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A Comparative Morphological Analysis of the Character of Prophet Jacob in the Holy Quran and the Old Testament, Focusing on the Concept of "Dominion"



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Abstract

Despite sharing common narrative frameworks, Abrahamic sacred texts are often the stage for profound ideological and teleological divergences. Accordingly, the central problem of this research is to explain the metamorphosis and differences in the morphological representation of the character of Prophet Jacob between two key texts: "The Holy Quran and the Book of Genesis." Relying on a descriptive-analytical method and utilizing a comparative narratological approach, this paper attempts to demonstrate how the Holy Quran, by applying the principle of dominion, has reread and refined the preceding Torah narrative. The research findings indicate that the Old Testament, in its pursuit of identity formation for a specific people, depicts Jacob as a "Gray," fluctuating character embroiled in human failings. In

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contrast, the transcendental discourse of the Quran, by intentionally omitting dramatic and challenging elements, elevates the theological status of this character and introduces him as an impeccable, static, and completely pristine model. The final achievement of this textual comparison shows that the national, fallible hero of Jewish narratives has been transformed, in the explicit text of the Quran, into a universal and flawless exemplar.

Keywords: Prophet Jacob, Old Testament, Holy Quran, Narratology, Dominion, Characterization.

Introduction

The manifestation of sacred concepts within the body of language has always required a narrative vehicle to make abstract theological experiences tangible in the realm of human understanding. In this regard, the stories of the prophets do not merely act as historical chronicles but as semiotic structures for transmitting the ideology of the author (the sacred text) (Rimmon-Kenan, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 45). The story of Prophet Jacob is among the few narratives that have occupied a significant volume of textual contemplation in both the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions. Nevertheless, a precise reading of the underlying layers of these two narratives reveals a "Crisis of Representation"; it is as if the reader is faced with two completely distinct subjectivities that share only a name (Jacob).

The fundamental question of the present research is: 'What are the morphological differences and distinctions in the representation and processing of the character of Jacob in the Hebrew text of the Book of Genesis compared to the Holy Quran, and how does each of these two sacred texts

depict his character components?' The background of related inquiries has mainly focused on moral, narrative, or intra-textual literary aspects; such as the research by Ashrafi and Taki, who have addressed characterization patterns in the Quran based on Rimmon-Kenan's perspective (Ashrafi and Taki, 2018 AD/1397 SH: 1-24), or the analyses by Habibi, Behroozi, and Khalifeh regarding the narrative components of Quranic stories (Habibi et al., 2011 AD/1390 SH: 37-49).

Regarding comparative approaches, one can mention works such as the article "A Comparative-Analytical Study of the Characterization of Prophet Jacob in the Quran and the Old/New Testaments" (Kazemzadeh and Asadi, 2019 AD/1398 SH) (the author of the present text), as well as Master's theses such as "Jacob in the Quran and the Testaments (Refuting Doubts)" (Mohammad Hadi Ma'refat, 2005 AD/1384 SH) and "Prophet Jacob from the Viewpoint of the Quran and the Testaments." (Mohammad Kazem Shaker, 1998 AD/1377 SH) Despite these valuable investigations, the innovation of the present research lies in its move beyond mere plot-based and descriptive comparisons; by relying on the original Hebrew text (and not merely translations of the Old Testament) and utilizing a "Comparative Narratology" approach, it analyzes the morphology of this character to explain the metamorphosis of this image while considering the discursive independence and hegemonic function (Dominion) of the Quran.

