

# AN EVALUATION OF THE IDENTITY OF *SĀMİRĪ* IN THE QUR'ĀN

Tolga Savaş Altinel  
*Ministry of National Education, Istanbul-Turkey*  
tsaltinel@yahoo.com  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6383-6484>

---

## Abstract

According to the classical Orientalist view, the Qur'ān copies biblical stories and, not infrequently, does so in an incorrect way. The Qur'ānic story of the Golden Calf, with the *Sāmīrī* (Samaritan) character as the protagonist, is given to be an explicit example of this incorrect copying. This paper, however, considers the possibility that the incidents depicted in the story might have happened in a different way from what is described in the Bible. Thus it aims to examine the Biblical version of the story with reference to the Qur'ānic version, but unlike the classical Orientalist view, adopts an unbiased attitude. In this way, an explanation is offered of the etymology of the word “*Sāmīrī*” indicating its possible relation to the concept of “firstborn” as well as to the genealogy of Joseph.

*Key Words:* Firstborn, Golden Calf, *ʿijl al-Sāmīrī*, Samaritan, Joseph, Aaron, Beloved Son, *Sāmīrī*.

## Introduction

Stories about the Israelites in the Qur'ān are similar to those in the Hebrew Bible in many aspects; however, they may also include dissimilar details. The “Golden Calf/ *ʿijl al-Sāmīrī*” is one of the stories that is common in both sacred texts. According to two narratives in the

---

Torah, it was Aaron who made the Golden Calf. However, the Qurʾān names this person Sāmīrī.

With the argument or prejudice that the Qurʾān was derived from previous sacred texts, certain Western researchers claim the existence of a historical “mistake” in the Qurʾānic narrative:

Muḥammad seems to have understood most of the Jewish legend correctly, but the word Sammâêl puzzled him. [...] But since the city of Samaria was not built, or at least called by that name, until several hundred years after Moses' death, the anachronism is at least amusing, and would be startling in any other book than the Qurʾān, in which far more stupendous ones frequently occur.<sup>1</sup>

Independent sources express various criticisms regarding the dating and accuracy of stories in the Bible. Nevertheless, certain Orientalists take the information in the Bible as truth when such criticisms or revisions are proposed by the Qurʾān. They attempt to evaluate the Qurʾān through the Orientalist perspective.<sup>2</sup>

The objective of this paper is to analyze the Golden Calf story in the Bible with reference to the word “Sāmīrī/Samaritan” in the Qurʾān while avoiding any theological conditioning<sup>3</sup> or methodological contradiction.

<sup>1</sup> William St. Clair Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qurʾān* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge & New York: E. S. Gorham, 1905), 113.

<sup>2</sup> Grounded in common stories in the Qurʾān and the Bible, certain Orientalists have written self-contained works arguing that these stories in the Qurʾān are derived from surrounding traditions. Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and Islām - A Prize Essay*, trans. F. M. Young (Vepery: M. D. C. S. P. C. K. Press, 1898); Tisdall, *The Original Sources of the Qurʾān*; Abraham I. Katsh, *Judaism in Islām: Biblical and Talmudic Backgrounds of the Koran and Its Commentaries. Suras II and III* (New York: New York University Press, 1954).

<sup>3</sup> Salime Leyla Gürkan calls this approach “theological/ideological conditioning,” which considers the Qurʾān as a “deficient or incorrect copy of the Old Testament just because the Old Testament precedes the Qurʾān and includes much more historical material.” According to Gürkan, “from an objective approach one has to admit that, as regards the same stories, the Qurʾān sometimes provides information different from the one contained in the Old Testament, and even sets those stories against a different context or background. It is also a fact that on many occasions the narratives presented in the Qurʾān do not contradict the archaeological findings, though neither confirm them directly ... This surely does

In this regard, the Golden Calf stories in the Torah and the Qurʾān will be handled in a comparative way, and the views of Orientalist and Muslim scholars will be presented with regard to the reasons behind the differences between the two sacred texts.

The etymology of the word “sāmīrī” will be analyzed to reveal the identity of the Sāmīrī who made the Golden Calf. Then, we will address possible connections between the Samaritan who made the Golden Calf and Aaron. Finally, we will consider the question of whether the Sā-mīrī could be the origin of the current name of the Samaritans.<sup>4</sup>

### **I. The Biblical Story of the Golden Calf and the Qurʾānic Story of *ʿIjl al-Sāmīrī***

The Golden Calf story is told twice in the Torah.<sup>5</sup> The first story is narrated in the Book of Exodus upon the departure of the Israelites

---

not mean that the Qurʾān’s narratives should be taken as pure historical information ... But it suggests the possibility that the incidents told in the Old Testament did actually happen, albeit in different ways, in different times, and perhaps in different places ... Thus, for scientific consistency, the narratives of the Qurʾān should be assessed by the same criteria used to assess the narratives of the Old Testament ... and one such criterion, before everything else, is archaeological-historical evidence.” See Salime Leyla Gürkan, “İbrahim’den Ezra’ya İsrailoğulları Tarihi” (unpublished manuscript in preparation), January 10, 2018, Microsoft Word file.

<sup>4</sup> Samaritans, who are one of the oldest communities in the Middle East, are a small religious-ethnic group today. They publish a monthly magazine called *The Samaritan News* as well as the bimonthly magazine *The Samaritan Update*, an internet newsletter & archive regarding the Samaritan Israelites. According to *The Samaritan Update*, as of 2018, the number of Samaritan population is only 810. They live in two settlements, a mountain village called Qiryat Luza near Nablus and Holon near Tel Aviv. See <http://thesamaritanupdate.com/>, accessed May 25, 2018. For further information about Samaritans, see James Allan Montgomery, *The Samaritans, The Earliest Jewish Sect: Their History, Theology and Literature* (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1907); Reinhard Pummer, *The Samaritans* (Leiden: Brill, 1987); Nathan Schur, *History of the Samaritans* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989); Benyamim Tsedaka, *Understanding the Israelite Samaritans from Ancient to Modern: An Introductory Atlas* (Jerusalem: Carta Jerusalem, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Exodus 32; Deuteronomy 9:7-21. English translation, known as the New International Version, is used as the reference for quotations from the Bible. *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2011).

from Egypt. According to the Book of Exodus, three months after leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrived in the Sinai desert and resided in front of Mount Sinai. Moses went up to Mount Sinai to meet God, whereupon the Israelites asked Aaron to make a god for them because they feared that Moses would not return from the mountain. Aaron melted the gold he collected from the Israelites and made a calf. When Moses returned from Mount Sinai and saw his people worshipping the Golden Calf, he broke the stone tablets in his hands. Then, Moses burnt the calf, ground it to powder, scattered it in water and had the Israelites drink it. Later, Moses issued a call for those who remained loyal to the Lord. The Levites gathered around Moses and slew three thousand persons who were involved in the incident.

The Book of Exodus gives a detailed account of how Aaron made the calf.<sup>6</sup> He carved it from the collected ornaments<sup>7</sup> like a master sculptor. However, he did not content himself with the calf and built an altar, and the people declared the calf their God and sacrificed to it.<sup>8</sup> Upon accusations by Moses on his return from the mountain, Aaron said he resorted to this method since his people were inclined toward evil and the calf, in a way, came into existence by chance. Thus, the first narrative (32:2-6) differs from the second (32:22-25).

The Torah does not state when the Golden Calf incident occurred in the wake of the Exodus from Egypt.<sup>9</sup> The Golden Calf incident is placed between the laws about the Tent of Meeting<sup>10</sup> (Exodus, Chapters 25-32 and Chapters 35-40) in the Book of Exodus. Thus, the Golden Calf story (Chapter 32) is placed between repetitive law

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 32.

<sup>7</sup> Exodus 32:4.

<sup>8</sup> Exodus 32:6.

<sup>9</sup> According to Jewish tradition, the Revelation at Sinai is based on four principal visits of Moses to Mount Sinai, including a preliminary one. In the Torah, Moses went up Mount Sinai three times. See Mustafa Sinanoğlu, "Eski Ahid ve Kur'ân-ı Kerîm'de Sîna Vahyi," *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2 (1998), 3-7.

<sup>10</sup> This dwelling is given various names in the Hebrew Bible. It is called by a single word, such as tent (*obel*), dwelling (*mishkan*), shrine (*miqdash*) or temple (*bekal*), or together with a description, such as the Tent of Meeting (*obel moed*, Exodus 27:21), the Tent of Testimony (*obel ba-eduth*, Numbers 9:15, 16:22; II Chronicles 24:6), the House of Testimony (*mishkan ba-eduth*, Exodus 38:21; Numbers 1:50, 53), or the Tent Dwelling (*miskhan obel*). The sanctuary is also described with the possessive construction of the House of Yahweh (*Beth Yahweh*), Exodus 25:8.

passages, as if the testament is renewed in Sinai. The Book of Exodus ends with the statement that the Tent of Meeting was completed in the first month of year two. Incidents in the Book of Numbers follow the narrative of the Book of Exodus as of the second month of year two, and the Book of Numbers presents the account of the first census among the Israelites. According to the book, the Levites, the protagonists of the Golden Calf incident, were distinguished from other Israelites in this census and allocated to the service of God.

The Golden Calf story is told for the second time in the Book of Deuteronomy. The Deuteronomistic source<sup>11</sup> includes no information about the cloth of Aaron and his lineage;<sup>12</sup> therefore, the inclusion of the Golden Calf in the Book of Deuteronomy is interesting.<sup>13</sup> In this

---

<sup>11</sup> Critics of the Bible argue that the Torah consists of multiple resources (Documentary-Supplementary-Fragmentary Hypotheses). According to these hypotheses, Deuteronomistic sources are among the references of the Torah. This source is restricted to the Book of Deuteronomy in the Torah. However, Martin Noth claims that a similar theme and style is used in the Books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings in the Hebrew Bible. Theologians call this series of sources Deuteronomistic History (DH). See N. Richard Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, "Martin Noth," in *Handbook of Biblical Criticism* (Kentucky: John Knox Press, 2001), 123.

<sup>12</sup> Deuteronomy 9:20-21.

