

New Perspectives on the Qur'ān

The Qur'ān in its historical context 2

Edited by Gabriel Said Reynolds

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8 Tripartite, but anti-Trinitarian formulas in the Qur'ānic corpus, possibly pre-Qur'ānic

Manfred Kropp

Introduction to method and results

Qur'ān 112 (*al-Ikhlāṣ*) is said to be a complete Muslim confession of a strictly monotheistic faith, the very essence of the Qur'ānic message on the character of God. But, astonishingly enough, for formal reasons certain voices in the Muslim tradition do not consider it to be part of the Qur'ān, properly speaking. In fact, like the first Sūra (*al-Fātiḥa*; Qur'ān 1), an opening prayer, and the last two Sūras (Qur'ān 113 and 114), two prayers invoking shelter and protection against evil powers, it is not expressed in direct divine speech. Instead these four pieces belong to liturgy and ritual. Only an introductory formula such as *qul*, “say,” can turn – quite artificially – their character into direct divine speech.

There are more peculiar features in Qur'ān 112. Not only are there tremendous grammatical ambiguities and difficulties with it but the tradition does not come to a clear explanation of the syntactical structure or the hapax legomenon *ṣamad*, which is of unclear meaning (verse 2; tradition offers more than a dozen different meanings). Also, the attested canonical variants for this short Sūra are quite numerous and diverge considerably from the canonical text. In fact, one gets the impression here of a living oral tradition. This is in stark contrast to the character of variant readings for other parts of the Qur'ānic corpus in general, which have more of the character of philological (guess)work on a highly ambiguous, undotted and unvocalized consonantal text.

Applying the method and rules of textual criticism to these variant readings as if they were variants in manuscripts yields a surprising result: a tripartite but strongly anti-Trinitarian formula. Verse 2 with the enigmatic word *al-ṣamad* reveals a later gloss and explanation for the problematical term *aḥad* (verse 1), an explanation of the type *obscurum per obscurior*. The thus reconstructed version is much more concise, rhetorical and well-constructed according to the rules of Arabic grammar: a nominal subject followed by two coordinated (conjunction *wa-*) verbal predicates, or, alternatively, a short nominal clause followed by two verbal phrases with the same subject as the nominal clause, without any coordination, but in harmony with the specific rhetoric *staccato*-style of such a formula. Exactly the same kind of formula with the same *fāṣila* (Qur'ānic rhyme) *-ad* and the crucial attribute for God (*a/e*)*ḥad* can be reconstructed in another Sūra of the

Qur'ānic corpus where the canonical version hides the original structure (and obfuscates the [Aramaic!] keyword *ḥad*) in one long but theoretically and syntactically awkward verse.

The conclusion proposed in this chapter is that these short and highly effective polemical formulas form part of a pre-Qur'ānic heritage. They are religio-political slogans – to be shouted in the streets of Mecca against religious adversaries or opponents – deriving from extra- and possibly pre-Qur'ānic materials. They were received and incorporated – but not without deep changes obfuscating their original structure and meaning – in the later authoritative version of the text.

The following article does not intend to trace back the whole scientific discussion of *al-Ikhlās*, either in Western or in Muslim scholarship. For this I refer to the article of A.A. Ambros, “Die Analyse von Sure 112,” which gives the essentials of scholarly work on this text accompanied by thoughtful analysis, especially on the syntax and the three (!) *hapax legomena* in this short text of fifteen words. Consequently I will reduce the citations, the footnotes and the bibliographical references – easily to be found in the aforesaid article and in the most common translations and commentaries of the Qur'ān – to the minimum necessary for presenting the new proposed interpretation – in order to reduce to a minimum also the number of “words about words.”¹

The text, its variants and problems

The canonical reading of the *rasm* and the translation of Marmaduke Pickthall² are as follows:

1	<i>Qul: huwa Llāhu aḥad</i>	Say: He is Allah, the One!
2	<i>Allāhu l-samad</i>	Allah, the eternally Besought of all!
3	<i>lam yalid wa-lam yūlad</i>	He begetteth not nor was begotten.
4	<i>wa-lam yakun la-hū kufu 'an aḥad.</i>	And there is none comparable to him.

The syntax of the English translation masks radically the complicated and tortuous structure of the Arabic original, which causes so many discussions among Muslim commentators. But, on the other hand, and as we will see, it catches instinctively the style of the religio-political and polemical formula that the text finally will reveal itself to be.

1 “Wollte man versuchen, das bestimmten Texten bekundete Interesse zu quantifizieren, indem man eine numerische Relation zwischen der Länge des Textes und dem Umfang der diesen gewidmeten ‚Worte über Worte‘ herstellt, dann würde unter den Texten arabischer Sprache der Sure 112 mit ihren knapp 15 Wörtern wohl der erste Rang zufallen.” A. Ambros, “Die Analyse von Sure 112” *Arabica* 63, 1986, 219. One may add that this could well be true for the prayer of “Our Father” in Christian literature.

2 This translation is chosen at random; the discussion in the article will show where the problems of the texts are. M. Pickthall's translation is traditionally the most widely accepted by Muslims of English tongue. A lot of Qur'ānic text corpora, including translations in different languages and of different authors, are to be found on the internet.

The variant readings are given in a simplified conspectus.³ But the most important fact about this text is that the oldest extant material testimonies are not part of the learned Muslim tradition. The mosaic inscription in the (outer) octagonal arcade of the Dome of the Rock⁴ and the legends on dinars and dirhams of the caliph 'Abd-al-Malik (starting from 77/696–7)⁵, as well as a protocol in a bilingual Arabic-Greek papyrus, dating from 88/707–08 (the caliph al-Walīd is mentioned as the actual ruler)⁶ antedate for a century or so the oldest parchment fragments of Q 112 and furthermore exhibit important variants to the canonical reading.

<u>Canonical text</u>	<u>Variants</u>
1. <i>qul</i> “say” <i>huwa</i> “He” <i>aḥad</i> “one”	<i>deest</i> ⁷ <i>deest</i> ⁸ <i>al-wāḥid</i> “the only one, the unique”
2. <i>Allāhu l-samad</i> “Allah, the eternally Besought of all!”	<i>deest</i> <i>al-ṣamad</i> “the eternally Besought of all!”
3. <i>lam yalid wa-lam yūlad</i> “He begetteth not nor was begotten”	<i>lam yūlad wa-lam yalid</i> “He was not begotten nor begetteth” (inversion of elements).
4. <i>wa-lam yakun</i> “and is not” <i>la-hū</i> “for him” <i>kufu'an</i> “comparable” <i>kifā'an; kifā(n); kaft'an</i> (and some more forms). <i>aḥad</i> “none”	<i>deest</i> <i>aḥad</i> “none” <i>kufu'</i> ⁹ ; <i>kuf'an</i> ; <i>kaf'an</i> ; <i>kufa'an</i> ; <i>kafwan</i> ; “equal, sufficient?” add.: <i>la-hū</i> “for him” <i>kufu'an</i> “comparable”

3 The traditional authorities for the different readings are omitted and the interdependence of the variants (forming a continuous reading in the end) must be reconstructed from the details. In fact, a deeper study of the overall structure of the readings would require a complete and space-consuming synoptical edition. For further details I refer to: *MQ* 'Abd-al-Laṭīf al-Khaṭīb: *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt*, Damascus: Dār Sa'd-ad-Dīn, 2002; *MQQ* *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt al-Qur'āniyya*. Ed. 'Abd-al-'Al Makram and Aḥmad Mukhtār 'Umar, Kuwait: Dhāt al-Salāsil, 1402/1982-1405/1985; A. Jeffery, *Materials for the History of the Text of the Qur'ān: The Old Codices*, ed. A. Jeffery, Leiden: Brill, 1937.

