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Self-Referential Features in Sacred Texts

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

SELF-REFERENTIAL FEATURES IN SACRED TEXTS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

by

Donald Haase

2018

To: Dean John F. Stack, Jr.
Steven J. Green School of International and Public Affairs

This thesis, written by Donald Haase, and entitled Self-Referential Features in Sacred Texts, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
SELF-REFERENTIAL FEATURES IN SACRED TEXTS

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This thesis examines a specific type of instance that bridges the divide between seeing sacred texts as merely vehicles for content and as objects themselves: self-reference. Doing so yielded a heuristic system of categories of self-reference in sacred texts based on the way the text self-describes: Inlibration, Necessity, and Untranslatability.

I provide examples of these self-referential features as found in various sacred texts: the Vedas, Āgamas, Papyrus of Ani, Torah, Quran, Sri Guru Granth Sahib, and the Book of Mormon. I then examine how different theories of sacredness interact with them. What do Durkheim, Otto, Freud, or Levinas say about these? How are their theories changed when confronted with sacred texts as objects as well as containers for content? I conclude by asserting that these self-referential features can be seen as ‘self-sacralizing’ in that they: match understandings of sacredness, speak for themselves, and do not occur in mundane texts.

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Introduction

This study concerns itself with ‘sacred texts’ and self-referential features in them. To discuss these features it is important to define key terms, beginning with asking the deceptively simple question: “What is a sacred text?” Answers to this question abound but, even in a source directly examining sacred texts as a category, can be vague or poorly defined. For instance, *The Death of Sacred Texts*, a collection entirely about the ritual treatment of sacred texts, opens with its first two sentences conflating sacred texts with “religious texts and scriptures.”¹ The introduction goes on to clearly describe what the subject matter of the book is, and a variety of definitions of what a sacred text, religious text, or scripture is, but continues to treat all these terms as having unclear relationships to one another (identity, sub-category, special instance of, etc.).²

Similarly, in the introduction to the collection *Rethinking Scripture*, Miriam Levering identifies her key term ‘scripture’ with ‘sacred texts’ and ‘sacred books.’³ While providing thorough examination of the ways in which the terms are used or misused and proposing a variety of novel interpretive models (that reflect the essays contained within the collection), she seems to conclude that “the very limited success of recent efforts at generalization by sensitive and well informed scholars gives power to the view that, considered as objects of comparison, ‘scriptures’ or ‘sacred texts’ do not make a single category.”⁴ This remains only one among many proposed explanations though, as

1 Myrvold, “Front Matter,” i.

2 Myrvold, “Introduction,” 2–4.

3 Levering, “Introduction,” 2–3.

4 Levering, 11.

Levering does not necessarily support the view she describes. Despite the strength of the non-definition, the working definition given is: “a special class of true and powerful words, a class formed by the ways in which these particular words are received by persons and communities in their common life.”⁵ This definition does relatively little other than provide an instance of selected definitions of the constituent terms ‘sacred’ and ‘text,’ but perhaps that provides a sufficient model to work from.

I will not presume to resolve the issue of what a sacred text is, nor to provide any normative definition of it as a category. With this study though, I do intend to provide a set of tools that might illuminate future investigations into what it means for a text to be sacred. As such, a working definition will be helpful to avoid vagueness: a sacred text is any text that is considered by any person to be sacred. At a glance, this may seem like a purely tautological or otherwise useless definition. This simple definition helps to prevent two common issues when dealing with the subject.

The first issue is discussing sacred texts without providing any definition, which abounds in scholarly writing on religion.⁶ My simple definition acts to prevent relying on a presumed (nonexistent) standard definition. The second issue that my definition attempts to avoid is treating ‘sacred text’ as an insular category. It seems many of those who do set out to provide a definition when dealing with sacred texts do so to call them a specific kind of thing, a single noun as opposed to an adjective prepended to a noun. One would not ask what defines a sacred animal or sacred hat as though it were its own

5 Levering, 2.

6 This would be difficult to demonstrate thoroughly. As a useful metric though, a full-text digital search of *The Encyclopedia of religion* shows at least 292 instances of the term in articles ranging from “African American Religions: History of Study” to “Worship and Devotional Life: Daoist Devotional Life” with only a select few, such as “The Sacred and the Profane,” attempting to provide any sort of definition of ‘sacred text.’

category apart from ‘sacred things.’⁷ The definition though, while avoiding these issues, does beg the questions: “What does it mean to be sacred?” and “What is a text?”

What does it mean to be sacred?

Just as with sacred text above, I do not intend to provide any normative definition of what it means ‘to be sacred.’ What I will do though, is explore differences between my working definition and common definitions of sacred. My definition follows, generally, that of Emile Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* which states that “heterogeneity [to the profane] is sufficient to characterize this classification of things and to distinguish it from all others.”⁸ There are two major points in Durkheim’s analysis, not reflected in this shortened definition, where my understanding diverges significantly enough to merit description.

First is that Durkheim’s view limits sacredness to being intrinsically tied to religion. This can be seen most clearly by his definition of religion, which is wholly dependent on the sacred: “*A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden.*”⁹ While Durkheim’s definition of the sacred does not require religion, his definition of religion leaves little other role for the sacred than religion.¹⁰ Here my line of thought is quite in line with Gordon Lynch who, in working toward a ‘sociology of the sacred,’ notes that “the concepts of ‘religion’ and the ‘sacred’ are often conflated in both popular and academic

7 This issue will be raised again, below, in the section “The Subjective Approach and Protestant Bias.”

8 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms Of The Religious Life*, 36.

9 Durkheim, 44.

10 For a thorough analysis of the conflated or even tautological uses of religion and the sacred in Durkheim that also seeks to draw clear lines between the two terms see Evans, “The Sacred.”

discourse. Equating ‘religion’ and the ‘sacred’ with each other is analytically unhelpful, however, as it blurs two related, though distinct, foci of study.”¹¹

Throughout *The Sacred in the Modern World*, Lynch concerns himself with the appearance of the sacred on its own, outside the umbrella of religion. Some of his examples come in the forms of nationalism,¹² care for children,¹³ or race.¹⁴ While the majority of my examples will come from religious sacred texts, the distinction between my understanding and that of Durkheim is that I will not be excluding sacred texts that are not religious from search or consideration. Some examples of such texts could be a national constitution¹⁵ or anthem,¹⁶ or literary works such as *Dracula*.¹⁷

The second major point of divergence from Durkheim is that I do not view sacrality as monocausal. For Durkheim “sacredness stems from one cause: It is a material representation of the clan.”¹⁸ His account of the sacred excludes any other factors from giving rise to the sacred. Lynch identifies this same issue in other theories of the sacred: “[the theories of Otto, Eliade, Csordas, and Giesen] *typically provide reductive accounts of the sacred as a social phenomenon*. By positing a single, originating ontological root for the human experience of the sacred, ontological theories always reduce their analysis

11 Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World*, 4.

12 Lynch, 66.

13 Lynch, 70.

14 Lynch, 116.

15 This line of thought can be found in legal and political theory relating to the US constitution such as Golding, “Sacred Texts and Authority in Constitutional Interpretation.” or Grey, “The Constitution as Scripture.”.

16 Evans, “The Sacred,” 35.

17 See Rarignac, *The Theology of Dracula*.

18 Durkheim, *Elementary Forms Of The Religious Life*, 124.

of expressions of the sacred to the terms of that originating experience.”¹⁹ While I would not reject the causes of sacredness posited by these thinkers, nor the possibility for any individual thing being sacred due to a single cause, I reject that all sacred things are sacred due to only one cause.

With these two distinctions, I would clarify my working definition of the sacred as: *a quality distinguished by its heterogeneity to all other qualities,²⁰ not necessarily relating to religion, and not identified as arising from any single cause.* The quality of sacredness is heterogeneous to any other quality. The second two conditions follow from this, but bear reiteration due to how commonly they are ascribed to it. If all sacred things were religious (or vice versa), then it would not be heterogeneous to that category. Similarly, if all things were sacred due to a single cause then sacredness would likewise be a subcategory of (or identical to) ‘things derived from that cause.’ This is an objective approach to sacred texts, in that they are treated as objects that have the quality of sacredness.

What is a text?

A text, as I will reference it, is any fixed and bounded set of words. These words can be stored in written form (a book), as memory (to be recited), or in some other sort of medium like a digital audio recording. By ‘fixed and bounded,’ I do not mean immutable but merely that they are understood to have a first and last word and a certain number

19 Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World*, 16.

20 I am here replacing ‘profane,’ which was Durkheim’s term merely for all things not sacred and all other categories that an object may fall into other than being sacred. For some of his uses of this dichotomy see Durkheim, *Elementary Forms Of The Religious Life*, 82, 84, 118.

between arranged in a certain way.²¹ A text may be made up of smaller texts. For example the Tanakh is a text composed of three other texts (*Torah, Nev'im, and Ketuvim*) which in turn are divided into books, then *sidrot* (divisions for public reading or study) or chapters and verses. Likewise, the Quran is divided into *suwar* (chapters) then *āyāt* (verses). I consider each of these divisions to be, likewise, a text of its own.

One issue when describing text, especially within a number of religious traditions, is a distinction between a 'cosmic' version of the text and the manifest, stored, text. In Islam, there is a concept of the cosmic or 'creational' Quran (*al-Qur'ān al-takwīnī*) which is distinguished from the written Quran (*al-Qur'ān al-tadwīnī*) as being present in all reality and in nature.²² In Judaism a similar concept is also present, with interpretation of the Psalms,²³ Genesis, and mystical works like the *Sefer Yetzirah* describing a 'cosmic Torah.'²⁴ Sikhism also exhibits this with their central text being the 'Eternal Guru,' but 'Guru' also being a reference to 10 human gurus and the formless God as 'true Guru.'²⁵

Similarly, there may be a distinction in a tradition between the written or recorded instance of a text and the spoken or recited instance of it. In Judaism, the Oral Torah is an explicitly different text from the written Torah with different content, and any number of traditions view the spoken form of their text as distinct from a written version that

21 I am indebted in this definition to Griffiths' detailed formalization of text (he prefers 'work'). Here though, I have stripped away the larger framework that is not necessary to my study. For the full 'Composition, Display, Storage' framework see Griffiths, *Religious Reading*, 22–26.

22 Karić, "Interpretation of the Qur'ān and the Destiny of the Islamic World," 6; Shah-Kazemi, *Spiritual Quest*, 110; Lessnoff, "Islam, Modernity and Science," 218.

23 Brown, *Psalms*, 98–105.

24 Brody, "Open to Me the Gates of Righteousness," 18.

25 Dusenbery, "The Word as Guru," 385; Myrvold, "Making the Scripture a Person: Reinventing Death Rituals of Guru Granth Sahib in Sikhism," 126.

transcribes it.²⁶ Unfortunately it is often not possible to determine if a text being referred to is the oral, cosmic, or written version. When I make reference to a text I will attempt to address this distinction if relevant. These sorts of ‘cosmic’ versions of texts do not qualify as texts according to my definition, being neither fixed nor bounded, and are not the subject of this study.

The Subjective Approach and Protestant Bias

Having described what it is that I will be considering as sacred texts, and the key of viewing them as texts that are sacred, I now turn to theoretical treatments that examine them with this *objective* approach. This approach, which treats a sacred text as an object, appears to be underrepresented in modern scholarship. Over the past 30 years, a few scholars have drawn attention to this absence. Levering wrote in 1989:

While members of these scholarly movements have acknowledged that texts could be ‘sacred’ in ways analogous to those in which spaces, actions, and ritual objects were sacred, little attention was paid to the category called “sacred text.” To some it may have seemed that scripture or sacred text – though a commonly found phenomenon in religious traditions within chirographic cultures – was not a form of religious expression the study of which led people into the heart of human religiousness, as a life-cycle ritual or pilgrimages might be. Others perhaps concluded that, whereas pilgrimages might be quite comparable across traditions, sacred texts really were not.²⁷

26 This is a vast subject in itself, but for a thorough look to the issue see Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*.

27 Levering, “Introduction,” 4.

From Levering's characterization we see that scholars, while nominally acknowledging that sacred texts could be seen objectively ("texts could be 'sacred' in ways analogous to those in which spaces, actions, and ritual objects were"), typically dismiss this approach for a variety of proposed reasons.

Specifically writing about the Quran, in 1987, Ayoub states that:

The role of the Qur'ān in Muslim piety, although crucial to Islamic spirituality, has until recently been neglected in Western scholarship. More surprisingly, it has also been neglected in contemporary Muslim scholarship, where moral and political approaches to Islam have been considered more important.²⁸

As an update to this, Svensson writes (in 2010): "Some twenty years later, one can note that the main assertion Ayoub put forward in 1987 is still valid. There is very little academic research on the role of the physical Qur'anic text as an object of religious veneration and respect among Muslims."²⁹ In attempting to explain this absence, Svensson continues: "One reason could be an inherited Protestant bias within the academic study of religions, uncomfortable with ritual and adhering to a restricted view on 'religion' as first and foremost a set of beliefs, a message and ethics, for which sacred texts merely constitute sources for information."³⁰

The approach described by Svensson is what I call *subjective*, in contrast to the objective approach described above. In the subjective approach, in the same way 'subject'

28 The 'until recently' Ayoub provides is unfortunately only directly referencing his own work. Ayoub, "Qur'ān: Its Role in Muslim Practice and Life," 7574.

29 Svensson, "Relating, Revering, and Removing: Muslim Views on the Use, Power, and Disposal of Divine Words," 32.

30 Svensson, 32.

is used grammatically, a sacred text is the ‘subject’ and describes, enlightens, instructs, narrates, prescribes, etc and is nothing more than a source of content. This approach is not limited to the Quran, and Svensson is not the only scholar to identify it as arising from a Protestant Christian bias. Levering calls this “the Protestant model” and notes that the lack of attention to this in models of the sacred has the effect that “‘sacred text’ is in practice often used with much the same assumptions that informed our biased concepts of ‘scripture’ and ‘canon.’”³¹

Smith also notes this when contextualizing the Bible as ‘sacred text’ that for much of its life was only encountered aurally, and when seen was only seen as an object.³² He follows by saying that this objecthood had been obscured by “the Protestant Reformation, in stressing the Preaching of the Word, and in rejecting what it called idolatry.”³³ Later on, he stresses the importance of not merely focusing on the content of the text (subjective approach) but also on the concept of the text (objective approach).³⁴ Douglas, in *Purity and Danger*, similarly points out that this Protestant attitude sees itself as intelligent and rational in contrast to “the magical treatment of the Scriptures practised by the Roman Catholics who loaded the Book with superstitious accretions.”³⁵ This attitude is not something that can be easily bypassed or rooted out, having been embedded in the

31 Levering, “Introduction,” 4.

32 Smith, “Scripture as Form and Concept,” 33–34.

33 Smith, 33–34.

34 Smith, 45.

35 Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 18–19. This kind of Protestant Model is also paralleled to the transition in Rabbinic Judaism from the Temple to the book being the central authority by Driver Driver, *The Magic of Ritual*, 141–42.

