



Questioning the Sources: Textual Parallels, Chronological Dilemmas and Orientalist Critics of the Qur'ān

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Abstract

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Western Orientalist scholarship adopted historical-critical source criticism to argue that non-biblical narratives in the Qur'ān were borrowed from Rabbinical and Apocryphal traditions. Pioneered by Jewish rabbinical expert regarding Jewish lore and expanded by Christian missionaries concerning Christian apocryphal Christology and Mariology, this premise asserted textual dependence on sources such as the Talmud, Midrashic compilations and extra-canonical Infancy Gospels. Subsequently, this hypothesis was widely weaponized in missionary polemics, echoed by various regional interlocutors including Urdu theological writers and continues to inform modern source-critical paradigms. This paper critically re-evaluates the validity of these borrowing hypotheses through a twofold analytical inquiry. First, it reassesses the alleged textual parallels to examine whether thematic resonance genuinely demonstrates literary plagiarism or reflects independent oral and shared late antique typologies. Second, it investigates the acute chronological dilemmas underpinning these claims, rigorously interrogating whether the proposed rabbinic and apocryphal texts were definitively compiled prior to the seventh-century Qur'ānic revelation or represent contemporary or posterior redactions. In doing so, this study challenges foundational assumptions in Orientalist source criticism and calls for a chronologically grounded framework for evaluating late antique scriptural intertextuality.

Keywords:

Orientalist, Rabbinic, Apocryphal, Polimics, Christian mission

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Introduction:

It is obvious that the stories of the earlier prophets and other personalities who are referred to in the Bible and especially in OT and Christological Qur'anic sections constitute approximately one quarter of the Qur'an. It is well recognized that unlike the Bible, which is characterized by expansion, the narratives in the Qur'an are brief, concise and do not dig deep into the chronological, historical and environmental dimensions. Muslims acknowledge its divinity from the moment of its revelation. Muslims believed that the Qur'an, which is contained in highly guarded Tablets, is the unchanged, eternal and immutable Word of God. Moreover, the history of the Book is closely connected with the emergence of the earthly society. At the same time, the early modern Western scholarship of the Qur'an was mainly centered on two issues. The first issue is concerned with discovering how Jewish and Christian concepts may have impacted the Qur'an, whereas the second one deals with the reconstruction of the chronological order of the Qur'an. In terms of the first polemics of Western scholarship, the Qur'an as a Book, which is nothing more than an echo of Judaism (or Christianity), tends to exaggerate the value of their methods and to demonstrate that the Qur'an is a human-made book and the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad created the Qur'an under the supervision of one or more Jewish and Christian teachers of his times. The first polemicists John of Damascus, who positions Islam as the first heretical religion in his section on heresies in his book *Sources of Knowledge*, believes that it is a religion which emerged as a result of Christianity. John is convinced that the prophet's acquaintance with the Old and New Testaments emerged because of his strong friendship with an Arian monk. The second Christian monk Abdul Masih ibn Ishac Al-Kindi elaborates on John's concept of Christian inspiration of the prophet. He asserts that a Nestorian monk and two Jews, Abdallah and K'ab, taught him many of the stories which are mentioned in the Qur'an. Peter the Venerable, Ricoldo of Montecroce, John of Segovia and Nicholas of Cusa are the main figures who replicated the stories of John and Al-Kindi. Especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, several writings established a new discourse and attempted to show that several sections of the Qur'an emerged from a Jewish rabbinical or Christian apocryphal text. It has been also observed that several Jewish and Christian scholars proposed parallel passages for Jewish sources. Abraham Geiger, the pioneer Jewish scholar, developed that discourse and wrote a book entitled "Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?" He employed an approach toward the passages of biblical legends specifically prophets mentioned in the Qur'ān from Jewish Midrashic, Talmudic and rabbinical literature and also showed parallels indicating borrowing. After Geiger, this method was used by Rev. W. St. Clair Tisdall, who wrote a book, under the patronage of Geiger, titled "The Original Sources of The Qur'ān" in 1905, which was published by the society of 'For the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, London'. He asserted that the Quranic Christ and Mary and their infancy passages in the Qur'ān were derived from a Christian apocryphal literature. After Geiger and Tisdall, more Christian Missionaries including Allama Barkatullah, Sultan Muhammad Paul, Father Imadud Din and orientalist, western scholars of the origins of the Qur'an since the nineteenth century until nowadays like Andrew Rippon Gabriel Said Reynold and Anglia Neuwirth are proposing that the Qur'anic text about prophets and traditional stories are borrowed from Rabbinical and apocryphal scriptural literature. A discussion of the later development of Qur'anic studies in the West follows this analysis. This study is not exhaustive. Instead, some of the influential scholars including Andrew Rippon, Gabriel Said Reynolds etc examined the issue of the relationship between the Qur'anic textual sections and the Rabbinical and apocryphal scriptural tradition; receive much attention. To prove what exactly was

