



Sheikh Dr Muhammad Al-Hussaini
Fellow in Islamic Studies, Leo Baeck College

THE QURAN AND ERETZ YISRAEL



<http://www.scripturalreasoning.org.uk/>

-
- ✗ Why is the study and interpretation of the Quran relevant to Jewish people?
 - ✗ Is there evidence for Jewish influences in the formative period of Islam and the development of its Quranic sciences?
 - ✗ As an example of texts with immediate relevance to Jewish-Muslim relations, a group study of Quranic texts and classical Islamic commentaries on Eretz Yisrael

JEWISH RELEVANCE – THE IMMEDIACY OF ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE HOPE OF PEACE

كتب علينا في القرآن أن نقتل اليهود حيث نجدهم إن أشد الناس عدواة
للذين آمنوا اليهود الشيخ أحمد ياسين

‘It is decreed upon us in the Quran that we kill the Jews wherever we find them – *”Truly the strongest among people in enmity to those who believe are the Jews”*

Sheikh Ahmed Yassin

ان الذين امنوا والذين هادوا والصابئون والنصارى من امن بالله واليوم
الاخر وعمل صالحا فلا خوف عليهم ولا هم يحزنون المائدة 69

‘Truly those who believe, and those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians and the Christians – whomsoever believes in God and in the Last Day and works righteousness, there shall be no fear upon them, nor shall they grieve.’

The Table (Quran 5) 69

THE HAMAS CHARTER

- ✗ Issued 18 August 1988. Thoroughly steeped in Islamic scripture – opening with repeated “proof-texts” from the Quran: “Allah is its target, the Prophet is its model, the Quran its constitution” **Article 8**
- ✗ “Giving up any part of Palestine is like giving up its religion” **Article 13**
- ✗ “The Islamic Resistance Movement believes that the land of Palestine is an Islamic Waqf consecrated for future Muslim generations until Judgement Day. It, or any part of it, should not be squandered: it, or any part of it, should not be given up.” **Article 11**
- ✗ “We must train the Muslim generation in our area, an Islamic training that depends on performing religious obligations, studying the Book of Allah very well, the prophetic narration *sunna*... **Article 16**

- ✘ Judaism and Islam – intertwining mutuality
- ✘ Narratives from Bible and Midrash in the Quran and *hadith* – eg. the story of Abraham and the idols found in *Midrash Rabbah*
- ✘ *Isra'iliyat* and *qisas al-anbiya'* literature fundamental to Quranic exegesis
- ✘ Jewish/Karaite exegetical and grammatical methods – Yefet ben Eli (c.10), Abu al-Faraj, Ibn Nuh (c.10) *Diqduq*
- ✘ Sacred language, '*ijaz* and linguistics – Saadiya Gaon (892-942) *Kutub al-Lugha* in Iraq, Judah HaLevi in Andalus
- ✘ *Kalam* and Philosophy – *Mu'tazilism* and Maimonides, Bachya ibn Pakuda, Ibn Daud
- ✘ Sufism and Hasidism – Rabbi Yaakov Yosef of Polnoye (1780) *Toledot Yaakov Yosef*, Rabbenu Bachya *Duties of the Heart*

JEWISH RELEVANCE – OUR COMMON DNA

-
- ✘ **Judaeophobia:** Historic Christian and Islamic religiously-motivated hatred and persecution of Jewish people. In Christianity, battle for doctrinal and scriptural territory (same Bible), and alleged murder of Jesus. “*His blood be upon us and upon our children*” **Matthew 27:25**. In Islam, unlike Christianity, there is not a shared scripture, and the Jews didn’t “win” or “murder” anyone – so motivations are very different.
 - ✘ **Anti-Semitism:** Wilhelm Marr (1818-1904) understood racially – modern history as an ongoing battle between “native Teutonic stock” and the Semitic foreigner. Not generally applicable in an Islamic context. Unlike Medieval Europe, the Middle East of the Caliphate has always been Semitic and multi-ethnic, multi-religious.
 - ✘ **Ahl al-Kitab:** “People of the Book” understood in Quranic terms as monotheistic believers of Scripture, to refer to at least Jews, Christians and Sabians – possibly others
 - ✘ **Ahl al-Dhimma:** “People of Protection” extra-Quranic term, applied during the caliphate to all “People of the Book” under Islamic jurisdiction, who were not obliged to undertake military service in lieu of which they are required to pay *jizya*.

