

Article

Islām and Genesis 17: A Study in Scriptural Intertextuality

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Received: 25 August 2018; Accepted: 17 September 2018; Published: 28 September 2018



Abstract: Abraham Geiger’s 1833 essay launched a particular genre of research that posits foreign etymology for many terms in the Qur’ān. Whereas some work has been erudite, others have posited far-fetched concepts to the point where at least one author opines that Aramaic was the original language of the Qur’ān. Muslim exegetes have compounded the problem by seeking to interpret the Qur’ān on its own, without reference to other Abrahamic scriptures. I argue that Muhammad’s audience understood him clearly since he was using terms that had become part of the Arabic language long before his time. I examine three terms: islām, imān, and dīn, showing that the meaning of these words in the Qur’ān can be deciphered by reliance on context of usage and intertextuality. To this end, I refer to several verses of the Qur’ān as well as of the Hebrew Bible and Talmudic literature. A proper understanding of these words allows us to see Q3:19 and Q5:3 as pluralistic instead of the particularistic interpretation that most exegetes proffer.

Keywords: Islam; Iman; Din; Qur’ān; Aramaic; Hebrew; Hebrew Bible; Talmud; Onkelos

Abraham Geiger’s 1833 essay *Was hat Muhammad aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen* postulated that the Qur’ān was largely unoriginal: Muhammad had compiled it using at least 14 terms from the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature, in addition to several other Jewish concepts (Geiger 1970, p. 44). Later analysis revealed that his work was “naïve and judgmental” (Lassner 1999), and that he sometimes fell victim to parallelomania, positing Qur’ānic borrowings from Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer without realizing that the latter document was composed after the advent of Islām (Stillman 1974). Yet, Geiger must be hailed as the pioneer of the quest for foreign provenance of Qur’ānic terms. His work set off a torrent of publications by Jewish scholars who sought to further detail Judaic influences on Islām. Hartwig Hirschfeld (Hirschfeld 1878), for example, wrote *Judische Elemente im Qoran* (1878), Charles Torrey penned *The Jewish Foundations of Islām* (1933), and Abraham Katsh authored *Judaism and the Koran* (Katsh 1954). By the 1870s, scholars began to oppose some aspects of Geiger’s claims. Adolph Harnack (d.1930) surmised influence from a gnostic Jewish-Christian community (see Pfanmuller 1923, p. 108). Julius Wellhausen (d. 1918), after careful analysis, suggested that Jewish concepts may have entered Islām through Christian refraction (Wellhausen 1961, p. 205).

This search for foreign provenance continues to this day, and while engendering some truly erudite scholarship, has also spawned some of the most ridiculous claims. One professor, for example, would have us assume that his Arabic skills are such that he can correct the text to “the form the word or phrase had when it was first uttered by the prophet Muhammad” (Bellamy 1993). Christoph Luxenberg claims that Muhammad did not even speak Arabic, but rather an Arabic-Aramaic hybrid, and that the Qur’ān is derived from Syriac Christian liturgy (Luxenberg 2000). Another writer tells us that contrary to what Muslims and historians have claimed, the Qur’ān was actually written in Aramaic (Sawma 2006).

Professor Walid Saleh’s words aptly describe the situation:

The rule is presented differently by different scholars, but in a nutshell, it states that for every word in the Qurʾān for which the native philological tradition fails to give a solitary explanation and instead offers multiple meanings, modern scholars have to presume that they are dealing with a foreign word. Having determined that a word in the Qurʾān is foreign, scholars have gone ahead and presumed that its meaning in a cognate language or in its purported language of origin was the determining factor, and not its usage in its Qurʾānic context. (Saleh 2010, pp. 649–98)

Working off Professor Saleh’s findings, I intend to show that three important terms: Islām, imān, and din were part of the Arabic vocabulary long before Muhammad’s time, and that his audience had no problems comprehending their meaning. I will also show that Islām actually owes its name to a particular Arabic rendering of Genesis 17:1. If I can sustain that line of reasoning for Arabic usage, rather than a foreign provenance, I demonstrate that two verses of the Qurʾān (Q3:19 and 5:3) allow for a pluralistic outlook rather than the particularistic interpretation that the majority of exegetes have offered. Each word is of such importance that it merits a full-length journal article or monograph. Fortunately, several scholars have written on the subject, and I use their findings to make my presentation more concise. I omit the use of diacritical marks except in cases where I assume—somewhat arbitrarily—there is an absolute need for pronounciational accuracy. In certain cases, I will abbreviate Qurʾān to Q followed by the chapter and verse number. For example, Q2:15 indicates the second sūra, verse 15.