Western scholarly study of religion for hundreds of years. In this project though, I will focus on the role of the ‘objective approach’ in studying sacred texts.

The Objective Approach and Self-Reference

As noted by many of the above scholars, the objective approach is not completely absent from the study of sacred texts. One of the more common places to encounter it is when Abrahamic sacred texts are conceived of as ‘magical’ in the form of talismans, amulets, or scrolls, which early anthropologists compared to the treatment of fetishes in ‘primitive societies.’³⁶ One study describes the uses of the Christian Bible as a ‘magical talisman’ pointedly in the Durkheimian language of a totem,³⁷ while another describes an English illuminated manuscript as “a sacred object to be shown on special occasions to impress.”³⁸ It can also be seen in looking at mystical³⁹ or ‘community’⁴⁰ forms of religion. In such studies there is a gulf between how these objects are treated (objectively), and the way the same texts are treated when they appear in a bound book or as ‘scripture’ (subjectively).

The aforementioned *The Death of Sacred Texts* appears to be the only example of a volume dedicated to the ritual treatment of text, and with very little comparative

36 Many examples of this can be found in Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic*; Harari, *Jewish Magic*; Porter, “The Use of the Arabic Script in Magic.” An examination of this sort of object alongside ‘fetishism’ can be found in Mommersteeg, “Allah’s Words as Amulet.”

37 This study includes the treatment of other texts in this way, as expensive and impressive objects, and not merely the Christian Bible. Cressy, “Books as Totems in Seventeenth-Century England and New England.”

38 Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 34.

39 Idel describes this in relation to Kabbalah having come from rabbinic Judaism where “worship centered on a portable sacred object, formerly the tabernacle, now a book.” Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 115.

40 Taylor, “Village Deity and Sacred Text.”

examination.⁴¹ Of note, in regards to theoretical approaches and the objective approach, is an article by Watts which posits that scriptural authority (the root of the subjective approach) stems from the use of text in ritual (the root of the objective approach), and that in turn stems from a desire to perform rituals correctly.⁴² Unlike the other provided examples Watts builds an objective approach that connects to, and can be understood with, a subjective approach. Without such a connection objective approaches stand merely as antithetical, incompatible, and separate to subjective approaches.

Similar to Watts' theory, I will be seeking below to link the objective approach to the subjective approach. My intention is to use the tools of the subjective approach, investigating the content of sacred texts and presuming textual autonomy, to explore the objective nature of the sacred texts. I will do this by looking to a class of cases where the two necessarily overlap: *self-reference*. When a text references itself, even indirectly or obliquely, it takes the role of both object and subject. By beginning from this nexus, my approach can serve a heuristic role: allowing for greater understanding of the limits of subjective approaches and how they may understand the objective nature of texts.

In this first section, the focus has been on laying out a background and foundation. By taking a look at the ways in which sacred texts have been treated, the usefulness of my approach has been made clear. In Section II, I will lay out my data. This includes a large number of instances of self-reference across sacred texts, primarily grouped into three large categories: Inlibration, Necessity, and Untranslatability. Each of these categories will be defined and instances of each provided that appear in various

41 Both the Introduction and Conclusion give a small amount of comparative perspective, but it is not their focus.

42 Watts, "Ritual Legitimacy and Scriptural Authority."

sacred texts. In Section III I will situate the incidence of self-reference within various theories of the sacred. The goal here is to demonstrate that as a heuristic system, not strongly tied to any particular theory of the sacred, these categories can provide new insights into each theory or allow the theory to provide new insights into sacred texts. Finally, in Section IV, I will put forth some of my own conclusions based on the data, foremost being that these self-referential features may be understood as ‘self-sacralizing,’ and look at where further research into this subject would go.

Self-Referential Features in Sacred Texts

Self-reference can come in many forms. In natural language, it can be as simple as a 1st person personal pronoun, “I,” and is the subject of investigation in such disparate fields as computer science (Turing machines), biology (autopoiesis), psychiatry (narcissism), and literary studies (metanarrative or autosymbolism).⁴³ Some of the most self-contained and familiar forms of self-reference exist as classical examples of paradox. For instance Epimenides, the Cretan, saying: “All Cretans are liars.”⁴⁴ When searching for self-reference in sacred texts, what I am looking for is the ways the text describes or mentions itself.

This may seem like a relatively narrow set of circumstances, and certainly the instances of clear and direct self-reference in a text by its title are rare. However there are many, sometimes oblique, ways in which this happens less explicitly. In some cases, one text describes an earlier one that later became treated as a single text. In other cases,

43 For a wider view on self-reference across disciplines see Nöth and Bishara, *Self-Reference in the Media*, 4–5.

44 Nöth and Bishara, 75.

terminology identified with the text may be used in a formula like: ‘the words of [a god/a prophet/a sage/truth/heaven/etc.]’ I will consider these sorts of cases (subject to demonstration in each instance) to be self-reference and, when looked at with this wider eye, examples abound. As outlined in Section I, these are instances where the text can be seen as both the subject and object, the describer and described.

Categories of Self-Reference

In searching for instances of self-reference across sacred texts, I found that a great deal of them fall into one of three general categories. These categories do not distinguish between formal aspects of the self-reference, such as the different indirect methods mentioned above. Instead, each loosely outlines an effect that the instance can be interpreted to have, the characteristics that they impart to the text. They are not intended to be exhaustive, but arose naturally from an analysis of self-referential passages in sacred texts. Each of the three will be defined at length in their own sections, but first I will present a short definition of each.

A text is an *Inlibration* when it is described as being divine in some way. This can often be established via a mechanism of revelation, where the words of the text are of supernatural origin, or via some other means by which the text becomes ‘transhuman.’⁴⁵ *Necessity* is the characteristic of a text being necessary, either to the practice of a religion or for some other desirable goal. There may be prescriptions requiring the study of the text, recitation of the text, transmission of the text, or use of the text in ritual (all of which would be impossible without the text itself). Finally, *Untranslatability* is when it is not

⁴⁵ This is an apt term that Levering uses to describe the origin of a sacred text as different than those of mundane texts. See Levering, “Scripture and Its Reception: A Buddhist Case,” 58.

permissible to translate a text. It could be that the text in translation is no longer the text, that it cannot serve ritual purpose, or that it cannot retain its meaning. In each of these cases, the characteristic of the sacred text is one that is unlike those of profane texts, that are mundane, unnecessary, and translatable.⁴⁶

Inlibration

Inlibration is a protologism in the field of Religious Studies. Used in Islamic or Christian-Islamic comparative studies, it refers to the status of an ‘eternal uncreated Quran’ being made the material, written, Quran.⁴⁷ As stated by John Renard:

As the presence of the word of God in book form, or “inlibration,” the Qur’ān functions more as a theological counterpart to the Christian understanding of Jesus as God’s Word made flesh in the “incarnation.” The New Testament, as the words of Jesus, could then be paralleled with the Hadith, authoritative gatherings of the words and deeds of Muhammad.⁴⁸

46 To be clear, with untranslatability I am not referring to an issue of modern semantics or semiotics. This characteristic does not denote a general notion of languages not mapping perfectly to each other, as it is understood that one could translate the sacred text. What the characteristic denotes is that it would then be merely a text and not a sacred text when in translation. This will be elaborated upon in the section on untranslatability.

47 The only other usage I have found for the term was to describe the process by which collections of writings and oral traditions are collected into a book. Thum, *The Sacred Routes of Uyghur History*, 88.

48 Renard, *In the Footsteps of Muhammad*, x.

Etymology and History

Most sources attribute this term to Wolfson in his *The Philosophy of the Kalam*⁴⁹ or some other work of his⁵⁰ appearing at or before 1974. One source attributes the term to Schimmel,⁵¹ but as Schimmel cites Wolfson as the originator, this can be dismissed. In *Kalam*, Wolfson dedicates the majority of a chapter to the issue of ‘The Uncreated Koran’ and the parallels to the ‘Uncreated Christ’ finally arriving at the term giving it as “inlibration, that is, the embookment, of the pre-existent Koran in the revealed Koran” (246).⁵²

Further uses of the term are infrequent, and often describe it as flawed. This is especially seen when the author is not directly working from Wolfson, but a secondary source. This can be seen clearly in Hofmann’s review of Schimmel, where he believes that she coined the term:

The word “inlibration” was coined by Prof. Schimmel in order to correspond to the term “incarnation”. Both have Latin roots. “Carne” means flesh and “liber” means book. Thus the idea is that God became flesh in Jesus (in-carn-ation) and a

49 This includes Johnston, “A Turn in the Epistemology and Hermeneutics of Twentieth Century Uṣūl Al-Fiqh,” 234., Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 157. (though Wansbrough does not adopt the term in his own text that he compares to Wolfson’s: *Quranic Studies*), Weiss, “Law in Islam and in the West: Some Comparative Observations,” 244., and Denny, “Islamic Theology in the New World,” 1072.

50 Schimmel refers to him coining the term, but does not specify when or where (Schimmel, *Islam*, 75. and Schimmel and Falaturi, *We Believe in One God*, 37.). Some others explicitly date the term prior to the publication of *The Philosophy of the Kalam*. A presenter at a symposium on Calligraphy in Modern Art merely refers to it being coined by “A contemporary historian of medieval philosophy at Harvard” a likely oblique reference to Wolfson (Halem, *Calligraphy in Modern Art*, 61.), and McCarthy makes mention of it being coined by Wolfson (McCarthy, “Review of The Mind of the Qur’ān,” 239.) both in 1974 (2 years prior to the book).

51 Hofmann, “Review of Morgenland Und Abendland,” 738–39.

52 Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 246.

book in case of the Qur'an (in-libr-ation). The latter idea obviously is warped, nevertheless the opposition between the two terms is descriptive.⁵³

He clearly disagrees with the comparative aspect of the term, but does agree with it being useful in a general way. Others agree and place the term in a more positive light. Weiss points out its appropriateness as a 'conceptual framework,' and deems the term to be "ingenious."⁵⁴ Johnston notes that it is a "striking parallel," but like Weiss does not adopt the term, only ever mentioning its existence.⁵⁵

While the term originates as a description for a concept in Islamic theology, I will be using it in a generalized formulation: *an inlibration is a text in which a deity, supernatural power, or sacred entity is manifested*. With regards to self-reference, the examples provided below will all be cases in which a text describes itself as an inlibration. As Islam provides the ur-example of this, the first examples provided will be from the Quran.

Quran

And if anyone of the Mushrikun (polytheists, idolaters, pagans, disbelievers in the Oneness of Allah) seeks your protection then grant him protection, so that he may hear the Word of Allah (the Quran), and then escort him to where he can be secure, that is because they are men who know not. (9:6)

53 Hofmann, "Review of Morgenland Und Abendland," 738–39.

54 Weiss, "Law in Islam and in the West: Some Comparative Observations," 244.

55 Johnston, "A Turn in the Epistemology and Hermeneutics of Twentieth Century Uṣūl Al-Fiqh," 234.

In Wolfson's analysis, the term "Word of Allah" here is a key demonstration of the text's self-identification as an inlibration.⁵⁶ It is clear that this interpretation is not an obscure one either, as the translator (Mushin Khan) chose to gloss the passage in the same way. Saeed emphasizes this interpretation even more strongly by enumerating what this does not mean: "It describes itself as the word of God (9:6), not that of a human being or jinn, and argues that no one has added to its composition."⁵⁷

In order to emphasize that the "Word of Allah" is indeed supernatural in nature, they are given additional properties aside from being the inlibration of the Quran:

Say (O Muhammad SAW to mankind). "If the sea were ink for (writing) the Words of my Lord, surely, the sea would be exhausted before the Words of my Lord would be finished, even if we brought (another sea) like it for its aid."

(18:109)

and

Nay! This is a Glorious Quran,

(Inscribed) in Al-Lauh Al-Mahfuz (The Preserved Tablet)! (85:21-22)

This "Preserved Tablet" in other translations can read as "eternal" or "guarded," and Wolfson takes as further indication of the supernatural self-identification of the Quran.⁵⁸⁵⁹

In Wolfson's work, he not only notes the in-text support for these views, but provides

56 Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 249, 253, 254–55, 260.

57 Saeed, "The Self-Perception and the Originality of the Qur'ān," 99.

58 Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 246–57.

59 Shnizer provides some further insight into the Quran as being sacred. Her descriptions flow out from commentary and are not as strongly concerned the text itself, so I do not rely on it. Shnizer, "Sacrality and Collection."

thorough historical sourcing for the way this view arose, a sectarian split on the issue, and the antecedent philosophical views that led to it. The basic historical construction of the idea is that first, the idea of eternal or uncreated attributes in God arises. These attributes are not merely considered to be descriptions of God, but “stand for real incorporeal beings which exist in God from eternity.”⁶⁰ The second step was “the belief in the existence of a Koran before its revelation and even before the creation of the world.”⁶¹ This is reflected by (85:21-22), as shown above, but also (56:76-77) and (43:3). The final step towards the Quran as inlibration is merely the co-identification of these first two things, the uncreated Koran as an uncreated attribute in God.⁶²

Some other passages indicate the Quran as being an inlibration in ways outside of the philosophy that Wolfson identified. For example:

And if you (Arab pagans, Jews, and Christians) are in doubt concerning that which We have sent down (i.e. the Quran) to Our slave (Muhammad Peace be upon him), then produce a Surah (chapter) of the like thereof and call your witnesses (supporters and helpers) besides Allah, if you are truthful. (2:23)

Here, other translations state “the revelation We have sent down,” and likewise gloss this to be self-referential.⁶³ This revealed nature is emphasized not only from the position of a nebulous ‘We,’ but to the prophet Muhammad and to his cohort in these following passages:

60 Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 112.

61 Wolfson, 238.

62 See Chapter III, Sections I-III of *The Philosophy of the Kalam* for more detail. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*.

63 Saeed, “The Self-Perception and the Originality of the Qur’ān,” 98.

And when Our Clear Verses are recited unto them, those who hope not for their meeting with Us, say: Bring us a Quran other than this, or change it."Say (O Muhammad SAW): "It is not for me to change it on my own accord; I only follow that which is revealed unto me. Verily, I fear if I were to disobey my Lord, the torment of the Great Day (i.e. the Day of Resurrection)." (10:15)

That this is verily the word of an honoured Messenger [i.e. Jibrael (Gabriel) or Muhammad SAW which he has brought from Allah]. (69:40)

Saeed describes these passages as acting to contradict the notion that Muhammad had any role of authorship in the Quran, and they do so by describing it as originating with God.⁶⁴

One last way by which the Quran self-describes as an inlibration is related to the previous one of stating that the Quran was revealed, but is different in that it argues for the position via a logic as opposed to merely stating it authoritatively. This can be seen in (2:23) above where the Quran challenges any disbeliever to produce a text to rival it. The formulation here tends to be that some quality of the Quran, its coherency, stories, or completeness are all beyond that which exist in human texts. This parallels the working definition of sacred from Section I in that, at the least, it argues against the Quran being of mundane origins (thus only leaving the supernatural, divine, etc).

