

Qur'ān Sūra 112, Parmenides and Eunomius**A Textual-Philological Investigation****(Essay: Rough Draft)**

By Dr. Samuel Zinner¹
Aulla, Tuscany
6 June 2016

In an issue of *Diogenes*, Gilbert Grandguillaume refers to Youssef Seddik, *Le Coran: Autre lecture, autre traduction* (Algiers: La Tour d'Aigues: Barzakh/Éditions de l'Aube, 2002), p. 87 who claims that Qur'ān sūra 112 “appears identical to the beginning of Fragment VIII of the Poem of Parmenides.”² From the perspective of Islamic *kalām*, Seddik's claim should cause no theological concern in the least, since the Qur'ān claims to be a confirmation of the previously revealed religions and wisdoms; this point should be kept in mind throughout the course of the present essay. A major contribution on Parmenides by John Palmer from 2009,³ which naturally was not available to Seddik in 2002, brought to light several semantic and philological adjustments and corrections to older translations and understandings of Parmenides fragment 8. Many of Palmer's insights are based on two 1987 volumes edited by Pierre Aubenque, *Études sur Parménide*.⁴ The present essay is designed to test Seddik's claim regarding a possible relationship between Qur'ān sūra 112 and Parmenides and to explore whether another stream of tradition, namely, Eunomian theology, might be reflected in Qur'ān sūra 112 as well. We begin with the Arabic text, a

¹ We thank Michael Ewbank for offering helpful comments on the first draft of this essay that led to its improvement.

² Gilbert Grandguillaume, “The Forgotten Cultures of the Qur'an,” *Diogenes*, no. 226, vol 57, issue 2 (2010), p. 58.

³ John Palmer, *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴ We thank our colleague Michael Ewbank for the following personal observation: “A great deal of what Palmer presents was already unearthed in 2 tomes edited by Pierre Aubenque, *Études sur Parménide* (Paris, 1987).”

transliteration, and a hyper-literal English translation of Qur'ān sūra 112's four *āyāt*, leaving unrendered for the moment the difficult terms *aḥad* and *ṣamad*:

- 1: قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ / *qul huwa l-lahu aḥadun* / say he God, *aḥad*
- 2: اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ / *al-lahu l-ṣamadu* / God he the *ṣamad*
- 3: لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ / *lam yalid walam yūlad* / not begets and not begotten
- 4: وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ / *walam yakun lahu kufuwan aḥadun* / and is not to him equal/like *aḥad*

As for the relevant lines from Parmenides fragment 8, we will begin with 2b–4, which states that there are “very many” σήματα, that is, “signs,” “signposts,” or “markers” upon the path of being, or of What Is; we give the John Palmer translation, adding our own underlining to key terms relevant for the discussion of Qur'ān sūra 112:

along this path markers are there

very many, that What Is is ungenerated (ἀγέννητον) and deathless (ἀνώλεθρον), whole (οὔλον) and uniform (μουνογενές τε), and still (ἀτρεμές) and perfect (τελεστόν).⁵

Regarding οὔλον μουνογενές τε, Palmer justifies its translation as “whole and uniform” with the following arguments:

Burnet 1930: 174 n. 4, and Kranz in Diels and Kranz 1951: 235, rejected the reading μουνογενές at fr. 8. 4a, in large part because they took it to mean something like ‘once’ or ‘only begotten’ and saw that this sense is incompatible with What Is being ἀγέννητον or ‘ungenerated’. In defending μουνογενές, Tarán 1965: 92, argued that it should be understood as ‘unique’, ‘the only thing of its kind’, or ‘single’; but his defence of this understanding by comparison with the phrase μονογενές τέκνον πατρὶ at Aesch. Ag. 898 is forced, and there are difficulties in finding an argument for uniqueness at the appropriate point. The arguments that What Is is ungenerated and deathless extend through fr. 8. 21, and the reasons given for taking What Is to be ἀτρεμές or ‘still’ begin at fr. 8. 26. Since Parmenides’ exposition follows the order of

⁵ Ibid., pp. 367-369.

this initial programme, fr. 8. 22–5 must be where he argues that What Is is οὐλον and μουνογενές. But there is certainly no argument there for the uniqueness of What Is. It is therefore best to understand μουνογενές as ‘of a single kind’ or ‘uniform’.⁶

Next we offer Palmer’s translation of Parmenides fragment 8. 5–6a, since it contains terms synonymous to those appearing in lines 2b–4; again we underline key terms relevant for the discussion of Qur’ān sūra 112:

but not ever was it, nor yet will it be, since it is now together entire (ὁμοῦ πᾶν), single (ἕν), continuous (συνεχές).⁷

Palmer notes the following additional synonyms in Parmenides: What Is “must be altogether” or “entirely,” πάμπαν πελέναι χρεών ἐστιν (8.11); “nor is it divided,” διαιρετόν; it is “all alike,” ὁμοῖον; “all replete,” ἔμπλεόν; “all continuous,” ξυνεχές (8.22-25). With regard to the translation of 8.22’s διαιρετόν, Palmer explains that “‘divided’ seems preferable to ‘divisible’ since διαιρετόν picks up ‘whole and uniform’ from the main programme.”⁸ As for What Is, it is not possible for anything “to come to be beyond (παρ’) it” (8.13a). What Is is also “unbeginning” and “unending,” ἀναρχον ἄπαυστον (8.27a); “the same,” τωυτόν, and “in the same place,” i.e., “unmoving,” ἐν τωύτῳ (8.29-31); “inviolable,” ἄσυλον (8.48-49).