BERNARD LEWIS ON DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ISLAM AND CHRISTIAN ANTI-SEMITISM

- ✗ The gospels are not part of the educational system in Muslim society and therefore Muslims are not brought up with the stories of Jewish deicide; on the contrary the notion of deicide is rejected by the Qur'an as a blasphemous absurdity.
- ✗ Muhammad and his early followers were not Jews and therefore they did not present themselves as the true Israel nor felt threatened by survival of the old Israel.
- ✗ The Qur'an was not viewed by Muslims as a fulfilment of the Hebrew Bible but rather a restorer of its original messages that had been distorted over time; Thus no clash of interpretations between Judaism and Islam could arise.
- ✗ Muhammad was not killed by the Jewish community and he was victorious in the clash with the Jewish community in Medina.
- ✗ Muhammad did not claim to have been Son of God or Messiah but only a prophet; a claim to which Jews reproached less.
- ✗ Muslims saw the conflict between Muhammad and the Jews as something of minor importance in Muhammad's career.

INSTANCES OF EARLY ISLAMIC JUDAEOPHOBIA OR ARABIAN TRIBAL VIOLENCE?

- ✗ Jewish tribes in Medina – Banu Quraydha, Banu Nadir, Banu Qaynuqa, each with different patron pagan Arab alliances 'Aws and Khazraj
- ✗ In 622 after Muhammad's arrival at Medina, the powerful Banu Nadir involved in warfare with the Banu Quraydha – lex talionis applied asymmetrically, and blood compensation half of that payable the other way
- ✗ Muhammad called on as arbitrator and insisted on parity between the two tribes
- ✗ Led to conflict between Muhammad and the Banu Nadir
- ✗ In 627 in the Battle of the Trench, the Banu Quraydha were accused of breaking their treaty obligations of mutual assistance and collaboration with the enemy Makkans. Sa'd b. Muadh was appointed as arbitrator and massacred 600-700 of the adult males.

INCLUSION AND AMBIVALENCE

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ
لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things).

The Apartments (Quran 49):13

INCLUSION AND AMBIVALENCE

لَيَسُوْا سَوَاءٍ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَائِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ آنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ
يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَيُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَٰئِكَ مِنَ
الصَّالِحِينَ
وَمَا يَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ فَلَن يُكْفَرُوهُ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُتَّقِينَ

Not all of them are alike: Of the People of the Book are a portion that stand (For the right): They rehearse the Signs of God all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration.

They believe in God and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and they hasten (in emulation) in (all) good works: They are in the ranks of the righteous

Of the good that they do, nothing will be rejected of them; for God knoweth well those that do right. *The Family of 'Imran (Quran 3):113-115*

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِن بِاللَّهِ فَقَدِ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَىٰ لَا انْفِصَامَ
لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in God hath grasped the most trustworthy hand- hold, that never breaks. And God heareth and knoweth all things.

The Heifer (Quran 2):256

INTOLERANCE AND POLEMIC

وَأَذَانٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ إِلَى النَّاسِ يَوْمَ الْحَجِّ الْأَكْبَرِ أَنَّ اللَّهَ بَرِيءٌ مِّنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ وَرَسُولُهُ فَإِنْ تُبْتُمْ فَهُوَ خَيْرٌ لَّكُمْ
وَإِنْ تَوَلَّيْتُمْ فَأَعْلِمُوا أَنَّكُمْ غَيْرُ مُعْجِزِي اللَّهِ وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ
إِلَّا الَّذِينَ عَاهَدْتُمْ مِّنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَنْقُصُوكُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَمْ يُظَاهِرُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَحَدًا فَأَتِمُوا إِلَيْهِمْ عَهْدَهُمْ إِلَىٰ مُدَّتِهِمْ إِنَّ
اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَّقِينَ
فَإِذَا انسَلَخَ الْأَشْهُرُ الْحُرُمُ فَاقْتُلُوا الْمُشْرِكِينَ حَيْثُ وَجَدْتُمُوهُمْ وَخُذُوهُمْ وَأَحْصُرُواهُمْ وَقَعُدُوا لَهُمْ كُلَّ مَرْصَدٍ فَإِنْ
تَابُوا وَأَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ فَخَلُّوا سَبِيلَهُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

And an announcement from God and His Apostle, to the people (assembled) on the day of the Great Pilgrimage,- that God and His Apostle dissolve (treaty) obligations with the Pagans. If then, ye repent, it were best for you; but if ye turn away, know ye that ye cannot frustrate God. And proclaim a grievous penalty to those who reject Faith.

