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Late Antiquity Revisited: Angelika Neuwirth's View on the Story of Prophet Abraham in the Qur'an

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Abstract

This article sheds light on Angelika Neuwirth's perspective on the Late Antiquity of Prophet Abraham in the Qur'an. Neuwirth examines the connections between the Qur'anic, Jewish, Christian, and pagan traditions, considering the development of religions and the collapse of the Roman civilisation in Europe during the Late Antiquity. She aims to foster dialogue between scriptures, highlighting the shared history of the Qur'an with other scriptures as part of the Abrahamic religion during that era. Using a critical study approach, this article analyses Neuwirth's ideas and compares them with Islamic literature to critique her thoughts. The results indicate that Neuwirth employs literary and historical criticism through microstructure analysis and intertextual studies to interpret Quranic verses. She starts by distinguishing between the two manifestations of the Qur'an: oral transmission *(Qur'ān)* and written form *(Kitāb)*. Neuwirth then deconstructs the revelation, treating the Qur'an as an invisible text to facilitate its literal and historical study. Her method resembles a hermeneutic development when studying Qur'anic verses and focuses on a diachronic reading between the Qur'an and the Bible.

Keywords: Late antiquity, Angelika Neuwirth, Abraham, diachronic, Qur'an

Introduction

In recent decades, Western Qur'anic studies have undergone significant advancements, reflecting an increasing diversity of motives and methodological approaches. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this scholarship was marked by a predominance of scepticism, apologetics, and polemics.[1] Prominent scholars such as Abraham Geiger, Gustav Flügel, and Theodor Nöldeke were instrumental in shaping this era of critical inquiry. For instance, Geiger's 1833 dissertation, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judentum aufgenommen?* and Flügel's publication, *Corani Textus Arabicus* (1834), which offered a critical edition of the Qur'anic text based on his philological studies, stand out as significant contributions. Nöldeke's work, *Geschichte des Qorân* (1860), further exemplifies this period by attempting to reconstruct the Qur'anic history. He argued that Prophet Muhammad received oral transmissions of Judeo-Christian teachings and doctrines, which were subsequently incorporated into the Qur'ān.[2]

In the early 20th century, Western Qur'anic studies experienced a shift towards an academic-dialogical approach, marked by increased collaboration between Muslim and Western scholars.[3] This period witnessed the creation of joint anthologies, reflecting a more constructive engagement. Among the most influential figures in this generation is Angelika Neuwirth, a professor of Qur'anic Studies at Freie Universität Berlin, renowned for her expertise in both classical and modern Arabic literature.

Neuwirth's scholarship has been pivotal in shifting the focus of Qur'anic studies from questioning the originality of the Qur'anic text to recognising it as a valuable literary artefact. Through her

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[1] Yusuf Rahman, "Tren Kajian Al-Qur'an Di Dunia Barat," *Jurnal Studia Insania* 1, no. 1 (April 30, 2013): 8, https://doi.org/10.18592/jsi.v1i1.1076.
[2] Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'an*, trans. Wolfgang Behn, Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān, v. 8 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 33–35.
[3] Rahman, "Tren Kajian Al-Qur'an Di Dunia Barat," 12.

exploration of the Qur'an's linguistic intricacies, literary devices, and historical context, she has deepened her appreciation for the text's unique qualities and role within the broader literary and cultural milieu. Her innovative methodologies and interdisciplinary approach have encouraged scholars to view the Qur'an not only as a religious scripture but also as a complex work of literature. This perspective has enriched discussions concerning the Qur'an's composition, structure, and thematic coherence, thereby underscoring its significance as a piece of world literature. This shift aligns with Abu Zayd's definition, transitioning from the paradigm of the genesis of the Qur'ān to the paradigm of *textus receptus*.[4]

Neuwirth established the Corpus Coranicum project to explore early Qur'anic manuscripts, particularly those from the Late Antiquity phase. This project has three primary objectives: documenting early Qur'anic manuscripts and their variant readings (*qira'at*), creating a databank of texts from the environment of the Qur'ān (*Manuscripta Coranica*), and conducting a critical interpretation of the Qur'ān. The Corpus Coranicum project offers a chronological commentary based on textual history, utilising methods of literary studies and drawing references from relevant texts from Antiquity and Late Antiquity. These source texts are accessible through the "Texts from the Environment of the Qur'ān" (TEQ) database. For the first time, the development of the early Muslim community is reconstructed, emphasising the interaction between the Prophet and the initial audience in Mecca and Medina.[5]

Neuwirth's research begins with the duality of the Qur'ān as both a communication process in its pre-canonical form and a closed corpus in its canonical form. She critiques both Muslim and Western scholarship for focusing exclusively on the canonical text of the Qur'ān, arguing that this approach neglects the historical context and the dialogical process between civilisations during its emergence. Neuwirth characterises the Qur'an as a medium of transmission and not a fixed compilation. From her perspective, the Qur'ān is not a rigid and finalised text but rather a chain of oral communication conveyed by the early Muslim community in Mecca and Medina, reflecting their expectations and religious backgrounds.[6]

The post-canonisation text (*mushaf*) of the Qur'ān is often regarded as a historical due to its lack of process registration in terms of language, style, and referentiality, as Neuwirth observes.[7] This perspective contradicts the Qur'ān's moral character, which is rooted in a dynamic communication process. Viewing the Qur'ān as a timeless, eternal text that transcends history overlooks its nature as a product of interaction and discourse.[8] For instance, historical details are often minimised in the Qur'ān's narratives, primarily serving as moral guidance for believers rather than comprehensive historical accounts. The story of Israel, for example, is conveyed in fragments across various verses and chapters, with prophets and nations often identified only in passing. The narrative does not explicitly name the apostles as callers, and the consequences faced by disobedient peoples are described in a cyclical manner, reflecting a cyclical conception of history.

