

The Development of Mosaic Narratives in the Hebrew Bible,
Jewish Sources and the Qur'an: Research Question and
Argument

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Abstract

This thesis will examine the character of Moses and the narratives he appears in in the Qur'an. It will use an intertextual methodology, situating the Qur'an within its Late Antique context, focussing on the relationship of the Qur'an to Jewish traditions. As such, the texts used will be the Hebrew Bible, Midrashic Collections up until and around the Seventh Century and the Qur'an; using all three traditions to determine what importance of Moses is in the Qur'anic tradition. This thesis will focus on narratives where he faces opposition as these are the narratives that are particularly prevalent in the Qur'an. As such, this thesis will include two case studies, the first is the Encounter of Moses with Pharaoh that involves the competition with the Magicians of Egypt, featured in Exodus 7:8-18 and Suras 7, 10, 11, 17, 20, 23, 26, 27, 28, 40, 43, 51 and 79. The second case study is the Golden Calf of Exodus 32 and Suras 2, 4, 7 and 20. This thesis argues that the Qur'an specifically separates its treatment of the prophet, Moses, and the people, the Israelites in order to suit its exegetical aims. These are to argue for a new leader based on a line of pre-existing prophecy and the need for a new community of God, based on the sins of the former community of God. These narratives show this dichotomy between prophet and people through consistently improving of the standing of the prophet, making his opponents appear more substantial and his people appear less faithful. Alongside these narrative conclusions, this thesis also makes conclusions about the relationship between the Qur'an, the Hebrew Bible and Jewish Exegetical material, noting the creative process by which the Qur'an is able to repurpose material to better suit its own aims.

I. Introduction, Literature Review and Methodology

1.1. The Development of Mosaic Narratives in the Hebrew Bible, Jewish Sources and the Qur'an: Research Question and Argument

This study seeks to examine the prevalence of the Mosaic narratives in the Qur'an and how they have been developed from the Hebrew Bible. The Qur'an contains entirely new narratives and is led by a new prophet, Muhammad, and yet it still includes these biblical narratives, often on multiple occasions. This project will seek to explore how these narratives have been used again and how they have changed in order to serve a new cause. It will consider the Late Antique context in which the Qur'an is written, including primarily the study of Jewish interpretative material from before the composition of the Qur'an.

In order to do this, two case studies will be examined; that of Moses' encounters with Pharaoh and that of the Golden Calf. This study will take an intertextual perspective, comparing the Qur'an with the Hebrew Bible and associated Jewish exegetical material. The Jewish exegetical material will be mostly from Midrashic collections but also taken from the Mishnah, Talmudic Literature and Targums. The material used will adhere to chronological boundaries that would have been

relevant in the time of the Qur'an. This project will assume the compilation of the Qur'an to have occurred in the 7th century and thus will use only Jewish exegetical material compiled up to and around this time.

This thesis will argue that the purpose of the Mosaic narratives in the Qur'an is to make Moses, the prophet of God appear impressive and the Israelites, the former people of God, appear undeserving. The Qur'an does this in order to justify a new prophet, Muhammad, in the line of succession of prophets that stretches all the way back to the Hebrew Bible, as well as a new people of God, the Muslims. The Qur'an does this by improving the reputation of Moses in these narratives, removing weaknesses, making him seem closer to God and making his leadership appear stronger, and denigrating that of the Israelites, by making them appear ungrateful and idolatrous. This method is not just limited to the characterisation of Moses and the Israelites but can be seen in other plot elements in these narratives, such as making Pharaoh appear worse in order that Moses appears stronger in contrast. Throughout these narratives, the power of God is emphasised. This makes the cause that Moses serves appear more righteous and undeniable, in turn improving the reputation of both the prophet and the religious community he serves.

1.2. Structure

The dissertation is structured around two case studies that feature in the Hebrew Bible, Midrashic traditions and the Qur'an. Each of these case studies is further separated into chapters that focus on individual motifs within them. These chapters each feature a biblical, midrashic and Qur'anic section. The arguments within these sections are drawn together in individual conclusions, case study conclusions and an overall conclusion.

The first of these case studies examines Moses' encounters with Pharaoh. In the Hebrew Bible, Moses has multiple encounters with Pharaoh, first meeting in Exodus 5. Pharaoh is seen last at the Reed Sea in Exodus 15. A version of Moses and Pharaoh's meetings occurs in Sūrahs Al-'A'rāf, Al-Yūnus, Hūd, Al-'Isrā', Tā' Hā', Al-Shu'arā', Al-Naml, Al-Qaṣaṣ, Ghāfir, Al-Zukhruf and Al-Dhāriyāt. The magical competition between Moses and the Sorcerers of Pharaoh in Exodus 7:8–18 is not considered as a plague by most modern academics but instead an introduction to the Plagues.¹ Yet, the competition between Moses and the Sorcerers is more prolific in the Qur'an than any of the actual Plagues, appearing

¹ This theory can be found in Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Indiana: SCM Press, 1974), 151 and in D. J. McCarthy, "Moses Dealings with Pharaoh Ex7.8–10.27," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (1965): 40–41.

in Sūrahs Al-'A'rāf, Ṭā' Hā', Al-Shu'arā' and Al-Naml. This chapter of the thesis aims to examine why this narrative is so important to the writers of the Qur'an.

This case study features four chapters covering themes that have been interpreted substantially differently from the Hebrew Bible to the Qur'an. The four chapters within this case study are: the 'white hand' of Moses, the character of Pharaoh, the role of the Sorcerers and the Plagues. The first of these, the 'white hand' occurs in Exodus 4 in the Hebrew Bible as a manifestation of leprosy upon Moses but in the Qur'an has been repurposed as a 'sign' occurring in the wider Plagues narrative. The second, the character of Pharaoh, appears substantially more threatening in the Qur'an due to the expansion of his dialogue.² The third, the role of the Sorcerers, become part of a Qur'anic theme of submission before God due to also receiving more dialogue and the description of their prostration. Finally, the Plagues no longer act as the central focus of the narrative but as another sign of God's greatness, appearing in much a shorter format than in the Hebrew Bible. Midrashic trends around this biblical

² For more on Pharaoh, Adam Silverstein, "The Qur'anic Pharaoh," in *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in its historical context 2*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 467–477. Eric Ormsby, "The Faith of Pharaoh: A Disputed Question in Islamic Theology," *Studia Islamica* 98/99 (2004): 5–28. Nicolai Sinai, "Pharaoh's Submission to God in the Qur'an and in Rabbinic Literature: A Case Study in Qur'anic Intertextuality," *The Qur'an's Reformation of Judaism and Christianity: Return to the Origins*, ed. Holger Zellentin (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 235–260.

narrative focus on the negative nature of Moses' leprosy, expanding the character of Pharaoh to be more sinful, expanding the characters of the Sorcerers and altering the Plagues.

The second case study is the Golden Calf narrative, occurring in Exodus 32 in the Hebrew Bible.³ In the Qur'an, this narrative occurs in Sūrah Al Baqarah and Al-Nisā'.⁴ The story of the Golden Calf is diverse across the Qur'anic versions. This section has also been divided into four chapters, these are: Moses' Anger, Theophany, the Nature of the Calf and Role of the Israelites. Firstly, Moses is angry at the sight of the Calf in the Hebrew Bible and becomes even angrier in the Qur'an and has more dialogue to express why. Secondly, Moses experiences a theophany after the incident of the Golden Calf in Exodus 33:12–21, whereas in the Qur'an, the theophany occurs before the Golden Calf. The

³ Other studies on this narrative in the Qur'an include Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Uri Rubin, "Traditions in Transformation: The Ark of the Covenant and the Golden Calf in Biblical and Islamic Historiography," *Oriens* 36 (2001): 196–214. Michael Pregill, "A Calf, A Body that Lows"; The Golden Calf from Late Antiquity to Classical Islam" in *Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds. Eric F. Mason and Edmondo F. Lupieri (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 264–292. Moshen Feyzbakhsh and Mohammad Ghandehari, "Facing Mirrors: The Intertwined Golden Calf Story" in *Reading the Bible in an Islamic Context: Qur'anic Conversations*, eds. Daniel J. Crowther, Shirin Shafaie, Ida Glaser and Shabbin Akhtar (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 80–106.

⁴ Q Al-Baqarah 2:51–54 and 92–3, Q Al-Nisā' 4:153, Q Al-'A'rāf 7:142–154 and Q Ṭā' Hā' 20:83–98.

theophanies in the Qur'an also vary in audience, one being given to Moses as in Exodus 33:12–21 and the other to the whole people, as in Exodus 19:9–20:26.⁵ The theophanies have vastly different results, being frightening in the Hebrew Bible but lethal in the Qur'an. Thirdly, the Calf is interpreted differently with space being given in the Qur'an for the interpretation that the Calf is a living god, not just a statue. Finally, the behaviour of the Israelites is important. In the Qur'an, they are interpreted as more demanding, they demand to see God as opposed to avoiding him in the Hebrew Bible. The Golden Calf narratives play into an overarching Qur'anic interpretation of the Israelites as disobedient and mistrusting of God. In Jewish exegetical material, the Golden Calf is a rich topic which shows some similarities in interpretative choices with the Qur'an, particularly concerning the apologetic approach to Aaron, the magical possibilities of the nature of the Calf and discomfort with theophany. The topic

⁵ For more on theophanies in the Qur'an: Wesley W. Williams, "*Tajallī wa-Ru'ya*: A Study of Anthropomorphic Theophany and Visio Dei in the Hebrew Bible, the Qur'an and Early Sunni Islam" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2008). Wesley W. Williams, "A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Tradition and Early Islam," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129, no. 1 (January–March 2009): 19–44. Anthony K. Tuft, "The Ruya Controversy and the Interpretation of Qur'an Verse VII (Al-'A'rāf): 143," *Hamdard Islamicus* 6, no. 3 (1983): 3–41. Anthony K. Tuft, "The Origins and Development of the Controversy over Ru'ya in Medieval Islam and its Relation to Contemporary Visual Culture" (PhD diss., University of California, 1979).

of anger is notably different, as Midrashic material often reads Moses' anger as a lack of control, whereas the Qur'an sees him as righteous.

1.3. Methodology

This project shall focus on literary features and philological concerns in particular due to the interrelated nature of Hebrew and Arabic and the fact that these features are readily available. The overarching methodology is one of intertextuality, believing that the Qur'an is best studied in relation to its Late Antique context. The Qur'an was composed in a Late Antique milieu, in which Christianity and Judaism were the predominant religions. As such, it is fit that it should be studied alongside these traditions as opposed to seen as entirely separate. For this project, that will be the Hebrew Bible and Jewish exegetical material composed up to and around the formative period of the Qur'an in the 7th century. That is not to say that this study seeks to deny the importance of Christian material which is also important to the Late Antique context of the Qur'an, as is being shown in more modern studies of the Qur'an. However, this project has a limited scope due to time constraint and word count and as such, will primarily focus on a breadth of Jewish material.

The beginnings of this project catalogued every occurrence of Moses in the Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible, looking for points of confluence and divergence. It became clear that certain Mosaic narratives occurred more often and were given more space in the Qur'an than others. These seemed the best choices for study as they were the Qur'an's preferred narratives and would show most about how these narratives are utilised in the Qur'an. The most prevalent narratives were of Moses' encounters with Pharaoh, making it an obvious choice for the first case study. In terms of length and frequency of occurrence, the Golden Calf was among the next most popular Moses narratives. After having chosen case studies, detailed lexical examinations were made in Hebrew and Arabic and interesting points of similarity and difference noted. When interesting points had been selected, the focus then turned to the midrashic collections in order to see what their opinions were on these issues.

This study takes a literary approach and will not seek to place the text within the realm of actual historical events during the time of the rise of Islam. This methodology is flawed due to a lack of other evidence for this period that requires reliance on almost entirely Muslim sources from a much later period. The Qur'an itself provides very little detail about the historical circumstances

during which it is written, the biography of Muhammad or the way in which the Qur'an is being composed. As such, this study will focus on literary features that are present in the text, taking the text as a final form. It will also treat the biblical and midrashic texts as final forms.

1.4. A Brief Summary of Moses in the Qur'an and Previous Studies

Here, I shall give a brief summary of some of the main points concerning Moses in the Qur'an. As the Qur'an does not have a linear structure in the way the Hebrew Bible does, stories are told when they are useful to the themes of a particular sūrah. This leads to repetition, as one story may be useful to a number of themes or those themes themselves may be repeated in multiple sūrahs. The stories are not told uniformly and appear in a variety of lengths and sometimes with significant plot elements changed from sūrah to sūrah.

Interestingly, the sections of the Qur'an that feature the Mosaic narratives are some of the longest continuous sections of the Qur'an, such as Q Al-'A'rāf 7:115–160 or Q Ṭā' Hā' 20:9–98, showing his overarching importance to the narrative. Some of these narratives have biblical parallels, like the Golden Calf

and some do not, such as Moses' fishing trip with Al-Khidr in Sūrat Al-Kahf. Of Mosaic narratives that have a biblical narrative, the encounters of Moses with Pharaoh are the most often retold, appearing in a variety of lengths and forms. The encounters of Moses with Pharaoh are retold in Sūrahs Al-'A'rāf, Al-Yūnus, Ṭā' Hā' and Al-Shu'arā', among others. The Golden Calf narrative is also told more than once in the Qur'an and can be found in Sūrahs Al-Baqarah, Al-Nisā', Al-'A'rāf and Ṭā' Hā'. The Burning Bush is shown three times, in Sūrahs Ṭā' Hā', Al-Naml and Al-Qaṣaṣ, with more details of his time in Midian featured in some of these. The Qur'an features other Mosaic narratives more than once, such as: his birth narrative, the murder of the Egyptian soldier, the drowning of the soldiers in the Reed Sea and the rebellion of the Israelites against Moses in the desert. A whole story may be summarised into one verse in order to set the scene for a more homiletic passage about something the Muslims are facing at the time of the Qur'an or as a preface to a more didactic or legalistic passage. Sometimes Moses' name is used alone, such as when the Qur'an refers to 'the book of Moses', meaning the Torah.

The most complete overview of Moses in the Qur'an is in Heinrich Speyer's 'Die Biblischen Erzählungen Im Qoran' of 1931.⁶ Speyer's work goes over all of the biblical narratives occurring in the Qur'an and devotes a significant amount of space to the Mosaic narratives. Speyer uses not only Rabbinic material for comparison but also Christian, Gnostic and Samaritan parallels. Speyer relates the Mosaic narratives to the Hebrew Bible, Apocryphal works, Rabbinic materials, Philo, Josephus and Artapanus, among others. The connections Speyer makes are often very helpful and insightful. Some of his connections seem less plausible due to developments in dating Jewish sources. There is also the problem of explaining how the early Muslims might have come into contact with all of these traditions as Speyer does seem to take the opinion that Muhammad is personally engaging with these texts, commenting at points on Muhammad being personally unclear on some narratives as an argument for why they are presented differently in the Qur'an.⁷

Speyer's mentor, Josef Horowitz completed an earlier monograph on the Qur'an in 1926.⁸ Initially, Horowitz's monograph focusses on genres of narratives and

⁶ Heinrich Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen Im Qoran* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1971).

⁷ Speyer, *Erzählungen Im Qoran*, 279.

⁸ Josef Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter & Co., 1926).

then provides an detailed glossary of names of character and places occurring in the Qur'an. The section of Horovitz's work that is of most interest is his work on *Straflegenden*, known as 'punishment legends'. This genre is still accepted today as one of the main genres of Qur'anic literature and is very useful in understanding the dynamic between Moses and Pharaoh. Moses' and Pharaoh's narratives is a very prevalent punishment legend, occurring many times.⁹ This dynamic brings a messenger of God against a powerful 'pagan' polytheistic political and religious opponent. Later, Watt narrows it down to seven main stories featuring; Noah, the Ad, the Thamud, Abraham, Lot, Midian, and Moses.¹⁰ Horovitz examines some of the Mosaic narratives but his focus is on genre, examining them through the lens of Qur'anic Prophetology or *Straflegenden* and ultimately applying this what Muhammad was trying to achieve through using these texts.¹¹

⁹ Punishment stories involve both Biblical and Arabic prophets in scenarios where they are rejected and then those who rejected them are punished by God. Examples of Biblical punishment stories are that of Moses and Pharaoh, Q 7:103–136 (among others), and Abraham and the people of Lot in Q 11:69–83. An example of an Arabic prophet who features in this kind of narrative is that of Shu'ayb and the 'men of the thicket', Q 26:176–91. This sura also involves the stories of Hūd and Šāliḥ. Watt and Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, 127–135. David Marshall, "Punishment Stories," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an: Volume 4 P–Sh*, ed. Jane Damen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 318–322.

¹⁰ Watt and Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, 132.

¹¹ Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 44.

Karl Prenner's study focussed on the stories of Moses in the Meccan suras of the Qur'an.¹² Prenner's study takes a structural methodology, analysing both the form of the text and focusing on philological features within it. Prenner also takes a comparative approach, using Rabbinic materials, as well as Christian sources to examine features in the Qur'an. Prenner is interested in Moses as a model for Muhammad and provides interesting insights into how the Plagues narratives has been restructured to make the believer-unbeliever dynamics clearer.¹³

Considerable scholarly work on the character of Moses in the Qur'an has been undertaken by Brannon Wheeler. His treatment of Moses in the Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an remains the most complete modern summary of Moses in the Qur'an.¹⁴ In this, Wheeler gives an overview of the Moses narratives in the Qur'an and how they are interpreted in later Islamic exegesis. Wheeler creates two categories for the Moses narratives, Moses in Egypt and Moses with the Israelites.¹⁵ Wheeler sees these stories in the Qur'an as being

¹² Karl Prenner, *Muhammad und Musa: Strukturanalytische und theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu den mekkanischen Musa-Perikopen des Qur'ān* (Altenberge: Christlich-Islamisches Schrifttum, 1986).

¹³ Prenner, *Muhammad und Musa*, 73.

¹⁴ Brannon M. Wheeler, "Moses," in *Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 248–263.

¹⁵ Wheeler, "Moses," 248.

affected by the Qur'an not stressing abstract qualities of good and evil but focussing on the distinction between right and wrong, legal and illegal. This idea is a compelling explanation of why the dichotomies in the Moses narratives in the Qur'an seem more severe than in the Hebrew Bible. Moses appears more heroic, more willing to punish the Israelites and less in need of the help of Aaron, Pharaoh seems crueller; areas of moral grey and confusion in the Hebrew Bible have been finessed into more simple categories of right or wrong. Wheeler also completed a monograph that specifically examines the story of Moses and Al-Khidr in Sūrat Al-Kahf.¹⁶ This story is not one of the narratives examined in this thesis as it does not have a biblical parallel. However, Wheeler's conclusion that this story is not a version of a biblical story but a version of a story about Alexander the Great is interesting as it demonstrates that the Hebrew Bible was not the only source of interest to the early Muslims.

Although few works have focussed specifically on Moses, others that seek to address the prevalence of biblical narratives and more specifically the stories of the prophets in the Qur'an have often touched upon Moses. In their still

¹⁶ Brannon M. Wheeler, "The Jewish Origins of the Qur'an 18:65–82: Re-examining Arent Jan Wensinck's Theory," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 118 (1998): 153–171. Brannon M. Wheeler, *Moses in the Qur'an and Islamic Exegesis* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002).

controversial book, 'Hagarism', Patricia Crone and Michael Cook seek to explain Moses' prevalence in the Qur'an through a theory of Moses being a model for Muhammad.¹⁷ This theory has two main points; that neither Moses nor Muhammad was scripturally trained as a religious professional and that they were both 'native prophets', that is a man from their people to represent their people. Although this theory appears attractive, as both points appear correct when applied to a general picture of each figure, on closer inspection it is less satisfying. The first criterion of not being scripturally trained, although applicable to both Moses and Muhammad, can also be applied to Abraham, Joseph and Noah. This makes it less convincing to explain why Moses is so prevalent. The second criterion of being a 'native prophet' is also problematic as both Muhammad and Moses had difficult relationships with their own people. Moses is adopted by a foreign king, flees that life to live in Midian and only at the age of eighty does he return to lead his own people, the Israelites. It also seems Muhammad faced a lot of opposition, having to flee from Mecca. The idea of a 'native prophet' is further complicated with regard to early Islam due to the complex nature of tribal identity and the rise of urbanisation. Considering the

¹⁷ Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

overarching importance of Muhammad to the Qur'an and the way Islam was spread across the Middle East and beyond, it is clear that Muhammad was considered more than a prophet for his own people. Uri Rubin puts forward that all previous prophets had been prophets to their own people or nation but Muhammad was intended to be a prophet for all of humanity, traversing ethnic boundaries.¹⁸

Other scholars have continued to work on this theory of Moses as a model for Muhammad, each proposing different criteria. Jacob Lassner notes a 'closeness' between the portrayals of Muhammad and Moses.¹⁹ To establish this point, Lassner relies upon numerical biographical details, such as: that Moses and Muhammad were both forty at the time of revelation from God, that their lives are divided into forty year periods with regard to their movements, that both men were born circumcised and finally that they both died on the day of their birth.²⁰ Lassner's theory that all these features come from knowledge of Jewish sources cannot be proven.²¹ Not only it is impossible to prove but it would be

¹⁸ Uri Rubin, "Prophets and Prophethood," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 242.

¹⁹ Jacob Lassner, "The Covenant of the Prophets: Muslim Texts, Jewish Subtexts," *AJS Review* 15, no. 2 (1990): 221–225.

²⁰ Lassner argues ritually clean as opposed to actually circumcised although there are Midrash that suggest Moses was actually born without a foreskin.

²¹ Lassner, "The Covenant of the Prophets," 232.

made even more difficult by the fact that Moses' biography is varied across the Hebrew Bible, Midrashic Sources and even the New Testament, with contradictions about his age present.

Roberto Tottoli comments on common elements in Moses and Muhammad's backstories and their similar styles of leadership, with the Mosaic narratives being framed within the theme of dispute between the prophet and people.²²

Tottoli also comments on perhaps the most striking parallel between these two figures, which is that the Torah was revealed to Moses and the Qur'an to Muhammad which makes them unique as figures of revelation.²³ Angelika Neuwirth concurs with Tottoli that 'the parallels between Moses and Muhammad are ultimately most apparent from their shared privilege of having been shown divine signs'.²⁴ Indeed, Moses and Muhammad do share in being prophets who receive direct revelation which is then recorded for use of the people. Although prophets from later in the Tanakh are included in the Qur'an, such as Elisha and Ezra, their revelation cannot be considered in the same magnitude, in terms of importance and sheer length. This closeness between

²² Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), 35.

²³ Roberto Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an*, 35.

²⁴ Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 285.

Moses, Muhammad and God can be seen through other features of their description in the Qur'an and later material, including physical descriptors involving the motif of light. This motif has been previously discussed with regard to Muhammad and later tafsīr by Uri Rubin and this study will continue to explore this feature, rendered important by the inclusion of Moses' white hand and other descriptions of whiteness and shining in the Qur'an.²⁵ This feature is directly related to Moses and Muhammad receiving revelation from God due to the biblical and Qur'anic trope of light in presence of the divine.

As shown, the majority of studies on Moses in the Qur'an have come to the conclusion that Moses is a model for Muhammad. The question remains of why it was necessary to model Muhammad on anyone. The most obvious answer is the new religious tradition's desire for legitimisation, which it seeks to achieve through the use of more established ideas. Reuven Firestone writes that although new religions must be deviant, that they need some idea of continuity in order to seem authentic.²⁶ Abraham Geiger proposed a similar argument the

²⁵ Uri Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light - Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975): 62.

²⁶ Reuven Firestone, "The Qur'an and Bible: Some Modern Studies of their Relationship," in *Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, edited by John C. Reeves (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2003), 2.

biblical material is present for legitimacy as Muhammad hopes to gain adherents from the Jews and Christians.²⁷ This theory requires adherence to both the traditional dating system of the Qur'an and history contained in much later sources, as there is no other evidence for these relationships that supposedly existed between Muhammad and these other religious communities. However, it is worth considering that this material does not need to have been included for any particular religious community if one accepts the idea that many people would have been familiar with these characters. This allows the possibility these narratives were included to add weight to the argument of a religious tradition without the requirement that they were there for any religious tradition in particular.

1.5. Academic Studies of Biblical Characters in the Qur'an

Substantive works have been completed on other biblical characters that appear within the Qur'an. These also contain similar theories about the characters being

²⁷ Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, trans. F.M Young (Madras: M.D.C.S.P.C.K Press, 1898), 7.

remodelled to represent the Muslim experience at the time of the rise of Islam and to act as models for the character of Muhammad.

The character of Abraham has garnered the most attention. This is understandable as he occupies a position of father to all monotheistic faiths that deem themselves to be 'Abrahamic faiths'. His early appearance in the Hebrew Bible allows him to remain appealing to all, without any specific tribal, national or religious factions present at that point.²⁸ His most important relationship is with God. In Islam, he is named a *Hanīf* of God, meaning a true believer or an adherent to perfect monotheism. Abraham is also key to Islamic tradition as Muslims understand themselves to be descended from his second son, Ishmael, who replaces Isaac in the Qur'anic version of the Akedah.²⁹ Shari Lowin's research on Abraham emphasises his role as a common forefather. Lowin comments on this issue of modelling by emphasising that Abraham is a more inclusive character than Moses, as he is not 'Jewish'. However, Moses is a more convenient model for Muhammad.³⁰ Lowin suggests that the character of

²⁸ See Rubin, "Prophets," 246. Carol Bakhos, *The Family of Abraham Jewish, Christian and Muslim Interpretations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1.

²⁹ See Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham–Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).

³⁰ Shari L. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 225.

Abraham's biography in the Qur'an is also made to resemble that of Moses in order that they are both suitable models for Muhammad.³¹ Carol Bakhos writes that the most prevalent image of Abraham in the Qur'an is that of the 'defiant son who so ardently battles against his father's idolatry'.³² Bakhos is correct to note the story of Abraham destroying Terah's idols as the most frequently repeated of Abraham's narratives in the Qur'an. This is particularly interesting from an intertextual perspective as that story does not occur in the Hebrew Bible as it is midrashic in origin. That this version of Abraham is the most prevalent image in the Qur'an makes clear that the early Muslims had knowledge and/or access to Jewish extra-biblical material. The use of this midrash in the Qur'an also suggests that the Hebrew Bible and midrashic traditions were understood together by the early Muslims and thus both were re-interpreted in the Qur'an. A recent study by Carlos Segovia focusses on the Qur'anic and biblical Noah.³³ Segovia asserts in his study that the way that biblical prophets are used in the Qur'an is based on a single prophetic model. This single model conglomerates all the biblical characters in order to project one image, removing the

³¹ Lowin, *Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives*, 227.

³² Bakhos, "Family of Abraham," 36.

³³ Carlos A. Segovia, *The Qur'anic Noah and the Making of the Islamic Prophet: A Study of Intertextuality and Religious Identity Formation in Late Antiquity* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015).

importance of their individual characteristics from the Islamic tradition. This theory makes sense as a way to explain the usage of biblical prophets in a new religious text, in that they are all there to reassert Muhammad's image as an ideal prophet. Although interesting to take this modelling theory to a new level, it is of course very difficult to prove. Segovia himself notes the difficulties with applying this theory to all characters, especially considering that his work only examines Noah. For this theory to be convincing, either the compilers of the Qur'an decided to showcase a certain set of features, or there must have been significant editing over time to make this happen. Segovia's work is also interesting in that it seeks to prove that the Qur'anic Noah is one taken primarily from apocalyptic literature as opposed to the book of Genesis, with the flood story performing a secondary role compared to the main theme of apocalypse. Segovia shows the apocalyptic Noah to be most prevalent through looking at themes, motifs and selective literary analysis of the Noah narratives. This methodology is very clear and successful in its aim and provides a good model for intertextual studies to follow.

Another biblical figure in the Qur'an thought to be related to Muhammad is Joseph. Marc Bernstein writes of how Joseph, along with Abraham and Moses,

serves as a model for Muhammad. Joseph ‘exemplifies for him the difficulties the Arabian prophet had to overcome in gaining acceptance for his mission’.³⁴

Bernstein further admits that although Joseph is not as important a model as Abraham and Moses for Muhammad, he is still seen as an antecedent who faced struggles such as those the nascent Muslim community face at the time of the composition of the Qur’an.³⁵ Joseph Witztum’s work on the Qur’anic Joseph suggests that there is a strong Syriac influence on the Qur’anic Sūrat Yūsuf, again showing the multiple sources that have affected the composition of the Qur’an.³⁶ Witztum comments on the issue of modelling, not with specific reference to Muhammad on this occasion but with reference to the plot of the story.³⁷ Witztum notes that the story of Joseph shows his eventual triumph, seeking to encourage Muhammad but also shows the fate of unbelievers before those who might be in this position at the time of the composition of the Qur’an. The theory of modelling does not only need to refer to individual

³⁴ Marc S. Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph: Narrative Migrations between Judaism and Islam* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2006), 2.

³⁵ Bernstein, *Stories of Joseph*, 33.

³⁶ Joseph Witztum, “Joseph among the Israelites: Q12 In Light of Syriac Sources,” in *New Perspectives on the Qur’an: The Qur’an in its historical context 2*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 425–48.

³⁷ Witztum, “Joseph among the Israelites,” 445.

character portrayals but can be applied to the way in which entire biblical plots have been repurposed for the Qur'anic narrative.

Some biblical villains presented in the Qur'an have also received scholarly treatments. Of particular interest to this study, the character of Pharaoh has received attention from Eric Ormsby, Adam Silverstein and Nicolai Sinai.³⁸

Adam Silverstein comments that there is only one Pharaoh in the Qur'an whereas there is more than one in the Hebrew Bible.³⁹ In the Qur'an, they have been grouped together which is common practice for the representation of villains throughout the Qur'an. Pharaoh is surrounded by people, one of which is Haman from the book of Esther. The Qur'an has no need to represent the Israelites' suffering throughout the ages in the way that the Hebrew Bible does, as due to this theme of modelling their current experience on past narratives, there only needs to be one. This allows one Pharaoh to be able to represent all of the evil unbelievers of the past.

From previous character studies in the Qur'an, two main issues are present, that of modelling and that of multiple sources. The idea the Qur'an repurposes these

³⁸ See note 2.

³⁹ Silverstein, "The Qur'anic Pharaoh," 467.

biblical narratives to reflect the experiences of Muhammad and the early Muslims is prevalent in Western scholarship. It can be seen to be particularly relevant to any study of Moses as he seems to be the character that it most applies to. The other issue is that intertextual studies using just the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an are not enough to gain a depth of knowledge of how the Qur'anic text functions. Other influences from midrashic trends to Syriac sources can be seen to have affected the composition of the Qur'an across the stories of Abraham, Moses, Joseph and others.

1.6. Academic Studies on the Golden Calf Narratives in the Qur'an and Jewish

Exegesis

In the same way as character studies have been conducted on individuals, some research has sought to focus on particular narratives. With relevance to this study, there have been several examinations of the Golden calf narrative in the Qur'an. They have often focussed on resolving perceived 'problems' in the Qur'anic text. These problems often refer to how the Qur'anic narrative differs from the biblical text of Exodus 32. These studies have used different methodologies, with those of Neuwirth and Rubin remaining more in the area of

Qur'anic studies and those of Pregill and Feyzbakhsh and Ghandehari using different but still intertextual methodologies.⁴⁰

Angelika Neuwirth's study on the Golden Calf focusses on how the narrative changes to adapt to the needs of the community of Early Islam as it changes.⁴¹ Neuwirth's study is an exercise in source criticism, dividing the text into layers in order to show the different provenances of each section. Although this approach can be flawed due to lack of evidence, Neuwirth only divides her texts into two layers and flexible date ranges of Meccan and Medinan, which serve to make her conclusions more convincing as she is aware of the difficulties with this methodology.⁴² Neuwirth sees the original Meccan layer of the text as being not far removed from the biblical text and mostly sympathetic towards Moses and the Israelites.⁴³ In contrast, Neuwirth sees the Medinan additions as focussing on God's wrath, his mercy, forgiveness and atonement.⁴⁴ Although this study will not use a source critical methodology, Neuwirth's comments on

⁴⁰ See note 3.

⁴¹ Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 306–308.

⁴² Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 316.

⁴³ Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 310–11.

⁴⁴ Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 317.

the text remain valid and her thoughts about major themes, such as that as forgiveness, are very valuable.

In his work on the afterlife of two biblical objects, the Ark and the Calf, Uri Rubin argues for a reading of the Golden Calf in the Qur'an which is combined with the Baal-Peor narrative of Numbers 25.⁴⁵ Rubin sees the identity of the Samaritan as Zimri, who was executed by Phineas for having sexual relations with a Midianite woman.⁴⁶ This is not only due to the similarity in spelling but also due to the fact that they are both in the process of actions that disobey God's instructions. Rubin connects this to the use of the Calf motif as building up a sinful image of the Children of Israel in order to prove Muslims as the new chosen community, excluding Jews and Christians.⁴⁷ As much as this argument about Zimri is not completely convincing due to differences in spelling and context, the idea that this story is being used discredit the Israelites and boost the Muslims as the potential new chosen community is compelling.

Michael Pregill has recently published an article, a precursor to an upcoming monograph on the topic, discussing the Golden Calf in the Qur'an, its Late

⁴⁵ Rubin, "Traditions in Transformation," 198.

⁴⁶ Rubin, "Traditions in Transformation," 202.

⁴⁷ Rubin, "Traditions in Transformation," 204.

Antique surroundings and later tafsīr.⁴⁸ This builds on his earlier work, including his PhD thesis which also focussed on the Golden Calf narrative in the Qur'an, Hebrew Bible, Jewish exegetical material and tafsīr. Pregill also wrote an article about a confusing line in the Qur'an that appears to ask the Israelites to kill themselves and convincingly explains it as a version of the Levitical election.⁴⁹ His most recent article on the Golden Calf, looks specifically at the 'lowing noise' the calf makes and seeks to explain this development, as well as offering a suggestion about the identity of Al-Sāmirī.⁵⁰ This article utilises a comparative methodology and philological focus to propose some new ideas about the narrative. The first, that the calf does not low, is not new. However, the way that Pregill argues for this, through comparison with Psalms is novel, making it considerably more convincing than older arguments that rely only on tafsīr. As with almost all studies on the Golden Calf, Pregill sees the identity of Al-Sāmirī as a key issue and seeks to solve this philologically by explaining he is not the Samaritan, but the 'watchman', Aaron.⁵¹ Pregill offers an interesting

⁴⁸ Pregill, "A Calf, a Body that Lows," 264–292.

⁴⁹ Michael Pregill, "Turn in Repentance to your Creator then Slay Yourself": The Levitical Election, Atonement and Classical Islamic Exegesis," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 6 (2010): 101–150.

⁵⁰ Pregill, "A Calf, a Body that Lows," 287–288.

⁵¹ Pregill, "A Calf, a Body that Lows," 287.

solution to this problem and notes the influence of a doctrine of perfection regarding the prophets.⁵²

Moshen Feyzbakhsh and Mohammad Ghandehari wrote an article about the Golden Calf narrative that seeks to understand the biblical and Qur’anic account together.⁵³ This methodology appears to seek to erase the differences in each text in order to make a more palatable, ‘similar’, text. As such, they also argue for Aaron as the identity of Al-Sāmirī, however their argument comes from a place of seeing the biblical and Qur’anic texts together, such that they cannot disagree.⁵⁴ This methodology appears flawed as it almost seeks to deny the different time period and cultural milieus of the different texts. Perhaps most importantly, it appears to discredit the Qur’an of being in control of its own creative process.

These comparative studies of the Golden Calf have often made use of material on midrashic interpretations of the Golden Calf, particular the seminal work of Smolar and Aberbach.⁵⁵ Later investigations of this topic in Jewish and Christian

⁵² Pregill, “‘A Calf, a Body that Lows,’” 292.

⁵³ Feyzbakhsh and Ghandehari, “Facing Mirrors,” 89.

⁵⁴ Feyzbakhsh and Ghandehari, “Facing Mirrors,” 96.

⁵⁵ Leivy Smolar and Moshe Aberbach, “The Golden Calf Episode in Post-Biblical Literature,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 39 (1968): 91–116.

exegetical material have been undertaken by Irving Mandelbaum, Pier Cesare Bori, Pekka Linquist and most recently Devorah Schoenfeld.⁵⁶ The work of Aberbach and Smolar gave an overview of the interpretative responses to the Golden Calf, seeing those that further judge the Israelites and those who provide special circumstances for their sin.⁵⁷ Mandelbaum's work further explains the differences in interpretation of this narrative based on the time period in which the interpretation was composed. Mandelbaum noticed that the earliest interpretations, from the Tannaitic period were much more critical of the Israelites and able to accept, sometimes even exaggerate, the sin of the Golden Calf.⁵⁸ The later interpretations from the Amoraic period become much more apologetic, probably due to critical influence from other religions. Deborah Schoenfeld has recently added what seems to be an extension to the first of these categories or possibly even a third category of its own, which is that of sin

⁵⁶ Irving J. Mandelbaum, "Tannaitic Exegesis of the Golden Calf Episode," in *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History*, eds. Phillip R. Davies and Richard T. White (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 207–224. Pier Cesare Bori, *The Golden Calf and the Origins of the Anti-Jewish Controversy*, trans. David Ward (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990). Pekka Lindqvist, *Sin at Sinai: Early Judaism Encounters Exodus 32* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2008). Devorah Schoenfeld, "'A Good Argument to Penitents': Sin and Forgiveness in Midrashic Interpretations of the Golden Calf" in (eds.) *Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds. Eric F. Mason and Edmondo F. Lupieri (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 176–193.

⁵⁷ Smolar and Aberbach, "The Golden Calf Episode," 102–104.

⁵⁸ Mandelbaum, "Tannaitic Exegesis of the Golden Calf Episode," 207.

but in a positive way.⁵⁹ Schoenfeld examines a series of interpretations that use the idea of the sin of the Golden Calf to argue that if God forgave the Israelites this, he can forgive them anything, which she argues is hopeful in tone. These categories are of interest to this study as they provide a framework through which to view not only the midrashic interpretations but also those of the Qur'an, which fall mostly into the second category of apologetic responses. There is room within the Qur'anic interpretations to argue for the category proposed by Schoenfeld, of 'forgiving' interpretations. Indeed, this kind of reading of the Qur'anic Golden Calf narratives has been proposed by Neuwirth in her work.⁶⁰

As well as interpretations of midrashic interpretations of the Golden Calf, scholars like Christine Hayes have been right to point out that the earliest form of Jewish exegesis on the Golden Calf is within the Hebrew Bible itself, in the form of the Books of Deuteronomy, Kings, Nehemiah, Hosea and Psalms.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Schoenfeld, "A Good Argument to Penitents," 177.

⁶⁰ Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 312, 320–21.

⁶¹ Christine Hayes, "Golden Calf Stories: The Relationship of Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy 9–10," in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James Kugel*, eds. Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 45–93. Robert A. Vito, "The Calf Episodes in Exodus and Deuteronomy: A Study in Inner-Biblical Interpretation," in *Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds. Eric F. Mason and Edmondo F. Lupieri (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 1–25. Pauline A. Viviano, "Do the Books of Hosea and Jeremiah know of a Sinai/Horeb Golden Calf Story?," in *Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity and*

There is debate about whether the Golden Calf is a later narrative than the calves of Jeroboam from 2 Kings and whether all ‘Golden Calf’ narratives in the Hebrew Bible should be viewed as commentary on the narrative from 2 Kings, as opposed to the narrative from Exodus. It is possible that the Exodus narrative predates the narrative from Kings and a criticism of Jeroboam was inserted later. As this study focusses on interpretation of this narrative from a much later point, when the Hebrew Bible text was in a ‘final form’, these text critical considerations are not as important. However, the intratextual possibilities from the Hebrew Bible are still important and as such not just the Exodus narrative will be considered when examining the Jewish exegetical and ultimately, Qur’anic material.

Connected to the Golden Calf narrative is that of God’s theophany, or more accurately theophanies. Although this connection has not previously been examined in detail, the topic of theophany has attracted some work in Qur’anic and comparative studies. The most detailed of these have been from Wesley Williams, whose PhD dissertation and articles stemming from it, focus on

Islam, eds. Eric F. Mason and Edmondo F. Lupieri (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 36–48. Richard J. Bautch, “The Golden Calf in the Historical Recitals of Nehemiah and Psalm 106,” in *Golden Calf Traditions in Early Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, eds. Eric F. Mason and Edmondo F. Lupieri (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 49–58.

theophany in the Qur'an, Hebrew Bible and Rabbinics.⁶² Williams discusses the ideas of anthropomorphism versus transcendence, seeing transcendence or an 'invisible God' as a Hellenistic idea, thus explaining why texts later than the Hebrew Bible seem more affected by this idea.⁶³ Williams also notes the way the theme of theophany is used by the Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible to show the dichotomy of God's purity and the Israelites impurity.⁶⁴ An earlier work by Anthony Tuft notes the connection between theophany and the Golden Calf in the Qur'an, viewing requests for theophany in the Qur'an as a 'verbal Golden Calf'.⁶⁵ Tuft is correct to note the connection between these two ideas which is of course a visual stimuli for worship. This study shall examine the connection between the Golden Calf narrative and the Theophany narratives that occur alongside it in the Qur'an.

These studies on the Golden Calf provide helpful ideas with regard to methodology but are often too focussed on reconciling differences between the Bible and the Qur'an to actually focus on why they might have occurred. The character of Moses and his role are touched upon but usually as a secondary

⁶² Consult note 4.

⁶³ Williams, "A Body Unlike Bodies," 19–20.

⁶⁴ Williams, "*Tajalli wa-Ru'ya*," 88.

⁶⁵ Tuft, "The Origins and Development of the Controversy over Ru'ya in Medieval Islam," 60.

concern. Most of these studies do provide arguments as to why the Golden calf is being included in the Qur'an, with the most prevalent being that it is a form of polemic against the Jews.

1.7. Problems Arising from the Idea of 'Influence' on the Qur'an

An issue that has longed plagued Western study of the Qur'an is the idea of 'influence'.⁶⁶ The earliest of these studies usually sought to assert the idea of Christian superiority over the Islamic religion, although perhaps the most influential, that of Abraham Geiger focussed on Jewish influence.⁶⁷ This idea of 'influence', that the Qur'an had been copied from either a written Bible or oral retellings, seeks to explain the biblical material within the Qur'an. Although how this material came to be present within the Qur'an is an entirely valid question, previous approaches have sought to solve this in a manner that is almost entirely reductive. Aside from being derogatory in approach, it relies on questionable

⁶⁶ For an overview of this topic see Michael Pregill, "The Hebrew Bible and the Quran: The Problem of the Jewish 'Influence' on Islam," *Religion Compass* 1, no.6 (2007): 643–659.

⁶⁷ Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (Bonn: University of Bonn Press, 1833).

historical data, mixing Islamic sources hundreds of years later with medieval polemics, to prove Muhammad's contact with Jewish and Christian communities in the Hejaz or converts from his own family and beyond. The idea of 'influence' may also have a limited idea the scope of what texts and oral narratives the Qur'anic authors were aware of. Although, this is not always true as Heinrich Speyer's work of 1931, is aware of the links between the Qur'an and biblical sources, Apocryphal sources, Jewish exegetical material, Syriac Christian material, Greek material and more.⁶⁸ In recent years, new approaches have been pioneered that seek to examine these narratives in the Qur'an without focussing on ideas of 'influence'. This has allowed for more fruitful study that seeks to examine the text and show context and progression within it.

Ideas of Jewish and Christian 'influence' on the Qur'an have circulated since the Qur'an came into contact with other communities and can be seen in medieval Jewish and Christian polemics. The first influential study that sought to prove this in a Western context was the study of Abraham Geiger. His study was so influential as it did something new in that it combined this idea of 'influence' with a sophisticated philological approach to the Qur'an. This kind of approach

⁶⁸ Speyer, *Erzählungen Im Qoran*, viii.

was something that biblical studies of the time were more accustomed to and seeing it used on the Qur'anic text must have been very convincing as studies continued in this vein for over a hundred years after Geiger's work was published. Geiger's argument relies on the idea that are Jewish tribes living in the Arabian peninsula with which Muhammad has contact.⁶⁹ Geiger argues that these Jewish tribes were powerful and known for being 'trouble with witty and perplexing remarks' so Muhammad was keen to use biblical stories to gain them as followers and so that there would be points of easy agreement between them.⁷⁰ Geiger finds the idea of oral tradition being what Muhammad relied on for his biblical information convincing as he misspells so many of the names of the prophets.⁷¹ Although Geiger's work was ground-breaking at the time, it now appears rather outdated in style and methodology, arguing that Muhammad is 'not clear' about aspects, relying on later biographical information and using midrashic collections thought to be completed after the composition of the Qur'an.⁷²

⁶⁹ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 4–5.

⁷⁰ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 4.

⁷¹ Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 19.

⁷² Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 127. An example of a midrashic collection now considered later can be found in Geiger's use of the Pirque de Rav Eliezer, Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 125.

Around the time of the First World War, scholars such as David S. Margoliouth, Charles C. Torrey and Julian Obermann continued this research, combining philological studies, archaeological information from the region and ideas of ‘influence’.⁷³ The earliest of these is Margoliouth who seeks to prove that the origins of the biblical material in the Qur’an are from native Jewish converts to Islam, continuing with a similar argument to Geiger. Margoliouth relies on existing examples of Jewish presence in the Arabian Peninsula, such as the Himyarite kingdom in what is now the Yemen. However, this was a long way from the Hijaz and was centuries earlier.⁷⁴ Margoliouth also posits that the influence must have been Jewish as the Muslims would have been anti-Christian due to Ethiopian imperialist tendencies and empathised with the Jewish search for nationhood. This is not convincing as Christianity appeared in many forms and modern studies have shown the Syriac variant to be the most relevant to the Qur’an. Charles C. Torrey is also convinced Jewish interaction was key rather

⁷³ Charles C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: Jewish Institute of Religion Press, 1933). David S. Margoliouth, *The Relations between Arabs and Israelites prior to the Rise of Islam: The Schweich Lectures 1921 The British Academy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924). Julian Obermann, “Islamic Origins: A Study in Background and Formation,” in *The Arab Heritage*, ed. N. A. Faris (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1944), 58–120.

⁷⁴ Other scholars have also been known to use archaeological evidence elsewhere on the Arabian Peninsula, such as the North and South in order to justify claims of Jewish communities, see S.D Goitein, *Jews and Arabs: Their contacts Through the Ages* (New York: Schocken Books, 1955), 47. However, this does not necessarily justify claims that there were Jewish communities in Mecca or Medina.

than Christian due to the Jewish communities of the Hijaz. To try to prove their existence, Torrey uses biblical stories that mention trading posts in Arabia or migration from that area to Palestine to suggest there might still be Jewish tribes in the area.⁷⁵ These ideas all rely on the idea of Jewish and Christian communities that were not only present but involved in the formation of Islam. It is not only non-Islamic sources that have found this a convincing theory, despite lack of evidence, as the *sīrah* of Muhammad also recount Jewish communities living in the Hejaz. There are three tribes', the *Banū Naḍīr*, *Qurayzah* and *Qaynuqā'*, who are at first friendly with Muhammad until relations worsen and end with the Battles of *Badr* and *'Uḥud*, termed the 'Break with the Jews'.⁷⁶ Despite a scant archaeological record and lack of other evidence for these communities, the existence has continued to be believed and is taken as read in scholarly works like William Montgomery Watt's extensive biographies on Muhammad.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Assertions about Mecca's popularity as a trading post have been questioned by Patricia Crone in *Meccan trade and the Rise of Islam* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 1987).

⁷⁶ W. N. Arafat, "New Light on the Story of the Banu Qurayza," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1976): 100–107. M. J. Kister, "The Massacre of the Banu Qurayza: a Re-Examination of a Tradition," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986): 61–96.

⁷⁷ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953). W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).

Many of these ideas of ‘influence’ are gleaned from traditional Islamic sources, such as *sīrah*. Since the Qur’an itself contains so little historical detail about its composition, scholars have often understood it through studying the life of Muhammad.⁷⁸ The *sīrah* literature contains many interesting ideas to explain the biblical material in the Qur’an. The fact that Muhammad’s first wife’s cousin was Christian, a Nestorian priest, before he converted to Islam is widely accepted by Islamic material and attested in multiple written sources.⁷⁹ The idea that one or more of Muhammad’s wives were Jewish is also a popular theory found in *sīrah* literature.⁸⁰ Impressive research has been undertaken on the topic by Uri Rubin, who in his monograph argues that these later biographies are using themes from biblical material in order to make Muhammad’s biography as impressive of that of any other prophet.⁸¹ Although it is tempting to use this library of extra material to examine the Qur’an, Gabriel Said Reynolds has also pointed out the impossibility of using later exegetical material in order to understand an earlier

⁷⁸ W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Mecca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953). W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).

⁷⁹ See Muhammad ibn Ishaq. *Sirat Rasul Allah*. Translated by Guillaume, A. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955). *The Life of Muhammad*, 107.

⁸⁰ See Ronen Yitzhak, “Muhammad’s Jewish Wives: Rayhana bint Zayd and Safiya bint Huyayy in the Classic Islamic Tradition,” *Journal of Religion and Society* 9 (2007): 1–14.

⁸¹ Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as viewed by Early Muslims: A textual analysis* (Princeton, NY: Darwin Press, 1995), 4.

text and work out its history.⁸² This approach was questioned as early as 1910, by Henri Lammens. Lammens suggested that these biographies were not historical but something that Muslim exegetes developed as a way to interpret the Qur'an.⁸³ The lack of outside evidence and the much later date of this material means it simply cannot be relied upon as an accurate source for information about the origins of the Qur'an.

Some Western scholars, such as Obermann and more recently Reuven Firestone propose a specific trajectory of oral transmission rather than a written one which allows for more flexibility when considering sources.⁸⁴ Although both these scholars hold onto a Jewish origins theory, this idea of oral tradition allows for the possibility of biblical tradition being told from either a Christian, Jewish or another source. This theory also allows for the possibility of combination of sources in something akin to the theory of formation of myth suggested by Otto Rank, in his case in reference to Heroic Birth narratives.⁸⁵ Rank's theory states the similar myths form, due to similar needs and desires in people and then

⁸² Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 7–9.

⁸³ Henri Lammens, "Qoran et tradition. Comment fut composee la vie de Mahomet?," *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 1 (1910): 25–61.

⁸⁴ Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham–Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990).

⁸⁵ Otto Rank, "The Myth and Birth of the Hero," in *In Quest of the Hero*, ed. Robert A. Segal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 1–89.

upon contact with other cultures they may become mixed. This theory is attractive when it comes to the Qur'an due to the amount of recognisable material that also appears in other traditions combined with a lot that does not. It does not relegate the Qur'an to a document stolen from other traditions and does not deny its writers agency. As can be seen by even a cursory glance at the Qur'anic 'retellings' of biblical narratives, they are not copies as they contain considerable material that is not present in the Hebrew Bible which often leads to them having different plots and characters. The creativity of the Qur'anic writers is such that the same base narratives are told differently even within the Qur'an.

Although ultimately an oral trajectory is as impossible to prove as a written one, it does move the scholar away from the idea of Muhammad and/or the early Muslims copying the Qur'an from a biblical scroll. This idea of direct copying in this manner limits our ideas of the narratives that the Qur'anic writers encountered. As has been shown by more recent approaches, the Qur'an is in no way restricted to the use of biblical narratives. As mentioned, Brannon Wheeler uses his work on Moses to show the Qur'anic knowledge of Syriac and Greek myths. Other studies have sought to show the involvement of the Syriac

tradition with the Qur'an, such as those of Christoph Luxenberg among others.⁸⁶ Another important feature is that of Jewish extra-biblical literature. The Bible would not have circulated alone, whether written or oral, and would have been understood alongside a range of interpretative materials in Hebrew and Aramaic. These would have included the Mishnah, Midrashic collections and Targums as they were all used by the early Rabbinic Jewish communities in order to further understand their text. Segovia's study of Noah seeks to show that the Qur'an is more affected by the Apocryphal version of Noah than the biblical one. Modern studies are successfully showing the Qur'an was not just engaging with the Hebrew Bible but also a whole range of other material. In order to avoid these issues of 'influence' and the historical uncertainties that come with it, more recently scholars like Gabriel Said Reynolds have used the term 'intertextuality' to study the Qur'an and the Bible together.⁸⁷ This method asserts that through reading both texts together that one may learn more about either text and its historical situation. This approach need not be used solely

⁸⁶ Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran: A Contribution to the Decoding of the Language of the Koran* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2007). Witztum, "Joseph among the Israelites," 425–448. For a critique on this work, please see, Daniel King, "A Christian Qur'an? A Study into the Syriac background to the language of the Qur'an as presented in the work of Christoph Luxenberg," *Journal for Late Antique Religion and Culture* 3 (2009): 44–71.

⁸⁷ Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, 2.

between two different texts from separate traditions but may have just as much value being used to study documents intra-religiously. Reynolds suggests a new way to read the Qur'an which is of great relevance to this project as he suggests that the Qur'an should be read in combination with what came before it.⁸⁸ He not only suggests this as his idea but as how the Qur'an was always meant to be read due to the nature of allusions and references that it provides. The Qur'an seems to suggest that the audience has prior knowledge of a corpus of literature. The biblical stories that appear in the Qur'an do not include all the biographical details and connections in the Hebrew Bible. They are shortened versions that focus on particular events or attributes, indicating the audience may already know the rest. This way of telling these stories would seem to agree with Reynolds' perception that in order to understand the Qur'an you must combine it with the Bible, for 'the Qur'an itself demands that they be kept together'.⁸⁹ This theory seems particularly convincing as we have shown that historically little can be learnt from the text, old methods of reading the Qur'an through the *sīrah* of Muhammad are clearly unreliable, however the fact that these allusions and references exist is concrete. Although this does not give

⁸⁸ Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, 2.

⁸⁹ Reynolds, *The Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext*, 2.

much hope to a scholar hoping to provide exact dates for the history of the text, it does give credence to the work of a literary scholars who seek to talk about the text itself.

There are criticisms of ‘intertextuality’ as a methodology, such as the fact that through focussing solely on the literary features of the text, it ignores any historical information that may be present. Indeed, modern Western scholars of the Qur’an have largely abandoned the search for the ‘origins’ of the Qur’an. Stephen Shoemaker notes a wider reluctance to engage with the Qur’an using more historical critical methods, which he argues, although born from a kind of sensitivity, only serves to ‘other’ it further and dampen attempts at pedagogy.⁹⁰ Shoemaker’s remarks are correct in that the search for the origins of other traditions, such as the biblical one, using historical critical methods continues unabated. However, even in biblical studies the old confidences about the use of source and historical criticism are fading to some extent. Although the ‘sensitivity’ around the Qur’an is partly due to a post–Orientalist guilt that is not helpful to the modern academic, who must acknowledge it but should not be held back by it, perhaps it is also motivated by more realistic concerns. With

⁹⁰ Stephen Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad’s Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 17.

limited archaeological access to the land where the Qur'an was composed and almost nothing that survives in the way of contemporary literature, probably due to a more oral culture and the expense of writing materials, the search for the precise origins of the Qur'an appears fruitless. Although the intertextual methodology does abandon hope of finding a historical truth, it does provide a way for Western scholarship of the Qur'an to move forward.

These newer intertextual methodologies focus on literary features as opposed to trying to impose a historical timeline onto the Qur'an, seeking to find its origins. Intertextuality accepts the presence of pre-Qur'anic material within the Qur'an, this is undeniable, but seeks to see how and why it has been repurposed within the Qur'an as opposed to how it came to be there. The historical origins of the Qur'an and the environment in which it was composed are something we may never be able to know for sure but seeking more detail about how the text functions with relation to its forebears is an endeavour that can yield results. However, even within this more literary methodology there is scope for disagreement over historical features within the text, such as its relationship to later Islamic history and traditional methods of dating individual sūrah.

1.8. Issues of Qur'anic Chronology

The problems of 'influence' are exacerbated by a lack of reliable historical information about the formation of the Qur'an, which also affects how we see the text progressing. These are not just issues of the historical milieu in which the Qur'an was composed but historical issues within the Qur'an. Many of the modern Western scholars who have done away with the search for Qur'anic origins based on a lack of evidence are regardless happy to accept a dating system for the text itself with a similar lack of evidence. The Qur'an has been traditionally separated into sūrahs revealed in Mecca and those revealed in Medina. Western scholarship has sought to broaden this to Early, Middle, Late Meccan and Medinan. However, this traditional Islamic approach of accepting that these sūrahs were revealed in these two places, remains largely unchallenged. It is not just the approach that remains in use almost unchanged since the medieval period but also which sūrahs go in which category. This methodology leaves modern scholars of the Qur'an tied to a particular place and date for the composition of each sūrah with little explanation as to why. Modern approaches, such as that of Angelika Neuwirth, although accepting the system, have added nuance to it by arguing for later additions within earlier sūrahs,

allowing for the possibility of mixed dating and place of composition within the same sūrah.⁹¹

The traditional Islamic dating of the Qur'an divides the sūrahs based on where each sūrah was revealed to Muhammad, Mecca or Medina. One of the most influential scholarly works on this topic, which is now over 150 years old, is still that of Theodor Nöldeke which divided the Qur'an into four sections and chronologically ordered them within these.⁹² These four sections were Early Meccan, Middle Meccan, Late Meccan and Medinan. Nöldeke's dates still hold popularity with many scholars, however, they were questioned as early as the early 20th century by Régis Blachère.⁹³ Blachère objected to the methods Nöldeke used to compose his chronology, a reliance on Muslim sources, *tafsīr* and *sīrah*. Blachère proposed that instead reliance should be purely on a literary basis, through the albeit sparse information the Qur'an provides. Nöldeke was also questioned by Bell and later Watt, although neither of them actually suggested a new chronology or completely disagrees with Nöldeke. Bell criticises the certainty with which Nöldeke places events according to the life of the prophet

⁹¹ Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 316.

⁹² Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns* (Leipzig: Dieterich, 1860).

⁹³ Régis Blachère, *Le Coran, Traduction Selon un Essai de Reclassement des sourates* (Paris: Maisonnueve, 1947–50).

when there are so many different views about these events.⁹⁴ When Watt commented on Bell's words, he came to the conclusion that attempts at dating are important and that although it will never be perfect, Nöldeke's is a good system.⁹⁵ This rather defeatist, although perhaps pragmatic, view of Qur'anic history established by Watt in the 1970s has essentially held sway until the present day.

There have also been claims that there is no proof the Qur'an was revealed in the early 7th century, as Muslim tradition and Nöldeke would have it, but that all or parts of it could be from 150–200 years later. Scholars espousing this viewpoint include John Wansborough, Patricia Crone and Michael Cook.⁹⁶

Traditional historical dating places the composition of the Qur'an in the 7th century, from around 620–640, and most scholars accept this. There is evidence for later editing, most famously during the 'Uthmānic recension, which sought to produce a definitive edition of the Qur'an. Scholars like Wansborough and Crone have argued for a much later dating of the Qur'an, into the 9th and 10th

⁹⁴ W. Montgomery Watt and Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an* (Edinburgh University Press: 1970), 111.

⁹⁵ Watt and Bell, *Introduction to the Qur'an*, 111–113.

⁹⁶ For their best-known works on the topic see, John Wansborough, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) and Cook and Crone, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

centuries. However, due to more recent manuscript finds, such as that of the Qur'an in the Birmingham University Library, combined with advances in carbon dating, it seems convincing that there were Qur'ans that were very close in nature to the one we have today present in the 7th century.⁹⁷ Most of these Qur'ans are fragmentary due to age and wear so the precise order and form cannot be completely discerned but enough that it is reasonable to assume the Qur'an was written in the 7th century.

More detailed modern studies of the sūrahs seek to include literary features to shore up the traditional dating system. Although this methodology does use aspects of modern academic practise, such as form and literary criticism, it does still work within the accepted framework of Meccan and Medinan Sūrahs. Some of the criteria are simple, such as Meccan Sūrahs generally being shorter than Medinan ones. Other criteria are more complex, such as Neal Robinson's assertion that there are six registers in which all early Meccan Sūrahs fall: polemics, eschatology, narrative, status and authenticity of revelation, signs of

⁹⁷ This is the radiocarbon report for the Birmingham/Paris Qur'an. T. Higham, C. Bronk Ramsey, D. Chivall, J. Graystone, D. Baker, E. Henderson, and P. Ditchfield, "Radiocarbon Dates from the Oxford AMS System: Archaeometry Datelist 36," *Archaeometry* 60, no. 3 (n.d): 628–40. Some statistical analysis of the same text, H. Sayoud, "Statistical Analysis of the Birmingham Quran Folios and Comparison with the Sanaa Manuscripts," *HDSKD International Journal* 4 (2018): 101–126.

God's power and God's personal communication with the messenger.⁹⁸

Robinson considers Medinan Sūrahs much less polemical with its place being taken by more exhortatory or legislative material.⁹⁹ These kind of literary hypotheses, to provide the Meccan and Medinan Sūrahs with separate characteristics, can be found in most introductions to work on the structure of the Qur'an.¹⁰⁰ As much as some of these hypotheses appear convincing, the fact remains that this information is being added to a pre-existing set of conditions.

Angelika Neuwirth has contributed considerable research to strengthen what we know about the editing processes that took place regarding the Qur'an.

