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to the Bible and Culture
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In the context of current anti-Islamic reverberations and the ‘clash’ (to be loose and imprecise) between the Jewish-Christian-Western and the Islamic-Eastern ‘civilizations’, few subjects can today be regarded as of greater significance than an empathetic, balanced consideration of the positive, symbiotic and intertextual relationships between the Bible and the Qurʾān, the foundational scriptural books of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and a plethora of associated religious and spiritual movements. For more than a millennium and a half, the alleged differences, contradictions and idiosyncratic dimensions of the Bible and the Qurʾān have been vociferously and voluminously mouthed and penned by triumphalist Muslim polemicists and Islamophobic Western missionaries and orientalists. A consciousness and appreciation of the oneness of humankind and the legitimacy and interrelated beauty of its multi-faceted religiosity and scriptural legacy should today lead towards a renewed respect for the moral and inspirational value of both the Bible and the Qurʾān. Both these sacred texts claim to be divinely inspired and each has generated a massive amount of expository literature over hundreds of years. Each should be taken seriously in a spirit of humble fellowship, and new pathways to mutual appreciation be assiduously explored.

A twenty-first-century global scriptural perspective can attempt to redress aspects of the aforementioned age-old prejudices and imbalances by focusing upon respected and established modern perspectives about the Bible and the Qurʾān as well as complementary insights generated by past exegetes. Academic perspectives and theological methodologies incorporating new, non-prejudiced, intertextual and related hermeneutics must be allowed to speak out in the arena of dialogue and mutual understanding (Hary 2000; McAuliffe et al. 2001–5, 2003; Reeves 2004). We know far more about the Bible and the Qurʾān and their centuries of transmission, translation and interpretation today than was ever possible in the past. The modern editing and study of ignored and newly discovered scriptural and related texts and mss. in a plethora of languages (including Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Ethiopic, Syriac and Arabic) reveal data that were unimagined by past scholars and exegetes. Methodological approaches and
historico-critical tools have been developed and refined over the past few centuries that today permit a more balanced and open-minded, potentially insightful evaluation of these many new materials and the light they throw upon issues in biblical and the related field of Qur’anic studies. Qur’anic studies and Muslim dialogue would be enriched by a greater awareness of modern biblical studies and associated academic disciplines.

The study of the ‘Dead Sea Scrolls’ discovered from 1947, along with the numerous other biblical and related finds from the Judean desert, has revolutionized biblical studies and thrown much suggestive light upon Qur’anic studies (Tov 2002, in Herbert and Tov 2002; Rabin [1957] 2001), as has the study of the fourth-century CE Nag Hammadi codices discovered in Upper Egypt in 1945, and other Hermetic and Gnostic writings. Recent research on Jewish and Christian pseudepigraphical writings, as evidenced in the Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha (Issue 1 1987) and the massive work of DiTommaso, A Bibliography of Pseudepigrapha Research (2001), has thrown new light on elements in the Qur’an, Taṣāfir (Commentary), Ḥadīth (Tradition) and related literatures. The Qur’anic Solomon narratives (Q. 21:82, 34:12–14), for example, are illuminated by select passages within the evolving Testament of Solomon cycle (c. second–ninth century CE?), not unknown in Syriac and Arabic versions also (Harding and Alexander 1999). The discovery of early (first–third century AH) Qur’ān codices (maṣāḥif), ‘manuscripts’ and other fragments in Şan’a in 1972 (Puin, in Wild 1996; Leehmuis, ‘Codices of the Qur’ān’, in E-Q 1:347–51) should also be mentioned at this point, especially since the study of early Qur’ān texts and their paleographical dating, variant readings and transmission history has taken major leaps forward in the past decade (Déroche, ‘Manuscripts of the Qur’ān’, E-Q 3:253–75).

Despite such discoveries which have opened up new vistas and challenges within both biblical and Qur’anic studies, medieval and pre-twentieth-century attitudes still dominate much of the Jewish-Christian-Muslim debate and dialogue. Muslim scholars, for instance, seldom refer to the modern findings of western biblical scholars, often reprinting anti-biblical material based on dated and inaccurate medieval polemic. Attitudes considered quintessentially biblical or Qur’ānic-Islamic need reappraisal in the light of the above-mentioned finds and related advances in Semitic scriptural research. Many essential doctrinal, textual and hermeneutical ideas need rethinking and rearticulation at both the academic and theological level, if the true relationship between Jewish, Islamic and Christian traditions is to be properly understood and appreciated.

The Bible and the Qur’ān

Though not simply a new Bible, there is little doubt that the Qur’ān is in various ways neo-biblical. Its opening ordering of the sūrahs (‘sections’), as a cluster of ‘seven long sūrahs’, reflects the initial gravitas of a five-fold Pentateuch (or Torah) and a four-fold Gospel mode of scriptural commencement. Frolov in this connection translates the following ḥadīth of the Prophet, ‘I was given the seven long suḥras instead of the Torah, the suḥras of a hundred verses instead of the Gospel . . . ’ (Frolov 2002: 194). Although
echoes of the Bible permeate the Qur’an. Very little Jewish or Christian scripture is directly cited or straightforwardly alluded to, a fact reflected in the Islamic doctrine that the Qur’an both expounds and supersedes past sacred books as ‘Archetypal Scripture’ (umm al-kitāb, ‘Mother Book’; Q.13:39; 43:4, etc.). The Qur’an can thus be viewed as an Arabic intertextual yet metatextual or supratextual universe which both interacts with and transcends the Bible. It would be difficult to adequately fathom its historical and scriptural depths outside of a knowledge of its biblical substrate. Though the Qur’an transcends the Bible, this and related sacred books remain hauntingly omnipresent within it.

Though the Jewish and Christian Bibles were known at least orally to Muhammad and his contemporaries, they were largely bypassed. Most scholars today affirm the Arabian prophet’s considerable awareness of oral channels of biblical and post-biblical religious tradition, but hold back from affirming the contemporary availability of an Arabic Bible. Transcending the limitations of biblical Scripture, the Qur’an presents itself as a revealed (wahy) text communicated piecemeal in history to Muhammad between c.610 and 632 CE. It is a collection of divine revelations in Arabic, new and pre-eminently ‘clear’ (mubīn), which abrogate biblical Scripture and claim a miraculous inimitability (i’jāz).

The Islamic Bible as sanctioned in the Qur’an includes four bodies of biblically related scripture:

(1) Antediluvian and later Şuḥuf (‘scriptural pages’, Q. 20:133; 53:37; 74:52; 87:8–19).