borrowed, however, these authors, almost always, refer to the part only of the picture in the rabbinical and apocryphal sources and they also show much less knowledge with the other text evidence and associated text-dating problems. There are Three major parts to reevaluate the problem:

1. Midrashic and Rabbinical Literature
2. Dating of Rabbinical and apocryphal Scriptures
3. Re-evaluations and Critiques in Later Scholarship

Part One: Midrashic and Rabbinical Literature:

There has been an assertion that is frequently made by Western critics in scholarly discourse on the possible Jewish origins of the Qur'an that the similarities existing between the Qur'an and the biblical literature mean that there was direct borrowing, implying that the stories found in the Qur'an were borrowed from prior biblical material. Under this assumption, they went ahead to mount a multi-faceted criticism, actively developing the idea of Judeo-Christian traditional influence in their academic writings. As noted by Theodor Nöldeke:

"The principal source of the revelations was undoubtedly Jewish scripture.....It would be superfluous to explain here that not only most of the histories of the prophets in the Koran but also many of the dogmas and laws are of Jewish origin."¹

Articulating this perspective in his essay, Michael E. Pregill observes:

"The crux of Geiger's analysis was his observation of the many conspicuous parallels between Quranic episodes and the narratives of the midrash, rabbinic exegesis of the Hebrew Bible. Essentially, Geiger explained the apparent deviations of Quranic stories about the patriarchs and prophets from their parallels in the canonical Hebrew Bible as due first and foremost to their derivation from what he assumed must be Jewish prototypes of those stories found in the midrash."²

Emphasizing the many similarities in vocabulary, style and theme of the two religious texts, specifically the similarities in language, idiom and even complete sentences, William Muir noted in his celebrated book, *The Corān*:

" Such narratives show very frequently a close correspondence, sometimes even in the words and the cast and turn of expression, with corresponding passages in the Bible. Many instances of this similarity will be found in the accounts of the fall of Adam and Eve; in the narratives of Noah and the Deluge; of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac; of Lot and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah; in the histories of Moses and of Joseph; of Zacharias and of John the Baptist; and of

Jesus Christ, including his annunciation, his conception by the Virgin Mary and his birth. From such correspondence an argument might have been drawn to show at how many points the Bible is supported by the Corân."³

Reinforcing this thesis, Richard Bell likewise underscores the putative Judeo-Christian textual transmission to the Qur'anic corpus, writing:

" From the Qur'an we should infer (as has been seen) that the Jewish and Christian systems and scriptures were wholly unknown to his fellow-citizens; indeed this is expressly stated: if we do not accept its assertion that these were communicated to Mohammed by special revelation, we can only suppose that he became acquainted with them on his travels. And the forms assumed by Biblical names and Jewish and Christian technicalities in the Qur'an indicate numerous sources. Thus the forms Yunus for Jonah and Elias for Elijah clearly get theirs from some Greek source or version made from the Greek."⁴

One hypothesis suggests that biblical motifs in the Qur'an were intentionally reconfigured and presented through a distinct narrative framework, effectively disguising any overt appearance of direct quotation or derivative transmission. In the words of Kenneth Cragg:

"The biblical narratives reproduced in the Qur'an differ considerably and suggest oral, not direct acquaintance. There is almost complete absence of what claimed as direct quotation from the Bible."⁵

Here, a critical question emerges regarding the historical plausibility of Jewish religious thought exerting an influence on the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Framing his central research questions around this premise in the introductory pages of his study, Geiger observes:

" And so this treatise falls into two divisions, of which the first has to answer the following questions: Did Muhammad wish to borrow from Judaism? Could Muhammad borrow from Judaism? and if so, how was such borrowing possible for him? Was it compatible with his plan to borrow from Judaism? The second division must bring forward the facts to prove the borrowing, which has been stated on general grounds to have taken place. Only in this way can an individual proof of the kind referred to acquire scientific value, partly as throwing light upon the nature of Muhammad's plan and partly as showing the intrinsic necessity of the fact and its actual importance by virtue of its connection with other facts of Muhammad's life and age. To this an appendix will be added, in which will be given a collection of those passages in which Muhammad seems

not so much to have borrowed from Judaism, as to have reviewed it and that too in a hostile spirit."⁶

