Covenantal Communities: A Comparative Study of Moses and Muhammad's Leadership in Exodus and Hijra

Lia Dekanadze

University of Groningen (S5728797)

University of Cordoba (20181684)

Erasmus Mundus Master Programme Religious Diversity in a Globalised World (ReD Global)

Supervisors:

Dr. Seyfeddin Kara, RUG

Dr. Lourdes Bonhome Pulido, UCO

Dr. Andrea De Vita, USAL

Jun 2025

Dedicated to the Interfaith Peace Project of Tbilisi Peace Cathedral
and to its devoted initiator

Abstract

This thesis compares Moses and Muhammad as covenantal leaders by examining the Exodus and the Hijra as foundational events in forming Jewish and Muslim communities. Drawing on primary sources, the Torah, the Qur'an, the Constitution of Medina, and early Islamic biography, it explores how prophetic authority was legitimised through covenantal frameworks that combined theological claims with socio-political organisation.

Focusing on the Sinai Covenant and the Constitution of Medina, the study examines how each figure established a theo-political community grounded in migration, divine law, and collective identity. The thematic exploration of covenantal leadership and community-building enables an analysis of how Jewish and Muslim traditions may have intersected or informed one another. It also allows for their independent development within shared Ancient and Late Antique Semitic cultural settings.

Rather than asserting direct influence or textual dependence between the Bible and the Qur'an, the thesis argues for a conceptual equivalence between the Mosaic Covenant and islam understood as covenantal submission. It identifies parallel leadership structures in Moses and Muhammad, particularly in their negotiation of authority within tribal societies and their use of covenant to address internal dissent and external threats. While Muhammad's leadership in Medina reflects Mosaic precedents, it also introduces new institutional innovations shaped by the Late Antique context, particularly the umma community.

By framing covenant as a political-theological grammar shared across both traditions, the thesis contributes to interreligious and scripture studies as a source of communal and political identity.

Keywords: Moses; Muhammad; Exodus; Hijra; covenantal leadership; community formation.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The leadership roles of Moses and Muhammad remain central examples of social and religious authority in their respective traditions. They are not solely prophetic figures but core leaders of the two communities' historical and spiritual formation. Moses and Muhammad's life experiences and prophetic careers are strongly connected to community leadership and organisation. Significant parallels exist in their figure as foundational leaders of their respective polities. Moses led the Israelites from Egypt during the Exodus, guided them during wilderness wandering in the desert, and finally organised a new community based on covenant and law. This foundational event of Jewish history parallels the Islamic history of Hijra. Muhammad led his followers to Yathrib (hereinafter referred to as Medina), where he established a socio-religious community and organised it around the *Umma* concept and law. The Medinan community or polity has been a paradigm of community building throughout Islamic history. Notably, it was there in Medina that the first recorded interaction between Jews and Muslims took place. Even though these core events' historical, geographical, and religious contexts significantly differ, they share two essential features of building a new community: Migration/exile and divine covenant and law as a ground for new "nation/people", which in this context, refers to a religious or religiously motivated group and its identity in belonging and membership of such a group. Both projects result in the foundation of a theo-political society, which was theological in its covenant with God and political in the form of a tribal confederation. In other words, theo-political society is a cohesive community that is both religiously motivated and socio-politically organised.

Moses and Muhammad's careers demonstrate the development of theological ideas and valuable insights into the development of social and political thought in the Near East. Nevertheless, for centuries, only learned theologians, historians, philologists, and Arabist-Hebraists had the authority to study these texts from methodologies envisaged in their disciplines. However, recently there has been an academic space for interested researchers from social and political sciences to reread the religious texts and histories to search for topics relevant to our field, such as social

history, community organisation, and identity formation[1]. Two key factors motivated my interest in exploring Muhammad's early movement in the context of Moses and Mosaic leadership. First, Moses, despite being the most frequently mentioned figure in the Qur'an[2] and an archetype of prophethood and lawgiving, often receives less comparative attention than Jesus or Muhammad in Muslim and non-Muslim scholarship. This seems inconsistent, given Moses' central role in the Qur'an, especially in depicting leadership challenges in dealing with external opposition (Egyptians) and internal resistance (Israelites). These narratives must have held significant relevance for the Qur'an's immediate audience, particularly as, according to tradition, Muhammad faced analogous challenges in establishing and leading the early Muslim community.

Second, my interest in the Constitution of Medina was sparked while working on an essay about the emergence of Islam as a social movement for the *Construction of Religious Identity* course at the University of Groningen. I analysed the document in light of Fred Donner's Believers Movement Theory[3]. Medina represents a turning point in the early Islamic movement, marking the transition from a pre-Islamic Arabian tribal society to a new form of community that integrated socio-political and religious elements. I am particularly intrigued by the possibility of examining this transformation through the lens of Abrahamic theopolitical models. By analysing the similarities between the leadership roles of Moses and Muhammad, I hope to determine whether these parallels are merely apparent and shaped by a shared monotheistic tradition or reflect more profound continuities within Semitic culture and civilisation.

Several remarks should be clarified from the beginning. First, finding conceptual analogies between Muhammad's ummah-making and Moses' establishment of the Israelites does not mean

---

[1]This research examines Moses and Muhammad through the lens of their human leadership agency, utilizing analytical tools from the social sciences. While it seeks to minimize reliance on supernatural explanations and miraculous events, it acknowledges the necessity of including episodes such as Moses' conversations with Yahweh and theophanies, as these are integral to understanding the covenant-making process. Desacralizing texts to derive secular narration, does not mean I reject the sacred nature of the them.

[2] Due to my limited expertise in Arabic and Hebrew philology, I will use simple transcriptions rather than linguistic transliterations in the Latin script.

[3] The Believer's Movement Theory, introduced in Muhammad and the Believers (2010), explored Muhammad's leadership in Medina, emphasizing the Umma community as a non-confessional religious-political movement, which did not have rigorous confessional boundaries. He called the document the Umma Pact and argued that believing in one God, the Day of Judgement, and allying with Muhammad was enough to become a member of the Movement despite narrow confessional identity. Back than Donner's claims of the Believers movement to be ecumenical seemed too far-fetched for me, but now I think his significant contribution opened an important window to reconsider Muhammad's relationship with Madenese jews and the nature of his community.

that hijra is a Muslim Exodus or that there is direct equivalence in the two traditions. Putting equation marks between them would be an unintelligent simplification of complex events in different historical and social contexts. Exodus, according to the Old Testament, is a liberation from slavery, fulfilment of God's covenant. At the same time, Hijra is Muhammad's and his followers' exile from a hostile environment to a new place to accomplish the mission of building a religious community. Yet, both the Exodus and the Hijra illustrate that the foundation of a new theo-political society often necessitates migration. Relocating to a new environment enables the development of a distinct community identity and governance structure, markedly different from those of the society left behind. Comparatively analysed, both the Exodus and the Hijra are foundational events, not only because they mark the starting point of their respective community calendars but also because they serve as the origin of their distinct historiographies.

Existing scholarship has studied Moses and Muhammad as prophets and lawgivers separately. When studied together, they emphasise Muhammad's Mosesness (the prophetic imprint of Moses on Muhammad). However, a scholarship vacuum exists in analysing their leadership comparatively through a common covenantal framework. The Sinai covenant and its depiction in the Quran, along with the other covenants that Muhammad made with the Medinese and Jews, are foundational documents. However, they are rarely analysed as comparative frameworks for understanding religious community and identity formation. The present study aims to contribute to this gap by analysing Moses and Muhammad's figures as community leaders, focusing on the foundational frameworks they used to organise new religious communities and identities after the Exodus and Hijra.

This objective will require situating Moses and Muhammad's leadership in their respective social, political, and spirituals contexts; examining the Mosaic Covenant, and its implications as depicted in the Torah and the Qur'an, and finally analysing the Constitution of Medina as the foundational framework of Muhammad's leadership in Medina and it connection to the Abrahamic tradition. The main research question is to determine to what extent Muhammad's leadership in Medina reflects, adapts, or diverges from the Mosaic leadership framework during the Exodus. Thus, the core variables and concepts of analysis are covenant and leadership. By comparatively analysing the leadership roles of the founding fathers, the study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the leadership framework in religious contexts and interreligious studies on the formative years of the Muslim community.

In what follows, I will compare Muhammad's leadership and community with Moses in light of shared and differing foundational frameworks. What is focused on here is their teachings on leadership framework and social organisation, mostly told indirectly through textual narration. For this reason, scriptures will be approached as they are: primary sources of traditions that encapsulate the religious narratives and the foundational events significant to the community. Needless to state that primary texts are theological but at the same time they are political as much as they tell and retell the story of people/nation-making and distraction; topics which are primary concern of them are also concern of political philosophy such as power and justice, individual and state/authority, obedience and disobedience, war and peace, and others. Furthermore, their answers and regulations to questions such as how human beings should act and organise themselves are, respectively, the sphere of ethics and sociology and have political implications.

This study aims to contribute to interreligious scholarship by exploring the leadership roles of Moses and Muhammad through the lens of the covenant. Incorporating insights from sociology and political science, the study contextualises leadership and community-building within the broader socio-political milieu of the Near East. The design is structured as follows: In the first chapter, I will name primary sources and discuss issues with their reliability. In the second chapter I will briefly outline the major theories about Qur'ans and generally Islam's relation with Judaism; Additionally, I explain covenant-making as a conceptual framework for the thesis and review scholarly works about covenant in Biblical and Islamic studies; In the third and fourth chapters I will describe Moses and Muhammad's leadership experience and covenants they made with their people and in the final chapter provide comparative conclusions about Muhammad's leadership both reflected and diverged from the Mosaic tradition. Given the limited scope of this thesis, the criteria for comparison are mission and objective, basic frameworks of community, and leadership style. Remarkably, focusing on the covenantal framework excludes other related theological doctrines.

Chapter 1: Literature Review

1.1. Reliability of Primary Sources

There is minimal historical material about Muhammad and almost non-existent on Moses' life and career experiences as historical figures. Egyptian or Canaanite sources do not confirm the Exodus event described in Torah, and sceptical Biblical scholars rejected Mosaic authorship. As for Muhammad, there are few references in Armenian, Greek, and Syriac documents about him[4], but most information comes from Islamic/Arabic sources. There are two main approaches in dealing with the source issue in scholarship in Islamic studies: traditional and revisionist. Traditional scholars recognise some Islamic sources' contradictions, legendary natures, and biases. However, they attempt to establish their source value by engaging them with rigorous scientific methodologies for reconstructing the historical narrative. Scholars like Fred Donner believe that traditional accounts contain "vestiges of very early theological and historical matters" that shed some light on the community's formative years (Donner, 1988, p. 29). Peters has similarly asserted that it is unimaginable for the community to have wholly forgotten the actions and teachings of Muhammad in Mecca and Medina. Although a significant portion of the narratives from the initial years have become obscured by myth and particular biases, he contends that a diligent reader could uncover what he refers to as the "valuable essence amidst the editorial debris in which it is currently situated" (Peters, 1991, p. 307).

Montgomery Watt studied Muhammad and his career in detail in his publications Muhammad at Mecca (1953) and Muhammad at Medina (1956). Later, he published the third book, Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman (1961) as an abridgement of the previous two volumes. In his methodology, Watt stood in a middle position between the overly critical attitude of the Western authors and the uncritical opinions of Muslim writers. He carefully engaged with sources without dismissing their value. The author explained the rise of Islam with material factors, but also argued

---

[4] Hoyland, R. G. (2000). The earliest Christian writings on Muḥammad: An appraisal. In The Biography of Muḥammad (pp. 276-297). Brill.

that "the social malaise they produce does not become a social movement until it has ideas to focus it" (p. 192). He explained Muhammad's socio-political movement's aim in terms of opposing wealthy Meccan merchants. "For Muhammad, the religious community was a body of people associated with one another in the whole of their lives, that is, was also a political unit" (Montgomery, 1961, 106). Watt was criticised for portraying Muhammad as a social reformer and Mecca as a rich, cosmopolitan place, thus reproducing a "secular" version of the "sacred vulgate" of the origins of Islam as remembered by later traditions (Shoemaker, 2022, p. 97).

On the other hand, Revisionists' sceptical scholarship, which was pioneered by Orientalists Ignaz Godziher (1850-1921) and Joseph Schacht (1902-1969), challenged the authenticity of the *hadith* collection and the origins of Islamic juridical traditions. They argued that these corpora projected later ideas and religious and political developments to Islam's origins, thus lacking historical value for the Prophet's time. Even though their severe criticism was only addressed to legal hadith literature, source reliability conclusions were generalised over all Islamic historiography and literature[5]. Patricia Crone's following quote summarises and illustrates revisionists' concerns:

"Whether one approaches Islamic historiography from the angle of the religious or the tribal tradition, its overall character thus remains the same: the bulk of it is debris of an obliterated past. The pattern in which the debris began to be arranged in the eighth century A.D. acquired the status of historiographical sunna in the ninth, the century in which the classical works of history and hadith were compiled." (Crone, 1980, p. 10)

Recently, some of the arguments of revisionists have been highly criticised by their fellow scholars as highly speculative and fragile.[6] Historians like Harald Motzki have a more optimistic view about reconstructing historical reality from the traditional source. In the introduction of his edited

---

[5] Other works of skeptical revisionist school are: two volumes by John Wansbrough, Qur'anic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretation (1977) and The Sectarian Milieu: Content and composition of Islamic Salvation History (1978) who confined himself with literary analysis of hadith collection without claiming to reconstruct all historical facts. Michael Cook & Patricia Crone, Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World (1977) as will be discussed in the research completely rejected Islamic sources and ground their study exclusively on non-Muslim material; Later they revised their methodologies and published seperate books: Patricia Crone, Slaves on Horses: The Evolution of the Islamic Polity (1980) and Meccan Trade and the Rise of Islam (1987) are based both Muslim and non-Muslim materials and Cook's work Muhammad (1983) is based on Qur'an and traditional sources with disclaimer that they are historically unreliable.

[6] Skeptical revisionists were criticized by Harald Motzki, "The Collection of the Qur'an: A Reconstruction of Western Views in Light of Recent Methodological Development, Der Islam, Vol. 78. (2001); Parvez Manzoor, "Method against Truth: Orientalism and Qur'anic Studies" in Andrew Rippin, ed., "Qur'an: Style and Content 2001), 381-397; Farid Esack, The Quran: A short Introduction (2002).

volume, he addressed five serious shortcomings of existing scholarship in a biography of Muhammad's life. According to the author, one of the most critical issues is that "systematic source-critical studies of the biographical traditions concerning Muhammad's life are almost lacking; the authors of historical biographies have been allowed to choose from the sources the information which they liked best. Source-critical studies which compare the different accounts available and attempt to date them are a prerequisite for the use of these traditions as historical sources." (Motzki, 2000, p. XIV) The mentioned volume utilises a variety of practical approaches such as studying textual and transmission history, reconstructing sources, unearthing unorthodox traditions, and determining the historical value of tradition to tackle issues regarding the methodology of studying biography, which opens a new horizon in the field.

Additionally, recent studies argue for the historical source value of *hadith*. Seyefeddin Kara who stududied notion of the distortion of the Qur'an through analysis wide range of *hadith* from both Suuni and Shi'i traditions, concluded that if studying with rigorous methods, they can "provide insights into the early history of Islam, especially with regard to the cristalisation of the Qur'anic codex, the role of the Prophet Muhammad in the early Medinan community, his relations with Jews and the connection between Islamic law and rabbinic law." (Kara, 2024, p. 254). This study not only raises the historical value of *hadith*, but also the Qur'an's integrity as well.

For several reasons, I would like to adopt a more optimistic position in this discussion regarding Islamic source issues, which is not a black-and-white scene for me. On one hand, this thesis does not take *hadith* literature, at face value when constructing a historical account of the biography of Prophet Muhammad, however, the total negation of Arab/Islamic materials including *hadith* collections by radical revisionists and Western orientalists would leave us in a hopeless situation to know anything about the Early Muslim movement. Moreover, it is a dismissive approach to Arab historiography, and undermines how Arab's and generally Muslims understand their history. I maintain that Qur'an, the Constitution of Medina, and *Sira* literature studied intertextuality reflect the collective memory of the religious communities concerning their foundational frameworks, which is too significant to be forgotten, entirely reimagined, or politically reshaped by later generations. Especially considering that the gap or so-called silence period between the first *maghazi* narrations and events they are referring to is more or less 70 years; and second, the Constitution of Medina indeed and the Qur'an were written down during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime or shortly after his death. On the other hand, since this is not primarily a

historical research endeavour, but a mixed one, the historicity of primary sources does not have substantial relevance. For this reason, I will only briefly list the primary sources on which this thesis is grounded without further elaboration on source criticism.

1.2 Primary Sources

The Bible (from the Greek word *biblia* for Books) is a collection of books representing holy scripture for Christians and Jews. The Jewish Holy Book *Tanakh* contains three parts: the *Torah* (Law), *Nebiim* (Prophets), and *Ketubim* (Writings). The Torah, also called the Old Testament, is the first five books (Pentateuch) of Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It is at least a 2500-year-old text developed in Middle Eastern socio-historical conditions. The Pentateuch, in particular, and the Bible, in general, are not uniform pieces of literature. They instead resemble a large cathedral that has grown over centuries. Its content is not the result of one but of many different voices. The magnificent Qumran findings suggest that it was likely completed by the second century B.C.E. Minor divergences demonstrate that there was no completely stable version of the Pentateuch during that time, as evidenced by the variations found among the different scrolls. While some of its texts are certainly much older, it is unlikely that any of them were composed later than this time frame. (Shmidt, 2018, link).

The present work will use The Revised New Jerusalem Bible (RNJB 2019) Study Edition, which Dom Henry Wansbrough, OSB, a general editor of the New Jerusalem Bible (1985), prepared and edited for a modern readership. Selected chapters and verses from the Torah primarily come from the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Numbers. The first book sets the framework for the covenantal relationship between God and Humans, and the following ones provide detailed accounts of Moses' personal life, his role as a prophet, and his leadership in the foundational events for the Israelites. Themes such as the Covenant, lawgiving, and Moses' leadership will be analysed in depth. Further, it will show that the Sinai covenant displays significant continuities within the Ancient Near Eastern traditions.

