

From Jewish King to Islamic Prophet: Interreligious Conversations about Solomon in Antique Jewish and Islamic Literature

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The mere mention of the figure of Solomon from the Hebrew Bible brings instantaneous recognition of his role as the king of Israel.¹ However, for those who study later renditions of Judaism in the Common Era, late Christian Antiquity, and Islam, the depiction of this revered monarch is noticeably different. Although Solomon is traditionally revered for building the Jerusalem temple and his unmatched wisdom,² an examination

1. While the pivotal role played by Solomon is referenced in numerous works relating to the history of Ancient Israel, little has been done detailing the characteristics and roles of Solomon's singularly. Although there does appear to be a *vacat* in the scholarship, some recent scholarly works have sought to investigate the figure of Solomon. See Joseph Verheyden, ed., *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Traditions: King, Sage, and Architect* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Pablo A. Torijano, *Solomon, the Esoteric King: From King to Magus, Development of a Tradition* (Luxembourg: De Boeck, 2002); S. Wälchli, *Der Weise König Salomo. Eine Studie zu den Erzählungen von der Weisheit Salomos in ihrem alttestamentlichen und altorientalischen Kontext*, Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament 151 (Stuttgart: Stuttgart, 1999).

2. See: Roddy Braun, "Solomon, the Chosen Temple Builder: The Significance of 1 Chronicles 22, 28, and 29 for the Theology of Chronicles," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 94 (1976): 581–590; R. Y. B. Scott, "Solomon

of Solomon in the Islamic sources³ reveals an additional reverence for his position as a prophet. By employing K. Lawson Younger Jr.'s methodology of textual comparison,⁴ this paper will explore the Islamic texts and traditions that refer to Solomon as a prophet and examine his characteristics and life as portrayed within them. These sources include the Qur'an, various *ḥadith*⁵ collections, and the Persian historian Abu Jafar Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari's historical chronicle entitled *History of Prophets and Kings* (1991).⁶

Central to this examination is the understanding of the bipartite distinction of *nabi* or *rasul*⁷ as it relates to the prophetic position in Islamic tradition. Understanding this distinction in

and the Beginnings of Wisdom in Israel,” in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Martin Noth and David Winton Thomas (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 262–279.

3. Like other subjects relating to Solomon that have been mentioned above, the role of Solomon in Islamic sources is an understudied topic. See Jules Janssens, “The Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā on King-Prophet Solomon,” in *The Figure of Solomon in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Traditions: King, Sage, and Architect*, ed. Joseph Verheyden (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 241–253.

4. K. Lawson Younger, Jr., “The ‘Contextual Method’: Some West Semitic Reflections,” in *The Context of Scripture, vol. 3 Archival Documents from the Biblical World*, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), xxxiii–xlii.

5. *Hadiths* are generally defined as a collection of traditions containing the sayings and actions (daily practices) of the prophet Muhammad.

6. Commonly known as *Tarikh al-Tabari* or *The History of al-Tabari*, this retelling of history is recognized as being the most important and authoritative “world” history produced within the Islamic world. It is a detailed chronicle about ancient nations (with special focus on biblical people and prophets), legends and events from the history of ancient Iran, and early Islamic history (from Muhammad to approximately 915 CE). See William M. Brinner, ed. and trans., *The History of al-Tabarī, vol. 3 The Children of Israel* (New York: SUNY, 1991), 152–178.

7. Both these terms, *nabi* and *rasul* are generally translated as prophet, however, I will be offering a more detailed definition of each of these terms later in the paper.

Islam, as well as similar distinctions that are made in the characteristics of Solomon in later Jewish traditions, provides an instructive system by which to measure Solomon as a prophet. Ultimately, this paper will propose that the preservation of the tradition designating Solomon as a prophet in the Islamic sources may be an accurate depiction of him as presented in earlier traditions preserved within Jewish texts outside of the Hebrew Bible.

Ancient ‘Canonicity,’ Younger’s Laws of Propinquity, and the Historicity of Islamic Solomon Traditions

In recent years, scholars have questioned traditional assumptions concerning canonicity in the ancient religious world.⁸ While scholarship has long perpetuated a parallel between modern canonical scripture with the antique canons of Judaism and Christianity, the manuscript evidence from the Judaean Desert has altered that perception to suggest that some texts commonly relegated to the position of apocryphal, pseudepigraphical, or non-biblical were authoritative among Jewish and Christian communities in antiquity. Because of this broadening perspective, scholars elect to use the phrase “authoritative texts” rather than “canon” to discuss possible documents that served as foundational

8. See Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (New York: Oxford, 2016); Shemaryahu Talmon, *Text and Canon of the Hebrew Bible: Collected Studies* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010); H. Daniel Zacharias and Craig A. Evans, eds., *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon* (London: T&T Clark, 2009); Craig A. Evans and Emanuel Tov, eds., *Exploring the Origins of the Bible: Canon Formation in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

or authoritative in these various faith communities.⁹ In a recent work, Mladen Popović concludes, “some non-biblical texts were apparently as authoritative as the biblical texts, even though they did not end up in the Jewish or Christian canons.”¹⁰ It is with this expansive view of authoritative texts in Judaism that the appearances of extra-canonical texts and traditions concerning Solomon can be related and assessed within the Islamic sources.