Through her exploration of pre-canonical readings, Neuwirth seeks to foster dialogue and raise awareness of the Qur'ān's shared history with other sacred texts from Late Antiquity.[9] She employs microstructural analysis of surah units and studies intertextuality, positioning her work within the broader framework established by Nöldeke, thereby lending further credibility to the periodisation of the Qur'ān.[10] However, Neuwirth's approach distinguishes itself from the historical studies of early

[4] Naṣr Ḥāmid Abū Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur'ān: Towards a Humanistic Hermeneutics* (Utrecht: University of Humanistics, 2004), 10.
[5] This online (open access) project was founded by the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences in 2007 and can be accessed at: https://corpuscoranicum.de/en/.
[6] Angelika Neuwirth, "Two Faces of the Qur'ān: Qur'ān and Muṣḥaf," *Oral Tradition* 25, no. 1 (2010): 142–43, https://doi.org/10.1353/ort.2010.a402427.
[7] Angelika Neuwirth, "The House Of Abraham And The House Of Amram: Genealogy, Patriarchal Authority, And Exegetical Professionalism," in *The Qur'ān in Context; Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'ānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirt, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (London, New York: Brill, 2009), 105–7.
[8] Angelika Neuwirt, "Qur'an and History – a Disputed Relationship. Some Reflections on Qur'anic History and History in the Qur'an," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 5, no. 1 (2003): 1, https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2003.5.1.1.
[9] Adrika Fitrotul Aini and Asep Nahrul Musadad, "Konteks Late Antiquity Dan Analisis Struktur Mikro Sebagai Counter Atas Skeptisisme Orisinalitas Teks Al-Qur'an: Refleksi Atas Pemikiran Angelika Neuwirth," *SUHUF* 10, no. 1 (September 8, 2017): 173–92, https://doi.org/10.22548/shf.v10i1.249.
[10] Lien Iffah Naf'atu Fina, "Membaca Metode Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Kontemporer Di Kalangan Sarjana Barat Analisis Pemikiran Angelika Neuwirth," *Ulumuna* 18, no. 2 (2014): 71, https://doi.org/10.20414/ujis.v18i2.854.

Islamic scholars, as exemplified by works like *Tarikh al-Qur'an al-Karim* by Muhammad Thahir al-Kurdi (d. 1400 AH) and *Tarikh Nuzul al-Qur'an* by Muhammad Ri'fat Sa'id (d. 1425 AH).

In Western and European history, key periodisations include Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and Modern Times, suppressing earlier models based on Christian tradition, particularly the theory of the four empires.[11] Antiquity, also considered as an ancient or classical period, encompasses the civilisations of ancient Greece, Rome, and the Barbarians, spanning from the 5th century BCE to the 4th century CE. The Middle Ages extend from the 5th century CE to the 13th century CE, while the Modern West includes the Renaissance of the 14th and 15th centuries CE and the Enlightenment from the 18th century CE to the present.[12]

Antiquity itself is further divided into Classical Antiquity and Late Antiquity, with the latter serving as a transitional period between ancient and medieval times. Peter Brown introduced the concept of Late Antiquity in his book *The World of Late Antiquity*, describing the period between 150 and 750 CE as distinct from Classical Antiquity, marked by the disappearance of ancient institutions.[13] Significant events during this time include the fall of the Western Roman Empire in 476 CE and the collapse of the Persian Empire in 665 CE. Late Antiquity also witnessed the expansion of Christian power in Europe and the emergence of Islam in the Near East.[14] Brown addresses a fundamental question: how did the Mediterranean world, once so homogeneous, evolve into three distinct civilisations—Western European Catholicism, Byzantium, and Islam—that characterised the Middle Ages?[15]

Late Antiquity can be extended beyond 750 CE, with some scholars, like Averil Cameron, referring to a "long Late Antiquity" that stretches up to 800 or even 1000 CE. The Qur'ān emerged during this period of Late Antiquity, a time marked by the coexistence of Pagans, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and the development of various religions in the Arabian Peninsula and Syria. As Muslim Arabs gained control over territories with Christian and Jewish populations, the interaction of these civilisations became more pronounced.[16] To fully understand the Qur'ān, it should be read through the lens of intertextuality, drawing on elements from the Late Antiquity tradition, Jewish and Christian texts, and Arabic and Greek rhetoric. Neuwirth proposes a model of pre-canonisation reading and advocates for fostering dialogue among Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.[17]

This study aims to critically analyse Angelika Neuwirth's conception of Late Antiquity as it pertains to the story of Prophet Abraham in the Qur'an. The research focuses on three primary objectives. First, it seeks to explore how Neuwirth examines the relationship between the Abrahamic tradition, Medinan Jews, and the Qur'anic community within the context of Late Antiquity. By understanding this historical backdrop, the study investigates how the development of the Abraham narrative in the Qur'an was influenced by the cultural and religious dynamics of the period. Second, this study aims to assess Neuwirth's pioneering approach to the dynamic relationship between religious narratives and their historical contexts during Late Antiquity.[18] By analysing her methodology and insights, the study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how the Qur'anic portrayal of Prophet Abraham serves as a significant case study for examining the complex interplay between religious tradition, cultural influences, and historical transformations in the formation of Islamic thought. Third, this study intends to deepen the scholarly discourse on the impact of Late Antiquity on Islamic traditions by conducting a comprehensive examination of Neuwirth's contributions, primary Qur'anic sources, and relevant historical texts. This exploration offers new perspectives on the dynamic connections between religious expression and historical developments, contributing to ongoing discussions in Islamic studies and the broader understanding of religious evolution during this pivotal period.

[11] Rebenich Stefan, "Late Antiquity in Modern Eyes - A Companion to Late Antiquity - Wiley Online Library," in *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, ed. Philip Rousseau and Jutta Raithel (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 77.
[12] Aini and Musadad, "Konteks Late Antiquity Dan Analisis Struktur Mikro Sebagai Counter Atas Skeptisisme Orisinalitas Teks Al-Qur'an," 179.
[13] Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: 150-750 CE*, New edition, Second edition, World of Art (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd, 2024), 17.
[14] 'Azīz 'Aẓmah, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allah and His People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 13.
[15] Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*.
[16] Carol Bakhos, *The Family of Abraham: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Interpretations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 77.
[17] Fina, "Membaca Metode Penafsiran Al-Qur'an Kontemporer Di Kalangan Sarjana Barat Analisis Pemikiran Angelika Neuwirth," 76–77.
[18] Rahman, "Tren Kajian Al-Qur'an Di Dunia Barat," 2.

Ultimately, by bridging the gap between textual analysis and historical context, this study attempts to reveal the complexities of Late Antiquity's influence on the development of Islamic thought, enriching the field of religious studies and encouraging further scholarly inquiry into the dynamic evolution of religious ideas.