Although Neuwirth mostly accepts the original dating of the sūrahs, she innovates in order to look at dating within individual sūrahs, coming to the conclusion that in order to view the Qur'an as a literary text, a diachronic methodology must be used.¹⁰¹ This more modern approach considers the idea of some editing having taken place, such as editing Meccan Sūrahs in the later Medinan period in order to reflect changes in doctrine and themes that have

⁹⁸ Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Washington D.C, MD: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 196.

⁹⁹ Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 197.

¹⁰⁰ For more on this topic, see Gerhard Böwering, "Chronology in the Qur'an," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an Vol. 1 A-D*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 316–335.

¹⁰¹ Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 307–309.

become important later. This approach is reminiscent of the literary and form critical approaches that have been taken in the field of biblical Studies since the 1950s and earlier.¹⁰² Neuwirth shows these later additions in stories of the Golden Calf appearing in Sūrahs Al-'A'rāf and Ṭā' Hā', using elements such as switching from a third person report to a second person address to argue for additions in the text.¹⁰³ This approach still includes using traditional dating for the date of the overall Sūrah but is uses critical methods as well.

1.9. The Use of Jewish Exegetical Material

The dating of Midrashic traditions is also a controversial topic, so this project will date by the age of compilation of the collections themselves, seeing this as the most reasonable way to assume they would have been transmitted up to and around the time of the Qur'an. Sometimes, later collections are used but individual traditions within them are assumed to be much older. Although certain interpretations can be found in very early sources, such as the Mishnah,

¹⁰² For an overview of modern techniques of interpreting the Bible see, Emmanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001). Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012). Stephen R. Haynes and Steven L. McKenzie, *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticisms and Their Application* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999).

¹⁰³ Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community*, 306–327.

traditions are then widely transmitted until they feature in medieval collections. However, lines of transmission are not always clear due to some interpretations appearing in multiple collections and two people having the same idea, yet being unconnected, remains a possibility. As such, dating by time of compilation of a collection is safer in order to secure the chronological boundaries of the project. Even this approach is not clear cut as there is debate over when entire collections date from, as such this project will only use material where there is a consensus that it was compiled around or before the compilation of the Qur'an. This project will use a variety of Midrashic collections containing interpretative traditions that could have been in circulation at the time of the composition of the Qur'an. Talmudic material, Halakhic midrash, Aggadic Midrash and Targums will all be used, as they all contain useful interpretative material. The primary collections used are the Mishnah, Talmud Bavli, Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, the Mekhilta de Rabbi Simon Bar Yohai, Sifra, Pesiqta de Rav Kahana, Genesis Rabbah, Tanhuma Yelammedenu, Tanhuma Buber. The Talmudic texts used will be the Mishnah and the Talmud. The Mishnah is the earliest text used in this study, thought to be canonised in the third

century.¹⁰⁴ The Mishnah is formed of six books, all which contain many smaller tractates. It seeks to provide a rules or laws about topics from agriculture to religious purity. The Talmuds seek to provide further detail and argument on these rules set forth in the Mishnah, providing expansive commentary. Of the Talmuds, the Jerusalem Talmud is dated earlier, to the fourth or fifth century and the Babylonian Talmud to the 6th century, although these also show signs of textual development that has allowed some scholars to date them later, especially the Babylonian Talmud which some consider not canonised until the 8th century, but is widely acknowledged to contain traditions from within the first centuries of the common era.¹⁰⁵

Halakhic Midrash, sometimes called Tannaitic Midrash, seek to connect law and scripture. They focus on the four books of the Torah (excluding Genesis): Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Although their primary concern is legalistic, they often contain large amounts of narrative, *Aggadic*, material.

The Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael is examined, which is commonly dated to the 3rd

¹⁰⁴ H. L. Strack and Günter Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and the Midrash* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 139.

¹⁰⁵ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and the Midrash*, 170–176, 192–197. Ben-Eliyahu, Cohn and Millar, *Handbook of Jewish Literature*, 30, 34–5.

century CE.¹⁰⁶ The Mekhilta de Rabbi Simon Bar Yohai has benefitted from less study and has a wider possible date range, anything from the fourth to fifth centuries.¹⁰⁷ The Sifra and Sifre (Numbers, Zutta and Deuteronomy) are dated from the middle to later part of the 3rd century, although very little is also known about the afterlife of these texts.¹⁰⁸

Aggadic Midrash, sometimes called Amoraic Midrash, is usually dated later than the Halakhic midrash. Aggadic collections often provide expansions of biblical narratives, proverbs and stories about historic sages. There may still be some halakhic material in these collections. It is possible to further divide Aggadic Midrash into sub-categories of Exegetical and Homiletic. Exegetical Aggada often takes a verse by verse approach, structuring itself after the biblical text it is interpreting. Homiletic Midrash on the other hand can be structured according to themes it wishes to discuss, using the biblical text more sparingly. Genesis Rabbah is the largest and perhaps earliest of the exegetical collections, dated to

¹⁰⁶ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and the Midrash*, 253–255. Eyal Ben-Eliyahu, Yehudah Cohn and Fergus Millar, *Handbook of Jewish Literature from Late Antiquity 135–700 CE* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 64.

¹⁰⁷ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and the Midrash*, 259. Ben-Eliyahu, Cohn and Millar, *Handbook of Jewish Literature*, 66.

¹⁰⁸ Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and the Midrash*, 261–67. Ben-Eliyahu, Cohn and Millar, *Handbook of Jewish Literature*, 67–73, 76.

the fifth century.¹⁰⁹ The *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* is a Homiletic collection, most commonly considered to be a fifth century work.¹¹⁰ The *Tanhumas Yelammedenu* and *Buber* contain both exegetical and homiletic material, the homilies supposedly originating from the Rabbi Tanhuma. Their dating remains controversial as they contain what could be early material, dated as early as the fourth century, however, scholars such as Stemmerger see a long period of textual development occurring with a final version that could be dated anywhere from the 5th to 7th centuries and into the Geonic period.¹¹¹ With a late dating, this work could have been composed during the formative period of Islam.

The Targums are translations of the biblical text into the vernacular language of the early centuries of the Common Era in Judaea/Palestine, Aramaic. However, these translations do not necessarily just seek to translate but also to explain and even comment on the biblical text. The Targums used will be the Targum Onkelos, Targum Neofiti and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on the Book of Exodus. The Targum Onkelos received an accepted status, being used alongside the Torah and studied by Rabbis. However, despite knowledge of its existence,

¹⁰⁹ Ben-Eliyahu, Cohn and Millar, *Handbook of Jewish Literature*, 81.

¹¹⁰ Strack and Stemmerger, *Introduction to the Talmud and the Midrash*, 295–296. Ben-Eliyahu, Cohn and Millar, *Handbook of Jewish Literature*, 85.

¹¹¹ Strack and Stemmerger, *Introduction to the Talmud and the Midrash*, 305–306.

the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan was not seen as reputable. This could be due to their different places of conception, the Onkelos in Babylonia and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan in Palestine. It could also be due to the fact that the Targum Onkelos is substantially earlier, being dated from the 1st to 2nd century as opposed to the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan in the 6th to 8th century, in terms of a final redaction.¹¹² Finally, it could also be due to their striking differences in interpretation. The Targum Onkelos is usually very close to the biblical text, however, does still make interpretative choices in changing words and sometimes leaving them out entirely. The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan takes a less subtle approach, often adding whole sentences that are not present in the Hebrew Bible, meaning verses are often interpreted nearly beyond recognition. This Targum is particularly interesting for this study of Islam, as it was written contemporarily to the rise of Islam, with some arguing that traces of polemic against Islam can be seen within the text itself.¹¹³

¹¹² See C.T.R Hayward, *Targums and the Transmission of Scripture into Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 432–445. Ben-Eliyahu, Cohn and Millar, *Handbook of Jewish Literature*, 115, 118.

¹¹³ Robert Hayward, “Targum Pseudo-Jonathan And Anti-Islamic Polemic,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34, no.1 (1989): 77–93.

1.10. A Note on Primary Sources

The Hebrew Bible references are all taken from the fifth edition of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.¹¹⁴ The Qur'anic quotations are taken from the standard Royal Cairo 1924 edition of the Qur'an.¹¹⁵ English translations are all my own unless stated otherwise, the original Hebrew has been taken from edited manuscripts. The *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael* is the critical edition by Jacob Z. Lauterbach and David M. Stern.¹¹⁶ The *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon Bar Yoḥai* is the critical edition by W. David Nelson.¹¹⁷ *Pesiqta de Rav Kahana* is the critical edition by William G. Braude.¹¹⁸ The *Tanhuma Buber* is the 1885 version, edited by Solomon Buber.¹¹⁹ The *Tanhuma Yelammedenu* is the edited version by Samuel Berman.¹²⁰ The

¹¹⁴ K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, eds., *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1997).

¹¹⁵ *Royal Cairo Edition of the Qur'an* (Cairo: Al-Azhar University, 1924).

¹¹⁶ Jacob Z. Lauterbach and David M. Stern, *Mekhilta De-Rabbi Ishmael* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004).

¹¹⁷ W. David Nelson, *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Shimon Bar Yoḥai* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006).

¹¹⁸ William G. Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati: discourses for feasts, fasts, and special Sabbaths* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968).

¹¹⁹ S. Buber, Midrash *Tanhuma haKadum veHaYashan* (Wilna: Wittwe & Gebrüder Romm, 1885). https://www.sefaria.org/Midrash_Tanhuma_Buber?lang=bi

¹²⁰ Samuel A. Berman, trans., *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu: An English Translation of Genesis and Exodus from the Printed Version of Tanhuma-Yelammedenu With an Introduction, Notes, and Indexes*. (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishers, 1996). https://www.sefaria.org/Midrash_Tanhuma?lang=bi.

Talmud Bavli is the Noé Koren edition, edited by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz.¹²¹ All of these texts have been digitised by the National Library of Israel, and were accessed through Sefaria.

The transliteration style from both Arabic and Hebrew is taken from the SBL handbook of style.¹²² Sources are presented vocalised unless the manuscript they were taken from is un-vocalised.

¹²¹ Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, ed., *Noé Edition Koren Talmud Bavli* (Jerusalem: Koren, 2012-2020).

¹²² Billie Jean Collins, ed., *SBL Handbook of Style: For Biblical Studies and Related Disciplines* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2014).

II. Encounters with Pharaoh in the Hebrew Bible, Rabbinic Literature and the

Qur'an

Introduction

One of the most compelling narratives within the Moses saga, which runs from Exodus 2 through to his death in Deuteronomy 34, is that of the Plagues narrative. The biblical account is long, running to 7 chapters from the competition between Moses and Pharaoh's sorcerers in Exodus 7 to the conclusion at the Reed Sea in Exodus 14. The Qur'an does not go over the whole Plagues narrative but is very interested in one particular part of this narrative, Moses' competition with the sorcerers of Pharaoh in Exodus 7:8–13. This encounter is mentioned thirteen times in the Qur'an, appearing in Sūrahs Al-'A'rāf Al-Yūnus, Hūd, Al-'Isrā', Ṭā' Hā', Al-Mu'minūn, Al-Shu'arā', Al-Naml, Al-Qaṣaṣ, Ghāfir, Al-Zukhruf and Al-Dhāriyāt and Al-Nāz'iāt. As well as small differences in each sūrah, such as precise wording and length, there are also larger structural and episodic differences which make some versions very different from another. Due to their varying length, narratives go into different levels of detail, as well as some featuring plot points that do not appear in the

biblical text. There are also events that do appear in the Hebrew Bible but not in the narrative in which they appear in the Qur'an.

There are four features that are particularly interesting that will be examined regarding the Qur'anic retellings of Exodus 7:8–13, these are; the 'leprous hand' of Moses from Exodus 4:6–7, the role of Pharaoh, the submission of the sorcerers and the Plagues. One very interesting feature across these narratives is the inclusion of parts of Exodus 4:6–7 in a Qur'anic narrative that resembles Exodus 7:8–13. Exodus 4:6–7 features God performing miracles just for Moses: Moses' staff is turned into a serpent, Moses' hand becomes leprous and God tells Moses how to make water into blood. In Exodus 7:8–13, the staff is turned into a serpent again and the sorcerers imitate this trick but there are no leprous hands. The Qur'an however includes the leprous, now 'white' hand, in versions of both of these narratives. The role of Pharaoh in the Hebrew Bible is certainly a villainous one but he actually has very little direct speech or characterisation. In the Qur'an, his speech has been increased and he uses it to make threats of violence, making him seem considerably more villainous. The submission of the sorcerers following the first meeting with Pharaoh does not occur in the biblical version but reoccurs in the Qur'an. Later in the Plagues narrative, the sorcerers

admit to seeing the work of God but they do not prostrate themselves as in the Qur'anic text. Finally, we shall examine the Plagues. There is one mention of five of the plagues, in a different order than that of the Hebrew Bible. However, short allusions to them are made in almost every mention of this story.

These features in the Qur'anic interpretation of the narratives of Moses' encounters with Pharaoh all show the removal of features that portray Moses negatively, as well as those that are irrelevant for the Islamic cause. These features are then replaced with themes that would be familiar to a Qur'anic audience. Moses' leprous hand carries the negative connotations of the disease of leprosy, as can be seen in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish Sources, as well as in the New Testament and Islamic sources. This is replaced with the idea of 'whiteness', which has positive connotations in the Qur'an as a sign of God and is developed later into ideas that all of the Prophets shone. The character of Pharaoh is made to appear more punitive and arrogant through his words and threats against his sorcerers, making him fit into a Qur'anic narrative of arrogant unbelievers. The sorcerers submit to God much earlier, making God not only seem more impressive but the nature of their submission is notably Islamic in the way they prostrate themselves. The Plagues have a less specific

importance to Islam as they do not see themselves as genealogically linked to those Israelites who were freed, as such only the 'clear signs' of God's power remain, as they are still relevant to the monotheistic message of the Qur'an.

2.1. The ‘Leprous’ and ‘White’ hands of Moses

Introduction

When God first appears to Moses in the Burning Bush narrative in Exodus 3–4, Moses raises doubts about his legitimacy as a candidate to communicate God’s message to the children of Israel and Pharaoh. God then shows two miracles to Moses, these are the turning of Moses’ shepherding staff into a snake and the turning of Moses’ hand white with leprosy. However, in the Qur’an this event is retold in both its original position in the Exodus 4 narrative, in Sūrahs Ṭā’ Hā’, Al-Naml and Al- Qaṣaṣ, and also in a new position in the biblical Exodus 7 narrative, in Sūrahs Al-’A’rāf and Al-Shu‘arā’. This causes the now ‘white/ابيض’ hand to be shown to Pharaoh and his people, instead of just Moses alone. The Qur’anic version of this event includes lexical differences, as well as a different audience to the Exodus narrative. In turn, this affects the characterisation of Moses as well as the portrayal of God’s intentions and the effect the act has on its intended audience.

The ‘leprous hand’ is mentioned five times across the Qur’an.¹²³ In the Hebrew Bible, the ‘leprous’ hand of Moses does not appear in Exodus 7 but instead in

¹²³ These occurrences are in Q 7:108, Q 20:22, Q 26:33, Q 27:12 and Q 28:32.

Exodus 4. The ‘white hand’ of Moses appears in the narratives of the competition between Moses and the sorcerers in Sūrahs Al-ʿAʿrāf and Al-Shuʿarāʾ. This could be an unintentional conflation of the stories as both stories feature the miracle of Moses turning his staff into a snake. Repetitive literary formulas are common in the Hebrew Bible and are present in the Moses stories, it could be that the snake and the white hand were seen as a literary formula, a necessary pairing.¹²⁴ Lastly, there is also the possibility that this combination has been created with a purpose in mind. This argument is convincing as in the retellings of this story in Q Ṭāʾ Hāʾ 20:22, Q Al-Naml 27:12 and Q Al- Qaṣaṣ 28:32, the narrative appears in its biblical position during the Burning Bush narrative. This signals that there was knowledge that this event was not necessarily from the Pharaoh and Sorcerers tradition. It is clear that both traditions were known and available to the compilers and that editorial choices must have been made.

The ambiguous nature of the leprous hand scene in Exodus 4, combined with other scenes in which similar vocabulary is used, makes a wide range of interpretations possible. Despite the very different objectives of Jewish and

¹²⁴ One example is the formula from the Plagues narrative where God orders Moses to tell Aaron to enact the plague (Exod 7:19, 8:5, 8:16).

Islamic interpreters, midrashic traditions and the Qur'an agree that this tradition has negative connotations. However, the ways they choose to deal with this are very different, with the Qur'an creating a new narrative in which this is much more clearly a sign of God's power.

2.1.1. The Leprous Hand of Moses in the Hebrew Bible

Moses receives leprosy in Exodus 4:6–7 during the Burning Bush narrative. The main question is why Moses is given leprosy by God. At the time Moses is given leprosy, Moses and God are discussing that Moses must go to Egypt. This event is often seen as a confirmatory miracle, part of Moses' prophetic call narrative. However, leprosy is steeped in negative connotations throughout the Hebrew Bible, so the question as to what it means here remains. There is also the question as to why the miracle of the leprosy is not repeated in front of Pharaoh in Exodus 7, as the miracles of the snake and the blood that also occur here in Exodus 4 are present in Exodus 7. Although leprosy itself is always negative, similar ideas, such as other things being 'כַּשֵּׁלֶג/like snow', can be used positively. With this in mind, Exodus 4 can be linked to another scene in which Moses' body is modified by God, Exodus 34. These scenes are linked by imagery about

shining and show the existence of both positive and negative traditions surrounding the ideas of a body that is white and/or shining.

Moses' encounter with God at the Burning Bush contains three signs of which leprosy is the second in Exodus 4:6–7:

And God said to him (Moses): Please Put your hand in your breast again. And he put his hand into his breast and brought it out, and behold, his hand was leprous as snow. And he (God) said: Return your hand to your breast. And he returned his hand to his breast and he brought it out, and behold, it had returned as his flesh.

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה לוֹ עוֹד הִבֵּא־נָא יָדְךָ בְּחִיקְךָ וַיָּבֵא יָדוֹ בְּחִיקוֹ וַיּוֹצֵאָהּ וְהִנֵּה יָדוֹ מְצֻרֶעֶת
בְּשֵׁלֶג. וַיֹּאמֶר הָשֵׁב יָדְךָ אֶל־חִיקְךָ וַיָּשֻׁב יָדוֹ אֶל־חִיקוֹ וַיּוֹצֵאָהּ מִחִיקוֹ וְהִנֵּה־שָׁבָה
כְּבָשָׂרוֹ:

Brevard S. Childs and Martin Noth argue this scene should be interpreted to be part of Moses' prophetic call.¹²⁵ Prophetic call narratives in the Hebrew Bible were first studied in detail by Norman Habel who divided them into two difference types: that of the throne calls and the narrative calls.¹²⁶ The call of Moses in Exodus 3–4 falls into the latter category as he is being spoken to directly by God. Habel also separated these calls into six sections: the divine

¹²⁵ Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Indiana: SCM Press, 1974), 78. Martin Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 45. Brian Britt, "Prophetic Concealment in a Biblical Type Scene," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (January 2002): 38.

¹²⁶ Norman Habel "The Form and Significance of the Call Narratives," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 77 (October, 1965): 298–301.

confrontation, the introductory word, the commission, the objection, the reassurance and the sign.¹²⁷ In Moses' call, all these aspects are present. The snake, leprosy and blood all fall into the final category of signs.

Moses' call is not the only call narrative to feature body modification. The calls of Ezekiel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Enoch all feature body modification. In the narrative calls of Jeremiah and Enoch, God touches Jeremiah's mouth in order to improve his speech and asks Enoch to wash his eyes with clay so that he might see clearly (Jer. 1:6 and Moses 6:36, respectively). Even in the throne calls of Ezekiel and Isaiah, body modification occurs. Isaiah has a hot coal placed on his lips so that his guilt is removed and Ezekiel eats a scroll in order than he may know its contents (Is. 6:6–7 and Ez. 3:1–3, respectively). Although all of these calls include the prophet's body being altered by God, all except Moses have an obvious purpose. All of the other modifications cause personal improvement in the prophet, whether to his speech, sight or knowledge.

All three of Moses' signs involve his hand. The staff is in his hand, the leprosy occurs to his hand and the drops of blood come from his hand. The relevance of Moses' hand is that from it he will bring forth the Plagues. Moses does not bring

¹²⁷ Habel, "Call Narratives," 299.

forth all of the Plagues physically but he is involved in the plagues of Boils, Hail, Locusts and Darkness (Exod 9:10–10:22). The Plague of Boils is enacted by Aaron and Moses and only says ‘they took soot/אֶת־פִּיחַ וַיִּקְחוּ’, implying the use of their hands but not explicitly. The plagues of Hail, Locusts and Darkness all specifically mention Moses’ hand (Exod 9:22, 10:12 and 10:22). The plague of Hail also involves Moses stopping it with his hands (Exod 9:33). Although Moses’ prophetic call does not express specifically what new characteristic he has been granted, it seems that his hand has been given the power to create miracles.¹²⁸ The plagues of Hail and Locusts also involve his staff, indicating further connection between the staff and the hand, and indeed, these plagues and the signs of Moses’ prophetic call in Exodus 4:2–9.

Although Moses’ leprosy gives him the power to make miracles, all other occasions of leprosy in the Hebrew Bible are as punishments from God. The first example of leprosy in the Hebrew Bible is that of Miriam, sister of Moses, who is punished when speaking out against Moses and God. The precise nature of her complaint is subject to debate as she talks of a 'Cushite woman' but the

¹²⁸ One could see a problem here, as Aaron’s hand also seems to possess this power to make miracles and he has no formal prophetic call narrative where he received signs. However, in Exodus 7:2, it does say that Aaron will be Moses’ prophet suggesting that what powers Moses has, Aaron will too.

complaint seems to be about her own status, or indeed lack of it.¹²⁹ Miriam is being punished for 'bad speech/לְשׁוֹן הַרְעָע' against Moses, the Cushite woman and ultimately, God.¹³⁰ The next person cursed with leprosy is Gehazi, servant of Elisha in 2 Kings 5:20–27. Elisha cures Naaman, King of Aram, of leprosy and refuses to accept payment. His servant, Gehazi, then accepts payment behind Elisha's back for which he is cursed with leprosy in 2 Kings 5:27. D. P. O'Brien notes that traditionally Gehazi is cursed for greed but also that he is disobedient, mirroring the Israelites.¹³¹ The final case of leprosy in the Hebrew Bible is that of King Uzziah, who lights the Temple incense, against the wishes of the priests (2 Chron 26:16–21). As Uzziah does this, leprosy breaks out on his forehead. Sara Japhet suggests that the speed at which the leprosy breaks out on his forehead in 2 Chronicles 26:21 is to reinforce the impurity of leprosy within the total purity of the Temple setting.¹³² From the examples of Miriam, Gehazi and Uzziah, it seems that the Hebrew Bible understands the disease of leprosy to be

¹²⁹ Rita J. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only Through Moses: A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 3–4.

¹³⁰ Naomi Graetz, "Did Miriam Talk too Much?" in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 232–233.

¹³¹ D. P. O'Brien, "'Is This the Time to Accept...?' (2 Kings V 26B): Simply Moralizing (LXX) or an Ominous Foreboding of Yahweh's Rejection of Israel (MT)?" *Vetus Testamentum* 46, no. 4 (October 1996): 448–457.

¹³² Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles* (London: SCM Press, 1993), 884.

negative and used as a form of punishment. Therefore, it would follow that Moses' leprosy may also be a form of punishment.

Although objection is one of the five features of a prophetic call, Moses raises not one but five objections to becoming a prophet (Exod 3:11,13, 4:1, 10, 13).

Moses' leprosy occurs after three objections. Finally, in Exodus 4:14, 'The Lord's anger burned against Moses/וַיִּחַר־אַף יְהוָה בְּמֹשֶׁה. As much as Moses' objections do make God angry eventually, God is only angry after he has already cured Moses. It is impossible to say whether God has been angry throughout the scene as his anger is only expressed much later in the scene. With so little of God's motivation explained, it is difficult to substantiate the idea of leprosy as a punishment for Moses.

Although leprosy is given as a punishment, it is interesting to note the descriptor, 'as snow/כְּשֵׁלֶג', can be used positively. Moses, Miriam and Gehazi are all described as 'leprous as snow/מִצְרֵעַת כְּשֵׁלֶג'. In Isaiah 1:18, the sins of the community will be 'as white as snow/יִלְבִּינּוּ יִלְבָּיֵן' when they are cleansed.¹³³ In Daniel 7:9, God's clothing is described as 'white as snow/כְּתֵלַג חֲנֹךְ' in Daniel's

¹³³ In the Leviticus Rabbah this verse is used to describe the way God cares for converts to Judaism, linking those who convert to Judaism to this positive description, Leviticus Rabbah 1:2.

dream. In both Isaiah 1:18 and Daniel 7:9, the colour is white, ‘as snow/כְּתֹלַג’ and ‘as wool/כְּעֵמָר’. Although the word for ‘white’ is different, ‘wax pale/חָוֵר’ in Daniel 7:9, the words for ‘snow’ and ‘wool’ remain the same.¹³⁴ These double descriptions are typical Hebrew uses of parallelism, a technique which allows the author to repeat the same idea with different words, mirroring each other for emphasis.¹³⁵ These examples show that although the disease of leprosy may have had negative connotations, there was clearly not just one interpretation of ‘as snow/כְּשֵׁלֶג’. This descriptor can be used to express both positive and negative ideas.

Brian Britt suggests that prophetic call narrative of Exodus 3–4 is linked to a more positive scene in Exodus 34 in which Moses face shines (Exod 34:29–32):

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Moses came down from Mount Sinai. And Moses had two tablets of testimony in his hands when he came down from the mountain. Moses did not know that the skin of his face was shining as he had spoken with him. And

¹³⁴ It is possible that the word used for ‘white’ (NRSV, NIV, KJV) in Judges 5:10 to describe the donkeys ‘צחרות’, from the root ‘צחור’, is also connected to this root of ‘חור’. It is translated as ‘glistening, light reddish’ in Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1273.

¹³⁵ Although to what extent parallelism is essential to Hebrew poetry is much debated, its prevalence in both poetry and prose cannot be denied. For a survey of attitudes surrounding Hebrew poetry and parallelism in particular; see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

¹³⁶ Brian Britt, “Prophetic Concealment in a Biblical Type Scene,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (January 2002), 37–58.

Aaron and the Israelites saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face was shining. And they feared to approach him.

וַיְהִי בְרִדָּת מֹשֶׁה מֵהָר סִינַי וְשָׁנִי לַחַת הָעֵדֻת בֵּי־מֹשֶׁה בְּרִדָּתוֹ מִן־הָהָר וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא־
יָדַע כִּי קָרַן עוֹר פָּנָיו בְּדַבְּרוֹ אֵתִי. וַיֵּרָא אֶהָרֹן וְכָל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וְהִנֵּה קָרַן
עוֹד פָּנָיו וַיִּירְאוּ מִגִּשְׁתֹּת אֱלֹהֵי:

This is another occasion in which God has modified Moses' body and yet again it does not seem clear as to why. However, in this case the reaction of an audience, Aaron and the elders, is provided. Although they find Moses' face frightening, Moses' own feelings are not described, nor is God's reasoning. A simple reading might suggest that being in God's presence causes this shining effect. This would require Moses to shine each time he was in God's presence. Childs and Cassuto suggest that, although the shining goes unmentioned after Exodus 34, the text implicitly suggests that it is still happening through the use of the frequentative tense.¹³⁷ Childs argues that the shining only happens at the point of Exodus 34 and afterwards due to the making of the covenant.¹³⁸ Joshua Philpot agrees that the shining here represents Moses' role as a covenant mediator.¹³⁹ Although Childs and Philpot relate this scene to the concept of covenant, they fail to argue as to why Moses would shine in this case. Britt

¹³⁷ Childs, *Exodus*, 617. Cassuto, *Commentary on Exodus*, 450.

¹³⁸ Childs, *Exodus*, 617–618.

¹³⁹ Joshua M. Philpot, "Exodus 34:29–35 and Moses' Shining Face," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 23, no. 1 (2013): 6–7.

argues that a prophet will be recommissioned in times when the community has done something terrible, such as the Golden Calf incident of Exodus 32.¹⁴⁰

Britt's idea of prophetic recommissioning links Exodus 4 and Exodus 34 and provides a reason for Moses' body to be modified once more, it is another sign of his prophetic call.

Unlike in Exodus 4, Moses is not diseased in Exodus 34 but he is shining which is similar to being white. The Hebrew word for light, 'אור', can mean a light, as in light in colour and to make something light, to make it shine.¹⁴¹ The word, 'אור', is not actually used in Exodus 34:29–35, however, it is alluded to.

'קרן/beams of light' is used in Exodus 34:32 and there is word play as his skin, 'עור', that is shining. The word 'light/אור' and 'skin/עור' are pronounced similarly in Hebrew but spelt with a א/ע respectively, leaving room for poetic suggestion, called *al tikrei*, which is common in Hebrew poetry and prose.¹⁴² Although the vocabulary is different, the concept of Moses being altered to be white or shining appears not only to be similar but just as mysterious when it comes to God's motivations.

¹⁴⁰ Britt, "Prophetic Concealment," 38.

¹⁴¹ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 32.

¹⁴² For a list of Rabbinic techniques, see Strack and Stemberger, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 17–34.

The signs of the snake and the blood are both repeated before Pharaoh, giving them a specific purpose but not the sign of the leprosy. Childs and Noth argue that this shows a difference in oral traditions and in that there probably was another tradition that involved the leprous hand being displayed before Pharaoh.¹⁴³ As much as this is an attractive theory, there is unfortunately no evidence available to back it up. Even with a conservative estimate of the cycles of editing Exodus has undergone, surely this sequence could have been harmonised so that all three signs appeared in both narratives. The fact that the Exodus 7 narrative appears without the sign of leprosy being present is intentional.

Throughout the Bible, ideas of whiteness and light can be seen in multiple ways which allow for different interpretations. In Exodus 4, it is unclear as to why Moses receives leprosy, leaving open both positive and negative possibilities. The disease of leprosy is resoundingly negative in other parts of the Hebrew Bible, however, the language that describes it can be used for things that are positive in nature. Another scene in which Moses' body is altered, Exodus 34, is also open to interpretation, as it is frightening to onlookers but does not affect

¹⁴³ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 74. Noth, *Exodus*, 45.

Moses. Considering this lack of clarity in both Exodus 4 and 34, it is no surprise that these scenes were of interest to later interpreters. In midrashic and targumic traditions, there are concerted attempts to clarify whether Exodus 4 and 34 contain positive or negative messages.

2.2.2. Leprosy in Midrashic Collections

In Midrashic collections and targums, the major trend is to interpret Moses' leprosy as a sign of God's anger towards Moses. The most common way to argue this in Midrashic collections is to use Exodus 4:1, where Moses assumes the Israelites will not believe him, to account for his punishment. Talmudic Literature, the Tanhumas Buber and Yelammedenu use this verse to argue Moses' leprosy is due to slander, perpetuating a dispute and suspicion of the innocent. The Targum Onkelos differs from this trend, removing the word 'leprosy' altogether, presumably to protect Moses against any suggestion of wrongdoing. In contrast, the similar scene in Exodus 34, where Moses' face shines brightly, is read positively by the Septuagint, Tanhuma Yelammedenu and Buber as a reflection of the glory of the God. These interpretations show how differently these two events are received, due to the surrounding context and the word 'leprosy'.

That the word ‘leprosy’ is key to Moses’ guilt in Exodus 4 can be seen by the Targum Onkelos’ decision to remove it. The Targum Onkelos chooses to use the word ‘white/הַוֵּרָא’ in the place the word ‘leprous/מְצַרְעֵת’. As such, Exodus 4:6 becomes, ‘his hand was white as snow/יָדָהּ הַוֵּרָא כְּתֵלְגָא’. In the biblical material, ‘as snow/כְּתֵלְגָא’, can be used as positive descriptor, meaning it is now possible to read this event as positive in the Targum too. The negativity of the word ‘leprous/מְצַרְעֵת’ is shown by the fact the Targum Onkelos does not use it at any point. Instead using the word ‘סָגַר’, which literally means to be ‘shut up’ or ‘isolated’.¹⁴⁴ The implicit meaning is that you ‘shut up/isolate’ someone because they have leprosy and can’t be in contact with others. However, the use of euphemism makes the event seem more comfortable. This word is also used for almost all cases of leprosy in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.¹⁴⁵ That the Targum Onkelos removes all mention of ‘leprous/מְצַרְעֵת’ is particularly important as the

¹⁴⁴ Thus, it appears in Leviticus 13 when discussing when the priest must isolate the leper, (Lev. 13:4, 13:5, 13:11, 13:21, 13:26, 13:31, 13:33, 13:50, 13:54).

¹⁴⁵ ‘סָגַר’ is used to describe the leprosy of Moses, Naaman, Gehazi and Uzziah in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. ‘סָגַר’ is also used throughout chapters 13 and 14 of Leviticus with three exceptions, where ‘צַרְעָתָא’ is used (Lev. 13:45, 14:2 and 14:57). These exceptions do not fall under one heading; those from Lev. 13:45 and 14:2 are referring to a leprosy person, ‘leprous/מְצַרְעֵת’, a participle form, and the exception from Lev. 14:57 is part of the construction ‘concerning leprosy?’. The only other exception is the leprosy of Miriam, during which she is cursed ‘with leprosy/בְּמַצְרַעְתָּא’. That the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan does retain some instances of the word, ‘צַרְעָתָא’, could be due to either the difference in time, location or language as it was composed some centuries later, in Jerusalem and in Western Palestinian Aramaic.

Targum Onkelos is, for the most part, a literal translation, unlike other targumim that seek to expand and comment, like the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan.¹⁴⁶ However, material about leprosy must have been considered so profane that it was removed.¹⁴⁷

In Sifra *Metzora* 3, a priest explains that leprosy, here called ‘הנגעים’, occurs it is due to slander:

He said to him preserved words: My son, leprosy comes only because of slander, as it is written (Dtr. 24:8).

יאמר לו דברי כבושים: בני אין הנגעים באים אלא על לשון הרע שנאמר

The Sifra makes it clear that when plague spots occur within a house, it is because someone has committed the sin of *lashon hara*. The same section of the Sifra also suggests pride as reason for leprosy, citing Uzziah, King of Judah, as an example. The Pesiqta de Rav Kahana agrees that pride causes leprosy in a tradition discussing cures in Piska 4:

Why is the leper cleansed with both tallest of the tall ones (trees), and the lowest of the lows ones? His answer was because when a man makes himself

¹⁴⁶ See N. Samet, “The Distinction Between Holy and Profane in Targum Onkelos,” *Megadim* 43 (2005): 73–86.

¹⁴⁷ The Targum Onkelos is not the only text to remove the word leprosy. Josephus and Philo use the phrase ‘whiter than snow’ and mentions of a ‘chalk’ coloured hand are used. The LXX simply removes the word leprous rendering the description simply ‘as snow’. These texts are all from the second century BCE to early second century CE, composed mostly in the Hellenistic period and into the Roman period, perhaps suggesting that discourse over a diseased hero was difficult in contrast with the model of a hero accepted by Greek and Roman cultures.

tall like a cedar, he is smitten with leprosy but when he humbles himself like hyssop, he is healed with hyssop.

אלא אמ' שלמה מפני מה מצורע זה מיטהר בגבוה שבגבוהים ובנמוך שבנמוכים
אלא על ידי שאם אדם זה מגביה את עצמו כארז הוא לוקה בצרעת וכיון שהוא
משפיל את עצמו כאזוב הוא מתרפא באיזוב

In these traditions from the Sifra and Pesiqta de Rav Kahana, two reasons for leprosy are discussed. Both the Pesiqta and the Sifra include traditions about pride causing leprosy, the former using the height of trees connected to the ritual to cure leprosy to explain this and the latter uses the biblical example of King Uzziah. Considering their differences, these seem very much like separate traditions. The Sifra also links leprosy to slander. It does not choose to expand on why plague within the house is caused by slander, although the verse it links to, Deuteronomy 24:8, talks of how one must take the advice of a priest in matters of leprosy. It is then followed by 'Remember what the Lord your God did to Miriam/למרים יהוה עשה את אשר עשה יהוה אלהיך למרים' in Deuteronomy 24:9. As will be shown below, Miriam is often linked to the disease of leprosy due to the perceived connection between leprosy and *lashon hara*.

In Talmud Bavli *Sanhadrin* 110a, it is argued that one who starts an argument, or 'perpetuates a dispute' can be cursed with leprosy and Exodus 4:6 is cited:

Reish Lakish says: From here we learn that one may not perpetuate a dispute, as Rav says: All who perpetuate a dispute transgress a prohibition, as it

is said: And he will not be like Korah and his audience (Num. 17.5). Rav Ashi says: he is fit to be afflicted with leprosy. It is written here: By the hand of Moses to him, and it is written there: And God said to him again: Now, put your hand into your breast (Exod 4:6).

ר"ל מכאן שכאן מחזיקין במחלוקת דאמר רב כל המחזיק במחלוקת עובר בלאו שנאמר (במדבר יז, ה) ולא יהיה כקרח וכעדתו רב אשי אמר ראוי ליצטרע כתיב הכא ביד משה לו וכתוב התם (שמות ד, ו) ויאמר ה' לו עוד הבא נא ידך בחיקך

The opinions of Resh Lakish and Rav Ashi also feature in the Tanhuma

Yelammedenu *Korah* 10:1. In this case, Moses' leprosy is mentioned according

to the sin of arguing. Certainly, Moses and God are engaged in a discussion that

much resembles an argument and if Moses would have agreed immediately it

would not have occurred, thus he is 'perpetuating a dispute'. This interpretation

carries over from the Talmud Bavli into the Tanhuma Yelammedenu and from

this is can be understood that this may have been a popular interpretation

around the time of the compilation of the Qur'an.

In the Talmud Bavli *Arachin* 15b, that the root meaning of the word for

'leprosy/צרעה' is because it is the law for one who slanders:

Resh Lakish said: What is that which is written 'this shall be the law of the leper? This will be the law of one who brings out an evil name.¹⁴⁸

אמר ריש לקיש מאי דכתיב זאת תהיה תורת המצורע זאת תהיה תורתו מוציא
שם רע

¹⁴⁸ A similar version of this is present in the Tanhuma Buber, Metzora 1.

This interpretation from the Tanhuma Buber, makes the word for leprosy into an acronym so that the very root of leprosy is one who slanders. Midrash Tanhuma Buber also agrees in *Shemot* 20:6 that Moses has slandered the children of Israel in saying that they would not believe him and therefore he is given leprosy.¹⁴⁹ This interpretation can be connected to those seen in earlier works of Halakhic and Aggadic midrash from the Sifra and Pesiqta de Rav Kahana, making this an enduring interpretation that carries over several centuries.

A reading is given in Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Metzora* 4 in order to explain why people are cursed with leprosy which expands beyond slander, that is:

From eleven things come plagues of leprosy upon man: with idolatry, with desecration of the name, with lewdness, with stealing, with slander, with bearing false witness, from a judge who corrupts the law, with false swearing, with illegal entry, with thinking false thoughts, and with one who causes strife between brothers.

עַל אַחַת עֲשָׂרָה דְבָרִים הַנִּגָּעִים בְּאִים עַל הָאָדָם. עַל עֲבוּדָה זָרָה, וְעַל חִלּוּל הַשֵּׁם, וְעַל גְּלוּי עֲרִיזוֹת, וְעַל הַגְּנִיבוֹת, וְעַל לְשׁוֹן הָרַע, וְעַל הַמַּעֲיֵד עֵדוֹת שֶׁקֶר, וְעַל הַדִּין הַמְּקַלְקֵל אֶת הַדִּין, וְעַל שְׂבוּעַת שְׁוֹא, וְעַל הַנִּכְנָס בְּתַחֲוִים שְׂאִינוֹ שְׁלוֹ, וְעַל הַחוֹשֵׁב מַחֲשָׁבוֹת שֶׁל שֶׁקֶר, וְעַל הַמְּשַׁלַּח מְדַנִּים בֵּין אַחִים.

¹⁴⁹ Medieval Jewish commentator Rashi (d. 1105) also takes the view that Moses is being punished for slander and cites his sister's punishment as proof; Rashi (on Exodus 4:6:1).

Within this section, each biblical case of leprosy is applied to one of these categories.¹⁵⁰ Miriam is cursed for slander, Uzziah for entering a domain that is not his and Naaman for pride. *Metzora* 4:1 includes the leprosy of Moses in this list, connecting it with his words in Exodus 4:1, when he asks what he will do if the people of Israel do not believe that the Lord appeared to him. The Tanhuma makes the judgement, ‘But it is necessary for you to be afflicted, as one who suspects the innocent is afflicted in his body/ אֵלֵא צָרִיד אֶתָּה לְלִקּוֹת שְׂכָל הַחוֹשֵׁד / אֵלֵא צָרִיד אֶתָּה לְלִקּוֹת שְׂכָל הַחוֹשֵׁד’, presumably putting him in the category of thinking false thoughts. Almost this exact wording can be found in Talmud Bavli Shabbat 97a as the opinion of Resh Lakish on this topic. The Tanhuma specifically connects Moses’ lack of belief in the Israelites to his being afflicted with leprosy, making it clear that his case of leprosy is also punishment for a specific behaviour.

In another section of the Tanhuma Yelammedenu, Moses’ disbelief in the Israelites from Exodus 4:1 is also linked his being cursed with leprosy. In Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Shemot* 23:2, Exodus 4:1 and 4:6–7 are again quoted together. On this occasion, the Tanhuma Yelammedenu uses an alternative reading of ‘*mazeh*/מָזֶה/what is this?’, reading it instead as ‘*mizeh*/with this’ in

¹⁵⁰ This list and these interpretations can also be found in Tanhuma Buber *Metzora* 10.

ascertained is that this tradition of personal sins causing leprosy continued to grow in the next centuries. Leprosy is always seen as a form of punishment and thus, using the Midrashic logic Moses was given leprosy in Exodus 4 as a form of punishment for his disbelief in the people or in God. These attitudes would have been circulating during the time of the composition of the Qur'an and are important to consider.

One completely different interpretation is given in the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Shemot* 23:2. This is that the leprosy given to Moses is symbolic of the unclean state of Egypt. In this interpretation the leprosy is not about Moses and thus does not affect his characterisation at all. In Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Shemot* 23:2, God explains why he has turned the rod into a snake and Moses' hand white:

So he said to him: Like a snake bites and destroys, so the Egyptians bite the Israelites. After that it was made into a tree, for the Egyptians were to become like a withered tree. He said to him: Now place your hand in your breast and behold, his hand was leprosy (Exod 4:6), for as leprosy is an impure thing, so the Egyptians were impure and made the Israelites impure. And he returned his hand in his breast and behold, it returned as his flesh. So I will cleanse Israel from the impurities of Egypt.

אָלָא אָמַר לוֹ: כְּשֵׁם שֶׁהַנָּחָשׁ נוֹשֵׁךְ וּמְמִית, כֵּן מִצְרַיִם נוֹשְׁכִין וּמְמִיתִין אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל.
וְאַחַר כֵּן נַעֲשֶׂה כְּעֵץ, כֵּן יִהְיוּ הַמִּצְרַיִם לְעֵץ יָבֵשׁ. אָמַר לוֹ: הֲבֵיא נָא יָדְךָ בְּחִיקוֹךָ,
וְהִנֵּה יָדוֹ מְצֻרֶת. מֵהַ הִצְרַעַת דְּבַר טָמֵא, כֵּן הַמִּצְרַיִם טָמְאִין וּמְטַמְּאִין אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל.
וַיָּשָׁב יָדוֹ אֶל חִיקוֹ וְהִנֵּה שָׁבָה כְּבָשָׂרוֹ, כֵּן אֲנִי מְטַהֵר אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל מִטְּמֵאת מִצְרַיִם.

This interpretation shows exactly the problem with the biblical passage in Exodus 4:6–7. The writer of this midrash has seen the ambiguity in the intention of these verses and creates an interpretation imagining that God had explained his actions. In this interpretation, each part of the scene from Exodus 4 is interpreted as a prophecy of what is to happen to the Egyptians. Each part is understood symbolically, the snake is the temperament of the Egyptians and the leprosy is an unspecified ‘impurity’. However, when other Midrashic sources discuss the Egyptians and their Pharaoh, the two most likely meanings seem to be idolatry or some kind of sexual perversion, as seen in the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael and the Tanhuma Yelammedenu.¹⁵³ This interpretation from the Tanhuma Yelammedenu is interesting as it almost removes Moses from the scene, he is merely a vessel for God to show his prophecy. This is a very different interpretation from those previously seen, leprosy is understood to be connected to the person who receives it and therefore affects how the character of Moses is understood in this scene.¹⁵⁴ This interpretation has chosen to represent the sins of Egypt over criticising or glorifying Moses thus removing any agency from him.

¹⁵³ As seen in the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael 12:6 and Tanhuma Yelammedenu Vaera 9.

¹⁵⁴ As seen in the Tanhuma Yelammedenu Metzora 4.

Although Moses' hand from Exodus 4 is usually interpreted negatively in midrashic interpretations, his face from Exodus 34 is unanimously positive. A positive interpretation of Moses' face shining after his meetings with God is also understood in post-biblical Jewish tradition. The Septuagint translation describes Moses' face as 'glorified/δεδοχασται', clearly taking these rays of light to be a positive phenomenon, signs of glory even. This approach is also found in the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Bereshit* 1:11, where the beams of light are seen as a reward:

Our teachers said: in reward for three things (Moses) was granted three things. As a reward for Moses hiding his face (Exod 3:6), he was granted the shining of his face (Deut 34:30).

וְאָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ: בְּשֹׁכֵר שְׁלֵשָׁה, זָכָה לְשֵׁלֶשָׁה. בְּשֹׁכֵר וַיִּסְתֵּר מִפְּנֵי מֹשֶׁה פָּנָיו, זָכָה לְקַלְסֵתֵר פָּנָיו.

This is not the only time the Tanhuma Yelammedenu makes reference to the beams of light as a divine reward for Moses. The Tanhuma Yelammedenu uses this interpretation twice more; another example is from *Ki Tisa* 37:1:

And it was as Moses came down from Mount Sinai, and Moses did not know that he shone (Exod 34:29). From where did Moses deserve distinctive beams of light? Our teachers of blessed memory said: From the cave, as it is said: And as my glory passes by, I will put you in a hollow of the rock (Exod 33:22). The Holy One, blessed be he, put the palm of his hand upon him, and from there he deserved distinctive beams of light.

וַיְהִי בְרִדְתָּ מֹשֶׁה מִהָרַם סִינַי, וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא יָדַע כִּי קָרַן. מִנֵּי זָכָה מֹשֶׁה לְקָרְנֵי הַהוֹד.
 אָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זְכוּרָנוּם לְבִרְכָה: מִן הַמְעַרְהָ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְהָיָה בְּעֵבֶר כְּבֹדֵי וְשִׁמְתִּידָ
 בְּנִקְרַת הַצּוֹר (שְׁמוֹת לֵג, כב). נִתֵּן הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא כִּפּוּ יְדוֹ עָלָיו, וּמִשָּׁם זָכָה לְקָרְנֵי
 הַהוֹד

This interpretation focusses on the closeness of God and Moses. Moses is shining as he ‘merits’ it but this is because he has been close to God. The Tanhuma Buber *Chukat* 16 quotes Exodus 34:30, ‘the skin of Moses’ face was shining/עור פניו פָּנִי’, in conjunction with Ecclesiastes 8:1, ‘a person’s wisdom lights up their face/תֵּאִיר פְּנֵי/וֹ’. The clear reading of this interpretation is that Moses’ face shone due to his wisdom. From both the Tanhuma Yelammedenu and Buber, it would appear that to be shining from the face is very positive and means that God has rewarded you. Light being emitted from the body can also be understood positively as a reward. The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan also interprets this verse making it clear to the reader that these beams are positive. After ‘Moses did not know the skin of his face was radiant/וּמֹשֶׁה לֹא יָדַע כִּי קָרַן עוֹר פְּנֵי’, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan includes ‘...with the splendour that had come upon him for the brightness of the glory of the Shekhina of the Lord in the time of his speaking with him’. This makes the reader absolutely clear that this shining is the glory of the Lord having been transferred to Moses.

Although the images of light in the two stories of Exodus 4 and 34 may be interpreted differently, one negatively and one positively, it is not only in their use of imagery that they are alike. For they both function within the plot as covenant markers. The white hand of Moses in Exodus 4 can be interpreted as a marker of the covenant between God and Moses personally, as it is before God has taken his covenant to the people. Exodus 34 is after Moses has taken the covenant to the people and it has been agreed. The shining of Moses' face in this situation is the final covenant marker of this kind using light imagery. It symbolises that the relationship between God and his people has been cemented. If both of these events are to be interpreted as covenant markers then surely they are both positive moments. However, there is a definite difference in interpretation in Rabbinic literature, with Exodus 4 being interpreted as negative and Exodus 34 as very positive.

2.1.3. The 'White/بيضاء' Hand of Moses in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, Moses' 'leprous hand' is interpreted as 'white/بَيُّضَاءَ' removing negative ideas of disease and divine punishment from this scene. However, in three of these occasions the Qur'an includes the caveat of 'white without disease/بَيُّضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ', clearly aware of the biblical context of this event. The

Qur'an shows the white hand three times in its Exodus 4 setting of the Burning Bush but it is also shown twice in front of Pharaoh during the competition between the Sorcerers and Moses. In this section, the differences in the overall narrative and particularly the specific terminology and setting will be examined. This will then be applied to the wider context of differences in presentation of prophets in the Qur'an and the Bible and Qur'anic attempts to model biblical prophets to resemble Muhammad.

Through the removal of the word 'leprous/צָרַעַת', the Qur'an removes the negative connotations of disease and punishment yet shows itself to be aware of them. The weight of the argument that this is a punishment for Moses has shifted substantially when the idea of disease has been removed and positive interpretations appear more convincing. The most literal translation from the Hebrew Bible would be 'leprous as snow' from the Hebrew in Exodus 4:6.¹⁵⁵ In two of the five mentions of Moses' hand in the Qur'an, it is simply described as 'white/بَيْضَاءَ' (Q Al-'A'rāf 7:108 and Q Al-Shu'arā' 26:33). In three of the five

¹⁵⁵ The root meaning 'leprous/צָרַעַת' is used 20 times in the Old Testament all referring to cases of leprosy or lepers as people. The descriptive element 'as snow/כַּשְׁלֵג' makes it clear the colour of the affliction that Moses receives here. Whether the disease we see as leprosy through the Greek translation to 'lepra/λεπρά' from the Septuagint may not be what we today consider leprosy, perhaps vitiligo or elephantiasis instead. The precise nature of the disease is not the important part but the stigma attached to it throughout the Bible instead. Discussion on this can be found in Gilbert Lewis, "A Lesson from Leviticus: Leprosy," *Man* 22, no. 4 (1987): 593–612.

times this event is mentioned the whiteness is elaborated on as 'white without disease/بَيْضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ' (Q Ṭā' Hā' 20:22, Q Al-Naml 27:12 and Q Al- Qaṣaṣ 28:32). This addition of 'without disease/بَيْضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ' shows knowledge of the idea that the hand is 'leprous/מַצְרֵעַת', as it actively denies this. If the Qur'an was not aware of the biblical context, it could just say 'white'. In the Bible, Moses puts his hand to his breast, takes it out, finds it to be leprous and then puts it back, after which the hand has returned to normal. In the Qur'an, he only brings it out 'white without disease/بَيْضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ'. It is possible that this verse is only based on the second part of the biblical exchange. However, this seems unlikely as although the process by which the hand became 'white' is missing, the hand is still described this way. Some translations, such as the Sahih International, translate Q 7:108 and Q 26:33 into English as 'white (with brilliance)'.¹⁵⁶ The bracketing shows the translator's awareness that this is not in the text but shows something about the sentiment that is expressed, that is, not that Moses' hand is

¹⁵⁶Emily Assami, Amatulla Bantley and Mary Kennedy, *The Holy Qur'an Sahih International translation* (Jeddah: Dar Abul Qasim Publishing House, 1997). Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali, *Interpretation of the Meanings of the Noble Qur'an* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 1999). Both these translations are from Saudi Arabia, with the latter translation being widely criticised for being steeped in Wahhabi theology. It is interesting, if not unsurprising, that translations from more stringent sects of Islam leave the least room for reader to interpret. Through the addition of (with brilliance), it is made clear that this event is positive, removing all other possibilities.

not necessarily diseased but shining and impressive. Despite this information not being in the text, it would explain the Qur'an's logic in keeping the white hand but removing the disease.

The white hand appears in two positions in the chronology of the Qur'an, the Burning Bush and Encounter with Pharaoh narratives which are equivalent to Exodus 4 and 7. Interestingly, considering the lexical differences above, those 'white hand' instances that happen before Pharaoh are just referred to as 'white/بَيْضَاءَ' (Sūrahs Al-'A'rāf and Al-Shu'arā') whereas those where Moses is just with God are 'white without disease/بَيْضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ' (Sūrahs Ṭā' Hā' Al-Naml, Al-Qaṣaṣ). In making this lexical choice, the Qur'anic compiler puts the Exodus 4 narrative in the Torah and the White Hand narrative as told before God in the Qur'an in direct conflict. By using the phrase 'white without disease/بَيْضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ' in the scenario where it was diseased in Exodus 4, the compiler shows knowledge of this fact and argues against it within the text. In contrast, it also makes clear the fact that the 'white/بَيْضَاءَ' hand before Pharaoh is new, as here there is no need to be combative within the text. The 'white/بَيْضَاءَ' hand before Pharaoh is never told in the same Sūrah as the 'white without disease/بَيْضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ' hand at the Burning bush. This suggests that the

compilers of the Qur'an were aware of the conflict of featuring this story twice. However, on the three occasions, the 'white without disease/بَيْضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ' hand appears before God (Q 20:22, Q 27:12, Q 28:32) and then a statement that makes clear that both these signs will be shown to Pharaoh is included. In Q 20:56 it states, 'And we caused Pharaoh to see all of our signs but he denied and refused/وَلَقَدْ أَرَيْنَاهُ آيَاتِنَا كُلَّهَا فَكَذَّبَ وَأَبَى', in Q 27:12 they are 'among the nine signs to Pharaoh and his people/فِي تِسْعِ آيَاتٍ إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ وَقَوْمِهِ' and in Q 28:32 they are 'the two proofs from your Lord to Pharaoh/بُرْهَانَانِ مِنْ رَبِّكَ إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ'. These statements suggest that both the sign of the snake and that of the 'white without disease/بَيْضَاءَ مِنْ غَيْرِ سُوءٍ' hand are shown to Pharaoh. Sūrat Al-Naml is more of a summary of these events, running only to seven ayas (Q 27:7–14) and does not repeat either of these signs, despite indicating that Pharaoh sees them, as he reacts 'this is magic manifest/هَذَا سِحْرٌ مُبِينٌ' in Q 27:13. In Sūrat Al-Qaṣaṣ, the competition with the sorcerers is also not featured but Pharaoh's reaction is recorded in Q28:36, where he says 'this is nothing but invented magic/هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُفْتَرٍ'. However, Sūrat Ṭā' Hā' shows the snake sign again (Q 20:69) as part of the magical competition with the magician but not that of the hand.¹⁵⁷ Out of

¹⁵⁷ It is worth noting that the sorcerers actively create their snakes in Q 20:66, whereas God tells Moses that he will in Q 20:69 and that it will swallow the sorcerers' snakes however it does not

these narratives, Sūrat Ṭā' Hā' features the longest Moses narrative which may explain why there is more detail present. However, in the shorter narratives, running to seven and forty ayas (in Sūrahs Al-Naml and Al- Qaṣaṣ, respectively), Pharaoh sees both signs. Both lexically and structurally, the compilers of the Qur'an's knowledge of the Exodus 4 tradition is made clear. They walk a delicate line, never including detailed versions of both traditions in one sūrah and yet implying that the white hand does appear both before God and Pharaoh in the sūrahs in which it only appears before God. This suggests both knowledge and a desire to avoid conflict despite the creation of what is a new narrative.

In the Qur'an, the context of the event has been changed so that Moses appears more willing to accept his commission and therefore there is no reason for him to be punished. In the Hebrew Bible, Moses objects to his commission on five occasions within the Burning Bush narrative (Exod 3:11,13, 4:1, 10, 13) and God's 'anger burned/יִחַר-אַף' against Moses in Exodus 4:14. In the Qur'an, this exchange between Moses and God occurs on two occasions but is considerably

then detail Moses doing this. It is made clear that he does from the sorcerers' reaction in Q 20:70.

shorter. In Sūrah Ṭā' Hā', this exchange takes place between Q 20:25–36 and includes some of Moses' objections from the Exodus narrative in Q 20:25–34:

He (Moses) said: expand for me my breast and ease for me my command and untie the knot from my tongue so they understand my voice. And appoint to me an assistant from my family, Aaron, my brother. Increase in him my strength and cause him to share in my command so we may exalt you highly and remember you often.

قَالَ رَبِّ اشْرَحْ لِي صَدْرِي وَيَسِّرْ لِي أَمْرِي وَاخْلُلْ عُقْدَةً مِّن لِّسَانِي يَفْقَهُوا قَوْلِي وَأَجْعَلْ لِّي وَزِيرًا مِّنْ أَهْلِي
هَارُونَ أَخِي اشْدُدْ بِهِ أَزْرِي وَأَشْرِكْهُ فِي أَمْرِي كَيْ نُسَبِّحَكَ كَثِيرًا وَنَذْكُرَكَ كَثِيرًا

This parallels his objection on account of his poor speech in Exodus 4:10. At this point in the Bible, God responds, leading Moses to object again, at which point God suggests that Aaron accompany him (Exod 4:15). In Sūrat Ṭā' Hā', Moses asks that Aaron go with him so that he might increase Moses' strength and share his task so that they might exalt and remember God (Q 20:29–35). Moses no longer appears weak or disobedient by arguing with God but instead as someone capable of making his own decisions. The reason why he needs Aaron is also different, it is not to speak for him as in the Bible but that that might both exalt and remember God. Moses' weakness has been removed and replaced with a more pious nature. In Q 28:34, Moses asks that his brother may be sent instead of him as he is much better speaker and he fears that 'they' may deny him, paralleling Exodus 4:13 where he asks if someone else might be sent instead and God responds about Aaron. When the previous verse is taken into

account, 'I killed someone from among them' (Q 28:33), it is clear that the 'they' is the Egyptians, this verse referring to the soldier Moses kills. Although Sūrat Al-Qaṣaṣ acknowledges the tradition that Aaron is a better speaker than Moses, it still shows Moses providing his own solution and God responding positively in the next verse. In Qur'anic interpretations of the Burning Bush narrative, Moses can be seen to object considerably less and be able to provide his own solutions to problems. Moses appears stronger and reasons used to blame him for his leprosy in Rabbinic literature are no longer present. The removal of the actual leprosy as well as his perceived bad behaviour means that in the Qur'anic interpretation of this scene, Moses appears blameless.

The context of leprosy in the Late Antique world is not positive and the Qur'an would have been aware of this, thus, removing the leprous nature of Moses' hand. Leprosy in the Hebrew Bible is a disease inflicted by God, something also accepted by the later Muslim community.¹⁵⁸ There are lengthy rituals to cleanse oneself of leprosy, which may only be carried out by a priest, as set out in Leviticus 13–14, as a religious disease may only be cured religiously. Also, as a leper one must live outside the community (Lev 13:46) and thus is excluded

¹⁵⁸ M.W Dols, "Djudham," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, eds. C.E Bosworth, E. Von Ronzel, W.P Heinrichs and G. Lecomte (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 272.

from society in general and specifically barred from the priesthood as you would be rendered ‘ritually unclean/טמא’. Knowing the cultural context of leprosy, it is easy to comprehend why the compilers of the Qur’an would wish to distance themselves from this interpretation.¹⁵⁹ It is worth noting that this omission of the leprosy of Moses is not specific to the Qur’an but also occurs in Hellenistic Jewish biblical translations and commentaries, such as the Septuagint, Josephus and Philo.¹⁶⁰ In Josephus and Philo the phrase becomes ‘whiter than snow’ and mentions of a ‘chalk’ coloured hand are used. The LXX simply removes the word leprous rendering the description simply ‘as snow’. Cornelis Houtman argues that the translators of the LXX wished to remove the idea of Moses as someone afflicted by leprosy due to the cultural perceptions of leprosy as a disease of those cursed by God.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ As further evidence that traditions involving leprosy continued to circulate, there is another story involving Moses and leprosy where he proves that he does not have leprosy on his scrotum by baring all to the Israelites. This is again Moses without leprosy, proving that he does not have leprosy. For further investigation of this story see David J. Halperin, “The Hidden Made Manifest: Muslim Traditions and the ‘Latent Content’ of Biblical and Rabbinic Stories,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish and Near Eastern Ritual, Law and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, eds. David Paul Wright, David Noel Freedman and Avi Hurvitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995). Joseph Witztum, “O Believers, Be Not Those Who Hurt Moses’ Q33:69 and its Exegesis,” in *Islam and its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity and the Qur’an*, eds. Carol Bakhos and Michael Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 126–131.

¹⁶⁰ C. Houtman, “A Note on the LXX Version of Exodus 4,6,” *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 97, no.2 (1985): 254.

¹⁶¹ Houtman, “The LXX Version of Exodus 4,6,” 254.

