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Islamic Studies Today

Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin

Edited by

Majid Daneshgar
Walid A. Saleh

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Cover illustration: A *pondok pesantren* (*ponpes*) in Indonesia, photo by Majid Daneshgar.

Frontispiece: Andrew Rippin in 2010 at the UVIC library in Victoria. Photo by Ted Kuzemski.

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Preface

This volume of studies is an homage and a tribute to one of the leading scholars of the study of Islam. Professor Andrew Rippin has been active in the field for the past 35 years, and his influence has been both broad and deep, ranging from studies on early Islam to research on the Internet and its use among Muslims. His early works remain classics in the field, and his Islamic studies textbooks have been used by many of us to teach Islam and the Qurʾān. Professor Rippin has also been a mentor for a generation of scholars in the field, as an advisor, recommender, reviewer, and academic innovator, as well as being unstintingly generous with his time and advice.

We are grateful to all the contributors who answered the call for this volume with great enthusiasm and eagerness. Each scholar wanted to contribute to this Festschrift not only to acknowledge the significance of Professor Rippin's works but also as a sign of their affection for a scholar who is universally admired.

The studies here focus primarily on the Qurʾān and *tafsīr*, both classical and modern, and represent important contributions to the field. Two articles, along with a short note in French, discuss the career, achievements, and contributions of Professor Rippin. First, Majid Daneshgar highlights his influence in the Muslim world; he was one of Majid's Ph.D. supervisors, and they collaborated subsequently on a number of projects. A concluding appreciation has been written by Rippin's colleague and long-time friend Professor Jane McAuliffe. These two articles attest to Rippin's influence in both academia and more widely. There is a final homage in French by Claude Gilliot, entitled "Andrew Rippin: La Sainte Sagesse et Le Saint Silence."

This Festschrift is divided into three parts. **Part 1** covers the early and classical period of Islamic exegesis and tradition. Gerald Hawting discusses the history of the motif of the building and rebuilding of the Kaʿba. He considers the history and implications of a *ḥadīth* of ʿĀʾisha, in which Muḥammad had said that he was not satisfied with the form of the Kaʿba, discussing how and why a tradition that implies that the Kaʿba is somehow flawed or imperfect and not in accordance with what the Prophet wished for, came to be so generally accepted. Andreas Görke, in a ground-breaking study, sheds light on the exegetical legacy of ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr, who, up to now, has been only studied as a historian and one of the seven *fuqahāʾ* of Medina. Gordon Nickel, also a doctoral student of Rippin, studies the exegesis of a verse in *sūrat al-Aḥzāb* that deals with Zayd and his wife, Zaynab bint Jaḥsh. Nickel's main source is the commentary of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 767), which was apparently written before

the formation of the doctrine of the *ʿiṣma* (infallibility) of prophets. Professor Roberto Tottoli pays particular homage to the career of Professor Rippin by revisiting the history of *asbāb al-nuzūl* literature and its connection to exegetical works, a topic that Professor Rippin examined in detail in his early work. Arnold Yasin Mol discusses the meaning and significance of *Laylat al-Qadr*, which was seen as a sacred night of enormous significance, as it was then that the Qurʾān and the fate of humanity were seen as intertwined together in both Sunni commentary and theology. Mol argues that, for the Islamic exegetical tradition, the revelation of the Qurʾān is not simply a matter of historicity (the occasions of revelation) and textual meaning (what and who is addressed), but primarily reflects a sacred cosmology in which the Qurʾān is transferred from Creator to creation, from the unseen to the seen world, and in Islamic theology this transfer became the main point that determined the ontological status of both the Qurʾān and time itself. This chapter relies heavily on the commentary of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944) on *sūrat al-Qadr* (Q 97). The last chapter in this section, written by Tariq Jaffer, investigates covenant theology in Islam through an analysis of Q 7:172. According to Jaffer, in the Islamic tradition the covenant has generally been understood as a primordial event that took place before the creation of the cosmos, one in which God extracted all future generations of souls from Adam's loins and charged them with a religious obligation to live in service of Him. This chapter traces the theme of "covenant" in Islamic intellectual history from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. Its main focus is on the theological controversies that surround Q 7:172 in Islamic theology and Qurʾān commentaries.

Part 2 is devoted to articles on both the Qurʾān and Qurʾanic Studies. The work of Angelika Neuwirth revisits the place and function of Biblical material in the Qurʾān. According to Neuwirth, the Qurʾān does not simply reflect a massive conversion process from paganism to a monotheist faith but equally offers a re-writing of the rich literary and social heritage of Arabian antiquity that is available to us through ancient Arabic poetry, epigraphic evidence, and archaeological findings. The radical change that the Qurʾān induced finds its echo in the recipients' allegation that the proclaimer is working *magic*, that he has enchanted reality. How do the two rival canons, the biblical and the Arabian, interact? Or, more precisely, how does the audience or, later, the community reach a consensus about their respective validity? The fact that, in its final stage, the Qurʾān displays a successful combination of these two cultural heritages invites the question about the strategies applied to achieve this particular merger which – in her view – signals a revolutionary expansion of monotheist religious thought in Late Antiquity. In his piece, Aaron W. Hughes reflects on the influence of German-Jewish Orientalism on the field of qurʾanic

studies. Hughes' concern is less with the religious beliefs and practices of the Arabian Jews, of which we have very few eye-witness accounts, than with how they have been imagined, and the uses to which they have been put. Michael Pregill provides readers with some theoretical reflections on the borrowing, influence, and mixing of Jewish and Islamic traditions, paying particular attention to the episode of the Golden Calf. The issue of inheritance in relationship to Ps. 37 is examined by Nicolai Sinai. He refers to Aloys Sprenger, who claimed that several qur'anic retellings of the Exodus imply that the Israelites were given possession of the land of the Pharaoh (Egypt) rather than the Promised Land. Whereas Sprenger did not hesitate to dismiss this as a "mistake" on the part of Muḥammad, Nicolai Sinai seeks to develop a more sophisticated interpretation of the relevant material by exploring the link between the Qur'ān's apparently deliberate and theologically motivated fusion of Egypt and Palestine into one sacred landscape on the one hand, and the Islamic scripture's general assertion that God's "righteous servants" shall "inherit the earth," a promise that Q 21:105 accurately ascribes to the Book of Psalms, on the other. He argues that the Qur'ān recasts the Exodus narrative in such a way as to make it conform to a pattern of divine behaviour that is inferred from Psalm 37. This recasting would have strongly resonated with Muḥammad's adherents prior to the *hijra*, who are likely to have awaited an act of divine deliverance that would have allowed them to 'inherit' the Meccan sanctuary.

Marianna Klar observes that recent scholarship on *Sūrat al-Kahf* has proposed that the *sūra* be split in a variety of places; moreover, a number of unifying themes have been suggested in order to justify the *sūra*'s progression through a series of textual blocks. Scholarly focus has tended to concentrate on the *sūra*'s concrete narratives, and there is some agreement on the parameters of the two narrative blocks, Q 18:9–26 for the Companions of the Cave pericope, and Q 18:60–82 for the Moses material. James Muilenburg, in his programmatic 1969 essay 'Form Criticism and Beyond', states that 'more often than not, no defence is offered for the isolation of the pericope. It has even been averred that it does not really matter'; as he goes on to comment, however, 'on the contrary, it seems . . . to be of considerable consequence' [Muilenberg 1969:9]. Following Muilenburg, Klar argues that insufficient attention has similarly been paid to the limits of the text units that make up *Sūrat al-Kahf*. Bruce Fudge applies Pollock's three-fold philological reading to *Sūrat al-Burūj* (Q 85) and especially to the "story" of the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* found therein. Fudge pays particular attention to Q 85 because its "textual" meaning is open to a variety of interpretations while its "contextual" meanings are characterized by a relatively small range of interpretations. Gabriel Said Reynolds highlights the doctrinal concerns of *mufassirūn* in their portrayal of qur'anic prophets in general and Noah

in particular. In analysing the interpretation on Q 11:42–46, Reynolds has two focal questions: (a) whether the son in question was in fact a son of Noah or, alternatively, the offspring of Noah's wife and another man; and (b) whether the divine rebuke (v. 45) implies that Noah was in error. Each of these studies is a detailed study either of a *sūra* or of a particular qurʾanic term.

Part 3 focuses on modern discussions pertaining to Islam, Qurʾān, and *tafsīr*. Herbert Berg's work builds on his extensive studies on Islam among African American tradition. Berg concentrates especially on Noble Drew Ali, the founder of the Moorish Science Temple. This chapter argues that Drew Ali's primary goal was to demonstrate that Jesus (ʿĪsā) was "Asiatic" (Black) and Muslim in order to convince African Americans to abandon the racially inappropriate European religion of Christianity for Islam. Peter G. Riddell's work revisits the chronological ordering of the Qurʾān, especially the two most widespread systems of chronology: the traditional chronology developed by Muslim scholars and the alternative chronology of Theodor Nöldeke. Johanna Pink shows how the creative use of the Qurʾān by modern Muslim exegetes continues to enlarge and widen the application of the Qurʾān to reflect developments in the Islamic world. Pink addresses early 20th-century understandings of Q 95:1–3 as an example of this phenomenon. Stefano Bigliardi explores the fascinating development of the "scientific interpretation" of the Qurʾān in the modern period. After tracing the history of the term *iʿjāz ʿilmī*, Bigliardi summarizes and discusses the criticism levelled at it and examines how the *tafsīr ʿilmī* is liable to blend with pseudoscience, anti-science, and conspiracy theories to the detriment of a solid harmonization of science and religion. Feras Hamza revisits the discipline's use of the taxonomical binary terms exoteric and esoteric as analytical tools to approach Islamic hermeneutical tradition, showing how this approach both helps and hinders our investigation of this tradition. The final chapter of Part Three, by Majid Daneshgar, highlights the significance of Professor Rippin's works in the Arab world, Iran and South East Asian academic contexts. After analyzing the status of the field of *Islamic Studies* in academic institutions in these areas, Daneshgar shows how Western, non-Muslim qurʾanic studies are perceived in Muslim academic contexts.

The concluding appreciation by Jane McAulliffe is a moving personal tribute from a close friend of "Andy". Finally, Gilliot dedicates a French tribute to his close friend, Andrew.

We are truly grateful for our colleagues for their generosity and dedication. We can only hope that this collection will be enjoyed by our dear friend Andrew.

Acknowledgments

This book is the result of a discussion that began in summer 2015 when the idea was first formulated by the editors. But the book really owes its existence to the selfless dedication of the contributors. A debt of gratitude is owed to many wonderful people for helping turn the vision into reality.

At the outset, our special thanks go to our colleagues and friends who have contributed to the vision-forming process through their comments and suggestions over the last year. It was through such a process of unstructured discussion that we were able to settle on the architecture of the volume and the identity of its contributors from different corners of the world.

We are all truly grateful to Brill for expediting the publication of this collection. We are especially thankful for the anonymous reviewers for their detailed comments. Their very helpful feedback and encouraging set of suggestions and comments were essential as to how the *Islamic Studies Today* could be shaped for greater impact.

Working with the Brill team has been a pleasure from the beginning. They struck the perfect balance between leaving us to get on with the job and providing prompt means of support. It is our pleasure to thank Dr. Joed Elich, Publishing Editor of Brill, and Teddi Dols, Editor of Middle East and Islamic Studies at Brill, who have accompanied us during the various stages of this project.

Last and by no means least, we both are cordially indebted to our families, who bore our absences for the purposes of editing with patience and good humor.

The editors
September 2016

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and loss (Routledge 2009); Human-divine communication as a paradigm for power. Al-Thaʿlabī's presentation of Q 38:24 and Q 38:34, in Roberta Sterman Sabbathm (ed.), *Sacred tropes. Tanakh, New Testament, and Qurʾan as literature and culture* (Leiden 2009); Through the Lens of the Adam Narrative: A Reconsideration of Sūrat al-Baqara, *Journal of qurʾanic studies* 17/2 (2015); an edited volume of articles on al-Ṭabarī and his hermeneutics entitled: Exegetical facets of Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *Journal of qurʾanic studies* 18/2 (2016); and Qurʾanic exempla and Late Antique narrative, in M.A.S. Abdel Haleem and M.A.A. Shah (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of qurʾanic studies* (Oxford, forthcoming 2016).

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dedicated to encouraging dialogue among scholars of the Qurʾān, the acts of which will appear as *The Qurʾān seminar commentary* (De Gruyter, 2016). He is currently Chair of the Executive Board of the International Qurʾanic Studies Association, and is also completing a brief commentary on the Qurʾān for Yale University Press.

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PART 1

Islamic Exegesis and Tradition: Formative and Classical Period

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"A Plaything for Kings"
ʿĀʾisha's Ḥadīth, *Ibn al-Zubayr and Rebuilding the Kaʿba*

Gerald Hawting

1   Introduction

It is reported that the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–193/786–809) told the jurist Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/795) that he would like to demolish the Kaʿba and restore it to the form it had had in the time of ʿAbdallāh Ibn al-Zubayr, who had demolished and rebuilt it following the withdrawal of the Umayyad army that had attacked Mecca in 64/683–4. Restoring the Kaʿba to the form given to it by Ibn al-Zubayr would, at the time of Hārūn's caliphate, have entailed demolishing the entire building as it stood then, and as it had done ever since the Umayyad commander al-Ḥajjāj killed Ibn al-Zubayr in 73/692 and changed significant features of his construction. Mālik pleaded with caliph not to do that:

> I implore you by God, O Commander of the Faithful, lest you make this House (*bayt*, i.e. the Kaʿba) a plaything for kings. Each of them will wish merely to tear down the House and rebuild it, so that respect for it will disappear from the hearts of the people.

Mālik's plea was heeded, for the caliph never carried out his plan.[1]

A century or so before this alleged encounter between the ʿAbbāsid caliph and the famous Medinan jurist, Ibn al-Zubayr himself is said to have asked the advice of the elite and notables about his wish to demolish and rebuild the Kaʿba. The majority was against it, and among them Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687–8) was the most urgent, pleading with Ibn al-Zubayr to leave it as the Prophet had left it:

> I fear that (if you do demolish and rebuild it), there will come after you someone who will demolish it (again), and it will never cease being demolished and rebuilt, so that the people will lose respect for its sanctity (*ḥurma*). Just patch it (*wa-lākin irqaʿhā*).

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1   Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Tamhīd limā fī al-Muwaṭṭaʾ min al-maʿānī wa-l-asānīd*, ed. al-ʿAlawī and al-Bakrī (Morocco 1387/1967), 10:49–50.

Ibn al-Zubayr rejected that advice and went ahead with his plans: "By God! None of you would be content to patch the house of your father and mother, so how should I patch the house of God, may he be exalted!"[2] Ibn ʿAbbās's warning was prescient, but only to a limited extent. Less than ten years after Ibn al-Zubayr's rebuilding, his Kaʿba was knocked down and rebuilt by al-Ḥajjāj. That was not followed, however, by the "ceaseless" demolitions and rebuildings foretold by Ibn ʿAbbās, for the Kaʿba in the form given to it by al-Ḥajjāj survived in Hārūn al-Rashīd's times and still does so today.

These reports about discussions between rulers and religious figures over what, if anything, should be done to the Kaʿba do not merely reflect a fear that, should it be knocked down and rebuilt, respect for it would be lost; they also show an uneasiness about the form of the building that is at the center of Islam's ritual and cult.

Ibn al-Zubayr's wish to demolish and rebuild the Kaʿba is explained in many reports as a consequence of his knowledge that the Prophet himself had expressed a desire to rebuild it. He knew a saying of the Prophet, reported by the latter's widow ʿĀʾisha, in which he expressed his regret that, because of the circumstances he faced after he had gained possession of Mecca, he was unable to demolish the Kaʿba and rebuild it. It was the fact that the Quraysh of Mecca had only recently become Muslims, he said, that prevented him doing what he wanted regarding the Kaʿba. If it were not for that, he said, he would have introduced certain changes to the building, which he detailed. When Ibn al-Zubayr rebuilt it, he made those changes, and that is why Hārūn wanted to return the Kaʿba to the form it had had after Ibn al-Zubayr's rebuilding and before al-Ḥajjāj rebuilt it again.

This *ḥadīth* of ʿĀʾisha about the Prophet's wishes for the Kaʿba is the subject of this paper for my friend Andrew Rippin. Andrew's special field is the study of the Qurʾān and *tafsīr*, and it may be argued that one effect of the *ḥadīth* is to underline a feature that the Kaʿba shares with the Qurʾān: neither the cultic center of Islam nor its scripture, according to the traditional understandings of them, exist in the form they would have had if the Prophet had been able to shape them.

The authenticity of the *ḥadīth* was widely accepted, and different versions of it are found in the canonical *ḥadīth* collections of Sunnī Islam.[3] The story of Mālik and Hārūn al-Rashīd, as well as reports that the Umayyad caliphs ʿAbd al-Malik and Sulaymān regretted that Ibn al-Zubayr's Kaʿba had been

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2 Al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka*, ed. Rushdī Malḥas (Beirut 1389/1969), 1:204.

3 My thanks to Majid Daneshgar for indicating that it is also in al-Majlisī's *Biḥār al-anwār* (Beirut 1403/1982), 29:412.

destroyed,[4] whether or not authentic, also reflect a significant degree of acceptance that Ibn al-Zubayr had indeed sought to fulfil what the Prophet wished for the building. The implication is that the Kaʿba, as it has existed from al-Ḥajjāj's rebuilding until today, is not as the Prophet wanted: if he had been able to do what he wished, it would have not been subjected to its later rebuildings, and we would have the Kaʿba in a form different from that of today.

The feeling that the Kaʿba, in that sense, is imperfect goes beyond its failure to match the wishes of the Prophet. According to tradition, the building erected by al-Ḥajjāj after he had demolished Ibn al-Zubayr's Kaʿba followed the model of one that had been constructed by the Quraysh during the *jāhiliyya*, at a time when they were still pagan idolaters. That implies that the Kaʿba of Islam, the focal point of Islamic ritual life, is the survival in Islam of an institution associated with paganism. No wonder, then, that some of the caliphs are reported as wishing they could go back to Ibn al-Zubayr's building.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the background and significance of ʿĀʾisha's *ḥadīth*. It will be proposed that, in spite of the difficulty of understanding the significance of the changes to the form of the Kaʿba that it mentions, it serves to justify what may have been the fundamental event for the incorporation of the Kaʿba into emerging Islam: Ibn al-Zubayr's rebuilding of it.

2   ʿĀʾisha's *Ḥadīth* and its Transmission

The *ḥadīth* is found in a number of different versions, sometimes cited formally with a proper chain of transmitters (the *isnād*), sometimes informally in the course of narrative accounts. The versions differ both in the *isnād*s that accompany them (when they have one) and in content. With regard to the latter, sometimes one aspect of what the Prophet wished to change is mentioned, sometimes another, and sometimes more than one.

A version commonly cited by Mālik b. Anas from, ultimately, Ibn ʿUmar emphasizes the Prophet's wish to establish the Kaʿba on the foundations (*qawāʿid*) of Abraham.[5] If ʿĀʾisha's people had not recently been unbelievers, the Prophet declared, he would have restored the Kaʿba on the foundations of Abraham. In a slightly ambiguous comment on ʿĀʾisha's words, Ibn ʿUmar appears to say that even without ʿĀʾisha's report we would know that the *bayt*

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4   Abd al-Malik: ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Ḥabīb al-Raḥmān al-Aʿẓamī (Beirut 1403/1983), 5:131–2 (in no. 9106 – the report of Marthad b. Shuraḥbīl); Sulaymān: Azraqī, *Makka* 1:220–1.

5   The sense of *qawāʿid* (singular: *qāʿida*; cf. Q 2:127: *wa-idh yarfaʿu Ibrāhīmᵘ l-qawāʿidᵃ mina l-baytⁱ wa-Ismāʿīlᵘ*) is not completely clear, but does not affect the discussion here.

had not been finished on the foundations of Abraham because, if it had been, the Prophet would not have failed to make the salutation (*istilām*) of the two corners that adjoined the Ḥijr.[6]

Ḥijr here refers to the semi-circular area enclosed by a low wall on the north-west side of the Ka'ba. We shall have more to say about it later. Ibn 'Umar's comment tells us that the Prophet, when he was ritually circumambulating the Ka'ba (making *ṭawāf*), made the salutation of its southern and eastern corners,[7] but did not do so at the northern and western corners because he did not regard them as marking the boundary of the area enclosed by Abraham's foundations: he regarded that as continuing into the Ḥijr.

That is made more explicit in other versions of 'Ā'isha's report, which also refer to additional changes the Prophet would have made to the Ka'ba. For example, one which Ibn al-Zubayr testified to having heard directly from 'Ā'isha runs:

> The Prophet said: "Your people fell short in building the House. Their finances were lacking and they left some cubits of it in the Ḥijr. If it were not that your people were unbelievers until only recently, I would demol-ish the Ka'ba and restore what they left out. I would give it two doors at ground level, one on the east for the people to enter by, and one on the west for them to leave. Do you know why your people raised up the door?" ['Ā'isha] replied: "No." [The Prophet] said: "So they could boast that nobody could enter unless they allowed it. If they did not want someone to go in, they would let him climb up until, just as he was about to go inside, they would push him so that he fell. Should your people decide to demolish it, come and I will show you what they left in the Ḥijr." And he showed her almost seven cubits.[8]

'Ā'isha's people (her *qawm*) were the Quraysh and the Prophet here refers to the time when they rebuilt the Ka'ba and left out of the building the area known as the Ḥijr. The Prophet, in this version, also refers to the Quraysh as having raised the door above ground level when they rebuilt it, and to his own wish that it be provided with two doors at ground level. Al-Azraqī's report of 'Ā'isha's

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6 al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī al-Quṭb (Beirut-Sidon, 1411/1991), *K. al-Ḥajj, bāb* 42 (*Faḍl Makka wa-bunyānihā*), no. 1583: *la-in kānat 'Ā'isha (r) sami'at hādha min rasūl Allāh (ṣ) mā urā rasūl Allāh (ṣ) taraka istilām al-ruknayni alladhayni yaliyāni al-ḥijr illā anna al-bayt lam yutammam 'alā qawā'id Ibrāhīm.*

7 I.e. those called the Yamanī *rukn*, and the *rukn* containing the Black Stone.

8 Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:206.

words goes on to say that when Ibn al-Zubayr demolished the Ka'ba, the foundations (here *asās*) of Abraham were uncovered and seen to continue into the Ḥijr in the form of remarkable stones. Subsequently Ibn al-Zubayr rebuilt it according to the Prophet's wishes, by including the Ḥijr inside the building and providing it with the two doors.

Some other versions of the *ḥadīth* refer only to the doors, and fail to make any mention of the "foundations of Abraham" or the Ḥijr.[9] Some narrative accounts of the rebuilding of the Ka'ba by Ibn al-Zubayr, on the other hand, also mention other changes that he introduced, ones which are not included in versions of the *ḥadīth*, such as replacing the six pillars that had previously supported the roof with three, and providing windows (or at least apertures for light) in the ceiling.[10] If the reports are to be believed, his building must have been relatively magnificent: details are given of his expenditure and effort to procure costly materials, notably *wars* (a yellow dyestuff) and *qaṣṣa* (alabaster?) from the Yemen.[11]

Regarding the *isnād*s of 'Ā'isha's *ḥadīth*, the number of transmitters associated with Ibn al-Zubayr and his family is striking and, of course, 'Ā'isha was Ibn al-Zubayr's aunt.[12]

However, perhaps the best known chain of transmitters only relates to the Zubayrids in its earliest part: the version of Mālik is transmitted from Zuhrī from Sālim b. 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar from 'Abdallāh b. 'Umar from 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr from 'Ā'isha.[13] Fundamentally, that is a common Medinan chain between Mālik and Ibn 'Umar.[14] The one who is said to have transmitted 'Ā'isha's words to Ibn 'Umar, 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, was 'Ā'isha's nephew, and this *ḥadīth* appears to be the only one in which he

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9   E.g. Abū Bakr b. 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, ed. Mukhtār Aḥmad al-Nadawī (Karachi 1406/1986), 4/1:303 (no. 1979, wrongly numbered 1989); Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Aḥmad al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī bi-sharḥ al-Suyūṭī wa-ḥāshiyat al-Imām al-Sindī* (Beirut 1406/1986), *K. al-Ḥajj, bāb binā' al-Ka'ba* (5:214ff), no. 2902.

10   E.g., Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:209 (part of the long composite account from Ibn Jurayj).

11   Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:205, 209. For *wars* see Penelope C. Johnstone, Wars, *EI2*.

12   'Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr's mother was Asmā' bt. Abī Bakr, the sister of 'Ā'isha.

13   For this chain see, e.g., Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, K. al-Ḥajj, bāb* 42 (*Faḍl Makka wa-bunyānihā*), no. 1583; *K. al-Tafsīr* on *Sūra* 2, *bāb* 10; *K. Aḥādīth al-anbiyā', bāb* 10, no. 3368; Mālik b. Anas, *Muwaṭṭa' al-Imām Mālik* (*riwāya* of al-Laythī), ed. Aḥmad Rātib 'Armūsh (Beirut 1397/1977), *K. al-Ḥajj*, no. 810; Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-Shaybānī, *The Muwaṭṭa' of Imām Muḥammad* (London 1425/2004), *K. al-Ḥajj*, no. 478; Nasā'ī, *Sunan, K. al-Ḥajj, bāb* 125 (*binā' al-Ka'ba*), no. 2900; Azraqī, 1:171.

