

Text-Critical Approaches to Sura Structure: Combining Synchronicity with Diachronicity in *Sūrat al-Baqara*. Part One

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Introduction

The following article is an exploratory attempt to rationalise a combination of seemingly disparate strands of current thought on sura structure into a workable, if tentative, system. Despite the number of unknowns in this area, the overlapping structures that are posited by thematic concerns, semantic repetitions, sura rhythm, rhyme patterns, and variations in verse length, would seem to highlight the possibility of a fusion of synchronic and diachronic elements in sura composition.¹ As a consequence, it will be suggested that there is no need for the various recent scholarly approaches to the text to be applied in isolation of one another. Indeed, although a certain flexibility of approach may be required, at least until a deeper understanding of the rules that govern sura composition is reached, the present tendency for methodological single-mindedness is—it will be argued—impeding progress in the field.

A belief in the structural and thematic integrity of Qur'anic suras undergirds a sizeable proportion of contemporary close textual scholarship on the Qur'an. The importance of treating suras as unities has been forcibly argued by Mustansir Mir since the 1980s,² while Angelika Neuwirth has long advocated an understanding of the shorter suras of the Qur'an as liturgical wholes, carefully structured and designed for recitation in a single sitting.³ Behnam Sadeghi's recent analysis of evidence from the Ṣan'ā' palimpsest, meanwhile, suggests that the sequence of verses within each sura probably attained stability at a very early date.⁴ Although there are some discrepancies in the ordering of the suras from codex to codex, the suras themselves show remarkable consistency from one codex to the next. There is no flexibility in the sequence of verses between the 'Uthmānic and what Sadeghi terms the C-1 textual

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tradition, attributed to a Companion of the Prophet; a partial codex dated with a high probability to earlier than 646 AD. This does indeed suggest that the discrete and unified nature of individual suras was fixed relatively early, and possibly even within the supposed lifetime of the Prophet.⁵ This consistency would moreover seem to hold even for the longer suras such as *al-Baqara* and *al-Mā'ida*, famously described by Angelika Neuwirth in the mid-1990s as 'collection baskets for isolated verse groups',⁶ whose structural and thematic integrity is less easy to ascertain. While the sample of representative folios studied by Sadeghi is small, in his 2010 article there is line-for-line consistency between the C-1 codex and the received text of the Qur'an for verses 191 to 223 of *Sūrat al-Baqara*, and for verses 41 to 72 of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*; this is expanded in his wider 2012 study to further encompass Q. 2:87–105, among others.

In parallel to this, however, it has traditionally been assumed that the elements of the Qur'an existed first as fragments, many of which were only later slotted into the context of a sura. Intra-Qur'anic references to its own diachronicity at Q. 25:32 (*Those who disbelieve say, 'Why has this Recitation not been sent down to him all at once?'*, *wa-qāla'lladhīna kafarū law lā nuzzila 'alayhi'l-furqānu jumlatan wāḥidatan*)⁷ and Q. 17:106 (*[We have sent] a Recitation which We have divided so that you may recite it to mankind at intervals, wa-qur'ānan faraqnāhu li-taqrā'ahu 'alā'l-nāsi 'alā mukthin*) would certainly seem to imply that individual verses and larger textual units might have been added organically to the corpus as it evolved. The suggestion that replacement verses could be inserted into the corpus (thus Q. 2:106, *Whatever verses We annul or cause to be forgotten (mā nansakh min āyatin aw nunsihā), We bring better or the like*, and Q. 16:101, *When We exchange one verse for another, idhā baddalnā āyatan makāna āya*) could also be taken to refer to an element of editorial flexibility prior to the establishment of a fixed codex. The *ḥadīth* record likewise suggests a deliberate editorial aspect to the compilation of the later suras. There is a widely adduced tradition which alludes to the Prophet's role in the compilation of the many-versed suras:⁸

Upon each revelation, [the Prophet] would call to some of his scribes, saying, 'Place this in the sura where such-and-such is mentioned.' [Thus] when [groups of] verses were revealed to him, he would say, 'Place these [verses] in the sura where such-and-such is mentioned,' and when [a single] verse was revealed to him, he would say, 'Place this verse in the sura where such-and-such is mentioned.'

It might seem natural to conclude from this that a certain proportion of these secondary seams must remain discernible within Qur'anic suras. Indeed, this was the focus of a great deal of academic attention in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when scholars such as Theodor Nöldeke and Richard Bell utilised a

combination of (quasi-) historical, grammatical, and thematic indicators, along with variations in verse length and rhyme, in order to break suras up into small fragments; the discrete logia in which they first existed.⁹ However, the reliability of the historical information on which these studies were based has since been questioned. Moreover, there is no suggestion of the functional holistic unity of the individual suras in their methods, and their results remain highly atomistic. Maybe as a result of this, contemporary structural studies of Qur'anic suras have tended to eschew diachronic concerns in their focus on identifying thematic or chiasmic schemes.¹⁰ A possible exception resides in the work of Mehdi Bazargan, recently brought back into scholarly focus by Behnam Sadeghi.¹¹ Bazargan divides the Qur'anic corpus into smaller textual blocks which are then diachronically arranged in accordance with their average verse length. The purpose of this exercise is a more accurate diachronic rearrangement of the text, but the thesis has potential repercussions for our understanding of the feasibility of sub-dividing suras along diachronic lines that, however, remain synchronically (thematically) informed.

Another pertinent line of enquiry for a deeper understanding of sura structure—with possible diachronic implications—concerns the issue of Qur'anic rhyme. This has, in recent years, been the subject of a small handful of articles by Devin Stewart, who argues that greater attention should be paid to the vestiges of *saj*^c and other (apparently pre-Islamic) literary forms within the Qur'anic corpus. Stewart refines the broad categorisations of Qur'anic rhyme in previous scholarship, and suggests the applicability of *saj*^c-specific and other metrical patterns beyond the narrow confines of the tightly-rhyming Meccan suras and other isolated passages where *saj*^c has long been considered to be present. This could feasibly be taken to suggest a more pivotal role for the rules of *saj*^c as a structuring force within Qur'anic material: if Qur'anic style evolved such that it moved away from the rigid rules of *saj*^c, *but continued to be informed by its rhythms*, then it could be the case that the cadences that are created by verse- (or clause-) length patterns and variations in end rhyme should be accorded much more prominence in any study of sura structure. This is an avenue that remains to be explored.

The present essay divides into two parts, and four main sections. Part One, 'Sura Structure I: Thematic and Chiasmic Approaches', contrasts five scholarly analyses of the structure of (largely) *Sūrat al-Baqara* in order to highlight the differences and overlaps between them; 'Sura Structure II: Considerations of Rhyme' builds upon the work of Angelika Neuwirth and Devin Stewart, and looks at the rhyme patterns in *Sūrat al-Baqara* in an attempt to achieve a closer definition of what should be considered anomalous within the context of this sura, and what the structural significance of this could be. Part Two first considers Mehdi Bazargan's system for the internal division of suras into diachronic layers ('Sura Structure III: Chronological Markers'). It contrasts this to the schemes proposed by Nöldeke and Bell, and makes a

preliminary attempt to assess the extent to which apparent chronological markers within *al-Baqara* can be utilised alongside synchronic approaches to the corpus, in order to attain a more precise understanding of sura structure. The final part of the article, 'Sura Structure IV: Exploring the Potential for Synthesis', further investigates the possibility that the structural markers identified by the various hermeneutical systems addressed need not be applied in isolation of one another, and looks at compositional paradigms for the Qur'anic corpus with specific reference to Medinan material.

Sura Structure I: Thematic and Chiastic Approaches

Scholars such as Neal Robinson, Mathias Zahniser, and Nevin Reda have produced valuable work identifying possible structural markers according to which suras such as *al-Baqara* (Q. 2), *Āl 'Imrān* (Q. 3), and *al-Mā'ida* (Q. 5) could putatively be divided into shorter, thematically-defined sections of text. A different, but still synchronic, approach to sura structure is evinced by proponents of ring theory, such as Raymond Farrin (working on *al-Baqara*) and Michel Cuypers (working on *al-Mā'ida*). Ring theory presents the text as consisting of a number of concentric structures, which draw the reader's, or listener's, attention to the core message located within their centre. A complex combination of textual, statistical, and contextual evidence underpins both of these approaches. I would argue, however, that although undeniable progress has been made on identifying the presence of structural markers within Qur'anic material, these continue to be inconsistently utilised within the wider field, and remain to be rationalised into any sort of coherent system. The variegation in competing hermeneutical systems, meanwhile, is very rarely the focus of such studies; nor is attention paid to the subtle shifts in meaning that are created by the imposition of structural divides at various junctures of a Qur'anic sura.

It is easy to illustrate the shifts in meaning that can arise from different hermeneutical approaches to the Qur'an. With reference to the narrative of Adam and the Garden in *Sūrat al-Baqara* (Q. 2:30–39), for instance, Raymond Farrin identifies Q. 2:21–39 (*People, worship your Lord who created you and those before you ... those who disbelieve and deny Our messages shall be the inhabitants of the Fire, and there they will remain*) as Ring B of a chiastically-structured *al-Baqara*.¹² According to Farrin's schema (see Table 1 below), Ring B is juxtaposed to Ring B', Q. 2:254–284 (*You who believe, give from what We have provided you ... Whatever is in the heavens and earth belongs to God, and, whether you reveal or conceal your thoughts, God will call you to account for them ...*). The verse cluster that embodies Ring B is in itself formed of a smaller ring, in which the external verses Q. 2:21–24 and Q. 2:39 mention the Fire, the internal verses Q. 2:25–26.5¹³ and Q. 2:30–38 make reference to the Garden, and the central verses Q. 2:26.5 to Q. 2:29 ask how the disbelievers can reject

faith when God created them, the heavens and the earth. These central verses are paralleled, Farrin argues, by the central verses of Ring B', Q. 2:255–260, which also contain a rejoinder to the disbelievers, and mention God's power to give life and death. This central section is bordered by Q. 2:254 (an exhortation to the believers) and Q. 2:261–284 (parables; charity; usury; debts).

Table 1: Showing the parallel structures of Farrin's Ring B and Ring B' in *Sūrat al-Baqara*.

Ring B	Ring B'
Q. 2:21–24 Fire	Q. 2:254 exhortation to the believers
Q. 2:25–26.5 Garden	
Q. 2:26.5–29 God creates	Q. 2:255–260 God gives life and death
Q. 2:30–38 Garden	Q. 2:261–284 parables; charity; usury; debts
Q. 2:39 Fire	

Ring B' as a whole Farrin identifies as containing, in the many mentions of God's perfect knowledge in Q. 2:256, 261, 265 *et passim*, an echo of God's knowledge of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden (although, in actuality, this latter sin is only implicit in the sura). Farrin therefore highlights two possible themes in the story of Adam and Eve: the mention of the heavenly gardens (emphasised by the chiasmic parallelism with Q. 2:25–26.5) and, through the links with Ring B', the suggestion of God's knowledge of Adam and Eve's sins. Both of these are subsumed to a central message of God's power to create, cause death, and resurrect, directed at the disbelievers.

Neal Robinson in contrast charts a progressive rather than a chiasmic path through *Sūrat al-Baqara*. As a consequence, Robinson does not foreground the existence of the heavenly gardens in the earlier verse cluster, subsuming this material under the category 'the dynamics of belief and unbelief'.¹⁴ Choosing an overarching theme of Islam as the true religion of Abraham, the first section (Q. 2:1–39) is read as an introduction, in which the narrative about the impending creation of Adam elaborates the earlier motifs of God's omniscience and His having created all that is on earth for man (both Q. 2:29). This mention of God's knowledge and creation shares some broad similarities with Farrin's analysis. However, although Robinson mentions the parallel between the gardens promised to the believers and the 'blessed state originally enjoyed by Adam and his spouse',¹⁵ this is among a number of other suggested parallels, for instance the corruption that will be wrought on the earth (Q. 2:11 and Q. 2:30). The sin of Adam and his failure to avoid the machinations of Satan are then evoked within the catalogue of the Banū Isrā'īl's shortcomings in Q. 2:40–121 (cf. verses 54, 58, 84–85, and 87).¹⁶ The theme of Adam's failure continues in the words by which Abraham is tested at Q. 2:124, echoing the provision of words of

repentance to Adam at Q. 2:37. Moreover, Abraham's having been 'placed' as a model for humankind at Q. 2:124 recalls the placement of Adam as a vicegerent on earth at Q. 2:30. The repeated references to God's knowledge towards the end of the sura, meanwhile, are identified by Robinson as a unifying, rather than a thematic, feature; part of a general section on striving towards God.

