

The Qur'ān and Kerygma: Biblical Receptions of the Muslim Scripture across a Millennium

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The relationship between the Bible and the Qur'an is usually considered in a one-dimensional manner. Virtually all studies have tended to read the Islamic text in light of the biblical one, with particular interest in the possible ways the Bible might have left its mark on the Qur'an. The presence of shared characters and traditions in both scriptures perhaps makes such an approach inevitable, and the Bible's chronological primacy as the earlier of the two works has encouraged a one-way understanding of their connection. According to this thinking, because the Bible predates the Qur'an and the two share certain features, any influence between them could have gone in only a single direction—from the earlier biblical text to the later Qur'anic one. Previous scholarship in this area tended to posit the Qur'an's direct dependence on the Bible. Although that mindset has persisted in some quarters, more recent work often offers a more nuanced perspective that highlights the Islamic text's creative reimagining and interpretation of the individuals and stories found in the Qur'an and the Bible.

But this is not the only way to explore how the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have interacted with and influenced one another. In fact, the dominance of this approach has actually been harmful because it has impeded our ability to appreciate the complexity and intricacy of the relationship between the Bible and the Qur'an. This is so because we have tended to focus on only the earliest stage of that relationship—the point at which the Islamic text emerged and could be compared with the biblical text. In other words, scholars have usually explored the link between the Qur'an and the Bible by studying how they “got together” and became a couple when the Qur'an appeared on the scene. This freezes the relationship at a particular moment in time while downplaying the fact that it has continued on into the present day. The result is similar to what would happen if you were to limit your understanding of your parents' relationship to everything up to and including your birth but not consider anything that happened after that point. You would have an incomplete and distorted sense of their time together that would not include what took place after your arrival.

In *The Qur'an and Kerygma* Jeffrey Einboden explores what happened after the Qur'an's arrival. He attempts to fill in the rest of the story by shifting the field of vision one hundred and eighty degrees in order to shine the light on some fascinating moments in the ongoing relationship between the Bible and the Qur'an. In the process, he demonstrates the “Qur'an's centrality to the Bible's literary afterlives” (2) through its role in various biblical translations, commentaries, and compositions. Images and vocabulary from the Qur'an have sometimes been employed by non-Muslim exegetes and authors engaged in biblical scholarship, and these Islamic idioms demonstrate how the Qur'an has influenced the ways some people have read the Bible. The six chapters of the book are arranged chronologically and cover a span of eleven centuries (approximately the years 880 to 1980), with each treating one figure or more who drew upon the language of Islam to present or understand the Bible.

Chapter 1 (“From al-Fātiḥa to Alleluja: The Qur'anic Psalter of Ḥafṣ al-Qūṭī”) discusses an early example of Christian Arab literature informed by qur'anic vocabulary in the work of a late ninth-century Andalusian from Cordoba. Al-Qūṭī identifies the biblical book of Psalms by the Islamic term *zabūr* rather than its Jewish or Christian counterparts, and he adopts similar Muslim terminology as he refers to each psalm as a *sūra* and each biblical verse as an *āya*. He ends the introduction to his translation with the words

“Praise to God, Lord of the universe,” which is found in the opening chapter of the Qur’an, and his translation of Psalms is interspersed throughout with phrases found in Islamic scripture. Al-Qūṭī refers to both God (“the merciful and compassionate”) and hell (*saqar*) in ways that are also Qur’anic. In Psalm 90, the Messiah is threatened by Iblis, an Islamic designation for Satan, and in al-Qūṭī’s commentary Jesus is identified as “the Messiah, son of Mary,” a frequent designation for him in the Qur’an. The psalmist refers to himself as *musallam* (saved), which is identical to the word *muslim* in their Arabic forms, and his enemies are described with a term commonly used in the Qur’an for unbelievers (*kuffār*). Echoes of Islam’s ninety-nine names of God are present in al-Qūṭī’s rendering of Psalms, and in his discussion of how to interpret the text he commonly makes use of Islamic terminology related to interpretation of the Qur’an like *ta’wīl*, *bāṭin*, and *zāhir*. Some connections al-Qūṭī attempts to draw between the Psalms and the Islam are inaccurate or wrong, as when he claims the word “Hallelujah” (Hebrew for “praise God”) has the same meaning as the phrase in the Muslim creed “there is no god but God.”