Considering the ideas about leprosy in circulation, the Qur'an almost certainly removed the reference to leprosy to shield Moses from criticism. Hava Lazarus-Yafeh notes that the Qur'an is willing to criticise but always against the heretic, the infidel or the non-Muslim; not against the heroes of the Qur'an.¹⁶² Jacob Lassner links this lack of criticism of other figures to an inability to criticise the prophet Muhammad. He also notes that while it is part of Jewish culture to criticise biblical characters and that the protagonists of the Hebrew Bible are flawed and often bring disappointment to their followers, this is not the same in Islamic culture.¹⁶³ Lassner continues that nowhere else in the Middle East is there a parallel for the Jewish tendency towards self-criticism and that the Muslim 'triumphalist' attitude towards their heroes and their history is much more usual.¹⁶⁴ Although homogenising attempts like this approach of Lassner's, casting Islamic traditions as 'triumphalism' and the Jewish traditions as guilt-ridden and suffering, can be dangerous and cause detail to be lost, there does

¹⁶² Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, "Self-Criticism in Jewish and Islamic Traditions," in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction - Essays in Honour of William M. Brinner*, eds. Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes and Fred Astren (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 304.

¹⁶³ Jacob Lassner, "Time, Historiography and Historical Consciousness: The Dialectic of Jewish-Muslim Relations," in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction - Essays in Honour of William M. Brinner*, eds. Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes and Fred Astren (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 9.

¹⁶⁴ Lassner, "Time, Historiography and Historical Consciousness," 9.

seem to be evidence here for this theory. For example, within the same set of characters we have the sin of the Golden Calf, which Aaron builds in the Bible, but in the Qur'an this responsibility is removed from him and in the most detailed retelling given to an entirely new character, Al-Sāmirī (Q 20:85, 87 and 95). Aaron is given a role in which he tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to stop the building of the Golden Calf due to fear of death (Q 7:150) or causing division among the people (Q 20:94), which is of course the opposite to the biblical narrative. There are of course other examples of the compilers of the Qur'an being uncomfortable with their protagonists committing sins and having weaknesses.¹⁶⁵ Interestingly Moses' sin of the killing of the Egyptian soldier does remain in the text, although the actual story is not told, merely mentioned (Q 20:40, Q 26:14 and Q 28:33). It seems that it is impossible for the Qur'an to tell the story of Moses without keeping the fact that he killed someone from among the Egyptians, however it is possible to soften it considerably, so it appears as a much less important feature as opposed to a story of its own.

¹⁶⁵ King David also retains a prominent role in the Qur'an but his major sin, that of the killing of Uriah in order to obtain Bathsheba for himself, is also never mentioned despite the other stories of David being recorded at some length. Once obliquely the story of Nathan rebuking David is told but Uriah's name is omitted, and the context is not the same. Some Muslim commentators know the biblical story but dismiss it as lies. See Lazurus-Yafeh, "Self-Criticism in Jewish and Islamic Traditions," 307-308.

Although it would be impossible for the Qur'an to retell most of the biblical stories without leaving some of the imperfections in, many are softened or removed.

The colour white in the Qur'an has a specific context and is often related to ideas of purity and closeness to God, making Moses' connection to God clear by the colour of his hand. In the Qur'an, the verbal root for white 'b-y-d/بيض' is used eleven times (all lexical forms included). Five of the times this word is used, it is to describe Moses' hand in this episode (as seen in Sūrah Al-'A'rāf, Ṭā' Hā', Al-Shu'arā', Al-Naml, Al-Qaṣaṣ). White is often contrasted with black to show two contrasting forces, such as the faces of the believers and the unbelievers in Q Al-'Imrān 3:106–7. It is also contrasted with black in Q Al-Baqarah 2:187, when the white and black threads of dawn are mentioned in connection to fasting. This metaphor describes when those who are fasting will know to stop eating. 'White/بَيْضَاءُ' is also the colour of the waters of paradise in Q Al Ṣāffāt 37:46. Andrew Rippin suggests that in both these cases the Qur'an wishes to signal purity shown through the use of the colour white.¹⁶⁶ Rippin also

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Rippin, "Colors," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00085.

suggests this meaning of ‘purity’ as a reading for the white hand of Moses, arguing that the purity plays upon the impurity of the original version of ‘leprosy’.¹⁶⁷ White is also listed as one of the colours of the fruits that grow due to God’s production of rain in Q Fāṭir 35:27, along with red and black . The meanings of this word all have a connection with the divine, whether it is creation or belief shown through purity.¹⁶⁸ The Qur’an has not only interpreted the wording of this scene differently so as to remove the negative stigma of leprosy but has chosen to substitute a word which implies the opposite, that of purity.¹⁶⁹

The idea of ‘light’ is related to ideas of ‘whiteness’, also carrying positive connotations of purity and closeness to God in the Qur’an. One of the ninety-nine names of God in Islam is ‘the light’, as well as being the title of the 24th Sūrah of the Qur’an. Although this is a different word for light, ‘nūr/نور’, the

¹⁶⁷ Rippin, “Colors,” http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00085.

¹⁶⁸ Another use of this word is to describe Jacob’s eyes as ‘white with grief/أَبْيَضَتْ عَيْنَاهُ مِنَ الْخُزْنِ’ upon hearing of the loss of his son Joseph in Q12.84. However, this is argued by Muntansir Mir to be an idiomatic usage meaning that Jacob went blind from the grief, the whiteness depicting the white eyes of a blind person. It seems fair to separate this example from the rest as there is an idiomatic rather than symbolic meaning. See, Muntansir Mir, *Verbal Idioms of the Qur’an* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989), 64.

¹⁶⁹ This contrasting of purity and impurity was something that could be seen in the Hebrew Bible also, particularly when it came to the case of Uzziah so enters a place of purity, only to be cursed with impurity. The case of Gehazi is also open to this interpretation as King Naaman is made pure through the removal of his leprosy, which is connected his piety, whereas Gehazi is made impure, which is connected to his greed and lack of respect for authority.

themes of light and whiteness are connected. In his article, Rippin suggests that God is seen as a source of light and purity, suggesting an implicit connection between the ideas of whiteness and light.¹⁷⁰ The word for white can be translated as to ‘make white’ (as a verb) but can also be used in the idiomatic sense for someone’s face to ‘light up’.¹⁷¹ The Qur’anic idea of the faces of the believers being white on the day of judgement (as shown in Q 3:106-7) can also be connected to ideas of purity and light through the practise of ablution or ‘*wuḍū*/وُضُو’. Muhammad Abdel Haleem suggests the original meaning has to do with ‘brilliance and glow’, especially in the face.¹⁷² Haleem connects this practise to the idea that those who do their ablution properly will have light on their faces and ankles.¹⁷³ Although Haleem does not note his source, this idea is detailed in Sahih Muslim and presented as the words of Abu Hurairah. In the Book of Purification, the word ‘*muḥajjal*/مُحَجَّل’ is used to describe the faces and ankles of the believers on the Day of Judgement.¹⁷⁴ This word can mean ‘wearing anklets’ for a woman, ‘white footed’ for a horse and ‘bright’ or ‘brilliant’ in

¹⁷⁰ Rippin, ‘Colors’, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00085.

¹⁷¹ Mir, *Verbal Idioms*, 63.

¹⁷² Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (London: I.B Tauris, 2010), 32.

¹⁷³ Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an*, 32.

¹⁷⁴ Nasiruddin Al-Khattab (trans.) Ibn al Hajjaj, *Sahih Muslim: Book 1: Book of Purification* (Riyadh: Maktaba Dar-Us-Salam, 2007), 374–378.

general.¹⁷⁵ This word oddly seems to be a connection between light and feet, perfect for discussing the topic of ablution which is concerned with the washing of faces and feet. The chapter talks about how people will shine on judgement day and explains this as a way for the Prophet to recognise members of his Ummah he has not met in life.¹⁷⁶ The light is a recognition of belief and faith. This story from the Book of Purification is the same story as is told in Q 3:106–7, just with a word meaning ‘brightness’ as opposed to the root for ‘white’ which can also mean to ‘light up’. As can be seen across these uses of ‘white/بَيْضَاءَ’, ‘bright/مُجَلِّلٌ’ and ‘light/نُورٌ’, they are all connected to the divine and the idea of receiving positive judgement from God.

These ideas of ‘whiteness’ and ‘light’ continue to have these positive meanings into later Islamic literature and become applied to the Prophets themselves, making it possible that this event with Moses is a precursor to a theme of ‘shining prophets’. It is possible that the popularity of the Moses the Sorcerers scene can be explained through a wider trend of modelling Muhammad and Moses to have similar narratives. Uri Rubin states that the miracle of Moses drawing his white hand out in front of Pharaoh is frequently compared to what

¹⁷⁵ Wehr, *Dictionary*, 134.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Khattab, *Sahih Muslim*, 374–378.

is regarded as a greater miracle of Muhammad, which is that when he sat down 'light was shining on his right and left'.¹⁷⁷ It is clear from these multiple narratives that the light of Muhammad is considered to be a mark of God. These narratives also include biblical prophets having been projectors of light: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus all glowed with light placed there intentionally by God.¹⁷⁸ Shari Lowin calls the light in Muhammad, 'a physical manifestation of the closer personal relationship with the divine'.¹⁷⁹ The issue with this material being used to determine the intention of the Qur'an is obviously that this Tafsīr material is considerably later. Although in this later material, distinct concepts can be seen, material used to justify them can already be found in the Qur'an around ideas of light and purity. The concept of light as a legitimising mark would however fit in with how modern biblical academics, such as Childs,

¹⁷⁷ Uri Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light – Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad," *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975): 62. Rubin quotes Abu Saad al-Khargushi, *Sharaf al-Nariyy* MS. British Museum, Or. 3014 96b, Ibn Kathir, *Shamail al Rasul* (ed.) Abd al-Wahid (Cairo, 1967) 497, Ibn al Jawzi, *al Wafa al bi Ahwal al Mustafa* (ed.) Abd al-Wahid (Cairo, 1966) 360, Ibn Shahrashub, *Manaqib al abi Talif* (al Najaf, 1956), 183.

¹⁷⁸ Rubin connects this to a Shiite concept that a prophetic religious experience is transmitted from prophet to prophet, including the light of God, Rubin, "Pre-Existence and Light," 108.

¹⁷⁹ Shari L. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 263.

have understood Moses' hand in Exodus 4 is a way of marking him out as a prophet.¹⁸⁰

In the Qur'an, the white hand has been repurposed in order to function in not only a different narrative but also a different way. The different audience removes this act from having anything to do with Moses' insecurity, removing ideas that he may have weaknesses from the Qur'anic text. Although this act is shown in its original position in the Qur'an, its purpose has now been made clear, that it be shown to Pharaoh. Thus, the ambiguity around whether Moses is being punished is no longer relevant. The lexical differences remove the fact that Moses is diseased and he now fits into a shining tradition connected to purity and a close relationship with God in the Qur'an.

2.1.5 Conclusion

The interpretation of the 'leprous hand' from the Bible, through midrashic collections and the Qur'an shows a clear transition. The biblical context, midrashic traditions and the Qur'anic version present ambiguous, positive and negative interpretations. In the biblical context, Moses is alone with God and why he has received leprosy appears ambiguous. Neither Moses nor God's

¹⁸⁰ Childs, *Exodus*, 78. Noth, *Exodus*, 45.

motivations are explained. Logically, being given a disease is surely negative however it could be read a demonstration of God's power, as it is in the work of Cassuto and Coats.

Midrashic collections primarily favour the idea that Moses is being punished.

Moses questions whether the Hebrews will believe him and this is interpreted as slander against the Hebrews by many of the midrashic interpreters. Some interpreters attempt other techniques, like removing the word 'leprosy' or interpreting it as a metaphor for the Egyptians, but whichever technique is used, receiving leprosy is clearly negative.¹⁸¹

The Qur'anic interpretation of this scene seems to agree with the midrashic interpreters that leprosy is negative. It replaces the word 'leprosy' with 'white'.

For half of the Qur'anic depictions of this scene, the audience has also changed to include Aaron, Pharaoh and his courtiers and sorcerers (Sūrahs Al-'A'rāf, Ṭā' Hā' and Al-Shu'arā'). Removing the word for 'leprosy' and changing the

¹⁸¹ The vast majority of Rabbinic sources read leprosy as a punishment, however, the one scene from the Tanḥuma Yelammedenu *Shemot* 23:2 chose to read it as a metaphorical depiction of the impurity of the Egyptians instead of those of Moses. Leprosy is still a sign of wrongdoing, just not of the one who receives it in this case.

audience makes it much easier to read this scene as a demonstration of God's power through Moses.

While removing the word for 'leprosy' is a technique present in the Targum Onkelos, Philo, Josephus and the Septuagint, the change in audience appears entirely Qur'anic.¹⁸² Biblical characters are often flawed and this is also not the first scene in the Qur'an that is interpreted with removing this in mind. Scenes with Aaron and King David are also interpreted to make them appear closer to an idea of perfection. This idea of perfection acts to establish Muhammad's status and authority in the new religion. Later, this feeds into the Islamic concept of *'Ismah*, the infallibility which is characteristic of the Prophets of God. These two changes in the Qur'an, the removal of the word for 'leprosy' and the addition of the 'white hand' in front of Pharaoh, as well as in the Burning Bush narrative, make Moses appear considerably stronger. Not only are any connotations of punishment removed but he is now connected to a positive tradition of 'whiteness', which symbolises a close connection to God. That the event is showed in both positions makes clear that it is meant to be impressive

¹⁸² There is a scene in the Pirke De-Rav Eliezer that features Moses showing his hand before Pharaoh and the magicians doing the same thing, however the PRE is now thought to be later in composition than the Qur'an. Geiger uses the argument the Qur'an is inspired by this tradition in Geiger, *Judaism and Islam*, 125.

to onlookers. These small steps make Moses seem like a more ideal Prophet,
communicating the message of God.

2.2. The Character of Pharaoh in the Hebrew Bible, Midrashic Collections and the Qur'an

Introduction

Alongside the heroes of the Hebrew Bible, like Moses, there are villains to act as their counterparts. This pattern of protagonists and antagonists can be seen throughout the biblical narratives, often this paradigm features a chosen person of the Israelites against a powerful oppressor: Abraham and his Pharaoh, David and Goliath, Esther and Haman and many others.¹⁸³ In the Hebrew Bible, the first Pharaoh of the Exodus narrative initially appears in Exodus 1:8, as a new king who goes on to enslave the Hebrews and order the slaughter of the Hebrew baby boys. His son, the next Pharaoh, appears in Exodus 5:1, meeting with Moses and Aaron for the first time. This scene of the competition between the sorcerers, Moses and Aaron occurs in Exodus 7:8–13, beginning the Plagues cycle. Pharaoh is present in every chapter until his presumed demise in the Reed Sea in Exodus 14.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ The story of Abraham and Pharaoh is featured in Genesis 12, David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 and Esther and Haman in the Book of Esther 1–7.

¹⁸⁴ Pharaoh is mentioned in later parts of the Hebrew Bible, including the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15 and the Haftorah portion for this section, Ezekiel 28:25–29:21.

Despite his position as the villain in the pivotal story of the Israelites, Pharaoh's characterisation is limited. He has little direct speech and it is more functional than emotive, such as asking that the plague of frogs be stopped in Exodus 8:8. Pharaoh's emotions, how he feels or his intentions behind a particular action are not explored within the text. However, on some occasions they may be discerned by the reader, such as when he recognises the righteousness of the Lord in Exodus 9:27–28. Even when he does entreat for forgiveness (Exod 10:16–17) or accept God's righteousness (Exod 9:27–28), there are no adjectives or anything that might give more detail. It is sometimes possible to draw out a character's attributes from their actions, however, for Pharaoh this is further complicated by the issue of his free will due to the 'hardening of his heart'.¹⁸⁵ These issues make Pharaoh seem underdeveloped and his motivations confused in the Plagues narrative of the Hebrew Bible.

¹⁸⁵ There have been many studies on this topic. To select a few, Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Louisville: Westminster, 1974), 173–74. Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (trans. Israel Abrahams; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1974), 55–58. Nahum N. Sarna, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 64–65. J. K. Currid, "Why Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart?" *Bible Review* 9, no.6 (1993): 47–51. John Van Seters, *The Life of Moses: The Yahwist as Historian in Exodus–Numbers* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 87–91. Nili Shupak, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4:1–15:21: Seen Negatively in the Bible but Favourably in Egyptian Sources," in *Egypt, Israel, and the Ancient Mediterranean World: Studies in Honor of Donald B. Redford*, eds. Gary N. Knoppers and Antione Hirsch (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 389–403. Michael McAfee, contains a good survey of previous studies as well as his own interpretation, "The Heart of Pharaoh in Exodus 4–15," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 20, no. 3 (2010): 331–354.

In the Midrashic Traditions, a focus of their interpretation of Pharaoh is to draw out his idolatry. Pharaoh is not seen to be obviously worshipping at any point in the Hebrew Bible. Although it seems clear to a modern audience that he would have worshipped Egyptian gods, the Rabbis show Pharaoh in a variety of other ways. Pharaoh is shown to be a worshipper of Canaanite gods, a river worshipping pagan and a Persian diviner (a magus). Pharaoh's behaviour is also criticised, Rabbinic insults are made about Pharaoh and other biblical antagonists that they engage in homosexual relations. In the Midrashic collections, a continued effort to flesh out the character of Pharaoh and his evil qualities has been made.

Pharaoh is the most frequently mentioned biblical antagonist in the Qur'an, being mentioned 52 times.¹⁸⁶ The stories that feature Pharaoh within the Qur'an are the Moses and the Sorcerers narrative, the crossing of the Reed Sea and a story involving Pharaoh and Haman building a tower like the Tower of Babel (Q

¹⁸⁶ For a summary of Pharaoh's role in the Qur'an see, Andrew Rippin, "Fir'aun," in *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Civilisation and Religion*, ed. Ian Richard Netton (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), 177. A.J. Wensinck and G. Vajda, "Fir'awn," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, eds. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Consulted online on 18 February 2018 http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2375, Reuven Firestone, "Pharaoh," in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an: Volume 4 P-Sh*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 66–68. Haim Zeev Hirschberg, "Pharaoh in Islam," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica Vol. 16 2nd edition*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007) 29–30.

Al Qaṣaṣ 28:38 and Q Ghāfir 40:36).¹⁸⁷ Pharaoh is also mentioned as an example of how bad people behave and are punished in lists and groups alongside other villains eight times.¹⁸⁸ A noticeable difference between the way Pharaoh is presented in the encounters with Pharaoh narratives in Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an is the amount of direct speech he is given. In the Qur'an, he is made to sound considerably more arrogant and cruel through his words. Much like the midrashic traditions, the Qur'an seeks to expand the character of Pharaoh and make him appear more villainous. Pharaoh's more villainous character makes Moses appear stronger for opposing him.

Pharaoh has limited expression in the Hebrew Bible, leaving room for both midrashic traditions and the Qur'an to expand upon him. Both traditions choose to make him more villainous using similar means, such as his idolatry and the technique of grouping him together with other villains so that he may be seen to take on their characteristics too.

¹⁸⁷ For more information on this interesting narrative, often interpreted as a version of the Tower of Babel, see Silverstein, "The Qur'anic Pharaoh," 467–477.

¹⁸⁸ In Q 3:11, Q 29:39, Q 38:12, Q 48:24, Q 50:13, Q 69:9, Q 85:18. The eight mention is implicit in Q 29:40, for discussion see Plagues section where this verse is discussed in reference to the plagues.

2.2.1. The Emotionless Pharaoh of the Hebrew Bible

In the Hebrew Bible, the character of Pharaoh is very limited with regard to how he is described personally and how he expresses himself, making it very difficult to gain a picture of him aside from his actions. In this section, the times he does speak will be examined as well as a well-known biblical studies issue, the ‘hardening’ of his heart. In the Hebrew Bible, Pharaoh is not developed as a character as he is really just a tool to show the oppression of the Israelites.

A cruel act that Pharaoh commits during the Plagues narrative, with free will, is to increase the labour of the Israelites in Exodus 5:6-7:

‘On that day, Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters of the people and the officials, saying: You will not give straw for making bricks to the people again, heretofore, they shall go and gather straw for themselves’.

וַיֵּצֵא פַרְעֹה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא אֶת־הַנְּגִישִׁים בְּעַם וְאֶת־שֹׁטְרָיו לֵאמֹר: לֹא תִאֲסָפוּן לָתֵת תְּבֹן לָעַם לְלֶבֶן הַלְּבָנִים כְּתִמּוֹל שֶׁלְשֵׁם הֵם יֵלְכוּ וְקִשְׁשׁוּ לָהֶם תְּבֹן:

Pharaoh says this in response to Moses’ and Aaron’s requests that the people might go and worship in the desert in Exodus 5:1 and 3. Responding to a request for freedom with more work certainly makes Pharaoh appear petty and vindictive. Here Pharaoh not only increases the Israelites’ labour but also refuses to let them go. This idea that Pharaoh will not let them go is the central motif

connected with the character of Pharaoh in the Plagues narrative, it occurs nine times.¹⁸⁹ Although on this occasion his free will is not in question, this changes as the narrative progresses, making it more difficult to see Pharaoh as villainous of his own accord.

Whether or not Pharaoh lets the children of Israel go is not always entirely his choice, as sometimes Pharaoh's heart is hardened. Michael McAfee argues that words like 'stubborn' (for קָשָׁה) and 'insensitive' (for כָּבֵד) would fit this scenario as well as the traditional 'hardening of the heart'.¹⁹⁰ In Exodus 7:3, God states that he will do this:

‘And I will harden the heart of Pharaoh so that I may increase my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt.’

וְאֲנִי אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת־לֵב פַּרְעֹה וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת־אֲתֹתַי וְאֶת־מוֹפְתֵי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

From the beginning, this presents the idea that God is interfering with Pharaoh's heart, which is clearly the centre of his decision-making. Although God says this, it seems that Pharaoh hardens his own heart on several occasions.¹⁹¹ There are also some occasions in which the verb is in the masculine singular but no subject is provided, as such, they can be read as 'Pharaoh

¹⁸⁹ Exod 5:2, 7:14, 8:32, 9:7, 9:35, 10:27, 10:27, 11:10 and 13:15.

¹⁹⁰ McAfee, "The Heart of Pharaoh," 339–40.

¹⁹¹ Exod 7:13, 8:11 and 8:20.

hardened his heart' or 'he hardened Pharaoh's heart'.¹⁹² On four occasions, it is specified that God hardens Pharaoh's heart.¹⁹³ It is notable that it happens in that order, Pharaoh hardens his own heart in the beginning, then it is ambiguous and then God does it. This topic has garnered considerable academic interest, concerning God and free will. Indeed, if Pharaoh has no free will, it is impossible for us to see him as an agent of cruelty as God is acting in his stead. Shupak and Currid's studies take into account the Egyptian setting of the idea of a 'heavy heart', and it that it might be a positive sign of Pharaoh's character but this seems unlikely as usually the Hebrew Bible places foreign settings within its own cultural milieu.¹⁹⁴ From the available lexical data, it appear as though God always intended for Pharaoh not to let the people go, allowing him to continue creating Plagues. This same data gives an unclear picture of how the process of hardening Pharaoh's heart works as sometimes Pharaoh seems to be doing it himself. The level of agency Pharaoh has in the Plagues narrative is at best ambiguous.

¹⁹² Exod 8:15, 9:7, 9:34 and 9:35.

¹⁹³ Exod 9:12, 10:20, 10:27 and 11:10.

¹⁹⁴ Shupak, "The Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4:1–15:21," 389–403. Currid, "Why Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart?" 47–51.

Pharaoh submits to God twice in the Plagues narrative, he takes it back each time, making him appear insincere. In Exodus 9:27, Pharaoh sees that the Lord is righteous:

‘Pharaoh sent and called to Moses and Aaron and he said to them: I have sinned this time. God is righteous and I and my people are wicked.’

וַיִּשְׁלַח פַּרְעֹה וַיִּקְרָא לְמֹשֶׁה וּלְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם חָטָאתִי הַפְּעַם יְהוָה הַצַּדִּיק וְאֲנִי
וְעַמִּי הָרְשָׁעִים:

This is not the only time Pharaoh submits to God, he again admits to sinning and asks for forgiveness and freedom from the locusts in Exodus 10:16–17.

These submissions could be positive but the fact that each time he reverts to his old ways. The hardening of the heart motif is important here again, as in Exodus 9:34–5, the subject is an unnamed masculine singular, so could be Pharaoh or God, whereas in Exodus 10:18, God does it. This leaves open the possibility that one submission, Pharaoh took back of his own accord. However, it also leaves open the possibility that his submissions were genuine and he only refuted them due to God interfering with his heart.

After the second false submission and Pharaoh still not letting the people go, this time as God hardens Pharaoh’s heart, Pharaoh threatens Moses with death in Exodus 10:28:

‘Pharaoh said to him: Go away from me. Guard yourself. Do not see my face again for the day you see my face, you will die.’

וַיֹּאמֶר-לוֹ פַּרְעֹה לֵךְ מֵעַלַי הִשְׁמֹר לְךָ אֶל-תִּסּוֹף רְאוֹת פָּנַי כִּי בַיּוֹם רְאִיתָךְ פָּנַי תָּמוּת:

Although this statement is aggressive, this is a clear case where God has acted upon Pharaoh so its impossible to entirely ascribe it to Pharaoh. This is also fairly mild in comparison with his father, the old Pharaoh, attempting to kill all the baby Hebrew boys in Exodus 1:22. The text intentionally places two Pharaohs side by side, despite mentioning the death of the old Pharaoh in Exodus 2:23, in order that the son might take on the sins of the father. This statement of Pharaoh’s seems aggressive but his motivations are suspect and this is actually not as evil as his father, with whom the text tries to conflate him.

The Hebrew Bible never ascribes the term cruel to Pharaoh but it does to the Egyptians. In Exodus 1:13-14, the Egyptians behaviour is described:

‘The Egyptians made the Israelites work with cruelty. They made their lives bitter with hard work, with mortar and with bricks and all of the work in the field. All of their work, they worked in cruelty.’

וַיַּעֲבְדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרֶךְ: וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת-חַיֵּיהֶם בַּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה בְּחַמֵּר
וּבִלְבָנִים וּבְכָל-עֲבֹדָה בְּשֹׁדָה אֵת כָּל-עֲבֹדָתָם אֲשֶׁר-עָבְדוּ בָהֶם בְּפָרֶךְ:

Although this is the time of Moses’ birth so a different generation, comments about the Egyptians continue throughout the narrative. In Exodus 5:14, it is the taskmasters that beat the Israelites, they have no orders from Pharaoh to do this.

Pharaoh only seems to know when the Israelites tell him. In Exodus 6:5, it is the Egyptians that hold the people in bondage rather than Pharaoh. Exodus 6:6 and 6:7 describe the Israelites as being freed from the labour of the Egyptians, not Pharaoh's. As much as Pharaoh is king of Egypt, he is called this nine times in this narratives, and an Egyptian, it is odd that he is not more of a focal point for criticism.¹⁹⁵

As well as dealing more harshly with the Egyptians in the text, there is also that the Israelites go to Pharaoh for help. In Exodus 5:15-16, the Israelites ask:

‘The officials of the Israelites came and cried to Pharaoh, saying: Why do this to your servants? No straw is being given to your servants but they say to us, ‘Make bricks’ And behold, your servants are beaten and the sin is your peoples.’

וַיָּבֹאוּ שֹׁטְרֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּצְעֲקוּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר לָמָּה תַעֲשֶׂה כֹה לַעֲבָדֶיךָ: תָּבֵן אֵין
נָתַן לַעֲבָדֶיךָ וּלְבָנִים אֹמְרִים לָנוּ עֲשׂוּ וְהִנֵּה עֲבָדֶיךָ מִכִּים וְחָטְאֵת עִמָּךְ:

Pharaoh in turn responds that the Israelites are ‘idlers/גִּרְפִּים’ which does not paint him as kind, however, that they would go to him indicates some possibility that he might have responded otherwise. The Israelites also blame the Egyptians here, not Pharaoh, stating that the fault of the actions is with the Egyptians.

¹⁹⁵ Pharaoh is called king of Egypt in Exod 3:18, 3:19, 5:4, 6:11, 6:13, 6:27, 6:29, 14:5, 14:8, 18:10. This is only the times this Pharaoh is called king of Egypt, other Pharaohs also receive this title.

Interestingly, even after they are rebuffed by Pharaoh, the Israelites still blame Moses rather than Pharaoh, as he ‘made them odious to Pharaoh/’הַבְּאִשְׁתָּם אֶת-פְּרָעָה’. As well as the Egyptian people being labelled as cruel rather than their leader specifically, the Israelites blame Moses rather than him.

In the Hebrew Bible, the character of Pharaoh appears underdeveloped.

Although Pharaoh is by no means kind and can be petty and insincere, the real cruelty seems to be being perpetrated by the Egyptian people. Pharaoh’s continued refusals to let the Israelites go are confused by the hardening of the heart motif, making it difficult to ascertain whether this act is his choice. Later midrashic collections seize upon Pharaoh’s lack of character, aiming to carve out a truly evil personality for him.

2.2.2. Pharaoh ‘the Idolater’ of the Midrashic Collections

The character of Pharaoh is expanded significantly in Midrashic and Targumic traditions. Their aim appears to be to give him more ‘evil’ characteristics.

Midrashic collections such as, the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael, Pesiqta de Rav Kahana, the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the Tanhuma Yelammedenu, seek to address this is through depicting him as an idolater, despite no explicit mentions of this in the Hebrew Bible. His idolatry is shown in a variety of ways:

through the worship of false Gods, the worship of the Nile and also through seeing himself as a God. Midrashic traditions from the *Tanhuma Yelammedenu* also seek to group Pharaoh together with other biblical villains, such as Nebuchadnezzar and the King of Tyre, in order to compound their sins.

A way in which the *Mekhilta* of Rabbi Ishmael presents Pharaoh's idolatry is to associate him with foreign gods. There is no mention of Pharaoh's idolatry in the biblical narrative. It can be assumed that a reader of the text would know that the Egyptians had their own gods and that he is not a believer in the God of Israel is made explicit, however, what he does believe in, is not. When foreign gods are mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, they are named, such as with the worship of Baal during the time of King Ahab (I Kings 18:16–46); so if the Hebrew Bible wanted to show Pharaoh as an idolater specifically, there is precedent for this.¹⁹⁶ In *Beshalach* 3:8–15, the *Mekhilta* of Rabbi Ishmael recounts how Pharaoh worshipped Baal-Zephon, a Canaanite god who appears in the Bible:

‘When they saw that Israel had turned back and camped before Pi-Hahiroth, before Baal Zephon, Pharaoh said: Baal-Zephon agrees about cutting

¹⁹⁶ The Hebrew Bible mentions over fifty gods, other than Yahweh, including Baal (I Kings 18:16–46), Chemosh (11:23–24) and Dagon (Joshua 15:41 and 19:27, Judges 16.23, 1 Samuel 5:2–7).

them down, to destroy them in the water. He began to sacrifice, to burn incense, and to pour libations to the idols. As such, it is said: When Pharaoh drew near'

כיון שראו ששבו ישראל לאחוריהם וחנו לפני פי החירת לפני בעל צפן, אמר פרעה: בעל צפן הסכים על גזרתי לאבדם במים. התחיל לזבח לקטר ולנסך לעבודה זרה. לכך נאמר ופרעה הקריב.

The Tanhuma Yelammedenu in *Beshalach* 8:3 also uses this interpretation that

Pharaoh sees their location as a sign from Baal Zephon to destroy them. Baal-

Zephon appear to be just be a place name in the verse being analysed (Exod

14:2-4).¹⁹⁷ Due to the name 'Baal' appearing in the name, it makes it very easy to

interpret this as a name of the god, Baal. This paints Pharaoh as an idolater in

terms that are familiar to readers of the Hebrew Bible as there are a series of

'bad' Kings of Israel who worship Baal, such as Ahab and his queen, Jezebel. The

dating of the Mekhilta ranges from the early 3rd to late 4th centuries, as the

opinions it quotes are Tannaitic but the final form is thought to be later. The

Tanhuma Yelammedenu is thought to have been composed in the 5th to 7th

centuries so is definitely a substantially later tradition.¹⁹⁸ The repetition of this

tradition in a later work shows its enduring importance of Pharaoh as an idolater.

The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan also offers an expansion on Exodus 14:2:

¹⁹⁷ It also appears as a place name in Numbers 33:7.

¹⁹⁸ Marc Bregman, "Tanhuma Yelammedenu," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica Vol. 19 2nd edition*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 503-504.

‘Before the idol Zephon, that remains of all idols of Egypt. For the Egyptians will say, elect is Baal Zephon from all the idols, because he remains and is not afflicted. They will give worship to it, and you will find that you are camped close to it, on the shore of the sea’

קָדָם טַעוֹר צֶפּוֹן דְּמִשְׁתִּיר מִכָּל טַעוֹן דְּמִצְרַיִם בְּגִין דִּימְרוֹן מִצְרַאי בְּחִיר הוּא בְּעַל
צֶפּוֹן מִכָּל טַעוֹתָא דְּאִשְׁתִּיר וְלֹא לָקֵא דִּייתוֹן לְמִסְגֻד לֵיהּ וְיִשְׁכַּחוּן יְתִכּוֹן דְּאִתּוֹן
שָׂרָן לְקַבְּלֵיהּ עַל גֵּיף יַמָּא:

Although it might seem more obvious for Pharaoh to ‘sacrifice, offer incense and libations and prostrate himself to his idol’ to a more traditional Egyptian god, such as Re or Amun, rabbinic hermeneutics requires the interpretation to be connected to the text, thus the Canaanite Baal Zephon.¹⁹⁹ Modern academics have tried to see Egyptian worship in the Plagues, such as Jonathan Grossman, who has suggested that the Plague of Darkness is intended to be a foil to the Egyptian Sun God.²⁰⁰ Although Amun is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, it is difficult to substantiate meanings behind individual plagues. Edward Greenstein sees the darkness as symbolising slavery and oppression.²⁰¹ Greenstein however

¹⁹⁹ This quotation is from the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael’s interpretation on Exodus 14:9, as featured in *Beshallah* 3.

²⁰⁰ Jonathan Grossman, “The Structural Paradigm of the Ten Plagues Narrative and the Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart,” *Vetus Testamentum* 64 (2014): 608.

²⁰¹ Edward L. Greenstein, “The First–Born Plague and the Reading Process,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, eds. David Paul Wright, David Noel Freedman and Avi Hurvitz, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995) 557. This theme of darkness as oppression is further discussed in E.L Greenstein, “Darkness Enslaves as Light Liberates,” *Baltimore Jewish Times*, January 6, 1984. W. Dennis Tucker Jr., “Revisiting the Plagues in Plague 105,” *Vetus Testamentum* 55, no 3. (2005) 408.

notes the possibility of seeing Egyptian worship in the death of the cattle.²⁰².

Considering that the commentators would have been aware of the nature of Egyptian worship and that he would not have been a Baal worshipper this is clearly intentional.²⁰³

Pharaoh is also shown to worship the Nile. This is obviously meant to conjure images of animism within the mind of the reader, the worship of natural objects and processes which is forbidden, as expressed in Exodus 20:4. In the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Vaera* 13:1 when interpreting Exodus 7:14 together with Exodus 7:19 it says:

‘Why were the waters first turned to blood? Because Pharaoh and the Egyptians served the Nile. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Smite his god first and then him, as in the popular aphorism, “Strike the gods and the priests will be frightened.”’

לְמָה לָקוּ הַמַּיִם תְּחִלָּה בְּדָם? מִפְּנֵי שֶׁפָּרַעַה וְהַמִּצְרַיִם הָיוּ עוֹבְדֵי לֵילָוֶה. אָמַר
הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ: הִנֵּה אֵלֹהֵהוּ תְּחִלָּה בְּפָנָיו וְאַחַר כֵּן עַצְמוֹ. מִשָּׁל הַדְּיוּט אֹמֵר: מַחֲוֹ
אֵלֵהֶּיָא וַיִּבְהַתּוֹן בְּמַרְיָא.

The Egyptians did worship gods in order to bring about the flooding of the Nile so this information may have been known, however, the Nile itself was not a

²⁰² Greenstein, “The First–Born Plague,” 562. See footnote 26 for a full list of Midrashic sources and modern academics that use this argument.

²⁰³ Jeremiah 46:25 hints at knowledge of Egyptian Religion, “The Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, said: “Behold, I am bringing punishment upon Amon of Thebes, and Pharaoh and Egypt and her gods and her kings, upon Pharaoh and those who trust in him.” This verse directly shows knowledge of the sun god, Amun, associated with Thebes and god of the Pharaohs.

God until the 4th century CE when the Romans introduced it as ‘Nileos’.²⁰⁴

Although this cult would not have existed during the time the encounter between Moses and Pharaoh would have taken place, the Rabbis are inserting practices used during their own time in order to make Pharaoh’s idolatry into an indirect polemic against modern practices.²⁰⁵ Genesis Rabbah 69:3 continues this theme of Nile worship,

‘Rav Yohanan said: The wicked’s existence depends upon their gods, as it says, ‘And Pharaoh dreamed, and behold, he stood upon the river (Gen. 41:1)’.

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן הַרְשָׁעִים מְתַקְיָמִין עַל אֱלֹהֵיהֶם, (בראשית מא, א): וּפְרָעָה חָלַם וְהָנָה עֹמֵד עַל הָאֵיר.

This is not the same Pharaoh that Moses encounters, it is instead the Pharaoh that Joseph serves. This interpretation uses synonymous parallelism to connect another King of Egypt with worship of the Nile. The sentence is divided into two parts, the interpretation and the quotation; ‘The wicked’ is equivalent to ‘Pharaoh’ and the ‘gods’ are the ‘river’, specifically the Nile.²⁰⁶ This passage does

²⁰⁴ Rikva Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons in Midrash* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), 71.

²⁰⁵ Michael Fishbane notes this kind of indirect polemic in material dealing with Pharaoh as he has doubts about the availability of material about Egyptian religion to the Rabbis in the time they were writing and sees these comments more likely to be in opposition to Roman practises, *Commentary on the Haftarah*, 66. This point is also made by Moses Aberbach in his article on Pharaoh, “Pharaoh and the Egyptians in the Aggadah,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica Vol. 16 2nd edition*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 28.

²⁰⁶ This word ‘האֵיר’, has a wider meaning of ‘river’ or ‘channel’ but it is used to specifically refer to the Nile, as can be seen by its use throughout the section of Moses in Egypt (see Exod 2:3,

not just suggest Pharaoh's worship of the Nile but also that his existence depends upon it. Rivka Ulmer notes, 'In Egypt, the Nile served as a supremely positive symbol, indicative of life, while in Midrashic texts the Nile is transformed into a negative symbol, indicative of idolatry and death'.²⁰⁷ Indeed, in Egyptian religion the Nile is hugely important as it irrigates the crops and provides life through access to water, a transportation system down the whole country and through providing food.²⁰⁸ However, the Midrashic traditions see all forms worship, other than that of the worship of the God of Israel, as idolatry, thus turning the Nile into a symbol of bad practice.

This comment that Pharaoh worships the Nile is also related to the next form of idolatry, that Pharaoh considers himself a god. Although Pharaohs saw themselves as gods, there is evidence in how they refer to themselves that by 18th dynasty (1550 to 1292 BCE) that this was seen to be more of a metaphorical designation, seeing themselves as more of an 'earthy surrogate of the god' or the 'highest rung in a command structure on Earth'.²⁰⁹ It is easy to see how there

2:5, 7:20 etc.). The more general word for river is 'נהר' and used in reference to all other rivers in the Hebrew Bible (see Gen 2:11, Ezek 1:1, Ps 137:1 etc.). See Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 559.

²⁰⁷ Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons in Midrash*, 11.

²⁰⁸ For more on the Nile in Egyptian Religious Practise, see Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*, 78–79.

²⁰⁹ Donald B. Redford, "The Concept of Kingship During the 18th Dynasty," in *Ancient Egyptian Kingship*, eds. David Bourke O'Connor and David P. Silverman (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 158–160.

would be the cultural background in place for this interpretation to be readily believed. In an interpretation from the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Vaera* 5:6 that shows Moses and Aaron telling Pharaoh all the things their God has created, Pharaoh rebukes them:

‘He said to them: “From the start, you have lied. For I am the lord of the world, and I created myself and the Nile, for it is said: The Nile is mine and I made it for myself (Ez. 29:3).”

אָמַר לָהֶם: מִתְחִלָּה שָׁקַר אַתֶּם מִדְּבָרִין, שֶׁאֲנִי הוּא אֲדוֹן הָעוֹלָם, וְאֲנִי בְרָאתִי עֲצָמִי
וְאֶת נִלוֹס, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: לִי יָאֵרִי וְאֲנִי עָשִׂיתִנִּי.

Ezekiel 29:3 is also used twice in the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael to discuss the Pharaoh of Exodus believing himself to be a god.²¹⁰ The Haftarah portion of a parashah of Torah is usually selected by similar themes, in this case both *Vaera* and Ezekiel 29 feature Pharaoh and themes of God being involved in the affairs of other nations. This section of Ezekiel (Ez. 28:25–29:21) is the haftarah portion associated with the parashah, *Vaera* (Exodus 6:2–9:35). This version of Pharaoh, as a god, is haughty and proud. Ezekiel 29:3 is also used in the Tanhuma Buber in order to ridicule Pharaoh’s belief in his own godliness through the fact that he needs to go to the river to urinate, something that gods

Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 60–63.

²¹⁰ Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael 15:11:1 and 18:10:2.

do not have to do.²¹¹ The Tanhuma Yelammedenu also finds a way to use this interpretation about Pharaoh's mornings ablutions, albeit using Exodus 8:16. In the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Vaera* 14:1, commenting on the line 'And the Lord said unto Moses: "Rise up early in the morning, and stand before Pharaoh; lo, he cometh from the water"' (Exod 8:16), it tells of how Pharaoh will be at the water early in the morning as he has to hide his need to urinate from the rest of the palace:

'Why did he go out to the waters? Because the wicked one was proud and said that he was a god and he did not go out to relieve himself. Therefore, he went out to the waters in the early morning so that no man would see him standing in shame.'²¹²

לְמָה הָיָה יוֹצֵא הַמִּימָה לְפִי שֶׁהָיָה אוֹתוֹ רָשָׁע מְשִׁתְּבֵחַ וְאוֹמֵר שֶׁהוּא אֱלֹהִים וְאֵינוֹ יוֹצֵא לְנִקְבֵיו, לְפָנֵיכֶם הָיָה יוֹצֵא הַמִּימָה בְּהִשְׁכָּמָה, שְׁלֹא יֵרְאוּהוּ בְּנֵי אָדָם שֶׁעוֹמֵד בְּקִלּוֹן.

This is due to the fact he claims divinity and implicitly we are meant to understand that gods clearly do not urinate, presumably as this is too anthropomorphic an action. Michael Fishbane describes this depiction by the Rabbis as 'bold mockery' that 'mocks (Pharaoh's) physical needs and vaunted divinity'.²¹³ As Fishbane notes, this Midrashic tradition paints Pharaoh in a very

²¹¹ Tanhuma Buber *Vaera* 16:4.

²¹² A slightly differently worded version of this interpretation, with nonetheless the same outcome, occurs in Tanhuma Buber *Vaera* 16:4.

²¹³ Fishbane, *Commentary on the Haftarah*, 66.

frivolous note, surely intending to make him seem less intimidating as a villain, through turning him into a figure of fun.²¹⁴ Through combining his idolatry with a demeaning and humorous interpretation, the Rabbis lower his stature in two ways simultaneously.²¹⁵

The idea of using demeaning portrayals combined with the idea of false divinity in order to lower the status of Pharaoh in our minds is popular in the Tanhuma Yelammedenu and Buber. Another is found in Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Vaera* 9:5 which asks:

‘From where do we know that Pharaoh had sex like a woman?’

פְּרָעָה מִנֵּין שֶׁנִּבְעַל בְּנָשִׁים

This section then goes on to detail how Hiram, Joash, Nebuchadnezzar and Pharaoh can all be shown to have ‘had intercourse like a woman’ or in the case

²¹⁴ This idea that Pharaoh uses the river as a lavatory can be found in other later commentaries as well. In the 13th century, Chizkuni states that God must raise Moses above the ground in order to communicate with him as the palace of Pharaoh is rendered unclean by Pharaoh defecating in the river (Chizkuni on Exodus 11:1).

²¹⁵ Rabbinic use of humour and parody in Midrashic Traditions is discussed by Carol Bakhos, “Reading Against the Grain: Humor and Subversion in Midrashic Literature,” in *Narratology, Hermeneutics, and Midrash*, eds. Gerhard Langer and Constanza Cordoni (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2014), 71–80. In the article, “The Talmud as a Fat Rabbi: A Novel Approach,” *Text and Talk* 28, no.5 (2008): 603–619, Daniel Boyarin argues for the Talmud being read as a Menippean satire, ‘characterised by their indecorous mixing of genres both high and low’, 609. A recent book by Holger Zellentin that also discusses Rabbinic uses of parody, *Rabbinic Parodies of Jewish and Christian Literature. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism* 139 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

of Nebuchadnezzar how he had intercourse with oxen.²¹⁶ This is of course an allusion to being penetrated by another male or in other words being the submissive sexual partner. When it comes to explaining how it is known Pharaoh behaved this way it is explained that he undressed like a woman and then immediately followed by discussing how he claimed to be a god, ‘an abomination in the world for exalting himself/עַל שֶׁהִגְבִּיחַ עֲצָמוֹ’. There appears to be a suggestion here that the two events are connected; that due to his claims of divinity, the ‘sexual perversion’ followed. Rivka Ulmer suggests that, ‘midrashic texts subvert these powerful pharaohs by revealing their character flaws; consequently, the pharaohs are readily rendered impotent by the rabbinic authors and superior ethics of Judaism’.²¹⁷ This comment about Pharaoh and his sexuality is exactly in line with Ulmer’s suggestion; it is there in order to make Pharaoh appear emasculated. It is important for Pharaoh to appear both weak and illegitimate in order to assert the strength and superiority of the Israelites over other cultures as well as the legitimacy of the God of Israel.

²¹⁶ That Pharaoh, Joash, Hiram and Nebuchadnezzar have sex, ‘like women/כְּנָשִׁים’, is also mentioned at Midrash Tanhuma Yelmdenu *Shoftim* 12. Aberbach notes that this idea of sexual immorality and the Pharaohs can also be applied to the Pharaoh of Abraham and Sarah from Genesis 12, although he is not aware she is married when they meet, Midrashic traditions build on the idea that he still pursued her afterwards. Aberbach ‘Pharaoh’, 28.

²¹⁷ Ulmer, *Egyptian Cultural Icons in Midrash*, 10.

Within the Tanhumas Yelammedenu and Buber there is a tendency to group Pharaoh together with other biblical villains, such as Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar.²¹⁸ These are all characters in the Bible who have oppressed the Israelites at some point; Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem in 701 BCE and Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem twice in 597 and 587 BCE, destroying the First Temple as well as imprisoning the prophet Daniel.²¹⁹ From this perspective, it could be said that Pharaoh is the first among them, at least chronologically. Connecting earlier parts of the Torah with later Tanakh is very common and is a mechanism for the Rabbis to justify the argument they are trying to make through using biblical proof-texts called a *Ka-yotze bo mi-makom acher*. Despite Pharaoh not appearing in the same narratives as these other characters, when they are grouped together, they can all be charged with the same crime. Themes of self-idolatry, arrogance, sodomy, false piety and

²¹⁸ Examples of Midrashic collections and Talmud grouping together villains (not exhaustive): Midrash Tanhuma Buber Tazria 8 groups together Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Edom and Sennacherib. Midrash Tanhuma Buber Pinchas 16 groups together Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar and Sennacherib. Sanhedrin 94b discusses Pharaoh, Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar together. As well as the examples of Midrash Tanhuma Yelammedenu 9:5 and 17:1.

²¹⁹ Sennacherib's military campaigns are described in the book of II Kings 18–19, Chronicles 32 and Isaiah 36–37. Nebuchadnezzar's siege is described in II Kings 25–26. He is also featured in I Chronicles 16, II Chronicles 36, Ezra 1:7, 2:1, 5:12–14 and 6:5, Nehemiah 7:6, Esther 2:6 and Jeremiah 28–29, 34:1 and 39:5. Finally, he is main character in the first four chapters of the Book of Daniel.

disingenuity are used to join these characters together.²²⁰ Finally, the idea that the ‘wicked’ will be falsely pious in times of trouble is mentioned in the

Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Vaera* 17:1:

And Pharaoh saw that it had ceased, the rain and the hail and the thunder. So are the wicked: Each time they are in trouble, they are moved. For when their troubles have passed over, they return to corruption.

וַיֵּרָא פַּרְעֹה כִּי חָדַל הַמָּטֶר וְהַבָּרָד וְהַקֶּלֶת וְגו'. כִּף הֵן הַרְשָׁעִים. כָּל זְמַן שֶׁהֵן בְּצָרָה,
מִכְנִיעֵין עֲצָמוֹן. מִשְׁהֲצָרָה עוֹבְרִת, חוֹזְרִין לְקִלְקוּלָם.

The Haftorah portion for Exodus 7 is Ezekiel 29, in which Pharaoh,

Nebuchadnezzar and the King of Tyre’s deeds and punishments are detailed.

This technique of grouping them together in order to prove they all committed the same crime is follows the structure of Ezekiel 29.

The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan explores many of the same themes as midrashic traditions by expanding on the verse. The Targum interprets Pharaoh as an idolater, significantly expanding Exodus 7:15:

‘Go to Pharaoh in the morning; behold, he is going out to *observe omens* on the water *like a magus*’

אֵיזִיל לֹות פַּרְעֹה בְּצַפְרָא חָא נְפִיק לְמִנְטוֹר קוּסְמִין עִילוּי מֵיָא הֵי כְּאַמְגוּשָׂא

²²⁰ In the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael *Shirata* 8 where Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Sennacherib and the Prince of Tyre are listed as those who called themselves gods. This is also used in the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Vaera* 9 says that Nebuchadnezzar, Pharaoh, Joash and Hiram claimed divinity.

The addition of these two phrases effectively accuse Pharaoh of being an idolater. Divining through water, hydromancy, is clearly intended to be a Zoroastrian practice. Divining is listed amongst the forbidden practises of the Canaanites in Deuteronomy 18:9–14 as well as being banned in I Samuel 28:3.²²¹ ‘Magus/מַשְׁכֵּן’ is a word for a Persian class of priests and is mentioned in other Rabbinic Literature, as can be seen from the prohibition of taking advice from a magus in the Talmud Bavli *Shabbat* 75a.²²² Shai Secunda argues that the Rabbis from 200CE to 600CE would have both had knowledge of Magi practises and that they saw them as effective.²²³ During this period Zoroastrianism was a major religion of the Sasanian empire, within whose empire the Babylonian Talmud was composed, so the Rabbis would indeed have viewed the Persians as an effective force.²²⁴ Following this logic, this term being applied to Pharaoh

²²¹ The state of divining in Ancient Israel is discussed in Mordechai Cogan, “The Road to En-Dor,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, eds. David Paul Wright, David Noel Freedman and Avi Hurvitz, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 319–326.

²²² For comment on this passage, see Jenny R. Labendz, *Socratic Torah: Non-Jews in Rabbinic Intellectual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 193–195. Shai Secunda, “Studying with a Magus/Like Giving a Tongue to a Wolf,” *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 19 (2005): 151–157.

²²³ Secunda, “Studying with a Magus,” 151, 154.

²²⁴ For more on majority and minority religions of the Sasanian Empire, see Touraj Daryaee, *Sasanian Persia: The Rise and Fall of an Empire* (New York: I. B Tauris and Co, 2009), 69–98.

uses a framework that the readers of Rabbinic Literature would be familiar with to paint Pharaoh as both an threatening idolater.

The word 'magus' becomes the word for magician, based on the works and the perception of these Persian priests. Speyer sees a trend of making Pharaoh appear as a powerful magician, seeing the trend increase in severity from making Pharaoh a powerful magician to interpretations where he thinks himself a God.²²⁵ The connection Pharaoh draws between the power of a magician and that of a God is interesting but more difficult to apply overall when the third group of interpretations, that of Pharaoh worshipping foreign gods, is considered.

In these Midrashic and Targumic traditions, the character of Pharaoh has been interpreted significantly. Pharaoh is involved in the worship of foreign gods, to see himself as a god, to be involved in divination and sexually immoral. The unclear character of Pharaoh from the Hebrew Bible has been made considerably more villainous in Jewish exegetical material. This seems to suggest that it was noted by the Rabbis that Pharaoh's character was not developed enough in the Hebrew Bible, particularly when the focal position he occupies is noted.

²²⁵ Speyer, *Erzählungen Im Qoran*, 271–272.

Pharaoh's role is important, not only as the obstacle to the Israelites being free but also as the opposite to Moses, their hero. This provides an exegetical context for the compilation of the Qur'an in which Pharaoh is again an expanded character.

2.2.3. The Violent Pharaoh of the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, Pharaoh has been given much more direct speech which impacts upon how he is received as a character. These words are coming from him and allow the text to present how he feels. Using this technique, the Qur'an makes Pharaoh proprietary and violent. It also implies that he thinks of himself as a god, something familiar from the Midrashic collections. The Qur'an also uses the technique of grouping villains together, again something that was present in Midrashic traditions. However, as well as making them all culpable for each other's sins as well as their own, as in the Midrashic interpretations, in the Qur'an, this ties biblical characters to more relevant Arabic villains. Pharaoh is given more direct speech in order to make him seem a more formidable opponent to Moses, in turn making Moses appear stronger and more heroic. In the Qur'an, the idea of prophecy is 'profoundly marked' by the experience of

opposition both in a religious and political sense.²²⁶ This opposition is necessary for Moses to prove his legitimacy as a prophet so it must seem strong enough for his victory to be impressive. This section will examine his jealous and violent nature, how he is combined with other villains, his self-deification and ongoing connection with the Nile.

When the sorcerers bow down to the God of Moses, Pharaoh says this in Q Al-Shu‘arā’ 26:49 and Q Al-‘A‘rāf 7:123:

‘You believed in him before I gave you permission’

ءَامَنْتُمْ لَهُ قَبْلَ أَنْ ءَاذَنَ لَكُمْ

With these words, Pharaoh shows that he expects people to ask permission of him to believe in a god. His following words, in which he threatens the sorcerers with hands being cut off and crucifixion, making it clear that he is angry about not being consulted:

‘I will cut off your hands and your feet from opposite sides and I will crucify you all’

لَأَقْطَعَنَّ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَأَرْجُلَكُمْ مِنْ خَلْفٍ وَأَصْلَبِنَاكُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

²²⁶ Marco Schöller, “Opposition to Muhammad,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an: Volume 3 J–O*, ed. Jane Damen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 576–580.

This violent threat make it clear that Pharaoh is not only angry but, perhaps motivated by arrogance or jealousy, angry enough to kill. Pharaoh is also given the title ‘Lord of Stakes/نُو الْأَوْتَادِ’, in Q Ṣād 38:12 and Q Al-Fajr 89:10.²²⁷ In Tafsīr Al Ṭabarī, Ibn Abbas names Pharaoh as the inventor of crucifixion, a hypothesis M. Asad also sees as likely.²²⁸ This is not entirely clear from the Qur’an as this word, ‘الْأَوْتَادِ’, is only used on one other occasion to describe the ‘mountains as stakes’ in Q Al-Nabā’ 78:7. It appears unlikely that Pharaoh is being called ‘Lord of the Mountains’ here as he lives by a river delta, a fact that Qur’an seems aware of by its reference to the Nile. In Hebrew, the word ‘יָתֵד’, although spelt slightly differently from the Arabic, may be a cognate. It refers to ‘pegs’ or perhaps ‘tent stakes’ (see Exod 27:19). It seems unlikely that the crucifixion and this narrative are not connected considering the sorcerers being threatened like

²²⁷ There is some confusion over this word ‘الاولتاد’, as well as the word, ‘صلب’, often translated as crucify. There seems to be a confluence of meanings, between ‘crucify’ and ‘impale’, involving both the word, ‘صلب’ and ‘الاولتاد’. John Granger Cook makes a thorough study of the cognate Hebrew word ‘צלב’ and its Ancient Near Eastern context in his book *Crucifixion in the Mediterranean World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 311–357.

²²⁸ Abū Ja‘far Muhammad al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: al-musammá Jami' al-bayan fi ta'wil al-Qur'an: Volume 7* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyah, 1997) 124, as cited in Wensinck, A.J. and Thomas, D., “al-Ṣalīb,” in *Encyclopædia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6533> . M. Asad, *The Message of the Qurʾān* (Gibraltar: Dar–Al–Andalus Limited ,1980), 190–91. Asad’s interpretations accompany a translation of the Qur’an. His interpretations can be more traditionally exegetical than strictly academic so should be interpreted with that in mind.

this covers three of the six mentions of the word ‘crucify/صَلَّبَ’ in the Qur’an (Q 7:124, Q 20:71, Q 26:49). Perhaps the Qur’an is further highlighting the evil of Pharaoh by suggesting that he invented this cruel punishment.

Another mention of crucifixion occurs in Q Al-Mā'idah 5:33, the punishments for those who wage war on God and his Messenger are execution, crucifixion, cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides or exile from the land²²⁹

‘The only reward for those who wage war against God and his messenger and strive in the land, spreading corruption is that they are killed or crucified or their hands and feet are cut off from opposite sides or they are exiled from the land’

إِنَّمَا جَزَاءُ الَّذِينَ يُحَارِبُونَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ وَيَسْعَوْنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَسَادًا أَنْ يُقَتَّلُوا أَوْ يُصَلَّبُوا أَوْ تُنَقَّعَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَرْجُلُهُمْ
مِنْ خَلْفٍ أَوْ يُنْفَوْا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ

Here in Q 5:33, the sorcerers are being threatened with a punishment that was seen as culturally appropriate to the Islamic environment in which this text was received. Here, this punishment appears as ironic as apostasy is turning away from God whereas here, although the sorcerers are turning away from Pharaoh, they are turning towards the true God. Indeed, this punishment in the Qur’an has a distinctly Egyptian context as four of the six times it is mentioned it is in

²²⁹ For more information on crucifixion in Islam, see Tilman Seidensticker, “Responses to Crucifixion in the Islamic World (1st to 7th/7th to 13th centuries)” in *Public Violence in Islamic Societies: Power, Discipline, and the Construction of the Public Sphere, 7th–19th Centuries CE: Power, Discipline, and the Construction of the Public Sphere, 7th–19th Centuries CE*, eds. Christian Lange and Maribel Fierro (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 203–216.

connection to a Pharaoh.²³⁰ When the context of crucifixion in the Qur'an is considered, not only is it a harsh punishment but it also brings the possibility of an inter-textual comment from the writers of the Qur'an on Pharaoh's idolatry.

It is worth briefly considering the biblical context of crucifixion. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, as described in the Gospels, is a key moment for Christianity as it cements Jesus' role as the Messiah as through his death, all are saved. The Qur'an denies the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, not because it proposes another method of death but because it proposes that Jesus is taken up to heaven by God, much in the same manner as Enoch or Elijah (Gen 5:24 and 2 Kgs 2:11).

Parallels can be drawn between the crucifixion of Jesus and that of the Sorcerers quite easily, they are all true adherents of God who are killed by unbelievers.

The problem with this is it relies on taking one part of the Qur'anic narrative, that Jesus was a prophet but not another, that he was not crucified. Speyer connects another biblical death to this crucifixion in the Qur'an, that of Haman, who is named as an advisor of Pharaoh in the Qur'an which provides a good

²³⁰ Crucifixion occurs in the Qur'an at Q 7:124, Q 20:71, Q 26:49 in connection with the Pharaoh of Moses. It occurs once when Joseph is interpreting his dream as to how the other prisoners of Pharaoh will be punished in Q 12:41. It occurs once in Q 5:33 as a prescribed punishment. The final mention is a denial that Jesus was crucified in Q 4:157.

connection to this narrative.²³¹ Haman is hanged in Esther 7:10 on either a tree or timber, 'רצ'. Although these punishments are not exactly the same, the way Haman is hanged allows for a wooden structure, much like a crucifix. However, Haman's death is not mentioned in the Qur'an, so it is unclear if there was knowledge of this event. Both biblical possibilities are unsatisfying when it comes to Pharaoh's crucifixion of the Sorcerers in the Qur'an as relating this narrative to Jesus would involve ignoring the fact the Qur'an denies his crucifixion and relating it to Haman is impossible as it's unclear the Qur'an is aware of his death in Esther.

The Qur'an mentions Pharaoh alongside other villains, biblical and Qur'anic, so that he becomes associated with their sins, as well as gaining more relevance through being associated with contemporary Qur'anic characters. This technique means a pattern becomes clear of what the features of an opposing 'unbeliever' are, meaning that these stories can be applied widely. This technique is familiar from the Midrashic traditions, however, they only sought to make him appear more villainous whereas the Qur'an also wishes to make him more universal. In the Qur'an, Pharaoh is most often mentioned in

²³¹ Speyer, *Erzählungen im Qoran*, 267.

conjunction with Haman. However, Pharaoh is also mentioned alongside Korah, the ‘Ād, the people of Noah (those who caused the Flood) and the Thamūd.²³²

Reuven Firestone argues that these groupings together of characters that resist the messengers of God are to act as an example for the contemporaries of Muhammad that they will be destroyed if they refuse to heed his message.²³³

Although these groupings cement together these characters as all being examples of those who did not listen to God and whose behaviour was heinous, it is Pharaoh who appears most often. Andrew Rippin notes that the treatment of Pharaoh may be considered unique in that the focus is not on resistance of a group but on a single person who becomes a ‘symbol of evil’.²³⁴ Although, the prevalence of vitriol against Pharaoh is undeniable, being mentioned seventy four times in the Qur’an which is far more than any one villain, this grouping together of villains surely shows that there is also resistance against a group.