Some passages that provide this argument for Quran as inlibration are:

Do they not then consider the Quran carefully? Had it been from other than Allah, they would surely have found therein much contradictions. (4:82)

⁶⁴ Saeed, 100–101.

which argues sacred (strictly non-mundane) coherency,⁶⁵

We relate unto you (Muhammad SAW) the best of stories through Our Revelations unto you, of this Quran. And before this (i.e. before the coming of Divine Inspiration to you), you were among those who knew nothing about it (the Quran). (12:3)

which argues sacred stories,⁶⁶ and

Say: "If the mankind and the jinns were together to produce the like of this Quran, they could not produce the like thereof, even if they helped one another."

And indeed We have fully explained to mankind, in this Quran, every kind of similitude, but most mankind refuse (the truth and accept nothing) but disbelief. (17:88-89)

which argues sacred completeness. This last method of self-describing as an inlibration, a sort of logical proof of the Quran's divinity, appears to be particular to it. The other two methods though, the authoritative declaration of divine origin and the cross identification of a divine uncreated attribute with the text, both appear in other texts such as the Torah.

Torah

The Torah is the next text I will be looking at as an inlibration,⁶⁷ due to Wolfson

mentioning it in his description of the Quran as inlibration:

65 Saeed, "Rethinking 'Revelation' as a Precondition for Reinterpreting the Qur'an," 107-8.

66 Saeed takes this as "the most beautiful stories." Saeed, "The Self-Perception and the Originality of the Qur'an," 100.

67 To note, I may not be the first to have described the Torah as an inlibration. In a review of *Die Maske des Moses* by Almut Sh. Bruckstein, Valentin mentions that Bruckstein describes Bruckstein as looking at incarnation and inlibration as central differences between Christian and Jewish thinking. It is not clear if these are Valentin's terms or Bruckstein's as the source material is not yet available in English. Valentin, "Review of Die Maske Des Moses. Studien Zur Jüdischen Hermeneutik," 144.

This conception of a pre-existent Koran is nothing but a reflection of the traditional Jewish belief in a pre-existent Torah, for the Koran constantly describes its revelatory nature as being the same as that of the Torah.⁶⁸

Wolfson does provide citations from Rabbinical sources for the Torah being a “Preserved Treasure” and “Hidden with God,” the same language used for the pre-existent Quran, but does not demonstrate these as flowing from self-reference in the text.⁶⁹

In order to see the most clear self-referential roots of Torah as inlibration we must look to the Greek compilation of Torah the Septuagint (LXX) as three of the sources that provide this self-reference, *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, *Baruch*, and *Wisdom of Solomon* are seen outside of the LXX as deuterocanonical.⁷⁰ As with the Quran, there are three components that make for self-referential inlibration: identification of an attribute associated with God (here, wisdom), the attribute being uncreated/co-existent with God, and the attribute being identified with the inlibration.

Holdrege, in exploring the roots of the pre-existent Torah, identifies four pre-Rabbinic sources for it: *Proverbs* 8:22-35,⁷¹ and the three Wisdom books above.

68 Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 238. Here Wolfson also cites Wensinck, but he only says the same without further detail. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, 77–78.

69 Wolfson is citing *BT Shabbat* 88b-89a and *Genesis Rabbah* 1-1 Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 238.

70 *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, unlike the other two wisdom books, was in a complex position canonically with the Rabbis. It was both quoted (with varying degrees of attribution and accuracy) and admonished in early Rabbinic sources. In any case, it is clear that both the Jerusalem and Babylonian groups had access to some forms of it. For further information on this see Labendz, “The Book of Ben Sira in Rabbinic Literature”; Satlow, “The Wisdom of Ben Sira.”

71 Holdrege actually only marks out *Proverbs* 8:22-31, but I am expanding this by a few verses to incorporate the analysis provided by Vawter on the same topic. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 133–38. Vawter, “Prov 8,” 206.

The LORD made me as the beginning of His way, the first of His works of old.

I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was.

When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains
abounding with water.

Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth;

While as yet He had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the
dust of the world. (Prov 8:22-26)

In *Proverbs* 8, the speaker is an anthropomorphized ‘Wisdom,’ and she is a ‘primal creation’ of God.⁷² Both Holdrege and Vawter follow modern theories which range from Wisdom as the personification of an attribute of God,⁷³ Wisdom as an attribute of nature created by God, or (as Vawter seeks to prove) a ‘possession’ that God has acquired.⁷⁴ If this Wisdom is merely an attribute of God, then it would fully parallel the example in the Quran. Being conservative, we can read this merely as pre-existent yet created. *Wisdom of Ben Sira* follows with the personification of Wisdom, providing it to have dwelt in the highest heavens since “the beginning” (BS 24:9)⁷⁵ and that “The source of wisdom is

72 Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 133.

73 This view is ascribed by Holdrege to R.N. Whybray, Helmer Ringgren, and others; and by Vawter to R.B.Y. Scott. It seems to rest primarily in Prov 8:35 “Who finds me finds life.” Traditional reading of this explicitly attributes the line to God and not Wisdom, but due to the fact that if it were Wisdom speaking she would be hypostasis. Hengel, writing on Hellenistic influences in this ‘wisdom literature,’ finds that there is not enough evidence to find hypostasis (at least as an influence from the Greek concept) in Proverbs 8 (nor in Job 28). See Holdrege, 134,465n9,465-466n10; Vawter, “Prov 8,” 213; Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 153–54.

74 Vawter, “Prov 8,” 205.

75 As a minor note, Holdrege accidentally cites this as in “BS 2.4,9” Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 466n12.

God's word in the highest heaven, and her ways are the eternal commandments" (BS 1:5).⁷⁶

Most importantly for my analysis though, is that *Wisdom of Ben Sira* not only has wisdom as uncreated, but identifies it with the Torah:

All this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God,
the law that Moses commanded us
as an inheritance for the congregations of Jacob (BS 24:23)

"All this," in context, is as Holdrege describes it: "universal wisdom, which God had originally 'poured out upon all his works,' (BS 1:9) assumed a particularized form and became embodied [inlibrated] on earth in the Book of the Torah."⁷⁷

Baruch 3:9-4:4 provides a similar example of a personified Wisdom to the one found in *Wisdom of Ben Sira*:

Hear the commandments of life, O Israel;
give ear, and learn wisdom! (3:9)

...⁷⁸

76 Unlike with Prov. 8, Hengel identifies the treatment of Wisdom in *Ben Sira* completely with that of Logos and hypostasis. This though is based on comparison to stoic literature of the time: "Ben Sira ... regarded wisdom more as a kind of 'world reason' emanating from God, which filled and permeated the whole creation." I will continue to read with Holdrege though that "Despite any Hellenistic influences evident in Ben Sira's hymn to preexistent wisdom, there is no doubt that Ben Sira himself wished to clearly distinguish the wisdom of Israel from the alien wisdom traditions of other nations by establishing true wisdom as God's unique gift to his chosen people in the form of the Torah." See Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 159; Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 136.

77 The proof-text of BS and gloss of embodied to inlibrated are my own. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 136. See also von Rad, who says of this that it is "the complete identification of wisdom with the Torah." Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 445.

This is our God;
no other can be compared to him.
He found the whole way to knowledge,
and gave her [Wisdom] to his servant Jacob
and to Israel, whom he loved.
Afterward she appeared on earth
and lived with humankind.
She is the book of the commandments of God [Torah],
the law that endures forever.
All who hold her fast will live,
and those who forsake her will die. (3:35-4:1)⁷⁹

Unlike *Wisdom of Ben Sira*, *Baruch* does not explicitly make wisdom a pre-existent entity. It does however have her ‘in heaven’ (3:29) and even describes the inlibration of Wisdom into Torah (3:37-4:1). *Wisdom of Solomon*, inversely, does not identify wisdom with the Torah despite going on at great length on the attributes of wisdom as “the fashioner of all things” (7:22) and being “present when you [God] made the world” (9:9).⁸⁰

The four sources above each have wisdom explicitly as divine, with two identifying it with the Torah. From the writings of Philo, we can also see the example of a

78 I have omitted the intermediary lines for the sake of brevity. They go on about the virtues and attributes of wisdom and embracing wisdom.

79 The glosses of ‘her’ as ‘Wisdom’ and ‘book of the commandments of God’ as ‘Torah’ are my own. They are supported not only by Holdrege, but the annotations provided in the Oxford Annotated Bible. Coogan et al., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1534n4.1-4.

80 Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 138.

Greek Jew reading the LXX and identifying Torah with Wisdom.⁸¹ This view is also represented in some fragments of Dead Sea Scrolls, specifically 4Q525 (*4QBeatitudes* or *4QWisdom Text with Beatitudes*) and 4Q185 (aka *4QSapiential Admonitions B* or *4QSapiential Work*),⁸² and other Second Temple era writings (such as the *Letter of Aristeas*, *1 Enoch*, *Third Sibylline Oracle*, and *Psalms of Solomon*).⁸³ A number of passages from the Hebrew Bible can also serve to bolster this identification:

See, just as the Lord my God has charged me, I now teach you statutes and ordinances for you to observe in the land that you are about to enter and occupy. You must observe them diligently, for this will show your wisdom and discernment to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and discerning people!” (Deut. 4:5-6)

Here the possession of wisdom is said to be demonstrated via following the laws of God, the Torah.

How can you say, “We are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us,” when, in fact, the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie? (Jer. 8:8)

Here the declaration of being wise can be read as being in apposition with “the law of the LORD”.

For you are sent by the king and his seven counselors to make inquiries about Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God, which is in your hand,

81 Holdrege, 139–40.

82 See both Crawford, “Lady Wisdom and Dame Folly at Qumran”; Schnabel, *Law and Wisdom from Ben Sira to Paul*, 166–226; Uusimäki, “Happy Is the Person to Whom She Has Been Given.”

83 Schnabel, *Law and Wisdom from Ben Sira to Paul*, 96–165.

...

And you, Ezra, according to the God-given wisdom you possess [in your hand],⁸⁴
appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people in the province
Beyond the River who know the laws of your God; and you shall teach those who
do not know them (Ezra 7:14,25)

In these two passages Ezra is said to have the law of his God in his hand as well as “God-given wisdom”, another cross identification of the two.

Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me
(Pss 119:98)

Finally this Psalm declares that God’s commandments (the Torah) make one wiser than those without it.

Job 28 can also serve to describe wisdom as being divine (or sacred) by being unlike, greater, or beyond all worldly things.⁸⁵ The importance of these last passages is that with the ideas of wisdom as Torah, or wisdom as uncreated, they can each be read as supporting Torah as inlibration. These ideas, while being best represented in the deuterocanonical works above, persist through Rabbinic and Kabbalistic writings⁸⁶ which all form the basis for what Wolfson called “the traditional Jewish belief in a pre-existent Torah.” Finally, as a last note regarding Torah and inlibration, it bears mentioning that the

84 Here I have glossed “in your hand” for “you possess.” The same term (חֵן) is used with both ‘wisdom’ and ‘the law of the LORD,’ supporting the identification of the two that is otherwise effaced by the translation: “according to the God-given wisdom in your hand.”

85 Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 153–54; Vawter, “Prov 8,” 205.

86 Holdrege provides very thorough analysis of these later works, but as they would never be considered ‘Torah’ and thus would not be self-referential, I do not review them here. For the details on these sources see Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 140–212.

main narrative of revelation can be interpreted as the Torah describing its inlibration mediated via Moses.⁸⁷

Veda

Preceding Holdrege's explanation of pre-existent Torah, in *Veda and Torah*, she does the same for the Vedas. She provides three ways that the Vedas, as mundane transmitted texts, are identified as inlibrations:

(1) the Veda is described as the Word (*brahman*), which is the essence of Brahman, the ultimate reality, and is at times designated more specifically as Śabda-brahman (literally, "word-Brahman"), Brahman embodied in the Word; (2) the Veda as the totality of knowledge is also at times identified with the creator principle [*Prajāpati*] as the immediate source of creation; (3) the Vedas (plural) are represented as the archetypal plan or blueprint containing the primordial expressions of the divine speech that the creator utters in order to manifest the phenomenal creation⁸⁸

For the first of these ways, we see an example in the Taittirīya Saṃhitā, with *ṛcs* (verses), *yajuses* (sacrificial formulae), and *sāmans* (chants)⁸⁹ each being described as limited manifestations of *brahman*: "The *ṛcs* are limited (*parimita*), the *sāmans* are limited, and the *yajuses* are limited, but of the Word (*brahman*) there is no end." (TS VII.3.1.4)⁹⁰ The Atharva-Veda, in Hymn X.7, also has these same three components, along with the fourth component of *atharvāṅgiras* (the source of the name of the Atharva

⁸⁷ I take this point as not needing a thoroughly dissected explanation.

⁸⁸ The bracketed insertion of *Prajāpati* is mine. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 29.

⁸⁹ These three are both the titles of Vedas and their constituents.

Veda), of the text residing in or created from Skambha (a personified Brahman or aspect of Brahman, literally “support”):

Who out of many, tell me, is that Skambha

In whom the Sages earliest born, the Ṛichas [*rcs*], Sâman [*sāmans*], Yajus, Earth, and the one highest Sage abide? (AV X.7.14)

...

Who out of many, tell me, is that Skambha

From whom they hewed the Ṛichas off, from whom they chipped the Yajus, he

Whose hairs are Sâma-verses and his mouth the Atharvângirases? (AV X.7.20)

Atharva-Veda IX.6 also similarly describes these components as body parts of an anthropomorphized Brahman: “Whoso will know Prayer [*brahman*] with immediate knowledge, whose members are the stuff, whose spine the verses [*rcs*]; Whose hair are psalms[*sāmans*], whose heart is called the Yajus.”⁹¹ (AV IX.6.1-2) In the Upaniṣads, this is made extremely explicit: “The Veda is the *brahman*, truth is its abode, tranquility and restraint its foundation.” (JUB IV.25.3)

Another divine entity that the Vedas are shown as components of is *vāc*, ‘speech.’ *Vāc* is described in the Ṛg-Veda as existing not merely as transcendent but in the speech of humans (and thus in the very speech describing this): “*Vāc* is measured in four quarters. Those *brāhmaṇas* whose thoughts are inspired know them. Three [quarters], hidden in secret, do not issue forth. The fourth [quarter] of *Vāc* is what human beings

90 The translation is from Holdrege. I will prefer her translations when she provides them as they are constructed to allow for the demonstration of the matter at hand (via glosses and untranslated terms). Where she does not provide translation, I will revert to traditional translations as listed in the works cited. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 41.