The poetry of a Palestinian Orthodox bishop born around 940 is the subject of chapter 2 (“‘Verily, Have I found Allah Oft-returning’: The Qur’anic Poetics of Sulaymān al-Ghazzī”). Like al-Qūṭī, al-Ghazzī uses imagery and expressions from the Qur’an as he treats biblical themes and personages. In one poem, he interprets the three Arabic letters that form the word “Allah” in trinitarian terms. In another he mentions a number of the Islamic ninety-nine names of God, including some that are rare in the Qur’an. Elsewhere he uses imagery from the Qur’an to describe heaven in Islamic terms, but he rejects certain features of the Muslim afterlife like the *houris* who are often interpreted as providing sexual favors to the inhabitants of paradise. Given his role as a bishop, it is not surprising that some of al-Ghazzī’s most interesting examples of his use of the Qur’an and Islamic imagery relate to the New Testament. Referring to supernatural beings cited in Islamic scripture that have no role in the biblical literature, he claims that Mary Magdalene was possessed by jinn and he describes Jesus as “Lord of humans and jinn.” Jesus is also referred to as “quickener of the dead,” which is almost identical to God’s title in Q. 30:50. Through his resurrection, according to al-Ghazzī, Jesus defeated Iblis rather than Satan. When Lazarus was raised from the dead (an episode recounted in the eleventh chapter of the Gospel of John), he uttered the Arabic expression *labbayk* (“Here I am!”) that is recited by Muslims during the pilgrimage. The fact that all of

these Qur'an-related ideas and expressions are found in the writings of a leader of the Christian community makes them all the more remarkable.

A similar use of Qur'an-inflected language can be seen in some of the first historiographies penned by Arab Christians, a topic treated in the third chapter ("The Religion of the Messiah in Multitudes': Echoes of the Qur'an across Christian Schisms"). Tensions between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Christian leaders, specifically in Egypt, form the background to this discussion. Sa'īd Ibn Baṭrīq (d. 940) was one of the latter group, and in his universal history of the world titled "String of Pearls" he sometimes introduces Islamic terminology to disparage the Coptic Orthodox Church. For example, he writes of an Orthodox bishop who violated the *sharī'a*. In his account of the garden story, Ibn Baṭrīq uses some qur'anic terminology, including a description of Satan whispering to Eve just as he does to Adam in the Qur'an (20:120). Some decades later, the Coptic bishop Ibn al-Muqaffa' responded to Ibn Baṭrīq and criticized non-Orthodox Christianity through Qur'an-related language when he wrote a treatise that located the origin of religious schisms in Iblis' refusal to bow down to Adam. Ibn al-Muqaffa' also used the Islamic title *al-rahmān* to refer to God. Elsewhere, he describes the Roman emperors as *kuffār* who persecuted faithful Christians who followed a path that was *mustaqīm*, an adjective used in the Qur'an to describe the way of Islam. In addition, he makes use of qur'anic vocabulary to describe Christians (*naṣārā*) and early church leaders (*hawāriyyūn*), terms that are also found in the writings of Ibn Baṭrīq. Einboden concludes his discussion with a consideration of how Ibn Baṭrīq's writings were later cited in England and eventually made their way to the American colonies, where they were used for political and religious purposes. A work containing qur'anic language that began as a response to Christian schisms in Egypt crossed the Atlantic centuries later to inspire early colonial efforts to move toward republicanism.

Chapter 4 ("Adheres to the Arabic Idiom': Ludovico Marracci's Qur'anic Vulgates") considers a sixteenth-century figure who served as Pope Innocent XI's personal confessor. Toward the end of his life Ludovico Marracci (d. 1700) produced an Arabic/Latin Qur'an titled *Alcorani Textus Universus*, which appeared in 1698 and contains paratextual comments that criticize Islam and defend Catholicism. Nearly thirty years earlier, Marracci wrote the introduction to an Arabic translation of the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible that was the work of the Vatican's Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. This chapter focuses on that earlier work, in which Marracci made numerous references to the Qur'an and Islam both

in the introduction and by virtue of his involvement in the translation. He begins his introduction with the words “Blessed by Allah, the creator of the earth and heaven,” which strongly echo the first verse of the Qur’an’s thirty-fifth chapter. Its opening section concludes with the phrase *amma ba’d* (“concerning what follows”), which is commonly used in Islamic addresses and sermons. Einboden’s treatment of the biblical text is limited to how the translation renders the book of Psalms. The evildoers in Psalm 1 are identified as hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*), a standard term in the Qur’an for enemies, even though the Hebrew text does not mention hypocrisy. The biblical request to “teach me your way, O Lord” in Ps 86:11 is translated as “guide me, O Lord, to Thy path,” which has a strong resemblance to Q 1:6. Some of the Islamic names of God appear throughout the Psalter, as in Ps 24:8 where six are strung together in succession. Islamic terminology like *dhikr*, *ḥāfiẓ*, and *sharī’a* is found in Psalm 119. The image of God sitting on a throne in Ps 9:4 has an intriguing connection with Q 10:3, particularly since the same Arabic verb is used in both. The command to kneel and bow down before God in Ps 95:6 is translated with words from the Arabic roots *raka’a* and *sajada* that are associated with Islamic prayer. A minor problem throughout this chapter, particularly when lengthier Psalms like 119 are involved, is that Einboden does not always cite the specific biblical verse being discussed.