14   On this Medinan *isnād*, see J. Schacht, *Origins of Muhammadan jurisprudence* (London 1950), 177.

appears in the *isnād*. We have little information about him, but according to Muṣʿab al-Zubayrī cited by al-Mizzī, he was killed at the battle of the Ḥarra in Dhū l-Ḥijja 63 (August 683). If that is correct and the *isnād* authentic, therefore, Ibn ʿUmar would have heard ʿĀʾisha's report before Ibn al-Zubayr even contemplated rebuilding the Kaʿba.[15]

Another family transmission from ʿĀʾisha is by ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr, another nephew of hers and a full brother of ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr. ʿUrwa's son Hishām then transmits it from him.[16] Sometimes ʿUrwa is transmitted by someone other than Hishām, for example by Yazīd b. Rūmān, a *mawlā* of the Zubayrids, who is said to have died in 130/747–8.[17]

Other transmitters direct from ʿĀʾisha are al-Aswad b. Yazīd (not obviously linked to the Zubayrids)[18] and Ibn Abī Mulayka (listed as a *qāḍī* and *muʾadhdhin* of Ibn al-Zubayr).[19] Yet more *isnād*s from ʿĀʾisha are ʿIkrima through Ibn ʿAbbās,[20] and ʿAbdallāh b. Abī Bakr b. Muḥammad b. ʿAmr b. Ḥazm through ʿAmra bt. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Saʿd b. Zurāra.[21]

Other versions of the Prophet's words from ʿĀʾisha are introduced more informally, without a full *isnād*. Thus it is sometimes reported that Ibn al-Zubayr, when he rebuilt the Kaʿba, claimed that he had heard them from ʿĀʾisha directly (*ashhadu la-samaʿtu ʿĀʾisha taqūlu qāla rasūl Allāh*).[22] In another version, Ibn al-Zubayr sent 70 of the leading men of the Quraysh to ʿĀʾisha, who was in Mecca at the time, and she reported the Prophet's words to them.[23] In yet another account, after al-Ḥajjāj had demolished Ibn al-Zubayr's Kaʿba and

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15   For ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Abī Bakr, see Yūsuf b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, ed. Bashshār ʿAwwād Maʿrūf (Beirut 1400/1980), 16:49 (no. 3530).

16   E.g., Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, K. al-Ḥajj*, no. 1585; Nasāʾī, *Sunan, K. al-Ḥajj*, no. 290. For ʿUrwa (d. 93 or 94/711–3) and his son Hishām (d. ca. 145/762–3), see G. Schoeler, 'ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr, *EI2*.

17   E.g., Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, K. al-Ḥajj*, no. 1586. For Yazīd b. Rūmān, see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 32: 122 (no. 6986).

18   E.g., Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, K. al-Ḥajj*, no 1584; Nasāʾī, *Sunan, K. al-Ḥajj*, no. 2902 (if the al-Aswad cited there is Ibn Yazīd). For al-Aswad (d. 74 or 75), see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 3:233 (no. 509).

19   E.g., Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 4/1:303, no. 1979, wrongly numbered 1989; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 5:104; Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:315. For ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUbayd Allāh b. Abī Mulayka, see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 15:256 (no. 3405).

20   E.g., Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:213. For ʿIkrima (d. 105/723–4?), see J. Schacht, 'ʿIkrima, *EI2*.

21   E.g., Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:213. For this ʿAbdallāh b. Abī Bakr (d. 135 or 136/752–4), see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 14:349 (no. 3190). ʿAmra (d. 98/716–7 or 106/724–5) was his father's maternal aunt; see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 35:241 (no. 7895), where it is pointed out that she was the daughter of al-Raḥmān b. Saʿd, not Asʿad as in the text of Azraqī.

22   Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:206.

23   ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 5:130–1 (no. 9157).

rebuilt it in a different form, al-Ḥārith b.ʿAbdallāh b. Abī Rabīʿa al-Makhzūmī, who had formerly been appointed over Baṣra by Ibn al-Zubayr, went to the caliph ʿAbd al-Malik in a delegation (*wafd*), the caliph expressed his disbelief that ʿĀʾisha had ever said that she had heard those words from the Prophet, and al-Ḥārith told him that he had heard them himself.[24]

On the basis of these *isnād*s it does not seem possible to assess the authenticity of the *ḥadīth*, i.e. whether it really transmits the words or even the ideas of the Prophet himself. The obvious points are that: all versions go back to ʿĀʾisha, although Ibn ʿUmar is also a major figure in the transmission; a substantial number of those named in the *isnād*s are members or supporters of the Zubayrid family; and ʿĀʾisha herself was Ibn al-Zubayr's aunt.

3   Other Material Concerned with Whether the Ḥijr is Part of the *Bayt*

In addition to ʿĀʾisha's *ḥadīth* there is other material concerned with the relationship of the Ḥijr to the Kaʿba, and she and Ibn ʿUmar figure largely in that too. Most simple is a saying transmitted from ʿĀʾisha by ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr and the latter's son Hishām: "I do not care whether I pray in the Ḥijr or the Kaʿba."[25] In other words, for her the Ḥijr, outside the Kaʿba, was of equal sanctity to the area enclosed by the building. More elaborate versions have ʿĀʾisha prevented from entering the Kaʿba where she wanted to pray, and being told by the Prophet to pray in the Ḥijr instead.[26] Yet another such tradition reports a family dispute between ʿĀʾisha and her brother ʿAbd al-Raḥmān. In her bid to patch things up, knowing that he was in the habit of circumambulating the Kaʿba at a certain time of the night, she waited for him by the gate of the Ḥijr, seized the edge of his robe, pulled him inside the Ḥijr and began to address him with the oath, "By Him in whose house I am!"[27]

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24   Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:170–1, 211, 311; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 5:127–8 (no. 9150) and elsewhere. For this al-Ḥārith, see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 5:239 (no. 1024). ʿĀʾisha is listed there as one of those from whom he transmitted.

25   Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:312; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 5:130 (no. 9155).

26   Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:312, 313, 315; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 5:130 (nos. 9154, 9156). In several of these reports it is a door-keeper of the Kaʿba (one of the *ḥajaba*) who prevents ʿĀʾisha's entry. The names are given variantly, as are some of the other characters involved. The *isnād*s, too, vary, but are not obviously associated with the Zubayrids.

27   Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:313; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 5:129–30 (no. 9153). The story is reported on the authority of ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUbayd b. ʿUmayr al-Laythī (d. 113/731–2; Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*, 15:259, no. 3406), whose father was known as the *qāṣṣ* of the Meccans (Mizzī, *Tahdhīb*,

There are other authorities cited in traditions of this type apart from ʿĀʾisha. One, from Sufyān b. ʿUyayna, says that Ibn ʿAbbās also held that the Ḥijr was part of the *bayt*, while Marthad b. Shuraḥbīl, who is said to have been present when Ibn al-Zubayr rebuilt the Kaʿba, also states that if Ibn ʿAbbās had had charge of al-Ḥijr, he would have included it in the *bayt*.[28]

The status of the Ḥijr – whether or not it should be regarded as a part of the *bayt* – relates to two aspects of the circumambulation ritual. As already mentioned, one of them is whether one should "salute" (make *istilām* of) all four *arkān* (corners) of the Kaʿba, or only the southern and eastern ones. The other is whether, when making the circumambulation, one should go around the outside of the Ḥijr or whether it is permissible to go simply around the Kaʿba, not enclosing the Ḥijr in the area circumscribed by the *ṭawāf*.

Various views are recorded on the question of whether the two corners (*ruknāni*) adjacent to the Ḥijr are to be saluted. Ibn Abī Shayba cites the Meccan ʿAṭāʾ b. Abī Rabāḥ as saying that his authorities (*mushayikha*) Ibn ʿAbbās, Jābir [b. ʿAbdallāh], Abū Hurayra, and Abū ʿUbayd b. ʿUmayr only made *istilām* of *al-ḥajar al-aswad* and *al-rukn al-yamānī*, not the other *arkān*.[29] On the other hand, Ibn ʿAbbās is reported to have told Muʿāwiya off for making *istilām* at all the corners, but Muʿāwiya seems to have refused to heed the criticism, saying that none of the building was "barred" or "left in the Ḥijr" (*laysa minhu shayʾ maḥjūr*).[30] Fākihī follows his version of the report about Muʿāwiya with statements that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAwf, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh (!) also saluted all of the corners.[31] Another named as making *istilām* at all the corners is Suwayd b. Ghafala.[32]

Ibn ʿUmar figures in several of these traditions. Fākihī's section on the salutation of the two "western" *rukn*s (that is, the two corners of the Kaʿba adjoining the Ḥijr) begins with a report about him stopping Yaʿlā b. Umayya from

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19:223, no. 3730) and was among those who advised Ibn al-Zubayr to demolish and rebuild the Kaʿba (Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:205).

28   Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:312; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 5:57 (8986), 127 (no. 9149) and 130–1 (no. 9157).

29   Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 4/1:444 (no. 2863). Read ʿUbayd b. ʿUmayr for Abū ʿUbayd b. ʿUmayr – see note 27, above.

30   Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 4/1:445 (no. 2868); Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Fākihī, *Akhbār Makka* (Mecca 1420/2009), 1:151–2 (nos. 188, 189).

31   Fākihī, *Makka*, 1:152–3 (nos. 191, 192, 195).

32   Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 4/1:444 (no. 2864). On Suwayd, see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 12: 265 (no. 2647); he is said to have been born in the same year as the Prophet (according to this, it was the year of the Elephant) but to have lived until a great age, dying in 80, 81, or 82 (ca. 700), aged around 120, with unimpaired health and sexual powers.

saluting "the *rukn* after *al-rukn al-aswad*" and urging Yaʿlā to follow the Prophet's example in not doing so.[33] That is followed by ʿAṭāʾ saying that he did see Ibn ʿUmar saluting the western *rukn*, but Nāfiʿ, the *mawlā* of Ibn ʿUmar, comments that he only saw that happen once and then it was a mistake for which Ibn ʿUmar asked God's forgiveness. We have two explanations for why Ibn ʿUmar regarded the salutation of the *rukn*s next to the Ḥijr as wrong (apart from his insistence on following the Prophet's example): "he did not perceive them as two corners (*ruknayni*) but only as something like the exterior (*ṣafḥa*) of the *bayt*, the two corners being beyond that (*fawqa dhālik*)"; "he did not think that the *bayt* had been completed on the *qawāʿid* of Abraham."[34]

Presumably, most of this material refers to the time before Ibn al-Zubayr's reported rebuilding of the Kaʿba so as to include the Ḥijr, or after al-Ḥajjāj had again excluded it. The motivation attributed to Ibn ʿUmar would not make sense in a situation where the Kaʿba had been extended over the Ḥijr. When we come to reports about Ibn al-Zubayr himself and whether he saluted all the corners or merely the one with the Black Stone and the southern one, however, matters become complicated. Since he is said to have regarded the Ḥijr as a part of the *bayt* and to have rebuilt the Kaʿba in a way that included it, we would assume that before his rebuilding he shared the view of Ibn ʿUmar and those other authorities who did not greet the two corners next to the Ḥijr. There are some traditions, however, which say that he did salute all of the corners.[35] They are not specific about time but are placed in the same chapters as the others. Elsewhere, however, in a composite narrative account of Ibn al-Zubayr's rebuilding of the Kaʿba, we find Ibn Jurayj describing a sort of consecration ceremony, in the course of which Ibn al-Zubayr is reported as slaughtering a hundred camels and making *ṭawāf* involving *istilām* of all the corners.[36] So it seems possible that the reports saying that Ibn al-Zubayr saluted all the corners (and possibly some of the other reports) are intended to apply to the time after his rebuilding of the Kaʿba.

As for whether *ṭawāf* should go around the outside of the Ḥijr or may be performed by simply going around the Kaʿba, the opinion seems to be unanimous

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33   On Yaʿlā, see Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 32:378 (no. 7110): His mother or grandmother is said to have been the progenitrix of Ibn al-Zubayr's father or grandfather. For the report of his reprimand by ʿUmar, see also ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 5:45 (no. 8945).

34   Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 4/1:444–5; Fākihī, *Makka*, 1:149–55.

35   Fākihī, *Makka*, 1:153–4 (nos. 193, 194, 196). Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, 4/1:445 (no. 2869), also appears to say that Ibn al-Zubayr made *istilām* of all four corners, but the printing in my copy makes the text obscure at this point.

36   Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:210.

that one must keep to the outside of the Ḥijr. That is reported as the Prophet's practice, and is the practice in the rituals of the Ḥajj. It is stated that if one accidentally cut short a circuit by going inside the Ḥijr, then the circuit should be repeated taking care to go around the outside of it. However, there is at least one report saying that Ibn ʿUyayna's father saw the Umayyad caliph Hishām wanting to go inside the Ḥijr while making *ṭawāf*, but that Sālim b. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar pulled him away so he did it outside.[37] While the evidence is sparse, that, together with the report about Muʿāwiya's making *istilām* of all the corners, hints that the "greeting" of the corners adjoining the Ḥijr and the *ṭawāf* of the Kaʿba alone may have been associated with the Umayyads.

4   Explanations and Effects

The material presented so far reflects disagreements about the form of the Kaʿba, and the position adopted on that issue then has implications for some of the rituals performed there. The issues, however, are presented in a way that makes their significance quite elusive and obscure. Motives and explanations, when provided, are often unconvincing, and one suspects that more was at stake than is apparent from the tradition.

We are told that Ibn al-Zubayr rebuilt the Kaʿba in a way that was substantially different from its previous form because he wanted to fulfil the wishes of the Prophet. The Prophet had been prevented from effecting what he wanted because it would have been too much for the Quraysh to accept, given their only recent abandonment of unbelief or *shirk*. The implication is that they needed time to adjust, and so the Prophet was prepared to allow them to maintain this relic of the *jāhiliyya*. Whether authentic or not, that explanation rather emphasizes that the Kaʿba built by Ibn al-Zubayr (and said to have been desired by the Prophet) represented a significant departure from what had been there before.

Why did the Prophet wish that he could change things? The most substantial motive mentioned is his knowledge that the Kaʿba in his time was not commensurate with the foundations of Abraham, but that is not always referred to, and it does not explain why he wanted to replace the single elevated door with two at ground level. Nor does it account for the other changes Ibn al-Zubayr is reported to have made.

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37   ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 5:57 (*bāb al-rajul yaṭūfu baʿda al-sabʿi fī l-Ḥijr*), 126 (no. 9149), 131–2 (no. 9157, end); Thiqat al-Islām Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad al-Kulaynī, *Kitāb al-kāfī*, ed. ʿAlī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (Tehran 1388/1968), 4:419 (*man ṭāfa wa-khtaṣara fī al-Ḥijr*).

The Quraysh, we are told in some versions of ʿĀʾisha's *ḥadīth*, had left the Ḥijr out of the building because they lacked the financial resources or the materials to complete the final seven cubits or so on that side. That is remarkable in that it conflicts with the copious reports elsewhere about their mercantile prowess and the wealth of some of their leading men. It conflicts, too, with other reports about the quarries from which they had collected stones for the building, and it is out of keeping with the accounts of the fear and reverence they felt for what they called "the house of our Lord." Similarly, the explanation sometimes implied for their decision to provide the building with a door considerably above ground level – the wish to make theft from the Kaʿba more difficult – seems arbitrary.

Finally, why did al-Ḥajjāj do away with Ibn al-Zubayr's innovations and return the Kaʿba to the form it had before the latter's reconstruction? There is little in the sources to explain that other than enmity to all the works of the dead rival of the Umayyads.

What all these reported motives lack is any relationship between the form of the Kaʿba and its function. Günter Lüling, whose arguments about the history of the building in the period we are concerned with in this paper seem generally unpersuasive, is nevertheless right when he says that changes in form must reflect changing ideas about worship, and changing ideas about the nature of the building.[38] The explanations that characterize much of the material we have discussed, on the other hand, seem largely fortuitous and arbitrary, when they are provided at all. The only substantial motive, one that seems in keeping with the multiple demolitions and rebuildings concerned, seems to be the wish to associate the building with Abraham, although as we have seen that is not always evident,

Another notable feature of the material is its supposition of continuity. It shows the Kaʿba as having been subject to several demolitions and reconstructions, but there is continuity of site and of the essence of the building. The ʿĀʾisha *ḥadīth* discussed here leads us back from Ibn al-Zubayr to the Prophet and then to the building work of the Quraysh, and it portrays Ibn al-Zubayr's Kaʿba as not merely fulfilling the wishes of the Prophet but also as correcting an error that the Quraysh had introduced for an understandable but incidental reason. The dual sense of the Arabic verb *banā*, meaning both to build and to rebuild, plays a part here too. Apart from the initial building by Abraham (which is often portrayed as being upon the foundations of the *bayt* established for Adam) every "building" is shown to be a "rebuilding."

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38   Günter Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad* (Erlangen 1981), 126–82, especially 153–61.

The accounts of Ibn al-Zubayr's Kaʿba, however, indicate that it must have been significantly different from what preceded and succeeded it. It was half as high again as the previous building had been (27 cubits [*adhruʿ*] instead of 18; approx. 40 feet instead of 26),[39] more than a quarter as long (just under 27 cubits instead of 20), and presumably – since the existing semi-circular wall enclosing the Ḥijr is a remnant of it – ended with a semi-circular wall on the northwest to the height of the roof. In addition, it had two doors at ground level, three instead of six pillars, apertures in the ceiling, and was built with costly material brought from as far away as the Yemen. Without the emphasis on continuity inherent in the ʿĀʾisha *ḥadīth* and some other material we might think that Ibn al-Zubayr's building introduced something new, an element of discontinuity, in the history of the Kaʿba. Furthermore, in spite of the common view that al-Ḥajjāj restored the building to the form given to it by the pagan Quraysh, it retained the height and the three pillars of Ibn al-Zubayr's building. What might be seen as continuity from one angle can appear as disruption and discontinuity from another.

4.1   *Explanation: What is the Significance of the Ḥijr?*

The obscurity of the motivation for the changes made in the form of the Kaʿba seems especially prominent when one considers the Ḥijr, which seems to be the central issue in the various versions of ʿĀʾisha's *ḥadīth* and in the various demolitions and rebuildings. Why did it matter whether it was to be included in or excluded from the Kaʿba? The only substantive explanation met with so far is that the foundations of Abraham continued into the Ḥijr, although that is not always included in the versions of ʿĀʾisha's *ḥadīth* or in the reports relating to the status of the Ḥijr.

That explanation of the importance of the Ḥijr is not mentioned in the narratives of the Quraysh's building of the Kaʿba when – which is not always the case – they refer to the Quraysh leaving it out of their building. Not all of the narratives of the Quraysh's work do mention their leaving it out, but, when they do, we are told that they left it out simply because they lacked the resources to include it. There is no indication in those narratives that it was a major issue for them, or any allusion to its possible importance for them. It must be remembered in this connection that in several reports there are

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39   Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:209, from Ibn Jurayj. The *dhirāʿ* varied in size from time to time and place to place, from about 0.5 of a metre to 0.75; see W. Hinz, dhirāʿ, *EI2*. Today the Kaʿba is said to be about 12.5 m (or 40 feet) high, and al-Ḥajjāj is not reported as having reduced Ibn al-Zubayr's building's height. Supposing that the present building has the height that Ibn al-Zubayr gave it, then, his *dhirāʿ* would have been just under 0.5 m.

references to their awareness of their descent from Abraham, and of his relationship to various features of their sanctuary, and in some of the narratives of their rebuilding of the Kaʿba they refer to the building as the house of their Lord (God). It would not be unreasonable, then, if the accounts had them show awareness of the connection of the Ḥijr with Abraham.

References to the Ḥijr in the traditions about the Kaʿba in the period before its rebuilding by the Quraysh are relatively rare (and are, of course, a product of Islamic tradition, not a survival from some remote period). It is only when we read the reports that the Quraysh did not have the resources to include it in the building that the Ḥijr begins to attract attention. As far as I know, there is no reference to it in any of the reports about previous buildings or rebuildings of the Kaʿba, and it goes largely unmentioned in the material on the erection of the Kaʿba by Abraham and the settlement of Hagar and Ishmael in Mecca.[40]

When works have a chapter or section devoted especially to the Ḥijr, again they are generally uninformative about its significance. Azraqī's sections *Dhikr al-Ḥijr* and *al-Julūs fī l-Ḥijr wa-mā jāʾa fī dhālik* consist mainly of material already referred to in this paper: traditions reporting the view of ʿĀʾisha and others that the Ḥijr is to be treated as a part of the *bayt*, and versions of her *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet expresses his wish that he could include the Ḥijr in the Kaʿba.

A few reports, however, seem to address the more general significance of the Ḥijr. Most notable is the description of it as a gate of Heaven (*al-janna*) opened for the benefit of Ishmael, and the place where he died. That explanation of it is attributed to the Umayyad governor of the Ḥijāz (87–93/706–12) and caliph (99–101/717–20), ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz.[41]

The transmitter of the words of ʿUmar, Khālid b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Makhzūmī,[42] then provides information about where in the Ḥijr it was

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40 Azraqī first mentions it in passing in a story about a meeting between Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn and a mysterious stranger who asks him about the origins of the *ṭawāf*. In passing it is mentioned that, after finishing his *ṭawāf*, Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn made the two concluding *rakʿa*s in the Ḥijr (Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:33). Subsequently, he refers to it, again in passing, in an account from Ibn Isḥāq about the descendants of Ishmael and the coming of Jurhum to Mecca: when Ishmael died he was buried with his mother in the Ḥijr, "and they claim that she was buried in it when she died" (Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:81).

41 Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:312. According to ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz, Ishmael complained to his Lord about the heat of Mecca, and God made known (*awḥā*) to him: "I am opening for you a gate of Heaven in the Ḥijr. The breeze will flow from it to you until the day of the Resurrection." It was in that place that he (Ishmael) died. The saying is transmitted from ʿUmar by one al-Mubārak b. Ḥassān al-Anmāṭī, who claimed to have been present.

42 Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, 8:124 (no. 1631).

thought Ishmael's grave was situated. The same transmitter is also credited with a report about a basket of green stones that were found in the Ḥijr, which ʿAbdallāh b. Ṣafwān[43] was able to identify as marking the grave of Ishmael.[44] As we have seen already, Ibn Ishāq also identified the Ḥijr as the place where Ishmael and his mother Hagar were buried.[45]

Some reports about stones in the Ḥijr identify them as the foundations of Abraham,[46] but others talk of the finding of a stone there with an inscription containing a blessing for the people of Mecca.[47] It seems possible that the multiplicity of reports about stones found in the Ḥijr has something to do with the various associations of the root *ḥ-j-r* in Arabic.

Azraqī's chapters also include a report about a miracle in which God protected the Prophet in the Ḥijr from the vengeful wife of Abū Lahab, an account of the Prophet's grandfather's seat (*mifrash*) in the Ḥijr, and details about the marble cladding applied to its wall by various caliphs and governors.

The Ḥijr, then, does not emerge with a strong or consistent identity from such material, and there is some sense in the reports of attempts to create one. While a significant amount of the material associates the Ḥijr with Abraham, the differing ways in which that is achieved (it contains the foundations of Abraham, the grave of Ishmael and his mother, a gate of heaven opened up for Ishmael) does not suggest a stable or established explanation of its significance. The association with the foundations of Abraham in several versions of ʿĀʾisha's *ḥadīth* may be the strongest theme to emerge: it has a symbolic force to do with the identity of the Kaʿba as a properly Abrahamic sanctuary and that would be commensurate to some extent with the reports about the succession of demolitions and rebuildings that we are told took place. But one still feels that the significance of the Ḥijr is elusive.

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43   Ibid., 15:125 (no. 3343). He was killed fighting alongside Ibn al-Zubayr against al-Ḥajjāj.

44   Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:312.

45   See note 40, above.

46   Some of the accounts suggest that those foundations were more than merely the foundations of the Kaʿba – when someone tried to move them, the whole of the *bayt*, or the whole of Mecca, trembled (ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 5:131, no. 9157 – the account of Marthad b. Shuraḥbīl; Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:206–7). The implication is that the stone was a foundation stone like the *eben shetiya* of Jewish tradition.

47   Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:313.

5 Continuity? ʿĀʾisha's *Ḥadīth* and the Building of the Kaʿba by the Quraysh

As we have seen, several versions of ʿĀʾisha's *ḥadīth* refer back to the fact that the Quraysh had left out the Ḥijr when they built the Kaʿba because of their lack of material or resources. This provides an element of continuity: the Prophet wished to rectify a mistake that he knew had been made when he was younger, before he was called to prophethood. Subsequently, Ibn al-Zubayr did put things right, only for al-Ḥajjāj to then reverse the situation.

We might wonder, however, whether, when the *ḥadīth* came into existence, there was indeed an established tradition that Quraysh had rebuilt the Kaʿba and left out the Ḥijr. We have already referred to the rather questionable explanation for the Quraysh's mistake, and also noted the scarcity of references to the Ḥijr in traditions about the history of the Meccan sanctuary before its rebuilding by the Quraysh. Did the Quraysh really build the Kaʿba and leave the Ḥijr out, or could we envisage that the issue of the Ḥijr only became important at the time of Ibn al-Zubayr? The elusive nature of the Ḥijr, discussed above, and the way in which traditions about it could be understood as attempts to create Abrahamic associations for it, make it worthwhile to consider the latter possibility.

The accounts of the building of the Kaʿba by the Quraysh do not inspire confidence regarding their historicity. It is obvious that they are composed from a repertory of narrative units, many of them stereotypical, appearing in various combinations and versions. The composite nature of the accounts seems evident from their repetitions and redundancies, as well as certain inconsistencies and a lack of cohesion, in spite of the efforts of the compilers to provide links between the units.

The narrative units contained in the composite accounts deal with such things as the age of Muḥammad at the time it happened; the cause of the decision to demolish and rebuild the Kaʿba; the fear of the Quraysh about doing so and how their fear was overcome; the appearance of a fearsome snake that prevented them from approaching to demolish the building and the coming of a bird that carried off the snake; Muḥammad's accidental exposure of his private parts while taking part in the bringing of stones; the quarrel among the Quraysh about which of their clans was to have the honor of replacing the Black Stone; and the role of Muḥammad in defusing that quarrel and placing the stone in position himself.

Some accounts contain just a few of these units, some several. One of the most obvious examples of the way they appear in variant forms is the treatment of when in the Prophet's life the event occurred. Thus Ibn Isḥāq's account

begins "when the Prophet reached 35 years of age," while al-Zuhrī starts "when the Prophet had attained puberty." In others the issue of the Prophet's age seems to be linked to the story of his accidental exposure.[48]

When several of these variants appear in the same composite account, they result in redundancy. An obvious example of that is the multiple explanation of the Quraysh's decision to demolish and rebuild the Kaʿba: it had been damaged by fire; it had been damaged by flood; it was too easy to steal from; a wrecked ship provided building material and a workman. Another example is the way in which Quraysh's fear of divine punishment, should they take part in the demolition, overlaps with the account of the snake that prevented them from approaching the building.

The stereotypical nature of some of the units is evident from the fact that they may be used in different contexts. Theft from the Kaʿba, and damage to it by fire or flood, appear on several occasions in the traditions about its history. Recourse to such explanations may even reflect reality in that the Kaʿba has historically experienced fire and flood, but the multiple possibilities offered in this case suggests that we are not dealing with precise historical memory. Ibn al-Zubayr's own reconstruction is explained in some traditions as a result of the weakening of the building by a fire and, among the various explanations of how the Black Stone became black, one ascribes it to the many fires which have engulfed it. The Quraysh's fear of divine punishment in retaliation for their joining in the demolition is also paralleled in the accounts of the fear felt by the people when Ibn al-Zubayr proposed demolishing it. So, too, is the placing of the Black Stone into a cloth which is then lifted by several people to the one who has the honor of finally putting it in place. All of this fails to instill confidence in the narratives as historical records.