The underlying message behind the borrowing idea seems to indicate that the Qurʾān has misleadingly depicted its ideas as original, and that such a claim has been debunked by the revelations of its alleged sources. However, the Qurʾān makes no secret that its material is not new; indeed, Muhammad’s detractors repeatedly described his narratives as “tales of the ancients” (Q6:25, 8:31, 16:24, 23:83, 25:5, 27:68, 46:17, 68:15, and 83:13), and he himself said that he had not come with any innovation (Q 46:9). The Qurʾān also describes itself as a preserver of the antecedent Abrahamic scriptures, even advising people to ask the Jewish mazkirim about matters relating to the prophets (Q 16:43; 21:7; Mohammed 2015, pp. 33–46). Even if there are perceived differences in narratives, to assume that we can trace the “true” story to some urtext is problematic, given the presence of the two Torot (written and oral). There was a wide variety of exegetical traditions that, over a long period of time, “supplemented, supported, amended, and even perhaps at times, subverted that legacy” (Pregill 2007, pp. 643–59). If we cannot trace the source for a reference, it may simply be that, as Marilyn Waldman noted, the Qurʾān is using the outlines of a story as a didactic vehicle. (Waldman 1985, pp. 1–13).

Insofar as language is concerned, some Western scholars seem reluctant to believe that, before the Qurʾān, Arabs could effectively communicate via a language of their own. As Afnan Fatani notes:

Arabic is not looked upon not as a sister or equal language of Hebrew, Aramaic, and other Semitic languages, i.e., when it is treated as an offspring that presented the original language in a degenerated form. It is this view that compels some Western scholars to constantly look for the etymology of Qurʾānic terms in other Semitic languages, convinced that Arabic must by necessity, have borrowed its lexicon from these older and more sophisticated languages”. (Fatani 2006, pp. 356–71)

Muslim exegetes added to the problem in several aspects. One was by relying upon creedal constructs to provide explanations of the terms, often engaging in semantic acrobatics to support their interpretations. The earliest exegetes whose works are available were writing in a milieu that was far removed from the one to which the Qurʾān was initially addressed, operating under constructs that often worked to their epistemological detriment. Early Muslim approaches to philology and etymology were clearly in the service of religion, and this came with several drawbacks (Kopf 1956, pp. 33–59). While earlier exegetes recognized the existence of loan words in the Qurʾān, later ones sought to literally interpret the Qurʾānic verses that referred to the document being in clear Arabic

(e.g., Q 12:2, 16:103, 26:195, 41:44, and 42:7). The derived reasoning was that since God cannot lie, then every word had to literally be from an Arabic source.

Another problematic concept was the widespread Muslim contention that the previous scriptures were corrupted and therefore not reliable. This is underlined by the idea that reliance upon rejecting Judaic traditions—known as *isrā'īliyat*—would lead to false interpretations (Mohammed 2015, p. 15). Rejecting biblical influence negatively affected exegesis, given that, as Reuven Firestone aptly noted, “the Qur’ān could not possibly exist without its scriptural predecessors as subtexts” (Firestone 2004, pp. 1–22). The dynamic influence that the Qur’ān has had upon the Arabic language has also exacerbated the problem. This is because almost every classical dictionary of Arabic relies heavily on the Qur’ān for elucidation, often without regard to differences between terminological and quotidian usage.

I rely on some late discoveries within the field of Islāmic studies to form certain relevant premises. The recent discovery of what some term as the Birmingham manuscript basically vouchsafes what the Muslim tradition has always held: that the Qur’ān goes back to the time of Muhammad, unlike the late dating that researchers have claimed, such as Patricia Crone, Michael Cook, and John Wansbrough, for example. The presence of Christian and Jewish tribes in the Arab peninsula long before Muhammad’s birth meant that, cognate consideration aside, certain religious concepts, even if they had stemmed from foreign terminology, had become completely Arabized by Muhammad’s time (Griffith 2013; Gilliot and Larcher 2001).¹ There is also a midrash dated to the second or third century Sifre to Deuteronomy 32:2 that states, “When God revealed Himself to give the Torah to Israel, He did so not in one language, but in four: in Hebrew, in Greek, in Arabic, and in Aramaic” (Goitein 1958, pp. 149–63). As Goitein astutely pointed out, whereas such translation was probably never committed to writing, it certainly must have been present via an oral method. The Arabs were therefore not as unfamiliar with Biblical material as the proponents of the foreign etymology camp might suppose.