Addressing the “parallelomania” that gripped biblical scholarship in the twentieth century and the equally responsive “parallelophobia” that followed, Younger developed a four-pronged approach to assessing the parallels between two disparate ancient texts and traditions. Younger’s four primary elements of assessment rely upon clear and distinct connections between two or more ancient texts in the areas of language, geography, chronology, and culture, which he terms the laws of propinquity.¹¹ At a basic level, Younger’s methodology emphasizes that when assessing the parallels between two ancient texts, the greater the number of these four criteria that are met with high probability, the stronger the evidence that one text is reliant and connected to the other.¹² This methodology is especially helpful for evaluating how the prophetic traditions concerning Solomon in Islam may be connected with ancient Jewish extra-canonical traditions that share the same perspective.

9. George J. Brooke, “‘The Canon within the Canon’ at Qumran and in the New Testament,” in *The Scrolls and the Scriptures: Qumran Fifty Years After*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans, JSPSup 26 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 244–250.

10. Mladen Popovic, *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 1.

11. Younger, “The Contextual Method,” xxxix.

12. Younger, “The Contextual Method,” xlii.

Undoubtedly, some traditions excluded from this analysis were likely orally transmitted or existed in manuscripts no longer available to us when the Islamic traditions were in their formative stages. To ensure that this study presents the firmest evidence of Jewish traditions that could have been available and utilized by antique Islamic authors, only Jewish and Islamic texts that meet all four of the criteria outlined by Younger will be included in this study. By exercising caution in this regard, it is my hope that the examples cited and discussed herein will be more of a certain character than those traditions that would fail to qualify under Younger's methodology.

To compare the extra-canonical texts and traditions of antique Judaism with the Islamic tradition, the four areas of emphasis proposed by Younger need to be applied to the Islamic traditions that preserve statements of Solomon as a prophet. As each Solomonic tradition is analysed below, the laws of propinquity will be applied to highlight the probability of contact between the antique Jewish sources and those of early Islam. While several intricate issues and questions concerning the Islamic traditions of *hadith*, and *tafsir*¹³ – relating to conclusions about language, geography, chronology, and culture – will be noted when appropriate, the acceptable probability of current scholarly consensus will provide the primary basis for the analysis, while at the same time leaving enough room for possible changes in perception where the data is inconclusive.

13. *Tafsir* is a form of Qur'anic exegesis, which attempts to clarify, explain, and interpret the Qur'an.

Solomon: *Nabi* or *Rasul*?

Jewish and Islamic Interaction in the Middle Ages

The influence of Judaism on Islam has become a budding topic of interest among some scholars in both fields of study. As Jacob Lassner has stated, “[a] salient characteristic of Muslim historiography was the manner in which the faithful fully appropriated the Jewish past as part of their own historical experience and world-view.”¹⁴ While each Islamic tradition or text discussed below will have a slightly different propinquity with the Jewish source from which it appears to be drawn, there are general points of contact between Judaism and Islam that contribute to this study and the connections scholars make between these two faith communities. Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to present a detailed history of Jewish-Islamic relations in the Middle Ages,¹⁵ analyzing the extent to which Judaism was present during the formation of various Islamic texts and traditions is worthwhile – one cannot truly divorce the rise of Islam from the life of Muhammad, and viewing the interactions between Muhammad and Jewish peoples is instructive.

Though Muhammad’s interactions with Jews was not singularly political or theological in nature, F. E. Peters emphasizes that, “despite the great deal of information supplied by later Muslim literary sources, we know pitifully little for sure about the political

14. Jacob Lassner, “Time, Historiography, and Historical Consciousness: The Dialectic of Jewish-Muslims Relations,” in *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication, and Interaction*, ed. Benjamin H. Hary, John L. Hayes, and Fred Astern (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 2.

