Re-examining Textual Boundaries

Towards a Form-Critical Sūrat al-Kahf

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1   Introduction

There is some variety in the junctures at which recent scholarship on *Sūrat al-Kahf* has proposed that this *sūra* be divided, and a number of unifying foci have been suggested in order to justify the *sūra*'s progression through a series of discrete textual blocks. The question of how to break up units of text that were produced before the modern convenience of printed paragraph breaks is a subjective one. James Muilenburg, in his programmatic 1969 essay "Form criticism and beyond," highlights the disagreement between commentators on the limits and scope of literary units within biblical texts. He states that "more often than not, no defence is offered for the isolation of the pericope. It has even been averred that it does not really matter"; as he goes on to comment, however, "on the contrary, it seems...to be of considerable consequence."[1] Within the context of the Qurʾān, Neal Robinson addresses the modern tendency to impose textual boundaries as follows:[2]

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1   James Muilenberg, Form criticism and beyond, *Journal of biblical literature* 88 (1969), 1–18, p. 9.

2   Neal Robinson, Hands outstretched. Towards a re-reading of *Sūrat al-Māʾida, Journal of qurʾanic studies* 3 (2001), 1–19, pp. 2–3. The issue of imposing paragraph breaks onto the Qurʾān was more recently raised in a 2012 Ph.D. thesis from Georgetown University, in which Rabia Bajwa comments that "the concept of a 'paragraph,' constructed around a particular theme or concept remains literary." Rabia Bajwa, *Divine story telling as self-presentation. An analysis of* Sūrat al-Kahf, Ph.D. diss. (Georgetown University 2012), 23. Bajwa is here questioning the reading of qurʾanic verses as discrete units in themselves, suggesting that what a modern reader would term a "paragraph break" could bear no relation to verse boundaries, but could transcend these, with thematic breaks falling as easily in the middle of a verse, as at its end. Bajwa would seem to be arguing from a different standpoint to Robinson, inasmuch as she presents paragraphs as essentially modern structuring devices, which transcend older devices such as end rhyme and other indicators of verse closure. Robinson, meanwhile, states that we must be "attentive listeners." His understanding would seem to be that paragraphs are an organic part of a *sūra*'s structure. See also the discussion in Angelika Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, Berlin-New York 1981, repr. with revisions 2007.

In the modern world, most literate people are accustomed to dealing with documents that are furnished with subheadings and broken into paragraphs. Hence, when they read the Qur'an, they tend almost instinctively to divide the *sūra*s into sections on the basis of changes in subject matter. In my experience, this is the case even with Muslims who can recite many of the *sūra*s from memory. Like everyone else, they are part of a culture that has long been dominated by the conventions of the written word.

Robinson suggests some criteria by which qur'anic paragraph breaks can be more accurately identified, explaining that:

> in the early days of Islam, the Qur'an was primarily an oral-aural phenomenon. Therefore, if we wish to establish criteria for identifying the *sūra* sections, we must be attentive listeners. When listening to someone reciting the Qur'an, it is hard to detect a change in subject matter unless there is a verbal cue, for instance a stereotyped formula of the sort that introduce the narratives. On the other hand, the listener may often sense a transition in the discourse on the basis of verbal cues, regardless of whether or not these are followed by obvious changes in subject matter.[3]

Studies carried out by Robinson and others have isolated introductory formulae such as *a-lam tarā, wa-idh, inna*, or *yas'alūnaka 'an* as indicators of structural divide.[4] Attention has also frequently been paid to formulae of address, e.g. *yā banī Isrā'īl, yā ayyuhā lladhīna āmanū*, or *yā ayyuhā l-nās*. A posited change in theme, genre, or prevalent *Leitwort* similarly acts as a justification for the hypothetical delineation of textual blocks. While some of these particular indicators are not present in *Sūrat al-Kahf*, it can be observed that the first reference to the Companions of the Cave in Q 18:9 (*am ḥasibta anna aṣḥāb*

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3   Robinson, Hands outstretched, 2–3.
4   See especially Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an. A contemporary approach to a veiled text*, London 1996; ibid., Hands outstretched; A.H. Mathias Zahniser, The word of God and the apostleship of 'Īsā. A narrative analysis of Āl 'Imrān (3):33–62, *Journal of Semitic studies* 36 (1991), 77–112; ibid., Major transitions and thematic borders in two long *sūrah*s. *al-Baqarah* and *al-Nisā'*, in Issa J. Boullata (ed.), *Literary structures of religious meaning in the Qur'an* (Richmond, UK 2000), 26–55; Nevin Reda El-Tahry, *Textual integrity and coherence in the Qur'an*, Ph.D. diss., Toronto 2010; and Marianna Klar, Synchronic and diachronic approaches to sura structure. The example of *Sūrat al-Baqara, Journal of qur'anic studies* 19 (2017, forthcoming). See also Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, 175–6 and *passim*. Neuwirth gives examples of introductory and closing formulae in mid- to late-Meccan *sūra*s. None of the examples she provides, however, fall on borders within *Sūrat al-Kahf* (to my knowledge).

al-kahfi wa l-raqīm . . .) is regularly taken to demarcate a new section within the *sūra*, as is the introduction of Moses in Q 18:60 (*wa-idh qāla Mūsā li-fatīhi . . .*). This latter example features the supposed introductory formula *wa-idh*, and the *wa-idh* that occurs at the outset of Q 18:50 ("We said to the angels, 'Bow down before Adam' . . .") is also felt by some to indicate a new section of the *sūra*. Q 18:16 ("Now that you have left such people, and what they worshipped instead of God . . ."), however, is consistently considered as an integral part of the Companions material, and the conversational *wa-idh* that occurs there is not held to be suggestive of any sort of thematic or textual break. Similarly, the opening formula *a-lam tarā*, identified as introductory in a number of Medinan *sūra*s, is singled out by Angelika Neuwirth as rarely being indicative of structural divide in mid- to late-Meccan material.[5] Indeed, any *sūra* will contain a number of potential structural indicators, some of which are clearly more suggestive of divide in that specific context than others. The matter of a *sūra*'s dominant themes, meanwhile, is by necessity largely reader-dependent, and an accurate definition of qur'anic genres remains to be compiled.

Within the example of *al-Kahf*, while there is some agreement on boundaries of Q 18:9–26 for the Companions of the Cave pericope, and Q 18:60–82 for the Moses material, the hypothetical divisions that punctuate the central section of the *sūra* (from verses 27 to 59) and the suggested thematic structure of the material that follows the Moses narrative (verses 83 to 110) remain highly ambiguous. Following Muilenburg, I would like to argue that further attention could be paid to the precise limits of the text units that make up *Sūrat al-Kahf*, and I propose a reinvestigation of the evidence for their attribution to specific thematic blocks. The five illustrative paradigms featured in Table 11.1 (below) are those of Mohammed Arkoun,[6] Angelika Neuwirth,[7] Mustansir Mir,[8] Ian Netton,[9] and Hannelies Koloska.[10] In the conclusion to this article I will

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5   Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, 240.
6   Mohammed Arkoun, Lecture de la sourate 18, *Annales. Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 35 (1980), 418–35.
7   Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, 268.
8   Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān. A study of Iṣlāḥī's concept of* naẓm *in* Tadabbur-i Qur'ān, Indianapolis 1986.
9   Ian R. Netton, Towards a modern *tafsīr* of *Sūrat al-Kahf*. Structure and semiotics, *Journal of qur'ānic studies* 2 (2000), 67–87.
10   Hannelies Koloska, *Offenbarung, Ästhetik, und Koranexegese. Zwei Studien zu Sure 18 (al-Kahf)*, Wiesbaden 2015. The division of the *sūra* proposed by Arthur Droge in his *The Qur'ān. A new annotated translation* (Sheffield 2013), 185–92 is in many ways compatible with that of Koloska. Droge proposes the following named units: "The purpose of the Qur'ān" (verses 1–8), "The story of the men of the cave" (verses 9–26), "Encouragement to

suggest an alternative paradigm, based on explicit thematic, lexical, and structural criteria.