That attempts to identify overarching themes and structures are highly impressionistic is of course a truism that has long been established, and should not be held to invalidate the potential insights that can be gleaned from such readings. Little attention would appear to have been paid, however, to the interpretive by-product of the search for structural meaning: the above analysis would seem to suggest that the importance and impact of the specific Adam narrative within *al-Baqara* is significantly wider when a progressive rather than a chiasmic model is utilised.¹⁷ A chiasmic Adam narrative is important within the sura only for its mention of a garden, and as an indirect illustration of God's omniscience; because the focus of each chiasmic cluster resides in its centre, and the purpose of the exercise (in this instance at least) is to highlight possible parallels across a wide expanse of verses, the minutiae of Qur'anic detail must needs be overlooked. An Adam narrative that is read progressively, meanwhile, primarily represents a stepping stone in a portrayal of Abraham and an illustration of the failings of the Banū Isrā'īl. While more attention is paid to the facets of the Adam narrative in this instance, there are limitations implicit in the act of employing Adam as a standard against which the success of later generations is to be gauged. In both readings, a large amount of the material that makes up the sura is held to be incidental, in one case to the chiasmic pattern, in the other to the overarching theme.

Farrin's and Robinson's methodologically-informed readings differ markedly, moreover, in where they draw their boundary lines between the textual blocks that make up the sura (see table 2 below). Where Robinson breaks the sura at Q. 2:40 (*Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you ...*), Q. 2:122 (again, *Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you ...*), Q. 2:153 (*You who believe, seek help through steadfastness ...*), Q. 2:243 (*Consider those people who abandoned their homeland ...*), and Q. 2:284 (*Whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to God ...*), Farrin suggests four further interim divisions at Q. 2:21 (*People, worship your Lord who created you ...*), Q. 2:104 (*People, do not say 'rā'īnā ...'*), Q. 2:142 (*The foolish people will say ...*), and Q. 2:178 (*You who believe, fair retribution is prescribed ...*). Farrin also modifies Robinson's final two divisions from Q. 2:243 (*Consider those people who abandoned their homeland ...*) to Q. 2:254 (*You who believe, give from what We have provided for you ...*), and from Q. 2:284 (*Whatever is in the heavens and the earth belongs to God ...*) to Q. 2:285 (*The Messenger believes in what has been sent down ...*). Farrin identifies a further two 'latch units' at Q. 2:97–103 and Q. 2:243–53.¹⁸ These serve to close their respective preceding sections.

Table 2: Showing the disputed borders in *Sūrat al-Baqara*.

Robinson 1996	Farrin 2010	Zahniser 2000	Reda 2010
Q. 2:1–39	Q. 2:1–20	Q. 2:1–39	Q. 2:1–39
	Q. 2:21–39		
Q. 2:40–121	Q. 2:40–103 (incl. Q. 2:97–103)	Q. 2:40–121	Q. 2:40–123
	Q. 2:104–141		
Q. 2:122–152	Q. 2:122–152	Q. 2:122–152	Q. 2:124–151
	Q. 2:142–152		
Q. 2:153–242	Q. 2:153–177	Q. 2:153–162	Q. 2:152–242
	Q. 2:178–253	Q. 2:163–237	
		Q. 2:238–242	
Q. 2:243–283	(incl. Q. 2:243–253)	Q. 2:243–283	Q. 2:243–286
Q. 2:284–286	Q. 2:254–284	Q. 2:284–286	
	Q. 2:285–286		

Further variation is apparent if Mathias Zahniser's and Nevin Reda's structural studies of *al-Baqara* are added to the discussion. Zahniser, who dedicated his 2000 study to a careful scrutiny of the thematic borders in *Sūrat al-Baqara* and *Sūrat al-Nisā'*, makes a cogent argument for the placing of the first two breaks at Q. 2:40 (*Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you ...*) and Q. 2:122 (again, *Children of Israel, remember how I blessed you ...*), in accordance with Robinson's view. Farrin's extra suggested

break at Q. 2:142 (*The foolish people will say ...*) is highlighted by Zahniser as the beginning of a 'thematic unit of obvious coherence',¹⁹ but he does not posit it as a thematic border per se. The area around the third break Zahniser identifies as comprising a hinge passage that spans from Q. 2:153–162 (*You who believe ... nor will they be reprieved*). Another hinge passage at Q. 2:238–242 (*Take care to do your prayers ... so that you may grow in understanding*) is suggested by Zahniser in lieu of Robinson's firm thematic border of Q. 2:243, *Consider those people who abandoned their homeland ...* (or Farrin's suggestion of Q. 2:254, *You who believe, give from what We have provided for you ...*). Zahniser concurs with Robinson in placing the final border of the sura at Q. 2:284. Reda, meanwhile, in her 2010 dissertation on narrative structure in *Sūrat al-Baqara*, redraws the textual boundary of the second section between Q. 2:123 and Q. 2:124, and divides her third (and final) section of the sura into three parts, with textual breaks between Q. 2:151 and Q. 2:152, and then between Q. 2:242 and Q. 2:243. She proposes a semi-chiastic reading of the sura: 'while chiasm describes the general layout of the sura, alternation is relevant for the last section.'²⁰ In contrast to Robinson's emphasis on the central verse,²¹ however, she states that 'while the sura's general structure is chiastic, it is not the central panel which receives the most emphasis; rather it is the last';²² it is worth noting that a similar phenomenon is argued by Robinson in his 2001 study on the structure of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, as will be discussed below, where the weight of the sura's message resides in its final section.²³

Disagreement arises on account of the large number of indicators that are utilised in order to define the limits of Qur'anic passages. Some attempt has been made to categorise these indicators, and limit their subjectivity. Thus Farrin states, with reference to *Sūrat al-Baqara*, 'all sections but the introduction, middle, and conclusion—A, E, and A'—begin with formulas of address.' Zahniser, however, already questioned Robinson's 'sense of the importance of attention to receptors of the discourse' in dividing *al-Baqara* into thematic blocks.²⁴ As Zahniser observed, and as is evident in Farrin's contrasting thesis of where the sura divides, the sura contains a number of formulas of address that are not posited by Robinson (or indeed Farrin) as indicating thematic breaks.²⁵ Zahniser accordingly adduces the presence of a formula of address (*yā banī Isrā'īl*) at Q. 2:40 coupled with the presence of a sizeable thematic block on either side of the formula in order to make his argument for the first border of the sura occurring between Q. 2:39 and Q. 2:40.²⁶

Reda, however, criticises Zahniser for an over-reliance on 'thematic analysis'.²⁷ She argues instead for greater attention to be paid to the presence of inclusios within the sura as structuring devices. Although she agrees with Robinson and Zahniser in placing the first textual break of the sura between Q. 2:39 and Q. 2:40, she posits the repeated term *hudan* in Q. 2:2 and Q. 2:38 as a frame for the structural unit Q. 2:1–39. As is evident from Table 3 below, the repeated phrase *yā banī Isrā'īla'dhkurū*

ni^cmatiya'llatī an^camtu ^calaykum (at Q. 2:40 and Q. 2:122) then encloses the second section of the sura, which Reda terminates a verse after the recurrence of this formula, at the end of Q. 2:123. Zahniser also mentions the plausibility that Q. 2:40 and Q. 2:122–123 might form an inclusio, such that the second break is located at Reda's preferred option of Q. 2:124 (*When Abraham's Lord tested him ...*).²⁸ Yet Zahniser places his second border two verses earlier, between Q. 2:121 and Q. 2:122. There his rationale is that the formula *yā banī Isrā'īla'dhkurū ni^cmatiya'llatī an^camtu ^calaykum* indicates a new section, as it is preceded by a wrap-up unit made up of three verses.²⁹ Q. 2:119 commences with *inna* and confirms the Prophet; Q. 2:120 consoles the Prophet; Q. 2:121 is 'a typical positive/negative verse'.³⁰ Robinson similarly places his second break at this point in the sura, seeing the final appeal to the Children of Israel of this section (Q. 2:122–152) as a discrete thematic section.

Farrin also argues for a break between Q. 2:121 and Q. 2:122, but as the second part of a series of three consecutive rings, forming the larger section Q. 2:104–141. This second ring runs from Q. 2:122 to Q. 2:133 (*Were you there to see when death came upon Jacob ...*), and is followed by a third ring, Q. 2:134–141, marked by the repetition of the formula, *That community passed away. What they earned belongs to them, and what you earn belongs to you: you will not be answerable for their deeds*, in Q. 2:134 and Q. 2:141. Reda, however, sees Q. 2:134 as significant in marking the *middle* of the compositional sub-unit Q. 2:124–141, and as such enacting a small internal border, not at Q. 2:133/134 as is posited by Farrin, but at Q. 2:134/135: 'Whereas the first part lays the claim that Abraham and his immediate descendants were Muslim (vv. 124–134), the second argues against the claim that they were either Jewish or Christian (vv. 135–141).'³¹ It would appear, then, that here the possible inclusio is judged subordinate to thematic concerns in dividing the sura.

A further section at Q. 2:124–151 is created by Abraham and Ishmael's prayer that a prophet be sent to their descendants in Q. 2:129, and the answering of this prayer in Q. 2:151. The extension of the section to include the verses that precede the posited inclusio at Q. 2:129 is, it would seem, so self-evident on thematic grounds as to require no explicit justification. The occurrence of the terms *udhkur* and *ṣalawā* in both Q. 2:152–153 and Q. 2:238–239, Reda argues, indicates another section at Q. 2:152–242. The extension of this section to include Q. 2:240–242 is justified on several grounds: the links forged by the repeated *wa'lladhīna yutawaffawna minkum wa-yadharūna azwājan* at Q. 2:234 and Q. 2:240; the mention of divorce at Q. 2:228 (*al-muṭallaqāt*), Q. 2:236 (*in ṭallaqtumu'l-nisā'*), and Q. 2:241 (*al-muṭallaqāt*); and the mention of monetary endowment (*matā'*) at Q. 2:236 and Q. 2:241. Reda's final suggested section of Q. 2:243–286 is marked by a delayed onset repetition: *unṣurnā 'alā'l-qawmi'l-kāfirīn* at Q. 2:250 and Q. 2:286. The final border of the sura (between Q. 2:283 and Q. 2:284) Zahniser sees as being marked by the presence of a familiar refrain at Q. 2:284 (*li'llāhi mā fi'l-samāwāti wa-mā fi'l-arḍ*,

Table 3: Showing the rationale behind the positioning of thematic breaks in *Sūrat al-Baqara*.