15. For a detailed analysis and history of relations between Muslims and Jews, see Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora, eds., *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

or economic history of Muhammad's native city of Mecca or of the religious culture from which he came."¹⁶ Montgomery Watt indicates that "there were Jews in Medina when Muhammad went there, but how they came to be there and whether they were of Hebrew stock is not clear."¹⁷ Robert Hoyland inquires on this comment and posits:

Should we think in terms of [...] 'a genuine Hebrew stock' linked 'with the learned centres in the greater world outside of Arabia' [...] or rather of a community mostly made up of Arab converts or refugees [that] substantially integrated within Arabian society and [were] barely in touch with non-Arabian Jewish communities, possessing a relatively low level of Jewish education?¹⁸

With this stark question in mind, and the lack of sources to answer it, Peters continues:

The Qur'an is filled with biblical stories, for example, most of them told [are] told in an extremely elliptical or what has been called an allusive or referential style. For someone who had not read or heard the Bible recited many of these Quranic narratives would make little sense. But they did and we can only conclude that Muhamad's audiences were not hearing these stories for the first time.¹⁹

16. F. E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: SUNY, 1994), 260.

17. W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad at Medina* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 192.

18. Robert Hoyland, "The Jews of the Hijaz in the Qur'an and in Their Inscriptions," in *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in Its Historical Context 2*, ed. Gabriel Said Reynolds (London: Routledge, 2011), 111.

19. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins*, 260.

Clearly the influences of Judaism are present in the worldview of Muhammad; what is less clear is the extent to which they were present. What can be concluded is that there was a Jewish community in Muhammad's social circles that may very well have been the source of some of the prophet's information on Jewish history.

After the death of Muhammad, interactions between Jews and the Islamic communities continued in a different way as the Muslim empire began to rise. During this period of Muslim conquest, Reuven Firestone notes, "Medinan Jews and early Muslims, like their descendants, shared many of the most fundamental notions of religion in prophecy, revelation, ethics, law, ritual, ritual purity, and theology [...] [but] the Qur'an itself, places revelation into the context of previous revelations known in seventh century Arabia through Jewish and Christian scripture."²⁰

The Jewish-Muslim relations that become vital to this analysis rise from the period between the ninth and fourteenth centuries, a period some have hypothetically labelled "the Golden Age" or *convivencia*.²¹ It is during this period that a relative cohesion takes place in the Islamic empire that enables Jews to standardize their practices, beliefs, and theology.²² Two Jewish

20. Reuven Firestone, "Muslim-Jewish Relations," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, published January 4, 2016, <https://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-17>.

21. While he does not agree entirely with the conceptualization of a "Golden Age" of existence, Mark Cohen has proposed that the situation within the Muslim world was much more favourable to Jews at this time than it was for Jews living in the Christian world. See Mark Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 276–284.

22. Marina Rustow, "Jews and Muslims in the Eastern Islamic World," in *A*

academies, Sura and Pumbedita near present day Baghdad, were established during this period and existed for centuries. It is because of an ease of travel throughout the empire and a period of relative peace that these Jewish centres of learning, interpretation, and law became known throughout the world. While further genres of Jewish learning were developed during this time, it is the access and preservation of manuscripts and texts like the Talmud,²³ Aramaic Targumim, and the Hebrew Bible itself (in various translations) that enabled the Jews to thrive intellectually. There grew out of this period a controlled intellectual discourse of the Jewish world, a discourse that would have likely been standardized to a point of recognition to non-Jews.²⁴

While this period was one of prosperity and intellectual growth for the Jews, even more could be said about the expanding Islamic empire. Though much has been said and more could be written concerning this ideal time, for our purposes the great outgrowth of this period was that of intellectual learning and textual construction regarding Islamic religion. Jane Dammen McAuliffe has emphasized the great progress that was made in the Islamic study of the Qur'an and in the Arabic language through these centuries as "the sciences of the Qur'an" rose to prominence.²⁵ Academies, similar to the ones established by the Jews, were

History of Jewish-Muslim Relations, ed. Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 75–98.

23. The Talmud is a compilation of ancient teachings (laws and traditions) regarded as sacred and normative by Jews.

24. Firestone, "Muslim-Jewish Relations."

25. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "An Introduction to Medieval Interpretation of the Qur'an," in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 311–319.

focused on lexicography, etymology, and the study of grammar and rhetoric within other ancient Arabic literature.²⁶ These academies sought to understand the use of words in a variety of contexts, to preserve oral as well as written traditions. This intellectual endeavour sought to acquire a clearer knowledge of God, and to do so through understanding his message as presented through his messengers, in both their textual and oral forms. To help clarify the Islamic position on prophecy, a recognition and perpetuation of a two-tiered definition of prophets was more fully developed with the aid of the intellectual advances mentioned above.

