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The Best of Stories:
Yusuf as Joseph in Hebrew Translations of the Qur'an

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Submitted May 1, 2012

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Introduction

In 2006, the Saudi Arabian King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an announced its newest undertaking; the publication of an "official" Hebrew translation of the Qur'an. An article in *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, a pan-Arab newspaper, described this project as a response to previously published Hebrew translations that "contain distorted or unreliable translations of the meanings of the Holy Quran," and are said to have been "prepared by prejudiced, anti-Islamic, or incompetent individuals."[1] Upon stumbling across this article's announcement of the undertaking - which has, as of yet, failed to come to fruition - several questions sprang to my mind. How many previous Hebrew translations had been published, and by whom? In what ways could they be considered anti-Islamic or otherwise inaccurate representations of the Qur'an? Who were their audiences, and who was the intended audience for this proposed new translation (especially given that at the time of its announcement Saudi Arabia was still enforcing a trade boycott with Israel)? From a more general viewpoint, what special concerns beyond those relevant to the translation of any work into any language are present when the Qur'an is translated into Hebrew, and how have these been addressed by translators in the past?

This project developed out of my continued fascination with these questions and my attempts to answer at least some of them. Upon conducting further research, I discovered that the collection of full, published translations of the Qur'an into Hebrew consisted of just four works, the first of which did not appear until 1857. The most recent was published nearly a century and a half later, in 2005. In some ways, the differences between the four translations reflect this long time span, and the monumental changes to the Hebrew language and the Jewish community that

[1] Abdulilah al Khulaifi, "Saudi Arabia: Official Translation of the Holy Qur'an into Hebrew to Take Over a Year," *Asharq Al-Awsat*, July 25, 2007, http://www.asharq-e.com/news.asp?section=7&id=9687.

occurred between these two dates. In other ways, however, these four translators are remarkably consistent in their treatments of the Qur'an. In examining these treatments of the Qur'an's specific contents, I was primarily interested in how the translators treat those of its narratives which are present also in the Hebrew Bible, as so many of the Qur'an's stories are.

Specifically, I focused my study on the story of Yusuf, which is related in the twelfth *sura*, or chapter, of the Qur'an. Known as Joseph in the Hebrew Bible, he is famous there - and in such modern works as the musical *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* - for his multi-colored garment and for his place in the family tree of the patriarchs. While neither of these two characteristics serve to define Yusuf, as featured in the Qur'an, in other ways the narratives of these two characters are closely related. Furthermore, in both the Jewish and Islamic traditions Joseph/Yusuf is an undeniably central and honored figure. His story is lengthy when compared to others in both Genesis and the Qur'an, and he is the subject of generous praise by both Jewish and Islamic commentators. They extol many of his personal qualities, particularly his exceptional physical beauty. Through comparing the four translations in this project, then, I examine the impact of these points of both convergence and divergence between the two narratives on the process of rendering the Qur'anic narrative in the language of the Biblical narrative. In multiple instances and in multiple ways, each translator incorporates the influence of the Hebrew Bible into his work, and thus filters Yusuf through the lens of Joseph. All four translators therefore, through different methods, produce works that are oriented more towards their target audience of Hebrew speakers than they are towards the source Arabic text of the Qur'an.

The first half of this paper offers a context for the questions guiding this comparison, and for their significance in the intersection of the larger studies of religion and translation. I discuss

first the Qur'an as a whole, and in particular those of its features that have historically complicated its translation. I then follow this with a discussion of the process of translating sacred texts in general, and especially the history of translation back and forth between Hebrew and Arabic. Finally, I turn to Yusuf himself, both his place in the Islamic tradition and his relationship to Joseph of the Jewish tradition. The second chapter of this project is then devoted to an analytical comparison of the four translations. I examine five discrete portions of text drawn from throughout the *sura*, and, in a separate section for each, offer observations and analysis of the distinct decisions made by each translator. These decisions reflect many of the ongoing challenges of the process of translation, whether of the Qur'an or of other texts, and whether into Hebrew or other languages. They also reflect the particular challenge of adapting a story from one tradition - that of Yusuf - for an audience more familiar with a parallel story from another, that of Joseph. While it is certainly extreme to judge these resultant translations as "distorted or unreliable," it is also clear that the story of Joseph has had a heavy influence on their production in all four cases. In this way, the specifics of each translator's choices that I discuss demonstrate how each has approached the Qur'an from this distinct context, and with this Biblical story in mind.

Chapter One: Background

The Qur'an

The Qur'an, the sacred text of Islam, dates back to 610 CE when, according to the Islamic tradition, the Prophet Muhammad began receiving divine revelations through the intermediary of the angel Jibra'il, or Gabriel, while meditating near the city of Mecca in the western Arabian Peninsula. He continued to receive these revelations, often in direct response to the events of his life, for two more decades until his death in 632 CE. During this time Muhammad acquired followers by preaching the contents of his revelations and, in 622 CE, the year that became the start of the Islamic Calendar, he led these followers from Mecca to settle in the city of Yathrib, later known as Medina.[2] During his lifetime the collection of Muhammad's revelations were transmitted and preserved orally. It is unclear when they were first written down or, at what point these writings were compiled into a standardized canonical work that formed the basis of the newly-formed religion of Islam. One common tradition holds that by the time of Muhammad's death, parts of the Qur'an were preserved as writings on various materials such as palm leaves, animal bones, wooden boards, and scraps of cloth and papyrus.[3] It was only under the guidance of Uthman, who ruled as the third caliph after Muhammad in 644 CE, that these various fragments were compiled into an official edition of the Qur'an.[4] Alongside this development of a

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[2] Reza Aslan, *No God but God : The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2006), 34-9.

[3] Claude Gilliot, "Creation of a Fixed Text," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 44.

[4] While Islamic tradition generally holds this Uthmanic text to be the source of the text of the Qur'an as we know it today, there are numerous uncertainties and inconsistencies in various accounts of the Qur'an's codification. Complicating this history is the fact that none of these early Qur'ans survive; the oldest extant versions are part of the large collection of manuscripts discovered in Sana'a, Yemen in 1972, and date from the 8th century. For more on alternative codification theories, see Fred Donner, "The Historical Context," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 23-40, Gilliot, "Creation of a Fixed Text," 41-58, and Aliza Shnizer, "Sacrality and Collection," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 159-171. For more on the Sana'a manuscripts, see G.R. Puin, "Observations on Early Qur'an Manuscripts in Sana'a'," in *The Qur'an as Text*, ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden; New York : E.J. Brill, 1996), 107-111.

standardized text came the development of an Islamic exegetical tradition in the form of commentary and interpretation, or *tafsir* and *ta'wil*.[5] In the centuries following Muhammad's death, multiple such collections of commentary were made, based not only on the text of the Qur'an itself but also on reports of Muhammad's other sayings and activities, known as *hadith*.[6]

When compared – as it often is – to Jewish and Christian scriptures, it becomes evident that the Qur'an contains aspects both undeniably foreign and extremely similar to those of these other religious texts. With regards to its dissimilar features, some of the most immediately striking concern the Qur'an's organization and format. While the work is divided into discrete sections – each referred to as a *sura*, plural *suwar* – unlike the chapters of the Hebrew and Christian Bibles, these 114 sections are arranged not chronologically but roughly in order of decreasing length.[7] Each *sura* is further divided into verses, known as *ayat* (singular, *aya*), a word which more generally refers to "signs" or "divine portents," and is used in this sense at several points in the Qur'an itself. The number of *ayat* in each *sura* ranges from three to 286, and the length of each *aya* itself ranges from three words to several lines long.

Despite this disparity in length, there are some features shared by all *suwar*. Each is given a short, often single word title drawn from its subject matter, and each opens with the phrase, central to Islam, known as the *bismillah*, which states, "بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم / In the name of Allah the Compassionate the Merciful."[8] There are, of course, exceptions. Namely, *Sura* 112 is the only one whose title ("الإخلاص / *al-Ikhlāṣ* / Sincerity") cannot be found in the text of the *sura*

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[5] Both terms refer to the act of interpretation; *ta'wil* occurs in the Qur'an itself, usually in relation to the act of dream interpretation, while *tafsir* is related to Hebrew and Aramaic word *pesher*, of similar meaning and use in the Jewish tradition. Claude Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Classical and Medieval," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Brill, 2005), http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/uid=3548/entry?entry=q3_COM-00058.

[6] For an overview of the more notable of these early exegetical collections, many of which are still in use today, see Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qur'an: Classical and Medieval."

[7] The primary exception to this rule is the first *sura*, سورة الفاتحة / *The Opening*, which contains only seven *ayat*.

[8] Throughout this paper, all Arabic and Hebrew quotes from the Qur'an, the Hebrew translations, or the Hebrew Bible are given in their original form, along with my own English translations. In the case of single words, I provide an English transliteration as well.

itself, and *Sura* 9 is the only one that omits the *bismillah*. In many editions, the heading to each *sura* also indicates whether it was first revealed to Muhammad during the Meccan – as are the majority – or Medinan period of his life, according to Islamic tradition.[9] In addition, the first *ayat* of twenty-nine different *suwar* begin with distinct sequences of one to five individual letters of unknown meaning.[10]

With regard to its contents, the Qur'an moves from genre to genre, and incorporates sections that can be classified as narrative, poetic, hortatory, hymnic, and legal.[11] It is among the most distinctly narrative sections that readers of Jewish and Christian scriptures will find more familiar aspects, as many of these sections consist of historical accounts concerning characters and events found also in the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. Indeed, a majority of named characters in the Qur'an are found in these works also; they include Abraham, Jonah, Noah, Moses, Jacob, Lot, Mary, Jesus and, of course, Joseph. Despite this extensive overlap, however, in the Qur'an these characters and stories take a distinct form, often with altered details, and serve a distinct purpose. Specifically, in the Qur'an, "it is clear that the biblical stories are cited not for their narrative or historical significance but for their spiritual and moral guidance, most especially in emphasizing the notion of God's determination of, and involvement in, history."[12] As such, the primary focus of these stories is on the role played by these characters in serving as divinely-guided prophets and thus as Muhammad's predecessors since he is presented as the last of this line of prophets. The terms "نبي / *nabī* / prophet" and "رسول / *rasūl* / messenger" are both

[9] For a detailed explanation of the stylistic and thematic differences that can be found between Meccan and Medinan *suwar*, see Angelika Neuwirth, "Structural, Linguistic and Literary Features," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 110-1.
[10] See Keith Massey, "Mysterious Letters," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Brill, 2005), http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=q3_COM-00128.
[11] Mustansir Mir, "Language," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 96.
[12] Andrew Rippin, "Interpreting the Bible Through the Qur'an," in *Approaches to the Qur'an*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdel-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 250.

used to refer to these central figures, though not always interchangeably, and a great deal of scholarship is devoted to the differing usages and connotations of the two.[13] At several points the Qur'an itself acknowledges the origins of this material and presents its own contents as both a confirmation of and successor to these previous works. *Sura* 3:3-4, for instance, states; "نزل عليك الكتاب بالحق مصدقا لما بين يديه وأنزل التوراة والإنجيل من قبل هدى للناس / He revealed to you [Muhammad] the Book in truth, confirming that which was before it, as he revealed the Torah and the Gospel before as a guidance for the people." Many early Islamic commentators as well refer to stories from the Jewish tradition, a genre known collectively as *Isrā'īliyat*.[14]

Many of these stories of Biblical prophets, which are scattered throughout the Qur'an, are further unified by the theme of divine retribution that is visited upon those who reject these prophets' messages and refuse to believe. There are several other prominent themes repeated throughout the work, which, along with extensive repetition of words, phrases, and stories, serve as a highly effective unifying force despite the paucity of chronological and narrative links. The most evident of these themes is the monotheistic assertion of Allah's uniqueness and the supremacy of his attributes. For much of the Qur'an Allah himself is the speaker, and the text switches between singular and plural first person.

As the lack of internal chronology offers no clue as to the order in which Muhammad received these revelations, Islamic tradition offers several possible arrangements. The very first of these revelations is almost universally accepted to be *Sura* 96, whose opening line, "اقرأ باسم ربك الذي خلق / Recite, in the name of your Lord who created," is interpreted as a reference to

[13] See, for example, W. A. Bijlefeld, "A Prophet and More than a Prophet," in *The Qur'an, Style and Contents*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2001), 131-158, Uri Rubin, "Prophets and Prophethood," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 234-247, and Roberto Tottoli and Michael Robertson, *Biblical Prophets in the Qur'an and Muslim Literature* (London: Routledge, 2009).

[14] For more on this genre, see G. Vajda, "Isra'iliyyat," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman et al. (Brill, 2006), http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=islam_SIM-3670.

Muhammad's initial reception and recitation of his revelations. Such self-awareness and referentiality is a prominent feature throughout the Qur'an. Frequently, the text refers to itself at the level of both individual revelations and as a larger text, explicitly one written in "لسان عربي مبين / clear Arabic language."[15] Of this characteristic, Stefan Wild explains:

> This self-reflexivity of the Prophet's recitation is mirrored by the self-referentiality of the Qur'anic text as we know it. This overriding concern of the Qur'anic text with itself, which reflects the concerns of the Prophet's recitation with itself, is a feature that distinguishes Muslim scripture from Jewish and Christian scripture.[16]

Furthermore, he claims, it is partially because of the very preexistence of these scriptures and their associated faiths that the Qur'an is so concerned with similarly defining itself as a written, analogous, text.[17] Despite the frequency of these references, however, there is some uncertainty as to the extent to which the use of certain terms in the text, such as "كتاب / *kitāb* / book," "آيات / *āyāt* / signs," and the word "قرآن / *qurān* / recitation" itself are intended with the connotations they hold now in referring to Qur'anic features.[18] In his article, "An Arabic Recitation: The Meta-Linguistics of Qur'anic Revelation," Wild further addresses the question of how to interpret the Qur'an's claims to be written in the Arabic language, and, consequently, the nature of its relationship to previous Arabic works. These earlier works primarily belong the genre of *saj'*, a distinctive style of rhymed prose.[19] While the Qur'an also includes small sections that can be technically classified as *saj'*, the majority of its content instead occupies a space somewhere in

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[15] This or similar phrasing can be found, for example, in 12:2, 16:103, 20:113, 26:195, 39:28, 41:3, 42:7, 43:3 and 46:12.

[16] Stefan Wild, "Why Self-Referentiality?" in *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an*, ed. Stefan Wild (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 3.

[17] Wild, "Why Self-Referentiality?" 4.

[18] For more on this debate, see Daniel Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), Daniel Madigan, "The Limits of Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an," in *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an*, ed. Stefan Wild (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 59-70, and Stefan Wild, "An Arabic Recitation: The Meta-Linguistics of Qur'anic Revelation," in *Self-Referentiality in the Qur'an*, ed. Stefan Wild (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 135-158.

[19] For more on the parameters of the *saj'* genre and its occurrence in pre-Islamic Arabia, see Devin J. Stewart, "Rhymed Prose," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾan*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Brill, 2005), http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=q3_SIM-00359.

between the categories of poetry and prose, as do much of the contents of the Hebrew Bible and other classical Hebrew texts.

The Qur'an's frequent use of rhyme and assonance blurs the lines between these two styles. In addition, the work commonly and intricately employs other literary devices such as ellipsis, repetition, simile, metaphor, and parable, to name a few. While to some extent its similarity to previous Arabic works places the Qur'an within a literary context familiar to its early Arabian readers, the style of the Qur'an still set it apart as a category all to itself. With regard to these readers, Mustansir Mir states:

> At the same time, that audience could not help but feel that the Qur'an's language was markedly different from the language of their poets and orators. The Qur'an invested ordinary words with special meanings, coined special terms, and then embedded these terms in a well-articulated worldview and placed them in a complex web of relationships. The net effect of this exercise was to create a coherent scheme of religious thought, the refashioned Arabic language serving as the gateway to that scheme.[20]

To a great degree, the Qur'an forms the center of Islamic beliefs, rituals, and culture; its verses are recited in daily prayers, committed to memory by both Arabic and non-Arabic speakers, and used frequently as artistic and architectural decoration. In accordance with its essential and original nature as an oral piece, the Qur'an is often experienced as such, in an auditory rather than visual manner. The art of Qur'an recitation is highly developed and plays a dominant role in Islamic ritual and culture. Recitation, governed by rules known as *tajwīd*, is closely regulated since, "the parameters of rhythm, timbre, and phonetics are all perceived as having a divine source and organization in that they preserve the sound of the revelation as it was transmitted to the Prophet Muhammad."[21] This auditory nature, along with its self-referentiality as an Arabic text and perceived divine nature, has largely contributed to the development of the idea of the Qur'an as an exclusively Arabic entity whose fundamental sounds, meanings and

[20] Mir, "Language," 90.
[21] Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur'an* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2001), xv.

power can never exist in any other language. This idea of the Qur'an's inimitability in either Arabic or any other language is expressed by the doctrine of *i'jāz*, a concept which, naturally, plays a central role in the discourse surrounding the Qur'an and its translation.

How to Translate a Sacred Text

Within the wide field of translation studies, extensive attention has been paid to the history, theory, and practices of translating texts held as sacred by certain religious communities.[22] While translation even as a general practice often straddles the line between controversy and necessity, this becomes all the more true when the work in question possesses this additional attribute of sanctity. This tension between the original and translated form of a sacred text is apparent from the inception of such translations, as when the first translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Greek Septuagint, was created in the third century BCE. One Talmudic tractate quite clearly expresses the controversy of this creation, stating; "It once happened that five elders wrote the Torah for King Ptolemy in Greek, and that day was as ominous for Israel as the day on which the golden calf was made, since the Torah could not be accurately translated."[23] Anthony Pym, in "On the Historical Epistemologies of Bible Translating," attempts to explain this perceived impossibility and undesirability of conveying a sacred text – here specifically the Christian Bible – in any language but the original:

> Even if a biblical fragment is linguistically like any other piece of language, even if the translator has no special faith concerning that text, the Bible is historically not just another piece of language, and translating it cannot be just another job. This is not

[22] See, for instance, Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation: History, Theory, Practice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) and William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). While most of the discussion of the translation of sacred texts both in these works and in my own paper focuses solely on the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, or the Qur'an, this discussion is by no means limited to a Jewish, Christian or Muslim context. For an example of a volume that also includes articles focused on various Buddhist and Hindu translation concerns, see Lynne Long, *Translation and Religion: Holy Untranslatable?* (Clevedon; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 2005).
[23] "Soferim, 1:7," in *The Minor Tractates of the Talmud*, trans. A. Cohen (London: Soncino 1966), 213.

> necessarily because the text is sacred as a linguistic object (sacredness is not a fact of linguistic features), but because something about the text, or about some of its versions, has long been *thought* to be sacred, and by many different people (sacredness is a fact of historical reception). Over the centuries, the Bible has thus been the site of so much human effort, both for and against particular readings, that its status is necessarily special. It has gained cultural weight, heavy with scholarship, revelation, mystery, elegance, cleverness, cunning, bigotry, blindness, and persecution. And that accumulated weight, if nothing else, affects the way any translator approaches the text.[24]

In such translations, a central consideration is the translation of terms with specific cultural or liturgical connotations, as oftentimes these connotations are not maintained in a literal translation from source to target language. John Elworde, for instance, with regard to the Hebrew Bible specifically, discusses the importance of considering "what associations such words (and referents) gave rise to in the minds of Hebrew-speakers (as reflected, for example, in the Bible's use of simile and metaphor) and whether these associations are shared by the culture of those who will use the translation." He illustrates this point with a specific example, asking, "What similarity is there in fact or in social perception between a biblical priest (*kohen*) and a priest in a Roman Catholic, or an Orthodox, or a Protestant receptor community?"[25] As, led by the Septuagint, the practice of Bible translation grew, so too did distinct theories and models of this practice. This discourse often focused on a dichotomy of literal translation versus more free approaches. One such early model was that based on the fourth century Vulgate, the essentially literal Latin translation by Saint Jerome, a model that "is characterised by the presence of a central, sacred text, that of the Bible, which must be translated with the utmost fidelity." As this

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[24] Anthony Pym, "On the Historical Epistemologies of Bible Translating," in *A History of Bible Translation,* ed. Philip A. Noss (Rome: Edizioni de Storia e Letteratura, 2007), 195-6.