The Qur'an is a heterogeneous corpus developed in Late Antique Arabia, specifically the Hijazi milieu. It consists of Meccan and Medinan chapters, as believed revealed to Islam's prophet Muhammad through his prophetic career for more than two decades. Quran's literary genre differs from the Torah as it does not have coherent storytelling according to chapters, but its moral-ethical and theological teachings are scattered throughout the text. Like Torah, the Qur'an used to be a

primary oral text during the life of the Prophet. There is scholarly disagreement about the composition of the Quranic text. According to the traditional narrative, which Western scholars share, it was textualised and canonised as the consonantal skeleton of the Uthmanic Codex after Muhammad's death as part of the Caliphal project. The oldest Qur'an manuscript available is from the University of Birmingham, whose radiocarbon analysis dates to 645 AD. Some scholars argue it was not canonised until the end of the 7th century. In any consideration, the Quranic text was composed no later than the end of the 7th century AD.

The paper will use The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary by Seyyed Hossein Nasr. From the Qur'an, I will observe the chapters and verses that depict Muhammad, Moses, their status, and the Covenants. At the same time, I will analyse how Muhammad and his leadership are portrayed and whether there is any reference to the Mosaic model that should or could be deployed by Muhammad and his followers in their migration and community-building.

Qur'an, al-Bukhari's *hadith* collection, together with al-Waqidi's *Maghazi*, Ibn Hisham's *Sira*, Ibn Sa´d's *Tabaqat,* and al-Tabari's *Tarikh* are standard sources for the biography of Prophet Muhammad up to this date. Al-Sira al-Nabawiyya in Arabic, meaning prophetic biography, is a genre of heterogeneous literature containing narratives about the life and military expeditions of Muhammad and his companions. The Sirah corpus includes treaties, correspondence, historical reports (*akhbar),* and preachings of Islam's prophet. It started as *maghazi* books (stories about the Prophet's raids during his lifetime) by Adan, son of the caliph 'Uthman, in Hijaz from Islam's first century and then continued in Iraq, Syria, and the Yaman during the second and third centuries. Later *maghazi* works were fully developed and integrated into the biographical genre.

The most comprehensive biography of the prophet in our hands is Ibn Ishaq's (d.767) *The Book of the Biography and the Beginning and the Campaigns,* which consists of three parts: ancient stories from the creation of Adam, Muhammad's early life and mission, and his military raids. The original work has not reached us; however, several recensions have given particular importance to annotated and abbreviated versions of his student al-Bakka', which is preserved in Ibn Hisham's (d. 833) work. Ibn Hishaq organised and compiled previous reports and works describing events related to the Prophet Muhammad within his comments and names of the narrators. This thesis used *The Life of Muhammad,* a translation of Ishaq's *Sirat Rasul Allah* with introduction and notes by Alfred Guillaume. From this text, we are interested in narrations about Prophet Muhammad's leadership, challenges, and community-building process in Medina.

The "Constitution of Medina," also referred to as the "*sahifa*" or "*kitab*", is the Treaty comprising various clauses regarding the commitment to support one another in case of attack, payment of blood money, ransoming captives, and other security related stipulations concluded between Muhammad and the inhabitants of Medina. This is Muhammad's first and earliest document, whose original text has not survived. Still, it has been preserved in two literary sources: Ibn Ishaq's biography of Muhammad from the mid-eighth century (d.767) and Abū ʿUbayd's Kitab al-Amwal (Book of Revenue) from the ninth century (d. 839). While both versions of this single document share the exact text, the Abū ʿUbayd version exhibits typical characteristics of written transmission (scribal errors), including omissions, interpolations, and the chain of transmitters (an *isnad)*. Notably, even though the preserved text dates more than a century after the death of Muhammad, there is consensus about the reliability and authenticity of the Document. After thoroughly analysing key features such as its archaic style and Qur'anic language, depiction of Muhammad as only arbitrator and mediator of the agreement instead of Prophet, and attitudes towards Jews, even skeptical scholars of Islamic studies have agreed that it is "sticking out like a piece of solid rock in an accumulation of rubble" (Crone, 1980, p. 7), meaning that the document dates back to early Medinese period, when Muhammad acted as a head of different Medinan tribes.

There are several scholarly editions of the document. I will use Michael Lecker's monograph *The Constitution of Medina - Muhammad's First Legal Document,* which includes both versions and their variants in Arabic with English translations and Latin transliteration of the Arabic. The Treaty is a relatively brief and unified document consisting of a preamble (clauses 1–2), a treaty with the Mu'minun (clauses 3–26), and a treaty with the Jews (clauses 27–63). The document is essential for understanding Muhammad´s leadership´s nature and the nascent community´s legal framework. For this reason, the focus of analysis will be clauses related to the *umma* concept, the contracting parties, and their relationship with each other.

The present thesis does not aim to reconstruct the origins of early Judaism and Islam but to compare how communities built a historical narrative of forming their religious identity. The Torah and Qur'an are essentially religious texts and not historical ones, but reading them in light of archaeological materials provides valuable insights about their times' religious and political development. For this purpose, the research examined primary sources, such as relevant passages from the Torah, the Qur'an, the Constitution of Medina, and biographical literature, to piece together the religious narrative about the formation of religious community and identity. The style,

composition, and structure of the primary sources significantly differ. Still, they share themes such as covenant-making as a source of new identity; migration as a foundational community-building act, and prophetic leadership. In particular, both sources confirm that the covenant framework is central to understanding the leadership of Moses and Muhammad. It functions as a unifying framework, simultaneously legitimising divine authority and establishing socio-political organisation.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

1.3.1 Approaches to Jewish-Muslim textual relations

The objective of the present research is not to engage in a longstanding debate regarding the origins of Judaism and Islam or propose a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between their scriptures. However, a concise overview of the discussion in scholarship will be helpful for two reasons. First, it establishes the intellectual legitimacy to study Muslim and Jewish covenants in tandem, which remains unexplored despite its potential for new insights. Second, it illustrates that Muhammad's leadership has not arisen in isolation, but reflects the socio-political and theological contexts of Late Antiquity.

Judaism's paternal role for Islam's origins has been seen and discussed by both Muslim and non-Muslim Islamists. While believers and faith-based scholars have explained this relationship with the scriptural and prophetic genealogy of Abrahamic traditions, and some historians interpreted it through a common Late Antique legal and religious context, Western scholars have been elucidating it in terms of Judeo-Christian "borrowing", "influence", and "Messianism". For centuries, Western scholarship on Islamic and Quranic studies has conceptualised the Quran's relationship with the Bible as one of dependency and has constantly searched for Jewish and Christian origins of the Quran. The most classic examples where the borrowing theory is implied even within the book titles are: *What did Muhammad take from Judaism* (*Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen*?) *(1833)* by Abraham Geiger; His theory that Muhammad was a religious enthusiast who had a wide access of Jewish and Biblical oral knowledge explains both omnipresence of Jewish credo and its discrepancies from Biblical traditions in Muhammad's teachings. This approach continued to develop in the 20th century by Richard Bell in *The Origin of Islam in its Christian Environment (1925)*; Charles Torrey's in *Jewish Foundation of Islam*

(1933), and Franz Rosenthal's *Judaism and Islam* (1961). Assertions that *"Islam is faith of Abraham and Moses* (Torrey, 1933, p. 2) were based on the methodology of literary, philological, and historical critics that analyse individual stories, laws, or words from Christian and Jewish traditions in the Qur'an. However, it is a conceptually flawed methodology as Qur'an never directly quotes any Bible passages; thus, there are only "paraphrases, allusions, and echoes' rather than 'quotations' in any strict sense of the word" (Griffith, 2013, p. 56).

 In addition, Rubin Uri argued that Biblical and Jewish models gave way to the basis of the Islamic biography of Muhammad. He studied literary sources within categories of attestation, preparation, revelation, persecution and salvation to assert that all stories about the Prophet were created to fit in a standard Biblical prophetic paradigm and are "the reflection of the communal self-image." (Rubin, 1995, p. 217) While displaying a vast knowledge of early and medieval Islamic sources, his claims go too far, especially considering the absence of describing what the standard prophethood paradigm truly means in Biblical scholarship. What is more problematic with borrowing theory is its reductive methodology, which fails to explain the nature and intentions of dependency and answer to the most critical question: what theo-political implications do these "borrowings" reveal in the Qur'anic framework, considering its portrayal itself as both confirmation and critique of earlier monotheistic traditions.

Recently, such a primitive understanding of one-way borrowing has become less acceptable. Qur'ans relationship with the Bible has been studied through the lens of "conversation", "polemics" and intertextuality - to say it with Sinais words "many scholars would now readily admit that the Quran does not simply and invariably 'borrow' from earlier traditions, but frequently appropriates and inflects them in line with its own theological agenda and purposes, often highly sophisticated and creative ways." (Sinai, 2015, p. 221) This shift is more beneficial than *"borrowing theory"* as it opens a broader window to see intentions and creative ways in which Quran engages with Biblical materials. Gabriel Reynolds, in his well-argued thirteen case studies of Qur'an's stories in light of Biblical and post-biblical material, demonstrates that the Qur'an has the character of a homily, not repeating the Judaeo-Christian tradition but rather engaging in debate with it to correct what it considers flawed theological positions. "Qur'an's concern is not simply to record Biblical confirmation but to shape that information for its own purposes" (Reynolds, 2010, p. 105). Notably, Reynolds uses the term *homily* similarly to Angelika Newirth, signifying the truth already announced. Therefore, the Quran does not need to describe

the story, but only allude to it with key words that facilitate the listener to recall the Biblical story in order to generate its own theological and pedagogical meanings.

The recent approach on intertextuality, overtaken by Michael Cuypers, provides a more elaborate methodology for intertextuality and contributes to "the Semitic Civilisation Thesis". Cuypers argues that both traditional Muslim and Western studies of Qur'anic intertextuality with the Bible are strongly influenced by Greek rhetorical tradition and do not take into account Semitic rhetorical style. "The books of the Bible unceasingly re-appropriate earlier writings, reusing them and turning them into a new perspective which advances a revelation. The Qur'an is no different, although it does so differently." (Cuypers, 2009, p. 31) Cuper draws his conclusion from analysing the fifth surah *al-Ma'ida* (table) with rhetorical analytical tools and found thematic and structural coherence, opposite to the traditional view of the Qur'an as a fragmented and unordered text. Additionally, the author's intertextual or "interscriptural" analysis does not diminish the Qur'an's originality; it highlights and amplifies it. More relevant to Cuypers' method is that it corresponds to questions about the Quran's positioning itself as the ultimate revelation within the Judeo-Christian tradition. It has had to revisit the earlier traditions while also imprinting its own significance on the texts it references. Even though this painstaking work mainly contributes to Islamic-Christian studies, his methodology applies to Islamic-Jewish scholarship.

Besides that, the broader context of Semitic Civilizational Theory challenges the commonly assumed idea that religious culture in Arabia was exclusively brought by Christians and Jews and, thus, was biblical. Moreover, within Jewish and Christian material, the Qur'an reflects many ideas from the broader Ancient Near Eastern cultural and religious world. Firestone rightly emphasises this diversity:

> "Arabia, like the Land of Israel, contained its own particular versions of a common library of ancient Near Eastern literatures, which existed in particular dialectical form wherever it was found. So-called 'biblical' material found in the Qur'an, therefore, was not inherently biblical. It was neither borrowed by a prophet nor deposited by visitors from outside. Still, it existed as a basic part of Arabian civilisation, just as it existed as a basic part of West Semitic or Mesopotamian civilisation, available to be shaped by the particularities of history" (Firestone, 2003, p. 143).

I concur with this theory because rather than merely turning the Qur'an into a "plagiarised collection of previous writings," it is placed on equal note with the Bible and analyses their

treatment of common themes. It allows for intertextually examining common themes of covenant and covenantal leadership/community with Biblical and extra-Biblical Semitic materials. However, Islamic scholars tend to neglect the broader matrix of Semitic culture in favour of narrowing it to Biblical dependency.

1.4 Conceptual Framework

1.4.1 Conceptual equivalence of the Sinai Covenant and *islam*

The vast amount of literature about Judeo-Christian influence on Islam and its scripture is relatively silent on the subject of covenant. Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, in their highly debated and criticised work, studied Hagarism as proto-Islam based on a very unconventional methodology in Islamic origins, meaning they completely rejected Muslim historiography as unreliable and only utilised a few contemporary and nearly contemporary non-Islamic sources, to which their radical academic scepticism was not applied. Authors see Islam's origins as "a gentile Jewish Messianism." (Crone & Cook, 1977, p. 27) Even though the book's methodology, assumptions, and tone did not shed much light on the historical emergence of Islam, they propose critical questions and doubts that scholars in early Islamic studies should have seriously considered at that time. An interesting and valuable part of this otherwise problematic book for my research is the authors' attention to the similarity of foundational covenantal frameworks of Mosaic and Muhammadan. Unfortunately, they dedicated only a few paragraphs to this issue, but their observation is a fertile ground starting point for building my argument.

To begin with, Crone and Cook analysed the creation of Ishmaelite genealogy and prophetology by Arabs as a rival to the Israelite genealogy. They argued that it was due to this general Abrahamic framework that the Arabian prophet had to be aligned with Moses. For this, the alignment shift in the Mosaic paradigm was significant. This shift was the transition from themes of redemption to revelation, moving from the Red Sea[7] to Sinai. They argue that it was easy to view Muhammad as a leader akin to Moses during the Exodus, thus justifying his reception of revelation on a sacred mountain. In the author's view, a good attestation of this paradigm shift is "the curious semantic evolution of the term *furqan*, from its original Aramaic sense of 'redemption' to its secondary

---

[7] The Biblical Sea of Reeds is often misunderstood as the Red Sea.

Arabic sense of 'revelation'". Second, the Mosaic complex contained helpful features for such a shift. The Deuteronomy envisaged a "prophet like Moses" to come. Muhammad's biographers and later exegesis of the Quran intended to identify him as a Deuteronomic prophet. Furthermore, Muhammad had to be identified with Qur'anic scripture to align with a Mosaic lawgiver and scriptural prophet model. Recognising older canons allowed them to put Muhammad and his scripture among the genealogy of Older canons, those of Moses and Jesus (pp. 17-18).

Another interesting observation relevant to our topic is how Crone and Cook propose the possibility of redefining the framework of Islam in light of Abraham's covenant. Submission to God and God's will is a central theme in Abraham's history (notably, his binding of Isaac). The authors argued that Muhammad's followers needed a broader covenant framework similar to Sinai, and they have seen *islam* as a religious category that has an analogous position to that of the Sinai covenant in Judaism. Authors know a possibility "of seeing in islam a development of the covenant of Abraham in the face of the challenge of the Mosaic covenant". Among the other Samaritan contributions to Muhammad's teachings, they identify the notion of *islam* applied in the sense of submission to God. Verb *aslama* in Arabic has the meaning of "submission" but also "to make peace," and it has cognates in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac; however, except for Samaritan writings, none of the previous religious literature identified it with its Islamic usage of submission. Understand in that way, "the primary sense of islam was entry into the covenant of peace" (p. 20) - they concluded. Notably, researchers see intentions to reinterpret *islam* as "submission," which has been a dominant interpretation in Islam as an attempt to differentiate the Hagarene covenant from the Jewish one. They suggest that even if there is a possibility of *islam being* a conceptual rival of the Mosaic framework, it still would be a historical successor of the Mosaic one (pp. 19-20)[8].

Similarities between the Islamic and Biblical covenants have been observed and explained with Islam's adaptation of Biblical salvation history. John Wansbrough, a teacher of Cook and Crone, similarly argued that the Qur'an represents the Arabian version of Biblical models. Thus, the covenant is necessary to the Biblical Calque, which summarises all previous theophanies. "Symbolic of man's obligation to God, the covenant was betrayed by the Jews, restored by Muhammad, and manifested neither differentiation nor development." (Wansbrough, 1979, p. 46)

---

[8] Long before the Publishing of Crone & Cook's book, Lidzbarski also concluded that *aslama* root for Islam should have been interpreted as *'to enter into the state of peace'* Aslama 85-90, quote taken from Wansbrough's *Quranic Studies; Sources And Methods Of Scriptural Interpretation, 11*.

While I strongly doubt the existence of any form of "Hagarism" as a proto-Islamic movement, I explore the possibility of equivalence between the Sinai Covenant and *islam*, and argue that the Constitution of Medina can be a conceptual analogy (not the calque!) of the Sinai Covenant in its significance of creating religious community. The following sequence dysplaces this relationship: Migration → Covenant → Community-Building.

1.5 Methodology

In my methodology, I aim to explore the parallels between Biblical and Islamic sources on community building and leadership through the lens of intertextual and interreligious frameworks. This approach goes beyond simple borrowing or a one-way influence theory; instead, it acknowledges the dynamic interplay between these two religious traditions. Intertextuality allows a richer understanding of how Islamic texts creatively engage with and respond to Biblical theological models. The thematic exploration of covenantal leadership and community-building will enable us to understand how Jewish and Muslim traditions might have crossed paths or informed each other, while still considering the possibility of them developing independently within common Ancient and Late Antique cultural settings.

Additionally, Quranic and Muhammad's other covenants have not been studied much within pre-Islamic treaty forms and structures, which can provide valuable insights into the covenant topic. Further, through this comparative study, I aim to highlight not just the similarities but also the unique divergences of each tradition to the concept of covenantal leadership and community building.