Let us examine the first of the three terms: Islām. It is derived from the fourth form (أَسْلَمَ) of the verb سَلِمَ (salima), which occurs in the Qur’ān in its various forms some 157 times. The verb forms of أَسْلَمَ occur 22 times, and the noun, Islām, from that verb, is found in eight verses. The meanings of various verb forms of a common root in Arabic can seem unrelated to each other. The second form of salima, for example, *sallama*, used transitively, means to hand over or to give over something. Used with a preposition, it means to greet, as in *Sallama alaihi*. One must avoid arbitrarily selecting a meaning from any particular root simply because it fulfills a cherished objective; an offered explanation should be accompanied by incontrovertible proof(s).

Jane Smith, in her 1975 doctoral dissertation, noted that, “[W]ithin the Muslim community itself, there has been a change in the understanding and interpretation of Islām, i.e., that the word connotes to Muslims of the current century something different (or additional to) what it meant to those of the early centuries of Islām” (Smith 1975, pp. 2–3). After 9/11, some Muslim apologists, trying to distance their faith from the stereotype of violence, tried to focus on one derivative of Salima (as opposed to its fourth form, *aslama*) to insist that Islām comes from the word ‘salam’ and means peace (see for example, Balogun 2014). Our task then is specific: it is not to simply look for the root, but to examine the word’s usage and if possible, refer to a narrative or concept already known to the Arabs.

Several lexicons provide a gamut of meanings, including “safety” as well as “freedom from blemish,” but end up referring to the Qur’ān to proffer Islām as submission (*khuḍū*) or accepting what the Prophet has brought (Al-Jawhari 1957; Al-Isfahani 1961, pp. 240–1; Ibn Manzur n.d., pp. 342–50). Isma’il al-Jawhari (d.c. 400), in his *Tāj al-Lughā*, deduced that the *aslama* and *istaslama* forms are contextually equivalent and therefore underlined the meaning as “submission” (1957). The general

¹ See for example, (Griffith 2013, pp. 1–53)

trend in the tafsirs is not different, as noted in Jane Smith's study of 14 major exegetes, to represent the explanation over a 14-century period (Smith 1975, pp. 218–26). Interestingly, she cites al-Rāzī who, among other definitions, offered that the term means “entering into wholeness or peacefulness”—this of course being achieved by subjecting oneself to the obligations required by God (Al-Rāzī, vol. 7, p. 702).

Some Western-based analyses have offered truly far-fetched interpretations. Margoliouth asserted that the derived word “Muslim” has little to do with the Arabic root to which it is usually traced, but that it was instead derived from the name Musailima, the false prophet of a monotheistic sect (Margoliouth 1903, pp. 467–83). Mark Lidzbarski debunked Margoliouth's allegation, and then, following the borrowing concept, alleged that the word has no meaning on its own, but can be traced to be like the Greek σωτηρια (soteria), indicating salvation (Lidzbarski 1922, pp. 85–96). Meir Bravman decided that none of these explanations was convincing and related the term to “gihād”, rendering it as “defiance of death, self-sacrifice (for the sake of God and his prophet), or “readiness for the defiance of death” (Bravmann 2009, pp. 1–38). Both David Kuntzlinger and Helmer Ringgren examined Hebrew and Aramaic cognates of the word, with the former pointing out that some usages in the Qur'ān match the Hebrew שָׁלוֹם (Kuntzlinger 1935, pp. 128–37). Ringgren refers to various parts of Qur'ān and verses of ancient poetry to show that, while he opted for a general meaning of submission and surrender, there are other usages (Ringgren 1949, pp. 1–27). Q2:66, for example, “mussalamatun la shīyata fihā”, indicates a heifer that is perfect and free from blemish. In Q37:82 and 26:89, he also points out that it means “sound” as in Qalb Salīm (1949). He drew upon Isaiah 38:3 to show an almost identical expression (שָׁלוֹם) that in context means “whole and undivided” (Ringgren 1949). Incidentally, in Arabic parsing, the term “sālim” is used to denote a noun (or its plural form), which is “sound”, i.e., adhering to all the qualities of a noun, as in the word “Qā'ilūn”, wherein the form of the plural suffix indicates that it is a sound masculine plural: “jam' mudhakkār sālim” (Ibn Hishām 2003).

