

The Schlomo Dov Goitein's "Political" Symbiosis in the *Secrets of Simon Ben Yohai*. A Qur'anic Reappraisal for a Jewish Apocalyptic Source on the Reflecting of an Early Islamic Background

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ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the concept of symbiosis in Islamic history as developed by Schlomo Dov Goitein, the 20th century Jewish German scholar in the area of Jewish and Arabic studies and discusses its application to the identity sourcing of Prophet Muhammad in particular. The aim of the study is to review the historical outline briefly on the background and formation of "symbiosis" preceding and in the aftermath of Goitein's conceptualization and context, following a qualitative research approach with an intertextual criticism to his references and discussing their possible philological aspects in his mindset. The study found that, while the Islamic historical sources presented the relations between Jews and Muslim in Madina period of Islam as negative, in Goitein's works, the Jewish perception of early Islamic history is positively grounded on a mid-eight century Jewish messianic-apocalyptic text, namely, *The Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai* as traditionally understood in Judaism for describing Ishmaelites as the savior of Jews from Christian oppression. This finding seems to be in explicit contradistinction to the concept of innovative "creative symbiosis" with subversion of historical experience.*

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Introduction

Academic efforts to understand and explain the nature of the historical relationship between Islam and Jewish traditions within orientalist studies have reached today a remarkable level in terms of quantity and quality. In these studies, the complex historical relationship between two religious groups is predominantly shown as an example of mutual hatred or harmony. Schlomo Dov Goitein was one of the German orientalists of Jewish origin who engaged in explanation of this relationship in depth and emphasized the Muslim and Jewish interdependence over the ages suggesting similar cooperation models today. Among the multiple ones, the most important terms he used to describe this relationship is "symbiosis". The term symbiosis, which at first glance seems to be borrowed from biology, was first used by Goitein in his article "Jewish-Arab Coexistence" published in 1949, then in his book *Jews and Arabs: A Concise History of Their Social and Cultural Relations* in the mid-50s, and later in his work on Mediterranean society in the 1980s (Libson, 2018, 164). Although prior to Goitein the western scholars did not literally use the term symbiosis to represent the interaction between Muslims and Jews, several attempts were made to denote the notion. According to Goldstein, *convivencia* a Roman cognate of symbiosis, had already been adopted long time ago by scholars of Andalusian context (Decter 2011, 104, 162).

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Jonathan P. Decter (Decter, *ibid.*) gives an example of convivencia by quoting a couplet from an Arabized Jew, al-Fakhkhār who alludes to the Qur'an (20:11-12) "remove your shoes for you are in the holy valley of Tuwa" which arguably an intertextual parallelism between two or three scriptural traditions and exhibits a proximate common world religious cultural reception.

Aside from being a conceptual aid in chemistry of Goitein's formula of symbiosis, convivencia is controversial with regards to its reality. Susanne Heschel (Heschel, 2018, 79) and others (Cohen, 2013, 28-38) assert that a golden age of Muslim Spain as a widespread historical myth of modern Jewish scholarship in Islam confirms that such a convivencia in Andalus attracted scholars such as Goitein. However, Goitein seems to know how to avail the picture of such utopian image to "bolster the notion of a Jewish Muslim" symbiosis.

In this context, the question of whether Goitein used this term based on the historical relations of both communities or whether, as Libson suggested (Libson, 2017, 164), was influenced by the concept used by German Jewish scholars to describe the relationship between Germans and the Jewish minority in Germany becomes important. To respond this question, the concept of symbiosis requires to briefly review the historical outline on the background and formation of "symbiosis" before and after Goitein's creation and context. In terms of methodology, the authors considered that the textual analysis can unveil the ambiguity in the literature regarding his neologism of "symbiosis". In that regard, utilizing an intertextual critique of Goitein's references and discussing its philological repercussions on "symbiosis" is inevitable as the idea represented in Islamic history within Goitein's references and sources would be the underpinning of their interpretation. In that regard the methodology of this paper is grounded on a qualitative research approach with the combination of an intertextual criticism and philological assessment of the literature.

In the subsequent parts of this study, the diverse and conceptually related terms such as convivencia, destructive or parasitic symbiosis, creative symbiosis and the concerning terminological problems will be outlined and discussed in terms of the historical formation process of Goitein's "symbiosis". For a basic outline, the historical development of the related terms will be sketched out with the major problematic aspects of the discussion in the literature. The following sections will exclusively focus on the scope of the symbiosis as comparatively discussed by Goitein and extended to the references in the Bible and Qur'an and what is pertaining to the Jewish Apocalypse in the depiction and portrayal of the prophet Muhammad and Muslim Arabs. Goitein's interpretative ideas of the Qur'anic passages are questioned from an inner-textual consistency and his political motives of a co-existential order of a historical Jewish-Arab "symbiosis" presumption is critiqued on the basis of his theological assertion.

