

# The foundations of the house (Q 2: 127)<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Witztum

Princeton University

jwitztum@princeton.edu

## Abstract

In Quran 2: 127 Ibrāhīm founded “the house” (most probably a reference to the Ka’ba) together with his son Ismā’īl. This scene does not appear in the Bible and none of the attempts to find a literary precedent for it are satisfactory. This paper argues that this scene reflects post-biblical traditions concerning Genesis 22. The argument is based on a comparison of the Quran, quranic commentaries, rabbinic sources and Syriac homilies on Gen. 22. After suggesting an origin for the story, the paper analyses the ways in which the Quran adapted and appropriated the story to its needs. The replacement of Isaac with Ismā’īl is a central point addressed in this context.

In the Quran Ibrāhīm is said to have founded the sanctuary of the Ka’ba together with his son Ismā’īl. In this paper I will suggest that this episode is a reflection of post-biblical traditions concerning Genesis 22. In addition to presenting the parallels between the stories, I will also discuss the new features found in the quranic version.

This episode is described in Q 2: 127–9 in the following manner:

(127) And when Ibrāhīm and Ismā’īl were raising the foundations of the house [they said] “Our Lord! Accept [this] from us. Indeed you are the hearer, the knower”.

(وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ)

(128) “And our Lord! Make us surrender to you and [make] of our offspring a surrendering nation and show us our rites and turn to us. Indeed you are the relenting, the merciful”.

(رَبَّنَا وَأَجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِن ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُّسْلِمَةً لَّكَ وَأَرِنَا مَنَاسِكَنَا وَتُبْ عَلَيْنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ)

(129) “And our Lord! Send to them a messenger from them who shall recite your signs to them, teach them the book and the wisdom, and purify them. Indeed you are the mighty, the wise”.

(رَبَّنَا وَأَبْعَثْ فِيهِمْ رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ يَتْلُو عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِكَ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ)

1 This essay was inspired by a text read with Emmanuel Papoutsakis and was first written as a paper for a seminar taught by Michael Cook. I thank them both for their comments and help. I also thank Meir Bar-Asher, Patricia Crone, Chanan Gafni, Judith Loebenstein-Witztum and the two anonymous readers for their comments. All remaining mistakes are of course mine.

There are two difficulties in the Arabic of verse 127 which are smoothed out in my translation. First, *Ismāʿīl* is not mentioned immediately after *Ibrāhīm*, but only at the end of the sentence after the description of the act and therefore seems to hang loose in the verse. A literal rendition of the verse's beginning would be: "And when *Ibrāhīm* was raising the foundations of the house and *Ismāʿīl* . . .".<sup>2</sup> Second, the words "[they said]" are missing in the original,<sup>3</sup> and the verse moves abruptly from a description of *Ibrāhīm* and *Ismāʿīl*'s act to the content of their prayer.

As a result of these difficulties, there is no agreement that *Ismāʿīl* indeed took part in the raising of the foundations. *Ṭabarī* (d. 923) quotes an opinion which holds that *Ismāʿīl* alone uttered the prayer, and adds that accordingly *Ibrāhīm* raised the foundations alone. The verse should then be rendered "And when *Ibrāhīm* was raising the foundations of the house and [when] *Ismāʿīl* [said] 'Our Lord! accept [this] from us. Indeed you are the hearer, the knower'". *Ṭabarī* does not identify those who hold this opinion, but refers to them as "others" (*ākharūn*).<sup>4</sup> A similar opinion is cited in the name of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728)<sup>5</sup> and is also held by the Baṣran grammarian al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ (d. 830) who comments on Q 2: 127: "it was *Ismāʿīl* who said: 'Our Lord! accept [this] from us'".<sup>6</sup>

However, this approach is far from convincing. Q 2: 125 demonstrates that *Ismāʿīl* had a real part to play: "[...] And we ordered *Ibrāhīm* and *Ismāʿīl*: 'purify my house for those who circle [it], for those who cleave [to it], and for those who bow and prostrate themselves'"

- 2 Edmund Beck, "Die Gestalt des Abraham am Wendepunkt der Entwicklung Muhammads", *Le Muséon* 65, 1952, 79, adduces this difficulty as one argument for his opinion that the entire sentence "And when *Ibrāhīm* was raising the foundations of the house and *Ismāʿīl*" is a later interpolation. His other arguments are the uncommon use of the imperfect *yarfaʿu* after *idh*, the use of *al-qawāʿid min al-bayt* instead of simply *qawāʿid al-bayt*, the contradiction with other verses which assume that the house existed before *Ibrāhīm*, and a comparison with Q 14: 35–41. Beck's arguments notwithstanding, I find his solution extreme and hard to prove, and will assume that the sentence is indeed part of the original text.
- 3 ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd's (d. 652/3) reading did, however, supply *yaqūlāni* ("[the two of them] saying/said") here; see Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, ed. M.M. and A.M. Shākir (Cairo: n.d.), vol. 3, p. 64. Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-Aḥkām al-Qurʿān* (Cairo, 1967), vol. 2, p. 126, attributes a similar reading *wa-yaqūlāni* both to Ibn Masʿūd and to Ubayy b. Kaʿb (d. between 640 and 656).
- 4 *Ṭabarī*, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 65. At pp. 68–71 *Ṭabarī* also cites two traditions attributed to the fourth caliph ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 661) which, according to *Ṭabarī*, assume that *Ismāʿīl* was a young child at the time of the building of the house and therefore did not participate in it. It should be noted, however, that neither tradition states explicitly that *Ismāʿīl* did not participate. All they do is describe *Ibrāhīm* building the house without mentioning *Ismāʿīl*. As a matter of fact, the second tradition even mentions that when the building was almost completed *Ibrāhīm* asked his son to go and find him the last stone. This implies that the child might in their view have been handing him stones earlier as well.
- 5 See ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Muḥammad Ibn Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʿān al-ʿAẓīm* (Riyadh, 1999), vol. 1, p. 233. I thank one of the anonymous readers for this reference. It should be noted that although al-Ḥasan attributes the prayer to *Ismāʿīl* alone, he adds that the father and son built together.
- 6 Al-Akhfash al-Awsaṭ, *Maʿānī al-Qurʿān*, ed. F. Fāris (Kuwait, 1981), vol. 1, p. 148.

