ADAPTATIONS
AND INNOVATIONS

Studies on the Interaction between Jewish and Islamic Thought and Literature from the Early Middle Ages to the Late Twentieth Century, Dedicated to Professor Joel L. Kraemer

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ISLAMIC RETELLINGS OF BIBLICAL HISTORY

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1 Introduction

The present study will explore aspects of biblical history as retold in Islamic sources, with a view to revealing the manner in which the retold history acquired local Arabian links. The study will be based on the analysis of traditions circulated during the first period of Islamic history, which is the period in which the great Islamic conquests outside of Arabia became an established fact. This fact provided the background for a universalized historical perception of the origins of Islam. The believers became convinced that their success on the battlefield reflected a divine global scheme in which Islam had played the pivotal role since the very beginning of human history. In fact, Islam came to see itself as the most authentic representative of a universal, supranational religion that has formed an inborn component of humankind since the first moment of Creation. This provided the basis for the Islamic self-legitimacy that was needed for the polemics with Jews and Christians.

On the literary level, one notices the presence of Jewish and Christian elements in the historical concepts that the Muslims formed for themselves. This must have been one of the crucial results of the contact with the older Jewish and Christian cultures, into which the young Islamic society was brought after the Islamic conquests. As noted elsewhere, the Muslims sought in the monotheistic precedent of their new non-Muslim cohabitants a messianic model upon which they could construct their own identity. Thus, they came to see in themselves a nation (umma) chosen by God to fulfill a sacred goal in world history. These concepts must have infiltrated into Islamic society through the countless non-Arab converts.


2 Uri Rubin, Between Bible and Qur’an, (Princeton: Darwin Press 1999), pp. 11-35.
Islamic historical writing evolved mainly through the Islamization of the existing Jewish and Christian historical narratives as preserved in biblical and post biblical sources. All phases of biblical history, from the antediluvian age to the Israelite one, were turned into stages of a sacred history culminating in Muḥammad. The biblical Adam, Noah and Abraham became Muslims in the retold biblical history, and the Jewish and Christian prophets, too, became links in a chain of successive revelations that was preordained to terminate in Muḥammad, the “Seal” of the prophets.

But the link that was established between Islam and world history always included local elements, which preserved the Arabian aspects of the communal Islamic self-image. The present study is dedicated to the analysis of some of these aspects. Arabian elements are noticed not merely in those phases of history in which Muḥammad himself was active, but rather in far earlier stages of history, in fact, already in the very beginning of the biblical history of humankind.

The Muslims connected their local Arabian history to biblical history in two major ways: geographically and genealogically.

2 The Geographical Linkage

The geographical linkage found expression in the stations of the Arabian pilgrimage to Mecca, which came to be associated with various stages of biblical history. Israelite prophets, like Moses and others, were linked to these places in traditions describing their pilgrimage to Mecca, and similar links were produced to the pre-Israelite stage of biblical history. This emerges in traditions about Adam and Eve, in which the first humans were connected to Arabia by means of some linguistic manipulations. For example, one of the stations of the Meccan pilgrimage is called Muzdalifa. The verb izdala’at means to draw near, and traditions were circulated saying that after Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise, they met and drew near each other (izdala’at) in this place. Thus, the name Muzdalifa commemorates their reunion here. Moreover, Adam and Eve are said to have renewed


5 Rubin, Between Bible and Qur’ān, pp. 36-44.

their acquaintance with each other (ta’ārafa) in this area, and hence the name 'Arafa, which stands for another important station of the pilgrimage. Likewise, Adam and Eve are said to have come together (ijtama‘a) here, and hence the form Jam which is another name for Muzdalifah. All these midrashic maneuvers are contained in a tradition of Ibn al-Kalbi (d. 204/819).8

The geographical linkage was also achieved in a straightforward manner in a tradition saying that when Adam and Eve were driven out of Paradise they landed in Mecca, Adam on the sacred hill named al-Ṣafā, and Eve on its twin, the hill named al-Marwa9.

'Ārafa, one of the most notable stations of the pilgrimage, acquired a special position in the life of Adam. This is attested to in a tradition relating that in this place God made a comprehensive covenant10 with all the future descendants of Adam, till the final generation of the days to come, in which all of humanity took it upon themselves to recognize God as the Lord of all. The covenant is mentioned in a Qur'anic verse11, and in the traditions recorded in Qur'anic exegesis it is stated that the covenant was made in 'Arafa, and more specifically, in a place there named Na‘mān12.