<sup>13</sup> The Book of Deuteronomy does not mention any kohen post (priesthood) rendered exclusive to Aaron and his descendants. It does, however, touch upon Aaron's sin of the Golden Calf. According to Friedman, the Book of Deuteronomy includes the story because it establishes an analogy between Moses and King Josiah. Josiah destroyed Golden Calves made by Jeroboam, just as Moses burnt and scattered the Golden Calf. For Friedman, this story was used to show that Josiah was like Moses. Richard Elliot Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1997), 113. The stages of evolution of the history of the priesthood (Kohen), which started with Aaron in Jewish tradition, is questioned in our day. The most apparent indicator is the presence of a guild of priests called Mushites in addition to Kohens in the history of the Israelites. Western scholars attempt to rewrite the history of the Israelite priesthood on the basis of conflict between the Mushites and Aaronites. See Stephen A. Geller, "Priest and Levites in Hebrew Bible," in *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Jews and Judaism*, ed. Alan T. Levenson (Malden MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 51, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118232897.ch3>; Michael David Coogan, *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament: The Hebrew Bible in Its Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 115. Western researchers propose various opinions

book, Aaron is not clearly stated as the maker of the calf. It reads, “You had made the calf.” Aaron’s part in the incident is unclear; however, it is stated that he was somehow guilty and that Moses saved him from punishment. According to Deuteronomy, Moses burns the calf before grinding it to powder. Then, he throws the powder from the mountain into some water.<sup>14</sup>

The making of the Golden Calf is mentioned twice in the Qurʾān. The al-Aʿrāf chapter does not indicate who made the calf but states that the Israelites went astray by worshipping the calf and that Moses considered Aaron responsible for the event.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the Ṭāhā chapter clearly indicates that the calf was made by some Sāmīrī/Samaritan.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the Old Testament, the Qurʾān talks about the lowing of the calf. According to the Qurʾān, the Samaritan, who perverted the Israelites by making a lowing calf, was eventually interrogated by Moses, whereupon he confessed that he made the calf out of the precious articles he obtained at the time of the departure from Egypt. The Samaritan also said he benefited from the “track of the messenger” while making the calf. He was then dismissed and isolated from the community by Moses. In addition, the calf was burnt and blown into water.

---

about the center of temple where Mushites carried out their services. In this regard, there might be three priest guilds during the early Israelite period: 1) Aaronites, who were priests in Shiloh and Bethel and considered Aaron their ancestor; 2) Mushites, who were travelling priests and who considered Moses their ancestor; and 3) Sadducees, who were in charge of the Temple in Jerusalem and who considered Zadok their priest ancestor. Following the exile, the Sadducees made Aaron their ancestor, whereupon they became partners with the legacy of the Aaronites. We are in the process of publishing a paper about priest guilds during the early Israelite period. See Kürşad Demirci and Tolga Savaş Altınel, “Erken Dönem İsrailoğulları Tarihinde Rahipliğin Gelişim Sürecine Alternatif Bir Bakış,” *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 58, no. 2 (2017), 31-61, [https://doi.org/10.1501/Ilhfak\\_0000001471](https://doi.org/10.1501/Ilhfak_0000001471).

<sup>14</sup> Deuteronomy 9:15.

<sup>15</sup> Q 7:148-157.

<sup>16</sup> Q 20:85-95. In light of differences between these two narratives in the Qurʾān, Bernard Heller asserts that the Qurʾān initially treated the story in line with the Torah before later claiming that the Golden Calf was made by a Samaritan. Bernard Heller, “al-Sāmīrī,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs, and G. Lecomte, new ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), VIII, 1046.

The principal difference between the Golden Calf stories in the Qurʾān and the Torah is the person who made the calf.

## II. Comments on *ʿIjl al-Sāmīrī*

Classical Orientalists claim that the story in the Qurʾān was derived from available Jewish sources and see the traces of these sources in different narratives in the Qurʾān.

In *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān*, Arthur Jeffery analyzes the word “Sāmīrī” and argues that the identity of the protagonist was inspired by the Samaritans in the Book of Hosea.<sup>17</sup>

*Your calf is rejected, O Samaria,  
My anger burns against them!  
How long will they be incapable of innocence?  
For it is from Israel.  
An artisan made [the calf],  
It is not God.  
The calf of Samaria shall be broken to pieces.*<sup>18</sup>

In the passage on Sāmīrī, Jeffery also allows for the argument by Sigmund Frankel. According to Frankel, the story of the Samaritan is taken from a Jewish Midrash that attempts to place the great sin of Aaron on a Samaritan. Ignaz Goldziher establishes the connection between the Samaritan sect and the Sāmīrī in the Qurʾān on the concept of “not to touch.” According to Goldziher, the Samaritan focus on avoiding blending with foreigners inspired Muḥammad to write the story. Abraham Geiger is another Orientalist whose argument is parallel to that of Goldziher. In Geiger’s view, the story is created on the basis of Rabbinic sources. The words of Aaron, “*the people ... were about to kill me,*”<sup>19</sup> are taken from sources that relate the slaying of Hur and the fear of Aaron. Geiger also relates the Samaritan to Micah, who made an idol according to the Book of Judges, and states that the name “Sāmīrī” is derived from Samuel.<sup>20</sup> In addition, Abraham Geiger uses the detail of the “lowing sound of [the] calf” to associate the story with

<sup>17</sup> Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938), 159.

<sup>18</sup> Hosea 8:5-6.

<sup>19</sup> Q 7:150.

<sup>20</sup> Geiger, *Judaism and Islām*, 131-132.

the lowing calf in Pirke De-Rabbi Eli'ezer.<sup>21</sup> According to this story, the angel of death called Samael, who entered into the calf and made the latter low, whereupon the Israelites thought the calf was alive. For Geiger, this story evolved into the version in the Qur'ān.<sup>22</sup> Heinrich Speyer finds this relationship to be a rebellion against Moses and claims that Zimri, the son of Salu, who committed adultery with woman from Moab, was transformed into Sāmīrī in the Qur'ān. Haim Schwartzbaum uses the detail of the “lowing sound of [the] calf” in Rabbinic narratives about the lowing of Golden Calves made in the time of Jeroboam and considers them the basis for the story in the Qur'ān.<sup>23</sup> All previous researchers reinforced their arguments by establishing a connection between the different incidents since the lands of the Samaritans are not unfamiliar to calf culture.<sup>24</sup>

Muslim scholars looked for a certain historical Sāmīrī/Samaritan to clarify the incident. According to some exegetes, the name of the Samaritan was Moses ibn Dhafar<sup>25</sup> or Aaron ibn Jafar.<sup>26</sup> However, the origin of these narratives is unknown, and the attempts to name the Samaritan by exegetes make the issue even more confusing. It should not go unnoticed that the mentioned names indicate that the Samaritan was the namesake of one of two leaders of the Israelites. In particular, the name “Aaron” is seen as an effort toward reconciliation between the Torah and the Qur'ān. On the basis of ‘*ya for nisba*’<sup>27</sup> at the end of the word *Sāmīrī*, scholars have attempted to find an appropriate tribe for Sāmīrī.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, 159.

<sup>22</sup> Geiger, *Judaism and Islām*, 132.

<sup>23</sup> Heller, “al-Sāmīrī,” VIII, 1046.

<sup>24</sup> I Kings 12:25-33.

<sup>25</sup> Mahmut Salihoglu, “Sāmīrī,” in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslām Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XXXVI, 78-79.

<sup>26</sup> Heller, “al-Sāmīrī,” amended by A. Ateş, in *İslām Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1988), X, 148.

<sup>27</sup> It signifies possession/relation in Arabic.

<sup>28</sup> Al-Zamakhsharī lists these narratives as below: Sāmīrī means (1) an Israelite tribe, (2) a tribe among Jews, (3) a person from Bajrma (a village in the watershed of Balih stream near Raqqah), (4) a landlord/aga from Kerman. Abū l-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar ibn Muḥammad al-Khwārazmī al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq ḡhawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa-‘uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta’wīl*, ed. ‘Ādil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwaḍ (Riyadh: Maktabat al-‘Ubaykān, 1998),



Certain modern Muslim scholars propose interpretations of the identity of Sāmīrī in the Qurʾān.<sup>29</sup> Based on the evolution of Samaritan references, it is argued that the current Samaritans originate not from the city of Samaria but from Shomronim, which means “observer of law.” Nevertheless, the secession occurred during the struggle to become High Priest between Eli, the fifth-generation grandson of Aaron, and Uzzi. Accordingly, some Muslim scholars’ arguments are grounded on the mentioned argument. Nevertheless, the adoption of the foregoing claim is no more than a step toward refuting the allegation in the Hebrew Bible about the emergence of the Samaritans.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the claim regarding the origins of the Samaritans in their own current sources is actually later than the emergence of Sāmīrī in the Qurʾān. In fact, the Priest Eli of Shiloh lived toward the end of the age of Judges, much later than Moses.

In his *İslâm Dünyasında Sâmirîler: Osmanlı Dönemine Kadar*, Nuh Arslantaş discusses the possibility that the person who made the calf may have left for Samaria. According to Arslantaş, since the northern Israelites also subsequently made a Golden Calf, the people in this region might have been called *Samaritans*. In addition, Arslantaş establishes a connection between Sāmīrī and the modern-day Samaritans and refers to al-Mawdūdī, who studied the origin of the word *Sāmīrī* and concentrated on the word *Sumerian*. In the eyes of the author, the Akkadians, who were representatives of Sumerian civilization, may have gone to Egypt. During the rule of the 19<sup>th</sup> dynasty

---

IV, 102 (Q 20:85). Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī claims that Sāmīrī was a Copt. Abū Muḥammad Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī al-mushtabir bi-l-Tafsīr al-kabīr wa-Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981), XXII, 101 (Q 20:85).

<sup>29</sup> ʿAbdullāh Yūsuf ʿAlī, *The Meaning of The Holy Qurʾān, new edition with revised translation, commentary and newly compiled comprehensive index* (Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 2004), 781-782, footnotes 2605-2608.