(وَعَهْدُنَا إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ أَنْ طَهِّرَا بَيْتِيَ لِلطَّائِفِينَ وَالْعَاكِفِينَ وَالرُّكَّعِ السُّجُودِ).<sup>7</sup> Therefore the view held by the majority of exegetes which understands Q 2: 127 as referring to Ibrāhīm and Ismāʿīl raising the foundations of the house together seems preferable.

What exactly, however, is meant by the phrase *yarfaʿu ʿl-qawāʿid*, which I translated as “raising the foundations” is not clear. The word *qawāʿid*, usually rendered as “foundations”, is found also in Q 16: 26: “Those that were before them plotted; so Allah came upon their building from the foundations, and the roof fell down on them from above them...” (قَدْ مَكَرَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَأَتَىٰ اللَّهُ بُنْيَانَهُمْ مِنَ الْقَوَاعِدِ فَخَرَّ عَلَيْهِمُ السَّقْفُ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ). In both verses the word *qawāʿid* is often understood as foundations (*isās* or *āsās*).<sup>8</sup> However, other explanations were suggested as well. Thus, in Q 16: 26 many exegetes understood the word as meaning either “foundations” or “columns” (*asāʿīn*).<sup>9</sup> More attention seems to have been paid to the word in Q 2: 127. While many commentators understood it as “foundations”, some preferred other meanings. The well-known philologist al-Kisāʿī (c. 737–805), for example, is said to have explained it as “walls” (*judur*).<sup>10</sup> An additional interpretation is that the word refers to the rows of bricks (*sāfāt*).<sup>11</sup> Presumably, these interpretations are aimed at explaining what it means to raise the *qawāʿid*. Since it is not entirely clear how foundations are raised,<sup>12</sup> the exegetes searched for other possible meanings for the word. But no matter how we choose to understand the phrase, it is clear that the father and the son are both depicted as participating in the erection of the house.<sup>13</sup> That “the house” refers to the Kaʿba, as the exegetes understand, seems very reasonable in the light of Q 5: 97: “Allah has appointed the Kaʿba, the sacred house, as an establishment for the people...” (جَعَلَ اللَّهُ الْكعبةَ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ).

At first glance, this scene does not seem to have a clear biblical precedent.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, modern scholars have suggested several sources as possible

7 The exact relationship between Q 2: 125 and Q 2: 127 is not clear. In the first verse Allah commands Ibrāhīm and Ismāʿīl to purify his house which seems to imply that the house already exists. The latter verse, however, describes how the father and son build the house. One interpretation attributed to al-Suddī (Kufan d. 745) claims that *tahhirā* means in this context “build [in purity]”. Another is that Allah’s command is to purify the place in which the house will be built; see Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 39. For further interpretations, see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr* (Cairo, 1934–62), vol. 4, pp. 57–8.

8 See, for example, Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, vol. 2, p. 120; vol. 10, p. 97 (the term used here is *uṣūl al-bināʿ*).

9 See, for example, Maḥmūd b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan Ḥaqāʾiq al-Tanzīl wa-ʿUyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Taʾwīl* (Beirut, 2001), vol. 2, p. 563.

10 See Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, vol. 2, p. 120.

11 See Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 213. Zamakhsharī also mentions another interpretation which, somewhat artificially, takes *qawāʿid* in Q 2: 127 to mean *mā qaʿada mina ʿl-bayti*.

12 A common explanation is that raising the foundations refers to building on top of them; see *ibid*.

13 Some traditions describe the father and son as building together. Others have Ibrāhīm doing the actual building, while Ismāʿīl passes him the stones; see Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, pp. 65–8.

14 Reuven Firestone, “Abraham”, *EQ*, vol. 1, p. 7, considers it to be one of the Abrahamic references in the Quran which have no parallel in biblical and later Jewish tradition.

inspirations. Henry Preserved Smith noted in 1897 that “the Old Testament makes him [i.e. Abraham] a builder of altars. What more natural than that Mohammed should suppose him the founder of the Kaaba?”.<sup>15</sup> Speyer, Goitein and Rubin<sup>16</sup> pointed to Jubilees 22: 24 where Abraham addresses Jacob and says: “This house I have built for myself to put my name on it upon the earth. It has been given to you and to your descendants forever. It will be called Abraham’s house. It has been given to you and your descendants forever because you will build my house and will establish my name before God until eternity. Your descendants and your name will remain throughout all the history of the earth”.<sup>17</sup> According to these scholars, the “house” referred to is a sanctuary (or perhaps the Temple in Jerusalem) and this tradition of Abraham as the founder of a sanctuary is the ultimate source for the quranic scene.

These suggestions are not entirely satisfactory. Although the passage from Jubilees refers to the building of “Abraham’s house”, this seems to be a metaphorical reference to Abraham’s family (i.e. household)<sup>18</sup> or to the land.<sup>19</sup> Since Jubilees did not previously describe Abraham as building an actual house or temple in his lifetime, there is no compelling reason to understand that a reference to such an edifice is being made in Jubilees 22: 24. Although Rubin argues that the general context of the passage in Jubilees implies the actual building of a sanctuary, I fail to see this.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, these suggestions do not address the unique aspect of the quranic verse, namely, that Ibrāhīm and his son Ismā‘īl build together.<sup>21</sup>

Joshua Finkel pointed to the story of Abraham’s attempt to sacrifice Isaac in Gen. 22 as the source of this episode.<sup>22</sup> In his opinion, the proto-Muslims responsible for this legend shifted the story of the attempted sacrifice to Mecca in order to form a national religion. Since Isaac was not an ancestor of

15 Henry Preserved Smith, *The Bible and Islam* (New York, 1897), 40.

16 Heinrich Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (reprint Hildesheim, 1971), 162; S. D. Goitein, *Ha-islam shel Muhammad: ketsad hithavta dat hadasha be-tsel ha-Yahadut* (Jerusalem, 1956), 182–4; Uri Rubin, “*Haniḥiyya* and Ka’ba: an inquiry into the Arabian pre-Islamic background of *din Ibrāhīm*”, *JSAI* 13, 1990, 108.

17 Translation from Ethiopic by James C. VanderKam, *The Book of Jubilees* (Louvain, 1989), 133.

18 See the remark in R. H. Charles and G. H. Box, *The Book of Jubilees or the Little Genesis* (London, 1917), 126, note 3: “‘House’ throughout this passage = ‘family’”. See also Joseph M. Baumgarten, *Studies in Qumran Law* (Leiden, 1977), 86.

19 See VanderKam, *Jubilees*, 133, in the note on 22: 24.

20 Rubin, “*Haniḥiyya*”, 108, note 108. It seems that the understanding of Jubilees 22: 24 as referring to a sanctuary built by Abraham is more of a concern for scholars in search of a source for the quranic scene than it is for scholars of Jubilees.