The critical consensus among these Western scholars fundamentally presupposes that the close correspondences between these narratives point to an underlying Judeo-Christian provenance for the Qur'anic text. In tandem with this view, a substantial segment of scholarship posits that the Prophet drew substantial narrative detail from Jewish oral and para-biblical traditions, specifically the Apocrypha, Haggadah, Talmud and Midrash. Popularized systematically by Abraham Geiger who laid the foundational groundwork for the literary borrowing hypothesis and reiterated by later critics, several Qur'anic accounts are regularly identified as having been adapted from Jewish lore:

1. The story of Cain and Abel
2. Noah's exchanges during the building of the Ark
3. Abraham's confrontation with idol worship
4. The Qur'anic account of Joseph
5. The episode of the Golden Calf
6. Moses' sign of the leprous hand
7. The eleventh-hour repentance of Pharaoh
8. Solomon's ability to understand the speech of birds

1- The Story of Abel and Cain:

Scholars have proposed four distinct perspectives to explain the emergence and transmission of the Cain and Abel narrative within the Qur'anic corpus:

First Perspective:

In identifying the putative underlying sources of this Qur'anic account, critical scholarship emphasizes extra-biblical rabbinic traditions, notably *Midrash Pirquei Rabbi Eliezer*, the *Targum of Jonathan* and the *Targum of Jerusalem*. Following the methodological trajectory initiated by Abraham Geiger, a corresponding argument was put forward by W. St. Clair Tisdall in *The Original Sources of the Qur'ān*, where he notes:

"A conversation, or rather argument, between Cain and Abel is mentioned in Jewish legend both in the Targum of Jonathan and in the Targum of Jerusalem. Cain, we are told, said, "There is no punishment for sin, nor is there any reward for good conduct." In reply to this, Abel asserted that good was rewarded by God and evil punished. Angered at this, Cain took up a stone and with it smote

his brother and slew him. The resemblance between this narrative and that given in the beginning of the foregoing quotation from the Qur'an is not striking. But the source of the rest of the Qur'anic account of the murder is the legend related in the Pirqey Rabbi Eli'ezer."⁷

Second Perspective: Targum of Jerusalem

Abraham Geiger alleged that this story from the Targum of Jerusalem appears in the Qur'anic Cain and Abel account. Abraham Geiger writes:

" The one event mentioned is their sacrifice and the murder which lead to it. Muhammad makes them hold conversation before the murder and one is likewise given in the Jerusalem targum on the strength of the words in Genesis " Cain said unto Abel his brother." Still, the matter of conversation is given so differently in each case that we do not consider it worthwhile to compare the two passages more closely. After the murder, according to the Qur'an, God sent a raven which scratched the earth to shew Cain how to bury Abel. what is here attributed to ascribed by the Jews to his parents."⁸

Third Perspective: The Jerusalem Targum and The Bible

Ibn Warraq posits that this Qur'anic narrative is a composite synthesis drawing from three primary sources: the biblical text, the Jerusalem Targum and Mishnah Sanhedrin. He Writes:

"The murder of Abel in Koran is borrowed from the Bible, But the conversation with Abel before Cain kills him is taken from Targum of Jerusalem, generally known as pseudo-Jonathan. In the Koran after the murder God sent a raven that Scratched the earth to show Cain how to bury Abel... They only become clear if we look at Mishnah Sanhedrin 4.5. The murder of Abel in the Koran is borrowed from the Bible, but the conversation of Cain with Abel before Cain kills him is taken from the Targum of Jerusalem, generally known as pseudo-Jonathan. In the Koran ,after the murder God sent a raven that scratched the earth to show Cain how to bury Abel:

And God sent a raven which scratched the earth to show him how he should hide his brother's body. He said, "Woe is me! I am not able to be like this raven;"and he became one of those that repent. For this cause we wrote unto the children of Israel that we who slayeth a soul without having slain a soul or committed wickedness in the earth shall be as if he had slain all mankind; and

whosoever saveth a soul alive shall be as if he had saved all mankind, (sura 5.30 35)"⁹

Fourth Perspective:

This specific line of inquiry was pioneered by Norman Stillman, who identified the putative roots of the narrative in *Midrash Tanhuma*, observing:

" Sidersky has rightly pointed out the Qur'anic version should be traced to Midrash Tanhuma which reads:

" When Cain killed Abel, the latter's lay cast aside for Cain did not know what to do. Then the Holy one (Blessed be he) sent him two pure birds and one of them killed the other. Then he dug with his claws and buried him and from him Cain learned. So he dug and buried Abel."