4 Cf., e.g., “The Arabic Islamic inscriptions on the Dome of The Rock in Jerusalem, 72 AH / 692 CE,” *Islamic Awareness* website, available at: <<http://www.islamic-awareness.org/History/Islam/Inscriptions/DoTR.html>> (with relevant bibliography; accessed February 4, 2011) based on C. Kessler, “'Abd al-Malik's inscription in the Dome of the Rock: A reconsideration,” *JRAS*, 1970, 2–14; E. Whelan, “Forgotten witness: Evidence for the early codification of the Qur'ān,” *JAOS* 118, 1998, 1–14.

5 Cf. A. Ambros, “Analyse von Sure 112,” 224–25.

6 C.H. Becker, “Das Lateinische in den arabischen Papyrusprotokollen,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und verwandte Gebiete*, 22, 1909, (166–93) 171–73.

7 Also on 'Abd-al-Malik's dirham.

8 Also on Abd-al-Malik's dirham.

9 Also in the inscription of the Dome of the Rock; cf. C. Kessler, “'Abd al-Malik's inscription”, p. 8 (Band 68) and the protocol of the bilingual papyrus; cf. C. H. Becker, “Das Lateinische”, p. 172.

The variants offer, exceptionally in the Qur'ānic tradition, all of the characteristics of a vivid oral tradition: omission of words, substitution of words, change in word order (indicated in the apparatus by *deest* corresponding to a following *add.*), change in vocalization up to the extreme change in the consonantal *rasm* (variants to *kufu'*).

The main difficulties of the canonical reading lie with the three (Qur'ānic) hapax legomena (*aḥad* [v.1]; *aṣ-ṣamad* [v.2]; *kufu'* [v.4]); the sheer number of variants to the word *kufu'* and the number of explanations and meanings given to *aṣ-ṣamad* indicate that there is a major problem here of comprehension.¹⁰ To these are linked enormous syntactical difficulties and anomalies if one intends – as an orthodox reader and commentator normally does – to construct a congruent, fluent, nay elegant, text instead of being satisfied by a sequence of rather short and isolated statements, such as the English translation of v.2: “Allah, the eternally Besought of all!”

Verse 1: syntactical structure and *aḥad* or *eḥad* as a foreign word

The introductory *qul*, “say,” is simply an instrument meant to integrate this text into the direct divine message. The first problematic point is the function of the initial *huwa*, “he is.” If it is omitted, as it is in many variants, and even one attributed to Muḥammad himself,¹¹ then the rest of the verse is a simple nominal phrase: Allāh is “one”; the second verse then becomes a postponed apposition to the subject, “Allāh, the eternally Besought by all!” or it remains an isolated exclamation. If *huwa* is kept, the syntactical structure changes.

The word *huwa* would seem to be a pronominal subject in *anaphora*, perhaps referring to an extra-textual situation furnished by the tradition: Muḥammad is asked by Meccan unbelievers, Jews or Christians, “What is the nature of your God?” The answer comes: “He is . . .” The following *Allāh* is in apposition, leaving *aḥad* as the only predicate and consequently isolating verse 2. Alternatively there are two predicates (*Allāh*, *aḥad*) which are not in congruence as far as determination is concerned, followed by a possible third one (verse 2). Or *huwa* is a kind of *ḍamīr al-sha'n*, a resumptive pronoun meaning “it is so then: . . .,” followed by the predicate *aḥad*; then one can opt for verse 2, making it a second predicate, not in congruence with the first one, or making it a remote and postponed apposition.¹²

Before discussing the exceptional use of the word *aḥad*, which makes it a semantic and functional *hapax legomenon* in the Qur'ānic context, a third possibility should be considered. There may well be a hitherto unseen Aramaicism/

10 It takes A.A. Ambros (“Analyse von Sure 112”) four pages to discuss the meaning and syntactical function of *aḥad*, but eighteen pages to do the same for *al-ṣamad*.

11 A.A. Ambros, “Analyse von Sure 113,” 227.

12 As a rule as well that one has to be aware of, in light of the highly rhetorical and poetical nature of the text, license is taken for the sake of rhyme or rhythm.

Syriacism,¹³ if we take *huwa* as a focusing pronoun equivalent to Syriac *hū dēn allāhā*, “As far as God is concerned/But God is . . .” This could well fit into possible explanations of *aḥad* as a formally and functionally foreign word (e.g. Hebrew or Aramaic).

Notwithstanding, the root of the word *aḥad* is very common in Arabic and other Semitic languages, in general meaning “one.” The specific form *aḥad*, frequently used in the Qur'ān (compare to verse 4!) – has the meaning “anyone;” in negative clauses it can mean “none; nobody.”¹⁴ The sense of “the only one, unique” occurs with (*Allāh*) *wāḥid*¹⁵ – as in some of the canonical variants – and when the root appears as an accusative adverb: *Allāh waḥda-hū*.¹⁶ Thus *aḥad* is peculiar in this context. One could adduce the necessary rhyme *-ad* (instead of *-id* as in *wāḥid*) as an argument; but the Qur'ānic *fāṣila* is not as strict as poetic rhyme and would tolerate this alternative. When considering this awkwardness with the syntactical anomalies, one cannot but think of foreign influence, first of all of *shama' Yisrā'el*, *Yahweh elohē-nū Yahweh eḥ(h)ād* (Dt. 6:4), and, eventually, of its Aramaic – Jewish and Christian – parallels.¹⁷

Verse 2: the Lord or unified in the Trinity?

If one accepts this interpretation, the function of verse 2 becomes clear. As in many other cases in the Qur'ānic corpus, a strange or foreign word is explained by a following Arabic translation or paraphrase which can be, but is not necessarily introduced by the rhetorical question *wa-mā adrā-ka* “and what lets you know . . .”¹⁸ The curious point in this analysis is that we have an explanation of the type

13 I owe this point to C. Luxenberg, who kindly discussed this matter with me.

14 Q 72:18; 72:20; 33:39; and numerous examples are to be found easily in concordances of the Qur'ān, as, e.g., Muhammad Fu'ād 'Abd-al-Bāqī, *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-karīm*. Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1988 (first printed 1364/1945); for a first orientation on Qur'ānic words and roots and their specific usage, A.A. Ambros, *A Concise Dictionary of Koranic Arabic* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2004) is most useful.