21 Goitein, *Ha-islam*, 184, notes that in Jubilees 22: 24 the house is built both by Abraham and Jacob. Nonetheless, they are not described as building together at the same time. Rather, Abraham commands Jacob to continue his work after he passes away.

22 It should be mentioned that although Goitein, *ibid.*, emphasizes Jubilees 22: 24, he also notes that Jubilees elaborates here on a link between Abraham and the Temple found already in 2 Chronicles 3: 1, according to which Solomon built the Temple on Mount Moriah (a reference to Gen. 22: 2). Therefore, Goitein too relates our quranic scene indirectly to Gen. 22.

the Arabs, his part was omitted from the story. Instead, Ishmael was assigned the auxiliary role of helping with the dedication ceremonies of the house.<sup>23</sup>

In what follows I will attempt to substantiate the link between Gen. 22 and the quranic scene. I will suggest, however, that the scene of the father and the son building together is not a mere replacement of the attempted sacrifice, as Finkel would have it, but rather an integral part of post-biblical traditions concerning Gen. 22.

After Abraham and Isaac reach Mount Moriah, it is said:

When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood (Gen. 22: 9).<sup>24</sup>

The biblical account is quite clear about the roles of the father and his son. All the actions in the verse are carried out by Abraham; Isaac is completely passive. Nevertheless, in post-biblical sources Isaac was ascribed the active role of one who willingly offers himself for slaughter.<sup>25</sup> As part of this portrayal Isaac was depicted by some sources as participating in the building of the altar. We find this theme already in Josephus Flavius, and it is further developed in several pre-quranic Christian sources (as well as in several post-quranic Jewish ones) where the father and son are described as building the altar together.

Josephus, in *Judean Antiquities* 1.227, writes: “And they brought with them as many things as were needed for the sacrifice except for the victim. When Isakos, who was in his twenty-fifth year, was setting up the altar and asked what they were about to sacrifice, since no victim was present, he said that god would provide for them. . .”<sup>26</sup> A homily attributed to Amphilochius of Iconium (c. 340–after 394) and preserved only in Coptic attributes the following speech to Isaac: “. . . And now, build a place of sacrifice, and this will become a tomb for me, for your son, and I shall ascend it well. I myself, my father, I shall help you eagerly to build my tomb. I shall heap up the stones. May my tomb resemble a temple, and guide me thereto. Slay me for the One who has called you”.<sup>27</sup> As Sebastian Brock notes, several anonymous Syriac homilies on Gen. 22 include a motif similar to that of Amphilochius and describe the father and the son building together.<sup>28</sup> Thus in an artistic prose homily dated by Brock

23 Joshua Finkel, “Jewish, Christian, and Samaritan influences on Arabia”, *The Macdonald Presentation Volume* (Princeton, 1933), 158–60. Finkel argues that the conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans concerning the location of Mount Moriah (Jerusalem versus Mount Gerizim) emboldened the Arabs to shift the story to a third site.

24 All translations of biblical verses are taken from the NRSV.

25 See James L. Kugel, *Traditions of the Bible: a Guide to the Bible as it was at the Start of the Common Era* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 304–06.

26 Translation by Louis H. Feldman in Steve Mason (ed.), *Flavius Josephus: Translation and Commentary* (Leiden, 2000), vol. 3, pp. 88–9.

27 “Amphilochii Iconiensis Oratio De Abraham Patriarcha”, ed. and trans. L. Van Rompay, in C. Datema, *Amphilochii Iconiensis Opera* (Turnhout, 1978), 286.

28 See Sebastian Brock, “Genesis 22 in Syriac tradition”, in P. Casetti et al. (ed.), *Mélanges Dominique Barthélemy* (Fribourg, 1981), 13, 27, and Sebastian Brock, “Two Syriac verse homilies on the binding of Isaac”, *Le Muséon* 99, 1986, 127.

to the late fourth or very early fifth century we find: “So the (two) wise architects (*ardekle ḥakkime*) began to build a choice altar for the noble offering. As Isaac collected together stones, Abraham took them from his beloved one”.<sup>29</sup> A similar description is found in two other Syriac homilies written in verse. The first (dated by Brock to the mid-fifth century) describes the building of the altar thus: “But now let us gather together some wood/so that we can build a pyre, (a labour) of our gladness . . . And Abraham began to build/the pyre that he had in mind, while Isaac was bringing along wood/on his shoulders to Abraham . . . old man and child both, readily became/workers for God. . .”.<sup>30</sup> The second (which makes use of the first and is dated by Brock to the second half of the fifth century) describes the building of the altar thus: “Abraham began to build,/for his mind was prepared, while Isaac brought along stones/on his shoulders to Abraham: they became workers for God/the old man and his son, equally. . .”.<sup>31</sup> Finally, descriptions of Abraham and Isaac building together are found also in several post-quranic rabbinic sources.<sup>32</sup>

The source most relevant to our issue is a Syriac verse-homily by Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) dedicated to Gen. 22. The description of the building of the altar runs for several lines and emphasizes Isaac’s willing participation in his own sacrifice. For our needs a few lines suffice:

Abraham approached and put down the fire with the knife / and began to build an altar for the Lord on the top of the mountain.

ܐܒܪܗܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ  
(ܐܒܪܗܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ)

The master-builder of faith approached and *ngad dumsa* / in order to build there a house for the mysteries which would take place.

ܐܒܪܗܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ  
(ܐܒܪܗܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ ܕܥܘܠܡ)

29 See Sebastian Brock, “An anonymous Syriac homily on Abraham (Gen. 22)”, *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 12, 1981, 250.

30 Brock, “Binding”, 109, lines 69–79.

31 *Ibid.*, 124, lines 55–7.

32 In *Midrash Tanḥuma* (began to crystallize in the fifth–seventh centuries, but continued to evolve into the Middle Ages), Wa-yera, 23, they build the altar together; see English translation in Samuel A. Berman, *Midrash Tanḥuma-Yelamdenu* (Hoboken, 1996), 147. In *Midrash Wa-yosha* (probably composed at the end of the eleventh century), Abraham builds the altar and Isaac hands him the wood and stones. Abraham is likened to one who builds a bridal home for his son, and Isaac to one who prepares a canopy for himself with joy; see Adolph Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* (Leipzig, 1853), vol. 1, p. 37. See also *Yalqut Shimoni* (a midrashic thesaurus of the twelfth or thirteenth century) on Genesis, no. 101 (quotes an anonymous Midrash similar to *Midrash Wa-yosha*) and *Sefer Ha-yashar* (date of composition disputed, eleventh/twelfth century or beginning of sixteenth century) where Abraham builds and Isaac hands him the stones and mortar; see English translation in M. M. Noah, *The Book of Yashar* (New York, 1840), 67. These sources are collected in M. M. Kasher, *Torah Shelema* (Jerusalem, 1938), vol. 3, tome 4, p. 890.