Muslims believe in pre-Mosaic divine revelations to numerous prophets who lived between the time of Adam (prophet and the first man in Islam) and the biblical-qur’anic Moses. In the Qur’an and elsewhere, such writings are several times referred to as (pl.) şuḥuf (sing. şaḥīfah), loosely, scriptural ‘leaves’, ‘pages’ or ‘scrolls’). This is succinctly expressed in the ‘History of Prophets and Kings’ of al-Ṭabarī (d. 923):

It is said that the leaves [şuḥuf] which God revealed to Abraham were ten in number. I heard this [related] from . . . Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī: I asked, ‘O Messenger of God! How many books [kitāb] did God reveal?’ He said, ‘One hundred and four books. To Adam he revealed ten leaves [şahā‘if], to Seth fifty leaves, and to Enoch thirty leaves. To Abraham he revealed ten leaves [şahā‘if] and also the Torah, the Injīl, the Ṭabūr, and the Furqān.’ I said, ‘O Messenger of God! What were the leaves of Abraham?’ He answered, ‘They were all proverbs . . . And they included parables.’ (Ṭabarī, Tārikh [1997] I:187; trans. Brinner, History II:130–1)

Numerous other Islamic sources register similar traditions which have something of a basis in the vast Jewish, Christian, Gnostic pseudepigraphical literature ascribed to pre-Mosaic figures. These include, for example, writings such as an Apocalypse and Testament of Adam, three or more books of Enoch and writings ascribed to Noah (the Sepher ha-Razim, ‘Book of Mysterie’) and Abraham (Sepher Yetzirah, ‘Book of Formations’). Islamic literatures ascribe many Arabic texts to these and other antediluvian figures as well as later sages and prophets. Most await translation and study.
In the Qur’an, the term Tawrát (18 times) often indicates ancient scripture sacred to Jews. In the Tawrát the advent of Muhammad as al-nabı al-ummı ‘the Gentile-unlettered prophet’ is predicted (Q. 7:156) and many attempts have been made to identify this reference. The Tawrát is only a few times loosely cited: for example, Exodus 21:25–6 at Q. 5:45a (‘hand’ and ‘foot’ replace ‘nose’ and ‘ear’), and Genesis 32:33 (25) where Jacob–Israel is said to have allowed ‘all food’ to the ‘children of Israel’ except what Israel (Jacob) ‘forbade unto himself’ (cf. Q. 3:87). It has been recently been suggested that the Prophet introduced a revised form of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20:1–17; Deut. 5:6–21) in Qur’an 17:22–39 and 6:151–3 though this has no clear Islamic precedent (Brinner 1986; Lewinstein, E-Q 1:365–7). Muhammad, it might be suggested, could have been made aware of the Tawrát through his companion Zayd ibn Thābit (d. 655 or 675/6) who had received instruction in Hebrew (and Syriac) at a Jewish school (midrāṣ).

Post-qur’anic Islamic literatures contain many thousands of Tawrát quotations, many of which are not to be found either in the Pentateuch or any other biblical text. An example of this is to be found the Kita¯b al-Jala¯l wa’l-jama¯l ‘Book of the Divine Majesty and Beauty’ of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn al-ʿArabi (d.1240). Commenting upon Q. 51:56, he quotes the following extra-qur’anic revelation (ḥadıṯ qudsı¯) allegedly contained in ‘His [God’s] Torah’ (tawrát):

God . . . revealed in his tawrát, ‘O Son of Adam, I created everything for thy sake and I created thee for My sake. So do not subjugate what I created for My sake to that which I created for thine own sake.’ (Ibn al-ʿArabi, Rasāʾīl, 15)

Note the use here of the biblical phrase yā ibn ādam (‘O Son of Man’). Ibn al-ʿArabi does not appear to cite the canonical Bible but often quotes non-canonical Islamo-biblical citations from pre-Islamic prophets.

The Q. also refers to divine revelations to Moses as alwaḥ (sing. lawḥ) scriptural ‘Tablets’ (Q. 7:145–51 cf. Exod. 24:12), kitāb ‘the Book’ and al-Furqa¯n ‘the Criterion’ (Q. 21:49). Muslim commentators have given rich interpretations to the ‘Tablets’ given to Moses on Sinai. The wide-ranging Fihrist ‘Bibliographical Compendium’ of the probably Persian Shīʾī, Baghdadī book dealer, Abuʾl-Faraj Ishāq b. Warrāq al-Nadīm (d. 990) records a great deal relating to the Bible and related traditions including the fact that a certain Ahmad had it that the alwaḥ ‘tablets’ revealed to Moses on Sinai were ‘green’ in colour with the writing on them ‘red like the rays of the sun’ (Fihrist, 38/Dodge, 43). In his seminal al-Insān al-kāmil . . . ‘The Perfect Man . . .’, the Shīʾite Sufi ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. c.1428) writes: ‘God sent down the Tawrát unto Moses on nine alwaḥ (cf. Q. 17:101), and commanded him to communicate seven of them and abandon two . . . The [seven] alwaḥ contained the sciences (ʿulūm) of the ancients and moderns.’ In view of the description of the Tawrát in Q. 5:46, al-Jīlī also has it that the first two alwaḥ were characterized by ‘Light’ and ‘Guidance’ (Insān, 1:114). Elsewhere, it is said that God sent down to Moses ‘nine Tablets’ but commanded him to divulge only seven of them. Two were made of ‘Light’, the lawḥ al-rubūbiyya ‘the tablet of Lordship’ and the
lawḥ al-qadr ‘the tablet of Destiny’, and were set aside. The other seven were made of marble, each exemplifying a divine quality, save the seventh which had to do with guidance on the religious path:

Tablet 1 = al-nūr (Light)
Tablet 2 = al-hudā (Guidance) (cf. Q. 5:44)
Tablet 3 = al-ḥikma (Wisdom)
Tablet 4 = al-taqwā (Piety – the Fear of God)
Tablet 5 = al-ḥukm (Justice)
Tablet 6 = al-‘ubūdiyya (Servitude)
Tablet 7 = ‘The explication of the way of felicity as opposed to the way of misfortune [distress] and the clarification of what is foremost’ (1:114–15).

This, al-Jīlī asserts, is the substance of what God commanded Moses to instruct the people.

The huge and widely respected early nineteenth-century commentary of the ‘Alīd Sunnī Abu al-Thana’, Shihaḥ al-Dīn al-Ālusī (d. 1854) also provides detailed comments upon the tablets which God gave to Moses on Sinai. Expounding the words, ‘And We wrote for him [Moses] upon the Tablets something of everything (Q. 7:145a), Ālusī records various opinions as to the number of tablets, their substance, their scope and their writer:

[Regarding] their number, it is said that there were ten and [also that there were] seven or two . . . the tablets were [made of] green emerald. The Lord . . . commanded Gabriel and he brought them from [the Garden of] Eden . . . Others say that they were [made] of ruby . . . I say that they were of emerald . . . It is related from the Prophet, ‘The Tablets which were sent down unto Moses were from the Lote-Tree of Paradise (sidr al-jannat) and the length of the Tablet(s) was twelve cubits. (Ruḥ al-maʿānī V:55)

(3) The Zabūr (‘Psalter’, ‘Psalms’).

The term zabūr designates the revealed book of 150 (or so) ‘Psalms’, attributed to David (alone) in Islamic literatures (Q. 4:161; 17:57; 21:105). It may reflect the Hebrew term mizmōr (‘Psalm’) or be a popular general designation for this Davidic part of scripture (Jeffery 1938: 148–9). The plural zubur means ‘scripture’ in general (Q. 26:196 etc.). Psalm 37:29a (cf. 37:9b, 11a) as a citation from the Zabūr is quoted at Qur’ān 21:105b, ‘My righteous servants who shall inherit the earth’. This stands out as the only fairly literal biblical citation in the Qur’ān. During the first Islamic centuries, versions of the Psalms were much cherished by Muslim philosophers, ascetics, Sufis and others. Zabūr texts were early translated, even recreated into Arabic (Schippers, ‘Psalms’, E-Q 4:314–18), most notably perhaps by Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 728 or later) who composed a still extant and variously entitled Kitāb Zabūr Dāwūd (Khoury 1972: 258f. and EI² article). As with the Tawrāt, Islamic literature contains large numbers of Zabūr citations often with no identifiable relationship to the biblical Psalms. In his commentary
on the Shi'i hadith compendia of Kulayni, Sadra al-Din Shirazi (d. 1640) cites the Zabur with the following introduction:

And as for the Zabur, God (exalted be He), said [therein], ‘O David! Say unto the learned [Rabbis] of the children of Israel and their monks: ‘Address such people as are God-fearing. And if you do not find among them the fear of God, then converse with the learned ones. And if you do not find it with them, converse with the wise. The fear of God, knowledge and wisdom are three realities which exhibit a degree of oneness such that if but one of them is absent in any one of My creatures, I have desired his destruction.”’ (Sh-Kafi 1992, vol. 3: 99–100)

Illustrative of a developed Islamic view of the Zabur are the following statements of 'Abd al-Karim al-Jili. For him, Zabur is a Syriac term meaning 'book'. It was sent down for David, as the most sensitive of the people and one especially good and virtuous. A recluse, hardly appearing before his people, he only made the Zabur known to a select group. It mostly consisted of religious exhortations and praises of God. It is without a religious law (shari'a) save for a few specified verses (al-Insan, 1:121–4).

