* (the very last according to N with some earlier material). The similarity of 5.59 to 7.126 suggests that by the end of Muhammad's life, the confrontation between the magicians and Pharaoh, which had been reflected in the confrontation between the Muslims and the Quraysh, is now evoked in their conflict with the People of the Book as well. Later, when *Sūrat al-Baqarah* was revealed, the desire of Pharaoh's magicians to die as *muslimīn* (7.126) is retrojected into the teaching of Ibrāhīm himself: "And Ibrāhīm bequeathed (his faith) to his sons, as did Yaʿqūb: 'Oh my sons! God had chosen the faith for you; then do not die not except as *muslimūn*'" (2.132).

The conversion of Pharaoh's magicians is one of the most significant differences in the way the Hebrew Bible and Qur'ān view the Egyptians and, by extension, all non-Jews. With its overall *covenantal* emphasis, the Hebrew Bible does not concern itself with the faith of non-Jews. It is generally only concerned with how the actions of non-Jews affect the lives, rights and responsibilities of God's chosen people, and it usually sees non-Jews, particularly the Egyptians, as adversely affecting or influencing them. As already seen in *Sūrat Yūsuf,* the Qur'ān and God's Prophets, with their *missionary* emphasis are supremely concerned with the faith of all peoples – Jews, Christians and polytheists – as all are called to *islām* – to (truly) submit to God. Non-believers only become truly "other" when they persist in their unbelief.

Following the conversion of the magicians, *Ṭā Hā* and *al-Shuʿarā* turn abruptly and briefly to the Israelites' flight from Egypt, Pharaoh's pursuit, and the miracle at the Sea (20.77-79 and 26.52-67) in which Pharaoh's troops are drowned. The Egyptians are mentioned in four more *sūras* from the second Meccan period (*Ṣād* 38.12 (N59); *Zukhruf* 43.46-56 (N61); *al-Mu'minīn* 23.45-49 (N64); *al-Isrā'* 17.101-103 (N67). *Sūrat Ṣād* was referenced above in the discussion above regarding Pharaoh as the "Lord of Stakes." Much of *Sūrat Zukhruf* is an answer

to a question posed in *āya* 25: "What was the fate of those who disbelieved?" After relating the rejection Ibrāhīm suffered from his people and that of Muhammad by his, it recounts Mūsā's rejection by the Egyptians. God afflicted them specifically "so that they might return" to him; but when their suffering ends, they turn away. Pharaoh is portrayed as an arrogant leader whom his depraved (*fāsiqīn*) people obeyed. Having incurred God's anger, they are all drowned. Although 43.46-55 repeatedly uses the word *qawm* ("people") - twice in *āya* 51 and twice again in *āya* 54 - it is clear from *āya* 46 which begins the section on Mūsā that it does *not* refer to all Egyptians, but *only* to those who rejected God's signs: "We sent Mūsā with Our signs to *Pharaoh and his ministers*." In other words, we must be careful not to interpret this indictment of Pharaoh and "his people" as a condemnation of the Egyptian people as a whole. *Al-Mu'minūn* 23.45-46 also makes this clear: "Then We sent Mūsā and his brother Hārūn with Our signs and clear authority to *Pharaoh and his ministers*, but they were arrogant and a haughty people" (*fastakbarū wa kānū qawm 'ālīn*). In the Third Meccan *sūras*, arrogance is a charge repeatedly made against the Egyptians in general as well as Pharaoh and his ministers.[627] Arrogance is no mere personality flaw according to the Qur'ān, but a fundamental trait of Iblīs who refused God's command to prostrate before Adam (7.13 and 8.74, 75). It characterizes not only the Egyptians, but also Nūḥ's people (&1.7), the 'Ād (41.15), the Thamūd (7.75-6), and the Madyan people (7.88) as well as the Meccans.[628] God does not love the arrogant (16.23) and Hell is the abode of the arrogant (40.76). It is related in the *ḥadīth* that Muhammad said: "He who has, in his heart, a grain of arrogance will not enter Paradise" (*Saḥīḥ Muslim*, 91).

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[627] 40.27, 35, 47, 48 (N78); 28.29 (N79); 29.39 (N81); 10.75 (N84); and 7.133 (N87). The active participle *mutakabbir* is used in addition to the past tense verb *astakbar*.
[628] Nasr Aby Zayd, "Arrogance" in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an* v. 1, 158-161.

## VI. Third Meccan *Sūras*

In the Third Meccan period, there are references to Egyptians in seven *sūras*, totaling some 135 *āyāt*, almost as many in the Second Meccan Period. Three of the *sūras* have brief references: *Hūd* 11.96-99 (N75), *Ibrāhīm* 14.6 (N76) and *al-'Ankabūt* 29.39-40 (N81). The remaining four *sūras* contain rather substantial material: *Ghāfir* (or *al-Mu'min*) 40.23-50 (N78), *al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.1-21, 25, 32-42 (N79), *Yūnus* 10.75-92 (N84), and *al-A'rāf* 7.103-141 (N87). Consequently, there is much that is new in terms of details and characters, both believers and unbelievers.

### VI.A. "The Believer"

*Sūrat Ghāfir* 40.28-45 introduces an unnamed Egyptian known in the *sūra* only as "the believer" (*al-mu'min*), an epithet by which the *sūra* is also known. He figures in neither the biblical nor *aggadic* accounts, and is thus unique to the Qur'ān. Islamic tradition will in time give him the name Ḥizqīl (see below). Although he is not mentioned in any other s*ūra*, he serves as a rare and important Qur'ānic example of a faith-filled individual in humanity's otherwise long history of doubt and unbelief. The section on Israel in Egypt begins in *āya* 23 with the confrontation between Pharaoh, accompanied by his ministers Hāmān and Qārūn (discussed below), and Mūsā. When Pharaoh expresses his desire to kill Mūsā, "a believer from the people of Pharaoh who concealed his faith" steps forward to challenge Pharaoh and his ministers, and defend Mūsā (40.28). He then turns to his compatriots, repeatedly exhorting them: "O my people!" and expressing his fear that they will suffer divine retribution for their obstinence as did the people of Nūḥ, the 'Ād, Thamūd, and others. He reminds them of how they failed to believe in *Yūsuf* who came to them and doubted the coming of another Messenger of God. His spirited *khuṭbah* is briefly interrupted by Pharaoh's plotting (*kayd* – see earlier discussion and previous

chapter) with Hāmān (see below), but the Believer forcefully continues: "Oh my people! Follow me! I will lead you on the right path." In an artful turn of contrasting phrases he declares:

> How is it that *I summon you to salvation* but *you summon me to the Fire*!
>
> *You summon me to disbelieve in God* and to associate with Him what I have no knowledge of, and *I summon you to the Powerful One*, the Oft-Forgiving! (40.41-42)

Upon the completion of his *khuṭbah* with *āya* 44, we hear no more from him yet are reassured that "God protected him from the evils they (i.e. Pharaoh et al.) had planned," while the people of Pharaoh (his ministers and army, we may assume) were punished (40.45). While al-Ṭabarī affirms that the Believer was saved along with Mūsā,[629] according to al-Thaʿlabī, he was executed along with Pharaoh's magicians who likewise had professed their faith in the one God,[630] but this appears to conflict with 40.45.

Given the Qur'ān's perfunctory description of the Believer as someone "from the people of Pharaoh," many have speculated about his identity. He is variously given the name Ḥizqīl (Ezekiel),[631] Harbel,[632] Simeon,[633] Ḥabīb,[634] and Khayr.[635] Al-Ṭabarī reports traditions that identify him as Pharaoh's paternal cousin (*ibn 'amm*) or even as an Israelite. Identifying him as an Israelite is predicated on the prepositional phrase that describes him as *min āl fir'awn* ("from the people of Pharaoh") which some regard as qualifying the verbal phrase *yaktum īmānuhu* ("he concealed his faith"), rather than describing the Believer himself. Thus, we would understand

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[629] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr,* v. 12, 7517-18. This reiterated by Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 4, 72: (the Believer) "was saved in this world and the next; in this world, God saved him along with Mūsā; and in the next world will return him to Paradise." Al-Ṭabarī omits the Believer from the Exodus account in his *Ta'rīkh* as does al-Rabghūzī in his *Qiṣas.*

[630] Al-Thaʿlabī 311.
[631] Al-Thaʿlabī 289.
[632] Al-Kisā'ī 228.
[633] Perhaps conflated with one of Pharaoh's magicians who converted. See above n. 90.
[634] Al-Zamakhsharī, 4, 123. Ḥabīb is also the name traditionally given to the unnamed person in *Yā Sīn* 36.20 ff.
[635] Tabarani (ca. 873 CE-970 CE) as cited by: Brannon M. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Qur'ān* (London: Continuum, 2002) 191.

40.28 to read: "A Believer (who), from Pharaoh's people concealed his faith…" This would mean, however, that the Believer was directing his *khuṭbah* to the Israelites, which al-Ṭabarī finds untenable, as do I.[636] It seems more likely that the Believer is exhorting the Egyptian people to heed God's signs which Pharaoh and his ministers had rejected. When the Believer upbraids them for summoning him to associate (*ushrik*) something with God (40.42), he must be speaking to *mushkrikūn,* i.e. the polytheistic Egyptians rather than the Israelites (although they subsequently engaged in *shirk* by worshipping the calf (20.88-97).

In both *tafsīr* literature and *qiṣaṣ*, the Believer of *Sūrat Ghāfir* is often identified with the unnamed man in *Sūrat al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.20 who came to warn Mūsā of Pharaoh's plot to kill him.[637] Some also believe he was also the carpenter who made the chest into which Mūsā was placed by his mother and set upon the waters, or Pharaoh's treasurer.[638] In his *Qiṣaṣ* al-Thaʿlabī quotes a *ḥadīth* in which Muhammad named the three men who were the first among the nations who did not reject God – "not even for one instant:" Ḥizqīl, the believer among the people of Pharaoh; Ḥabīb, the name given to the man in *Yā Sīn* 36.20 ff.; and ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭalib.[639] In the previous chapter, we saw that tradition regards al-ʿAzīz, Yūsuf' Egyptian master, one the three most intuitive (*afras*) of people beside Abū Bakr, and the Midianite woman who asked Shuʿayb to employ Mūsā. With Ḥizqīl we have a second Egyptian who bears distinction above all other believers, and we shall see, Pharaoh's wife will be a third.

In extra-Qur'ānic texts and tradition, Ḥizqīl's wife is also honored as a believer. Al-Thaʿlabī cites a *ḥadīth* in which Muhammad relates that he learned of her from the angel Jibrīl during the *Isrā'*. The unnamed woman was the hairdresser of Pharaoh's daughter. When she

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[636] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr,* v. 12, 7505. The debate is reiterated by many *mufassirūn*. The consensus is that the Believer was Egyptian.
[637] E.g. al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr,* v. 11, 6728-6729; al-Zamakhsharī, v. 3, 302; al-Thaʿlabī 289; al-Kisā'ī 221.
[638] Al-Thaʿlabī 311.
[639] Al-Thaʿlabī 289.

dropped her comb one day, she invoked the name of (the one) God. The princess asked her if she was referring to Pharaoh, but the woman replied, "No, rather my Lord and the Lord of your father." Brought before Pharaoh, the woman reiterated her belief to him: "My Lord and your Lord is God," and was thus sentenced to death by fire along with her children. Before being cast into the flames with her remaining son, an infant in arms, the child said to her: "Mother, be steadfast, for yours is the truth." This child is considered one of the four who spoke in infancy, according to tradition, in addition to the "witness" (*shāhid*) from *Surat Yūsuf* (see previous chapter), Jesus, and "the companion of Jirjīs."[640] Although the *ḥadīth* does not identify her as the wife of the Believer Ḥizqīl, popular tradition does. Thus, along with Pharaoh's magicians, the Believer (Ḥizqīl), his wife, and their son are examples of Egyptians from the Exodus story that may be counted among the *mu'minīn.*

**VI. B. The Wife of Pharaoh**

In addition to the Believer of *Sūrat Ghāfir*, the third Meccan period introduces one of the most significant of Egyptian believers: the wife of Pharaoh who is first mentioned in *al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.9. This is the first of only two brief references to her in the Qur'ān, the other being *āya* 11 of *Sūrat al-Taḥrīm* (66), a Madīnan *sūra.* Yet, this unnamed woman in time became a much-honored figure in Islamic tradition known as Āsiyah who assumes the role played by Pharaoh's daughter in the Book of Exodus. In 28.9, she intercedes on behalf of the infant Mūsā: "And the wife of Pharaoh said: '(He is) a joy to the eye for me and you! Do not kill him. Perhaps he will be of use to us, or we shall adopt him as a son." She is addressing her husband first as evidenced by the second person masculine pronoun in the phrase: *qurrat 'ayn lī wa la**ka**.* A switch to the plural imperative in the next phrase (*lā taqtulū-hu*) indicates a request to Pharaoh, Hāmān and the soldiers (mentioned in the previous *āya*). She then gives her justification: *'asā an yafa'anā*

[640] Al-Thaʿlabī 312. For the "companion of Jirjīs" (or Juraij), see: n. 381 in previous chapter.

*aw nattakhidha-hu walad* – which, as we have seen, are the same words al-ʻAzīz spoke to his wife in *Sūrat Yūsuf* 12.21 when he introduces Yūsuf into their household. This linguistic analogy implies that benevolence extended by al-ʻAzīz towards Yūsuf will similarly be extended by Pharaoh's wife towards Mūsā. Moreover, in both cases, the phrase signifies an individual who recognizes the special qualities possessed by God's prophets (Yūsuf and Mūsā), and thus is considered a believer. Surprisingly most classical and modern exegetes seem to overlook the connection between 12.21 and 28.9.[641]

Al-Ṭabarī recounts Āsiyah's story in his *Ta'rīkh* based on several traditions. He gives her patrilineage as: bint Muzāḥim b. ʻUbayd b. al-Rayyān b. al-Walīd. She was thus the great granddaughter of al-Rayyān, the Pharaoh who freed Yūsuf from prison (see previous chapter). She is said to have been the wife of Qabūs b. Muṣʿab b. Muʿāwiyah, who succeeded al-Rayyān. After Qabūs died, Āsiyah was married to his brother al-Walīd b. Muṣʿab, the Pharaoh to whom Mūsā was sent. Perhaps due to her steadfast belief in the one God as exhibited particularly in 66.11, some traditions cited by al-Ṭabarī, al-Thaʿlabī and others claim that Āsiyah was as an Israelite, although this is not supported by the Qur'ānic references.[642] From a historical perspective, we do know that several pharaohs of the Eighteenth- and Nineteenth Dynasties took foreign (Asiatic) princesses as wives for diplomatic purposes, including Thuthmose III, Thuthmose IV (r. 1400-1390 BCE), and Amenhotep III (r. 1390-1352 BCE), as well as Ramses

[641] Al-Ṭabarī does not note it, nor does al-Zamakhsharī or Ibn Kathīr. In more recent times, it also seems to have escaped the notice of Sayyid Qutb. Fatoohi (*Mystery*, 115) is aware of the repetition of the phrase but does not reflect on the connection being made between the two individuals (al-ʻAzīz and Pharaoh's wife) who cared for God's Prophets (Yūsuf and Mūsā).

[642] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 445; al-Thaʿlabī 313. Al-Ṭabarī does not cite any such traditions in his *Tafsīr* for 28.9 or 66.11. Al-Zamakhsharī repeats a (unattributed) tradition that Asiya was Mūsā's paternal aunt (*'ammah*). Cf. *Al-Kashshāf* 4, 433; Al-Kisā'ī regards Asiya as Mūsā's cousin (*Qiṣaṣ* 217).

II.[643] Given that Ramses II is traditionally identified as the Pharaoh of the Exodus, it is worth noting that some have suggested Ramses' wife Isis-Nofret was possibly Canaanite due to the name given to her daughter: *Bint-Anath*, "the Daughter of Anath" (a Canaanite goddess).[644] Identifying ethnicity on the basis of names is quite problematic, however, and even if Isis-Nofret were of Canaanite origin, her daughter's name *Bint-Anath* is hardly reflective of a monotheistic mother. Given the Qur'ān's silence on the ethnicity of Pharaoh's wife, as well as the traditional patrilineage assigned to her in some Muslim sources, we may continue to regard her as an Egyptian.

Many traditions speak of the great love which Āsiyah felt for the infant Mūsā at the moment she opened the chest into which he had been laid and saw him: "She cast her love onto him, the like of which had never been cast by her on any other person."[645] When the small boy pulled Pharaoh's beard and was threatened with execution, it was Āsiyah who intervened on his behalf. According to al-Thaʿlabī, Āsiyah, having witnessed the execution of the hair dresser, the wife of Ḥizqīl (see above), rebuked Pharaoh for his cruelty and confessed her own faith "in God, my Lord and your Lord, the Lord of All-Being." She, too, then suffered torture and death. It has been assumed that her words in *al-Taḥrīm* 66.11 reflect those of a martyr:

> And God gives an example to those who believe: the wife of Pharaoh. Lo! She said: "O Lord! Build for me near You a dwelling in Paradise, and save me from Pharaoh and his works, and save me from the depraved people."

In *al-Taḥrīm,* Āsiyah serves as one of God's examples to believers along with Maryam (66.12). These *āyāt* became the foundation for several *ḥadīth* that extol and distinguish Khadīja and Fāṭima in relation to Āsiyah and Maryam who are considered "the most excellent" of the female

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[643] Joyce Tyldesley, *Chronicle of the Queens of Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 111-113, 123-124, 158-159; Samuel Meier, "Diplomacy and International Marriages," *Amarna Diplomacy: the Beginnings of International Diplomacy*, eds. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2000), 165-173.
[644] Tyldesley, *Chronicle* 156.
[645] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 453.

inhabitants of heaven.[646] In other *ḥadīth* it is said that among women only Āsiyah and Maryam have achieved perfection (*lam yakmul min al-nisā' illā Āsiyah imra'at fir'awn wa Maryam bint 'Imrān*), even as the Prophet's wife 'Ā'isha is said to be superior over other women.[647] In medieval Cairo, the mausoleum (*mashhad*) of *sayyida* ("Lady") Āsiyah, was located in in the Qarāfa cemetery, alleged to have been her burial place and was a popular place of pilgrimage.[648] In a copper plate inscription from the Ottoman treasury at Topkapı originally attributed to 'Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib, Āsiyah is described as a "believer" (*mu'minah*). The text relates how the sword of the Prophet Dāwūd, concealed from Pharaoh, came into the possession of Āsiyah, who then passed it on to Mūsā.[649]

It has been argued that Āsiyah's story, particularly as related by extra-Qur'ānic material, bears "undoubted similarities" to the Christian legend of St. Catherine of Alexandria.[650] While there are some common elements in the story – i.e. an Egyptian woman of royal birth who suffers torture and martyrdom rather than betraying her faith – such commonalities are *topoi* frequently encountered in stories of martyrs, Christian and Islamic. It has also been suggested that Āsiyah's name is a corruption of *Aseneth*, the biblical name of Joseph's wife (see previous chapter), which is rendered *Asyat* in Syriac.[651] More convincing, perhaps, is the suggestion that

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[646] Spellberg 156.
[647] *Saḥīḥ Bukharī*, 3411 (cf. 3433). Cf. Spellberg 164.

[648] Christopher S. Taylor, "Sacred History and the Cult of Muslim Saints in Late Medieval Egypt," *Muslim World* 80, 2 (2007), 72-80; 'Alī ibn Aḥmad al-Sakhāwī, *Tuḥfat al-aḥbāb wa-bughyat al-ṭullāb* (al-Qāhirah : Maktabat al-Kullīyāt al-Azharīyah, 1986), 115-116.
[649] Hilmi Aydin, *The Sacred Trusts: Pavillion of the Sacred Relics, Topkapı Palace Museum Istanbul* (Somerset: Tughra, 2009) 280-81.
[650] John Walker, "Asiya: the Wife of Pharaoh," *Muslim World* 18 (1928), 45-48.
[651] J. Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* 86.

*Āsiyah* is derived from the name of the Egyptian goddess Isis, rendered in Coptic as *Esī*,[652] whose worship was ubiquitous in the ancient Near East well into the Christian era.[653]

In the Hebrew Bible, Pharaoh's *daughter* rather than his wife is Moses' adoptive mother, but Jewish and Islamic traditions characterize the two women similarly. Although she is unnamed in the Book of Exodus, Pharaoh's daughter is called Bithiah in 1 Chr. 4.17 where she is also identified as the wife of Mered from the tribe of Judah, and mother of his sons Jared, Heber and Jekuthiel.[654] *Bithiah* is a distinctively Hebrew name meaning "daughter of Yah(weh)," and suggests that she followed the God of Moses, as the Qur'ān makes clear in 66.11. Bithiah thus represents a rare *biblical* example of an Egyptian who came to believe in the one God. In the *Aggadah*, as in Josephus, her name is given as *Thermutis*, a Greek form of the Egyptian Renenutet, a goddess who was merged with Isis in the Greco-Roman Period.[655] In recognition of her care of Moses, God bestowed the name *Bithiah* upon her, calling her His daughter. That Bithiah believed in Israel's God is also evidenced by her desire to cleanse herself of the impurity of the idol worship,[656] and that "she was permitted to enter Paradise alive."[657]

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[652] Cf. al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 279, n. 5.

[653] In the east, her cult was widespread among the Nabateans. See: Robert Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: from the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (London: Routledge, 2001), 142-3. Her image is also found in Qaryat al-Faw, at the edge of the Rubʿ al-Khali in the Arabian Peninsula. See: Abdulrahman Muhammad Tayeb al-Ansari, "Qaryat al-Faw," in: *Roads of Arabia,* ed. Ali Ibrahim al-Ghabban et al. (Washington, DC: Freer Sackler, 2012) 336. For images at Jabal al-Lawdh in Yemen, see: *Queen of Sheba: Treasures from Ancient Yemen,* ed. St John Simpson (London British Museum, 2002) 133.

[654] Mered is called *Caleb* in the *Aggadah.*

[655] Francesco Tiradritti, *Isis, the Goddess Who Conquered Rome: Egyptian Museum of Cairo, November 29-December31, 1998* (Cairo: Supreme Council of Antiquities, 1998), 13-14; Wilkinson, *Complete God and Goddesses*, 225-6. Since Thermoutis came to be identified with Isis, one can see how Pharaoh's daughter/wife came to known as *Āsiyah* (Coptic, *Esī*) in the Islamic tradition. For Thermoutis as a Christian saint, see A. Hermann, "Das Kind und seine Hüterin," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Instituts für ägyptische Altertumskunde in Kairo* 8 (1939): 171-176.