And when Isaac gazed and saw what his father was doing, / he himself lifted stones in order to bring them forth to build the altar.

וַיִּבֶן יִצְחָק אֶת-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְאֵלֹהֵי אֲבֹתָיו, וַיִּלָּחֶץ אֶת-הַאֲבָנִים  
(וַיִּלָּחֶץ אֶת-הַאֲבָנִים לְבִנְיַת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ)

He had seen the priest building an altar for his own sacrifice / and stretched out his hand in order to finish [the building] with him untroubled.

וַיִּרְאֵהוּ הַכֹּהֵן בּוֹנֵה אֹתָר לְעֹלֹתָיו, וַיִּשְׁטַח אֶת-יָדָיו  
(וַיִּשְׁטַח אֶת-יָדָיו לְבִנְיַת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ)

For he [i.e. Abraham] was the priest, the master-builder and the father of the lamb/and Isaac was the sacrifice, the stone bearer [lit: the labourer of stones] and the son of the priest.

וְהוּא הָיָה הַכֹּהֵן, הַבּוֹנֵה וְהַאֲבִיב, וְיִצְחָק  
הָיָה הַזֶּבֶחַ, הַבֹּרֵךְ וְהַבֵּן, וְאַבְרָהָם הָיָה הַבֵּן

The meaning of *ngad dumsa* in the third line is not clear. The word *dumsa* (a Greek loanword) may refer to a house, to a row of bricks (or stones) or to the foundation of a building.<sup>34</sup> It is difficult to understand it as referring in this instance to the entire structure since the next line states that the final aim was “to build there a house. . .” (*d-nebne tamman bayta*).<sup>35</sup> It might, therefore, be preferable to understand it here as referring to a part of the structure, either to a row of bricks (or stones) or to the foundation. These meanings are found in Bar Bahlūl’s entry on *dumsa*.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, the Arabic words he uses are the same ones found in the exegetes’ definitions of the Arabic *qawā'id*: *sāf* and *asās*. Rabbinic sources have *dimos* (דִּימוֹס) (row or layer of stones), which in some instances seems to be the responsibility of the master-builder, the *ardikhāl* (אַרְדִּיכַל), who sets the stones in the *dimos*.<sup>37</sup> This parallels Jacob’s scene where the master-builder (*ardekla*) deals with the *dumsa*. As for the meaning of the Syriac verb *ngad*, which literally means “to draw” or “to pull”, in this context, it seems to mean “to lengthen”, “to stretch” or “to extend”.<sup>38</sup>

33 Paulus Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* (Paris, 1905–10), vol. 4, p. 90, lines 4–13.  
 34 For these meanings, see Carl Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Halis Saxonum, 1928), 158a. The meaning “course of stone or bricks in a building” exists also for the Greek δόμος (alongside the meaning “house”); see H. G. Liddel and R. Scott, *A Greek–English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1996), 444.  
 35 Although one could argue that *dumsa* in line 3 refers to the actual edifice, while *bayta* in line 4 refers to its function as a house for mysteries.  
 36 Rubens Duval, *Lexicon Syriacum Auctore Hassano Bar Bahlule* (Paris, 1901), vol. 1, p. 543.  
 37 See Tosefta BM 11: 5 and BT BM 118b.  
 38 R. Payne Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus* (Oxford, 1879–1901), vol. 2, p. 2277 cites *ngad šure*, which is translated by J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford, 1957), 327, as “he lengthened the walls i.e. built further”. The source of this quotation is J. P. N. Land, *Anecdota Syriaca* (Leiden, 1862), vol. 1, p. 61, citing the Syro-Roman Law Book. *Šure*, however, is testified in only one manuscript of this work. Other manuscripts read either *šuve* (streets) or *šqaque* (lanes); Walter Selb and Hubert Kaufhold, *Das Syrisch-Römische Rechtsbuch* (Vienna, 2002), vol. 2, p. 154.

Therefore, *ngad dumsa* could be understood to mean “extended the layer of stones” or “extended the foundation”.<sup>39</sup>

In Jacob’s homily, we have more than Isaac simply helping with the building of the altar. The whole scene is described in terms of construction: Abraham is a master-builder (*ardekla*), Isaac is a labourer who carries stones (*pa<sup>c</sup>la d-kipe*), and most importantly, the structure being built is not only an altar but also a house (*bayta*).<sup>40</sup> I suggest that a similar version in which Abraham built an altar which was also a house together with his son (Isaac) served as the background for the quranic scene in which Ibrāhīm and his son (Ismā‘īl) raise the foundations of the house together. Without putting too much emphasis on it, I find the similarity between the Arabic *yarfa‘u ‘l-qawā‘id* and the Syriac *ngad dumsa* striking. *Qawā‘id* and *dumsa* can both mean “foundation(s)” or “row(s) of bricks”.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, the two verbs are not that far apart in meaning. While the Arabic means “to raise”, the Syriac means “to pull” or “to extend”.<sup>42</sup> It is perhaps of interest that “a certain resemblance” has been noted previously between the Quran and another homily of Jacob regarding the story of the Sleepers of Ephesus.<sup>43</sup>

Further support for the suggestion that Q 2: 127 reflects traditions concerning Gen. 22 is found in the prayer which accompanied the building of the house in

---

I am indebted to one of the anonymous readers for drawing my attention to the other readings.

