The Creation of Arabian Jewish Tradition: The Myth and Image of Muḥammad's Jewish Companion ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām (d. 43/663) in Classical Islam

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A Dissertation presented to the Graduate Faculty of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Religious Studies

The University of Virginia
2019

Abstract

This dissertation examines the myth and image of the first and most significant Jewish convert to Islam, ʿAbdallāh b. Salām (d. 43H/663CE), and his representation in the classical (until 13th c. AD) and post-classical (until 17th c. AD) works of Arabic literary biography and qurʾānic commentary. Ibn Salām belongs to the venerated generation of Muslims known as the Companions – a group that includes the earliest followers of Muḥammad – and his conversion to Islam is regarded as a pivotal moment in Muḥammad's career in Medina. The dissertation identifies the literary tropes used by the biographical sources, including the biographies of Muḥammad and the Companions, to construct Ibn Salām's image as the ideal Jewish convert to Islam. In portraying Ibn Salām as the quintessential Jewish convert to Islam and faithful Companion of the prophet, the biographical literature simultaneously constructs an Arabian Jewish tradition on the eve of Islam that was deeply engaged in the study of Jewish scriptures and eagerly anticipating Muḥammad's advent. The dissertation then examines how the qurʾānic exegetes employ Ibn Salām's image to interpret scriptural verses that identify and praise a minority among the People of the Book.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Ibn Salām in Islamic Tradition

Islamic tradition reveres ʿAbdallāh ibn Salam (d. 43/663) at one and the same time as an unrivaled scholar of biblical scriptures in seventh century Arabia, a model Companion of the Muḥammad, and the most significant Jewish convert to Islam during Muḥammad's prophetic career in Medina (1/622–10/632).[1] Ibn Salām is a major figure in the traditional Islamic accounts of Muḥammad's initial encounter with the Jews of Medina and Judaism, where he is recognized and praised as the paradigmatic Jewish convert to Islam during Muḥammad's lifetime. Indeed, he is arguably the most revered Jewish figure in the Islamic tradition. Ibn Salām played a crucial role in how Muslims throughout the classical (7th–13th century AD) and post-classical period of Islamic history articulated their understanding of Muḥammad's conflict with the Jewish tribes of Medina, the Jewish scriptures' confirmation of Muḥammad's mission, and the Qurʾān's relationship to Jewish scriptures and the biblical past. As the first, and one of the few, Jews who reportedly embraced Islam during Muḥammad's lifetime, Ibn Salām acquired an elevated and authoritative status among Muḥammad's early followers – collectively referred to as simply "the Companions" (*al-ṣaḥāba*), or "the Companions of God's messenger" (*aṣḥāb rasūl allāh*)[2] – and served as a symbol in classical Arabo-Islamic literature of the ideal

[1] Throughout the dissertation I reserve the designation Yathrib to identify the Arabian desert oasis in the Ḥijāz that came be known as "the city of the prophet" (*madīnat al-nabī*), shortened to Medina, prior to Muḥammad's arrival in 622 AD. The name Medina refers to the oasis and its various settlements from the time of Muḥammad's residence there in the years 1/622–10/632 until the present day.

[2] For an introduction to the Companions and their place in early Islam and Islamic intellectual history see M. Muranyi, "al-Ṣaḥāba," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, *Second Edition*, 12 vols., ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs (Leiden, Brill, 1960-2005), hereafter cited as *EI*^{2}; L.I. Kern, "Companions of the Prophet," *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, ed. J.D. McAuliffe (Leiden Brill: 2001-

Jewish response to Muḥammad's mission and the Qurʾān's revelation. Narratives describing the circumstances surrounding Ibn Salām's conversion, which Islamic tradition dated to the period immediately following Muḥammad's arrival in the settlement then known as Yathrib, later named "The City of the Prophet" (*madīnat al-nabī*), in 1/622, are reported in virtually all of the substantial works on Muhammad's *Sīra* (life and prophetic career),[3] biographical works on the early Muslims,[4] as well as works

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2006), 1:386-390, hereafter abbreviated as *EQ*; E. Kohlberg, "Some Zaydī Views on the Companions of the Prophet," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 39.1 (1976), 91-98; id., "Some Imāmī Shīʿī Views on the Ṣaḥāba," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984), 143-175; A.I. Tayob, "Ṭabarī on the Companions of the Prophet: Contours in Islamic Historical Writing," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 119.2 (1999), 203-210; A. Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims: History and Memory* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 59-75; N. Khalek, "'He was tall and slender and his virtues were numerous': Byzantine Hagiographical Topoi and the Companions of Muḥammad in al-Azdī's *Futūḥ al-Shām*," in *Writing 'True Stories': Historians and Hagiographers in Late Antique and Medieval Near East*, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages; IX, ed. A. Papaconstantinou (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 105-123.

[3] On the literary genre of Muḥammad's biography see W. Raven, "Sīra," *EI*^{2}; M.J. Kister, "The Sīrah Literature," in *Arabic Literature to the End of the Umayyad Period*, ed. A.F.L Beeston, T.M. Johnstone, R.B. Sergent, and G.R. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 352-367; H. Motzki, ed., *The Biography of Muḥammad: The Issue of the Sources,* Islamic History and Civilization; XXXII (Leiden: Brill, 2000); J. Horovitz, *The Earliest Biographies of the Prophet and their Authors*, ed. L.I. Conrad (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2002); G. Schoeler, *The Biography of Muḥammad: Nature and Authenticity*, Routledge Studies in Classical Islam; I, tr. U. Vagelpohl and ed. J. E. Montgomery (London: Routledge, 2014); P. Pavlovich, "The Sīra," in *The Routledge Handbook of Early Islam*, ed. H. Berg (New York: Routledge, 2018), 65-78.

[4] On the genre of Arabic literary biography see Cl. Gilliot, "Ṭabaḳāt," *EI*^{2}; J.A. Nawas, J.A. Nawas, "Biography and Biographical Works," in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, ed. J. Meri (New York: Routledge, 2006), 1:110-112; H.A.R. Gibb, "Islamic Biographical Literature," in *Historians of the Middle East*, ed. B. Lewis and P.M. Holt, Historical Writings on the Peoples of Asia (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1962), 54-58; I. Hafsi, "Recherches sur le genre *Ṭabaqāt* dans la littérature arabe," *Arabica* 24.1 (1977), 1-41; F. Malti-Douglas, "Controversy and its Effects in the Biographical Tradition of al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī," *Studia Islamica* 46 (1977): 115-31; T. Khalidi, "Islamic Biographical Dictionaries: A Preliminary Assessment," *The Muslim World* 63.1 (1979), 53-65; P. Auchterlonie, *Arabic Biographical Dictionaries: A Summary Guide and Bibliography*, Middle East Libraries Committee Research Guides; II (Durham: Middle East Libraries Committee, 1987); G. Makdisi, "Ṭabaqāt-biography: Law and Orthodoxy in Classical Islam." *Islamic Studies* 32.4 (1993), 371-396; W. al-Qādī, "Biographical Dictionaries: Inner Structure and Cultural Significance," in *The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East,* ed. G. Atiyeh (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1995), 93-122; id., "Biographical Dictionaries as the Scholars Alternative History of the Muslim Community," in *Organizing Knowledge: Encyclopaedic Activities in the Pre-Eighteenth Century Islamic World*, Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science; LXI, ed. G. Endress (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 23-88; C. F. Robinson, "al-Muʿāfā b. ʿImrān and the beginnings of the *ṭabaqāt* literature." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 116.1 (1996), 114-120; M. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The H^{ei}rs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Maʾmūn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); id., "Classical Arabic Biography," in *Understanding Near Eastern Literatures: A Spectrum of Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. B. Gruendler and V. Klemm, Literaturen im Kontext arabisch, persisch, türkisch; I (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 2000), 177-188; id., "Biographical literature," in *The New Cambridge History of Islam, Volume 4: Islamic Cultures*

devoted to the biographies and merits (*faḍāʾil*) of the Companions.[5] Ibn Salām's confirmation of Muḥammad's status as God's messenger was regarded by Muslim scholars as a decisive proof (*dalīl*, pl. *dalāʾil*), or sign (*ʿalam*, pl. *aʿlām*) of Muḥammad's prophethood, and the narratives of his conversion were accordingly included in the "Proofs of Prophecy" (*dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*) works.[6]

As in the case of many of Muḥammad's other Companions, Ibn Salām drew the attention of Muslim scholars of *Ḥadīth* criticism,[7] historiography,[8] biography, and qurʾānic exegesis (*tafsīr*)[9] throughout the classical and post-classical period. In addition

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and Societies to the End of the Eighteenth Century, ed. R. Irwin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 458-473; R. Roded, *Women in Islamic Biographical Collections: From Ibn Saʿd to Who's Who* (Boulder: L. Reiner, 1994).

[5] Traditions regarding the Companions' biographies and virtues are located in the canonical *ḥadīth* works, as well as biographical dictionaries of the early Muslims (*ṭabaqāt* works), and transmitters of *ḥadīth* (*rijāl*). On the "virtues of the Companions" (*faḍāʾil al-ṣaḥāba*) see S. Enderwitz, "Faḍāʾil," *Encyclopedia of Islam, Three*, ed. K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas, and E. Rowson (Leiden: Brill, 2007–), henceforth *EI*[3].

[6] The most common title of works in the proofs of prophecy genre is *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*; although *Hujjaj al-nubuwwa* and *Aʿlām(āt) al-nubuwwa* are nearly synonymous titles. On the *Dalāʾil* works and their literary genre see S. Stroumsa, "The Signs of Prophecy: The Emergence and Early Development of a Theme in Arabic Theological Literature," *The Harvard Theological Review* 78.1-2 (1985), 101-114; C. Adang, *Muslim Writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible From Ibn Rabban to Ibn Hazm*, Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science; XXII (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 139-191; M. Koertner, "The Dalāʾil al-Nubuwwa Literature as Part of the Medieval Scholarly Discourse on Prophecy," *Der Islam* 95.1 (2018), 91-109.

[7] For an introduction to *Ḥadīth* criticism see G.H.A. Juynboll, *Muslim Tradition: studies in chronology, provenance, and authorship of early ḥadīth*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 134-160.

[8] On classical Islamic historiography see F. Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 1952); A.A. Duri, *The Rise of Historical Writing among the Arabs*, ed. and tr. L.L. Conrad (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); C. Kahen, "History and Historians," in *Religion, Learning, and Science in the ʿAbbasid Period*, ed. M.J.L. Young, J.D. Latham, and R.B. Serjeant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 188-233; T. Khalidi, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); F.M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Arabic Historical Writing*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam, XIV (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1999); C.F. Robinson, *Islamic Historiography*, Themes in Islamic History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[9] Scholarship on the classical genre of qurʾānic exegesis has made significant progress over the past several decades, arguably in large part, due to the publication of John Wansbrough's *Qurʾānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977). Wansbrough's work stands as one of the first studies in the Western academy to criticially engage with *tafsīr* works from the first four centuries of Islam, including works existing solely in manuscript form that had yet to be studied. For an introduction to the *tafsīr* genre of the classical period see A. Rippin, "Tafsīr," in *The Encyclopedia*

to reporting varying accounts of the circumstances surrounding Ibn Salām's conversion that are well-attested in the works on Muḥammad's *Sīra*, the biographical literature also addressed Ibn Salām's background and ancestry, his expertise and learning in Jewish scriptures and traditions, his participation in the affairs and military campaigns of the early Caliphate, the biographies of his children, his role in transmitting *ḥadīth* and exegetical traditions, and his status as a model Companion who was held in particularly high esteem by Muḥammad. The prophet's affection and admiration for Ibn Salām are expressed, for example, in numerous traditions where Muḥammad declares that Ibn

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of Religion, ed. M. Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1987), 14:236-244; id., "Tafsīr," *EI*^{2}; Cl. Gilliot, "Exegesis of the Qurʾān: Classical and Medieval," *EQ*, 2:99-124; M.M. Bar- Asher, "Introduction," in *The Study of Shiʿi Islam: History, Theology and Law*, ed. F. Daftary and G. Miskinzoda (London: I.B. Taurus, 2013), 79-93; W. Saleh, "Sciptural Exegesis, Islamic," in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia,* 2:706-708; Michael E. Pregill, "Exegesis," in the *Routledge Handbook of Early Islam*, ed. H. Berg (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 93-125. Major studies of the *tafsīr* genre and specific *tafsīr* works include I. Goldziher, *Schools of Koranic Commentators with an Introduction on Goldziher and Hadith from Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums by Fuat Sezgin*, ed. and tr. W. Behn (Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz, 2006); N. Abbot, *Studies in Arabic Literary Papyri, II. Qurʾānic Commentary and Tradition* (Chicago: University Press, 1967); G. Bowering, *The mystical vision of existence in classical Islam: the Qurʾānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896)* (Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1980); A. Rippin, "The Present Status of Tafsir Studies." *The Muslim World* 72 (1982), 224–238; id. (ed.), *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); id., *The Qurʾān and its Interpretive Tradition* (Aldershot: Variorum, 2001); Y. Goldfeld, *Qurʾānic Commentary in the Eastern Islamic Tradition of the First Four Centuries of the Hijra: an Annotated Edition to the Preface to al-Thaʿlabī's "Kitāb al-Kashf wa l-Bayān ʿan Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*," (Acre: Srugy, 1984); id., "The Development of Theory on Qurʾānic Exegesis in Islamic Scholarship." *Studia Islamica* 67 (1988), 5-27; J.D. McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); N. Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham," in *Approaches to the Qurʾān*, ed. G.R. Hawting and A.A.A. Shareef (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 103-138; C.H.M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar and Qurʾānic Exegesis in Early Islam* (New York and Leiden: Brill, 1993); M.M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmī-Shiism* (Boston: Brill, 1999); H. Berg, *The Development of Exegesis in Early Islam: The Authenticity of Muslim Literature from the Formative Period* (Richmond: Curzon, 2000); W. Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: the Qurʾān Commentary of al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035),* Texts and Studies on the Qurʾān; I (Boston: Brill, 2004); B. Fudge, "Qurʾānic Exegesis in Medieval Islam and Modern Orientalism," *Die Welt des Islams* 46, no. 2 (2006), 115-147; id., *Qurʾānic Hermeneutics: al-Ṭabrisī and the Craft of Commentary* (New York: Routledge, 2011); N. Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung: Studien zur frühen Koraninterpretation* (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009); A. Lane, *A Traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān Commentary: The Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī* (Boston: Brill, 2006); G. Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering in the Earliest Commentaries on the Qurʾān*, History of Christian-Muslim Relations; XIII (Leiden: Brill, 2011); K. Bauer, ed., *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Qurʾanic Exegesis (2nd/8th – 9th/15th c.)*, Institute of Ismaili Studies Qurʾanic Studies Series; IX (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); T. Jaffer, *Rāzī: Master of Qurʾānic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Salām is destined for paradise. At the same time, the classical qurʾānic exegetes were busy pursuing references to Ibn Salām in the Islamic scripture, and identified him in their commentaries on numerous scriptural verses that they believed addressed Jews, Jewish scriptures, and early Jewish-Muslim encounters during the life of the prophet Muḥammad. The exegetical tradition even went so far as to specify the qurʾānic verses (Qurʾān 26:197 and 46:10) that they believed were revealed to highlight and applaud Ibn Salām's conversion to Islam.[10] The traditions transmitted in the classical sources praise Ibn Salām and portray his testimony to the truth of Islam as authoritative, sincere, and exemplary. Because his image is so deeply intertwined with the apologetic, polemical, and sectarian concerns that propelled Muslim self-definition during the classical and post-classical periods, it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to recover the historical personality of Ibn Salām from the legendary figure whose primary purpose is to lend Muḥammad the attestation, confirmation, and authority of Jewish scriptures. In short, Ibn Salām as a historical personality from early Islam has been subsumed by an enduring symbolic persona that embodies the perceived confirmation that Jewish scriptures afford Muḥammad's mission and the rise of Islam.

1.2. Ibn Salām in the Secondary Literature

Scholars of early Islam, the history of Jewish-Muslim relations, and Qurʾānic studies have identified Ibn Salam as a highly symbolic figure from the early Islamic milieu. As early as the late nineteenth century, the English Orientalist Hartwig Hirschfeld observed

[10] All citations from the Qur'ān follow the translation of A. Jones, *The Qur'ān Translated into English* (Exeter: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2009).

that Ibn Salām "has been made the symbol of Jewish proselytism to Islam, and is consequently a very important person."[11] Hirschfelds brief, albeit significant, remark considers Ibn Salām to be a historical figure from Muḥammad's biography who over time acquired a symbolic status as the emblematic Jewish convert to Islam. This observation is echoed in subsequent scholarship where Ibn Salām is identified as the idealized praiseworthy Jew in Islamic tradition. For example, the German Jewish Orientalist Josef Horovitz states that Ibn Salām is the:

> typical representative of that group of Jewish scribes which honored the truth, admitting that Muḥammad was the Prophet predicted in the Torah, and protecting him from the intrigues of their co-religionists.[12]

Horovitz characterizes Ibn Salām as the ideal Jewish native informant to Muḥammad, whose sincerity and learnedness in Jewish tradition and scriptures led him to convert to Islam and protect the prophet from the subversive machinations of the Jews in Medina. His remark highlights the extent to which Ibn Salām's image is intertwined with the alleged confirmation that Jewish scriptures afford Muḥammad, and how the praise bestowed on Ibn Salām in the classical Islamic sources often serves as polemic directed against Muḥammad's Jewish opponents, and more broadly, against Jews writ large. Specifically, Horovitz identifies the most fundamental function of Ibn Salām in the

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[11] H. Hirschfeld, "Historical and Legendary Controversies Between Mohammed and the Rabbis," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 10.1 (1897), 110.

[12] J. Horovitz, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām," *EI*^{2}. These remarks have been echoed recently by Gordon Nickel and Shimon Shtober. Nickel states that Ibn Salām "represents the honest acceptance of the prophethood and apostleship of Muḥammad based on knowledge of his description in the Torah." *Narratives of Tampering*, 175; while Shtober describes him as a "prototypical leader" of the small group of Jews in Medina who converted to Islam. "Present at the Dawn of Islam: Polemic and Reality in the Medieval Story of Muḥammad's Jewish Companions." In *The Convergence of Judaism and Islam: Religious, Scientific, and Cultural Dimensions*, ed. M. Laskier and Y. Lev (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 66.

Arabo-Islamic sources: to supply confirmation that the Torah[13] predicts Muḥammad's mission as God's messenger. Steven Wasserstrom, likewise, notes that the figure of Ibn Salām "was used by Muslims to give voice to purportedly Jewish age-old traditions that had prophecied the coming of Muhammad."[14] More recently, Michael Pregill has described Ibn Salām as the "stereotypical 'good Jew' in Islamic literature" whom Islamic tradition regards as the "leader of the Jewish community of Medina who acknowledged the truth of Muḥammad's claim to prophethood."[15]

The scholarly assessments of Ibn Salām routinely associate him with other well-known Jewish and Christian figures from the early Islamic milieu, such as the Christian monk Baḥīrā (fl. 6th century AD),[16] the legendary Arabian monotheist and contemporary

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[13] The Qurʾān and its commentary tradition, the biographies of Muḥammad, and the *ḥadīth* all advance the claim that Muḥammad and his mission is predicted in "the Torah." It is important to note that the Arabic sources on which this study is based use the term Torah (*Tawrāt*) in a broad sense to identify Jewish scriptures, including the Torah, Hebrew Bible, and at times even apocrapha and pseudipigrapha. As one scholar has noted, for the early Muslims the term Torah had a "wide meaning of the whole corpus of Jewish scriptures, as Torah in ancient Jewish literature itself." H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "Tawrāt," *EI*^{2}. The vast majority of the quotations from "the Torah" provided in Arabo-Islamic sources cannot be traced back to canonical or apocaprahal Jewish scriptures. M.J. Kister notes that the quotations from the Torah provided in Arabic literary sources were "derived from popular Jewish and Christian stories, legends, wise sayings, and traditions which were introduced by Jewish and Christian converts and gained wide popularity. The Muslim scholars were however aware of the fact that the expressions 'I found in the Torah,' 'it is written in the Torah,' 'it is recorded in the Torah,' do not necessarily refere to the Pentateuch, or even the Bible." "*Ḥaddithū ʿan banī Isrāʾīla*," 229. On the biblical passages adduced by Medieval Muslim scholars to prove that Jewish and Christian scriptures predict Muḥammad's mission see W.M. Watt, "The Early Development of the Muslim Attitude to the Bible," *Transactions, Glasgow University Oriental Society* 16 (1955-1956), 50-62; H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 75-110; C. Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 264-266; S. Schmidtke, "The Muslim Reception of Biblical Materials: Ibn Qutayba and his *Aʿlām al-nubuwwa*," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 22.3 (2011), 253-260; S.H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic: The Scriptures of the "People of the Book" in the Language of Islam,* Jews Christians, and Muslims from the Ancient to the Modern World (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 179-182.

[14] S. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis Under Early Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 175.

[15] M. Pregill, "Isrāʾīliyyāt, myth, and pseudepigraphy: Wahb b. Munabbih and the early Islamic versions of the fall of Adam and Eve," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008), 218.

[16] See A. Abel, "Baḥīrā,", *EI*^{2}; B. Rogemma, "Baḥīrā," *EI*^{3}; id., *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Polemics in Response to Islam,* History of Christian-Muslim Relations; IX (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

of Muhammad, Waraqa ibn Nawfal (fl. 6th century AD),[17] the famous rabbi and Jewish convert Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. ca 652 AD),[18] and the Yemenite authority on biblical and post-

[17] Waraqa in regarded as an Arabian Christian and scholar of biblical traditions and lore who observed the pure monotheism of Abraham around the time of Muḥammad's advent. He is identified as the cousin of Muḥammad's first wife, Khadījah, and is commended in the works on Muḥammad's *Sīra* for affirming the divine origin of Muḥammad's initial experience of prophetic inspiration. For a discussion of the traditions involving Muḥammad, Khadījah, and Waraqa around the time of the first revelations of the Qurʾān, see U. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam; V (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1995), 103-112. For a discussion of Waraqa's place in Islamic historiography, see C. F. Robinson, "Waraka ibn Nawfal," *EI*^{2}; M. Lecker, "The Monotheistic Cousins of Muḥammad's Wife Khadījah," *Der Islam* 94.2 (2017), 365-367. On Waraqa's biography see Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. ʿU. al-ʿUmrawī (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1417/1995), 63:3-28; al-Dhahabī, *Tajrīd asmāʾ al-ṣaḥāba* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, n.d.), 2:128; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. ʿA.A. al-Turkī (Cairo: Markaz Ḥajar li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabīyat wa-l-Islāmīyat, 1429/2008), 11:328-333.

[18] For an introduction to the figure Kaʿb, see M. Lecker, "Kaʿb al-Aḥbār," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Second Edition, ed. F. Skolnik (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), 11:584-585, henceforth *EJ*^{2}; S. Lowin, "Kaʿb al-Aḥbār," *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. N. Stillman (Leiden: Brill, 2010), henceforth *EJIW*; M. Schmitz, "Kaʿb al-Aḥbār," *EI*^{2}. B. Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 96-97; R. Firestone, "Jewish Culture in the Formative Period of Islam," in *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*, ed. D. Biale (New York: Schocken, 2002), 191-198; R. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature*, Routledge Studies in the Qurʾān (London: Routledge, 2009), 89-92; J. C. Reeves, "Jewish Apocalyptic Lore in Early Islam: Reconsidering Kaʿb al-Aḥbār," in *Revealed Wisdom: Studies in Apocalyptic in Honour of Christopher Rowland*, ed. J. Ashton (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 200-216. On the narratives of Kaʿb's conversion to Islam, see M. Perlmann, "Another Kaʿb al-Aḥbār Story," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 45.1 (1954), 48-58; id., "A Legendary Story of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār's Conversion to Islam," in *The Joshua Starr Memorial Volume: Studies in History and Philology = Jewish Social Studes* 5 (1953), 85-99. Monographs dedicated to Kaʿb include I. Wolfensohn, *Ka'b al Aḥbār und seine Stellung im Ḥadīṯ und in der islamischen Legendenliteratur* (Glenhausen: F.W. Kalbfleisch, 1933); id., trans., *Kaʿb al-Aḥbār* (al-Quds: Maṭbaʿat al-Sharq al-Taʿāwuniyya, 1976); A.A. Twakkal, "Kaʿb al-Aḥbār in the Isrāʾīliyyāt and Tafsīr Literature" (PhD dissertation, McGill Univesity, 2008). Biographical notices on Kaʿb in the classical Arabic sources include: Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. ʿA. ʿUmar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khanjī, 1421/2001), 9:449; Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb al-Māʿarif*, ed. S. Okacha (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat Dār al-Kutub, 1960), 430; al-Tabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī*, ed. M. Ibrāhīm (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1960-1977; repr., Beirut: Dār al-Turāth, n.d.), 11:627; Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *al-Jarḥ wa-t-taʿdīl* (Hyderabad: Matbaʿt Majlis Dāʾirat al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1372/1953), 3:161; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Thiqāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1998), 2:456; al-Khargūshī, *Manāḥil al-shifā wa-manāḥil al-ṣafā bi-taḥqīq Kitāb Sharaf al-muṣṭafa* (Mecca: Dār Bashāʾir al-Islāmīya, 1424/2003), 1:275-277; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jamharat Ansāb al-ʿarab*, ed. ʿA.S. Hārūn (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1382/1962), 434; Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyāʾ*, ed. M. ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 2010), 5:364-391; id., *Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. M. Ismāʿīl and M. al-Saʿdnī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1422/2002), 4:157; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 50:151-176; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* (Cairo: Dār al-Ṣafā, 1411/1991), 2:380-381; al-Ṣāliḥī, *Ṭabaqāt ʿulamāʾ al-ḥadīth*, ed. A. al-Būshī and I. al-Zaybaq (Beirut: Muʾāssasat al-Risāla, 1417/1996), 1:105; al-Dhahabī, *al-Kāshif fī maʿrifta man la-hu riwāya fī-l-kutub al-sitta*, ed. ʿI.ʿAṭīya and M. Muwashshī (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1972), 3:9; id., *Siyar Aʿlam al-nubalāʾ*, ed. S. al-Arnaʾūṭ (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risala, 1422/2001), 3:489-494; id., *Tahdhīb Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, ed. S. al-Arnaʾūṭ (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1412/1991), 1:118; id., *Tadhhīb tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl* (Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha li-l-Ṭibāʿa wa-l-Nashr, 1425/2004), 7:453-455; id., *Tadhkirat al-Ḥuffāẓ* (Hyderabad: Maṭbaʿ Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmāniya, 1388/1968), 1:52; id., *Tajrīd asmāʾ al-ṣaḥāba* (Bombay: Sharaf al-Dīn al-Kutubī wa-Awlāduhu, 1969), 2:33; al-Ṣafadī, *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, Bibliotheca Islamica; 6x (Beirut and Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1413/1993), 24:345; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Taḥrīr Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb* (Beirut:

biblical traditions Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 110/728 or 114/732),[19] who are all recognized – and to varying degrees, praised within Islamic tradition – for supplying biblical attestation to Muḥammad's mission and the rise of Islam.[20] Although Islamic tradition maintains that each figure operated at different points in Muḥammad's career or early Islamic history, they are all accorded significant roles in the historiography of Islam's early encounter with, and appropriation of, biblical history and scriptural lore.[21] In particular, western scholarship has routinely identified these figures as the primary source of the so-called "*isrāʾīlīyāt*" (lit. Israelite traditions) that permeated through the various genres of classical Islamic literature; a term that is used in Islamic sources to classify narrative, historical, or exegetical material – often pertaining to biblical figures and historical narratives – that is reputedly of Jewish origin and thus foreign to Islamic

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Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1417/1997), 3:198-199; id., *Taqrīb al-Tahdhīb*, ed. M. ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1415/1995), 2:43.

[19] See R.G. Khoury, "Wahb ibn Munabbih," *EI*^{2}. For a comprehensive bibliography of secondary literature on Wahb, as well as the writings and traditions that have been ascribed to him in Islamic literary sources, see M. Pregill, "Isrāʾīliyyāt, myth, and pseudipigraphy," 215-284. Biographical entries on Wahb are found in Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 8:102; Ibn Ḥibbān, al-*Thiqāt*, 3:99; Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, 23-81; Ibn ʿAsakir, *Taʾrīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 63:366-403; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 1:508-511; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl*, ed. B. Maʿrūf (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Risāla, 1413/1992), 31:140-163; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 4:444-456; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Taḥrīr Taqrīb al-tahdhīb*, 4:72.

[20] In this respect, Western scholars have followed the Arabo-Islamic literature in classifying Ibn Salām, Waraqa, Kaʿb, Salmān al-Fārisī, and Wahb ibn Munabbih as early Muslim figures who were recognized as experts in biblical scriptures and traditions. These early figures are discussed in H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "Tawrāt," *EI*^{2}; S. Lowin, "Isrāʾīliyyāt," *EJIW*; id., *The Making of a Forefather: Abraham in Islamic and Jewish Exegetical Narratives*, Islamic History and Civilization; LXV(Leiden: Brill, 2006), 10-15; M. Pregill, "Isrāʾīliyyāt," 218-221; J. C. Reeves, "Jewish Apocalyptic Lore," 23.

[21] In this context, it is worth noting that the Companion and legendary convert Salmān al-Fārisī (lit. Salmān "the Persian") is also accorded a prominent place in early Islamic historiography, particularly, in connection with the conversion of Persia to Islam, the origins of Shīʿism, and the emergence of Sufism. See G. Levi Della Vida, "Salmān al-Fārisī," *EI*^{2}; L. Massignon, "Salmāniyya," in *E.J. Brill's First Encyclopedia of Islam 1913-1936*, ed. M.T. Houtsma, A.J. Wensinck, H.A.R. Gibb, and E. Lévi-Provençal (Leiden: Brill, 1987), henceforth *EI*^{1}; id., *Salmān Pāk et les prémices spirituelles de l'Islam iranien* (Paris G.P. Maisonneuve, 1934); V.B. Moreen, "Salman al-Fārisī and the Jews: An Anti-Jewish Shīʿī Ḥadīth from the Seventeenth Century?," *Irano-Judaica* 2 (1990), 144-157, 146. Biographical entries on Salmān in the classical literature include Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 4:69-87; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 328-330; Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*, 2:455-460; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 21:373-460; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 1:220-233; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 11:245-256; Ibn Kathīr, al-Sīra al-nabawīya, ed. M. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1396/1976), 1:296-307.

tradition and literature.[22] Jewish converts such as Ibn Salām and Kaʿb are often credited in the scholarly literature with fascilitating the transmission and spread of Jewish, biblical, and extra-biblical traditions in Islamic literature, particularly, in the genres of qurʾānic commentary and the "Stories of the Prophets" (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*).[23] One scholar, for example, goes so far as to characterize Ibn Salām and his descendents as follows: "ʿAbd Allah and his family became personifications of the process of isrāʾīlīyyāt (Ar. Israelite lore), a symbolic dynasty of theological middlemen."[24]

Ibn Salām, as we have mentioned, is celebrated in the biographies of Muḥammad for converting to Islam upon the prophet's arrival in Medina (622 AD) before the onset of armed conflict between the prophet and the three major Jewish tribes of the oasis. Tradition praises Ibn Salām for providing Jewish testimony to Muḥammad's status based on his recognition of Jewish scriptures' description of Muḥammad at a crucial point in the prophet's career. The monk Baḥīrā and the Christian cousin of Muḥammad's wife Khadījah, Waraqa ibn Nawfal, however, are said to have recognized Muḥammad's prophetic credentials much earlier: Baḥīrā recognizes the prophet in Syria when he meets

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[22] For example, see S. Lowin, "Isrāʾīliyyāt," *EJIW*; G. Vajda, "Isrāʾīliyyāt," *EI*^{2}; C. Adang, *Muslim Writers*, 9; G.D. Newby, *History of the Jews of Arabia: From Ancient Times to Their Eclipse Under Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009), 66-76; S.H. Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic*, 177-178; R. Vollandt, *Arabic Versions of the Pentateuch: A Comparative Study of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Sources*, Biblia Arabica; II (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 49. On the *isrāʾīlīyāt* see G.H.A. Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussions in Modern Egypt* (Leiden, Brill, 1969), 121-138; J.D. McAuliffe, "Assessing the Isrāʾīliyyāt: An Exegetical Conundrum," in *Storytelling in the Framework of Non-fictional Arabic Literature*, ed. S. Leder (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1998), 345-369; G.D. Newby, *A History of The Jews of Arabia*, 56; R. Tottoli, "Origin and Use of the Term Isrāʾīliyyāt in Muslim Literature," *Arabica* 46. 2 (1999), 193-210; S. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather*, 7-18.

[23] For a survey of the literary genre of *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* see T. Nagel, "Ḳiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ," *EI*^{2}; R. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets in the Qurʾān and Muslim Literature*, trans. M. Robertson (New York: Routledge, 2009), 138-157.

[24] S.M. Wasserstrom, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām," *EJIW*.

Muḥammad as a young boy of either nine or twelve years old (ca. 579 or 582 AD),[25] while later in Mecca, Waraqa affirms that Muḥammad's visions are true prophecy when the revelation of the Qurʾān begins ca. 610 AD. Similar to Ibn Salām, Baḥīrā and Waraqa are portrayed as confirming Muḥammad based on their conviction that biblical scriptures describe Muḥammad and predict his mission. As Patricia Crone has noted, these stories are all variations of a literary topos found in the biographies of Muḥammad, which she describes as "Muḥammad's encounter with representatives of non-Islamic religions who recognize him as a future prophet."[26] The narratives involving Ibn Salām, Baḥīrā, and Waraqa in the *Sīra* works are ultimately intended to legitimize an early Islamic doctrine concerning Muḥammad's status vis-à-vis biblical scripture and prophecy: namely, that Jewish and Christian scriptures affirm Muḥammad's mission and the rise of Islam. As with the accounts of Ibn Salām's conversion, the biblical confirmation supplied by Baḥīrā and Waraqa are regarded in classical Islamic literary sources as proofs, or signs, of Muḥammad's prophecy; and the accounts of these figures and their confirmation of Muḥammad's legitimacy are repeated in virtually all of the standard *Sīra* works composed during the classical period of Islamic history, and throughout the "Proofs of Prophecy" literature as well.

As a symbolic and legendary figure, Ibn Salām and his image in the works of Arabic literary biography share several defining features with the previously mentioned personalities. First, even as he is portrayed as a model Companion and Muslim, the

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[25] As Abel notes, the age at which Muḥammad is widely reported to have met Baḥīrā, age 12, is likely a common topos in the accounts of prophets encountering representatives of ancient religions in their youth. Abel states: "The age at which Muḥammad met this witness, 12 years of age, is the same as that of Jesus at the time of his first supernatural undertaking, the discussion with the doctors (Luke II, 42-49), and here can be seen an attempt at polemical influence." A. Abel, "Baḥīrā," *EI*^{2}.

[26] P. Crone, *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 219.

sources readily acknowledge and accentuate Ibn Salām's Jewish ancestry and expertise in Jewish scriptures and traditions. Ibn Salām is praised in particular for the sincerity and piety that he demonstrates by recognizing his scriptures' announcement of Muḥammad. While the biographical tradition regards him as an authoritative Companion who reliably transmitted *ḥadīth* reports from Muḥammad, Ibn Salām is also praised in Islamic literature as a reliable authority on "authentic," uncorrupted biblical and extra-biblical Jewish tradition. For this reason, a large number of prominent Companions and their Successors (*tābiʿūn*) reportedly transmitted *ḥadīth* traditions from Ibn Salām.[27] His authority and expertise in Jewish traditions distinguishes him from the majority of the Companions who are not priveleged with the requisite background or pedigree to access the biblical scriptures, exegetical traditions, and lore that, according to Islamic tradition, confirms Muḥammad's status as God's messenger. The sources portray Ibn Salām's learning and knowledge as biblical by connecting him with the biblical past, embellishing his Jewish ancestry and sholarly pedigree, and by associating him with the Torah and its exegesis. As an idealized representative of the biblical authority appealed to in the Qurʾān, Ibn Salām serves as a model native informant to Muḥammad and his Companions in the *Sīra* works.