The Qur'anic version is merely an epitome of the above midrash."¹⁰

A comparable line of argument has been sustained by a broader spectrum of critical commentators, including William Goldsack, Anis Shorrosh, L. Bevan Jones, Robert Morey, N. A. Newman, Mateen Ellass and Joseph Smith. This position was further popularized in the vernacular literature of the Indian subcontinent by Christian apologists such as Allama Barkatullah and Thakur Das etc in their Urdu works on the Qur'an. These authors consistently reinforce the premise that discrete elements of the Cain and Abel narrative in the Qur'an were directly derived from the aforementioned rabbinical Jewish traditions.

2-Noah's exchanges during the building of the Ark:

Ibn Warraq asserts that the narrative details surrounding Noah's conversations while building the Ark in the Qur'an are drawn directly from rabbinic sources, observing:

"A part of the story of Noah in the Koran obviously comes from Genesis, but an account of Noah's character is drawn from rabbinical sources (suras 7.57 ; ,22.43 ;10.72 etc.). The conversations Noah has with the people while he is building the ark are the same as those found in Sanhedrin 108; and both the Koran and the rabbinical scriptures declare that the generation of the Flood was punished with boiling water (Rosh Hashanah 16.2 and Sanhedrin 108; suras 11.42, 33.27)."¹¹

3. Abraham's confrontation with idol worship:

Abraham Geiger initiated the theory whereby the episode of Abraham challenging the idols found in Sūrah al-An'ām (6:74) is borrowed from the *Midrash Genesis Rabbah*, noting:

"A special instance of this was when he destroyed the idols and , putting the staff into the hand of the largest, attributed the action to him. He sought thus to

convince the people, who quite perceived the impossibility of the idols having done it, since they could not move, but they were not thereby persuaded. Abraham is represented as praying in vain that his father might be released from the punishment of hell. We are told too that the people, embittered by Abraham's conduct towards the idols, wanted to have him burnt alive, but that he was rescued from that fate by divine intervention. The whole story is taken from the Rabbinical writings, where we read as follows."¹²

4. The Quranic account of Joseph:

The Qur'anic account of Joseph has similarly formed a central locus of debate within Western critical scholarship. Commentators argue that key narrative elements of the Sūrah become fully intelligible only through the hermeneutical lens of rabbinic and Midrashic traditions, specifically pointing to *Midrash Yalkut*, *Midrash Tanḥuma*, *Midrash Ha-Gadol*¹³, *Midrash Genesis Rabbah*¹⁴, *Sefer Ha-Yashar*¹⁵ and *Midrash Yalkut*¹⁶ and related compilations.

5. The episode of the Golden Calf:

Directing his critical inquiry toward this specific Qur'anic account, Gieger remarked in his seminal treatise:

" Muhammad says that the calf lowed as it come forth. With this is to be compared the Rabbinical statement: "There came forth this calf lowing and the Israelites saw it. Rabbi Jehuda says that Samael entered into it and lowed in order to mislead Israel." In the Qur'an it is said that among the people of Moses there was a tribe which kept the truth. This seems to refer to the tribe of Levi and especially to their behavior about the calf, although possibly it may refer also to their belief in Moses' mission to Pharaoh of which we have spoken before. In the biblical accounts a statement is made, which is explained by the Rabbis as follows: "From Exodus 32. 26, it is clear that the tribe of Levi was not implicated in the matter of the golden calf."¹⁷

Regarding this Qur'anic narrative, W. St. Clair Tisdall closely followed and reproduced the hypothesis originally advanced by Abraham Geiger, stating:

" This legend also comes from the Jews, as is evident from the following extract which we translate from Piry Rabbi Eli'ezer, § 45, "And this calf came out lowing [the sound uttered by cattle; moo] and the Israelites saw it. Rabbi Yehûdah says that Sammaël was hidden in its interior and was lowing in order that he might deceive Israel." The idea that the calf was able to low must come from the supposition that, though made of gold (Exodus 32. 4), it was alive,

since it "came out" (5. 24) of the fire. Here, again, we see that the figurative expression, when taken literally, led to the growth of a myth to explain it."¹⁸