Angelika Neuwirth and the Perspective of Late Antiquity

Discussions of Western Qur'anic studies can generally be divided into two categories. The first category comprises the group of "old" orientalists, such as Ignaz Goldziher (d. 1930), Edward Sell (d. 1932), and Arthur Jeffery (d. 1959). Their studies often focus on the external influences on the Qur'an and the historical context of its emergence, typically employing methodologies such as philology, text criticism, and form criticism. For example, Sell's work *Historical Development of the Qur'ān* and Jeffery's study *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān* are notable contributions to this category.[19]
The second category consists of scholars who concentrate on what is before or in front of the text, reflecting a paradigm shift from a philological and text-critical approach to a literary one.[20] This group focuses on examining how the Qur'an influences those who read or hear it and how its readers and listeners accept and understand the text.[21] Angelika Neuwirth is one of the most prominent Western scholars in this group, alongside figures such as Issa J. Boullata, A.H. Johns, A.M. Zahniser, Michael Sells, and A.T. Welch. These scholars represent a shift towards a literary approach in Western Qur'anic studies. As a neo-orientalist, Neuwirth challenges the views of her predecessors, including John Wansbrough and Andrew Rippin. Her approach emphasises examining the impact of the Qur'an on its audience, contrasting with the "old" orientalists' focus on the historical development of the Qur'an, its external influences, and philological aspects.[22] Neuwirth's work has significantly contributed to the modern understanding of the Qur'an, adding new dimensions to the academic study of the text.

Neuwirth has notably advanced Qur'anic studies by adopting the perspective of Late Antiquity. Through literary-historical criticism, she demonstrates that the Qur'an is intricately connected with surrounding traditions, including Jewish, Christian, and pre-Islamic Arab traditions. By employing microstructural analysis of Meccan Surahs and conducting diachronic readings (intertextuality) with Biblical literature and pre-Islamic Arabic texts, Neuwirth establishes connections between these texts based on similarities in language, style, vocabulary, and narrative structure. She also utilises the concept of intertextuality, where each reading depends on textual codes and previous interpretations.[23] Through this approach, she asserts that the Qur'an emerged from Late Antique culture and represents a text of relevance for Europeans, thereby bridging the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims.

To study the Qur'an from a literary perspective, Neuwirth redefines it as both *wahy* (inspiration) and *tanzīl* (sending down). She identifies a series of unique communication processes through which the Qur'an was initially transmitted orally and gradually formed by its community. Unlike Naṣr Hāmid, Neuwirth views the Qur'an as a product of human culture (*muntaj tsaqafi*).[24] Her method can be considered a hermeneutic development of the Qur'an. The process begins with deconstructing the revelation into an ordinary text, followed by philological and historical studies, and concludes with historical criticism (hermeneutics). Additionally, she avoids focusing on Arabic grammar in her literary criticism and rejects subjective interpretations of the Qur'an.[25] This approach has significant implications for interpreting some essential concepts in the Qur'an.

Neuwirth contends that the pre-canonical Qur'an should be understood as a transcript of a communication process, an assembly of texts, and an audibly pronounced performance. As such, the

[19] Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Quran* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463213664.; Rahman, "Tren Kajian Al-Qur'an Di Dunia Barat," 2.
[20] Stefan Wild, *The Qu'ran as Text*, Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science, v. 27 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996), vii.
[21] Abū Zayd, *Rethinking the Qur'ân*, 10.
[22] Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity: A Shared Heritage*, trans. Samuel Wilder, 1 online resource (xv, 534 pages) vols., Oxford Studies in Late Antiquity (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019).
[23] Yusuf Rahman, "Survei Bibliografis Kajian al-Qur'an dan Tafsir di Barat: Kajian Publikasi Buku dalam Bahasa Inggris Sejak Tahun 2000an," *Journal of Qur'an and Hadith Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 116.
[24] Angelika Neuwirth, "Locating the Qurʾan and Early Islam in the 'Epistemic Space' of Late Antiquity," in *Islam and Its Past: Jahiliyya, Late Antiquity, and the Qur'an*, ed. Carol Bakhos and Michael Cook (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 165–85, https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198748496.003.0005.
[25] Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, Poetry, and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text*, Qur'anic Studies Series (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 47.

language of the Qur'an is closely related to pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. Neuwirth argues that the Qur'anic engagement with the understanding of the time of pre-Islamic poets does not merely manifest itself in supersession or polemic, nor is it confined to descriptions of God's dealings with the times of day and their specific metaphors.[26] The hymnic surah is one of the earliest Qur'anic texts to give poetic form to a new linear understanding of time. It begins with four oaths: a pair of types of trees (or fruits) and two places, Mount Sinai, and Mecca. This cluster of oaths is rich with biblical references, reclaimed for a biblically imprinted context.

Neuwirth's interpretation of the Qur'an within the framework of Late Antiquity underscores the importance of understanding the Qur'anic text in relation to its historical and cultural milieu. This perspective not only sheds light on the Qur'an's engagement with pre-Islamic traditions but also aligns with the broader objectives of the Late Antique project. By examining the Qur'an through the lens of Late Antiquity, the project seeks to achieve several objectives. First, it aims to contribute to the current state of research within Europe and the Western world, addressing the critical discussion of Western contributions, which often involve heterogeneous methods and divergent schools in Qur'anic research—an area that has been somewhat neglected. Second, the project endeavours to bridge the prevailing hermeneutic divide between Muslim and Western research initiatives. Third, it contributes to fostering (self-)critique within Western scholarship, thereby paving the way for dialogue that directly engages with inner-Islamic research on the Qur'an. Fourth, the project aims to present the Qur'an to Western readers in a manner that reflects its significance during its emergence in the early community.

Neuwirth posits that the Qur'an emerged from an engagement with Late Antique discourses and inscribed itself within Christian and Jewish traditions commonly regarded as European.[27] She contends that if the Qur'an is a document of communal formation, it seeks to narrate its development through the theological, ethical, and liturgical sequences that engaged the early community. Her approach involves a diachronic reading of the Qur'an, not based on traditional exegesis but grounded in the *Sīrah* (Prophetic biography), which provides a broad panorama of the Qur'anic proclamation. The Late Antique preconditions—particularly those of the early Meccan period—of the Qur'anic creation of theology, including letters, signs, and names, are also introduced within the Late Antique context. Neuwirth argues that the Qur'an during the early Meccan period aligns more closely with Syriac-Christian theology than with Jewish mysticism, a conclusion drawn from the Neoplatonic practice of explicitly connecting words, things, and concepts.[28]

The Qur'anic Community: Pagans, Judaism, and Christians

Islam and the Qur'an began to take shape at the dawn of Late Antiquity. During this period, the Qur'an emerged through interactions among diverse religious traditions, including paganism, Christianity, and Judaism, as well as the expansion of Near Eastern religions.[29] It has been suggested that the customs and literature of the Qur'anic Community influenced Qur'anic texts. This approach, often referred to as the "New European Approach to Reading the Qur'an," posits a significant connection between the Qur'an and the texts that preceded it.