(4) The Injil ('Evangel', Gospel[s]) of Jesus.

Twelve times used in the Qur'ân, the Qur'anic Arabic Injil translates the Greek evangelion 'good news', 'gospel' (cf. the Ethiopic cognate wangeľ, 'Evangel', Jeffery 1938: 71–2). It evidently signifies the original kerygma of Jesus as well as the Scripture of Christians at the time of the Prophet. Though now lost, an Arabic Injil probably existed around or just after the time of the Prophet (El² Indjil). Muhammad may have had some exposure to New Testament concepts through Waraqah b. Nawfal, the biblically learned cousin of his first wife, Khadijah bint al-Khuwaylid (d. c.619 CE) (Ibn Isḥaq-Guillaume, 83). From Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. c.732) and Ibn Isḥaq (d. 765) to the polymath Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. 1051) and the mystically inclined 'Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Ghazzālī (d. 1111) among many others, Muslim thinkers throughout the centuries have cited the New Testament in biblical or Islamo-biblical forms. Thousands of texts ascribed to Jesus or the Injil exist in the Islamic sources. They often express Islamic perspectives rather than anything Jesus might have uttered, but must still be viewed as important expressions of Islamic spirituality. Sayings of Jesus or sayings from the Injil are especially significant in Islamic mysticism and Shi'i gnosis (Asín Palacios 1919, 1926; Ayoub 1976; Khalidi 2001).

A one-time disciple of the unworldly 'Umayyad preacher Abū Sa'id Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728), the important early Iraqi preacher and moralist Abū Yahyā Mālik b. Dinār (d. c.747) frequently cited Jewish sources and was greatly influenced by Christianity (Pellat El² VI:266–7). Known as the Rāḥib (monk-ascetic) of the Arabs, he is presented by Tor Andreae as the Muslim originator of the Islamo-biblical version of the following story of Jesus, the disciples and the dead dog:

Jesus and his disciples walked past a dead dog. The disciples said: ‘How disgustingly he stinks!’ But Jesus said: ‘How white his teeth are!’ In this manner he exhorted them not to speak ill of anyone. (Isfahani, Ḥilyâ 2:283 trans. Andreae [1947] 1987:17)
Versions of this story are found in the writings of various Persian poets including the *mathnawi* poem entitled *Bustān* (‘Orchard’) of Shaykh ʿAbū ʿAbd Allāh Saʿdī of Shirāz (d. c.1292). A poetical version is also found in the *Khamsah* of Nizāmī: ‘Even pearls are dark before the whiteness of his [the dead dog’s] teeth!’ (trans. Alger, Poetry of the Orient: 70; Khalidi 2001: 127).

The deeply spiritual and intellectual mystic Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 1240) quite frequently cited the Injīl, though rarely, if ever, the canonical Bible. He claimed mystic intercourse with the celestial Jesus which evidently made concrete biblical consultation and citation unnecessary. Jesus, the fountainhead of the Injīl, converted him, taught him and ever watched over this deeply Qurʾān-centric mystic (Futuhat vol. III: 341; vol. II: 49; Addas 2000: 25–6). Islamo-biblical pericopae relating to Jesus or the Injīl are found in the writings of many Shiʿī sages, philosophers and theologians. Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī (d. 1640) attributes the following words to Jesus, which obviously say more about Mullā Ṣadrā or his source than anything Jesus himself might have uttered:

> Out of the community of Muhammad . . . are the ‘ulamāʾ (the learned), ḥukamaʾ (the wise, philosophers). In view of (their) [legal] comprehension (fiqh) they are even as prophets (anbiyāʾ). They will be made content by God with but little of providence (al-rizq) and God will be satisfied with them through a mere token of their action. They will assuredly enter Paradise through [their uttering] ‘There is no God but God’. (Sh-Kafi 3:100)

For many disciples of Ibn al-ʿArabī in particular, both the Tawrāt and the Injīl anticipate the Qurʾān. They become quintessentially proto-Qurʾānic writings mystically registered in the Qurʾān, just as the whole Qurʾān was thought to have been registered in the *basmalah*, its first letter ‘b’ or its dot as the alphabetic locus of created Reality and the divine Word. ʿAbd al-Raḥman Jāmī (d. 1492), like other Sufis of the school of Ibn al-ʿArabī including al-Jīlī (d. c.1428: al-Insān, 1:111–14), expressed this in the 28th section of his composite Arabic-Persian *Naqd al-nusūṣ* (The Deliverance of the Texts), which comments upon aspects of Ibn al-ʿArabī’s *Naqsh al-fusūṣ* (The Imprint of the Bezels). Focusing upon the mysteries of the ‘bezel’ relative to ‘the peerless wisdom in the Muhammadan Word’, the Qurʾān is equated with the Logos-like *nafs* (‘Self’) and ḥaṣīqa (Reality) of Muhammad seen as

> a singular expression of the combination of the entirety of the divine books. He said, ‘God revealed one hundred and four books from heaven.’ Then he deposited the knowledge of these one hundred in these four; that is, the Tawrāt, the Injīl, the Zabūr and the Furqān ‘Criterion’ (= the Qurʾān). Then he deposited the knowledge of these four in the Qurʾān. He then deposited the knowledge of the Qurʾān in the substance of its [114] surahs. Then he deposited the substance of its surahs into al-ʾFāṭihā ‘the opening Sura’. Whoso has a knowledge of the commentary (tafsīr) on has a knowledge of the commentary upon all the revealed books of God. Whosoever recited it (al-ʾFāṭihā) it is as if he had recited the Tawrāt, the Injīl, the Zabūr and the Furqān. (Jāmī, *Naqd*: 275)

Jāmī’s mystical conflation of all the revealed books in this way, so that the substance of the Bible as contained in the Tawrāt, Zabūr and Injīl is spiritually subsumed within the essence of the Qurʾān, to some degree, rendered biblical citation and knowledge
secondary or unnecessary. It also highlights the essential ‘oneness’ of Abrahamic, biblical-qur’ānic sacred writ (Lambden 2002).