However, it is not a pre-existing group but instead, a group which the Qur’an has selected. Although Pharaoh would not naturally occur with Korah as they are featured in different narratives, however, they all fall under the umbrella of

²³² Pharaoh is mentioned with the Thamūd in Q 85:18, with Haman and Korah at Q 48:24 and Q 29:39 (also obliquely in Q 29:40), with the ‘Ād and the people of Lot at Q 50:13, with ‘those before him’ in Q 69:9 and Q 3:11 and with the people of Noah and the ‘Ād in Q 38:12.

²³³ Firestone, ‘Pharaoh’, 67.

²³⁴ Rippin, “Fir’aun,” 177.

people who disobeyed God. This technique harmonises the individual faults of these characters, who all transgress but in different ways, and makes them into one overall lesson against a particular characteristic, such as arrogance. Lazarus-Yafeh sees this harmonising technique occurring, even within just one narrative, she notes that the Qur'an lessens the narrative importance of the Jews' release from slavery, making the scenes between Pharaoh and Moses a struggle between good and evil as opposed to having any political meaning within the narrative.²³⁵ Despite Pharaoh's role in the Exodus narrative having less meaning to a Muslim audience, who do not see themselves as direct descendants of those Israelites, the message of the punishment of your opponents is universal. This technique of grouping villains together makes understanding and relating to the particular narrative they feature in less important as the message of disbelievers being punished becomes universal.

Another characteristic of Pharaoh that is familiar from midrashic traditions is his belief that he is a god. On three occasions (Q Al-Nāzi'āt 79:24, Q Al-Shu'arā' 26:29, Q Al-Qaṣaṣ 28:38) within the Qur'an, Pharaoh refers to himself as a Lord or God. In Q 28:4, it states that Pharaoh 'exalted himself in the

²³⁵ Lazarus-Yafeh, "Self-Criticism in Jewish and Islamic Tradition," 306.

earth/إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ عَلَا فِي الْأَرْضِ/ meaning he viewed himself as a God. In Tanhuma Yelammedenu Vaera 9, Pharaoh is described as ‘an abomination in the world for exalting himself’ and ‘he who made himself divine’. The word for exalting is not the cognate to that used in Arabic, which would be ‘עלה’ but instead from the verb ‘גבה’, which also means to raise, elevate or exalt.²³⁶ Despite a difference in exact terminology, it is clear that the same idea of Pharaoh claiming divinity is being used in the Qur’an and Tanhuma Yelammedenu. This idea of false divinity is used in the Qur’an to show Pharaoh as someone who places himself above the true God and also to add to his aggression. In Q 26:29 Pharaoh ‘said: If you take a God other than me, I will surely put you with the prisoners/ قَالَ لئن اتَّخَذْتُ إِلَهاً غَيْرِي لأَجْعَلَنَّكَ مِنَ الْمَسْجُورِينَ’. In Q 28:38 ‘Pharaoh said: O chiefs I know to you there is no other God but me/ وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ مَا عَلِمْتُ لَكُمْ مِنْ إِلَهٍ غَيْرِي’. This statement reaffirms his arrogance that he cannot see his people turning against him. Denial of the messengers of God and ‘arrogance’ are two sins frequently applied to villainous characters in the Qur’an.²³⁷ Vadja and Wensinck note that

²³⁶ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 204.

²³⁷ Lazarus–Yafeh notes the major characteristic of Pharaoh in the Magical competition scene in the Qur’an is Pharaoh’s ‘arrogant unbelief’. Indeed, being ‘arrogant/استكبر’ is used in reference to Pharaoh on four occasions (Q 10:75, Q 23:46, Q 28:39 and Q 29:39) and does seem to form the heart of the Qur’an’s criticism against him. His arrogance can also be connected to other references about him ‘exalting’ himself and believing himself to be a god. Pharaoh is also described as one who ‘commits excesses/مُسْفِين’ twice (Q10:83 and 44:31) and it is stated that he

Pharaoh's aspirations to divinity, with particular reference to Q 28:38, are Aggadic in origin due to the fact that similar traditions can be found in midrashic collections.²³⁸ Of course this does not have to mean dependence as Vadja and Wensinck suggest but instead lends itself to the idea of shared exegetical environment. Although Pharaoh seeing himself as a God is a form of idolatry shown in the Qur'an, the Qur'an does not choose to paint him as one who also worships idols. This is strange as the Qur'an frequently speaks about the worship of 'idols/ أَصْنَمًا', choosing to include extra-biblical stories such as that of Noah and the destruction of his father Terah's (named Azar in Q Al-'An'ām 6:74) idols.²³⁹ In this way, the Qur'an be understood to have taken a different exegetical path to that of midrash, seeking only to portray Pharaoh as an idolater through his own deification as opposed to any other means.

In Q 43:51, the Qur'an uses Pharaoh's relationship with the Nile to express his power, showing his arrogance. In Q 43:51, Pharaoh says:

'transgressed/طَفِيَ' on three occasions (Q20:24, Q 20:43 and Q 79:17). Lazarus-Yafeh, "Self-Criticism in Jewish and Islamic Tradition," 306.

²³⁸ Wensinck and Vadja, "Fir'awn," http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2375.

²³⁹ Carol Bakhos describes this as the most prevalent image of Abraham in the Qur'an, showing him as a valiant defender of God who serves as a model for Muhammad in this respect.²³⁹ Bakhos is right that this is the most common image of Abraham shown in the Qur'an, with that story being mentioned seven times (Q 6:74-84, Q 19:41-50, Q 21:51-73, Q 6:69-86, Q 29:16-27, Q 37:83-98, Q 43:26-7 and Q 60:4). Carol Bakhos, *The Family of Abraham: Jewish, Christian and Muslim Interpretations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014) 76.

‘O people, does the kingdom of Egypt not belong to me? And these rivers flowing from under me. Then do you not see?’

يَقُومَ أَلَيْسَ لِي مُلْكُ مِصْرَ وَهَذِهِ الْأَنْهَارُ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِي أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ

Reuven Firestone notes that this verse associates Pharaoh’s power with the Nile.²⁴⁰ In midrashic traditions, an argument for Pharaoh worshipping the river is present in the *Tanhuma Yelammedenu Vaera* 5:6 and 13:1 and *Genesis Rabbah* 69:3. This is drawn from his association with the Nile as an Egyptian. There are also other references in the text from Exodus and its Haftorah portion in Ezekiel that focus on his relationship with the river. Midrashic traditions in the *Tanhuma Yelammedenu* and *Genesis Rabbah* significantly expand upon Ezekiel 29:3’s claim that Pharaoh made the Nile. Considering the Qur’an’s references to Pharaoh’s divinity do not usually rely on the Nile, it seems unlikely that they have been solely influenced by this piece of Ezekiel or even midrashic traditions that use it. However, the similarity in themes present, that of exalting oneself as a god and the presence of the river Nile, point to a shared exegetical environment.

In the Qur’an, much more direct speech from Pharaoh is included so he is able to express himself. This makes him appear considerably more unpleasant and

²⁴⁰ Firestone, “Pharaoh,” 68.

villainous. Although this is interesting for Pharaoh's characterisation, since he shares this scene with Moses it also reflects on Moses' portrayal. In making Pharaoh more than an underdeveloped, 'bad' character by fleshing out his evil qualities, it adds to the dynamic of opposites. Instead of a faceless evil, this enhanced characterisation of threatening violence in the face of jealousy makes Moses and those who choose to follow him appear braver and more devoted to their God.

Conclusion

In the Qur'an and later Islamic writings, Pharaoh is seen as a prototype for pride, arrogance and sexual lust.²⁴¹ These characteristics are interesting, as they are much the same as what is present in midrashic collections. The midrashic collections and the Qur'an are responding to the same problem; that Pharaoh is just not evil enough to justify the important position he occupies in both traditions. They both achieve the level of character detail they are seeking by expanding upon his character with qualities that would have been considered sins in their shared cultural context.

²⁴¹ Wensinck and Vajda, "Fir'awn," http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2375 . Firestone, "Pharaoh," 68.

However, they both take different routes in securing this goal. Midrashic traditions mainly focus on Pharaoh as an idolater, as his ideological sins are what concern the rabbis and what they wish to emphasize in order to make him more villainous in the mind of the reader. They are very thorough in this theme, covering foreign gods, river worship and Pharaoh's view of himself as a divine being. The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan also uses the same themes of idolatry in its translation. The Targum focusses more on Pharaoh's use of magic and equates him to his sorcerers which is slightly different.

The Qur'an takes a different approach and expands Pharaoh's personal characteristics, through his speech we see him as violent, threatening and proud. The sorcerers react differently to Moses in the Qur'an and that allows for Pharaoh to be reactive. Although there is no idolatry towards an object, such as the Nile or an idol like in midrashic traditions, the way in which Pharaoh speaks of himself as a God is present in both midrashic traditions and Qur'an.

Although midrashic traditions are committed to showing Pharaoh involved in a wide range of idolatries, the Qur'an focusses only on self-deification. This is due to a focus on arrogance, which can be seen in the Qur'an applied to Pharaoh and other villains, through grouping them together. This technique of grouping

villains together, as seen in midrashic traditions and the Qur'an, makes it clear that there is an overall pattern for what the characteristics of an 'unbeliever' are, making these scenes applicable to a wide range of circumstances.

The dramatic tension around this scene is increased as Pharaoh is made to seem more arrogant, in turn making Moses appear more righteous and the anticipation of Pharaoh's punishment more tantalizing. This scene not only causes Moses to seem more impressive but through making his opponent that much viler but to make all unbelievers appear in a pattern that stretches back to these characters.

2.3. The Submission of the Sorcerers

Introduction

The sorcerers of Pharaoh play a key role in the magical competition held between Pharaoh and Moses in Exodus 7 as they oppose Moses, as the agents of Pharaoh. They first appear in Exodus 7:11 where Pharaoh calls them to do battle with Moses. They act on behalf of Pharaoh and more widely, Egypt. In the Hebrew Bible, they appear on five occasions and only speak once in Exodus 8:19, to concede to the power of God.²⁴² They are mentioned in plural, so it is safe to assume that there are two or more of them. However, there is very little detail given about them, aside from the role that they play in the competition, their eventual concession and punishment.

In the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Tanhuma Yelammedenu, the sorcerers gain the names, Jannes and Jambres and appear in narratives outside the Plagues narratives.²⁴³ By naming the sorcerers, a number is given as well as a level of importance implied by their naming. It is clear from these details that the fact

²⁴² Exodus 7:11, 7:22, 8:7, 8:19 and 9:11.

²⁴³ These names also appear in the New Testament in 2 Timothy 3:8.

the Sorcerers lacked detail was noted by later writers who saw their potential, in this narrative and others.

In the Qur'an, the characters of the sorcerers are also expanded. In the Hebrew Bible, they see the power of God but in the Qur'an the nature of their submission is completely different. Upon seeing it they convert and are willing to risk their lives on the basis of the God of Moses and Aaron being the true God. Their submission is greater, as well as earlier, occurring as soon as the serpents are cast. These differences in plot and characterisation affect the depictions of God, Moses, Pharaoh and the Sorcerers. God and Moses appear more impressive due to the lack of further competition and as we have seen Pharaoh appears evil due to his threatening behaviour. This section will examine when and how they occur in the Hebrew Bible, Midrashic traditions and the Qur'an.

2.3.1. The Sorcerers of Egypt in the Hebrew Bible

In the Hebrew Bible, the sorcerers occupy a very small role, only appearing five times. They act of behalf of Pharaoh and Moses on behalf of God, both agents of their respective masters. This creates a potentially uncomfortable dynamic as Moses is equal to 'sorcerers' in the text. Within the wider context of the text,

Moses represents the Israelites, the chosen people of God, and the sorcerers represent the Egyptians, another culture and faith that opposes the Israelites. When and how the sorcerers occur, the context in which their magic operates will be examined.

The sorcerers of Pharaoh first appear during Exodus 7:11:

‘And also Pharaoh called to the wise men and the sorcerers. And then the Sorcerers of Egypt also did so with their spells’

וַיִּקְרָא גַם־פַּרְעֹה לַחֲכָמִים וְלַמְכַשְׁפִּים וַיַּעֲשׂוּ גַם־הֵם חֲרֻטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם בְּלִהְטִיהֶם בֶּן:

In later appearances, they are also trying to replicate the work of Moses and Aaron (Exod 7:22, 8:7, 8:18–19). They are first referred to as the ‘wise men/חֲכָמִים’ and ‘sorcerers/מְכַשְׁפִּים’ in Exodus 7:11. In the same verse they are collectively referred to as ‘sorcerers of Egypt/חֲרֻטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם’ and then this name is used to refer to them thereafter. The fact that three names are initially used to refer to these people makes their identity more confusing. Although ‘sorcerers/מְכַשְׁפִּים’ and ‘sorcerers/חֲרֻטְמֵי’ are synonyms, ‘wise men/חֲכָמִים’ is more general. It is possible that there are two or three separate groups of people or just one group, described three ways. How many people each of these groups is composed of and what any who are not in the magical competition are doing there is not made clear. They are successful in replicating the plague of blood

(Exod 7:22) and the plague of frogs (Exod 8:7) but they cannot replicate the plague of lice (Exod 8:14–15). Upon realising that they cannot replicate this third plague, they say to Pharaoh ‘This is the finger of God/אֶצְבַּע אֱלֹהִים הוּא’ and do not continue to compete with Moses and God (Exod 8:15).²⁴⁴ The sorcerers are mentioned once more in the biblical narrative shown being punished with the plague of boils like the rest of the Egyptians (Exod 9:11). In the Hebrew Bible, these men are mentioned sparingly, such that they are barely more than an indistinct group. The point of their submission has no obvious reasoning and Pharaoh’s reaction to it is not noted. The sorcerers are then punished by God, along with the rest of the Egyptians. They seem to be punished in the same way, such that we must assume their role as sorcerers did not mark them out, only that the author wishes us to know that they were included. The sorcerers have a small role and then blend into the rest of the Egyptian population, becoming part of the wider Plagues narrative as opposed to having any personal importance of their own.

²⁴⁴ The fact that the sorcerers only appear in this competition for the first three plagues and introductory competition has been of some interest to the field of source criticism. See, Childs, *Exodus*, 151.

Magic and practitioners of magic are often placed in opposition to religion in both cultural and scholarly discourses, however, in the Hebrew Bible this negative attitude does not seem to prevail.²⁴⁵ What is important about ‘magic’ in the Hebrew Bible is where it came from, this is clear in the Moses and the Sorcerers competition, as Moses’ magic is from God and the sorcerers’ magic is not. Both terms are very difficult to define and general descriptors often overlap. There is a wide context for magical prohibition in the Hebrew Bible despite the Israelites engaging with magic in the form of divination on several occasions.²⁴⁶ In Exodus 7, it is possible to see Moses and Aaron in the role of sorcerers, even their first sign, the snake is related to a type of banned magic.²⁴⁷ However, it is also possible to see them in a priestly role. A priestly narrative would view magic more positively as priests have access to types of magic in the Hebrew Bible, such as divination.²⁴⁸ Indeed, Moses and Aaron act first on each plague and then the Sorcerers of Egypt copy them, so Moses and Aaron are in opposition to

²⁴⁵ Todd Klutz, “Reinterpreting Magic in the World of Jewish and Christian Scripture: An Introduction,” in *Magic in the Biblical World: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, ed. Todd Klutz (London: T and T Clark, 2003), 3.

²⁴⁶ Exod 22:17–18; Lev 19:26, 31; Lev 20:6, 27; Deut 18:10–12; I Sam 28:1–13; II Kgs 9, 23–24; II Chr 33:1–9; Isa 8:19–20; Isa 47; Mic 5:12–13.

²⁴⁷ There is even a type of magic, ‘נחש’, literally snake but often interpreted to mean hissing or whispering in these cases (Lev 19:26, Deut. 18:10–11). Considering the staff of Moses turns into a ‘נחש’, a connection is being made here.

²⁴⁸ In the Hebrew Bible, priests are involved with magic through the Urim and Thummim (Exod 28:30, Lev 8:8; Num 27:21, 1 Sam 28:6, Ezra 2:63, Neh 7:65).

practitioners of magic. Thomas C. Romer argues that the prohibitions on magic come from the Deuteronomistic strand of the text and that the encounter shown in Exodus 7 is part of a priestly narrative with a more positive view on magic.²⁴⁹ However, what is important in this scene is not the performance of magic but the culture from which the magic comes. The magic of Moses and Aaron is directly from Yahweh, God of the Hebrews whereas the magic of the sorcerers is Egyptian. Romer agrees that although the subject of this scene is magic, this the scene is actually a cultural battle between the Yahwist and the Egyptians.²⁵⁰ Throughout the uses of magic in the Hebrew Bible, there is a separation between magic sanctioned by the God of Israel and that used without his permission or by foreigners.²⁵¹ Although magic and religion can be seen in opposition, it is clear that the view from the Hebrew Bible does not divide these topics and is focussed on having the correct authority. Thus, in this scene Moses and Aaron need not be seen as doing something forbidden.

In the Hebrew Bible, the sorcerers appear rarely and it is difficult to be sure of anything about them, even how many there are. What is clear is that they act as

²⁴⁹ Romer, "Competing Sorcerers," 17–19.

²⁵⁰ Romer, "Competing Sorcerers," 22.

²⁵¹ See Frederick H. Cryer, *Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment: A Socio-historical Investigation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 229–282.

a force of opposition to Moses and God. The difference between what they are doing and what Moses and Aaron are doing is that Moses and Aaron derive their magic from God and it is therefore legitimate, making clear why it is allowed and also why they win the competition.

2.3.2. Fleshing out the Sorcerers in Midrashic Collections

The Midrashic traditions mention the Sorcerers of Egypt and elaborate on their narratives. They are used in narratives other than the Plagues narrative in which they occur in the Hebrew Bible. An interesting feature of the Sorcerers in the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 19:1 and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan is the decision to give them names. In the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of Exodus 7:11:

‘Then Pharaoh called to the wise men and to the sorcerers; *and, Jannes and Jambres*, the sorcerers *who were in* Egypt, also did the same with the spells *of their divinations.*’

וַיִּקְרָא לְחֹד פְּרָעָה לְחַכְמֵיָא וּלְחַרְשֵׁיָא וְעַבְדֵּי לְחֹד הַיְנוּן יַגִּיס וַיִּמְבְּרִיס חַרְשֵׁין
דְּבַמְצָרִים בְּלַחְשֵׁי קוּסְמִיהוֹן הַיְכָדִין:

These names, Jannes and Jambres, are found here in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the Tanhuma Yelmdenu *Ki Tisa* 19:1, as well as in the New Testament, ‘Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers

oppose the truth' (2 Tim. 3:8).²⁵² In the Hebrew Bible, the sorcerers are never named, we do not even know the exact number that are present. This new rendering of the text creates a hierarchy among the sorcerers, that there are the 'wise men and sorcerers/חֲכִימָא וְלַחְרָשִׁיא' and then also 'Jannes and Jambres', who correspond with the 'sorcerers of Egypt/חֲרָטְמֵי מִצְרַיִם' in Exodus 7:11. The three groups are separated to the point where the distinction between the wise men, sorcerers and Jannes and Jambres is clear. The inclusion of 'of their divinations' seems to cement the magical nature of the events they create, which creates further separation from what God creates through Aaron and Moses to what the sorcerers create through magic. This Targum includes further information about the characters of the sorcerers, giving them both names and describing their actions more fully. It also clears up some of the ambiguity regarding the status and role of the sorcerers in Exodus 7:11 by making the groups distinct.

In the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, Jannes and Jambres also appear in Exodus 1:15, interpreting Pharaoh's dream and telling him of the child to be born to the Israelites (Moses), expanding the information known about them in the process:

²⁵² In the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 19:1, the names are spelt slightly differently but are the same in essence, 'יִוְנוֹס וְיִמְבְּרוֹס'. The semi-vowels have been elongated from yods to vavs but the consonants remain the same.

‘He called to all the sorcerers of Egypt and gave to them his dream. Jannes and Jambres, the head Sorcerers, opened their mouths and said to Pharaoh: A child will be born to the congregation of Israel, by whose hand there will be destruction to all of the land of Egypt.’

וּקְרָא כָּל חֲרָשֵׁי מִצְרַיִם וְתָנִי לְהוֹן יֵת חוֹלְמִיָּה מִן יַד פְּתָחִין פּוֹמְהוֹן יִינִיס וְיִמְבָּרֵס
רִישֵׁי חֲרָשֵׁיאַ וְאַמְרִין לְפָרְעָה בִּיר חַד עָתִיד לְמַהּוֹי מְתִילִיד בְּכַנְיִשְׁתְּהוֹן דְּיִשְׂרָאֵל דְּעַל
יְדוּ עָתִידָא לְמַחְרָבָא כָּל אַרְעָא דְּמִצְרַיִם

Here, Jannes and Jambres remain within the Exodus narrative. As well as being named, a piece of information about their rank is also given. Jannes and Jambres are the chief sorcerers. This both explains their role but also makes it likely that the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan just sees them as the only ones important enough to have names. If there are chief sorcerers, it makes sense that there must be others for them to oversee. This leaves open that the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan is interpreting that there were many sorcerers present at the magical competition with Moses. It seems that the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan is again using the sorcerers to make Moses appear more impressive, as it clearly sees Moses having competed against many of Egypt’s sorcerers, who are an organized force with a hierarchy.

Jannes and Jambres also occur in other positions in the Hebrew Bible narrative, where they previously had no role, such as the Golden Calf and as the servants of Balaam (Exod 32 and Num 22). In the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 19:1–

4, they appear transforming the gold earrings of the Israelites into the Golden Calf.²⁵³ The sorcerers not only solve the textual problem of how the calf is created, but also excuse the Israelites from wrongdoing. In this narrative, the sorcerers are used as a familiar source of prohibited magic, the kind that has not been derived from God. They are believable creators of the Golden Calf due to their magical prowess being shown in the Plagues narrative. Two servants riding with Balaam in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan to Numbers 22:22 are called Jannes and Jambres. In Numbers 22, the servants have no names and it is not made clear in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan whether these are intended to be the sorcerers of the Plagues narrative or the just people with the same name. Regardless of their identity, the names set up a parallel between this narrative and the Plagues narrative. The obvious parallel seems to be of the servants serving bad masters, Pharaoh and Balaam. In this case, naming them Jannes and Jambres enhances Balaam's sinful nature since as surely the Pharaoh of Egypt is the greater sinner. In these stories, it does not seem as though the sorcerers themselves are the focus, more that they have fulfilled a need in another narrative. However, what was considered important about them by the Targum

²⁵³ An examination of this interpretation is present in the section on the Nature of the Calf, later in this thesis.

Pseudo- Jonathan and Tanhuma Yelammedenu is clear, they are skilled sorcerers and they serve poor masters.

From the clear prohibitions on magic in the Hebrew Bible, comes a more nuanced view in the Mishnah.²⁵⁴ Certainly, the Mishnah provides strict prohibitions on magic but it also provides loopholes as to types of magic which can be performed, such as for healing or aiding your study.²⁵⁵ Despite the ways in which magic is to be allowed being expanded in the Mishnah and Talmud Bavli, the prohibitions still remain. This is again in part due to the idea that magic is foreign, whether that be Amorite, Egyptian or Persian. Ulmer views this continued hostility towards the ‘foreignness’ of magic as being due to the formative state that Judaism is it. In other words, it is necessary for Judaism to oppose what is other in order to make its own identity clear.²⁵⁶ In the both the

²⁵⁴ For more detail see, Brigitte Rikva Kern-Ulmer, “The Depiction of Magic in Rabbinic Texts: The Rabbinic and Greek Concepts of Magic,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 27, no. 3 (August 1996): 289–303. J. Neusner, “Science and Magic, Miracle and Magic in Formative Judaism,” in *Religion, Science and Magic*, eds. J. Neusner, E. S. Frerichs and P.V McCracken Flesher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 61–81.

²⁵⁵ Summarised by Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History*, 369. Saul Shaked, “Medieval Jewish Magic in Relation to Islam: Theoretical Attitudes and Genres,” in *Judaism and Islam, Essays in Honor of William M. Brinner*, eds. Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astren (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 103–104.

²⁵⁶ Kern-Ulmer, “The Depiction of Magic in Rabbinic Texts,” 294.

biblical and later Aggadic and Halakhic traditions, the Israelites and Egyptians are pitted against each other as direct opposites in terms of religion and culture.

In terms of the Sorcerers of Egypt, they are not more obviously prohibited in the Midrashic and Targumic texts in which they are found. However, their roles are expanded so they become a clear enemy as opposed to an indistinct mass acting at the behest of Pharaoh. This is achieved through naming and further description. Their inclusion in other stories, such as the Golden Calf and Bilaam's donkey places them in situations where Israelites are led astray, confirming their attributes as morally bad characters.

2.3.3. The Submission of the Sorcerers in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, there are three interesting differences in the behaviour of the sorcerers. The sorcerers recognise the power of God after three plagues in the biblical version, whereas in the Qur'an they recognise it immediately. On recognition of this, the sorcerers then submit, recognising the God of Aaron and Moses as the Lord of the Worlds, رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ (Q Al-'A'rāf 7.121 and Q Al-Shu'arā', 26:47). Finally, their submission is described in terms used in the daily Muslim ritual of prayers, using terminology present in the Qur'an.

The earlier submission of the sorcerers in the Qur'an not only makes them more sympathetic characters but acts on all those around them. Their submission affects the characterisation of Moses and the depiction of God. In the Hebrew Bible, the sorcerers of Egypt can reproduce the snakes, blood and frogs. Humans being able to recreate the work of God, through whatever means, makes God's power less impressive. However, if on seeing the first miracle, being able to reproduce it but then instantly recognising the power of God, how miraculous the event was, is very clear. This affects not only God, whose power is clearly undeniable but also he who wields it, Moses. Karl Prenner notes that this instant submission makes the Sorcerers and Israelites the prototype for believers and the Egyptians appear as a prototype for believers.²⁵⁷ Prenner notes the Egyptians are presented in contrast to these believers who submit as sinners who are not paying attention to the signs of God and will ultimately be punished.²⁵⁸

As well as the submission becoming instant, the nature of the submission is also different as here they convert to monotheism, a much more powerful statement of the visibility of the power of God. In the Hebrew Bible, the sorcerers, see the

²⁵⁷ Prenner, Muhammad und Musa, 73.

²⁵⁸ Prenner, Muhammad und Musa, 73.

‘finger of God’ but nothing further is said. In the Qur’an, the Sorcerers see God and convert. This is expressed in Q 7:121–122, where the sorcerers say they ‘believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the God of Moses and Aaron’ (also Q 26:47). This term, ‘Lord of the Worlds/رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ’ is a name with meaning, appearing in the opening Sūrah of the Qur’an, Al-Fatihah and on forty two occasions to signify God’s mastery over all creation.²⁵⁹ The sorcerers conversion is expanded in Q 7:125–126 when they respond to Pharaoh’s threats that, ‘to our Lord we will return’ and that they ‘believed in the signs of our Lord’, and finally ask that the Lord ‘pour out his patience upon and let us die as Muslims’ (also Q 26:51).²⁶⁰ This term that came to be the name of those who follow Muhammad, ‘Muslim/مُسْلِمِينَ’, literally means one who submits. Thus, this very word implies that a kind of conversion has taken place, leading to a continuous submission. The quotation from Q 7:125, that ‘to their Lord they will return’, also shows the conversion of the sorcerers is so strong that they are willing to die for their new-

²⁵⁹ Simonetta Calderini, “Lord,” in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an: Volume 3 J–O*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 229–231. In the version of the conversion in Sūrat Ṭā’ Hā’, the term ‘lord of the worlds’ is not used but they do refer to God as the who one who created them ‘والذي فطرنا’ (Q 20:72) which recognises the same mastery of creation as the title.

²⁶⁰ The word ‘Muslim’ is not used in Sūrat Ṭā’ Hā’, however that they will go on to the afterlife is still included with the gardens of paradise described in Q 20:76. Additional detail about the forgiving nature of the Lord is also included in Q 20:74–75. This term ‘signs/آيَاتٍ’ is also loaded with symbolism and discussed in more detail with relation to the Plagues.

found belief. In a list of Aggadic and Qur'anic parallels concerning Pharaoh, Wensinck and Vadja consider the conversion of the sorcerers a Qur'anic innovation, not linked to Aggadic material.²⁶¹ The submission of the Sorcerers is steeped in Qur'anic language related to complete belief in God, making the conversion appear sincere and God's power clear.

The time at which the sorcerers submit and the words they use are important, as is the physical description of them at this time as it is used to make their submission appear more Islamic in a way that would have been familiar to a Muslim audience. In the Qur'an, 'The sorcerers fall down prostrate/ وَالْقِيَ السَّحَرَةُ' (Q Al-'A'rāf 7:120, Q Ṭā' Hā' 20:70 and Q Al-Shu'arā' 26:46) before Moses. Ideas of prostration are also key in Islam as they are part of the daily prayer cycle, expressed through the words 'raka'/'رَكَعٌ' and 'sujud/'سُجْدٌ'.²⁶² These prostrations are not only ritual acts, performed every day but also key to the ideas of humility before God that the Qur'an preaches. This idea of humility can be seen in the Qur'an, presented in opposition to the Meccan pagans who are

²⁶¹ Wensinck and Vadja, "Fir'awn," http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_2375.

²⁶² See Roberto Totoli, "Bowing and Prostration," in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an: Volume 1 A-D*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 254-55. Roberto Totoli, "Muslim Attitudes Towards Prostration (sujūd): I. Arabs and Prostration at the Beginning of Islam and in the Qur'ān." *Studia Islamica* 88 (1998): 5-34.

arrogant and mock the Muslims for their submission (Q Al-Furqān 25:60 and Q Al-Qalam 68:42–43). Other verses stress the importance of prostrating to believers and prostrating whilst reading the Qur’an.²⁶³ The sorcerers here prostrate themselves using the word ‘*sujud*/سُجِدْ’, tying in perfectly with the ritual language for this act. They are placed in the role of Muslims and Pharaoh in the role of an arrogant person, opposing them. This simple description of body language creates an intertextual link, to rituals performed daily, that places the characters of the sorcerers and Pharaoh in instantly familiar roles of Muslims and those who oppose them.

The prostrations of sorcerers in the Qur’an may be related to a phrase from the Hebrew bible that describes them as prostrate. In the Hebrew Bible, the last appearance of the sorcerers in Exodus 9:11 begins, ‘And the Sorcerers could not stand before Moses/וְלֹא יָכְלוּ הַחֹרְטָמִים לַעֲמֹד לְפָנַי מֹשֶׁה’. Now, a reading of this verse could be that they fell down before him, as they could not stand. However, it could also mean that they could not be in his presence and left. There is another magical competition in the Hebrew Bible, to which this action of prostration is more familiar. In 1 Kings 18, Elijah competes with the Baal priests to show

²⁶³ For full references see Totolli, “Bowling and Prostration,” 254.

whose God is greatest, with Elijah victorious.²⁶⁴ On witnessing the power of

YHWH in 1 Kings 18:39:

‘And all the people saw and fell upon their faces and they said YHWH he is God, YHWH he is God’

וַיִּרְא כָּל־הָעָם וַיִּפְּלוּ עַל־פְּנֵיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים יְהוָה הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים:

The theme of people falling on their faces before God is a common one

occurring over 30 times in both the Old and New Testaments, on occasions

where the person concerned encounters the presence of divinity.²⁶⁵ Despite the

prostration of the sorcerers being new to this narrative, the idea of falling down

before the presence of God is used frequently in the Bible. In his article, Totolli

notes that bowing and prostration were very common across Judaism and

Christianity and attested to in pre-Islamic sources. Despite prostration being

common in the Middle East during this time, the conversion of the sorcerers is

unmistakeably Islamic due to the vocabulary used.

The sorcerers of the Qur’an serve the same role in the Hebrew Bible and the

Midrashic traditions, that is to show the power of God. However, the way in

²⁶⁴ This Elijah narrative is told within the Qur’an in Sūrat Al Šāffāt 37:123–132, with the phrase ‘Do you call upon Baal and leave the best of your creators?’ / *‘اندعون بعلا وتذرون احسن الخلقين* / in Q 37:125 being what identifies it.

²⁶⁵ Occasions in the Hebrew Bible where people fall on their faces before God (not exhaustive): Ezek 1:28, Josh 7:6, Gen 19:1, Num 20:6 and Lev 9:24. In Ruth 2:10, Ruth is prostrate before Boaz not God showing that are other uses.

which they do this is quite different and considerably more convincing. Instead of simply recognising the power of God, they fully submit to it, making it seem much more powerful. Their method of doing so is unmistakably Islamic, making their actions more relatable to the audience of the Qur'an. Contextually, this scene appears to be related to many other tales of belief and disbelief.

Conclusion

The characters of the sorcerers lack detail in the Hebrew Bible and are an instrument of the opposition and have no autonomy over themselves. In midrashic and targumic traditions, their characters are expanded to include names and they are placed in other stories, fleshing them out and giving them life beyond the plagues narrative. In the Qur'an, they receive a considerably more detailed portrayal in this magical competition scene. Although their conversion is only shown through four ayas, this is four ayas of direct speech. They oppose Pharaoh, even in the face of the repercussions for their actions and their submission to God is filled with Islamic language, steeped in meaning. They address God using a name used frequently in the Qur'an, they prostrate themselves in the way ritually required in the Qur'an and they refer to themselves as 'muslim'. Despite having examined the exegetical environment

around bowing and prostration and it being common across the Hebrew Bible as well, the language used makes this clear that a specifically Islamic conversion process that is taking place. From relative obscurity in the Hebrew Bible, the sorcerers in the Qur'an are used to show how clear God's legitimacy is, even to unbelievers and that it is worth standing up to those who disagree, despite terrible odds.

2.4. The Fluidity of the Plagues Narrative – Inclusions and Exclusions

Introduction

In the Hebrew Bible, the narrative of Moses and the Sorcerers in Exodus 7:7–16 is part of the larger Plagues narrative. The Moses and Sorcerers narrative is seen as an introduction by scholars such as Childs, who interprets it as an ‘initial attempt’ to convince Pharaoh of God’s power, after which the ‘sequence of the plagues starts’.²⁶⁶ In the Hebrew Bible, the Plagues narrative takes place from Exodus 7, starting with the plague of blood (Exod 7:17–25) and culminating with the death of the first-born Egyptians in Exodus 12 (Exod 12:21–30).²⁶⁷ Over five chapters, it goes into vivid detail about each plague and is highly significant within the text due to the role it plays in the Israelites’ journey to Israel, marking the transition of the Israelites from being slaves to being free people. This narrative is also an important point in the Israelites’ relationship with God. Before the Plagues narrative, God’s relationship is with individuals, whereas afterwards, his relationship is expanded to include all Israelites through

²⁶⁶ Childs, *Exodus*, 151.

²⁶⁷ For more detail about individual plagues, see, Moshe Greenberg, “Plagues of Egypt,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica Second Edition: Volume 16*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit, MI: USA Macmillan Reference, 2007), 210–214.

their coming into the land of Israel.²⁶⁸ However, in the Qur'an, the Plagues narrative has been dramatically reduced. The Qur'an does not go through each plague in pain-staking detail, as the Hebrew Bible does, but it does not ignore them either. The Qur'an uses the phrases, 'signs' and 'clear signs', to refer to the plagues. The Qur'an also makes a list of the plagues in Q 7:133, although this list deviates from the biblical order substantially.

In this section, the form and purpose of the Plagues narratives in the Hebrew Bible, Midrashic collections and the Qur'an will be compared in order to demonstrate that the contents of the Plagues narrative has always been fluid.

Differences in number, contents and terms are present across these traditions. A theme that comes across throughout the Plagues narratives in the Hebrew Bible, Midrashic collections and the Qur'an is that of power dynamics.²⁶⁹ However, this theme of power dynamics changes. In the Hebrew Bible, there is a power struggle between God and Pharaoh, conducted through Moses, Aaron and

²⁶⁸ For more on this pivotal change in relationship between God and the Israelites, see R. W. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32–34* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1983).

²⁶⁹ The theme of power dynamics in this section has previously been commented on by Thomas B. Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009). Childs, *Exodus*, 153. Noth, *Exodus*, 71–72. Greenstein, "The First-Born Plague," 563–565. Ari Mark Cartun, "Who knows Ten? The Structural and Symbolic Use of Numbers in the Ten Plagues Exodus 7:14–13:16," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 45 (1991): 65–117.

sometimes the Sorcerers of Egypt, which is symbolic of a wider battle between Israel and Egypt. In the Qur'an, the narrative only focusses on one section of the Plagues, that of Moses and the Sorcerers. The different literary context of the Qur'an also affects the presentation of the Plagues narratives as the Israel versus Egypt dynamic is not of such importance to a group that do not consider themselves genealogically related to the Israelites. However, the Qur'an features an ongoing narrative of the messengers of God being victorious over idolaters that replaces the Israel versus Egypt narrative present in the Plagues narrative.

2.4.1. The Plagues across the Hebrew Bible

Although the Plagues are traditionally ten in number, starting with the plague of blood and ending with the death of the firstborns, the number is widely contested across biblical and extra-biblical material, showing the fluidity of the tradition. In biblical material, the Plagues are mentioned again in Psalms 78:44–51 and 105:28–36. In Psalm 105:28–36, only seven plagues are mentioned and these are not the same as those in Exodus 7–12. Lice, death of the livestock and plague of boils, from Exodus 8:16–18, 9:3–7 and 8–11 respectively, are all excluded. In Psalm 105, the plagues appear in a different order than in Exodus. Darkness comes first, followed by blood, frogs, flies, hail, locusts and the death

of the firstborn. A verse between the plagues of hail and locusts, about the death of vines and fruit trees, may appear to be its own plague at first glance (Ps 105:33). However, when read intertextually, it is clear that this is merely describing the destruction of caused by the plague of hail, as described in Exodus 9:25. These differences can be explained by an examination of the theme of Psalm 105. From the beginnings of the Psalm, it is clear that it relates to God's covenant made with Abraham to provide his people with a land of their own (Ps 105:8–11). The Psalm moves from Abraham to those who wandered from nation to nation, to Joseph in Egypt, into the Plagues, through Moses in the desert and ends in Israel. Building upon earlier work by R. J Clifford, Dennis Tucker Jr. also notes repeated words in the text that relate to this theme of the covenant, such as 'land', 'servant' and 'chosen ones'.²⁷⁰ An argument can be made that this grouping of plagues is more suited to a theme about land. The excluded plagues, lice, livestock and boils, affect people not agricultural ability. The remaining plagues, darkness, blood, frogs, swarms, hail and locusts would all severely impair the growth of crops. A focus on land-based agriculture also makes sense of the verse devoted to the death of trees and vines, considering the

²⁷⁰ Tucker, "Plagues in Psalm 105," 403. R.J Clifford, "Style and Purpose in Psalm 105," *Bib* 50 (1969): 491–96.

whole section is only eight verses long. In Psalm 105, the narrative of the Plagues has been substantially altered in order to fit within a thematic structure focussed around the idea of God's covenant with Abraham.

In Psalm 78:44–51, the plagues are again different to those presented in Exodus. The plagues of blood, flies, frogs, locusts, hail and the death of the first born are clearly mentioned (in that order). Although cattle are mentioned (Ps 78:48), it is in relation to their death by hail as is also shown in Exodus 9:25 as opposed to being shown as a plague of its own as Greenstein asserts.²⁷¹ There is also a pestilence upon the people in Psalms 78:50, 'דָּבָר', unlike in Exodus where the pestilence affects only the livestock (Exodus 9:3). Greenstein goes on to argue that the Plagues have been repurposed in this Psalm in order to present a reminder and moral lesson to the people, that will encourage them to become more faithful to God.²⁷² The introductory section of Psalm 78 expresses that it wishes to remind the young of the ways of patriarchs, so they will not sin like their fathers (Ps 78:1–8). However, it would be better categorised as a Psalm about the faithfulness of the Lord. Psalm 78 repeatedly shows the Israelites

²⁷¹ Edward L. Greenstein, "Mixing Memory and Design: Reading Psalm 78," *Prooftexts* 10, no.2 (1990): 197.

²⁷² Greenstein, "Reading Psalm 78," 197.

misdeeds and how angry God becomes (Ps 78:49) but ends on the note of his enduring faithfulness, ‘with a complete heart, he tended to them and with a skilful hand, he led them’ (Ps 78:72). The plagues are depicted in Ps 78:44–51 to emphasise how angry God can be while also showing that he can use this anger to help the Israelites, juxtaposing his faithfulness with their faithlessness. The inclusion of a plague of leprosy feeds into the theme of God’s anger, as it is a punishment always meted out by the Lord. In Psalm 78, as in Psalm 105, the plagues are being used in order to argue a point, whether this is about God’s covenant concerning the land or his enduring faithfulness despite his rage.

Despite the number of Plagues in the Hebrew Bible not being fixed, ten has become the authoritative number. Jonathan Grossman suggests that the idea of numbering them is found in its earliest form in the Book of Jubilees, a work from the 2nd Century BCE.²⁷³ The Book of Jubilees 48:11 states:

‘And everything took place according to your words; ten great and terrible judgements came upon the land of Egypt’²⁷⁴

²⁷³ Grossman, “The Structural Paradigm of the Ten Plagues Narrative,” 592.

²⁷⁴ I haven’t provided the Hebrew as most translations of the Book of Jubilees are taken from Ethiopic Ge’ez. Hebrew fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls have been found but never a full manuscript. J. C VanderKam’s study find the Ethiopic version to be an accurate rendition of the Hebrew fragments. J. C VanderKam, “The Book of Jubilees,” in L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls: Volume 1*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 435. This translation is from R. H Charles version digitised here, https://www.sefaria.org/Book_of_Jubilees.48?lang=bi.

However, between verses 48:6–9 the Book of Jubilees lists what seem to be eleven plagues. In Jubilees 48:6–8, the plagues listed are the same as those in the Exodus narrative. However, in verse 48:9, an extra plague seems to have been included which describes the destruction of the idols of the Egyptians with fire. Thus, even a source that states there are ten plagues, finds it difficult to stick to ten plagues. Even the plagues of Exodus can themselves be grouped into nine depending on how one divides them.²⁷⁵ In terms of the symbolism around numbers present in Judaism, nines and tens both have significance. Nine is three threes which is one of the numbers that symbolises completeness in the sense of a start, middle and end, whereas ten is symbolic in a genealogical sense as there are ten generations from Adam to Noah.²⁷⁶ There is also the opportunity to expand the plagues to eleven by including the scene between Moses and the Sorcerers as a plague. Thomas B. Dozeman refers to it as an ‘introductory plague of snakes’.²⁷⁷ However, the production of snakes does not affect the entire people of Egypt as with the rest of the Plagues, and the prevailing opinion is that it functions as an introductory formula.²⁷⁸ D. J McCarthy notes that the

²⁷⁵ This is something noticed by the Rashbam (d.1148) commenting on Exodus 7:26. Also featured in Chizkuni (13th century) on Exod 8:15 and Sforno (d.1550) on Exod 8:12.

²⁷⁶ Cartun, “Who knows Ten?” 75.

²⁷⁷ Dozeman, *Commentary on Exodus*, 196.

²⁷⁸ Childs, *Exodus*, 151.

snakes are menacing but not damaging and thus does not need to be understood as a plague in itself.²⁷⁹ As an introduction, the section of the competition between Moses and the Sorcerers introduces the back and forth power struggle between God and Pharaoh that will ensue for the next five chapters. The snakes only appear in the presence of Pharaoh and his court, the sorcerers reciprocate and then Pharaoh refuses Moses' requests to leave with the Israelites. This is a version of each plague sequence but in miniature scale, as it only affects a small number of Egyptians. Even in sequences where the number ten has been specifically quoted or seems obvious from the context, such as in the Exodus narrative, some fluidity over the number of plagues remains. This is significant when considering the transmission of this story into midrashic collections and in the Qur'an, as the number remains unfixed.

From reading the Exodus story, one might assume that the Plagues are intended to change Pharaoh's mind but they are actually to show God's power. The structure of the plagues aids this assumption, a plague occurs (e.g Exod 7:19–21) and Pharaoh refuses to let the Israelites go (Exod 7:22–23) which seems to cause another plague (Exod 8:1–6). As Martin Noth notes, 'the story of the

²⁷⁹ D. J McCarthy, "Moses Dealings with Pharaoh Ex. 7.8–10.27," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27, no.4 (1965): 40–41.

plagues has no real purpose', as Moses leaves with the Israelites without Pharaoh letting them go, thus rendering the plagues ineffective.²⁸⁰ However, the plagues are not there for Pharaoh's benefit. The reason given for the plagues is in Exodus 7:5, 'And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord when I stretch out my hand over Egypt and bring the children of Israel out from among them'. The Plagues are not an exit mechanism for the Israelites but a way in which to show the power and legitimacy of God. The Israelites leaving is the way in which this objective is achieved as opposed to the objective itself. God stretching out his hand also refers to the plagues, as can be seen by the language used each time Aaron enacts a plague, using the same word 'נָטַף', for stretching out one's hand (Exod 7:19, 8:1, 2, 12 and 13). Pharaoh is among the Egyptians and therefore this may be understood to apply to him also, however it does not state that he must release the Israelites. In fact, Exodus 7:5, makes clear that God will bring the Israelites out of Egypt, not Pharaoh. When Exodus 7:5 is considered, it is clear that the purpose of the Plagues is to convince the Egyptians of the legitimacy and power of God and that this will be achieved through the use of Plagues and bringing the Israelites out of Egypt.

²⁸⁰ Noth, *Exodus: A Commentary*, 68–69.

The Hebrew Bible shows that the plagues are by no means a fixed narrative.

Within the Bible, there are multiple numbers and contents given for the Plagues, as shown by versions in the Psalms. Within the Exodus narrative, it is possible to include extra plagues, depending on how the narrative is divided up. Finally, from the statement in Exodus 7:5, the purpose of the Plagues is to cause belief in the Egyptians. This purpose does not require a set number of plagues, nor does it specify what needs to be in them. When considering the transmission of the Plagues into the midrashic collections, the lack of a fixed set of contents continues as does the overriding message of God's power and legitimacy.

2.4.2. Continuing Fluidity and Application to Exegetical Frameworks – The

Plagues in Midrashic Collections

In Midrashic collections the number of the Plagues is also discussed, often without an agreement reached. It is not just the number of plagues that is not fixed but the content of them and even how they are described. The number, content or even whether they are 'plagues' is not what is important to these midrashic interpreters. What is important is that the Plagues can be easily manipulated to fit into different exegetical frameworks. The exegetical

framework most popular for the use of the Plagues is in order to argue the power of God.

The Mekhilta of Simon Bar Yochai offers a variety of answers for how many plagues there were in *Beshallah* 26:6:

And Israel saw the great power/hand: Different and severe plagues and different and severe deaths. Rabbi Yosi Ha-Galili says, 'How can you say from the Scripture in Egypt there were ten plagues and upon the sea there were fifty (plagues)?' In Egypt, it is said 'and the Sorcerers said to Pharaoh'. And on the sea it says, 'and Israel saw the great power/hand'. How many were they struck with one finger? Ten plagues. Now we must say that in Egypt, they were struck with ten plagues and that upon the sea, they were struck with fifty plagues.

Rabbi Eliezer says, 'From where do we know that each plague that was brought upon the Egyptians by the Holy One, blessed be he, was four plagues?' It is said, 'And he sent them burning anger'. One, anger, two, indignation and trouble, three. And a band of wicked messengers, four. So now he must say that in Egypt they were struck with forty plagues and upon the sea, they were struck with two hundred. Rabbi Akiva says, 'from where do we know that each plague the Holy One, blessed be he, was five plagues?' It is said, 'And he sent them burning

anger'. Behold, it is one. So now we say that in Egypt they were struck with fifty plagues and upon the sea they were struck with two hundred and fifty plagues.

ויר[א ישראל] את היד הגדולה. : מכות המורות ומכות משונות זו [מזו ומיתות] משונות ומיתות המורות זה מזו : ר' יוסי הגלילי אומ' מ[נין אתה] אומ' שלקו מצ' במצ' עשר מכות ועל הים לקו חמיש[ים מכות] : שבמצ' הוא אומ' ויאמרו החרטומים אל פרעה וגו' (שמ' ח טו) [ועל הים] הוא אומ' וירא יש' את היד הגדולה וגו' : כמה לקו ב[אצבע עשר] מכות: אמור מעתה במצ' לקו עשר מכות ועל הים [לקו] חמשים מכות : ר' אליעזר אומ' מנין שכל מכה ש[הביא] המקום ב"ה על המצ' היתה של ארבע מכות : שנא' וישלח בם חרון אפו וגומ' (תה' עח מט) עברה : אחת וזעם שתים וצרה שלש. ומשל' מלאכי רעים ארבע. : אמור מעתה במצרים לקו ארבעים לקו ארבעים מכות ועל הים לקו מאתים מכות. : ר' עקיב' אומ' מנין שכל מכה ומכה שהביא המקום ב"ה על המצ' היתה של חמש מכות : שנא' ישלח בם חרון אפו וגומ' : הרי אחת וכול : אמור מעתה במצ' לקו חמשים מכות ועל הים לקו חמשים ומאתי' מכות.²⁸¹

This interpretation uses the polyvalence of the word 'יד', meaning both 'hand' and 'power'. This with the verse from Exodus 9, where sorcerers see the finger, 'אצבע', of God. The central argument is that if a finger of God created ten plagues then a whole hand, five fingers, would create fifty plagues. This interpretation acknowledges two biblical Plagues narratives and seeks to synthesise them into a whole new set of numbers. This tradition clearly seeks to enhance God's powers and explain why the people feared him but also points to the fluidity available to interpret the number of the plagues as long as the central message of God's power remains.

The Tanhuma Buber shows that the plagues are also open to interpretation with regard to their contents. Tanhuma Buber *Bo* 5:1 also includes the drowning of the Egyptians in the Reed Sea in its list of plagues:

‘They thought to drown them in the water, so the Holy One, blessed be he drowned them in the waters. As it is said ‘ he emptied Pharaoh and his army into the Reed Sea.’

הם חשבו לשקע אותם במים אף הקב"ה שקען במים שנאמר ונער פרעה וחילו בים סוף וגו'

This interpretation seeks to solve why each particular plague was visited upon the Egyptians.²⁸² It uses a rationale that each plague ruined the livelihoods of the Egyptians in some way. The rationale for drowning the Egyptians in the Reed Sea is that Pharaoh intended to drown the Israelites, presumably referring to Pharaoh's pursuit of the Israelites to the Reed Sea which he did not know they could cross. This interpretation actually contains two exegetical frameworks, one that ruins the livelihoods of the Egyptians and another that meets out punishments upon them they intended for the Israelites. However, they both operate under parallelism, employing dramatic irony as the Egyptians are punished in the place of the Israelites. The way in which the Plagues are used in this section shows that the individual contents of each Plague are not important,

²⁸² Moshe Greenberg notes that using an exegetical strategy to explain the purpose or sequence of the Plagues is common in Midrashic traditions post 7th century, more details in "Plagues of Egypt," 214.

perhaps as the rationale for each of them is never explained in the Hebrew Bible.

What remains important is to show the power of God, the Plagues themselves may be used to justify the exegetical framework they exist to support.

There is also a variety of words used to refer to the plagues across the Hebrew Bible and the Midrashic traditions. God refers to what he is going to do in Exodus 7:3 as ‘my signs and wonders/וְאֹתֵי וּמוֹפְתָי’.²⁸³ This word for wonders is repeated by Pharaoh in Exodus 7:9, when he tells Moses to show him his wonder. God uses the word ‘נָגַע’ to refer to the plagues in the Exodus 11:1, which can also mean a strike, a blow or a spot of leprosy.²⁸⁴ The word ‘מַכָּה’ is used on multiple occasions within the Midrashic traditions and the targums despite not being used once to describe the plagues in the Hebrew Bible. Frank Jastrow translates this word to mean a ‘wound, stroke, blow or plague’.²⁸⁵ In the Midrash Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Vaera* 10, God says ‘I will obtain retribution from the Egyptians through the ten plagues’. The word used for plagues is ‘מַכּוֹת’. This word is also used to translate ‘נָגַע’ in Exodus 11:1 by the Targum

²⁸³ This term for wonders is used by God again in Exod 11:9. The pairing of ‘signs and wonders’ appears in Ps 78:43. The term signs is used in Ps 105:21 to refer to the plagues.

²⁸⁴ This word is also used to mean plague in Gen 12:17, 1 Kgs 8:38 and Ps 91:10. The majority of other mentions occur in Lev 13 and 14 in which it refers to wounds from leprosy.

²⁸⁵ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 874–875.

Onkelos and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan. Seemingly, this word 'מִקָּה' becomes a popular term for the plagues in later literature. However, when the biblical material is considered there are a variety of ways to refer to the plagues. As the Exodus narrative lists every plague, there is no real need for a collective name. This is a problem of later literature that wishes to give this whole narrative a name so it can be referred to easily. However, the existence of multiple terms that are used to refer to the plagues in both the Bible and Midrashic traditions shows that there was no hegemony over their collective name. That they were not known under a single name but general terms that can be used in other circumstances show that the plagues were seen in a wider structure of miracles of God.

Upon examining Midrashic and Targumic traditions from the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael, Targum Onkelos, Tanhuma Buber, Tanhuma Yelmdenu, it becomes clear that there was not one way of thinking about the plagues. The number of plagues, what constitutes a plague and even what word one uses to mean 'plague' have not been agreed. The exegetical environment concerning the plagues is clearly very flexible and not fixed to the 'Ten Plagues of Egypt' Exodus 12–15 narrative, now seen as the authoritative version. The number or nature of

the plagues is not what is important to writers of the Mekhilta, Targum Onkelos and Tanhuma Yelammedenu and Buber. The Plagues themselves are open to modification depending of what exegetical framework is being used. The important fact seems to be that the overall point proven is the power of God. This also means the plagues themselves are explained by this process, as the precise meaning of their number or contents remains unclear in the Hebrew Bible. In the Qur'an, their number remains fluid, as do the ways of referring to them but their use to signal the power of God remains the same.

2.4.3. The Apparent Absence of the Plagues in the Qur'an – Hidden but Not

Lost

The Plagues narratives appear to be absent from the Qur'an at first. However, although the biblical Plagues narrative and almost all the formulas we have come to recognise are absent, the plagues are present. However, they are significantly shorter than in the biblical interpretation and are referred to with the word 'signs/آيَات', which can refer to a host of other miracles of God. This section will argue that the Plagues in the Qur'an have been included in a wider category of miracles that prove the legitimacy of God as opposed to retaining their connection to the Israelites leaving Egypt, as in the Hebrew Bible. In order

to examine this, we will look at explicit references to the Plagues, ways they are implied and possible allusions.

The contents of the Plagues recognisable from the Hebrew Bible are listed once, at the end of the sorcerers narrative in Sūrat Al-'A'rāf, where it says, 'We sent on them the flood, locusts, lice, frogs, blood as signs/ فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الطُّوفَانَ وَالْجَرَادَ وَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمُ الْقُمَّلَ وَالضَّفَادِعَ وَالدَّمَ آيَاتٍ مُفَصَّلَاتٍ (Q Al-'A'rāf 7:133).²⁸⁶ This verse lists four of the plagues and what was contained in them, as well as a reference to 'the flood/الطُّوفَانَ'. This word for flood is used on one other occasion in Q Al-'Ankabūt 29:14 to describe the flood that afflicted the people in the time of Noah. However, the words for describing the drowning in the Reed Sea and the flood of the time of Noah are the same. The verb 'drowned/غَرَقَ' is used in relation to the people of Noah on nine occasions.²⁸⁷ This same word is also used to describe the drowning in the Reed Sea nine times.²⁸⁸ Considering that both narratives use, 'drowned/غَرَقَ', it is possible that they would also both use 'the

²⁸⁶ In Q 43:48, the wording 'sign after sign, each greater than its sister/آيَاتٍ مُفَصَّلَاتٍ' is used which might through an intertextual reading show how the order of these plagues should be understood. However, this is of course impossible to substantiate.

²⁸⁷ Qur'anic verses which use the word drowning in relation to Noah: Q 10:73, Q 11:37, Q 11:43, Q 21:77, Q 23:27, Q 25:37, Q 26:120, Q 37:82 and Q 71:25.

²⁸⁸ Qur'anic verses which use the word drowning in relation to Pharaoh: Q 2:50, Q 7:136, Q 8:54, Q 10:90, Q 17:103, Q 26:66, Q 28:40, Q 43:55 and Q 44:24.

flood/الطوفان'. Speyer also notes this possibility that this could be referring to the Egyptians drowning in the Reed Sea.²⁸⁹

The four plagues listed are the first three from the sequence in Exodus 7–12: blood (Exod 7:14–25), frogs (Exod 8:2–14) and lice (Exod 8:16–19). The fourth plague is the plague of locusts, which appears eighth in the Exodus sequence (Exod 10:1–20). However, they do not appear in this order in the Qur'an, appearing as locusts, lice, frogs and then blood. Although the order does not reflect the biblical order and the selection of plagues may appear random, there are connections. These are all plagues related to the earth, the land of Egypt. These are all natural phenomena, including the flood. Even the plague of water to blood has been argued to be a reflection of a natural process that happens to the Nile due to its 'red tides' of algae or a tsunami from a volcanic eruption.²⁹⁰ A major theme within the Qur'an is to address God as the 'Creator/ بَدِيع', normally creator of the heavens and earth, a term meaning his creation encompasses all.²⁹¹ The Qur'an uses this idea of God as supreme creator of all natural things

²⁸⁹ Speyer, *Ezrählungen Im Qoran*, 279.

²⁹⁰ Barbara J. Sivertsen, *The Parting of the Sea: How Volcanoes, Earthquakes, and Plagues Shaped the Story of Exodus* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 38–39.

²⁹¹ God is called creator of the heavens and earth is Q 2:117, Q 6:101, Q 2:54, Q 10:3, Q 12:101 Q 13:16, Q 21:56, Q 26:77–8, Q 35:1, Q 36:70, Q 39:46, 62, Q 40:62, Q 42:11, Q 46:3, Q 59:24, Q 64:2–3, Q 85:13, Q 91:5–6.

as proof that he alone deserves worship, thus, it makes sense that the most naturally occurring of the Plagues have been selected in order to prove God's supremacy.²⁹² In Q 7:133, the plagues are made to fit into an existing Qur'anic typology of using natural phenomena to prove God's existence as supreme creator, deserving worship alone.

A method used to allude to the plagues is to refer to them as 'signs/آيَات', or more specifically 'clear signs/آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَات'.²⁹³ This gets across the message of the Plagues narrative, the power and legitimacy of God, without having to go into detail. This is used in almost every Qur'anic allusion to the plagues, which makes sense as the Hebrew Bible rarely says 'plague/פְּגָעָה' but describes their content. In Exodus 7:3, God says:

'And I will harden Pharaoh's heart and increase my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt'

²⁹² God deserves worship due to status as supreme creator in Q 2:2, Q 6:1, 80, 96, Q 7:10, Q11:61, 118–9 Q 14:10, 32–4, Q 16:52, 80–1, Q 36:22, Q 39:6, Q 43:26–7, Q 56:57–62, Q 87:1–4. God is recognised as supreme creator by pagan opponents (proving it to be true) in Q 2:22, 164–5, Q 6:1, 14, 73, 80, 101–3, Q 7:54, 194, Q 10:32, 35, 69, Q 13:16, Q 16:17, Q 20:4, Q 25:3, Q 27:59–61, 64 Q 29:61, Q 30:27, 40, Q 31:11, 25, Q 32:4, Q 34:49, Q 35:3, 13, 40, Q 37:95–6, Q 39:38 Q 40:61–4, Q 41:9, Q 43:9, 87, Q 46:4, Q 52:35–6, Q 56:57–62. For more on God as a creator see, Daniel Carl Peterson "Creation," in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 472–480. For more on the links between God and the natural world see, Ian Richard Netton, "Nature as Signs," in *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 528–535.

²⁹³ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic Fourth Edition* (ed.) J. M Cowan (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1979), 46. Binyamin Abrahamov, "Signs," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an: Volume 5*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 2– 11.

וְאֵנִי אֶקְשֶׁה אֶת־לֵב פְּרַעֲהוּ וְהִרְבִּיתִי אֶת־אֲתַתִּי וְאֶת־מוֹפְתֵי בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

In Exodus 7:4 they are referred to as 'judgements/שְׁפָטִים'. The word for signs used in Exodus 7:3, 'אוֹת', is a cognate for the Arabic word, 'آيَات', used in almost all these cases.²⁹⁴ When examined lexically, the terms being used in Hebrew and Arabic are related. Passages that use this word in the Qur'an are: Q Hūd 11:96, Q Al-'Isrā' 17:101, Q Tā' Hā' 20:56, Q Al-Mu'minūn 23:45, Q Al-Naml 27:12, Q Al-Qaṣaṣ 28:36, Q Ghāfir 40:23, Q Al-Zukhruf 43:46 and Q Al-Nāzi'āt 79:20.