Palmer explains in the following manner these various terms’ spatial and temporal applications and senses:

What Is both must be (or exist), and must be what it is, both temporally and spatially. For What Is to be (or exist) diachronically is for it to be ungenerated and deathless. For it to be what it is diachronically is for it to be ‘still’ or unchanging. For What Is to be (or exist) throughout space is for it to be ‘whole’. For it to be what it is everywhere

⁶ Ibid., p. 140.

⁷ Ibid., p. 369.

⁸ Ibid., p. 151.

internally is for it to be uniform. Finally, for it to be what it is everywhere at its extremity is for it to be perfect.⁹

Consequently, according to Palmer, What Is possesses both “diachronic unity and continuity.”¹⁰

We now turn to Qur'ān *sūra* 112. We examine this *sūra*'s two terms *aḥad* and *ṣamad* in a forthcoming Qur'ān commentary,¹¹ which we will to a degree anticipate here. The word *aḥad*, “one,” is derived from *waḥad* by means of changing *wāw* to *alif*, which reflects the frequent phonetic practice of preferring a lighter consonant.¹² However, there is more at work behind *waḥad* > *aḥad* than just the choice of *wāw* over *alif*. The *aḥad* also transparently functions as an allusion to the opening of the Hebrew Jewish shema', “Hear, O Israel, the Lord, the Lord your God is one,” which may have been known to nascent Islam either through Jewish and/or Christian contacts.

Arabic *ṣamad* is here likely associated via wordplay with Arabic *ḍamada*, “to bind up”; cf. Syriac *ṣmad*. The Hebrew cognate bears the same basic meaning, צמד, *ṣāmad*, “bind,” “join,” among whose derivatives are *ṣemed*, “couple,” “pair,” and *ṣāmid*, “bracelet.”¹³ From the root צמד comes the word “braid.” In the Hiphil *ṣāmad* means “to combine,” “to harness,” “to fit together.” In Syriac the cognate word means “to bind.” The basic sense of *ṣamad* in *sūra* 112 would then seem to imply by contrastive implication, “undivided.” In *sūra* 112, arguably *ṣamad* basically means “united.” *Sūra* 112:3 alludes negatively to the Nicene creed by insisting that God does *not* beget and that God is *not* begotten. Jesus is not the son, but the servant of God. Therefore the relationship between God and Jesus is not *walad*,

⁹ Ibid., p. 140.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 146.

¹¹ Samuel Zinner, *The Praeparatio Islamica: An Historical Reconstruction with Philological-Exegetical Commentary on Selected Qur'ānic Āyāt Based on Ancient Hebrew, Syro-Aramaic, Mandaic, Samaritan and Hellenistic Literatures*.

¹² Edwin E. Calverley, “The Grammar of Sūratu 'l-Ikhlāṣ,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 8 (1957), p. 10.

¹³ See R. Laird Harris; Gleason L. Archer; Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 769.

generation, but *ṣamad* in some sense. The term *aḥad* implies oneness, whereas *ṣamad* suggests multiplicity. This contrast is reflected elsewhere in Islamic *kalām* by the doctrine that there is one divine essence, but many divine attributes, some of which may even be personified, depending on the particular school of thought involved, such as word (*kalima*) and spirit (*rūḥ*). However, in standard Islamic theologies any personified attributes do not pertain to the plane of the divine essence as such, so that God remains essentially one. Bringing these insights to bear on *sūra* 112, in short, God is *ṣamad* not in the mode of generation of a son (*āya* 3), nor in the marital mode of possessing the maternal Holy Spirit as a wife who is mother of a son (see *āya* 4's implied "consort"),¹⁴ but in the theological mode of creation and philosophical mode of emanation, the latter possessing several different possible valences, depending on the particular school of thought involved.

J. M. F. Van Reeth refers to *al-ṣamad*'s Hebrew and Aramaic cognates which bear the sense of "yoke."¹⁵ Before addressing the question of hypostases, Van Reeth points out with regard to *sūra* 4:157's formula *rafa'a 'anhu* which describes Jesus' assumption to God, that "this is in any case a Manichaean liturgical formulaic expression," as well as being reflective of "pure adoptionism" in Ebionite mode.¹⁶ Van Reeth detects traces of the Ebionite True Prophet doctrine in the Qur'ān and concludes with regard to the theological implications of the term *al-ṣamad*: "The divine epiphany is incorporated and tangible in the persons involved in the succession of the prophets, but the prophet is not therefore a hypostasis, a son of God, but only the earthly shell for a transcendent divinity who subsists indivisibly, eternally and immutably. Like the Aristotelian ἄτομον, *al-ṣamad* therefore means a self-subsisting principle which is exalted above every individualized existence."¹⁷ Therefore, the

¹⁴ According to al-Bayḍāwī, *āya* 4 combats the idea that God has a *ṣāhibah*, a "consort"; see Edwin E. Calverley, "The Grammar of Sūratu 'l-Ikhlās," *Studia Islamica*, no. 8 (1957), p. 14. God is not a father who begets a son (*āya* 3), and as God does not have children, he does not have a consort or wife from whom children could be born; this is the general meaning of the *āya* according to classical commentators.

¹⁵ J. M. F. Van Reeth, "Die Vereinigung des Propheten mit seinem Gott," in Markus Gross, Karl Heinz-Ohlig, *Schlaglichter: Die beiden ersten Islamischen Jahrhunderte* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2008), p. 382.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 383. Our translation from the German.