(But the treaties are) not dissolved with those Pagans with whom ye have entered into alliance and who have not subsequently failed you in aught, nor aided any one against you. So fulfil your engagements with them to the end of their term: for God loveth the righteous.

But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practise regular charity, then open the way for them: for God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful.

Repentance (Quran 9):3-5

WHAT QUESTIONS DOES ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP ASK OF SCRIPTURE? MASORETIC – RHETORICAL

وَلَتَجِدَنَّ أَقْرَبَهُمْ مَّوَدَّةَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّا نَصَارَىٰ ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ قِسِيّٰسِينَ
وَرُهْبَانَا وَأَنَّهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

‘And you will find the nearest among them in love to the believers are those who say, “We are **Christians**”; that is because there are priests and holy men among them and they are not proud’ **The Table (Quran 5):82**

- ✗ What variant *qira’at* “masoretic readings” could there be by varying the vowelling of the Arabic text (remember the original written Quranic text was written in a *scriptio defectiva* just like the Hebrew Bible, and had no *nugad* “consonantal pointing” nor *tashkil* “vowelling”)
- ✗ What is the *sarf* “grammatical declension” of this verse? Could the texts be read in a variant way if we read the declension of a particular verb differently or vary the way we read the case of a particular noun?
- ✗ Is this obscure word **nasara** “**Nazarenes/Nazarites**” found in the pre-Islamic *jahiliyya* Arabic poetry? Do the Bedouins still use this word? Is it a loan word from Hebrew, Syriac, Nabatean, Coptic, Amharic or Greek?
- ✗ What are the *nadhm* “metrical” and *balagha* “rhetorical” features of the verse

WHAT QUESTIONS DOES ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP ASK OF SCRIPTURE? HAGGADIC

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَالَّذِينَ هَادُوا وَالنَّصَارَى وَالصَّابِّينَ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ
وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَلَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ وَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

‘Indeed, those who believe and those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians and the Sabians, whomsoever believes in God and in the Last Day and works righteousness, so their reward is with their Lord, and there shall be no fear upon them nor shall they grieve’ The Heifer (Quran 2):62

- ✗ Who are the people this verse is talking about? Who are the “People of the Book”? What tribe are these people the “Sabians”? In relation to other verses of the Quran, what was the name of Pharaoh's wife? Who was the person who pushed Joseph into the pit? What was the name of the dog in the story of the seven sleepers?
- ✗ What are the *asbab al-nuzul* “the occasions of revelation” of this verse – namely the particular historical circumstances in the ministry of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) which prompted the revelation of this verse? Did the Jews ask the Prophet a question in the market? al-Suyuti’s *Perfection in the Quranic Sciences* a primer to Quranic sciences from the 15th Century lists 12 categories of *asbab al-nuzul* – eg. Makkan or Medinan, day or night, travelling or sedentary, revealed to previous prophets or only to this prophet

WHAT QUESTIONS DOES ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP ASK OF SCRIPTURE? HALAKHIC – ALLEGORICAL

مِنْ أَجْلِ ذَلِكَ كَتَبْنَا عَلَى بَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ أَنَّهُ مَنْ قَتَلَ نَفْسًا بِغَيْرِ نَفْسٍ أَوْ فَسَادٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَتَلَ النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَمَنْ أَحْيَاهَا فَكَأَنَّمَا أَحْيَا النَّاسَ جَمِيعًا وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ثُمَّ إِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنْهُمْ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ فِي الْأَرْضِ لَمُسْرِفُونَ

‘For that reason we decreed upon the Children of Israel that whomsoever killed a life apart from [the taking of] a life or corruption in the land, it was as though he had killed the whole of humanity, and whomsoever saved a life, it was as though he had saved the life of all humanity; but there came to them Our messengers with clear evidence and yet thereafter many of them were committing excesses in the land’

The Table (Quran 5):32

- ✗ Is there a *hukm* “juridical ruling or commandment” that arises from this text? What is the *muhkam* “evident ruling” or the *zahiri* “evident, apparent” reading of this verse?
- ✗ Is there additionally a *mutashabih* “allegorical” or *batini* “inward, esoteric” reading of this text?
- ✗ What response does God seek of the pious believer to this verse, through His use of these particular words? How should this text be applied to our religious life today?