[656] Ginzberg, I/II, 455.

[657] Ginzberg, I/II, 458. In Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1956), Bithiah is depicted as someone who gradually comes to believe in Moses' God, enters into Moses' household during the Passover, departs from Egypt with the Israelites, witnesses the destruction of Pharaoh's army, and remains with the Israelites to receive the Covenant at Sinai.

## VI. C. Hāmān

The *sūras* of the Third Meccan period introduced another Egyptian, Hāmān, an official of Pharaoh, who, like him, epitomizes *unbelief* rather than belief, in contrast to the Believer and Pharaoh's Wife (Āsiyah). Hāmān has no equivalent in the Book of Exodus or in *aggadic* texts, although an individual by that name appears in the Book of Esther (3.1 ff.) where he is a high-ranking official of the Persian King Ahasuerus.[658] The biblical Hāmān (הָמָן) plotted to exterminate the Jews because Mordechai refused to bow down to him. From the perspective of biblical scholars, Hāmān's apparent relocation from the Persian court of the Book of Esther to Pharaoh's court in the Qur'ān has presented something of a conundrum. Christian authors have attacked the credibility of the Qur'ān on this account prompting vigorous, albeit historically flawed, Muslim responses.[659] This alleged conflation has been treated at length by Adam Silverstein[660] and will not be repeated here, as my purpose is rather to discuss the *depiction* of Hāmān in the Qur'ān and Islamic tradition rather than his relationship, if any, to the figure in the Book of Esther.

Taking the *sūras* according to the order of the N-chronology, Hāmān is briefly mentioned in *Ghāfir* 40.23-25, 36-37; *al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.6, 8 and 38; and *al-'Ankabūt* 29.39 (N78, 79, and 81, respectively). There is no direct speech attributed to him, and he is always mentioned in association with Pharaoh. Although his particular office or function is not given, it has been assumed from context that he was one of Pharaoh's officials. In 40.23-25, he is mentioned along

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[658] Usually identified with Xerxes I (486-465 BCE), although the Septuagint and Peshitta read *Artaxerxes*, perhaps the denoting Artaxerxes I, the son of Xerxes I, r. 465-424 BCE (*The Jewish Study Bible*, 1626 n.1).

[659] Sher Mohammed Syed, "Hāmān in the Light of the Qur'ān," *Hamdard Islamicus* 7, 4 (1984): 83-92; MSM Saifullah et al., "Historical Errors of the Qur'an: Pharaoh and Haman," 4th updated version (2006) http://www.islamic-awareness.org./Quran/Contrad/External/haman/html. See also Fatoohi's particularly flawed discussion in *The Mystery of Israel in Ancient Egypt*, 119-126.

[660] Adam Silverstein, "Hāmān's Transition from Jāhliyya to Islām," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008): 285-308. Silverstein concludes that the biblical and Qur'ānic Hāmān are indeed one, but that both drew from previous Near Eastern literary traditions.

with Pharaoh and Qārūn (Korah of Num. 16) the Israelite (cf. 27.76), all of whom rejected God's signs, accused Mūsā of being a deceitful magician, and plotted the death of Israel's male children. They are thus referred to as "unbelievers" (*kāfirīn*) and stand in stark contrast to the Believer of 40.28 ff. Hāmān reappears in 40.36-37 when Pharaoh orders him to build a tall building or tower that he might disprove the existence of Mūsā's God in the heavens, an episode that is reiterated in 28.38.[661] In doing so, Hāmān aids and abets Pharaoh's arrogance, defiance, and blasphemy. Hāmān's authority and close association with Pharaoh is seen in 28.6 and 8 where the military is described as "*their* forces" (*junūda-humā*), with the dual possessive pronoun referring to Pharaoh and Hāmān. Together, Pharaoh, Qārūn, and Hāmān are all identified as "sinners" (*khāṭi'īn*). *Sūrat al-'Ankabūt* recounts the messengers God has sent and the people who rejected them including the Madyan, the 'Ād, and Thamūd, as well as more specifically Qārūn, Pharaoh and Hāmān who, we are told, were arrogant (*astakbarū*) even when Mūsā came to them with clear signs. On the basis of 29.40 (*minhum man aghraqnā*), some exegetes[662] believe that Hāmān perished along with Pharaoh in the waters of the sea, although it is not entirely clear from the text. There is no mention of Hāmān in any *sūras* revealed after *al-'Ankabūt*.

Given the brevity of these references, exegetes have been unable to resist augmenting the Qur'ānic material so as to elucidate Hāmān's character, second only to that of Pharaoh in villainy. Thus, al-Ṭabarī relates a tradition that after Pharaoh had spoken alone with Mūsā, he related the conversation to Hāmān. Due to Pharaoh's willingness to listen to Mūsā, Hāmān

[661] Al-Ṭabarī also relates the story of Namrūd who did likewise (II, 320). This obviously evokes the biblical story of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11). Silverstein discusses the connection between the Tower of Babel story and Pharaoh's tower, and theorizes how a story, which the Bible sets in Mesopotamia, is transferred in the Qur'ān to Egypt. See his: "Hāmān's Transition from Jāhliyya to Islām," 285-208; and "The Qur'ānic Pharaoh," *New Perspectives on the Qur'ān: the Qur'ān in its Historical Context 2,* ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2011) 467-477.
[662] E.g. Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh*, 480; al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ*, 326; Qutb, *Fī Ẓilāl*, 20.40.

sharply criticized him as a weak ruler, telling him: "You will become a slave who serves, after having been a master who is served."[663] This tradition is reiterated by al-Thaʿlabī who makes it clear that Pharaoh "intended to believe" in Mūsā until Hāmān castigated and dissuaded him.[664] According to al-Kisā'ī, when Mūsā first attempted to see Pharaoh, Hāmān had him arrested and imprisoned, and subsequently stripped Hārūn of his clothing to humiliate him.[665] Al-Rabghūzī tells us that Hāmān began his career as a baker, and first met Pharaoh when the future ruler arrived in Egypt from Balkh. They became partners in crime until Pharaoh overthrew the reigning king and Pharaoh made Hāmān is minister.[666] During Mūsā's contest with Pharaoh's magicians, Hāmān assumes a particularly aggressive and belligerent role, attempting to speak for Pharaoh until reprimanded by Mūsā. [667] Hāmān is not drowned with Pharaoh, according to al-Rabghūzī, but succeeds Pharaoh as ruler of Egypt as do his sons after him.[668]

As Pharaoh's wife Āsiyah achieved great fame as a woman of faith in Islamic tradition from the two brief references to her in the Qur'ān, so did Hāmān achieve in just a few *āyāt* a high degree of *infamy* as one of Mūsā's principal opponents along with Pharaoh. Unlike Haman in the Book of Esther who falls from royal favor and is ultimately executed, the Qur'ānic Hāmān suffers no such fate. After the explicit reference in 29.39, (chronologically speaking) there is no further mention of him in any of the subsequent Exodus *āyāt* (or after 40.36 sequentially speaking). Yet, he remains a notorious example of a Qur'ānic Egyptian who even more than Pharaoh refused to submit to the God of Mūsā.

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[663] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 476.
[664] Al-Thaʿlabī 306. Al-Rabghūzī also relates this tradition (*Qiṣaṣ*, 326-7).
[665] Al-Kisā'ī 227.
[666] Al-Rabghūzī 305-307.
[667] Al-Rabghūzī 327.
[668] Al-Rabghūzī 341.

## VI. D. Pharaoh

As I have demonstrated above, in the earliest Qur'ānic references to the Exodus story, the object of condemnation is not the Egyptian people, Pharaoh's courtiers, magicians, or troops; it is *Pharaoh* himself for he, above all, rejects Mūsā and the divine imperative he brings: to submit to the one God. Even when his ministers and people are implicated along with him in the *sūras* of the Second Meccan period, it is he, more than they, who is characterized by unbelief (*kufr*), someone who transgresses (*ṭaghā)*, is Mūsā's (and God's) enemy ('*adūw*), who rejects (*abā*) him, plots against him (*kayd*), is arrogant (*istakbara*), and who executes those who accept Mūsā as prophet and his God, traits and actions indicative of a truly *diabolical* individual. Ironically, in the third Meccan *sūras,* we see Pharaoh at his worst - as a mass murderer - and perhaps at his best, as someone who appears to have ultimately submitted to the God of Mūsā.

### D.1. Infanticide

It is only with the revelation of the Third Meccan *sūras* that Pharaoh's slaughter of Israel's male children is explicitly mentioned. It is true that 20.39 from the Second Meccan period describes the infant Mūsā being set adrift on the waters by his mother, but the reason for her action is not explicitly provided in the *sūra* other than God commanded it. There are six *āyāt* that refer to the killing of the Israelite children, five of which come from Third Meccan *sūras* (in order of N-chronology: 14.6; 40.25; 28.4; 7.127; 7.141), and one in a Madīnan *sūra* (2.49).[669] In three of these instances (40.25, 28.4, and 7.127) Pharaoh is the instigator (along with Hāmān and Qārūn in 40.25); in the remaining three *āyāt* the "people of Pharaoh" (14.6, 7.141 and 2.49), perhaps referring to Pharaoh's military and ministers, share collectively in the guilt.

[669] In this section I am concerned only with the killing of the Israelite children, not infanticide in general, which the Qur'ān likewise condemns (6.137, 140 and 151; 17.31 and 60.12). It is interesting to note, however, that three of the five references to infanticide – those of *Sūrat al-An'ām* (6) that deal with the practice for cultic or economic reason - come from the third Meccan period as do most of the references to Pharaoh's murder of the children.

According to Ex. 1.9-22, Pharaoh ordered the killing of the Israelite newborn male children because he considered the Israelites a security risk to Egypt. The Qur'ānic references to Pharaoh's infanticide do not provide a reason for the order, but classical exegetes and authors, relate that astrologers warned Pharaoh about the imminent birth of a Israelite child: "He will vanquish you in your dominion, send you out of your land, and change your religion."[670] Another tradition says that Pharaoh had a dream that his seers interpreted as foretelling Egypt's destruction at the hands of an Israelite.[671] This explanation is found in the *Aggadah* as well.[672] Two of the six Qur'ānic references to the infanticide (40.25 and 7.127) may be distinguished from the others, however, as they appear to be a threat made *after* the adult Mūsā confronts Pharaoh rather than before or during his infancy. Thus, exegetes have considered whether 40.25 and 7.127 refer to a *second* slaughter of Israelite children, while other authors avoid the issue entirely.[673] A second slaughter of Israelite children is not supported by the biblical account, although the *Aggadah* explains that the tenth and final plague was visited upon the Egyptians as divine retaliation for "their *intention* to [again] murder the men children of the Israelites at their birth."[674] This suggests therefore that the Pharaoh of the Exodus *intended* to repeat the heinous events perpetrated by Pharaoh of the Oppression (Ex. 1.15-22) but was thwarted by divine intervention.[675] The Qur'ānic text actually supports this claim; in 40.25 after Pharaoh, Hāmān and Qārūn order the killing of Israel's male children, we are informed: *wa ma kayd al-kāfirīn illā*

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[670] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 445-446. This is actually the justification for the actions taken by Pharaoh (Ramses I) in the film *The Ten Commandments* (1956).
[671] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 447; al-Thaʿlabī 279-80; al-Kisā'ī 214-15; al-Rabghūzī 307.
[672] Ginzberg, I/II, 447.
[673] E.g. al-Ṭabarī (*Tafsīr,* v.12, 7503) concludes that there was a second slaughter, although he omits any reference to it in his *Ta'rīkh.* Al-Zamaksharī also cites traditions supporting a second slaughter (*al-Kashshāf,* 4, 121). The issue is overlooked by al-Thaʿlabī, al-Kisā'ī, and al-Rabghūzī in their *Qiṣaṣ*. Ibn Kathīr (*Qiṣaṣ* 323) mentions a second killing, and Fatoohi argues in favor of it however bases his argument on erroneous premises (*The Mystery of Israel in Ancient Egypt* 170).
[674] Ginzberg, I/II, 507-8 (my emphasis).
[675] This is how the tenth plague was explained in the film *The Ten Commandments* (1956), which utilized extra-biblical traditions in recounting the Exodus story.

*fī ḍalāl* - "but the plot of the unbelievers (ends in) nothing but error," suggesting that their plan to perpetrate another slaughter of Israelite children failed.

In 7.127, Pharaoh's second order to kill the children is couched in the future tense – *sa-nuqattil* ("We will kill"), but there is no indication that the action was ever carried out. Subsequent references to plagues (7.130-133) suggest that Pharaoh's intentions were frustrated by the afflictions visited upon the Egyptians. The first plague mentioned in 7.133 is *ṭūfān*, a word that refers to some kind of calamity, and is often translated as "flood"[676] in this context even though a flood is not one of the plagues according to the biblical account. The word *ṭūfān* is derived from the verb *ṭāf* which means "to go or move about," and is quite similar in meaning to the verb used in Ex. 12.23 ( עָבַר ) to describe the LORD *moving* among the Egyptians to strike down their firstborn, a comparison not made before by commentators. I conclude, therefore, that within the context of 7.133 *ṭūfān* actually refers to the pestilence of the tenth plague, which resulted from Pharaoh's threat to kill the Israelite children (7.127) and *not* a flood. This is also suggested by the order in which the (selected) plagues are mentioned in 7.133. Rather than being listed in the order in which they occurred according to Ex. 7.14-12.32, the plagues appear in *reverse* chronological order: after *ṭūfān* come locusts (8th plague), lice (3rd), frogs (2nd) and blood (1st). Thus, *ṭūfān* could only refer to the ninth plague (darkness) or the tenth plague (the death of Egypt's firstborn). Etymologically, *ṭūfān* fits the description of the tenth plague. Thus, like the *aggadic* tradition, the Qur'ān suggests that Pharaoh *intended* a second slaughter but was thwarted by the tenth plague.

Although the initial slaughter of the male children was explained by Muslim exegetes as a means of eliminating the imminent threat to Pharaoh and Egypt posed by a newborn Israelite,

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[676] E.g. Ahmed Ali, N.J. Dawood, and Muhammad Asad. In the context of *al-'Ankabūt* 29.14 which relates the story of Nūḥ, *ṭūfān* is fittingly rendered as "flood."

in 40.25-26 Pharaoh, Hāmān and Qārūn provide a different justification for their (second) order to kill the Israelite children: "Kill the sons of those who believe in him (i.e. Moses)…" Thus, the second attempted slaughter of the children is meant as a punishment to those Israelites who accepted Mūsā and his message just as persecution was later inflicted upon those who accepted Muhammad as God's prophet and his message of the one God. Moreover, 40.26 says that Pharaoh was intent on killing not only the sons of those who would follow Mūsā, but Mūsā himself: "for I am afraid that he will change your religion…" – an accusation that was likewise made in 20.63 (see above), but here with Pharaoh's threat to murder Mūsā.

Until the Third Meccan period, Pharaoh's malevolence was explained primarily in terms of his rejection of Mūsā, and his refusal to submit to the one God. Now, his actions as a ruthless oppressor of the Israelites finally are made explicit. This is in stark contrast to the biblical account in which Pharaoh's order to kill Israel's newborn males is related in the very first chapter of Exodus, and establishes the fatal conflict between the Egyptians and the Israelites. The personal confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh in the Bible does not commence until Exodus 7. If the basic N-chronology is more or less accurate, and if, as I have suggested above, the Qur'ān's account of Israel in Egypt mirrors the story of the Muslims in Mecca, it seems appropriate that the references to the killing of the Israelite children were first revealed in the third Meccan period when the persecution of the Muslims was at its most intense prior to the *hijra* when Muhammad himself was nearly murdered. In three of the *āyāt* in which the slaughter of the Israelite children is mentioned – 14.6, 7.141 and 2.49 – two phrases reoccur in conjunction with the infanticide: *yasūmūnakum sū' al-'a<u>dh</u>āb*, "they (the people of Pharaoh) afflicted you with the pain of suffering" and *fī <u>dh</u>ālikum balā' min rabbikum 'aẓīm*, "in that was a great trial

from your Lord." Both of these phrases aptly apply to the condition of the Muslim community in Mecca suffering under afflictions imposed by the Quraysh.

**D.2. Pharaoh: from Idolatry to Islām?**

Already in the revelations of the first Meccan period, Pharaoh attempts to divert his peoples' attention away from Mūsā's God by claiming his own divinity. Thus, in *al-Nāzi'āt* 79.18-24, when Mūsā offers to lead Pharaoh to the ruler's (true) Lord (*rabbika*), Pharaoh proclaims to his people: "I am *your* Lord (*rabbukum*), the Most High!"[677] It is an arrogant claim and is evidence of Pharaoh's transgression (*ṭaghā*) of which God speaks in 79.17. Pharaoh not only rejected Mūsā and his God (79.21) but also attempted to prevent his own people from accepting the Prophet's message, and thus was punished by God (79.25). In *al-Shu'arā'* 26.29 revealed during the second Meccan period, Pharaoh threatens to imprison Mūsā if he professes faith in a god besides Pharaoh. Thus, not only does Pharaoh demand his own people's devotion, he demands it of Mūsā as well. Finally, in *al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.38 of the third Meccan period, to ensure the loyalty of his ministers, Pharaoh declares to them: "I know of no god for you except myself," and then orders Hāmān to build the tower to the heavens to prove his point (see above).

Pharaoh's claims to divinity in the Qur'ān are noteworthy, as he makes no such claims in the biblical account. Similarly, however, in the *Aggadah*, after listening to Moses preach about the omnipotent God, Pharaoh retorts: "I have no need of Him. I have created myself, and if you say that He causes dew and rain to descend, I have the Nile…"[678] This itself appears to be a paraphrase of Ez. 29.3 in which God warns Pharaoh of impending punishment for claiming divine status: "I am going to deal with you, O Pharaoh king of Egypt, Mighty monster, sprawling

[677] The divine epithet *al-A'lā* has no exact ancient Egyptian equivalent, but is found in the Hebrew scriptures as *Elyon* (e.g. Num. 24.16; Deut. 32.8), or *El-Elyon* – "God, Most High" (e.g. Gen. 14.18-19), as well as in other *ayāt* of the Qur'ān (e.g. 87.1; 92.20).
[678] Ginzberg, I/II, 500.

in your channels, who said, My Nile is my own; I made it for myself." From an ancient Egyptian perspective, Pharaoh's claim of divinity is certainly justified *to some extent* since the reigning king was identified with the god Horus as evidenced particularly by two of the five "great names" of the royal titulary, and by a third name which identifies him as *sa Ra* - "the son of Reʿ (the sun-god), and bore the designation *nṯr nfr* – "the good god."[679] An Egyptian king was human in that he was born as such, suffered illness, aged, dealt with the mundane affairs of state, periodically required ritual rejuvenation, was subject to death (natural or otherwise), and had need of a proper burial in order to achieve immortality. By means of the rites of coronation, however, he assumed *a divine office* becoming the living Horus and the necessary mediator between human and divine realms. Although the actual worship of kings generally occurred only after the monarch's death, in rare instances a living king might be worshipped as a god. This seems to have been the case, for example, with Amenhotep III at the Temple of Soleb, and Ramses II at the Temple of Abu Simbel where the king's image occupies a place in the sanctuary beside those of the gods Amun, Ptah and Re-Horakhty.[680]

From the perspective of the Qur'ān and the Islamic tradition, any claim to divinity made by a human is considered *shirk,* literally the "sharing" or "associating" of God's divinity with anyone or anything, and is to be condemned:

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[679] Marie-Ange Bonhème, "Kingship" in: *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, 2, 238-245; Ronald J. Leprohon, "Titulary," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt,* 3, 409-411; Denise M. Doxey, "Epithets," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt,* 1, 477-478; Ronald Leprohon, *Ancient Egyptian Royal Titulary* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2013).

[680] Paul John Frandsen, "Aspects of Kingship in Ancient Egypt" in: *Religion and Power: Divine Kingship in the Ancient World and Beyond,* ed. Nicole Brisch. Oriental Institute Seminars, no. 4 (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 2008), 47-73; *Ancient Egyptian Kingship,* ed. David O'Connor and David P. Silverman, Problème der Ägyptologie 9, (Leiden: Brill, 1995); David P. Silverman, "Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt," in: *Religion in Ancient Egypt: Gods, Myths and Personal Practice*, ed. Byron E. Schafer (Ithaca: Cornell, 1991), 58-73; Richard Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt*, 54-58; Betsy M. Bryan, "Designing the Cosmos: Temples and Temple Decoration," *Egypt's Dazzling Sun: Amenhotep II and His World* (Cleveland Museum of Art, 1992), 106-111; Kitchen, *Pharaoh Triumphant*, 174-178.

> God does not forgive associating (anything) with Him, but He forgives what is less serious than this for whomever He wills; and those who associate (anything) with God, surely have gone far astray. (*al-Nisā'* 4.48)

This clearly is not meant as an absolute; if it were, there would no impetus for polytheists to embrace Islam. Moreover, as this study has already demonstrated, there are a number of Egyptians who, according to the Qur'ān and/or Islamic tradition, as a result of their interaction with the prophets Yūsuf or Mūsā, abandoned the worship of multiple gods and submitted to the one God. *Al-Nisā'* 4.116 is qualified by *āya* 115:

> The one who contends with the messenger after guidance has become clear (*tabayyana)* to him and follows (a path) other than the path (*sabīl*) of the believers, We shall leave him to that which he turned and deliver him to Hell – such a terrible end!

Thus, it is not every person who ever practiced idolatry that should fear divine retribution, but the one who has obstinately rejected God's messengers, message, signs and guidance after they have come to him. This *āya* has particular significance for Pharaoh as evidenced by the words *bayyana* and *sabīl*. Mūsā came to him with "clear evidence" – *bayyinah* (7.105), "clear authority" - *sulṭān mubīn* (11.96; 23.45; 40.23; 44.19), and "clear signs" – *āyāt bayyināt* (17.101; 28.36) all related to the verb *bayyana*; yet Pharaoh refused to believe. Moreover, in 10.88 and 40.37, we are told that Pharaoh turned away from the path (*sabīl*). He remained arrogantly opposed to the Prophet and his message and was therefore drowned along with all who were with him as he pursued the Israelites (17.103).