The sacred Black Stone13 which is attached to the southeastern corner of the Ka‘ba, also gained a history going back to Adam’s days. It is related that Adam brought it down from heaven to earth, when it was still white as snow. Along with it, Adam brought down the rod of Moses which was made of the myrtle of Paradise.14 Another version relates that when the stone was brought down it was made of a shining diamond which later lost its luster and became black due to the impurity of the pilgrims who touched it.15

Thus Adam and Eve were made into the first pilgrims to Mecca, and the Arabian pilgrimage gained roots in the very beginning of human history. This implies that the Arabian pilgrimage represents the fundamental monotheism that was inherent in humankind since its creation.

The origin of the Ka‘ba itself was projected back to Adam’s time in a tradition relating that God sent this shrine down to Adam, to provide him with

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13 On which see Peters, Pilgrimage, 14-15.
a place of worship\textsuperscript{16}. Alternately, it was related that Adam himself built the Ka‘ba with the aid of the angels, in a sacred territory “opposite” (bi-hiyāl) God’s Throne. The Ka‘ba was built with stones taken from five mountains: Mount Sinai, the Mount of Olives, Mount Lebanon, al-Jūdū (= Ararat), and Ḥirā’ (in Mecca). The latter provided the foundations of the Ka‘ba\textsuperscript{17}.

It is evident that we have here an Islamized, or rather, Arabicized version of Jewish patterns pertaining to the primordial origin of the Temple in Jerusalem\textsuperscript{18}. Our traditions are designed to assert the superiority of the Arabian Mecca over the Jewish Jerusalem, which is also evident from the fact that these traditions are associated with a Qur’ānic verse (3:96) stating that the House at Bakka was the first to be established for humankind. The Muslim exegetes are sure that Bakka is Mecca and that the Ka‘ba was established 40 years before the temple of Jerusalem\textsuperscript{19}.

3 Genealogy: the Table of the Nations

The genealogical link between Arabian and biblical histories comes out in traditions in which names of heroes figuring in Arabian pre-Islamic epics are incorporated into the biblical genealogy of the generations from Adam to Abraham.

Such a link was gained, to begin with, for Ḥūd, the righteous prophet who lived amidst the sinners of ‘Ād, an extinct people known to us mainly from the Qur’ān\textsuperscript{20}. The Qur’ān mentions Ḥūd’s community together with Thamūd, the extinct community of the prophet Ṣāliḥ. Islamic tradition has located Ḥūd deep in the past of ancient extinct nations whom God destroyed because of their sins. Ḥūd himself is said to have found shelter in Mecca\textsuperscript{21}. The story of Ḥūd is related by Ibn Ishaq (d. 150/768), a famous biographer of Muhammad who flourished in the beginning of the second Islamic era. His work is based on very early historiographical sources, including traditions which were circulated by Jewish converts to Islam. Ibn

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., vol. I, p. 124 (vol. I, p. 123).
\textsuperscript{21} Mas‘ūdī, Ithbāt al-waṣīyā, p. 38.
Ishaq’s account was recorded by al-Ṭabari in his well-known historical compilation. Ibn Ishaq also states that Hūd and Sāliḥ were the only prophets between Noah and Abraham. Thus, Arabian heroes gained a place among biblical forefathers.

More specifically, Hūd’s name was linked to the biblical Table of the Nations. This Table contains a detailed list of the races and nations that were formed after the Deluge, and Hūd’s name was linked to Eber (in Arabic: ‘Ābir), one of Shem’s descendants and the ancestor of the Hebrews. The link to this ancestor was facilitated by the fact that Hūd in Arabic means “Jews”. That Hūd was identified with the biblical Eber is indicated in a tradition quoted by al-Ṭabari from an unidentified source. In fact, already the Qur’an places Hūd and Sāliḥ immediately after Noah.