Sometimes there is extra information such as the number of signs. The number of signs in the Qur'an is cited to be nine on two occasions, in Q 17:101 and Q 27:12. In Q 27:12 Moses is told:

'put your hand into the neckline of your garment and it will come out white without disease, (this is) among the nine signs to Pharaoh and his people.'

وادخل يدك في جيبيك تخرج بيضاء من غير سوء في تسع آيات الى فرعون وقومه

Counting the white hand among the nine plagues only leaves space for eight of the biblical plagues from the Exodus narrative. The turning of the serpent into a staff is mentioned in Q 27:10 and translators like Yusuf Ali and the Sahih

²⁹⁴ Francis Brown, S R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon: With an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic: Coded with the Numbering System from Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. (Peabody, MS: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 16.

International see this as also being included within the nine signs.²⁹⁵ This can be seen by their choice of ‘these will be among the nine signs’, compared to Muhammad Pickthall who chose ‘this’.²⁹⁶ There is no word for ‘this’ or ‘these’ present, only ‘in/في’, leaving the reader to decide whether this means to include both the white hand and the serpent.²⁹⁷ If the serpent and white hand are included, then only seven of the signs can be the plagues of Exodus 7–12. Speyer notes that Muhammad is unclear on the number of Plagues and links the number nine to being important with reference to Hebrew Bible and New Testament sources.²⁹⁸ However, considering the Qur’an is much more focussed on the competition with the sorcerers than the rest of the plagues, then their inclusion in these lists makes sense. Grouping together both the ‘white hand’ and the ‘staff to snake’ events with the plagues makes one cohesive narrative. Thus, in referring to one event, it draws attention to the whole narrative.

²⁹⁵Emily Assami, Amatulla Bantley and Mary Kennedy, *The Holy Qur'an Sahih International translation* (Jeddah: Dar Abul Qasim Publishing House, 1997) and Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary (3rd ed.)* (Kashmiri Bazar, Lahore: Shaik Muhammad Ashraf, 1938).

²⁹⁶ Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran: An Explanatory Translation* (New York, NY: A. A. Knopf, 1930).

²⁹⁷ In Q 28:31–32 the staff transforming into a serpent and the hand turning white are detailed. Then in Q 28:31, they are called ‘برهانان’. This word, meaning ‘proof’ or ‘demonstration’, is in the dual form. This makes it clear that there are two ‘proofs’, furthering the idea that these two events are thought of as a pair and are being considered as two in Q 27:10–12. See, Wehr, *Dictionary of Modern Arabic*, 69.

²⁹⁸ Speyer, *Ezrählungen Im Qoran*, 279.

Mentions of the ‘white hand’ and ‘serpents’ can act to remind the reader of all of the plagues.

The idea of ‘clear signs/ءَايَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ’ is not used just to refer to the plagues but also to refer to other messages of God, placing the Plagues within the wider context of events that demonstrate the power and legitimacy of God. For example, in Q 40:34:

‘Joseph came to you with clear signs before but you did not cease to doubt what he brought you.’

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَكُمْ يُوسُفُ مِنْ قَبْلُ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا زِلْتُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِمَّا جَاءَكُمْ بِهِ

This verse does not use ‘ءَايَاتٍ’ but instead a word better translated as ‘clarities/الْبَيِّنَاتِ’. However, it is clearly performing the same function as the word, ‘signs/ءَايَاتٍ’, in the Plagues narratives. Joseph is bringing signs of God to disbelievers and still they do not believe in him, just as with Pharaoh and the Egyptians with regard to the plagues. This word, ‘clarities/الْبَيِّنَاتِ’, is also used in the Qur’an to refer to Moses in Q 29:39. However, this is only one verse and the previous and next verses are not about Moses, so it is difficult to say whether the plagues are the intended subject. It is also used to modify the word ‘signs’ twice in Q 17:101 and Q 28:36, making the phrase, ‘clear signs/ءَايَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ’.²⁹⁹ Therefore,

²⁹⁹ Binyamin Abrahamov discusses these different linguistic terms in his article, “Signs,” 8. He states that we do not know the difference between the words ‘signs/ءَايَاتٍ’ and ‘clarities/الْبَيِّنَاتِ’,

the idea of a ‘clear sign’ has a wider meaning within the overall Qur’anic context as it can act as an ‘umbrella term’ referring to an act of God. A ‘clear sign’ is not just a way to refer to a plague but in fact to any act of God.³⁰⁰ Another interesting variation to the above ‘clear signs’ formula is the addition of the phrase ‘an authority manifest/سُلْطَانٍ مُّبِينٍ’. This phrase includes the word ‘مُبِينٍ’ which features the same root as the earlier word for ‘clarities/الْبَيِّنَاتِ’, showing the interconnected nature of the terms used to describe acts of God. ‘An authority manifest/سُلْطَانٍ مُّبِينٍ’ is included on three occasions, Q 11:96, Q 23:45 and Q 40:23, and used on its own once in Q Al-Dhāriyāt 51:38. All of these examples use exactly the same wording to express ‘an authority manifest’. The point is that the authority of God was so clear that the Egyptians specifically chose not to see it. This additional piece of phrasing is emphasising the rejection that Moses and God face from the Egyptians and from Pharaoh (and his servants/chiefs) as their leader. The Qur’an increases the dramatic tension

however, when they are combined, they are applied to historical and supernatural wonders as opposed to natural ones. This could possibly apply to the plagues as there are both natural and supernatural miracles within them.

³⁰⁰ This term is used to refer to things other than plagues at Q 2:99, in which it could be referring to the messages of Gabriel from Q 2:97 or something from the reign of Solomon which is mentioned in Q 2:103. In Q 3:97, this term refers to the Ka’ba.

between the protagonists, Moses and God, and the antagonists, Pharaoh and the Egyptians, by making the Pharaoh's denial of God seem even more unbelievable.

In Q 29:40, a list is provided that could be confused for plagues but is actually a list of punishments for disbelievers, specifically Qarun (Korah) and Pharaoh.

The list is as follows, 'We sent a storm of stones, and among them were those who were seized by the crying, and among them were those whom we caused the earth to swallow, and among them were those whom we drowned'. The previous verse, Q 29:39 says, 'Qarun, Pharaoh and Haman, Moses had already come to them with clarities'. The mention of Pharaoh and the use of the term, 'clarities/الْبَيِّنَات', makes a connection with the plagues seem likely. However, when Qarun is mentioned, Q 29:40 takes on a different meaning. Korah is swallowed by the earth in Numbers 16:32–34, a death that also takes place in Q 28:81.³⁰¹

Korah and his followers are the only people that die like this in either text.

Considering Korah is mentioned in Q 29:39 and the unique method of his death, there is no question that Q 29:40 refers to him. The next punishment is those 'who we drowned', which, taking into account the previous verse, must be

³⁰¹ Korah's death is repeated in Exodus 26:10.

Pharaoh.³⁰² In the Hebrew Bible, Haman is impaled or hung on gallows (Esther 7:10). In the Qur'an, Haman appears not as the assistant to Ahasuerus but to Pharaoh. As Haman does not appear in the same position in the Qur'an and his death is not mentioned, it is possible that the first method of death, 'a storm of stones', refers to him. Q Saba' 34:9 and Q Al-'Isrā' 17:68 both involve storms of stones and being swallowed by the earth as punishments for disbelief.³⁰³ This example shows that although the term, 'clarities/الْبَيِّنَات', has multiple uses, they all fall under the umbrella of the power of God.

In the Qur'an, the Plagues do appear but not in the form they take in the Hebrew Bible. They most often feature as an allusion, under the term. Four Plagues are listed once, showing the Qur'an's awareness of the contents of the Exodus narrative and making it clear that the way in which they are referred to is an interpretive choice. This choice means that the Qur'an can avoid a much longer narrative, which does not stylistically suit it. More importantly the

³⁰² As discussed above, words for the Egyptian soldiers and Pharaoh drowning in the Reed Sea are interchangeable and both are punishment narratives so when no name is mentioned it is possible that either could be being referred to. However, due to the mention of the earth swallowing someone and the names of Pharaoh and Korah being mentioned, it is clear that in this case the drowning is that of the Reed Sea.

³⁰³ A storm of stones also occurs in the Sūrah of the Elephant where it is used. This Sura refers to a battle in which Mecca was supposedly under threat from an army, mounted upon elephants, from Aksum. God causes birds to rain down stones (Q 105:4), upon the army and they perish.

Exodus narrative features many details that would not resonate with its new audience. The Israelites freedom and the ways their captors are punished are significantly less important to an audience that does not believe themselves to be related to them. The relationship the Qur'an does see is one of faith, in keeping with the way the Plagues are interpreted in the Qur'an, used as part of a wider context for God's legitimacy and power.

Conclusion

From a survey of biblical, midrashic and Qur'anic material, it is clear that the Plagues narrative was seen as very open to interpretation. The number of plagues, what their content was, how they are referred to and how much content needs to be included varies vastly across all three textual traditions. The three traditions share many characteristics in their treatment of the plagues due to the open exegetical environment around this topic. The Bible presents the first version in the Book of Exodus but other versions within the Hebrew Bible present differently in number and content. Midrashic traditions are perhaps even more varied, sometimes using often using very different numbers and plagues. These are often related to midrashic techniques, such as exploring polyvalent words and suggesting alternative explanations. The discord already

existing in the Hebrew Bible provides very fertile ground for the midrashic traditions to use. The Qur'an refers to the plagues with only phrases and short descriptions. As with the later biblical versions and the Midrashic ones, the content varies, as does what constitutes a plague.

What the Qur'an has actually taken from this narrative is the way it expresses the power of God. Instead of spending chapters explaining the whole narrative, the Qur'an distils it into a few words. The Qur'an has taken what is valuable to its message from the Plagues narrative, the omnipotence of God and examples of those who deny it and made it into the central message of this narrative.

Through using the terminology of 'signs', the plagues fit into a wider spectrum of miracles of God, used to prove his legitimacy, power and role as creator of all things. The Plagues becoming included in this much wider theme allows for the more specific features of the narrative from the Hebrew Bible to fall away, such as the freeing of the Israelites. This means that the plagues can become part of a universal message that applies easily to this new religious community.

2.5. Conclusion - Encounters with Pharaoh

This scene was chosen to be the focus of the first case study due to its prevalence in the Qur'an. This scene is interpreted differently in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an, with some themes becoming apparent in Rabbinic literature. Major differences can be seen in the characterisations of Moses and Pharaoh, the submission of the sorcerers and the overall depiction of the Plagues. The combination of these differences causes Moses to appear stronger, a more suitable model for a prophet and causes Pharaoh, and in turn other unbelievers, to appear not just mistaken but vile. The power of God is distilled into 'clear signs', so obvious that they cause instant conversion in some, only serving to make the 'unbeliever' seem more intentionally against God.

Moses' characterisation in the Moses and the sorcerers scenes in the Qur'an has been interpreted with his imperfections removed. The Hebrew Bible setting of the leprous hand shows Moses' prophetic commission and the meaning of the leprosy remains ambiguous. In Rabbinic literature, this scene is perceived as resoundingly negative due to Moses being guilty of slander or suspecting the innocent. In the Qur'an, this scene has been lexically altered in order to remove

connotations of disease. Just this alteration is not enough to make this scene positive for Moses, however, it does remove the immediate problem of his leprosy. In the Qur'an, the positive nature of the scene comes from two further interpretative strategies. The first of these is to move this scene so that it occurs before Pharaoh and his court. Not only does this remove the idea that Moses is insecure but it also transforms the 'white hand' into a miracle from God, intended to cause awe in those who behold it. Although this act in itself is ultimately not enough to convince Pharaoh of their strength and righteousness, it still comes from a position of strength acting within a power struggle. The second way in which this act becomes positive in the Qur'an is due to the fact that it fits into an already present Qur'anic theme of prophets and righteous people shining. Although, this theme is much more detailed in later tradition, particularly that of the Shi'ite Muslims, positive shining traditions can already be found in the Qur'an. Through showing Moses as shining, it not only solidifies his position as a prophet of God in the Islamic belief system but also connects him to Muhammad. This scene provides connections between Moses and Muhammad that further strengthen the role of Moses as a prophetic antecedent.

Pharaoh has been made more active but also more universal in the overall narrative of the Qur'an. This is the only substantive scene in which Pharaoh appears, all other mentions of him only occupy one or two verses. In these individual verses, Pharaoh is often mentioned in conjunction with other villains, of biblical and Arabic origin. This technique can also be found in Rabbinic literature and serves to apply a particular sin to not just one character but a whole group. This in turn, means that individual narratives of each character become less important as they are just there to push forward one agenda. In the Qur'an, all villains reject the messengers of God and therefore God and will be punished. This universalisation of villains serves two purposes. Firstly, it means that all stories featuring these characters emphasise this central Qur'anic message about the messenger of God being victorious over the disbelievers. Secondly, it means that all biblical villains can be made relevant to the new Islamic cause, despite difference in religion, culture and time period. For example, the struggle between the Israelites and the Egyptians is important in the context of the Hebrew Bible and later Rabbinic literature, who see the Egyptians as cultural rivals. Thus, a long and protracted sequence where the Egyptians and their leader, Pharaoh, are repeatedly punished makes sense in the Hebrew Bible. However, when it comes to the Qur'an, who do not see

themselves as genealogical descendants of the Israelites but instead as descendants of Abraham through Ishmael, this Egyptian/Israelite rivalry has little relevance. Within this sea of details, it can be difficult to see how Pharaoh and the wider struggle of the Plagues is relevant to the formation of Islam. Through universalising Pharaoh, he becomes part of the wider struggle of the messenger against those who oppose him.

Although the Plagues narratives show the power of God in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an, in the Qur'an another feature is used to confirm this. The submission of the sorcerers narrative functions within the text to make the power of God abundantly clear. This is much more immediate than in the Hebrew Bible, where it takes three plagues in order to convince the sorcerers of God's power. The submission of the sorcerers not only shows God's power but also makes this act into a decisively Islamic one. This is achieved through the insertion of terms related to Muslim practise, such as prostration, that are already featured within the Qur'an. This event not only makes the power of God appear more obvious within the text but also that it is clearly the power of a Muslim God as the actions that come over them are within that frame of reference.

III. The Golden Calf - Anger, Theophany, the Role of the Israelites and the

Nature of the Calf

The story of Golden Calf in the Hebrew Bible is a defining moment for the people of Israel and one of the clearest expressions of sin shown in the Hebrew Bible. Neuwirth suggests that the Golden Calf has become the 'locus classicus on human guilt'.³⁰⁴ The building of the Golden Calf occurs in Exodus 32 in the Hebrew Bible but is retold several times. At this point in the narrative Moses has left the people of Israel under the charge of Aaron in order to ascend the mountain to speak to God. During this time Moses receives the first tablets of law from God. However, whilst he is away the people become nervous and ask Aaron to make them a God to worship, which he does. Upon his return Moses is angry and smashes the tablets. Moses pleads on behalf of the Israelites and secures a second set of tablets from God.

The Calf is mentioned frequently in Jewish exegesis, with the majority of the interpretations around it able to be divided into two categories, those that focus on the sin of the event and those that try to ignore it. The apologetic strand is generally from Midrashic Collections dated in the Amoraic period, when

³⁰⁴ Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 323.

Judaism would have been coming into contact with other religions and feeling the need to defend its own traditions against criticism from outsiders. Within these traditions there is a strong theme of ‘magic’ that is often linked to an Egyptian presence. The relationship of these interpretations to the Calf, from either strand, show how the Golden Calf continues to be interpreted as the greatest sin of the Israelites well into Late Antiquity.

In the Qur’an, this event is mentioned 4 times, in Sūrah Al-Baqarah, Al-Nisā’, Al-’A’rāf, and Ṭā’ Hā’. In Sūrah Al-Baqarah, Al-’A’rāf and Ṭā’ Hā’, a full narrative is told whereas in Sūrat Al-Nisā’ it is just a mention in one aya (Q Al-Nisā’ 4:153). Gerald R. Hawting notes the verbal and conceptual parallels in the biblical and Qur’anic narratives to be the evil committed, the punishment received, God’s forgiveness and the role of Moses in obtaining that forgiveness.³⁰⁵ The Qur’an also shares parallels with the Midrashic Collections, featuring apologetic tendencies as well as a focus on the idea of the Calf having been made ‘magically’. Having noted the similarities the two versions hold, there are also many differences. Additionally, the Qur’anic versions are, within themselves, different from each other. However, they have in common an

³⁰⁵ Gerald R. Hawting, “Calf of Gold,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an Vol. 1 A–D*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 273–276.

attempt to remove Aaron as being at all responsible for the sin, some through inefficacy and once through the addition of another character who becomes the instigator. The Qur'an also maintains the connection between this narrative and the theophany of Exodus 33 but includes and repurposes other theophanies.

The Golden Calf narrative undergoes substantial changes from the Hebrew Bible into Midrashic Collections and the Qur'an. The Qur'an presents a heightened version of the biblical narrative through changing several aspects of the narrative. Although the fact that the major theme of the Golden Calf story is that of idolatry may already seem obvious in the biblical narrative, the Qur'anic tradition involves the idea that the Calf speaks. This adds to the question of what the Golden Calf is and how it came to be, an area of substantial confusion; is it a representation of YHWH? Is it a God itself? Did Aaron carve it or did it come into existence mystically? Moses makes a request for theophany in Exodus 33, after the Golden Calf narrative in Exodus 32. In the Qur'an these two events occur almost simultaneously. Sometimes the theophany involves Moses and sometimes the theophany involves the whole community. Another feature of the Golden Calf narrative is the emotional language used to describe both Moses and God. Moses is angry with the Israelites in the Bible, as is God. The Qur'an

keeps this theme and elaborates on it. The biggest change to the narrative is that in one Qur'anic retelling Aaron is not the person who makes the calf but a person called Al-Sāmirī is held responsible. This may seem extreme. However it matches a Midrashic tradition of removing Aaron's agency from the event.

However, the Midrashic traditions and the Qur'an show different methods to reach the same goal. Finally, other biblical narratives involving calves have been woven into the Qur'anic narrative in Sūrat Al-Baqarah. These plot changes feeds into overarching themes of idolatry, forgiveness and an uncertain polemic.

This section on the Golden Calf seeks to examine the Qur'anic, biblical and Midrashic narratives from the standpoint of how the major players, that is Moses, God, the Calf and the Israelites, behave within it. This section shall be split into four subsections, these are: Moses' Anger, Theophany, the Role of the Israelites and the Nature of the Calf.

3.1 Moses' 'Anger' at the Golden Calf in Exodus 32, Midrashic Collections and

Sūrahs Al-Baqarah, Al-'A'rāf, Ṭā' Hā'

In the Golden Calf narrative of Exodus 32, Moses exhibits an emotional reaction at the sight of the Golden Calf. Moses' 'nostrils are inflamed/זַיִחַר-אַף' and he breaks the tablets of law (Exod 32:19). After this, he destroys the Calf and causes

the Israelites to drink the remains and then he berates Aaron for his involvement in the Golden Calf episode (Exod 32:20–21). In Exodus 32, Moses is not the only character expressing anger. In Exodus 32:10, God is also angry with the Israelites upon viewing their worship of the Calf before Moses descends the mountain. As such, Moses' and God's emotions can be examined together. God is the most frequently angry 'person' in the Hebrew Bible, being the subject of anger 518 times, out of the 714 times that anger is expressed.³⁰⁶ Anger is clearly understood as an emotion particularly connected with the divine and those he speaks through. This leads to a division between who may express anger and who may not. This issue of when and by whom it is appropriate to express anger can be seen throughout the Hebrew Bible and Jewish exegetical material.³⁰⁷ In Exodus 32, the anger of Moses and of God shows their close emotional connection, another theme that runs throughout the Hebrew Bible and into the minds of Qur'anic interpreters.

³⁰⁶ Ellen Van Wolde, "Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions: Anger and Love in the Hebrew Bible," *Biblical Interpretation* 16 (2008): 8.

³⁰⁷ For example, women do not express anger in the Hebrew Bible, with the exception of the wives of Elkanah, Hannah and Penninah. For discussion on this see, Van Wolde, "Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions," 12–14.

In order to show the development on this narrative, this section will examine Moses' angry response to the Golden Calf in the Hebrew Bible, by Midrashic interpreters and in the Qur'an. These three groups of literature all interpret Moses' anger differently due to different ideas of what it means to be a servant of God, namely a prophet. Rabbinic literature seeks to show a calm, obedient leader whereas the Qur'an wishes to show one that is appropriately angered by the Golden Calf. There is also a change in the object of Moses' anger, which is Aaron in the Hebrew Bible but has been expanded to the whole people of Israel in the Qur'an. This can be explained by changes in the plot that seek to preserve 'perfect' leaders in Moses and Aaron and criticise those communities that came before the Muslims. It will also show that the close relationship between God and Moses can be seen through their emotions. This relationship is present across traditions but how it functions changes from both Moses and God angry in the Hebrew Bible, only God angry in Midrashic collections and only Moses angry in the Qur'an.

In the Qur'an, Moses' reaction to the Calf is repeated in each retelling of the narrative (Q Al-Baqarah 2:54, Q Al-'A'raf 7:150 and Q Tā' Hā' 20:92–93).³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ It does not feature in the brief mention of the calf found in Q 4:153. However, this is only one verse so only conveys that the calf was made, god's forgiveness and Moses' authority.

Moses' reaction here differs to that of the Hebrew Bible in that it addresses the Israelites as a whole, as opposed to him only speaking to Aaron in the Hebrew Bible and in that he is more violent. Moses only directly addresses his anger at Aaron in *Sūrat Ṭā' Hā'* and even then, he blames the Israelites. This can be explained by the new character that makes the Calf, Al-Sāmīrī, makes the Golden Calf in Aaron's place in *Sūrat Ṭā' Hā'* and not to describe a creator in *Sūrahs Al-Baqarah* and *Al-'A'rāf* 7. This feeds into a wider dichotomy in the Qur'an of being unable to attribute bad characteristics to prophets, who were the leaders of the Israelites, but being perfectly comfortable to criticise the Israelites as a whole.

3.1.1. Moses' 'nostrils are inflamed' in Exodus 32

In the Hebrew Bible, emotions are expressed through a number of metaphorical devices. Studies on emotions are a relatively new field, encompassing work from psychology, linguistics, literature and religious studies. A current trend is the use of cognitive linguistics to offer new perspectives on how we perceive emotions and commonalities of expression across cultures.³⁰⁹ The way the

³⁰⁹ Françoise Mirguet, "What is an "Emotion" in the Hebrew Bible? An Experience that Exceeds Most Contemporary Concepts," *Biblical Interpretation* 24 (2016): 442–465. Paul A. Kruger, "Emotions in the Hebrew Bible: A Few Observations on Prospects and Challenges," *OTE* 28, no.2 (2015): 395–420.

Hebrew Bible expresses emotion is notably different to how modern western cultures do in English. In English, we commonly use the verb ‘to feel’. However, ‘to feel’ does not have an equivalent in Biblical Hebrew and emotion is often expressed through associated physical behaviours instead.³¹⁰ The emotion of anger is mentioned 714 times, using nine paired terms.³¹¹ The most common way to express anger in the Hebrew Bible is through the verb–noun combination, ‘אף תרה’. ‘אף’ or ‘אפים’ meaning anger but more specifically meaning nostrils, being a metaphorical device referring to the flaring of the nostrils in an angry person.³¹² The verb ‘תרה’ means to be hot and to inflame, so together this phrase means that someone’s anger is inflamed.³¹³ This term is used to describe an ‘erupting emotion’, followed by fierce discussion or destructive actions.³¹⁴ Translatability is one of the issues faced by studies of emotion. The multiplicity of terms used to describe anger and their meanings in the Hebrew Bible does not come across in English. The word ‘anger’ is used on each

³¹⁰ Mirguet, “What is an “Emotion” in the Hebrew Bible?” 446, 451–3.

³¹¹ Van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions,” 7–8. Kruger, “Emotions in the Hebrew Bible,” 411.

³¹² Kruger, “Emotions in the Hebrew Bible,” 402. Aubrey R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1949), 11.

³¹³ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 501.

³¹⁴ Van Wolde, “Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions,” 11.

occasion, when the Hebrew often seeks to convey something much more metaphorical and illustrative of the person's mood.

In the Hebrew Bible, Moses becomes angry upon seeing the Israelites dancing around the Calf. He descends the mountain pre-warned about the worship of the Calf, having already discussed it with God (Exod 32:7–14). Moses' anger at returning from Mount Sinai in order to find the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf is detailed from Exodus 32:19–21:

‘And it was as he drew near to the camp and he saw the Calf and the dancing. Moses' nostrils were inflamed, and he threw the tablets from his hands, and he shattered them below the mountain. 20: And he took the calf which they made and burnt it in a fire. He ground until it was a powder and strewed it upon the water and made the children of Israel drink. 21: And Moses said to Aaron: What did this people do to you for you to bring upon them a great sin?’

וַיְהִי בְּאֲשֶׁר קָרַב אֶל־הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיֵּרָא אֶת־הָעֵגֹל וּמַחֲלַת וַיַּחַר־אַף מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁלֶךְ מִיָּדוֹ
אֶת־הַלְּחָת וַיִּשְׁבֵּר אֶחָם תַּחַת הַהָר: וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָעֵגֹל אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ וַיִּשְׂרֹף בְּאֵשׁ וַיִּטְחֶן
עַד אֲשֶׁר־דָּק וַיִּזֶר עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם וַיִּשְׁק אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן מָה־
עָשָׂה לָךְ הָעַם הַזֶּה כִּי־הִבֵּאתָ עָלָיו חַטָּאת גְּדוֹלָה:

Moses' anger can be seen in a number of ways from this section of the Golden Calf narrative. The first is the description of his anger ‘nostrils inflamed/וַיַּחַר־אַף’ (Exod 32:19). This is the most common term for anger in the Hebrew Bible.

What is more illustrative of his anger is his breaking of the tablets directly afterwards. His second act of rage is making the Israelites drink the crushed up

Golden Calf. This is a very strange event and not at all explained in Exodus 32, making it difficult to know why Moses acts this way.³¹⁵ Considering Moses' anger, it can be seen as a kind of punishment. Christine Hayes suggests that it has been left out the retelling in Deuteronomy 9:8–21 as it reflects on Moses badly, making him appear vindictive.³¹⁶ There is a connection to be made between this ritual and the ritual of Numbers 19, the Red Heifer, in which a cow is also burnt and suspended in water. However, this ritual does not involve forcing anyone to drink, the water is merely placed upon them for cleansing purposes (Num 19:18). Lastly, Moses is clearly angry in his speech. The text cites him as blaming Aaron and calling the Calf a 'great sin/גְּדֹלָהּ גְּחִטָּאָה' (Exod 32:21). Moses anger is expressed in these verses through description, actions and his own words.

Moses' anger can also be seen expressed through the massacre of the three thousand in Exodus 32:25–29 as God does not clearly order it. In fact, in Exodus 32:14 God recants his desire to destroy the Israelites, 'God repented about the punishment which he said he would bring upon his people/ וַיִּנְחַם יְהוָה עַל־הָרָעָה

³¹⁵ Hayes, "Golden Calf Stories," 82–83. Christopher Begg, "The Destruction of the Golden Calf (Ex 32:20/Deut. 9/21)" in *Das Deuteronomium; Entstehung, Gestalt und Botschaft*, ed. N. Lohfink (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1985), 208–251.

³¹⁶ Hayes, "Golden Calf Stories," 82.

אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר לַעֲשׂוֹת לְעַמּוֹ. It is Moses that calls on the Levites to slaughter the Israelites. In Exodus 32:27, Moses says ‘This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says/יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל’, before giving the order to massacre. However, considering Moses’ and God’s conversation is recorded earlier in the verse, it does not make sense why this instruction is missing. The Levites ‘rally to him (Moses)/וַיֵּאָסְפוּ אֵלָיו’ when he calls (Exod 32:26) but how those who were slaughtered were chosen is not explained. The first issue is that Moses seems to be meting out divine punishment according to his own desires and the second is that there does not seem to be a method of finding out who is guilty and who is not, therefore the punishment appears no more than random slaughter. In the last verse of the chapter, ‘God struck the people with a plague because of what they did with the Calf Aaron had made’ (Exod 32:35). Thus, God does punish the people who ‘sinned against him’ (Exod 32:33). This last-minute plague makes the massacre even more confusing as surely the Levites have already killed those who sinned against him. However, it does lend strength to the idea that one punishment is from Moses and then God delivers his own punishment later. Moses appears to have ordered the massacre committed by the Levites because he is angry. Whether he had the authority to do this from God is not clear.

The Hebrew Bible does not appear to view anger positively judging by its own words. The Book of Proverbs features ten proverbs against the idea of being quick to anger.³¹⁷ Needless to say, people still get angry in specific circumstances. Angry responses from humans in the Hebrew Bible can be divided into two categories. The first, like Moses, is those of high favour with God who become angry at bad behaviours in others. For instance, Jacob is angry when Rachel is envious and Laban pursues him (Gen 30:2, 31:36), Elisha is angry when King Joash only strikes the ground three times (2 Kgs 13:19) and Samuel is angry to have made Saul king when he does not carry out the commandments of God (1 Sam 15:11). God is the most frequent subject of anger in the Hebrew Bible, with Israel as the object of his anger, suggesting that anger is an appropriate emotion for the divine more than others, particularly as most expressions of anger from humans are interpreted badly.³¹⁸ There are several issues arising from God's anger, one is that it appears to attribute an anthropomorphic nature to God. When God is angry, the same body metaphors are used as in the case of humans, leading to the possibility of a God with

³¹⁷ Proverbs 12:16, 14:29, 15:1, 15:18, 16:32, 19:11, 22:24, 29:11, 29:22 and 30:33.

³¹⁸ Some examples of when God is angry (not exhaustive): God is angry with Moses in Deuteronomy 4:21, with Balaam in Numbers 22:22, with Saul in 1 Samuel 11:16, with Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6:7, with Solomon in 1 Kings 11:9, with Baasha and Elah in 1 Kings 16:13 and with Amaziah in 2 Chronicles 25:15.

flaring nostrils.³¹⁹ This is not so much of a problem in the context of the Hebrew Bible, as can be seen by many references to God's body by later interpreters of the text.³²⁰

The second category is that of anger used to show someone is villainous. In Genesis 4:5, Cain becomes angry, Pharaoh is angry (Gen. 40:2, 41:10), Asa (in his later years) is angry with a seer (2 Ch. 16:10) and Uzziah is angry when breaking the temple rules (2 Ch. 26:19). From the Book of Proverbs and the angry responses from villains it is clear that anger is seen negatively except when expressed by those who are righteous, foremost among them God. Anger is viewed as an emotion fit for the divine and only appropriate for humans who God has placed high in his favour.

Although other prophets express anger, Moses is foremost among them in that he may express his own anger. Moses' emotions can mostly be seen through his words, for example, in his commission he may be seen as uncertain (Exod 3:11–4:13), when Pharaoh doubles the work of the Egyptians he may be seen to despair (Exod 5:22–23) and when he sees the Burning Bush he could be

³¹⁹ Van Wolde, "Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions," 8.

³²⁰ For more on the problems of God's body see, Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

described as curious (Exod 3:3). However, these are all interpretations of the text based on Moses' direct speech, his emotions are not actually specified by the text on these occasions. On only seven occasions, the precise emotion that Moses feels is described. In all of these occasions, the emotion that Moses feels is anger (Exod 11:8, 16:10, 32:19, Lev 10:16, Num 11:10, 16:15, 31:14).³²¹ Anger is clearly an important emotion for Moses in the Hebrew Bible, the most frequently angry human in the Hebrew Bible. Other prophets have angry responses to idolatry in the Hebrew Bible, such as Hosea and Joshua but Moses is the only prophet who is angry on his own behalf. In the Book of Hosea, the Israelites have taken other gods and are depicted as an unfaithful wife throughout the Book of Hosea (Hos 4:2, 12–15). However, it is not the prophet Hosea who becomes angry but God. God speaks his words to Hosea, with the implication that Hosea will speak them too but Hosea himself does not react at all (Hos 4:1). In the Book of Joshua, Achan loots, directly against God's orders (Josh 7:1). However, Joshua does not react with anger but merely asks, 'why have you brought trouble upon us' (Josh 7:25). God is angered by Achan's disobedience, as shown in his speech (Josh 10–15) and the description that he

³²¹ Moses is also described as angry in the New Testament, Romans 10:19. He is also described as angry in 4 Maccabees 2:17.

‘turned from his burning anger/וַיִּשָׁב יְהוָה מִחֲרוֹן אַפָּיו but Joshua expresses no anger of his own (Josh 7:26). Both of these events show occasions in which God is angry but the prophet of the time does not express their own personal anger. The difference between these events and that of Moses upon seeing the Golden Calf is that he expresses his own anger as opposed to just delivering the words of God. The only time people are angry on their own accord is with regard to personal relationships.³²² No one is angry with the people of Israel as a whole aside from God and Moses. This places Moses in a special position as he is the only prophet to express his own anger against Israel.

In the Hebrew Bible, Moses’ emotional responses are remembered in a way that divides him from other prophets. His ability to be angry with the whole people of Israel in the case of the Golden Calf makes him unique. Moses occupies this position due to his unique relationship with God as the first leader of the Israelites. That Moses is able to act on his anger and punish the Israelites through making them drink the ashes of the Calf and ordering a massacre becomes an issue for later Jewish commentators who interpret these events as having had more input from God.

³²² Saul is angry with Jonathan in 1 Sam. 17:28 and Elias with David in 1 Sam. 20:30 and so on.

3.1.2. A More Rational Midrashic Moses

In Midrashic traditions present in the Talmud, Tanhuma Yelammedenu and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, the anger of Moses presents a problem for the compilers. A number of techniques are used to mitigate the compilers' discomfort with the idea of an angry Moses.³²³ Arguments are made to show that Moses had permission from God to act in this way or that there was some rationale to his behaviour other than blind rage. From these arguments, it is clear that the problem these interpreters have with Moses in Exodus 32 is not only that he is angry but also the fact that he appears to be acting without the instruction of God. What these traditions have in common is their discomfort with Moses' anger and their attempts to make him appear more rational than he is portrayed in Exodus 32.

³²³ Jewish writers in a Hellenistic and Roman context are also uncomfortable with Moses' anger. Pekka Lindquist suggests that this is due to Moses appearing to have failed in his leadership and being recast as a 'serene' leader to fit in with Greek and Roman aretalogies. Pekka Lindqvist, *Sin at Sinai: Early Judaism Encounters Exodus 32* (State College, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 137.

In Talmud Bavli *Bava Batra* 14b, it is argued by Resh Lakish that God approved of Moses breaking the tablets, making Moses' actions seem reasonable as they are sanctioned by God:

‘And the other? He requires it for that which Resh Lakish (interprets), as Reish Lakish says: (What is the meaning of) which you broke? HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to Moses: May your strength be straight because you broke them.’

ואידך ההוא מיבעי ליה לכדריש לקיש דאמר רייל אשר שברת אמר לו הקבייה
למשה יישר כחך ששברת

The argument being used here in one of *al tikrei*. The root letters of ‘אשר’ and ‘ישר’ are the same but for the first letter so the rabbis swap the ‘alef/א’ for the ‘yod/י’. Rabbi Steinsaltz interprets this to mean that the Talmud Bavli sees God as approving of Moses' actions in breaking the tablets, therefore sanctioning his anger. This can be seen in Steinsaltz's commentary, ‘These words allude to the fact that God approved of Moses' actions based on the fact that the Talmud is already expressing this in this verse through the use of the phrase ‘may your strength be straight/ישר כחך’.³²⁴ Steinsaltz is correct to argue this, as God is clearly wishing Moses well on the basis of smashing of the tablets. However, this interpretation argues for God's approval of Moses' decision but does this

³²⁴ Steinsaltz, *Noé Koren Talmud*, https://www.sefaria.org/Bava_Batra.14b?lang=bi.

retrospectively. Moses still does not receive instruction, God just agrees with him after the fact.

In the Talmud Bavli *Shabbat* 87a, Resh Lakish's teaching about the tablets is included in a larger interpretation about three things Moses did of his own intuition but where God agreed with him. The other actions included in this list are adding a day to the time the Israelites were separated from their wives before the theophany at Mount Sinai and separating entirely from his own wife. With regard to the breaking of the tablets, two extra levels of interpretation are present in comparison to the interpretation that appears in *Bava Batra* 14b.

Shabbat 87a interprets that Moses smashed the tablets due to the law about the Paschal Lamb from Exodus 12:43, 'זבל בן נער לא יאכל בו/ no alien shall eat of it', seeing the apostate Israelites as 'aliens' at this point in the narrative. This gives the narrator an opportunity to directly call the Israelites apostates, 'התורה כולה וישראל משומדים על אחת/ and all of Israel were apostates one and all/ כמה וכמה'. The interpretation from *Shabbat* 87a is using the same tradition from *Bava Batra* 14b but has built on it to make Moses' rationale for breaking the tablets stronger by using a biblical lemma and adding an interpretation over this from the narrator. Although this source does give Moses agency over his

actions, unlike some other Midrashic traditions, it still removes his anger from the situation.³²⁵ In Exodus 32:19, Moses' anger 'waxes hot/יִוָּחַר אֵף' and he destroys the tablets. Here, Moses has time to think through a theologically appropriate reason as to why he should break the tablets. It transforms him from an irrational person into a clear thinking and rational leader. The second part of the interpretation, which states that God agrees with Moses' decision, serves to emphasise that Moses' actions were correct. Although this interpretation allows Moses' actions to be his own idea, it removes his anger and makes his decision one that is approved by God.

In the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 26, Moses' agency and his anger are removed by arguing that he does not break them in anger but drops them due to a 'magical' change in them:

'After they had done it, Moses descended from the mountain and he approached the camp and saw the Calf they had made. Until that moment, the tablets that the HaKadosh Baruch Hu, blessed be He, had given him had carried themselves strongly, but as he descended and approached the camp and saw the calf, the letters written upon them flew away and they became heavy upon the hands of Moses. Moses' nostrils were inflamed and he threw them from his hands.'

בְּשִׁעְשׂוֹ אוֹתוֹ מִמַּעֲשֵׂה וַיֵּרֵד מֹשֶׁה מִן הַהָר וַיִּקְרַב אֶל הַמַּחֲנֶה וַיִּרְאֶה אֶת הָעֵגֶל שֶׁעָשׂוּ
בְּשִׁעָה שָׁנְתָן לוֹ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֶת הַלּוּחֹת הָיוּ סוֹבְלִין אֶת עֲצָמָן. בֵּינָן שֶׁיֵּרֵד

³²⁵ Such as that from the Tanhuma Yelammedenu explored below this paragraph.

וְקָרַב אֶל הַמַּחֲנֶה וְרָאָה אֶת הָעֵגֶל פָּרַח אֹת הַכְּתָב מֵעֲלֵיהֶם וְנִמְצְאוּ כְּבָדִים עַל יָדָיו
שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה. מִיָּד וַיַּחַר אֵף מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁלֶךְ מֵיָדָיו.

This interpretation argues that the tablets are being carried by an internal divine ‘magic’ in the words upon them. When Moses sees the Calf, the words upon them fly away and become as heavy as normal stone tablets. Without the enchantment Moses is unable to carry them, drops them and they break. This removes any agency or emotion from Moses as he is never carrying them, just guiding them. Moses cannot drop them if he was never carrying them in the first place, making his motivation for dropping them irrelevant. This argument has two functions: not only does it remove the idea that Moses is angry but it also makes the fault of the incident clear. Upon seeing the Calf, the magic is broken and the tablets fall, placing the blame entirely on the people. This interpretation takes the argument a step further than in Talmud *Bava Batra* and *Shabbat* because it is not only that God approved afterwards but that he was in control of the whole process, as it happened.

In the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Exodus 32:20, an addition is made to the strange punishment of the drinking of the Calf’s ashes which makes it clear why Moses does this and removes any idea that it is punishment for punishment’s sake:

‘And all who had given any piece of gold, the sign of it came forth in his nostrils.’

וְכָל מֵאֵן דִּיהֵב תִּמְזֵן כָּל מֵאֵנָּה דְדִהֵבָּה הוּהּ סִימָא נִפְקָא בְּאַנְפָּא:

The Targum takes an obscure punishment and gives it meaning. Moses does this in order that those who contributed to the building of the Calf will become known to him. This transforms this act from being a punishment to being a method of dividing the righteous from the wicked. In the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Exodus 32:28, the Levites kill those ‘who had the mark in their nostrils/בְּאַפִּיהוֹן/סִימָן דִּהוּהּ עִמָּא דִּהוּהּ סִימָן בְּאַפִּיהוֹן’, continuing the interpretation that this act is a marking technique. In Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 26:3, this interpretation, that the drinking of the ashes is used as evidence against the guilty, also appears. The Tanhuma Yelammedenu connects the drinking of the ashes to the tradition of a suspected adulteress drinking bitter water (Num. 5:11–31). The Tanhuma places this event from the Golden Calf narrative with an already accepted method of obtaining justice, making Moses appear as a judge as opposed to a ‘hot tempered’ murderer. This change in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan gives Moses purpose as a leader and makes him seem in control of the situation. The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan is not the only source that saw fit to interpret this event differently, Pseudo-Philo alters this event to give it more purpose. In Pseudo-Philo Chapter 12 section 7, the water cuts off the tongues of

those who worshipped the Calf and makes the faces of those who did not, shine.³²⁶ There is a distinct transition in the way this event is interpreted in the course of the history of its interpretation in Antiquity: it is removed from Deuteronomy 9, made a punishment with meaning in Pseudo-Philo and transformed into a ritual for obtaining justice in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the Tanhuma Yelammedenu. From the Exodus narrative, through the Deuteronomist and Midrashic traditions, there is a trend of making Moses more rational as the history of interpretation develops.

There is considerable discomfort among ancient interpreters with Moses expressing his anger as he does in Exodus 32. This leads to a variety of explanations based on the idea that God sanctions his emotions and his strange choice of punishment is not borne out of rage but as a technique with a specific purpose, to identify the guilty. The Jewish exegetical environment is in agreement on this topic but starkly different to the interpretation of the Qur'an. The Qur'an includes the anger of Moses and even makes it more violent, literally in places. Whereas in the midrashic collections, Moses' anger is viewed as an embarrassment, an action that places him out of step with the obedient image of

³²⁶M. R. James, *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo* (New York, NY: Cosimo, 2007), 112.

a prophet that is expected, in the Qur'an his anger is viewed as righteous and appropriate. That the Qur'an sees Moses' anger positively can be seen by the fact that it is increased and expressed more violently.

3.1.3. 'Kill yourselves' - Moses Violent Anger

The Qur'an highlights the hot temper of Moses during the Golden Calf narrative on three occasions, in Q-Al Baqarah 2:54, Q Al-'A'rāf 7:150 and Q Ṭā' Hā' 20:92–93. Moses' seems angrier in the Qur'an than in the Hebrew Bible. He is not only described as angry as in the Hebrew Bible but he is even depicted as being physically violent towards Aaron (Q 7:150) and appears to suggest mass suicide to the Israelites. However, this latter depiction seems to be based on a misdirection, as what is represented is actually the massacre of Exodus 32:27–28 (Q 20:92–93). Aside from increasing the ways in which Moses expresses his anger the Qur'an also represents his anger as being directed differently. In the Hebrew Bible, Moses' speech is directed only at Aaron. In the Qur'an it is directed towards the Israelites (Q 2:54 and Q 7:150). Both of these aspects, the greater variety of ways in which Moses is angry and the different direction his anger takes, feed into wider Qur'anic structures of the perfection of prophets and the ongoing theme of the disobedient Israelites. Moses' anger becoming

more violent makes Moses appear a more valiant defender of God, as well as making clear that the Israelites are deserving of this level of castigation.

In the Qur’anic text, Moses appears angrier than he is interpreted in the Hebrew Bible due to threats of physical violence. For instance, in Q 7:150:

‘And when Moses returned to his people, angry and grieved, he said: How terrible is that with which you have replaced me from after me. Were you impatient for the command of your Lord? And he threw the tablets and seized his brother by the head, pulling him toward him.’

وَلَمَّا رَجَعَ مُوسَىٰ إِلَىٰ قَوْمِهِ غَضْبَانَ أَسِفًا قَالَ بِئْسَمَا خَلَفْتُمُونِي مِن بَعْدِي أَعَجِلْتُمْ أَمْرَ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَلْقَى الْأَلْوَابَ وَأَخَذَ بِرَأْسِ أَخِيهِ يَجُرُّهُ إِلَيْهِ

Firstly, this verse tells the audience that Moses is ‘angry/غَضْبَانَ’ and ‘grieved/أَسِفًا’,

providing a double description of his emotional state. Moses is not just angry

but his anger has led to depression.³²⁷ His words are also more emotive here

than in the Hebrew Bible. When Moses descends the mountain in Exodus 32:21,

he says to Aaron, ‘What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?’, blaming Aaron for their sin but not describing it. In the

Qur’an, their sin is described as ‘wretched/بِئْسَمَا’ and Aaron as ‘impatient/أَعَجَلَ’.

Finally, Q 7:150 shows Moses throwing down the tablets in order that his hands

³²⁷ This is noted as a stage of anger in the Hebrew Bible as well, see Paul A. Kruger, “A Cognitive Interpretation of the Emotion of Anger in the Hebrew Bible,” *Journal of Northern Semitic Languages* 26, no.1 (2000): 182–3.

are free to seize his brother by his head.³²⁸ This not only adds a physical dimension to Moses' rage but also provides a more immediate reasoning for the destruction of the tablets. Moses had to throw down the tablets so that he could enact physical punishment on his brother. Unlike the Rabbinic material, where the compilers seek to explain Moses' anger through rationale, the Qur'an seeks to use Moses' anger as a rationale for his actions.

In Sūrat Al-Baqarah, Moses has a harsh verbal response upon seeing the Calf, as he suggests that the Israelites should all kill themselves, Q 2:54:

‘And when Moses said to his people: O people, indeed you have wronged yourselves by taking the calf for yourselves. Repent to your Creator and kill yourselves. That is best for you in the sight of your Creator.’

وَإِذْ قَالَ مُوسَىٰ لِقَوْمِهِ يٰقَوْمِ إِنِّكُمْ ظَلَمْتُمْ أَنفُسَكُمْ بِأَتِّخَاذِكُمُ الْعِجْلَ فَتُوبُوا إِلَيَّ يَا بَارِئِكُمْ فَأَقْتُلُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ ذٰلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ عِنْدَ بَارِئِكُمْ

This suggestion that God would prefer it if the Children of Israel killed themselves is striking. At first, it appears to the reader that God is commanding a mass suicide of his people. However, it can also be translated as ‘kill one another’. Although this may not seem like a huge difference, in the Hebrew

³²⁸ Aaron asks Moses not to seize him by his beard or his head in Sura 20:94. This is clearly describing the same tradition of Moses being physically angry, just not showing him going through with it as in Sura Al-'A'raf.

Bible the Israelites do kill one another in an organised cull performed by the

Levites, which is ordered by Moses in Exodus 32:27–28:³²⁹

‘And he said to them: Thus, the Lord God of Israel says: Each man put his sword upon his side and cross and return from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man, his brother and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. 28: And the sons of Levi did as Moses said and fell from the people in that day three thousand men.’

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁימוּ אִישׁ־חַרְבּוֹ עַל־יְרֵכּוֹ עֲבְרוּ וְשׁוּבוּ
מִשְׁעַר לְשַׁעַר בַּמַּחֲנֶה וְהָרְגוּ אִישׁ־אֶת־אָחִיו וְאִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ וְאִישׁ אֶת־קָרְבוֹ: וַיַּעֲשׂוּ
בְנֵי־לֵוִי כַדְבָר מִן־מֹשֶׁה וַיִּפְּלוּ מִן־הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כִּשְׁלֹשֶׁת אֲלָפֵי אִישׁ:

The detail about the massacre being performed by Levites is missing from the

Qur’an which makes it initially difficult to identify these narratives as being

based on the same event. However, the context of both massacres is very similar.

Exodus 32:25–29 and Q2:54 both occupy a similar position in the structure of

the Golden Calf narrative as one of Moses’ statements after he descends the

mountain. The phrasing of who to kill in Exodus 32:25–29 and Q 2:54 is also

much alike. In the Hebrew Bible, Moses asks the Levites, his own kinsmen, to

kill their brothers, friends and neighbours and the Qur’an asks them to kill ‘one

another’. Both of these statements show the Israelites being asked to kill those

closest to them, although it is notable that the family of Moses will be spared as

³²⁹ On this topic see, Michael Pregill, “‘Turn in Repentance to your Creator then Slay Yourselves’: The Levitical Election, Atonement and Classical Islamic Exegesis,” *Comparative Islamic Studies* 6 (2010): 101–150.

they rallied to him. This exclusion of the Levites from the text can be explained by an overall lack of priestly and Israelite tribal material in the Qur'an, as such, the election of the Levites is unimportant.³³⁰ The Levites are not mentioned at all, with Aaron's role as a Levite and High Priest left out entirely.³³¹ It is possible that the priestly structure was excluded as it was irrelevant at the time of composition of the Qur'an.³³² The massacre suggested in Sūrat Al-Baqarah is clearly the massacre of the Levites but it appears likely that due to the Temple system no longer being operational by the time of the Qur'an and the lack of a similar priestly or tribal system in Islam that the precise details were excluded.³³³ However, the idea of Moses being angry enough to punish the Israelites with

³³⁰ Pregill, “” Turn in Repentance,” 107.

³³¹ Knowledge of the tradition of Aaron as a priestly figure is known by later Islamic commentators such as Ibn Kathir and al-Tabari, see Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text and Translation and Commentary* (New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1998), 773.

³³² The word for rabbi appears sparingly, 'الرَّبِّيُون', alongside the word for a Christian priest, 'الاحبار' (Q 5:44, 63, Q 9:31, 34). The word for rabbi is spelt differently in some of these occasions, in Sūrat Al-Mā'idah it is spelt as above and in Sūrat Al-Tawbah, it is spelt with an 'h/s' between the first and third letters, making the spelling 'الرهبان' in Q9:34 (In Q9:31 there is a possessive suffix, 'their rabbis'). These two spellings are very similar as the extra 'h' merely aspirates the 'a'.

³³³ There are many tribes mentioned in the Qur'an but the Qur'an sees religious identity as superseding tribal identity whereas for the Hebrew Bible tribal identity and religious identity are inextricable. The twelve tribes of Israel are named after the sons of Jacob and his wives, genealogically linking them the Israelites (but not to the Muslims). The land of Israel is given by God and divided by Joshua in Joshua 13–21.

death is still important to the Qur'an in order to prove the wrongdoing of the Israelites and thus, it remains.

The last expression of Moses' anger addresses Aaron but shifts the blame for the Calf on to the Israelites in Q 20:92–3, recusing Aaron whilst blaming the

Israelites:

‘(Moses) said: O Aaron, what stopped you when you saw them going astray? That you did not follow me and disobeyed my command?’

قَالَ يَهْرُونَ مَا مَنَعَكَ إِذْ رَأَيْتَهُمْ ضَلُّوا أَلَّا تَتَّبِعَنِ أَفَعَصَيْتَ أَمْرِي

These verses demonstrate a redirection of Moses' anger. Feyzbakhsh and

Ghandehari use these verses to suggest that Moses is more critical in the Qur'an

than he is in the Bible but miss this important feature of the redirection of his

anger.³³⁴ Although this passage starts, ‘O Aaron’, it refers to ‘them’ as going

astray. Aaron is absolved as he is separate from ‘them’, the Israelites. The second

is to blame the Israelites, as a whole, for the Golden Calf. In Sūrat Al-’A’rāf,

Moses ‘returns to his people/لِقَوْمِهِ إِلَى قَوْمِهِ’ and says ‘you have replaced

me/خَلَفْتُمُونِي’ in the plural. This makes it clear that Moses is directing his anger at

the whole people and blaming them for the action of making the Calf. In Sūrat

Al Baqarah, Moses again speaks to ‘his people/لِقَوْمِهِ’ and uses the second person

³³⁴ Feyzbakhsh and Ghandehari, “Facing Mirrors,” 53.

plural throughout. A decisive shift in blame can be seen from the Bible, in which Aaron is addressed and blamed for the sin, to the Qur'an in which the people are addressed and blamed.³³⁵ The reasons for this shift are related to the perfection of the prophets and the criticism of previous communities in the Qur'an. Moses and Aaron are leaders of the Israelites and both seen as prophets in the Qur'an.³³⁶ As such, they are held up as models of perfection and any poor behaviours are expunged from them in the Qur'an. As they represent an unbroken line of prophecy from God through to Muhammad, they cannot be seen to fail. On the other hand, criticising the Israelites as a whole is prolific in the Qur'an, as it shows the need for a new people of God.

The Qur'an also turns Moses' other emotions, such as his fear, from potential weaknesses to strengths. The Qur'an features many of the same techniques as are used in the Hebrew Bible to show emotional reactions from characters in the text, like performative actions. This way of showing emotion can be seen in the Qur'an when Moses faints at the sight of God.³³⁷ However, in the case of Moses' emotions, the Qur'an uses direct description more often than the Hebrew Bible.

³³⁵ The exception to this rule is Sura Ṭā' Hā'.

³³⁶ Aaron is referred to as a prophet in Q 19.53.

³³⁷ Karen Bauer, "Emotion in the Qur'an: An Overview," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19, no. 2 (2017): 7.

Moses is described as 'fearful/خَائِفًا' directly four times in Sūrat Al-Qaṣaṣ alone, as well as by God twice (Q Al-Qaṣaṣ 28:18, 21, 33, 34 [31,32 by God]). It can also be implied that Moses is afraid in Q 28:31 when upon seeing the staff become a snake, he 'turns in flight/وَأَلَىٰ مُدْبِرًا' (also Q Al-Naml 27:10). The Qur'an directly describes Moses' fear through the narrator, through God's words and through a performative action. This moment in Exodus 4 is interpreted very differently by the Midrashic compilers and the writers of the Qur'an. In the Hebrew Bible, Moses' fear is of his own shortcomings but in the Qur'an, his fear is primarily that he will be punished for the murder of the Egyptian soldier whom he killed (Q Al-Shu'arā' 26:14 and Q Al-Qaṣaṣ 28:33). Although the Qur'an does mention his poor speech (Q 26:13) and his fears that the people will not believe him (Q 26:12 and Q 28:34), it prefaces this with a fear for his life. Instead of appearing as a weak man, lacking in confidence, he appears as a man with a genuine fear for his life, a much more compelling reason not to return to Egypt. These occasions when Moses is fearful are another example of Moses' emotions being interpreted differently in the Qur'an and by the Midrashic compilers. In both the interpretation of Moses' fear and anger, the Qur'an finds a way to take an emotion that the Jewish interpreters see as a weakness and interpret it as a strength.

The relationship between Moses' and God's reactions is still present in the Qur'an but the dynamic has changed, with Moses' anger and God's forgiving nature being emphasised in contrast. God remains angry in the Qur'an, with his anger being mentioned on twenty occasions, substantially more than in the case of any other character.³³⁸ The Qur'an continues to see anger as an appropriate emotion for God and few others.³³⁹ However in the case of the Golden Calf in the Qur'an, God is not interpreted as angrily as he is in the Hebrew Bible. In Q 7:145–7, he makes a speech about those who will not believe his signs in the place of his speech about his anger in Exodus 32:7–10. However, these two expressions are hardly equivalent, as the God of the Hebrew Bible is 'inflamed/וַיִּחַר' and the God of the Qur'an is clearly more resigned. God's compassion and forgiveness are emphasised more in the Qur'anic retellings of the Golden Calf than his anger. That he forgives the Israelites for their worship of the Calf is mentioned in Q 7:153. The Qur'an emphasises God's forgiving

³³⁸ Karen Bauer's study notes the total number of times 'anger' is present in the Qur'an as 39 but admits she is not sure of her own calculations, (Bauer, "Emotion in the Qur'an," 3). She identifies three verbal roots, 'غضب', 'سخت', and 'غيط'. God's anger can be found expressed mostly through the most common of these, 'غضب' and also through 'سخت' but never 'غيط'. This last verb seems to be reserved for the anger of the disbelievers and their punishment in Hellfire (e.g. Q 68:7, Q 9:15). A distinction seems to be drawn between righteous and non-righteous anger in language. See Shahzad Bashir, "Anger," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an Vol. 1 A–D*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 92–93 for more details on what kind of situations make God angry.

³³⁹ Jonah is angry in Q 21:87.

nature in contrast to the anger felt by Moses, maintaining their close relationship as shown in the Hebrew Bible. Their reactions may also be related to their statuses, Moses is angry with his people, a human reaction whereas God is 'ever-forgiving and most merciful/لَعَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ', a divine reaction. One of God's many names is the 'the compassionate, the merciful/الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ', first mentioned in the Qur'an in Sūrat Al-Fatihah. That God forgave the Israelites is particularly important as the Qur'an depicts the communities before the Muslims being given multiple chances to obey God and still failing to do so, proving the legitimacy of the Muslims' claim.³⁴⁰

In the Qur'an, therefore, Moses' remains angry. With regard to the fact that he is angry, Moses' depiction in the Qur'an is very similar to that in the Hebrew Bible. However, when it comes to the interpretation of Moses' anger, this is very different in the Qur'an compared to that in the Bible. In the Qur'an, Moses' anger is interpreted in a number of different ways. Even physical violence is brought into play to express the anger. Moses is depicted as being violent

³⁴⁰ This technique of listing the sins of the Israelites and contrasting them with God's forgiving nature is not unique to the Qur'an and appears in the Hebrew Bible. Most often in the Book of Psalms, for example, Psalm 105. This comparison between stories of the Israelites and Psalms has been noted by Angelika Neuwirth in Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 321.

towards Aaron and wishes death on the Israelites, explaining the massacre by the Levites to an audience that the Levites would have had little to no relevance to. The focus of Moses' anger is also different, as it is no longer directed towards Aaron, who did not make the Calf. Instead, Moses' anger is directed towards the people who worshipped it. With Aaron's role as the maker removed, only the behaviour of the Israelites remains a problem. This not only makes Aaron almost blameless but also fits into the Qur'anic narrative of the Israelites as a people who are given so many chances and yet continue to disobey the word of God.

Conclusion

From examining Moses' anger in the Hebrew Bible, selected Midrashic traditions and the Qur'an, it is clear that two very different interpretative strategies have been taken by midrashic traditions on one hand and the Qur'an on the other. Midrashic traditions are deeply uncomfortable with the idea of a Moses who is angry. Moses' anger not only seems irrational to these interpreters but also means that he is acting without direct permission from God, making him seem disobedient in acting on his anger. The Qur'an on the other hand revels in Moses' anger. There, Moses' anger remains as fiery as it is in the

Hebrew Bible. In fact, it becomes even stronger, in some cases even turning violent, in word and deed.

The Qur'an's treatment of Moses' anger feeds into two major Qur'anic themes, the righteous prophets of God and the sinful people of Israel. The Qur'an sees the people of Israel as constantly sinning against God. It often displays these sins in list forms in sūrahs, such as Al-Baqarah. However, the prophets of Israel are joined in an unbroken line from God to Muhammad and therefore, their good character cannot be in question. Moses' anger must be perceived as righteous, disciplining the Israelites who have sinned. It is much easier for the Qur'an to take this hard line with the Israelites than it is in the Hebrew Bible as it does not see the Muslim community as genealogically related to the people of Israel but solely linked by faith in some of the same prophets.

Moses' emotional connection to God is constant in all three traditions. In the Hebrew Bible, a transition appears from God being angry, to Moses being angry. In the Qur'an, this emotional connection remains but how it functions has changed. Although God remains angry in the Qur'an, as he is in the Hebrew Bible, in the Golden Calf scenes his anger appears more as disappointment. The characteristics of God emphasised in these retellings are those of his forgiveness

and compassion. Thus, the emotional connection between God and Moses in the Qur'an is one of opposites, or one of balance. Moses is angry with the people and God is compassionate towards them.

This separation between the prophet, who is righteous in his anger and connected to God, and the people, who have sinned, serves the Qur'an's message perfectly. Not only is Moses a prophet adhering to God perfectly but he is serving a people that does not deserve him. An argument is being made for a new community to arise, that of the early Muslims, and take over from this community of God, whose sins were many. However, the line of prophecy which allows for a new prophet to lead this community and continue to have a relationship with God, remains legitimate as the prophets were always righteous, despite their peoples.

Having shown the similarities and differences regarding the depictions of Moses' and God's anger in the Hebrew Bible, Jewish exegetical traditions and the Qur'an, I will now discuss another feature with bearings on the relationship between God and man, that of Theophany and how it functions in these three traditions.