Literature Review

Conceptual Background and Theoretical Review

Goitein's definition of symbiosis occurs in his work *On Jewish-Arab Symbiosis* (Goitein, 1949, 259-266) and is widely open to interpretation. In the original Hebrew text, the very first paragraph introduces a definition of symbiosis "הביוֹלוֹגְיָה מְגִדֵּרָה אֶת הַמוֹשֵׁג הַסִּמְבִּיּוֹזָה כ־חִיִּים יַחְדָּו" של שְׁנֵי אֲוֵרָגָנִים בְּאוֹפֵן שֶׁשְׁנֵיהֶם מְפִיקִים תְּעֵלָה מִצְמִידוֹתָם, בְּחִינַת זֶה נֹהֵג וְזֶה לֹא חָסֵר *habiyolog'yah mag'diyrah et hamushoag symvyvzh k'chayim yach'dav quotshel sh'ney vrgnym mechalek mish'niy m'fitykiym t'alah mtzmydvtm, b'chiynat zeh neh'eneh v'zeh lo chaser*" (Goitein, *ibid.*, 259). According to this definition, Goitein presents symbiosis as a concept of living together in a mutually productive link. However, there seems no agreed clarity on its certain meaning. There are mainly two attempts that have been proposed for the possible reading of the original Hebrew definition. While one reading suggests a translation as such "Biology defines symbiosis as the coexistence of two organisms so that both benefit from their being linked, and neither suffers loss" (Hoffman, 216, 219), the other reading offers "the coexistence of two organs in such a way as to benefit from the proximity, in the sense that one party benefits while the other does not suffer" (Libson, 1998, 1975; Herman, 2016, 350). Liran Yadgar seems to conform to this translation citing Libson agreeingly (Yadgar, 2016, 7).

On analysing the idea of Goitein's symbiosis as interchangeable with convivencia, Goldstein seems to agree with this offered translation: "In symbiosis or convivencia, two organisms coexist, each preserving its own identity, in a relationship that is either mutualistic or parasitic" (Goldstein, 2015, 28). On the other hand, Aaron W. Hughes (Hughes, 2005, 68) argues that his definition is "right out of a biological text book" leaving it all in mystery as to what this textbook would be. His and others' assertion for "proximity" in the text is remarkably notable. However, it seems obscure which word or phrase is suggesting that particular meaning. Obviously, in the literature the latter is predominantly preferred over the former.

Grammatically, perhaps the former underlies a sense of rendering for a translation in accordance with mutualism after associating it with both demonstrative Hebrew pronouns *za's* (this) presented in the comparison not as between the *symbiont* and *symbiote* but rather between "this" and "this" (situation). The former translation seems plausible at first glance due to the fact that both are producing benefit and for themselves apparently. However, the example what Goitein offers in the following clarifies the mist in that what "separates this desirable symbiosis from subordination or parasitism, which is to say, a situation in which two bodies are connected to one another and one drains the marrow of the other without giving anything in return" (Goitein *ibid.*; Hoffman, *ibid.*; Cole, *ibid.*). One can only conjecture what scientific trend Goitein was under the influence before delving into the long development of the biologic term.

The date of Goitein's article "On Jewish-Arab Symbiosis" in which he modified the biological term to the social sciences notably synchronizes the scientist Edward Fröhlich Haskell's article in 1949. Haskell led the classification of an integral approach to

symbiosis of co-actions or (interactions) “whether the interactants experience a positive, negative, or neutral effect as a result of the interaction” (Lidicker, 1979, 475-477). Perhaps it was to the extent of this varying bio-science terminology discussions in the background that led Goitein to use a broadly framed definition.

“Destructive” Symbiosis (Parasitism)

Another form of symbiotic relationship had been long in usage before Goitein’s coinage. It had a quite negative charge, though. The literature has a vast number of sources indicating the German *Judenthum* denigrating the Jewish “parasitism”. Initially, it appeared in the German context of pre-Nazi propaganda as a brutal depiction of Judaism where the “symbiosis” was an anti-Jewish destructive notion. Wasserstrom explored the history of ‘German-Arab Symbiosis’ in detail and provided a bulky number of sources. He observes the literal attestation of negative symbiosis as a term and its discussion employed as a scholarly critique in Alex Bien’s influential study “Discourse on the Term ‘German-Jewish Symbiosis’” (Wasserstrom, 1995, 3-40). If this is the case, then as Yadgar summarizes what Wasserstrom understood from symbiosis that it originated in the concept of “German-Jewish Symbiosis” is factually true because the sources of the idea traces back to the negative Jewish image association of the German-Jewish symbiosis discussions. This can be verified in the repercussion of Goitein’s innovation after his publication, too (Yadgar, *ibid*; Goitein, 1955, 10, 129-130). On the other hand, Yadgar argues that Wasserstrom’s notion of the term was reduced to its absolute negativity and self-criticism of German Jewish intellectuals such as Gershom Scholem against the delusional positive aspersions of German Jewish intellectuals for the undergoing sufferings of Jews through the crimes committed by the Nazi regime and the indelible memory of the Holocaust. Although Yadgar thinks that the same critique is heard in Goitein’s *Jews and Arabs*, published a decade after the end of the War” (Yadgar, *ibid*). The critique accordingly was due to “commenting on An Introduction to the Arabic Literature of the Jews (1901) by Moritz Steinschneider, who compared the German-Jewish symbiosis to the Arab-Jewish symbiosis”. However, it is not quite the case as Goitein’s disagreement extending to Steinschneider seems nothing to do with an assessment of the positive or negative aspects of German-Jewish symbiosis. Rather, it is precisely Goitein’s criticism of Steinschneider for equalizing both civilizations to be equally important. Goitein prioritizes the Jewish intellectual creativity and civilizational well-being in Islamic medieval world incomparable to any other experience in history including modern Germans and ancient Greeks because they are “essentially at variance with the religious culture of the Jewish people” but more importantly because according to Goitein “Islam, however, is from the very flesh and bone of Judaism” (Goitein, 1955, 59-60).