Aside from the Sufi mystical appropriation of the Injīl and other pre-Islamic scriptures, Shī‘ī ḥadīth collections include texts that establish a close connection between pre-Islamic scripture and the authoritative Being of various (Twelver Shī‘ī) Imams as loci of Islamic authority and persons truly biblically aware. The Imams and especially the twelfth messianic Qā‘īm (‘Ariser’) or Mahdī inherit the real pre-Islamic scripture and Abrahamic-Isrā‘īliyyāt traditions as well as the secrets of future events either in oral, mystical ways or in the form of varieties of an inscribed, though ‘unwritten’, scroll known as the Jafr (lit. inscribed cow-hide) (‘Ali, Kitab al-jafr; al-Bursi, Mashariq, 94; Mulla Sadra, Sh-Kafi 2: 85–9; Majlisi, Bihar2 1: 238ff.; 47:270ff.). The future messianic Qā‘īm is expected to appear in possession of varieties of this Jafr, including divinatory dimensions of the ‘ilm al-ḥurūf, the qabbalistic ‘science of letters’ or gematric prognostication. According to Imam Ja‘far al-Sādiq (d. c.765) and others, there were two types of Jafr: (1) al-jafr al-abyäd ‘the white jafr’ with pure recensions of the Suhūf of Abraham, the Tawrāt of Moses, the Zabūr of David and the Injīl of Jesus as well as the mushaf (Scroll) of Fātimah; and (2) al-jafr al-ahmar ‘the red jafr’, a bag containing the weaponry of the prophet Muhammad or of the messianic Qā‘īm as the bearer of the sword.

‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī’s consideration of the Injīl also includes the following interesting passage.

God sent down the Injīl unto Jesus in the Syriac language and it is recited in seventeen languages. The beginning of the Injīl is ‘In the Name and the Father and the Mother and the Son’ like the beginning of the Qur‘ān, ‘In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate’. His community takes this utterance (al-kalām) according to its outer sense. They suppose that the Father and the Mother and the Son are tantamount to the Spirit, Mary and Jesus. Thus they say: ‘God is the third of three (Q. 5:73) and they do not realize that the intention of ‘the Father’ is the name Allāh (God). And the ‘Mother’ is His Being, the Divine Essence which is expressive thereof through the substance of Reality. And in the ‘Son’ is the ‘Book’ which is indicative of absolute existence for he is the subsidiary and outcome of the substance of His Being. Hence God, exalted be He, says, ‘and with Him is the Archetypal Book (umm al-kitāb)’ (Q. 13:39b). (al-Jīlī, al-Insān 1: 143–4)

The real Injīl is here painted in distinctly proto-qur’ānic terms. The true Gospel must be expressive of Islamic perspectives and be in the language of Jesus, assumed to be Syriac-Aramaic as it is in several other medieval and some later Islamic sources. The original Injīl was thought to have been written in Hebrew or Syriac (Aramaic) being replaced by inadequate Greek Gospels, or texts in other languages. Such a viewpoint was expressed, for example, by numerous medieval and later writers, including al-Jāhiz (d. 869), ‘ Abd al-Jabbār (d. 1025), and al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153). Established New Testament scholarship affirms that the four canonical Gospels were originally written in Greek though the existence of earlier Aramaic or Hebrew texts has been voiced since the first Christian centuries and is today fundamental to those ‘criteria for authenticity’ surrounding the scholarly quest for the genuine, Aramaic kerygma or logia of Jesus (Casey 1998, 2002; Peterson 1989). As indicated in the above passage, it was following and developing
qu'ranic polemic that Muslim scholars contested Christian doctrines, including the Trinity, Incarnation, Sonship, Atonement, Crucifixion and Resurrection, etc. Existing New Testament texts were often viewed as not being proto-Islamic enough as well as textually corrupt, indirect representations of the original Injil.

The always singular qu'ranic Injil (Gospel – not Gospels) may refer to a unified original Gospel. Such a text is believed by Muslims to have been revealed to Jesus though he is not known to have written or personally directed the writing of anything (cf. though Rev. 1:1ff.). The Injil may have something of a prototype in Tatian's (d. 185 ce) Diatessaron, a conflation of the four gospels into a continuous narrative, written around the year 170 ce, and widely used in Syriac-speaking churches until the adoption of the four separate Gospels probably in the fifth century ce (see Peterson 2001). The Injil of the Qu'ran is assumed to be identical to the Gospel in the hands of the Prophet's Christian contemporaries (Q. 5:47).

Statements are attributed to the Shi'i Imams which are interesting in the above connection. The first, sixth, seventh and eighth Shi'i Imams are presented in various Shi'i sources including the Ihtijaj (Religious Disputation) compilations of al-Ta'barisi (d. c.1153) and Majlisii (Bihar1 vols 9–10) as having an impressive knowledge of the Bible and of the Jewish and Christian religions. In Ibn Babiya al-Qummii's (d. 901) Kitab al-Tawhid ('Book of the Divine Unity', c.950), there is an account of the conversion of the (now unknown) Christian Patriarch Bariha by the eighth Imam Musaa al-Kazim (d. 799) and the Shi'i theologian Hishaam b. al-Hakam (d. 796). The Imam is presented as having an unsurpassed knowledge of al-kitab 'the Book' (Bible, New Testament) and its ta'wil 'exegesis'. He is said to have recited the Injil/Gospel in Christ-like fashion and explained to the astounded Bariha that 'We [the Imams] have the [Abrahamic] books as a legacy from them. We recite them as they did, and pronounce them as they did' (Tawhid, 275; trans. Thomas 1988: 54ff., 60). In a debate with the (Armenian) Patriarch (al-jathiliq), the Jewish Exilarch (r'is al-jalut) and others (Ibn Babiya, Tawhid, 417), Imam 'Ali al-Ridha' (d. 818) is said to have shown his expertise in all past sacred scriptures in their original languages (Hebrew, Persian, Greek, etc.). He exhibited a perfect knowledge of biblical prophecies fulfilled in Islam, for example, and stunned the Jewish Exilarch by reciting verses of the Torah and a conflation of Isaiah 21:7 with parts of Psalm 149 (Tawhid, trans. Thomas, 1988: 73 n.53, 77). When asked by the Christian Patriarch to explain how 'the first Gospel' had been lost, rediscovered and reached its present form, he replied that the Gospel was lost for a day, then rediscovered when John and Matthew communicated it. Claiming a greater knowledge of Gospel origins than the Patriarch, Imam al-Ridha explained:

I know that when the first Gospel was lost the Christians met together with their experts and said to them: 'Jesus, son of Mary, has been killed and we have lost the Gospel. You are the experts, so what can you do?' Luke and Mark said to them: 'The Gospel is in our hearts and we will produce it for you book by book, every one...we will recite it to you, each and every book, until we have brought it together for you completely.' So Luke, Mark, John and Matthew sat down and wrote for you this Gospel after you had lost the first Gospel. But these four were disciples of the first disciples. (Ibn Babuyaa, Tawhid, 425–6 trans. Thomas, 74 cf. Bihar2 10: 306f.)
In this text the Imam understands that the extant Gospels are not first-hand, eye-witness accounts and acknowledges the fourfold origins of the canonical Gospels. Though an alleged first Gospel (= the qur’ânic Injîl) had been lost, it was recovered by ‘disciples of disciples’. This Imam does not accuse Christians of tahríf ‘falsification’ and in fact quite frequently cites canonical Bible texts. Others, however, perhaps a majority of Muslims, have not been so favourably disposed.

