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# Solomon and Mythic Kingship in the Arab-Islamic Tradition: Qaṣīdah, Qurʾān and Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ

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## Abstract

This article contrasts techniques from non-narrative, poetic and Qurʾānic texts with the narratives of Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ (the Stories of the Prophets) in order to interpret passages on Sulaymān/Solomon in pre- and early Arab-Islamic texts. Beginning with the renowned non-narrative Sulaymān passage in the pre-Islamic poet al-Nābighah al-Dhubaynī's ode of apology to the Lakhmid king al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir and several Qurʾānic passages concerning Sulaymān, the article compares these to the eminently narrative prose renditions of Solomonic legend that appear in Qurʾānic commentary and the (related) popular Stories of the Prophets (Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ). I argue that verbal structures and rhetorical techniques characteristic of non-narrative forms such as poetry and the Qurʾān have the effect of preserving and stabilizing the essential panegyric (poetic) or salvific (Qurʾānic) message in a manner that the constantly mutating popular narrative forms neither strive for nor achieve.

## Keywords

Bilqīs – al-Nābighah al-Dhubaynī – narrative, prophethood – *al-anbiyāʾ* – Queen of Sheba – Qurʾān – Solomon – transgression and redemption

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Translations from the Arabic are mine except where otherwise noted.

## Introduction

Together with the Qurʾān, the classical Arabic ode (*qaṣīdah*) forms the literary cultural foundation of Arab-Islamic civilization. Rooted in the pre-Islamic and, ultimately, the ancient Near East, the earliest extant *qaṣīdahs* have been dated to the century or so before the mission of the Prophet Muḥammad (ca. 570-632 CE), i.e., from around the sixth century CE, and the genre continued as a generative literary form through the 1940s. Taking as my focus the passage on Solomon (in Arabic, Sulaymān) from an ode by the renowned pre-Islamic panegyrist al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī (active 570-600 CE), I will discuss the poetic and rhetorical processes by which the Arab poet establishes an identification or “mythic concordance” between the prototypical ancient Near Eastern (Semitic) magician-king, Solomon, and the poet’s concrete, contemporary royal Arab patron. At the same time, I will examine the manner in which the ode became the preeminent vehicle for encoding and transmitting the ideology of Islamic hegemony and the foremost insignia of Islamic political legitimacy and authority. This interpretation, in turn, reveals the ceremonial and political function of the *qaṣīdah* as a documentary ritual of allegiance. The study then engages some of the Qurʾānic passages and ancillary Arabic scholarship found in Qurʾānic commentary alongside the popular narratives of the Stories of the Prophets, as well as the cognate Biblical and Midrashic materials, to discuss the rhetorical strategies that determine the condensed and non-narrative discourses of the *qaṣīdah* and the Qurʾān, as opposed to the expansive narrative forms of Qurʾānic commentary and the popular Stories of the Prophets.

To discuss Solomonic legend is much like letting a jinni let out of the bottle, so that to present an argument of consequence within the limitations of a scholarly article is therefore an attempt to force it back inside. I will therefore broadly summarize much of the background and ancillary material so as to allow for a close interpretation of the key texts under discussion.

Semitic (Jewish or Judaeo-Christian) antecedents or cognates of the Islamic Solomonic legends are found in the Bible, Targum, Midrash, and Aggadah in general, and reveal as well, over their course of development, substantial and formative Persian influence, especially from the legends of the great Persian mythic hero-king Jamsheed. Solomonic legend is part of a vast, ever-evolving, and primarily oral mythic-folkloric corpus, part of the general shared cultural patrimony of the Near East, of which the passages preserved textually in religious or literary materials form only a small portion. These legends tell of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: he is the commander of demons and jinn, the builder of the Temple in Jerusalem, the possessor of a magnificent throne and magical seal or signet ring, the ruler of the wind, and the subduer of the

Queen of Sheba; he knew the language of birds and was proverbial for his wisdom and justice and for his prodigious sexual potency with his 300 wives and 700 concubines, and so on.<sup>1</sup> The Solomonic stories generally take a popular oral narrative form of which we find the most authentic reflection, in my opinion, in the Jewish Aggadah and the Islamic Stories of the Prophets. In other words, regardless of the existence (or not) of a historical Solomon, and setting aside the traditional privileging of religious canonical scripture and other at least vaguely datable literary texts, it is my contention that the genuine Solomon, in broader cultural terms, is the Solomon of the popular mythic imagination, and that his appearance in texts represents, above all, the cooptation of that figure for ideological, religious, or political purposes.

Studies of the genesis of Islamic political thought have routinely neglected or denied the formative role of pre-Islamic poetic and popular legendary materials in Islamic concepts of rule. In this respect, Aziz Al-Azmeh's *Muslim Kingship* is typical in its lack of awareness of the political role of the *qaṣīdah* as well as in its premise of excluding what the author terms "Judaic kingship." Of the latter he writes:

Similarly, ancient Judaic kingship, though geographically and historically proximate, has been excluded because it was a local and tribal phenomenon which, unlike other traditions discussed here, had no aspirations to religio-imperial universalism. It is clear from recent scholarship that ancient Israelite history is a field for which extravagant claims have been made and whose scholarship is overloaded with theological and political purposes as well as an unfounded imputation of coherence to biblical chronology and narrative, often in clear contradiction to archeological evidence. In addition, post-Exilic constructions of the past, which were influenced by Assyrian and Persian materials, tend to re-insert the topic into the broader bearings of the political and theologico-political culture of an area in which parts of Palestine did not play a central, still less a foundational, role.<sup>2</sup>

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1 For a concise summary of the Qur'ānic, and then legendary, lore on Solomon in the Islamic tradition, plus bibliography, see J. Walker and P. Fenton, "Sulaymān b. Dāwūd," *Encyclopaedia of Islam, New Edition* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960-2004). Hereafter: *EI2*.

For similar coverage of Jewish materials see especially the sections on Solomon in the Bible and Aggadah, in Samuel Abramsky, et al., "Solomon," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 2nd ed., vol. 18 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 755-763. See further sources in the notes of Part II, below.

2 Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian, and Pagan Polities* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1997), x-xi.

While not attempting to address the issue of a historical Solomon, I hope to demonstrate that the ideas of mythic kingship as personified in Solomonic legend, and pre-Islamic poetic references to them, are formative to and informative of the political and religious conceptualizations of Arab-Islamic rule.

The specifically Arabic-Islamic materials that I will consider in this study themselves take a number of forms: 1) the brief poetic passage evoking the Solomonic model of kingship in a pre-Islamic ode of praise and apology by the renowned panegyrist al-Nābighah al-Dhubayānī; 2) two of the main Qur'ānic passages that deal with Sulaymān the (proto-)Islamic prophet and king (Sūrat Ṣād 38:30-40 and Sūrat al-Naml 27:15-44); and 3) some of the Islamic narrative versions of Solomonic legend from the Stories of the Prophets that relate to those Qur'ānic passages. While I agree that the oft-noted “disjointedness,” “absence of sustained narrative,” and highly “elliptical” modes of expression that characterize both the classical Arabic poetic and Qur'ānic passages on Solomon (and similar subjects) indicate that the intended audience already knew a fuller narrative version,<sup>3</sup> in the present study I seek to demonstrate that these texts employ coherent and effective non-narrative rhetorical strategies (“poetics”) that confer upon them a stability and focus on message that largely elude the constantly shifting and evolving narrative forms.

### Part 1: Solomon and Pre-Islamic Kingship in al-Nābighah's *Dāliyyah*

In the pre-Islamic Arabic poetic tradition, Sulaymān, the proto-typical ancient Near Eastern magician monarch, makes an appearance in lines 21-26 of the celebrated *qaṣīdah* rhymed in *dāl* of the pre-Islamic panegyrist al-Nābighah al-Dhubayānī. Of particular note in al-Nābighah's poem is the condensed, non-narrative form in which he merely invokes, rather than retells, the legend of Solomon, and how this brief encapsulation of the myth is subordinated to the poet's overarching rhetorical strategy. To understand the poet's techniques and strategies, we will first have to place the passage within the poetic structure of the ode and within the anecdotal framework that the Arabic literary tradition provides.<sup>4</sup> In terms of the latter, it is important to keep in mind that these

3 See, for example, the remarks of Jacob Lassner and Jamal Elias on the Qur'ānic accounts of the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, cited and discussed in Part II.

4 For the full text, translation, and interpretation of al-Nābighah's *Dāliyyah* and his description of al-Mutajarridah in the context of classical Arabic literary lore, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, “Transgression and Redemption: Cuckolding the King: Al-Nābighah al-Dhubayānī and the Pre-Islamic Royal Ode,” in *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy: Myth, Gender, and Ceremony in the Classical Arabic Ode* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 1-47.

narratives do not provide verifiable historical evidence of the poem's original circumstances, but rather a literary (re)construction that serves interpretative and evaluative functions.

The classical Arabic-Islamic notices concerning al-Nābighah's career as a court panegyrist to the courts of the two Arab dynasties of the sixth century CE—the Lakhmids and their rivals the Ghassānids—all point, according to Albert Arazi, to a period of poetic activity from 570–600 CE.<sup>5</sup> The poem at hand is a poem of apology or excuse (*i'tidhāriyyah*) by means of which the poet attempted—successfully, it appears—to reinstate himself in the good graces of his erstwhile patron, King al-Nu'mān ibn al-Mundhir (Nu'mān III) (r. 580–602). Al-Nu'mān was the last of the line of the Arab dynasty of the Lakhmids of al-Ḥīrah in Iraq, who were staunch Jacobite Christians and vassals of the great Persian dynasty of the day, the Sasanians.<sup>6</sup>

The occasion for the fall from grace of al-Nu'mān's poet-laureate and companion (*nadīm*) is variously reported in the classical literary compendia. The most colorful version, among those found in the *Kitāb al-aghānī* (Book of Songs) of Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī (d. 356 h./967 CE), relates the reason for al-Nābighah's flight from al-Nu'mān's court as follows:

Al-Nābighah was sitting together with the poet al-Munakhkhal al-Yashkurī before al-Nu'mān. Al-Nu'mān was misshapen, leprous, and ugly, whereas al-Munakhkhal was one of the comeliest of the Arabs. He had caught the eye of al-Nu'mān's wife, the beautiful al-Mutajarridah, which fed rumors among the Arabs that al-Nu'mān's two sons were actually fathered by al-Munakhkhal. Al-Nu'mān asked al-Nābighah to describe al-Mutajarridah in his poetry, so the poet composed and recited his *qaṣīdah* in which he described her abdomen, her buttocks, and her private parts. This so stirred the jealousy of al-Munakhkhal that he said to al-Nu'mān that only someone who had experienced al-Mutajarridah's charms first hand could have composed such a poem. Al-Nu'mān was convinced this was true. Fearing the wrath of the outraged husband, al-Nābighah fled and took refuge at the rival court of the Ghassānids, vassals of the Byzantines.<sup>7</sup>

Sometime later al-Nābighah returned to the Lakhmid court under the protection of two tribesmen of the Lakhmid-allied Banū Fazār, fully aware that Arab mores dictated that al-Nu'mān could not outrage these guests by harming their protégé. When al-Nābighah's poem of apology, the *Dāliyyah*, is recited

5 A. Arazi, "al-Nābighah al-Dhubayānī," *EI2*.

6 Irfan Shahid, "Lakhmids," *EI2*.

7 Abū al-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, ed. Ibrāhīm al-Abyārī, 32 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Sha'b, 1969–1979), 11:3800.

to al-Nu'mān, he is so taken with it that he reinstates the poet and, for good measure, rewards him with one hundred fine camels of the royal Ḥīran breed.<sup>8</sup>

Given the poet's precarious situation, the performative goal of the apology-poem—to reestablish relations between al-Nābighah and al-Nu'mān and to negotiate the poet's reentry into the Lakhmid court—determines the poet's rhetorical strategy. In this respect the poet's prestation of the *qaṣīdah* and the king's counter-prestation of one hundred camels constitute a rite of (re)incorporation, one that we can interpret in light of Marcel Mauss's formulation of ritual exchange.<sup>9</sup> This negotiation for reentry into the king's court is initiated by the outcast poet performing a ritual that comprises submission and supplication, a declaration of allegiance, and the prestation of a gift—the poem itself. The patron, for his part, is engaged or entrapped in a ritual exchange that obligates him to accept and reciprocate the poet's proffered gift with a counter-gift (absolution, reinstatement, 100 purebred camels)—or face opprobrium. The patron's acceptance of the poet's request and his proffered praise at the same time enacts or embodies, and thereby confirms, the virtues attributed to him therein. The underlying pattern is that of transgression and redemption.