6. Moses' sign of the leprous hand:

Tracing the scriptural parallels to the miraculous sign given to Moses (peace be upon him) in the Qur'an, Abraham Geiger identified its putative antecedent in the "leprous hand" motif of *Midrash Pirkei Rabbi Eliezer*, observing:

" Further Moses is supposed to have shewn the sign of his before Pharaoh , which is not mentioned in Scripture, but which agrees with the following statement in the Rabbinical writings: " He put his hand into his bosom and drew it out as white as snow from leprosy ; they also put their hands into their bosoms and drew them out as white as snow from leprosy." ¹⁹

7. The eleventh-hour repentance of Pharaoh:

The Qur'anic portrayal of Pharaoh's eleventh-hour confession of faith in the Lord of Moses and Aaron exhibits striking parallels with the rabbinic account in *Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer*. The relevant Qur'anic verses corresponding to this Midrashic text are as follows:

" Rabbi Nechunia, son of Hakkanah, said: know thou the power of repentance. Come and see from Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who rebelled most grievously against the Rock, the Most High, as it is said, "Who is the Lord, that I should hearken unto his voice?" (Ex. v. 2). In the same terms of speech in which he sinned, he repented, as it is said "Who is like thee, O Lord, among the mighty?"... The Holy One, blessed be He, delivered him from amongst the dead. Whence (do we know) that he died? Because it is said, "For now I had put forth my hand and smitten thee"... He went and ruled Nineveh." ²⁰

8. Solomon's ability to understand the speech of birds:

With respect to the Qur'anic account of Solomon's mastery of the speech of birds (Q. 27:16) and his dialogue with the bird depicted in Q. 27:20, Abraham Geiger asserts:

"The life of Solomon is in itself unimportant and it is only the wisdom for which he is famed in the Bible which makes him the hero of the whole East, one might therefore, expect to find much more about him in the Quran than really exists there. Muhammad speaks of his [i.e., Solomon's] wisdom and especially brings forward the fact that Solomon understood the language of the birds. This is also asserted by the Rabbis and is found in the Biblical statement: "He spake of trees and birds." The winds also performed his will and the Genii were also found

in his following; this is also related, e.g., in the Second Targum on the Book of Esther, thus: "To him were obedient demons of the most diverse sorts and the evil spirits were given into his hand."²¹

Part Two: Dating of Rabbinical and apocryphal Scriptures:

A foundational premise in early Western source-critical scholarship has been the attribution of parallel Qur'anic accounts encompassing prophetic cycles, patriarchal legends and the infancy narratives of Mary and Jesus to extra-canonical Judeo-Christian corpora. Scholars operating within this paradigm frequently operated on the uncritical assumption that these non-canonical compilations decisively antedated the rise of Islam in early seventh-century Arabia. To rigorously test the validity of this borrowing hypothesis, it is necessary to examine the historical-critical dating of their final redactions alongside the paleographical evidence of their extant manuscript witnesses. The principal rabbinic and Midrashic corpora invoked in these comparative studies comprise:

1. Talmud
2. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Targum Yerushalmi)
3. Midrash Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer
4. Midrash Tanhuma
5. Midrash Ha-Gadol
6. Midrash Genesis Rabbah (Bereshit Rabbah)
7. Sefer Ha-Yashar (The Book of Jasher)
8. Yalkut Shimoni
9. Targum Sheni to the Book of Esther

1. Talmud:

Etymologically derived from the Hebrew root signifying "instruction" or "learning," the term *Talmud* refers to the monumental corpus of rabbinic law and lore. The primary analytical commentary and expansion upon the foundational code of the *Mishnah* is known as the *Gemara*. Taken together, the composite integration of the Mishnah's core legal dicta and the Gemara's dialectical exegesis constitutes the *Talmud*:

"The Hebrew word 'Talmud' and its Aramaic equivalent 'Gemara' both mean "study" Each term had other meanings at various times, but in the end 'Gemara' came to be the name of the vast Mishnah commentary that had taken shape and talmud the name of the combined text (Mishnah plus Gemara) that eventually emerged."²²

