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Adam and the names

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Abstract

This paper examines the naming episode in the Quran's Adam story, in which God teaches Adam "the names, all of them", to counter the angels' objection to the creation of the human creature on the basis that he will "spread corruption … and will shed blood". I try to show that the traditional understanding of this narrative in Western scholarship, which connects it ultimately to the Genesis 2 episode in which Adam names all the creatures of the land and sky, fails to do justice to a close reading of the quranic text itself. Instead, I argue for an alternative reading of the passage already suggested by early Muslim exegetes, in which God's teaching Adam the "names" refers to Adam being introduced to his future offspring. This, in turn, is central to the Quran's engagement with the problem of theodicy.

Keywords: Adam; Quran; Genesis Rabbah; Rabbinics; Intertextuality; Genesis

Introduction[1]

A reasonably well-established process for the intertextual study of the Quran has now gained widespread currency. An ever-greater number of studies approach the text through a bifocal reading, attempting to do justice to a close reading of the Quran on its own terms, while simultaneously paying close attention to the antecedent traditions with which the text is engaged (especially biblical, rabbinic, or Syriac and Byzantine Christian). The question of how to negotiate the tension between these two aforementioned perspectives, the intra-quranic and the intertextual, remains a serious challenge, however. Part of the problem is that the intertextual study of the Quran remains undertheorized. This need not necessarily be an issue – an intuitive grasp of how the Quran might be engaging with particular late antique traditions is often sufficient to produce a convincing reading of the text. However, where one has a sense that an intertextual reading of the Quran has failed to

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[1] Quran translations throughout are from M.A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an: A New Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), though freely adapted to make them more literal. Bible translations are from the NRSV. Citations from Genesis Rabbah are from the translation of H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, *Midrash Rabbah: Translated into English with Notes, Glossary and Indices under the Editorship of H. Freedman and Maurice Simon; with a foreword by I. Epstein* (London: Soncino Press, 1983), and transliterations are from the edition by Yehudah Theodor and Chanoch Albeck (eds), *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah*, 3 vols., 2nd ed. (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1965; reprinted Jerusalem: Shalem Books, 1996). Babylonian Talmud citations are from the Epstein translation, slightly adapted, and the text is from the Vilna print. Transliterations from Targums are from the digital Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project (http://cal.huc.edu/). The text of both recensions of the ʾAbot de Rabbi Nathan is from the Bar Ilan Responsa Project (https://www.responsa.co.il/default.aspx).

adequately explain a passage in the scripture, a theorization of the various intertextual strategies that the Quran employs may be helpful in clarifying the issue.

The present study begins, therefore, by providing a rudimentary taxonomy of how quranic intertextuality proceeds as a precursor to the main subject at hand, the Sūrat al-Baqara pericope on Adam. More specifically, this study examines the naming episode within the story, in which God teaches Adam "the names, all of them" (v. 31), to counter the angels' objection to the creation of the human creature on the basis that he will "spread corruption … and will shed blood" (v. 30). I will try to show that the traditional understanding of this narrative in Western scholarship, which connects it ultimately to the Genesis episode in which Adam names all the creatures of the land and sky (Gen. 2: 19–20), does not do justice to a close reading of the text itself, from both a narrative and grammatical perspective. Instead, I will argue for an alternative reading of the passage already suggested by early *mufassirūn*, in which God teaching Adam the "names" in Q. 2 should not be taken to mean the names of all birds and land animals on the basis of Genesis 2, but rather refers to – or at the very least includes alongside the names of the other creatures – Adam being introduced to his future offspring. I will show that this not only fully accounts for otherwise puzzling elements of the story, but that this reading too has antecedent intertexts that are ultimately more relevant than the Genesis 2 naming incident. Before looking at the Q. 2 pericope, let us first consider the nature of the Quran's intertextuality.

The Quran and intertextuality

The first serious engagement with the Quran in Western scholarship was Abraham Geiger (d. 1874) and his work *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen*, translated in 1896 as "Judaism and Islam". Geiger's engagement with the Quran was firmly intertextual and rooted in source criticism – tracing quranic stories to their biblical and rabbinic antecedents.[2] His work set the trend for Western scholarship on the Quran, and his methodology continues to be influential even today, albeit with an increasing prominence given to Christian sources.[3]

While this endeavour to connect quranic stories to their antecedent intertexts has undoubtedly brought into sharper relief both the text and the milieu in which it was proclaimed, firmly anchoring the Quran into its late antique historical space, the past few decades have also witnessed scholarly dissatisfaction with the "parallelomania" such an approach has encouraged[4] – a term we may borrow from biblical studies, where it describes the past "extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction".[5] There is now widespread acceptance that it is not, of course, sufficient when trying to interpret the

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[2] For a summary of Geiger's scholarship, see Reuven Firestone, "The Qur'an and the Bible: some modern studies of their relationship", in *Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, ed. John C. Reeves (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 1–22, 7–11.

[3] For a bibliography, see Joseph Benzion Witztum, "The Syriac milieu of the Quran: the recasting of biblical narratives", PhD diss. (Princeton University, 2011), 10–65.

[4] See, for instance, Marilyn R. Waldman, "New approaches to 'biblical' materials in the Qur'ān", *The Muslim World* 75, 1985, 1–13, 1; Michael E. Pregill, "The Hebrew Bible and the Quran: the problem of the Jewish 'influence' on Islam", *Religion Compass* 1, 2007, 643–59, 648, 651, 653; Tryggve Kronholm, "Dependence and prophetic originality in the Koran", *Orientalia Suecana* 31, 1982, 47–70, 60; Vernon K. Robbins and Gordon Darnell Newby, "A prolegomenon to the relation of the Qur'an and the Bible", in John C. Reeves (ed.), *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 23–42, 25–6.

[5] Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, 1962, 1–13, 1.

Quran to trace its stories and motifs to their "sources". Rather, the Quran's own creativity in drawing upon a common late antique heritage and deploying it for its own theological and rhetorical purposes has to be appreciated.[6] The scholarship of the late nineteenth and earlier twentieth century that frequently dismissed discrepancies between quranic narratives and their intertexts as resulting from the Prophet having received garbled versions of, or himself having misremembered, the pristine original narratives of the Bible is a relic of the past[7] – though it should be acknowledged that even this early scholarship at least occasionally granted that the quranic versions of biblical narratives may have been purposefully adjusted to suit the Quran's own theology.[8] This greater sophistication in conceptualizing the Quran's engagement with the late antique milieu has been accompanied by the recognition that in fact many of the previously identified parallels between the Quran and the post-biblical traditions do not stand up to scrutiny: the quranic version could well have arisen independently of its late antique parallels, or else it may predate its sister traditions, particularly in rabbinic writings.[9] Most interestingly of all, as Michael Pregill has argued building on the work of John Reeves, there may be instances in which the Quran records a version of a biblical story that reflects the concerns and background of the latter more accurately than the various retellings and interpretations of the story in intervening literature.[10]

Despite the acceptance of such complexity in the relationship between the textual traditions of antiquity and late antiquity, there remains some reluctance in modern scholarship, when examining a quranic pericope that has biblical resonances, to depart too far from the narrative structure of the biblical, patristic, or rabbinic stories that seem to lie behind quranic retellings.[11] Stories of biblical figures in the Quran are still read in a manner that ensures that the original biblical and/or post-biblical plots remain at least recognizable in the Quran's retelling, albeit with an allowance for subtle reformulations that renders the story theologically relevant to the new scriptural community. Thus, while the web of relationships between the aforementioned textual traditions has been shown to be more complex than previously recognized, the nature of those relationships remains to be explicated. Broadly, and somewhat simplistically, I suggest the following non-mutually exclusive categories as a useful starting point for sorting how the Quran engages with antecedent traditions: (1) intertextual continuity; (2) intertextual polemics; (3) intertextual repurposing.[12]

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[6] E.g. Witztum, "The Syriac milieu", 4; Walid A. Saleh, "In search of a comprehensible Qur'an: a survey of some recent scholarly works", *Bulletin of the Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies* 5, 2003, 143–62, 154–5; Robbins and Newby, "The relation of the Qur'ān and the Bible", 26–9; Angelika Neuwirth, "The Qur'ān's enchantment of the world: 'Antique' narratives refashioned in Arab late antiquity", in Majid Daneshgar and Walid Saleh (eds), *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 123–44.

[7] See, e.g., Firestone, "The Qur'ān and the Bible", 9–10.

[8] E.g. Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* (Leipzig: Verlag von M.W. Kaufmann, 1902), 14 [= *Judaism and Islam: A Prize Essay*, trans. F.M. Young (Madras: M.D.C.S.P.C.K. Press, 1898), 10]; Richard Bell, *The Origin of Islam in Its Christian Environment: The Gunning Lectures* (Abingdon: Routledge 2012), 69.

[9] Pregill, "The Hebrew Bible and the Quran", 655; Pregill, "Some reflections on borrowing, influence, and the entwining of Jewish and Islamic traditions; or, what an image of a calf might do", in Majid Daneshgar and Walid A. Saleh (eds), *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin* (Brill: Leiden, 2017), 164–97.

[10] Michael E. Pregill, *The Golden Calf between Bible and Qur'an: Scripture, Polemic, and Exegesis from Late Antiquity to Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), esp. 24–5.

[11] Saleh, "In search of a comprehensible Qur'ān", 154–6.

[12] For another attempt to categorize the different ways the Quran engages with antecedent traditions, see Neuwirth, "The Qur'ān's enchantment of the world". More broadly, see in particular the very useful discussion on "Comparative literary analysis – methodological considerations", in Michal Bar-Asher Siegal, *Early Christian Monastic Literature and the Babylonian Talmud* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 25–34.

By *intertextual continuity*, I refer to those passages in which the Quran straightforwardly reproduces or alludes to a well-known biblical story in such a way that the Quran assumes and, crucially, does not seek to subvert, the audience's previous familiarity with the story. Indeed, the frequent allusiveness of the Quran's references to biblical stories demonstrates that the audience was expected to know the broad outlines of the latter, without which the Quran's narrative would hardly be comprehensible.[13] One example will suffice. In Jonah's story, which is recounted in most detail in Q. 37: 139–48, after we are told that he fled to a ship (v. 140), we are next told that he cast lots and lost (v. 141), and so was swallowed by a fish (v. 141). We are nowhere told why he engaged in casting lots, or with whom. The biblical background necessary to understand the story is simply assumed: the ship in which he was fleeing was overwhelmed by a storm, and the sailors decided to cast lots to determine which of them had brought this danger upon the ship and should thus be discarded into the sea.