Chapter 2 Covenantal Communities

2.1 Covenant in the Torah

Critical Biblical scholarship questions the existence of Moses and Exodus, and explains the gradual development of Yahwism and the Biblical concept of God within the Near Eastern religious and political context, especially with negotiations and dialogue with West Semitic and Canaanite traditions and peoples. Prominent Biblical Philologist Mark Smith analysed this line of religious development of Israel in terms of *convergence* and *differentiation*, where "convergence involves the coalescence of various deities and/or some of their features into the figure of Yahweh" during period of judges and first half of monarchy; the author provides poetical and literary evidences how features belonging to deities such as El, Baal, Asherah and Sun were absorbed and assimilated into the Yahwistic religion of Israel (ch. 1). On the other hand, Smith demonstrates dissimilation of imagery of these deities from the ninth to six century with legal and prophetic condemnation of Baal worship "numerous features of early Israelite cult were later rejected as 'Canaanite' and non-Yahwistic" (Smith, 2002, p. 50).

Furthermore, recent archaeological discoveries allow scholars to analyse the Sinai [Mosaic] Covenant in light of Ancient Assyrian, Canaanite, and Hittite treaties[9]. The most notable work in comparison of Biblical treatise with other ANE Vassal-Suzerainty contracts has been done by George Mendenhall, who categorised basic elements of the Hittite suzerainty treatise into six categories and compared it with Sinai one: titulary, historical introduction, stipulations, list of divine witness, blessings and curses, whitin recital of the covenant and deposit of its tablets (Mendenhall, 1954, pp. 66-87). Scholar Moshe Weinfeld further categorised two types of Biblical covenants: obligatory, reflected in God's covenant with Israel, and promissory, mirrored in the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants (Weinfeld, 1970, p. 184). His thorough analysis of Near Eastern covenants demonstrates that covenants were expressed in terms of *oath, commitment, grace,* and *friendship.* This semantics can be explained "by the fact that any settlement between two parties

---

[9] Most prominent works in this field: G. Mendenhall, " Covenant forms in Israelite Tradition", Bibl. Archeol. 17 (1954); D. J McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, Analecta Biblica 21, 1963; D. Hillers, Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969); E. H. Merrill, "A Theology of the Pentateuch," in A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament, ed. Eugene H. Merrill (Chicago: Moody, 1991).

must be based on: (1) some kind of mutual understanding which enables the conclusion of an agreement, (2) a pledge or formal commitment to keep the agreement" (Weinfeld, 1973, p. 190). The author also observes a typological parallel between God's promises with Abraham and David and their descendents for their loyal service with "royal covenantal grants" of the Hittites and Assyrians. In both cases, even formulating a commitment "to keep the promise to the descendants" of the loyal and faithful servants is analogous (p. 194). The most common Hebrew covenantal terms in the Torah are (*krt bryt* 'to cut a covenant') corresponding to Akkadian, Aramaic, and Phoenician ones for denoting a *bond*. After meticulously analysing covenant formulations and idiomatic expressions, the author argued for the common origin of the treaty terminology in the Near Ancient World:

> "The similarity in idioms is too great to enable the supposition of independent growth. The identity in the nomenclature of the treaty as: bond, oath, faith on the one hand and kindness, friendship, love, brotherhood, peace on the other; the use of hendiadys in all the areas as: bond and oath, covenant and grace, friendship and peace, kindness and truth, love and friendship, etc.; identical verbs in expressing the establishment of a treaty as: "to cut a pact," to put, give and erect the covenant, and the verbs "to enter the covenant," "to guard/remember" and also the identical expressions in the sphere of "violation," all these could hardly be the product of coincidence." (p. 197)

The canonical interpretation considers covenant (*Hebrew brt*) one of the Bible's core themes, if not the most central one. In the Torah and throughout the Bible, God communicates with personages within a covenantal framework. There are several universal and particular covenants throughout the text, most significantly the Noachic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic Covenants. The first universal Covenant we encounter is God's promise after the flood made with Noah, his descendants, and every living creature on earth for all ages to come: "And I shall maintain my covenant with you: that never again shall all living things be destroyed by the waters of a flood, nor shall there ever again be a flood to devastate the earth." (Gen 9:11); Covenant made with Abraham and his progeny also seems universal: "And I shall maintain my covenant between myself and you, and your descendants after you, generation after generation, as a covenant in perpetuity, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you." (Gen 17:7) This covenant with humans, containing mutual promise and obligations, has been renewed and reestablished with later generations.

The importance of the Covenant in Israelite political history has been observed and studied by theologians, historians, and social and political scientists for centuries. In his work *Theology of the Old Testament(1878/81)*, Julius Wellhausen argued that the concept of the covenant was a theologically charged metaphor, a later prophetic invention during the Exile. In this philological-historical work, the author debated that Israel's initial relationship with God was "natural", a*s* *"that of son to father; it did not rest upon observance of the conditions of pacts"*. He argued that it was a prophetic strategy to convert a tribal god into a transcendent God and create a bond through an ethical covenant or contract. Thus, in his view, the covenant can not serve as a core organisational theme of Old Testament theology. (Wellhausen, 1885, p. 2)

Unlike Wellhausen, Max Weber, in his extensive analysis of Ancient Judaism, noted the political character of the covenant - "the extensive employment of 'covenant' as the actual, or constructed, basis of the most varied legal and moral relations. Above all, Israel as a political community was conceived as an oath-bound confederation." (Weber, 2010, p. 75) He believed that the sacred covenant was a strategy the Israelites used to handle the issue of constant social instability between various sub-groups; Having a covenant with a common Yahweh could ensure a united and firm confederation led by purely charismatic judges.

One of the most important Old Testament theologians of the twentieth century, Walter Eichrodt, argued against Wellhausen's point that the covenant is an artificial concept and asserted that it is a significant motif of the Old Testament. Covenant is the centrepiece of Eichrodt's analysis of how Israel was related to its God; however, unlike Weber or Wellhausen, he considered covenant's theological significance more critical than details of its historical origin.

> *"The concept in which Israelite thought gave definitive expression to the binding of the people toGod and by means of which they established firmly from the start the particularity of their knowledge of him was the covenant…it can be demonstrated that the covenant-union between Yahweh and Israel is an original element in all sources…Indeed, this is still true even of those passages where the word berît has disappeared altogether… The safest starting-point for the critical examination of Israel's relationship with God is still the plain impression given by the OT itself that Moses, taking over a concept of long standing in secular life, based the worship of Yahweh on a covenant agreement; ...the use of the covenant concept in secular life argues that the religious BerîT too was always regarded as a bilateral relationship; for even though the burden is most unequally distributed between the two contracting parties, this makes no difference to the fact that the relationship is still essentially two-sided." (Eichrodt, 1960, pp. 36–7)*

This idea that the prophets introduced the covenantal framework (in the above quote ascribed to Moses) is further developed and elevated by another great scholar of Old Testament Theology of the last century. In his *God and His People (1986)*, Ernest Nicholson studied the theoretical and philological features of the covenant in Ancient Israel. His scholarship continued the argument that the covenantal idea was the work of the prophets and was the most significant distinguishing feature of the Israelites from other nations at that time. According to this line of argument, prophets "desacralised" Israel's connection with Yahweh by refusing to perceive the relationship as only natural and unbreakable. They started to emphasise mutual choice and the will of Yahweh and the Israelites to choose each other.

> "… they [sc. the prophets] gave a qualitatively new dimension not only to the perception of the nature of Yahweh as transcendent, but also to the concept of Israel as the 'people of Yahweh'. Theirs was a radically theocentric understanding of Israel's existence… But what came to the fore in their preaching and the desacralised understanding of Israel which it embodied initiated, at the hands of others, just such a rationalisation. And it was this that found expression in the notion that Israel's relationship with Yahweh was a covenant relationship." (Nicholson, 1986, p. 211)

Other scholars recognise the function of covenant not only to bid but to assure and communicate with people. Rapoport explains that a Covenant between Yahweh and the Prophets is a deliberate act that clarifies all the intentions and proofs. As he observes in Genesis, Hebrews used to form new moral relationships only with a covenant, and God is a covenant-making God who makes promises and gives assurances. He parallels the covenant given to Abraham as a response to his doubts and the one given to the Israelites as a response to their uncertainties about Yahweh's pledge to Moses (Rapoport, 1979, p. 131).

In that sense, this covenant is not a constitution in its modern understanding, but it does create a people by establishing a bond with God and a particular group/groups of the treaty. Notably, this covenant does not establish any type of political structure, which is a reason why the Old Testament provides diverse political systems of the Israelites' governance:

> "Israel went from a confederation of nomadic tribes under Moses to a government of settled tribes under Joshua; from the governance of settled tribes on a confederal basis under the Judges to a federal basis under Samuel and Saul to a federal monarchy under David. Subsequently, after the destruction of the first Commonwealth, Israel went from a

monarchy to what has been called a nomocracy, with no king, established by Ezra and Nehemiah and so on throughout Jewish history." (Elazar, 1980, p. 17)

Elezar's brief summary of Israel's political history demonstrates that the covenant did not impose a particular political structure or government as long as the core principles were maintained. I will not delve into the whole Biblical history and the evolution of covenantal theology, as the primary concern of the present paper is the Sinai Covenant made with Moses and the Israelites in Exodus. I consider the Mosaic Covenant a theo-political agreement. Thus, it is vital to situate Moses' leadership and community-building in the Covenantal framework.

The second half of the 20th century witnessed great interest not only in the comparative analysis of Biblical covenants, but also in their political teachings. Foundational works, *Studies in the Bible and Jewish Thought* (1985) by Moshe Greenberg; *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible" (1985) by* Jon Levenson; *Moses as Political Leader* (1984) Aaron Wildavsky's, *Exodus and Revelation* (1985) by Michael Walzer's have systematically studied and analysed Mosaic leadership and the political thought of the Bible. The authors accepted the Hebrew Bible as a political text that provides teachings and conclusions about leadership and political organisation, not a treatise, but within narrations. Wildavsky followed the Israelites' political journey from slavery to anarchy, from anarchy to equity, and finally from equity to hierarchy when leadership was institutionalised and Moses, as the leader, disappeared in the Book. Wildawsky concludes his book by discussing "Leadership as a Function of Regime" and concludes that Moses' leadership was functional.

The literature mentioned is only a sip of the ocean of Old Testament scholarship, which discusses covenant from different perspectives. However, it summarises major discussions in the field. According to these authors, in Torah, Moses' leadership is covenantal. Thus, the Israelites are the confederal covenant people created within the Mosaic covenantal framework. It also shows continuation and novelty within Ancient Near Eastern social, political, and religious developments. With the context of the covenant established in the Torah, we can now examine the reflections of the pre-Islamic Arabian and Mosaic covenants within Islamic tradition.

2.2 Covenants in Islamic tradition

2.2.1 Covenantal communities

The continuity of covenantal ideas and structures within the Ancient Near East and beyond is a historically and literally proven fact.[10] Pre-Islamic Arabs similarly had covenantal and oath-taking traditions. The earliest attestation is Herodote's note that "no nation regards the sanctity of a pledge (*pistis*) more seriously than the Arabs (*arabioi*)". South Arabian inscriptions describe the formation of religio-political communities under covenant from the beginning of the first millennium BCE. These sources depict the formation of political communities through covenants of "union" under the authority of deities. Marsham points out that these are covenant formulas that expressed alliances and allegiances in the Ancient Near East. (Marsham, 2009, p. 26)

Late Antique Arabia was also characterised by tribal alliances that sought to obtain individual security in the absence of the state. The pacts ensured consultative and more or less equal rights of smaller tribes and larger confederations and were contracted by the leading man. Pre-Islamic Arabian covenants or oath of alliances, *hilf,* were an instrument for tribes to cooperate. Standard tribal treaties from the 6th and 7th centuries preserved in later Arabic sources depict the standard structure of *hilf,* including opening formula, names of parties, the treaty stipulations, and invocation of God as a witness. Ancient Arab poetry also contains references to such covenants. Invocation of God or a deity as a guarantor for the agreement is a typical pattern not only in Arab but also in all Near Eastern covenants (p. 27).

The relationship between covenant and sacrifice was also a common practice among them. In Arabia, when a covenant was established between two groups that connected them through a shared duty related to blood feuds, it would involve a sacrificial ceremonial event where their blood would be mingled. Furthermore, Hoyland describes that Arabs also practised covenantal relationships with deities, which were similar to those of one parent and children:

> "In their early inscriptions, each of the various south Arabian peoples appears bound by
> allegiance to the cult of their patron deity, of whom they are designated 'the children', and
> by loyalty to their king, who was the lord of his people. Likewise, the Nabataeans came

---

[10] Weinfeld persuasively demonstrates that Greek and Roman semantics for covenantal relationship is similar to ANE, however, it is not relevant to this study. See M. Weinfeld. (1973). Covenant Terminology in the Ancient Near East and Its Influence on the West. Journal of the American Oriental Society, 93(2), 190–199.

together to worship Dushara and their affection for their monarch, described in numerous inscriptions as 'king of the Nabataeans, lover of his people'. Otherwise, attachment to a place could provide the basis for group cohesion." (Hoyland, 2002, p. 115)

This praxis parallels the Mesopotamian and Semitic socio-religious and treaty developments described in the previous chapter, further supporting the Semitic Civilisation Theory.

Stefen Esders also studied the Late Antique Promissory oath both in the West and East and concluded that monotheism was a prerequisite to engage in the Late Antique promissory oath. According to him, swearing an oath is a transformational experience: "The contract… meant that the person would 'become' something different in quality (or status) from the quality he possessed before." They enable individuals to enter new social relationships that otherwise could have posed a barrier to the new relationship formed, such as familial or ethnic ties". (Esders, 2012, p. 358) As a result, the political culture of such oath/promissory-based communities was characterised not by citizenship or legal status, but by personal dedication and loyalty to a leader (p. 369).

The described paradigm applies to Muhammad's movement in Medina. His Treaty can be considered a covenant between the contracting parties, which was transformational, as it created (at least intended to do so) the *umma*. Further, the structure of the *Hilf* and *Umma Covenant* is similar. The *umma* is an umbrella term that generally designates "people" and "community of the faithful" in the Treaty and the Qur'an. It is a meta identity, which includes all Muhammad's followers, Jews, and their allies with broad autonomy in their religious and customary laws. Notably, Umma identity did not replace tribal belonging but superseded it. Umma members were not citizens of Medina in its modern understanding of citizenship. Still, their membership was based on their commitment to the monotheistic ideas and their political loyalty to Muhammad.

2.2.2 Covenants in the Qur'an

The Qur'an contains numerous explicit and implicit references to covenantal relationships. It emphasises the critical importance of keeping covenants and pledges, exhaustively calls for fulfilling a given covenant, and provides means of expiating and punishing those who break it.

Those who break God's Pact after accepting His Covenant, and sever what God has commanded be joined, and work corruption upon the earth, it is they who are the losers (2:27); Fulfill the pact

27

of God when you have pledged it, and break not your oaths after solemnly affirming them, and having made God a Witness over you. Surely God knows whatsoever you do (16:91).

Truly those who pledge allegiance unto thee pledge allegiance only unto God. The Hand of God is over their hands. And whosoever reneges, reneges only to his detriment. And whosoever fulfills what He has pledged unto God, He will grant him a great reward (Q 48:10).

Notably, according to the context of this verse, the reward has two dimensions: earthly and eschatological. Another verse, Q (5:89), distinguishes between frivolous and earnest oaths and claims that God does not make people accountable for frivolous oaths but does for earnest ones. If someone breaks a solemn oath, they must perform an act of expiation: feeding ten poor people with food equivalent to their means, clothing them, or freeing a slave. If unable to do any of these, fasting for three days serves as atonement. The verse concludes with an exhortation to respect oaths and a reminder of God's guidance as a sign of gratitude.

As for the specific covenants, Qur'an 7:172, where God asks humanity to affirm His lordship, is traditionally regarded as the locus classicus for understanding the concept of covenant within Islamic tradition.

"And when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam, from their loins, their progeny and made them bear witness concerning themselves, "Am I not your Lord?" they said, "Yea, we bear witness"—lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection, "Truly of this we were heedless."

Regardless of sectarian division (except Mutazilites), Sunni, Shia, and Sufi exegetics considered the Covenantal Verse between God and humanity and extensively interpreted it throughout the Classic and Medieval periods.

Western scholars also studied Quranic covenants fragmentally. John Wansbrough in Quranic Studies briefly analysed covenant as one of the four themes (retribution, sign, exile, covenant), illustrating Quranic theodicy (justification of God's justice). He argued that the covenant in Quranic imagery is related to the salvation history of the past nations (*umami khalifa*). According to him, the Quran presents its moral and theological lessons by stating that communities or nations honouring their covenant with God were saved, while transgressors were punished. Qur'an covenantal history represents chronological extension, not historical development. He further observed a conceptual transformation from profane legal terminology to divine imagery by introducing divine sanction in Islamic history. The designations for covenants in the Qur'an concluded that *ahd* and *mithaq* can be synonymous and refer to divine (unilateral and bilateral) and

human (secular) covenants, like Biblical *Berit.* He sees Qur'an's depiction of the Mosaic covenant to "exhibit haggadic accretion". After brief philological and textual analysis of Quranic covenantal terms, Wansbrough suggests that separate traditions of unilateral and bilateral covenants were merged in the Quranic production of the concept of submission, explicit in the term *islam*. He concluded Quranic and Islamic covenant terminology "support the derivation of aslama from salam proposed by Lidzbarski, namely 'to enter into a state of peace', or 'perhaps 'of salvation', exhibiting the equivalence berit: shalom." (Wansbrough, 1977, pp. 8-11)

Toshihiko Izutsu, in his *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Quran*, thoroughly investigated the Islamization of old Arab virtues from Jahiliyah, among which are loyalty and faithfulness to a covenant (*wafa*). *Wafa*, related to blood fellowship, was a consciousness and covenant connection regulating tribal and inter tribal affairs. According to him, Islam's adoption of nomadic *wafa* affected new monotheistic faith in two directions: within the realm of everyday social interactions among the believers and in the religious context regarding the connection between God and humans. "The Prophet transcends all the crude ideas of primitive nomadic religion and betaking himself to the characteristically Semitic conception of Covenant, as formal expression of the religious bond between God and men… this conception of religion is most typically exemplified by the Old Testament." (Izutsu, 2002, p. 88) Izutsu further argues that all moral values developed in Islam are directly or indirectly related to the concept of the covenant. However, his primarily philological analysis does not extend to examining this issue in light of the Biblical or pre-Islamic Arabian covenants.