There are nine references in the Qur'ān to the drowning of the Egyptians as related in Ex. 14.26-31, appearing in each of the periods of revelation except the first Meccan. In order according to the N-chronology, they are: 44.24, 26.66, 43.55, 17.103 (second Meccan), 29.40, 10.90-92, 7.136 (third Meccan), 2.50 and 8.54 (Madīnan). In most of the references, the object of

drowning is in the plural, explicitly or implicitly "the people of Pharaoh" – or, within the context of the Exodus, more specifically Pharaoh's soldiers pursuing the escaping Israelites. Two passages specifically mention the drowning of Pharaoh himself: 17.103 and 10.90-92. It is the latter passage, revealed in the Third Meccan period, which has been the subject of much discussion and debate among Muslims exegetes, theologians and philosophers over the ages because it suggests that Pharaoh, the Qur'ānic archetype for all that is sinful – arrogant, tyrannical, murderous, and unbelieving – ultimately *submitted* to the God whose prophet and message he had so stubbornly rejected:

> We permitted the children of Israel to pass through the sea, and Pharaoh and his forces followed them aggressively and hostilely until he started to drown. He said: "I believe that there is no god except the One in whom the Children of Israel believe, and I am one of those who submit." (10.90)

The debate over this *āya* sought to settle the questions whether or not Pharaoh's submission was genuine and if so, was he therefore saved from punishment in the hereafter, and even if his repentance were heartfelt, was it too late to be accepted by God? The answers to these questions also depend on how the subsequent two *āyāt* are understood:

> (It was said to him:) "Now? But you rebelled before and you were one of the depraved. Today We shall save you in your body so that you will be a sign for those who come after you. But surely many people are heedless of Our Signs." (10.91-92)

These *āyāt* are traditionally understood to mean that God did *not* accept Pharaoh's last-minute confession which arose from fear rather than genuine faith, but left his corpse intact as proof to the people of his death. The rejection of what appears to be Pharaoh's genuine statement of faith in 10.90 is also based on 4.17-18:

> God accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance, then repent soon afterwards. To them God will turn (in mercy) for God is the All-Knowing and All-Wise. But repentance is not for those who do evil until one of them faces death, and he says:

> "Indeed, now I have repented," nor from those who die while disbelieving. For them we have prepared a terrible punishment.

In spite of Pharaoh's profession of faith in 10.90, the thought of him actually submitting to God proved so shocking and unthinkable to many in the Muslim community that traditions soon emerged (and were then often repeated) attributing the speech in 10.91-92 to the angel Jibrīl who, not only lured Pharaoh into the sea to pursue the Israelites that he might be drowned, but then stuffed mud into Pharaoh's mouth to prevent him from repenting and thereby obtaining God's mercy.[681] Yet, al-Rabghūzī relates a rather astonishing tradition in which God actually chides Jibrīl over his treatment of Pharaoh at the sea:

> Oh Jibrīl, if only you had given Pharaoh the opportunity to affirm his true faith so that he would have converted. By My Might and Glory, I would have accepted it and granted him admission to Paradise.[682]

The debate over the authenticity and acceptability of Pharaoh's profession of faith was precipitated especially by comments which Ibn 'Arabī (1165-1240) made in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*.[683] As this has been discussed at length elsewhere,[684] I will for the purposes of this discussion succinctly summarize Ibn 'Arabī's position, note his supporters and opponents, and cite additional sources to illustrate how Pharaoh has been viewed in exegetical literature and the

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[681] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, v. 7, 4548 ff.; *Ta'rīkh*, 488. Cf. al-Thaʿlabī, 329-330; al-Rabghūzī, 338-339; al-Zamakhsharī, 2, 274.

[682] Al-Rabghūzī 339. As seen in the previous chapter on Ibrāhīm and the Egyptians, al-Rabghūzī wrote his *Qiṣaṣ* in order to encourage the conversion of the Chaghatai Mongols. By acknowledging Pharaoh's genuine attempt to convert, al-Rabghūzī was undoubtedly appealing to the sensitivities of his pagan patrons.

[683] *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Bayrūt: Dār Ṣāder, 2005); English translation: R.W.J. Austin, *Ibn al 'Arabi: the Bezels of Wisdom* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1980).

[684] Denis Gril, "Le Personnage Coranique de Pharaon d'après l'Interpretation d'Ibn 'Arabī;" Carl W. Ernst, "Controversies over Ibn al-'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ:* the faith of Pharaoh;" Hamid Algar, "Reflections of Ibn 'Arabi in Early Naqshbandī Tradition," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society* 10 (1991): 45-57 (http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/articles/naqshibandi.html); Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: the Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* 158-165; Vincent J. Cornell, "'I am Your Lord Most High:' Pharaoh and the Sin of Hubris in the Qur'an," *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning* 2.2 (Sept. 2002), http://jsr.lib.virginia.edu/issues/volume2/number2/ssr02-02-e03.html; Eric Ormsby, "The Faith of Pharaoh: a Disputed Question in Islamic Theology."

tradition as part of a larger picture of Qur'ānic Egyptians. Ibn 'Arabī's comments about Pharaoh must be seen within the context of his metaphysical notion of *wajūd* ("being/existence") according to which the divine names and realities which God created "issue forth from Him into the macrocosm outside him;"[685] that is, "the traces of God's names and attributes are externalized as the specific and unique characteristics of *each* creature"[686]– including the most nefarious of people, such as Pharaoh. For Ibn 'Arabī, Pharaoh is not a defiant unbeliever, but a *provocateur* who goads Mūsā to more articulately preach the one God to his court. According to Ibn 'Arabī, Pharaoh asked questions of Mūsā about the "Lord of the Worlds" (26.23 ff.) not out of ignorance, but "to acquaint those present, without their knowing it, of what he himself was aware in asking the question."[687] In mocking Mūsā, Pharaoh was attempting to elicit from Mūsā divine knowledge that he (Pharaoh) himself already knew. Ibn 'Arabī was even willing to state that Pharaoh was *in a sense* correct when he said: "I am your Lord, the Most High," because he was in fact in a position of authority over his subjects: "Pharaoh is saying… 'My rank now is that of de facto power over you. Although I am you, essentially, I am, nevertheless different from you in rank.'"[688]

Most shocking to his contemporaries, however, was Ibn 'Arabī's claim that Pharaoh's profession of faith was *not* a "death bed" conversion made quickly for fear of dying, as many exegetes had asserted, but was genuine. Having seen the Israelites pass through the waters: "Pharaoh was not certain of destruction when he came to belief, unlike the dying man [who

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[685] *ma kharaga 'ani-hi fī al-'ālam al-kabīr al-munfaṣili* (*Fūṣūṣ,* 132); Austin, 253.
[686] William C. Chittick, *Ibn 'Arabi: Heir to the Prophets* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2005), 64. (My emphasis)
[687] *Fuṣūṣ,* 138; Austin, 261.
[688] *Fuṣūṣ,* 139; Austin, 262-3. As early as the first half of the ninth century CE, al-Ḳāsim b. Ibrāhīm (785-860 CE) had understood Pharaoh's claim of being "lord" (79.4) to be merely an assertion of the sovereign rule he held as king. See: Binyamin Abrahamov, *al-Ḳāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God's Existence: Kitāb al-Dalīl al-Kabīr* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 175-77.

believes] so that death does not touch him."[689] God thus accepted Pharaoh's profession of faith and "saved him from punishment in the Hereafter in his soul…although people maintain that he was damned, there is nothing in the text to support this."[690] Instead of casting a sinful man into Hell:

> God took him to Himself spotless, pure and untainted by any taint, because He took him in the act of commitment, before he could commit any sin, since submission [to God] erases all that has gone before it. Thus, He made of him a symbol of the loving care He may bestow on whomsoever He wills lest anyone despair of the mercy of God…[691]

For Ibn 'Arabī, the question of Pharaoh's eternal fate following his declaration of faith is answered by the steadfast mercy of God, the All-Embracing (*al-Wāsi'*) who says in *Sūrat al-A'rāf* 7.156: "My Mercy embraces (*wasi'at*) everything." In his *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyah* ("The Meccan Openings"), Ibn 'Arabī describes the God who reaches out to humanity in mercy and forgiveness:

> He (God) descends to the closest highness, which is the first heaven from our direction, for it is the 'closest heaven, that is, nearest to us. He does not descend to chastise and make wretched. On the contrary, He says: "Is there any caller so that I may respond to him? Is there any asker so that I may give to him?...Is there any turner so that I may turn toward him?...Is there anyone seeking forgiveness so that I may forgive him?[692]

Ibn 'Arabī's provocative remarks engendered many responses both in support of his assessment of Pharaoh, and those opposed. Ormsby has identified at least eight known Muslim exegetes, theologians or philosophers who specifically refuted these ideas in writing over the centuries beginning with Ibn Taymiyah (d. 1328), and seven (ṣūfī) supporters, beginning with 'Abd al-

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[689] *Fuṣūṣ,* 141; Austin, 265 (slightly modified).
[690] *Fuṣūṣ*, 141; Austin, 265 (slightly modified).
[691] *Fuṣūṣ,* 134; Austin, 255.
[692] Quoted by William C. Chittick in his: *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabī's Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York, 1998), 330. Ibn 'Arabī incorporates in this passage a *ḥadīth qudsī* that he also includes in his *Mishkāt al-Anwār*. For additional discussion on mercy, forgiveness and repentance in Ibn 'Arabī's thought, see: Chawkat Moucarry, *The Search for Forgiveness: Pardon and Punishment in Islam and Christianity* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2004), 233-268.

Razzāq al-Kāshānī (d. 1330), many of which remain unpublished.[693] Even al-Kāshānī, however, who like Ibn ʻArabī believed Pharaoh's profession of faith was genuine and accepted by God, found it impossible to believe that Pharaoh was absolved of his previous sins and therefore was consigned to hell nevertheless.[694] For many ṣūfīs, Pharaoh, who was symbolic of the *nafs* (ego), is not an unredeemable sinner and idolater as much as someone who must overcome his baser impulses (*al-nafs al-ammāra*). Thus, Rūmī wrote: "The ego is Pharaoh. Beware! Do not indulge it, lest it bring back that age-old infidelity."[695] Pharaoh is therefore not unlike Zulaykhā in the story of Yūsuf and the Egyptians; thus, Jāmī who was inspired to tell Zulaykhā's story also wrote a commentary on Ibn ʻArabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam.*[696] When the mullah ʻAbd al-Qādir Badāʻūnī (c. 1540-1615) raised objections about the influence of the ṣūfī Shaykh Tāj-ud-dīn of Delhi on the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1556-1605), he specifically mentions Ibn ʻArabī's remarks about Pharaoh's faith in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* as the issue by which Tāj-ud-dīn "became a chief cause of the weakening of the Emperor's faith in the commands of Islam."[697]

The Islamic debate over the ultimate fate of Pharaoh is not entirely original to Islam. The account in the Book of Exodus (14.28) does not specifically speak of Pharaoh's demise in the sea and is sufficiently vague as to invite a more definitive ending to his story. Thus, the *Aggadah* too tells of Pharaoh's apparent conversion:

> (Pharaoh) pointed his finger heavenward, and called out: "I believe in you, O God! You are righteous, and I and my people are wicked, and I acknowledge now that there is no god in the world beside you." Without a moment's delay Gabriel descended and laid an

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[693] Ormsby 27-28.
[694] Ormsby 16.
[695] Rūmī, *Mathnawi of Jalalud'din Rumi,* ed. and trans. R.A. Nicholson, 8 vols, (London: Luzac, 1925-1940), II, 474-80. For a full discussion of Rūmī's characterization of Pharaoh, see: Amer Latif, *Qur'anic Narrative and Sufi Hermeneutics: Rūmī's Interpretations of Pharaoh's Character.*
[696] *Sharḥ al-Jāmī ʻalā Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (Cairo, 1304-23 CE).
[697] ʻAbd al-Qādir al-Badāʻūnī, *Muntakhabu-t-Tawārīkh,* trans. W.H. Lowe (1898; Delhi: Renaissance, 1986) v. 2, 265-66. Although Tāj-ud-dīn was called *Tāj-ul-ʻārifīn* ("Crown of the Sages") by his contemporaries, he is little known otherwise.

> iron chain about Pharaoh's neck, and holding him securely, he addressed him thus: "Villain, yesterday you said, 'Who is the Lord that I should hearken to His voice? And now you say: 'The Lord is righteous.'"[698]

While ṣūfīs like Ibn 'Arabī understood *Yūnus*10.92 to mean that that Pharaoh was saved from eternal damnation but nevertheless drowned (as indicated by 17.103), *aggadic* accounts go even further claiming that Pharaoh did not drown in the sea but was eventually installed as the king of Nineveh, who led his people in repentance in response to Jonah's prophesizing (Jonah 3).[699] Whatever we may conclude among Pharaoh's fate, it is significant that both Jewish and Islamic texts and theologians, faced with the ambiguities of their Scriptures, posited the redemption of Pharaoh. In both the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'ān, Pharaoh is second only to Iblīs in his treachery. He is the enemy not only of Mūsā and the Israelites but of believing Egyptians as well, and by extension, the enemy of all God's prophets and all who wish to be counted among those who submit – *muslimūn*. To some extent, however, both traditions seem reluctant to place even him beyond the reach of God's mercy. The effort on the part of ṣūfīs in particular to "rehabilitate" Pharaoh is similar to some *ṣūfī* reflections on Iblīs who, like Pharaoh, is guilty of pride and disobedience, yet whose refusal to bow down to Adam reflects his single-minded devotion to God, like a lover transfixed by his Beloved.[700] In his *al-Insān al-kāmil* ("The Perfected Human") 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (1365-1428) wrote that in the End Time even Iblīs would return to God:

> Then Iblīs will return to the divine intimacy he possessed in God's presence. And this will come to pass after the disappearance of Hell, for everything created by God will inevitably return to what it possessed. That is a fundamental principle that has been decided, so take note![701]

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[698] Ginzberg, III/IV, 18-19.
[699] Ginzberg, III/IV, 19.
[700] P.J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption* (Leiden: Brill, 1983).
[701] Quoted by Awn, 183.

The redemption of Pharaoh proposed by Ibn ʻArabī and his supporters, and that of Iblīs as stated by ʻAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, are reminiscent of the concept of *apokatastasis* as articulated by the Christian theologian Origen (ca. 184-ca. 254). Inspired especially by 1 Cor. 15:28 ("God will be all in all)," Origen developed a theology of universal salvation in which all of creation and every human being will be returned to God from whom it came, including the wicked, for:

> just as when the Son is said to be subjected to the Father the perfect restoration of the entire creation is announced, so when his enemies are said to be subjected to the Son of God we are to understand this to involve the salvation of those subjected and the restoration of those that have been lost.[702]

In several of his works Origen addressed the hardening of Pharaoh's heart as this raised questions about the culpability of his actions and the justice of divine punishment.[703] Like Ibn ʻArabī, Origen concludes in *De Principii:*

> He (God) knows how by means of the great plagues and the drowning in the sea He is leading even Pharaoh; and his superintending care for him does not stop at this point. For when he was drowned he was not destroyed.

While Origen does not deny punishment for sinners in the Hereafter, he rejects it as a permanent condition, asserting that:

> in those ages to come God will show the riches "of His grace in kindness," since the worst sinner, who has blasphemed the Holy Spirit and has been ruled by sin from the beginning to end in the whole of this present age, will afterwards in the age to come be brought into order, I know not how.[704]

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[702] *Origen: On First Principles,* trans. Henri De Lubac (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) 3.5.7. For discussion, see: Tom Greggs, "Apokatastasis: Particularist Universalism in Origen," in: *"All Shall Be Well:" Explorations in Universalism and Christian Theology, from Origen to Moltmann* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 29-46; Ilaria Ramelli, "The Debate on Apokatastasis in Pagan and Christian Platonists: Martianus, Macrobius, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, and Augustine," *Illinois Classical Studies,* nos. 33-34 (2008-2009), 201-234; Ramelli, *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis: A Critical Assessment from the New Testament to Eriugena*, Vigiliae Christianae, Supplements (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

[703] Mark S.M. Scott, *Journey Back to God: Origen on the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: University Press, 2012), 80-100.

[704] "On Prayer" (27, 16) in: *Origen (Classics of Western Spirituality)*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (Mahwah: Paulist, 1979).

Whether Origen's concept of *apokatastasis* had any influence on Islamic ideas of Pharaoh's redemption such as articulated by Ibn 'Arabī and others is unknown.[705]

## VII. Madīnan Sūras

After the more than 135 *āyāt* of the third Meccan period that concern the Egyptians and the Exodus, there is a considerable decline in the number of pertinent *āyāt* during the Madīnan period, a total of only seven: *al-Baqarah* 2.49-50 (N91), *al-Anfāl* 8.52-54 (N95), *Āl 'Imrān* 3.11 (N97), and *al-Taḥrīm* 66.11 (N109). Both the N- and E- chronologies agree on their place and order of revelation. In *Sūrat al-Baqarah* there is a considerable amount of material that relates to Mūsā and the *banī Isrāʿīl* (*āyāt* 40-86), but the emphasis is not on their oppression at the hands of the Egyptians but on the *covenant* God made with the *banī Isrāʿīl*. Between *āyāt* 27 and 177, the word "covenant" (*ʿaḥd*) and its verbal form (*ʿahida*) are used eleven times, more than in any other single *sūra*, followed closely by *Sūrat al-Tawbah* 9 (also a Madīnan *sūra*) with eight occurrences. Israel's captivity in Egypt is summarized in just *two āyāt* (2.49-50) in which the *banī Isrāʿīl* are exhorted to remember how God delivered them from persecution inflicted upon them by the Egyptians, and how God led them through the sea but drowned *the people of Pharaoh*, here referring specifically to Pharaoh's soldiers. The drowning of *the people of Pharaoh* is reiterated in *al-Anfāl* 8.52-54, and *Āl'Imrān* 3.11 virtually repeats 8.52. The very limited number of references to the Egyptians in the Madīnan period is consistent with the theory I have espoused throughout this chapter, i.e. that the Qur'ān's account of Israel in Egypt often mirrors that of the Muslims in Mecca. The story of Israel's oppression by an unbelieving people,

[705] Cyril Glassé includes an article on "*apocatastasis*" [sic] in his *The New Encyclopedia of Islam* (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2001). While he does not address possible influences on Islamic notions of universal salvation whether from Christianity, Hinduism or Buddhism, he does indicate that *apocatastasis* is "at the root if the classical debate between theologians and Muslim Aristotelian philosophers."

of a Prophet who came to convert a pagan people, of unbelievers who came to faith in the one God and remained steadfast even as they suffered for it, of the Exodus, and the defeat of the Prophet's opponents had given comfort and meaning to the travails of the Muslims who had endured ridicule and violence at the hands of the Quraysh. Although conflicts with Quraysh continued following the *hijra,* they were not as central to the concerns of the *ummah* as they had been. Thus, the revelations of the Qur'ān from this period are less concerned with the oppression of "believers" by *mushrikūn* – either pagan Egyptians or the Quraysh - than with the relation of the "believers" to the *ahl al-kitāb* (the Jews and Christians of Madīna), reflecting the prevailing social context of the *ummah* in Madīna. Once freed from the persecution of the Quraysh, the *ummah* had to define itself as a community of believers vis-à-vis others who worshipped the God of Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf and Mūsā. This is reflected in the shift in references from Israel's Captivity to Israel's Covenant.

According to both the N- and E- chronologies *Sūrat al-Taḥrīm* 66.11, which concerns Pharaoh's wife (Āsiyah), is the last *āya* revealed in the Qur'ān that contains a reference to an Egyptian who figured in the story of Mūsā and the *banī Isrāʿīl*. Moreover, in both chronologies, *al-Taḥrīm* was revealed in the later Madīnan period; in E, *al-Taḥrīm* is the twenty-first of twenty-eight *sūras* revealed in Madīna (E107) and in N, it is the nineteenth out of twenty-four (N109). Although the *sūra* initially refers to tensions among the wives of Muhammad (*āyāt* 1-5), it then turns to exhort believers and unbelievers (*āyāt* 6-12) alike. It is within this context that Āsiyah and Maryam bint 'Imrān are extolled as examples of faith, as already discussed above, for both believing women *and* men. Thus, for those who heard the *sūras* of the Qur'an when they were first revealed, this final reference to an Egyptian contains the plea of a steadfast believer. By contrast, for those who engage the text according to the canonical arrangement of the *sūras*, it

is Pharaoh, her antithesis, who is mentioned last in *al-Fajr* 89.10-11 as the epitome of a transgressor.

## VIII. Conclusions

The Qur'ānic references to Israel in Egypt provide a wealth of material for assessing Islamic views of the ancient Egyptians, and these views reflect the Qur'ān's *missionary* character. Rather than examining the numerous Qur'ānic references to the Egyptians and the Exodus in their canonical order, in this chapter I have chosen to consider the relevant *sūras* and *āyāt* in the order they *may* have been revealed, according to the Nöldeke-Schwally chronology which, although yet unproven, nevertheless remains a useful working hypothesis in the opinion of many. My reason for doing so was to develop an overall picture of the Egyptians in the Exodus accounts more systematically rather than randomly given the numerous scattered references to the Egyptians, and to discern any general trends, developments and changes in the Qur'ānic depiction of the Egyptians in the Exodus accounts. This chronological approach strongly suggests that the over three-hundred *āya* that refer to the Egyptians were revealed not merely to tell the story of the Prophet Mūsā, of his divinely sanctioned mission to a largely unbelieving people, some of whom became outstanding examples of faith, or of his confrontation with Pharaoh and success in delivering the *banī Isrāʿīl* from his tyranny, but to directly relate this saga to the prophetic mission of Muhammad among the Meccans, which likewise was characterized by the Quraysh's stiff opposition and persecution as well as by their conversion to Islam. Although the N- and E-chronologies differ in their ordering of the *sūras* according to their revelation, both agree that all but *seven* of the some 309 *āya* concerning Mūsā's mission in Egypt were revealed in the Meccan period. Thus, similar to the Hebrew Bible and in Jewish tradition,

the Egyptians may symbolize the enemies of the community of believers in any period, but with significant differences.