Rather than defining features of a historical personality from Muḥammad's career, Ibn Salām's Jewish identity and ancestry, his sincerity and piety, along with his expertise in biblical scriptures and post-biblical Jewish traditions, are literary topoi that the biographical tradition employ to supply Muḥammad with biblical authority and legitimacy. The Jewish or Christian background of figures like Ibn Salām, Waraqa, Kaʿb,

[27] F.H. Manouchehri, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām," *EIs*.

and others is a literary trope that lends biblical legitimacy to these figures, and thereby, to their confirmation of Muḥammad's prophecy. Similarly, their scholarly background and purported expertise in biblical scriptures and their exegetical traditions is also a trope that confers legitimacy on Muḥammad and his claims to prophecy. These figures are all portrayed as recognizing that their scriptures identify Muḥammad as God's prophet. The purpose of the accounts surrounding them in the *Sīra* works, and more broadly, in classical Arabo-Islamic literature, is to demonstrate that Jewish and Christian scriptures predict and affirm Muḥammad's advent.

In addition to their shared reputation as experts in biblical scriptures and traditions, figures like Ibn Salām, Baḥīrā, and Kaʿb have all been embellished and mythologized in subsequent Islamic literature. Moreover, in the case of Ibn Salām, Kaʿb, and Wahb ibn Munabbih, their reputations as experts in biblical tradition made them particularly vulnerable to the widespread practice of pseudipigraphic attribution, and all three are regarded in Islamic tradition as authors of works on biblical history, traditions, and lore.[28] Kaʿb in particular acquired a reputation as a "putative author and oracular exponent of apocalyptic lore."[29] As scholars have noted, the historical personality behind each of these figures has been overshadowed and obscured by the symbolic potency that they acquired in classical Arabo-Islamic literature, especially, in the realm of apologetics and polemics.[30] Narratives of Ibn Salām and Kaʿb's conversion to Islam, for example,

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[28] A list of the works attributed to Ibn Salām, Kaʿb, Wahb, and others is provided in F.M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 297-306. With several exceptions, the majority of these works have not been critically edited and published, nor have they received sustained scholarly attention.

[29] J.C. Reeves, "Reconsidering Kaʿb al-Aḥbār," 209.

[30] For example, the historian Bernard Lewis makes a distintinction between Kaʿb's image and Kaʿb the historical figure with the pessimistic remark: "While the historical figure of Kaʿb is so overgrown with myth and legend as to be barely distinguishable, there is enough to show that his image had a negative as well as a positive side in Muslim perceptions." B. Lewis, *Jews of Islam*, 96.

were widely circulated, retold, and embellished as they were believed to provide authoritative and persuasive proof of Muḥammad's prophetic status. Regarding Ibn Salām, the early accounts of his conversion after Muḥammad successfully answered his questions that only a legitimate prophet could know was transformed, and eventually transmitted widely as an independent literary work under the title "The Questions of ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām" (*Masāʾil ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām*).[31] Similarly, the accounts of Muḥammad's encounter with Baḥīrā and the narratives of Kaʿb's conversion known from the *Sīra* works were taken up by subsequent medieval Muslim scholars operating in diverse literary genres and reshaped to advance their own scholarly, apologetic, and polemical goals.

The extent to which these early figures were infused with religious symbolism throughout the medieval period is demonstrated by the fact that Ibn Salām, Kaʿb, and

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[31] H. Daiber, "Masāʾil Wa-Adjwiba," *EI*^{2}; J. Horovitz, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām," *EI*^{2}; S.M. Wasserstrom, "ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām," *EJIW*, 1:7-8; F.H. Manouchehri, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām," *EIs*; H. Hirschfeld, "Historical and Legendary Controversies," 112-116. The Arabic *Masāʾil* texts have a long and complicated manuscript tradition. In undertaking research for this dissertation I have prepared a preliminary list of extant manuscripts of the work which is included in the bibliography. Ulisse Cecini, who is preparing a critical edition of the *Masāʾil*, was kind enough to share his own list of manuscripts of the *Masāʾil* with me. See the bibliographical entries on the *Masāʾil* in F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), 1:304; M. Steinchneider, *Polemische und apologetische Literatur in arabischer Sprache: zwischen Muslimen, Christen und Juden, nebst Anhängen verwandten Inhalts*, Abhandlungen fur die Kunden des Morgenalndes; VI, 3 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1966), 110-115; id., *Die arabische literatur der Juden, ein Beitrag zur Literaturgeschichte der Araber großentails aus handschriftlichen Quellen* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1987), 8-9; F.M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins*, 299. Published editions of the *Masāʾil* works in Arabic include *Kitāb Masāʾil sayyidī ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām li-n-nabī* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿa al-Yūsufīya, nd); "Kitāb Masāʾil sayyidī ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām li-n-nabī," in *Majmūʿa mufīd dhū maqāṣid wa-fawāʾid mafhūma jalīla* (Tunis: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Tūnisīya, 1350/1931-1932), 1:7-27; al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, *al-Ikhtiṣāṣ* (Qum: Manshūrāt Jamāʿat al-Mudarrisīn fī al-Ḥawzat al-ʿIlmīya, 1980), 42-51; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, ed. M. Duryāb (Beirut: Dār al-Taʿāruf li-l-Maṭbūʿāt, 1421/2001), 23:166-179; Ibn al-Wardī, *Kharīdat al-ʿajāʾib wa-farīdat al-gharāʾib*, ed. A. Zinātī (Cairo: Maktabat Thaqāfat al-Dīniya, 1428/2008), 392-415. English translations of the *Masāʾil* include N. Davis, *The Errors of Mohammedanism Exposed, or: A Dialogue between the Arabian Prophet and a Jew* (Malta: G. Muir, 1847); M. Margoliouth, *A Pilgrimage* to *the Land of my Fathers* (London: Richard Bentley, 1850), 2:1-40. The sole monography dedicated to the *Masāʾil* is G.F. Pijper, *Het Boek der duizend Vragen* (Leiden: Brill, 1924). Ronit Ricci has examined the translation and adaptation of the Arabic *Masāʾil* works into the languages of South and Southeast Asia, including, Javanese, Malay, and Tamil languages. See R. Ricci, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion, and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia*, South Asia Across the Disciplines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

Baḥīrā were at different points appropriated by Jewish and Christian scholars and exploited to refute the foundations of Islam and Muḥammad's legitimacy.[32] Whereas in the *Sīra* works, Ibn Salām, Baḥīrā,Waraqa, and Kaʿb eagerly and faithfully supply Muḥammad with biblical legitimacy and confirmation, in the hands of Jewish and Christian scholars the image of these figures was transformed and used to prove that Muḥammad was a fraud who had no claim to the biblical tradition of prophecy. These medieval Jewish and Christian polemiclal works, which have been described as "antibiographies" of Muḥammad, were designed to refute the basic theological claims of Islam and "deflect the authority of canonical Muslim biography of Muhammad (Sira) as well as other hagiographic tales of Muhammad."[33] For example, Ibn Salām and Kaʿb both appear in Jewish polemical works that recount the story of ten Jewish sages who converted to Islam only to instruct and assist Muḥammad in composing the false scripture that became the Qurʾān.[34] The previously mentioned Arabo-Islamic work, the *Masāʾil ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām*, gained a certain popularity in the Latin West where it was initially translated into Latin by Herman of Carinthia between the years 1142 – 1143 AD and was subsequently used, along with Latin translations of the Qurʾān and other Islamic texts, as a tool to familiarize Christians with Islamic doctrine and refute the theological

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[32] Steven Wasserstrom, for example, has noted that Ibn Salām and the Muslim accounts of his conversion were "reappropriated, re-Judaized in Jewish legends concerning Muhammad." *Between Muslim and Jew*, 176.

[33] S. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 177.

[34] J.C. Reeves, "Reconsidering Kaʿb al-Aḥbār," 205. On the traditions of Muḥammad's Jewish Companions see R. Firestone, "The Prophet Muhammad in Pre-Modern Jewish Literatures," in *The Image of the Prophet Between Ideal and Ideology: A Scholarly Investigation*, ed. C. Gruber and A. Shalem (Berlin: De Gruyter), 27-44; R.G. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey and Evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam; XIII (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1997), 505-508; J. Leveen, "Mohammed and his Jewish Companions," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 16.4 (1926), 399-406; S. Shtober, "Present at the Dawn of Islam: Polemic and Reality in the Medieval Story of Muḥammad's Jewish Companions," in *The Convergence of Judaism and Islam: Religious, Scientific, and Cultural Dimensions*, ed. M. Laskier and Y. Lev (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), 64-88.

foundations of Islam.[35] Muḥammad's responses to Ibn Salām's numerous theological questions in the translation was viewed by European Christians as a primer of sorts, containing a representative sample of heretical Islamic doctrines and beliefs. Similarly, Christians throughout the Middle East began to narrate their own interpretations in both Syriac and Arabic of Muḥammad's encounter with Baḥīrā as early as the eighth century AD in response to the challenges that the Islamic conquests and Islamic doctrine posed to their communities, traditions, and theologies.[36] In these polemical Christian biographies of Muḥammad, Baḥīrā is transformed and depicted as Muḥammad's

> secret religious teacher, who instructed him in a simple form of monotheism, a heretical form of Christianity, or a sound form of Christian orthodoxy that was lost on the pagan Arabs and corrupted by a Jew.[37]

In the hands of Jewish and Christian polemicists, figures like Ibn Salām were portrayed as deviants, heretics, or corrupted monotheists who were largely responsible for Muḥammad's adulterated brand of religion and his confused understanding of biblical history and scripture. Given the broad reception of these figures in medieval Islamic, Christian, and Jewish religious literatures, it is perhaps appropriate to regard Ibn Salām as a shared and contested religious symbol among the three religious traditions. Although each community propogated different interpretations of Ibn Salām's status as a Companion of Muḥammad throughout the medieval period, all three agreed that

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[35] U. Cecini, "Liber de doctrina Mahumet," in *Christian-Muslim Relations: A Bibliographical History Volume 3 (1050-1200)*, History of Christian-Muslim Relations; XV, ed. D. Thomas and A. Mallett (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 503-507; Ó. de la Cruz Palma and C.F. Hernández, "Liber de doctrina Mahumet," *Christian-Muslim Relations*, 503-507.

[36] These works, along with their manuscript history, have been studied, edited, and translated by Barbara Rogemma (see note 16). For additional discussion and analysis of the Christian Baḥīrā legend see S.H. Griffith, "Muḥammad and the Monk Baḥīrā: Reflections on a Syriac and Arabic Text from Early Abbasid Times," *Oriens Christianus* 79 (1995), 146-174; K. Szilágyi, "Muḥammad and the Monk: The Making of the Christian Baḥīrā Legend," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008), 169-214.

[37] B. Rogemma, "Baḥīrā," *EI*^{3}.

understanding Ibn Salām's role in early Islam was necessary in order to interpret Islam's origins, and establish whether it was truly founded on divine revelation. At different points in classical and post-classical Islam, Jews, Christians and Muslims all viewed Ibn Salām as a pivotal figure who could either prove the voracity of, or refute, the legitimacy of Islam.

1.3. Ibn Salām and the Jews of Medina

Islamic tradition situates Ibn Salām's life and career in the socio-cultural milieu of the Jewish tribes in the seventh century Ḥijāz region of Arabia, specifically, among the settled Jewish tribes that lived in the desert oasis then known as Yathrib.[38] Ibn Salām is regarded by tradition as the leading religious scholar among the Banū Qaynuqāʿ, a prominent Jewish tribe in Medina along with the Banū al-Naḍīr and the Banū Qurayẓa. Islamic sources report that the Qaynuqāʿ were allies of the strong Arab tribe al-Khazraj who, in addition to the Arab tribe al-Aws, wielded the most political power and influence in Medina at the time of Muḥammad's emigration to the oasis. The Qaynuqāʿ are said to have been goldsmiths by trade and reportedly owned a number of fortresses (*āṭām*, sing.

[38] For a selection of recent literature on the Jews of Arabia see S. Lowin, "Hijaz," *EJIW*; M. Gil, "Origins of the Jews of Yathrib," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1984), 145-166; G.D. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia: From Ancient Times to their Eclipse Under Islam* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1988); id., "The Jews of Arabia at the Birth of Islam," in *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day*, ed. A.W. Meddeb and B. Stora (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 39-51; M. Lecker, *Muslims, Jews and Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina*, Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts; XIII (Leiden: Brill, 1995); id., *Jews and Arabs in Pre- and Early Islamic Medina,* Variorum Collected Studies (Aldershot: Variorum, 1998); J. Lassner, *Jews, Christians, and the Abode of Islam: Modern Scholarship, Medieval Realities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 131-154; R.G. Hoyland, "The Jews of the Hijaz in the Qurʾān and in their Inscriptions," in *New Perspectives on the Qurʾan: The Qurʾān in its Historical Context 2*, ed. G.S. Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2014), 91-116; H. Mazuz, *The Religious and Spiritual Life of the Jews of Medina*, Brill Reference Library of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

uṭum) and date orchards (*amwāl*, sing. *māl*) that were eventually confiscated by Muḥammad following the Qaynuqāʿ's expulsion from Medina in 2/624.[39] Fortresses like those possessed by the Qaynuqāʿ were a prominent feature of Medina's topography which served to protect the settlement, including her orchards and cultivated fields, from outside agression.[40] Ibn Salām's tribe is also notable for their market (*sūq*), which served as the main market in Medina at the time of the *hijra*, and for their house of study (*bayt al-midrās*).[41] For reasons that are not entirely clear, the Qaynuqāʿ were besieged by Muḥammad and his followers for fourteen days before surrendering. As a result of the intervention of the Khazraj chief ʿAbdallāh ibn Ubayy, the Qaynuqāʿ avoided being killed and were allowed to flee Medina, first settling in the Jewish settlement of Wādī al-Qura[42] just north of Medina and then traveling to Adriʿāt in Syria.[43] Islamic accounts of the siege of the Qaynuqāʿ and their expulsion from Medina are narrated in the biographies of Muḥammad and the accounts of his military campaigns (*maghāzī*).[44]

As scholars have noted, Islamic sources preserve the most information about these three Jewish tribes specifically because they had political, religious, and economic importance for the biographies of Muḥammad and the historiography of the rise of Islam.[45] In other words, the Arabian Jews that Islamic sources tell us the most about are those who figure prominently in the *Sīra* and *Maghāzī* works as Muḥammad's chief

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[39] M. Lecker, "Qaynuqāʿ, Banū," *EJ*^{2}, 16:760.

[40] W.M. Watt, "al-Madīna," *EI*^{2}.

[41] Ibid.

[42] M. Lecker, "Wādī ʾl-Ḳurā," *EI*^{2}.

[43] A.J. Wensinck, "Ḳaynuḳāʿ," *EI*^{2}.

[44] For example, see Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 513-514, al-Wāqidī, *Kitāb al-Maghāzī*, ed. M. Jones (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 176-180; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 3:5-7; al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 1: 145-147.

[45] G.D. Newby, *History*, 55.

opponents in Medina. The major scholarly questions regarding the Jews of Medina concern their origins, including when and how Jews arrived in Arabia, and the nature of their Jewish religious and cultural identity.[46] Specifically, scholars of early Islam have attempted to evaluate the extent to which the Jews of Medina practiced a normative Judaism, by which scholars typically mean a fully-articulated and authoritative Rabbinic Judaism with a distinctive theology, canonical scripture, and a well-established set of exegetical methods and study practices. At this point, my goal is not to provide a critical evaluation of the numerous scholarly positions regarding the Jews of Medina. Rather, I wish to outline some of the more convincing answers that scholars have provided to the vexing historical questions surrounding the origins of the Jews of Medina, and survey how the Arabo-Islamic sources represent and their religious orientation.

It is a well-established tradition, or in Islamic terminology, a *sunna*, to begin any scholarly treatment of the Jews of Medina with the caveat that virtually all of our sources to reconstruct the history and religious identity of the Arabian Jews are Islamic, and were usually composed centuries after the events that they seek to recount. Despite the numerous traditions preserved in the Arabo-Islamic literary sources attesting to the literacy of the Medinan Jews, their practices of studying and interpreting scripture, and their synagogues (Ar. *kanīsa*) and study houses, the Jewish tribes encountered by Muḥammad left us no writings or records.[47] Another stumbling block for our ability to uncover the history and identitity of the Arabian Jews is the fact that many of the Islamic

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[46] In a recent monography on the Jews of Medina, the author surveys the positions of virtually all of the scholars who have attempted to account for the enigmatic origins of the Jews of Medina and provides their cautious statements on the problems involved in research in this area. H. Mazuz, *Religious and Spiritual Life*, 1-7.

[47] See, however, the recent article by Hoyland analyzing a small set of Jewish inscriptions in Arabia. "The Jews of the Hijaz," 91-116.

sources are openly hostile to Jews and Judaism, and as such are primarily interested in representing the Jews of Medina as the primary foil to Muḥammad during his career. The scholar of Jews in Islam Gordon Newby summarizes the situation, noting that Jews in Islamic literary sources, including the Qurʾān, *ḥadīth*, Qurʾān commentaries, and biographies of Muḥammad, "are made to fit the stereotypes developed from the particular theological perspectives of Islam."[48] Like Ibn Salām, the Jews of Medina play a major role in the foundation narrative of Islamic origins and Muḥammad's career. Whereas Ibn Salām is portrayed as the ideal honest Jew who confirms Muḥammad's claims to prophecy, the Islamic sources represent the Medinan Jews as the prophet's staunch opponents who corrupted the true meaning of Jewish scripture and religion. Thus, the image of Ibn Salām and the Jews of Medina in classical Arabic literature is heavily influenced by two related Islamic doctrines regarding biblical scripture: that biblical scripture predicts Muḥammad's advent, and the accusation that Jews and Christians have corrupted and falsified (*taḥrīf*) their own scriptures.[49]

Despite the serious difficulties involved in recovering the history of the Jews of Medina from Islamic literary sources, scholars have cautiously offered several explanations for the origins of the Jewish presence in the Hijaz. Archaeological evidence and Aramaic inscriptions on tomb munuments would seem to suggest a Jewish presence

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[48] G.D. Newby, *History*, 4.

[49] *Taḥrīf* literally means to change, alter, or forge words or statements. The accusation of scriptural falsification was a widespread polemical motif in pre-Islamic times that was often connected to the translation of scriptures, and was used often used by sectarian groups to discredit their opponents. H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "Taḥrīf," *EI*^{2}. According to John Wansbrough, the doctrine of *taḥrīf* is a major theme of Muslim polemics which was adopted and adapted from its use among Jews and Christians in the Middle East around the time of the rise of Islam. J. Wansborough, *The Sectarian Milieu: The Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2006), 40-41. See the thorough discussion on *taḥrīf* in G. Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering*, 1-36.

in Arabia before the Christian era.[50] Newby situates the origins of Jewish settlement in Arabia in the centuries following the Bar Kochba revolt (132–135 AD) which saw "the movement of Jews from the Roman *oikoumene* to the periphery, Gaul, Iberia, and Arabia."[51] Norman Stillman also cites the Roman suppression of Jewish revolts in Judaea as the origin of substantial Jewish presence in Arabia.[52] For both of these authors then, the original Jewish inhabitants of Arabia were Judean refugees who were fleeing Roman persucution after the suppression of the "great revolt" (66–70 AD) and Vespasian's destruction of the temple in 70 AD, or following the Bar Kochba revolt. These Jewish refugees presumably brought their languages, ritual practices, legal and scriptural traditions with them to their new settlements in Arabia. Subsequently, a distinct Jewish dialect of Arabic –referred to by Western scholarship as Judaeo-Arabic and Islamic literature as "the Jewish [tongue]" (*al-yahūdīya*) – emerged in Arabia in the following centuries, and gradually over time, Hebrew and Aramaic terms were assimilated into the Arabic of the Hijaz.[53] According to Newby, these linguistic developments among the Jews of Arabia can be seen in the Qurʾān's widespread use of common words like *nabī* (from the Hebrew *naviʾ*, "prophet") and *ṣadaqa* (from the Hebrew *tzedaqa*, "charity, almsgiving") which are treated in Islamic scripture as clear Arabic.[54]

By Muḥammad's time, the Jews of Medina were fully assimilated into Arabian society. Jews lived both as sedentary inhabitants of cities or oasis settlements and as nomadic bedouin. In terms of occupation and participation in Arabian culture, the Jews

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[50] S. Lowin, "Hijaz" *EJIW*.

[51] G.D. Newby, "The Jews of Arabia," 42.

[52] N. Stillman, "Yahūd," *EI*^{2}.

[53] Ibid. 41.

[54] Ibid.; id., *History*, 21-22.

were warriors, merchants, agriculturalists, scribes, and poets.[55] Along with the Arabs, the Jews were also organized into distinct tribes and clans. The Medinan Jews were lead by their judges, military leaders, and religious scholars.[56] Scholars routinely claim that although the Jewish tribes were originally the dominant group in Medina, in the centuries preceding Muḥammad's *hijra* they had become subservient clients (*mawālī*, sing. *mawlā*) to two powerful Arab tribes in the oasis, the Aws and Khazraj, collectively identified as the Banū Kayla. Michael Lecker, however, has convincingly shown that one of the earliest extant literary sources on the social and tribal organization of Medinan society around the time of the *hijra* – the so called "Constitution of Medina"[57] – represents the Jews as the strongest element of Medina's population at the time of Muḥammad's arrival to the oasis.[58]

Our main sources on the religious life of the Medinan Jews are the text of the Qurʾān, the biographies of Muḥammad, and the commentaries on the Qurʾān. The treatment of Jews in all three of these sources is usually colored by anti-Jewish polemics and the defense of Islamic doctrine and scripture. Islamic sources maintain that although the Jews were divided into tribes and clans like their Arab neighbors, their social organization was distinct in that they revered and submitted to the authority of religious leaders, who are identified with the qurʾānic terms *rabbānīyūn* and *aḥbār*. The term *rabbānīyūn*, according to Newby, "appears to be the term 'Rabbinate,' a term of self-description by the *geonim* and the usual Karaite word for the majority group of Jews who

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[55] G.D. Newby, *History*, 50.

[56] H. Mazuz, *Religious and Spiritual Life*, 11.

[57] See M. Lecker, "Constitution of Medina," *EI*[3].

[58] See M. Lecker, "Were the Jewish Tribes in Arabia Clients of Arab Tribes?," in *Patronate and Patronage in Early and Classical Islam*, ed. M. Bernards and J. Nawas (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 50-69.

adhere to rabbinic precepts."[59] The term *aḥbār* (sing. *ḥabr/ḥibr*) also appears to be an Arabized version of a term used in Talmudic circles to designate a subclass of rabbinic Jews who, while not being part of the rabbinical elite, are considered companions of the Rabbis (*'haver*) on account of their strict adherence to rabbinical law and codes of conduct.[60] According to Mazuz, however, the *rabbānīyūn* were the Jews religious scholars *(ʿulamāʾ*) and the *aḥbār* were the jurists (*fuqahāʾ*).[61] Both Newby and Mazuz interpret the appelations that, according to the Islamic sources, the Medinan Jews used for their religious leaders as a strong indication of the "Talmudic-Rabbinic character of the Jews of Medina."[62] The Jews' religious leaders and rabbis figure prominently in the Islamic accounts of the Medinan Jews, where they routinely interrogate Muḥammad with questions on points of doctrine or biblical history. For this reason, the Jewish leaders in Medina are identified in the biography of Muḥammad as the "people of the question" (*aṣḥāb al-masʾala*).[63] The representations of these exchanges between the prophet and the rabbis depict the Jewish leaders questioning Muḥammad in an attempt to confuse and humiliate him. Islamic sources also attest to the religious practices of the Medinan Jews, including their dietary restrictions, direction of prayer, sabbath observance, Torah study, and fasting. In several cases, such as the changing of the direction of prayer (*qibla*) from Jerusalem to Mecca, we know that Muḥammad ordered his followers to change their ritual in order to distinguish the Muslims from the Jews.

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[59] G.D. Newby, *Jews of Arabia*, 46.

[60] Ibid.

[61] H. Mazuz, *Religious and Spiritual Life*, 21.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid. 9. This representation of the Jewish leaders in Medina belongs to the topos in Muḥammad's biography of representatives of Judaism and Christianity interrogating or examining Muḥammad to assess his claims to prophecy.

1.4. Project Description

This dissertation responds in part to recent scholarly demands that the historical and biographical accounts surrounding Ibn Salām, and other major figures in early Islam who were reportedly of Jewish or Christian origin, be re-evaluated. Michael Pregill, for example, has proposed that:

> The various traces of evidence concerning these figures and their activity as intermediaries, including not only the historical and biographical accounts about them in the literary sources but the materials preserved in later works transmitted in their name, as well as the pertinent manuscript evidence, need to be subjected to a comprehensive re-evaluation.[64]

As an initial step towards a re-evaluation of the figure of Ibn Salām, my project assesses the construction and reception of Ibn Salām's biography and legendary image in a broad range of sources from the genres of literary biography, prophetic biography, historiography, *ḥadīth*, and qurʾānic commentary composed during the classical and post-classical periods of the Islamic tradition. There are two major goals to this project. First, the dissertation shows how the genre of classical Arabic literary biography created and embellished Ibn Salām's legendary image as the quintessential Jewish convert to Islam and model Companion of Muḥammad. My hope is that a detailed analysis of Ibn Salām's biography will shed light on the broader question of how Arabic literary biography constructed and embellished the image of Muḥammad's Companions, who are collectively revered in Islamic tradition above all subsequent generations of Muslims as the "pious predecessors" (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*). While scholars have routinely characterized

[64] M. Pregill, "Isrāʾīliyyāt, myth, and pseudipigraphy," 220.

Ibn Salām as a legendary, mythical, or symbolic figure, there has yet to be a sustained or comprehensive effort to assess 1) *how* Ibn Salām acquired the elevated and legendary status that he achieved in the literary sources, 2) the methodology and literary topoi that the biographical tradition employs to portray Ibn Salām and his conversion to Islam, and 3) how Ibn Salām himself is deployed as a topos in the various literary genres in which he figures prominently, in particular, the genre of qurʾānic commentary. The dissertation identifies the methodology and topoi that the biographical literature used to portray Ibn Salām as the ideal Jewish convert to Islam, and then analyzes how the qurʾānic commentaries use Ibn Salām, including accounts of his background and activities during Muḥammad's career, to interpret Islamic scripture. The use of Ibn Salām to interpret passages in the Qurʾān ultimately reflects how the exegetes understood and chose to represent Arabian Judaism and Jewish scripture on the eve of Islam. Second, the dissertation sheds light on how Muslims interpreted their origins, community, scripture, and prophet in relation to the biblical past and Jewish other. In light of Ibn Salām's prevailing reputation in early Islam and beyond as the first and most significant Jewish convert to Islam, I view the creation of his biography and legend as being intertwined with how Islamic tradition defined and interpreted Muḥammad's encounter with Jews and Judaism, and the Qurʾān's relationship with Jewish scriptures and tradition. The dissertation, therefore, approaches Ibn Salām's biography as a window into classical Islamic perspectives, interpretations, and anxieties concerning the Jewish other. The biography of Ibn Salām, including the accounts of his background in Arabia, his scholarly pedigree and activities, virtues, and conversion provided Muslim scholars and

exegetes with a venue in which they could construct their image of Arabian Judaism and Jewish tradition on the eve of Islam.

The dissertation argues that Ibn Salām functions as a trope that the biographical, historiographical, and qurʾānic commentary literature utilizes to invoke the authority of biblical scriptures and their purported confirmation of Muḥammad's prophetic status. The literary sources deploy Ibn Salām in an effort to lend Muḥammad the authority and legitimacy that Muslims during the classical and medieval period believed Jewish scriptures afforded their prophet. For many of the Muslim scholars, traditionists, historians, exegetes, and theologians that are consulted below, Ibn Salām personifies a particular interpretation of biblical history and scripture: namely, that biblical prophecy and scriptures legitimize Muḥammad's advent as God's final messenger. I argue that Ibn Salām, as he is depicted in the biographical literature, is an exegetically and doctrinally constructed figure.[65] The sources' representations of Ibn Salām's status among both the Jews of Medina and Muḥammad's Companions are inextricably connected to, and shaped by, how Muslim's understood Islamic origins and Islamic scripture. Specifically, the portrayals of Ibn Salām are shaped by how Muslim's interpreted the Jews' rejection of Muḥammad, and the Qurʾān's assertion that biblical scriptures predict Muḥammad's mission. Within this charged theological context, the Islamic biographical tradition transformed an individual Companion, whose conversion is only briefly narrated in the early biographies of Muḥammad, into a powerful and eduring symbol to legitimize the prophet of Islam. As a symbol, Ibn Salām represents the confirmation that, according to

[65] My description of Ibn Salām as a figure whose image was constructed in light of exegetical and doctrinal considerations draws on Jeremy Cohen's discussion of what he terms the "hermeneutical Jew." See the author's Introduction to *Living Letters of the Law: Ideas of the Jew in Medieval Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 2-5.

the Qurʾān and Islamic doctrine, Jewish scripture affords Muḥammad's prophecy and the rise of Islam. Ibn Salām is an exegetically constructed figure in the sense that he exemplifies what, from an Islamic perspective, *should have been* the Arabian Jews' response to Muḥammad's claims to prophecy. In this way, Ibn Salām is made to personify the Torah's confirmation of Muḥammad, as well as the desired Jewish response to Islam. For generations of Muslim scholars, their students, and communities of readers, Ibn Salām embodies how Jews of past and present should respond to the qurʾānic revelation and Muḥammad's mission.

1.5. Sources and Methodology

Our knowledge of the views and interpretations of early and medieval Muslims of the career of ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām is derived from Islamic traditions that have been preserved and collected into numerous and often voluminous compilations. The individual traditions about Ibn Salām are in the form of *ḥadīth*, which can be broadly defined as traditions about the words and deeds of Muḥammad, the Companions, and other figures in early Islam.[66] These *ḥadīth* traditions are attributed to the early followers of Muḥammad, the Companions, and in certain cases, to Ibn Salām's direct descendents, who would have all been in a position to directly observe Ibn Salām during his life or inherit traditions from him. The *ḥadīth* traditions were intially transmitted, embellished, preserved, and studied orally until they were eventually collected, edited, and codified

[66] Scholars often subdivide the *ḥadīth* corpus into specialized categories of traditions, for example, exegetical, legal, or historical *ḥadīth*. For an introduction to the *ḥadīth* corpus and a concise discussion of the categories, or genres, of the *ḥadīth* see J. Scheiner, "Ḥadīth and Sunna," in *Routledge Handbook on Early Islam*, ed. H. Berg (New York: Routledge, 2018), 79-97.

beginning in the second half of the eighth century AD. The traditions on Ibn Salām occur not only in *ḥadīth* collections and works on Muḥammad's *Sīra*, where the account of his conversion to Islam is narrated as a decisive moment in Muḥammad's career in Medina, but also in works of literary biography, historiography, and qurʾānic commentary. The commentaries on the Qurʾān, in particular, are an invaluable source reflecting the conception that Muslims had of Ibn Salām during the classical period, and how they interpreted and legitimized their scripture over and against Jewish scriptures. Although the qurʾānic commentaries utilize many of the *ḥadīth* that appear in standard *ḥadīth* collections and biographical sources, they also contain additional exegetical traditions involving Ibn Salām that demonstrate the major role his image played in the interpretation of the Qurʾān. The traditions on Ibn Salām in the qurʾānic commentaries occur either in the form of brief exegetical glosses on vague references in scriptural verses, or narratives that purport to specify the historical circumstances in which a particular qurʾānic verse was revealed. After surveying these traditions, it is clear that while Ibn Salām is treated in works belonging to distinct literary genres of the Arabo-Islamic tradition, it is often the case that scholars writing in different literary genres draw on and employ the same traditions, be they *ḥadīth* traditions or exegetical traditions that were used to interpret the text of the Qurʾān.[67] A tradition on Ibn Salām's scholarly pedigree and background, for example, may appear simultaneously in a biographical

[67] This feature of classical Arabo-Islamic literature is noted by Michael Lecker in his study of early Islamic Medina. To justify his inclusion of literary sources beyond the *Sīra* literature in his study of Muḥammad's career in Medina, Lecker argues that: "classification according to genres (History, *Adab*, Qurʾān Exegesis) often obscures the simple fact that different 'genres' use identical material which they draw from the huge repository of Islamic tradition." M. Lecker, *Jews, Muslims, & Pagans: Studies on Early Islamic Medina*, Islamic History and Civilization, Studies and Texts; XIII (Leiden: Brill, 1995), xi n. 8. Recently, Marianna Klar has examined this question by looking at how genre boundaries influenced the material that the historian and qurʾānic exegete al-Ṭabarī decided to include in his historiographical and exegetical works. See M. Klar, "Between History and Tafsīr: Notes on al-Ṭabarī's Methodological Strategies," *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 18.2 (2016), 89-129.

compilation dedicated to the virtues of Muḥammad's Companions, a work of *Sīra* on Muḥammad's life and career, a qurʾānic commentary, and a biographical dictionary on early Muslims who reportedly visited the city of Damascus. Thus, in order to shed as much light as possible on the development of Ibn Salām's image in the classical sources, I have consulted *Sīra* works, including works from the subgenres of Muḥammad's biography such as the "Proofs of Prophecy" (*Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*) and "Outstanding Characteristics of the Messenger" (*Shamāʾil al-rasūl*), biographical dictionaries and compilations devoted to the early Muslims and transmitters of *ḥadīth* traditions (*tabaqāt* and *rijāl* works, respectively), historiographical works, qurʾānic commentaries (*tafsīr*, pl. *tafāsīr*), and the "Occasions of Revelation" (*asbāb al-nuzūl*)[68] subgenre of the qurʾānic commentaries.[69]

My approach to the traditions on Ibn Salām makes no attempt to separate biography from hagiography, or history from legend. The biographies of Ibn Salām are the literary product of Islamic devotion and, as such, were primarily intended to defend and edify the faith of the believers, confer authority and praise upon the prophet

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[68] The "occasions of revelation" (*asbāb al-nuzūl*, sing. *sabab*) are narrative traditions that purport to describe the historical context in Muḥammad's career surrounding the revelation of verses in the Qurʾān. Like the *ḥadīth*, the occasions of revelation typically have chains of transmission which purport to identify the source and transmission of the exegetical traditions. On the occasions of revelation and their place in the classical tradition of Qurʾānic commentary see A. Rippin, "Occasions of Revelation," *EQ*, 3:569-573; id., "The Exegetical Genre 'Asbāb al-nuzūl': A Bibliographical and Terminological Survey," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48.1 (1985): 1-15; id., "The Function of 'Asbāb al-nuzūl' in qurʾānic Exegesis," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51.1 (1988), 1-20; R. Tottoli, "Asbāb al-Nuzūl as a Technical Term: It's Emergence and Application in the Islamic Sources," in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, ed. M. Daneshgar, Texts and Studies on the Qurʾān; XI (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 62-73.

[69] In undertaking research into the primary sources on Ibn Salām I relied upon the works of M.J. Kister and his students, especially Uri Rubin and Michael Lecker, as a model. As Kister's scholarship demonstrates, the broadest range of source material should be consulted to analyze a given theme or topic in Islamic tradition. Prime examples of Kister's methodology at work include his "Ḥaddithū ʿan banī isrāʾila wa-lā ḥaraja: A Study of an early tradition," *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972), 215-239; and "Ādam: A Study of some Legends in Tafsīr and Ḥadīt Literature," *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), 113-162. Kister's illuminating articles on various aspects of early Islamic history and tradition have been collected in *Studies in Jāhiliyya and Early Islam*, Variorum Collected Studies Series, CXXIII (London: Variorum, 2008).