Late Antiquity, spanning from the early third century to the end of the sixth century or the beginning of the seventh century, was marked by profound changes, particularly following the Byzantine-Sasanian wars and the subsequent collapse of the southern frontiers (limes) of both empires.[30] During these centuries—from the fourth century to the early seventh century—Near Eastern history experienced a series of transformative events, including the rise of a sophisticated Greek-Christian culture and government, the declaration of Christianity as the state religion, and the advent of Islam.[31]

[26] Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 123–24.
[27] Neuwirth, 2–3.
[28] Neuwirth, 237–75.
[29] Gabriel Said Reynolds, *New Perspectives on the Qur'an: The Qur'an in Its Historical Context 2*, Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān (Abingdon, Oxon: Taylor & Francis, 2011).
[30] A. D. Lee, *Pagans and Christians in Late Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, Second edition, Routledge Sourcebooks for the Ancient World (London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016), 1.
[31] Hugh N. Kennedy, "Islam," in *Interpreting Late Antiquity: Essays on the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 219.

According to Brown, Late Antiquity witnessed an unprecedented phenomenon: the expansion of Christian power in Europe and the emergence of Islam in the Near East.[32] His explanation addresses a crucial question in world history: how did the Mediterranean world become so homogeneous, divided into three civilisations—Western European Catholicism, Byzantium, and Islam—distinct from the Middle Ages. From an Iranian perspective, both the Persian and Sasanian Empires and from a Western perspective, the Roman Empire experienced a tragic decline and collapse. In contrast, Islam's spread was extensive throughout Europe and the Near East.[33]

During this period, the Qur'an emerged among pagans, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians, and amidst the development of various religions in the Arabian Peninsula and Syria.[34] According to Finster, Prophet Muhammad exemplifies the archetypal sacred figure in the Late Antique society, presenting himself as an intermediary, organiser, and bearer of the divine. This role marked the advent of a new era in religious history, supplanting the institution of the temple.[35] Following the establishment of Zoroastrianism as the official religion of the Persian Empire in the sixth century, it exerted considerable influence over Arabia, even taxing the Jewish inhabitants of Medina. The deaths of Al-Arith and the martyrs of Najran during this period made Medina an important pilgrimage site for Christians within the Byzantine and Sassanian empires.[36] Due to their enduring rivalry, the Christian and Byzantine empires employed religion as a means of legitimising comparable yet mutually antagonistic cultural concepts of sacred universal rule and sovereignty.[37]

Neuwirth contends that the Qur'an did not emerge in a vacuum, challenging the notion of an "empty Hijaz."[38] As an Islamic revelation, the Qur'an has close associations with the religion and civilisation of its time. The Qur'anic text becomes polyphonic, incorporating not only the addressed speaker, Muhammad, but also individual and group listeners, who are either included in the text or mentioned in the absence of the speaker. By the end of the seventh century, the Near East was under the influence of the Byzantine and Persian Empires, Gnosticism, early Christianity, ancient Arabic poetry, and rabbinic Judaism.[39] Additionally, Mecca was connected to South Arabia, East Africa, and the eastern Mediterranean through the caravan trade, establishing it as the centre of a vast international network for the spice and perfume trade.[40]

The Complex Interplay of Abraham's Stories

The chronology of the surahs, encompassing the early Meccan, middle Meccan, late Meccan, and Medinan surahs, forms a key aspect of Neuwirth's diachronic approach to analysing the Qur'an, as observed through the lens of the *Sīrah*. Building upon Nöldeke's foundational work, Neuwirth employs a literary-historical methodology that reveals the historical development of the Qur'an within the context of Late Antiquity. Each of verse and surah is subjected to a comprehensive analysis, considering its structural organisation, sentence construction, length, and semantic significance within the framework of its original audience. In her scholarly exploration, Neuwirth engages in a dynamic dialogue with Islamic tradition while also incorporating classical Arabic linguistic stylistics. This dual approach allows her to examine the text and its intricate relationships with other literary works. Through the amalgamation of these methods, Neuwirth illuminates not only the theological and

[32] Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity*, 17.
[33] Muntasir F. al-Hamad and John F. Healey, "Late Antique Near Eastern Context: Some Social and Religious Aspects," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 80–96, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199698646.013.43.
[34] Aini and Musadad, "Konteks Late Antiquity Dan Analisis Struktur Mikro Sebagai Counter Atas Skeptisisme Orisinalitas Teks Al-Qur'an," 179.
[35] Barbara Finster, "Arabia In Late Antiquity: An Outline Of The Cultural Situation In The Peninsula At The Time Of Muhammad," in *Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'āNic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirt, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 62.
[36] Norbert Nebes, "The Martyrs Of Najrān And The End Of The Himyar: On The Political History Of South Arabia In The Early Sixth Century," in *Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'āNic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 25–60.; Emran Iqbal El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, Routledge Studies in the Qur'ān (London: Routledge, 2014), 70.
[37] El-Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, 54.
[38] Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 14–16.
[39] Muḥammad Muṣṭafá. Aẓamī, *The History of the Qur'ānic Text: From Revelation to Compilation: A Comparative Study with the Old and New Testaments* (Leicester: UK Islamic Academy, 2003), 8.
[40] Mikhail D. Bukharin, "Mecca On The Caravan Routes In Pre-Islamic Antiquity," in *The Qurʾān in Context; Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu*, ed. Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx, vol. 6, Texts and Studies on the Qurʾān (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 115–34.

ethical dimensions of the Qur'an but also explores its liturgical aspects, uncovering intertextual connections among various scriptures.

Regarding the interpretation of the figure of Abraham in the Qur'an, Neuwirth primarily relies on a diachronic reading between the Qur'an and the Bible. Her interpretation reveals that significant events and concepts in the story undergo changes in tone and meaning.[41] For instance, (1) the term *ummī*—initially interpreted as "illiterate" in reference to Prophet Muhammad and the Arabs—is later understood as a reference to a "nation/people"; (2) the role of the father in the story of Maryam bint 'Imrān seems to diminish, giving rise to matriarchal nuances; (3) contradictory information about the sacrificial event involving Ishmael and Isaac emerges; and (4) the meaning of *millat Ibrāhīm* is reinforced as a legacy of faith and genetics inherited by Muslims.[42] These topics will be discussed in the following sections.