Goitein in his opus magnum *A Mediterranean Society* supports the preference of religious and cultural cohesion with Islam from a historical dimension, too. According to Goitein, between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries after the sweeping of Mongolian invasions the skeptics of the three religious communities stood out during a time which the Jewish community recompensed its intellectual crisis and spiritual dissatisfaction in the Jewish communities by seeking consolation in Islamic spirituality and participating to passionate sufi order sermons and rituals. Thus, it was this physical and education symbiosis between Muslims and Jews that held them together under the disadvantageous circumstances except the Mamluk ruling in which Goitein notes a religious minority discrimination causing a loss of Jewish intellectual members but he does not clarify with tangible examples. At any rate, for Goitein the Muslim communities offered Jews an absolute monotheistic comfort whereas medieval Christian inquisition courts could easily burn someone on the stake for an unorthodox interpretation the doctrine of trinity. Goitein raises the question for further support from the mouth of Abraham Maimonides the embodiment of the symbiosis and the ideal, moral, civil Jew of all the ages. For Goitein it is uniquely an Arab and Jewish symbiosis. “And had not Abraham Maimonides himself written that the pious of Islam were truer followers of the Prophets of ancient Israel than many of his Jewish contemporaries?” (Goitein, 1938, 9-10).

“Creative” Symbiosis

In contrast to the general idea of the negative symbiosis or the German-Jewish symbiosis in its destructive form because of the cultural alienation mainly, Goitein’s understanding of Arab-Jewish symbiosis is such a positive one because it is a creative symbiosis in favor of Jews and reciprocally for Arabs. As discussed above, Goitein opined that the relationship between Jews and Arabs in the period before the thirteenth century is one of such saliently positive, productive ‘symbiosis’ experience. Then according to Goitein creative symbiosis found its embodiment in top notch scholars, inspirational poets, selective doctors and grammarians thus marking the era for Jews to be intellectually active as civilizational pioneers, the influential community unprecedented in the world history. In summary, it is identifiable as ‘Jewish-Arab Symbiosis’. The term recurs in many of his works with such laden notion where the focus of investigation is Jewish-Arab relationships.

There are numerous researchers who have critically approached to Goitein’s definition of symbiosis. Libson, for example, argues that Goitein’s thoughts on the subject are unorganized and he clearly considers this to be his “flaws”. The multiplicity of the terms used in variation with symbiosis by Goitein to describe the relationship between the Jewish and Arab interaction and experience demonstrates his reticence to delimit it. Besides its terminological and conceptual standardization problem, its content is still largely appreciated today. Regardless of its flaws, one can still refer to the current acclaim of Judeo-Arabic scholarship where symbiosis is highlighted ever since it was institutionalized by Goitein. Therefore “symbiosis” marked his hallmark of scholarship and the very foundational concept that influenced all the generations of scholarship after him (Libson, 2018, 164; Wasserstrom, 1995, 4-7).

The Biblical and Qur'anic Sources: Goitein's Qur'anic and Biblical archetypes of "symbiosis" in his Book titled *Jews and Arabs*.

The main arguments for a comparative scripture discussion by Goitein is found in his work shortly to refer "Jews and Arabs" (Goitein, 1955, 19-32). At the beginning of his discussion Goitein points at a major turnout in the recent scholarship asserting that a general "Semite" is harmful to describe the origin of Israel and Arabs, disregarding it as a "nebulous notion" about the Semitic race. What he considers the Semitic race inclusiveness as a "pseudo-scientific" myth without any real basis in history is based off his historical interpretation. For digging in the roots of Arabs, he sets for research in the scripture. It is noteworthy that his fundamental reference to understand the history of Arabs is exclusively biblical. After asserting that there is no record in the Bible that indicates Ishmael was forefather of Arabs, he delves into Judges 8:24 to elaborate the opinion. Gleaning on the descriptions from the verse that Ishmael indiscriminately is used as a collective noun for camel herders, the Midianites, are called Ishmaelites as well. Hence in the context when Joseph was sold to both Midianites and Ishmaelites in Genesis 37:25, 28, 36, his apprehension of Ishmaelites is that it is not an ethnonym but a "common noun" (Goitein, *ibid*).