It is difficult to gauge it significance, though it is nevertheless notable, that the accounts of the Quraysh's rebuilding usually fail to refer to a feature of the Kaʿba that appears to be very important in the time of the Prophet and Ibn al-Zubayr: the pictures of Abraham, Jesus with Mary, and possibly other prophets and angels that were inside. We are told that at the time when Muḥammad went inside the Kaʿba (the *fatḥ*) he saw these pictures and ordered their

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48   Cf. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, 1:192 (Ibn Isḥāq's account), with the version of al-Zuhrī in ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, 5:100 (no. 9104 in the *K. al-Ḥajj*), 5:318–9 (part of the *K. al-Maghāzī*), and Azraqī, 1:158–9 (who has it from from ʿAbd al-Razzāq's brother Muʿādh al-Ṣanʿānī). All three of those versions of al-Zuhrī's account are virtually the same. Ibn Abī Najīḥ's long account (Azraqī, *Makka*, 5:159–67) includes the story of the Prophet's accidental exposure of his private parts, and that begins "He was a *ghulām*, the revelation not yet having come to him."

erasure, apart from that of Jesus and Mary. The latter is said to have survived until the time when Ibn al-Zubayr demolished the building. If these reports have a basis in reality (and it is both hard to see what that reality might be and why the reports would be fabricated), and if we take the traditions about the various reconstructions of the Kaʿba at face value, the pictures must have been put there at the time of the Quraysh's rebuilding, but there is usually no reference to them in the narratives of that event.

It seems impossible to analyze these composite accounts in a way that might provide a developmental history of them. Thus, one cannot say that an account containing many of the narrative units is necessarily later in origin than one that contains only a few. One might imagine that the material would become more profuse over time, but it is possible that a particular scholar would omit some of the material that he knew because it was not relevant for his purposes. In contrast with Ibn Isḥāq's focus on the life of Muḥammad, for example, Azraqī's section on the Quraysh's building of the Kaʿba is more interested in the details of the building (such things as size, materials from which it was made, how it was before it was rebuilt) than anything else. He is not concerned to provide a straightforward narrative but gives us a series of brief and longer accounts that overlap with and do not always agree with one another.[49]

Now, the failure of the Quraysh to include the Ḥijr in the building is one of the units that appear in some of the composite accounts but not in others. It is notable that neither the account of al-Zuhrī nor that of Ibn Isḥāq has any reference to the Ḥijr, whereas al-Azraqī, right at the beginning, refers to the Quraysh's "falling short" and leaving some of the *bayt* in the Ḥijr. The longest continuous account in Azraqī's section, that of Ibn Abī Najīḥ, also contains a unit referring to the Quraysh running out of financial resources (*nafaqa*) and leaving almost seven cubits of the building in the Ḥijr. It is a relatively short part of an unusually long and developed composite narrative and its words obviously relate to the version of ʿĀʾisha's *ḥadīth* that Ibn al-Zubayr claimed to have heard from her.[50] It certainly seems possible that the information about the Ḥijr was not an original ingredient of the narrative of Quraysh's rebuilding, although we cannot say that for sure.[51]

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49 Azraqī, *Makka*, 1:157ff.

50 Ibid., 1:206.

51 But note that, if the Mālik . . . . Ibn ʿUmar *isnād* of the version of ʿĀʾisha's *ḥadīth* is authentic, then Zuhrī must have known of it. Other possible "back-projections" into the accounts of the Quraysh's building are the reports about pictures of Abraham, Jesus, and other subjects in the Kaʿba.

The possibility suggested here, then, is that the traditional narratives about the Quraysh's rebuilding of the Kaʿba are mainly a product of emerging Islam's needs and are of questionable value as evidence for the historical reconstruction of the events they claim to narrate. Among those needs the most obvious would be to provide biographical information and background detail about the Prophet, and it may be that the fundamental ingredient in the narratives is the account of how Muḥammad, even before his call to prophecy, was able to establish an agreement between the rival clans of the Quraysh and to put the Black Stone in place himself. Another would be the need to develop an acceptable history for the Islamic sanctuary at Mecca. The story of the Prophet putting the Black Stone in place is relevant there too. Whether the early Muslims had any real historical information about the construction of the sanctuary at Mecca that Ibn al-Zubayr demolished and rebuilt is open to question, and the preferred answer will affect our assessment of the relative balance of continuity and discontinuity in the history of the Meccan Kaʿba.

6 The *Ḥadīth* as a Zubayrid Invention?

There seem to be two possibilities, then, regarding the *ḥadīth* of ʿĀʾisha. We could accept what the tradition tells us about the building history of the Kaʿba in the period discussed in this paper, and about the acts and wishes of the various parties involved. ʿĀʾisha's *ḥadīth* could then be understood as a true expression of the Prophet's thoughts about the Kaʿba. The effect it has regarding the imperfection of the Kaʿba as it exists would reflect historical circumstances and events. No doubt that is the way that most Muslims who are aware of the tradition would view it: the fact that the Kaʿba does not reflect the wishes of the Prophet, but rather those of the pagan Quraysh, is yet another of the unfortunate results of the way impious rulers and others have corrupted true Islam for their own purposes.

The obvious alternative is that the ʿĀʾisha tradition originated in Zubayrid circles and represents words and ideas attributed to the Prophet rather than originating with him. Recent scholarship has argued that it was the Zubayrids who first stressed the importance of Muḥammad as the Prophet at the heart of Islamic identity, against the Sufyānid caliphs who emphasized the position of the caliph and showed little inclination to promote a Muḥammadan identity for the emerging religion. In addition, Wilferd Madelung has shown that the events of the second *fitna* generated a number of traditions that survive in the *ḥadīth* collections.[52]

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52   Wilferd Madelung, Abd Allāh B. al-Zubayr and the Mahdī, *Journal of Near Eastern studies* 40 (1981), 291–305; Wilferd Madelung, Apocalyptic prophecies in Ḥimṣ in the Umayyad

If we theorize, then, that the ʿĀʾisha *ḥadīth* came from the same context, it would be difficult to be precise about who originated it, but the main point would be that the words were attributed to the Prophet rather than originating from him, and the attribution was made with a purpose. The most obvious purpose would be to claim both a Muḥammadan and an Abrahamic sanction for the sanctuary erected by Ibn al-Zubayr: he was fulfilling the wish that the Prophet had expressed, and his Kaʿba or *bayt* was in conformity with the one built by Abraham in the same place.

In this scenario, Ibn al-Zubayr's building of a sanctuary at Mecca would be an innovation, and the *ḥadīth* a way of reducing its impact: not only was Ibn al-Zubayr merely doing what the Prophet had wished for but been unable to complete, he was restoring the sanctuary to the form that Abraham had given it. Furthermore, we should not imagine that Ibn al-Zubayr's building was really new, since the one it was replacing would have been the same as it, were it not for the Quraysh running out of cash or material.

The broader picture in which all this might make sense is the establishment of the Muslim sanctuary as the Kaʿba at Mecca. That process is usually associated with the conquest of Mecca by the Prophet (the *fatḥ*), and the subsequent developments associated with Ibn al-Zubayr and al-Ḥajjāj are seen as mere postscripts. The alternative, proposed here, is that it was Ibn al-Zubayr's decision to demolish the Meccan Kaʿba and replace it with a different type of building that was really the crucial event. Before that the Kaʿba was still the pre-Islamic sanctuary that existed in Mecca, and Ibn al-Zubayr was the first to establish an Islamic sanctuary on the site, which was now for the first time identified as the place where Abraham had built his.

That, of course, leaves many questions hanging, not least the nature of al-Ḥajjāj's subsequent destruction of many of the distinctive features of Ibn al-Zubayr's building while yet maintaining the site. It also does not throw light on the significance of the Ḥijr before it came to be associated with Abraham and Ishmael, or why it was so important for Ibn al-Zubayr to include it in his sanctuary. ʿĀʾisha's *ḥadīth* does, however, invite a more complex understanding of developments than is apparent from the traditional accounts.

Age, *Journal of Semitic studies* 31 (1986), 141–85; Wilferd Madelung, ʿAbd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr the *mulḥid*, in C. Vázquez de Benito and M.Á. Manzano Rodríguez (eds.), *Actas XVI congreso UEAI*, Salamanca 1995 (cited from the reprint in S. Schmidtke [ed.] *Wilferd Madelung. Studies in medieval Muslim thought and history* (Farnham, UK 2013), XVII: 301–8).

Remnants of an Old *Tafsīr* Tradition?
The Exegetical Accounts of ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr

Andreas Görke

1   Introduction

This article aims to assess the exegetical traditions ascribed to the early Medinan scholar ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr (d. c. 93/712). ʿUrwa is mainly known as a jurist and historian, but several *ḥadīth* collections and commentaries on the Qurʾān also contain a number of exegetical statements based on his authority, which have not been closely examined to date. By focusing on the statements of a seemingly marginal figure in the history of *tafsīr*, this article also seeks to contribute to the study of the early Islamic exegetical tradition. This field is characterized by contrasting and seemingly irreconcilable positions with regard to the ascription of exegetical material to early figures of the first and second centuries AH (seventh and eighth centuries CE). Focusing on marginal figures may provide a better chance of finding authentic material from that period, which will in turn allow for a better understanding of the early development of *tafsīr*.

This article will first briefly summarize previous scholarship on ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr as well as on the debates surrounding the origins and early development of *tafsīr* to place it into its scholarly context. Subsequently, the material that is adduced on the authority of ʿUrwa in Qurʾān commentaries will be analyzed to provide an overview of the topics and types of traditions that have been circulating with reference to him. This will be followed by an assessment of the authenticity of these references, i.e. whether they do indeed go back to ʿUrwa and reflect his positions or whether they are later ascriptions. The article concludes with a discussion of the impact these results may have on understanding the early development of Islamic exegesis.

2   Previous Scholarship on ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr and His Role in *Tafsīr*

ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr is mostly renowned for his expertise in law and his knowledge of the Prophet Muḥammad. He is counted among the seven *fuqahāʾ* of Medina, legal scholars who were active around the turn of the seventh

century CE and who are deemed largely responsible for the development of legal thought in Medina. He is also considered to be one of the earliest scholars to write down and transmit traditions about the life of Muḥammad.[1]

There is, in particular, a considerable amount of scholarship on ʿUrwa's role as a historian[2] and some recognition of his importance in the development of Islamic law.[3] In contrast, very little research has been conducted on his traditions relating to the Qurʾān, despite the fact that a considerable number of those that are traced back to him more or less explicitly refer to the Qurʾān. Von Stülpnagel, to whom we owe the first substantial study of the life and work of ʿUrwa, identified a total of some 315 independent traditions going back to him, of which almost 100, or roughly a third, refer to the Qurʾān either by explicitly quoting parts of a *sūra* or by clearly hinting at it.[4] ʿUrwa is also regularly quoted in all major works of *tafsīr*. Thus, for instance, al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) and al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) quote him on at least 50 occasions, and al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) in more than 100 instances, with the total number of traditions quoted being considerably higher.

Despite the apparent importance of the Qurʾān in traditions going back to ʿUrwa, he was never regarded as a prominent figure in the field of qurʾanic exegesis. As such, Ibn al-Nadīm (d. c. 380/990) does not mention him in the chapter on *tafsīr* in his *Fihrist*,[5] and he features in neither of the two classical

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1 Cf. Gregor Schoeler, Urwa b. al-Zubayr, *EI2*.

2 See in particular Joachim von Stülpnagel, *ʿUrwa Ibn az-Zubair. Sein Leben und seine Bedeutung als Quelle frühislamischer Überlieferung*, Ph.D. diss. (Tübingen 1957), 54–113; A.A. Duri, *The rise of historical writing among the Arabs* (Princeton 1983), 76–95; Salwā Mursī al-Ṭāhir, *Bidāyat al-kitāba al-ṭārīkhiyya ʿinda l-ʿArab. Awwal sīra fī l-Islām, ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr b. al-ʿAwwām* Beirut 1995; Gregor Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie der muslimischen Überlieferung über das Leben Mohammeds* (Berlin 1996), 28–32, 59–170; Andreas Görke, The historical tradition about al-Ḥudaybiya. A study of ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr's account, in Harald Motzki (ed.), *The biography of Muhammad. The issue of the sources* (Leiden 2000), 240–75; Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler, Reconstructing the earliest *sīra* texts. The Hijra in the corpus of ʿUrwa ibn al-Zubayr, *Der Islam* 82 (2005), 209–20; Andreas Görke and Gregor Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte über das Leben Muhammads. Das Korpus ʿUrwa ibn az-Zubair* (Princeton 2008); Stephen J. Shoemaker, In search of ʿUrwa's *Sīra*. Some methodological issues in the quest for "authenticity" in the life of Muḥammad, *Der Islam* 85 (2011), 257–344; Andreas Görke, Gregor Schoeler, and Harald Motzki, First-century sources for the life of Muḥammad? A debate, *Der Islam* 87 (2012), 2–59.

3 See von Stülpnagel, *ʿUrwa*, 126–30, 139–46; Charles Pellat, Fuḳahāʾ al-Madīna al-Sabʿa, *EI2*; Joseph Schacht, *An introduction to Islamic law* (Oxford 1964), 31.

4 Von Stülpnagel, *ʿUrwa*, 55.

5 Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-fihrist*, ed. Gustav Flügel (Leipzig 1872), 1:33–4.

works on the history of *tafsīr*, al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*[6] and al-Dāwūdī's (d. 945/1538) work of the same title.[7] While Ibn al-Nadīm and al-Suyūṭī focus on written works (and thus the omission of ʿUrwa is not surprising), al-Dawūdī also lists a number of early authorities in the field, such as Ibn ʿAbbās (d. c. 69/688),[8] the alleged "founder" of *tafsīr*, and his students ʿIkrima (d. c. 105/723),[9] Qatāda b. Diʿāma (d. c. 118/736),[10] and Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. c. 104/722),[11] as well as other early figures such as al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728)[12] and al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim (d. 105/723),[13] but he does not mention ʿUrwa even in passing. Ibn Saʿd (d. 230/845), the most important early source on ʿUrwa, does list Ibn ʿAbbās amongst the people from whom ʿUrwa heard traditions, but otherwise only indicates that ʿUrwa was a legal scholar, and does not mention any exegetical activity.[14]

While ʿUrwa's exegetical traditions have been mentioned in previous studies, they have not been studied in any detail so far. Preliminary results indicated that some of these traditions seem to be connected to legal discussions.[15] Others are connected to events in the life of Muḥammad,[16] although they do as a rule not feature in ʿUrwa's lengthy traditions on these events.[17] Traditions with a purely exegetical background that are not connected to legal discussions or the life of Muḥammad seem to have been mostly traced back to either ʿUrwa or ʿĀʾisha (d. 58/678). Those traditions that are said to have been transmitted by ʿUrwa's student Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124/742) are often traced back to a generation before ʿUrwa, while those allegedly transmitted by his son Hishām (d. 146/763) regularly stop with ʿUrwa.[18] These exegetical traditions mostly either contain explanations of words or identify to which event a specific revelation refers.[19] We will revisit these preliminary results in the course of this study.

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6   Suyūṭī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, ed. ʿAlī Muḥammad ʿUmar, Cairo 1976.

7   Dawūdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-mufassirīn*, ed. ʿAbd al-Salām ʿAbd al-Maʿīn, Beirut 2002.

8   Ibid., 167.

9   Ibid., 265.

10   Ibid., 332–3.

11   Ibid., 504–6.

12   Ibid., 106.

13   Ibid., 155.

14   Ibn Saʿd, *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* (Beirut 1985), 5:179.

15   See von Stülpnagel, *ʿUrwa*, 38, 40, 43, 51, 52.

16   See e.g. ibid., 39, 45, 48; Görke and Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 69–73, 80–2, 174.

17   Görke and Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 75, 222, 252–3, 265–6.

18   Ibid., 16.

19   Ibid.

3 Debates on the Origins and Early Development of *Tafsīr*

As ʿUrwa is said to have lived in the first/seventh century and the earliest extant written sources containing his traditions date from the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries, an assessment of his exegetical statements cannot be made without addressing the question of the reliability of the purported lines of transmission, the *isnād*s. This question is closely linked to that of the origins of Islamic exegesis and its early development, which is a highly controversial and contested field. While the extant commentaries on the Qurʾān from the third/ninth century and later claim to contain material going back to the first generations of Muslims, the question is whether these ascriptions can be considered reliable or not, and what this tells us about the early development of *tafsīr*.

The reliability of the *isnād*s in general was challenged first and foremost by Goldziher[20] and Schacht[21] in their studies on *ḥadīth* and law. Goldziher argued that individual *ḥadīth*s, despite being traced back to the Prophet, reflect later political and theological debates and thus should be regarded as documents for the later developments of Islam rather than for the time of Muḥammad.[22] Schacht took this skepticism towards the *isnād*s further. On the basis of his analysis of legal discussions in early Islam, he argued that *ḥadīth*s only became important from the second half of the second century AH (late eighth/early ninth centuries CE) and that *ḥadīth*s traced back to the Prophet only became the rule after al-Shāfiʿī (d. 204/820) had been able to make the case for the supreme authority of prophetic *ḥadīth*s over any statements from later generations.[23] This, according to Schacht, led to a "backward growth of *isnād*s," through which statements by later figures were gradually traced back to higher authorities and ultimately to the Prophet.[24]

The controversy with regard to the reliability of the *isnād*s has also impacted on the study of early *tafsīr* in general. There are basically three different views as to the origins and early development of *tafsīr*. Fuat Sezgin can be regarded as the major proponent of a very early written exegetical tradition, beginning as early as the first/seventh century and faithfully transmitted ever since.[25] An opposing view was advanced by John Wansbrough, who argued that the *tafsīr*

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20   Ignaz Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien* (Halle 1890), volume 2.
21   Joseph Schacht, *The origins of Muhammadan jurisprudence*, Oxford 1950.
22   Goldziher, *Muhammedanische Studien*, 2:6.
23   Schacht, *Origins*, 2–3, 138.
24   Ibid., 165.
25   Fuat Sezgin, *Geschichte des Arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden 1967), 1:19–24.

tradition cannot be traced back before roughly the year 200/815, as the material was only provided with *isnād*s at that time,[26] and that different types of exegesis evolved in a particular chronological order.[27] Other scholars held that while the earliest history of exegesis may be shrouded in darkness, various types of exegetical activities can already be observed from the time of the second and third generations of Muslims.[28]

The different positions are closely related to the question of the reliability of the *isnād*s. Thus, some scholars have argued that the general skepticism towards the *isnād*s does not apply to the same degree to exegetical traditions as it does to legal ones. The main reason is that exegetical *ḥadīth*s are, as a rule, only traced back to the generations of the successors or of the companions, not to Muḥammad himself.[29] Others, however, disagreed and saw the same procedures of ascription of later positions to earlier authorities at work in the *tafsīr* tradition,[30] with the main difference being in the fact that in the exegetical tradition positions were ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās and his students on account of the association of exegesis with Ibn ʿAbbās.[31]

What all the previous studies, despite their very different conclusions, have in common is that they have focused on the major figures commonly associated with the field, such as the alleged "founder" of *tafsīr*, Ibn ʿAbbās, or some of the putative early authors of *tafsīr* works such as Mujāhid b. Jabr and

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26   John Wansbrough, *Quranic studies. Sources and methods of scriptural interpretation* (Oxford 1977), 179.

27   Ibid., 119–246.

28   See, e.g., Fred Leemhuis, Discussion and debate in early commentaries of the Qurʾān, in Jane Dammen McAuliffe et al. (eds.), *With reverence for the word. Medieval scriptural exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Oxford 2003), 322–3; Claude Gilliot, The beginnings of qurʾānic exegesis, in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *The Qurʾān. Formative interpretation* (Aldershot 1999), 9–24. Herbert Berg gives a summary of the different positions and arguments in his *The development of exegesis in early Islam. The authenticity of Muslim literature from the formative period* (Richmond, UK 2000), 65–111. For a critique of some of Berg's assessments, see Harald Motzki, The question of the authenticity of Muslim traditions reconsidered. A review article, in Herbert Berg (ed.), *Method and theory in the study of Islamic origins* (Leiden 2003), 211–57.

29   See, e.g., Heribert Horst, Zur Überlieferung im Korankommentar aṭ-Ṭabarīs, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 103 (1957), 305–7.

30   See in detail e.g. Berg, *The development of exegesis in early Islam*.

31   Herbert Berg, Weaknesses in the arguments for the early dating of qurʾānic commentary, in Jane Dammen McAuliffe et al. (eds.), *With reverence for the word. Medieval scriptural exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Oxford 2003), 330–2. See also Claude Gilliot, Portrait "mythique" d'Ibn ʿAbbās, *Arabica* 32/2 (1985), 127, for a discussion of Ibn ʿAbbās's role in early exegesis.

Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767). While their importance of course warrants the attention they received, it also makes them the most likely candidates for false ascriptions by later generations. As they were held in highest esteem, it is probable that later material was falsely transmitted under their name to enhance its authenticity.

Focusing on a figure who is not among the famous eponyms of *tafsīr*, namely the early Medinan scholar ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr, may provide a better chance of unearthing authentic material from the early *tafsīr* tradition. Despite his marginal role in *tafsīr*, it can of course not be assumed *a priori* that traditions circulated under his name are authentic, but they have to be scrutinized before any far-reaching conclusions can be drawn.

4 An Overview of the Exegetical Traditions Ascribed to ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr

Let us first analyze the contents of the traditions quoted on the authority of ʿUrwa in the Qurʾān commentaries. Most of these works do record some statements going back to ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr, although the number of such traditions varies considerably in each commentary. As a complete survey of all ʿUrwa traditions in all commentaries was beyond the scope of this study, a selection had to be made. A skimming through of various commentaries indicated that the type of material they include seemed roughly similar, and many later sources cite earlier commentaries, in particular al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) *tafsīr*. In contrast, the commentaries of al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) and al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) seemed to include some material not present in al-Ṭabarī's work. These three commentaries were therefore taken as the basis for this analysis. The type of material included by al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) and Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) seems roughly similar to that present in these three works. Most other commentaries contain less material going back to ʿUrwa. Unlike al-Ṭabarī, who usually provides an *isnād*, al-Qurṭubī and al-Māwardī include several statements from or positions of ʿUrwa without an *isnād* (*hādhā qawl ʿUrwa* or *qālahu ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr*), and this is often also the practice in later *tafsīr* works. While this study can thus not claim to be comprehensive and it is possible that some more traditions can be found in other commentaries, the following survey should provide a good overview of the material traced back to ʿUrwa in the *tafsīr* tradition.

This material adduced on the authority of ʿUrwa consists of various types. We can at the outset distinguish between traditions in which ʿUrwa's own statements are related (A) and those in which ʿUrwa merely figures as a

transmitter of older material (B). The first type – statements of ʿUrwa – can be divided further into statements of an exegetical nature (A1), those in which ʿUrwa is quoted with general statements about the Qurʾān (A2), and those which ʿUrwa's legal position or practices are adduced (A3). The second type of traditions, those in which ʿUrwa appears as a transmitter of older material, can likewise be further divided into four sections. A significant part consists of *ḥadīth*s relating to historical events in the life of Muḥammad (B1) or to his practices (B2), both of which are seen in the light of specific qurʾanic verses, in the context of which they are adduced. Another, smaller, part consists of traditions of legal or ritual practices of companions of the Prophet (B3), which likewise are intended to explain the understanding of specific verses. Yet other traditions quote exegetical statements of earlier authorities, mostly from his aunt ʿĀʾisha (d. 58/678) (including, in rare instances, a reference to the *muṣḥaf* of ʿĀʾisha) (B4).

There is not a direct quotation from a specific qurʾanic verse in all of these cases, and often it is not clear whether the connection of a tradition to a specific verse or *sūra* was made by ʿUrwa or by a later transmitter or compiler. This is particularly true for a large number of the Prophetic *ḥadīth*s (B1 and B2) and a good part of the companion traditions (B3), which do not contain a direct quotation from the Qurʾān. In general, these types of traditions seem to have their origin in ʿUrwa's interest in the *sūra* or law rather than in his attempts to explain or contextualize the Qurʾān. It is most likely that they have been adduced by the respective compilers to explain the historical context of specific verses and that they were not based on ʿUrwa's preoccupation with the Qurʾān. This can be concluded from the observation that several qurʾanic elements are not included in ʿUrwa's traditions on the events alluded to in these verses. For instance, while Q 48 (*al-Fatḥ*) is commonly thought to be connected to the events of al-Ḥudaybiya in the year 6/628, several of the topics mentioned in the *sūra* do not feature in ʿUrwa's traditions on the event. Thus he mentions neither Muḥammad's dream (Q 48:27) that is usually considered to have been the cause of the campaign, the Bedouins who refused to join Muḥammad (Q 48:11–2), nor the pledge of allegiance under the tree (Q 48:18).[32] Likewise, in his reports on the Battle of the Trench (*al-Khandaq*) (5/627), several elements from Q 33 (*al-Aḥzāb*), which is thought to refer to this event, are not mentioned, such as the strong wind that God sent in support of the Muslims (Q 33:9) or the people who tried to flee because their houses were exposed (Q 33:13).[33] Several of these historical traditions of ʿUrwa have been

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32   See Görke and Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 266.

33   Ibid.

discussed in detail elsewhere,[34] and as they are not exegetical, they can be disregarded here.

As this article pays particular attention to the exegetical activities of ʿUrwa, it will mainly concentrate on those traditions that contain statements of ʿUrwa's own positions (A1). Traditions that do not explicitly refer to a specific verse or *sūra* of the Qurʾān will not be taken into consideration, as it is impossible to decide whether ʿUrwa may have established such a connection or not. While the traditions in which ʿUrwa features as a transmitter of earlier material are not the primary focus, they will be taken into account to establish to what extent they overlap with his alleged own positions.