The poem itself boasts a classic, indeed paradigmatic, Arabic panegyric structure:<sup>10</sup> it opens with the topos of the ruined abode that bespeaks the breach in the relations between the poet and his erstwhile royal patron, transitions next to the perilous journey-to-the-patron episode in which the poet's mount, the she-camel, is likened in its fortitude and resolve to an oryx bull that fends off a hunter's hounds, conveying a sense of the poet's resolute yet perilous return to the Lakhmid fold. What follows is the poet's praise of his patron:

8 Ibid., 11:3814.

9 On the presentation of the Arabic panegyric ode and the patron's counter-prestation of the prize of a reward (*jā'izah*) in terms of Marcel Mauss's formulation of gift exchange, see Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, "Pre-Islamic Panegyric and the Poetics of Redemption, *Mufaḍḍaliyyah* 119 of 'Alqamah and *Bānat Su'ād* of Ka'b ibn Zuhayr," in Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, ed., *Reorientations: Arabic and Persian Poetry* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 1-57; and S. Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, passim. See also Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967) (*Essai sur le don, forme archaïque de l'échange*, 1925).

10 As I have discussed at length elsewhere, I reject, on the one hand, Arazi's description of al-Nābighah's *i'tidhāriyyāt* (poems of apology) as "hybrid pieces containing a combination of excuses and panegyric" (Arazi, "Al-Nābigha al-Dhubayānī") and, on the other, Wahb Rūmiyyah's contention that the *i'tidhāriyyah* constitutes a generic category distinct from the *qaṣīdat al-madhī* (panegyric ode) [Wahb Rūmiyyah, *Qaṣīdat al-madhī ḥattā nihāyat al-'aṣr al-umawī: bayn al-uṣūl wa-al-iḥyā' wa-al-tajdid* (Damascus: Manshūrāt Wizārat al-Thaqāfah wa-al-Irshād al-Qawmī, 1981), 19-21; 49; 168-169]. See S. Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, ch. 1 and passim.

## قال النابغة الذبياني

فَصَلًّا عَلَى النَّاسِ فِي الْأَدْنَىٰ وَفِي الْبَعْدِ	٢٠	فَتَلْغِي تَبْلُغِي التُّعْمَانَ إِنَّ لَهُ
وَلَا أَحَاشِي مِنَ الْأَقْوَامِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ	٢١	وَلَا أَرَىٰ فَاعِلًا فِي النَّاسِ يُشْبِهُهُ
قُمْ فِي الْبَرِيَّةِ فَاحْدُدْهَا عَنِ الْفَنَدِ	٢٢	إِلَّا سُلَيْمَانَ إِذْ قَالَ الْإِلَٰهُ لَهُ
يَبْنُونَ تَدْمُرَ بِالصُّقَّاحِ وَالْعَمَدِ	٢٣	وَخَيْسِ الْجِنِّ إِنِّي قَدْ أَذِنْتُ لَهُمْ
كَمَا أَطَاعَكَ وَادَّلَهُ عَلَى الرَّشَدِ	٢٤	فَمَنْ أَطَاعَكَ فَانْفَعُهُ بِطَاعَتِهِ
تَنْهَى الظُّلُومَ وَلَا تَقْعُدُ عَلَى ضَمَدٍ	٢٥	وَمَنْ عَصَاكَ فَعَاقِبْهُ مُعَاقِبَةً
سَبَقَ الْجَوَادِ إِذَا اسْتَوْلَىٰ عَلَى الْأَمَدِ	٢٦	إِلَّا لِمِثْلِكَ أَوْ مَنْ أَنْتَ سَابِقُهُ
مِنَ الْمَوَاهِبِ لَا تُعْطَىٰ عَلَى نَكَدِ	٢٧	أَعْطَىٰ لِفَارِهِةٍ حُلُومٍ تَوَابِعُهَا
سَعْدَانُ تُوضِحُ فِي أَوْبَارِهَا اللَّبَدِ	٢٨	الْوَاهِبُ الْمَائَةَ الْمِعْكَاءَ رَيْبِهَا
مَشْدُودَةٌ بِرِحَالِ الْحَيْرَةِ الْجُدُدِ	٢٩	وَالْأُدْمَ قَدْ خُيِّسَتْ فِتْلًا مَرَاغِقُهَا
بَرْدُ الْهَوَاجِرِ كَالغِرْلَانِ بِالْجَرْدِ	٣٠	وَالرَّأَكِضَاتِ ذُبُولِ الرِّيطِ فَانْقَهَا
كَالطَّيْرِ تَنْجُو مِنَ الشُّبُوبِ ذِي الْبَرْدِ	٣١	وَالْحَيْلِ تَمْرَعُ غَرْبًا فِي أَعْتَبِهَا
إِلَى حَمَامٍ شِرَاعٍ وَارِدِ التَّمَدِ	٣٢	أَحْكُمُ حَكْمَ فِتَاةِ الْحَيِّ إِذْ نَظَرْتُ

20. Such a she-camel  
conveys me to Nu'mān,  
Whose beneficence to mankind, both kin and foreigner,  
is unsurpassed.
21. I see no one among the people  
who resembles him,  
And I make no exception  
from among the tribes,
22. Except for Sulaymān,  
when God said to him:  
"Take charge of my creatures  
and restrain them from sin.
23. "And subdue the Jinn,  
for I have allowed them  
To build Tadmur  
with stone slabs and [lofty] columns.

24. "Then whoever obeys you,  
reward his obedience  
In due measure and guide him  
on righteousness' path.
25. "And whoever defies you,  
chastise him with a chastisement  
That will deter the evil-doer.  
But don't persist in anger,
26. "Except with one who is your equal  
or whom you outstrip  
Only as a winning steed outstrips  
the runner-up."
27. [I see no one] more generous  
in bestowing a gift  
Followed by more gifts and sweeter,  
ungrudgingly given.
28. The giver of a hundred  
bulky she-camels,  
Fattened on the Sa'dān plants of Tūḍiḥ,  
with thick and matted fur,
29. And white camels, already broken in,  
wide-kneed,  
On which fine new Ḥīran saddles  
have been strapped,
30. And slave-girls kicking up the trains  
of long white veils,  
Pampered by cool shade in midday heat,  
lovely as gazelles,
31. And steeds that gallop briskly  
in their reins  
Like a flock of birds fleeing  
a cloudburst with hail.
32. Judge with perspicacity  
like the girl of the tribe:  
When she looked at a flock of doves  
hastening to drink at a dried-up puddle.<sup>11</sup>

11 For the text and translation, I have followed the recension of al-Aṣma'ī and commentary of al-Shantamarī in Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm, ed., *Diwān al-Nābighah al-Dhubyanī*, 3rd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1990), 14-28; and I have consulted the text and commentary



The introduction of Sulaymān into the poem at once condenses a body of ancient lore and myth and brings it to bear upon the patron, al-Nu‘mān. The comparison with Sulaymān is a guarantee of legitimacy that comprises both religious and mythic components. It has the effect of establishing a “mythic concordance” (Paul Connerton’s term)<sup>12</sup> or identification of al-Nu‘mān with Sulaymān. The logic here is that if the king behaves as Sulaymān did, then he, too, is a legitimate monarch in accordance with divine precepts of rule, as prescribed by God himself in lines 22-26.

The poetic passage encapsulates or enacts a four-part model of kingship: divine appointment [“God said to him, “Take charge of my creatures” (line 22)], cosmic power [“subdue the Jinn” (line 23)], the enactment of justice through rewarding obedience and punishing defiance (lines 24-25), and finally forbearance, the virtue celebrated by Arab culture in both the Jāhiliyyah period and later articulated in Islam as *ḥilm* (lines 25-26). The admonition to desist from anger alludes to a major theme of kingship that is more explicitly spelled out in the Biblical, popular, and Qur’ānic treatments of Solomon: that God confers total dominion on him only after Solomon has overcome the lusts and passions of this world (see Part II). The particular way that al-Nābighah expresses this concept, that is, through Allāh’s exhortation that it is beneath the dignity of a man of Sulaymān’s stature to persist in anger against an underling, is tailor-made to fit the poet’s own predicament. What warrants emphasis here is that this poetic passage does not provide a narrative context for the reference; rather, it presumes the listeners’ or readers’ acquaintance with Solomonic legend, which it evokes with lapidary concision.

The motif of the jinn building Tadmur (Palmyra in the Syrian desert) for Sulaymān (line 23) is emblematic of both his divine appointment and his cosmic power—not only men but also spiritual beings are subject to his rule. The association of Solomon with the building of Tadmur is much less prevalent in the Solomonic legendary materials than is his building of Bayt al-Maqdas, the Temple at Jerusalem. Nevertheless, it, too, can boast Biblical precedent.

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of Ibn al-Sikkīt’s recension in Shukrī Fayṣal, ed., *Dīwān al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī*, recension of Ibn al-Sikkīt (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1968), 2-26; and al-Khaṭīb Abū Zakariyyā Yahyā ibn ‘Alī al-Tibrīzī, *Sharḥ al-qaṣā’id al-‘ashr*, ed. ‘Abd al-Salām al-Ḥūfī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyyah, 1985) 347-375. For my translation of the full *qaṣīdah*, see S. Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, 20-25.

- 12 In this study and elsewhere, I have extended Connerton’s term, which he applies to the identification of two events in commemorative ceremonies, to include the identification of two figures, one religious, mythic, or legendary, and the other a living contemporary of the poet. See Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 43; and S. Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, 35.

1 Kings 9:18 reads: “so Solomon rebuilt Gezer and lower Bethhoron and Baalath and *Tamar* in the wilderness, in the land of Judah”; however, the parallel passage in 11 Chronicles 8:4 reads: “[Solomon] built *Tadmor* in the wilderness.” Although some Biblical scholarship prefers “Tamar,” a small place in southern Judah, as the original place-name in both instances, it appears that in the popular imagination, at least, the magnificent caravan city of the western Syrian desert became identified with Solomon’s Biblical building campaign. Thus we read in a source closer to the period of the poem at hand, *The Life of Alexander Akoimetes* (Alexander the Sleepless), that after this saint (d. ca. 430 CE) “had passed through all the desert ... enthusiastically singing psalms, he came to the city of Solomon, mentioned in the Book of Kings, Palmyra which he built in the desert.”<sup>13</sup>

- 13 “Vie d’Alexandre l’Acémète [Life of Alexander Akoimetes] texte grec et traduction latine,” ed. E. de Stoop, in *Patrologia Orientalis* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1911) 6:645-701, as cited and trans. in Richard Stoneman, *Palmyra and Its Empire: Zenobia’s Revolt against Rome* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), 192. For more on Palmyra in legend, see *ibid.*, 17 and notes, 64-65.