The Talmudic Corpus: Conceptually recognized as the repository of Rabbinic Oral Law (*Torah she-be'al peh*), the Talmud embodies the legal and exegetical traditions preserved and transmitted across successive generations. Within traditional rabbinic historiography, this Oral Torah was revealed synchronously alongside the Written Torah (*Torah she-bi-khtav*) to Moses (peace be upon him) at Mount Sinai, transmitted to Joshua and subsequently conveyed through the prophetic and rabbinic lineage. This sprawling oral corpus received its foundational codification circa 200 CE when Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi systematically compiled the *Mishnah*. The Talmudic corpus crystallized into two major geographical and textual recensions:

- **The Jerusalem (Palestinian) Talmud (*Talmud Yerushalmi*):** Initiated under the auspices of Rabbi Yohanan at the rabbinic academy in Tiberias during the third century CE, receiving its final redaction during the late fourth century CE and serving primarily the rabbinic milieu of Palestine.
- **The Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*):** Traditionally attributed to the pioneering editorial efforts of Rav Ashi and formally completed around the turn of the sixth century CE. This compilation was produced for the major Jewish academies of the Babylonian diaspora.

Nevertheless, contemporary historical-critical scholarship interrogates the thesis of an absolute sixth-century closure, demonstrating that subsequent post-Amoraic revisions, structural refinements and textual expansions by the *Savoraim* and early *Geonim* continued into later centuries. Wayne Doiseck States:

"There are fifteen additional tractates of Talmud, known as the Minor Tractates, which were compiled after the Babylonian Talmud was completed (ca. 600 c.e.). Sometimes they are printed as an addendum to the text of the Babylonian Talmud; sometimes they are printed in a separate book."²³

Historical-critical scholarship demonstrates that the Babylonian Talmud was subject to prolonged redactional evolution, textual interpolations and exegetical refinement under authoritative rabbinic leadership, situating its definitive codification near the eleventh century CE a developmental trajectory overseen by the heads of the Babylonian academies known as the *Geonim* (singular: *Gaon*, signifying "pride" or "eminence" per Psalm 47:5), who functioned as the paramount spiritual and juridical arbiters of world Jewry during the Geonic epoch (c. 600–1000 CE).²⁴ Following the turn of the second millennium (the eleventh century CE), the Babylonian Talmud (*Talmud Bavli*) decisively superseded the Palestinian or Jerusalem recension (*Talmud Yerushalmi*) as the authoritative juridical and pedagogical standard in rabbinic academies, fostering an expansive scribal and exegetical apparatus while leaving the

Palestinian text comparatively under-edited and subject to ongoing textual-critical restoration: "...but by the beginning of the second millennium this process had run its course. From then on, 'the Talmud' always meant the Babylonian. It was taken for granted that issues of Jewish law should be resolved by reference to the Babylonian Talmud, not the Palestinian. Once the primacy of the Babylonian Talmud was established, this primacy was continually reinforced. The Babylonian Talmud received more attention. It was studied by more scholars, it became the subject of more and of better commentaries; it was copied more often and more carefully by larger numbers of scribes. The result is that modern scholars have a more solidly established text of the Babylonian Talmud and a more fully developed exegetical tradition with which to work. Modern critical study of the Jerusalem Talmud has much more fundamental analytical and restorative work to accomplish before a reliable and comprehensible text becomes available."²⁵

2. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (Targum Yerushalmi):

Etymologically rooted in the Quadrilateral Semitic stem *t-r-g-m* (Hebrew: תרגם), the verb signifies both semantic translation and exegetical exposition. Within the lexicon of classical rabbinic literature, however, *targum* (pl. *targumim*) functions as a technical terminus designating the vernacular Aramaic paraphrastic translations of the Tanakh. A central text invoked in comparative Qur'anic studies is the recension commonly styled *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (or *Targum Yerushalmi I*), an appellation stemming from its erroneous attribution to Jonathan ben Uzziel in the first printed edition (Venice, 1591). Regarding the historical provenance and contested nomenclature of this targumic tradition, Per Åke Bengtsson notes:

".....the bulk of haggadic material in Ps-J as dating to the 2nd century CE. Hayward claims that Ps-J is prior to PRE, but does not suggest a precise date. Many Targumists, however, date the final redaction of Ps-J to a period after the Islamic conquest. Rieder dates it to the age of the Crusaders. Le Deaut confirms that the final redaction of Ps-J could not be dated earlier than the eight century CE. From the great affinity of Ps-J to PRE (7th-9th c.), Shinan dates the Targum to the 7th or 8th centuries."²⁶