	Robinson	Farrin	Zahniser	Reda
Q. 2:1				
Q. 2:21	no break here: the address to unspecified people echoes v. 8, and there are numerous lexical and thematic links to the preceding material	1. addressed to unspecified people 2. ring marked by mention of the Fire	no break here, despite the formula of address; Q. 2:30–39 does however form a 'solid coherent span' of narrative	no break here; <i>hudā</i> at v. 16 caps off an internal unit, but does not terminate the inclusio that extends from Q. 2:2–38
Q. 2:40	1. formula of address 2. theme: shortcomings of the Children of Israel	1. addressed to the Children of Israel 2. ring marked by mention of Children of Israel	1. formula of address 2. sizeable thematic units either side	1. formula of address forms an inclusio with additional central repetition at vv. 47–48
Q. 2:104		1. response to the People of the Book 2. ring marked by mention of believers	no break here, despite the formula of address and the presence of a small unit Q. 2:104–109: thematically linked to preceding	
Q. 2:122	1. formula of address 2. theme: final appeal to the Children of Israel	no break here: Q. 2:122–133 is marked by God's favour to the Children of Israel; Q. 2:134–141 by repetition of formula	1. formula of address 2. preceding wrap-up unit 3. clear thematic connection in material	no break here: the repetition of the formula of address has a bracketing effect on the intervening material; this echoes the structure of §1; Children of Israel are not mentioned explicitly in the following material

	Robinson	Farrin	Zahniser	Reda
Q. 2:124	no break here; but Q. 2:124 introduces a brief allusion to the testing of Abraham	no break here, linked to preceding verse: all one exhortation to the Children of Israel	no break here, although this is the beginning of a discernible thematic section, 'Abraham stories'	1. inclusio formed by the realisation of Abraham and Ishmael's prayer at v. 151
Q. 2:142	no break here: forms a subunit about the <i>qibla</i> , but linked to the preceding through references to 'turning', 'face', 'nation', and realisation of Abraham and Ishmael's prayer	1. verses about the <i>qibla</i> 2. ring marked by mention of Muslim community, the Prophet, and the importance of faith	no break here: Q. 2:142–152 nonetheless forms 'a thematic unit of obvious coherence'	no break here: forms a subunit of the overarching ring through multiple repetition of 'turning'
Q. 2:152	no break here: Q. 2:150–152 are linked by use of the first person for the deity	no break here, as this is linked to the preceding verse: a message to the Muslim community		1. inclusio formed by repetition of 'remember' and 'prayers' 2. extended by linked references to 'widows' and 'divorcees' 3. strengthened by repetition of 'signs' and 'having sense'
Q. 2:153	1. formula of address 2. theme: legal provisions	1. addressed primarily to the Muslims 2. ring marked by mention of patience, prayer and adversity	1. formula of address	no break here: the first person for the deity continues until v. 160; second person for the community of believers also continues
Q. 2:163	no break here, although this verse is singled out as establishing the foundational principle of Islamic law	no break here: this is part of a section of introductory verses about the disbelievers, God and His signs	1. 'singularity, sovereignty and omnipotence of God' appropriate introduction to section on legislation	

	Robinson	Farrin	Zahniser	Reda
Q. 2:178	no break here, although this lays out legislation for dealing with manslaughter	1. legislative section 2. latch to close the section	no break here, despite the presence of a formula of address	
Q. 2:243	1. introductory formula 2. theme: striving for God with life and property	no break here, but Q. 2:243–253 constitute a latch	1. introductory formula makes a 'clear syntactic break in the discourse'	1. inclusio formed by the repetition of the Israelite prayer in v. 250 and v. 286
Q. 2:254	no break here; furnishes the cue for Q. 2:255	1. ring marked by mention of charity	no break here, despite the presence of a formula of address	
Q. 2:284	1. contains thematic references to entire sura	no break here: forms part of subsection Q. 2:161–184, with thematic links to the preceding	1. opening refrain 2. syntactic break from preceding 3. contains thematic references to entire sura	no break here: closure provided by inclusio at v. 250 and v. 286 overrides multiple echoes in v. 284 and v. 285.
Q. 2:285		1. ring contrasts believers to unbelievers, and is marked by mention of forgiveness		

cf. Q. 3:109, Q. 3:129, Q. 4:126, Q. 4:131, *et passim*), while the numerous echoes of preceding themes in Q. 2:284–286 cause Zahniser to identify these last three verses as an independent wrap-up unit for the entire sura, and hence a discrete sub-section of their own. Reda however sees the repetition between Q. 2:250 and Q. 2:286 as overriding the multiple thematic links to the sura as a whole in Q. 2:284 and Q. 2:285.

It is clear from Table 3 above that apparent lexical indicators of structural divide are often obscured by other lexical or thematic considerations when it comes to dividing a sura up into sections. Accordingly, individual scholars posit different schemes for the allocation of material to textual blocks. In his 2001 study of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*, Neal Robinson made a concerted effort to reduce the guess-work involved in ascertaining the structural boundaries of Qur'anic material.³² He identified a

number of general indicators of textual divides: (i) the presence of introductory formulae (e.g. *wa-idh*), (ii) two types of inclusio (one formed by the first and last verse of a section, and the other by its second and penultimate verse), (iii) the repeated presence of key words or phrases throughout an individual section, and (iv) three variations on what Zahniser might term ‘the wrap-up unit’ (the recurrence of ‘similar or identical phraseology’ in the last two or three verses of a section; the presence of an eschatological climax; or a coda consisting of ‘stereotyped theological formulae’).³³

In positing his structural divides, Robinson was careful to specify the presence of repeated or formulaic words and phrases, rather than suggesting thematic patterns. Although he does supply thematic labels for his putative sections, he expressly states that these are for convenience of reference rather than indicating any thematic pattern: ‘The reader should not infer that each section has a single theme or that the descriptions are definitive.’³⁴ He also provides supporting evidence derived from other suras for his structural divisions. Thus for instance *la-hum maghfiratun wa-ajrun ʿaẓīm*, which Robinson argues as indicating imminent closure of the first section of *Sūrat al-Māʿida* by its presence in Q. 5:9, occurs with minor variation in Q. 35:7, where it again would appear to fall at the end of a textual section, and in the last, and consequently indisputably closing, verse of *Sūrat al-Fath* (Q. 48). In Table Four, below, the two sections marked *x* exist in parallel to the overall chiastic structure.

Table 4: Showing the rationale behind Robinson’s 2001 treatment of *Sūrat al-Māʿida*.

block	verses	rationale
A	Q. 5:1–9	framed by an inclusio, Q. 5:9 is a standard concluding verse
<i>x</i>	Q. 5:10	<i>stand-alone statement repeated verbatim at Q. 5:86</i>
B	Q. 5:11–19	last three verses have stereotyped phrases set at the end, indicating closure
C	Q. 5:20–26	change in genre to narrative; last two verses end identically
D	Q. 5:27–32	a fresh narrative; penultimate two verses end identically; last verse linked by <i>min ajli dhālika</i> and Mishnaic parallels
E	Q. 5:33–40	framed by an inclusio; stereotyped closing phrases in Q. 5:40
E'	Q. 5:41–50	change of addressee; clustering of <i>Leitwörter</i> ; two rhetorical questions in Q. 5:50 indicate closure
D'	Q. 5:51–58	change of addressee; change of <i>Leitwort</i> ; repetition in verses 57 and 58 indicate closure
C'	Q. 5:59–68	change of addressee; echoes between Q. 5:59 and Q. 5:68 form an inclusio; repetition in verses 67 and 68 indicate closure

block	verses	rationale
B'	Q. 5:69–85	shift in subject; element of repetition in penultimate two verses; standard eschatological crescendo in Q. 5:85 indicates closure
x	Q. 5:86	<i>stand-alone verse repeated verbatim from Q. 5:10</i>
A'	Q. 5:87–108	change of addressee; repetition with variation in last three verses indicate closure
B''	Q. 5:109–120	dramatic temporal shift; ends with multiple echoes of section B

Robinson's attempt to combine a number of structural indicators in order to produce a more transparently justified division of the sura into discrete blocks is of significant value, and, by this stage of the present essay, the language Robinson utilises in defining his textual borders should be becoming familiar to the reader. That Robinson's is not the only way to divide the sura in accordance with the patterns suggested by ring theory is of course evident from even a cursory comparison to the scheme suggested by Michel Cuypers in his 2007 study of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida* (nor does Robinson anywhere imply that this might be the case). Cuypers' rings are arranged A1 (1–11), A2 (12–26), A3 (27–40), A4 (41–50), and A5 (51–71), at which point the chiasmic structure reverses through B1 (72–86), B2 (87–108), and B3 (109–120) at the close of the sura.³⁵ It is worth observing one particular point, however, in which Robinson would appear to depart from the prevalent trend in chiasmic theory. The neat chiasmic arrangement of the central statement of his ring C—the opening section of Q. 5:64, *The Jews have said, 'God is tight-fisted,' but it is they who are tight-fisted, and they are rejected for what they have said (wa-qālati'l-yahūdu yadu'llāhi maghlūlatun ghullat aydihim wa-lu'cinū bi-mā qālū)*, in which speech is followed by mention of hands then locking (*wa-qālat—yadu'llāhi—maghlūlatun*), and repeated in reverse order (*ghullat—aydihim—mā qālū*)—would appear to indicate to Robinson that here there is a discrete hinge, upon which the chiasmus rotates. However, unlike Cuypers,³⁶ or Farrin (who follows Mary Douglas),³⁷ Robinson does not see any emphatic function in this chiasmic statement. The central focus of the sura resides for Robinson in section B, the themes of which (he argues) are echoed in verses 69–85 (his ring B') and verses 109–120 (his ring B''). Thus the themes of ring B are revisited twice, and the third occurrence falls—significantly—outside of the chiasmus, at the very end of the sura. The complex patterning of ring C' of the sura does not appear, for Robinson at least, to have any hermeneutical function whatsoever.

Nor does the presence of a chiasmus appear to have any structuring function. Ring C' contains a further chiasmic sentence: Robinson identifies *yā ayyuhā'l-rasūlu balligh mā unzila ilayka min rabbika wa-in lam taf'al fa-mā ballaghta risālatahu (Messenger, proclaim what has been sent down to you from your Lord. If you do not do that, you*

are not delivering His message) in the first part of Q. 5:67. Here the movement is from *rasūl* to *balligh* to *mā*, and then back through *mā* to *ballaghta* to *risālatahu*; the centre of the sentence is not included in the chiasmus. A similar argument can be made for the inverted phraseology that occurs between Q. 5:33 and Q. 5:41 (where *khizyun fī'l-dunyā* becomes *fī'l-dunyā khizyun*) and between Q. 5:18 and Q. 5:40 (where *yaghfiru li-man yashā'u wa-yu'adhdhibu man yashā'u wa-li'llāhi mulku'l-samāwāti wa'l-arḍ* becomes *Allāha lahu mulku'l-samāwāti wa'l-arḍi yu'adhdhibu man yashā'u wa-yaghfiru li-man yashā'u*). In none of these instances does Robinson propose a structural divide. Indeed, Q. 5:33 and Q. 5:41 occur at the beginnings of suggested units E and E', while Q. 5:18 and Q. 5:40 fall towards the ends of B and E. The chiasmus spans structural divides, and clearly performs a unifying function, as Robinson points out, across the sura as a whole. This would appear to be in some contrast to Reda's argument for the formation of thematic inclusions through the repetition of material, a tendency that is also acknowledged in general terms by Robinson himself.³⁸

Despite Robinson's efforts, the variety in these methods can be confusing, but the identification of structural markers undertaken by scholars such as Robinson, Zahniser, and Reda remains an extremely valuable starting point from which to begin a discussion of sura structure. There is every indication that such devices as opening and closing formulae, repeated statements, changes of addressee, and eschatological crescendos perform some sort of structuring function within the text, and that they should be considered alongside thematic considerations in dividing a sura up into constituent blocks. The catalogue of possible indicators can be epitomised as follows:

Table 5: Summarising the suggested indicators of structural divide.

Section openers	Section closers
presence of a formula of address e.g. <i>yā banī Isrā'īl</i> , <i>yā ayyuhā'lladhīna āmanū</i> , or <i>yā ayyuhā'l-nās</i>	presence of stereotypical formulae, e.g. <i>inna'llāha 'alā kulli shay'in qadīr</i> , in verse final position
presence of an introductory formula, e.g. <i>a-lam tarā</i> , <i>wa-idh</i> , <i>inna</i> , or <i>yas'alūnaka 'an ...</i>	doubling of material in form or content across two consecutive verses, e.g. identical verse closers, repeated lexical items, matching rhetorical devices
change in theme, genre, or prevalent <i>Leitwort</i>	presence of a wrap-up unit, e.g. an eschatological diptych, a positive/negative verse, or a generic address to the Prophet
near presence of a repeated (and thus arguably chiasitic) sentence or clause	near presence of a repeated (and thus arguably chiasitic) sentence or clause

It is important to note that, in the vast majority of instances, the presence of these indicators is not read by Robinson, Farrin, Zahniser, or Reda as suggestive of a major divide. Rather, their presence raises the likelihood that a major divide at that juncture *may be possible*. Yet, as was argued regarding the impressionistic nature of attempts to identify overarching themes or structures for the long suras, the lack of any rigid exactitude in structural studies of Qur'anic material should not be held to invalidate their findings. Such studies do, however, tend to turn a blind eye to the structuring force of rhyme, to which we shall now turn.