On all this presumption he does not hesitate to outline a conclusion that it is, "therefore, not surprising that when, during the period of the Second Temple, the Jewish people had many dealings with Arab tribes (we have already mentioned the Nabataeans), the term Ishmael was extended to them and so used in early Christian and Talmudic literature" (Goitein, *ibid*). For the attestation of various Jewish sources referring to Arabs as "cousins" *dodanim* (from *dod* 'uncle'), one being mentioned in Isaiah 21:13 to be construed in that regard accordingly. But for Goitein this is simply a "pun" and possibly for all the other references as such. The critical passage that Goitein connects all this to the Qur'an is an eye-opener remark for demonstrating his order of sources in his method. By suggesting so, his point the "cornerstone of the new creed" alluding to a root for Islam must therefore must be related to his second temple period development of the notion in Judaism. His approach to chapter 2, verse 125 having the glimpse of Ishmael helping his father Abraham in converting the Ka'bah to the shrine of the true religion suggests this subliminal retrospective shift of theological construction in the second temple period aside from assigning to Abraham the role of the physical ancestor of Arabs, "the founder of Islam" (Goitein, *ibid*).

Goitein's parsing this all idea is also vital for his theological assessment of sources that Jews and Arabs were not two related lineages as being "cousins" from Ishmael and Isaac, the two sons of Abraham according to the indigenous tradition either in the Bible or the ancient Arabs. While he considers the Biblical tradition as monolithic without any canonization authorship concern, he entertains liberty in his imaginary asserting that the notion of cousinhood was incorporated by Muhammad in the Holy book of Islam. Such an adoption of the kinship supposedly illustrates a fair example of the religious amalgamation which the "symbiosis" gives its character to the formation of Islamic tradition on the basis of Jewish roots.

In all aspects of Goitein's argumentation, one fundamental problem is his lack of entire reading and discussion of the Qur'an, which leads to a series of errors. The selectivity in evidential reasoning or the lack of an integral probative approach sets the handicaps of the pseudo-science regarding of which he criticized his previous scholarship. The Qur'an in no place designates Abraham as the founder of Islam because that is the radical contradiction to Islamic monotheism doctrine. Considering the Qur'an 3: 67 it is only reasonable to acknowledge the status of Abraham identified as an iconoclastic figure to reject their de-facto religious traditions in his contemporary time, designating him as the Muslim prototype without any discussion involving his ethnic background. The variables of the comparison is obvious to be a religious truth claim, criticizing Judaism and Christianity, on account of the anachronistic designation of their scholarly claims that Abraham was represented by them as "Jewish" or Christian". In fact, the verse in Qur'an 3:67 concisely proves the historical Abrahamite reception to be exclusively Islamic:

"Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but he was one inclining toward truth, a Muslim [submitting to Allah]. And he was not of the polytheists."

It is in this very context that the Qur'an is dismissive of their innovations on part of the People of the Book, alluding a polytheistic character to an such attitude while dismissing the domination of human authority on religion by using a retrospective consideration of Abraham as the par example of dissention and the symbiosis of human kind in the origin of pristine, pure monotheism.

Thus, Goitein's approach is unsubstantiated because of its theological irrelevance because Goitein's aspired literalism for seeking evidence in the Bible for Ishmaelite equated to Arabs does not concord with Qur'an. It is particularly a methodological inconsistency when both traditions converge on the same legacy of ancestral identification.

Qur'an 2:140 says: "Or are you saying that 'Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the Tribes were Jews or Christians?' [Prophet], asks them: 'Who knows better: you or God? Who could be more wicked than those who hide a testimony [they received] from God?' God is not unmindful of what you do."

The literal meaning of the verse is acknowledging the existence of Israel patriarchs as a legitimate ideal for the legacy of monotheism as the leadership of people but strikingly rejects any Jewish and Christian association to it. The verse rather prevents from all sorts of retrospective distortions in their name and declares the universal perennial ownership in the "submission" to God alone as the absolute authority. Goitein's other attempt to distinguish the Israelite and Arab society is based on his reading of the particular animal breeding. This minor detail becomes significant in the final analysis. it will be helpful to have a glimpse of his underpinning ideas.

Goitein is known to hold a severe criticism against Pan-Arabists (Hanan Harif, 2018, 328-329) who view the both Islamic and Jewish traditions one and same. Goitein refers to the analogy of the wandering Israel patriarchs as Arab *sheikhs* and repudiates it as another mere misconception. For him the substantial difference between the sheep and cattle raising semi-nomads with the occasional employment in the agriculture inside is technically incompatible with Arab Bedouin life style. Goitein notes by an underlying suggestion on the etymology of the Bedouin in Arabic denoting “outsider” must associate them to live in the desert, hence the exclusive idea of Arabs with camels to be herded. In spite of the many biblical attestations of the camel. Obviously enough, Goitein is strongly confident in stating that “there is no single reference in the Bible which would indicate that the Israelites at any time were camel-breeding Bedouins or that they emigrated from Arabia” (Goitein, 1955, 26). Then the question arises with regards to the origin of the Israel’s religion to be born in the desert and the idealization of Israel in the desert by the biblical prophets. For Goitein’s “biblical criticism”, these must be the plainly later accounts causing an anachronistic mistake.