Such attestations as that of Saint Alexander to the popular (in this case, Christian) belief in the pre-Islamic period that Tadmur was built by Solomon are relevant not so much to the Biblical reading, but to refuting those Arab scholars who claim that the Solomon passage in al-Nābighah’s poem is anachronistic, and therefore a later interpolation that cannot be authentically pre-Islamic. Their line of thinking is apparently that the Arabs did not know of Solomon until the coming of the Prophet Muḥammad and the Qur’ān. To the contrary, the historical record suggests that al-Nābighah’s passage is a poetic condensation of contemporary popular beliefs concerning Solomon as a divinely appointed magician-king, beliefs that are largely consonant with the (subsequent) Qur’ānic text.

In addition to the Christian references above, as Arazi notes, al-Nābighah:

Evokes the myth of the foundation of Palmyra (Tadmur) by Solomon, who imposed on the *djinn*s the task of constructing the city (*Dōwān*, I, 21-3). Some critics have protested that this is a forgery, seeing here the hand of Muslim transmitters. However, Buhl (see Palmyra in *ET*) and the Jewish sources (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jerusalem 1973, xv, 107b, ll. 5-7) have suggested that Solomon (Sulaymān) and this legend were known in the pre-Islamic period (Arabic sources: al-Tibrīzī in *Sharḥ al-Ḥamāsa*, 435; al-Djāhīz, *op. cit.*, vi, 223; the legend would have been propagated by Djāhīlis who had embraced the Jewish faith).

(See Arazi, “al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī.”)

In an altogether circular manner, we find in the Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā’ al-Tha’labī’s citation of two anonymous lines of poetry that are, nevertheless, identifiable to us as variants of al-Nābighah’s lines 22 and 23, in support of Solomon’s having ordered the devils (*al-shayāṭīn*) to build for him the city of Tadmur (Palmyra) with stone slabs and columns of white and yellow marble. The lines (translation mine) read:

And remember Sulaymān, when the Ruler said to him:

It should be noted that in the Biblical versions, Solomon makes use of the labor of Israelites for the Temple at Jerusalem (1 Kings 5:13), and that of subjugated foreign tribes for the building of Tadmur (11 Chronicles 8:7-8). In the Qurʾān, however, although there is no mention of Tadmur/Palmyra (or, for that matter, of Bayt al-Maqdas), we nevertheless find two relevant passages. In one, Allāh subjugates spiritual beings (jinn and *shayāṭīn*, satans) to Sulaymān as a labor force for his building campaigns:

سُورَةُ سَبَا ٣٤

وَلِسُلَيْمَانَ الرِّيحَ غُدُوها شَهْرٌ وَرَوَاحُها شَهْرٌ ۖ وَأَسَلْنَا لَهُ عَيْنَ الْقِطْرِ وَمِنَ الْجِنِّ  
 مَنْ يَعْمَلُ بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ ۖ وَمَنْ يَزِغْ مِنْهُمْ عَنْ أَمْرِنَا نُذِقْهُ مِنْ عَذَابِ السَّعِيرِ  
 {١٢}

يَعْمَلُونَ لَهُ مَا يَشَاءُ مِنْ مَحَارِبَ وَتَمَاثِيلَ وَجِفَانٍ كَالْجَوَابِ وَقُدُورٍ رَاسِيَاتٍ ۗ اعْمَلُوا  
 آلَ دَاوُدَ شُكْرًا وَقَلِيلٌ مِنْ عِبَادِيَ الشَّكُورُ {١٣}

Qurʾān: Sūrat al-Sabā 34:12-13

12. [We gave] unto Solomon the wind; its morning course was a month's journey and its evening course a month's journey, and We made the fount of copper gush forth for him, and [We gave him] some jinn who worked before him by permission of his Lord. And any of them that deviated from Our command, We made taste the punishment of flaming Fire.
13. They made for him what he willed: synagogues and statues, basins like wells and cauldrons built into the ground. Give thanks, O House of David! Few of My servants are thankful.<sup>14</sup>

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“Take charge of my creatures and restrain them from sin,  
 And mobilize the army, for I have permitted them.  
 to build Tadmur with stones and columns.”

Oddly, the *dīwān* version of al-Nābighah's poem more accurately supports al-Thaʿlabī's description. See al-Thaʿlabī, *Arāʾis al-majālis*, ed. Sayyid, 410-411; and Brinner, *Arāʾis al-majālis*, 507. Brinner's translation of these lines is incorrect.

- 14 I have taken as a basis for the translations from the Qurʾān throughout this essay Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran, an explanatory translation* (London: A. A. Knopf, 1930). I believe it reproduces the repetitions and end-cadences of the Arabic better than other available translations. Due to his rather outdated style, I have

## سُورَةُ ٣٨

فَسَخَّرْنَا لَهُ الرِّيحَ تَجْرِي بِأَمْرِهِ رُخَاءً حَيْثُ أَصَابَ {٣٦}  
 وَالشَّيَاطِينَ كُلَّ بَنَّاءٍ وَغَوَّاصٍ {٣٧}  
 وَآخِرِينَ مُقَرَّبِينَ فِي الْأَصْفَادِ {٣٨}

Qur'an: Sūrat Ṣād 38:36-38

36. So We made the wind subservient unto him, setting fair by his command wherever he intended.
37. And [We made subservient to him] the unruly [Satan], every builder and diver,
38. And others linked together in chains.

In al-Nābighah's poem, the identification of King al-Nu'mān with Sulaymān is achieved by what we could term the extended elative simile—a formulaic rhetorical structure characteristic of pre-Islamic poetry. The structure is: "I see no one, with the exception of Sulaymān [followed by descriptive lines] ... more generous than he..." (lines 21-27). The effect of this structure is that the description, strictly speaking, of Sulaymān (lines 22-26) comes to describe al-Nu'mān; at the same time, the description of al-Nu'mān (lines 27-31) applies equally to Sulaymān. Furthermore, the elative formulation has the performative effect of issuing a challenge to al-Nu'mān to try to match Sulaymān in these virtues.

With equal rhetorical subtlety, the poet's choice of grammatical forms of reference reinforces the identification of al-Nu'mān with Sulaymān. Al-Nu'mān is referred to in the third-person masculine singular as "him" (lines 21, 27-30). The poet then employs direct quotation (lines 22-26) to present God's admonition to Sulaymān, "when Allāh said to him [Sulaymān], 'Take charge of my creatures.'" Within the context of the ceremonial recitation of the *qaṣīdah* to the patron, the result is that the poet himself, speaking in the first person, appropriates Allāh's series of imperatives to Sulaymān and addresses them to al-Nu'mān. That is, there is a total verbal identity or concordance between Allāh's exhortation to Sulaymān and al-Nābighah's exhortation to al-Nu'mān: "take charge," "restrain," "subdue," "reward," "chastise," "guide aright," and, above all,

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made adjustments to make it more palatable to the contemporary English-language reader. Also consulted were Arthur. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (New York: Macmillan, 1955); and Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Elmhurst, New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'an, 1987).

“do not persist in anger!” Allāh commands Sulaymān, and the poet, through his direct quotation of Allāh, commands the Arab king.

By line 32 the poet has dispensed with the conceit of divine or mythic exhortation, and the imperative has now almost imperceptibly modulated to the poet’s addressing the king explicitly in his own voice, “Judge with perspicacity! like the girl of the tribe” (vis., the proverbially keen-eyed Zarqā’ al-Yamāmah), and, later in the poem, to the poet’s protestations of innocence—“I never said those evil things!” (“*mā qultu sayyī’in;*” line 39)—and his more abject imperatives: “Go easy on me!” (“*mahlan;*” line 42) and “Don’t fling at me more than I can withstand!” (“*lā taqdhifannī bi-ruknin lā kifā’a lahu;*” line 43). This then leads into the poet’s much celebrated, and in Islamic times, much imitated, description of the patron as more generous than the mighty Euphrates (lines 44-47).

Rhetorically, that is, performatively, the poem was an instant success. In the classical Arabic literary lore collected in al-Iṣbahānī’s *Kitāb al-aghānī*, the event of the poem’s recitation is recounted by none other than Ḥassān ibn Thābit, a renowned pre-Islamic panegyrist who was destined to become the most celebrated panegyrist of the Prophet Muḥammad. Having failed to install himself as a panegyrist at al-Nu‘mān’s court in al-Nābighah’s absence, Ḥassān is chagrined by the return of his patron’s erstwhile favorite. He comments that, after the recitation of al-Nābighah’s poem to al-Nu‘mān, “I envied [al-Nābighah] three things, and I don’t know which of them pained me the most: his being brought back into the king’s graces after his estrangement and becoming once again his companion and confidant; or the excellence of his poetry; or the hundred purebred royal camels that he bestowed upon him.”<sup>15</sup> In brief, the Arabic literary tradition sees in al-Nābighah’s poem of praise more than adequate compensation for the poet’s (actual or metaphoric) encroachment on the king’s (sexual) domain.

The Arabic literary tradition has bestowed a position of eminence on this *qaṣīdah* and its poet. The poem has been accorded the status of *mu’allaqah* (“suspended ode,” an epithet said to refer to the ode’s being written in letters of gold and suspended from the Ka’bah in Mecca) in a number of the recensions of the seven or ten most illustrious pre-Islamic odes.<sup>16</sup> Al-Nābighah al-Dhubayānī has pride of place among the top-ranked poets of the Jāhiliyyah, and the poem itself became a paradigm for the literary expression of Arab-Islamic

15 Al-Iṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-aghānī*, 11:3813-14.

16 A fifty-line version of the poem is found in the collection of ten *mu’allaqāt*: al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī, *Sharḥ al-qaṣā’id al-‘ashr*, 347-375.

legitimate and hegemonic rule.<sup>17</sup> The practical and literary success of al-Nābighah's non-narrative (i.e., poetic) rhetorical strategies provides adequate grounds for dismissing remarks such as Arazi's that the poem is "completely lacking in narrative sense; al-Nabigha is incapable of telling a story."<sup>18</sup> Such arbitrary privileging of narrative over non-narrative means of expression, or more precisely, the evaluating of non-narrative forms of verbal art on the basis of narrative norms, I term the "narrative fallacy."

## Part II: Solomon and Islamic Kingship in the Qur'ān and Qīṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'

Of the Qur'ānic passages dealing with Sulaymān,<sup>19</sup> I have selected two—Solomon and the Sleek Steeds (QK Sūrat Ṣād 38:30-40) and Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, named Bilqīs in Islamic legend (Sūrat al-Naml 27:15-44)—to demonstrate how the Qur'ān coopts and exploits Solomonic legend to express the Islamic concepts of absolute power and religio-imperial universalism (oecumenism), as Al-Azmeh has discussed in his study of Islamic kingship.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, I will attempt to refute the widespread accusations of the Qur'ān's narrative shortcomings by stressing in my discussion its carefully crafted non-narrative and eminently effective rhetorical strategies.

First, let me clarify what I argue here is the literary-rhetorical purpose of the Qur'ān. It is not to tell stories nor to present a tribal history, but rather to promulgate a salvific message: that is, *its primary goal is not to inform, but to persuade*. The purpose of the Qur'ān is to convince mankind to (re)turn to Allāh alone (to the exclusion of all other deities) and thus to righteousness; and to submit to Allāh's divine command through submitting to the earthly and spiritual rule of his final prophet, Muḥammad, thereby achieving salvation and immortal bliss in the heavenly garden. Second, it is worth reiterating here that Muḥammad did not claim to be revealing a new religion, but rather to be calling mankind back to, or reminding them of, the original true religion of Ibrāhīm/Abraham, which the Meccan polytheists and the People of the Book—Jews and Christians in particular—had, over time, corrupted. Thus the Prophet Muḥammad presented the message of the Qur'ān as both abrogating and fulfilling the scriptures of the Jews and Christians, the Tawrāt and the Injīl.