<sup>30</sup> In consideration of information in the Hebrew Bible, the name of the Samaritans means the owner of the hill where the city of Samaria was founded. This origin was long accepted as correct. The name was considered plausible also because modern-day Samaritans live in Samaria. The first objection to the story of the appearance of Samaritans came from modern-day Samaritans. Islamic Awareness, “The Samaritan’ Error in The Qurʾān?” <http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Contrad/External/samaritan.html>, accessed November 4, 2015.

in Egypt, Sumerians were among the groups that left Egypt together with Moses. Therefore, the builder of the Golden Calf was a member of this community.<sup>31</sup>

In conclusion, Western researchers consider the narrative in the Hebrew Bible the benchmark for the stories and attempt to read the differences in the Qurʾān from this perspective. Nevertheless, considering the stories from the perspective of the Qurʾān not only complies better with critical logic but also provides a new opportunity to recognize the original version of the stories. Studies by Muslim scholars of the Samaritan problem, in contrast, are limited to two aspects of the question. They are interested in the identity of Sāmīrī and his possible relation with today's Samaritans. Another important aspect of the Sāmīrī problem, namely, the reason behind the attribution of the sin of the Golden Calf made by Sāmīrī to Aaron, is left unanswered. Therefore, a three-stage approach including the origin of the word, the connection between Sāmīrī and Aaron, and his relation with today's Samaritans seems to provide a better step toward a solution.

### III. The Meaning of the Word *Sā-mar* and Two Possibilities for the Identity of *Sāmīrī* in the Qurʾān

Both the Torah and the Qurʾān include words from Egyptian,<sup>32</sup> the best-known of which is “pharaoh.” Meaning “Great House” in Ancient Egyptian, Pharaoh signifies the King of Egypt and is mentioned seventy-four times in the Qurʾān.<sup>33</sup> A similar word is Hāmān. This word has been a point of debate among Orientalists for a long time, and the Qurʾān has been accused of a historical mistake because of “Hāmān.”<sup>34</sup> However, the claim by Muslim scholars that Hāmān was a title bestowed to the high priests of Amun is a more accurate argument than the acceptance of an imaginary protagonist in the Book of Esther as if

<sup>31</sup> Nuh Arslantaş, *İslâm Dünyasında Sāmīrīler: Osmanlı Dönemine Kadar* (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2008), 50-56.

<sup>32</sup> For words such as Moses, Yamm, Tabut, Zaytun, etc., see Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān*.

<sup>33</sup> Ömer Faruk Harman, “Firavun,” in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XIII, 121.

<sup>34</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, Hāmān lived at the time of the Book of Esther – therefore during the time of Babylonian exile. The Qurʾān, in contrast, mentions him among the foes of Moses, like Pharaoh. Q 28:6, 8, 38; Q 29:39; Q 40:24, 36.

he were a real personality.<sup>35</sup> In our opinion, it is necessary to go beyond the limits the Hebrew Bible attempts to maintain find the meaning of *Sāmīrī*. Muḥammad Asad, a converted Muslim exegete, provides a guide in his efforts to find an Egyptian origin/root for the word *Sāmīrī* in his interpretation of relevant Qurʾān verses.<sup>36</sup>

*Sāmīrī* may also be an Ancient Egyptian word and a construction like *Pbaraoh*. Indeed, Ancient Egyptian does include a word that consists of *sā* and *mer* and means “beloved son.”<sup>37</sup> *Mer* is a verb that means “to love, to desire, to want.” It has many derivatives, such as *mer-t* (love) and *merut* (beloved woman). In addition, *merr* and *meri* are epithets used for many deities.<sup>38</sup> This name is also used among Israelites. For example, Merari, son of Levi, is thought to be named after this root.<sup>39</sup> Miriam is another name related to the root *merr*. It is argued that the name Miriam originates from Ancient Egyptian.<sup>40</sup>

The word *sā* means “son” and is used in various constructions.<sup>41</sup> These words can be used alone or in noun phrases. The chain possessive construction “*sāmar-f*” is used as a title for a high priest and funeral priest of Heru-shef.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, the word *sāmīrī* in the Qurʾān may originate from the Ancient Egyptian *sā-mar*, which means “beloved son.” In

<sup>35</sup> Şaban Kuzgun, “Hâmân,” in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XXXV, 437.

<sup>36</sup> According to him, the word should be related to “shemer,” which means “foreigner” in Ancient Egyptian. Muhammad Asad, trans., *The Message of the Qurʾān: Translated and Explained by Muhammad Asad* (Gibraltar: Dār-al-Andalus, 1997), 479, footnote 70.

<sup>37</sup> Sir Ernest Alfred Wallis Budge, *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary: with an Index of English Words, King List and Geographical List with Indexes, List of Hieroglyphic Characters, Coptic and Semitic Alphabets, etc.* (London: John Murray, 1920), 584.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 310.

<sup>39</sup> James Meek Theophile, “Moses and the Levites,” *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 56, no. 2 (1939), 119, <https://doi.org/10.1086/370531>.

<sup>40</sup> Alan H. Gardiner, “The Egyptian Origin of Some English Personal Names,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56, no. 2 (1936), 194-196, <https://doi.org/10.2307/594666>.

<sup>41</sup> Budge, *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary*, 583.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 584.

consideration of *nisbah yā* (يَا), which signifies the possessive in Arabic, *sā-mirī* may mean “a descendant of a beloved son, his adherent or representative.”

In our opinion, there are several possibilities with regard to whom *sā-mirī* signifies in the sense of “beloved son.” First, this word may indicate a representative of the priest system of the firstborn. The idea that *Sā-mirī* is a firstborn son who is a priest of the Israelites fits well with the context of the Golden Calf incident. Indeed, the Golden Calf incident is one of the milestones in the Israelite history of priesthood. We know that following the Golden Calf incident, the Levites were taken into the service of God against the firstborn sons of Israelites. Their loyalty and heroics in the Golden Calf incident made the Levites the new holders of the priesthood. Why did God need such a reassignment? The previous priests, who consisted of firstborns, must have committed a fault to deserve such punishment and reassignment. Otherwise, it would be a unilateral decision to opt for this reassignment.

The details of the Golden Calf event are likely to support the foregoing interpretation. According to the Torah, the event of the Golden Calf was followed by a kind of civil war in which people went from door to door and were tasked with slaying their brothers, neighbors, and relatives and even became enemies with their true siblings and sons.<sup>43</sup> In a similar expression, the Qurʾān says “kill yourselves.”<sup>44</sup> Therefore, since the maker of the Golden Calf is a firstborn son and is supported by firstborns, we can talk about a civil war that concerns every family. The killing of approximately three thousand persons (siblings, neighbors, and relatives) by the Levites in the Book of Exodus complies with this interpretation.

As a second option, the word *sā-mirī*, which means “beloved son,” can signify Joseph. Indeed, Joseph is the most beloved son of his father. Moreover, Joseph has obtained the right of the firstborn from Reuben.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Joseph is suitable for both possible meanings of *sā-mirī* because he is both beloved and the firstborn son of his father.

<sup>43</sup> Exodus 32:28-29.

<sup>44</sup> Q 2:54. For a comment about the possibility that this may be a battle among Israelites, see al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, I, 269 (Q 2:54).

<sup>45</sup> The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father’s marriage bed, his rights as firstborn were given to the sons of

Almost every detail in the story of the Golden Calf bears traces of Egyptian culture. The calf is reminiscent of the Egyptian deities Apis<sup>46</sup> or Mnevis,<sup>47</sup> both in the form of a bull. The use of gold in making the calf recalls Ptah, the god of craftsmen in Ancient Egypt.<sup>48</sup> In addition, the introduction of Aaron as a sculptor and the lowing of the calf recall Egyptian animation rites. The Egyptians had special sculpting methods as well as some techniques that made sculptures look alive.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, if we search for traces of Egyptian culture in the builder of the calf, we will inevitably note Joseph as the most suitable ancestor since his lineage has Egyptian origins because his wife was from this land. Joseph grew up in Egypt, where he married the daughter of a priest. Upon marriage, his name was also changed.<sup>50</sup> Consequently, Ephraim and Manasseh, who are descendants of Joseph, are matrilineal Egyptians.

This possibility seems even more probable since Jeroboam, who built Golden Calves for the second time in the history of the Israelites, was a member of the Tribe of Ephraim.<sup>51</sup> According to the Hebrew Bible, because the kingdom was divided in two following King Solomon, Jeroboam made two Golden Calves in northern Bethel and Dan to establish alternative religious centers to Jerusalem. The common feature of the calf made by Aaron and the two golden calves by Jeroboam is that both stories are used for the same purpose.<sup>52</sup> The

---

Joseph son of Israel; so he could not be listed in the genealogical record in accordance with his birth right, and though Judah was the strongest of his brothers and a ruler came from him, the rights of the firstborn belonged to Joseph.), I Chronicles 5:1-2.

<sup>46</sup> The Bull God is the living form of Ptah, the deity of the city of Memphis. George Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), 29.

<sup>47</sup> Sacred bull of Sun God of Heliopolis. Mnevis is also written as *mer-wer*. See *ibid.*, 95.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

<sup>49</sup> Budge, *Egyptian Magic* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1901).

<sup>50</sup> Genesis 41:45.

<sup>51</sup> I Kings 11:26.

<sup>52</sup> The most striking similarity between Aaron and Jeroboam is that the sons of both are called Nafab and Abihu. For others, see Moses Aberbach and Leivy Smolar, "Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, no. 2 (1967), 129-140, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3263268>.

sin of the Golden Calf is an argument that bears traces of Egyptian culture, exploited by southerners against the Tribe of Ephraim who were matrilineal Egyptians.

In conclusion, the story of the Golden Calf relates that the person who made the calf was a representative of the priesthood system based on the firstborn, whereupon God took his post as priest and granted priesthood to the Levites since they abided by Moses on this occasion. Another possibility is that a descendant of Joseph under the Egyptian influence made a calf similar to Apis or Mnevis and thus perverted the Israelites.

#### IV. The Relation between Aaron and *Sā-mirī*

The Qurʾān indicates *Sā-mirī* as the maker of the Golden Calf, whereas the Torah shows Aaron as the perpetrator; this is probably because of a connection established between *Sā-mirī* and Aaron. The connection between *Sā-mirī* and Aaron during the struggle for power between the priest groups was used to show Aaron as the maker and perpetrator of the Golden Calf. Groups of priests against Aaron may have used this sin in their struggle as an element of anti-propaganda against Aaron and his descendants.