Muḥammad, and uphold the scriptural status of the Qurʾān. Specifically, the traditions surrounding Ibn Salām served to 1) provide Muslim communities with proof of the Qurʾān's claim that biblical scriptures predict and confirm Muḥammad's career as God's messenger, and 2) demonstrate that exceptional Jews, and by extension Christians, could and did become exemplary Muslims and Companions to Muḥammad. Both of these points, in turn, then served as ammunition in Muslim anti-Jewish and anti-Christian polemics throughout the medieval period. Therefore, I do not regard Ibn Salām's biography as a collection of disinterested, or sober, historical accounts of one of Muḥammad's Companions and his activities among the early community of believers in Medina. Rather, the traditions of Ibn Salām, as well as the way that the classical sources represent his background and career, reflect how classical and post-classical Islamic tradition understood the origins of the Muslim community (*umma*), and the character of Arabian Judaism and Jewish scriptures at the dawn of Islam. Stated differently, the biographies of Ibn Salām reflect how Muslims articulated and justified their self-image in relation to a Jewish other.

1.6. Chapter Summary

Chapter One provides an inventory of traditions that purport to supply biographical information on Ibn Salām, including, his name, ancestry, tribal affiliation, date of conversion to Islam, descendants, involvement in Muḥammad's military campaigns and, subsequently, the early Islamic conquests. These traditions are located primarily in biographical compilations that contain notices on Ibn Salām, *Sīra* works, universal

histories that narrate Muḥammad's *Sīra*, and commentaries on the Qurʾān. This inventory highlights the particular moments in Ibn Salām's biography and career that drew the attention of the Arabic biographical tradition. My analysis identifies the details of Ibn Salām's biography on which the sources are ambivalent, contradictory, or in general agreement with one another. The sources betray major disagreements over Ibn Salām's tribal affiliation and the date and circumstances of his conversion, and neglect to provide substantial biographical information on his activities and background in pre-Islamic Yathrib, or his involvement in the affairs of the early Islamic community following his conversion. The sources are nearly unanimous, however, in their attempt to portray Ibn Salām as an exemplary and authoritative Jewish scholar in Yathrib on the eve of Islam who provided confirmation of Muḥammad's claims to prophecy.

Chapter Two examines how the biographical and historiographical sources praise Ibn Salām and construct his image as the quintessential Jewish convert to Islam and model Companion of Muḥammad. The sources focus their efforts on 1) embellishing Ibn Salām's credentials as the preeminent scholar of Jewish scriptures and tradition in Medina, and more broadly, Arabia, on the eve of Islam; and 2) representing his close relationship with Muḥammad, the admiration and praise that the prophet held for Ibn Salām, and Ibn Salām's distinguished status among Muḥammad's Companions. I demonstrate that the pattern of praise in the biographies of Ibn Salām is, ultimately, intended to legitimize the prophet Muḥammad and supply biblical legitimacy for his mission.

Chapter Three shifts our attention from the construction of Ibn Salām's legendary persona to an analysis of how his image was taken up by the qurʾānic exegetes and

deployed in their commentaries on the Qurʾān. An entire chapter was devoted to Ibn Salām's place in the qurʾānic commentaries, in part, because the Islamic biographical and historiographical sources insist that several verses of the Qurʾān were revealed specifically in reference to him. In other words, the classical Muslim scholars – along with their communities of colleagues, students, interpreters, and readers – considered Ibn Salām's association with the revelation of the Qurʾān to be a major feature of his biography. My analysis begins by identifying the group of qurʾānic verses that the classical exegetes routinely identified with Ibn Salām. I then proceed to assess the themes and rhetorical patterns shared by the scriptural verses that provoked the exegetes to identify Ibn Salām as the subject or referent of a given scriptural verse. The qurʾānic exegetes effectively read Ibn Salām into the Qurʾān by identifying him with exegetical glosses on scriptural verses that were believed to identify praiseworthy Jews, or appeal to an elite minority of Jews who recognized their scriptures' confimation of Muḥammad. My evaluation of the exegetical traditions preserved in the qurʾānic commentaries concludes that the exegetes point to Ibn Salām as a trope to invoke the legitimacy and confirmation that biblical tradition and scriptures lend Muḥammad.

2. The Life and Career of ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām

2.1. Introduction

The purported details of Ibn Salām's biography are supplied by the classical works of Arabic literary biography and historiography. Additionally, the exegetical literature on the Qurʾān several contain reports on Ibn Salām's tribal affiliation and the circumstances surrounding his conversion to Islam. The goal of the present chapter is not to present a straight-forward biography of Ibn Salām based on an uncritical reading of the primary sources on his life. Rather, I have attempted to inventory and provide an overview of the moments in Ibn Salām's life and career that drew the attention of the biographical tradition. Providing an inventory of the material on Ibn Salām in the biographical literature is necessary in order to assess the tropes in Ibn Salām's biography, as well as the emergence and embellishment of his legendary image in Islamic tradition. Specifically, a survey of the details provided on the life and career of Ibn Salām tells us what the biographical tradition deemed necessary and important to include in their notices on the famous Jewish convert.

2.2. Ibn Salām's Origin and Pedigree

According to the classical Arabic biographical sources, Abū Yūsuf ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām ibn al-Ḥārith al-Isrāʾīlī (d. 43/663)[70] was a highly regarded rabbi in Yathrib (later

[70] For the biographical notices on Ibn Salām in the standard works of classical literary biography and historiography see Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, ed. M. al-Saqqā, I. al-Abyārī, and ʿA.H. Shabbī

Medina) at the time of Muḥammad's emigration (*hijra*) to the oasis from Mecca in 1/622. By most accounts, Ibn Salām was known as al-Ḥuṣayn prior to his conversion to Islam, at which point it is reported that Muḥammad gave him the personal name (*ism*) ʿAbdallāh.[71]

(Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1425/2004), 362-364; Ibn Saʿd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, 2:304-305; 5:377-386; Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, ed. S. Zakkār (Damascus: Maṭābiʿ Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-s-Siyāḥa wa-l-Irshād al-Qawmī, 1966) 18; id., *Tārīkh Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ*, ed. S. Zakkār (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1414/1993), 29, 155; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 11:675; Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Jarh wa-t-Taʿdīl* (Hyderabad: Matbaʿt Majlis Dāʾirat al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1372/1953), 2:62-63, no. 288; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Mashāhīr ʿulamāʾ al-amṣār wa- aʿlām fuqahāʾ al-aqṭār*, ed. M. Ibrāhīm (Al-Manṣūra: Dār al-Wafāʾ, 1411/1991), 36, no. 52; id., *Taʾrīkh al-ṣaḥāba alladhīna ruwiya ʿanhum al-akhbār*, ed. B. al-Ḍannāwī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1408/1988), 156-157; Ibn Munjawayh, *Rijāl Saḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. ʿA.A. al-Laythī (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1407/1987), 1:344-345; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb*, ed. ʿA. Muʿawwad and ʿĀ. ʿAbd al-Mawjūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1422/2002) 3:53-54, no. 1579; Ibn Mākūlā, *al-Ikmāl fi raf*ʿ *al-irtiyāb ʿan al-muʿtalif wa-l-mukhtalif min al-asmāʾ wa-l-kunā wa-l-ansāb* (Hyderabad: Maṭbaʿ Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-ʿUthmānīya, 1384/1965), 4:403-405; Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. M. Ismāʿīl and M. al-Saʿudanī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1422/2002), 3:156-157; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:97-136, no. 3334; id., *Tahdhīb Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1407/1987), 7:446-451; al-Suhaylī, *Al-Rawḍ al-unuf fī sharḥ as-sīra l-nabawiyya li-Ibn Hishām*, ed. ʿA.R. Wakīl (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1387/1967-1390/1970), 4:307-309; Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-Muntaẓam fī tārīkh al-mulūk wa-l-umam* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1992), 5:206-208; id., *Ṣifat al-safwa*, 1:308-310, no. 107; id., *Talqīḥ fuhūm ahl al-athar fī ʿuyūn al-tārīkh wa-s-siyar*, ed. ʿA. Ḥasan (Cairo: Maktabat al-Ādāb, 1975), 219, 440-441, 460; Ibn Qudāma al-Makdisī, *al-Istibsār fī nasab al-ṣaḥāba min al-anṣār,* ed. ʿA. Nuwayhiḍ (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1972), 193-194; Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī t-tārīkh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣāder, 1385/1965), 3:439; id., *al-Lubāb fī tahdhīb al-ansāb* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1400/1980), 1:54; id., *Usd al-ghāba fī maʿārifat al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. ʿA. al-Muʿawwad and A. ʿAbd al-Mawjūd (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1415/1994), 265-266; al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmāʾ wa-l-lughāt,* ed. ʿA. Muʿawwad and ʿĀ.ʿAbd al-Mawjūd (Beirut: Dār al-Nafāʾis, 1426/2005), 366, no. 304; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl,* 15:74-75; al-Ṣāliḥī, *Ṭabaqāt ʿulamāʾ al-ḥadīth*, 1:86-87; al-Dhahabī, *Al-ʿIbar fī khabar man ghabar*, ed. Ṣ.D. al-Munjad (Kuwait: Dāʾirat al-Maṭbūʿāt wa-l-Nashr, 1960), 1:51-52; id., *Tahdhīb Siyar aʿlām*, 1:71-72; id., *Siyar aʿlām al-nubalāʾ*, 1:288-289, 432-438, no. 316; id., *Tadhhīb tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl*, ed. A. Salāma (Cairo: al-Fārūq al-Ḥadītha li-l-Ṭibāʿ wa-l-Nashr, 1425/2003), 5:172; id., *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 1:26-27; id., *Tārīkh al-Islām wa- wafayāt al-mashāhīr wa-l-aʿlām*, ed. ʿU. Tadmurī (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1410/1990), 3:32-35; id. *Tajrīd asmāʾ al-ṣaḥāba*, 1:315; al-Ṣafadī, *Al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, ed. D. Krawulsky (Weisbaden: Verlag, 1401/1981), 17:198-199, no. 184; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-n-nihāya fī t-taʾrīkh* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1424/2003), 3:220-223; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 6:108-110, no. 4716; id., *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* (Hyderabad: Maṭbaʿat Majlis Dāʾirat al-Maʿārif al-Niẓāmīya, 1325H-1327H; repr., Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1968), 5:249; al-Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ḥuffāẓ*, ed. ʿA. ʿUmar (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīnīya, 1996), 18; Ibn al-ʿImād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab fī akhbār man dhahab*, ed. ʿA.Q. al-Arnāʾūṭ and M. al-Arnaʾūṭ (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr), 1:233-234; al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām: qāmūs tarājim li-ashhar al-rijāl wa-n-nisāʾ min al-ʿarab wa-l-mustaʿribīn wa-l-mustashriqīn* (Beirut: Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Malāyīn, 2002), 4:90.

[71] J. Horovitz, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām," *EI*^{2}; M. Lecker, "ʿAbdallāh b. Salām," *EI*^{3}; F.H. Manoucheri, "ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām," *EIs*; M.J. Kister, "'Call Yourselves by Graceful Names…,'" in *Lectures in Memory of Professor Martin M. Plessner* (Jerusalem: Institute of Asian and African Studies, The Hebrew University, 1975), 18; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 363; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:377; al-Fasawī, *Kitab al-Maʿrifa wa-t-tārīkh*, ed. A. al-ʿUmarī (Baghdād: Riʾāsat Diwān al-Awqāf, 1394/1974), 1:170; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 11:675; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Mashāhir*, 36; id., *Taʾrīkh al-ṣaḥāba*, 156; Ibn Munjawayh, *Rijāl Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:345; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 3:54; Ibn Mākūlā, *al-Ikmāl*, 4:403-404; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*, 3:156; al-Baghawī, *Muʿjam al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. M. al-Jaknī (Kuweit: Maktabat Dār al-Bayān, n.d.), 4:102; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:98, 100-104; id., *Tahdhīb*, 7:446; al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-unuf*, 4:307; Ibn al-

Alternative accounts of the conversion, however, state that his name before he converted to Islam was Samuel (Asmāwīl/Ashmāwīl/Samāwīl).[72] The Islamic sources distinguish Ibn Salām and highlight his Jewish ancestry by applying to his name the *nisba* (noun of relation) "al-Isrāʾīlī,"[73] which was often given to Jewish converts to Islam and rhetorically identifies Ibn Salām as a descendant of the biblical Children of Israel (*Banū Isrāʾīl*). According to the historian ʿIzz al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī Ibn al-Athīr (d. 630/1233), Ibn Salām and other Jewish rabbis who converted to Islam in Medina were known by the nisba "al-Isrāʾīlī" (*yunsab ilayhi mi-m-man aslama min aḥbār al-yahūd minhum ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām wa-ghayrihi*).[74] The historian Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn

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Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 1:308; id., *Talqīḥ*, 219; Ibn Qudāma, *al-Istibṣār,* 193; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, 3:265; al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmāʾ*, 366; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 15:74; al-Ṣāliḥī, *Ṭabaqāt ʿulamāʾ al-ḥadīth*, 1:87; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 433; id, *Tadhhīb tahdhīb,* 5:172; *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 1:26; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 17:199; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 6:108; id., *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 5:249; al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām*, 4:90.

[72] Ibn al-Wardī, *Kharīdat al-ʿajāʾib wa-farīdat al-gharāʾib*, 392; Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār*, 23:166. The conversion accounts preserved in both of these works are variants of the "Questions of Ibn Salām (*Masāʾil Ibn Salām*)" mentioned above. Ibn Salam's Jewish name prior to the conversion is also given as Samuel in several manuscripts of the *Masāʾil*. For example, "*wa-kāna isma-hu qabl al-Islām Asmāwīl*." *Masāʾil ʿAbdallāh ibn Salam*, Bibliothèque Nacionale de France MS Árabe 131 f. 32r. Other manuscripts read Ashmāwīl: "*wa-kāna ismahu qabl islāmihi Ashmāwīl*." *Masāʾil ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām li-nabīyinā Muḥammad,* Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, MS Petermann 331 f. 74r; *Durar al-kalām fī masāʾil ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām*, Leipzig University, MS Vollers 0739 f. 59.

[73] As scholars have noted, the *nisba* functions in the Arabic biographical tradition to testify to an individual's inherited or acquired characteristics, such as their geographical, intellectual, or religious background. The *nisba* may also relate an individual to a group, such as a tribe, dynasty, family, or ancestor; or to a place, such as a country, region, city, or village. See J. Sublet, "Nisba," *EI*^{2}*,* and A. Schimmel, *Islamic Names* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1989), 10-12. The *nisba* "al-Isrāʾīlī" is given in the following biographical notices on Ibn Salām: Ibn Ḥibbān, *Taʾrīkh al-ṣaḥāba*, 156; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istiʿāb*, 3:53; Ibn Mākūlā, *al-Ikmāl*, 4:403; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tahdhīb*, 7:446; id., *Tārīkh*, 29:97; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talqīh*, 219; Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *al-Istibṣār*, 193; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Lubāb*, 1:54; id., *Usd al-Ghāba*, 3:265; al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmāʾ*, 366; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 15:74; id., *Tuḥfat*, 4:352; al-Ṣāliḥī, *Ṭabaqāt ʿulamāʾ al-ḥadīth*, 1:86; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 1:432; id., *Tahdhīb Siyar aʿlām*, 1:71; id., *Tadhhīb tahdhīb*, 5:172; id., *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 1:26; id., *Tajrīd asmāʾ al-ṣaḥāba*, 1:315; id., *Tārīkh al-Islām*, 4:4:74; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafayāt*, 17:198; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 6:108; id., *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 5:249; al-Khazrajī, *Khulāṣat tadhhīb*, 2:77; al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā wa-r-rishād fī sīra khayr al-ʿibād*, ed. ʿA.ʿA. Ḥilmī (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aʿlā li-l-Shuʾūn al-Islāmīya, 1418/1997), 3:552; Ibn al-ʿImād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, 1: 233; al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām*, 4:90.

[74] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Lubāb*, 1:54.

Aḥmad al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348)[75] refers to Ibn Salām as "al-Ibrāhīmī al-Isrāʾīlī," thereby associating the convert with the forefather Abraham (Ibrāhīm) in addition to the Israelites.[76] Multiple sources further embellish Ibn Salām's ancestry and pedigree by describing him as a descendant of Joseph (*min wuld/dhurīyat/sibṭ Yūsuf*) and the biblical patriarchs Abraham, Isaac (Isḥāq), and Jacob (Yaʿqūb).[77] It is unclear exactly what the sources are trying to convey when they identify Ibn Salām as "al-Ibrāhīmī," or describe him as a descendant of the patriarchs from the Bible. One possible interpretation of this piece of Ibn Salām's biography is that by identifying the convert with these illustrious and well-known figures the sources are trying to connect Ibn Salām with biblical history, scripture, and lore. Alternatively, describing Ibn Salām as "al-Ibrāhīmī" could also be an assessment of Ibn Salām's piety and religious practice before the converted to Islam. According to the traditional narrative of Islamic origins, a pristine form of monotheism associated with Abraham existed in Arabia prior to Muḥammad's advent, and was observed by a select group of individuals – known as *ḥanīfs* (*ḥanīf*, pl. *ḥunafāʾ*) – who were uncorrupted by the paganism and idolotry that reportedly dominated pre-Islamic

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[75] On al-Dhahabī's life and works see C. Bori, "al-Dhahabī," *EI*[3], which includes substantial references to earlier scholarship.

[76] Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 3:509. Al-Dhahabī also refers to Ibn Salām's son Yūsuf as "*al-Ibrāhīmī al-Isrāʾīlī*." See *Tahdhīb Siyar aʿlām*, 1:120.

[77] H. Hirschfeld, "Historical and Legendary Controversies," 110; M. Lecker, "ʿAbdallāh b. Salām," *EI*[3]; Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:377; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Taʾrīkh al-ṣaḥāba*, 156-157; id., *al-Thiqāt*, 1:365; Ibn Manjuwayh, *Rijāl Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:344; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istiʿāb*, 3:53-54 (*min wuld Yūsuf ibn Yaʿqūb*); Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh*, 29:98, 100, 102; id., *Tahdhīb*, 7:446; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 1:308; Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *al-Istibṣār*, 193; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, 3:265; al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmāʾ*, 366; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 433; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 198; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 6:108 (*min dhurīyat Yūsuf*); al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafā bi-akhbār dār al-muṣṭafā*, ed. Q. al-Sāmarrāʾī (Mecca: Muʾassasat al-Furqān li-l-Turāth al-Islām, 1422/2001), 1:305; al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-hudā*, 3:552; al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām*, 4:90. Al-Khazrajī conveys Ibn Salām's reputed descent from Joseph by adding to Ibn Salām's name the *nisba* "al-Yūsufī." *Khulāsat tadhhīb tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmāʾ al-rijāl*, ed. M. al-Shūrā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1422/2001), 2:77.

Arabian society.[78] As the Qurʾān insists (Qurʾān 3:67),[79] this pristine monotheism exemplified by Abraham's worship of God is distinct from Judaism and Christianity; and the pre-Islamic *ḥanīfs* are regarded in Islamic tradition as being a monotheistic group distinct from the established Jewish and Christian communities in and around Arabia. In this context, designating Ibn Salām as "al-Ibrāhīmī" could be a way of distancing the convert from his background in the Jewish religion, and asserting that he, instead, was originally a follower of the pure Arabian monotheism of Abraham during the pre-Islamic period.[80]

Ibn Salām's distinguished status among the Medinan Jews prior to his conversion is also noted in many of the biographical sources, which attribute to him the honorific titles of rabbi and scholar. Already in ʿAbd al-Mālik Ibn Hishām's (d. 213/828 or 218/833) recension of Muḥammad Ibn Isḥāq's (d. 150/767) biography of Muḥammad (*al-Sīra al-nabawīya*), Ibn Salām is described as the rabbi (*ḥabr*)[81] and most learned (*aʿlam*)

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[78] The term used in Islamic tradition to identify the pure monotheism of Abraham is *ḥanīfīya.* The individuals in pre-Islamic Arabia who observed the religion of Abraham are referred to as *ḥanīf* (pl. *ḥunafāʾ*). See W.M. Watt, "ḥanīf," *EI*^{2}, id., *Muhammad at Mecca* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), 162-164; U. Rubin, "Ḥanīfiyya and Kaʿba: An inquiry into the Arabian pre-Islamic background of *dīn Ibrāhīm*," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990), 85-112.

[79] "Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was a man of pure faith, one who surrendered. He was not one of those who associate others with God" (*mā kāna Ibrāhīm yahūdīyan wa-lā naṣrānīyan wa-lākin kāna ḥanīfan musliman wa-mā kāna min al-mushrikīn*). A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 71.

[80] U. Rubin, "Ḥanīfiyya and Kaʿba," 109.

[81] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 363. Ibn Salām is also explicitly identified as a rabbi in Ibn Ḥibbān, *Mashāhir*, 36; id., *Taʾrīkh al-ṣaḥāba*, 156; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istiʿāb*, 3:54; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, ed. by ʿA.M. Qalʿajī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1405H), 1:530, 6:260; Ibn Mākūlā, *al-Ikmāl*, 4:403; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh*, 29:100-101; id., *Tahdhīb*, 7:446; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī*, 17:198. Ibn al-Athīr describes Ibn Salām as a "scholar of the People of the Book" (*min ʿulamāʾ ahl al-kitāb*). *Al-Kāmil fī-t-tārīkh*, 3:439. Al-Kalāʿī states that Ibn Salām was a "learned rabbi" (*kāna ḥabr ʿālim*). *Al-Iktifāʾ fi maghāzī rasūl Allāh wa-th-thalāthat l-khulafāʾ*, ed. M. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1387/1967) 1:471; al-Ṣāliḥī, *Ṭabaqāt ʿulamāʾ al-ḥadīth*, 1:86; al-Dhahabī, *al-Kāshif*, 2:94; "*al-imām al-ḥabr.*" id., *Tahdhīb Siyar aʿlām,* 1:71; "*kāna ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām min kibār al-aḥbār.*" Ibn Ḥabīb, *al-Muqtafā min sīra al-muṣṭafā*, ed. M. al-Dhahabī (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1416/1996), 82. For a historical analysis of the meaning and use of the term *ḥabr* (pl. *aḥbār*) see G.D. Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia*, 57-58.

figure among the Jews in Medina.[82] Al-Dhahabī identifies Ibn Salām as both a religious leader and rabbi (*al-imām al-ḥabr*).[83] More explicit descriptions of Ibn Salām's scholarly pedigree and status in Medina are found in Muḥammad Ibn Saʿd's (d. 230/845) *Ṭabaqāt* and several biographical compendia written by al-Dhahabī. Ibn Saʿd transmits a brief report summarizing the circumstances of Ibn Salām's conversion wherein the latter is described as "the most learned of the Children of Israel in the Torah and the most sincere among them" (*wa kāna aʿlam banī Isrāʾīl bi-t-Tawrāt wa-sdaqa ʿindahim*).[84] Al-Dhahabī characterizes the famous convert in similar terms: "ʿAbdallāh [ibn Salām] was the most learned of the People of the Book and the most favored of his generation in Medina" (*wa kāna ʿālim ahl al-kitāb wa-fāḍilihim fī zamānihi bi-l-madīna*).[85] Ibn Salām's widely-recognized reputation in early Islam as a learned scholar is highlighted by a tradition attributed to the renowned traditionist and expert in biblical lore Wahb ibn Munabbih, who reportedly boasted about his own scholarly achievements as follows:

> They say ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām was the most learned of his generation (*aʿlam ahl zamānihi*), and that Kaʿb [al-Aḥbār] was the most learned of his generation. But have you considered he who combines both of their knowledge (*aʾ-fa-raʾayta man jamaʿ ʿilmahimā*)? Is he more learned or they?[86]

The statement attributed to Wahb implies that Ibn Salām had a widespread reputation in early Islam as the most learned religious authority of his time, specifically, during the life

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[82] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 362; al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-unuf*, 4:307; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 2:297; A.J. Wensink, "Ḳaynuḳāʿ," *EI*[2].

[83] Al-Dhahabī, *Tahdhīb Siyar aʿlām*, 1:71.

[84] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:382; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:114-115.

[85] Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 1:26.

[86] Ibid. 1:101. A variant of this tradition is reported in al-Sakhāwī, *al-Iʿlān bi-t-tawbīkh li-man dhamma al-tārīkh*, ed. F. Rosenthal (Baghdad: Maṭbaʿa al-ʿĀnī, 1382/1963), 88-89.

and career of the prophet. The traditions cited above are intended to show that Ibn Salām was not merely one among many rabbis in Yathrib on the eve of Islam, but rather, the most learned and illustrious religious scholar among the Jews during Muḥammad's lifetime.

In addition to his scholarly standing and elevated status among the Jews of Yathrib on the eve of Islam, the biographical tradition attempts to supply the basic details pertaining to Ibn Salām's affiliation with the settlement's main Jewish tribes, as well as his purported status as a confederate (*ḥalīf*) of one of the Arab tribes.[87] Upon closer examination, however, it is apparent that the Islamic literary sources offer contradictory explanations of Ibn Salām's affiliation with both the Jewish and non-Jewish Arab tribes in Yathrib. By most accounts,[88] he was regarded as a member of the Banū Qaynuqāʿ who, along with the Banū al-Naḍīr and Banū Qurayẓa, comprised the most prominent Jewish tribes that Muḥammad encountered in Medina during his career.[89] Similarly, the majority of the scholarly assessments in the Western academy of the Jews of Medina and Ibn Salām regard him as a member of the Banū Qaynuqāʿ. Islamic sources, however, preserve traditions suggesting otherwise. For example, a tradition reported in the qurʾānic

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[87] For an introduction to the social norms and institutions that governed inter-tribal relations in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times see E. Tyan, "Ḥilf," *EI*^{2}; P. Crone, "Mawlā," *EI*^{2}.

[88] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 361; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Mashāhir*, 36; id., *Taʾrīkh al-ṣaḥāba*, 156; Ibn Ḥazm, *Jawāmiʿ al-Sīra al-nabawīya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1424/2003), 92; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Durar fī ikhtiṣār al-maghāzi wa-s-siyar*, ed. S. Ḍayf (Cairo: Dār al-Taḥrīr li-l-Ṭibaʿ wa-l-Nushr, 1386/1966), 149; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, 3:183; al-Iṣfahānī, *Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba,* 3:156; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, 3:265; al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmāʾ*, 366; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 6:108; al-Samhūdī, *Wafāʾ al-wafā,* 1:305. Al-Dhahabī identifies Ibn Salām as a member of the Banū Qaynuqāʿ and also states that the tribe descended from Joseph, the son of Jacob. *Tajrīd asmāʾ al-ṣaḥāba*, 1:315.

[89] For a concise introduction to the three Jewish tribes that figure prominently in the *Sīra* see M. Lecker, "Qaynuqāʿ, Banū," *EJ*^{2}, 16:760; id., "Naḍīr, Banū," *EJ*^{2}, 14:725; id., "Qurayẓa, Banū," *EJ*^{2}, 16:776. For a critical evaluation of Ibn Salām's affiliation with the Jewish tribes see M. Lecker, *The "Constitution of Medina": Muḥammad's First Legal Document*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam; XXIII (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2004), 63-66.

commentaries of Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 425/1037)[90] and al-Ḥusayn ibn Masʿūd al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122),[91] specifies that Ibn Salām was a member of the Banū al-Naḍīr ("al-Naḍarī");[92] while the early history of Medina by Ibn Zabāla al-Makhzūmī (completed in 199/814-815) states that Ibn Salām belonged to the relatively marginal Jewish tribe of Zaydallāt.[93] Alternatively, several biographical sources avoid the question of Ibn Salām's affiliation with the Jewish tribes altogether and instead identify him only as a confederate of the Medinese Arab supporters of Muḥammad (*ḥalīf al-anṣār*), specifically, as a client of the Qawāqil(a), a subdivision of the Khazraj branch known as the ʿAwf ibn al-Khazraj.[94] Indeed, the earliest biographical sources are ambiguous concerning Ibn Salām's affiliation with the Jewish tribes. While Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* counts him among the Banū Qaynuqāʿ who opposed Muḥammad (lit. "the opponents

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[90] On al-Thaʿlabī's life and works see C. Brockelmann, "al-Thaʿlabī," *EI*; A. Rippin, "al-Thaʿlabī," *EI²*; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 50-51; W. Saleh, *Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 25-52.

[91] On al-Baghawī's life and works see J. Robson, "al-Baghawī," *EI²*; E. Dickinson, "al-Baghawī," *EI³*; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 113-114.

[92] Al-Thaʿlabī, al-*Kashf wa-l-bayān*, ed. A.M. Ibn ʿĀshūr (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1422/2002), 2:126; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1423/2002), 116.

[93] The tradition is cited in the history of Medina written by the fifteenth century Egyptian scholar Nūr al-Dīn ʿAlī ibn ʿAfīf al-Dīn al-Samhūdī (d. 891/1506), *Wafāʾ al-wafā*, 1:305, who cites the earlier now lost work of Ibn Zabāla. On Ibn Zabāla's history of Medina see H. Munt, "The Prophet's City before the Prophet: Ibn Zabāla (d. after 199/814) on Pre-Islamic Medina," in *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East*, Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity, ed. Ph. Wood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 103-121; id., "Writing the History of an Arabian Holy City: Ibn Zabala and the First Local History of Medina," *Arabica* 59 (2012), 1-34. Following the earlier observation of Joseph Horovitz, Michael Lecker considers Ibn Zabāla's report to be more historically reliable as it portrays Ibn Salām in a less favourable light. See Lecker's discussion of Ibn Salām's tribal affiliation in *The Constitution of Medina*, 63-66; id., "The Jewish Response to the Islamic Conquests," in *Dynamics in the History of Religions between Asia and Europe*, eds. V. Krech and M. Steinicke, Dynamics in the History of Religions; I (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 177-178, n. 3; id., "ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām," *EI³*; J. Horovitz, "Abdallah ibn Salām," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Second Edition, 1:241.

[94] M. Lecker, "ʿAbdallāh b. Salām," *EI³*; Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:377; Ibn Manjuwayh, *Rijāl Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1:344-345; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 3:54; Ibn ʿAsakir, *Tahdhīb Tārīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 7:446; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 15:74; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 1:433; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 5:249; Ibn al-ʿImād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, 1:233. The designation *anṣār* ("helpers") identifies the followers of Muḥammad from the Aws and Khazraj tribes in Medina, as distinguished from the *muhājirūn* ("emigrants"), who were Muslims from Muḥammad's hometown of Mecca. For an introduction to the *anṣār* and *muhājirūn* see W.M. Watt, "al-Anṣār," *EI²*.

among the Jews," *al-aʿadāʾ min al-yahūd*),[95] the early *Ṭabaqāt* works of Ibn Saʿd and Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ al-ʿUṣfurī (d. 240/854) are ambiguous regarding Ibn Salām's affiliation with the Jewish tribes. Whereas Ibn Saʿd identifies him as a confederate of the Qawāqila (*ḥalīf al-Qawāqila*), Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ lists him as a client (*mawlā*) of the Banū Hāshim ibn ʿAbd al-Manāf, the clan of the Quraysh to which the prophet Muḥammad belonged.[96] This latter tradition suggests that Ibn Salām was attached to Muḥammad's clan, the Banū Hāshim of the Quraysh tribe in Mecca, as a client. According to Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ, Ibn Salām had no tribal affiliation with the *anṣār* in Medina, but rather, was directly related to the prophet and his closest kin through the institution of clientage. It is also notable that Ibn Salām is not included in the historiographer and genealogist Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Baladhurī's (fl. 3rd/9th c.)[97] list of prominent Medinan Jews (*asmāʾ ʿuẓamāʾ yahūd*) in the section of his *Ansāb al-ashrāf* ("The Genealogies of the Notables") devoted to Muḥammad's biography.[98] Thus, our earliest extant biographical works outside of Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* are silent regarding Ibn Salām's affiliation with the major Jewish tribes and offer contradictory accounts of his tribal affiliation with the Arab tribes in the Ḥijāz. While the sources agree that Ibn Salām was a Jewish scholar, in fact, the most learned and renowned Jewish scholar in Yathrib, they display a certain ambivalence and confusion regarding his place among the major Jewish tribes of the oasis.

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[95] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 361.

[96] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:377; Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt*, 1:14, 18.

[97] On al-Balādhurī and the significance of his *Ansāb al-ashraf* see A. Bahramian (tr. J. Esots), "al-Balādhurī," *EIs*; F. Rosenthal, "al-Balādhurī," *EI*^{2}.

[98] See the section titled "Names of Prominent Jews" (*asmāʾ ʿuẓamāʾ yahūd*) in al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 1:283-286.

2.3. The Date and Circumstances of Ibn Salām's Conversion

The decisive moment in Ibn Salām's career, and the most significant in determining his reception in classical Arabo-Islamic literature, is his conversion to Islam. Muslims throughout the medieval period understood the event as a critical moment in Muḥammad's career in Medina, as evidenced by the broad transmission of narratives of Ibn Salām's conversion across the major genres of classical Arabo-Islamic literature, including, historiography,[99] literary biography,[100] prophetic biography, proofs of prophecy, *ḥadīth*, and qurʾānic commentary.[101] The narratives describing the conversion are largely shaped by apologetic and polemical concerns. On the one hand, the conversion accounts are intended to provide decisive proof of the Qurʾān's claim that Muḥammad is foretold in the "previous scriptures," namely, the Torah and the Gospels.[102] In this sense, Muslims saw in Ibn Salām's conversion the fulfillment of the Qurʾān's numerous appeals to the People of the Book for confirmation of its revelatory status. On

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[99] Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*, 3:220-222.

[100] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:377-382; al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashraf*, 1:266; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh*, 29:106-114.

[101] The classical qurʾānic commentators employ narratives of Ibn Salām's conversion in their commentaries on several verses of the Qurʾān. However, the verse most closely associated with the conversion is Qurʾān 46:10: "Say, 'Have you considered? If it is from God, and you disbelieve in it, and witness from the Children of Israel testifies to its like, and believes, and you way proud, God guides not the people of the evildoers." A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 463. For the narratives of Ibn Salām's conversion in the qurʾānic commentaries see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2009), 11:277-281; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, ed. H. al-Badrānī (Irbid: Dār al-Kitāb al-Thaqāfī, 2008), 6:7-8; al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, ed. ʿA. Muʿawwaḍ, ʿĀ.ʿAbd al-Mawjūd, Z. ʿAbd al-Majīd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1413/1993), 3:231; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān,* 9:9-10; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr (Maʿālim al-tanzīl)*, 1185; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 4:302-304; Ibn ʿAṭiyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajīz*, 5:94-95; al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 2005), 10:9-11; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, ed. S. al-Badrī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2010), 16:125-126; al-Nasafī, *Madārik al-tanzīl wa-ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl*, 4:209; al-Nīsābūrī, *Gharāʾib al-Qurʾān wa-raghāʾib al-furqān*, 6:118-119; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *Tafsīr al-baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, ed. ʿA.R. al-Mahdī (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 2002), 8:81-82; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr fī tafsīr bi-l-maʾthūr* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1421/2001), 7:379-381; id., *Lubab al-nuqūl fī asbāb al-nuzūl* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1432/2011), 210-211; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1423/2002), 4:2622.

[102] Qurʾān 7:157: "Those who follow the messenger, the prophet of his community, whom they will find mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel that is in their possession." A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 163.

the other hand, the narratives also serve as a testament to the insincerity of Ibn Salām's (Jewish) co-religionists who – in stark contrast to the actions of their eminent rabbi and leader – refused to acknowledge their scriptures' confirmation of Muḥammad's claims to prophecy. In this respect, the conversion narratives implicitly criticize Muḥammad's Jewish opponents by highlighting the sincerity and learnedness in the Jewish traditions that compelled Ibn Salām to convert to Islam.