17 See S. Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, 53, 80-83, 102.

18 Arazi, "al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī."

19 See Qur'ān 2:96; 4:161; 6:84; 21:78-81; 27:15-44; 34:12-14; 38:30-40.

20 Al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship*, passim.

However, it is not the canonical scriptures of these religions, but rather the broadly shared and widely dispersed mythic-folkloric Abrahamic patrimony of the sixth-century CE Near East—which transcended, I argue, doctrinal and communal differences at the popular level—that provides the literary-cultural matrix for the Islamic scripture. Such preeminent figures of these traditions as Abraham, Moses, Joseph, and Jesus (in Arabic: Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, Yūsuf, and ʿĪsā), along with autochthonous Arab figures such as Šāliḥ and Hūd, thus appear in the Qurʾān as Prophets who serve as prototypes for and precursors of Muḥammad. What we witness, then, is the Qurʾān on the one hand confirming popular belief, but also exploiting popular belief, that is, coopting it to serve its own salvific rhetoric. This being the case, I argue, as have others, that the Qurʾān assumes that the audience it is trying to “convert,” or rather “save,” is already familiar with the narratives (whether in Scriptural or popular folkloric form) of the figures involved.<sup>21</sup> The Qurʾān then *evokes, reminds of, or alludes to*, rather than *retells*, these narratives in its own intentionally and essentially non-narrative form of expression.<sup>22</sup>

It is necessary to issue a caveat at this point: for the purposes of the present study, I accept, broadly speaking, a date for a codification of Qurʾānic text either late in the lifetime of the Prophet Muḥammad (d. 10/632) or at the time of the ʿUthmānic recension compiled within twenty years of Muḥammad’s death, that is by around 30/650.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, the post-Qurʾānic *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (and

21 See, for example, the remarks of Jacob Lassner and Jamal Elias on the Qurʾānic accounts of the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, cited and discussed below.

22 To take a parallel example from Western literature, consider W. B. Yeats’ “Leda and the Swan”—there, too, the poet does not recount a story (in this case the origins of the Trojan War), but evokes it only through allusion. And yet, to my knowledge, Yeats has never been criticized for excessive “disjointedness” or “ellipsis,” much less for an inability to produce a “coherent narrative.”

23 The controversies over the dating of the codification of the Qurʾān are ongoing, and beyond the scope of the present study. However, I am inclined to follow the path of Donner in favor of the earlier and more traditional dating, in Fred M. Donner, “The Date of the Qurʾānic Text,” in *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 35-63, especially 47, 49, 60, where he argues that the Qurʾān was already a “closed” body of text sometime between the Prophet’s death in 632 CE and the first Fitnah in 656-661 CE; and, taking up where Donner left off, two studies based on an early non-ʿUthmānic Qurʾān manuscript from the Grand Mosque of Yemen discoveries: Benham Sadeghi and Uwe Bergmann, “The Codex of a Companion of the Prophet and the Qurʾān of the Prophet,” *Arabica* 57 (2010), 343-436, and Benham Sadeghi and Mohsen Goudarzi, “Šanʿāʾ 1 and the Origins of the Qurʾān,” *Der Islam* 87 (2012), 1-129; see especially 2-5 on the state of the controversy and 17-18 on their dating

their Jewish counterparts, the post-biblical Aggadah)<sup>24</sup> appear to be much more popular and oral in nature, so that the specific authored and dated texts we have seem to be only particular chronological points in a flowing river of popular narrative that changes over time. It follows, then (although I am arguing here that the Qur'ānic non-narrative passages presume the listener's or reader's knowledge of widely circulated Prophetic narratives), that we cannot know precisely what those were. Therefore, this study is not concerned with mapping how the various narrative renditions of particular stories influenced each other or the Qur'ānic rendition. Rather, this study is concerned with a comparative analysis of the narrative techniques of the Stories of the Prophets versus the non-narrative rhetorical strategies of the Qur'an. The renditions of the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* consulted and cited in this work are: al-Fārisī (d. 289/902);<sup>25</sup> al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923);<sup>26</sup> the more "folkloric" al-Kisā'ī (circa tenth century CE, or later);<sup>27</sup> al-Tha'labī (d. 427/1039);<sup>28</sup> and Ibn Kathīr

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and conclusions, in which, likewise a mid-seventh century CE date is set for the standardized ('Uthmānic) compilation.

- 24 As Lassner notes, *Targum Sheni*, whose accounts of Solomon are in many ways closest to the Islamic post-Qur'ānic ones, is variously dated to the fourth, sixth, seventh, eighth, and eleventh centuries CE. This obviously makes the historical tracing of influences problematic. See Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 47. The most useful resource for the Jewish materials remains Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 7 vols., trans. Henrietta Szold and Paul Radin (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), 4:125-176 and notes 6:277-303. The interplay and overlap of Islamic and Jewish materials is fascinating, but beyond the scope of the present study. Ginzberg's text and notes are the obvious starting point for such a venture.
- 25 Raif Georges Houry, ed., "Kitāb Bad' al-Ḥalq wa-Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'," in *Les légendes prophétiques dans l'Islam, depuis le I<sup>er</sup> jusqu'au III<sup>e</sup> siècle de l'Hégire, d'après le manuscrit d'Abū Rifā'a 'Umāra b. Waṭīma b. Mūsā b. al-Furāt al-Fārisī al-Fasawī* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1978), Dāwūd: 91-126; Sulaymān: 127-180.
- 26 Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-al-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al., vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879-1901), Dāwūd: 559-572; Sulāymān: 572-597.
- 27 Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Kisā'ī, *Bad' al-khalq wa-qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā' lil-Kisā'ī*, ed. al-Ṭāhir ibn Sālimah (Tūnis: Dār Nuqūsh 'Arabīyyah, 1998), Dāwūd: 326-336; Sulaymān: 336-360. English translation: W. M. Thackston, Jr., trans., *The Tales of the Prophets of al-Kisā'ī* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), David: 270-288; Solomon: 288-321.
- 28 Abū Ishāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Naysābūrī, al-ma'rūf bi-al-Tha'labī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā' al-musammā 'arā'is al-majālis*, ed. Muḥammad Sayyid (al-Qāhirah: Dār al-Fajr lil-Turāth, 2001), Dāwūd: 374-396; Sulaymān: 397-445. English translation: William Brinner, *'Arā'is al-majālis fi qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā' or "Lives of the Prophets" as recounted by Abū Ishāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Tha'labī* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002), David: 462-481; David and Solomon: 482-490; Solomon: 490-548.



(d. 774/1373).<sup>29</sup> I also rely to some extent on Qur'anic commentary, that of the same al-Ṭabarī,<sup>30</sup> which often overlaps with the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* inasmuch as it provides, among other things, "narrative" details or background to fill in the context of allusive and/or elusive Qur'anic passages.

*Solomon and the Sleek Steeds: Transgression, Repentance, and Absolute Rule*

سُورَةُ ص ٣٨  
 وَوَهَبْنَا لِدَاوُودَ سُلَيْمَانَ نِعَمَ الْعَبْدِ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ {٣٠}  
 إِذْ عَرَضَ عَلَيْهِ بِالْعَشِيِّ الصَّافِنَاتُ الْهِيَادُ {٣١}  
 فَقَالَ إِنِّي أَحْبَبْتُ حُبَّ الْخَيْرِ عَنْ ذِكْرِ رَبِّي حَتَّى تَوَارَتْ بِالْحِجَابِ {٣٢}  
 رُدُّوهَا عَلَيَّ<sup>ط</sup> فَطَفِقَ مَسْحًا بِالسُّوقِ وَالْأَعْنَاقِ {٣٣}  
 وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا سُلَيْمَانَ وَالْقَيْنَانَ عَلَى كُرْسِيِّهِ جَسَدًا ثُمَّ أَنَابَ {٣٤}  
 قَالَ رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَهَبْ لِي مُلْكًا لَا يَنْبَغِي لِأَحَدٍ مِنْ بَعْدِي إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْوَهَّابُ  
 {٣٥}  
 فَسَخَرْنَا لَهُ الرِّيحَ تَجْرِي بِأَمْرِهِ رُخَاءً حَيْثُ أَصَابَ {٣٦}  
 وَالشَّيَاطِينَ كُلَّ بَنَّاءٍ وَغَوَّاصٍ {٣٧}  
 وَآخِرِينَ مُقَرَّنِينَ فِي الْأَصْفَادِ {٣٨}  
 هَذَا عَطَاؤُنَا فَامْنُنْ أَوْ أَمْسِكْ بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ {٣٩}  
 وَإِنَّ لَهُ عِنْدَنَا لَزُلْفَىٰ وَحُسْنَ مَآبٍ {٤٠}

29 Abū al-Fidā' Ismā'il ibn Kathīr, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 2 vols., ed. Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Wāhid (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīthah, 1968), Dāwud: 2:265-284; Sulaymān: 2:285-314.

Two important early writers of *qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* much cited in later works are Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. ca. 728-732?) and Abū Khudhayfah Ishāq ibn Bishr (d. 821). For a concise review and description of major authors and works of this genre, see: Brinner, *Arā'is al-majālis*, xviii-xxxii; and M. O. Klar, *Interpreting al-Tha'labī's Tales of the Prophets: Temptation, Responsibility and Loss* (London: Routledge, 2009), 1-4; 9-13.

30 Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*, 30 vols. (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1954).

Qur'ān: Sūrat Ṣād 38: 30-40

30. And on David We bestowed Solomon. How excellent a servant! He was ever returning [toward Us] in repentance.
31. When he was shown at evening light-footed coursers
32. And he said: [Alas!] I have preferred the good things [of the world] to the remembrance of my Lord; till they were taken out of sight behind the curtain.
33. [Then he said]: Bring them back to me, and fell to slashing their legs and necks.
34. And verily We tried Solomon, and set upon his throne a [mere] body. Then did he repent.
35. He said: My Lord! Forgive me and bestow on me sovereignty such as shall not belong to any after me. For surely Thou art the Bestower.
36. So We made the wind subservient unto him, setting fair by his command wherever he intended.
37. And [We made subservient to him] the unruly [Satans], every builder and diver,
38. And others linked together in chains,
39. [Saying]: This is Our gift, so bestow it or withhold it, without reckoning.
40. And surely he has a station near to Us, and a happy final return.

These verses from Sūrat Ṣād follow directly upon a passage concerning Allāh's testing of Dāwūd/David and the latter's repentance (38:17-26) for having forgotten God, following the passions of his own heart, and straying from the right path:

### سورة ص ٣٨

اصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَاذْكُرْ عَبْدَنَا دَاوُودَ ذَا الْأَيْدِ ۗ إِنَّهُ أَوَّابٌ {١٧}

إِنَّا سَخَّرْنَا الْجِبَالَ مَعَهُ يُسَبِّحْنَ بِالْعَشِيِّ وَالْإِشْرَاقِ {١٨}

وَالطَّيْرَ مَحْشُورَةً ۗ كُلٌّ لَّهُ أَوَّابٌ {١٩}

وَشَدَدْنَا مُلْكَهُ وَأَتَيْنَاهُ الْحِكْمَةَ وَفَصَّلَ الْخِطَابِ {٢٠}

وَهَلْ أَتَاكَ نَبَأُ الْخَضِرِ ۖ إِذْ تَسَوَّرُوا الْمِحْرَابَ {٢١}

إِذْ دَخَلُوا عَلَى دَاوُودَ فَفَرِحَ مِنْهُمْ ۖ قَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ خَصِمَانِ بَغَى بَعْضُنَا عَلَى  
بَعْضٍ فَأَحْكُم بَيْنَنَا بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تُشْطِطْ وَاهْدِنَا إِلَى سَوَاءِ الصِّرَاطِ {٢٢}  
إِنَّ هَذَا أَخِي لَهُ تِسْعٌ وَتِسْعُونَ نَعْجَةً وَّيَ نَعْجَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ فَقَالَ أَكْفِلْنِيهَا وَعَزَّنِي  
فِي الْخِطَابِ {٢٣}  
قَالَ لَقَدْ ظَلَمَكَ بِسُؤَالِ نَعَجْتِكَ إِلَى نِعَاجِهِ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الْخُلَطَاءِ لِيَبْغِيَ بَعْضُهُمْ  
عَلَى بَعْضٍ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَقَلِيلٌ مَا هُمْ ۗ وَظَنَّ دَاوُودُ أَنَّمَا  
فَتَنَاهُ فَاسْتَغْفَرَ رَبَّهُ وَخَرَّ رَاكِعًا وَأَنَابَ ۗ {٢٤} ﴿١﴾  
فَغَفَرْنَا لَهُ ذَلِكَ ۗ وَإِنَّ لَهُ عِنْدَنَا لَزُلْفَىٰ وَحُسْنَ مَّآبٍ {٢٥}  
يَا دَاوُودُ إِنَّا جَعَلْنَاكَ خَلِيفَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ فَاحْكُم بَيْنَ النَّاسِ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا تَتَّبِعِ الْهَوَىٰ  
فِيضِلَّكَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ يَضِلُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ بِمَا  
نَسُوا يَوْمَ الْحِسَابِ {٢٦}