Abraham holds a central and pivotal role in the beliefs of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In all three religious traditions, Abraham is explicitly recognised as a friend of Allah. This significance is evident in Judeo-Christian contexts through three specific Biblical passages: II Chronicles 20:7, Isaiah 41:8, and James 2:23. Similarly, in the Qur'an (Q 4:125), Abraham is referred to as *khalīlah*, signifying his close friendship with Allah.[43] Approximately 245 verses across twenty-five surahs of the Qur'an are dedicated to Abraham (Ibrahim), the progenitor of the Israelite nation. While the Islamic portrayal of Abraham shares several similarities with the biblical account and subsequent Jewish exegetical literature, the Qur'an emphasises his role as a precursor to Muhammad and the originator of Mecca's pilgrimage rituals.

Many of the stories involving Abraham in the Qur'an find parallels in the Bible. Abraham departed from his father and people and encountered God in a foreign land, where he established his family (Q 19:48-49; 21:71; 29:26; 37:83-101; cf. Gen 12:1-5). He erected the House of God as a sacred site (Q 2:125-127; cf. Gen 12:6-8). He presented a humble challenge to God, who then instructed him to divide animals (Q 2:260; cf. Gen 15:1-10). His association with God's covenant is evident (Q 2:124-5; 33:7; cf. Gen 17:1-14). Divine messengers visited him and his wife to announce the impending birth of a son and to punish the people of Lot (Q 11:69-76; 15:51-59; 29:31; 51:24-30; cf. Gen 18:1-20). He engaged in a discourse with God concerning the fate of Lot's household (Q 11:74-76; cf. Gen 18:20-33). He attempted to sacrifice his son, from which God ultimately released him (Q 37:99-111; cf. Gen 22:1-19). Additionally, he is described as a close companion of God (Q 4:126; compare Isaiah 41:8; II Chronicles 20:7).[44]

According to Dirk, the Judeo-Christian tradition is notably silent regarding Abraham's life in Ur and Mecca. In contrast, the Qur'an offers a more comprehensive narrative about these periods in Abraham's life, albeit with limited details about his time in Palestine.[45] In contrast, Judeo-Christian perspectives tend to emphasise Abraham's life in Palestine. In this context, the Qur'an's portrayal of Abraham's story complements and rectifies discrepancies present in preceding scriptures, particularly concerning aspects related to Hagar and Ishmael.[46]

Neuwirth posits that the roles and teachings of Abraham are encapsulated in the terms *"milla"* and *"ḥanīf."* In the Qur'an, the phrase *"millat Ibrahīm ḥanīfa"* appears five times (Q 2:135, 3:95, 4:125, 6:161, and 16:123). The term *"millat Ibrahīm"* occurs in three other instances without the addition of *"ḥanīfa"* (Q 2:130, 10:38, and 22:78). *"Millat Ibrahīm"* is linked to the biblical covenant of circumcision. The word *"milla,"* borrowed from Hebrew, signifies God's covenant with Abraham.[47] Neuwirth interprets *"ḥanīfa"* as denoting a "servant of God from among peoples." This term encompasses established religious principles and exemplary piety, both of which are emphasised in the Qur'an. *"Ḥanīf"* is derived from the Syriac term *"ḥanpā,"* meaning an outsider or someone outside established religions. In pre-Islamic poetry, a *"ḥanīf"* was understood as an ascetic who

[41] Neuwirth, "The House Of Abraham And The House Of Amram," 525–30.
[42] M. A. Abdel Haleem, *Exploring the Qur'an: Context and Impact* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017).
[43] James Oswald Dykes, *Abraham, the Friend of God: A Study from Old Testament History* (London: Nisbet, 1877), 1.
[44] Reuven Firestone, "Abraham," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 6.
[45] Dykes, *Abraham, the Friend of God*, 3.
[46] Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur'an and Its Biblical Subtext*, Routledge Studies in the Qur'an (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 13.
[47] Neuwirth, "The House Of Abraham And The House Of Amram," 502.; Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 402.

practised solitary worship.[48] Thus, *"millat Ibrāhīm"* designates Muhammad's community as the originators of Meccan rituals and the entirety of traditions associated with him.[49]

Neuwirth departs from the genealogical paradigm and adopts a religious one instead. For instance, the Qur'anic passage Q 37:99-113, depicting Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael, is interpreted as a symbol of exemplary piety in contemporary Islamic liturgical practice rather than solely as a historical account of salvation. Similarly, the physical *hijra* of Abraham, although distinct from the later *hijra* (migration), exemplifies the desired conduct of believers in situations of religious oppression.[50] Neuwirth's interpretation aligns with the views of scholars like Zuḥailī, who asserts that *"millat Ibrāhīm,"* Abraham's religion, is an ancient form of Islam, characterised by monotheism, submission, and devotion to Allah.[51] Al-Asfahānī also defines *"milla"* as *"dīn,"* signifying a decree from Allah for His servants through His Prophets.[52]

In the Qur'an, Abraham's prayer for Mecca is mentioned in Q 14:35-41, where he seeks blessings and guidance for his descendants in Mecca. Neuwirth argues that Abraham's significance in the Meccan context is primarily attributed to this prayer, which marks a significant shift in focus from the Holy Land to the Arabian Peninsula.[53] By relocating some of his descendants to Mecca and supplicating for their well-being and spiritual path, Abraham's influence becomes intricately tied to the Meccan sanctuary. This theme is further emphasised in Muslim ritual prayer, with the "House of Abraham" (*Āli Ibrāhīm*) holding a vital place, symbolising the prophetic genealogy, and serving as a connection to the House of the Prophet Muhammad. As the founder of the Meccan sanctuary, Abraham occupies a central and revered position within Islam. [54]

Significant events are associated with the location of Abraham's sacrifices in Mecca, particularly in the *'aqida* teachings, which highlight his willingness to sacrifice his son. This narrative is mirrored in Q 37:99-107 and draws parallels with the binding of Isaac in the Book of Genesis (22:1-19). In the Biblical version, Isaac is identified as the son intended for sacrifice. According to Genesis, Abraham receives a divine command in a dream to offer Isaac as a sacrifice in the land of Moriah. The text specifies that Isaac is referred to as Abraham's "only son," omitting mention of his other son, Ishmael. While the Bible identifies Isaac as the son involved, the Qur'an lacks the mythic dimension of sacrifice present in Judeo-Christian traditions, focusing instead on the theological concept of sacrifice. Furthermore, the establishment of the Kaaba is described in the Qur'an (Q 2:124-129). It is likened to the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 8:14-61) or the foundational significance of Christ in the establishment of the sacrificial site of Golgotha. These narratives involving father-son relationships share similarities. However, Neuwirth asserts that the Qur'an lacks the mythic dimension present in Judeo-Christian traditions. This mythic aspect is derived from the profound theological concept of sacrifice prevalent in those traditions, which is not as pronounced in the Qur'an.[55] The comparisons and contrasts between these events in different religious traditions underscore the intricate interplay of themes and theological concepts, shedding light on how they are understood and emphasised within the respective texts.