The N-chronology indicates that in the first Meccan period, references to the Egyptians and the Exodus are generally brief and focused on Pharaoh as an example of tyranny and unbelief, who is mentioned along with unbelieving *peoples, s*pecifically the ʻĀd and Thamūd. In the second Meccan period "the people of Pharaoh" – i.e. his ministers and military forces - are now increasingly implicated along with their ruler, perhaps reflecting the growing opposition to Muhammad among the Quraysh. Like his predecessor Yūsuf, Mūsā is regarded as a prophet *to the Egyptians,* to preach to them and bring them to belief, unlike the Hebrew Scriptures where Moses' sole purpose in Egypt is to secure the release of the Israelites from bondage that they may freely worship *their* God. This reflects the essential difference of the Bible's account of the Exodus vis-à-vis the Qur'ānic version; namely, that the Book of Exodus serves to explain how the Israelites entered into *covenant* with the LORD, *the God of Israel*, to the exclusion of other peoples; hence the very negative depiction of the Egyptians on the whole. The Qur'ān's Exodus references, on the other hand, serve to recount Mūsā's *mission* among the Egyptians, some of who became outstanding examples of faith, while those who rejected God's Prophet and signs experienced God's punishment.

The second and third Meccan *sūras* contain noteworthy and, in some instances, unique examples of Egyptians who submit to the God of Mūsā or had already embraced the faith; these include Pharaoh's magicians who, having witnessed God's power and declared their belief, claimed to be "the foremost of believers," and according to tradition, lost their lives as a result; the "believer" who exhorted his people in a spirited *khuṭbah* to believe in the one God; and the wife of Pharaoh who is extolled for her faith in several *ḥadīth*. To these Egyptian believers,

Islamic tradition adds the hairdresser of Pharaoh's daughter who suffers martyrdom along with her children. Pharaoh and his aide Hāmān are the principal and nefarious unbelievers of the Exodus accounts, yet the Qur'ān, like the *Aggadah*, recounts that even Pharaoh confessed the one God as the waters engulfed him. The implication of that confession was debated over the centuries with many ṣūfī exegetes supporting Ibn 'Arabī's position that while Pharaoh died in the sea, he was nevertheless redeemed as a believer. In Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation, no one, not even Pharaoh, the Qur'ān's most recalcitrant villain, is beyond God's mercy, an idea that echoes Origen's concept of *apokatastasis.*

Both N- and E-chronologies suggest that after the *hijra* the story of Pharaoh's opposition to Mūsā and the oppression of the Israelites become less immediately relevant to the *ummah* as indicated by the precipitous decline in the number of references to the Egyptians. Instead, it is the *banī Isrāʿīl* of Madīna who are now exhorted to remember God's actions on their behalf: "O Children of Israel, remember the favor which I bestowed on you and that I preferred you to all others…And remember We delivered you from the people of Pharaoh…" (*al-Baqarah* 2.47 ff). In the Hebrew Bible, Israel is frequently reminded of its captivity in Egypt, which is often referred to as "the land of slavery" post-Exodus,[706] particularly as there is a greater emphasis on the *covenant* in the final redactions of the saga. Israel is to remain apart and separate from foreigners such as the Egyptians in order to retain its singular character and exclusive relationship with the LORD. By contrast, in the Qur'ān, neither Egypt nor the Egyptians are explicitly mentioned in prophetic missions after Mūsā delivers the Israelites from bondage. Idolatrous enemies (whether Pharaonic Egyptians or Quraysh) are no longer the pressing

[706] Ex. 13.3, 14; 20.2; Deut. 5.6; 6.12; 7.8; 8.14; 13.5; 13.10; Josh. 24.17; Judges 6.8; Jer. 34.13; Micah 6.4.

concern, but the Children of Israel, both Biblical and Qur'ānic, who betrayed the convenant and ignored God's prophets.

Muslim historians and exegetes were, however, familiar with Egyptian-Israelite relations post-Exodus as related in the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus, al-Ṭabarī records that the Pharaoh of Egypt (Necho/Nekau II, r. 610-595 BCE) slew Josiah, King of Judah (r. 640-609 BCE) in battle, held his son Jehoahaz captive in Egypt, installed Jehoiakim as king of Judah, and then exacted tribute from him.[707] Al-Ṭabarī is also aware that the prophet Jeremiah, who is not a Qur'ānic figure, was taken into Egypt by his captors who were fleeing the Babylonian invasion.[708] Exegetes and authors of *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* also narrate the flight into Egypt of the Prophet 'Īsā following his birth based on the account in the Gospel of Matthew 2.13-23 and a vague reference in *al-Mu'minūn* 23.50. It is to 'Īsā's sojourn among the Egyptians that we now turn.

[707] *Ta'rīkh*, 643; Cf. II Kings 23.28-35.
[708] *Ta'rīkh,* 646-7; Cf. Jer. 43.1-7.

# Chapter 6 - ʻĪsā and the Egyptians

## I. Introduction

When the Qur'ān recounts prophetic history or names the prophets whom God has sent to exhort humanity to faith in the one God, Mūsā is often followed immediately by ʻĪsā even as the text elsewhere recognizes several intervening prophets including Dāwūd, Sulaymān, Zakarīyā and Yaḥyā among others:

> And We gave Mūsā the Book and We sent after him Messengers. And We gave ʻĪsā, the son of Mary clear signs, and We strengthened him the Holy Spirit. (*al-Baqarah* 2.87)
>
> Say: "We believe in God and what was revealed to us and what was revealed to Ibrāhīm, Ismāʻīl, Isḥāq, Yaʻqūb, and (his) descendants, and what was given to Mūsā and ʻĪsā, and what was given to (all) the Prophets from their Lord." (*al-Baqarah* 2.136)[709]

In some instances, the jump from Mūsā to ʻĪsā is to intended to emphasize a continuity in Scriptures revealed to the prophets, namely the *Tawrah* and *Injīl*, as precursors to the Qur'ān revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (e.g. 5.44-48; 61.5-6). Having examined the texts concerning the Egyptians associated with Mūsā in both Qur'ānic and extra-Qur'ānic texts in the previous chapter, I will now turn to Islamic traditions regarding ʻĪsā's sojourn among the Egyptians, which have been overlooked by modern authors.[710] Whereas the Qur'ān furnishes a great deal of material for both Yūsuf and Mūsā's interactions with the Egyptians, this is not the case with ʻĪsā. As with the story of Ibrāhīm and the Egyptians, most of the Islamic traditions regarding ʻĪsā in Egypt are extra-Qur'ānic that incorporate, to some degree, biblical and extra-biblical material. I begin with the biblical and apocryphal accounts of the *Flight into Egypt* to serve as a basis of comparison and contrast with the Islamic material.

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[709] See also: 3.84; 5.44-46; 33.7; 42.13; 43.46-57 ff.; 61.5-6

[710] The literature on Jesus in the Qur'ān and Islam is quite vast. See Chapter 2: Literature Survey for more recent works and Oddbjørn Leirvik's extensive bibliography (*Images of Jesus Christ in Islam,* 271-285).

## II. *The Flight into Egypt* in the Bible.

In the New Testament, the flight into Egypt by Joseph, Mary and the infant Jesus is recounted exclusively in the Gospel of Matthew 2.13-23. Neither Mark, now generally regarded as the earliest of Gospels (ca. 68-73 CE),[711] nor John (ca. 90-110 CE) possess an infancy narrative, and that of Luke (ca. 85 CE and roughly contemporary with Matthew) speaks rather of Joseph's and Mary's journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and their subsequent return to Nazareth without any reference to a sojourn in Egypt.[712] Matthew's account of the flight into Egypt is a succinct, yet well-crafted literary narrative. The sequence of events in 2.13-15 which relate Joseph's dream, the instructions he received from an angel, the journey into Egypt, and the fulfillment of Hosea's prophecy (Hos. 11.1) is precisely mirrored by 2.19-23 which describe the return journey *out* of Egypt, with the slaughter of Bethlehem's infants between these two parts:

2.13: An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said:
- "Get up, take the child and his mother and flee to Egypt"
2.14: Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother…
2.15: Prophecy fulfilled
[Slaughter of the infants by Herod: 2.16-18]
2.19: An angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said:
- 2.20: "Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to Israel"
2.21: Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother…
2.23: Prophecy fulfilled

[711] Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 127. For a discussion of "the synoptic problem," see his overview, 111-122.
[712] For a complete analysis of Matthew's and Luke's infancy narratives, see Raymond Brown's classic treatment: *The Birth of the Messiah*.

Although artful in its telling Matthew's account is, however, lacking in details. It provides no information about the journey to Egypt, where Joseph, Mary and Jesus lived in Egypt, for what length of time they remained there, what transpired during their stay, etc. The Gospel writer's sole interest seems to be in getting Jesus *into* and *out* of Egypt, while Luke apparently has no need of, or interest in, such an episode. It thus appears that the flight into Egypt serves a particularly Matthean and, we may assume, *Christological* rather than historical purpose. Raymond Brown[713] and other biblical scholars[714] have noted the parallel Matthew draws between Joseph, the legal father of Jesus, and Joseph of Genesis chapters 37, 39-50; both are men of dreams and both find safety and security for their families in Egypt. Just as the Joseph story in Genesis sets the stage for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, so too does Matt 2.15 evoke the Exodus by citing Hosea 11.1: "Out of Egypt I have called my son." Like Moses who escaped from Pharaoh's decree to slaughter Israel's newborn sons, Jesus is saved from Herod's order to kill the children of Bethlehem. As in Ex. 4.19 the LORD tells Moses to return to Egypt "for all those who were seeking your life are dead," so in Matthew 2.20 the angel tells Joseph to return to Israel "for those who were seeking the child's life are dead." Matthew's primary purpose in relating Jesus' sojourn in Egypt was apparently to depict him as the *new Moses* who will save his people (Matt. 1.21) in a new and greater way.[715] This is consistent with the author of the Gospel who knew the Jewish Scriptures, laws and customs, Hebrew and perhaps Aramaic, and was thus

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[713] *Birth of the Messiah* 29, 112, and 190.

[714] E.g., David L. Turner, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 89; Donald Senior, *Matthew* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 47; Stephen J. Binz, *Advent of the Savior: a Commentary on the Infancy Narratives of Jesus* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1996), 25.

[715] Craig A. Evans, *Matthew* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 58; Allison, *The New Moses*; R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 76-81; See also: Michael P. Theophilos, *Jesus as New Moses in Matthew 8-9: Jewish Typology in First Century Greek Literature* (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2011); Robert J. Miller, *Born Divine: the Births of Jesus and Other Sons of God* (Santa Rosa: Polebridge, 2003), 109 ff.; Binz, *Advent*, 25-26.

in all likelihood a Jewish Christian.[716] Pope Benedict XVI wrote: "With the flight into Egypt and the return to the Promised Land, Jesus grants the definitive Exodus…He returns home, and he leads others home."[717] Unlike the Book of the Exodus, however, Matthew's Gospel is not concerned with the covenant of Sinai, but with what was revealed in Jesus's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7). The *missionary* thrust of the Gospel (28.19-20) means that disciples are to be made of all nations. Thus, there are no xenophobic polemics here against the Egyptians or any other people. The harshest criticisms are levied against the scribes and Pharisees.

In time, the *Flight into Egypt* became one of the most popular subjects in Christian and Orientalist art, and rendered as mosaics, icons and paintings, as well as in stained glass and relief sculpture by artists from the Middle Ages to the Modern Period.[718] For some early Christian writers, however, the flight of the Holy family into Egypt was nevertheless disconcerting given Egypt's association with pagan worship, the oppression of the Hebrews, and stalwart enemy of the Israelites. Why would the sinless Son of God go among such a depraved and godless people? The anonymous author of an incomplete work on Matthew (of uncertain date) offered an explanation:

> For, just like a doctor, the Lord went down into Egypt that he might visit it as it languished in error, not that he might stay there. For at first blush it seems as if he went down into Egypt in flight from Herod. The fact is that he went in order to put to flight the demons of Egypt's error…Do you not see then that it was not to escape death that he went down into Egypt but that he might eradicate their deadly idols?[719]

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[716] Brown, *Introduction* 208-216.
[717] Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: the Infancy Narratives* (New York: Image, 2012) 111.
[718] For a partial list of paintings by western artists, see: http://www.textweek.com/art/flight_into_egypt.htm
[719] *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1-13,* ed. Manlio Simonetti (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 2001) 32.

The author's comment is based on Isaiah 19.1 which, like Hosea 11.1, Christians interpreted as foretelling Jesus' flight into Egypt: "See, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and comes to Egypt; the idols of Egypt will tremble at his presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them." In his *Tractate on Matthew,* Chromatius, Bishop of Aquileia (d. ca. 407 CE), asserted that the presence of the Christ in Egypt signaled the salvation of the heretofore-wicked land:

> After Egypt's ancient, grave sin, after many blows had been divinely inflicted upon it, God the omnipotent Father, moved by devotion, sent his Son into Egypt. He did so that Egypt, which had long ago paid back the penalty of wickedness owed under Moses, might now receive Christ, the hope for salvation. How great was God's compassion as shown in the advent of his Son! Egypt, which of old under Pharaoh stood stubborn against God, now became a witness to and home for Christ.[720]

## III. Apocryphal Texts.

Matthew's succinct account of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt was supplemented by several extra-canonical infancy narratives that were popular with Christian communities from the early days of the Church. They introduce additional characters, such as Salome[721] who accompanied the Holy Family into Egypt as Mary's midwife, and stories of miracles performed by Jesus during their travels such as causing a palm tree to bed low so that Mary might eat of its fruit, and a spring to open beneath the tree, miracles which are also found in the Qur'ān (*Maryam* 19.23-26).[722] The texts which augment Matthew's account of the flight into Egypt include: *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, or more properly, "The Childhood Deeds of Jesus," which was perhaps originally a Greek text of the second century CE that was translated early into Syriac (the language of the oldest extent manuscript), Latin, Ethiopic, Slavonic and Georgian; *The*

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[720] *Tractate of Matthew* 6.1 in: *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Matthew 1-13,* 33-34.
[721] Not to be confused with the daughter of Herodias who danced for Herod and demanded the head of John the Baptist (Mark 6.22-29), but a follower of Jesus (Mark 15.40; 16.1).
[722] See discussion below.

*History of Joseph the Carpenter,* probably of Egyptian origin, which was originally composed in Greek between the fourth- and fifth centuries, and survives in Coptic and Arabic versions as well; *The Arabic Infancy Narrative*, perhaps originally written in Syriac, which may date to the sixth century CE; an *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy* translated in the sixth century from a Syriac original;[723] *Pseudo-Matthew,* a Latin text that probably originates in the sixth-seventh century although the oldest extent manuscript is eleventh century in date; and finally, there is *Leabhar Breac* (literally, "the speckled book"), a fifteenth-century Irish manuscript containing an infancy gospel perhaps of ninth-century origin.[724] Although apocryphal, these tales, several of which date from the period immediately preceding the advent of Islam, became part of Christian folklore, were incorporated into the highly popular *Golden Legend* (ca. 1260),[725] and elements of them frequently incorporated into Medieval and Renaissance paintings depicting the flight.[726]

## IV. Coptic traditions.

While theologians and biblical scholars debate the historical veracity of Matt. 2.13-23, the Coptic Orthodox Church has maintained an unshakeable belief in the Holy Family's flight into Egypt, which it commemorates on Bashan 23 (June 1). The Church maintains that the biblical account is supported by the writings of Hippolytus (170-235 CE), Origen (184/185 – 253/254 CE), Eusebius (ca. 260/265 – 339/340 CE), Sozomen (c. 400-450 CE), and an Arabic

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[723] Abraham Terian, *The Armenian Gospel of the Infancy* (Oxford: University Press, 2008).
[724] For descriptions and translations of these texts (except for the *Armenian Gospel*), see: J.K. Elliott, *A Synopsis of the Apocryphal Nativity and Infancy Narratives* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); and his: *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: University Press, 1993).
[725] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton: University Press, 1993).
[726] Lucette Valensi, *La Fuite en Égypte: Histoires d'Orient et d'Occident* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002); Martin O'Kane, "The Flight into Egypt: Icon of Refuge for the H(a)unted," in: *Borders, Boundaries and the Bible,* ed. Martin O'Kane, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 313 (New York: Sheffield, 2002) 15-60.

text of uncertain date titled *The Vision of Theophilus,* among others.[727] Based on such texts as well as local traditions, the Church has developed an extensive itinerary of the Holy Family's journey in Egypt, covering a period of three and a half years during which they travelled from the Delta to Upper Egypt.[728] These locations are today marked not only by churches and monasteries but, in some places such as Matariya (ancient Heliopolis), by mosques too as Muslims are likewise drawn to sites traditionally associated with Mary and Jesus. Coptic traditions about where the Holy Family stayed in during were known to Muslim historians such as Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī (1364-1442) who included such information in his topographical study of Egypt.[729]

## V. The Qur'ān, *Tafsīr* and *Qiṣaṣ*

The most complete Qur'ānic account of the birth of 'Īsā is found in *Maryam* 19.16-33. Although there is no *explicit* reference to the Flight into Egypt, *āyāt* 22-26 appear to constitute an *implicit* reference to such a journey. These *āyāt* relate an episode that is also found in *Pseudo-Matthew* (see above). According to the Christian text, on the third day of the Holy Family's journey to Egypt, Mary wished to rest under a palm tree. She desired some of the tree's fruit but it was out of her reach; so the infant Jesus commanded the tree to bend its branches down to

[727] The writings of these authors and their relevance for the flight into Egypt are discussed by Stephen J. Davis in his chapter on "Ancient Sources for the Coptic Tradition" in: *Be Thou There: the Holy Family's Journey in Egypt,* ed. Gawdat Gabra (Cairo: American University, 2001), 133-162; *Vision of Theophilus: the Book of the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt,* trans. A Mingana (Putty: St. Shenouda Monastery, 2012). For modern reflections on the journey of the Holy Family in Egypt, see: James Cowan, *Fleeing Herod: a Journey through Coptic Egypt with the Holy Family* (Brewster: Paraclete, 2013); and Bishop Youssef (Bishop, Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States), "Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt," http://suscopts.org/resources/literature/255/flight-of-the-holy-family-into-egypt/;

[728] Cornelius Hulsman, "Tracing the Route of the Holy Family Today," in: *Be Thou There,* 31-132; *The Holy Family in Egypt* (Cairo: Egyptian Ministry of Tourism, 1999); Otto F.A. Meinardus, *The Holy Family in Egypt* (Cairo: American University, 1986).

[729] *Al-Mawāʿiẓ wa al-Iʿtibār bi-Dhikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa al-Āthār,* 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktabah al-Thaqāfah al-Dīnyah, 1987) 1, 237.

her.[730] Then, in order to satisfy the family's thirst, Jesus produced a spring of cool water from the roots of the tree. *Leabhar Breac* recounts a similar story.[731] The Qur'ānic version of the story is told in just five verses and describes a similar scene. It may be rendered in English as:

> 22. So she conceived him and she withdrew with him to a remote place. 23. And labor pains drove her to the trunk of a palm tree, and she said: "Would that I had died before this and utterly forgotten!" 24. But (a voice - Jesus or an angel) cried out from below it (i.e. the tree/or her): "Do not grieve for your Lord has made a brook under you. 25. And shake towards you the trunk of the palm tree, and it will let fall to you ripe fruit. 26. So eat and drink and comfort yourself, and if you see anyone, say: "I have vowed a fast to the Most Merciful, and I will not speak to any one today. (*Maryam* 19)

These *āyāt*, as traditionally understood, seem to conflate the nativity of 'Īsā which, according to Matthew's (and Luke's) Gospel, took place in Bethlehem, with the miracle at the palm tree which, according to the apocryphal Christian texts, occurred during the flight into Egypt a*fter* his birth. Thus, the Qur'an would seem to imply that 'Īsā's birth took place under a palm tree near or in Egypt. Al-Ṭabarī therefore relates on the authority of Wahb b. Munabbih (654-730 CE) that *before* 'Īsā was born God told Maryam to leave her people because her unusual and unexpected pregnancy would cause them to revile her; so Yūsuf took her away, travelling towards Egypt. When she and Yūsuf were "*close to Egypt*, far from the land of her people," Maryam gave birth under the palm tree.[732] To this day, Egyptian Muslims venerate the site of Matariya (outside of

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[730] Elliott, *Synopsis,* 114. In the *Arabic Infancy Narrative*, Jesus brings forth a spring from a *balsam* tree (*Synopsis,* 122). Suleiman A. Mourad sees the origin of the story of Mary and the palm tree in the Greek myth of Leto, such as is told in the *Hymn to Delos* by Callimachus (d. ca 240 BCE). See: Suleiman Mourad, "Mary in the Qur'ān," in: *The Qur'ān in its Historical Context,* ed. Gabriel said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2008) 163-174.

[731] Elliott, *Synopsis* 122-3.

[732] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 727. Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* v. 9, 5800 ff. It should be noted that al-Ṭabarī relates a second account of 'Īsā's birth according to Ibn Masʿūd which does not include a flight into Egypt. The events described in 19.22-26 are said to have occurred in Jerusalem (*Ta'rīkh* 732-733).

