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The Qur'an

A Neo-Structuralist Analysis

Sam Winders

[31/12/2014]

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General Introduction

The central goal of this dissertation is the exploration and elaboration of the structure of the Qur'an. Whilst others have attempted analyses of the structure of the Qur'anic *narrative* (Neurwith 2006a, 2006b, El-Awa 2006), this, I believe, is the first time the anthropological structuralist method pioneered by Lévi-Strauss (1973, 1974, 1978, 1982, 1994) – which seeks to discover the logical categories beneath the narrative - will be applied to the text. Further to Lévi-Strauss' foundational work, I draw on the Biblical structuralism of Kunin (1995, 1998, 2003), Leach (1969,) and Leach and Aycock (1983) as well as further scholarship refining structuralist method by Kunin (2009), Miles-Watson (2009), and Dumont (1980).

In this respect my work is very much situated within a structuralist genealogy and I contribute to ongoing debates within the field including the role of structure in ritual (implicit myth) and its relationship with (explicit) myth (Kunin 2012, Miles-Watson 2012) as well as the question how particular myths change as they move across cultures (Kunin 2009). Indeed, the Qur'an demonstrates a deep familiarity with a wide body of Jewish and Christian myths which it shapes to elaborate its own structure. Moreover, it is using these myths to carve out its own independent identity in competition with Christianity and Judaism. I explore how the Qur'an negotiates this dichotomy between emphasising its unique difference, yet maintaining its self-understanding as the last piece of revelation revealed by a long line of prophets, many shared with the other two religions of the book - and how this affects Qur'anic myth.

Exactly why an anthropological structuralist analysis of the Qur'an has yet to be performed is unclear. On one level, I believe this may partly reflect the relative paucity of the ethnographic data available. Unlike much of the foundational work of Levi-Strauss which was largely conducted on the living myth of existent tribes which were thus available for ethnographic analysis, my work focuses on the myth of a culture which existed over 1,400 years ago. Whilst structural analysis has been conducted on historical societies, notably Kunin and Miles-Watson's work on Israelite and Welsh society respectively, both societies "were largely literate... and have left in their own word their own vision of how their society cohered" (Miles-Watson 2009:6). In contrast, the Qur'an is traditionally understood as the foundational literate work of a hereto oral culture. Whilst a large body of later Islamic literature refers back to the period of the Qur'an's revelation, since the work of John

Wansbrough (1977), certain western scholars have viewed this entire corpus with great suspicion. Rather than being concerned with historical or ethnographic accuracy, this literature instead consists of later interpolations, the creation of a community improvising a salvation history in a highly charged sectarian environment.

Equally, however, that structuralist method has only now been applied to the Qur'an may reflect the current state of anthropological structuralist theory. The bulk of Lévi-Strauss's original work was concerned in the main part with primitive, non-literate societies. Whilst, since the work of Edmund Leach, structuralism has increasingly been applied to literature and literate societies, a lot of structuralism has either remained focussed on primitive peoples or tackled the literature of a culture with which the author was already very familiar. The relative absence of the Anthropology of Islam in the academy – a situation only just beginning to be seriously remedied – as much as the cloud of unknowing which surrounds early 7th century Arabia has perhaps delayed the appearance of such a work.

In many ways the Qur'an, the Bible and the Hebrew Bible can be said to play parallel roles in Islam, Christianity and Judaism respectively. Whilst, however, the latter two emerged from settled civilisations which already possessed developed literary traditions, the Qur'an is the very first piece of Arabic literature and is viewed as both marking and causing the emergence of Islamic civilisation. For Islamic culture, the Qur'an is both Homer and the Bible rolled into one: the civilisation's central religious text and its literary foundation. Nevertheless, despite a relative paucity of contemporary ethnographic information, it is my contention that the structure of the Qur'an is intimately related to the concrete political, economic and sociological conditions of the society from which it emerged.

The Qur'an is both the cause of great change and the product of a society undergoing great change and therefore provides a unique case study regarding structure and perceptions of time. Indeed, F M Donner (1998:93-105) argues that the society which produced the Qur'an had no understanding of history, however, it is significant that within only around half a century after the Qur'an's composition, Islam's historiographical tradition begins to emerge. In other words the Qur'an is the first piece of literature of what Lévi-Strauss' would call a cold society, one which considered itself not to be subject to *historical* change (1966:233-4). Yet it is precisely the Qur'an's composition which would lead to a radical

change in society and thus collapse this understanding of time and lead to the emergence of Islamic history. This will be discussed in more depth in my methodology.

One of the particular challenges I encountered whilst writing this thesis was to discover a suitable layout which allowed the material to be analysed logically yet succinctly. This problem of layout was perhaps also encountered by Lévi-Strauss who chooses to arrange his *Mythologiques* as a music symphony thus emphasising the anti-narrative aspect of his structural method which treats "the sequences of each myth, and the myths themselves in respect of their reciprocal interrelations, like the instrumental parts of a musical work and to study them as one studies a symphony." (1964:36). In this way by repeatedly analysing the recurring theme and pattern of each myth the overall pattern grows clearer. The complications encountered by Lévi-Strauss are exacerbated by the famously anti-narrative style of the Qur'an which is not so much arranged chronologically, as typologically, often flitting back and forth between various different narratives to illustrate a particular point. Because a diachronic analysis of the type applied by Kunin to the historically arranged Biblical text is unsuitable for the synchronically arranged Qur'an, I have taken what may at first appear to be a slightly unusual arrangement.

For instance, in the first section of my analysis (Chapter 3) I focus exclusively on *Sura 28* which acts as a key myth, a starting point of my analysis which raises various points which are explored in later chapters. *Sura 28* features a reasonably long piece of extended narrative focussing on the prophet Moses, the most frequently featuring character in the Qur'an. In this chapter we identify both the chief oppositions which define the structure of the Qur'an and also the more abstract formula which relates these oppositions. My priority in this chapter is to familiarise the reader with the shape and feel of Qur'anic structure.

Though the first chapter focuses on just one *Sura*, in subsequent chapters I switch to thematic analysis, analysing several different sections of Qur'anic text which pertain to a particular theme which was flagged as significant in Chapter 3.

In Chapter 4 I analyse the structural role of family, tribe and genealogy in the Qur'an. In the first half of the chapter I focus predominantly on *Sura 11 Hud*: through structural analysis I show how the Qur'anic understanding of genealogy and family relates to the binary oppositions we identified in the previous chapter. Moreover, if the previous chapter was more concerned with identifying an abstract underlying structure, this chapter focuses upon relating

this structure back to the concrete historical and sociological circumstances of the society from which the Qur'an arose; in particular the emergence of a theocratic Islamic State in hereto exclusively tribal Arabia.

The subject matter of the second half of the analysis is somewhat more eclectic. I begin by analysing the structural significance of the orphan. Having explored how this character helps illuminate the Qur'an's understanding of genealogy, I then turn my attention to the biography of Muhammad as related through Ibn Ishaq and demonstrate that the Prophet's biography is arranged along the same structural lines as the Qur'an. Finally I turn my attention to Jews and Christian who, as monotheists who aren't Muslims, are structurally ambiguous with attributes of two normally opposed categories. I conclude this chapter by comparing how the Qur'an, Hebrew Bible and New Testament structurally understand genealogy, before relating this comparison back to how Jews and Christians are presented as actors *in* the Qur'an.

In the fifth chapter I turn my attention to the Qur'an's cosmology and show how the relationship between this world and the next and the arrangement of various cosmological symbols reflects the Qur'an's structure. I then analyse how water and fire often function as mediators and how they are defined relationally. I conclude the chapter by demonstrating how the association of fire and *jinn* explains why Moses is given the 'sign' of his staff turning in to a snake to demonstrate the power of God to Pharaoh in *Sura* 28, which we analysed in chapter 3.

In the final chapter I explore how Qur'anic structure manifests itself in implicit myth such as food laws, ritual purity and, in particular, the *Hajj* ritual. Rather than implicit myth being more fragmented than explicit myth as Lévi-Strauss suggests (1981:668-669, 1996:83), my work, particularly on the *Hajj*, supports Miles-Watson's claim (2012) that implicit myth is potentially more cohesive and holistic than explicit myth.

Though the specific content of my thesis is structuralist, I believe that my thesis as a whole makes a significant contribution to the anthropology of Islam. I wish to champion the structuralist perspective in the Anthropology of Islam and prove that this method of mythic analysis is an extremely useful tool for both studying as diverse a religion as Islam and for studying a text that is as politically charged as the Qur'an.

Chapter 1. Methodology

1.1. Myth

At first glance there are those who might raise an eyebrow at the application of structuralism – a method of *mythic* analysis – to the Holy Qur'an. Indeed, throughout this thesis I refer to both individual Qur'anic *myths* and the whole Qur'an as a body of *myth*. I must emphasise, however, that by this I do not mean to insinuate that the Qur'an is untrue or fictional in the same way as one would commonly refer to the Loch Ness monster as mythical. Neither do I wish to suggest a binary division between the Qur'an's mythic recount of Arabian and Biblical history and the more scientific approaches to history familiar to academic historians.

Rather, following Lévi-Strauss (1991:68), I'd like to suggest that instead of history and science being opposed to myth, all three are in fact organised along mythic principles. Indeed, Eliade believes that myth acts to reveal a society's origins thus providing a pattern of existence for arranging reality (1964:37): a function myth, history and science can all be said to share. Similarly Malinowski argues that myth functions to protect society from crisis by lending legitimacy and support to existing social structures (1954:101). However, whilst Malinowski believed that myths function to preserve the structure of society on the conscious level, the structuralist understanding of myth believes this process to take place on the subconscious level.

Turning away from the sociological and into the psychological, one could suggest that myth resembles the collective dreams of society in that it deals with crisis by sublating a perceived threat into narrative (Jung 1967). Yet whilst a dream deals with one specific worry or neurosis, myth instead serves to convey a recurring logical pattern, framework or blueprint by which many contradictions may be resolved. Frequently the central dichotomy of these contradictions is that between nature and culture. Myth can be said to legitimise existing society and *culture* by presenting a structural and organising logic as *natural*. In doing so this fundamental and unbridgeable paradox is, if not fully resolved, then cunningly hidden in plain sight of society. In this way mythology, the medium and child of culture, validates itself (Kunin 1995:38)

Whilst those brought up in any given culture will, without realising it, absorb this organising logic and subsequently subconsciously express themselves through it, the goal of

the structuralist is, through analysing the relations and oppositions between mythic symbols, to reveal this organising logic.

There are therefore two main advantages of treating a book which is as highly politically charged and intellectually contested as the Qur'an as myth. In the first instance it looks past the obvious question of the book's ontological truth: whether a particular myth did indeed occur historically or whether the Qur'an is indeed the last and uncorrupted revelation of God. That is the concern of the theologian or the believer. The structuralist rather seeks to let the Qur'an speak on its own terms and to explore and understand its own frame of reference. It seeks to, as it were, get inside the minds of those to whom it was first revealed.

In the second instance, structuralism claims that those brought up with a particular mythology will in turn absorb its organising logic, and use this logic as a mode of self-expression. Whilst, of course, structure can change and Islam is by no means a unified faith - and indeed some forms of Islam are not particularly Qur'anic - across many aspects of Islam, there is a strong global movement *ad fontes*, which perhaps may trace its roots to the emergence of Wahhabism. With the Qur'an playing an increasing role in Islam in many parts of the globe, this thesis therefore not only implicitly recognises this movement and the increasingly important role the Qur'an plays in Islam, but simultaneously offers a base for comparison for future ethnography and mythic analyses.

1.2. Structural Method

Lévi-Strauss developed structuralism from the structural linguistics of Saussure. At the root of Saussure's understanding of how language functions is his claim that any given word has no intrinsic relationship to the phenomena which it describes: there is nothing intrinsically 'doggy' about the word dog. Rather, a word is simply an abstract sound, a "signifier" arbitrarily associated with what it "signifies". What links a "signifier" to the "signified" – thus creating a "sign" – is the signifier's place and function within an extensive and interdependent web of language. Thus, for Saussure, rather than focussing on particular sounds or lexicon, the task of the structural linguist is instead to understand the organising logic behind the language which gives the sounds meaning (Saussure 1916).

The same is true for the structuralist analysis of myth. The individual constituent parts of a given myth – frequently referred to as mythemes - in themselves have no particular intrinsic meaning and only gain meaning when they are understood within the context of the

wider myth or even body of mythology. Just as there is nothing particularly doggy about dog, so sometimes a mythological cigar is just a cigar! Indeed, as I demonstrate within this thesis, a single mytheme told in different ways can be used to express conflicting ideas across different cultures. Like the structural linguist, the structural anthropologist is not concerned with the individual meaning of a particular myth, but rather focuses on exploring and understanding the organising logic and categories which give a whole body of myth meaning (Sturrock 1979:6-9)

Perhaps the best analogy, however, is found in the first volume of the *Mythologiques* (1969:17) when Levi-Straus compares myth to music:

“Music and myth [are] both languages which, in their own different ways, transcend articulate expression, while at the same time - like articulate speech, but unlike painting – requiring a temporal dimension in which to unfold.”

Like myth, music is both composed and received in real time. Yet when I listen to a piece of music with which I am very familiar, I not only experience the phenomena of the diachronic unfolding procession of sounds, but simultaneously I can recall synchronically the phenomena of the piece of music as a whole. As the American composer Aaron Copland argues: “the ideal listener is both inside and outside the music at the same moment” (2004: 7); one both enjoys the music unfolding in the moment but must simultaneously stand back and appreciate the composition in its entirety as it exists outside of time. Similarly, one could say that the ideal receiver of myth both appreciates the diachronic unfolding of the narrative as well as having an appreciation synchronically of the myth as a whole. Thus, one is not just aware of the individual sounds or mythic elements, but a true appreciation of these art forms equally lies in the perception of the dense web of interconnections between the myth's constituent parts.

Yet this analogy does not only work on the level of melody and an individual piece of music, or between elements of myth and a particular myth. It can equally be expanded to the relationship between a myth and the body of mythology of a particular culture or between a piece of music and a genre of music. Indeed, a piece of music does not exist in a vacuum but rather is influenced by and evokes other pieces of music with which the composer and his audience is familiar. Similarly both myth and an entire culture can be said to exhibit structure. Just as the composer learns and absorbs the structure and pattern of the music from

his surrounding culture, so the mythmaker is encultured in the structure of a society and in turn produces myth reflecting and expressing this structure.

1.3. The All-Pervasiveness of Structure

A final useful analogy with which to understand Lévi-Strauss' structuralist method is the historical materialism of Karl Marx. For Marx, the politics and culture of any given nation were essentially a function of its economic base. Thus, a feudal economy in which the land rights were controlled by an elite warrior class would lead to a feudal political system. However, with the emergence of capitalism in which the means of production were controlled by a city based mercantile class, and particularly as industrialism massively shifted the balance of wealth and power away from land to capital, a nation would outgrow its feudal system of government and move to a liberal democratic revolution, the system of government best suited to the new bourgeoisie. According to Marx, the key to understanding history lay in the economic substructure. The features which had hereto dominated the study of history - namely wars, politics and polities - were in fact merely superstructure, the tip of an iceberg which was only given coherence by an understanding of the vast study of economics which lay menacingly submerged.

In many ways Lévi-Strauss' structuralist method displays a certain historically materialist streak in that frequently the mythology of a society reflects material economic processes. In *The Savage Mind*, for instance, he shows how the structure of the myth concerning how the Hidatsa people were taught to hunt eagles intimately reflects the mode of eagle hunting which in turn relates to female menstruation (1966:48-51). Similarly, at the beginning of *From Honey to Ashes* (1973:51-70) prior to his analysis of a cycle of myths associated with honey, he spends an entire 30 pages of the introduction examining both how different species of bee and wasp produce honey, what the various properties of the different honeys are and the different methods of extracting them. Levi-Strauss thus demonstrates how ecology, economic production and mythology are intimately interrelated.

On one level, the difference between Levi-Strauss and Marx is one of scale. Whilst Marx was analysing industrial economies and was therefore more concerned with the tectonic collision and crush of vast historical forces driving a continual process of creative destruction, Lévi-Strauss was analysing primitive societies without any real concept of historical development and whose mythological "superstructure" was intimately

interdependent with both social structure and the economic base which in turn was entwined with the surrounding ecology.

On another level, however, the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss is – I believe - a refinement of and improvement on Marx’s historical materialism. Whilst Marx argues that politics and culture are a product of social structure which is in turn determined by a relationship of power embedded in the mode of economic production, Levi-Straus posits the existence of organising principles which pervade all aspects of how a culture perceives and lives in the world.

Indeed, not only is structure a useful tool for analysing myth, but also for analysing the rituals and taboos of any given culture - what Lévi-Strauss would refer to as implicit myth (1981:668-669). Indeed, Mary Douglas (1984) uses this method to decode Israelite food rules. Building on her analysis, Kunin links the structure of food rules and the ritual of sacrifice and circumcision into a wider analysis of Israelite mythology. Not only is structure pervasive across all aspects of culture, but fundamentally different aspects of culture share the same underlying structure and categories. Although this current analysis is primarily concerned with the Qur’an, in Chapter 6 I develop my analysis to consider how Islamic food laws, sacrifice and circumcision and the *Hajj* pilgrimage reflect underlying Qur’anic structure.

1.4. Layers of Structure

Just as one may critique Marx’s historical materialism for being too determinist, so the same criticism has been levelled at the traditional structuralist method of Lévi-Strauss, which is accused of prioritising a rigid abstract structure ahead of the lived reality. Indeed, Tim Ingold, in *Perceptions of the Environment* (2000:16-18) critiques Lévi-Strauss’s understanding of the mind as equating to the brain. By grounding structure in fixed, material, biological processes Levi-Straus has risked robbing structuralism of the necessary dynamism and flexibility needed to accurately describe reality.

Yet in many ways modern or neo-structuralist theory has pre-empted these criticisms. Whilst the fundamental underlying aspect of human nature at the biological level remains the “holy grail” of structuralism, neo-structuralism has increasingly shifted the focus away from psychology towards sociology. To this end several interrelated layers of structure have been identified charting the all pervasiveness of structure from the biological, upwards,

manifesting itself first through a deep abstract formula, before becoming more culturally specific (Miles-Watson 2009). That structure exists on several distinct but interrelated levels is latent but not explicit in the work of Lévi-Strauss. For this reason I will follow the model of Kunin (2004:7-15) who proposes the existence of three levels of structure (S^1 , S^2 , S^3) underpinning one level of narrative (N^1).

The lowest and deepest of these levels, S^1 , represents the biological level of the human mind. It is both abstract and contentless and is rarely discussed in any great depth by structuralists (Kunin 1996 196). It is perhaps best considered as representing the human mind's capacity to structure or a computer prior to receiving any programming. Grounded in the biological, this level is universal to all humans.

The next level of structure, S^2 , is still abstract and contentless and is generally expressed as a basic formula depicting the relationship between distinct categories. Rather than being grounded in the biological like, S^1 , the seat of S^2 is the sociological. Each culture or group of cultures will possess a similar structure at this level. Moreover, because this level of structure is contentless, it can remain very stable over long periods of time.

The S^2 level is typically represented by three ideal types of structural relationship. A negative relationship (-) suggests exclusivity between the opposed categories: whatever is in category A cannot move into category B. Moreover any symbols which are ambiguous and thus threaten to mediate between the two opposed categories will be very negatively valenced in order to emphasise the oppositional structure. In contrast, a positive relationship (+) indicates a high degree of overlap between categories: whatever is in category A will also be in category B. Finally, in a neutral structure (n) there is some degree of overlap; mediation and movement between categories is possible. It should be emphasised, however, that these are idealised categories and that in reality there is more of a sliding scale, rather than a rigid three fold division.

At the highest level of structure S^3 we begin to move away from abstract relationships and begin to explore the content of the logical categories. Although the level of S^3 is still intimately entwined with the relatively stable and unchanging level of S^2 , unlike S^2 , S^3 is equally affected by cultural context and social structure. Furthermore because the level of S^3 is so entwined with the material cultural context of a particular social group, it is highly unstable and subject to change in parallel with changing material circumstances. If similarity

at the level of S^2 binds a group of similar cultures, similarity at S^3 binds one particular culture. Moreover, as a particular culture moves forward in time, whilst its structure at the level of S^2 remains unchanged, because the material circumstances of a culture change so does the underlying structure at the level of S^3 .

Indeed, Miles-Watson equates this level of structure with Bourdieu's concept of habitus, thus moving away from the traditional Lévi-Straussian understanding of brain and the world as binary opposites, with the former functioning to classify and impose logic on the raw chaotic sense data it receives from the latter. In this way neo-structuralism avoids becoming prescriptive. By prioritising the lived experience of existence and myth creation before with an abstract logically structure, space is thus made for human agency. Rather than the brain being the seat of structure, Miles-Watson argues that structure is in fact grounded in the mind which, following Ingold, he suggests is best conceptualised as mediating between self and environment. In this way S^3 and habitus serve to mediate between abstract structures and the reality of social life. Moreover, habitus or the level of S^3 is organic, emerging out of collective cultural history but continually shaped by an agent's life and experiences. It is thus enduring yet mutable and, unlike S^2 cannot be reduced to an abstract algebraic equation. In this way S^3 adds dynamism to structuralist theory. (Miles-Watson 2009)

1.5. Structural Play and Repetition

Lévi-Straus also drew strongly on the Saussurean terminology of *langue*, the structural side of language, and *parole* an individual performance of language (1972, 209). Fundamentally the two exist in a dialectical relationship in which *langue* is in effect the accumulation of an individual's experience of many thousands of instances of *parole*, whilst *parole*, an individual performance of language, is shaped by one's conception of *langue*. Thus a child develops a concept of *langue* by a process of experiencing, playing around and experimenting with *parole*.

This process of repetition and play is equally noted in structuralist theory. In each individual mytheme, which we can perhaps equate with *parole*, a slightly different structural arrangement is tried out. The effect on the narrative level is that of continually changing and sometimes contradictory repetitions of similar circumstances. These individual mythemes, or instances of performance, however, are best understood, not on the narrative level, but as

outlining the structural concept of the myth as a whole in the same way as a child, through experiencing instances of *parole*, gains a concept of *langue*.

Indeed, structural play is perhaps most useful in explaining uncertain ambiguous symbols or categories within myth. Thus in the Qur'an, Jews and Christians occupy the ambiguous position of being monotheist, without being devotees of Islam, the monotheistic religion par excellence. Christians and Jews thus play often contradictory roles, sometimes doing good and sometimes doing bad. This serves not only to gradually categorise what had hereto evaded easy categorisation, but simultaneously moves towards the enculturation of the neophyte (Leach 1986: 58), teaching children or converts a society's structure and perception of the universe in the same way as a child learns to talk.

1.6 previous “structuralist” analyses

Having outlined Lévi-Strauss' methodology, it is perhaps worth taking a moment to explore other thinkers who have purported to structurally analyse the Qur'an. I must emphasise, however, that although my thesis and some of these previous works both use the word “structure” to describe our styles of analysis, without exception, our methodologies and aims are substantially different. What makes my analysis unique is that, rather than being concerned with the Qur'an's genre(s) or the relationship between various narrative or textual elements, it seeks to penetrate beneath the narrative level and discover the underlying categories - and the abstract relationships between these categories – which structure both the Qur'an and the society in which it was produced.

Superficially, Angelika Neurwith's article on structure and the emergence of the community seems to have some similarities with my thesis (2006a). Her stated aim to “reconstruct the Qur'anic communication process” in order to “shed light on the founding event of Islam, the orally performed drama between the messenger and his listeners” may seem similar to my thesis which similarly links the structure of the Qur'an with societal change in 7th century Arabia.

Though we both seek to go beyond the exterior level of the Quranic codex, our projects are very different. Rather than trying to isolate the abstract categories which helped structure the whole of Quranic society, Neurwith seeks to unearth particular instances of communication or performance – the mode of production of the original oral material which was allegedly later written down when the literary Qur'an was sealed.

Ultimately, this is tied into her desire to read into the Qur'an a particular historical development in style and delivery "through four diverse discourses" from the earlier Meccan *Suras* into the (later) Medinan *Suras* in order to demonstrate the historical development of the Prophet and early Islamic community. Thus following Michael Sells (1990, 1993) she identifies the *Saj'* style – the medium of the pre-Islamic soothsayers – as the dominant mode of the early short Meccan *Suras*. This not only serves to present the early *Suras* as a development of earlier Arabic poetry, but the phonetic correspondence of the verse endings which characterises *Saj'* style means that it is was at once versatile and easy to memorise, a key aspect of any work which was designed for performance, recitation or chant (Nelson 1985). Though *Saj'* ultimately gave way to a smoother flowing prose style, Neurwith sees within this style the seeds of the division of *Suras* into particular verses or *ayats*.

As the *Suras* develop into the middle and later Meccan periods, and the text draws on Biblical characters and locations, Neurwith suggests that the text has changed in function and already taken on a more explicitly cultic function. Subsequently, in the Medinan period we see the emergence of specific cultic and ethical regulations – presumably because Muhammad was now obliged to set expectations of behaviours for the Muslim exiles from Mecca – as well as the appearance a new ambiguous group of characters: the Medinan Jews.

For Neurwith, a transition in "structure" and genre within the Qur'an can be observed which mirrors the history of the Prophet and Early Islamic community. For two reasons, however, my analysis will ignore the traditional division between Meccan and Medinan *Suras*. In the first instance, I believe that Neurwith is guilty of circular reasoning. In recent years, the *Sira* material which alleges to recount the biography of the Prophet has been treated with increasing scepticism: over a century had passed between the likely codification of the Qur'an and the earliest biography of Ibn Ishaq. Moreover, as I demonstrate later in the analysis, the *Sira* material itself is highly mythical. This therefore begs the question, is the Medinan material considered late because it references Jews and outlines societal rules and therefore matches the *Sira's* description of the community's development in Medina, or does the *Sira* mention Jewish tribes and the formation of a community of exiles in order to provide a back story for the material of the Qur'an? Whilst Neurwith may be correct in identifying different genres within the Qur'an – and whilst she may even be correct in relating them back to particular modes of performance – it is questionable whether without the crutch of the *Sira*

material she would have been able to detect the same historical progression within the Qur'an.

In the second instance, however, the method of structural anthropology developed by Lévi-Strauss requires that the text be taken and analysed as a whole as it will reflect the structure of the society in which it was redacted. In this respect my method differs from Neurwith's in several ways. Perhaps most significantly, whilst Neurwith seeks to analyse the structure of the *narrative* (N^1), either as a text or as oral performance (2006b), my analysis moves deeper than the surface narrative level and seeks to uncover the logical categories (S^3), and the abstract relationship between them (S^2), which give both the Qur'an – and the society in which it was redacted – coherence and structure. It therefore flows from this that, unlike Neurwith's analysis, the structure will remain the same throughout the entirety of the narrative, otherwise the reader would find the work incoherent. (Kunin 1996). Whilst Neurwith seeks to understand the Qur'an by recovering the original situation in which it was performed or delivered, my analysis seeks to discover, within the Qur'an, the logical categories which would have pervaded the whole of the society in which the Qur'an was redacted.

A different but related approach to understanding the Qur'an is taken by El-Awa in *Textual Relations in the Qur'an: Relevance, Coherence and Structure* (2005). Rather than being concerned with the genre or structure of particular *Suras*, El-Awa is instead interested in the relationships between different *Suras* and between different sections of narrative within these *Suras*.

This question of whether the Qur'an possesses an "organic unity" is particularly germane considering the Qur'an's highly fragmented narrative style which may jump between different characters, the distant past, debates in the Prophet's present or judgement day apparently at random. Earlier attempts at discovering how the Qur'an's constituent parts relate to each other generally attempted to discern a linear development, thus the Medieval scholar Fakhr al-Din al-Razi (d.1209) attempts to provide an explanation for every single change in subject matter whilst, in the 20th century, Richard Bell attempted to rearrange the whole Qur'an in order to reveal a linear narrative.

However, as the 20th century progressed and postmodernism shattered the idea that a text must possess a linear unity, two scholars, Admin Ahsan Islahi and Sayyid Qutb

suggested that each *Sura* had a unifying theme which linked together its constituent narrative elements. The key task for Qur'anic scholars therefore is to uncover the narrative structure of particular *Suras*, to find the boundaries where one section of narrative end and another begins (Neurwith 1981, Robinson, 1996, 2000, 2001, Zahniser 2000) and subsequently to explain how an understanding of one particular section contributes to a wider understanding of the unifying theme. Building on these ideas, El-Awa brings to bear two theories current in linguistic theory, Contextual Theory - in order to help explore the contextual web in which a particular narrative is to be understood – and Relevance Theory to help prioritise which particular contextual segment is most likely to aid understanding (2006).

Whilst El-Awa's analysis may be an extremely useful contribution to understanding the content of the Qur'an, like Neurwith's analysis it remains focussed on the structure of the narrative (N¹) and does not seek to understand the logical categories which lend the whole body of myth – and by extension the society in which it was redacted – coherence. Indeed, the question which primarily animates El-Awa – how do the chaotically arranged textual elements which constitute the Qur'an relate to each other? – is one which is of little or no concern to the structuralist. Because structure in the Lévi-Straussian sense exists at the subconscious level and cannot be consciously shaped or affected, the structural unity of any manifestation of culture (especially in mythology) is taken as a given, even if the redactor has consciously attempted to *structure the narrative* chaotically.

Ultimately, Neurwith and El-Awa can be considered to be using techniques derived from the social sciences to help understand the *narrative* structure of the Qur'an and thus conduct *literary* analysis. My analysis on the other hand is best considered a work of anthropology as I attempt to understand the underlying logical categories which defined the early Islamic community and which are therefore manifest in the Qur'an.

1.7. Myth and History

As I noted at the start of this section, it is unwise to consider myth and history as binary opposed concepts. Indeed, whilst mythology may draw upon concrete historical events, history is frequently organised along mythological lines; in other words mythology may both suggest which arbitrary events are selected and provide the arbitrary storyline which validates the selection of events.

Of this latter phenomenon two concrete examples from relatively recent western history spring to mind: the historical analysis of Karl Marx and Hayek's *On the Road to Serfdom* (1944). In the former, the influence of German idealism combined with 19th century economic theory leads Marx to posit that all history has hereto been the history of class struggle. Thus the key historic events for Marx become revolutions, the perfect example of which was the French Revolution leading to the overthrow of the French feudal system by the emergent middle class which, in turn, ultimately pre-figures the final proletarian revolution. Similarly in *On the Road to Serfdom*, Hayek makes the claim that the fundamental root of totalitarianism was socialist economic theory which, he argued, undermined the Christian emphasis on the individual. Writing in the classical liberal tradition, Hayek argued that it was only the emergence of the rule of law, and the basic freedoms of speech, trade and conscience which had led to the world's current prosperity. If these were threatened, a slide back into barbarity and poverty was possible as shown by the disaster of the 2nd World War and by the subsequent growth of communist Russia. In both these cases one can see that, though their ideologies are built on largely indisputable historic facts, they have been arranged in such a way as to support a "mythic" ideology: the events support the narrative – revolutions imply dialectical class struggle, barbaric regimes adopt socialist economic policy - whilst the narrative in turn support the selection of events – revolutions are the essence of class struggle etc.

The role of myth in organising history is particularly noticeable in the Abrahamic religions. Thus in Judaism and Christianity we respectively find the Exodus and the Crucifixion as the key events in both religions' mythical history. All other historical events reflect these two paradigmatic myths thus securing their own place in sacred history by their similarity, whilst simultaneously securing the role of the central event as paradigmatic. Thus in the period in which Islam emerges we find, after Procopius the last of the classical historians writing in the style of Thucydides, the growth in both Judaism and Christianity of the chronicle, which presented history through Biblical tropes, as well as the apocalypse, which presented recent history as the realisation of cataclysmic events foretold in scripture. In all cases the pattern of history was already set in Biblical myth; the task of interpreting and categorising history was simply a task of realising how current events fitted into this pre-existing template.