However, it is precisely the internal evidence deriving from comparisons of the Arab and biblical literatures which shows how different the origins of the two peoples must have been. Arabic classical biblical literature, like the Bible, was written down almost entirely in sedentary environments—mainly in Iraq and Syria, by authors from families who had lived for many generations in towns or who were not Arabs at all; but its every page betrays the origin of its people in the Arabian desert. The vocabulary, the metaphors, the similes, the very themes of their poetry teem with reference to camel breeding tent life in Arabia. Nothing of that kind is to be found in the Bible, where everything breathes the fragrance of the Palestinian soil, and reflects the life of farmers and shepherds (Goitein, *ibid*).

It is not clear on what lexical data Goitein establishes his idea regarding the etymology of Bedouin but the “outsider” is not a true choice. Moreover, such an explanation is quite obscure. What does this “outsider” mean, perhaps a mysterious foreign visitor? Furthermore, in such imaginary form of the Arabic world the limits between the desert life and urban land in the Arab life is too separate. The etymology of the Arabic term derives from the root *بدا* (*badaa*) “coming in sight” or “coming into opening” from where the term is specialized and used in the sense of “going into desert” and hence developed into the antonym with civilization as a cultural form and life style. For example, in Lane’s lexicon we read:

“The people, or company of men, went forth to the *بَادِيَّة* [or desert]: (M, Msb, K:) or, the former, went forth to their *بَادِيَّة*: (S:) or went forth from the region, or district, of towns or villages or of cultivated land, to the pasturing places in the deserts: (T:) [ISd says,] *بَدُو* may be used as meaning *بَدَاوَةٌ*, which is the contr. of *حَضَارَةٌ*: (M:) [J says,] *بَدَاوَةٌ* and *بَدَاوَةٌ* signify the dwelling, or abiding, in the *بَادِيَّة* [or desert]; the contr. of *حَضَارَةٌ*” (Lane, 1968, 171).

The primary idea of bedouin therefore from the lexical sources is not presented in the Arab mind as a desert settlement dweller as if it were a permanent address but the inhabitant in mobility between the cultivated land and the desert. The developed sense of dwelling and abiding in the desert as opposed to a civilized resident may be related to structural organization of the early medieval times, the posterior ages but not before.

From Goitein’s strict separation of Arab bedouinism to Jewish civilization landscape one can infer an *ad contrarium* argument that while Judaism portrays a civilized religion the primordial form of it is Islam. This simple comparison might have been embedded in ulterior motives. In his discussion of Goldzhier and Geiger’s influence on Goitein, Libson notes a point where they oppose Renan who viewed Semitic religions (in this case including Islam and Judaism) desert-creations (Libson, 2018, 157). It is possible to interpret that Goitein’s invention of symbiosis served a considerably a refutation on behalf of Judaism and could lay the ground work for a future program of subjugating Islam in a political scholarly discourse in the more specific veer of “creative symbiosis” that is, the historical background and a theoretical sketch for the assimilation of Arab Palestinians in the budding of the modern Israel state in 1928 when he was appointed professor of Islamic History and Islamic Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and that founded the School of Asian and African studies and of the Israel Oriental Society. In short, if we really apply the idea of symbiosis and creative symbiosis in particular, then it seems to have yielded rather a political commensalism, a mode of symbiosis in which only one side benefits.

Goitein’s perspective that camel would be attributed to desert people can be traced to its sourcing as contemporary Jewish Encyclopedia article provides the information the article “camel”. The citation of the many passages are considerably suggesting the camels are found among the people of the deserts bordering on the land of Israelites. The reception of the camel in the pre-world War II century Jewish scholarship could well be inspirational to shape Goitein’s intellectual guess. The idea of camel is not a petty detail, after all, in his history of Jews and Arabs, it is one of the two main motifs by which Goitein drew the lines between the Israelites and the Ishmaelites. On that account, there is a less uttered connection between the symbolism of camel in the Jewish apocalypse and the Arab imagination as part of his symbiosis construction. Goitein, in his article titled “Muhammad’s inspiration by Judaism”, argues the origin of Islam is simply Judaism and it is to that extent accordingly that prophet Muhammad was “indebtedly” inspired.