Prophet as epiphany is not a divine hypostasis, but, as in Sufi ideology, the earthly and fully human *tajallī* of a supernal hypostasis.

In Ebionite terms, the Holy Spirit, who is the real True Prophet who instantiates cyclically beginning with Adam, is the underlying hypostasis who remains immutable as she passes through the succession of the prophets throughout the course of salvation history. That the Prophet of Islam is the final instantiation of the maternal Holy Spirit in the series of the succession of the supernal True Prophet is confirmed in the view of Islamic theologies by his being the Praiseworthy One foretold by Jesus, which involves a wordplay on the Greek term for the Paraclete, who is, however, none other than the divine Holy Spirit.

That *āya* 2's *ṣamad* synonymously overlaps conceptually with *āya* 1's *aḥad* is indicated by the fact that several traditional variant readings attest *al-wāḥid* rather than *al-ṣamad*; taken as a whole these traditions show a degree of theological synonymy between the three terms *al-aḥad*, *al-wāḥid* and *al-ṣamad*.¹⁸ *Āya* 3 alludes to the Nicene belief in God the father and God the son, whereas *āya* 4 alludes to the belief in God the maternal Holy Spirit. In light of this, we can conclude that *āyāt* 1 and 2 imply that God is not one and three, as in the Nicene creed, but that God is one, and the one God is bound through/in an intimate union with the word and the Holy Spirit, not through/in an identification in or of the divine essence, but on the lower plane of the hypostatic (not in a Christian sense of the term, but in the sense of “personified”) or the emanational, valences encountered in both *kalām* and Sufi theosophy. However, although the passage alludes to the Nicene creed, the fact that *āya* 4 presupposes a maternal mode of the Holy Spirit indicates that the Trinitarian thought being dealt with in this context may have been mediated through the lens of what scholarship generally calls “Jewish-Christian,” but which we would more specifically describe in this instance as an Ebionite-like theology.¹⁹

¹⁸ See Ethan Kohlberg, Mohammed Ali Amir-Moezzi, *Revelation and Falsification: The Kitāb al-qirā'āt of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Sayyārī. Critical Edition with an Introduction and Notes* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 286-287.

¹⁹ Although we have previously used the terminology “Jewish Christian” in past publication, we have now mostly abandoned the phrase, replacing it with “Jewish Jesus sect” (which was composed of several competing groups), especially for the first century and a half or so of the

God's nature is one, God's attributes are diverse but united together, that is, God is *aḥad* and *ṣamad* respectively. That God is *aḥad* and *ṣamad* corresponds to the frequent designation of God as “one and only” in sources such as the *Corpus Hermeticum*. We can also compare God as *aḥad* and *ṣamad* with the following passage from an anonymous kabbalist quoted by Rabbi Shem Tov ben Shem Tov: “The Name, our Lord, blessed be He, is One, Unique and Special (*'ehad yahid u-meyuhad*) . . . His knowledge is *united* to Him. . . .”²⁰ Similarly, in the *Sefer Yeẓirah* folio 63a, God is described as “alone and unique” (*yahid u-meyuhad*).²¹ Although Idel renders *'ehad yahid u-meyuhad* as “One, Unique and Special,” we would prefer a somewhat more literal “one, alone and unique.”

In the Mandaean *Ginza R* Book 1,6 we read, “He has no father who would be older than he, no firstborn who would have been before him.” With this we may compare the following statement from the late 3rd-century CE Rabbi Abbahu of Palestine who explains Isaiah 44:6 as follows: “‘I am the first,’ because I have no father; ‘and I am the last,’ because I have no son, ‘and beside me there is no God,’ because I have no brother” (*Exodus Rabbah* 29). Abbahu's formulation possesses an echo in Ibn Ezra, whose *Ḥay ben Meqitz*, reads in lines 676ff.:

He replied, “He is one, none is second to Him

He has neither son nor brother.

Places are unable to contain Him.

Time cannot predate Him.²²

The additional lines 704ff. are also of relevance, since they reflect related Isaianic tropes:

sect's history. In some later periods, “Jewish Christian” may arguably still apply to some particular groups, but for earlier periods, the language of “Jewish Christian” should be abandoned as misleading and simplistic.

²⁰ See Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 53, 503.

²¹ Cited in Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*. Edited by R. J. Zwi Weblowsky. Translated by Allan Arkush (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 341-342.

²² Cited in Aaron W. Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 206; for commentary, see p. 182.

He has neither shape nor likeness

He has no image by which one can compare Him. . . .

He knows the concealed as if revealed

The hidden as if visible.²³

Interestingly the wording of the tradition found from Rabbi Abbahu to Ibn Ezra on God's transcendence stems from Ecclesiastes 4:8: "There is one that is alone, and he hath not a second; yea, he hath neither son nor brother; yet is there no end of all his labour, neither is his eye satisfied with riches: 'for whom then do I labour, and bereave my soul of pleasure?' This also is vanity, yea, it is a grievous business" (JPS 1917).

Sūra 112:4's *kufū* has its ultimate inspiration in Tanakh texts such as Isaiah 44:7, "Who is like me?" A similar idea as found in *sūra* 112:4 appears in *sūra* 42:11: "There is not anything (*shayon*) like him (*kamithlihi*)." The crucial difference in *sūra* 42:11 is that *shayon* is not personified or hypostatic. However, other scriptural passages, both biblical and Qur'ānic grant that there is a divine likeness, as in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make humanity in our image, according to our likeness," Ezekiel 1:26, "and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form," Qur'ān *sūra* 30:27: "And his is the highest likeness (*mathalu*) in the heavens and the earth, and he is Exalted, Wise," *sūra* 16:60: "God's likeness (*mathalu*) is the highest."