This blurring of myth and history, together with an understanding of ancient mythological history's immanence in day to day life, is also present in the Qur'an. Rather than the Exodus or the Crucifixion playing the central role, it is Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son and Muhammad's willingness to be rejected by his tribe at God's command which are the central events. Indeed, if anything, the understanding of mythic history as existing synchronically almost outside of time is even more pronounced in the Qur'an. Whilst the Bible is arranged chronologically, the Qur'an, as I argue in the ethnography, is arranged typologically: separate mythemes are arranged seemingly at random to emphasise particular mythic points. Perhaps the epitome of this disregard for chronology is found in *Sura 28* where Haman, a disobedient character associated with Persia, and Pharaoh, a disobedient character associated with Egypt, work together to build a Babel-like tower to heaven: an archetypal of mortal disobedience.

Yet not only does myth affect how history is arranged, the structure of myth also affects how the phenomena of time is perceived in itself. Whilst Levi-Strauss identified the contrast between hot societies like ours, which view time as a linear progression, and cold societies, which view history synchronically, several other models have been argued to exist (Leach and Hugh-Jones 2000:182-6). Indeed, in this analysis I demonstrate how Christian and Islamic structures respectively shape their perceptions of history.

1.8. Myth and the Qur'an

One of the interesting assumptions made by Lévi-Strauss is his equation of "cold" societies with societies with oral mythology. Indeed, in his essay *Time Regained* (1966, 234) he suggests that cold societies "annul the possible effects of historical factors on their equilibrium and continuity in a quasi-automatic fashion; the latter resolutely internalizing the historical process and making it the moving power of their development", in other words because an oral culture is constantly in flux – one could say that at the level of S^3 it continually changes to reflect social structure and thus validate it – it acts to mask any perception of historical change: apart from the present, all history exists synchronically in myth. With the advent of literacy, however, it becomes possible to freeze mythology and history. If mythology is not in constant flux and no longer continually reflects and validates social structure, then society must come to terms with the fact that real changes have occurred, thus leading to an understanding of history.

Following F M Donner, I believe that the anti-chronological, typological arrangement of the Qur'an is evidence that the Qur'an was composed, and almost certainly redacted, in a society which had a synchronic understanding of history. As the story of Pharaoh, Hamman and the tower of heaven shows, all Qur'anic characters are theoretically present in any place or time, available to be brought together in any structurally coherent combination. For the Prophet's audience, the entire roster of Judaeo-Christian and Arabic prophets seem to have existed in a mythic continuum: like Muhammad, all prophets from Abraham to Jesus seem to come to their people, demand they submit to God, then be rejected or accepted, bringing punishment or reward in their wake.

However, very soon after the composition of the Qur'an, Islam develops its own rich historical tradition. The act of sealing the revelation of Muhammad as the revelation of the last Prophet closes this synchronic, mythic history within a book or fixed body of revelation. Whilst all the prophets may exist synchronically in the mythic time of the Qur'an, non-mythic history thus becomes dated from the Qur'an's closing, or a significant date, perhaps retroactively, associated with the Qur'an's revelation. Interestingly therefore, "in the 640s the historical record alerts us to a new phenomenon disrupting the familiar course of the Late Antique world. Arabs equipped with a new name for themselves (*Muhajirun*) and a new era" (Hoyland 1997:547).

Unlike Leach, who selects particular myths for analysis, I have tried to follow Kunin in analysing the Qur'an holistically. Whilst I emphasise the unity of the structure throughout my analysis, the anti-chronological nature of the Qur'an does not lend itself to a diachronic analysis of various prophets/patriarchs as attempted by Kunin (1996). Ultimately my decision to, after Chapter 3, analyse the Qur'an thematically may be open to the criticism that I have cherry picked the narratives which most support my understanding of structure. On the contrary, I would argue that it is precisely by analysing the Qur'an thematically that I can analyse as wide a body of material on diverse subject matter and thus best and most honestly present the structure of the Qur'an

Because the Qur'an was likely redacted at one particular period of time and because of the constraints of the Master's thesis and my desire to give the Qur'an the largely undivided attention it deserves, I have largely kept my analysis focussed on the Qur'an. Though this analysis is therefore mostly synchronic in nature, I do occasionally tread onto

new territory. In particular, I analyse an abridged version of the Prophet's biography and aspects of Islamic implicit myth. A diachronic analysis of Islamic myth as it develops historically would no doubt be a worthy subject for future study.

1.9. The Anthropology of Islam

As I suggested at the end of my introduction, one of the broad aims of this thesis is to demonstrate that structuralism has a valuable and unique contribution to make to the Anthropology of Islam, a subject which is plagued by problems of definition.

On one level the Anthropology of Islam suffers from many of the apparently insoluble problems of all anthropologies of religion. Despite continual interest in the area, there is still no universal methodology for studying belief and ritual, nor is there a widely held unified anthropological theory of religion. Scholars remain divided as how to define religion or what indeed the concept of religion should actually cover (Hartford Institute for Religion 2014).

The Anthropology of Islam, however, suffers a further complicating factor: the diversity of Islamic practise across the globe and also through history. Although Islam began in a specific locality, Arabia, and is based on the teachings of Muhammad, a particular historical person, it quickly spread across continents and now is practised by radically different cultures, often with significant differences in beliefs and practises. To truly study Islam as an international religion one must have a grasp of what Robert Redfield (1956) describes as the "great tradition" - the orthodox form of the religious centre - and the "little traditions" - the often heterodox form of the religion practised in a particular locality.

A solution to both the question regarding the scope of religious anthropology and the diversity of Islamic practise is offered by Clifford Geertz. For Geertz, religion is:

"a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." ('Religion as a cultural system' 1973, 90)

Drawing on this definition, in *Islam Observed* Geertz seeks, not so much "mindless celebration of the unique" - that is, endless description of various examples of the great and

little traditions - but to reach an understanding of Islam through the "comparative study of religion". He claims that between the various great and little traditions of Islam,

"the field over which that content and behaviour range is not a mere collection of unrelated ideas and emotions and acts, but an ordered universe, whose order we shall discover... by comparing different parts of it. The central task for us is to discover, or invent, the appropriate terms of comparison, the appropriate frameworks with which to view material phenomenally disparate in such a way that its very disparateness leads us into a deeper understanding of it." (54-55)

Though successful in providing an initial paradigm for the anthropological study of Islam, *Islam Observed* suffers two main interrelated critiques. The first relates to a lack of any Muslim voices in his ethnography, whilst the second questions whether his contention - drawn from his comparison of Moroccan and Indonesian Islam - that Islam essentially works around an opposition between scripturalism and mysticism is universally applicable to the entire tradition of Islam (el-Zein 1977:232). Ultimately Geertz is accused of offering "a counterproductive view of what Islam, rather than what a Muslim, is" (Marranci 2008:37).

Abdul Hamid el-Zein levels the charge against much of the Anthropology of Islam - and indeed Islamic theology - that it has been guilty of essentialising Islam and prioritising the Islamic adjective ahead of the human subject. In an article comparing different anthropological approaches against received Islamic theological viewpoints, el-Zein makes the provocative claim that there is not a single, real Islam, but rather a plurality of islams (1977:249). el-Zein is equally critical of the discourse of great tradition vs little tradition which allows both anthropologists and theologians to prioritise the great tradition and regard local islams as a "less ordered, less objective, and somehow less complete versions of the religious experience" (1977:243). This dichotomy is part of an Islamic elite's attempt to dominate the discourse about what constitutes real religion (el-Zein 1977:252).

Whilst for Geertz, religion was a "system of symbols which acts...", for el-Zein anyone aspiring to study Islam ought to understand that "Islam... can only exist as a facet within a fluid yet coherent system: it cannot be viewed as an available entity for cultural systems to select and put to various uses"(1997:240). In other words, Islam does not so much exist as a bounded entity - a system of symbols - but as a mere aspect of culture which can only be understood within the cultures in which it is embedded: there is no ontological Islam.

This reluctance to approach Islam as an entirety has led to redoubled focus on detailed ethnography based on extensive fieldwork, often in a small or isolated locale. Whilst these studies are indeed valuable, they sidestep the difficulties we have raised and offer no real avenue with which to approach and understand Islam in its entirety.

Whilst I believe el-Zein's concern regarding a-priori prioritising the great tradition over the little traditions is valid, I believe his description of Islam as a cultural "facet" within a wider "fluid yet coherent" cultural system, not only does Islam a disservice, but equally encourages anthropologists to engage in minutely detailed field work and ethnography whilst neglecting wider questions regarding Islam and the anthropology of Islam as a whole. An example of this is the anthropologist Gabrielle Marranci who argues that the true subject of the Anthropology of Islam is not Islam, but Muslims: a Muslim who is defined simply as person who feels that they are a Muslim. His approach is utterly anti-textual and opposed to any sense of Islam as a unified phenomenon with any meaningful existence outside of one's emotions and interior disposition (Marranci 2008).

An alternative approach is offered by Talal Asad who suggests that Islam, rather than being something one *feels* they are a part of or a heterogeneous collection of culturally specific practises and beliefs, is best approached as a discursive tradition. In doing so Asad grounds Islam, not so much in a believer's interior disposition or in a synchronic set of symbols, but rather in an historical narrative or discourse which relates both to the past (from the founding of the practice), to the present (how it links to other practices, social conditions and institutions) and to its future (how the practice is best secured, modified or abandoned) (Asad 1986:20). For Islam this this refers primarily to those relating back to the Qur'an and *Hadith*.

El-Zein, of course, would accuse Asad of prioritising the orthodox great tradition for theological reasons. Indeed, Marranci is correct to note that many Muslims have little familiarity with the Qur'an and *Hadith*. Yet Asad's conscious decision to favour the great tradition is based on two points. Firstly, that "orthodoxy is not a mere body of opinion but a distinctive relationship – a relationship of power to truth (Ibid. 22)." He then suggests that homogeneity is not a function of a tradition, but rather a technique through which to control communication. In other words the appeal of religious homogeneity across Islam lies not in

the fact that Islam is homogenous, but rather that a large and powerful religious elite wish to preserve and transmit what they consider to be orthodox and true teachings. He concludes:

“An anthropology of Islam will therefore seek to understand the historical conditions that enable the production and maintenance of specific discursive traditions, or their transformation – and the efforts of practitioners to achieve coherence (Ibid. 23).”

Precisely because strong historical conditions are functioning to preserve and more widely transmit an "orthodox" reading of the discursive tradition, these historical conditions deserve studying. Precisely because there is a strong international push for a globalised and Qur'anic Islamic *Ummah*, this movement is therefore worthy of study. Though el-Zein may claim to speak from position of cultural relativity embracing many islams, Asad would argue that this "moral neutrality" is no "guarantee of political innocence" (Ibid 24). Ultimately Asad seems to suggest that anthropologists' focus on small, peripheral instances of Islam and the neglect of the wider religion is as ideologically motivated as his focus on the orthodox tradition

The anthropology of Islam is therefore split between those who wish to reach some understanding Islam in itself - either as an "ordered universe" like Geertz or a living tradition like Asad - and those like Marranci and el-Zein who would rather focus their attention on more specific and differentiated islams as experienced by individual Muslims. It seems that one is left in the mutually exclusive positions of either searching for a more totalising - and perhaps more controversial and methodologically problematic - overarching understanding of Islam, or focussing one's gaze on particular instances of its practise and practitioners.

It is here where I believe structuralism and in particular my thesis can make a unique contribution to the subject. I focus primarily on the text of the Qur'an, certainly what Asad and indeed many Muslims would consider one of the central pillars of the Islamic Tradition. It therefore not only takes seriously what for many Muslims is the textual basis of the religion, allowing us to explore its own frame of reference, but also it allows us to access to one of the earliest Islamic communities predating the emergence of separate great and little traditions.

Though it takes seriously the textual aspect of Islam emphasised by the great tradition, it by no means prioritises it over other practises of Islam. Rather, I present the reader with - to borrow the language of el-Zein - a road map of a book of mythology which plays a greater or

lesser cultural role in many "fluid yet coherent" individual islams. In this respect my unique and original contribution the Anthropology of Islam is threefold: (1) it takes seriously the textual nature of Islam emphasised by the greater tradition (2) without prioritising the greater tradition, thus maintaining a culturally relativist viewpoint. Perhaps most significantly, however, (3) my analysis offers a basis for comparative analysis of the greater and lesser traditions and a chance for an objective and non-judgemental exploration of how they relate to each other...

1.10. Neo-Structuralist Theory

I have previously suggested, following Miles-Watson, that the seat of structure is the embodied mind which, in turn, is best understood as being created by the interplay of man and his environment. If this understanding is sound, the art of the structuralist is not so much to divine an abstract code or equation for patterning the chaos of nature, but – as it were – to get inside the mind of a culture. Thus an understanding of habitus or structure at the level of S³ grants fundamental insights into both social structure and how a particular culture categorises and perceives the universe.

Though structuralism certainly provides a useful theoretical tool for conducting anthropology and though it is likely that it is the level of habitus which will remain of most interest to anthropologists, a structuralist equally has the ability to abstract from these more concrete details. Indeed, it is perhaps the unique selling point of modern structuralist theory that it has the capacity to grant intimate familiarity with a culture whilst preserving the ability to discuss culture in a more abstract fashion, thus opening up the possibility of comparative analysis. This bifocal vision which structuralism lends to anthropology allows one to see individual cultures in fine detail whilst retaining the ability to understand how an individual culture exists in relation to those around it. In reality, no culture is a bounded entity, but rather is in continual engagement with others.

It is in this respect that structuralism is particularly useful for the anthropology of religion and the Anthropology of Islam in particular. Here structuralism creates room, both for in depth ethnographical research, whilst simultaneously allowing for the possibility of genuine comparative analysis. In *Islam Observed*, Geertz suggested that the task of comparative study of religion is not “mindless descriptivism... or an equally mindless celebration of the unique”, but rather “to discover, or invent, the appropriate terms of

comparison, the appropriate frameworks with which to view material phenomenally disparate in such a way that its very disparateness leads us into a deeper understanding of it.” (1968: 54). Certainly the different instances of Islam are “materially phenomenally disparate”, however, I believe that structuralism provides “the appropriate framework” which can begin to lead us to a deeper understanding of Islam

Yet structuralism not only allows for comparison within a particular culture or group of cultures, but also between major cultural groups. Indeed, Islam did not emerge in isolation, but in close contact with Judaism, Christianity as well as other religions and sects. Moreover, like modern Christianity and Judaism, Islam is the inheritor of many Biblical myths. Building on the work of Kunin, a comparison of how these cultures’ structure affects how these myths are presented is an important aspect of my analysis.

Chapter 2. An Idealised Ethnography of Arabia in the 7th century

2.1. Scepticism of the Received Islamic Account

The Islamic Tradition contains a glut of sources which relate back to the earliest period of Islam, including both *Hadith* – sayings of the Prophet – and various biographies and histories of the Prophet’s life. Since the 1970s, these Islamic accounts have been treated with increasing suspicion by certain strands within Western scholarship. On one level this may stem from the relatively late dating of much of the non-Qur’anic material: the first biography was probably completed by Ibn Ishaq who died in 767, whilst the earliest Qur’anic commentary was written by Muqatil Ibn Sulayman, who died in the same year, over a century after the first Islamic conquest of Byzantine lands (Versteegh 1993: 69). Perhaps more significantly, however, scholars such as Michael Cook and Patricia Crone (1977: 34) view this whole body of literature with great scepticism as they argue that the ultimate purpose of the Islamic historical accounts is to project an orthodox Islamic history back onto these early events which took place whilst Islam was only just beginning to emerge.

From the perspective of structurally analysing the Qur’an, this poses certain problems. As I emphasise in my methodology, the structure of myth is intimately bound up with the material sociological and economic functions of a society. If the primary sources which purport to tell me about this society are in fact later interpolations and can themselves be considered highly *mythical* then it would be easy for my analysis to be caught in an endlessly self-confirming iteration.

2.2. The Qur’an

It is wise therefore to begin by isolating the likely date at which the Qur’an emerged. Islamic tradition holds that Muhammad would experience a state of revelation which would precede his recitation of God’s words. His followers would then learn the revelation and recite it to others. Tradition thus recognises that the Qur’an was originally composed and circulated in an oral tradition, whilst maintaining that it was written down in uncollated pieces in the prophet’s lifetime.

The final collation or redaction of the Qur’an begins under Abu-Bakr who, fearing that too many of those who knew the Qur’an by heart might pass away during one of his military campaigns, ordered that a complete and canonical book should be made and kept

with him. It was from this collection that the caliph ‘Uthman derived his codex which he then distributed across the Empire.

For our analysis, this poses certain problems. Because structure is intimately bound up with the material sociological and economic functions of a people, should I thus produce the analysis based on the ‘Uthmanic Codex, the apparently identical copy compiled by Abu Bakr, or the apparently unchanged revelation received over the course of Muhammad’s life? Considering the massive changes affecting Arab culture during this period, then some substantial change at the S³ level is likely.

Though Wansbrough (1977) and following him Crone and Cook (1977) have argued for a later foundation of the Qur’anic text, I am convinced by F M Donner who argues convincingly for an earlier date. Because of the Qur’an’s dissimilarity from the later *Hadith* material stylistically, theologically and in its attitude to politics and because there are no divergent versions of the Qur’an’s consonantal text over a vast geographic area, it is likely that it crystallised very early perhaps around 656-661 AD (1988: 1-25).

2.3. The Tribal Economy

The Near Eastern tribes of the 19th century were relatively egalitarian societies, generally led by a chief and elders whose only power was the power of persuasion (Van Der Steen 2013:10). Instead, “personal reputation is the basis of political power as far as political power exists at all” (Lancaster 1988: 73). As can be found in other tribal societies around the world, it thus seems likely that personal honour and generosity both became ways of enhancing one’s own prestige and the prestige of one’s tribe.

Intimately linked with the concept of personal honour is that of wealth and military prowess. Indeed, whilst a tribe would have communal ownership of land use-rights and of the springs and wells on it, individual tribe members also had their own personal property including their tent and agricultural produce, livestock, wives and slaves and any wealth they could acquire in raids (Steen 2013: 13). In some of the *Hanging Odes*, a binary opposition appear between the tribal code and individual codes of honour: “in those cases a hero transcends the laws of the tribe and follows his own independent code”. (Heath 1996: 82-5)

Although raiding was both an important source of tribal wealth and prestige throughout the history of Arabia, it seems that pastoralism and agriculture would have been the main employment for much of Arabian society throughout the 7th century. In Arabia the difference

between agricultural land suitable for farming and desert where pastoralism was dominant would have been sharp and sudden. Nevertheless, conflict between settled and nomadic aspects of society does not seem to have been a particular feature of life in Arabia beyond the continuous petty raiding and inter-tribal conflict. Rather pastoralists and settled regions seemed to have lived in a symbiotic relationship with single tribes often being composed of both nomads and settled peoples (Van Der Steen 2012: 52) Settlements were thus often composed of several different tribes, with individual tribes consisting of both settled peoples and nomads. Indeed, according to Islamic tradition, it was precisely because of his ability to mediate in an inter-tribal feud that Muhammad came to hold such a dominant position in Medina.

Beyond raiding and agriculture, trading via caravan seems also to have been a feature of Arab life. Indeed, the Islamic sources and, following them, older Western Islamic scholarship epitomised by Watt have placed great emphasis on Mecca's importance as a trading centre. According to Watt, Muhammad's tribe the Quraysh, who controlled Mecca, "controlled all the trade passing up and down the Arabian West coast route which at that time was perhaps the chief artery between the Indian Ocean (including its African shores) and the Mediterranean". Mecca was thus a key stop on the prosperous spice and incense routes. (1968: 3). Moreover, Mecca's role as a trading hub was intimately related to its role as a centre of pilgrimage. Not only was the sacred space of the *hijaz* inviolable, and was thus a safe space in which to trade, but the thousands of pilgrims there presented an extra opportunity for merchants to trade on their way to Syria, Iraq or Iran.

Since Crone published *Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam* (1987), however, considerable doubt has been cast over this traditional account. The ease of transporting incense and spices via boat as opposed to by caravan makes it highly improbable that any of such high value trade passed overland through the dangerous Arabian interior on its way to the Mediterranean. Rather, it seems that the main goods produced in Arabia would have been livestock, leather and other animal products. Whilst it is possible that the Meccans would have exported these low value goods to Syria and the settled lands to the north, it raises the question of why the Arabs would make such an arduous journey to sell goods which could equally be produced locally in the Levant. Crone thus concludes that whilst some produce may have been exported to the north, Mecca was, if anything, most probably a centre of local trade for the tribes of the immediate surrounding area. Whilst it's possible that the *Kab'a*

played a facilitating role in trade, prior to the rise of Islam, its exact role and function remain shrouded in mystery.

The picture which emerges of pre-Islamic Arabia is one defined by a highly fractious, quarrelsome and chaotic tribal system. Whilst trade would almost certainly have been a feature of this period, it is unlikely that it would have been on anything like the same scale as that envisioned by Watt. Rather the main employment of the majority of those living in Arabia would have been agriculture or pastoralism. These two occupations would have, for environmental reasons, been clearly defined, however, rather than being antagonistic, they instead existed in a symbiotic relationship as evidenced by the fact of single tribes comprised both settled and nomadic peoples. After agriculture the main employment would likely have been warfare and raiding, an essential element in a society which was defined by personal reputation and charisma and subsequently the reputation and honour of the tribe.

2.3. The Sectarian Milieu and the Qur'anic Ancient Middle East

Having outlined the likely date at which the Qur'anic text crystallised, I will now turn my attention to the social, political, economic and mythical setting in which the text emerged in order to explore how these material conditions may have influenced the Qur'an's structure.

Though the traditional Islamic account of the Qur'an's emergence suggests that the Qur'an emerged in an almost exclusively pagan setting with limited Judaeo-Christian influence, recent scholarship suggests otherwise. Though I disagree with John Wansbrough's theories regarding the Qur'an's late dating, I find convincing his claim that the Qur'an emerged within a "*sectarian milieu*" of competing religious identities and narratives (1978). Rather than being uniformly pagan, Mecca and the Arabian Peninsula and other peripheral areas are better understood as a swirling melting pot of competing religious theologies, identities and myths. Sparsely settled, possessing an oral culture which may have had a strong emphasis on poetry and storytelling and lacking an organised Church to preserve true doctrine, Arabia may have been fertile ground for the development of new myth.

That Arabia was a melting pot of newly introduced religions and mythologies is supported by the historical record. The 6th and 7th centuries bear witness to a sharp increase in inter-religious tension and an escalation of millenarian speculation. In the Byzantine Empire the Miaphysite split was acute as evidenced by the vigour with which Heraclius pushed the doctrines of Monotheletism and Monoenergism. Perhaps more significantly,

however, the Persian inspired Jewish revolt in Jerusalem heightened anti-Semitism, possibly peaking with the forced conversion of the Jews in 614 (Maas 2010: 508), whilst the removal of the True Cross to Ctesiphon followed by Byzantine victory and its restoration fanned the furnace of millenarian speculation. With such chaos across the Middle East, it is possible that Pre-Islamic Arabia experienced a wave of religious refugees fleeing war or persecution.

I believe that the text also supports my contention that the Qur'an emerged in a sectarian milieu. Indeed, Gabriel Said Reynolds in the *Qur'an and its Biblical Subtext* (2010) demonstrates that Qur'an exhibits a deep familiarity with myths from the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Christian and Jewish pseudepigrapha, as well as early Patristic homilies – particularly those that existed in the Syriac tradition.

Therefore, just as Lévi-Strauss can trace a myth which establishes an equivalence between incest and eclipses from Brazil to the Bering Strait, across the whole of America via Amazonia and Guiana (1969: 296), so a similar geographic spread and mutation of mythology can be seen across the Middle East of Late Antiquity. The Qur'an thus emerges at the periphery of a great web of related mythology. If one were to – rather arbitrarily – take Greek Chalcedonian Christianity in Antioch as our hypothetical starting point, moving west, the mythic landscape would eventually shift to Latin Chalcedonian Christianity in Italy and then to the Arian Christianity of the Goths in Spain. Moving east, Greek Christianity would slowly give way to Semitic Syriac speaking Christianity, then on to Persian Zoroastrianism and then to the Buddhism and Hinduism of Northern India. Moving south, one would encounter Samaritans and Jews before encountering Egyptian influenced Miaphysite Christianity. Southwards to Nabatea and beyond the picture becomes more uncertain, but it seems likely that outside the settled lands of the Empire one would encounter a largely Syriac speaking, eclectic collection of Judaeo-Christian and possibly Gnostic-influenced sects. Finally, deep in the sectarian milieu, as Syriac gives way to Arabic as the dominant language and the aforementioned mythologies rub against native religions, we may stumble upon Mecca and the early Qur'anic community.

2.4. The Significance of the Tribe in the *Jahiliyya*

Islam emerges therefore from a highly fragmented, chaotic and changeable tribal system. Because of a lack of reliable sources from this period, an exact ethnography of this tribal

system is difficult. To sketch an outline, however, I will draw from studies analysed by Eveline Van Der Steen of pre-industrial 19th century tribal Arabian society; a society which, although there may be a significant discontinuity in history between the 19th and the 7th centuries, would - it seems likely - have been subject to similar historical forces (Steen 2013: 38). Indeed, the picture which Van Der Steen paints of the Middle East is “characterised by a complex and fluctuating network of relations: tribes belong to confederations and are themselves divided into sub tribes, clans and families. Tribes and confederations can belong to large overarching “super” confederations.” Moreover, these tribes were subject to change; “clans expand into tribes, tribes into confederations. Confederations and tribes shrink and fission and become tribes or clans in other tribes.” (Ibid. 9).

To add to this complexity, it seems that whilst the reality of kinship did form the basis of tribal society, it was rather the *perception* of kinship which was the deciding factor (Ibid.10). In other words lineage systems, whilst having a basis in biological fact, would be retroactively altered for economic, political and social purposes and thus “manipulated to include non-members and members and even whole clans of other tribes and sometimes simply invented.”

The (rather extensive) genealogy of the Prophet is no exception. In particular the received family tree of the prophet seems to serve three main functions. In the first instance, his descent from Ishmael the forefather of all Arabs and thus Abraham, the archetypal Muslim before Muhammad, serves to incorporate Muhammad’s teaching into the Biblical narrative and thus present Islam as the true religion from which Christianity and Judaism were derived. In the second instance, his descent through legendary Arabic figures dating all the way back to ‘Adnan the legendary father of all the Northern Arabic tribes serves to link the Arabs’ new religious identity as Muslims with their tribal past. Finally, the appearance of Umayya and al-Abbas, respective founders of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties as Muhammad's second and first paternal cousins surely functioned as a legitimising tool for these early dynasties.

Given the central role the Prophet plays in Arabic and Islamic culture, it is tempting to look for an idealised genealogy in the prophet’s ancestry. Indeed, this was attempted by certain medieval scholars (Varisco 1995: 141) based on the human skeleton with each tribal division representing a major body part. Thus the highest division, the *sha’b*, represents the

head, with the next tribal division, the *qabila* (usually translated as the generic English “tribe” Ibid. 142), representing the jaw or face, whilst the *'imara* represents the chest. Further down, the *batn* represented the belly, the *fakhidh* the thigh and the *fasila* the lower leg. Such an idealised medieval schema, however, tells us very little about the actual reality of early or pre-Islamic genealogies. Indeed, subsequent studies have shown that the majority of the segmentary terms are fluid and used interchangeably across different groups to describe divisions as different as a family and a clan in what Van Der Setten describes as a "terminological jumble" (2013: 9). The only exception to this rule being the *sha'b* which almost always remains the highest dividing term and usually refers to a more conceptual division such as that between the Northern and Southern Arabs and thus has no material sociological function beyond abstract categorisation; because a *sha'b* is so large, it seems unlikely that all of its members would ever even attempt to meet.

Indeed, this uncertainty was even apparent in the medieval period as demonstrated by the fact that there could be no agreement on exactly where the segmentary divisions could be applied to Muhammad’s genealogy. Figure 1 shows the differing opinions of four medieval scholars:-

Division	A	B	C	D
Sha'b	Mudar	Muda	Khuzayma	'Adnan
Qabila	Kinana	Kinana	Kinana	Rabi'a/Mudar
'imara	Quraysh	Quraysh	Quraysh	Quraysh/Kinana
Batn	'Abd Manaf	Qusayy	Qusayy	'Abd Manmaf/ Ibn Makhzum
fakhidh	Hashim	Hashim	Hashim	Hashim/Makhzun
fasila	'Abd al - Muttalib	al-'Abbas	al-'Abbas	al-'Abbas/ 'Abd al -Muttalib

(Varisco 1995:142)

Key: Column A: Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr.
 Column B: Zubayr bn Bkkrin In b Rashiq.
 Column C: al-Suwaydi.
 Column D: al-Zamakhshari.

Whilst the Medieval Islamic scholars failed to derive a unified idealised genealogy by focusing on content, I believe with a structuralist method we can begin to draw out more meaning from Muhammad's genealogy. In the first instance, I would argue that the *sha'ib*, the highest division, always exhibits a binary split. Adnan, for instance, is the legendary founder of all northern Arabs who stands opposed to Qahtan, the legendary father of the southern, Yemeni Arabs. Though both Qahtan and Adnan are descended from Noah, only Adnan is descended from Ishmael. Whilst medieval Islamic scholars associate various Arab civilisations mentioned in the Qur'an with a third group, it is emphasised that these were all wiped out. Both genealogically and historically, therefore, unity gives way to duality. If, however, we were to take Mudar as the patriarch of the *sha'ib*, a similar binary opposition appears between him and his brother Rabi'ah. Rather satisfyingly, the Qahtani Arabs exhibit a further binary division into Himyar and Kahlan mirroring this second split. The Arabic tribal system can thus be said to work from a legendary single ancestor, through the conceptual dual division of the *sha'ib* and on to the myriad smaller segments which have a more concrete sociological function in people's lives.

Secondly, there is a strong preference for endogamy. On the one hand, this is a manifestation of the Arabic tradition of patrilineal cousin marriage. Indeed, the Prophet's mother, Amima, is the granddaughter of ‘Abd Manaf and thus the patrilineal 1st cousin of Abd' Allah, Muhammad's father, whilst his first wife, Khadija, is also descended from Quasayy, the great great great grandfather of the prophet. On the other hand, however, this preference for endogamy in many ways reflects the biblical genealogy of King Solomon who, as Edmund Leach points out, is validated both by a double line of descent from Jacob – what he calls the endogamy principle – and by descent from Esau the Edomite and Heth the Canaanite – what he calls the alliance principle. (Leach 1969: 25-85) He is thus legitimate heir to Israel, both by his genealogy and by right of Alliance. (Varisco 1995: 149).

Indeed, this pattern of double descent is clear, not only for Muhammad, but for all the Prophet's major ancestors as outlined in the table above. At the very start of the genealogy, Adnan marries Mahdad, herself a descendant of Abraham, thus creating a double descent from the Prophet. Similarly Mudar, a hero of Pre-Islamic poetry and the other candidate for

patriarch of the Prophet's *Sha'ib*, is not only the fruit of a patrilineal cousin marriage, but himself marries his own cousin. The next major ancestor, Kinana, witnesses something of a twist. Kinana marries Barra, his second cousin and great grand-daughter of the legendary Mudar; Barra was previously the second wife and thus also second cousin once removed of Kinana's father, Khuzayma.

This pattern of double descent continues in a similar vein until we come to Qusayy, the great great great grandfather of the Prophet who became the first member of the Quraysh tribe to govern the *Kab'a*. Qusayy thus takes a wife from the tribe which previously governed the *Kab'a* who, although she is a distant cousin through Mudar, perhaps better represents the idea of continuity in the *Kab'a*'s governance as well as the emergence of the alliance principle. Nevertheless, the implication from the genealogy is clear: the significance of all the Prophet's major ancestors from Adnan, Mudar and Qusayy are underscored by the double genealogical descent.