Goitein expresses his main concern is understanding the truth of the Qur’an by throwing in hypothetical questions for prophet’s performative “mentorship” and what the certain Jewish doctrines were influential in his religious career and so how this inspiration in his particular Medina period was formed, addressing the audience in Institute of Jewish Studies and asking their tolerance for approaching to the topic as an “Islamist” (Goitein, 1958, 148-149). Goitein after listing a number of sources for identifying the Jews

in pre-Islamic Arabia among which are enumerated a) Talmudic literature b) epigraphic evidence c) Christian and particularly Muslim sources. He chooses *Sifre Deuteronomy* (32:2) for his chronological order to mention “a few salient facts”. What Goitein quotes the excerpt verbatim from the Midrash to Deuteronomy (32: 2) is as follows:

“When God revealed Himself to give the Torah to Israel, he did so not in one language, but in four: in Hebrew, in Greek, in Arabic, and in Aramaic.” Goitein infers from this passage that it indicates clearly the translation of the Hebrew Bible must therefore have not only been accomplished into Greek but through the Targums, Aramaic and even in Arabic as early as the source of *Sifre* in the second or third century. However, the alleged translations must have been in the oral circulation thus not committed to writing (Goitein, *ibid*, 151). Khalid Ibrahim opines with this remark of Goitein and even considers it as an astute conclusion. He seems to be convinced with the interpretation of the Midrashic reference on account that the Arabs were certainly familiar with Biblical material, using it as a reliable historical account to object whom he considers as the proponents of the “foreign etymology camp” the representatives are as such: Patricia Crone, Micheal Cook, John Wasnbrough (Mohammed, 2018, 3). On the other hand, there are a number of fundamental errors and fallacies on the entirety of this argument. First Goitein is clearly not quoting the excerpt from the *Sifre* accurately.

The related text of the *Sifre* 343 [Devarim] reads as follows:

ד"א ויאמר ה' מסיני בא - כשנגלה הקב"ה ליתן תורה לישראל לא בלשון אחד נגלה אלא בארבע לשונות: ויאמר ה' מסיני בא - זה לשון עברי. וזרח משעיר למו - זה לשון רומי. הופיע מהר פארן - זה לשון ערבי. ואתא מרבבות קודש - זה לשון ארמי.

Variantly: "And he said: The L-rd came from Sinai": When the Holy One Blessed be He appeared to give Torah to Israel, He did so not with one language but with four languages, viz.: "And he said: "The L-rd came from Sinai" — Hebrew. "and he shone forth from Seir to them" — Romish; "He appeared from Mount Paran" — Arabic; "And He came from the myriads of the holy ones" — Aramaic.

If anything, but the difference between the original text between the modifications of Goitein is undoubtedly clear and appalling. There is no indication or even an implication that the Hebrew Bible or Tanach was ever translated into any of the so-called languages at all. From the unequivocal allusions of Goitein, one can connect the idea to the role of *mutergeman* known in the Jewish tradition as “the interpreter in early times, the translator of the Torah and Prophets into the vernacular (Aramaic) when these were read in public in the synagogue service” and Targums which were referred as the translations of the Hebrew Bible into the vernacular Aramaic (Grossman, M. 2011).

Steven D. Fraade actually has outlined the traditional context of the Midrash *Sifre*, Deuteronomy 305 where he discusses the theological and rabbinical conceptions of *mutergeman* in that he notes a possible misanalogy by drawing the attention to “Moses’ mediation of God’s word at Sinai should be taken as a model for the practice of Targum in the synagogue” because the same Rabbinic sources which refer to Moses as the initial mediator of the word of God to the people of Israel presume that both God and Moses communicated in Hebrew which cannot accommodate to the role of the *mutergeman* as orally performing the interpretation or committing to writing the translations between two languages. Fraade suggests rather a *kerygmatic* understanding of translation, evoking the term as “internal translation” (Fraade, 1992, 267) which is an interpretive reading of the Bible, even though it is undertaken in the same language. On that note the interpretation of the Palestinian texts such as the *Sifre Deuteronomy* can be taken as interpreting Deut. 33:2 in that God revealed himself to Israel in four languages – Hebrew, Latin, Arabic and Aramaic representing four different outsourcing languages (Fraade, *ibid*, 267).

The other final significant element is his Qur’anic allusion in Surah al-Fussilat, 43:4. For the author of this paper and the reader, it would be safe and compelling to contest his context-free approach as mere speculation even at least for his negligence of the preliminary use of the Qur’anic studies methodology. Obviously under his symbiotic Judeo-Islamic scripture concerns, he just replaced the discipline with his idiosyncratic and delusional boundaries of a personal peculiar hermeneutics, bereft from evaluating even a single data out of a vast number of historical, linguistic or philological legacy in the Islamic sciences. The Qur’an 41:44 states:

“Had We made it a non-Arabic Qur’ān, they would have said, “Why are its verses not clearly explained? Is it a non-Arabic (book) and an Arab (messenger)?” Say, “For those who believe, it is guidance and cure. As for those who do not believe, there is deafness in their ears, and for them it is blindness. Such people are being called from a distant place”.

Thus, presuming the Qur’anic passage as an allusion to a Biblical translation, Goitein tries to justify his point by making an outright assumption that the passage “would make sense only” if the Prophet Muhammad and his audience knew that the Torah as a routine activity was read and translated verse by verse into Arabic.