Both meanings of the word *Sā-mir* (a representative of the priesthood system of the firstborn son or a descendant of Joseph) are suitable for the establishment of a connection between *Sā-mirī* and the Prophet. Following the revelation in Sinai, the Levites were taken into the service of God. We understand that the priesthood among the Israelites in Egypt was based on the principle of the firstborn<sup>53</sup> since it was given to the first son of each family.<sup>54</sup> Presumably, Aaron was among the leaders of this community where the oldest son was the priest of the family.<sup>55</sup> These firstborn priests, led by Aaron during the

<sup>53</sup> The Lord said to Moses, "Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal." Exodus 13:1.

<sup>54</sup> Numbers 3.

<sup>55</sup> According to the Torah, Aaron is the elder brother of Miriam and Moses and the firstborn son of Amram and Jochebed (Exodus 6:20; Numbers 26:59). Nonetheless, the beginning chapters in the Book of Exodus imply that Moses was the firstborn son of the family, and the name of his older sister is not given (Exodus 2:1-10). Therefore, it is controversial whether Aaron, Miriam, and Moses were siblings.

sojourn of Moses on Mount Sinai, were involved in the sin of the Golden Calf. Therefore, Aaron was held primarily responsible for the sin even if he did not make the Golden Calf in person. At this point, we can even consider that Nadab and Abihu, the first two sons of Aaron, were also involved in the sin of the Golden Calf. The Torah relates how Nadab and Abihu were sentenced to death by God during the early days of the Tent of Meeting for presenting an incorrect sacrifice. Nevertheless, the death sentence is too heavy for the presentation of an incorrect sacrifice.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, the true reason for the punishment of the two sons of Aaron may be their making of the Golden Calf. According to the chronology in the Torah, there were approximately six months between the Golden Calf event and the punishment of Nadab and Abihu. However, the assignment of the Levites, the heroes of the Golden Calf incident, as servants of God instead of the firstborn sons occurred approximately the same time later. The Levites replaced the firstborns only after the first census in the desert – in other words, approximately six months after the sin of the Golden Calf and a month after the punishment of Nadab and Abihu.<sup>57</sup>

In principle, there is a common point between the sons of Aaron and Sā-mirī in terms of “untouchability.” According to the Torah, during their interment, Moses told his people not to touch their bodies and to carry them in their coats out of the camp.<sup>58</sup> The Qurʾān also talks about the untouchability of Sā-mirī, who was punished by Moses, in

---

<sup>56</sup> Levites 10:1-20. To explain the death sentence on *Nadab* and *Abihu* and why they deserved the sentence, there are comments that they deliberately violated or undervalued the commandment of God; nevertheless, such arguments are insufficient to find a balance between the crime and punishment since the latter seems too heavy for the former. Ed Greenstein, “The Incident of Nadav and Avihu: A Mysterious Transgression or a Mysterious Deity?” <https://thetorah.com/nadav-and-avihu-mysterious-transgression-or-deity/>, accessed April 28, 2017.

<sup>57</sup> See Sinanoğlu, “Eski Ahid ve Kurʾân-ı Kerîm’de Sîna Vahyi,” 3-7. In terms of this problem, the Revelation at Sinai includes chronological problems. Indeed, in the Book of Exodus, the duties of Kohens who adhere to the Revelation at Sinai are analyzed, where the Levites are tasked under the leadership of Ithamar, the fourth son of Aaron; see Exodus 38:21. Thus, according to the Revelation at Sinai, Ithamar is assigned as Kohen, skipping the two sons of Aaron – who were already slain.

<sup>58</sup> Levites 10:1-4.

the sense of damnation.<sup>59</sup> In brief, the grounds for the accusation of Aaron in this event may be that his two eldest sons pulled the Israelites into a great sin.

The second possibility, that Sā-mirī, the maker of the calf, was a descendant of Joseph, also allows for a connection between Aaron and Sā-mirī. We base this connection primarily on the assumption that Aaron may be a descendant of Joseph. Therefore, we refute the accuracy of certain information about the lineage and priesthood of Aaron in the Hebrew Bible.

The Hebrew Bible indicates that Aaron is a descendant of Levi, son of Jacob.<sup>60</sup> According to the Torah, Aaron is a Levite and therefore from the Tribe of Leah.<sup>61</sup> However, because the present Hebrew Bible was established under the political influence of the Tribe of Judah, namely, the descendants of Leah, this information about lineage may seem suspicious. Our doubts are reinforced by the efforts to erase the traces of the Tribe of Rachel from the history of the Israelites. The rivalry between the Tribes of Leah and Rachel – in other words, between the descendants of Judah and Joseph – is observable in every chapter of the Hebrew Bible.

For example, the Hebrew Bible includes a story that states that the lineage of Judah continues through his daughter-in-law.<sup>62</sup> It is noteworthy that this story is located in the middle of the story of Joseph.<sup>63</sup> The objective of this location is to emphasize the importance

---

<sup>59</sup> Q 20:97.

<sup>60</sup> Exodus 6:14-27; I Chronicles, Chapter 6.

<sup>61</sup> Genesis 29:31 - 30: 22; 35:16-18.

<sup>62</sup> According to this story in Genesis, Chapter 38, Er, the firstborn of Judah, does evil before God and dies. His brother Onan becomes obliged to marry Tamar, the wife of Er. Onan prevents the birth of any children since the lineage will belong to his brother Er. God then kills Onan as well. Judah sends her daughter-in-law to her father's house to wait for his third son. Taking advantage of the death of Judah's wife, Tamar gets rid of her mourning clothes. She wears a veil as a disguise and sleeps with her father-in-law, whereupon she has two sons. Peres, the older son, becomes the ancestor of David.

<sup>63</sup> Chapter 37 of Genesis begins the story of Joseph; however, Chapter 38 suddenly changes to the story of Judah and Tamar, before Chapter 39 resumes the story of Joseph.



of Judah and particularly of Tamar.<sup>64</sup> Tamar is introduced as a descendant of the famous priest Sam in Jewish tradition<sup>65</sup> to place her before the wife of Joseph. In our opinion, one of the reasons behind the inclusion of this story in the Torah is to emphasize that the sons of Judah are the descendants of a powerful woman.<sup>66</sup> This story is the account of how Tamar obtained her share even though Judah and his sons did not do their part. The Torah argues that the Tribe of Judah are descendants of powerful women such as Sarah, Rebecca, and Tamar. Joseph, the ancestor of the rival lineage, was married to the daughter of an Egyptian priest, whereas the sons of Judah are shine thanks to this powerful woman (Tamar).<sup>67</sup>

The Israelites are described as a slave community that lived in the suburbs of the Egyptian city of Pi-Ramses and worked on the construction of the pyramids.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, we know that some

<sup>64</sup> Even though, at first glance, this story seems about an incestuous relationship and criticizes Judah and David, the true message here is that the continuation of a lineage is valued over anything. In this regard, the continuation of the bloodline eliminates the evil in the relationship between a woman and her father-in-law.

<sup>65</sup> Esther Blachman, *The Transformation of Tamar (Genesis 38) in the History of Jewish Interpretation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 239.

<sup>66</sup> In our opinion, another reason is to seek a historical ground for Levirate marriage (a type of marriage in which the brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his brother's widow).

<sup>67</sup> Jewish myths try to transform this marriage of Joseph into a sincere one. According to the legend, Asenath, whom Joseph marries, is the daughter born of the seduction of Dinah, mentioned in the Torah, by Shechem. Asenath was adopted in an extraordinary manner (according to a narrative) or was found alone by a priest in Egypt (according to another narrative). Later, Joseph recognized this illegitimate niece and married her. Tamar Kadari, "Dinah: Midrash and Aggadah," in *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/dinah-midrash-and-aggadah>, accessed November 5, 2015.

This myth includes a double meaning that we encounter in the stories of Judah and Levi. Does the story of such a marriage condemn or praise Joseph? Indeed, upon this marriage, the matrilineal lineage of Joseph is based on an illegitimate mother. Furthermore, the father of Asenath is a local of Shechem. In contrast, the marriage of Joseph turns into a marriage of uncle and niece.

<sup>68</sup> "Certain researchers on early history of Israel concluded that only very few among old Israelites were actually slaves in Egypt." See Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 82.

Israelites settled in Heliopolis, the city of Joseph,<sup>69</sup> and that the Israelites included people close to the court.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, the existence of the descendants of Joseph in Heliopolis is overlooked, as are the Israelites close to the court.

Likewise, there seems to be an effort to establish a kind of balance between the Tribes of Judah and Joseph during the settlement in the desert and the holy land. During the Battle of Rephidim against the Amalekites,<sup>71</sup> Aaron is one of the persons to keep up the hands of Moses, who was tired of praying, whereas the other is Hur from the Tribe of Judah.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, in the story of the twelve spies, Joshua, who

<sup>69</sup> This city, also called *Iunu* and *On*, is currently located in a suburb of modern Cairo. See Margaret R. Bunson, "Heliopolis," in *Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt, third edition* (New York: Facts on File, 2012), 180-181; James P. Allen, "Heliopolis," in *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Donald B. Redford et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), II, 88.

<sup>70</sup> Miriam is the leading personality among these. She expressed her opinion about finding a wet-nurse for Moses, who was taken out of the river by the family of the Pharaoh, and offered her birth mother as a wet-nurse. Miriam's access to the court and respect for her opinion seems improbable since she belonged to a community of slaves. Another notable personality is Korah. According to the Torah, Korah was a man who revolted against Moses with regard to the priesthood of Aaron. However, the Qur'ān sees Korah in a very different manner and unites with the Haggadah at some point. The Qur'ān introduces Korah as a very rich man from the tribe of Moses and says he was punished for impertinence due to his riches (Q 28:76-82). The description of Korah in the Haggadah as the Treasurer of the Pharaoh matches the identity of Korah in the Qur'ān. See Aaron Rothkoff, "Korah (In the Aggadah)," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik, second edition (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007), XII, 298-299.

<sup>71</sup> Exodus 17:8-16.

<sup>72</sup> The name *Hur* is mentioned no more following the event of the Golden Calf. According to Talmudic comments, he was slain for opposing the Israelites during the event of the Golden Calf. *Sanbedrin 7a*. Hur has a very confusing genealogy and is associated with many persons, including Miriam, Caleb, and Bezalel. Hur is the son of Miriam and Caleb. Although this is not certain, it was probably the grandfather of Bezalel who built the Ark of the Covenant. See *Sanbedrin 69b*, *Sotah 11b*.