91 The glosses are mine reading back to the Sanskrit.

speak.”⁹² (RV I.164.45) In a later hymn in the Ṛg-Veda, Vāc describes herself as having the role of instilling the power of *brahman* into the speech of reciters (*ṛṣi* – sages, seers): “Him whom I love I make powerful, a possessor of the power of *brahman*, a *ṛṣi*, a sage.”⁹³ (RV X.125.5) or in yet another it is the vocalization of the *mantras* by *ṛṣis* that make the transcendent Vāc manifest: “With sacrifice the trace of Vak they followed, and found her harbouring within the Rsis. They brought her, dealt her forth in many places: seven singers make her tones resound in concert.” (RV X.71.3)

The second method of inlibration provided by the Vedas is in the identification of themselves as *Prajāpati*, the creator principle: “Prajāpati in the beginning was the Veda.” (JUB I.46.1) Similar identifications occur many times in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa with the Vedic *mantras* and meters being named as constituting parts of *Prajāpati*:

Prajāpati bethought himself, 'Truly, all existing things are in the threefold lore: well, then, I will construct for myself a body so as to contain the whole threefold lore.'

He arranged the Ṛk-verses into twelve thousand of Bṛhatīs, for of that extent are the verses created by Prajāpati. (X.4.2.22-23)

...

All the three Vedas amounted to ten thousand eight hundred eighties (of syllables); muhūrta [moment] by muhūrta he gained a fourscore (of syllables), and muhūrta by muhūrta a fourscore was completed.

92 Holdrege’s translation. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 42.

93 Holdrege, 42.

Into these three worlds, (in the form of) the fire-pan, he (Prajāpati) poured, as seed into the womb, his own self made up of the metres, stomas, vital airs, and deities. (X.4.2.25-26)⁹⁴

Here, Prajāpati not only creates the different Veda components, but is also made up of them.

The last way in which the Vedas are described as inlibrations is via being identified with the divine speech of the creator. In one formulation, Prajāpati speaks three utterances (each identified as the essences of the first three Vedas) to create the three realms of existence: “He uttered (root *hr + vi-ā*) “*bhūḥ*” – that became this earth; “*bhuvah*” – that became the midregions; “*svah*” – that became yonder heaven.” (ŚB II.1.4.11-13)⁹⁵ Another compelling formulation has Prajāpati chanting the words of one verse to create the gods, humans, and sacrificial components:

These swift Soma drops have been poured out through the filter for the sake of all blessings.

[*ete asṛgam indavaḥ tiraḥ pavitram āśavaḥ | viśvāni abhi saubhagā ||*] (RV IX.62.1)⁹⁶

[Saying] “*ete*” (“these”) Prajāpati brought forth the gods; [saying] “*asṛgam*” (“have been poured out”) he brought forth human beings; [saying] “*indavaḥ*” (“Soma drops”) he brought forth the ancestors; [saying] “*tiraḥ pavitram*” (“through the filter”) he brought forth the [Soma] libations; [saying] “*āśavaḥ*”

94 See also ŚB X.3.1.1, ŚB VI.2.1.30, ŚB XII.1.4.1-3, and ŚB XII.6.1.1.

95 Holdrege’s translation. This also appears at ŚB XI.1.6.3. For Holdrege’s assertion of the Vedas being the three realms see Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 51,54,56-57. and JUB I.1.1-7.

96 Both the English and Sanskrit are provided by Holdrege. The Sanskrit is replicate here to better illustrate how the latter passage follows the earlier word for-word (which does not come across as well in translation). Holdrege, 446n132.

(“swift”) he brought forth the *stotra*; [saying] “*viśvāni*” (“all”) he brought forth the *śāstra*; [saying] “*abhi saubhagā*” (“for the sake of blessings”) he brought forth the other beings. (PB VI.9.15)⁹⁷

This demonstrates that the vedic mantras are not merely mundane, but replicate (and are identical to) the divine creative speech. Here, the self-reference not generalized but directly referencing a prior verse.

As described in my definition of text, self-reference often appears by the reference to components of a text such as passages, verses, chapters, or individual books within a larger corpus. In the case of the Vedas, the components are not typically ‘the words’ or ‘the book’ but *ṛcs*, *yajuses*, and *sāmans*. As noted above, this can be seen as self-referential as they each are the matter of one of the Vedas. The self-reference can also work on that initial general level and allows even the descriptions of the meter of the writing as being divine to work as demonstrating inlibration.⁹⁸

Sri Guru Granth Sahib

Sikhism is unique to living religions in the status and authority attributed to their text Sri Guru Granth Sahib (SGGS). Kristina Myrvold explains this well:

The scripture is believed to enfold words of an ontologically divine nature and mediate the revelatory experiences and teaching of ten human Gurus.

97 Holdrege, 55.

98 Further methods of self-reference describing inlibration could also be possible via the mechanism of Sanskrit in general being a divine language (or that is, the earthly Sanskrit existing to describe a divine language). I believe that the above three methods are sufficient, as my goal is not to be comprehensive. For more on Sanskrit as a divine language see Houben, *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit*.

Simultaneously, the sacred text is considered to be the living Guru with the authority to provide spiritual guidance and establish human-divine connections.⁹⁹ Despite being understood primarily as an inlibration (though not like the examples above as a pre-existent divine principle being manifested) this notion of inlibration is not understood to arise from the text. The instilling of Guruhood¹⁰⁰ and transformation of the Adi Granth (the name for the text as compiled, meaning ‘original book’¹⁰¹) into the SGGS is understood to have occurred as specific historical event.¹⁰² There seems to be no indication that the decision to promote the Adi Granth was founded in the text itself either (as, for example, the fulfillment of prophecy or following a precedent). I have however, following the prior examples above, found that there are two different methods by which the text describes itself as an inlibration.

The first of these methods relies on a cross-identification of the SGGS with other terms as, unlike Torah, Quran, or Veda, the name ‘Granth’ rarely appears within itself.¹⁰³ Instead, the major term lending to self-identification is ‘Guru,’ which as Myrvold describes, has many different uses:

99 Myrvold, “Making the Scripture a Person: Reinventing Death Rituals of Guru Granth Sahib in Sikhism,” 125.

100 Engle describes this power that passes from Guru to Guru as ‘Shabd Power,’ power of the hymn. But he does not indicate that the 10th Guru passed this power to the Adi Granth, instead simply saying “Most state he proclaimed the *Adi Granth* his successor” Engle, *Servants of God*, 153, 157.

101 Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, 3.

102 The event was recorded by a witness in a secondary document. See Singh and Shankar, *The Sikhs*, 55; Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, 3, 129. Mann provides a more nuanced social explanation as well, citing scholarly disagreement about the historical role of the text. Mann, 129–34.

103 This appears at GGS 3:19 as “garanth” (ਗਰੰਥ) and is referencing the varieties of ways in which people devote themselves to God. It may be the case that this appears more often in different constructions, but I could find no reference to such a thing in secondary literature. The same is the case for the constituent components, such as *rāgas* (the chapters of the Granth, or specifically the meters used to sing them), which are only used in a formal context to number each (“This is Raag 1” etc).

The Sikh conceptualization of the term “guru” conjures up several images that go well beyond its common meaning and application in the Indian culture. The word is used as a designation of the formless God – the true Guru (*satiguru*) – and the primordial Word (*bani, shabad*) which was revealed historically to humans. The term guru has also come to signify ten historical persons, from Guru Nanak (1469–1539) to Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), who operated in northern India as spiritual preceptors and worldly leaders of the Sikh community for a total period of 239 years. Subsequent to the developments at the turn of the eighteenth century, the term is more strongly associated with the Sikh scripture – *Guru Granth Sahib* – and the Sikh community – the *Guru Panth* – the first of which now embodies spiritual authority as the personal Guru of the Sikhs while the second signifies the temporal power of the Sikh collective as represented by religious institutions. For believers, the categories evoked by the word “guru” are often perceived as interrelated: human Gurus were born into the world in a concrete moment of history to mediate and teach a divine message of truth, which continues to live through the scripture and the community.¹⁰⁴

The term ‘Guru’ then, is one method in which self-reference occurs in the SGGS. What it is often then identified as is two terms that are used for ‘word’ or ‘uttered sound’: *śabad*, and *bāṇi*.¹⁰⁵ Myrvold glosses these terms as “primordial Word” in the excerpt above, while Gurinder Singh Mann provides definitions of *bāṇi* as “‘utterances,’ ‘compositions’ the compositions recorded in the Adi Granth” and *śabad* as “‘word,’ ‘hymn’ term used

104 Myrvold, “Making the Scripture a Person: Reinventing Death Rituals of Guru Granth Sahib in Sikhism,” 126.

105 Dusenbery, “The Word as Guru,” 391.

to refer to both to [sic] the Word received from God and a hymn contained within the Adi Granth.”¹⁰⁶

Bearing those two sets of general terms in mind, a passage such as: “The Word, the Bani is Guru, and Guru is the Bani. Within the Bani, the Ambrosial Nectar is contained.” (982:10) can be taken as “The SGGS is the primordial Word.” A similar effect is drawn from verses such as “The Dear Lord is True, and True is the Word of His Bani. Through the Shabad, we merge with Him.” (32:5) or “The Dear Lord is True, and True is the Word of His Bani [utterances]. Through the Word of the Shabad, [hymn] Union with Him is obtained.” (64:16), each of which identify *śabad* or *bāṇi* with the ‘Word of God.’¹⁰⁷ This understanding of these passages is coherent with Myrvolds assertion that “The words of Guru Nanak and the following Gurus emanated from a divine source and became accessible to humanity when their speech was transformed into writing.”¹⁰⁸

The second method of inlibration is more direct and via the text calling itself “The Word of the Gurmukh” (speech dictated by the Guru).¹⁰⁹ “The Word of the Gurmukh is God Himself.”(39:5) Mann also notes this status given to the words of the gurus:

106 Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, 179, 181.

107 In seeking passages containing a formula of ‘(*śabad* or *bāṇi*) the Word of God’ an amazing preponderance were provided. Unfortunately, the majority of these were merely glosses by the translator. This does help to demonstrate that this identification is understood as applying widely to the text by modern practitioners. I believe though that a number of passages still contain similar formulas that were not due to a translator’s gloss. Further investigation and expertise with Sant Bhasha would be needed to confirm: (95:8), (308:5), (424:5), (494:5), (515:15), (545:6).

108 Myrvold, “Making the Scripture a Person: Reinventing Death Rituals of Guru Granth Sahib in Sikhism,” 127.

109 Myrvold, 127; Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, 180.

The increased significance of these hymns is already reflected in the position of Guru Amardas, who declared that the hymns of the gurus were God himself (*Vahu vahu bani nirankar hai tisū jevadu avaru na koi* [M3, AG, 515]) and the light of the world (*Gurbani isū jag mahi chananu karami vasai mani ae* [M3, AG, 67]).¹¹⁰ Waaho! Waaho! is the Bani, the Word, of the Formless Lord. There is no other as great as He is. (515:17)

Gurbani is the Light to illuminate this world; by His Grace, it comes to abide within the mind. (67:10)

Myrvold echoes these by pointing out how the speech of the human Gurus is called *akaz bani* (speech from the sky) or *dhur ki bani* (words from God).¹¹¹

Unfortunately, compared to most of the texts I have surveyed, there is little exegetical scholarship regarding the SGGS. Much of the secondary sourcing makes reference to this as a specific issue in Western scholarship of Sikhism in general. Most cite issues with the early translation by Ernest Trumpp, which was seen to be hostile to the text, as being the foundation of this avoidance of addressing the text.¹¹² Due to this, it was difficult to find secondary scholarship to support some of my identifications. The interpretations given regarding the identifications of ‘Word’ with those for the Quran and Vedas though are striking. Christopher Shackle also makes note of the emphasis of *vāc* in the Vedas being represented in the SGGS.¹¹³ Further study of this issue is likely to reveal

110 Mann, *The Making of Sikh Scripture*, 130.

111 Myrvold, “Making the Scripture a Person: Reinventing Death Rituals of Guru Granth Sahib in Sikhism,” 127.

112 Shackle, “Repackaging the Ineffable,” 256; Nesbitt, “Guru Granth Sahib,” 3717.

113 Shackle, “Repackaging the Ineffable,” 257.

a more rigorous system behind the idea of inlibration in the SGGS, akin to those provided from Wolfson and Holdrege for the Quran, Torah, and Vedas.

Necessity

Compared to inlibration, necessity will be an easier category to describe though a harder category to define. In this context, necessity can mean any number of things and I will take a wide view to possible meanings. A text can describe itself as necessary in (at least) the following ways:

- Soteriologically Necessary: Necessary for salvation.
- Eschatologically Necessary: Necessary to bring about the end of the world, or to make the end of the world occur in a desired way.
- Ritualistically Necessary: Necessary for the correct performance of a ritual.
- Ontologically Necessary: Necessary for the functioning or existence of reality.
- Commanded Necessity: Mandated to be used in some way by a sacred source (without explicit invocation of one of the above reasons).¹¹⁴

What this is not is any kind of implied necessity of the contents of the text. For instance a text merely describing a ritual or the end of the world does not make it ritualistically or eschatologically necessary. The most common occurrences of this though are commands within a text that the text be read, recited, studied, copied, or otherwise transmitted.

¹¹⁴ Perhaps this could be separated into distinct types. Sample statements that would fall under this would be commands to read, learn, teach, copy, pass down, or safeguard the text. Each of these is impossible to fulfill without the text.

Torah

I will begin with the Torah, as it provides some of the most clear instances of self-described necessity. For instance, Deuteronomy 6:6-9 commands that you must both study and ritualistically use “these words”:

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart.

Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise.

Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut 6:6-9)¹¹⁵

This passage forms the basis for the ritual objects of *mezuzah* and *tefillin* in which the same passages, “these words,” are worn on a practitioner’s body or affixed to doorposts and gates. Not only that, but these practices were understood in rabbinic practice to not only be a form of Torah study, but in a more abstract way a command to study and memorize Torah in general.¹¹⁶ As can be seen, the text here is not merely conveying information about practice but describing itself as a necessary object to practice.

The writing of Torah is also commanded in a few other passages. Deuteronomy 31:19, for instance: “Now therefore write this song, and teach it to the Israelites; put it in their mouths, in order that this song may be a witness for me against the Israelites.” “This

¹¹⁵ These commands are almost exactly repeated in Deuteronomy (11:13-21). A similar command appears in Exodus 13:1-16 which asks that “this statute” be kept on the hands and between the eyes.

¹¹⁶ In a strict way this is seen as also requiring contemplation on and recitation of these passages (or more precisely Deut. 6:4-9, the *Sh’ma*). In a broader sense, it would be the entirety of the Torah. Alexander, though specifically looking at the exclusion of women from this practice, provides a thorough examination of the Rabbinic understandings of *Sh’ma* recitation and *tefillin* as Torah study. Alexander, “Women’s Exemption from Shema and Tefillin and How These Rituals Came to Be Viewed as Torah Study.”

song,” is traditionally understood to be the entirety of the Torah¹¹⁷ and the basis for the practice of writing a Torah scroll as fulfilling a commandment.¹¹⁸ Deuteronomy 17:18-19 requires these same things of any King as well:

When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him in the presence of the levitical priests.

It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, diligently observing all the words of this law and these statutes (Deut 17:18-19)

For a King the process is more specific, mandating that the text be kept with him and copied in the presence of priests.