We must concede an element of subjectivity in classifying this, or any other quranic story, as an instance of intertextual continuity, as the theological message derived from the Jonah story in the Quran has clearly changed. The biblical book continually contrasts the reluctant Israelite prophet Jonah with the God-fearing gentiles, whether the sailors who were terrified of throwing a man of God into the waters, or the penitent gentile city of Nineveh to whom Jonah is sent. Evidently, the moral of the biblical story is that righteousness is not proprietary to any given nation, even God's chosen people.[14] In the Quran, however, the story is used to warn the Prophet not to abandon his preaching as Jonah had done. Nonetheless, the core narrative is the same.[15] Additionally, in employing the story to communicate a theological or moral lesson different to (although not necessarily at odds with) the familiar pre-quranic story, the Quran is well aligned with Christian or Jewish homilies that might similarly draw on a biblical story for a variety of moral exhortations.[16]

A very different type of quranic engagement with its antecedent traditions may be termed *intertextual polemics*, or alternatively "dogmatic re-articulation" (Emran El-Badawi), "polemical corrective" (Sidney Griffith), or "counterfactual intertextuality" (Zishan Ghaffar).[17] Here again the Quran's audience is expected to be aware of the biblical story or the post-biblical reception that lies behind the quranic narrative, but rather than accept it and build upon it, the Quran subverts it for some polemical motivation. An example of this may be the angelic veneration of God in Q. 2: 30: "We glorify You with praise and declare You holy". As Zellentin has shown, the vocabulary of praise and

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[13] John E. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2004), 1; pace Marilyn R. Waldman, "New approaches to 'biblical' materials in the Qurʾān", *The Muslim World* 75, 1985, 1–13, 6.

[14] For an alternative reading of the biblical story, which reads it as a parody of biblical prophetic narratives, see Arnold J. Band, "Swallowing Jonah: the eclipse of parody", *Prooftexts* 10, 1990, 177–95. I am grateful to Holger Zellentin for alerting me to this article.

[15] Albeit that the Quran seems to include a late antique Christianized twist on the plot, whereby the incident of Jonah under the tree is moved to immediately after his being vomited out by the great fish, rather than after God's acceptance of Nineveh's repentance. See Saqib Hussain, "Jonah, Job, Elijah, and Ezra", in Nicolai Sinai, Marianna Klar, Gabriel Said Reynolds, and Holger Zellentin (eds), *Biblical Traditions in the Qur'an* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, forthcoming).

[16] For example, Pregill notes the variety of theological and homiletic purposes for which the Golden Calf narrative was employed by Christians; *The Golden Calf*, 180.

[17] Emran Iqbal El-Badawi, *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 5; Sidney Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 32–33; Zishan Ghaffar, "Kontrafaktische Intertextualität im Koran und die exegetische Tradition des syrischen Christentums", *Der Islam* 98, 2021, 313–58. I am grateful to Holger Zellentin and Nicolai Sinai for alerting me to the latter two respectively.

glorification in the parallel account of the *Cave of Treasures* is directed by the angels at Adam, who, as the typological precursor to Jesus, is the object of angelic veneration.[18] The Quran retains the scene of the angels bowing down to Adam, yet, by directing their praise and glorification to God rather than Adam, the Quran polemicizes against the element of the *Cave of Treasures* narrative it finds unacceptable.

In both of the aforementioned techniques, the quranic message can be appreciated in full only synoptically alongside the corresponding biblical or post-biblical narratives. However, in *intertextual repurposing*,[19] the Quran appropriates familiar biblical characters and motifs, and then creates a new story from them. The biblical characters and motifs function as a literary hook to draw the audience into the story, but, crucially, contribute relatively far less to the narrative structure of the new quranic story than is the case with intertextual continuity or polemics. In these instances, if as readers we impose the biblical narrative structure onto the new quranic story, the latter will be fundamentally misconstrued. As with "intertextual continuity" and "intertextual polemics", the Quran redeploys a biblical or post-biblical story to serve its own message, but now the redeployment is more radical. It is also easier to miss,[20] and there are serious interpretive difficulties that arise as a result; where intertextual repurposing is taken to be an instance of intertextual continuity, a narrative framework is imposed on the quranic story that hinders rather than aids interpretation.[21]

Though it has not always been explicitly theorized in this manner, several quranic stories have in fact been understood in recent scholarship through the hermeneutic of what I am calling intertextual repurposing. Reynolds describes the same phenomenon in his appraisal of several case studies in which the Quran engages with the biblical tradition:

> Like its repetition of accounts, the Qurʾān's peculiar character descriptions should be seen as a feature of homily. The Qurʾān places Haman in Egypt with Pharaoh when he should be in Persia with Xerxes ... The Qurʾān conflates Mary the mother of Jesus with Mary the sister of Moses and Aaron ... Yet for the Qurʾān there is no question of historical accuracy in such matters. These characters and these places are all topoi at the service of homily. Pharaoh in the Qurʾān is closely associated with self-deification and opposition to God's people, and Haman is the anti-Israelite villain par excellence. Mary in the Qurʾān is closely associated with the Temple, and Aaron (the brother of Miriam) is the Israelite priest par excellence.
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> Thus to suggest that the Qurʾān has missed the identity of these characters is the sort of judgment which, although strictly correct, hardly leads to a better understanding of the book. Indeed it is to suggest that these characters and places are part of a

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[18] Holger Michael Zellentin, "Trialogical anthropology: The Qurʾān on Adam and Iblīs in view of Rabbinic and Christian discourse", in Rüdiger Braun and Hüseyin I. Çiçek (eds), *New Approaches to Human Dignity in the Context of Qurʾānic Anthropology: The Quest for Humanity* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 61–131, 82.

[19] This term is also used by Mark Durie, *The Qurʾan and Its Biblical Reflexes: Investigations into the Genesis of a Religion* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), esp. xxxviii–xxxix. Durie, however, sees "repurposing" as the primary way the Quran engages with the biblical tradition, as opposed to the more organic inheritance of theological developments within the Bible itself (ibid., l–lii). He thus creates a dichotomy between what he sees as theological continuity within the Bible (albeit allowing for theological developments) and theological discontinuity between the Bible and the Quran. I remain unpersuaded by this special pleading for the nature of intertextuality within canonized books of the Bible.

[20] See Waldman, "New approaches", 1, for a discussion on the natural assumption that a quranic story must be a "version" of the biblical story.

[21] Pregill, "The Hebrew Bible and the Quran", 653; Saleh, "In search of a comprehensible Qurʾān", 157–8. Pregill further notes that the fact that the Medieval Muslim exegetes often relied so heavily on biblical accounts in interpreting quranic stories has demonstrably encouraged modern scholarship to do the same (despite the frequently encountered insistence that we need to divorce the study of the quranic text from its reception in *tafsīr* studies); see Pregill, "The Hebrew Bible and the Quran", 655–7; Pregill, "The Golden Calf", 266–7.

well-recorded history, the precepts of which should not be violated. If they are seen instead as topoi, then they have one function in their Biblical context and another function in their Qurʾanic context. Neither is right and neither is wrong. For the Qurʾan all that matters is the impact on the reader, the degree to which its discourse on these characters and places might lead the reader to repentance and obedience.[22]

To take a specific example, as Sinai has argued, the Israelite Exodus story in the Quran strongly suggests that the Israelites took over Egypt, rather than conquered Canaan.[23] It is clear why this may have been a more appropriate narrative for the early believing community, as the story is reshaped to a tale of overcoming opponents in one's hometown (i.e. Mecca), rather than abandoning it for a previously promised holy land. There does not appear to be any reason to suppose that the Quran is polemically rejecting the notion of the Israelite conquest of Canaan – rather, the new storyline better fits the Meccan Quran's kerygma. I would argue, however, that while the quranic story resembles its biblical counterpart, it has at the same time been radically reshaped in a way that would be missed were we to impose the biblical plotline onto the quranic account.

A more complicated example is Zellentin's study of the Quran's Lot narratives and their biblical and rabbinic counterparts. Before the angels go to Sodom, they first go to Abraham to deliver good news of a son to be born to Sarah (Gen. 18; Q. 51: 24–37, 15: 49–77, 11: 69–83 and 29: 28–35). Expanding on this story, whereas the midrash has angels fearing Abraham, the Quran reverses the situation, and has Abraham fearing the angels.[24] This would appear to be a polemical move that portrays the angels and Abraham's reaction to them in a manner more in keeping with the Quran's angelology. Intriguingly, however, the Quran retains a midrashic detail mentioned in connection with the fear motif, but repurposes it. Zellentin observes that:

> the reason the angels fear Abraham, in the Midrash, also finds a transposed echo in the Qurʾān. For the rabbis, the angels begin fearing Abraham since "he had stepped out of their obligation" (*yṣ' ydy ḥwbtn*, Bereshit Rabbah 48: 14), meaning they had fulfilled their mission to announce the birth of his son. The idiom uses the noun *yad*, "hand", so the verse literally reads that the angels began to fear Abraham in the moment "he went out of the hands of their obligation", or, in most manuscripts, simply "out of their hands". It is in this moment that that "fear of him seized them" (*'ymtw mwṭlt 'lyhm*), that is the angels, as Abraham stood over them. The Midrash then continues its line of thought by stating that they pretended to eat because "if you come into a town (*qrt'*), follow its customs". In order to follow earthly customs, the angels then "seemed as if they were eating, removing each course in turn". The Qurʾān's narrative reflects various aspects of the rabbinic version. The Qurʾān's statement that Abraham "experienced fear of them" (*wa-'awjasa minhum*

khīfatan) because the messengers' "hands did not reach" (*ʾaydiyahum lā taṣilu*, Q11: 70), in effect uses rabbinic themes – in both cases, the fear sets on at the moment that "hands" are mentioned along with movement at the moment of a refusal to eat.

The example illustrates the difficulty of the comparative task at hand: there are many shared details between the Qurʾān and the rabbinic depiction of the same moment in biblical history than coincidence should allow for, yet there are too many differences to categorize the interdependency as a direct one. If anything, the example shows the Qurʾān's liberty in integrating these rabbinic elements: in the Midrash, they pretend to eat, in the Qurʾān, they ostentatiously do not do so; in the Midrash, the messengers experience fear, in the Qurʾān, Abraham fears; in the Midrash, Abraham went out the messengers' hands (*yṣʾ ydyhm*), in the Qurʾān, the messengers' hands in turn do not reach (*ʾaydiyahum lā taṣilu*, which in turn causes Abraham's fear). In effect, the Qurʾān's sustained narrative interventions use a recognizable rabbinic narrative element, suggesting an intentionally diverging, rectified and ecotypified retelling in an oral setting. The Qurʾān, it seems, successively imparts on its audience knowledge of its own version of the rabbinic tradition, integrating qurʾānisation and rabbanisation into the process of biblicisation.[25]

What Zellentin identifies as "the Qurʾān's liberty in integrating … rabbinic elements", I suggest can be categorized variously as intertextual continuity (e.g. the angels visit Abraham to deliver news that his wife will bear them a child, before going on to the cities associated with Lot), intertextual polemics (e.g. it is Abraham who fears the angels, not the reverse), and intertextual repurposing (e.g. the use of the term "hand" to introduce the fear motif).[26]

Such intertextual repurposing may even be in play within the Quran's own later retellings of chronologically earlier quranic stories. As Witztum has observed, again in relation to Abraham's visitors, several motifs in the story seem to float freely around the various quranic iterations, such as when exactly Abraham started to fear his guests: when he first encountered them, or when they did not partake of the food he laid out for them.[27] Here, quite clearly, as we are dealing with intratexts rather than intertexts, the variations have to do with textual repurposing rather than textual polemics. And as with intertextual repurposing, we could attempt to harmonize the intratextual readings by imposing the

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[25] Zellentin, "The synchronic and the diachronic Qurʾān", 145.