The background that Ringgren and Kuntzlinger provided is certainly useful, but when examining both the Hebrew and Arabic cognates, they seemed to overlook certain simple facts. The first is that the Qur'ān occasionally reports Biblical stories with its own—obviously Arabic—rendition of the actual dialogue. The second is that, in the Arabian environment, as noted earlier in Sifre midrash to Deuteronomy 32:2, there is evidence that there were at least partial translations of the Torah in Arabic. Most likely, such translations would have originated too from the Aramaic Targum rather than the Hebrew text. The third is that, in the Qur'ān, Abraham is the prototype of the perfect worshipper. Indeed, the Qur'ān 2:135 revisits the argument that Jews and Christians have engaged in over the identity of Abraham with, “They say, ‘Be Jews or Christians, and you will be guided.’ Say ‘Rather the path of Abraham, a ḥanīf; he was not one of the polytheists.’” The Qur'ān 2:128 also has Abraham and Ishmael laying the foundations of the Ka'aba in Mecca and asking God that they be Muslim.

Charles Torrey pointed out that Muhammad did not consider Islām as a new religion (Torrey 1967, p. 64), referring to the identification of Abraham in the Qur'ān, not only as Muslim, but exhorting his offspring to be such (Q 2:132). Rather strangely, Torrey makes no mention of verse Q2:131. He then states that there was no real equivalent in Aramaic or Syriac (Torrey 1967, p. 101), and as such, he attributed the word to a genuine Arabic usage. While disputing the interpretation of “submission”, he offers the meaning of “yielding to the will of God.” This is where Q2:131 becomes so important to us: *Idh qāla lahū Rabbuhū “Aslim.” Qāla, “Aslamto li rabbil alamīn.”* The Qur'ān is obviously referring to Genesis 17.1, wherein the partly-translated text reads, “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, The Lord appeared before him and said I am God Almighty. Walk before me and be תָּמִים (tamīm). The various translators have rendered תָּמִים differently: some as “blameless”, others as “whole-hearted.” While there is agreement that in order to obey God's edicts, one must submit, the word in context has no direct connotation of submission; rather, it indicates the attempt to be perfect, to be without blemish, to be sincere and loyal. The Arabic contextual rendition, working off the Hebrew cognate, would be either *كن تامما* (Kun tamāman) or *أتمم* (atmim). Since the Arabs were more familiar with the Aramaic Targum, the more significant word, as in Onkelos, would have been

שָׁלִים (shalīm). It is rather noteworthy that תָּם (tam) of the Hebrew Bible is generally rendered as שָׁלִים, except in a few cases, such as in Job 1:1, where it becomes מִוֹם לֹלֵא (without blemish).

If we are to accept the Midrash in Sifre, as earlier mentioned, the Arabic version would seem to be more obviously related to the Aramaic cognate rather than the Hebrew תָּם. The effective translation then of Q 2:131 is: “His Lord said to him; ‘Be whole (without blemish)’. He responded, ‘I will (seek to) be whole/without blemish for the Lord of the Worlds.’” Since the Qur’ān summarizes the entire episode, it subsumes the rest of the Genesis narrative in Q2:132: Abraham bequeathed unto his offspring, as did Jacob, “O our children. God has purified for you the dīn; do not die unless you are in a state of being without blemish.” Being whole or without blemish, in context, would be only achievable by following God’s edicts. This is underlined by the references already made, for example to Abraham approaching his lord “bi Qalbin Salīm”—a perfect heart (Q37:82). What the Quran has effectively done then, is to simply use a word that would have been known to the Arabs with the presence of Jewish and Christian tribes. I have no reason as to why Western-based researchers have overlooked Q2:131. It is obvious, however, that in so doing, they missed the element of understanding the term Islām.