Accusations of Scriptural Tahríf ‘Falsification’ and Tabdîl ‘Alteration’

Accusations of tampering with biblical Scripture for polemical or selfish reasons were common within all varieties of Judaism and Christianity from the early centuries CE. Recent careful textual analysis suggests that biblical texts were somewhat malleable in Antiquity, even leaving room for the occasional ‘orthodox’ rewriting (‘corruption’) of Scripture (Ehrman 1993; Kannaday 2004: 5ff.). From pre-Christian times Jews accused their Samaritan neighbours and various Christian groups of tampering with sacred writ (Tov 2001: 80ff., 94–6, Lowry 1977). Justin Martyr (d. c.165 CE) objected to Jews who contested the veracity of the Greek (LXX) version of Isaiah 7:14, accusing them of ‘imprudent and selfish thinking’ (Hengel 2002: 29ff.). The second-century Christian ascetic Marcion of Sinope (d. c.160 CE) affirmed only the partial veracity of select letters within the ‘corrupted’ Pauline corpus and the Gospel of Luke and considered the Hebrew Bible the aberrant production of the false God of this world, not the benign ‘Father of Jesus Christ’.

Accusations along these lines are to be found in the Qur’an though the veracity of the whole Bible is not contested:

>a section of them [the Jews] heard the word of God and then, having understood, they deliberately falsified it (yuḥarrifina) (Q. 2:75b) . . . some among the Jews distort the words out of their context (yuḥarrifina). (Q. 4:46a)

Following a few qur’ânic verses primarily directed towards Jews (e.g. 2:75b; 4:46a; 5:13a; 5:41b, cf. 4:48, 5:16), and exaggerating and extrapolating for apologetic or polemical reasons, Muslim writers from early on in the evolution of Islam condemned both Jews and Christians for indulging in the tahríf ‘scriptural falsification’ or tabdîl ‘textual alteration’ of the biblical text. Dialogue has never recovered from such attacks despite the fact that the Qurʾān itself does not support radically negative views of biblical Scripture, as both learned Muslims and Western scholars have frequently pointed out (Montgomery Watt: 1991: 30; Ayoub 1986: 3). The qur’ânic use of the imperfect active form yuḥarrifina ‘they falsify’ does not support the post-qur’ânic theory of the corruption of the whole Bible, although belief in the tahríf (‘falsification’) of the Bible became widespread in the Muslim world. Muslim Bible study and quotation were outlawed or inhibited, and to this day Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue about the Bible remains difficult in the light of issues surrounding accusations of tahríf.

Insufficient attention has been given to those great Islamic thinkers who distinguished between tahríf al-naṣṣ ‘textual falsification’ and tahríf al-maʿnā ‘falsification of
meaning’ in Jewish and Christian Bible exegesis. Despite prejudices born of exaggerated notions of biblical tahrīf, there were a fair number of apologists, thinkers and philosophers, both Sunnī and Shīʿī, who cited the Bible with confidence and apologetic acumen. Aside from the Shīʿī historians al-Yaʿqūbī (d. c.905) and al-Masʿūdī (d. 956), who cited and gave weight to the integrity of biblical Scripture, a distinguished example is the Iranian (possibly Ismāʿīlī) thinker Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 1153), best known for his Kitāb al-milal waʾl-nihal ‘The Book of Religious and Philosophical Creeds’, which is recognized today as the first history of religion text in world literature (Wasserstrom 1997: 128). Aside from his positive view and knowledge of the Bible evident in his Kitāb al-milal, almost no attention has been paid to the prologue to his incomplete Persian Tafsīr work Maṣāḥīḥ al-āsrār wa maṣāḥīḥ al-ābrār ‘Keys of the Mysteries and Lamps of the Pious’. Therein, it is stated that despite some Jewish twisting of scriptural word(s) out of context (Q. 4:46), there existed a single recension (naskh) of the Tawrāt, representative of the alwāh ‘Tablets’ given to Moses and entrusted to the safekeeping of the sons of Aaron. The Tawrāt did not lose its status as an honourable expression of the ‘Word of God’ (kalām Allāh). This is clear from the qur’ānic reference to it as ‘a guidance and a light’ (Q.5:44a). The Injīl ‘Gospels’ are likewise the ‘Book of God’ (Kitāb Allāh) although existing in four differing recensions with innumerable differences deriving from their four authors. The extant Gospels are thus not wholly the ‘Word of God’ but contain portions of the true Gospel, just as the Qurʾān is not wholly present in the commentaries of the Islamic commentators. That there is waḥy (‘divine inspiration’) in the existing Gospels is also apparent from the Qurʾān which states that the Injīl confirms previous scripture (Q. 3:3, 50) (Shahrastanī 1997: 122–3).

Even the far-sighted and brilliant Muslim historian Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406), who pioneered the philosophy and sociology of history and is well known for his rejection of polemical views of biblical tahrīf, upholds the genuineness of the Bible with reference to Q. 5:43[7] and in view of a tradition handed down from Ibn ʿAbbās to the effect that a religious community is unable to wholly, materially corrupt their sacred book (Fischel 1958, 1967). In his famous, though still uncritically edited Muqaddimah (Prolegomenon), he argues for the authenticity of the Bible: ‘the statement concerning the alteration (of the Torah by the Jews) is unacceptable to thorough scholars and cannot be understood in its plain meaning’ (Muqaddimah, trans. Rosenthal 1: 20–1). Most Muslim editions of this work, including the very recent Beirut 2004 edition, omit the paragraph about the falsity of the Muslim accusation of biblical tahrīf (‘corruption’) though it is almost certainly authentic (cf. Lazarus-Yafeh 1992: 48).

In the nineteenth-century Muslim world there was a recrudescence of polemical, anti-biblical writing in response to evangelical Orientalism and Christian missionary propaganda. The widely distributed Orientalist, anti-Islamic Mīzān al-Ḥaqīq ‘The Balance of Truth’ by the German Protestant missionary Carl Gottlieb Pfander (1803–65), early published in Armenian (1831), Persian (1835) and Arabic (1865), sparked off many anti-biblical Muslim responses. The most famous of these, focused mainly on the issue of biblical tahrīf, was the Izhār al-ḥaqīq (The Manifestation of the Truth) of the learned Indian Shiʿī Muslim writer Raḥmat-Allāh ibn Khalīl al-ʿUthmānī al-Kairānawī [al-Hindi] (d. Mecca, 1891). Born out of a debate with Pfander held in
Agra (British India) in 1854, Kairānawī sought to underline the magnitude of biblical *talārīf* with a detailed critique of biblical texts. His work stands out as one which took some account of the ‘folly’ of ancient and mid-nineteenth-century ideas about the biblical text (Powell 1976: 53). It is based on now-dated Western biblical scholarship, including the massive *Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* by the English theologian and bibliographer Thomas Horne (1780–1862), and contains highly selective presentations of medieval Islamic anti-Bible materials. Kairānawī, for example, accurately records Horne’s denial of the Davidic authorship of the biblical Psalms and rejoices in Patristic and mid-nineteenth-century Western ‘confusion’ about the authorship of the *Zabūr* (Psalms) (Izhar, 1:138, referring to Horne 1828, 4: 102–3). The *Izḥār al-ḥaqq*, first published in two volumes in 1867 and then in subsequent translations into French (1888) and English (1989–90 and 2003), was an effective response and is still highly regarded in the biblically uneducated Muslim world. No detailed and up-to-date Western analysis of the contents of the *Izḥār al-ḥaqq* in the light of contemporary biblical scholarship seems to have been attempted. This and a fresh study of *talārīf* in the same light remain something of an academic and theological desideratum (Schirrmacher 1992).