HADITH AND THE ORIGINS OF TAFSIR

- ✗ *tafsir* verbal noun of *fassara* (II form root *f-s-r* to explain, expound) - exegesis
- ✗ *ta'wil* verbal noun of *'awwala* (root *'-w-l* to elucidate) – deeper hermeneutic, moral and allegorical meaning
- ✗ *hadith* (root *h-d-th* news, conversation, chat) – the oral tradition of the sayings of the Prophet reported by his Companions and Followers of the Companions – this is called the *sunna* (the practice of the Prophet)
- ✗ a *hadith* consists of a *matn* (actual saying) and a *sanad* or *isnad* (chain of narration) – John reported that Luke reported that Matthew reported that Mark reported that Pontius Pilate said, “I take one sugar in my tea”
- ✗ Science of *hadith* – *mutawatir* (“widespread” >20 reporters in each generation from different places), *hasan* (“good” >4 reporters in each generation in one place), *da'if* (“weak” <4 reporters in each generation)
- ✗ Modern Orientalists Goldziher, Schacht and Wansborough questioned the authenticity of *hadith* - “isnads have a tendency to grow backwards”

EXEGESIS TRADITIONIS

- ✗ *Exegesis traditionis* – *tafsir bi-l-ma'thur* “exegesis according to that which is inherited”
- ✗ The only legitimate authority of interpretation of the Quran derives from 1) other verses of the Quran 2) the Prophetic *sunna* 3) the reports of the Companions and the Followers **Ibn Taymiyya**
- ✗ “Whoever talks about the Quran on the basis of his personal opinion (*ra'y*) or from a position of ignorance shall surely occupy his seat in the Fire” **Ibn Kathir Tafsir 1:5**
- ✗ Canonised in 8th century by the principles of *'usul al-fiqh* expounded by *al-Shafi'i* in his legal-exegetical work the *Risala*
- ✗ Will admit lexical discussion from pre-Islamic poetry in order to elucidate points of Arabic grammar, but little else that is external
- ✗ *asbab al-nuzul* “the occasion of revelation”, *ahkam al-shari'i* “legal injunctions”, *isra'iliyyat* “Jewish stuff”

-
- ✗ *Exegesis rationis* – *tafsir bi-l-ra'y* “exegesis from reason”
 - ✗ Basra in the latter half of 8th century at school of sage Hasan al-Basri, argument with Wasil b. ‘Ata on free will versus *qadar* “predestination”
 - ✗ *‘itazala* (VIII root ‘-t-z to leave, slip, kick) – *mu’tazila* or *ahl al-tawhid wa al-’adl* “the people of monotheism and justice”
 - ✗ Key Mu’tazilite theological doctrines: Unity of God without any *sifat* “attributes”, hence the Quran is created not an eternal attribute of God; Man has free will; Revelation through Scripture but ultimately only Reason can bring true knowledge of Faith
 - ✗ Development of *kalam* “philosophical ratiocination” and *falsafa* “Greek philosophy”
 - ✗ Jewish and Karaite Mu’tazilites: Musa b. Maimun (Maimonides), Dawud al-Muqammiz, Yusuf al-Basir
 - ✗ Under Caliph Ma’mun and Mu’tazilism becomes the official doctrine and the *mihna* “inquisition” takes place of Sunni dissenters such as Ahmad b. Hanbal
 - ✗ With Sunni victory, the Gates of *ijtihad* are closed – remain shut to this day