1. Research Background

In the field of studying the character and life narrative of Prophet Jacob, numerous studies have been conducted using interpretive, comparative, and literary approaches. One of the fundamental studies in this area is the article

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"A Comparative-Analytical Study of the Characterization of Prophet Jacob in the Quran and the Testaments" (Kazemzadeh and Asadi, 2019 AD/1398 SH), in which the authors, through qualitative content analysis, compared the character traits of this prophet in the two holy books and highlighted the narrative and theological differences. Alongside this article, academic theses have also addressed other aspects of this subject:

- (Mohammad Kazem Shaker, 1998 AD/1377 SH) in his Master's thesis titled "Prophet Jacob from the Viewpoint of the Quran and the Testaments," conducted a comparative study of his status in the two sacred texts.
- (Mohsen Rajabi Qodsi, 2021 AD/1400 SH) in his dissertation titled "A Review and Critique of the Entries on Prophet Jacob and Prophet Joseph in the Encyclopedia of the Quran and the Encyclopedia of Islam," took a critical look at how these two prophets are introduced in reference sources.
- (Azam Mansoubi, 2025 AD/1404 SH) also, in research with a novel approach in her Master's proposal titled "An Analysis of the Element of Time in Reading the Narrative of Jacob the Prophet in the Quran and the Testaments based on Gérard Genette's Theory," analyzed the narrative structure of the story from the perspective of temporality.

The present research, in continuation of these studies, attempts to move away from a purely comparative view and toward a morphological reading, re-examining the narrative logic governing the representation of Jacob in the Quran and the Old Testament. Specifically, it seeks to advance the question

of why and how the Quran, through purposeful silences and specific narrative choices, presents a distinct image of this prophet that is not aligned with the Torah narrative. In fact, the main focus will be on the point that the differences lie not only in "What is said," but also in "How it is said" and "What is not said," something that links to the concept of Quranic dominion and forms the theoretical framework of this research.

2. The Doctrine of "Dominion": The Metatextual Function of the Quran in Correcting Narratives

The focal keyword for understanding the logic of the transformation of the People of the Book's narratives within the Quran is verse 48 of Surah al-Mā'idah: "And We have revealed to you, [O! Muhammad], the Book in truth, confirming that which preceded it of the Scripture and as a dominion over it." Leading Islamic exegetes, in explaining the word "*Muḥaymin*," are in consensus on concepts such as "Dominion," "Guardianship," and "Corrective Oversight." (Ṭabrisī, 1993 AD/1372 SH: 313) Allamah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, in his commentary on this verse, explicitly states that the Quran holds dominion over preceding scriptures; meaning that it invalidates whatever human distortions and self-serving interferences have occurred to the sacred texts over the passage of history, and revives their original, revelatory core (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1995 AD/1374 SH: 349).

Based on this theoretical framework, the Quran's meaningful silence regarding many of the dramatic passages of Jacob's life in the Torah (such as the struggle for birthright, the deception of Isaac, and family conflicts with Leah and Rachel) is not merely a matter of brevity, but an "Active Narrative Strategy" to exercise dominion. By consciously omitting these challenging

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narrative knots, the Quran is effectively invalidating the anthropomorphic and degraded image that the Jewish tradition had depicted of the prophetic office. This narrative filtering is the fundamental basis for creating the Quranic Jacob (Zamakhsharī, 1986 AD/1407 AH: 641).

3. Morphology of Jacob in the Poetics of the Old Testament: The Ascending Arc of a Dynamic Character

A hermeneutic reading of the Book of Genesis reveals that the implicit author (the editorial traditions) has deliberately avoided the "Static Character" archetype, portraying the third patriarch of the Israelites as a deeply "Dynamic" human being with gray areas and internal conflicts. This dynamism begins at the very point of the narrative's genesis in the mother's womb, where the Torah text ties the etymology of the name "Jacob" to the physical act of "Grasping the brother's heel": "Afterward his brother came out, and his hand took hold of Esau's heel; so his name was called Jacob." (The Holy Bible, 1895, Genesis 25:26) In Hebrew philology, the word Jacob (*Ya'aqov* - יַעֲקֹב) comes from the root *Akev* (עָקַב), meaning heel-catcher, supplanter, and in its metaphorical semantic development, it implies the concept of a "Deceiver and usurper of status." (Alter, 1996: 126) This linguistic genealogy is not merely a mythological naming but the "Narrative's genetic code" that lays the foundation for his character arc throughout the text. From the outset, the Jacob of the Torah is a character who does not refrain from using trickery to seize superior gifts (whether material or spiritual), and

this trait is the driving force of the plot in the first part of his life (Epstein, 2008 AD/1387 SH: 42).