[26] It remains possible, of course, that the shared hand motif is coincidental. The point here is merely to illustrate what intertextual repurosing might look like. Another example of intertextual repurposing that is frequently mistaken for intertextual continuity is the story of Saul in Q. 2: 249 (Saleh, "In search of a comprehensible Qurʾān", 156–7).

[27] Joseph Benzion Witztum, "Thrice upon a time: Abraham's guests and the study of intra-Qurʾanic parallels", in Holger M. Zellentin (ed.), *The Qurʾan's Reformation of Judaism and Christianity: Return to the Origins* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 277–302, 277–86. See also Zellentin, "Variant traditions, relative chronology, and the study of intra-Quranic parallels", in Behnam Sadeghi, Asad Q. Ahmed, Adam Silverstein, and Robert Hoyland (eds), *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1–50, 14–43, and Saqib Hussain, "Holger Zellentin (ed.): *The Qurʾan's Reformulation of Judaism and Christianity: Return to the Origins*", *Journal of Jewish Studies* 71, 2020, 447–51, 449. Witztum acknowledges that such variation between stories within the Quran sits uneasily with the Quran's declaration that "had it been from other than God, they would have found therein much discrepancy (*ikhtilāf*)", and suggests that perhaps the consistency that the Quran insists on is not the details, but the "overall Qurʾanic message" (Witztum, "Variant traditions", 44). See also Cecilia Palombo, "Formulae and repetition in the Medinan Qurʾan: the story of the Golden Calf between Meccan and Medinan suras", in Nicolai Sinai (ed.), *Unlocking the Medinan Qurʾan* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 120–63, 139, who suggests taking the repetition of key lexical roots as the starting point for synchronic analysis of a quranic narrative.

plotline of any one pericope on the others,[28] but this risks missing the desired literary and thus theological effect of each variant of the story in its surah context.[29] Now, if the Quran takes liberties with motifs in earlier versions of its own narratives, we should *a fortiori* be open to it doing so as it incorporates and "quranicizes" biblical and post-biblical stories. With this possibility in mind, it is to these various versions of the Adam story that we now turn.

The Adam story in Sūrat al-Baqara: problems with the traditional interpretation

The Quran's creation story of Adam in Sūrat al-Baqara (Q. 2) is given below:

> [30] And [recall] when your Lord said to the angels, "I am going to put a vicegerent (*khalīfah*) in the earth". They said, "Will You put in it someone who will spread corruption (*yufsidu*) in it and will shed blood (*yasfiku l-dimāʾ*), while we glorify You with praise and declare You holy?" He said, "I know what you do not know".

> [31] He taught Adam the names, all of them (*al-asmāʾa kullahā*). Then He displayed them (*ʿaraḍahum*) [masculine plural] before the angels, and said, "Tell Me (*anbiʾūnī*) the names of these (*hāʾulāʾ*) if you are truthful".

> [32] They said, "Glory be to You. The only knowledge we have is what You have taught us. You truly are the knowing and the wise".

> [33] He said, "Adam! Tell them (*anbiʾhum*) their names (*asmāʾihim*) [masculine plural]"; when he had told them (*anbaʾahum*) their names (*asmāʾihim*) [masculine plural], He said, "Did I not tell you that I know what is invisible (*ghayb*) in the heavens and the earth and that I know what you disclose (*tubdūna*) and what you have been hiding (*taktumūn*)?"

Although the pericope is replete with details that invite intertextual analysis,[30] in the present paper I shall address two questions only: (1) What were the names that Adam was taught (v. 31); (2) What were the angels accused of "hiding" (v. 33)?

The naming incident is at least in some ways clearly grounded in Genesis 2:

> [19] So out of the ground the Lord God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.

> [20] The man gave names to all cattle and to the birds of the air and to every animal of the field, but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

A second text that is clearly relevant for understanding the quranic story, on account of its closeness to the narrative, is a passage from Genesis Rabbah that comments on Adam giving names to all creatures:

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[28] This is not to say that the Quran does not assume the audience's familiarity with its own earlier narratives, just as it may assume various degrees of familiarity with the biblical tradition. See Nicolai Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 41–2; Zellentin, "The synchronic and the diachronic Qurʾān", 138–9.

[29] See n. 27 above.

[30] See Zellentin "Trialogical anthropology", and Nicolai Sinai, *The Qurʾan: A Historical-Critical Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 143–50.

"Let us make man" (Gen. 1: 26). "What will be the nature of this man?" they [the angels] inquired. "His wisdom will exceed yours", He answered. What did the Lord do? He brought the animals, beasts, and birds before them and asked them, "What should be the name of this?" but they did not know. "And of this?" and they did not know. Then He paraded them (*hᶜbyrm l-pny*) before Adam, and asked him, "What is the name of this?" "An ox." "And of this?" "A camel." "And of this?" "An ass." "And of this?" "A horse." Thus it is written, "And the man gave names to all cattle" (Gen. 2: 19). (Gen. Rab. 17: 4)

Western scholarship has universally read the naming motif in Sūrat al-Baqara as an *intertextual continuation* of the biblical and rabbinic accounts, and the overlaps are quite evident. Indeed, it can seem as though the naming motif cannot be understood without the biblical and rabbinic backgrounds, with the Quran thus inviting us to draw on such traditions to fill in gaps in the passage, reinforcing the sense of intertextual continuity. Specifically, according to the widespread reading in modern academic scholarship, we should understand God's teaching Adam all the names to mean that He taught him the names of all the "cattle and … the birds of the air and … every animal of the field" (Gen. 2: 20).[31] Additionally, scholars have noted a degree of *intertextual polemics* in the Quran's story – it is no longer Adam who names the creatures, but rather God who teaches Adam the names. Such a move, it is argued, emphasizes the sovereignty of God over all creation, and is in line with the Quran's eschewal of describing Adam as created in the "image" of God, which might have suggested a quasi-divinization of Adam.[32] Instead, the Quran describes him as God's *khalīfah* ("vicegerent"),[33] again drawing attention to his ultimate subordination to the Creator.

But there are good reasons to believe that scholars have taken a wrong turn, as a result of which various interpretive mistakes are being compounded. I will make the case for Q. 2: 31, "He taught Adam the names, all of them", being an *intertextual repurposing* of the well-known biblical naming motif, rather than a straightforward *continuation* of the Adam story in Gen. 2: 19–20. If this is correct, the quranic naming episode appropriates the naming motif in the biblical and post-biblical Adam stories to create a different story, for which the Genesis 2 pericope becomes much less relevant, indeed a hindrance to correct understanding of the quranic account.

Let us first consider the shortcomings in reading the quranic naming episode as an instance of intertextual continuity/polemics. First, imposing the biblical or rabbinic narrative as the background does not make for a wholly satisfying response by God to the angels' objections. It is undeniable of course that the quranic story has clear overlaps with the Genesis Rabbah account: in both, the angels are concerned about the nature of this new creature, and in both Adam's knowledge of the names – a knowledge that surpasses that of the angels – serves to counter their objections, whether actual or potential. However, the rabbinic account highlights Adam's *inherent* ability to name the animals as a demonstration to the angels of his superior wisdom, and thus forestalls any objections they might put forth to God's decision to create him. In the Quran, on the other hand, as it is now God who teaches man the names, the nature of God's demonstration to the angels is significantly different; it is no longer Adam's superiority that is being demonstrated, but the angels' lack of knowledge (and indeed man's dependence on God for

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[31] See, for example, Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and the Bible* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2018), 37; Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical–Critical Introduction*, 145; Zellentin, "Trialogical anthropology", 123–4.

[32] Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, 147, 149.

[33] Nicolai Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an: A Critical Dictionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023), s.v. "*istakhlafa*", 258.

whatever knowledge he has). On this reading, the angels' reasonable and insightful question goes unanswered – we are left none the wiser about why God is creating a creature "who will spread corruption … and will shed blood", only that God knows best, and the angels (and by extension the Quran's audience) have no business asking such questions. This is particularly frustrating as later in the same surah humankind will be described as doing exactly what the angels predicted. For example, the Quran accuses the Israelites of shedding each other's blood using the same vocabulary as the angels (*yasfiku l-dimāʾ* [v. 30] vs *tasfikūna dimāʾakum* [v. 84]), an observation to which we will return below.

It is of course possible that the purpose of the story remains a demonstration of Adam's superiority to the angels, or at least his worthiness in being created (rather than an insistence that the angels'/audience's knowledge pales in comparison with God's, and thus they should not concern themselves with such questions), yet the aforementioned adjustments the Quran makes to produce a more theocentric narrative would leave the story with an unresolved tension as an unintended byproduct: Adam, as in the rabbinic account, has knowledge that the angels do not, yet this knowledge no longer actually demonstrates Adam's inherent worthiness.[34] While we cannot logically rule out such a reading, and there may be ways to try to resolve the tension,[35] I would argue that the narrative difficulties generated by such an interpretation give us all the more reason to consider carefully whether we have understood the story correctly in the first place.

The second, and more significant, shortcoming with the commonly held interpretation is that the grammar of the passage probably does not allow for the "names" to refer to the names of animals. The masculine plural pronoun suffixes *-hum/him* in vv. 31 and 33 ("Then He displayed them [*-hum*] before the angels …, He said, 'Adam! Tell them their [*-him*] names'; and when he had told them their [*-him*] names …") are not used in Arabic for animals or inanimate beings. The recent study of adjectival agreement in the Quran by Simone Bettega and Luca D'Anna confirms that this sort of agreement "never occurs in the *Muʕallaqāt*".[36] The authors then consider three verses in the Quran, including Q. 2: 31, in which this rule is seemingly contravened, and conclude that they "represent the first (and very limited) instances of a situation that is also found in contemporary dialects",[37] whereby "masculine plural agreement occurs with non-human controllers".[38] Yet, the two examples they cite besides Q. 2: 31 seem to be instances of anthropomorphizing of inanimate objects, or necessity of rhyme scheme, or conjoining of human and non-human controllers:[39]

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[34] Note that Christian readings stress not Adam's *ability* to name the creatures, but his *right* to do so, as a reflection of his sovereignty on earth (a precursor to Christ's sovereignty). See Sergey Minov, "Satan's refusal to worship Adam: a Jewish motif and its reception in Syriac Christian tradition", in Menahem Kister, Hillel I. Newman, Michael Segal, and Ruth A. Clements (eds), *Tradition, Transmission, and Transformation from Second Temple Literature through Judaism and Christianity in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 230–71, 245. (I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for directing my attention to this study.) Thus, the naming incident was already being employed in different ways before the Quran, in turn, utilized it for its own theological ends.

[35] Ibn ʿĀshūr, recognizing that simply learning the names of the various creatures would not be enough to demonstrate Adam's worthiness as God's *khalīfah*, interprets the passage to mean that Adam was given the ability to use language; *al-Taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, 30 vols (in 15) (Tunisia: Al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya li-l-Nashr, 1984), 1: 408–11.

[36] Simone Bettega and Luca D'Anna, *Gender and Number Agreement in Arabic* (Leiden: Brill, 2023), 211.

[37] Bettega and D'Anna, *Gender and Number Agreement in Arabic*, 212.

[38] Bettega and D'Anna, *Gender and Number Agreement in Arabic*, 211.