Several scholars have attempted to categorize the different exegetical devices or techniques that can be observed in the *tafsīr* tradition. Wansbrough has argued for a chronological order for the development of these techniques or interests,[35] but this is controversial.[36] Nevertheless, it seems useful to investigate which exegetical techniques are employed by individual figures to identify different concerns and priorities. This may eventually also lead to a better idea of the emergence and development of specific techniques. Based on the categories identified by Wansbrough, Berg, and Versteegh,[37] the following list should cover most of the devices common in the *tafsīr* tradition: variant readings of specific words (*qirāʾāt*); circumstances of the revelation of a verse (*asbāb al-nuzūl*); identification of persons, places or other items not mentioned specifically in a verse; discussion of whether a verse is abrogated (*al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*); lexical explanations and paraphrases; citation of poetry; citation of other qurʾanic verses; grammatical explanations; rhetorical explanations, adducing of prophetic traditions; legal precepts (*aḥkām*); metaphorical interpretations; and theological explanations.

In the exegetical traditions traced back to ʿUrwa, a number of these techniques can be observed. Thus, there are some instances that specify how he read specific words. In Q 5:6, the verse of ablution (*wuḍūʿ*), he is quoted as having read *arjulakum* rather than *arjulikum* or *arjulukum*, relating to the question of whether one has to wash or wipe one's feet.[38] Another verse for which a

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34   See, in particular, Schoeler, *Charakter und Authentie*; Görke, al-Ḥudaybiya; Görke and Schoeler, Hijra; Görke and Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte*.

35   Wansbrough, *Quranic studies*, 119–246.

36   See, e.g., Fred Leemhuis, Discussion and debate, 322, for a different view.

37   Wansbrough, *Quranic studies*, 121; Berg, *The development of exegesis*, 148–56; C.H.M. Versteegh, *Arabic grammar and qurʾānic exegesis in early Islam* (Leiden 1993), 91–2.

38   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo 1968³), 6:127.

reading of ʿUrwa is recorded is Q 11:42, where he is said to have read *wa-nādā Nūḥ ibnahā* (or *ibnaha*) ("and Noah called out to her son")[39] instead of *ibnahu* (his son).[40] In Q 11:46, he is said to have read "he behaved badly" (*innahu ʿamila ghayra ṣāliḥin*) instead of "it was bad conduct" (*innahu ʿamalun ghayru ṣāliḥin*).[41] And in Q 17:24 ("And lower unto them [i.e. the parents] the wing of humbleness") he is supposed to have read *janāḥ al-dhill* ("wing of submissiveness [?]") instead of the more common *janāḥ al-dhull* ("wing of humbleness").[42]

On one occasion, a specific reading by ʿUrwa is implied, but not made explicit, in what is otherwise a lexical gloss on Q 7:26, when he translates "plumage" (*riyāsh*) as "wealth" (*māl*).[43] The majority of the *qurrāʾ* read *rīsh* instead of *riyāsh* (with the same meaning of "plumage")[44] and thus it is implicit that ʿUrwa was following the minority reading. Other examples for lexical explanations can be found for the same verse, when he glosses "garments" (*libās*) with "clothing" (*thiyāb*),[45] and "piety" (*taqwā*) with "fear of God" (*khashyat Allāh*),[46] as well as in a number of other instances. On verse 7:199 he states that *ʿurf*, in the phrase *wa-ʾmur bi-l-ʿurf*, has the same meaning as the (much more common) *maʿrūf*, and the phrase thus translates as "enjoin good."[47] On the same verse, ʿUrwa is also quoted stating that the (cryptic) expression *khudh al-ʿafw* ("take to forgiveness" [?]) means to be lenient towards the character traits of the people.[48] With regard to Q 17:24, mentioned above, he explains that to lower the wing of submissiveness/humbleness onto the parents means to not deny them anything they want.[49] Other instances of lexical paraphrases include Q 2:217, where ʿUrwa explains the meaning of the phrase *wa-lā yazālūna yuqātilūnakum ḥattā yaruddūkum ʿan dīnikum in istaṭāʿū* ("and they will not cease to fight you until they turn you back from your religion if

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39   All translations from the Qurʾān are my own.

40   Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, ed. Aḥmad ʿAbd al-ʿAlīm al-Bardūnī (Cairo 1966–7³), 9:38, 47.

41   Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 9:46.

42   Ibid., 10:244.

43   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 8:148.

44   Ibid., 8:147.

45   Ibid., 8:147.

46   Ibid., 8:149; Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn. Tafsīr al-Māwardī*, ed. al-Sayyid b. ʿAbd al-Maqṣūd b. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm (Beirut n.d.), 2:214.

47   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 9:155; Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 2:288.

48   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 9:153–4.

49   Ibid., 15:66.

they can").[50] He also paraphrases *aḥāta bi-l-nās*, ("[God] encompasses man-kind") in Q 17:60 as "protects you from mankind" (*manaʿaka min al-nās*).[51]

In a number of traditions ʿUrwa is said to have identified what a verse refers to. For instance, he states that *ṣalāt* (usually referring to the ritual prayer) in Q 17:110 (*wa-lā tajhar bi-ṣalātika wa-lā tukhāfit bihā* – "and be not [too] loud in your prayer, nor [too] quiet") actually refers to the more informal invoca-tion or supplication (*duʿāʾ*) (*qāla: fī l-duʿāʾ*).[52] For Q 10:64, he explicates that the "good tidings" that are promised to the friends of God consist in their vision of him.[53] On Q 26:214 ("and warn your nearest kin"), he relates that Muḥammad directly addressed his daughter Fāṭima and his aunt Ṣafiyya [the mother of al-Zubayr, ʿUrwa's father] directly, in one version also including the whole clan of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, implying that these were Muḥammad's nearest kin.[54] With regard to Q 9:107 he identifies those who have "founded a mosque on piety" as the Banū ʿAmr b. ʿAwf.[55] Other instances of attempts to explicate what a verse refers to can be seen for Q 5:34, where ʿUrwa identifies "those who repent before you overpower them" with people who went to the *dār al-ḥarb*, even if they were Muslims,[56] and on Q 33:50, where he indicates that "any believing woman who gives herself [in marriage] to the Prophet" refers to Umm Shurayk bt. Jābir.[57]

At least one case is concerned with the grammar, that of Q 3:7, on the ques-tion of whether the meaning of some verses is only known to God, or also to those firm in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūna fī l-ʿilm*). Both readings are possible, and ʿUrwa is reported to have held that those firm in knowledge do not know the interpretation, but that this refers to God only.[58]

ʿUrwa also provides a number of circumstances of revelation. As such, he explains the reason and occasion for the revelation of Q 2:229 (*al-ṭalāq mar-ratayn*, "divorce is twice").[59] He also provides the occasion for the revelation of Q 9:74 ("they swear by God that they did not say it"), stating that this was revealed about al-Julās b. Suwayd,[60] and explains further parts of the verse in

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50   Ibid., 2:354.
51   Ibid., 15:110.
52   Ibid., 15:184.
53   Ibid., 11:137.
54   Ibid., 19:119, 122–3.
55   Ibid., 11:28.
56   Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 2:34.
57   Ibid., 4:414; Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 22:23.
58   Ibid., 3:182–3.
59   Ibid., 2:456; Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 2:293–4.
60   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 10:185, 186; cf. Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 2:383.

reference to what al-Julās did.[61] ʿUrwa also relates that Q 80:1 ("He frowned and turned away") refers to Ibn Umm Maktūm and gives the occasion of the revelation.[62] On Q 60:1 he explains that the verse was revealed in relation to Ḥātib b. Abī Baltaʾa and provides a lengthy background story.[63] Likewise, he provides a background for the revelations of Q 2:218,[64] Q 28:53,[65] Q 46:11,[66] and Q 79:46.[67]

On at least one occasion ʿUrwa is also reported to have cited one qurʾanic verse to explain another. Q 111:5 reads "On her neck is a rope of *masad*" (*fī jīdihā ḥablun min masad*), with *masad* usually understood as a palm fiber. ʿUrwa, however, is cited as a proponent of a different interpretation, namely that it is a metal chain, and he states that it is 70 cubits long, citing Q 69:32 (*silsila dharʿuhā sabʿūna dhirāʿan*).[68]

There seem to be no instances of discussions about abrogation, citations of poetry, rhetorical explanations, metaphorical interpretations, or theological explanations in the traditions of ʿUrwa. This overview allows for some interesting observations. The overall number of exegetical traditions traced back to ʿUrwa is rather low, amounting to no more than 30 or 40 traditions. The higher number given by von Stülpnagel also includes traditions in which ʿUrwa only features as a transmitter as well as those in which the link to the Qurʾān is possibly only secondary and not an essential part of the tradition. Most of the traditions do not seem to have been widely circulated, and many are only adduced by one or two commentators. Only very few, in particular those with a legal or ritual relevance, can also be found in *ḥadīth* collections, with a significant number of variants. Despite the small number, they display quite a large array of exegetical techniques attributed to ʿUrwa. If these can indeed be shown to go back to ʿUrwa, this would be an indication of the rather early development and application of most of these techniques.

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61   Ibid., 10:187, 188.
62   Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 19:211; Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 30:51 only has the information that this was revealed about Ibn Umm Maktūm (without the occasion of the revelation) on the authority of ʿUrwa.
63   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 28:60.
64   Ibid., 2:356.
65   Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 13:296.
66   Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 15:274.
67   Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 19:209.
68   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 30:340; cf. Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 6:367.

5 Early Attestations of ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr's Exegetical Traditions?

The overview presented above is based on sources from the late third/ninth centuries and later. As indicated, most of these traditions have only been recorded by a few commentators, and some of them do not provide proper *isnād*s for the statements, so no serious study of different variants can be made. This is in contrast to ʿUrwa's traditions on the biography of the Prophet or his legal traditions, for which usually a large number of variants exist, allowing, to some extent, the reconstruction of ʿUrwa's teachings in these fields. As the small number of variants does not allow for a systematic *isnād-cum-matn* analysis to examine whether these statements can securely be attributed to ʿUrwa, it is necessary to resort to other considerations. In the following, the earliest attestations of ʿUrwa's exegetical traditions shall therefore be scrutinized.

To assess whether ʿUrwa's traditions were circulated in the early *tafsīr* tradition, let us look at the extent to which they were adduced by the early commentators of the formative phase. The focus will be on those commentators who were active before the systematic study of the grammatical features of the Qurʾān began. This roughly encompasses the time until the end of the second century after the Hijra (early ninth century CE).[69] Although several allegedly early *tafsīr* works of this period have been published in the last decades, the question of the extent to which they actually contain early material is controversial. It is therefore necessary to consider each of them in its own right. In the following section the works ascribed to Mujāhid b. Jabr, Muqātil b. Sulaymān, Sufyān al-Thawrī, ʿAbdallāh b. Wahb, and ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī shall be examined.

The commentary of Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. ca. 104/722) has not come down to us in its original form. Quotations from Mujāhid in later works show that several different recensions of the work must have existed. The published commentary of *Mujāhid*[70] is based on the manuscript Cairo, Dār al-kutub, MS 1075 tafsīr, which in fact contains the *Tafsīr ʿan Warqāʾ b. ʿUmar ʿan Ibn Abī Najīḥ ʿan Mujāhid*, transmitted by Ādam b. Abī Iyās. It is best described as a collection of statements and traditions based on the lectures of Mujāhid, to which

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69   Cf. Claude Gilliot, Kontinuität und Wandel in der "klassischen" islamischen Koranauslegung (II./VII.–XII./XIX. Jhd.), *Der Islam* 85 (2010), 7.

70   There are at least three editions of the work: *Tafsīr Mujāhid*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Ṭāhir b. Muḥammad al-Sūratī, 2 vols., Islamabad n.d.; *Tafsīr al-Imām Mujāhid b. Jabr*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Salām Abū l-Nīl, Cairo 1989; and *Tafsīr Mujāhid*, ed. Abū Muḥammad al-Asyūṭī, Beirut 2005. I have used the Cairo edition from 1989.

later transmitters added further traditions.[71] The *Tafsīr* contains three tradi-
tions that are traced back to ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr. However, none of the three
was transmitted by Mujāhid; rather, they are among the later additions. They
are traced back through Ādam b. Abī Iyās from either Ḥammād b. Salama or
al-Mubārak b. al-Faḍāla, then from ʿUrwa's son Hishām, and finally from ʿUrwa
himself. One contains ʿUrwa's explanation for the "wing of humbleness [or
submission]" in Q 17:24,[72] with the other two being statements from ʿĀʾisha.[73]

In contrast to Mujāhid's *Tafsīr*, the work of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767)
appears to have been composed by Muqātil himself and most probably
retained its original form during its transmission, with only a few later interpo-
lations that are clearly indicated as such.[74] Nevertheless, the published work[75]
represents only one of several different recensions of the *Tafsīr*.[76] However, it
does not seem to contain any references to ʿUrwa.

Sufyān al-Thawrī's (d. 161/777) work resembles that of Mujāhid in that it
constitutes a later collection of statements and traditions on the authority of
Sufyān. The published *Tafsīr* is based on the single manuscript of the work,

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71   See Georg Stauth, *Die Überlieferung des Korankommentars Muǧāhid B. Gabrs. Zur Frage
      der Rekonstruktion der in den Sammelwerken des 3. Jh.d.H. benutzten frühislamischen
      Quellenwerke*, Ph.D. diss., Gießen 1969; Fred Leemhuis, Ms. 1075 *tafsīr* of the Cairene Dār
      al-kutub and Muǧāhid's Tafsīr, in Rudolph Peters (ed.), *Proceedings of the ninth congress
      of the Union européenne des arabisants et islamisants, Amsterdam, 1st to 7th September 1978*
      (Leiden 1981), 169–80; Fred Leemhuis, Origins and early development of the *tafsīr* tradi-
      tion, in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān*
      (Oxford 1988), 19–22; Versteegh, *Arabic grammar*, 57, 107; Claude Gilliot, Mujāhid's exege-
      sis. Origins, paths of transmission and development of a Meccan exegetical tradition in
      its human, spiritual and theological environment, in Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink
      (eds.), *Tafsīr and Islamic intellectual history. Exploring the boundaries of a genre* (Oxford
      2014), 63–111.
72   Mujāhid, *Tafsīr al-Imām Mujāhid b. Jabr*, 430.
73   Ibid., 550, 626.
74   Kees Versteegh, Grammar and exegesis. The origins of Kufan grammar and the *Tafsīr
      Muqātil*, *Der Islam* 67 (1990), 207–9; idem, *Arabic grammar*, 130–1; Gilliot, Kontinuität und
      Wandel, 13–5.
75   There are at least two editions of the work: *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, ed. ʿAbdallāh
      Maḥmūd Shiḥāta, Cairo 1980–7, and *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd,
      Beirut 2003.
76   Claude Gilliot, Muqātil, Grand exégète, traditionniste et théologien maudit, *Journal
      Asiatique* 279 (1991), 39–50; Mehmet Akıf Koç, A comparison of the references to Muqātil
      b. Sulaymān (150/767) in the exegesis of Thaʿlabī (427/1036) with Muqātil's own exegesis,
      Journal of Semitic studies 53 (2008), 69–101.

found in Rampur.[77] The manuscript is incomplete, only covering the text up to Q 52, and the beginning is missing.[78] While in the manuscript the *sūra*s are discussed in the common order, the order of the verses within each *sūra* does not always correspond to the order in which they are discussed.[79] This *Tafsīr* contains four traditions that are traced back to ʿUrwa through his son Hishām.[80] In one tradition ʿUrwa, referring to Q 2:180 (prescribing a bequest if a believer is close to death and leaves behind wealth), relates that ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib denied the wish of a man from the Banū Hāshim to make a bequest because he considered the man's wealth too small.[81] This tradition from ʿAlī as transmitted by ʿUrwa is recorded in numerous variants in works of *tafsīr* as well as in *ḥadīth* collections. A second tradition provides the occasion of the revelation of Q 2:231 on the authority of ʿUrwa.[82] The story provided is similar to the one that ʿUrwa is said to have related with regard to Q 2:229.[83] That the story is linked to different verses is not necessarily surprising; these verses are closely related, as the whole passage (Q 2:228–32) deals with divorce. The third tradition has the explanation for the "wings of humbleness" (Q 17:24) on the authority of ʿUrwa,[84] while the last contains the identification of *ṣalāt* with *duʿāʾ* in Q 17:110, although not on the authority of ʿUrwa, but rather as transmitted by ʿUrwa from ʿĀʾisha.

ʿAbdallāh b. Wahb (d. 197/813) included chapters on *tafsīr* and the qurʾanic sciences in his *Jāmiʿ*, the text of which has been transmitted by his student Saḥnūn b. Saʿīd (d. 240/854), and which have been edited and published.[85] There is some debate about the ascription of the work to Ibn Wahb, but it is certainly amongst the oldest extant manuscripts of any exegetical work.[86]

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77   *Tafsīr Sufyān al-Thawrī*, ed. Imtiyāz ʿAlī ʿArshī, Beirut 1983.

78   Versteegh, *Arabic grammar*, 111; Gilliot, The beginnings of qurʾānic exegesis, 14–5; Gilliot, Kontinuität und Wandel, 8–9. See also Gérard Lecomte, Sufyān al-Ṯawrī. Quelques remarques sur le personnage et son œuvre, *Bulletin d'études orientales* 30 (1978), 52–8.

79   Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr*, 35–6.

80   Ibid., 55–6, 67, 171, 175.

81   Ibid., 55–6.

82   Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr*, 67.

83   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 2:456; Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 2:293–4.

84   Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr*, 171.

85   There are two editions of the work, in three volumes each. The first is: *al-Ǧāmiʿ. Die Koranwissenschaften*, ed. Miklos Muranyi, Wiesbaden 1992 (first volume), and *al-Ǧāmiʿ. Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, ed. Miklos Muranyi (final two volumes), Wiesbaden 1993–5. The second is: *al-Jāmiʿ fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān li-ʿAbdallāh b. Wahb*, ed. Miklos Muranyi, 3 vols., Beirut 2003. I have used the latter edition.

86   On this work see Andrew Rippin, Studying early *tafsīr* texts, *Der Islam* 72 (1995), 322–3; Miklos Muranyi, Neue Materialien zur *Tafsīr*-Forschung in der Moscheebibliothek von

The fact that his *Tafsīr* is arranged according to transmitters rather than according to the chronology of the Qurʾān may suggest a rather early date.[87] The work does not include any statement by ʿUrwa, but does have three traditions in which ʿUrwa allegedly transmitted material going back to ʿĀʾisha and ʿUmar (on Q 12:110 and 98:1). Al-Zuhrī, Ḥabīb b. Hind, and Abū l-Aswad are recorded as transmitters from ʿUrwa.[88]

The commentary of ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/826) is sometimes ascribed to his teacher Maʿmar b. Rāshid (d. 154/770), whose teachings constitute the main source of the *Tafsīr*.[89] There are at least three editions of the work.[90] Altogether, 27 traditions are traced back to ʿUrwa. Of these, eight are statements of ʿUrwa himself on a specific verse, five are traditions from ʿĀʾisha on specific verses, and the remaining fourteen are general statements not explicitly linked to a verse, either by ʿUrwa himself or transmitted by him. Amongst the traditions is the one about ʿAlī with regard to Q 2:180,[91] as well as others traced back to ʿĀʾisha on Q 2:225,[92] Q 4:3,[93] Q 26:223,[94] Q 33:28,[95] and Q 60:10.[96] ʿUrwa's own statements are adduced on Q 7:199 (on the meaning of *khudh al-ʿafw* and *ʿurf*),[97] on Q 9:107–8, with regard to the mosque "founded on piety" and that established "for harm,"[98] Q 17:110 (identification of *ṣalāt* with *duʿāʾ*),[99] Q 26:217 (Muḥammad's nearest kin),[100] Q 60:1 (Ḥāṭib b. Abī Balṭaʾa),[101]

Qairawān, in Stefan Wild (ed.), *The Qurʾan as text* (Leiden 1996), 230–43; Berg, *Development of exegesis*, 87–8.

87   Muranyi, Neue Materialien, 242.

88   Ibn Wahb, *al-Jāmiʿ fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 1:27; 3:21–2, 62.

89   Versteegh, *Arabic grammar*, 154–6; Gilliot, Kontinuität und Wandel, 16–7; Rippin, Studying early *tafsīr* texts, 321–2.

90   *Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad ʿAbduh, 3 vols., Beirut 1999; *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān lil-Imām ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣanʿānī*, ed. Muṣṭafā Muslim Muḥammad, 3 vols., Riyadh 1989; *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿazīz al-musammā Tafsīr ʿAbd al-Razzāq*, ed. ʿAbd al-Muʿṭī Amīn Qalʿajī, 2 vols., Beirut 1991. I have used the Riyadh edition.

91   ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 1:68.

92   Ibid., 1:90.

93   Ibid., 1:145.

94   Ibid., 2:78.

95   Ibid., 2:115.

96   Ibid., 2:278.

97   Ibid., 1:245.

98   Ibid., 2:287–8; cf. Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 11:25 and 28. In the former case, this is cited as a tradition via ʿUrwa from ʿĀʾisha in Ṭabarī, while the latter, as in ʿAbd al-Razzāq, is given as ʿUrwa's own statement.

99   ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 1:393.

100   Ibid., 2:77.

101   Ibid., 2:286.

as well as Q 2:196[102] and Q 79:43.[103] All these traditions are also recorded, in some variant form, in later works. The last alleged comment of ʿUrwa, on Q 54:29, in which he states that the person who hamstrung the Prophet Ṣāliḥ's camel was among his people as unassailable as Abū Zamʿa,[104] is usually considered as part of a sermon by the Prophet and is transmitted by ʿUrwa as such on other occasions. In this case it is connected with Q 91:11–2, which likewise deals with the story of Ṣāliḥ.[105]

In sum, the study of the pre-canonical works does not help much to ascertain the authenticity of the exegetical traditions ascribed to ʿUrwa. Even if the ascription of these works to their putative authors were accepted, this would only confirm that some of the traditions adduced in later works were already circulating in the middle of the second/eighth century. The overall number of exegetical traditions traced back to ʿUrwa in these works is very small, but this is in accordance with their volume: four of the 911 traditions included in Sufyān's work are traced back to ʿUrwa (0.4%), compared to the 27 of roughly 3,750 traditions in ʿAbd al-Razzāq (0.7%), and some 180 of around 38,000 traditions in al-Ṭabarī (0.5%).

The character of the traditions in the allegedly early works is similar to the ones in later collections: they almost exclusively consist of traditions that were transmitted from ʿUrwa by his son Hishām and his most prominent student Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī. The vast majority of traditions which contain exegetical statements of ʿUrwa himself feature his son Hishām in the *isnād*, while those traditions that are traced back to ʿUrwa through Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī include more accounts from earlier authorities, in particular from ʿĀʾisha. The rare instances in which an exegetical position of ʿUrwa is transmitted through al-Zuhrī (and sometimes Yazīd b. Rūmān) rather than through Hishām seem to be more closely linked to the *sīra*, such as the reason for the revelation of Q 2:218, which ʿUrwa and others thought refers to the expedition of ʿAbdallāh b. Jaḥsh,[106] or the story about Ḥāṭib b. Abī Baltaʿa, which has been commonly assumed to be connected to Q 60:1. The scope of different types of traditions is smaller, and there seem to be no traditions on variant readings, grammatical explanations, or citations of the Qurʾān. As these are likewise rare in the later works, it is impossible to decide whether their lacking in the earlier collections indicates a later origin of these traditions or whether this is just due to the small sample.

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102   Ibid., 1:75–6.
103   Ibid., 2:347.
104   Ibid., 2:258.
105   See von Stülpnagel, *ʿUrwa*, 137–8, with further references.
106   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 2:356.

While the earlier commentaries do not provide clear clues as to the authenticity of the traditions ascribed to ʿUrwa, the fact that the character of the traditions they include is similar to those found in the later works makes it feasible to discuss them together and consider them to be independent attestations.

6   A Critical Analysis of the Exegetical Traditions Ascribed to ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr

As seen above, there are too few variants of ʿUrwa's exegetical traditions to securely establish their authenticity through an *isnād-cum-matn* analysis, and there are no indisputable early attestations of his traditions. How, then, can we establish whether these traditions go back to ʿUrwa or whether they are later ascriptions? Closer scrutiny of the traditions themselves and their significance within the discussion of the verses to which they relate may provide some hints.

Let us first have a closer look at the *isnād*s. As indicated above, and in line with previous observations,[107] ʿUrwa's son Hishām features as a transmitter for most of his exegetical traditions, while there are a few that are traced back through al-Zuhrī, Yazīd, or are recorded as anonymous traditions from ʿUrwa.[108] The range of transmitters from Hishām is quite wide. While Sufyān al-Thawrī appears to have transmitted directly from Hishām, and in ʿAbd al-Razzāq's work almost all traditions are traced back via Maʿmar to Hishām (only one from Maʿmar <-- Qatāda <-- Hishām),[109] the names of transmitters in the other sources include Ḥammād b. Salama, al-Mubārak b. al-Faḍāla, Abū Muʿāwiya, Ibn Abī l-Zinād, ʿAbd b. Sulaymān, Jarīr, Ibn Idrīs, Abū Usāma, Wakīʿ, Ibn al-Mubārak, Anas b. ʿIyāḍ, and Mālik b. Anas.

A comparison of the traditions that claim to include statements by ʿUrwa with those in which ʿUrwa only features as transmitter reveals that these ascriptions are not always unanimous. Thus, while al-Ṭabarī once cites ʿUrwa as an authority with regard to the interpretation of 7:199, in two other traditions the same statement is traced back via ʿUrwa to Abū l-Zubayr, and in

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107   Görke and Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 16.

108   In addition to most of the statements in Māwardī's work and some in Qurṭubī's, which are adduced without *isnād*, see also Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 8:147, 148, and 149, where the traditions are traced back through Abū Saʿd (or Abū Saʿīd) al-Madanī from someone who heard ʿUrwa.

109   ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 1:131.

one through Hishām b. ʿUrwa from Wahb b. Kaysān from Abū l-Zubayr.[110] Ibn Abī Ḥātim includes a tradition of the same tenor, but allegedly transmitted by ʿUrwa from Ibn ʿUmar,[111] while al-Bukhārī records a version traced back via ʿUrwa from his brother ʿAbdallāh b. al-Zubayr.[112] The statement that ṣalāt in 17:110 actually refers to the *duʿāʾ* is not only traced back to ʿUrwa, but also via ʿUrwa to ʿĀʾisha.[113] Likewise, the identification of the "nearest kin" in Q 26:214 is sometimes reported on the authority of ʿUrwa, and sometimes as transmitted by ʿUrwa from ʿĀʾisha.[114] The same is true for the comments on Q 79:46 and Q 80:1.[115] Nevertheless, many traditions are only traced back to ʿUrwa (and have no variants reaching further back to earlier authorities via ʿUrwa), while other traditions are only reported on the authority of ʿĀʾisha (or other companions) and not as positions ʿUrwa held.

