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ABRAHAM'S JOURNEY TO MECCA IN ISLAMIC EXEGESIS: A FORM-CRITICAL STUDY OF A TRADITION

The sharing of a parallel textual tradition between Judaism and Christianity in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament ensures a degree of stability between the traditions' portrayals of biblical figures, despite the fact that significant differences in exegesis certainly occur between them. But for Jewish or Christian readers examining the qur'anic portrayals of figures found both in the Bible and the Qur'an, the problem of distinct religious traditions describing the same person in very different terms becomes immediately apparent. As might be expected, the scriptural variance carries over into the traditional interpretive literature of the religious traditions as well.

In the case of the Abraham story, for example, Islamic interpretive literature traces his journies to Haran, the land of Canaan, Egypt and back again to Canaan in a manner that parallels the basic route and chronology of the biblical story found in Genesis. A break with biblical history and geography is made, however, when Abraham and his progeny are subsequently established by Islamic sources in the Arabian city of Mecca. Abraham's prayer in Qur'an 14:37 serves as a proof text in the exegetical literature for his Meccan experience: "OUR LORD! I HAVE MADE SOME OF MY OFFSPRING DWELL IN AN UNCULTIVATED WADI BY YOUR SACRED HOUSE, IN ORDER O LORD, THAT THEY MAY ESTABLISH REGULAR PRAYER." Although not plentiful, other scriptural refe-

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rences such as Qur'an 2:125-127, 3:97, and 22:26 place Abraham in a sacred location presumed to be the holy city of Mecca.

The great nineteenth and early 20th Century Orientalists tended to attribute the phenomenon of variant traditions between Islam and its Jewish and Christian religious cousins to errors among the early Muslims in their borrowing of Jewish or Christian religious lore. The general assumption was that the pre-Islamic Arabs were unfamiliar with biblical legends and had no indigenous biblically-oriented traditions of their own. When the first Muslims (including Muhammad) sought to place their new religion among the established monotheistic traditions, therefore, they had little choice but to seek out and learn about monotheism and biblical lore from their more knowledgable neighbors: Christians and Jews. According to this approach, the early Muslims unfortunately could not or would not learn the material accurately. The result: Islam.

Not only did many of the great Orientalists have difficulty envisaging the idea of a unique Arabian monotheism, they also had difficulty sharing their pride of monotheistic origins with their sister religionists. Jews tended to attribute Islamic parallels of biblical traditions only to Jewish tradition. (1) Christians generally attributed them only to Christianity. (2) Within the last few decades, however, a greater self-conscious awareness of natural bias in approaches to text and to religious studies has enabled scholars to approach the issue of differing traditions in a somewhat more objective manner. (3) A less religiocentric approach might suggest that early Islam may have been more indebted to local tradition made up of lore deriving from both biblically-influenced and independent indigenous Arab sources (most likely oral), than to the traditions of any single religious community. (4)

(1) Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (1835, and translated into English as *Judaism and Islam* (Madras, 1898); Charles C. Torrey, *The Jewish Foundation of Islam* (New York: Bloch, 1933), etc.

(2) Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment* (London, 1926); W. Ahrends, *Muhammad als Religionsstifter* (Leipzig, 1935), etc.

(3) The late Fazlur Rahman served as a powerful counterweight to the natural biases of many scholars of Islam. Marilyn R. Waldman has currently been at the forefront in calling attention to the problem in relation to the study of Islamic texts (See, for example, her "New Approaches to 'Biblical' Material in the Qur'ān", in William Brinner and Stephen Ricks (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions* [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986]).

(4) Cf. Norman Stillman, "The Story of Cain and Abel in the Qur'ān and in the Muslim Commentators: Some Observations," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 (1974):

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Unfortunately, few early sources are available to provide information regarding the religious life of pre-Islamic Arabia during the century or two prior to the birth of the Prophet Muhammad. Those which do, including such important works as those of Hisham b. Muhammad al-Kalbi, were compiled some five generations after the beginning of Islam and cannot be relied upon for objective and reliable reporting. (5) Muslim historiography stressed the absolute and revolutionary changes brought about by Islam. The hazy period which preceeded Islam is referred to as the "period of ignorance," and was considered a time of fear and barbarism dominated by abhorent pagan religious practices until Muhammad brought order and religious truth to the erring indigenous peoples of the Arabian Peninsula. It would hardly be consistent with this dichotomy to report evidence supporting the existence of indigenous forms of pre-Islamic Arabian monotheism or hybrid religious expressions incorporating elements of Jewish or Christian along with native Arabian Ideas. The literary and historical evidence at our disposal, however, does indeed suggest the possible existence of these very phenomena.

The historical evidence is clear that in the mountanous west-central Arabian highlands known as the Hijaz (in which Mecca is located) Jews lived together with indegenous Arabian groups in major settlements such as Yathrib (Medina), Khaybar, and al-Ta'if long before the birth of Muhammad. (6) These Jews spoke Arabic and were, as best we can tell, deeply integrated into the language and culture if not the religious outlook of the non-Jewish Arab population. Fewer Christians appear to have lived in the immediate area, though they regularly traded with the population of the Hijaz. (7) Jewish, Christian, and other Arabs engaged in plenty of

p. 239. Julian Oberman, "Islamic Origins: A Study in Background and Foundation," in Nabih Amin Faris, ed., *The Arab Heritage* (New York, 1963): pp. 59-60; and H. Hirshberg, "Stories of the Torah in Ancient Arabia" (Hebrew), *Sinai* 18 (1946): pp. 92-94. See also Jacques Waardenburg's analysis in his "Towards a Periodization of Earliest Islam According to its Relation with other Religions," in *Proceedings of the Ninth Congress of the Union Europene Des Arabisants Et Islamisants 1978* ed. by R. Peters (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1981) pp. 304-326.