- 39 Compare with instances where Jacob uses *dumse* in the plural (probably referring to parts of one structure rather than to several structures) with *mtah* “to stretch”; see Bedjan, *Homiliae*, vol. 1, pp. 476, 530. A parallel use of the verbs *ngad* and *mtah* is found also in the passage from the Syro-Roman Law book cited in the previous note: ܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ ܕܿܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ ܕܿܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ ܕܿܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ. Another verb that Jacob uses with *dumse* is *traš* “to make straight”; see Paulus Bedjan, *S. Martyrii, qui et Sahdona, quae supersunt omnia* (Paris, 1902), 627, 848. I thank one of the anonymous readers for these references.
- 40 In Jacob’s homily on the Flood, he uses similar language to describe Noah’s building of the altar when he emerges from the ark (Bedjan, *Homiliae*, vol. 4, p. 54 line 19–p. 55 line 2). Noah is described as a master-builder of faith (*ardekla d-haymanuta*) and his altar is called a building (*benyana*) and a house (*bayta*). I am indebted to Emmanuel Papoutsakis for this reference.
- 41 For my argument it is not crucial that *dumsa* must be shown to mean “layer of stones” or “foundation” (as opposed to “house” or “edifice”) in this instance, only that it might have been understood in this manner.
- 42 In the beginning of the homily on the Flood (Bedjan, *Homiliae*, vol. 4, p. 3, lines 19–20), Jacob uses a phrase which could be considered the exact Syriac equivalent of *yarfa‘u ‘l-qawā‘id*. He says concerning Noah: “He alone was diligent in uprightness / and he toiled and raised the straight (stone) rows [or edifices] of faith” (ܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ ܕܿܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ ܕܿܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ ܕܿܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ / ܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ ܕܿܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ ܕܿܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ, ܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ ܩܘܿܪܿܐܢܿܐ). See also *ibid.*, p. 5, line 11, where the *dumsa* (in this case probably an edifice) rises (*saleq*) based on rows of stones (*sedre*). I thank Emmanuel Papoutsakis for these references.
- 43 See I. Guidi, “Seven sleepers”, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York, 1921), vol. 11, p. 429. For the latest study, also emphasizing the importance of Jacob’s homily, see Sidney H. Griffith, “Christian lore and the Arabic Qur’ān: the ‘Companions of the Cave’ in Sūrat al-Kahf and in Syriac Christian tradition”, in Gabriel S. Reynolds (ed.), *The Qur’ān in Its Historical Context* (London, 2008), 109–37.



Q 2: 127–9. In it Ibrāhīm and Ismāʿīl ask that Allah accept their deed with special emphasis on the (religious) fate of their offspring. This parallels Gen. 22: 15–8, which considers Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son as merit for his descendants:

The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, “By myself I have sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice”.

In the biblical text this promise is God’s initiative and does not follow a prayer by Abraham. However, later Jewish sources (probably motivated also by the obscure words of Gen. 22: 14: “So Abraham called that place YHWH will see . . .”) portray Abraham as praying to God to remember his willingness to sacrifice his son as merit for his offspring. In *Genesis Rabba* 56.10, for example, the following prayer is put in Abraham’s mouth:

Lord of the universe! When you told me “Take your son, your only son Isaac”, I could have answered: Yesterday you told me “for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named after you” and now you tell me “Take”. God forbid, I did not do so, but suppressed my compassion in order to fulfill your will. In the same manner, may it be pleasing to you, O Lord our God, that when the children of Isaac are in trouble, you will remember in their favor that binding and be filled with compassion over them.<sup>44</sup>

Further support for the linking of the quranic scene with Gen. 22 might be found in the way the section concerning Ibrāhīm begins in Q 2: 124: “And [remember] when his Lord tested (*ibtalā*) Ibrāhīm<sup>45</sup> with words and he fulfilled them. . .” (وَإِذْ أَبْتَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ رَبُّهُ بِكَلِمَاتٍ فَأَتَمَّهُنَّ). The classical exegetes offer several different identifications of these words of trial. The words are interpreted, for example, to refer either to the laws of Islam, to acts of ritual purification, to

44 For text and rabbinic parallels, see J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba* (Jerusalem, 1965), vol. 2, p. 607. See also Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis* (Wilmington, 1988), 87. For Targumic versions which are closer to the *Genesis Rabba* prayer, see Martin McNamara, *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis* (Collegeville, 1992), 118–9 and Michael Maher, *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis* (Collegeville, 1992), 80. For a survey of the redemptive virtue of the Binding of Isaac in midrashic literature, see Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden, 1983), 206–08.

45 This follows the majority reading. A reading which would render the verse “And when Ibrāhīm tried his lord” is attributed to Jābir b. Zayd Abū al-Shaʿthāʾ (of Baṣra. d. 711/2 or 721/2), to his teacher Ibn ʿAbbās and to Abū Ḥanīfa. See Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, vol. 1, p. 210; Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*, vol. 2, p. 97, and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīr*, vol. 4, p. 40.

the rites of the *Hajj* or to the tests to which Ibrāhīm was subjected.<sup>46</sup> The verb “tested” (*ibtalā*), however, is reminiscent both of the way Gen. 22: 1 begins (“After these things God tested (*nissa* [נסה]) Abraham. . .”) and of the manner in which the Quran itself describes the attempted sacrifice episode in Q 37: 106 as a trial (*balā*). Therefore, it seems likely that this verse refers to the trial of the sacrifice. This interpretation is found in a few classical exegetes,<sup>47</sup> and is popular with Western scholars.<sup>48</sup> If Q 2: 124 is taken as a heading for the following verses, then Q 2: 127 should be related to the sacrifice episode.<sup>49</sup>

Yet another link to the sacrifice story of Gen. 22 is found in later traditions concerning the building of the Ka’ba. A motif common to many of these traditions is that Ibrāhīm could not find the location of the house on his own. Ṭabarī’s introduction to his chapter about the building of the Ka’ba reflects the gist of these traditions: “Ibrāhīm did not know in which place to build since [Allah] had not made this clear to him. Therefore he was unable to accomplish it. . .”.<sup>50</sup> As a result Ibrāhīm received some sort of supernatural help. The traditions differ as to whether the help came from Jibrīl,<sup>51</sup> from a supernatural strong wind,<sup>52</sup> from the Sakīna,<sup>53</sup> from a cloud that rested over the site,<sup>54</sup> or

46 See Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, pp. 7–17. Rudi Paret, *Der Koran Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart, 1971), 28, suggests a different understanding: the “words” refer to Allah’s promise of offspring to Ibrāhīm in his old age, and it is Allah who is the subject of the verb *atamma* and fulfils his promise.

47 See, for example, ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, ed. Ṭ. al-Mūsawī al-Jazā’irī (Najaf, 1386–7 AH), vol. 1, p. 59, and Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi’*, vol. 2, p. 97 (unattributed opinion). According to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, the verse refers to the various trials which Allah brought upon Ibrāhīm. His opinion is transmitted in several versions, some of which mention the attempted sacrifice as one of the trials; see Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 14.