The exegetical statements with which ʿUrwa is credited are, as a rule, not unique. Usually he is cited alongside other authorities who held similar views, such as Ibn ʿAbbās, Mujāhid, al-Suddī, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, and others. There are only a few instances in which he is presented as the only person to have held a specific view. Thus, he seems to be the only one to hold that *taqwā* (piety) in Q 7:26 means fear of God (*khashyat Allāh*).[116] In one case where his position is not a common one (his variant reading of Q 11:42), his view is regarded as anomalous (*shādhdh*).[117]

The exegetical traditions traced back to earlier authorities through ʿUrwa in general show a slightly different profile than the ones given as his positions. Most of these are traced back to ʿĀʾisha. A large part deals with occasions of the

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110   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 9:154.

111   Ibn Abī Ḥātim, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm musnadan ʿan Rasūl Allāh wa-l-ṣaḥāba wa-l-tābiʿīn*, ed. Asʿad Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib (Mecca 1997), 5:1637. Ibn Abī Ḥātim's *Tafsīr* is incomplete, and the edition faulty and partly extrapolated from quotations in other works. However, the commentary from *sūra*s 1 to 13 and from *sūra*s 23 to 29 is extant, thus covering the part quoted here. See Mehmet Akıf Koç, *Isnād*s and *rijāl* expertise in the exegesis of Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/939), *Der Islam* 82 (2005), 146.

112   Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. Muṣṭafā Dīb al-Bughā (Beirut 1990), 1702.

113   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 15:183; this is also widely transmitted in the *ḥadīth* literature, see, for example, Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 1750, 2331, 2737.

114   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 19:118.

115   Compare e.g. Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 19:209 (ʿUrwa) with Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 30:49 (ʿĀʾisha), and Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 19:211–2 with Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 30:50–1, where both Qurṭubī and Ṭabarī adduce versions going back to ʿUrwa next to versions traced back to ʿĀʾisha.

116   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 8:149; Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 2:214.

117   Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 9:37, 48.

revelation and explications of whom or what a verse refers to, while it appears that she is not quoted with lexical glosses or grammatical explanations. Usually her statements are not unique, but occasionally she does seem to be the only one to have held a specific opinion.[118] It is again impossible to decide whether the different profile is an indication of the reliability of the transmission or just a result of the small sample. In some cases, 'Urwa's position is said to have been different from 'Ā'isha's.[119]

The traditions traced back to 'Urwa are remarkably consistent in their contents – there are no cases in which 'Urwa is cited with differing or contradicting views. This is in contrast, for instance, to traditions traced back to 'Ā'isha via 'Urwa, in which she is sometimes cited with opposing views. Thus, while she is quoted as holding that *ṣalāt* in 17:110 refers to the *du'ā'*, as we have seen, a different tradition claims that she said that this actually refers to the part of the ritual prayer where the believer kneels down (the *tashahhud*).[120] Such contradicting views are also very common in the traditions ascribed to Ibn 'Abbās or Mujāhid, and thus the consistency in 'Urwa's traditions is noteworthy.

Those traditions of 'Urwa that have been recorded in different variants usually differ in their wording while they retain the same sense. As seen above, some traditions deal with occasions of revelation of specific verses or grammatical features. None of these traditions employ any specific technical vocabulary, and none of the terms that came to be used in the discussion of the qur'anic grammar occur in the traditions ascribed to 'Urwa.[121] Likewise, the term *sabab* is not adduced to indicate a reason or occasion for a revelation, but the traditions traced back to 'Urwa are introduced with *fa-'anzala llāh* ("and God sent down . . .") or *fa-nazalat* ("and [such and such verse] came down"). As Rippin has shown, the term *sabab* seems to have been used in this technical sense only from the time of al-Ṭabarī onwards.[122]

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118   E.g. Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 20:145, where she is cited with the opinion that the "reprehensible deeds" that Lot's people committed in their gatherings (Q 29:29) consisted of them farting.

119   E.g. Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, vol. 4:414.

120   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 15:187.

121   See e.g. Versteegh, *Arabic grammar*, 96–106, for a general discussion, and 196, for a list of some common terms.

122   Andrew Rippin, The exegetical genre *asbāb al-nuzūl*. A bibliographical and terminological survey, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48 (1985), 14.

7 Conclusion

How can these features be best explained? The most likely scenario is that the majority of the exegetical traditions traced back to ʿUrwa do indeed go back to him. As he was not known as an expert in exegesis, it seems improbable that people deliberately ascribed exegetical positions to him (unlike, for instance, to Ibn ʿAbbās or Mujāhid). The fact that the traditions traced back to him are remarkably consistent and do not show any opposing views also speaks in favor of an authentic transmission, as does the lack of any technical vocabulary. If the traditions were later ascriptions, one might expect that these would contain occasional contradictions or an anachronistic use of terminology.

The small number of exegetical traditions and the variants in wording indicate that these traditions were not part of any form of *tafsīr* work, but rather were passed on as oral traditions. While the overall number of ʿUrwa traditions adduced in the major commentaries, such as those of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Thaʿlabī, al-Baghawī, al-Qurṭubī, and Ibn Kathīr, reaches some 150 or 200, a large part of these consists of legal or historical traditions from ʿUrwa with no explicit reference to the Qurʾān. As shown, it is very likely that the connection of these traditions to verses from the Qurʾān was only made at a secondary stage and not by ʿUrwa himself.

ʿUrwa's exegetical traditions do not seem to have been transmitted together with his legal traditions or those on the life of the Prophet, but may have originally been oral glosses or side remarks. That at least two of the statements are connected with different verses of the Qurʾān (however with a similar context) indicates that it was known what these statements referred to, but not necessarily on what occasion ʿUrwa made them.

In the course of the transmission of ʿUrwa's statements the *isnād*s were sometimes extended to a companion, usually ʿĀʾisha. This process could also be observed in his traditions on the life of Muḥammad.[123] That the same tradition is occasionally traced back to different companions indicates that this is very likely to have been a secondary process, and that statements on ʿUrwa's informants cannot generally be trusted. This is not to say that it is impossible that the traditions traced back through ʿUrwa contain authentic material from earlier authorities, but this cannot be ascertained through this study.

It cannot be completely ruled out that ʿUrwa's son Hishām, rather than only transmitting exegetical traditions from his father, actually invented them (or at least some of them). The fact that a number of traditions are also transmitted through al-Zuhrī or other scholars makes this less likely, but the small

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123 Görke and Schoeler, *Die ältesten Berichte*, 270–2.

number of variants makes it impossible to exclude this possibility. Whether in fact originating with ʿUrwa or his son Hishām, the traditions ascribed to ʿUrwa clearly reflect an old *tafsīr* tradition and date from the late first century to the middle of the second century AH (first half of the eighth century CE). Despite their small number, they do show that several exegetical techniques, including lexical glosses, circumstances of revelation, identification of references, citation of qurʾanic verses, and grammatical explanations were already in use in a rudimentary form at that time. This conforms with the views of Gilliot and Leemhuis on the early development of the exegetical tradition, against the positions of Sezgin and Wansbrough.

The traditions studied here also indicate that exegesis was not confined to a few experts in the field, but was practiced on a wider scale in scholarly circles. While the exegetical traditions of ʿUrwa in themselves do not contain a lot of extraordinary material not otherwise known, this study has shown that a focus on minor figures in the exegetical tradition may be a way forward to find old exegetical traditions that have less or not been affected by later attributions and back-projections. Criteria such as the consistency of the contents of the reported traditions, the vocabulary used and the role of the traditions within the discussions of the respective verses may help to establish the authenticity of such traditions when too few variants exist for an *isnād-cum-matn* analysis.

Muqātil on Zayd and Zaynab

"The sunna of Allah Concerning Those Who Passed Away Before" (Q 33:38)

Gordon Nickel

1 Introduction

The idea that Islam advances a number of large theological claims is not a matter of dispute among modern western scholars of Islamic studies. The apparent reluctance of the same scholars to interact with those religious truth claims, however, is a matter of some curiosity.

The sourcebooks of Islam – the texts that Muslims appeal to for authority – are by their very nature a series of religious truth claims. Andrew Rippin[1] described the character of the sources through an explanation of the scholarly insights of John Wansbrough:

> [T]he entire corpus of early Islamic documentation must be viewed as "Salvation History." What the Koran is trying to evidence, what *tafsīr*, *sīra*, and theological writings are trying to explicate, is how the sequence of worldly events centered on the time of Muḥammad was directed by God. All the components of Islamic salvation history are meant to witness the same point of faith, namely, an understanding of history that sees God's role in directing the affairs of humankind. And the difference that makes is substantial . . . .[2]

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1 Andrew Rippin introduced me to the formative period of *tafsīr* and especially to the commentary of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān. While doing research for my dissertation, I noticed that a number of scholars drew attention to Muqātil's interpretation of Q 33:38. Andrew taught me the methodology of literary analysis, and I have tried to use that methodology in this essay, in his honor. The references to dispassionate research and response to truth claims also come out of our relationship. We have often discussed these things during the past 10 years.

2 Andrew Rippin, Literary analysis of Qurʾān, *tafsīr* and *sīra*. The methodologies of John Wansbrough, in Richard C. Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam in religious studies* (Tucson, AZ 1985), 154, repr. in Ibn Warraq (ed.), *The origins of the Koran. Classic essays on Islam's holy book* (Amherst, NY 1998), 354–5. Cf. John Wansbrough, *Quranic studies. Sources and methods of scriptural interpretation* (Oxford 1977), 43.

The "difference" that Rippin saw in Wansbrough's analysis related to the question of the historicity of Muslim tradition and the widespread willingness of modern western scholars to accept that tradition as history. Rippin counseled that Muslim tradition be approached rather through the methodology of literary analysis, but at the same time he helpfully trained a spotlight on the fundamental nature of the Muslim literary sources.

Many passages in the Qur'ān give the reader the impression of entering debates in progress between the claims of Islam and groups of listeners who do not accept those claims. Kate Zebiri writes that "polemic in the sense of argumentation or the refutation of others' beliefs is a prominent element in the Qur'ān since in the course of his mission Muḥammad encountered various types of opposition and criticism."[3] *Sūra*s 2–7 of the Qur'ān – nearly 30 percent of its contents – contain a great deal of polemical material, often addressed explicitly to Jews, Christians, "associators," or simply "disbelievers."[4]

A test case for this thesis about the nature of the Muslim sources – one of countless possible examples – is the exegetical development of a passage in *sūra* 33 that Muslims have traditionally linked with the story of Zayd, Zaynab, and the Messenger of Islam (Q 33:36–40).[5] The passage has a number of features that draw the reader's attention. Typical of the so-called "Medinan" verses of the Qur'ān, it associates Allah with his messenger for authority and obedience (Q 33:36). Verse 37 is the only verse in the Qur'ān in which a Muslim other than Muḥammad is named – Zayd (Q 33:37). This passage also contains one of only four verses in the Qur'ān where the name "Muḥammad" appears – one of only two verses to state explicitly that the messenger of Allah is Muḥammad.[6] Along with mention of Muḥammad comes a major truth claim, that he is "the seal of the prophets" (Q 33:40). This expression *khātam al-nabiyyīn* occurs only here in the Qur'ān, and the Islamic doctrine of the finality of prophethood is based on this verse.[7]

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3   Cf. Kate Zebiri, Polemic and polemical language, *EQ*. A different approach to the same material is Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau, Polemics in the Koran. The Koran's negative argumentation over its own origin, *Arabica* 60/1–2 (2013), 131–45.

4   Andrew Rippin and Gordon Nickel, The Qur'ān, in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *The Islamic world* (London 2008), 148–9.

5   Several scholars of the Qur'ān and Hebrew Bible read an earlier draft of this essay and made many good suggestions for improvement: David S. Powers, Peter Riddell, Havilah Dharamraj and Elmer Martens. I thank them all.

6   John Wansbrough wrote that the occurrence of the name Muḥammad in Q 33:40 "suggests a particular polemic, in which not only the credentials but also the identity of the Arabian prophet was in dispute"; *Qur'ānic studies*, 64.

7   David S. Powers, Zayd b. Muḥammad, *EQ*; David S. Powers, *Muḥammad is not the father of any of your men. The making of the last prophet* (Philadelphia 2009), 50–7; David S. Powers,

In spite of the mention of Muḥammad and the high claims made for him, the wider passage – as well as the Islamic interpretive tradition – sees the subject of the action as Allah. The passage repeats the claim that the command (*amr*) of Allah is the determining factor (Q 33:37, 38). Allah has "ordained" something for the prophet mentioned in Q 33:38. The passage also specifies that the divine action in view is "God's wont (*sunnat Allāh*) with those who passed away before" (Q 33:38).[8] The qurʾanic expression makes a claim about the practice or behavior of God. Because of its proximity to Q 33:37, the practice seems to be the actions of Allah toward the person addressed there. The Qurʾān then invites the reader to compare the practice of Allah toward the one addressed in Q 33:37 with the practice of God toward those who passed away previously (Q 33:38). This openness to the past is typical of the Qurʾān.

The scholarly method well suited for investigation of the sourcebooks of Islam is a descriptive literary analysis alive to critical questions. The scholar need turn neither to the right nor the left, whether the current fashion of the academy be the "irenic" approach of an earlier generation of scholars or the unaccountable "confessionalism" since 9/11.[9] Rippin wrote that the "irenic" approach "has led to the unfortunate result of a reluctance on the part of many scholars to follow all the way through with their insights and results."[10] Similarly, Zeʾev Maghen notes the extreme sensitivity toward using terms like "influence" in discussions of accounts of prophetic figures, and the "drawn-out terminological deliberations that often accompany such issues in present-day academia." Such deliberations, writes Maghen, "hinder rather than help the pursuit of knowledge."[11]

Literary analysis of the Muslim sourcebooks is thus "dispassionate" in the sense that scholars try not to allow personal feelings or beliefs to influence their research. Once the source is accurately described, however, the content frequently appeals to the reader/listener for a response. What is to prevent the scholar who has responsibly completed the necessary research, description, and analysis from responding to the subject matter?

     Zayd (Philadelphia 2014), 111–23; Uri Rubin, The seal of the prophets and the finality of prophecy. On the interpretation of the qurʾānic *Sūrat al-Aḥzāb* (33), *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 164 (2014), 67.

8   Qurʾān translations are those of Arthur J. Arberry, *The Koran interpreted* (London 1964), except when a literal rendering helps to better understand Muslim exegetical comments.

9   Aaron W. Hughes, The study of Islam before and after September 11. A provocation, *Method and theory in the study of religion* 24 (2012), 314–36.

10   Rippin, Literary analysis of Qurʾān, *tafsīr* and *sīra*, 359.

11   Zeʾev Maghen, Davidic motifs in the biography of Muḥammad, *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 35 (2008), 91, nt. 1.

The exegetical treatment of Q 33:38 in focus in this essay is that of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767 CE). Muqātil was born in Balkh and lived in Marv, Baghdad, and Baṣra. He is also said to have taught in Mecca, Damascus, and Beirut. His *Tafsīr* is of special significance because of its probable (though not undisputed) early date.[12]

2   Muqātil on Q 33:38, the *Sunna* of Allah

The early Muslim commentator Muqātil offered his interpretation of Q 33:38 in the midst of his discussion of the larger pericope Q 33:36–40.[13] The *sūra* itself, known as *al-Aḥzāb*, contains a great deal of material about "the prophet" and "the messenger." "The prophet" is repeatedly addressed in the second person and described in the third person. Three statements from this *sūra* that are well-known among Muslims are: "The prophet is nearer to the believers than their selves" (Q 33:6); "You have a good example (*uswa*) in Allah's messenger" (Q 33:21); and "Allah and the angels bless the prophet. O believers, do you also bless him, and pray him peace" (Q 33:56). "The messenger" is frequently paired with Allah for submission and obedience (Q 33:12, 22, 31, 33, 36, 57 66, 71).[14] The *sūra* also gives detailed instructions about the wives who are permitted to the prophet (v. 50).

At Q 33:38 the qur'anic text switches from first-person plural address to a single listener in Q 33:37, to third person claims in Q 33:38. The verse seems to start with a justification, or perhaps defense,[15] of the messenger: "There is no fault (*ḥaraj*)[16] in the prophet, with respect to what Allah has ordained (*faraḍa*) for him" (Q 33:38). Here Muqātil glosses *faraḍa* as *aḥalla* – what Allah permits the prophet.[17]

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12   Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin (ed. and trans.), *Classical Islam. A sourcebook of religious literature* (London 2013²), 154; Andrew Rippin, Tafsīr, *EI2*; Claude Gilliot, Muqātil, grand exégète, traditionniste et théologien maudit, *Journal asiatique* 279/1–2 (1991), 39–92; Kees Versteegh, Grammar and exegesis. The origins of Kufan grammar and the *Tafsīr Muqātil*, *Der Islam* 67 (1990), 206–42; Gordon Nickel, *Narratives of tampering in the earliest commentaries on the Qur'ān* (Leiden 2011), 30–4, 68–72.

13   *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, ed. ʿAbdallāh Maḥmūd Shiḥāta (Beirut 2002), 3:490–9.

14   Gordon Nickel, The clans (sūra 33), in Hans-Josef Klauck et al (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the Bible and its reception* (Berlin 2012), 5:cols. 385–6.

15   Zeʾev Maghen, Intertwined triangles. Remarks on the relationship between two prophetic scandals, *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 33 (2007), 77.

16   *ḥaraj* also carries the sense of reproach, prohibition, or sin.

17   *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 3:496.

Muqātil's interpretation of the second part of the verse is more substantial and – as it was later judged – more controversial. "The *sunna* of Allah with those who passed away previously."[18] Muqātil first indicates that this means those who passed away prior to Muḥammad. He then specifies who and how this would be:

> This means David the prophet (*ṣal*)[19] when he fell in love with (*hawiya*)[20] the woman with whom he was infatuated (*futina*),[21] namely the wife of Ūriya ibn Ḥanān. Allah joined (*jama‘a*) David together with the woman he fell in love with, and likewise Allah joined Muḥammad (*ṣal*) together with Zaynab when he fell in love with her, as he did with David, upon whom be peace. That is his saying, "Allah's commandment is certain destiny." So Allah decreed for David and Muḥammad their marriage (*tazwīj*).[22]

Muqātil's interpretation picks up on the tone of the verse itself, that this is an action of Allah. Allah permitted something to the prophet, as was his practice in the past. Allah joined both David and Muḥammad to the women they fell in love with. However, Muqātil also gives responsibility to the humans involved in two ways: to David and Muḥammad when he uses the verb *hawiya*, and to the wife of Ūriya with the passive *futina*.

David Powers writes that the negative reputation of Muqātil among a number of early Muslim authorities is directly related to his interpretations of these verses and his expansions on the Zayd and Zaynab story.[23]

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18   The expression *sunnat Allāh* ("God's practice") occurs again in *sūra* 33 in verse 62 (x2), and a total of eight times in the Qurʾān. To this may be added Q 17:77: "You will find no change in our *sunna*." See Rosalind W. Gwynne, The neglected Sunnah. Sunnat Allāh (the Sunnah of God), *American journal of Islamic social sciences* 10 (1993), 455–63.

19   *ṣal* is an abbreviation for "may the prayers (*ṣalla*) and peace of Allah be upon him" (cf. Q 33:56). For the translation of this expression, see Cristina de la Puente, The prayer upon the Prophet Muḥammad (*taṣliya*). A manifestation of Islamic religiosity, *Medieval Encounters* 5/1 (1999), 121–9.

20   With Maghen, 77. Other scholars have rendered *hawiya* in this passage in a number of ways. David S. Powers: "The Prophet . . . experienced sexual desire for her." *Muḥammad is not the father*, 42; Claude Gilliot: "le Prophète s'éprit d'elle," Muqātil, grand exégète, 73; Jean-Louis Déclais: "il désira," Le péché et la pénitence de David dans les premières traditions musulmanes in *Figures de David à travers la Bible. XVIIᵉ congrès de l'ACFEB (Lille, 1er-5 septembre 1997)* (Paris 1999), 443.

21   Again the phrase is rendered in a number of other ways. Gilliot: "la femme qui le séduisit," Muqātil, 74; Déclais: "la femme par laquelle il fut séduit," Le péché et la pénitence de David, 443; Maghen: "the woman by whom he was enraptured," Intertwined triangles, 77.

22   *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 3:496–7.

23   Powers, *Muhammad is not the father*, 55.

2.1 *Two Stories as Muqātil Understood Them*

Why was Muqātil's interpretation of "the *sunna* of Allah" at Q 33:38 so controversial? A clue may be sought in his understanding of the stories of David and Bathsheba, on the one hand, and the Messenger of Islam and Zaynab on the other. Muqātil tells the Zaynab story just prior to his comments on Q 33:38, and includes his version of the David and Bathsheba story subsequently, at Q 38:21.

For Muqātil, the Zaynab bint Jaḥsh story begins with Muḥammad giving her in marriage to Zayd.[24] He gives some background to both Zaynab and Zayd to explain why Zaynab and her brother ʿAbdallāh b. Jaḥsh were not happy with the match. Zayd was a desert Arab in the *Jāhiliyya*. After Zayd had been captured in a raid, the Messenger of Islam had freed him from slavery and adopted him. Zaynab says she would not accept Zayd as her husband, and describes herself as one of the most perfect (*atamm*) Qurayshī women. The Messenger tells Zaynab that he has already accepted Zayd for her. At that point, according to Muqātil, Allah reveals the verse, "It is not for any believer, man or woman, when Allah and his Messenger have decreed a matter, to have the choice in the affair" (Q 33:36).

Muqātil then provides a flashback to Zayd's initial request to the Messenger to have Zaynab's hand, and his recruitment of ʿAlī to help him persuade the Messenger. ʿAlī is successful, and after receiving the Messenger's approval, ʿAlī approaches Zaynab and her family to convey the marriage proposal. Zayd marries Zaynab, but before long he complains to the Messenger about how she is treating him. According to Muqātil, the Messenger goes to see Zaynab in order to repair the relationship.

> . . . the Prophet entered then admonished her (*waʿaẓahā*). When he spoke with her, her beauty, grace and elegance filled him with admiration (*aʿjabahu*). It was a matter decreed by Allah, powerful and glorious. When the Prophet (*ṣal.*) returned, he maintained in his heart [regarding Zaynab] what Allah wanted him to maintain. After that, the Prophet (*ṣal.*) was asking [Zayd], "How is she with you?" [Zayd] complained to him about her. So the Prophet (*ṣal.*) said to him, "Keep thy wife to thyself, and fear God" [Q 33:37], but a different thought was in his heart. So Allah sent down . . . .[25]

Muqātil writes that this incident was the occasion of recitation for the last clause of Q 33:36, "Whosoever disobeys Allah and his messenger has gone

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24   *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 3:491.

25   Ibid., 3:493.

astray into manifest error." Muqātil then gives a second version of the story of the Messenger's encounter with Zaynab that adds a number of interesting details.

> The Prophet (ṣal.) came to [visit] Zayd. He saw Zaynab in the act of getting to her feet (qāʾima). She was beautiful and white, one of the most perfect Qurayshī women. The Prophet (ṣal.) fell in love with her (hawiya). Then he said, "Subḥān Allāh who has the power to transform a man's heart!"[26] Zayd noticed (faṭana) [this remark] and said, "O Messenger of Allah, permit me to divorce her. She is proud, she is hard on me, and she irritates (adhiya) me with her tongue.[27]

According to Muqātil, the Messenger then tells Zayd to retain his wife, but while saying this conceals his personal wish that Zayd would divorce her.[28] Zayd indeed divorces Zaynab, and Muḥammad marries her.

Muqātil tells his story about David and Bathsheba in his commentary on Sūra Ṣād (38) to explain verse 21.[29] The Qurʾān passage that prompts Muqātil's story simply tells of "two disputants" who scale the "sanctuary" (miḥrāb), approach David, and ask him for a judgment on their dispute (Q 38:21–2). The first disputant says that his opponent had 99 ewes but prevailed upon the first disputant to give him the only ewe he possessed. David pronounces judgment that the second disputant did wrong in asking for the one ewe when he already had 99 (Q 38:23–4).

Muqātil starts his interpretation immediately after the scriptural words, "the dispute when they scaled the sanctuary" (Q 38:21). David is anticipating a trial from God because, according to Muqātil, he has asked God to raise him to the status of Abraham and Moses. While he is praying, a beautiful bird comes and lands near him. When David moves toward the window to catch the bird, it flies off into the garden. Muqātil writes:

> …So David looked down and saw a woman bathing, and was amazed (taʿajjaba) at her beauty. The woman saw his shadow, then shook out her hair [so that it] covered her body. His amazement (ʿajab) with her increased, and the woman entered her apartment. David sent a slave immediately. Since she was Batsāmaḥ (sic) the wife of Udriyā (sic) ibn

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26   On this expression, see Powers, *Muḥammad is not the father*, 42.

27   Ibid., 3:493–4.

28   Ibid., 3:495.

29   Ibid., 3:639–40.

Ḥanān, whose husband was involved in the raid on Balqā, which is in Syria, with Nawāb (sic) ibn Ṣūriyā, son of David's sister, David wrote to his nephew with instructions that he send Udriyā forward, [that] he fight the people of Balqā and not return until he was victorious or was killed. [Nawāb] sent him forward and he was killed, may the mercy of Allah be upon him.[30]

According to Muqātil, David waits until completion of the legally prescribed waiting period (after a woman has been widowed or divorced), then marries her. Muqātil writes that when David realized that his visitors were angels, he fell down in penitent prostration for forty days and nights. God eventually forgave his sin and informed him of the high position he would get in the next life.

3   Muḥammad and David in Later Commentary

Muqatil's understanding of the stories of David/Bathsheba and Muḥammad/Zaynab generally matches the interpretations of later Muslim writers, with the emphatic exception of Muqātil's claim at Q 33:38 that Allah himself joined David and Muḥammad to the women they fell in love with (hawiya). Later commentators knew of Muqātil's narratives, and some cite him explicitly and relay his comments on Q 33:37.[31] However, the commentators of later centuries show a definite trend to avoid any mention of sin on the parts of David or Muḥammad, and even to deny credibility to the Bathsheba and Zaynab narratives.