[39] The use of the masculine plural in cases of anthropomorphizing and of conjoining (whether by *ikhtilāt*, "admixture", or *iqtirān*, "serial linking") of human and non-human controllers – or, in the phraseology of the Arab grammarians, rational (*ʿāqil*) and non-rational (*ghayr ʿāqil*) nouns – is recognized already in the Arab grammatical tradition. See ʿAbbās Ḥasan, *al-Naḥw al-wāfī*, 4 vols (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1975), 4: 428 n. 2.

And God created each creature (*dābbah*) out of a fluid (*māʾ*): some of them (*-hum*) crawl on their bellies, some of them (*-hum*) walk on two legs, and some of them (*-hum*) on four. God creates whatever He will; God has power over everything (Q. 24: 45).

It is He who created night and day, the sun and the moon, each floating in its orbit (*yasbaḥūn*) (Q. 21: 35).

As the *mufassirūn* point out, Q. 24: 45 conjoins humans (the probable referent of the phrase "some of them walk on two legs") and non-humans. Note that *dābbah* ("creature") clearly includes the human creature in Q. 16: 61 and 35: 45. The inclusion of humans in the list of creatures in Q. 24: 45 is also suggested by the use of the indefinite *māʾ* ("fluid"), used repeatedly in the Quran to refer to the seminal fluid from which the human being was created (e.g. Q. 32: 8, 77: 20, 86: 6). Note also that Q. 21: 30 refers to the creation of *all* living things through *māʾ*, which again suggests that the creatures listed in Q. 24: 45 include humans. The verse points out the continuity between the animal and human worlds, building on the imagery from vv. 41–42 that "all those who are in the heavens and earth praise God, as do the birds with wings outstretched … Control of the heavens and earth belongs to God, and to God is the final return".

As for Q. 21: 35, the masculine plural verb *yasbaḥūn* to refer to the sun and the moon could be the result of anthropomorphizing, or to maintain the surah rhyme scheme, as the authors acknowledge.[40] We likewise see an anthropomorphizing of heavenly bodies in Q. 12: 4, where Joseph describes the sun, the moon, and eleven stars, "I saw them (*-hum*) prostrating (*sājidīn*) to me".

None of these explanations for the use of masculine plural pronouns adequately explains their use in Q. 2: 31, 33, however. The *mufassirūn* were well aware of this problem, and offered a variety of solutions: perhaps Adam was taught the names of all the angels (the sound masculine plural, being reserved for rational beings, may be used for angels too); or perhaps he was taught to name the genus of everything (which would include the genus "human", and as this is thus included in the referent, the relevant pronouns and adjectives can be sound masculine plural); finally, they suggested that Adam was taught the names of his offspring.[41] Note that while all these suggestions resolve the grammatical issue, the first two solutions leave the problem of how the angels' objections are addressed unresolved. We will return to the final suggestion, that Adam was taught the names of his offspring, below.

Finally, the usual interpretation of the naming episode in the Quran leaves unexplained God's somewhat cryptic final remark to the angels: "I know what you disclose and what you have been hiding". What is it that the angels were supposed to have been hiding? In what follows, I will offer an alternative reading of the story that addresses these various concerns.

A neglected reading of the Sūrat al-Baqara Adam story

If we take seriously the implications of the aforementioned masculine plural pronominal use (which, as mentioned above, can only be used for rational beings), Adam is not taught the names of all *animals*, but the names of all *people*, i.e. he is introduced to his future

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[40] Bettega and D'Anna, *Gender and Number Agreement in Arabic*, 212.
[41] See, e.g., Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, 26 vols, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hajar, 1422/2001), 1: 518.

descendants.[42] Note the emphasis in v. 31 created by the right dislocation of *kull* ("all") – "He taught Adam the names, all of them (*al-asmāʾa kullahā*)", rather than "He taught Adam all the names (*kulla ism*)" – emphasizing that whereas the angels' criticism may prove true of some of humanity, they were wrong to suggest that it would be true of all.[43] Adam was thus made aware in particular of his righteous descendants, who are then presented to the angels, with God challenging them to "tell Me the names of these [people] if you are truthful", – i.e. if you are correct in your assessment that mankind will "spread corruption" and "shed blood". Adam then introduces the angels to those righteous descendants, thus directly addressing their concern regarding the human creature's behaviour. As we will see, this reading of the Q. 2 passage is attested in *tafsīr* literature and can be traced back to at least the second century Hijri.

The primordial gathering

Beyond grammatical and narrative considerations, in further support of this reading, we may note that in an earlier, Meccan proclamation, the Quran had already depicted Adam and his descendants arraigned before God for the primordial covenant:[44]

> And when your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins (*ẓuhūrihim*), their seed (*dhurriyyatahum*), and made them testify concerning themselves, [saying] "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Of course. We testify" – lest you say on the Day of Resurrection, "We were unaware of this". (Q. 7: 172)

I suggest that Q. 2 is building upon this image, with Adam introduced to his progeny at the time of their covenant with God. This notion of Adam being shown his righteous offspring has a clear antecedent in several rabbinic traditions, often in commentary on the Genesis verse, "This is the list of the descendants of Adam" (Gen. 5: 1).[45]

> Babylonian rabbinic texts
> Rab Judah said in Rab's name: When the Holy One, blessed be He, wished to create man, He [first] created a company of ministering angels and said to them, "Is it your desire that we make a man in our image?" They answered, "Sovereign of the Universe, what will be his deeds?" "Such and such will be his deeds", He replied. Thereupon they exclaimed, "Sovereign of the Universe, 'What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You think of him?'" (Psa 8: 5). Thereupon He stretched out His little finger among them and consumed them with fire. The same thing happened with a second company. The third company said to Him,

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[42] This is the opinion ultimately preferred by al-Ṭabarī for this reason, though he includes the names of the angels, as they too are *ʿāqil* (see n. 39); al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, 1: 485.

[43] Mustansir Mir, *Understanding the Islamic Scripture: A Study of Selected Passages from the Qurʾān* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2008), 22. See also Zellentin, "Trialogical anthropology", 123–4, who suggests that *kullahā* implies that what Adam learned may have been more expansive than merely the names of the animals.

[44] On the significance of this verse for understanding the Quran's anthropology, see Wadad Kadi (al-Qadi), "The primordial covenant and human history in the Qurʾan", *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 147, 2003, 332–8. Most recently, with a summary of previous scholarship, see Halim Rane, "Higher objectives (*maqāṣid*) of covenants in Islam: a content analysis of *ʿahd* and *mīthāq* in the Qurʾān", *Religions* 14/4, 2023, 514.

[45] I am grateful to Holger Zellentin for alerting me to several of these texts. A primordial gathering of souls is also mentioned in Genesis Rabbah 8: 7 (God takes counsel with the souls of the righteous before creating the world). More broadly, on the notion of the primordial existence of souls in late antiquity, see Patricia Crone, "Pre-existence in Iran: Zoroastrians, ex-Christian Muʿtazilites, and Jews on the human acquisition of bodies", in *The Iranian Reception of Islam: The Non-Traditionalist Strands: Collected Studies in Three Volumes*, Volume 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 319–51. I am grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for suggesting this article.

"Sovereign of the Universe, what did it avail the former [angels] that they spoke to You [as they did]? The whole world is Yours, and whatsoever that You wish to do therein, do it". When He came to the men of the age of the flood and of the division [of tongues] whose deeds were corrupt, they said to Him, "Lord of the Universe, did not the first [company of angels] speak aright?" "Even to old age I am the same, and even to hoar hairs will I bear", He retorted. ...

The Holy One, blessed be He, showed him [Adam] every generation and its interpreters, every generation and its sages. When he came to the generation of Rabbi Akiba, he [Adam] rejoiced at his learning (lit. Torah) but was grieved at his death, and said, "How weighty are Your friends to me, O God". (b. San. 38b, with a partial parallel at b. ʿAbod. Zar. 5a.)

Palestinian rabbinic texts
While Adam lay a shapeless mass before Him at whose decree the world came into existence, He showed him every generation and its sages, every generation and its judges, scribes, interpreters, and leaders. Said He to him, "Your eyes did see unformed substance! The unformed substance [i.e. your potential descendants] which your eyes did see have already been written in the book of Adam" (Gen. Rab. 24: 2).

This teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, showed to Adam all the generations destined to come forth from him, standing and rejoicing before him as it were. And some say God showed him only the righteous, as it is said, "Everyone who has been recorded for life in Jerusalem" (Isa 4: 3). Rabbi Joshua ben Korhah says, "Lo, it says, 'Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book they were all written (Psa 139: 16)': this teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, showed to Adam every generation and its teachers, every generation and its administrators, every generation and its leaders, every generation and its prophets, every generation and its heroes, every generation and its sinners, every generation and its saints; (and He told him that) in this generation so and so was destined to be king, in that generation so and so was destined to be a sage" (ʾAbot R. Nat. [A] 31).

Adam was lying as a soulless lump (stretching) from one end of the world to the other. God made every generation with its judges pass before (mʿbyr) him along with every generation with its apostates, diviners, hardened criminals, and robbers. He was lying as a soulless lump and God made them pass before him (mʿbyrn l-pnyw) like flocks of sheep. God showed him a just man with things going well for him, a just man with things going badly for him, a wicked man with things going well for him and a wicked man with things going badly for him. When the Holy One, blessed be He, showed Adam the just who were to be his descendants, he gave him one of his own days, which is equivalent to a thousand years, as Scripture says: "For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past" (Psa 90: 4). God withdrew seventy years from him and gave them to his children and grandchildren until the end of history, as Scripture says: "The days of our life are seventy years" (Psa 90: 10). And so the life which Adam lived was nine hundred and thirty years (ʾAbot R. Nat. [B] 42).

This notion of a primordial gathering of Adam's future progeny is clearly widespread in late antique rabbinic literature, occurring in both Palestinian and Babylonian texts, and spanning tannaitic to amoraic rabbis. Intriguingly, the passages from the Babylonian Talmud (henceforth the Bavli pericope) and ʾAbot de Rabbi Nathan (henceforth the ARNa and ARNb pericopes) seem to be recast in a cluster of ḥadīths using diction from

both the Q. 7 and Q. 2 pericopes, strongly suggesting that at least some early Muslims (I will consider the dating of the ḥadīth below) made precisely the connection that I am suggesting, namely, that both the Q. 7 and the Q. 2 pericopes relate to the same motif: a primordial gathering of souls. The following is al-Tirmidhī's wording:

> The Messenger of God, God bless him and grant him peace, said: "When God created Adam, He wiped his back (masaḥa ẓahrahu) and every person that He would create among his offspring (dhurriyyatihi) until the Day of Resurrection fell out of his back. He placed a gleam of light between the eyes of every person. Then He showed them (ʿaraḍahum) to Adam and he said, 'O Lord! Who are these (hāʾulāʾ)?' He said, 'These are your offspring (dhurriyyatuka)'. He saw a man among them whose gleam between his eyes amazed him, so he said, 'O Lord! Who is this?' He said, 'This is a man from the latter nations of your offspring (dhurriyyatika) called (yuqālu lahu) [in variant narrations: his name is (ismuhu)][46] David'. He said, 'Lord! How long did You make his lifespan?' He said, 'Sixty years'. He said, 'O Lord! Add forty years from my life to his'. So when Adam's life came to an end, the Angel of Death came to him, and he said, 'Do I not have forty years of my life remaining?' He said, 'Did you not give them to your son David?'" He [the Prophet] said, "Adam denied, so his offspring denied, and Adam forgot (nasiya) and his offspring forgot, and Adam sinned, so his offspring sinned".[47]

This ḥadīth is usually cited by the mufassirūn in relation to Q. 7: 172 (given above). At least one detail in the ḥadīth clearly does not align with the Quran: whereas the Quran suggests an image of a cascading emergence of all of humanity, one generation after another ("your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their seed"),[48] the ḥadīth suggests the collective emergence of all of humanity from Adam in one fell swoop. Yet, the ḥadīth serves as an important witness to the link (at least in the mind of whoever put the ḥadīth into circulation) between the rabbinic texts and the two Quranic verses. Even apart from the ḥadīth, there are intriguing direct overlaps between the rabbinic texts and Q. 2 and Q. 7. The complex network of connections between these various texts is detailed below.