Sura Structure II: Considerations of Rhyme

The overall significance of rhyme within any structural reading of Qur'anic suras remains to be ascertained.³⁹ Robinson makes a note of the recurrence of rhyme words as a part of his analysis of *Sūrat al-Baqara*, although he does not suggest any structural divisions on the basis of this. Within his treatment of *al-Mā'idā*, moreover, the inclusio that is formed by the near-repeated phrase, *What has been sent down to you from your Lord will indeed increase many of them in insolence and unbelief* (which occurs within Q. 5:64, *wa-la-yazīdanna kathīran minhum mā unzila ilayka min rabbika ṭughyānan wa-kufran* and Q. 5:68, *wa-la-yazīdanna kathīran minhum mā unzila ilayka min rabbikum ṭughyānan wa-kufran*), indicates for Robinson a discrete sub-unit. This runs from part-way through Q. 5:64 to the end of Q. 5:68,⁴⁰ closing the preceding unit at the (internal) clause *bi-mā qālū*. Q. 5:64 in itself ends with *mufsidūn*; verse 63 with *yaṣna'ūn*; verse 65 with *jannāt al-na'im*. The *-ūnl-īnl-ūml-īm* rhyme, along with words of the CvCvC pattern, form the dominant rhyme pattern of the sura.⁴¹ A posited division, part-way through verse 64, at *bi-mā qālū* does not correlate with the pattern of verse-final clauses for the sura.

Robinson provides no explanation for why the structuring force of a chiasmic sub-unit would traverse the structuring rhythm of the presence of end-rhyme.⁴² It is worth noting, however, that ring-motivated studies regularly posit chiasmic structures as traversing verse boundaries. Cuypers, for instance, subdivides a small ring structure within *Sūrat al-Mā'idā* that runs Q. 5:15–19 at Q. 5:15.8, at Q. 5:17.5, and at Q. 5:18.5 and Q. 5:19.5.⁴³ For *Sūrat al-Baqara*, Farrin breaks the second ring of his structure B' halfway through Q. 2:26, and the fourth ring of his structure A' half way through Q. 2:286, while he commences the final ring of A' just before the end of that verse. This raises the question of how any mnemonic or structuring function that resides in chiasmic formations could be situated with respect to any similar function that is posited for end rhyme. Rhyme moreover does seem to form some sort of a structuring function, inasmuch as *Sūrat al-Mā'idā* opens with four verses ending in the CvCvC pattern, and closes with five verses of the same pattern; a similar phenomenon is observed by Zahniser in his 1991 study of *Āl 'Imrān*.⁴⁴

Shifts in rhyme were remarked upon by Bell in his *Commentary on the Qurʾān*. From his analysis of *Sūrat al-Baqara* it is apparent that he expected cohesive textual units to exhibit mono-rhyme. Variations in the rhyme pattern of the sura he then viewed as diachronic interpolations. Bell states that Q. 2:175 (which closes with *ʿalāʾl-nār*) is an ‘addition of uncertain date’ as it is ‘out of rhyme’.⁴⁵ He describes Q. 2:210–212 (which terminate *al-umūr*, *al-ʿiqāb*, and *bi-ghayri ḥisāb*) as follows: ‘These verses are entirely out of connection here, are out of rhyme, and are not even connected with each other. They cannot be placed.’⁴⁶ Bell would moreover appear to have assumed that out-of-rhyme passages had a high likelihood of originally belonging with other out-of-rhyme passages of the same type. Thus he comments of Q. 2:197 (which closes with *ūliʾl-albāb*) and Q. 2:200–202 (which end *khalāq*, *al-nār*, and *al-ḥisāb*): ‘This has the rhyme in –āL and perhaps did not belong to this surah; but this rhyme occurs in other parts of the surah *in additions made about this time*’ (emphasis mine).⁴⁷ Regarding Q. 2:165–167 (which terminate *al-ʿadhāb*, *al-asbāb*, and *min al-nār*), he observes, ‘As the rhyme is different, they were *not added at the same time* [as vv. 155–157, another putative insertion, but ending in *-ūnl-īn*]’ (emphasis mine).⁴⁸

Irrespective of the validity of Bell’s hypothesis (which will be discussed in more detail in Part II below), the issue of what constitutes a significant shift in the rhyme pattern is in itself not a straightforward one, nor is there any consensus on what that significance might be. Angelika Neuwirth makes a careful attempt to extend our understanding of Qurʾanic rhyme as part of her 1981 study of the Meccan suras of the Qurʾan. Here Neuwirth isolates instances in early Meccan suras where she argues that a sudden protrusion in the rhyme-series coincides with a slight thematic shift;⁴⁹ elsewhere, a fleeting alteration in the rhyme scheme indicates for Neuwirth the impending closure of a thematic unit.⁵⁰ The situation for mid- and late-Meccan suras is, she posits, subtly different. Here again, however, Neuwirth argues that changes in the dominant rhyme scheme can coincide with, or be located close to, thematic borders.⁵¹ This thesis, though by no means worthy of dismissal, remains problematic. This is both because, within the suras she cites as examples, Neuwirth suggests the presence of significantly more thematic borders than she identifies shifts in the rhyme scheme, and because her definition of what constitutes a change in rhyme tends to be based upon *dominant* rhyme patterns. Fleeting anomalies in the rhyme pattern in mid- and late-Meccan suras are largely—in Neuwirth’s assessment—of no structural significance.⁵²

In ascertaining the degree of presence of rhyme, an amount of flexibility resides within the interplay between *qāfiya* (‘rhyme’) and *wazn* (‘morphological pattern’), both of which contribute to the total matching effect of a lexical pair. *Qāfiya* dictates, for instance, that all the short vowels rhyme with each other, as do *-ī-* and *-ū-*, *-n-* and *-m-*, *-l-* and *-r-*, or *-b-*, *-d-*, and *-q-*.⁵³ *Wazn*, on the other hand, highlights the

equivalence between such word pairs as *alīm* and *baṣīr*, *multaḥad* and *murtafaq*, or *arḍ* and *sam*^c. With particular reference to *saj*^c ('rhymed prose'), therefore, a number of levels of correspondence are acknowledged by the rhetoricians. These have been outlined by Devin Stewart in a number of articles on this subject.⁵⁴ Thus *saj*^c *mutamāthil* (or *saj*^c *muraṣṣa*^c) describes fully matched cola, which display almost complete metrical parallelism. The example often provided is Q. 88:25–26, *inna ilaynā iyābahum * thumma inna alaynā ḥisābahum*. *Saj*^c *mutawāzī* is then used of cola where it is only the verse-final words that match, in both morphological pattern and rhyme. An illustrative example would be Q. 88:13–14, *fihā sururun marfū'a * wa-akwābun mawḍū'a*. The end-words in *saj*^c *muṭarraḥ*, meanwhile, rhyme but do not display morphological correspondence, as is evidenced in Q. 71:13–14, *mā lakum lā tarjūna li'llāhi waqārā * wa-qad khalaqakum aṭwārā*. The term *muwāzana* or *izdiwāj* is then used to describe pairs of *fāṣilas*, for instance the final words of Q. 88:15 and Q. 88:16 (*maṣfūfa/mabthūtha*), which match in their morphological pattern but do not rhyme. The existence of these four categories suggests a degree of pliability in the extent of the correspondence required in order to uphold an element of *saj*^c parallelism within a section of text.

Table 6: Showing the various categories of *saj*^c.

category of <i>saj</i> ^c	verses consist of fully-matched cola	<i>fāṣilas</i> match in morphological pattern	<i>fāṣilas</i> match in rhyme
<i>saj</i> ^c <i>mutamāthil</i>	yes	yes	yes
<i>saj</i> ^c <i>mutawāzī</i>	no	yes	yes
<i>saj</i> ^c <i>muṭarraḥ</i>	no	no	yes
<i>muwāzana</i>	no	yes	no

Neuwirth formulates her own scheme for ascertaining the presence of Qur'anic rhyme, based on the three criteria of the accentual stress, morphological form, and vocalic pattern of the last three syllables of the rhyme word, and also taking into account whether the very final syllable of the rhyme word is open or closed.⁵⁵ Neuwirth also, however, adopts Nöldeke's system of distinguishing between rhyme words on the basis of the assonant effect of the final radical, arguing that the vast majority of mid- and late-Meccan suras favour a dominant or even an exclusive pattern of either sonorants, plosives, fricatives, or semi-vowels in final position, and very rarely seem to be random.⁵⁶ She then utilises Nöldeke's contrasting terms *Reimwechsel* and *Reimabwandlung* to describe two distinct types of aural shift.⁵⁷ Such shifts as the movement from *ka'l-ihn* at Q. 70:9 to *ḥamīmā* at Q. 70:10, and from *al-ṣākhkha* at Q. 80:33 to *akhīh* at Q. 80:34, are classified as *Reimwechsel*: these *fāṣilas* do not rhyme according to Neuwirth's classification, but nor do their final radicals match in

assonant effect. The shifts from *al-ṣudūr* at Q. 11:5 to *mubīn* at Q. 11:6, however, or from *ghulbā* at Q. 80:30 to *abbā* at Q. 80:31, slight assonance shifts between pairs of *fāṣilas* which otherwise do rhyme according to Neuwirth's classification, she classifies as *Reimabwandlung*, arguing that these are almost always indicative of minor topic shifts.⁵⁸ In contrast, Stewart petitions for the suitability of a dominantly *sajc*-inspired methodology in approaching the rhythms and rhymes of the text. On the basis of the presence of *sajc* in letters and personal prayers ascribed to the Prophet, and the possible allusion in Q. 7:180 to the *asmā' al-ḥusnā* being utilised in non-Qur'anic contexts, Stewart argues that 'the formal conventions of *sajc* composition and the specific genres in which it was used may permeate the Qur'an to a great extent'.⁵⁹ He explicitly extends this beyond the confines of the early Meccan suras where *sajc* has, to a greater or lesser extent, traditionally been acknowledged as present; Stewart questions the assumption that the longer multiple-cola verses of later suras are entirely free of *sajc* elements.

It is worth looking in depth at the example of *Sūrat al-Baqara*, both in order to explore Stewart's proposal, and in order to investigate how a late sura such as *al-Baqara* fits into Neuwirth's suggested scheme of structural significance for rhyme change. As is evident from the left hand column of Table 7 below, the vast majority (246 out of a total of 286) of the verses in *Sūrat al-Baqara* rhyme in *-ūnl-īnl-ūml-īm*. The dominant morphological pattern of these rhyming words is that of the masculine plural. Thus Q. 2:2–5, for instance, terminate in *li'l-muttaqīn*, *yunfiqūn*, the slightly different *yūqinūn*, and *muflīḥūn*. These masculine plural forms are however interspersed with some 50 words of the CvCīm or CvCīn pattern. Accordingly, for example, verse 7 closes with *ʿaẓīm*, verse 29 with *ʿalīm*, verse 32 with *al-ḥakīm*, and verse 37 with *al-raḥīm*; there is *muhīn* at verse 90, *mubīn* at verse 168, and again at verse 208. Some of these occur as isolated verses within long series of *-ūnl-īnl-ūml-īm fāṣilas*; on other occasions, however, these words occur in short series, in parallel with other CvCīC *fāṣilas* which evidently match the CvCīm or CvCīn words in their morphological pattern (*wazn*), even though they do not strictly speaking rhyme.