(5) See EI (1st Ed.) II, 689; and Jacob Lassner, *Islamic Revolution and Historical Memory: An Inquiry into the Art of 'Abbasid Apologetics* (American Oriental Society Series Volume 66, 1986).

(6) The most recent study of this topic is Gordon Newby's *A History of the Jews of Arabia: From Ancient Times to their Eclipse Under Islam* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1988).

(7) See J. Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic*

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social intercourse in day-to-day activities as well as during the annual fairs; (8) the various groups could not have avoided hearing each other's stories and tales during the course of daily life. (9)

There is no reason to preclude the possibility of non-orthodox Jews and Christians entering the Hijaz and exerting an influence upon the local lore as well. Much of Arabia was outside the control of Byzantium or Persia and was therefore a logical location for heterodox groups to seek a haven from the pressures and persecutions of either empire. (10) As the various groups living in the Arabian Hijaz interacted with one another over the decades or centuries with the concomitant accretion and attrition of membership between them, new groups or offshoots of established groups might naturally form and develop hybrid ideas and traditions. Support for this may be found in the existence of a number of well-known Arabs living before and during the lifetime of Muhammad who are considered to have been monotheists in their religious orientation but not adherents of Judaism or Christianity. Such figures as Zayd b. 'Amr, Umayyah b. Abi al-Salt, Waraqah b. Nawfal, and Maslama (Musaylima) may have represented early syntheses of Jewish and/or Christian and indigenous pagan Arab religious tradition. (11)

In the overwhelmingly oral culture of the pre-Islamic Hijaz (12) and with Jewish and Christian groups living and trading among the indigenous Arab population there, one would logically assume biblically-based traditions to have existed alongside traditions native to the Arabian Peninsula. A literary analysis of a broad collection of early Islamic oral traditions subsequently transcribed appears to confirm this, and suggests further that Islamic traditional lore treating the legend of Abraham's transfer from the Land of

Times (London and New York: Librairie du Liban, 1979), pp. 243-286, especially pp. 247-248.

(8) Michel Hayek, *Le Mystère d'Ismaël* (Paris: Mame, 1964) pp. 105-106.

(9) Newby, *History* pp. 49-53.

(10) See Hamilton A. R. Gibb, "Pre-Islamic Monotheism in Arabia," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962) p. 271; Trimingham, p. 68; Newby, p. 125, n. 5.

(11) EI (1st Ed.) III, 745-6; IV, 997, 1121-1122, 1194; Hamilton A. R. Gibb, "Pre-Islamic Monotheism in Arabia," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962) pp. 269-280; M. J. Kister, "Labbayka, Allahumma, Labbayka...: On a Monotheistic Aspect of a Jahiliyya Practice," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* II (1980), Jerusalem: Hebrew University, pp. 33-57; Trimmingham, pp. 249, 261-267.

(12) See Michael Swettler (*The Oral Tradition of Classical Arabic Poetry* [Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1978]) and J. Monroe, "Oral Composition in Pre-Islamic Poetry," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 3 [1972], pp. 1-53).

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Israel to Mecca is made up largely of composite traditions deriving from three major sources. Two represent pre-Islamic traditions: one made up of biblically grounded legends which evolved and took on characteristics of native Arabian lore as they were brought by Jews and Christians into the Arabian Peninsula, and the other consisting largely of native Arabian legends exhibiting a minimal biblical influence.[13]. The third source represents a layer that entered into some of the older legends during the early Islamic period. This Islamic layer reflects both the influence of Islam upon older traditions and an attempt to render familiar pre-Islamic legends acceptable to newer Islamic worldviews.[14]

Hundreds of individual references commenting upon Abraham's journeys to Mecca may be found in a broad field of Islamic sources, many of which include full or partial narrative depictions of the journeys. A large sample of these narratives were collected for study and then classfied into groups based on similarities in plot, structure, literary motifs, language, and characters. Definite patterns immediately emerged from the depictions of his initial journey to Mecca, and it soon became evident that nearly every individual rendition or telling of the story belonged to one of only a few categories of narratives. Each category, in turn, tended to be attributed to a single early Muslim traditionist. Before examining the source material, however, a few words must be said about the nature of early Islamic tradition literature and the problem of sources and attribution.

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Various genres of Islamic religious literature rely for their contents on (originally oral) traditions passed between religious scholars over the generations, and many of these traditions *(ahadith)* supply information about characters found both in the Bible and the Qur'an. This is particularly the case in the formal Qur'an commentaries *(Tafsir)*, the universal histories which generally begin with Creation and include the history of the biblical world *(Ta'rikh)*, and the hagiographic collections of stories about charac-

(13) See Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands: The Evolution of the Abraham-Ishmael Legends in Islamic Exegesis* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990): 3-21.

(14) The Islamic insertions may have been a conscious effort by an editor, but more likely evolved naturally while the legends were being rendered orally (See Albert Lord, *Singer of Tales* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960]).

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ters set in the biblical period *(Qisas al-anibya')*.(15) Within these genres of Islamic religious literature as well as the formal Prophetic Literature known as the *Hadith* which collects, organizes and evaluates hundreds of thousands of Islamic traditions, each individual unit of tradition is ideal-typically structured in the same manner. It is made up of its informative statement or narrative section *(matn)*, usually prefaced with a chain of authentication *(isnad)* in the form of a list of names separated by connectives signifying who originated the statement and to whom it was passed until it arrived in the written source.(16) Because of the specific nature of oral tradition literature and the particular historical problems that arose in the process of collecting and authenticating it in the early Islamic period, the more popular or more acceptable statements tended to be repeated among the sources while those less popular or considered suspect for whatever reason were not passed on as often. The less popular traditions subsequently appear less frequently or not at all among later Islamic works.