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[46] Namely, the variants reported by Abū Yaʿlā and al-Firyābī – see n. 47.

[47] Reported as narrated by Abū Hurayra in Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ, 5 vols, ed. Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir, Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī and Ibrāhīm ʿAṭwah ʿIwaḍ (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa-Awlāduhu, 1937–1975), [repr. with vols 4–5 (ed. ʿIwaḍ) replaced by a 4th vol., ed. Kamāl Yūsuf al-Ḥūt (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, n.d.)], tafsīr al-Qurʾān ʿan rasūl Allāh 8, bāb wa-min sūrat al-aʿrāf, no. 3076. Variants of the ḥadīth from Abū Hurayra are also found in Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿAmr al-ʿAtakī al-Bazzār, al-Baḥr al-zakhkhār (Musnad al-Bazzār), 18 vols, ed. Maḥfūẓ al-Raḥmān Zayn Allāh, ʿĀdil b. Saʿd and Ṣabrī ʿAbd al-Khāliq al-Shāfiʿī (Medina: Maktabat al-ʿUlūm wa-l-Ḥikam, 1988–2009), 15: 335, no. 8892; Abū Yaʿlā Aḥmad b. ʿAlī al-Tamīmī, Musnad Abī Yaʿlā, 13 vols, ed. Ḥusayn Salīm Asad (Damascus: Dār al-Maʾmūn li-l-Turāth, 1404/1984), 11: 263, no. 6377, 12: 8, no. 6654; Abū Muḥammad ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad al-Fākihī al-Makkī, Fawāʾid Abī Muḥammad al-Fākihī, ed. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ghabānī (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd 1419/1998), 328, no. 134; Muḥammad b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Ḥākim al-Naysāpūrī, al-Mustadrak ʿalā l-Ṣaḥīḥayn, 9 vols (Cairo: Dār al-Taʾṣīl, 2018), 5: 74, no. 4183; Abū Bakr al-Firyābī, Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad, Kitāb al-Qadr, ed. ʿAbd Allāh b. Ḥamd al-Manṣūr (Saudi Arabia: Aḍwāʾ al-Salaf, 1418/1997), 35, no. 19, 37, no. 20. The ḥadīth is also reported through Ibn ʿAbbās in several sources, such as Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, al-Musnad, 50 vols, ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ et al. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1413–21/1993–2001), 4: 127–28, no. 2270, 4: 446–47, no. 4713, 5: 463, no. 3519.

[48] See Sinai, Key Terms, s.v. "rabb", 325, n. 7. Sinai suggests that rather than a primordial covenant, perhaps the scene is set at a time when there are a number of human beings ("children of Adam") already in existence. It seems to me that my proposed reading of the emergence of successive generations adequately accounts for how the verse is worded. On the connection between my proposed reading and the rabbinic intertexts, see below.

Overlaps between the *ḥadīth* and the rabbinic pericopes:

- In all texts, Adam is introduced to his offspring. There is a particular emphasis on the righteous offspring, especially in the Bavli, ARNa, and the *ḥadīth*.
- In the Bavli and the *ḥadīth*, Adam is impressed by one prominent Israelite (respectively, Rabbi Akiva and David – note that David is presented as a rabbinic sage in the Babylonian Talmud [b. San. 16a], though not in Palestinian rabbinic literature),[49] is grieved that that person will have to die, and communicates his grief to God.
- Adam gives a portion of his life to his righteous offspring (seventy years in ARNb) / David (forty years in the *ḥadīth*).
- More speculatively, the mention of Torah in the Bavli pericope has been replaced by light in the *ḥadīth*, in line with the connections between Torah and light attested to in both the Hebrew Bible (Prov 6: 23) and the Quran (Q. 5: 44).

Overlaps between the *ḥadīth*/rabbinic pericopes and Q. 7:

- The *ḥadīth* has God drawing Adam's offspring (*dhurriyyah*) from his back/loin (*ẓahr*), just as the Q. 7 verse has God drawing out the offspring (*dhurriyyah*) of the Children of Adam from their loins (*ẓuhūr*);
- The *ḥadīth* and Bavli pericope castigate Adam and his children for their forgetfulness and for breaking the covenant, just as the Q. 7 verse warns the Children of Adam that their being heedless (*ghāfilīn*) will not avail them;
- The rabbinic texts have Adam introduced to "every generation", just as the Q. 7 verse implies a successive emergence of the generations after Adam.

Overlaps between the *ḥadīth*/rabbinic pericopes and Q. 2:

- Just as in Q. 2, the Bavli pericope of Adam being introduced to his progeny is preceded, as part of the same sugya, by God conversing with the angels regarding the creation of Adam.
- Both the *ḥadīth* and Q. 2 speak of God "presenting" (*ʿaraḍa*) something to Adam (his offspring in the *ḥadīth*) or the angels (the names in Q. 2: 31). (See below for more discussion on the presentation to Adam.)
- In both the *ḥadīth* and Q. 2, the objects presented are referred to simply as "these" (*hāʾulāʾ*, Q. 2: 31).
- Both the *ḥadīth* and Q. 2 place emphasis on Adam being told the name(s) of his offspring (on the assumption that my reading of the Q. 2 pericope is correct), with some variants of the *ḥadīth* specifically using the phrase *ismuhu* ("his name") to introduce David.

The various points relating to the Bavli in these lists are worth pausing over. The pericope in b. San. 38b presents us with a progression of ideas: a confrontation between God and the angels regarding the wickedness of man at the time of his creation and Adam being introduced to his righteous offspring (one of whom is introduced by name). If we understand the "names" in Q. 2 to refer to the names of Adam's offspring, then Q. 2 follows the same progression. Note that in the Bavli pericope the angelic concern is vindicated: "When He came to the men of the Age of the flood and of the division [of tongues]

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whose deeds were corrupt, they said to Him, 'Lord of the Universe, did not the first [company of angels] speak aright?' 'Even to old age I am the same, and even to hoar hairs will I bear', He retorted". In Q. 2, on the other hand, the angels' concerns that mankind will be a shedder of blood are directly addressed, the response being that not all humanity will be thus.

Excursus: The *tafsīr* of Ibn Zayd and dating the Adam *ḥadīth*

That there were early Muslims who recognized that the aforementioned Q. 2 and Q. 7 passages are connected both to each other, and to the rabbinic stories of the primordial gathering of souls, is evident from the existence of the *ḥadīth* that is a reworking of the rabbinic texts (especially the Bavli and ARNb pericopes) utilizing diction from both Q. 2 (Adam, ʿaraḍa, and hāʾulāʾ) and Q. 7 (dhurriyyah and ẓahr). We can determine how far back we can safely date this opinion by the fact that both the narration of the *ḥadīth*, which draws on the Q. 2 and Q. 7 pericopes and in which Adam is introduced to his offspring, and the opinion recorded in *tafsīr* literature that "names" in Q. 2 refers to offspring, independently go through the same family of transmitters, namely the household of Zayd b. Aslam. The common link for the Adam *ḥadīth* is Hishām b. Saʿd,[50] who reports from Zayd b. Aslam (from whom the *ḥadīth* is traced back to the Prophet thus: Zayd b. Aslam < Abū Ṣāliḥ < Abū Hurayra < the Prophet). The opinion in al-Ṭabarī at Q. 2: 31 that the "names" refer to Adam's offspring is attributed to ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, the son of Zayd b. Aslam, whom al-Ṭabarī refers to as Ibn Zayd. Given that Zayd b. Aslam is a *tābiʿī*, whose death date is commonly given as 136 AH,[51] the *terminus ante quem* for the emergence of an exegetical opinion that connects the two verses with each other and with the rabbinic stories appears to be the early second century AH.

For the validity of this dating method, which draws on the observation that the aforementioned *tafsīr* opinion and the *ḥadīth* pass through the same family, we would need to accept that the *ḥadīth* can be attributed to the tradent above the common link, namely, Zayd b. Aslam. In fact, the presence of the *tafsīr* opinion is evidence of the accuracy of the attribution. Otherwise, we would have to accept that it is a coincidence that the *ḥadīth* that simultaneously recasts the Bavli/ARNb narratives and connects the Q. 2 and Q. 7 passage was attributed to Zayd b. Aslam, and the *tafsīr* opinion (which does not cite the *ḥadīth*) that supports the same network of connections was attributed to his son ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd b. Aslam. It is far more likely that these connections were being transmitted by the *tābiʿī* scholar Zayd b. Aslam, including to his own son.[52]

Intriguingly, there are two more verses in the Quran that may refer to this primordial existence of the human creature. In Q. 40: 11, the disbelievers are depicted as saying before God on the Day of Judgement, "Our Lord, twice You have brought us to death (amattanā) and twice You have brought us to life (aḥyaytanā)". What is this first death?

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[50] See n. 47. On the historical reliability of *ḥadīth* reports being traceable to at least as far back as the common link, see J.J. Little, "The hadith of ʿĀʾišah's marital age: a study in the evolution of early Islamic historical memory" (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2022), 133–46.

[51] See Shams al-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 25 vols, 3rd ed., ed. Shuʿayb al-Arnaʾūṭ et al. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risālah, 1405/1985), 8: 349.

[52] There is a risk of circularity here, but I believe it can be avoided. I am not arguing from the premise that the *ḥadīth* usually used in connection with the Q. 7 passage goes as far back as Zaid b. Aslam, and the further premise that the *tafsīr* opinion that "names" in Q. 2 refers to Adam's offspring is from ʿAbd al-Raḥman b. Zayd b. Aslam, to the conclusion that the Q. 7 and Q. 2 passages are linked. Rather, the various links between the Q. 7 and Q. 2 passages having been independently established, it would be a great coincidence that the respective *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* opinion through which those connections are expressed each happen to be falsely attributed to the same family of tradents. More likely is that these connections can be traced back to the same family.