3.2 The Theophany of Exodus 33 and its Qur'anic counterparts in Sūrahs Al-

Baqarah , Al-Nisā' and Al-'A'rāf

A theophany is defined as 'the self-disclosure of God'.³⁴¹ In the Hebrew Bible, the purpose of God appearing to a human is usually to deliver a message or revelation. God speaks to people but is rarely seen, such as when he speaks to Cain (Gen. 4).³⁴² God also appears in dreams or visions, as to Amos (Am. 7) and to Ezekiel (Ez. 1).³⁴³ Finally, there are occasions when it is unclear whether God is really there or whether poetic license and style is being used (Ps. 18).³⁴⁴ An important distinction to note in the definition of a theophany is the idea that God is visible and present. There are two main ways God can do this, one is through natural phenomena like thunder and smoke and the other is through

³⁴¹ Theodore Hiebert, "Theophany," in *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary Vol.6*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1992), 505.

³⁴² God speaks to Cain in Genesis 4:6–15, to Noah in Genesis 6:13–22, 7:1–4 and 8:15–19, to Noah and his sons in Genesis 9:1–17, to Abraham and Sarah in 18:13–31.

³⁴³ God appears in visions to Balaam in Numbers 24:4–9, to Samuel in 1 Samuel 3:15 and 21, to Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1–13, to Amos in Amos 7:1–17 and 8:1–14, to Jeremiah in Jeremiah 1:11–19, to Ezekiel in Ezekiel 1:1–28 and 8:1–18, to Zechariah in Zechariah 1:7–21.

³⁴⁴ This can also be applied to when God speaks to Adam and Eve as they hear him walking in the garden but it is not stated that they see him, only that he calls to them in Genesis 3:8–22. There is also some confusion over whether the Lord appears, whether angels appear or whether the angels are the Lord in Genesis 18:1–12, until the Lord directly speaks in Genesis 18:13.

more ‘human’ appearances.³⁴⁵ As well as these issues regarding what constitutes a theophany, there are also wider problems, such as that of God’s invisibility, raised for example in Exodus 33:20: ‘no man may see me (God) and live’. While Exodus 33:11 says that God and Moses speak ‘face to face/פָּנִים אֶל-פָּנִים’, it is made clear at the end of chapter 33 that Moses has not seen the face of God. This seems to contradict the earlier text. Although the clear reading would seem to be that Moses does see God’s face, scholars like Umberto Cassuto, choose to read this as a metaphor for being in God’s presence, in part due to the textual contradiction.³⁴⁶ However, there are problems here with both a human seeing the face of God and the very fact that God has a face to be seen at all. It is quite clear that the passage continued to cause problems for interpreters through looking at the Targumic traditions.³⁴⁷ This discomfort with a human image of God permeates biblical interpretation from the earliest translations up until the present day. This is because this physical image of God harks back to

³⁴⁵ Hiebert, “Theophany,” 505. Kuntz provides a list of types of theophany in John Kenneth Kuntz, *The Self-Revelation of God* (London: Westminster Press, 1967), 17.

³⁴⁶ Cassuto, *Exodus*, 436. Joel F. Drinkard, “Face,” in *Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary Vol.2*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1992), 743.

³⁴⁷ In the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and the Targum Neofiti this verse is rendered as God speaking to Moses ‘word to word’, keeping the pattern of ‘face to face’, but avoiding the issue of God’s body. See Benjamin Sommer, “Translation as Commentary: The Case of the Septuagint to Exodus 32–33,” in *Textus: Studies of the Hebrew University Bible Project: Volume XX Dedicated to Shemaryahu Talmon in Honor of his Eightieth Birthday*, ed. Alexander Rofé (Jerusalem: Magnes Press Hebrew University, 2000), 43–60.

polytheistic religious narratives like the Enuma Elish, the Gilgamesh and Egyptian myths, that describe both the powers of gods, such as creating storms and fire, along with their physical appearances.

In the Torah, there are two theophanies of God which occur to Moses only; one at the Burning Bush in Exodus 3:1–4:17, the other in Exodus 33:18–23, immediately after the Golden Calf narrative. At the Burning Bush, God appears to Moses within the fire of the bush, so he cannot see his form. In Exodus 33:18–23, Moses asks God to see his ‘glory/כְּבוֹד’. This is an expression of desire to see a corporeal form of God as can be seen from God’s reply that Moses’ may not see his face (Exod 33:18). God’s glory is equal to his physical form, as can be understood from Exodus 33:22, ‘while my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock and will cover you with my hand while I pass by’, where ‘glory’ and ‘I’ are used interchangeably. Moses expresses this desire as he wishes ‘to know God so that he may find favour in his sight’ (Exod 33:13). Moses states that God knows him and he wishes to know God, the language used is duplicated when it comes to each knowing the other. Through the context and repeated linguistic formulae, such as can be seen between God and Moses statements in Exodus 12, 13 and 17, it seems as though an equal relationship is

being sought here by Moses. Moses wishes to know God in the way God knows him.³⁴⁸ God tells him no man can see his face but then allows Moses to see his back. In this way, the text avoids there being an absolute parallel and thus equality between Moses and God, which would be theologically dangerous. However, it does come very close. The relationship between Moses and God is one of the closest shown between a man and God in the Tanakh. This moment, where Moses and God mirror each other's actions depict this close relationship between the two characters. Moses' reaction to the theophany is not recorded and the chapter ends there, then moving onto a narrative about the new stone tablets in Exodus 34.

This theophany in Exodus 33 is connected to the Golden Calf episode in both the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an. The theophany between God and Moses appears in Exodus 33, with the Golden Calf narrative taking place in Exodus 32, so they are linked in the final form of the Hebrew Bible due to being placed next to each other. In the Qur'an, the sense that these two narratives are continuous has remained. This episode appears in Sūrah al-Baqarah (Q2:55–56) and Al-

³⁴⁸ In Exodus 1 and 13 Moses is speaking to God and uses the language 'know you (by name)' three times and the phrase 'find favour in your sight' twice. God responds in verse 17 using 'know you by name' and 'favour in my sight', mirroring Moses' statements about their relationship.

'A'rāf (Q7:143). In Sūrat al-Baqarah, the Golden Calf narrative is told in verses Q2:51–54 with the theophany narrative directly following on in verses Q2:55–56. In Sūrat Al-'A'rāf, the Golden Calf narrative occurs in verse Q7:148–153, placing the theophany before the Golden Calf. Whether the theophany is before the Golden Calf or happening concurrently, as Moses is on the mountain and the people are down below, is not made clear in Sūrat Al-'A'rāf. There is another theophany of interest to this study that occurs in Sūrat Al-Nisā' (Q4:153). This theophany is not just to Moses, but to the whole people of Israel. It seems to be a version of Exodus 20, when the people of Israel nearly experience a theophany and beg Moses not to see it. In Sūrat Al-Nisā', the people of Israel ask for the theophany. The request of a theophany then angers God and he strikes the people down.

In the Qur'an, the textual and philosophical issues that plague the Hebrew Bible and its ancient readers are also present. Although the Qur'an includes these two theophanies, it shows them in a very negative light, with both Moses and the people of Israel fainting and dying at the sight of God. The Qur'an does this by using pre-existing motifs from the Bible but causing them to have entirely different meanings in these Qur'anic versions. This section will examine the

ways in which the Qur'an interprets the statement that no man may see God and live, the punitive tone it places on both these narratives, the way thunder is used in the Qur'anic version, and its wider connection to the overall themes of the Golden Calf narrative within the Qur'an. It will posit that the reasons for these textual changes that can be seen from the Hebrew Bible into the Qur'an are related to larger issues such as representation of the physical body of God, idolatry, revelation, and, ultimately, what constitutes an appropriate relationship between man and God.

3.2.1. The Theophanies of Exodus 3, 19–20 and 33 - Fear and Revelation

In the Hebrew Bible, theophanies function as a form of revelation. God appears to prophets in order to relay a message and give instruction. These theophanies come in two ways: God can appear through natural phenomena such as thunder and lightning, or God's 'physical' presence can be seen. God speaks to Moses many times throughout the Torah and God's presence can be felt a number of times, such as when the Reed Sea parts (Exod 15) or when Korah is swallowed by the earth (Num. 16). However, when it comes to more defined theophanies, those of God's natural or physical presence, Moses is involved in three. God appears to Moses alone at the Burning Bush in Exodus 3–6 and again in Exodus

33 and to the whole people of Israel in Exodus 19:9–20:26. These theophanies can each be divided into four sections: preparations made for the theophany by the people and Moses, God’s mode of appearance, the purpose of it and the response from the audience. When these steps are examined, the magnitude of God’s appearances is clearly very great. God’s appearances have necessary functional purposes, in order to communicate with the people but they are potentially very dangerous to those who witness them.

There are varying levels of preparation present for theophanies, showing the possible peril someone faces if they do not prepare properly for a theophany. In Exodus 3:5, God asks Moses to remove his shoes before approaching the Burning Bush, as he is now standing on holy ground. In Exodus 19, God makes clear the preparations needed for his theophany to the people. They must stay pure for three days, wash their clothes and not engage in sexual relations with women (Exod 19:14–15). There are also rules for when God is present, they must not touch the mountain or approach until the sounding of the trumpet, upon pain of death (Exod 19:12–13). These varying levels of preparation seem to suggest that different people need to prepare accordingly. Considering the modes of preparation fall broadly under the banner of making oneself ritually

pure, it makes sense that a more ritually pure person would need less preparation in order to commune with God. Moses requires very little preparation in Exodus 3 whereas the people require three days of preparation in Exodus 19–20. This is commensurate with Moses' spiritual purity and close relationship with God.

In Exodus 33:21, when Moses asks to see God, Moses does not need to undertake any preparation but God take precautions on his behalf:

‘And God said: Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; 22: and as my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand upon you until I have passed by 23: then I will take away my hand, and you will see my back but you will not see my face.’

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה הִנֵּה מָקוֹם אֶתִּי וְנִצַּבְתָּ עַל-הַצּוּר: וְהָיָה בְּעֵבֶר כַּבְּדִי וְשָׁמַתִּיךָ בְּנֹקְרַת הַצּוּר וְשִׁכַּתִּי כַּפִּי עָלֶיךָ עַד-עֲבָרִי: וְהִסְרֹתִי אֶת-כַּפִּי וְרָאִיתָ אֶת-אַחֲרֵי וּפְנֵי לֹא יֵרְאוּ:

These precautions are related to the statement in Exodus 33:20, that ‘no man may see me (God) and live/וְחָיִה הָאָדָם וְחָיִה. However, here Moses does see God and live but only parts of him. Moses cannot see his face, leading to the assumption that this is the ‘dangerous’ part of God, however, that God and Moses speaks ‘face to face/אֶל-פְּנֵים אֶל-פְּנֵים’ is expressed in Exodus 33:11, leading to another contradiction. A common explanation in order to avoid this conflict is that ‘face to face/אֶל-פְּנֵים אֶל-פְּנֵים’ is an expression meaning ‘in-person’, much like it is used in the English language today. Many of the issues surrounding this

theophany relate to discomfort with the idea of God having a corporeal form. Judaism is an aniconic tradition and as expressed in Exodus 20:2, God is too vast for a human mind to comprehend. Corey Walsh even suggests that the variety of descriptions of God through human and naturalistic forms is so that the reader cannot picture God as one image.³⁴⁹ In Exodus 33:22–23 the hand, back and face of God are mentioned, suggesting God possesses a human body. This language causes a problem for later interpreters, however, describing gods to have bodies and indeed human personalities and relationships was common in an Ancient Near Eastern context of the Hebrew Bible.³⁵⁰ Wesley Williams proposes that God may have a human body but that perhaps it is made of fire, making it a ‘non-body’.³⁵¹ Williams is trying to tie together the human and natural theophanies along with pro and anti–anthropomorphism. However, although this fiery ‘non-body’ may be what was intended, it seems more realistic to accept that there were many different interpretations of this topic across the different parts of the Hebrew Bible. Although Moses is the only person to ever see God’s body in the Hebrew Bible, his body is imagined or used

³⁴⁹ Corey Walsh, “Where did God Go? Theophanic Shift in Exodus,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 42, no. 3 (July 2013): 117.

³⁵⁰ Wesley W. Williams, “*Tajallī wa-Ru’ya*,” 21. Also see Mark S. Smith, *God in Translation: Deities in Cross-Cultural Discourse* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

³⁵¹ Williams, “*Tajallī wa-Ru’ya*,” 23.

metaphorically in the Book of Psalms and seen in visions by other prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel and David (Isa 6, Ezek 1, Ps 18). All of these people had close relationships with God, showing that a bodily theophany of any kind requires a high level of intimacy between prophet or king and God. That Moses is being depicted as the only one to see God in this way is a sign of his unique relationship with God.

Now while God can appear bodily, depending on his level of emotional closeness to a person, his most common mode of appearance is in natural phenomena such as fire and thunder and lightning. In Exodus 3–6, for example, God appears to Moses for the first time, in Exodus 3:2:

‘the angel of the Lord appeared to him (Moses) in flames of fire from within a bush’

וַיֵּרָא מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה אֵלָיו בְּלִבְתַּאֲשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה:

The angel of the Lord is what Moses sees despite ‘God/יהוה’ speaking to Moses in Exodus 3:4. The term of ‘angel of the Lord/מִלְאָךְ יְהוָה’, using the name of God ‘יהוה’ or the more general term ‘אַלְהִים’, occurs 65 times in the Hebrew Bible and can lead to it being difficult to ascertain whether this figure is God or one of his messengers. This is further complicated by the fact that there is very little angelology present in the Hebrew Bible until Daniel 8–12, making it difficult to

identify a specific ‘angel of the Lord/מַלְאֲכֵי יְהוָה’. Samuel Meier argues many of these ‘angels’ were added in later to combat occasions where it was theologically uncomfortable for God to be present.³⁵² This theory makes sense of why these two modes of revelation exist, especially considering later discomfort with a more anthropomorphic God. In Exodus 3, God uses both a bush and a fire as means by which to appear, combining something very natural, the plant, with a more dangerous element, the fire. This method of combining the natural and something more dangerous can also be found in God’s mode of appearance in Exodus 19. In Exodus 19, God appears in thunder and lightning and a thick cloud over the mountain. These more violent images of God, the fire and the thunder can be related not only to the natural phenomena they depict, storms, bush fires and possibly volcanoes but also to imagery of other gods. The Ugaritic and Canaanite Baal gods were storm gods, their appearance was discerned in storms that would bring fertility to the land. These gods were also sometimes associated with particular locations, such as mountains. Yahweh himself may have originated as a storm and fertility god, making the ways he

³⁵² Samuel Arthur Meier “Angel of Yahweh,” in *The Dictionary of Deities and Demons*, eds. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking and P. W. van der Horst (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 58–59..

appears in the Hebrew Bible appear as part of a natural progression of his identity.

When examined more closely, the purpose of the three theophanies of the Exodus saga are about confirming the relationships between God and Moses or the Israelites. In Exodus 3, God appears to Moses and shares his identity with him. God describes the purpose of the Exodus 19–20 Sinai theophany in Exodus 19:9:

‘And God said to Moses: Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud so the people may hear when I speak with you and so have faith in you forever.’

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי בָּא אֵלֶיךָ בְּעָבַב הָעָנָן בְּעִבּוּר יִשְׁמַע הָעָם בְּדַבְרֵי עֲמֶךָ וְגַם־בָּךְ יֵאֱמִינוּ לְעוֹלָם:

The theophany in Exodus 19–20 is intended to confirm Moses’ relationship with God in the eyes of the people. Moses asks to see God’s ‘glory/כְּבוֹד’ in Exodus 33:18 but does not give a reason as to why. Earlier in the chapter, Moses asks God ‘pray, let me know your ways so that I may know you and continue to find favour in your eyes/בְּעֵינַיִךְ אֶמְצָא־חֵן לְמַעַן וְאֶדְעֶךָ וְאֶת־דְּרֹכֶיךָ נָא אֶת־דְּרֹכֶיךָ וְאֶדְעֶךָ לְמַעַן אֶמְצָא־חֵן בְּעֵינַיִךְ (Exod 33:13). Here, Moses is asking for a theophany in order to continue building a good relationship with God. This is confirmed by Moses mentioning God’s relationship with his people on three occasions before asking to see his glory, asking how other people will know that the Israelites have found favour with

God (Exod 33:12, 15–16). These statements suggest that a continuing relationship between God and Moses and God and his people are not the only important things but also that other people should be aware of their relationship. Moses clearly views that this theophany will cement his relationship with God, as well as that of the people and make it obvious to others that they have found favour with God. Whether this is intended to be metaphorical or is connected to the physical effects of being in God's presence, such as Moses' shining face from Exodus 34, is difficult to tell. Although theophanies are an important part of relationship building, they also have a more functional capacity which is to relay information. When God appears to Moses in Exodus 3, he tells him to go to the Pharaoh of Egypt and in Exodus 20, he relays the Ten Commandments. Although God can appear as just a disembodied voice in order to give revelations to people and prophets, theophanies are a stronger form of this revelation for more important occasions. When God appears, there is the reaction of the audience to consider, which is most commonly a fearful one. In Exodus 3, Moses exhibits a mixed reaction. He is curious that the bush remains unconsumed by the flames and approaches it (Exod 3:3). However, upon the Lord speaking to him and announcing his

identity, Moses ‘hid his face for he was afraid to look at God/ וַיִּסְתֵּר מִשֶׁה פָּנָיו כִּי יִרְא מִהַבַּיִט אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים (Exod 3:6). In Exodus 19:16, when the mountain becomes covered in cloud and the horn sounds, ‘all of the people who were in the camp trembled/וַיִּתְרַד כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בְּמַחֲנֵה/וַיִּרְא הָעָם וַיִּנָּעוּ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ מֵרָחֵק/וַיִּרְא הָעָם וַיִּנָּעוּ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ מֵרָחֵק/וַיִּרְא הָעָם וַיִּנָּעוּ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ מֵרָחֵק’.³⁵³ In Exodus 20:18, the people see the mountain smoke and hear the horn, the signs of God’s arrival, and refuse to go any further, ‘they saw and remained at a distance/וַיִּרְא הָעָם וַיִּנָּעוּ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ מֵרָחֵק/וַיִּרְא הָעָם וַיִּנָּעוּ וַיַּעֲמֵדוּ מֵרָחֵק’.³⁵³ Moses tries to encourage them, telling them not to be afraid of God and that he has come to ‘test/נִסָּה them (Exod 20:20).³⁵⁴ The meaning of the word is important, as if God has come to test the Israelites; then they may have failed by being too afraid to see him. However, Moshe Greenberg argues that this word does not have to mean ‘test’, as it is often translated, but can mean ‘to be familiar with’.³⁵⁵ It seems unlikely that a response of fear is a failure from the people as this is the usual response to a theophany. Fear of God is a common concept in the Hebrew Bible when encountering the divine, however it does not have to mean ‘terror’ but can mean something more akin to a respectful kind of

³⁵³ Due to differences in numbering of the Ten Commandments in the Torah and English translations of the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament, this verse appears at Exodus 20:15 in the former and Exodus 20:18 in the latter.

³⁵⁴ This word is translated as test in the NRSV, NIV and KJV (prove in KJV) translations.

³⁵⁵ Moshe Greenberg, “נסה in Exodus 20:20 and the Purpose of the Sinaitic Theophany” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79, no. 3 (September 1960): 275.

awe.³⁵⁶ In Exodus 33, Moses marks himself apart by actually asking for the theophany, presumably meaning that he is unafraid of the consequences. In the theophanies of Exodus 3 and 19–20, God appears due to his desire to strengthen relationships with Moses and the people and is greeted with fear. However, in Exodus 33, Moses is the one who desires to know God better and since the initiative is his own, he has no reason to fear.

In the Hebrew Bible, theophanies are functional as they are the only way for God to communicate with his people. God does this through selecting people, prophets, to whom he appears in order to communicate his message. Although both Moses and the Israelites are initially frightened by the theophanies, they are not intended to be negative, quite the reverse. Theophanies are intended to confirm relationships between man and God. However, human beings do have reason to be afraid since seeing God's face can kill a man. Physical representations of God's 'human' body cause problems for later interpreters in Midrashic traditions, as can be seen by their attempts to explain this as purely metaphorical language.

3.2.2. Theophany in Midrashic Collections - Drawing Away from God

³⁵⁶ Walsh, "Where did God Go?" 116.

Midrashic traditions from the Tanhuma Buber, Tanhuma Yelammedenu, Targum Onkelos and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan all interpret these theophanies from Exodus 19–20 and Exodus 33. All show a level of discomfort with the idea of a visible God and deal with this accordingly. As much as some, such as Daniel Boyarin, argue for the idea of an anthropomorphic God only becoming unthinkable much later than biblical and Rabbinic traditions, there have always been traditions that see this as uncomfortable.³⁵⁷ This is combatted through the use of various strategies, from changing words that imply that God has body parts to interpreting God’s body symbolically and finally through interpreting the theophanies as more perilous than they are represented in the original text. The exception is when it comes to Moses, who throughout seems to benefit from God’s presence. All of these techniques either try to detract from the event or highlight its dangerous and inappropriate nature, albeit with the exception of Moses. It is clear that there is an already existing strand of discomfort with theophanies that is present in Jewish exegetical material before the composition of the Qur’an.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁷ Daniel Boyarin, “Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic,” *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 3 (1990): 533.

³⁵⁸ More examples of this from a later period that this study allows can be found detailed in Williams, “Tajalli w-Ru’ya,” 96–98. Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision*

The Targum Onkelos, for example, removes the phrase, ‘face to face/פְּנִים אֶל-פְּנִים’ and interprets it as ‘speech to speech/מִמְלַל עִם מִמְלַל’, showing discomfort with the idea of God’s face (Exod 33:11). This interpretation of ‘speech to speech’ can also be found in Targum Pseudo-Jonathan showing that the subject of Moses and God’s speaking ‘face to face’ remained contentious. The linguistic pattern of the same word being used twice remains, joined by the preposition ‘עִם’, makes this replacement feel similar to the Hebrew Bible. However, the context has been changed significantly and made less intimate. The Targums are still qualifying a special relationship between God and Moses, only they that speak ‘speech to speech’. This does not express the physical closeness that ‘face to face’ does. Benjamin Sommer suggests that this change is in order to smooth out a textual inconsistency, which is that no man may see God’s face and live (Exod 33:20), but Moses is seen here in Exodus 33:11 as speaking to him, ‘face to face’.³⁵⁹ Sommer notes that this interpretation is not only used in the Targums Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan but also in Septuagint manuscripts.³⁶⁰ Sommer is right to suggest this was changed to smooth out a textual

and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 13–51.

³⁵⁹ Sommer, “Translation as Commentary,” 53–54.

³⁶⁰ Sommer, “Translation as Commentary,” 53–54.

inconsistency, an opinion shared by Wolfson, as the explanation of contradictions in key to Rabbinic writings.³⁶¹ However, accepting this does not deny that the description of God's body was also an issue. The Targums change God's 'face/פָּנִים' to his 'speech/מִקְלָל', removing any visual idea from the reader, should they only have been concerned with consistency they might have used 'mouth/פֶּה' which is employed elsewhere (Num. 12:8). The Targum Onkelos is notably uncomfortable with the idea of God having a body.³⁶² The Targums use issues of consistency in order to challenge concepts that make them uncomfortable.

In Midrash Tanhuma Buber *Ki Tisa* 16:2, the physical attributes of God are interpreted symbolically, so as to avoid the idea of God having an actual body:

'And he said: You cannot see my face. Moses requested to understand about the reward for (keeping) commandments and about the prosperity of the wicked. HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to him: You cannot [see my face]. And without this word, this word is the prosperity of the wicked. It is said (in Deut. 7:10): And he repays those who reject him (to his face). HaKadosh Baruch Hu said: Then I will take away my hand. In this world, I show to you the reward of the fearful ones but in the world to come, I will show the goodness which is

³⁶¹ Wolfson, *Through a Speculum*, 27.

³⁶² Michael L. Klein, *Michael Klein on the Targums: Collected Essays 1972–2002*, in (eds.) Michael L. Klein, Avigdor Shinan, Rimon Kasher, Michael Marmur, Paul Virgil McCracken Flesher (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 60.

provided for them. David said (in Ps. 31:20): How much is your goodness that you have provided for those who fear you.³⁶³

ויאמר לא תוכל לראות את פני בקש משה לעמוד על מתן שכרן של מצות ועל שלותן של רשעים א"ל הקב"ה לא תוכל [לראות את פני] ואין הלשון הזה אלא לשון שלותן של רשעים שנאמר ומשלם לשנאיו [אל פניו וגו']. אמר [לא] הקב"ה והסירותי את כפי בעולם הזה אני מראה לך מתן שכרן יראים ולעולם הבא אני מראה הטוב שהוא צפון להם אמר דוד מה רב טובך אשר צפנת ליראיך

The face of God is 'the prosperity of the wicked' and the hand of God is showing

Moses 'the reward of the fearful ones/יראים/מתן שכרן'. That the face of God

means 'the prosperity of the wicked/רשעים של שלותן' is backed up by a quote

from Deuteronomy 7:10, 'God repays those who reject him to his face/ומשלם

לשנאיו אל-פניו'. This makes it clear that the prosperity of the wicked, refers to

them being repaid in kind by God. Considering that this is an interpretation of

Exodus 33, Moses' request to know how God punishes the wicked may be

intended to be read as those who worshipped the Calf. This interpretation

connects the idea of theophany with 'those who fear God', this is something that

has already been seen in Exodus 3 and 19–20, as both Moses and the Israelites

are afraid in those theophanies.³⁶⁴ This interpretation makes it clear that fear is

appropriate as those fearful ones will be rewarded in the future. The theme of

³⁶³ A slightly shorter version of this also appears in the Midrash Tanuhma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 27.

³⁶⁴ See Phillip Michael Lasater, *Facets of Fear: The Fear of God in Exilic and Post-Exilic Contexts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019) for a recent treatment of the subject.

appropriate fear is placed in opposition to wickedness, which may be referring to the Golden Calf incident, as symbolism that replaces the images of God's human body, which it is uncomfortable describing.

This is not the only example of the Tanhuma detracting from a description of God, in the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Yitro* 13 on Exodus 19:18, the Tanhuma puts forward its views on the impossibility of describing God:

‘And the smoke rose as the smoke of the furnace. Which furnace? Could it be like this furnace? The Talmud says: And the mountain burned with fire (Deut 4:11). If so, what does the Talmud say: This sinks into the ear (i.e aids perception) what it cannot hear. As it appears: The Lion roars, who will not fear? (Amos 3:8) For who gave strength and power to the lion if not him? We describe him by the aspects of his creations, so that it sinks into the ear what it cannot hear. As it appears: And Behold, the glory of the God of Israel from the eastern road and his voice was like the sound of great waters and the land shone from his glory (Ezek. 43:2). For who gave strength and power to the waters if not him? We describe him by the aspects of his creations so it may sink into the ear.’

וַיַּעַל עָשָׁנוּ בְּעֵשֶׁן הַכְּבֹשֶׁת. אִיזָה כְּבֹשֶׁת? יָכוֹל כְּכֹבֶשֶׂת הַזֶּה? תִּלְמוּד לֹא מֵרָחֵק לֵאמֹר: וְהָרָה בְּעַר בְּאֵשׁ. אִם כֵּן מָה תִּלְמוּד לֹא מֵרָחֵק: כְּבֹשֶׁת? אֵלָּא לְשִׁבְדָּה אֶת הָאָזְנוֹ מִה שְׂיִכְוֹלָה לְשִׁמְעָה. כִּי־יִצְאָה בּוֹ אֲרִיָּה שֶׁאֵין מִי לֹא יִירָא. וְכִי מִי נִתֵּן כַּח וּגְבוּרָה בְּאֲרִיָּה? לֹא הוּא אֵלָּא הָרִי אֲנִי מְכַנֵּן אוֹתוֹ מְבִרְיוֹתָיו כְּדִי לְשִׁבְדָּה אֶת הָאָזְנוֹ מִה שְׂיִכְוֹלָה לְשִׁמְעָה. כִּי־יִצְאָה בּוֹ וְהִנֵּה כְבוֹד אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּא מִדְרָדִים הַקְּדִים וְקוֹלוֹ כְּקוֹל מַיִם רַבִּים וְהָאֲרֶץ הָאֲרִיָּה מְכַבְּדוֹ. וְכִי מִי נִתֵּן כַּח וּגְבוּרָה בְּמַיִם לֹא הוּא? אֵלָּא הָרִי אֲנִי מְכַנֵּן אוֹתוֹ מְבִרְיוֹתָיו לְשִׁבְדָּה אֶת הָאָזְנוֹ.

This interpretation uses three examples, a mountain burning with fire, the roar of a lion and the sounds of great waters (a large river) in order to describe God.

These are examples of when god is described through natural phenomena, or his creations as this interpretation describes them. Aside from appearing bodily, God does appear through these means and others, like thunder and lightning, in the Hebrew bible. This interpretation seeks to explain why this occurs, it is because the human mind cannot comprehend what God would be like. This interpretation is definitely influenced by ideas of transcendence, which is to argue that God is so vast and complex as to be incomprehensible. Ideas of divine transcendence are very much the opposite of the kinds of Semitic anthropomorphism that can be found in the Hebrew Bible. They deny that god may have a body, in so much as that a human can envision a body and therefore it must not be so. This interpretation uses ‘natural’ theophanies in order to explain the impossibility of God having a body or anything that we might be able to imagine.

As well as altering text to remove descriptions of God’s body, as we have seen above, the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan also makes theophanies appear more dangerous. In Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on Exodus 20:15 we read:

‘And all the people saw the thunder, and were turned back, everyone as he heard them coming forth from the midst of the lights, and the sound of the trumpet as it will raise the dead, and the mountain smoking; and all the people saw and drew back and stood twelve miles away.’

וְכָל עַמָּא חֲמִינ יַת קְלִיָּא הוּדְ הוּ מִתְהַפְּכִין בְּשִׁמְעֵהוּן דְּכָל חַד וְחַד וְהִידְ הוּ נִפְקִין
מִן גּוּ בְּעוֹרֵיָא וְיַת קַל שׁוֹפְרָא הִידְ הוּהּ מְחִי מִיִּתְיָא וְיַת טוֹרָא תְּנִין וְחֲמוּן כָּל עַמָּא
וְרָתְעוּ וְקָמוּ תְּרִיסַר מִלִּין מִרְחִיק:

This interpretation from the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan has added a number of details that the Hebrew Bible version does not include. The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan includes the raising of the dead and a distance of twelve miles. Both of these features are intended to make the theophany appear more frightening and dangerous, in other words, an inappropriate experience for man. Firstly, the distance of twelve miles is added whereas in the Hebrew Bible, they are just ‘far away/רחוק’. In the Hebrew Bible, the text makes it appear that the Israelites are frightened enough to draw away but the specificity of twelve miles has a special relevance to the Rabbis, as it is the distance the furthest Israelites are camped.³⁶⁵ As such, the Israelites have drawn back to the limit (of their camp), there is no further they could go. Making the Israelites to the ‘limit’ makes it clear how frightened the Israelites were. The Targum Pseudo- Jonathan is not the only interpreter to make this connection between theophany and the raising of the dead. Another interpretation of Exodus 20 from the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Terumah* 11 also makes this connection between theophany and the reviving of

³⁶⁵ As argued in Talmud Bavli *Eruvin* 51 and 55b, based on Numbers 33:49.

the dead 'the dead brought before me leave alive/מֵתִים נִכְנָסִין לְפָנַי וְיוֹצֵאִים חַיִּים/.

This second feature makes the event more frightening but also causes awe, again, encountering this intersection between fear and awe that is the 'fear of God' in the Hebrew Bible. This feature of raising the dead is particularly interesting when it comes to the interpretation of the Qur'an in which God does kill the Israelites with his presence and revive them again.

This trend of dangerous theophanies can also be seen in the Talmud Bavli

Shabbat 88a, where we read:

'And they stood at the lowest part of the mountain (Exodus 19:17). Rabbi Avdimi bar Ḥama bar Ḥasa teaches that HaKadosh Baruch Hu overturned the mountain upon them like a tub and said to them: If you accept the Torah, good and if not, there will be your burial.'³⁶⁶

וּיִתְחַצְבוּ בַתְּחִתִּית הַהָר אִמְרַר רַב אַבְדִּימִי בַר חַמָּא בַר חַסָּא מְלַמֵּד שְׁכַפְהָ הַקְדוּשׁ
בְּרוּךְ הוּא עֲלֵיהֶם אֵת הַהָר כְּגִיגִית וְאָמַר לָהֶם אִם אַתֶּם מִקְבָּלִים הַתּוֹרָה מוֹטֵב וְאִם
לֹא שֵׁם תִּהְיֶה קְבוּרַתְכֶם

This interpretation uses the same technique as the interpretation from the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan above, making the theophany appear more frightening and awesome than it appears in the Hebrew Bible. It can also provide an excuse for the Israelites' behaviour over the Golden Calf. Later in *Shabbat* 88a, Rav Aha notes that the people may say they were coerced. He receives the response that

³⁶⁶ An almost identical version appears in Talmud Bavli *Avodah Zarah* 2b.

this is possible. However, we know for sure that in the time of King Ahasuerus they were already seen as having accepted it willingly. It is possible that the link being suggested between theophany and the Golden Calf here is that they had not accepted God willingly at this point as they were so frightened of being crushed by the mountain during the theophany.

One interpretation of Exodus 33:11 from Tanhuma Buber *Ki Tisa* 14:2 is that God speaks to Moses face to face to placate him, implying that this personal act from God causes a positive reaction from Moses:

‘In the past, when Moses was angry with Israel, God would placate him.’

לשעבר כשהיה משה כועס עם ישראל היה הקבייה מרצה אותו

Whether this is a real theophany is contentious due to the following narrative.

However, the Tanhuma is clearly interpreting that Moses needs this close relationship with God after the Golden Calf episode. Another interpretation of this verse from the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 27 makes explicit that the anger that Moses and God feel is due to the incident of the Golden Calf.

Considering this, it seems that this is another connection between theophany and the Golden Calf. In this case, the Israelites actions have caused a theophany to be necessary in order that Moses might forgive them. This is not the only time it is suggested that theophany has a positive effect on Moses, in Exodus

34:29 Moses' face shines after he has been speaking with God. In itself this is neither positive nor negative, however, the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 37:1 interprets it as a reward for Moses. Although theophany is frightening and threatening for the Israelites, for Moses it seems to yield only positive results.

In these interpretations, several strategies that show discomfort with the idea of God's body are used. The first of these is just to change terminology so they are no longer described with human body parts. The second is to argue that descriptions of his body ought to be understood allegorically as they are describing something else or so the idea of God is comprehensible. Another technique is to make clear the interpreter's disapproval of the idea of theophany, which is achieved through making the theophanies appear more dangerous than in the Hebrew Bible. Despite these techniques, Moses escapes unscathed. His close relationship with God and right to theophany is preserved. These techniques are all relevant when it comes to interpreting the Qur'an, which does describe God's body, makes theophanies considerably more dangerous once more and yet still treats Moses differently from the Israelites.

3.2.3. Theophany, Visual Worship and Punishment in Sūrah Al Baqarah, Al-

Nisā' and Al-'A'rāf

Within the Golden Calf stories in the Qur'an, scenes of Moses on the mountain with God are included. The Qur'an has a different mode of revelation, as Muhammad receives the Qur'an through the words of the Angel Gabriel and is therefore, able to repurpose these biblical theophanies in order to fit into the wider theme of the Israelites' disbelief. As opposed to the Hebrew Bible which uses theophanies so that God may communicate and to signify closeness in God's relationships and Midrashic traditions which try to say that they were only metaphorical, the Qur'an punishes people for them. The Qur'an shows theophanies occurring to both Moses alone and the whole people as Israel, similar to the scenes shown in Exodus 32 and Exodus 20 but with different outcomes, in line with the fact that these events are now punishments for their disbelief. This section will examine the change in impetus for the theophanies, which is now upon the Israelites, the different effect the theophany has on Moses and the Israelites and the connection these theophanies possess to the Golden Calf narratives in the Qur'an. Through these differences the theophany becomes an aspect of the Israelites' need for a visual stimulus to worship and also of their pattern of failing God.

In Sūrat Al-Baqarah depicts a theophany to the Israelites that the people demand, whereupon God punishes them with death by thunder. Thus by demanding to see God the Israelites appear disbelieving. In response, God punishes them by killing them and then showcases his miraculous powers by reviving them in Q Al-Baqarah 2:55–56:

‘And you said: O Moses! We shall never believe in you until we see God manifestly. But you were dazed (by) thunder and lightning as you looked on. 56: Then we revived you from after your death that perhaps you would be grateful.’

وَإِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَىٰ لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّىٰ نَرَى اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً فَأَخَذَتْكُمُ الصَّعِقَةُ وَأَنْتُمْ تَنْظُرُونَ ثُمَّ بَعَثْنَاكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَوْتِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

These verses are similar to the theophany that appears in Exodus 19–20, as the theophany is to the whole people and there is thunder and lightning imagery (Exod 19:16 and 20:18). In Exodus 19–20, although the theophany is planned to be to the whole people of Israel, they do not request it and are in fact too afraid to comply with it (Exod 20:18). However, in Sūrat Al-Baqarah, the whole people of Israel demand to see God. In fact, it is God’s idea so that the people of Israel trust Moses. Thus, the purpose, imagery and audience of the theophany are the same in both Sūrat Al-Baqarah and Exodus 19–20. What has changed in Sūrat Al-Baqarah is that the Israelites demand to see God. As opposed to a willing offer from God, this demand is interpreted as a sinful request from the people to see something which is forbidden. The request being made by the Israelites,

allows God to punish them for being without blind faith and to show his powers of resurrection through bringing them back from the dead. It may also be significant that these verses are adjacent to a Golden Calf narrative that appears in verses Q 2:51–54 making their connection clear within the structure of the sūrah.

In Sūrat Al Nisā', a shorter version of what occurs in Q 2:55–56 is shown.

Although this version is shorter, it adds a clear note of judgement, stating that the people were struck for their 'wrongdoing' as well as mentioning the Golden Calf within the same verse, making the connection clear in Q Al-Nisā' 4:153:

'But they had asked Moses more than that and they said: Show us God manifestly. So, the thunderbolt struck them for their wrongdoing.'

فَقَدْ سَأَلُوا مُوسَىٰ أَكْبَرَ مِنْ ذَلِكَ فَقَالُوا أَرْنَا اللَّهَ جَهْرَةً فَأَخَذَتْهُمُ الصَّعِقَةُ بِظُلْمِهِمْ

This verse contains the same desire to see God expressed by the community in Sūrat Al-Baqarah and the inclusion of thunder. However, unlike in Sūrat al-Baqarah, here the thunder is explained. The thunder strikes the community for their wrongdoing, which remains unspecified. Considering the structure of the verse, it seems clear that their wrongdoing is to ask to see God. The Golden Calf is mentioned within the same verse, after this event, separated by 'then/ثم' which can mean 'after' but can also suggest an event that is connected. The Qur'an is

expressing a causative effect, that the request to see God led to another sinful act. This could be due to a continued sinful nature or it could be that with their request to see God rejected, they made a God for themselves. Conceptually, the request to see God and the building of the Calf are both attempts to have an image to worship. The community cannot envisage a god without a corporeal form so they build the Calf, creating a way to access God. In this verse, the Qur'an is criticising the worship of images and idols. The criticism here is stronger than in Al-Baqarah as it explains the reason for the Israelites' punishment. The Israelites are not shown as revived in Sūrat Al-Nisā'. Either they do not die in this version or we are simply not told of the resurrection. Whatever is the case, the expression 'then they took the Calf/ثُمَّ اتَّخَذُوا الْعِجْلَ', clearly indicates that they live. This illustrates another difference between Q 2:55 and Q 4:153, in Al-Baqarah the Calf occurs and then the theophany is mentioned whereas in Al-Nisā', these events are presented the other way around. This difference is illustrative of Sūrat Al-Baqarah's pattern of sin and forgiveness, each sin is shown separately along with God's forgiveness, in this case shown by him reviving the Israelites. Sūrat Al-Nisā' does not feature this pattern as strongly and therefore changes the order of events in order to show an ever-increasing scale of sin.

In Q 7:143, a theophany to Moses alone is shown in which he is not punished but still faints from the shock of seeing ‘God’ and is revived as a more fervent believer:

‘And when Moses came to the place appointed by us and his Lord spoke to him, he said: My Lord, show me, that I may look at you. He said: You cannot see me but look at the mountain, if it stays in its place, then you will see me. But when his Lord appeared to the mountain, he made it crumble to dust. And Moses fell down unconscious. So when he recovered he said: Glory to you. I turn to you and I am the first of the believers.’

وَأَمَّا جَاءَ مُوسَى لِمِيقَاتِنَا وَكَلَّمَهُ رَبُّهُ قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِي قَالَ رَبِّ أَرِنِي أَنْظُرُ إِلَيْكَ قَالَ لَنْ نَرَىٰ تَرَبِّنِي وَلَكِنْ أَنْظُرْ إِلَى الْجَبَلِ فَإِنِ اسْتَقَرَّ مَكَانَهُ فَسَوْفَ تَرَىٰ رَبَّنَا فَلَمَّا تَجَلَّىٰ رَبُّهُ لِلْجَبَلِ جَعَلَهُ دَكًّا وَخَرَّ مُوسَىٰ صَعِقًا فَلَمَّا أَفَاقَ قَالَ سُبْحَانَكَ تُبْتُ إِلَيْكَ وَأَنَا أَوَّلُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ

This passage illustrates that there are clear differences in the way the Qur’an treats a theophany to Moses and one to the Israelites as a whole. Firstly, Moses is not punished as the Israelites are but instead succumbs to his own shock.

Later interpretations of the text, such as that of Al-Tabari, come to the conclusion that Moses, like the Israelites, does die at the sight of God.³⁶⁷ Indeed, this contradiction was also present in the Hebrew Bible, as Exodus 33:20 states that ‘man may not see me (God) and live/וְחַיִּי הָאָדָם וְיִרְאֵנִי וְחַיִּי אִישׁוֹ, and yet, it seemed that Moses did see God and lived. David J. Halperin also sees here a parallel between Q 7:143 and Ex 33:20 and how the latter’s depiction of the theophany

³⁶⁷ Cited by Halperin, “The Hidden Made Manifest,” 584. Williams also discusses this interpretation, “*Tajalli wa-Ru’ya*,” 91.

could lead to the version of Q 7:143 in which Moses dies.³⁶⁸ For Halperin, the crux of the issue is whether Moses dies or faints, which is made unclear through the use of the word *صَعَفًا*.³⁶⁹ This word means to ‘strike down’, usually associated with lightning.³⁷⁰ This is another connection between the punishment of the Israelites, by being struck by lightning and Moses’ state in Q 7:143. However, *صَعَفًا* encompasses within it, both the meanings to be struck by lightning but also to be struck as in ‘to be stunned’ or ‘to pass out’.³⁷¹ It is necessary to expand Halperin’s lexical analysis to several of the other words in this passage as many of them are also involved in the meaning of this verse. The words *خَرَّ* and *أَفَاقَ* are key to the meaning of this verse. The former means to ‘fall down’ and the latter means to ‘surpass’ in its basic form but can mean to ‘revive’ or to ‘wake up’ in other forms.³⁷² The form appearing in Q 7:143, is that of a form 4 irregular verb. Form 4 verbs take on causative and often reflexive meanings, meaning this word must be to cause oneself to awake. To mean to revive someone else, as would be required if God was indeed resuscitating

³⁶⁸ Halperin, “The Hidden Made Manifest,” 583.

³⁶⁹ Halperin, “The Hidden Made Manifest,” 583.

³⁷⁰ Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary for Qur’anic Usage* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 525.

³⁷¹ Badawi and Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 525.

³⁷² Badawi and Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 260 and 726.

Moses, this word would need to be a form 2 word. Considering these lexical points, it seems that Moses is merely stunned and wakes himself up. As in the Hebrew Bible, it appears as though theophanies in the Qur'an affect people differently and once again, Moses' privileged relationship with God is a benefit to him, as he does not die.

Moses' theophany of Q 7:143 contains a similar contradiction as is present in Exodus 33:20 and Exodus 34, when God tells Moses that he may not see him but then offers to show himself. In Q 7:143, God says that Moses cannot see him and should look at the mountain and if it remains still, Moses will see him. This is another contradiction. God causes the mountain to crumble and Moses faints. Presumably, as the mountain does not remain still, Moses does not see God. This is interesting as although God appears to offer to show himself to Moses, he never intends to do so as shown by the mountain crumbling. This places God in the role of a trickster as he tells Moses a lie, or at best a 'half-truth'. Williams sees that this is as close to a theophany as the Qur'an gets and is almost as if Moses did see him.³⁷³ The imagery used, of the mountain crumbling, is very similar to that of the mountain shaking in Exodus 19:18, 'And the whole

³⁷³ Williams, "*Tajallī wa-Ru'ya*," 92

mountain trembled lots/וַיִּתְרַד כָּל-הָהָר מְאֹד. On this occasion in the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites do not end up seeing God as they are too afraid. The Qur'an is using a similar interpretative strategy to the Hebrew Bible here, which is that the sight of the shaking mountain would cause a reaction of fear. In both scenarios, the fear causes the theophany not to occur as planned. The people of Israel refuse to see God (Exod 20:18) and Moses faints at the sight of the crumbling mountain (Q 7:143).

The theophany of Q 7:143 is positioned while Moses is on the mountain talking to God, before he descends to find the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf. As in Sūrat Al-Nisā', this places the two events on an ascending scale of visual worship. The theophany in Sūrat Al-'A'rāf is the opposite to the Hebrew Bible where the Golden Calf occurs in Exodus 32 and the theophany to Moses in Exodus 33. Although this narrative does appear directly after the Golden Calf narrative within its biblical setting, it is still notable that theophanies remain connected to the Golden Calf within Sūrahs Al-Baqarah, Al-Nisā' and Al-'A'rāf. The Golden Calf only appears in one more sūrah, Sūrat Ṭā' Hā', undoubtedly the most apologetic version of the Golden Calf story in the Qur'an. As these theophanies have all been interpreted negatively in the Qur'an, it makes sense

that there would not be a theophany in a sūrah that seeks to present the Israelites role in the Golden Calf narrative as positively as possible.

Each depiction of a theophany or an attempted theophany in the Qur'an has been written with a negative tone implied. When Moses sees God, he faints and when the people ask to see God, they are killed with a thunderbolt. Despite sharing many similarities, these narratives have very different outcomes to their biblical counterparts. In order to discuss why the Qur'an has given these narratives this treatment, it is necessary to consider the Qur'anic history of the idea of a visible God. The Qur'an states that 'visions cannot grasp him/ لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ', when discussing God (Q Al-'An'am 6:103). Later Islamic tradition developed along the lines that humans could not see God. The Mu'talizites line of thought was that of 'tanzīh/تَنْزِيهِ', removal or withdrawal. *Tanzīh* is understood as the denial that God could have any created quality attributed to him. Another school of thought was that of the Ash'arites, who made part of their theology the contradiction that God is described as having human features, such as a face and hands, but that he remains transcendent and therefore cannot be anthropomorphised.³⁷⁴ Although doctrines that state God does not have a

³⁷⁴ Jamal Elias, "Face of God," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an Vol. 2 E-I*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 160.

human body became the prevailing view, they were not the only view. There were more literalist approaches, known to their critics as ‘corporealists’ or ‘*mushabbihun*/مُشَبِّهِينَ’; however, due to an overwhelming majority arguing against this, there is limited textual history for it.³⁷⁵

In the Hebrew Bible, theophanies are a necessary means of revelation. In the Qur’an, however, the agent of revelation is Gabriel, not God, rendering theophanies unnecessary. Although there are different ways for God to communicate with humans and some, such as the theophany Moses receives, may be seen as ‘truer’ theophanies than others, God is still the direct communicator in these cases. What God is communicating is his message for the people, which he speaks to a prophet. This makes theophany a necessary part of the Hebrew Bible as this is how God communicates with his people. In opposition, Mustansir Mir makes the point that theophany does not belong within the theological framework of the Qur’an.³⁷⁶ As Mir alludes, the Qur’an has a different method for delivering revelation, the angel Gabriel or Jibril.

When Muhammad receives a revelation, it is delivered to him by the angel Jibril,

³⁷⁵ Richard C. Martin, “Anthropomorphism,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an Vol. 1 A–D*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 104.

³⁷⁶ Muntasir Mir, “Theophany,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an Vol. 5 Si–Z*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 276.

not directly from God (Q Al-Najm 53:4–9 and Q Al-‘Alaq 96:1–5). Although the angel Jibril is always seen as the intermediary of God, there is an occasion where it seems as though God speaks directly to Muhammad (Q 53:10). However, considering that the vast majority are ‘mediated’ through Jibril, there is no real need for theophany in the Qur’an.³⁷⁷ That theophanies have become unnecessary in the Qur’an allows for them to be repurposed into a tool to criticise the Israelites, as can be seen in Sūrah Al-Baqarah, Al-Nisā’ and Al-‘A‘rāf.

The Qur’an utilises the theme of theophany using much of the same imagery as the Hebrew Bible. However, the Qur’an repurposes these theophanies as part of the greater Qur’anic theme of the failures of the Israelites. These theophanies show their greediness, God does not wish to reveal himself to them, instead they demand it as payment for their belief. The Qur’an is able to do this, as unlike the Hebrew Bible it does not require them as a form of revelation. Although the Hebrew Bible is against visual worship, it maintains descriptive elements of the Ancient Semitic cultural milieu in which it was composed. As in Midrashic traditions, there is a process of Semitic anthropomorphism being removed and replaced by newer traditions of a transcendent God. The Qur’an links these

³⁷⁷ Daniel A. Madigan, “Revelation and Inspiration,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’an Vol. 4 P–Sh*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 437.

theophanies to the Golden Calf, presenting them side by side as evidence of the Israelites' lust for a corporeal God and their inability to believe in the transcendent God that the Qur'an proposes. Yet again, the Israelites are placed in opposition to God and his true followers. That Moses does not belong in the same category as the Israelites is shown by the fact that he alone does not die when presented with a theophany.

Conclusion

In all of these texts, theophany is clearly related to the Golden Calf. The two narratives are positioned in close proximity in the Bible, then both midrashic traditions and the Qur'an further weave the theophany narrative together with the Golden Calf narrative. The Qur'an places these theophanies together with the Golden Calf narrative, regardless of whether the theophany is a version of the Exodus 19–20 or Exodus 33 theophany. In fact, the theophany to the whole people in Exodus 19–20, Sūrah Al Baqarah and Al-Nisā' better suit the Qur'an's purposes. This purpose is to use the theophanies to show the Israelites desire for a visual God that they may worship. Sūrat Al-Nisā' shows this particularly clearly, showing their rejection by God leading them to build the Golden Calf. However, in Al Baqarah the sin of the Calf being followed by another sin of

asking to see God also achieves the same goal of presenting the theophany as another request for a visual reference to worship, just more in the style of that sūrah. These narratives are placed next to each other within the sūrahs and both of Theophany-Golden Calf narratives present an overall message of the Israelites disbelief as they are unable to have faith without seeing their God.

With regard to the idea of theophany in the Bible and the Qur'an, the idea of revelation is key. In the Hebrew Bible, God reveals himself directly, speaking with prophets personally. The messenger of God's revelation in the Bible is God himself and thus his presence is necessary. Midrashic traditions later try to disassociate themselves with the idea that God can be seen due to a discomfort with a physical manifestation of God, however, they cannot remove this primary method of revelation from the Hebrew Bible. Attempts can be seen to limit it, through those being spoken to by God being limited to those strictly necessary for the narrative, as seen by the privilege of hearing the word of God being removed from Aaron by the Rabbis. By the time of the Qur'an, the method of revelation has changed and Muhammad is dictated the Qur'an by the angel Jibril. The Qur'an is free to use these narratives differently and, as such, uses

them to add to a Qur'anic theme of the disbelief of the Israelites which is shown by their need for visual stimuli to worship.

These theophany narratives also show the difference between Moses and the Israelites as they are placed in opposition to each other. However, on this occasion it is not direct, as with the Golden Calf. In the Hebrew Bible, the people must wash and cleanse themselves for three days in order to see God, yet Moses only needs to remove his shoes. The Israelites are too frightened to see God but Moses requests to know him. Moses and the Israelites are on very different levels when it comes to their relationship with God. In Midrashic traditions, despite the Israelites' theophanies being made more dangerous, Moses still benefits from his. In the Qur'an, this separation can be seen through the effect the theophany has on Moses and the Israelites, the Israelites die because of it but Moses merely faints. That Moses is on a different plane to the Israelites is shown in both the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an. The Hebrew Bible leaves open the possibility that the Israelites could have this access to God, they are just too frightened to attain it. Whereas, in killing them the Qur'an does not. As well as expressing the differences between Moses and the Israelites, these theophanies also show something about the kind of relationship God wishes to

foster with his people. The God of the Hebrew Bible has a presence in the world and appears to his prophets, at least, trying to appear to his people as well. The God of the Hebrew Bible has a chosen people and appears to wish to have a close relationship with them. Whereas, the God of the Qur'an does not seem to desire closeness to his people. God has no physical presence in the world in the Qur'an, he may affect the world through his actions and he is clearly affected by the actions of people on the earth. The God of the Qur'an is able to punish, to be angry and to be merciful and compassionate. However, he is not physically available to anyone in the way that the God of the Hebrew Bible is, not even to Muhammad.

A closer look at the role of the Israelites in the narrative process of the Golden Calf Story will be taken, first in the Hebrew Bible itself, then in some Jewish traditions, and finally in the Qur'an, Sūrah Al-Baqara, Al-Nisā', Al-'A'rāf and Ṭā' Hā'.

3.3. The Role of the Israelites in Exodus 32, Midrashic Collections and Sūrahs

Al-Baqarah, Al-Nisā', Al-'A'rāf and Tā' Hā'

In the Golden Calf narrative, Moses is opposed by his own people who create another God whilst he is away on the mountain. The God they create is a Golden Calf. This section will focus on what the people's rationale was for creating the Calf and how they behaved during the process. In the Hebrew Bible, Midrashic traditions and the Qur'an, what motivated the people, the role of Aaron and how the Israelites act during the Golden Calf narrative will be examined.

In the Hebrew Bible, the Golden Calf narrative starts with the people's complaint that Moses has been delayed a long time and they are unsure of what has happened to him. With this in mind, they ask for a God. The phrasing in the first verse of Exodus 32 leads the major question about the people's intentions in the Golden Calf narrative, do they intend for the Calf to replace Moses or to be another god? These are not the only options as some scholars, such as Cross and have proposed that the Calf may be a footstool or even a

combination of several of these options.³⁷⁸ In any situation, their behaviour transgresses boundaries that they have agreed to in Exodus 20. Aaron enables the people's behaviour and after their original request, seems to be in control of what follows. Aaron chooses the material of the Calf and institutes ways to worship the figure, becoming a cult leader around it. In the Hebrew Bible, although questions over intention remain, that the Israelites and Aaron have acted badly is clear from their behaviour.

Midrashic traditions take two positions on the Golden Calf, usually depending on the age of the tradition. The earlier interpretations of the Golden Calf tradition focus on the greatness of the sin. However, a shift in interpretation can be seen during the Amoraic period. These later interpretations from the Tanhumas Yelammedenu and Buber, Talmud Bavli and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan seek to absolve Aaron and the Israelites by the introduction of new characters to the Golden Calf narrative who lead the Israelites astray. Satan and the sorcerers of Pharaoh, Jannes and Jambres, not only lead the people astray but, in some cases, make the Calf themselves. Another method used to excuse Aaron but not the Israelites is that the Israelites had become violent and he

³⁷⁸ Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 73.

feared for his life. In these later Jewish exegetical trends, reasons for the Israelites behaviour, reasons why they in fact did not create the calf themselves and reasons why Aaron cooperated so readily are given to exculpate those involved.

In the Qur'an, traditions regarding the disobedience of the people similar to the Hebrew Bible and some Midrashic traditions remain but Aaron has been more completely separated from the people. The Qur'an maintains the tradition that they are concerned that Moses will not return. However, the Qur'an focusses more on the disobedience and lack of belief that led to their decision to build a calf. Aaron, who has a focal role in the Hebrew Bible, has a much more limited role in the Qur'an. In the longest retelling of the story, in Q Ṭā' Hā' 20:83–97, he has been almost completely absolved by the introduction of Al-Sāmirī who makes the Calf. Aaron is not shown to make the calf in any Qur'anic retelling. In one retelling it is specifically noted that the people made the Calf, again absolving Aaron. Aaron is much more separated from the people in the Qur'an than the Hebrew Bible showing the effect of traditions surrounding his perfection as he is a prophet in the Qur'an. This is similar to interpretations of Aaron in the Jewish exegetical literature which also seek to absolve him based on

his later role as High Priest, even the method, replacing him with a new character that creates the Calf, is the same. The Qur'an also has little interest in defending the people, unlike Midrashic traditions, as it criticises them in order to persuade people of the many failings of the Israelites and the legitimacy of the new faith of Islam. Now, the way in which the Israelites' and Aaron's shared responsibility for the transgression is depicted in Exodus 32 shall be examined.

3.3.1. The Israelites' and Aaron's Shared Responsibility in Exodus 32

In the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites appear confused by Moses' disappearance (Ex 32:1), leading them to approach Aaron. They do this, seemingly aggressively, and ask him to build them a god. Aaron does this and sets up a cult around the God, which is in the shape of a Calf. However, due to the people's original request, it is unclear whether this God is meant to replace Moses as an intermediary or to replace God. This section shall seek to establish why the Israelites make this request, Aaron's actions in response to this, the nature of their request and their actions upon receiving this new god. From any reading of Exodus 32, it is clear that both the Israelites and Aaron come out of the Golden Calf narrative having sinned greatly. That the sin is shared between the Israelites and Aaron is interesting in contrast to later Midrashic trends which

will in particular seek to absolve Aaron and Qur'anic trends that will do the same thing but seek to add to the sin of the Israelites.

In Exodus 32:1, the reason for the people's betrayal is interpreted as Moses taking too long to come down from the mountain:

‘and the people saw that Moses delayed in coming down from the mountain, and they gathered against Aaron and they said, ‘Come, make for us a god that will go before us, for that Moses, the man who brought us out of Egypt, we do not know what happened to him’

וַיֵּרָא הָעָם כִּי־בָשַׁשׁ מֹשֶׁה לָרֶדֶת מִן־הַהָר וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל־אַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו קוּמָה עֲשֵׂה־לָּנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לְפָנֵינוּ כִּי־זָה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מָה־הָיָה לּוֹ:

The first words of Exodus 32 name Moses' prolonged absence as the reason why the people go to Aaron, starting the process that leads to the Calf. In their direct speech, the people also make it clear that not knowing what happened to Moses is why they need a God. In Exodus 24:18, Moses goes up the mountain and stays for forty days and nights whilst God describes the building of the tabernacle and Aaron's investiture as High Priest. Whether considering the time stated in Exodus 24:18, forty days and nights, or the time in the narrative, seven chapters, Moses is gone for a long time. In Exodus 24:14, Moses does leave instructions to wait for him and aside from that 'if any man has things/דְּבָרִים מִי־בַעַל' to go to Aaron and Hur. The Israelites do not directly disobey this instruction, as they do

wait for him and when they have an issue they do indeed go to Aaron. However, the manner in which they approach Aaron is perhaps not what Moses had in mind as ‘the people gathered against Aaron/וַיִּקְהַל הָעָם עַל אֶהֱרֹן’. This phrasing, in particular the use of the preposition ‘עַל’, makes it clear that this was an encounter placing the people at odds with Aaron.³⁷⁹ They came to him aggressively, this much is made clear by Moses who says later ‘the people were out of control/כִּי פָרַע אֶת־הָעָם מִיָּד מֹשֶׁה’, so much so that ‘they would be a menace to all who opposed them/לְשֹׂמְצָה בְּקִמְיָהֶם’ (Exod 32:25). Although the people are out of control and would threaten people, Moses blames this on Aaron, as he had allowed them to get out of control (Exod 32:25). The people’s request is motivated by a concern that Moses will not return to them and although they obey his instruction, to approach Aaron, they appear to do so in a way that is aggressive, demanding another god.

Apart from the question why the people want the Calf the most important question surrounding the Golden Calf narrative is what exactly the Israelites want, as it is not clear whether the Golden Calf is intended as a way to access

³⁷⁹ This verb plus ‘al/עַל’ always implies a threatening confrontation (Num. 16:3, 17:7, 20:2), see William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 19–40* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2006), 547.

God, as a new God of its own replacing Yahweh, or even a footstool for God.³⁸⁰

The people ask for a God to be made as they do not know what has happened to Moses, not what has happened to God, which can be used as an argument for the Calf being an intermediary to access Yahweh, as Moses did. Arguments that propose this have often included other sources from the Bible, as well as archaeological evidence, that show oxen as common decorative motifs associated with the God of Israel and therefore an appropriate symbol. Uri Rubin argues that these depictions are of a calf connected with Yahweh due to the Exodus formula used in Exodus 32:8, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt’.³⁸¹ Although this can be understood as Rubin did, a clear attribution of this calf to the God that took the Israelites out of Egypt, there is an alternative interpretation. Douglas K. Stuart argues that without alternative textual readings where this is a singular God, it must be read as ‘gods’, as it is meant to show Israel’s dissatisfaction with a God represented by one man, after whose departure, they feel unprotected.³⁸² This places Stuart and Rubin in direct opposition over the word ‘אֱלֹהִים’ which can be used to mean God or gods. A

³⁸⁰ These three options are outlined in Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 581–583, with the idea of a throne in more detail on 516–519.

³⁸¹ Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation,” 197.