[25] John Elwolde, "Language and Translation of the Old Testament," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies,* ed. J.W. Rogerson and Judith Lieu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 148. For more detailed discussion of the different routes taken by the major English translations of the Hebrew Bible in conveying specific Hebrew terms and syntax, see
chapter eight of Harry Mayer Orlinsky and Robert G. Bratcher, *A History of Bible Translation and the North American Contribution* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 279-306.

central text "was seen as timeless and unchangeable precisely because of its sacred nature," this model thus bases itself upon the ideal of a strict word-for-word translation.[26]

As these models of sacred translation developed, so did divergent opinions and trends in Jewish and Christian discourse on the topic. Starting, again, with the Septuagint, which even in Greek reveals the influence of Hebrew grammar and style, an enduring feature of Jewish Bible translation has thus been a "privileging [of] the Semitic base or source over the target language."[27] Accordingly, Jewish translations are much more likely than Christian ones to utilize footnotes or other notations to refer to this Hebrew source language by indicating cases in which the meaning of the original word is ambiguous.[28] In a more general sense, a distinct Christian religious view of the translation of its sacred text has developed, in that, in contrast to Judaism – and, of course, Islam – "only Christianity has accorded sacred status to translations of its foundational texts. Indeed, one might argue that Christianity has been based on those translations, creating and depending on a multiplicity of texts, ostensibly conveying the same message."[29] This conferring of sanctity upon a text even when no longer in its source language can be related to the fact that, over time, "the two Scriptural languages of Christianity have virtually disappeared from Christian places of worship."[30] In contrast, in both Judaism and Islam the original languages of each religion's sacred text, Hebrew and Arabic, have continued to occupy a central place in religious practices and worship, and their preservation is a concern of the highest regard.

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[26] Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere, "Introduction, Where are we in Translation Studies?" in *Constructing Culture: Essays on Literary Translation*, ed. Susan Bassnett and Andre Lefevere (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998), 2.
[27] Leonard Greenspoon, "Texts and Contexts: Perspectives on Jewish Translations of the Hebrew Bible," in *Translation and Religion*, ed. Lynne Long (Clevedon; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 2005), 55-6.
[28] Greenspoon, "Texts and Contexts," 63.
[29] Pym, "On the Historical Epistemologies of Bible Translating," 195.
[30] Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation*, 186.

Even as compared to the prominence of Hebrew in Judaism, this idea of linguistic centrality is exceptionally true in Islam, since, as discussed earlier, one of the most central features of the Qur'an is its Arabic nature and the resulting doctrine of its inimitability, or *i'jāz*. Despite its importance, this doctrine has not, of course, precluded the translation of the Qur'an by either Muslims or non-Muslims. Naturally, such translations first arose once Islam had spread beyond the Arabian Peninsula and gained converts. The earliest of these, into Persian, strove, like Jerome, to maintain the syntax of the original as much as possible with literal word-for-word translations.[31] The first translation into a western language did not occur until 1143, several centuries after the Qur'an's creation, when a Latin version was completed under the Abbot of Cluny, Peter the Venerable. In 1543 this version was published, and formed the basis for further translations into Italian, German, and Dutch.[32] A 1647 French translation by Andrew Du Ryer was similarly utilized as a source text for several other translations. These included the first into English, which was carried out in 1649 by Alexander Ross; one pointed assessment of this work declares that, seeing as Ross was "utterly unacquainted with Arabic, and not a thorough French scholar," the resulting translation was "faulty in the extreme."[33] Subsequent early English translations were made by George Sale (1734), John Rodwell (1861), and Edward Henry Palmer (1880).[34] Later English translations of note for their popularity today include ones by Marmaduke Pickthall (1930), Abdullah Yusuf Ali (1934), Richard Bell (1937), Arthur John Arberry (1955), and N. J. Dawood (1956).

Even as translation of the Qur'an has become increasingly widespread, there is no shortage of views expressing the fundamental impossibility of conveying its meaning and beauty

[31] Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Qur'an Translation: Discourse, Texture, and Exegesis* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 21.
[32] Abdul-Raof, *Qur'an Translation*, 19.
[33] S. M. Zwemer, "Translations of the Koran," *The Moslem World* (1915): 250.
[34] Zwemer, "Translations of the Koran," 250-1.

in any other language. In the forward to his widely-read 1930 English translation, the British Muslim Marmaduke Pickthall introduced his attempt with just such a statement:

> The Koran cannot be translated. That is the belief of the old-fashioned Sheykhs and the view of the present writer. The Book here is rendered almost literally and every effort has been made to choose befitting language. But the result is not the Glorious Koran, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy. It is only an attempt to present the meaning of the Koran – and peradventure something of the charm – in English. It can never take the place of the Koran in Arabic, nor is it meant to do so.[35]

Accordingly, Pickthall – along with many subsequent translators – took care to classify his work not as a translation so much as an interpretation, entitling it *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*. Multiple other Muslim scholars have as well denied the translatability of the Qur'an, such as Hussein Abdul-Raof, who, over seventy years after Pickthall's words, introduces his work on the subject with a similar declaration:

> Qur'anic expressions and structures are Qur'an-bound and cannot be reproduced in an equivalent manner to the original in terms of structure, mystical effect on the reader, and intentionality of source text. Inaccuracies and skewing of sensitive Qur'anic information will always be the by-product of any Qur'an translation. The 'translation' of the Qur'an remains in limbo for the word of God cannot be reproduced by the word of man.[36]

He later elaborates upon this belief, citing several distinctive features that contribute to the futility of reproduction, such as; "The position of individual words in a sentence, the rhythm and sound of its phrases and their syntactic construction, the manner in which a metaphor flows almost imperceptibly into a pragmatic statement, [and] the use of acoustic stress."[37]

In practice, attempts to most accurately convey some of these distinctive features of the Qur'an's Arabic form have led to the publication of many English Qur'ans criticized for their overly literal and source-oriented approach to translation. Such an approach, it is argued, has led

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[35] Marmaduke William Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* (New York: New American Library, 1953), vii.
[36] Abdul-Raof, *Qur'an Translation*, 1.
[37] Abdul-Raof, *Qur'an Translation*, 60.

to the use of excessively formal, archaic, and cumbersome language and syntax through which many aesthetic characteristics of the text are lost.[38] In addition to this concept of the Qur'an's untranslatability on a purely linguistic level, this concept functions also on what Abdul-Raof terms "the religio-philosophical" level.[39] This level consists of concerns not just of semantic and syntactic loyalty to the source text, but of loyalty to its core theological ideas as well. In a separate article, he offers the case of the translation of the name Allah as an instance in which these two levels of concerns converge:

> The word Allah, for instance, has a number of componential features idiosyncratic to Islam. It designates above all the oneness of God, (i.e. monotheism) who has 99 attributes mentioned in the Qur'an, the Lord with whom no one else can be associated, and the Creator of everything including the Prophets. To highlight the divinity and the notion of oneness of God, the Qur'an employs the word [Allah] unique in its grammatical form: it cannot take the plural form, i.e. the notion of oneness is backed up by the very morphological form of the word itself.[40]

While a great amount of this scholarship focuses on the difficulties of translating specific Qur'anic stylistic features and poetic devices from Arabic into English, the main consideration of this project is to what extent these same difficulties hold true for Arabic to Hebrew translation. Indeed, the extensive linguistic similarities between Arabic and Hebrew, as two closely related Semitic languages, mean that many of these specific difficulties are no longer causes for concern.[41] Both are members of the Semitic language family, along with languages such as Akkadian, Aramaic, Amharic, Ugaritic, and Syriac. Surviving Hebrew texts date from the end of the second millennium BCE, and the earliest epigraphic evidence of Arabic comes from about

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[38]Pickthall's translation in particular often garners this accusation. See Hussein Abdul-Raof, "The Qur'an: Limits of Translatability," in *Cultural Encounters in Translation from Arabic,* ed. Said Faiq (Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 2004), 105.

[39]Abdul-Raof, *Qur'an Translation*, 61.

[40] Hussein Abdul-Raof, "Cultural Aspects in Qur'an Translation," in *Translation and Religion,* ed. Lynne Long (Clevedon; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 2005), 166.

[41] For the most part, the discussion here refers exclusively to features of Biblical Hebrew and Classical Arabic, the languages of the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an, rather than to those of Modern Hebrew and Modern Standard Arabic as used today, although extensive similarities still remain.

the seventh century BCE, although it was only in the sixth century CE that what is now known as Classical Arabic developed.[42] The most prominent feature of Semitic languages is their morphological system of trilateral (though occasionally bilateral or quadrilateral) roots, each of which can produce a collection of semantically-related words in multiple parts of speech through the addition of vowels and through other manipulations. It is through this system that certain common stylistic devices are possible in both Hebrew and Arabic, such as parallelism between words derived from the same root. Additional features shared by Hebrew and Arabic include verb-subject-object word order, a dual plural, the use of prefixes and suffixes to indicate personal pronouns and other information, and a large pool of shared vocabulary.[43]

On the other hand, however, even in the absence of as many linguistically-based translation concerns as are present in less similar languages, Hebrew translations must still contend with theologically-based complications in translating the Qur'an. In this case, such complications are, arguably, of even greater concern given Hebrew's strong association with a competing sacred text. In using the language of the Hebrew Bible to express the similar and often overlapping subject matters of the Qur'an, then, a central consideration becomes the avoidance of automatically imparting theological connotations specific to the Hebrew Bible.

Given this discussion of the dynamics both of translating sacred texts and of translation between related Semitic languages, one historical movement of great relevance is that of Arabic translations of the Hebrew Bible during the early period of Islam. As in the case of Hebrew Qur'ans, this movement is of particular interest because "beyond the specific phenomenon of

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[42] Angel Saenz-Badillos, *A History of the Hebrew Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 52; Karin C. Ryding, *A Reference Grammar of Modern Standard Arabic* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

[43] For more on the Semitic language family and its development, and comparative surveys, see Louis H. Gray, *Introduction to Semitic Comparative Linguistics* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2007) and William Wright, *Lectures on the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages* (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2002).

scriptural translation lies the complex transmission history of the Judaeo-Christian biblical traditions found in early Islamic literature."[44] It is unclear when this practice first began due to a lack of extant texts; while some fragments of earlier translations survive, the first complete translation dates from the early tenth century and is credited to Saadiah Ben Yosef al-Fayyumi, often referred to as Saadiah Gaon.[45] His *Tafsir*, which included the Hebrew source text and a commentary in Arabic along with the Arabic translation, was widely read and adopted by Arabic-speaking Jewish communities, and became a model for the subsequent tradition of Arabic bible translation by the medieval Jewish Karaite sect. Members of this sect, who believed in "the utter rejection of oral law as contained in the Talmud and in all other Rabbinic literature, and the adherence to the Hebrew Bible as the sole repository of the law and basis for religious practice," produced multiple Arabic versions of the Hebrew Bible during the tenth and eleventh centuries.[46]

In her extensive work *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, Meira Polliack examines thirty-four of these translations and provides a thorough linguistic and exegetical analysis of them. She concludes:

> The most consistent and central thread of the Karaite concept of translation [is] its essential literalism. This literalism definitely conveys more than a simple attempt to imitate the structure of the Hebrew source text in the Arabic translated text. The imitative impulse is but the external manifestation of a deeper didactic motive, namely, that of arriving at a correct presentation of the language and text of the Hebrew Bible in translation…The stress on accuracy was most significant to the Karaites, and accuracy in grammatical, lexical and textural presentation is best achieved by means of a literal rather than a free translation.[47]

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[44] Meira Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation: A Linguistic and Exegetical Study of Karaite Translations of the Pentateuch from the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries C.E.* (Leiden; New York: E.J. Brill, 1997), xiii.

[45] Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, xvi. There is, however, some evidence - specifically the discovery of several ninth century Genizah fragments of Judaeo-Arabic translations of the Hebrew Bible – that Saadiah relied on earlier works, as the vocabulary of these fragments is in places similar or identical to that of Saadiah's *Tafsir*. See, for example, Joshua Blau, "On a Fragment of the Oldest Judaeo-Arabic Bible Translation Extant," in *Genizah Research After Ninety Years: The Case of Judaeo-Arabic*, ed. Joshua Blau and Stefan C. Reif (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 31-9.

[46] Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, xiv-xv.

[47] Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, 280.

Many of the questions she asks and the analyses she makes in coming to these conclusions are directly relevant to my own comparison of Hebrew translations of the Qur'an, despite the large gap in time and culture between the two movements in question. Specifically, many of the syntactic and lexical features that she studies, such as root repetition, the use of cognates, and the rendering of proper names, are features that are equally relevant and enlightening in examining these much more modern Hebrew Qur'ans.

While the Hebrew translations in general adhere much less to the ideal of literalism than the Karaite works do, both groups of texts do have in common a central concern with maintaining the cohesion of the source text through filling in its ellipses with the addition of words, clauses and sentences not present in the original. Through these additions, Polliack claims, the role of the translator "converges with that of the interpreter. As various elements are added into his translation, that which was left unsaid in the source text is now said, the gap left open is now closed, the missing link is forged."[48] In translations of both the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an, additions serve two primary purposes; firstly, to "provide links with background information or other contextual elements which restore a logical sequence in the narrative plot," and secondly, to "satisfy theological principles or general religious beliefs and ideology" of the translator.[49] As the Arabic-speaking but still Jewish audience of Karaite translations possessed the same religious tradition as that of the source text, this second type of addition largely stemmed from specifically Karaite religious beliefs, such as the rejection of anthropomorphic descriptions of God.[50] In the case of the Hebrew Qur'ans, however, all of which represent a Jewish translator's presentation of a Muslim text for a Hebrew-speaking, presumably Jewish audience, the question of

[48] Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, 210.
[49] Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, 228-230.
[50] Polliack, *The Karaite Tradition of Arabic Bible Translation*, 230.

theologically-motivated additions and alterations in translation is of much more interest. As I discuss later, the choices made by each translator in expressing specific religious terms – the name Allah, for instance – reveal the degrees to which the influence of the Hebrew Bible and the larger Jewish tradition can be felt in each of their translations.

A strikingly similar trend of external religious influence is evident in the early Arabic translation of the Hebrew Bible made by Saadiah. Here, in contrast to the literalism of the majority of the later Karaite translations, he often "deviates from the biblical text or its standard rabbinic understanding in favor of an interpretation drawn from the Qur'an or other Islamic sources."[51] In doing so, David Freidenreich argues, Saadiah "catered to the concerns of Jews whose religious, intellectual, and aesthetic norms were deeply influenced by the Arab culture and Muslim environment in which they lived."[52] He thus, for example, translates the Hebrew term for priest, "כוהן / *kohen*" not with its nearly identical Arabic cognate "كاهن / *kāhin*," but with the Arabic word "إمام / *īmām*," a term with strong connotations of a Muslim religious leader.[53] Furthermore, in several instances, Saadiah elects to incorporate into his translation information found in the Qur'an and other Islamic sources that is not present in the Biblical versions of the stories shared by both works. One of these instances, in fact, occurs in his translation of the story of Joseph in Genesis. Here, as Freidenreich points out, Saadiah deviates from his use elsewhere in the work of the Arabic word "ثوب / *thawb* / garment" in place of the Hebrew word "בגד / *beged* / garment" in favor of the more specific term "قميص / *qamīṣ* / shirt" to refer to Joseph's clothing. As this is the word used prominently throughout the Qur'anic narrative in which Yusuf's clothing plays a major role at several points in the plot, it is this narrative that provides an evident source

[51] David M. Freidenreich, "The Use of Islamic Sources in Saadiah Gaon's 'Tafsir' of the Torah," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 93, no. 4 (2003): 354.
[52] Freidenreich, "The Use of Islamic Sources in Saadiah Gaon's 'Tafsir' of the Torah," 357.
[53] Freidenreich, "The Use of Islamic Sources in Saadiah Gaon's 'Tafsir' of the Torah," 361-2.

for this specific deviation.[54] With regard to this and other references to works of the Islamic tradition, Freidenreich suggests that "Saadiah considers Islamic sources to contain accurate information and insights regarding biblical history."[55] In light of this dynamic present in this tenth century Arabic translation, the focal question of my project is whether a similar dynamic exists with the modern translators of the Qur'an. In the second half of this paper, I demonstrate that it does. The four translators, just as Saadiah does for the Qur'an, consider the stories in the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish tradition as sources of similarly accurate information for Qur'anic narratives, as is evident in their Hebrew products.

Such considerations can be found also in the historical case of medieval translations into Hebrew of Arabic texts by primarily Iberian Jewish scholars. Several of these Islamic texts, whose genres range from philosophical, theological, scientific, ethical, and literary, incorporated quotations from the Qur'an, and thus "brought to the fore tensions inherent in the relationship between Judaism and Islam."[56] As Jonathon Decter describes, the most major of these tensions related to their treatment of these Qur'anic quotations:

> Translators were forced to make decisions on literary and ideological levels concerning the texture of the works they were producing for Jewish consumption. They had to judge the value of conveying qur'anic sources literally when doing so resulted in the elevation of the status of the Qur'an as a model of eloquence and as a source of knowledge.[57]

As such an elevation would have run counter to the implicit anti-Muslim polemic running throughout their works, a polemic which included a denial of the status of the Qur'an as a divine

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[54] Freidenreich, "The Use of Islamic Sources in Saadiah Gaon's 'Tafsir' of the Torah," 382-3.
[55] Freidenreich, "The Use of Islamic Sources in Saadiah Gaon's 'Tafsir' of the Torah," 386.
[56] Jonathan P. Decter, "The Rendering of Qur'anic Quotations in Hebrew Translations of Islamic Texts," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 96, no. 3 (2006): 337. The tensions that Decter mentions here refer specifically to those that developed in the medieval period between Jewish and Muslim communities living in the majority Christian environment of Iberia. Implicit anti-Muslim polemics can thus be found incorporated into many Jewish writings of the time, including exegetical, philosophical, and theological works. See Moshe Perlmann, "The Medieval Polemics between Islam and Judaism," *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S.D. Goitein (Cambridge, Mass: Association for Jewish Studies, 1974), 103-38.
[57] Decter, "The Rendering of Qur'anic Quotations in Hebrew Translations of Islamic Texts," 358.

revelation, a trend arose of either wholly omitting these quotations, or of replacing them with similar Biblical and rabbinic quotations. Abraham Ibn Hasdai, for example, in his thirteenth century translation of *Mīzān Al-'amal*, a Sufi ethical tract by the Persian philosopher al-Ghazali, replaces several verses from the Qur'an quoted within the work with similarly themed and worded verses from Biblical books such as Psalms, Numbers, and Proverbs.[58] While the religious dynamics revealed in these translations and in those by Saadiah and the Karaites relate only to the limited purview of their medieval Jewish context, the insights they offer are of much wider significance. To a large extent, the same sorts of questions as are asked of these earlier translations of religious texts can be asked of the much more recent Hebrew Qur'ans in order to discover evidence of a similar influence of religious dynamics.

Despite the unique translation possibilities offered by the two languages' similarities, however, Arabic to Hebrew translations of the Qur'an are far from widespread. A few fragments do survive of early versions of the Qur'an transliterated into Hebrew characters; one of these, now held in the Bodleian Library, includes in its margins "Hebrew translations of some passages and references to the Bible and the haggadic literature" and is attributed to the seventeenth century rabbi of Zante, Jacob Ben Israel Ha-Levi.[59] In addition to this one, two other manuscripts of seventeenth or eighteenth century Hebrew Qur'ans survive today. One in the British Museum and one in the Library of Congress. However, these translations were made using not the Arabic

[58] Decter, "The Rendering of Qur'anic Quotations in Hebrew Translations of Islamic Texts," 344-7.
[59] *The Jewish Encyclopedia; A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, comp. Isidore Singer and Cyrus Adler (New York and London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1901), s.v. "Koran." This article cites additional evidence for similar fragments in both German and Austrian libraries, as well as the possibility of a volume containing the Torah, the Targum, and the Qur'an together, as mentioned in a bookseller's list.

text itself, but through chains of source texts in European languages such as Latin, Italian, and Dutch.[60]

The first true translation from Arabic to Hebrew, therefore, was not accomplished until 1857 when the Jewish German scholar Herrmann Reckendorf published his work, entitled *Der Koran* or *אלקוראן או המקרא / Al-Qur'an or the Scripture* in Leipzig, Germany.[61] Born in 1825, Reckendorf studied first Hebrew and then additional Semitic languages, later becoming a lecturer at the University of Heidelberg and publishing several works on Jewish history.[62] His translation of the Qur'an is accompanied by several essays on the life of Muhammad, the formation of early Islam, and the central tenets of Islam. The lengthy forward also includes a listing of which specific verses of the Qur'an are derived from or similar to ideas and specific verses in Jewish and Christian scriptures, and from pre-Islamic Arabian religion.