The diachronic analysis of the Qur'an and the Biblical text reveals certain complexities. Firstly, the veracity of information present in the Bible is sometimes viewed as providing validation for the Qur'an's claims. This interrelation suggests a dynamic where the Qur'an draws upon Biblical narratives to reinforce its authenticity. Secondly, as discussed by Firestone, there is a notable discrepancy in the Qur'an concerning the familial relationship of Ishmael with Abraham.[56] While certain Qur'anic verses (Q 6:86; 19:54-55; 21:85; and 38:48) seemingly imply that Ishmael has no direct familial connection to Abraham, other passages include both Ishmael and Isaac in Abraham's genealogy. The Qur'an presents variations in its use of idiomatic phrases: "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" appears in Q 12:38 and 38:45, while "Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes" is found

[48] Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 403.
[49] Neuwirth, "The House Of Abraham And The House Of Amram," 503.
[50] Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 393.
[51] Wahbah Al-Zuḥailī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Munīr Fī Al-'Aqīdah Wa Al-Sharī'ah Wa Al-Manhaj*, vol. 1 (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), 318.
[52] Rāghib Al-Aṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qurān* (Bayrūt, Lubnān: Dār al-Qalam, 1991), 779.
[53] Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 399.
[54] Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an: Text and Commentary. Volume 1, Early Meccan Suras: Poetic Prophecy*, trans. Samuel Wilder (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022), 352.
[55] Neuwirth, "The House Of Abraham And The House Of Amram," 501; Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 395–400.
[56] Firestone, "Abraham," 99.

in Q 2:132, 140; 3:84; and 4:163.[57] Firestone, citing Hurgronje, suggests that the Meccan verses represent an earlier linguistic idiom before the Prophet Muhammad's extensive interactions with Jewish and Christian communities. The subsequent Medinan idiom appears to align more closely with the Biblical genealogy, reflecting the influence of local Jewish communities during Muhammad's time in Medina. In other words, early Meccan verses differ from later Medinan verses, suggesting that the influence of local Jewish and Christian communities may have affected the Qur'an's presentation of genealogy.[58]

Muslim scholars approach these complexities with a balanced perspective—neither entirely affirming nor refuting the Biblical account. Zuhailī exemplifies this approach, advocating for constructive debates.[59] However, Genesis states that the *dhabīh* (the sacrificed person) is Isaac, contradicting the Qur'an's account. Zuhailī counters this by offering five reasons to assert that Ishmael, not Isaac, was the intended sacrifice: (1) Ishmael's birth occurred shortly after the *hijra*; (2) the announcement of Ishmael's birth accompanied news of Isaac's birth; (3) based on hadith, both Isaac and Ishmael were considered to have been sacrificed (*dhabīh*); (4) the event took place in Mecca; (5) the presence of news about Jacob's birth, Isaac's son, alongside the announcement of Isaac's birth itself, suggests that the intended sacrifice does not apply to Isaac during his teenage years. Given the fact that there is a 13-year gap between Ishmael and Isaac, with Isaac being the second child of Abraham, it reinforces the notion that the intended sacrifice in the Qur'an's account is not Isaac. Instead, Ishmael is positioned as the more likely candidate based on the chronological sequence and other contextual factors within the narrative.[60]

Table 1: Comparisons between Qur'an and Bible

Aspect	Qur'an (Islam)	Bible (Judaism & Christianity)	Late Antiquity Context
Ancestry	Ishmael or Ismail is the ancestor of Prophet Muhammad. Ishaq is the forefather of the Israelites.	Ishmael is the forefather of several Arab tribes. Isaac is the ancestor of the Israelites.	Both traditions are based on pre-Islamic Arabia and Judeo-Christianity.
Sacrifice	Ishmael was intended to be sacrificed by Abraham, but his son is not explicitly mentioned.	Isaac is identified as the son in the Binding, sacrificed as a test of Abraham's faith.	An indication of the difference in narratives that Islam emphasizes Ishmael's role in the Arab lineage.
Character Traits	While both Ismail and Ishaq are portrayed as submissive to God, the Qur'an places less emphasis on Ismail's story.	Isaac is described as obedient, while Ishmael, though depicted as an outsider, is nevertheless acknowledged as blessed.	The depiction of both sons reflects different religious identities.
Prophetic Lineage	Both of sons were prophets, but Ismail was more prominent in the emergence of Islam.	Isaac is central of Israelite prophets. Ishmael is not considered a prophet in the Bible.	Judaism and Christianity focus on the lineage of Isaac, while Islam reinterprets it to emphasise Ishmael.
Religious Identity	Ishmael is closely linked to Arab and Islamic identity. The story of Isaac is part of both Jewish and Islam.	Isaac holds central important in both Judaism and Christianity. Meanwhile, Ishmael is often associated with "the other."	Both stories are used for religious identity. Islam highlights Ishmael to emphasise the Arab ancestry.

[57] Angelika Neuwirth, *The Qur'an: Text and Commentary. Volume 2.1, Early Middle Meccan Suras: The New Elect* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024), 209.
[58] Firestone, "Abraham," 8.
[59] Al-Zuḥailī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Munīr Fī Al-'Aqīdah Wa Al-Sharī'ah Wa Al-Manhaj*, 1991, 1:8–9.
[60] Wahbah Al-Zuḥailī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Munīr Fī Al-'Aqīdah Wa Al-Sharī'ah Wa Al-Manhaj*, vol. 4 (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), 118–20.

This intricate interplay between the Qur'an, Biblical accounts, and scholarly interpretations highlights the complexity of understanding Abraham's role and significance across different traditions. The diachronic analysis underscores the multifaceted process by which the Qur'an incorporates and adapts material from existing religious traditions while also reflecting the evolving context of the early Muslim community. It emphasises the complex interaction between linguistic expression, historical context, and religious engagement, offering insights into the Qur'an's dialogues with its religious predecessors.