Jane Smith focused on how Muslim exegetes interpreted the term. Since their discussion, as noted earlier, focused upon the term solely from an Arabic linguistic perspective and creedal foundations, they largely opted for a meaning of submission. Relying upon the general use of the word from the root salima, Ringgren noted that it would appear that the general meaning is one of “wholeness, entirety, or totality... something that is whole, unbroken, and undivided and therefore sound and healthy, or peaceful and harmonious” (Ringgren 1949, pp. 1–35). Surprisingly, he still opted for a meaning of submission. Given the milieu to which Muhammad arrived, it would seem unlikely that Muhammad would have chosen a term that has the concept of submission as its primary meaning, since the polytheist gods also demanded submission (Baneth 2001, pp. 85–92). Abraham, as portrayed in Genesis, while subjecting himself to God’s commands, is not an example of abject submission: he questions and reasons with God. Were the primary meaning to be submission, the word would most likely have been istislām, and that would not have been sourced to Genesis 17:1. A derived noun from istislām, mustaslimūn, occurs as a hapax legomenon in 37:26, where the connotation is clearly one of abject submission, describing the condition of the contumacious folk who, having mocked the concept of a day of reckoning, would now be gathered for sentencing.

The long discourse on the meaning of Islām does not contain much reference to Muslim exegetes who—at least the ones whose works I have examined—did not try to find the Hebrew Bible reference of Q2:131 to buttress their explanations. Since it is clear then that the Qur’ān was working off a Biblical reference for its coinage, this segues into the discussion about imān, that I, as do most other researchers on the subject, translate as “faith” or “belief”.

Q49:14 makes a clear distinction between Islām and imān: the bedu Arabs say, “We have believed!” Say, “You have not believed; say rather, ‘we have professed Islām,’ for faith has not entered your hearts.” Kazi (1966) and Smith (1975) excellently investigated the terms to the point where a summary of their findings will suffice for our purposes. The Muslim savants of the second and third hijri centuries debated over what removed a person from being considered a ‘mu’min’ (believer). The Khawarij, Mu’tazilites, and Shi’as set the most rigid standards, insisting that imān was basically belief professed by the tongue and felt in the heart, and manifested in abstinence from sin—although they differed regarding the extent of the sin that would expel someone from being a mu’min (Kazi 1966, pp. 227–37). With the spread of Asharite theology, imān was deemed as restricted to belief, and not necessarily manifested in conduct (Kazi 1966, pp. 227–37). This lessening of standards was not accepted by everyone, and thus a more appropriate nomenclature was sought for those who did not merit the designation of mu’min; “muslim” seems to have been the appropriate choice. By the end of the Umayyad period (circa 750), the scholars had identified Islām as the religion of the Arabs, and “Muslim” as the designation for the followers of this religion (McAuliffe and Clare 2001, pp. 398–417).

Abu Hanifa, in differentiating between Islām and īmān, considered the former term as indicating submission and subjection and the latter denoting confirmation and belief; yet, he noted that one was not possible without the other (Kazi 1966, pp. 227–37). By the sixth century hijri, Al-Shahristani (d. 548/1158) had come up with what is now accepted as the majoritarian view: Islām denotes outward submission, and both a mu’min and a hypocrite (Al-Shahristani 1910, pp. 53–54) can practice it. A mu’min, from this outlook, denotes one who sincerely believes, and who acts according to the dictates of the faith.

Jane Smith examined the two terms in the 14 hadiths and concluded that there is a clear line of demarcation drawn between Islām and īmān. Islām consists of performing five specific rituals (shahādah, ṣalāt, zakāt, ṣawm, and ḥajj), whereas īmān is faith in various elements that are mentioned in the Qur’ān and traditional literature, such as God, the messengers, Muhammad, angels, Heaven, Hell, Reckoning, and divine decree (Smith 1975). Like Kazi, she found a clear distinction was not always made and that the terms were deemed to have an interlocking relationship (Smith 1975).

The root āmana (أمن) and its derivatives are far more frequent in the Qur’ān (859) than salima and its derivatives (157). This frequency, Kazi convincingly contends, as well as the Kharijite and Mu’tazile refusal to consider sinners as mu’minīn, indicate that the earliest followers of the Prophet were called mu’minūn (Kazi 1966, pp. 227–37). It is significant too that the caliphs from the time of Umar were called amīr al-mu’minīn, not “amir al-muslimīn”. In Q 2:62, the Qur’ān juxtaposes “those who believe” (alladhīna āmanū) against Jews and Christians, instead of using the term “those who profess Islām” (alladhīna aslamū), thus underlining Kazi’s contention.