Arkoun's 1980 article on *Sūrat al-Kahf* starts from the premise that the *sūra* is a composite entity, formed of a number of originally independent pericopes that can, nonetheless, be argued to rotate around a central (unspecified) theme. Accordingly, he initially divides the *sūra* along chronological lines at verses 8/9, 25/26, 31/32, 82/83, and 101/102.[11] Thematically, however, he proposes another, over-riding structure, breaking at verses 8/9, 25/26/27, 59/60, and 98/99. Thus, Arkoun argues that the Companions material from verses 9 to 25 forms a coherent narrative unit ("une première unité narrative"), as do verses 60 to 98, which he identifies as a unified textual block by dint of its addressing motifs from a single source ("deux récits puisant des éléments dans une source commune"), the *Alexander Romance*. The remainder of the *sūra*

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the prophet" (verses 27–31), "Parable of the two men" (verses 32–44), "Parable of the rain and plants" (verses 45–6), "A judgment scene" (verses 47–9), "Idolatry is worship of Iblīs and the Jinn" (verses 50–1), "A judgment scene" (verses 52–3), "Disbelief and its consequences" (verses 54–9), "The story of Moses and the servant of God" (verses 60–82), "The story of Dhū-l-Qarnayn" (verses 83–98), "A judgment scene" (verses 99–101), "Punishment and reward" (verses 102–8), "Oceans of revelation" (verse 109), and "The prophet only human" (verse 110). It is only the borders at 101/102 and 109/110 that differ from those suggested by Koloska. The first of these is, however, in line with Mir and Netton's analyses, and the second is also proposed by Neuwirth. No justification is provided for the placement of borders at these particular junctures, although the names provided for the units give some indication of Droge's rationale here.

11 Arkoun states that he is following Blachère's analysis of the *sūra*. Qur'anic chronology is by no means a precise science. In contrast to Arkoun's (Blachère's) suggestion of verses 1–8, 26–31, and 82–101 being Medinan, Theodor Nöldeke, who works from traditional information, mostly al-Suyūṭī, cites the following as Medinan verses: 1–8, 28 (in whole or in part), 83, and 107–10. Nöldeke, however, adds to this his own impression that the Moses and Dhū l-Qarnayn material, which he extends from verses 60 to 98, may stem from a different time period to the remainder of the *sūra* (Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The history of the Qurʾān*, ed. and trans. by Wolfgang H. Behn [Leiden 2013], 114–5), an instinct that would appear to be corroborated by Arkoun's identification of the same material as a unified textual block. Mehdi Bazargan meanwhile, who breaks the text into thematic clusters which are then reordered in accordance with increasing mean verse length, suggests breaks at 8/9, 28/29, and 59/60. See Behnam Sadeghi, The chronology of the Qurʾān. A stylometric research program, *Arabica* 58 (2011), 210–99, p. 232. Richard Bell, whose division of the sūra is purely contextual, suggests diachronic breaks at 5/6, 9/10, 12/13, 21a/21b, 26/27, 46/47, 53/54, 59/60, 82/83, 98/99, 101/102, 102/103, 106/107, 108/109, and 109/110: Richard Bell, *The Qurʾān translated, with a critical rearrangement of the suras* (Edinburgh 1937), 1:273–83. For a critique of Nöldeke and Bell's diachronic treatments of the *sūra* see Koloska, *Offenbarung, Ästhetik, und Koranexegese*, 43–5.

(verses 1–8, 27–59,[12] and 99–110) consists of exhortatory material ("le discours prédicatif") addressing themes of direct relevance to the Prophet and his community. While defining the *sūra*'s structure is not the focus of Arkoun's article, he presents some rationale behind the divisions he proposes. Furthermore, there are critical differences between the scheme suggested by Arkoun for the *sūra* and the paradigms supplied by others. These boundaries will be investigated in more depth below.

Structure is the explicit focus of Neuwirth's treatment of the *sūra* in her 1981 *Studien zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*. Neuwirth identifies *al-Kahf* as a mid-Meccan *sūra* of tripartite form: like *sūra*s 15, 20, 26, and 27, she argues, it displays a structure whereby a clearly demarcated central narrative section ("klar eingegrenztem Erzählungsteil") is flanked by an introductory and a concluding section. This is also a feature, Neuwirth argues, of some late Meccan *sūra*s (7, 11, and 12).[13] Neuwirth accordingly apportions *Sūrat al-Kahf* to six blocks: the Introduction ("Anfangsteil"), the four blocks ("Companions of the Cave," "Parables and Polemics," "Moses," and "Dhū l-Qarnayn") that constitute the Central Section ("Mittelteil"), and the Conclusion ("Schlussteil"). Within these larger blocks, she proposes a number of semi-permeable structural borders.

Neuwirth gives no explicit reasons for the location of the subdivisions she posits for *Sūrat al-Kahf* but, in a general sense, mentions changes in thematic content, rhyme pattern, verse length or structure, subject, or speaker, as being indicative of structural divide.[14] Such occurrences do fall at some of the borders Neuwirth posits for the *sūra*, as will become clear below. She also gives examples of specific opening and closing formulae in other *sūra*s of this type: Q 7:174 (*wa-kadhālika nufaṣṣilu l-ayāt…*) and Q 26:190 (*inna fī dhālika la-āyatin…*) serve to close textual units; the formula *wa-mā khalaqnā l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍ* opens a textual unit in Q 15:85. Neuwirth stresses, however, that there are no hard and fast rules with such formulae. It also seems apparent from Neuwirth's analysis that the self-same motif can be classified as "introductory," "concluding," or "narrative" depending on its location. Iblīs material is thus described as "introductory" in *sūra* 7, "narrative" in *sūra* 18, and "concluding" in *sūra* 15. Indeed, it is interesting to note in this regard that much of the material

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12   Verse 26 ("Say, 'God knows best how long they stayed'…") appears to have been omitted from Arkoun's analysis.

13   Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, 242.

14   Ibid., 239–40. Neuwirth refers the reader to Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin 1926), 4–6.

TABLE 11.1   *The disputed boundaries of* Sūrat al-Kahf

	Arkoun (1980)	Neuwirth (1981)	Mir (1986)	Netton (2000)	Koloska (2015)
Introduction	1–8	1–8 (7–8)	1–8	1–8	1–8
Companions of the Cave	9–25 (26)	9–31 (13–21) (22) (23–4) (25–31)	9–26	9–26	9–26
Exhortation	27–59		27–31	27–31	27–8
Eschatology					29–31
Parable I	(32–44)	32–59	32–49	32–44	32–44
Parable II	(45–6)	(45–6)		45–59	45 46
Eschatology		(47–9)			47–9
Iblīs (*wa-idh*)		(50–3)	50–9		50–1
Eschatology					52–3
Exhortation		(54–9)			54–9
Moses (*wa-idh*)	60–98	60–82 (65–70) (71–6) (77–82)	60–82	60–82	60–82 (65–82)
Dhū l-Qarnayn		83–102	83–101	83–101	83–98
Eschatology	99–110	(99–102)	102–10	102–10	99–102
Closure		103–10 (106–8) (109) (110)			103–8 109–10

Key: ▢ narrative material   ▨ non-narrative material

classified by Arkoun as "exhortatory" ("prédicatif") within the context of *al-Kahf* is labelled as "narrative" by Neuwirth.[15]