3. Midrash Pirkei De-Rabbi Eliezer:

Framing this internal evidence through textual and historical-critical analysis, *The Jewish Encyclopedia* outlines the post-Islamic chronological markers embedded in the text:

"Jost was the first to point out that in the thirtieth chapter, in which at the end the author distinctly alludes to the three stages of the Mohammadan conquest, that of Arabia, of Spain and of Rome, the names of Fatima and Ayesha occur

beside that of Ishmael, leading to the conclusion that the book originated in the time when Islam was predominant in Asia Minor. As in ch. 36, two brothers reigning simultaneously are mentioned, after whose reign the Messiah shall come, the work might be ascribed to the beginning of the ninth century, for about that time the two sons of Harun al-Rasid, El-Amin and El-Mamun, were ruling over Islamic realm." ²⁷

4. Midrash Tanḥuma:

On this chronological question, Samuel Berman similarly contends that the compilation achieved its definitive redaction during the late ninth or tenth century CE, observing:

"The Midrash Tanhuma Yelemmedenu is a homiletical Midrash divided according to the Palestinian practice of reading the Torah according in a triennial cycle. This fact, together with the preponderance of saying quoted in the name of Palestinian sages, has lead some Midrashic authorities to maintain that it was compiled in Palestine. Other scholars insist that the references to the Babylonian academies, the inclusion of passages from the She'iltot of Rav Ahai Gaon, who lived in Babylon where he wrote the She'iltot and the quotation of a considerable number of earlier Babylonian teachers, indicate that the Tanhuma was produced in Babylon. Concerning the date of the completion of this text, we may assume from the inclusion of She'iltot passages and the references to heretics (i.e., the Karaites) that the earliest manuscript of this text was completed in the late eighth or the ninth century." ²⁸

5. Midrash Ha-Gadol

Comprising an extensive exegetical anthology on the Pentateuch, the Five Scrolls and various other biblical corpora, this compilation represents a late medieval synthesis. Regarding its chronological provenance, Solomon Fisch contends that the text of *Midrash Ha-Gadol* was originally composed during the thirteenth century CE, remarking:

"Midrash ha-Gadol, 13th century rabbinic work on the Pentateuch, emanating from Yemen and consisting mainly of excerpts of older rabbinic texts of the Talmudic period." ²⁹

6. Midrash Genesis Rabbah (Bereshit Rabbah)

This Midrashic work achieved its attested textual form in the twelfth century. Regarding its manuscript history, Hans-Jürgen Becker writes:

" The Genesis Rabbah text of Theodor and Albeck (1929), which is today widely used for research, is based upon the London manuscript of Genesis

Rabbah and Leviticus Rabbah (probably twelfth century). This text was emended ('corrected') by the editors based on manuscripts and was supplemented according to MS Vatican 30. The end-product is a Genesis Rabbah text which never before existed."³⁰

7. Sefer Ha-Yashar (The Book of Jasher)

Categorized as a late medieval Haggadic compilation, *Sefer Ha-Yashar* (The Book of Jasher) offers an expanded narrative retelling of biblical episodes from Genesis and Exodus (1:1–2:21) through Joshua and Judges (1:1–2:10). Addressing its geographical and chronological provenance, Moshe David Herr observes:

"Hence the work was written apparently at the end of the 11th century, perhaps in southern Spain. First published in Venice in 1625, it has since been republished many times."³¹

8. Yalkut Shimoni

Widely designated as the *Yalkut* of Simeon of Frankfurt, *Yalkut Shimoni* stands as the quintessential and most exhaustive medieval Midrashic compilation, anthologizing rabbinic exegesis across the entirety of the Tanakh. The exact identity and historical persona of its compiler, however, remain contested within critical scholarship. Delineating these conflicting attributions, Jacob Elbaum notes:

"Zunz dated the Midrash to the 13th century based on the facts that Nathan b. Jehiel of Rome, Rashi and other 12th century scholars did not know the Yalkut, its use of sources which date at the earliest from the end of the 11th century (according to Zunz – including Exodus Rabbah, Numbers Rabbah, Midrash Avkir, Divrei ha-Yamim ha-Arokh, etc.) as well as the fact that Azariah dei *Rossi had a manuscript of it written in 1310. Not all of Zunz's arguments are valid. For example, Rapoport has shown that the Yalkut does not utilize Exodus Rabbah and Numbers Rabbah, but Zunz's view as to its date prevails, despite Gaster's claim that it was compiled in Spain in the 14th century. The attempt of Aptowitzer to predate it to the middle of the 12th century is not convincing."³²