Cairo) along with their Coptic brethren as the site of the miracles described in *Maryam* 19.23-26.[733]

Other Islamic sources, however, agree with the Christian tradition that the birth took place in Bethlehem (*bayt laḥm*). Among the accounts related by al-Thaʿlabī is one (not clearly attributed) tradition which places both the birth of ʻĪsā and the miracles of the palm in Bethlehem.[734] Ibn Kathīr relates an (other) account from Wahb that also places the birth in Bethlehem, as well as *aḥādīth* that do likewise.[735] Some modern commentators as well maintain Bethlehem as ʻĪsā's birthplace.[736]

The confusion surrounding the setting of the events related in 19.22-23 as occurring in or near Egypt or in Palestine derives, I believe, in part from the traditional interpretation of two phrases: *faḥamalat-hu* in 19.22 and *al-makhād* in *āya* 23. Since 19.16-21 narrates the annunciation to Maryam, *faḥamalat-hu* has been understood to mean: "so she *conceived* him (ʻĪsā)," thus continuing the narrative of the Annunciation. It could, however, just as easily be translated "so she carried him (in arms) – and she withdrew with him to a remote place." Thus, *fā-ḥamalat-hu* ("she carried him") is paralleled by *fā-ntabadhat bi-hi* ("she withdrew with him"). In other words, the moment of ʻĪsā's birth occurs (without narration) *between ayāt* 21 and 22. This has not been considered by commentators medieval or modern. What, then, does *al-makhāḍ* signify in *āya* 23 if not "labor pains" as traditionally rendered? The verb *makhaḍa* essentially

[733] Otto Meinardus, *Coptic Saints and Pilgrimages* (Cairo: American University, 2002), 89-92. In his *Two Thousand Years of Christianity* (Cairo: American University, 1999) 22-23, Meinardus also names Ihnasya al-Madina (ancient Heracleopolis) as the location associated with 19.23-26.
[734] Al-Thaʿlabī 642.
[735] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* 3, 110-111.
[736] Yūsuf ʻAlī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* n. 2475.

means to shake, agitate, or churn (milk),[737] and thus *makhāḍ* could, in my opinion, signify the discomfort that comes from travelling a great distance on rough rural roads and desert paths by donkey. Thus, *āya* 23 may be understood to mean that Maryam, having already given birth to ʻĪsā in Palestine, sought respite under the palm tree from the long and difficult journey to Egypt, and that she expresses, *not* the pain of childbirth, but her despair from being forced to flee from her home with a newborn infant in arms. Although this interpretation is at odds with the traditional understanding of the text, my conclusion is supported *Pseudo-Matthew* which says that it was Mary's desire to rest from the heat and fatigue of travelling that caused the Holy Family to rest under the palm tree.[738] Thus, the *makānān qaṣiyyān* of 19.22 would clearly refer to Egypt to which Maryam and ʻĪsā fled (with Yūsuf) *after* ʻĪsā's birth, as corroborated by both canonical and apocryphal Christian texts. That Maryam gave birth *before* seeking refreshment under the palm tree is supported by a sixteenth-century Persian painting which shows the newborn ʻĪsā, enveloped by a halo of flames, laying on the ground as his mother grasps the trunk of a palm tree.[739] Moreover, if it is accepted that ʻĪsā was born *before* Maryam reached the palm tree as related in the apocryphal Christian texts, then the long-standing debate regarding the identity of the speaker in *āyāt* 24-26 may be easily resolved in favor of ʻĪsā (speaking *ex-utero* not *in utero*) rather than the angel Jibrīl as some have maintained.[740] Thus, in my revised interpretation 19.22-24 would be rendered in translation as:

> 22. So she *carried him* (in arms) – and she withdrew with him to a remote place. 23. And the *discomfort of the journey* drove her to the trunk of a palm tree, and she said: "Would

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[737] Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon, Book 1, Part 7* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1955; Orig. London, 1885) 2693-2694.
[738] Elliott, *Synopsis*, 114.
[739] Chester Beatty Library (Per 231.227). See: Elaine Wright, *Islam – Faith, Art, Culture: Manuscripts of the Chester Beatty Library* (London: Scala, 2009) 213, fig. 166.
[740] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* 9, 5800 ff.; Cf. Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* 3, 11.

> that I had died before this and utterly forgotten!" 24. But (Jesus) cried out from below it (i.e. the tree): "Do not grieve for our Lord has made a brook under you…"

The flight of the Holy Family into Egypt may also be implicitly mentioned in *al-Mu'minūn* 23.50. Some commentators believe that the word *rabwah* ("high ground") in *al-Mu'minūn* 23.50 refers to Egypt: "And We made the son of Mary and his mother as a sign, and We gave them shelter on *high ground* which provided rest/security and a spring." Thus, according to al-Ṭabarī, following the visit of the Magi, Maryam and Yūsuf take the child into Egypt which al-Ṭabarī identified as the "high ground" of *al-Mu'minūn* 23.50, as does al-Thaʿlabī in his *Qiṣaṣ*, perhaps both authors on the authority of Wahb.[741] In al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* the "height" (*rabwah*) is more frequently identified in the traditions he cites as the town of Ramlah in Palestine or even Damascus or Jerusalem.[742] Al-Zamakhsharī also names Egypt as one of several possible locations for the high ground of 23.50, as does Ibn Kathīr.[743] Local Egyptian tradition associates the *rabwah* with Bahnasa (ancient Oxryhynchus).[744] Egypt, or at least the Egyptian desert, does fit the description of "high ground" as the land adjacent to the Nile Valley to the east and west is a high desert plateau. To enter Egypt proper from Palestine and the Eastern Desert, one *descends* from the desert into the valley. Even though the identification of the "high ground" of 23.50 with Egypt cannot be determined with any degree of certainty from the context of *al-Mu'minīn*, it may be corroborated by *Sūrat Maryam* 19.23-26. It is thus evident from the traditions cited in al-Ṭabarī's *Ta'rīkh* that from an early date that some Muslim exegetes maintained the Christian tradition of Jesus'/ʿĪsā's journey into Egypt, drawing to some degree

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[741] *Ta'rīkh* 729. A second account of 'Īsā's birth attributed by al-Ṭabarī to Ibn Masʿūd does not include the flight into Egypt; al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ* 647.
[742] *Tafsīr,* v. 10, 6270-6272. Al-Thaʿlabī also mentions these possibilities (*Qiṣaṣ* 647).
[743] Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf* 3, 145. Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* 3, 232. For the opinions of other exegetes, see: Mourad, "Mary in the Qur'ān," 169-171. Mourad believes that various places identified as the *rabwah* "serve to fit certain regional claims, whether political or religious, between rival cities and areas during the medieval Islamic Period" (171).
[744] Jill Kamil, *Christianity in the land of the Pharaohs: the Coptic Orthodox Church* (London: Routledge, 2002) 25; Otto F.A. Meinardus, *Two Thousand Years of Coptic Christianity* 23.

from Matthew's Gospel, the apocryphal Infancy Narratives and Coptic legends while adding their own unique material. Authors of *Qiṣaṣ* such as al-Thaʿlabī[745] and al-Kisā'ī[746] include the flight into Egypt in their accounts of 'Īsā, as does al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (1002-1071 CE),[747] while the episode is conspicuously (and inexplicably) lacking in al-Rabghūzī's work which adheres closely to the Qur'ānic account of 'Īsā's birth in this case.[748]

In more modern works, some Muslim authors are willing to accept the historicity of the flight into Egypt not on the basis of the *Qiṣaṣ,* but because Matthew's account is corroborated by the *Gospel of Barnabas* (chapter 8), a pseudepigraphical text that survives in an Italian manuscript of the sixteenth-century CE and a Spanish manuscript dated to eighteenth-century. [749] It first appeared in English translation in 1907, followed immediately by the Arabic when Rashīd Riḍā began publishing excerpts of the translation by Khalīl Saʿadeh in *al-Manār.* An Urdu translation soon followed (1916) and still others in languages spoken in countries with large Muslim populations;[750] henceforth it has been regarded by many Muslims as a more "authentic" gospel than those in the New Testament canon as its Christology is essentially that which is presented in the Qur'ān.[751] Thus, in his 1941 *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā',* ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Najjār cites both the Gospels of Matthew *and* Barnabas in his brief discussion of 'Īsā's flight into Egypt, identifying the *rabwah* of *al-Mu'minūn* 23.50 with the district of 'Ain Shams and Matariya

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[745] Al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ* 642-647.
[746] Al-Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ* 330-333.
[747] Al-Khatīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rīkh al-Anbiyā'* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 2006) 319.
[748] Al-Rabghūzī, *Qiṣaṣ* 484-486.
[749] Jan Joosten, "The Date and Provenance of the Gospel of Barnabas," *Journal of Theological Studies, NS,* 60, 1 (April 2010): 200-215. Joosten believes that the text is actually fourteenth-century in composition, however.
[750] *The Gospel of Barnabas: Edited and Translated from the Italian Manuscript in the Imperial Library at Vienna,* trans. and ed. Lonsdale and Laura Ragg (Oxford, 1907). The complete Arabic translation was available by 1908 under the title: *Injīl Barnāba,* ed. Rashīd Riḍā (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Manār, 1325/1907).
[751] P.S. van Konigsweld, "The Islamic Image of Paul and the Origin of the Gospel of Barnabas," *The Routledge Reader in Christian-Muslim Relations,* ed. Mona Siddiqui (London: Routledge, 2013), 33-48; Leirvik, *Images,* 132-144; Umar Ryad, *Islamic Reformism and Christianity: a Critical Reading of the Works of Muḥamad Rashīd Riḍā and His Associates, 1898-1935* (Leiden: Brill, 2009) 213-242.

outside of Cairo.[752] Muḥammad ʻAta ur-Raḥīm uses *Barnabas* extensively in his 1977 book on Jesus, claiming it "covers Jesus' life more extensively and accurately than the other Gospels," and thus also maintains the flight into Egypt.[753] In a 2004 book on the life of Christ, a Muslim author cites the Gospel of Barnabas *instead* of Matthew for the flight into Egypt.[754] There are, moreover, at least two artistic renderings of the *Flight into Egypt* from a Muslim cultural context. The first depicts Mary carrying Jesus on a donkey led by Joseph appears on a pen box from eighteenth-century Isfahan where it is paired with a painting of the Annunciation.[755] It is not possible to determine if this painted box was produced for a Muslim or a Christian. The second is an engraving of the Virgin and Child resting during the flight into Egypt, clearly produced by a European artist, but which was incorporated into an album of artwork collated by the Mughal Prince Dārā Shikoh (1615-1659) for his wife ca. 1633-42.[756]

In the *Arabic Infancy Narrative* (10-11), *Pseudo-Matthew* (22-24), and *Armenian Gospel* (15.10-16), the presence of the Christ child in Egypt causes pagan idols to fall on their faces and shatter. This phenomenon fulfills what had been prophesied by Isaiah (19.1 – see above). Although apocryphal, this episode found its way into medieval Christian art probably though the *Golden Legend*.[757] This theme is also found in Islamic traditions attributed by al-Ṭabarī to Wahb who reported that after the birth of ʻĪsā "[w]herever idols were worshipped, the idols were

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[752] ʻAbd al-Wahhāb al-Najjār, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'* (Reprinted: Bayrūt: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-ʻArabī, 1996) 420-421.
[753] Muhammad ʻAta ur-Rahim and Ahmad Thomson, *Jesus: Prophet of Islam*, rev. ed (Orig. pub., 1977; Elmhurst: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 2002) 11, 19.
[754] Al-Shafīʻ al-Māḥī Aḥmad, *'Īsā ibn Maryam: min al-mīlād ḥattā al-wafāh* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Warrāq, 2004) 57.
[755] Brosh with Milstein 125-6.
[756] Toby Falk and Mildred Archer, *Indian Minatures in the India Office Library* (London: Sotheby Parke Bernet, 1981) 68f.42v; S.P. Verma, *Crossing Cultural Frontiers: Biblical Themes in Mughal Painting* (New Delhi: Aryan Books International, 2011) xxv, pl. 38.
[757] See, for example, the altarpiece panel by Melchior Broderlam (d. ca. 1409), Musée des Beaux-Arts, Dijon; De Voragine, *Golden Legend* 1, 57.

toppled and thrown upside down."[758] In Wahb's account, the destruction of the idols proved so upsetting to the demons that spoke through them that they hurried to alert Iblīs. He attempted to see the newborn prophet who was causing the uproar but was prevented by angels who surrounded the place of his birth. This is repeated by al-Thaʿlabī.[759] This episode is similar to a passage in the *Armenian Gospel* in which the demons cry out to the Egyptians about the destruction of their idols and temple and exhort them to seek out and kill the child.[760]

In addition to the downfall of the idols, the various *Qiṣaṣ* report other miracles that occurred in Egypt during 'Īsā's presence there, some of which are also be found in the apocryphal Infancy Narratives, or seemingly inspired by them. Al-Ṭabarī[761] on the authority of Wahb relates that 'Īsā was able to identify the two perpetrators of a theft that occurred in house of an Egyptian dignitary where he and his mother were staying. The dignitary offers some of his recovered wealth to Maryam and her son, but she declines the reward. This story is not found in the Christian apocryphal texts and may replace a story related in the *Arabic Infancy Gospel* and in *The Vision of Theophilus* in which two robbers, identified in *The Vision* as an Egyptian and a Jew, follow the Holy Family and seize their possessions. When the Egyptian (called Titus in the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*) bargains with his accomplice to secure the safety the Holy Family, Jesus tells Mary that these two robbers will one day be crucified with him at the hands of the Jews. The Egyptian, he says, "will confess me and believe in me on the Cross, and will first enter Paradise before Adam and all his other children."[762] Since this story is meant to foreshadow events at Jesus' crucifixion (Luke 23.32-43) which is traditionally rejected in Islam, Muslim authors

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[758] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 727.
[759] Al-Thaʿlabī 643.
[760] Terian, *Armenian Gospel* 15-16. The meaning of this episode in the Islamic tradition is described in the conclusions to this chapter.
[761] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 730.
[762] *Vision of Theophilus* 45.

discarded it, replacing it with another story featuring robbers, but one which highlights ʻĪsā's wisdom in house of his Egyptian host. According to the account related by al-Ṭabarī, when this same dignitary runs out of wine for his son's wedding fest, ʻĪsā touches the jars filling them with wine – a curious transposition of the wedding at Cana (John 2.1-11) to an Egyptian setting. Al-Thaʿlabī likewise includes in his *Qiṣaṣ* the miracles related by Wahb, as well as a second, more explicit water-to-wine miracle, on the authority of al-Suddī.[763]

Al-Thaʿlabī also tells a story in which the child ʻĪsā instructs a teacher in religious tenets by using the letters of the alphabet. Recognizing the boy's wisdom, the teacher tells Maryam, "he has no need for a teacher."[764] This story is found similarly in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (6-8)[765] where the teacher is named Zacchaeus; and in the *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy* (20)[766] where Jesus' teacher is Gemaliel (Acts 5.34-39), although in both cases the scene is set in Nazareth rather than in Egypt. In other stories related by al-Thaʿlabī, ʻĪsā raises a dead prince at the request of the Egyptian king, a miracle not found in the Christian texts, and another boy of whose death ʻĪsā has been wrongfully accused, a story which is reported in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (9)[767] and in the *Armenian Gospel* (17),[768] although neither is this miracle situated in Egypt according to the Christian texts. Finally, al-Thaʿlabī[769] and al-Kisāʾī[770] tell the story of ʻĪsā performing a miracle in Egypt while serving as an apprentice to a dyer. The miracle, in which ʻĪsā produces garments of different colors from a single vat, serves to bring the dyer to faith.

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[763] Al-Thaʿlabī 650-651.
[764] Al-Thaʿlabī 648; Cf. al-Kisāʾī, 332-333.
[765] Eliott, *Apocryphal New Testament* 76-79.
[766] Terian, *Armenian Gospel* 92-97.
[767] Eliott, *Apocryphal New Testament* 78.
[768] Terian, *Armenian Gospel* 82-87.
[769] Al-Thaʿlabī 652.
[770] al-Kisāʾī 333.

This story is also found in the *Arabic Infancy Gospel* (37), which situates the miracle in Salem[771] and the *Armenian Gospel* (21), which places it in the city of Tiberias.[772]

## VI. Conclusions

Although Islamic tradition retains the biblical account of the *Flight into Egypt,* and repeats many of the elements found in the Christian apocryphal texts, neither the two brief Qur'ānic references that seem to refer to this episode, nor al-Ṭabarī's account in his *Ta'rīkh,* nor the various *Qiṣaṣ* offer any material that might illustrate Islamic attitudes towards the Egyptians. This is in contrast to the very rich material we have examined in connection with Mūsā, Yūsuf, and, to a lesser degree, Ibrāhīm. The focus of these stories is always on 'Īsā and his prophetic gifts, and the Egyptians are fairly inconsequential to the story as they are in most of the Christian accounts as well. Although there is not universal acceptance of the Flight into Egypt among Muslim authors, nevertheless there are sufficient references to this event in *tafāsīr* and *qiṣaṣ* suggesting that the story must have been considered worthy of repeating and developing. Clearly, the Islamic texts do not have the Christological concerns of Matthew's Gospel – i.e. that of demonstrating that Jesus is Israel's new Moses, the Messiah whose coming was foretold by the prophets. I would argue, however, that aside from the miracle stories, two elements of the Christian accounts of the flight into Egypt, canonical and apocryphal, in particular resonated with Muslim community and ensured its survival among *mufassirūn* and *quṣṣāṣ*: the themes of forced migration and the fight against idolatry. As seen in this study, these are two essential elements in the stories of prophets as related by the Qur'ān and *qiṣaṣ*, especially Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf, Mūsā and 'Īsā, as well as Muhammad.

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[771] Eliott, *Apocryphal New Testament* 106.
[772] Terian, *Armenian Gospel* 99ff.

The forced flight of ʻĪsā into Egypt to escape harm at the hands of his own people and Herod recalls the migration of Ibrāhīm (21.71; 37.99), the forced removal of Yūsuf to Egypt (12.20-21), Mūsā's fleeing to Madyan (28.22), and anticipates the *hijra* of Muhammad and the *ummah* to Madīna (16.41, 110; 22.58; 59.8).[773] In a tradition cited by Ibn Ḥanbal (780-855 CE), ʻĪsā said: "What God loves most are the strangers." He was asked, "Who are the strangers?" He replied, "Those who flee with their faith. They shall be judged together with ʻĪsā on the Day of Judgment."[774] Egyptian author Nagīb Maḥfūẓ (1911-2006) captured this idea of the Holy Family as migrants and strangers in his allegorical novel *Awlād Ḥāratinā* ("The Children of Our Alley")[775] which depicts several Prophets including ʻĪsā, whom Mahfouz calls "Rifāʻa." As the chapter on Rifāʻa opens, his future parents, Shāfʻī (Joseph) and ʻAbda (Mary), are fleeing their home due to the corruption and wickedness of local leaders. Despairing of their forced migration, ʻAbda says to her husband: "We'll live in exile (*ghurbah*) as if we had no people, we who belong to Gebel's [i.e. Moses'] people, the lords of the Alley."[776] The narrator adds: "Morning would find her amongst strangers (*qawm ghurabā'*) who would be her neighbors, and her baby would be born into their hands. It would grow up on strange soil (*arḍ gharībah*), like a cutting taken from a tree."[777] Maḥfūẓ artfully used three words – *ghurbah, ghurabā'* and *gharībah* – all derived from the verb *gharaba*, meaning "to go away, to be a stranger," in his account of the flight of the Holy Family to emphasize the idea of forced migration and alienation. Undoubtedly,

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[773] There was also the earlier *hijra* of a group of Muslims to Abyssinia led by Jaʻfar b. Abī Ṭālib (al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh,* 1180-1184).

[774] Cited in: Tarif Khalidi, *The Muslim Jesus: Sayings and Stories in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 2001), no. 55. Khalidi notes that in two alternative versions of this tradition, the speaker is Muhammad rather than ʻĪsā. Similarly, in another *ḥadīth* Muhammad said: "Be in this world as if you were a stranger (*gharīb*) or a traveler." (*Sahih al-Bukhari* no. 6416).

[775] First published in 1959 in the newspaper a*l-Ahrām* in serial form. It was published in book form in Lebanon in 1967. For citation purposes here, I use the 2006 edition published by Dār al-Sharūq, Cairo.

[776] *Awlād Ḥaratinā*, 223. English translation by Philip Stewart published as: *Children of Gebelawi,* rev. augmented ed. (Pueblo: Passeggiata, 1999) 190.

[777] *Awlād Ḥaratinā* 224; *Children of Gebelawi* 191.

the Muslim community saw in Christian accounts of the Holy Family's flight into Egypt, some dating as late as the sixth- and seventh-centuries, a prophetic paradigm which suited Islamic characterizations of 'Īsā and Maryam, and paralleled the experience of Muḥammad and the *muhājirūn* who likewise were forced to leave their homes. The flight into Egypt remains a meaningful story for Muslims fleeing oppression today as evidenced by the words of Irfan Yusuf, a lawyer and blogger:

> Jesus was born into a family of internal refugees. His mother had to seek refuge, fleeing Herod's nasty dictatorship. I doubt even Saddam Hussein or the Taliban would have had a policy involving the industrial-scale slaughter of male infants…Despite coming from an aristocratic family, Mary was forced to flee her home… I believe Jesus' humble beginnings (not to mention the fact that I believe he was divinely inspired) led him to understand what it was like to be marginalised… Real Islam, real Christianity — indeed real religion — wants to rid us of pomposity and self-righteousness. God's prophets (including the Son of Man) made time for those whom society pushes away. Jesus, the child of a refugee, was there for everyone. [778]

The other element in the story of Jesus' flight into Egypt that may have ensured its survival in Islamic sources is the toppling of the idols, an element consistent with Islam's *missionary* quality. As discussed above, this episode is common to both the Christian apocryphal texts and Islamic *qiṣaṣ.* As with the theme of migration, combatting idolatry through preaching and/or smashing idols by is a *prophetic* act, and is part of the Qur'ānic narratives for Ibrāhīm (21.51-58; 26.69-104), Yūsuf (12. 38-40) and Mūsā (2.54; 7.138-140), as well as for Muhammad, according to his biographers, when he cleansed the Ka'ba.[779] Although the Christian texts see the toppling of Egypt's idols as a fulfillment of Isaiah 19.1, the Islamic texts make no such connection but nevertheless incorporate the episode as it serves the Islamic prophetic paradigm. In *Pseudo-Matthew,* the toppling of the idols results in the conversion of the

[778] Irfan Yusuf, "A Muslim's View of Jesus the Refugee," 21 December 2010: http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?aeid=24586#.UuhO45co5Ms.
[779] E.g. Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-nabawīyah* (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1990), v. 4, 59.

pagan Egyptians: "Then all the people of the city believed in the Lord God through Jesus Christ." With this divine purpose fulfilled, Joseph is then instructed to return to Judah. Similarly, al-Ṭabarī ends the account of 'Īsā's sojourn in Egypt with an oblique reference to the conversion of the Egyptians: "Upon seeing what he ('Īsā) had done, *the [Egyptian] people were in awe of him and of the powers that God has endowed him with.*"[780]

'Īsā's sojourn in Egypt concludes, according to the various Islamic accounts, when God reveals to *Maryam* (rather than Joseph, as in the Christian accounts) that they should return to Palestine.[781] Both al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī (from Wahb?) state that 'Īsā reached his twelfth year of age before returning to Palestine with Maryam (and Yūsuf),[782] an interesting departure from the apocryphal Christian texts which state that the Holy Family remained in Egypt three years (*Arabic Infancy Narrative*) or seven (*Leabhar Breac*).[783] Ironically, it is possible that the Muslim tradition is more dependent on Luke 2.41-52, which states that Jesus was aged twelve when his parents come upon him among the priests in the Temple of Jerusalem. Although the Islamic accounts of the flight into Egypt are admittedly no more revealing than the Christian accounts with regard to the Egyptians, they do ultimately portray Egypt as an idolatrous land in need of *conversion* rather than condemnation, a land to which God had sent at least four of His prophets – Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf, Mūsā, and 'Īsā - to accomplish the task.