Apart from individual persons, whole tribal units were also linked to the biblical genealogy, thus affirming the Arabian links of the biblical Table of the Nations. Ibn Ishaq tells us that the biblical Lud, the son of Shem, begot a son named Ṭasm, as well as a son named Imliq, the ancestor of the Amalekites, and that the descendants of these two sons settled in the Mashriq, ‘Uman, Hijāz, Syria and Egypt. Ibn Ishaq goes on to recount names of tribes and leaders that were born to the biblical Lud, who lived in Arabia in remote pre-Islamic times. One of them is al-Arqam, whom Ibn Ishaq describes as “king of the Hijāz” who resided in Taymā’. Further on, Ibn Ishaq mentions a person named Umaym whose descendants were destroyed by God and only a few of them survived. As for Ṭasm, Ibn Ishaq goes on to say that his children lived in the region of the Yamāmah (eastern Arabia). Ibn Ishaq defines all these clans as an ethnic Arabian group in contrast to another branch of the sons of the biblical Lud whom he describes as Persian-speaking peoples.

It is thus clear that Islamic historiography anchored the Arabian past in the universal biblical past by adding Arab links to the original biblical genealogy. It should be noted that in Jewish post-biblical genealogies, as recorded for example in the Book of Jubilees (Chapters 8-9), the sons of Lud lack any Arabian touch, not to mention the fact that in the original Table of the Nations Lud has no children whatsoever.

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24 Genesis 10.
30 Genesis 10:22.
As for Amalek, who according to Ibn Isḥaqq was also one of Lud’s children, he does appear in the Bible, but with no relationship to Lud. He is rather the son of Esau.31

Another son of Shem, according to the Table of the Nations, is Aram.32 In the Book of Jubilees,33 his territory lacks any Arabian links, but not so in Ibn Isḥaqq. Here the list of Aram’s descendants includes several Arabian links, namely ‘Ād, Thamûd and Jadîs.34 Ibn Isḥaqq defines these peoples as indigenous Arabs (‘arab ‘āriba), saying that their mother tongue was Arabic. He distinguishes them from the children of Ishmael who are called al-‘arab al-muta’arriba, “Arabicized” Arabs, because the latter only learnt Arabic when they settled among the indigenous Arabs.

4 Ishmael

The ancestors included in the Table of the Nations provide the Arabian past with links to the remotest world history, but a more immediate connection was offered by Ishmael, son of Abraham and half-brother of Isaac.35 The Ishmaelite links are geographical as well as genealogical.

On the geographical level, Ishmael’s name was associated with the history of various holy sites near Mecca, which serve as stations in the Arabian pilgrimage to Mecca. Ishmael’s presence in Arabia was made possible by means of a remolding of a passage in Genesis 21, in which Hagar and Ishmael are cast out on the behest of Sara and wander in the wilderness of Beer Sheba. They soon run out of water, Ishmael is about to die, and thereupon an angel appears and reveals to them a well of water. Thus they are saved and the boy grows up and dwells in the wilderness of Paran. Islamic tradition locates these events in Arabia, and the well which saved Ishmael’s life is identified with Zamzam, the sacred well near the Ka’ba.36

As we have seen above, Ishmael is not considered to be an indigenous Arab; indeed, some versions of the story of Hagar and Ishmael describe the transformation of Ishmael’s Hebrew identity into an Arab one. It is related that when Ishmael and his mother were looking for water in the Meccan

31 Genesis 36:12.
32 Genesis 10:22.
33 Jubilees 9:5.
in the wilderness, Hagar discovered the well that was produced by the angel Gabriel. She called her son in Hebrew to approach the water, but at that moment the boy forgot his Hebrew and answered his mother in Arabic. Ishmael was thus the first person to speak Arabic in his own generation. This miraculous shift from Hebrew to Arabic means that the latter language replaces Hebrew as the new Holy Tongue.

Most significant also is Ishmael's role as a genealogical link connecting the local Arab tribes to biblical genealogy. To begin with, Ibn Ishāq reproduces the names of Ishmael's twelve sons as listed in the Bible, and he adds the name of their mother, which is missing from the Bible. She is al-Sayyida bint Muqāq of the tribe of Jurhum. This tribe is believed to have been dominant near Mecca, and thus Ishmael's sons gain direct genealogical links to Arabia.

Above all, the first two names on the list of Ishmael's twelve sons, Nebajoth and Kedar, were turned into ancestors of none other than the Prophet Muḥammad himself. The names of these two brothers interchange in the various versions of Muhammad's pedigree. One of the earliest versions is that of Ibn Ishāq in which Muḥammad's lineage is connected to Ishmael through Nebajoth. It begins with 'Abdallāh, Muhammad's father, and ends with Adam. Nebajoth figures in Ibn Ishāq's list as the father of an Arab ancestor named Yashjub.