As we reach Muhammad and the trunk of the family tree, the prevalence of patrilineal cousin marriage and the sheer detail recorded makes the genealogy rather complex. Both the progenitors of the Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties are present here as is Hashem, the progenitor of the Hashemite dynasty currently ruling Jordan and formerly also Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Interestingly Hashem's mother and wife are actually of Southern Arabic descent, marking a break with endogamy. This perhaps either symbolises a desire to portray Muhammad as descended from and in some sense the heir to both the Northern and Southern Arabs (marriage principle) or perhaps is a method by which prominent Southern Arabian families in the Early Islamic period could emphasise their closeness to the Prophet as the Umayyads and Abbasids have. (Varisco 1995, 150)

2.5. Submission to the Islamic State

Prior to the emergence of the Qur'an, Arabian society seems to have been essentially tribal with one's political and economic power determined by the success of one's tribe and one's position within that tribe. Though such a fractious environment may breed fierce warriors, various sources - including Theophylact Simocatta and the fragments we have of Menander Protector - attest to the Arab's lack of political unity and military cohesion. (Maas 2010: 96).

The advent of Islam, however, seems to have brought to an end this highly fractious political landscape. Firstly, Islam provided the ideological conditions necessary to give both the nomadic and settled populations of Arabia unprecedented unity. Patricia Crone argues that this achievement cannot be downplayed: “no other civilisation seems to have created a high cultural model of equal intelligibility to both...” settled states and nomadic tribes (2008: 43). The strength and depth of this new unity was amply demonstrated during the Islamic invasion which required the concentration of the Arabs’ military might under one leader. Moreover, it allowed the Arabs to turn potentially short term tactical gains into long term strategic ones. As Walter Kaegi notes of the Islamic invaders after winning the battle of Yarmuk against the Byzantines: “They (the Muslims) did not stop after the battle to relax or quarrel over the booty. They concentrated on sound military goals, the destruction of the remaining Byzantine forces as organized armies... and these actions transformed what was merely a great victory into a decisive one” (1992: 60). Both the Arabs’ military success and the speed with which the new polity and system of taxation were set up demonstrate emphatically that the emergence of Islam had displaced the “extreme political fragmentation” of the Arabian tribes with “a relatively centralised unified and unifying polity” (Donner 1981: 96).

Whilst, as Van Der Steen notes, Arabian tribalism is defined by masculine competition and honour, the word Muslim - from the root *salam* - can literally be translated as 'one who is in submission'. Within modern Arabic the trilateral root of *salam*, however, has a much broader range of meaning. In the first verbal form, *salam* has the sense of being safe, secure, blameless, free or to escape, whilst the second verb form - which often has a causative element - has the sense of preserving, saving from injury, surrendering, submitting, resigning or granting salvation. In the third form it denotes keeping or making peace and in the fourth form it means to forsake, leave, desert, let sink or drop. The fifth form, often the reflexive version of the second form has the sense of obtaining, taking over or assuming whilst the sixth form means to make peace with one another. The 8th form, often a reflexive version of the first form has the sense of touching or taking possession of. The tenth form means to surrender or capitulate.

Broadly speaking *salam* can be used to describe three interrelated concepts. In the first instance, it can be used to denote soundness or a degree of perfection; this is emphasised in its adjectival form where it denotes "Soundness, intactness, safety". In the second instance, particularly in the 4th verbal form, it can refer to a movement downwards - sinking, dropping

or forsaking. Interestingly the noun can also refer to a ladder or set of stairs. Finally *Salam* can also have the sense of surrendering or making peace and an end of war. Hence Islam, "submission or resignation to the will of God". (Wehr and Cowan 1976: 425)

In many respects the fractious and warlike tribal political system centred on personal and tribal honour and competition is the inverse of Islam which is associated with surrender, peace and downwards movement. It is therefore striking that, despite this apparently radical opposition between Islam and the tribal system, Islam has historically existed side by side with the tribe rather than replacing it. A central concern of our thesis therefore will be how Qur'anic structure reflects how the early Islamic community negotiated this dichotomy between tribe and religious state.

2.6. The Constitution of Medina

Perhaps the best insight into how the first Muslims balanced the apparently conflicting sociological, economic and political demands of tribe and Islamic state is found in the *Constitution of Medina*, allegedly the earliest political document of the Islamic community. Indeed, the *Constitution* is accepted as largely authentic even by Patricia Crone, one of the most suspicious scholars of early Islamic History (Lecker 2004:67). The Constitution depicts a fundamental change in the social fabric in that, whilst the relationship between the individual and his tribe is to a large degree preserved, the document introduces a new supra-tribal entity, the divinely sanctioned early Islamic State*.

Indeed, unlike, say, ‘*The Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen*’, which is primarily concerned with defining a new two way relationship between the individual and the law of the nation-state, the *Constitution of Medina* outlines a three tier relationship between individuals, separate tribes and their responsibilities to each other and the new Islamic State. Indeed, it is telling that, whilst Article 3 states that “the aforementioned communities [the emigrant Muslims and the people of Medina] shall formulate a constitutional unity as distinct from other peoples” - in other words it presents the new Islamic State as a kind of super tribe - immediately following this declaration Articles 4-12 each name 8 tribes individually and emphasise how each, “shall be responsible for their ward and they shall, according to their former approved practice, jointly pay the blood money in mutual collaboration and every

*I have used Watt's translation of the Constitution (Watt 1998: 130-134)

group shall secure the release of their prisoners by paying the ransom.” Although each tribe retains its identity and its responsibility for its “wards”, the primacy of the Islamic State is still emphasized: the above articles are each suffixed by the statement: “the deal among the believers shall be in accordance with the recognized principles of law and justice.” Whilst the “former approved practice” of the tribe is still sanctioned, all relations between tribes of *believers* must be in accordance with the “recognised principles of law and justice” of the new *religious* polity.

In issues of war, in particular, the primacy of the State over tribal rights becomes clear. Article 49 prohibits “fighting or bloodshed among the various communities of the state”, thus legally outlawing warfare within the environs of the state, whilst the permission of the Prophet Muhammad – in whom is vested final command and authority - is required for any military expedition, so preventing the outbreak of any new tribal conflict without the state’s explicit consent. In the event of a conflict between kinship codes and the *Constitution*, the *Constitution* is clear: just as no refuge shall be given to the Quraysh or their allies - the Prophet’s tribe – (Article 53), so collective resistance is owed by all believers “against any individual who rises in rebellion, attempts to acquire anything by force, violates any pledge or attempts to spread mischief amongst believers... *even if he is the son of any of them*” (Article 16).

However, just as the *Constitution* makes requirements of the believers regardless of tribe, so equally it confers status on believers purely in virtue of their being believers. Indeed, Article 18 guarantees that equal protection of the *Constitution* is to be granted to “even the humblest of believers”, presumably regardless of pre-existing tribal status, whilst Article 50 confers on him the equal right of protection and constitutional shelter as long as he commits no harm. This, presumably, would have been significant in the early years of the community when new converts would have been joining the steadily growing ranks of Islam. In a nod to existing social norms, however, Article 51 states that a woman cannot be given shelter without the consent of her family.

What is apparent is the explicitly religious tone of the *Constitution*. Whilst in tribal society authority is drawn from one’s personal honour and authority as perceived by the other members of one’s tribe, the *Constitution* makes it clear that its own authority is drawn from divine sources: thus the very first article states that this is “a constitutional document given

by Muhammad (Peace be upon him), the prophet”, whilst the final Article 63 emphasises that Allah and the prophet are the protectors of good citizens and those who fear Allah. The Constitution is thus framed by its quasi-divine origin and in Article 18 equates the security of God and protection under this constitution. It is perhaps interesting that, as Heath remarked above, whilst Pre-Islamic poetry depicts a binary and conflicting relationship between the tribal honour code and the personal honour of the individual protagonist, which in some case exceeds that of the tribe, in contrast the *Constitution* perhaps instead exhibits a binary opposition between the rights of the tribes and the divinely inspired law of the prophet which binds and regulates them.

Whilst in many respects the tenor of the *Constitution* is that of what we would describe as an absolutist theocracy with adherence to Islam conflated with that of citizenship, the exception to this is the Jews, who at once are part of the new Islamic Polity, yet retain their distinct identity. Indeed, whilst Articles 24 and 38 emphasise that both Jews and believers must jointly bear the cost of war, the Jews may maintain their own religion provided they do not do wrong, act unjustly or bring evil on themselves and their household. Although the Jews had equal rights under the *Constitution*, the continual refrain that they must not act unjustly or do wrong suggests that the author of the *Constitution* viewed this group with some suspicion.

The new Islamic Polity is clearly an innovation in the hitherto primarily tribal political, economic and social arrangement of Arabia. The picture which emerges is of something much more significant than merely a super-tribal confederacy. Whilst the tribe remained a significant feature of the social organization of the Islamic State, the *Constitution* bears witness to a state led by a single leader who claims to draw his authority, not from his own personal honor and charisma as in the tribal system— though he may indeed have possessed both – but instead from almighty Allah. Moreover, any man, merely in virtue of becoming a Muslim, gained full rights under the *Constitution* regardless of his tribal status. Finally, whilst in many respects the *Constitution* does seem to conflate belief and membership of the new Islamic Polity, the presence of Jewish tribes suggests a degree of pluralism and thus the possibility of being a citizen of the state without being compelled to convert to Islam.

What does this tell us about the structure of the society depicted in the *Constitution*? Though we have observed that the new Islamic State and the tribal system are potentially conflicting, it is telling that the *Constitution* - a self-consciously religious document - doesn't seem to want to abolish the tribal system as much as reincorporate it within the framework of the new Islamic State. Ultimately this suggests a mediating structure, albeit one where the religious aspect seems to predominate over the tribal.

Chapter 3. The Character of Moses in Sura 28, 'The Story'

I begin my analysis by studying *Sura 28, The Story*, which follows the Prophet Moses in Egypt in the run up to the Exodus. In many respects this myth functions as my key myth, an arbitrary starting point, which will raise various points which are explored in more depth in later chapters. My chief task in this chapter is to sketch the structure of the Qur'an. I thus discover two major sets of interrelated oppositions - believer and disbeliever, divine and profane – which I believe define the Qur'an at the level of S^3 , before plunging deeper to the abstract level of S^2 to explore how these opposed categories relate to each other.

3.1. The Believers in Egypt

Sura 28 opens with an overview of the story of the Exodus from Egypt which follows a narrative very similar to that of the Bible. I have divided the narrative into two mythemes which form a basis for analysis.

Qur'an 28.3-6

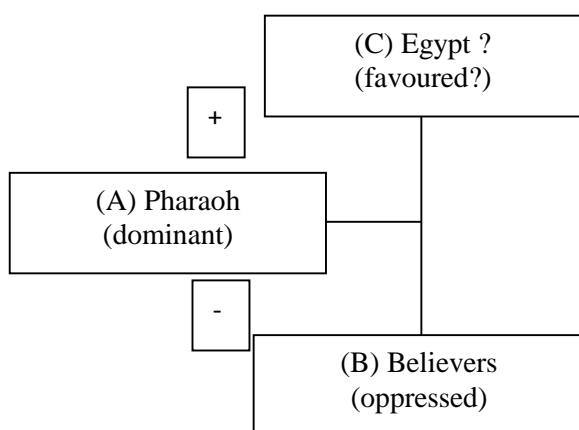
1. Pharaoh makes himself "high and mighty in the Land" and divides the people into two groups. He oppresses one of the groups, slaughtering their sons but sparing their women.
2. God, however, wishes to favour the oppressed and make them "leaders". He affects this change, making the oppressed leaders, and shows "Pharaoh, Haman and their armies the very thing they feared"

The first mytheme seeks primarily to develop a power relationship between the dominant and oppressing Pharaoh (A) and the oppressed group (B), whom we shall refer to as believers. An oppositional relationship can thus be said to exist between Pharaoh (A) and the believers (B). The mytheme also mentions a third group who aren't oppressed, presumably the Egyptians (C). It is currently unclear exactly how they relate to either Pharaoh or the believers.

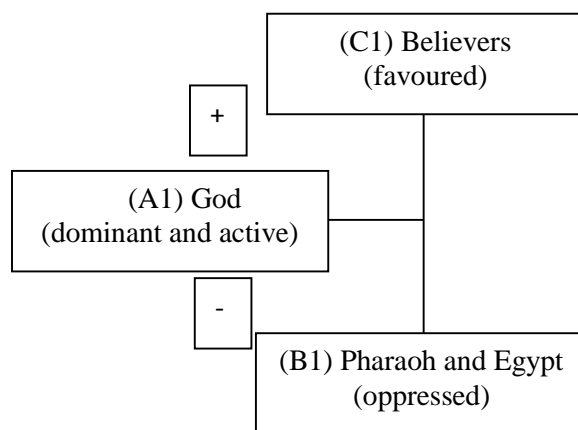
In the second mytheme, an inversion seems to have occurred. The active dominant role previously occupied by Pharaoh is now occupied the narrator of the Qur'an, God (A1). In contrast, the role of the oppressed is now occupied by Pharaoh, Haman and his armies, who all seem to occupy the same oppressed category (B1). Similar to the previous mytheme,

an oppositional relationship can be said to exist between God (A1) and the oppressed Pharaoh and his servants (B1). In this mytheme, however, the role of the third group, the believers (C1), is much clearer. They have been made leaders in the land by God, indicating a strongly positive relationship between them. If we are to consider the second mytheme a straight inversion of the first, then we can perhaps imply a positive relationship between Egypt and Pharaoh in the first mytheme. Just as the believers are favoured by God in the second mytheme, so perhaps the Egyptians are favoured by Pharaoh in the first.

Mytheme 1



Mytheme 2



How are we to make sense of this transformation? On one level, it may be possible to suggest that God and Pharaoh are structurally identical as they both play almost identical dominant roles. On the contrary, certain key differences exist between the two characters. The first difference is implicit in the characters of God and Pharaoh. In contrast to God who is presented in the Qur'an as the all-powerful, divine "Lord of Worlds... and Master of the Day of Judgement" (Q1) and is the Qur'an's omniscient narrator, Pharaoh is a human profane ruler of a particular land, a character in the narrative. Indeed, whilst Pharaoh has the power to oppress the believers and presumably favour the disbelieving Egyptians, God has not only the power to oppress the Egyptians and favour the believers, but significantly, power over Pharaoh whom He punishes. Whilst Pharaoh has power only temporarily, God is presented as having final authority. It seems that the Qur'an is suggesting that the divine power of God is greater than the profane power wielded by Pharaoh.

God : divine : final authority :: Pharaoh : profane : transient authority.

A similar pattern emerges when we compare and contrast the believers and the disbelievers. To be a believer is to be in *submission* to the divine. In contrast, to be a disbeliever or to practise idolatry is to put your faith, or submit to, the profane. Thus, whilst the disbelievers are in an advantageous position when Pharaoh is dominant, the believers are in an advantageous position when God is dominant. The advantage possessed, however, is tied to the authority from which it is derived. Just as God's enduring power brings enduring advantage to the believers, so Pharaoh's transient power brings transient advantage to the disbelievers.

God : believers : divine :: Pharaoh : disbelievers/Egyptians : profane

3.2. Moses' Mother and Pharaoh's Wife

After this overview, the narrative then switches to Moses' mother who, presumably following Pharaoh's command to slaughter all the sons of the believers and spare the women, is commanded by God to part with her child and cast him into the water. Like in the previous section we have the same two phase movement showing first the believers at an initial disadvantage, followed by a miraculous reversal in which the believers and disbelievers swap position. Indeed, although this section is only a small part of the story outlined in section one, I would argue that the two sections have an almost identical structure.

Qur'an 28.7-13

1. God inspires Moses' mother to suckle her son, before putting him in the river. God promises to ultimately return her son to her.
2. Pharaoh's household pick him up and Pharaoh's wife persuades Pharaoh not to kill the child, believing – falsely - that he will bring joy.
3. Moses' mother wavers and is on the verge of revealing everything about Moses until God strengthens her heart. She instead sends Moses' sister to go and watch Moses from afar.
4. God ordains that Moses will refuse to feed from Pharaoh's wet nurses.
5. Moses' sister approaches Pharaoh's household and suggests that her mother may make a good wet nurse. In this way God reunites Moses with his mother.

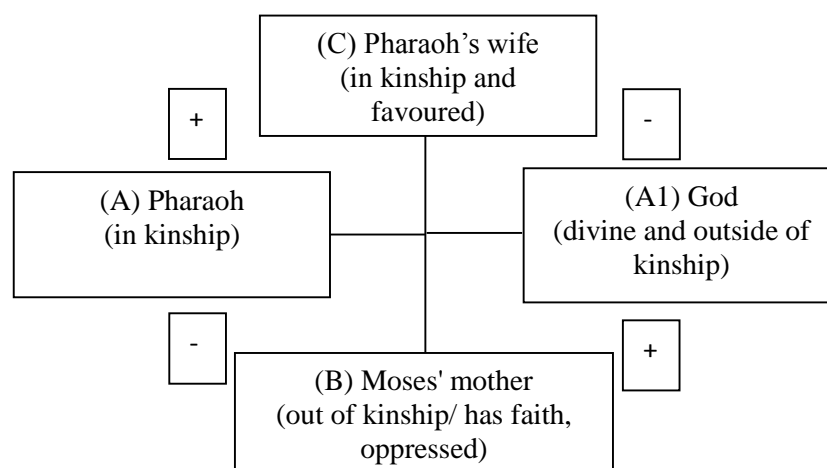
In the first two mythemes, it is implicit that Pharaoh once again occupies the dominant position A as it is he who has commanded that all the believers' sons shall be killed

and their women spared. An opposition is thus apparent between Pharaoh (A) and Moses' Mother who is forced to part with her child and thus occupies the oppressed category B. The favoured category C is instead occupied the Pharaoh's wife who gains a child.

In the fourth and fifth mythemes a reversal is once again affected: the narrative makes clear at several points that God is now playing the dominant role (A1). For instance, God ordains that Moses will not suckle any of Pharaoh's wet nurses; just as Pharaoh forces Moses' mother to part with her child, so God intervenes to prevent Moses feeding from Pharaoh's household symbolising disjunction between Moses and Pharaoh, emphasising Pharaoh's move into the oppressed category B1. In contrast, Moses' mother's employment as a wet nurse emphasises her movement into the favoured category C1.

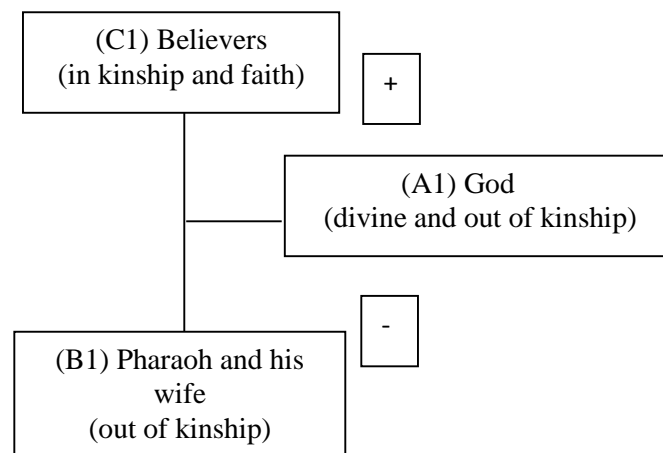
Let us begin by analysing the first two mythemes. The relationships between the opposed categories are almost identical to those we encountered in the previous section. In the first instance an opposition can be said to exist between Moses' mother (B) and Pharaoh's wife (C). Whilst the former is a believer, the latter is not. A second opposition exists between God and Pharaoh. God symbolises divine authority, whilst Pharaoh represents profane authority, here symbolised by his familial relationship with his wife. Whilst the believer (Moses' mother) has a positive relationship with the divine (God), the disbeliever (Pharaoh's wife) has a positive relationship with the profane (Pharaoh). Under Pharaoh's profane/familial authority, however, the disbeliever is at an advantage, whilst the believer is at a disadvantage. Whilst Pharaoh's wife is defined by her familial relationship with profane Pharaoh, Moses' mother is defined by her faith in God. In this respect it may be possible to merge the two graphs we have identified as they are in fact part of one interrelated movement.

Before reversal



In the second mytheme, a reversal has taken place. Whilst in the previous mytheme Pharaoh seemed to have authority as his massacre of the innocents compelled Moses' mother to part with her child, after the reversal, God has authority as he restores Moses to his mother. Subsequently, Moses' mother, who was in a positive relationship with the divine, has had her child restored to her and can thus be said to be in an advantageous position, whilst Pharaoh's wife, who was in a positive relationship with the profane, is now at a disadvantage.

After Reversal



This process of reversal which I believe is characteristic of the Qur'an's underlying structure grants fundamental insight into the nature of the oppositions. In this section, for instance, Pharaoh's profane authority is expressed through the means of familial relations: his wife gains an extra child because of his power. In contrast, Moses' mother is willing to part with her child at God's command. On the one hand this emphasises Moses' mother's position as a believer in submission to the divine – God commands her to give up something which is precious to her and she complies. On the other hand, however, it emphasises the opposition between believer and disbeliever: whatever defines the disbeliever's profane power will be that which the believer is willing to give up and that which the believer gives up is that which will become a manifestation of the disbeliever's profane power. Following the reversal, however, the believers receive back what they were willing to give up, whilst the disbelievers lose that aspect of profane power they placed ahead of submission to God. Thus in the previous section the believers become leaders in the land at Pharaoh's expense, whilst in this section, Moses is reunited with his mother at Pharaoh's wife's expense.

Believer : submission to divine : transient disadvantage : lasting advantage

Disbeliever: submission to profane : transient advantage : lasting disadvantage

In this way Qur’anic structure overcomes genealogy before once again re-establishing it. In this myth, for instance, the Qur’an presents a stark choice: we can either, like Moses’ mother, have faith in God but be outside of kinship relations or, like Pharaoh’s wife, be inside kinship relations and have faith in God. Prior to the narrative reversal, these are a stark binary choice. Following the reversal, however, Moses’ mother, *because* of her faith in God, finds herself once again in kinship relations with her son symbolised by her employment as a wet nurse, whilst Pharaoh’s wife is both outside of kinship relations with Moses and does not have faith in God. In this way the Qur’an deems to demonstrate a mediating structure, albeit an imbalanced one. Those who are in the believing category ultimately mediate with kinship, whilst those who are defined by the profane category of kinship fail to mediate at all, finding themselves outside of both kinship and faith.

	Prior to Narrative Reversal		After Narrative Reversal	
	Kinship	Faith	Kinship	Faith
Moses’ Mother	-	+	+	+
Pharaoh’s wife	+	-	-	-

This lack of balance in the Qur’an’s mediating structure is similarly expressed in the charts above. Prior to the reversal, Pharaoh’s profane authority is balanced by God’s divine authority – albeit in a dormant mode. In the second graph following the reversal, however, God’s divine authority is dominant, whilst Pharaoh, representing profane authority is absent thus making the graph - and thus the reversal - appear unbalanced. Since structure is all pervasive and follows the same pattern throughout a myth, both graphs ought to follow the same pattern.

One explanation for this unbalance would be that the structure expressed so far is not sufficiently crystallised and thus the role of profane authority post reversal will emerge as we

study more myths. In other words, the category of profane authority is implicitly present in the second graph, it is just not sufficiently developed.

A more likely explanation for this apparent imbalance is suggested in the role God – the paragon of *divine authority* – who seems to have power over *profane authority* after the reversal. In contrast, prior to the reversal, whilst profane power may *appear* to be dominant over divine authority, it never succeeds in totally dominating it. In the previous section he overthrows “Pharaoh, Haman and their armies” and places the believers in a position of political, profane authority (“leaders in the land”), whilst in this section God re-establishes *genealogy* – symbolic of Pharaoh’s wife’s profane power – through reuniting Moses with his mother. Whilst prior to the reversal divine power and profane power appear distinct, after reversal, the divine authority of God can be said to have encompassed the profane authority of Pharaoh. In other words, following the narrative reversal, profane authority is subsumed into the all-encompassing divine authority; the former is present but it has been reduced to an aspect or manifestation of the latter.

A comparison of this section with the previous section also begins to give us an insight into the structural position of women in the Qur’an. A surface explanation would suggest that whilst men are perhaps to be associated with the political, the women are associated with the domestic. A deeper reading of the text, however, suggests a less extreme division between Pharaoh’s wife and Moses’ mother than that between the believers and Egypt and Pharaoh. Indeed, in many ways Pharaoh’s wife is doing a good deed in rescuing the infant Moses and preventing him from being killed even if she does this without comprehending God’s plan*. Similarly, Moses’ mother, after being commanded by God to cast her child into the river, nearly breaks God’s commandment, perhaps by begging Pharaoh’s household for her child. God is thus forced to strengthen her resolve to maintain his plans, thus suggesting a degree of ambiguity in her character. In this way the text eschews the same stark opposition between believers and disbelievers we found in the previous section – female characters seem more ambiguous, perhaps implying a tendency to mediate.

*Interestingly, later Islamic Tradition views Pharaoh’s wife in very high regard – partly because of her decision to adopt Moses and partly because of a reference to Q66.11 which recounts the conversion to Islam of Pharaoh’s wife.

Defined by kinship (negative)		Defined by faith	
(positive) →			
Pharaoh	Pharaoh's wife	Moses' mother	Believer
Completely defined by profane power/kinship relations.	Defined by kinship relations, though possibly converts to Islam.	Has faith in God, though at one point she wavers and needs to be strengthened.	Has total faith in God

Indeed, mediators are an important area of interest in this section. Rather than playing an active role in the narrative, the infant Moses, a future prophet, can be said to function as a narrative mediator between the believers and the disbelievers. At the opening of the passage conjunction is established between Moses and his mother symbolised by her suckling him. This conjunction gives way to disjunction, symbolised by her placing him in the river, whilst the attempted adoption of Moses by Pharaoh's household seems to imply conjunction. Ultimately, however, Moses will refuse to feed from the wet nurses establishing disjunction and instead is reunited with his mother via his sister.

Moses' mother	+ (suckles)	Moses	-	
Moses' mother	- (River)	Moses	+ (adoption)	Pharaoh's wife
Moses' mother	+ (Moses' sister)	Moses	- (won't suckle)	Pharaoh's wife

Several points can be drawn from this. In the first instance, Moses, a prophet, works to emphasise the disjunction between the believers and the disbelievers. This is achieved through a process of experimentation: can the disbelievers adopt a child who is a future believer? Ultimately, the failure of Moses to suckle implies that the experiment is a failure. What is perhaps of more interest is the movement of Moses' sister towards Egypt in order to re-establish conjunction between Moses and his mother. On the one hand this perhaps emphasises the role of women as mediators. On the other hand, however, considering that Arabic society did and still does often practise patrilineal cousin marriage, is the Qur'an suggesting that one must give a daughter in order to receive a son?

3.3. The Emigration of Moses

The narrative now switches to the adult Moses who has just reached “full maturity and manhood”. Whilst this section continues to develop the oppositions between divine and profane and between Muslim and infidel, we see the emergence of an ambiguous group, the Jews. In this way the Qur’an begins to deal with a paradox both in its own theology and in the concrete situation of 7th century Arabia. On the mythical level, the Qur’an holds that Moses was a prophet and thus a Muslim, yet equally the Judaeo-Christian religious history from which the Qur’an draws emphasises that he was Jewish. By establishing mythically Moses’ identity separate from Judaism, the Qur’an can thus be said to function to differentiate Islam from the two existing monotheistic religions

Qur'an 28.14-21

1. Moses reaches "full maturity and manhood", is granted wisdom and knowledge from God.
2. He enters the city unnoticed by its people and finds two people fighting, an Egyptian and one from his own people. His kinsman cries out for help and Moses kills the Egyptian, apparently accidentally as he says, 'This must be Satan's work: clearly he is a misleading enemy.'
3. He immediately asks God for forgiveness and pledges to never support those who do evil.
4. The next morning he is walking in the city, "fearful and vigilant", when suddenly he comes across his kinsman from the previous day in another fight.
5. Moses is about to attack the Egyptian who "was an enemy of them both", when the Egyptian accuses Moses of aspiring to be a "tyrant in the land", with no intention of putting things right.
6. A man comes running from the furthest part of the city warning Moses to flee as the authorities wish to kill him.
7. Moses leaves the city "fearful and wary" and prays to God, 'My Lord, save me from people who do wrong.'

The first mytheme. sees Moses reach full maturity, receive wisdom and knowledge from God emphasising both that he is a believer and that in some sense he possesses divine

authority. He enters the city and, finding two men fighting, he kills the Egyptian, saving the man from his own people. If we compare this mytheme to the previous sections, then we could perhaps say that Moses is “oppressing” or forcing the Egyptian into a disadvantageous position, whilst favouring his kinsman. In many ways Moses resembles the tyrannical aspects of Pharaoh we witnessed earlier in this chapter.

Ultimately, however, this section rather seeks to emphasise the contrast between Moses and Pharaoh. Indeed, whilst Pharaoh was slaughtering innocents, Moses’ murder of the Egyptian was accidental, “this must be Satan’s work”; whilst Pharaoh’s authority originates in profane political power (he made himself high and mighty in the land” 28.4), Moses’ authority is given to him by God. As if to emphasise this, in the third mytheme he unambiguously submits to God and begs for forgiveness for killing the Egyptian. Whilst Pharaoh symbolises profane authority, Moses – as a prophet – represents divine authority.

In mytheme 4, Moses comes across a similar fight between the same man from his own people and another Egyptian. After previously being saved by Moses, his kinsman - presumably a Hebrew - is now playing a much more ambiguous role. Indeed, a sliding scale can be said to exist, running between Moses and the disbelievers, with the Hebrew occupying an ambiguous mediating position. As a prophet and an exemplary believer, Moses is opposed to the disbeliever who is both an enemy of Moses and Israel. Moses, however, refers to the Hebrew as a “troublemaker”. Indeed, whilst Moses is moving in the city “fearful and vigilant”, his kinsman has managed to recklessly start another fight, thus establishing structural distance between Moses and Israel despite their kinship. Israel is thus a negatively valenced mediator between believers and disbelievers.

The final mytheme is a structural inversion of the first mytheme in this section and has the purpose of further emphasising the difference between Moses and Pharaoh. Whilst in the first mytheme Moses, representing divine authority, saved Israel and killed the Egyptian, here Pharaoh representing profane authority, forces Moses, a believer, to flee. In section one and section two Pharaoh’s profane power comes, respectively, from his political position and his kinship relations with his wife. At the start of this section, it was emphasised that Moses’ authority comes from God. However, when he kills the Egyptian to save his own kinsman, it is perhaps implicit in the text that Moses could easily possess profane political power based on *his* kinship with Israel. However, because Moses has refused evil by submitting to God

(28.17), he refuses to become a tyrant thus leading to his exile. Put another way, just as Moses' mother must give up her son at God's command, so Moses' decision to submit to God leads directly to him losing all political power and his kinship connections through his exile.

In this way we see the recurrence of the linked themes outlined in the previous sections. For Moses, submission to God is intimately tied to a loss of political power and a break with kinship relations. The Qur'an thus develops the recurring opposition between believers and disbelievers. The former are in total submission to the divine, whilst the latter idolatrously put their faith in some earthly phenomena, frequently associated with kinship and/or political power. This binary opposition between submission to God and genealogy or kinship is implicit in all three sections we have so far analysed. In this section Moses is forced into exile, in the previous section Moses' mother is commanded by God to throw her child in the river, whilst in the first section Pharaoh uses his profane authority to slaughter the sons of the believers.

Moses : Pharaoh :: submission to divine : submission to profane

3.4. Moses in Midian

The next section of the analysis takes place out of the city and outside of Egypt, at the waters of Midian. Within *Sura 28*, this perhaps represents the structural nadir of Moses' journey. Having begun, at the start of the previous section within kinship relations with his family and people and in submission to God, Moses now finds himself outside of his own land, in a foreign country, estranged from his people and entirely alone. Though he is almost entirely without any earthly power, the text frequently emphasises that he is in complete submission to God, praying frequently for His guidance.