Before continuing we should clarify that Isaiah 44:7, "Who is like me?" can be also understood as in the NJPS: "*Who like Me* can announce, can foretell it—and match Me thereby?" Similarly, in the shema', "Hear, O Israel, the Lord, the Lord your God is one," may alternatively be rendered as, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord, the Lord your God alone." As Arnaud Sérandour comments:

²³ Ibid., p. 206. Hughes (ibid., p. 244) suggests Deuteronomy 29:28 as a parallel to the contrast between the concealed and visible: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law." This Torah verse influenced several Qur'ānic *āyāt*, including 6:50, 59 and 52:37. On the relationship between these *āyāt* and *merkabah* mysticism, see our essay, "Further Evidence of the Prophet of Islam's Contact with *Merkabah* Mysticism."

The most common translation of Deuteronomy 6.4 goes as follows: “Hear, O Israel, Yhwh is our Elohim, Yhwh is one.” Theologians have tried to read Deuteronomy 6.4 as a theological doctrine pronounced by a believing community whose aim is to found monotheism by defining the divine person of Yhwh as “one,” and interpreting the word “one” as meaning “unique.” We should note at once that there is a different Hebrew word to express the quality “unique.” It is a word that is used in particular to mean an “only” child and by extension people who are alone and lonely [Ps 25.16 (יחיד); 68.7 (יחידים)]. Furthermore, why must the verb “to be” be implied in this statement? The Hebrew syntax does not indicate that “our Elohim” and “one” are attributes of the divine name. Neither does the context recommend it.²⁴

Sérandour explains of the foreign gods mentioned in such Tanakh passages as Jeremiah 2:5, 11, 27; 3:9; 10:10-11: “Thus these gods are not denied *per se*, it is the power and ability to reign that is denied them in these passages.”²⁵ According to Wesley Williams, the same paradigm would apply to the Qur'ān, as *sūra* 38:4's formulation of the Prophet of Islam's teaching supposedly illustrates: “all the gods (are) one God.”²⁶ Sérandour additionally points out the incorrectness of the claim for a divine “plural of majesty” in the Tanakh: “The first person plural ‘us’ in Hebrew cannot be understood as a ‘form for royalty’. In that case the third person is used.”²⁷ Williams argues that what is actually involved in the Tanakh is an address to a plural divine council.²⁸

To return now to *sūra* 112:4's idea of incomparability, this is reflected in the frequent Qur'ānic trope that denies God having a partner, the affirmation of which constitutes the sin

²⁴ Arnaud Sérandour, “On the Appearance of a Monotheism in the Religion of Israel (3rd Century BC or Later?),” *Diogenes* 205: 33–45 (2005), pp. 42-43.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

²⁶ On this subject, see Wesley Williams, “God Among the Gods: Divine Plurality in the Qur'an in the Light of Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Mythic Tradition” http://drwesleywilliams.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/God_Among_the_Gods1.106153051.pdf

²⁷ Arnaud Sérandour, “On the Appearance of a Monotheism in the Religion of Israel (3rd Century BC or Later?),” p. 39.

²⁸ See Wesley Williams, “God Among the Gods: Divine Plurality in the Qur'an in the Light of Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Mythic Tradition,” pp. 13-15.

of “association,” *shirk*, a concept equivalent to the Jewish theological term *shittuf*, that is, placing partners beside or next to God. According to Parmenides it is not possible for anything “to come to be beyond (παρ) it,” that is, beyond What Is (8.13a). Interestingly, as Palmer notes, in this particular instance παρ “is temporal, not spatial” because “to mean ‘to come to be beside it’, αὐτὸ would have to be in the dative case rather than the accusative.”²⁹ Nevertheless, it remains intriguing that with only a slight case adjustment, 8.13a would coincide semantically and linguistically parallel the Qur'ānic denial of *shirk* reflected in equivalent terminology in *sūra* 112:4. Moreover, according to Parmenides fragment 8.49, What Is is “equal to itself.”

While Isaiah 44:7 is certainly an inspiration behind *sūra* 112:4's *kufū*, a far more proximate connection is the theology of Eunomius, according to which there is no “likeness” or equivalency in essence between God the creator and the pre-existent, created personified Logos. In fact the name of the Anomoean school is derived from the Greek word for “dissimilar,” literally “not” ἀ(ν) “similar” ὅμοιος. Eunomius' denial of essential likeness between God on the one hand and the Logos and the Holy Spirit on the other is in fact based on the foundational Anomoean axiom that God is neither begotten nor begets, as the first sentence of Eunomius' *Liber apologeticus* 9 illustrates: “But if God is unbegotten . . . , he could never undergo a generation which involved the sharing of his own distinctive nature with the offspring of that generation, and could never admit of any comparison or association with the thing begotten.”³⁰ That this sentence is immediately preceded by a statement insisting on the divine unity and a rejection of what Islamic theology calls *shirk* arguably confirms that *sūra* 112 is indeed a reflection of Eunomian theology; we cite the final sentence of *Liber apologeticus* 8: “So then, if . . . ‘the Unbegotten’ . . . is not applied to a part of him only (for he is without parts), and does not exist within him as something separate (for he is simple and uncompounded), and is not something different or alongside him (for

²⁹ John Palmer, *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy*, p. 147.

