## Historical Dictionary of Prophets in Islam and Judaism

*Scott B. Noegel and Brannon M. Wheeler*
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As the compilers of this dictionary point out, Qur'anic and Islamic views of prophecy have been studied largely in isolation, despite the obvious connections between Islam and the Biblical tradition. Comparative studies have focused on what Islam has taken, or borrowed, from Biblical sources, often implying that this material has been manipulated for tendentious motives.

The present dictionary works toward a less polemical comparative study of prophecy, investigating the complex relationships between

Islamic, Biblical, and other Near Eastern views. The dictionary has been designed to examine shared traditions, promote interdisciplinary dialogue, and include a wide range of material not only from the Qur'an and the Bible, but also from extra-Biblical and extra-Qur'anic texts, without claiming to be comprehensive. Such texts include Rabbinic literature of many types; Christian pseudepigrapha, apocrypha, and commentaries; Qur'anic commentary (*tafsir*), histories, geographies, biographical dictionaries, stories of the prophets (*qisas al-anbiya'*), and theological discussions of prophetology (*dala'il al-nubuwah*).

It also includes several extremely useful additions: a general introduction (pp. xxiii-xxxvii), a chronology (pp. xix-xxii), a brief history of prophecy in the Near East (pp. xxiii-xxxvii), a list of entries (Appendix I: pp. 357-64), a list of prophets (Appendix II: pp. 364-68), a bibliography, and an index. The bibliography, arranged by topic, is extensive and extremely useful for those interested in exploring the topic further (pp. 368-480).

The entries on the main characters and prophetic figures shared by the Biblical and Islamic traditions – Aaron, Abraham, Adam and Eve, David, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and so on – are extremely informative, concise, and accurate synopses. In addition to giving an overview of the Biblical material, they refer precisely to the elements of Biblical accounts that appear in the Qur'an, providing an excellent basis for comparative study. There is an occasional slip in these discussions, such as the statement that the Arabic term *kalim Allah* applied to Moses means "the spokesperson of God," when it actually means "the one to whom God spoke," a reference to the scene at the burning bush on Mount Sinai. All of the Prophets, one would gather from the Qur'an, are "spokespersons of God"; Moses is special because God addressed him directly and not through inspiration or an intermediary.

The entries also include important scholars, places, texts, and even topics in methodology, such as "Form Criticism," "Speech Act Theory," and "Textual Criticism." A variety of general entries on religious practices appear – "Divination," "Dreams and Dream Interpretation," "Sacrifice" – as well as entries on ancient Near Eastern religious traditions pertinent to prophecy, such as "Ebla," "Epic of Gilgamesh," "Marduk Prophecy," "Mari," "Ugarit," and entries on Manichaean and Zoroastrian texts. Other entries relate to scholars and commentators in later Jewish, Christian, or Islamic traditions: "Maimonides," "Jerome," "Origen," Sa'adia ha-Gaon," "Ibn Rushd," "Tabari," and others.

Perhaps most interesting for a comparative understanding of the Qur'an are the entries describing lesser known texts related to Biblical narratives in the Qur'an. "Infancy Gospels" discusses several non-canonical Christian gospels, including the "Infancy Gospel of Thomas," which, in one passage, tells of Jesus' giving life to a clay bird, and the "Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew," which depicts a palm tree bending down above Mary at childbirth to offer her its fruit. Both stories resemble quite closely scenes depicted in the Qur'an. The "Testament of Solomon" portrays King Solomon's binding of demons to build the Temple in Jerusalem, paralleling his control over the jinn in the Qur'an. The "Life of Adam and Eve" includes a narrative of the fall of Satan that resembles the Qur'anic story quite closely.

The pagan Arab religion has been regularly denigrated in Islamic tradition, just as medieval Christians denounced Greek and Roman religious practices as barbaric. Whereas Greek mythology has been recuperated in the West, nothing similar has occurred with ancient Arabian beliefs in the Muslim world. Modern scholarship has, for the most part, inherited this anti-pagan bias, which often interferes with a sound historical understanding of the Qur'an and Islamic origins. This makes for poor treatment of the pre-Islamic Arabian religious tradition in most scholarship in the field, including this dictionary.

For example, the entry "Wadd, Suwa`, Yaghuth, Ya`uq, Nasr" simply informs the reader that these were gods worshipped by the people of Noah, as is stated in *Surat Nuh* (Q 71:23). However, it is well-known that these were pre-Islamic Arabian gods. Their appearance in the Qur'an as the gods of Noah's opponents represents a significant reinterpretation of the Arabian past to make it part of Biblical history. Similarly, the entry "Ka'bah" discusses the well-known Ka'bah at Mecca without informing the reader that there were many other *ka'bahs*, rectangular temples or shrines, located in Arabia.

The entry "Kahin," meaning soothsayer, discusses the important cultic functions of this individual, but does not name any specific soothsayers. The soothsayers Shiqq and Satih achieved legendary status and appear prominently in the *Sirah* of Ibn Hisham, predicting the Ethiopian invasion of Yemen and the advent a great Arab Prophet. The "false prophets," also designated as *kahin*, the most famous of whom was Musaylimah "the Liar," led religious movements similar to Islam contemporary with the Prophet and just after his demise. Moreover, the entry does not inform the reader that many passages in the Qur'an draw extensively on the style of pre-Islamic soothsayers' oracular pronouncements, including cryptic

oaths, omens, charms, and curses presented in rhyming and rhythmic cadences (Ar. *saj`*). Several entries that present Biblical and ancient Near Eastern material exclusively could have benefited from the additional discussion of pre-Islamic Arabian material, particularly "False Prophets," "Oracles," and "Parallelism."

This historical dictionary is an extremely informative and useful work, and hopefully it will promote the more informed comparative study of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. A Biblical bias is understandable, even expected, in a work framed in a manner such as this one. The short shrift given to pre-Islamic Arabian religious traditions, however, is a major problem in the field and a decided obstacle to an informed understanding of the Qur'an in context. One hopes that the comparative, interdisciplinary framework will expand to include this material.

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