In this respect, Moses can be said to structurally resemble the believers in section 1 when they are both completely oppressed by Pharaoh and in complete submission to God. From this - admittedly dire - position, God intervenes and reverses the situation leaving the believers in the dominant position and Pharaoh destroyed. Similarly from this point of complete weakness, things begin to improve for Moses, beginning with his marriage to the Midian woman through which Moses is re-established within kinship relations.

In the previous section, we established the existence of three groups: believers, disbelievers and Jews who occupied an ambiguous intermediate category. One of the

fundamental questions in this section is where the Midianites fit into this schema, and thus what the significance is of Moses' marriage.

Qur'an 28.22-28

1. On his way to Midian he prays to God to guide him the right way.
2. Arriving at Midian's waters he finds a group of men watering their flocks and two women holding their flocks back. The women cannot water their sheep until the men have finished, they are unaccompanied by a man because their father is very old.
3. After watering their flocks for them, Moses prays to God and the women's father invites Moses to speak with him in order to reward him for watering the flocks. Moses tells him his story and the women's father tells Moses that he is now safe from those who do wrong.
4. The women suggest they hire Moses because he is a "strong and trustworthy man", their father invites Moses to marry his daughter in return for 8 years of service.

Moses' marriage to the woman from Midian is the beginning of a reversal stemming from Moses' willingness to give up all material advantage at God's command. As we saw in the previous section, whatever one was willing to give up in God's service would be reinstated, whilst whatever one placed ahead of submission to God would be taken away.

If we can consider Moses' exile to Midian as the nadir of his career as a Prophet and the beginning of a reversal within the narrative, then it is perhaps interesting that this section is the first time a character in the believer category has achieved successful mediation. Throughout this *Sura* the Qur'an's structure has played around and experimented with various attempted movements between the opposed category of believer and disbeliever. In section two, the infant Moses' adoption into Pharaoh's household was a failure emphasising the disjunction between Moses' mother (believer) and Pharaoh's wife (disbeliever). In 3.3, Israel spectacularly fails to mediate between Moses (believer) and the Egyptian (disbeliever) leading to Moses' exile. In this section, however, the Midian women mediate successfully between Moses and the Midianites.

This further emphasises the role of women as mediators in the Qur'an. In section two Moses' sister serves as a narrative mediator to re-establish conjunction between Moses and

his mother, whilst the opposed characters of Moses' mother and Pharaoh's wife possess a degree of ambiguity, in that the former needs her faith strengthening (she almost puts her genealogical relationship with Moses ahead of submission to God), whilst the latter acts to save Moses.

The Midian Women's role as mediators is perhaps also emphasised numerically. Moses is a lone individual whilst the Midianites are in a group. That the Midian Women are dual and thus grammatically and conceptually halfway between single and plural perhaps emphasises their role as mediators. This structural opposition between oneness and plurality not only reflects the emphasis the Qur'an places on the opposition between the oneness of God and the many gods of the polytheists, but also the prophet's genealogy which is descended from one legendary ancestor, before splitting into two conceptual *sha'b*, which in turn split into a myriad of smaller tribes and clans with a more concrete sociological function.

This successful mediation is not only emphasised by the fact that the mediators are both dual and women, but also in the space in which these mediations occur. Whilst unsuccessful conjunction usually happens in clearly defined space, successful mediation occurs in liminal space which itself can be said to mediate between two distinct areas.

In the first step where Moses helps the man from his own people and kills the Egyptian (thus establishing conjunction between Moses and Israel), Moses occupies a doubly liminal position. Not only is he described as entering the city and thus crossing the boundary between rural and urban, but he has also just reached "full maturity and manhood"; in other words he has just crossed a temporal boundary*.

In contrast, the two men fighting are unambiguously within the city. Subsequently, Moses is walking in the city and thus in a clearly defined position. In contrast again, it is the messenger from the Egyptian authorities - who comes from the "furthest part of the city" - who can perhaps be said to occupy the liminal space.

*As an interesting aside, elsewhere in the Qur'an, "maturity" denotes 40 years of age (Q.46.15) the age at which Muhammad first received revelations. The importance and authority of old age is similarly attested in Bourdieu's ethnography of the Algerian Berber: "The mythico ritual categories cut up the age continuum into discontinuous segments, constituted not biologically (like the physical signs of ageing) but socially... [age is amongst] the institutionalised instruments for maintenance of the symbolic order whose very functioning serves the interests of those occupying a dominant position in the social structure, the men of mature age" (1977: 165)

The final successful mediation in Midian, however, is framed differently. All three parties can be said to occupy liminal space by the waters of Midian where the Midianites have gathered to water their flocks. The fact that here water allows successful mediation makes an interesting contrast with the role the river Nile plays in apparently separating the infant Moses from his mother. We can perhaps argue that water has a potential conjoining and disjoining function depending respectively on whether it's a river - which separates land - or a watering hole – which is a place of social interaction. Finally, just as when Moses first kills the Egyptian he was on the verge of full maturity and manhood, so in step 3, the father of the Midian women is so old that he cannot accompany his flocks to the watering hole and thus structurally opposite to Moses, at the extreme end of manhood and maturity.

<u>Believer</u>	<u>Mediating category</u>	<u>Other</u>
1) Moses + (enters city liminal)	Israel – (clearly defined in city)	Egypt
2) Moses - (clearly defined in city)	Israel - (clearly defined in city)	Egypt
3) Moses + (enters Midian liminal)	Midian women + (by Midian's waters liminal)	Midian men

Having reached something of a partial conclusion with the marriage of Moses to one of the Midian women, it is worth taking a moment to draw out some of the significant themes we have developed. Perhaps most striking is the similarity between Moses' exile and that of the Prophet and early Islamic community's exile or *Hijrah* to Medina. As we mentioned in the ethnography, the Islamic calendar marking the beginning of the Islamic polity – one of the first definitive marks of the emergent Islamic faith attested to independently by non - Islamic sources – dates from the *Hijrah* (Hoyland 1997: 547). Therefore it is perhaps highly significant that the first successful mediation between distinct peoples happens immediately after Moses' exile. Just as Muhammad was invited to Medina at the end of the Year of Grief, the nadir of his prophetic career, so the same pattern of exile is repeated with Moses.

Another significant question is how exactly Midian fits into the Qur'an's religious and ethnic schema. So far we have identified three main categories. Moses and his mother represent believers or Muslims as it is emphasised that they are willing to give up all earthly advantage including familial relations at God's command. An ambiguous category is implied by the "troublemaker" from Moses' own people, probably to be identified with the Jews.

Finally, the Egyptians probably represent infidels or disbelievers who place earthly authority and kinship relations ahead of submission to God and are the enemy of both believers and Jews.

One explanation is that the Midianites refer to the Bedouin, nomadic traders who herd livestock. Indeed, the Qur'an makes direct reference to the "desert Arabs" (Q9.90-120), mainly in the context of how they claim to profess Islam, yet are notoriously unreliable in their support for the Islamic polity. However, though the Midianites are first found herding sheep, there is little apart from this to support such an association.

An attractive solution can be found with reference to the Bible. Indeed, on occasions the terms Ishmaelite and Midianite (Gen 37. 25-28) were used interchangeably, often to describe Arabs. Is the text perhaps suggesting that, although Moses has gone into exile, he has perhaps stumbled upon Abrahamic Muslims in northern Arabia, the location of Midian? In this respect the myth could be functioning to further obscure Moses' Jewish identity. Unfortunately, however, the other references in the Qur'an to the Midianites are mostly negative and thus point away from this suggestion. Indeed, in *Sura 7*, the prophet Shu'aib comes to the Midianites and preaches the word of God and commands them to stop using false weights and measures (7.85). They refuse to submit and instead order Shu'aib to abandon Islam or leave the city. In the end, God destroys them all with an earthquake.

Rather, this myth perhaps tells us something about early Islam's approach to marriage. Whilst the identity of the Midianites as a whole is uncertain, it is strongly emphasised that Moses' father-in-law at least is a monotheist. In the Biblical version, Moses' father-in-law is the "Priest of Midian" (Exodus 2.18), whereas in the Qur'anic version, after Moses tells him his *story* - *The Story* also being the title of this *Sura* - he offers Moses sanctuary. Just as the prophet Muhammad tells the story of Moses in a bid to convert his audience (28.3), so Moses has, perhaps, converted his father-in-law by his story (28.25). In this respect, it is perhaps emphasising that marriage is acceptable between believers regardless of ethnicity.

It is tempting to see this section, therefore, as a partial abrogation of existing tribal customs. Whilst the preference was and still is within the Arab world for endogamous patrilineal cousin marriage, here we find Moses who has submitted to God and subsequently found himself outside of genealogy, thus marrying exogamously within the family of another believer. Moreover, no bride price is paid to Moses' wife or her father. Instead Moses agrees

to serve her father for eight years after which he leaves and his family follows him emphasising the patriarchal and patrilocal nature of Arabic marriage. Considering that the *Constitution of Medina* orders that protection should be granted to even the humblest believer joining the exiled community, it is perhaps useful to see this section as abrogating tribal custom for those recently having joined Islam.

The *Constitution of Medina* may also hold the clue to explaining the recurrent opposition between faith in the divine and profane authority which is frequently manifested in kinship relations. The Constitution bears witness to a society that was moving away from a primarily tribal based politico-economic system to one centred around a central religious state, led by the Prophet – albeit a religious state in which tribes continued to play a significant role. Just as the new Islamic state had to negotiate this new relationship, subsuming tribal allegiance beneath the authority of the Prophet, so Qur’anic structure similarly reflects this sociological development. Just as allegiance to the Islamic State left room for tribal allegiance, so those who submit to God in the Qur’an, ultimately have tribal relations re-established. Those who cling to tribal relations, however, are ultimately destroyed by God’s power.

3.5. Moses vs Pharaoh

This section witnesses the climax of the narrative. Though the transformations are again not quite as crystallised as in the earlier sections, a clear opposition is established between Pharaoh and Moses who are presented as structural inversions of each other. Moreover we see the recurrence of the interrelated themes of kinship, submission to God and temporary and enduring advantage. The pivot of the text is verses 36 to 38 (mytheme 5 and 6) when Moses battles Pharaoh’s counsellors or Magi. I shall augment the text here with supplementary material from *Sura 7*, which deals with the same scenario. This helps bring out some aspects of the structure which are only implicit in this *Sura*.

Qur'an 28. 29-41

1. After fulfilling his term of service to his father in law, he happens to be travelling with his family and when he sees a fire on a mountainside. He volunteers to go and either bring news or return with a burning stick to warm them.

2. When he reaches the fire, however, the voice of God calls him from "the right hand side of the valley, from a tree on the blessed ground".
- 3 God gives Moses two signs to show to Pharaoh: Moses is given the power to turn his hand leprous and when Moses throws down his staff it turns into a snake. Moses is commanded not to fear the snake.
4. Moses tells God he fears returning to Egypt as he is wanted for murder. God agrees to send his brother Aaron with him.
5. When Moses comes to Pharaoh with his two "clear signs", the Egyptians dismiss them as mere conjuring tricks. Moses warns Pharaoh that God knows the truth of his signs and that "wrongdoers will never succeed."
6. Pharaoh reminds his counsellors that they have no God but him and orders Haman to light a fire and bake some bricks so that he may climb up to Moses' God and prove that he is lying.
7. For behaving arrogantly in the land, God seizes Pharaoh and his armies and throws them into the sea: they were "leaders calling others to the fire" and will not be helped on judgement day,

The prelude to this narrative sees Moses drawn away from his family by the sight of fire on a mountainside, before encountering God and reacting with righteous fear. The symbolic significance of this section is very rich. On the one hand it outlines the structural position of a prophet as a mediator between God and the people. Moses, for instance, is drawn upwards (by God) to a raised position doubly emphasised by the mountain and by the fire, which as I shall later demonstrate, mediates between upwards and downwards and thus between divine and profane. Yet, just as the prophet is doubly raised up above the people, so God is doubly raised up above the prophet, symbolised by his position from the right hand side of the valley (the position of authority) and from a blessed tree which is raised up in the air. Significantly, despite Moses' raised position in relation to his family, it is emphasised that Moses remains in submission to God: he throws *down* his staff on God's command and shows great fear of God's power to turn his staff into a snake – the significance of which we shall draw out in chapter 5.

In previous chapters we have observed how submission to the divine is often opposed to genealogy, which often represents profane authority. Although Moses' family feature

prominently at the start of this section it is implicit that his submission to God entails the overcoming of genealogical relations. Moses is summoned by God, away from his Midian family who are not heard from again, thus structurally overcoming genealogy. After having submitted to God, however, genealogy is re-established as symbolised by the appearance of his brother, Aaron.

Beyond symbolising the reestablishment of genealogy, Aaron perhaps plays two other structural roles. On one level it is possible that by having two prophets, this emphasises their function as mediators between the *one* God and the *plural* Pharaoh and his chiefs. Fittingly, *one* God sends *two* prophets with *two* signs (*one* white leprous hand and a *one-footed* snake) to the *plurality* of the people. On another level, however, it is possible that the addition of a second prophet functions to mirror the addition of Haman to Pharaoh's retinue.

Divine: Profane :: One : Many

That Moses and Pharaoh are inversions of each other is emphasised beyond their symbolic doubling. Indeed, the vertical movement of Moses up the mountain towards God is mirrored by Pharaoh's attempt to build a tower towards heaven in order to disprove Moses' claims. Moses is drawn upwards by God's authority, by the *natural* phenomena of fire on a mountainside where he receives the signs of his prophethood and is joined by his brother Aaron. Pharaoh, on the other hand, after witnessing Moses' signs - by his own profane authority - orders Haman to *artificially* use fire and baked earth to build a tower towards God. Though both Pharaoh and Moses are in positions of power, as symbolised by the conjunction of fire – which moves upwards and has a heavenly association - and earth, whilst Moses represents divine authority, Pharaoh represents profane authority. Whilst Moses is a prophet sent from God to reveal God's word, Pharaoh is presented as an anti-prophet, God made him leader in order to call others to the fire (28.41)

Moses: God's authority: naturally raised up: submission to God.

Pharaoh: own authority: artificially raised up: rebellion against God

These two inverted narratives respectively precede and succeed the central pivot of this section, the clash between Moses and the magi or counsellors of Pharaoh. In this narrative, though Moses comes with signs to Pharaoh, he fails to convince Pharaoh of God's word. Pharaoh dismisses them as conjuring tricks and reminds (or commands?) his

counsellors that they shall have no god except for him. Whilst Pharaoh clearly rejects God's revelation, it is unclear how his counsellors respond. Indeed, in *Sura 7*, which also recounts this scene, Moses' serpent/staff "devours the fakery" of Pharaoh's magi/counsellors at which point they all fall on their knees and declare allegiance to God. Even though Pharaoh threatens to crucify them, the magi refuse to give up their adherence to God.

This section neatly expresses the structure we've been slowly unveiling throughout this chapter. Most clearly it brings out the contrast between the prophet Moses, representing divine authority, and Pharaoh, representing profane, earthly authority. It should be emphasised, however, that the identity of any prophet in the Qur'an is defined relationally. When on the mountain before God, Moses occupies the position of the believer in submission to God; however, when he returns from the mountain, as a prophet, he represents God's divine authority on earth and it is the magi who occupy the position of the believers in submission to the divine.

Thus:-

Divine authority : submission to the divine :: God : Moses :: Moses : Magi

In contrast, on earth, Pharaoh represents earthly authority, whilst the Egyptians or his counsellors are in submission to his profane authority. It is telling, however, that Pharaoh is not so much summoned upwards like Moses, as uses his own authority to command the building of a tower. As a prophet, the source of Moses' divine authority is derived from him being in submission to God on the mountain. Where however, does Pharaoh, whom we have described as an anti-prophet, structurally the inverse of Moses derive his authority from? On the one hand it is possible that Pharaoh is the source of his own profane authority: whilst Moses proclaims the word of God, Pharaoh declares that *he* is god. This, however, would suggest the following analogy:-

Profane authority: submission to the profane:: Pharaoh (god) : Pharaoh:: Pharaoh : Egyptians

Whereas magi (believers) were to Moses (divine authority), as Moses (believer) was to God (divine authority), in the above analogy it is implied that Egyptians (disbelievers) are to Pharaoh (profane authority) as Pharaoh (disbeliever) is to Pharaoh (profane authority), which seems unnatural. Another explanation, bearing in mind the text claims that God made Pharaoh a leader in order to lead others to damnation, is that God is the source of Pharaoh's

profane authority. This, however, would seem to contradict our understanding of God as associated with divine authority and the stark opposition we have observed between profane authority and divine authority. To resolve this question it is necessary to understand how this section fits into the Qur'an's wider structure.

As we've already established, the central contest is between Moses and Pharaoh. Whilst the former's divine authority is emphasised by the fact that he comes with the truth and with "clear signs", the latter's earthly authority is expressed through lies about himself, "you have no other god that I know of except me", and about God's revelations, "these are mere conjuring tricks". However, in the profane world, under Pharaoh's rule, those who are in submission to the profane are in an advantageous position, whilst the believers who are in submission to the divine are in a disadvantageous position. Indeed, so great is Pharaoh's authority that both Moses, who fears Pharaoh will kill him (28.33), and the Magi, who are threatened with crucifixion (7.124), are in danger of losing their lives at the hand of Pharaoh. In contrast the divine authority of Moses is expressed much more passively: "my Lord knows best who comes with guidance from Him and who will have the final Home: wrongdoers will never succeed". (28.37).

This section exhibits the Qur'an's characteristic narrative inversion. Under God's divine authority, those in submission to God who were willing to give up their lives find themselves in an advantageous position, whilst the disbelievers are "thrown into the sea" (28.40) leading to death. We thus see the opposition between submission to God and profane idolatry restated: whatever one is willing to give up in order to submit to God will be reinstated whilst whatever the idolater places ahead of God will be taken from him. In this way the Qur'an effects a life/death mediation. Those willing to give up their lives for God survive, whilst those who cling to this earthly life ultimately die.

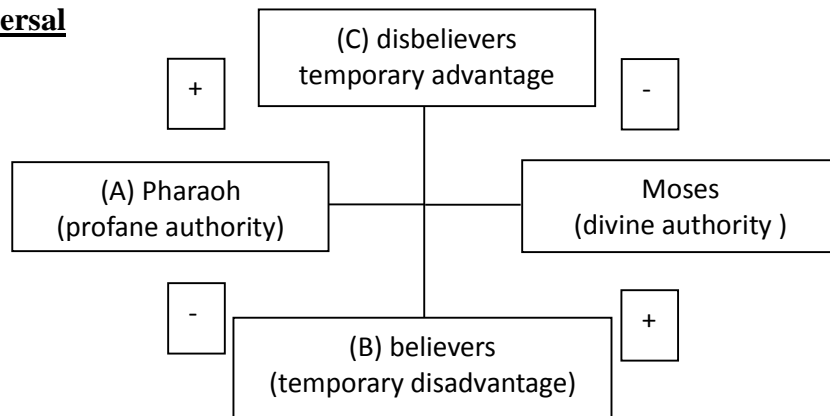
Disbelievers : faith in profane authority : life now : ultimate death

Believers : faith in divine authority : death now : ultimate salvation/ life

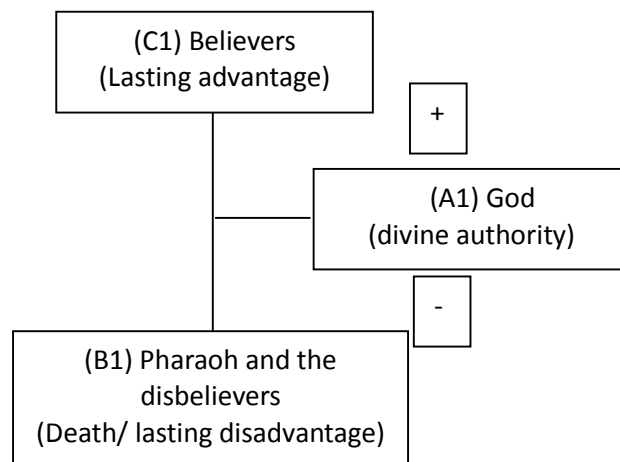
In this way, the profane political authority is exposed as being merely an aspect of the total divine authority possessed by God. Whilst on earth under Pharaoh's rule, divine and profane seem to be radically opposed with the latter being stronger – even granting Pharaoh the power to grant life or death; following the inversion, the power which Pharaoh exhibited

is subsumed under God's total divine authority. To answer the question of who is the ultimate source of Pharaoh's profane authority, it is clear that God's divine authority is the source of all power.

Prior to Reversal



After reversal



3.6. Truth, Lies, Sound and Sight

Apart from the opposition between divine and profane which is developed here, I believe that the Qur'an also develops a parallel opposition between truth and lies. This opposition is most apparent in the final contest between Pharaoh and Moses. Once again, Moses and Pharaoh are structural inversions of each other. Moses, for instance, is drawn upwards to God when he *sees* a fire on the mountain. His experience with the divine, however, is in the form of aural truth or revelation. In contrast Pharaoh begins his ascent with a lie, "Councillors', you have no other god that I know of except me", before ascending the tower in order to attempt to see God.

Q28.37-38

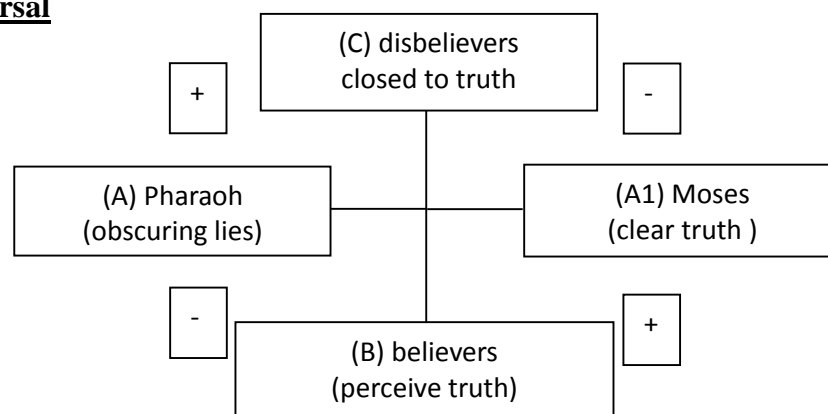
37. Moses said, ‘My Lord knows best who comes with guidance from Him and who will have the final Home: wrongdoers will never succeed.’

38. Pharaoh said, ‘Councillors, you have no other god that I know of except me. Haman, light me a fire to bake clay bricks, then build me a tall building so that I may climb up to Moses’ God: I am convinced that he is lying.’

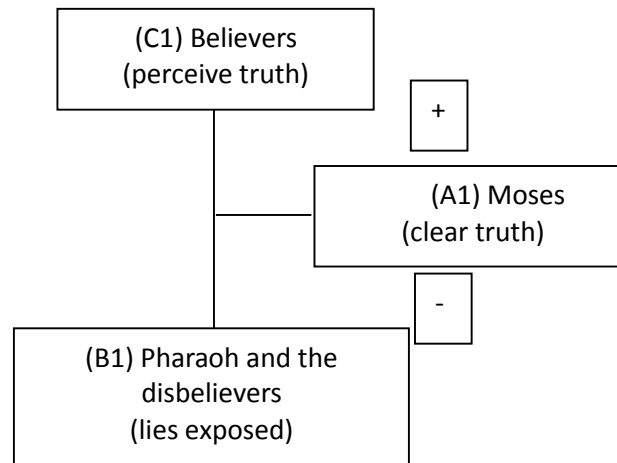
Whilst Moses is summoned upwards by the visual to experience an audible truth, Pharaoh uses an audible lie, “you have no other god but me”, to command his people to build him a clay tower so that he can try and visually witness the divine.

However, this opposition is most explicit in the actual contest between Moses and Pharaoh’s sorcerers. Here the contrast between the truth of Moses and the lies of Pharaoh is emphasised by the sorcerers themselves who “cast a spell on people’s eyes striking fear into them, and bringing about a great sorcery” (7.116) thus obscuring the truth. Moses, however, casts down his staff which turns into a snake and “devours their fakery. The Truth was confirmed and what they had produced came to nothing” (7.117-8). The truth of Moses’ prophecy triumphs over the lies of Pharaoh just as the signs to confirm Moses’ Prophethood devour the conjuring tricks of the sorcerers, leading to them converting to Islam. We can thus begin to plot these oppositions on the transformations we have developed.

Moses : divine authority : clear truth :: Pharaoh : profane authority : obscuring lies

Prior to reversal

After reversal



3.7. From S^3 to S^2

At the level of S^3 , Qur'anic structure is defined by two sets of interrelated oppositions, that between believer and disbeliever and that between the divine and the profane. Whilst the Muslim is defined by submission to the divine, the disbeliever is defined by submission or allegiance to the profane. These oppositions, however, can only be understood with reference to the Qur'an's characteristic reversal.

Prior to the reversal, the profane seems to be more powerful than the divine as the disbelievers are at an advantage over the believers. Indeed, often it is whatever material advantage that God commands the believer to give up – typically political power and kinship relations – which is exactly the source from which the disbelievers derive power. In this way the text seems to emphasise that submission to God and submission to the profane are mutually exclusive.

With the intervention of God, however, the reversal is affected. Those disbelievers who previously occupied an advantageous position slide into disadvantage, whilst those who submitted to divine authority move into the advantageous position. Interestingly, whatever material advantage the believers were forced to give up to symbolise their submission to God is typically reinstated. Those who refused to give up their material power either lose it or are obliterated by God.

Believer : faith in God : disadvantage in profane sphere : advantage in divine sphere

Disbeliever : faith in profane: advantage in profane sphere : disadvantage in divine sphere

What does this tell us about the underlying structure at the abstract S^2 level? Most clearly, the two oppositions between divine and profane and between believer and disbeliever suggest some form of binary opposition. Moreover, whilst the believers are in submission to the divine, the disbelievers are in submission or alliance with the profane, thus indicating that the Muslims are associated with the divine, whilst the disbelievers are associated with the profane. We can thus identify a divine category A and a profane category B.

How do the opposed categories A and B relate to each other? On the one hand the Qur'an's structure seems very oppositional. Israel, which threatens to break down the opposition between believer and disbeliever, is negatively valenced. Indeed, as we shall see elsewhere, the Qur'an abhors the Christian conception of Jesus which it understands as idolatrous in that it blends the divine and profane (5.116).

Mediation, however, and movement between categories is possible. Arguably the most important mediator in the Qur'an is the Prophet who converts Pharaoh's magi and persuades them to submit to God, thus allowing them to move between categories. Interestingly, the identity of the prophet is defined relationally: in contrast to God he is the ideal believer, in total submission to God's divine authority. When on Earth, however, the prophet represents the divine authority, previously God's positions, whilst the believers submit to the divine authority of God as previously embodied by the prophet.

Perhaps the best way to understand the Qur'an's underlying structure, however, is to closely analyse the relationship between profane authority and divine authority. Apart from Christians and Jews, who we shall study in more detail in the next chapter, all characters in the Qur'an are defined either by their relationship with or submission to divine or profane authority. The believer, in some ways typified by Moses' mother who was willing to submit to God by placing her child in the river, is defined by his or her willingness to break with genealogy which is a manifestation of the profane category B. Distance is thus established between the divine and between the profane: whilst Moses' mother gives up her child at God's command, Pharaoh's wife gains a child and thus profane advantage through her husband's unholy actions. Following the narrative reversal, however, God re-establishes Moses' mother in genealogy, thus breaking down the distance between faith and genealogy and subsequently

mediating the opposed categories of divine and profane. We can thus say that the Qur'an possesses a mediating structure: submission to the divine and submission to the profane or genealogy are initially opposed, before being reconciled.

Similarly, in the contest between Moses and Pharaoh, Moses – symbolising divine authority – seems much less powerful than Pharaoh, who symbolises profane authority. Following the narrative reversal, however, God not only overthrows Pharaoh, but in making the believers “leaders in the land” - thus granting profane advantage to those who were previously exclusively defined by divine advantage - the text emphasises that earthly, profane authority is an aspect of his divine authority, again signalling mediation between categories A and B.

Though there is certainly mediation between divine category A and profane category B, it is clear that the divine category is much more powerful than and has primacy over the profane category. Prior to the reversal, although the profane seems to be more powerful than the divine, both are distinct and apparent in the text. Following the reversal, profane authority is not so much revealed as inferior to divine authority, as entirely subsumed within divine authority. As the diagrams on page 63 and 64 show, whilst on earth, Pharaoh's profane authority is partially balanced by Moses' divine authority, whilst after God's intervention, the profane is entirely encompassed by God's divine authority. In this respect, the classical formula expressing mediation, $A \text{ n } B$, is not fit for purpose as it fails to reflect the dominance of divine category A.

Perhaps the best way to express this asymmetry between the two categories is by reference to Louis Dumont's idea of hierarchical opposition. Dumont suggested that, rather than being merely defined as oppositional and reciprocal, binaries were in fact frequently best understood as existing within a hierarchical relationship. His theory develops Hertz's theory of handedness, that many cultures positively associate the right hand with life, the divine or the orthodox, whilst the left hand is negatively associated with death, the profane and the heterodox (Hertz 2013). Thus in English "right" is a homophone meaning both right handed and correct. Similarly, Catholics, the traditional minority Christian faith in the UK, are "left footers", whilst someone with an unorthodox modus operandi is "left of field".

Dumont takes this opposition a step further. Not only are the relative properties of right and left oppositional, but they are distinct in the fact that usually the right is dominant to

the left. Moreover, Dumont argued, rather than being two parts of one whole, the weaker binary was often best understood as a section or aspect of the larger binary which acts as the whole. Thus in the English language the word 'man' can not only be understood as in opposition to 'woman', but also as encompassing her, in the sense of using man to refer to all mankind. On one level man appears as the opposite of woman, on another level, however, woman appears as an aspect of man.

The Qur'an similarly demonstrates a cultural preference for the right hand over the left: the voice of God comes to Moses from the right hand of the valley, signifying authority. Similarly several Prophets come to their people from the right hand (Q37.28). Moreover, in traditional nomadic communities in the Middle East, the chief's tent is situated at the east or the right hand of the tent circle (Van der Steen 2013: 85). The divine and the dominant category A is thus to be associated with the right hand.

Returning to the Qur'an, in the profane sphere - which is to be associated with category B - divine category A appears to be opposed to the profane category B. Following the reversal, when one is in the divine sphere - which is associated with category A - and therefore under God's authority, divine category A instead can be said to encompass the profane category B: whilst Pharaoh and Moses may appear opposed, ultimately even Pharaoh's political power is presented as a manifestation of God's divine power. Like the simultaneous relationships of opposition and encompassment between the words man and woman, the Qur'an can be said to exhibit a hierarchical relationship. In this respect the structure of the Qur'an is perhaps best expressed as $A \supset (A \supset B)$: on one level - within the brackets - A and B appear opposed, however, both are ultimately subsumed into category A.

Why, however, does the apparently inferior profane seem to dominate in the earthly sphere? A good explanation can be found with reference to the Berber (Kabyle) house Pierre Bourdieu studies in *Outline of a Theory of Practise* (Bourdieu 1977) which Dumont has flagged as a particularly clear example of hierarchical opposition. Like the Qur'an, Dumont notes that the Berber house exhibits a reversal:

"Once the threshold has been crossed, space becomes reversed, the cardinal points are interchanged; as though the threshold were the centre of symmetry or rather of similitude (homothétie) between the exterior space and the interior space of the house, which is reversed in relation to the former. But let us go beyond this physical image to

say rather that the interior space is qualitatively different to the exterior space, something other while still the same. We are made aware that in crossing the threshold we have passed from one level of life to another. This is a distinction that will doubtless be encountered again in other forms in this culture... [the house is] as a spatial whole, subordinated or superordinated to the exterior space." (Dumont 1979: 18 785-817)

In other words, outside : inside in the Berber house, as the divine world : profane world in the Qur'an. Just as entering the Berber house reverses the cardinal points of a compass, so moving into the profane world from the divine seems to elevate profane power over divine power.