Various genealogists circulated other versions, and in one of them the Arabian pedigree is traced back to Ishmael through Kedar. This is a tradition of Ibn al-Kalbi, the celebrated genealogist, as preserved by Ibn Sa’d. It is confined to the remote ancestors of the Quraysh, Muhammad's tribe. Their list begins with Ma’add ibn ’Adnan ibn Udad, and contains 37 names linking Ma’add's grandfather to Kedar. Some of the names are biblical, such as Uz the son of Aram, who is here the grandson of Kedar. Uz has thus been removed from his original biblical generation as specified in the Table of the Nations to a later Arabian one. Such a shift shows that the Muslim genealogists looked desperately for names with which to bridge the enormous gap separating the immediate ancestors of the Quraysh from

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37 Mas’ūdī, Iḥbāt al-waṣīyya, p. 44.
43 Ibn Sa’d, Kitāb al-tabaqāt, 8 vols., (Beirut 1960), vol. I, p. 56.
44 Genesis 10:23.
Ishmael. Other biblical names that were located between Ishmael and the ancestors of the Quraysh occur in the above list of Ibn Ishâq; note especially Nahor and his father Terah, the latter being specified as Nebajoth's great grandson. The same pair of names recurs on Ibn Ishâq's list in their original biblical location, as Abraham's ancestors.

As for Ibn al-Kalbi, it is significant that he does not identify his source for the names linking Ma'add ibn 'Adnan ibn Udad to Nebajoth. He only says that "an informant told it to me on the authority of my father, but I did not hear it (directly) from him." One suspects that Ibn al-Kalbi's obscure informant is a Jew; this is confirmed by yet another account, in which Ibn al-Kalbi discloses the origin of the genealogical list bridging the gap between Ma'add ibn 'Adnan and Ishmael. He tells us that a Jew of the people of Tadmur (Palmyra) who embraced Islam and was well versed in Hebrew scriptures used to say that the most accurate genealogy of Ma'add ibn 'Adnan had been recorded by Jeremiah's secretary, Baruch the son of Neriah. Ibn al-Kalbi adds that the Arab names on his own list are very similar to those recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that they were "translated" (turjimat) from the Hebrew. Ibn al-Kalbi also informs us—again from an unidentified source—that Ma'add lived in the time of Jesus.

It follows that non-Muslim converts were only too glad to supply religious information to their Arab partners, but the latter used their materials for particularistic purposes, namely, to link the distinctive Arabian origins of Islam to the biblical past.

But Muslims were not always happy with all the genealogical data that came from Jewish origins. Their aversion to this information soon grew to the degree that traditions were circulated in which it was claimed that the Prophet himself, when recounting his own genealogy, never went beyond the name of 'Adnân ibn Ma'add ibn Udad. The Prophet used to stop there, saying that the genealogists have lied concerning the rest of the pedigree (kadhaba l-nassâbûn). The Prophet also adduced a Qur'anic passage (25:38) that was understood in the sense that many generations who lived before 'Ād and Thamûd had perished and sank into oblivion (wa-qurūn an bayna dhâlika kathīran)\(^{49}\). This tradition about the Prophet was circulated by Ibn al-Kalbi's father (Muhammad ibn al-Sa'îb, Kûfan d. 146/763) on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas.\(^{50}\) Al-Kalbi himself, so his son Ibn al-Kalbi tells us,}

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\(^{45}\) But in Genesis 11:24 Nahor is Terah's father. 
\(^{46}\) Ibn Sa'd, vol. I, p. 56. 
\(^{49}\) According to Ibn Mas'ud, this verse speaks about "'Ad and Thamûd and those beyond them, whom only God knows, and the genealogists have lied." See Ibn Sa'd, vol. I, p. 56. 
\(^{50}\) Ibn Sa'd, vol. I, p. 56.
took this tradition seriously, and he too stopped recounting the full list of names joining 'Adnān to Ishmael. Several more traditions asserting the dubious nature of the genealogical data beyond 'Adnān were circulated on the authority of 'Urwa ibn al-Zubayr, and others.

However, whatever the intermediary links, every one agreed that Muḥammad’s pedigree traces to Ishmael, and those who did not rely on the full lists, simply recounted them from Muḥammad till Ma‘add, then resumed the delineation from Ishmael up to Adam. Such cautious practice was recommended by Ibn Sa’d to his readers.