3.1. Usurpation of the Blessing and the Motif of "Deception"

The turning point in the processing of the dark (yet dynamic) aspect of Jacob's character is manifested in the episode of seizing the birthright and stealing Isaac's prayer of blessing. The Torah narrator, adopting an objective omniscient point of view, depicts the collusion of Jacob and his mother (Rebekah) to deceive a blind father without any moral cover-up. When Isaac realizes he has been deceived, he utters a key sentence to Esau: "Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing." (The Holy Bible, 1895, Genesis 27:35) The word used in the original text (*Biblia Hebraica*) for the concept of "Deceit" is the Hebrew word *Mirmah* (מִרְמָה), which explicitly connotes treachery, fraud, and trickery (Bar-Efrat, 2009: 87). Nevertheless, the theology hidden within the Old Testament does not use this clear moral lapse to reject Jacob; rather, in a paradoxical twist, it appropriates it for "Ethnic Teleology." Here, Jacob is the conduit for the realization of the overwhelming will of "Yahweh," who had destined that the older shall serve the younger. Thus, the character's moral weaknesses are not seen as a deficit in the revelatory realm of the text, but as a dramatic tool for establishing the hegemony of the Israelites in the arena of history (Yitzchaki, 1999: 112).

3.2. The Laban Period and the Function of the Principle of Reciprocal Retribution

Jacob's character development enters a new phase of maturity upon fleeing to Haran and being placed on the altar of exploitation by Laban (his uncle). Here, the Jewish Midrashic tradition reveals a fundamental theological rule: the principle of "*Midah Kenedged Midah*" (מִידָה כְּנֶגֶד מִידָה), the exact equivalent

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of the "Law of reciprocal retribution" or cosmic reflection of deeds (Mishnah, Sotah 7:1). The Jacob who, by taking advantage of his father's failing eyesight, deprived his older brother of his birthright, is now deceived by Laban in the darkness of the wedding night, embracing Leah (the older sister) instead of Rachel (the younger sister). This narrative symmetry is not accidental; rather, it is a purifying mechanism in the plot structure to polish the patriarch's rebellious psyche. The fugitive and outcast Jacob undergoes an identity transformation over two decades of suffering and day-and-night labor, evolving from an opportunistic youth into a seasoned, patient man endowed with wisdom. By imposing these accumulated sufferings, the narrator restores the reader's empathy, which had been tarnished in Chapter 27, in Chapter 29, preparing the ground for his final confrontation and his greatest spiritual transformation (Genesis 29).

3.3. The Peniel Theophany: The Zenith of Dynamism and the Formation of the Name "Israel"

The peak of the Old Testament poetics in the formation of this dynamic character occurs when crossing the Jabbok River and through the incident of wrestling with a sacred being (Theophany/Divine Manifestation) in a place called "Peniel." The narrative indicates that Jacob wrestled with this man (angel/God) until daybreak and refused to let him go unless he obtained the divine blessing, this time not through deception, but through "Direct Struggle." (Hawks, 1998: 953) At this point, a dramatic and ontological dialogue takes place, leading to a change in his name: "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel (יִשְׂרָאֵל - Yisrael); for you have struggled

(שָׂרִיטָה - Sarita) with God and with men, and have prevailed." (Elliger and Rudolph, 1997, Gen 32:28) In the semiotics of sacred texts, this name change signifies a complete identity transformation. Jacob (the deceiver/supplanter) burns in the furnace of suffering, and from his ashes, "Israel" (one who struggles with God / one who has prevailed over God) is born. While this mythological processing is in complete contradiction with the Islamic principles of divine transcendence, for the author of the Torah, it is the best metaphor to explain the turbulent nature of the Jewish people within the context of salvation history (Sarna, 1989: 227).