Table 7: Showing the various categories of *fāṣila* in *Sūrat al-Baqara*, and how these could potentially divide the sura into rhyme-defined blocks.

	rhymes in -ūnl-īnl- -ūml-īm	rhymes in -ūr/-īr/ -ūll-īl	rhymes in -ībl-īd	rhymes in -ābl-ād/ -āq	rhymes in -ār	wazn is CvCīC	wazn is vCCīC	wazn is CīC
Q. 2:1–19								Q. 2:1
						Q. 2:7		
Q. 2:20		<i>qadīr</i>				Q. 2:20		

	rhymes in -ūn/-īn/ -ūm/-īm	rhymes in -ūr/-īr/ -ūll/-īl	rhymes in -īb/-īd	rhymes in -āb/-ād/ -āq	rhymes in -ār	<i>wazn</i> is CvCvC	<i>wazn</i> is vCCvC	<i>wazn</i> is CvC
Q. 2:21–105						Q. 2:29		
						Q. 2:32		
							Q. 2:36	
						Q. 2:37		
						Q. 2:49		
						Q. 2:54		
						Q. 2:90		
						Q. 2:104 –110		
Q. 2:106–110		<i>qadīr</i> <i>naṣīr</i> <i>al-sabīl</i> <i>qadīr</i> <i>baṣīr</i>						
						Q. 2:114 –115		
						Q. 2:119 –120		
Q. 2:120		<i>naṣīr</i>						
Q. 2:121								
Q. 2:122– 124								
Q. 2:125–126			<i>al-sujūd</i>			Q. 2:125 –129		
		<i>al-maṣīr</i>						
Q. 2:127– 147						Q. 2:137		
						Q. 2:143		
Q. 2:148		<i>qadīr</i>				Q. 2:148		
Q. 2:149– 164						Q. 2:158		
						Q. 2:160		
						Q. 2:163		

	rhymes in -ūn/-īn/ -ūm/-īm	rhymes in -ūr/-īr/ -ūll/-īl	rhymes in -īb/-īd	rhymes in -āb/-ād/ -āq	rhymes in -ār	wazn is CvCVC	wazn is vCCVC	wazn is CVC
Q. 2:165–167				<i>al- ‘adhāb al-asbāb</i>		Q. 2:165	Q. 2:166	
					<i>al-nār</i>			Q. 2:167
Q. 2:168– 174						Q. 2:168		
						Q. 2:173 –174		
Q. 2:175					<i>al-nār</i>			Q. 2:175
Q. 2:176			<i>ba‘īd</i>			Q. 2:176		
Q. 2:177– 195						Q. 2:178		
						Q. 2:181 –182		
						Q. 2:192		
Q. 2:196–197				<i>al-‘iqāb al-albāb</i>		Q. 2:196		Q. 2:197
Q. 2:198– 199						Q. 2:199		
Q. 2:200				<i>khalāq</i>		Q. 2:200		
Q. 2:201					<i>al-nār</i>			Q. 2:201
Q. 2:202				<i>al-ḥisāb</i>		Q. 2:202		
Q. 2:203								
Q. 2:204–207				<i>al-fasād al-mihād bi’l- ‘ibād</i>		Q. 2:204		
Q. 2:208– 209						Q. 2:208 –210		
Q. 2:210		<i>al-umūr</i>						
Q. 2:211–212				<i>al-‘iqāb ḥisāb</i>				
Q. 2:214			<i>qarīb</i>			Q. 2:214 –215		
Q. 2:215– 232						Q. 2:218		
						Q. 2:220		
						Q. 2: 224–228		
						Q. 2:231		
Q. 2:233–234		<i>baṣīr khabīr</i>				Q. 2: 233–235		
Q. 2:235– 236								
Q. 2:237		<i>baṣīr</i>				Q. 2:237		

	rhymes in -ūn/-īn/ -ūm/-īm	rhymes in -ūr/-īr/ -ūl/-īl	rhymes in -īb/-īd	rhymes in -āb/-ād/ -āq	rhymes in -ār	wazn is CvCVC	wazn is vCCVC	wazn is CVC
Q. 2:238– 252						Q. 2:240		
						Q. 2:244		
						Q. 2:247		
Q. 2:253		<i>mā yurīd</i>			Q. 2:253			
Q. 2:254– 258						Q. 2: 255–256		
Q. 2:259	<i>qadīr</i>				Q. 2:259			
Q. 2:260– 264						-261		
						Q. 2:263		
Q. 2:265	<i>bašīr</i>				Q. 2:265			
Q. 2:266								
Q. 2:267		<i>ḥamīd</i>				Q. 2:267		
Q. 2:268						-268		
Q. 2:269				<i>al-albāb</i>			Q. 2:269	
Q. 2:270					<i>aṅṣār</i>		Q. 2:270	
Q. 2:271	<i>khabīr</i>					Q. 2:271		
Q. 2:272– 283						Q. 2:273		
						Q. 2:276		
						Q. 2:282		
Q. 2:284–285	<i>qadīr</i> <i>al-mašīr</i>				-285			
Q. 2:286								

It can thus be observed that the block that runs from verses 104 to 110 consists of two verses, 104 and 105, whose *fāšilas* (*alīm* and *al-ʿaẓīm*) rhyme with the preceding block (Q. 2:21–105, rhyming consistently in *-ūn/-īn/-ūm/-īm*). It contains, however, a further five verses, 106 to 110, whose *fāšilas* (*qadīr*, *našīr*, *al-sabīl*, *qadīr*, and *bašīr*) match in their *wazn* with verses 104 and 105, but do not rhyme with the preceding verses. This creates a cohesive block from verse 21 through to verse 110, with no breach in the rules of correspondence for *saj*^c units. A similar phenomenon can be witnessed at verses 119 to 120. *Al-Jaḥīm* at the close of Q. 2:119 matches the preceding *-ūn/-īn/-ūm/-īm* rhyme pattern of Q. 2:111–118; the following *fāšila* (*našīr* at Q. 2:120) does not *rhyme* with this block, but corresponds to Q. 2:119 in its

morphological pattern. Thus the block can be considered to run from verse 111 to verse 120. To cite a third example, the two occurrences of *‘alīm* at Q. 2:282 and Q. 2:283 match both the preceding *-ūnl/-īnl/-ūml/-īm* rhyme pattern that runs from Q. 2:272–283, and the following CvCvC morphological pattern of the block that runs from verses 282 to 285. Q. 2:284–285 close with *qadīr* and *al-maṣīr*, and terminate the block Q. 2:272–285.

Conversely, at other junctures, a CvCvC morphological cluster would appear to lead into an *-ūnl/-īnl/-ūml/-īm* rhyme pattern. This occurs at Q. 2:125–129, which consist of five verses of the CvCvC pattern. Q. 2:125 closes with *al-sujūd*, and Q. 2:126 with *al-maṣīr*, but verses 127 to 129 close with *al-‘alīm*, *al-raḥīm*, and *al-ḥakīm*. These, therefore, rhyme with the *-ūnl/-īnl/-ūml/-īm fāṣilas* that run uninterrupted from verse 127 to verse 147. In this instance, moreover, verse 147 is followed by a single verse terminating in *qadīr* (Q. 2:148). I would suggest that this anomalous rhyme word can initially be read to close the textual block, such that the rhyme-defined block runs from Q. 2:125–148. A similar phenomenon can be observed at Q. 2:20 (again: *qadīr*); has already been commented on for *naṣīr* at Q. 2:120; and can be posited for Q. 2:176 (*ba‘īd*), Q. 2:210 (*al-umūr*), Q. 2:237 (*baṣīr*), Q. 2:253 (*mā yurīd*), Q. 2:265 (*baṣīr*), and Q. 2:271 (*khābīr*). Minor textual borders at these junctures are certainly plausible.

Other instances of CvCvC openers potentially occur at Q. 2:214–215 and Q. 2:233–235. Thus verse 214 closes with the protruding rhyme-word *qarīb*; and *‘alīm* at verse 215 matches verse 214 in morphological pattern, but rhymes with the *-ūnl/-īnl/-ūml/-īm fāṣilas* of Q. 2:216–232. The structurally cohesive textual block that is created by these shifts in first morphological pattern and then rhyme runs from Q. 2:214 to Q. 2:232. Subsequently, the short run of verses from Q. 2:233 to Q. 2:237 closes with *baṣīr*, *khābīr*, *ḥalīm*, *al-muḥsinīn*, and *baṣīr*, displaying the same pattern as was observed at Q. 2:125–148 above, but in microcosm.

While the inherent flexibility of a large sura such as *al-Baqara* means that, as has already been amply demonstrated, it is possible to posit a variety of plausible textual divisions, the fact that the vast majority of these rhyme-defined borders coincide with the thematically-defined borders of both Abdel Haleem’s and Rudi Paret’s Qur’an translations is surely of some significance.⁶⁰ It seems apparent from this that Neuwirth’s suggestion, that in mid- to late-Meccan suras words ending in *-ūr/-īr/-ūll/-īl* rhyme (in an apparently straightforward fashion) with words of the *-ūnl/-īnl/-ūml/-īm* pattern, does not necessarily hold for *al-Baqara*. *Al-Baqara* would seem, rather, to follow *saj*^c conventions in this particular instance. *Al-Baqara* does not fall into *saj*^c-units per se, but it would appear to abide by the rules of *saj*^c nonetheless, in utilising ruptures in the rhyme pattern in order to emphasise pausal breaks within the text.

There is the potential to argue that the issue is complicated somewhat by the fact that the *-ūn/-īn/-ūm/-īm* textual blocks are regularly interspersed with words of the CvCīC pattern. Although, as is evident from Table 7 above, these consistently rhyme with the surrounding block, they share features with the opening and closing CvCvC clusters. All of these *fāṣilas* occur as part of a specific type of verse closer (*khātima*): rhythmically satisfying doubled epithets (thus for example *wa-lahum ʿadhābun ʿazīm* at verse 8; *innaka antaʿl-ʿalīmuʿl-ḥakīm* at verse 32; and *innahu huwaʿl-tawwābuʿl-raḥīm* at verse 37), or, more occasionally, formulaic expressions of eternal truths or Divine attributes (such as *wa-huwa bi-kulli shayʿin ʿalīm*, said of God at verse 29, or *innahu lakum ʿuduwwun mubīn*, said of al-Shayṭān at verse 168). Both Robinson and Zahniser read lists of God's attributes and other formulaic expressions as possible 'wrap-up units', which serve to close the thematic blocks they identify within the text.⁶¹ There would therefore appear to be some argument for highlighting these instances of *sajʿ mutarraḥ* within the *-ūn/-īn/-ūm/-īm* rhyme scheme. It should be observed, however, that none of these fall on the major structural borders of Robinson's, Zahniser's, Farrin's, or Reda's studies of *Sūrat al-Baqara*, and there are clearly numerous occurrences of these formulae at junctures where no thematic shift is taking place.⁶²

Divine double epithets are the explicit focus of Stewart's 2013 article for the *Journal of Qur'anic Studies*. There he cites two anecdotes which would seem to suggest that these *khātimas* could feasibly reside in some sort of structural parallel to the main fabric of the revealed corpus. The first of these implies a degree of flexibility in the precise rhyme of the divine epithets:⁶³

When the Prophet dictated *ghafūran raḥīmā*, Ibn Abī Sarḥ would change the text and write instead *ʿalīman ḥakīmā*; when the Prophet dictated *samīʿan baṣīrā*, he would write *samīʿan ʿalīmā*. Then, when he read the text back to the Prophet, the Prophet would accept it with these alterations as correct.

In the version of this *ḥadīth* provided on the authority of ʿIkrima in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* of Q. 6:93, Ibn Abī Sarḥ goes on to boast of this event to members of Quraysh, reiterating that he modified the precise words of the rhyming *khātima* (in this instance from *ʿazīz ḥakīm* to *ghafūr raḥīm*) and the Prophet appeared to corroborate his modification (*fa-yaqūlu ʿnaʿam sawāʿ*). Al-Suddī's variant, also cited by al-Ṭabarī at this juncture, has Ibn Abī Sarḥ ironically claiming this as proof of his own Divine inspiration, comparable to that of Muḥammad: 'If a revelation has been sent to Muḥammad, then a revelation has been sent to me' (in *kāna Muḥammad yūḥī ilayhi fa-qad ūḥiya ilayya*, a paraphrase of Q. 6:93). Here the cited modifications are two-fold, from *ʿalīm ḥakīm* to *samīʿ ʿalīm* and vice versa.

The other cited example is equally ambiguous:⁶⁴

Mu[°]adh b. Jabal exclaimed [with reference to Q. 23:12–14], *Blessed be God, the best of creators!* (*fa-tabāraka'llāhu aḥsanu'l-khāliqīn*). The Messenger of God—may God bless him and grant him peace—laughed. Mu[°]adh asked him, ‘At what did you laugh, O Messenger of God?’ He responded, ‘It closes with that phrase’ (*bihā khutimat*).