Aside from the fact that there is no reason whatsoever to corroborate a biblical translation here, even an allusion, a simple discourse analysis of the text makes it clear the addressee are the pagan Arabs and their knowledge of a routine reading of a Hebrew Bible translated verbatim into Arabic is nothing but a far-fetched idea. As part of Goitein’s habit for clipping the reference texts the passage seems to be de-contextualized. Reconsidering the ethos in the final part of the verse is evidently decisive “As for those who do not believe, there is deafness in their ears, and for them it is blindness. Such people are being called from a distant place.” which elicits the spiritual achievement of reading and understanding the scripture rather than a physical verbatim translation precision as a historical phenomenon and in the context what is reinforced is the hypothetical objection that is not exactly a factual consideration but a rhetorical appealing to a hyperbole effect in the text to object the pagan pretext for disbelief even before it surfaces to become

a question (Goitein, 1955, 150). Since the scope of this paper is too limited to include all the Qur'anic deconstructions of Goitein, it would be wise to discuss it in a different study. Therefore, it suffices for us to leave the reader with the examples above to help having a glimpse into his Qur'anic exegesis.

A Zionistic re-contextualization of a Jewish apocalyptic source

A If we go back to the discussion of camel within the frame of Goitein's book *Jews and Arabs*, the motif of camel becomes significant in his article titled "Muhammad's inspiration by Judaism". The former was published approximately ten years later than the latter, therefore the historical sequence may suggest a development of his ideas and why it constituted one of the two main themes in establishing the socio-cultural identity between Arabs and Jews in his later assessments. In his study "Muhammad's inspiration by Judaism" Goitein takes into account an apocalyptic reference to the historical reception of Arabs by Jews. The so-called work *The Secrets of Rabbi Simon ben Yohai* is a Jewish apocalypse text dates back to-eighth century, relaying a Judaic messianic interpretation of the Arab conquest of the early 7th century. The translation below is quoted from Reeves (2006, 10).

R. Šim'on answered and said: 'From whence are they (understood as) our deliverance?' He said to him: 'Did not Isaiah the prophet speak thusly? "And should he see chariotry of a pair of riders, one riding an ass, (and) one riding a camel" (Isa 21:7).' Why did he put the 'rider of an ass' before the 'rider of a camel'? Should he not instead have said 'rider of a camel, rider of an ass'? (No, the textual sequence means that) when the one who rides the camel (Ishmael or Muhammad) emerges, the kingdom ruled by the 'one mounted upon an ass' (Zech 9:9)26 has manifested (lit. 'sprouted') by his (i.e., Ishmael's or Muhammad's) agency. Another opinion: 'rider of an ass' (means) at the (same) time when he 'rides upon an ass' (Zech 9:9). Consequently they (Ishmael) are a deliverance for Israel like the deliverance (associated with) the 'one mounted upon an ass' (Zech 9:9).

Goitein contrasts the defeated and expelled situation of the Jews in al Madina as a result of the failure of mentorship out of a missionary zealot that allegedly led the prophet to subvert the Jewish fortune and well-being causing the destruction of their settlements and expulsion of their population from Northern Arabia, adding certain dramatic features of economic incentives upon the Jewish plantations and date groves which accordingly tempted Muslims to that end. It is of course not surprising that Goitein interspersed a sensational conclusive opinion in such a small paragraph whereas in the whole paper he never discussed those aspects, let alone providing any evidence.

His sympathy for the Jewish settlers of al-Madina who signed the Madina treaty and which they historically and undeniably violated it multiple times echoes in Goitein's humanist attitude that characterizes on a psychological level a different tone from his other peers. It is understandably the same nature of sentimentalism of his scholarly inclinations shaped in the age of 20th century orientalism that affected his judgement. A distinctly irreprehensible treatment could well be his projections of the crimes of an occupying state onto the inhabitants under the British mandate, then the future occupied land of Palestine in which Goitein was part of the assimilating "symbiosis" program". That said, he did not hesitate to benefit from the Jewish tradition pragmatically as he appreciated Islam as savior once he compared the relationships between the Christian and Jewish communities throughout the history. As long as the essential concern was Jewish well-being, that mattered the symbiosis the most. His subtle approach on reading of the text as contextualizing it from 7th century or "early Islamic times" in a broad time period is noteworthy even though today it is established in the scholarship to be accurate. However, Goitein appealing to the tradition disregards the very traditional reception of the text, the Jewish sages as pre-eternal. No doubt that he might have just eliminated from his evaluation the Quranic adjustment to appoint the date for the circulation of the text and its historical consequences as echoed in the Quran 2: 89:

"And when there came to them a Book from Allah verifying that which they have, and aforesaid they used to pray for victory against those who disbelieved -- but when there came to them that which they recognized, they disbelieved in it; so Allah's curse is on the disbelievers."

The above verse explicitly indicates the synchronic reaction of the Medina Jews to the prophet's call for conversion to Islam. The theme of the "victory" is particularly interesting where the Qur'an describes a long-term historical expectations of the inhabitant Jews in Medina. The particular theme of the victory in the verse resonates with the idea of the apocalyptic text, shortly can be referred as the *Secrets*.