Even though he is introduced as a descendant of Judah, his closeness to Miriam and the Ark of the Covenant suggests the possibility of his belonging to another lineage. Because he is assigned by Moses as a stand-in and presented as one of those who lifted the hand of Moses, he might be a consequence of efforts to create

is the successor of Moses and a member of the Tribe of Ephraim, is put on par with Caleb from the Tribe of Judah. Unlike the twelve spies, only Joshua and Caleb have entered the holy land with a new generation. In these stories, Hur is rendered equivalent with Aaron, whereas Caleb is shown as equivalent with Joshua.

Saul, who is the first-ever king of the Israelites and a descendant of Benjamin, has never been respected as much as David. Together with David, the sons of Judah rose to power among the Israelites, and the Hebrew Bible presents the following religious discourses in favor of the mentioned power.

*God rejected the tent of Joseph,  
He did not choose the tribe of Ephraim;  
But he chose the tribe of Judah,  
Mount Zion, which he loves.<sup>73</sup>*

The kingdom was divided as of the rule of Solomon; thus, the struggle between the tribes of Judah and Joseph took the form of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Following the Babylonian exile, the Tribe of Judah considered the Tribe of Joseph among the ten lost tribes; accordingly, the Samaritans, who claimed to be the descendants of Joseph, were not allowed to participate in the construction of the Second Temple. In short, the Hebrew Bible includes an effort to strengthen one of the Tribes of Leah against the sons of Rachel, to overlook the details and achievements of the sons of Rachel, and to make readers believe that the sons of Rachel are lost.

The change in the bloodline of Samuel, the final ruler in Israelite history, is the most significant example of this approach. There is an effort to introduce the latest ruler-Prophet Samuel as a Levite, even though he is among the sons of Ephraim.<sup>74</sup> Aaron might have also been transformed into a Levite in a similar way, as though he is actually among the sons of Ephraim.<sup>75</sup> Pursuant to this approach, Aaron is

---

a personality from the lineage of Judah (!) as an alternative to Aaron. A similar possibility is plausible for Caleb and Joshua. See Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* 203-204.

<sup>73</sup> Psalms 78:67-68.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. I Samuel: 1 and I Chronicles 6:33.

<sup>75</sup> The earliest mention of Aaron is in Exodus 4:14: "Then the Lord's anger burned against Moses and he said: "What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see

shown to be of Levite descendant, whereupon the Tribe of Rachel will be completely erased from Israelite history.

It is meaningful that Levi, among the other sons of Leah, is chosen as the ancestor of Aaron. Thus, the inhabitants of Samaria are given a message by means of Levi, who is among the culprits of the massacre in Shechem. During the time of Jacob, the locals of Shechem wanted to be circumcised and unite with the Israelites. However, they were put to the sword in a massacre led by Levi and Simeon. The local Samaritans (in other words, the Tribe of Joseph) wanted to unite with the south following the Babylonian exile, but they were not allowed to do so.<sup>76</sup>

There is no strong evidence to prove that Aaron was a descendant of Joseph.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, a detail in both sacred texts about the Golden Calf story reminds us of the conflict between the Tribes of Rachel and Leah, leading to the conviction that Aaron might have taken sides with the Tribe of Rachel.<sup>78</sup> Both the Hebrew Bible and the Qurʾān talk in the Golden Calf story about a group of foes that intimidates Aaron:

---

you.” The identification of Moses’ brother as Levite is another question. Indeed, this description is unnecessary for brothers; moreover, it may be proof that being Levite means being a prophet. Also see Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-service in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985), 68.

<sup>76</sup> In our opinion, the difference between the Tribes of Ephraim and Judah during early Israelite history is the Egyptian influence on the former. The revilement of Solomon toward the end of his kingdom or the accusation of Jeroboam for making the Golden Calf should be evaluated within the context of criticisms of Egyptian influence. The sons of Judah, who were self-enclosed, remained nomadic and thus had an anthropomorphic conception of God, disliked and criticized the sons of Ephraim, who were outward, under Egyptian influence and had a relatively more abstract conception of God.

<sup>77</sup> Modern-day Samaritans do not consider Aaron a descendant of Joseph; thus, our assumption seems weaker.

<sup>78</sup> The history of the Israelites highlights a dual separation between the Sons of Jacob. This duality can be presented as follows: The Sons of Ephraim vs. the Sons of Judah, farmers (settlers) vs. shepherds (nomads), northerners (Kingdom of Israel) vs. southerners (Kingdom of Judah), those influenced by Egyptian culture vs. those influenced by Babylonian culture, those coming from Egypt vs. those coming from Canaan.

... Moses saw that the people were running wild, for Aaron had let them run wild, to the derision of enemies.<sup>79</sup>

Aaron said, “O son of my mother, indeed the people oppressed me and were about to kill me, so let not the enemies rejoice over me and do not place me among the wrongdoing people.”<sup>80</sup>

In our opinion, the enemies mentioned by Aaron note the distinction between the Tribes of Leah and Rachel. Our presumption is based on the address by Aaron to Moses, “O son of my mother.” All Israelites are descendants of the same father (Jacob). It is their mother who makes them different. By saying “O son of my mother,”<sup>81</sup> Aaron might be asking for mercy from Moses, who is a descendant of the same mother (the Tribe of Rachel) against the descendants of other children (the Tribe of Leah). More precisely, the *mother* in “O son of my mother” is probably no one but Rachel.

The same fact is repeated in the story of Joseph in the Qurʾān.<sup>82</sup> Asking his brothers to bring his other brother (Benjamin), Joseph does not say “bring me your brother” but “your paternal half-brother.”<sup>83</sup> As the story goes, the youngest brother (Benjamin) is accused of theft, whereupon the other sons of Jacob say, “His brother had also stolen,” meaning Joseph but not themselves. These details can be interpreted as follows. Contrary to common belief, Aaron and Moses are descendants of Rachel. In the story of the Golden Calf, Aaron addresses Moses as “O son of my mother” to take refuge in the family of Rachel against the sons of Leah.<sup>84</sup>

This call of Aaron to Moses can be interpreted in another manner. More precisely, Aaron might have meant Leah with the word *mother*. In this case, the chapter notes the fact that Aaron and Moses are

<sup>79</sup> Exodus 32:25

<sup>80</sup> Q 7:150.

<sup>81</sup> Q 20: 94; Q 7:150.

<sup>82</sup> Joseph 12:77.

<sup>83</sup> Joseph 12:59.

<sup>84</sup> This interpretation presents a new approach to Qurʾān verses that propose that Moses and Aaron are brothers. Contrary to the Torah, the Qurʾān gives no details about the brotherhood of Aaron and Moses. There is no information about the identity of their mother or father or the basis for their brotherhood. Therefore, Aaron and Moses may be maternal half-brothers, or the word “brother” might have been used for them since they were from the same tribe.

descendants of Leah. Indeed, this comment complies with the genealogies in the Hebrew Bible. However, the accusation of the northern Israelite Kingdom for the Second Golden Calf seems to position Aaron closer to the descendants of Rachel. Certain Western scholars claim that the Tribe of Joseph were the only Israelites leaving Egypt and that this bloodline united with other Israelites in Canaan; this approach is also suitable for the argument that Aaron was a descendant of Joseph.<sup>85</sup>

It is possible to make similar uncertain deductions about Aaron's blood ties with Joseph. Beyond such deductions, the connection between Aaron and the lineage of Joseph is essentially established by Shiloh,<sup>86</sup> the first temple hill where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. Therefore, it became sacred to the Israelites long before the sanctuary in Jerusalem. This temple was administrated by Aaronite priests just like Bethel. Therefore, the Sadducee<sup>87</sup> priests in Jerusalem have

<sup>85</sup> In *Musa ve Yabudilik*, Hayrullah Örs also indicates that the Israelites in Exodus are exclusively the House/People of Joseph. Örs thinks that the Sons of Joseph and the Kohens from Egypt came together with the communities who spoke the same language on the east and west of the Jordan River and formed the Israelites as we know them. For Örs, this is why Joshua had the Israelites circumcised after passing the Jordan River. According to him, those from Egypt and the locals influenced one another, whereupon they began to call God Jehovah, after a deity of one of these tribes. See Hayrullah Örs, *Musa ve Yabudilik*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2000), 155.

<sup>86</sup> Shiloh is located between Jerusalem and Shechem (Nablus) where Mount Gerizim, the holy mountain for the Samaritans, exists. Presumably, it is the modern archaeological site called Khirbet Seilun.

<sup>87</sup> Zadok is the mystical priest of the time of David and Solomon. He was a priest together with Aviathar, another priest from Shiloh, under the rule of David. However, because Aviathar was exiled during the period of Solomon, Zadok was consecrated by the King and became the high priest of the Temple. Ezra bases the genealogy of Zadok on Aaron (Ezra 7:1-6), but his past is actually unknown. Wellhausen thinks Zadok was a local of Jerusalem and therefore a Jebusite; see Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 79. Mystery about Zadok includes his lineage as well. In *Missing Priest*, Alice Hunt claims that the term "Sons of Zadok/Zadokites" is pure fabrication. According to her, in the history of Kohens, we can talk about no dynasty prior to Onias, whose rights were extorted by the Hasmoneans. The greatest evidence of this fact is the absence of any information about the Sons of Zadok in pre-exile sources even though they had

ascribed the sin of the Golden Calf, which was actually made by Sāmīrī of Joseph's lineage, to the Aaronic priests who were in charge of the Josephite temple<sup>88</sup> (in the land of the Tribe of Joseph) and their ancestor Aaron as an inevitable consequence of the struggle between the rival groups of priests.