Several *mufassirūn* connected the verse to Q. 2: 28, almost immediately prior to the Adam pericope: "How can you ignore God when you were dead (*amwātan*) and He gave you life (*aḥyākum*)?"[53] It seems this verse, like Q. 40: 11, can be read as affirming a state of existence before this worldly life, which both verses call a *death*, but which (on this reading) is not the same as non-existence. (Note that the death following this worldly life is also not a state of non-existence in the Quran, but a type of sleep – see Q. 36: 52, 39: 42). If these interpretations are correct, it is surely no coincidence that one of these two verses occurs prior to the Q. 2 Adam pericope, which also depicts – on the reading presented here – a primordial gathering of souls. Tellingly, this interpretation of Q. 40: 11 is attributed to none other than Ibn Zayd, who describes the first death as the moment when "He created them from the back (*ẓahr*) of Adam, and took their covenant from them, and he [Ibn Zayd] recited, 'And when your Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins (*ẓuhūrihim*), their seed' (Q. 7:172)".[54] Whatever the plausibility of this interpretation of Q. 40: 11 and Q. 2: 28, we see a consistent association of Ibn Zayd with the notion of a primordial existence of souls, strengthening the likelihood that the attribution of the *ḥadīth* to his father Zayd b. Aslam is historical.

The "Names" of Adam's offspring

For the reading presented here to be viable, we must consider the plausibility of the term "names" being used as a reference to Adam's offspring. We can approach this from several perspectives: how the term is used elsewhere in the Quran; the structure of Sūrat al-Baqara; and the relationship between Sūrat al-Baqara and other related surahs that have a naming motif. We should note upfront that the reading defended here is not so much that Adam was taught the individual names of his offspring; rather, it is that he was taught either the *characteristics* or *identities* of his offspring, and in particular the righteous among them, that being necessary to meet the angels' objections.

From its occurrence elsewhere in the Quran, it seems that "names" can be used metonymically to refer to the essence of a thing. Thus, where the Quran proclaims, "Glorify the name of your Lord (*isma rabbika*)" (Q. 87: 1), it is evidently the Lord Himself who is to be glorified. The Quran decries both those who make the angels female (Q. 39: 19), and also those who "give the angels female names" (Q. 53: 27). When Jesus prophesies the coming of Muḥammad, he describes him as "a messenger coming after me whose name is most praised", in other words who himself is most praised.[55] When Zechariah is told that he is to have a son called John (*ismuhu Yaḥyā*, Q. 19: 7), he is also told that God has not made a *samiyy*, or "namesake", for him. This latter word, from the same root as *ism* ("name"), can also mean "competitor for superiority", again demonstrating the name/characteristic duality of the root; the Quran here both recalls Luke 1: 61 ("There is no one among your relatives who has that name"), and at the same time offers an elevated praise of John.[56]

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[53] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1: 418–23.

[54] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1: 420.

[55] Sean Anthony, "Muḥammad, Menaḥem, and the Paraclete: new light on Ibn Isḥāq's (d. 150/767) Arabic version of John 15: 23–16: 1", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 79/2, 2016, 255–78, 277.

[56] This is in keeping with the general tenor of Sūrat Maryam, which presents Zechariah/John and Mary/Jesus as having parallel and commensurate lives, and is thus a direct and polemical inversion of Luke 1–2, in which the parallelism between the two pairs is constructed to demonstrate the inferiority of Zechariah/John, the representatives of the Hebrew prophets and the Temple-based religion, to Mary/Jesus, who are the culmination of the former. (See Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, 85–6.) Indeed, even the phrase *ismuhu Yaḥyā*, "his name will be John (Yaḥyā)" (v. 7), which literally translates as "his name will live", is again a possible counter to the supersessionist Lukan account: the quranic John's name, and thus prophetic role as a bringer of revelation, lives on, rather than being eclipsed by Jesus. (See Ghaffar, "Kontrafaktische Intertextualität", 335.) The

This conflation between the name of something and its essence or identity is broadly attested in the Ancient Near East.[57] Indeed, in Genesis Rabbah 17 (cited above), it appears that Adam is able to name all creatures as he, unlike the angels, understands their essential characteristics. This is suggested by how he, after naming the animals, names himself and God:

> Said He [God] to him, "And what is your name?" "It is fitting that I be called Adam, because I was created from the ground (*adamah*)", he replied. "And what is My name?" "It is fitting for You to be called Adonai (Lord), since You are Lord over your creatures", was the answer. (Gen. Rab. 17: 4.)

As for the evidence provided by the structure of Q. 2, we may begin by noting that several surah studies have consistently shown a connection between surah openings and the concerns expressed later in the surah.[58] Sūrat al-Baqara begins with a contrast between the believers (vv. 1–5) and the unbelievers, the latter including those who merely feign belief (vv. 6–21). This is followed by an address to the whole of humanity to "worship your Lord who created you and those before you" (v. 21). The two groups are again contrasted in vv. 23–25. The Adam story commences in v. 30, by which point the contrast between the believers and unbelievers has been well established in the surah. The Adam pericope concludes the introduction to the surah, following which Q. 2 will become a surah of two halves: a castigation of the Israelites and their failures, and an address to the believers as the new Abrahamic community. In between these two sections, the legacy of Abraham is recounted, including a discussion of his righteous and unrighteous offspring (vv. 125–6).[59] In other words, like the opening of the surah, we repeatedly have a contrast

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parallelism between v. 7 and Jesus's saying in v. 31, "He [God] has made me blessed wherever I may be, and has commanded me to pray, to give alms as long as I live [*mā dumtu ḥayyan*]", reinforces this non-supercessionist presentation of Jesus vis-à-vis John in Q. 19. Note that the name *Yaḥyā* is already attested in Safaitic as *yḥy* and *yḥyy*, and was thus probably adopted for John the Baptist by at least some Arabic-speakers prior to Islam, being phonetically approximate to the Syriac *yūḥanān* (Hebrew: *yôḥānān*; Greek: Iōannēs). See Ahmad Al-Jallad and Ali Al-Manaser, "The pre-Islamic divine names ʿsy and the background of the Qurʾānic Jesus", *Journal of the International Qur'an Studies Association* 6, 2021, 107–36, 126.

[57] Benjamin D. Sommer, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 59, from Sinai, *Key Terms of the Qur'an*, s.v. "ism", 414.

[58] Neal Robinson, "The structure and interpretation of Sūrat Al-Muʾminūn", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 2/1, 2000, 89–106, 96; Robinson, "Sūrat Āl ʿImrān and those with the greatest claim to Abraham", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6/2, 2004, 1–21, 96; Robinson, "Hands outstretched: towards a re-reading of Sūrat al-Māʾida", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 3/1, 2001, 1–19, 7; Robinson, "The dynamics of Sūrat Āl ʿImrān", in Nicolai Sinai (ed.), *Unlocking the Medinan Qur'an*, 391–421, 419; Saqib Hussain, "The bitter lot of the rebellious wife: hierarchy, obedience, and punishment in Q. 4: 34", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 23/2, 2021, 66–111, 70; Joseph E. Lowry, "A guide to the legal material in Sūrat Al-Nisāʾ (Q 4)", in Sinai (ed.), *Unlocking the Medinan Qur'an*, 422–79, 450–51. Klar cautions that despite the widespread assertion that the opening verses of Sūrat al-Baqara (vv. 1–39) contribute to the literary coherence of the surah as a whole, both their internal redactional history and the redactional history of the surah as a whole complicates this relationship. Yet, a complicated redactional history need not detract from the role that the surah's prologue came to have in its final edited form vis-à-vis the rest of the surah. See Marianna Klar, "Lexical layers vs structural paradigms in the opening of Sūrat Al-Baqara: typically Medinan structures in Q 2, Q 3, and some shorter Medinan compositions", in Sinai (ed.), *Unlocking the Medinan Qur'an*, 57–119, 57–58.

[59] For structural studies of Sūrat al-Baqara, see Raymond K. Farrin, "Surat Al-Baqara: a structural analysis", *The Muslim World* 100, 2010, 17–32, 23–25; Nevin Reda, *The Al-Baqara Crescendo: Understanding the Qur'an's Style, Narrative Structure, and Running Themes* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017), 120–21; Sinai, *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, 103; Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 2007), 206–20. For a comparison of various Q. 2 structural studies see Marianna Klar, "Text-critical approaches to Sura structure: combining synchronicity with diachronicity in Sūrat Al-Baqara. Part one", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19/1, 2017, 1–38, and Klar, "Text-critical approaches to Sura

between those who are not (true) believers, and the believers. An interpretation of the Adam story that contrasts the wicked and righteous seems more in keeping with the surah's concerns than a reading in which God shuts down angelic questioning about why He is about to create man: the former motif aligns perfectly with the rest of the surah, both before and after the Adam story, while it is difficult to find examples of the mysterious unknowability of God's reasons to act as He does attested anywhere in the Quran.[60]

Furthermore, as Marianna Klar and Neal Robinson have demonstrated,[61] diction and motifs from the Adam story may be heard throughout the surah after the prologue. Klar traces the themes of "gardens", "parable", "prostration", "covenant", "wrongdoing", and "blindness" from the Adam story through to the rest of the surah.[62] Robinson argues for the relevance of the Adam story in each of the surah sections into which he divides Q. 2. While such observations have been used to demonstrate the aesthetics and literary unity of the surah, they have rarely been used to solve interpretive difficulties, which I propose here to attempt. For instance, the angelic concern that mankind will "cause mischief" and "shed blood" (v. 30) are precisely two of the crimes that the Israelites are accused of later in the surah (vv. 60, 84).[63] (The connection between the sin of Adam and Eve and the subsequent transgression of the Israelites is a motif occasionally encountered in late antique rabbinic and Christian literature too.)[64] Similarly, the angels' hiding (*taktumūna*, from the root *k-t-m*, v. 30) the mention of the righteous (on the interpretation presented herein) mirrors the repeated accusation that the Israelites are hiding (from the same *k-t-m* root) evidence of the truth of Muḥammad's prophecy, and thus preventing people from joining the ranks of the believers.[65]

A number of these concealment passages simultaneously invoke multiple other motifs from the Adam pericope. For instance, immediately after the Adam pericope, the Israelites are exhorted to believe in this revelation (v. 41), following which they are warned against hiding the truth (*lā taktumū l-ḥaqq*), and encouraged instead to "bow down with those who bow down" (v. 43). We have here several of the elements in the Adam pericope: the hiding motif, the bowing motif (albeit with the root *r-k-ʿ* now rather than *s-j-d*, the two roots in any case closely related and frequently collocated in the Quran),[66] and – if my reading of

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structure: combining synchronicity with diachronicity in Sūrat Al-Baqara. Part two", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19/2, 2017, 64–105. The summary of the surah presented here is broadly consistent with all these analyses, though based primarily on Robinson's and Sinai's, which I find most persuasive.

[60] Possible counterexamples include: "You who believe, do not ask about matters which, if made known to you, might make things difficult for you" (Q. 5: 101); "He is not questioned about what He does, rather they will be questioned" (Q. 21: 23); to Noah regarding his drowned son: "Do not ask Me for things you know nothing about" (Q. 11: 46); and the story of Moses and his travelling companion, who comes to be known as Khiḍr in the later Islamic tradition (Q. 18: 65–82). Yet, none of these passages argue for the inscrutable will of God in the way we would have to interpret the Adam pericope on the standard reading. Q. 5: 101 seems to be about legal minimalism (c.f. Q. 2: 67–71); Q. 21: 23 seems to concern divine sovereignty rather than inscrutability; Q. 11: 46 is preceded by an explanation of why Noah's son was drowned; and in the Khiḍr story Moses's travelling companion shows him that God (through "Khiḍr", in this case) does indeed act with purpose in creation.