The first Hebrew translation of the Qur’an, titled *al-Qōrān ō ha-Miqrā* and published by Tzvi Chaim “Hermann” Reckendorf in 1857, is the subject of the fifth chapter (“By Origin and Language An Hebrew’: The Genesis of a Judaic Qur’ān”). An interesting feature of this version is that it is sometimes more a transliteration than a translation because of the close relationship between Arabic and Hebrew as Semitic languages. It appears that Reckendorf made certain translational decisions in order to make the Qur’an’s connection to the biblical text more explicit or to put it more in line with Jewish beliefs. The last verse of the opening chapter of the Qur’an contains a word that refers to those who have angered God, but the Hebrew gives the meaning “those who have provoked you to anger.” The likely reason for this change was to echo a biblical phrase in 1 Kgs 14:15 and therefore introduce a Hebrew Bible criticism of the Israelites into the Islamic text. In its version of Q 4:164-165 the Hebrew translation leaves out a reference to other prophets and messengers from outside the Jewish tradition and the book of Psalms is described as the “songs of Israel,” a phrase also found in 2 Sam 23:1. The title of chapter 72 in the Qur’an is changed from “Jinn” to

“Devils,” thereby removing any possible positive qualities the Islamic invisible creatures might possess. The Hebrew translation has a footnote after the reference to Jesus’ mother as “sister of Aaron” in Q 19:30. Mary’s name is virtually the same in both Arabic and Hebrew, and Reckendorf adds a pejorative comment in which he says some Muslim commentators have been foolish enough to believe that Jesus’ mother and Aaron’s (and Moses’) sister were the same person. The translation introduces a change to Jesus’ name by writing it as *Yeshū* in Hebrew, which removes its usual meaning of “God saves.” By doing this, Reckendorf follows the lead of some early rabbis who spelled Jesus’ name the same way in order to subtly resist Christian beliefs about him.

The concluding chapter (“A ‘Totally Typological’ Christian Qur’an: Northrop Frye’s Triple Mirror”) discusses the twentieth-century Canadian literary scholar’s engagement with Islamic scripture. Expanding on his idea of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament as forming a double mirror, Frye considered the Qur’an to be a “newer testament” that creates a triple mirror in which the biblical and Islamic canons might be viewed together. Einboden draws upon notes Frye wrote in his personal copy of the Qur’an and in his journals to illustrate this development in his thinking. Frye believed that the Islamic text challenges the Christian mythos through its synchronic presentation of biblical characters whereby Mary is simultaneously the mother of Jesus and the sister of Moses, and Haman, who appears only in the late biblical book of Esther, is also a contemporary of Pharaoh. Drawing on the imagery in Q 16:64-65, which describes divine revelation as water God sends to earth to give life, Frye imagines the text of the Qur’an as rain descending from the sky where it does not matter if two drops are similar to one another or not. For Frye, the multiple versions of Qur’an stories and their similarities to and differences from their biblical counterparts are due to the text’s nature as an orally composed book that descends on a variety of circumstances and contexts. According to Einboden, Frye “christens” the Qur’an so that it becomes the realization or fulfillment of Christian scripture. This can be seen, for example, in his suggestion that the sign sent by God in Q 3:13 to assist the Muslim army was anticipated by Jesus’ claim in Mt 26:53 that God could send legions of angels. In this way, the New Testament becomes an older testament in relation to the Qur’an.

The above summary contains just a sampling of the many astute observations Einboden makes in each chapter. His analysis of the texts he examines is thorough and insightful, and he has a fine eye for Qur’anic allusions

and echoes. In the process, he convincingly demonstrates that the authors he discusses have brought the Qur'an into their Bible-related work. One issue he might have devoted some more attention to is why they did this. Einboden occasionally offers some thoughts on a particular author's motivation to cite or somehow reference Islamic scripture, but further information or speculation on this matter would have been illuminating.

These six snapshots of various moments in the relationship between the Bible and the Qur'an provide an important corrective in that they remind us that, like all relationships, this one has been a two-way street. One direction of that road, the one that considers the Bible's possible influence on the Islamic text, has been well traveled. Einboden is to be commended and thanked for pointing us in the opposite direction so we can better appreciate the Qur'an's role in shaping how the biblical literature has been presented and understood. He is an able and informative tour guide on this fascinating journey.

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