48 See, for example, Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Islam* (Madras, 1898), 102, and Beck, “Gestalt”, 74.

49 One might be tempted to find further links to Gen. 22 in the mention of “words” (*kalimāt*) in Q 2: 124 (cf. *devarim* in Gen. 22: 1) and “place” *maqām* in Q 2: 125 (cf. *maqom* in Gen. 22: 3, 4). These words, however, are common enough in both texts so that such links are inconclusive.

50 See Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-Rusul wal-Mulūk*, ed. M. J. De Goeje (Leiden, 1879–1881), ser. 1, vol. 1, p. 274.

51 See the tradition attributed to Mujāhid b. Jabr (Mecca, d. c. 720) and other anonymous scholars in Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, pp. 61–2.

52 See the tradition attributed to al-Suddī (Kufa, d. 745) in *ibid.*, pp. 65–6. The wind is described as having two wings and a head in the shape of a snake. When Ibrāhīm and Ismā’īl cannot find the house, the wind sweeps away the earth that covered the remains of the first house.

53 See, for example, the tradition attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (in the transmission of Sa’īd b. al-Musayyab [Medina, d. c. 712]) in *ibid.*, p. 63. In it, Ibrāhīm (coming from Armenia) is led by the Sakīna which first marks the site as a spider marks its house, and then reveals to him great stones (presumably the foundations of the earlier house). See also the tradition attributed to ‘Alī (in the transmission of Khālīd b. ‘Ar’ara) in *ibid.*, pp. 69–70. In this tradition Ibrāhīm finds the matter difficult (*fa-dāqa Ibrāhīmu bi-dhālika dhar’an*), so Allah sends him the Sakīna, which is identified as a strong wind with two heads (a conflation of two originally independent elements; compare previous note) to lead him to the site. When they reach Mecca, the Sakīna wraps itself around the site of the house.

54 See the Kufan tradition attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (in the transmission of Ḥāritha b. Muḥarrab) in *ibid.*, 68–9. In this tradition Ibrāhīm sees a likeness of a cloud

from a *Ṣurad*<sup>55</sup> bird.<sup>56</sup> Several of these traditions cite explicitly or at least hint at Q 22: 26 “And [remember] when we assigned (*bawwa’na*) for Ibrāhīm the site of the house . . .” (وَأِذْ بَوَّأْنَا لِإِبْرَاهِيمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ). The common meaning of the verb *bawwa’a* in the second form is “to lodge one in an abode” or “to prepare an abode for one”.<sup>57</sup> This by itself could already give the impression of divine help concerning the site of the house. Moreover, the same root (in the fifth form) can also refer to a closely related meaning of marking a place in order to abide there.<sup>58</sup> Some exegetes actually interpreted the word in this verse as meaning “we showed” (*araynā*).<sup>59</sup>

This motif is again reminiscent of a common theme in post-biblical traditions concerning the sacrifice story. In Gen. 22: 2 God commands Abraham:

Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.

Verse 4 then reports that:

On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away.

Since the text does not mention that God showed this site to Abraham, readers naturally wondered how Abraham identified it. This question was answered in several ways. According to the homily attributed to Amphilochius of Iconium, God himself opened Abraham’s insight and made him see the place in response to his request.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, one of the anonymous Syriac verse-homilies has a voice from above identifying the mountain for Abraham.<sup>61</sup> According to Jacob of Serugh, Abraham recognized the site through “the

---

(*mīthl al-ghamāma*) above the site of the house. In it there is a likeness of a head (*mīthl al-ra’s*) which instructs him to build the house according to the dimensions of the cloud.

55 For the various descriptions of this type of bird, see Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge, 1984), vol. 2, p. 1677.

56 Three traditions (all transmitted via the Meccan scholar Ibn Jurayj [d. c. 767]) in Muḥammad b. ‘Abd Allāh al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka* ed. R. Ş. Malḥas (Mecca, 1352–57 AH), vol. 1, pp. 23, 24 and 26, mention that Ibrāhīm was accompanied by an angel, the Sakīna, and a *Ṣurad* bird. Al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Navādir al-Uṣūl*, ed. M.‘A. ‘Aṭā (Beirut, 1992), vol. 1, p. 287 mentions only the Sakīna and the *Ṣurad*, and explains that they fulfilled different roles: the bird was the guide, and the Sakīna supplied the dimensions of the building (it is not clear whether this is Tirmidhī’s opinion or a quotation from Abū Hurayra).

57 Lane, *Lexicon*, vol. 1, p. 271.

58 *Ibid.* Several traditions use the fifth form to describe how the Sakīna marked the site of the house in the same way a spider marks its house (*ma‘ahu ’l-sakīna tadulluhu ‘alā tabawwu’i ’l-bayti kamā tatabawwa’u ’l-‘ankabūtu baytahā*); see, for example, the tradition attributed to ‘Alī in Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 63. This clear reference to Q 22: 26 was overlooked by Reuven Firestone, *Journeys in Holy Lands* (Albany, 1990), 86; he is intrigued by the spider motif, and suggests that it is either a comparison to the natural habits of a spider or a reflection of “a deeper but obscure level of association”.

59 See Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, vol. 12, p. 36.

60 Van Rompay, “Amphilochii”, 282.

61 Brock, “Binding”, 123, line 45.

eye of prophecy” and saw a symbol of the crucifixion on the top of the mountain.<sup>62</sup> Classical Midrashim mention that Abraham saw a cloud enveloping the mountain. *Genesis Rabba* 56.2, for example, has the following comment:

*And saw the place far away.* What did he see? He saw a cloud enveloping the mountain. He said: “this seems to be the place where the Holy One, blessed be he, told me to sacrifice my son”.<sup>63</sup>

Later Jewish sources, based on the rabbinic use of the word *hammaqom* (“the place”) to refer to God, say that Abraham saw the Shekhina standing on the mountain.<sup>64</sup> Thus *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chapter 31, states:

And when they reached Zophim they saw the glory of the Shekhina resting upon the top of the mountain as it is said, “On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw *the place* afar off”. What did he see? A pillar of fire standing from the earth to the heavens.<sup>65</sup>

Some sources not only explain how Abraham eventually identified the site, but also stress the difficulty which he had to begin with in a manner reminiscent of the Islamic traditions. Thus, for example, the homily attributed to Amphilochius puts the following request in Abraham’s mouth:

Show me the way, which is hidden from me now, and you will see my zeal . . . For behold, I see many high mountains before me. Which one therefore pleases you? Which way will attain you? Where will you come to me? From where will you look at the one whom I shall present? For behold, it is our third day today that I and my son are searching to find you . . . and the path was confused for me . . . Look and see my suffering. Show me the way you have chosen and (to which) you have called me.<sup>66</sup>

62 See Brock, “Genesis 22”, 26, note 51. For additional opinions in Syriac sources, see *ibid.*, 10.

63 For text and parallels, see Theodor, *Bereshit*, vol. 2, p. 595. See discussion in Jonathan Grossman and Gilad Sasson, “On implicit biblical analogies in Midrashim of the Sages – in the footsteps of Rabbi Y. Bin-Nun and Rabbi Y. Medan”, *Megadim* 46, 2007, 26–30 [in Hebrew]. Grossman and Sasson suggest that the literary similarities that exist between Genesis 22 and Exodus 24 led to the transferral of the cloud motif from Exodus 24: 15 (“Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain . . .”) to Gen. 22.