15 E.g., Q 4:171 (*ilāh wāḥid*); 5:73 (*illā llāh wāḥid*); 12:39 (*Allāh al-wāḥid al-qahhār*); this term can be definite and indefinite, as a nominal component of the clause as well as predicative.

16 Cf. Q 7:70 (*li-na'buda Llāha waḥda-hū* “so we my serve God alone”); it is to be found in the *shahāda* “confession of faith” on the reverse of 'Abd-al-Malik's dinars and dirhams, which already mentioned *lā ilāha illā Llāhu waḥda-hū lā sharīka la-hū* “there is no God but God alone; he has no associate.”

17 This idea is not new and has been discussed many times; cf. with caution (“weniger plausibel als – vielleicht – auf den ersten Blick”) Ambros, “Analyse von Sure 112,” 227 and n. 14; (now!) much more decidedly, A. Neuwirth, *Zur Komposition der mekkanischen Suren*, 2nd edition, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007, 26: “[Q 112] Sein Anfangsvers . . . ist eine freie Übersetzung des jüdischen Glaubensbekenntnisses, . . . dessen Schlüsselwort “Einer,” ehad, in arabischer Lautung *aḥad*, im Korantext noch durchklingt.”

18 Cf., e.g., Q 69:3; 74:27, for introduced translations or paraphrases; Q 85:5 is an example of an Arabic equivalent for a preceding unknown or uncommon word; consequently “the fuel-fed fire” is the paraphrase for preceding *ukhdūd*, which must mean “hell-fire,” and cannot mean “ditch”; cf. M. Kropp, “Chaire européenne. Études coraniques,” *Annuaire du Collège de France, Cours et travaux, Résumés* 118, 2007–08, (783–99) 786–87.

obscurum per obscurior, as the key-term *ṣamad* is also a hapax legomenon, and one that puzzled the minds of medieval Muslim commentators.

When it comes to Western scholarship all available arms in comparative Semitic etymology were called upon, even comparison as far-fetched as with Ugaritic and Old-Aramaic words.¹⁹ Etymologies and parallels taken from Ugarit or Ancient Syria (viz. that *ṣamad* is an epithet of the ancient Syrian god Hadad, “the one who hits with his mace”) may be of linguistic interest but are of no help for understanding the Qur’ānic text. The most common proposed explanations can be divided into two directions.

First, *ṣamad* is an Arabic word with a wide range of meanings, from “compact, massive, undivided” to “lord and provider” and “eternal.”²⁰ For the last meaning the vague phonetic assonance to the equally unclear *sarmad(i)*²¹ may play a role. For the general meaning “compact” and its derivatives, the word would be thought of as a polemical monotheistic and anti-Trinitarian epithet of God, possibly used already in pre-Islamic times for the “High-God” of the Meccan Ka’ba. *Ṣamad* as “lord and provider” is used in light of the eminent qualities of an Arab *ṣayyid* (nobleman) who is “besought of all” in all kinds of distress and difficulty.²² The Muslim tradition has in fact a predilection for this interpretation. If this is the meaning then I add the idea that it is the translation of the *qerē Adonay*, “my Lord,” for the *ktīb*, YHWH. This fits well into the proposed function of the verse as a (later) explanation or paraphrase.

The other direction derives the word in question from the Aramaic (Syriac) root √SMD (going ultimately back to the Semitic root, present in Arabic and other languages √DMD), “to bind (together),” against the verdict of A. Schall, “liegen zu weit ab.”²³ C. Luxenberg²⁴ proposes *ṣamīdā*, “bound together, united,” meaning the Trinitarian God in his undivided Trinity, and refers to relevant passages in Syriac theological writings. Without going into the details, I would note that this would be a definitely pro-Trinitarian statement that would not fit with the theological messages of the verses around it.

Further study and investigation must concentrate on the very nature and function of this verse. Is it a concise, but deep and sharply formulated theological “confession of faith” in a strict sense, in which one can expect precise terminology? Or is it a religio-political slogan, where polemical and immediately impressive formulations outweigh theological subtleties? In this chapter I will argue that this

19 For all details cf. Ambros, “Analyse von Sure 112,” 227–44.

20 Thus “eternally” in M. Pickthall’s translation

21 Q 28:71–72; A. Ambros, *Concise Dictionary*, 133.

22 A. Schall, “Coranica,” *Orientalia Suecana*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 33–35, 1984–86, 371–73, adduces Arabic *ṣindīd* (pl. *ṣanādīd*), “leader, nobleman,” as derived from the same root.

23 See *ibid.*, 373.

24 C. Luxenberg, “Zur Morphologie und Etymologie von syro-aramäisch *sātānā* = Satan und koranisch-arabisch *shayṭān*,” in C. Burgmer (ed.) *Streit um den Koran*, Berlin: Schiler, 2007, (69–82) 80, n.1.

verse is a later addition to the “possibly pre-Qur'ānic formula,”²⁵ which was just such a slogan.

**Verse 3: absolutely no divine begetting, expressed
*per merismum***

Verse 3 offers no lexical or syntactical difficulties; but there are some remarks – perhaps banal to a connoisseur – to be made. First, the (negative) perfect in this verse as well as in verse 4 (*lam yalid, lam yūlad, lam yakun*) is extra-temporal and indicates absolute and ever-valid statements. Second, the construction “lam + apocopate (short imperfect)” to indicate negative past is reserved to written (Standard and Classical) Arabic in modern times, in contrast to the spoken Arabic languages which do not possess this construction. This could lead to the conclusion to see here definitely an element of elevated language in the Qur'ān which cannot have been introduced *après coup* in the text (in the way the *hamza* was introduced), because this would have meant frequent and rather radical changes of the *rasm*. But there are good arguments and indications that this construction formed part of the spoken – perhaps in contrast to the poetical *koiné* vulgar – language in antiquity. It is to be found in the Nemara-inscription (dating from AD 328; line 4: *fa-lam yabliḡ malik mablagħah*, “no king reached his rank”) and, more importantly for our argument, in a bilingual (Greek and Arabic written in Greek letters) fragment of Psalm 78:30, dating perhaps from the beginning of the eighth century AD, published by B. Violet²⁶ (*wa-lam yu'dimū shahwat-om*, “before they had satisfied their desire”). This would then be a special feature, common to spoken and later Classical Arabic until at least the eighth century AD, but then lost in the spoken varieties.

25 Ambros comes near to my present estimation when he proposes to see the choice of the word *ṣamad* as dictated by *ḍarūrat al-shi'r* (“poetic necessity”), in this case for a word with the ending *-ad* that matches the rhyme: “Es ist gewiß nicht überflüssig zu betonen, daß die Überlegung, es könnte sich bei *ṣamad* um ein bloßes, formal-ästhetisch motiviertes ‘Füllsel’ ohne scharfe semantisch-theologische Intention handeln, nur mit großer Reserve geäußert werden kann. Zunächst mag es ja nahezu wie ein Sakrileg anmuten, wenn die Textbedeutung dieses Wortes, das über so lange Zeit den Gegenstand intensiver Bemühungen der Exegeten gebildet hat (bis zu dem Punkt, da darin eine mystische Summe der göttlichen Eigenschaften erblickt wurde) nun quasi als Scheinproblem der Koranwissenschaft abgelegt würde.” A. Ambros, “Analyse von Sure 112,” 243–44. A cynical historian like me may well add: this in fact is a very typical development in the history of human thinking, especially when religion and religious texts are concerned. The original intentions and meanings of a text are nearly nothing in comparison to what subsequent generations read or want to read and to interpret into it. And, as a conclusion and in humility a historian may say: what modern and positive scholarship can and will find out about the original Qur'ān will have a minimal, if any, impact on contemporary Islam and Muslims, and – said in paradoxical cynicism – rightly so.