Some scholars, argue that Quranic covenants are presented scattered and fragmentary manner and does not allow construction of coherent lineal covenantal narrative: "Elements often connected to the idea of a covenant, especially if such are understood within the context of treaty agreements are to be found in the Qur'anic presentation of God, but one would not want to push the connection too far since such aspects do not form into one cohesive picture of a treaty-covenant but are rather scattered." (Rippin, 2006, p. 230)

On the other hand, some new studies provided more detailed treatment of covenant in the Qur'an in terms of "inclusivism" (Firestone) and "pluralism" (Lumbard). Firestone argued that the Qur'an is polemical in its discussion of the Jewish covenant; nevertheless, "the Qur'an does not consider prior covenants to have been annulled or abrogated." (Firestone 2011, p. 18) This new approach is reflected in Joseph Lumbard's *Covenant and Covenants in Qur'an.* The author argues that the

covenant between God and humans is the prevailing theme of the Qur'an, "which remains severely understudied" (Lumbard, 2015, p. 1). Based on classical Islamic exegesis (mostly Sunni) he identifies "covenantal pluralism" in Qur'an: one primordial, universal covenant with all human beings to which human nature itself bears witness; second particular covenants between God and prophets so the letters call people for the observance of the first covenant and third, specific covenants of human beings on this earth. In this article, he analyses Q 7:172, which, according to Muslim exegetists and Lumbard, is a pre-temporal covenant. God affirms to be the creator of all humankind and all creation, and human beings in their response affirm their indebtedness to the witness. This covenant is a part of human nature and memory, and the mission of later prophetic covenants is to reawaken awareness and remind humankind to observe the first covenant (8-9). Covenant with the Prophets attests that their function is to remind and reaffirm previous covenants:

And [remember] when God made the covenant of the prophets: "By that which I have given you of a Book and Wisdom, should a messenger then come to you confirming that which is with you, you shall surely believe in him and you shall help him." He said, "Do you agree and take on My burden on these conditions?" They said, "We agree." He said, "Bear witness, for I am with you among those who bear witness." (Q 3:81)

And [remember] when We made with the prophets their covenant, and with thee, and with Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus the son of Mary; We made with them a solemn covenant, that the truthful may be questioned concerning their truthfulness (Q 33:7-8).

Lumbard further argues that accepting "covenantal pluralism" is crucial for Islamic theology. Instead of considering the series of covenants in human history as ones that replace or abrogate each other, we can interpret each covenant as testifying to the truth of the original covenant. Furthermore, every individual is born with a natural disposition (*fitra*) that enables them to recognise and potentially affirm that original covenant within themselves (p. 15).

Other scholars, such as Gerhard Böwering and Wadad Al-Qadi, argued that rereading the covenantal verse has enormous potential for understanding the Qur'anic vision of human salvation history. In *the Encyclopedia of Islam,* the former states that in that primordial covenant, "God's servants professed monotheism as humanities pledge in response to God's revelation in the event of a primordial covenant concluded at the dawn of creation." (Böwering, 2012, p. 477) Al-Qadi similarly argued that Q 7:172 adds a stage to three-stage human existence, one that is situated

between humans' first, at celestial existence, and their second, earthly lives. At this stage, God broadened the scope of parties, including the whole of humanity in the covenant with God (the first covenant was only with Adam). Additionally, he made a covenant "interactive", letting all men affirm their obedience with their own words, securing the fulfilment of the covenant by giving men agency (Al-Qadi, 2003, p. 336).

In his recent reconsideration of Qur'anic covenants, Andrew O'Connor argued that the Qur'an's covenant theology is not just about monotheism but is complex and multifaceted. He identified three elements of the Qur'an's covenant theology: its prophetological connotations; its association with legal and ethical injunctions; and eschatological implications. He also argued that the Qur'an uses the covenant motif for multiple purposes. One is "to legitimise the mission of its Messenger and his new revelation in various ways. The text negotiated its place in covenantal history by placing its Prophet in the terms of the covenant, … obedience to the covenant, and therefore obedience to God, implies obedience to the Prophet." (O'Connor, 2019, p. 12) He further criticised previous scholars for overemphasising on Q 7:172 as Quran's representation of covenant and contended that "in terms of quantitative allusions, the Mosaic Covenant - the covenants established between God, Moses and Israelites at Sinai - is the most central and paradigmatic covenant for the Qur'an." (p. 19)

A comprehensive and in-depth study of the Qur'anic covenant and its full theological and political implications remains for further exploration. However, within the scope of this research, it suffices to assert that the Qur'an has a strong notion of covenant-making and the Mosaic covenant holds a particularly central and foundational role in shaping community bonds and leadership paradigms. Furthermore, the mentioned literature demonstrates that pre-Islamic Arabic covenantal traditions were not far from those of their ANE counterparts.

2.2.3 The Mosaic Covenant in Qur'an

One essential obstacle to seeing coherency in Quranic covenantal narrative is a common assumption among the Muslim and non-muslim, medieval or modern scholars that Qur'an is a supersessionist text which in its polemics obsoletes earlier monotheistic scriptures and abrogates Old and New covenants and their respective religious traditions (Q 2:62). However, Qur'an reaffirms God's covenants with Biblical Patriarchs and also with Christians (Q 5:14), and states that, nevertheless, previous communities (mainly Jews, Q 2:83) broke their covenants with God;

unlike the New Testament, it does not establish a New Covenant. The Qur'an claims that it does not bring anything new that was not carried by the previous prophets (Q 41:43) and that its message is in the scripture of Abraham and Moses (Q 88:18-19). By affirming previous covenants, the Qur'an legitimises its Arab, non-Jewish prophet within the Abrahamic framework.

The Mosaic covenant, which is a primary focus of this research, did not hold a central place in Muslim exegesis, while the Quran at several places refers to it and the Decalogue as part of God's covenantal act with the Israelites:

And when We made a covenant with you, and raised the Mount over you, "Take hold of what We have given you with strength, and remember what is in it, that happy you may be reverent. (Q 2:63).

O Children of Israel! Remember My Blessing which I bestowed upon you, and fulfill My covenant, and I shall fulfill your covenant, and be in awe of Me (Q 2:40). This verse emphasises the reciprocal and bilateral relationship promulgated by the covenant, which is considered a blessing instead of a punishment.

The most meticulous and serious analysis of the Sinai Covenant in the Qur'an was recently published by Vahid Mehr. He sees the Mosaic covenant as an obligation to the Israelites, but not in a unilateral sense like the previously mentioned scholars. By quoting Rabbinic belief about covenant[11], he argues that the Sinai covenant is eternally binding, and requires acceptance of the second party, aka every generation of Jewish people. Mehr criticised Western scholars' approach to studying the Qur'an as a supersessionist text with polemical objectives. He painstakingly analyses the Qur'an's longest and, for this theme, most important, the second surah, with a non-supersessionist theological framework in light of a wide range of Rabbinic literature. He concluded that this surah "contains a series of arguments with a Jewish audience to convince them of the legitimacy of this non-Jewish prophet and seems to expect the Jewish audience to recognise this new prophet's validity and legitimacy." (Mehr, 2023, p. 54) The author highlights that the Qur'an not only affirms that God chose the Children of Israel but also uses this premise to validate the Prophet and his community in the eyes of its Jewish audience. However, this divine election neither implies exclusivism nor precludes punishment for transgressions. The Qur'an, similar to

---

[11] "The Jewish people can claim that they were coerced into accepting the Torah, and it is therefore not binding. Rava said: even so, they again accepted it willingly in the time of Ahasuerus" - Shabbat 88a, Mehr, p. 26.

rabbinic Judaism, affirms that breaking God's covenant by the elected people was met with punishments. However, this did not result in the annulment of the Jewish covenant (p. 27). Vaher Mehr's well-argued view that the Qur'an is not a supersessionist text and does not annul the Sinai Covenant carries critical implications for my argument. This perspective suggests that Muhammad did not dismiss the Mosaic Covenant as obsolete but recognised it as a valid framework for God's relationship with humanity.

This chapter's analysis demonstrates the centrality of covenant in Biblical and Qur'anic traditions. In both cases, the covenant is a mechanism that transformed tribal alliances into a unified religious-political community. It also reveals how covenantal binding legitimises leadership and the organisation of community and communal identity. This chapter paves the way for a separate and comparative analysis of Moses' and Muhammad's leadership.

Chapter 3 Mosaic Leadership

3.1 Context of Exodus

According to Biblical accounts, the social and political context of the Israelites in Egypt was challenging. Even though the Hebrews were welcomed in Egypt during the time of Joseph, several generations later, his remembrance was erased among the Pharaohs. The Hebrews are presented as a rapidly growing population lacking their own state and governance. They were a minority in political power; nevertheless, their demographic strength evoked deep fear and anxiety among Egyptian rulers that they might eventually impose military and political threats (Exo 1:9-10). To prevent possible destabilisation, Pharaoh and his subjects systematically oppressed the Hebrews with various forced labour in the field and construction works, including digging clay and making bricks (Exo 1:11-14). However, according to the text, the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread out, which caused more drastic measures by Pharaoh, who ordered the murder of all newborn male Hebrews by midwives.

Other characteristics of the Hebrews in Egypt were that they were a tribal community and elders among the tribes had authority and hierarchy over the rest (Exo 3:16 & 4:29). As it will be shown later, this informal elders union plays a vital role in communitie's life and Moses needs to gain their trust and legitimacy before leading a larger group and presenting them in front of Pharaoh. Additionally, the Hebrews in Egypt, as stated in the text, seem to be semi-pastoral people as they owned flocks and sacrificed lambs. Thus, the Hebrews were diverse groups involved in nomadic, agricultural, and construction lifestyles.

Notably, the text does not mention that the Hebrews ever initiated any rebellion against their economic and social subjugation or sought divine support against Pharaoh's authority. In fact, according to the narrative, it is God who initiates their liberation from slavery as a fulfilment of his previous promise. In Exo 2:24, the narrator tells that *God heard their groaning, God remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.* Later on, Yahweh himself tells Moses that he listened to the outcry of Hebrews and remembered his covenant to grant patriarchs land of Canaan and now as he sees and hears sufferings of Hebrews wishes to frees them out of Egypt, chooses them as his people and bring them to the country promised to previous patriarchs (Exo 4:4-8). According to this passage, the original covenant meant God's promise of a land, which was fulfilled. Exodus would be a new fulfilment of the reestablished covenant between Yahweh and the

Hebrews. This covenantal relationship connects Exodus with Genesis theologically and thematically.

3.2 The Exodus

There are no extra-biblical accounts or evidence about Moses's life and career. The only source Torah tells us that Moses lived one hundred and twenty years (Deut. 34:7), which are divided into three parts: his life in Egypt at Pharaoh's court, his shepherd's life in Midian, and his leadership to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Text briefly tells us a story of his born in Levite, priestly family, he survived Pharaoh's order to massacre Jewish newborn boys with the help of the god-fearing Hebrew midwives who did not kill him, hidden by his mother for three months, his mother who put him in the river Nile with basket, Pharaoh's daughter who found and adopted him and his sister who suggested Moses mother to nurse baby (Exo 2:2-10).

There are not many details about his personal life and characteristics, but text shows that he was pretty concerned with human suffering and injustice, demonstrated in three episodes when he provided aid for defenseless: his killing of an abuser Egyptian in defense of a Hebrew, his involvement in the fight between Hebrew slaves, and his help of sisters bullied by shepherds in Median (Exo 2:11-17). The first episode also demonstrates that Moses, regardless of Egyptian upbringing, was aware of his Hebrew origin and the importance of the ethnic bond: *What do you mean by hitting your kinsman?* - asks him to fight Hebrew, who had a legitimate question about Moses' involvement: *And who appointed you, to be prince over us and judge? (Exo 2:13)*. At this point, Moses had no authority to rule over the Hebrews; obtaining such a position would take him several decades. One personal trait we certainly know from the text is Moses's speech impediment (Exo 4:10), for which his brother Aaron assisted him as a speaker during his leadership career.

Moses' conversation with Yahweh in the burning bush is the beginning of his complex leadership career filled with challenges and obstacles. Moses' socio-political project envisaged two sequential processes: liberation and community formation. First, had to liberate people from long-lasting slavery in Egypt, find a stable and just society in the wilderness, and conquer the Promised Land of Canaan. For these objectives, Moses ought to speak and persuade the Hebrew Elders that Yahweh, who has spoken to him, and the God of their Patriarchs were the same. Moses, with the help of Aaron, successfully conveyed this message to the Elders and got their support to address the Pharaoh together (Exo 4:29-31). Second, he had to persuade and firmly confront the external

enemy; instead of letting the Israelites leave Egypt to perform sacrifice and worship, Pharaoh increased their workload to wear them down. This deepened the Israelites' dissatisfaction, inner doubts, and conflict with Moses, which would not have been solved without God's involvement with a series of plagues, including the slaughter of the firstborn Egyptian son, which seems to be retaliation. Yahweh tells Moses to tell Pharaoh, that *"This is what Yahweh says: Israel is my first-born son. I told you: Let my son go and worship me; but since you refuse to let him go, well then! I shall put your first-born son to death." (Exo 4:22-23).*

The miseries Egyptians experienced due to plagues demonstrated that now the Hebrews were not only people to suffer, but their oppressors were subject to it as well, which should have encouraged them to support Moses actively. Moses' negotiation and victory over Pharaoh reinforced his leadership credibility. Nevertheless, in the storyline of Egypt, the Hebrews do not actively participate in their liberation but passively observe and follow events initiated by Yahweh and executed by Moses and Aaron.

Eventually, the Hebrews, once slaves, *left Egypt fully armed* (Exo 13:18) like winners with their chief leader. Exodus becomes their paradigm of salvation, communal and collective liberation from national suffering and oppression by foreign rule. However, Exodus is not the end of the story, but the beginning of creating a new nation. Neither the dramatic scene of victory over the Egyptians guarantees unity within the community; wandering in the wilderness would test Moses' leadership and give rise to new challenges with his kinsmen. First, obstacles started again with the external enemy when Pharaoh's troops chased them. Terrified Israelites cried out to Moses that they preferred serving Egyptians, where they had a secure life, to dying in the desert (Exo 14:11-12). They had the same dissatisfaction when experiencing water and food shortages in the desert, complaining that at least they and their children would not have died of hunger and thirst in Egypt. This crisis and distress among the community confused Moses, who only encouraged people and reminded them to have firm faith in Yahweh but still would not make individual decisions without appealing to Yahweh for help: *"How am I to deal with this people? Any moment now they will stone me!"* (Exo 17:4). God responded to the crises with miraculous defeat of Egyptians and appearance of quail, manna and water in the desert.

Moses' complicated and conflictual relationship during Exodus is sometimes seen as a failure of his leadership. "…Moses: his life consists of one failure after another, through which runs the thread of his success. Moses brought the people out of Egypt, but each stage of this leadership is a

failure. Whenever he comes to deal with this people he is defeated by them.*"* (Buber, 1948, 125) During the challenging episodes and events until the Sinai Covenant, Moses's source of justification and legitimisation was miracles. Miracles played an essential role in persuading people that Yahweh had supported his leadership. However, miracles did not have long-standing implications for the Hebrews since they only witnessed them without having any commitment or obligation; therefore, Moses' task was to initiate something mutual and more effective to bind them with each other, and Yahweh and the Sinai Covenant are precisely such a solution.

3.3. The Sinai covenant

The heart of Exodus is the Sinai covenant, which legitimises Israel's relationship with God. As narrated in Exo 19-24, three months after leaving Egypt, the Hebrews reached Mt. Sinai, where theophany and the self-revelation of God happened again on a larger scale. Now Yahweh not only revealed himself to Moses but also in front of the rest of the purified Hebrews. This theophany is also a covenant-making event, where God, as a king, confirms that he has chosen the Hebrews as his holy people and established his kingdom over them:

"You have seen for yourselves what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you away on eagle's wings and brought you to me. So now, if you are really prepared to obey me and keep my covenant, you, out of all peoples, shall be my personal possession, for the whole world is mine. For me, you shall be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." Those are the words you are to say to the Israelites.' (Exo 19:4 -6)

Moses came down from the mountain and delivered Yahweh's message to the Hebrews and conveyed their confirmation of taking covenant *"whatever Yahweh has said, we will do"* back to Yahweh (Exo 19:8). This dialogue between the parties illustrates that the covenant is not a mere act of revelation or unilateral oath given by God, but a mutual and reciprocal theo-political act of agreement. Furthermore, the Decalogue (Ten Commandments, Exo 20:1-17) as Yahweh's Sinai Covenant promulgated divine and civil prescriptive law without specified punishments and particular social situations. However, the Book of the Covenant (Exo 20:23-23:19) is conditional. God gives laws and commandments which the Israelites have to fulfil, and if they refuse to follow those instructions, God will not protect and bless Israel. So God took the obligation to guide and protect the Israelites, as long as they obeyed his will and law. Finally, text depicts the covenant ratification ceremony, the people's oath, and the covenant document's writing down (Exo 24:3-7).

According to McCarthy, Exodus 19-24 incorporates aspects of the covenant structure, including a historical prologue, stipulations, and blessings. The historical prologue is evident in 19:3 and following, while the divine will is articulated in 20-23:19, corresponding to the stipulations. Moreover, the promise of blessings found in 23:20 and onward partially aligns with the curse-blessing section of the covenant format (McCarthy, 1978, p. 245). He also highlights Moses' special role as a mediator. At the same time, such a mediator figure in extra-Israelite covenant-making stands outside, while Moses is a participant and mediates the covenant between God and the people (p. 294).