The flexibility that is inherent in any classification of the material within *Sūrat al-Kahf* becomes more manifest when the work of Mir is taken into consideration. Mir's monograph, *Coherence in the Qur'an*, published in 1986, is a critical elaboration of the thought of the twentieth century Pakistani intellectual Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (1904–97). Iṣlāḥī based his work of qur'anic exegesis, in turn, on the principles of his teacher, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī (1863–1930), who argued that the Qur'ān is composed around a number of overlapping thematic structures. Each *sūra*, for instance, is held to rotate around a central axis (*'amūd*), "the unifying thread" through which every verse should be interpreted.[16] *Sūra*s can also consist of a number of sections, each of which possesses its own individual *naẓm* (coherence).[17] Iṣlāḥī divides *Sūrat al-Kahf* in accordance with two rotational axes: "warning to the Quraysh that affluence should not make them arrogantly deny the truth" and "instructions to the Muslims to persevere in the face of the Quraysh's opposition to them and wait for deliverance."[18] Mir sees this as an apposite analysis of the *sūra*, which he divides into five stories and three reinforcing passages. The five stories are those of the Companions of the Cave (Q 18:9–26), the Two Gardens (Q 18:32–49), Adam and Satan (Q 18:50–9), Moses (Q 18:60–82), and Dhū l-Qarnayn (Q 18:83–101). Mir argues that they each corroborate Iṣlāḥī's proposed *'amūd* by emphasizing themes of oppression, material affluence, defiance and its consequences, patience, and humility. The reinforcing passages, meanwhile, which run from Q 18:1–8, 27–31, and 102–10, again "state and reinforce the *'amūd* as described by Iṣlāḥī."[19]

Netton's 2000 article on *Sūrat al-Kahf* for the *Journal of qur'anic studies* works according to a different paradigm. Netton seeks to investigate how the archetypes "sleeper," "proto-Muslim," "hero," "mystic," and "anti-hero" serve to elaborate the *sūra*'s main themes. These Netton posits as "the 'brevity and mystery of life,' the 'study of Existence and reflection on the Revelation' and the force of reason and harmony versus the force of chaos."[20] Netton divides the *sūra* into eight discrete blocks, with a focus on *four* named narratives: the Companions

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15   Neuwirth defines her paragraphs in accordance with a number of pre-set categories, in
      which she follows, to a great part, the classifications of Horowitz. See preceding note.

16   Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān*, 34.

17   Ibid., 42.

18   Ibid., 68.

19   Ibid., 68.

20   Netton, Towards a modern *tafsīr* of *Sūrat al-Kahf*, 68.

of the Cave, the Two Gardens, Moses, and Dhū l-Qarnayn. Mir's identification of the reference to Adam and Satan as a narrative element is not an emphasis shared by Netton, nor does Netton follow Neuwirth's classification of the entire central section of the *sūra* as "narrative." Netton's eight blocks, moreover, do not exhibit a perfect match with the eight blocks posited by Iṣlāḥī/Mir, and stand in some contrast to the six blocks suggested by Neuwirth, and the five put forward by Arkoun.

Correspondingly, perhaps, the classification of the *sūra*'s material in accordance with form and genre is one of the explicit foci of Koloska's 2015 monograph on *Sūrat al-Kahf*. Koloska divides the material into three registers: exhortation ("Verkündigung"), narrative ("Erzählung"), and commentary ("Kommentar"). Like Arkoun and Netton, Koloska is more inclined to view the material that exists between the explicitly narrative blocks (here defined as four: the Companions, the Parables, Moses, and Dhū l-Qarnayn) as separate entities that serve to unite the *sūra* and give it its coherence. Like Arkoun, Koloska comments on the lack of thematic and stylistic connection between the narrative elements of the *sūra*, here, however, counted as four rather than two.[21] The *sūra* is exemplified by Koloska as an illustration of God's power and might, as a warning of the final judgment, and as an exposition of the differences between believers and non-believers, and between human and Divine knowledge.[22] This is in contrast to Mir's stated themes of "warning to the Quraysh that affluence should not make them arrogantly deny the truth" and "instructions to the Muslims to persevere in the face of the Quraysh's opposition to them and wait for deliverance," and Netton's of "the 'brevity and mystery of life,' the 'study of Existence and reflection on the Revelation' and the force of reason and harmony versus the force of chaos." The boundaries Koloska proposes, moreover, show some disparity with those of the other scholars under discussion here, especially with regard to the parables and the Iblīs material,[23] and the close of the Dhū l-Qarnayn pericope, placed by Koloska at 98/99 on the strength of the shift to the Divine first person plural at this point in the *sūra*.[24]

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21   Koloska, *Offenbarung, Ästhetik, und Koranexegese*, 31.

22   Ibid., 30–1.

23   Koloska initially suggests an unusual divide of the two parables in *al-Kahf* at 32–43, 44–5, and 46 (Koloska, *Offenbarung, Ästhetik, und Koranexegese*, 34), but this is not fully reflected in her later discussion of the *sūra*'s structure. Although verse 46 is again pulled out as a "Commentary" verse (Koloska, *Offenbarung, Ästhetik, und Koranexegese*, 48, 50, 108–9), verse 45 there exists as a standalone unit (Koloska, *Offenbarung, Ästhetik, und Koranexegese*, 50, 109–10). It is this latter reading of the *sūra* that I reflect in Table 11.1 above.

24   Koloska, *Offenbarung, Ästhetik, und Koranexegese*, 161.

2   The Form-Critical Boundaries of the *Sūra*

The fundamental areas of disagreement over *Sūrat al-Kahf* – the isolation of its principal themes, the categorization of its constituent elements, and the location of its major textual borders – contribute to the presence of a variety of hypotheses regarding the *sūra*'s structure. While the clear references to the Companions of the Cave in verse 9, and Moses in verse 60, have led to the unanimous positing of firm structural borders at these points, there is less, and in some instances, no consensus on the location of the other boundaries of the *sūra*. The material between verses 27 and 59, and from 99 to the end of the *sūra*, would appear to be particularly labile. Mohammed Arkoun also raises the possibility that the two text blocks 60 to 82 and 83 to 98 are in fact a single narrative unit.

The issue of what does and does not constitute narrative is especially influential in defining the *sūra*'s structural blocks. Thus, verses 27 to 31, for instance, are classified by Arkoun, Mir, Netton, and Koloska, as an "exhortatory" section which either connects to, or acts as a hinge to, the following material. Neuwirth, meanwhile, presents these verses as an integral part of the Companions narrative.[25] It is notable that some sort of division of the *sūra* at 31/32 is, however, acknowledged by all five scholars in Table 11.1. The question then is simply whether the material that immediately precedes this is to be attached to the Companions sub-section, as proposed by Neuwirth, whether it should be viewed as a stand-alone unit, as can be seen in the paradigms of Mir, Netton, and Koloska, or whether Arkoun is correct in positing a unified central section. It is the function and directionality, and not the location, of the *sūra*'s paragraphs that is up for discussion at 31/32. A similar observation can be made regarding the border at 44/45, acknowledged by all five scholars, but seen by Netton as a transition between the "narrative" and "exhortatory" sections of the

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25   Indeed, the firm border posited by others at verse 26/27 does not feature in Neuwirth's analysis of the *sūra's* structure at all. The deductive process behind Neuwirth's suggestion of a structural unit Q 18:25 ("The Sleepers stayed in their cave for three hundred years") to the beginning of the Parable of the Two Gardens ("Tell them the parable of two men…"), at verse 32, is not supplied. Although verses 25 and 26 contain references to the length of the Companions' sleep, this is not true of the remainder of this posited block, which consists of an address to the Prophet (verses 27 to 28), followed by an eschatological section (verses 29 to 31). Yet it could be argued that the *qul* commands that occur in the middle of verses 22 ("…Say: My Lord knows best how many they were…"), and 24 ("…Say: May my Lord guide me closer to what is right"), and in verse initial position in verses 26 ("Say: God knows best how long they stayed…"), and 29 ("Say: Now the truth has come from your Lord…"), are suggestive of a degree of cohesion to this textual block. One response would be to connect this material to the end of the Companions narrative, as Neuwirth proposes.

sūra, by Arkoun as an integral part of an "exhortatory" section, and by Neuwirth, Mir, and Koloska as a sub-section of the "narrative" center of the *sūra*. Indeed, it is only the Companions and the Moses/Dhū l-Qarnayn material that is consistently classified as "narrative": the categorization of verses 27 to 31, 45 to 46, 47 to 49, 50 to 51, 52 to 53, 54 to 59, and 99 to 102, remain in dispute.