Whether or not these traditions can be relied upon as accurate or as authentic or undistorted utterences of those who are attributed as their sources continues to be a subject of great debate among scholars of Islam.(17) The question of authenticity is irrelevant, however, for this study of the Abraham legend. We ask not who must be credited with first articulating any specific tradition, but rather, what is the literary (intertextual) history, whether oral or written, of the narratives describing Abraham's journey to Mecca.

Material for this study is made up of narratives collected from a sample of well-known and published Islamic sources spanning from the 9th to the 15th Centuries.(18) Despite the striking parallels

(15) These include extra-biblical characters as well, such as the Arabian prophets Hud, Salih, and even Alexander the Great, but they are set into a context assumed to have been biblical. See Wheeler Thackston, Jr. (transl.), The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisa'*i* (Boston: Twayne, 1978).

(16) Cf. Mishna *Avot* 1:1.

(17) The outline of this debate is spelled out succinctly by Fred Donner in his introduction to A. A. Duri's *The Rise of Historical Writing Among the Arabs* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1983).

(18) Abu Adballah Muhammad Ibn Sa'd (d. 845), *Al-Tabaqat al-kabir* 9 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-Sadr, 1380/1970).

Ahmad Ibn Hanbal (d. 856), *Al-musnad* (Beirut, 1389/1969).

Muhammad b. Abdallah b. Ahmad al-Azraqi (d. 858), *Akhbar Makka* ed. F. Wustenfeld as *Chroniken der Stadt Mecca* 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1858); reprint ed., *Akhbar makka al-musharrifa* (Beirut, n.d.).

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and similarities these Islamic legends about Abraham share with traditions deriving from a biblicist (19) environment, the style and content of the Islamic versions suggest a distinct quality that sets them apart from Jewish and Christian legends. The old assumption of attributing these traditions to mistakes in the transmission of Jewish or Christian sources appears today to be inaccurate and too simplistic. A close scrutiny of the field of Islamic sources treating Abraham's connection to Mecca suggests a rather more complicated literary history.

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Abu Abdallah Muhammad b. Isma'il al-Bukhari (d. 870), *Al-jami' al-sahih* (Lahore, 1979).

Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (d. 923), *Ta'rikh al-rusul wal-muluk (History)* ed. M. J. De Goeje as *Annales* (Leiden: Brill, 1964); and al-Tabari, *Jami' al-bayan 'an ta'wil ay al-qur'an* 30 volumes in 15 (Beirut: Dar al-fikr, 1405/1984, *Commentary*).

Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Ibrahim al-Tha'labi (d. 1035), *'Ara'is al-majalis* (Cairo: Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi, 1374/1954).

Radi al-Din al-Fadl b. al-Hasan Amin al-Din al-Tabarsi (d. 1153), *Majma' al-bayan fi 'ulum al-Qur'an* 30 parts in 6 volumes [Beirut: Dar al-Maktaba, n.d.].

'Izz al-Din Abu al-Hasan Ali Ibn al-Athir (d. 1233), *Al-kamil fi al-ta'rikh* 5 vols. (Beirut: Dar al-sadr liltiba'ati wal-nashir, 1385/1965.

'Imad al-Din Isma'il b. 'Umar Ibn Kathir (1373), *Tafsir al-qur'an al-'azim* (Commentary) 4 vols. (Cairo: 'Isa al-Babi al-Halabi, n.d.); and Ibn Kathir, *Qisas al-Anbiya'* (Which represents the first two volumes of his history) Beirut 1402/1982).

(19) One is immediately confronted with a problem of terminology when referring to the environments in which legends based directly or indirectly on the Bible may have developed and grown. The term "biblical" refers only to the Bible itself, and excludes the massive corpus of non-canonical or post-biblical literature based upon biblical themes. We know that various Jewish and Christian groups produced their own Bible exegesis through the medium of the story or legend. The legends and *peshers* of the Qumran community confirm the probability that most if not all religious groups considering the Hebrew Bible sacred scripture developed a corpus of biblically based legends. Jews and Christians each had their own legends, and they clearly borrowed aspects of each others' traditions as well. Yet despite the commonalities, each community, whether Jewish or Christian, orthodox or heterodox, professed differing ideologies that eventuated in their separation into distinct groups that remained religiously separate. The popular term, "Judeo-Christian", which seems at first sight to be a logical term for denoting an environment of shared Scripture, actually describes only the Christian view of the culmination of ideas based upon Jewish ("Old Testament") roots, does not adequately note the profound differences between Judaism and Christianity, and fails to account for what was eventually determined to be non-orthodox Jewish or Christian ideas. For lack of a better term describing an environment of shared biblical scripture (and even a limited sharing of scripturally-based traditions) among groups holding distinct religious ideologies, we refer to it as a "biblicist" milieu.

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While some Qur'anic texts such as Suras 11:69-76 and 15:51-60 refer to Abraham in Syria [20] and others such as 2:125-127, 3:97, 14:37 and 22:26 refer to him in Mecca, the Qur'an itself does not explain how he made the transition. Muslim exegetes attempting to understand how that transition was made found traditions that filled the gap in different ways. Among the sources treating the qur'anic Abraham narratives, three coherent versions of the story depicting Abraham's move to Mecca can be found. Each version is told on the authority of a different respected early traditionist: Ali b. Abi Talib (d. 661), Mujahid b. Jahr al-Makhzumi (d. 722), and Abdallah Ibn Abbas (d. 687). [21]

The Ali Version

According to the version attributed to Ali b. Abi Talib, Abraham journied to Mecca in reponse to God's command to establish the sacred Ka'ba there. Seventeen renditions of this version are attributed to Ali, and a close examination reveals three co-variants of a common legend. Each co-variant notes that Abraham received supernatural assistance in locating the site of the Ka'ba. Two report that a supernatural being called the *Sakina* acted as his guide, [22] while the third describes essentially the same being without referring to it as such.