Summing up the interpretations of the formative period,[32] al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) tells the story of Zayd, Zaynab, and Muḥammad in both his history, Ta'rīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk, and his commentary, Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān. The version he transmitted eventually became the standard telling of the episode. In his Taʾrīkh, al-Ṭabarī begins his story[33] with Muḥammad going to call on Zayd. However, Zayd is not at home. Zaynab bint Jaḥsh, Zayd's wife, rises to meet the Messenger.

30   Ibid., 3:639–40.

31   For example, Qurṭubī, al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān (Beirut 2006), 17:156.

32   Andrew Rippin, Tafsīr, in Mircea Eliade (ed.), Encyclopedia of Religion (New York 1987), 14:240.

33   Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk (Cairo 1967), 2:562–4. Translations from Ṭabarī's Taʾrīkh are those of Michael Fishbein, The history of al-Ṭabarī. Volume 8. The victory of Islam (Albany, NY 1997), 1–4.

> Because she was dressed only in a shift, the Messenger of Allah turned away from her. She said: "He is not here, Messenger of Allah. Come in, you who are as dear to me as my father and mother!" The Messenger of Allah refused to enter. Zaynab had dressed in haste when she was told "the Messenger of Allah is at the door." She jumped up in haste and excited the admiration (a'jabat)[34] of the Messenger of Allah, so that he turned away murmuring something that could scarcely be understood. However, he did say overtly: "Glory be to Allah the Almighty! Glory be to Allah, who causes hearts to turn!"[35]

When Zayd arrives home, he asks Zaynab about the visit, and Zaynab repeats to him the exclamation Muḥammad made after seeing her. Zayd then goes to meet Muḥammad and refers to Muḥammad's visit. Zayd says, "Messenger of Allah, perhaps Zaynab has excited your admiration (a'jabatka), so I will separate myself from her." Muḥammad instructs Zayd to keep his wife, but Zayd "could find no possible way to [approach] her after that day."[36] The implication is that Zayd and Zaynab ceased having sexual relations, as required by the expression in Q 33:37, "Zayd had accomplished what he would of her."

Al-Ṭabarī includes a second tradition about the Messenger's encounter with Zaynab:

> One day the Messenger of Allah went out looking for Zayd. Now there was a covering of haircloth over the doorway, but the wind lifted the covering so that the doorway was uncovered. Zaynab was in her chamber, undressed, and admiration for her (i'jābuhā) entered the heart of the prophet. After that happened, she was made unattractive to the other man.[37]

In his commentary *Jāmi' al-bayān*, al-Ṭabarī presents the story of Zayd and Zaynab in his interpretation of Q 33:36–40.[38] The detail of the wind lifting the door cover appears here in virtually the same words.[39] Al-Ṭabarī presents

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34   Maghen finds seven different Arabic phrases for this emotion in the commentaries, the same number that are used to describe David's emotional state after he sees Bathsheba; Intertwined triangles, 48.

35   Ibid., 2:562.

36   Ibid.

37   Ibid., 2:563.

38   Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī musamma. Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl al-qur'ān* (Beirut 2005), 10:301–5.

39   Ibid., 10:302; Maghen, Intertwined triangles, 33.

the David story along the same lines as Muqātil, while adding some interesting details and explanations.[40] He understood the "two disputants" of Q 38:22 to be angels in disguise. Al-Ṭabarī understood the Qurʾān's reference to 99 ewes in Q 38:23 to be a parable about the 99 wives of David and the one wife of Uriah. In the dispute, one angel takes the part of Uriah, the other that of David. Al-Ṭabarī interprets the expression, "Put [the one ewe] in my charge" (Q 38:23), as "Divorce her in my favour, put her in my charge; give her to me, grant her a divorce for me, I will marry her; put her in my charge."[41] David uses his rank to exploit Uriah by forcing him to surrender his wife. When David realizes the meaning of the parable, he is convicted of his sin and repents.

Al-Ṭabarī gives five different versions of the Bathsheba story, each of which contributes to an interesting cumulative list of narrative elements.[42] Here the disputants make it clear to David that in giving his judgment contained in Q 38:24, David condemns himself. David's sin (khaṭīʾa)[43] in these narratives is that he sent Uriah to his death in battle so that he could marry Bathsheba. There is no mention of adultery. Al-Ṭabarī's understanding of the disputation scene was generally accepted in the Muslim community and became popular.[44]

However, a trend in the interpretation of Q 38:21–5 in later classical commentaries was to distance the passage from the biblical account of David, and especially to remove any question of sin on David's part. The shift was underway two centuries later when al-Zamakhsharī (d. 1144) wrote his commentary *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl*. al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation of Q 38:21–5[45] includes explanations that attempt to mitigate David's wrongdoing, and remarks that show the influence of the Islamic doctrine of prophetic sinlessness (ʿiṣma).[46] For al-Zamakhsharī, David's fault was only that he asked to marry Bathsheba, and the seriousness of the fault is reduced here from *khaṭīʾa* to *zalla* ("slip," "lapse").[47]

Less than a century later, al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) strongly disagreed with al-Zamakhsharī about the possibility of even a minor lapse on David's part, and

40   Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 10:567–74; A.H. Johns, David and Bathsheba. A case study in the exegesis of qurʾanic story-telling, *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Etudes Orientales du Caire* 19 (1989), 229–34; Déclais, Le péché et la pénitence de David, 432–6.

41   Johns, David and Bathsheba, 232.

42   Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 10:570–4; Johns, David and Bathsheba, 233–4.

43   Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, 10: 574.

44   Johns, David and Bathsheba, 234.

45   Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-taʾwīl* (Beirut 2006), 4:77–85.

46   Maghen, Intertwined triangles, 52–4; Johns, David and Bathsheba, 237–45.

47   Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 4:74.

advanced an extensive argument for David's virtue in his commentary *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*. Al-Rāzī's treatment of the Bathsheba story was circumscribed by his commitment to the Islamic doctrine of prophetic sinlessness.[48] He used the descriptions of David's praiseworthy qualities in Q 38:17–20 and 27 to negate the possibility of the traditional story of sin and repentance at Q 38:21–5. He explained Q 38:21–4 as no more than a story of two human disputants, and wrote that David asked forgiveness for a mere feeling of anger toward the disputants when they burst in, or perhaps for too quickly jumping to the conclusion that the disputants wanted to kill him.

In the commentary of Ibn Kathīr (d. 1373), the biblical story of David disappears altogether. Ibn Kathīr simply chose not to tell the story of Bathsheba in his commentary *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*. Rather, at Q 38:21–5 he counsels readers to read the verses of the Qurʾān and nothing more; do not attempt to explain the story of the disputants with reference to any other source, he writes, but "consign its proper interpretation to Allah."[49] Ibn Kathīr similarly declined to recount the Muslim story of Zayd and Zaynab at Q 33:37, characterizing the tradition as unsound and the *isnād* weak. Maghen observes that late medieval and modern Muslim writers have largely followed Ibn Kathīr's approach to the Bathsheba and Zaynab stories – an approach he calls "erasure."[50]

3.1 *Those Who Passed Away Previously*

The claim of Q 33:38 that there is no reproach (*ḥaraj*) for the prophet – that what Allah did in his case is the "*sunna* of Allah concerning those who passed away previously," raises a reasonable question: To what extent was this understood to be God's way prior to Islam?

The question is reasonable because the Qurʾān frequently refers to pre-Islamic knowledge and history, including accounts of famous prophetic figures (biblical and non-biblical) from the past. The Qurʾān gives no impression that such investigation is negative or ill-intentioned. On the contrary, the Qurʾān calmly claims in a variety of contexts that its recitations confirm (*muṣaddiq, taṣdīq*) what the listeners already have in their possession (Q 2:41).[51] For example, the Qurʾān confidently presents its retelling of the story of Joseph as proof

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48   Johns, David and Bathsheba, 245–63.

49   Maghen, Intertwined triangles, 59, quoting from Ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm* on Q 38:21. Also Déclais, Le péché et la pénitence de David, 440.

50   Maghen, Intertwined triangles, 60.

51   In many cases these verses appear to refer to the earlier scriptures: Q 2:41, 89, 91, 97, 101; 3:3, 81; 4:47; 5:48; 6:92; 35:31; 46:12, 30; 61:6 (*muṣaddiq*); 10:37; 12:111 (*taṣdīq*); cf. Nickel, *Narratives of tampering*, 47–8, 63–4, 188–91.

of its inspiration (Q 12:1–3, 102–11), and claims that the story is "a confirmation (*taṣdīq*) of what is before it" (Q 12:111).

When the Qurʾān refers to God's practice with those in the past, it invites the question of to whom this refers, and whether its description of God's practice in the past is indeed true. The Qurʾān refers to the past in a paraenetic, allusive, and elliptical manner, as if the reader/listener is familiar with the story to which it refers.[52] To what story does it refer? Is this an Arabic translation of a biblical text? Are these local oral tales about biblical characters? Are there possible parallels in rabbinic Jewish or apocryphal Christian discussions?

The account of David and Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11 has some similarities to the versions that Muslims came to accept, but in other ways it is strikingly different. The biblical account sharply contradicts Muqātil's claim in Q 33:38 that God arranges the marriages of prophets when they fall in love. The focus of the biblical account is on David's actions, and, especially, their consequences.

In the biblical account, David is very much a king (2 Samuel 11:1–2; 12:7). The narrative is striking for the series of verbs of which David is the sole subject: he saw, he sent messengers to get her, he slept with her, he wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah, he had Bathsheba brought to his house (2 Samuel 11:2, 4, 14, 27). In 2 Samuel, Bathsheba bears no blame for astonishing, infatuating, or testing David. In the Hebrew text, "the woman was a very good sight (*marʾeh*)" (2 Samuel 11:2).

The extensive and elaborate account (2 Samuel 11:5–25) of David's attempts to disguise his adultery by coaxing Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba after she became pregnant, and then to remove the husband altogether, indicates a guilty and frenetic monarch. God is not involved in any of this. In fact, there is no mention of God at all until the last verse of 2 Samuel 11. When God is mentioned, he is not the divine actor joining David to the woman he fell in love with. Rather, solemnly, "The thing that *David did* (*ʿāsāh*) was evil in the eyes of Yahweh" (2 Samuel 11:27).

God sends Nathan the prophet (2 Samuel 7:2) to confront the king. The punchline of Nathan's parable about the sheep was the straightforward – and potentially dangerous – declaration, "You are the man!" When Nathan delivers Yahweh's message close on the heels of his parable about the "one little ewe lamb," it is certainly not one of approbation. God has indeed done much for David, Nathan says; but through Nathan God directly questions David's actions:

> Why did you despise the word of Yahweh by doing what is evil in his eyes?
> You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be

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52   Wansbrough, *Quranic studies*, 1, 40–3, 47–8, 51–2, 57–8; Rippin, Literary analysis, 359–60.

your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, there-
fore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised
me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own (2 Samuel
12:9–10).[53]

Again, the relentless series of strong verbs firmly making David responsible for
his actions provides a stark contrast to the ambiguous Islamic versions of the
Bathsheba story. According to the biblical account, David is stripped of any
illusions: "I have sinned (ḥāṭā'tî) against Yahweh," he acknowledges to Nathan
(2 Samuel 12:13).

Jewish tradition has identified Psalm 51 with David's confession and repen-
tance, "when Nathan the prophet came to him after David had been with
Bathsheba."[54] The writer of the psalm acknowledges:

> For I know my transgressions,
> And my sin (ḥaṭṭā't) is always before me.
> Against you, you only, have I sinned (ḥāṭā'tî)
> And done what is evil in your eyes,
> So that you are proved right when you speak
> And justified when you judge (Psalm 51:3–4).[55]

Perhaps even more significant than these details in the biblical account –
though strangely possible to miss – is the shape and tone of the narrative itself
and its importance in the larger context of 2 Samuel. "The sword will never
depart from your house," prophesied Nathan, "because you despised me and
took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own" (2 Samuel 12:10). Subsequent
events recounted in 2 Samuel certainly support the prophecy. There follow
echoes not only of the sword but also of sexual sin.

Robert Alter observes that 2 Samuel 11 – "the story of David as adulterer and
murderer" – is "dense with moral and psychological meanings and possibility

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53   Compare the first-person address of 2 Samuel 12:7–10 with the first-person address of
      Q 33:37.

54   For example, Barbara Ellison Rosenblit, David, Bat Sheva, and the fifty-first Psalm, *Cross
      Currents* (Fall 1995), 326–9.

55   This translation is that of the New International Version. Verse numbering of the Hebrew
      original is Psalm 51:5–6. It is true that the ascription to David at the start of Psalm 51 is
      not part of the original text of scripture. In this sense it resembles the "occasions of rev-
      elation" material, which, according to Muslims, links Q 33:37 with the story of Zayd and
      Zaynab; Maghen, Davidic motifs, 135, n. 101.

of meaning."[56] Alter compares the David account with other biblical narratives, and finds that it "is in fact one of the richest and most intricate examples in the Bible of how ambiguities are set up by what is said and left unsaid in dialogue, and how characters reveal themselves through what they repeat, report, or distort in the speech of others." He also notes that in the biblical account, David's adultery and murder are the source of "all the subsequent disasters that befall David's court."[57]

The striking differences between the biblical account and Islamic versions of the Bathsheba story can be accounted for, at least in part, by differences in the understanding of prophethood. William Brinner has written that the text of the Hebrew Bible and Islamic traditions "diverge greatly in their respective attitudes toward the role of prophets."[58]

> In Judaism the words of the prophets offer chastisement, inspiration, healing, hope, and comfort, but as men and women the prophets do not serve as models or exemplars. Virtually the opposite is true in Islam. The words of the prophets are virtually divested of significance by the concept of the centrality of God's word in the Qur'ān. *How* to lead a Muslim life is, however, based on the model of the prophet *par excellence*, Muḥammad.

These distinctions, in addition to the wider literary context of 2 Samuel, strongly suggest that the depiction of David's actions in 2 Samuel 11 and their straightforward prophetic condemnation in 2 Samuel 12 are not some strange glitch in the biblical account. They also suggest that the earliest Muslim commentators were not familiar with the biblical account. Muqātil, for example – or even al-Ṭabarī – shows no sign in any of his stories about biblical characters that he knows the biblical text, or is "correcting" allegedly falsified biblical narratives.[59] In that case, what is the source of Islam's version of the story?

Scholars of Islamic studies who are familiar with Jewish rabbinic writings have identified similarities between the Islamic version of the David story and the Mishna, Talmud, and Jewish haggada.[60] The rabbinic writings tend to

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56   Robert Alter, *The art of biblical narrative* (New York 1981), 76.

57   Alter, *Art of biblical narrative*, 76.

58   William M. Brinner, Prophets and prophecy in the Islamic and Jewish traditions, in William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Judaic traditions II* (Atlanta 1989), 77.

59   *Pace* Powers, *Muḥammad is not the father*, 49.

60   For example, Heinrich Speyer, who cited the rabbinic material in Hebrew, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Hildesheim 1971), 379–80 (Sanhedrin 107a, ʿĀbōdā-zārā 4b, Shabbāt 30a).

exonerate David of the charges of adultery and murder.[61] One rabbi wrote that at that time, soldiers like Uriah who went to war first divorced their wives. The same rabbi claimed that David had merely contemplated the act but had not gone through with it. The rabbis also claimed that God was testing David, and that God's forgiveness of David proved that he had passed the test.[62] Similarly, in Islamic tradition we read that Bathsheba was engaged to Uriah, but not married to him; that both Uriah and David asked for Bathsheba's hand, and her parents preferred the king; or that Bathsheba was already divorced or widowed when David first saw her.[63]

Isaac Hasson observes, "The need to explain some cryptic allusions in the Qurʾān opened the door to the abundant and readily available Jewish and Christian legends about David."[64] He explains that Muslim storytellers and exegetes accepted these extra-biblical revisions "and rejected the older image of David from the Book of Samuel and Kings, where he is charged with adultery and murder."[65]

4   Scholarly Observation and Analysis

The journey of exploration outward from Muqātil's interpretation of Q 33:38 reveals a terrain fertile for polemic and apologetic, truth claim and counter-claim. Along the way more than a few fascinating ironies can be spotted. A number of academic scholars have examined the Muḥammad and Zaynab story, and especially the Islamic David and Bathsheba stories, in order better to understand questions about prophetic succession and the finality of prophethood,[66] the influence of the David story on the portrait of Muḥammad,[67] and the history of the development of the Islamic David.[68] Their observations on, and analyses of, these stories have raised a range of questions that beg for response.

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61   Maghen, Intertwined triangles, 40–6; Powers, *Muḥammad is not the father*, 48–9.
62   Powers, *Muḥammad is not the father*, 49. The element of trial or testing is also part of the qurʾanic material on David: "Then David guessed that we had tried (*fatana*) him" (Q 38:24). The forgiveness then follows: "So we forgave him that" (Q 38:25).
63   Isaac Hasson, David, *EQ*. See also Maghen, Intertwined triangles, 46–53.
64   Hasson, David, 496.
65   Hasson, David, 497.
66   Powers, *Muḥammad is not the father*.
67   Maghen, Intertwined triangles, 17–92; Maghen, Davidic motifs, 91–139.
68   Déclais, Le péché et la pénitence de David, 429–45; Déclais, *David raconté par les musulmans,* Paris 1999; Johns, David and Bathsheba, 225–66; Khaleel Mohammed, *David in Muslim tradition. The Bathsheba affair*, London 2015.

1. Muslim exegetes evidently chose to transmit rabbinic extra-canonical versions of the David and Bathsheba story – what Maghen calls "the vast industry of revisionism" that grew up around the story.[69] Then, when the biblical account became more widely known, some Muslim scholars cited the biblical story of David's adultery as a "proof" that Jews and Christians had falsified the Bible.[70]

2. On the one hand, Muqātil attributed to ʿUmar al-Khaṭṭāb the tradition, "If the Messenger of Allah (ṣal) could have concealed (katama) anything from the Qurʾān, he would certainly have concealed" the rebuke in Q 33:37, "thou wast concealing within thyself what God should reveal, fearing other men; and God has better right for thee to fear him."[71] On the other hand, the Qurʾān frequently accuses its audience of concealing (katama), and Muqātil interprets this series of katama verses to mean that the Jews of Medina conceal references to Muḥammad in the Torah.[72]

3. This concealing tradition attributed to ʿUmar makes the claim that Muḥammad did not conceal anything that was revealed to him. Powers finds in this tradition a suggestion of "[t]he growing discomfiture of the Muslim community with the story of Muḥammad's infatuation with Zaynab."[73] In his interpretation of Q 33:38, Muqātil has in mind a group of critics who were "troubled by the manner in which God's decree appears to have been designed to satisfy the sexual desires of the Prophet."[74] If so, the questions posed by this group were applied toward a test of true prophethood, and their doubts demanded a defense of Muḥammad.

4. Certainly in the encounter between the conquering Arabs and the conquered Christian communities of the Middle East, there are signs that the Zaynab story attracted attention. It must be noted that the Zaynab story is a Muslim story, and that the disagreements surrounding the story were

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69   Maghen, Intertwined triangles, 40.

70   Camilla Adang, *Muslim writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden 1996), 240 (Ibn Ḥazm in his *Kitāb al-fiṣal fī l-milal wa-l-ahwāʾ wa-l-niḥal*). More recently Raḥmat Allāh Kayrānwī, *Iẓhār al-ḥaqq* (Beirut 1998), 2:478–81. Cf. Hasson, David, 497; Powers, *Muḥammad is not the father*, 48; Gordon Nickel, *The gentle answer to the Muslim accusation of biblical falsification* (Calgary 2015), 136–44.

71   *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 3:495–6; see also ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, 2:97. This tradition was also attributed to ʿĀʾisha and Anas ibn Mālik: Maghen, Intertwined triangles, 39–40; Powers, *Muḥammad is not the father*, 49–50.

72   Nickel, *Narratives of tampering*, 88–96, 112–3. This was also al-Ṭabarī's understanding of the katama verses; ibid., 145–9.

73   Powers, *Muḥammad is not the father*, 49.

74   Powers, *Muḥammad is not the father*, 48.

internal to the Muslim community. Ibn Kathīr, for example, disagreed even
with the founder of his own *madhhab*, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, about the soundness
of the tradition; he declined to tell the Zaynab story in his commentary, "lest
those lacking in understanding make improper use of it."[75] John of Damascus
(d. 749) comments on the story in his *De haeresibus*, and the topic also comes
up in an exchange of letters attributed to the Byzantine emperor Leo III
(r. 717–41) and the caliph ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz (r. 717–20).[76] According to this
latter document, the interest of the Byzantine emperor was theological – he
had heard that the Qurʾān claims that the actions of the story were commanded
by God ("We gave her in marriage to thee," Q 33:37). Leo III responds, "Of all
these abominations the worst is that of accusing God of being the originator
of all these filthy acts . . . Is there indeed a worse blasphemy than that of alleg-
ing that God is the cause of all this evil?"[77] Here the emperor also emphasizes
that when David took Uriah's wife, "he committed a sin before the Eternal, for
which he was grievously punished."

5. Q 33:38 makes a claim for the behavior of God, and Muqātil and other
Muslim exegetes explained the *sunnat Allāh* in various ways. After Muqātil,
however, Muslim scholars began to make the categorical claim that the con-
duct of David in the Bible is unthinkable for a prophet. This view is presented
forcefully in the recently-published *Study Quran*: "But the idea that David had
adulterous relations with Bathsheba before Uriah's death, found in 2 Samuel
11:4–5, is considered by Muslims to be an abomination that *could not have been
committed by a prophet*."[78] This claim shows the influence of the Islamic doc-
trine of *ʿiṣma*, the belief in prophetic immunity or impeccability, which was
developed by Muslim scholars during the second to fifth centuries of Islamic
history.[79]

6. These theological issues and questions about God and prophets are sig-
nificant, especially when Islam declares that all subsequent human behavior
would be based on the model of Muḥammad. The interpretations of these

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75   Maghen, Intertwined triangles, 59–60, quoting Ibn Kathīr's *al-Bidāya*.

76   Powers, *Muḥammad is not the father*, 29–30.

77   Arthur Jeffery, trans., Ghevond's text of the correspondence between ʿUmar II and Leo III,
      Harvard theological review 37 (1944), 324.

78   Seyyed Hussein Nasr et al., *The study Quran. A new translation and commentary* (New York
      2015), 1106 (my italics).

79   Michael E. Pregill, Bathsheba. Islam, in Matthew A. Collins et al (eds.), *Encyclopedia of the
      Bible and its reception* (Berlin 2011), 3: cols. 604–5; W. Madelung, ʿIṣma, *EI2*; Paul E. Walker,
      Impeccability, *EQ*; A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim creed. Its genesis and historical development*
      (London 1965), 94, 192–3, 217–8, 246–7; Tor Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds in Lehre und
      Glaube seiner Gemeinde* (Stockholm 1917), 139–45.

stories in the commentaries provide evidence that, over time, theological concerns became more important, not less so, and that commentators showed a greater concern to defend the honor of both Allah and His Messenger as time went on. In other words, sensitivity to the polemical edges of these issues increased in the minds of Muslim exegetes.

7. The trend in the later commentaries was to measure information reputed to be from Jewish or biblical sources against developing Islamic doctrines, or traditions attributed to Muḥammad.[80] Khaleel Mohammed highlights three doctrinal factors that strongly affected the Muslim portrayal of biblical stories: *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, a negative attitude toward material from Jewish sources; *ʿiṣma*, the belief that all prophets are sinless; and *taḥrīf*, accusations of corruption or falsification against the Bible.[81] This interpretive strategy can be seen to subject history to the exigencies of ideology, writes Anthony H. Johns. "[T]he manipulation of the qurʾanic text to make it support views reached on the basis of a priori reasoning – in this case the reasons that [al-Rāzī] gives as to why a prophet must be immune from sin and error, may well render the facts of history and of historical context irrelevant."[82]

8. If this is to be the Muslim approach to pre-Islamic sources of information, the expression in the qurʾanic text "those who passed away previously" (Q 33:38) also becomes problematic. For these later exegetes, there is no reliable knowledge before Islam, and the picture of history prior to Islam can only be drawn from the Qurʾān's own materials and the traditions attributed to Muḥammad. As Jean-Louis Déclais characterizes the approach of Ibn Kathīr, he "wants to cut the cord that links Muslim culture to the biblical tradition."[83]

9. One is left with two different accounts about David that do not agree about his sin, and two histories of interpretation which tend to accentuate – not ameliorate – the theological divide. Khaleel Mohammad, in a recent monograph about the figure of David in Islam, sets out the situation in its plain reality: "…[U]nless David sinned, it would have made no sense for God

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80   Norman Calder illustrates how traditions attributed to Muḥammad became the determining factor in the interpretation of qurʾanic material about biblical figures: *Tafsīr* from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr. Problems in the description of a genre, illustrated with reference to the story of Abraham, in G.R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (eds.), *Approaches to the Qurʾān* (London 1993), 120–1, 124–34.

81   Khaleel Mohammed, *David in Muslim tradition*, 13–20.

82   Johns, David and Bathsheba, 263.

83   Le péché et la pénitence de David, 440.

to forgive him; and if he did indeed sin, then such action would negate the idea of prophetic *ʿiṣma*."[84]

5   Response to Truth Claims

Academic scholars attempt to report what they find, turning neither to the right nor the left. In this sense they are "dispassionate" – they try not to let personal feelings or beliefs skew their reading and description of the sources. Wherever scholars from past and present may have allowed their animus against – or advocacy for – Islam to prejudice their research, this behavior must be avoided.

However, scholarly dispassion does not mean lack of interest. And it does not mean that scholars must be cold or indifferent. The sources themselves use exclusive language and often directly address the reader/listener, pronouncing judgment on the faith of others and making supremacist and triumphalist claims for Islam, its Messenger, its scripture, its law and its politics. To allow these claims to distort scholarly research would be unwise. But to experience no response at all would be unnatural.

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84   Khaleel Mohammed, *David in the Muslim tradition*, 18.

Asbāb al-Nuzūl as a Technical Term

Its Emergence and Application in the Islamic Sources

Roberto Tottoli

Andrew Rippin was not only the first scholar to discuss the literary genre of *asbāb al-nuzūl* (occasions of revelation) within exegetical literature, but also the first to raise some fundamental questions about the origin and emergence of this expression in its technical sense, which occurred in the fourth/tenth century. A number of his studies have highlighted various problems connected with the emergence of technical terms and expressions as designating literary genres or sub-genres in the history of early Islam. On the basis of newly available sources published over the last thirty years, this study aims to contribute to this discussion, examining how the expression *sabab al-nuzūl* or *asbāb al-nuzūl* is employed in early Islamic literature and how it emerged as the defining label of a genre of exegetical literature.