The first of the *sūra*'s disputed passages, text block 27–31, is located between the last explicit reference to the Companions in verse 26 (which opens, "Say: God knows best how long they stayed…") and the injunction "Tell them the parable of two men…" in verse 32. That there is some sort of a textual border at the close of verse 26 is suggested by the fact that it terminates with the message, "they have no one to protect them other than Him; He does not allow anyone to share His rule." This would appear to be an exposition of the self-same theme of the solitary omnipotence of God that is put forward in verses 4 to 5 ("It warns those people who assert, 'God has offspring.' They have no knowledge about this, nor did their forefathers – it is a monstrous assertion that comes out of their mouths: what they say is nothing but lies"). This is, moreover, a theme that returns in verse 44 ("… the only protection is that of God, the True God…"). It is also implicit in the *sūra*'s denouncement of the *jinn* in verse 51 ("I did not make them witnesses to the creation of the heavens and earth, nor to their own creation; I do not take as My supporters those who lead others astray"), and it occurs towards the end of the *sūra* in verse 102: "Did they think that they could take My servants as masters instead of Me? We have prepared Hell as the disbelievers' resting place." All of these statements fall towards the end of apparent textual blocks, and could be posited as indicative of impending closure.

The repetition of material from the *sūra*'s opening at its close is remarked upon by Neuwirth, who points out, among others, the parallels between the declaration "It warns those people who assert, 'God has offspring,'" and two of the *sūra*'s final statements, "your God is One" and "give no one a share in the worship due to his Lord" (verse 110).[26] Koloska, too, makes reference to the circularity of the opening and closing material,[27] emphasizing in general terms the coherence of the *sūra*'s themes,[28] and giving specific examples of potential correspondences.[29] The point I am making here, however, is subtly different. The challenge that is put forward in verses 4 to 5 would appear to provide a primary structural focus for the rest of the *sūra*, one that is addressed not only in the closing statements of verse 110, but in the concluding material

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26   Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, 261.

27   Koloska, *Offenbarung, Ästhetik, und Koranexegese*, 31.

28   Ibid., 32.

29   Ibid., 32ff.

of a number of the *sūra*'s potential candidates for discrete textual blocks. If one looks not at general themes, but at the specific *Leitwörter* used to indicate entities other than God (*min dūnihi/min dūni llāh/min dūnī*) to which one might erroneously turn, it can be seen that these occur at verses 14, 15, 26, 27, 43, 50, and 102. This concept would accordingly appear to be dominant within the Companions narrative, occurring again at the beginning of the disputed text block 27–31, towards the close of the Two Gardens pericope, alongside the direct reference to Iblīs, and after the final reference to Dhū l-Qarnayn. An element of thematic structuring would therefore seem to be undeniable.

TABLE 11.2 *The various reiterations of* min dūnihi/min dūni llāh/min dūnī *and how these connect to the initial challenge of the* sūra

Q 18:4–5	*wa-yundhira lladhīna qālū **ttakhadha** llāhu waladan mā lahum bihi min ʿilmin wa-lā li-abāʾihim kaburat kalimatan takhruju min afwāhihim in yaqūlūna illā **kadhiban***
Q 18:14	*... fa-qālū rabbunā rabbu l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi lan nadʿū **min dūnihi ilāhan** ...*
Q 18:15	*hāʾulāʾi qawmunā **ttakhadhū min dūnihi ālihatan** law-lā yaʾtūna ʿalayhim bi-sulṭānin bayyinin fa-man aẓlamu mimmani ftarā ʿalā llāhi **kadhiban***
Q 18:26	*... mā lahum **min dūnihi min waliyyin** wa-lā yushriku fī ḥukmihi aḥadan*
Q 18:27	*... lan tajid **min dūnihi** multaḥadan*
Q 18:43	*fa-mā kāna lahu min fiʾatin yanṣurūnahu **min dūni llāhi** wa-mā kāna mina l-muntaṣirīn*
Q 18:50	*... a-fa-**tattakhidhūnahu** wa-dhurriyyatahu **awliyāʾa min dūnī** ...*
Q 18:102	*... a-fa-ḥasiba lladhīna kafarū an **yattakhidhū** ʿibādī **min dūnī awliyāʾ** ...*

A degree of structuring would appear to be at play, however, in other of the *sūra*'s recurring elements. These overlapping recurrences can be mapped across the *sūra*, as shown below, in Table 11.3. Thus, the nature and purpose of God's scripture, for instance, is the focus of verses 1 to 6, 27 to 28, 54 to 57, and 109. This is regularly followed by an injunction to the Prophet for the disbelievers (verses 6, 28–9, 57–9); his lack of influence over the outcome is the explicit message of verses 57–9 and is implicit in verse 110 ("... I am only a human being, like you..."). That God will "reduce all this to barren dust" (verse 8) is echoed in the fact that "their deeds come to nothing: on the Day of Resurrection We shall

give them no weight" (verse 105); the term *ṣaʿīdan juruzan*, employed in verse 8, is, moreover, reflected in the *ṣaʿīdan zalaqan* to which we are told the garden-owner's land might be reduced in verse 40. The *sūra* presents two heaven and hell diptychs, at verses 29–31 and 106–8, and there are several brief allusions to Judgment Day (*yawma*, verses 47, 52, 105; *yawmaʾidhin*, verses 99 and 100). The inevitability of the Hour (*al-sāʿah*, verses 21 and 36) and the truth of God's promise (*waʿd allāh/waʿd rabbī*, verses 21 and 98, cf. also the use of the related term *mawʿid* at verses 48 and 58) are also recurring themes. The *sūra* denies the validity of protectors (*awliyāʾ*) that might be sought apart from God at verses 17, 26, 50, and 102, as is the concept of His sharing (*yushriku* etc.) His rule is repudiated in verses 26, 38, 42, 52, and 110, while the act of ridiculing His messages and His messengers (*ittakhadhū āyātī… huzuwan*) is criticized in verses 56 and 106. The status of worldly goods as the temporary adornments (*zīnah*) of this life is raised in verses 7, 28, and 46. There are three detailed descriptions of Judgment Day, in verses 47–9, 52–3, and 99–102, and two references to hell, at verses 53 and 100–2. Other repeated lexical elements occur only in what would appear to be discrete sections of the *sūra*, as will become apparent below.

It is interesting to observe that the two unanimously acknowledged "narrative" sections of the *sūra* (the Companions, at verses 9–26, and Moses/Dhū l-Qarnayn, at verses 60–98) are largely excluded from this thematic skeleton.