THE SENSES OF SCRIPTURE: SELF-REFERENTIALITY IN QURAN 3:7

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ زَيْغٌ فَيَتَّبِعُونَ مَا تَشَابَهَ مِنْهُ ابْتِغَاءَ الْفِتْنَةِ وَابْتِغَاءَ تَأْوِيلِهِ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ تَأْوِيلَهُ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَالرَّاسِخُونَ فِي الْعِلْمِ يَقُولُونَ آمَنَّا بِهِ كُلٌّ مِّنْ عِندِ رَبِّنَا وَمَا يَذَّكَّرُ إِلَّا أُولُو الْأَلْبَابِ

'He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: In it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part thereof that is allegorical, seeking discord, and searching for its hidden meanings, but no one knows its hidden meanings except God [PAUSE??] and those who are firmly grounded in knowledge who say: "We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord:" and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding.' Quran 3:7

- ✗ Interpretation of this fundamental verse is deeply controversial and is a matter of punctuation!
- ✗ Two readings dependent on whether there is a caesura in the middle of the verse.
- ✗ Traditional Islamic cantillation marks added later in printed copies of the Quran place a *waqf lazim* 'obligatory pause' in the middle of the verse!

THE SENSES OF SCRIPTURE: POLYVALENCE AND SHARED JUDAEO-ISLAMIC SCHOLARSHIP

- ✗ Scripture as *dhu wujuh* “possessor of faces” in polyvalent textual interpretation
- ✗ *mukhamat* “juridical, evident” relating to *halal* and *haram* versus *mutashabihat* “allegorical” (terminology from Quran 3:7)
- ✗ *zahir* “outward, evident, back” vs. *batin* “inward, hidden, belly” – in Sufism exegesis in continuity with eisegesis
- ✗ Sahl al-Tustari senses of Scripture: *zahir* “outer meaning”, *batin* “norm”, *hadd* “an anagose”, *matla/muttala* “horizon” – four senses, literal, allegorical, moral/tropological, anagogical – the influence of Jewish scholarship and the medieval Christian *quadriga* on Islam?
- ✗ Outer sense in *tilawa* “recitation” for the common people, inner sense in *fahm* “understanding” for the men of understanding
- ✗ Saadia Gaon *Kitab al-Amanat wa al-‘Itiqadat* “The Book of Beliefs and Opinions” uses terminology of *zahir* and *ta’wil* and is part of the shared *zahiriyya* school of interpretation as Ibn Hazm which emphasises the primacy of the evident literalist reading

THE SENSES OF SCRIPTURE: HIERARCHIES OF MEANING

- ✗ Sufi involvement in the development of *tafsir* was extensive, and even Hanbali scholar Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728) wrote *Risala fi 'ilm al-batin wa-l-zahir* expressing the view that there is *majaz* 'metaphor' in readings of Quranic phrases
- ✗ Shi'ite *tafsir* genre very similar to Sunni but with sectarian allegorical interpretation favouring *ahl al-bayt* 'the People of the House [of the Prophet]' – eg. the Verse of Light (*Quran* 24:35) that the verse is about 'Ali (Prophet's son-in-law), Fatima (daughter) is the "niche" and the "shining star", Hasan and Husayn (grandsons) are the "lamp" which is mentioned twice, etc
- ✗ Al-Ghazali who writes the allegorical *Mishkat al-Anwar* permits allegorical and symbolic explanations as *supplementary only* – eg. *wuquf* (standing) during Hajj likened to future standing before God, but *only where the literal meaning is established first as the primary reading*. This principle remained Sunni orthodoxy and orthopraxy in exegetical sciences for many centuries in scholarly circles, maintaining a balance between literalism and metaphor.
- ✗ Rejection by al-Ghazali in *Fada'ih al-Batiniyyah* of unfettered Isma'ili allegorical and anti-nomian substitution – eg. fasting really means withholding true esoteric knowledge from the uninitiated, circumambulation in Hajj is really the circling of the seven Imams in one's heart
- ✗ Criticism by Jewish-Arabic and Muslim scholars of Christian approaches to reading