The first of two definitions for a prophet preserved in the Qur'anic text is the term *nabi*. A cognate with the Hebrew word, *nbi*, this type of prophet can be defined as:

One who announces. A person called by God to communicate a divinely given message in the form of general moral teachings to humankind and the unseen world of spirits. [One who] expresses the communicative nature of prophethood, rather than the emissary function of delivering a message in specific language. The message is exemplified in the *nabi's* life.²⁷

Especially when understanding the purview of the Islamic traditions concerning ancient prophets like Solomon, various points within the definition of a *nabi* will warrant highlighting below.

The second title employed to designate a prophet in the Qur'an is *rasul*, defined as:

26. Gordonn Newby, *A History of the Jews of Arabia from Ancient Times to Their Eclipse under Islam* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 97–100.

27. "Nabi," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito, *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e1679>.

A messenger (of God). One of two Qur'anic terms to refer to Muhammad and other prophets. Usually translated as "prophet." Some scholars describe a *rasul* as a *nabi* who has delivered a written revelation (scripture), although the *Quran* appears to use the terms interchangeably. It describes a coherent chain of prophets and messengers (and scriptures associated with them) sent by God, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, David (the Psalms are considered his scripture), Solomon, Moses (who brought the *Torah*), Jesus (the Gospels are considered his scripture), and Muhammad (who brought the *Quran*). The *Quran* states (10:47) that a *rasul* has been sent to every spiritual community (*ummah*). All messengers call humanity to worship the one God and renounce evil.²⁸

Some may note that while all prophets designated as a *rasul* can also be considered a *nabi*, not all prophets designated as a *nabi* can be considered a *rasul*. Recognizing the definitions of these two distinctive terms for prophet in Islamic literature will aid in an analysis of the Islamic and Jewish texts designating Solomon as a prophet. At the outset of our exploration of ancient Jewish and Islamic texts, it should be noted that even in the *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, scholars struggle to conclusively categorize Solomon as a prophet with the title of *rasul*. While he is included in the proper prophetic circles, questions abound as to his appropriate status. While the primary objective of this paper is to identify the Jewish traditions and source texts that influenced Islamic traditions identifying Solomon as a prophet, an ancillary purpose is to validate claims that he indeed belongs with the prophets, both the *nabi* and the *rasul*.

28. "Rasul," in *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito, *Oxford Islamic Studies Online*, <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/je1679>.

Islamic Traditions of Solomon as a Prophet and Their Jewish Sources

Having established the necessary foundation upon which this analysis of Solomonic prophetic traditions can proceed and be assessed, it is from the texts of both Islam and Judaism that the most productive insights are attained. In the following section, several Islamic traditions and texts that preserve and construct a memory of Solomon as a prophet will be presented chronologically as they appear in the Hebrew Bible. These texts will appear in an abbreviated form, though some material from their context will be drawn upon to solidify certain conclusions. Each Islamic text or tradition presenting Solomon as a prophet is paired with a Jewish text that appears to be the source from which the Islamic authors drew their material. Where appropriate, multiple sources will be cited. After presenting the textual data for the Solomonic prophetic characteristics presented in both the Jewish and Islamic traditions, Younger's laws of propinquity will be applied to solidify historical dependence, as is demonstrated by Table 1 below. As established above, a line of dependence between the posterior Islamic sources and the anterior Jewish sources existed in early Islam. It is important to note that the Islamic traditions presented below may not be derived from the exact Jewish sources presented. Nevertheless, the identification of the Jewish source as being available to an Islamic scholar in the Middle Ages who is likely associating with Arabian Jews will be a sufficient starting point for diagnosing an Islamic dependence on Jewish traditions designating Solomon as a prophet.

	Language	Geography	Chronology	Cultural
Qur'an ²⁹	Arabic	Mecca, Medina, Damascus, Basra, Kufa	650 CE	Arab, Islamic
Seder Olam Rabbah ³⁰	Aramaic	Babylonian Academies	200 CE	Jewish Rabbinic
Hebrew Bible (ca. 600 CE)	Hebrew, Greek, Syriac, Aramaic	Wherever there are Jews	100 CE	Jewish Hellenistic
Mishnah	Hebrew, Aramaic	Babylon	200 CE	Jewish
<i>Tafsir Ibn-Kathir</i> ³¹	Arabic	Syria	1300 CE	Islamic
Tg. Song of Songs	Aramaic	Babylonian	100 CE	Jewish
al-Tabari	Arabic	Iran	800 CE	Islamic

Table 1: A Diagram of Islamic and Jewish Textual Information Against Younger's Method of Comparison.