(20) Syria is the common term among the Islamic sources for what Jewish sources consider the Land of Israel.

(21) While Islam does indeed consider these three early traditionists to be the sources for these traditions, much of modern western scholarship doubts the veracity of the claims. For recent works on this subject, see John Wansbrough's, *Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Oxford, 1977) and *The Sectarian Milieu* (Oxford, 1978); and G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: Studies in Chronology, Provenance and Authorship of Early Hadith* (Cambridge, 1983). Nearly 80% of the narratives located in our sample represent renditions of one of these three versions. Whether or not they were first articulated in Islamic tradition by the first authorities named in their chains of authentication, the narratives remain consistent within each category. Even if Ibn Abbas was not the true source for the version attributed to him, a consistent and coherent "Ibn Abbas" version of Abraham's journey to Mecca may nevertheless be found throughout the sources.

(22) The name and image evolved from the rabbinic *Shekhina* or "Divine Presence," which is derived from the Hebrew root *sh-k-n*: to dwell or abide (God's dwelling presence). The Hebrew meaning merged with the pure Arabic root *s-k-n* which denotes quiet rest or tranquility (compare Qur'an 2:48 with Q. 9:26, 40; Q. 48:4, etc.), but note the secondary Arabic meaning also of *s-k-n*: to abide in or inhabit a place. The original rabbinic notion dropped out but its supernatural quality was retained as it described a benevolent *jinn* or supernatural being. In all

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In the most popular co-variant, God commands Abraham to build Him a house, but Abraham is very uneasy because he does not know where to build it.(23) To remedy this, God sends him the *Sakina*, a gale wind with two heads which leads him to Mecca. When they arrive in the proper place, the *Sakina* coils up on the site of the Ka'ba. God then tells Abraham to build where the *Sakina* came to rest.(24)

The second group attributed to Ali centers around a comparison of the way the *Sakina* showed Abraham the location of the House to the way in which a spider marks out its home; namely, by marking its perimeter as would a spider first thread as single strand around the perimeter of its web before filling it in.(25) Abraham is depicted here as coming to Mecca from Armenia.(26)

The third and smallest group of renditions attributed to Ali features a supernatural cloud which floats over the site of the Ka'ba in order to mark the location for Abraham.(27) As in the others, God commands Abraham to build the Ka'ba. But in this group of traditions, Abraham brings Hagar and the boy Ishmael along with him. When they reach Mecca, Abraham sees a cloud over the site of the Ka'ba. It speaks to Abraham and tells him to build God's

our sources, the *Sakina* acts as a kind of divinely commissioned guide for Abraham (cf. Goldziher, *"La Notion De La Sakina Chez Les Mohametans"* in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* XXVII [1893]: pp. 296-308. Cf. A. J. Wensinck, "The Ideas of the Western Semites Concerning the Navel of the Earth", in *Studies of A. J. Wensinck* [New York, 1978]: pp. 60-65).

(23) Al-Azraqi I, 28-9; al-Tabari *(History)* I, 275; al-Tabari *(Commentary)* I, 551, *ibid., ibid.* (the same story is given here with three different chains of authentication); al-Tha'labi pp. 87-8; Ibn Kathir I, 178.

(24) A slightly different rendition found in al-Tabari's *History* (I:277) depicts God commanding Abraham to call the people to make the pilgrimage as well as build the Ka'ba. Abraham brings Hagar and Ishmael with him as he is guided by the *Sakina* "a wind with a tongue for speaking". When it arrived at the site of the Ka'ba, it circled around it and said, "Build upon me! Build upon me!".

(25) Al-Azraqi I, 27, 29; al-Tabari *Commentary* I, 548-9; Ibn Kathir *Commentary* I, 178.

(26) One rendition (al-Azraqi I, 27) continues with an accounting of how a cloud floated over the exact site of the Ka'ba and gave Abraham instructions about how to build God's House, a motif found also in the third group of Alid renditions discussed below.

Three of the four renditions have an angel join him (one refers to him as Gabriel) along with a special bird *(surad)* native to the Najd region of the Arabian Peninsula.

(27) Al-Tabari *Commentary* I, 551, *History* 275-6; Ibn Kathir *Commentary* I, 178). Incomplete references to this tradition can also be found in Ibn al-Athir I, 106 and al-Azraqi I, 27.

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House exactly on the line that its shadow makes on the ground. After Abraham finishes and leaves to return to Syria, Hagar asks him to whom he is entrusting her an Ishmael. He answers, "To God", which Hagar accepts by saying, "He will not allow us to perish".

Some time after Abraham leaves, Ishmael becomes extremely thirsty. Hagar climbs the nearby hill, *al-Safa* to look for water but sees nothing. She then moves across to the opposite hill, *al-Marwa* but still sees nothing. She returns to *al-Safa* and moves back and forth between the two hills seven times, finally addressing her little son: "O Ishmael, die where I will not see you." When she comes back to him, he is scratching up the ground with his foot from thirst. The angel Gabriel then appears and says, "Who are you?" She answers, "I am Hagar, the mother of the son of Abraham." Gabriel asks, "To whom are you two entrusted?" She answers, "We are entrusted to God", which satisfies the angel. Then the boy scratches up the ground with his finger, and out flows the well of Zamzam. (28)

The sequence with Ishmael's thirst and Hagar's desperate search for water directly parallels the ritual running *(Sa'y)* between Safa and Marwa making up a part of the Pilgrimage ritual *(Hajj)* in Mecca during both pre-Islamic and Islamic times. (29) Hagar's running between the hills in search of water for her son Ishmael overlays a monotheistic origin for an earlier pagan practice later adopted and reinterpreted by Islam.