9. Targum Sheni to the Book of Esther:

The primary Aramaic recensions of Esther are conventionally categorized as *Targum Rishon* (First Targum) and *Targum Sheni* (Second Targum), with the former displaying a comparatively restrained degree of haggadic expansion relative to the heavily interpolated nature of the latter. Moreover, the extensive corpus of Esther targumic citations preserved

across rabbinic and medieval commentaries frequently diverging from both extant recensions attests to the dynamic multivocality and fluid transmission history of this tradition, which never coalesced into a single, standardized canonical text. Scholarly consensus generally dates the redaction of *Targum Rishon* between the sixth and eighth centuries CE. Delineating this chronological and text-critical framework, Alinda Damsma observes:

"This work is tentatively dated to the end of the seventh or beginning of the eighth centuries CE and, like Targum Rishon, probably has a Palestinian provenance. However, the surviving manuscripts are dated much later, ranging from the late twelfth to fifteenth centuries and are from central Europe, Italy and Yemen."³³

Part Three: Re-evaluation:

While the historical presence of Jewish communities in Medina and their religious autonomy under the Constitution of Medina (*Mithāq al-Madīnah*) remain undisputed, their possession and widespread knowledge of textual corpora beyond the Torah remain problematic. Haggai Mazuz, a leading specialist in the historiography of the Medinan Jewish communities, observes that external Jewish or Christian documentary sources detailing the history of the Jews of the Hijaz are entirely absent and likely never existed. The primary rabbinic corpora, including the *Mishnah*, the *Talmud Bavli* and the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, contain virtually no descriptive historical data regarding Jewish life in the Arabian Peninsula, rendering them of negligible utility for reconstructing their socio-religious profile. As a result, historical inquiry into this milieu remains almost exclusively dependent upon early Islamic source material. He notes:

"There are no and perhaps never were any Jewish or christian sources documenting the history of the Ḥijāzī Jews. the Mishna along with the Babylonian and Jerusalem talmuds lack any detailed information on the lives of Arabian Jews and provide little assistance in building a comprehensive profile of these communities. As a result, we are forced to rely almost exclusively on Islamic sources."³⁴

The historical accounts delineating the socio-cultural fabric and religious rituals of the Medinan Jewish communities remain markedly sparse and fragmented, rendering them insufficient for establishing definitive scholarly conclusions.

"If it is difficult to find historical evidence of the connection between the Arabian Jews and the Land of Israel, it is doubly so in regard to the presence of

the Jerusalem (or Babylonian) talmud amongst the Arabian Jews. the Arab sources on Jewish customs in this period are poor and scarcely allow us to reach any conclusions on the subject."³⁵

Conclusion:

The intersection of text-critical rabbinic scholarship and early Islamic historiography critically destabilizes the foundational premise of nineteenth-century source criticism originally advanced by rabbinic scholars, Christian missionaries and orientalist polemicists. The hypothesis that Qur'anic narratives represent derivative adaptations of rabbinic prototypes rests on a pronounced chronological anachronism: it retrojects late haggadic anthologies, fluid targumic traditions and post-Islamic Midrashic redactions (Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, Midrash Tanḥuma-Yelammedenu, Midrash Ha-Gadol and medieval Talmudic recensions) into the seventh-century Hijazi milieu. Internal textual markers such as direct references to early Islamic dynastic figures alongside contemporary textual scholarship underscore that many of these rabbinic corpora achieved definitive crystallization centuries after the advent of Islam. Compounding this chronological dilemma is a decisive historiographical paradox. As contemporary specialists on the Jews of Arabia acknowledge, external documentary and rabbinic sources documenting the socio-religious life and textual literacy of Medinan Jewry are non-existent, leaving historical inquiry almost entirely dependent upon the Islamic corpus itself. Viewed within this framework, thematic convergences between the Qur'an and surrounding Late Antique religious traditions cannot be sustained as evidence of unmediated literary borrowing. Instead, the Qur'an operates within an autonomous revelatory and hermeneutical paradigm articulated through its self-defined roles as "Muṣaddiq" (authenticating primordial monotheistic truth) and Muhaymin" (a sovereign, corrective arbiter). Through this dual mechanism, the Qur'anic discourse actively redresses historical accretions, engages the circulating oral and scriptural motifs of Late Antiquity and re-establishes prophetic history upon an independent transcendent foundation.

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