As with all of Muḥammad's Companions, the date and circumstances of Ibn Salām's conversion were crucial issues taken up in the biographical literature. By establishing the exact date and circumstances in Muḥammad's career that prompted an individual's conversion to Islam, *ḥadīth* scholars who engaged in criticism of the biographies and trustworthiness of those who transmitted prophetic *ḥadīth* (*ʿilm al-rijāl*)[103] were able to assess a given Companion's sincerity and commitment to Islam, and assign him a relative status and rank among the prophet's followers. The sources provide conflicting dates for Ibn Salām's conversion. The most common date given is the first year of the *hijra* (1/622) immediately following Muḥammad's emigration from his hometown of Mecca to Medina.[104] Alternative traditions transmitted in biographical

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[103] *ʿIlm al-rijāl* (lit. "The Study of the Men") is used in classical Arabo-Islamic literature to refer to the scholarly criticism of the ancestry, biographies, and trustworthiness of the *ḥadīth* transmitters. Until recently, modern scholarship has assumed that the classical genre of Arabic literary biography arose in conjunction with the study of *ḥadīth*, and more specifically, the study of *ḥadīth* transmitters who appear in the chains of transmission (*isnād*, pl. *asānīd*) preceding *ḥadīth* reports. For an alternative reconstruction of the relationship between *ḥadīth* criticism and the rise of Arabic literary biography see M. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography: The Heirs of the Prophets in the Age of al-Maʾmūn*, Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-8. On the classical genre of ḥadīth criticism and the *rijāl* works see G.H.A. Juynboll, "Ridjāl," *EI*^{2}.

[104] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 363; Khalīfa ibn Khayyāṭ, *Tārīkh*, 29; al-Fasawī, *al-Maʿrifa wa-t-tārīkh,* 1:264; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 3:54; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:100, Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *al-Istibṣār*, 193; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talqīḥ*, 155; al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmāʾ*, 366; Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 1:249; al-Ṣāliḥī, *Ṭabaqāt ʿulamāʾ al-ḥadīth*, 1:87; al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 1:26; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 17:199; Ibn Kathīr, *Shamāʾil al-rasūl wa-dalāʾil nubuwwatihi*

sources and qurʾānic commentaries ascribe an even earlier date to Ibn Salām's conversion while Muḥammad was still in Mecca (610–622).[105] Far less favorable for Ibn Salam's reputation in early Islam, however, are reports that the conversion did not occur until 8/630, in other words, until two years before Muḥammad's death in 10/632.[106] The conflicting dates for Ibn Salām's conversion are impossible to reconcile historically and should be viewed as traditions that were circulated among the early Muslim community and later to either embellish or diminish the reputation of Ibn Salām and his standing among Muḥammad's Companions.

For the classical biographical tradition, each of the dates given for the conversion held major implications for how Ibn Salām was evaluated and ranked among Muḥammad's earliest followers. As a general rule, an early date of conversion was favorable to a Companion's status and reputation, and was viewed as a measure of their sincerity, devotion, and religious conviction. This ideal is enshrined in the notion of "precedence" (*sābiqa*), initially a qurʾānic concept that in the biographical literature refers specifically to precedence in converting to Islam.[107] Thus, the accounts that the conversion occurred in Mecca or during the first year of the *hijra*, praise Ibn Salām and imply that a sincere conviction led him to recognize the authenticity of Muḥammad's

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wa-faḍāʾilihi wa-khaṣāʾṣihi, ed. M. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid (Cairo: Maṭbaʿ ʿĪsā Albānī al-Ḥalabī, 1386/1967), 329; id., *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 2:294, 296; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 5:249.

[105] F. Haj Manouchehri, "ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām," *EIs*; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tahdhīb*, 7:447; Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1418/1997), 10:387; al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ al-zawāʾid wa manbaʿ al-fawāʾid* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1402/1982), 9:326; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, 1423/2002), 2:1566; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 8:611.

[106] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tahdhīb*, 7:446; id., *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:99; Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 433; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 6:108.

[107] Asma Asfaruddin states: "The term *sābiqa*, meaning 'precedence' in general and, more specifically, 'precedence in submission and service to Islam,' was a key concept in the early socio-political history of Islam, invoked to 'rank' the faithful according to their excellences." For a discussion of precedence and the virtues (*faḍāʾil*/*manāqib*) of the Companions see Asfarrudin's *Excellence and Precedence: Medieval Islamic Discourse on Legitimate Leadership*, Islamic History and Civilization; XXXVI (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 36-79.

claims to prophecy. In Ibn Salām's case, an early conversion suggests that Muḥammad corresponded so clearly to the Jewish scriptures' description of a coming prophet that the leading Torah scholar of Medina immediately recognized him as a prophet. Conversely, reports that the conversion took place two years before Muḥammad's death diminish Ibn Salām's standing among Companions and call into question his religious conviction and the purity of his motives. The latter date proposed for the conversion implies that it took eight years of Muḥammad's political maneuvering – in particular, the Muslims' military subjugation, exile, and extermination of the Jewish tribes, the Banū Qaynuqāʿ (2/624), the Banū al-Naḍīr (7/627), and the Banū Qurayẓa (7/627) – and public preaching in Medina to finally convince Ibn Salām to convert.

While the biographical tradition was scrutinizing the various dates supplied for Ibn Salām's conversion, the qurʾānic commentators were forced to try to reconcile the prevailing view that the conversion occurred shortly after the *hijra* in Medina with the widely held exegetical opinion that a Meccan chapter of the Qurʾān (46:10) identified Ibn Salām and his conversion to Islam.[108] For the exegetes, then, the various dates proposed for Ibn Salām's conversion had ramifications for their project of distinguishing between Meccan and Medinan revelations in the Qurʾān, and provoked competing interpretations of Qurʾān 46:10. The verse in question states:

> Say, 'Have you considered? If it is from God and you do not believe in it, and a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to its like and has believed (*wa-*

[108] Islamic scholarship has traditionally categorized the Qurʾān's chapters and verses as having been revealed either during the Meccan or Medinan period of Muḥammad's career. Similarly,Western scholarship on the Qurʾān has also attempted to establish a chronology of the qurʾānic revelations based on a range of stylistic, rhetorical, and thematic criteria. For an overview of the chronology of the Qurʾān and the attempts to date the chapters of the Qurʾān see G. Bowering, "Chronology and the Qurʾān, *EQ*, 1:316-335; W. Montgomery Watt, "The Dating of the Qurʾān: A Review of Richard Bell's Theories," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1-2 (1957), 46-56; N. Robinson, *Discovering the Qurʾān: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*, Second Edition (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003), 60-96.

> *shahida shāhidun min banī Isrāʾil ʿalā mithlihi fa-amana*), and you are haughty – God does not guide the people who do wrong.'[109]

As the qurʾānic commentators readily admit, the prevailing exegetical opinion throughout the classical period and beyond was that the verse's mention of "a witness from the Children of Israel" refered to Ibn Salām and his conversion to Islam. The qurʾānic commentators Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Rāzī (d. 609/1209) and Abū Ḥayyān Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344),[110] for example, explicitly acknowledge that the prevailing exegetical opinion on the verse during their era was that Ibn Salām is the witness referred to in the verse, and the qurʾānic commentaries cite several early exegetical authorities who were of the same opinion.[111] This interpretation of the verse is regularly established in the commentaries by a *ḥadīth* attributed to the famous Companion Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ (d. ca. 50/670-671 – 58/677-678)[112] who reports that Muḥammad declared Ibn Salām to be among the denizens of paradise, and that the verse was revealed to praise Ibn Salām.[113] The commentaries, however, also contain traditions that reject the association of Ibn Salām with the verse on the grounds that this specific chapter of the Qurʾān was revealed in Mecca, while Ibn Salām was widely held to have

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[109] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 463.

[110] S. Glazer and Th. Emil Homerin, "Abū Ḥayyān al Gharnāṭī," *EI*^{3}; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 492.

[111] Al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 10:9. Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *Tafsīr al-baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 8:81. The early exegetical authorities cited in the commentaries to support the identification of Ibn Salām as the "witness from the Children of Israel "(*shāhid min banī Isrāʾīl*) include Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid, Qatāda, ʿIkrima, and al-Daḥḥāk. See al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 1185; al-Qurṭubī, *Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 16:125; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *Tafsīr al-baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 8:81.

[112] Like Ibn Salām, Saʿd is often regarded as one of the Companions who Muḥammad promised would enter paradise (*ahad al-ʿashara al-mashhūd la-hum bi-l-janna*). Al-Ṣaliḥī, *Ṭabaqāt ʿulamāʾ al-ḥadīth*, 1:84. On the life and career of Saʿd see G.R. Hawting, "Saʿd b. Abī Waḳḳāṣ," *EI*^{2}.

[113] al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 3:231; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 9:9-10; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 1185; al-Suyūṭī, *Durr al-manthūr*, 7:379; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 4:2622. The traditions of Muḥammad promising Ibn Salām a place in paradise will be fuly treated in Chapter Two.

converted only later in Medina. This dissenting opinion is attributed to the famous Successor, traditionist, and legal expert ʿĀmir ibn Sharāḥil al-Shaʿbī (d. between 103/721 and 110/728).[114] According to al-Shaʿbī, Ibn Salām did not convert until two years before Muḥammad's death.[115] In his commentary on the verse, the Mamlūk era polymath and qurʾānic commentator Jalāl al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)[116] quotes al-Shaʿbī emphatically declaring: "Not a single thing in the Qurʾān was revealed concerning Ibn Salām, may God be pleased with him" (*mā nazzala fī ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām raḍīya allāh ʿanhu shayʾun min al-Qurʾān*).[117]

The biographical sources also address the circumstances surrounding Ibn Salām's conversion to Islam. According to particularly popular traditions attributed to the Companion Anas ibn Mālik (d. ca. 91/709–95/713),[118] the conversion occurred in Medina after Muḥammad successfully answered three questions (*masāʾil*) put to him by Ibn Salām that only a true prophet could know.[119] As Uri Rubin has noted, Ibn Salām's interrogation of Muḥammad is an example of a well-known motif in the *Sīra* literature in which "well-versed scholars from the People of the Book (including Ibn Salām) are often said to have tested Muḥammad."[120] Presumably, Ibn Salām and other Jewish and

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[114] al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 9:10; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, 1185; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 16:125; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, 4:2622.

[115] al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 10:9; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 16:125.

[116] On al-Suyūṭī's life and scholarly output see E. Geoffroy, "al-Suyūṭī," *EI*^{2}.

[117] al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 7:380.

[118] On Anas ibn Mālik see A.J. Wensinck, "Anas b. Mālik," *EI*^{2}; G.H.A. Juynboll, "Anas b. Mālik," *EI*^{3}; A.A. Salem, "Anas b. Mālik," *EIs*. Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 9:332-386.

[119] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:378-580; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, 2:528-529, 6:260-261; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 1185; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tahdhīb*, 7:447; id., *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:106-107; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 4:302-303; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 1:309; Ibn Kathīr, *Shamāʾil al-rasūl,* 329-330; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 1:288, 433-434; id., *Taʾrīkh al-Islām,* 1:33-34, 2:367-368; Ibn Sayyid al-Nās, *ʿUyūn al-athar*, 1:250; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 2:296; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 6:109; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1424/2003), 1:68.

[120] U. Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, 122.

Christian scholars know which questions Muḥammad should be able to answer because of their expertise in biblical scriptures. Following the conversion that occurred privately in the presence of the prophet, Ibn Salām and Muḥammad then conspire to trick the Jews into revealing their deceitful nature. After Muḥammad has passed Ibn Salam's test and answered his questions, the two then devise a ruse test Muḥammad's Jewish opponents and trick them into revealing their deeply ingrained hypocrisy. Ibn Salām suggests to Muḥammad that he call for a meeting with the Jews before they have learned of his conversion. The Jews are summoned and they arrive to meet with Muḥammad. Unbeknownst to the Jewish crowd that has gathered, however, Ibn Salām has hidden from view in the room and is able to overhear the entire verbal exchange that ensues. Muḥammad begins by asking the group before him to describe Ibn Salām's standing among the Jewish community. They quickly respond: "He is the best of us and the son of the best of us; our chief and the son of our chief; our scholar and the son of our scholar" (*huwa khayrunā wa-ibn khayrinā wa-sayyidunā wa-ibn sayyidinā wa-ʿālimunā wa-ibn ʿāliminā*).[121] After the Jews admit to the high esteem in which they hold Ibn Salām, Muḥammad then asks if they would consider converting to Islam if their revered rabbi were to do so.[122] The Jews' response is emphatic: "May God protect him [Ibn Salām] from that!," i.e., converting to Islam.[123] Ibn Salām suddenly emerges from his hiding place and publicly announces his conversion before his former coreligionists by making the Islamic declaration of faith (*shahāda*): "There is no god but God and Muḥammad is

[121] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:379.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Ibid.

his messenger."[124] At this point in the narrative, the Jews demonstrate their deceitful nature by stating – contrary to their prior words of praise and reverence – that Ibn Salām is "the most wicked among us and the son of the most wicked; the most ignorant and the son of the most ignorant" (*sharrunā wa-ibn sharrinā wa-jāhilunā wa-ibn jāhilinā*).[125]

Another account of the conversion, which does not include Ibn Salam's questioning of Muḥammad, is reported in Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* and subsequently transmitted in later sources.[126] Unlike the narrative attributed to Anas ibn Mālik, this account is attributed directly to Ibn Salām and is reported by one of his descendants, who is not identified by name in the text.[127] Thus, the tradition is presented as Ibn Salām's first-person account of his conversion as recounted by one of his descendants. The narrative begins with Ibn Salām stating that he recognized Muḥammad as a prophet even before the latter arrived in Medina. Ibn Salām justifies his belief in Muḥammad's prophetic status before meeting him with the following explanation:

> I knew by his description (*ṣifatuhu*), name (*ismuhu*), and time [of his appearance] (*zamānuhu*) that he was the one we were waiting for, and I was overjoyed about this but kept it to myself until God's Messenger [Muḥammad] came to Medina.[128]

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[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid.

[126] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 363-364. For translations of this narrative see H. Hirschfeld, "Sur le Histoire des Juifs de Ḿédine," *Revue d'Études Juives* 10 (1885), 12-13 n. 2; id., "Historical and Legendary Controversies," 110; A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1955, repr. Oxford University Press, 2009), 240-241; N. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Sourcebook* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 113-114; R. Firestone, "Jewish Culture in the Formative Period of Islam," in *Culture of the Jews: A New* History, ed. D. Beale (New York: Schoken Books, 2002), 267-268; S. Shtober, "Present at the Dawn of Islam," 66-67. Ibn Ḥishām's conversion account is transmitted in the later *Sīra* works. For example, see al-Suhaylī, *al-Rawḍ al-unuf*, 4:308-309; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 2:297; al-Ṣāliḥī, *Subul al-huda*, 3:552-553.

[127] My translation follows that of Reuven Firestone (see previous note) with minor alterations. Ibn Ishāq is quoted saying that he reports the account of Ibn Salam's conversion "as it was reported to me by a member of his family" (*kamā ḥaddathanī baʿḍ ahlihi*). Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 363.

[128] R. Firestone, "Jewish Culture," 267.

The statement that begins Ibn Salām's account of his conversion gives voice to the claim made elsewhere in the *Sīra* that in Pre-Islamic Arabia the Jews, particularly the Jewish rabbis and religious scholars, were eagerly anticipating the arrival of a prophet who they found described in their scriptures.[129] In traditions preserved in the *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* works, Ibn Salām is more specific and voices the description of Muḥammad found in the Torah.[130] Ibn Salām learns of Muḥammad's arrival in Medina while tending to his family's date trees with his aunt Khālida bint al-Ḥārith.[131] Although the Banū Qaynuqāʿ were known primarily for their market in Medina and metal working, they did reportedly own an unspecified number of date orchards.[132] Ibn Salām responds to the news with the exclamation "God is great!," and tells his aunt that Muḥammad is the "brother of Moses and of the same religion, having been sent on the same mission" (*akhū Mūsā ibn ʿImrān wa-ʿalā dīnihi buʿitha bi-mā buʿitha*).[133] Ibn Salām then rushes to meet Muḥammad and converts; and subsequently orders his family members to do the same.[134] The narrative concludes with an account of the ploy – which differs from that mentioned above only in minor details – that Ibn Salām and Muḥammad enact to reveal the corrupt nature and hypocrisy of the Medinan Jews.

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[129] See, for example, the claim in Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* that the "Jewish rabbis, Christian monks, and Arab soothsayers had spoken about God's messenger before his mission when his time drew near. As to the rabbis and monks, it was about his description and the description of his time which they found in their scriptures and what their prophets had enjoined upon them." Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 160.

[130] For example, see al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, ed. M. al-Rashīd (Riyāḍ: Dār al-ʿĀṣima, 1412H), 835-836.

[131] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 363; R. Firestone, "Jewish Culture," 267.

[132] M. Lecker, "Qaynuqāʿ, Banū," *EJ*, 16:760.

[133] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 363.

[134] Ibid.

Another tradition locates Ibn Salām's conversion in the synagogue of Medina on an unspecified Jewish holiday (*kanīsat al-yahūd yawm ʿīdihim*).[135] Muḥammad enters the synagogue and asks the Jews to produce twelve individuals to testify that he is God's messenger (*aʾrūnī ithnay ʿashar rajul minkum yashhadūn an lā ilāha illā llāh wa-an Muḥammad rasūl allāh*).[136] The Jews refuse and as Muḥammad is about to leave, one of them, who we subsequently learn is none other than Ibn Salām, testifies that Muḥammad is indeed God's messenger described in the Torah and Gospels. The Jews, who previously recognized Ibn Salām as "the most learned in God's scripture" (*wa-llāhi mā naʿlam rajul aʿlam bi-kitāb allāh*),[137] now deem him to be a liar, and the convert abruptly leaves the synagogue with Muḥammad.

Several extant narratives of the conversion characterize Ibn Salām's recognition of Muḥammad in terms drastically different from those that we have encountered in the Sunnī *ḥadīth* collections and biographies of Muḥammad. The following narratives occur primarily in qurʾānic commentaries and may be regarded as apocryphal to the extent that they have been excluded from the overwhelming majority of the classical Sunnī biographical compilations, *ḥadīth* collections, and qurʾānic commentaries consulted for the present study. The first is an account reported in an Imāmī-Shīʿī qur'ānic commentary attributed to the eleventh Imām of the twelver Shīʿa, Abū Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī

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[135] U. Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder*, 39. Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 11:280, no. 31259; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:112-113; id., *Tahdhīb Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 7:448; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 16: 118-119, no. 8162; al-Ḥākim al-Nīsābūrī, *al-Mustadrak ʿalā al-Ṣaḥīḥayn*, ed. M. ʿAbd al-Qādir ʿAṭā (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1422/2002) 3:469; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-aʿlām*, 437; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 7:379.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

al-ʿAskarī (d. 260/873).[138] The commentary frames its narrative of Ibn Salām's conversion with the "questions" (*masāʾil*) motif found in the traditions attributed to Anas ibn Mālik mentioned above. Additionally, *Tafsīr al-ʿAskarī*'s narrative also concludes with Muḥammad questioning the Jews about Ibn Salām's character and status before they have learned of the conversion, a literary trope that is found in the traditions attributed to Anas ibn Mālik, as well as Ibn Hishām's biography of Muḥammad, among other sources.[139] It is clear, however, that this Shīʿite commentary's account has appropriated Ibn Salām's questioning of Muḥammad and uses this motif as tool to assert and defend Imāmī-Shīʿī doctrine regarding ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's status as Muḥammad's legitimate sucessor.

The narrative is introduced with what appears to be a statement by a redactor: "When ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām accepted him [Muḥammad] after his questions (*masāʾilihi*) that he asked the Messenger of God and his [Muḥammad's] responses to them."[140] The commentary begins by assuming that its audiences are already familiar with the story of Ibn Salām's conversion to Islam after Muḥammad has successfully answered his questions, and purports to provide a more complete and authoritative account of the circumstances surrounding the particularly momentous encounter between the rabbi and the prophet. Following this brief introduction, Ibn Salām states that he has one remaining question, which he describes as "the greatest question" (*al-masʾala al-kubra*), to ask

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[138] On the Imām al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī see J. Eliash, "al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī," *EI*^{2}. For one of the few studies of the qurʾānic commentary ascribed to the Imām see M. Bar-Asher, "The Qurʾān Commentary Ascribed to the Imām Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 24 (2000), 358-379.

[139] Al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, *Tafsīr li-l-imām Abī Muḥammad al-Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī al-ʿAskarī*, ed. S. ʿAlī ʿĀshūr (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1421/2001), 362.

[140] Al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, *Tafsīr,* 361.

Muḥammad before he is prepared to convert and pronounce the declaration of faith.[141] As it turns out, this final question that must be asked concerns the identity of Muḥammad's successor, and how Ibn Salām may be able to recognize him. It is important to note that Ibn Salām does not question Muḥammad about his successor in any of the conversion narratives employing the *masāʾil* morif that are transmitted in Sunnī biographical compilations, *Sīra* works, or qurʾānic commentaries. *Tafsīr al-ʿAskarī's* commentary advances the claim that the Sunnī accounts of Ibn Salām's conversion have failed to include, or perhaps even intentionally omitted, the most important question that Ibn Salām asked Muḥammad and the latter's response. Muḥammad answers the question by pointing to a group of his Companions who are gathered nearby and explains to Ibn Salām that his successor is among them, and that a radiant light (*nūr sāṭiʿ*) will guide Ibn Salām to the successor's identity.[142] In addition to the guidance provided by the light, the tradition states that scrolls (*ṭūmār*)[143] in Ibn Salām's possession will begin to speak and his limbs will shake, attesting to the light that is emanating from the successor.[144] These scrolls, presumably, contain biblical or Jewish scripture and traditions that describe Muḥammad and the identity of his successor. As the narrative proceeds Ibn Salām is immediately captivated by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the prophet's cousin, son-in-law, and first Imām of the Imāmī-Shīʿa, who has a light shining from his face "that encompasses the light of the sun" (*yasṭaʿ min wajhhi nūr yabhar nūr al-shams*), and proclaims that both

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[141] Ibid. 361.

[142] Ibid. 361.

[143] For a brief discussion and definition of the term *ṭūmār* see R. Sellheim, "Ḳirṭās," *EI2*; E.W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban: 1968), 5:1880; A. Gacek, *The Arabic Manuscript Tradition: A Glossary of Technical Terms and Bibliography* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 51; id., *Arabic Manuscripts: A Vademecum for Readers* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 225.

[144] Al-Ḥasan al-ʿAskarī, *Tafsīr*, 361.

Muḥammad and ʿAlī have been foretold in the Torah.[145] In the tradition, the narrative framework of the *masāʾil* traditions is used to assert that ʿAlī's elevated status as Muḥammad's legitimate successor is confirmed by Jewish scripture.[146]

Another tradition locates Ibn Salām's conversion in Mecca well before Muḥammad's emigration to Medina. In one such account, Ibn Salām travels from his home in Medina to Mecca in order to meet the prophet. He encounters Muḥammad and observes the "seal of prophethood" (*khātim al-nubuwwa*) located on his back, at which point he acknowledges that Muḥammad is indeed the prophet predicted by biblical scriptures.[147] Ibn Salām's recognition of the prophet in this tradition closely resembles several accounts in the *Sīra* works of the encounter between Muḥammad and the Syrian monk Baḥīrā.[148] In both stories, distinguished representatives of the Jewish or Christian communities in Arabia recogize a physical mark of prophecy on Muḥammad's body based on their study of biblical scriptures.

Additional accounts of the purported Meccan conversion are supplied by the qurʾānic exegetes ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. 327/938), al-Faḍl ibn Ḥusayn al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), and al-Suyūṭī in their commentaries on Qurʾān 112 (*al-Ikhlāṣ*). In the commentaries, the narratives of the Meccan conversion are adduced to illustrate the purported historical circumstances in Muḥammad's career that prompted the revelation of this chapter of the Qurʾān. In other words, the narratives of Ibn Salām's

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[145] Ibid. 361.

[146] The tradition in *Tafsīr al-ʿAskarī* belongs to the corpus of Shīʿite traditions attributed to recognized Jewish and Christian converts that claim biblical legitimacy and confirmation of ʿAlī's status as Muḥammad's successor. See M.J. Kister, "Ḥaddithū ʿan banī Isrāʾīla," 222-223; R. Tottoli, *Biblical Prophets*, 90.

[147] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tahdhīb*, 7:447.

[148] See B. Rogemma, *The Legend of Sergius Baḥīrā*, 37-56.

conversion are cited in these qurʾānic commentaries as the occasion of revelation for Qurʾān 112. According to the tradition reported by al-Ṭabrisī, Ibn Salām encounters Muḥammad, who promptly asks: "Do you find me in the Torah [described, or identified] as God's messenger?" (*hal tujidanī fī t-Tawrāt rasūl allāh*).[149] Ibn Salām responds with a question of his own and asks Muḥammad to describe his Lord, which prompts the revelation of Qurʾān 112: "Say, 'He is God, One, God, the Eternal, Who has not begotten nor has been begotten. There is no equal to Him.'"[150] This question and answer that occurs between Ibn Salām and the prophet evokes the converson narratives attributed to Anas ibn Mālik discussed above, which describe Ibn Salām's conversion after he asked Muḥammad three questions. Al-Ṭabrisī's commentary, however, explicitly identifies the revelation of the Qurʾān's chapter in response to Ibn Salām's question as "the cause of his [Ibn Salām's] conversion" (*sabab islāmihi*).[151] Thus, according to al-Ṭabrisī, Ibn Salām's conversion was not prompted by Muḥammad's response to his questions, but rather, by the fact that God revealed a qurʾānic verse in direct response to a question that he asked Muḥammad. The tradition then concludes by stating that Ibn Salām concealed his conversion until Muḥammad's arrival in Medina, at which point he publicly announced his belief in the prophet.[152]

Al-Suyūṭī relates a similar story of the Meccan conversion in his commentary on Qurʾān 112.[153] The narrative begins with Ibn Salām traveling from Yathrib (Medina) to Mecca in order to pray in "Our father Abraham's house of worship" (*masjid abīnā*

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[149] Al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, 10:387.

[150] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 596.

[151] Ibid.

[152] Ibid.

[153] al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 8:611. A variant of the report is also found in al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣāʾiṣ al-kubra*, ed. M. Khalīl Harās (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1967), 1:358-359.

Ibrāhīm).[154] This statement attributed to Ibn Salām suggests that he, and presumably other Jews in pre-Islamic Arabia, recognized and venerated the Kaʿba in Mecca as a sacred site associated with the patriarch Abraham. The tradition implies, in other words, that the Kaʿba was widely revered by the Arabian Jews prior to Muḥammad's career, and that, along with the pre-Islamic Arabs, the Jews associated the shrine with Abraham. When Muḥammad encounters the rabbi he asks him: "Are you ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām?"[155] The prophet's question implies that he was already aware of Ibn Salam's distinguished status as the preeminent rabbi in Yathrib before he made the *hijra*. In another version of the report provided by the Damascene scholar, historian, and biographer Abū al-Qāṣim ʿAlī ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176),[156] Muḥammad's prior knowledge of Ibn Salām's status as the renowned Jewish scholar in Arabia is made explicit when he asks: "Are you Ibn Salām, the scholar of the people of Yathrib?" (*anta Ibn Salām ʿālim ahl Yathrib*).[157] Muḥammad's statement recognizes that Ibn Salām stands at the forefront of Jewish scholarly activities in Medina. The prophet then eagerly asks Ibn Salām if the Torah describes him as God's messenger. As in al-Ṭabrisī's tradition, Ibn Salām responds by

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[154] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 8:611. A variant of the report is found in al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ al-zawāʾid,* 9:326; Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, 2:355; and Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh*, 3:387.

[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibn ʿAsākir's monumental biographical dictionary "The History of Damascus" (*Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*) is an invaluable resource for the study of Arabic literary biography and Islamic historiography during the classical period. On Ibn ʿAsākir's life and works see N. Eliséef, "Ibn ʿAsākir," *EI*^{2}; S. Mourad, "Ibn ʿAsākir and family," *EI*^{3}; S.A. Mourad and J.E. Lindsay, *The Intensification and Reorientation of Sunni Jihad Ideology in the Crusader Period: Ibn ʿAsākir of Damascus (1105-1176) and His Age, with an Edition and Translation of Ibn ʿAsākir's* The Forty Hadiths for Inciting Jihad, Islamic History and Civilization; XCIX (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 3-15. Studies of Ibn ʿAsākir's works include J.E. Lindsay, "Damascene Scholars During the Fāṭimid Period: An Examination of ʿAlī b. ʿAsākir's *Taʾrīkh Madīnat Dimashq*," *al-Masāq* 7 (1994), 35-75, id., ed., *Ibn ʿAsākir and Early Islamic History*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam; XX (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 2001); id., "Sarah and Hagar in Ibn ʿAsākir's *History of Damascus*," *Medieval Encounters* 14 (2008), 1-14; S.A. Mourad, "A Twelfth-Century Muslim Biography of Jesus," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 7.1 (1996), 39-45; S.C. Judd and J.J. Scheiner, eds., *New Perspectives on Ibn ʿAsakir in Islamic Historiography*, Islamic History and Civilization; CXLV (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

[157] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh*, 3:387.

asking Muḥammad to describe his Lord, at which point Qurʾān 112 is revealed, thereby prompting Ibn Salām to convert.

The sources mention that Ibn Salām's conversion prompted several of his family members to embrace Islam. For example, Ibn Isḥāq's conversion narrative concludes with Ibn Salām stating: "I then publicly revealed my conversion *and the conversion of my family*, and my aunt Khālida also became a good Muslim."[158] The qurʾānic commentaries specify an additional member of Ibn Salām's family who accepted Muḥammad's prophethood, his nephew Salama, in the interpretation of Qurʾān 2:130: "Who turns away from the religion of Abraham except those who are foolish? We chose him in this world, and in the world to come he will be among the righteous."[159] According to an occasion of revelation provided by the commentators to this verse, Ibn Salām invited his two nephews, Salama and Muhājir, to embrace Islam by reciting a verse from the Torah in which God describes Muḥammad advent:

> I will send a prophet from among the descendents of Ishmael whose name is Aḥmad. Whoever believes in him is rightly guided and is on the right course; and whoever disbelieves in him is cursed (*innanī bāʿithun min wuld Ismāʿīl nabī ismuhu Aḥmad fa-man āmana bihi fa-qad ihtadā wa-rashuda wa-man lam yuʾmin bihi fa-huwa malʿūn*).[160]

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[158] R. Firestone, "Jewish Culture," 268; Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 363; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:110; al-Kalāʿī, *al-Iktifāʾ*, 1:476; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya*, 3:222. The Arabic biographical literature recognizes Ibn Salām's aunt, Khalida bint al-Ḥārith, for her conversion to Islam and her role as a witness to Ibn Salām's conversion. For example, see Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 873; al-Dhahabī, *Tajrīd asmāʾ al-ṣaḥāba*, 2:261.

[159] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 40.

[160] Al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-nuqūl fī asbāb al-nuzūl*, 24, no. 63; Al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 65-66. In the qurʾānic commentary of the early exegete Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, the passage from the Torah cited by Ibn Salām is phrased differently: "*aʾlastumā taʿlimān an allāh qāla li-Mūsā ʿinnanī bāʿithun nabī min dhurīyat Ismāʿīl yuqālu la-hu Aḥmad yaḥmīd ummatahu ʿan al-nār wa-annahu malʿūn man kadhaba bi-Aḥmad al-nabī wa-malʿūn man lam yattabiʿ dīnihi*." Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 1:139-140. Al-Ṭabrisī provides a version of the report that omits the Torah's description of Muḥammad. According to his commentary, Ibn Salām declares to his nephews "We know that Muḥammad's description is in the Torah" (*la-qad ʿalamnā an ṣifat Muḥammad fī t-Tawrāt*). *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, 1:310. The episode is also addressed in al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:216-217; Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī, *Gharāʾib al-Qurʾān*, 1:405; and Abū

While Salama chose to follow the example of his uncle and convert, Muhājir refused and his rejection of Muḥammad, according to the qurʾānic exegetes, is what prompted the Qurʾān's mention of those who "turn away from the religion of Abraham." Several sources also briefly identify a brother of Ibn Salām, Thaʿlaba ibn Salām, who reportedly converted to Islam and is counted among those singled out for praise in Qurʾān 3:113:

> "They are not [all] alike. Among the people of the Book there is an upright community who recite the signs of God in the watches of the night and who prostrate themselves" (*min ahl al-kitāb ummatun qāʾimatun yatlūna āyāt allāh anāʾa l-layl wa-hum yasjudūn*).[161]

An exegetical tradition attributed to the early Meccan scholar ʿAbd al-Mālik ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAẓīm ibn Jurayj (d. 150/768),[162] often cited in the qurʾānic commentaries as simply Ibn Jurayj, states that the verse refers to Ibn Salām, his brother Thaʿlaba, and several other Jewish converts to Islam during Muḥammad's career.[163]

The Arabic biographical sources offer very few details pertaining to Ibn Salām's relationship and interaction with his ancestral faith following the conversion. For the most part, his conversion is portrayed as an abrupt, wholehearted break with Jewish beliefs, traditions, and practices. The qurʾānic commentaries, however, preserve traditions suggesting that Ibn Salām continued to observe certain Jewish practices for some time after he embraced Muḥammad. These traditions occur in the commentaries on Qurʾān 2:208: "O you who believe, enter the peace, all of you. Do not follow the

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Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 1:564. For a concise analysis of the tradition see A. Rippin, "The Function of the '*Asbāb al-nuzūl*'," 4.

[161] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 76.

[162] See H. Motzki, "Ibn Jurayj," *EI*[3].

[163] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 3:399; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 133; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 11:11, no. 14; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 2:21, no. 935; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 2:280.

footsteps of Satan. He is a clear enemy to you."[164] According to a tradition attributed to the famous Companion and cousin of the prophet ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687-688),[165] Ibn Salām and a small group of Jewish converts to Islam continued to observe Jewish practices, such as keeping the Sabbath and abstaining from comsuming Camel's meat and milk, after their conversion to Islam.[166] Additional accounts describe how the converts observed Jewish practices after they converted to Islam (*baʿd mā aslamū*),[167] and point out that Muḥammad's non-Jewish Arab followers resented them for it (*fa-ankara dhālika ʿalayhim al-muslimūn*).[168] In his collection of the occasions of revelation, the qurʾānic commentator Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076)[169] characterizes the religious practice of Ibn Salām and his fellow Jewish converts as follows: "They observed his [Muḥammad's] customary practices (*sharāʾiʿhi*) and those of Moses (*sharāʾiʿ Mūsā*)."[170] The converts are also reported to have asked Muḥammad

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[164] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 49.

[165] Ibn ʿAbbās is a celebrated Companion who is regarded in Islamic tradition as the "rabbi of the Muslim community" (*ḥibr/ḥabr al-umma*) and the great "interpreter of the Qurʾān" (*turjumān/tarjumān al-Qurʾān*). On Ibn ʿAbbās's biography and his mythological status in Islam see L. Vaglieri, "ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās," *EI*^{2}; Cl. Gilliot, "ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās," *EI*^{3}; id., "Portrait 'mythique' d'Ibn ʿAbbās," *Arabica* 32 (1985), 127-183. Gilliot's article in *EI*^{3} provides a comprehensive bibliography of the biographical notices on Ibn ʿAbbās in the Arabic literary sources.

[166] Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 1:356; al-Samarqandī, *Bahr al-ʿulūm*, 1:197; al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, 68. In his commentary on the verse al-Suyūṭī identifies the previously mentioned brother of Ibn Salām, Thaʿlaba ibn Salām. *Al-Durr al-manthūr*. 1:540-541.

[167] Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 2:126; al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, 68.

[168] Al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, 68; id., al-Wasīṭ, 1:312.

[169] R. Sellheim, "al-Wāḥidī, *EI*^{2}; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 269-281. For an assessment of al-Wāhidī's place in the history of qurʾānic exegesis see W. Saleh, "The Last of the Nishapuri School of Tafsīr: Al-Wāḥidī (d. 468H/1076) and his Significance in the History of Qurʾanic Exegesis," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 126, no. 2 (2006), 223-243. Saleh has also published a critical edition of the introduction to al-Wāḥidī's major commentary, *al-Basīṭ*. See W. Saleh, "The Introduction to Wāḥidī's *Basīṭ*: An Edition, Translation, and Commentary," in *Aims, Methods, and Contexts of Qurʾanic Exegesis*, ed. K. Bauer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 67-100.