Moving away from commands to read, write, and study the text we can see some instances of implied ritual necessity. In the book of Nehemiah, a passage describes how after their return from exile in Babylon Ezra read from the Torah to describe how to properly celebrate the festival of Sukkot (Neh 8:1-17). Though this is not a specific command that the Torah be used for this festival, it does demonstrate the understanding that without the use of the Torah it may be held incorrectly. A similar instance is found in both 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles where King Josiah is presented with a “book of the law” (or “book of the covenant”) found in the Jerusalem Temple (2 Kings 22:8ff) (2 Chr 34-35). This book is then used to rectify current practices and the celebration of Passover.

This, like the case in Nehemiah and others in Ezra,¹¹⁹ are seen by James Watts as ways in

117 This is reinforced by another self-referential passage which states “You must diligently observe everything that I command you; do not add to it or take anything from it” (Deut 12:32) (13:1 in some versions). This is the basis by which references to passages become understood to refer to the whole.

118 See Maimonades’ *Sefer Ahavah*, The Laws Governing Torah Scrolls, Tefillin, and Mezuzot 7:1

119 The books contain many other instances where things are done according to “the book of the law of Moses” but, unlike the two examples above, do not specifically state that they were correcting

which “[ritual specialists] used ancient books to provide [a reinforcement of authority], because texts have the unique property of appearing to ‘speak’ from the distant past.”¹²⁰ In my terminology, the text is describing itself as necessary due to having greater authority than priests or kings to validate ritual practice.

A few additional narratives do not go as far as to denounce one practice in favor of what is in the text, as in the above two. For example, Exodus 24 recounts Moses writing the laws of God then reading from “the book of the covenant.” When reading from it he pronounces that the sacrifice ritual has been made with God “in accordance with all these words” (Ex 24:8). Similarly Deuteronomy 31 (described above for requesting that the text be copied and taught) has the same story of Moses writing the law then reading from it to the people. Joshua does this, following in Moses’ footsteps, in Joshua 8. These narratives can serve as a history of the text, describing its origin, but also function as a demonstration of how the text is to be used: read aloud, repeated, remembered, written, and copied.

A final sort of necessity described in the Torah is again one of command:

These are the statutes and ordinances that you must diligently observe in the land that the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given you to occupy all the days that you live on the earth.

You must demolish completely all the places where the nations whom you are about to dispossess served their gods, on the mountain heights, on the hills, and under every leafy tree.

improper practice. (Ezra 3:3-5), (Ezra 6:18), (Ezra 9:11-12), (Neh 5:1-13), (Tob 1:8), (Tob 7:12-13), and (1 Macc 4:47,53). See Watts for a breakdown of how these fit into a wider narrative of the ancient text validating ritual practice. Watts, “Ritual Legitimacy and Scriptural Authority,” 412–14.

¹²⁰ Watts, 407–8.

Break down their altars, smash their pillars, burn their sacred poles with fire, and hew down the idols of their gods, and thus blot out their name from their places.

You shall not worship the Lord your God in such ways. (Deut 12:1-4)

This works towards a necessity in two ways. First is the direct, positive, command to “diligently observe” the statutes and ordinances. This, in context, refers to the laws to follow but can also be the Torah generally. The second way this implies a necessity of the text is in via a negative command. You are positively commanded to destroy the items and mechanisms of worship of foreign gods and, in the negative, told to not do such to God. In the very least this provides a command to protect the written name of God, but can be expanded to be understood as a command to protect the Torah.¹²¹

The Book of Mormon

Having looked at the Torah’s wide range of self-described necessity, we will continue through another Abrahamic work. The Book of Mormon carries a number of descriptions of necessity that are very similar to the examples set forth in the Torah. In the book of Jacob, Jacob recounts a commandment received from the prophet Nephi:

For he said that the history of his people should be engraven upon his other plates, and that I should preserve these plates and hand them down unto my seed, from generation to generation. (Jacob 1:3)

It is clear that the production of history and transmission of the tablets was commanded by the prophet In this context, the tablets are the components of the Book of Mormon.¹²²

121 This is paralleled by Ezekiel 6:3-6, though without the negative command. See Peterson, *Ezekiel in Context*, 62; Schleicher, “Accounts of a Dying Scroll,” 17.

122 According to their tradition, Joseph Smith found the Book of Mormon engraved on golden tablets/plates and transcribed them into English. Hansen, “Mormonism,” 6192.

Similar commandments are given to describe the creation of the tablets in the book of Nephi in which God speaks to Nephi:

Therefore, if ye do these things blessed are ye, for ye shall be lifted up at the last day.

Write the things which ye have seen and heard, save it be those which are forbidden.

Write the works of this people, which shall be, even as hath been written, of that which hath been.

For behold, out of the books which have been written, and which shall be written, shall this people be judged, for by them shall their works be known unto men.

And behold, all things are written by the Father; therefore out of the books which shall be written shall the world be judged. (3 Nephi 27:22-26)

Here, the creation and transmission of the text (“by them their works be known unto men”) are divinely mandated. 1 Nephi 19:3 also has Nephi recounting a command from God to keep and teach with the tablets:

And after I had made these plates by way of commandment, I, Nephi, received a commandment that the ministry and the prophecies, the more plain and precious parts of them, should be written upon these plates; and that the things which were written should be kept for the instruction of my people, who should possess the land, and also for other wise purposes, which purposes are known unto the Lord.

This not only describes the text as needing to be ‘kept’ and the earthly purpose of the text, but unknown divine purposes.

Sri Guru Granth Sahib

Unlike the Torah and Book of Mormon, the SGGS does not seem to contain mandates to read, transmit, write, or study it. Due to the nature of its inlibration though, and the fluid nature of the term Guru in the text, it is described as necessary in more esoteric ways.

Here we see one of the general descriptions of necessity:

The Word of the Shabad is his Guru and spiritual teacher, profound and unfathomable; without the Shabad, the world is insane. (SGGS 635:6)

The Word, the *śabad*, is necessary for the sanity of the world and this reflects the self-described ontological necessity of the text. This formula, ‘without X the world is insane,’ occurs many times with Guru, the Guru’s wisdom, or other terms identified with the text.¹²³

In fact, the SGGS is also described as the only connection between God and mankind:

That Carefree Lord cannot be appraised; His Real Value is known only through the Wisdom of the Guru's Teachings. (20:14)

O Nanak, the Naam, the Name of the Lord, is obtained only through devotion to the Guru. So focus your consciousness on the Guru's Feet. (122:6)

In other statements, the text is closer to being soteriologically necessary:

Eternal bliss is known only through the Guru, when the Beloved Lord grants His Grace. (SGGS 917:17)

Without the True Guru, no one finds the Way. (1351:18, 1353:9)¹²⁴

¹²³ Similar passages occur at (424:6), (440:4), (568:19), (604:4), (644:5), (1140:13), (1234:13), and (1287:7). In each of these the term used for ‘insane’ is *urānā*.

Each of these is in line with the earlier descriptions of the SGGS being understood as being the manifestation of the divine in the profane world.

Quran

The opening words of the Quran and, by most accounts, the first revelation to Muhammad was the command *iqra*: ‘Read!’ or ‘Recite!’¹²⁵ This command is repeated many times, and refers typically to the passages that follow (which are then recited). The word shares its root with the title of the text,¹²⁶ with the Quran being ‘the recitation,’ and implicitly commands to recite will be referring to the Quran.¹²⁷ These commands, coming from Allah, the angel Gabriel, and the prophet Muhammad, would be impossible to carry out without the Quran (in part or in whole). This strongly parallels the prior Abrahamic instances, especially when considering that in an oral form recitation serves the place of both reading and transmitting.

Some of these passages include:

O you wrapped in garments (i.e. Prophet Muhammad SAW)!

Stand (to pray) all night, except a little.

Half of it – or subtract from it a little

Or add to it, and recite the Qur'an with measured recitation. (Q 73:1-4)

124 This same statement occurs in both places in the original. The translations differ slightly with the occurrence on 1351 reading “Without the True Guru, you shall not find the Way.”

125 Gwynne, “Patterns of Address,” 74. See also Gade for the generalization of this first revelation which is “often interpreted as a command, specifically directed to the prophet while also directed to Muslims in general, to voice the Qur’ān.” Gade, “Recitation,” 482.

126 The term *talā* is also used in the same role, but with the meaning more strongly associated to ‘read’ before ‘recite.’ See Günther, “Muḥammad, the Illiterate Prophet,” 5.

127 Peterson, “The Language of God,” 52.

And with truth We have sent it down (i.e. the Quran), and with truth it has descended. And We have sent you (O Muhammad SAW) as nothing but a bearer of glad tidings (of Paradise, for those who follow your Message of Islamic Monotheism), and a warner (of Hell-fire for those who refuse to follow your Message of Islamic Monotheism).

And (it is) a Quran which We have divided (into parts), in order that you might recite it to men at intervals. And We have revealed it by stages. (in 23 years). (Q 17:105-106)

Recite (O Muhammad SAW) what has been revealed to you of the Book (the Quran), and perform As-Salat (Iqamat-as-Salat). Verily, As-Salat (the prayer) prevents from Al-Fahsha' (i.e. great sins of every kind, unlawful sexual intercourse, etc.) and Al-Munkar (i.e. disbelief, polytheism, and every kind of evil wicked deed, etc.) and the remembering (praising, etc.) of (you by) Allah (in front of the angels) is greater indeed [than your remembering (praising, etc.) Allah in prayers, etc.]. And Allah knows what you do. (Q 29:45)

This sort of description occurs many more times throughout the Quran, directing the listener (or reader) themselves to recite.¹²⁸ Sebastian Günther asserts that, according to the Quran (Q 2:121): “Reading the Scripture in the accurate manner means to believe in God.”

¹²⁸ Some other similar passages include (Q 2:151), (Q 87:6), and (Q 96:1). For the command to promulgate see Peters, “The Scriptures,” 30. For a more thorough look at passages that involve the command to read or recite see Günther, “Muhammad, the Illiterate Prophet,” 5–6.

The Papyrus of Ani

Popularly known as ‘The Egyptian Book of the Dead,’ the Papyrus of Ani is a personalized instance of a funerary ritual scroll. The text would have been read during the funeral, from the scroll, in order to ensure correct passage to the afterlife.¹²⁹ Included are self-referential passages that dictate when the scroll is to be recited:

Here begin the chapters of coming forth by day, and the songs of praising and glorifying which are to be recited for “coming forth” and for entering into Khert-Neter, and the spells which are to be said in beautiful Amentet. They shall be recited on the day of the funeral, entering in after coming forth.(5 1:1-3)¹³⁰

The following is to be recited on the day of the month (i.e., New Moon Day). (21 133:1)

These passages have the appearance of mere instructional apparatus not actually to be read, but these are specifically those contained within chapters. Many more references to when and how to recite occur within the ‘Rubrics’ which provide more instructional apparatus and appear not to be content to be recited.

An additional passage has the reader self describe as the one who recites “the words of the liturgy of the festival of the Soul-god in Tetu.” (5 1:27). Compellingly, a number of the pictorial scenes that are part of the scroll are also self-referential. These scenes, called vignettes by E.A.W. Budge, depict various stages of the funeral process and some portray a priest reading from the scroll itself.¹³¹ It is especially clear that this is

¹²⁹ Budge, *The Papyrus of Ani*, 2:339.

¹³⁰ I could not find a standardized method for citation of this text. The numbers here indicate plate then chapter and line based off Budge’s naming. Budge, 2:355.

¹³¹ Watts, “Ritual Legitimacy and Scriptural Authority,” 411n33.

the scroll itself as the scene contains text that reflects the words of the priest, which come from the scroll.¹³² These reflect, as in many of the above examples, how the text in itself is necessary for the ritual as an object.

Untranslatability

Translation of sacred texts is the foundation of many contemporary issues in Religious Studies. For instance, one can look to Talal Asad's *Genealogies of Religion* which is otherwise not focused on the issue of translation but has to contend with issues in the translation of the Christian Bible from Greek to Latin,¹³³ and devotes two chapters of the book to the issue of 'the translation of cultures' which applies the understanding of issues with textual translation to the understanding of foreign cultures.¹³⁴ W.C. Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion* likewise is not 'about' translation, but builds its arguments about the problematic use of the word 'religion' via exploring the translations and mistranslations that brought it from Cicero's *religio* to our modern day.¹³⁵ Despite these examples existing in a context of post-modernism, deconstruction, and critique of scholarship, they resemble issues with translation described within some sacred texts.

One problematic issue with this category is that it may overlap with Inlibration. The reasoning goes that if a text is an inlibration, is divine, then how could it possibly be treated as a profane text and translated? Effectively, each instance of self-described inlibration may be understood as self-described untranslatability as well. Due to this the

132 Budge describes this vignette Budge, *The Papyrus of Ani*, 2:244–46. Images of this scene in higher resolution are also provided by the British Museum "Image Gallery."

133 Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 136.

134 Asad, 171–238.

135 Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 19–42.

examples below will be those where the inlibrated nature of the text is not the primary cause of the inlibration.¹³⁶

Quran

In the case of the Quran, there are a variety of passages that specifically describe how the text is specifically tied to the Arabic language. One reads:

And this is a confirming Book (the Quran) in the Arabic language, to warn those who do wrong, and as glad tidings to the Muhsinun. (Q 46:12)

And another:

And We sent not a Messenger except with the language of his people, in order that he might make (the Message) clear for them. Then Allah misleads whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And He is the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. (Q 14:4)

According to Muhammad Abdel Haleem these, and at least three other, passages describe the way in which the Arabic language is codified as the only language of the Quran.¹³⁷ These passages all emphasize that Arabic is the language used in order to “ensure clear communication,” and have been taken to indicate that the Quran is untranslatable.¹³⁸ The distinct use of the Quran as only an Arabic text, also provides distance between a more direct issue of translation and the text being untranslatable due to inlibration. While these passages do not act to forbid translation, they impart the idea

136 The Vedas and SGGS specifically, which both rely on the identification of the text as composed divine words for its inlibration, will seem relatively underrepresented compared to the status of the oral nature of each.

137 (Q 12:1-2), (Q26:192-199), and (Q 16:103). See Haleem, “An Arabic Qur’ān,” 88–89.

138 See Haleem, 90; Mir, “Language,” 89. Earlier in the same book, Haleem discusses at length his view that prohibition against translation is unfounded. The views come though from a position of historical and theological analysis and are not supported by additional citations of the Quran itself. Haleem, “Translating the Qur’ān,” 59–65.

that a translation or alteration of the text is no longer a Quran. This position is further bolstered if one takes into account a coherence between the oral and written text.

Reinhart discusses “Qur’ān as inseparably sound, structure, and meaning.”¹³⁹

Once translated to another language, even if structure and meaning were to be maintained, sound would necessarily be different. This issue of the oral text though is an extremely wide one in scope, and not necessary to demonstrate a textual source for the written text being untranslatable. This importance of the inseparable aspects of the text is also conveyed by the frequent use of the description ‘clear.’