1 Introduction

Andrew Rippin's ground-breaking studies on *asbāb al-nuzūl* still stand as fundamental works on the topic.[1] His articles constituted the first comprehensive inquiry into this exegetical literary genre and the first description of the works connected to it. They discussed the logic of the relationship between reports and qur'anic verses on the one hand, and the theoretical approaches of later authors such as Zarkāshī (d. 794/1392) and Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) on the other. Before his works, other studies had, in general, dealt with specific

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1 Andrew Rippin, The exegetical genre *asbāb al-nuzūl*: a bibliographical and terminological survey, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48/1 (1985), 1–15; ibid., Al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī on the "occasion of revelation" material, *Islamic culture* 49 (1985), 243–58; ibid, The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in qur'anic exegesis, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51/1 (1988), 1–20; now collected in Andrew Rippin, *The Qur'ān and its interpretative tradition* (Aldershot, UK-Burlington, VA 2001), nos. XVII, XVIII, XIX. These articles came from Rippin's Ph.D. dissertation at McGill in 1981: *The Qur'ānic asbāb al-nuzūl material. An analysis of its use and development in exegesis*. For further considerations on the topic, see his Occasions of revelation, *EQ*.

aspects – such as the first works belonging to the genre, their use and function in qur'anic exegesis, and the question of origin and historicity – without attempting a comprehensive discussion.[2]

After the work of Rippin, only one extensive monograph-length study, by Hans-Thomas Tillschneider, has offered a substantial further contribution to the topic.[3] His work provides a comprehensive and exhaustive analysis of the theoretical premises of the concept, its interconnectedness with the qur'anic text, early exegesis, Islamic historiography, and *ḥadīth* literature, and its subsequent significance for juridical discourse. Tillschneider analyzed in detail the formulas and formal devices found in the reports contained within the work of Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076), as well as in early works, and dealt with the question of which verses are discussed in this genre and by related literature. He did not specifically address the origin of the expression *asbāb al-nuzūl* in exegetical and *ḥadīth* literature, but he demonstrated that *sabab* and *asbāb* are rather rare in the formulas introducing reports and related verses. Indeed, Tillschneider was more concerned with the presumed early function of this literary tradition, i.e. to date and provide a context for the qur'anic revelation, than with all the connected problems of historicity and authenticity that affect other early Islamic traditions.

Significant as these scholarly works on the *asbāb al-nuzūl* undoubtedly are, one major point surrounding this literature still merits some attention. I refer here to the origin and use of the expression *asbāb al-nuzūl* in qur'anic exegesis to indicate this kind of report. Rippin notes the late origin and late attestation of such expressions in Islamic literature and book titles, despite the early appearance of reports of this kind and even of works belonging to the same literary genre.[4] As he points out, "the technical term *sabab* in reference to the 'cause' or 'occasion' of revelation would appear to emerge somewhat after the time of the establishment of the genre."[5] Rippin also discusses the

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2   T. Nöldeke, F. Schwally, G. Bergsträßer, and O. Pretzl, *The history of the Qur'ān* (Leiden–Boston 2013), 361–2 [= ed. or. *Geschichte des Qorāns*, 3 vols. (Leipzig 1909–38), 2:182–4]; John Wansbrough, *Quranic studies. Sources and methods of scriptural interpretation* (Oxford 1977), 141–2, 177–85; Uri Rubin, *The eye of the beholder. The life of Muḥammad as viewed by the early Muslims. A textual analysis* (Princeton 1995), 227–33.

3   Hans-Thomas Tillschneider, *Typen historisch-exegetischer Überlieferung. Formen, Funktionen und Genese des asbāb an-nuzūl-Materials* (Würzburg 2011).

4   See on this "The exegetical genre *asbāb al-nuzūl*," in part 2–4 where, according to the list of works cited, the oldest work, entitled simply *asbāb al-nuzūl al-Qur'ān*, is al-Wāḥidī's (d. 1075), which is also the major work on the topic. Previous works and other ones bear alternative titles such as *Nuzūl al-Qur'ān* or *Kitāb al-tanzīl*.

5   Rippin, The exegetical genre *asbāb al-nuzūl*, 12.

emergence of *sabab* in connection with this topic and consequently with the literary genre, taking as his starting point the Qurʾān, in which text derivatives of the root *sababa* display a number of different meanings but nothing that connects them to its later use in exegesis.[6] Consequently, its relation to the term *qiṣaṣ*, for instance, is also a significant issue – along with the meaning of *asbāb* as occasions rather than causes – in later major works on the topic.[7]

The relationship between genres and literary productions and the terms that came to be used to name them is an intriguing question in Islamic studies. The sort of issues related to *asbāb al-nuzūl* are not uncommon. Expressions and definitions of genres, literature, and corpuses of traditions in Arabic literature have, in some cases, unclear meanings in early attestations compared to their common, later usage. In early Islamic literature as a whole, other terms and expressions raise similar problems.[8] The emergence of these expressions as "technical terms" is the result of a historical evolution and the ongoing definition of concepts in early Islamic traditions and literature.

In this study, my aim is to verify the occurrence in early Islamic literature of the term *asbāb al-nuzūl* and related expressions,[9] using digital databases of Muslim traditions,[10] as a small contribution to the study of this literary genre and of the origin of one of the technical definitions connected to qurʾanic exegesis. The problem here is neither the precise meaning of *sabab* and the use of the term, usually referred to as an historical *khabar*[11] or *qiṣṣa*, nor the relevance of some of the traditions labeled as *asbāb al-nuzūl* to exegetical or legal discourses.

I intend only to investigate when the expression itself and its related terms emerged, and what their meanings are. As such, I am not interested in all the formulas introducing *akhbār* in early literature and reports dealing with "occasions of revelation," but only in texts in which the expression *asbāb al-nuzūl*

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6   Ibid., 12.

7   Ibid., 4.

8   See, for instance, my studies on other terms such as *isrāʾīliyyāt*, *dār al-islām*, or *khabar*: Roberto Tottoli, Origin and use of the term *isrāʾīliyyat* in Muslim literature, *Arabica* 46/2 (1999), 193–210; ibid., *Dār al-islām/Dār al-ḥarb* in the *Tafsīr* by al-Ṭabarī and in early traditions, in G. Calasso and G. Lancioni (eds.), *Conceptualizing Dār al-islām and Dār al-ḥarb* Leiden–Boston forthcoming; ibid., L'espressione *ruwiya fī al-khabar* nella letteratura islamica, *Studi Magrebini*, forthcoming.

9   Expressions such as *sabab nuzūl*, *sabab nuzūlihā*, etc.

10   I have used the database of *al-Maktaba al-shāmila* and *Ahlulbayt 1.0*, subsequently checking all the references in the printed editions.

11   On this see Rippin, The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in Qurʾānic exegesis, 2.

is quoted or the terms *sabab* and *asbāb* appear in connection with qurʾanic verses.

2 Attestations of the Expressions

Some of the studies discussed above have already touched on this problem. Tillschneider pointed out that *sabab* and *asbāb al-nuzūl* do not appear in early exegetical literature and in the literature on the *sīra* of Muhammad.[12] Rippin had already made some initial progress towards answering this question by investigating the first attestations of the various terms and formulas. According to him, early authors such as Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767), Muḥammad b. Isḥāq (d. 150/767), Wāqidī (d. 207/823), or the authors of the *Ṣaḥīḥ* works, i.e. Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and Muslim (d. 261/875), do not make use of these expressions. The use of the term *sabab* only started to appear consistently during the fourth/tenth century, for instance in the works of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), where the terms related to *sabab* denote, according to Rippin, "a semi-technical-but-not-quite usage," and al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/949), who "seems not totally aware of the technical status of the word *sabab*."[13] It is only with al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981), Rippin goes on to observe, that the term *sabab* is quoted regularly and takes on a full technical meaning.[14]

The picture that will emerge from the discussion below broadly confirms Rippin's dating and considerations over the origin of the expression and its technical use. In fact, it seems that it was at the turn of and during the fourth/tenth century that the first use of *sabab* was made, while in the fifth/eleventh centuries its technical use was consolidated, something that prompted Wāḥidī to write a book entitled *Asbāb al-nuzūl*. No substantial attestation points to the middle of the third/ninth century, and so it can be ascertained that the use and technical meaning of the expression and various related words appear to have been the result of exegetical and literary activity, and are not as early as other terms and themes that have been employed since the very beginnings of Islamic literary and exegetical activity. In fact, the emergence of this concept of a *sabab* connected with the revelation of words, verses, or chapters of the Qurʾan appears through the use of *sabab* (*al-*)*nuzūl*(*-hā*) and similar

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12   Rippin, The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in Qurʾānic exegesis, 14; Tillschneider, *Typen historisch-exegetischer Überlieferung*, 14; see on this Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 141.

13   Rippin, The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in Qurʾānic exegesis, 14, 15; Tillschneider, *Typen historisch-exegetischer Überlieferung*, 14, relies on Rippin's analysis.

14   Rippin, The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in Qurʾānic exegesis, 16.

statements in fourth/tenth century literature. Earlier qurʾanic commentaries and literary works must have included material serving the same function, but awareness of and the practice of mentioning *sabab* (occasion, cause) in relation to revelation (*nuzūl, tanzīl*) is a later phenomenon, as has been noted by Rippin. As such, the early examples of the technical use of *sabab* and *asbāb al-nuzūl* can evidently be considered as represented by the first occurrences of the expressions, as mentioned above.

As previously noted, the first attestations of *sabab nuzūl* and related formulas go back to the end of the third/ninth and beginning of the fourth/tenth centuries. An early occurrence of the term *sabab* in one of Ibn Qutayba's (d. 276/889) works gives a first example, when the writer states that one verse was revealed generally (*ʿāmmatan*) and adds that the occasion of its revelation (*sabab nuzūlihā*) was what happened to two men who were with the Prophet, whose story is mentioned before this definition.[15] This is its only occurrence in all the works by Ibn Qutayba and it is significant not only for its appearance but also because the narrative setting is the main reason behind the use of the expression *sabab nuzūl* in explaining the reason or occasion for which a verse was revealed. It is evident from this that the concept was not yet clearly expressed by fixed formulas, as is also evident in the work of al-Ṭabarī. For instance, when commenting on Q 5:91–2, al-Ṭabarī states and repeats verbatim *ikhtalafa ahl al-taʾwīl fī al-sabab alladhī min ajlihi nazalat hādhihi al-āya* ("the exegetes have different opinion on the cause/occasion by which this verse was revealed").[16] The significance of this sentence is that it appears as an early, "rudimentary" use of *sabab*, which must be explained fully and not simply quoted or evoked as *sabab nuzūl*, but introduced by the unequivocal definition that this is *al-sabab alladhī min ajlihi nazalat hādhihi al-āya*. In other passages the concept is not expressed so clearly, even though the use of *sabab* and *nuzūl* points to the same connection.[17] Further significant evidence of the transition between a longer definition of what an "occasion of revelation" is and the later use of shorter formulas is offered by al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933), who, writing a little after al-Ṭabarī, included a number of examples in many of his works, and not only in those connected to qurʾanic exegesis. In fact, he makes frequent reference to the issue. His favorite long formula is *al-sabab allādhī kāna fīhi nuzūl*

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15   Ibn Qutayba, *Taʾwīl mushkil al-Qurʾān* (Beirut 1981), 162.

16   Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* (Beirut 2000), 10:566, 574.

17   See, e.g., Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 4:250 (but here the meaning of *sabab* seems more generic as "occasion/cause"), 10:569.

qawlihi/hādhihi al-āya,[18] but he also uses the one used by al-Ṭabarī, which was quoted above (*…min ajlihi…*).[19] Furthermore, in other passages there is the simple formula *sabab nuzūl…*, which was later to become the typical formula for introducing reports with the occasions(s) of revelation (see below).[20] Al-Ṭaḥāwī thus signals the transition from longer definitions to the emergence of simple formulas that point to an established meaning and early technical use.[21] This picture, demonstrating the emergence of specific formulas in the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, is not limited to Sunnī sources, as the first attestations from Shīʿī sources confirm. The commentary by al-Qummī (d. 329/941), most significantly, includes some passages where traditional explanations ascribed to early authorities are introduced by the words *sabab nuzūl*, as are other expressions mentioning qurʾanic verses or even *sūras*.[22]

From the same period (the first half of the fourth/tenth century), the *tafsīr* of al-Māturīdī (d. 333/954) attests to a growing awareness of the use of the term *sabab* in connection with a revelation, as he systematically introduced into his work the simple phrase *sabab nuzūl…*, followed by an indication of the verse (through *al-āya*, or *hādhihi al-āya*, the suffix *–hā* substituting it, or other such devices).[23] These occurrences are significant as they attest to the culmination of the transition process, as there is a change from introducing the reader to the *sabab* by including a long explanation of what it means, to having a shorter formula as seen here, thus showing a greater general awareness of the reference to the occasions/causes of revelation. Al-Naḥḥās, albeit less

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18 Al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār* (Beirut 1994), 1:67, 123; 3:142, 144, 6:285 (*…nuzūl mā qad talawnā*); 12:99, 105; 15:5; cf. 2:42: *al-sabab alladhī dhakara Anas anna nuzūla-hā fīhi.*

19 Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār*, 4:116; 12:33.

20 Ibid., 1:50; 3:397; 4:110, 147; cf. 4:113; 6:282, 283; 15:420, 422, 427; al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān al-karīm* (Istanbul 1995), 1:134, 153, 155, 157, 160, 199, 244; 2:94, 408, 409, 410, 411; al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Mukhtaṣar ikhtilāf al-ulamāʾ* (Beirut 1997), 3:482; 4:472.

21 The case of al-Ṭaḥāwī is not isolated since a few later works include both longer definitions and concise formulations such as *sabab nuzūl*, etc. This must be a sign of the survival of differing styles in just a few authors rather than evidence against the emergence of the technical use of concise formulas; see, for instance, Makkī b. Abī Ṭalib, *al-Hidāya ilā bulūgh al-nihāya fī ʿilm maʿānī al-Qurʾān wa-tafsīrihi wa-aḥkāmihi wa-jumal min funūn ʿulūmihi* (Sharjah 2008), 2:947: *wa-kāna sabab hādhihi al-sūra fī nuzūlihā bi-l-tawḥīd…*; 3:2233: *wa-kāna nuzūl hādhihi al-āya bi-sabab…*; in other passages he uses *sabab nuzūl hādhihi al-āya*; see below, n. 26.

22 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* (Beirut 1991), 1:137, 353; 2:44: *sabab nuzūl sūrat al-kahf*, 1:55, 172, 305, 316, 365, 367, 371, 376, 492.

23 Al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna* (Beirut 2005), 6:596; 7:435; 8:317, 349, 350, 388; 9:142, 293, 331; 10:632.

frequently, shows the same practice at the same time, using only one shorter
expression (*sabab nuzūl hādhihi al-āya*), thereby suggesting that it was widely
known and its meaning had already become established.[24] Authors writing
in the second part of the fourth/tenth century confirm this picture and attest
to the circulation of these expressions (*sabab [al-]nuzūl[ihā]/hadhihi al-āya*,
and suchlike) connecting *sabab* to *nuzūl* and the mention or reference of
qurʾanic verses.[25] Most significant in this regard, while not isolated, as the
sources quoted above in the previous note attest, is the use of these expres-
sions by al-Jaṣṣāṣ, as has been noted by Rippin and Tillscheider.[26]

It is not easy to give a general evaluation of the practice applied within a
literary genre or production in regard to the use of any term over the centuries,
but there can be no doubt that the fifth/eleventh century provides evidence
of the final step in the consolidation of the technical meaning of the formu-
las connected to *sabab* and *asbāb al-nuzūl*. In the period before al-Wāḥidī's
book, an already-generalized use of expressions such as *sabab nuzūl (hādhihi)
al-āya/qawlihi/-hā* had emerged and was widely employed by many authors,
ranging from Central Asia and Khorasan to the Iberian Peninsula.[27] This dem-
onstrates that the concept was, by this time, clear, and the expression *sabab*

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24   Al-Naḥḥās, *Maʿānī al-Qurʾān* (Mecca 1988–9), 1:103, 160; 6:351; al-Naḥḥās, *al-Nāsikh wa-
      l-mansūkh* (Kuwait 1988), 441, 452, 455, 711.

25   Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm* (Beirut 1992), 1:124, 188, 200, 374, 473, and cf.
      for instance 1:70, 86, 87; 3:589: *wa-qāla baʿḍuhum/wa-yuqāl li-nuzūl hādhihi al-āya sabab
      ākhar*; Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Tanbīh al-ghāfilīn* (Damascus–Beirut 2000), 231; Ibn
      al-Khaṭṭāb, *Maʿālim al-sunan. Sharḥ Sunan Abī Dāwūd* (Aleppo 1932), 2:195; Abū Saʿd
      al-Kharkūshī, *Sharaf al-Muṣṭafā* (Mecca 2003), 3:389; 4:168; 5:459; 6:131, 142; al-Bāqillānī,
      al-Intiṣār li-l-Qurʾān (Amman–Beirut 2001), 1:129; 2:530.

26   Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* (Beirut 1994), 1:75, 116, 326, 409, 538; 2:24, 66, 159, 171, 173, 309,
      431, 510, 605; 3:42, 59, 431, 531, 610, 621; al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *al-Fuṣūl fī al-uṣūl* (Kuwait 1994), 1:340,
      341, 343.

27   Al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Beirut 2002), 1:237, 262, 266; 2:11, 26
      (*wa-sabab tanzīlihā*), 74, 140, 234; 3:145, 267; 4:339; 5:93; 6:117; 7:68, 72, 270, 272; 9:221; 10:98,
      but cf. 8:60: *fī sabab nuzūl al-ḥijāb*; Makkī b. Abī Ṭalib, *al-Hidāya ilā bulūgh al-nihāya*, 1:723;
      2:1123, 1531, 1632; cf. al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-majīd* (Beirut 1994), 1:268: *al-
      sabab fī nuzūl hādhihi al-āya*; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā* (Beirut n.d.), 7:339: *sabab nuzūl sūrat
      al-anfāl*; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām* (Cairo 1968), 6:763; Ibn Baṭṭāl, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ
      al-Bukhārī* (Riyadh 2003), 5:100, cf. 8:319; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā* (Beirut 2003),
      7:252, 767; 8:346; 9:402; the use of these expressions, though not very frequent, is also
      attested in the other works by al-Bayhaqī such as *Shuʿab al-īmān*, *Maʿrifat al-sunna wa-
      l-āthār*, and *Sharḥ al-sunna*; Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, *al-Istidhkār* (Beirut 2000), 4: 226, 227; 5:189;
      8:168; al-Isfarāyīnī, *al-Tabṣīr fī al-Dīn wa-tamyīz al-firqa al-nājiya ʿan al-firaq al-hālikīn*
      (Beirut 1983), 92.

nuzūl meant something that had, in earlier times, been articulated with different words, before becoming more explicit through the use of the two words together with longer introductory formulas. In this respect, the most significant qur'anic commentary displaying this is *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn* by al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058), which includes a number of different versions of the concise later formulas, mentioned above.[28] And the widespread, shared use of this expression is confirmed by Imāmī Shīʿī authors of the period who used it in line with their previous Shīʿī attestations, which are contemporaneous with Sunnī literature.[29]

It seems that the fifth/tenth century marked the zenith of the use of the expression, and later on it seems to have been taken for granted in exegetical discourse. Al-Wāḥidī's book must have contributed to this, and the already widely-attested quotation of *sabab nuzūl* in fifth/tenth century exegetical literature and beyond fixed the relation between formulas and the traditions used to explain the occasion of the revelation of a passage of the Qur'ān. It is consequently pointless to consider differences in use by later authors, and in particular by exegetes who display differing attitudes while quoting more or less the same fixed expressions to refer to a by-then fixed concept. The path covered, over a period of more than two centuries, that led to an established definition of this technical expression regarding materials and reports attested in early works and commentaries is evident in those writings that use the terms *sabab* and *nuzūl* by ascribing it to reports taken from previous works. For instance, in relation to the commentary of Q 3:18, Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī quotes a report from Muqātil b. Sulaymān as follows: *qāla Muqātil: sabab nuzūl hādhihi al-āya*, before reproducing verbatim Muqātil's exegesis of that verse, despite Muqātil not using the expression *sabab nuzūl* at all.[30] Other examples with other names and early authors are also attested.[31]

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28   Al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn* (Beirut n.d.), 1:162, 172, 175, 177, 181, 242, 249, 252, 274, 275, 347, 399, 404, 405, 409, 418, 423, 427, 439, 444, 448, 455, 492, 500, 502, *passim*; see also his *al-Ḥāwī al-kabīr fī fiqh madhhab al-imām al-Shāfiʿī* (Beirut 1999), 2:68; 8:411; 9:5, 19, 39, 319; 10:311, *passim*; and cf. 1:233; 3:414: *al-sabab fī nuzūl*; 9:476: *li-nuzūl hādhihi al-āya sababan*; see also 10:151.

29   al-Sharīf al-Raḍī, *Ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl* (Beirut n.d.), 232, 257; al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, *al-Intiṣār* (Qom 1994), 335; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān* (Qom 1989), 1:110, 363, 402; 2:222, 506, 510, 531, 542, 562, 600, *passim* throughout all the ten volumes.

30   Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, 1:200; and cf. again in relation to Muqātil, Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 4:456.

31   Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 2:415, 4:100 with Kalbī (*qāla al-Kalbī wa-sabab nuzūl…*); but in another passage it is pointed out that it is not al-Kalbī who uses the expression, 4:421: *wa-sabab nuzūl hādhihi al-āya ma ḥakāhu al-Kalbī*.

To sum up, we can say that because, from the fifth/eleventh century, the connection between words and expressions and their exegetical meaning had been firmly established, there was consequently no longer any need for it to be repeatedly stated. Without taking our discussion further with references, al-Zamakhsharī's (d. 538/1144) *tafsīr* makes only scanty use of these formulas, while the works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), Ibn al-Jawzī (597/1201), Ibn ʿAṭiyya (d. 541/1146), al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), Abū Bakr Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148), al-Samʿānī (d. 562/1166), and Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī (d. 745/1344) all attest to the acquired meaning of the formulas, using them more or less frequently.

3   Formal Devices

The quotation of terms and expressions related to the *asbāb al-nuzūl* bears some significance not only in relation to their emergence as a technical term but also as a way to express exegetical method and interest. It may be observed, for instance, that expressions and terms related to *asbāb* and *nuzūl* are frequently quoted in relation to the fact that there are divergences (*ikhtilāf*) on the "occasions" at the origin of some verses or *sūra*s. The sources use different words to express this, but usually state that exegetes *ikhtalafū/yakhtalifūna* in regard to the occasions of revelation of a specific qurʾanic verse or verses.[32] This is also attested in relation to the full expression designating the genre as such, *asbāb al-nuzūl*, when, for instance, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī states that there are differing opinions on the occasions of revelation (*ikhtalafū fī asbāb al-nuzūl*),[33] or that in relation to them there are differing *wujūh* ("interpretations").[34]

It appears clear that this formal device is indicative of the fact that *sabab* is strictly connected to exegetical activity and practices, and differing evaluations do not constitute a problem. But the exegetical concern that appears clearly in most of these quotations is essentially narrative, and the extensive

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32   See, in Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, 10:566, 574; Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 6:596; 7:435; see also al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 2:11, 74; 3:267, 5:93; 6:117, 270, 272; 10:98; Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 1:347, 418, 444, 492, 500, 528; 2:19, 53, 59, 63, 70; 3:293, 353, 409; 4:277; 5:327, 330; 6:292; 7:363, 369; Māwardī, *al-Ḥāwī al-kabīr*, 8:99; Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, 1:110, 402; 2:506; 5:191; 6:440 (*fī sabab nuzūl hādhihi al-āya qawlān*); Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 3:59, 431; cf. Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī l-tafsīr* (Beirut 1999), 3:82, 368; 5:268; and see al-Ṭaḥāwī, *Sharḥ mushkil al-āthār*, 5:87 (and cf. 4:113), where he mentions two occasions together (*al-sababayn jamīʿan*).

33   Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut 1999), 9:412; 16:103.

34   Ibid., 10:120; see also Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 3:621.

use of terms pointing to narration, stories, etc., characterize their early function. Notwithstanding the exegetical concern, the *asbāb al-nuzūl* are in fact a matter of transmitted reports and material. They concern what is related or transmitted (*ruwiya, riwāya, nuqila, manqūl*),[35] or has been related (*al-marwiyya*), for example by previous generations' reports.[36] As such, the many cases where this divergence is mentioned attest to the fact that the occasions of revelation are matters of dispute, and that exegetical lines of inquiry and traditional attestations can be different and even contrasting.

Some passages, above all, but not only, those found in exegetical literature, further specify who the actors in this divergence in opinion and interpretation are, i.e. who can hold differing opinions. These reports clearly indicate that they are exegetes; thus, those who hold (or can hold) differing opinions are the *ahl al-taʾwīl*,[37] the *mufassirūn*,[38] the *ahl al-tafsīr*,[39] or even those indicated with the generic term *al-ʿulamāʾ*, or other, similarly vague definitions.[40]

4   The Expression *Asbāb al-Nuzūl*

In the discussion above we have mainly analyzed the emergence and attestation of formulas connected to the phrase *sabab nuzūl* and its variants as a means to introduce the exegesis or discussion of reports and related qurʾanic passages. However, the term that came into use to define the literary genre and the genre of report is *asbāb al-nuzūl*, and the history of its verbatim attestation is rather different. In fact, on the evidence of our inquiry we can state that the expression *asbāb al-nuzūl* only appears in the later literature, mostly after Wāḥidī had written his book. Some mediaeval qurʾanic commentaries, for

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35   See e.g. Ṭaḥāwī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 1:153, 157, 538, *passim*; Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, 1:523; 2:235. But the references could be many more.

36   Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī al-tafsīr*, 5:268; cf. Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī, *Gharāʾib al-Qurʾān wa-raghāʾib al-furqān* (Beirut 1995), 4:317: *ruwāt asbāb al-nuzūl*.

37   Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna*, 10:632; Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, 10:566, 574; Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 1:242; 2:70; Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, 1:110.

38   Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-ghayb*, 16:103; Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī, *Gharāʾib al-Qurʾān*, 5:156; Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 2:74, 234; 3:267; 7:272; Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 2:19; Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, 1:402.

39   Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 1:404; 2:53.