The second such translation, *אלקראן / Al-Qur'an*, was published by Joseph Joel Rivlin in Tel Aviv in 1936. Rivlin was born in 1889 in Jerusalem to a prominent Ashkenazi Jewish family, and, after studying at the University of Frankfort, began teaching Arabic at the newly opened Hebrew University in Jerusalem.[63] In her survey of literary translations from Arabic into Hebrew from 1868 to 2002, Hannah Amit-Kochavi places Rivlin's work within the context of the first such wave of translation which was led by "a group of Jewish scholars who lived in Jerusalem and belonged to the small aristocratic community of well-to-do Oriental Jews who had lived in

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[60] A detailed description of these manuscripts and thorough analysis of their provenance is given by Myron Weinstein in an article titled "A Hebrew Qur'an Manuscript." In an endnote for page 207, he additionally provides a listing of references to further Hebrew Qur'an manuscripts that as of yet had not been positively identified or located. Myron Weinstein, "A Hebrew Qur'an Manuscript," in *Jews in India*, ed. Thomas A. Timberg (New York: Advent Books, 1986), 205-247.

[61] To be precise, the word *"המקרא / haMikra"* in the title of Reckendorf's work, which I have translated here as "scripture," is more often used to refer to the Hebrew Bible. Like the Arabic word "قرآن / *qurān*," it comes from the root meaning "to read," and similarly connotes a work intended to be recited.

[62] *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Reckendorf, Hermann (Hayyim Zebi Ben Solomon)."

[63] This information can be found at the Rivlin family website, along with further information about the extensive accomplishments of the family's astoundingly numerous and illustrious members. "Yosef Yoel Rivlin," last modified March 2, 2009, http://www.rivlinfamily.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=40&Itemid=181&lang=eng.

Palestine prior to the first Zionist immigration."[64] Prior to the establishment of Hebrew University and its Institute of Oriental Studies, this group gained exposure to the Arabic language and culture through study with Arabic scholars, and believed "that the only chance for the Jews to integrate into the Middle East was through cooperation with the Arabs."[65] Accordingly, Rivlin attributes his motivation for this undertaking to the deep link he sees between the Qur'an – and Islam as a whole – and the beliefs and culture of the Jews in Palestine. In his introduction, he states of the Qur'an: "We Jews find a special value in it, from that it is one of the most astonishing of Semitic creations. It is full of the special prophetic pathos for the sons of Shem and the rhythm of our most ancient works."[66] Throughout his career, Rivlin further produced translations of several other notable Arabic works, including *One Thousand and One Nights* and Ibn Hisham's biography of Muhammad, *Al-Sīra al Nabawiyya*.

A third translation, *הקראן הקדוש:ספר הספרים של האשלאם / The Holy Qur'an: The Great Book of Islam*, was made in 1971 by the Israeli Aharon Ben-Shemesh, a lecturer of Muslim Law at Tel Aviv University. In 1979 he went on to produce an English translation of the Qur'an as well, the introduction to which provides some insight into his general theory of translation:

> I have endeavored to render my translation into plain, simple, clear and readable English, aiming at a degree of lucidity not present in previous translations, and have attempted to clarify several difficult passages in the Book. Whenever faced with a choice between obscurity and unliteral translation I have preferred the latter, being guided by the Talmudic rules of translation. Thus, by avoiding rhetorical or poetic effects while stressing constant clarity, I have endeavored to make the Quran speak out as unambiguously as possible.[67]

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[64] Hannah Amit-Kochavi, "Integrating Arab Culture into Israeli Identity through Literary Translations from Arabic into Hebrew," in *Cultural Encounters in Translation from Arabic*, ed. Said Faiq (Buffalo: Multilingual Matters, 2004), 53.

[65] Amit-Kochavi, "Integrating Arab Culture into Israeli Identity through Literary Translations from Arabic into Hebrew," 53-4.

[66] Joseph Joel Rivlin, *אלקראן* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1963), v. This and all other quotes from the four Hebrew Qur'ans are my own translation.

[67] Aharon Ben-Shemesh, *The Noble Quran* (Ramat-Gan: Masada, 1979), x. In the preface to the work, he further elaborates on the Talmudic rules of translation mentioned here, stating, "These rules lay down: 1) The Torah was not given to angels; 2) The Torah speaks in the language of human beings; and 3) He who translates a Verse literally is

This introduction also includes an explanation of Ben-Shemesh's "suggested new meanings" for several difficult phrases for which his translation differs from that of previous translators.[68] In the forward to his Hebrew translation, he provides an overview of the Qur'an and the main beliefs it imparts, emphasizing in particular the relationship of these beliefs, and the early Islamic community, to those of the Jewish and Christian communities and respective sacred texts. While he mentions several points at which the Qur'an diverges from the tenets of these earlier faiths, such as its rejection of most Jewish dietary restrictions and explicit denunciation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, Ben-Shemesh goes on to state, "Generally one does not find in the Qur'an principles in conflict with Judaism, and so various Orientalists describe Islam as Judaism adapted to the concepts of Arab tribes and their beliefs."[69] He refers also to the repeated claim in the Qur'an itself that it "is only a text in the Arabic language of the Torah of Moses that precedes it."[70]

Most recently, in 2005, Uri Rubin, a professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at Tel Aviv University, published *הקוראן / The Qur'an*. In addition to producing this translation, he has also published extensively on the topic of the Qur'an and early Islam. His translation is accompanied by an introduction in which he provides a history of Qur'an translation into Hebrew as well as details the conventions and principles he adhered to in his work, plus several appendices and a

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misleading." Ben-Shemesh, *The Noble Quran*, vi. Despite the avoidance of literalism that he claims here, however, an examination of his English translation reveals that in sentence structure and vocabulary it adheres more closely to the Arabic source text than does his Hebrew translation. I discuss this trend in greater depth in chapter two of this project.

[68] Ben-Shemesh, *The Noble Quran*, x. Specifically, he compares his own interpretations and proposed etymologies of several terms and phrases, such as *Sura* and *Al-Rahīm*, to those made by Muhammad Ali, Abdullah Yusuf Ali, M. Rodwell, Richard Bell, Arthur Arberry, and N.J. Dawood. Several of these suggestions are also included in a two part article published prior to the release of his Hebrew translation, in 1969 and 1970. Aharon Ben-Shemesh "Some Suggestions to Qur'an Translators," *Arabica* 16, no. 1 (1969): 81-83, and Aharon Ben-Shemesh, "Some Suggestions to Qur'an Translators (Continuation)," *Arabica* 17, no. 2 (1970): 199-204.

[69] Aharon Ben-Shemesh, *הקראן הקדוש:ספר הספרים של האשלאם* (Ramat-Gan: Masada, 1971), יא (introduction equivalent of page xi).

[70] Ben-Shemesh, *הקראן הקדוש*, טו (introduction equivalent of page xv).

comprehensive index. More so than any of the previous translations, Rubin's received Israeli media attention, and was positively reviewed by several publications.[71]

To date then, these four works represent the only attempts at a full rendering of the inimitable Arabic of the Qur'an into Hebrew.[72] They span a period of nearly one hundred and fifty years, and, accordingly, offer a window into both the evolution of the Hebrew language during this time period as it was revived as a modern spoken language and the evolution of Jewish reception of Muslim beliefs. While all four translations were made by Jewish scholars, and all but one were published in Israel for a Jewish Israeli audience, each comes out of a distinct historical and social context clearly reflected in their multiple instances of divergence.

Why *Surat Yusuf*?

As mentioned in the introduction, I chose to study these divergences by focusing on a single *sura*, that relating the story of Yusuf. Even given the wide variance of styles and subjects throughout the Qur'an, *Surat Yusuf* stands out as unique when encountered as a part of this whole. Most striking is the restriction to a single subject and narrative in this *sura*, the only one of the Qur'an to do so. More so than any other narrative, the story of Yusuf is largely self-contained and functions fully independent of the rest of the work. On a literary level, its wide cast of characters and extensive use of dialogue place this *sura* firmly within the narrative genre, in contrast to the majority of the Qur'an's contents. On account of its discrete nature and distinctive features, many

[71] Links to these reviews are available at Uri Rubin's website, along with a full list of his scholarly publications and links to interviews with him about these works. "Uri Rubin," accessed March 31, 2012, http://www.urirubin.com/index.html.

[72] Although Saudi Arabia at one point, at least, had ambitions of bringing this number up to five, as mentioned in my introduction.

scholars have chosen *Surat Yusuf* as an ideal case study for examining various literary and thematic aspects of the Qur'an, and I have chosen to follow this precedent.[73]

More importantly, however, I was drawn to the study of this *sura* in particular by its exclusive focus on a character and narrative drawn from the Biblical tradition. While, as discussed earlier, both the Qur'an and the wider Islamic tradition prominently feature many such Biblical characters and narratives, in this respect too *Surat Yusuf* stands out. While multiple *suwar* are titled after Biblical characters, it is, again, only Yusuf whose story comprises the entirety of his eponymous *sura*.[74] On the other hand, in contrast to figures such as Moses, who is referenced a total of 136 times in many separate *suwar*, Yusuf is mentioned only twice, and only briefly, outside of *Surat Yusuf*.[75]

Surat Yusuf, like the other *suwar* in which Biblical figures feature prominently, is considered a revelation of the Meccan period of Muhammad's life.[76] Early Islamic commentary provides two alternative explanations for the cause of its revelation to Muhammad and

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[73] While by no means a complete list, some of works in which scholars have made this choice include Anthony H. Johns, "The Quranic Presentation of the Joseph Story: Naturalistic Or Formulaic Language?" in *Approaches to the Qur'an*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdel-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 37-70, Mustansir Mir, "The Qur'anic Story of Joseph: Plot, Themes, and Characters," *The Muslim World* 76, no. 1 (1986): 1-15, Mustansir Mir, "Irony in the Qur'an: A Study of the Story of Joseph," in *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'an*, ed. Issa J. Boullata (London: Curzon Press, 2000), 173-187, and Marilyn Waldman, "New Approaches to 'Biblical' Material in the Qur'an," in *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions: Papers Presented at the Institute for Islamic-Judaic Studies, Center for Judaic Studies, University of Denver*, ed. William M. Brinner et al. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 64-84.

[74] The others are; *Sura* 10 Yunus/Jonah, *Sura* 14 Ibrahim/Abraham, *Sura* 19 Maryam/Mary, and *Sura* 71 Nuh/Noah. While, unlike the other figures, Maryam is not considered a prophet in the Islamic tradition, she is uniquely distinguished as the only female character directly named in the Qur'an.

[75] The first of these mentions is in 6:84, in which Yusuf is named as one of several previous prophets aided by Allah: "ووهبنا له إسحاق ويعقوب كلّا هدينا ونوحا هدينا من قبل ومن ذريته داوود وسليمان وأيوب ويوسف وموسى وهارون وكذلك نجزي المحسنين" / And we gave to [Ibraham], Ishaq, and Yaqub, all of them we guided. And Nuh, we guided before. And from his descendants, Dawoud and Suleiman and Ayub [Job] and Yusuf and Musa and Haroun. Thus we reward the doers of good." The second occurs in 40:34 which reads in part: "ولقد جاءكم يوسف من قبل بالبينات فما زلتم في شكّ مما جاءكم به" / And Yusuf had already come to you before with clear proofs, but you remained in doubt of what he brought to you."

[76] That said, there is also strong evidence that the very first couple of *ayat*, which introduce the narrative, may be later Medinan insertions. See Johns, "The Quranic Presentation of the Joseph Story," 43.

subsequent inclusion in the Qur'an.[77] Al-Baydawi, in his thirteenth-century *tafsir*, or commentary on the Qur'an, offers the following as one possible interpretation of the phrase "تلك آيات الكتاب المبين / these are the verses of the clear book" that introduces the narrative in the first line of the *sura*:

> The meaning therefore is "[the sura that makes clear] to the Jews that which they asked". For it is recorded that their learned men said to the chiefs of the polytheists, "Ask Muhammad why Jacob's family moved from Syria to Egypt, and about the story of Joseph," whereupon [this sura] was revealed.[78]

Alternatively, a commentary by the Persian Sheikh Ahmad-e Jami relates the story that this *sura* was revealed in response to the following request made by companions of Muhammad: "Oh Prophet of Allah! What if you told us a story, what if Allah Almighty would send a surah that did not contain commandments and prohibitions, and that surah would be a story that soothed our hearts?"[79] In seeking to understand what might have prompted this *sura*, therefore, both stories center on its unusual aspects, namely its striking coherence as a sustained and focused narrative.

Throughout *Surat Yusuf* – as throughout most of the Qur'an – the repeated use of several literary devices contributes to the narrative's cohesion. Especially prominent is the consistent rhyme scheme created by the repetition in almost every *aya* of the sounds "ين / *-īn*," "ون / *-ūn*," or "يم / *-īm*" as the ending syllable. In many instances, this repetition is achieved by extensive use of words ending with a masculine plural suffix, as well as extensive use of the فاعلين / *fā'līn* form of a masculine plural active participle as the last word of an *aya*. In practice, this often results in phrases such as "وهو من الصّادقين / and he is of the righteous" (12:26) rather than the perhaps more

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[77] Both explanations belong to the genre of *Asbab al-Nuzul*, or Occasions of Revelation, a subcategory of Qur'anic exegesis concerned with establishing the context, historical or otherwise, that prompted the revelation of specific *suwar* or *ayat*. See Andrew Rippin, "Occasions of Revelation," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Brill, 2005), http://brillonline.nl/subscriber/entry?entry=q3_SIM-00305.
[78] Beeston, A.F.L., trans., *Baidawi's Commentary on Surah 12 of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 1.
[79] Atiq ibn Muhammad Surabadi and Parviz Natil Khanlari, *Yusuf va Zulaykha: az tafsir-i Farsi-i turbat-i Jam* (Tehran: Amir Kabir, 1983), 7, quoted in Gayane Karen Merguerian and Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Zulaykha and Yusuf: Whose 'Best Story'?" *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, No. 4 (1997): 485.

natural-sounding phrase "he is righteous."[80] Beyond this repetition on the syllabic level, both linguistic and structural parallelism abound throughout the *sura*, often in conjunction with each other. One clear example of this is the thematic juxtaposition of the two scenes in which Yusuf's brothers convince their father to let first Yusuf, and later his younger brother, go with them. While in the first instance they speak the line with obvious irony due to their ill-intentions, and are sincere only in the second, in both scenes they use the identical phrase "وإنّا له لحافظون / and indeed we will be guardians for him" (12:12, 63).[81]

Several individual words – or rather, individual trilateral roots – are prominent throughout the *sura* as well. Significantly, many of these relate to themes of knowledge and morality, largely contributing to the prominence of both as dominant themes of the narrative. Of these theme words, the root "ع-ل-م / *'ayn-lām-mīm*" is most common, appearing a total of thirty-three times in twenty-six different *ayat*. The words derived from this root all concern knowledge or its acquisition, include forms meaning "to know," "to teach," "to learn," "knowledge," and "all-knowing," and are used almost exclusively to refer to either Allah or Yusuf.[82] These words are very often used in conjunction with a form of the root "ح-ك-م / *ḥā'-kāf-mīm*" as well,

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[80] In this respect, *Surat Yusuf* is not at all unusual. In its article on the incorporation of the *saj'* style of rhymed prose into the Qur'an, the *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an* cites one estimate that 86% of the verses of the Qur'an as a whole employ end rhyme, of which a vast majority uses this same in/un/im pattern. Such a use of the active participle is not unique to this sura either, but is one of several types of deviation in features such as gender and word order made for the sake of rhyme and leading "many commentators on the Qur'an, either unaware of or determined to ignore the poetic character of the text, [to] propose tortuous arguments to explain grammatical and syntactic features that are primarily due to rhyme." Stewart, "Rhymed Prose."

[81] See Johns, "The Quranic Presentation of the Joseph Story," for a full discussion on dramatic techniques used in this and the many other instances of dialogue throughout the sura.

[82] This prominence of the root "ع-ل-م / *'ayn-lām-mīm*" and the concepts of knowledge it expresses are not limited to *Surat Yusuf*. One scholar, Franz Rosenthal, goes so far as to declare that "no other concept...has been operative as a determinant of Muslim civilization in all its aspects to the same extent as *'ilm*." A.H. Mathias Zahniser too, in his article on the Qur'anic conception of knowledge, provides further statistical support for this striking prominence. He claims that words for knowledge derived from this one root make up a full one percent of the words in the Qur'an, and that "except for words from the roots *k-w-n*, 'being,' and *q-w-l*, 'saying,' the only words occurring more times than words for knowledge from the root *'-l-m*, are *Allah* and *Rabb* [lord]." Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 1-2; A.H. Mathias Zahniser, "Knowing and Thinking," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Andrew Rippin (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Pub., 2006), 282.

concerning wisdom. The phrase "العليم الحكيم / the knowing, the wise," for example, is the most common of the many descriptive epithets used for Allah in the *sura*.[83] In this and other *suwar*, he is further described with words such as "الرحيم / *al-raḥīm* / the merciful," "السّميع / *al-samī'* / the hearing," and "الغفور / *al-ghafūr* / the forgiving."[84]

Yusuf as well is frequently described with moral terms; he is at times considered as one of "الصالحين / *al- ṣāliḥīn* / the righteous," "المؤمنين / *al-mu'minīn* / the faithful," "المحسنين / *al-muḥsinīn* / the good-doers," "الصادقين / *al-ṣādiqīn* / the truthful," and "المتصدّقين / *al-mutaṣddaqīn* / the charitable."[85] In contrast, terms such as "الغافلين / *al-ghāfalīn* / the unaware," "الظّالمين / *al-ẓālimīn* / the wrongdoers," "الكاذبين / *al-kādhibīn* / the liars," "الخاطئين / *al-khāṭ'īn* / the sinners," and "المشركين / *al-mushrikīn* / the polytheists" are frequently used to refer to both specific characters and, in a more general sense, to groups condemned by the speaker. Finally, of special note in this discussion is the root "ك-ي-د / *kāf-yā'-dāl*," which appears most often and prominently in the *sura* as both a noun and verb meaning plot or scheme. As will be discussed in greater detail later, this word is most strongly associated with the character of the Egyptian's wife and her efforts to seduce Yusuf. However, it is also associated both within this *sura* and elsewhere in the Qur'an with Allah, and thus presents a unique case of a term with alternatively immoral or moral connotations according to the context.[86] Because the repetition of roots such as

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[83] See Mir, "The Qur'anic Story of Joseph," 6-7 for more on the joint usage of these two words.

[84] For more on these pairs of divine names, and especially those which relate to knowledge, see Zahniser, "Knowing and Thinking," 283-4.

[85] Of note is the fact that these last two terms both derive from the root "ص-د-ق / *ṣād- dāl- qāf*." This root gives us the word "صدّيق / *ṣadīq* / righteous" as well. As noted by several scholars, this term is uniquely associated with Yusuf in not only Islamic but also Jewish and Samaritan works. While in the Qur'an the adjective "righteous" is also applied to the characters of Ibrahim (in 19:41) and Idris (19:56), it appears with the definite article only in relation to Yusuf. See John MacDonald, "Joseph in the Qur'an and Muslim Commentary I: A Comparative Study," *The Muslim World* 46, no. 2 (1956): 125, and Michael A. Sells, "The Wiles of Women and Performative Intertextuality: 'A'isha, the Hadith of the Slander, and the Sura of Yusuf," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 30, no. 1 (1999): 55.