SOME NOTABLE CLASSICAL COMMENTATORS

- ✗ Abu Ja'far Muhammad b. Jarir al-Tabari (Tabaristan 839) *Jami' al-Bayan 'an Ta'wil 'Ay al-Quran* – exemplar of *tafsir bi-l-ma'thur*
- ✗ Abu al-Qasim Mahmud b. 'Umar al-Zamakhshari (Khwarazm 1075) *Al-Kashshaf 'an Haqa'iq Ghawamid al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqawil fi Wujuh al-Ta'wil* – Mu'tazilite *tafsir bi-l-ra'y*
- ✗ 'Umar Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (Rayy 1149) *Mafatih al-Ghayb* – Asharite anti-Mu'tazilite but still discursive and rationalist
- ✗ 'Imad al-Din Isma'il b. Umar b. Kathir (Damascus 1300) *Tafsir al-Quran al-Azim* – Hanbalite and juridical

WHAT DOES THE QURAN SAY ABOUT ERETZ YISRAEL? SOME DEFINITIONS

- ✗ *al-masjid al-'aqla* – the furthest mosque (place of prostration); what and where is this? *The Night Journey* (Quran 17):1
- ✗ *bayt al-maqdis* (root: **קדש**), *al-quds* – Arabic terms for Jerusalem; these terms are not found in the Quran but are extensive in hadith literature; also 'Iliya from *Aelia Capitolina*
- ✗ *'ula al-qiblatayn, thani al-masjidayn, thalith al-haramayn* “First of the two qiblas, second of the two mosques, third of (ie. after) the two sanctuaries (ie. Makkah and Medina)”
- ✗ *al-ard al-muqaddasa* (root: **ארץ**) – Arabic term for the Holy Land; the term Canaan is not found in the primary Quranic text
- ✗ *al-isra'* – “the Night Journey” from the Arabic verb **أَسْرَاهُ**, “to make one depart by night” referring to the Prophet's journey by night to Jerusalem
- ✗ *al-miraj* – the ascent into heaven and encounter with Moses

THE NIGHT JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM – QURAN

17:1

- ✗ This is the only verse with explicit reference to the “remote temple” and the *isra’* – nocturnal departure
- ✗ Angelika Neuwirth has suggested on the basis of poesy and the form and rhyme of the clausula that the verse is out of place; though this is not an opinion shared by most scholars
- ✗ Islamic tradition records in al-Tabari via Ibn Ishaq (d. 767 biographer of the Prophet) a plain sense tradition from Umm Hani’, a cousin of the Prophet
- ✗ The elaborated traditions in relation to this event are actually two – 1) *al-isra’* firstly, a horizontal journey to Jerusalem, and 2) *al-miraj* secondly, a vertical ascent to heaven and encounter with the prophets of past ages
- ✗ Islamic tradition confounds these two ancient oral accounts into a single seamless sequence of events which becomes increasingly elaborate with the amplification of tradition
- ✗ J Horowitz in 1919 undertook the first major Western exegetical analysis of Quran 17:1, in conjunction with Schrieke, offering the interpretation that this account was not of a translation to Jerusalem but an ascent to the “furthest mosque” in heaven

UMM HANI' TRADITION IN AL-TABARI

“The nocturnal departure of the Messenger of God took place as follows: He was staying at my house, where he spent the night. When he had performed the final evening prayer he went to sleep and so did we. In the early morning, God’s Messenger woke us for the morning prayer and when we had concluded it together he said to me, ‘Umm Hani’, I have been praying here together with you the evening prayer, as you remember. But then I was in *Bayt al-Maqdis* and prayed there. And now I have been praying with you the morning prayer in this place.” *al-Tabari Jami 15:3*

TRADITIONS OF THE *ISRA'* – THE MOSQUE OF SANCTUARY

Hasan al-Basri (d. 642-728) transmission: “I was told that al-Hasan said the Prophet said: ‘While I was sleeping in the *Hijr*, Gabriel came and stirred me with his foot. I sat up but saw nothing and lay down again. He came a second time and stirred me with his foot. I sat up, but saw nothing and lay down again. He came to me a third time and stirred me with his foot. I sat up and he took hold of my arm and I stood beside him and he brought me out to the door of the mosque and there was a white animal, half mule, half donkey, with wings on its sides with which it propelled its feet, putting down each forefoot at the limit of its sight and he mounted me on it. Then he went out with me keeping close to me.” *Ibn Hisham al-Sira al-Nabawiyya* I:398