Whilst the main binary opposition at the level of S^3 in the Qur'an is that between divine and profane, Bourdieu argues that the main opposition in Kabyle culture is that between male and female. Whilst the man is associated with the outside and culture, the woman is associated with the inside, nature, darkness or the nocturnal and thus the house (90). Whilst the man is the lamp of the outside, the woman is the lamp of the inside (127). Whilst man's domain is that of the outside, woman's domain is that of the inside; she is only "superior" within the inferior sphere. Moreover, the ideal position of woman is under the protection of man and thus inside the house, comparable to cultivated and therefore *domesticated* land. Whilst a man may enter a house, the woman's domain, at which point the main room becomes the male domain and another smaller area the female room, a woman who is without male protection and thus outside the house is "twisted"*, sterile and comparable to fallow, wild or uncultivated land. The dominant, cultural male may enter the inferior natural space, whilst the inferior natural woman, even if she attempts to enter superior male space outside, doesn't so much become cultural, as doubly natural and wild.

This hierarchical relationship expressed in the Berber house is almost identical to that found in the Qur'an. Whilst God (divine category A) can be equated with the dominant male category, humans and the profane (category B) can be equated with the inferior female category. In the superior divine sphere which occurs after the narrative reversal, God's divine power is dominant. In contrast, in the inferior profane world, profane power appears

*This association between that which is "twisted" and the untamed woman – and thus the rebellious divine - perhaps explains the rather obscure Qur'anic reference to witches blowing on (twisted) knots (113.5).

dominant. Like in the Berber symbolic universe, the inferior profane is only "superior" to the superior divine in the inferior sphere. Just as the believer's movement downwards into submission leads to mediation with the divine, so the married woman's movement into the house leads to mediation with man. Just as in the Berber house the cardinal points are reversed, so a profane human's (category B) apparently negative movement downwards, actually leads to mediation with the divine (Category A), a positive upward movement. In contrast, Pharaoh is like the twisted, sterile woman; despite their attempts to move upwards into the divine universe or outwards into the male universe, they instead become doubly negative - destroyed or wild and uncultivated.

The similarities between the Berber hierarchical structure identified by Bourdieu and the hierarchical structure of the Qur'an are striking. At the abstract level of S^2 , I believe that they are identical. Since the Berber society of 1960s which Bourdieu analysed is Islamic and thus at least to some extent Qur'anic, this supports Kunin's claim that structure at the abstract level can remain constant across very long periods of time (Kunin 1995: 22). At the cultural specific level of S^3 , however, whilst I suggest that divine and profane are the main opposed categories within the Qur'an, Bourdieu suggests that male and female are the main opposed categories within Berber structure. We shall explore these similarities and differences further throughout the following chapters.

Chapter 4. The Family in the Qur'an

In the previous chapter we analysed *Sura 28*, The Story of Moses. We observed the Qur'an's hierarchical structure, both at the abstract S^2 level, and also at the culturally specific level S^3 . At this level the Qur'an exhibits a binary opposition between divine authority and profane authority, with the latter frequently associated with genealogy and political power. In this chapter, however, I wish to further explore how the concept of tribe, family and genealogy functions within Qur'anic structure and relate this back to the concrete historical and sociological circumstances of the society from which the Qur'an arose; in particular the emergence of a theocratic Islamic State in hereto exclusively tribal Arabia.

In the first half of this chapter I thus wish to focus primarily on how the Qur'an's structure and its understanding of the family relates to that of the structure of the *Constitution of Medina*. Having shown how family and tribe typically functions in Qur'anic structure, I then use this to explain the significance of the character of the orphan before in turn briefly analysing the prophet's biography as related by Ibn Ishaq and showing how this too demonstrates a very similar structure to that found in the Qur'an.

In the second half of the chapter I compare and contrast how family and tribe function within Qur'anic structure and within the structure of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament. I then conclude the chapter by showing how, through a process of structural play and repetition, the ambiguous characters of Jews and Christians - and their distinct understandings of genealogy - are categorised within Qur'anic structure

Whilst in the previous chapter I focussed entirely on one *Sura* for analysis, in this chapter, though I begin with an extended analysis of *Sura 11*, *Hud*, I ultimately analyse several other *Suras*. I am aware that this opens me up to the accusation that I have cherry picked the sections which most support my understanding of Qur'anic structure, however, I would emphasise that it precisely by analysing various sections of the Qur'an thematically that I can most holistically and honestly explore its structure.

4.1. Believing is Seeing

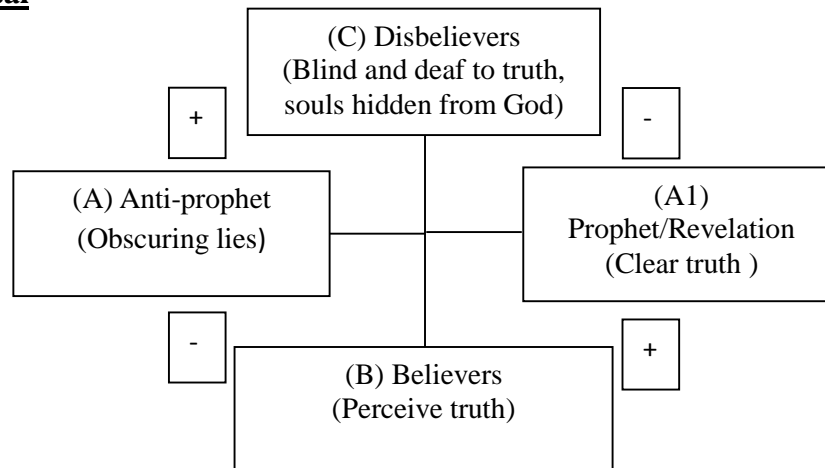
Seeing, hearing and understanding the divine or word of God are all closely linked in the Qur'an and help us illuminate the Qur'an's epistemology. Moreover, I believe that these concepts are fundamentally linked to the hierarchical relationship and reversal I described in the previous chapter. Just as those who place their trust on mutable earthly profane things only gained apparent or transient advantage and just as those who place their trust in the unchanging divine gained actual advantage, so the ability to understand or perceive the *unseen* is associated with eternal truth, whilst those who are preoccupied with the phenomenal *seen* world are unable to grasp truth.

Though we initially encountered this opposition at the end of the previous chapter, *Sura* 11 further develops this opposition between truth and lies, and allows us to further understand how they relate to the Qur'an's underlying structure. The first verse of the *Sura* describes the Qur'an as "perfected, then set out clearly from One who is all wise and all aware" (11.1). This serves to emphasise both revelation's role as a mediator between God and humanity as well as emphasising the simplicity of the truth. In contrast to the openness of revelation the disbelievers "wrap themselves up, to hide their feelings" (11.5) from God. Moreover, rather than spreading the truth, the disbeliever "invents lies about God" (11.18). The disbelievers are to the believers "like the blind and deaf as compared with those who can see and hear well" (11.24).

Believers: seeing and hearing the truth :: disbelievers : blind and deaf to the truth

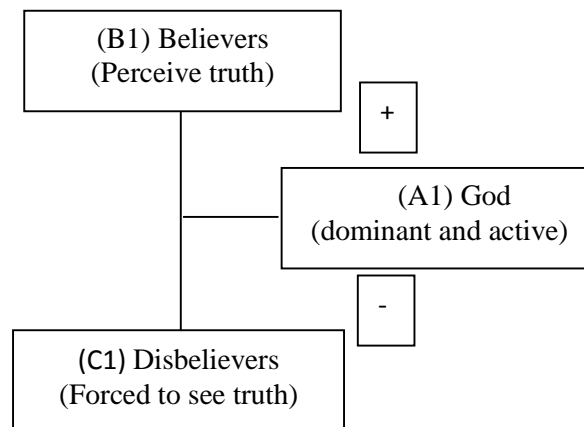
What, however, is the significance of the disbelievers wrapping themselves up to hide their feelings - or souls - from God? This can only be understood in relation to the Qur'an's characteristic narrative reversal. In this world, prior to the reversal, the disbelievers are characterised by their inability to perceive the truth and by their attempts to hide their souls from God. After the reversal - at judgement day for instance - God is revealed as all seeing (11.5) thus exposing their hidden souls whilst, similarly, the reality which the disbelievers mocked is suddenly all around them (11.8) thus forcing them to confront the truth they refused to acknowledge.

Prior to Reversal



This seeing/unseeing mytheme also exhibits the narrative reversal found previously. Prior to this reversal, the disbelievers exhibit the dual property of being blind to what has been revealed, whilst attempting to conceal their true selves. In contrast, God is all seeing (11.5) and thus the disbelievers are exposed. Moreover, on judgement day, “what they mocked will be all around them” (11.8), in other words they will be forced to see what they have blinded themselves too.

After reversal



In this way it is possible to see how the theme of seen and unseen is expressed through the Qur’an’s hierarchical structure. In the inferior, earthly plane the divine (category A) is hidden, whilst the power of Pharaoh (category B) is visible for all to see. The disbelievers have the power both to obscure their own hearts and to obscure the truth through their lies. In the superior divine plane, however, it is the power of God which is manifest and visible, whilst the lies of Pharaoh, rather than being hidden, will be exposed as God is all seeing. Whilst it is

possible for the divine to hide from the profane, it is not possible for the profane to hide from the divine.

Again this opposition between seen and unseen is redolent of Bourdieu's analysis of the Berber house: "Whereas for the man, the house is not so much a place he enters as a place he comes out of, movement inwards properly befits the woman" (Bourdieu 1977: 94). Like the dominant male, God is hidden in the inferior world and is revealed or emerges in the superior world. Like the woman's relationship with the man, the believers' relationship with God is complementary, mediation or recognition of God coincides with their movement into submission.

4.2. Belief and Islam as a Break with Genealogy

Having shown how the seeing/unseeing mytheme fits the shape of Qur'anic structure, I now want to relate this back to the oppositions we identified as being central to Qur'anic structure at the level of S^3 . In this section, which mainly focuses on the prophet Noah before turning to other prophets later in the narrative, we begin to see how the various categories we have identified relate to each other. Because this section is dense with symbolism I have decided to analyse the Qur'anic translation rather than compress it into mythemes.

Q11.25-34

25. We sent Noah to his people to say, 'I have come to you to give a clear warning:
26. worship no one but God. I fear you will have torment on a painful day'
27. But the prominent disbelievers among his people said, 'We can see that you are nothing but a mortal like ourselves, and it is clear that only the lowest among us follow you. We cannot see how you are any better than we are. In fact, we think you are a liar.'
28. He said, 'My people, think: if I did have a clear sign from my Lord, and He had given me grace of his own, though it was hidden from you, could we force you to accept it against your will?
29. My people, I ask no reward for it from you; my reward comes only from God. I will not drive away the faithful: they are sure to meet their Lord. I can see you are foolish.

30. My people, who could help me against the lord if I drove the faithful away? Will you not take heed?

31. I am not telling you that I hold God's treasures, or have any knowledge of what is hidden, or that I am an angel. Nor do I say that God will grant any good to those who are despised in your eyes: God Himself knows best what is in their souls. If I did this I would be one of the wrongdoers.'

32. They said, 'Noah! You have argued with us for too long. Bring down this punishment you threaten us with, if you are telling the truth.'

33. he said, It is God who will bring it down, if He wishes you will not be able to escape.

34. My advice will be no use to you if God wishes to leave you to your delusions: He is your Lord and to him you will be returned.'

The first mytheme, verses 25 and 26, sees Noah arrive as a prophet with God's *clear* revelation. In the second mytheme, verse 27, the prominent disbelievers are established as the inversion of Noah. As Moses is to Pharaoh, so Noah is to the prominent disbelievers. Indeed, whilst Noah may claim to come with a clear warning and divine authority, the prominent disbelievers emphasise how they can *see* that he is a mere mortal and thus perceive nothing divine about him. In a similar vein, rather than heeding Noah's clear warning, they instead emphasise that it is *clear* that only the lowest in society that follow him.

Just as Pharaoh represented profane human authority and Moses divine authority, so the same is true for Noah. Whilst Noah is sent from the *unseen* God, the disbelievers refuse to believe him because of his lack of any visual signs of divinity. In this way they confuse profane authority with divine authority. Whilst social position can be associated with the visual, divine authority stems from the *unseen*.

Divine authority : profane authority :: Noah : "prominent disbelievers"

The apparent difference between Noah and the prominent disbelievers instead manifests itself in the way they express their authority. The disbelievers' authority comes from their social position, which in turn is precisely that which forced the new believers into a position of earthly disadvantage. The expression of the disbelievers' power actively disempowers the believers. In contrast verses 28 – 32 demonstrate that Noah is very passive

in his use of power. Whilst some may willingly submit to God's authority, he wields no earthly power with which to compel them. Indeed he emphasises that any good which may come to the disempowered believers is dependent on God (11.31). Nevertheless, despite the *apparent* advantage the disbelievers may possess, Noah emphasises that it is merely *delusional*. Whilst the *unseen* divine truth may be *hidden* in this earthly sphere, it is the *visible* profane which will ultimately be proved *delusional*.

The narrative then switches to the building of the ark in preparation for the major narrative reversal. In following God's command to build the ark, the believers encounter the scorn of the disbelievers, further emphasising my claim that whatever action God commands from the believers to symbolise their submission will be directly related to their oppression by the disbelievers. This, however, all takes place under the eyes of God, emphasising his omniscience.

Q11.36-41

1. It is revealed to Noah that no more of his people will convert and that he should thus construct an Ark under God's "watchful eyes". Noah is commanded not to plead for those who have done evil.
2. Whilst building the Ark, the disbelievers mock Noah as he works. Noah warns that it is they who will receive a humiliating punishment.
3. Water gushes from the Earth and Noah boards the Ark with a pair of each species, believers and his own family which have believed.
4. The Ark sails on the water like "mountains".

The reversal here is very clear. The positive upward movement of the believers is emphasised by the fact that they sail on waves like mountains, whilst the drowning of the disbelievers symbolises their negative downward movement. Just as the disbelievers poured "scorn" on the believers in building the ark, so in return God grants them a "humiliating punishment". Precisely what the disbelievers had been humiliating the believers for - their faith in God - is precisely that which allows them to avoid this humiliating punishment.

This reversal also reintroduces the significance of genealogy, which was present in some form or another in every single section in the previous chapter. Here, Noah not only rejects the prominent people amongst his kin, but also with those of his own family who

disbelieve (11.40). This dissolution of genealogy becomes more explicit in the conclusion to Noah's story:

Q11.42-49

1. Noah calls to his son to come on the Ark. His son, however, decides to seek refuge on a mountain where he drowns.
2. God disperses the waters and the Ark lands on mount Judi.
3. Noah calls to God asking about his son, God replies that his son is not part of his family.
4. Noah accepts God's judgement and is blessed along with some of the communities which are descended from him.

On one level, this section sees a repeat of the standard narrative reversal. Noah, as a believer, places his trust in divine authority and warns his son that only God has the capacity to save his people from the flood. Noah's son, however, places his trust in the profane world. As Noah goes *down into* the enclosed ark, his son moves *up* onto a mountain. When the flood comes, however, Noah is moved up on waves as high as mountains, whilst his son drowns, thus symbolically moving downward. Just as the cardinal points of the compass are reversed inside the Berber house (the inferior world) (Dumont 1979: 785-817), so one's attempt to move downward in submission or upwards in rebellion in this inferior world, will have their respective movements reversed in the superior world.

Noah : initial negative movement (into ark) : final positive movement (mount Judi)

Noah's son : initial positive movement (mountain) : final negative movement (drowns)

One of the most puzzling aspects of this passage is the Qur'an's claim that Noah's drowned son is no longer of his family (Q11.46). It is possible that this implies that family relations between believers and disbelievers are impossible. Indeed, that submitting to God coincides with a break with genealogy or kinship relations is a recurring theme of the Qur'an. This break is so strong that God warns Noah for doubting him when he questions God as to why his son drowned (11.45). Yet having submitted to God and temporarily broken kinship relations, in the final verse, Noah is promised that he will father many communities, thus

suggesting the possibility of re-establishing kinship relations. Significantly, however, though some of his offspring will receive blessings, others will not.

That becoming a believer in some sense dissolves family relations is supported in the several mini narratives which I shall briefly outline. Verses 50-60 follow the Arabic prophet Hud whose revelation is rejected by his own brethren (11.50), the ‘Ad, who are in turn destroyed by a curse from Allah. Verses 61-68 outline the story of Salih who is sent to his people, the Thamud, who refuse to give up worshipping the gods of their fathers (11.62). When Salih provides them with a miraculous She-Camel sent from Allah as proof of his revelation (11.64), his people hamstring it before being destroyed by a mighty blast from Allah (11.68). In Verses 84-95, the prophet Shu’aib comes to his people the Midianites (the same as those encountered by Moses); like the Thamud they refuse to give up worshipping the gods of their fathers. In following Allah, Shu’aib finds himself socially in a “very weak” position and he is informed by his people that if it was not for his family connections they would stone him (11.91). Shu’aib replies with the question “Is my family of more consideration with you than Allah?” Ultimately the Midianites are destroyed by a mighty blast.

All of these three mini-narratives follow, in a rather compressed mode, the same two-step process of structural transformation we have hereto encountered. The prophets (representing category A) each come to their own respective peoples with God’s command that they must submit to Him and a warning that if they fail to obey this command then they will be destroyed. The people (representing category B), however, reject their prophets and pour scorn on God’s revelation – symbolised in the story of Salih by the hamstringing the divine she-camel. The believers thus find themselves in submission to God and oppressed by the disbelievers who refuse to submit to God. Following this first step, however, Allah intervenes, inverting the relationship between believer and disbeliever, saving the former and destroying the latter.

Like in the Noah narrative, all three of these narratives emphasise that becoming a believer requires overcoming existing family connections. In all three narratives, submitting to God and preaching to non-believers entails being rejected by your people. In the myths of Salih and Shu’aib this break with their people is underlined by the fact that the people reject Allah because they follow the “gods of their fathers”; they are unwilling to place Allah above

what they have inherited. Finally, this conflict between genealogy and belief is explicitly referred to in the story of Shu'aib when he asks rhetorically whether family is of more consideration than Allah. The profane authority of the anti-prophet is explicitly linked with genealogy.

Prophet : anti-Prophet :: divine authority : genealogical (profane) authority

Similarly:-

Believer : disbeliever : submission to divine : submission profane

4.4. The Orphan as the *Natural State of Humanity*

One of the central motifs and stock characters of the Qur'an is that of the orphan; being charitable to or dealing correctly with the orphan is a command which recurs 22 times. On the narrative level this commandment is very similar to the recurring refrain in the Old Testament that Israel must look after the orphan and the widow (for instance Deuteronomy 29.19), those who are weakest in society. When this material is transposed into the pattern of Qur'anic structure, however, the character of the orphan takes on a new significance.

The orphan is forcibly and naturally without family relations and outside of the bonds of the tribe. Since genealogy and submission to God are opposed categories, then by the Qur'an's own structural logic, if the orphan is not a part of genealogy, then he must by definition be naturally in submission to God. Moreover, an interesting parallel exists between Allah and the orphan. Whilst the orphan is without parents, Allah, it is repeatedly emphasised, has no children; neither a son as Christianity claims (2.116), nor daughters as the pagans claim (37.149-156). Unlike Judaism and Christianity whose adherents claim to be the children of God (Exodus 4.22 and John 1.12), Muslims are in thus some respect God's orphans; it is by being orphans outside of family relations that one can achieve mediation with the divine which is also outside of genealogical relations.

It is significant therefore, that Adam is created autochthonically and thus outside of the genealogical relations. Indeed, the Qur'an strongly emphasises the primacy of God in Adam's creation: "He created him from dust, then he said to him "Be": and he was" (Q3.59). Here God's word mediates between dust and life. Just as the prophet, the bearer of God's word and revelation, has the power to move the disbeliever who will ultimately die (profane-profane) into the category of believer who is in submission to the divine and thus achieves eternal life

(divine-profane), so God's word has the power to turn fallow earth (profane-profane) into life (divine-profane)

God : prophet :: prophet : believer :: God : revelation :: revelation : earth

Certainly God's authority extends over all areas of the genesis of humanity. However, note the twofold step of creation: God is both responsible for creating the material body of the human from dust, and commanding the body to live. In this respect the creation of Adam resembles the Qur'an's hierarchical structure. On one level Adam is created through a mediation of the divine and the profane, essence or being and autochthonic body. Ultimately, however, on another level the divine is also responsible even for the creation of the profane body emphasising the primacy of the divine.

This two-step process of Adam's creation is also echoed in the creation of all humans.*

Q40 66-68

66. Say [Prophet], 'Since clear evidence has come to me from my Lord I am forbidden to serve those you call upon besides God: I am commanded to submit to the Lord of Worlds.'

67. It is He who created you from dust, then from a drop of fluid, then from a tiny, clinging form, then He brought you forth as infants, then He allowed you to reach maturity, then He let you grow old – though some of you die sooner – and reach your appointed term so that you may reflect.

68. It is He who gives life and death, and when He ordains a thing, He says only 'Be' and it is.

In the first step of creation there is just dust: potentially fertile ground, perhaps a metaphor for the female womb. The conjunction of a drop of fluid – semen- with this dust leads to the creation of a clinging form or foetus. Here the fluid seems to possess the vivifying property comparative to God's word in the creation of Adam. Though we will explore how water functions in relation to Qur'anic structure in the following chapter, we can theorise that:-

God : fluid :: fluid : dust

*I have made the decision on this occasion to leave the text of Abdul Haleem's translation unredacted on the grounds that the symbolism is very rich and any attempt to compress it even further would lose some of the nuance.

It is important, however, to note the ambiguity of fluid as a symbol. In relation to God, fluid represents the profane, in contrast to the ground, however, fluid seems to be the more divine aspect as it brings life to the dead dust. Indeed, it is only by understanding how water is defined relationally that it is possible to understand how the creation of man reflects the Qur'an's characteristic reversal. Whilst the believer in submission to God represents the profane, so this submission ultimately leads to resurrection and life whilst the disbeliever is destroyed. In contrast to the disbeliever, the believer represents the divine. Equally, the creation of life sees the fluid, water or semen move downwards into the dust or woman (submission), before the upward movement of the creation of life or essence.

This extended metaphor for the creation of life reflects the hierarchical relationship between divine and profane in two more ways. In the first instance the conjunction of fluid (semen/category A) and dust (fertility/category B) implies the mediation of male and female and by extension familial relations. Not only is this profane act of creation dependent on God's final command to "Be", but the very profane act of creation is dependent on God's divine command. In this way the divine is depicted as being dominant over and encompassing the profane. This is further emphasised in the final implication of this metaphor. Although reproduction is presented as a hierarchical mediation between profane genealogy (the union of man and woman) and the divine, the similarity with creation of Adam suggests that - on some level - all people are in fact created autochthonically and thus naturally outside of genealogical relationships.

I believe that the very biology of reproduction reflects and leads to a greater understanding of how the Qur'an depicts the structural relationship between genealogy and submission to God. Because man is naturally outside of genealogical relations, submission to God is associated with the natural, whilst those who place profane genealogy ahead of submission to the divine are in some sense acting contrary to nature. Indeed, one is reminded of the contest between Moses and Pharaoh where Moses is raised up by the natural phenomena of a fire on a mountainside, whilst Pharaoh artificially raises himself up on fired bricks.

In this way, it could perhaps be said that all people in some sense begin life naturally as orphans and thus outside of genealogy. Adam, the first human is breathed into life purely at God's will, before entering into family relations with his wife; similarly the act of creating

life is emphasised as being purely affected by Allah. It can thus be said that all humans begin life as Allah's orphans and then, by material necessity must enter into a genealogical relationship with their parents. It is perhaps for this reason that one can be said not so much to convert to Islam, as revert to Islam. Unlike in Christianity, one isn't elected *out of* original sin but instead returns *into* the original natural submission to God.

4.3. Belief and Islam as Genealogy Reaffirmed

It seems, therefore, that submission to God is related to the dissolution of genealogy. Two other narratives in this *Sura* point towards an understanding of the complex relationship between Islam and genealogy presented in the Qur'an. The first deals with the announcement to Abraham of his son's coming birth.

Q11.69-72

1. Two messengers come to Abraham who brings them a roasted calf. When they do not eat the calf, he becomes afraid of them. They tell him not to be afraid: they have been sent against the people of Lot.
2. His wife laughs and she is given the good news of her pregnancy of Isaac, and after him Jacob
3. She asks the messengers how she is to bear a child when she and her husband are so old.

Rather than Abraham's faith – signified by his righteous fear of the two messengers/angels- entailing the dissolution of his family ties as in previous narratives, it actually leads him and his wife to conceive a child. Rather than belief causing Abraham to sever his bonds with his existing family, on the contrary it sees him maintain his marriage and gain a new son. Instead of severing family relations, here it is presented as reaffirming them and being linked to fruitfulness.

A more equivocal story in regard to the relationship between belief and genealogy is found in the parallel story of the prophet Lot.

Q11.77-81

1. Messengers come to Lot who is anxious for them as his kinsmen wish to "commit foul deeds" with them. He offers his daughters in order to protect them,

2. They refuse his daughters and Lot despairs that he will not be able to protect his guests.
3. The messengers reveal that he must flee his household with his daughters at night. His wife will suffer the fate of the others.
4. As punishment God turns the town upside down and rains stones of baked clay on it.

Like Abraham, Lot is presented as being a good host to the angels of God, who as divine messengers, symbolise revelation. In attempting homosexual rape of God's revelation personified, Lot's people are clearly acting in a similar way to the people of Thamud, Midian and 'Ad in rejecting and ridiculing God's word. Indeed, Lot is so committed to God's word, that he offers his two daughters to satisfy the lust of his people. In this way submission to God's authority is directly associated with a break in genealogy. The reversal in this narrative, however, sees Lot and his two daughters escape, whilst his wife and his people are destroyed. In this myth, submission to God requires an unequivocal break with genealogy. Following the reversal in the narrative, however, genealogy is re-established with qualifications. Genealogy is only re-established with those family members who are believers. Like Noah's son, Lot's wife and rest of his people are destroyed by God's punishment.

Messengers (divine authority) : Lot (submission to divine) :: Lot (divine authority) : daughters (submission to divine)

Though still ambiguous, the relationship between genealogy and Islam is beginning to become more crystalized. The story of Abraham's departure from his father's household (Q19.41-49) helps shed light on the partial story of Abraham we studied above. Abraham plays a central role in the history of Islam and we can thus perhaps infer an idealised relationship between belief and genealogy.

Q19.41-49

1. Abraham asks his father why he worships something "that can neither hear nor see nor benefit you in any way? Abraham asks his father to follow God and warns that a punishment may afflict him.
2. Abraham's father threatens to stone him if he does not return to polytheism.

3. Abraham wishes him peace and departs. He is granted Isaac and Jacob who become prophets.

The narrative opens by developing an opposition between Abraham, perhaps playing the role of prophet, and Abraham's father, perhaps playing the role of anti-prophet. In contrast to Allah who is elsewhere associated with omniscience, the gods of Abraham's father are, like the disbelievers, blind. Nevertheless, Abraham's father refuses to submit to the message of the divine as relayed by Abraham and instead threatens to stone Abraham. This threat to kill Abraham signifies a break with genealogy and thus temporary earthly disadvantage for Abraham. The reversal in this narrative, less dramatic than in some of the previous myths we have analysed, occurs when Abraham leaves his father. His father loses a son, whilst Abraham gains sons.

At the end of the last chapter we noted a series of oppositions

Believers: divine authority: temporary disadvantage : final advantage

Disbelievers: profane authority: temporary disadvantage: final advantage

It's now possible to see how the theme of genealogy maps onto these oppositions. Frequently we have seen that profane authority (category B) is to a greater or lesser degree associated with genealogy, most explicitly when Shu'aib asks "Is my family of more consideration with you than Allah?" Though those who place their faith in God (category A) find themselves temporarily outside of genealogical relations, they are ultimately re-established. In contrast, those who put their faith in profane authority find, for a short time, that they remain inside of genealogical relations – which symbolise earthly advantage – before being forced outside of genealogical relations, often by their own demise. Thus:

Believers: divine authority: temporary dissolution of genealogy : genealogy re-established

Disbelievers: genealogical authority: inside genealogy: genealogy dissolved.

The exact method by which genealogy is re-established varies. Moses, for instance, finds his genealogy re-established via marriage to a foreign people whom he has converted to Islam. On his return home to Egypt, his genealogy is symbolically re-established by the appearance of Aaron, his brother. In the story of Abraham and Noah, who break genealogy

with their father and son respectively, genealogy is re-established by the provision of more offspring. Finally, some characters receive back that which they were willing to give up. Thus Moses' mother becomes Moses' nursemaid for the family of Pharaoh. Similarly in the story of Lot, two daughters (genealogy) are offered to protect two angels (divine), though ultimately Lot and his daughters escape, re-establishing genealogy. In short the ways in which genealogy is broken and re-established are many and varied.

It is an interesting question to what extent the Qur'an's structural understanding of genealogy resembles that of Christianity and Judaism. Both Judaism and Christianity develop a theology of sacred seed or what Kunin refers to as divine fruitfulness which he associates divinity with genealogy (1996). In Judaism - through a biological genealogy - and in Christianity - through a symbolic genealogy entered in through faith - Jews and Christians are naturally born divine in opposition to all other peoples who are associated with the profane. In the Old Testament, Israel is repeatedly separated from the nations through a repeated process of symbolic death and rebirth of the patriarchs. In the New Testament, Christians are elected through the literal death and resurrection of Christ.

In the Qur'an I have suggested the presence of a life death mediation. For instance, Moses is willing to suffer death when he returns to Egypt at God's request, however, ultimately Moses lives and it is Pharaoh - who was unwilling to give up his life for God - who dies. This willingness to die or suffer any earthly disadvantage before being saved by God is structurally identical to the process of submitting to God, breaking with genealogy (earthly disadvantage) and being reinstated in genealogy. Like the New and Old Testaments, does the Qur'an perhaps exhibit a symbolic death, followed by resurrection within a sacred genealogy?

Although I shall compare Jewish, Christian and Qur'anic approaches to genealogy and the divine in more detail later in the chapter, it will suffice to say that the Qur'an does not exhibit a theology of sacred seed. In the first instance, there is no sense of a symbolic death or resurrection. In the case of Abraham and his father, for instance, although his father threatens to stone Abraham, Abraham simply leaves home overcoming genealogy and subsequently being rewarded with children. There is no real sense that Abraham symbolically dies or is reborn, he simply breaks genealogical relations with his father. Moreover, of his children, whilst some are indeed prophets, it says of Abraham's offspring elsewhere in the Qur'an that,

“whilst some were good, others clearly wronged themselves” (37.113), pointing against any idea that Abraham is the patriarch of a divine or elect race.

Rather than blend the categories of the divine and genealogy, the Qur’an relates them through its hierarchical opposition. Though naturally separate on the earthly plane, genealogy is revealed as merely an aspect of divine authority on the divine plain. Whilst the two may coexist, that can only happen if genealogy (category B) is entirely inferior to divine authority (category A). Those who prioritise genealogy ultimately end up outside of both genealogy and relationship to the divine, whilst those who prioritise God end up both inside of genealogy and in a positive relationship with God. Moreover when genealogy is re-established it is often presented slightly ambiguously: thus Lot loses his wife whilst, of Noah’s future descendants, some are blessed whilst some are cursed, presumably because they are not believers. Submission to God is a condition of being reinstated into genealogy: one can only be in genealogy with those who are in submission to God.

This opposition between genealogy and submission to God similarly manifests itself in the biography of the Prophet Muhammad. Not only is Muhammad born an orphan, and thus in some sense naturally outside of genealogical relations, but like many of the Prophets of the Qur’an, he is rejected by his tribe, the Quraysh, and forced to flee with his followers to Medina. Muhammad is born outside of immediate family relations and then receives revelations from God symbolising his submission to the divine, before being rejected by his wider tribe thus overcoming genealogy. In Medina, however, he creates an *Ummah* or brotherhood of believers, thus re-establishing genealogy in its correct relationship with the divine.