To conclude, the Siani Covenant became the basis of social ethics, since only the first four commandments of the Decalogue established a proper relationship between individuals and Yahweh. In contrast, the rest of the commandments introduced proper ethical conduct between the individuals. Those commandments, as well as later detailed Book of Law, provide twofold consequences, first, they create the collective identity of Israelites as Yahweh's chosen religious people, and secondly, they establish ethical norms of their coexistence. Thus, Moses mediates the Sinai covenant to make the Israelites a theocratic nation, and the Decalogue served as both a religious and legal foundation for the community.

3.4. Mosaic Leadership

Mosaic leadership has peculiarities. Firstly, it does not imply apparent authority, distinct title, or power; power always lies with God in the Torah and the Qur'an. The Torah text does not call or identify him as a priest, king, or judge but as a *servant of Yahweh*, or *mediator of the covenant*. Exodus depicts the evolution and transformation of Mosaic leadership from reluctant to liberator and community builder. In a burning bush conversation with Yahweh, Moses seems unsure, reserved, and overwhelmed by the leadership mission Yahweh imposed upon him. However, he agrees to take on a task after Yahweh disclosed his name "I am who he is" and promised him to support and guide along the way (Exo 3:12, 14). In the initial leadership phase, Moses takes no initiative; God is an employer, supervisor, and assistant in his leadership activities. Moses' passivity during the first part of his leadership was also observed by Wildawsky, who noted that "between the burning bush and Mount Sinai, Moses does not undertake a single independent, act… and this passivity mirrors of his people" (Wildawsky, 1985, p. 81), here Moses understood his leadership role to follow and fulfill the responsibilities and tasks given by God.

Notwithstanding, the Golden Calf episode is a transformative experience for both Moses' leadership and his people's obedience. This first and biggest crisis since leaving Egypt demonstrated many aspects of Moses and Aaron's leadership. Interestingly, at the beginning of this episode, it seems that Mosaic leadership (not prophecy) was replaceable. Aaron was mandated to lead the community when Moses left for Mt. Sinai to receive the tablets. However, Aaron's leadership only represents Moses. He does not lead the community but reacts to their demands. After Moses' absence was prolonged, people requested Aaron to make them a tangible, visible god, meaning that without Moses' spiritual guidance, people lacked their own connection with god. Without any resistance or questioning, Aaron started following the rebellion's demands. He cooperated with the Hebrews, melted all the golden rings they brought to him, made the calf statue, built an altar, announced a sacrificial offering and feast to Yahweh's honour. Aaron was reluctant and unstable to stay firm under pressure and assert his authority and leadership.

On the other hand, Moses's test of leadership was more difficult than Aaron's. When Yahweh informs Moses about people's corrupted actions and threatens him with disaster to inflict on the Hebrews, Moses stands up as a caring leader of his people. He tries to placate Yahweh, asks him to give up on his burning wrath, and reminds him of his covenant given to previous patriarchs to make their descendants numerous (Exo 32:11-13). This act of advocacy for his people and agency to change Yahweh's decision makes him an outstanding leader; however, after descending to the camp, he shows a more complex nature. First, upon seeing the calf and dancing people, he angrily smashes tablets, on which was God's writing. This signifies a broken covenant between his people and Yahweh, as people were not fully accountable.

Then, Moses first investigated what happened and, after hearing an explanation from Aaron, saw people out of hand, *then stood at the gate out of the camp and shouted, 'Who is for Yahweh? To me!* Yahweh and Moses are on the same side; obedience to Moses means obedience to Yahweh's will. This is a key episode, where Moses gives people the choice to decide for themselves whether to hold them accountable and responsible for their actions. Furthermore, Moses demonstrated that he could sacrifice both the individual lives of Israelites and his position with Yahweh to maintain communal integrity. Namely, he decisively commended Levites to punish perpetrators and idolaters; this bloodshed was consecration to Yahweh for their sin. Great punishment came with great forgiveness, and Moses again went to Yahweh to ask for expiation and redemption for his people, offering to remove his name from God's book to substitute for their sin. Again, Moses

plays a central mediating role in eliminating alienation between Yahweh and the Israelites, reestablishing a covenant with Yahweh to receive his guidance to the promised land. With perseverance, Moses achieved the renewal of the Covenant and received new tablets.

Yet, this crisis and disruptions did not end Moses' challenges with his community. The next book of Torah, Numbers, describes the Israelites' forty-year journey into the wilderness full of constant complaints and rebellions against Moses and God. In Numbers chapter 11, the Israelites were weeping about the diverse food they used to eat in Egypt freely, and complaining about their dependence on manna in the desert. Here, both Yahweh and Moses are overwhelmed and furious at such disgrace. Moses' frustrated address to Yahweh demonstrates the heaviness of Mosaic leadership, his awareness that the divine mission of building a nation and being their foster-father is larger than his ability:

"Why do you treat your servant so badly? In what respect have I failed to win your favour, for you to lay the burden of all these people on me? Was it I who conceived all these people, was I their father, for you to say to me, "Carry them in your arms, like a foster-father carrying an unweaned child, to the country which I swore to give their fathers"? Where am I to find meat to give all these people, pestering me with their tears and saying, "Give us meat to eat"? I cannot carry all these people on my own; the weight is too much for me. If this is how you mean to treat me, please kill me outright! If only I could win your favour and be spared the sight of my misery!"(Num 11:11-15)

Yahweh understood Moses' overwhelmingness and decided to delegate the burden of leadership to other Israelites. He asked Moses to collect seventy elders and scribes, bring them to the Tent of Meeting, and let them stand beside him. *Then they will bear the burden of the people with you, and you will no longer have to bear it on your own. (Num 11:17).* In this episode, like Jetro's suggestions, Mosaic leadership is delegated to the community for accountability and responsibility. Nevertheless, the challenges of Mosaic leadership were not resolved with a delegation of power. When they reached the Promised Land, Moses sent out people to reconnoitre it, and they received adverse reports. The frightened Israelites refused to raid the Land. They started weeping and decided to return to Egypt, as slavery in their view would be better than dying out in battle with the giant inhabitants of the Promised Land. After seeing the Israelites' lack of faith in God's promises, God becomes furious and wishes to exterminate and replace them with a new, greater nation, but Moses, like in the Golden calf episode, gets involved on behalf of the people and manages to appease Yahweh (Num 14:1-18). As a community leader, Mose mediates between

divine promise and his community; this time, God introduces consequences for them. He swears that no adults who witnessed the Exodus, except Joshua and Caleb, who did not join the rebellion, will enter the Promised Land. The fulfilment of such generational punishment required the Israelites to wander in the desert until the adult generation passed away, and a new one who did not experience Egyptian slavery and rebellions against Moses would enter the Land and form a new nation.

Moses' leadership and authority were tested again shortly after. Numbers 16 tells a story of the rebellion of Korah, a Levite, with two hundred and fifty Israelites, who were the community leaders, with a high reputation and prominent roles. Their concern was the authority of Moses and Aaron who were taking too much on themselves and monopolising leadership: *"You take too much on yourselves! The whole community, all its members, are consecrated, and Yahweh lives among them. Why set yourselves higher than Yahweh's community?" (Num 16:3).* This is one of the most critical moments during the whole Torah when Moses as a leader is challenged and unity of community is disrupted. Their complaints addressed not only authority issues in the community but also conditions of life in the desert and the unfulfillment of entering the Promised Land. Besides punishing revolts, the most important outcome of this rebellion was reinforcing Moses' authority and hierarchical structure; However, there was a remarkable compromise within the division of authority, mainly dividing priestly authority given to Aaron and his descendants from Mosaic leadership.

Another notable characteristic of Moses' leadership is his exclusivism. Moses draws firm group boundaries between the Israelites and others to ensure his theological and political project. One moment should be noted that according to the Torah, during Exodus, *"a mixed crowd of people went with them, and flocks and herds, quantities of livestock"* (Exo 12:38). However, this multitude of people, non-Hebrews, were not part of the new covenantal community. Moses had clear ethnic boundaries for his nation. Additionally, his theological project was strictly monotheist, so he prevented the Israelites from attempts at idolatry. The first commandment of the Decalogue is that the Israelites should not have had any other god except for Yahweh, as he is a jealous God. Second, specific laws such as observance of Shabbat and ethical conduct aim to differentiate Israelites, God's chosen nation, from others.

Furthermore, Israelites are not supposed to have any alliance with others. Moses is warned not to make a pact with the country's inhabitants he was about to enter, or they would share with his

community. Additionally, he had to tear down their altars, smash their cultic stones, and cut down their sacred poles (Exo 34:12-13). The profound anxiety of Israelites possibly partaking in their neighbour's ritual worship, sacrifice, or intercultural marriages requires firm group boundaries to differentiate Israelites from the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Exo 34:15-16). This paragraph demonstrates that the Israelites were distinct ethnic groups and not originally from the land; additionally, some religious objects (statues) and cultic rituals were unknown to them.

Mark, then, what I command you today. I am going to drive out the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites before you. Take care you make no pact with the inhabitants of the country which you are about to enter, or they will prove a snare in your community. You will tear down their altars, smash their cultic stones, and cut down their sacred poles, for you will worship no other god, since Yahweh's name is the Jealous One; he is a jealous God. Make no pact with the inhabitants of the country or, when they prostitute themselves to their own gods and sacrifice to them, they will invite you and you will partake of their sacrifice, and then you will choose wives for your sons from among their daughters, and their daughters, prostituting themselves to their own gods, will induce your sons to prostitute themselves to their gods. 'You will not cast metal gods for yourself' (Exo 34:11-17).

Another significant aspect of Mosaic leadership, as depicted in the Torah, is his careful selection of a successor. Joshua, son of Nun, who had served as Moses' assistant since his youth, is portrayed as a trustworthy and capable leader throughout the Exodus narrative. In Exodus 17:8-16, Moses entrusts Joshua with leading the Israelites in battle against Amalek, a task he accomplishes. Joshua was one of the spies sent to scout the Promised Land, demonstrating unwavering faith and readiness to lead the people into battle despite the challenges (Num 14:6-9). Moses, deeply concerned about the community's future leadership, expressed his fear that the Israelites might become "like sheep without a shepherd" after his departure (Num 27:18). In response to this concern, Yahweh commanded Moses to appoint Joshua as his successor. To ensure a smooth leadership transition, Moses brought Joshua before the priest Eleazar and the entire congregation, publicly commissioning him as the future leader. This act legitimised Joshua's authority and reinforced communal trust in the continuity of divine guidance through his leadership (Num 27:22-23).

To sum up, Mosaic Leadership is not a title but a function to liberate people and build a new nation bonded with a law. His leadership is covenantal, and covenant is a foundation of his theo-political community. Covenant promulgated in the Decalogue is a law, an ethical norm that regulates relationships at horizontal and vertical levels among fellow members and authorities. Moses was transformed within his leadership career; From being a reluctant and passive leader to an authoritative and just leader. Moses' leadership faced significant preparatory challenges from Pharaoh, disobedience, and constant rebellions from his people, but he managed to mediate between the people and God. He punished perpetrators, restored justice and respect to agreements; He obtained agency to establish and reestablish covenants and delegate his power and authority to community members. Moses started his leadership in Egypt as a charismatic leader, but later transformed his power into an institutionalised and decentralised one. Moses is fully human and has human limitations, making human mistakes, which are also reflected in his leadership.

As for the political organisation, Exodus 18:13-27 points out that one of Moses's roles during the wilderness was administering justice for the people. From morning to evening, people would go to Moses "to consult God." Moses would "give a ruling between the one and the other and make God's statutes and laws known to them." According to this passage, Moses acted as a judge, arbiter, and law deliverer. A key moment in the Exodus is the introduction of social structures such as councils. After seeing Moses perform several roles, Moses' father-in-law, a nomadic priest, suggested that what he was doing was wrong. Jethro was concerned that Moses would tire himself and the people this way, since the task was too heavy for one person to fulfil. Jethro firmly advised Moses to appoint credible and pious people as permanent judges, heads of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Moses would remain the sole representative of the people with God, but his administrative and judicial power would be shared and delegated to the community. This is a key moment for community formation for several reasons.

To begin with, Moses' leadership is depicted as an interpretation of the law. Moses is a community leader because he interprets the law and sets norms of coexistence for the community. Second, the Istarelites demonstrate that they are trustworthy and capable of cooperation and self-organisation. Such a body widened the interpretative community and shared responsibility and decision-making among the tribes. Last but not least in its importance, this establishment was not divine as it was not initiated by Yahweh and antedated the Sinai Covenant. The text does not specify, but this

division probably meant organising the twelve tribes. Hence, the ideal social-political organisation of the Israelites seems to be a tribal confederacy.

This chapter shows Moses' leadership in the Exodus and the challenges of liberation and community formation of the Hebrews. The Sinai Covenant emerged as a mechanism to address these challenges and to establish a cohesive community bound by divine law. The Sinai Covenant legitimised Moses' leadership and authority and gave a theological and socio-political framework for organising the Hebrews into a new society. This experience of leadership and covenant provides a point of comparison with Muhammad's leadership and covenants after the Hijra.

Chapter 4 Muhammadan leadership

4.1 The context of Hijra

Traditional Islamic accounts describe the pre-Islamic period as Jahiliyya, or "ignorance," of monotheism. This era is characterised by statelessness and tribal strife, with a predominance of polytheistic beliefs. The Arabs worshipped various idols, and the Ka'bah in Mecca became a significant pilgrimage site, attracting many who performed rituals there. Trade, commerce, and nomadic pastoralism were the main economic activities. Additionally, the tradition affirms the presence of Jewish tribes in the oases and Christian monks in the desert.

Historical-archaeological imagery of pre-Islamic Arabia mainly attests to this narrative. However, it demonstrates that the situation was more complex and nuanced than Islamic sources depict. Agriculture and pastoralism were indeed primary sources of the basic livelihood of Arabs. Three types of pastoralism were found depending on the geography of the peninsula. Agropastoralism - growing field crops and raising sheep and goats, transhumance - the seasonal movement, and nomadic pastoralism - horizontal movement towards availability of water and pasture (Holylend, 2002, p. 89); the Main economic activity that brought fortune and fame to Arabs was trade and commerce of aromatics, namely frankincense and myrrh. As for the social stratification, the author states that pastoralists practised minimal division of labour; thus, significant social distinction was between full members of the tribe and affiliated members/dependent, allies, or war-slaves.

On the other hand, agriculture or trade tribes were more hierarchical and had proper labour division. (pp. 118-120) There was no centralised sovereignty or governance among pastoralists, and the practice of "tribal councils" had legal functions, heard cases publicly, decided according to custom (*sunna*), and executed retaliation or blood-money compensation. However, wealthier sedentary polities of Arabia, such as the Nabateans in the north, had a "popular assembly", and the South Arabian Kingdom had a more elaborate institutional framework of a supreme court (pp. 121- 125).

As for the religious context, up until the 4th century, Arabia was a polytheist. Arabs had deities, an idea of sacred places, sacred offices, and sacred times (months). Bloodshed was prohibited at sacred *haram* months and places, which also served as places for gatherings, pilgrimages, and marketplaces. Many of the Arabian deities, such as Allah, Allat, al-Uzza, and Manat, who had priests or guardians, were invoked, thanked, and petitioned in the inscriptions. In South Arabia,

patron deities played a vital socio-political role in people's cohesion and communal entity. People were collectively called "children", and their respective patron was the "lord" of the shrine. Cult of deity functioned "as a sort of social glue". The north Nabatean kingdom also had loyalty to their deities and foreign cults brought by international merchants and different neighbouring people. East and northeast Arabia also had several deities and patrons of polities; during the Greco-Roman period, the pantheon of divinities was expanded with foreign cults and titular deities.

For monotheism, the northwest of the Arabian Peninsula (north of Hijaz) had an ancient Jewish community. South Arabia also had a greater prominence of Jews from the mid-fourth century onward. At the end of the fourth century, Himyarite King Abikarib As'ad converted to Judaism and called his subjects to do so; From this period onward, mention of traditional deities completely ceased and was replaced by a unique God, mentioned as "the Merciful" (Rahman) and Jewish expressions like concluding "peace"[12]. Christianity also appeared in the Arabian Peninsula from the fourth to the sixth century. It was predominantly present in Sasanian realms, coastline populations, and northern Arabia. As for the south, from the fifth century, it was promoted by the Byzantine Empire via Ethiopia and violently clashed with Judaism. Missionaries and monastery communities mainly promoted conversion. Sectarian division of Christian churches was also presented in the Peninsula (pp. 139-149).

As for the political power, in the sixth century Arabia had three major royal powers: "the Jafnid and Narid clients of Rome and Iran, respectively, led the federations of Ghassan and Lakhm in the north of the Peninsula; in the south, the once autonomous kingdom of Himyar was ruled first by vassals of the Ethiopian king of Aksum, and then, after c. 570–5, by rulers supported by Sasanian Iran" (p. 32). All of the mentioned political powers tried to impose their authority on Arabian nomad tribes by various ideological (patronage), religious (conversion), and financial (imposing tax on the marketplace) means. The sources maintained a twofold relationship between Arabian nomad tribes and royal leaders. On the one hand, they celebrated independence and liberation from royal economic obligations; at the same time, some of the sources praised monarchs in a manner of

---

[12] Christian Julien Robin in *the Judaism of the Ancient Kingdom of Ḥimyar in Arabia: a discrete conversion* describes racial religious reform and discrete conversion to Judaism in Himyar Kingdom. As he explains: "religious reform had several aims. The first was to re-establish the old correspondence between political groups and the distribution of religious rites. The second was to resist Byzantine pressure. The third consisted in replacing the temple as the beneficiary of taxation. One can undoubtedly add a last goal: the conversion to a new religion, which transformed the past into a tabula rasa and obliterated past times, enabled the monarchy and principalities to seize treasures accumulated in polytheist sanctuaries" (pp. 190-91).

ancient Near Eastern tradition when the king was represented as a god or god's representative to bring justice, protection, and fertility on earth.