Qurʾān: Sūrat Ṣād 38:17-26

17. Bear patiently what they say, and remember Our servant David, lord of might, surely he was ever returning [to Us] in repentance.
18. Surely We subdued the hills to hymn [Our] praises with him at nightfall and sunrise,
19. And the birds assembled; all were turning unto H/him.
20. We made his kingdom strong and gave him wisdom and decisive speech.
21. And has the story of the litigants reached you? How they climbed the wall into the royal chamber;
22. How they burst in upon David, and he was afraid of them. They said: Do not be afraid! [We are] two litigants, one of whom has wronged the other, therefore judge aright between us; do not be unjust; but lead us to the fair, even path.
23. This my brother has ninety and nine ewes while I had one ewe; and he said: Entrust it to me, and he conquered me in speech.
24. [David] said: He has wronged you in demanding your ewe in addition to his ewes, for surely many partners wrong one another, except

- those who believe and do good works, and they are few. And David guessed that We had tried him, and he sought forgiveness of his Lord, and he bowed himself and fell down prostrate and repented.
25. So We forgave him that; and surely he has a station near to Us, and a happy final return.
26. [And it was said to him]: O David! Surely We have set you as a viceroy in the earth; therefore, judge aright between mankind, and do not follow desire, lest it beguile you from the way of Allāh. Surely those who stray from the way of Allāh have an awful doom, for they forgot the Day of Reckoning.

It is a message of repentance, submission to Allāh, divine gifts and forgiveness, and ultimate salvation (*inna lahu 'indanā la-zulfā wa-ḥusna ma'āb*). It is of particular note with regard to the argument of the present study that the David passage is, narratively speaking, incomprehensible or incoherent. Nothing in the Qur'ānic text itself gives the reader any indication of why "David guessed that We had tried him," which is obviously the essence of the story in the narrative sense. It is only when we rely on external information about David or read the Qur'ānic commentaries that the story makes sense. Thus, al-Ṭabarī informs us that the Qur'ānic phrase "This my brother has ninety and nine ewes while I had one ewe" (QK 38:23) is a parable that refers to David's own situation: "it is said that David had ninety-nine wives while a man that he sent to battle until he was slain had only one; and after he was slain, [David] married his wife."<sup>31</sup>

Readers of the Bible will recognize in this the story of David and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and the parable of David's crime that Nathan presented before him (11 Samuel: 11-12). The story of the two angels coming to David with the parable of the ninety-nine ewes and David's extravagant repentance is accorded elaborate narrative expansions and variant versions in the Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the juxtaposition of the fully narrative Biblical version or the elaborate and varied Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā' renditions alongside the Qur'ānic evocation highlights the distinctive Qur'ānic rhetoric: the Qur'ān does not intend to *tell* or *retell* the story, but rather to *remind* the reader/listener of it. It then limits itself to distinctive allusive highlights (if you know the story, you recognize and remember it immediately) that bring

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 22:19.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Tha'labi, *Arā'is al-majālis*, 380-390; Brinner, *Arā'is al-majālis*, 468-480. Klar discusses the Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā' versions, but without reference to the Qur'ānic text or the parallelism to Sulaymān, in a section entitled "Crime and Punishment: David and the Glance," in Klar, *Interpreting al-Tha'labi's Tales of the Prophets*, 102-119.

into focus the salvific pattern of: 1) transgression (following passion, turning away from God); 2) repentance (returning to God); 3) forgiveness; and 4) salvation, that is, access to Allāh's presence (*zulfā*/nearness). This is, of course, precisely the pattern of transgression and redemption—and of the rite of (re)incorporation—that plays out between the poet and the king in al-Nābighah's poem of apology to King al-Nu'mān. This pattern is repeated and emphasized in the ensuing Sulaymān passage of Sūrat Ṣād 38:30-40, again through the use of non-narrative techniques: repetition of formulaic phrases and the use of rhyme. In effect, the Qur'ān structures its allusion to the presumably well-known narrative story in such a way as to achieve its own specific goals: to foreground the repeated salvific pattern of transgression—repentance—forgiveness—salvation.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, the repeated, indeed formulaic, rhyming end-phrases of the Qur'ānic passages (termed *fawāsil*, s. *fāṣilah*) under discussion add an element of mnemonic structuring and stabilization, while the specific rhyme words acoustically highlight the structural parallelism and shared moral paradigm of cognate passages, such as David QK 38:17-26 and Solomon QK 38:30-40.

#### RHYME PATTERNS: Qur'ān: Sūrat Ṣād 38

##### Dāwūd/David (38:17-26)

38:16 <i>yawmi al-ḥisāb</i>	Day of Reckoning
38:17 <i>lahu awwāb</i>	returning [to Us] in repentance
38:24 <i>wa-anāb</i>	and repented
38:25 <i>wa-ḥusna ma'āb</i>	and a happy final return
38:26 <i>yawma al-ḥisāb</i>	Day of Reckoning

##### Sulaymān/Solomon

38:30 <i>innahu awwāb</i>	returning [to Us] in repentance
38:34 <i>thumma anāb</i>	then he repented
38:35 <i>anta al-wahhāb</i>	Thou art the Bestower
38:36 <i>ḥaythu aṣāb</i>	wherever he intended
38:39 <i>bi-ghayri ḥisāb</i>	without reckoning
38:40 <i>wa-ḥusna ma'āb</i>	and a happy final return

As the parallel sequences of rhyme-endings makes clear, Solomon, like David, is tested, fails, realizes his failure, repents, and is reinstated. As with the

33 Note, too, that the later sections of Sūrat Ṣād convey the obverse, the eternal damnation (*sharra ma'āb* = evil journey's end) (QK 38:55) of those who defy Allāh and refuse to recognize and submit to his messengers.

condensed Qur'ānic Dāwūd and the Biblical cognate or antecedent of the story of David, we can, with the help of external materials, reconstitute a narrative behind the Qur'ānic passage about Sulaymān and the sleek steeds: Sulaymān finds himself so enchanted with a herd of thoroughbred steeds that is brought before him that he forgets his Lord—that is, as the stories tell us, the sun set and he was so distracted by the steeds that he forgot the afternoon prayer (*ṣalāt al-ʿaṣr*). When he realizes that he has forgotten his Lord, he calls for the horses to be brought back before him and slaughters—that is, sacrifices,—them. These narrative materials serve to explain QK 38:33.

Al-Fārisī's version of the story in his collection of *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* includes delightful details: the horses were piebald—Sulaymān's favorite kind. The jinn, who have told him that piebald horses are the best and that they have wings and can fly, devise a ruse to capture them for him.<sup>34</sup> Al-Thaʿlabī relates in his collection, among other variants, that “God gave exclusively to Solomon the excellent Arabian horses which He brought out of the sea for him;” and that “Al-Ḥasan has said, ‘I have heard that it was a horse that came forth from the sea and had wings.’” Ultimately, Solomon and the swift steeds become an etiological myth for Arabian horses. Of the nine hundred horses arrayed before him, Solomon slaughtered all but one hundred, “and whatever Arabian horses people possess are from the stock of those one hundred.”<sup>35</sup>

Allāh then punishes Sulaymān by placing a body on his throne (QK 38:35)<sup>36</sup>—most generally interpreted as referring to Sulaymān's expulsion and replacement by his demonic doppelganger Ṣakhr, while the real Sulaymān wanders as a mendicant. This is usually presented in legend as Sulaymān's loss and recovery of his magic seal or signet ring, the symbol of his God-given dominion. His turning from or forgetting God takes the form of being tricked out of his signet ring by Ṣakhr. Parallel to this episode, we also find in the legends one in which Solomon loses his signet ring when he leaves it with a servant girl before going in to his wives. Ṣakhr, in the guise of Sulaymān, takes it from her and assumes Sulaymān's throne. The mendicant Sulaymān finally retrieves the signet ring when gutting a fish he has been given (there are many variants of the story).<sup>37</sup>

34 Al-Fārisī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 151-152.

35 Trans. Brinner. Al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 410; Brinner, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 506.

36 For an extensive study and interpretation of the many variant explanations of this verse in the Islamic tradition, see M. O. Klar, “And We cast upon his throne a mere body: A Historiographical Reading of Q. 38:34,” *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 6.1 (2004), 103-126.

37 Al-Fārisī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 157-164; al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 436-441; Brinner, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 539-543.

Yet another parallel episode relates that Solomon swore that he would sleep with a thousand women in one night and each and every one of them would become pregnant and bear him a warrior who would fight in the way of Allāh. He slept with a thousand of them, but none got pregnant except for one who bore him a deformed son: “The Prophet [Muhammad] said, by God, if he had excepted even one then said, ‘if God wills,’ then he would have begotten those 1000 *mujāhidīn*.” So overweening is Sulaymān then in his attentions to this deformed son that God has the Angel of Death kill it and put the corpse on Solomon’s throne—i.e., in accordance with verse QK 38:34.<sup>38</sup>

Yet another version initiates the story of Sulaymān’s dethronement and Šakhr’s usurpation with Sulaymān’s conquest of a distant island, where he kills the king and takes his daughter as a wife or concubine. He is altogether smitten with the beautiful girl; when, under Shayṭan’s influence, she pleads with Sulaymān to let her have a statue made of her dead father to allay her grief, he relents. Soon his minister Āṣaf reveals to Sulaymān that idolatry is taking place under his own roof.<sup>39</sup> These versions, of course, recall the Biblical accusations (1 Kings 11) that Solomon’s many foreign wives turned his heart from the God of Israel, until he worshipped Ashtoreth, goddess of the Sidonians, Milcom of the Ammonites, and Chemosh of Moab. Note once again, however, that where the Biblical account ends with Solomon’s falling away from God and the later diminution of his kingdom, thereby exemplifying the Biblical message of divine judgment acted out in history, in the Qur’ānic and popular Islamic accounts, Sulaymān is triumphantly reinstated in power after his repentance and atonement. Al-Fārisī in his *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* cites a version in which Sulaymān’s reinvestiture in which he mounts his throne clad in gleaming white raiment, whereupon the joyous populace cries “*maradd nayrūz*,” for which the holiday Nayrūz takes its name (that is, the Persian holiday Nawrūz, most often associated with the Indo-Iranian culture-hero Jamsheed).<sup>40</sup> That is, the story becomes an etiological myth. The many versions of this story have further cognates in the legends of Jamsheed, and for that matter, in the *1,001 Nights* stories as well.

Let me remark briefly on the Qur’ānic steeds and the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’* variants: the steeds must be understood above all as a metaphorical expression of

38 Al-Fārisī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, 153.

39 Al-Fārisī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, 155-157; al-Tha’labī, *Arā’is al-majālis*, 436-441; Brinner, *Arā’is al-majālis*, 537-544.