³⁰ Richard Paul Vaggione, editor, *Eunomius: The Extant Works*, p. 43.

he is one and only he is unbegotten), then ‘the Unbegotten’ must be unbegotten *essence*.”³¹ Note that in this sentence as well each point contained in *sūra* 112 is represented, for God is “one” (= *aḥad*, *āya* 1), “without parts” (= *ṣamad*; *āya* 2), “unbegotten” (= *lam yalid*; *āya* 3b), “only he is unbegotten” (this implies “not begets” = *lam yūlad*; *āya* 3a), and “not something different or alongside him” (= no one is equivalent, *kufū*, to God; *āya* 4).

The Arabic term *kufū* has another precise parallel in the Greek term ἰσότητα/ἰσότητος as found in Eunomius’ *Liber apolgeticus* 11: “Neither the likening nor the comparison nor the association of the essence has left any room for a pre-eminence or a distinction but has manifestly yielded an equivalence (ἰσότητα), and along with that equivalence (ἰσότητος) has shown that the thing likened or compared is itself unbegotten.”³² Shortly after this, at the end of the same chapter, Eunomius offers a succinct encapsulation that accords with *sūra* 112 in a most impressive manner: “that the God [θεός = *allāh*] of all things is one [εἷς = *aḥad*] and that he is unbegotten [ἀγέννητος = *lam yūlad*] and incomparable [ἄσύγκριτος = *lahu kufuwan*].”³³ Eunomius writes similarly in chapter 26: “the God of all things’ is the one and ‘only true God,’ unbegotten, without beginning, incomparable. . . .”³⁴ Chapter 15 associates begetting with partition: “we have not ascribed begetting to the essence of God (it is unbegotten); we have not ascribed separation or partition (it is incorruptible). . . .”³⁵ In chapter 26, Eunomius insists that the personified Word is “neither *homoousios* nor *homoiousios*, since the one implies a generation and division of the essence and the other an equality.”³⁶

In light of the above evidence, *sūra* 112’s negation of the Nicene creed seems to presuppose the theology of Eunomius.³⁷ As we have already observed, *sūra* 112 refers to the Nicene creed negatively by taking up the position of those dissenters to Nicaea via a denial that God can be begotten or that he can beget, which accords with the theology of the

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., p. 47; Greek on p. 46.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 69.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 71.

³⁷ We thank Michael Ewbank for bringing this potential link to our attention.

Anomoean school that teaches that an unbegotten, and therefore simple, God would become complex and partitioned by an act of generation; that is, generation would dualistically split or partition the divine into two gods, one unbegotten, and one begotten.³⁸ When *sūra* 112 says that God does not beget nor is he begotten, this reflects the reverse order of argumentation employed by the Anomoean theology, namely, the denial of begetting follows the denial of having been begotten. As is often the case when the Qur'ān alludes to previous scriptures, it chiastically reverse various statements contained in the original citation/s. Eunomius' notion of the simple essence of God would be reflected in *sūra* 112's *aḥad*, "one," while *ṣamad*, "united," "joined," alludes to the opposite of the split or division between an unbegotten and a begotten God, as argued by Eunomius. An α-β-β-α structure becomes apparent in *sūra* 112 when we correlate it with Eunomius' articulation, namely, that God is one, simple, *because* he is not begotten, and God is united, undivided, non-partitioned, *because* he does not beget. If we reverse *sūra* 112's Eunomian α-β-β-α order to α-β-α-β, as in Table 1, we can accentuate its underlying semantic and creedal symmetry.

Table 1

Eunomian Theological Correlates in *Sūra* 112:1-3

α	β
<i>aḥad</i> (<i>āya</i> 1)	<i>al-ṣamad</i> (<i>āya</i> 2)
one/simple	the undivided/united
α	β
<i>lam yalid</i>	<i>lam yūlad</i>
not begotten (<i>āya</i> 3b)	does not beget (<i>āya</i> 3a)

Thus the availability of evidence is clearly quite abundant for illustrating an affinity between Eunomian theology and *sūra* 112. Indeed, *sūra* 112 is thoroughly Eunomian both in formulation and in tone with the single exception of *āya* 4's feminine understanding of the

³⁸ On Eunomius' theology, see Richard Paul Vaggione, editor, *Eunomius: The Extant Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Holy Spirit. However, we know that some Syrian documents partially preserve what are usually called “Jewish-Christian” traditions. For example, the *Apostolic Constitutions*’ understanding of female deacons presupposes a feminine conception of the Holy Spirit, and in this particular corpus of writings Eunomian theology has been integrated.³⁹ In contrast to Eunomius who retained talk of God having a “son,” while stressing the strictly metaphorical nature of the term, the Qur’ān excludes even the metaphor. This likely reflects an influence from rabbinic theology, but most likely this itself had already been integrated within so-called “Jewish Christianity” in Arabia. Already in the Syrian Pseudo-Clementine literature and in the *Apostolic Constitutions* we have evidence of “Jewish-Christian” adoption of various rabbinic trajectories. It would not be too surprising if a group of “Jewish Christians” in Arabia whose earlier origins had been in Syria at some point decided to adopt standard rabbinic polemic against talk of God having a son. If the Qur’ānic Sabeans are indeed to be identified as the Mandaeans (most likely a number of gnostic-like groups, Mandaeism representing but one among them, are described by the Qur’ānic Sabeans), then it would be significant that the Mandaean *Ginza R* Book 1 folio 6 denies that God has a “firstborn” in a formulation that closely agrees with Rabbi Abbahu’s explication of Isaiah 44:6. The Qur’ānic denial of God having a son might therefore reflect Mandaean influence as well as rabbinic, although this cannot be confirmed, given the late date of Mandaean scriptural redaction.⁴⁰