[86] Michael Sells, in his discussion of the use of this word in connection with Aisha, one of Muhammad's wives, details the term's complicated web of connotations, especially those relating to gender. He states, "The word *kayd* means no more than plot or stratagem – whether positively or negatively viewed. A strong strand of traditional commentary, however, defines *kayd* through the 'Aziz's application of it to all women in a context where it means

those just discussed is a crucial device for the establishment of the *sura*'s themes of morality and knowledge – and because Hebrew, unlike English and most other languages, shares Arabic's trilateral root system – a central consideration in my comparison of the Hebrew translations is whether, and if so how, this repetition was maintained.

First, however, a few words about how this treatment of Yusuf and his story in both *Surat Yusuf* itself and in the larger Islamic tradition compares to that of Joseph in Genesis and in the Jewish tradition. In terms of relative length, the Biblical narrative of Joseph is of a comparable prominence to the Qur'an's narrative. Consisting of a total of 391 verses from Genesis 37-50, it is similarly the longest continuous narrative of the Hebrew Bible focusing on a single character.[87] With regard to the nature of this narrative, the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* says:

> Of all the Genesis narratives, those about Joseph are the longest and most detailed. They are not a collection of isolated and fragmentary incidents, but a continuous biography, novelistic in complexion, the artistic creation of a consummate storyteller.[88]

Within the context of the larger Torah, this narrative, and the character of Joseph himself, clearly functions as "the link between Canaan and Egypt [and] the bridge between the Patriarchs and Moses."[89] As they are related here, the events of Joseph's life both conform to and are an essential part of the larger chronology of Genesis and Exodus. Accordingly, the narrative is intended as historical to some degree, and places great emphasis on the identification of details

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sexual trickery. Indeed, some medieval commentators, both Shi'ite and Sunni, used the association of Zulaykha and the Companions of Yusuf with 'A'isha to attack 'A'isha and, more generally, women's roles in public affairs." With regard to the intricacies of translating this term then, he goes on to explain that, "In its wider Qur'anic context, *kayd* is attributed to the Qur'anic prophets, to their enemies, to Satan, and to God. Translators of the Qur'an qualify what alone is really a morally neutral concept with favorable nouns and verbs, such as stratagem, wit and cunning or pejorative terms, such as guile, plot, deception, wile, or trick, depending on which character is exercising *kayd*." Sells, "The Wiles of Women and Performative Intertextuality," 67-9.

[87] The only exception to this continuity is Genesis 38, which digresses in order to relate the story of Judah, Joseph's brother, and his daughter-in-law Tamar.

[88] Nahum M. Sarna, et al. "Joseph," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 406-413.

[89] Eric I. Lowenthal, *The Joseph Narrative in Genesis* (New York: Ktav, 1973), 1. See W. Lee Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family: A Literary Study* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 194-212 for further discussion of this transitional role played by the Joseph narrative.

such as names, lineages, places, quantities, and so on. The section from Genesis 46:5 to 46:27, for example, is devoted to a complete and impressively detailed inventory of the nearly seventy family members who accompanied Jacob in his journey to Egypt.

Within this strongly chronological context, however, the Joseph narrative is distinguished by its relatively sparse references to God in comparison with the rest of Genesis and Exodus, in which "reference to the deity is boldly direct in almost every segment or episode."[90] While the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* notes this unique secularism as well, it does so in conjunction with a warning against overemphasis of this feature:

> Although there are no miraculous elements; no divine revelations experienced by Joseph, no associations with altars or cultic sites, the discourse is permeated with the consciousness of God at work, and if there is no direct intervention by Him in human affairs, no doubt is left that the unfolding of events is the directed act of Providence.[91]

In his discussion of the motif of Joseph and Potiphar's wife as represented in Near Eastern, Jewish, and Islamic folklore, Shalom Goldman points to this secularism and non-theological tone as a major factor in the eligibility of the Biblical Joseph narrative for "cultural borrowing on a grand scale," since "cultures that did not share the theology and history of Ancient Israel could share in the richness inherent in these stories."[92]

Initially, this literary expansion was begun by early Jewish exegetes, who elaborated upon details of Genesis' narrative of Joseph in Genesis Rabbah and other aggadic works.[93] It is these commentaries that provide the origins for many of the narrative deviations between the story of Joseph as it is told in Genesis and in *Surat Yusuf*. Specific accounts found in both the Aggadah and in this *sura*, but not in Genesis, include that of a banquet during which the women

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[90] Humphreys, *Joseph and His Family*, 118.
[91] Sarna, et al. "Joseph."
[92] Shalom Goldman, *The Wiles of Women, the Wiles of Men: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in Ancient Near Eastern, Jewish, and Islamic Folklore* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 3.
[93] A collection of these narrative expansions by early Jewish commentators can be found in Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003) 2:3-184.

of Egypt accidentally cut their hands in response to beholding Joseph's beauty, and the presence of a witness during the attempted seduction of Joseph. Additional details shared not with the *sura* itself but with early Islamic commentary include the naming of Potiphar's wife as Zuleika (or less commonly, Rail), and the identification of the witness as her young child.[94] While some of these Jewish commentaries place great emphasis on describing and praising Joseph's physical appearance while holding his vanity as directly responsible for the attempted seduction, others recast this incident as a purely moral cautionary tale.[95] As Goldman puts it, "The reader is encouraged to resist sexual temptation, as did Joseph. As recompense, he or she … is promised glory in this world and reward in the hereafter."[96] He further expands upon this idea by linking the morality seen in these elaborations with the more prominently moral tone of the Qur'an's treatment of this narrative, stating:

> Midrashic embellishments are the product of the pietistic world-view of the Rabbinic exegetes. In the Qur'an, and in later Islamic versions of the tale, we move even further away from the world of the Heroic Age of ancient Israel and more to the realm of the pietistic. In Surat Yusuf, elements of our motif are crafted into an artfully constructed moral tale; its world view is that of early Islam. The motif thus remains within the Mediterranean tradition from which it emerged, yet develops its own distinctive Islamic voice.[97]

As discussed earlier, in the Qur'an, Yusuf is portrayed as an exceedingly moral character, and his story is correspondingly a primarily moral tale. Indeed, some commentators interpret the

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[94] See Goldman, *The Wiles of Women, the Wiles of Men*, 31-56 for a fuller discussion of the treatment of Joseph in both Jewish and Islamic commentaries.

[95] As in these Jewish commentaries, Yusuf's exceptional physical appearance is a favorite subject of Islamic commentators as well. While not directly relevant to the discussion at hand, many of these commentaries are worthy of mention solely for the highly excessive nature of this praise. In the words of the 11th century commentator al-Thalabi, "The beauty of Joseph was like the light of day; his skin was fair, his face comely, his hair curly, eyes large, he stood upright, had strong legs, upper arms, and forearms, a flat belly with a small navel, he was hook-nosed, and had a dark mole on his right cheek which beautified his face; a white birthmark between his eyes resembling the Moon when it is full, and eyelashes like the fore-feathers of eagle wings. His teeth sparkled when he smiled, and light emanated from his mouth between his incisors when he spoke...When he swallowed, greens and fruit which he ate could be seen in his throat and chest until they reached his stomach." Ahmad ibn Muhammad Thalabi, *'Ara'is al-Majalis fi Qisas al-Anbiya, Or Lives of the Prophets*, trans. William M. Brinner (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 184.

[96] Goldman, *The Wiles of Women, the Wiles of Men*, 37.

[97] Goldman, *The Wiles of Women, the Wiles of Men*, 42.

phrase "أحسن القصص / the best of stories" (12:3), used to introduce the *sura*'s narrative, as a self-reference to its morally instructive nature. Al-Baydawi explains it as either "'the best sort of storytelling' because it is related in the finest of styles; or 'the best kind of thing related' because it includes marvels and aphorisms and signs and instructive examples."[98] While his character is certainly held in high regard in Genesis, in the Qur'an Yusuf is fully elevated to the role of a prophet, one of Muhammad's precursors, blessed with divinely-endowed knowledge and abilities.[99] As such, the absolute righteousness and innocence of his character is emphasized far more in this depiction. Genesis 37:2, for instance, relates how "ויבא יוסף את־דבתם רעה אל־אביהם / Joseph brought an evil report [about his brothers] to their father," as partial justification for their animosity towards him. *Surat Yusuf*, in contrast, assigns none of this blame to Yusuf. Rather, a decidedly less secular explanation for the brothers' enmity is given when Yusuf's father, in warning him to be wary of them, claims: "إنّ الشَّيطان للإنسان عدوّ مبين / indeed Satan is an avowed enemy to man" (12:5).

In addition to this difference in the characterizations of Joseph and Yusuf, another significant difference between the two narratives is that of the role played by God. As previously discussed, this is a largely passive role in Genesis, in which God is only rarely referred to as an active participant as events unfold. In contrast, mentions of Allah abound in *Surat Yusuf*; he is often implied to be the cause of many plot developments and said to be aware of all events. F. V. Greifenhagen, in comparing the two narratives, finds common ground between these passive and active roles, stating that both stories present the idea that "Allah's or God's plans are carried out even when appearances seem to the contrary." However, he goes on to demonstrate how in

[98] Beeston, *Baidawi's Commentary on Surah 12 of the Qur'an*, 1-2.
[99] Much has also been written about possible parallels in the characterizations of and trials faced by both Yusuf and Muhammad himself. See, for example, M.S. Stern, "Muhammad and Joseph: A Study of Koranic Narrative," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (1985): 193-204, and Mir, "Irony in the Qur'an."

practice this presentation is given a different structure in each; while in the Bible various deceptions prove to be the means through which God's plans are indirectly carried out, in the Qur'an Allah's plan succeeds through his direct foiling of such deceptions.[100]

Because of this increased emphasis on the story's moral and theological aspects, the Qur'an correspondingly de-emphasizes its function as a historical narrative. As compared to the Genesis narrative, *Surat Yusuf* is highly decontextualized (as, of course, is all of the Qur'an).The story is no longer presented as part of a larger chronological history of the descendants of Abraham, but rather as a self-contained tale centered on the character of Yusuf and meant to convey a moral message. Accordingly, in contrast to the long lists of names included in Genesis, only four of the many characters in the *sura* are named: Yusuf, Yaqub, Ibrahim and Ishaq. In regard to this divergence, M.A.S. Abdel Haleem states:

> It matters very much to Jewish readers to know the names of their ancestors – it does not matter to Muslim readers to know the names or, if it did matter, they could be sought in history textbooks, but not in the revealed text of the Qur'an. In connection with revelation it matters very much for Muslims to know the names of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, etc. because being Muslim means believing in these prophets.[101]

In explaining this difference in content as a consequence of a fundamental difference in function, Haleem protests earlier studies of *Surat Yusuf* that failed to attribute to this alternate function the many ways that it differs in "its tone, its timespan, the characterization and the artistic forms" from its Biblical predecessor.[102] Marilyn Waldman, in her article *New Approaches to 'Biblical' Material in the Qur'an* presents a similar critique of early comparative studies, arguing that "the

[100] Specifically, in his aptly-titled article, "Clothes Encounters: Yusuf's Shirt in Qur'an 12," he draws such conclusions through examining the fascinating role that clothing plays in the many deceptions that drive the plots of each narrative. F.V. Greifenhagen "Clothes Encounters: Yusuf's Shirt in Qur'an 12," *Studies in Religion-Sciences Religieuses* 39, no. 1 (2010): 53.
[101] M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, "The Story of Joseph in the Qur'an and the Old Testament," *Islam & Christian-Muslim Relations* 1, no. 2 (1990): 185.
[102] Haleem, "The Story of Joseph in the Qur'an and the Old Testament," 171.

two [narratives] do not tell the same story in thematic, theological, or moral terms" and that "to view the Qur'anic Joseph story as a version of the biblical one is itself a cultural decision."[103]

Given these two approaches to comparisons of the Biblical and Qur'anic treatments of this story, a crucial question of this project is how, if at all, translators acknowledge the relationship between the two as they translate the latter into the language of the former. As I demonstrate in the following section, all four translators in question do clearly acknowledge this relationship, and in all four translations the influence of Joseph in the Hebrew Bible clearly shines through.

[103] Waldman, "New Approaches to 'Biblical' Material in the Qur'an," 50. While his work is not named by either Waldman or Haleem, it is easy to read John MacDonald's "Joseph in the Qur'an and Muslim Commentary" parts I and II as the precise sort of comparative study critiqued by both. Here, MacDonald traces many details of the sura back to Jewish sources and, in cases where the sura fails to include an aspect of the story found it these sources, concludes merely that, "it would seem that the Prophet knew the Jewish sources only in outline" rather than exploring deliberate causes for these omissions. MacDonald, "Joseph in the Qu'ran and Muslim Commentary I," 119.

Chapter Two: Findings

Methodology

In order to go about examining this influence within the scope and time frame of this project, I chose to isolate five discrete portions of text - varying in length from seven to eleven *ayat* - out of the 111 total *ayat* of *Surat Yusuf*. These portions represent a cross-section of the various themes and narrative threads of this *sura* while highlighting the most prominent of these. In particular I was drawn to sections that illustrated themes such as the contrasting moral terminology used to create positive and negative portrayals of different characters, and the theme of knowledge in connection with this morality. While another consideration was selecting portions of texts that corresponded to some degree with the story of Joseph as told in the Hebrew Bible, I included instances both in which these narratives converged, and ones in which they diverged in order to examine the extent to which these similarities and differences were acknowledged within each translation.

The five portions I focus on include both the opening and closing sections of the *sura*, as both are significant for their role in framing the narrative as a revelation to Muhammad and placing it within the larger context of the Qur'an. I also examined two sections, which I have termed the *Seduction of Yusuf* and the *Vindication of Yusuf*, that contain both a strong focus on moral language and multiple points of contact with the story of Joseph as told in Genesis and in Jewish commentaries. Finally, the middle section that I studied, *Yusuf in Prison*, was chosen for its dominant focus on religious terminology, much of which also appears in the closing section, which marks a strong divergence from the Biblical narrative.

My examination of these five sections consisted primarily of extensive cross-referencing to compare the usage of Hebrew terms in the four translations both with each other and with that

of the Hebrew Bible or other Jewish texts as applicable. These usages were then further compared to the meanings and connotations of the original Arabic terms and their usages throughout the Qur'an or in other Arabic texts. In addition to studying the effect of the Biblical story of Joseph on these translations, my reading of the texts was largely concerned with the reoccurring use of specific language centered on certain themes, such as morality and knowledge. In these cases I tracked which Arabic words or trilateral roots were repeatedly used to convey this theme, and then examined which corresponding Hebrew terms were used in each translation. In certain instances, I relied as well upon outside sources of each translator's work to provide additional insight into their translation processes and interpretations of the text. Primarily, these sources were available for the two most recent translations; they include Aharon Ben-Shemesh's 1979 English translation of the Qur'an and several articles he wrote about the process, as well as scholarly articles and books produced by Uri Rubin. My conclusions also draw on the ways in which the translators introduce their work in forwards to each translation, as well as on what is known about each translator's life and field of scholarship.

This analytical section begins with a description of some of the differences between the format and presentation of each of the four translations as a whole. Each of the five text portions from *Surat Yusuf* is then addressed in its own section, which begins with a description of the events and themes of each. This is followed by a discussion of the extent to which each section corresponds with or diverges from the events and language of the Genesis narrative. All other observations for each section are then grouped into rough categories according to the most salient themes and features of the section. As is done throughout the rest of the paper, all Arabic and Hebrew quotes from the Qur'an, the translations, or the Hebrew Bible are given in their original form, along with my own English translation, as well as English transliteration in the

case of single words. When quoting from non-Qur'anic and non-Biblical sources however, such as Jewish or Islamic commentaries, as well as when quoting from other content in the translations, such as footnotes, only English translations (my own or others') are given. I have also attempted to remain consistent in rendering titles and names as they appear in the text in question. That is, I use the name Yusuf when discussing an event from the original Qur'anic text, but Joseph when referring to one of the translations or to the Hebrew Bible. This holds true also for characters, such as Potiphar, who are named in the Hebrew Bible but identified otherwise (in this case, as "the Egyptian") in the Qur'an. Finally, for reference, my own English translation of each of the five portions of text I discuss is provided in full at the start of each relevant section.

General Observations

Presentation and Structure

The Arabic text of the Qur'an is not presented identically in every edition; in general, however, it is given with full diacritical marks but with no punctuation. Divisions within the text are made by the numbering of individual *ayat*, as well as by the frequent inclusion of markings similar to Biblical cantillation marks meant to indicate proper pronunciation and pacing according to the rules of Qur'anic recitation. Reckendorf uses Hebrew numerals to number the verses and doesn't divide the text in any other way. He adds punctuation as well, although he does not mark dialogue with quotation marks. Rivlin too uses Hebrew numerals and partial punctuation, and further breaks the text up into paragraphs. His is also the only translation to indicate vowels with full diacritical marks. Ben-Shemesh presents the text as fully punctuated continuous prose divided into paragraphs with no divisions between verses apart from marginal notes indicating every fifth verse. Rubin uses Arabic numerals to number the verses and divides

the text into paragraphs as well. His text is partially punctuated (lacking quotation marks) and contains some diacritical markings, which are primarily used with transliterated terms or as "necessary in places where they assist in preventing misunderstanding," as he outlines in his preface.[104]

Heading and Bismillah

Each translation has a different heading for the text with varying degrees of details; Reckendorf and Rivlin give the number of verses in the *sura* and Rivlin adds that it was revealed in Mecca, while Ben-Shemesh and Rubin just give the title. Each also translates *sura* with a different Hebrew term. Reckendorf uses "חזון / *chazon*," meaning revelation or prophecy and Rivlin uses "פרשת / *parashat*" meaning story, and used to designate portions of the Hebrew Bible. Both also insert the phrase "עליו השלום / peace upon him," after Joseph's name in the title, an expression of honor in the Jewish tradition used to commemorate a deceased figure, particularly the Jewish patriarchs. Ben-Shemesh uses the term "בשורת / *B'sorat*," a decision he explains in his article "Some Suggestions to Qur'an Translators (Continuation)." Here, he proposes the etymological source of *sura* to be "the Hebrew word '*B'Surah*,' used by the early Hebrew Christians to denote: Revelation, Announcement and Gospel."[105] Rubin, on the other hand, chooses simply to transliterate *sura* as "סורה."

Aside from the differing terms used in place of Allah, all except for Ben-Shemesh render the *bismillah* in the same way, maintaining the doubled use of the Arabic root "ر-ح-م / *rā'-ḥā'-mīm*." All therefore translate the epitaphs "the Merciful and the Compassionate" with the cognate Hebrew "הרחמן והרחום / *haRachaman v'haRachom*." Ben-Shemesh, however, in a conscious

[104] Uri Rubin, *הקוראן* (Tel-Aviv: Universitat Tel Aviv, 2005), טו (introduction equivalent of page xv).
[105] Ben-Shemesh, "Some Suggestions to Qur'an Translators (Continuation)," 200.

effort to avoid this root repetition, replaces the second term with the word "האהוב / *haAhuv* / the Beloved," a decision he also rationalizes in his article.[106]

Finally, all four of them choose to present the three mystery letters at the beginning of the *sura*, "ا-ل-ر / '*alif-lām-rā*'" with their equivalents in the Hebrew alphabet, "א-ל-ר / *alef-lamed-resh*."

Proper Names

The entirety of *Sura* 12 contains only four proper names (Yusuf, Yaqub, Ibrahim, and Ishaq), all of which belong to Biblical prophets featured in Genesis (Joseph, Jacob, Abraham, and Isaac). In all four translations, then, the Hebrew versions of these names are used, as are the Hebrew versions of other named Biblical figures, such as Lot and Moses, which are mentioned in other *suwar* throughout the Qur'an.