Al-Tha[°]labī, in his exegesis of Q. 6:93, provides a version of this *ḥadīth* that would appear to conflate both episodes. Here Ibn Abī Sarḥ's alteration of *samī[°]ā* ‘*alīmā* to ‘*alīmā ḥakīmā*, ‘*alīmā ḥakīmā* to *ghafūrā raḥīmā*, and their ilk (*wa-ashbāh dhālika*), leads straight into a discussion of the posited insertion of *tabāraka'llāhu aḥsanu'l-khāliqīn* after ‘*We created man from an essence of clay*’ on the instigation of Ibn Abī Sarḥ:

When *We created man from an essence of clay* (Q. 23:12) was revealed, God's Messenger dictated it. °Abd Allāh [b. Sa[°]id b. Abī Sarḥ] marvelled at the description of the creation of mankind, and said ‘Glory be to God! The best of creators!’ God's Messenger said, ‘Write it down. That is how it was revealed.’ °Abd Allāh [b. Sa[°]id b. Abī Sarḥ] had doubts, and said, ‘If Muḥammad is sincere, then a revelation has been sent to me as revelation is sent to him (*la-qad ūḥiya ilayya kamā ūḥiya ilayhi*), and if he is false, then [it was] I [who] spoke (as it was written).’ He renounced the Muslims and joined the disbelievers. He said to them both, ‘Look at Muḥammad! He dictated to me; I altered it; and he wrote down what I wanted.’

Stewart cites these anecdotes in order to illustrate the conventional nature of such material, which implies, he argues, some sort of a connection to pre-Islamic forms of speech.⁶⁵ Both anecdotes also, however, have repercussions for our understanding of sura composition, and for the borders that indicate closure, and they highlight how little we know about the mechanics of sura formation. It is worth observing, on this note, that Richard Bell removed the rhyme phrases from the primary compositional process entirely in a number of instances. Bell posited an unwieldy paradigm in which rhyme phrases were added to pre-circulating material at the point of its insertion into a specific sura, or used to indicate replacement verses. That Q. 2:102 was intended as a replacement for Q. 2:101, for instance, was suggested to Bell by the repeated rhyme word *ya[°]lamūn* at the close of both verses. The *yas[°]alūnaka* ‘*an* section, meanwhile, that runs from verses 215–222 (with exceptions), Bell considered wholly extraneous to the Qur'an. Bell accordingly suggested that the rhyme phrases of Q. 2:215, 217, 219, 200, and 221 were all additions supplied during the codification process, and not originally intended to be part of the verses themselves.⁶⁶

It is impossible to retrospectively construct with any degree of convincing accuracy a Qur'anic *Urtext* that might have been subject to the level of editorial flexibility suggested by Bell, yet the Ibn Abī Sarḥ and Mu[°]adh b. Jabal anecdotes do raise the question of whether, if there did indeed exist an instinctive consensus on where these divine epithets and formulaic *khātimas* were to be inserted, then the indicators of structural divide might not precede these passages, rather than residing in them. Moreover, it seems apparent that such *khātimas* need not necessarily function as closers, but could equally well exist as interjections that do not disturb the surrounding flow of speech. Al-Tha[°]labī's cited *ḥadīth* is explicit in having Ibn Abī Sarḥ suggest his interjection without any prior knowledge of what was to be dictated next. This places any discussion of the divine epithets on a separate axis from the main text and removes them from the table as reliable indicators of closure. The requirement that they rhyme—in the second anecdote the flow of *fāṣilas* from Q. 23:12–14 runs *ḥīn/makīn/khāliqīn*—would appear to be what is paramount; this is made abundantly clear in the addition of the phrase 'and their ilk' (*wa-ashbāh dhālika*) in al-Tha[°]labī's cited version of this *ḥadīth*. This rhyme need not be exact—the Prophet accepts a substitution of [°]*alīmā* for *baṣīrā*—although it would seem, from the fact that the other suggestions all rhyme in *-īmā*, that the preference may have been for exact rhyme. This complicates any reading of *khātimas* as indicators of firm structural borders within *al-Baqara*. As with other possible section openers or closers, such as formulae of address or the presence of repeated material, thematic considerations must be taken alongside lexical indicators in order to build a compelling argument for rhyme-informed structural divide at specific junctures of a sura, and precedents are required in order to strengthen a case.

The final type of protruding *fāṣila* within *Sūrat al-Baqara*, consisting of words of the CvCāC, aCCāC, or CāC patterns, do not fall on any apparent structural borders, and are the most difficult of all the disturbances in *al-Baqara*'s rhyme pattern to rationalise. Cuypers proposes, with respect to Semitic rhetoric, that 'it is a very common process in Semitic rhetoric to place in the centre of a system an idea which interrupts the thread of the speech, so as better to draw the attention of the reader/listener to a particularly important point';⁶⁷ what, then, is the function of a short series of *fāṣilas* that would appear to interrupt a sura's rhythmic flow? Neuwirth's analysis of mid- to late-Meccan suras suggests that, for suras of that particular period, series of *-ūn/-īn/-ūml/-īm* rhymes are regularly interjected by *-āC* rhymes. This leads Neuwirth to disregard their potential as structuring devices.⁶⁸ Yet the *fāṣilas* that terminate in *-CāC* occur too infrequently within the texture of *al-Baqara* to be convincingly posited, as Neuwirth suggests for mid- to late-Meccan suras, as a natural part of an *-ūn/-īn/-ūml/-īm* rhyme scheme. The rules of *saj^c* would moreover dictate that, as Bell observes, the verses of *al-Baqara* that rhyme in *-āC* form evident exceptions within the dominant *-ūn/-īn/-ūml/-īm* pattern of the sura, and as a

consequence are worthy of further consideration. Bell's hypothesis, that the *-CāC fāṣilas* in *al-Baqara* exist in parallel to their surrounding *-ūn/-īn/-ūm/-īm* textual blocks, is worth re-examining. The extensively random compilation process that Bell proposes may seem untenable, but the underlying assumption that elements of a sura could co-occur with other, pre-existing textual blocks remains a plausible postulate.

There are a total of seventeen *-CāC* rhymes within *al-Baqara*: *al-^cadhāb/al-asbāb/min al-nār* at Q. 2:165–167, *al-^calā'l-nār* at Q. 2:175, *al-^ciqāb/al-albāb* at Q. 2:196–197, *khalāq/al-nār/al-ḥisāb* at Q. 2:200–202, *al-khiṣām/al-fasād/al-mihād/bi'l-^cibād* at Q. 2:204–207, *al-^ciqāb/ḥisāb* at Q. 2:211–212, and finally *al-albāb/lanṣār* at Q. 2:269–270. These are designated in pale gray in Table 7 above. As is apparent from the table, they are for the most part clustered into small, arguably discrete units, suggestive of the fact that, despite the fact that they tend to display inexact rhyme, they do possess some level of structural coherence. The short pericope at Q. 2:165–167 (*al-^cadhāb/al-asbāb/min al-nār*) is distinguished from its surrounding material by its focus on the rivals the disbelievers set up besides God. Q. 2:196–197 (*al-^ciqāb/al-albāb*) insert additional ordinances to do with the pilgrimage into the fabric of the sura, as do Q. 2:200–202 (*khalāq/al-nār/al-ḥisāb*). Q. 2:204–207 (*al-khiṣām/al-fasād/al-mihād/bi'l-^cibād*) consists of a diptych contrasting the corrupt and the righteous, and exhibits a clear parallelism: both sections of the diptych commence with *wa-mina'l-nās man ...* Q. 2:211–212 (*al-^ciqāb/ḥisāb*) qualify the statement at Q. 2:210, as does the isolated verse at Q. 2:175 (*al-^calā'l-nār*) its predecessor Q. 2:174. Both are linked with, but can nonetheless be separated out as an expansion of, the preceding material. Q. 2:211–212 specify that clear signs have been brought before, and name the Banū Isrāʾīl as the recipients of these signs. Q. 2:175 clarifies the nature of the 'exchange' entered into by 'those who conceal the Scripture that God sent down'. Q. 2:269–270 (*al-albāb/lanṣār*) are an interesting example as they follow a double divine epithet (*wa'llāhu wāsi^cun alīm*), thereby extending the theme of God's knowledge (and wisdom) for a further two lines before the instructions on giving continue at Q. 2:271. A similar observation can be made regarding Q. 2:200–202: the preceding verse 199 closes with *inna'llāha ghafūrun rahīm*.

None of these *-CāC fāṣilas* occur within the blocks of *al-Baqara* whose rhythmical parameters have already been tentatively defined by the presence of a series of CvCīC/CvCūC *fāṣilas* at one of their borders. The thesis that single CvCīC/CvCūC *fāṣilas* that do not terminate in *-n* or *-m* may also serve to demarcate the closing edges of rhyme-defined textual blocks within *Sūrat al-Baqara* (suggested above with reference, for example, to Q. 2:20, Q. 2:120, and Q. 2:148) can however be carried into the material in which the *-CāC fāṣilas* are embedded. It could therefore be suggested that the *-CāC fāṣilas* at Q. 2:165–167 and Q. 2:175 occur within a rhyme-defined block that opens at Q. 2:149, following the closure of the previous

rhyme-defined block, and terminates in *ba^ʿid* at Q. 2:176. The next indication of closure occurs at Q. 2:210, with the rhyme-word *al-umūr*. The –CāC *fāṣilas* at Q. 2:196–197, Q. 2:201–202, and Q. 2:204–207 could therefore be contained within this block, spanning from Q. 2:177 to Q. 2:210.

As mentioned above, however, the –CāC *fāṣilas* at Q. 2:211–212 would appear to be thematically connected to Q. 2:210. They are moreover lexically connected to the preceding material via the echoing of Q. 2:210's *ya^ʿtiyahum* in Q. 2:211's *ataynāhum*, and of Q. 2:209's *al-bayyināt* in Q. 2:211's *bayyina*. It therefore seems unlikely that they should be located outside the border that is suggested by the presence of the protruding rhyme-word *al-umūr* at Q. 2:210. Furthermore, if Q. 211–212 were to be attached to the preceding textual block, Q. 2:213 would potentially exist as an isolated verse, prior to the posited opening cluster at Q. 2:214–215. There is, therefore, a strong argument for attaching it to Q. 2:211–212. Not only is it thematically connected to the preceding material, but it closes with a formulaic *khātima*, in this case *wa'llāhu yahdī man yashā'u ilā širāṭin mustaqīm*.⁶⁹

A similar proposition can be made regarding Q. 2:266 and Q. 2:286. Both occur outside of the boundaries suggested by the presence of CaCīr *fāṣilas*. Since they are isolated between two anomalous *fāṣilas*, or between an anomalous *fāṣila* and the end of the sura, one could argue that both should be attached to the ends of their preceding textual blocks. Q. 2:266 is evidently thematically connected to Q. 2:265; it closes with the formulaic *la'allakum tatafakkarūn*;⁷⁰ Q. 2:267 opens with a formula of address (*yā ayyuhā'lladhīna āmanū*). Q. 2:286, meanwhile, is linked to Q. 2:285 by the plea to 'rabbanā', and the repeated rhetorical device of reported speech. As mentioned above, the repetition of rhetorical devices was posited by Robinson as indicative of a discrete, closing unit in his treatment of *Sūrat al-Mā'ida*.