5 Arabian Authority: The Light of Muḥammad

The Arab descendants of Ishmael as listed in the Islamic genealogical lists soon acquired a prophetic status of their own which overshadowed the biblical prophets who succeeded Abraham. This is reflected mainly in the fact that the Arab figures replaced the biblical prophets as models of authority, which were used to legitimize the claims of certain Islamic dynasties. Originally, the models were based on the precedent of the Israelite prophets who were taken to represent a divinely chosen pedigree. The Umayyads, for example, claimed that the Israelite prophets possessed a divine legacy which Muḥammad inherited from them, and in due course it was passed on to the Umayyad caliphs.

The Shi‘īs too know of an unchanging divine legacy, or a divine light, that transmigrates through the generations from Adam to Muḥammad. On its way, it passes through the Israelite prophets who forward it to Muḥammad, and from him it reaches the imāms.

In some versions the successive legacy is identified with Muḥammad’s own pre-existent entity. This is the case in a tradition recorded by Ibn Sa’d, which attributes to Muḥammad the following statement:

I was brought forth from amongst the best generations of the sons of Adam, generation after generation, until I was brought forth from the generation in which I live.

Bu‘iṭtu min khayri qurāni bānī ‘Adama qarnan fā-qarnan ḥattā bu‘iṭtu mina l-qarnī iladā hāntu fiḥī.

Goldziher\(^\text{58}\) has already pointed out that this tradition speaks about the same prophet, i.e. the pre-existent Muhammad, who has appeared among humans, generation after generation (qarnan fā-qarnan), until at last he arose as Muḥammad. This means that according to Goldziher, this tradition sees in the corporeal Muhammad a prophet who has received his prophetic sparkle from the prophets of previous generations. This may well be the case, but Muslim scholars interpreted the tradition in an entirely different way\(^\text{59}\). Al-Qaṣṭallānī (d. 923/1517), for example, says that the tradition deals with Muḥammad’s transmigration\(^\text{60}\) in the loins of the ancestors, from one ancestor to another and from one generation to the other, until he emerged in the generation in which he lived. Al-Qaṣṭallānī goes on to say that this means that Muhammad first transmigrated through the loins of the children of Ishmael, then through the Kināna (a subdivision of the children of Ishmael to which the Quraysh belonged) to the Quraysh, and finally to Ḥāshim (Muḥammad’s own clan)\(^\text{61}\).

In other words, al-Qaṣṭallānī’s commentary excludes the Jewish and Christian prophets from the line of transmission, and instead reads into the tradition a particularistic concept seeing in Muḥammad’s Arab ancestors (all of whom descending from Ishmael) links in a chain of a divine hereditary legacy. In this manner, the line of Muḥammad’s Arab ancestors has become the channel through which Muḥammad the man inherited his prophetic essence. Consequently, the Arab ancestors have replaced the Israelite prophets as his spiritual and prophetic archetypes.

Al-Qaṣṭallānī’s explanation was inspired, in part, by numerous other traditions praising Muhammad’s Arab forefathers as virtuous persons belonging to a chosen pedigree, whose mission was to bear in their loins the pre-existent Muḥammad and give birth to him in due course. The traditions highlight not only the purity of their race but also their religious integrity, which is said to have been focused on the uncontaminated religion of Abraham. As such, they are often described as ḥanīfs, i.e. monotheists ad-

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\(^{59}\) For which see also Rubin, “Pre-Existence”, p. 72 n. 27.

\(^{60}\) In Arabic: *taqallub*, a term gleaned from Qurān 26:219 which was interpreted as though dealing with the transmigration of the pre-existent Muḥammad through the loins of his forefathers.

hering to the religion of Abraham. The Muslims were requested to honor the memory of these ancestors, as is indicated, for example, in the following instruction that was attributed to the Prophet: “Do not curse Ma’add, for he adhered to the hanifiyah of Abraham.”

Some traditions describe emblems of Abrahamic authority that were transmitted among the Arab ancestors of the Quraysh, from generation to generation. For example, it is related that Ḥāshim had in his possession the bow (qaws) of Ishmael, which had come down to him from his own forefathers, the descendants of Ishmael. Ḥāshim bequeathed the bow to ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib his son, grandfather of Muḥammad, together with other objects, such as the banner (liwāʾ) of his forefather Nizār, and put him in charge of the affairs of the pilgrims coming to Mecca. The entire authority of the Quraysh as custodians of the Ka’ba was based on the perception that they were keeping an Abrahamic legacy. This is indicated in a tradition relating that the Arabs used to say: “The Quraysh carried out for us the religious duties which Ishmael entrusted us with.” Overall it was reported that the Quraysh preserved many elements of the law (shariʿah) of Abraham and therefore they used to circumcise their children and perform the rites of the pilgrimage, observe various rules of purification, etc.