The Torah insistently indicates that the priesthood of Aaron began on the piedmonts of Sinai. The Torah does not mention the priesthood of Aaron before his consecration as Kohen. Nevertheless, we have some doubts about this problem. Certain researchers, who look for the roots of Moses and monotheistic beliefs in Egyptian culture,<sup>89</sup> propose assertive claims on the question. According to them, Moses started a rebellion as a priest, called Osarsiph, from Heliopolis and realized the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt.<sup>90</sup> Pursuant to the same point of view, both Aaron and Miriam are well-educated Egyptians. Aaron is a member of the guild of priests in Egypt; this is why he became the first priest of the Israelites. Likewise, Miriam sings in Exodus since she was a former singing nun in the temple.<sup>91</sup>

In our opinion, it is not accurate to claim that the Israelites were a people completely isolated from Egyptian culture and traces; likewise, it is inaccurate to argue that all of the leaders who led the Israelites out of Egypt were Egyptians. Indeed, the quest for Egyptian roots for Moses is based on the effort to confine the monotheistic belief of Israelites to Egypt. In light of this effort, there is a counter-effort to refuse any religious experience in Egypt and to accept the revelation at Sinai as the beginning of the religion of the Israelites. In fact,

---

administered the Temple since the time of David. Alice Hunt, *Missing Priests: The Zadokites in Tradition and History* (London: T & T Clark, 2006).

<sup>88</sup> Donald G. Schley, *Shiloh: A Biblical City in Tradition and History* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 187, 197.

<sup>89</sup> The famous Egyptologist Jan Assmann asserts that Moses might be an Egyptian. See Jan Assmann, *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

<sup>90</sup> The Egyptian historian Manetho claims that Moses was an Egyptian priest. The work by Manetho on the history of Egypt has not reached our day; his views have been transferred by means of the works of Josephus, the famous Jewish historian; see Flavius Josephus, *Against Apion*, in *Josephus Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1970), 1.26.

<sup>91</sup> Budge, *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 41-42.

however, the Israelites did have religious experiences in Egypt in the time of Joseph. At this point, we believe that Heliopolis was the binding element between Joseph and Moses. Among the Israelites, the existence of persons under Egyptian influence or who are matrilineal Egyptians explains the origin of the Egyptian-based names of the so-called Levites, Aaron above all.<sup>92</sup>

The following words, addressed to Eli in the Book of Samuel, give a hint of the priesthood of Aaron, the ancestor of Eli, in Egypt:<sup>93</sup>

27. Now a man of God came to Eli and said to him, "This is what the Lord says: 'Did I not clearly reveal myself to your *ancestor's family* when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh? 28. I chose your ancestor out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod in my presence. I also gave your ancestor's family all the food offerings presented by the Israelites. 29. Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?'"<sup>94</sup>

Among the Israelites, Aaron is a descendant of a lineage that bears Egyptian traces and served as priest in Egypt. When Sā-mirī, another descendant of the same bloodline, made the Golden Calf, the blame was put on his kin Aaron. In this context, a detail in the Qurʾān may lead us to the following prediction regarding why the sin of Sā-mirī is identified with Aaron. In the Qurʾān, the word "messenger" in the expression *track of the messenger* by Sā-mirī as an inspiration for making of the calf might refer to Aaron. Islamic sources attempt to relate the identity of this messenger through a narrative from Ibn ʿAbbās. According to the narrative, the messenger signifies Gabriel. Most exegeses indicate even today that the *track of the messenger*

<sup>92</sup> Ahira, Assir, Hori, Hur, Merari, Miriam, Phineas, Puah, and Putiel are examples of these names. James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 222-226.

<sup>93</sup> On the contrary, Wellhausen considers Eli a Moses follower and thinks that this expression includes a reference to the priesthood of Moses in Egypt. Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, 79.

<sup>94</sup> I Samuel 2:27-29.



means the footprints of his horse.<sup>95</sup> Recently, there have been comments that the messenger signifies Moses.<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, such arguments fail to notice the dialogue between Moses and Sā-mīrī. Aaron, in fact, is the only messenger in whose absence such talk may occur. The use of Aaron's knowledge in making the Golden Calf might have led to the reference to him about this sin.

In short, Aaron might have been accused because of the offense committed by his sons, for his inability to prevent the making of the Golden Calf as a leader, or even for providing the knowledge (track) for the making of the calf. In terms of the history of the Israelite priesthood, Aaron is a leader who is praised by his supporters and reviled by his foes. Most probably, the Sadducees, who accepted Aaron as their ancestor following the exile, made him their first high priest (Kohen), whereas the rival priest group that praises Moses or those from Jerusalem tried to discredit him as the maker of the Golden Calf.

As a result, there is a connection between Sā-mīrī and Aaron in terms of the firstborn sonship and descendance of Joseph. Aaron, one of the leaders of the firstborn system, was acting for Moses when the Israelites committed the sin of the Golden Calf; accordingly, Aaron was held responsible for the offense. Moreover, the sin was put on the shoulders of Aaron because of the role of his first sons Nadab and

<sup>95</sup> Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī al-musammā Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hijr, 2001), XVI, 149-150 (Q 20:96).

<sup>96</sup> See Asad, *The Message of the Qurʾān*, 480-481, footnote 82. There is an interesting narrative quoted from al-Bīrūnī. According to a narrative by Jewish Yaʿqūb ibn Mūsā al-Nīqrisī, the “track of the messenger” is the picture of calf that Moses drew to take the coffin of Joseph out of the Nile. While leaving Egypt, Moses drew a picture of a fish to take the casket of Joseph out of the Nile; he wrote something on the paper before reading and throwing it into water. Then, he drew a calf, wrote something and read it; he was about to put the paper into water as casket surfaced, and he left the paper aside. However, one of the attendants took the paper. According to the narrator, this is the track of the messenger is this paper. Abū l-Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiyah ʿan al-qurūn al-kbāliyah* [*Chronologie Orientalischer Völker*], trans. C. Eduard Sachau (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1923), 276. The narrative does not indicate who took the paper during the removal of the casket of Joseph. Later, however, Aaron is shown as the one who took it. This fact may be a sign of certain probable changes in Jewish sources with regard to the builder of the Golden Calf.

Abihu in the incident and their punishment of death by God. Another point of connection is the possibility that Aaron, like Sā-mirī, is a descendant of the Sons of Joseph. Even though there is no certain proof of this, we may draw such a conclusion since we encounter traces of historical conflict between the Tribes of Rachel and Leah in the Golden Calf incident.

### **V. Possible Bloodline of the Beloved Son: Modern-day Samaritans**

The meaning “beloved son” and/or “firstborn son” of the word *Sā-mirī* includes certain aspects that are applicable for today’s Samaritans. First, Joseph, who is the beloved and firstborn son of Jacob, has a privileged place in the heart of Samaritans. Modern-day Samaritans believe that they are descendants of the Prophet Joseph. Jews claim that following Babylonian exile, ten Israelites tribes were lost;<sup>97</sup> nevertheless, Samaritans have accepted Joseph as their ancestor among the twelve ancestors of the Israelites. Current Samaritans – except for Kohens, whom they consider of Levite descent – claim that they are descendants of Joseph through the sons of Ephraim and Manasseh.<sup>98</sup> This argument is supported by the fact that their land, Samaria, is given to the descendants of Joseph during distribution of promised lands among the Israelites. In genealogical terms, the conflict between the Samaritans and the Jews transformed into conflict between the descendants of Judah and Ephraim (the son of Joseph who was blessed as the firstborn).

Like his father Joseph, Ephraim, the prominent ancestor of the Samaritans, is blessed as the firstborn son even though he actually was not;<sup>99</sup> therefore, the name of the Samaritans might rather signify

<sup>97</sup> II Kings 15:29; 17:6; 18:11. For Apocryphal books and Haggadic comments, see Joseph Jacobs, “Tribes, Lost Ten,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, XII, 249-253.

<sup>98</sup> Like the Jews, modern-day Samaritans include those who believe they are descendants of Benjamin; however, there have been no Samaritan sons of Benjamin since 1892. Monika Schreiber, *Comfort of Kin: Samaritan Community, Kinship, and Marriage* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 24-34, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004274259\\_010](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004274259_010).

<sup>99</sup> Joseph is the firstborn child of his mother Rachel but the eleventh child of his father Jacob. Deuteronomy 21:15-17. The Zohar presents an interesting comment on the issue: If Laban had not deceived Jacob, Joseph would actually have been the

“beloved son.” According to the Torah, Joseph brought his sons Ephraim and Manasseh before his father Jacob for consecration. He placed Manasseh and Ephraim on the right and left of his father, respectively, pursuant to birth order. Nevertheless, as Jacob extended his hand crosswise to begin consecration, Joseph thought his father was mistaken and tried to intervene. Jacob, however, insisted he was aware of what he was doing and consecrated Ephraim as the firstborn son.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, modern-day Samaritans are descendants of Joseph, the “beloved son” of Jacob, and of Ephraim, who is also consecrated as the “firstborn son”<sup>101</sup> by Jacob. Thus, Samaritans have an ancestor who meets both meanings of the word *sā-mar*.

Today, Samaritans believe that the tomb of the Prophet Joseph is located in the valley between Mount Gerizim, the holy mountain for Samaritans, and Mount Ebal.<sup>102</sup> According to the Book of Joshua, the remains of Joseph were brought from Egypt and buried in Shechem, the holy city of the Samaritans.<sup>103</sup> Samaritans believe that the Temple was built not in Jerusalem<sup>104</sup> but on Mount Gerizim in Shechem.<sup>105</sup>

---

firstborn son. Jacob married Leah because he mistook the latter for Rachel, whereupon Reuben was born. Zohar: Vayechi 29:262.

<sup>100</sup> Genesis, Chapter 48.

<sup>101</sup> In the Book of Jeremiah, Ephraim is also identified as the firstborn son of God: “For I am the father of Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn son.” (31:19)

<sup>102</sup> Alan D. Crown, Reinhard Pummer, and Abraham Tal, eds., *A Companion to Samaritan Studies* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993), 207.

<sup>103</sup> “And Joseph’s bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph’s descendants.” Joshua 24:32.

<sup>104</sup> According to the Samaritans, God ordered David to build the Temple in Nablus, but David disobeyed and constructed the Temple in Jerusalem. This is why Samaritans call Jerusalem “The Cursed City.” They also claim that God talked to Moses on Mount Nablus. Samaritans end their common history with Jews at the time of Eli, during the age of Judges; therefore, they reject the holiness of Jerusalem and feel hatred toward David, who built the Temple in Jerusalem instead of Shechem. See Arslantaş, *İslâm Dünyasında Sâmirîler*, 51.