The term used in Arabic is *mubīn*, which according to Mustansir Mir “means both ‘clear in itself’ and ‘that which clarifies (something else).’”¹⁴⁰ This appears as a descriptor of the Quran in over a dozen passages such as:

O people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians)! Now has come to you Our Messenger (Muhammad SAW) explaining to you much of that which you used to hide from the Scripture and passing over (i.e. leaving out without explaining) much. Indeed, there has come to you from Allah a light (Prophet Muhammad SAW) and a [clear] Book (this Quran). (Q 5:15)¹⁴¹

Alif-Lam-Ra. [These letters are one of the miracles of the Quran, and none but Allah (Alone) knows their meanings]. These are the Verses of the Clear Book (the Quran that makes clear the legal and illegal things, legal laws, a guidance and a blessing). (Q 12:1)

139 Reinhart, “Jurisprudence,” 437.

140 Mir, “Language,” 88. See also Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 153; Haleem, “An Arabic Qur’ān,” 89–90.

141 Here the translator had used the term ‘plain’ which I have substituted ‘clear’ by reading with Mir and other translations. This is also the case for (Q 36:69).

And We have not taught him (Muhammad SAW) poetry, nor is it meet for him.

This is only a Reminder and a [clear] Quran. (Q 36:69)

This emphasis on clarity is explicitly situated to separate the Quran from both profane text (like poetry) or other sacred texts (Books of Moses, Psalms of David, Gospel of Jesus). Though this clarity usually stands on its own, it sometimes appears as ‘clear Arabic’: ‘*arabī mubīn.*’ This formula appears at (Q 16:103) and (Q 26:195), tying the uniqueness and necessity of its clarity to the notion that the Quran is exclusively an Arabic language text. The uniqueness of the Quran is also related to this nature of clarity. As Haleem puts it, referencing (Q 25:1) and (Q 34:28): “The Qur’ān was revealed at a particular time in a particular locality and in a particular language.”¹⁴²

A final way the Quran describes its untranslatability is through emphasis on the sound of its recitation. Concurring with Reinhart’s description, Gade states that “as a highly self-referential text, the Qur’ān includes many descriptions of its own recitation and the power of hearing and voicing the text.”¹⁴³ Among support for the exact sounds being the same, and thus translation being impossible, are passages which describe the effects of the recitation of the Quran on listeners.

Those were they unto whom Allah bestowed His Grace from among the Prophets, of the offspring of Adam, and of those whom We carried (in the ship) with Nuh (Noah), and of the offspring of Ibrahim (Abraham) and Israel and from among those whom We guided and chose. When the Verses of the Most Beneficent (Allah) were recited unto them, they fell down prostrating and weeping. (Q 19:58)

142 Haleem, “Translating the Qur’ān,” 59.

143 Gade, “Recitation,” 481.

In this example, the effect of the recitation is not linked clearly to the listeners understanding the language as they are from different groups. Also supporting this is a passage that explicitly rejects the Quran as a physical book:

And even if We had sent down unto you (O Muhammad SAW) a Message written on paper so that they could touch it with their hands, the disbelievers would have said: "This is nothing but obvious magic!" (Q 6:7)

A last component to this emphasis on sound is one that is component to the text, but not demonstrable through citation.

The very complex language and style of the Qur'ān, concise as it is, its rich vocabulary and structure that show multiplicity of meanings, and the surpassing sound-effect that enhances meaning and gives the Qur'ān a grandeur in Arabic that is difficult to achieve in any approximation – all these factors have contributed to the belief that the Qur'ān is untranslatable.¹⁴⁴

The assertion here derives from the construction of the text itself, and may be considered more something the text demonstrates than a way the text self-references. The notion is of a similar nature though, as something inherent to the text and not ascribed to it externally: the construction and nature of the Quran, as a text, is unlike that of any other.

Vedas

As seen with the Quran, one possible way that a text may be untranslatable is for the text to be specifically understood as being a series of specific sounds as well as merely words. According to William Graham: “the ancient Vedic tradition represents the paradigmatic

¹⁴⁴ Haleem, “An Arabic Qur'ān,” 91.

instance of scripture as spoken, recited word.”¹⁴⁵ The goal of these recitations is not merely orally transmitting the contents of the text, but to recreate specific series of sounds. As such any change made to that series of sounds, as would result from translating into another language, would not be the same text.

This was made clear above with the description of the roles played by the meters and sounds of the Vedic chants. The importance of the orality of the text may also be understood though through descriptions of the powers and effects of the chanted hymns.

He [Indra] who grew (root *vṛdh*) through the ancient and present-day hymns (*gīrs*) of lauding *ṛṣis*. (RV VI.44.13)

Aśvinas, do others than we surround you with *stomas* [chant]? The *ṛṣi* Vatsa, the son of Kaṇva, has magnified (root *vṛdh*) you with hymns (*gīrs*).¹⁴⁶ (RV VIII.8.8)

O Soma, we who are skilled in speech (*vaco-vid*) magnify (root *vṛdh*) you with hymns (*gīrs*). (RV I.91.11)

Holdrege describes these passages as depicting the *ṛṣis* “cognizing and sending forth the hymns through their speech in order to augment the power of the gods.”¹⁴⁷ The meaning of the words is not devoid of importance, but it is the sounds that transmit their power.

In the evidence for the inlibration of the Vedas, we saw the case of the creator principle *Prajāpati* creating various levels of beings by chanting a verse from the Rg-Veda.¹⁴⁸ That same verse continues on by saying “Having become *Prajāpati*, he who,

145 Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, 68.

146 The gloss for *stomas* is my own.

147 Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 349.

148 This appears at (PB VI.9.15) and the verse he chants is (RV IX.62.1).

knowing thus, chants with this opening brings forth beings.” (PB VI.9.15)¹⁴⁹ The Vedas are conferring the power active in the creation not to the divine sources, but to the sounds that one may replicate.¹⁵⁰

Śvetāmbara Jain Āgamas

The Āgamas are the canonical texts of the Śvetāmbara Mūrtipūjaka Saṅgha Jains.¹⁵¹ They consist of 45 texts on various subjects. The last text in the standard lists is the *Anuyogadvārāṇi*, the ‘Doors of *anuyoga*.’¹⁵² With meanings of disquisition, investigation,¹⁵³ conjoining,¹⁵⁴ and ‘atomic conjoining,’¹⁵⁵ *anuyoga* is a broad class of exegetical methods. The practice and its standard techniques, described in the *Anuyogadvārāṇi*, have to do with “‘conjoining’ each significant word in a scriptural text with its broadest connotative context and thus bringing it into full association with the complexity of reality.”¹⁵⁶

The relevance of *anuyoga* to untranslatability is that the practice prevents the use of a work in translation. As *anuyoga* relies on ascertaining as many connotative meanings

149 See also (PB VII.5.1,4).

150 Holdrege cautions that this is given in a limited way and that most similar passages will enumerate the specific purpose that can be fulfilled via correct recitation. These include (PB VII.10.13-17), (PB VII.5.1-3), and (PB XIII.5.13). Holdrege, *Veda and Torah*, 538n39.

151 Dundas, *The Jains*, 60–61, 76.

152 This is called the *Anuyogadvārasūtra* by Jyväsjärvi. Dundas, “Somnolent Sūtras,” 77; Jyväsjärvi, “Retrieving the Hidden Meaning,” 147.

153 Jyväsjärvi, “Retrieving the Hidden Meaning,” 146.

154 Dundas, “Somnolent Sūtras,” 77.

155 The sense being to recombine and reinterpret the text on an ‘atomic’ level, by its smallest parts: word-by-word. Jyväsjärvi, “Retrieving the Hidden Meaning,” 147.

156 Dundas, “Somnolent Sūtras,” 77.

from each word, this would necessarily be different in another language. A small example of this comes from the Br̥hatkalpabhāṣya¹⁵⁷ with the word ‘cooked’ (*pakka*):

'Cooked' is to be known from the points of view of name, representation, material substance and essential aspect. [Materially] cooked is just what is finely ground etc., or cooked due to contact with a kindling substance. From the point of view of its inner essence, "cookedness" is the activity of restraint, right conduct, and purity in the preparation of alms-food. There is also another explanation: it is the death of a *jīva* when it has completed its life-span.¹⁵⁸

Here the meanings can be understood to an extent in the sample translation into Sanskrit, but some of these do not map to the same term in English (nor would they in any language).

A similar exposition can be found in a commentary of a commentary by a 5th century Jain author Agastyasimha:

A sūtra comes about through syllables. Suppose one makes that sūtra [composed in] Prākṛit Sanskrit, as for example *dharmo maṅgalam utkr̥ṣṭam* (i.e. instead of the original Prākṛit *dharmo maṅgalam ukkaṭṭham*, "dharma is the best auspicious word" Daśavaikālika Sūtra 1.1). Alternatively, one can (completely) alter the phonemes (of the Prākṛit sūtra) while maintaining the same sense (e.g. by substituting the expression *puṅṅam kallāṅam ukkosam dayāsaṃvaranijjarā*). But this (i. e. translating into Sanskrit or altering the phonemes) should not be done.

Why? Because a disagreement (*visaṃvāta*) with regard to syllables will lead to a

157 To be extra clear, this is not a canonical text providing self-reference. This, and the following, are merely examples of the technique described in the canonical text. Unfortunately it seems as though there are no English translations of the *Anuyogadvārāṇi* available to be able to provide direct quotes.

158 The translation is provided by Jyväsjärvi. Jyväsjärvi, “Retrieving the Hidden Meaning,” 149.

disagreement about meaning. When there is loss of meaning, there is loss of correct behaviour; when loss of correct behaviour, absence of (the possibility of) deliverance, and when there is absence of deliverance, then ascetic initiation (*dikkhā*) becomes pointless. Therefore one should not alter the syllables of scripture.¹⁵⁹

This demonstrates again the issue of direct translation, and expounds on the ritual and soteriological problems with a text in translation. The same document then provides a demonstration of how translation can produce gibberish as results.¹⁶⁰

The Book of Mormon

According to the scripture of the LDS church, Doctrine and Covenants¹⁶¹, God provided Joseph Smith access to devices by which he translated otherwise untranslatable found texts:

Now, behold, I say unto you, that because you delivered up those writings which you had power given unto you to translate by the means of the Urim and Thummim, into the hands of a wicked man, you have lost them. (10:1)

Here, Urmin and Thummim refer to ‘seer stones’ that allowed Joseph Smith to translate the text found in the earlier Book of Mormon. This example is somewhat roundabout, as the method of translation is not a component of the original text (the golden plates) but is found in another, equally canonical, work. This echoes the Quranic statements that

159 This is Dundas’ translation. Dundas, “Jain Attitudes Towards the Sanskrit Language,” 150.

160 Unfortunately, Dundas does not provide this portion in translation as well. It is however, provided in transliteration. Dundas, 150n10.

161 ‘Doctrine and Covenants’ is the title of one work of their canon. I make note of this because compared to the titles of other texts, this one can easily seem as though referring to their doctrine and their covenants.

revelation is provided in forms appropriate to the receiver.¹⁶² It is understood that without the use of this divine mechanism, the golden tablets would not have been translatable into the Book of Mormon.

Conclusions

As stated in the introduction to this section, neither these categories nor the examples within them are intended to be exhaustive. Many of the more common examples of self-reference do not fit into these categories, and could easily appear in mundane texts: indexes, colophons, rubrics (as appear in the Papyrus of Ani), or front/back matter that is typically not treated as component to the text. Some examples simply do not seem to fit into these categories at all.

Take this example that Nalini Balbir describes when writing on the tradition of textual preservation in Jainism:

A passage found in the *Mahāniśīthasūtra*, a work which belongs on the edge of the Śvetāmbara canon, narrates how the leaves of its palm leaf manuscript were eaten by white ants so that the mutilated text had to be restored.¹⁶³

The same text, according to Dundas, states that both commentary and an important mantra had been lost “owing to the degenerative effects of time.”¹⁶⁴ This example does not fit well into any of my categories, with the closest perhaps being necessity. Based on the understandings of Jains that their original sacred texts, the *Pūrvas*, were lost to time

162 Haleem, “An Arabic Qur’ān,” 89.

163 Balbir, “Is a Manuscript an Object or a Living Being?: Jain Views on the Life and Use of Sacred Texts,” 108.

164 Balbir does not cite where this appears in the text, and unfortunately Dundas cites a German commentary as the source of his assertion. This makes it difficult to pierce deeper beyond these references, and it may be that they refer to the same passage. Dundas, “Somnolent Sūtras,” 76, 93n22.

and degeneration, this takes on an understanding of the necessity of textual preservation. Despite the primacy of oral recitation and transmission the written text is, as Balbir puts it, “seen as a *pis aller* and a guarantee that, to some extent, no more is going to be lost.”¹⁶⁵ This does not quite fit with necessity as the only necessity it describes is the record of a text, be it in memory or on palm leaf, as necessary for the text to exist, not a requirement or command for sacred purposes.

The evidence of this section, despite not being comprehensive, should be sufficient to demonstrate that these categories have use as a way to describe commonalities among self-referential features in sacred texts. This could be the end-goal of a literary analysis about genre and text. I see these categories as forming a heuristic framework, a formal construction whose value comes not from the claims it makes but from how it can be used to better understand theories of the sacred. In the following section, I will look at how this framework can interact with theories of sacredness. If this first section answers the question “What do you mean ‘self-sacralizing’ features?” the second will answer “So, what do I do with these?”

Situating With Theories of Sacredness

In my introduction I used the theory of sacredness from Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* to arrive at a working definition of sacredness as: *a quality distinguished by its heterogeneity to all other qualities, not necessarily relating to religion, and not identified as arising from any single cause*. I devised this definition due to my assessment that no existing theories of sacredness are well equipped to be able to

¹⁶⁵ Balbir, “Is a Manuscript an Object or a Living Being?: Jain Views on the Life and Use of Sacred Texts,” 109.

describe the sacredness of sacred texts. This position is bolstered by the writings of Levering, Ayoub, and Svensson who all describe a distinct lack of treatment of the subject of sacred text for anything but its content.¹⁶⁶ This is not to say that existing theories are without merit, quite the contrary, any number of theories may be brought to bear in the matter and provide new and meritorious interpretations.

In this section, I will be attempting to understand how theories of sacredness would be able to incorporate my heuristic system of self-referential features. To do this, I will give some examples of how these features could be interpreted by various theories. The primary goal of doing this is to better understand the usefulness and meaning of these self-referential features. At the same time though this may demonstrate new ways in which theories that had only ever interacted with sacred texts subjectively, for their content, would interact with them as objects.

In choosing what theories to work with, I sought well known theories that also cover as wide a range of thought as possible. Reading, again, with Lynch, I will be looking primarily to Emile Durkheim's *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* and Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*. In Lynch's words, "Durkheim and Otto's theories of the sacred are not simply foundational contributions, but have formed the basis for two radically different approaches to this subject: The *ontological* and the *cultural sociological*."¹⁶⁷ After the ontological and sociological theories I will also be taking a brief look at some that are orthogonal to the axis they form with the works of Sigmund Freud and Emmanuel Levinas.