[170] Ibid.

for permission to continue to observe the Sabbath and recite the Torah at night.[171] According to the commentary tradition, it was Ibn Salām and his fellow converts' continued adherence to Jewish practices that prompted the Qurʾān's demand that they "enter the peace" (*udkhulū fī s-silm*),[172] meaning, that they fully embrace Islam, or "the peace" (*silm*), and leave their attachments to Jewish religious observance behind.

According to a rare tradition, however, Muḥammad explicitly endorsed Ibn Salām's desire to recite passages from both the Qurʾān and the Torah after his conversion to Islam. The tradition is reported on the authority of Ibn Salām's son, Yūsuf ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām, who quotes his father saying: "The messenger of God ordered me to recite the Qurʾān one night, and the Torah the next" (*amaranī rasūl allāh an aqraʾ al-Qurʾān laylatan wa-t-Tawrāt laylatan*).[173] In a slightly different account, Ibn Salām approaches Muḥammad and informs him that his devotional regimen involves regularly reciting from both the Qurʾān and the Torah.[174] Muḥammad endorses the practice and orders Ibn Salām to alternate between reading the two scriptures at night (*iqraʾ hādha laylatan wa-hādha laylatan*).[175] The majority of the classical biographical sources rejected the authenticity of the tradition, and exclude it from their entries on Ibn Salām. Al-Dhahabī, the scholar who transmits the tradition in two of his biographical works,

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[171] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 1:541. Al-Ṭabarānī and al-Wāḥidī's account only mentions their request to be allowed to recite from the Torah during prayer. *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 1:356; *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, 68.

[172] Additional reports of this exchange between Muḥammad and the Jewish converts are found in the following commentaries on Qurʾān 2:208: Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 1:179-180; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 2:336, no. 4019; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 116; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:280; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 2:199; al-Qurṭubī, *Jamiʿ li-aḥkām*, 3:18; Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī, *Gharāʾib al-Qurʾān*, 1:579; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 2:195; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1:408-409; al-Suyūṭī, *Lubāb al-nuqūl*, 38, no. 128.

[173] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:383; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 29:132. There are traditions of other Companions, such as ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, who reportedly read both the Qurʾān and the Torah with Muḥammad's permission. See M.J. Kister, "Ḥaddithū ʿan banī Isrāʾīl," 231-232.

[174] Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 1:435; id., *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 1:27.

[175] Ibid.

explicitly rejects the tradition on doctrinal grounds and evaluates its chain of transmission (*isnād*) as weak (*ḍaʿīf*) and unreliable. For al-Dhahabī, a scholar operating in the eighth/fourteenth century, there is no reason to read the Torah after the Qurʾān has been sent. According to al-Dhahabī, the Torah has been corrupted by the Jews and has been abrogated and superceded by Islamic scripture. Al-Dhahabī's vehement and absolute rejection of the account of Ibn Salām's reading Jewish and Muslim scriptures is repeated in his commentary on a tradition involving another Companion of Muḥammad, the Qurashī ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ (d. ca. 65/685), who had a reputation as an expert in biblical scriptures and the Qurʾān.[176] According to a tradition transmitted by the Egyptian traditionist ʿAbdallāh ibn Lahīʿa (d. 174/790), ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAmr bn al-ʿĀṣ recounted a dream he had to Muḥammad in which he saw that he had honey on one of his fingers and butter on another (*fī iḥdā yadayya ʿasalan wa-fī-l-ukhrā samnan*).[177] Muḥammad explains the meaning of the dream and states: "You will recite the two scriptures: the Torah and Qurʾān" (*taqraʾ kitabayn al-Tawrāt wa-l-Qurʾān*).[178]

The biographies of Ibn Salām generally do not address how his conversion to Islam was received by the Jews of Medina, nor do they shed light on any further engagement or interaction between the Medinan Jews and Ibn Salām once he joined the ranks of Muḥammad's Companions. However, a number of traditions preserved in the qurʾānic commentaries describe how Ibn Salām and a small group of his fellow Jewish converts were initially ostracized and ridiculed by the Jews of Medina after they became

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[176] Kister provides a summary of the tradition on ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAmr ibn al-ʿĀṣ, as well as al-Dhahabī's rejection of the tradition in his *Taʾrīkh al-Islām*. M.J. Kister, "Ḥaddithū ʿan banī Isrāʾīla," 231. The tradition and several of its variants are transmitted in Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 31:255-256, and Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, al-Iṣāba, 6:311.

[177] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 31:255; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Isāba*, 6:311.

[178] Ibid.

Muslims. In one tradition, Ibn Salām approaches the leaders of the Medinan Jews (*ruʾus/ruʾusāʾ al-yahūd*) and invites them to follow Muḥammad, to which they respond that their religion is superior to the religion adopted by Ibn Salām and the Jewish converts, meaning Islam.[179] In this brief exchange the Jewish leaders look down on Ibn Salām for his decision to follow Muḥammad, and regard his adopted religion to be inferior and incompatible with their ancestral faith. Another tradition found in the qurʾānic commentaries records the purported reaction of the Jews to the conversion of Ibn Salām and several other Jewish converts. The tradition is cited in the qurʾānic commentaries as the occasion of revelation for Qurʾān 3:113 mentioned above. According to the tradition, following the conversion of Ibn Salām and other Medinan Jews, the Jewish leaders state that only the most wicked from their community would abandon the religion of their forefathers and join Muḥammad.[180] The tradition is intended to highlight the resentmentment of the Jewish leaders, and identify Ibn Salām and his fellow converts as the individuals praised in the qurʾānic verse as the "upright community" (*umma qāʾima*) among the People of the Book.

2.4. Ibn Salām's Immediate Family and Descendants

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[179] Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 1:267; al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:252.

[180] The tradition is reported on the authority of the Companion ʿAbdallāh ibn ʿAbbās. See al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 3:398-399, no. 7642 and 7645; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 2:114; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 3:130; al-Wāḥidī, *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, 122, no. 237; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 237; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 1:316; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 3:173, 176; al-Qurṭubī, *Jamiʿ li-aḥkām,* 4:112-113; Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī, *Gharāʾib al-Qurʾān*, 2:239; al-Thaʿālibī, *al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿA. al-Ṭālibī (Algiers: al-Muʾassasat al-Waṭanīya li-l-Kitāb, 1985),1:359; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 2:280; id., *Lubāb al-nuqūl*, 55, no. 215.

The biographical sources mention that Ibn Salām had two sons, Yūsuf and Muḥammad, who were active in transmitting traditions that they acquired from their father.[181] Ibn Salām's firstborn, whose full name is given as Abū Yaʿqub Yūsuf ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām ibn al-Ḥārith al-Isrāʾīlī al-Madanī, receives far more attention in the sources than his brother Muḥammad.[182] The sources do not provide a specific date for Yūsuf's birth, although al-Dhahabī does state that he "was born during the prophet's lifetime" (*wulida fī ḥayāt al-nabī*).[183] As is the case with his father, Yūsuf is identified with the Children of Israel and is described as a descendent of Joseph.[184] The sources also claim that the prophet personally gave him the name Yūsuf, just as he gave Ibn Salām the name ʿAbdallāh following his conversion.[185] While it is impossible to establish the historical authenticity of Muḥammad's purported naming of Ibn Salām's firstborn son, the tradition gives literary expression to a particularly close and affectionate relationship between Muḥammad and Ibn Salām. Unlike his father, the sources do not indicate that Yūsuf was known by another name prior to being named by Muḥammad; and from this we can infer

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[181] Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, *Ṭabaqāt*, 1:18; Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *al-Jarḥ wa-t-taʿdīl*, 2:63; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 29:100,101; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, 3:265; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 1:433; id., *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 1:28.

[182] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 72:244. For biographical entries on Yūsuf ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām see Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6:565; Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *al-Jarḥ wa-t-taʿdīl*, 9: 225; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Tārīkh al-ṣaḥāba*, 268; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 4:159; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh Madīnat Dimashq*, 74:244-246; Ibn Qudāma al-Maqdisī, *al-Istibṣār*, 194-195; al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmāʾ*, 655-666; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 32:435-437; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 3:509-510; id., *Tahdhīb Siyar aʿlām*, 1:120-121; id., *Tadhhīb tahdhīb*, 10:145-146; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 29:226-227; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥāba*, 11:456-457; id., *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 11:416; id., *Taḥrīr taqrīb al-tahdhīb*, 4:134. For biographical entries on Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh b. Salām see Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *al-Jarḥ wa-l-taʿdīl*, 3:297; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Tārīkh al-ṣaḥāba*, 228; Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī, *Maʿrifat al-ṣaḥāba*, 1:181-183; al-Dhahabī, *Tajrīd asmāʾ al-ṣaḥāba*, 2:59.

[183] al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 3:509; id., *Tahdhīb Siyar aʿlām*, 1:120-121.

[184] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:565. "*min banī Isrāʾīl min wuld Yūsuf ibn Yaʿqūb ibn Isḥāq ibn Ibrāhīm*." Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 4:159; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 74:245. "*wa-huwa rajul min banī Isrāʾīl min wuld Yūsuf*." al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 3:510; al-Khazrajī, *Khulāṣat tadhhīb*, 3:300.

[185] M.J. Kister, "Call Yourselves," 20. Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 6:565; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 4:159; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 74:245; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 32:436; id., *Tuḥfat al-ashrāf*, 9:597; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-aʿlām*, 3:509; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 29:226; al-Khazrajī, *Khulāṣat tadhhīb*, 3:300.

that Ibn Salām's firstborn was most likely born a Muslim and, therefore, at some point after Ibn Salām's conversion. The sources credit Yūsuf with transmitting traditions from his father, for example, the account of Muḥammad encouraging Ibn Salām to read from the Torah mentioned above. The traditions that are attributed to Ibn Salām's children in the biographical literature usually portray their father in the best light possible, and often accentuate and embellish his Jewish pedigree. The biographical literature reports that Yūsuf died during the reign of the Umayyad caliph ʿUmar (II) ibn ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r. 99/717–101/720).[186]

The biographical literature does not supply details on Ibn Salām's descendants beyond the brief biographies of his children. Several Muslim scholars during the classical period, however, refer to various descendants of Ibn Salām and attribute to them religious writings and translations of scriptures. For example, the famous Shiʿite scribe and bibliophile Abū al-Faraj Muḥammad ibn Isḥāq al-Nadīm (d. ca. 385/995) attributes Arabic translations of various biblical writings to a descendant of Ibn Salām, a certain Aḥmad ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām.[187] Scholarly assessments of Ibn Salām emphasize the supposed role that his descendants played in transmitting biblical, extra-biblical, or Jewish material in Islamic tradition, despite the fact that we, along with the Islamic biographical tradition, know almost nothing about them. Steven Wasserstrom, for example, overstates the case and claims that "By the tenth century his [Ibn Salām's]

[186] Ibn Ḥibbān, *Tārīkh al-ṣaḥāba*, 268; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 74:245-246; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 32:437; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 3:509; al-Khazrajī, *Khulāṣat tahdhīb*, 3:300.
[187] Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist*, ed. G. Flügel (City: Publisher, 1966), 21-22.

family was seen as a dynasty of Jewish converts transmitting miscellaneous holy books."[188]

2.5. Ibn Salām and the Early Caliphate

The biographical literature offers few details regarding the remainder of Ibn Salām's life, especially when compared to the sustained attention that the sources devote to his Jewish background, scholarly pedigree, status among the Jews of Yathrib, and conversion to Islam. However, as Josef Horovitz has already noted, there are a few passing references to Ibn Salām in the accounts of Muḥammad's military campaigns (*maghāzī*) during the Medinan period of his career. Given that the biographies typically date Ibn Salām's conversion to the very beginning of the Medinan period or, as we have seen, even earlier in Mecca, it is difficult to explain why the literary sources would not have counted Ibn Salām as a participant in Muḥammad's major military campaigns that have been memorialized in the *Sīra*, such as the battle of Baḍr (2/624) or Uḥud (3/625). While Horovitz offers the theory that tradition might have later inserted a few insignificant mentions of Ibn Salām into the accounts of Muḥammad's campaigns to remove the glaring condradiction posed by the widely accepted early date of his conversion,[189] Lecker takes the position that Ibn Salām, in all likelihood, did not convert until late in the

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[188] S.M. Wasserstrom, "ʿAbd Allah ibn Salām," *EJIW*, 1:7. While discussing early translations of biblical material into Arabic Hava Lazarus-Yafeh notes: "Muslim and Karaite authors mention some earlier Jewish and Muslim translators other than Saadia, but except for their names we know nothing about them, a fact that did not deter some scholars from ascribing to such sources (for example, Aḥmad b. ʿAbdallāh b. Salām) some early Biblical quotations of Muslim authors." H. Lazarus-Yafeh,

[189] J. Horovitz, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām," *EI*^{2}.

Medinan period and, for this reason, did not participate in Muḥammad's military campaigns.[190]

For the period shortly after Muḥammad's death, however, the sources do provide details of Ibn Salām's involvement in important negotiations and military campaigns of the early Islamic conquests under the caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13/634-23/644). The sources report that Ibn Salām accompanied the caliph on his trip from Medina to al-Jābiya in Syria (16/637 or 17/638),[191] and that he was also with ʿUmar on the Temple Mount (Bayt al-Maqdis) during the Islamic conquest of Jerusalem in the same year.[192] While there are several explanations offered in the sources for the purpose of ʿUmar's trip to al-Jābiya, it seems that the Caliph's primary goals were to 1) attend to administrative matters in the wake of the Muslims' military victories and occupation of Syria, and 2) negotiate a treaty with the people of Jerusalem in preparation of the Muslims' occupation of the city.[193] These traditions place Ibn Salām alongside the caliph at the forefront of the Islamic conquest of Syria, which included Palestine and the city of Jerusalem. The traditions of Ibn Salām and ʿUmar at al-Jābiya suggest that the caliph welcomed the presence, and perhaps participation and opinion, of the famous Jewish convert to Islam as he negotiated an agreement with the people of Jerusalem, including

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[190] M. Lecker, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām," *EI*^{3}; id., *The Constitution of Medina*, 64.

[191] J. Horovitz, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām," *EI*^{2}; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:97; id., *Tahdhīb Taʾrīkh*, 7:446; al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmāʾ*, 366; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 15:75; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 5:249; al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām*, 4:90.

[192] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:97; id., *Tahdhīb Taʾrīkh*, 7:446; al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmāʾ*, 366; al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 15:75; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 433; id., *Tahdhīb Siyar aʿlām*, 1:71; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 5:249; al-Khazrajī, *Khulāṣat tadhhīb*, 2:77; al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām*, 4:90. On the traditions of ʿUmar's activities in Jerusalem at the time of the conquest see H. Busse, "ʿOmar b. al-Ḫaṭṭāb in Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 5 (1984), 73-119; B. Shoshan, *The Arabic Historical Tradition and the Early Islamic Conquests: Folklore, Tribal Lore, Holy War*, Routledge Studies in Classical Islam; IV (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 110-133.

[193] F.M. Donner, *The Early Islamic Conquests* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 151-152.

her Jewish and Christian inhabitants. On a symbolic level, however, the traditions of Ibn Salām and ʿUmar on the Temple Mount associates the convert with the very beginnings of the Islamization of Jerusalem, and more specifically, the Islamization of the site of the former Jewish temples.

In addition to the traditions involving ʿUmar and the conquest of Syria, it is reported that Ibn Salām witnessed the Muslim victory over the Sassanian army at the decisive battle of Nihāwand in Persia (c. 21/641-642).[194] It is not specified whether Ibn Salām participated in the military campaign itself, or if as the sources state, he was simply present during the conquest of Nihāwand (*shahada fatḥ Nahāwand*).[195] The tradition in question is attributed to Ibn Salām who is, perhaps, simply attesting to his presence at Nihāwand at the time of the conquest. The Egyptian *ḥadīth* scholar and historian Aḥmad ibn Nūr al-Dīn Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d.852/1499),[196] however, cites a tradition where Ibn Salām is engaged in negotiations after the battle of Nihāwand between the Jewish Exilarch in Persia (Ar. *raʾs al-jālūt*, Heb. *rosh ha-golah*, Aram. *resh galuta*)[197] and the Muslims over the ransoming of Jewish female captives.[198] The tradition cited by al-ʿAsqalanī suggests that during the conquest of Nihāwand Ibn Salām acted as the Caliph's lead negotiator in the ransoming of female Jews who had been captured by the Muslim army. The tradition portrays Ibn Salām as an ideal intermediary between the Exilarch and the Muslims on account of his knowledge of Jewish scriptures and law, and

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[194] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:385; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:134; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 436.

[195] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:385.

[196] See F. Rosenthal, "Ibn Ḥadjar al-ʿAsḳalānī," *EI*^{2}.

[197] On the Exilarch and the institution of the Exilarchate in early and classical Islam see M. Gil, "The Exilarchate," in *The Jews of Medieval Islam: Community, Society, and Identity*, ed. D. Frank (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 33-65.

[198] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Maṭālib al-ʿāliyya,* 4:31-32. A variant of the tradition is preserved in al-Iṣfahānī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, 838-839. This tradition – and several additional accounts of Ibn Salām and the Exilarch – is discussed in M. Lecker, "Jewish Response," 181-182.

presumably, his knowledge of Jewish law governing the ransoming of captives taken in battle. Additionally, several sources describe Ibn Salām's involvment in the religio-political conflicts surrounding the early caliphate where he appears in an episode defending ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb from the latter's enemies in an attempt to prevent the Caliph's assasination and the subsequent internal conflict among the Muslims.[199] According to virtually all of the biographical sources, Ibn Salām died in 43/663-664 in the city of Medina. Despite the near unanimous identification of Medina as the place of Ibn Salām's death, the Damascene historiographer Ibn ʿAsākir reports a tradition locating Ibn Salām's grave in the town of Saqbā, in southern Syria just east of Damascus.[200]

[199] J. Horovitz, "ʿAbd Allāh b. Salām," *EI*^{2}; F.H. Manouchehri, "ʿAbd Allah b. Salām," *EIs*; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Faḍāʾil al-ṣaḥāba*, ed. W.A. ʿAbbās (Mecca: Dār al-ʿIlm li-l-Ṭibāʿat wa-l-Nushr, 1403/1983), 1:484, 486-489, 491; id., *Kitab al-ʿIlal wa-maʿrifat al-rijāl*, ed. W.A. ʿAbbās (Beirut: al-Maktabat al-Islāmī, 1408/1988), 2:390.

[200] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tahdhīb Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 7:451.

3. The Myth and Image of ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām in Arabic Biographical Literature

3.1. Introduction

Although the biographical literature appears to supply many details pertaining to the life and career of Ibn Salām, the information preserved in the sources is often contradictory or vague, and therefore, cannot simply be accepted as objective reports attesting to historical reality in seventh century Arabia. Additionally, the sources are noticeably silent for extended periods of Ibn Salām's career – most notably, the interval between his conversion until his death – and emphasize traditions that confer authority, legitimacy and praise upon Ibn Salām. For instance, if we examine how the sources address Ibn Salām's ancestry it is clear that they are not interested in providing a biological genealogy that specifies his family's lineage and background in Arabia. Rather, the biographies claim that Ibn Salām was a descendent of central figures from the Hebrew Bible, including Joseph, and the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. By connecting him with these revered figures from biblical history the sources endow Ibn Salām with authority and prestige, while at the same time embellishing his Jewish background and connection to biblical scriptures and lore, thereby, distinguishing him from the majority of Muḥammad's Companions. In the case of Ibn Salām's genealogy, along with many other aspects of his biography, as we will show below, the sources are less concerned with the historical-biographical details of Ibn Salām's career than constructing an image of the Jewish convert as an authoritative witness from the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*) who attests to Muḥammad's prophetic status.

As we have already noted, western scholars have – to varying degrees – recognized the extent to which Islamic tradition has sanctified Ibn Salām and embellished his image as the primordial Jewish convert to Islam. While there appears to be a scholarly concensus regarding the symbolism attached to Ibn Salām's image during the earliest centuries of Islam and beyond, scholars have yet to address how his authoritative and symbolic status was initially articulated and subsequently embellished and reshaped; how Ibn Salām has functioned as a literary trope in the various genres of classical Arabo-Islamic literature in which he figures prominently; or the literary tropes that the tradition uses to portray Ibn Salām. What follows is a preliminary attempt to identify and assess the major topoi of Ibn Salām's image by looking at the biographical details and narratives of his career that have been preserved by the classical biographical sources. After examing how the biographies praise Ibn Salām, and what the numerous representations of Ibn Salām emphasize regarding his background, piety, religious learning, and authoritative status, we will be in a better position to assess how his mythical image is employed as a literary trope in Arabo-Islamic Literature.

The biographies of Ibn Salām reflect clear attempts to praise and sanctify him. This is apparent in how the sources highlight Ibn Salām's authoritative standing as a scholar and leader among the Medinan Jews prior to his conversion and, subsequently, his renown among Muḥammad's Companions. The sources go to great lenghts to illustrate Ibn Salām's sincerity, piety, and his particularly close relationship with Muḥammad. The image of Ibn Salām that is constructed by the classical biographies is that of an authoritative Jewish witness to Muḥammad's prophethood who was compelled by his interpretation of Jewish scriptures to embrace Islam. On the one hand, the

objectives of sanctifying Ibn Salām are to glorify him, celebrate his conversion to Islam, and construct his venerated status among Muḥammad's early followers. On the other hand, the praise that the sources give to Ibn Salām is ultimately intended to grant authority and legitimacy to Muḥammad, whose prophetic status, it is argued, was recognized by the most renowned scholar of Jewish scriptures in Medina. In this respect, praising Ibn Salām often goes hand in hand with villifying and condemning the overwhelming majority of Medinan Jewry who, as the biographies of the prophet claim, stubbornly refused to accept that Muḥammad's mission was foretold in the Torah. In other words, the biographies' praise for Ibn Salām is inextricably connected to Muslim anti-Jewish polemics, the reception of biblical scriptures and traditions in Islam, and Islamic conceptions of Muḥammad's legitimacy and authority. The biographical sources' praise of Ibn Salām is a method of legitimizing Muḥammad and the rise of Islam.

3.2. The Preeminent Jew in Medina

A major feature of Ibn Salām's sanctified image is his reported status as the preeminent religious authority and scholar among the Medinan Jews of Muḥammad's lifetime. The biographies of Ibn Salām regularly highlight the credentials and virtues that distinguish him from the rest of Medinan Jewry so that he may serve as a compelling symbol of Jewish scriptures' confirmation of Muḥammad and the Qurʾān. The major points that the biographies regularly highlight are Ibn Salām's unrivaled learning in Jewish scriptures and his distinguished ancestry and scholarly pedigree. Several traditions reported in the sources are intended to provide explicit testimony to Ibn Salām's elevated standing

among the Jews of Medina. In one such tradition, Ibn Salām is described as "the most knowledgeable in the Torah of the Children of Israel and the most sincere among them" (*wa-kāna aʿlam banī Isrāʾīl bi-t-Tawrāt wa-asdaqahu ʿindahim*).[201] The Damascene historian and traditionist Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar Ibn Kathīr's (d. 774/1373)[202] describes Ibn Salām in his work on the Muḥammad's outstanding qualities (*shamāʾil al-rasūl*) as "a leader of those from the people of the Book who believed" (*min aʾimat ahl al-kitāb mi-man āmana*).[203] Similarly, the historian al-Dhahabī remarks that "ʿAbdallāh *ʿālim ahl al-kitāb wa-fādilihim fī zamānihi bi-l-madīna*).[204] The historian and qurʾānic exegete Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)[205] reports a similar tradition praising Ibn Salām as "the best among them [i.e. the Jews] and the most knowledgeable in the Scripture" (*afḍal rajul minhum wa-aʿlamihim bi-l-kitāb*).[206] These brief assessments of Ibn Salām's renown in Medina do not portray him as a typical or ordinary member of the Jewish tribes. Rather, Ibn Salām is represented as an extraordinary Jew who surpassed all his contempories in righteousness and Torah learning.

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[201] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:382; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:115.

[202] See H. Laoust, "Ibn Kathīr," *EI*^{2}, id., "Ibn Kathīr, historien," *Arabica* 2 (1955), 42-88; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 79-81; J.D. McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, 71-76.

[203] Ibn Kathīr, *Shamāʾil al-rasūl*, ed. M. ʿAbd al-Wāḥid (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat ʿĪsā Albānī al-Ḥalabī, 1386/1967), 113.

[204] Al-Dhahabī, *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 1:26.

[205] On al-Ṭabarī's life and works see R. Paret, "al-Ṭabarī," *EI*^{1}; C.E. Bosworth, "al-Ṭabarī," *EI*^{2}; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 374; F. Rosenthal, ed. and tr., *The History of al-Ṭabarī (Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk), vol. I, General introduction and From the creation to the flood* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 5-80; J.D. McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, 38-45; C.F. Robinson, "al-Ṭabarī," in *Arabic Literary Culture, 500-925*, ed. M. Cooperson and S.M. Toorawa, Dictionary of Literary Biography; 311 (Detroit: Thomson-Gale, 2005), 332-343; H. Kennedy, ed., *al-Ṭabarī: A Medieval Muslim Historian and His Work*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam; XV (Princeton: Darwin Press, 2008).

[206] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 11:279.

The sources' representation of Ibn Salām as the foremost expert in Jewish scriptures is not an objective historical assessment of Torah learning among the Medinan Jews of Muḥammad's time. Rather, the sources emphasize Ibn Salām's learnedness in Jewish scriptures in order to 1) praise him, 2) confer legitimacy upon Muḥammad whose prophethood was recognized by Ibn Salām, and 3) condemn the rest of Medinan Jewry for failing to follow the example of their eminent rabbi and scholar. In other words, praising Ibn Salām's learnedness in the Torah is part of the broader project in the biographies of legitimizing Muḥammad's prophetic claims by constructing and appealing to authoritative Jewish testimony. In highlighting his learnedness and scholarly background, the biographical literature is attempting to lend credibility and significance to the claim that Ibn Salām recognized Jewish scriture's description of Muḥammad. Ibn Salām is represented as being learned in Jewish scriptures to the extent that he recognizes their confirmation of Muḥammad's mission. A prominent theme of the traditional narratives of Muḥammad's encounter with the Jews of Medina is the idea that the Torah in the Jews' possession contained passages confirming Muḥammad's status and the divine origins of the Qurʾān.[207] In this context, Ibn Salām's unrivaled knowledge of the Torah only enhances the integrity and rhetorical power of his conversion, which, according to many accounts, ocurred as a result of his recognition of the Torah's mention of Muḥammad's name (*ism*) and description (*ṣifa*).[208] Therefore, by advancing the claim that the most learned and distinguished scholar in Medina recognized Muḥammad from his description in the Torah the sources are, in fact, legitmizing Muḥammad and embellishing his prophetic credentials. Ibn Salām's honest interpretation of scripture and

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[207] G. Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering*, 218.

[208] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 363.

scholarly repute are used in the sources to demonstrate the doctrine that Jewish scriptures testify to Muḥammad's mission. From this perspective, the representations of Ibn Salām and details of his biography provide a window into how Muslims during the classical and post-classical period understood the interconnection between Jewish scriptures, their interpretation, and the legitimacy of Muḥammad's mission.

To legitimize their depiction of Ibn Salām as *the* renowned religious scholar in Medina on the eve of Islam, the biographies assert that the Arabian Jews themselves venerated Ibn Salām and recognized his immense learning and distinguished ancestry. According to a number of the accounts of the conversion, the Jews of Medina clearly admit to Muḥammad that they considered Ibn Salām to be their most illustrious rabbi and scholar. By highlighting the reverence that the Jews reportedly had for Ibn Salām, the sources emphasize the gravity of his conversion while also embellishing Muḥammad's credentials as a prophet. The Jews' lauditory remarks occur in the context of a ruse that Ibn Salām devises with Muḥammad to reveal the ingrained deceit and hypocricy of the Jews, who at this point in the conversion accounts have yet to learn that their rabbi has converted to Islam.[209] Ibn Salām, who having converted now shares the suspicion and distrust that Muḥammad and his followers harbor towards the Jews, anticipates that when his former co-religionists learn of his conversion they will demonstrate their true hypocricy by slandering him; and so he instructs Muḥammad to question the Jews about his status among them. In response to Muḥammad's question, the Jews readily admit that Ibn Salām is indeed "our chief and the son our chief, our rabbi and scholar" (*sayyidunā*

[209] The ruse devised by Ibn Salām is briefly discussed in Gordon Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering*, 215.

wa-ibn sayyidinā wa-ḥabrunā wa-ʿālimunā).[210] In another account of the exchange the response that the Jews give to Muḥammad is even more laudatory:

> "He is the best among us and a descendant of our best; the most knowledgable in God's scripture; our chief, scholar, and the most favored among us" (*khayrunā wa-ibn kayrinā wa-aʿlamunā bi-kitāb allāh sayyidunā wa-ʿālimunā wa-afḍalunā*).[211]

All the variant reports of the Jews' description of Ibn Salām are unanimous in their depiction of him as the revered rabbi and leader of the Jews in Medina.[212] Additionally, the Jews' statement ascribes a distinguished and authoritative pedigree to Ibn Salām, who is identified as a descendent of the most prestigious leaders and Torah scholars of the community. The tradition implies a well-established tradition of Torah study in Arabia on the eve of Islam, and places Ibn Salām at the pinnacle of that tradition. In short, the biographies portray Ibn Salām as *the* celebrity among the Jews of Medina during the time of Muḥammad's career.

In addition to his descent from Medina's most notable Jewish scholars, the biographical literature embellishes Ibn Salām's ancestry by identifying him as a descendant of several revered figures from the Bible. As we previously mentioned, multiple sources state that Ibn Salām descended from Joseph (Yūsuf) and the biblical Patriarchs Abraham (Ibrāhīm), Isaac (Isḥāq) and Jacob (Yaʿqūb). The genealogy that the sources attribute to Ibn Salām is rather unique for a Companion, and it worth noting that the sources do not attribute a similarly distinguished ancestry to the famous Jewish

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[210] Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*, 363. According to other accounts, the Jews' response is "he is our chief and the son of our chief, our scholar and the son of our chief" (*sayyidunā wa-ibn sayyidinā ʿālimunā wa-ibn ʿāliminā*). Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:379, 380

[211] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:380.

[212] The Jews' description of Ibn Salām in the multiple versions of the tradition display minor differences in wording. See, for example, Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:378-380; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:106-108, 110-111; id., *Tahdhīb Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 7:448.

convert to Islam Kaʿb al-Aḥbār. Clearly, the line of descent beginning with Abraham, through the patriarchs, culminating in Ibn Salām is not a strict tribal genealogy of the type we would expect from the Arabic biographical and historiographical tradition which placed an enormous emphasis on specifying the lineage of the Arab tribes in pre-Islamic Arabia, as well as the tribal identity and genealogy of the early Muslims. As Michael Cooperson has noted, genealogy was often "a matter of assertion and negotiation rather than biological fact" which functioned in the Islamic biographical literature as a "framework within which scribal culture could convey information about the individual."[213] In the classical biographical literature, an individual's character, virtue, and social status could all be expressed through their genealogy. In this case, the genealogy proposed for Ibn Salām raises several immediate questions. First, what are the sources trying to convey about Ibn Salām by asserting his descent from Joseph and the biblical Patriarchs? And second, is this genealogy intended to convey information about Ibn Salām's genealogy, Jewish background, religious identity, or possibly, a combination thereof?

The genealogy that the sources provide for Ibn Salām places him in a spiritual line of descent and identifies him with the tradition of revelation, scriptures, and prophecy that the Qurʾān insists resides with Abraham and his progeny. For example, Qurʾān 29:27 distinguishes Abraham's progeny as follows:

> And We gave him Isaac and Jacob, and placed prophecy and the Scripture among his progeny (*wa-wahabnā la-hu Isḥāq wa-Yaʿqūb wa-jaʿlnā fī dhurrīyatihi a-n-nubuwwat wa-l-kitāb*). We gave him his reward in the world, and he will be among the righteous in the world to come.[214]

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[213] M. Cooperson, "Biographical Literature," 461.

[214] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 365.

The genealogy is an attempt to convey information about Ibn Salām's spritual and religious background, rather than his biological descent. The purpose of identifying Ibn Salām with Abraham and his progeny is to suggest that the Jewish convert has a particularly intimate knowledge of, and connection to, biblical revelation and scriptures. Ibn Salām's relationship to Abraham and his progeny – in particular, the tradition of prophecy and scripture that God bestowed exclusively among his descendants – has prepared him to recognize Muḥammad's prophethood as the culmination of revelations given first to Abraham, and subsequently, to the long line of biblical prophets among Abraham's descendants. The proposed genealogy, moreover, identifies Ibn Salām with the pure monotheism of Abraham that the Qurʾān identifies as the precedent and model for Muḥammad's mission. More so than establishing a biological, ethnic, or tribal link between the Patriarchs and Ibn Salām, the sources employ the genealogy to identify Ibn Salām with the the biblical revelations and scriptures that, according to the Qurʾān and Islamic doctrine, predict Muḥammad's mission.

3.3. Muḥammad's Illustrious Companion and Confidant

The biographical sources portray Ibn Salām as a celebrated Companion who was remarkable in his honesty, piety, and devotion to Muḥammad.[215] The biographies' representation of Ibn Salām as Medina's preeminent rabbi and scholar parallels his reputation among Muḥammad's Companions as an authoritative scholar whose extensive religious knowledge and learning was recognized by the early Muslims. The sources

[215] F. Haj Manouchehri, "ʿAbd Allāh ibn Salām," *EIs*.

praise Ibn Salām and embellish his status among the early Muslims by underscoring his close relationship with Muḥammad, and by reporting traditions where Muḥammad praises Ibn Salām. As is the case regarding his status among the Jews of Medina, several of the biographies directly address Ibn Salām's reputation among the Companions. Already in Ibn Saʿd's ninth century biographical work Ibn Salām is singled out as "one of the exalted Companions of God's messenger" (*min ʿillīyat aṣḥāb rasūl allāh min ahl al-dīn*),[216] while later sources describe Ibn Salām as a "well-known Companion" (*la-hu ṣuḥba mashhūra*)[217] who was counted among "the most distinguished of the prophet's Companions" (*min knawāṣṣ aṣḥāb al-nabī*).[218]

The sources draw attention to Ibn Salām's renown among the Companions as an authoritative source of religious knowledge by classifying him as a member of elite groups, or classes (*ṭāʾifa* pl. *ṭawāʾif*), comprised of Companions who were revered and held positions of authority in the early community on account of their religious learning and precedence in Islam. A *tāʾifa* in the classical biographical literature can be defined as a "group that has been entrusted with an exclusive body of knowledge or characteristic activity."[219] Examples of *tāʾifas* found in classical biographical literature include poets, Companions, *ḥadīth*-scholars, Qurʾān reciters, qurʾānic exegetes, or more broadly, scholars, jurists, and so on. Ibn Saʿd, for example, states that Ibn Salām belonged to a distinguished group of Companions who were recognized as "scholars and jurists (*ahl al-*

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[216] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:382. For the translation of the construction *min ʿillīyat* followed by a plural noun see E. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1968), 5:2125.

[217] Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī-t-tārīkh*, 3:439.

[218] Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-aʿlām*, 433.

[219] M. Cooperson, *Classical Arabic Biography*, 15.