Finally, in this connection mention should be made of the zealous evangelical missionary Henry Martyn (d. Tokat 1812) whose missionary propaganda precipitated more than a dozen Persian and Arabic treatises, several of which dwell upon biblical *talārīf*. Martyn not only translated the Hebrew Psalms and Greek New Testament into Persian, but his preaching and literary activities in and around Shiraz in 1811–12 led Shīʿī mullas and mujtahids to pen detailed treatises. Of these, several were published in nineteenth-century Iran and a few others were summarized by the Oxford Semitic scholar Samuel Lee (1783–1852), himself the author of a response to accusations of biblical *talārīf* (falsification) (Lee 1824). Other responses to Henry Martyn, which frequently exhibit a high level of biblical knowledge, include the leading mujtahid of Shiraz Mīrzā Ibrāhīm Fasāʾī, Mullā Aḥmad Naraqī (d. c.1829), and the Niʿmatallāhī Sufi Mullā Muhammad Rıḍāʾ Hamadānī (d. 1841) whose erudite writings raised *talārīf* issues in such great detail (Lee 1824: 161–450) that Samuel Lee was moved to write the above mentioned defence published in his *Controversial Tracts* (Lee 1824: 451–584).

Negative Islamic *talārīf* doctrines propagated from medieval times by Ibn ʿḤazm and others, inhibited Muslim Bible study and acted as a barrier to adequate awareness of Western biblical scholarship. Very few Muslim commentaries upon biblical texts exist, though notable exceptions include learned Persian Shīʿī scholars of the Safavid and Qajar periods including Sayyid Aḥmad ibn Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn al-ʿAlawī (d. c.1650), author of four volumes (ʿAlawi 1995; Corbin, EIr. 1: 644) and Muhammad Bāqir ibn Ismāʿīl Ḥusaynī Khāṭūnābādī, (d. 1715), who wrote a recently published Persian commentary upon the four Gospels, the *Tarjumah-yi anājīl-i arbaʿīh* (ed. Jaʿfariyan, 1996). A relative of his was involved in the biblical translation project of Nādir Shāh Afshār (r. 1688–1747) (Netzer, EIr. IV: 298).

Shīʿī-Shaykhī contributions generated by disciples of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥṣāʾī (d. 1826) and Sayyid Kāẓim Rashtī (d. 1843) to the debate with western evangelical Christianity, notably those of the polymathic and anti-Bābī third Shaykhī leader Karīm Khān Kirmānī (d. 1871) and his followers, have yet to be studied (Kirmānī, Nusrat).
But it can be confidently stated that it was the quasi-Shaykhī-rooted Bābī-Bahā’ī religions which successfully made the transition from Islamic Shi‘ism to biblically affirmative post-Islamic religiosity (Lambden 2002). Bahā’ī leaders and their zealous disciples embraced and made good use of the Bible in their attempt to convert their hearers, including missionaries and others who themselves had largely failed to make converts in the Muslim world.

Islamic Bible Citations

By about the middle of the eighth century, biblical quotations began to become numerous in a wide range of Islamic literatures. They may be loosely divided into five categories, none of which need be regarded as aberrant or ‘false’. First, the number of literal, accurate Bible citations increased markedly in the second and third centuries of the Islamic era, though it was not until the circulation of printed Arabic, Persian and Turkish Bibles from the sixteenth century CE, that segments of the literate Islamic world had direct access to the complete text of the Bible. Early examples of straightforward Arabic Bible citation, including verses from Genesis 1 and New Testament texts, are found for example in statements attributed to the (Twelver) Shi‘ī Imams, and certain of the writings of ‘Abd-Allāh Ibn Qutayba (d. 889), whose accurate knowledge of the New Testament is evidenced in his reference to three sets of fourteen generations (Heb. David = D + W + D = 4 + 6 + 4 = 14) separating Abraham and Jesus (K. al-Ma‘ārif, 34) in line with Matthew 1:17. An interesting juxtaposition of a literally conveyed biblical logion of Jesus, and an Islamo-biblical version is found in the Ḥilyat al-awliyā’ of Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī:

Jesus walked past a woman who said, ‘Happy, happy is the womb that carried you, and the breasts that suckled you’ (Luke 11:27–8). But Jesus [the proto-Muslim] said, ‘No, happy is the one who reads the Qur‘ān and keeps that which is written therein.’ (Ḥilyā IV: 119, trans. Tör Andrae [1947] 1987: 27)

Other examples are Matthew 6:21 (= Luke 12:34) cited, for example, by Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), Kitāb al-zuhd (The Book of Asceticism) and Ibn al-‘Arabī, al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya (The Meccan Disclosures) 2:812: Jesus said, ‘Place your treasures in heaven, for the heart of man is where his treasure is’ (cf. Khalidi 2001: 71). The negative form of the ‘golden rule’ ascribed to Jesus (Matt. 7:12/Luke 6:31; Matt. 5:39b/Luke 6:29) is cited by the sixth Shi‘ī Imam Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq (d. c.145/760): ‘Whatsoever you do not wish to be done to yourself, do not do the same to anyone else. And if anyone should strike you on the right cheek, then let him strike the left one also’ (cited Majlisī, Bihār 2 14:287).

A second category may be defined as interpretive, paraphrastic or extended citations containing elements of textual divergence or apologetic rewriting. Recreated citations of Deuteronomy 33:2 (‘The Lord came from Sinai’), for example, are found in numerous Islamic sources including the writings of ‘Alī al-Ṭabarī (fl. mid-ninth cent CE) and Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. 1051). The opening words are sometimes extensively rewritten to
avoid anthropomorphism, while other parts of this text are interpreted to express an Islamic view of salvation history fulfilled in Muhammad and Islam. A beautiful example appears in the Shi‘i prayer Du‘ā al-simā‘ (Supplication of the Signs) ascribed to Muhammad al-Baqi‘ (d. 126/743):

I beseech Thee, O my God! by Thy Glory through which Thou did converse with Thy servant and Thy messenger Moses son of ‘Imrān in the sanctified [Sinaitic] regions beyond the ken of the cherubim above the clouds of Light beyond the Ark of the Testament (al-tābi‘at al-shahāda) within the Pillars of Light: in Mount Sinai and Mount Horeb in the sanctified vale in the blessed spot in the direction of the Mount [Sinai] situated at the right-hand side of the [Sinaitic] Bush [Tree]. (cited al-Kafāmī, al-Misbaḥ., 561)

Another example is the interpretive citation of John 16:7f. as a messianic prediction of the advent of Muhammad as the Fāraqlíṭ (Paraclete = ‘Comforter’) who will communicate all mysteries:

The Son of Man (Ibn al-bashar) [= Jesus] is going and Fāraqlíṭ (Paraclete) [= Muhammad] will come after him. He will communicate the secrets unto you and expound all things. He will bear witness unto me just as I have borne witness unto him. I, verily, have come unto you with parables but he will come unto you with [clear] exegesis (bi‘l-tawīl). (Majlīsī, Ḥaqq al-yaqīn, cited al-Abṣā‘ī, al-Kashkūl, mss, 2: 538–9)

A third category contains citations exhibiting significant textual ‘rewriting’ and interpretation, particularly to highlight cases of scriptural fulfilment in Muhammad and Islamic history. Expansions or conflations of Isaiah 42:1f. are cited by several authors in this way as intimations of the person of Muhammad in the Tawrāt (Torah = Hebrew Bible). Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī’s (d. 870) provides a good example:

He [God] said in the Tawrāt, ’O thou Prophet! We assuredly sent you as a witness, a herald of good-tidings (mubashshir) and a protector of those [Arab] unlettered ones. You are my Servant and my messenger (cf. Isa. 42:1). I have named you al-Mutawakkil (‘The Trusting [in God]’), one neither given to hard-heartedness nor crudity: not shouting out in the streets (cf. Isa. 42:2a–3). He will not requite evil for evil, but shall pardon and forgive. God will never withhold his grasp upon him until through him he straightens a twisted [Arab] community such that they exclaim ‘There is no God but God’, thereby opening the eyes of the blind, the ears of the deaf and the uncircumcised [hardened] hearts (cf. Isa. 42:6–7). (Bukhārī, Sahīh, Kitab al-tafsīr on Q. 48:8)