The word *Ummah* is itself significant. Whilst there is some disagreement over how it is best to be translated, most scholars translate it as community. Whilst *Ummah* can refer to any community, including one of idolaters (Q16.36, Q35.24), it is also used in a specific sense to refer to the Islamic community: when founding the *Kab’a*, Abraham prays to God to make his descendants "into a community devoted to [God]" (Q2.128). Interestingly, the community or *Ummah* of "Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the tribes" is juxtaposed with Judaism and Christianity (Q2.139-141).

The scholar W. Robertson Smith (1903: 32) derives *Ummah* from the Hebrew *em* which is translated as "mother", but also "stock, race and community". In Arabic *Omm* is

mother and thus *Ummah* is a derivation. Louis Massignon, goes one step further and links the association of the dwelling tent (ahl) to the etymological discussion emphasising the tent's connection with the woman in the marriage relationship. (1947: 152). Although these scholars' opinions are not universally accepted and although I am sceptical of their arguments regarding the feminine root of *Ummah* as a relic of a hypothetical pre-historic matriarchal model of kinship, I find their association of motherhood, the tent and the community convincing, especially if it is explained in structuralist terms.

As we saw in Bourdieu's analysis of the Kabyle Berber, whilst the outside is associated with the masculine, the inside of the house is associated with the feminine: the man is the lamp of the outside, the woman the lamp of the inside (1977: 91). Whilst the natural movement of the male is from inside to outside, the natural movement of the woman is from outside going in. Indeed, the woman moving *into* the house and thus *under* male authority is presented as the favoured state of woman, comparable to ploughed land. The female tamed by the male is the opposite, not only of the male, but also of the wild, untamed female such as the maiden and the crone who are associated with wild untamed nature. This doubly female woman "does not depend on any man... has escaped from the authority of her parents, her husband... has no children... 'she is twisted wood'. She is akin to fallow land, the wilderness; she has affinities with the dark forces of uncontrolled nature" (1977:126).

In the Qur'an, the underlying pattern at the level of S^2 remains the same, however, the categories at S^3 are different. Whilst Kabyle structure is defined by a male/female opposition, the Qur'an is defined by a divine power/profane power opposition. Just as in Kabyle structure where the favoured woman is one who is inside the female house under the authority of man, so in Qur'anic structure, the ideal state of man is in the feminine *Ummah*, in *submission to God**, a downward negative movement. Not only is the believer in opposition to God, but also to the corrupted and twisted disbeliever who is ultimately associated with death and evil.

How does this structure relate to the concrete material circumstances of the community from which the Qur'an emerged? On the one it is perhaps possible to see the Qur'an's structure as

*Whilst the favoured position of woman in Kabyle structure is woman in submission to male (male-female), the favoured position of man in Qur'anic structure is man in submission to the divine (divine-profane). Similarly, whilst female-female and profane-profane are presented negatively, the dominance of the male and divine in both respective structures means that the opposition between the male-male/divine-divine and the male and divine in union is never explicitly recognised (Bourdieu 224).

outlining the sociological process of converting to Islam. This can be understood on two levels. In the first instance, a convert would be forced to leave their tribe, breaking genealogy, and then re-enter genealogy within the new religious *Ummah* as a Muslim brother. In the second instance, however, as more and more of a particular tribe converted to Islam, the process of conversion would entail, first a break with the infidel remnant of one's tribe, before being readmitted into the already converted section of one's tribe, along with the larger *Ummah*.

Equally, however, behind the Qur'an's structure at the level of S^3 lies the material political-economic situation of mid-7th century Arabia when the Qur'an was redacted. This period witnessed a change away from a fractious, primarily tribal economic and political system, to one centred on a unifying religious polity, a transition that was accompanied by rapid and unprecedented military conquest in the Middle East. Though undoubtedly successful, this social revolution presented an implicit conflict between the two opposed nuclei of political and social capital in the Arab world: the tribe and the Islamic state. The Qur'an thus functions to resolve this apparently unbridgeable dichotomy through the process of mediation outlined above: submission to God is associated with victory and ultimate reconciliation with genealogy, whereas submission to genealogy is associated with death and defeat and an ultimate break with genealogy. Instead genealogy and tribal relations are incorporated inside the all-encompassing aegis of the Islamic State.

The model for analysing this transformation from disbeliever to believer is best analysed using the canonical structuralist formula developed by Lévi-Strauss

$$F_{X(A)} : F_{Y(B)} \approx F_{X(B)} : F_{A-1(Y)}$$

The first half of the equation, $F_{X(A)} : F_{Y(B)}$, depicts the relationship between God and the believers. Whilst function x refers to possessing divine power, function y refers to submission to the divine. Thus

God (divine authority) : believer (submission)

The second half of the equation, $F_{X(B)} : F_{A-1(Y)}$, shifts the emphasis from God – and his relationship to the believer – to the believer and his relationship with a new category. This new relationship can thus be defined as

Believer (divine authority) : submission (inversion of God)

We can see therefore that the canonical formula neatly describes the Qur'an's characteristic reversal and the relationship between God (divine –divine) and the believer (divine-profane) and between the believer (divine-profane) and the disbeliever (profane-profane).

God (divine authority) : believer (submission) \approx Believer (divine authority) : submission (inversion of God)

Similarly it describes the Qur'an's narrative reversal. Prior to the reversal, the believers must submit to God which entails an initial negative movement. Following the reversal, however, the believers now find themselves in the position of the divine authority in contrast to the disbelievers – those who are in submission to the inverse of God. Similarly this canonical formula maps neatly onto the concrete political, economic and sociological circumstances of seventh century Arabia. Though one may have to initially break one's tribal affiliations and submit to the Prophet, one ultimately will have military success over those who refuse to submit.

4.5. The Biography of Muhammad the Orphan

Having shown why the character of the orphan is particularly significant in Qur'anic structure, I want to take a short diversion and analyse the biography of Muhammad. Drawing on and abridging the biography of Ibn Ishaq, one of the first biographies produced in the first half of the 8th century, I wish to show that in many respects, the biography of the Prophet can be treated as myth and possesses an almost identical structure to that found in the Qur'an.

1. Muhammad is born in Mecca. His father dies before he is born and his mother when he is six years old. He is then looked after by his grandfather until he dies two years later. At the Age of 8 he is adopted by his uncle and, on reaching adulthood, he marries a wealthy widow and trader who is fifteen years older than him.
2. At the age of 40 he receives his first revelation and soon after begins preaching in Mecca.
3. The Meccans begin to persecute Muhammad and his followers. This persecution becomes most acute in the "Year of Grief", when the Meccans institute a total boycott against the prophet and his followers. In the middle of this hardship his wife and uncle die.

4. From this nadir, however, things began to improve. He is taken by Gabriel to Jerusalem where he meets several prophets including Abraham and Jesus.
5. On his return he meets several pilgrims from Medina who convert and invite Muhammad and his followers to emigrate there. Thus begins the *Hijra*, later adopted as the start of the Muslim calendar. In Medina, the Prophet acts as a mediator between the warring tribes and slowly starts moulding his followers from tribesmen into Muslims.
6. Eventually after some years of conflict with the Meccans, he returns and conquers Mecca allowing his former enemies to convert to Islam.

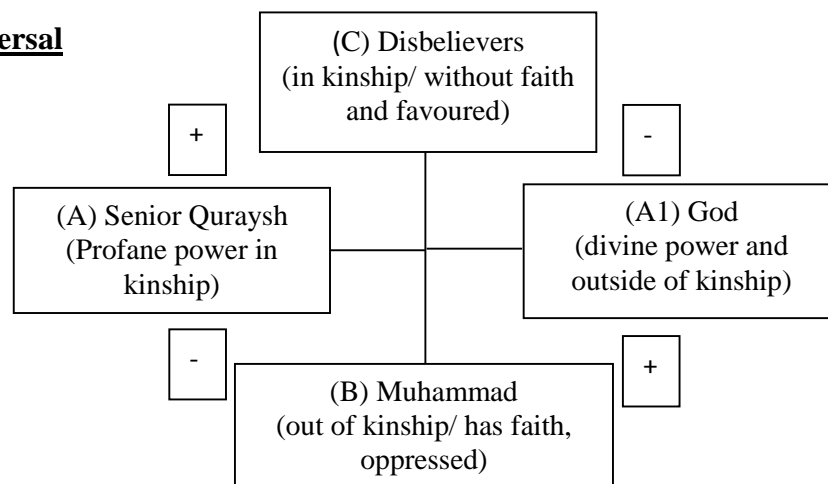
Within this brief overview of Early Islamic history, it is possible to observe several structural parallels with the Qur'an. In the first instance, the prophet's status as an orphan is emphasised several times. His father dies before he was born, his mother dies when he is four and his grandfather dies when he is six. Muhammad is both born an orphan and, by the time he is eight, has lost all his closest relatives. After becoming triply an orphan, however, he is adopted by his uncle and later married thus re-establishing genealogy.

This severing and subsequent reestablishment of familial relations in Muhammad's childhood can be seen to foreshadow his experience as a prophet. Like Noah in *Sura 11*, Muhammad experiences ridicule which escalates into persecution from the disbelievers within his tribe. In the Year of Grief he experiences the complete annihilation of all existing relations with his tribe – who refuse to socialise or trade with him and even attempt assassination – as well as the death of his uncle and wife. From this nadir, however, he is accompanied by Gabriel first to Jerusalem and then to heaven – perhaps the structural apex of his prophethood. On his return to earth, the *Hijrah* or migration begins and genealogical relations are re-established within the *Ummah*, a symbolic family of those who are in submission to God. This period sees the creation of the first mosque in Medina and the beginning of the Islamic calendar, marking the start of a new era. Structurally, the experiences of Muhammad can be said to mirror those of the prophets in the Qur'an. Because he is willing to give up all tribal and familial relations, he not only experiences the dramatic mediation with God signified by his journey to heaven, but God re-establishes whatever he was willing to give up in his service symbolised by the emergence of the new *brotherhood* or *Ummah* of believers in Medina

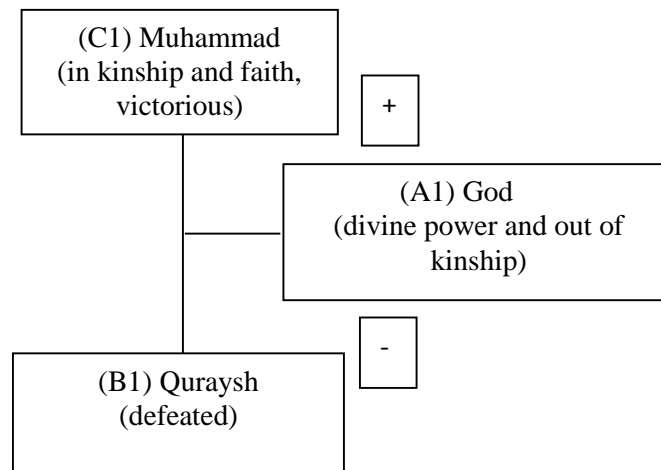
That the establishment of the community in Medina represents an overcoming of a primarily tribal based law and the beginning of a new, primarily religious law is strongly emphasised. Not only does the prophet act as a father figure moulding the new Muslims from unruly tribesmen, but similarly, the *Constitution of Medina*, which we analysed in the ethnography, depicts tribal law subsumed under the Prophet and his religious law. Just as the Qur'an's hierarchical opposition sees genealogy subsumed into divine authority, so tribes and existing tribal values are subsumed into the higher religious law of the Prophet..

The exile to Medina represents a symbolic breaking of genealogy – in the Year of Grief - and reestablishment of genealogy inside the Islamic community of Medina. The same pattern can be observed with the return to and conversion of Mecca. Elsewhere in the Qur'an, Mecca is referred to as the mother of cities (Q6.92). On this level the exile to Medina could be understood as the break with genealogy, whilst the final surrender of the Quraysh and their submission to Islam represent the reestablishment of genealogy under Islam. Like in *Sura 28*, where Moses' exile to Midian and his return to Egypt both respectively entail the breaking of familial relationships, submission to God and then the reestablishment of familial relationships, both the *Hijrah* and the return to Mecca have the same structure.

Prior to Reversal



After Reversal



4.6. Comparing Qur'anic, Christian and Jewish understandings of genealogy

So far we've observed how Islamic structure at the level of S^3 plays around with a central opposition between the divine and genealogy, which frequently represents the profane. Whilst a believer is in submission to God, a disbeliever idolatrously places some earthly profane phenomenon - such as genealogy - ahead of the divine. Through this logic, Qur'anic structure can be said to fulfil the dual purposes of reconciling the opposition between loyalty to the tribe and loyalty to the new Islamic State whilst simultaneously defining what it is to be a believer in relation to pagan tribal Arabs. Yet, not only did Islam have to define its own identity in relation to pagans, but also in relation to Jews and Christians, two existing monotheistic religions which clearly exerted great influence on Islam's development. Before turning to explore how Islam presents the other two monotheistic religions, it is perhaps briefly worth exploring how these two religions understand the relationship between genealogy and the divine.

In regard to Jewish myth, Kunin has explored this relationship in depth in *The Logic of Incest*. He identifies an interrelated opposition between Israel and the nations and between divine birth and natural birth. Whilst Israel is the product of divine fruitfulness, the nations are the product of natural fruitfulness thus emphasising the structural distance between the two groups. This opposition is developed in two ways. In the first instance, Israel's genealogy is steadily differentiated from that of the other nations through the intervention of God in bringing about the birth of Israel's major ancestors. Thus in the conception of Isaac, Sarah is long past child bearing age, whilst Abraham has undergone the symbolic castration of circumcision, emphasising the divine nature of Isaac's birth. In the second instance, all the major ancestors of Israel go through a symbolic death and resurrection. Thus Isaac is

symbolically sacrificed by Abraham in Genesis 22, whilst Joseph is symbolically murdered by his brothers in Genesis 37 (Kunin 2004, 104-117).

In Israelite structure, genealogy and relationship with the divine are therefore intimately entwined. What defines Israel is not so much submission to God, but rather genealogy. Indeed, at the abstract level S^2 , Israelite structure is highly oppositional suggesting, at least theoretically, the impossibility of moving between categories. In other words, the text suggests that one is Jewish purely by virtue of being inside a sacred genealogy, whilst playing down the possibility of converting into the divine category. (Ibid, 237)

In contrast, Christianity is defined, not so much by biological genealogy as by faith, suggesting a mediating structure. Indeed, whilst Israelite structure presents an unimpeachable dichotomy between Israel and the nations, Christianity breaks down the dichotomy between Jew and Gentile (Col. 3.9-11) and suggests that everyone can enter the New Israel through the mediation of Christ.

Nevertheless, whilst Christianity rejects biological genealogy as a means of self-definition, it retains an understanding of symbolic genealogy which one can enter through faith in Christ. Indeed, whilst Isaac's sacred birth is partially symbolised by the castration of Abraham – which is related to natural barrenness and thus divine fruitfulness – St Paul instead develops the theology of circumcision of the heart (Rom.2.29). In this way Paul emphasises that one can enter the divine symbolic genealogy of the church through a disposition of the heart, i.e. faith. As G Vermes notes in *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (1961: 193-228), whilst Israel understands the sacrifice of their biological forefather Isaac as atoning for their sins, Christianity understands that the crucifixion of Christ, the antitype of Isaac (Gal 3.26-29), atones for the sins of all his spiritual descendants.

Christianity thus also understands a relationship with God to be intimately tied to genealogy. Unlike Judaism, however, genealogy presents not so much an unbreakable biological division, but rather a symbolic category into which one can move through faith. Whilst Israel is in relationship with the divine qua its sacred biological genealogy, the Christian can be said to be in a relationship with the divine qua its sacred spiritual genealogy qua faith in Christ. In both instances, the forgiveness of sins – in other words conjunction with the divine – is understood as being inherited from a biological or spiritual ancestor.

Both the binding of Isaac and the crucifixion – the fulfilment of the binding of Isaac in Christian thought – present particularly good insights into their respective underlying structures. Indeed, in *We Think What We Eat*, Kunin demonstrates that in many ways they are transformations of each other (2004: 104-117). Interestingly, the Qur'an features its own version of the binding of Isaac myth allowing a direct comparison between Christian, Jewish and Islamic structure and of their respective understandings of the relationship between genealogy and divinity

Q37.101-113

1. Abraham is given the news that he will have a son. When the boy is old enough to work, Abraham tells him that he saw him sacrificing him in a dream and asks his son what he thinks. His son says that he must do exactly as God commands him.
2. They both submit to God, and Abraham is about to sacrifice his son, when God calls out for him to stop, revealing that it was just a test.
3. His son is ransomed “by a momentous sacrifice” and Abraham is praised by succeeding generations
4. He is given the news of Isaac’s conception and they are both blessed: “though some of their offspring were good, others clearly wronged themselves.

The narrative can be said to follow the pattern of transformation which typifies Qur'anic structure, though the category of disbeliever or anti-prophet is absent. Thus in the first phase, Abraham, playing the role of the prophet, comes to his son with the command that he is to sacrifice him. His son willingly accepts, symbolising both his submission to God and a break with genealogy. Just as Abraham is to sacrifice his son, however, God intervenes affecting the reversal in the narrative. Abraham is rewarded with the good news of Isaac, whilst Isaac and Abraham are promised further offspring symbolising the reestablishment of genealogy. Rather than being a symbolic sacrifice and thus implying a death/rebirth mytheme, this narrative is presented as a “test to prove their true characters”. In other words it serves to demonstrate their willingness to forego profane power and genealogical relations and thus submit to God.

Of central concern to the Qur'an's underlying structure is the sharp definition between genealogy and submission to God followed by their reconciliation. Whilst Hebrew myth can

be said to separate a sacred biological genealogy from a profane biological genealogy and Christian myth presents a sacred spiritual genealogy as the fulfilment of biological genealogy, the Qur'an, however separates the very concept of genealogy and the divine.

It is this radical separation of genealogy and religious belief which perhaps best explains the anonymity of Abraham's son. Indeed, whilst the Hebrew Bible presents Isaac, a patriarch of Israel, as the child who is sacrificed, Islamic tradition identifies the child as Ishmael, the forefather of Islam by associating this myth with Q2.125 where Abraham and Ishmael purify God's house which itself is traditionally associated with the *Kab'a* in Mecca. Perhaps in leaving the child anonymous, the Qur'an is emphasising that it is not so much the genealogical identity of the son which is significant, but rather that any rightly guided prophet would be willing to lay down his life or the lives of his family for Allah.

That the Qur'an is at pains to emphasise the radical separation between genealogy is expressed in the myth's salvatology. As Vermes outlines (1961: 206-218) certain strands of thought within Judaism see the sacrifice of Isaac as the central event which justifies the Jewish people precisely because they are Isaac's descendants. Thus the temple sacrifice functions to commemorate Abraham's sacrifice. In Christianity, one becomes part of the "New Israel", not by biological inheritance, but by faith. Nevertheless it is emphasised that the Church – the children of Christ – is redeemed by the death and resurrection of Christ. In other words, like Israel, the Church "inherits" its salvation from an ancestor, albeit a symbolic or spiritual one. In this myth, however, the Qur'an states explicitly that, of Abraham and Isaac's descendants, some "were good but some clearly wronged themselves", an explicit rejection of the Judaeo-Christian salvatologies of inherited salvation. The idea that one in some sense *inherits* one's salvation from a biological or spiritual ancestor is alien to Qur'anic thought. Rather the Qur'an exhibits a radical understanding that deliverance can only occur through God's mercy.

Jews and Christians both view themselves as the "elect": they are chosen and set apart by God above all peoples, a fact validated by the actions of their respective legendary forefathers. In this respect their divine status is presented as a sacred break with nature. All other peoples are profane and natural, yet through being a part of Jewish or Christian sacred genealogy one becomes divine; by virtue of genealogy they are naturally divine or cultural. In Islam, however, this position is reversed. Adam, who was created outside of genealogy, was

naturally in submission to God. Similarly Moses found his divine authority symbolised by the natural, whilst Pharaoh found his profane authority symbolised by the artificial. For Qur'anic structure, submission to God is presented as being the natural state of man, whilst genealogy is presented as an artificial or unnatural break with man's true nature. Whilst in Christianity and Judaism one is elected and moved culturally upwards above the hurly burly of the natural world, in Islam, however, the dominant movement is downwards or inwards: one is allowed to see through the cultural chaos in which one finds oneself and perceive clearly the true natural state of man. Islam is thus a *culture* which allows man to regain his *natural* relationship with God.

4.7. How Does the Qur'an Present these Theological Differences?

Qur'anic structure exhibits a radical separation of the concepts of genealogy and submission to God. This, I have suggested, serves the twin functions of defining what it is to be a Muslim in contrast with other pagan tribal Arabs, as well as reconciling the political tensions that may have existed in the early Islam between state and tribe. This underlying structural logic, however, leaves Christianity and Judaism in an ambiguous category. Whilst on the one hand they are monotheist and in submission to God, they both associate relationship with the divine with genealogy thus potentially blending categories A and B. The Qur'an, through a process of structural play and repetition, categorises these ambiguous religions through a rewritten – or from a Muslim perspective, corrected – Biblical History spanning from Abraham to Jesus.

The identity of Abraham is thus of paramount importance. Throughout the Qur'an Abraham is referred to as a *Hanif* (Q3.67, Q16.120 etc.) a word over which there is some debate as to the exact translation. For instance, whilst Abdel Haleem translates the word as "upright", others such as Yusuf Ali leave the word untranslated reflecting an interpretation which argued that the "*hanifs*" referred to a particular group or certain individuals in pre-Islamic Arabia who followed a primitive monotheism. I, however, believe that the most convincing interpretation is provided by Gabriel Said Reynolds who suggests that *hanif* is in fact a Syriac loan word used to describe Gentiles. Thus when Abraham is described as "neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was a *hanif* devoted to God, never an idolater", the Qur'an is emphasising that he practised a primeval version of monotheism prior to Judaism or Christianity (2010: 77-87).

That the prophecy of Muhammad and Islam generally is identical to that preached and practised by Abraham is one of the central beliefs of Islam. Indeed, during the *Hajj* pilgrimage, believers act out Abraham's sacrifice of his son on the *Kab'a*. Though this event is no doubt significant in Islamic thought, as we explored in the previous section, the Qur'an radically rejects the Judaeo-Christian idea of one dramatic event being central to a people's or the world's salvation. Instead the Qur'an believes that each generation of every distinct race will be individually tested by God (Q10.47). Moreover, they will each be tested and asked to submit in a way resembling that of Abraham –overcoming genealogy and the profane and submitting to God. Judaism and Christianity are thus deviations from the original, undiluted, Abrahamic monotheism. In this way the Qur'an presents Islam as the natural faith, with Christianity and Judaism being deviations from the truth.

We have already encountered the Qur'an's ambiguous portrayal of the Jews in the story of Moses. Though it is emphasised that the Jews, like the prophet Moses, are enemies of the infidels, disjunction is also established between Moses and his kinsman as his troublemaking leads to Moses' exile. Their position as a negatively valenced mediator between Muslim and infidel becomes more apparent in *Sura 2, The Cow*. If Muslims are defined by submission to God and infidels by submission to genealogy or the profane, then the Jews are characterised by their vacillation between these two opposed states.

That *The Cow* is largely concerned with the identity of Judaism is itself significant. It is the longest *Sura* in the Qur'an and, as the second *Sura* in the Qur'an follows immediately on from *The Opening* a particularly short *Sura* which contains the monotheistic essence of Islam. *The Cow* is a reference to the idol of the Golden Calf the Israelites set up when Moses went up to Mount Sinai. Its length and prominent position in the Qur'an perhaps reflects the importance it plays in differentiating Muslims from the other peoples of the book.

Q2.40-61

1. The children of Israel are commanded to honour their pledge to God, believe in his message and be not the first to reject it. They must not mix truth with falsehood and must keep the prayer, give to charity and “bow down to God with those who bow”.
2. They are reminded that on Judgment Day, “no soul will replace another in any way, no intercession will be accepted from it, nor any compensation; nor will they be helped.” [the passage then recounts several instance of Israel's disobedience]

3. Moses goes up to mount Sinai to receive revelation and when he returns they are worshipping a golden calf. Israel repents and is forgiven by God.
4. They then tell Moses that they will not believe until they see God face to face. They are then struck by lightning, though God revives them so that they may be thankful and are sent manna and quails.
5. Israel complains that they only have one type of food to eat in the desert. They are thus told to return to Egypt where they will have what they desire. They are thus struck with “humiliation and wretchedness” and incur the wrath of God because they persistently rejected his message and kill prophets. They are lawbreakers.
6. The passage concludes, however, that “the believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians – all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good – will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve.”

Verses 40 to 46 serve a dual purpose. On one level they lay out God’s commandments. The observant reader, however, will note that they largely describe those aspects of religious practise - prayer, charity and the recitation of scripture - which Judaism has in common with Islam. This passage can thus be understood as functioning to emphasise the Qur’anic claim that Islam is the aboriginal faith from which Judaism has strayed. Indeed, the revelation to Israel is presented as confirming that which they had already received rather than containing innovation. Similarly, they are commanded to “bow down with those that bow down”. They should worship, presumably, with other (Islamic) monotheists rather than remaining separate.

Implicit in the command: “Do not mix truth with falsehood, or hide the truth when you know it”, is perhaps the Islamic understanding that any differences in the Hebrew Bible theologically from the Qur’an are the result of the scripture being doctored for evil purposes. Indeed, this command is perhaps related to the warning that on judgement day, “no soul will replace another in any way, no intercession will be accepted from it, nor any compensation”. Because the actions of one cannot atone for the actions of another, the Qur’an is explicitly rejecting the Jewish idea that their divinity or absolution from sin is somehow inherited from the actions of the patriarchs.

Indeed, rather than presenting Israel as in any way a divinely chosen people, verse 49 presents Israel as zigzagging between the states of submission to God and idolatry. As soon as Moses goes up to Mount Sinai, Israel immediately start worshiping the golden calf, before repenting on Moses' return. This pattern of idolatry followed by repentance is repeated several times throughout this passage.

Although this propensity to zigzag between the divine and the profane serves to emphasise Israel's position as a mediator between Muslim and infidel, it equally serves as a warning to Islam. Though after submitting to God, a Muslim may ultimately find himself in an advantageous position amongst a brotherhood of believers, like Israel before him it does not mean that he can forget about God. Unless one is continually willing to submit and reject material advantage, one risks losing in the long term that advantage and the favour of God. To be a Muslim requires continual faith and submission.

Despite their ambiguity, the Qur'an does emphasise that other monotheists who believe in God and the last day will be rewarded by the Lord. Structurally this can be said to emphasise the primary importance of submission to God. However, Israel's vacillation does not go unpunished as the Qur'an uses the rebellious behaviour of Israel to explain the extensive Mosaic Law:

“For the wrongdoings done by the Jews, We forbade them certain good things that had been permitted to them before” (Q4.160). “

Though Abraham was banned from eating blood and swine (Q2.173) the more extensive Jewish Law was only revealed as a punishment for Israel's inability to remain in submission to God (Q3.93). The significance of this becomes more apparent in the next *Sura*.

Q3.47-71

1. Mary asks the angel how she can have a son when no man has touched her. The Angel replies 'This is how God creates what He will: when He has ordained something, He only says 'Be' and it is.
2. Jesus is taught scripture, wisdom, the Torah and the Gospel and is sent as a messenger to the children of Israel in order to “confirm the truth of the Torah which preceded me, and to make some things lawful to you which used to be forbidden. I have come to you with a sign from your Lord.”

3. Ultimately, Jesus becomes aware that they (Israel) did not believe and he instead turns to the disciples who record the truth.
4. Though Israel scheme against him, “God is the best of Schemers”.
5. The narrator of the Qur’an instead exhorts the People of the Book to “arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.’ If they turn away, say, ‘Witness our devotion to Him.’
6. The narrative then asks about Abraham, asking “ why do you argue about Abraham when the Torah and the Gospels were not revealed until after his time? Do you not understand? You argue about some things of which you have some knowledge, but why do you argue about things of which you know nothing? God knows and you do not. Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian. He was upright and devoted to God, never an idolater and the people who are closest to him are those who truly follow his ways, this prophet, and [true] believers – God is close to [true] believers

The New Testament presents itself as the fulfilment of the Old; it is both foreshadowed in the Old Testament and functions to complete it. Kunin argues, in his brief analysis of the crucifixion, that the structure of the New Testament exhibits the overcoming of the profane biological genealogy of Judaism in favour of a new, symbolic spiritual genealogy (Kunin 2004: 133-141). Similarly Paul presents faith and love overcoming the law as an analogous spiritual fulfilment of the material (Galatians).

In contrast to Christianity, the Qur’an presents Islam, not so much as fulfilling Christianity and Judaism as restoring these corrupted faiths back to their original, pristine, Abrahamic state. Rather than associating the divine with culture raising one above profane nature, Islamic structure functions to restore man to his natural relationship with the divine from which the profane has distracted him.

The above section not only helps establish the position of Christianity, another ambiguous religion from the Qur’anic perspective, but also provides a striking example of the process of bricolage, the subconscious adaption of originally foreign mythemes to native structure. In particular, the Qur’an has taken several myths which express the Christian theology of fulfilment and used them to express its own theology of Abrahamic restoration.

Because Islam believes that revelation functions to restore one to one's natural position in relationship with the divine, all instances of revelation from Adam to Muhammad are congruent. Thus, just as Moses came to confirm what Israel already possessed, so Jesus comes to confirm the truth of the original unadulterated Torah. The reference to making things lawful which used to be forbidden relates to the Islamic understanding that Christ lifted the extensive law with which the Jews had been punished with. Ultimately I believe that this is an adaptation of the Christian theology of fulfilment of the law. Rather than expressing it as the completion of the law, Qur'anic structure instead presents Jesus' teaching as attempting to restore the Jewish faith back to its original natural condition.

The Immaculate Conception is similarly developed to reflect Islamic structure in several ways. Most immediately, Jesus' creation - God only says "Be and it is" - is identical to that of Adam's, a point the text makes explicit: "In God's eyes Jesus is just like Adam" (Q3.59). Reynolds argues that this is an adaptation of the Christian understanding of Jesus as the second Adam. Just as Adam brought sin into the world, so Jesus, as the second Adam and fulfilment of the first, redeems the sin of the world. (2010: 208-221). Within the Qur'an, however, this myth is adapted to emphasise the similarity between Adam and Jesus, both were created outside of genealogy and thus naturally in submission to God.

It is also possible that the Qur'an uses this mytheme to blur Jesus' Jewish identity. Indeed, it is possible that a similar pattern is observable in the story of Moses. He is both adopted into Pharaoh's Egyptian household and then marries into a Midian family, perhaps functioning to obscure his original genealogy. Jesus' conception can be seen to take this theme a step further as it literally sees a divine overcoming of his Jewish genealogy. Just as the Islamic religion Jesus preaches centres around the overcoming of genealogy in favour of submission to divine, so Jesus' very genealogy - or lack thereof - also reflects this overcoming of genealogy.

Indeed, just as the other prophets we have studied encouraged their people to forsake their family relations, stop worshipping the pagan religion of their forefathers and submit to God, so Jesus leads his disciples out of the corrupted and excessively genealogical religion of Judaism into submission to God.

Jesus' preaching can thus be said to follow exactly the same pattern as previous prophets in the Qur'an. Jesus functions as a prophet who comes to his people with the

command to submit to God. Some of his people - the disciples - submit, whilst others refuse. That the Jews play the role of the anti-prophet is implicit in verse 54. “The [disbelievers] schemed but God also schemed; God is the best of Schemers”. The scheming refers to the attempt to crucify Christ symbolising a total break in genealogy and the symbolic oppression of the believers. Before his crucifixion, however, God affects a reversal, summoning Christ back to heaven, “making those who followed superior to those who disbelieved” and making the disbelievers “suffer severely in this world and the next”.