ʿilm wa-l-fatwa) among the Companions of God's messenger,"[220] while the ninth century traditionist Abū Zurʿa ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ibn ʿUmar al-Dimashqī (d. 282/895)[221] regards Ibn Salām as one of the distinguished scholars of the first generation of Muslims, along with Muʿādh ibn Jabal, ʿAbdallāh ibn Masʿūd, and others.[222] Similarly, the tenth century traditionist and ḥadīth critic Abū Ḥātim Muḥammad Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965)[223] classifies Ibn Salām among "the Companions who possessed knowledge and were regarded as scholars of the scriptures" (*min fuqahāʾ al-ṣaḥāba wa-ʿulamāʾihim bi-l-kutub*).[224] Elsewhere, Ibn Salām is regarded as an authoritative theologian (*mutakallim*) among the Companions.[225] These Muslim scholars and biographers, therefore, are claiming that Ibn Salām as belonged to a specialized *tāʾifa* among Muḥammad's Companions. Ibn Salām is identified as a scholar, and more specifically, as a scholar of scriptures and scriptural traditions. Ibn Salām's proficiency in these areas of religious learning places him among the most distinguished Companions of Muḥammad. In particular, his learning in biblical scriptures (*kutub*) sets Ibn Salām apart from the majority of Muḥammad's early followers who were not of Jewish or Christian background, and are therefore, not traditionally regarded as experts in both qurʾānic and biblical traditions.[226] By praising Ibn Salām as a

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[220] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:304.

[221] See S.C. Judd, "Abū Zuraʿ al-Dimashqī," *EI*^{3}.

[222] Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī, *Kitāb al-Tārīkh*, ed. Luṭfī Manṣūr (ʿAmmān: Dār al-Fikr, 1429/2008), 1:475.

[223] See J.W. Fück, "Ibn Ḥibbān," *EI*^{2}; P. Pavlovitch, "Ibn Ḥibbān al-Bustī," *EI*^{3}.

[224] Ibn Ḥibbān, *Mashāhīr ʿulamāʾ al-amṣār*, 36. Ibn Ḥibbān uses the term *fuqahāʾ* in its non-technical sense to identify an idividual who possesses knowledge (*fiqh*) of something, rather than the technical meaning that the term later acquired as a specialist in Islamic law (*sharīʿa*) and the science of its derivative details (*furūʿ*). On the meanings of *faqīh* see E. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 6:2429-2430; D.B. Macdonald, "Faḳīh," *EI*^{2}. Al-Dhahabī similarly characterizes Ibn Salām as a "scholar among the Companions" (*min ʿulamāʾ al-ṣaḥāba*). *Tadhhīb tahdhīb*, 5:172.

[225] Al-Sakhāwī, *al-Iʿlān*, 338.

[226] This is not to say that knowledge of Jewish or Christian traditions among the Companions belonged exclusively to those who had converted from either Judaism or Christianity. For a discussion of other

scholar of Jewish and Islamic scriptures, the biographies supply him with what Michael Cooperson describes as a "figurative genealogy," meaning, "membership in an intellectual or spiritual line of descent."[227] Here, Ibn Salām is placed at the beginning of an intellectual line of descent as the first Jewish convert among the Companions who is recognized for his learning in both Jewish and Muslim scriptures, as well as the interpretive traditions surrounding those scriptures. Portraying Ibn Salām in this way necessarily involves a certain amount of revisionism and back-projection on the part of the Islamic biographical tradition, which represents Ibn Salām as a full-fledged qurʾānic exegete (*mufassir*), rabbi, and scholar of biblical scriptures.

The sources also attribute statements praising Ibn Salām's religious learning to the revered Companion Muʿādh ibn Jabal (d. 18/639), one of Muḥammad's scribes who was famously appointed by the prophet to serve as the chief judge (*qādī*) in Yemen.[228] According to one version of the tradition, one of Muʿadh's students, Yazīd ibn ʿAmīra al-Saksakī, fears that once his teacher dies he will no longer be able to study and gain knowledge (*ʿilm*). In an attempt to console his grieving student, Muʿādh orders Yazīd to study with four prominent Companions, one of whom is Ibn Salām.[229] In another version of the the tradition, Muʿādh's students ask him to designate his successor before he dies,

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Companions and members of the early community who were reportedly familiar with aspects of the biblical tradition, see S. Lowin, *The Making of a Forefather*, 8-15.

[227] M. Cooperson, "Biographical Literature," 462.

[228] It is worth noting that Michael Lecker has uncovered exegetical traditions in the qurʾānic commentaries that strongly suggest that Muʿādh was a former Jew. See "Ḥudhayfa b. al-Yamān and ʿAmmār b. Yāsir, Jewish Converts to Islam," *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 11 (1993), 152.

[229] In the multiple recensions of the tradition, the names of the individuals listed by Muʿādh varies, although Ibn Salām is named throughout. The other Companions that are mentioned in the tradition are ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd, Salmān al-Fārisī, ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, and ʿUwaymar Abī Dardāʾ. See Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:304; 5:383; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Faḍāʾil al-ṣaḥāba*, 144; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 16:122; al-Shīrāzī, *Ṭabaqāt al-fuqahāʾ*, ed. Iḥsān ʿAbbās (Beirut: Dār al-Rāʾid al-ʿArabī, 1981), 43,47; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:128-129; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, 266; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-aʿlām*, 434-435; id., *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 1:26; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 6:109.

at which point Muʿādh instructs them to seek out Ibn Salām and other distinguished Companions for religious knowledge.[230] Given his own standing as a prominent Companion who was recognized as an authority in legal matters and qurʾānic exegesis, Muʿādh's endorsement of Ibn Salām as an expert in religious learning confers authority and distinction upon the Jewish convert. Moreover, the statement attibuted to Muʿādh places Ibn Salām in the company of some of Muḥammad's earliest and most influential followers, such as the renowned Qurʾān reciter ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd (d. 32/652), the second Caliph of Islam ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb (r. 13/634-23/644), and the legendary Persian convert to Islam Salmān al-Fārisī (d. 35/655-666 or 36/656-657). The above mentioned Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī also identifies Ibn Salām with these figures, and describes them collectively as the "religious scholars who succeeded Muʿādh ibn Jabal" (*al-ʿulamāʾ baʿd Muʿādh ibn Jabal*).[231]

3.4. Muḥammad's Praise for Ibn Salām

The sources sanctify Ibn Salām with a number of traditions whose primary purpose is to show that Muḥammad held Ibn Salām in high esteem and that the two were particularly close to one another. As we have already seen, the biographical sources maintain that Muḥammad personally gave Ibn Salām the name ʿAbdallāh upon his conversion to Islam and also named Ibn Salām's firstborn son Yūsuf.[232] The names that the prophet is reported to have given the Jewish convert and his firstborn son are particularly significant in light

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[230]Al-Nasāʾī, *Fadāʾil al-ṣaḥāba*, 144; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq,* 29:129; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, 3:266; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 6:109.

[231] Abū Zurʿa al-Dimashqī, *al-Tārīkh*, 1:475.

[232] See note 2 and 71 above.

of statements attributed to Muḥammad that the names ʿAbdallāh and those of the prophets, including Yūsuf, are those most favored by God.[233] In the case of Ibn Salām, the name ʿAbdallāh (lit. "slave of God") is meant to reflect the new Islamic spirit of obedience and submission to God and his prophet Muḥammad demonstrated by Ibn Salām's conversion to Islam.[234] It is not uncommon in the sources for Muḥammad to provide a Companion with a suitabe Islamic name either to mark the individual's conversion to Islam, or to replace a name that was felt to evoke vestiges of the pre-Islamic pagan society of Arabia (*al-jāhilīya*). Far less common, however, are traditions where Muḥammad, rather than a child's father as was customary among the Arabs, names the firstborn son of a Companion. This tradition praises and sanctifies Ibn Salām by giving him the honor and privelege of having his firstborn son named by Muḥammad. At the same time, the tradition of Yūsuf's naming is intended to show that Ibn Salām was a particularly important and close Companion of Muḥammad.

The biographical literature explicitly illustrates Muḥammad's reverence and admiration for Ibn Salām in traditions where the prophet promises Ibn Salām entry into paradise. Apparently, the tradition of Muḥammad promising Ibn Salām paradise was so widely transmitted and well known during the medieval period that al-Dhahabī begins his biography of the convert by describing him as "the one who was guaranteed paradise" (*al-mashhūd la-hu bi-l-jinna*).[235] One version of the tradition is attributed to the Companion Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ, who is often regarded by Islamic tradition as one of

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[233] M.J. Kister, "Call yourselves by graceful names," 8, 20.

[234] Ibid. 8.

[235] Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 1:432.

the ten Companions to whom Muḥammad guaranteed entry into paradise.[236] ʿĀmir ibn Saʿd ibn Abī Waqqāṣ reports his father as saying: "I never heard the Prophet say of anyone who walked the face of the earth that he would be among the denizens of paradise (*innahu min ahl al-jinna*) except for ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām."[237] According to another tradition reported on the authority of the previously mentioned Muʿādh ibn Jabal, Muḥammad identifies Ibn Salām as "the tenth of the ten individuals [guarunteed to enter] paradise" (*innahu ʿāshir al-ʿashara fī-l-jinna*).[238] As in the case of Muʿādh's praise of Ibn Salām's learnedness, these traditions place Ibn Salām in the company of Muḥammad's closest Companions and several of the most revered figures of the early Muslim community.

Other traditions praising Ibn Salām along similar lines depict Muḥammad indirectly designating Ibn Salām among those who will be in paradise in the presence of other Companions. In one such tradition, Muḥammad appears before a group of his Companions with a large bowl of *tharīd*, a dish consisting of bread, meat, and broth,[239]

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[236] For the ten Companions who were promised paradise by Muḥammad, traditionally designated as the "ten to whom Paradise was promised" (*al-ʿashara al-mubashshara*), see by A.J. Wensinck, "al-ʿAshara al-Mubashshara," *EI*^{2}; and M. Yazigi, "*Ḥadīth al-ʿashara* or the Political Uses of a Tradition," *Studia Islamica* 86 (1997), 159-167; al-Ṭabarī, *al-Riyāḍ al-naḍara fī manāqib al-ʿashara* (Cairo: Maṭbaʿ al-Khānjī,1326/1909); al-Shawkānī, *Darr al-saḥāba fī manāqib al-qarāba wa-l-ṣaḥāba*, ed. Ḥ. Al-ʿAmrī (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1404/1984), 127-138.

[237] G.H.A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, 303-304; Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 3:32; id., *Faḍāʾil al-ṣaḥāba*, 144; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6:160; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:160; al-Nasāʾī, *Faḍāʾil al-ṣaḥāba*, 144; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 16:120; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 3:54; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tahdhīb*, 7:449; id., *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:116-118; al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmāʾ*, 366; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar aʿlām*, 1:434; id., *Tadhhīb tahdhīb*, 5:172; id., *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 1:26; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 6:109; id., *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb*, 5:249.

[238] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:304, 5:383; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istīʿāb*, 3:54; Ibn ʿAsakir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:128-129; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd al-ghāba*, 3:266; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-aʿlām*, 1:434; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 6:109.

[239] On the definition of *tharīd*, see E.W. Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon*, 1:334-335.

and begins to eat what is reported to have been one of his favourite dishes.[240] After he has eaten his fill, Muḥammad leaves what is left of the *tharīd* in the bowl and tells the Companions gathered before him: "A man who is a denizen of paradise will come this way and eat these leftovers" (*yadkhul min hādhā al-fajj rajul min ahl al-jinna yaʾkul hādhih al-faḍlat*).[241] Ibn Salām appears on the scene and eats the *tharīd* that has been left out by Muḥammad. A similar tradition omits the detail of the leftover *tharīd* and simply portrays Muḥammad declaring to a group of his Companions, "A man who is a denizen of paradise will appear on this road" (*la-yaṭluʿanna min hādhā al-shiʿb rajul min ahl al-jinna*), at which point Ibn Salām appears.[242]

Another clear example of Islamic tradition's praise for Ibn Salām are the traditions in which Ibn Salām recounts a mysterious dream, or vision (*ruʾya*), that he had to the prophet, who then provides his interpretation.[243] As scholars have noted, narratives of dreams and dream interpretation was a literary device used by medieval traditionists, biographers, and historiographers to legitimize historical figures, groups, or doctrines.[244] In particular, Muḥammad's interpretation of the dreams and visions of his followers is a common trope found in the biographical literature which serves to sanctify and lend

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[240] M. Rodinson, "Ghidhāʾ," *EI*^{2}. *Tharīd* appears to be closely associated with the Quraysh tribe, the annual pilgrimage in pre-Islamic Arabia to the Kaʿba in Mecca, and the prophet's great-grand-father Ḥāshim ibn ʿAbd al-Manāf. According to one account, a famine in pre-Islamic Arabia made food particularly scarce in Mecca one year during the annual pilgrimage. As one of the leading member of the Quraysh who was responsible for feeding the pilgrims, the prophet's great-grand-father brought back loaves of bread from Syria and crumbled (*ḥashama*) them to make *tharīd* for the pilgrims at the Kaʿba. Following this event, he was known as Ḥāshim, although his proper name was ʿAmr. See P. Crone, *Meccan Trade*, 207; W.M. Watt, "Ḥāshim b. ʿAbd al-Manāf," *EI*^{2}.

[241] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:120.

[242] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tahdhīb*, 7:449; id., *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:119

[243] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:383-385; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīh*, 16:123-124; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Tahdhīb*, 7:450; id., *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:122-128; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa*, 1:309-310; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-aʿlām*, 1:434; id., *Tadhkirat al-ḥuffāẓ*, 1:27.

[244] L. Kinberg, "Dreams," *EI*^{3}.

authority to the Companions and other celebrated figures of early Islam.[245] During the medieval period, dreams were believed to contain profound truths regarding an individual's nature and ultimate fate in the hereafter. However, it was felt that the interpretation of dreams (*taʿbīr al-ruʾyā*),[246] which were believed to occur as a result of divine intervention akin to the inspiration of prophecy, required the insight and knowledge that only God's prophets possessed. Thus, Muḥammad's interpretations of his followers' dreams are regarded in the biographical literature as the true, authoritative, and binding pronouncements of the prophet.

According to a tradition related by the Companion Qays ibn ʿUbād, the story of Ibn Salām's dream begins in the mosque of Medina (*masjid al-madīna*).[247] Qays describes how Ibn Salām – described in the text as "a man whose face had a mark of submissiveness and humility" (*rajul bi-wajh athr min khushūʿ*) – approached the entrance to the mosque when those who were gathered inside declared: "This man is among the denizens of paradise" (*hādha rajul min ahl al-jinna*).[248] After Ibn Salām has quickly performed his morning prayers (*rakaʿtayn*) and left the mosque, Qays follows him back to his home and relates the words of praise that the people had for him.[249] Ibn Salām's

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[245] L. Kinberg, tr., *Morality in the Guise of Dreams: a Critical Edition of* Kitāb al-Manām *with Introduction*, Islamic Philosophy Theology and Science: Texts and Studies; XVIII (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 41. On dreams and dream interpretation in Islamic intellectual history see L. Kinberg, "Dreams," *EI*^{3}; id., "Literal Dreams and Prophetic ḥadīth in classical Islam – a comparison of two ways of legitimization," *Der Islam* 70.2 (1993), 279-300; J.C. Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim Tradition of Dream Interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002); E. Sirriyeh, *Dreams & Visions in the World of Islam: A History of Muslim Dreaming and Foreknowing* (London: I.B. Taurus, 2015).

[246] T. Fahd, "Taʿbīr al-ruʾya," *EI*^{2}.

[247] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:383; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6: 161; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:160-161; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa*, 6:461-462; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:122-123; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-aʿlām*, 1:436; Ibn Kathīr, *al-Bidāya wa-n-nihāya*, 6:225.

[248] Ibid.

[249] "*fa-dakhala al-masjid fa-ṣalā rakaʿtayn fa-awjaza fīhimā fa-lammā kharaja attabaʿtuhu ḥattā dakhala manzilahu fa-dakhaltu maʿhu fa-ḥaddathtuhu fa-lammā istaʾnasa qultu: inna al-qawm lammā dakhalta qibala al-masjid qālū kādhā wa kādhā.*" Ibid.

response to Qays shows his true piety and humility: "It is inappropriate for anyone to say what they do not know" (*lā yanbaghī li-aḥad yaqūl mā-lā yaʿlam*).[250] The statement attributed to Ibn Salām implies that only God and his prophet Muḥammad have the knowledge of who is destined to enter paradise. The narrative portrays Ibn Salām as being troubled by what he views as the gossip and trivial talk of those in the mosque of Medina. This is the context in which Ibn Salām narrates his dream and Muḥammad's subsequent interpretation to Qays in order to illustrate the principle that "it is inappropriate for anyone to say what they do not know." The account of the dream which is reported by Ibn Salām in the first-person is provided below in full:

> I had a vision during the time of God's messenger (*raʾaytu ruʾyā ʿalā ʿahd rasūl allāh*) and I related it to him. I dreamt as if I was in a green meadow (*rawḍa ḥaḍrāʾ*); in the middle of the meadow there was an iron pillar (*ʿamūd ḥadīd*). The base of the pillar was on the ground and the top of it was in heaven (*asfalahu fī-l-arḍ wa-aʿlāhu fī-s-samāʾ*). At the top of the pillar there was a handle (*ʿurwa*). Then I was told, 'Climb the pillar (*aṣʿad ʿalayhi*)!' And I said, 'I can't.' Then a righteous man (*munṣif*) came to me and raised my clothes behind me and said, 'Climb the pillar!' So I climbed until I took hold of the firmest handle (*fa-ṣaʿadtu ḥattā akhadhtu bi-l-ʿurwat al-wuthqā*). Then I awoke and the handle was in my hands. And when I awoke in the morning I went to God's messenger and related my dream to him and he said: 'As for the meadow, it is the meadow of Islam. And as for the pillar, it is the pillar of Islam. And as for the handle, it is the firmest handle (*al-ʿurwat al-wuthqā*). Truly, you will remain firmly comitted to Islam until you die (*anta ʿalā l-islām ḥattā tamūt*).'[251]

Unlike the previous remarks of those gathered in the mosque of Medina, Muḥammad's interpretation of the dream serves as a decisive and authoritative assessment of Ibn Salām's commitment to Islām. The symbol of Ibn Salām's sincerity and devotion to Islam in the dream is his taking hold of the "firmest handle" (*al-ʿurwat al-wuthqā*), a

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[250] Ibid.

[251] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 5:384; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 6:161; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:161; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:122-123; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-aʿlām*, 1:436.

phrase used in the Qurʾān to indicate a complete submission and devotion to God that is unbreakable.[252] This connotation is made explicit, for example, in Qurʾān 2:256:

> There is no compulsion in religion. The right course has been clearly distinguished from error. Those who reject idols and believe in God have grasped the firmest handle which will never be broken (*fa-qad istamsaka bi-l-ʿurwat al-wuthqā lā infiṣām la-hā*).[253]

The prophet's interpretation of the dream praises Ibn Salām by characterizing his devotion in terms that the Qurʾān uses to describe complete and unwavering submission to God. Thus, Ibn Salām's conversion to Islam is validated by Muḥammad, and the Jewish convert is praised and singled out as an example of someone who has truly "grasped the firmest handle which will never be broken."

Muḥammad's interpretation in another account of the dream guaruntees Ibn Salām's status among the denizens of paradise. The account begins with a mysterious figure who visits Ibn Salām and invites him along on a wondrous journey (*manhaj ʿaẓīm*).[254] Two paths appear before Ibn Salām, one to his right and one to his left. He follows the path to the right and arrives at a treacherous mountain (*jabal zalaq*) when suddenly an iron column with a gold handle (*ʿurwat dhahab*) appears at the mountain's peak. Ibn Salām's companion takes his hand and pushes him until he takes hold of the gold handle. After recounting his dream to Muḥammad, the prophet declares the following:

> As for the wondrous journey, it was the final judgment (*al-maḥshir*). The path that appeared to you on your left was the path of the denizens of Hell (*ṭarīq ahl al-nār*); and you do not belong among them. The path that appeared to your right

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[252] The phrase *al-ʿurwat al-wuthqā* occurs twice in the Qurʾān: at 2:256 and 31:22. A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 58, 378.

[253] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 58.

[254] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:385. A variant of Ibn Saʿd's narrative is reported in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 7:162.

> was the path of the denizens of Paradise (*ṭarīq ahl al-jinna*). The treacherous mountain was the abode of the martyrs (*manzil al-shuhadāʾ*). And as for the handle that you took hold of, that was the handle of Islam; so take firm hold of it until you die (*fa-stamsik bi-hā ḥattā tamūt*).[255]

Muḥammad's explanation sanctifies Ibn Salām and confers upon him the authority that one secures from receiving the prophet's praise and admiration. Additionally, Muḥammad's affirmation of Ibn Salām's sincerity and devotion to Islam absolves the latter of any suspicion or criticism among subsequent generations of Muslims that may have arisen on account of his Jewish background.

3.4. The Qurʾān's Praise for Ibn Salām

The biographies of Ibn Salām contain numerous traditions identifying the convert with the revelation of particular qurʾānic verses. The verse most commonly associated with Ibn Salām is Qurʾān 46:10, which is typically understood in the qurʾānic commentaries as alluding to his conversion to Islam. Although the role that the figure of Ibn Salām plays in the qurʾānic commentaries will be treated fully in the following chapter, it is important at this point to recognize that Ibn Salām's association with the revelation of qurʾānic verses is a major feature of how he is represented in the biographical literature as a sincere convert from the People of the Book who affirms Muḥammad's prophetic claims. While in the qurʾānic commentaries scriptural verses are regularly interpreted to refer to key figures who participated in the early community, including the Companions, members of the prophet's family, and Muḥammad's opponents in Mecca and Medina, the

[255] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 5:385.

biographical sources selectively include exegetical traditions that specify the qurʾānic verses that were revealed in reference to Ibn Salām's conversion and virtue. By including traditions in their biographies that interpret the Qurʾān's statements regarding the pious, sincere, and praiseworthy members the People of the Book as identifying Ibn Salām, the sources endow him with the authority, legitimacy and praise of Islamic scripture.

Although the qurʾānic commentaries associate Ibn Salām with numerous verses in the Qurʾān,[256] the biographical literature includes traditions that identify him with a select number of qurʾānic verses in their presentation of his biography. In a sense, the biographies include only the traditions of qurʾanic references to Ibn Salām that were popularly known and widely accepted during the classical period. Their inclusion of these exegetical traditions is governed by a desire to represent the Jewish convert as an authoritative and trustworthy testament to the truth of Muḥammad's prophetic claims. The first tradition that the biographies cite pertains to Qurʾān 46:10:

> Say, 'Have you considered? If it is from God and you do not believe in it, and a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to its like and has believed (*wa-shāhada shāhid min banī Isrāʾīl*), and you are haughty – God does not guide the people who do wrong.'[257]

In its scriptural context, the verse is a rhetorical and polemical statement that has traditionally been understood as an exhortation addressed to Muḥammad's opponents to accept the Qurʾan as divine revelation. The verse rhetorically points to an unnamed "witness from the Children of Israel" (*shāhid min banī Isrāʾīl*) who has testified to the

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[256] See Gordon Nickel's discussion of Ibn Salām in one of the earliest commentaries on the Qurʾān, the *Tafsīr* of Muqātil b. Sulaymān. G. Nickel, *Narraratives of Tampering*, 174-175. In her study of how the Qurʾānic commentaries address the Qurʾan's references to Christians, J.D. McAullife discusses several verses where the commentators identify Ibn Salām. See J.D. McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, 161, 163-165,195-196, 242-243, 246.

[257] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 463.

Qurʾān's divine status. The attestation of the unnamed witness mentioned in the verse is clearly deemed by the Qurʾān to be authoritative, to the extent that his positive reception of the Qurʾān is singled out by Islamic scripture in an attempt to persuade Muḥammad's opponents.

The biographical sources present multiple traditions where renowned exegetical authorites of the generation of the Sucessors to the Companions (*al-tābiʿūn*), such as Abū al-Ḥajjāj Mujāhid ibn Jabr (d. ca. 100/718 – 104/722),[258] Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Muzāhim al-Balkhī (d. 106/724),[259] and Abū al-Khaṭṭāb Qatāḍa ibn Diʿāma (d. ca. 117/735),[260] declare that the verse in question refers to Ibn Salām. In addition to these exegetical authorities, the prophet Muḥammad is reported to have claimed that the verse refers to Ibn Salām.[261] In a somewhat peculiar tradition, Ibn Salām himself states:

> Verses from God's scripture were revealed concerning me (*anzalat fīya āyāt min kitāb allāh*). "…and a witness from the Children of Israel has testified to its like" (Qurʾān 46:10) was revealed concerning me, as well as the verse, "Say, 'God is sufficient witness between me and you, [as are] those who possess knowledge of the Scripture'" (Qurʾān 13:43).[262]

This tradition reflects the idea that it was a privelege and an honor for Companion to have a qurʾānic verse revealed about them, whether the verse referred to their conversion to

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[258] Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:305, 5:382; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 11:279; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:130. On Mujāhid's biography see A. Rippin, "Mudjāhid b. Djabr al-Makkī." *EI*^{2}; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 504.

[259] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 11:279-280; al-Baghawī, *Muʿjam al-ṣaḥāba*, 4:103; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:130. On al-Ḍaḥḥāk's life and career see al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 155; Cl. Gilliot, "A Schoolmaster, Storyteller, Exegete, and Warrior at Work in Khurasan: al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāhim al-Hilālī (d. 106/724)," in *Aims, Methods, and Contexts of Qurʾānic Exegesis (2nd/8th – 9th/15th c.)*, Institute of Ismaili Studies Qurʾānic Studies Series; IX, ed. K. Bauer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 311-392.

[260] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 11:279; al-Baghawī, *Muʿjam al-ṣaḥāba*, 4:103; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madinat Dimashq*, 29:130-131. On Qatāda's biography see Ch. Pellat, "Katāda b. Diʿāma," *EI*^{2}; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 332-333; A.R. al-Salimi, *Early Islamic Law in Basra in the 2nd/8th Century: Aqwāl Qatada b. Diʿāma al-Sadūsī*, Islamic History and Civilization; CXLII (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 3-10.

[261] Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:100.

[262] Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *al-Iṣāba*, 6:110.

Islam, support of Muḥammad in battle, or struggle against the prophet's opponents in Mecca or Medina. Despite the humility that Ibn Salām demonstrates in other traditions we have examined, here he appears to be boasting that several verses of the Qurʾān were revealed to highlight his conversion to Islam. Other versions of this tradition are found in al-Ṭabarī's qurʾānic commentary and are attributed to Ibn Salām's descendants, including his grandson, Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām, and an unnamed nephew of Ibn Salām (*ibn akhī ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām*).[263] It is likely that traditions of this kind would have been preserved and circulated among Ibn Salām's descendants as a way to honor and assert the prestige of their famous ancestor. Scholars include these exegetical traditions in the biographical notices on Ibn Salām as a way of sanctifying and honoring him. This is reflected, for example, in the Damascene traditionist Muḥyī al-Dīn Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Nawawī's (d. 676/1277)[264] biographical notice on Ibn Salām, where he states that Qurʾān 46:10 and 13:43 were revealed "concerning his [Ibn Salām's] distinction (*nazzala fī faḍlihi*).[265] Al-Nawawī's remark implies that Ibn Salām's conversion was such a momentous and praisworthy event during Muḥammad's career that it received God's attention and praise in the form of serveral qurʾānic revelations.

The biographies of Ibn Salām also praise him by identifying him as the subject of a phrase used in Qurʾān 13:43 to highlight and confer authority upon a group of individuals who are learned in God's scripture:

> Those who do not believe say, 'You are not sent as a messenger.' Say, 'God is sufficient witness between me and you (*kaffā bi-llāh shahīdan baynī wa-*

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[263] Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, 11:279.

[264] See W. Heffening, "al-Nawawī," *EI*^{2}.

[265] al-Nawawī, *Tahdhīb al-asmāʾ*, 366. For additional citations of these two Qurʾānic verses in biographical entries on Ibn Salām see al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 15:74; and al-Khazrajī, *Khulāṣat tadhhīb*, 2:77.

> *baynakum*), [as are] those who possess knowledge of the Scripture (*wa-man ʿinda-hu ʿilm al-kitāb*).'[266]

As in Qurʾān 46:10, the verse supplies Muḥammad with a rhetorical statement to deliver to his opponents. Those who would deny the authenticity of Muḥammad's prophecy and the Qurʾān's divine origin are confronted with the argument that God and those who are learned in scripture(s) confirm Muḥammad's legitimacy. The words used in both Qurʾān 46:10 and Qurʾān 13:43 to designate the the individual who attests, confirms, and serves as a witness (*shahada shāhid*, Qurʾān 46:10; and *shaḥīdan*, Qurʾān 13:43) are derived from the same root as, and indeed evoke, the declaration of faith (*shahāda*) that is pronounced when an individual converts to Islam. Thus, both of the verses that the biographical sources choose to include in their representations of Ibn Salām can rather easily be made to support and lend qurʾānic embellishment to the image of Ibn Salām as the emblematic Jewish convert to Islam.

Ibn Salām is identified with Qurʾān 13:43 in biographies from the ninth, twelfth, and fourteenth centuries.[267] As with Qurʾān 46:10, the biographies draw on exegetical traditions attributed to early authorities, such as Mujāhid, to show that the verse was revealed regarding Ibn Salām.[268] These traditions were most likely articulated and circulated initially in the context of qurʾānic exegesis, and were subsequently taken up by

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[266] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 238.

[267] The following biographical works cite traditions identifying Ibn Salām as the subject of Qurʾān 13:43. Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, 2:304, 5:382; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:131; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-aʿlām*, 435. Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, who is quoted in the later biographical work of al-Ṣafadī, relates the opinion of "some of the Qurʾān commentators" (*baʿḍ al-mufassirīn*) that both Qurʾān 13:43 and Qurʾān 46:10 were revealed concerning Ibn Salām. Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Iṣāba*, 3:54; and al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 17:199; Ibn al-ʿImād, *Shadarāt al-dhahab*, 1:233-234. Both verses are also mentioned in al-Ziriklī's biographical entry on Ibn Salām. al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām*, 4:90.

[268] For example, Ibn ʿAsākir cites two traditions attributed to Mujāhid ibn Jabr. *Taʾrīkh madīnat Dimashq*, 29:131.

the biographical tradition to praise Ibn Salam and embellish his image. At the same time, qurʾānic commentators like al-Ṭabarī and al-Suyūṭī cite traditions attributed to Ibn Salām, like that mentioned above regarding Qurʾān 46:10, to establish the specific subject of the verse.[269] The qurʾānic exegete al-Suyūṭī, for example, cites a tradition attributed to Ibn Salām's grandson, Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf ibn ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām, who reports that his grandfather stated "God revealed Qurʾān 13:43 concerning me" (*qad anzala allāh fīya*).[270]

Although Qurʾān 46:10 and Qurʾān 13:34 are the verses most frequently encountered in the biographies of Ibn Salām, the sources include exegetical traditions that identify Ibn Salām with several additional qurʾānic passages. For example, Ibn Saʿd reports traditions that identify Ibn Salām as the "learned of the Children of Israel" (*ʿulamā' banī Isrā'īl*) mentioned in Qurʾān 26:197.[271] The fourteenth century biographical works of al-Dhahabī and al-Ṣafadī count Ibn Salām among the righteous members of the people of the Book who are praised in Qurʾān 3:113: "Among the people of the Book there is an upright community (*umma qāʾima*) who recite the signs of God in the watches of the night and who prostrate themselves…"[272] As with the verses cited above, the biographical literature points to Qurʾān 26:197 and Qurʾān 2:113 as scriptural references to Ibn Salām to embellish his image as the primordial Jewish convert to Islam.

3.5. Conclusion

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[269] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmʿi al-bayān*, 7:409; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 4:591.

[270] Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 4:591.

[271] Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt*, 2:305; 5:382.

[272] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 76. al-Dhahabī, *Siyar al-aʿlām*, 434; al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfī bi-l-wafāyāt*, 17:199.

The ambivalence and selectivity that characterizes how the biographical literature portrays Ibn Salām's background and career points to a process of praise and sanctification at work in the representation of Muḥammad's Jewish Companion. The sources portray Ibn Salām as a towering figure among the Jews of Medina during Muḥammad's lifetime, and yet there is serious confusion, and to a certain degree apathy, regarding his affiliation with the famous Jewish tribes that play such a major role in accounts of Muḥammad's *Sīra*. Beyond his conversion to Islam – which, depending on the source, is dated to either an unspecified time during Muḥammad's preaching in Mecca (610-622), the first year of the *hijra* (1/622) immediately following Muḥammad's arrival in Medina, or two years before Muḥammad's death (10/632) – the biographies of Ibn Salām provide very few details regarding his subsequent activities in Medina, or his participation in the battles of the Islamic conquests and the political affairs of the early Islamic empire. Moreover, the narratives of his conversion – the event from Ibn Salām's career that recieves the most attention in the sources – are clearly not intended as objective historical accounts of a Jew's conversion during Muḥammad's time in Medina. Rather, the multiple narratives of Ibn Salām's conversion betray a clear effort to praise and sanctify the Jewish convert, and at the same time, demonstrate the legitimacy of Muhammad's prophecy. Moreover, the conversion narratives employ common tropes that are shared by many of the accounts of Muḥammad's interactions and polemical exchanges with the Jews found in the *Sīra*, such as the recurring motif of the Medinan Jews interrogating Muḥammad with questions to evaluate his claims to prophecy.

The project of sanctifying Ibn Salām goes beyond the narratives of his conversion and shapes how many details of his biography are presented in the sources. Regarding his

personal name, ʿAbdallāh, and that of his firsborn son Yūsuf, the sources praise Ibn Salām by giving him and his son the honor of being named by the prophet Muḥammad. Likewise, the treatment of Ibn Salām's tribal affiliation and genealogy is also colored by the process of sanctification. On the one hand, when the sources do address his precise affilitiation with the prominent Jewish tribes of Medina they are contradictory. While many of the sources agree that he belonged to the powerful Jewish tribe the Banū Qaynuqāʿ, there are also reports claiming that he was a member of the Banū al-Naḍīr or the marginal tribe of Zaydallāt. Most of the biographical sources, however, assert that Ibn Salām was consided by his Jewish contemporaries to have belonged to a long line of the settlement's Torah scholars and leaders whom the sources do not describe or name. On the other hand, when the sources recount Ibn Salām's ancestry they are virtually unanimous in highlighting his descent from Joseph and the patriarchs of the Bible. The classical works of Arabic literary biography appear to be unaware of, or unconcerned with, the details of Ibn Salām's affiliation with the Jews of Medina, including his family's history. The biographies highlight Ibn Salām's prestigious ancestry and his connection to Yathrib's foremost Torah scholars precisely because these are the qualities that – according to the biographical literature – make him the ideal Jewish witness to Muḥammad's prophetic claims.

Although the biographies take up issues that are typically considered historical in nature, such as the date and circumstances of Ibn Salām's conversion, his tribal affiliation, genealogy, and descendants, the representations of Ibn Salām are not critical and objective reports intended to shed light on a pivotal moment or significant figure from Muḥammad's career in Medina. Rather, the biographies of Ibn Salām belong to the

collective memory of Muslim communities that flourished during the classical and post-classical periods of Islamic history and, as such, are shaped by several major preoccupations, biases, and anxieties. Chief among these is a desire to show that Muḥammad's prophetic claims were acknowledged by leading representatives of the Christians and Jews of seventh century Arabia. Closely related to this concern is the need to demonstrate that Muḥammad's prophethood is anticipated and confirmed by Jewish or biblical scriptures. With this in mind, the representations of Ibn Salām in the biographical literature reflect how Muslims remembered and interpreted Muḥammad's encounter with the Jews of Medina, and Jewish scriptures' anticipation of Muḥammad and the rise of Islam.

The biographies of Ibn Salām are primarily interested in representing him as the symbol or personification of how the Jews of the past and present should respond to God's revelation to mankind through the prophet Muḥammad. As a symbol, Ibn Salām stands as a timeless testament to the perfidity and hypocracy of the Jews who have rejected their scriptures' anticipation of Muḥammad. At the same time, Ibn Salām is used to prove the Islamic doctrine that the biblical scriptures attest to the authenticity of Muḥammad and the Qurʾān that he was comissioned to recite. In this sense, Ibn Salām personifies the confirmation that Muslims believed the Torah affords Muḥammad and the Qurʾān. The biographical literature succeeds in transforming an individual Jew from Muḥammad's time in Medina into a timeless and enduring symbol by embellishing his credentials and virtues, and by narrating accounts of his conversion. In their representations of Ibn Salām, the biographical literature depicts a figure that is both anchored in Muḥammad's time in Medina, and yet timeless; a figure who is considered to

have been the most illustrious religious figure among the Jews of Muḥammad's day, and yet also a model Companion and confidant of the Prophet.