More speculatively, the series of *-ūnl-īnl-ūml-īm fāṣilas* that runs from Q. 2:121–124 sits between a rhyme-defined block that terminates with *našīr*, and an opening sequence of CvCvC *fāṣilas*. Considerations other than rhyme suggest that Q. 2:121 might be attached to its preceding textual block. Verse 122 commences with a formula of address (*yā banī Isrā'īl*), and verse 121 closes with the arguably formulaic *ulā'ika humu'l-khāsirūn*.⁷¹ The presence of phonetically isolated verses outside of the textual borders suggested by the indications of end-rhyme has already been posited for Q. 2:213, Q. 2:266, and Q. 2:286, all of which were argued to attach to their preceding textual units. Q. 2:121 differs from these examples as it connects via rhyme to the verses that follow it. Other factors can, nonetheless, be taken as an indication of there being a textual border at this juncture. The presence of the formula of address at verse 122, along with the arguably formulaic *khātima* at the close of the preceding verse, could in this instance justify the heretofore unprecedented suggestion of a textual break in the midst of a unifying block of rhyme. This is not to imply

the absence of any textual breaks other than those outlined above within *al-Baqara*—there is no doubt that many of the rhyme-defined blocks are further subdivided by other formal indications of opening or closure—but here a break is being posited for reasons of phonetic precedence (the comparable examples of Q. 2:213, Q. 2:266, and Q. 2:286) in a situation where no such considerations are in fact being brought to bear.⁷²

Table 8: Showing the suggested borders of some apparent hinge passages in *Sūrat al-Baqara*.

hinge passage	rhymes in	lexical considerations	preceding rhyme border	subsequent rhyme border	proposed unit
Q. 2:121–124	-ūn/-īn/ ūml/-īm	Q. 2:122 opens <i>yā banī Isrāʿīl</i>	Q. 2:120 (<i>naṣīr</i>)	Q. 2:125 (<i>al-sujūd</i>)	Q. 2:111–121; Q. 2:122–124
Q. 2:211–213	various	² -t-y in vv. 210 and 211; b-y-n in vv. 209 and 211	Q. 2:210 (<i>al-umūr</i>)	Q. 2:214 (<i>qarīb</i>)	Q. 2:177–213
Q. 2:266	-ūn/-īn/ ūml/-īm	Q. 2:267 opens <i>yā ayyuhā ...</i>	Q. 2:265 (<i>baṣīr</i>)	Q. 2:267 (<i>ḥamīd</i>)	Q. 2:260–266
Q. 2:286	-ūn/-īn/ ūml/-īm	<i>rabbānā</i> in vv. 285 and 286	Q. 2:285 (<i>al-maṣīr</i>)	end of sura	Q. 2:272–286

To return to the function of the *-CāC fāṣilas*, the texture that is created by these sudden protrusions in the rhyme scheme would not appear to be suggestive of opening or closure. Nor is there any indication that attempts were made to blend these passages into the dominant *-ūn/-īn/-ūml/-īm* rhyme scheme of the sura: the only occasion where a *-CāC fāṣila* abuts a word of similar morphological pattern is at Q. 2:270–271 (*anṣār/ḫabīr*). The most likely explanation then, in my view, is that the sudden shift in rhyme to *-CāC* was intended to be emphatic. In the absence of any evident thematic reasons for this, I would posit that the emphasis is diachronic. The shift in rhyme from *-ūn/-īn/-ūml/-īm* to *-CāC fāṣilas* within *Sūrat al-Baqara* served to acknowledge and emphasise the presence of new material within a pre-existing textual block.

This is a slightly unusual aspect of diachronicity, inasmuch as it stems from a desire to explain a formal textual feature within a sura that is, I would propose, indicative of emphasis rather than of stylistic change. This thesis does not depend upon a sizeable lapse of time between the publication of an original logion and its re-publication with inserted, extra material. It does depend, however, upon an understanding of sura

composition that assumes the pre-existence of, possibly rhyme-defined, arguably discrete sections of *al-Baqara* prior to the sura's being completed. A focus on diachronic studies of the text, in Part II of this essay, should help bring this general issue into sharper relief.

NOTES

1 Synchronicity and diachronicity are of course variously understood. It can however loosely be stated that synchronic approaches work on a horizontal ('flat') axis, in which the entirety of a designated unit of the text is assumed to be equally present, all the time. Diachronic approaches work behind the bound Qur'anic corpus, within a premise of the continued viability of dividing this corpus into the logia that are held to have preceded its current manifestation as a fixed canon. The methodological stance of synchronicity encompasses the growing sub-field of studies which treat suras as literary unities, utilising the tools of text-immanent analysis in order to highlight themes and structure. Diachronic approaches, meanwhile, can be presented as falling into two main camps. Those that explore evidence of textual seams or stylistic development posit a scheme for how the text might have appeared prior to its final form. Those that place specific elements of the text on a vertical axis suggest a possible trajectory of theological or narrative development as the text began to coalesce. The latter diachronic approach has been more widespread in contemporary Qur'anic studies than the former, although recent attempts have been made to refine our understanding of the stylistic markers assumed in chronological rearrangements of the text. These will be discussed in more detail below.

2 See, for example, Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'an*, and his 'The *Sūra* as a Unity'.

3 See, among others, Neuwirth, '*Sūra*', and her 'Vom Rezitationstext'.

4 See Sadeghi and Bergmann, 'The Codex of a Companion', p. 355, and Sadeghi and Goudarzi, '*Ṣanʿāʾ 1*'.

5 'The most secure conclusion of the present study is that the sequences of verses and sentences were fixed already in the Prophetic prototype' (Sadeghi and Bergmann, 'The Codex of a Companion', p. 346). The very minor variations that are present—Q. 20:31 and Q. 20:32 are inverted, and Q. 9:85 is omitted (evidence suggests this might be a scribal error)—are discussed in Sadeghi and Goudarzi, '*Ṣanʿāʾ 1*', p. 23. For a description of some of the *ḥadīth* debates surrounding the issue of the Qur'an's collection, and the promulgation of this issue in sectarian works of the eighth to tenth centuries, see Modarressi, 'Early Debates'. For a recent discussion of the evidence for and against an early codification of the Qur'an see Sinai, 'When Did the Consonantal Skeleton...? Part I' and 'Part II'; Cook, 'The Stemma of the Regional Codices'.

6 "'Sammelkörbe" für isolierte Versgruppen' (Neuwirth, 'Vom Rezitationstext', p. 98, as translated by (and cited in) Zahniser, 'Major Transitions', p. 26). This statement is also adduced in El-Tahry, 'Textual Integrity', p. 2, and Robinson, 'Hands Outstretched', p. 18, n. 2 and especially n. 6, where Robinson alerts the reader's attention to the suggestion of a modification of Neuwirth's stance in the light of Zahniser's subsequent work on the unity of the longer suras. Yet although Neuwirth does acknowledge Zahniser's contribution to this issue in her *EQ* article, she still maintains at that juncture that 'Most of the so-called "long *sūras*" (*ṭiwāl al-suwar*, for example, Q. 2–10) cease to be neatly structured compositions, but appear to be the result of a process of collection that we cannot yet reconstruct.'

7 Translations of the Qur'an are based upon Jones' *The Qurʾān*, with some modifications.

8 Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, vol. 1, p. 57. The scribal element in the recording of the text is similarly apparent in the series of Ibn Abī Ṣarḥ traditions (to be adduced in greater detail below), which open with the statement: 'When "We created man from an essence of clay'

(Q. 23:12) was revealed, God's Messenger dictated it ... God's Messenger said, 'Write it down. That is how it was revealed.'" See, for example, al-Tha'labī's exegesis of Q. 6:93.

9 As will become clear below, I am here discussing Nöldeke's detailed breakdown of suras into individual verses in the *Geschichte*, not his basic chronology. For recent studies confirming the parameters of his basic chronology, see, for example, Sinai, 'The Qur'an as Process', and Schmid, 'Quantitative Text Analysis'. For an exploration of some of its limitations, see Stefanidis, 'The Qur'an Made Linear'.

10 Progress has however been made—by Angelika Neuwirth and, more recently, Nicolai Sinai—in identifying instances of diachronic insertion where much later (Medinan) material would appear to have been inserted into earlier (Meccan) suras. The general working hypothesis is that sudden variations in verse length, rhyme pattern, or—in specific instances—lexical content can be taken as possible indicators of editorial insertions. Angelika Neuwirth provides a brief analysis of some suggested later insertions, along with a summary of earlier scholarship on this, in *Studien zur Komposition*. Further discussion of this phenomenon is offered in Sinai, 'Two Types'. Cf. also Sinai 'When Did the Consonantal Skeleton ...? Part II', pp. 515–519. This methodology has begun to be extended by Sinai into the Medinan suras of the Qur'an. Thus Sinai, 'Editorial Expansion'. See also the discussion in Part Two below.

11 Sadeghi, 'The Chronology of the Qur'ān'.

12 Farrin, 'Surat al-Baqara'.

13 Farrin regularly breaks verses at points other than their final boundaries, and indicates this by dividing the verses in question by a power of ten. Other scholars break verses by internal clauses, assigning a letter of the alphabet to each clause. In the interests of consistency, Farrin's method of decimalisation will be used throughout this article to indicate partial verses.

14 Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, p. 202.

15 Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, p. 206.

16 Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, pp. 207–208.

17 For a more general exploration of the significance of the Adam narrative in *Sūrat al-Baqara* see Klar, 'Through the Lens'. For the tendency to reclassify the Adam narrative in accordance with its perceived geographical location within a sura, see Klar, 'Re-examining Textual Boundaries'.

18 Farrin defines a latch as follows: 'This is an additional part that makes a second closure, binding the whole together. Such a part typically occurs at the end of a long composition or of a long interior section. It ties the beginning firmly to the end, often by reference once more to the opening phrases and events, and functions thematically as epilogue.' See Farrin, 'Surat al-Baqara', p. 19. Farrin refers the reader to Douglas, *Thinking in Circles*, esp. pp. 18, 33–38, 43, 47, and 68–69.

19 Zahniser, 'Major Transitions', p. 33.

20 El-Tahry, 'Textual Integrity', p. 78.

21 Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, p. 201.

22 El-Tahry, 'Textual Integrity', p. 116.

23 Robinson, 'Hands Outstretched'.

24 Zahniser, 'Major Transitions', p. 34.

25 Zahniser, 'Major Transitions', p. 31.

26 Cf. the similar argument made in Robinson, 'Hands Outstretched', but via the presence of key words rather than thematic blocks (Robinson, 'Hands Outstretched', p. 5).

27 El-Tahry, 'Textual Integrity', p. 84.

28 Zahniser, 'Major Transitions', p. 33.

29 Zahniser defines 'wrap-up units' as follows: 'They function at the verse-group level the way a rhyme clause functions for many verses. Wrap-up units reinforce the content of the passages they cap off, act as motivational support for them, or reinforce the world-view of the Qur'ān in general.' See Zahniser, 'Major Transitions', p. 32.

30 Zahniser, 'Major Transitions', p. 32.

31 El-Tahry, 'Textual Integrity', p. 91.

32 He also makes a focussed argument for the aural structuring properties of the verbal clues implicit within chiasmic arrangements of material.

33 Robinson, 'Hands Outstretched', pp. 3–4. Cf. Zahniser, 'Major Transitions', p. 32.

34 Robinson, 'Hands Outstretched', p. 2. David E. Smith is similarly careful in avoiding any categorical definitions of a sura's thematic structure in his study of *Sūrat al-Baqara*. 'In the case of *al-Baqarah*, to say that the authority of the Qur'ān itself is the key to the structure of the surah ... identifies the central organizing principle of the text, a text whose content may include a number of different themes, any of which may actually represent the thematic focus of the text, themes like Judgment Day or the priority of submission to God' (Smith, 'The Structure of *al-Baqarah*', p. 121).

35 See Cuypers, *Le Festin*.

36 See for instance Cuypers, 'Semitic Rhetoric', epitomising the eighteenth-century Biblical scholar Johann Albrecht Bengel, 'between the two sides of the inverse parallelism, a central element is inserted (AB/x/B'A')' (Cuypers, 'Semitic Rhetoric', p. 3). Cuypers distinguishes between ring composition (AB/x/B'A'), parallel composition (ABC/A'B'C'), and mirror composition (ABC/C'B'A'). The emphatic function would seem however to dominate: 'It is necessary to underline the frequency of concentric composition, at the intermediate levels, which are also the most significant for the interpretation of the text: the centre of these compositions certainly plays quite a particular role and is key to interpretation' (Cuypers, 'Semitic Rhetoric', p. 15). See also Cuypers, 'Semitic Rhetoric', p. 15, 'the centre has generally also a particular importance as a key to understanding the entire text', and Cuypers, 'Semitic Rhetoric', p. 22, 'the characteristics of the centre ... as a privileged place for the meaning of the entire text'.