4. Morphology of Jacob in the Poetics of the Holy Quran: The Crystallization of an Ideal Static Character

In transitioning from the narrative realm of the Old Testament to the revelatory territory of the Holy Quran, the reader encounters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in characterization. As the "*Muhaymin*" (the overseer and corrector of previous scriptures), the Quran passes the Torah narratives through the filter of *Tanzīh* (divine transcendence) and the theological principle of the "Impeccability of the prophets," removing elements incompatible with the sacred station of the prophetic mission (Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 1991 AD/1390 SH: 74). Based on structuralist narratology (such as the views of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan), the Jacob of the Quran must be classified among "Static Characters" who are, at the same time, "Ideal." In this context, "Static" does not mean stagnation or a lack of psychological depth; rather, it indicates the teleological truth that the divine prophet is at the peak of moral and epistemological perfection from the very beginning of the plot and has no need to traverse an evolutionary arc through committing errors and

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accumulating experience (Rimmon-Kenan, 2008: 58). Unlike the Jacob of Genesis, whose prophetic identity was contingent upon passing through the furnace of deceptions and reciprocal suffering, the Jacob of Surah Yusuf is a complete "Master of the Path," established in the station of certainty (*Yaqin*) and in control of the flow of events. The dramatic tensions of the story are formed not within him, but in the contrast between his sublime consciousness and the ignorance of the surrounding actors (his sons) (Kamaljou and Shahabi, 2012 AD/1391 SH: 160).

4.1. Pedagogical Stewardship and Confronting the Brothers' Group Bias

The first manifestation of Jacob's prophetic wisdom in Quranic poetics appears in the episode of hearing Joseph's dream and the way he manages the latent crisis within the family. Whereas the Torah text portrays Jacob, in response to Joseph's dream, as aggressive and reproachful (Genesis 37:10), the Holy Quran depicts from him a completely compassionate reaction grounded in preventive psychology: "He said, "My dear son, do not relate your dream to your brothers, lest they devise a plot against you." (Yūsuf: 5) In this statement, Jacob, fully aware of the envy-prone nature of his other sons, not only does not belittle Joseph, but also, through a skillful displacement of the root of evil onto a metaphysical agent (Indeed Satan is to man a clear enemy), he seeks to prevent the collapse of family cohesion. *Fakhr Rāzī*, in his "*Tafsīr al-Kabīr*," regards this act as the height of paternal compassion and pedagogical genius, one that elevates the Quranic Jacob from a "Discriminating Father" (as inferred in the Old Testament) to a "Wise divine

educator." (Fakhr Rāzī, n.d.: 18, 420) Being aware of Joseph's bright future (Your Lord will choose you), he lays the cornerstone of a long-term protective strategy that justifies all his later actions.

4.2. The Manifestation of the "Beautiful Patience" Paradigm in the Face of Loss

When confronted with Joseph's blood-stained shirt, Jacob's reaction in the Torah and Quranic accounts is entirely different. In the Torah, Jacob shows a hysterical response marked by intense impatience: he tears his clothes, puts on sackcloth, and accepts no one's consolation. But in the Quran, Jacob's reaction is cognitive and epistemic: "Rather, your souls have made something seem alluring to you; so [for me] beautiful patience." (Yūsuf: 18) Here, "Beautiful Patience" is not mere passivity; it is an active stance grounded in reliance upon God and trust in divine wisdom.

4.3. The Dialectic of "Rational Planning" and "Revelatory Trust in God"

The apex of Jacob's epistemic maturity in the Quran is shown in his synthesis of prudent planning and trust in God. When he advises his sons, "My sons, do not enter from one gate; enter from separate gates," (Yūsuf: 67) he adopts an entirely rational and security-oriented measure. Yet he immediately ties this measure to the divine will and adds: "I cannot avail you against God at all... upon Him I have relied." This dialectic reflects the completion of his character: he takes account of apparent means, but does not forget the ultimate Causer of causes.