To sum up, it was a primarily monotheistic religious context in Arabia in late antiquity, where and when Prophet Muhammad's prophetic and leadership career started. It reflected both Arabian political and spiritual traditions and existing forms of monotheism.

4.2 Muhammad's Leadership

The Qur'an provides little information about Muhammad, making it challenging to produce a biographical sketch. Since the Qur'anic genre is not one of storytelling, direct references to its prophet are also scattered throughout the text. The Qur'an explicitly mentions conflicts between Muhammad and Meccans (2:91), his migration to Medina (33:13, 60), and military encounters between his followers and opponents (3:123). As for Muhammad's characteristics in the Qur'an, in one place, he is attributed to the same epithets as God: "being kind and merciful unto the believers" (Q 9:128). Qur'an also states Muhammad's theological mission and vision: Say, "It is only revealed unto me that your God is one God. So will you be a submitter?" But if they turn away, say, "I have proclaimed to you all equally. I know not whether that which you are promised is nigh or far off." (Q 21:108-9) Additionally, the text says that Muhammad had an "exalted character" (Q 68:4) and was "a beautiful example for those who hope for God and the Last Day, and remember God much." (Q 33:21)

As for his authority and social role, the Qur'an attests that Muhammad was only a warner (Q11:2), a reminder of original monotheism, and did not have other authority: "So remind! Thou art but a reminder; "thou art not a warder over them (Q 88:21). However, elsewhere God claims that Whosoever obeys the Messenger obeys God." (Q4:80) Furthermore, the Qur'an also envisages the closure of prophetic charisma within him: "Muhammad is not the father of any man among you; rather, he is the Messenger of God and the Seal of the prophets. And God is Knower of all things." (Q 33:41) The Qur'an does not depict Muhammad performing any miracles despite his opponents' insistence to prove his prophecy this way. However, his biography records several major miracles done by him or to him (Q 6:37, 13:7, 21:5; Sira 134). According to the Quranic text, Muhammad's major miracle was the Scripture (Qur'an itself), God's direct speech to him. So it is the Qur'an that validates Muhammad's prophethood instead of miracles. (Q 47:2 48:29) Further, the Qur'an has an

interactive relationship with the Prophet Muhammad's life and also criticises him for ignoring a blind man in Q 80:1-10; and repeating recitation too quickly in Q 75:16-19.

Nevertheless, the Qur'an's relative silence on Muhammad's biographical details is filled by extra-Quranic material. His biography and tradition tell vibrant information about his life, social context, and prophetic career. According to the established classical outline of Muhammad's biography, the pilgrimage sanctuary of Ka'bah, initially built by Abraham and Ismail to worship one God, became a place for idolatry over time. When the sons of Ismael became numerous and left Mecca to inhabit other places, they took stones from sacred areas with them and started worshipping them (*Sira*, p. 35). According to tradition, it was exactly Mecca where Muhammad was born in 570, the year of the elephant, when the South Arabian king Abraha tried to conquer Mecca and destroy its shrine. Muhammad was born in a powerful tribe of Quraysh, in the Hashim clan, in a prominent but not affluent family. "The apostle of God was the nobles of his people in birth and the greatest in honour both on his father's and his mother's side" (*Sira*, p. 69). However, his father died before his birth, and his paternal grandfather, Abd al-Muttalib, started taking care of him. Muhammad spent several years with foster parents. At the age of six, his mother passed away. After two years, his guardian grandfather as well, so he went under the protection of his uncle Abu Talib, who became the new head of the Hashim clan. Muhammad started trading journeys to Syria with his uncle and became famous for being a "trustworthy man". At age 25, he married a wealthy, high-class woman, Khadija, the mother of his children except for one, and the first and primary supporter of his prophetic career (*Sira*, pp. 70-83).

According to the traditional narrative, Muhammad used to seclude himself in the surroundings of Mecca. He received the prophetic call in one of such meditations in the Hira cave during Ramadan at the age of 40. Angel Gabriel carried God's message to him to recite in the name of the creator God (Q 96:1). Muhammad was overwhelmed with this experience and was reluctant to take the prophetic responsibility. However, the experience continued, and he had to accept it eventually. Then Muhammad started preaching his monotheistic message about the uniqueness and unity of God, which was progressively communicated to humankind through a series of prophets, believing in the Day of Judgement and the importance of individual piety. His wife Khadija was the first to accept his prophethood and supported him for the rest of her life. Initially, he preached within a small, intimate circle of family and friends for three years. Then, he started public announcements

of his religious project, which found few followers from both the leading members of Quraysh and poor, marginalised groups (*Sira*, p. 112).

Muhammad encountered several challenges as the number of his followers expanded. Initially, he was perceived as a poet or a soothsayer, which led to scepticism regarding his claims of divine inspiration. Furthermore, to undermine Muhammad's followers and his teachings, the Meccans began to harass and persecute his adherents, particularly those from the lower social strata (*Sira*, 143). Although Muhammad became a fully-fledged leader in Medina, his leadership decisions during the Meccan period were also significant. For example, sending some of his followers to seek refuge in Abyssinia (modern-day Ethiopia) under the protection of the Christian king Negus. This decision had twofold implications: ensuring the safety of his followers and fostering relationships with the Christian community.

Additionally, Muhammad sought to establish alliances with various Arab tribes, attempting to negotiate with them to further his theopolitical objectives. However, after these efforts proved unsuccessful, he adopted alternative strategies. He engaged with the tribes' leaders in the oasis of Medina. After a successful agreement at Aqabah, he facilitated the first wave of immigrants settling in the oasis, where agricultural development contrasted with their experiences in Mecca. According to tradition, it was the Medinan tribes who invited him to relocate and serve as an arbiter between the rival Arab tribes of Aws and Khazraj. Ultimately, he fled Mecca after his adversaries attempted to assassinate him (*Sira*, p. 223)

4.3 Umma Covenant

Hijra, the migration, or political exile from Mecca to Medina, is a key event in Islamic history. It was after Hijra that the most critical phase of Muhammad's leadership and community formation took place. The Medinan period of Muhammad's career is characterised by what we would call diplomacy today; however, to avoid anachronism, it can be simply said that after moving to Medina, Muhammad concluded a series of treaties and sent letters to neighbouring leaders inviting them to join his movement and message. First, he ended a separated non-belligerency treatise with the prominent Jewish tribe of Medina - Nadir, Qurayza and Qaynuqa' who held great political and military power in Medina before arrival of Muhammad regarding the security guarantees that they neither fight him nor assist his enemy against him (Lecker, 2003, pp. 2-3).

One year later, he concluded a more important treaty commonly known as the *Ahd al-Umma* or "The Constitution of Medina", or Umma Treaty as I prefer to call it from now on, which included a broader legal framework prepared by Muhammad for his activities. The first clause of the Treaty states that the agreement is "between *mu'minun* and *muslimun* of Quraysh and Yathrib and those who join them as clients". In the following clause, the Treaty established a singular community (*Umma*), asserting that "they form one people to the exclusion of others" (§2). The first important question is to clarify who the contracting party is. The Treaty encompasses various groups, including clients and potential clients of *Lahiqa wa Jahada*. This dynamic reflects pre-Islamic Arabic practices, as already described above, where individuals or smaller tribal units sought affiliation with larger factions, particularly in conflict. Such affiliations ensured these smaller groups received guarantees and protection similar to those of the dominant tribes they allied with. In this case, the contracting parties are: *muslimun, mu'minun* and *yahud.*

The *believers (Mu'minun),* are positioned as the most significant party, defined as opposing the *Kafir,* a non-believer (§15) and is one who acknowledges the Treaty, believes in God and the Last Day (§25). The document asserts the collective responsibility for any infractions its members commit (clauses 2–10). Furthermore, it deems believers as high-ranking individuals and calls on them to unite against wrongdoing and injustice, even if the committers are the son of one of them. Believers should not kill another believer in retaliation for non-believers and should not assist non-believers against believers. Believers were each other's allies and were granted God's binding protection for all (§14-17). The *Muhajirun*, early followers of Muhammad who migrated to Medina to escape Meccan persecution, played a crucial role in developing the new community. As participants in the document, they operated as a unified group without subdivisions. They retained their tribal organisation and leadership and maintained autonomy regarding blood money and other customs (§3). Both the Meccan emigrants and their Medinian helpers are considered believers.

Although *Muslimun* is cited as a primary contracting party in the first clause, subsequent references are sparse (mentioned only in clauses 1, 28, and 44 of the Treaty). In his philological analysis of Mu'minun and Muslimun, Lecker argued that Mu'minun were from Quraysh and Yathrib (Medina), while the Muslimun were from Yathrib. He points to *Muslimun* as a Medinese identity (p. 43). However, the text states that both the *mu'minun* and *muslimun* exist in both Quraysh and the People of Yathrib, making his observation less persuasive. Lecker further suggests that in the context of the Treaty, the relevant use of *muslim* is "one who makes peace". He

gives the example of Asan al-Uzza and his progeny, who used to make peace among quarrelling groups and were referred to as Muslims. He also mentions the Prophet's letter to the people of Maqna, where *Mu'minun* and *Muslimun* are called upon to treat them kindly; and second, in the treaty between Habib b. Maslama and the people of Tbilisi prescribe that if a Muslim is unable to proceed in his journey in their land, they should bring him to the nearest party of *Mu'minun* and *Muslimun* (pp. 44-45).

The second part of the Treaty addresses the rights and responsibilities of Jews of Medina. It identifies seven Jewish tribes that shared the duty of maintaining the city's security and covering war-related expenses. The Treaty grants equal rights and guarantees of protection to Jews and their nomadic allies and claims not to aid Jews' enemies against them. (§18)

"The jews of banu awf are secure from the *mu'minun*. The jews have their religion and the muslimun have theirs. [This applies to] their allies and their persons. but whoever acts unjustly and sins will only destroy himself and his agnates." (§28)

Notably, clause 28 states that "the Jews of Banu Awf shall be considered as one Umma along with the believers", meaning that Jews formed a common community or confederation with the *Mu'minum*. "The jews of aws, their allies and their persons, have the same standing as the people of this treaty, together with the righteous and sincere people of this treaty." (§57)

From this, it is evident that Jews are equal to other believers and included in the believer's community. Muhammad Ahmed also argues that Jewish tribes could be counted among the believers as they shared sufficient religious identity (Belief in a monotheistic Abrahamic deity and the Day of Judgment) (Ahmed, 2023, p. 204). Including Jews among the believers can also be supported by Qur'anic verses which consider Jews as believers, who will receive salvation with other monotheist believers:

"Truly those who believe, and those who are Jews, and the Christians, and the Sabeans—whosoever believes in God and the Last Day and works righteousness shall have their reward with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them, nor shall they grieve." (Q 2:62)

"Those unto whom We gave the Book before it, they are believers in it. And when it is recited unto them, they say, "We believe in it; verily it is the truth from our Lord. Truly we were submitters even before it. It is they who will be given their reward twice over for their having been patient. And they repel evil with good, and spend from that which We have provided them. And when they hear idle talk, they turn away therefrom and say, "Unto us our deeds, and unto you your deeds. Peace be upon you! We do not seek out the ignorant." (Q 28:52-55)

Furthermore, Clauses 29-33 grant the same right to the rest of the contracting Jewish tribes. However, the Treaty restricts them from engaging in independent military actions (§40). The Treaty goes on to state that Muslims and Jews have their separate expenditure but common obligation to help each other in case one of the contracting parties is at war: "Incumbent upon the Jews is their expenditure and upon the Muslimun theirs. They will aid each other against whosoever is at war with the people of this treaty." (§ 44) The Treaty's following calls for *"sincere advice and counsel between them"* (§46) can be explained as initiative for making mutual decisions; the subsequent clause further supports that all the parties should collectively agree on providing protection: "No protection will be granted without the permission of the parties to this treaty." (§51) Treaty also promulgated other ethical norms like protecting a neighbor as one's self as long as he does not cause damage or acts sinfully (§50).

The Treaty claims that it will not intervene to protect an unjust man and a sinner (*§*61); and also points to the choice to freely leave the Treaty as long as the person acts justly:

"He [of the Jews] who goes out [opting not to participate in the compact] is safe and he who stays is safe, except he who acts unjustly and sins." (§62)

Key clauses of the Treaty address the relationship between Muslimun and Yahud concerning *din* and *nafaqa* law (§28) and finances *(§ 44)*. Lecker suggests that this specific emphasise means that they are otherwise associated with each other; However, Muslimun are not affiliated with specific Jewish groups and, unlike the Jews, - he suggests - the Muslims were in some way closer to Muhammad's message and might be ready to recognise his prophethood (pp. 43-44). Another point is omitting Jews as the contracting party in the first clause. Muhammad Ahmed persuasively argued for the possibility that Jews were included either in the *mu'minun* or *muslimun* of Yathrib and contended that "those who are engaging in this promissory oath are the: mu'minun, *muslimun* and al-yahud (who are perhaps not a group independent of *mu'minun, muslimun*), the Jews are believers in their own right, but also followers of the early Muslim community of believers in this pact" (p. 201). He further proved that *muslimun* undoubtedly means *mu'minun* and the two terms are synonymous and plesionymous, which enables them to substitute one another.

All parties are referred to as "the people of the treaty" (§ 45), a group governed by a common principle of solidarity and commitment to the Treaty, and the guarantor of the agreement is God. "Allah guarantees the most loyal and most righteous fulfillment of this treaty." *(§60)*

As for the excluded parties of the Treaty, clause 23 states that non-believers, specifically those identified as polytheists or associators not belonging to the Jewish or Muslim groups, are excluded. While the text establishes a clear hierarchy favouring believers over non-believers, it adopts a more lenient stance towards the Medinan polytheists compared to the Quraysh, who were subjected to much harsher treatment. Notably, neither the Quraysh nor their supporters were guaranteed protections, as indicated in clauses 23&54. This meant that identity and social boundaries between monotheist believers were fuzzy; however, those between believers and polytheists were rigid. The Treaty acknowledges Muhammad as a socio-political leader, as all the disputes or major crimes had to be brought before God and Muhammad, and he would settle the disagreements among the members of the Treaty and rule the right (Clauses 26 and 52).

In his introduction, Lecker highlights that the idol worshipper Arabs of Medina as well as none of the three main Jewish tribes of Nadir, Qurayza and Qaynuqa' were not party of this Treaty; the limited Jewish participation in this particular Treaty lets Lecker assume that the document is less significant regarding Prophet's relationship with the Jews than it was previously argued. Additionally, the rapid growth of Muhammad's movement and advancement of the Islamic cause made much of this legal framework irrelevant (Lecker, 2004, pp. 3, 48). While Lecker's observation about the treaty's limited applicability to specific groups is valid, it does not negate or belittle the document's broader historical and theological importance. The Treaty of Medina remains pivotal in establishing a theo-political model to unify several groups into a cohesive *umma*.

Furthermore, the Document demonstrates several significant aspects of Muhammad's leadership and the social dynamics of Medina. First, it highlights Muhammad's dual role as a socio-political leader and as an arbitrator. He acted as the tribes chief, responsible for decisions on security and alliance, and as an arbiter mediating disputes among the community members. Second, the treaty suggests that boundaries between monotheist groups were not rigid but fluid, except for "associators" Muhammad draws a very rigid line between monotheistic believers and polytheists, but lines among monotheists seem flexible and fluid. Muhammad's concept and framework of the *umma* integrated different tribal and social groups, including immigrants from Mecca and local Medinese, giving them rights and obligations. Third, the Document illustrates that even in a predominantly oral culture and illiterate Hijazi milieu of Muhammad's time, important agreements and documents were written down and formalised.

4.4 Muhammadan leadership

Muhammad's leadership in Medina was theo-political. He "embraced and taught a theocentric understanding of leadership; that is, he believed that ultimately God chooses and puts in place all leaders, regardless of the specific procedure of a person's appointment to a leadership role within a community or army" (Heyward, 2021, p. 19). Still, as a theo-political leader, he had a twofold challenge. First, he had to solve occasional disputes between emigrants and helpers, handle opposition from Medinese hypocrites, and negotiate his relationship with Medinese Jews. On the other hand, he had enmity and threats from his own Quraysh clan.

Muhammad in Medina instituted brotherhood between emigrants and helpers. This was a way to create stronger bonds and kinship among his community (Sira, 234). Qur'an also elaborates on the importance of migration and support for those who move:

"Truly those who believe, and migrate, and strive with their wealth and themselves in the way of God, and those who sheltered and helped—they are protectors of one another. As for those who believe and did not migrate, you owe them no protection until they migrate. But if they ask your help for the sake of religion, then help is a duty upon you, except against a people with whom you have a covenant" (Q8:72).

In his Farewell sermon, Muhammad established fraternity among all Muslims by declaring that "every Muslim is a Muslim's brother, and that the Muslims are brethren." (Sira, p. 651)

As for the enmity, Islamic tradition records several fights between Muhammad and his allies against a coalition of Quraysh known as the Battle of Badr, Uhud, the Trench, and Hunayn. After the battle of Badr, Muhammad's followers disobeyed his order to gather all the booty together and divide it equally. The quarrel started as those who collected it claimed for themselves and refused to share, while those who fought the battle and others who defended Muhammad claimed an equal right to the share. Finally, Muhammad divided it equally among them. (Sira, 307) Quran 3:152 also refers to this quarrel as a test to see who desired this world, and one who desired the Hereafter. According to the verse, God pardoned the disobedient for their mistake and a little further praises Muhammad for being gentle and asks him not to be disheartened and to continue consulting with his people:

"Then [it was] by a mercy from God that thou wert gentle with them. Hadst thou been severe [and] hard-hearted they would have scattered from about thee. So pardon them, ask forgiveness

for them, and consult them in affairs. And when thou art resolved, trust in God; truly God loves those who trust" (Q 3:159).