[61] Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an* (2007), 206–20; Marianna Klar, "Through the lens of the Adam narrative: a re-consideration of Sūrat al-Baqara", *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 17/2, 2015, 24–46.

[62] Klar, "Through the lens of the Adam narrative", 24.

[63] Klar, "Through the lens of the Adam narrative", 27.

[64] Pregill, *The Golden Calf*, 130, 217 n. 27.

[65] Robinson already notes the concealment motif (*Discovering the Qur'an*, 222), as do A.H. Mathias Zahniser ("Major transitions and thematic borders in two long Sūras: Al-Baqara and al-Nisā", in Issa J. Boullata (ed.), *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qur'ān* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000), 26–55, 36) and Klar ("Through the lens of the Adam narrative", 28, 37–8).

[66] See Q. 2: 125, 3: 43, 9: 112, 22: 26.74, 48: 29.

the "names" motif in the Adam pericope is correct – a juxtaposition between believers and those who reject God's revelation.

Again, in v. 72, the Israelites are accused of hiding some matter (in context, the identity of a murderer). God brings the dead to life, probably to reveal the identity of the true murderer (v. 73), which brings to mind the story of the creation of the first man (c.f. v. 28 discussed earlier, "you were dead and He gave you life"). The hard-heartedness of the Israelites is then unfavourably compared to rocks who "fall down" (*yahbiṭu*) out of fear of God (v. 73), recalling the angels' prostration and Iblīs's refusal to prostrate. Crucially, this is then followed by a contrast between unbelieving Israelites and the true believers, in which once again themes of concealing and revealing loom large:

> [76] When they meet the believers, they say, "We believe". But when they are alone with each other they say, "Would you tell them about what God has revealed (*fataḥa*) to us, so they will be able to use it to argue against you before your Lord! Have you no sense?"

> [77] Do they not know that God is well aware of what they conceal (*yusirrūna*) and what they reveal (*yuʿlinūn*)? (Q. 2)

Note that the opening of v. 76 here is identical to v. 14 in the surah's opening section.

Most compellingly, in vv. 140 and 146, those who have scripture are again accused of hiding the truth (*yaktumūna l-ḥaqq*). As with v. 43 considered above, here also conceal-ment is linked with correct prostration, in that the passage establishes the sacred mosque, literally the "sacred place of prostration" (*al-majid al-ḥarām*) as the prayer direction for the believers (vv. 144, 149–50). Intriguingly, the Quran accuses those who have scripture of knowing the truth of what they are concealing "as they know their own sons" (v. 146), which appears to be an echo, along with the motifs of concealment and prostration, of the Adam pericope in which he is introduced to his progeny.

Examining the aforementioned passages in light of the Adam story, the Israelites vari-ously exhibit the characteristics of Iblīs who refuses to prostrate, or the angels who con-cealed, or are presented as the fulfilment of the angels' dire predictions regarding humanity. We thus have a complex web of images in the Adam pericope that recur throughout the surah in relation to the Israelites, always to the detrimental portrayal of the latter. What is clear is that in each case their concealment is designed to prevent recognition of the true believers, whom they know "as they know their own sons", just as, as I have argued, the angels failed to mention the righteous children of Adam.

The final connections between the Adam story and the remainder of Sūrat al-Baqara are more circuitous, as they involve interpreting the Adam pericope in light of similar passages in other Medinan surahs. First, Sūrat al-Baqara appears to have significantly overlapping con-tent with at least parts of Sūrat al-Ḥajj (Q. 22).[67] In particular, both surahs are concerned with Abraham's legacy in constructing the Temple in Mecca, calling people to pilgrimage, and teach-ing them the rites thereof. Both surahs may thus be considered as inaugurating a new Abrahamic community. Sūrat al-Ḥajj concludes with what this new community is to be called:

> And strive for God as He should be striven for. He has chosen [for] you – and has placed no hardship for you in the religion – the creed of your father Abraham. He (i.e. God)[68] named you (*sammākum*) muslims before (*min qablu*), and herein, that the

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[67] David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 119–30.
[68] This makes most sense given the parallel with the earlier *huwa*, and given that it would be strange for the Quran to suggest that Abraham's speech in the Quran is distinct from his speech in earlier scripture.

Messenger may be a witness for you, and that you may be witnesses for mankind. So perform the prayer and give the alms, and hold fast to God. He is your Master. How excellent a master, and how excellent a helper! (Q. 22: 78)

Much of this verse is echoed in various parts of Sūrat al-Baqara.[69] Of particular interest is the proclamation that God has named this community who follow the way of Abraham *muslim*s. Sūrat al-Baqara will confirm this message; Abraham prays for himself and for his future progeny to be *muslim*s. It seems to me that, given the plethora of connections between the two surahs, the *names* motif in Q. 2 is likely also to be a direct continuation of the *naming* motif in Q. 22. Note that Q. 22: 78 does not say that it was in previous *scripture* that God called Abraham's community *muslim*s – it says simply that this was the name God gave the believers *beforehand*, i.e. possibly to the angels at the dawn of human creation. In response to the angels' objection that this new human creature would sow corruption and shed blood (Q. 2: 30), God countered by having Adam introduce them to those of his off-spring who have a particular name or characteristics (*asmāʾ*) that counters their claim. This then perfectly lays the ground for the structure of the main body of Q. 2: we are first introduced to those who "spill blood" and "spread corruption" (Q. 2: 30), before the Quran turns to Abraham and his new community, who are to be *muslim*s (the verb *aslama* and its active participle *muslim* repeated six times in the range Q. 2: 128–36, which concerns Abraham), a term we learn in Q. 22 is the chosen way God has named (*sammā*) the righteous. Note also that Q. 2: 140 and 146 discussed above – two verses in close succession in which the concealment of those who have scripture is denounced – are preceded just a few verses earlier by believers being told to proclaim to Jews and Christians that "we are *muslim*s to Him" (v. 136).

The second surah of potential significance here is Sūrat Āl ʿImrān (Q. 3), which again has multiple connections with Sūrat al-Baqara, the two plausibly forming a surah pair.[70] Just as in Q. 2 the Adam pericope serves as a bridge between the introductory section and the extended address to those with scripture, particularly the Israelites, so similarly in Q. 3, at the conclusion of the introductory section and approximately at the same number of verses into the surah,[71] we have mention of the election of Adam ("God chose Adam, Noah, Abraham's family, and the family of ʿImrān, over all other people" [v. 33]) followed by a section in which the past behaviour of those with scripture is of central concern. Indeed, much of the diction between the two sections in the two surahs relating to the previous scriptural communities is identically phrased, such as Mary being told in Q. 3: 43 to "bow with those who bow down" (c.f. Q. 2: 43 discussed above). Intriguingly, in the Q. 2 Adam pericope, which led into the Israelite section, we had an allusion to the creation of the male and the female (i.e. Adam and his spouse, v. 35), a reference to

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[69] Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, 119–20. As Marshall points out, "in the final verse of surah 22 the believers are told that their religion is 'the creed [*millah*] of your father Abraham', and, further, that '[God] named you Muslims … that the messenger might be a witness against you, and that you might be witnesses against mankind' (22: 78). There are clear parallels here with the important passage 2: 124–43, which also empha-sizes the '*millat Ibrāhīm*' (2: 130, 135), the term 'Muslims' (2: 128, 132–3, 136), and the roles of Muḥammad as wit-ness against the believers, and of the believers as witnesses against mankind (2: 143). Indeed 2: 143 and 22: 78 are the only occurrences in the Qurʾan of the phrase '*shuhadāʾ ʿalā al-nās*'."

[70] For surah pairs, see *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, s.v. "Pairs and pairing"; Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qurʾan: A Study of Iṣlāḥī's [Sic] Concept of Naẓm in Tadabbur-i Qurʾān* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1986), 75–84; Robinson, *Discovering the Qurʾan*, 272–3; Sinai, *The Qurʾan: A Historical-Critical Introduction*, 29–31. Specifically for the connection between Q. 2 and 3, see Robinson, "*Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*", 4–5, Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qurʾān*, 9 vols (Lahore: Faran Foundation, 2009), 2: 9–14; Zahniser, "Major transitions and thematic bor-ders", 42.

[71] For a breakdown of the surah's structure, see Robinson, "*Sūrat Āl ʿImrān*", 1–2.

Satan (*al-shayṭan*) as a misguiding force (v. 36), a reference to God's knowledge of what is hidden (*ghayb*, v. 33), instruction to Adam to inform the angels (*anbiʾhum*, v. 33) of a part of what was hidden from them and, significantly, a naming and offspring motif (vv. 31, 33) (again, if the interpretation of Q. 2 offered here is correct). We now find these very motifs at the start of the Q. 3 Israelite section:

> ³⁵ ʿImrān's wife said, "Lord, I have dedicated what is growing in my womb entirely to You; so accept this from me. You are the One who hears and knows all",
> ³⁶ but when she gave birth, she said, "My Lord! I have given birth to a girl" – God knew best what she had given birth to, the **male is not like the female** – "**I name her (***sammaytuhā***)** Mary and I commend her **and her offspring (***dhurriyyatahā***)** to Your protection from the rejected **Satan**".
> ...
> ⁴⁴ This is an **account of unseen (***anbāʾ al-ghayb***)** that we reveal to you ...

Moreover, whereas in the parallel annunciation narratives in Sūrat Maryam (Q. 19) it seems to be God who addresses Zechariah (Q. 19: 7) and God's Spirit who addresses Mary (Q. 19: 17), in Q. 3 it is the angels (*malāʾikah*) who address both (Q. 3: 39, 42, 45), creating another parallel with the Q. 2 Adam story, which commences with a dialogue between God and the angels. Further, whereas in Q. 19 the annunciation to Mary does not include a naming motif, in Q. 3: 45 the angels announce "a word from Him whose name (*ismuhu*) will be Jesus Christ, son of Mary".[72] Thus, in Q. 2, God introduces the angels, through Adam, to "names" whom they had failed to mention, who would be a counter to the angelic objection that the human creature will "spread corruption ... and will shed blood", and in Q. 3 the angels tell Mary the name of the child she is to have, who, in contrast to the angels' predictions about mankind at the dawn of creation, "will be held in honor in this world and the next, who will be one of those brought near to God. He will speak to people in his infancy and in his adulthood. He will be one of the righteous" (vv. 45–6).

From the perspective of Quranic semantics, ancient and late antique Near Eastern (including rabbinic) linguistic use, surah structure, and intra-surah references, there appears to be good support for interpreting "names" to mean the identities of Adam's offspring. The question remains why this language is adopted in the first place. There are several possibilities. First, we need to recall Zellentin's proposal that in the Q. 2 Adam story the Quran creatively merges and responds to multiple rabbinic and Syriac Christian discourses in a trialogue.[73] It is no surprise then that the Quran also combines multiple rabbinic stories (or rabbinic and biblical motifs), specifically those in which Adam is introduced to his offspring, with vocabulary taken from a quintessential Adam story, that of his naming the creatures. This *repurposing* allows the story to remain recognizably one about the biblical Adam, while at the same time communicating the Quran's own theology. We see the same technique in the Quran's use of the term "word" (*kalimah*) to describe Jesus (Q. 3: 45) (albeit that here the motivation is clearly polemical) – as with Adam and the "names", the Quran's acceptance of the term "word" ensures that a familiar Jesus narrative is produced, yet the significance of the term is entirely different now: it no longer refers to God's eternal *logos*, but his command "Be" that brings Jesus into existence.[74]

Second, there may also be a polemical motivation. In Genesis Rabbah 17, a text closely related to the Q. 2 story as we have seen above, Adam names not only the creatures, but

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[72] Ghaffar also notes that the naming motif is absent from the Q. 19 Jesus story, whereas it is attested for both Jesus and Mary in Q. 3; "Kontrafaktische Intertextualität", 336–7.
[73] Zellentin, "Trialogical anthropology".
[74] Ghaffar, "Kontrafaktische Intertextualität", 348–55.

also himself and God. By adopting the naming motif to describe Adam's introduction to his children, the Quran is possibly not just repurposing a well-known motif, but simultaneously polemicizing against the notion that Adam gave God His name.