Having examined the ways that the classical Arabic biographical sources sanctify and praise Ibn Salām, it is now possible to identify the recurring tropes in the sources on Ibn Salām's biography and legendary image. The fundamental features of Ibn Salām's image are his authoritative status as a scholar of biblical scriptures and his sincerity. The biographies represent and highlight these two basic features of Ibn Salām's persona with several tropes. First, Ibn Salām's image as an authoritative scholar of biblical scriptures is expressed in traditions attesting to his ancestry, scholarly pedigree, and unrivaled standing among the Medinan Jews as their leading religious scholar. The sources also highlight and embellish Ibn Salām's status by pointing to his distinguished reputation among Muḥammad's Companions, who, we are told, regarded him as a scholar of the Bible, Qurʾān, and *ḥadīth* traditions. Ibn Salām's sincerity and pure religious conviction is expressed through several tropes, which often appear in the numerous accounts of his conversion to Islam. For example, the conversion narratives in which Ibn Salām achnowledges that Muḥammad is indeed the prophet predicted by biblical scriptures are intended to highlight his sincerity by contrasting his reception of Muḥammad with that of the Medinan Jews who corrupted, misinterpreted, and concealed parts of Jewish scripture. The conversion narratives also attempt to highlight Ibn Salāms sincerity by claiming that he converted as soon as Muḥammad arrived in Medina, or according to some traditions, even earlier while Muḥammad was still in Mecca. The sources also represent Ibn Salām's sincerity with tropes that involve Muḥammad. For example, the trope of Muḥammad's interpreting Ibn Salām's dream is intended to show that a deep and sincere conviction

prompted him to convert. The numerous traditions of Muḥammad guarunteeing Ibn Salām's place among the inhabitants of paradise are also intended to highlight the convert's sincerity and conviction.

4. Ibn Salām in the Qurʾānic Commentaries

4.1. Introduction

Ibn Salām's legendary image as the exemplary Jewish convert to Islam and model Companion to Muḥammad is embellished by his association with the revelation of many verses in the Qurʾān. As we have already seen, the biographical literature cites several verses that were widely held to have been revealed regarding Ibn Salām as a testament to his virtues (*fadāʾil*) and outstanding traits (*manāqib*). While the text of the Qurʾān does not identify Ibn Salām by name, qurʾānic commentaries composed during the classical and post-classical periods maintain that many scriptural verses were revealed to praise Ibn Salām, distinguish him from his Jewish contemporaries, and applaud his conversion to Islam. Given the ambiguity and often vague language of the Qurʾān, however, it is important to recognize that the identification of Ibn Salām as the subject or referent of the verses in question is a product of exegesis and, as such, should be viewed as part of the broader process in the classical Arabo-Islamic tradition of constructing Ibn Salām's mythical image.

Ibn Salām appears in the qurʾānic commentaries primarily in three contexts. First, he is cited as an authority in the chains of transmission (*asānīd*, sing. *isnād*) that precede exegetical traditions employed by the commentators to interpret a given qurʾānic verse. Additionally, Ibn Salām also serves as a protagonist in narrative traditions – collectively referred to as the "circumstances of revelation" – that are used by the qurʾanic exegetes to clarify the purported historical circumstances surrounding the revelation of an individual scriptural verse or group of verses. In many of these traditions, such as the narratives of

Ibn Salām's conversion discussed above, Ibn Salām figures prominently in formative episodes from Muḥammad's encounter with the Jews of Medina. And finally, the commentators may name Ibn Salām as the subject or referent of ambiguous scriptural verses with a brief exegetical gloss or paraphrase. This exegetical technique, which is described in the standard works on the qurʾānic sciences (*ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*) as "specifying the ambiguous" (*taʿyīn al-mubham*), is a major feature of the classical genre of qurʾānic commentary, which made it an exegetical priority to specify and name the individuals, places, and historical circumstances alluded to in the Qurʾān.[273]

What follows is an assessment of the contribution made by the tradition of qurʾānic commentary to Ibn Salām's symbolic and mythical image. Specifically, our aim is to trace how Ibn Salām's image is used in the qurʾanic commentaries to interpret and shape the meaning of Islamic scripture. Our analysis focuses on instances where the exegetes – typically with a brief exegetical gloss – identify Ibn Salām as the referent of qurʾānic verses that were believed to describe a distinguished and praiseworthy elite among the People of the Book who accepted Muḥammad's prophetic claims during his career. Many of these qurʾānic passages make an appeal to Jews and Christians to supply confirmation that Muḥammad belongs to the line of biblical prophets, and that the Qurʾān he has been commisioned to recite is to be regarded as divine revelation. These texts from the qurʾānic commentaries are particularly valuable for the light they shed on how Ibn Salām's image was embellished and placed in the service of defending Islamic doctrine. Whereas the "circumstances of revelation" traditions involving Ibn Salām are primarily concerned with situating vague scriptural passages within the narrative framework of

[273] See J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 135-136, and B. Fudge, *Qurʾānic Hermeneutics*, 89-92.

Muḥammad's encounter with Medina's Jews,[274] the exegetical glosses found in the commentaries demonstrate how the commentators appealed to and employed Ibn Salām's image to uphold and construct the scriptural authority of the Qurʾān through exegesis. In appealing to Ibn Salām's image to defend the scriptural status of the Qurʾān, I argue, the commentators also uphold and embellish Ibn Salām's sanctified image as the ideal Jewish convert to Islam. The commentaries embellish Ibn Salām's status as a model Companion and pious Jewish convert by anchoring his virtues – particularly his commitment to Islam and expertise in biblical scriptures and traditions – in the qurʾānic verses that appeal to a righteous minority among the People of the Book to serve as proof of Muḥammad's prophecy. In this way, Ibn Salām's image is deployed in the commentaries to prove Muḥammad's prophecy and defend the Qurʾān's scriptural status. Through exegesis, the commentators buttress the virtues that dominate Ibn Salām's representation in the biographical literature and supply his image with qurʾānic colouring, legitimacy, and praise.

Our textual analysis of material from the commentaries begins by identifying the themes and rhetorical patterns shared by the scriptural verses that prompted, and indeed invited, the qurʾānic commentators to identify Ibn Salām through exegetical glosses. Ultimately, these glosses read Ibn Salām into the qurʾānic revelation where he is designated to serve as proof of Muḥammad's legitimacy as God's messenger and the Qurʾān's divine origin. Ibn Salām is deployed in the commentaries on these passages to provide the confirmation that, according to Islamic scripture and doctrine, Jewish scripture affords Muḥammad's claims to prophecy. The sustained reading of Ibn Salām

[274] On the broad function of the *asbāb al-nuzūl* traditions to historicize qurʾānic passages by relating them to episodes in Muḥammad's career see A. Rippin, "Occasions of Revelation," *EQ*, 3:569-573; id., "The Function of 'asbāb al-nuzūl'," 1-20.

into these verses across the major works of qurʾānic commentary from the classical and post-classical periods shows that his image was constructed in the context of contemporary discourses and polemics concerning the Qurʾān's authority vis-à-vis Jewish scriptures, and interpretations of Muḥammad's formative encounter with the Jews. In other words, it is impossible to account for the origins, development, and subsequent reception of Ibn Salām's image without taking into account how his image is used in the qurʾānic commentaries to interpret and shape the meaning of the Islamic scripture.

4.2. Qurʾānic Verses Addressed to Muḥammad

The first group of qurʾānic verses that prompt the commentators to identify Ibn Salām are distinguished by their pattern of address, in that they imply, or explicitly address, an *individual* addressee who the commentators routinely identify as Muḥammad.[275] These verses, read through the commentary of the exegetes, console and encourage Muḥammad in the face of doubts concerning the Qurʾān's revelation, and at times supply him with an appropriate response to critics who refused to accept the Qurʾān as authentic divine revelation. While the passages contain numerous ambiguities that demand interpretation and clarification by the commentators, in their scriptural context it is clear that the verses are intimately concerned with the status of Muḥammad and the revelation he has been

[275] For a brief survey and discussion of these types of verses in the Meccan chapters of the Qurʾān see N. Robinson, *Discovering the Qurʾan: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2006), 120-122, 240-243. Walid Saleh addresses the exegetical problems verses like these posed for the classical commentators in *Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 112-127.

comissioned to recite.[276] Significantly, each passage identifies a group of individuals who are distinguished by their knowledge of God's previous revelations to Jews and Christians, broadly identified by the exegetes as the Torah and the Gospels, to serve as proof of the authenticity of the revelation communicated by Muḥammad. In these instances, the confirmation that these unnamed individuals afford the qurʾānic revelation serves the Qurʾān's rhetorical goal of refuting criticism leveled at Muḥammad by his opponents. At the same time, their confirmation serves to console and embolden Muḥammad as he carries out his mission and confronts his opposition.

Qurʾān 10:94 addresses an individual addressee that the commentators initially identify as Muḥammad. The verse addresses the prophet with the following words of guidance and consolation:

> If you (sing.) are in doubt about what We send down to you (*fa-in kunta fī shakk mimmā anzalnā ilayka*), ask those who recited the Scripture before you (*fa-s-ʾal alladhīna yaqraʾūn al-kitāb min qablika*). The Truth has come to you (sing.) from your Lord. Do (sing.) not be one of the doubters.[277]

The verse raises several problems for the exegetes, the most problematic being the implication that Muḥammad, to a certain extent, entertained doubts about the revelation of the Qurʾān. The idea that Muḥammad initially questioned the divine origin of the revelations is, of course, not limited to this particular verse in the Qurʾān and its reception in the qurʾānic commentaries. The early biographies of Muḥammad and *ḥadīth*

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[276] The Qurʾān's awareness and defense of itself as a divinely revealed scripture has prompted several studies dedicated to the so-called "self-referentiality" in the text of the Qurʾān. See D.A. Madigan, *The Qurʾān's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); S. Wild, ed., *Self-referentiality in the Qurʾān*, Diskurse der Arabistik; XI (Weisbaden: Harrassowitz-Verlag, 2006); id., "The Self-referentiality of the Qurʾān: Sūra 3:7 as an Exegetical Challenge," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. J.D. McAuliffe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 422-436; A.S. Boisliveau, *Le Coran par lui-même: vocabulaire et argumentation du discours coranique autoréférentiel* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

[277] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 205.

collections, for example, report numerous traditions describing Muḥammad's doubt, fear, and even contemplation of suicide around the time of the first revelations of the Qurʾān.[278] Qurʾān 10:94 does not specify whether Muḥammad's doubts were confined to the content, meaning, or interpretation of the revelation, or if the doubt mentioned in the verse concerned the divine source of the Qurʾān, and therefore, the very authenticity of the revelation. Another ambiguity that demands interpretation and specification is the verse's instruction to "ask those who recited the Scripture before you." The verse does not specify who the individuals that recited Scripture before Muḥammad's advent are, or explain how they are uniquely positioned, as the verse implies, to alleviate the prophet's doubt concerning the Qurʾān's revelation. And finally, the identity of the scripture (*kitāb*) mentioned in the verse is also ambiguous.

There are serveral strategies adopted in the qurʾānic commentaries to address the possibility raised by Qurʾān 10:94 that Muḥammad questioned what was revealed to him in the Qurʾān. One of the earliest commentators on the Qurʾān, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 150/767),[279] simply ignores the verse's mention of doubt concerning "what We send down to you," and focuses instead on identifying Muḥammad as the verse's addressee.[280] Another strategy to resolve the problem is to limit Muḥammad's doubts to what was

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[278] See U. Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, 103-112. The biographies of Muḥammad describe another period in the prophet's career that was marked by similar dejection, self-doubt, and suicidal thoughts. The so-called lapse in the revelation of the Qurʾān (*fatrat al-waḥy*, "the interval in the prophetic inspiration") refers to the period shortly after the initial revelations of the Qurʾān in which Muḥammad was not visited by the angel Gabriel. See U. Rubin, *Eye of the Beholder*, 113-124.

[279] On the life and works of Muqātil see M. Plessner, "Mukātil b. Sulaimān," *EI*; id. and A. Rippin, "Mukātil b. Sulaymān," *EI*^{2}; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 520-521. I. Goldfeld, "Muqātil ibn Sulaymān," in *Bar Ilan Arabic and Islamic Studies* 2 (1978), xiii-xxx; Cl. Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète, traditionniste et théologien maudit" *Journal Asiatique* 279.1 (1991), 39-92. For recent studies of Muqātil's qurʾānic commentary see G. Nickel, *Narratives of Tampering*, 67-116; N. Sinai, "The Qurʾān Commentary of Muqātil b. Sulaymān and the Evolution of Early Tafsīr Literature," in *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre*, ed. A. Görke and J. Pink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 113-143.

[280] Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 2:248.

revealed in the previous verse, Qurān 10:93. For example, al-Ṭabarī interprets Qurʾān 10:94 in light of the previous verse's mention of disagreement among the biblical Israelites:

> We lodged the Children of Israel in sure lodging, and We gave them good things as sustenance. *And they did not disagree until knowledge came to them*. Your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that about which they used to differ.[281]

For al-Ṭabarī, the statement "If you are in doubt about what We send down to you" only refers to the Qurʾān's informing Muḥammad of an unspecified disagreement among the Israelites. In this way, Muḥammad's doubt is made specific, and is limited to the issue of the disagreement among the Israelites. Al-Ṭabarī then clarifies the issue at the heart of the Israelites' disagreement by expanding on the Qurʾān's statement "And they did not disagree until knowledge came to them (Qurʾān 10:93)." He explains:

> The Children of Israel did not disagree about your [Muḥammad's] prophecy until you were sent as a messenger to His creation, because they find you written in their possession (*li-annahum yujidūnaka ʿindahum maktūb*), and they recognize you by the description that you are described with in their scripture, the Torah and Gospels (*wa-yaʿrifūnaka bi-ṣ-ṣifat allatī anta bi-hā mawṣūf fī kitābihim fī t-Tawrāt wa-l-Injīl*).[282]

Read through the lens of al-Ṭabarī's exegesis, Qurʾān 10:94 assures Muḥammad to consult Jews and Christians for confirmation that he is indeed foretold and described in *their* scriptures;[283] while the doubt the verse implies Muḥammad entertained is limited to his description in biblical scriptures. Although the verse appears to describe an episode in

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[281] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 205.

[282] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 6:609.

[283] Ibid. al-Ṭabarī cites an exegetical gloss attributed to the Companion ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbbās to support this interpretation of "ask those who recited the Scripture before you." The tradition glosses Qurʾān 10:94 as: "The Torah and the Gospels; Those of the People of the Book who encountered Muḥammad and believed in him. Ask them if you doubt that you [Muḥammad] are written." (*al-Tawrāt wa-l-Injīl alladhīna adrakū Muḥammad min ahl al-kitāb fa-āmanū bi-hi yaqūl fa-sʾalhum in kunta fī shak bi-annaka maktūb ʿindahim*).

the distant biblical past, al-Ṭabarī understands the passage in light of how Jews and Christians of Muḥammad's time find him mentioned in their scriptures. In other words, according to al-Ṭabarī, the verse addresses Muḥammad's doubt as to whether he is truly described in Jewish and Christian scriptures. The qurʾānic verse, then, counsels Muḥammad to seek out the Jews and Christians of Arabia for confirmation that their scriptures in fact describe him as God's messenger.

The final strategy that the commentary tradition adopt to resolve the problematic implication that Muḥammad held doubts about the Qurʾān's revelation is to argue – based on the linguistic and rhetorical norms of the pre-Islamic bedouin (*al-ʿarab*) and citing parallel qurʾānic verses that are also addressed to Muḥammad as prooftexts – that while Qurʾān 10:94 is grammatically addressed directly to the prophet, the intended addressee of the verse is in fact his audience.[284] According to this line of interpretation, Qurʾān 10:94 urges Muḥammad's audience, and specifically, the Arab polytheists who rejected the Qurʾān, to seek out Jews and Christians for confirmation of Muḥammad's legitimacy. If, as several commentators suggest, the rhetoric of the verse is understood to be directed at Muḥammad's pagan Arab audiences, then an immediate contradiction presents itself: how could the testimony of Jewish or Christian individuals meaningfully persuade the purported polytheists in the Qurʾān's intial audience to acknowledge Muḥammad and his claims to prophecy? The Andalusian polymath and qurʾānic exegete Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272)[285] addresses this apparent contradiction with a tradition describing the purported socio-cultural milieu of pre-Islamic Arabia.

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[284] al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 5:149; al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 2:559; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 609; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 2:350; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 8:244; al-Thaʿālabī, *al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān*, 2:258.

[285] R. Arnandez, "al-Kurṭubī," *EI*^{2}; al-Dāwūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, 347-348.

According al-Qurṭubī, the idolators of pre-Islamic Arabia (*ʿabadat al-awthān*) considered the Jews to be more learned than themselves, specifically, because God previously revealed a scripture (*kitāb*) to the Jews.[286] Here, the pre-Islamic Arabs – who are routinely characterized in Islamic tradition as thoroughly pagan, idolatrous, and corrupt – are depicted as respecting and deferring to the Arabian Jews on account of their scriptures, and traditions of exegesis and religious learning.

All of the interpretations of Qurʾān 10:94 examined thus far regard the unnamed individuals who "recited the Scripture before you" to be authoritative and particularly qualified to confirm Muḥammad's claims to prophecy, whether this confirmation is intended for Muḥammad himself, or the Arab polytheists in his audiences. In the first case, they assure Muḥammad that his prophecy has been predicted by Jewish and Christian scriptures, while in the second case they supply the corroborating evidence needed to persuade the pagan Arabs that the Qurʾān is indeed authentic divine revelation. Their authoritative status, as well as the weight that their testimony carries, is based on the biblical scriptures that were revealed to them, which according to the exegetes, describe Muḥammad and his mission. While the commentary tradition allows for several interpretations of the verse's mention of doubt, the exegetes are nearly unanimous in specifying who is indented by the verse's mention of "those who recited the Scripture before you."

Multiple qurʾānic exegetes identify Ibn Salām as the individual described in the verse as reciting the Scripture before Muḥammad's advent. A survey of the glosses provided in the qurʾānic commentaries for "those who recited the Scripture before you"

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[286] al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jamiʿ li-aḥkām*, 8:244.

shows how Ibn Salām functions as a trope that the exegetes employ to interpret qurʾānic verses that were believed to praise Jews or the People of the Book. The exegetical glosses portray Ibn Salām as an emblematic figure who is the leader and exemplar of pious Jewish converts to Islam. For example, the exegete Muqātil ibn Sulaymān glosses the verse with "Ibn Salām and his companions" (*Ibn Salām wa-asḥābihi*).[287] His commentary specifies Ibn Salām by name, while those Jews who followed Ibn Salam's example remain anonymous. Presumably, the "companions" mentioned in Muqātil's gloss designates fellow Jews, and perhaps Christians, who followed Ibn Salām in recognizing Muḥammad. The exegetes al-Wāḥidī and al-Baghawī similarly assert that the verse describes "the People of the Book who believed, such as Ibn Salām and his companions" (*man āmana min ahl al-kitāb ka-ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām wa-aṣḥābihi*).[288] Ibn Salām's reported fellow Jewish and Christian converts remain anonymous in additional glosses provided by the exegetes, which specify only that the verse describes "Ibn Salām and others like him" (*Ibn Salām wa-nahwihi/wa-amthālihi/wa-ghayrihi*).[289] In exegetical glosses of this type Ibn Salām personifies, and serves as a symbol, of Jewish conversion to Islam.

There are several possible explanations for why the the majority of the exegetes fail to name Ibn Salām's companions or identify additional Jewish and Christian converts

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[287] Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 2:248. The designation "Ibn Salām and his companions" occurs repeatedly in the qurʾānic commentaries on many of the verses discussed below. The formula is regularly used by the commentators in their interpretation of Qurʾānic statements that identify and praise certain groups among the people of the Book.

[288] Al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 2:560; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 609.

[289] "*min ahl al-Tawrāt wa-l-Injīl ka-ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām wa-nahwihi*." Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 6:609-610. "*fa-s-ʾal man aslama min al-yahūd yaʿnī Ibn Salām wa-amthālihi*." Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 8:244. "*man aslama min ahl al-kitāb ka-ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām wa-ghayrihi*." al-Thaʿālabī, *al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān*, 2:258.

to Islam in their commentaries on Qurʾān 10:94.[290] One possibility is that the exegetes omitted this information because it was not available to them, either because additional Jewish converts did not exist historically, or were not recorded in the early biographies of Muḥammad and his Companions. The second plausible explanation is that the exegetes did not deem it necessary, or particularly beneficial for the purposes of elucidating the qurʾānic verse in question, to specify other Jewish and Christian converts to Islam. Presumably, the commentators were not compelled by exegetical demands to name additional converts to Islam because Ibn Salām could meaningfully and convincingly serve as the enduring symbol of Jewish confirmation of Muḥammad. This latter explanation, I argue, is the most convincing, and sheds light on how Ibn Salām has been received in the qurʾānic commentaries. By identifying Ibn Salām in their commentaries on Qurʾān 10:94, the exegetes have accomplished their primary exegetical task of specifying what is ambiguous in the text by naming who they believe the verse identifies. At the same time, the exegetes remain attentive to the fact that the verse clearly describes a group of people, in the plural, as "*those* who recited the Scripture before you." The language of the scriptural verse forces the majority of the exegetes to name Ibn Salām and also point to anonymous members of the People of the Book – whether real or imagined – who were compelled by their piety and knowledge of biblical scriptures to embrace Muḥammad. The sanctified image that Ibn Salām acquired in the early biographies of Muḥammad and his Companions allows for the renowned convert to be effectively deployed by the exegetes in their commentary to Qurʾān 10:94, where he personifies the confirmation that previous scriptures afford the Qurʾān. The exegetes'

[290] The exception being the exegete al-Thaʿlabī, who identifies the the famous Persian convert to Islam, Salmān al-Fārisī, and the Palestinian Christian convert to Islam Tamīm al-Dārī, in addition to Ibn Salām. al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 5:149. On Tamīm al-Dārī see M. Lecker, "Tamīm al-Dārī," *EI*^{2}.

identification of Ibn Salām in their commentary presupposes, and embellishes, the authoritative and sactified image that the biographical literature constructs for Ibn Salām. It is sufficient for the exegetes to name only Ibn Salām without specifying additional converts precisely because he was already revered within the classical Islamic tradition as *the* Jewish convert to Islam during Muḥammad's career.

Qurʾān 16:43 addresses Muḥammad describing, and then clarifying, his status among a series of messengers who have been sent by God with a scripture. The verse states:

> We have sent before you (sing.) as messengers only men whom we inspired (*wa-mā arsalnā min qablika illā rijāl nūḥiyā ilayhim*) – ask the people [who have] the reminder if you (pl.) do not know (*fa-s-ʾalū ahl al-dhikr in kuntum lā taʿlamūn*) – With the clear signs and the Scriptures.[291]

The Qurʾān addresses Muḥammad and clarifies that he is merely a man, like all messengers sent before him, who has been sent with divine signs and a scripture to deliver to his community. The verse then directs Muḥammad's audiences to consult the "people of the reminder" (*ahl al-dhikr*)[292] if they doubt the Qurʾān's description of God's messengers. According to the exegetes al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and others, Islamic scripture was provoked in this instance to clarify Muḥammad's relationship with previous prophets by the former's detractors, who claimed that it is inappropriate for God to send a man, rather than an angel, as his messenger.[293] The exegetes situate the verse's appeal to the

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[291] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 253. The Qurʾān repeats the statement "We only sent as messengers before you (sing.) men whom We inspired. Ask (pl.) the people of the reminder if you do not know" verbatim at Qurʾān 21:7.

[292] It has been suggested that the term *dhikr* is at times used in the Qurʾān specifically to designate "sections of the 'heavenly Book' that deal with the history of the prophets and earlier peoples." See D.A. Madigan, *The Qurʾān's Self-Image*, 131.

[293] Al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī's remarks occur in their commentaries to Qurʾān 21:7 where both exegetes state that the verse was revealed in response to the dismissive remarks made by Muḥammad's opponents

"people of the reminder," therefore, amid a polemical exchange that occured between Muḥammad and his opposition during his career.

The verse designates a group, referred to as "the people of the reminder," to confirm the Qurʾān's positioning of Muḥammad among God's previous messengers and refute the claims made by the prophet's opponents. According to al-Qurṭubī, the people of the reminder are described as such specifically because they "preserved the tidings of the prophets that the Arabs were unaware of" (*kānū yadhkurūn khabar al-anbiyāʾ mimmā lam taʿrufhu al-ʿarab*).[294] "Tidings of the prophets" (*khabar al-anbiyāʾ*) here identifies either scriptures or revelations that were sent to the biblical prophets, or narratives and traditions about the prophets themselves. Then, the exegete clarifies that the people of the reminder refers to Jews and Christians with a brief anecdote that purports to describe historical circumstances in Arabia on the eve of Islam: "The Qurashī disbelievers used to question the People of the Book concerning the matter of Muḥammad" (*wa-kāna kuffār Quraysh yurājiʿūn ahl al-kitāb fī amr Muḥammad*).[295] As in the commentaries on Qurʾān 10:94 discussed above, the exegetes identify Muḥammad's tribesmen, the Quraysh in Mecca, as those who the verse urges to consult the Jews and Christians about Muḥammad's mission as God's messenger. The qurʾānic exegetes attribute a priveleged status in Arabia to the People of the Book for their ability to shape how the Qurʾān and Muḥammad are received by pagan audiences in Mecca. After specifying that the people

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quoted in Qurʾān 21:3: "With their hearts diverted. Those who do wrong talk together in secret: 'Is this anything other than a mortal like you?'" al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān,* 9:6; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jamiʿ li-aḥkām*, 11:170. In their commentaries on Qurʾān 16:43, Ibn al-Jawzī and Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī cite traditions where the Quraysh claim: "God is above his messenger being a mortal man. So why has He not sent an angel to us" (*allāh aʿẓam min an yakūn rasūlahu bashar fa-ha-lā baʿtha ilaynā malak*)? Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 2:561; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 5:630.

[294] al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 11:180.

[295] Ibid.

of the reminder refers to Jews and Christians, several commentators further specify that the verse refers to Ibn Salām and other converts to Islam from the Jewish and Christian communities of Arabia.[296]

Ibn Salām is identified by the exegetes in their commentary on additional verses that repond to, and attempt to discredit, the criticism that audiences in Mecca and Medina leveled against Muḥammad. These scriptural passages adddress Muḥammad and supply him with a decisive response to his detractors. The responses that the Qurʾān addresses to Muḥammad's opponents are introduced with the command, "Say" (*qul*), which marks the statement that follows as divine revelation that guides the prophet's polemical engagement with his audiences.[297] For example, Qurʾān 13:43 quotes Muḥammad's opponents who deny that he has been sent as God's messenger and then supplies him with a response:

> Those who do not believe say, 'You are not sent as a messenger.' Say, 'God is sufficient witness between me and you, [as are] those who possess knowledge of the Scripture (*man ʿindahu ʿilm al-kitāb*).'[298]

The verse designates an unspecified group that possesses "knowledge of the Scripture" (*ʿilm al-kitāb*) to serve as a witness, or proof, that Muḥammad is indeed a prophet. At the same time, the verse assures and emboldens Muḥammad with the promise that God and "those who possess knowledge of the Scripture" testify to the truth of his prophecy. The

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[296] Ibn Abī Zamanayn, *Tafsīr*, 1:435-436; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 2:561; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Bahr al-muḥīt*, 5:630; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 5:117.

[297] The Qurʾān's "Say (*qul*)-statements" are discussed in R.W. Gwynne, "Patterns of Address," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Qurʾān*, ed. A. Rippin (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2009), 80-81; M. Radscheit, "Word of God or Prophetic Speech? Reflections on the Quranic qul-statements," in *Encounters of Words and Texts: Intercultural Studies in Honor of Stefan Wild*, eds. Lutz Edzard and C. Szyska (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1997), 33-42; N. Sinai, *The Qurʾan: A Historical Critical Introduction*, The New Edinburgh Islamic Surveys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 12-14.

[298] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 238.

verse contains several ambiguities that demand specificiation by the qurʾānic commentators, including 1) the identity of disbelievers who denied that Muḥammad has been sent as a messenger, 2) the identity of "those who possess knowledge of the Scripture," and 3) the identity of the Scripture referred to in the passage. For our purposes, we will focus our analysis on how the commentators specify and interpret the verse's mention of "those who possess knowledge of the Scripture."

Qurʾānic commentaries from the classical and post-classical period identify Ibn Salām with "those who possess knowledge of the Scripture" with brief exegetical glosses.[299] The earliest commentator to do so, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, interprets the polemical exchange reflected in the verse to be between Muḥammad and "the Jews" (*al-yahūd*). He initially glosses "those who possess knowledge of the Scripture" as "he who possesses the Torah, ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām" (*wa-yashhad man ʿindahu al-Tawrāt ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām*).[300] The gloss establishes that the scripture mentioned in the verse is the Torah, and that "those" who have knowledge of this scripture actually designates an individual, Ibn Salām. Muqātil then paraphrases what the verse has commanded Muḥammad to say to his *Jewish* opponents: "He [Ibn Salām] testifies that I am a prophet [and] messenger foretold in the Torah" (*fa-huwwa yashhad annanī nabī rasūl maktūb fī-t-Tawrāt*).[301] For Muqātil, Ibn Salām is deployed in the interpretation of the verse to testify against the Medinan Jews that Muḥammad is indeed described and predicted by Jewish

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[299] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 2:384; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 7:409-410; al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, ed. Majdī Bāsallūm (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 2005), 6:357; al-Ṭabarānī, *Tafsīr*, 4:23-24; al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 2:198; Ibn Abī Zamanayn, *Tafsīr*, 1:406; al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 3:21; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 680; al-Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr*, 1:510; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 2:502; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 9:220; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 5:514; al-Thaʿālibī, *al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān*, 2:373; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 4:591.

[300] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 2:384.

[301] Ibid.

scripture. Read through the lens of Muqātil's exegesis, Qurʾān 13:43 defends Muḥammad's prophecy on the basis of God's testimony and the testimony of Jewish scripture. Muqātil's exegesis of the passage shows how Ibn Salām is used in the qurʾānic commentaries as a symbol, or personification, of Jewish scripture's confirmation of Muḥammad. In this instance, the commentator utilizes Ibn Salām as a testament against the Jews for their refusal to recognize that their own scriptures legitimize Muḥammad.

Subsequent commentaries identify Ibn Salām as the referent of the qurʾānic phrase "those who possess knowledge of the Scripture" by citing brief paraphrases of the verse attributed to prominent Successors (*al-Tābiʿūn*) who are regarded in Islamic tradition as early exegetical authorities.[302] Glosses attributed to prominent Successors such as Mujāhid ibn Jabr, Qatāda ibn Diʿāma, and ʿIkrima are cited in the commentaries to specify Ibn Salām as either the sole referent of the phrase,[303] or one among several famous converts to Islam whom Islamic tradition regards as experts in biblical scriptures.[304] The commentators also employ traditions attributed to Ibn Salām's descendants to support their interpretation of Qurʾān 13:43 as a specific reference to Ibn Salām. These traditions, which are transmitted in several of the biographies of Ibn Salām, report the famous convert proudly declaring that the verse was revealed "concerning me"

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[302] The term Successor refers to the generation of Muslims who came after the Companions of Muḥammad. The Successors are followed by the generation of the "Successors to the Successors (*tābiʿ al-tābiʿīn*)." These first three generations of Muslims are collectively revered in the sunni historical memory as the "Pious Forebearers" (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*). See E. Chaumont, "al-Salaf wa ʾl-khalaf," *EI*^{2}. For an introduction to the Successors and their historical milieu see S.A. Spectorsky, "Tābiʿūn," *EI*^{2}; and A. Afsaruddin, *The First Muslims: History and Memory* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), 76-105.

[303] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 7:410; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 680; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 2:502; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 5:514; al-Thaʿālibī, *al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān*, 2:373

[304] "*ʿan Qatāda qāla kāna minhum ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām wa-Salman al-Fārisī wa-Tamīm al-Dārī.*" al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 7:410. "*wa-qāla ʿIkrima wa-Qatāda yaʿnī ʿulamāʾ ahl al-kitāb minhum ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām wa-Salmān al-Fārisī wa-Tamīm al-Dārī.*" al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 3:21; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 2:502; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 5:514; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 4:591.

(*nazzalat fīya*/*anzalat fīya*).[305] These traditions that were purportedly preserved and transmitted among Ibn Salām's descendents are cited in the qurʾānic commentaries to establish the specific referent of the qurʾānic verse, while in the biographical works they are cited to praise Ibn Salām, and confer upon him authority and prestige for having been singled out by a qurʾānic revelation.

Similar to Qurʾān 13:43, Qurʾān 17:107 draws attention to an unspecified group using the phrase "Those to whom knowledge has been given previously" (*alladhīna ūtū al-ʿilm min qablihi*). Whereas the previous verse identifies a group distinguished by their knowledge of scripture, here Islamic scripture points to priveleged individuals who were given an unspecified knowledge (*ʿilm*) prior to Muḥammad's advent and the revelation of the Qurʾān. The passage supplies Muḥammad with a rhetorical argument to deliver to his audience:

> Say, 'Believe in it or do not believe. Those to whom knowledge has been given previously fall down on their chins in prostration when it is recited to them (*alladhīna ūtū al-ʿilm min qablihi idhā yutlā ʿalayhim yakhirrūn li-l-adhqān sujadan*).'[306]

Al-Ṭabarī identifies "those to whom knowledge has been given" as the "believers among the people of the two scriptures" (*muʾminū ahl al-kitābayn*), by which he means Jews and Christians who accepted Muḥammad's prophecy.[307] Accordingly, we can assume that the two scriptures (*al-kitābayn*) mentioned in al-Ṭabarī's gloss refers to Jewish and Christian scriptures. Al-Qurṭubī similarly specifies that the verse refers to "the believers among the

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[305] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 7:409; al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 6:357; Ibn Abī Zamanayn, *Tafsīr*, 1:406; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 9:220; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 4:591.

[306] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 270.

[307] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 8:163.

people of the Book" (*muʾminū ahl al-kitāb*).[308] According to both exegetes, the verse points to how the Qurʾān has been received among a pious minority of Jews and Christians as proof of Islamic scripture's authenticity and authority. The rhetoric of the passage draws attention to the reception of the Qurʾān among these exceptional Jews and Christians in an attempt to influence how others – presumaly, those who denied Muḥammad's claims to prophecy – respond to the revelation recited by Muḥammad. Muqātil's commentary goes even further than al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī in specifying who is intended by "those to whom knowledge has been given previously." First, Muqātil specifies that the verse addresses the disbelievers in Mecca (*kuffār Mecca*) who have a choice to either accept or deny the Qurʾān.[309] He then clarifies that "those to whom knowledge has been given previously" refers to those who were given knowledge, specifically, in the form of the Torah, prior to the revelation of the Qurʾān.[310] For Muqātil, then, the knowledge mentioned in the verse refers to the revelation of the Torah to the Jews. According to Muqātil, the verse is focused exclusively on how an exceptional minority among the Jews have responded to the Qurʾān, as opposed to the interpretations of al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī that include both Jewish and Christian converts with the phrases "believers among the people of the two scriptures," and "believers among the People of the Book." Muqātil concludes his exegesis of the verse by specifying that when the Qurʾān is recited to Ibn Salām and his companions (*Ibn Salām wa-asḥābihi*), they fall down on their faces in prostration out of piety and devotion.[311] Muqātil's interpretation constructs Ibn Salām as an exemplary figure who personifies the pious and reverent

[308] al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 10:220.

[309] Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 2:555.

[310] Ibid.