TRADITIONS OF THE ISRA' – THE FURTHEST MOSQUE

“The Apostle and Gabriel went their way until they arrived at the Temple at Jerusalem. There they found Abraham, Moses, and Jesus among a company of the prophets. The Apostle acted as their imam in prayer. Then he was brought two vessels, one containing wine and the other milk. The Apostle took the milk and drank it, leaving the wine. Gabriel said: ‘You have been rightly guided to the way of nature and so will your people be, Muhammad. Wine is forbidden you.’ Then the Apostle returned to Makkah, and in the morning he told Quraysh what had happened. Most of them said, ‘By God, this is a plain absurdity! A caravan takes a month to go to Syria, and a month to return, and can Muhammad do the journey in one night?’ Many Muslims gave up their faith.’ **Ibn Hisham *al-Sira al-Nabawiyya* I:398**

TRADITIONS OF THE *MIRAJ*

Ibn Ishaq reporting on the authority of Abu Sa'id al-Khudri has the ascent to heaven follow directly from the journey to Jerusalem, attributing to 'Abd Allah b. Mas'ud:

“They reached the seventh heaven and his Lord. There the duty of fifty prayers a day was laid upon him. The Apostle said: ‘On my return I passed by Moses and what a fine friend of yours he was! He asked me how many prayers had been laid upon me and when I told him fifty he said, ‘Prayer is a weighty matter and your people are weak, so go back to your Lord and ask him to reduce the number for you and your community.’ I did so and He took off ten. Again I passed by Moses and he said the same again; and so it went on until only five prayers for the whole day and night were left. Moses again gave me the same advice. I replied that I had been back to my Lord and asked him to reduce the number until I was ashamed and I would not do it again. Anyone of you who performs them in faith and trust will have the reward of fifty prayers.” *Ibn Hisham al-Sira al-Nabawiyya* I:407

JEWISH SETTLEMENT OF THE LAND – QURAN

5:21 AND 17:104

يَا قَوْمِ ادْخُلُوا الْأَرْضَ الْمُقَدَّسَةَ الَّتِي كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَلَا تَرْتَدُّوا عَلَى أَدْبَارِكُمْ فَتَنْقَلِبُوا خَاسِرِينَ

‘O my people, enter the land which God has decreed [lit. written **כתב**] for you, and turn not back on your heels, otherwise you be overturned as losers’

The Table (Quran 5):21

وَقُلْنَا مِنْ بَعْدِهِ لِبَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ اسْكُنُوا الْأَرْضَ فَإِذَا جَاءَ وَعْدُ الْآخِرَةِ جِئْنَا بِكُمْ لَفِيفًا

‘And we said after that to the Children of Israel settle [*uskunu* **שכון**] the Land [*ard* **ארץ**], and when the latter promise came to pass we brought you together as a company’

The Night Journey (Quran 17):104

POINTS ARISING IN THE CLASSICAL COMMENTARIES – THE HOLY LAND

- ✗ *al-ard al-muqaddasa* “the Holy Land”
- ✗ al-Tabari and al-Qurtubi discuss variant *hadith* on the question of the identity of the territory in question – 1) *al-Tur* (the mountain, Mount Sinai in the Quran) 2) *al-Sham* (Syria-Palestine, or Syria-Palestine-part of Jordan, or Damascus) 3) ‘*Ariha*’ (Jericho and surrounding territories)
- ✗ al-Zamakhshari and al-Baydawi recount the narrative of Abraham being called by God to ascend Mount Lebanon, and the vision of his eyes being the territory promised to his descendants

POINTS ARISING IN THE CLASSICAL COMMENTARIES – COVENANT

- ✗ *allati kataba Allah lakum* “Which God has written for you”
- ✗ al-Tabari and al-Qurtubi recount grammatical renderings via oral *hadith* tradition of the semantic implication in this context of *kataba* with ‘*amara* “he ordered, commanded” and *wahaba* “bestowed, granted”
- ✗ al-Tabari makes explicit reference to this writing being *thabbata* “confirmed, firmly established” on *al-lawh al-mahfuz* “the preserved tablet”, being the eternal tablet in heaven from which are said to emanate all the holy scriptures, the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel and the Quran