The Qur’anic version of the crucifixion myth similarly emphasises Qur’anic structure. Rather than actually being crucified on the cross, the Qur’an claims that that God raised Jesus to heaven and instead created merely the illusion of crucifixion (Q4.157-158). On the one hand this removes the central point of Christian salvatology which sees the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross as atoning for all the sins of Christians who become spiritual members of the new Israel. Moreover, it helps equate Jesus with all of the other prophets whose family or tribe try to kill them, before the divine intervention affects a reversal in the narrative saving the prophet and destroying the disbelievers.

Yet after having been restored to the true religion, The Qur’an understands that the Christians also corrupted their scriptures. Like the Jews, Christians are accused of “mixing truth with falsehood” and leading true believers astray. In this way Jesus’ carving of a new religion out of a corrupted Judaism becomes paradigmatic for Islam’s self-identification. Just as the Jews rejected the prophet Jesus, so those following the now corrupted Christian faith reject the prophet Muhammad.

The Qur’an thus presents Islam as a return to the natural Abrahamic religion. Implicit in the text is a polemic against the genealogical aspect of Judaism and Christianity which manifests itself in arguments between Jews or Christians over who are Abraham’s legitimate descendants (Q.65), historically a focus point of Jewish and Christian polemic. (Eusebius [1926]: 1-45) Rather, Qur’anic structure radically separates the categories of genealogy and divinity. The Qur’an thus emphasises that Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, he was instead a Gentile (*Hanif*) devoted to God. Those who follow his ways and utterly submit to God – thus breaking genealogy – are in fact those who are closest to him. Islam thus presents itself as the essence of monotheism and, moreover, the essence of the corrupted Jewish and

Christian religions: “let us arrive at a statement that is common to us all: we worship God alone, we ascribe no partner to Him, and none of us takes others beside God as lords.”

The Qur’an thus retells biblical history in order to categorise the ambiguous religions of Judaism and Christianity who are monotheistic, yet distinct from Islam. Abraham is therefore neither a Jew nor a Christian, but a gentile monotheist who originally practised a pure form of Islam. When Moses led the Jews out of Egypt, however, they continually rebelled against God leading, not only to their punishment with their extensive law, but also to the corruption of their scripture. Jesus tried to call the Jews back to the true Islamic faith and lift the punishment of the law. Most, however, rejected him though his disciples follow him to found a new faith. Unfortunately this too becomes corrupted, setting the scene for the teaching of Muhammad and the restoration of the aboriginal Abrahamic faith. Islam is thus a triple distilled monotheism.

Whilst Islam represents the ideal faith, paganism or polytheism is emphasised as being the most antithetical to Islam. Judaism and Christianity thus mediate between these opposed categories. The Qur’an, however, claims that “you are sure to find that the most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God; you are sure to find that the closest in affection towards the believers are those who say, ‘We are Christians’” (Q5.82). That Christianity is closer to Islam than Judaism is emphasised in the Qur’anic history. The presentation of Judaism in *Sura 2*, where they zigzag between submission to God and idolatry, is much more negative than the presentation of Christianity in *Sura 3*. Indeed, in *Sura 3* it is in fact the Jews who attempt to crucify Christ. Thus whilst Judaism is a religion mired in corruption close to paganism, Christianity has been partially restored, a process completed by Islam.

Interestingly, this sliding scale matches how close to Islam each religion’s respective theologies are. On one extreme, Islam is purely determined by faith in God with genealogy playing no role in salvation. In contrast, the pagan tribal Arabs are presented as purely concerned with genealogy and following the religion of their forefathers. This opposition matches the Qur’an’s structural opposition between submission to God (divine) and "submission" to profane genealogy. Judaism and Christianity, however, blur these radically opposed categories of genealogy and divinity. In Judaism, which is much more negatively valenced, one can be said to be in relation to the divine in virtue of one’s sacred genealogy;

precisely because one is a child of Israel, one is born into God's covenant. Because one's Jewish genealogy in some sense precedes one's belief in God, Judaism is closer to the purely genealogical paganism. In Christianity one enters into a sacred genealogy by virtue of one's faith. In other words, the emphasis has shifted away from biological genealogy towards one's interior mental disposition. Thus Christianity is presented much more favourably than Judaism, though still a departure from the pure emphasis of submission to God and dependence on God's mercy found in Islam.

Chapter 5. Cosmology and Mediation

In this chapter I analyse the Qur'an's cosmology. Firstly, this will allow me to unpack and explain the relationship between much of the symbolism we have encountered in the previous two chapters, thus allowing us a greater insight into how Qur'anic society perceived the world around it. It is also, however, a necessary preliminary exercise prior to my analysis of Islamic ritual, particularly the *Hajj* ritual which brings together and plays with a great deal of Qur'anic cosmology.

In the previous chapter I suggested that, unlike Judaism and Christianity, the Qur'an presents Islam as the natural condition of humanity with genealogy and profane power as artificial distractions from man's natural relationship with the divine. In this chapter, particularly through the opposition between water and fire, I hope to further explore the Qur'anic understanding of nature and culture.

Throughout this chapter I have made the decision to leave the text of Abdul Haleem's translation unchanged on the grounds that the symbolism of the passages referring to cosmology is often rich and any attempt to compress it even further would lose some of the nuance.

5.1. "The Day you will see it": Death and Judgement

I have previously identified how the Qur'an exhibits a hierarchical structure which opposes the superior divine to the inferior profane. Moreover, this opposition can only be understood with reference to the Qur'an's characteristic narrative reversal. Prior to this reversal, in the inferior earthly sphere, the profane and divine appear in opposition to each other with the former appearing to be dominant over the latter. Following the narrative reversal, however, it is the divine which is clearly dominant and in fact entirely encompasses the profane. In the superior divine sphere, the profane is reduced to merely an aspect of the divine.

The Qur'an's hierarchical structure, and in particular the opposition between the inferior earthly plane and the superior divine plane, is manifest in the Qur'an's cosmology, often in the opposition and interrelation between the phenomenal world in which we live our day to day lives and in the sublime world which – not infrequently - irrupts into the phenomenal. Perhaps one of the best contrasts between these two worlds can be seen at death

or at judgement day, when one is wrenched from the illusion of the phenomenal world and into the full glare of God whose glory is no longer hidden, but revealed in the sublime.

Q23.99-103

99. When death comes to one of them [the disbelievers], he cries, ‘My Lord, let me return

100. so as to make amends for the things I neglected.’ Never! This will not go beyond his words: a barrier stands behind such people until the very Day they are resurrected.

101. On that Day when the Trumpet is blown, the ties between them will be a nothing and they will not ask about each other:

102. those whose good deeds weigh heavy will be successful,

103. but those whose balance is light will have lost their souls for ever and will stay in Hell.

This passage contains what I consider to be one of the most useful images with which to consider the relationship between this profane world and the next divine world: “a barrier stands behind such people until the very Day they are resurrected.” Elsewhere in the Qur'an (25.53, 55.19-20) *barzakh* is used to describe the barrier that exists between fresh water and salt water at the mouth of a river estuary. Here there exists a very sudden point where the water ceases to be fresh and suddenly becomes salty. Whilst fresh water, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, is associated with new life, resurrection and revelation, salt water is associated with unformed chaos, divine punishment and death. This barrier can thus be thought of as clearly defined, separating two radically different worlds, yet penetrable.

Q23.1-2

1. People be mindful of your Lord for the earthquake of the Last Hour will be a mighty thing:

2. on the Day you see it, every nursing mother will think no more of her baby, every pregnant female will miscarry, you will think people drunk when they are not, so severe will be God's torment.

The opposition between the phenomenal world and the sublime also intersects with the opposition between genealogy and submission to the divine. The association of submission to divine and the sublime world is very strong, “those whose deeds weigh good will be successful”. Genealogy, however, is a purely profane phenomenon; so total is this dissolution of family relations that even pregnant women and nursing mothers have their bonds with their children dramatically dissolved on judgement day. Whilst genealogy is that which typically defines advantage in the profane world, submission to God is that which defines power and advantage in the sublime world. Thus the unveiling of the divine world, caused either by an individual crossing into the sublime at death or judgement day or by divine intervention in the profane world, affects a reversal in the relative positions of the believers and the disbelievers.

faith (in the divine) : heaven :: genealogy (profane) : earth

The hierarchical relationship between this world and the next feeds back into our understanding of the seen/unseen opposition we encountered in the previous chapter. In this world, God is hidden by the barrier of the visible physical world which obstructs man's knowledge of Him. Yet though this world may appear solid and tangible, the earthquake of the last hour in which the Earth literally tears itself apart, reveals what was hidden. whereas that which was previously visible ultimately proves insubstantial, the unseen God is revealed as having true existence.

This in turn allows us to shed greater light on the role of revelation in mediating between these two opposed worlds. Indeed, as we have observed, revelation is sent directly from God, and thus from the sublime world, through the prophet, and into the profane world. Whilst God is hidden, revelation is described as clear. It thus allows those who believe to see through the insubstantial profane world, renounce their this-worldly affiliations to their tribe and submit to God. Revelation functions as a mediator between God and man, and thus between hidden and seen as it allows those in the visible world to know that which is hidden before judgement day.

Although the influences on which the Qur'an draws is a hotly debated topic, there is a certain sense in which the Qur'an's cosmology -at least on the narrative level - resembles

Plato's allegory of the cave in that this world is merely a shadow dependant on the other world in which truth resides. Whilst in Plato's cave the philosopher may leave the illusory and changeable world of the cave and enter into the bright light of the truth of the world of forms, so in the Qur'an the man of faith may experience the truth of the next world whilst he lives in this world. Just as for Plato, written or spoken philosophy can be said to mediate between the two worlds, so written or spoken revelation plays a similar mediating function in the Qur'an.

Moreover, whilst Plato identifies the next world with eternal unchanging truth, so the Qur'an similarly associates the next world with permanence and oneness and this world with the changeable and plural. Indeed, whilst after death there is nothing you can do to affect your judgement – you cannot “make amends for the things [you] neglected” – before death some groups such as the Jews can almost be said to yoyo between the states of in submission to God and not in submission to God. Similarly, whilst in this life there are *many* separate peoples, in the next life all biological family relationships are dissolved and you are either part of the family of believers, the *Ummah* of those willing to give up genealogy, or you are not. This in turn further emphasises how revelation mediates between these two worlds: the Qur'an allows one to momentarily dissolve one's family relations and be purely part of a brotherhood of people in submission to God.

This world : change :: next world : constancy

Space also functions differently in the two different worlds. In this world, God made the Earth smooth and the mountains to keep it stable (Q78.7). Just as in this world people can move in and out of submission to God, so spatially people move back and forth across the land to trade (Q40.4) and vertically up and down in the manner of Moses and Pharaoh in an attempt to mediate with God. In the next world, however, the transience of this world is revealed: the mountains are as tent pegs (Q78.7) and will be “set in motion and become a mirage” (Q78.20). On judgement day, “eight [angels] will bear the throne of the Lord above them (69.18), On that Day you will be exposed and none of your secrets will remain hidden” (69.19). In the other world geographic space therefore ceases to function and one is entirely exposed to the Lord above them. Those things which are hidden, both God and the secrets which are in your heart, will be exposed, whilst the apparently concrete reality of space and

geography prove to be delusional. They are struck down with the ease with which a Bedouin pulls out the pegs of his tent and breaks camp.

The Qur'an likewise presents the changeableness of time and history in radical contrast to the permanence of God. This opposition is most redolent when we observed the Qur'anic account of the history of Israel and Christianity in the previous chapter. Whilst the characters, the situation, and the identity of the prophet change, the revelations they reveal remain one and unchanging. This is why Jesus and the Qur'an's prophet can claim to be practising the same faith as Abraham: there is no sense of the theology of fulfilment or of type and antitype which you find in Christianity. Rather than building to a Christological climax in which history becomes divine, the Qur'an presents revelation and the divine as a steady rhythmic drumbeat against the chaotic noise of profane history.

5.2. Divine and Profane

In the previous section, I aimed to clarify and draw out the contrast and relationship between the phenomenal profane world and the sublime divine world. In the following section taken from *Sura 39, The Throngs*, I want to look more closely at a selection of cosmological symbols and how they help elaborate the opposition between the divine and the profane.

Q39. 5-20

5. He created the heavens and the earth for a true purpose; he wraps the night around the day and the day around the night; He has subjected the sun and the moon to run their courses for an appointed time; He is truly Mighty and Forgiving.
6. He created you all from a single being, from which He made its mate; He gave you four kinds of livestock in pairs; He creates you in your mothers' wombs, in one stage after another, in threefold depths of darkness. Such is God, your Lord; he holds control, there is no god but Him. How can you turn away?
7. If you are ungrateful, remember God has no need of you, yet he is not pleased by ingratitude in his servants; if you are grateful, he is pleased [to see] it in you. No soul will bear another's burden. You will return to your Lord in the end and He will inform you of what you have done: He knows well what is in the depths of your hearts.

8. When man suffers some affliction, he prays to his Lord and turns to Him, but once he has been granted a favour from God, he forgets the One he had been praying to and sets up rivals to God, to make others stray from His path. Say, “Enjoy your ingratitude for a little while: you will be one of the inhabitants of the fire”.

9. What about someone who worships devoutly during the night, bowing down, standing in prayer, ever mindful of the life to come, hoping for his Lord’s mercy? ‘How can those who know be equal to those who do not know?’ Only those who have understanding will take heed.

10. Say, ‘[God says], believing servants, be mindful of your Lord! Those who do good in this world will have a good reward – God’s earth is wide – and those who persevere patiently will be given a full and unstinting reward’ ...

15. You may serve whatever you please beside Him.’ Say, ‘The true losers are the ones who will lose themselves and their people on the Day of resurrection: that is the most obvious loss.

16. They will have layers of Fire above them and below.’ This is how God puts fear into his servants: My servants, beware of Me.

17. There is good news for those who shun the worship of false idols and turn to God. So [Prophet] give good news to My servants

18. Who listen to what is said and follow what is best. These are the ones God has guided; these are the people of understanding.

19. What about the one who has sentenced to punishment? Can you [Prophet] rescue those already in the Fire?

20. But those who are mindful of their Lord will have lofty dwellings built for them, one above the other, graced with flowing streams. This is the promise from God: God does not break His promise.

The Qur’an places a great degree of emphasis on oneness. God is one in contrast to the many gods of the pagans, whilst Muslims are one people in contrast with the many pagan tribes, or the two religions of Christianity and Judaism. Similarly genealogy is presented as moving from one legendary ancestor, through two conceptual *Sh’abs*, into a myriad of smaller segments with a more concrete sociological function. Whilst oneness and immutability is associated with the divine, plurality and mutability is associated with the profane.

Verse 5, which presents a brief overview of God's creation of the cosmos and verse 6, which presents an overview of man's creation of humanity can be said to follow this pattern. For instance, man is single and is made dual by woman, whilst livestock are plural. Similarly the One God is separated from the plurality of life by the dual phenomena of heaven and earth, day and night, and sun and moon.

This hierarchy between male and female, divine and profane is in turn evocative of Bourdieu's ethnography of the Berber house. Not only is the house - associated with the female and enclosed - in opposition to the masculine outside world, but a similar opposition between masculine and feminine operates within the house. Indeed, the house is divided into two. The larger, higher part is associated with the masculine: it is the place of human occupation, the hearth and thus fire and with the cultural occupation of weaving. In contrast, the lower part of the house is the stable, the place of animals and nature, darkness and water and dampness. Interestingly, an honoured guest (qabel) is invited to sit next to the loom, the seat of honour. The root of qabel, is linked to the qibla, the direction of Mecca towards which Muslims pray. (Bourdieu 1977: 91)

<u>(Sacred)</u>	<u>Mediating</u>	<u>(Profane)</u>
Single	Dual	Plural
→		
God	Mankind	livestock
Man	Woman	Livestock

The mediating function of heavenly phenomena is not only expressed through numerical symbolism. Indeed, they also serve as temporal mediators. Whilst the sublime world is associated with permanence and the phenomenal world with an almost chaotically changeable transience, it is tempting to see the regular rhythm of day and night and the phases of the moon as mediating between these opposed states. Perhaps most significantly, however, they also serve to mediate God's revelation. Abraham, for instance, first worships a star, then the moon and finally the sun before realising, because they all periodically set, that he can only worship the unchangeable one God. (Q6.75-79)

<u>(Sacred)</u>	<u>Mediating</u>	<u>(Profane)</u>
Constant	Periodic	Changing
→		
God	heavenly phenomena	livestock

The stars, however, are a particularly important mediator between this world and the next. *Sura 37* describes how God has “adorned the lowest heavens with stars and made them a safeguard against every rebellious devil” (Q37.1-11); the stars function not only as a barrier between this world and the next, but also between the angels in heaven and the devils on earth as well as between order and chaos. Whilst the angels are depicted as ranged in ranks, the devils that approach the vault of the heavens are pursued by a shooting star: the stars can also be said to mediate between stillness or immutability and mutability*.

Whilst the stars mediate between this world and the next, the same can also be said for humans. Indeed, one of the most interesting parallels drawn in this passage is that between God’s ability to create the foetus in the womb (“in one stage after another, in threefold depths of darkness”) and God’s knowledge of “what is in the depths of one’s heart”†. Humans are thus in a sense hybrid creatures partly comprised of visible bodies and partly comprised of hidden souls and wombs. God, however, has authority over all aspects.

The comparison of the contents of man’s heart with the womb of a woman draws out several interesting points. Like the dark, enclosed Berber house, the womb is an inferior feminine area. When, however, this empty hidden space is protected, encompassed or in submission to the superior masculine rule, it becomes fertile leading to the emergence of life. Similarly, a man's heart is hollow, profane, hidden and inferior. However, when that heart submits to the divine it allows for the potential of resurrection and the emergence of life. Alternatively, if the heart rejects God and becomes hard or enclosed against the divine, it becomes like the old, "twisted" woman: sterile and incapable of resurrection and the creation of new life.

Ultimately this association maps onto the canonical formula we identified in the previous chapter. In relation to God, both the man's heart and the woman's womb is dark,

*Indeed, bearing in mind how the stars play a similar structural role as revelation and that the rhythm of the moon is central to the Islamic calendar, it is perhaps therefore tempting to see this as the reason why iconoclast Islam is often represented by the moon and star.

† This, however, also explains the Qur’an’s theology of the heart. In English we think of the heart as primarily the seat of emotion, potentially set into opposition with the mind, the seat of our reasoning faculties. The Qur’anic conception, however, can be said to be more similar to the Hebrew. It denotes not just the emotional seat, but also a person’s physical, moral and intellectual centre.

enclosed and associated with death. However, precisely in being in submission to God, that which was previously enclosed and sealed breaks open and produces life - resurrection or birth, especially when contrasted to the disbeliever whose heart is hard and sealed against God.

God's revelation (open) : man's heart/woman's womb (enclosed/hidden) \approx man's heart/woman's womb (open) : sealed (inversion of God's revelation/profane)

This opposition between seen/unseen open/enclosed further manifests itself in the opposition between day and night. Indeed, this passage explicitly associates prayer at night with devotion to God praising the one “who worships devoutly during the night, bowing down, standing in prayer, ever mindful of the life to come”. Interestingly, the Qur’an understands dreams as the movement of your soul temporarily back to Allah before returning again on waking. In Berber structure the night is associated with the feminine and the inferior, creaturely half of the house and sexual relations. The night time and the darkness is the time of downwards movements and submission and thus conjunction between male and female and between profane and divine.

Indeed, the association of hiddenness and night time with the divine is augmented following this section’s narrative reversal where “those who are mindful of the Lord, will have lofty dwellings built for them” (Q39.20), whilst the disbelievers will find themselves in the fire (Q39.16). Those believers who move downwards in submission, particularly in the negatively valenced unseen night time - a double submission - find themselves raised up in heaven in the next world. In contrast those who attempted rebellious upwards movements in this world - such as Pharaoh and Noah's son - find themselves in hell, enclosed by fire.

The Qur’an depicts heaven and hell as lofty and enclosed respectively, whilst the Earth is depicted as wide. In this instance it seems likely that the Qur’an shares a similar cosmology with that of the Bible. Indeed, like in Biblical cosmology, the Earth- which is flat and open- is presented as being half way between and thus mediating between heaven – which is raised up - and hell – which is underground. That which is open and wide can therefore be said to mediate between what is raised up and enclosed. Interestingly, however, the lofty heights of heavens are “graced with flowing streams” whilst hell is depicted as a fiery place. In the next two sections I will explore how fire and water function within the Qur'an.

Heaven (up) : earth (down) \approx earth (up) : down (inversion of heaven)

5.3. Water as a Metaphor for Revelation

Water, I believe, is one of the most important mediators in the Qur'an. Not only does it mediate between sky and earth, but also between vertical and horizontal (rain falls vertically whilst springs and rivers move horizontally) as well as several other categories. The significance of water within the Qur'an reflects the importance with which it was viewed in the desert culture which produced this Book. The climate of Mecca, for instance, is extremely hot and arid and what little rain it receives occurs almost exclusively in winter via a process known as "advective transport". This is a process in which:

"The horizontal transport by wind of moist air from the sea into the land during winter, when the land becomes colder than the sea, causes atmospheric condensation over the cold continents and generates winter rains" (UN 2006).

As a result, plant life has a very narrow opportunity for growth.

These plants survive the scorching summer in the form of seeds, bulbs, or tubers, and quickly sprout during the narrow window of opportunity which the rains provide.

The onset of the winter rains would, within days, transform an arid desert into a lush green landscape. Indeed, the rivers or wadis of Arabia are exclusively seasonal and run only in the winter before drying up in the Summer and leaving barren river courses behind them. Interestingly for our analysis, some of the wadis, such as Wadi Al-Rummah which rises near Medina and is Arabia's longest river course, disappears underground before emerging elsewhere.

Water can therefore be seen to mediate between several different structurally opposed concepts. In the first instance it mediates between heaven and earth as rain falls from the sky. It also mediates between vertical/ raised up (as it falls as rain), enclosed (as it emerges in springs from the ground or occasionally disappears into the ground) and horizontal (as it

Mecca Climate Graph											
J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
20	1	6	11	0	0	1	5	5	14	21	21
30	31	34	38	42	43	42	42	42	40	35	31
18	19	21	24	27	28	29	29	28	25	22	20
Average max. and min. temperatures in °C											
Precipitation totals in mm											
(Weatherbase 2011)											

forms wadis and flows across the land). Moreover, just as we established a sliding scale between single, dual and plural, so the seasonal and periodic nature of the wet season can perhaps be seen as mediating between the unchanging constancy of God and unregulated chaos. Water can thus be considered a mediator across many spatial and temporal dimensions, mediating from symbols usually associated with the divine – oneness, heaven, raised up - towards those usually associated with the profane – plurality, earth, enclosed.

Water's propensity to mediate between divine category A and profane category B is strongly emphasised in the Qur'an:-

Q23.18-20

18 We sent down water from the sky in due measure and lodged it in the earth...

20. ...And with it we produce for you gardens of date palms and vines, with many fruits there for you to eat.

Though most obviously water mediates between heaven and earth. In this respect it strongly resembles revelation: both are sent down by God, just as revelation moves downwards from God to man, so water moves down from heaven to the earth.

God : revelation :: revelation : man :: heaven : rain :: rain : earth

Moreover, whilst they both initially move down, they both in turn inspire a corresponding move upwards. Just as rain moves downwards, lodges in the ground and then inspires plant growth upwards, so revelation comes to man, leads him to submit to God before leading to a narrative reversal and resurrection.

It is important, however, to emphasise that the symbols of water and revelation can play a variety of structural roles. Not only do they have the ability to mediate between heaven and earth, they both share ability to allow the earth to mediate between death and life...

Q39.21-23

21. Have you not considered that God sends water down from the sky, guides it along to form springs in the earth, and then, with it, brings forth vegetation of various colours, which later withers, turns yellow before your eyes and is crumbled to dust at His command? There is truly a reminder in this for those who have understanding.

22. What about the one whose heart God has opened in devotion to Him, so that he walks in light from his Lord? Alas for those whose hearts harden at the mention of God! They have clearly lost their way.

23. God has sent down the most beautiful of all teachings: a Scripture that is consistent and draws comparisons; that causes the skins of those in awe of their Lord to quiver. Then their skins and their hearts soften at the mention of God: such is God's guidance. He guides with it whoever He will; no one can guide those God leaves astray.

The believer, for instance, submits to God, a downwards movement associated with enclosure. Having submitted, however, his skin and heart softens leading to an upward movement in contrast to the disbeliever with the hard heart who "no one can guide". Similarly, water occupies the divine position in relation to the earth: the earth must accept water inside it. However, once the earth has submitted to water, it brings forth "vegetation of various colours" before crumbling to dust in the heat. Indeed, in this respect it is possible to see how water maps onto the canonical formula:

water (wet/heavenly/life) : earth (dry/terrestrial/death) \approx earth (wet/ heavenly/life) :
dry/terrestrial/death (inversion of water)

It is likely that water holds the key to explaining several other interesting phenomena in the Qur'an. *Sura 53*, for instance, warns against the pagan Meccan's practise of worshipping the Dog Star. Indeed, the high status with which the Dog Star was held in Pre-Islamic Arabian cosmology is reflected in its name *al Abur al Yammaniyyah*, literally 'on the right side': an interesting manifestation of the Qur'an's strong, hierarchical preference for the right hand. The Dog Star rises in the Autumn in Mecca roughly coinciding with the beginning of the winter rains which were essential for agriculture, emphasising the role of the divine in bringing water.

The structure of the Arabian Agricultural calendar is central to the Qur'an's structure. Indeed, once again, striking similarities can be drawn with Bourdieu's analysis of the Berber, a similar desert civilisation living at a similar latitude. The coming of the rains in Autumn initiated the beginning of the dark and cold winter associated with the female and the interior of the house. It was a time in which both seeds are sown and the men move out of the cold

and start spending more time inside the house, both negative downwards movements. It is associated with sexual relations, the coming of darkness and thus sunset and the west. In contrast, the Spring is a time of upwards positive movements. Crops grow, men and livestock move outwards to pasture. Moreover it is a time of increasing light and thus is associated with the outside, the hot, the male and the sunrise in the east.

This association between nature, agriculture, revelation and water also explains the striking shift, noted by Neurwith (2006b), in how nature is portrayed in pre-Islamic poetry – where it is something which threatens the hero and must be overcome - and in the Qur'an where it is presented as bountiful. Drawing on her analysis of how the structure and genre of the *Suras* develop, Neurwith implies that this shift may be influenced by Biblical material, in particular the Psalms. Whilst Biblical material may have played a role, I would argue that this shift is best explained by the transformation at the level of S³ from an opposition between male and female, which seems likely to have defined pre-Islamic structure, to an opposition between divine authority and profane authority. Thus, in contrast to the heroic poet (masculine), nature is feminine, something to be overcome and domesticated, which when wild is associated with crookedness and dark magic. In the Qur'an, however, the divine-masculine position is occupied by God, with nature and humanity both occupying the feminine profane category. Man can only mediate with God by submitting to him and being – as it were - domesticated by his revelation, something for which nature – naturally in submission to God – becomes an example or proof.

Revelation can arguably be seen to move to the rhythm set by water and the agricultural calendar. Just as the coming of the rains demands the sowing of seeds and the movement into the inferior feminine space of the house, so revelation similarly moves downwards and demands submission from the believers, a negative movement associated with night time prayer and being wrapped or enclosed in one's cloak (Q74). Having submitted in this inferior world, however, a reversal is effected. Just as the coming of the male superior summer leads to the growth of crops and other outward movements, so the superior divine world sees those who submitted move either into an advantageous position or be resurrected after death.

5.4. Fire, Jinn and Snakes

Fire presents an illuminating contrast with water. Though both water and fire can be said to mediate between heaven and earth, whilst water moves downwards, fire can be said to move upwards. Whilst heaven is frequently associated with flowing streams, hell is associated with fire. Indeed, whilst water first moves down from a superior position to an inferior position before creating life which grows upwards, fire roars upwards – sometimes destructively – and leaves nothing behind but ashes. Whilst the movement of water reflects both the agricultural cycle and submission to God in that a downward movement precedes an upwards movement, the fire perhaps reflects the disbelievers who seize immediate earthly advantage (upward movement) and are later destroyed by God (downward movement).

Perhaps one of the most interesting contrasts is that between the conjunction of clay with water and clay with fire. Whilst the former is associated with the creation of life, the latter is associated with evil – Pharaoh commands Hamman to bake clay bricks for his tower to heaven whilst baked clay is often rained down on infidels (Q15.74, Q5.133 etc.). Fire thus either symbolises the act of disobedience or is a fitting punishment for those who, like fire, seek transient advantage instead of lasting submission to the divine.

The negative conjunction of fire and the earth is redolent of low repute with which the smith is held in Berber culture, an occupation which involves the conjunction of fire and iron. The smith is believed to possess "the maleficent, suspect craftiness" (Bourdieu 1977: 126) associated with the sterile old woman whom we earlier compared to the disbeliever in the Qur'an. The action of the smith is further associated with the peak of summer. The last day by which everyone must have started harvesting in the summer is known as "a fiery ember has fallen into the water", a reference to the smith's tempering of iron. The run up to the harvest is a time of warding off potential evil and diseases: "fever, madness (possession by jinn) and sterility" (Bourdieu 1977: 127).

This contrast between water and fire is further developed through the respective characteristics of humans and jinn. On one level a certain parallelism is drawn between jinn and humans. Both possess free will, Muhammad is described as bringing God's revelation to both humans and jinn (Q 72), and, elsewhere in Islamic folklore, the jinn are described as having social structures similar to that of humans. Whilst, however, humans are made from clay and water, jinn are created from smokeless fire. The conjunction of clay and water in the creation of humans emphasises my claim that humans are naturally in submission - like water

we move downward (submission to God), before being moved upwards, (creation of life, resurrection). In contrast the jinn are portrayed as naturally mischievous characters, antithetical to the word of God. Like humans, the characteristics of the jinn resemble that of the material from which they are created. Whilst, however, humans are naturally in submission to the divine, the jinn are naturally rebellious creatures.

Nevertheless, it is emphasised that jinn are capable of submitting to God's word. They can willingly choose to believe the word of God and submit (Q72.-4) and God sometimes commands the jinn to serve his prophets (Q34.12-15). In this respect, the jinn can be said to resemble the Qur'an's hierarchical structure. Whilst on this inferior earthly plane, the rebelliousness of the jinn may appear to be in opposition to God, ultimately the jinn are under and encompassed by God's authority.

Interestingly, elsewhere in Islamic folklore, the jinn are associated with snakes, another ambiguous creature in the Qur'an. Whilst this connection isn't explicit in the Qur'an, it is implied in the Q28.31, the scene where Moses' staff is turned into a snake as a symbol of his prophethood. Here the Arabic can literally be read as *jinn* - the beings composed of smokeless fire. Why this has always been translated into English as "snake" and not as the more literal jinn, is perhaps best explained by the other instances of this myth in the Qur'an where Moses' staff is said to turn into a *thaunaan* (Q7.107) or *hayyah* (Q20.19), both of which are more obviously translated as snake. Interestingly, whilst *thaunaan* is traditionally associated with larger snakes such as a Boa constrictor, *hayyah* has the sense of something twisting or coiling. Ultimately the use of these three Arabic words to express what in English is one word - snake - gives us a key insight into why the snake and the jinn are associated. Just as the swirling, magical and fiery nature of the jinn is presented as naturally in rebellion to God -so equally, however, it is possible the slithering snake represents the "twisted" or bent sterile woman: it is the epitome of untamed wilderness, stealthy and potentially deadly.

This association of snakes with the jinn becomes more explicit in the later *Hadith* literature where snakes are believed to be jinn in human form. Muhammad thus commands that believers should kill all snakes they find. An exception to this rule, however, is house snakes which are believed to be the friendly jinn who have converted to Islam. These you must ask to leave three times. This seemingly bizarre command can only be understood with reference to the Qur'an's hierarchical structure. Whilst the snake outside the house is the epitome of wild, twisted nature in rebellion to God, once it crosses the threshold inside the

house and thus the inferior interior world it can be said to have been "domesticated" and having symbolically submitted to God.