29. James A. Bellamy, "Textual Criticism of the Koran," *Journal of American Oriental Society* 121 (2001): 1–6; Farid Esack, "Qur'an," in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, ed. Richard C. Martin (New York: Macmillan, 2004), 562–568.

30. Heinrich Walter Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam: The Rabbinic View of Biblical Chronology* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), xi.

31. *Tafsir Ibn Kathir* is a classic commentary on the Qur'an written by Imad ud Din Ibn Kathir and dates to the fourteenth century CE. It is accepted as a summary of the earlier commentary by al-Tabari. It is also celebrated because it links various *hadiths* (sayings of Muhammad) and sayings of the *sahaba* (Muhammad's companions) to verses in the Qur'an.

Solomon in Prophetic Lists³²

Qur'an 4.163 ³³	Seder 'Olam 20 ³⁴
<p>Indeed, We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], as We revealed to Noah and the prophets after him. And we revealed to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the Descendants, Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Solomon, and to David We gave the book [of Psalms].</p>	<p>(Here Solomon is listed among 48 Jewish Prophets)</p> <p>[...] since Solomon died, he (Shishak) came and took the treasures of the Lord [...]³⁵</p>

The utilization of individuals from the Hebrew Bible occurs regularly within the Qur'an. As cited above, it is the consensus of scholars that Muhammad and those who engaged in the oral and textual transmission of the Qur'an during the seventh century CE could have been familiar with the primary religious text of Judaism. While a few examples of employment from the Hebrew Bible texts will be referenced below, the reference found here is of interest when analysing the Qur'an for dependence on a Jewish source.

32. While several prophetic lists in both Jewish and Islamic sources exist, for the purposes of this study it will be sufficient to offer the few examples listed here.

33. "An-Nisa the Women 4:163," Quran.com, accessed April 17, 2021, <https://quran.com/4.163>.

34. "Seder Olam Rabbah 20," *Sefaria*, accessed April 17, 2021, http://www.sefaria.org/Seder_Olam_Rabbah.20?lang=en. My translation.

35. Baer Ratner provides notes suggesting that the taking up of the treasure of the Lord was a symbolic representation of receiving the status of a prophet. See Baer Ratner, *Mabo leha-Seder Olam Rabbah* (Wilna: Widow & Bros, 1894), 8.

The Seder ‘Olam text is part of the Babylonian Talmud, a document that was produced around 200 CE by Jewish scholars near Babylon. The primary function of the text was to provide an interpretation of both the preserved text of the Hebrew Bible and the oral tradition that accompanied it, the Mishnah.³⁶ These texts were predominately written in Aramaic, a cognate language with Arabic.³⁷ These texts were primarily circulated in Jewish centres around Babylon and would have been present during the “Golden Age” of Jewish and Islamic relations. Based on Younger’s methodology, it is probable that both Jewish and Islamic scholars would have had access to this text when the Qur’an was being transmitted.

The conceptualization of a prophet list is an important indicator of who is classified alongside Solomon in both the Jewish and Islamic traditions. While lists of prophets are rare prior to the Common Era, numerous other types of lists existed in antiquity.³⁸ A peculiar tradition of maintaining a prophet list is preserved in the Armenian tradition, where prophets from both Jewish and Islamic sources are utilized.³⁹

36. Guggenheimer, *Seder Olam*, xi.

37. Max Leopold Margolis, *A Manual of the Aramaic Language of the Babylonian Talmud* (London: David Mutt, 1910), 1.

38. The Sumerian Kings List is the best example of ancient lists. The Hebrew Bible primarily substitutes the kings list with genealogies (see Gen. 5), making the genealogies a break from the traditional recording of authority. See John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1989), 128.

39. Scott B. Noegel and Brannon M. Wheeler, eds., *The A to Z Prophets in Islam and Judaism* (Toronto: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 40.

David's Heir

Qur'an 27.16	1 Kings 2.12 ⁴⁰
Solomon inherited from David [...] everything has come to us.	So Solomon sat on the throne of his father David; and his kingdom was firmly established.
Ibn Kathir ⁴¹	Mas. Sotah 48b ⁴²
Solomon Inherited prophethood and kingship, but not all of David's property because David had other sons.	Who are the former prophets? Rabbi Huna says, They are David, Samuel and Solomon [...]

Like the prophets list mentioned above, it appears that the emphasis on Solomon becoming a prophet is tied to heredity. It is worth noting that both the Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible make clear that Solomon inherits his father's throne and kingdom. Even more interesting is the commentary that exists in both Islamic and Jewish traditions, which emphasizes that the inheritance from David was not just monarchical. Ibn Kathir, who wrote a *tafsir* in the fourteenth century (near the end of the "Golden Age" of Jewish and Islamic relations), may have had access to a Jewish tradition that formed in the Midrashim, or the Oral Torah.⁴³ Emerging from the ashes of the

40. The translation of the Hebrew Bible used in this paper is derived from the *New Revised Standard Version* unless otherwise noted.

41. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 266.

42. The Hebrew translations of the Talmud Texts are my own.

43. During the Second Temple Period, it was believed that an oral law that had not been written was transmitted from generation to generation along with the written Torah. This Midrash (textual interpretation) provided further information on the texts of the Hebrew Bible. These explanations were not considered like sacred scripture but were accepted as true. Following the

Second Temple, the Mishnaic texts provided further knowledge and understanding of the Torah. While the Mishnah commentary was written after the fall of the Second Temple, their traditions are dated as far back as the fifth century BCE. While preserved in Hebrew, the text is:

A Hebrew that differs from the literary language as it is found in even the latest versions of the Hebrew Bible. Greek, Latin, and Aramaic influences are a consequence of the cultural influences with which the Jews had come in contact. Aramaic had entirely, or almost entirely, displaced Hebrew as the language of the Jews.⁴⁴

Once written, these Mishnaic texts primarily circulated around Jewish centres in the vicinity of Babylon and would have been present and readily available in Aramaic,⁴⁵ and perhaps in Arabic translations or transliterations,⁴⁶ when Ibn Kathir was producing his *tafsir*. Based on Younger's methodology, it is probable that both Jewish and Islamic scholars would have had access to this text when the Qur'an was being transmitted.

In arguing for the purposes behind these texts in establishing Solomon as a prophet, it is instructive that Solomon is

destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the rabbis believed that it was an appropriate time to record these oral sayings and traditions for the purpose of ensuring their survival. The *sotah* (a tractate – found at the beginning of the Talmud) text quoted here is among those early Midrashim.

44. Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1933), xxvii.

45. While it is uncertain whether authors like Ibn Kathir knew Aramaic, they appear to draw from sources that are only available in Aramaic today. This suggests that either there were translations of the text into other languages or the *tafsir* authors were familiar enough with the language to draw information from them. See Emran El-Badawi, *The Qur'an and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

46. Danby, *The Mishnah*, xxix.

put in the same category as his father. While David is never referred to in the Hebrew Bible as a prophet, the Aramaic Targumim, the Qur'an, and veiled references in the Dead Sea Scrolls suggest that he was revered as such even in the Second Temple period.⁴⁷

Solomon as a Prophet-King

Ibn Kathir ⁴⁸	Tg. Song of Songs 1:1 ⁴⁹
<p>God gave Solomon what he wanted and allowed him to use it how he wanted. God allowed him to do what he wanted and he did not have to account for it to God. These are the circumstances of a prophet-king [...] God made a division between succession to prophethood and kingship after the Prophet Muhammad [...]</p>	<p>Songs and praises (from) Solomon the prophet-king of Israel spoke by the spirit of prophecy before the Lord of all the World.</p>

The conceptualization of Solomon as not only a king, but a prophet-king, is emphasized by the *tafsir* of Ibn Kathir. Providing a lengthy commentary on the differences between a prophet-king and a prophet-servant,⁵⁰ Ibn Kathir juxtaposes Solomon's prophetic call with that of Muhammad, who was given the option to be a prophet-king, but in humility he turned it down.⁵¹ While Younger's catego-

47. See Peter Flint, "The Prophet David at Qumran," in *Biblical Interpretation at Qumran*, ed. Matthias Henze (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 158–167.

48. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 273.

49. "Aramaic Targum," *Sefaria*, accessed April 17, 2021, https://www.sefaria.org/Aramaic_Targum_to_Song_of_Songs.1?ven=English_Translation_by_Jay_Treat&lang=en.

50. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 273.

51. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 273.

ries for Ibn Kathir have already been addressed, the Aramaic Targumim have not. The Aramaic Targumim are primarily an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible. However, scholars have noted that the translators took certain liberties when translating text from Hebrew to Aramaic.

This created what some scholars have called “liberalism translation” and “Midrashic interpretation” of most of the Hebrew texts.⁵² These texts were produced sometime after one hundred CE, following the destruction of the Second Temple, in Babylon. While the primary audience and culture was that of the Jews, for *tafsir* authors like Ibn Kathir, these sources would have been invaluable in reconstructing the records of the peoples of the Bible.