³⁸² Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture (The New American Commentary)* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 669.

forth option is that the calf is meant to represent Moses, as his physical presence is now absent from the camp.³⁸³ Other arguments that aid this possibility are Moses' connection to the Exodus formula, as the 'man who brought us out of Egypt' (Exod 32:1) and Moses 'horns' on returning from God in Exodus 34:29–30, making him appear bovine.³⁸⁴ What the people hope to gain from the statue is left unclear by the text. Frank Moore Cross points out that it need not be only one of these interpretations, as one could use the Calf to worship Yahweh but still worship it too.³⁸⁵ However, that it is wrong, regardless of whether it was idolatrous behaviour, intending to worship another god, or simply idolatrous practice, worshipping the right god in the wrong way, is made unequivocally clear by the reactions of Moses and God.³⁸⁶

Although the Ten commandments have not been brought down at the time of the Golden Calf, prohibitions already exist that make it clear why building the Calf was wrong, regardless of the Israelites' intention. In Exodus 20, rules are

³⁸³ George Coats, "The Golden Calf in Psalm 22," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 9, no.1 (1987): 2.

³⁸⁴ Jack M. Sassoon, "Bovine Symbolism in the Exodus Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 18, no.3 (1968): 384–87.

³⁸⁵ Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 73.

³⁸⁶ The difference between idolatrous behaviour and practise, whether one seeks to worship another god or your god but in the wrong way, is delineated by Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit in their book, *Idolatry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 180–213.

made about correct forms of worship. The first of these that is applicable to the

Golden Calf episode is Exodus 20:4:

‘you shall not make for yourself a sculptured image or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters beneath the earth’

לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לְךָ פֶסֶל וְכָל־תְּמוּנָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְאֲשֶׁר בַּאֲרֶץ מִתַּחַת וְאֲשֶׁר
בַּמַּיִם מִתַּחַת לָאָרֶץ:

As the Calf is a representative of something from the earth and has been

sculptured by Aaron it clearly contradicts this rule. This verse bans both the

subject and method of making the Calf. Exodus 20 does not stop there, in

Exodus 20:20 even the material for the Golden Calf is prohibited. Exodus 20:20

prohibits, ‘gods of silver and gold/וְאֱלֹהֵי זָהָב וְכֶסֶף וְאֱלֹהֵי זָהָב’, foreshadowing the Golden

Calf event. The rules set forth in Exodus 20 are given sometime before the sin of

the Golden Calf. Therefore, it is clear that whatever the Israelites intended the

Calf to be, it had already been specifically prohibited to them.

After their initial request, Aaron is very much involved in the people’s betrayal

of Moses as the builder and overall organiser of the Calf cult. Although Aaron

does not start the process, as he is approached in an aggressive manner, he

responds to the idea of the people to build a God. After the initial idea, it

appears as though Aaron is in charge, as all the ideas seem to be his. Aaron asks

that the Israelites bring their earrings to him in Exodus 32:2, leading to him casting them into a molten figure in Exodus 32:4. Although the Israelites ask for Aaron to build them a god, what he does next, essentially organise the cult around it, is certainly not requested by the people. So, it must be assumed that when Aaron builds an altar before the calf and proclaims the day to be a festival in Exodus 32:5, it is of his own volition. Propp argues that what Aaron attempted was to regain control over the Golden Calf and focus the cult around Yahweh but there seems little evidence for this.³⁸⁷ Although there are legitimate altars in the Hebrew Bible, altars to false gods are frequent, linking Aaron's behaviour to an established pattern of idol worship.³⁸⁸ Aaron explains his actions to Moses in Exodus 32:22–24, in which he provides two excuses and relays the words of the people in Exodus 32:1, concerning Moses' delay (Exod 32:23). The first excuse is to blame the people for what happened as they were 'bent on evil/הוא/ברע' (Exod 32:22). The second excuse is the way he describes the making of the Calf. Here Aaron repeats that he asked them to throw their earrings in the fire but states that 'this Calf was brought out/היה העגל הוצא' or perhaps 'out came this Calf' is more a functional translation. This statement,

³⁸⁷ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 552.

³⁸⁸ For examples, altars are built to Baal in 2 Kings 21:3 and Judges 6:25.

described as ‘delightfully ridiculous’ by Viviano, makes it seem as though he does not cast the Calf himself and as if it had a will of its own.³⁸⁹ Although Aaron blaming the people seems to be at least partially justified, as they did after all approach him and put him under duress, he did nevertheless play a significant role, not only in initiating but also in shaping the cult around the Calf. His statement, which almost seems to suggest that the Calf somehow came out of nowhere stands in direct contradiction to the earlier narrative that clearly describes him as making it.

With Aaron as organiser, the people play an active part in the worship of the Calf, bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices in Exodus 32:6:

‘Early next day, the people offered up burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; they sat down to eat and drink, and then rose to dance’

וַיִּשְׁבְּימוּ מִמַּחֲרַת וַיַּעֲלוּ עֹלֹת וַיִּגְשׂוּ שְׁלָמִים וַיֵּשֶׁב הָעָם לֶאֱכֹל וְלִאֱכֹל וְשָׂתוּ וַיִּקְמוּ
לְצַחֵק:

They are still dancing around the calf when Moses comes down the mountain in Exodus 32:17–19. From Moses’ angry reaction it is clear that this is a form of unacceptable behaviour. God also sees them ‘bowing low/וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ-לוֹ’ before the

³⁸⁹ From the third person verb, ‘וַיַּעַז’, it is clear that Aaron is not disclosing that he brought it out as that would be in the first person. Viviano, “Do the Books of Hosea and Jeremiah,” 38. Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 562.

Calf whilst he is talking to Moses on the mount, describing this as ‘acting basely/תָּוֹהוּ’ and the people as ‘stiffnecked/קִשְׁיֵה-עֲרֵךְ’ (Exod 32:7–9). From the reactions of Moses and God, it is clear this kind of worship is unacceptable and a betrayal of their worship of Yahweh. The idea of dancing is only linked with idolatry this once in the Hebrew Bible and has previously been interpreted to have an erotic meaning.³⁹⁰ Dancing is often combined with musical instruments to show joy in the Hebrew Bible (Ps 30:12, 31:13, 150:4).³⁹¹ Indeed, this kind of celebration appears in Exodus 24 to celebrate the Israelites relationship with Yahweh.³⁹² From this, it may be inferred that the people of Israel are celebrating this new god and what is offensive to God and Moses about this particular behaviour is the people cementing their relationship with another god. ‘Burnt offerings’ are again, an acceptable form of worship, if offered to Yahweh but not when offered to other gods. The people offer ‘burnt offerings’ to Baal in Jeremiah 19:5. How the types of behaviour the Israelites display towards the Calf are examples of acceptable behaviour when directed towards Yahweh but not towards other gods. Again, the confusion over whether the Calf is meant to

³⁹⁰ Viviano, “Do the Books of Hosea and Jeremiah,” 43. Devorah Schoenfield, ““A Good Argument to Penitents,”” 178.

³⁹¹ Viviano, “Do the Books of Hosea and Jeremiah,” 43.

³⁹² Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 553.

represent Yahweh or whether it is the focus of its own worship comes into question.

An examination of the behaviour of the Israelites while Moses is on the mountain and of their explanations when he returns suggests that their motivation for their behaviour was a fear that Moses may not return and they will be left without an intermediary. Moses' brother, Aaron, is very much a part of the process of building the Calf and organising the cult around it. What the Israelites intend the Calf to represent and how they worship it are not clear.

Questions over whether this episode constitutes idolatry or a type of syncretism have plagued the study of this narrative. The text does not make it clear what the Israelites want, a god or an intermediary. However, from the way the text is written it is at least clear that they have acted wrongly. The actions of the Israelites, dancing and bringing burnt offerings, are again acceptable actions in the form of the worship of the correct god. However, should they be attributed to another, in this case the Calf, they too become a form of idolatrous practice.

The Hebrew Bible presents a mixed picture of what the sin of the Golden Calf actually is but makes it perfectly clear that it is a great sin from the reactions of God and Moses, both in their words and actions. This unclear sin leads to two

separate traditions, of acceptance and denial, in the Jewish exegetical writings.

The various ways in which these two different responses were interpreted in the latter is the subject of the next section.

3.3.2. Apologetic Interpretations of Aaron and the Israelites in Midrashic

Collections

Midrashic traditions take two main exegetical strategies when approaching the Golden Calf narrative, accepting the sin and detracting from it, in order to exculpate Aaron and the Israelites. Irving Mandelbaum argued that these strategies can be broadly divided in Tannaitic and Amoraic categories.³⁹³ The older Tannaitic interpretations of the Golden Calf seek to emphasise the sin that occurs and what a terrible moment it occupies in the history of Israel. The later Amoraic interpretations tend to be more apologetic, seeking to reason as to why Aaron and the Israelites might have acted this way. Pekka Lindqvist agrees with

³⁹³ This difference between Tannaitic and Amoraic interpretations of the Golden Calf is noted by Irving Mandelbaum in his article, "Tannaitic Exegesis of the Golden Calf Episode," in *A Tribute to Geza Vermes: Essays on Jewish and Christian Literature and History*, eds. Phillip R. Davies and Richard T. White (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 207–224. Mandelbaum does not offer a hypothesis as to why this is the case. Edward Kessler discusses the use of polemics in his work, *An Introduction to Jewish–Christian Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 73.

this approach, noting the apologetic interpretations to be post-Tannaitic and suggesting the rise of the Constantinian era as an explanation, a strong church leading to increased pressure on the Jewish community.³⁹⁴ Smolar and Aberbach agree with this distinction of acceptance and apologetics but do not see the temporal distinction as strongly as Mandelbaum and Lindqvist, seeing both Tannaim and Amoraim concerned with polemical attacks from Christianity.³⁹⁵ However, Smolar and Aberbach do see that the apologetic trend is much more widespread than the acceptance trend, as well as emphasising a third trend of God's forgiveness of Israel which has been covered in more detail by Devorah Schoenfield.³⁹⁶ Smolar and Aberbach also make clear that these more apologetic readings are in line with the Rabbinic default of defending the nation of Israel from outside attacks, essentially that these interpretations are responses to Christian polemics.³⁹⁷ These strategies can be applied to both the character of Aaron and the people of Israel as a whole. Amoraic interpretations in order to exonerate Aaron and the people use the themes of Egyptian influence and the

³⁹⁴ Lindqvist, *Sin at Sinai*, 295.

³⁹⁵ Smolar and Aberbach, "The Golden Calf Episode in Post-Biblical Literature," 95. Schoenfield, "A Good Argument to Penitents," 185.

³⁹⁶ Smolar and Aberbach, "The Golden Calf Episode," 112, 116. Schoenfield, "A Good Argument to Penitents," 176–193.

³⁹⁷ Smolar and Aberbach, "The Golden Calf Episode," 107.

presence of Satan. One theme exonerates and even praises Aaron at the cost of the people, Aaron's fear for his life based on the supposed murder of Hur at the hands of the Israelites. This section will focus on the later Amoraic interpretations of the Golden Calf, as they are more relevant to the exegetical environment in which the Qur'an was composed.

Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 26:1 points out how God had forgiven Aaron and the Israelites but does so acknowledging their roles within the Golden Calf narrative. It reads:

‘Rabbi Joshua Ben Levy said: When they transgressed with the Golden Galf, they sinned with the hands of Aaron, who said to them: Whoever has gold. And when the HaKadosh Baruch Hu reconciled with them and requested that they know that He bore no resentment over the calf, he wanted to do so with the hands of Aaron, as is said: And he said unto Aaron: Take a bull for a burnt offering (Lev 9:2)’.

אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ בֶּן לֵוִי: בְּשַׁחֲטָאוֹ בְּעֵגֶל חֲטָאוֹ עַל יְדֵי אַהֲרֹן שֶׁאָמַר לָהֶם לְמִי זָהָב.
וּכְשֶׁנִּתְרַצָּה הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וּבִקֵּשׁ לְהוֹדִיעַן שֶׁאֵין בְּלִבּוֹ כָּלבוֹ כְּלוּם בְּעֵגֶל נִתְרַצָּה
עַל יְדֵי אַהֲרֹן שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל אַהֲרֹן קַח וְגו’.

Interestingly, this verse does admit that the people ‘sinned through Aaron’, admitting Aaron's guilt. However, its goal is to show how God forgave him and the people. The structure of this midrash shows the people sinning through him and being forgiven through him. Aaron is integral to this argument as not only his sin is removed but also makes him the person who removes the sin from the

people. This interpretation is based on his High Priest Role where he made sin offerings on behalf of the people, using the connection between the Golden Calf and the bulls he will now sacrifice.

In Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Tetzaveh* 10:6, Aaron's innocence is obtained through the idea that the Israelites killed Hur for not building the Calf:³⁹⁸

‘For what did he elevate Aaron and his sons to a holy station? Rav Mani of Shaab and Rav Joshua of Sikhnin said in the name of Rav Levi: When Israel requested him to do the act (making the Golden Calf), they said to Aaron: Rise, make for us a God/gods. Hur, the son of Caleb, stood and rebuked them. They stood against him and killed him. Aaron saw and feared for his own life, as it is said: Aaron saw and he built an altar before it. You know that they killed Hur, for Moses told them before he went up the mountain: Behold, Aaron and Hur are with you; whoever has matters, let him come approach them. When he came down, you do not find mention of Hur, not as living nor as dead. What does Scripture say: And Moses said to Aaron: What did this people do to you that you have brought such great sin upon them? That they killed Hur.’

וּמָה רָאָה שְׂיִגְדֵל לְאַהֲרֹן וּבְנָיו לְקַדֵּשׁ אוֹתָם? אָמַר רַבִּי מְנִי דְשָׂאֵב וְרַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ
דְּסַכְנִין בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי לִוִּי: בְּשַׁעָה שְׁבַקְשׁוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתוֹ מַעֲשֵׂה אָמְרוּ לְאַהֲרֹן קוּם
עֲשֵׂה לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים. עָמַד חוֹר בֶּן כָּלֵב וְגַעַר בְּהֵן מִיַּד עֲמָדוֹ עָלָיו וְהִרְגוּהוּ. רָאָה אַהֲרֹן
וְנִתְיָרָא מֵעֲצָמוֹ שְׁנֵאמַר: וַיֵּרָא אַהֲרֹן וַיִּבֶן מִזְבֵּחַ לְפָנָיו. הָיָה קוֹרָא בּוֹ וַיֵּרָא אַהֲרֹן וַיִּבֶן
מִזְבֵּחַ לְפָנָיו. תִּדְעַ לָךְ שֶׁהִרְגוּ לְחוֹר שְׁבַשְׁעָה שְׁעָלָה מִשָּׁה לְהָר מָה אָמַר לָהֶם: הִנֵּה
אַהֲרֹן וְחוֹר עִמָּכֶם מִי בַעַל דְּבָרִים יִגַּשׁ אֲלֵיהֶם. כְּשִׁירַד אֵין אַתָּה מוֹצֵא שֶׁהִזְכִּיר לְחוֹר
לֹא בַחַיִּים וְלֹא בַמְּוֹת. וּמָהוּ אוֹמַר: וַיֵּאמֶר מִשָּׁה אֶל אַהֲרֹן מָה עָשָׂה לָךְ הָעַם הַזֶּה כִּי
הִבְאֵת וְגו' הָיָה שֶׁהִרְגוּ לְחוֹר.

³⁹⁸ A version of this interpretation can also be found in Midrash Tanhuma Buber, *Beha'alotcha* 24:1.

This midrash makes it clear that Aaron builds the Calf, only after seeing the murder of his nephew, Hur, by the Israelites. It uses a play on words ‘Aaron saw and he was afraid/ונתירא/זירא אהרן ונתירא’, based on the similar letters, in order to show that Aaron was afraid. Smolar and Aberbach note that in this midrash, Aaron performs a good deed, in that, in stopping the people from murdering him, he saves them from more sin.³⁹⁹ Smolar and Aberbach also see the building of the altar as a way to play for time, hoping Moses will come back and restore order.⁴⁰⁰ This midrash not only exculpates Aaron but also argues that his behaviour during this event is why he and his sons were made High Priests, making it clear that he is sinless and exalted.

Another way to use the popular midrashic tradition surrounding the murder of Hur is to combine it with another tradition, the involvement of Satan. In

Midrash Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 19:2:⁴⁰¹

‘When Moses failed to return by the fortieth day and the sixth hour of that day, Aaron and Hur said to them: Now he is coming down from the mountain (but) they did not pay attention. Some say: That Satan stood and showed them the likeness of his bier (burial bed) from the mountain (and) from that they said: For this is the man Moses. Then Hur stood and rebuked them.

³⁹⁹ Smolar and Aberbach, “The Golden Calf Episode,” 110. Lindquist, *Sin at Sinai*, 217.

⁴⁰⁰ Smolar and Aberbach, “The Golden Calf Episode,” 110.

⁴⁰¹ A similar tradition of Satan and Hur can be found in the Tanhuma Buber *Ki Tisa* 13:1. A version of this tradition about Satan can be found in the Talmud Bavli *Shabbat* 89a.

They stood against him and killed him. When Aaron saw this he was afraid and started to occupy them with other matters.’

וְאוֹתוֹ הַיּוֹם יוֹם אַרְבָּעִים הָיָה בְּשֵׁשׁ שָׁעוֹת בַּיּוֹם. אָמְרוּ לָהֶם אֱהָרֹן וְחֹר: עַכְשָׁו יוֹרֵד מִן הָהָר לֹא הַשְּׂגִיחוּ. וַיֵּשׂ אֹמְרִים: שְׁעָמַד שְׁטָן וְהִרְאָה לָהֶם דַּמוֹת מִטָּתוֹ מִן הָהָר מִמָּה שְׁאָמְרוּ: כִּי זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ. מִיָּד עָמַד חֹר וְנָעַר בָּהֶם. עָמְדוּ עָלָיו וְהִרְגוּהוּ. כְּשֶׁרָאָה אֱהָרֹן כִּדְ גַּתִּירָא וְהִתְחִיל מְעַסִּיקָן בְּדַבְרִים.

In *Ki Tisa* 19:1–2, Satan is mentioned. Although this theme is not elaborated on, it provides another excuse for why Aaron co-operated with the Israelites. In fact, the inclusion of Satan removes agency from Aaron as it implies that he is being affected by an external demonic force. Satan also shows the Israelites an image of Moses dead on the mountainside. This convinces them that Moses will not return and of their need for a new god. Aaron seeking to occupy them with other matters is another version of the theme noted by Smolar and Aberbach of Aaron trying to save the Israelites of sinning further by going along with their plans.

The Targums include both the traditions about Hur and Satan. The Targum Neofiti, the Fragmentary Targum and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan all include an interpretation about Hur being killed as part of Exodus 32:5.⁴⁰² This is an interesting placement for the tradition about Hur as it replaces the verse about

⁴⁰² For more on this see Lindqvist, *Sin at Sinai*, 216–219.

Aaron building and altar and proclaiming the day a festival to God. Not only does this make Aaron's response far more comprehensible, as he feels threatened but it also removes some of his more questionable actions regarding his involvement with the Calf cult. Despite all three of these Targums showing apologetic tendencies, the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan is the only Targum that includes the midrashic tradition about Satan being involved in the Golden Calf.⁴⁰³ In the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan the name of 'Satan/סַטָּנָה', is mentioned three times, in Exodus 1, 19 and 24. In Exodus 32:1 in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan:⁴⁰⁴

'But the people saw that Mosheh delayed to come down from the mount, and the people gathered together unto Aharon, when they saw that the time he had appointed to them had passed and Satan had come, and caused them to err, and perverted their hearts with pride'.

וְחָמָא עַמָּא אַרוּם אֲשַׁתְּהִי מֹשֶׁה לְמִיחֻת מִן טוֹרָא וְאֲתַכְנִישׁ עַמָּא עַל אֲהֲרֹן כֹּד
 חֲמוֹן דְּעֵבֵר זִמְנָא דְקָבַע לְהוֹן וְאִזְל סַטָּנָא וְאֲטַעִינוּן וְיִדֵר לְבָהוֹן זְחוּחִין

The first part of the verse is the same as in the Hebrew Bible; but Satan causing them to sin and filling their hearts with pride is additional. This removes sin from the people as it is no longer at their request that the god is being made as they have been influenced by Satan. The difference between this midrash and

⁴⁰³ For a full comparison table see Lindqvist, *Sin at Sinai*, 209–213.

⁴⁰⁴ For more on the Golden Calf in the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, see Robert Hayward, *Targums and Transmission of Scripture into Judaism and Christianity* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 234–258.

some of the other midrashim examined is that this midrash does not seek to specifically exculpate Aaron, it still shows him making the Calf. However, it seeks to remove sin from the entire people of Israel.

There is a theme that the Calf was created by people who had left Egypt along with the Israelites. It is found later in the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 21:⁴⁰⁵

‘Go, get down for your people are acting corruptly. Not the people but your people. HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to Moses: It is your people who made the Calf. When I said to you: Bring out my hosts, my people, the children of Israel. And you received the mixed multitude, saying: It is right to receive those who turned towards (God). But I saw what they would do in the future, they would make the Calf since they had been idolaters and would cause my people to sin with them. See what is written: And he received from their hands and carved it with an engraving tool and they said: “This is your god” (Exod 32:4). It is not “our god” but it is written “your god, Israel”. So, it was the foreigners that came from Egypt with them who made it. ‘

לָךְ יָרַד כִּי שָׁחַת עַמֶּךָ. הָעָם לֹא נִאָּמַר אֱלֹהֵי עַמֶּךָ. אָמַר לוֹ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְמֹשֶׁה:
עַמֶּךָ עָשׂוּ אֶת הָעֵגֶל. שְׂאֲנֵי אִמְרָתִי לָךְ וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶת צְבָאתִי אֶת עַמִּי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.
וְאַתָּה הָיִיתָ גּוֹרֵם וְקִבַּלְתָּ הָעֵרֶב רַב וְאַמְרַתָּ מוֹטֵב לְקַבֵּל אֶת הַשָּׂבִים. וְאֲנִי הָיִיתִי
רוֹאֶה מָה הֵם עֹשִׂים לַעֲשׂוֹת וְהֵם שָׁעֲשׂוּ אֶת הָעֵגֶל שֶׁהָיוּ עוֹבְדֵי עֲבוֹדָה זָרָה וְגָרְמוּ
לְעַמִּי לְחַטֵּא עִמָּהֶם. רָאֵה מָה כְּתִיב: וַיִּקַּח מִיָּדָם וַיִּצַּר אֹתוֹ בְּחָרֵט וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָה
אֱלֹהֵיךְ. אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֵין כְּתִיב אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁהַגָּרִים שָׁבְאוּ עִמָּהֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם
הֵם עָשׂוּ אוֹתוֹ.

This interpretation uses the wording of two phrases from Exodus 32 to argue

that the Egyptians from the ‘mixed multitude/רַב הָעֵרֶב’ of Exodus 12:38 were to

⁴⁰⁵ A shorter version of this interpretation can be found in the Tanhuma Buber *Emor* 15:2. This version just comments on the interpretation of Exod. 32:4, ‘This is your God, O Israel’.

blame for the Golden Calf. The first of these phrases is God's words from Exodus 32:7 'your people are acting corruptly/כִּי שָׁחַת עַמְּךָ', suggesting that if it were the Israelites he would have said 'my people' instead. The second of these phrases is 'this your god(s)/אֱלֹהֵיְךָ אֵלָּהּ' from Exodus 32:4. This phrase causes problems for those interpreting the biblical text, as who is speaking is not clear. Aaron makes the Calf but then this line is spoken in the third person plural, implying that a group is saying it, not Aaron. This interpretation does not explicitly mention this issue, although it lends weight to its argument. However, it does pick up on the speaker calling it 'your god(s)/אֱלֹהֵיְךָ' and not 'our god(s)/אֱלֹהֵינוּ'. This difference implies that the speaker is not one of the Israelites.

Another interpretation from the Tanhuma Yelammedenu argues for the Egyptians' involvement in the Golden Calf, in *Achrei Mot* 8:

'HaKadosh Baruch Hu said to Aaron: Is it not written in my Torah about all cases of misappropriation, about a bull, about a donkey and about a sheep? About a bull, do you not remember what you did, as it is written: And they traded their glory for an image of a bull (Psalms 106:20). About a donkey is the Egyptians, as it is written: flesh like the flesh of donkeys. They made the molten

Calf, before which Israel acted corruptly, as it is written: And the mob in their midst...⁴⁰⁶

אָמַר לִיָּהּ הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְאַהֲרֹן: לֹא כְּתַבְתִּי בְּתוֹרָתִי עַל כָּל דְּבַר פֶּשַׁע עַל שׁוֹר
עַל חֲמוֹר עַל שֶׂה וְגו'. עַל שׁוֹר אֵין אֶתָּה זוֹכֵר מַה שֶּׁעָשִׂיתָ בְּשׁוֹר שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וַיִּמְרוּ אֶת
כְּבוֹדֶם בְּתַבְנִית שׁוֹר. עַל חֲמוֹר עַל אוֹתָן מִצְרַיִם שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בָּהֶם אֲשֶׁר בָּשַׂר חֲמוֹרִים
בְּשׁוֹרִים. עָשׂוּ לָהֶם עֵגֶל מִסֶּכֶה שִׁיְהוּ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים לוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְהָאֶסְפָּסוּף
אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבּוֹ.

This interpretation takes a verse from Exodus 22 about the misappropriation of bulls, asses and sheep and uses it to liken the Calf to the bull, the Egyptians to donkeys, and later, the Israelites to sheep (Exod 22:8). It also uses a verse about a ‘mob/אֶסְפָּסוּף’ from Numbers 11:4 to argue for the presence of the Egyptians within the people who leave Egypt, this is probably intended to be a version of the mixed multitude used in the interpretation above from Exodus 12:38.

Through this interpretation, the same objective is reached as above, namely that the Egyptians made the Calf, not the Israelites.

From the midrashic trends here, mostly from the Tanhuma, it is clear that these writers sought to exculpate the Israelites and Aaron. The method of doing this is almost always to substitute someone else in the place of Aaron or the Israelites as making the Calf or influencing Aaron and the Israelites to do so. However,

⁴⁰⁶ The word for ‘mob/אֶסְפָּסוּף’ is a hapax legomenon, only occurring in this passage from Numbers 11:4. However it is clearly composed of the verb to ‘add/אָסַף’ or ‘increase’ so a large group makes sense.

there is special focus on Aaron. The Rabbis are willing to heap more blame on the Israelites in order to preserve Aaron as sinless, as can be seen by the midrashim that mention Aaron being frightened due to the Israelites' murder of Hur. These interpretative trends are relevant to the Qur'an's treatment of the Golden Calf narrative as they share some approaches.⁴⁰⁷ The Qur'an, too, seeks to remove sin from Aaron, it inserts new characters in order to exculpate him and finally, does not mind blaming the Israelites. The Qur'an makes an emphatic point of doing so. The theme of God's forgiveness is also continued in the Qur'an, if not heightened, in order to make it clear how continually ungrateful the Israelites are. Let us see in the next section how these themes play out in detail.

3.3.3. The Exoneration of Aaron at the Cost of the Israelites in the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, the behaviour of the Israelites and their leader in the absence of Moses, Aaron, is mitigated by the introduction of a new character, Al-Sāmirī. This character is shrouded in mystery, with several theories about his identity having been put forward. Whatever the case, he removes the onus of making the

⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, these apologetic trends continue to be written in midrashic collections after this point, such as the Pirke de Rav Eliezer, showing their continued relevance.

Calf from Aaron in Sūrat Ṭā' Hā', although this does not remove suspicion from Aaron completely. The creation of this new character is only present in Sūrat Ṭā' Hā', not in Sūrahs Al Baqarah, Al-Nisā' and Al-'A'rāf. In these sūrahs, the blame falls between Aaron and the Israelites. Aaron's fault is that he was a poor leader and did not stop the Israelites from going astray. His role as maker of the Calf in contrast is never mentioned in the Qur'an. On the other hand, the criticism of the people is much more severe and can be divided into two themes, their disbelief and God's forgiveness. These two themes are repeated consistently in Sūrahs Al-Baqarah, Al-Nisā' and Al-'A'rāf in order to make clear that the fault of the Israelites was their disbelief and to contrast this with the loving and forgiving nature of God.

In the Qur'an, perhaps the most important difference in the Golden Calf narrative compared with the Jewish traditions is that Aaron is replaced by 'Al-Sāmirī/السَّامِرِيُّ' as the person who builds the Calf, mostly exonerating Aaron from this sin. Al-Sāmirī, first mentioned in Q Ṭā' Hā' 20:85, is most often translated to mean a Samaritan, however there are a variety of theories as to whom he is meant to represent. The most linguistically convincing suggestion is that this name of Al-Sāmirī comes from a verse in Hosea, commenting on the

same calves from 1 Kings 12. In Hosea 8:5, it states, ‘Samaria, throw out your calf! שְׁמָרוֹן/שְׁמָרוֹן עֲגֹלָיִךָ זָנְיָהּ.’⁴⁰⁸ The Hebrew letters used are exact cognates for the name of Al-Sāmirī in Arabic, something that has been commented on by Horowitz and Rubin, meaning that it is not a Samaritan being blamed for the Calf in the Qur’an, but a Samaritan.⁴⁰⁹ Among others, Ignaz Goldziher and Bernard Heller argued for ‘Samaritan’, thinking the Qur’an wished to explain the separation of the Jews and Samaritans which they achieve through a Samaritan making the Calf.⁴¹⁰ Considering the Qur’an does not mention the Samaritans at other points, this seems unlikely.⁴¹¹ Pregill considers this is an inventive way of naming Aaron, as the ‘watchman’ from the verb to watch or guard, ‘שָׁמַר’.⁴¹² However, this is not completely convincing as it does not explain why his identity is masked if the Qur’an still intends for this to be read as Aaron. Uri Rubin argues for a version of ‘Zimri/זִמְרִי’, taken from the character in Numbers 25:14 who disobeys Moses by having a sexual relationship with a Midianite

⁴⁰⁸ Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible: Hosea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 493–494.

⁴⁰⁹ Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation,” 203.

⁴¹⁰ B. Heller and A. Rippin, “al-Sāmirī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_6580.

⁴¹¹ Michael Pregill also sees his identity as unlikely to be that of a Samaritan as this opinion does not appear in Tafsīr until the 11th century, Pregill, “” A Calf, A Body that Lows,” 275.

⁴¹² Pregill, “” A Calf, A Body that Lows,” 287.

woman, as both are involved in acts against God.⁴¹³ However, the Arabic abjad has two letters more cognate to the Hebrew ‘z/ז’, so the spelling does not match up.⁴¹⁴ Ultimately, it does not matter in view of the judgement of Aaron and the Israelites who Al-Sāmīrī is meant to be, as what is important, is that it is not them. Al-Sāmīrī is a creation of the Qur’an with the purpose of taking the sin of building the Calf from Aaron and the Israelites in the longest and most complete retelling of the Golden Calf narrative in the Qur’an.

Although Aaron’s major sin is expunged in the longest Golden Calf narrative in the Qur’an in Sūrat Ṭā’ Hā’, there are still attempts to detract from his involvement and obtain forgiveness for him, particularly in Sūrat Al-’A’rāf.

Aaron is mentioned in Q Al-’A’rāf 7:142, when Moses leaves him in charge, before ascending Mount Sinai. Aaron is then not mentioned again until Q 7:150, where he is not mentioned by name but as ‘his brother/أَخِيهِ’. Aaron’s response in this sūrah is that ‘the people considered me weak and were about to kill me/الْقَوْمَ أَلْفَؤْمَ’ أَسْتَضَعُّعُونِي وَكَادُوا يَقْتُلُونَنِي’. This is a response that we have already seen in Midrashic

traditions, where Aaron’s compliance is linked to a threat to his own life after he

⁴¹³ Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation,” 202.

⁴¹⁴ The Qur’an also mentions the character of Zechariah, whose name is spelt ‘زَكَرِيَّا’ (Q 3:37, Q 19:4 and 7) in parallel to the Hebrew ‘זַכְרְיָהוּ’ showing no reason a ‘z/ז’ should be translated into Arabic as a ‘s/س’.

witnesses the murder of Hur.⁴¹⁵ This makes his actions understandable as he fears for his life and is preventing the Israelites from the further sin of killing him. Even though the Qur'an has excused Aaron in Sūrat Ṭā' Hā', in Sūrat Al-'A'rāf, alternate methods are used to continue to remove this sin from Aaron. In Q 7:151, Moses seeks forgiveness for himself and his brother 'Lord, forgive myself and my brother/رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَلِأَخِي'. In the Exodus narrative, Moses does not specifically seek forgiveness for his brother, but for the people when he is still atop of the mountain in Exod 32:11–13. In the Qur'an, he seeks forgiveness for himself and for Aaron which seems odd as Moses has not done anything wrong. This adds to an overall picture of Moses as the perfect believer but also has the effect of making it seem that both Aaron and Moses need forgiveness, regardless of their actions. Through Moses' request for forgiveness, Aaron seem less guilty as he is risen to Moses' status in this joint act of prayer. God's compassion and mercy is one of the overall themes of the Qur'anic retelling of the Golden Calf, in which the idea of forgiveness is central. Even in this retelling of the Golden Calf in Sūrat Al-'A'rāf, where there is no character replacing Aaron, he is portrayed in a much more sympathetic light than in Exodus 32. This is not an

⁴¹⁵ Refer back to the Midrashic traditions section above for more detail on traditions concerning the death of Hur.

easy achievement either, as three different methods are used to complete the picture of Aaron as being without sin. His involvement in the story is limited as he is still not shown building the Calf, he uses the excuse that he feared for his life and is involved in a prayer for forgiveness.

In the Hebrew Bible and Midrashic trends, the idea that Moses was delayed is prevalent and a version of this tradition can be seen in Sūrat Ṭā' Hā', although it functions less as an excuse and more as a criticism of the Israelites. Echoes of this tradition can be seen in stages in the Qur'an. Firstly, that Moses hastens from his people, followed by comments about the time from God and the Qur'anic narrator, then that he forgot about them and finally his criticism on returning to them. At the start of the Golden Calf narrative in Sūrat Ṭā' Hā', Moses 'hastens/عَجَلَ' up the mountain, and God asks him 'what made you hasten from your people?/وَمَا أَغْجَلَكَ عَنْ قَوْمِكَ يَمُوسَى' (Q 20:83-84). This section seems to be a version of the idea that the people are confused about Moses absence as he is speeding away from them. God states in Q 20:84, that this has been enough time for Al-Sāmirī to tempt the Israelites away. This verse uses the idea of the time Moses is away, making it clear that he has been very fast, in order to criticise the Israelites for being tempted away from Moses and Yahweh in such a

short time. In Q 7:143, Moses meets with God at ‘our timing/مِيقَاتِنَا’, presumably meaning that God has prearranged a time with Moses.⁴¹⁶ However, they meet for thirty days and then complete it in an additional ten days (Q 7:142), which could indicate that Moses was away ten days longer than expected by the people. However, forty days is the time he is away in the Hebrew Bible (Exod 24:18) so it seems likely that this is just a difference in phrasing. These comments about the time are not conclusive with regard to whether Moses is delayed but Q 7:142 does allow for the possibility that Moses was delayed an extra ten days. In Q 20:88, someone says, ‘This is your God and the God of Moses but he forgot/ هَذَا الْهُكْمُ وَالْإِلَهُ مُوسَى فَنَسِيَ’.⁴¹⁷ The wording is open to interpretation, as what Moses has forgotten is not made clear. From the context, it seems that he forgot God, implying perhaps that he has been led astray and this is why he has not returned. As this is not made explicit, it is possible that what Moses forgot is the Israelites, explaining why he has not returned to them. Although it is not clear

⁴¹⁶ This word is translated by Yusuf Ali to mean the place appointed by us, by Pickthall as our appointed tryst and by the Sahih to mean the appointed time. These three translations present a series of suggestion from time to arrangement to place. The word ‘مِيقَاتِنَا’, is from the root ‘وَقَّتْ’, meaning time so ‘our timing’, considering the possessive ending and prepositional mem seems the most appropriate translation.

⁴¹⁷ That it is Moses who forgot has also been debated. Abdullah Yusuf Ali puts (Moses) after the ‘he’ in order to make it clear that it is Moses who has forgotten. Feyzbakhsh and Ghandehari suggest that it is Al-Sāmīrī who has forgotten but this relies on the fact that he is not the speaker of this passage and a series of grammatical problems arising from this verse, for their theory see, Feyzbakhsh and Ghandehari, “Facing Mirrors,” 96.

who utters this line, it is clearly someone trying to lead the Israelites astray using the idea that Moses has forgotten them, or even that he has forgotten God, rendering him their leader no longer. The Israelites feel Moses' absence and worship the Calf. Although this may be read as sympathetic, as in the Rabbinic texts, when Moses returns from the mountain in Q 20:86, it is made clear that it is not. In Q 20:86, Moses berates the people for worshipping the Calf and says, 'أَفَطَالَ عَلَيْكُمْ؟'. Again, this verse points to the tradition of him being delayed and the people confused but uses it to suggest that they should have been strong enough in their belief to wait. This theme has been repurposed in order to focus on the Israelites' disbelief, making it clear not only that they failed but also pointing out how quickly it all happened, thereby emphasising the severity of the Israelites' sin.

In Sūrahs Al-Baqarah, Al-Nisā' and Al-'A'rāf, no one is described making the Calf but the blame falls on the Israelites. In Sūrahs Al-Baqarah and Al-Nisā', the text is written addressing the second person, 'you', as if speaking to the whole of the Israelites. Sūrat Al-'A'rāf is a longer retelling than in Sūrahs Al-Baqarah or Al-Nisā' and blames the Israelites, making this explicit by attributing the act to the 'people of Moses/قَوْمِ مُوسَى'. This gives the community a collective

responsibility as opposed to raising a figure, internal or external. This is particularly apparent in Sūrat Al-Baqarah which focuses on judging the Israelites. In Q 2:54, the Israelites are told by Moses that they have ‘wronged yourselves/ظَلَمْتُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ’ and ordered to ‘kill yourselves/فَأَقْتُلُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ’. This makes it clear that the Israelites have not only sinned but that the only solution is a fatal punishment. In Q 2:92, the juxtaposition between the ‘clear proofs/بَيِّنَاتٍ’ the Israelites have been shown and the narrator’s critique of ‘wrongdoers/ظَالِمُونَ’ (Q 2:51 and Q 2:92) makes their sin clear and associates them with other sinners who ignored clear proofs, such as Pharaoh. In Q 2:93, the Israelites express, ‘we hear and disobey/سَمِعْنَا وَعَصَيْنَا’ upon making the Calf. They are aware of God and disobey him by making the Calf. In Q 2:93, the narrator interprets the Israelites actions, ‘their hearts absorbed the Calf because of their disbelief/أَشْرَبُوا فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ’¹, expressing that worshipping the Calf is not the start of their sin but that they were disbelievers before this point. In direct statements about the Israelites in the Golden Calf narratives, they receive criticism based on their having done wrong and this is linked to their long history of disbelief. Even in Sūrat Ṭā’ Hā’, where Al-Sāmirī is present to shoulder a lot of the blame, Moses still addresses his criticism to ‘O my people/يَعْلَمُ’ (Q 20:86). Clearly, Moses sees some fault for the Golden Calf as falling upon his people. Ideas that the

Israelites have failed in some way are further aided by the idea that they are being tested by God. In Q 20:85 God says that he ‘tried your people/فَتَنَّا قَوْمَكَ’ to Moses and this idea is repeated in Q 20:90. This makes it clear that a major aim of the narrative in the Sūrat Ṭā’ Hā’ is to show that the Israelites have failed. Much of the Qur’anic discourse about the Golden Calf focusses around two central themes, the ideas of disbelief and forgiveness, often combining them in order to emphasise the sinful nature of the Israelites. A good example of the contrast between disbelief and forgiveness is that of Q 4:153. As it is only one verse, both of these themes can be seen clearly:

‘Then they took the Calf after clear proofs had come to them and we forgave that.’

ثُمَّ اتَّخَذُوا الْعِجْلَ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمْ الْبَيِّنَاتُ فَعَفَوْنَا عَنْ ذَلِكَ

The theme of disbelief is particularly present in Sūrat Al-Baqarah which covers the history of the Israelites’ disbelief from Q 2:40–122.⁴¹⁸ Sūrat Al-Baqarah’s short retelling of the Golden Calf falls fully within this overarching narrative about the disbelief on the Israelites, as has been noted by Michael Pregill.⁴¹⁹ The Golden Calf is mentioned in two separate places in Sūrat Al-Baqarah, at Q 2:51–

⁴¹⁸ This sūrah has been divided into sections many times, here I find Neal Robinson’s division most helpful, see Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur’an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Washington D.C, MD: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 202.

⁴¹⁹ Michael Pregill, “Slay Yourselves”, 105.

54 and Q 2:92–93, with these two Golden Calf narratives forming bookends to a section that focusses on the failures of the Israelites. Sūrat Al-Baqarah uses many different terms in order to express this theme of disbelief. This whole section is mostly focussed on their disbelief, with it being mentioned specifically in Q 2:55, Q 2:61, Q 2:85 and Q 2:88. It is also mentioned under synonymous terms like, the Israelites ‘turned away/تَوَلَّيْتُمْ’, in Q 2:64 and Q 2:68 and their ‘hearts hardened/فَسَتَّ قُلُوبُكُمْ’ or were ‘wrapped/غُلِّفْنَا غُلْفًا’ in Q 2:74 and Q 2:88. The Qur’an also accuses them of denying and killing messengers in Q 2:85 and Q 2:91 and of altering the text of the Torah in Q 2:75 and Q 2:79. In Sūrat Al-Baqarah, this list of the Israelites sins both encircles and is completed by the Golden Calf narrative, each sin making the other appear worse and more inevitable. In Sūrat Al-ʿAʿrāf, this theme of disobedience is also incorporated into the Golden Calf narrative. When Moses is still on the mountain, God asks him to go down so he can ‘show you the home of the defiantly disobedient/سَأُورِيكُمْ دَارَ الْفَاسِقِينَ’ (Q 7:145). God continues in a speech criticising the Israelites, calling them ‘arrogant’, saying that they will not believe (Q 7:146) and have denied his signs (Q 7:147). From Sūrahs Al-Baqarah, Al-Nisā’ and Al-ʿAʿrāf, it is clear that the themes of disbelief and disobedience are a necessary part of the Golden Calf narrative. From Sūrat Al-Baqarah, this can be

understood the other way around as well, the Golden Calf narrative is necessary to a greater narrative, to prove the continued disbelief of the Israelites, a theme which in turn explains the need for a new messenger and the legitimacy of Muhammad's prophethood.

In combination with the theme of disbelief, the theme of forgiveness is used to make it clear that the Israelites are ungrateful. This theme appears as a contrast to the many tales of the Israelites disbelief that appear in Sūrat Al-Baqarah forming a pattern of disbelief and forgiveness. The prevalence of mentions of God's forgiving nature in the Sūrat Al-Baqarah version of the Golden Calf has been noted by Neal Robinson and Angelika Neuwirth.⁴²⁰ Neuwirth finds this pattern of disbelief and forgiveness so compelling that she compares it well to certain Psalms with similar patterns of failures and forgiveness.⁴²¹ Each time the Israelites disobey, God forgives them, emphasising their continued disobedience and God's eternal loving nature. This combination makes the Israelites' behaviour appear even worse, as they had so many chances provided to them by God and yet, each time, they fail to be his obedient servants. In Q 2:52, that God

⁴²⁰ Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, 208. Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 312.

⁴²¹ Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community*, 321.

‘Forgave/عَفَوْنَا’ is mentioned explicitly and he also ‘forgave their sins/تَغْفِرُ لَكُمْ جَطَائِكُمْ’ in Q 2:58. The idea that God does things so that the Israelites ‘might be grateful/لَمَّا كُمْ نَشْكُرُونَ’ is repeated in Q 2:52 and Q 2:56. A similar concept is mentioned in Q 2:53, that they ‘might be guided/لَعَلَّكُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ’. God’s forgiveness is also mentioned in Sūrat Al-ʿAʿrāf where he is called ‘forgiving and merciful/لَعَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ’ in Q 7:153 and provides ‘guidance and mercy/وَرَحْمَةً’ in Q 7:154. Forgiveness, and indeed guidance, are being mentioned with connection to God specifically in these Golden Calf narratives so that the people of Israel seem particularly ungrateful in worshipping the Golden Calf. This motif of forgiveness also makes it clear that the failures are those of the Israelites alone, as God is always shown to be good natured. This makes it clear that God is still a legitimate cause for worship whilst delegitimising the Israelites’ claim to him.

In the Qur’an, a concerted effort can be seen to remove sin from Aaron and redirect it towards the Israelites. The Israelites are made to appear more sinful through expunging sin from Aaron, from repurposing other exegetical trends and through pre-existing Qur’anic trends being applied to this narrative. It is easy to be distracted by Al-Sāmirī, a character who appears to remove blame from Aaron and the Israelites, whereas he seems only to have been introduced to

the narrative to detract from Aaron. Even though this step is taken, from language used in other Sūrahs, it is clear that these narratives do not wish to focus on Aaron as the person who builds the Calf. This is connected to Aaron's role as a prophet and the concept of the perfection of prophets in Islam.

Although Aaron's sins are expunged, the Israelites sins are emphasised. There is also a technique that combines two prevalent Qur'anic techniques, disbelief and forgiveness, in order to emphasise the Israelites' behaviour and place it firmly within this framework of disbelief. This framework can be seen most strongly in Sūrat Al-Baqarah due to the context in which the story is related. A list of other sins of the Israelites, however, is present throughout the retellings of the Golden Calf in the Qur'an. This framework makes the need for Muhammad's prophethood clear as previous messages to people have not worked. In emphasising the continued failure of the Israelites, the Qur'an shows that the Israelites cannot be the 'chosen people' of God as they will continue to fail him. At the same time, God appears an attractive master, always forgiving the people and seeking to guide them. This message of the failures of the Israelites and forgiveness of God seeks to delegitimise previous communities whilst at the same time making a new community appear attractive and necessary.

Conclusion

Thus in all three traditions, the Hebrew Bible, midrashic traditions and the Qur'an, questions exist over who is to blame for the transgression perpetrated by making and worshipping the Golden Calf and what role each character, in particular Moses and the collective of the Israelites, plays. The major theme is that of appropriate and inappropriate worship. This theme, however, changes and develops through the three traditions. There is also a dichotomy that exists between the Israelites and Aaron, which becomes much stronger in midrashic collections and the Qur'an. In the Hebrew Bible, the Israelites' worship is inappropriate, which is shown partially through the contrast of their use of appropriate methods of worship, directed inappropriately. What exactly is inappropriate about the Calf remains unclear. The Israelites and Aaron are involved in the process, yet Aaron is forgiven and the Israelites are punished.

In midrashic collections, there are two ways to understand the actions of Aaron and the Israelites, the first is the Tannaitic way which seeks to accept the sin and to emphasise how great it was, making it the worst thing the Israelites ever did.

The second way, the Amoraic way, does not detract from the sin but shifts the blame, including this theme of appropriate versus inappropriate worship but

using others to show what is inappropriate. These interpretations exonerate either just Aaron or the whole of the people, in which Aaron would then presumably be included. Aaron is exonerated through fear of his own life as the people were violent when they demanded that a replacement for Moses and Yahweh be found and killed Hur. The people as a whole are in some sources exonerated by a range of outside actors, who proved to be the real perpetrators, including the sorcerers of Pharaoh, the Egyptians and Satan. A dichotomy between Aaron and the people exists within these interpretations as it seems that the people must be saved by outside forces. However, in order to save Aaron it is permissible to blame the people.

The Qur'an shares a similar interpretative strategy to some Amoraic interpretations, seeking to replace Aaron with another person as the maker of the Calf. Aaron is replaced with Al-Sāmirī who creates the Calf using magic and leads the people astray in Sūrat Ṭā' Hā'. In Sūrahs al Baqarah and Al-'A'rāf, Al-Sāmirī is not present but Aaron still does not make the Calf, detracting from any sin that Aaron may have committed. However, unlike the Jewish interpretations that seek to exonerate the people through the use of outside actors, Al-Sāmirī is only intended to exonerate Aaron. The Qur'an does not intend to exonerate the

Israelites and uses this narrative as part of a larger structure of the Israelites' continued failures, as can be seen most clearly in Sūrat Al-Baqarah but is present in all the Qur'anic Golden Calf narratives. The Aaron-Israelites dichotomy presented in the Qur'an arises from a need to absolve Aaron and a corresponding need to show unequivocally that the Israelites have failed. These aims are important to the author of the Qur'anic text as Aaron is a prophet and therefore cannot be seen to sin. This doctrine is only codified later in Qur'anic exegesis, under the name of *'Ismah*, but, as has been seen throughout this thesis, a form of it is already operating in the Qur'an itself. The Israelites, as a whole, do not need to not be saved. It is key that the Israelites are not saved, as room needs to be made for the new community of God, the Muslims. Through increasing the degree of sinfulness on the part of the Israelites and including the Golden Calf narrative in the context of their wider sins and failures, the Qur'an emphasizes the need for a new, faithful community of God. For Israel, the 'chosen people', have clearly failed.

To conclude this chapter, the nature of the Golden Calf itself will be examined, as it is depicted in Exodus 32, the Midrashic collections and in the Qur'an, in Sūrahs Al-Baqara, Al-Nisā', Al-'A'rāf and Ṭā' Hā'.

3.4. The Nature of the Calf in Exodus 32, Midrashic Collections and Sūrahs Al-Baqarah,

Al-Nisā' Al-'A'rāf and Ṭā' Hā'

Introduction

In the Golden Calf narrative, the Israelites oppose Moses through building a molten image of a calf. The present section will examine what the opposition to Moses and God really is. It will achieve this by examining a number of themes across the Hebrew Bible, Jewish exegetical materials and the Qur'an. These themes are the way the Calf is described, the ways it is made and destroyed and elements of magic that appear in the descriptions of its creation. The section will argue that themes of magic that cause the Calf to represent something more than 'just an idol' are present in the Hebrew Bible and exaggerated by both Jewish exegetical material and the Qur'an, albeit, with different purposes. Jewish exegetical material includes magic in the descriptions of the making of the Calf in order to distance Aaron and the Israelites from the event. These interpretations argue that the Israelites could not possibly have achieved such things themselves and interference from outside sources, the devil for instance, must have created the Calf.

Although the Qur'an contains elements of this apologetic treatment, removing the making of the Golden Calf from Aaron and giving it to the mysterious Al-Sāmirī, in the

case of the live calf something else is being achieved. The Qur'an uses none of the words it typically uses to describe acts of idolatry, making it clear that this is a special case of, if not idolatry, then at least disobedience. The idea of a live calf is important across the Jewish exegetical material and the Qur'an, as something special was necessary to tempt the Israelites away from God. This takes on a special relevance in the Qur'an, as although the Hebrew Bible does acknowledge God's role as creator, it does not use it in the same way as the Qur'an. The Qur'an uses the idea of God's supreme creatorship in order to argue against unbelievers. In this way, the Calf being a life created, is particularly contradictory and clearly something that is wrong.

The questions surrounding the nature of the Calf in all three traditions focus on how it was made and what it is. Responses about its nature range from the Calf being dead or alive, an idol or god. Academic debates surrounding the making of the Golden Calf in the Hebrew Bible are exacerbated due to unclear terminology. Academic debates around the Calf in Jewish exegetical material focus on whether the interpretations given intend on fully accepting the sin, with this being somewhat positive as God can forgive anything, or whether they are meant to function as apologetics against new religious traditions. The idea of whether the Golden Calf was alive in the Qur'an is discussed in several works of comparative and modern Islamic studies. The argument essentially falls

into two camps, whether it is intended to be read as a live calf or as a metaphor. In the following sections, each suggestion will be discussed.

3.4.1. The Molten Calf and the Calves of Gold of the Hebrew Bible

The Golden Calf is described most fully in Exodus 32, but it is mentioned several times also in other parts of the Hebrew Bible. The Golden Calf is described in Deuteronomy 9:7–21, Nehemiah 9:16–21 and in Psalm 106:19–23. The calves of Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12:26–30 are similar to that of the Golden Calf and which story is the ‘original’ story of calf worship is of some debate.⁴²² Due to this source critical issue, it is important to look at descriptions of both the Golden Calf and the calves of 1 Kings 12, as the prevailing scholarly opinion is that the Golden Calf has been edited to resemble the narrative from Kings.⁴²³ Criticism of calf worship that seems likely to refer to the calves at Dan and Bethel also appears in Hosea 8:1–6. The nature of these biblical calves can be discerned from their names, judgement terms that surround them, the ways they are made and destroyed and one description that implies a kind of magic. This overview of the nature of the calves in the Hebrew Bible will show that although some features, such as their

⁴²² For a recent treatment of this topic see, Vito, “The Calf Episodes,” 1–25.

⁴²³ Vito, “The Calf Episodes,” 2.

metallic nature, appear to be universal, others, such as what they represent, are open to a multiplicity of interpretation.

In order to correctly identify the nature of the Calf, the terms that describe and refer to it need first to be examined.⁴²⁴ This title of the ‘Golden Calf’ was only used later in the Hebrew Bible, to describe the ‘golden calves/זָהָבִי עֲגֻלֵי’ of Jeroboam (1 Kgs 12:28 and 2 Chr 13:8). It is known as the ‘molten calf/מִסְכָּה עֲגֻלֵי’ in Exodus 32 verses 4 and 8 and called simply ‘the calf/הָעֲגֻלָּה’ in Exodus 32 verses 20, 24 and 35. The word ‘gold/זָהָב’ is only used in Exodus 32:2,3 and 24 to describe the jewellery the calf was made from, as opposed to the object itself. In Deuteronomy 9, Nehemiah 9 and Psalm 106, the Golden Calf is also called a molten calf/מִסְכָּה עֲגֻלֵי’ (Deut 9:16, Neh 9:18), a ‘molten thing/מִסְכָּה’ (Deut 9:12, Ps 106: 19) and ‘the calf/הָעֲגֻלָּה’ (Deut 9:21, Ps 106:19). The calves of Jeroboam are also referred to just as ‘calves/עֲגֻלִים’ in 1 Kings 12:32. In Hosea, the calf the prophet rails against is referred to as the ‘your calf Samaria/שְׁמֵרוֹן עֲגֻלָּה’, most likely meaning the calf of Jeroboam at Beth–El (Hos. 8:6).⁴²⁵ Including this instance, Hosea describes this creature as a ‘calf/עֲגֻלָּה’ on two occasions (Hos. 8:5). Hosea uses the term ‘images/עֲצָבִים’ in Hosea 8:4. This word is used in the plural seven times in the Hebrew Bible, with four

⁴²⁴ For a full list of terms across the Hebrew Bible, see Viviano, ‘Do the Books of Hosea and Jeremiah,’ 36–48.

⁴²⁵ Viviano, “Do the Books of Hosea and Jeremiah,” 40. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2010), 224.

of those occasions occurring in Hosea, a book focussed on idol worship.⁴²⁶ This noun form is related to the verbal form 'עָצַב', which means 'to be distressed' or 'suffer', certainly transforming the idea of an 'image' into a negative one.⁴²⁷ Psalm 106:20 uses another word for image, that of 'תְּבִנִית', specifically the image of a 'bull/שׁוֹר'.⁴²⁸ The use of 'bull/שׁוֹר' instead of 'calf/עֵגֶל' is a departure from the usual terminology, however, both have a meaning of a male cow.⁴²⁹ From these descriptions across the Hebrew Bible, three things become clear: it is representative of a calf, it is gold and it is considered an idol or image.

The calves are described in the way that they appear, their colour and material but they are also described using judgement loaded phrases in order to describe what they are. In Deuteronomy, the Calf is described as 'your sinful thing/חַטָּאתְכֶם' in 9:21. In Psalm 106:20, where the Golden Calf is referred to as 'the image of an ox, an eater of grass/תְּבִנִית שׁוֹר אֹכֵל עֵשֶׂב', this is clearly meant to be a pejorative statement about the worth of the Calf. This can also be ascertained by the opening phrases of the same verse,

⁴²⁶ Ps 127:2, Hos 4:17, 8:4, 13:2, 14:9, Zech 13:2, 2 Chr 24:18.

⁴²⁷ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1101.

⁴²⁸ This term is noted by Richard Bautch as also appearing in Deut 4:17, Bautch, "The Golden Calf in the Historical Recitals," 53.

⁴²⁹ Having examined midrashic collections and commentaries, medieval and modern, this difference in terminology does not seem to be of much interest. It is commented on by A. A Andersen who considers 'calf' may have been a derogatory term for bull. A. A Andersen, *The Book of Psalms Vol. 2* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1972), 742.

‘they traded their glory for/וַיִּזְמִירוּ אֶת־כְּבוֹדָם’. This seeks to compare the glory of being in a relationship with the legitimate God with what the text sees as the opposite, a relationship with the Golden Calf. When speaking of the Calf of Samaria, Hosea 8:6 makes clear that ‘it is not a god/לֹא אֱלֹהִים’. When Ahijah speaks of idols in the book of 1 Kings 14:9, he describes them as ‘other gods and molten things/וּמַסְכוֹת וְאֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים’. This could be seen as two separate statements, meaning the ‘molten things’ are not seen as gods or as a double description, meaning that they are both gods and molten things. Considering their place in a speech against the practises of Jeroboam, these terms are certainly intended as a critique but not necessarily one that implies that the ‘molten things’ are not ‘gods’. The judgement phrases are particularly strong in Nehemiah, where Bautsch notes the narrative is divided into two sections, with the second half introducing the theme of moral failure.⁴³⁰ This can be seen in phrases such as ‘committing great impieties/וַיַּעֲשׂוּ נְאֻצוֹת גְּדוֹלוֹת’ in Nehemiah 9:18. When considering such judgement phrases that are used to describe the Calf, or calves, there are considerably more of those in the later books of the Bible, that of Nehemiah and the Psalms. Bautsch suggests that the prevalence of these phrases in these retellings is due to a difference in genre, with a structure based on a sin–punishment–repentance–salvation cycle.⁴³¹

⁴³⁰ Bautsch, “The Golden Calf in the Historical Recitals,” 54–55.

⁴³¹ Bautsch, “The Golden Calf in the Historical Recitals,” 54–55.

Certainly, it seems that these narratives from Psalms and Nehemiah are intended to provide a commentary on those of Exodus and 1 Kings, with these judgement phrases making clear the negative view of this behaviour.

The Calf is made by Aaron in Exodus 32:4. However, a series of strange terms obscure the precise details of how it is made:

‘And he took from their hands and he cast it with an engraving tool and made it a molten calf. And they said: This is your God, Israel, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.’

וַיִּקַּח מִיָּדָם וַיִּצַר אֹתוֹ בַּחֲרָט וַיַּעֲשֶׂהוּ עֵגֶל מִסַּכָּה וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הָעֵלּוּךְ
מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:

There are two key terms used here, the first is that of a ‘cast/וַיִּצַר’ and the second is that of the ‘engraving tool/חֲרָט’. Both of these terms are uncertain due to limited appearances in the Hebrew Bible. The word for cast is from the root ‘וַיִּצַר’, meaning to bind up.⁴³² This has led to suggestions that the method of casting used was to cast a bundle of metal rods, explaining why Aaron would bind them.⁴³³ The word ‘חֲרָט’ is sometimes translated as ‘engraving tool’ (KJV) but is also translated as ‘mould’ in other translations (JPS, NRSV offers both). The verbal form of this word means to chisel or engrave in its simplest form. However, in the Hiphil it can mean ‘to shape’ or ‘to model’, explaining

⁴³² Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1305.

⁴³³ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, 549–550.

the two possibilities for the translation of this related noun.⁴³⁴ Propp argues for ‘mould’ making more sense considering the previous verb ‘to cast/bind’, however, the afterlife of the word seems to suggest that it was used primarily to mean an ‘engraving tool’.⁴³⁵ The Calf of Samaria in Hosea 8:6, is ‘made by a joiner, it is not a god/ וְהוּא חָרַשׁ עָשָׂהוּ וְלֹא אֱלֹהִים’. This makes it clear that firstly, this calf has been made by human hands and secondly, this prevents it from being a god. This directly rules out the ability to create physical gods which is interesting when compared with the words of Moses in Exodus 32:31, ‘they have made themselves gods of gold/וַיַּעֲשׂוּ לָהֶם אֱלֹהִי זָהָב’. Descriptions of how the Calf/calves are made in Exodus and Hosea seem to agree on elements of craftsmanship. However, Hosea’s proclamation that this cannot be a ‘God’ leads to an interesting contradiction with Moses’ statement over whether these calves can be gods or are just idols or images.

The descriptions of how the Calf is destroyed are more detailed than the descriptions of how it was made, allowing for more to be discerned from these descriptions. This is understandable considering the making of the Calf was a great sin, whereas its

⁴³⁴ Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 501.

⁴³⁵ Propp, *Exodus 19–40*, .549. Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 501.

destruction allows Moses to appear righteous and frees the Israelites from its thrall. In

Exodus 32:20, we read:

‘And he took the Calf which they made and burned it in fire. And he ground it until it was fine and scattered it upon the face of the water and made the sons of Israel drink.’