37 See Farrin, 'Surat al-Baqara', p. 19.

38 See Robinson, 'Hands Outstretched', p. 3.

39 There would appear to be very little scholarship on this. 'Umar, '*Al-Fāṣila al-Qur'āniyya*', describes the minor adjustments that are made to maintain end-rhyme. Stewart deals with this in '*Saj*^c in the Qur'ān', 'Rhymed Prose', and 'Divine Epithets'. The 1990 article ('*Saj*^c in the Qur'ān') presents a convenient digest of the medieval tradition, where the emphasis is on identifying and cataloguing the prevalent patterns. Yet, while Medinan suras exhibit end rhyme (and their verses end in *fāṣila*, pl. *fawāṣil*), it seems unlikely that their verses would ever be categorised as *saj*^cas. This comes up in 'Rhymed Prose': 'many sections of the Qur'ān do not maintain the rhythmical parallelism *saj*^c requires. This is particularly clear in the longer sūras, where successive verses, despite end-rhyme, are so long and of such unequal length as to preclude any sustained meter, whether quantitative or accentual.' The end of a verse does nonetheless appear to have some additional aural significance, investigated in 'Divine Epithets', but the focus there is really on ascertaining the reason for, and likelihood of, the maintenance of rhyme.

40 The sub-unit is extended a further verse beyond the boundaries of the inclusio by the 'latch-unit' formed by the repeated terms *al-qawm al-kāfirīn* that occur at the end of Q. 5:67 and Q. 5:68.

41 There is one apparent anomaly: Q. 5:72 ends *min anṣār*.

42 Robinson does however make interesting observations on the importance of adopting an oral/aural mindset in discerning the Qur'anic equivalent of 'paragraph breaks' within individual suras: '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' (Robinson, 'Hands Outstretched', pp. 2–3).

43 Cuypers, 'Semitic Rhetoric', p. 11. As stated in note 13 above, Farrin's system of the decimalisation of Qur'anic verses is being utilised throughout this article; it should however be observed that Cuypers uses the letters of the alphabet to break verses into their constituent clauses.

44 Zahniser, 'The Word of God', p. 86. Here Zahniser, moreover, in a footnote, makes some preliminary comments regarding the potential structuring significance of rhyme. See Zahniser, 'The Word of God', pp. 86–87, n. 36. The end of *Sūrat al-Ṭāriq* (Q. 86:15–17) displays a similar strong rhythmical closure, with CvCCā protruding markedly from the prevalent CāCiC pattern of the sura. For the suggestion that Q. 86:11–14 should harmonise more closely with Q. 86:1–10 than the *tajwīd* tradition allows, see Stewart, 'Divine Epithets' as discussed below.

45 Bell, *Commentary*, pp. 34–35.

46 Bell, *Commentary*, p. 44. It should be noted that Neuwirth observes the imprecision in earlier classifications of Qur'anic rhyme in accordance solely with the final syllable of each verse (Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, pp. 69–70), and remarks that patterns that occur together and would therefore appear to rhyme in mid-Meccan suras, do not co-occur, and consequently presumably do not rhyme, in early Meccan suras (Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, pp. 69–70). It should also be noted that Bell interprets other apparent anomalies in the rhyme pattern differently. He posits a misplaced interpolation separating the originally consecutive rhyme-words *mushrikīn* (Q. 2:135) and 'ābidūn (Q. 2:138). Part of Bell's argument here involves the close resemblance between the rhyme-phrases at Q. 2:136 (*wa-naḥnu lahu muslimūn*) and Q. 2:138 (*wa-naḥnu lahu 'ābidūn*). The duplication would appear to indicate—for Bell—the presence of superfluous material. He also however adduces a thematic disconnect between the end of Q. 2:136 plus the entirety of Q. 2:137, and their surrounding material (Bell, *Commentary*, p. 27). A similar logic seems to be being employed in his removal of the second half of Q. 2:140 (*Say, 'Do you know better...'*). Here Bell specifically states: 'note the similarity of the rhyme-words [of vv. 140, *ta'lamūn*, and 141, *ya'lamūn*] as an indication that a substitution has taken place' (Bell, *Commentary*, p. 28). Bell also countenances the possibility that subsequent rhyme phrases were *added* to existing verses in order to maintain rhyme (pp. 44–46, p. 56).

47 Bell, *Commentary*, p. 41.

48 Bell, *Commentary*, p. 32.

49 In support of this she posits, for example, subtle thematic sub-units at Q. 70:8–9, 10, then 11–14; at Q. 52:9–10, 11–12, 13, and 14–16; and at Q. 80:33 and 34–36. Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, pp. 91–95. A further example is provided at Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, p. 98, where Neuwirth argues that thematic units coincide with shifts in the rhyme pattern at all but one border in *Sūrat al-Muddaththir*. Neuwirth also discusses changes in assonance (which she terms 'Reimabwandlung', see text relevant to note 54 below).

50 An example provided for the mid-Meccan suras is Q. 80:31/32 (*Studien zur Komposition*, p. 95), for late-Meccan suras Q. 13:5/6 (*Studien zur Komposition*, p. 107).

51 Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, pp. 101–107. She cites, among others, the shifts at Q. 18:64/65 and 102/103, Q. 19:33/34, 40/41, and 74/75a, and Q. 20:24/25 and 32/33. In the summary of her findings, she classifies these shifts as a) falling on major borders (two examples), b) coming a few verses before or after a major border (three examples), c) falling on minor borders (six examples), d) coming a few verses before or after such borders (one example), or e) falling between two components of the same textual block (two examples).

52 See Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, p. 73. Neuwirth does however acknowledge that she is making a *broad* categorisation of Qur'anic rhyme in order to investigate its significance for structural borders, and that her study is not intended to provide a systematic exploration of Qur'anic rhyme. See Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, p. 78.

53 See Stewart, 'Saj^c in the Qur'ān', and 'Rhymed Prose'.

54 See Stewart, 'Saj^c in the Qur'ān', 'Rhymed Prose', and 'Divine Epithets'.

55 Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, p. 71.

56 Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, p. 72.

57 Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, p. 74.

58 See Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, p. 81.

59 Stewart, 'Divine Epithets', p. 24. Cf. Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, p. 66, who questions the feasibility of using *saj^c* in order to understand Qur'anic rhyme. She cites the non-viability—in her estimation—of using later *saj^c* as any sort of contextual foil, and the limited nature of our knowledge of either pre-Islamic *saj^c* or Qur'anic rhyme at the (then) present time.

60 See the discussion in Part Two.

61 Cf. also Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, p. 117: 'periodization is achieved by insertion of fixed formulae, for example, *wa-llāhu 'azīzun ḥakīm*, *wa-huwa'l-'alīmu'l-raḥīm*, etc.' Robinson also highlights the textural effect that is created by the recurrence of matching *fāsilas* in verses whose final words list the attributes of God. See Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an*, pp. 198–201.

62 If these 'anomalous words' are plotted against the suggested structural divisions of the sura, very little correlation is found with the formations postulated by either Robinson or Zahniser: the *naṣīr* at Q. 120 could be argued perhaps to occur towards the end of one of their sections, while *qadīr/maṣīr* at Q. 2:284–285 fall at the beginning of their final textual block of the sura. There is more correspondence between the pattern suggested by these anomalous rhymes, and Farrin's proposed scheme, although that may merely be symptomatic of the increased number of divisions within chiasmic systems. Following the general scholarly tendency of seeing significance near the beginnings and endings of structural units, the *qadīr* at Q. 2:20 can be witnessed to be the last verse of Farrin's ring A; the *naṣīr* at Q. 2:120 occurs in the penultimate verse of the first ring, and *maṣīr* at Q. 2:126 the central verse of the middle ring, of his section D; *qadīr* at Q. 2:147 is again the central verse of his section E; while *min al-nār* at Q. 2:167 occurs at the end of the first ring of section B', with *'alā'l-nār* (at Q. 2:175) and *ba'īd* at Q. 2:176 marking the end of the penultimate ring of that section. The anomalous rhymes at Q. 2:200–202, Q. 2:204–207 fall just before the central ring, and Q. 2:210–212 and Q. 2:214 within the central ring, of section C': both Q. 2:207 and Q. 2:214 Farrin has designated turning verses within his putative structure, and the *zurīd* at Q. 2:253 is the last verse of C'. The *qadīr* at Q. 2:259 is the penultimate verse of the central ring of B', and the anomalous rhymes at Q. 2:265, Q. 2:267, Q. 2:269–271 occur within the final ring of this section. At the end of the sura, moreover, Farrin's scheme would appear to falter in displaying any correspondence with any structure suggested by end-rhyme: the rhyming couplet *qadīr/maṣīr* at Q. 2:284–285,

which for Robinson and Zahniser could be seen to mark the beginning of their final section of the sura, is split by the onset of Farrin's ring A'. In addition, however, as is suggested in Robinson's later study of *Sūrat al-Mā'idā*, scholars have tended to focus (over-much) on opening formulae, and neglected to justify the closure of their posited structural units.

63 Stewart, 'Divine Epithets', pp. 37–38. This is an epitomisation of the *ḥadīth* in question and not a direct quote. Alan Dundes similarly adduced these anecdotes in his *Fables of the Ancients?*, taking them as suggestive of the Qur'an's oral compositional nature: 'What is significant in this anecdote is Muhammad's apparent judgment that one formula may justifiably be substituted for another' (see Dundes, *Fables of the Ancients?*, p. 32).

64 Stewart, 'Divine Epithets', p. 38. That Ibn Abī Sarḥ is sometimes the named actor in this *ḥadīth*, as we see in the version cited below from al-Tha'labī's *Tafsīr*, is also acknowledged by Stewart.

65 It should be noted however that Stewart does contextualise his observation with the following statement, 'Al-Bāqillānī cites Ibn Abī Sarḥ's example in order to show that the Prophet did not approve of merely conveying the sense of the Qur'an but rather insisted on preserving its exact linguistic form' (Stewart, 'Divine Epithets', p. 62, n. 56). This aspect of both narratives is easy to perceive in the way the *ḥadīth* are constructed. The confusion as to the source of these predictable passages of the Qur'an resides solely in the mind of the apostate in question. This does not detract from the suggestion of the presence of pre-Islamic forms of speech. Cf. also comments such as that made by Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, p. 117, 'locutions like *huwa yuḥyī wa-yumīt* and *wa-ilayhi turja'un* might well represent crystallized formulae of cultic origin and thus not the appropriate evidence of irregular syntax.'

66 See Bell, *Commentary*, p. 19 and pp. 44–46, and *Translation*, p. 14 and pp. 29–31.

67 Cuypers, 'Semitic Rhetoric', p. 16.

68 Neuwirth is clear in her acceptance of the fact that they do not strictly speaking rhyme, but nonetheless describes them as variants of the *-ūn/-īn/-ūm/-īm* rhymes, rather than any change in the rhyme scheme (Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, p. 71 (the example she cites is *qahhār* interjected within an *-ūn/-īn* series) and p. 77, where she is clear that *ā* does not rhyme with *ū/ī*). Wansbrough did however suggest that all long vowel plus final consonant combinations could be argued to rhyme (Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, p. 116).

69 A very similar *khātima* occurs at Q. 2:142 (*yahdī man yashā'u ilā širāṭin mustaqīm*), and at numerous other junctures throughout the Qur'an.

70 The same phrase occurs at Q. 2:219, and at numerous other junctures throughout the Qur'an.

71 Thus also Q. 2:27, Q. 7:178, Q. 8:37, *et passim*.

72 It could be argued that verse 124 is thematically connected to verses 125 to 134, narrating aspects of the history of Abraham; Paret's paragraph here, for instance, runs from verses 124 to 134. Yet the later Abraham material within *Sūrat al-Baqara* (Q. 2:258–260) also appears to be divided by a rhyme-defined border at the close of Q. 2:259, despite a large measure of thematic and lexical coherence between verse 258 and verse 260. Thus in Q. 2:258 Abraham describes God as 'He who gives life and death' (*yuḥyī wa-yumīt*); in Q. 2:260 Abraham questions God about His ability to 'give life to the dead' (*tuḥyī'l-mawtā*). The textual border suggested by the presence of *qadīr* at the close of verse 259 is, however, reinforced by the opener *wa-idh* at the onset of verse 260: another possible indicator identified by Robinson in his 2001 study of *al-Mā'idā*. Considerations other than rhyme corroborate the presence of a textual border at Q. 2:260, and it seems by extension that a divide between Q. 2:124 and Q. 2:125 might be equally feasible.

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