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[780] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 731 (my emphasis).
[781] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 731; al-Thaʿlabī 653. At the end of his discussion about the life of 'Īsā, al-Ṭabarī adds yet another synopsis of his birth according to "some historians," including the instruction Yūsuf had received from an angel to return to Nazareth (740).
[782] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 731; al-Thaʿlabī 647 and 653.
[783] Eliott, *Synopsis* 122-23. *Theophilus* says three years and six months (54).

## Chapter 7 - Conclusion

The historical and cultural importance of the Egyptians in the ancient Near East from the fourth millennium BCE until its incorporation into the Roman Empire is without dispute. Even after Egypt ceased to be an independent political power with the death of Cleopatra VII in 30 BCE, it continued to play a significant and indeed inestimable role in the early histories of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Over the millennia, theologians and philosophers of all three traditions have studied and taught in the synagogues, catechetical schools, and mosque-universities of Alexandria and Cairo. In spite of Egypt's significance, or perhaps because of it, from the perspective of the Hebrew Bible the Egyptians represented the quintessential "other" to the Israelites - lascivious, idolatrous, tyrannical, hostile and murderous.[784] Egypt is relentlessly vilified as that "house of bondage," a harsh portrayal eased almost exclusively by the Prophet Isaiah who could see the day when an altar to Israel's God would be built on Egyptian soil and the Egyptians would be counted among God's people. The biblical characterization of the Egyptians may be explained by the historical context in which early Israel emerged, a context in which Egypt represented a political, military and cultural threat to Israel's survival and distinctiveness, and in which the Israelites came to regard themselves as a *covenanted* people, in a unique and exclusive relationship with their God, as described in Anthony Smith's *Chosen Peoples*.[785] As Israel's *covenantal* consciousness became even more acute in the post-Exilic period when the Hebrew Scriptures were finally redacted, the Egyptians remained the primary symbol of the "other" even though they no longer posed a threat to Israel's survival, and in spite of the large and prosperous diaspora communities that settled in Egypt. The *lived* reality of Jewish prosperity in Egypt is perhaps better reflected in the post-biblical *Aggada,* which, as we

[784] See my Introduction.
[785] See my Introduction.

have seen, occasionally tempers the rather harsh treatment of the Egyptians in the Jewish canon. In spite of the universal outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.9-11), the prejudices of the Hebrew Bible were inherited to some extent by the early Christian community which, according to the apostle Paul, has been grafted into Israel's salvation history, and thus continued to associate the Egyptians with tyranny, idolatry and base morality throughout the ages as evidenced by sermons, artistic images, hymns and motion pictures.

Smith contrasts the inward-looking *covenantal* identity of Israel and some Christian communities (such as the Armenians and Ethiopians) with the expansive *missionary* focus of other Christian societies and nations. Although he does not specifically treat Islam *per se,* his characterization of missionary peoples is also applicable to the Muslim *ummah*. Drawing on Smith's distinctions of covenanted and missionary identities, this thesis has hypothesized that the Qur'ān and Islamic tradition with its pronounced missionary thrust present a rather different image of the Egyptians, given the historical context in which Islam emerged. It is an image that is more nuanced and less generalized, one that considers the faith and actions of the *individual* as indicators of righteousness above considerations of ethnicity, race, tribe or culture. This analysis assumes a *humanistic hermeneutic* which holds that even sacred scriptures are necessarily conditioned by history, culture and language. Thus, this study presents a unique examination of the Egyptians in the Qur'ān and extra-Qur'ānic traditions and texts as related through their encounters with the prophets Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf, Mūsā and 'Īsā. It constitutes an original contribution to Qur'ānic and Islamic studies as the Egyptians have not been treated on the whole, eclipsed by the prophets who are central in the Qur'ān, as well as in exegetical and secondary literature. In the past, the Pharaoh of the Exodus story has garnered some attention from classical Islamic scholars due to his apparent profession of faith (*Yūnus* 10.90), and Yūsuf's would-be

seductress (Zulaykha) has been the subject of *ṣūfī* musings on holy longing. No study, however, classical or modern, has attempted what this thesis does: an examination of *all* Qur'ānic Egyptians that combines a thorough exegetical and *intertextual* study with an analysis of extra-canonical texts such as the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* and traditions such as are found in al-Ṭabarī's *al-Ta'rīkh.* Moreover, this thesis uniquely addresses historical, Egyptological and archaeological issues in each case, not to "disprove" the veracity of these encounters, but to critique classical and modern attempts to absolutely fix the accounts of the prophets in a historical period and demonstrate the limitations of literalist understandings. This study moreover has shown how the Qur'ānic portrayals of the Egyptians in particular reflect less the contexts and concerns of the ancient past, but those of the early *ummah*, a community of believers which not only struggled to survive the hostilities of the Quraysh, but which sought to bring them and others to faith in the God of Ibrāhīm. Unlike the Israelites who understood themselves to be in a unique and exclusive relationship with their God, a community that ultimately expelled foreigners from their midst in order to purify "a land unclean with the filth of the peoples of the lands" (Ezra 9.11), the Muslim *ummah* coalesced not as a closed community based on cultural, ethnic, racial or tribal identity, but was open to who "those who believe [in God and His prophets], who do righteous deeds, and who humble themselves before their Lord" (*Hūd* 11.23). This understanding, that neither faith (*īmān*), nor righteousness (*ṣalāḥ*), nor humbling oneself before God (*khabata*) is found among one people to the exclusion of all others, is exemplified in the Qur'ānic treatment of the Egyptians, augmented by the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'.* Although references to the Egyptians are clearly not as ubiquitous in the Qur'ān and *qiṣaṣ* as in the Hebrew Bible and *Aggada*, among them are found individuals that provide vivid and sometimes dramatic examples of repentance, conversion

and steadfast faith, prompted by the prophets of God who have been sent to the Egyptians: Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf, Mūsā, and ʻĪsā.

Although the story of Ibrāhīm and Sāra's descent into Egypt[786] is not mentioned in the Qur'ān, it is recounted in numerous *aḥadīth* and *qiṣaṣ.* This thesis hypothesizes that the story was retained and valued by the Islamic tradition, not because it prefigures Israel's Captivity as it does in the Bible, but because it recalls the *hijra* of Muhammad and the Muslims. The triumph of Ibrāhīm and Sāra over a pagan Egyptian king was the triumph of believers over non-believers. Like the *aggadic* versions of the story, however, the Islamic accounts nevertheless depict the Egyptian king as someone who comes to acknowledge the omnipotence of the God of Ibrāhīm and Sāra. This motif, common to *extra-canonical* Jewish and Muslim texts, perhaps reflects the concerns of faith communities living as minorities who wished to portray the (unbelieving) sovereign and people of that realm in the best possible light. This thesis has shown that al-Rabghūzī's version of Ibrāhīm's sojourn in Egypt as related in his *Qiṣaṣ* contains a noteworthy element: the conversion of Pharaoh (*not* to be confused with the Pharaoh of Exodus) after Sāra castigates him for his idolatry and as a result of Ibrāhīm's preaching; the Egyptian king thus becomes *muslim.* This thesis has suggested that this unique element in al-Rabghūzī's account may have been introduced to facilitate the conversion of the Chagatai Mongols whom he served. Moreover, it has been suggested herein that al-Rabghūzī perhaps based his characterization of the Pharaoh on the Mamlūk sultan Kitbugha. Thus, a Muslim author reshaped the basic biblical story to illustrate not the mere defeat of unbelievers – the Egyptians or any others – by plagues or other manifestations of divine wrath, but how they might be brought to faith through the efforts of God's prophets, by preaching God's Word. Finally, the story also serves to introduce Hājar,

[786] See Chapter Three.

the mother of Ismāʿīl, into Islam's prophetic history, an Egyptian woman whose memory is particularly evoked in the rites of the *Ḥajj*.

This thesis has also provided a detailed *linguistic* and *intertextual* exegesis of *Sūrat Yūsuf* 12.21-57,[787] the portion of the narrative that concerns the prophet's interaction with the Egyptians, by analyzing significant words in these *āyāt* and how they are used elsewhere in the Qur'ān. In some cases this has yielded new and original interpretations of the text that have have not been offered before perhaps due to the relative paucity of attention given to the Egyptians in the exegetical literature. Several versions of the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* have been considered to augment the Qur'ānic materials in order to develop 'character profiles' for the individual Egyptians and groups thereof, and compare and contrast them with biblical and extra-biblical texts. Although the Islamic accounts have some elements in common with *aggadic* material, a fundamental difference in the Qur'ānic and biblical accounts has been noted: the Islamic tradition understands Yūsuf to be a *prophet to the Egyptians*, not merely a patriarch of the Israelites. His purpose was to bring the Egyptians to faith, not subjugate or exploit them. This results in unique Islamic characterizations of some of the Egyptians as *believers*, such as al-'Azīz, Yūsuf's Egyptian master, who was esteemed in Islamic tradition as one of the "sharpest" (i.e. most astute) of individuals, who senses Yūsuf's special character, and who exhorts his duplicitous wife to seek God's forgiveness for her wayward acts. Moreover, in contrast to traditional renderings, this study suggests that the "witness" (*shāhid*) in *Sūrat Yūsuf* 12.26-27 signifies a witness to *faith* rather than legal matters. There are the "women in the city" (12.30-31; 12.51) who acknowledge the illicit behavior of al-'Azīz's wife, invoke the name of God, and testify to Yūsuf's innocence. There is one of Yūsuf's prison companions who recognized him as

[787] See Chapter Four.

a person of truth and sincerity (12.45-46), and the king of Egypt himself, called Rayyān in the tradition, who is consistently described as a believer. The *theological* elements in the words used by these individuals, ascertained through an intertextual analysis, have also gone unnoticed by many exegetes, and stand in stark contrast to the rather *untheological* story of Joseph in Genesis with its minimal references to God and its lack of concern for the faith of Egyptians. Finally, there is the complex character of al-ʻAzīz's wife (Zulaykha) who, although initially appears to signify all that is base and illicit, ultimately becomes a celebrated icon of conversion, faith and purified love, particularly among the *ṣūfīs*. This is a uniquely Islamic perspective. This thesis argues that the accounts of her repentance may have resulted from a conflation with the figure of Aseneth, the biblical wife of Joseph known particularly from the *Aggadah* and the text *Joseph and Aseneth.* Not only is al-ʻAzīz's wife "redeemed" through Yūsuf's presence, according to the Qur'ān, but *the land of Egypt* is restored as well for in Yūsuf's interpretation of the king's dream, prosperity will return to Egypt after the period of famine. This again represents a subtle although not insignificant difference with the biblical account. It has also been suggested above that this cyclic vision of creation in which life and death are brought out of the other by a beneficent God, and mirrored in life's tragedies and triumphs, is fundamental to Islamic theology, as well as ancient Egyptian belief.

This thesis contains an analysis of the more than 300 *āya* that refer to the prophet Mūsā's encounter with the Egyptians found in twenty-six different *sūras.*[788] The approach was an original one: to examine these *āyat* not in their current canonical order or by theme or topic since there is no single continuous narrative as with Yūsuf, but to consider the references to the Egyptians in the Exodus story as far as possible in the order in which they were revealed using

[788] See Chapter Five.

the Nöldeke-Schwally chronology as a working hypothesis. Although such an approach is not without its difficulties, it has been strongly suggested that the references to the Egyptians were revealed not merely to tell the story of Mūsā and his confrontation with Pharaoh, but to relate the saga of Israel in Egypt to the unfolding prophetic mission of Muhammad among the Meccans and the opposition and persecution he and his followers experienced. In other words, sometimes the Qur'ānic Egyptians resemble the Quraysh of Muhammad's time more than they do their biblical counterparts. References to Egyptians in the early Meccan period tend to be brief and focused on Pharaoh. In the second Meccan period, "the people of Pharaoh" – i.e. his ministers and military forces – are increasingly implicated along with their ruler, perhaps reflecting the growing opposition to Muhammad among the Quraysh. Third Meccan *sūras* introduce us to the likes of Hāmān, second only to Pharaoh in his villainy, and provide the first references to Pharaoh's slaughter of Israelite children at a time when the very survival of the *ummah* is in doubt. At the same time, the second and third Meccan *sūras* introduced some outstanding and unique examples of repentance, conversion and steadfast faith among the Egyptians such as are rarely if ever encountered in the Hebrew Bible and only occasionally in the *Aggada*: Pharaoh's magicians who heeded Mūsā's words and God's signs, asked to be forgiven their sins, and then claim to have become "the foremost (i.e. the most significant) of believers" even as they faced death at Pharaoh's hands; the Egyptian "believer" of *Sūrat Ghāfir* 40.28-45 who in a spirited *khuṭbah* urgently exhorts his people to believe in one God before they are completely lost; and perhaps most famously, the wife of Pharaoh who, although mentioned only briefly in the Qur'ān, is frequently extolled in the tradition as one of the most faithful of all women having saved Mūsā from her murderous husband. To these, we may add the hairdresser of Pharaoh's daughter who appears in *qiṣaṣ* where she is portrayed as a martyr to the faith. Pharaoh, by contrast, is the most

nefarious of unbelievers in the Qur'ān's Exodus accounts, as indicated *linguistically* by the words associated with him signifying unbelief (*kadhdhaba*), opposing (*'aṣā*), turning away (*adbara*), and transgressing (*ṭaghā*), for example. This thesis has suggested, however, that his Qur'ānic epithet *dhū al-awtād*, commonly translated as "Lord of Stakes," probably should be understood as "Lord of Obelisks" (or "Columns") signifying an arrogant ruler who commands the authority and resources to raise monuments, but lacks faith and humility like the 'Ād and Thamūd people with whom he is often compared. Although Pharaoh threatens his magicians with torture and death when they submit to Mūsā's God, it appears that even he ultimately comes to faith, as he does in the *Aggadah*. Muslim theologians later hotly debated this shocking scenario as more *covenantal* elements entered the *ummah* in the thirteenth- and fourteenth centuries probably as a result of the Crusades when the very survival of Islam was threatened, just as the survival of ancient Israel *vis-à-vis* its enemies fostered its *covenantal* consciousness. As was the case with Zulaykha, *ṣūfīs* in particular, such as Ibn 'Arabī, have not seen Pharaoh as an unredeemable villain but as a repentant sinner who is not beyond the reach of God's all-embracing mercy. This thesis shows that Mūsā, like Yūsuf before him, serves as a prophet *to the Egyptians*, and is sent to Pharaoh not merely to secure the release of the *banī 'Isrā'īl* as in the biblical account, but to bring Pharaoh to faith in the one God. This is one clearest indications of the Qur'ān's missionary character. God's instructions to Mūsā to speak "gentle words" (*qawl layyin*) to Pharaoh (*Ṭā Hā* 20.44) stand in sharp contrast to the threatening words God commands Moses to say to Pharaoh in Ex. 4.23: "I have said to you, 'Let my son [Israel] go, that he may worship Me,' yet you refuse to let him go. Now I will slay your first-born son.'" No mere deliverer, Mūsā acts in the Qur' ān as a messenger *to Pharaoh*, to bring him and his people into the fold of those who serve the one God.

Compared to the wealth of references to Mūsā and the Egyptians in the second and third Meccan periods, there are very few in the Madīnan *sūras* as the emphasis shifts from Israel's Captivity in Egypt to the Covenant. It is suggested above that this reflects a change in the concerns of the *ummah* following the *hijra* when issues of communal identity and fidelity take precedence over fears of persecution.

Finally, this thesis examines the much-overlooked Islamic traditions regarding 'Īsā and the Egyptians.[789] The discussion first documents the story of the Holy Family's *Flight into Egypt* in Matthew's Gospel and the extensive extra-biblical material to aid in elucidating the Islamic texts. It analyzes the two brief passages in the Qur'ān that may refer to the 'Īsā's journey to Egypt, namely, *Sūrat Maryam* 19.22-26 and *al-Mu'minūn* 23.50. The thesis departs from the traditional interpretation of 19.22-26 as combining both the conception of 'Īsā and his subsequent birth, arguing instead that linguistically the entire passage should be understood as a description of the *post-partum events* that occurred en route to Egypt as described particularly in the apocryphal Christian texts, including the miracle of the palm. Several *mufassirūn* have, in fact, understood 23.50 also to refer to Maryam and 'Īsā's journey to Egypt. The two brief references in the Qur'ān are supplemented by traditions and *qiṣaṣ* which repeat some episodes also found in the Christian apocryphal accounts, especially 'Īsā's toppling of the idols, but also present original accounts of miraculous events associated with 'Īsā's presence. Whereas Matthew's pericope served Christological purposes, this thesis maintains that the Islamic community preserved and developed the basic story because it fits 'Īsā's prophetic role as a *muhājir* and opponent of idolatry. Although neither the Qur'ānic nor extra-Qur'ānic accounts of 'Īsā in Egypt provide much in terms of an overall assessment of the Egyptians, al-Ṭabarī

[789] See Chapter Six.

suggests that they did come to faith due to ‘Īsā’s presence among them. As in the accounts of Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf, and Mūsā, the very presence of ‘Īsā among the Egyptians imparts to them true faith. For the Qur’ān and Islamic tradition, the gathering of people of different nations in common worship of the one God, the God of Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf, Mūsā, ‘Īsā and Muhammad does not happen in some grand idealistic vision of the future such as Isaiah prophesied; rather, it happens gradually, individual by individual, in every age, and in *every* land and nation to whom a prophet has been sent.

Before concluding this study of the representation of Egyptians in the Qur’an, Islamic exegesis and tradition, we would be remiss if we did not make mention of the connections, however minimal, that one other prophet had with Egypt and the Egyptians, namely, the Prophet Muhammad himself. Egypt in Muhammad’s time was quite different than it had been in ‘Īsā’s day when Egypt was but a Roman province that had only recently been seized from the Ptolemies after the death of Cleopatra VII in 30 BCE. At that time, the Egyptians still worshipped a multitude of deities as they had for millennia while a large community of diaspora Jews in Alexandria and other Egyptian cities worshipped the God of Abraham. By the time Muhammad began receiving the revelations of the Qur’ān, Egypt had become a province within the *Christian* empire of Byzantium, although the last bastion of the ancient Egyptian religion, the Temple of Isis at Philae, had remained open until just twenty years before the Prophet’s birth. Although pagan temples continued to stand, many of them had been converted into churches, and the Patriarch of Alexandria served as shepherd of the faithful only at the discretion of the Byzantine emperor who ruled from Constantinople. Although Egypt had ceased to be an independent political power, it nevertheless retained its economic importance serving as a principal source of grain for the Byzantine Empire as it had for Rome before, and as a nexus for

international trade. Muhammad would have known seen the caravans from Yemen pass through the Hijāz en route to Egypt, and perhaps travelled into the Sinai himself for commercial or religious reasons.[790] He clearly knew that Egypt was a Christian land as evidence by his letter to *al-Muqawqis,* "the Ruler of Alexandria and Egypt," (perhaps the patriarch of Alexandria) exhorting him to embrace Islam and quoting *Sūrat Āl 'Imrān*:[791]

> 'O People of the Book! Come to common terms between us and you; that we worship none but God and do not associate anything with Him nor do we take for ourselves lords other than God.' So if they turn back, say: 'We testify that we are Muslims.'(3.64)

Although *al-Muqawqis* did not accept the invitation, he did send Muhammad two women from noble Coptic families as well as other gifts, as a diplomatic gesture. One of the women, Māriya, became part of Muhammad's household as a concubine, perhaps to consciously imitate Ibrāhīm's reception of Hājar from the king of Egypt. Muhammad's love for Māriya incurred considerable jealously among his wives, especially after she gave birth to the Prophet's son Ibrāhīm, who died however in infancy.[792] Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam recounts a tradition that survives in several versions and transmitted by numerous authorities (including al-Ṭabarī[793]) in which Muhammad said to his followers: "God will open Egypt to you after me, so take good care of its Copts [i.e. the Egyptians] for they are your kinsmen and responsibility..."[794] Some of the traditions continue: "for Hājar the mother of Ismāʿīl was one of them."[795] 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ repeated the Prophet's words to two Coptic prelates when he entered Egypt as commander of a

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[790] John Andrew Morrow, *The Covenants of the Prophet Muhammad with the Christians of the World* ([Lexington, KY:] Angelico Press / Sophia Perennis, 2013), 15 ff.
[791] Morrow 48.
[792] Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 1686, 2461-2463; Muhammad Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr: fī al-nisā'* (al-Qāhirah: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 2001), v. 10, 201-205.
[793] See above Chapter 1.
[794] Ibn 'Abd al- Ḥakam *Kitāb futūḥ miṣr* 2-3.
[795] Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam 2-3. Some commentators held that the reference to "kinsmen" indicated Māriyah. See: Gautier H.A. Juynboll's note in: *The History of al-Ṭabarī, Volume XIII: the Conquest of Iraq, Southwestern Persia, and Egypt* (Albany: SUNY, 1989) n. 569.

Muslim army in 641 CE, encouraging them to embrace Islam.[796] This tradition of the Prophet and its subsequent use by Ibn al-'Āṣ exemplify well Islam's *missionary* orientation which, as demonstrated in this study, is reflected in the way the Qur'ān, *tafāsīr*, and *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* portray the Egyptians in their interactions with the prophets Ibrāhīm, Yūsuf, Mūsā, and 'Īsā. In contrast with the Hebrew Scriptures, the Egyptians were not generally demonized in spite of the nefarious acts of *some* individuals, for several noteworthy believers – those who submitted to the one God and heeded His prophets – were found among them just as they were to be found among the Quraysh and others who had initially opposed the Prophet Muhammad.