64 Interestingly, Jacob of Serugh also says that the Škinta was present when Abraham and Isaac reached the mountain; see Brock, “Genesis 22”, 26, n. 52.

65 Translation by Gerald Friedlander, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* (New York, 1981), 225–6. Later on in the same chapter it is said that God himself pointed out the altar to Abraham. See also *Aggadat Bereshit*, ch. 31; English translation in Lieve M. Teugels, *Aggadat Bereshit* (Leiden, 2001), p. 99. See also the Palestinian Targums on Gen. 22: 14. Fire marking the site is possibly mentioned in a Qumran fragment (4Q225); see Mark Bregman, “The Aqedah at Qumran: fire on the mountain” (Abstract of lecture presented at the Orion Center, May 21, 1998, online access at: <http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il/orion/programs/Bregman.shtml>).

66 Van Rompay, “Amphilochii”, 282. Compare with the fourth/fifth-century piyyut *Az be-’En Kol* where it is said of Abraham: “He ran quickly to do His desire/though the

All in all, these parallels seem more convincing than previous attempts to explain the supernatural help that Ibrāhīm received as reflecting either Abraham's three visitors in Gen. 18,<sup>67</sup> the cloud that guided the Israelites in the desert as well as the cloud in which God would descend on the tabernacle,<sup>68</sup> or indigenous pre-Islamic Arab legends regarding the sanctity of the shrine.<sup>69</sup>

A final parallel between the Gen. 22 tradition and the founding of the house might be adduced again from later Islamic and Jewish traditions. Although the Quran only mentions Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl as the founders of the house, many traditions claim that Ādam had already built it (or that it had come down from heaven in his time).<sup>70</sup> The explanation given is that Ādam's Ka'ba had to be rebuilt on account of the flood. A similar tradition is found again in post-quranic Jewish sources with regard to the altar built by Abraham. Thus, according to *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* on Gen. 22: 9, Abraham built his altar at the exact site where Adam had built his. At the time of the flood it was demolished, built again by Noah only to be demolished again at the time of the scattering of the nations (Gen. 11) and finally rebuilt by Abraham.<sup>71</sup> Admittedly, parallels between post-quranic Islamic and Jewish sources cannot prove the origin of the quranic episode itself. They do, however, indicate that to early audiences real parallels existed between the two stories. This in turn lends strength to the idea that these parallels were already present in the background of the quranic narrative itself.

That such parallels exist between the sacrifice story of Gen. 22 and the quranic scene describing the building of the Ka'ba is not surprising taking into account the similar etiological function of both texts. The scene in the Quran serves to explain the origin of the worship at the Ka'ba (see Q 2: 125). Gen. 22

---

way was concealed from him"; English translation in Michael D. Swartz and Joseph Yahalom, *Avodah: an Anthology of Ancient Poetry for Yom Kippur* (University Park, PA, 2005), 170.

67 G. R. Hawting, "The origins of the Muslim sanctuary at Mecca", in G. H. A. Juynboll (ed.), *Studies on the First Century of Islamic Society* (Carbondale, 1982), 41, suggests that the traditions which describe Ibrāhīm's journey to find the site of the house in the company of three heavenly beings (one of them being the Sakīna) are reminiscent of Abraham's three visitors in Gen. 18 (one of whom could be identified with the Lord). In Gen. 18, however, there is no question of finding a site. Moreover, the Islamic traditions which refer to three guides (one of whom is in fact a *Ṣurad* bird) seem to be a compromise between conflicting traditions which mentioned only one.

68 See Firestone, *Journeys*, 207, note 45.

69 See Reuven Firestone, "Abraham's journey to Mecca in Islamic exegesis: a form-critical study of a tradition", *Studia Islamica* 76, 1992, 15–6. It is of course possible that elements originating from developments of Gen. 22 might have been reinterpreted according to Arabian folklore.

70 See Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, pp. 57–60. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 63, states that these traditions find support in the wording of Q 2: 127 ("were raising the foundations of the house") which indicates that there were ruins of a former building.

71 See Maher, *Pseudo-Jonathan*, 79. In *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. 31, it is the same altar on which Adam, Cain and Abel, and Noah and his sons offered their sacrifices. This is deduced from the text of the verse which refers to Abraham building "*the* altar" (*ham-mizbeaḥ*) as opposed to "an altar" (*mizbeaḥ*).

probably also serves as an etiology for the worship at the temple in Jerusalem (see Gen. 22: 14), and at the very least was understood in this fashion in later Jewish tradition.<sup>72</sup> Therefore the scene in the Quran may be understood as an appropriation of the foundation story of the Jerusalem temple, adapting it to the founding of the Ka'ba. This would not be the first time that the site in which the attempted sacrifice took place was identified with a sacred site of another religion. The Samaritans identified the site with Mount Gerizim,<sup>73</sup> while as a result of their typological reading of Gen. 22 as prefiguring the crucifixion,<sup>74</sup> several Christian writers identified the site with Golgotha.<sup>75</sup>

If the quranic description of the building of the Ka'ba does indeed reflect post-biblical traditions concerning Gen. 22, what are the changes that it introduces to the story? An obvious addition is the last part of the prayer in which Ibrāhīm (with Ismā'īl) requests that a prophet be sent to his offspring (Q 2: 129 "And our Lord! Send to them a messenger from them who shall recite your signs to them, teach them the book and the wisdom, and purify them. Indeed you are the mighty, the wise"). This has no precedent in the prayer of Abraham as attested in the various Jewish sources, and is a reference to Muḥammad himself, as can be seen from other verses which employ the same language most probably with regard to Muḥammad.<sup>76</sup> Thus the story now serves not only as an etiology for the sanctuary in Mecca but also as a prediction of Muḥammad's prophecy.<sup>77</sup>