With regard to the disputed question of “Jewish Christians” in pre-Islamic Arabia, Carlos A. Segovia has recently quoted from an important Guy G. Stroumsa essay: “But however attractive this hypothesis may prove due to a number of apparent parallels existing between the ideas expressed in the Qur’ān and those found in the literature attributed to the Jewish Christians and other similar groups (e.g. the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* and the *Didaskalia*), it presents several problems. As Guy Stroumsa aptly notes, ‘our documentation

³⁹ On Eunomian theology in the *Apostolic Constitutions*, see Richard Paul Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 259-260.

⁴⁰ Mandaeism and Islam most likely mutually influenced each other, rendering arguments of one-sided influence by Islam upon Mandaeism somewhat myopic.

on Jewish Christian communities rarely goes beyond the fourth century.”⁴¹ However, we must point out that Stroumsa’s point is that even though we are faced with a scarcity of sources in regard to this question, there is a respectable degree of evidence for “Jewish-Christian” influence in nascent Islam. Only two sentences after Segovia’s Stroumsa citation, we read the following conclusion from Stroumsa: “Thanks to a series of discoveries and studies, our knowledge of the early Jewish Christians has now become more precise. We now know that some Jewish Christian communities may have survived, at least in Palestine, until the Muslim conquests. It is certainly not far-fetched to imagine a possible Jewish Christian presence in late antique Hijāz.”⁴² Apropos of Stroumsa’s essay, his point that there can be no simple equation between “Jewish Christianity” and nascent Islam is salutary, and his following comment concerning Islam’s origins is worth quoting: “The mystery of the birth of a religion cannot be solved, and neither can the alchemical transformation of religious ideas, of their passage from solid to fluid state.”⁴³

If, as suggested above, *sūra* 112:3’s negation of يُولَدُ / يُؤَلِّدُ is a correction of a mistaken understanding of Parmenides’ *μουννογενέες* as “only begotten” rather than “uniform,” then this *sūra*’s rejection of “begotten” and “begets” would essentially parallel Eunomius’ teaching that in the phrase “only begotten son” the terms “begotten” and “son” are metaphors, since literally or physically speaking God does not beget and is neither father nor son. According to Eunomius, “to beget” must therefore really mean “to create.” What Islamic theology has done, arguably in order to attain more linguistic and semantic consistency, is to exclude altogether the metaphorical terminologies of “father,” “son,” and “beget” from the description of God.

⁴¹ Carlos A. Segovia, “The Jews and Christians of Pre-Islamic Yemen (Himyar) and the Elusive Matrix of the Qur’ān’s Christology,” <https://www.academia.edu/14840043/The_Jews_and_Christians_of_pre-Islamic_Yemen_%E1%B8%A4imyar_and_the_Elusive_Matrix_of_the_Qur_%C4%81ns_Christology_2015_Awarded_Conference_Paper_-_Upcoming_Book_Chapter>. Retrieved 3 March 2016.

⁴² Guy G. Stroumsa, “Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins,” in Behnam Sadeghi, Asad Q. Ahmed, Adam Silverstein, Robert G. Hoyland, eds., *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts: Essays in Honor of Professor Patricia Crone* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2015), p. 76.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

Connected to this trajectory is the Qur'ānic insistence that Jesus is the “servant,” not the “son” of God. This reflects knowledge of the role played by Isaiah 42:1 in early Christian texts: “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved in whom my soul is well pleased.” Isaiah’s “servant,” Hebrew עַבְד is rendered with Greek παῖς, which may be translated either as “servant” or “child.” The same applies to Aramaic טְלִיא, “servant,” “child.” This enabled early Christian authors to transform Isaiah’s “servant” of God into the “son of God.” What the Qur'ān is doing is either rejecting the Christian interpretation of Hebrew/Aramaic/Syriac words for “servant” as “child,” which had been achieved by Christians by means of associating עַבְד with the ambiguous Aramaic טְלִיא and Greek παῖς, or warning against an over-literal or quasi-corporeal understanding of the term “son.” This is already evident in the synoptic accounts of Jesus’ baptism (Matthew 3:17 and parallels) and transfiguration (Matthew 17:5 and parallels), which may, under the influence of Psalm 2:7’s “son,” have transformed Isaiah 42:1’s “servant” to “son.” Luke 3:22’s variant reading of the baptismal account which introduces, “this day I have begotten you,” reflects texts such as Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:3 LXX, the latter most likely representing the earliest sense of the ancient Hebrew text. This demonstrates that both the “servant” and “son” theological trajectories in early Christian sources possess roots in the Tanakh. Eunomius’ (and Islamic theology’s) point here would be that the language of “son” and “begotten” must be understood metaphorically as “servant” and “created.”

John 1:29 appears (although this is by no means certain) to exploit the ambiguity of Aramaic טְלִיא, “servant/child” and “lamb,” in its proclamation, “Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” which is transparently based on Isaiah 42:1’s “Behold, my servant” and Isaiah 53:11’s servant who “shall bear their iniquities” like a “lamb,” הַשׁ (verse 7). 2 *Enoch* 64:5 (long recension) calls Enoch “the one who has carried away (᾿Ομιμητής) the sin of humanity.”⁴⁴ The short recension reads, “for the Lord has chosen you, and appointed you the taker-away of our sins.” This agrees with Isaiah 42:1’s “my chosen” and

⁴⁴ On this passage, see Andrei A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), pp. 232-234.