40 Al-Fārisī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, 165; see also the reference in Walker and Fenton, “Sulaymān b. Dāwūd.” For a different Solomonic etiological myth of Nayrūz, see 166. On the extensive shared mythic folkloric elements of the two culture-heroes, Jamsheed and Solomon, see Huart, Cl.; Massé, H., “*Djamshīd*,” *Elz*.

sexual or material desire—i.e., as an example of following one's passion. In the Arabic poetic context, one thinks immediately of Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā's frequently cited metaphor for the loss of youth—"wa-'urriya afrāsu al-ṣibā" ("the steeds of youthful passion were stripped," viz., of their saddles and gear)<sup>41</sup>—or of the sexual, as well as poetic, competition implied in the horse-description contest between the two Jāhili master-poets, Imru' al-Qays and 'Alqamah al-Faḥl.<sup>42</sup> Obviously, Sulaymān's hubristic desire in one of the Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā' versions to impregnate one thousand women in one night expresses in crass narrative terms the same unbridled passion that the sleek steeds of the Qur'ān express more metaphorically.

As is clear from my adducing the various legendary versions to fill in the Qur'ānic text, the Qur'ān does not provide a narrative form of the story. Rather, in a manner that is paratactic and metonymic, and hence more poetic than narrative, elements of the story are subordinated to a ritually structured pattern. The (oral) formulaic and ritually structured repetition of ordered rhymed phrases conveys with great auditory clarity and insistence the Qur'ānic message of repentance and salvation. Indeed, in a comparison of the compact poeticity of Qur'ānic recitation with the narrative expansiveness of the Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā', we find that the "message" in the latter becomes diluted amidst delightful narrative detail—or rather that the focus on the salvific message of the Qur'ān is submerged in a variety of other "messages." This is particularly evident in those versions—which is most of them—that insert the Qur'ānic verses into the narrative, or we could equally say, in which the Qur'ānic verses form a framework for the narrative. Here we find that the rhymed phrases that hammer in the message in the Qur'ānic recitation are so dispersed that, though they may serve as mnemonic road-marks or frameworks and scriptural authorizations for the popular prose narratives, they lose control of the message.

Another feature of Qur'ānic rhetoric to be noted with regard to the Biblical account of Solomon's final deposition and loss of dominion is that the Islamic Solomon of Sūrat Ṣād is granted full dominion only after his repentance and return. It might seem strange to us, indeed impertinent, for Sulaymān to ask

41 See the references and discussion in Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the Abbāsīd Age* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 74.

42 On this celebrated "verbal duel" see Akiko Motoyoshi Sumi, *Description in Classical Arabic Poetry: Wasf, Ekphrasis, and Interarts Theory* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2004), 19-60. On the association of the horse with fertility, virility, and sexual potency, especially as suggested by the individual names given to horses, see Jaroslav Stetkevych, "Name and Epithet: The Philology and Semiotics of Animal Nomenclature in Early Arabic Poetry," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 45/2 (1986), 104.



Allāh for a dominion greater than anyone who comes after him. Strange, that is, until we recall al-Nābighah's *qaṣīdah* from the first half of this study. For this is precisely what the poet does: he repents, submits, and then asks for lavish gifts; he then, as the *akhbār* inform us, gets his wish and is brought near to his L/lord once more. An archetypal pattern is revealed that underlies virtually every Arabic three-part panegyric *qaṣīdah*, pre-Islamic or not, and which informs as well the expression of the Qur'ānic ideology of salvation.<sup>43</sup> Still, we can find a rhetorical twist in each case.

Both al-Nābighah's poem (lines 22-26) and the Qur'ān (38:36-40) invoke the same moment of Solomonic myth: Allāh's conferring of cosmic dominion upon Sulaymān. Al-Nābighah, however, in order to persuade King al-Nu'mān to desist from his anger, privileges the virtue of forbearance (do not persist in anger against a subordinate, do not submit to the rule of passion). The Qur'ānic version, keeping ever in mind the role of Solomon as a prototype of the Prophet Muḥammad, confers on him absolute authority in his rule only after he has repented. Once conferred, however, his rule is not merely cosmic, embracing the wind and the jinn, but whether Sulaymān bestows or withholds the bounties Allāh has granted him and however he disposes of the divine donation, *he will not be held to account* (QK 38:39).

The Qur'ān is not a work of political theory; nevertheless, inasmuch as its rhetorical goal is to convince mankind to submit to Allāh through recognizing and submitting to His Prophet Muḥammad, and inasmuch as Sulaymān serves as a prototype for and forerunner of the Prophet Muḥammad, the message is clearly that the testing of Prophets is to be left to Allāh; mankind cannot hold them to account. Within the Qur'ānic context, I believe we are correct in assuming that this concept is intended to apply to the Prophet Muḥammad. However, given that Sulaymān was destined in Islamic times to become the prototypical Islamic ruler, it seems to establish a precept of absolute rule. It is important to note, however, that in both the Qur'ānic and Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā' narrative versions, God confers dominion on those who foreswear following

43 On other aspects of ritual and poetic language in the Qur'ān, especially in terms of speech acts, see Thomas Hoffman, "Ritual Poeticity in the Qur'ān: Family Resemblances, Features, Functions and Appraisals," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 6.2 (2004), 35-55. I do feel obliged, however, to register my disagreement with his statement, "Once the Qur'ānic discourse was launched, it was only a question of time before it had installed itself as the new heir to the obsolete discourse of the *jāhiliyya*" (41). See S. Stetkevych, *Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy*, chapters 1-3; and Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), chapters 1 and 7.

their own passions and “remember their Lord,” that is, who follow the path of selfless righteousness.

*Solomon and the Queen of Sheba: Religio-Imperial Universalism*

٢٧ سُورَةُ النَّملِ  
وَلَقَدْ آتَيْنَا دَاوُودَ وَسُلَيْمَانَ عِلْمًا وَقَالَا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي فَضَّلَنَا عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِّنْ  
عِبَادِهِ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ {١٥}  
وَوَرِثَ سُلَيْمَانُ دَاوُودَ وَقَالَ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ عَلِمْنَا مَنَظِقَ الطَّيْرِ وَأُوتِينَا مِنْ كُلِّ  
شَيْءٍ إِنَّ هَذَا لَهُوَ الْفَضْلُ الْمُبِينُ {١٦}  
وَحَشِرَ لِسُلَيْمَانَ جُنُودُهُ مِنَ الْجِنِّ وَالإِنْسِ وَالطَّيْرِ فَهُمْ يُوزَعُونَ {١٧}  
حَتَّىٰ إِذَا اتَّوَا عَلَىٰ وَادِ النَّمْلِ قَالَتْ نَمْلَةٌ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّمْلُ ادْخُلُوا مَسَاكِمَكُمْ لَا  
يَحْطَمَنَّكُمْ سُلَيْمَانُ وَجُنُودُهُ وَهُمْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ {١٨}  
فَتَبَسَّمَ ضَاحِكًا مِّنْ قَوْلِهَا وَقَالَ رَبِّ أَوْزِعْنِي أَنْ أَشْكُرَ نِعْمَتَكَ الَّتِي أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيَّ  
وَعَلَىٰ وَالِدَيَّ وَأَنْ أَعْمَلَ صَالِحًا تَرْضَاهُ وَأَدْخِلْنِي بِرَحْمَتِكَ فِي عِبَادِكَ الصَّالِحِينَ  
{١٩}  
وَتَفَقَّدَ الطَّيْرَ فَقَالَ مَا لِيَ لَا أَرَى الْهُدُودَ أَمْ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَائِبِينَ {٢٠}  
لَأُعَذِّبَنَّهُ عَذَابًا شَدِيدًا أَوْ لَأَذْبَحَنَّهُ أَوْ لَيَأْتِيَنِّي بِسُلْطَانٍ مُّبِينٍ {٢١}  
فَمَكَثَ غَيْرَ بَعِيدٍ فَقَالَ أَحَطْتُ بِمَا لَمْ مَحْطُ بِهِ وَحِجَّتِكَ مِنْ سَبَابِ بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ  
إِنِّي وَجَدْتُ امْرَأَةً تَمْلِكُهُمْ وَأُوتِيَتْ مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَلَهَا عَرْشٌ عَظِيمٌ {٢٢}  
وَجَدْتُهَا وَقَوْمَهَا يَسْجُدُونَ لِلشَّمْسِ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَزَيْنُ لَهُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَعْمَاهُمْ  
فَصَدَّهُمْ عَنِ السَّبِيلِ فَهُمْ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ {٢٣}  
أَلَا يَسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ الَّذِي يُخْرِجُ الْخَبْءَ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا تُخْفُونَ  
وَمَا تُعْلِنُونَ {٢٤}

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ رَبُّ الْعَرْشِ الْعَظِيمِ {٢٦}  
 قَالَ سَنَنْظُرُ أَصَدَقْتَ أَمْ كُنتَ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ {٢٧}  
 أَذْهَبُ بِكِتَابِي هَذَا فَأَلْقِيهِ إِلَيْهِمْ ثُمَّ تَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ فَانظُرْ مَاذَا يَرْجِعُونَ {٢٨}  
 قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ إِنِّي أُلْقِيَ إِلَيَّ كِتَابٌ كَرِيمٌ {٢٩}  
 إِنَّهُ مِنْ سُلَيْمَانَ وَإِنَّهُ بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ {٣٠}  
 أَلَّا تَعْلَمُوا عَلَيَّ وَأَتُونِي مُسْلِمِينَ {٣١}  
 قَالَتْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَفْتُونِي فِي أَمْرِي مَا كُنتَ قَاطِعَةً أَمْرًا حَتَّى تَشْهَدُونِ {٣٢}  
 قَالُوا نَحْنُ أَوْلُو قُوَّةٍ وَأُولُو بَأْسٍ شَدِيدٍ وَالْأَمْرُ إِلَيْكِ فَانظُرِي مَاذَا تَأْمُرِينَ {٣٣}  
 قَالَتْ إِنَّ الْمُلُوكَ إِذَا دَخَلُوا قَرْيَةً أَفْسَدُوهَا وَجَعَلُوا أَعْرَاجَها أَذِلَّةً وَكَذَلِكِ  
 يَفْعَلُونَ {٣٤}  
 وَإِنِّي مُرْسِلَةٌ إِلَيْهِمْ بِهَدِيَّةٍ فَنَاظِرَةٌ بِمِ يَرْجِعُ الْمُرْسَلُونَ {٣٥}  
 فَلَمَّا جَاءَ سُلَيْمَانَ قَالَ أَتُمِدُّونَ بِمَالٍ فَمَا آتَانِي اللَّهُ خَيْرٌ مِمَّا آتَاكُمْ بَلْ أَنتُمْ  
 بِهَدْيِكُمْ تَفْرَحُونَ {٣٦}  
 ارْجِعْ إِلَيْهِمْ فَلَنَأْتِيَنَّهُمْ بِجُنُودٍ لَا قِبَلَ لَهُمْ بِهَا وَلَنُخْرِجَنَّهُمْ مِنْهَا أَذِلَّةً وَهُمْ  
 صَاغِرُونَ {٣٧}  
 قَالَ يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَلَأُ أَيُّكُمْ يَأْتِينِي بِعَرْشِهَا قَبْلَ أَنْ يَأْتُونِي مُسْلِمِينَ {٣٨}  
 قَالَ عَفْرَيْتُ مِنَ الْجِنِّ أَنَا آتِيكَ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَقُومَ مِنْ مَقَامِكَ ط إِنِّي عَلَيْهِ لَقَوِيٌّ  
 أَمِينٌ {٣٩}  
 قَالَ الَّذِي عِنْدَهُ عِلْمٌ مِنَ الْكِتَابِ أَنَا آتِيكَ بِهِ قَبْلَ أَنْ يَرْتَدَّ إِلَيْكَ طَرْفُكَ فَلَمَّا رآه  
 مُسْتَقَرًّا عِنْدَهُ قَالَ هَذَا مِنْ فَضْلِ رَبِّي لِيَبْلُوَنِي أَأَشْكُرُ أَمْ أَكْفُرُ وَمَنْ شَكَرَ فَإِنَّمَا  
 يَشْكُرُ لِنَفْسِهِ وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ رَبِّي غَنِيٌّ كَرِيمٌ {٤٠}