Another example is the rewritten, Islamo-biblical form of the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ (Matt. 6:10–13; Luke 11:3–5) attributed to Muhammad as found in the Sunan of Abū Dāwūd al-Sijistānī (d. 888):

Our Lord God, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name; Thy kingdom [is] in heaven and on earth; as Thy mercy is in heaven, so show Thy mercy on earth; forgive us our debts and our sins. Thou art the Lord of the good; send down mercy from Thy mercy and healing from Thy healing on this pain, that it may be healed. (Abū Dawud, Sunan I, cited in Goldziher, trans. Stern 1971 (Muslim Studies) II: 350)
There is a tradition that, just prior to this prayer, Muhammad said that ‘if anyone suffers or his brother suffers’ he should recite it (ibid.).

A fourth category consists of Islamo-biblical texts which echo, conflate and/or transcend biblical text(s) in expressing a distinctly Islamic perspective with minimal or unclear biblical precedent. To this category belong certain Islamic Merkabah (‘Throne mysticism’) and related texts (cf. Q. 2:255), found in Tafsır works and mystical literature, and rooted in Ezekiel 1:1ff. and Revelation 4:6b–9. The possibly Zaydi (Shi‘i) commentator Muqātil b. Sulaymān al-Khurāsānī (d. Basra, 767) relays the following tradition from Wahb ibn Munabbih via the ahl al-kitāb (‘possessors of scripture’):

Four angels bear the [divine] Throne [Seat] (kursi), every angel having four faces. Their legs are situated beneath the [foundational] Rock which lies beneath the lowest earth extending [for the distance of] a 500-year journey; and between all [of the seven] earth[s] is a 500-year journey! (1) [There is] an angel whose face has the appearance of a man [human form] which is the archetype of forms. Of God he requests sustenance for the progeny of Adam. (2) [There is] an angel whose face has the appearance of the exemplar of cattle which is the Ox. Of God he requests sustenance for the cattle [animals]. (3) [There is] an angel whose face has the appearance of the exemplar of the birds which is the Eagle [Vulture]. Of God he requests sustenance for the birds. (4) [There is] an angel whose face has the appearance of the exemplar of beasts of prey which is the Lion. Of God he requests sustenance for the beasts of prey. (Muqātil, Tafsir I: 213 on Q. 2:255b cf. V:222)

The Qur’ānic image of the celestial Throne of God was of central cosmological and mystical importance as evidenced by the Qur’ānic ‘Throne verse’ (Q. 2:255). This text was given a variety of symbolic and esoteric interpretations by the twelver Imāms and by numerous Sufi and other exponents of the ‘uluṁ al-ghayb (Islamic esoterica). While Ezekiel 1:10 mentions ‘the four faces of the four creatures which he visioned’, the Ezekiel Targum understands this to signify four multi-faceted faces ($4 \times 16$) equalling 64 faces. The above tradition reflects such traditions.

A final category would include Islamic pseudepigraphical texts and writings (sometimes) with biblical-Qur’ānic ascription but often exhibiting little or no concrete biblical basis or substrate. Examples of this category are the many pseudepigraphical texts ascribed to Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Daniel and others including, for example, the šuluf (sing. saḥifa) ‘scriptural leaves’ attributed to Idrīs, i.e. Enoch. These are paraphrased and set out in the Sa‘d al-su‘ūd li‘l-nufūs maḥdūd (‘The Felicity of Good Fortune for Blanketed Souls’) of Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 1226) and the Biḥar al-anwār (Oceans of Lights) of Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (d. 1699/1700) which cites no less than 29 titled, pre-Islamic pericopes ascribed to Idrīs–Enoch (Biḥar², vol. 95: 453–72; cf. 11: 269).

There are also Islamicate recreations or versions of the Zabūr or Mazamir (Psalms) and the Book of Daniel such as the Kitāb al-malāḥīm li Dāniyāl (The Book of the Conflagration of Daniel) existing in a number of Shi‘ī recensions. According to one of these, knowledge of the cryptic predictions in the Mālḥamat Dāniyāl enabled the Sunni Caliphs Abū Bakr and ‘Umar to gain successorship after the passing of Muhammad (Fodor 1974: 85ff.; Kohlberg 1992: 143). Then there are the extra-Qur’ānic ‘divine sayings’ (ḥadīth qudsī) attributed to biblical figures as transmitted by the Prophet Muhammad
or the Shi’i Imams. These include a great deal of Islamo-biblical material, even whole pseudepigraphical books. According to some traditions the Prophet and the Imams were heir to pure forms of pre-Islamic sacred writ either orally or through secret and guarded channels. The well-known Sufi theological disclosure which commences, ‘I [God] was a hidden treasure’ is believed to have been revealed to the biblical-qur’anic David, while the following remarkable prayer for blessings upon all the prophets is attributed to his mother:


This prophetological supplication is among very many devotional pieces which are attributed to pre-Islamic figures in Shi’i literature. It lists over 40 messengers and related figures, in a loose and sometimes eccentric chronological order, and perhaps suggests Islamic devotion to some Israelite and related prophets, largely unmentioned in the Qur’ān.

These apologetic and interpretive Islamo-biblical citations which translate and make the biblical Hebrew text meaningful for succeeding generations, are in that sense no more ‘false’ than Jewish or Christian pseudepigraphical writings, recreations and re-translations of biblical texts. Islamic works in this category were considered important enough to be ascribed to such past sages and prophet figures as Adam, Enoch, Hermes, Moses, Solomon, Daniel, Jesus and others. Other examples include a proto-qur’anic Munajāt Mūsā (‘Supplications of Moses’), Islamic recreations of the Zabūr of David sometimes reflecting the biblical Psalms (Schippers, ‘Psalms’ E-Q 4:314–18) and even an Islamic Tawrāt (‘Torah’) divided, like the Qur’ān, into sūrāhs! These Islamo-biblical recreations with the many texts in Islamic sources ascribed to pre-Islamic scripture can be viewed as the fruits of a creative scriptural symbiosis among diverse ‘people of the Book’, and need not be dismissively or derisively ignored as a pseudo-biblical phenomenon.

Though genuine manuscripts representative of early Arabic Bible translations are few, Islamic pseudepigraphical texts and writings are numerous. Some Muslims claim to have rediscovered or creatively invented allegedly ‘genuine’ texts or portions of the Tawrāt (Pentateuch) of Moses, the Zabūr (‘Psalter’) of David, the original Injīl (Gospel) of Jesus as well as other books ascribed to pre-Islamic prophets. A modern example is the so-called ‘Gospel of Barnabas’. This is a work of 222 chapters (200+ pages) ascribed
to a Christian companion of Paul originally named Joses then Barnabas (fl. first century CE, Acts 4:36, chapters 11–15), but it is essentially a sixteenth-century Islamic-created Gospel harmony, extant in only a few sixteenth–seventeenth-century mss of Spanish and Italian Morisco (Crypto-Muslim) provenance. It has been frequently reprinted and translated in the Muslim world (Arabic, 1908; Urdu, 1916, etc.) from the 1907 English translation of Lonsdale and Laura Ragg, though without their critical introduction in which it was exposed as a medieval ‘forgery’. Muhammad is mentioned by name in the ‘Gospel of Barnabas’ and many Muslims today view this as the only remaining authentic Gospel despite the fact that western scholarship has for long remained unconvinced of its veracity (Ragg 1907; Sox 1984; Slomp http://www.chrlages.de/barnarom.htm). A massive literature now surrounds the debate over this and related issues of scriptural preservation, transmission, falsification and veracity. Abrahamic religionists have long accused each other of tampering with sacred writ and of misquoting established scripture to suit selfish or polemical purposes.