TABLE 11.3   *The overlapping structure of other of the* sūra's *recurring elements*

Q 18:1–5	GOD'S MESSAGE
Q 18:6	PROPHET IS POWERLESS TO CHANGE OUTCOME
Q 18:7–8	*God will reduce all to dust* (*ṣaʿīdan juruzan*)
Q 18:7	*worldly goods are a* (*temporary*) *adornment* (*zīnah*)
Q 18:17	no protectors (*awliyāʾ*) outside of God
Q 18:21	*the inevitability of the Hour* (*al-sāʿah*) *and the truth of God's promise* (*waʿd*)
Q 18:26	no protectors (*awliyāʾ*) outside of God; He gives no share (*sh-r-k*) in His rule
Q 18:27	GOD'S MESSAGE
Q 18:28	PROPHET IS POWERLESS TO CHANGE OUTCOME
Q 18:28	*worldly goods are a* (*temporary*) *adornment* (*zīnah*)
Q 18:29–31	**heaven and hell diptych** (***jannātu ʿadnin* and *nār***)
Q 18:36	*the inevitability of the Hour* (*al-sāʿah*)
Q 18:38	He gives no share (*sh-r-k*) in His rule
Q 18:40	*the garden-owner's possessions will turn to dust* (*ṣaʿīdan zalaqan*)

Q 18:42	He gives no share (*sh-r-k*) in His rule
Q 18:46	*worldly goods are a (temporary) adornment (zīnah)*
Q 18:47–9	*Judgment Day (yawma)*
Q 18:48	*the appointed time (mawʿid)*
Q 18:50	no protectors (*awliyāʾ*) outside of God
Q 18:52–3	*Judgment Day (yawma)*
Q 18:52	He gives no share (*sh-r-k*) in His rule
Q 18:53	**hell alone (*al-nār*)**
Q 18:54–9	GOD'S MESSAGE
Q 18:56	THEY RIDICULE HIS MESSAGES AND HIS MESSENGERS (*ittakhadhū āyātī… huzuwan*)
Q 18:57–9	PROPHET IS POWERLESS TO CHANGE OUTCOME
Q 18:58	*the appointed time (mawʿid)*
Q 18:98	*the truth of God's promise (waʿd)*
Q 18:99–102	*Judgment Day (yawmaʾidhin)*
Q 18:100	*Judgment Day (yawmaʾidhin)*
Q 18:100–2	**hell alone (*Jahannam*)**
Q 18:102	no protectors (*awliyāʾ*) outside of God
Q 18:103–6	*God will reduce good deeds to nothing (lā nuqīmu lahum… waznan)*
Q 18:105	*Judgment Day (yawma)*
Q 18:105–8	**heaven and hell diptych (*jannātu l-firdaws* and *Jahannam*)**
Q 18:106	THEY RIDICULE HIS MESSAGES AND HIS MESSENGERS (*ittakhadhū āyātī… huzuwwan*)
Q 18:109	GOD'S MESSAGE
Q 18:110	PROPHET IS POWERLESS TO CHANGE OUTCOME; He gives no share (*sh-r-k*) in His rule

While the issues of God's protection and the inevitability of the Hour do occur within the Companions material, and the truth of God's promise is highlighted by Dhū l-Qarnayn, there is a much greater density of pan-*sūra* lexical elements in the initial, central, and final clusters. Furthermore, the reiterated themes of God's message and the Prophet's relative lack of power – that introduce and conclude the *sūra* and are, therefore, highly likely to possess some sort of bracketing function – similarly occur, loosely, at either side of the Companions and Moses/Dhū l-Qarnayn textual blocks. The issue, then, is whether the reiterated themes of God's message and the Prophet's relative lack of power similarly bracket a central section, or whether the central section exists independently

of these bracketing blocks that serve, instead, to enclose the Companions and the Moses/Dhū l-Qarnayn sections. In my view, a central section that runs from verse 27 to 59 seems the most likely. The reiteration of the core theme of God's sole power and sole right to rule at verse 26 strengthens an impression of closure at this particular juncture, and running the Moses/Dhū l-Qarnayn section as far as verse 108 seems – as will become apparent below – counter-intuitive. It is worth observing that none of the scholars in Table 11.1 propose verses 103 to 108 as anything other than non-narrative, and concluding to the *sūra* as a whole.

The matter of the internal structure of this posited central section also remains to be resolved. It is here that the discrepancies between the various paradigms of Table 11.1 are at their greatest. The initial question is that of the relationship of the second parable, which opens at verse 45, to the first, opening at verse 32. Q 18:44 again contains a riposte to the challenge of verses 4 to 5, implying closure at this point, but the borders at verses 32 and 45 are marked by the repeated opening formula *wa-ḍrib lahum mathal…*, suggestive of a degree of underlying connection. This section of the *sūra* is, furthermore, characterized by other repeated lexical elements that are unique to this textual block. The reference to "God's reward" at the close of verse 31 (*… niʿma l-thawāb wa-ḥasunat murtafaqan*), is thus echoed in verse 44 (*… huwa khayrun thawāban wa-khayrun ʿuqban*), and again in verse 46 (*… khayrun ʿinda rabbika thawāban wa-khayrun amalan*). This would appear to strongly suggest the presence of some sort of paragraph running from verses 32 to 44, and another from verses 45 to 46: the opening at verses 32 and 45 is indicated by the presence of the formula "Tell them the Parable … (*wa-ḍrib lahum mathal…*)," again unique to this particular section of the *sūra*.

The presence of noticeable structural parallels between verses 45–9 and 50–3, however – a single verse *mathal* is followed by an explanatory verse, and then eschatological material – questions the rigidity of the structural border suggested by the repeated reference to "God's reward" (*thawāb*) in verse 46. That a new paragraph opens at verse 50 is implicit in the *wa-idh* that occurs at the outset of this verse ("We said to the angels, 'Bow down before Adam' …"); *wa-idh* is a recognized structural opener in qurʾanic material, and the introduction of a new set of characters here is self-evident. Yet this brief Iblīs pericope is apparently difficult to classify. Arkoun, Netton, and Koloska consider it to be part of an exhortatory sub-unit than runs from 47–59, 45–59, or 50–1, respectively; Neuwirth and Mir delegate it to a narrative sub-section that either spans verses 50–3 or 50–9; there is no consensus on either its function or the precise location of its opening and closure.

It is similarly worthy of note that, in addition to the lexical connections between verses 31, 44, and 46, and the structural parallels between verses 45–9 and 50–3, the Parable of the Two Gardens is striking for the cumulative ways in which it anticipates and makes reference to the Iblīs pericope and the wider Fall narrative (see Table 11.4, below). Its garden (*jannah*) setting recalls the garden (*jannah*) inhabited by Adam and his wife in *sūra*s 2, 7, and 20. The accusation "wronging himself" (*ẓālim li-nafsihi*) directed at the garden-owner utilizes the *Leitwörter* of Adam and Eve's plea for forgiveness (*ẓalamnā anfusanā*) in *Sūrat al-Aʿrāf*. The reference to creation and forming (*khalaqaka min turābin thumma…thumma…*) is cast in terms used, elsewhere in the Qurʾan, expressly of Adam. Thus we are told *khalaqahu min turābin* in Q 3:59 and *khalaqnākum thumma…thumma…* in Q 7:11.

Also suggestive of the wider primordial context is the garden owner's misguided claim of superiority: his understanding "I have more wealth and a larger following than you" recalls Iblīs' declaration, "I am better than he: You created me from fire and him from clay" in Q 7:12. The assumption of permanence for the garden "I do not think this will ever perish" (Q 18:35) subtly reflects Iblīs's attempt to beguile Adam and Eve through the promise of permanence: "the tree of immortality and a power that never decays" (Q 20:120). Equally subtle are the parallels between the man's assumption that his Lord will give him better if he is returned to him ("even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better there," Q 18:36), and Iblīs' request for postponement of his punishment ("My Lord, give me respite until the Day when they are raised from the dead," Q 15:36). There is a level of juxtaposition between the garden owner of the Parable, who has no troops (*fiʾa*) to help him succeed (in v. 43), and Iblīs, who is told "assault them with your cavalry (*khayl*) and your infantry (*rajil*)" in Q 17:64.