The body of *shura*, a consultative council which predated Islam's origins, is notable in the details of traditional chronicles about these battles. Muhammad also used this tribal mechanism to discuss decisions related to social and military issues, such as strategies of conducting raids and military campaigns, constructing tribal alliances, and dividing booty justly. (Sira, p. 308) The Qur'an also emphasises the importance of *shura* as a means of social functioning and knowledge. In Q. 42:38, the Qur'an "places shura alongside prayer and charity as essential human behaviour". (Heyward, p. 31). Sira demonstrates cases when Muhammad's initiatives, especially related to battle tactics, had flaws and were corrected by the *shura* members.

Nevertheless, there were episodes when Muhammad did not act upon shura suggestions, and the companions, such as the chronicles about the Treaty of al-Hudaybiyah, challenged his leadership. When Muhammad decided to perform a minor pilgrimage in Mecca with hundreds of his followers and animals to be sacrificed, he dispatched peace emissaries to notify Quraysh that he had peaceful intentions. The beginning of a negotiation between Muhammad and the Meccans was unsuccessful and caused internal dispute among the nascent Muslim Community. Some of his companions strongly disapproved of Muhammad's decision to make a ten-year peace with Quraysh and the conditions of this Treaty. They considered the treaty as a sign of weakness and advocated for fulfilling their intention to perform pilgrimage and siege Mecca by force if necessary. Regardless of this disruption and objections, the treaty of Hudaybiya was concluded between the Prophet Muhammad and the representative Muslim community and Suhayl b. 'Amr, a representative of Quraysh.

> *"They have agreed to lay aside war for ten years during which men can be safe and refrain from hostilities on condition that if anyone comes to Muhammad without the permission of his guardian he will return him to them; and if anyone of those with Muhammad comes to Quraysh they will not return him to him. We will not show enmity one to another and there shall be no secret reservation or bad faith. He who wishes to enter into a bond and agreement with Muhammad may do so, and he who wishes to enter into a bond and agreement with Quraysh may do so." (Sira 504).*

According to the narrative, this agreement had essential implications for Muhammad's community; on one hand, it ensured stability and security from military attacks on both sides,

promised Muslims to perform the pilgrimage from the following year, and attracted more people to Islam. During the next two years, the number of Muslims doubled. (Sira, p. 507)

More critical episodes that challenged Muhammad's leadership were his relationship with three Jewish tribes of Medina, with whom he had Treaties. The first tribe in conflict with Muhammad was Banu Nadir. According to Ibn Ishaq, the reason for the conflict was bloodshed, which al-Nadir had to contribute according to the mutual alliance treaty. However, members of Nadir decided to use the opportunity and kill Muhammad to get rid of him as a confederation leader. Muhammad knew the plan and ordered the burning of their palm trees and fighting them. However, the Sira tells that "they asked the apostle to deport them and to spare their lives on condition that they could retain all their property which they could carry on camels, except their armour and he agreed". Ibn Ishaq mentioned that expelled members of al-Nadir went to Khaybar and Syria, and their left property was divided among the first emigrants (Sira, pp. 437-38). A similar story is told concerning the expulsion of the second Jewish tribe, Banu Qaynuqa, from Medina.

As for the third tribe of Qurayza, the tradition relates it to the Battle of the Trench when the confederation of Quraysh's army besieged Medina and imposed existential threats. According to Sira, in the initial phase, members of Banu Qurayza contributed to the preparation by providing war material as envisaged by the Treaty; however, during the siege, they changed attitudes and became the allies of the Quraysh tribe against Muhammad. As a result, after the war was over, by the communal decision (in which, according to Sira, Jewish learned ones also participated), they were punished for breaking the alliance promulgation: "Men were killed, the property divided, and the women and children taken as captives" (Sira, p. 464).

As Muhammad gained more authority in Medina, and secured risks of attacks from neighbors, he made several key doctrinal and social decisions, such as changing a prayer direction (*Qibla*) from Jerusalem to Mecca, establishing pilgrimage to Ka'bah, introducing Ramadanfast, daily prayers and Friday prayer; introducing several dietary restrictions; initiating new laws regarding finances, alms tax, inheritance, marriage, divorce, and others. These religious and social reforms indicate the beginning of forming a distinct identity for his community against pagans and "People of the Book". One example, which is related to Moses' name, is related to Fast. The Jews of Madina fasted on Yom Kippur, the most important day of the Jewish calendar, the tenth day of the month of Tishri. Muslim sources mention this holiday as yawm ʿAshura, a Hebrew-Aramaic word for the tenth day, according to Abd Allah b. ʿAbbas, and other Muslim sources, when he came to Medina,

Muhammad saw Jews celebrating this day for Moses' deliverance from and victory over Pharaoh. Muhammad claimed that Muslims had more right to Moses than Jews, so he fasted and ordered the people to fast with him.[13] According to another variant of this account, "The Jews replied that Moses had instituted this fast in commemoration of God's deliverance of His Prophet and his people, and the drowning of Pharaoh and his armed hosts. Muhammad declared, "We have a greater claim on Moses and a closer relationship with him than you," whereupon the Prophet fasted and commanded his following to fast[14]." Receiving revelation on the mountain and commemorating it with fasting became a common theme for both religious traditions.

Another important aspect of his leadership and covenant relationship with pagans is demonstrated in the conquest of Mecca. Muhammad's followers took Mecca with a bloodless campaign. He pardoned his opponents' enmity and took a pledge of allegiance from assembled Meccans before the Ka'bah. Mecca's surrender was the culmination of Muhammad's well-planned tactics of treaty and ally-making in the Hijaz. Additionally, during this sermon, Muhammad once again abolished the avenging of the bloodshed from the pagan period and declared Mecca a holy land (Sira, pp. 651-2).

One peculiar aspect of Muhammad's leadership was leaving the succession issue open. He has not nominated his successor; however, according to Sunni and Shia tradition, Abu Bakr and Ali were considered for such a position (Sira, pp. 679-683). The issue of succession was a major reason for schism in the early Muslim community, and the leadership issue remains unresolved among Muslims to this day.

This chapter examined Prophet Muhammad's leadership, focusing on the pacts and covenants by which he organised the socio-political community. The pragmatic dimension of his leadership is his adaptation of the pre-Islamic tradition of covenant-making, basing it on a common monotheistic ground and divine principles. Entering into the Umma Covenant and *islam* provided a new identity for both individual followers and tribal alliances.

---

[13] Muslim, Ṣaḥīḥ, 2:796 (book [kitāb] no. 13: section [bāb] no. 19: ḥadīth no. 128).
14 Muslim b. al-gajjaj, Sahih, 4 vols., /"in 2] Cairo, [n.d.JIII], 150

Chapter 5 Comparison notes on Mosaic and Muhammadan leadership

5.1 Moses in the Qur'an

The Qur'an and *Sunnah* have a rather curious relationship with both Moses and Muhammad: while Moses is frequently mentioned in the Qur'an by name, Muhammad is named only several times. However, the text itself directly refers to him as "you", and he is more present in the Sunnah. The Quranic silence about major and minor events of Muhammad's life is filled with rich and extensive material in the *Sunnah*. As already stated, the Qur'an does not provide a biographical or historical narrative; it tells stories of previous prophets and communities, conveying theological and pedagogical messages, and has little interest in history as such.

It is still important to highlight what the Qur'an says about Exodus and the wandering of the Israelites in the Wilderness. Moses is mentioned 136 times in the Qur'an, making him the most mentioned character throughout the text. Though he is frequently mentioned, there is no single unified and connected biographical account, but stories are scattered among different Chapters (*surahs*). Moses is described as "pure a messenger, a prophet" (Q 19:51); Qur'an affirms that to him was revealed "book" (2:53), "clear proofs" (2:92) the tablets (Q7:150-4) and the scriptures (Q87:18-19); a succession of messengers to follow him (2:87); it is also stated that "unto Moses God spoke directly"(Q 4:164), and "manifested Himself to the mountain" (Q 7:143). It is also declared that God's speaking with Moses signifies His preference for Moses over other humans: "O Moses! Verily I have chosen thee above mankind through my messages and My speaking [unto thee]" (Q 7:144). Some verses refer to Moses, without naming him outright: "Those are the messengers. We have favoured some above others. Among them are those to whom God spoke and some He raised up in ranks…" (Q 2:253).

Additionally, Moses and his scriptures are key components in situating the Qur'an and Muhammad in the Biblical historical development, leading to the common patriarch Abraham. Moses is also part of the so-called "punishment stories" to show how the Israelites disobeyed the prophets and received punishments from God. In Q 7:142-47, the Qur'an describes Moses's receipt of Torah during his stay on the mountain for forty days and nights. And Q 148:58 depicts the Israelites' worship of the golden calf during his absence. Besides referring to Moses as an exemplary lawgiver and prophet, the Qur'an is interested in Moses' social drama, particularly his

confrontations with Pharaoh and the Israelites. His conflict with Pharaoh and competition with Pharaoh's magicians is similarly narrated in Exodus 7:8-18 and Q 7, 10, 11, 17, 20, 23, 26, 27, 28, 40, 43, 51 and 79; His confrontation with Israelites as we have seen in previous chapters is depicted in Golden Calf episode of Exodus 32, Numbers 11 and Q 2, 4, 7 and 20. These narrations emphasise the dual confrontation of the faithful prophet-leader with his disbelieving enemies and his less faithful community. This point was essential for the Qur'an's immediate audience and Muhammad's context of leadership.

Relatively long and connected references about his birth and childhood in Egypt, his accident and flight to Midian, revelation, confrontation with Pharaoh, miracles and competing with magicians, the plagues and Exodus from Egypt, and the Golden Calf episodes that are close parallels of the Biblical narratives are told in Q 20:9-99. The intertextual analysis of the retrospective storyline of this chapter illustrates that the Quranic narrations about Moses contain nuances and special emphases which will be highlighted in the subsequent paragraphs.

To begin with, God in his conversation with Moses presents himself not as a god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, aka god of a specific people, but as a universal god, not taking part in historical events, but in eschatological end. Additionally, this conversation emphasises the notion of *tawhid* (uniqueness and oneness of God) and liturgical piety.

Truly I am God, there is no god but I. So worship Me, and perform the prayer for the remembrance of Me. Ś Surely the Hour is coming. I would keep it hidden, that every soul might be recompensed for its endeavors. So let not he who believes not and follows his caprices turn thee away from it, or thou wilt perish (Q 20:14-16).

Notably, in Q 20:24, God prepared Moses not only to persuade Pharaoh to let the Israelites go, but also to convert him. Understanding this way, Moses' prophetic leadership was universal, not only confined to his mission to guide the Israelites but also the Egyptians.

There are other stories in the Qur'an about Moses that do not have their parallel in the Bible, and the Qur'an uses them to produce new theological or pedagogical conclusions. For instance, there are notable differences between the Qur'an and the Bible about Moses' infancy. According to the Qur'an, Pharaoh's wife and not his daughter rescues baby Moses and decides to adopt him (Q 28:9), meaning that Moses becomes the adopted son of Pharaoh and his wife. Later on, when Moses returns to Pharaoh and requests liberation of the Israelites, the latter asks him, "Did we not raise you among us as a child and you stayed among us for many of your years?" (Q 26:18).

Notably, according to Exodus 4:19 Moses confronted the new Pharaoh. Still, the Qur'an suggests that the same Pharaoh raised Moses. Such generational antagonism is also portrayed in the Qur'an's narratives about Abraham and his father (Q 19:41-48), Noah and his son (Q 11:42-43). As Gabriel Raynolds observes, this narrative is part of the Qur'an's pattern to amplify familiar conflicts and conclude that faith comes before family. The Qur'an chooses material and shapes it based on its own theological and polemical concerns (Reynolds, 2017, p. 144). This also must be an intelligible analogy for the Qur'an's immediate audience. Muhammad's most severe opposition from the Quraysh tribe was his extended family, including his uncles and cousins. One of the Quraysh's critiques of Muhammad before the treaty of Hudaybia was "Muhammad, have you collected a mixed people together and then brought them to your own people to destroy them?" (Sira, p. 502).

Another interesting difference is related to the golden calf episode, which is narrated in several places in the Qur'an. Remarkably, in 20:95-95, it is not Aaron but an unnamed Samaritan who initiates and is responsible for the sin: *He said, "What was your purpose, O Samaritan?" He said, "I saw that which they saw not. So I took a handful [of dust] from the footsteps of the messenger, and I cast it. Thus did my soul prompt me."*

In this narrative, God does not impose any blame or guilt on the Israelites for their idolatry; rather, it is a figure of al-Samiri who is charged with the action. Such interpretation of the event excludes Israelites' punishments or everlasting guilt among them for the incident and makes immediate reconciliation between God and His people (Neuwirth, 2014, p. 10).

One of the most critical Quranic narratives of Moses not found in the Bible is in Q 18:60-82, where Moses and his unnamed servant started a journey to "the junction of the two seas". Once they reached the point they had to go back to search for a "lost fish", their lunch. On their way, they met "God's servant," a mysterious figure whom Islamic tradition considers a prophet, Khidr. Moses asked him to be his guide, and he reluctantly agreed in case Moses would not have asked him any questions about his actions. After they set off on the journey, the "God's servant" scuttles a ship, kills a young boy and rebuilds a wall without asking for a recompense. Moses could not contain himself and asked the reasons for such actions. The guide explains the wisdom and justice behind his actions and separates from Moses.

Both traditional Muslim and Western scholarship tried to explain this mysterious journey and its symbols in different contexts. The question of the identity of God's servant and how the prophet,

like Moses' rank, was guided by the mysterious figure was debated in traditional exegetics. Traditionally, this pericope is understood as a sign of God's justice and wisdom, and Moses' questioning of Khidr is not out of pride, but his quest for justice. Muslim exegetes have emphasised the meaning of inner wisdom and knowledge more than on Moses' characteristics in the story (Singh, 2005, pp. 215-18). However, there have been different interpretations as well. Brannon Wheeler, who also shares the "Borrowing Theory" of Qur'an from Judaism, explained how Muslim exegesis used Qur'anic and non-Qur'anic sources to produce an image of Moses, especially concerning Muhammad. He studied Q 18:16-82 and its connections with Gilgamesh, Alexander the Great, and Shuayb in Midian based on Late Antique and Medieval sources[15]. He argued that the Qur'an itself is a source for extra Qur'anic accounts and not vice versa, and sources are more intertwined than previously believed in the scholarship. In his argumentation, the conflation of Moses' figure with Gilgamesh and Alexander the Great, introducing new elements such as al-Khidr's figure into established narratives, and the combination of elements from different contexts are not confusion but a deliberate attempt by Muslim exegesis to portray Moses as a prideful and impatient character, who did not fully grasp divine justice. However, Wheeler's argument is insufficiently developed and not supported by the Qur'an and the exegetical sources he quotes.

Wheeler further explores the difference between Exodus 32:30-35 and Q 5:25. As we have seen above, in this episode of Exodus, Moses pleads that God might allow him to take the blame and forgive the Israelites for their worship of the Golden calf. Similarly, Moses made a similar intercession in Deuteronomy 9 and Numbers 14 in the episode of the Golden Calf and refused to take possession of the land. In Q 5:2&5, after the Israelites refused to enter the Holy Land, Moses asks God to separate and distinguish him and Aaron from rebellious Israelites. Wheeler argues that in their critique of Moses, Muslim exegetes capitalise on already existing Jewish and Christian interpretations about Moses to demonstrate Muhammad's superiority over him. Some of these parallels seem interesting, such as Night Journey and passages from Ezekiel from which the author concludes that: "Just as a new Torah was revealed to Ezekiel during his visionary journey to Jerusalem, with the explicit purpose of impugning and abrogating the old Torah of Moses, so the old Torah of Moses is said to have been replaced by the new Torah revealed to Muhammad"

---

[15] The author cites the Bible, the Gospel, the Talmud, the midrash, tafsir literature (commentary of Qur'an), hadith, poetry, folk stories, and other non-Quranic materials.

(Wheeler, 2002, p. 116). Nevertheless, as we have already seen the Qur'an is not a supersessionist "Torah", that abrogates previous teachings, moreover, it clearly states that "before it was the Book of Moses, a model and a mercy" (Q 46:12) as guidance and blessings on Israelites; thus Wheeler's above-mentioned parallel is less persuasive. Additionally, links between various allusions, such as Night Journey and "washing of Prophet's heart narrative" to the Pool, which, according to tradition, Muhammad will allow believers to enter on Judgment day with ritual purity, and sanctuaries related to Abraham, appealing less convincing and seem to be artificially connected to advance his argument.

Wheeler concludes that Abraham and not Moses are valid paradigms of Muhammad's prophethood. "Rather than being the passive recipients of garbled stories, Muslim exegetes seem to have appropriated and forged ideas in the crafting of an exegetical paradigm which projects the Prophet Muhammad as a model for their own authority" (p. 126). As Wheeler suggests: Muslim exegetes refer to Muhammad as a completely obedient "servant-prophet" like Abraham as opposed to the "king-prophet" model exemplified by Moses. The prophet Muhammad based his authority only on the knowledge he received as revelation, not on his learning. His position was as a messenger of God, not as king among his people (p. 264). Wheeler's contrasts are quite misleading, considering that neither the Bible nor the Qur'an ever allude to Moses as a "king", unlike David and his son Solomon, who are recognised and referred to as "King-Prophets", receivers of divine knowledge and guidance (Q 21:78-81). However, he is right in his observation that Abraham has a central role in forming the Muslim as an Abrahamic identity.

The idea that Moses figures in Islamic tradition and exegesis has been overshadowed by Muhammad, and is shared by other scholars. These observations are precise, giving the central role and significance Muhammad gained through the crystallisation of his teaching into what later became Islam. "On the one hand, Islam reflects the Jewish depiction of Moses as God's messenger and His right-hand man. However, it also asserts that Moses was not only matched by a later prophet whose life and mission mirrored his own but that this prophet also surpassed him in significance. This prophet, as we know, is Muhammad b. 'Abdallah, the prophet of Islam" (Lowin, 2019, p. 228). Such readings of the Qur'an and Qur'anic exegesis are biased because Moses is depicted as a prophet par excellence, and both Islam and Islamic exegesis regard him as an exemplary, rightly guided, and just prophet.