Biblical Features

As expected, given their publication prior to the completion of Hebrew's revival as a literary and spoken language, both Reckendorf's and Rivlin's translations rely largely upon the grammatical constructions and vocabulary of Biblical Hebrew. Specifically, some features present in the Hebrew Bible that they employ include the vav conversive construction and the relative pronoun "אשר / *asher*" instead of the prefix "-ש / *sh*-" to mean "that," or "which." Both translations also frequently include idioms no longer in modern use, such as Rivlin's use in 12:3 of the phrase "בגלותינו את אזנך / in our opening your ear" to mean "in our announcement to you." While for the most part these particular features and uses of Biblical vocabulary are not present, or are rare, in Ben-Shemesh's and Rubin's translations, Ben-Shemesh does use the vav conversive construction for verbs surprisingly often, though not exclusively. The two later

[106] Specifically, he derides the more common translations as "repetitious and superfluous" and largely bases his alternative interpretation on the fact that the Aramaic root related to "ر-ح-م / *rā'-ḥā'-mīm*" is used to denote "love" rather than "compassion." Ben-Shemesh, "Some Suggestions to Qur'an Translators," 81-82.

translations, but not the earlier ones, also on occasion use the word "של / *shel* / of" to indicate possession, as it is used in Modern Hebrew.

Names for God

In the forty-six total lines I examined, the Arabic text contains twenty-four direct references to God (not including instances in which God is referred to with only the personal pronoun or possessive suffix). Of these references, sixteen are with the proper name "الله / *Allah*," and the remaining eight are with the term "ربّ / *rabb*," which means lord and is also employed an additional five times in a secular sense, to refer to either Potiphar or Pharaoh.

All four Hebrew translations take a different approach to these divine terms. Ben-Shemesh is the only one who maintains the distinct proper name *Allah*, which he transliterates as "אללה" and uses a total of fifteen times. Reckendorf does use the transliteration "אלה" once, but only in the *bismillah*. In the body of the text itself, he instead prefers the proper name "אלוהים / *Elohim*," used frequently in the Hebrew Bible for God. Along with fifteen uses of this term, his translation also contains four instances in which the Hebrew term "עדון / *adon*," analogous to the Arabic "ربّ / *rabb*," is used to mean lord. Unlike any of the other translators, Reckendorf additionally refers to God on eight occasions with just the Hebrew letter "ד / *dalet*," possibly with the intention of avoiding the sacred properties held by many of the other names and titles for God.[107] Both Rivlin and Rubin primarily use "אלוהים / *Elohim*" as well, a total of twenty-five and sixteen times respectively. While Rivlin uses this term exclusively, in eight instances Rubin additionally employs the term "ריבון / *ribon*," cognate to "ربّ / *rabb*," which Ben-Shemesh as well uses seven times.

[107] As the only apparent precedent for this usage is in Targum Onkelos, the Second Temple period Aramaic translation of the Torah, it is a mystery why Reckendorf too chooses to do so in his translation, and why only in these specific instances.

Within the sections of Genesis relating the story of Joseph, God features throughout but is not named with the same frequency. References within the narration itself are primarily in the form of the tetragrammaton "יהוה / *yod-hey-vav-hey*," usually translated into English as Lord, while nearly all references spoken in dialogue - usually by Joseph - are made with the name "אלוהים / *Elohim*." While the word "עדון / *adon* / lord" is used several times as well in these chapters, it is always in a secular sense to refer to Pharaoh, Potiphar, or Joseph himself.

The Opening: Verses 1-7

Translation

(1) Alif-Lam-Ra. These are the verses of the clear book.
(2) We sent it, an Arabic Qur'an, so that you may understand.
(3) We narrate to you the best of stories in what we have revealed to you [of] this Qur'an, and before it you were of the unaware.
(4) Yusuf said to his father, Oh my father, I saw eleven stars and the sun and the moon, and I saw them bowing to me.
(5) He said, Oh my son, do not narrate your vision to your brothers or they will plot a plot against you, for Satan to man is a manifest enemy.
(6) And thus your Lord will choose you and teach you of the interpretation of sayings and fulfill his grace upon you and upon the tribe of Yaqub like he fulfilled it on your fathers before [you], Ibrahim and Ishaq. For your Lord is knowing and wise.
(7) And there were already in Yusuf and his brothers signs for those who ask.

Description

Surat Yusuf does not open directly with the story of Yusuf and his activities, but rather first introduces the narrative as a component of the revealed Qur'an. *Ayat* 1-3 of this opening section thus function as a framing device, in which Allah, speaking in the first person plural as he does for much of the Qur'an, directly addresses Muhammad.[108] The narrative that follows is described as "أحسن القصص / the best of stories" (12:3) that is sent so that "لعلكم تعقلون / you may understand" (12:2). This story itself begins with the phrase "إذ قال يوسف لأبيه / Yusuf said to his

[108] To be more exact, the speaker of these and other lines throughout the Qur'an is most often interpreted to be Allah speaking to Muhammad through the mouth of the angel Jibra'il, or Gabriel.

father" (12:4) and continues from *ayat* 4-6 as Yusuf relates his dream and his father, Yaqub, responds by cautioning him not to share this dream with his brothers, as well as by praising Allah for granting Yusuf this knowledge of "تأويل الأحاديث / the interpretation of sayings" (12:6). In *aya* 7 the text shifts back again as the narrator (presumably Allah) comments on the importance of what has occurred so far by saying, "لقد كان في يوسف وإخوته آيات للسائلين / And there were already in Yusuf and his brothers signs for those who ask."

In spite of its brevity, this section manages to establish a strong narrative theme of knowledge, as well as a strong theme of phonological repetition. Allah is twice characterized as the granter of knowledge (a gift that is bestowed specifically on Yusuf as a result of his moral righteousness), and every *ayat* of the section (along with the *bismillah* which precedes them) ends with the sounds "ين / *-īn*," "ون / *-ūn*," or "يم / *-īm*." Both themes continue to have a strong and cohesive presence throughout the *sura*, but are especially prominent within this short initial section.

Correspondence with Genesis

12:4-6 are the only lines of this section that form part of the narrative of Yusuf itself rather than the story's introduction directly addressed to Muhammad, and are thus the only lines with parallels to the story as told in the Hebrew Bible. The clearest parallel to Genesis in this section occurs in 12:4; here, the phrase "رأيت أحد عشر كوكبا والشمس والقمر رأيتهم لي ساجدين / I saw eleven stars and the sun and the moon, and I saw them bowing to me" is virtually identical to Genesis 37:9, which reads in part, "הנה חלמתי חלום עוד והנה השמש והירח ואחד עשר כוכבים משתחוים לי / Behold, I dreamed another dream and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing to me." Apart from maintaining the Arabic order, which places "eleven stars" first in the list of luminaries, Reckendorf's translation mimics the phrasing of Genesis through using

identical vocabulary as well as by omitting the second occurrence of "I saw." Both Rivlin and Rubin's translations use this same vocabulary as well, but keep the repeated "I saw." Ben-Shemesh's translation diverges the most from the Arabic by replacing the verb "to see" with the cognate accusative "חלמתי חלום / I dreamed a dream" lifted from Genesis, as well as by following the Biblical order of heavenly orbs.[109]

Parallels can also be seen in the words used to describe Joseph's skill at dream interpretation, mentioned here in 12:6 and several times later in the *sura* with the Arabic word "تأويل / *tāwīl* / interpretation." Reckendorf is the only one who translates this as "פתרון / *pitron*," the term used exclusively throughout the Genesis narrative in reference to this skill; the other translators use "פשר / *pesher*" instead, also meaning "interpretation" and etymologically related to "פתרון / *pitron*" but found only once in the Hebrew Bible.[110]

Self-Referential Language

As discussed in chapter one, the Qur'an as a text is partly characterized through its use of self-referential terms, several of which appear in this first half of this section as the narrative is introduced. One of these self-referential terms is the Arabic word, "آية / *āya*," which holds the meaning of both verse and sign. In this section it appears with both meanings; first in 12:1 when the text refers to the ensuing narrative as "آيات الكتاب المبين / the verses of the clear book," and second in 12:7 when the text refers to the story as containing "آيات للسائلين / signs for those who ask." All four translators maintain this lexical repetition, using the word "אות / *ot* / sign" in both

[109] While seemingly minor, this alteration in order does have an impact on interpretation of the story. Mustansir Mir, drawing on commentary by the medieval Muslim scholar al-Zamakhshari, argues that the precise phrasing of Yusuf's dialogue in this section offers significant clues about his personality. Specifically, Mir characterizes Yusuf as "shy, modest, and respectful," seeing as "he mentions the sun and the moon - his parents - *after* the stars - his brothers - , out of respect delaying mentioning his parents." Mir, "The Qur'anic Story of Joseph," 12.
[110] William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 300.

cases. While etymologically related to "آية / *āya*," this term does not share its second meaning of "verses," and thus does not also connote the verses of the Qur'an itself as the Arabic does.

The word "قرآن / *qurān*" itself is used twice as well, in 12:2 and 12:3. In this first appearance the text refers to itself as "قرآنا عربيّا / an Arabic Qur'an." Reckendorf is the only one of the four to deviate from a literal translation of this phrase, rendering it instead as, " הקורן בלשון ערבית / the Qur'an in the Arabic language." Both Rivlin and Rubin do comment on this line in footnotes; Rivlin explains, "Saying, in the language understood to them," and Rubin offers the theory of Islamic commentators that

> All of the holy stories, namely the Torah, the New Testament and the Qur'an, originated in an eternal heavenly book (in Sura 4:43 it is called "the mother of the book"), but the Qur'an is different from the other books in that it is given in the Arabic language in order that it will be understood to the contemporaries of Muhammad.[111]

Other Noteworthy Differences

None of the translations retain the phonological repetition and end rhymes of the source text. In Arabic this is largely achieved through ending each *aya* with a masculine plural suffix; while similar sounding suffixes are also in use in Hebrew ("ים / *-im*" rather than "ين / *-īn*" or "ون / *-ūn*," for instance), only in verse 7 of the Hebrew translations is one used for the last word of the verse. Ben-Shemesh is the only translator who does not end this verse with a masculine plural active participle meaning "those who ask," as the Arabic text does, as he instead renders it as "דורשי האמת / the seekers of the truth." In another instance Reckendorf's translation further disrupts the structural and phonological parallelism of Arabic phrase "عليم حكيم / *'alim hakim /* knowing and wise" (12:6), describing Allah. While none of the translations maintain the internal rhyme of this phrase, Reckendorf's alters it the most through instead utilizing a common idiom of Biblical Hebrew, "יודע כל וחכם לב הוא / he knows all and is wise at heart."

[111] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 189.

Ben-Shemesh's translation deviates from the source text and the other translations in two other instances. The first is in 12:3, where he inserts the title "השליח / *haShaliach* / the apostle," to clarify that the line is directed toward the Prophet Muhammad rather than towards the readers. He then alters Jacob's mention of "your fathers," when speaking to Joseph in 12:6 so that it instead reads "אבותינו / *avoteinu* / our fathers."[112] Finally, Rivlin's translation includes one other feature of note, which is his translation of 12:3, the first line of the narrative itself. He begins this line with the parenthetical insertion of the word "זכר / *z'chor*," the imperative form meaning "remember." While unclear, it is likely that this insertion is intended as a direct command from Allah or the angel Jibra'il to Muhammad, instructing him to pay close attention to the narration that follows.

Footnotes and Parentheticals

Reckendorf and Rivlin both include several short footnotes clarifying the meaning of certain phrases, and Rivlin additionally does this through the insertion of parenthetical information at several points. Ben-Shemesh has no footnotes for this section. Rubin's are the lengthiest and the most intertextual, and often direct readers to other verses of relevant interest both elsewhere in the Qur'an and in Genesis. He also offers several interpretations of the contents of this section given by various Islamic commentators.

The Seduction of Yusuf: Verses 19-29

Translation

(19) A caravan came and they sent their water bearer and he let down his bucket. He said, Oh good news, this is a boy. And they hid him as goods, and Allah is knowing of what they do.
(20) They sold him for a low price, numbered dirhams, and they were neglectful of him.
(21) And he that bought him, from Egypt, said to his wife, Honor his stay, perhaps he will profit us or we will take him [as] a son. And thus we established Yusuf in the land to teach him of the

[112] Curiously, however, this alteration was not made in his 1979 translation into English, which maintains the original "your fathers." Ben-Shemesh, *The Noble Quran*, 193.

interpretation of sayings, and Allah is victorious over his affairs, but many of the people do not know.
(22) And when he reached his maturity, we gave him wisdom and knowledge, and thus we reward the good-doers.
(23) The one whose house he was in sought to seduce him, and she closed the doors and said, Come, you. And he said, I seek refuge in Allah! And indeed he is my lord who has made my stay good, and the wrongdoers will not succeed.
(24) And certainly she desired him, and he desired her, except that he saw the proof of his lord so thus we would turn away from him evil and immorality. Indeed he is of our servants those who are sincere.
(25) Both raced to the door and she tore his shirt from behind, and they found her lord at the door. She said, What punishment for [one who] desires evil for your family except that he be imprisoned, or a painful punishment?
(26) He said, She sought to seduce me, and a witness from her family testified that if his shirt was torn from in front [then] she was truthful and he was of the liars.
(27) But if his shirt was torn from behind then she lied and he is of the truthful.
(28) And when he saw his shirt, torn from behind, he said, Indeed it is of your plot, indeed your plot is great.
(29) Yusuf, turn away from this, and [my wife], ask forgiveness for your sin. You indeed were of the sinners.

Description

This section begins as Yusuf, having been abandoned by his brothers, is discovered by a group of travelers who sell him to an Egyptian. The narrator interjects at this point to explain that it is through Allah's will that Yusuf is established in the Egyptian's household, in order "لنعلمه من تأويل الأحاديث / to teach him of the interpretation of sayings," once he has grown to maturity. At this point in the narrative, however, the wife of his Egyptian master attempts to seduce Yusuf, who, upon seeing "برهان ربه / the proof of his lord" (12:24), rebuffs her and attempts to escape. In doing so, his shirt is torn, which ends up proving his innocence when the Egyptian discovers them. An unidentified witness reasons that because it has been torn from the back, rather than the front, he must have been the victim rather than the aggressor in this scenario. The Egyptian is convinced of Yusuf's innocence and declares of his wife's lie, "إنه من كيدكن إن كيدكن عظيم / indeed it is of your plot, indeed your plot is great" (12:28).

Terms relating to morality feature heavily in this section, which is unified largely through their repetition. Specifically, terms with positive connotations such as "غالب / *ghālib* / victorious," "المحسنين / *al-muḥsinīn* / the good-doers," and "الصادقين / *al-ṣādiqīn* / the truthful" are used for Allah and Yusuf and associated with their respective roles as giver and recipient of knowledge. These are contrasted with negative terms such as "الظالمون / *al-ẓālimūn* / the wrongdoers," "فحشاء / *faḥsha'* / immorality," and "الكاذبين / *al-kādhibīn* / the liars" that are used to describe the Egyptian's wife and her actions as well as the general category of unbelievers.

Correspondence with Genesis

12:19-20 roughly corresponds to Genesis 37:36, the last verse of this chapter of Genesis, which recounts how Joseph was sold by Midianite (also called Ishmaelite) traders to Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. In Genesis this narrative is then interrupted by the unrelated events of chapter 38, and is continued in 39:1 which repeats that "ויוסף הורד מצרימה ויקנהו פוטיפר סריס פרעה שר הטבחים איש מצרי מיד הישמעאלים אשר הורדהו שמה / And Joseph was brought down to Egypt and Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials, captain of the guard, an Egyptian man, bought him from the hands of the Ishmaelites that had brought him there." The story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife then continues up until 39:20 when Joseph is placed in prison. The sequence of these events is similar to that of those told in *ayat* 12:21-25, in that the narrative first establishes that Joseph/Yusuf was bought by an Egyptian who looked upon him with favor. In both texts God is named as the reason for this goodwill, and the direct source of Joseph/Yusuf's success. Both narratives then go on to describe how the Egyptian's unnamed wife desires Joseph/Yusuf and how he refuses her sexual advances. It is at this point that the narratives diverge; in the Hebrew Bible Joseph's garment, which is left in the wife's hands, serves as evidence for her accusation of his unwanted advances, rather than of his righteousness as Yusuf's torn shirt does in the Qur'an.

The Biblical narrative does not include a witness to testify on Joseph's behalf, and the Egyptian thus believes his wife's story. It is at this point that Joseph is imprisoned, an event which in the Qur'an occurs only later, in 12:33, and is through Yusuf's own volition.

At several points in the translations, the influence of these corresponding versions of events can be seen. One instance is in Ben-Shemesh's translation of 12:23, in which Yusuf rebuffs his mistress' advances by saying "He [Potiphar] is my lord who has made my stay good." Ben-Shemesh then has Joseph follow this line by asking, "ואיך אעשה את הרעה הגדלה הזאת וחטאתי / And how will I do this great evil and sin?" a nearly word for word replication of his response to Potiphar's wife in Genesis 39:9. The only alterations are the addition of the particle "את / *et*" to indicate the definite direct object, and the elimination of "לאלהים / against Elohim" which occurs at the end of the verse as found in Genesis.

With regard to Yusuf's prominently featured shirt, rendered as "قميص / *qamīṣ*" in Arabic, all four translators opt to use the Hebrew "כתונת / *k'tonet* / shirt" rather than the more general "בגד / *beged* / garment," the term used in this section in Genesis. While this choice maintains the Arabic's level of specificity as to what kind of garment it was, it additionally recalls the previous noteworthy use of this term in Genesis. Specifically, it features earlier in the narrative when used to describe the special garment Jacob makes for Joseph. In addition to its meaning in Modern Hebrew of "shirt," then, for readers of the Hebrew Bible the term carries further connotations of its Biblical meaning of a more cloak or coat-like garment.

Finally, Ben-Shemesh explicitly identifies the travelers that arrive in 12:19, who receive no other identification in the Qur'an, as "ישמעאלים / Ishmaelites," as they are described in Genesis 37:25 and later.[113] He also explicitly names Egypt as the setting of the narrative in both 12:20 and 12:21; while 12:21 does mark one of only two places in the *sura* in which this setting is

[113] He does not, however, identify them as such in his English translation.

indicated, as Yusuf's buyer is identified as an Egyptian, Ben-Shemesh inserts the additional description "בארץ מצרים / in the land of Egypt" later in the verse as well.[114] The Egyptian who buys Joseph is identified as Potiphar, his name in the Hebrew Bible, in footnotes by Reckendorf, Rivlin, and Rubin, but not by Ben-Shemesh.

Correspondence with Jewish and Islamic Commentaries

Even though this section of the Qur'anic story of Yusuf at times differs greatly from the story in Genesis, many of the additions to the plot are also found in Jewish commentaries that expand upon the Biblical narrative. Specifically, such additions include the concepts of a divine sign stopping Joseph from giving in to temptation, and of there being a witness to proclaim his innocence.

The divine sign appears during the account of the wife's advances on Yusuf in 12:24, which begins, "ولقد همت به وهم بها لولا أن رأى برهان ربه / and certainly she desired him, and he desired her, except that he saw the proof of his lord." While no such sign is mentioned in Genesis, several Jewish commentaries relate how when Joseph "was on the point of complying with the wish of his mistress," a succession of images appears to dissuade him; first of his mother Rachel, and of his aunt Leah, and of his father Jacob, and then the image of the Lord himself.[115] Reckendorf translates 12:24 as, "ותחשק נפשה בו וגם נפשו חשקה בה לולי ראה אות מאת אדוניו / and her soul desired him, and also his soul desired her, if it were not that he saw a sign from his lord," and in a footnote he interprets this sign to be, specifically, "the image of Jacob," citing the origin of this theory to be Rashi's commentary on the corresponding events in Genesis 39:11.[116] Rivlin

[114] The only other instance in which Egypt is named within the *sura* is in 12:99 when Yusuf, newly re-united with his family, proclaims to them, "ادخلوا مصر إن شاء الله آمنين / enter Egypt, Allah willing, in safety," a phrase that today can be seen adorning a wall of the Cairo International Airport.