This latter example is, however, of special interest. An almost identical expression is used of Qārūn in Q 28:81: "he had no army to help him against God, nor could he defend himself (*fa-mā kāna lahu min fiʾatin yanṣurūnahu min dūni llāhi wa-mā kāna mina l-muntaṣirīn*)." The Qārūn pericope likewise contains oblique references to the primordial narrative through its utilization of such *Leitwörter* as "corruption on earth" (*al-fasād fī l-arḍ*, Q 28:77; cf. the protest of the angels at Q 2:30) and the issue of superior knowledge (Qārūn claims to have been given great wealth on account of the knowledge he possesses, Q 28:78; the angels concede their inferior knowledge in Q 2:32). The extent to which the primordial narrative structures qurʾanic discourse is a matter I have discussed elsewhere with reference to *Sūrat*

TABLE 11.4   *The links between Q 18:32–44 and the primordial Fall narrative*

Q 18:32 et passim	multiple references to the Parable's setting in a "garden" (*janna*)	Q 2:35; Q 7:19, 22, 27; Q 20:117, 118, 121, 123	Adam and his wife inhabit a "garden" (*janna*)
Q 18:34	…*anā aktharu minka mālan wa-aʿazzu nafaran*	Q 7:12	…*anā khayrun minhu khalaqtanī min nārin wa-khalaqtahu min ṭīn*
Q 18:35	*wa-dakhala jannatahu wa-huwa ẓālimun li-nafsihi…*	Q 7:23	*qālā rabbanā ẓalamnā anfusanā…*
Q 18:35	…*mā aẓunnu an tabīda hādhihi abadan*	Q 20:120	…*hal adulluka ʿalā sha-jarati l-khuld wa-mulkin lā yablā*
Q 18:36	…*la-in rudidtu ilā rabbi la-ajidanna khayran minhā munqalaban*	Q 15:36	*qāla rabb fa-anẓirnī ilā yawmi yubʿathūn*
Q 18:37	*khalaqaka min turābin thumma min nuṭfatin thumma sawwāka rajulan…*	Q 3:59	*mathala ʿĪsā ʿinda llāhi ka-mathali Adama khalaqahu min turābin*
		Q 7:11	*wa-laqad khalaqnākum thumma ṣawwarnākum thumma qulnā li-l-malāʾikati sjudū li-Adam*
Q 18:43	*wa-lam takun lahu fiʾatun yanṣurūnahu min dūni llāhi wa-mā kāna muntaṣiran*	Q 17:64	…*wa-ajlib ʿalayhim bi-khaylika wa-rajilika…*

al-Baqara,[30] and the blurring of temporal lines between past, present, and future events seen at a variety of junctures in *al-Baqara* is similarly in evidence here: all of the phrases and *Leitwörter* listed in Table 11.4 occur

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30   See M.O. Klar, Through the lens of the Adam narrative. A re-consideration of *Sūrat al-Baqara, Journal of qurʾanic studies* 17 (2015), 24–46.

elsewhere, outside of any primordial context. The construct *khalaqaka min turābin thumma... thumma...*, for instance, is utilized in Q 22:5, Q 30:20, Q 35:11, and Q 40:67 with clear reference to mankind as a whole, with no connection to Adam, and the concept of man's turning to dust after death is widely employed in refutations of the Resurrection (thus, for example, Q 13:5; 23:35; 37:53, and *passim*).[31] The two examples cited, however, Q 3:59 and Q 7:11, expressly link the construct to Adam. Taken *cumulatively* alongside the other suggestions of the primordial narrative in Q 18:32–44, the potential for Q 18:37 being a reference to Adam seems clear. Similar arguments can be made regarding the garden setting and the reference to wrongdoing.

Yet it should be observed that the numerous lexical overlaps between the garden owner and the Adam Fall narrative may serve to anticipate the introduction of Iblīs as a named character in Q 18:50, but in no way do they invite a straightforward comparison between one "villain" and the other. Just as dust (*turāb*) and garden (*jannah*) occur in references to the initial act of creation, in contemporaneous exempla, and in descriptions of the afterlife, primordial terminology is utilized to characterize past, present, and hypothetical wrongdoing. The *al-Kahf* Iblīs material is couched in terms not of Iblīs' original act of villainy, but within the wider pan-*sūra* theme of the disputed validity of those claimed to be partners with God. Thus, we are informed that the "they" of verses 50–2, referring back to Iblīs and his offspring (*Iblīs... wa-dhurriyyatahu*), should not be taken as "masters" (*awliyā'*), "supporters" (*'aḍudan*),[32] or "partners" (*shurakā'*). The Two Gardens parable is likewise connected to this theme: the companion (*ṣāḥibuhu*) protests "I will never set up any partner with my Lord (*lā ushriku bi-rabbī aḥadan*)"; the garden-owner eventually bewails, "I wish I had not set up any partner to my Lord (*yā laytanī lam ushrik bi-rabbī aḥadan*)." The intervening material (verses 45–9) is *lexically* connected to the preceding by the repeated opening formula *wa-ḍrib lahum mathal...* in verses 32 and 45, and the near-repeated closing formula *huwa khayrun thawāban wa-khayrun 'uqban* in verses 44–6. It is also *structurally* connected to the following by the parallel inclusion of eschatological material in verses 47–9 and 52–3. The text block that runs from verses 45–9 is, however, *thematically* unrelated to the theme of the paragraphs on either side of it. Instead of addressing the issue of partnership with God, it deals instead with the ephemeral nature

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31   For the qur'anic references to the resurrection, see Patricia Crone, The quranic *mushrikūn* and the resurrection (Parts I and II), *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 75 (2012), 445–72 and 76 (2013), 1–20.

32   A *dis legomenon* which, interestingly, only occurs elsewhere in the Qur'ān in the Moses pericope of Q 28. Cf. the Qārūn narrative adduced above.

of this life, and the inescapability of judgment in the next. The cohesive elements that structure the central block of the *sūra* are complex; rather than being straightforwardly repetitive, they again work cumulatively. A tripartite "narrative" structure to this central section, in which text blocks 32–44, 45–9, and 50–3 are flanked by an introduction (verses 27–31) and a conclusion (verses 54–9), does, however, seem increasingly likely.

This impression is strengthened by close scrutiny of the following section of the *sūra*, which can similarly be regarded as consisting of three thematic blocks: Moses and the Fish, Moses and the Servant of God, and the Dhū l-Qarnayn material. Although Mohammed Arkoun is unique among the commentators in Table 11.1 in *not* considering the transition at verse 82/83 to represent a firm textual border between the Moses and Dhū l-Qarnayn material, the lack of any insulating material between these two supposed textual blocks, and the blurring of our contextually-informed understanding of the confluence of the two seas motif (verses 60–4) and the Dhū l-Qarnayn pericope (verses 83–98) does indeed raise questions over the assumption that we are dealing with two separate paragraphs here. Like the preceding, there are a series of links between the textual blocks that make up the section 60–98. The epithet "Moses" *lexically* connects verses 60–4 to 65–82, while the suggested Alexander background forms a *contextual* bridge between verses 60–4 and verses 83–98.