166 See the above section "The Subjective Approach and Protestant Bias." Levering, "Introduction," 4; Ayoub, "Qur'ān: Its Role in Muslim Practice and Life," 7574; Svensson, "Relating, Revering, and Removing: Muslim Views on the Use, Power, and Disposal of Divine Words," 32.

167 Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World*, 10.

Sociological

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim puts forth a model of how things come to be sacred. Based on ethnographic studies on the ‘primitive’ practices of various tribal peoples, Durkheim’s model involved communities imbuing sacredness and members of the community seeing the process as external to themselves. Key to this though was that the object that is made sacred did not have any inherent sacredness. Via the Totemic Principle, sacredness is imputed to objects (called ‘totems’) as a representation of a society.

To properly engage with Durkheim’s work, we must also look to the theories of the sacred that preceded him and that he contended with. Prior to Durkheim, there existed two major strains of theory to explain sacredness in tribal societies: Animism and Naturism.¹⁶⁸ Each dealt with elementary religion as fulfilling specific roles to bolster the society. To Durkheim’s view though Animism reduced religion to being “so many hallucinatory representations, without any objective basis.”¹⁶⁹ Naturism, on the other hand, fails to provide any compelling reason for the existence of sacred/profane dichotomy.¹⁷⁰ Despite this though, Naturism does provide an idea that is relevant to this exploration as it posited that “natural things truly had become sacred beings by virtue of their imposing forms or the force they display.”¹⁷¹ This was a monocausal system to explain sacredness as internal: these things have a special quality that made them sacred.

168 See Chapters 2 and 3 of Durkheim respectively for more on how Durkheim viewed these. Durkheim, *Elementary Forms Of The Religious Life*.

169 Durkheim, 65.

170 Durkheim, 82–83.

171 Durkheim, 83.

Durkheim clearly took exception to this based on contemporary ethnographies that revealed that it could not be so. Writing in his chapter on Naturism in *The Elementary Forms*, Durkheim states:

“[I]n fact, the great cosmic phenomena were not deified until fairly recent times. The first beings to which the cult was addressed – the proof of this will be given in the chapters to follow – are humble plants and animals in relation to which man found himself on an equal footing at the very least: the duck, the hare, the kangaroo, the emu, the lizard, the caterpillar, the frog, and so forth. Their objective qualities surely could not have been the origin of the religious feelings they inspired.¹⁷²

There were strong counterexamples to the claims of Naturism, aside from the relatively ‘mundane’ plants and animals above, including *churingas* that were purely profane objects only made sacred via the application of a ‘totemic mark.’¹⁷³ This totemic mark, by being something made by a society and agreed upon within it, was something that is explainable sociologically.

With these counterexamples, Durkheim concluded that sacredness arises *only* from the community and not from any property of the sacred object. Like the Naturism he sought to replace, his explanation is monocausal. Furthermore he felt that, having shown that this is the case for ‘primitive peoples,’ the explanation must follow for any related phenomena: “If, among certain peoples, the ideas ‘sacred,’ ‘soul,’ and ‘gods’ can be explained sociologically, then scientifically we must presume that the same explanation is

172 Durkheim, 83.

173 Durkheim, 121.

valid in principle for all the peoples among whom the same ideas are found with essentially the same characteristics.”¹⁷⁴

Text as Totem

Despite Durkheim’s theory originating from the sacralization of simple objects, it has been stretched and extended to describe all aspects of the sacred/profane dichotomy. With sacred texts this theory runs into the issues discussed above regarding a Protestant bias, as Christian Protestantism actively opposes the ritual treatment of the Bible,¹⁷⁵ and modern scholarship on religion has largely inherited that bias.¹⁷⁶ Regardless of this opposition, such practices are common both in contemporary culture (such as with the ritualized disposal of text)¹⁷⁷ and historically.

Using Durkheim’s totemic model, one way of understanding the above self-referential features would be as totemic marks. Just as a community takes a mundane object and makes it sacred via a totemic mark, perhaps a mundane text is made sacred via the addition or inclusion of totemic marks. Certainly, portions of any number of sacred texts could appear mundane without a larger context, presenting as genealogies, histories, legalistic writings, or poetry.

In a less extreme formulation these self-referential features may reflect a pre-existing community view of the sacredness of the text that preceded it. Many of the

174 Durkheim, 418.

175 Parmenter, “A Fitting Ceremony: Christian Concerns for Bible Disposal,” 55.

176 See the section above “The Subjective Approach and Protestant Bias” for a more in-depth explanation.

177 This can be observed, at least, in Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sikhism. See Myrvold, “Front Matter.” For a compilation featuring writings on this treatment in each of those religious traditions.

examples provided above of self-reference would fit this formulation well once a historical context is provided. The self-reference that describes the Torah as an inlibration, for example, comes primarily from ‘wisdom literature,’ which was some of the last to be written and was not considered Torah by Rabbinic Judaism. Similarly some of the examples of the ritualistic necessity of the Torah come from the books of the Prophets and histories, specifically documenting the attitudes of communities that already had a text they understood as the Torah (strictly the first five books, the books of Moses).

Likewise, many passages about the nature of the Vedas as an inlibration come from the Upanishads, later texts which are specifically commentary upon the first Vedas (though are still in a wider sense considered ‘Vedas’). Following this interpretation, these self-referential features may provide insight into the changing attitudes within a community towards a text. For example, the wisdom literature identifying the Torah with the abstract ‘Wisdom,’ has been described by some as the result Hellenic syncretism and the influence of Stoic philosophy and the concept of Logos.¹⁷⁸

Ontological¹⁷⁹

In *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto puts forth a model of how people interact with the sacred as a Kantian *a priori* category.¹⁸⁰ Working with the notions of ‘Religious

178 Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, 159, 167; Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 179–80.

179 This approach is also often termed phenomenological. The difference between the two, in short, is whether the thing actually exists (ontological) or appears to be (phenomenology). In application the two come very difficult to distinguish, as they may be identical with the exception of the ‘actual’ existence of the thing being considered either unprovable or unimportant to phenomenologists. I use ontological here as I am reading with Lynch’s interpretation and seek to present it as an approach as distant to that of the sociological as possible. Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World*, 10–11.

180 The translator of the text made a point to state that the term rendered in the title and throughout the text as ‘the holy’ likewise could be ‘the sacred.’ I will be using the latter in order to align it better with my terminology and that of Durkheim. Harvey, “Translator’s Preface to Second Edition,” xvii.

Experience' from William James,¹⁸¹ which Otto would dub '*mysterium tremendum*,' he primarily sought to explore the referent or cause of these experience. Otto dubbed this cause the '*numinous*,' something that is "wholly other," "supernatural and transcendent."¹⁸² This description, especially 'wholly other,' aligns with my definition of the sacred. Otto's theoretical contribution to this was to give the sacred ontological status. It is not merely a description, but is "objective and outside the self."¹⁸³ This notion that the sacred is not merely an agreed upon quality of a thing but is a thing in itself is the foundation of the ontological approach to the sacred and the element that later theorists like Gerardus van der Leeuw, Joachim Wach, and Micea Eliade.

One way in which the categories of self-referential features might be understood through Otto would be as what he calls "manifestations of a predisposition" to religion, or to the apprehension of the *numinous*.¹⁸⁴ In describing these manifestations Otto provides various examples from what he calls pre-religion (magic, myth, animism, pantheism, etc),¹⁸⁵ as well as examples from the Bible.¹⁸⁶ The Biblical examples he provides have to do with the ways in which encounters with God are described as evoking fear, dread, awe, and wonder. Self-referential features could serve to have the same effect upon those who encounter them. By the text stating to the audience that it is an inlibration, necessary, or untranslatable, it makes itself 'wholly other' to mundane texts. Unlike the examples Otto provides though, where this is apprehended immediately

181 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 10-11n1, 53n1; Lynch, *The Sacred in the Modern World*, 10-12.

182 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 25, 30.

183 Otto, 11.

184 Otto, 112-16.

185 Otto, 117-25.

186 Otto, 72-82.

(literally: without mediation), most of the examples rely on an understanding in reason based on the content of the text.

One example of textual self-reference that is very close to Otto's are the descriptions of the untranslatability of the Quran, especially those regarding the effect its recitation has on listeners. Gade describes the occurrence of these passages and their effects as follows:

The Qur'ān often expresses the embodied, emotive responses of believers to its own recitation. For example, the Qur'ān describes these reactions as “shivering” skin and “trembling” heart (for example Q 19:58 and 39:23). Weeping as a recognition of the message of the recited Qur'ān is a common Qur'ānic theme, as in Q 5:83, “And when they hear what has been sent down to the messenger [of the Qur'ān], you see their eyes overflow with tears because of what they have recognized of truth. They shout: ‘Our Lord! We believe; so You will write us down among the witnesses to the Truth’.” The Qur'ān often links such descriptions of affective response to the altered moral state of the believer who is receptive to the message. An example is Q 17:107–9, “When it [the Qur'ān] is recited to them, they fall down upon their faces, prostrating, and say: ‘Glory be to our Lord. Our Lord's promise is fulfilled.’ And they fall down upon their faces, weeping, and it increases them in humility.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ Gade, “Recitation,” 482.

Many of these same effects appear in Otto for the same purpose: shivering,¹⁸⁸ trembling,¹⁸⁹ and prostration.¹⁹⁰ In this case though the citation of sacred text is not used to describe how these effects are evoked, as the other manifestations do, but as the text is also evoking them it is itself *numinous*.¹⁹¹

The self-referential categories in general may also mirror Otto's notion of sacred. Speaking of the 'holy' as a Kantian category, Otto says that "the rational ideas of Absoluteness, Completion, Necessity, and Substantiality" are components of it.¹⁹² His Substantiality maps roughly to my Inlibration, as an inlibration is a manifestation of something otherwise without substance. His Necessity could certainly map to mine. Finally, Absoluteness and Completion may be able to map to Untranslatability. For this to make sense, I would need to modify my category to something more broad. Untranslatability may be merely a specific sort of absoluteness and completion. In any case, modifying it in any way would be prohibited, as if it is complete, the completion would be violated by translation (or at least be pointless); and if it is absolute, then it would also be untranslatable.

Psychological

In his work *Totem and Taboo*, Sigmund Freud puts forth a psychological explanation for religion and the sacred. Freud relies heavily on evidence similar to that of Durkheim's

188 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 128, 215.

189 Otto, 13, 70–71, 183.

190 Otto, 50.

191 Or, at least, that the text is describing itself as sacred.

192 Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 112.

from, then fairly new, anthropological studies of so-called primitive peoples.¹⁹³ Freud's system understood the rituals and practices of primitive peoples, and by extension all religion, as expressions of feelings of sons towards their fathers that he called a father-complex.¹⁹⁴ He used as his basis a narrative of primal patricide, first put forth by J.J. Atkinson, of the sons of a tribal leader having been driven away by the father:

One day the brothers who had been driven out came together, killed and devoured their father and so made an end of the patriarchal horde. United, they had the courage to do and succeeded in doing what would have been impossible for them individually. (Some cultural advance, perhaps, command over some new weapon, had given them a sense of superior strength.) Cannibal savages as they were, it goes without saying that they devoured their victim as well as killing him. The violent primal father had doubtless been the feared and envied model of each one of the company of brothers: and in the act of devouring him they accomplished their identification with him, and each one of them acquired a portion of his strength.¹⁹⁵

Over time, this would be replicated via a procession of various ceremonial, ritualistic, and symbolic replacements in which “the god of each of them is formed in the likeness of his

193 There was a great deal of overlap in the sources they used. Both cited works from Johann Bachofen, Franz Boas, Charles Darwin, James Owen Dorsey, James Frazer, Alfred William Howitt, Henri Hubert, Frank Byron Jevons, Andrew Lang, RR Marrett, Marcel Mauss, Lewis Henry Morgan, Max Müller, Julius Pikler, William Robertson Smith, Baldwin Spencer, Herbert Spencer, Northcote Whitridge Thomas, Edward Burnett Tylor, and Wilhelm Wundt. Not only that, but Freud cited some of Durkheim's previous works (*Elementary Forms* only came out a year prior to *Totem and Taboo*). This was gathered from the index and bibliographies added in modern reprints: Durkheim, *Elementary Forms Of The Religious Life*, 449–64; Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 188–93.

194 Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 163.

195 Freud, 164–65.

father ... his personal relation to God depends on his relation to his father.”¹⁹⁶ As an effect of this initial violent act, and in general a childish desire for the “protection, care, and indulgence” of a father,¹⁹⁷ religion arises to replace the absent father.

Freud’s theory could be used to explain why the category of necessity exists. As a form of protection, the substituted father imposes rules of conduct (taboos) to protect a community from their own harsh nature. Primary to these rules are prohibitions against murder and incest¹⁹⁸ but by extension this applies to all the rules proscribed by a religion and even most of human morality.¹⁹⁹ In fact, according to Freud “religion arose from the filial sense of guilt, in an attempt to allay that feeling and to appease the father by deferred obedience to him.”²⁰⁰

It would seem only natural that the repository or record of the taboos, the sacred text, would itself be protected by taboo. This may also be a reflection or extension of how taboos are enforced: “The punishment for the violation of a taboo was no doubt originally left to an internal, automatic agency: the violated taboo itself took vengeance.”²⁰¹ This ascription of agency to the taboos, the prohibitions and proscriptions, may be the basis of the text having the agency to declare itself necessary and protected.²⁰² Another

196 Freud, 171.

197 Freud, 168.

198 Freud, 167.

199 Freud also indicates that he sees taboos as existing under and being the causes of Kant’s ‘categorical imperatives,’ and morality in general. Freud, 26, 82, 170.

200 This quote is directly about ‘Totemic religion,’ but in the next sentences and further on the following page Freud goes on to say the same is true of all religion. Freud, 168ff.

201 Freud, 23.

202 Especially protected from loss via requirements of transmission and study.

explanation for this, and self-reference in sacred texts generally, could be to have the text fulfill the role of the father as the totem does.

In Freud's system, the totem is a surrogate for the father²⁰³ and becomes abstracted in non-totemic religions as a "gods and spirits"²⁰⁴ or a single "God the father."²⁰⁵ This God, the father, becomes a figure to be worshiped in a general way expanding the specific forms of ritual and treatment of the totem. This role though, in some instances, can be seen as being ascribed (even if only mediately)²⁰⁶ to the text. Moshe Idel described this as occurring in rabbinic Judaism where "worship [is] centered on a portable sacred object, formerly the tabernacle, now a book."²⁰⁷ A Digambara Jain scholar in the 18th century noted the existence of centuries old palm-leaf manuscripts of sacred texts whose function "was to serve solely as objects of worship" due to their fragility and the inability of their caretakers to read the texts.²⁰⁸ Self-referential features would serve here in two roles. First they could reflect the attitudes of the communities seeking to establish the connection between the symbolic father and his totem of the physical manifest text. In a second way though, they may also function to anthropomorphize the text. It is typical that a text can convey rules, tell stories, explain the otherwise unexplainable, and sit in the role of the wise father teaching his sons right

203 Freud alternates and changes terminology of this depending on context. Though I prefer precision in this sort of language to prevent accidental conflation of meaning or confusion, I walk through the terms that appear interchangeably: replacement, substitute, and now surrogate. Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, 172.