[115] This incident appears in; Tractate Sotah 36b on the Talmud, Genesis Rabbah 87:7 and 98:20, Midrash Samuel 5:63, the Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael Wa-Yesheb 9, Yalkut I on Abkir 145-6, and Targum Yerushalmi Gen. 49:24. See Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 2:53-4.

[116] Herrmann Reckendorf, *אלקוראן או המקרא* (Leipzig: Gerhard, 1857), 133.

translates it as "ואכן חשקה נפשה בו ואף הוא חשק נפשו בה לולא ראה אות אלהיו / and indeed her soul desired him and also his soul desired her, if it were not that he saw the sign of his God," and explains this sign in a footnote as "a warning not to do an abomination," with no further interpretation of its form.[117] Ben-Shemesh's translation reads, " ואולם היא חשקה בו מאוד ואף הוא אולי היה נענה לה לולא הוזהר על-ידי אות מריבונו / but she desired him greatly and he was also perhaps responding to her, except that he was warned by a sign from his lord," and, like Reckendorf, he interprets this sign to be the image of Jacob, quoting in a footnote Talmudic tractate on the adulterous wife that states "'At that time came a portrait of his father and appeared to him in a window' (Sotah 36:72)."[118] Rubin phrases the line as, " היא חשקה בו וגם הוא היה חושק בה אלמלא ראה את מופת ריבונו / she desired him and he also was desirous of her except that he saw the sign of his lord," and interprets it in a footnote as "he remembered to avoid sin. And there are claims that the angel Gabriel was revealed to him, or Jacob his father," although he offers no source for these theories.[119]

In the Qur'an, Yusuf's protestation of innocence against the wife's accusation is supported when "شهد شاهد من أهلها / a witness from her family testified" (12:26) that Yusuf's shirt is torn from behind, and he therefore must be telling the truth. Within the Arabic text, this witness is unambiguously male, but otherwise unidentified. The commentator al-Baydawi offers some possible interpretations, saying "Some say it was her paternal cousin, others her maternal cousin, he being then a child in the cradle."[120] Similarly, many Jewish commentaries on Genesis hold the idea that Joseph is defended (unsuccessfully, however, unlike in the Qu'ran) by an infant

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[117] Rivlin, *אלקראן*, 233.
[118] Ben-Shemesh, *הקראן הקדוש*, 149.
[119] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 191. The claims that Rubin cites here may well be ones made by Islamic commentators, as many include a similar interpretation of these events. Al-Baydawi, for instance, remarks on this line, "Some say that he saw Gabriel, others that a mental picture of his father biting his fingers came before him, others a mental picture of Qitfir [Potiphar], others that a voice cried to him, 'Joseph, you are written down among the prophets, and yet you are doing the deed of fools.'" Beeston, *Baidawi's Commentary on Surah 12 of the Qur'an*, 15.
[120] Beeston, *Baidawi's Commentary on Surah 12 of the Qur'an*, 16.

miraculously endowed with the power of speech. In some, the child is the son of Potiphar's wife, who is given the name Zuleika:

> God opened the mouth of Zuleika's child, a babe of but eleven months, and he spoke to the men that were beating Joseph, saying: "What is your quarrel with this man? Why do you inflict such evil upon him? Lies my mother doth speak, and deceit is what her mouth uttereth. This is the true tale of that which did happen," and the child proceeded to tell all that had passed - how Zuleika had tried first to persuade Joseph to act wickedly, and then had tried to force him to do her will. The people listed in great amazement. But the report finished, the child spake no word, as before.[121]

Other commentaries, however, believe this child to be Asenath, Joseph's wife as named in Genesis 41:45. She is further imagined to have been adopted by Potiphar and his wife after having been born to and abandoned by Dinah, Joseph's sister. This interpretation states:

> Asenath had saved Joseph's life while she was still an infant in arms. When Joseph was accused of immoral conduct by Potiphar's wife and the other women, and his master was on the point of having him hanged, Asenath approached her foster-father, and she assured him under oath that the charge against Joseph was false. Then spake God, "As thou livest, because thou didst try to defend Joseph, thou shalt be the woman to bear the tribes that he is appointed to beget.[122]

Reckendorf directly asserts and cites this latter interpretation in a footnote to his translation of 12:26, stating, "That is Aseneth who was still a small girl, and Potiphar's wife seduced Joseph in front of her for she wasn't afraid to face her because of her youth. See Sefer haYashar, Parshat VaYeshev."[123] Curiously, this interpretation is put forth despite the fact that his translation, like all of the others, retains the Arabic use of masculine constructions for the witness. Rivlin does not comment upon the line, and Ben-Shemesh, who also includes no footnote, instead incorporates the idea of the witness being a child into the text itself, by

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[121] Yashar Bereishit Wa-Yesheb 88a-89a. See Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 2:57.
[122] Yalkut I on Abkir 145-6. An abridged version of this tale appears also in Origen, *Commentary on Genesis* 41:45. See Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 2:76-7.
[123] The work which he cites here, Sefer haYashar, is an anonymous medieval midrash that was not accepted into the rabbinical canon. Reckendorf, *אלקוראן או המקרא*, 134.

translating the line as "one of the children of her house helped him."[124] Rubin comments on the line with a footnote saying, "there is commentary that the advice was heard from the mouth of a baby in a crib endowed with the strength to speak," though he does not specify the source of this commentary.[125] Reckendorf additionally refers to the belief in Jewish commentary that Aseneth is the daughter of Potiphar in one other instance. Here, it is in order to interpret the statement made by the Egyptian to his wife, regarding Joseph, that "אולי יועילנו או יהיה לנו לבן / maybe he will benefit us or he will be to us for a son" (12:21). In a footnote, he comments:

> Our Rabbis commented on the written saying: And God chose the Egyptian's house because of Joseph, Genesis 39:5, for there weren't children to Potiphar before Joseph came to his house, and after Joseph came his wife bore to him Aseneth, the wife of Joseph; because Potiphar and Potiphera are one according to some interpretations.[126]

Rubin includes additional references to Jewish commentaries in footnotes to the account given in 12:19 and 12:20 of the travelers' discovery and sale of Joseph. The first of these footnotes reads, "the traders did not reveal what they found in the pit. There are commentaries that say that the brothers returned to the pit after Joseph was removed from it, and they pretended that Joseph was an escaped slave and sold him to the traders (In the spirit it is said in Genesis 37:28-9 about the sale of Joseph to the Midianites for ten pieces of silver)."[127] The second clarifies that the sale of Joseph was from "the traders to Potiphar," and adds, again, that, "there are commentators that say that the brothers sold Joseph to the traders."[128] As he notes in another footnote that the name of the Egyptian's wife is Zuleika according to Islamic tradition, Rubin is thus the only translator to draw, albeit briefly, upon Islamic commentary in this section.[129]

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[124] Again, this change is not made in his English translation, which instead speaks of "one of her household who witnessed it." Ben-Shemesh, *The Noble Qur'an*, 195.
[125] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 191.
[126] Reckendorf alludes here to the inspiration for this particular tradition, which is the similarity between the name Potiphar and the name given in Genesis 41:45 for Asenath's father, Potiphera. Reckendorf, *אלקוראן או המקרא*, 133.
[127] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 190.
[128] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 190.
[129] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 191.

Moral Language

As already mentioned, the most dominant theme of this section is the contrast between the knowledgeable and upright, such as Yusuf, and the deceitful, namely the Egyptian's wife. One of the most significant terms used to draw this contrast in the Arabic text is the word "كيد / *kayd*," usually translated as "plot" or scheme." Shalom Goldman, in discussing the motif of Joseph and Potiphar's wife in multiple traditions, addresses the use of this word in this and other Qur'anic narratives. Specifically, he counters the assumptions that this word is used exclusively both with negative connotations, and with female characters:

> An analysis of the use of the term *kayd* in the Qur'an indicates that 'guile' or 'deceit' is a misleading translation of the Arabic original, and that *kayd* is a quality attributed to men and women. 'Artifice' or 'stratagem,' terms that do not have pejorative connotations, would be more appropriate translations of *kayd*. Elsewhere in the Qur'an *kayd* is not a stratagem of men and women only, it is also utilized by God against unbelievers. There are at least thirty-four uses of the Arabic root K.Y.D. in the Qur'an, and a number of them refer to God's actions.[130]

He further likens the connotations of this term to those of the Hebrew "מרמה / *mirmah* / ruse," similarly used throughout the Hebrew Bible for the schemes of both female and male characters, such as Rebecca, Rachel, Tamar, and Joseph's brothers.[131]

In addition to several occurrences elsewhere in this *sura* in connection with characters such as Yusuf's brothers and the women of the city, and throughout the Qur'an as a whole, "كيد / *kayd*," is used twice in this section. Both times are in 12:28 when the Egyptian accuses his wife of deceit, saying to her, "إنه من كيدكن إن كيدكن عظيم / indeed it is of your plot, indeed your plot is great." One striking feature of the Arabic text here is that the term is given both times with the second person plural feminine possessive suffix. As al-Baydawi's commentary says of the line, "the plural pronoun is addressed to her and those like her, or to women as a whole," and the

[130] Goldman, *The Wiles of Women, The Wiles of Men*, 48.
[131] Goldman, *The Wiles of Women, The Wiles of Men*, 48-9.

adjective "عظيم / *'aẓīm* / great" is used because "the craftiness of women is subtler, more insinuating and with greater effect on the mind, and because by it they outface men and by it Satan whispers stealthily."[132] Every translator except for Ben-Shemesh uses the Hebrew feminine plural ending for both instances in this line; Ben-Shemesh, instead, goes further and alters the line to read, "הרי זו מזימת נשים אכן עצומות הן תחבולות הנשים!" / then this is of a plot of women, indeed great are the schemes of women!"

For the two uses of "كيد / *kayd*," in this line, Reckendorf and Rubin both use the Hebrew "תחבולה / *tachbula*," and Ben-Shemesh too uses it for the second occurrence. For the first, he uses "מזימה / *m'zemah*" instead, which Rivlin as well uses for both instances. Both of these nouns have similar meanings of "plot" or "scheme." Additionally, all (or similar forms) occur within the Hebrew Bible, though only infrequently and primarily in Proverbs and Psalms rather than in connection with this narrative. While the Hebrew "מרמה / *mirmah* / ruse," presented by Goldman as equivalent to "كيد / *kayd*" does not appear in any of the translations of this section, Reckendorf does use it in this sense in 12:52, as will be discussed later. Here and throughout the *sura*, Rivlin is the only translator who, through consistent repeated use of the term "מזימה / *m'zemah*" and other words from the same root, creates as strong a thematic focus as is achieved in the Arabic with "كيد / *kayd*" and its connotations. He in fact inserts the related verb "זמם / *zamam* / to plot" one additional time within this section, in an instance where "كيد / *kayd*" is not used in the source. His translation of 12:25 has the wife of the Egyptian ask him, in accusing Joseph, what the punishment should be for one who "זמם להרע לאשתך / plots to do evil against your wife."

The contrast throughout this section between moral and immoral characters is heightened by the Arabic's striking parallel structure in 12:26-27. The two juxtaposed phrases in question are; "فصدقت وهو من الكاذبين / then she was truthful and he is of the liars" and "فكذبت وهو من الصادقين / then

[132] Beeston, *Baidawi's Commentary on Surah 12 of the Qur'an*, 17.

she lied and he is of the truthful." Only in Reckendorf's translation is this structure fully maintained, as "דבריה נכונים והוא דבר כזבים / her words are correct and he speaks lies" and "היא דברה כזבים ודבריו נכונים / she speaks lies and his words are correct." Additionally, Reckendorf is the only translator not to use the Hebrew term "שקר / *sheker*" to mean lie in these two lines; he instead uses "כזב / *cazav* / lie," the cognate of the Arabic root "ك-ز-ب / *kāf-zāy-bā*'" used in this sense throughout the section. While both Rivlin and Rubin maintain the repetition of the two terms used for truth and lies in 12:26-7, they do so without setting up a similar parallel structure, and Ben-Shemesh's translation uses "צודקת / *tzodeqet* / right" in the first line to refer to the wife but "אמת / *emet* / truth" in the second referring to Joseph.

Other Noteworthy Differences

In 12:22, the Arabic text reads "آتيناه حكما وعلما / we gave him wisdom and knowledge," two concepts that are similarly paired many times throughout the *sura* and the Qur'an as a whole, such as in 12:6. Here, neither Ben-Shemesh nor Rubin uses simply "חכמה / *hochma*," cognate of the Arabic "حكما / *ḥokmā*," for wisdom as they do elsewhere. Instead, Ben-Shemesh's translation reads "הענקנו לו כוח-שיפוט ודעת / we awarded to him power of judgment and knowledge," replacing the noun entirely, and Rubin's reads "נתנו לו חוכמת משפט ודעת / We gave to him wisdom of judgment and knowledge," specifying the precise category of wisdom given.

When the text states, in 12:20, that Yusuf was sold for the price of a few dirhams, both Reckendorf and Rivlin opt instead to name the currency used with the Hebrew "אדרכמונים / *adarchmonim* / drachmas," meaning the ancient Greek currency from which the Arabic dirham

derives its name.[133] While Ben-Shemesh maintains the name dirham by transliterating it, Rubin instead names the price as simply "מטבעות ספורות / a few coins."

While Yusuf is directly addressed in the first half of 12:29, the second half of the line is directed towards the Egyptian's wife. Reckendorf clarifies this switch by inserting the words "my wife" to the text, and Rivlin explains in a footnote who is being addressed in each part of the statement. In the same footnote, he further proposes that the speaker is either Potiphar (as it is usually assumed to be) or Elohim. Both Ben-Shemesh and Rubin follow the Arabic in indicating the addressee simply by altering the gender of the second person pronoun. One final minor alteration is found in Reckendorf's translation of 12:25, in which he translates the line " وألفيا سيدها لدى الباب/ and they found her lord at the door," as "ותפגע בבעלה הבא / and she encountered her husband coming in," removing Yusuf as part of the subject.

Footnotes and Parentheticals

Reckendorf's footnotes primarily offer interpretations of several events in the text drawn from both Rashi's commentary on Genesis and from other, unnamed Jewish commentators. In one instance, in a footnote to 12:19, he also notes that the Qur'an's reference to a water-bearer discovering Yusuf is in contradiction to the statement in Genesis 37:24 that Joseph had been thrown into a pit empty of water.[134] Rivlin includes only a few brief footnotes, primarily to clarify ambiguous wording. He also includes several parenthetical insertions similarly meant to further clarify and refine the text. Ben-Shemesh's only footnote in this section is in regard, as already mentioned, to the divine sign that appears to Joseph. Rubin as well mentions relevant interpretations found in various unnamed commentaries in his footnotes, and in 12:22 he clarifies

[133] To be precise, the term used by Reckendorf and Rivlin is a corrupted form of the similar word "דרכמונים / *darchmonim*." Both forms appear in the Hebrew Bible, though rarely and only in late texts. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament,* 5.
[134] Reckendorf, *אלקוראן או המקרא*, 133.

that the original Arabic term he translates as "חוכמת משפט / wisdom of judgment" is "حكما / *ḥokmā* / wisdom" (which he gives with voweled Hebrew characters).[135]

Yusuf in Prison: Verses 36-42

Translation

(36) And entered with him the prison two young men. Said one of them, Indeed, I see myself pressing wine. And said the other, Indeed, I see myself bearing over my head bread, and the birds are eating from it. Inform us of its interpretation, for indeed we see you as of the good-doers.
(37) He said, There will not come to you both food [that] you are provided with except that I will inform you both of its interpretation before it comes to you both. That is of what my lord taught me. Indeed I left a people [that] don't believe in Allah, and they in the Hereafter are disbelievers.
(38) And I follow the religion of my fathers, Ibraham and Ishaq and Yaqub. It was not for us that we associate with Allah anything. That is from the grace of Allah to us and to the people, but many people do not give thanks.
(39) Oh my two companions of the prison, are separate lords better, or is Allah, the one, the supreme?
(40) You worship not other than him, but names [that] you named them, you and your fathers, but Allah has not sent down for them authority. But the judgment is not but for Allah, he ordered that you not worship but him alone. That is the correct religion, but many of the people do not know.
(41) Oh my two companions of the prison, as for one of you, he will give wine for his lord to drink, and as for the other he will be crucified and the birds will eat from his head. It has been decided, the matter that you both inquire about.
(42) And he said to he who he thought is saved of them, Remember me to your lord. But Satan made him forget to remember to his lord, and he remained in the prison several years.

Description

These seven *ayat* relate Yusuf's stay in prison following his rejection of the advances of the women of the city. *Aya* 12:36 opens by introducing Yusuf's fellow prisoners, who each relate a dream they have had, and appeal to Yusuf to inform them of its meaning. With the exception of this first line, as well as the last one, the entirety of this section is an address from Yusuf to his two fellow prisoners. He begins by promising to provide an interpretation of their dreams, as this ability is "ذلكما مما علمني ربي / of what my lord taught me" (12:37), but then segues into a personal

[135] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 191.

statement of belief before finally fulfilling his promise and interpreting the dreams in 12:41. In his statement, he expresses his adherence to "ملة آبائي إبراهيم وإسحاق ويعقوب / the religion of my fathers, Ibrahim, Ishaq and Yaqub" (12:38), which condemns the worship of multiple deities as practiced by those who "بالآخرة هم كافرون / in the Hereafter are disbelievers" (12:37), and instead preaches belief in "الله الواحد القهار / Allah, the one, the supreme" (12:39). The last line then relates how the one pardoned prisoner - under the influence of Satan - forgets to remind the king of Yusuf's presence in prison despite Yusuf's request for him to do so.

While it is Yusuf's interpretations of the dreams and the subsequent explanation of why he remains in prison that have the most bearing on the narrative's plot, it is clear that the primary concern of this section is with its theological content, rather than the relation of these events. To this end, the most dominant characteristic of the text of this section is its heavy use of religious terminology. This terminology is largely paired with impartations of moral judgment; "المحسنين / *al-muḥsinīn* / the good-doers," who believe in Allah, for example, are contrasted with the "كافرون / *kāfirūn* / disbelievers" who "لا يعلمون / do not know" and "لا يشكرون / do not give thanks."

Correspondence with Genesis

This section tells the same events, though in a condensed format, as are related in the entirety of Genesis chapter 40, a total of 23 verses. Like the *sura*, this chapter opens by talking about two of Joseph's fellow prisoners, identified here as Pharaoh's butler and baker, who had been placed in prison for offending him. While the Qur'an refers to them simply with the dual form "فتيان / *fatayān* / young men," Reckendorf expands this to say "שני עבדי המלך / two servants of the king," and, in a footnote, identifies the first speaker as the chief butler. Rivlin says merely "שני נערים / two young men," and offers no additional identification. Like Reckendorf, Ben-Shemesh as well specifies that they are "שניים מעבדי המלך / two of the king's servants."

Additionally, he later alters Joseph's dialogue with insertions in 12:41-2 to clarify that he is speaking directly to the "שר-המשקים / chief butler" and the "שר-האופים / chief baker," rendering these titles as they are found in Genesis. Rubin calls them "שני עבדים / two servants" and provides no further identification.

Similarly, the Arabic text refers to the ruler of Egypt only in passing when Yusuf, in talking to the two young men, mentions their "ربّ / *rabb* / lord" in 12:41-2. Rubin's translation is the only one that uses the name "פרעה / Pharaoh" to identify this ruler, though this is used only in the footnotes.[136] While, as mentioned, both Reckendorf and Ben-Shemesh refer to "המלך / *haMelech* / the king," earlier in the section, all four translations translate the word "ربّ / *rabb* / lord" as "אדון / *adon* / lord," which, like the Arabic term, can also be used to refer to God.

As in the Qur'an, the narrative in Genesis then continues with the two other prisoners each relating a dream to Joseph, though here in much more detail. While in the Qur'an the first describes his dream concisely, saying, "إني أراني أعصر خمرا / Indeed I see myself pressing wine" (12:36), in Genesis this dream is described in detail over the course of several lines, from 40:9-11. Joseph then immediately interprets each man's dream, whereas in the Qur'an this interpretation is prefaced by Yusuf's proclamation of his faith in a single supreme god. In the Genesis narrative Joseph does acknowledge the role played by God in these events by declaring, "הלוא לאלהים פתרנים / Are interpretations not of Elohim?" (40:8).[137] Beyond this brief statement, however, the Genesis story lacks any equivalent to Yusuf's lengthy speech in the Qur'an, which thus marks a point of strong divergence between the two narratives.