Abraham's prayer for Mecca (*rabbij'al hādhā al-balad*) is recorded in Q 2:126. While Surah Ibrāhīm utilises the *"isim ma'rifat"* (*al-balad*), Surah al-Baqarah employs the *"isim nakirah"* (*balad*). According to Zuḥailī, Surah al-Baqarah records Abraham's prayer for the first time before he built the Kaaba, whereas the prayer in Surah Ibrāhīm occurs after its construction.[61] Similarly, Ibn Kathīr suggests that Abraham's prayer in Surah Ibrāhīm is directly related to the construction of the Kaaba. From this explanation, it becomes evident that although Neuwirth employs a literary approach, she appears to overlook certain aspects of Arabic grammar when interpreting the Qur'an.[62]

Neuwirth argues that the ritual prayers of Muslims suggest that the Islamic faith is primarily rooted in the patriarchal tradition.[63] She contends that the text designates the House of Abraham as the archetypal House of Prophet Muhammad. Interestingly, Q 3:33 portrays the House of Amram, representing the Holy Family of Christianity, as a rival to the House of Abraham. Mary, the central female protagonist, is supported by a second and more active figure, her mother. Her mother provides her with matrilineal ancestry to establish her elevated position. Mary, along with her mother and son, forms the "Ali 'Imran," the House of Amram, which Q 3 depicts as comparable to Abraham's patrilineal family.[64]

From this perspective, it can be concluded that Neuwirth interprets 'Imran in Q 3:33 as referring to Amram, the Biblical father of Moses and Aaron. Since the woman of 'Imran in Q 3:33 pertains to a member of the family of 'Imran, it explicitly indicates that Mary's mother was a descendant of 'Imran. Christian traditions identify Joachim as Mary's father, and Mary's mother and John's mother, Elisabeth, were cousins (Luke 1:36). Therefore, the juxtaposition of both in Q 3:33 may be interpreted as a polemic against the privileged status of the Abrahamic tradition.

In contrast to the *Protoevangelium of James*, the Qur'an in Q 3:33-62 omits the paternal role and is remarkably explicit in its gender-specific physical details, discussing the female womb and childbirth (*fī baṭnī, waḍaʿtu, waḍaʿat, unthā*). A prophetic aside demonstrates that God accommodates the infant in the temple despite His knowledge of the differing natures of men and women.[65] According to Qutb, Allah mentions the family of 'Imran to present the story of Maryam and Prophet 'Isa.[66] In comparison, other stories are not mentioned because they are irrelevant to this narrative. The story opens with the expression *"taharrur,"* signifying a sincere and devoted expression to Allah as a form of monotheism and submission. Al-Sha'rāwī states that the birth of 'Isa without a father and the birth of Maryam from a barren and elderly mother become *"āyāt"* (signs of Allah) in Q 18:40.[67] Additionally, al-Ṭabarī explains that the significance of *Āli Ibrāhīm* and *Āli 'Imrān* lies in the believers who share their religion with others who follow them.[68] Thus, the intent behind Q 3:33, according to Ibn Abbas, encompasses the believers among the followers of Abraham, the followers of 'Imran, the followers of Yasin, and the followers of Muhammad. This interpretation aligns with Q 3:68, where those closest to Abraham are deemed believers. 'Imran in Q 3:33 refers to two distinct individuals: firstly, 'Imran as the father of Maryam bint 'Imran, and secondly, 'Imran as the father of Moses and Aaron, who are linked to 'Isa (Jesus) and his mother as descendants of Abraham. Additionally, in Q 3:35, 'Imran refers to Hanna's husband and Maryam's father. The temporal gap between the two references (Q 3:33 and Q 3:35) spans approximately 1,800 years.[69]

[61] Wahbah Al-Zuḥailī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Munīr Fī Al-'Aqīdah Wa Al-Sharī'ah Wa Al-Manhaj*, vol. 2 (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1991), 66–69.
[62] Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Al-Qur'ān al-'Aẓīm*, vol. 4 (Beirūt: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1998), 144.
[63] Neuwirth, "The House Of Abraham And The House Of Amram," 499.
[64] Neuwirth, 507–8.
[65] Neuwirth, 512.
[66] Sayyid Quṭb, *Fī Ẓilāl Al-Qur'ān*, vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2003), 391–93.
[67] Muhammad Mutawallī Al-Sha'rāwī, *Tafsīr Al-Sha'rāwī*, vol. 2 (Cairo: Mathābi' Akhbār al-Yawm, 1997), 1277.
[68] Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān an Ta'wīl Al-Qur'ān*, vol. 6 (Beirūt: Dār al-Fikr, 1988), 326.
[69] Al-Zuḥailī, *Al-Tafsīr Al-Munīr Fī Al-'Aqīdah Wa Al-Sharī'ah Wa Al-Manhaj*, 1991, 1:212–13.

Neuwirth contends that Q 3:33 reflects a matrilineal perspective due to the perceived absence of the paternal role in tracing Maryam's lineage, as it is attributed to her mother.[70] This claim can be addressed by examining the lineages of Maryam's father and mother. According to the Bible, Hannah is descended from Aaron, while her father, according to al-Ṭabarī, traces his lineage to Sulayman. Both lineages ultimately trace back to Abraham. Therefore, it can be concluded that the Qur'an does not diminish the role of the father in Maryam's lineage, even though he passed away long before Maryam's birth.[71]

Prophet Muhammad was chosen to follow the *millat Ibrāhīm* and was bestowed with the title of *"nabī ummī"* (Q 7:156-158), which corresponds to the Hebrew *"navi me-ummot ha-'olam."* The term *"ummī"* is derived from the Arabic *"umma"* (community) and the Hebrew "ummot ha-'olam" (non-Jewish peoples). Thus, Neuwirth defines *"nabī ummī"* as a Prophet emerging from among various peoples. The term *"ummī"* presents challenges when interpreted as "illiterate" or "unlettered" concerning the Prophet and his community, as this interpretation contradicts his role in imparting scripture and wisdom.[72] A similar meaning of *"ummī"* (nations) is used by Christians in the New Testament to designate non-believers. Neuwirth appears to disagree with the opinion of the majority (*jumhūr*) of commentators who believe that Prophet Muhammad was *ummī* (unlettered).