The Bible, Islamo-biblica and Isrā‘iliyyāt (‘Israelitica’)

By the tenth to eleventh centuries CE many, though by no means, all Muslims came to regard the Bible as largely or wholly ‘corrupted’. They repeated versions of a tradition banning qur’ānic-Islamic exposition through biblically related traditions known as Isrā‘iliyyāt (‘Israelitica’), and played down prophetic traditions which advocated the opposite. The Arabic plural isrā‘iliyyāt ‘Israelitica’ is derived from the biblical and qur’ānic figure Israel, also known as Jacob, father of the twelve tribes (Gen. 32:28, 35:10; cf. Qur’ān 3:87, etc.). In use from the early Islamic centuries in Tafsīr (qur’ānic exegesis) and other oral and literary connections (Khoury 1972: 227ff.; EI 2 XI: 34a), the term is indicative of data and traditions thought to have been transmitted by or derived from the Jews or ‘children of Israel’ (banī Isrā‘il), although its uses in a multitude of ancient and modern Islamic sources presuppose that Isrā‘iliyyāt material can indicate a very wide range of Abrahamic-Israelite, biblical and associated scripture and tradition. Early on, this type of material was communicated by such Muslim believers and converts as ‘Abd-Allah ibn ‘Abbas, the Father of Islamic Tafsīr, Rabbi of the Arabs and cousin of the Prophet (d. c.687), and Abu ‘Abd Allāh Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. c.728) perhaps the most important Muslim transmitter of Isrā‘iliyyāt.

The term Isrā‘iliyyāt initially had purely descriptive and neutral connotations (Adang 1996: 9, n. 49), but in some circles in later centuries it came to be used pejoratively though this negative use of Isrā‘iliyyāt was not and never has been adopted universally in the Muslim world. Isrā‘iliyyāt can indicate the biblical heritage and related Islamo-biblical materials transmitted in a wide range of Islamic literatures often by Jewish converts to Islam. A wide-ranging trajectory of 20 or more key categories of Islamic literatures rich in Isrā‘iliyyāt traditions containing biblical and/or Islamo-biblical materials could today be confidently set down (cf. Lambden 2002 and forthcoming). This massive, symbiotic Islamic heritage bears eloquent testimony to the creative Islamic engagement, occasional remythologization and exegesis-eisegesis of Abrahamic and related scripture and tradition.
Without attempting a full overview, Islamic literatures containing Israʾiliyyāt would include Islamic pseudepigraphical texts and biblically ascribed writings of the kind mentioned below (Sadan 1986). Significant in this respect are numerous Tafsīr (exegetical) and related literatures of Qurʾān commentary along with works of exegesis-eisegesis and hermeneutics (Newby 1979). In addition to Ḥadīth compendia of prophetic and other authoritative traditions where multitudes of Israʾiliyyāt-related texts can be found, such materials are likewise fundamental to many Qīṣāṣ al-ʾanbiyyāʾ (Stories of the Prophets) and related literatures such as works of Mubtadaʾ (Beginnings), Awāʾil (Originations) and Muʾannah (the ‘Long-Lived’). Works associated with Nubuwwa (‘Prophetology’) such as the Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa (‘Proofs of Prophethood’) texts as well as volumes of Islamic Sīrah (‘Biography’) and Tārikh (History writing) often exhibit considerable biblical influence and the presence of Islamo-biblic or modes of Israʾiliyyāt. Sufi and related literatures such as Persian poetry also contain thousands of biblical, Islamo-biblical and Israʾiliyyāt motifs, texts and narratives as do Islamic adab (belles lettres) works, Wisdom literatures and those associated with religious disputation, dialogue and world religions. Finally, but not exhaustively, mention should be made of Islamic devotional literatures and works representative of messianism and apocalyptic eschatology which often contain a good deal that is biblically related or Israʾiliyyāt informed.

Writings and literary remnants of emergent Islam and diverse orthodox-heterodox factions which proliferated throughout Islamic history, including Imamī Shiʿism (Wasserstrom, bib. Modarressi 2003), various ghulāt (‘extremist’) groups, Zaydism and (proto-)Ismāʿīlism, are replete with echoes of biblical and Israʾiliyyāt traditions. So too are many of the little-studied literatures representative of the ‘uluṣ al-ghayb (Islamic esoterica), including Jafr (gematric divination), Sihr (varieties of Magic), Kimiyāʾ (Alchemy) and dream-vision interpretation.

Only a few specific further examples of Islamo-biblica or Israʾiliyyāt can be spelled out here which illustrate that widespread Muslim notions of taḥrīf failed to eclipse the wonderfully creative Islamic reaffirmation of the pre-Islamic scriptural heritage of humankind. Biblical and extra-biblically generated ideas, texts and motifs remained very much alive in the Islamic intertextual universe of discourse. A probable example of Israʾiliyyāt is found in the occurrence of the Arabic loan word H-W-R-Q-L-Y-A (pointing uncertain as hurqalyāʾ or havaqalyāʾ) in the Ḥikmat al-iskrāq of Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī (d. 1191) when understood as originating from a somewhat garbled Arabic rendering of the Hebrew הַרְאִיק הַרְאִיק (ha-raqiʿa (= AV ‘the firmament’, Gen. 1:5–7, etc.), interpreted as a cosmogonic and mystical interworld. Another Shiʿī example would be the Arabic ‘I am’ type logion as translating ἐγώ ἐμέ... ἡ ἀληθεία (‘I am the Truth’) allegedly uttered by Imam ʿAlī (d. 40/661) in his arcane and possibly ghulūw (‘extremist’) Khutba al-ṭutunjiyya (‘Sermon of the Gulf’) (cited al-Bursī, Mashariq: 176).

Conclusion

This survey of the relationship between Islam and the Bible has in no way been motivated by an orientalist-type attempt to source-critically account for Islamic doctrines
and perspectives by dismissively registering their biblical roots or origins. The Islamic assimilation of the Bible in no way devalues the creative genius of Islam and its founder prophet. Sadly, the post-qur’ānic assertion of the total loss or textual falsification of the Jewish and Christian Bible is without doubt the greatest barrier to dialogue and mutual appreciation among Abrahamic religionists or ‘peoples of the Book’. Along with those Safavid works relating to biblical texts which have been mentioned above, the two mid-nineteenth-century volumes comprising The Mohomedan Commentary on the Holy Bible (1862, 1865) by the Indian Muslim modernist Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan (d. 1898) remain virtually unique. Modern Muslim engagement with the Bible and biblical scholarship largely awaits balanced and unprejudiced realization. This is hardly surprising given the orientalist venom which pollutes much pre-modern evangelical and missionary discourse and the volume of triumphalist, ill-informed, sometimes anti-Semitic and anti-biblical-Isra‘īliyyāt propaganda which blackens the face of Islam. Hopefully the rise of a globally less prejudiced scholarship and an increasing awareness of the religious interdependence of all humanity, will remain fundamental and ultimately succeed.

References