Ironically, it is 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ, the Muslim conqueror of Egypt, who presents a celebrated case of an avowed Qurayshī enemy of the Prophet who ultimately submitted to God, not unlike Pharaoh, his magicians, and other Egyptians mentioned in the Qur'ān. 'Amr himself tells us that he was strongly hostile to Islam, fighting against the Muslims in the battles of Badr, Uḥud and the Trench alongside idolaters. He had even divorced his wife when she had embraced Islam. When Ja'far ibn Abī Ṭalib had led a group of Muslims to safety in Abyssinia, it was 'Amr who pursued them and accused them before the Negus. Realizing it was only a matter of time before Muhammad would enter Mecca in triumph, 'Amr himself later fled to the court of the Negus in Abyssinia. When the Negus expressed his belief in Muhammad's prophetic mission, 'Amr finally saw the error of his own ways. With an explicit reference to Mūsā and the Egyptians, the Negus counseled him: "'Amr, do as I say and follow him, for his cause is that of the truth, and he will win over all those who oppose him, in the same way as Mūsā won against Pharaoh and his soldiers."[797] Pledging to become a *Muslim,* 'Amr travelled to Medina where he

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[796] Al- Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīkh* 2585.

[797] Ibn Hishām, *Al-Sīrah al-nabawīyah,* v. 4, 222; Adil Salahi, *Muhammad: Man and Prophet,* rev. ed. (Markfield: Islamic Foundation, 2002) 587. For lengthier studies of his life, see: Munīr Muḥammad al-Ghaḍbān, *'Amr ibn al-*

found the Prophet and pledged his loyalty to him (629/30 CE). In a decade, he was leading a Muslim army towards Egypt, having already distinguished himself in the conquests of Syria and Palestine.

‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ was of course just one of many unbelieving opponents of Muhammad, both male and female, who came to embrace Islam. Many like him rose to prominence in the community of believers after their submission. A faith community that seeks to call people to faith cannot completely or perpetually demonize the other, or else there is little incentive for repentance and conversion. As this study of the Egyptians in the Qur’ān and Islamic tradition has demonstrated, people of faith, whether nascent or mature, as well as those lacking in faith, are to be found in every community and nation. This perspective underlies the teaching of the Qur’ān and the prophets of which it speaks, and accounts for the nuanced way the Qur’ān and subsequent Islamic texts have portrayed the Egyptians. A careful analysis of these texts and traditions such as provided by this study has illuminated the Qur’ānic and Islamic traditions which encourage toleration for “unbelievers” who might in time come to belief through the movement of God’s grace and mercy, through encouragement and exhortation rather than coercion. Perhaps more accurately, it might remind us that the current global and confessional dichotomies in which people are identified as believers or unbelievers, righteous or unrighteous, the God-fearing or God-forsaken, saved or damned, must never be regarded as fixed and unchangeable, and are distinctions best left to God, *al-Ghafūr al-Raḥīm*, “the Oft-Forgiving and Most Merciful.”

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*‘Āṣ: al-Amīr al-Mujāhid* (Makka: Markaz Buḥūth al-Dirāsāt al-Islāmiyah, 2000); ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Majīd ‘Alī, *‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ: al-Qā’id wa al-Siyāsī* (‘Ammān: Dār Zahrān, 1998); and Ḥasan Ibrāhīm Ḥasan, *Ta’rīkh ‘Amr ibn al-‘Āṣ* (al-Qāhriah: Madbūlī, 1996).

**Appendix I: Sūrat Yūsuf (12.21-57)**

21. And the one from Egypt who bought him said to his wife: "Make his dwelling (with us) honorable/generous. Perhaps he will be of use to us, or we will adopt him as a son." And so We established Yusuf in the land so that We might teach him the interpretation of stories/events. And God is the Master of His decrees, but most people do not know (it).

22. And when he (Yusuf) attained his age of maturity, We gave to him wisdom and knowledge, and thus We reward those who do what is right. 23. And she in whose house he was desired (to seduce) him from himself; and she bolted the doors, and said: "Now, come." And he said: "(I seek) God's refuge; truly He is my Lord. He made good my dwelling place; truly the wrongdoers do not succeed." 24. And indeed she desired him, and he would have desired her had he not seen the pledge of his Lord. And thus We turned him away from evildoing and indecency for surely he was one of Our pure/righteous servants. 25. And the two of them raced to the door, and she tore his tunic from the back; and they found her husband at the door. She said: "What is the punishment for the one who wanted to do evil to your wife, but prison or painful punishment?"

26. He said: It was she who wanted to seduce me – from my own self." A witness (m.) from her household testified: "If his tunic was torn from the front, then she spoke the truth, and he is a liar." 27. "And if his tunic was torn from behind, then she lied and he is telling the truth."

28. So when he saw that his tunic was torn from behind, he said: "Surely it is a deception of yours (f.pl). Truly your (f.pl.) deception is great!" 29. "O Joseph, turn away from this, and, (you, woman), ask forgiveness for your offense for you have been a sinner."

30. And the ladies in the city said: "The wife of al-'Azīz wants to seduce her young servant from his own self. Surely, he has struck her deeply with love for we see her in clear error." 31. So when she heard of their mischief, she sent for them, prepared for them a repast, and gave each one a knife. And she said (to Joseph): "Come out before them." When they saw him, they extolled him, cut their hands, and said: "God preserve us! This is no mortal but a noble angel!" 32. She said: "There before you is the one about whom you blamed me. Truly, I wanted to seduce him from his own self, but he held fast, and now if he does not do what I commanded him to, he will be imprisoned and among the lowest."

33. He said: "O Lord, I prefer the prison to that to which they (f.pl.) summon me. And unless you turn their (f.pl.) plot away from me, I may give in to them (f.pl.) and become one of the ignorant. 34. So his Lord hearkened to him and turned him from their (f.pl.) plot, for surely He is the All-Hearing and All-Knowing. 35. Then it became clear to them (m.pl.) after they had seen the signs to imprison him for the time being.

36. And two young men entered the prison with him. One of them said: "I saw myself [in a dream] pressing wine." And the other said: "I saw myself carrying bread on my head, and birds were eating of it." "Tell us its meaning for we see that you are one of those who do good." 37.

He said: “No food that is provided to you will come to you until I have told you its meaning [and] before these things happen to you which my Lord has taught me. Surely I have rejected the faith of a people who do not believe in God, and are disbelievers in the Hereafter. 38. And I follow the faith of my fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was not for us to associate with God anything. Such is from God’s grace upon us and upon the people; but most people do not give thanks. 39. O my friends of the prison, is a variety of lords better, or God, the One and Supreme? 40. You worship nothing but names that you have named – you and your fathers. God has not sent down authority for them. There is no authority but God’s. He commanded you to worship none but Him. This is the true faith, but most people do not know. 41. O my friends of the prison, as for one of you, he will serve his lord wine. And as for the other, he will be crucified and the birds will eat of his head. The matter about which you enquired is decided.” 42. And he said to the one of the two whom he thought was to be saved: “Remember me to your lord.” But Satan made him forget to remember him to his lord, so he (Joseph) remained in prison for some years.

43. And the king (of Egypt) said: “I see seven fat cows whom seven lean ones eat, and seven green ears of corn, and (seven) others withered. O ministers, explain to me my visions if you can interpret visions.” 44. They said: “This is a confusion of dreams, and we do not know how to interpret dreams.” 45. And the man, the one who had been saved of the two, remembered after some time, said: “I will tell its interpretation. So give me leave.” 46. “O Joseph, O man of truth, explain to us the seven fat cows (that are) eaten by seven lean ones, and the seven green ears of corn, and the withered other ones, so that I might return to the people that they might know.” 47. He said: “You shall sow seven years diligently, and what you reap leave in the ear except for a little which you shall eat.” 48. “Then after that will come seven hard (years) that will consume what you have prepared for them beforehand, except for the little you kept aside.” 49. “Then after that will come a year when the people will be helped (with rain), and in which they will press (grapes).

50. And the king said: “Bring him (Yūsuf) to me.” But when the messenger came to him, (Yūsuf) said: “Return to your lord and ask him: ‘What is the state of the women who cut their hands? For my Lord is aware of their plot.’” 51. He (the King) said (to the women): “What happened when you attempted to seduce Yūsuf away from his own self?” They said: “God preserve us! We do not know anything evil about him.” The wife of al-‘Aziz said: “Now the truth has come to light. I was the one who wanted to seduce Yūsuf from his own self; and he is truly one of the truthful ones. 52. This (I say) that he may know that I have not betrayed him in his absence, for God does not guide the scheme of the perfidious. 53. And I do not absolve myself for the soul is prone to evil unless my Lord shows mercy. Surely my Lord is Oft-Forgiving and Most-Merciful.”

54. And the King said: “Bring him to me for I want him for myself.” And when he had spoken to him (Yūsuf), he said: “Today, in our presence, you are established and secure.” 55. And he (Yūsuf) said: “Set me over the store houses of the land for I will be an effective administrator.”

56. And so We established Joseph in the land, to settle there as he willed. We bestow our mercy on whomever We will and We do not neglect to reward those who do good. 57. And the reward of the Hereafter is better for those who believe and have been conscious (of God).

## Appendix II

**References in the Qur'an to the Pharaoh of the Exodus, his Ministers, and his People:**

- *Al-Baqarah* 2.49-50 (2 '*ayāt*)
- *Āl 'Imrān* 3.11 (1)
- *Al-A'rāf* 7.103-141 (39)
- *Al-Anfāl* 8.52-54 (3)
- *Yūnus* 10.75-92 (18)
- *Hūd* 11.96-99 (4)
- *Ibrāhīm* 14.6 (1)
- *Al-Isrā* 17.101-103 (3)
- *Ṭā Hā* 20.24; 38-79 (43)
- *Al-Mu'minūn* 23.45-49 (5)
- *Al-Shu'arā* 26.10-68 (59)
- *Al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.1-21; 25; 32-42 (34)
- *Al-'Ankabūt* 29.39-40 (2)
- *Ṣād* 38.12 (1)
- *Ghāfir* 40.23-50 (28)
- *Zukhruf* 43.46-56 (11)
- *Al-Dukhān* 44.17-31 (15)
- *Qāf* 50.12-14 (3)
- *Al-Dhārīyāt* 51.38-40 (3)
- *Al-Qamar* 54.41-42 (2)
- *Al-Taḥrīm* 66.11 (1)
- *Al-Ḥāqqah* 69.9-10 (2)
- *Al-Muzzammil* 73.15-16 (2)
- *Al-Nāzi'āt* 79.15-26 (12)
- *Al-Burūj* 85.17-20 (4)
- *Al-Fajr* 89.10-14 (5)

## Appendix III

### *Āyāt* referring to Pharaoh, his ministers, his people, etc.

The order of the *āyāt* below is as they occur in the Qur'ān. The number in parenthesis with hashtag indicates the possible order in terms of revelation according to the Nöldeke-Schwally chronology (see Appendix IV).

***al-Baqarah* 2.49-50 (#23)**

49. And (remember) when We delivered you (Children of Israel) from the people of Pharaoh who imposed on you the pain of suffering, and who slaughtered your sons and let your females live, and in this there was for you a great trial from your Lord.

50. And (remember) when We divided the Sea for you and delivered you, and drowned the people of Pharaoh as you looked on.

***Āl 'Imrān* 3.11 (#25)**

[Those who disbelieve will be] like the case of the people of Pharaoh and those before them who denied Our signs. And God punished them for their sins and God is severe in punishment.

***al-A'rāf* 7.103-141 (#7)**

103. Then We sent after them [previous prophets] Moses with our signs to Pharaoh and his ministers, but they scorned them. And see what the end was for the depraved!

104. And Moses said: "O Pharaoh! I am a messenger from the Lord of the Worlds.

105. It is right that I say nothing about God other than the truth. For I have come to you (pl.) with clear evidence from your (pl.) Lord, so send out with me the Children of Israel."

106. (Pharaoh) said: "If you have come with a sign, then show by it that you are one of the truthful ones."

107. Then he (Moses) cast down his staff and lo! It was a clearly a snake.

108. And he drew out his hand and lo! It was white to those who saw.

109. The ministers of the people of Pharaoh said: “This is indeed a learned magician.

110. (Pharaoh said?) He wants to remove you (pl.- people of Pharaoh) from your (pl.) land. What do you (pl.) advise?”

111. They (the minister?) said: “Make him and his brother wait, and send to the cities heralds,

112. to bring to you (ms.) all the learned magicians.”

113. And the magicians of Pharaoh came and said: “Shall we have a reward if we are victorious?”

114. And he (Pharaoh) said: “Yes for you will be among those closest (to me).”

115. And the said: “O Moses! Will you cast down (your staff) or shall we be the ones to cast (first)?”

116. And he (Moses) said: “You cast down (first).” And when they cast down (their staffs), they cast a spell over the eyes of the people, and frightened them, and produced a great feat of magic.

117. And We revealed to Moses: “Cast down your staff.” And lo! It swallowed up what they had faked.

118. So truth prevailed and what they had done was to no avail.

119. So they were defeated in that place and were rendered weak.

120. And the magicians fell down in prostration,

121. And said: “We believe in the Lord of the Worlds.

122. The Lord of Moses and Aaron.”

123. And Pharaoh said: “You (pl) believed in him before I granted you (pl) permission? Surely this is a plot which you (pl) planned in the city to drive out its people, but you will learn.

124. For I will cut off your (pl) hands and feet from opposite (sides), and then I will impale you (pl) all together."

125. They said: "But as for us, to our Lord will we return.

126. You exact punishment upon us (for no reason) other than we believed in the signs of our Lord when they came to us. Our Lord, pour out perseverance on us and let us die as those who submit.

127. The ministers of the people of Pharaoh said: "Will you leave Moses and his people to create havoc in the land, to abandon you and your gods?" He said: "We will kill their sons and we will allow the females to live. And we will be masters over them."

128. Moses said to his people: "Beseech God and persevere, for the land belongs to God which he bequeaths as he wills to his servants and the reward is for the righteous."

129. They (the people) said: "We have been persecuted before you came to us and after you came to us." He said: "It may well be that your (pl) Lord will destroy your (pl) enemies and make you (their) successors in the land so that He may see how you act."

130. And We punished the people of Pharaoh with years (of drought) and shortage of fruits that they might take heed.

131. But when good fortune came to them, they said: "This is due to us." And when hardship befell them, they attributed it to Moses and those with him. Truly, their misfortune was due to God, but most people do not know (it).

132. They said: "Whatever sign you bring us to work magic on us, we will not believe in you."

133. So We sent upon them plague, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood – clear signs, but they were arrogant and a sinful people.

134. And when the punishment befell them, they said: "O Moses! Call upon your Lord for us since He has made a covenant with you. If you remove from us the punishment we will believe in you, and we will send out the children of Israel with you."

135. But whenever We removed from them the punishment for a time which they were to complete, behold! They broke their word.

136. So We took revenge on them: We drowned them in the sea because they rejected Our signs and were heedless of them.

137. And We made the people who were weak to become inheritors of the lands of the East and the West which We blessed. And the good word of your Lord was fulfilled for the children of Israel because they persevered, and We destroyed what Pharaoh and his people had made and what they had built.

138. And We permitted the children of Israel to pass through the sea. Then they came upon a people who clung to idols. They said: "O Moses! Make for us a god like the gods they have." He said: "Indeed you are an ignorant people.

139. As for these people, they are in the midst of destruction and what they do is worthless."

140. He said: "Apart from God, shall I seek for you (another) god as He has preferred you above the nations?"

141. For We delivered you from the people of Pharaoh who afflicted you with the pain of suffering and killed your sons and let your females live. In that was a great trial from your Lord.

***al-Anfāl* 8.52-54 (#24)**

52. like the case of the people of Pharaoh and those before them who disbelieved the signs of God. And God punished them for their sins and God is Strong and severe in punishment. [cf 3.11]

53. For God does not change the blessings He has bestowed on a people unless they change their very selves, for God is All-Hearing and all-Knowing.

54. like the case of the people of Pharaoh and those before them who denied the signs of their Lord so We destroyed them for their sins, and We drowned the people of Pharaoh and all were evildoers.

***Yūnus* 10.75-92 (#12)**

75. Then We sent after them [previous prophets] Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and his ministers with Our signs; but they were arrogant and a sinful people.

76. When the truth came to them from Us, they said: "This is clearly magic."

77. Moses said: "You speak of the truth when it has (already) come to you? Is magic like this? Magicians will not prosper."

78. They said: "Have you come to turn us away from that (path) upon which we found our fathers so that you two could be great in the land, but we do not believe in you!"

79. And Pharaoh said: "Bring me every learned magician."

80. And when the magicians came, Moses said to them: "Cast down what you (wish) to cast down."

81. And when they had cast down, Moses said: "What you have brought is magic which God will render worthless for God does not prosper the deeds of the depraved.

82. And God establishes truth by His words even though the sinners despise it."

83. But none believed in Moses except for the offspring of his (Pharaoh's) people on account of (their) fear of Pharaoh and their ministers lest he (Pharaoh) persecute them for indeed Pharaoh was a tyrant in the land and he was one of the transgressors.

84. And Moses said: "O my people! If you believe in God, then trust in Him, if you are those who submit."

85. They said: "In God do we trust. Our Lord! Do not make us a target for the evildoers.

86. And save us in your mercy from the unbelievers."

87. And we revealed to Moses and his brother: "Provide homes for your (dual) people in Egypt, make your homes into places of worship, and attend to prayer and announce good news to the believers."

88. Moses said: “Our Lord! You gave Pharaoh and his ministers riches and wealth in this worldly life, our Lord, such that that they strayed from Your path. Our Lord, wipe out their wealth and harden their hearts for they will not believe until they see the painful punishment.”

89. He (God) said: “Your (dual) petition is accepted, so follow the straight (path) and do not follow the path of the ignorant.”

90. We permitted the children of Israel to pass through the sea, and Pharaoh and his forces followed them aggressively and hostilely until he started to drown. He said: “I believe that there is no god except the One in whom the children of Israel believe, and I am one of those who submit.”

91. “Now? But you rebelled before and you were one of the depraved.
92. Today We shall save you in your body so that you will be a sign for those who come after you. But surely many people are heedless of Our signs.”

***Hūd* 11.96-99 (#13)**

96. And We sent Moses with Our signs and clear authority

97. to Pharaoh and his ministers, but they followed the command of Pharaoh and the command of Pharaoh was not true.

98. He will go before his people on the Day of Resurrection and lead them into the fire. Wretched is the place to which they are led.

99. And they are followed in this (life) by a curse and on the Day of Resurrection. Wretched is the gift that shall be given.

***Ibrāhīm* 14.6 (#18)**

6. Moses said to his people: “Remember the blessing of God upon you when he saved you from the people of Pharaoh who imposed on you the pain of suffering, and who slaughtered your sons and let your females live, and in this there was for you a great trial from your Lord. (cf. 2.49)

***al-Isrā'* 17.101-103 (#11)**

101. And We gave Moses nine clear signs. Ask the children of Israel. When he (Moses) came to them (who?), Pharaoh said to him: "I think that you, O Moses, are bewitched!"

102. (Moses) said: "You know that these things have been revealed by none other than the Lord of Heaven and Earth as evidence. And I think you, O Pharaoh, that you are doomed!"

103. So he (Pharaoh) wanted to wipe them from the land, but We drowned him and all who were with him.

***Tā Hā* 20.24; 39-79 (#8)**

24. (God said to Moses:) "Go to Pharaoh for he has transgressed."

38. We revealed to your mother what was revealed:

39. "Cast him into the chest, and then cast it into the sea. The sea will cast him on the shore, and he will be taken by an enemy of Mine and an enemy of him. But I have cast upon you My love that you might be reared under My eye."

40. Your sister went and said: "Shall I lead you (pl) to someone who can nurse him?" And We returned you to your mother that her eye might be dried and she would not grieve. And when you killed a man, We saved you from grief, and We subjected you to various trials. You stayed for some years with the people of Midian, and then you came (back) as commanded, O Moses!

41. "And I formed you for Myself.

42. Go! You and your brother with My signs, and do not neglect to remember Me.

43. Go to Pharaoh for he has transgressed.

44. But speak to him with gentle words so that he might take heed and be fearful.

45. They (Moses and Aaaron) said: "Our Lord! We are afraid that he will transgress against us."

46. He said: “Do not be afraid for I am with you (dual). I hear and see (everything).

47. So go to him and say: “We are messengers of your Lord. Send out with us the children of Israel and do not afflict them. Indeed, we have come to you with a sign from your Lord, and peace be upon the one who follows the right way.

48. It has been revealed to us that punishment comes to those who disbelieve and turn away.”

49. He (Pharaoh) said: “So who is your (dual) Lord, O Moses?”

50. He (Moses) said: “Our Lord is the One who gave everything its form and guidance.”

51. He (Pharaoh) said: “So what then is the state of previous generations?”

52. He (Moses) said: “The knowledge of that is with my Lord in a book. My Lord does not err nor does He forget;

53. He who made for the earth a bed for you (pl), and cleared paths for you in it, and sent down water from the sky.” We brought forth by means of it a diversity of plants.

54. So eat (pl) and pasture your cattle, for truly in this are signs for those with understanding.

55. From it (the earth) We created you and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you forth once again.

56. And We showed him (Pharaoh) our signs – all of them – but he rejected and refused (them).

57. He said: “Have you come to drive us from our land with your magic, O Moses?

58. We will certainly show you magic like it! So set a time for us and you that neither nor you shall fail to keep; a place that is fair (for us both).

59. He (Moses) said: “Your time shall be ‘the day of adornment,’ and let the people be assembled in the morning.”

60. So Pharaoh withdrew, hatched his plot and came back.

61. Moses said to them: “Woe to you (pl)! Do not fabricate lies about God lest He utterly destroys you with punishment, and the one who fabricates (lies) will fail.”

62. They disputed the case among themselves and kept it secret.

63. They said: “Surely these two are magicians who want to drive you (pl) out from your land by their magic and do away with your (pl) customary ways.