Structural parallels, meanwhile, imply a link between verses 65–79 and 83–98. Thus, just as the Moses and the Servant of God pericope divides into three parts (the boat; the child; and the wall), Dhū l-Qarnayn witnesses three miraculous sights (the place of the setting of the sun; the place of the rising of the sun; and the construction of the mythical barrier). More subtly, however, a nuanced and coherent thematic progression can be traced from the Servant of God's declaration "I wanted (*aradtu*) to make it defective" (verse 79, with reference to the boat), via "We wanted (*aradnā*) their Lord to replace him with better" (verse 81, with reference to the child), to "Your Lord wanted (*arāda rabbuka*) the boys to reach maturity and retrieve the treasure (verse 82, with reference to the wall). An even more understated but, nonetheless, similar progression can be perceived from verse 87, where Dhū l-Qarnayn will punish the wrongdoers and reward the righteous, but God will add to this, via verse 90, where Dhū l-Qarnayn observes God's actions and appears to do nothing, to verse 95, where Dhū l-Qarnayn not only needs cooperation from the people to build a barrier against Gog and Magog, but expressly states that this will then be destroyed (verse 97) when God's promise is fulfilled. Dhū l-Qarnayn goes from working with God, to merely being privy to God's workings, to acknowledging that his mortal actions will be undone by God. This would seem to suggest a degree of textual cohesion between verses 65–82 and verses 83–98 that might echo the structure of the central, Iblīs panel of the *sūra*.

TABLE 11.5   *The parallels between Q 18:65–82 and Q 18:83–98*

Q 18:68	*wa-kayfa taṣbiru ʿalā mā lam tuḥiṭ bihi **khubran***	Q 18:91	*kadhālika wa-qad aḥaṭnā bi-mā ladayhi **khubran***
Q 18:74	*laqad jiʾta shayʾan **nukran***	Q 18:87	*fa-yuʿadhdhibuhu ʿadhāban **nukran***
Q 18:79	*… aradtu an aʿībahā …*	Q 18:87	*qāla ammā man ẓalam fa-sawfa nuʿadhdhibuhu thumma yuraddu ilā rabbihi …*
Q 18:81	*aradnā an yubdi lahumā rabbuhumā khayran …*	Q 18:90	*… wajadahā taṭluʿu ʿalā qawmin lam najʿal lahum min dūnihā sitran*
Q 18:82	*… arāda rabbuka an yablughā ashuddahumā …*	Q 18:95	*… aʿīnūnī bi-quwwatin ajʿal baynakum wa-bayna-hum radman*
Q 18:82	*… **raḥmatan min rabbika** …*	Q 18:98	*… **raḥmatun min rabbī** …*

There are, moreover, a number of lexical links between the two pericopes. The term *nukr* ("terrible") is utilized of both of Moses' understanding of the Servant's actions in verse 74 ("How could you kill an innocent person? He has not killed anyone! What a terrible thing to do!") and of the future punishment God will bestow upon the wrong-doers in verse 87 ("… when they are returned to their Lord He will punish them terribly"). Meanwhile *khubr* ("knowledge") is used to describe what Moses does not possess in verse 68 ("How could you be patient in matters beyond your knowledge?") and what God does possess in verse 91 ("And so it was: We knew all about him"). Neither of these terms occur elsewhere in the *sūra*, lending strength to an impression that they serve some sort of a cohering function within a discrete textual unit here. The Servant's concluding statement, too, "as a mercy from your Lord (*raḥmatan min rabbika*). I did not do this on my own account" (verse 82), is reflected in Dhū l-Qarnayn's final statement, "This is a mercy from my Lord (*raḥmatun min rabbī*). But when my Lord's promise is fulfilled, He will raze this barrier to the ground: my Lord's promise always comes true" (verse 98).[33]

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33   The near repetition of the lexical cluster *raḥmatan min rabbika* at verses 82 and 98, like the near repetition of *huwa khayrun thawāban wa-khayrun ʿuqban* at verses 44 and 46, is suggestive both of cohesion and of closure. However, unlike the *nukran* and *khubran* repetitions, the near-repeated formulae *huwa khayrun thawāban wa-khayrun ʿuqban* and

The material that follows the last direct textual reference to Dhū l-Qarnayn in verse 98 consists of an eschatological passage (verses 99–102). This is classified by Arkoun and Koloska as part of the non-narrative tail of the *sūra*, separate from the Dhū l-Qarnayn material; by Neuwirth as an integral part of the Dhū l-Qarnayn pericope; and by Netton and Mir as partially narrative and partially non-narrative, with the break between the Dhū l-Qarnayn and the final section of the *sūra* occurring at 101/102.[34] In my view, the thematically significant statement "Did they think that they could take (*yattakhidhū*) My servants (*'ibādī*) as masters (*awliyā'*) instead of Me (*min dūnī*)?" in verse 102, like the similar statements of God's unity at verses 26, 44, and 51, indicates that this is the close of this particular textual unit, attaching the section 99 to 102 to the Moses and Dhū l-Qarnayn textual block. It is also worth considering that the term *'abd* ("servant") occurs only four times in *Sūrat al-Kahf*: in the opening verse of the *sūra* ("Praise be to God, who sent the Scripture down to His servant..."), and then twice in verse 65 ("[Moses and his boy] found one of Our servants (*'abdan min 'ibādinā*)..."), prior to its occurrence in verse 102. This adds to the impression that verse 102 is a closer to a larger, cohesive textual unit that precedes it. The near echo of verse 100 (*wa-'aradnā Jahannama yawma'idhin lil-kāfirīna 'ardan*) at the end of verse 102 (*... innā a'tadnā Jahannama lil-kāfirīna nuzulan*) also adds to an impression of cohesion in this section of the *sūra*. The repetition of the term *yawma'idhin*, meanwhile, connects verse 99 to verse 100. The structural unity of verses 99–102 would appear, therefore, to be undeniable.

That verse 103 opens a new textual unit is suggested by the initial *qul* command at the beginning. The *qul* command occurs in verse-initial position in *Sūrat al-Kahf* at verses 26, 29, 103, 109, and 110, all of which happen to fall at the very beginning (or, in the case of Q 18:26 and Q 18:110, at the very end) of form-critical textual units as defined by Koloska in Table 11.1. While these are not all major structural borders by any means, the small shifts of subject at verses 29 ("Say: Now the truth has come from your Lord. Let those who wish to believe in it do so, and let those who wish to reject it do so. We have prepared a Fire..."), 103 ("Say: Shall we tell you who has the most to lose..."), 109 ("Say: If the whole

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rahmatan min rabbika are both anticipated by (less exact versions of) the same formulae: *ni'ma l-thawāb wa-hasunat murtafaqan* at the close of verse 31, and *ataynāhu rahmatan min 'indanā*, said of the Servant in verse 65. While verse 31, like verses 44 and 46, would appear to fall at the end of a textual block, verse 65 is usually regarded as the beginning of the Moses and the Servant pericope. Verses 65 to 101 are, moreover, categorized by a shift in the dominant morphological pattern of the final word from CvCvCā to CvCCā. It seems unlikely that the *rahmatan min* formula at verse 65 should be symptomatic of closure. It could, however, be taken as further evidence of textual cohesion.

34   This border is also observed by Droge; see Droge, *The Qur'ān*, 192.

ocean were ink …"), and 110 ("Say: I am only a human being like you …") are evident.[35] It would appear then that initial *qul* within the context of *al-Kahf* possesses an emphatic function that is employed to open thematic paragraphs at verses 29 and 103, and to mark the very close of the *sūra* at verses 109 and 110. The numerous lexical links between the final eight verses of the *sūra* and the preceding material have been commented on by other scholars, and need not be reiterated here.