<sup>105</sup> The Hebrew Bible relates that Abraham settled for a while in the oak forest of More in Shechem (Genesis 12:6). Jacob bought a tract from Hamor, the father of Shechem, and built an altar (Genesis 33:20). This tract in Shechem was given by Jacob to Joseph. It is also indicated that during his sojourn in Hebron, Jacob sent Joseph to Shechem to bring word of his brothers (Genesis 37:12).

According to the Samaritan faith, Joshua constructed a temple on Mount Gerizim in the second year of the arrival of the Israelites in Canaan<sup>106</sup> and placed the Ark of the Covenant in this temple. Eli, a descendant of Aaron's son Ithamar, broke with Uzzi, the legitimate Kohen in Shechem, and this secession produced the holiness of Jerusalem. Shechem regained importance when it was made the administrative center of the northern Israelite kingdom founded by ten tribes led by Jeroboam; thus, the temple in the city was renewed.<sup>107</sup> This temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. There are debates about the exact date of the second construction. Nevertheless, the temple on Mount Gerizim was devastated once again by John Hyrcanus, the famous ethnarch of the Hasmoneans.<sup>108</sup> The Tomb of Joseph, the holy site of Samaritans near Mount Gerizim, was also considered important by Christians. The Roman Emperor Theodosius II (408-450) forced the Samaritans to open the grave of the Prophet Joseph and sent his remains to Byzantium.<sup>109</sup>

The motif of Joseph is still extant in the faith of modern-day Samaritans. The Messiah, named Taheb, will be a descendant of Joseph according to Samaritan belief.<sup>110</sup> The name of this restorer prophet,

<sup>106</sup> The Book of Joshua tells the story as follows: "On that day Joshua made a covenant for the people, and there at Shechem he reaffirmed for them decrees and laws. And Joshua recorded these things in the Book of the Law of God. Then he took a large stone and set it up there under the oak near the holy place of the Lord. "See!" he said to all the people. "This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the Lord has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God" (24:25-27).

<sup>107</sup> I Kings 13:25.

<sup>108</sup> Nuh Arslantaş, *İslâm Dünyasında Sâmirîler*, 116.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 44. Some Muslims think that the grave belongs to Sheikh Yûsuf al-Dîk, a wise man who lived in the Middle Ages.

<sup>110</sup> Arslantaş (2008, 119) indicates that Taheb is to be a descendant of Joseph and Moses. However, it would be controversial to declare that Taheb was a descendant of both Joseph and Moses. Indeed, modern-day Samaritans believe that Moses and Aaron are descendants of Levi. A manual published by Samaritans emphasizes the genealogy of Joseph with regard to the savior; thus, Taheb cannot be a Kohen but a Prophet, just like Moses. The description of Taheb at the end of the manual eliminates any confusion: Taheb will be a descendant of Joseph or Levi, it says. See Shomron & Osher Sassoni, *The Samaritan Israelites and Their Religion: Educational Guide, vol. 1* (Holon, Israel: n. p., 2004), 30, available at

based on a reference to Deuteronomy 18:18,<sup>111</sup> is unknown; nevertheless, he is believed to be someone like the Prophet Moses. Taheb will come from the East, rule on Mount Gerizim, restore the former glory of the Israelites and bring back the Ark of the Covenant, which was lost during the time of Uzzi. Upon the arrival of Taheb, the age of Fanuta (Displeasure) will come to an end, and the age of Rahuta (Pleasure and Peace) will be restored.<sup>112</sup> Unlike the Jews, the Samaritans do not consider David the everlasting ruler and identify the Holy Kingdom with the rule of the Prophet Joseph in Egypt. According to Samaritan sources, Taheb will be a prophet and a powerful king, just like Moses, and will rule the entire world with his kingdom. Under his rule, Samaritan Hebrew will become the universal language of the world. When Taheb dies, he will be buried on Mount Gerizim, next to Joseph.

In short, modern-day Samaritans might be called “Sā-mīrī” in consideration of their ancestors, holy sites and messianic faith, and with reference to Joseph (and also Ephraim), who is the “beloved” and is made the “firstborn” son.

Modern-day Samaritans may also be related to the meaning “firstborn son” of the word *Sā-mir*. Nevertheless, we will not claim that the privilege of being the firstborn son was adopted by the Jews after the Samaritans. Indeed, the privileged status of the firstborn son was already in place in the period of the ancestors, as observed in the example of the Prophet Abraham.<sup>113</sup> Furthermore, it is based on a mindset that is present in other communities outside the relevant region.<sup>114</sup> Moreover, following Babylonian exile, the Jews revised

---

<http://shomron0.tripod.com/educationalguide.pdf>. It is coherent that Father Raba is likened to Taheb even though he is actually a Kohen.

<sup>111</sup> “I will raise up for them a prophet like you among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him.”

<sup>112</sup> Sassoni, *The Samaritan Israelites*, vol. 1, 4-5, 13.

<sup>113</sup> With regard to the sacrifice by the Prophet Abraham of his son to God, see Ömer Faruk Harman, “Hz. İbrahim, Hz. İsmail ve Kurban,” in *1. Hz. İbrahim Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, ed. Ali Bakkal (Şanlıurfa: n.p., 2007), 155.

<sup>114</sup> Ömer Hilmi Buddha, “Sami Dinlerde Kurbanın Mahiyet ve Faaliyeti - IV: İlk Mahsulat Kurbanı,” *Darülfünun İlahiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 4, no. 17 (1930), 57-71; Fara: The firstborn calf of a camel. In the Age of Ignorance (*Jābiliyyab*), the heretics sacrificed camels to their idols, saying, “The milk of his mother will become more

ancestral stories in the Torah on the basis of firstborn sonship pursuant to the “Holy Seed” approach,<sup>115</sup> and almost all of these stories are included in the current Samaritan Torah.<sup>116</sup> Consequently, their inclusion prevents the establishment of a complete connection between modern-day Samaritans and *Sā-mar*, in the sense of “firstborn son.” On the grounds of the struggle for the seat of Chief Kohen, we will call modern-day Samaritans as “supporters of the firstborn son.”

According to Samaritan sources, Eli, charged in Shiloh, disclaimed Uzzi, the legal Chief Kohen of the Temple on Mount Gerizim. A separation then emerged between the Israelites.<sup>117</sup> Eli went to Shiloh together with his supporters and became the Kohen, which led to the disintegration of the Israelites. According to the Samaritans, Uzzi should have become the Chief Kohen as the son of the former Chief Kohen Bukki; nevertheless, because Eli rejected this process, he caused disaccord. In the eyes of the Samaritans, the legitimate Chief Kohen was not Eli but Uzzi since the latter is a descendant of Eleazar, son of Aaron. Eli, in contrast, is a descendant of Aaron’s second (fourth) son Ithamar. Therefore, according to Samaritans, the descendance of Uzzi from Eleazar, the firstborn son (the third and oldest surviving son) of Aaron, is a reason for his legitimacy, and they take sides with firstborn sonship through Eleazar.

It is very troubling that Eli became the Kohen in Shiloh together with the Ark of the Covenant. Indeed, it remains unclear when the administration of the Ark of the Covenant passed from the descendants of Eleazar to those of Ithamar. Jewish tradition shares the same names as Samaritans with regard to the first Kohen leaders, beginning with Aaron. Nevertheless, the Book of Samuel speaks of the ruling of the Ark of the Covenant by Eli, apparently supporting the story of secession in Samaritan sources. According to the Book of Samuel, it was unfortunate that the Ark of the Covenant was seized by the

---

productive.” Halit Ünal, “Atîre,” in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, IV, 79.

<sup>115</sup> The chain of Holy Seed, which is attempted to be established with regard to the Israelite conception of being chosen, is discussed in another paper.

<sup>116</sup> This is a different version of the Torah. It is written in Samaritan Hebrew with the Samaritan alphabet. This version of the Torah is closer to the translation of the Septuagint than the Masoretic text.

<sup>117</sup> Abū l-Faṭḥ, *The Kitāb al-Tārikh of Abu l-Faṭḥ*, trans. Paul Stenhouse (Sydney: Mandelbaum Trust, University of Sydney, 1985), 47.

Palestinians in the time of Eli. The Ark of the Covenant was regained by the sons of Eleazar, namely, Zadok, whereupon the post of Chief Kohen was restored to its true possessors. Nonetheless, it is unknown how the leadership of the Kohen, which passed from Aaron to Eleazar and then to Phinehas, was obtained by the descendants of Ithamar. Aware of this problem, the authors of the Books of Ezra and Chronicles presented different lists of Kohen leaders that exclude Eli, and anonymous people are used to fill the period between Uzzi and Zadok.

The Eli story in Samaritan sources calls into question the reliability of the Jewish Kohen leaders list. Samaritans grounded the legitimacy of the priesthood of Uzzi in his descendance from Eleazar, the surviving son of Aaron. Nevertheless, in *Kitāb al-Tārīkh*, Abū l-Faṭḥ indicates that the struggle for priesthood actually occurred between the sons of Phinehas and Ithamar. Consequently, lists of Kohen leaders by both sects seem inaccurate.<sup>118</sup>

Finally, modern-day Samaritans are a group related to both meanings of the word *Sā-mar*. If *Sā-mar* means the Prophet Joseph, the beloved and firstborn son of Jacob, then the Samaritans, who consider Joseph their ancestor, are the group that most deserves to assume the name “sons of Joseph.” The name *Sā-mar* in the sense of “firstborn son” also complies with modern-day Samaritans. Samaritans ground the story of their separation from the Jews on the dispute between the descendants of the sons of Eleazar and Ithamar of Aaron. Taking sides with Uzzi, who is a descendant of the eldest son of Aaron, Samaritans are, in a sense, supporters of the firstborn son.