This same motif also parallels the biblical depiction of Hagar's search for water for her dying son in Genesis 21:14-21. This is the only direct parallel between the Ali version and the Bible, however, and occurs in only three of the 17 renditions attributed to Ali. In fact, only five mention Hagar and Ishmael at all, and one

(28) This is the Meccan well which plays an important part in the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca since pre-Islamic times. The motif of Hagar running between the Meccan hills of Safa and Marwa in search of water for her son is found also in all renditions of the Ibn Abbas version of the legend, detailed below.

(29) The idols Isaf and Na'ila were said to have graced the peaks of the two hills in pre-Islamic times, and pilgrims would engage in a quickly-paced walk between them (Nabih Amin Faris [Transl.], *The Book of Idols. Being a Translation from the Arabic of the Kitab al-Asnam by Hisham Ibn-Al-Kalbi* [Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1952] p. 8; Toufic Fahd, *Le Panthéon de L'Arabie Centrale A La Veille De L'hégire* [Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1968] pp. 103-109; Norman Calder, "The Sa'y and the Jabin: Some Notes on Qur'an 37:102-3", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 31 [1986] 17-26).

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group of Ali traditions even makes the claim that Abraham came to Mecca from Armenia rather than from the land of the Bible. (30)

The Ali version is noteworthy for its use of the supernatural. The strange but divinely guided beast known as the *Sakina* guides Abraham to the very site of the holy Ka'ba, speaks to him, or curls up around the spot where the shrine should be built; or a talking cloud leads Abraham to the sacred site. As noted above, the supernatural *Sakina* parallels the rabbinic *Shekhina*. It is possible that the role and function of the rabbinic *Shekkina* may have taken on the characteristics of a supernatural Arabian figure as the paradigm came into Arabia through Jewish immigration. More likely, however, the depiction of an indigenous Arabian *jinn* in an old Arabian legend came to be connected with the rabbinic *Shekhina* as the rabbinic concept of a guiding divine presence became more familiar in Arabia under the influence of Jewish immigration. The talking cloud also has the earmarks of Arabian legend, (31) and in some renditions, a magic bird or an angel accompanies Abraham in his journey. (32) It appears, in conclusion, that the various permutations of the Ali version evolved largely out of old Arabian legends associated with the founding of the Meccan sanctuary. These legends came to be influenced by biblical tradition and lore brought to the Arabian Hijaz by Jews and Christians in the period prior to Islam.

The Mujahid Version

According to the story attributed to Mujahid, (33) Abraham brings Ishmael and Hagar with him to Mecca where God or Gabriel shows him the site of the Ka'ba. They begin their journey in Syria when Ishmael is still a suckling, and the angel Gabriel personally guides them on their journey by taking them on the supernatural steed, al-Buraq. (34) Whenever they pass a pleasant spot

(30) The question as to why Ishmael and Hagar are mentioned in so few of the traditions attributed to Ali while they are virtually always included in the traditions attributed to Ibn Abbas and Mujahid will be treated below.

(31) Cf. Ursula Nowak, *Beitrage zur Typologie des arabischen Volksmarchens* (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1969) pp. 210-249.

(32) See note (26) above.

(33) Four renditions are given on his authority: al-Azraqi I, 21, al-Tabari *History* I, 278-279, *Commentary* I, 548, and Ibn Kathir *Commentary* I, 179. One rendition is given on the authority of Ibn Ishaq (al-Azraqi I, 21-22), and one on the authority of al-Sadiq (al-Tabarsi I, 470).

(34) For al-Buraq, see Rudi Paret, "Buraq" in EI2 1, 1310-1311.

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Abraham asks Gabriel if that is where he should build the Ka'ba, but Gabriel answers in the negative each time. When they finally arrive in Mecca, they find a desolate spot containing only thorny trees and rocks. Abraham again asks if that is the place, and Gabriel answers in the affirmative; Abraham thereupon leaves Hagar and Ishmael next to the site of the future Ka'ba and recites Qur'an 14:37: O LORD! I HAVE MADE SOME OF MY OFFSPRING LIVE IN AN UNCULTIVATED WADI BY YOUR SACRED HOUSE, IN ORDER, O LORD, THAT THEY ESTABLISH REGULAR PRAYER. SO FILL THE HEARTS OF SOME WITH LOVE TOWARD THEM, AND FEED THEM WITH FRUITS SO THAT THEY MAY GIVE THANKS. After leaving Hagar and Ishmael at the sacred site, Abraham returns to Syria.(35)

The "Mujahid" version has little in common with biblicist legends aside from the names of the characters. Gabriel is clearly a biblicist name (Daniel 8:16, 9:21 and in later biblicist interpretive literature), but appears in the Mujahid version to represent an Arabian *jinn*(36) who guides Abraham upon a magic horse and speaks in riddles until they finally arrive at their destination in Mecca. Like the Ali version, the Mujahid version features Arabian supernatural motifs. Unlike the Ali version, however, the Mujahid version includes Ishmael and Hagar in Abraham's journey to Mecca and also features Abraham's recitation of Qur'an 14:37. The inclusion of the Qur'an verse represents a later Islamic layer which, by binding the legend to the Qur'an, renders its pre-Islamic elements relevent and acceptable to the developing sensibilities of early Islam.

The Ibn Abbas Version

The "Ibn Abbas" version, occuring a total of nineteen times among the sources, is the most popular and most complete explanation of Abraham's transfer from Syria to Mecca.(37)

(35) Two renditions continue with the sequence of Hagar searching for water from the hills of Safa and Marwa (al-Tabari *History* I, 278-79; al-Tabarsi I, 470).

(36) With a role similar to the *Sakina* in the version attributed to Ali.

(37) 12 full narratives can be found in al-Azraqi I, 22 f., and I, 279-80; al-Bukhari IV, 372-375, and IV, 379-380; al-Tabari, *History*, I, 279-281, and I, 282-283; al-Tabari, *Commentary* XIII, 229, and XIII, 230-231; Ibn Kathir, *Commentary* I, 176, and I, 177, and *Qisas al-anbiya'* I, 223-224, and I, 227-228.