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[136] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 192.

[137] In the same vein, Genesis 41:16 has Joseph saying to Pharaoh, "בלעדי אלהים יענה את־שלום פרעה / It is not in me, Elohim will answer Pharaoh with peace." A similar idea is expressed earlier in the Qur'an, in 12:6, when Yaqub informs Yusuf that it is God who has taught him his knowledge of interpretation, stating "يجتبيك ربك ويعلمك من تأويل الأحاديث / your Lord will choose you and teach you of the interpretation of sayings."

There is one instance in Reckendorf's translation in which he clearly borrows phrasing from the Genesis narrative. In 12:41, Joseph interprets the second prisoner's dream saying, "فيصلب فتأكل الطير من رأسه / he will be crucified and the birds will eat from his head." While the other three translators render this using the root "צ-ל-ב / *tsade-lamed-bet* / to crucify," which is not present in Biblical Hebrew, Reckendorf instead alters the phrase so that it mimics the corresponding interpretation given in Genesis 40:19. The line in Genesis reads, "ותלה אותך על עץ ואכל העוף את בשרך מעליך / you will hang on a tree and the bird will eat your flesh from upon you" and Reckendorf accordingly translates the Arabic as "יתלה על העץ והעוף יאכל את בשרו מעל ראשו / he will hang on the tree and the bird will eat his flesh from upon his head."

Religious Language

It is in this section, in 12:37, that Yusuf first talks about the concept of the Hereafter. In Arabic, this concept is expressed with the term "الآخرة / *al-ākhira*," which, while also meaning "the last" in a general sense, is used almost exclusively in the Qur'an to refer to the Hereafter. Throughout his translation, Rivlin is consistent in translating this term with its Hebrew cognate, "האחרית / *haAcharit*." While phonologically and etymologically similar, this term does not carry the same religious connotations as the Arabic one does. It occurs in the Hebrew Bible, for instance, primarily with the meaning "the end" or "the last," and is also used in this secular sense once later in the section by both Rivlin and the other translators. In light of this, the three other translators instead consistently render this term as "עולם הבא / the world to come." This phrase carries religious connotations of a Hereafter similar to those of the Arabic "الآخرة / *al-ākhira*," although the concept is not prominent in the Jewish tradition, and is not expressed with these terms in the Hebrew Bible.

Also in 12:37, Yusuf refers to those who, in the Hereafter, are "كافرون / *kāfirūn* / disbelievers." Reckendorf instead talks about "מכחשים / *machashim* / they who deny" the Hereafter, while Rivlin uses the same root to say "ויכחשו / v'*yichasho* / they deny." Both Ben-Shemesh and Rubin, on the other hand, employ forms of the root "כ-פ-ר / *kaf-pey-resh,*" which is cognate to the Arabic term used here but not present in Biblical Hebrew with that meaning. Ben-Shemesh renders it closest to the Arabic, with "הכופרים / *hakoferim* / the disbelievers," while Rubin says "ויכפרו / *v'yikfaru,*" with the meaning instead of "they will atone."

In proclaiming the beliefs of his fathers, Yusuf states, "ما كان لنا أن نشرك بالله من شيء / it was not for us that we associate with Allah anything" (12:38), with the implication being that "anything" refers to other gods or idols.[138] Reckendorf gives this phrase as "לא נאוה לנו לדמות אלוהים אחרים אל ד' / it is not fitting for us to imagine other gods compared to God," Rivlin as "חלילה לנו לשתף אל אלוהים מאומה / it is forbidden to us to associate Elohim with anything," Ben-Shemesh as "אין אנו משתפים עם אללה אלילים / we do not associate with Allah idols," and Rubin as "אל לנו לצרף לאלוהים שותף כלשהו / it is not for us to attach to Elohim any partner." All except for Rivlin, then, specify what it is - gods, idols, or partners - that Allah must not be associated with.

In 12:39, when Yusuf asks whether multiple deities are better than a single God, the Arabic text uses the terms "ءأرباب / *'ārabāb* / lords" and "الله / *Allah*" to refer to the two. In translating this verse, Reckendorf and Rivlin both use "אלהים / *Elohim*" twice in the sentence, once to refer to "separate gods" and once for "one God" as it can be understood as either a singular or plural term. Ben-Shemesh, on the other hand, uses "אדונים / *adonim* / lords" for the first instance and "אללה / *Allah*" for the second. Rubin uses first "ריבונים / *ribonim* / lords," cognate of the Arabic term, and then "אלוהים / *Elohim.*"

[138] The same root, "ش-ر-ك / *šīn-ra'-kāf,*" is used elsewhere in the Qur'an to refer to the denounced Christian association of God with the other members of the Trinity. See, for example, 2:113 and 9:31.

Finally, in 12:40, Yusuf speaks of "الدين القيم / the correct religion," a phrase which gets translated in several different ways. Reckendorf renders it as "אמונת אמת / true faith," Rivlin as "הדת הנכונה / the correct religion" Ben-Shemesh as "הדת הנצחית / the eternal religion" and Rubin as "הדת הנכוחה / the upright religion."

Other Noteworthy Differences

As in the Opening Section, the Arabic text implies but never explicitly states that is dreams that are being discussed; only the verb "to see" is used to relate their contents.[139] All four translations, however, amend these lines so that both prisoners clearly state either "ראיתי בחלומי / I saw in my dream," or a similar phrase. In Ben-Shemesh's translation, the word "חלומות / *halomot* / dreams" is used three additional times later in the section when Joseph is asked to and finally does interpret what they had seen.

There is some variance in how Joseph is described in 12:36 when his fellow prisoners say, "نراك من المحسنين / we see you as one of the good-doers," to explain why they are appealing to him to interpret their dreams. While both Rivlin and Rubin maintain the focus on his moral righteousness as source of his expertise in interpretation, saying respectively "רואים אנחנו אותך מעושי הטוב / we see you as of the good-doers" and "אנו סבורים שאתה במיטיבים / we believe that you are among the benefactors," Reckendorf and Ben-Shemesh instead focus on his intelligence. Reckendorf translates the phrase as "לאיש נבון חשבנוך / an intelligent man we think of you," and Ben-Shemesh as "אנו רואים שאתה מן החכמים והישרים / we see that you are of the wise and the upright."

Finally, Reckendorf's translation of the phrase "ذلك من فضل الله علينا / that [belief] is one of the graces of Allah to us" (12:38) alters it to read instead, "אלהים גלה לנו את תורתו למען הורותה /

[139] This holds true throughout the *sura*; while dreams feature prominently at several points, in only two instances are they directly named as this with the word "أحلام / *āḥlām* / dreams." Both occurrences are in 12:44, when the king's dreams are discussed.

Elohim revealed to us his teachings in order to instruct." Significantly, though, the word used for "teachings" is "תורה / *torah*" which, though it certainly holds this meaning (and is derived from the same root as the word used here for "instruct"), also holds clear connotations of its use as a designation for Hebrew scripture. While it is unclear with which meaning Reckendorf most intends the word here, in either case his audience of Hebrew readers would be fully aware of both connotations.

Footnotes and Parentheticals

With the exception of the last verse, very little in this section is commented on in footnotes. Both Reckendorf and Rivlin include just a few short ones clarifying the text, and Ben-Shemesh has no other footnotes. Rubin's other footnotes all point to the corresponding sections in Genesis 40, except for one that clarifies that the text is referring to Pharaoh. The last verse of the section, however, relating how Joseph's request to the freed prisoner was forgotten, is accompanied in every translation except for Rivlin's with explanatory footnotes. Reckendorf refers to Jewish commentary on this event, explaining, "For Joseph put his trust in the chief butler and not in God, he dwelled more years in prison. See Midrash Rabba on Genesis 49, and Midrash Yalkut 147."[140] Ben-Shemesh refers to two verses in Genesis that correspond to what is mentioned in the verse (Genesis 40:1-14 and Genesis 40:23).[141] While Rubin does not cite any specific commentaries, he interprets the verse saying, "Namely, the servant forgot to remember Joseph to Pharaoh. But it can also be translated: 'Made him forget the memory of his lord.' Accordingly there are commentaries that say it is Satan that forgot from Joseph the memory of Elohim."[142]

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[140] Reckendorf, *אלקוראן או המקרא*, 135.
[141] Ben-Shemesh, *הקראן הקדוש*, 150.
[142] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 192.

The Vindication of Yusuf: Verses 50-57

Translation

(50) The king said, Bring him to me. But when the messenger came he said, Return to your lord and ask him, what is the case of the women that cut their hands? My lord of their plot is knowing.
(51) He said, What was your affair when you sought to seduce Yusuf? They said, Allah forbid! We don't know about him any evil. The wife of the Aziz said, Now the truth is evident. I sought to seduce him and indeed he is of the righteous.
(52) This [is so] he will know that I do not betray him unseen, and that Allah does not guide the plot of the deceitful.
(53) And I don't absolve myself. Indeed, the soul is inclined to evil, unless my lord gives mercy. Indeed my lord is forgiving and merciful.
(54) The king said, Bring him to me, I will select him for myself. And when he spoke to him he said, Indeed you are today with us established and trusted.
(55) He said, Put me over the treasures of the land, and indeed I am a knowing guardian.
(56) And thus we established Yusuf in the land to settle in it where he willed. We bestow our mercy on who we will, and we do not neglect the reward of the good-doers.
(57) And surely the reward of the Hereafter is better for those who believe and are fearing.

Description

The events of this section occur after the king has had a dream and called for its interpretation. The released prisoner finally recalls Yusuf, as promised in the previous section, and returns to where he is imprisoned to acquire an interpretation. It is implied that this interpretation is then relayed to the king who, in the first line of this section, then calls for Yusuf to be brought to him. Mustansir Mir, in his discussion of the literary features of this narrative, imagines its plot as a succession of tensions that are created in the first half and resolved, in reverse order, in the second. According to his outline, this section falls roughly at the midpoint of this series. The king's dream, the last of these tensions, has been resolved first by Yusuf's interpretation, and the resolution of Yusuf's imprisonment, the second most recent tension, is dependent upon the resolution of Yusuf's earlier encounter with the women of the city.[143] Thus, in this section, Yusuf requires first that the king obtains a statement of Yusuf's innocence from the women of the city who had desired him. They provide this, as does the wife of the Egyptian

[143] Mir, "The Qur'anic Story of Joseph," 1-3.

from before, who states, "الآن حصحص الحق أنا راودته عن نفسه وإنه لمن الصادقين / Now the truth is evident. I sought to seduce him and indeed he is of the righteous" (12:51). His righteousness thus affirmed, Yusuf is brought before the king and rewarded with a position of power, thanks to, as the second to last line of the section states, the mercy of Allah. As in the section *The Seduction of Yusuf*, the strongest theme in the language of this section is that of moral righteousness, Yusuf's in particular. This morality is, once again, linked to the themes of religious belief and divinely-granted knowledge.

Correspondence with Genesis

This section of the *sura* diverges sharply from the narrative in Genesis, in which Joseph is called to interpret Pharaoh's dream in person and immediately does so: "וישלח פרעה ויקרא את־יוסף ויריצהו מן־הבור / And Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and he was quickly brought from the dungeon" (41:14). In the Qur'an, on the other hand, this process involves several additional events, as the servant who had been imprisoned with Yusuf goes himself back to the prison to ask Yusuf about the dream, then returns to the king to relate the interpretation, at which point the king calls for Yusuf, who initially refuses to come. *Ayat* 12:54-5 of the Qur'an then correspond with Genesis 41:39-41, in which Pharaoh determines that Joseph be put in charge of all the storehouses of Egypt, citing his clear intelligence as the reason. In Genesis, Joseph is understood to have subtly promoted himself for this position. In the Qur'an, on the other hand, he explicitly asks for it, citing his own intelligence by claiming that he will be a "حفيظ عليم / knowing guardian."

The event that Yusuf refers to in 12:50, "the case of the women that cut their hands," is not present in the Biblical narrative. Several Jewish commentaries, however, do note an incident

in which Joseph must rebuff the advances of a group of women. They relate how, as in 12:30-32, Potiphar's wife Zuleika prepares a banquet to display Joseph to the women of Egypt:

> When Joseph came in, the women could not take their eyes off him, and they all cut their hands with the knives, and the oranges in their hands were covered with blood, but they, not knowing what they were doing, continued to look upon the beauty of Joseph without turning their eyes away from him.[144]

It is unclear, however, whether it is in these commentaries or in the Qur'an that this story first appears, and none of the translators note this shared tradition.[145]

Despite this lack of correspondences in the two narratives, Ben-Shemesh's translation does incorporate one clear example of Biblically-influenced phrasing, as he himself indicates in a footnote. His translation of Yusuf's statement in 12:53, that "إن النفس لأمارة بالسوء / indeed the soul is inclined to evil," phrases it as "יצר לב האדם רע מנעריו / the intent of the heart of man is evil, from his youth." Here, this wording mimics a line not from the story of Joseph but from earlier, in Genesis 8:21. This verse, in the context of the story of Noah and the flood, reads, "ויאמר יהוה אל־לבו לא־אסף לקלל עוד את־האדמה בעבור האדם כי יצר לב האדם רע מנעריו / and the Lord said in his heart I will not again curse anymore the ground on account of man, for the intent of the heart of man is evil, from his youth." It is worth noting that while in his English translation of the Qur'an he similarly points to Genesis 8:21 in a footnote, Ben-Shemesh does not insert its wording into the text itself, leaving the line as "for man's soul is inclined to evil."[146]

Moral and Religious Language

The Arabic term "كيد / *kayd* / plot," as used prominently in the *Seduction of Yusuf* section, appears again several times here as part of the section's similar thematic focus on moral and

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[144] Yashar Bereishit Wa-Yesheb 87a-87b, and the Mekilta of Rabbi Ishmael Wa-Yesheb 5. Additionally, Midrash HaGadol relates a similar incident, substituting "bread and meat" in place of oranges. See Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 2:50-1.

[145] See Goldman, *The Wiles of Women, the Wiles of Men*, 103 for his theory of a Qur'anic origin as opposed the argument made by Ginzberg that the tale first appeared in Jewish commentaries.

[146] Ben-Shemesh, *The Noble Qur'an*, 198.

immoral characterizations. The first of these occurrences is in 12:50 when Yusuf, in charging the king to investigate the incident that had occurred with the women of the city, states that Allah is "بكيدهن عليم / knowing of their scheme." In this instance, both Reckendorf and Rubin again use "תחבולה / *tachbula* / plot" as they do in 12:28, and Rivlin and Ben-Shemesh use "זמם / *z'mam* / plot"; Ben-Shemesh in fact uses it twice, as he alters the line so that Joseph more specifically requests the king to discover, "נשות השרים מה זממו / what the wives of the chiefs plotted."

12:52 as well speaks of "كيد الخائنين / the plot of the deceitful." Reckendorf renders this as "ערמת אנשי מרמה / cunning of cheating people," using, for "cheating," the Hebrew "מרמה / *mirmah*" that Goldman likens to "كيد / *kayd."* Rivlin translates the phrase as "מזמת הבוגדים / the schemes of the betrayers," and Ben-Shemesh as "צבועים בעלי מזימות / hypocrites with schemes," both again using forms of "זמם / *z'mam.*" Rubin is consistent in again translating it with the term "תחבולה / *tachbula*," saying "תכבולת הבוגדים / the schemes of the betrayers."

12:57 contrasts these deceitful people with those who believe and "كانوا يتقون / are fearing," of, presumably, Allah. Both Reckendorf and Rivlin include this implied object; Reckendorf speaks of "יראי אלוהים / those who fear God," and Rivlin of, "היראים (את אלהים) / those who fear (God)." As in the previous section, in 12:57 Rivlin again uses the term "האחרית / *haAcharit*" for "الآخرة / *al-ākhira* / the Hereafter" rather than "עולם הבא / the world to come" as the others do.

Other Noteworthy Differences

While it is very common in the Qur'an as a whole for personal pronouns to serve as the only indication of a dialogue's speaker and addressee, this feature is particularly evident in this section, which features several speaking characters, of whom Yusuf is the only one given a proper name. While titles such as "the king" or "the wife of the Aziz [official]" are used to refer

to several others, in only two lines of dialogue is the speaker, in both cases the king, explicitly named. As a result, all four translators employ a combination of in-text and parenthetical insertions, as well as footnoted comments, to name these characters and clarify which ones are involved in the dialogue throughout this section.

Reckendorf, for instance, uses the title "king" for the first line, as is seen in the Arabic, but then changes this to "pharaoh" in a later occurrence. He also translates the Arabic title "العزيز / *al-Azīz*" as "האיש הנכבד / Honorable man," and uses footnotes to specify that Joseph is the subject of the first line, and that the Egyptian and his wife are later subjects. Rivlin as well uses several parenthetical insertions to clarify that Joseph is referred to in the first line, that the king is speaking in the second, that Joseph is referring to the Egyptian official in 12:52, and that Joseph is the speaker in 12:55. He also uses a footnote to say that it is Joseph speaking in 12:52. In multiple places, Ben-Shemesh chooses to replace pronouns with names or titles to clarify the speakers of several lines, and inserts the phrase "his lord from before" in 12:51 to specify who the "wife of the chief" is. Additionally, he further specifies in 12:55 and 56 that the land in question is Egypt even though the setting is identified as such only twice throughout the *sura* as a whole, and goes unnamed in this section. Rubin only clarifies the identification of a character in one instance, adding in parentheses in 12:51 that the king is the speaker.

This section also provides several interesting examples of how each translator renders the Arabic word "ربّ / *rabb* / lord," which is used at different points in this section, and throughout the *sura*, as a title for alternatively Allah, the Egyptian official, and the king. In this section, all four translators use the Hebrew word "עדון / *adon* / lord" in at least one of these instances when the king is the intended character, and Reckendorf and Ben-Shemesh additionally refer to the Egyptian official in this way. Rather than using this same term for Allah as well, as the Arabic

text does, both Ben-Shemesh and Rubin instead use the term "ריבון / *ribon*," also meaning lord, while Reckendorf and Rivlin use only the proper name "אלוהים / *Elohim*" instead.

Footnotes

Reckendorf's footnotes are short and primarily for the purpose of clarifying speakers and addressees, or for expanding on a line to make its meaning clearer. Rivlin as well includes only two notes; one saying that Joseph is the speaker and one clarifying the meaning of a phrase. Ben-Shemesh cites Jewish commentary to interpret line 12:51, in which the wife confesses her own wrongdoing. He quotes: "The wife of Potiphar will come and witness for Joseph (Avodah Zarah 3:71)."[147] His only other footnote is the one pointing to the section of the verse in Genesis he quotes. Rubin has two footnotes for this section, both of which offer possible interpretations of the identity of the speakers of lines 12:52 and 53, as given by various commentaries. While it is most commonly accepted that the speaker of this first line is the Egyptian's wife, and the speaker of the second Joseph, here Rubin offers the possibility that the Egyptian himself is the speaker in both cases, or else that his wife is the speaker of the second line as well as the first, rather than Joseph.[148]

The Closing: Verses 101-111

Translation

(101) My Lord, already you gave me the dominion and taught me of the interpretation of sayings. Creator of the heavens and the earth, you are my protector in the world and the Hereafter, cause me to die in submission and join me with the righteous.
(102) That is of the stories of the unseen we reveal to you, for you were not with them when they put together their affair and when they were plotting.
(103) Many of the people are not believers, although you desire [it].
(104) And what you ask them of reward, it is not except a reminder to the worlds.
(105) And [how many] a sign in the heavens and the earth [do] they pass over it, and they are of those who turn away.

[147] Ben-Shemesh, *הקראן הקדוש*, 151.
[148] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 193.