וַיִּקַּח אֶת־הָעֵגֶל אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ וַיִּשְׂרֹף בָּאֵשׁ וַיִּטְחֵן עַד אֲשֶׁר־דָּק וַיִּזֶר עַל־פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם וַיִּשְׁקוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Moses burns it and grinds it into a fine dust. From this description, the Calf must have been made of material that burns. It could be ground into a powder and that powder floated. From the fact that it could be ground up, floated and could be burnt with fire, neither a hollow golden calf nor a wooden calf, plated with gold, can be ruled out. The making of the Calf is not described in Deuteronomy 9 but Moses destroying it is described in Deuteronomy 9:21 with the following words:

‘I took it and I burned it in the fire. I broke it into pieces, and I ground it well until it was a fine dust and I threw the dust into the river that comes down from the mountain.’

וַאֲשֶׁרֶף אֹתוֹ בָּאֵשׁ וְאָכַת אֹתוֹ טָחוֹן הֵיטֵב עַד אֲשֶׁר־דָּק לְעֶפֶר וְאִשְׁלָךְ אֶת־עֶפְרוֹ אֶל־הַנָּחַל הַיָּרֵד מִן־הַהָר:

From Deuteronomy, an expanded process can be seen. Moses has an extra step where he breaks the Calf into pieces, the word for ‘dust/עפר’ is also used twice whereas in Exodus, it is merely implied. In Hosea 8:6, the Calf of Samaria’s future destruction is described, it ‘shall be reduced to splinters/שִׁבְבִים’. Again, both wood and metal are capable of

splintering, however this does remove the possibility of it being fleshy, as flesh does not splinter.⁴³⁶ 1 Kings 18:13, Asa deposes his mother and cuts down and burns her statue to Asherah, showing this to be a standard process for the destruction of idols and images. Since her statue to Asherah is not intended to be live, again, the chances of the Calf being made of wood and metal seem likely. From the Golden Calf, the Calf of Samaria and other figures, burning and crushing are the ways to destroy them, making clear that they are made from either wood or metal.

That the Calf/calves are clearly wooden or metal is important when it comes to the final feature of the calf that is alluded to in the Hebrew Bible, the possibility that the Calf is somehow alive. From our discussion on its destruction, it is clearly not a flesh and blood, live, calf. However, due to the way Aaron explains the making of the Calf in Exodus 32:24, 'out came this Calf/הַעֵגֶל הַזֶּה וַיֵּצֵא', later interpreters come back to this verse with the idea of it being animated in mind. Now, this can be understood as purely an excuse, in order not to describe how he himself made the Calf. As has been discussed, how Aaron made the Calf has its own problems, but it does seem clear from Exodus 32:4 that he did, merely the method is obscured. If Aaron's statement is to be taken at face

⁴³⁶ This word is a hapax legomenon in the Hebrew bible, thought to come from Arabic as Rashi notes on the interpretation of this word. Jastrow agrees that this word is of an Arabic derivation. Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 1510.

value, that the calf did indeed come out by itself, that implies that the Calf has its own source of movement. It is possible to consider a wooden or golden calf that is animated, meaning it need not contradict the descriptions of its destruction. Indeed, that something like this is the case is considered feasible by a number of midrashic sources that will be examined in the next section. However, from the Exodus narrative, this one sentence and the obscurity around the making of the Calf are all that suggest a live calf, meaning that this was probably not the intended meaning but a convenient later interpretation.

The descriptions of the Golden Calf and the Calves of Jeroboam show that there are many ways to view the nature of these calves. The terms used to describe them mostly agree, however there is room for other terms. How they are made is shrouded in mystery due to the use of unusual terms to describe the process and although the process of their destruction is easier to understand, it still does not shed a huge amount of light on their precise materials. This mystery around these figures leads to huge interpretative possibilities in Midrashic collections and the Qur'an. In particular this last feature, the possibility of a live calf, captures the imagination of both the Jewish exegetical and Qur'anic writers who elaborate on this theme.

3.4.2. Magical Midrashic Calves

When it comes to descriptions of the Golden Calf, the midrashic traditions have several focusses, often associating the Golden Calf with other calves from the Tanakh. These can be loosely broken down into, descriptions of the Golden Calf on its own, association with the Calves of Jeroboam and association with the vision of Ezekiel (Ez. 1). Common to many of these interpretations concerning the nature of the calf is the idea that there was some kind of magic present in the creation and existence of the Golden Calf and other biblical calves. This can be seen to fall into a wider trend of Midrashic apologetics concerning the Golden Calf which seeks to remove responsibility for its existence from the Israelites and transfer it to a variety of other sources.

In midrashim from the Tanhuma Yelammedenu and the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, whilst the Israelites still ask for the Calf and Aaron is still involved, other forces act upon the Calf. As Pier Cesare Bori notes, in these midrashim, Aaron merely lets the gold fall into the flames, while the creation of the calf is achieved by fire, magic or the devil.⁴³⁷ In the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 19:1, the second of these scenarios occurs when the sorcerers of Pharaoh, now named Jannes and Jambres appear with the Israelites:

‘Forty thousand people gathered with the Israelites, two Egyptian sorcerers with them and their names were Jannes and Jambres, who had performed magical feats before Pharaoh, as it is written: And also the sorcerers of Egypt did so with their arts’.

⁴³⁷ Bori, *The Golden Calf*, 18.

נְתַפְנְסוּ אַרְבָּעִים אֶלֶף שְׁעָלוּ עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל וּשְׂנֵי חַרְטֻמֵי מִצְרַיִם עִמָּהֶם וּשְׂמוֹתָם יוֹנוֹס וַיּוֹמְרוּ
שְׁהִיוּ עוֹשִׂין לְפָנַי פְּרָעָה כָּל אוֹתָם בְּשִׁפְיָם כְּמוֹ שְׂכָתוֹב: וַיַּעֲשׂוּ גַם הֵם חַרְטֻמֵי מִצְרַיִם
בְּלִהְטִיהֶם

This continues in *Ki Tisa* 19:4, when after Aaron throws the earrings into the fire, ‘the sorcerers approached and performed magical feats\בְּחַרְטֻמֵיהֶם וַעֲשׂוּ בְּחַרְטֻמֵיהֶם וַעֲשׂוּ בְּחַרְטֻמֵיהֶם וַעֲשׂוּ בְּחַרְטֻמֵיהֶם’. These two verses make clear that the Calf is made with the gold from the earrings. However, the Calf comes alive from the Egyptian sorcerers approaching the fire and ‘doing magic’. In the first verse (Exod 19:1), the sorcerers are reintroduced to the audience, who of course would already be familiar with them in a role where they create something using magic, something alive, as they do with the serpents and the plague of frogs (Exod 7:11 and 8:7). In the second verse (Exod 19:4), they then create the Calf from the fire and gold earrings. This use of familiar characters makes the argument of this interpretation more convincing as the audience already knows their capabilities. When the sorcerers and Aaron are used in tandem, it is clear to the reader who is more able to create something using magic. This interpretation not only draws focus away from Aaron and the Israelites but also uses the idea of ‘Egypt’, a place of sin, idolatry and suffering for the Israelites, to take the blame.

In Targum Pseudo-Jonathan 32:24, the third of these scenarios occurs when links the calf is made by Satan. There we read:

‘And I said to them, whoever has gold, bring it and give it to me and I threw it into the fire. And Satan went into the body, and the likeness of this calf came out from it.’

וְאָמְרִית לְהוֹן לְמֵאן אֵית דְּהַב פְּרִיקוּ וְיִהְיוּ לִי וְטָלִיקְתִּיהּ בְּנוֹרָא וְעָאֵל סְטָנָא בְּגוֹיָהּ וְנִפְקָ
מִיָּנִיָּה דְּמוֹת עֵיגְלָא הָדִין:

In this case, the gold is cast into the fire by Aaron, as in the Exodus narrative, but with the addition that Satan also goes into the fire. Although the precise way Satan makes the Calf is not described, that he affected it with his power or dark magic is implied. This implication, together with the pre-existing mysterious assertion that the Calf ‘came out/נִפְקָ’ as opposed to being brought out makes a clear case for a magical calf, in this case a Satanic one. It should be taken into account that this is Aaron’s explanation of how the Calf came to be. In the earlier description of its making, Satan is mentioned peripherally, lying to the Israelites about Moses’ death (TPJ Exod 32:1) but not actually seen going into the fire, as he does when Aaron retells the events to Moses. Instead Aaron builds the Calf, as he is afraid after the slaughter of Hur (TPJ. Exod 32.5).⁴³⁸ The Targum Pseudo-Jonathan is here combining a number of Midrashic trends in order to make a truly apologetic reading of the Golden Calf narrative.

⁴³⁸ For more on the death of Hur and the Israelites motivations for building the Calf, see the Role of the Israelites section.

Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 19:4 takes a different tack and claims that Micah, a man who commissions an idol in Judges 17–18, made the Golden Calf. It reads as follows:

‘Some say: That Micah ground the bricks that Moses had saved into the mixture. He took the tablet on which Moses had written ‘rise bull’ when he raised Joseph’s coffin. He threw them inside the furnace between the earrings. And the calf came out lowing as it was leaping.⁴³⁹ They began to say: These are your gods Israel. The guardian angels started to say: They forgot God, their saviour, who did great things in Egypt.’

וַיֵּשׁ אֹמְרִים: שְׁמִיכָה הִיָּה שְׁנַת־מִכְמֶךָ בְּבִנְיָן מֵהַשְּׁהֲצִיל מֹשֶׁה מִן הַלְּבָנִים. נָטַל הַלּוּחַ שֶׁכָּתַב עָלָיו מֹשֶׁה עֲלֵה שׁוֹר כְּשֶׁהֵעֵלָה אֲרוֹנוֹ שֶׁל יוֹסֵף. הִשְׁלִיכוּ לְתוֹךְ הַכּוּר בֵּין הַנְּזָמִים וַיֵּצֵא הָעֶגְלָה גּוֹעָה כְּשֶׁהוּא מְקַרְטֵעַ. הַתְּחִילוּ אֹמְרִים: אֵלֵה אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל. פָּתְחוּ מִלְּאֲכֵי הַשָּׂרֵת וְאָמְרוּ: שָׁכְחוּ אֵל מוֹשִׁיעֵם עֲשֵׂה גְדֻלוֹת בְּמִצְרַיִם.

In this interpretation, Micah uses two different materials to make the Golden Calf, some bricks of Moses and the tablet that brought Joseph’s coffin from the Nile. The provenance of the bricks is uncertain, although this is the task that Pharaoh instructs the Israelites to complete whilst in slavery for him in Exodus 5:7–8.⁴⁴⁰ That the bricks would also be Egyptian makes sense as that connects them to Joseph’s coffin, which would surely be in Egypt. The second material, the tablet, is already established to possess magic when it appears in Mekhilta De Rabbi Ishmael *Beshalach* 2. Although the bones of Joseph are taken from Egypt by Moses in Exodus 13:19, how he obtained them is entirely midrashic:

⁴³⁹ This word ‘גועה’ it appears to mean lowing. Jastrow, *Dictionary*, 261.

⁴⁴⁰ Lindqvist, *Sin at Sinai*, 236, 236 n.3.

'It is told that Serah, the daughter of Asher survived from that generation and she showed Moses the grave of Joseph. She said to him: The Egyptians put him in a small metal coffin which they sunk in the Nile. Moses came and stood by the Nile, he took a pebble and threw it in and he cried out and said: 'Joseph, son of Jacob! The oath to redeem his children, which God swore to our father Abraham, has reached its fulfilment.'

אמרו: סרה בת אשר נשתיירה מאותו הדור והיא הראתה למשה קבר יוסף. אמרה לו: במקום הזה שמוהו. עשה לו מצרים ארון של מתכת ושקעוהו בתוך נילוס. בא ועמד על נילוס נטל צרור וזרק לתוכו וזעק ואמר: יסף יסף הגיעה השבועש שנשבע הקב"ה לאברהם אבינו שהוא גאל את בניו.

In this interpretation, Moses uses a pebble to cause a seemingly miraculous event to occur, the coffin of Joseph rises from the Nile. This pebble is the tablet that is mentioned in the interpretation from the *Tanhuma Yelammedenu* that is part of the material used to make the Calf. Lindqvist suggests that this object that already possessed supernatural powers is now transformed into a magical amulet in the hands of Micah.⁴⁴¹ Aside from the pebble or tablet as a connection, there are also other similarities between the two narratives. Both are throwing materials into something, the Nile or the fire, to achieve making something magical 'rise' from it. Versions of this narrative from the *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael* also appear in the *Talmud Bavli Sotah* 13a and the *Tanhuma Yelammedenu Beshalach* 2. In the *Tanhuma* version, the tablet has carved upon it, the words 'arise, ox/שׁוֹר/עֲלֶה', as the tablet does by the time Micah comes to use it in the *Tanhuma*. These words seem another obvious connection to the Golden Calf narrative

⁴⁴¹ Lindqvist, *Sin at Sinai*, 236.

as they call for a calf, albeit an ox, to rise. In the context of Joseph's coffin, these words refer to how Moses refers to him in Deuteronomy 33:17, as an ox. This web of narratives serves to connect the Golden Calf's provenance to Egypt, a land of idolatry and also to put the onus of making the calf onto Micah, a man who has already been involved in making idols in Judges.

Returning to the midrash from the Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 19:4, these materials used by Micah cause the Calf to come out 'lowing as it leapt/מְקַרְטֵעַ/גֹּעֵה בְּשֵׁהוּא'.

'Leaping/מְקַרְטֵעַ' and 'lowing/גֹּעֵה' certainly seems to imply that the Calf has been brought to life as it has its own movement and can 'speak'. Finally, the 'guardian angels' proclaim a verse from Psalm 106 which refers to the sin of the Golden Calf. The verse, Ps. 106:21, is another version of the Exodus formula, remembering God as the one who brought the Israelites out of Egypt. When this interpretation from the Tanuhma Yelammedenu is examined in combination with this related midrash from the Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael, the theme of intimate objects being caused to move with 'magic' is shared.

In an interpretation of the related Golden Calf narrative, the Calves of Jeroboam, the Talmud Bavli *Sotah* 47a argues that they were capable of speech:

‘What did Gehazi do? There are those who say that he hung a magnetic rock on Jeroboam’s Calf and he suspended it between heaven and earth. And there are those who say: He engraved the name on its mouth, and it would say: “I am (the Lord your God)” and “You shall not have other gods.’

מאי עבד איכא דאמרי אבן שואבת תלה לו לחטאת יהבעם והעמידו בין שמים לארץ ואיכא דאמרי שם
חקק לה אפומה והיתה אומרת אנכי ולא יהיה לך

In this passage, the Rabbis aim to add to the sin of Gehazi as in the previous page they ask why his punishment, leprosy for himself and all his descendants (1 Kgs. 5:27), was so severe, considering his sin, taking payment for services (2 Kgs. 5:20–24), was so minor. Gehazi causes the Calf to do two things: to appear to hover and to speak. The first thing, to make it move, the Rabbis suggest was caused by the use of a pair of magnetic rocks. In this case, the calf appears to have life but does not. It is interesting that the Rabbis seem to think that it would be important for the Calf to appear to be alive, as this would make it a more attractive object of worship. As in the interpretations concerning Micah and Joseph’s coffin, ideas of ‘magic’ rocks and things being made to rise are once again present. Secondly, Gehazi carves the name of God upon the mouth of the calf, causing it to speak. In the Ancient Near Eastern world, names had power as can be attested by biblical texts, such as when Jacob wrestles with God in Genesis 32, as well as Egyptian and other Ancient Near Eastern sources, such as the name of Ra.⁴⁴² This

⁴⁴² For more on this concept, see Daniel S. Breslauer, “Secrecy and Magic, Publicity and Torah: Unpacking a Talmudic Tale,” in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, eds. Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 264–282. Otto Eissfeldt, “Renaming in the Old Testament,” in *Words and Meanings: Essays*

power is present in ritual also, as the name of God is not spoken by devout Jewish people and was only spoken in the Temple on the Day of Atonement. The name of God has power, which has here been invoked in order to cause a miraculous, magical event to occur. In this case, Gehazi has invoked the power of the name of God in order to give life to this metal calf. The commandments that it speaks from Exodus 20:2 are very similar to sentiments expressed in the Golden Calf in Exodus 32, 4, 8, 11 and 23 about God bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. Although this interpretation refers to the Calves of Jeroboam, these events are clearly highly related within the Hebrew Bible and throughout its interpretation in Jewish exegetical circles.⁴⁴³ As with the interpretation of the Golden Calf from the Tanhuma Yelammedenu and the midrash from the Mekhilta De Rabbi Ishmael, this interpretation from the Talmud Bavli also uses themes of inanimate objects being brought to life, combined with gold and the power of the name of God.

Presented to David Winton Thomas, eds. Peter R. Ackroyd and Barnabus Lindars (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 69–80.

⁴⁴³ Indeed, there is what appears to be a version of this interpretation but related to the Golden Calf in Pirke de Rav Eliezer 45. It includes the detail about carving the name of God on to metal in order to imbue the calf with power. However, Pirke de Rav Eliezer falls later than the composition of the Qur'an and so outside the boundaries of this study. Certainly, its interpretation of the Golden Calf seems to know the Qur'anic version as it mentions the 'lowing' that appears in Q 7:148 and Q 20:88.

The Tanhuma Yelammedenu *Ki Tisa* 21:1 links the Golden Calf to Merkabah tradition through using a quotation from Ezekiel about the chariot and the sin of the Calf:

‘I saw them coming to Sinai and accepting my Torah, and also that I would descend at Sinai on my chariot with four animals and they would examine it and unhitch one from them and cause me to anger, as it is said: And they four had the face of an ox, etc. (Ezek. 1:10), and it is written: They exchanged their glory for an ox that eats grass (Ps. 106:20).’

שָׂאֲנֵי רוּאָה שְׁבָאִים לְסִינֵי וּמִקְבָּלִים תּוֹרַתִי וְאֲנִי יוֹרֵד בְּסִינֵי בְּטַטְרָאמִלִּין שְׁלֵי שְׁהֵם מִתְכוּנְנִים בּוּ וְשׁוֹמְטִין אֶחָד מֵהֶם וּמִכְעִיסִין אוֹתִי בּוּ שְׁנֵאָמַר: וּפְנֵי שׁוֹר מֵהַשְּׂמַאֵל וְגו'. וּכְתִיב: וַיִּמְרוּ אֶת כְּבוֹדִם בְּתַבְנִית שׁוֹר.

This verse from Ezekiel which links the ox to God, has been used by some, including Bori to ask the question of ‘if God appears, as he does, alongside an eagle, man, lion and a bull, was the worship of a calf only a partial transgression?’⁴⁴⁴ This interpretation suggests that the Calf was not inspired by the creatures of the chariot of God but was in fact one of them, that the Israelites unhitched when it landed at Sinai. Although not all interpretations of the Golden Calf seek to remove sin from the Israelites and some do emphasise the sin, this interpretation is interesting as it replaces the sin of making the Golden Calf with the sin of stealing it! The question of whether stealing a creature from God’s chariot is worse than one of idolatry is impossible to answer. God becomes angry, it is clear that God sees the Israelites as having done wrong. This link between the Merkabah and Golden Calf traditions in Jewish exegesis has been noted by scholars such

⁴⁴⁴ Bori, *The Golden Calf*, 4.

as Pekka Lindqvist and David Halperin.⁴⁴⁵ This connection becomes much more explicit in later, medieval traditions when the Merkabah becomes more associated with popular mystic traditions. However, as early the 6th century, this link between the Merkabah and Golden calf traditions is being forged. Since they both feature cows, a link to the divine and a ‘magical’ element, the links are obvious.⁴⁴⁶

Jewish exegetes were no stranger to the idea of these idols, whether they were this Golden Calf or the Calves of Jeroboam being alive. From midrashic interpretations of the nature of the Calf, two themes come across strongly, that of magic and that of Egypt. These two themes are connected by the idea of inappropriate forms of worship, using Egypt, a well-established land of idolatry and sorcery, as the place that inspired Israel’s idolatrous acts like that of the Golden Calf. These themes both continue to be significant going into the Qur’anic narratives of the Golden Calf, however, the spectre of Egypt has been replaced with another outside influence. As Schoenfield notes, the

⁴⁴⁵ Lindqvist, *Sin at Sinai*, 237. David Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel’s Vision* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 159.

⁴⁴⁶ There is an interpretation in a much later midrashic collection, outside the range of this study, Midrash ha-Gadol (14th century, Yemen), that links together the Merkabah and Joseph’s coffin narratives. It says that Moses threw a cup into the Nile on which was carved the four animals of the chariot and this is what causes the coffin to rise. This is interesting as it shows a continued linking of the Golden Calf, Merkabah and Joseph’s coffin narratives in Jewish exegetical thinking.

stories of the non-Israelites bringing the Calf to life and the Qur'anic version of events are very similar.⁴⁴⁷

3.4.3. The Live Calf of the Qur'an

In the Qur'an, the Golden Calf is described being made and destroyed, much as in the Hebrew Bible. The main question that arises from the Qur'anic narrative is whether the Calf is alive, made to be so by magic. This is a theme familiar from the midrashic traditions and it built upon further in post-Qur'anic midrashic traditions. Around this topic are issues of interpretation; whether the Qur'an truly means that the Calf lives, and dating; whether the midrashic traditions related to this narrative are contemporary to the Qur'an, or fact taking after it. As with the Hebrew Bible, in the Qur'an the specific terms used to refer to the calf and how they fit into their Qur'anic context will be examined. The possibility that the Calf is alive and somehow magic is expanded upon in the Qur'an and has become a big question in traditional interpretation and modern academic work. As such, how the calf is made and how it acts will be examined. The Calf is not destroyed in the Qur'an as it is in the Hebrew Bible, probably due to a wish to focus on the sin of building it and the people's continued disobedience, as opposed to its removal. This section will argue that the Calf is not described in terms frequently used

⁴⁴⁷ Schoenfield, "A Good Argument to Penitents," 183 n.13.

to describe idolatry in the Qur'an as it describes the actions of monotheists. However, this does not detract from the Qur'an's desire to use the description of the calf to show the continued disobedience of the people of Israel through the idea that it is clearly not a god.

The most common term used to describe the Calf, is simply, 'the Calf' (Q Al-Baqara 2:51, Q 2:54, Q 2:92, Q 2:93, Q 4:153 and Q 7:152). In Sūrat Al-Baqarah, this is the only term used to describe it. The Calf is described as an 'جَسَدًا' in Q Al-'A'rāf 7:148 and Q Ṭā' Hā' 20:88. This verb means to make something corporeal or for something to assume a physical state, in this case describing a three-dimensional embodied calf.⁴⁴⁸ Using an intra-textual approach, Pregill notes that this word can mean image, likeness or body (Q Al-'Anbiyā' 21:8 and Q Ṣād 38:34).⁴⁴⁹ In the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan 32:24, the calf is also described as have a body, 'גוֹיָא'. It does not cast aspersions about the nature of the thing that now has a body in the way that calling it an idol would, as it does not by itself mean something idolatrous. In Sūrat Al-'A'rāf, the Calf is related to idols as the people of Israel pass a place where people are worshipping 'idols/أَصْنَامٍ' and from this ask Moses to make them one (Q 7:138). This narrative is then shortly followed by the Golden Calf narrative in Q 7:148–154. Hawting comments that this word for 'idols/أَصْنَامٍ' is used

⁴⁴⁸ Badawi and Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 164.

⁴⁴⁹ Pregill, "A Calf, A Body that Lows," 267 n.13.

when the children of Israel see the peoples' idols by the Reed Sea, however when they ask Moses to 'make for us a god as they have gods' it is the word 'god/إِلَهًا' that it used.⁴⁵⁰ The Qur'an is willing to use this word to describe idolatry in others but reticent to apply it to the desires of the Israelites.

Within the Qur'an, there are both general terms used to express ideas of idolatry, as well as specific names of idols. Hawting notes that the word, 'أَوْثَانًا/ idols', is most often used within the story of Abraham and his father's idols, in a context related to people of the past.⁴⁵¹ For example, in Q Al-ʿAnkabūt 29:16–17 where Abraham goes to his people to warn them against worshipping 'أَوْثَانًا/ idols'.⁴⁵² This is the most prevalent image of Abraham in the Qur'an and, as correctly argued by Carol Bakhos, shows him as a valiant defender of God and in this sense a precursor to the Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁵³ The Qur'an uses this word to ascribe idolatry to polytheists of the past but is clearly reticent to ascribe it to monotheists, even in times when their desire for idolatry would seem clear, as during the Golden Calf narrative. The phrase 'طُغُوتَ/ idols' is used on eight occasions

⁴⁵⁰ G. R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 55.

⁴⁵¹ Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, 55.

⁴⁵² This story of Abraham and his father's idols is repeated in Q Al-ʿAnʿām 6, Q ʿIbrāhīm 14, Q Maryam 19, Q Al-ʿĀnbiyāʾ 21, Q Al-Shuʿarāʾ 26, Q Al-ʿAnkabūt 29, Q Al-Ṣāffāt 37, Q Al-Mumtaḥanah 60 and Q Al-Jumuʿah 62.

⁴⁵³ Bakhos, *The Family of Abraham*, 76.

throughout the Qur'an.⁴⁵⁴ Literally, it means one who crosses boundaries or more broadly, one who rebels.⁴⁵⁵ Commenting on the use of this word, Hawting notes that it can indicate singular or plural and notes that this word does not seem to be understood by the later exegetical tradition.⁴⁵⁶ Worship of goddesses is mentioned in Q Al-Nisā' 4:117, this time combined with the worship of Satan, creating an equivalency between them. The Qur'an also mentions Arabic idols on several occasions. In Q Al-Nūḥ 71:23, it names the gods as Wadd, Suwa, Yaghuth and Nasr and in Q Al-Najm 53:19 the gods are named Al-Lat, Al-Uzza and Manat. These were pre-Islamic goddesses whose cult centre was in Mecca.

Interestingly, despite having many terms for referencing idolatry, none of these are used when discussing the Golden Calf incident except for a similar but not identical rhetorical strategy. It is notable that all of the terms used for idolatry, are used to refer to pagan worship. Despite the Golden Calf incident, which is difficult not to see as one of idolatry, the Israelites are still not called any of the terms the Qur'an uses to show idolatrous behaviour. In fact, these idolatrous terms are not used to refer to any of the other monotheistic worshippers, Christians and Sabians, mentioned in the Qur'an. The

⁴⁵⁴ Occurring in Q 2:256, Q 2:257, Q 4:51, Q 4:60, Q 4:76, Q 5:60, Q 16:36 and Q 39:17.

⁴⁵⁵ Mustansir Mir, *Understanding the Islamic Scripture* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 55.

⁴⁵⁶ Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, 55–56.

division the Qur'an maintains between polytheists and monotheists is retained, even in instances such as the Golden Calf. The divisions between believers and unbelievers seem to mirror the division between those who believe in one God and those who do not, as opposed to dividing the Muslims from other monotheistic believers.

Although the Calf is not described with words normally used to describe idols, that is not to say it is not criticised. In Q 7:148, a descriptive critique is given of the Calf:

‘Did they not see that it could not speak to them or guide them to a way?’

أَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّهُ لَا يُكَلِّمُهُمْ وَلَا يَهْدِيهِمْ سَبِيلًا

Here we have both a description of the Calf as well as a criticism of its lack of abilities. A version of this criticism also appears in Q 20:89:

‘Did they not see that it could not return to them a word and that it did not possess for them harm nor benefit?’

أَفَلَا يَرَوْنَ أَلَّا يَرْجِعُ إِلَيْهِمْ قَوْلًا وَلَا يَمْلِكُ لَهُمْ ضَرًّا وَلَا نَفْعًا

Perhaps contrary to descriptions above that suggest that the Calf cannot speak, the

Qur'anic Golden Calf 'lows/خَوَارٌ'. In Q 7:148 and Q 20:88, respectively, we read:

‘And after him the people of Moses made from their ornaments a calf, a body with a lowing sound’

وَاتَّخَذَ قَوْمُ مُوسَىٰ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ مِنْ خُلَيْبِهِمْ عَجَلًا جَسَدًا لَهُ خُورٌ

‘So, he brought forth for them a calf, a body with a lowing sound’

فَأَخْرَجَ لَهُمْ عَجَلًا جَسَدًا لَهُ خُورٌ

However, this does not have to be a direct contradiction with the judgement of the

Qur'anic narrator, that it cannot 'speak'. The spirit of the Qur'anic narrator seems to be

that the Calf cannot communicate with the Israelites, and ‘lowing’ is clearly not intelligible to humans. However, it is possible that these ideas of ‘lowing’ and ‘speaking’ are set up to be a contradiction of sorts, between the real guidance that God can offer the Israelites and the unintelligible ‘lowing’ that their calf can provide them. Rubin suggests that the ‘lowing’ motif is connected to the idea of guidance.⁴⁵⁷ The calf is a replacement for Moses as he has been gone a long time and the Israelites seek another person/thing to idolise. The role of Moses is to guide the community on a spiritual and a literal journey through the promised land. Rubin sees the intended role of the calf to be this guide for the community in place of Moses and sees the ‘lowing’ as a way of showing the fact that the Calf will not guide or speak to the community, merely low.⁴⁵⁸

Despite, not being able to speak to the Israelites, this lowing does imply that the Qur’anic Calf is alive. Although Rubin argues that the calf is not alive, this theory of the calf ‘lowing’ as taunting that it will not help the community could be applied to a living or metal calf and is compelling in either scenario.⁴⁵⁹ It may be that the Qur’anic is meant to be a living calf, however considering the context, it seems far more likely that the inference is that the Israelites or Al-Sāmīrī succeeded in making a living god. Not all

⁴⁵⁷ Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation,” 201–202.

⁴⁵⁸ Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation,” 201–202.

⁴⁵⁹ Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation,” 201–202.

commentators agree that the Qur’anic calf lived, the Mut’azilites state that a human cannot create life, very much in line with the Qur’anic doctrine of God as the ultimate and only creator.⁴⁶⁰ Commentating on this issue less than 100 years AH, Sa’id Ibn Jubayr (d.714) states that the noise is merely the sound of wind passing through the hollow body of the metal calf.⁴⁶¹ Rubin quotes this opinion and puts forward the idea that the noise is to emphasize the ‘beastly or demonic nature’ of the image they have created.⁴⁶² However, he is eager to distance the narrative from any idea of the Calf being alive, as he suggests the noise is just an ‘eerie hollow sound’, agreeing with the early Muslim commentaries he quotes.⁴⁶³ Michael Pregill offers an alternative reading of this verse, not as ‘lowing calf image’ but the other way around, ‘an image of a lowing calf’.⁴⁶⁴ Pregill’s interpretation removes the interpretative issues of the Calf ‘lowing’ as in his argument it is only a representation of a calf in the act of lowing. Pregill uses Neuwirth’s work on Psalms in the Qur’an to suggest that this verse is a version of Psalm 106:20, ‘They traded their glory for an image of an ox that eats grass’.⁴⁶⁵ There is a similarity in syntax between a ‘calf that lows’ and an ‘ox that eats grass’ however this syntactical similarity

⁴⁶⁰ Hawting, “Calf of Gold,” 275.

⁴⁶¹ As cited by Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation,” 202.

⁴⁶² Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation,” 202.

⁴⁶³ Rubin, “Traditions in Transformation,” 202.

⁴⁶⁴ Pregill, “” A Calf, A Body that Lows,” 288.

⁴⁶⁵ Pregill, “” A Calf, A Body that Lows,” 288.

does not explain other plot details about the Calf's nature which will be covered below.

As Hawting notes, it also fails to take into account the Jewish exegetical milieu in which the Calf/Calves can be seen lowing on two occasions, caused by Micah and Gehazi, suggesting a pre-existing framework for a 'lowing' Calf.⁴⁶⁶

As to how the Calf is made, Al-Sāmirī delivers this odd line, hinting at its magical creation in Q 20:96:

'He said, "I saw what they did not see, so I took a handful from the track of the messenger and threw it, and thus did my soul entice me'

قَالَ بَصُرْتُ بِمَا لَمْ يَبْصُرُوا بِهِ فَقَبَضْتُ قَبْضَةً مِّنْ أَثَرِ الرَّسُولِ فَنَبَذْتُهَا وَكَذَلِكَ سَوَّلْتُ لِي نَفْسِي

This sentence is difficult to understand as so little details are provided but it seems to suggest that Al-Sāmirī was aware of something the Israelites were not and took it from the 'track/أثر' of 'the messenger/الرَّسُولِ' and threw it. The idea of a material being thrown is easily likened to the gold thrown in the fire by Aaron or even the dust thrown in by Micah in the Tanhuma Yelammedenu above. The fact that only Al-Sāmirī sees this material also gives it magical possibilities as it appears to be hidden to everyone else, a secret. Despite similarities to other Golden Calf narratives, what the material is and who the messenger is remain unexplained. According to Hawting, most Muslim interpreters have seen the dust as from the hooves of the horse of the angel Gabriel when he came

⁴⁶⁶ Hawting, "Calf of Gold," 275.

down to split the Reed Sea.⁴⁶⁷ However this view is not ubiquitous and has been challenged in a recent study by Michael Pregill who suggests that this phrase does not refer to the angel Gabriel, or his horse.⁴⁶⁸ Pregill argues that correctly translated this verse should read ‘followed the path of the messenger for a while, and then rejected it’.⁴⁶⁹ Pregill is right to point out that neither the angel Gabriel, nor a horse are mentioned in the Arabic, ‘the messenger’ could refer to a number of people . Where Pregill’s argument is less convincing is his denial of any involvement of magic in the Qur’anic Golden Calf narratives. He sees this theme as tied to issues of ‘influence’, with scholars wishing to map the Qur’anic story on to what Pregill sees as later Jewish exegetical material. Indeed, this can be seen in the works of Halperin and Linqvist, who both propose linking this tradition to much later medieval traditions about the Merkabah, arguing for the possibility of significantly older material in these later collections.⁴⁷⁰ However, although there are later estimates for material from the Tanhumas and Targums, the majority of scholars place them pre–Qur’an, meaning the possibility that themes of magic around the Golden Calf are present in both Jewish and Qur’anic exegetical environments must be left open.

⁴⁶⁷ Hawting, “Calf of Gold,” 274.

⁴⁶⁸ Pregill, “” A Calf, A Body that Lows,” 275.

⁴⁶⁹ Pregill, “” A Calf, A Body that Lows,” 284.

⁴⁷⁰ Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 177. Lindqvist, *Sin at Sinai*, 237.

As with in the Hebrew Bible, the destruction of the Golden Calf is described in the

Qur'an: In Q 20:97 Moses says to Al-Sāmirī:

‘And look to your god to which you remain devoted. We will surely burn it, then scatter it in the sea, blown apart’

وَأَنْظُرْ إِلَيَّ إِلَهَكَ الَّذِي ظَلَمْتَ عَلَيْهِ عَاقِبًا لَنْحَرَقَهُ ثُمَّ لَنْنَسِيفَنَّهُ فِي الْيَمِّ نَسْفًا

The destruction of the Calf in Sūrah Ṭā' Hā' is very close to the biblical versions, in which it is melted down and thrown into water, particularly that of Deuteronomy in which the dust is thrown into the river by the mountain. Ismail Albayrak argues that this ‘removal or killing’ of the Calf marks a new contract between God and the Israelites, an irreversible action that renews their relationship.⁴⁷¹ Albayrak is right to note the irreversible nature of the destruction of the Calf, as it is burnt, scattered and blown apart. Although this destruction is as complete in the Qur'an as in the Hebrew Bible, it only occurs in Sūrah Ṭā' Hā' and although the new contract that Albayrak notes seems a good interpretation of the biblical versions, it does not fit with the Qur'anic ones. In Sūrah Ṭā' Hā', the Calf is destroyed not to show the changing fates of the Israelites and highlight new good behaviours but to show God's supremacy. This can be gleaned from the next verse, ‘Your God is only God, except for whom there is no God/ إِنَّمَا إِلَهُكُمُ اللَّهُ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ’ (Q 20:98). This verse is then followed by a number of verses about how those

⁴⁷¹ Ismail Albayrak, “The Qur'anic Narratives of the Golden Calf Episode,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 3, no. 1 (2001): 67.

who turn away from the Qur'an will be punished on the Day of Resurrection. The context of the destruction of the Calf in the Qur'an makes it clear that it is intended to show God's supremacy and the punishment that will befall those who doubt it. The destruction of the Calf has also had relevance to the Qur'an as some sects have used this verse to note that the Calf cannot have been just gold as gold does not burn, strengthening arguments that the Calf was alive.⁴⁷²

Although the creation of the Calf by Al-Sāmirī lacks context, when combined with the description of its destruction it has substantial parallels with the creation of life by God. Across the Jewish and Islamic traditions, there are many suggestions for what the Calf was made of; including, gold, the tablet of Joseph, brick dust and dust from an angelic horse. In Genesis 2:7, God makes man out of 'dust from the earth/מִן־הָאֲדָמָה' and when people die they return to dust (Gen. 3:19):

'until you return to the earth, for from it you were taken, for dust you are and to dust you will return'

עד שׁוֹבֶדָ אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה כִּי מִמֶּנָּה לָקַחְתָּ כִּי עֹפָר אַתָּה וְאֶל־עֹפָר תָּשׁוּב:

God also makes the animals in the Garden of Eden from earth in Genesis 2:19. These processes are mirrored in the Qur'an, where both creation from dust and returning to it are described. Adam is created several times in the Qur'an, sometimes from 'clay/طين' (Q

⁴⁷² Hawting, "Calf of Gold," 275.

Al-'A'rāf 7:12, Q Al-'Isrā' 17:61, Q Al-Mu'minūn 23:13, Q Al-Sajdah 32:7, Q Ṣād 38:71 and Q 38:76) and sometimes from 'dust/تُرَابٌ' (Q Al-'Imrān 3:59, Q Al-Kahf 18:37, Q Al-Ḥajj 22:5, Q Al-Rūm 30:20, Q Fāṭir 35:11, Q Ghāfir 40:67).⁴⁷³ Although these different terms exist that he is still made from the earth is clear.⁴⁷⁴ That people are made from dust or clay is juxtaposed by the jinn and the angels who are made from fire (Q Al-'A'rāf 7:12, Q Al-Ḥijr 15:27, Q Ṣād 38:76). That people will return to dust upon death is confirmed in Q Al-Ra'd 13:5 (also Q Al-Mu'minūn 23:35, Q23:82, Q Al-Naml 27:67, Q Al-Ṣāffāt 37:16, Q 37:53, Q Qāf 50:3, Q Al-Wāqī'ah 56:47). In the Bible and the Qur'an, creation and destruction feature dust. In the Qur'anic Golden Calf narrative of Sūrah Ṭā' Hā', the Calf is made from a 'handful/قَبْضَةً' of something from the 'track/آثَرٌ' which can also be translated as remains.⁴⁷⁵ That material from the ground would be dust or earth is only logical. Thus, it seems that whether the creation of the Calf is meant to be from the hoofprints of the horse of Gabriel or mirror a narrative from a Midrashic collection cannot be certain. That its creation falls into an already accepted process of creation by a God is certain. The Calf is offensive not only as it draws worship from the one true God

⁴⁷³ Some of these verses refer to just Adam and others to all people's creation. In Q 55:14, Adam is also made from clay but a different word is used, 'صَلْصَلٌ'. In Q 15:26, this is added to as 'clay from black mud/صَلْصَلٌ مِّنْ حَمَإٍ' and by Q 15:28, this has become 'clay from altered black mud/صَلْصَلٌ مِّنْ حَمَإٍ مَّسْنُونٍ'. In 71:17, God creates 'from the earth/مِّنْ الْأَرْضِ'.

⁴⁷⁴ Cornelia Schöck, "Adam and Eve," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an Vol. 1 A-D*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 24.

⁴⁷⁵ For entries on these words see, Badawi and Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary*, 10, 723.

but also because it features a perversion of the natural order, only a God may create in this manner. This focus on his role as creator makes sense in Islam, God is above all a creator and judge of all creation, only he can offer life after death.⁴⁷⁶ God's role as creator is often used to argue for his supremacy against disbelievers, as only God can create (Q Al-‘Imrān 3:190, Q Al-Yūnus 10:34, Q Luqmān 31:11, Q Al-Zumar 39:6, Q Al-Wāqī‘ah 56:62). In Sūrah Ṭā’ Hā’, the Israelites are taken in by a false and perverse creation and in so doing become an example of a Qur’anic trope proving them to be disbelievers.

In the Qur’an, the nature of the Calf is strongly affected by the theme of magic. The Calf is not referred to using normal terminology for idols and idolatry, showing the continued divide the Qur’an interprets between monotheists and polytheists, even in times of great sin. This theme of magic and the secrecy around how the Calf is made also serves to divide this from a ‘normal’ form of idolatry. When examined, the sin that has been committed is an insult to God. However, this is in the form of replicating something that only he may do, creation. That the Calf is a live creation is made clear by its lowing and the way in which it is created.

⁴⁷⁶ Jacob Neusner, Bruce Chilton and William Graham, *Three Faiths, One God: The Formative Faith and Practice of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 27.

Conclusion

The nature of Golden Calf is left very much open to interpretation in the Hebrew Bible, leaving room for later interpreters to make choices about what was intended by the Bible. The Midrashic collections, Targums and the Qur'an all seem preoccupied by the theme of magic. This seems to have been initially caused by the phrasing around Aaron's excuse of the Calf coming out by itself and helped by the lack of description over how it is made. In fact, from the Hebrew Bible, very little about the Calf's nature can be discerned for certain.

Around the nature of the Calf in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish exegetical material, the figure of Egypt looms prominently. This can be seen in the chosen figure of the Calf, which may be Egyptian from the passing of the idols on the journey from Egypt to Sinai. In the Tanhuma Yelammedenu, the Calf is created from the magic of the Egyptian sorcerers. In another interpretation, it is created from the tablet associated with the coffin of Joseph from the Nile and bricks that appear to be from Egypt. This theme is quite apologetic as it shows the Israelites influenced in their desire for the Calf by the Egyptians or that it was made by them. This theme is lacking in the Qur'an, despite the theme of magic being present, as well as an outsider to make the Calf. The Qur'an does not wish to show the Calf being created by anything other than the desires of the

Israelites. The presence of the outsider is due to a conflict with another theological priority concerning the perfection of prophets as opposed to exonerating the Israelites.

What is present in the Qur'an is this idea of a form of magic but not a form of idolatry.

This is interesting as the Qur'an has a strong focus on idolatry and idolaters.. The magical aspects of the Calf, its 'lowing' and strange creation, create a distance from traditional idolatry. This allows the Qur'an to criticise the Israelites but not to the extent that it creates problems regarding their historical legitimacy, which the Qur'an requires to establish itself. As such, the Qur'an places the Israelites in the role of 'unbelievers' who are convinced by false creation or do not believe in God's true creation as is often used as a retort to unbelievers. In many ways, in using this theme of magic without the theme of Egypt, as above, creates the Israelites as a new Egypt in the Qur'anic narrative as they now occupy the space of the Egyptians, motivating themselves to worship in this fashion.

3.5. Golden Calf Conclusion

From this study of the Golden Calf narrative in the Hebrew Bible, Midrashic Collections and the Qur'an, several themes that relate to the wider narrative of the Qur'an are apparent. The first of these is the question of what the Golden Calf is. The Golden Calf is usually described as 'idoltrous' but when studied, this term appears far too simple to encompass the complexity of the phenomenon. Even in the Hebrew Bible, it is unclear what the Calf is meant to represent. Interestingly, considering that the Qur'an intends to criticise the Israelites, the Qur'an does not choose to use any of the lexical terms it uses to describe idolatry when discussing the incident of the Golden Calf. Whether or not the Qur'an uses the Golden Calf as a polemic against the Jews, it is more complex than merely labelling them as idolaters. The Qur'an cannot do this, as to label the Israelites as idolaters would interfere with the legitimacy of the Islamic tradition. The Israelites must continue to be seen as monotheists, such that the Muslims can be the inheritors of this tradition. Terms used to denote idolatry are only ever used in the Qur'an to describe the behaviour of polytheists and thus, cannot be used to describe the Israelites. The Israelites are heavily criticised throughout the Golden Calf narratives, by Moses, God and the narrator but still as people within the monotheist tradition of which the Muslims are the natural inheritors in the Qur'an.

Considering that the Israelites are not painted as idolaters here in order that the legitimacy of the Muslim claim on the monotheist tradition is not damaged, the Qur'an must find other ways to use the Golden Calf tradition to criticise the Israelites. The most consistent way it does this is not to associate them with those who oppose God through idol worship but those who oppose God through their disbelief, even in the face of clear evidence. This lack of faith in God can be clearly traced throughout the Golden Calf narratives. Sūrat Al-Baqarah in particular uses this theme throughout the sūrah, combining the theme of God's compassion and forgiveness. These themes work in tandem, with one explicitly criticising the Israelites and the other contrasting their faithless nature with the loving nature of God. This makes the Israelites lack of faith seem even worse as they are given so many chances. Their failure to believe is shown in other ways too, such as when they request a theophany, for which they are punished and yet forgiven through their revival from the dead. This theophany is important as it shows the reason the Israelites cannot believe; they need to see in order to believe, which the Qur'an considers a great failing. Their inability to continue without a visual stimulus is then shown through the building of the Golden Calf, which follows on from this event, showing that they are not capable of 'blind faith', as well as their inability to learn from past sins.

One way in which the Israelites are depicted as disbelievers is interesting in an intertextual way, in view of the role of Egypt in the Golden Calf narrative in the Hebrew Bible and Midrashic collections and the role of the Israelites in the Qur'an. The spectre of Egypt looms heavy over the Golden Calf narrative in the Hebrew Bible as they have just escaped from there, passed idolaters on the way and built something that could resemble an Egyptian god. This Egyptian presence is expanded in the Midrashic writer's minds as they seem to involve the Egyptians, or their sorcerers, or items that came from there in the creation of the Golden Calf. This theme is particularly prevalent in the Tanhuma Yelammedenu. In the Midrashic collections the theme of the Egyptians is combined most often with the idea of 'magic'. Despite the Egyptians not being present in the Golden Calf narratives of the Qur'an, the idea of 'magic' does seem to be present. The ways in which the Calf is made and the way it acts share notable similarities with how it is interpreted in the Tanhuma. However, without the Egyptians being present to take the blame for making the Calf, it falls to Al-Sāmirī, whose origin remains contentious and of course to the Israelites themselves. In the Qur'an, the Israelites find themselves placed in the position of the Egyptians in Jewish exegetical material, they want for the Calf to be built. As the Israelites look back on the Egyptians as disbelievers who use 'magic', the Qur'an and the community to which it preaches, looks back on the Israelites in a remarkably similar way.

The Golden Calf narrative places Moses in opposition to the Israelites, explicitly in his role to criticise them and implicitly as the true believer in God. Moses' increased anger in the Qur'an, shown by his threats of violence and the redirection of his anger towards the Israelites feeds into both these themes. Through his anger he is clearly opposed to the Israelites actions, his words and actions criticise them as well as placing him in a position of opposition as a true believer. This can also be seen through the redirection of his anger, although Aaron does not escape completely unscathed, as he is still a bad leader. However, he is also a prophet and must be shown as a true believer, like Moses. Aaron no longer builds the Calf and Moses is no longer angry with him, so much as with the Israelites. Moses can also be seen in opposition to the Israelites through their reactions to theophanies. The Israelites demand a theophany and it kills them, yet Moses does not actually see God but more the physical effect of his presence (the crumbling mountain) and faints. This difference between death and fainting is one thing, but what happens afterwards is a stronger sign of the difference between Moses and the Israelites: When the Israelites are revived, they go on to build the Golden Calf, whereas Moses awakes a more ardent believer than he was before. Both have undergone the same process and yet the effect is totally different.

Some of these actions that are used to criticise the Israelites are specifically problematic in the Qur'an due to changing ideas of an appropriate relationship between God and his community. The idea of what is the correct relationship for a prophet and God is also connected to this theme. Through the study of Moses and God's emotional responses, what is appropriate changes greatly throughout the traditions, with them both angered in the Hebrew Bible, Moses becoming much more rational in the Jewish exegetical material and much angrier in the Qur'an. In the Hebrew Bible, God has a much more physical presence in the world. As such his threats to affect the world are more frequent and his anger is more threatening. In the Qur'an, God is almost completely removed from the world and as such his emotional responses appear less powerful. As discussed, there are other reasons for his compassion, however, this difference of God's presence in the world can also be seen at other times. This is particularly clear through the theophanies, which function as a mode of revelation in the Hebrew Bible, become a subject of discomfort for Midrashic writers based on anthropomorphised descriptions of God and become defunct in the Qur'an. As the Qur'an changes the method of revelation so it always happens through an intermediary, God appears to have no presence in the world. This not only changes the relationship between God and people but also that of God and prophet. It is appropriate for Moses to be more angered and act more forcefully

alone when God's presence in the world is less, he has a larger role in the world that people inhabit.

The Golden Calf narratives in the Qur'an have become transmuted from the greatest sin of the Israelites, as they are seen in the Hebrew Bible and Jewish exegetical material.

Instead, the Golden Calf has become one of many sins committed by the Israelites, as part of a litany of evidence that they no longer merit to call themselves the chosen people of God.

IV. Conclusion

In this thesis, I have examined the way the character of Moses is depicted in a number of narratives in the Qur'an. I have examined these narratives with regard to the Qur'an's Late Antique background, comparing them with narratives of very similar form and content in the Hebrew Bible and with Midrashic interpretations of these narratives up until the 7th century. I have found out that prevalent in the Qur'an is a creative process through which narratives are repurposed so that they serve their new setting. I have examined this process by selecting two key narratives as case studies, the encounters of Moses with Pharaoh and the story of the Golden Calf. Both narratives recur several times in different parts of the Qur'an and therefore appear to be quite dominant themes. I have also established that the Qur'an can interpret these texts in very similar ways to Jewish exegetical sources of the time and preceding centuries, although it does so usually with quite different interpretative goals. Within this, it has become clear that the interpretations of certain Jewish sources are often similar to the Qur'an's process, usually those closer in date of composition. With regard to the titular character of this thesis, Moses, I have more clearly defined the purpose of his character within the Qur'anic narrative as a model for Muhammad. I have shown that the tool used to achieve this

effect is the theme of ‘opposition’, which is important in the narrative lives of Moses and Muhammad as depicted both in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur’an.

Instead of focusing on only one narrative or one sūrah, I have examined multiple Qur’anic narratives in different parts of the Qur’an. However, all the narratives have in common the unifying theme of Moses and certain events related to his life. I have demonstrated how the Qur’an uses and re-shapes these narratives. I have used a intertextual methodology to understand these texts, which has provided information not only about the role of these narratives in the Qur’an but also about how this relates to other (earlier) traditions. The Golden Calf narrative in the Qur’an has received more attention as such.⁴⁷⁷ With regard to this narrative, I have commented on pre-existing debates regarding the role of Aaron and the nature of the Calf but have also provided an examination of lesser studied features, such as the theophanies and Moses’ emotional state.⁴⁷⁸

In the section of Moses and the Sorcerers, I have established that although the doctrine of the perfection of prophets was not codified until a much later point, this theme is already operational within the Qur’an. The section of Moses’ white hand shows how the

⁴⁷⁷ As featured in Q 2:51–54, Q 2:92–95, Q 4:153, Q 7:148–154 and Q 20:83–98.

⁴⁷⁸ The theophanies of Q2:55–56, Q 4:153 and Q 7:143. Moses emotional responses in Q2:54, Q 7:150 and Q 20:92–93.

Qur'an repurposed a negative event in the life of a prophet and made it into a positive sign of this prophet's belief in God.⁴⁷⁹ This narrative also shows how a negative event, leprosy, probably obtained through argumentation, is replaced with a visible mark of God's favour. The re-interpretation of narratives that make Moses appear less favourably can also be seen in other parts of the thesis, such as concerning the theophany narratives. When Moses awakes from his theophany, he is an even more fervent believer in God.⁴⁸⁰ This reflects particularly well on Moses as the Israelites, despite being revived from death, go on from their theophany to build the Golden Calf.⁴⁸¹ This makes Moses appear more positive in opposition to the Israelites. The technique of causing Moses to appear stronger in opposition to an opposing force is also used when he encounters Pharaoh. Pharaoh's enhanced villainy through his violent threats makes Moses appear stronger for opposing him and for the opposition to be that much more legitimate and necessary.⁴⁸² Moses' character is also improved by less drastic plot changes, such as his angrier response to the Golden Calf when he comes down from the mountain. This doesn't require a large amount of reinterpretation like some of the other events in Moses' life as it is not correcting a weakness but still makes him appear stronger than in

⁴⁷⁹ Moses 'white' hand appears in Q 7:108, Q 20:22, Q 26:33, Q 27:12, Q 28:32.

⁴⁸⁰ See Q 7:143.

⁴⁸¹ See Q 2:51-56 and Q 4:153.

⁴⁸² Pharaoh makes threats in Q 7:124, Q 20:71 and Q 26:49.

the Hebrew Bible. Moses is not the only person in his narratives affected by this need for perfection, showing that this idea applied to both major and less important prophets.

Moses' brother Aaron, who has only a small role in the Qur'an, is also affected by this need to make prophets into symbols of perfection, shown by his removal as the craftsman of the Golden Calf.⁴⁸³

Turning Moses into a more 'perfect' character is necessary due to his link in an unbroken line of prophecy to Muhammad. Connections made between Moses and Muhammad were present across the "Encounters with Pharaoh" and "Golden Calf" narratives. This modelling technique can be most easily seen in the wider context of these narratives.

The very prevalence of the encounters with Pharaoh scenes in the Qur'an, repeating again and again how Moses met with Pharaoh, shows how important Moses being faced with opposition is to the Qur'an. This is in order to show Moses in a similar position to Muhammad, a true believer who is faced with powerful opposition. The Golden Calf also makes this point about Moses being a true believer, shown through how he faces adversity but it does this with a different source of opposition. In the Golden Calf narrative Moses is opposed by his own people over a matter of belief in God. This narrative links the way in which Moses is made more 'perfect', through making him a

⁴⁸³ Al-Sāmirī makes the Calf in Q 20:85–88.

more outspoken believer, to this theme of opposition and the modelling that occurs with Moses and Muhammad.

I have also questioned the purpose of the Golden Calf narrative in the Qur'an. In academic responses to the Golden Calf story, the question of whether this narrative is intended to be a polemic against the Jewish people of the time often surfaces. The more nuanced response provided in this thesis looks at how the Qur'an understands the Israelite community. As the Qur'an understands the community as monotheists, part of the tradition to which the Qur'an also belongs, it struggles to depict them as idolaters. Although Hawting has shown occasions where more the Qur'an and later tafsīr does criticise the People of the Book for idolatry, the narratives of the Golden Calf are notably free of the specific language of idolatry in the Qur'an.⁴⁸⁴ To distance the Israelites from this possibility, the Qur'an makes what they do so strange and different to any kind of idolatry in the Qur'an, such that it cannot be labelled as that. The magical circumstances of the Calf in the Qur'an do not protect the Israelites from the criticism of Moses, God or the Qur'anic narrator, however, they attempt preserve the reputation of the monotheism from whence the Qur'an comes.⁴⁸⁵ The Israelites are saved from being

⁴⁸⁴ Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry*, 47–57.

⁴⁸⁵ The magical circumstances of the Calf can be seen in Q 7:148, Q 20:88 and Q 96.

idolaters on this occasion but only due to the relationship they possess with the Muslim community.

The Israelites are important in the Qur'an in relation to the nascent Muslim community. Seeing the Israelites as the forebears of the Muslim tradition inspires the way in which the Qur'an treats the Israelites. This can be seen particularly in the Golden Calf narratives. Although they are not idolaters, this does not make the Qur'an see their sin as less severe. The way that the Qur'an often presents the sins of the Israelites, in a list format, does make the sins seem less severe individually as the reader is overwhelmed, not by each individual sin, but by the effect of them being grouped together. The Qur'an criticises the Israelites harshly for the sin of the Golden Calf. This is necessary in order to argue for the need for a new community of God. The Qur'an sees itself in the same monotheistic tradition as the Israelites and therefore, the natural inheritors of their position. The Qur'an does not only use direct criticism to achieve this result, it also uses other techniques. For example, in one instance it refers to God's forgiveness towards the Israelites to highlight the chasm between the latter's disbelief and sinfulness and God's forgiving nature. Clearly, from the perspective of the Qur'an, the problem thus created by the Israelites is of such enormity and cannot be solved but for the introduction of a new, more faithful community.

Across this thesis, the way in which the Qur'an is able to repurpose biblical and extra-biblical texts has been a major focus. The presence of biblical material within the Qur'an has been studied in different ways for decades, often seeking to prove 'influence'. This thesis has conclusively shown that ideas of 'copying' are misled. Rather, the Qur'an emerges from a creative process through which texts are re-interpreted and re-narrated to suit new purposes. The creative process of re-interpretation is particularly clear in cases where the Qur'an does not appear to have any use for the original purpose of a text as it occurs in the Hebrew Bible, for example in the sections on Theophany and the Plagues. Due to the lack of direct revelation and the lessened importance of the Israelites leaving Egypt and journeying to the land of Israel, these narratives could have easily been left out of the Qur'an. However, in both cases the Qur'an is able to take these narratives and re-apply meaning to them retrospectively. Scenes of theophany become a way to criticise the Israelites and in so doing legitimise the Muslims and the Plagues feed into an overarching narrative of God's power and legitimacy from his 'clear signs'.⁴⁸⁶ This kind of creative process can also be seen in more subtle ways, such as in the case of the story of the Submission of the Sorcerers. Here the event does not undergo a total

⁴⁸⁶ Examples of this can be found in Q17:101 and Q 28:36.

reinterpretation but instead is 'Islamised' by changing the way in which the sorcerers submit so that it has a much clearer relevance to the community for which it is intended.

Another process at which the Qur'an excels is the ability to boil down a whole narrative into a phrase or few words that are salient to the message the Qur'an wishes to project.

This can be seen across this thesis, with some of the most prevalent being the ideas of 'clear signs', forgiveness and disbelief and disbelievers themselves. The Qur'an only needs make mention of one of these phrases and it acts as shorthand for an entire narrative and the Qur'anic argument that goes along with it. As has been shown, the Qur'an does not need to tell the full Plagues narrative, as it gained all it needs to from the idea of 'clear signs'. Through these two words, the Qur'an presents ideas of God legitimacy, his power as a creator and the obstinance of those who disbelieve. Another example is from Sūrat Al-Baqarah which couples the ideas of forgiveness and disbelief repeatedly.⁴⁸⁷ Again, through two words, or concepts, as the words used to express them are not always the same, the Qur'an encompasses the whole history of the Israelites and every sin they ever committed. In fact, this phrase encompasses the history of all monotheistic communities that came before the Muslims, the need for a new community and the ever-loving nature of God.

⁴⁸⁷ Such as in Q2:51, 52, 55, 56, 58.

This thesis offers conclusions not only on the narratives themselves but on the relationship of the Qur'an to Jewish exegetical material from the 2nd to 7th centuries.

There are many studies on this topic, often trying to prove the Qur'anic narrative has been taken from a particular collection. This study maintains that this theory is very difficult to substantiate from the textual evidence present. What can be said is that the Qur'an does come up with some ideas that are present or at least very similar to those in some Jewish exegetical material. This does not mean that the early Muslims necessarily had access to any Jewish texts but that people reading or hearing narratives from the Hebrew Bible saw similar issues and contradictions presented within these narratives and sometimes solved them in similar manners. These interpretations cannot be said to be 'copies', as throughout this thesis, it is clear that the Qur'an interprets these narratives from the Hebrew Bible in a way to suit its own narrative. On occasions this is in step with what the Midrashic collections seek to achieve also and thus, they agree.

However, this is rarely due to a shared interpretative problem or goal. Rather, it is merely the case that the interpretation is fluid enough to support both what the Jewish interpreters and the Qur'an wish to present.

The Jewish exegetical texts that have been used most often in this study have been the Talmud Bavli, the Tanhumas Yelammedenu and Buber and the Targum Pseudo-

Jonathan. Despite sharing many very similar interpretations, these texts represent different styles of work. Talmudic Literature is a mixed text but coming from a legal background, the Tanhumas are Aggadic in nature and the Targum is a 'loose' translation of the Hebrew Bible itself. Aside from differences in purpose and structure, all of these texts are usually dated from the fourth to sixth centuries CE, placing them directly before the emergence of Islam and the compilation of the Qur'an. Depending on how early one dates these texts, they could have been anywhere from three hundred to less than a hundred years old at the time of the rise of Islam. It is possible that these texts and their interpretations were in circulation as they were more current and the writers of the Qur'an were aware of some of these interpretations. However, as previously mentioned, this is almost impossible to substantiate. Another possibility is that both the Qur'an and the Jewish texts of this period are trying to legitimise and defend themselves against external pressure. The Qur'an, representing a new faith, clearly had to face opposition. Judaism, although it was established, was by this point in contact with many other faiths, some of whom opposed it. As such, the interpretations that the Qur'an and the Jewish exegetical traditions of this period make, although they have different individual goals, can be said to come from a place of defending a faith and making it look positive. With regard to midrashic collections, this tendency was particularly clear when it came to the Golden Calf story, in which the sin was accepted and even enhanced

in Tannaitic interpretations, while interpretations became very defensive and apologetic in this later period.

It is my hope that this thesis will add to research being conducted about the Qur'an and its Late Antique background, studies into biblical characters and the narratives in which they occur in the Qur'an.

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