Kazi however asserts that the expression āmanu was new, since there was “no background to its usage in the pre-Islāmic Arabic language” (Kazi 1966, pp. 227–37). Kazi’s assessment is highly questionable, as we simply do not have access to written material to make such an authoritative pronouncement. Even the foreign etymology proponent, Arthur Jeffery (Jeffery 2007), agrees that by Muhammad’s time, the word was in normal usage, albeit with several shades of meaning (Pregill 2007). We do know that long before Muhammad, the Jews and Christians said “Āmen”, derived from the Hebrew אָמֵן (emunah) at the end of prayers, from whence comes the Islamic Āmīn, and we can assume that those who lived in the Hijaz used the Arabic equivalent.

Psalm 15 states:

1. LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent?
Who may live on your holy mountain?
2. The one who walks uprightly (blamelessly),
Who does what is righteous,
Who speaks the truth from their heart;
3. Whose tongue utters no slander,
Who does no wrong to a neighbor,
and casts no slur on others;
4. Who despises a vile person
but honors those who fear the LORD;
Who keeps an oath even when it hurts,
and does not change their mind;
5. Who lends money to the poor without interest;
Who does not accept a bribe against the innocent.
Whoever does these things
will never be shaken.

Rabbi Simlai, in Makkot 24a, a Talmudic tractate that predates Muhammad, offers the following explanation. The Gemara analyzes these verses: “He that walketh uprightly”: this is referring to one who conducts himself like our forefather Abraham, as it is written concerning him: “Walk before Me and be thou whole-hearted” (Genesis 17). The commentary continues, based upon Habakkuk

2:4, that “But the righteous shall live (באמונתו, *be emunatu*) by his faith” (Epstein 1935). Another tractate, Shabbath 97a, has God referring to the Jewish people as “*maminim bnei mamimin*”—מאמינים בני מאמינים—believers, the children of believers (Epstein 1935). Faith is elemental to the Christian faith as well, and reference to it occurs more than 230 times in the Testament. It is unthinkable that any of the Arabic-speaking Christian or Jewish tribe would have not known the Arabic word in a terminological context.

Q 2:260 states: Abraham said, “Lord, show me how you give life to the dead”. God asked, “Do you not believe? (أولم تؤمن)”. Abraham answered, “Certainly, but just to set my heart at ease”. After which, God gave him some directions that he obeyed. Genesis 15 seems to be the reference for this Qur’ānic narrative with the most important part being verse 6 which tells us: And he (Abraham) believed in the Lord (والله). It seems evident then that the Arabic *īmān* involves conviction in the heart, and not simply an outward declaration of belief in God. This certainly supports the findings of Professors Fred Donner and Robert Shedinger that Muhammad and his early followers saw themselves as a community of believers, including Jews, Christians, Zoroastrians, and other monotheists, rather than as a “new or separate religious confession” (Donner 2010, p. 69; Shedinger 2012, p. 81). Muhammad declared that he was no innovator among the apostles, meaning that he was not bringing anything new or different from what they had delivered (Q46:9). Professor Donner sums it up as follows:

Believers then, whatever religious confession they may have belonged to—whether (non-trinitarian) Christians, Jews, or what we might call “Qur’ānic monotheists” recent converts from paganism—were expected to live strictly by the law that God has revealed to their communities. Jews should obey the laws of the Torah; Christians those of the Gospels; and those who were not members of one of the preexisting monotheist communities should object the injunctions of the Qur’ān. The general term for these new Qur’ānic monotheists was Muslim. (Donner 2010, p.71)

Donner’s statement is supported by Q 5:48: “For each among you, we have made a *sharī’a* and a program”. The Qur’ān also takes time to chastise those who do not observe the sabbath with full devotion (2:65). The idea of conquest by the sword—at least in early Islām—and of opposition to what we deem Islāmīc principles, seem problematic given the absence of any significant polemic against Muhammad’s movement for at least a century after his death (Donner 2010). The later Muslim descriptions of bloody conquests are based largely on hadith literature, a genre that often tells us more about how their writers wanted the past to be than what it was. Certainly, there were battles, but the spread of Muhammad’s movement seemed, at least in the early stages, before the rise of a distinct reconstruction of the term “Islām”, not so much to convert as to impose a political hegemony (Donner 2010, p. 109).