64. So hatch your (pl) plot and then come in an ordered fashion. The one who succeeds today will prevail.”

65. They said: “O Moses! Will you cast down (your staff) or shall we be the first to cast (ours)?”

66. He said: “You cast.” Due to their magic it seemed to him that their ropes and their staffs were moving.

67. So Moses was himself afraid.

68. We said: “Do not be afraid for you shall prevail.

69. Cast down what is in your right hand. It will quickly seize what they have produced. What they have produced is a magic trick and the magician does not succeed wherever he goes.”

70. So the magicians threw (themselves) down prostrate and said: “We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses.”

71. He (Pharaoh) said: “You believed in Him before I give you permission? Surely he (Moses) is your master who taught you magic! I will cut off your hands and feet from opposite sides, and have you impaled on palm trunks and you will know which of us (can give) the most severe and lasting punishment!

72. They said: “We will not prefer you to the clear signs that came to us and He who created us. So pronounce whatever judgment you wish for you can only pronounce judgment in this worldly life.

73. For we have come to believe in our Lord that He may forgive us our sins and the magic which you compelled us to do, and God is the
the Best and the Everlasting."

74. Truly the one who comes to his Lord [after death] as a sinner, for him is Hell (where) he neither dies nor lives.

75. And for the one who comes to Him as a believer who has done righteous deeds, for them are exalted states:

76. The Gardens of Eden below which rivers flow, abiding there forever; this is the reward of those who are pure.

77. And We revealed to Moses: "Travel by night with My servants, and forge a dry path for them through the sea. Do not fear being overtaken (by Pharaoh), and do not be fearful (of the sea)."

78. Then Pharaoh pursued them with his forces, but the waters of the sea covered them.

79. Pharaoh led his people astray, and did not lead them rightly.

***al-Mu'minūn* 23.45-49 (#19)**

45. Then We sent Moses and his brother Aaron with Our signs and clear authority

46. to Pharaoh and his ministers but they were arrogant and a haughty people.

47. They said: "Shall we believe in men like ourselves? Their people are servants to us!

48. So they rejected them (two) and were doomed to perdition.

49. And We gave Moses the Book that they might be (rightly) guided.

***al-Shu'arā'* 26.10-68 (#9)**

10. Behold, your Lord called Moses: "Go to the evil people

11. the people of Pharaoh. Will they not fear (*yattaqūn*) (God)?"

12. He (Moses) said: "O my Lord! I am afraid they will accuse me of lying.

13. My heart will fail and my tongue will be twisted, so send for Aaron.

14. And they are holding a crime against me, and I am afraid that they will kill me."

15. He (God) said: "Not so! Go with Our Signs. We are with you (pl), listening.

16. So go (you two) to Pharaoh and say: "We are messengers of the Lord of the Worlds.

17. Send out with us the children of Israel."

18. He (Pharaoh) said: "Did we not raise you (*nurabbika*) as a child among us? And did you not spend years of your life with us?

19. And you did your deed which you (know you) did, so you are one of the unbelievers (i.e. ungrateful)!"

20. He (Moses) said: "I did it when I was one of the sinners."

21. So I fled from you (pl) when I feared you, but my Lord has granted me authority and made me one of the messengers.

22. And this is the favor that you bestow on me, that you enslaved the children of Israel?"

23. And Pharaoh said: "And what is the 'Lord of the Worlds?'"

24. He (Moses) said: "The Lord of the Heavens and the Earth, and what is between them, if (only) you were one of the faithful."

25. He (Pharaoh) said to those present: "Did you not hear?"

26. He (Moses) said: "Your (pl) Lord and the Lord of your forefathers."

27. He (Pharaoh) said: "Surely your (pl) messenger who was sent to you is possessed!"

28. He (Moses) said: “Lord of the East and the West, and of what is between them, if (only) you understood!”

29. He (Pharaoh) said: “If you take a god besides me, I will surely make you a prisoner!”

30. He (Moses) said: “And if I showed you something clear(ly true)?”

[cf. 7:106 ff)

31. He (Pharaoh said): “Show it if you are one of the truthful!”

32. So he (Moses) cast down his staff, and lo! It was clearly a snake!

33. And he drew out his hand and lo! It was white to those who saw.

34. He (Pharaoh) said to his ministers present: “This is indeed a learned magician.

35. He wants to remove you (pl) from your (pl.) land with his magic. What do you (pl.) advise?”

36. They (the ministers) said: “Make him and his brother wait, and send to the cities heralds,

37. to bring to you (ms.) all the learned magicians.”

38. So the magicians were gathered at the appointed time and day,

39. And the people were told: “Are you all assembled

40. So that we might follow the magicians if they are victorious?”

41. So when the magicians came, they said to Pharaoh: “Shall we have a reward if we are victorious?”

42. And he (Pharaoh) said: “Yes for you will be among those closest (to me).”

43. And Moses said to them: “Cast down what you will!”

44. So they cast down their ropes and staffs, and said: “By the power of Pharaoh, it is we who shall be victorious!”

45. And Moses cast down his staff, and lo! It swallows up what they fake.

46. And the magicians fell down in prostration,

47. And said: “We believe in the Lord of the Worlds,

48. the Lord of Moses and Aaron.”

49. And Pharaoh said: “You (pl) believed in him before I granted you (pl) permission? Surely he is your master who taught you magic, but you will know! **For** I will cut off your (pl) hands and feet from opposite (sides), and then I will impale you (pl) all together.”

50. They said: “No injury will come to us; to our Lord will we return.

51. We (only) desire that our Lord will forgive us our sins as we are the foremost of the believers.”

52. And We revealed to Moses: “Travel by night with my servants for surely you will be pursued.”

53. Then Pharaoh sent heralds into the cities

54. (saying): “These (i.e. the Israelites) are a small group,

55. and they have enraged us,

56. And we are all on guard,.”

57. So We drove them out from gardens, springs,

58. treasures, and lavish abodes;

59. And thus We bequeathed them to the children of Israel.

60. And they (the Egyptians) pursued them at sunrise.

61. And when the two groups saw (each other), the companions of Moses said: "Surely we will be overtaken."

62. He (Moses) said: "Not at all, for my Lord is with me (and) He will guide me."

63. Then We revealed to Moses: "Strike the sea with your staff." So it split and each part was like an immense towering mountain.

64. And We made the others (i.e. the Egyptians) approach there.

65. And we delivered Moses and all those who were with him.

66. Then We drowned the others.

67. Surely in this is a sign, but most of them are not believers.

68. And surely your Lord, He is Mighty and Merciful.

***al-Qaṣaṣ* 28.1-21; 25; 32-42 (#10)**

1. Ṭā sīn mīm
2. These are the verses of the Clear Book.
3. We recite to you from the story of Moses and Pharaoh in truth for a people who believe.
4. Truly Pharaoh exalted (himself) in the land and divided its people, debasing a portion of them; He slaughtered their sons and let the females live for he was one of the corrupt.
5. And We wanted to show kindness to those who were debased in the land, and make them masters and make them inheritors.
6. And establish them in the land, and show Pharaoh, Hāmān, and their forces among them what they were wary of.
7. And We revealed to the mother of Moses: "Nurse him, but when you fear for him, cast him into the sea and do not fear nor grieve for We will restore him to you and will make him one of the messengers.
8. The people of Pharaoh took him though he became to them an enemy and affliction. For Pharaoh and Hāmān and their forces were sinners.
9. And the wife of Pharaoh said: "(He is) a joy to the eye for me and you! Do not (pl) kill him. Perhaps he will be of use to us, or we will adopt him as a son." [cf. 12.21]. And they (pl – not dual) did not realize (what was to come).

10. And the heart of the mother of Moses became void and she was about to reveal him (i.e. that he was alive) unless We had strengthened her heart so that she would be one of the believers.
11. And she said to his sister: "Follow him." So she watched him from a distance, and they did not realize (it).
12. And We forbade him to suckle until she [his sister] said: "Shall I show you (pl) the people of a house who can feed him for you and treat him well?"
13. And We restored him to his mother so that her eye might be soothed and not grieve, and to know that the promise of God is true, but most people do not know.
14. And when he attained his age of maturity was established, We gave to him wisdom and knowledge, and thus We reward those who do what is right [cf 12.22].
15. And he entered the city at a time unnoticed by its people, and found there two men fighting, one of them from his own group, and one from his enemies. And the oe form his own group asked him for help against the one from his enemies, and Moses struck him, and finished him off. He said: "This is a work of Satan for he is an enemy, clearly a deceiver."
16. He said: "O Lord! I have wronged my own self. Forgive me!" And He forgave him for He is the Oft-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.
17. He said: "O Lord! Because you have blessed me, never will I be a helper to sinners."
18. But he became fearful in the city looking about when the one he had helped the day before called out to him for help, and Moses said to him: "You are clearly an instigator!"
19. When he was about to thrash the one who was an enemy to the two of them, he said: "O Moses, are you going to kill me like you killed someone yesterday? You only want to become powerful in the land, and not one of the righteous."
20. A man came running from the farthest (part) of the city. He said: "O Moses! The ministers are planning to kill you, so flee, for I one of those who wish you well!"
21. And he fled in fear, looking about, and said: "O Lord, save me from the sinful people!"

22. – 35. Moses in Midian.

> 25. (b) So when he (Moses) came to him (Jethro) and told him the story, he (Jethro) said: "Fear not; you have been saved from a sinful people."

32. (God said:) "Put your hand into your bosom; it will come out white without blemish. Hold your arm close to you, without fear. These are two signs from your Lord to Pharaoh and his ministers, for truly they are a depraved people."

33. He (Moses) said: " O Lord! I have killed one of them, and I fear that they will kill (me).

34. And my brother Aaron is more eloquent in speech than I, so send him with me as a support to testify to me, for I am afraid that they will not believe me."

35. He (God) said: "We will strengthen your arm with your brother and give you authority so they will not touch you. With Our signs the two of you and those who follow you will triumph."

36. When Moses came to them with Our clear signs, they said: "This is nothing but faked magic and we have not heard of this among our forefathers.
37. And Moses said: "My Lord knows who comes with guidance from Him and for whom there will be an eternal home, for surely the depraved will not succeed.
38. And Pharaoh said: "O you minsters! I know of no god for you except myself. So, Hāmān, light for me (a kiln to make bricks) of clay, and make for me a tall building that I may ascend to the god of Moses; but as for me, I think he is a liar.
39. And he was arrogant, he and his forces in the land devoid of truth and thought that they would return to Us (after death).
40. So We seized him and his forces and hurled them into the sea. See what the end was for the depraved!
41. And We made them as those who lead (the way) into the fire, and on the Day of Resurrection, they shall not be helped.
42. And We have made a curse to follow them in this world, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be among the loathed.

***al-'Ankabūt* 29.39-40 (#22)**

39. (Remember) Qārūn, Pharaoh and Hāmān. Moses came to them with clear signs, and they were arrogant in the land, but they did not outstrip us.

40. Each one we seized for his sin. Among them were those upon whom We sent a storm; among them were those whom a blast took; among them were those whom We caused to the earth to swallow; and among them were those whom We drowned. It was not God who did them harm, but they harmed themselves.

***Ṣād* 38.12 (#6)**

12. Before them (the current unbelievers) the people of Noah rejected (the Message), and 'Ād, and Pharaoh, the Lord of Stakes.

***Ghāfir (*or: *al-Mu'min)* 40.23-50 (#14)**

23. We sent Moses with Our signs and clear authority,
24. to Pharaoh, Hāmān and Qarūn but they said: "(He is) a magician and liar!"
25. And when he came to them with truth from Us, they said: "Kill the sons of those who believe in him, and let their females live, but the plot of the unbelievers (end in) nothing but error.
26. Pharaoh said: "Leave me kill Moses and let him call on his Lord for I am afraid that he will change your religion or that he will cause depravity to spread in the land.
27. And Moses said: "I have indeed taken refuge in my Lord and your Lord from every arrogant one who does not believe in the Day of Reckoning.
28. And a man, a believer from the people of Pharaoh who concealed his faith said: "Will you (pl) kill a man because he says, 'My Lord is God'? – even though he has brought you (pl) clear signs from your Lord, and if he is a liar, then the lie is on him; but if he is trustworthy, then that of which he warned you will fall upon you, for God will not guide anyone who is a lying transgressor.
29. O my people! Yours is the kingdom this day. You prevail in the land; but who will aid us against the power of God if it comes upon us?" Pharaoh said: "I do not show you (anything) but what I see, nor do I lead you except (in) the way of integrity."
30. And the man who believed said: "O my people! I fear for you as on the Day of the Confederates,
31. Such was the habit of the people of Nūḥ the 'Ād, the Thamūd and those who came after them, but God does not want injustice for His servants.
32. O my People! I fear for you the Day of Summoning,
33. a day (when) you will turn, retreating without any defender for you from God. And anyone whom God lets stray, for him is no guide.
34. And Yūsuf came to you before (this) with clear signs, but you did not cease to doubt what he brought you until he died (when) you said: 'God will not send after him a(nother) Messenger.' Thus, God lets stray anyone who transgresses and doubts.
35. Those who quarrel about the signs of God without having any authority, grievous and repugnant (is this) with God and those who believe. And so God closes the heart of the arrogant transgressor.
36. [cf. 28.28] And Pharaoh said: "O Hāmān! Build for me a tall building that I may attain the means,
37. the means (to reach) the heavens, so that I may ascend to the God of Moses; but as for me, I think he is a liar." And so, pleasing to Pharaoh was the evil of his actions, and he was turned away from the path, and the plot [note significance of this word as in Surat Yusuf] of Pharaoh came to nothing but ruin.

38. And the one who believed said: “O my people! Follow me! I will guide you on the right path.
39. O my People! This worldly life is a (passing) pleasure. It is the Hereafter that is the lasting abode.
40. The one who does evil will not be repaid except with the like. And the one who does righteous deeds – whether man or woman – and is a believer, they will enter Paradise and will be provided for without measure.
41. O my people! How is it I summon you to salvation but you summon me to the Fire!
42. You summon me to disbelieve in God and to associate with Him what I have no knowledge of, and I summon you to the Powerful One, the Oft-Forgiving!
43. Surely, you summon me to that which cannot be called upon in this world or the next; and our place of return will to God, and the transgressors will be the companions of the Fire.
44. You will remember what I say to you; and I submit my case to God for God knows (His) servants.
45. And God protected him from the evils they had planned, and the pain of punishment encompassed the people of Pharaoh.
46. The Fire - they shall be set before it morning and evening, and on the day when the hour comes: “Subject the people of Pharaoh to the most severe punishment.”
47. And behold! They will argue in the Fire. The weak ones will say to those who were arrogant, “We were (just) following you. Will you take from us a share of the Fire?”
48. Those who were arrogant said: “All of us are in it! For truly God had judged between (His) servants.”
49. And those in the Fire will say to the Guardians of Hell: “Beseech your Lord to lighten for us the punishment for a day!”
50. They will say: “Did not your Messengers come to you with clear signs?” They (those in the Fire) will say: Yes.” And they (the Guardians) will say: “You may beseech, but what the unbelievers beseech is nothing but in error.”

***al-Zukhruf* 43.46-56 (#15)**

46. We sent Moses with Our signs to Pharaoh and his ministers. He said: “I am the Messenger of the Lord of the Worlds.”
47. But when he came to them with Our signs, lo! They derided them.
48. We did not show them any sign except what was greater than the other; and We inflicted punishment on them that they might return (to Us).
49. And they said: “You magician! Petition your Lord for us according to the covenant you have, and we will surely find guidance.”

50. But when we removed the punishment from them, lo! They broke their word.
51. And Pharaoh proclaimed to his people: "O people! Does not the kingdom of Egypt belong to me, and the rivers run at my command? Do you not see?"
52. Am I not better than this wretch who can scarcely (express himself) clearly?
53. Then why haven't bracelets of gold been bestowed on him? Why haven't ranks of angels come with him?"
54. Thus he fooled his people, and they obeyed him for they were truly a sinful people.
55. And when they angered Us, We inflicted punishment on them, and drowned them all.
56. And We made them (a thing of the) past and an example for future generations.

***al-Dukhān* 44.17-29 (#16)**

17. We tried the people of Pharaoh before them (i.e. the unbelievers of Muhammad's day). A noble messenger came to them,
18. (saying:) "Surrender to me the servants of God, for I am a true messenger to you (pl).
19. And do not make yourself superior to God for I have come to you with clear authority.
20. For I have sought refuge with my Lord and yours lest you stone (me) to death.
21. And if you do not believe, then stay away."
22. And he called to his Lord: "These are truly a sinful people."
23. "Travel with my servants by night, for surely you will be pursued.
24. Leave the sea behind calmly for they are a force to be drowned."
25. How many gardens and springs were left behind,
26. and fields and noble homes,
27. and comforts in which they delighted.
28. And so it was; and We bequeathed other people.
29. and neither heaven nor the earth wept for them, nor were they given respite.
30. And We did deliver the Children of Israel from the humilitating oppression,
31. from Pharaoh for he was among the greatest of transgressors.

***Qāf* 50.12-14 (#4)**

12. Before them (i.e. the unbelievers of Muhammad's day), the people of Nūḥ disbelieved, (as did) the Companions of the Rass, the Thamūd,
13. the Ād, Pharaoh, and the brethren of Lūṭ,
14. the Companions of the Forest, and the people of Tubbaʿ. All (of them) rejected my messengers, and My promise was confirmed.

***al-Dhārīyāt* 51.38-40 (#17)**

38. And in Moses, lo! We sent him to Pharaoh with clear authority.
39. But he turned away in his pride and said: "(He is) a magician or someone possessed!"
40. So We seized him and his army, and hurled them into the sea, and he was deserving of blame.

***al-Qamar* 54.41-42 (#5)**

41. And warners came to the people of Pharaoh,
42. But they rejected all Our signs, so We afflicted them (with) punishment of the Mighty One, the Powerful.

***al-Taḥrīm* 66.11 (#26)**

11. And God gives an example to those who believe: the wife of Pharaoh. Lo! She said: "O Lord! Build for me near You a dwelling in Paradise, and save me from Pharaoh and his works, and save me from the depraved people.

***al-Ḥāqqah* 69.9-10 (#20)**

9. And Pharaoh, those before him, and the Overthrown Cities came in sin,
10. and opposed the Messenger of their Lord, so He seized them with an increasing seizure.

***al-Muzzammil* 73.15-16 (#1)**
15. We sent to you (pl) a Messenger, a Witness for you as We had sent a Messenger to Pharaoh. [Note here the parallel is made between Muhammad and Moses]
16. But Pharaoh opposed the Messenger, so We inflicted on him serious punishment.

***al-Nāzi'āt* 79.15-26 (#21)**

15. Has the story of Moses reached you?
16. Lo! His Lord summoned him to the Holy Valley of Ṭuwā:
17. "Go to Pharaoh for he transgressed,
18. And say: 'Do you (want) to be purified?
19. And I will guide you to your Lord so that you may fear Him?"

20. And he showed him a great sign.
21. But he disbelieved and opposed (him).
22. Then he turned away deliberately.
23. He gathered (his people) and proclaimed,
24. and said: "I am your Lord, the Most High."
25. But God seized him (for) punishment in the Hereafter and in this life.
26. Truly in this is a warning for those who fear (God).

***al-Burūj* 85.17-19 (#3)**

17. Has the story of the forces reached you?
18. of Pharaoh and the Thamūd?
19. Yet, those who disbelieve (are still) in denial.
20. And God encompasses from behind them.

***al-Fajr* 89.10-14 (#2)**

(continuing from 89.6: Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with….)
10. and Pharaoh, lord of stakes
11. those who acted tyrannically in the land,
12. and increased depravity in it.
13. So your Lord poured out on them a lash of punishments,
14. for your Lord is on the watch!

Appendix IV: **Order of *Sūras* with reference to the Egyptians and Exodus**

**According to Nöldeke-Schwally chronology:**

| N# | # of sura | # of *āyāt* re: Egyptians |
|---|---|---|
| **First Meccan** | | |
| 1. N22 | 85 | 4 |
| 2. N23 | 73 | 2 |
| 3. N31 | 79 | 12 |
| 4. N35 | 89 | 5 |
| 5. N38 | 69 | 2 |
| 6. N39 | 51 | 3 |
| **Second Meccan** | | |
| 7. N49 | 54 | 2 |
| 8. N53 | 44 | 15 |
| 9. N54 | 50 | 3 |
| 10. N55 | 20 | 43 |
| 11. N56 | 26 | 59 |
| 12. N59 | 38 | 1 |
| 13. N61 | 43 | 11 |
| 14. N64 | 23 | 5 |
| 15. N67 | 17 | 3 |
| **Third Meccan** | | |
| 16. N75 | 11 | 4 |
| 17. N76 | 14 | 1 |
| 18. N78 | 40 | 28 |
| 19. N79 | 28 | 43 |
| 20. N81 | 29 | 2 |
| 21. N84 | 10 | 18 |
| 22. N87 | 7 | 39 |
| **Madinan** | | |
| 23. N91 | 2 | 2 |
| 24. N95 | 8 | 3 |
| 25. N97 | 3 | 1 |
| 26. N109 | 66 | 1 |

**Appendix V: Order of *Sūras* with reference to the Egyptians and Exodus According to the Standard Egyptian chronology:**

| | E# | # of sura | # of *āyāt* re: Egyptian |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Meccan:** | | | |
| 1. | E3 | 73 | 2 |
| 2. | E10 | 89 | 5 |
| 3. | E27 | 85 | 4 |
| 4. | E34 | 50 | 3 |
| 5. | E37 | 54 | 2 |
| 6. | E38 | 38 | 1 |
| **7.** | **E39** | **7** | **39** |
| **8.** | **E45** | **20** | **43** |
| **9.** | **E47** | **26** | **59** |
| **10.** | **E49** | **28** | **43** |
| 11. | E50 | 17 | 3 |
| 12. | E51 | 10 | 18 |
| 13. | E52 | 11 | 4 |
| 14. | E60 | 40 | 28 |
| 15. | E63 | 43 | 11 |
| 16. | E64 | 44 | 15 |
| 17. | E67 | 51 | 3 |
| 18. | E72 | 14 | 1 |
| 19. | E74 | 23 | 5 |
| 20. | E78 | 69 | 2 |
| 21. | E81 | 79 | 12 |
| 22. | E85 | 29 | 2 |
| **Medinan** | | | |
| 23. | E87 | 2 | 2 |
| 24. | E88 | 8 | 3 |
| 25. | E89 | 3 | 1 |
| 26. | E107 | 66 | 1 |

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