POINTS ARISING IN THE CLASSICAL COMMENTARIES – ISRAEL'S DISOBEDIENCE

- ✗ Clearly, according to the primary Quranic text and to classical *tafsir* discourse, Israel's major wrongdoing was her cowardly *disobedience* when commanded by God, to *enter the Land* and to undertake *jihad* against its inhabitants. This is recorded in al-Tabari, al-Qurtubi, al-Baydawi and al-Zamakhshari. A strong anti-Jewish polemic on the cowardice and disobedience of Israel is expounded in Ibn Kathir's commentary.
- ✗ In *Quran* 5:20 Moses remonstrates with his people to recall God's favour upon them, to which the people's response is one of cowardly desertion from battle, leaving the task to "two brave men" (according to traditional commentaries, Joshua and Caleb). There are *tafsir* narratives on the immense strength of the existing inhabitants of the Holy Land and the cowardice of Israel in the face of this formidable enemy.
- ✗ For this disobedience, Israel is forbidden entry to the Land for 40 years and condemned to wander, prior to finally entering the Holy Land.

SOME MODERN ACADEMIC VIEWS

- ✗ There is a considerable quantity of popular Islamic material contending viewpoints in support of the theory of Jewish dereliction of their ownership to the Holy Land by reason of Israel's wrongdoing and alleged Jewish crimes through history, and also theories of the Canaanite origin of the Palestinian people
- ✗ "Apes, Pigs and Islamic Identity" by Uri Rubin traces the historical development of the mindset of Muslim ascendancy during the military expansion in the first two centuries after the Prophet
- ✗ "“In both Jewish and Islamic understandings of the term 'written,' there is the meaning of finality, decisiveness and immutability...So the simple fact is then, from a faith-based point of view: If God has 'written' Israel for the people of Moses, who can change this?' He also quoted two of Islam's most famous exegetes - Ibn Kathir and Muhammad al-Shawkani - as supporting this explanation.”

Interview with Professor Khaleel Mohammed, San Diego University

SCRIPTURAL REASONING

- ✗ “Scriptural Reasoning” is the shared reading and interpretation by Jews, Christians and Muslims of their sacred texts in order to understand religious differences
- ✗ The aim is not to promote a forced consensus but rather to engender the particularity of each tradition’s differences and promote “*better quality disagreement*”
- ✗ Began as an intra-Jewish conversation in Princeton between rabbinical scholars and Jewish academics of philosophy and social sciences as to how the Hebrew sacred texts in a post-*shoah* context might become an instrument for *tikkun olam* “healing of the world”
- ✗ Christians and Muslims joined this conversation to make it an interfaith-interdisciplinary reading of the texts which enables new reading of familiar scriptures by their being reflected and refracted back through the eyes of believers from other faith traditions.
- ✗ In the UK has developed as a powerful instrument to discuss, debate and open up Islamic readings and interpretations of the Quran and hadith through community reading. Now takes place in the major mosques in London and as a programme among young people in universities and schools.
- ✗ Islamic reading is sanctioned even for the most conservative through a *fatwa* issued by the Shari’a Court of the Islamic Cultural Centre and London Central Mosque after extensive consultation.

-
- ✘ Drawn attention to the importance for the Jewish community of an understanding of Islamic approaches to the interpretation of the Quran – both by reason of our common DNA, and the urgent imperatives of anti-semitism and need for Jewish-Muslim engagement
 - ✘ Explored the preoccupations of classical Islamic scholarship in relation to Scripture and the questions it asks of the text
 - ✘ Examined the origins of the science of *tafsir* commentary through the authority of oral tradition, and the way Muslim scholarship has been influenced by Jewish approaches in its hierarchical ordering of evident over metaphorical meaning
 - ✘ Examined questions in relation to the *tafsir* commentary on Quranic verses relating to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. What are some classical commentaries on the Quranic accounts conveying in their narratives of the settlement by the Children of Israel of the Holy Land as territory which “God has written” for them and “firmly established” on the “preserved tablet in heaven”? In this literature, is there any explicit or implicit sense in which such Jewish covenant with the Land has been terminated? Is there any Islamic or Arab or other counter-claim to the Holy Land either stated or implied anywhere in the primary Quranic text or in the classical *tafsir* commentaries? What are the implications of absence of a counter-claim?