The last term of our analysis is *dīn*. In Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic, the word seems to deal with justice. From Hebrew and Aramaic, we have the term *beth din* to refer to a place where judgment is issued, and several verses in the Tanakh refer to this type of usage as in Genesis 6:3, 15:14, 49:16, and Deuteronomy 32:36. The Qur’ān speaks of the *yawm al-din*, and describes the happenings on that day in terms that are akin to a courthouse scenario. People appear with a record of their deeds (Q84): their body parts testify against them (Q36:64); the good are separated from the evil and each group gets its just reward (Q82). The scenario is also known as *Yawm al-Ḥisāb* (Day of reckoning), in which the rendering of judgments implies “*din*” as the general body of commandments that the Divine requires of worshippers. “*Din*”, as religion, is a modern rendition that misrepresents the Arabic term, probably used only to convey a sense of consistency in translation (Brodeur 2001), given that even in the broader sphere of religion studies, there is no agreed-upon definition of the word. As Brodeur further pointed out, the term seems to more represent “God’s right path for human beings on earth at all times” and a “prescribed set of behaviors” (McAuliffe and Clare 2001). A far closer word to the idea of “religion”, per Qur’ānic usage, would be *milla*, as in “*millat Ibrahim*”, the response that the Qur’ān 2:135 directs Muhammad to provide when asked to become a Jew or a Christian.

This brings us then to two verses, Q 3:19 and 5:3, that are generally translated as,

Q3:19: Indeed, the dīn with God is Islām. Those who were given the Book before you did not differ until after knowledge had come to them, out of mutual envy. And whosoever rejects the signs of God, then God is swift in calling to account.

Q 5:3: This day I have perfected your dīn for you, and made complete my bounty unto you, and have chosen for you Islām as a dīn.

The first verse is preceded by an outline of whom the pious are: those who are patient, observe the commandments of God, and are steadfast in prayer, and followed by the idea that God is just. This sets up the conclusion that the right form of comportment is to seek to follow the edicts of the various Sharias that God has imposed upon the different communities, all of which seek to adhere to the desire to be without blemish, to be whole. The verse is not a proclamation of a specific, distinct religion from that followed by Jews and Christians. If it were, Q2:62 would be meaningless: Those who believe, and the Jews and the Christians and the Sabians, whoever believes in God and the last day, and does good deeds, for them is their reward with their Lord: on them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve". As Kazi notes, "... Muslim is applicable to the followers of the previous prophets also, whether before or after the revelation of the Qur'ān" (Kazi 1966). This verse has no juxtaposition, as pointed out earlier, between Muslims and the other communities. It seems to indicate, therefore, that God will judge every community according to their various sharias that the Divine had enjoined upon them to achieve wholeness and blamelessness. This includes Muhammad's followers, the mu'minūn; the verse then is not a particularistic one.

The other verse, Q 5:3, is in line with Q3:19, establishing textual consistency. The right "din" with God would include all those who follow their different sharias, since to every different nation, the Divine had sent a prophet, and with this came different laws and programs, concordant with their tribal and cultural differences. Islām is the term covering all of those people, as all the prophets, according to the Qur'ān, followed that path based on Genesis 17:1, the reference for Q2: 131.

Were the Hebrew version of Genesis 17:1 directly translated to Arabic rather than via an Aramaic intermediary, as I have earlier surmised, then the religion we now know as Islām would most likely have been instead called Itmām. The foregoing research not only fulfilled the goals of my inquiry but also demonstrated two other points. Firstly, when one reads the Qur'ān as an intertext with the Hebrew writings, the former document is quite understandable, without need for any great reliance on the tafsir or hadith literature. Secondly, Abraham Geiger was not entirely incorrect when he declared that the Qur'ān was unoriginal. The paradox is that the Qur'ān's originality is structured on that very lack of originality in that Muhammad's purpose was to establish a path that covered all monotheists, without claiming singular salvation for one group. That most of his later followers diverged from that path of pluralism is something that makes modern research into the intertextual relationships of the Abrahamic religions so vital.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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