26 B. Violet, *Ein zweisprachiges Psalmfragment aus Damaskus*. Berichtigter Sonderabzug aus der Orientalistischen Litteraturzeitung, 1901, Berlin: Peiser, 1902, col. 8 and 10. The language of the Arabic version is clearly spoken Arabic, not Classical or Qur'ānic.

A third point is rather surprising and must be raised and discussed briefly. Philological and theological idiosyncrasy is found in the learned speculation and interpretation of the second statement *lam yūlad*, “He was not begotten.”²⁷ But the position of the two elements shows (once again in this study) the importance of rhyme to the Qur’ān, as the logical sequence would be *lam yūlad wa-lam yalid*.²⁸ Ambros comes near to the point, when he states *lam yūlad* may be a (stylistic) parallel motivated by the *rhyme*. But he fails to cite the relevant stylistic device, the *figura etymologica* figuring in this passage as well as in many others in the Qur’ān and generally very frequent in the Arabic language: *expressio per merismum*. With this device the two extreme parts are meant to represent the entire range of meaning in between; the interpreter should not give any special meaning or weight to the two extremities.²⁹ Thus the appropriate translation, not trying to imitate the specific Arabic (and Semitic) style, could be: “And He has absolutely nothing to do with begetting!”

Verse 4: the consequences of non-initial *hamza* inserted into Qur’ānic language

The original language of the Qur’ān is characterized by the loss of *hamza* (glottal stop) in nearly every instance of the non-initial position, as clearly reflected by the complicated orthographical rules of canonical Qur’ānic Arabic and later Classical

27 The current Muslim explanation is that God is without beginning from all eternity. But that is rather banal and would not require the metaphorical use of the image of begetting for his coming into existence.

28 On this cf. Ambros, “Analyse von Sure 112,” 244. “Die Frage, was *kufu’* in v. 4 genau bedeuten soll, graviert deshalb so sehr, weil bei der Annahme von ‘Gefährtin’ die drei Negationen in v. 3–4 exakt den drei Personen der christlichen Trinität nach islamischer Auffassung entsprechen (*lam yalid* – ‘Vater’, *lam yūlad* – ‘Sohn’, *lam yakun lahū kufu’an aḥad* – ‘Maria.’ Leider sehen wir keine Möglichkeit, durch intern-koranische oder externe (philologische oder linguistische) Beibringungen zu einer Entscheidung bezüglich *kufu’* zu gelangen. Hält man dazu, daß *lam yalid* ebenso gut die Allah-Kindschaft anderer Wesen (insb. von *al-Lāt* usw.; vgl. [Q] 53,19f.) in Abrede stellen kann (wie in der koranwissenschaftlichen Literatur wiederholt ausgeführt wurde) und daß *lam yūlad* sehr wohl auch bloß parallelistisch und durch Reim motiviert sein kann (bzw. ganz allgemein die Urewigkeit Allahs emphatisieren soll), daß spricht ebenso viel dafür, das der ‘negative Reflex’ der Trinität auf Koninzidenz, nicht Intention beruht.” (Ambros, “Analyse von Sure 112,” 245). His argument comes out of his very brief consideration of *kufu’*. His first agnostic skepticism about *kufu’* will be shown to be unnecessary by the following discussion of verse 4. Moreover, his parallel between *ṣāḥiba* (“The female companion;” Q 6:101; 72:3) and *kufu’* reveals a false reading in two Qur’ānic passages, as will be demonstrated below.

29 For another example I cite only Q 85:3: *wa-shāhid wa-mashhūd*, which means simply “by the fact of an absolute/absolutely true testimony.”

Arabic for representing this consonant in the non-initial position.³⁰ Now, the hapax legomenon *kufu'*, in the presumed indefinite accusative *kufu'an*, is derived, according to the canonical reading, from a verb III', a class which is not regularly acknowledged by Arabic grammarians. For the sake of brevity suffice it to say that these verbs III' merge with III w or y.³¹ They may leave traces of their original semantic field, but as a general rule all of these three classes are closely related (morphologically and semantically) and may ultimately go back to one proto-class; consequently there is one proto-root for each of the three possible roots. Semantic differences are then revealed as later secondary differentiations out of the common meaning which can be attributed to the proto-root. The great variety of the readings for the word in question bears testimony to these facts. The variants vary, even in the consonantal *rasm*, between the (Classical Arabic) roots \sqrt{KF} ', \sqrt{KFW} ', and \sqrt{KFY} '.

At this point let us look at the syntactical structure of verse 4 proposed by the canonical reading:

<i>wa-lam yakun</i>	<i>la-hū</i>
initial verbal predicate	prepositional complement (to the following object)
<i>kufu'an</i>	<i>aḥad(un)</i>
object (complement of the verb)	subject

The rather unusual sequence of the elements may well be explained by *ḍarūrat al-shi'r* ("poetic necessity"): the rhyme *-ad* is represented by the subject which must then be in the last position. Otherwise the word *kufu'an* and its case (indefinite accusative) are keys to understanding the syntactical construction of this verse and thus its meaning. The verb *kāna*, "to be," takes its predicate in the accusative (in Classical Arabic). Consequently the prepositional complement *la-hū*, "to him," refers to the following *kufu'an*, "equal."

30 The Arabic represented by the pure consonantal text (*rasm*) of the Qur'ān was of the same type as the modern living Arabic languages, i.e. among other characteristics the already mentioned loss of *hamza*, dropping of short vowels at the endings of the word, consequently no inflectional cases for the noun nor modes of the verb in the prefix conjugation, etc. I am basing my considerations on the still valuable study of K. Vollers, *Volkssprache und Schriftsprache im alten Arabien*, Straßburg: Trübner, 1906 and J. Owens, *A Linguistic History of Arabic*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. The few phenomena in the Qur'ānic *rasm* which seem to contradict this statement cannot be discussed here in detail. The non-existence of *hamza* if not in initial position and its subsequent and later introduction into the text are the only phenomena relevant for the present discussion; and they are not too controversial in Muslim tradition and Western scholarship.

31 Cf. K. Vollers, *Volkssprache*, 83–97, about the *hamza* in the Qur'ān; 83 for the verb classes III', w, and y. This is illustrated in an anecdote about readers of the Qur'ān who discuss if in a certain verse one has to read *bada'na*, *badayna* or even *badawna* (K. Vollers, *Volkssprache*, 85). The number of variant readings attested in the *qirā'āt* (cf. *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt al-Qur'āniyya*, ed. Aḥmad 'Umar and 'Abd al-'Āl Mukarram, Tehran: Dār al-Uswa li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1426) for other verbs retained as classical III' gives further examples; e.g. *shat'* (Q 48:29) and the many variant forms for the verb *haza'a*.