[311] Ibid.

reception of the Qurʾān alluded to by the verse. Ibn Salām is exemplary in the sense that his reaction to the Qurʾān's revelation is highlighted as an example that should be heeded and ultimately followed by Muḥammad's opponents. At the same time, the exegete portrays Ibn Salām as the embodiment of the knowledge given by God before the Qurʾān's revelation, identified in the commentary as the Torah, which confirms Muḥammad's prophetic status and mission.

Ibn Salām is identified in the qurʾānic commentaries on two remaining passages that are addressed directly to Muḥammad. Like all of the scriptural passages we have analysed thus far, there is an implicit polemical context behind these verses that offer Muḥammad consolation and encouragement. The central claim made in Qurʾān 13:36 and Qurʾān 26:197 is that certain members of the People of the Book recognize and accept the Qurʾān as divine revelation, revealed to Muḥammad by the same God that previously revealed scriptures to the Jews and Christians. Qurʾān 13:36 addresses Muḥammad and declares: "Those to whom we have give the Scripture rejoice in what has been sent down to you (sing.)." Muqātil identifies Ibn Salām and his companions – referred to by the exegete as "the believers among the people of the Torah (*muʾminū ahl al-Tawrāt*) – as the individuals described in the verse.[312] The scripture that they have been given, which Muqātil identifies as the Torah, has led Ibn Salām and his fellow Jewish converts to believe in the Qurʾān. While the later commentary tradition allows for additional interpretations, for example, that the verse refers to both Jewish and Christian converts to

[312] Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 2:382. Muqātil's identification of Ibn Salām with the verse is subsequently cited in the commentary of Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 2:248.

Islam, Ibn Salām is regularly identified as the paradigmatic Jewish convert to Islam referred to in the passage.[313]

Qurʾān 26:197 occurs in the context of an extended passage addressed to Muḥammad that describes the revelation, origin, and language of the Qurʾān. The passage in its entirety states:

> It is the message sent down by the Lord of all beings, which the faithful spirit has brought down upon your (sing.) heart, that you may be one of the warners, in a clear Arabic tongue. It is in the scrolls of the ancients. Is it not a sign for them that the learned of the Children of Israel know it (*aw lam yakun la-hum āya an yaʿlamahu ʿulamāʾ banī Isrāʾīl*)?[314]

The commentaries attempt to clarify several exegetical problems raised by the ambiguous language of the passage, including, the identity of the "faithful spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*), the insistance that the revelation is in a "clear Arabic tongue" (*lisān ʿarabī mubīn*), as well as the identity and contents of the "scrolls of the ancients" (*zubur al-awwalīn*). For our purposes, however, we will focus on how the commentators interpret the "learned of the Children of Israel," who are singled out in the concluding verse to serve as a proof, or "sign" (*āya*), of the legitimacy of the revelation to Muḥammad.

The qurʾānic commentaries provide several narratives of the circumstances in Muḥammad's career that may have prompted Islamic scripture to identify the "learned of the Children of Israel" *(ʿulamāʾ banī Isrāʾīl*) in Qurʾān 26:197. One exegetical tradition states that the verse identifies this distinguished group in response to Muḥammad's Meccan opponents, who claimed that the Qurʾān was taught to Muḥammad by a

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[313] See al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:501; al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr*, 2:362; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 5:509; al-Thaʿālibī, *al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān*, 2:371.
[314] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 342.

monotheistic individual in his hometown of Mecca, rather than revealed to him by God.[315] Other exegetical traditions interpret the verse in light of encounters that purportedly took place between the Jews of Medina and the prophet's Qurashī tribesmen. According to these traditions, the Meccan Arabs traveled to Medina to question the Jews about Muḥammad, and asked that the rabbis evaluate his claims to prophecy and his prophetic credentials.[316] In the qurʾānic commentary of the Ḥanafī theologian Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Māturīdī (d. ca 333/944),[317] for example, the encounter between the Jews and Meccans is briefly narrated as follows:

> The Meccans dispatched a delegation to the Jews in Medina to question them about God's messenger. The Jews informed them about him, saying that he would emerge at such a time, and that his description is as such, and that this was the time of his emergence (*an ahl Mecca arsalū ilā al-yahūd bi-l-madīna yasʾalūnahum ʿan rasūl allāh fa-akhbarūhum ʿanhu annahu yakhruj fī waqt kādhā wa-an naʿtahu kādhā wa-hādhā wayt khurūjihi*).[318]

As in in the commentaries on Qurʾān 16:43 discussed above, the exegetes also interpret this verse's reference to the "learned among the Children of Israel" in the context of the priveleged position of the Jews in Arabia to confirm Muḥammad's claim to prophecy. Specifically, the exegetes' conception of the Jews regards them as being capable of

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[315] "*wa-dhālik annahu lammā qāla kuffār Mecca inna Muḥammad yataʿllam al-Qurʾān min Abī Fukayha*." Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 3:280. Muqātil provides more details about this individual,Yasār Abū Fukayha, who was suspected by the Meccans to have taught Muḥammad the Qurʾān, in his commentary on Qurʾān 16:103: "In truth We know what they say, 'It is only a mortal who is teaching him.' The Speech of the one at whom they hint is foreign, whereas this is clear Arabic speech." Muqātil identifies Yasār as the servant (*ghulām*) of a certain Meccan, ʿĀmir b. al-Ḥaḍramī al-Qurashī, and states that the former was a non-Arab Jew (*yahūdī ʿajamī*) who spoke *al-rūmīya* (Greek or Aramaic). Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, 2:487. On Yasār and the accounts of Muḥammad's informants see Cl. Gilliot, "Informants," *EQ*, 2:512-518.

[316] al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 8:85; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 4:510; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 946; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 13:196. One such account of a meeting between the Quraysh and Jews in Medina is attributed to Ibn Salām, who describes how a group of Quraysh from Mecca met a group of Jews from the Banū Qurayẓa while they were reading aloud from the Torah. Al-Ṣuyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 6:290.

[317] On the life and works of al-Māturīdī see W. Madelung, "al-Māturīdī," *EI*^{2}.

[318] al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 8:85.

confirming the time, or historical circumstances that signal Muḥammad's emergence, and whether Muḥammad meets the criteria established by the Torah's description of a future prophet among the Arabs. The Jews of Medina owe their priveleged position to the fact that they have been given revelation in the Torah, whereas the Meccans do not possess a divinely revealed scripture. More importantly, exegetical traditions like the one cited by al-Māturīdī portray the Jews of Medina as being not only learned in their scriptures, but also willing to share their knowledge and interpretation of the Torah with the pagan Arabs to evaluate Muḥammad's claims to prophecy.

Having established that the knowledge of the "learned of the Children of Israel" is intended to serve as a sign, or proof, for Muḥammad's Arab opponents, the exegetical tradition proceeds to name the individuals that belong to this elite group among the Jews. Muqātil is the first exegete to identify Ibn Salām and his companions as the "learned of the Children of Israel."[319] The commentaries also cite traditions attributed to early exegetical authorities that name either Ibn Salām, Ibn Salām and Salmān al-Fārisī,[320] or Ibn Salām and other Jewish converts.[321] These brief glosses provided in the qurʾanic commentaries show how Ibn Salam, as a figure and a trope, is appealed to by the commentators as a symbol of the Jewish scripture's confirmation of Muḥammad. Through exegesis, Ibn Salām is made to epitomise the "learned Jew" of Muḥammad's time, despite the fact that the verse refers to the Children of Israel, which the Qurʾān

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[319] Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 3:280.

[320] "*qāla Mujāhid yaʿnī ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām wa-Salmān wa-ghayrihumā mimman aslama*." Al-Qurṭubī, *Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 13:93.

[321] "*qāla Mujāhid ʿulamāʾ banī Isrāʾīl ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām wa-ghayrihi min ʿulamāʾihim*." Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 9:477. "*wa-qāla ʿAṭīya wa-kānū khamsa ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām wa-Yāmīn ibn Yāmīn wa-Thaʿlaba wa-Asad wa-Usayd*." Al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 3:363. *ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām wa-naḥwihi qālahu Ibn ʿAbbās wa-Mujāhid wa-Muqātil*. Al-Thaʿālibi, *al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān*, 3:237.

often uses to identify the biblical Israelites.[322] The commentaries have also specified the rhetoric of the verse by identifying Ibn Salām as the "learned of the Children of Israel." Read through the lens of the exegetical glosses, the verse urges the pagan Arabs to reflect on the example of Ibn Salām's conversion when they are evaluating Muḥammad's claims to prophecy.

Ibn Salām is identified in more extensive glosses of the passage where the exegetes praise the convert and explain how his example serves as a sign to the disbelievers. For example, Ibn Salām is praised by a tradition attributed to the Companion Ibn ʿAbbās, who glosses the verse as:

> Ibn Salām was one of the learned of the Children of Israel, and one of the best among them (*wa-kāna min khayārihim*). He believed in Muḥammad's scripture (*fa-āmana bi-kitāb Muḥammad*). So God said to them [the disbelievers]: 'Is it not a sign that the learned of the Children of Israel and the best among them know it?'[323]

The tradition praises Ibn Salām by identifying him as the examplar of an elite group of Jews highlighted in the qurʾānic verse on account of their learning in the Jewish scriptures and recognition of Muḥammad. In identifying Ibn Salām as one of the most distinguished Jews of his time, the exegetical tradition is consistent with the biographical sources, which portray Ibn Salām as the most learned and exceptional Jew in Medina. Al-Māturīdī's commentary similarly identifies Ibn Salām's conversion as a sign of Muḥammad's prophethood, and counts Ibn Salām among the Jews' scholarly elite and

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[322] Although the Qurʾān uses the phrase "Children of Israel" primarily to identify the biblical Israelites, Muslim historiographers and qurʾānic exegetes often understood verses on the Children of Israel as an "instrument to illuminate relations between Muḥammad and the Jews of Medina." U. Rubin, "Children of Israel," *EQ*, 1:306.

[323] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 9:476; al-Ṣuyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 6:290.

jurists (*ʿulamāʾ banī Isrāʾīl wa-fuqahāʾihim*).[324] The exegete Ibn Kathīr's gloss of "learned" shifts our attention from Ibn Salām's learnedness or scholarly training, and highlights the convert's integrity and piety:

> The upright among them who recognize the description of Muḥammad – his mission, and his community – that is in their possession (*al-ʿudūl minhum alladhīna yaʿtarifūna bi-mā fī aydihim min ṣifa Muḥammad wa-mabʿathi wa-ummatihi*).[325]

According to the exegete, Ibn Salām is exemplary for his honest recognition that Jewish scriptures attests to the truth of Muḥammad's prophecy. By glossing "learned" (*ʿulamāʾ*) with "upright" (*ʿudūl*), Ibn Kathīr highlights and praises Ibn Salām's integrity and honest (*ʿadl*) rather than his learnedness or knowledge (*ʿilm*). For Ibn Kathīr, it is Ibn Salām's upright character – which is demonstrated by his recognition of Jewish scripture's confirmation of Muḥammad – that constitutes a "sign" for the polytheists.

The exegete al-Wāḥidī, however, does not appear to be concerned with praising Ibn Salām's honesty and scholarly acumen in his interpretation of the passage. Rather, he focuses his exegesis on specifying the particular knowledge that Ibn Salām has acquired from studying Jewish scriptures. Al-Wāḥidī glosses the verse and then provides a brief explanation:

> Is the knowledge (*ʿilm*) of the learned of the Children of Israel – that Muḥammad is a true prophet (*nabī ḥaqq*) – not a sign (*ʿalāma*) and proof (*dalāla*) of his prophethood for them? Because the learned [of the Children of Israel] who believed in Muḥammad used to announce that he is mentioned in their scriptures

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[324] "Is the conversion of the learned of the Children of Israel and their jurists – like Ibn Salām and others - not a sufficient sign for them that he [Muḥammad] is a messenger?" (*aw lam yakfihim āya islām ʿulamāʾ banī Isrāʾīl wa-fuqahāʾihim anna-hu rasūl naḥwa Ibn Salām wa-ghayrihi*). al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 8:85-86.

[325] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 3:2122.

> (*li-anna al-ʿulamāʾ alladhīna āmanū min banī Isrāʾīl kāna yakhbirūna bi-wujūd dhikrihi fī kutubihim*).[326]

al-Wāḥidī's interpretation begins with the assumption that Ibn Salām, and any Jew who is learned in the Jewish scriptures, could not help but acknowledge and recognize Muḥammad's prophethood. The true sign to those who reject Muḥammad's prophecy is that the Jewish scriptures – and not necessarily Jewish converts themselves – testify to his mission. The Jewish converts to Islam, as exemplified by Ibn Salām, are pointed to by al-Wāḥidī as proof of the Qurʾān's claim that Jewish scripture attest to Muḥammad. Furthermore, the proof that Jewish scripture attests to Muḥammad, according to the exegete, is demonstrated by the fact Ibn Salām and Jews like him proclaimed that the Torah they revered and studied contained "his [Muḥammad]mention" (*dhikrihi*).

4.3. Ibn Salām's Belief in the Qurʾān

The qurʾānic commentators identify Ibn Salām with scriptural verses that assert that the Qurʾān's message and authority are confirmed by individuals who were exceptional in their religious learning and steadfast belief in God and Muḥammad's mission. The Qurʾān uses several vague phrases and titles to identify these individuals and praise their belief in Muḥammad. The clearest language that Islamic scripture uses is found in Qurʾān 2:4 and Qurʾān 28:52-53, which praise an unspecified group for their belief in previous revelations as well as the Qurʾān. For example, Qurʾān 2:4 points to those "who believe

[326] Al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 3:363.

in what has been sent down to you (sing.) and what was sent down before you (sing)."[327] The commentators state that the verse describes Ibn Salām and other anonymous members of the People of the Book who revered their own scriptures and also believed in Muḥammad's mission.[328] Qurʾān 28:52-53 similarly singles out individuals who have studied biblical scriptures revealed before Muḥammad's mission, and describes their reaction to hearing the Qurʾān's recitation:

> Those to whom We previously gave the Scripture (*alladhīna ataynāhum al-kitab min qablihi*) – they believe in it. When it is recited to them they say, 'We believe in it. It is the truth from our Lord. We had surrendered before it came (*innā kunnā min qablihi muslimīn*).[329]

An exegetical tradition attributed to Qatāda states that the verse describes members of the People of the Book, such as Ibn Salām and others, who were firmly established on the righteous path (*sharīʿa al-ḥaqq*) and also believed in Muḥammad when he was sent.[330] Another tradition, often attributed to the early exegetical authority Ismāʿīl ibn ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Suddī (d. 127/745),[331] glosses "those to whom we previously gave the Scripture" as "the Jews who submitted, Ibn Salām and his companions" (*muslimī al-yahūd ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām wa-asḥābihi*).[332] Another exegetical tradition maintains that the verse designates Ibn Salām and Salmān al-Fārisī, who are described as "a group of

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[327] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 25.

[328] The exegetes describe these Jewish and Christian converts to Islam with the phrase "the believers among the people of the Book" (*muʾminū ahl al-kitāb*). However, Ibn Salām is typically the only convert specified by name in the commentaries. See, for example, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, 1:81,84; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:82; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 1:29; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 1:126; al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr*, 1:45; Nizām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī, *Gharāʾib al-Qurʾān*, 1:146; al-Thaʿālibī, *al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān*, 1:46.

[329] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 358.

[330] Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 10:85; al-Qurṭubī, *Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 13:196; al-Ṣuyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, 6:375.

[331] On al-Suddī see G.H.A. Juynboll, "al-Suddī," *EI*^{2}.

[332] Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 5:71; al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 3:402; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 3:387. Ibn Salām and his companions are also identified in al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 8:179; and al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 984.

Israelites who were given the Scripture before the Qurʾān, and believed in the Qurʾān" (*qawman mi-m-man utū al-kitāb min banī Isrāʾīl min qabl al-Qurʾān yuʾminūn bi-l-Qurʾān*).[333] The qurʾānic commentaries on these passages portray Ibn Salām as the personification of the confirmation that the Jewish scriptures affords Muḥammad's mission.

The commentaries identify Ibn Salām with several qurʾānic references to "those who are firm in knowledge" (*al-rāsikhūn fī-l-ʿilm*), and "men of learning" (*ūlū al-ʿilm*). The Qurʾān uses these phrases to describe authoritative figures who proclaim their belief in God, His scriptures, and Muḥammad's mission. Ibn Salam is first identified with "those who are firm in knowledge" in the commentaries on Qurʾān 3:7, a qurʾānic verse that has been characterized as the "point of departure for all scriptural exegesis" in Islamic tradition.[334] The verse is provided in full below:

> It is he who has sent down to you the Scripture, in which are firm signs which are the matrix of the Scripture, whilst there are others that are like one another. As for those in whose heart is deviation, they follow [the verses] that are like one another, seeking mischief and seeking its interpretation. Only God knows its interpretation. Those who are well-grounded in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūna fī-l-ʿilm*) say, 'We believe in it. All is from our Lord.'[335]

Muqātil identifies Ibn Salām and his companions as the *rāsikhūn fī-l-ʿilm*, and contrasts them with the majority of Jews who interpret scripture in such a way as to spread doubt, confusion, and disbelief in Muḥammad.[336] Other exegetes identify Ibn Salām in their commentaries on the verse and describe him as a member of "the believers among the

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[333] Al-Qurṭubī, *Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 12:196.

[334] J. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 149. The verse has recieved substantial scholarly attention. See S. Wild, "The Self-referentiality of the Qurʾān," 422-436.

[335] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 65.

[336] Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 1:87.

People of the Book" (*muʾminū ahl al-kitāb*).[337] Al-Ṭabarānī also specifies Ibn Salām and his companions, and describes them as "the religious scholars of the People of the Book who believed [in Muḥammad]" (*hum ʿulamāʾ ahl al-kitāb alladhīna āmanū min-hum*). [338] After the exegete has identified who "those who are firm in knowledge" are, he then specifies the knowledge that Ibn Salām and his companions possess by glossing *rāsikhūna fī-l-ʿilm* as "those who study the knowledge of the Torah (*dārisūn ʿilm at-Tawrāt*)."[339] The exegete al-Samarqandī also identifies Ibn Salām and his companions, and characterizes them as "those who proclaim the knowledge of the Torah and the Gospels" (*bālighūn ʿilm a-t-Tawrāt wa-l-Injīl*).[340]

The exegetical glosses provided in the commentaries specify and shape the meaning of the verse's vague reference to "those who are firmly rooted in knowledge."[341] According to the exegetes, the phrase describes righteous Jews who revered their scriptures and were deeply engaged in the study and interpretation of the Torah in Arabia on the eve of Islam. Ibn Salām is characterized as the singular representative of these Jews whose learning in Jewish scriptures compelled them to believe in Muḥammad's mission. The sincerity and piety embodied by Ibn Salām stands in stark contrast to the Qurʾān's description of "those in whose heart is deviation" who unfaithfully interpret scripture in order to undermine Muḥammad's mission. In contrast to these individuals,

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[337] Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 3:15; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 2:619.

[338] Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr,* 2:13.

[339] Ibid.

[340] al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:247.

[341] The exegete's also identify Ibn Salām in their commentary on the only other instance of the phrase *rāsikhūn fī-l-ʿilm* at Qurʾān: Q4:162. See Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 1:422; al-Ṭabaranī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 2:330; al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 2:139; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 350; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:623; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 1:497; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 4:2308; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jamiʿ li-aḥkām*, 6:11; al-Bayḍāwī, *Tafsīr*, 1:248; al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr*, 1:382; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 3:558; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1:861

Ibn Salām and his anonymous companions personify and give voice to the passage's concluding declaration: "We believe in it. All is from the Lord." Ibn Salām and his companions, in other words, affirm that all of God's revelations, including the Qurʾān, confirms Muḥammad's mission. Read through the lens of the exegetes' glosses, the verse declares that Ibn Salām and others who have a deep knowledge of biblical scriptures testify to the truth of all of God's revelations, including, the Torah, the Gospels, and the Qurʾān.

The qurʾānic exegetes identify Ibn Salām in their commentaries on Qurʾān 3:18 which refers to "men of learning" (*ūlū al-ʿilm*): "God bears witness that there is no god but Him. As do the angels, and men of learning, upholding justice."[342] The verse recognizes the ambiguous group, "the men of learning," in addition to God's angels, for their authoritative testimony to God's absolute oneness. The primary exegetical task taken up by the commentators is to specify who the Qurʾan intends by the laudatory phrase "men of learning." The majority of the commentators gloss the phrase "men of learning" with Ibn Salam and his companions. Muqātil glosses the phrase as: "men of learning *in the Torah, Ibn Salām and his companions*" (*ūlū al-ʿilm bi-t-Tawrāt ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām wa-aṣḥābihi*),[343] while al-Ṭabarānī states: "the learned believers among the People of the Book, ʿAbdallāh ibn Salām and his companions" (*ʿulamāʾ al-muʾminīn ahl al-kitāb ʿAbdallāh ibn Salam wa-aṣḥābihi*).[344] The later commentaries of al-Thaʿlabī and al-Baghawī cite Muqātil's exegetical opinion, and specify Ibn Salām and his companions

[342] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 66.

[343] Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 1:267.

[344] Al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 2:25.

in their glosses on the verse.[345] Al-Thaʿlabī, however, builds on Muqātil's tradition and cites "those to whom knowledge has been given (Qurʾān 17:107)" and "those who possess knowledge of the Scripture (Qurʾān 13:43)" as parallel scriptural verses that, in his opinion, also refer to Ibn Salām.[346] Al-Thaʿlabī's observation suggests that, at least among the qurʾānic exegetes, Ibn Salām was closely associated with the Qurʾān's laudatory statements regarding previous scriptures and the communities in which those scriptures were revered and interpreted.

4.4. Ibn Salām: The Exceptional Jew in Islamic Scripture

Islamic scripture admits, on several occasions, that the majority of the Jews it addresses refused to heed the Qurʾān's message, and instead chose to misinterpret and corrupt the meaning of their own scriptures. At the same time, however, the Qurʾān carefully states that not all of the Jews or Christians in its audience are to be regarded as unbelievers. The final verse-group to be analyzed is comprised of instances where Islamic scripture itself, rather than the qurʾānic exegetes, explicitly identifies an exceptional righteous minority among the People of the Book who are worthy of praise and admiration. We have seen in the verses analyzed thus far that the Qurʾān has a tendency to identify or distinguish a particular group among the People of the Book, often using vague and ambiguous language that demands specification and intepretation by the qurʾānic commentators. Familiar examples of this kind of language used in the Qurʾān include the phrases: "Those who recited the Scripture before you" (Qurʾān 10:94), "the people of the

[345] Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 3:33; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 194.
[346] Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 3:33.

reminder" (Qurʾān 16:43), "those who possess knowledge of the Scripture" (Qurʾān 13:43), "those who are firmly rooted in knowledge" (Qurʾān 3:7 and 4:162), and "men of learning" (Qurʾān 3:18). Through their exegetical glosses and commentary, the commentators determine the meaning of these passages and identify Ibn Salām and various Jews, Christians, and early converts to Islam as those intended by the verses' vague language.

On several occasions the text of the Qurʾān identifies a righteous minority among the People of the Book and praises them as true believers (*muʾminūn*). These qurʾānic verses identify the exceptional minority among the Jews and Christians using language like "among them" (*minhum*), "among the people of the Book" (*min ahl al-kitāb*), and "except for a few" (*illā qalīlan*). The Qurʾān's claim that not all of the People of the Book deserve condemnation draws the attention of the qurʾānic exegetes, who are eager to specify which Jews or Christians are being praised by Islamic scripture. For example, Qurʾān 3:110 offers a broad evaluation of the People of the Book: "Had the People of the Book believed it would have been better for them. Some of them are believers (*min-hum al-muʾminīn*), but most of them are profligate."[347] The exegetes name Ibn Salām in their glosses on the verse where he epitomizes the faithful members of the People of the Book who accepted Muḥammad's prophecy.[348] The qurʾānic exegetes point to Ibn Salām as the exceptional member of the People of the Book that is singled out for praise in the verse. Qurʾān 4:46 points to a minority among the Jews that has avoided God's wrath: "But God has cursed them for their unbelief, and so they do not believe, except a few (*fa-lā*

[347] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 76.

[348] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 1:295; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 2:112; al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, 1:291; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 1:315.

yuʾminūn illā qalīlan).”[349] According to the commentaries, Ibn Salām, and other Jews who followed his example and converted to Islam, are the exception among the majority of the Jews who have been cursed by God for refusing to embrace Muḥammad.[350] Qurʾān 3:199 is more specific in its praise of a minority among the People of Book, and highlights their humility and belief in God’s scriptures:

> Among the People of the Book there are some who believe in God and what has been sent down to you and what has been sent down to them, humble before God, not purchasing a trifling gain at the cost of God’s signs.[351]

The exegetes assert that the passage describes Ibn Salām and other unnamed members of the People of the Book who followed his example and converted to Islam.[352] The exegetical glosses on these passages identify Ibn Salām as the representative of pious Jewish and Christian converts to Islam. Through exegesis, Ibn Salām is made to personify the praise that the Qurʾān reserves for a distinguished minority among the People of the Book.

In other instances, the Qurʾān identifies an “upright community” (*ummatan qāʾimatan*) and a “moderate community” (*ummatun muqtaṣidatun*) from the People of the Book and offers them praise. Both of these passages reflect an attempt by the Islamic scripture to qualify its condemnation of Jews and Christians by pointing to a

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[349] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 94.

[350] al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 3:199 al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 2:246; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 308; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 1:416; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 4:2113; al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr*, 1:335; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 3:375.

[351] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 86.

[352] Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, 1:323; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 3:560, no. 8382; al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 2:566; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 2:179; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 3:238; al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ*, 1:537; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 269; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:487-488; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, 1:364; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 3:134; al-Bayḍāwī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 1:197; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 3:209; al-Thaʿālibī, *al-Jawāhir al-ḥisān*, 1:408. The classical interpretation of this verse is discussed at length in J.D. McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians,* 160-167.

praiseworthy minority among the previous monotheistic communities. For example, Qurʾān 3:113 highlights the piety that is exhibited by certain members of the People of the Book:

> They are not all alike. Among the People of the Book there is an upright community (*ummatan qāʾimatan*) who recite the signs of God in the watches of the night and who prostrate themselves.[353]

Several commentators specify that Ibn Salām and his fellow converts are the upright community praised in the verse for their submission to God.[354] Similarly, Qurʾān 5:66 praises a "moderate community" that has faithfully observed the commandments that God revealed in biblical scriptures:

> Had they observed the Torah and the Gospel and what was sent down to them from their Lord, they would have eaten [what was] above them and [what was] below their feet. Among them there is a moderate community (*min-hum ummatun muqtaṣidatun*), but many of them are evil in what they do.[355]

According to the qurʾanic exegetes, Ibn Salām and his companions are the exceptional minority praised by the verse.[356] In their glosses on these passages, the exegetes identify Ibn Salām as the exception to the substantial polemic, criticism, and condemnation that Islamic scripture addresses to Jews and Christians.

4.5. Conclusion

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[353] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 76.

[354] Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 3:49; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, 1:604

[355] A. Jones, *The Qurʾān*, 120.

[356] al-Ṭabarānī identifies three distinct righteous groups among the people of the Book: al-Najāshī and his companions, Bāḥīrā the monk and his companions, and Ibn Salām and his companions. al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 2:423. al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 4:90; al-Baghawī, *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, 388; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 1:691; al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 4:2470; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām*, 6:156; Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ*, 3:722

The myth and image of Ibn Salām looms large in the qurʾānic commentators' understanding of Islamic scripture, including the Qurʾān's legitimacy, rhetoric, and praise for the People of the Book. Through exegesis, the commentators establish Ibn Salām's conversion to Islam as a proof of the Qurʾān's scriptural authority and legitimacy. Just as Ibn Salām serves in the *Sīra* as proof of Muḥammad's legitimacy, he is pointed to by the exegetes as an example that should influence how the prophet's Arab audiences respond to the revelation of the Qurʾān. Ibn Salām also shapes how the scriptural authority of the Qurʾān is constructed and represented the qurʾānic commentaries. In the exegetes' conception, the authority and legitimacy of Islamic scripture is demonstrated by Ibn Salām's conversion to Islam, and the commentaries maintain that the Qurʾān points to, applauds, and praises the convert and his conversion. Accordingly, the Qurʾān is represented as a divinely revealed scripture that appeals and speaks to Jews – especially Jews like Ibn Salām who are learned in biblical scriptures and their interpretation – confirming their scripture's description of a coming prophet among the Arabs. The Qurʾān's confirmation of the purported passages in Jewish scripture describing Muḥammad's mission is regarded by the exegetes as a reflection of the text's legitimacy and authenticity as a divinely revealed scripture.

The qurʾānic exegetes identify Ibn Salām in their commentary on particular types of verses in the text of the Qurʾān. The majority of these verses are intensely concerned with establishing the legitimacy of Muḥammad and the qurʾanic revelation. Moreover, the scripural passages we have examined seem to have initially emerged in a charged polemical context in which Muḥammad's audiences challenged the origin, authenticity, and legitimicy of the revelation. In this context, the Qurʾān appeals to biblical scriptures,

Jews, and Christians to confirm the divine status of the revelations communicated by Muḥammad. In their commentaries on these passages, the exegetes routinely identify Ibn Salām in an attempt to clarify and specify the language, rhetoric, and polemic of the Qurʾān. At times the exegetes point to Ibn Salām and his conversion as a powerful example that should persuade Muḥammad's polytheistic opponents to accept the Qurʾān as divine revelation. As a part of their representation of Ibn Salām as an ideal model to be emulated by the Arab polytheists, the commentators portray Arabian Judaism on the eve of Islam in particular ways. According to the qurʾānic commentaries we have examined, Arabian Jews had a well-established tradition of scriptural study and exegesis which prepared them to recognize Muḥammad as a prophet once he appeared. Jewish scripture as it existed in seventh century Arabia described the Arabian prophet and detailed the historical circumstances that signaled his advent. As for the pre-Islamic Arabs, the exegetes claim that they regularly consululted the Jews with questions about Muḥammad and the description of an Arabian prophet found in Jewish scriptures. The accounts of the interactions between the Jews and the Arab polytheists in the qurʾānic commentaries imply that the Arabs in pre-Islamic times held great admiration and respect for the Arabian Jews on account of their scriptures and tradition of Torah study and exegesis. The exegetes identify Ibn Salām in their commentaries as the chief exemplar of this authentic Arabian Jewish tradition which describes and confirms Muḥammad's mission. While Ibn Salām and authentic Arabian Jewish tradition should persuade Muḥammad's opponents, they are also cited by the commentators to provide consolation and encouragement to Muḥammad as he endures criticism and ridicule.

As we have seen, Islamic scripture often points to select individuals among the People of the Book who are deemed to be righteous, truthfull, and praiseworthy. These unnamed individuals are an exception to the majority of Arabian Jews and Christians of the time who rejected Muḥammad's claims to prophecy. The commentaries on these passages identify Ibn Salām as the exception par excellence to the Jews and Christians of his age. A clear pattern can be seen in the commentaries on scriptural passages that differentiate between members of the People of the Book or identify an exceptional minority among them. The exegetes routinely state that the verses in question describe Ibn Salām and other anonymous righteous Jews who converted to Islam during the lifetime of the prophet. In the exegetical glosses supplied in the commentaries Ibn Salām functions as a topos that represents the Jewish confirmation of Muḥammad. Collectively, the exegetical glosses on these passages represent Ibn Salām as *the* exceptional Jew of his age who repeatedly draws the attention and praise of the qurʾānic revelation.

Conclusions

The biographies of Ibn Salām are not a reflection of the socio-cultural and religious milieu of Arabian Judaism in the seventh century Hijāz. The Islamic sources that have been consultued for this study fail to answer questions surrounding the history of the Jews encountered by Muḥammad, including, their origins, practices, or beliefs; nor do they shed light on the status that Jewish scripture held among the Jews of Medina or the role that scriptural exegesis and Torah study may have played in their religious and intellectual life. The sources do not fare much better when it comes to Ibn Salām and his background in Arabia. Again, the sources do not provide a sober historical account of Ibn Salām's background and ancestry, or his affiliation with the major Jewish tribes located in Medina and her immediate surroundings. The biographies of Ibn Salām do, however, attest to how Muslims during the classical and post-classical period of Islamic history conceived of and represented Arabian Jews, Judaism, and Jewish scriptures on the eve of Islam. Ibn Salām's biography provided Muslim scholars, traditionists, and qurʾānic commentators an opportunity to articulate their understanding of how Jews of past and present should respond to Muḥammad's mission, and how Jewish scriptures legitimize Muḥammad and the rise of Islam.

Our analysis of Ibn Salām's biography and legendary image is a case study in how Jewish figures, Judaism, and Jewish scriptures functioned as tropes in early Islamic literature to legitimize the prophet of Islam. Although we have focused on analyzing the biographies and representations of Ibn Salām, this dissertation is ultimately a study in how Islamic literary sources legitimize Muḥammad. Rather than other early Jewish and

Christian figures that are well attested in the traditional Islamic literature, Ibn Salām in particular drew the attention of Muslim scholars and was memorialized as the prophet's pious Jewish Companion, the quintessential Jewish convert to Islam, and the enduring symbol of biblical scriptures' anticipation of Muḥammad. There are several explanations for why Ibn Salām – as opposed to Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, Wahb ibn Munabbih, and other figures from early Islam that we have discussed – became such a celebrated and legendary figure in Arabo-Islamic literature. First, the accounts of his conversion are generally reported in the biographies of Muḥammad, including Ibn Isḥāq's standard early biography of the prophet, *al-Sīra al-nabawīya*. Given Ibn Salām's purported background as a rabbi and scholar among the Medinan Jews, Muslim scholars of *ḥadīth*, historiographers, biographers of Muḥammad and the Companions, and qurʾānic exegetes recognized the conversion as a pivotal moment in Muḥammad's career, and an essential part of the story of Muḥammad's encounter with the Jews of Medina. Moreover, the report of the conversion in the popular *Sīra* of Ibn Isḥāq almost guarunteed Ibn Salām's renown among subsequent biographers of Muḥammad, scholars, and the communties that studied these texts. The second reason that Ibn Salām in particular achieved such a legendary status is that his purported early conversion to Islam, either in Mecca or shortly after the prophet's arrival in Medina, guarunteed him the status of a Companion with precedence (*sābiqa*) in Islam. Ibn Salām's widely regarded background as a scholar of biblical scriptures combined with his largely unquestionable credentials as a Companion made him a reliable transmitter of ḥadīth traditions and authentic biblical traditions in the eyes of Muslim scholars.

Ibn Salām's image, including the various accounts of his life and career, emerged as a theological construct in early Islam to lend Muḥammad biblical authority and credibility. Through Ibn Salām's biography, Muslim authors depict what they believed was the ideal Jewish response to Muḥammad's claims to prophecy in contrast to the reported rejection of Islam's prophet by the majority of Jews in seventh century Arabia. The biography of Ibn Salām afforded Muslim scholars the opportunity to articulate their understanding of what Arabian Judaism and Jewish tradition was on the eve of Islam. After reading the biographies of Ibn Salām a distinct picture of seventh century Arabian Judaism emerges that serves as an important theological backdrop to Muḥammad's career and the rise of Islam. According to the Islamic accounts of Ibn Salām, a well-established Arabian Jewish religious tradition existed in Medina in which Jewish scholars and rabbis engaged in the study and interpretation of Jewish scriptures. The Jews who participated in this tradition, we are told, were anxiously awaiting and eagerly anticipating the arrival of a prophet in Arabia. The scriptures that the Arabian Jews studied and interpreted, identified in the Islamic accounts as the Torah, contained descriptions of the era and historical circumstances that signaled the arrival of an Arabian prophet. The Torah that was read and studied by these Jews also described the advent of the Arabian prophet and his physical appearance. At the same time, the pre-Islamic pagan and idolotrous Arab tribes of the Hijāz recognized this Arabian Jewish tradition and held the Jews in high regard on account of the latter's scriptures, religious learning, and traditions of scriptural exegesis. To a certain extent, the pre-Islamic Arabs deferred to the Jews in matters of religion and would often seek out the Jewish rabbis and scholars to question them about the arrival of a prophet in Arabia.

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