Between the *tafsir* of Ibn Kathir and the Targumim tradition, there appears to be an acceptance of an individual holding both the office of a prophet and king. Ibn Kathir points out that following Muhammad, no other prophet-king will reside on the earth until the end of the world.⁵³

Solomon’s Reception of Scripture

al-Tabari 577	Tg. Song of Songs 1:1 ⁵⁴
The demons said to Solomon: “O Messenger of God! Do not be angry, because if there is anything to be known, the hoopoe knows it.”	Songs and praises (from) Solomon the prophet-king of Israel spoke by the spirit of prophecy before the Lord of all the World.

52. D. R. G. Beattie, “Textual Tradition of Targum Ruth,” in *The Aramaic Bible: Targums in Their Historical Context*, ed. Derek R. G. Beattie and Martin J. McNamara (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 342.

53. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 273.

54. “Aramaic Targum,” *Sefaria*, accessed April 17, 2021, https://www.sefaria.org/Aramaic_Targum_to_Song_of_Songs.1?ven=English_Translation_by_Ja_y_Treat&lang=en.

While on the surface these two passages look to have little to do with each other and the reception of scripture, al-Tabari employs the recognizable title of *rasul* in the voice of demons to describe Solomon. Al-Tabari⁵⁵ wrote his history of the children of Israel in the late ninth or early tenth century CE in modern-day Iran near the thriving Jewish academies mentioned earlier. For al-Tabari, Solomon is not just a prophet, but a messenger of God, recognizing him as a bestower of scripture. While most of the texts that reference Solomon as a *rasul*, including the Qur'an, bestow upon him this title, they (and scholars studying them) fail to recognize what scriptural text Solomon provided. Speculation abounds in scholarship as to whether Solomon wrote Proverbs or Qohelet,⁵⁶ but in the Targum of Song of Songs, not only is Solomon designated as the author of the text, but the recipient of the text via revelation and prophecy from God. The exact definition of a *rasul* in Islamic tradition.

Solomon's Communication with Animal Life

Qur'an 27.16 ⁵⁷	1 Kings 4.33
<p>And Sulaiman (Solomon) inherited (the knowledge of) Dawud (David). He said: "O mankind! We have been taught the language of birds, and on us have been bestowed all things. This, verily, is an evident grace (from Allah)."</p>	<p>He would speak of trees, from the cedar that is in the Lebanon to the hyssop that grows in the wall; he would speak of animals, and birds, and reptiles, and fish.</p>

55. Brinner, *The History of al-Tabarī*, 152–178.

56. See Peter Enns, *Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 111.

57. "An-Naml the Ant 27.16," Quran.com, accessed April 17, 2021, <https://quran.com/27.16>.

Abu Malik ⁵⁸	Legends of the Jews ⁵⁹
Solomon was also able to understand the speech of other animals and other creatures.	Once the guest refused the gift (from Solomon), and asked the king to teach him the language of the birds and the animals instead.

Like Wheeler – who compiled various Islamic traditions, *hadith* and *tafsir*, in accessible volumes to aid students in their studies of Islamic exegesis – Louis Ginzberg compiled ancient Jewish traditions into accessible volumes and edited them into a progressing narrative from Genesis through the Hebrew Bible. While not the most direct source, Ginzberg’s Jewish legends provides texts that are difficult to identify and locate. The traditions upon which Ginzberg relies are Mishnaic and follow the same *Sitz im Leben* as those cited above.

Like the tradition of Solomon being the complete heir of his father, the tradition of Solomon speaking with animals finds its depth, not in the Qur’an or Hebrew Bible parallels, but in the interpretations of those primary texts. Abu Malik, one of the sources Ibn Kathir draws upon for his *tafsir*, seems to have been aware of a Jewish tradition that appears in the Mishnaic sources. The fact that these sources speak of Solomon conversing with animals so extensively is a sure sign of intertextuality between the Islamic

58. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 267.

59. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 4 *From Joshua to Esther* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1913), 138. Ginzberg references *Ben ha-Melek we-ha-Nazir* XXIV and Prym and Socin, *Der Dialekti des Tur Abdin*, LXVI as primary sources for this legend, although various other attestations to the legend exist.

world and Judaism.⁶⁰ For the authors, this secret knowledge is further evidence of Solomon’s role as a *rasul* and a *nabi*.