The replacement of Isaac with Ismā'īl is perhaps the most striking innovation, and is most probably related to the notion that the Arabs are the descendants of Ismā'īl. Although the Quran never states this explicitly, this notion is known to have existed among some Arabs in pre-Islamic times, as testified in the writings of two fifth-century Greek authors, Theodoret and Sozomen.<sup>78</sup>

My suggestion might shed light on the much-debated issue of the identity of the intended victim in Q 37: 100–111. As it does in many cases, the Quran neglects to mention a name, but rather refers to the "boy" (*ghulām*).<sup>79</sup> Classical exegetes as well as modern scholars disagree as to whether this refers

72 See discussion in Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven, 1993), 111–24.

73 See Isaac Kalimi, "Zion or Gerizim? The Association of Abraham and the *Aqeda* with Zion/Gerizim in Jewish and Samaritan Sources", in Meir Lubetski *et al.* (eds), *Boundaries of the Ancient Near Eastern World* (Sheffield, 1998), 442–57.

74 For this theme, see, for example, Brock, "Genesis 22".

75 See Adam Kamesar, *Jerome, Greek Scholarship, and the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford, 1993), 187, and Brock, "Genesis 22", 7–8, 25.

76 See Q 2: 151, Q 3: 164, Q 62: 2.

77 For similar predictions concerning Muḥammad, see Q 7: 157 and Q 61: 6. For a discussion of Ṭabarī's treatment of these passages, see Jane D. McAuliffe, "The prediction and prefiguration of Muḥammad", in John C. Reeves (ed.), *Bible and Qur'an: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality* (Leiden, 2003), 107–31.

78 See Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington, 1989), 154–6, 171–2 and 179–80.

79 Q 37: 101.

to Iṣḥāq or Ismāʿīl. Both sides adduce arguments from the Quran, and it seems that none are conclusive. Several scholars who examined the history of the exegesis of the story in Q 37 concluded that Iṣḥāq was originally considered to be the intended victim, and only later was he replaced with Ismāʿīl.<sup>80</sup> If, however, the link between Q 2: 127 and Gen. 22 is to be accepted, then we may conclude that at least one passage of the Quran already identified the son in question as Ismāʿīl.

If the traditional chronology of the Suras is accepted, this might be an instance of change over time in the Quran's presentation of a theme. The progression from a Meccan Sura (Q 37) in which the name of the son is not mentioned to a Medinan one (Q 2) where he is identified as Ismāʿīl coincides with the opinion of several Western scholars regarding the development of the figure of Ismāʿīl in the Quran. These scholars argue that Ismāʿīl changed from a prophet unconnected with Ibrāhīm in the Meccan period to his first son in the Medinan one. It should be noted, however, that this opinion uses a circular argument in treating Q 14: 37 as a Medinan addition to a Meccan Sura only on the basis that Ismāʿīl is Ibrāhīm's son in that verse.<sup>81</sup> Whatever the exact relationship between Q 2 and Q 37, Q 2: 127 can still serve as evidence that the replacement of one sibling with another began already in the Quran.

A comparison of these two passages raises, however, a different difficulty. Nowhere is a sacrifice mentioned in Q 2: 124–9 on the building of the house, while conversely, when the Quran does deal with the attempted sacrifice (Q 37: 100–111), the building of the house is neither mentioned nor alluded to. This would seem to imply that the two episodes are completely unrelated in the Quran. This conclusion is, however, unmerited, since it is quite common for the Quran to present different parts of the same story in different Suras in accordance with the themes of each Sura.<sup>82</sup> Thus one could argue that in this instance too the Quran chooses to present the elements which illustrate best the argument of each Sura. The verses in Q 37 are part of a unit that deals with the deliverance of messengers from distress, and therefore emphasize the sacrifice element of the story.<sup>83</sup> On the other hand, the verses in Q 2 are part of a unit which deals with the religious legacy of Ibrāhīm, and, as a result, highlight the sanctuary and rites related to the story.<sup>84</sup>

80 See Reuven Firestone, "Abraham's son as the intended sacrifice (*al-Dhabīḥ*, Qur'ān 37: 99–113): issues in qur'ānic exegesis", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 34, 1989, 95–131, and Suliman Bashear, "Abraham's sacrifice of his son and related issues", *Der Islam* 67, 1990, 243–77. For a critique of Firestone's conclusions and a discussion of the difficulty of determining the opinion of early authorities on this issue, see F. Leemhuis, "Ibrāhīm's sacrifice of his son in the early post-Koranic tradition", in Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar (eds), *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqeda (Genesis 22) and Its Interpretations* (Leiden, 2002), 130.

81 For the various theories regarding Ismāʿīl in the Quran, see Rudi Paret, "Ismāʿīl", *EF*, vol. 4, p. 184.

82 See Wadad Kadi and Mustansir Mir, "Literature and the Qur'ān", *EQ*, vol. 3, p. 212. They coin the term *taṣrif* (based on quranic usage such as Q 17: 41) for this quranic narrative principle.

83 See Q 37: 71–148.

84 See Q 2: 122–52.

My suggestion does, nevertheless, suffer from other flaws. The parallels from post-biblical treatments of Gen. 22 are gathered from different Jewish and Christian texts. Thus, for example, the descriptions of father and son building together are found in pre-Islamic Christian texts (but only in post-quranic Jewish sources), while Abraham's prayer is found in many Jewish sources but not in Christian ones. Had all these elements been found in one source, my case would definitely have been stronger. Another weakness of the argument is that some of the parallels could have arisen independently. All the same, when taken together they make for an interesting case.

This paper has attempted to show the biblical background of the story of the foundation of the Ka'ba, by demonstrating the way post-biblical developments of Gen. 22 were appropriated by the Quran and later Islamic traditions. A completion of the cycle is found in the Judaeo-Persian work *Bereshit [Nāmāh]* of Mawlānā Shāhīn-i Shīrāzī (fl. fourteenth century) which, arrestingly, incorporates the Islamic story of the building of the Ka'ba into its retelling of the events of Genesis.<sup>85</sup>

85 See Vera B. Moreen, "Is[h]ma'iliyat: a Judeo-Persian account of the building of the Ka'ba", in Benjamin H. Hary *et al.* (eds), *Judaism and Islam: Boundaries, Communication and Interaction* (Leiden, 2000), 185–202.