Muslim ritual prayer, perhaps the most expressive medium of religious identity, suggests that the Islamic faith relies predominantly on patriarchal tradition. It singles out one particular prophetic genealogy as the model for the House of the Prophet Muhammad—namely, the House of Abraham, Āl Ibrāhīm:

\[
\text{Allāhumma ṣalli 'alā Muḥammadin wa-ʿalā ʿali Muḥammadin}
\text{ka-mā ṣallayta 'alā Ibrāhīma wa-ʿalā ʿali Ibrāhīma}
\text{wa-bārik ʿalā Muḥammadin wa-ʿalā ʿali Muḥammadin}
\text{ka-mā bārakta 'alā Ibrāhīma wa-ʿalā ʿali Ibrāhīma fi l-ʿālamīna}
\text{innaka ḥamīdun majīd}
\]

It should be noted that the figure of Abraham evoked in this prayer, though no other than the biblical patriarch, is first and foremost identical with the founder of the Meccan sanctuary; he is thus an unambiguously Muslim figure, whose image has little in common with the shared ancestor of the three monotheistic religions foregrounded in modern interfaith discourse,1 let alone with the character of Abraham as it is formed within Jewish tradition. Since the current essay will focus on a controversy kindled in Medina, between the time-honored heirs to the Abrahamic tradition, the Medinan Jews, and the Qur’anic community, a brief summary of Abraham’s “Qur’anic career” is in place.2

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1 For Abraham’s image within the Qur’an, see Speyer, *Biblische Erzählungen*, 121–186, and Nagel, “Der erste Muslim,” who stresses the difference between the respective images of Abraham in the diverse traditions. For Abraham’s Meccan development see Sinai, *Fortschreibung und Auslegung*.

2 Firestone, “Abraham,” is not concerned with the chronological development of the Qur’anic image of the patriarch.

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* I am grateful to Nicolai Sinai for a critical reading and to Ghassan Masri for kindly polishing the English language of this paper.
Given that the Qur’anic community did not share the Jewish view of the children of Abraham ranking as the “People of God,” one finds that Abraham whose name is mentioned already in some of the earliest surahs (Q 87:19, 53:37) does not prominently figure as the progenitor of the Israelites. From the beginning of the Qur’anic discourse, the patriarch rather makes his appearance as the paragon of unconditional confidence in God, honored with the visit of angelic messengers who announce the birth of a son to him (Q 51:24–30); in the same story, he argues with God over the fate of the people of Lot (Q 11:71, cf. Gen. 18:1–20). He appears again in the story of the Aqedah (Q 37:99–107), where Abraham’s offering of his son for sacrifice, is recounted (cf. Gen. 22:1–19). Still more significant, perhaps, than these events, geographically located in the Holy Land and in Mecca, is the part of his biography that precedes his sojourn in the Holy Land, when he—still residing in Mesopotamia—becomes the destroyer of his father’s idols (Q 37:83–98; 21:51–73; 26:69–89, 29:16–27), an episode also known from midrashic literature. Another part of the history before his emigration is his attempt to abstract knowledge about the divine from the observation of cosmic movements (Q 6:76–79) and his debate about God with a high-ranking figure commonly identified as Nimrod (Q 2:258), stories equally found in apocryphal literature. The Qur’anic Abraham is thus a complex figure, who does represent the exemplary just man known from the Genesis cycle, but who at the same time is a figure endowed with Mesopotamian wisdom, and last but not least a formative role in the emergence of the Meccan cult is attributed to him.

In terms of religious politics, Abraham’s significance is felt for the first time following his “prayer for Mecca,” reported in a late Meccan text, Q 14:35–41. Here, Abraham mentions that he has settled some of his progeny in Mecca, and it is for their subsistence and religious guidance that he prays. Though this prayer silently relocates Abraham’s focal activities from the biblically attested milieu, the Holy Land, to the Arabian Peninsula, the text itself does not display any polemical tendency directed against the heirs of the older traditions. As Tilman Nagel has recently emphasized, we have to assume that traditions

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3 Though their privileged rank is conceded, see e.g., Q 17:70, 2:47.122.
4 The Aqedah story seems to allude to a rite of the Meccan pilgrimage, see Firestone, “Abraham.”
5 Firestone, “Abraham”; Speyer, Biblische Erzählungen.
6 See Speyer, Biblische Erzählungen.