We can thus finally work out why God grants Moses the sign of a snake to confirm his prophecy. The Qur'an demonstrates a binary opposition between divine authority (category A) and earthly authority (Category B). In the inferior earthly sphere, earthly authority appears to be dominant. In the divine sphere, however, God's divine authority is dominant. Moreover divine authority is depicted as encompassing earthly authority. Whilst water is symbolic of a natural submission to God, fire is symbolic of a natural rebelliousness against God, similar to that demonstrated by Pharaoh. In granting Moses power over the snake/jinn – which is created from fire – the narrative emphasises that God has authority over profane, earthly authority. Thus Moses comes to Pharaoh – the paragon of profane authority – with a sign of God's authority over the profane and thus proving that Pharaoh should submit to God.

Chapter 6. Islamic Structure in Performance

In the final chapter I explore how Qur'anic structure manifests itself in implicit myth such as food laws, ritual purity and, in particular the *Hajj* ritual. Rather than implicit myth being more fragmented than explicit myth as Lévi-Strauss suggests (1981:668-669, 1996:83), my work, particularly on the *Hajj*, supports Miles-Watson's claim (2012) that implicit myth is potentially more cohesive and holistic than explicit myth.

6.1. Purity and Food Laws

Like Judaism, Islam has a developed system of food laws and ritual purity. Many of these laws have their origin in the Qur'an, though they are developed in more detail elsewhere, usually in the *Hadith*. Though less extensive and less detailed than Jewish food law, there are certain similarities - in particular the prohibition on eating pork and the practise of draining blood from meat. Whilst Islam may have been influenced by Jewish food laws, it is my contention that, through a process of bricolage, the Qur'anic food laws express the Qur'anic hierarchical structure we have discovered.

One of the central oppositions in the Qur'an is that between believer and disbeliever. Indeed, this opposition is central to Islamic purity laws, whilst the Muslims are normally ritually clean, non-Muslims are always ritually unclean (Q9.28). Similarly, in verse 2.222, after emphasising that menstruation is a painful condition and that women must be cleansed before one has sexual intercourse with them, the Qur'an goes on to claim that "God loves those who turn to Him, and He loves those who keep themselves clean". In the Qur'an cleanliness is intimately linked with godliness.

That menstruation is considered particularly unclean is again perhaps best explained through comparison with Berber structure. As Bourdieu notes with references to the sterile twisted female woman, "every woman partakes of the diabolic nature of the female woman especially during menstruation, when she must not prepare meals, work in the garden, plant, pray or fast (1977: 126).

Whilst a woman is particularly unclean or dangerous during menstruation, all Muslims, male and female, must take particular care to avoid ritual uncleanliness during one's daily ablutions. Indeed, the laws dealing with going to the toilet are extensive. One must face

perpendicular to the *Qibla*, find an enclosed or hidden space, enter this space first with one's (inferior) left foot and left hand and leave it first with one's (superior) right hand and right foot. One must then clean with water - or sand if water is unavailable - but only with the left hand, the unclean hand with which one greets the unclean disbelievers.

Blood and faeces thus represent phenomena which are out of place within Qur'anic structure. Like woman, the ideal place for blood is inside and enclosed where it represents life. When it is outside, however, blood resembles the rebellious, dangerous and sterile woman who is associated with death. Just as a woman who is unmarried, untamed and thus *outside* the house - her natural domain - is dangerous, so equally blood *outside* of its natural place - inside the body is also potentially dangerous, hence the relationship between menstruation and the sterile, untamed woman. In a slightly more complex way, excrement as something dead and rotten which emerges from the body, represents a perversion of the Qur'anic cycle of submission and enclosure (death) succeeded by resurrection and emergence (life). Both potentially dangerous substances, faeces and the menstrual blood must be treated with special care: whilst the unclean woman must not fast or prepare food, any contact with faeces must only be with the inferior left and which is washed thoroughly with water.

It should be noted, however, that these symbols are ambiguous and, because they are defined relationally, may appear to change function. Thus whilst menstruation or shedding of blood is respectively associated with uncleanness and mischief (2.30), blood must be drained from meat otherwise it is *haram* or forbidden (16.128). This perhaps represents a reversal: whilst blood outside of a *living* creature is associated with death and the forbidden and requires ritual washing after contact, if blood is inside a *dead* animal then meat is *haram*, only when it is drained *outside* the body does the animal become fit to eat.

Blood inside: life :: blood outside : death :: blood inside of a dead animal: death

The ambiguous role played by blood and faeces is emphasised in *Sura 16 The Bee*, part of which I have quoted in full.

Q 16: 64-69

64. We have sent down the scripture to you only to make clear to them what they differ about, and as guidance and mercy to those who believe

65. It is God who sends water down from the sky and with it revives the earth when it is dead. There is truly a sign for those who listen.
66. In livestock, too, you have a lesson - We give you a drink from the contents of their bellies, between [digestive matter] and blood, pure milk, sweet to the drinker
67. from fruits of date palms and grapes you take sweet juice and wholesome provisions. There is truly a sign in this for the people who use their reason.
68. And your Lord inspired the bee, saying, 'Build yourselves houses in the mountains and trees and what people construct.
69. Then feed on all kinds of fruit and follow the ways made easy for you by your Lord.' From their bellies comes a drink of different colours in which there is healing for people. There truly is a sign for those who think.

Here the Qur'an draws together several comparisons as signs to help explain revelation and its effects. In the first instance a comparison is drawn with water moving down from the heavens to revive the earth from death. Here an initial negative downward movement by a more heavenly - or masculine - substance, precedes a positive upward movement from the more profane. A further comparison, however, is drawn with milk which is described as the conjunction of digestive material and blood. Here blood seems to be the more heavenly or masculine substance - first moving *downwards* into the belly of an animal before causing life to emerge *out* from the belly of the animal. Inside a living animal, blood : faeces or the contents of the belly, as - elsewhere - water : earth :: revelation : man. Blood within the body is thus playing the divine life giving role in contrast to the contents of the belly. Blood is thus an ambiguous symbol - within the body in contrast to the contents of the stomach it is potentially holy, however, outside the body it is like the untamed female - a source of potential danger.

Two final comparisons are drawn with the sweet juice coming from grapes and other fruits and with the bees and honey. Whilst the sweet juice of the fruit comes forth from the enclosed or swollen fruit resembling birth or resurrection*, the creation of honey sees the bee

*Having briefly explored the Qur'an's food rules, it is worth speculating about the Islamic prohibition on drinking alcohol. Central to Qur'anic structure is its hierarchical opposition between divine and profane which is very reminiscent of Bourdieu's analysis of the Berber hierarchical structure opposing the masculine and the feminine. For the Berber, cooking is a strongly structured activity: in the damp feminine winter, most cooking takes place indoors and the food is often "boiled, sweet, bland and liquid", whilst in the summer cooking is done outside and is often dry, hard, salty, roasted and highly flavoured. Summer cooking can perhaps be associated with the male-male and winter cooking with the male-female. With relation to the process of fermenting or rotting wine, however, I would like to speculate that this process of rotting is associated with the female-female or profane-profane. In other words is associated with an excess of nature which has become out of control (Bourdieu 1977: 147).

- which is associated with heaven, and culture because it makes its nest in high mountains, trees or cultural human buildings - move downwards like rain to sample the enclosed fruit, which in turn causes sweet honey with healing and thus life giving properties to pour forth.

This link between submitting to God and cleanliness is perhaps another manifestation of the Qur'anic association of water with revelation. Both follow the pattern of Qur'an's characteristic reversal. An initial movement downwards from an advantageous position to a position of disadvantage (from sky to earth or from inside genealogy to submission to God) precedes a reversal which sees a corresponding upwards movement from disadvantage to advantage (creating plant life or being saved by God). It is perhaps therefore unsurprising that ritual washing with water is an important aspect of Islamic worship.

Indeed, the *wudu* or partial ablution involves washing the arms up to the elbows, the feet up to the ankles, washing one's face and the *masnah* (from the same root as Messiah), an anointing of the head with water. The *wudu* is the typical preparation for prayer or handling the Qur'an. In this way the Qur'an links together three of the most important mediators in Islam, water, revelation and prayer. Like water and revelation, the physical performance of prayer involves a downward movement followed by an upward movement – the supplicant prays to Allah three times on his feet, on his knees and prostrated on the floor. Moreover, as Bourdieu notes, the pattern of prayer times marking out the day resembles that of the agricultural calendar. Just as the year begins with the Autumn rains and the beginning of the inferior, dark, female part of the year, so the day begins with the sunset prayer of *Al-Maghreb*, *Al Maghreb* referring to both sunset and the west. If *Al Maghreb* is associated with death, the night prayer, *Al Isha*, is said around midnight and is associated with burial, darkness and the middle of winter. With the sunrise, *Al Fajr* is said, the morning prayer associated with Spring, new life coming forth from the ground, resurrection and the men leaving the inferior home for the superior exterior world. The midday prayer, *Al Zuhr*, represents heaven, the harvest and maturity, whilst the mid- afternoon prayer *Al Asr* represents old age, and the sterile fallow period of the year (Bourdieu 1977: 151). The act of *wudu*, washing oneself with water in preparation for the encounter with revelation, is intimately entwined with the structure of water and thus the structure of agricultural calendar, prayer and the pattern of the day.

In contrast, the *ghusl*, or full ablution marks occasions of particular significance; it is recommended before the Friday sermon, in preparation for the *Hajj*, before *Eid* and on converting to Islam. It is only mandatory, however, after sex or coming into contact with sexual fluids, menstruation or child birth, or after contact with a dead body. In other words, *ghusl* is mandatory to move one out of a dangerous state of uncleanness. Outside of faeces and infidels which we've discussed above, the Qur'an recognises three other main sources of uncleanness, blood, sex and death (Q5.6).

Indeed, whilst both the living body and the corpse of an infidel are always unclean, the corpse of a Muslim is unclean from the moment it ceases to be warm. All who come into contact with it must thus perform the full *ghusl*. After the body has been prepared for the funeral, and thus undergoing the *ghusl* itself, it is clean once again. There is a sense therefore in which this process of uncleanness followed by cleanliness resembles that of death and resurrection in the Qur'an. The believer begins alive or clean. Following his death - a negative movement - the body then becomes unclean. With resurrection or the full *ghusl*, however, the soul is resurrected and the body becomes clean again. In this way the Qur'an further emphasises that water, revelation, death and resurrection are intimately intertwined.

6.2. The Lesser Pilgrimage

The *Hajj* pilgrimage brings together many different aspects of Qur'anic structure. Traditionally founded by Abraham and Ishmael, the *Kab'a* in Mecca is, in Islamic tradition, believed to be the location in which Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son (Q37.99-114). Moreover Mecca is the birthplace of the Prophet Muhammad. As such, the *Hajj* pilgrimage is the rich and complex epicentre of Islamic mythology and brings together both the structure and symbolism uncovered in the Qur'an as well as Islamic understandings of ritual purity. Dr Ali Shariati, an Islamic sociologist, goes as far as to argue that "the actions of *Hajj* transmit the message the Qur'an relates in words". (1977: 120)

The *Umrah*, or lesser pilgrimage consists of three main steps. Below is a basic outline of the major parts of the pilgrimage.

The lesser pilgrimage begins at a *Miqat* or starting place where Muslims put on *Ihram*, entering a sacred state in preparation for the pilgrimage. Whilst in *Ihram*, one is restricted from certain actions including sexual intercourse, looking in the mirror, killing animals and plants, giving orders, marriage ceremonies, sheltering in the

shade, covering one's head or face (if male or female respectively), cutting the hair or nails, nor must they wear make-up or perfume. Importantly one must also wear the *Kafan* or funeral garb, a white robe without any marks of distinction.

The city of Mecca resembles a huge bowl encircled on all sides by mountains. Every valley, street and alley points towards the *Ka'aa*. The *Ka'aa* itself is located within a sacred "*haram*" zone within which everyone is silent. The pilgrim must first complete seven circumambulations of the *Kab'a*. After this he reads two units of prayers in "Abraham's position" where he stood and prayed during the *Kab'a's* original construction.

Next the pilgrim begins *Sa'y* where he runs seven times up and down between the hills of Safar and Marwah in a re-enactment of Hagar's frantic search for water for Ishmael. At the midpoint between the hills where the land is at the same level as the *Kab'a*, one should perform the *harwala* or hurrying up. After Hagar became exhausted, the scratching of the child Ishmael's feet on the sand caused the well of *Zamzam* to spring forth. Many pilgrims now drink from the well after completing *Sa'y*.

After this the *Umrah* or lesser pilgrimage is complete and one may cut one's hair and remove the *Kafan* and return to normal clothes.

We identified as central to the Qur'an's structure the transition from a fractious tribal identity, towards a unified central Islamic state or *Ummah*, under which one's tribal or familial identity is re-established.. In many ways the *Umrah* can be seen as physically acting out this transition- although perhaps with some slight structural development at the level of S³. For instance, on embarking on pilgrimage at *Miqat* one is instructed to remove all personal marks of identity and dress in the *Kafan* or funeral garb. Whilst in normal life one's social position – originally associated with tribal identity - may be defined and differentiated by what one wears, upon entering pilgrimage, everyone appears as one without any signs of differentiation except their submission to God. In this way the *Umrah* shows not just an overcoming of tribal relations, but any position based on any earthly economic or political system, be it tribal, feudal or capitalist, and the pilgrim's admittance into a new religious *Ummah*: just as Islam has ceased to be purely a religion of tribesmen, so the Qur'anic

emphasis on foregoing one's familial relations in order to become a Muslim has been expanded to apply to all worldly positions of advantage.

The *Umrah* pilgrimage seeks to reconcile in several ways the opposed categories of submission to God and worldly social identity. In the first instance, the *Umrah* mediates between life and death. At *Miqat*, pilgrims don the *Kaffan*, the white funeral garb in which they will eventually be buried. The movement towards oneness and the break with one's worldly identity is thus associated with a symbolic death. Indeed, upon death all Muslims are buried facing the *Kab'a*, the centre of the Universe so on judgement day they will arrive there to be judged by Allah. Just as the downward motion of the rain causes the plants to grow upwards, so the movement of the pilgrimage towards the *Kab'a*, the Earth's centre, represents a symbolic death and resurrection.

In the second instance, the *Umrah* mediates between plurality and oneness. Many pilgrims arrive at *Miqat* and emerge as one large pilgrimage of indiscernible individuals. Since no marks of personal worldly status are visible, the pilgrimage appears as one mass of identically dressed Muslims moving towards the *Kab'a*. So submerged is one's individuality during *Hajj* that one is even forbidden from looking in the mirror. The identical repetition of the *Umrah*, not only serves to unify the pilgrims present, but also serves as a link dating all the way back to Abraham. This becomes explicit in the reading of the prayers in Abraham's place as he blessed the original *Kab'a*; there actually exists a pair of footprints in the floor which Abraham apparently left. One can come so close to being one with Abraham as to actually stand in his footsteps. Similarly, the place of *Miqat* south of Medina allegedly marks the place where Muhammad began his pilgrimage to Mecca from Medina. In *Hajj* the pilgrim becomes one with all pilgrims and prophets both synchronically and diachronically.

In these ways the *Umrah* effects a significant structural inversion. By foregoing one's earthly identity and totally submitting to Allah (becoming a Muslim), one can be considered to have symbolically died, the ultimate submission. In other words, one moves from being in divine category A to emphatically being in category B: One is in such a position of submission as to have symbolically died. Yet precisely in effecting this movement from power to submission, the pilgrims have moved from a plurality of individuals to one *Ummah*. As in the acts of submission and death – moving totally into category B – allow mediation from profane plurality (category B) to divine oneness (category A); similarly, by submitting

to Allah – entering category B - the pilgrims become one *Ummah* worshipping one God in one religion and thus achieve mediation with the divine, category A.

Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of the structure of the lesser pilgrimage, is how it relates to *tawaf*, the 7 circumambulations of the *Kab'a*, and *sa'y*, the running back and forth 7 times between the mountains of Safar and Marwah . Islamic Tradition explains these rituals with reference to the primordial actions of Abraham and Hagar. Whilst the act of *tawaf* commemorates Abraham's sacrifice of his son (Q37.99-114), the act of *sa'y* commemorates the action of Hagar when she was abandoned with her son Ishmael in the desert by Abraham. Dying of thirst, she frantically runs between two hills searching for water for her son until, miraculously, the scratching of the child Ishmael causes a spring to gush forth.

A structuralist explanation, however, would emphasise how these rituals mediate and reconcile the opposed categories of raised up (category A) and enclosed (category B). Beginning first with *tawaf*, it should first be emphasised that the *Kab'a* is located in the centre of Mecca which is itself situated in the middle of a depression ringed by hills. As if to emphasise the *Kab'a's* “enclosedness”, it is immediately surrounded by the *Masjid Al-Haram* or banned area: whilst pilgrims at *miqat* must enter into the sacred state of *Ihram* to complete the pilgrimage, so on their arrival in Mecca they enter the sacred space of the *haram* zone. *Ihram* and *haram* share the same root as *hareem*, and it is interesting that whilst in these “enclosed states”, men and women are instructed to uncover their heads and faces respectively and are forbidden from seeking shade. Because they are already in an enclosed space, there is thus no requirement for further covering of the head. In fact, in a nod to the hierarchical opposition Bourdieu observed in Berber structure, just as on entering the enclosed feminine house, certain aspects of reality are reversed – such as the points of a compass (Dumont 1979: 18 785-817) – so upon entering the enclosed Haram zone of Mecca, the usual requirements of covering one's face or hair are reversed. Interestingly the very act of *tawaf* or circumambulation sees the pilgrims literally enclose the *Kab'a*.

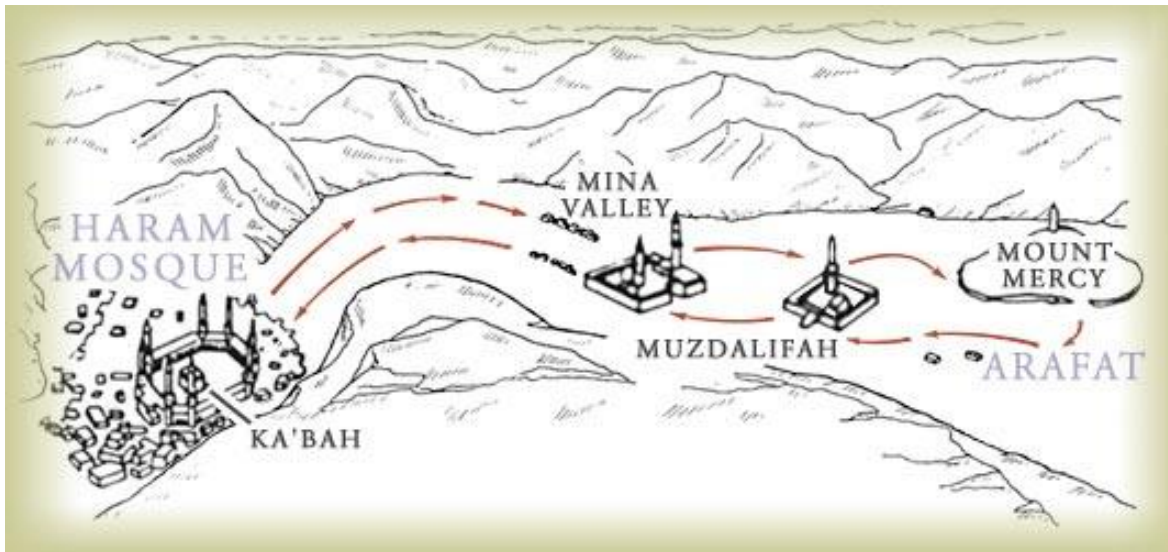
After completing the circumambulation, a physical encirclement of the centre of the universe, the pilgrims then move to complete *sa'y*. Just as the movement of *tawaf* traces a circular motion around the *Kab'a*, so *sa'y* traces a back and forth motion between two hills. The act of *sa'y* both traces a straight line back and forth and involves running up and down two hills. By first completing the circular motion of *tawaf* and then the straight up and down,

back and forth motion of *sa'y*, pilgrims can be said to literally mediate between the opposed categories of raised up and enclosed. Just as in the Qur'an, one must first submit to the divine (a negative downward movement associated with the enclosed) before achieving a corresponding resurrection or advantage, so after first moving into the enclosed centre of the universe during *tawaf*, the pilgrim then is moved upwards to the raised up position of *sa'y*.

This mediation is itself emphasised in several ways. Just as in *Sura 23*, water plays a mediating role between heaven and earth, so, at the low point between the hills of Safar and Marwah which is on the same level as the *Kab'a*, is the spring of Zamzam which God originally caused to spring forth to quench the thirst of Hagar and Ishmael. Located between the hills, yet on the same level as the *Kab'a*, it can be considered as mediating between the two oppositions of raised up and enclosed.

6.3. The Greater Pilgrimage

Whilst the *Umrah* can be completed at any time during the year, the greater *Hajj* must take place between the 8th and 13th of *Dhul Hijjah*, the sacred month in the Islamic calendar. Beginning in Mecca on the 8th, the pilgrim enters the state of *ihram* before heading to the valley of Mina to pray for the remainder of the day. The pilgrim then remains there for the evening before heading over to Arafat, the mountain of mercy. From here pilgrims leave Arafat after sunset and head to Muzdalifah where the whole night should be spent in prayer and 70 stones collected. Just before sunrise the pilgrim leaves for Mina where he must stone with 70 stones the three statues which symbolise devils before sacrificing a sheep in memory of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. The pilgrim must then head to Mecca and perform again the *Umrah*. On the 11th and 12th you are required to stone each of the three devils again seven times. Before sunset on the 12th the pilgrim must leave for Mecca before sunset or stay to stone the devils another seven times. On the 13th you must complete a final farewell *tawaf* (*tawaful-wadaa*) and thus your pilgrimage is complete.



Like the Lesser Pilgrimage, the Greater Pilgrimage brings together and mediates between various oppositions we encountered in the Qur'an. In the first instance, the geography of the pilgrimage is highly significant. The pilgrimage begins in Mecca where the pilgrim enters *ihram*: both the state of dress, Mecca's geography and the myths relating to Abraham, his son and the *Kab'a's* founding all emphasise submission as we explored when analysing the *Umrah*. From here, however, the pilgrim heads east to the mountain of Arafat, the mountain of mercy. In this respect, the greater *Hajj* can be said to resemble the Qur'an's hierarchical structure: the believer must first submit to God in Mecca (downward movement), before moving to the mount of Mercy (upward movement) symbolising resurrection.

That Arafat is associated with resurrection is emphasised in several respects. Most notably, it is believed to be the location where God will gather all the believers on judgement Day before resurrection. Equally, however, its association with resurrection is emphasised by its location east of Mecca. East is the direction from which the sun rises which is itself associated with resurrection (Q 70.34-40). Indeed, the pilgrims who have been waiting in the valley of Mina, begin to approach Arafat from sunrise and will see the sun rising before them as they approach. They attend all day prayers, before departing at sunset for Muzdalifah.

If Mecca represents the submission of the believer to the divine, and if Arafat represents the resurrection of the believer by God, then the gathering of seventy stones with which to stone the three stone devils represents the downfall of evil and the disbeliever. This final act of stoning the devil therefore completes the reversal which characterises Qur'anic structure and can be neatly expressed through the canonical formula:-

God (divine authority) : believer (submission) \approx Believer (divine authority) : submission
(inversion of God)

which here is best expressed

God (divine authority/life) : believer (submission at Mecca) \approx Believer (divine
authority/resurrection) : submission (devil)

Conclusion

The primary aim of this thesis has been to conduct the first ever structuralist analysis of the Qur'an, whilst previous scholars have looked at the narrative structure of the Qur'an, mine is the first work which applies the Lévi-Straussian method to the text in order to discern the underlying logical categories. Consequently, throughout my thesis, I have identified the opposing categories which essentially define the Qur'an, namely the opposed categories of divine (category A) and profane (category B) and, relating to these, the opposition between believer and disbeliever. In the Qur'an the profane category is frequently associated with genealogy and familial identity. This, I believe, emerges out of the material situation of 7th century Arabia which was moving away from a primarily tribal political economic system to one centred on a unified religious state within which, however, tribalism continued to play a significant role. Having identified these central categories, I then proceeded to uncover the abstract formula which defines their relationship. Ultimately I discovered that although Qur'anic structure allows mediation between the opposed categories of divine and profane, the divine category is considerably more dominant.

To best define this unbalanced mediation, I thus turned to Dumont's concept of hierarchical opposition. Hierarchical opposition functions across two distinct levels. In the inferior sphere - which in the Qur'an is associated with the profane - the inferior profane category appears dominant. However, following a narrative reversal and a movement into the superior divine sphere, the divine category appears dominant whilst the inferior profane is subsumed into merely being an aspect of the superior divine. Ultimately I believe the Qur'an can thus be defined by the formula $A_n(A_nB)$.

Beyond merely elaborating Qur'anic structure, however, my research also contributes to several ongoing debates within the field of structuralism. In my final chapter, for instance, I show how Qur'anic structure also manifests itself within Islamic food laws, ritual purity and - most spectacularly - in the *Hajj* ritual; instances of what Lévi-Strauss would refer to as implicit myth. Rather than implicit myth being more fragmented as he suggests (1981:668-669, 1996:83), my work supports the claims of Miles-Watson who argues, on the contrary, that implicit myth is potentially more cohesive and holistic than explicit myth (2012). This is most clear in my analysis of the *Hajj*: not only do I show how the *Hajj* fits Lévi-Strauss's

canonical formula in the same way as the Qur'an's structure does, I also demonstrate how it brings together and mediates between a host of oppositions associated with divine and profane.

Indeed, throughout I have attempted to show how structure is an all pervasive phenomenon. Just as Kunin shows how the same structure pervades both the myth of the Hebrew Bible and its food and purity laws (2004), I have demonstrated, not only that the same hierarchical structure pervades the whole Qur'an, the *Hajj* and food and purity laws, but also some related mythology. In chapter 4, I briefly analyse the Prophet's biography as related by Ibn Ishaq and demonstrate that it exhibits a structure apparently identical to that of the Qur'an.

This pervasiveness of structure is in turn intimately related to the material conditions of the society from which the Qur'an originated. During this period, Arabia was undergoing a revolutionary change, away from a fractious and essentially tribal system of political, economic and sociological organisation, towards one centred on a unified and unifying religious polity which ultimately led to the dramatic Arab conquest. This revolution, however, created a potential conflict between these opposed poles of social organisation: the profane tribe and the new religious polity. Just as the *Constitution of Medina* historically resolved this conflict by incorporating the tribal system within the emergent Islamic polity, so similarly the Qur'an's hierarchical opposition on one level acknowledges the opposition between divine authority and profane/tribal authority whilst, on another level, it presents the profane/tribal as subservient to the divine.

This thesis also contributes to the ongoing structuralist debate over how myths change (Kunin 2009). In the first instance, my comparison of Qur'anic structure with Hebrew and Christian structure is a useful case study as to how myths change as they move across structures. Whilst the much of the Qur'an's narrative is influenced by material from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, I have endeavoured to show that the Qur'an has restructured this material to elucidate its own structure. This is most clear in how the concept of tribe or genealogy functions in all three religions. In the Hebrew Bible, for instance, the divine yet biological genealogy of Israel is in radical opposition to the profane genealogy of the nations (Kunin 1995). In the New Testament, however, this sacred biological genealogy is replaced by a sacred symbolic genealogy: one can now become part of the Church or the body of

Christ and thus God's Son through an act of faith. In New Testament structure therefore, the sacred symbolic genealogy of the Christians is opposed to profane biological genealogy of the Jews - though mediation between the categories is possible. In Qur'anic structure, however, genealogy is entirely associated with the profane aspect and is opposed to faith in the divine.

Myths, however, not only change as they move across cultures, but also within one culture as it develops through time. Indeed, throughout this analysis I have been struck by the similarities between Bourdieu's analysis of the Kabyle Berber and my analysis of the Qur'an (1977). Though the Qur'anic society and the Kabyle society are separated by some 1300 years and several thousand miles, both are desert based tribal cultures who would both identify as Islamic. Whilst both Kabyle and the Qur'anic society's structural understanding of cosmology is very similar, I argue that they exhibit differing key opposed categories. Whilst the essential opposition of the Qur'an is that between divine and profane, the essential opposition which Bourdieu identifies in Kabyle structure is that between male and female. Though different at the culturally specific level of S^3 , the hierarchical relationship between these opposed categories in both structures is identical.

In this respect, my work supports Kunin's claim that within any given culture as it moves through time, though the level of S^3 will change, the abstract level of S^2 remains constant. Moreover, this in turn is consistent with Miles-Watson's argument (2009) that the level of S^3 can in many ways be equated with Bourdieu's concept of Habitus. Rather than the biological brain being the seat of structure, structure is in fact grounded in the mind which mediates between the self and the environment. In this way the culturally specific level of S^3 serves to mediate between an abstract and formulaic structure and the reality of social life. Thus between the Qur'anic society and Bourdieu's Kabyle Berber, whilst the abstract hierarchical relationship remains almost identical, the opposed categories have shifted from an opposition between divine and profane to one between male and female. In this way structure is presented as enduring, yet mutable: whilst the formula remains constant, because society is no longer split between the opposing poles of tribal identity and emerging Islamic State, so the habitus or culturally specific categories of the S^3 level have changed.

As the first analysis of the Qur'an using the method of structural anthropology, I believe my thesis has made a fresh, unique and exciting contribution to anthropology.

Equally, however, I feel that it has opened up several further fruitful avenues of enquiry. The first avenue is a larger structural analysis of the mythology of the late antique Middle East. In my methodology for instance, I present the Middle East in which the Qur'an emerged as gradually shifting melting pot of competing religious identities in which – moving southward - the Chalcedonian Christianity of Antioch slowly shifts to the Miaphysite Christianity centred around Alexandria with instances Judaism scattered across the Empire. In the east existed Zoroastrianism, whilst outside of the great Roman and Persian empires there perhaps existed a sectarian milieu of competing religious identities with the emerging Islamic faith quietly germinating in Arabia. Just as in his *Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, Lévi-Strauss - perhaps over ambitiously - attempts a wide ranging analysis of mythology spanning the whole of the Americas, so this analysis presents a first piece of a wider analysis of Middle Eastern mythology.

Equally, however, my analysis also offers the first piece of a diachronic historical analysis of Islam as it develops. Whilst I briefly stray into some of the later mythology of the Prophet's biography, a more detailed analysis of the *Hadith* literature and through into the folklore of the middle ages would no doubt be a worthy subject for study. Moreover, it would potentially allow for a comparative analysis of the primarily Arab influenced Sunni Islam and the Persian influenced Shia Islam.

Indeed, I believe that it is the greatest attribute of this thesis - and indeed structuralism more generally - that it opens up the potential for deep comparative analysis. Though I have focused primarily on the Qur'an, I have ventured to make comparisons with Christianity, Judaism and the Kabyle Berber. Whilst this is thus merely a preparatory work, it strikes me that Judaism and Christianity have a closer structural affinity than Islam does to either - certainly Kunin suggests that Christianity is a transformation of Judaism (2004, 104-117). Moreover, from their similarities at the level of S^2 - and to a lesser extent at S^3 - I would suggest that the Qur'anic society and the Kabyle Berber are even closer structurally than the communities of the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible.

In this respect my analysis offers - not so much a challenge - as a way forward through the current impasse which holds back the Anthropology of Islam. My analysis takes seriously the great emphasis placed on the Qur'an by many instances of Islam without prioritizing it. It thus maintains a culturally relativistic position whilst simultaneously

offering a basis for comparison of the various "greater" and "lesser" traditions of Islam and a chance for objective and non-judgmental exploration of how they relate to each other and how Islam exists in relation to other cultures.

In this way I hope this thesis is the first step towards what Geertz would consider the central task of the comparative study of religion: "to discover the appropriate terms of comparison, the appropriate frameworks with which to view material phenomenally disparate in such a way... [as] leads us to a deeper understanding of it."

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