There is still much controversy surrounding the dating of the composition of PRE, although all academic scholars concur that it was written in Palestine after the rise of Islam.\(^1\) By the late 19th century, Zunz already identified PRE as a post-Islamic composition, dating it no later than the 2nd half of the 8th century.\(^2\) It alludes to formulas of prayer and customs prevalent in Palestine at the beginning of the Gaonic era.\(^3\) It is quoted both in *Pirqoi ben Baboi* (circa 8th–9th c.),\(^4\) and the tractate *Soferim* (of the mid. 8th or early 9th c.).\(^5\) Most significantly, the text frequently alludes to Arab rule, under the guise of the narrative expansions on Ishmael. For example, the ‘two lads’ in the ‘Aqedah passage (PRE 31) are named Eliezer and Ishmael (in contrast, they remain anonymous in *Gen. Rab.*).\(^6\) In PRE 32, the author

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\(^1\) See Barth’s note on all the sources dating PRE to the early Islamic period, in 1987: 4, n. 16.

\(^2\) His speculations are based on the calculation of “the End,” c. 729 C.E. (cf. Zunz-Albeck 1947: 136 and 420, n. 270). See the discussion to follow.

\(^3\) Zunz lists the following references to halachic practice or minhag in Palestine and the centrality of the land: calendrical calculations (PRE 6–7), the intercalation of years ['ibur ha-shana] (PRE 8), Shabbat (PRE 18), Havdalah (PRE 20), Yom Kippur (PRE 46), Repentance (PRE 43), circumcision (PRE 29), comforting mourners (PRE 17), excommunication (PRE 38), and resurrection of the dead in the land of Israel (PRE 33 and 34) (Zunz-Albeck 1947: 135).

\(^4\) PRE 3 is quoted in the *Iggeret* of Pirkoi ben Baboi, the late 8th/early 9th c. apologist who polemicized against Palestinian religious practices to promote the Babylonian Talmud. See the article on Pirkoi ben Baboi in *EJ* by Herr 1971b 13: 561–562. On citations of PRE in the gaonic sources, see Radal’s introduction to PRE 1852: 13, n. 7; Ginzberg 1929 2: 544; Zunz-Albeck 1947: 135 and 417, n. 12; Albeck’s introduction to *Midrash Breshit Rabbati* 1966/67: 18, n. 2; Barth 1999: 21, n. 41.

\(^5\) *M. Soferim* 19:9 on charity (gemilut hassadim) quotes PRE 17 almost verbatim, ascribing the opinion to R. Eliezer ben Hyncaus (though the halakah is given over anonymously in the original). See the article in *JE* by Blau who suggests mid-8th c. as the dating of *M. Soferim* (Blau 1905 11: 426–428).

\(^6\) *Gen. Rab.* 56:1 (Theodor-Albeck 1965: 595–596); likewise in *Tanhuma Vayera* 23 they remain anonymous. However, in *Lev. Rab.* 20:2 and *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Gen. 22:3 they are named as in PRE 31. See J. Heinemann’s comment on this passage in 1974a:
lists six auspicious acts of pre-natal naming in the Bible, including Ishmael, this one signifying the violent destiny of Islam against the Jewish people. After the banishment of Ishmael, Abraham visits his son in the wilderness of Paran (PRE 30). While the visit is recorded in the Hadith (the exegesis on the Quran and Muslim Law), Aviva Schussman argues that the Islamic folklore draws from PRE and not the other way around. Both Schussman and Heinemann point to the ambivalent attitude towards Islam in PRE, where Ishmael is portrayed in both apologetic and polemic terms. In that same passage, Ishmael’s wives are named ‘A’isha and Fatima, after the names of Mohammed’s favorite wife and daughter respectively (PRE 30). Their characterization is highly significant – ‘A’isha depicted as the mean, inhospitable one (whom Abraham advises Ishmael to divorce), Fatima the generous, kind one, on account of whom Ishmael’s household is blessed. This may indicate the proto-Shi’ite milieu in which PRE was composed. According to Gordon Newby, Fatima is portrayed in a favorable light because she is not only the daughter of Mohammed and wife of ‘Ali, but also the mother of the line of Shi’ite Muslims. He suggests

186–189, and Elbaum 1986b: 350–351. Gordon Newby claims that this passage was written as an anti-Islamic polemic – Ishmael and Eliezer are ‘disqualified’ from the sacrifice because they do not see the glory of the Shekhinah on top of Mount Moriah. Accordingly, this passage serves as a polemic against the Muslim tradition treating Ishmael as the son elected by God to be the intended sacrificial victim (Newby 2000b: 22). However, the rabbinic tradition identifying one of the lads as Ishmael pre-dates the rise of Islam. Furthermore, the tradition identifying Ishmael, rather than Isaac, as the designated sacrifice (based on Sura 37:101) is relatively later in the Hadith, most likely post-dating PRE (see Firestone 2001 1: 10).

7 See my discussion on this passage in Adelman forthcoming and Elbaum’s comment on this passage in 1996: 253.

8 See Appendix C for a semi-critical edition of the Hebrew text.

9 The stories of “Hagar’s Banishment” and “Abraham’s visit to Ishmael” are recounted in the Hadith, and are attributed to Ibn Abbas (d. 687), Ali (d. 660), and Mujahid (d. 722), though the legends may have been written much later. See Firestone 1990: 63–71 and 76–79. Firestone notes the parallels to PRE but does not comment on whether the midrash drew upon the Islamic sources or not. For an analysis claiming the Jewish sources constitute a polemic against the Islamic versions, see Grünbaum 1893: 124–131; Heller 1925: 47–54; and Schwarzbaum 1971: 1–24. Schussman argues that the story of “Abraham’s visit to Ishmael” is an original Hebrew composition, an exegetical narrative on Gen. 21, and was written with both apologetic and polemic intent. Later the composition made its way into the Hadith with some major changes – Ishmael’s wives, for example, are not named in most of the Islamic sources (Schussman 1980: 325–345).