Now the verb *kāna*, “to be,” is frequently used with the preposition *li-*, “to,” with the meaning “to have”; the thing possessed is the grammatical subject of the verb; the possessor is expressed by the noun or pronoun governed by the preposition. If one cuts out the element *kufu’an*, “equal,” the remaining phrase takes the simple meaning “and he has none.” But this phrase would be incomplete, so the key to the interpretation of this phrase is the function of the word *kufu’an*. Admittedly one could take this word as a free adverbial complement referring to the whole phrase and not as an direct object to the verb *kāna* (“to be”). The phrase would then mean: “And he has none as/in quality of an equal.” The construction is, however, rather tortuous and unusual, and so a fresh interpretation of *kufu’an* is called for.

Certainly, the root $\sqrt{\text{KF}}$ has to be ruled out for Qur’ānic Arabic.³² Thus we must consider the merged root $\sqrt{\text{KF-’y}}$ which has – as the accepted $\sqrt{\text{KFY}}$ in Standard Arabic – the general meaning “to be enough; to be sufficient (for a task, etc.); to suffice.” From this general meaning are derived “to protect” and “to contend with,” which comes near or equals “equal, rival,” in the canonical interpretations of Sūra 112. When the hamza in *kufu’an* is eliminated and the *rasm* of this word is read without the shaping Classical Arabic, the forms would be *kaf(u)wan* or *kuf(u)wan* (as attested in variants). These nouns then can be taken as a “vulgar” form of Classical *kufu’*.³³ The form *fu’l* – normally a concrete noun or an infinitive – has the tendency to insert a secondary vowel and to form *fu’ul*. As an infinitive the form *ka/uf(u)w* is equivalent to classical *kifāya*, “sufficiency; enough; on the sufficient, right level,” which appears, not by chance, among the (*rasm*-changing) variants. The phrase of verse 4 could then be translated: “And He has none to (His) sufficiency / to (His) level / rank.”

The variant given in the inscription in the Dome of the Rock offers the opportunity to go even a step further in interpretation of verse 4. There in fact the final *alif* is lacking; the noun appears in the nominative. This can be explained away easily by a probable haplography, given that the last word starts with an *alif*. But a final *alif* must not necessarily indicate a long final vowel *-ā*, or *-an*, respectively, if taken as a case-marker. As an *alif al-wiqāya*, it is added graphically without being pronounced to a final long vowel *-ū*. This purely graphical usage is confined in Classical Arabic to cases in which this long vowel represents a specific grammatical category (e.g. third-person plural endings of the verb), whereas in Qur’ānic orthography it can be added to every final *-ū*. Reading *kafū* (or *kāfū*)³⁴ one could assume a hybrid word triggered by Aramaic (Syriac) in the

32 The attestations of this root in pre-Islamic poetry, often cited by the Muslim commentators, are either built in clear imitation of the Qur’ānic text or refer to a different semantic field of this root, attested in other Semitic languages (e.g. Classical Ethiopic [Gə’əz]): “to fall down; to be weak (bad); to fall down.”

33 Cf., e.g., Q 25:41 *huzuwan*, derived from the root $\sqrt{\text{HZ}}$ where this “vulgar” form is received even in the standard reading; cf. Ambros, *Concise Dictionary*, 279.

34 I owe the following to long oral and written discussions with C. Luxenberg, who is about to publish a separate and detailed study on Sūra 112; For now see C. Luxenberg, “Zur Morphologie,” 80, n.1.

form (*fā'ūl* as an active participle, as in *fārūq*) and in the meaning. For this last aspect one has to think of the normal Syriac equivalent for Arabic *kafā*, "to suffice": *sfaq*. The semantic field of this verb *sfaq* is not congruent with that of the Arabic one. It has the special meaning, derived from the general meaning "to be able to" (which is present also in Arabic), "to understand." Without entering into further details of this and other possible Aramaic (Syriac) *calques*³⁵ in the passage the following interpretation is possible: "And none is able to understand it (i.e. the mystery of the character of God)."

To choose between this meaning and that mentioned above ("And He has none to [His] sufficiency / to [His] level / rank."), a further investigation into the nature and the original function of this text is necessary. For the moment the first one ("level, rank") seems to fit the context better.

Another tripartite and anti-Trinitarian formula in the Qur'ān

Before putting together the different parts into a coherent interpretation and translation, the discovery of another tripartite but anti-trinitarian formula in the Qur'ān will be briefly presented. In the Qur'ān only, numerous parallel passages to Q 112 exhibiting the keywords *walad* and *aḥad* are to be found (which is not really surprising, seeing that it is somewhat the core of Qur'ānic theology). The discovered parallels in synopsis yield further synonyms or substitutes, especially for *ṣamad* and *kufu'*. Most of them lack, however, the character of a precise and pregnant slogan, except one which had to be discovered and reconstructed out of its actual canonical reading, which totally obfuscates the original wording and syntactical structure.

The word *walad* in the Qur'ān is mostly found in regulations about heritage, especially in Sūra 4. The expression *walad Allāh*, "Son of God," is found in Q 6:101; 19:91; 37:12;³⁶ and 43:81. Most important for our purposes is 6:101:

khāliqū a-samawāt wa-l-arḍ! annā yakūnu la-hū waladun wa-lam yakun la-hū ṣāhibatun wa-khalaqa kulla shay'in wa-huwa bi-kulli shay'in 'alīm

"The Originator of the heavens and the earth! How can He have a child, when there is for Him no consort, when He created all things and is aware of all things?"

35 The assumption of such a linguistic *calque* can also to a new interpretation of Q 85:8 and the verb *naqama*, "to take revenge." The corresponding Syriac verb *tba'* has among others the (general) meaning "to ask for, to demand," which gives a new plausible interpretation to the passage; cf. M. Kropp, "Chaire européenne," 787–88.

36 Embedded in the story of Jonah and connected with the question of the gender to which angels belong. Thus one could understand here, "sons or daughters of God."

“Creator of heaven and earth” or “Lord of heaven and earth” is an important element which seems to be part of the Muslim answer to the Nicene Creed and is possibly represented in Q 112 by *šamad*. The word of *šāhiba*, “the (female) consort,” seems at first glance logical. However, by examining the other parallel passages we will see that this reading and interpretation is too smooth and banal and, above all, against the basic tenets of Qur’ānic theology. For the other relevant passages, the word *walad* figures always in the verbal expression *ittakhadha waladan*, “He has taken for himself a child/son,” which in fact proves to be the basic and essential formula.³⁷ Ambros³⁸ offers a good conspectus of the different constructions and meanings of this verbal phrase, from the concrete “to take s.th.” to “to make s.th. out of s.th., to turn into.” He does not look, however, for one of the most important constructions: direct accusative object and indeterminate adverbial accusative (for which he gives only *ittakhadhahu huzuwan*, “take s.th. as a joke = to mock”³⁹), which here would be *ittakhadhahu waladan* “to take someone as a child, son = to adopt (!)” The indeterminate accusative then is to be taken as adverbial, not as the direct object, which in most cases is not expressed in the respective Qur’ānic passages. It forms one precise verb (“to adopt”) together with the rather periphrastic basic verb *ittakhadha*. The consequences for the – theological – interpretation are obvious: this formula is polemically directed against the (Nestorian) adoptionists, while *lam yalid* or its similar is in direct opposition to the Chalcedonian expression: “only-begotten and first-born son of God.”