## Conclusion

The origin of the word *Sāmīrī* is important to identify the Sāmīrī/Samaritan in Qurʾān. In this regard, the Ancient Egyptian word *Sā-mar* (beloved son) provides us with two possibilities. According to the first possibility, a Samaritan in the Qurʾān is a member of the

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 47. In our opinion, this list is established through a combination of Moses-follower priests with Aaronites among the earliest Kohen leaders. For a list of Kohen leaders between Aaron and Zadok (pre-monarchic period) see Emil G. Hirsch, “High Priest,” in *Jewish Encyclopedia*, VI, 391-392; Arslantaş, *İslâm Dünyasında Sāmīrîler*, 211. There are differences in Josephus’ lists of Kohen leaders; cf. Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, in *The Complete Works of Josephus*, 5.11.5; 8.1.3.

priesthood system prior to the Kohen among the Israelites; in other words, he is a firstborn son. However, the firstborn priests were involved in the sin of the Golden Calf, whereupon God dismissed them from the priesthood and granted the office to the Levites. Presumably, Aaron's firstborn sons, who were punished and executed by God, were also involved in this sin. Accordingly, they were mentioned together with the name of Aaron. In the fight for priesthood between Eli and Uzzi during the age of Judges, modern-day Samaritans take sides with Uzzi since he is a descendant of Eleazar, the eldest surviving son of Aaron. Therefore, they can be called supporters of the firstborn son in this regard.

The second possibility is that the Samaritan was a descendant of Joseph, who is both the firstborn and the beloved son of Jacob. In this case, an Israelite who was half Egyptian through his mother made the Golden Calf, which bears traces of Egyptian culture and caused the Israelites to rebel against God. Then, as a result of the conflict between Judah and Israel, Sadducee priests in Jerusalem used the abovementioned incident as a trump against the Aaronites who administrated the Josephite Temples (Shiloh-Bethel) in the north. The sin of the Golden Calf became a smear campaign against the Tribe of Joseph and the Aaronites, who were probably descendants of the former. Modern-day Samaritans, therefore, became the first-hand owners of this name because they are descendants of Joseph and Ephraim, the beloved son and grandson of Jacob, respectively.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Aberbach, Moses, and Leivy Smolar. "Aaron, Jeroboam, and the Golden Calves." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86, no. 2 (1967): 129-140. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3263268>.
- Abu l-Fatḥ. *The Kitāb al-Tārikḥ of Abu l-Fatḥ*. Translated with notes by Paul Stenhouse. Sydney: Mandelbaum Trust, University of Sydney, 1985.
- ‘Alī, ‘Abdullah Yūsuf. *The Meaning of The Holy Qur’ān, new Edition with revised translation, commentary and newly compiled comprehensive index*. Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 2004.
- Allen, James P. "Heliopolis." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. 3 vols. Edited by Donald B. Redford, Edward Bleiberg, John L. Foster, Rita E. Freed, Gerald E. Kadish, Ronald J. Leprohon, and David P. Silverman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, II, 88-89.



- Arslantaş, Nuh. *İslâm Dünyasında Sâmirîler: Osmanlı Dönemine Kadar*. İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2008.
- Asad, Muḥammad, trans. *The Message of the Qurʾān: Translated and Explained by Muḥammad Asad*. Gibraltar: Dār al-Andalus, 1997.
- Assmann, Jan. *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- al-Bīrūnī, Abū l-Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad. *al-Āṭbār al-bāqiyab ʿan al-qurūn al-khāliyah* [Chronologie Orientalischer Völker]. Translated by C. Eduard Sachau. Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1923.
- Blachman, Esther. *The Transformation of Tamar (Genesis 38) in the History of Jewish Interpretation*. Leuven: Peeters, 2013.
- Budda, Ömer Hilmi. "Sami Dinlerde Kurbanın Mahiyet ve Faaliyeti - IV: İlk Mahsulat Kurbanı." *Darülfünun İlahiyat Fakültesi Mecmuası* 4, no. 17, (1930): 57-71.
- Budge, Sir Ernest Alfred Wallis. *Egyptian Magic*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1901.
- . *An Egyptian Hieroglyphic Dictionary: with an Index of English Words, King List and Geographical List with Indexes, List of Hieroglyphic Characters, Coptic and Semitic Alphabets, etc..* London: John Murray, 1920.
- . *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt*. London: Oxford University Press, 1934.
- Bunson, Margaret R. "Heliopolis." In *Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Facts On File, 2012, 180-181.
- Coogan, Michael David. *A Brief Introduction to the Old Testament: The Hebrew Bible in Its Context*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Crown, Alan D., Reinhard Pummer, and Abraham Tal, eds. *A Companion to Samaritan Studies*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1993.
- Demirci, Kürşad and Tolga Savaş Altunel. "Erken Dönem İsrailoğulları Tarihinde Rahipliğin Gelişim Sürecine Alternatif Bir Bakış." *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi (AÜİFD)* 58, no. 2 (2017): 31-61. [https://doi.org/10.1501/Ilhfak\\_0000001471](https://doi.org/10.1501/Ilhfak_0000001471).
- Friedman, Richard Elliot. *Who Wrote the Bible?* San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1997.
- Gardiner, Alan H. "The Egyptian Origin of Some English Personal Names." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56, no. 2 (1936): 189-197. <https://doi.org/10.2307/594666>.
- Geiger, Abraham. *Judaism and Islām - A Prize Essay*. Translated by F. M. Young. Vepery: M. D. C. S. P. C. K. Press, 1898.
- Geller, Stephen A. "Priest and Levites in Hebrew Bible." In *The Wiley-Blackwell History of Jews and Judaism*, edited by Alan T. Levenson. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012, 35-52. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118232897.ch3>.

- Greenstein, Ed. "The Incident of Nadav and Avihu: A Mysterious Transgression or a Mysterious Deity?" <https://thetorah.com/nadav-and-avihu-mysterious-transgression-or-deity/>. Accessed April 28, 2017.
- Gürkan, Salime Leyla. "İbrahim'den Ezra'ya İsrailoğulları Tarihi." Unpublished manuscript, January 10, 2018. Microsoft Word file (in preparation).
- Haran, Menahem. *Temples and Temple-service in Ancient Israel*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1985.
- Harman, Ömer Faruk. "Hz. İbrahim, Hz. İsmail ve Kurban." In *1. Hz. İbrahim Sempozyumu Bildirileri*, edited by Ali Bakkal, 149-158. Şanlıurfa: n.p., 2007.
- . "Firavun." In *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XIII, 118-121.
- Hart, George. *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. London & New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Heller, Bernard. "al-Sāmīrī," In *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, edited by C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs, and G. Lecomte. New ed. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991, VIII, 1046.
- . "Sāmīrī." Amended by A. Ateş. In *İslam Ansiklopedisi*. Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1988, X, 147-148.
- Hirsch, Emil G. "High Priest." In *Jewish Encyclopedia*, VI, 389-393.
- Hoffmeier, James K. *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition*. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- The Holy Bible: New International Version*. Michigan: Zondervan, 2011.
- Hunt, Alice. *Missing Priests: The Zadokites in Tradition and History*. London: T & T Clark, 2006.
- Islamic Awareness. "The Samaritan' Error in The Qur'ān?." <http://www.islamic-awareness.org/Quran/Contrad/External/samaritan.html>. Accessed November 4, 2015.
- Jeffery, Arthur. *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1938.
- Josephus, Flavius. *Against Apion*. In *Josephus Complete Works*. Translated by William Whiston. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1970.
- . *The Antiquities of the Jews*. In *Josephus Complete Works*. Translated by William Whiston. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1970.
- Jacobs, Joseph. "Tribes, Lost Ten." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, XII, 249-253.
- Kadari, Tamar. "Dinah: Midrash and Aggadah." In *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/dinah-midrash-and-aggadah>. Accessed November 5, 2015.
- Katsh, Abraham I. *Judaism in Islam*. Albany: State University of New York, 1954.
- Kuzgun, Şaban. "Hâmân." In *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XXXV, 437.

- Montgomery, James Allan. *The Samaritans, The Earliest Jewish Sect: Their History, Theology and Literature*. Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Co., 1907.
- Pummer, Reinhard. *The Samaritans*. Leiden: Brill, 1987.
- Rabbi Epstein, ed. *The Babylonian Talmud*. London: The Soncino Press, 1978.
- al-Rāzī, Abū Muḥammad Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar. *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī al-mushtabir bi-l-Tafsīr al-kabīr wa-Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*. 32 vols. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1981.
- Redford, Donald B., ed. "Heliopolis." In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*. Oxford University Press, 2001, 88.
- Rothkoff, Aaron. "Korah (In the Aggadah)." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, edited by Fred Skolnik. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2007, XII, 298-299.
- Örs, Hayrullah. *Musa ve Yabudilik*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 2000.
- Salihoglu, Mahmut. "Sāmīrī." In *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslām Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, XXXVI, 78-79.
- Sassoni, Shomron, and Osher Sassoni. *The Samaritan-Israelites and Their Religion: Educational Guide, volume 1*. Holon, Israel: n.p., 2004. Available at <http://shomron0.tripod.com/educationalguide.pdf>. Accessed May 25, 2018.
- Schley, Donald G. *Shilob: A Biblical City in Tradition and History*. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989.
- Schreiber, Monika. *Comfort of Kin: Samaritan Community, Kinship, and Marriage*. Leiden: Brill, 2014. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004274259\\_010](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004274259_010).
- Schur, Nathan. *History of the Samaritans*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1989.
- Sinanoğlu, Mustafa. "Eski Ahid ve Kurʾân-ı Kerīmʾde Sīna Vahyi." *İslām Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2 (1998): 3-7.
- Soulen, Richard N., and R. Kendall Soulen. "Martin Noth." In *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Revised and expanded. Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 123.
- al-Ṭabarī, Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn Jarīr ibn Yazīd. *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī al-musammā Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*. 14 vols. Edited by ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī. Cairo: Dār Hījr, 2001.
- Theophile, James Meek. "Moses and the Levites." *The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 56, no. 2 (1939): 113-120. <https://doi.org/10.1086/370531>.
- Tisdall, William St. Clair. *The Original Sources of the Qurʾān*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge & New York: E. S. Gorham, 1905.
- Tsedaka, Benyamim. *Understanding the Israelite Samaritans from Ancient to Modern: An Introductory Atlas*. Jerusalem: Carta Jerusalem, 2017.
- Ünal, Halit. "Atüre." In *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslām Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, IV, 79.

Wellhausen, Julius. *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*. Translated by J. Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies. Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885.

al-Zamakhsharī, Abū l-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar ibn Muḥammad al-Khwārazmī. *al-Kasbsbāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq gbawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa-ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūb al-taʾwīl*. 6 vols. Edited by ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Mawjūd and ʿAli Muḥammad Muʿawwaḍ. Riyadh: Maktabat al-ʿUbaykān, 1998.