Notably, the Muslim tradition of Moses' depiction and insights into the Jewish reaction to

Muhammad's alleged Mosesness are visible. In his studies of the Jewish response to "Muhammad's claims of Mosesness", Shari Lowin compared the Islamic depictions of the Medinan Jewish reactions to those of Medieval Jewish scholars writing about Muhammad. His study is based on Muslim traditions, medieval Jewish traditions, and Muslim-Jewish polemical writings. In his comparative analyses of Islamic and Jewish sources[16], Lowin illustrated that Muhammad's contemporary Jews as those of the Medievals reacted to Muhammad's Mosesness in the same manner as those of the Middle Ages, namely with questions, tests, rejection, and mockery. The source of their reaction, according to the scholar, was the same: the Bible, Jewish tradition, and the Jewish understanding of Moses (Lowin, 2019, p. 254).

A more persuasive analysis of Moses' figure in the Qur'an is presented in the diachronic studies of the Qur'an by Angelika Neuwirth. She explained Moses' role as a central figure and the prophet *par excellence* during the Meccan period. Moses' figure was essential in the middle Meccan chapters, when Muhammad's followers tried distinguishing themselves from Meccan idolatry and getting closer to the Biblical realm of prophethood and monotheism. In the Meccan period, Moses was an exemplar prophet-leader to be a model to whom Islam's prophet could mirror. However, the changes happened "in the process of the community's shift from a pious religious reform movement to a self-reliant religious community with a strong political identity on its own" (Neuwirth, 2014, pp. 8-10). This shift mainly occurred in Medina, where Muhammad gained a central role in community and identity-building, and his mission overshadowed that of Moses in significance. Thus, while Moses is neither neglected nor forgotten in the Qur'an and Islamic exegesis, his prominence is somewhat overshadowed by the evolving identity centred on the Prophet Muhammad.

5.2 Comparison notes on Mosaic and Muhammadan Leadership

This sub-chapter examines key aspects of leadership ascribed to Moses and Muhammad in their respective traditions. Comparing their leadership reveals similarities and differences that shaped the nature of their communities.

To begin with, Moses and Muhammad's leadership fundamentally revolves around the concept of the covenant. Moses and Muhammad took the existing Semitic secular practice of treaty-making

---

[16] Lowin uses texts of Ibn Hisham and al-Waqidi with the Jewish writings by Maimonides, Samaw'al al-Maghribi, Netanel ibn al-Fayyumi, Daniel al-Qumisi, Ibn Kammuna, and Ibn Adret.

and legitimised it with divine sanction; the Covenant is the fundamental and most general conceptual framework in which religious concessions of the Israelites and Muslims developed. For Moses, the Sinai Covenant established a bond between Yahweh and the Israelites, giving them the identity of God's chosen people. The Decalogue is a foundation of Israelite religious and social life. It enables cohesion between community members and personal and collective commitment to the common God. The Qur'an's conception of the covenant, as embodied in the Umma Covenant and the term *islam*, transcends ethnic boundaries and creates a community defined by monotheism and peacemaking. Similarly, the Qur'an and Muhammad's praxis promulgated ethical laws that bind members of the emerging Muslim community together.

According to both textual traditions, Moses and Muhammad were somehow privileged members of their societies. Moses was raised at the Pharaoh's court, which would have provided him with experience in statecraft, geography, and politics of his time. Additionally, his shepherd years in Midian could have broadened his understanding of the religious worldview of his contemporary Near East. In contrast, Muhammad did not have any experience with the political establishment. However, he was experienced in trade and negotiation. His trips to Syria would allow him to encounter the religious and political affairs of the region. The previous experiences are reflected in how they lead their people. As for their status, in the Umma Covenant, Muhammad is not described as a Prophet or spiritual leader, but as an arbitrator and mediator; similarly, Moses is depicted as a mediator of the Sinai covenant.

Moses and Muhammad's leadership was full of chronicles of opposition and conflicts from the external enemy and the ruled community. Moses constantly faced challenges from the Israelites in the wilderness. He somehow managed to meet the demands of his people and divine commands by negotiating his authority with Yahweh and his large group. Muhammad also navigated conflicts, including battles. Both adapted challenges and pragmatically responded to the breaking of the covenant and disruption in the community; they punished covenant-breakers and rewarded those who fulfilled their commitments. According to texts, Moses had to manage a larger group than the estimated number of Muhammad's followers. Regardless of group size, both leadership styles were transformational for them and the community.

The Sinai Covenant created a bond between the same ethnic group (which does not necessarily mean that the Israelites were homogenous); The primary audience of the Sinai Covenant is the Israelites; Yahweh's attention and energy are directed to the Hebrews as an ethnic group. On the

other hand, the Qur'an's audience seems more heterogeneous. It sometimes addresses Jews, Christians, other monotheists, Muhammad's followers, and polytheists. Qur'an is not concerned with Arabs as an ethnic group; it only refers to its message being conveyed "in a clear, Arabic tongue" (Q 26:195). However, it never mentioned their superiority or chosenness over other people. Additionally, Umma Covenant is not very exclusive with ethnic or confessional boundaries, but has a rigid line between monotheistic and polytheistic.

Moses did not make any pacts with other groups; Moreover, he was prohibited from making pacts or engaging in relations with local people to avoid mixing up with them. In contrast, Muhammad made alliances and pacts with believers and non-believers. Besides that, Moses had a destination; the Promised Land was waiting to be conquered and settled by his community. However, Moses never conquered or entered the Promised Land. Muhammad did not have the earthly promised land, but he established sanctified cities, and the ultimate reward for his followers was an eschatological, eternal place in paradise.

Furthermore, Moses divided his leadership during his lifetime. First, he separated his leadership from priestly leadership, which continued through Aaron's lineage. The Jethro episode is a key moment in shaping a structure for his theo-political society, showing how Moses established a council and delegated political and administrative power to it. He also publicly named Joshua as his successor, which would avoid any disagreement about the power succession after his death. Similarly, according to the Umma Pact and Muhammad's biography, Muhammad served as Medina's arbitrator, chief, and community leader. People would go to him and ask about minor or major issues related to ethical, moral, and legal matters. Muhammad also had a so-called *shura* - a mutual consultation body which had delegated power to engage in decision-making related to military campaigns and socio-political issues. In both cases, leaders were chosen based on merit, according to their social authority (tribal or beyond), piousness, and loyalty. However, Muhammad did not separate religious and administrative spheres or nominate and announce his successor.

Miracles serve as a sign of divine authority in both traditions. Moses' leadership is closely tied to miraculous events like the plagues of Egypt and the parting of the Sea, or providing food in the desert. While the Qur'an also acknowledges miracles of earlier prophets with God's will and intervention, it refuses to meet the demands of Muhammad's opponents for miraculous proofs and names Qur'anic revelation as a sign of his authority. Even in their discussion of miraculous and

divine mediation between people and God, neither tradition ascribes them divine, non-human qualities. Moses and Muhammad are represented as fully human beings, with human desires, emotions, and weaknesses.

To sum up, while there are notable similarities between Moses and Muhammad's prophetic kerygma, namely, creating a theo-political confederation, there are critical distinctions. From the traditional accounts, it is clear that Muhammad is not a Prophet like Moses, considering that he did not directly speak to God, his community was not elected as God's chosen nation, and he did not liberate people to bring them the Promised Land. The most compelling and essential parallels lie in their leadership strategies. Muhammad is a leader like Moses, who founded his theo-political community based on covenantal ideas and divine law. However, the boundaries of his community, alliances with other groups, and eschatological dimensions are essential distinctions in his leadership.

Conclusions

The present thesis compared foundational frameworks of Mosaic and Muhammadan leadership during the formation of their theo-political communities. It began by briefly reviewing how Western scholarship has addressed the Qur'an's relationship with the Old Testament, identifying key themes and methodological approaches. Next, it established Semitic Civilizational Theory as a major theoretical approach to see Islam's development in relationship to Judaism; It selected the covenant as a conceptual framework, examining its treatment in Biblical and Quranic studies to outline its theological and socio-political dimensions. Finally, it analysed Moses and Muhammad's leadership through this covenantal lens, highlighting how the covenant informed their roles in community formation and governance.

The historical accuracy of Moses and Muhammad's biographies, the tyranny of historicism, and source criticism of Exodus or Hijra was irrelevant to this study. Still, the thesis provided a brief historical reconstruction to demonstrate that covenant-making was widespread praxis among Ancient Near Eastern societies, with the Sinai Covenant as a notable example. Importantly, both in its Ancient and Late Antique periods, Arabia was not isolated from its northern Semitic counterparts and similarly engaged in covenant-making practices between deity and people. In the tribal and pastoral, stateless societies of Arabia, pacts and agreements were essential for individual and collective survival. Muhammad inherited the pre-Islamic Arabian treaty culture and the Biblical covenant-making tradition. He continued this historical tradition by synthesising these two frameworks and situating his covenants within the Abrahamic lineage. This placement legitimised his message, leadership, and community within the broader religious landscape of the Arabian Peninsula.

Both communities have a mutual pedigree, Abraham, through Isaac and Ismael, and share a similar salvation history, whether fulfilled on earthly or eschatological levels. Remarkably, the Qur'an does not abrogate the Sinai covenant; on the contrary, it highlights its importance as a mutual relationship between God and the Israelites. Regardless of the multiplicity of covenants in the Qur'an, the Sinai Covenant is most central and pragmatic for its religious and political implications. Moses is also depicted as a model of a prophetic leader, whose story reminds the Qur'an prophet and the audience of the challenges and difficulties previous prophets went through in their careers.

The Sinai covenant transformed the Hebrews from a nomadic tribe into a cohesive society governed by divine law. At the same time, the concept of islam and the Umma Covenant reorganised and united Medinan tribes as an *umma* under divine law and principles. In this background, *islam* should be understood as several scholars have already noted in terms of "making peace" or "entering into a covenant" instead of its dominant meaning, "to submit".

Moses and Muhammad's religious vision (monotheism) and socio-political goals (building a community around the ethical law) are similar. However, the methods of achieving them significantly differ. Additionally, legitimisation of their theopolitical project in both cases is a covenant framework. The people-making projects in both instances culminate in the formation of tribal confederacies composed of religiously motivated groups. Both Israelites and Muslims perceive their relationship with God as a covenantal bond, obligating them to adhere to divine laws in exchange for guidance and protection. Like Judaism, Islam has a strong covenantal credo, with the concept of covenant as the foundation of prophetic leadership and the construction of communal identity. Prophetic leaders revived existing secular and religio-political practices of covenant-making and shaped them entirely with religious language to legitimise a socio-political agenda. Religio-ethical and socio-political spheres were not strictly distinguished in their contexts, which ensured both projects' success and long-lasting results.

Further and more profound research on this topic is vital for several reasons. First, comparative studies of covenant in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have broader implications for interfaith dialogue. Incorporating covenant as a foundational framework for Jewish and Muslim communities can uncover deeper common roots within the shared Abrahamic monotheistic tradition, enriching Muslim-Christian-Jewish interreligious understanding. Second, the social contract theory underpinning modern liberal democracies finds its conceptual origins in covenant-making traditions. Reflecting on this foundational framework and reinterpreting the Medinan Covenant as a model of Muhammad's leadership can provide Muslim communities with a viable, tradition-based paradigm for governance. Such insights can also help Muslims living under democratic regimes engage more effectively with broader civic structures. Finally, examining Islamic covenant in the context of pre-Islamic Arabian and Near Eastern covenant-making traditions offers a renewed perspective on the origins of Islam, situating it justly within its Late Antique milieu.

Bibliography

Primary sources

Nasr, S. H. (2015). The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary. New York: HarperOne.

Lecker, M. (2004). The "Constitution of Medina": Muhammad's First Legal Document. Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press.

Guillaume, A. (1955). The life of Muhammad: A translation of Ishāq's Sīrat Rasūl Allāh. Oxford University Press.

Wansbrough, H. (2019). The revised New Jerusalem Bible study edition. HarperOne.

Secondary literature

Ahmed, M. I. (2023). Islam and Judaism: Religious Attitudes and Identity in the Medinan Era. Al-Masāq, 35(2), 194-216.

Al-Qadi, W. K. (2003). The Primordial Covenant and Human History in the Qur'ān. Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, 332-338.

Barton, J. (2003). Covenant in Old Testament Theology. Covenant as Context: Essays in Honour of EW Nicholson, 23-38.

Bell, R. (2012). The origin of Islam in its Christian environment. Routledge.

Böwering, G. (2012). "Covenant." Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān, Vol. 1, edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, 464–467. Leiden: Brill

Brannon M. Wheeler. (2002). Moses in the Qurʾan and Islamic Exegesis. Routledge.

Brown, J. A. (2011). Muhammad: A very short introduction (Vol. 261). Oxford University Press.

Buber, M. (1948). "Biblical Leadership," in Israel and the World. New York: Schocken.

Crone, P., Cook, M. A., & Cook, M. (1977). Hagarism: The making of the Islamic world. CUP Archive.

Crone, P. (1980). Slaves on horses: the evolution of the Islamic polity. Cambridge University Press.

F. Denny, "The Meaning of 'Ummah' in the Qurʾan", History of Religions 15, 1 (1975): 34–70.

Donner, F. M. (1998). Narratives of Islamic Origins. Studies in late Antiquity and early Islam, 14, 28-29.

Donner, F. M. (2010). Muhammad and the believers: At the origins of Islam. Harvard University Press.

Elazar, D. J. (1980). The Political Theory of Covenant: Biblical Origins and Modern Developments. *Publius, 10*(4), 3–30.

Esders, S. (2016). 'Faithful Believers': Oaths of Allegiance in Post-Roman Societies as Evidence for Eastern and Western 'Visions of Community'. In Visions of Community in the Post-Roman World (pp. 357-374). Routledge.

Firestone, R. (2003). The Quran and the Bible: Some modern studies of their relationship. Bible and Quran: Essays in scriptural intertextuality. (John C. Reeves, Ed.). Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature.

Firestone, R. (2012). Is there a notion of "divine election" in the Qurʾān?. In New Perspectives on the Qur'an (pp. 393-410). Routledge.

Greenberg, M. (1985). Studies in the Bible and Jewish thought.

Griffith, S. H. (2013). The Bible in Arabic: The scriptures of the ' People of the Book ' in the language of Islam. Princeton University Press.

Hoyland, R. G. (2000). The earliest Christian writings on Muḥammad: An appraisal. In The Biography of Muḥammad (pp. 276-297). Brill.

Hoyland, R. G. (2002). Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the coming of Islam. Routledge.

Izutsu, T. (2002). Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'an (Vol. 1). McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP.

Kara, S. (2024). The Integrity of the Qur'an: Sunni and Shi'i Historical Narratives. Edinburgh University Press.

Lecker, M. (1997). Did Muḥammad Conclude Treaties With the Jewish Tribes Naḍīr, Qurayẓa, and Qaynuqā?. Dhimmis and others, 29-36.

Levenson, J. D. (1985). Sinai and Zion: An entry into the Jewish Bible* New Voices in Biblical Studies. Winston Press.

Lowin, S. L. (2019). "A Prophet Like Moses"? What Can We Know About the Early Jewish Responses to Muḥammad's Claims of Mosesness? Hebrew Union College Annual, 90, 227–255.

Marsham, A. (2009). Rituals of Islamic Monarchy: Accession and Succession in the First Muslim Empire. Edinburgh University Press.

McCarthy, Dennis J., Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Forms in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978).

Nicholson, E. W. (1986), God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

O'Connor, A. J. (2019). Qur'anic Covenants Reconsidered: mīthāq and ʿahd in Polemical Context. Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations, 30(1), 1-22.

Peters, F. E. (1991). The quest of the historical Muhammad. International Journal of Middle East Studies, 23(3), 291-315.

Rahman, F. (2009). Major Themes of the Qur'an. University of Chicago Press.

Rippin, A. 2006. "God." In The Blackwell Companion to the Qur'ān, edited by Andrew Rippin, 223–233. Malden, MA: Blackwell

Reynolds, G. S. (2010). The Qur'an and its biblical subtext. Routledge.

Reynolds, G. S. (2017). Noah's lost son in the Qurʾān. *arabica*, *64*(2), 129-148.

Robin, C. J. (2021). The Judaism of the Ancient Kingdom of Ḥimyar in Arabia: a discreet conversion. Diversity and Rabbinization: Jewish Texts and Societies Between 400 and 1,000 CE, 165-270.

Rosenthal, Erwin. Judaism and Islam. London: Yoseloff, 1961.

Rubin, Uri. *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims*. Princeton University Press, 1995.

Shoemaker, S. J. (2022). Creating the Qur'an. University of California Press.

Smith, M. S. (2002). The early history of God: Yahweh and the other deities in ancient Israel. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.

Sinai, N. (2015). Historical-critical readings of the Abrahamic scriptures.

Singh, D. E. (2005). Qur'anic Moses and his Mysterious Companion: Developmental Revelation as an Approach to Christian Discourse with Muslims?. Transformation, 22(4), 210-224.

Torrey, C. C., & Rosenthal, F. (1967). The Jewish Foundation of Islam. KTAV Publishing House.

Wansbrough, J. (1979). The sectarian milieu. Oxford University Press.

Watt, W. M. (1956). Muhammad at Medina.

Weber, M. (2010). Ancient Judaism. Simon & Schuster.

Weinfeld, M. (1973). Covenant terminology in the ancient Near East and its influence on the West. Journal of the American Oriental Society, 190-199.

Weinfeld, M. (1970). The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East. Journal of the American Oriental Society, 184-203.

Wellhausen, J. (1885). Prolegomena to the History of Israel: With a Reprint of the Article Israel from the" Encyclopaedia Britannica." A. & C. Black.

Wildavsky, A. B. (1984). The nursing father: Moses as a political leader. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press.