4.4. Unseen Knowledge, the Olfactory Motif, and the End Goal of Seeking Forgiveness

Jacob's extrasensory perception in smelling Joseph from far away, "Indeed, I find the scent of Joseph, if you do not think me senile" (Yūsuf: 94), indicates

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his spiritual and unseen connection. In the face of those around him reproaching him, he underscores his revelatory knowledge: "Did I not tell you that I know from God what you do not know?" (Yūsuf: 96) In the end, this ideal character harbors no rancor; and in response to his sons' request for forgiveness, he promises to seek forgiveness for them: "I will ask my Lord to forgive you." (Yūsuf: 98)

5. Comparative Synthesis: Teleological Divergence in Subject Formation

The difference between the Quranic and Toraitic Jacob is rooted in a teleological divergence. The Jacob of the Old Testament is a dynamic character, possessing moral flaws, and serving a nation-centered narrative whose goal is to justify the superiority of the people of Israel. Conversely, the Quranic Jacob is a static, universal, and perfected subject who is depicted as an ideal model and an impeccable prophet.

Conclusion

By applying the mechanism of "*Haymanah*" (dominion/corrective oversight over previous scriptures), the Holy Quran prunes the incongruous and human elements of the Torah narrative (such as deception, lying, and wrestling with God). In the Quran, Jacob is redefined with attributes such as "Steadfastness," "Learned encompassing knowledge of the Unseen," and "Beautiful patience" in order to present a "Realized" truth and a pedagogical model for all ages.

The fundamental difference between the two narratives lies not merely in the story's details, but in the ultimate goal of each text. The Toraitic narrative of Jacob serves the ethnic (ethnographic) history of the Israelites; his character, with all his weaknesses and faults, is a symbol of "Man in the process of evolution," a human who sometimes deceives, sometimes is deceived, and ultimately attains divine blessing and promise. This approach justifies the ethnic superiority and historical legitimacy of the Jewish people. In contrast, the Holy Quran, with a supra-ethnic and universal perspective, presents Jacob as an absolute pedagogical model; a prophet who stands from the beginning in an impeccable and perfect position, with any element incompatible with this status being deleted or redefined.

By employing the doctrine of "*Haymanah*," the Quran does not merely suffice with deleting incompatible elements but places the "Active correction of the narrative" on its agenda. For instance, in the Torah, Jacob wrestles with God and his name is changed to "Israel," a narrative that carries heavy ethnic symbolism. The Quran completely omits this scene and instead emphasizes Jacob's *Sabr Jamil*, his Trust in God, and his divine knowledge. This correction is, in effect, a redefinition of the nature of prophecy: the prophet is not a mythological hero with human failings, but an ideal model for individual and social upbringing.

In the Torah, Jacob has a dynamic character: "A Deceptive child, a cunning youth, and a wise elder." This arc of transformation brings him closer to a "Gray" hero and a relatable human. However, in the Quran, Jacob is a static character: "From the beginning, a perfect prophet, knowledgeable of the Unseen, and patient." This static nature is not a weakness of the narrative, but a conscious choice to present an immutable and universal model. By

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removing moral ups and downs, the Quran is essentially saying: "Prophets are absolute models; their errors in previous narratives are distortions that must be corrected."

This narrative difference has profound implications for religious pedagogy and Islamic theology. The Quranic Jacob is a model for patience in calamity, trust in despair, and knowledge of the Unseen, attributes that every believer can apply in their own life. In contrast, the Toraitic Jacob is a model for struggle, challenging God, and attaining blessing through trickery, a narrative that serves ethnic identity-building rather than individual moral cultivation. In other words, by correcting the narrative, the Quran replaces ethnic theology with pedagogical theology.

In a word, it can be said: "The Torah "Humanizes" Jacob; the Quran "Prophetizes" him. These two narratives are not in conflict, but rather in a state of mutual correction, though from the Quran's perspective, the Toraitic narrative requires correction, and the Quran performs this correction through the mechanism of "*Haymanah*." The present research demonstrates that the morphological differences between the two narratives are not accidental, but arise from the different ends, audiences, and functions of these sacred texts."

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