53:11's "he shall bear their iniquities." It is possible that we have an allusion to Enoch the prophet in John 1:21's "the prophet," a third entity distinct from the messiah and Elijah, since the apocalyptic arrival of Enoch was expected as well. It may also be that just as Jesus viewed John the Baptizer as an apocalyptic instantiation of Elijah, so Jesus may have understood himself as an instantiation of Enoch who is identified as the Son of Man in *1 Enoch* 71. To be more precise, Jesus may have believed that his heavenly counterpart was Enoch the Son of Man, which may shed light on Jesus' frequent reference to the Son of Man in the third rather than in the first person, as if the Son of Man were simultaneously intimately linked to Jesus yet still somehow distinct from him.⁴⁵

At this point we can gather our research results in order to compare Qur'ān *sūra* 112 and Parmenides fragment 8. We give our own translation of *sūra* 112 and Palmer's version of Parmenides fragment 8.2-6. We re-order *sūra* 112's *āyāt* so as to accentuate their Parmenidean correlates:

Table 2

Parallels Shared between Parmenides Fragment 8 and Qur'ān Sūra 112

Parmenides Fragment 8	Qur'ān <i>sūra</i> 112
2: What Is is ungenerated and deathless,	3: he does not beget and he is not begotten
3: whole and uniform, and still and perfect;	1: he, God, is one, 2: God, he is united
4: but not ever was it, nor yet will it be,	3: he does not beget and he is not begotten
since it is now together entire,	
5: single, continuous;	1: he, God, is one, 2: God, he is united
for what birth will you seek of it?	3b: he is not begotten
6: How, whence increased?	3a: he does not beget

⁴⁵ This paradigm would answer the difficulties that Daniel Boyarin seems perplexed by in his recent essay, "How Enoch Can Teach Us about Jesus," *Early Christianity*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2011), pp. 51–76.

Table 2 indicates that Parmenides fragment 8 lines 5-6 correspond, more or less, to both the content and sequence of Qur'ān *sūra* 112:1-4, with the exception that *āya* 3's two main statements appear in reverse order, 3b followed by 3a. (Compare the reversed, chiasmic structure we find when we compare *sūra* 112:1-3 with Eunomian theology's fundamental articulations). By contrast, fragment 8 lines 2-3 correspond to *sūra* 112:3, 1-2, in that specific order. If we can coordinate fragment 8 line 4's temporal "nor yet will it be" with line 6's "increased," which could be either spatial or temporal, then line 4 could be coordinated with *sūra* 112:3. When we recall that line 3's "uniform" is the Greek $\mu\omicron\upsilon\nu\upsilon\epsilon\nu\acute{\epsilon}\varsigma$, and that this could be understood hyper-literally as "only begotten," then we can discern a further linguistic connection shared between $\mu\omicron\upsilon\nu\upsilon\epsilon\nu\acute{\epsilon}\varsigma$ and يُولَدُ/يُولَد , "beget," "begotten." Indeed, it could be the case that *sūra* 112:3's negation of يُولَدُ/يُولَد is intended as a correction of a mistaken understanding of Parmenides' $\mu\omicron\upsilon\nu\upsilon\epsilon\nu\acute{\epsilon}\varsigma$ by excluding its translation with the Arabic يُولَد , "begotten," by insisting through the negation وَلَمْ يُولَد , "and not begotten," that the correct meaning of $\mu\omicron\upsilon\nu\upsilon\epsilon\nu\acute{\epsilon}\varsigma$ is in fact أَحَدٌ , "one," and its near semantic partner الصَّمَدُ , *al-ṣamad*, rather than يُولَد , "begotten."

Missing from Parmenides fragment 8.2-6 is any clear parallel to *sūra* 112:4, "and no one (*aḥad*) is equal/like him." The accusative indefinite noun *kufū* which in *sūra* 112:4 appears in the form *kufuwan*, "equal," "like," or "equivalent," which occurs only here in the entirety of the Qur'ān, means that God has no partner in the sense of a consort, here a feminine consort or wife being implied, in contrast to the masculine father and son implied by *āya* 3's "does not beget," that is, as a father, and "is not begotten," that is, as a child/son, which most likely connotes the son of Trinitarian theology. This clearly suggests that *āya* 4 alludes to a maternal portrayal of the Holy Spirit, which indicates an acquaintance with the Jewish Jesus sect doctrine of the Holy Spirit as mother, as in the *Gospel of the Hebrews* which records Jesus speaking of "My mother, the holy spirit." Consequently, *sūra* 112 exhibits awareness of both standard Nicene and Jewish-Christian trinitarian theologies,

most likely understanding the former through the lens or prism of the latter, since the *sūra* ends on what we might call a Semitic-Christian note.

To summarize, the evidence would seem to indicate that *sūra* 112's most proximate inspirations were the Jewish shema' and Anomoean rejection of the Christian Nicene creed, the last viewed through the prism of Semitic-Christian Trinitarian (or perhaps better, "triadic") theology. However, although the closest analogues to *sūra* 112 are elements of the Jewish shema' and the Nicene creed, nevertheless, the conceptual affinities combined with an isomorphic structural sequence shared between *sūra* 112 and Parmenides fragment 8 suggest that the latter can be viewed as an additional influence behind *sūra* 112, but more remotely so than the shema' and the Anomoean rejection of the Nicene creed. To claim that Parmenides fragment 8 "appears . . . identical" to *sūra* 112 sounds like an overstatement, and in any case is an incomplete description of *sūra* 112's sources.