There is no extant documentation of a written source for the *Secrets* from the 7th century. Therefore, it is only reasonable to presume an oral circulation of the apocalypse from that time period. In light of the Qur'anic information, considering the circumstances that were exacerbating for Jews in Medina under the oppression in the pagan domination, the existence of an apocalyptic narration as such would be quite useful and could be rendered in a suitable contextual reading for their socio-political predicament in its theological discourse as early as the Qur'anic revelation. The broadly established date of its composition in Goitein's terms as from early Islamic history and in the established scholarship ranging between the 7th or 8th century is inspirational for what they suggest a time line synchronizing with the Qur'anic verse, providing an obvious context to it; consequentially providing a sufficient reason for the Qur'an to determine a date for its oral circulation in precision.

The content of the verse seems to support this presumption too. It criticizes the Jewish denial of the prophetic call to Islam by using the validation of their discrepancy at the cost of their own premises: a prophet would come along to save them from the pagans so

they would be victorious but they rejected him. All of which can be taken as a Qur'anic report of an incidental decline of the *Secrets* on occasion of Prophet Muhammad's prophecy.

Conclusion

Goitein's adoption of symbiosis from biology to use in social sciences is still a controversial idea today and after painstaking efforts, the recent studies asserted how some of its simple aspects proved to be failing because of its equivocality ranging from the definition of the term, the philological issues such as the appropriateness of the metaphor, its possible various interpretations, and finally the plethora of the synonyms replacing the *symbiosis* and finally its historical adaptability. Though its noted aggravation today, ever since it was introduced in Judeo-Arabic studies Goitein's symbiosis preserves its eminent place and thus its problems are attentively focused in the current scholarship. All besides, one fact is not to be obfuscated: his symbiosis can easily be marked for its reversal of the Islamic domination of Jews in history though subtly because he never painstakingly attempted to solve such a fundamental discrepancy, serving the means of an academic end in the creation of a Jewish Israel state academic doctrine and to open a clean page for an alternative to European counterpart a new mutual realm of civilizational symbiosis but in reality a co-existential dystopia at the time of the exacerbating anti-Jewish animosity in Europe. Goitein's contradictions in Islamic history are far flat-out problematic in understanding matters arising from his refusal to Islamic studies methodology which explains his selective use of the evidence and misrepresent the facts such as eliminating a major fact as Madina treaty and its obligatory consequences.

The failure to identify a mentorship source to the prophet Muhammad by not fulfilling his own research question under the investigation is an overt indication of his approach and unsubstantiated speculations from his orientalist myopia. On the other hand, it is traditionally consistent to propose for what Jewish sources could resonate with the Islamic history in case of the *Secrets*, if the "symbiosis" applies as a "synoptic" reading. On that end, in this study the dating of the messianic oral tradition's for Ishmaelis i.e. the Prophet Muhammad and Muslims described as saviors is proposed that it could be reasonably predated prior to the revelation of the related Qur'anic verse in discussion above and intertextually consistent to be interpreted in accordance with the messianic anticipations of Medina Jews based on the substantiation of the Qur'anic chronology.

Consequently, the *Secrets* and Goitein's concerns can be explainable with one major impact of this metaphorical camel that is remodeled as a characteristic Bedouin desert attribute to the cost of opposing a good number of scholars at his time. Obviously, his association of the camel as a socio-cultural element in his early reference to the metaphor for the victorious, savior Ishmaelis narration in the *Secrets* can be reconciled as the perception of Arabs in view of Jews according to Goitein's analysis. The two accounts of the camel therefore cannot be a mere random coincidence of wording because while the literal camel stands for a self-exposing hint for his hypothesis of a non-amalgamated co-existence and its necessity, it applies as transient boundaries between the two people. His hypothetical question molded into Abraham Maimonides' fair judgement recasts not only his deep veneration for him as authority for a reference to universal wisdom in Judaism, for the characterization of an ideal Jewish symbiosis figure but also a re-assurance for what the camel saviors of the *Secrets* could offer the Jews in the modern establishment of a Jewish state on the run from the Christian hostility, though such a phenomenon was obviously at odds with the facts unless one defines that the Zionist occupation and subjugation of Palestinian Muslims with no choice other than expulsion or assimilation is a form of it. This explains that his "creative" symbiosis had the agents in reverse order and how a German Jewish scholar's *weltanschauung* was shaped throughout his political inclinations culminated in its pristine sense in the authoritarian foundation of a Zionist state and its secular reading of the "camel savior" narration as a future vision.

The discussion in this paper has been limited to the analysis of the idea on a comparative scripture basis including the religious oral tradition used in Goitein's own references and sources but restricted to certain motifs like the camel and the aspects such as the prophecies in apocrypha. The argument could be further strengthened by researching throughout the collection of Goitein in order to attain a more comprehensive understanding for his interpretation of symbiosis in his own system. Additional research might also introduce other possible motifs and characters of early Israeli-German scholars in comparison with Goitein in order to examine his influence of scholarship from the infancy of his neologism to the most recent successor of his legacy.

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