Two incomplete narratives are located in Ibn Hanbal I, 253, and I, 347-8.

Five fragments containing a few of the motifs can be found in Ibn Sa'd I, 50; Ibn Hanbal, I, 360, and V, 121; and al-Azraqi, I, 22, and I, 279.

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1. The episode begins because Sarah's jealousy for Hagar following the birth of Ishmael causes conflict and strife between the two women (8/19).[38]

2. Hagar lets down her dress or soaks the bottom of her dress to hide her tracks from Sarah (9/19).

3. Abraham gives Hagar a water skin (12/19) and personally brings Hagar and Ishmael to Mecca (19/19), where he leaves them under a large tree (9/19).[39]

4. After depositing them there, Abraham leaves to return to Syria, and arrives at Kada (7/19).[40]

5. Hagar follows him and asks him to whom he is entrusting them in that desolate place. When he finally answers: "to God", or that God commanted him, Hagar is satisfied (13/19). Abraham then recites Qur'an 14:37: O LORD! I HAVE LADE SOME OF MY OFFSPRING LIVE IN AN UNCULTIVATED WADI BY YOUR SACRED HOUSE, IN ORDER, O LORD, THAT THEY ESTABLISH REGULAR PRAYER. SO FILL THE HEARTS OF SOME WITH LOVE TOWARD THEM, AND FEED THEM WITH FRUITS SO THAT THEY MAY GIVE THANKS (7/19); or Qur'an 14:38: O LORD! YOU KNOW WHAT WE CONCEAL AND WHAT WE REVEAL, FOR NOTHING ON EARTH OR IN HEAVEN IS HIDDEN FROM GOD (2/19).

6. The water in the water skin runs out and Hagar, who was still nursing Ishmael, could no longer produce milk (11/19). Ishmael begins writing or having a seizure from thirst (6/19), and Hagar cannot bear to see him die (8/19).

7. She climbs Safa and Marwa (15/19) and runs between them seven times (11/19).

8. A comment is inserted here on the authority of Muhammad himself that this is why or how people run between Safa and Marwa (8/19).

9. Hagar is desperate because of the worsening condition of her son. She thinks she hears a voice (10/19), which turns out to be an angel (8/19) or Gabriel (6/19) who scratches the ground with his heel (14/19) or wing (3/19), bringing forth water. Or she returns to

(38) Although the story is generally consistent, details tend to vary among the various renditions. Each motif is numbered here for clarity, followed by the number of times it occurs in relation to the total number of renditions (for example, motif #1 occurs in eight out of ninteen renditions).

(39) In all versions, Abraham brings them to Mecca without divine command or supernatural assistance].

(40) A location just outside of Mecca.

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find Ishmael scratching the ground with his own heel, which brings forth the water (2/19).

10. Hagar immediately dams up the flow or scoops water into her water skin (19/19).

11. A second comment is inserted here on the authority of Muhammad (15/19), or Ibn Abbas (1/19) to the effect: "May God have mercy on the mother of Ishmael. If she had not done that, then Zamzam would be flowing forever with a great volume of fresh water."

12. The angel tells Hagar not to worry about perishing, for the boy and his father will someday build the House of God there (7/19).

This version of the legend follows the biblical account of Genesis 21:9-21 in almost perfect order.

Motif #1 parallels Genesis 21:9-10.
Motif #3 parallels verses 14-15.
Motif #6 parallels verses 15-16.
Motif #7 parallels 16.
Motif #9 parallels verses 17-19.
Motif #10 parallels verse 19.
Motif #12 parallels verse 18.

Moreover, like the biblical rendition, no supernatural intervention can be found in the entire episode aside from the miracle of the well. Even the location of Mecca in Arabia has been associated by Arabs, following the Jewish understanding, with the biblical Paran of Genesis 21:21, therefore drawing an even closer parallel with the Bible. (41)

In addition to its biblical parallels, the Ibn Abbas version also includes elements of extra-biblical Jewish tradition. Motif #2 of Hagar hiding her tracks parallels *Pirkei deRabbi Eli'ezer* 67a-b: "[Abraham] took a water barrel and tied it around her waist so that it would drag behind her in order to demonstrate that she was

(41) Biblical Paran was an area inhabited by nomads during most of the biblical period and was associated with Arab peoples. The Muslim geographer, Yaqut (d. 1228) writes in his classic work: "*Faran*...an arabized Hebrew word. One of the names of Mecca mentioned in the Torah." (*Mu'jam al-buldan* [Liepzig, 1868], III, 34). Ibn Kathir also refers to the area of Mecca as Faran (Commentary IV, 14). An early statement by Wahb b. Munabbih (d. 110 or 114/728 or 732) provides an etymology for Faran in his *Kitab al-Tijan* (F. Krenkow, "The two oldest books on Arabic Folklore", in *Islamic Culture* 2 [1928], p. 207).

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a bondwoman".(42) Motif #11 parallels *Genesis Rabbah* 53:14: "'And she went and filled the bottle with water' (Gen. 21:19) This means that she was lacking in faith."(43)

This version of the legend attributed to Ibn Abbas is consistently careful to remain faithful to the chronology of the Bible and includes only characters found in the book of Genesis. It essentially fills in and adds to the biblical narrative in a manner typical of the Jewish Midrash and in such a way that it does not contradict the biblical depiction. Of course, it lessens the significance of God's biblical promise to Abraham of establishing his seed in the Land of Israel by establishing his other son at the sacred site of Mecca, but it is not contrary to the literal progression of the biblical story. Even the geographical locus of Mecca is connected to a biblical site through its identification with Paran.