As to how Parmenidean articulations could have been mediated to the author of *sūra* 112, it may be the case that some of the basic thoughts of Parmenides fragment 8 had been integrated with other later Hellenistic thinkers' contributions, and that in such modulated articulations may have contributed to *sūra* 112's background. In such a mode, the author of *sūra* 112 may have been influenced only indirectly by Parmenides by inheriting widely distributed Hellenistic philosophical formulations indebted to various degrees to Parmenides, but to other ancient thinkers as well. There is, however, another possible alternative route we might trace. Geneviève Gobillot has assembled an impressive body of evidence that indicates the Qur'ān reflects links with the writings of Lactantius.⁴⁶ This raises the possibility that perhaps *sūra* 112 may have been influenced by Parmenides via a list of short Hellenistic citations such as we find in Lactantius and Clement of Alexandria, both of whom read into such citations Jewish-Christian monotheism. Gobillot has also presented evidence for Qur'ānic links with Porphyry, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Tertullian, the

⁴⁶ Geneviève Gobillot, "Grundlagen der Theologie des Koran," in Markus Gross; Karl Heinz Ohlig, eds. *Schlaglichter: Die beiden ersten Islamischen Jahrhunderte* (Berlin: Verlag Hans Schiler, 2008), pp. 320-369.

Clementine literature, and the Alexander Romance.⁴⁷ Recent archaeological evidence has emphasized that Hellenism was a part of pre-Islamic Arabia,⁴⁸ so that Hellenistic literary influences on the Qur'ān should not be too surprising.

Before concluding it would be helpful to note the possible occurrence in Parmenides of tropes and terminologies that remind us to varying degrees of Qur'ānic ideas and language. None of the following examples are strong enough to qualify as evidence of literary dependence, but conceptually they are sufficiently congruent and intriguing so as to deserve mention. To begin with, the mares and maidens of fragment 1 might be compared to the steeds of *sūra* 100 which Munther Younes interprets as human women, “maidens.”⁴⁹ We argue in our forthcoming Qur'ān commentary that the feminine entities who in *sūra* 100 are said to go forth are most likely heavenly objects (stars/planets), but maidens may be implied, especially since Greek stories of Helios celebrate not only his four fire-breathing horses, but his maiden daughters as well, the Heliades.

To continue, there are a number of notions from fragment 1 which can be compared to several of the early poetic-like *sūras* involving contrasts between night and day and other cosmic phenomena. We hope to be able to develop these in detail in a future essay; for now we will mention only the following, all given according to the Palmer translation. Fragment 1.29-30, “the unshaken heart of well-rounded reality / and the notions of mortals, in which there is no genuine trustworthiness.” Cf. *sūra* 4:157: “those who disagree concerning it are in doubt thereof; they have no knowledge thereof save pursuit of a conjecture (*ẓani*).” Cf. also with “unshaken heart” *sūra* 53:2-3, 11: “Your companion has not strayed, and he has not erred. . . . The heart lied not, what it saw.” We would suggest that the phrase “well-rounded reality” probably refers to the smoothness or overall coherence of the path of truth, which may remind one of the notion underlying the Qur'ānic trope of the “straight path,” for the latter implies a path that takes one to a destination without time-consuming detours. In

⁴⁷ <http://www.inarah.de/cms/vor-und-fruehgeschichte-des-islam.html>

⁴⁸ See, for example, <http://www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/201102/roads.of.arabia.htm>.

⁴⁹ Munther Younes, “Charging Steeds or Maidens Doing Good Deeds? A Re-Interpretation of Qur'ān 100 (*al-‘ādiyāt*),” *Arabica* 55 (2008), pp. 362-386.

other words, a straight path is the opposite of a crooked or winding path. Parmenides' term for "reality," ἀληθείη, usually rendered "truth," has as its Qur'ānic equivalent the word *haqq*.

Fragment 6.6-7 "They are borne along / deaf and blind at once, bedazzled, indiscriminating hordes"; cf. *sūra* 17:45-46, which is ultimately inspired by Isaiah 6:1-10. Fragment 8.2-3's "very many" "signs" upon "the path" can be compared to the Qur'ānic doctrine of divine and cosmic *āyāt* as well as the theological notion of "path" which begins in *sūra* 1:6-7.

Fragment 8.50-52: "the trustworthy account and meditation / regarding true reality; from this point on mortal notions / learn, listening to the deceptive order of my verses." The word "account" here is λόγος, a word that overlaps with the Arabic word *qur'ān*, since not *verbum*, but *sermo* is the proper Latin rendering of Greek *logos*. Additionally, "meditation" is νόημα; Palmer comments on these two terms: "λόγος, an account (most basically, something said), and a νόημα, something brought before the mind in thinking, which is to say, a thought, conception, or, somewhat more naturally, a meditation."⁵⁰ With the trope of a *trustworthy* word/discourse, we can compare the Arabic adjective *amīnun* in *sūra* 26:107, "faithful messenger," and 26:193, "the trustworthy spirit," usually identified as the angel Gabriel, who brings down the Qur'ān, the "discourse," from heaven. Lastly, with Fragment 8.54, "they have wandered astray," we may compare *sūra* 1:6.

⁵⁰ John Palmer, *Parmenides and Presocratic Philosophy*, p. 112.