قَالَ تَكْرُوْا لَهَا عَرْشَهَا نَنْظُرْ أَتَهْتَدِي أَمْ تَكُونُ مِنَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَهْتَدُونَ {٤١}

فَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ قِيلَ أَهَكَذَا عَرْشُكَ ۗ قَالَتْ كَأَنَّهُ هُوَ ۗ وَأُوتِينَا الْعِلْمَ مِنْ قَبْلِهَا وَكُنَّا مُسْلِمِينَ {٤٢}

وَصَدَّهَا مَا كَانَتْ تَعْبُدُ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ ۗ إِنَّهَا كَانَتْ مِنْ قَوْمٍ كَافِرِينَ {٤٣}

قِيلَ لَهَا ادْخُلِي الصَّرْحَ ۗ فَلَمَّا رَأَتْهُ حَسِبَتْهُ لُجَّةً وَكَشَفَتْ عَنْ سَاقِيهَا ۗ قَالَ إِنَّهُ صَرْحٌ مُّمَرَّدٌ مِنْ قَوَارِيرَ ۗ قَالَتْ رَبِّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي وَأَسْلَمْتُ مَعَ سُلَيْمَانَ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ {٤٤}

Qur'an: Sūrat al-Naml (The Ants) 27:15-44

15. And We gave knowledge to David and Solomon, and they said: Praise be to Allah, Who has preferred us above many of His believing servants!
16. And Solomon was David's heir. And he said: O mankind! Lo! we have been taught the language of birds, and have been given [an abundance] of all things. This surely is evident favour.
17. And there were gathered together unto Solomon his armies of the jinn and humankind, and of the birds, and they were set in battle order;
18. Till, when they reached the Valley of the Ants, an ant exclaimed: O ants! Enter your dwellings lest Solomon and his armies crush you, without realizing it.
19. And [Solomon] smiled, laughing at her speech, and said: My Lord, inspire me to be thankful for Your favor with which You have favored me and my parents, and to do good that shall be pleasing to You, and include me in [the number of] Your righteous slaves.
20. And he searched among the birds and said: How is it that I do not see the hoopoe, or is he among those who are absent?
21. Surely I will punish him with a severe punishment or I will slay him, unless he brings me a clear excuse.
22. But he was not long in coming, and he said: I have found something that you are unaware of, and I come unto you from Sheba with sure tidings.
23. Lo! I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given [an abundance] of all things, and hers is a mighty throne.

24. I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of Allah; and Satan makes their works seem fair to them, and bars them from the way [of Truth], so that they are not guided aright;
25. So that they worship not Allah, who brings forth what is hidden in the heavens and the earth, and knows what you conceal and what you proclaim,
26. Allah; there is no God but Him, the Lord of the Mighty Throne.
27. [Solomon] said: We shall see whether you speak the truth or whether you are one of the liars.
28. Take this my letter and throw it down to them; then turn away and see what [answer] they return,
29. [When she received the letter, the Queen of Sheba] said: O chieftains! There has been thrown to me a noble letter.
30. It is from Solomon, and it [says]: In the name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful;
31. Do not exalt yourselves against me, but come to me as those who surrender.
32. She said: O chieftains! Pronounce for me in my case. I decide no case till you are present with me.
33. They said: We are lords of might and lords of great prowess, but it is for you to command; so consider what you will command.
34. She said: Kings, when they enter a township, ruin it and turn the honor of its people into shame. Thus will they do.
35. But I will send a present to them, and see with what [answer] the messengers return.
36. So when [the envoy] came to Solomon, [Solomon] said: What! Would you help me with wealth? But what Allah has given me is better than what He has given you. It is you [and not I] who exult in your gift.
37. Return to them. We shall come unto them with hosts that they cannot resist, and we shall drive them out from there with shame, and they will be abased.
38. He said: O chiefs! Which of you will bring me her throne before they come to me, surrendering?
39. A stalwart of the jinn said: I will bring it to you before you can rise from your place. I am strong and trusty for such work.
40. One who had knowledge of the Scripture said: I will bring it to you before your gaze returns to you [= in the twinkle of an eye]. And when he saw [her throne] set in his presence, [Solomon] said: This is of the bounty of my Lord, that He may try me whether I give thanks or am ungrateful. Whoever gives thanks gives thanks only

for [the good of] his own soul; and whoever is ungrateful [is ungrateful only to his own soul's hurt]. Surely, my Lord is Absolute in independence, Bountiful.

41. He said: Disguise her throne for her so that we may see whether she will go aright or be among those not rightly guided.
42. So, when she came, it was said [to her]: Is your throne like this? She said: [It is] as though it were the very one. And [Solomon said]: We were given the knowledge before her and we had surrendered [to Allah].
43. But what she worshipped instead of Allah hindered her, for she came from disbelieving folk.
44. She was told: Enter the hall. And when she saw it she deemed it a pool and bared her legs. [Solomon] said: It is a hall, made smooth, of glass. She said: My Lord! Surely I have wronged myself, and I surrender with Solomon unto Allāh, the Lord of the Worlds.<sup>44</sup>

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44 This translation is based on that of Marmaduke Pickthall. I offer here also a prose paraphrase of QK 27:15-44:

Sulaymān, the heir of Dāwūd, had been taught the language of birds and been given an abundance of all things. Once when he had gathered his armies of jinn and men and birds [...] he discovered the hoopoe missing. He threatened to punish it if it did not have a good excuse. When the hoopoe returned, he announced to Sulaymān that he had found a mighty kingdom in Saba'/Sheba ruled by a woman and that she and her people worshipped the sun. Sulaymān sent the hoopoe with a letter, in which he wrote: "In the Name of Allāh, the merciful, the most merciful, do not hold yourselves aloof from me, but come to me surrendering (*muslimīn*)."<sup>44</sup> After consulting with her chieftains, the queen decided on the prudent course of sending an envoy with precious gifts. Sulaymān refused her gifts and threatened to send a mighty host against her if she would not submit to him. As the queen made her way, then, toward Sulaymān, to submit, Sulaymān had her throne (magically) transported from Saba' and then disguised it, to test whether she was rightly guided. When asked if it is hers, she replied, "It looks just like it." Then Sulaymān said, "We were given knowledge prior to her and we have submitted (to Islam)." Sulaymān diverted her from worshipping others than God. She was asked to enter his lofty Palace. Believing the mirrored floor that Sulaymān had installed to test or trick her, to be a pond, she uncovered her legs, whereupon Sulaymān told her it was merely glass. Thereupon the queen declares: "O my l/Lord, I have wronged myself; I hereby submit /surrender with Sulaymān to Allāh, the Lord of the Worlds." [*qālat rabbi 'innī ḡalamtu nafsi wa-'aslamtu ma'a Sulaymāna li-Allāhi rabbi al-'ālamīn*].

The second and final Solomon passage we will deal with is the Qur'ānic passage on Sulaymān and Bilqīs,<sup>45</sup> the Islamic cognates of the Biblical Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. We are fortunate in having Jacob Lassner's study, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*,<sup>46</sup> which gathers a wealth of Biblical, Postbiblical Judaic, and Islamic material on these two figures and brings it to bear on a broad-ranging and insightful discussion of gender, which I will not reiterate here. I would like, instead, to take up the issue of what Lassner terms the disjunctiveness of the Qur'ānic text. Of the passage we are treating here, he states:

The case for a story that is compressed from a larger and more detailed version begins with the inaccessibility of the Qur'ānic text. Unlike the extant Jewish versions, which are fairly straightforward, the rather loose narrative of Muslim scripture creates a host of interpretative problems for current readers of Sūrah xxvii. Shorn of all exegesis, verses 15-44 represent a seemingly disjointed account more reminiscent of an opaque folktale than historical narrative or a didactic midrash based on an ancient and oft-read chronicle. Moreover, the Qur'ānic version remains elusive and ahistorical even after considering the scattered references to Solomon that are found elsewhere in Muslim scripture. Relying on the Qur'ān alone, the modern reader will have difficulty reconstructing even the detailed outline of a story that has a beginning, middle, and end, all of which hang together. The thread that would tie together all these disparate parts is somehow missing. It is as though the Qur'ānic account were torn out of a larger tale known to contemporary audiences but beyond our grasp. Without the background material (that is, the missing larger story) available to these early readers and listeners, we are unable to tease meaning out of particularly vexing passages. Simply put, too many questions are left unanswered in the Qur'ānic version for it to have been a cohesive account of Solomon's joust with the queen. There must have been a more detailed and broadly focused account that informs the scriptural version.<sup>47</sup>

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45 As Lassner notes, the name Bilqīs for the Queen of Sheba is not found in the Bible, the Qur'ān, or the midrashim. On this and for suggested etymologies and references, see Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 228, n. 11. On this and more, see E. Ullendorff, "Bilqīs," *EI2*.

46 Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*.

47 *Ibid.*, 42.

He remarks further that “Muslim scripture often appears disjointed, with little if any evidence of sustained and unified composition.”<sup>48</sup> First, let me remark on the “elusive and ahistorical” quality of the Qur’ānic version of the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Lassner is quite correct about its ahistorical nature: the Qur’ān does not try to establish a chronological history, as does the Hebrew Bible; rather, in what is more like the Christian reading of the Old Testament as allegorical, the Qur’ān is concerned with archetypal and prototypical patterns of salvation and damnation. In this regard, I would argue that the Biblical versions of such “stories” represent not an original historical chronicle, but rather the superposition of a “historical chronological narrative” on what were originally folkloric materials. As for “elusiveness,” it is my argument that although the text may prove elusive if we insist on imposing a “narrative” reading, a more “poetic” reading, attuned to the rhetorically structured use of language, symbol, and so on reveals that the Qur’ānic passage cogently and persuasively conveys the Qur’ānic message of salvation through submission (*islām*) to God and His prophets. Likewise, with the claim of the “disjointedness” of the Qur’ānic passage. Again, it seems to me that Lassner has been somewhat seduced, as have many members of the recent generation of Biblical scholars (and literary critics in general), by what I term the “narrative fallacy,” i.e., that the only coherent or meaningful literary structure is the narrative, and that literary forms that do not strive for or exhibit narrative form are *ipso facto* aesthetically or logically lacking (see Arazi’s remarks cited above concerning the narrative lack or incapacity of al-Nābighah and his *qaṣīdahs*).

Lassner is quite correct that the Qur’ānic versions assume the existence of widely known narrative forms of the same material. What we then need to recognize is that if the narrative forms—tales, stories, folk-stories, even scriptural versions—were already widely known, then they are therefore redundant.<sup>49</sup> The Qur’ān neither needs nor intends to merely reiterate popular or religious

48 Ibid., 43.

49 In a more recent article about Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Elias argues much along the same lines as Lassner:

“The encounter of Solomon with the Queen of Sheba stands out as one of the more noteworthy *stories related* in the Qur’ān. Among the distinguishing characteristics of the majority of Qur’ānic pericopes of the pre-Islamic prophetic figures are the *apparent disjointedness* of the references, the *absence of sustained narrative*, and *allusions to characters and events that do not appear* in the Qur’ānic text itself. The story of the Queen of Sheba stands out among these pre-Islamic tales in these regards; it is *elliptical and terse* to the point that often one is not clear which of the principal characters in the story—God, Solomon, the Queen of Sheba, or some fourth party—is speaking. The Qur’ānic references are fully comprehensible only if one is familiar with the narrative from some other



narratives, but rather it aims to convey a religious message of salvation. Nevertheless, Lassner has some idea, though he does not pursue it, that the Qur'ānic language itself, its "rhythmic assonanced prose," may have some redeeming value: "The power of the language was in this case perhaps as important if not more important than a message clearly stated."<sup>50</sup>

What I would like to propose is that the non-narrative, rhetorically and ritually encoded language of the Qur'ān may indeed convey and conserve its "message" more effectively than narrative forms.<sup>51</sup> Even a quick review of the Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā' narrative versions of the story of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba reveals the variety and instability in their focus, much as we saw above in the narrative cognates of the Qur'ānic Solomon and the Sleek Steeds passage (QK 38:30-40). That is, although the narratives make for compelling storytelling, the "message" shifts from one version to another.<sup>52</sup> Some center on the claim that the jinn told Sulaymān that Bilqīs had hairy legs and donkeys' hooves. When he tricks her with the fake glass pond, so that she lifts her skirts, he sees her hairy legs. When Sulaymān refuses to let a razor touch Bilqīs's legs, he queries his jinn, and they solve the problem by suggesting a depilatory instead, and

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source, which strongly suggests that it is intended for an audience that already knew the story of the encounter between Solomon and the Queen. (57; *emphasis mine*)."