Despite these parallels, however, the Ibn Abbas version is not entirely dependent upon biblicist tradition. Abraham, for example, personally brings Hagar and Ishmael to Mecca.(44) Moreover, Hagar asks Abraham to whom he is entrusting her and their infant son and is satisfied with their lot when she learns that it is God's decree, an attitude clearly in opposition to the rabbinic view that Hagar strays after idols because of lack of faith in God.(45) As mentioned above in regard to the Mujahid version of the legend, Hagar's running between Safa and Marwa reflects a pre-Islamic Arabian religious ritual and provides an explanation for the miraculous nature of the Zamzam well.(46) The entire narrative, of course, provides an acceptable explanation for the holiness of a previously pagan religious shrine in Mecca.

(42) The Warsaw edition (*Pirkey Rabbi Eli'ezer*, Jerusalem: 1970). *Yalqut Shim'oni* Genesis 95 (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1973: 1, 424) has: "He took a veil *(radid)* and tied it around her waist to show that the was a bondwoman.

(43) Folio edition with traditional commentaries (Jerusalem: P'er HaTorah, 1970) p. 110a.

(44) Cf. Gen. 21:14.

(45) Cf. Palestinian Targum (TJ1) on Gen. 21:16: "She went and sat to one side and took on foreign religious worship...", and PRE 67b. The approach of PRE is probably polemical. Virtually all scholars are in agreement that TJ1 predates Islam, though it is also known that some sections were clearly inserted after (cf. TJ1 on Genesis 21:21).

(46) The literary parallel with Miriam's well *(be'erah shel miryam)* must be noted here. This may represent a less pronounced parallel with biblicist tradition (BT *Pesahim* 54a and Rashi *ibid.* s.v. *be'er*; Rashi on BT *Shabbat* 35a s.v. *zehu be'era shel miryam*).

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Certain other motifs in the narrative can be traced to neither biblicist nor pre-Islamic Arab sources. Motif #5, for example, binds action in the drama directly to Qur'an verse 14:37 or 14:38, and motif #8 explains the running ritual between Safa and Marwa in terms acceptable to Islamic religious ideology. Finally, Motif #11 consists of an authoritative insert that explains why the sacred Zamzam well gave forth very little water. This third category of literary material suggests a later Islamic origin. It represents a layer that established a specifically Islamic identity for a legend made up of older biblicist and Arabian motifs.

In summary, then, the Ibn Abbas version appears as a hybrid made up largely of biblicist material along with some pre-Islamic Arabian elements referring to the sacred areas of Mecca. The Islamic material represents the last layer that entered into the legend, tying it to scripture and Islamic practice as its popularity assured it a place within the corpus of Islamic Tradition literature.

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The foregoing suggests that the organization of plot and style and the use of motifs in a collection of traditional Islamic narratives treating Abraham's journey to Mecca corresponds accurately with their attribution to early Muslim traditionists. Virtually all of the mass of narrative traditions on this topic can be divided into the three consistent versions enumerated above, each identified by the earliest authority listed in its chain of authentication *(isnad)*. The versions attributed to Ali and Mujahid rely largely on material having little direct connection with biblicist legends. Although they include biblical names and some biblical allusions, they appear to be unaware of the specifics of the biblical narrative or unconcerned about remaining consistent with the biblical text. Abraham is known to them as a monotheist who obeys his God, but little more about him or his place within the full scope of the Bible is apparent. These two versions of the legend connect Abraham directly to the pre-Islamic Arabian religious site of the Ka'ba through a generous use of supernatural elements. The intent of the Ali and Mujahid versions appears to establish a sacred and monotheistic origin for the pre-Islamic Ka'ba. A man by the name of Abraham, known perhaps because of his reputation as an ardent monotheist and as a founder of

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religious shrines,(47) serves the role of main character in all renditions.

The longer Ibn Abbas version of the legend, on the other band, draws a much closer parallel to the biblical text. It remains quite cognizant of the biblical story and takes care to connect Abraham and his Ishmaelite descendants to Mecca and its environs in a manner that is consistent with the biblical narratives. Though alluding to the fact that it will one day be built as God's house, the Ibn Abbas version holds no immediate concern for the religious shrine of the Ka'ba and appears not to be derived from a local sanctuary tradition. Neither does it contain the extra-biblical supernatural occurances found among the Ali and Mujahid versions. It represents, rather, an *extension* of the biblical story, lengthening a tale that comes to an abrupt halt at Genesis 21:21. As such, it serves in effect as an Islamic *midrash* on Genesis 21:10-21, and indeed, contains motifs with clear parallels in post-biblical Jewish exegetical literature. It works through the biblical story and carefully adds narrative material in classic aggadic style that remains consistent with the biblical text, but nevertheless fills in the lacunae of the text in a manner that remains consistent with an Islamic religious world view. Whatever individual or party this exegesis represents, it demonstrates that the compilor(s) worked within the parameters of both a biblicist and Islamic world view.

The mention of Hagar and Ishmael in virtually all renditions of Abraham's transfer to Mecca except those attributed to Ali merits additional comment, and the context of the Ali traditions within the sources provides insight into this problem. Muslim traditionists collected and organized their traditions in the Islamic sources in a variety of ways. Within the formal genre of qur'anic exegesis, the most common format became the linear commentary organized around the chapters and verses of the Qur'an, which themselves lack any kind of chronological order. The universal histories and hagiographies, on the other hand, are organized chronologically and provide an often detailed account of the sequence or events. Even in the linear commentaries, however, chronological locci can sometimes be established. According to the generally accepted chronology of the Abraham story in the medieval sources, Abraham first journeyed to Mecca at the time that he

(47) See Genesis 12:6-8, 13:3-4, 13:18, 22:1-14.

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established Hagar and their suckling baby Ishmael there. After visiting Ishmael twice more when his son was to choose a wife, Abraham came a fourth time to build the Ka'ba when Ishmael was a grown man. The Ali traditions treating Abraham's transfer are located in one of two locations within our sources: either around Abraham's first journey to Mecca, or around his later journey when he built the Ka'ba.