The most exalted aspect of the role of the Arab ancestors as links in a chosen pedigree, which was the origin of the Islamic revelation, is represented in their function as bearers of what is known as Nūr Muḥammad: “The Light of Muḥammad.” This is the luminous representation of the pre-existent Muḥammad that wanders through the loins of the ancestors. The traditions describe in detail the course of its transmission from Ishmael to Muḥammad, as well as its arrival to Ishmael from his own biblical forefathers since Adam. The Israelite prophets, i.e. the descendants of Isaac, are totally excluded from the course of this Light which goes from Abraham to Ishmael, and from then on remains confined to a purely Arabian chain of transmission, till Muḥammad. The Muslim prophet thus inherits his prophetic power from his own Arabian ancestors and not from the Israelite prophets.

The exclusion of the Israelite prophets from the course of Nūr Muḥammad is explicitly described in traditions recorded by al-Khargūshī (d. 406/1015) in his Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā. One of these traditions describes the transi-

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62 Rubin, “Pre-Existence”, 71-78.
tion of the Light from Abraham on, saying that Ishmael (and not Isaac) was the one who inherited it from Abraham, and from Ishmael the Light reached Ishmael's son, Kedar. Moreover, the latter is said to have married numerous wives from the children of Isaac but none bore him a child. Eventually an angel appeared to Kedar and told him that he must marry a woman of Arab descent, because only she would bear him a son who shall inherit from him the Muḥammadan Light.

Furthermore, the Light of Muhammad which was possessed by Kedar is considered equal in prophetic importance to the Ark of the Covenant (in Arabic: ṭābūt), the most precious symbol of Israelite prophethood. Islamic tradition describes the course of the ark's transmission from Adam to Abraham and thence to the Israelite prophets. In Khargūšī's version, however, Abraham is said to have bequeathed the Ark to Ishmael (and not to Isaac), and Ishmael forwarded it to Kedar his son. The sons of Isaac requested that the Ark be returned to them, claiming that only prophets ought to hold it. Kedar refused to part with the Ark and even tried to open it but failed to do so because he was not a prophet. Eventually an angel appeared to Kedar telling him to hand the Ark over to Jacob. Kedar carried the Ark from Arabia to the Land of Canaan, where he entrusted it to Jacob, and the latter bequeathed it to his children, the Israelite prophets. The most significant element in this story is the assertion that in spite of losing the Ark to the Israelites, Kedar retained in his body the Light of Muḥammad, and Jacob himself is said to have praised him for having this Light. This implies that the Light of Muḥammad is equivalent to the Israelite Ark and ensures for the Arab ancestors a prophetic eminence identical to that embodied in the Ark.

Thus, by means of the concept of Nūr Muḥammad, the origins of Islam have been detached from the Jewish and Christian line of transmission and have been anchored in the pure and noble Arabian pedigree of the Prophet.

6 Farazdaq

When did the Arabian origins of Islam become part of biblical history as retold in Islam? A clue is provided in the poetry of al-Farazdaq (d. 112/...
730) who flourished in the Umayyad period. His verses already betray a developed awareness and pride of the divine legacy of the pre-Islamic ancestors of the Quraysh. The pre-Islamic Arabian legacy which Farazdaq praises revolves around the central places of worship in the Hijāz, and above all the Ka’ba in Mecca. This sanctuary is closely associated in his mind with the universal legacy of Abraham, to which, in his perception, the Muslims are the direct heirs. They have inherited it from Abraham through the Arabian children of Ishmael, the ancestors of the Quraysh. Abraham’s name appears in this context in the following verse in which Farazdaq proudly declares:

We have inherited from the friend (khālīl) of God a House/ suitable for prayer and purification
It is the House towards which from every direction / the dead in the graves are directed.
Warithnā ‘an khālīlī ilāhī bayṣān yaḥṭū li-l-ṣalātī wa-li-l-tuḥūrī
Huwa l-baytū tlaḍḥī min kullī wajān ilāyhi wujīhu aṣḥābī al-qubārī

By “We” Farazdaq seems to refer to his own tribe, the Tamīm, who were deeply involved in the rites of the Ka’ba in pre-Islamic times71. But his pride has now gained a communal Islamic context, because the Ka’ba has become the destination of every believer, and all graves, as he says, are directed towards it. The key words here are “We inherited” (warithnā) which implies the idea of a divine legacy being handed down since Abraham.