My point, as stressed in the main text of this study, is that such Qur'ānic passages are not intended to be "stories related," but, as Elias states toward the end of the cited paragraph, passages "intended for an audience that already knew the story." According to my present argument, they are constructed so as to convey and preserve a particular message rather than to recount a particular story. The narrative deficiencies of such texts are precisely the rhetorical qualities valued in non-narrative literary forms, such as poetry: "allusive," "elliptical," and "terse" expression. See Jamal J. Elias, "Prophecy, Power and Propriety: The Encounter of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 11.1 (2009), 57-74.

50 Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 226, n. 23.

51 Of interest here (although altogether different in its approach from the present study), both in regard to al-Nābighah's proclamatory passage discussed in Part I and to our discussion of Solomonic passages in the Qur'ān, is: Ayman A. el-Desouky, "Nazm, Ijāz, and Discontinuous Kerygma: Approaching Qur'anic Voice on the Other Side of the Poetic," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 15.2 (2013), 1-21. His remarks on the hermeneutics of voice and the "possibility of a uniquely Islamic hermeneutics of proclamation" (5) and his engaging Northrop Frye's work in his discussion of narrative and discontinuous kerygma (15-17) are particularly pertinent.

52 In this respect, see the composite narrative of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba that Elias has compiled based on a number of the early sources, in Elias, "Prophecy, Power and Propriety," 59-63. As should be clear from the present study, I find the process of analysis based on a composite narrative methodologically problematic.

Sulaymān thereby becomes the first person to make a depilatory—an etiological myth.<sup>53</sup> Many of the Jewish and Islamic versions dwell on the battle of the sexes, in which Bilqīs and Sulaymān try each other with elaborate tests and riddles, a variant of the folkloric commonplace of the contest between two wizards. The variety of riddles and tests that Bilqīs puts before Sulaymān are most often of a sexually symbolic nature, so that they fall under the folkloric type of the bride-to-be testing the maturity and sexual knowledge of her potential husband. While in most Islamic legends, the Queen marries Solomon, other versions of the Solomon-and-Queen-of-Sheba legend serve as genealogical or foundational myths: forced by Solomon to marry, she chooses Dhū Tubbaʿ, thereby instituting the Tubbaʿ dynasty of kings of Yemen;<sup>54</sup> as Ullendorff further summarizes:

In Jewish sources the combined narrative of Qurʾān and Muslim commentators can first be traced in the 8th (?) century Targum Sheni to Esther where we find a most elaborate version of this story. This is further embellished in the 11th(?) century Alphabet of Ben Sira which avers that Nebuchadnezzar was the fruit of the union between Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The fullest and most significant version of the legend appears in the *Kebrā Nagast* ('Glory of the Kings'), the Ethiopian national saga. Here Menelik I is the child of Solomon and Makeda (the Ethiopic name of Bilqīs) from whom the Ethiopian dynasty claims descent to the present day.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, even in cases where the plot elements in the narrative variants of the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* remain largely the same, the purpose or the message of the story is subject to vast variation. The gist of the Qurʾānic version is that the clever queen wants to know whether the mighty Solomon is merely a worldly, material king—in which case the gift of material tribute will satisfy him; or whether he is as well truly a Prophet, in which case he will demand more—sexual/full submission and submission to his religion, his God.

In the Qurʾān, it appears that there is a reduplicated ending. The first ending has Sulaymān trying to test the queen with her disguised throne, yet with God's help she seems to recognize it and is so impressed that she submits to Islam.

53 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 19:169-170 (QK 27:44), variant versions.

54 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 2, 585-586 (with *b-t-ʿ* instead of *t-b-ʿ*); Brinner, *The Children of Israel*, 164 (misprinted Tubbaʿ instead of Tubbaʿ, but see 164, n. 834); al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 435-436; Brinner, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 536.

55 Ullendorff, "Bilqīs."

The second ending is almost redundant: he tricks her once more with the glass “sea.” In the Qur’ānic version, the glass pond is Sulaymān’s ultimate test of the queen, tricking her into revealing her legs—a synecdoche for revealing her private parts. In other words, we should understand this visual violation as essentially a sexual violation or acquisition. Her exclamation “I have wronged myself” thus functions as a double-entendre: first, she has been outwitted and allowed herself to be violated, but, second, she was wrong in trying to outwit Sulaymān, who through his trick has outwitted her, thus demonstrating his true prophethood and the correctness of his religion. She submits, therefore, both to him (sexually) and to his God.

Also coming to the fore in the Qur’ānic passage is the Islamization of Solomon through the insertion into the recitation of explicitly Islamic diction: *mu’minīn*; *al-rahmān al-rahīm*; *muslimīn*; *ihādā/hudā*; *aslama/islām* (believers, the All-Merciful, submitters/Muslims; right guidance; submission/Islam).<sup>56</sup> These words appear within a discourse also otherwise weighted with Qur’ānic-Islamic formulae—for example, *al-hamdu lillāhi* (praise be to God) (QK 27:15) and the cornerstone of Islamic doctrine, *Allāhu lā ilāha illā huwa* (Allāh, there is no god but He) (QK 27:26)—while Sulaymān’s letter to the queen opens “*bismi Allāhi al-rahmāni al-rahīm*” (in the name of God the All-Merciful) (QK 27:30). My point is that within the Qur’ānic context, Sulaymān speaks the same Islamic language as Muḥammad, thereby strengthening the bond of identification between the two: the prototype and the Seal of the Prophets.

The Islamization of Sulaymān reaches its climax in the closing verse of the passage, when the queen declares: “*aslamtu ma’a Sulaymāna lil-Lāhi rabbi al-‘ālamīn*” (I submitted with Sulaymān to Allāh the Lord of the worlds) (QK 27:44). Above all, through the verbal play (*jinās*, paranomasia) on the root *s-l-m*, the very name Sulaymān becomes semantically and acoustically identified with Islam: he both submits and is submitted to; indeed, submission to him constitutes submission to Allāh, just as it is supposed to do with the Prophet Muḥammad. Whereas the Hebrew etymology or word-play of the Bible derives the name *Shelomo* (Solomon) from *shalom* (peace) (I Chron. 22:9: “Behold, a son shall be born to you; he shall be a man of peace. I will give him peace from all his enemies round about; for his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days”), the Qur’ānic Sulaymān comes to be irrevocably associated with Islam itself. Above all, this condensed but semantically rich paronomasiac phrase encapsulates in a compelling mnemonic the

56 On *muslim*, *aslama*, and *islām*/Islam, see Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba*, 166, and for further reference, 246, n. 124.

kernel of the Qurʾānic recitation. Whatever else might be lost, this epigrammatic, lapidary formulation will remain.

It is perhaps worth noting that in the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* on Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, another Arabic etymology is offered for the name Sulaymān. Al-Thaʿlabī relates that Sulaymān chides the ant for warning the other ants that he and his army might trample them (QK 27:18-19), and then he asks the ant to instruct or advise him. In doing so, the ant explains the etymology of the name of his father David, and his own name:

... “And do you know why you were named Solomon (*Sulaymān*)?” He said: “No.” She said, “Because you are *salīm* (content). You have reconciled yourself to your circumstances through your heart’s tranquility (*salāmah*) and it is therefore your right to surpass your father David.”<sup>57</sup>

Further buttressing the Islamicization of Solomon is the etymological and symbolic sense of the hoopoe (*hudhud*). Although its primary function is not evident in the Qurʾānic passage under discussion (QK 27:20-28), it is foregrounded in the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* narratives: the hoopoe is the bird that can locate water, even under the ground. In the narratives, it is only when Solomon needs water for his prayer ablutions that he notices that the hoopoe is missing. It is interesting that this association between the bird and Solomon has made its way into the Ḥadīth (the sayings or traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad), as reported by his Companion Anas ibn Malik: “The Prophet of Allāh said: ‘I forbid you to kill the hoopoe, for it was Solomon’s guide to water.’”<sup>58</sup> As the bird that guides one to water, that is, to life, the *hudhud* becomes a symbol of moral and religious (right) guidance, *hudā*, and ultimately in this story, to Islamic salvation. Furthermore, the reduplicated root *h-d* identifies *hudhud* etymologically as well as acoustically with the finally weak root *h-d-(y)* of the word *hudā*, which in an Islamic context denotes “true religion,” i.e., Islam. Even today in the Arab world girls named Hudā are nicknamed Hudhud. Note that related Islamic terms, such as Sharīʿah (path to water, Islamic law) share a similar metaphoric etymology.

In sum, like the *qaṣīdah*, the Qurʾān generates and guarantees its message not primarily through narrative, but through the ritually or archetypally determined arrangement of key concepts encoded in semantically and symbolically

57 Al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 403; Brinner, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 498.

58 Trans. Brinner. Al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 422; Brinner, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 520-521; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 2, 578; Brinner, *The Children of Israel*, 157; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 19:143-144 (QK 27:21); al-Fārisī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 135.

laden terms that are bound together by rhetorical means such as rhyme, repetition, metaphor, and wordplay—techniques we more generally associate with poetry.

Turning once more to Al-Azmeh's statements, the description of Sulaymān in the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* as a *ghāzī* (military campaigner) who could hear of no land without desiring to subdue it and bring it into the Islamic *ummah*, or community, unquestionably reveals a concept of "religio-imperial dominion"—what with utter clarity the final verse of the Qur'ānic passage (QK 27:44) states. The *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* theme of the Hudhud (as an embodiment of *hudā*, "Islamic Right Guidance") going out and scouting distant lands for potential Islamic conquests and of even the mightiest of nations being intimidated by and surrendering to Sulaymān, his mighty armies, and his God, the Lord of the Worlds, likewise unmistakably expresses the idea of religio-imperial dominion in a language and rhetoric that would be immediately grasped by the audience to which the Qur'ān was directed.

In conclusion, although Al-Azmeh may be correct as far as the non-recoverability of putative tenth-century BCE concepts of kingship in Ancient Israel, the rich Semitic and Semito-Persian mythic-folkloric narrative tradition, along with specifically Arabic non-narrative materials such as pre-Islamic odes, the Qur'ān itself, and the ancillary commentaries and legends, reveal an autochthonous tradition of kingship that lays the immediate foundation for Islamic concepts of rulership and dominion. At the verge of Islam (i.e., al-Nābighah's period), at the initial appearance of the Qur'ān, and during the first three centuries of Islamic dominion, the myth or legend of Sulaymān in its various forms expressed through a variety of narrative and non-narrative strategies an unmistakable rhetoric of absolute power and religio-imperial universalism. Above all, these autochthonous materials provided a lexicon of symbols, archetypes, and tropes of mythic kingship in "a clear Arabic tongue" (*lisānun 'arabiyyun mubīn* QK 16:103).