According to classical Arabic dictionaries, the term *"ummī"* is derived from "*umm*," meaning "mother," and it pertains to an individual who lacks the ability to write, as writing is a skill acquired through training rather than being innate. *"Ummī"* also denotes Arabs who were without a written scripture and had not read any preceding books, as indicated in Q 62:2.[73] Several pieces of evidence support the notion that Prophet Muhammad was unable to read and write. Among these is the selection of scribes for revelations, as well as indications of editing following dictation. Once the transcription of the latest Qur'anic verses was complete, Zayd ibn Thābit would read them back to the Prophet to ensure accuracy and correct any potential scribal errors.[74] Another piece of evidence involves historical accounts regarding the news of the Battle of Uhud. Ibn 'Abbas, who was in Mecca, composed a letter to the Prophet regarding the impending departure of the Quraysh from Mecca.[75] Upon receiving the letter, the Prophet summoned Ubay ibn Ka'ab to read it aloud and keep its contents confidential. A third piece of evidence is a letter penned to Bani Thāqif. After embracing Islam, they requested the Prophet to draft a letter outlining various conditions. The Prophet responded, "Write down what you wish, and I will affix my signature later."[76]

The interpretation of *"ummī"* as referring to one individual among various peoples could seemingly conflict with another verse, Q 2:78, which acknowledges the presence of a group of *"ummī"* (illiterate) individuals among the Jews.[77] This apparent contradiction raises questions about how to reconcile these verses and understand the broader context of the term *"ummī."* In Neuwirth's interpretation, there appears to be a focus on the literal meaning of the term *"ummī,"* potentially overlooking the nuanced and intended meaning conveyed by the Qur'an. The significance of *"ummī"* becomes evident in Q 29:48, where it emphasises that Prophet Muhammad had not encountered any written scriptures, such as the Psalms, Torah, or Bible, before the revelation of the Qur'an. This understanding aligns with the traditional view that he was unacquainted with formal written texts prior to his role as a prophet.[78]

The discursive nature of interpreting the Qur'an underscores the efforts of scholars to reconcile and harmonise apparent contradictions present in its verses. This process involves considering not only the immediate context but also the historical backdrop and nuanced linguistic aspects. The profundity of the Qur'an necessitates meticulous and comprehensive study to achieve a deeper understanding of its

[70] Lily C. Vuong, *Gender and Purity in the Protevangelium of James* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Co. KG, 2013), 71.
[71] aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān an Ta'wīl Al-Qur'ān*, 6:330.
[72] Neuwirth, *The Qur'an and Late Antiquity*, 403–4.
[73] Al-Aṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qurān*, 86.
[74] Muhammad Mustafa Al-Azami, *The Scribes Of The Prophet*, trans. Anas M al-Azami (London: Turath Publishing, 2020), 28.
[75] Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Emergence of Islam, 2nd Edition: Classical Traditions in Contemporary Perspective*, Book Collections on Project MUSE (S.l.: FORTRESS PRESS, U S, 2023).
[76] Abraham Al-Abyasi, *Sejarah Alquran (Ta'rikh Al-Qur'ān)*, ed. Ramli Harun (Jakarta: Departemen Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 1991), 32.
[77] Nöldeke et al., *The History of the Qur'an*, 33.
[78] Marianna Klar, "Qur'anic Exempla and Late Antique Narratives," in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur'anic Studies*, ed. Mustafa Shah and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 130, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199698646.013.45.

teachings and messages. Diverse scholars may offer differing interpretations, fostering scholarly debates that are inherent to the field of Qur'anic studies. It is imperative to approach these discussions with an open-minded attitude and a willingness to explore a range of perspectives. Such a mindset allows for a richer understanding of the multifaceted layers of meaning within the Qur'an.

Conclusion

The story of Abraham serves as a compelling case study for unravelling the multifaceted interplay between religious tradition, cultural influences, and historical transformations, highlighting how the Qur'an skilfully draws upon and engages with the Late Antique milieu. While Late Antiquity undoubtedly played a role in shaping the cultural and historical backdrop of the Qur'an, an excessive focus on this era could overshadow other influences and factors that contributed to the development of the Qur'anic text. It is essential to consider a broader range of influences and not solely attribute the Qur'an's content to the Late Antique milieu.

Neuwirth may have been influenced by her preconceived notions about Late Antiquity's role, leading her to interpret the text to align with her preconditions selectively. Her argument might oversimplify the complex relationship between religious tradition, cultural influences, and historical transformations by attributing the Qur'an's engagement with the Late Antique milieu as the sole driving force. The interaction between these elements is likely more nuanced and multifaceted than a straightforward cause-and-effect relationship. Moreover, Neuwirth's methodology may not adequately address the spiritual and theological dimensions of the Qur'an's portrayal of Abraham. A purely historical or contextual analysis might overlook the deeper messages and lessons that the text intends to convey.

However, it cannot be denied that Neuwirth's scholarly contributions have offered valuable insights into understanding Late Antiquity as a dynamic and diverse period that significantly influenced the development of Islamic traditions and thought. Neuwirth's ground-breaking scholarship has deepened the understanding of Late Antiquity's profound impact on Islamic traditions. It underscores the need to view religious texts as dynamic and evolving expressions influenced by their historical surroundings. The study's significance lies in its potential to inspire further investigations into other aspects of Islamic literature and history, fostering a deeper appreciation for the intricacies of religious narratives and their relationship to the past. By enriching the field of religious studies, this research encourages continued scholarly inquiry into the dynamic interplay between religious texts and their historical contexts.

While Neuwirth's analysis of Late Antiquity offers a significant lens through which to view the Qur'anic narrative, it is crucial to remain wary of reducing the Qur'an to the product of its historical surroundings. The tendency to focus primarily on historical and cultural influences may inadvertently marginalise the Qur'an's intrinsic claims of divine origin and its assertion of being a timeless guidance. By concentrating on the external factors shaping the text, there is a risk of undermining the Qur'an's theological self-assertion as a revelation that transcends specific epochs and contexts. Additionally, Neuwirth's framework may fall short of acknowledging the Quran's role in challenging and reshaping existing Late Antique paradigms rather than merely adapting or reflecting them.

The complexity of the Qur'an's engagement with Abraham's story suggests that it operates on multiple interpretive levels—historical, theological, and ethical—each of which cannot be fully explained through historical analysis alone. Neuwirth's emphasis on the historical may downplay the Qur'an's ability to construct a universal narrative that appeals not only to its immediate audience but also to believers throughout time. The Qur'an's portrayal of Abraham, for instance, serves as both a continuity of earlier religious traditions and a radical redefinition of monotheism that transcends its Late Antique context, pointing to a vision of faith that is timeless and transhistorical.

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