Q 25:2, *al-Furqān*,⁴⁰ is presented here as an illustrative example which offers all the needed parallels to Q 112:

*alladhī la-hū mulku l-samawāti wa-l-arḍi wa-lam yattakhidh waladan
wa-lam yakun la-hū sharīkun fī l-mulki wa-khalaqa kulla shay’in fa-qadda-
rahu taqdīran.*

“He unto Whom belongeth the Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth, He hath chosen no son nor hath He any partner in the Sovereignty. He hath created everything and hath meted out for it a measure.”

37 *Akhadha*, in its eighth stem, *ittakhadha*, is one of the most irregular verbs in the Qur’ān (as exhibited by the variant readings), and at the same time one of the most used (and colloquial) ones; cf. K. Vollers, “Volkssprache,” 40, 90, 120 and 192. I might add here that Vollers’ “Folgerungen” (*Volkssprache* 175–85) is among the important and fascinating analyses of the Qur’ānic language, of the ‘Arabiyya, and of their relationship to (historical) spoken Arabic. It is one of the incredible facts in the history of research and scholarship that the verdict of a single person – albeit Nöldeke – caused it to be neglected and nearly forgotten for so long.

38 Ambros, *Concise Dictionary*, 22.

39 Other nouns attested in this function in the Qur’ān: *khalīlan* “as a friend” (Q 4:125) – *ilāhan* “as God” (Q 26:29) – *sabīlan* “take one’s way” (Q 18:61) – *ahdan* “take as obligation or pact” (Q 19:78), etc.

40 There are many other relevant passages, easily to be found by looking up the attestations of *ittakhadha waladan* in the concordances (MQ; MQQ or using electronic text corpora); e.g. Q 2:16; 10:68; 17:11; 18:4; 19:35; 19:88; 19:92; 21:26; 23:91; (43,16: *ittakhadha banāt* “adopting daughters”).

In sum, each of the three principal elements of Q 112 corresponds to a group of related terms or expressions found in parallel passages:

- Q 112:1-2: *aḥad, ṣamad* versus: *wāḥid, waḥda-hū; ghanī, qahhār, khāliq* *kulla shay'in, la-hū mulku al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ* (among others);
- Q 112:3: *lam yalid wa-lam yūlad* versus *mā ittakhadha / lam yattakhid waladan*
- Q 112:4: *lam yakun la-hū kuḥwan aḥad* versus *lā sharīka la-hū (fī l-mulki)*.

Having in mind these tripartite and anti-Trinitarian formulas, well arranged according the aforementioned categories of divine epithets, clearly answering to respective assertions in the Christian (Nicene) Creed, let us read *al-Jinn* (72) 3:

wa-annahū ta'ālā jaddu rabbīnā mā ittakhadha ṣāḥibatan wa-lā waladan.

“And (we believe) that He – exalted be the glory of our Lord! – hath taken neither wife nor son!”

The case of Q 112:4 demonstrated that uncertainties of reading and interpretation can be signaled by a large number of variants. In this verse the uncertainty is clear even in the translation.⁴¹ The pious exclamation is unusual and is found in a very strange position and formulation. The verb *ta'ālā*, “be He exalted,” normally stands alone⁴² and refers simply to God, not to one of his qualities. The impressive list of variants and readings, some of which change the *rasm* of the text,⁴³ could indicate that there was a vivid oral tradition regarding this verse. But an analysis of the variants shows that they reflect rather the philological difficulties caused by a strange misreading of the keyword in this passage and the subsequent guesswork of interpreters who in fact had no authentic oral tradition, or, even worse, used every effort to hide the original wording of this passage.

41 Better said, the translations; by far the most extravagant in tackling this passage is Paret's: “Unser Herr, der Inbegriff von Glück und Segen, er ist erhaben!” to which an additional commentary in the footnote is added: “Das Glück (jadd) unseres Herrn ist erhaben.”

42 Or in the expanded form *subḥānahu wa-ta'ālā*, “be He praised and exalted.”

43 *ta'ālā jaddu rabbīnā* “be exalted the majesty/the fortune of our Lord.”

ta'ālā juddu rabbīnā, ta'ālā jiddu rabbīnā, (dialectal) variants of the word *jadd*.

ta'ālā jaddun, rabbunā, “be exalted the Grandeur (in general), our Lord” *jadd* and *rabbunā* in apposition.

ta'ālā, jadda rabbunā, “be He exalted, our Lord is magnificent.”

ta'ālā jaddan rabbunā, “be He exalted, seriously (!) our Lord.”

ta'ālā jiddan rabbunā, “be He exalted, verily, our Lord” (as if there were degrees to exaltation).

ta'ālā jadā rabbīnā, “be exalted the gift (?) of our Lord (change of *rasm*).

ta'ālā jalālu rabbīnā, “be exalted the majesty of our Lord (change of *rasm*).

ta'ālā dhikru rabbīnā, “be exalted the memory of our Lord” (substitution of a whole word).

Having in mind now the three categories of the tripartite and anti-Trinitarian formula, we recognize *ittakhadha waladan* as the second (placed third for the sake of the *rhyme*); *ittakhadha ṣāhibatan* – which still has to be discussed in its precise reading – represents in fact the third (*sharīk*) if we take for the moment the “consort” as “partner.” Thus we have to discover the first category (*aḥad, wāḥid* or *la-hū l-mulk* or similar) in the remaining words – and we easily do this by cancelling the dot in the presumed “majesty, fortune,” *jadd. Had*, “the one,” is in fact the required word and concept, no matter that it is apparently in an Aramaic form.⁴⁴ This leads immediately to the discovery of the tripartite structure of this passage, indicated by the – not perfect⁴⁵ – *rhyme* in *-ad*. Thus we present the reconstructed reading⁴⁶ and translation:

... *innahū — ta ‘ālā — ḥad! Rabbīnā mā (i)ttakhad — ṣaḥaba wa-lā walad!*
 ‘ | — | ‘ | ‘ | — | ‘ | ‘ | — | ‘ | ‘ |⁴⁷

“... He – exalted be He – is One! Our Lord did not adopt – neither partners (in his sovereignty) nor a son!”