3   Conclusions

A close analysis of the thematic, structural, and lexical links that occur within *Sūrat al-Kahf* suggests that the *sūra* is divided into five principal sections. These are marked by reference to a dominant unifying theme of the Oneness of God, which is raised in the *sūra*'s opening verses, expanded upon with reference to the Companions, the Parable of the Two Gardens, the allusion to Iblīs and his descendants, and the Moses/Dhū l-Qarnayn section, and referred to again in the *sūra*'s concluding verses. The *Leitwörter* used to indicate recourse to powers outside of God, *min dūnihi/min dūni llāh/min dūnī*, serve to reinforce this theme within the Companions narrative (at verses 14, 15, and 26) and within the central section (at verses 27, 43, and 50). The related concepts of alleged partnership with God (the claiming of *shurakāʾ*) and the positing of external sources of protection (*awliyāʾ*) occur within the Companions narrative (at verses 17 and 26), in the Parable of the Two Gardens (at verses 38 and 42), in the section referring to Iblīs and his descendants (at verses 50 and 52), at the close of the Moses/Dhū l-Qarnayn textual block (at verse 102), and in the final verse of *sūra* (verse 110). Other recurring themes and lexical items include the fact that God will render everything to dust (stated in the Introduction, and echoed with reference to the destroyed garden in verse 40) and that worldly goods are a mere adornment (*zīnah*, stated in the Introduction, Companions, and the second of the two parables). The inevitability of the Hour (*al-sāʿah*) is declared in both the Companions and the Parable of the Two Gardens textual blocks; the truth of God's promise (*waʿd*) in the Companions and the Dhū l-Qarnayn narratives. There are numerous references to Judgment Day, two heaven and hell diptychs, and two descriptions of hell alone. It is interesting to note that

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35   The *qul* command that occurs alongside the first reference to Dhū l-Qarnayn in verse 83 ("…Say: I will tell you something about him") might feasibly mark the shift to a new subject, but this is not the case for the *qul* commands that occur in the middle of verses 22 and 24. It seems plausible, therefore, that the non-initial *qul*s of verses 22 and 24 might be sealed by the emphatic, initial *qul* of verse 26.

these are first referred to by the terms *jannātu ʿadnin* and *nār* (verses 29, 31, and 53), and then by the terms *Jahannam* and *jannātu l-firdaws* (verses 100, 106, and 107). That the disbelievers ridicule God's messengers and messages is stated twice, in the exhortatory material that closes the central panel, and in the concluding part of the *sūra*.

That the central panel of the *sūra* exists as a coherent whole is reinforced by its references to the primordial Fall story, by the repeated section opener

TABLE 11.6   *The breakdown and suggested structure of* Sūrat al-Kahf

Vv. 1–8 Introduction	Introductory section		raises the deliberative themes of the *sūra*: the truth of God's message; God is One; the Prophet is powerless to change the outcome for the disbelievers; Judgment Day
Vv. 9–26 First panel	Illustrative Example I: The Companions		opens with a direct reference to the Companions; closes with a declaration of God's Oneness
Vv. 27–59 Central panel	Introduction	Vv. 27–31	Introduction reiterating the deliberative themes of the *sūra*: the truth of God's message; the Prophet is powerless to change the outcome for the disbelievers; contrast between heaven and hell; closes with a formulaic reference to God's reward
	Example I	Vv. 32–44	Parable I: formulaic opening; closes with declaration of God's Oneness and formulaic reference to God's reward
	Example II	Vv. 45–6	Parable II: formulaic opening; closes with formulaic reference to God's reward
		Vv. 47–9	Judgment Day
	Example III	Vv. 50–1	Iblīs: declaration of God's Oneness
		Vv. 52–3	description of hell

	Conclusion	Vv. 54–9	Concluding section reiterating the deliberative themes of the *sūra*: the truth of God's message; the Prophet is powerless to change the outcome for the disbelievers
Vv. 60–102 Third panel	Example I	Vv. 60–4	Moses and the Fish
	Example II	Vv. 65–82	Moses and the Servant of God
	Example III	Vv. 83–98	Dhū l-Qarnayn
	Conclusion	Vv. 99–102	wrap-up unit, marked by inclusion and declaration of the Oneness of God
Vv. 103–10 Conclusion	Concluding section		reiterates the deliberative themes of the *sūra*: Judgment Day; contrast between heaven and hell; the truth of God's message; the Prophet is powerless to change the outcome for the disbelievers; God is One.

wa-ḍrib lahum mathal and the near-repeated section closer *huwa khayrun thawāban wa-khayrun ʿuqba* in its first two clusters, and by certain structural parallels in its two final clusters. A similar phenomenon of lexical, thematic, and stylistic unification is at play in the Moses/Dhū l-Qarnayn textual block, which divides into three "narrative" units: Moses and the Fish; Moses and the Servant of God; and Dhū l-Qarnayn. The repeated terms *khubr, nukr, raḥmatan min rabbi/rabbika/ʿindanā, and ʿabd/ʿibād* unify the second two clusters, as do their matching tripartite structure. The parallel named subject "Moses" meanwhile links the first two clusters; the suggestion of a Gilgamesh subtext unites the Moses and the Fish and Dhū l-Qarnayn sections. That this unit closes at verse 102 is indicated by the presence there of a declaration of the One-ness of God, comparable to the similar declarations at the close of the Companions material at verse 26.

The strict demarcation of this material into "narrative" and "non-narrative" elements remains a subjective act. To return to Muilenberg, with whom this

essay began, in the self-same 1969 essay he raises the concern that "form criti-
cism by its very nature is bound to generalize because it is concerned with
what is common to all the representatives of a genre, and therefore applies an
external measure to the individual pericopes."[36] In the case of the Qurʾān, this
same desire to allocate pericopes to specific literary forms (*Gattungen*) would
appear to result in the occasional arbitrary allocation of a literary unit to one
genre, when it could equally well be argued to belong to another. An accu-
rate definition of qurʾanic genres remains to be compiled, but based on the
paradigm put forward in Table 11.6, the designation of the Companions and
the three Moses/Dhū l-Qarnayn pericopes as narrative does seem clear. Thus,
verses 9–26 and 60–98 constitute two narrative panels to the *sūra*. Both peri-
copes open with a direct reference to the narrative in question, and close with
a declaration of God's Oneness.

The question remains, however, as to whether the three illustrative examples
put forward in the central panel of the *sūra* should similarly be classified as nar-
rative. Despite the fact that their integration into the thematic underlay of the
sūra is much more thorough than the flanking Companions and Moses/Dhū
l-Qarnayn panels, the Moses/Dhū l-Qarnayn panel also features what would
appear to be a concluding unit in its final verses: the eschatological content
of verses 99–102 reflects the references to Judgment Day and the Fire in verses
47–9, and 52–3. Moreover, the tripartite division of the Moses/Dhū l-Qarnayn
material echoes the three-fold nature of the narrative exempla in the cen-
tral panel. My inclination would therefore be towards a similar classification
of narrative for verses 32–44, 45–6, and 50–1. While the middle one of these
three passages (verses 45–6) is more difficult to classify in terms of its genre
than its neighbors, the declamatory reference to God's Oneness in verse 44,
coupled with the parallel formulae at the outset of verses 32 and 45, and the
repeated lexical material at the close of verses 43 and 46, makes me disinclined
to pursue a different classification for this section.

The flexibility that is inherent in such classifications will inevitably con-
tinue until we have a more precise catalogue of qurʾanic genres. Within these
confines, however, *Sūrat al-Kahf* provides a number of lexical, structural, and
contextual indications of how it should be read. Close attention to these mark-
ers makes for a more accurate division of the *sūra*. This should, in turn, facili-
tate a more accurate reading of both its genres and its likely themes.

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36   Muilenberg, Form criticism and beyond, 5.