Most of the Ali traditions (eleven of seventeen) are located among the sources in sections treating Abraham's building of the Ka'ba, but they all assume that it was Abraham's first (not his fourth) journey to Mecca. As pointed out earlier, Hagar and Ishmael are mentioned in less than a third of the renditions attributed to Ali. All of these are located only in the sections of the sources treating Abraham's first divinely guided journey to Mecca—never around his building of the Ka'ba. This is an apparent contradiction to Qur'an 2:127: AND REMEMBER ABRAHAM RAISED THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE HOUSE WITH ISHMAEL. On the other hand, Ishmael's inclusion in the qur'anic verse appears syntactically problematic. The name, Ishmael, appears as if it had been added to an already complete sentence: *wa'idh yarfa'u ibrahim al-qawa 'id min al-bayt wa'isma'il* (literally: "And remember Abraham raised the foundations of the House, and Ishmael"). It is true that traditions attributed to Ali which portray Abraham's actual building of the ka'ba tend to include Ishmael, but his role is always peipheral and he is never involved in the actual work of building. The traditions mentioning Ishmael both underplay his role and fail to even mention him or his mother Hagar in the story of Abraham's transfer to Mecca which immediately preceed it. (48) This suggests that the Ali version represents a remnant of an early and most likely pre-Islamic tradition connecting only Abraham to the building of the Ka'ba, a tradition alluded to even in the text of the Qur'an itself. The character of Ishmael came to assume greater importance, however, as the Muslim Arabs began to see their genealogical origins deriving from Abraham through Ishmael. (49) As a result, the characters of Hagar and Ishmael then came to be associated with Abraham's journey to Mecca and even-

(48) See al-Azraqi I, 27-29; al-Tabari *History* I, 275, *Commentary* I, 548-548, 555; Tha'labi 87-88; Ibn Kathir, *Commentary* I, 178.

(49) The genealogical connection appears not to have existed prior to Islam. See Rene Dagorn, *La Geste D'Ismaël d'après l'onomastique et la tradition arabes* (Paris: Champion, 1981).

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tually became part of the legend which earlier assumed only Abraham to have erected the sacred shrine.

Despite their plentiful differences, the Ibn Abbas and the Ali-Mujahid versions function similarly in that they incoporate both biblicist and pre-Islamic Arabian material. They represent hybrid legends that in all cases evolved to explain the sanctity of the Meccan sanctuary. Earlier versions of what became the Ibn Abbas tradition may have served as biblical exegesis which had no relation whatever with the Arabian Ka'ba. The Ali and Mujahid versions, on the other hand, most likely originated as indigenous Arab legends informing the supernatural origin and sanctity of that pre-Islamic shrine.

Like all oral traditions, these legends evolved and adapted to the changing realia of the people who told them. The final changes affecting their evolution were the brief editorial comments or inserts made by the early Muslims. This last layer anchored what had evolved out of non-Islamic tales to Islamic themes. As such, it successfully identified the legends as Islamic and allowed their inclusion into the canon of acceptable tradition literature. This final stage took place as the traditions began to be transcribed and their evolutionary journey brought largely to a halt. Futher evolution became far more difficult in a world of written literature. ([50])

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The forgoing raises some important issues regarding the nature of pre-Islamic Arabian communities and early Islam. The existence of the Ali and Mujahid legends suggests an established pre-Islamic connection among indigenous Arabs between a legendary figure named Abraham and the Ka'ba. How extensively did this and perhaps other biblicist motifs permeate pre-Islamic Arabian culture cannot yet be determined, but it raises important questions concerning the extent of penetration if biblicist ideas and lore into the Arabian Peninsula in pre-Islamic times. To what extent, for example, do the qur'anic renditions of biblical stories and its allusions to biblical themes represent biblicist legends current among indigenous pre-Islamic Arabs? ([51]) Or might the unique renditions

(50) See Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy* (London: Methuen, 1982).

(51) Take, for example, Ibn Ishaq's claim that the Quraysh considered themselves the sons of Abraham long before Muhammad received his first revelation (Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950: p. 87]).

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of biblical themes found in the Qur'an reflect religious traditions current among indigenous Arabian monotheists? (52)

The close parallel between the Ibn Abbas version of Abraham's journey with Genesis and Jewish narrative exegesis raises the question as to the cultural and religious impact of Jewish groups living in the Arabian Hijaz during the sixth and seventh centuries. The version's significant deviation from Jewish renditions and parallels with indigenous Arabian lore suggests the possibility of syncretistic Jewish groups finding refuge in the isolation of the Arabian Peninsula or evolving over time in the Arabian environment.

Moreover, the existence of a consistent Ibn Abbas version of Abraham's journey which is careful to comply with the thrust of the Bible suggests the possibility of a stage in early Islam where Biblicist-Muslims represented a faction parallel to the Jewish-Christians of early Christianity, but which soon died out and was not mentioned by later historians. (53) This may help to account for the open acceptance in early Islam of legends attributed to Jews and known later as *Isra'iliyyat*, (54) but which were resoundly rejected by the religious establishment during the first Abbasid (mid-eighth to mid-ninth) century.

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(52) Such as Waraqah b. Nawfal, Maslama, Umayya, etc. mentioned above.

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

(54) See Goldziher, "Mélanges Judéo-Arabes IX: *Isra'iliyyat*," *REJ* 44 (1902): 63-66; S. D. Goitein, *"Isra'iliyyat," Tarbiz* 6 (1934-5): 89-101, and 510-522; G. Vajda, *"Isra'iliyyat"* in EI2 4:211-212; and Gordon D. Newby, "Tafsir Isra'-iliyat," *JAR* Thematic Issue 47 (December, 1979): 685-697.

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