Finally, it is possible that when Adam is taught "the names, all of them" (v. 31), what is intended is indeed the names of all creatures, including both animals and Adam's own progeny. It is then only in the following verses (especially v. 33), with the use of the masculine plural pronouns, that the focus shifts squarely and unambiguously to his progeny.[75] Interestingly, there is some evidence of a movement already in the Palestinian rabbinic texts towards conflating the presentation of the animals to Adam in Genesis with the presentation of his offspring to him. Genesis has God bringing the animals to Adam (Hebrew: *wayyābē' el hā-ādām*, Syriac: *w-'yty 'nwn lwt 'dm*), with the cognate phrase replicated in the Babylonian Talmud (*hbdy'-n 'l 'dm*, b. Ḥul. 27b), Targum Onqelos (*'yt-h lwt 'dm*), and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (*'yyty lwt 'dm*). In Genesis Rabbah, on the other hand, as we have seen above, the animals are not simply brought to Adam, but made to pass before him (*h'byrm l-pny 'dm*, Gen. Rab. 17: 4). A cognate phrase is given in the Cave of Treasures (*w'brw klhwn qdm 'dm*, Cav. Tr. 2: 20).[76] It is this same image, with the same verb, that is given in 'Abot de Rabbi Nathan (B), both in relation to the animals (*h'byr l-pnyw*, 'Abot R. Nat. [B] 8),[77] but also in relation to Adam's offspring, who are likewise made to "pass before him" (*m'byrn l-pnyw*).[78] Further, the Quran's language that God "displayed them" (*'araḍahum*, Q. 2: 31) is arguably closer to this Palestinian rabbinic allusion to a parade (whether of animals or Adam's offspring), than it is to the biblical language of the animals being brought to Adam.

Revealing what the angels concealed

Several rabbinic antecedents to the Quran's Adam story clearly exhibit a concern with theodicy:

> R. Berekiah said, "When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create Adam, He saw righteous and wicked arising from him. Said He, 'If I create him, wicked men will spring from him; if I do not create him, how are the righteous to spring from him?' What then did the Lord do? He removed the way of the wicked out of His sight, and associated the quality of mercy with Himself and created him, as it is written, 'For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish (*tō'bēd*)' (Psa. 1: 6) – what does 'perish' (*tō'bēd*) mean? He destroyed it (*'ybd*) from before His sight and associated the quality of mercy with Himself and created him". R. Hanina did not say thus, but [rather he said], "When He came to create Adam He took counsel with the ministering angels, saying to them, 'Let us make man'. 'What shall his character be?' asked they. 'Righteous men shall spring from him', He answered, as it is written, 'For the Lord knows (*yôdēa'*) the way of the righteous', which means that the Lord made known (*hwdy'*) the way of the righteous to the ministering angels; 'But the way of the wicked shall perish': He destroyed (*'ybd*) [hid] it from them. He revealed (*gylh*) to them that the righteous would arise from him, but He did not reveal (*gylh*) to them that the wicked would spring from him, for had He revealed to them that the wicked would spring from him; the quality of Justice would not have permitted him to be created". (Gen. Rab. 8: 4).

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[75] I thank Nicolai Sinai for this suggestion.

[76] Su-Min Ri, *La Caverne des trésors: les deux recensions syriaques* (Leuven: Peeters, 1987), 18.

[77] Translated in Anthony J. Saldarini (trans.), *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan (Abbot de Rabbi Nathan) Version B: A Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 78.

[78] Saldarini, *The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan*, 250.

R. Simon said, "When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create Adam, the ministering angels formed themselves into groups and parties, some of them saying, 'Let him be created', whilst others urged, 'Let him not be created'. Thus it is written, 'Love and Truth fought together, Righteousness and Peace combated each other' (Psa. 85: 11): Love said, 'Let him be created, because he will dispense acts of love'; Truth said, 'Let him not be created, because he is compounded of falsehood'; Righteousness said, 'Let him be created, because he will perform righteous deeds'; Peace said, 'Let him not be created, because he is full of strife'. What did the Lord do? He took Truth and cast it to the ground. Said the ministering angels before the Holy One, blessed be He, 'Sovereign of the Universe! Why do You despise Your seal? Let Truth arise from the earth!' Hence it is written, 'Let truth spring up from the earth' (Psa. 85: 112)". ... R. Huna the Elder of Sepphoris, said, "While the ministering angels were arguing with each other and disputing with each other, the Holy One, blessed be He, created him. Said He to them, 'What can you avail? Man has already been made!'" (Gen. Rab. 8: 5).

God is aware of the capacity this new creation will have for evil, but also sees the good that man will do. He sees both the righteous and the wicked, and reasons that the inevitable emergence of the wicked is not sufficient cause to abstain from creating the righteous. The situation with the angels is more complex: they are variously presented as either unaware of what man's nature will be, or else unsure whether he should be created on account of the inclusion of the wicked in his midst. God responds in the two stories by either informing (*hwdyʿ*, from the verb *hôdîaʿ*) them only of the righteous and withholding information about the existence of the unrighteous (cf. ʾAbot R. Nat. [A] 31 cited above: "Some say God showed him only the righteous"), or else by pre-empting the matter and creating man despite the objection of the angels.

The question of theodicy is central in the Quran's introduction of Adam, too. Yet here we have a telling variation not yet seen in the rabbinic accounts: rather than (1) God concealing the future existence of the wicked so as not to give the angels of the divine council a reason to object, and thus revealing (*hôdîaʿ*) only the existence of the righteous, or (2) the angels disputing the appropriateness of a creation that will include both the righteous and the wicked, in the Quran we now have the angels disclosing (*tubdūna*, from *abdā*, v. 33) only the unrighteous, and God commanding that they inform Him – and then eventually asking Adam to inform them – (*anbaʾa*, vv. 31, 33) of the "names, all of them", i.e. to recognize alongside the wicked the existence of the righteous that the angels had been concealing (*taktumūn*, v. 33). The C-stem verbs in both the Hebrew (*hôdîaʿ*) and the Arabic (*anbaʾa* and *abdā*) meaning "to inform" or "to reveal" are used in the various texts in connection with revealing the reality of Adam's offspring to the angels. In many ways, the Quran uses the deliberations of the divine council at the time of Adam's creation to respond to concerns of theodicy in the same way as Genesis Rabbah does, yet the God of the Quran is recognizably more sovereign: He *announces* his decision to create man rather than *consult* the angels, and it is they who conceal (i.e. fail to mention or recognize) the totality of human moral possibility to Him rather than the reverse, an omission on their part that He corrects.

Conclusion

The Adam story in Q. 2 is a variant of the Adam creation stories found scattered in various biblical and post-biblical passages, the most prominent features being the divine council and the problem of theodicy (Genesis Rabbah and the Babylonian Talmud), the "names"

motif ubiquitously associated with Adam (in Genesis 2, rabbinic texts, and Christian texts) – though now with a different significance in the Quran – and the motif of Adam being introduced to his children, widely attested in various rabbinic texts. It is difficult to say for the Quranic story whether the Palestinian rabbinic versions of the story are the primary intertextual background or the Babylonian. On the one hand, as is clear from the manner of God's engagement with the angels (a dialogue that includes conceal-ment motifs in Genesis Rabbah and the Quran, as opposed to the destruction of the angels in the Talmud), and the fact that the theodicy problem in the divine council of the Babylonian Talmud has a fundamentally different solution to both Genesis Rabbah and the Quran (one that foregrounds God's forbearance rather than the existence of the right-eous alongside the wicked), a Palestinian background seems more likely.[79] It is also note-worthy that it is likewise in the Palestinian rabbinic tradition that we begin to see an overlap in the description of how both the *animals whom Adam names* and the *progeny to whom Adam is introduced* are paraded before him, an overlap that is accentuated in the Quran and transformed into Adam being introduced to the *names*, i.e. characteris-tics/identities, of his *progeny.* On the other hand, the progression of ideas in the Bavli per-icope matches the quranic story very well. We need not decide on one over the other. What seems clear is that from a close grammatical and narrative reading of the Sūrat al-Baqara passage a story emerges that has a rich array of meaningful quranic intratexts (especially with the Q. 7 passage) and biblical and post-biblical intertexts, some of which the Quran repurposes, and some of which it polemicizes against.

If the reading offered in the present study of the Q. 2 Adam episode in the Quran is correct, then we must postulate a milieu for the Quran's initial audience in which the array of rabbinic traditions that the Quran is drawing on were widely known and under-stood. Prima facie, even on the traditional presentation of the Quran's emergence in Mecca and then Medina, the latter with its established Jewish community, an assumption that these rabbinic stories were well known to the audience seems very plausible given the narrative nature of the material, which would have facilitated its spread outside the confines of a scholarly elite, and the enduring popularity of the creation story.[80] At the very least, from our study of *ḥadīth* narratives and recorded opinions in *tafsīr* works, we can confidently say that the rich array of the Quran's intra- and intertextuality proposed in this paper was fully appreciated by the text's readers at least as far back as the beginning of the second century Hijri.

As I have argued, the Quran engages with its antecedent traditions in a variety of ways, an appreciation of which can assist in the balancing act between affirming the Quran's creative autonomy while trying to understand it in light of the traditions with which it is in dialogue. The present study has argued that in the case of Adam and the names, the nature of some of this engagement has been misunderstood, as a consequence of which the quranic story itself has been misconstrued. Sūrat al-Baqara does not present us with a story of Adam being taught the names of beasts and birds, or at least not *merely* such names, but rather his being introduced to his future progeny, and then introducing that progeny to the angels. The "names", or characteristics/identities, of this progeny are such that the angelic concern regarding the wicked nature of mankind is allayed, for, as indicated in Sūrat al-Ḥajj and later in Sūrat al-Baqara, there are those among Adam's off-spring who will be called *muslim*s, submitters to God's will, the very opposite of how the

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[79] I am grateful to Holger Zellentin for alerting me to the potentially greater relevance of the Palestinian rab-binic tradition for contextualizing the Quran over the Babylonian tradition.

[80] For similar considerations in relation to the Quran's engagement with Christian materials, see Nicolai Sinai, "The Christian elephant in the Meccan room: Dye, Tesei, and Shoemaker on the date of the Qurʾān", *Journal of the International Qurʾanic Studies Association* 9, 2024.

angels imagined this human creature. When the angels failed to make mention of these *muslim*s, God introduced them through Adam, and throughout the surah, the Quran invites those with scripture to join this category of humanity.

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