The course of Abraham’s legacy is strictly genealogical and goes through Ishmael, as is indicated in another verse in which Farazdaq states: “Our father is the friend of God and (so is) the son of His friend” (abūnā khālīlū ilāhī wa-ibnī khālīlīhī)72. This is an allusion to Abraham and Ishmael his son, forefathers of the community to which Farazdaq belongs.

In fact, elsewhere Farazdaq mentions explicitly several of the Arabian ancestors in close association with Abraham’s legacy. This legacy was continued through the Umayyad caliphs, whom he praises in many of his verses. In some of the verses, Farazdaq mentions the forefather Lu’ayy ibn Ghālib, as well as the heritage of Abraham, which the latter handed down to his posterity of the Quraysh, containing “every treasure and prophetic scripture”73.

It is significant that Farazdaq’s Mecca and the Ka’ba are not associated with any other prophet except Abraham, which seems, perhaps, to indicate that the traditions about Adam and Mecca, for example, are the result of a secondary elaboration on the initial Abrahamic kernel of the Arabian pilgrimage.

71 See Kister, “Mecca and Tamīm”, passim.
Finally, one wonders whether the Qur’ānic retellings of biblical history already contain Arabian links.

To begin with, Bedouins (a’rāb) are treated in the Qur’ān with considerable contempt, and the only Arabian pride that is evinced in the Qur’ān is the linguistic one. The Qur’ān stresses repeatedly that the tongue of this scripture is clear Arabic.

As for the Quraysh, they are anything but virtuous, in fact they are treated as unbelievers who have to be admonished and called to repent (106:1-4).

As for the religious message of the Qur’ānic prophet, nowhere in the Qur’ān is there any hint that Muhammad’s prophethood is related to any Arabian prophetic precedent. His prophetic mission is strictly and exclusively related to the legacy of the Israelite prophets, as is stated for example in 4:163:

> We have revealed to you (our word) in the same way as We have revealed (it) to Noah and to the prophets after him, and as We revealed (it) to Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the tribes (of Israel), and Jesus and Job and Jonas, and Aaron and Solomon. We gave Psalms to David.

It is noteworthy that Abraham and Ishmael are entirely related here to the Israelite line of biblical prophets, and lack any Arabian link. All this seems to indicate that the Qur’ān preserves here a very early stage in the evolution of the Islamic self-image, when the basic model of Islam was still closely associated with the Israelite monotheistic legacy.

However, Abraham and Ishmael do appear in other verses in what seems to be an Arabian context. Thus in 14:35-41 the Qur’ān clearly associates the Holy House of God, i.e. the Ka’ba, with the posterity of Abraham, as well as with Abraham himself, who lodges his descendants close to that House. In 2:124-28, Abraham is accompanied by his son Ishmael, and God commands them to purify the House for worshippers frequenting it, and performing the rites there. Abraham and Ishmael raise up the “foundations of the House”. Afterwards Abraham prays to God, asking him to show him the holy rites, and to send among his seed a messenger, who is the Qur’ānic Prophet (2:128-129).

This interchange of the Qur’ānic Abraham between the Israelite and the Arabian contexts—which is also indicated in some other Qur’ānic passages dealing with the Meccan pilgrimage—was noticed by Islamicists long ago, and already Snouck Hurgronje described it systematically. For most mod-

75 E.g. Qur’ān 16:103, etc.
ern scholars this was indicative of a change in Muḥammad’s policy, who, following what is known as the “break with the Jews” of Medina, suppos-edly decided to dissociate himself from Jewish legacy and concentrate on the Arabian one. But this can only be accepted if one takes for granted the authenticity of the Qurʿān as a collection of prophetic revelations of the histor-ical Muḥammad. On the other hand, in light of serious doubts that younger scholars have raised in this respect, one can no longer be sure what was the exact history of the Qurʿān. It is therefore equally feasible to assume that the Arabian oriented layers of the Qurʿān are the product of post Muḥammadan authors guided by a particularistic urge to highlight the Arabian origins of Islam.