204 Freud, 23.

205 Freud, 176.

206 I would not assert that these traditions are necessarily worshiping the texts in themselves. Though texts that are inlibrations might be worshiped as components of the supernatural, and otherwise the text may serve as a conduit, focus, or mediator of worship to another entity.

207 Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 115.

208 Dundas, *The Jains*, 64.

conduct. These texts, by containing self-reference, have even higher agency, and are closer to the father they replace as they are able to tell stories about themselves.

Levinas

Emmanuel Levinas' is the only theoretical structure I will treat that does not arise from a single writing and cannot be accurately labeled as being representative of a specific school of thought. In line with what is broadly deemed 'Continental Philosophy' his writings are often termed as Ethics, but it fits in poorly when described alongside traditional ethical systems.²⁰⁹ His theoretical structures are a wide web of interrelating ideas and not any one specific theory with clear practical, methodological application. Jacques Derrida, writing on the style of *Totality and Infinity* said:

The thematic development is neither purely descriptive nor purely deductive. It proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself.²¹⁰

Fundamental to his theoretical construction are a number of key terms, their meanings and relationships. Below, those terms will be outlined by being presented first with quotations. The cornerstone of his works is a notion that Ethics, not logic nor the self, is foundational to the phenomenological understanding of humanity. Ethics, recast by Levinas,²¹¹ is the substrate of what occurs in every face-to-face interaction between two people and despite the generally pluralistic nature of his philosophy, this is universal.

209 For the general difficulty of typing Levinas' work see Critchley, *The Problem with Levinas*, 79.

210 Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 103n7.

211 What we often think of as Ethics, "adherence to transcendent or historical laws or inner principles" Levinas terms as 'Justice.' See Lévinas, "Ethics and Infinity," 192.

This Ethics is defined thinly, almost as in a physics, in relation to the force that it acts with being ‘ought-to-be-doneness.’ It is not grand notions, nor particulars of case studies, but the forceful perception active in us that drives towards what ‘ought-to-be-done.’

The primary subject in this view is ‘the Other.’ In its atomic form, this is not a reference to identity politics, minorities, or exclusion, but the being outside oneself that one interacts with. This is a shift from his mentors who centered the primacy of subjectivity on the self or ‘Being.’ Instead, the self only exists²¹² once confronted by the Other. Levinas’ definition of the other differs strongly from the way it was envisioned by his philosophical ancestors and mentors. While the phenomenology following Descartes placed the Other as an object within the self (the only apprehendable Other being constructed by our minds and senses), Levinas makes clear that for him the Other, or otherness, is something that fundamentally transcends the self:

The relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion, or a sympathy through which we put ourselves in the other's place; we recognize the other as resembling us, but exterior to us; the relationship with the other is a relationship with a Mystery.²¹³

The method by which the Other confronts the self is ‘face-to-face.’ For Levinas, the face and our interaction with another’s face is effectively an epiphany.²¹⁴ There is an

212 That is to say, “the self only exists as a social human.” Levinas still has a sense of an absolute self, but it plays a relatively minor role in the construction of his own philosophy (and more when he is building his way away from Hegel and Heidegger). The self is discussed and constructed in *Time and the Other* as a means of arriving at an explanation of the Other. Levinas will often also refer to the self as ‘the same,’ in that it is everything internal, where the Other is different-from. For a summation of the creation of the self, see Lévinas, *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, 67–68.

213 Lévinas, 76.

214 Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 187.

immediacy²¹⁵ which leaves no room but to understand it as Other, as radically not the self. The face-to-face is not merely a set of perceptions where ones eyes see another's, but it is understanding in the event and recognition of the otherness of the Other.

It is here that Levinas allows for a construction of a transcendent god. When we encounter otherness without a face, without the face-to-face, we have an Other that cannot be struggled against (with discourse) but must be responded to.²¹⁶ This is a 'thin' god, but one open to pluralistic ascriptions. It is compatible with the transcendence of an Abrahamic God, but also to spiritual forces and impersonal gods, as well as the gods of idols whose faces are built to allow the face-to-face. In the face-to-face there arises a basic unit of Ethics, 'responsibility.' The face of the Other 'calls the same to responsibility,'²¹⁷ in that it demands a sort of response. Underlying that response is Ethics.

Like with the interpretation given with Freud, self-referential features may work here to anthropomorphize a text. With Freud this meant making it more as a father, but here it would be like "giving it a face.' This role of the text as Other which can be entered into face-to-face confrontation with is supported, in the instance of Torah, by his understanding of the text as the signifier of the face of God.²¹⁸ Levinas also understands that even the most direct contact with God cannot be face-to-face, as described in Exodus 33 with Moses seeing the 'back' of God, and so the text becomes a way of contact.²¹⁹

215 This is not per-se one of Levinas' technical terms, but it calls back to a very literal meaning: 'without mediation' as opposed to the modern common understanding of 'really quickly.'

216 Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 197.

217 Lévinas, 197.

218 Lévinas, *Beyond the Verse*, xii.

219 Lévinas, 144.

This notion is further supported by another writing of Levinas' regarding the ego in which he states that what provides individuality to ego is not any defining characteristics of biology or consciousness but self-reference.²²⁰ This very sort of self-reference, being able to be a subject and object, is the underpinning of sentience²²¹ and self-consciousness.²²² The text possessing self-reference would, as such, be encountered as an ego, as an "I" that an individual would recognize even without a human face.

Conclusions and Further Research

This study arose from a simple question: "How do sacred texts talk about themselves?" In gathering examples, my three categories of self-referential features emerged as common to various sacred texts. Along a similar line of inquiry, Levering provides a description of what is seen as common characteristics of sacred texts which seems to parallel, to a degree, my three categories of self-referential features:

In discussing what these words and texts have in common, and what distinguishes them from other words and texts in the same tradition or culture, three approaches predominate. The first points to allegations about the genesis of these texts, or to claims about their ontological status. In this view, what distinguishes scriptures or sacred texts from others is that they are believed to be revealed by transhuman powers, to convey eternal truths, or to replicate the speech of the gods.²²³

220 This is from the article "The Ego and the Totality" which is only available in English via Levinas' collected works. Lévinas, "The Ego and the Totality," 28; Levinas, "Le Moi et La Totalité."

221 Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 59.

222 Dudiak, *The Intrigue of Ethics*, 92.

223 Levering, "Scripture and Its Reception: A Buddhist Case," 58.

The idea of inlibration can be subsumed in this first approach that Levering identifies. By looking back to my definition: *an inlibration is a text in which a deity, supernatural power, or sacred entity is manifested*, it is clear that this is some form of the above approach. It both alleges a the genesis of the text as being ‘transhuman’ as well as its ontological status. The component of “speech of the gods” also causes this to overlap with untranslatability in the same way that I described an inlibration might above.

Levering continues:

The second is a functional approach: one often hears that what distinguishes scriptural texts from others is that they are used as normative or authoritative bases for communal life in its relations to the sacred.²²⁴

This approach does not map as straightforwardly as the first, but does seem again to be a generalized form of what I call Necessity. This is particularly true for the cases of ritual necessity, but even with the variety of texts that demonstrate necessity via transmission and study this can apply. The text is prescribing its own use by the individual or community receiving it. In cases the necessity is tied specifically to how to relate to sacred entities. The Papyrus of Ani, for instance, dictates to the community how it is used to user the dead into the afterlife properly. The Quran has passages that describe how “reading the Scripture in the accurate manner means to believe in God.”²²⁵ The Torah tells stories about how rituals were performed wrong until people rediscovered it and used it to rectify them and how it should be read publicly.²²⁶ These are all normative practices for a community related to the sacred.

224 Levering, 58.

225 Günther, “Muḥammad, the Illiterate Prophet,” 5–6.

226 Watts, “Ritual Legitimacy and Scriptural Authority,” 406–11.

And finally:

The third pursues the significance of an observation about the reception of such texts: they are treated as “sacred,” that is, powerful and inviolable.²²⁷

This point about the reception of texts would include the various varieties of untranslatability. The examples of the clear language and overwhelming power of the Quran as recited would underlie the treatment of the text as powerful. Inviolability would also be a more generic term for almost all the reasons translation is said to be impossible. They rely on the power and identity of the text arising from its complete nature, or the exact appearance of every component (word, meaning, sound, meter, etc).

Something common to the works of Durkheim, Otto, Freud, and Levinas, as I worked with them, was that each would seem to possibly treat these self-referential features as something like ‘self-sacralizing’ features. The self-reference in each case appears to describe the text the same way sacred things are described or, in a meta level, merely the ability for the text to describe itself makes it fit more into the role of a sacred entity. To Durkheim these could be totemic marks, the things that make an object sacred. To Otto these could be manifestations of the *numinous*. To Freud they could make the text appear more as a father. To Levinas, they could give the text a face and an ego. In a very general way they set sacred texts apart from mundane texts, which do not purport to be inlibrations, necessary, or untranslatable. They also set themselves aside for the mere occurrence of this self-reference, which is not commonly found in mundane texts.

I set out to provide these features primarily as a formal heuristic system. On the face of them, they would require no grand assertions, and each tends to be coherent with

²²⁷ Levering, “Scripture and Its Reception: A Buddhist Case,” 58.

emic and etic, objective and subjective understandings of the qualities of the text. My definitions of sacred, text, and sacred text were as broad and thin as possible in an attempt to make the data not methodologically neutral, but compatible. While these features can find use as a new sort of object of study and learning tool, just as a new archaeological find could provide, their greatest contribution will come from their coherence with understandings of why things are sacred.

As self-sacralizing features they force a reassessment of what it means for something to be sacred. Just as these features lie at a nexus of treatment of a text for its content (subjective) and as an object to be interacted with (objective), they also lie at a nexus of two broad conceptions of how sacredness arises. On one side is ‘sacred things are sacred because people say so,’ and on the other is ‘sacred things are sacred *a priori*, due to some essential nature.’ These self-sacralizing features equally demonstrate both. Undoubtedly there was a historical moment in which each of these features were first uttered or written by a human and decisions were made about the nature of them. Even as divine revelation, there was the choice to recite, to affirm, the words spoken. Undoubtedly there was a historical moment in which each of these features were first heard or read by another, encountering them already as fixed.

Further Research

The most basic avenue for further research lies in the expansion of data presented above. The sacred texts of Abrahamic religions were over-represented due not to any specific preponderance of self-reference but primarily due to my own familiarity with them, and the availability of secondary sources. The same is the case for non-religious sacred texts.

In my introduction I took lengths to segregate my definition of sacred from religion. One reason for this was to prevent a general conflation of the terms, and to build up a precisely defined (if thin) foundation. Another though was to leave open the possibility of providing instances of these self-sacralizing features in non-religious texts, especially ones that have had a sort of special status. That I found none should not be indicative of their lack of existence.²²⁸ There are five additional topics that I feel are compelling for further research arising from this study.

First is to investigate further non-sacred self-reference. Above I made reference a number of times to self-reference appearing in formal ways that are not necessarily considered part of the text but merely of the specific manifestation of a text. These include things such as a title, table of contents, page numbers, indexes, colophons, etc. With regards to the Papyrus of Ani, I specifically excluded self-reference that appeared in the ‘rubrics,’ as the scholarly interpretation was that these components were not read as part of the text, but included as additional reference. While I still take these to be well-understood by the reader, a thorough description and delineation of these sorts of features may help to illuminate the self-reference that occurs within a text.

The second follows the first in that it seeks to better define a negative by asking “What is *not* a sacred text?” While there are ample discussions and explanations regarding canon within traditions, I would seek to understand the role that self-sacralizing features might have in the distinction between what is and is not treated as sacred text. A

228 A few texts came close, but their self-reference was not quite in line with my definitions. I did not think it appropriate to modify my definitions to be able to include individual examples. For instance, the US Declaration of Independence is quite close to an inlibration. With “we hold these truths to be self-evident,” it matches Levering’s understanding of approaches to the sacred in which they may “reflect eternal truths” and as being self-evident would be ‘transhuman.’ U.S., “The Declaration of Independence”; Levering, “Scripture and Its Reception: A Buddhist Case,” 58.

case study could arise in the form of “Why is the *Epic of Gilgamesh* not a sacred text?” How much might need to be added to it to have it be comprehended as being such? How much would have to be removed from a sacred text for it to no longer present as one?

These questions echo an issue raised by Smith when discussing the origins of the term ‘religion,’ in that the traditions and beliefs of extinct peoples are typically seen as monolithic and are described as ‘the religion of’ a people but have no name.²²⁹ What makes these ‘religions’ and not merely culture, myth, or ritual? This may find fertile ground in the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls. There, debates are ongoing regarding how various texts understood alternatively as ‘rewritten bible’ or ‘biblical commentary’ were treated by their authors and those who read them.²³⁰

A third issue for further research involves the philosophical concept of hylomorphism. This concept was put forth first by Aristotle and involves understanding objects as metaphysically complex, consisting of both matter (*hyle*) and form (*morphe*).²³¹ To my understanding this has not been applied to the study of sacred objects by modern scholarship, but may provide a useful system to help describe the complex objective and subjective natures of sacred texts. A fourth thing, in the realm of philosophy like the previous, is the role that this self-reference plays in paradox. In philosophy, self-reference is typically of interest due to being a component (perhaps a necessary one) to paradox.²³² If threads of self-reference run through understandings of the sacred, perhaps there are unexplored ties between paradox and the sacred.

229 Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 58–60.

230 See for example Uusimäki, “Use of Scripture in 4QBeatitudes,” 83; Collins, “Epilogue,” 428n26; Bernstein, “4Q252.”

231 Evnine, *Making Objects and Events*, 2–5.

232 Bolander, “Self-Reference.”

A final avenue of study would be to seek to incorporate theory and practice from the study of sacred images and sacred spaces. Just as self-reference in sacred texts might act to self-sacralize, parallels may be drawn to the ‘language’ of iconography in sacred images and spaces. As my system involves the understanding of sacred texts as sacred objects, it would only be natural as a further step to look to how other sacred objects are ‘read’ in order to better understand how to read sacred texts.

Each of these paths for further research work towards serving the primary intent of this work: the development of a heuristic system. Whatever objections there may be to some of the individual examples, or to the assertions of the self-sacralizing nature of these features, my base assertion that self-referential features are a frequent occurrence in sacred texts is undeniable. These features bridge a gap between objective and subjective understandings of the texts. Though few tools currently exist to understand the objective nature of sacred texts, this system should provide the means for the creation of such tools in the future.

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AV – Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā

JUB – Jāiminīya Upaniṣad Brāhmaṇa

PB – Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa

ṚV – Ṛg-Veda Saṃhitā

ŚB – Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa

TS – Taittirīya Saṃhitā

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