(106) Many of them don't believe in Allah except that they are those who associate.
(107) Do they feel secure [if] an overwhelming of punishment of Allah comes to them, or if the Hour comes to them suddenly and they will not be aware?
(108) Say, This is my way. I invite to Allah with enlightenment, I and those who follow me. And glory to Allah, and I am not of those who associate.
(109) And we did not send before you except men. We revealed to them from [among] the people of the towns. Didn't they travel in the land and see what was the end of those before them? Indeed the home of the Hereafter is better for those who fear. So then will you not understand?
(110) Until when the messengers despaired and thought they were already denied, our help came to them and those we willed were saved, and our punishment can't be repelled from the criminal people.
(111) Indeed, already there was in their stories a lesson for men of understanding. It is not an invented saying but a confirmation of what was before it, and an explanation of everything, and a guidance and a mercy to believing people.

Description

Aya 12:101 is the concluding line of both a speech by Yusuf begun in the previous *aya* and of the narrative itself. Following Yusuf's proclamation of praise for Allah, "وليي في الدنيا والآخرة / my protector in the world and the Hereafter," the remainder of the *sura* is part of the framing device that had introduced the narrative in 12:1-3. The narrator, most likely the angel Jibra'il, once again addresses Muhammad directly and refers to the preceding tale as one of "أنباء الغيب نوحيه إليك / the stories of the unseen we reveal to you" (12:102). He then laments the number of those who still do not believe in Allah despite Muhammad's efforts, and instructs him to, "قل هذه سبيلي أدعو إلى الله على بصيرة أنا ومن اتبعني وسبحان الله / Say, This is my way. I invite to Allah with enlightenment, I and those who follow me. And glory to Allah" (12:108). The narrator further reminds Muhammad in this address of the similar struggles faced by the prophets preceding him, as well as of their eventual salvation through the help of Allah. This closing address, while not part of the narrative itself, restates many of the theological believes previously expressed through the mouth of Yusuf. Its language is thus characterized by much of the religious terminology present in earlier sections, particularly in the *Yusuf in Prison* section.

It is worth noting that the verse numbering in Reckendorf's and Rivlin's translations of this section differs from the standard Egyptian system in wide use today. As this system was not introduced until 1925 - well after Reckendorf's publication date and not long before Rivlin's - this deviation is not surprising. In Reckendorf's translation this change affects verses 102-110, and in Rivlin's 101-103, although in both cases the total number of verses remains the same. While it is unclear which system Reckendorf follows, Rivlin appears to adhere to the system developed by the German Gustav Flügel in 1834, and commonly used in European translations as the main alternative to the Egyptian system.[149]

Correspondence with Genesis

In terms of content, this section lacks any correspondence to events of the Genesis narrative, as it is concerned not with relating the story of Yusuf itself but with directly addressing and preaching to the readers of that story.

Of relevance, however, is the fact that the text itself alludes to Jewish scripture in the last line of the *sura*, 12:111. This line asserts that the story of Yusuf, and the Qur'an as a whole, is, "ما كان حديثا يفترى ولكن تصديق الذي بين يديه / not an invented saying but a confirmation of what was before it," thus appealing to the authority of previously revealed scriptures with parallel content.[150] In the translations, there is wide variance in the degree to which the subtlety of this allusion is maintained. Reckendorf's translation simply reads, " אין בהם כזבים או דברי שקר, אכן מקימים את אשר בידיהם / there are not in them [the stories of the Qur'an] lies or false words, indeed they establish that which was before them," although he then clearly specifies in a footnote that

[149] Abdullah Saeed, *The Qur'an: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008), 51-2.
[150] See Stern, "Muhammad and Joseph," 197 for a discussion of the significance of the Arabic word "حديث / *ḥadīth*," used here to mean "saying" and used in the larger Islamic tradition to describe the collected sayings ascribed to Muhammad.

this is "The Torah and the New Testament."[151] Rivlin says, "דבר בדוי מן הלב. ואולם לקים את אשר לפניו (הורד) / It is not a thing fabricated from the heart. But it maintains what (was sent) before it," with no further explanation given. Ben-Shemesh is explicit in naming these implied scriptures, translating the line as "אין הקראן ספר בדוי, אלא אישור לספר התורה שקדם לו, עם ביאורים מתאימים / The Qur'an is not a fabricated book, these [stories] are a confirmation for the book of the Torah that was before it, with suitable insights/annotations." Like Rivlin, Rubin keeps the ambiguity of the text itself by saying, "אין הוא מעשה בדיה כי אם אישור לאשר לפניו / It is not an act of fiction but a confirmation for that which was before it." While he does include a footnote to this line, it does not name "that which was before it" but instead points to reader to a similar phrase in *sura* 2:41.[152]

Religious Language

As in the beginning of the *sura*, this section uses the word "آية / *āya*," to mean sign, here to ask how many "آية في السماوات والأرض / a sign in the heavens and the earth" are ignored by the disbelievers (12:105). All except for Reckendorf once again use the Hebrew "אות / *ot* / sign" for this phrase; his translation instead uses the term "מופתים / *moftim* / wonders."[153]

The practice of associating others with Allah is again denounced twice in this section, as it is earlier in 12:38. In 12:106 the narrator declares that the majority of humanity does not believe in Allah "إلا وهم مشركون / except that they are those who associate," that is to say, polytheists. For the most part, the translators render this line with identical or similar phrasing to that used earlier. The exception is Reckendorf, who alters it to read more explicitly as, "רבים לא

[151] A note on my translation of Reckendorf's Hebrew: the last word of the phrase, "בידיהם / *b'yadehem*" can be literally translated as "in their hands," the literal translation also of the Arabic term it replaces. In Hebrew, this word does not carry the idiomatic connotations of previous possession as strongly as it does in Arabic, where it is understood to mean "before." I have made the assumption, however, that Reckendorf intends it with these connotations regardless, and thus rendered it as "before them."

[152] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 198.

[153] The two terms often appear together in the Hebrew Bible, particularly in Deuteronomy: see, for instance, Exodus 7:3, Deuteronomy 4:34, 6:22, 7:19, 13:1-2, and Nehemiah 9:10.

יאמינו באלהים כי אם באלילים / many do not believe in God but in idols." Later, in 12:108, Muhammad is instructed to declare, "وما أنا من المشركين / and I am not of those who associate [polytheists]." Reckendorf instead phrases the line as, "אינני עובד אלהי נכר / I do not worship foreign gods," and Ben-Shemesh as well slightly alters it to read, "השבח לאללה שאין אנו מאלה המשתפים עמו אלילים / praise to Allah that we are not of those who share with him idols."

In further describing the disbelievers who will suffer Allah's punishment, 12:110 uses the description "القوم المجرمين / the criminal people." This description differs in each translation; Reckendorf calls them "הבוגדים / *habogdim* / the betrayers," Rivlin "האנשים הזדים / the wicked people," Ben-Shemesh "קהל החוטאים / the crowd of the sinners," and Rubin "העם החוטאים / the people that sin."

As in the *Yusuf in Prison* section, the concept of the Hereafter features in these closing statements made by both Yusuf and the story's narrator, and each translator again renders the term in these two cases as he did earlier, in 12:37 and 12:57. In a similar vein, 12:107 features the Arabic term "الساعة / *al-Sā'h* / the Hour" to refer to an impending time of judgment; the term appears throughout the Qur'an in both this and a general, secular sense. Both Rivlin and Ben-Shemesh thus choose to translate it with the direct Hebrew cognate, "השעה / *haShaah* / the Hour," set within quotation marks, although in Hebrew the word is used only in the everyday secular sense; Rivlin thus uses a footnote to specify that this term is a moniker for Judgment Day.[154] Reckendorf instead renders it as "יום מותם / the day of their deaths," and Rubin as "שעת הדין / the hour of judgment."

Finally, regardless of target language, 12:101 presents a dilemma for translators, as Yusuf's request to Allah in it, "توفني مسلما" can be translated either as "cause me to die as a Muslim" or as "cause me to die in submission," in accordance with the literal translation of the

[154] Rivlin, *אלקראן*, 243.

root from which the term Muslim is derived. All four Hebrew translators (along with many English translators) choose the second interpretation, though all still render it slightly differently. Reckendorf says "אמותה נא באמונתך / May I please die in your faith," Rivlin says "אספני נא אליך תמים עמך / Gather me please, to you, blameless with you," Ben-Shemesh says "חזקני באמונתי ותן לי למות כאחד מאלה המסורים לך / Strengthen me in my belief, and give me to death as one of those that are devoted to you," and Rubin, "אסוף את נשמתי בעודי מתמסר / Gather my soul while I surrender/dedicate myself." Rivlin, however, explains in a footnote that his phrase, "blameless with you" is "precisely, Muslim," while Rubin points in a footnote to *sura* 2:112 which similarly uses the verb "أسلم / *īslam* / submit" to expresses the phrase "من أسلم وجهه لله / he who submits his face to Allah."[155]

Footnotes and Parentheticals

All of Reckendorf's footnotes for this section offer short clarifications of the meanings of several phrases. In 12:108 (12:109 in most editions of the Qur'an) he interprets the description of previous prophets as "בני אדם יושבי ערים / sons of man, city dwellers" as an implied rebuttal to the Christian doctrine of Jesus' divinity.[156] In the same line he also explains that " אחרית האנשים אשר היו לפניהם / the ends of the men that were before them" alludes to specific stories elsewhere in the Qur'an of the destruction of the peoples of *'Ad* and *Thamud*. Similarly, Rivlin's footnotes serve primarily as clarifications and, in several places, direct his readers to parallel concepts found both elsewhere in the Qur'an and in sections (or *parashot*) of the Hebrew Bible. Ben-Shemesh includes no footnotes for this section.

Rubin's footnotes offer clarifications similar to those of Reckendorf and Rivlin, as well as pointing to several relevant passages elsewhere in the Qur'an. In one instance, he explains that

[155] Rivlin, *אלקראן*, 243; Rubin, *הקוראן*, 197.
[156] Reckendorf, *אלקוראן או המקרא*, 139.

his phrase "דבר-תוכחה / word of reproach" is a translation of an Arabic word (given in Hebrew characters as "דִ'כְּר / *thikr*") that more literally connotes a reminder or warning.[157] Like Rivlin, he also provides further interpretation of the description of previous prophets as humans, adding, "And not angels. A hint to the claims of the infidels that men of flesh and blood are not able to be prophets."[158]

Summary

This collection of observations on these five portions of text are not intended as a quantitative analysis of their differences. Rather, they represent a sampling of what I found to be the most interesting, instructive, and occasionally puzzling examples of the divergent choices made in each Hebrew translation. These choices, and the various forms in which they are revealed, demonstrate the ways that each of these four translators understands and presents his own version of "the best of stories." In the conclusions that follow this section, I offer a more synthesized analysis of these observations and of their larger implications.

[157] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 197.
[158] Rubin, *הקוראן*, 198.

Conclusions

The preceding observations represent a comparison of only short sections totaling less than half of the 111 *ayat* that make up *Surat Yusuf*, which itself is only one of 114 *suwar* in the Qur'an. Undoubtedly, an expanded examination of the remainder of this *sura*, and of the rest of the Qur'an, would yield numerous further examples and provide further insights. Examination of even just this small sample size, however, reveals distinct trends across the four translators' works. While achieved in different ways, every work displays strong evidence of the influence of the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish tradition on the process of translating the Qur'an into Hebrew. All four translators, despite working in disparate historical and cultural contexts, consciously incorporate or acknowledge Biblical narratives - in this case the narrative of Joseph - into their versions of Qur'anic narratives.

In his examination of Saadiah Gaon's Arabic translation of the Hebrew Bible, David Freidenreich finds the work to clearly demonstrate that "Saadiah considers Islamic sources to contain accurate information and insights regarding biblical history."[159] With regard to the Hebrew Qur'ans, there is strong evidence of this same process, but in reverse. I argue that these four modern translators consider Jewish sources, and in particular the stories of the Hebrew Bible, to similarly provide "accurate information and insights" about the contents of the Qur'an. In his tenth-century translation, Saadiah frequently and freely modified the source Biblical text to incorporate specific terminology and ideas from Islamic texts and tradition. In the same way, these four authors mold their translations of the Qur'an around incorporations from Jewish tradition.

All four translators thus clearly believe this to be the most appealing approach for presenting a story from the Islamic tradition to a Hebrew-speaking audience. All, therefore,

[159] Freidenreich, "The Use of Islamic Sources in Saadiah Gaon's 'Tafsir' of the Torah," 386.

choose to create translations that are primarily target-oriented, rather than source-oriented. In this case, the target audience consists of readers to whom the Jewish conception of Joseph is presumed to be a more familiar and accessible one than the Islamic conception of Yusuf. Accordingly, all four are consistent in favoring more natural Hebrew phrasing rather than maintaining the rhymes and sounds that constitute a major feature of the inherently oral Arabic text. In doing so, they deviate from several major historical translations of sacred texts, such as the Septuagint, Jerome's Vulgate, and early Persian Qur'an translations. The creators of these works all heavily favored the meanings and features of their source texts, as reflected in their literal translations. However, the four translators in question here do not take a uniform approach in producing their translations for a target audience. Rather, each relies upon a distinct combination of methods and develops distinct themes. In the end, given that readers in Leipzig in 1857 are not, say, those in Tel Aviv in 1971, it is perhaps not this variance between translations itself that is most surprising, but the fact that it is not greater.

Out of the four translators, Reckendorf relies the most upon various Jewish Biblical commentaries from the Mishnaic to medieval periods to in order to interpret difficult passages or to expand the narrative with additional details. He includes many footnotes offering these - but not Islamic commentaries - as decontextualized interpretations of the text. More subtly, many technical details of the structure and format of his translation are based upon the Hebrew Bible as a model of a religious text in Hebrew; the model, in other words, of how his audience expects a scripture to look. His text, therefore, includes several attributes drawn from this tradition of Jewish scripture and other religious works. These include the insertion of the phrase "עליו השלום / peace upon him" after Joseph's name in the title of the *sura*, a practice used to honor the names of Jewish patriarchs. It also includes his use of the word *Elohim*, as Rivlin and Rubin do also,

and his use elsewhere of simply the Hebrew letter "ד / *dalet*" for Allah, which appears only in his translation. Both choices clearly equate the concepts of a Muslim and a Jewish God and assume that a Jewish reader of this work can best understand the former when it is presented using the exact terminology of the latter. Additionally, largely as a function of having been made much earlier than any of the others and before the full revival of Hebrew as a literary and spoken language, Reckendorf's translation shares the greatest amount of vocabulary with the Hebrew Bible. Even beyond those cases in which this sharing is necessary - such as when an alternative Hebrew word utilized by later translators was not in use as of 1857 - in other instances also Reckendorf makes the conscious decision to alter the source text in order to mimic phrasing from the Hebrew Bible. One example of this is his translation of Joseph's interpretation of his fellow prisoner's dream in 12:41, which is explicitly identical to this interpretation as it appears in Genesis 40:19. In both structure and content, then, Reckendorf draws upon both the Hebrew Bible and other Jewish works as models for his version of the Qur'an.

In many ways Rivlin, like Reckendorf, presents the text using the format of Hebrew scripture as a model. In addition to similarly modifying Joseph's name with "עליו השלום / peace upon him" in the title, Rivlin translates *sura* as "פרשת / *parashat*," the term commonly used to designate sections of the Hebrew Bible. Rivlin's translation distinguishes itself from the others largely with its frequent inclusion of parenthetical clarifications of certain details, such as the speakers, addressees, or subjects of certain lines. Through filling in the ellipses of the source text in this way, he clearly makes a priority his readers' comprehension of the narrative over adherence to the occasionally ambiguous and fragmented nature of the original Arabic. In other ways, however, he makes source-oriented choices not made by any of the other translators. Specifically, he translates several Arabic terms with religious connotations, such as "الساعة / *al-*

Sā'h / the Hour" and "الآخرة / *al-ākhira /* the Hereafter" with Hebrew cognates that maintain the sound and literal meanings of these words but not necessarily their connotations in Islam. As compared to Reckendorf and Rubin's works, his contains a great deal fewer footnotes, as only rarely does Rivlin interpret or contextualize the narrative through referring to commentaries. When he does, however, he does not refer to Islamic commentary but rather points his reader towards similar passages in the Hebrew Bible.

Ben-Shemesh's translation stands out as most divergent from the other three, largely because he most closely follows the principles of a free rather than literal translation process, and accordingly makes numerous alterations to the source text. Additionally his translation, more so than any other, removes almost all contextual features of the Qur'an in its original Arabic form. Namely, he presents the text as a continuous and cohesive prose narrative rather than as a series of numbered verses. In constructing this prose narrative, he further alters the structure of the text in order to make it clearer and more accessible, such as by freely inserting transitional phrases, identifying subjects and addressees, and by marking - and in some cases creating - dialogue with quotation marks. He is also the only translator who in many places reduces the ambiguity of the source text by adding identifying details - such as names of characters and places - that are present in the Biblical narrative but either not included or greatly deemphasized in the Qur'an. In some cases the details and proper names that he reinserts can be assumed to be accurate of both narratives. Both, for instance, are unambiguously set in Egypt. Even when the information he adds is not necessarily inaccurate or contradictory to the Qur'anic story, though, his additions have a substantial impact on the narrative's tone and context. With his heightened emphasis on such identifying details, Ben-Shemesh implicitly rejects the Qur'anic framing of the narrative as

a self-contained moral tale, and very much uses the more historical Biblical narrative as a model for his translation.

On the other hand, however, Ben-Shemesh's translation is the one that most often renders Arabic terms such as *Allah* and *dirhams* by transliterating them into Hebrew rather than using equivalent Hebrew terms such as *Elohim* or *adarchmonim* (drachmas). Ben-Shemesh further decontextualizes the narrative by presenting it almost entirely free of commentary or annotations. Partly because his translation itself removes much of the ambiguity of the source text, in only a few instances does he offer further interpretation, all quoted from Jewish commentaries. Much like Reckendorf's translation, in many places Ben-Shemesh clearly either mimics phrasing from the Hebrew Bible, such as when Joseph relates his dream in 12:3, or more explicitly inserts phrases from the Biblical narrative, as he does in his translation of 12:23 and 12:53. Especially given that he chose not to make the majority of these alterations or insertions when translating the Qur'an into English rather than Hebrew, it is clear that his primary intention in doing so is to tailor the story of Yusuf for a specifically Hebrew-speaking audience by explicitly basing it on the story of Joseph in the Jewish tradition.

Finally, Rubin's translation, more so than any other, presents the Qur'an in a scholarly context with extensive annotations. On several occasions, for instance, he offers the original Arabic form of a word (transliterated with Hebrew characters) in places where he feels it necessary to clarify his choice of Hebrew wording. In addition to pointing to several parallel verses in Genesis in his footnotes, Rubin further places many of the passages of the *sura* within the larger context of the Qur'an through pointing to other *suwar*, something that is done infrequently or never in the other translations. While, like Reckendorf, he often provides interpretations of the narrative drawn from commentaries, he does not indicate sources for these

ideas or specify whether they derive primarily from the Jewish or Islamic tradition. As the latest in this series of translations, Rubin's benefits most from having the previous three as guides - or, perhaps, as cautions - and it is possible to understand many of his divergent choices as conscious responses to those of these earlier works.

The challenges faced by these four translators and the approaches they take in response are not, of course, limited to the realm of Hebrew translation. Successfully rendering the Qur'an into any language involves conveying not only its semantic features but its religious concepts as well, a process that has never been free of controversy. Nor are these challenges limited to the realm of the Qur'an. Rather, there are clear parallels between these translation processes and those at work in many earlier translations between Hebrew and Arabic. The medieval Hebrew translations of Islamic works studied by Jonathan Decter, for example, contain many similar instances of the incorporation of Jewish works and ideas. In this way, the four translations examined here reveal themselves to be part of an ongoing movement at the crossroads of sacred text translation and Jewish-Muslim dynamics. Despite the limited scope of this project, I hope that it serves as a discrete and thorough case study of the specific considerations of the process of translating the Qur'an into Hebrew. As these four translations reveal, this process is strongly influenced by the complex dynamic between Islam and Judaism, their respective scriptural histories, and the interlapping of their shared traditions.

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