Solomon’s Signet Ring

al-Tabari 589	Josephus, <i>Antiquities of the Jews</i> VIII. 46–47 ⁶¹
<p>He (Solomon) had a chief concubine named al-Āminah to whom, when he entered his privy or when he wished to have intercourse with one of his wives, he would give his signet ring until he purified himself, because he would not touch his signet ring unless he was pure. His dominion was in his signet [...] he commanded the demons.</p>	<p>And he (Solomon) left behind him the manner of using exorcisms, by which they drive away demons, so that they never return, and his method of cure is of great force unto this day; for I have seen a certain man of my own country [...] releasing people that were demonical in the presence of Vespasian [...] the manner of cure was this: He put a ring that had a foot of one of those sorts mentioned by Solomon to the nostrils of the demoniac, after which he drew out the demon⁶² through his nostrils [...] making still mention of Solomon, and reciting the incantations which he composed.</p>

60. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. 4, 287–288. “The conception that he who knows the language of the animals must keep it secret at the peril of his life seems to be presupposed also in Arabic legends [...] Solomon’s knowledge of the languages of the animals plays an important part in the [Islamic] legends [of returning to the original language spoken in the Garden of Eden by the Snake].”

61. Ralph Marcus, trans., *Josephus Jewish Antiquities Books 7–8* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), 154.

62. This tradition also appears in the Targum Sheni. See Bernard Grossfeld, *The Two Targums of Esther* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 115.

The most famous of all Solomonic traditions in Islam is that which is associated with Solomon’s signet ring and the power that it possesses to control all that is around him. While al-Tabari includes a version of this tale in his *History of the Children of Israel*, it is of interest to note the similarities between Josephus’ account of a contemporary Jew performing the same acts of Solomon, with his ring and wisdom. The ability to pass along an item to control external forces fits into the worldview introduced by the prophet lists discussed above, particularly the text of Seder ‘Olam. Whether this account suggests that Josephus thought of Solomon as a *rasul* or *nabi* is debatable. Josephus wrote in Greek and primarily in the Levant, suggesting that this tradition extended from the end of the Second Temple Period to the ninth and tenth centuries CE. It is highly unlikely that the Josephus text was the source for al-Tabari, but it is evidence that the tradition existed at least a millennium before al-Tabari recorded it in his history.

Solomon’s Reign and Death

Qur’an 34.14 ⁶³	1 Kings 11.42–43
<p>Then when We decreed death for him [Sulaiman], nothing informed them (jinns) of his death except a little worm of the earth, which kept (slowly) gnawing away at his stick, so when he fell down, the jinns saw clearly that if they had known the unseen, they would not have stayed in the humiliating torment.</p>	<p>The time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years.</p> <p>Solomon slept with his ancestors and was buried in the city of his father David, and his son Rehoboam succeeded him.</p>

63. “Saba Sheba 34.14,” Quran.com, accessed April 17, 2021, <https://quran.com/34.14>.

Ibn Kathir ⁶⁴	Legends of the Jews ⁶⁵
<p>In the fourth year of his reign, Solomon started building Jerusalem. According to Zuhri he lived for 52 years, and his reign was 40 years. [...] His son Rehoboam was king after him for seventeen years, and after him the kingdom of the Israelites split up.</p>	<p>At the youthful age of twelve, Solomon succeeded his father David as king.</p>

The death of Solomon, like those prophets before him, proves nothing more than that he was mortal and susceptible to death. It is interesting to note that while both the Qur'an and the Hebrew Bible record the death of Solomon, the outside traditions of Ibn Kathir and Mishnaic texts align in their assessment that Solomon ascended to the throne at twelve, reigned for forty years, and died at fifty-two. While some sources do hover around the twelve-year-old ascension mark,⁶⁶ the extra canonical traditions preserve a congruent timeline for the prophet and king of Israel.

Conclusion

As explained above, although Solomon is traditionally revered for building the Jerusalem temple and for his unmatched wisdom, an examination of this king of Israel in Islamic traditions

64. Wheeler, *Prophets in the Quran*, 279.

65. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 125.

66. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, 125. Ginzberg relies on the work of Ratner and cites the Talmudic books of Seder 'Olam 14, Nazir 5a, Temurah 15a, and Sanhedrin 69b as evidence for his conclusion.

through the lens of Jewish source texts reveals an additional reverence for his position as a prophet. When employing the methodology of Younger's textual comparison, the Islamic texts and traditions that refer to Solomon as a prophet – including the Qur'an, various *ḥadith* collections, and the History of al-Tabarī – appear to be in harmony with extra-canonical Jewish traditions that could have been available to the Islamic authors. Central to this examination has been the bipartite distinctions of the prophetic position defined in Islamic tradition of *nabi* and *rasul*. Solomon, in both Jewish and Islamic sources, qualifies for both distinctions and the method employed provides an instructive system by which to measure other historical figures as prophets in both faith traditions. Ultimately, this paper suggests that the tradition that distinguishes Solomon as a prophet in the Islamic sources may be an accurate depiction of Solomon as presented in earlier traditions preserved within non-canonized Jewish texts as opposed to the Hebrew Bible which does not designate him as such.