The very concrete and human idea of a consort for having a son from the very beginning seems too banal and in any case unacceptable as a theological tenet, even when willingly misunderstood by an ideological adversary. In the context of the passage with the expression *ittakhadha-waladan* it is simply not needed, since it is adoption which is presumed, discussed and naturally rejected. This leads logically to the reading *ṣaḥaba*,⁴⁸ “companions, company,” which is furthermore in perfect semantic parallel to *sharīk*, “partner,” and – as has been demonstrated – to *kufu’ / kufw*, “equal, on the same level,” in Q 112:4. This “partner,” or better, “partnership,” does not refer to the Holy Spirit,⁴⁹ as has been speculated,⁵⁰ but to

44 One could think of a kind of haplography or other reasons for the elision of the *alif* of *aḥad*; but that would lead back to the discussion of this word in verse 1 of Q 112.

45 Unless we consider a dialectal form, *ittakhad*, for this verb which anyway is multi-faceted in the Qur’ān.

46 Here I include some linguistic features (not in accordance with Classical Arabic) and the alternative reading *ṣaḥaba*, “companions, partners,” instead of *ṣāhibā*, “consort.” These cannot be discussed in detail, which would require a separate study. Thus some short remarks must suffice. The short vowel *i* in *rabbīnā* is not a case marker, since we assume original Qur’ānic Arabic to be caseless. It is in fact an epenthetic vowel caused by the structure of the syllables as it exists in many of the modern variants of spoken Arabic (cf. J. Owens, *Linguistic History*, 107–08). The form of *ittakhad*, as already indicated, includes an initial *alif*, dictated by the rhythm of the sentence. The final *dāl* instead of *dhāl* could well be a vulgar form of the word, or it may come from *ḍarūrat al-shi’r*, “poetic necessity.”

47 The very regular and pregnant rhythmic structure is remarkable: seven syllables and three symmetrically placed accents in each verse. The structure of the formula in Q 112 is less regular, but follows at least the rule of increasing syllables (i.e. the longest one at the end), as the three phrases have a pattern of 5 – 7 – 9 syllables, with two accents in every phrase.

48 There are other morphological forms for the plural or collective of *ṣāhib*, “companion;” *ṣaḥaba* is chosen here for rhythmical reasons.

49 Which is, in fact, grammatically feminine in Arabic.

50 Cf. Ambros, “Analyse von Sure 112,” 244–45.

the second part of qualities and epithets referring to the “Son” in the (Nicene) creed: very God of very God, of one essence with His Father, by Whom the worlds were established and everything was created.⁵¹

Still further conclusions can be drawn on the basis of a new analysis of these passages. If it is true that *kufw*, *ṣaḥaba*, and *sharīk* are references to the “*homoousion*” and its paraphrases in the Christian (Nicene) creed, then *shirk* is nothing else than assuming, believing and defending this tenet; consequently the omni-present *mushrikūn* in the Qur'ān must be Trinitarian Christians.⁵²

Another point has to be stressed. *Al-Jinn* is a remarkable piece in the Qur'ān, especially from the literary point of view. The partial transfer of the religious controversy and the preaching of God's message from the human world to that of non-human spirits (*jinn*) is an ingenious literary device which does not lack some humor and irony – qualities not always present with this text and its author(s). Furthermore this device needs to be analyzed under the aspects and premises of the speech-act theory. The discourse in this Sūra involves different speakers, and the identity of the narrator is unclear. This is a most complicated text, where the inspired religious medium builds up his own world, which could be quite remote from the concrete historical situation he actually lives in.⁵³

A recycled passage in Q 72:3

The comparison between the reconstructed formula and its canonical reading demonstrates that there are misreadings (e.g. *ḥad* as a foreign word designating one of the essentials of God's nature), or better, changes which can be explained either by ignorance or by an intention to hide the original wording. Others, such

51 Explicitly the Qur'ān is anti-binarian (not anti-Trinitarian), since it insists on refuting the Son as begotten by God the Father, and the Son as equal in essence and as a partner in the creation of the world. Theological utterances and tenets about the Holy Spirit, which have clear echoes in the Qur'ān (e.g. Q 2:87; 2:253; 4:171, etc.), are acceptable because they enter into the normal framework and character of anthropomorphic metaphors of God's nature.

52 It is true that the term *sh.r.k.* is attested in epigraphic South Arabian inscriptions in the – very probable – sense of “paganism; polytheism”. This, in fact, does not affect the result of our analysis of what this word means in the Qur'ān. A word in context has not its etymological or historical meaning, but its specific one required by the context and meant by the authors of the text. On the contrary, the one who chose, perhaps very consciously, this special term for designating his religious adversaries, could well have meant that Trinitarian Christians are nothing better than polytheists.

53 This is in fact a program for a whole series of studies to be made on the Qur'ānic corpus. I apologize for my ignorance of relevant English literature and cite only three German monographs which opened for me new horizons in Qur'ānic studies: P. von Polenz, *Deutsche Satzsemantik: Grundbegriffe des Zwischen-den-Zeilen-Lesens*, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985; P. Kühn *Mehrfachadressierung: Untersuchungen zur adressatenspezifischen Polyvalenz sprachlichen Handelns*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995; A. Wagner, *Prophetie als Theologie. Die so spricht Jahwe-Formeln und ihr Beitrag für das Grundverständnis alttestamentlicher Prophetie*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004.

as *annahu* and *waladan*, follow the logic of the insertion of this hitherto isolated, independent formula into a larger narrative and literary context, which probably required the deletion of the original tri-partite staccato rhythm and an adaptation to the longer verses in the rest of the Sūra. These adaptations could well have been gradual and in different steps, in accordance with the history of the Qur'ānic corpus, as will be shortly shown in the conclusion to this chapter. For now I would like to present some pre-Islamic parallels to the tripartite formulas transmitted in the Muslim tradition which will further illustrate the possible historical background and the religious atmosphere in which the Qur'ānic texts originated.

Al-Hajj (22) deals in its first part (verses 27 to 39) with the details of the pilgrimage. To introduce the atmosphere of the text I cite here Q 22:29–31 in M. Pickthall's translation:

[29] Then let them make an end of their unkemptness and pay their vows and go around the ancient House. [30] That (is the command). And whoso magnifieth the sacred things of Allah, it will be well for him in the sight of his Lord. The cattle are lawful unto you save that which hath been told you. So shun the filth of idols, and shun lying speech, [31] Turning unto Allah (only), not ascribing partners unto Him; for whoso ascribeth partners unto Allah, it is as if he had fallen from the sky and the birds had snatched him or the wind had blown him to a far-off place.

Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, in his *Tafsīr*,⁵⁴ still censored by Sunni orthodoxy today, explains for “lying speech” that this refers to *shirk*, “ascribing partners to God” – and in particular the *shirk* in the *talbiya*, “ritual invocation of God during the pilgrimage,”⁵⁵ used by several Arab tribes in Mecca, among them the Quraysh, the tribe of Muḥammad. Then he gives the precise formula:

labbayka, Allāhumma, labbayk To Your service, O God, to Your service!
(the specific formula – a confession of faith):

54 Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*. Taḥqīq: Aḥmad Farīd. Bayrūt: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1424/2003. The passage in the Arabic original:

يقول : اتقوا الكذب ، وهو الشرك .
حدثنا أبو محمد ، قال : حدثني أبي ، قال : حدثنا الهذيل ، عن مقاتل ، عن محمد بن علي ، في قوله تعالى قول :
(واجتنبوا الزور) قال : الكذب وهو الشرك في التلبية ، وذلك أن الخمس قريش ، وخزاعة ، وكنانة ، وعامر بن
: صعصعة ، في الجاهلية كانوا يقولون في التلبية
لبيك اللهم لبيك ، لبيك
لا شريك لك
إلا شريكاً هو لك
تملكه وما ملك
يعنون الملائكة التي تعبد هذا هو قول الزور لقولهم : إلا شريكاً هو لك

55 Muqātil adduces more than 50 different *talbiyas* of the pre-Islamic Arabs. For further details cf. M.J. Kister, “Labbayka, Allāhumma, labbayka . . . On a monotheistic aspect of a Jāhiliyya practice.” *JSAI* 2, 1980, 33–57.

<i>lā sharīka lak</i>	Thou hast no partner
<i>illā sharīkan huwa lak</i>	Except such partner as thou hast
<i>tamlīkuhu wa-mā malak</i>	Thou possessest him and all that is his!

Under the influence of an article by R. Köbert⁵⁶ I wanted to see here a popular – though slightly mitigated in tenor – pre-Islamic Arabic extract of the Nicene Creed,⁵⁷ with a possible reference to 1 Corinthians 15:27–28. As for the possibility of an allusion to the subtle and complicated theological statement in 1 Corinthians 15:27–28, I am much more skeptical now, seeing the rather simplifying and polemical nature of these Arabic formulas. The Muslim tradition has preserved a version of the *talbiya* attributed to Muḥammad himself:⁵⁸

<i>lā sharīka lak</i>	Thou hast no partner
<i>inna l-ḥamda wa-l-ni'mata laka wa-l-mulk</i>	The grace and the praise are thine and the empire
<i>lā sharīka lak</i>	Thou hast no partner

As for the contents it is a clear and simple variant of the already known formulas in the Qur'ān. What is striking at first glance, however, is the deletion of the pregnant poetical form (changing rhythm) and the – rather awkward – simple repetition of the first line instead of a third statement as in the other versions.

56 R. Köbert "Eine von Kor 15,27f beeinflusste talbiya," *Biblica* 35, 1954, 405–06. For the sake of illustration of how difficult it is to read and understand this text, I provide here the modern English and Arabic version of the passage:

1 Corinthians 15:27–28: "For HE has put all things in subjection under his feet. But when He says, 'All things are put in subjection,' it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him. [28] When all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself also will be subjected to the One who subjected all things to Him, so that God may be all in all.

٢٧. وَلَكِنْ، فِي قَوْلِهِ إِنَّ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ قَدْ أُخْضِعَ، فَمِنَ الْوَاضِحِ أَنَّهُ يَسْتَنْثِي اللَّهَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَاضِعًا لِلابْنِ
٢٨. وَعِنْدَمَا يَقُولُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ لِلابْنِ، فَإِنَّ الابْنَ نَفْسَهُ سَيُخْضَعُ لِلَّذِي أُخْضِعَ لَهُ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ، لَكِنِّي بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ هُوَ كُلُّ
الشَّيْءِ فِي كُلِّ شَيْءٍ

57 This is the right place to present (in Latin transliteration) the first tenets of the most common (Nestorian) form of the Nicene creed in Arabic (for further details, especially the oldest Arabic versions transmitted by Muslim scholars of the first centuries of the Hijra, see P. Maṣrī, "*Ṣiḡha Arabiyya qadīma li-qānūn al-īmān, yatanāqilu-hā al-mu'allifūn al-Muslimūn bayn al-qarn 9 wa 13 m(īlādiyyayn)*," *Islamochristiana*, 20, 1994, 1–26); the underlined words are the key words and concepts to which the Muslim formulas directly correspond in their refutations:

Nu'min bi-llāh al-wāhid, al-āb, mālik kull shay' wa-sāni' mā yurā wa-mā lā yurā – wa-bi-l-ibn al-wāhid, Iṣḥā' al-masīh, ibn Allāh al-wāhid, bīkr al-khalā'iq kullihā, mawlūd wa-laysa bi-maṣnū', ilāh haqq min ilāh haqq, min jawhari abīhi alladhi bi-yadihi utqinat al-'awālim wa-kull shay'.

58 To be found in different collections of the ḥadīth; e.g. Al-Bukhārī, *Saḥīh*, "K. al-Shahādāt," 29 (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1420/1999), 2: 182.

To conclude this section, here is a synopsis of the religious slogans – tripartite, pro- and anti-Trinitarian – to be shouted, by men and *jinn*, in the streets and sanctuary of ancient Mecca:

<i>talbiyat ash-shirk</i>	Q 112 (reconstructed)	Q 72:3 (reconstructed)
(<i>labbayka, allahumma, labbayk</i>)		
<i>Lā sharīka lak</i>	<i>Huwa llāh aḥad</i>	<i>Inna-hu ta'ālā ḥad</i>
<i>illā sharīkan huwa lak</i>	<i>lam yalid wa-lam yūlad</i>	<i>rabbi-nā mā ittakhad</i>
<i>tamlīku-hū wa-mā malak</i>	<i>lam yakun la-hū kufwan aḥad</i>	<i>ṣaḥabah wa-lā walad</i>

Conclusions: the three supposed historical layers in Qur'ānic texts

1. Short Arabic religious formulas and pieces, probably of anonymous origin and the property of specific religious communities. They are occasionally received in the Qur'ānic Corpus, as in Q1 (*al-Fātiḥa*), Q 72:3; and Q 112–114. They are confessions of faith and apotropaic prayers. The exceptional nature of these texts is attested by the importance of the variant readings, reflecting a vivid oral tradition, in contrast to most of the other Qur'ānic texts, where philological guesswork prevails in the variant readings.

2. Some of these formulas are used and inserted into individual compositions, as sermons, exhortations, etc. The new context and the changed function requires (mostly slight) adaptations, but in general respects the original meaning and structure, still known and very similar to the intentions of the actual “user.” The modifications adopted allow insights into the circumstances of the composition of these texts. By analysing the linguistic and literary peculiarities one sees an individual author at work. This is the case for example for Q 85:1–10 and Q 72:3. These texts are perhaps drafts and well-formulated introductions of sermons; one should imagine that longer, perhaps improvised, sermons followed these introductions but were not transmitted.

3. The collection of these dispersed text materials into a new corpus had further consequences. The frequent composition of new textual unities out of hitherto separate pieces demanded a minimum of standardization (orthography, style, etc.). Above all, the collection as the fundamental text of a new and powerful religion definitely had other aims and ambitions than those of the (presumed) first missionaries preaching to Arabs in Mecca and Medina. This could have meant a re-interpretation of the texts by means of orthographical standards, vocalization, and even more radical changes and modifications in certain cases. Perhaps quite a number of ambiguous and opaque passages in the Qur'ān are so due to this final recast. It is the painstaking task of textual criticism to trace back and to detect what happened to these texts.