40   Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, 3:145; 5:99; 10:98; Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, 3:431: *qad ikhtalafa al-salaf fī taʾwīlihā wa-sabab nuzūlihā*. A passage in Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*, 1:500 is even more generic: *qāʾilū hādhā al-qawl*.

instance, quoted the exact expression in their introductory chapters.[41] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī used it in a few passages of his commentary, but it was primarily Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī who made systematic use of it, and he also clearly indicated that the expression relates to a genre or kind of report.[42] All of these late mediaeval exegetes wrote after the fifth/eleventh century, and thus after the affirmation and consolidation of the use of *sabab nuzūl* to introduce this kind of exegetical discourse in discussion of qurʾanic passages. Other exegetes do not appear to have paid the same attention to the expression when dealing with the same topics. For instance, Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) did not cite it at all, while various other authors, though probably aware of it, also neglected to use it.

The late appearance of the expression is counterbalanced by its diffusion and use in modern and contemporary literature. It is above all in contemporary qurʾanic exegesis that the expression is widely used to refer to a literary genre, much more systematically than in Islamic sources before the theoretical works by Zarkāshī (d. 794/1392) and Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). It could even be suggested that it was the title of Wāḥidī's work that caused the technical use of *asbāb al-nuzūl* that emerged subsequently, consolidated only later, and which has come into common use in modern and contemporary literature. This is decidedly significant, and follows a different path to that of other exegetical expressions and technical terms. Though modern and contemporary exegetes list *asbāb al-nuzūl* as only one of a number of exegetical sub-genres, the use of the expression with a technical meaning as such is evidently a later development, later than that of other exegetical activities (e.g. *al-nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh*).

5   Conclusion

This inquiry into early and mediaeval literature largely confirms what Andrew Rippin posited about the origin of the term *asbāb al-nuzūl* in its role as indicating the occasions of revelation. At the turn of the fourth/tenth century authors started to use formulas that recall this significance and thus led to a

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41   Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fī ʿilm al-tafsīr* (Beirut 2001), 1:14; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān* (Cairo 1964), 1:3.

42   Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-ghayb*, 9:412; 10:120; 16:103; 25:127; Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fī l-tafsīr* (Beirut 1999), 1:523; 2:235, 496; 3:82, 85, 689; 5:268, 466, 515; 7:126; see especially 5:513 and 6:123. Amongst mediaeval exegetes, the expression is also quoted in some passages by Niẓām al-Dīn al-Nīsābūrī, *Gharāʾib al-Qurʾān*; see 1:61; 2:132; 3:300, 503; 4:317; 5:156; 6:170, 606.

fixed simple one (*sabab nuzūl*... and variants) to introduce qur'anic verses and passages connected to reports and traditions. Narrative considerations appear to be the primary aim of this exegetical or para-exegetical activity, which reached its peak in the fifth/eleventh century. This was the time when al-Wāḥidī wrote his book *Asbāb al-nuzūl*, through which title he fixed a phrase that came to designate the genre as a whole. However, this was not universally accepted since later mediaeval works display differing attitudes towards the use of the expression and how they deal with the topic in their works. The use of the expression to designate the literary genre thus appears the result of later theoretical reflections and, consequently, of the modern and contemporary use.

Laylat al-Qadr as Sacred Time
Sacred Cosmology in Sunni Kalām *and* Tafsīr[1]

Arnold Yasin Mol[2]

1 Introduction

1.1 *Revelation within Metaphysical and Physical Cosmology*

In religious and academic literature the revelation of the Qurʾān is mainly viewed from the point of view of historicity, i.e. when and why a certain text was revealed in history. As such, the revealed text is viewed as a physical text *within* time and *within* the physical world. Because of the Qurʾān's physical existence within creation as well as its designation as the word of God (*Kalām Allāh*, Q 2:75; 9:6; 48:15), there were discussions in early Islam as to the created or uncreated ontology of the Qurʾān. How can the divine attribute of speech, which exists outside of creation and time, be present within a physical and time-bound vehicle such as language? This has many parallels to Christian discussions on how the word of God (*Logos*, John 1:1) could be manifested within Jesus.[3] The Qurʾān also indicates that Mary received the word of God (*bi-kalimatin minhu*, Q 3:45; 4:171), thereby providing, depending on which exegetical interpretation is followed, an Islamic Logos-Christology.[4]

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3 For an overview of different Logos-Christologies, see Mark Edwards, *Image, word and God in the early Christian centuries*, Ashgate, UK 2013.

4 Some Muslim scholars understood God's word in this verse as referring to Jesus, thereby formulating an Islamic Christology, but the majority of scholars linked the word to the creational word (*Be!, kun*) in the next verse, "He says: 'Be and it is' (*yaqūl lahu kun fa-yakūn*, Q 3:47)." See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Beirut 1420/1999), 7:220–26; 11:270–2; Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafsīr al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī* (Riyadh 2003), 2:255–64; 4:38–239. Wolfson claims, without reference, that the whole discussion on the (un)createdness of the Qurʾān is caused by Q 3:45. If Muslims could believe the word of God is eternal and uncreated, he states, they must also accept the Christian concept of the Incarnation (*ḥulūl*), and this is why,

It therefore became important for Muslim scholars to differentiate between the divine attribute of speech and its manifestation within creation.

Early theologians such as the Muʿtazila viewed the divine attribute of speech (*kalām* or *qawl*) as belonging to the active attributes (*ṣifāt al-afʿāl*),[5] because to them speech is bound to an audience.[6] Later theologians from the Ashʿarī and Māturīdī schools saw divine speech as belonging to to the essential attributes (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*)[7] since God can have an internal speech (*kalām al-nafsī*) which is not dependent on an external, non-divine audience. But all three schools agreed on the hermeneutical differentiation between divine attributes and their effectual manifestations within creation. God and world are incomparable and never collapse into one another. When divine speech is viewed as being an essential attribute it doesn't exist through letters or sounds (*laysa min jins al-ḥurūf wa al-aṣwāt*), although the Qurʾān is expressed in letters and sounds which are created (*makhlūq*).[8] The Qurʾān is an expression

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he goes on to say, the Muʿtazila claimed the Qurʾān and divine speech were created. Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge 1976), 308–18. The Islamic theologian and exegete Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209 CE) provides a similar argument to Wolfson by comparing the Ḥanbalī-Ḥashawiyyah (the theo-anthropomorphism adherents among the Ḥanbalī) to Christians, because the former believed the word of God to be eternal and to exist with letters and sounds, thereby making the earthly Qurʾān a hypostasis (*uqnūm*) which is incarnated (*ḥālla*), just as Jesus is within Christian theology; Rāzī, *Tafsīr*, 1:44.

5 For the Muʿtazila and the Ashʿarī these are active, non-essential, and bound to the creative act, attributes that designate which divine activities are essential for creation to exist. They are not essential for God and therefore not timeless-eternal (*qadīm*). The Ashʿarī deem them as "not disappearing (*lā yazal*)." Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944 CE) and his school see active and essential attributes as both being *qadīm*. Abū Bakr ibn Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *al-Iʿtiqād wa-l-hidayah ilā sabīl al-rashad* (Beirut 1401/1980), 71–2; Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* (Beirut 2010), 113–6; Abu al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-kalām yabḥthu fī baʿḍ al-firaq al-Islāmiyya wa-l-radd ʿalayhā min al-Kitāb wa-l-Sunna* (Beirut 2005), 32–3.

6 For the positions of the Muʿtazila, see Aḥmad bin Ḥamad al-Khalīlī, *al-Ḥaqq al-dāmigh* (Muscat 2012), 159–74; al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa* (Cairo 2009), 529–62.

7 The essential attributes (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) are those which are essential for God and the ones that differentiate Him from creation, and are therefore timelessly-eternal (*qadīm*); Bayhaqī, *al-Iʿtiqād*, 71–2.

8 Al-Taftāzānī's commentary on the *ʿAqāʾid al-nasafī* in *Sharḥ al-ʿaqāʾid al-Nasafiyya maʿa ḥāshiyatih: jamuʿ al-farāʾd bi-ʾinārat sharḥ al-ʿaqāʾd wa yalīhimā sharḥ mīzān al-ʿaqāʾid* (Karachi 2012), 159. See also ʿAbdallāh al-Bayḍāwī, *Ṭawāliʿ al-anwār min matāliʿ al-anẓār* (Cairo n.d.), 189; Mullā ʿAlī al-Qārī, *Sharh kitāb al-fiqh al-akbar* (Beirut 2007), 47–9; Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, ibid., 60–1; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, ibid., 1:43–5. Divine speech as an attribute is one (*wāḥida*), but when revealed becomes multiplicit whereby the Hebrew ordering (*manẓūm*) is the Torah, and the Arabic ordering the Qurʾān; Mullā ʿAlī al-Qārī, 52.

or manifestation of divine speech, but this speech is not incarnated in the physical text itself (*ghayri ḥāll fīhā*);[9] rather, it is produced (*maḥdūth*)[10] or conveyed (*ikhbār*) using letters and sounds that make it understandable within creation.[11] Revelation did not manifest itself initially on the tongue of the Prophet Muḥammad, but, according to the Islamic tradition, had already gone through a whole process before its oral manifestation. The Qurʾān is said to be written on the well-preserved Tablet (*al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ*)[12] on which is also recorded the whole of creation, including ontology (*wujūd*), capabilities (*imkāniyya*), and acts (*afaʿāla*), is also recorded, meaning a complete description of every real and possible determination (*qadr*) of everything that will

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9   Taftāzānī, 167.

10   "That he says: 'The Qurʾān is *Kalām Allāh taʿālā* [which] is uncreated (*ghayr makhlūq*),' and he doesn't say: 'The Qurʾān is uncreated.'" Taftāzānī, ibid., 164. The Qurʾān is indicated as being *ḥadīth/muḥdath* (a produced telling/event) in numerous verses (Q 39:23; 45:6; 52:34; 56:81), thereby allowing it to be designated as produced (*ḥudūth*) but not created (*makhlūq*); see Shāh ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz al-Dahlawī in his *Sharḥ mīzān al-ʿaqāʾid* in *sharḥ al-ʿaqāʾid al-nasafiyya maʿa ḥāshiyyatih*, 165; Mullā ʿAlī al-Qārī, *Sharh*, 48–9; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, ibid., 1:43–4; 21:426, 30:782. The Māturīdī theologian Abu Muʿīn al-Nasafī (d. 1113) is also against using *ḥudūth* as a designation for the Qurʾān because the *Ur-Qurʾān* exists within divine speech and is thereby also eternal (*qadim*). Our expression (*ʿabarah*) of the *Ur-Qurʾān* is an expression with letters and sounds, and the remembrance of this within our hearts doesn't mean the *Ur-Qurʾān* is present within them. Thus, for al-Nasafī, we can only use *ḥudūth* for the expression of the *Ur-Qurʾān*, but he never explains how the recited and written forms of the *Ur-Qurʾān* can be truly called Qurʾān (according to al-Nasafī. the use of *ḥadīth/muḥdath* in the aforementioned verses refers to the angel Gabriel). Abu Muʿīn al-Nasafī, ibid., 63–9.; Abu al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-adilla fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Cairo 2011), 1:66–9. These detailed discussions try to find the ways in which one can discuss the earthly Qurʾān without collapsing it with God and but also, at the same time, without separating it from its divine origin. A similar discussion can be seen surrounding each of the divine attributes mentioned in the Qurʾān, in human language, and in what way they truly describe God; Abu Muʿīn al-Nasafī, ibid., 70–1.

11   On the development of the discussions on the (un)createdness of the Qurʾān, see: Taftāzānī, ibid., 157–67; Wolfson, ibid., 235–73; al-Khalīlī, ibid., 96–176.

12   Qurʾān 85:21–2. These verses can be read in two ways: (1) "… a glorious Qurʾān, in a well-preserved Tablet (*lawhin maḥfūẓin*)," or (2) "… a glorious well-preserved Qurʾān (*Qurʾānun majīdun*) in a Tablet (*lawḥin maḥfūẓun*)." In reading (1) the Qurʾān and the *qadr* of all creation on the Tablet are protected against tampering, change, and corruption by Satan or other forces. In reading (2) is the Qurʾān protected in its revealed form on earth. The *Lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ* is generally seen as similar or linked to the *umm al-kitāb* (Q 3:7; 13:39; 43:4) and the *Kitāb maknūn* (Q 56:79); see Tāhir ibn ʿĀshūr, *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr* (Tunis n.d.), 12:255; Maḥmūd al-Alūsī, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm wa al-sabʿ al-mathānī* (Cairo 2005), 30:386.

be, or could have been, created, is there.[13] Islamic theologians differed as to whether *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ* was one of the first things created, or if it was fashioned together with the creations it describes (heavens, earth, angels, beings etc.).[14] It is from *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ* that God's word as a divine attribute is transferred into a revelation that is present within creation,[15] and therefore takes up a physical position within the Islamic cosmology which is defined as a *sacred space* by the Islamic tradition. This Islamic cosmology was inherited from Greek-Persian-Indian cosmology, to which the Islamic tradition added sacred spaces (see figure and table 5.1, below).

The Islamic tradition has constructed multiple versions of *how*, *where*, and *when* the Qurʾān was revealed to Muḥammad. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) describes in his encyclopedia of qurʾanic sciences, *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, multiple traditions of how the Qurʾān was transferred from *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ* to Muḥammad (in order of most to least accepted version):

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13   The Ḥanafī-Māturīdī emphasize that this determination is recorded as a description and not as a decree (*bi-l-waṣf wa lā bi-l-ḥukm*), that it expresses God's eternal knowledge of what is and will be, and that it does not command the fate of everything (predestination), which would eliminate free will from creation. The freely-chosen human beliefs and acts are described, but not decided by God; cf. Mullā ʿAlī al-Qārī, ibid., 74–5; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, ibid., 9:379.

14   A prophetic *ḥadīth* says the "pen" (*al-qalam*) was the first creation, and the Tablet the second. Another narration says the Tablet is the first creation. The Tablet is understood by some as a metaphor (*yushabbahu*) for the Throne (*al-ʿarsh*) which itself is also understood to be a metaphor (*majāz*) for God's knowledge (*ʿilm*) or power (*sulṭān/mulk*). Others see it as a physical object (*jism*) containing real writing, but differ on the substances from which it is made (the most popular traditions say it is made from pearl (*durr*). There are also claims that there are four Tablets: *lawḥ al-qaḍāʾ* (tablet of decree), *lawḥ al-qadr* (tablet of determination), *lawḥ al-nafs* (tablet of the soul), and *lawḥ al-hayyūlā* (tablet of primal matter). These coincide with the higher intellects and forms in Islamic philosophy: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, ibid., 29:52, 27:617–8; ʿAbdallāh al-Bayḍāwī, *Ṭawāliʿ al-anwār*, 148–9; al-Māturīdī, ibid., 10:369–70, 490; Ṭāhir ibn ʿĀshūr, ibid., 12:253–4; al-Alūsī, ibid., 30:386; A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim creed: Its genesis and historical development* (London 1965), 148–9; Ibn Abī l-ʿIzz, *Sharḥ al-ʿaqīda al-ṭaḥāwiyya*, trans. Muḥammad Abdulḥaqq Anṣārī (Riyadh 2000), 209–10, 223–6; Ibn Kathīr al-Damashqī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿAẓīm* (Beirut 2004), 4:463–4.

15   On the *Lawḥ* is God's word, the Qurʾān and other revelations, described in the forms (*ashkāl*) of words and sounds. Mullā ʿAlī al-Qārī, ibid., 49. The Muʿtazilī al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 1025 CE) emphasizes that this described Qurʾān has therefore become a physical object (*jism*) and proves it is an originated creation (*ḥadath*); al-Qāḍī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Mutashābuh al-Qurʾān* (Cairo n.d.), 685.
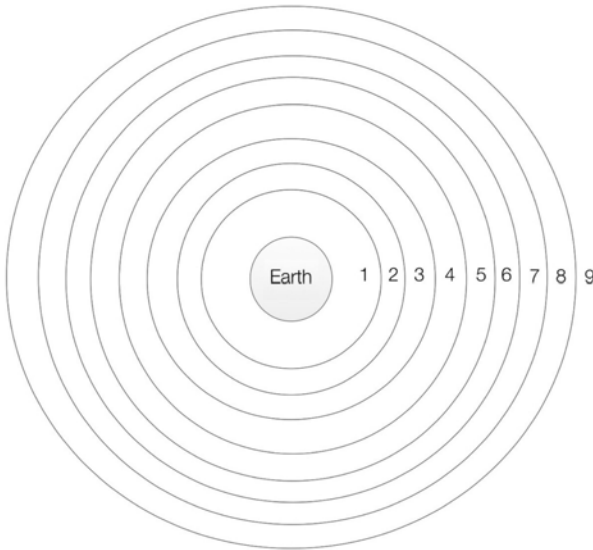
FIGURE 5.1   *The spheres within classical Greek and Islamic cosmology,*
                  photo by Arnold Y. Mol.

1.   On *Laylat al-qadr* God brought it down to the lowest heaven (*al-samāʾ*
       al-dunyā) in its totality, after which He revealed it in parts over a period
       of twenty, twenty-three, or twenty-five years. The differences are due to
       the differences [of opinion] on how long the [the Prophet] remained in
       Mecca after his calling.

2.   The Qurʾān descended in its totality on *Laylat al-qadr*, and it was between
       the spheres of the stars. Then God revealed it to His Messenger piece
       by piece.

3.   In one night, *Laylat al-qadr*, the Qurʾān descended to the lowest heaven,
       after which it was revealed over a period of twenty years.

4.   The Qurʾān was separated from the *Dhikr*[16] and was placed within the
       Abode of Glory (*Bayt al-ʿizza*)[17] in the lowest heaven, after which Gabriel
       revealed it to the Prophet.

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16   *al-Dhikr*, lit. remembrance/admonition, a common term used in the Qurʾān itself for the
        Qurʾān as revelation (e.g. Q 3:58; 6:69, 90; 7:2, 63; 15:6), and for the revelations revealed to
        all previous messengers (16:43–4, 21:48, 105), and is understood in relation to the Tablet as
        being the totality of revelation as written on *al-Lawḥ al-mahfūẓ*.

17   *Bayt al-ʿizza*, a non-qurʾanic term which is linked by many commentators to the frequent
        house (*Bayt al-maʿmūr*) mentioned in Q 52:4. According to Islamic tradition this is located

5. It was given to Gabriel who placed it within the *Bayt al-ʿizza*, after which he brought it down [to earth] in parts.[18]

In the multiple versions there is agreement over *when* the Qurʾān was sent down to the lowest heaven and from there to Muḥammad: the month of Ramaḍān. This is also mentioned in the Qurʾān "Ramaḍān is the month in which the Qurʾān was sent down (Q 2:185)," and for this reason it is the month specified for fasting.[19] According to the traditions mentioned above, based on Q 97:1, there is also a specific night within the month of Ramaḍān on which it is sent down: *Laylat al-qadr*, the night of power or determination. Al-Suyūṭī tries to reconcile the conflicting traditions of the double descent with the majority opinion of it having been sent down during Ramaḍān: the Qurʾān was sent down to the lowest heavens during Ramaḍān (1st *tanzīl*), *and* was also revealed to Muḥammad during Ramaḍān (2nd *tanzīl*). There is even a tradition that claims that all previous revelations were also sent down during Ramaḍān. Al-Suyūṭī tries to do the same for *Laylat al-qadr*, whereby the cosmic descent, as well as the earthly descent, all collapse into a singular *sacred time*.[20] With the transfer from the 1st to the 2nd *tanzīl*, the Qurʾān was brought from the unseen world (*ʿālam al-ghayb*) to the seen world (*ʿālam al-shahāda*).[21] This revelatory cosmology (see figure 5.2 below) provides a *sacred space* that is not accessible for the common man as it belongs to the unseen world, but it also provides a *sacred time* that is accessible, because time overlaps the unseen and seen worlds and can

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in the lowest heaven, is similar to the Kaʿba, and is the place where angels perform their own Ḥajj rituals. Others see the *Bayt al-ʿizza* as the place where revelation is copied by the noble scribes, mentioned in Q 80:15–6. Al-Bayḍāwī places the *Bayt al-maʿmūr* in the fourth heavenly sphere if it is understood as the angelic Kaʿba, or its is the earthly Kaʿba, or it is the heart of the believers, and he does not mention any linkage to the *Bayt al-ʿizza*. Al-Māwardī states it is the heavenly Kaʿba but also that it is above the seven heavens. Other opinions he cites says it is the original Kaʿba as build by the prophet Adam, or the current Kaʿba. Al-Suyūṭī mentions it could also be in the third, sixth, or seventh heaven. ʿAbdallāh al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl wa āsrār al-tāʾwīl* (Beirut 2004), 2:1016; Abū al-Ḥasan al-Māwardī al-Baṣrī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿUyūn Tafsīr al-Māwardī* (Beirut n.d.), 5:377–8; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Damascus 1995), 523; Ibn Kathīr al-Damashqī, *Tafsīr*, 4:218–9.

18 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut 1997), 1:116–7.

19 Fasting during the month of Ramaḍān belongs to the five pillars of Sunni Islam. For a discussion on the requirements and proofs for its obligation on mature healthy Muslims, see Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, *al-Fiqh al-Islāmiyya wa-adillatuhu* (Damascus 2008), 2:509–10.

20 al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān*, 1:117–21. The definitions of *sacred time* and *sacred space* are given below.
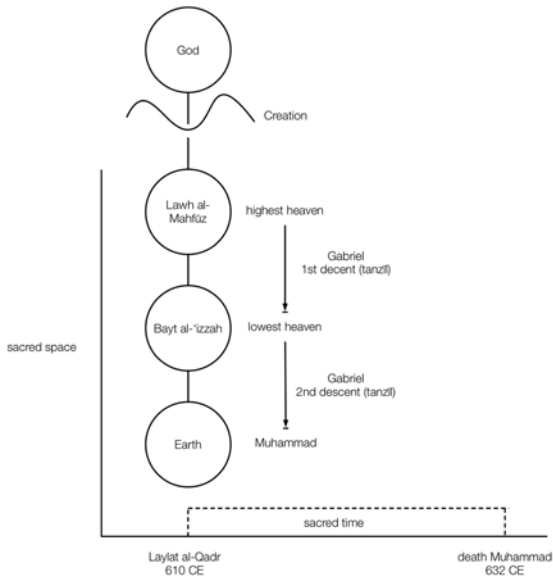
21 al-Alūsī, 30:523.

FIGURE 5.2   *Revelatory cosmology, photo by Arnold Y. Mol.*

be witnessed by both.[22] It is this *sacred time* in which mankind can perform acts which create their own *sacred spaces* on earth.

2 Sacred Time and Space in Islam

Islam acknowledges multiple *sacred spaces* that were considered sacred before the advent of Islam, such as Jerusalem,[23] Mecca,[24] and the graves of prophets. The Qurʾān also designates monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques as *sacred spaces* because in them "God's name is mentioned frequently (Q 22:40)."[25] The month of Ramaḍān was named as such in the Arab calendars before the advent of Islam, and the Qurʾān integrated the calendar

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22   The exception is the Prophet Muḥammad who during the night journey (*al-miʿrāj*) went to the highest heaven, which mirrors the act of revelatory descent of *Laylat al-qadr*.

23   The "furthest mosque" (Q 17:1).

24   The "first house" (Q 3:96), the "sacred house" (Q 14:37), the "sacred mosque" (Q 2:143), the "old house" (Q 22:29), and the "house of the Lord" (Q 106:3).

25   The issue if God's name is mentioned in all these religious buildings equal in monotheistic worth, see Ṭāhir ibn ʿĀshūr, ibid., 17:276–80.

TABLE 5.1   *A comparison of Aristotelian, Islamic theological, and Islamic philosophical cosmologies*

Sphere	Aristotle	Islamic theology	Islamic philosophy
1. 7th and lowest heavenly sphere	Moon, four elements	Moon, four elements *Bayt al-ʿizza/Bayt al-maʿmūr*	Moon, tenth intellect, four elements, Gabriel
2. 6th heavenly sphere	Mercury, ether	Mercury	Mercury, ether, ninth intellect
3. 5th heavenly sphere	Venus, ether	Venus	Venus, ether, eighth intellect
4. 4th heavenly sphere	Sun, ether	Sun	Sun, ether, seventh intellect
5. 3rd heavenly sphere	Mars, ether	Mars	Mars, ether, sixth intellect
6. 2nd heavenly sphere	Jupiter, ether	Jupiter	Jupiter, ether, fifth intellect
7. 1st heavenly sphere	Saturn, ether	Saturn	Saturn, ether, fourth intellect
8. Sphere of the stars	Zodiac, fixed stars	Zodiac, fixed stars	Zodiac, fixed stars, third intellect
9. Outer greatest sphere	Sphere of the prime mover	Outer sphere which moves everything, highest heaven, *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūẓ, al-ʿArsh*	Outer sphere which moves everything, highest heaven, second intellect; beyond this sphere is the first intellect, which emanates directly from God and does not embody a sphere

into the new religion. The same holds for the sacred months designated for the Ḥajj rituals and truces.[26] Existing months that were designated as *sacred time* before Islam were integrated into it, while other previously existing months

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26   Q 2:197; 9:2, 36; and 5:2. The holy months of the Ḥajj and ʿUmra rituals are in the Sunnī tradition Shawwāl, Dhū l-Qaʿda, and Dhū l-Ḥijja. The holy months of Q 9:36 are Dhū l-Qaʿda, Dhū l-Ḥijja, Muḥarram, and Rajab; Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-Tanzīl*, 1:116, 405. Several calendars existed before Islam, both solar and lunar, which were applied by different Arab tribes, but the specific names as mentioned were already known. With the advent of Islam

that were not sacred before were made into *sacred time* with the introduction of the new religion. As for *Laylat al-qadr*, it is a name given by the Qurʾān to a specific moment in time unknown before Islam and, therefore, marks the creation of *sacred time* through revelation, something that is sacred because it refers to the act of revelation itself.[27] In Mircea Eliade's concept of *sacred time* and *sacred space* he positions the sacred, the "transcendent," in opposition to the profane, the "secular," thereby linking the sacred to cosmogony, the creation of the world. *Sacred spaces* link creator, created cosmos, and the human daily world through ritual spaces that represent this cosmogony on earth.[28] We see this concept in Islam with the heavenly *Bayt al-maʿmūr* being a copy of the earthly Kaʿba, linking humans and angels together into a single ritual space and act. *Sacred times* point to the moment of creation, the *illud tempus*, and through being present and performing a determined set of acts within that timeframe the moment of creation itself is made present.[29] It is this aspect of linking time and creation through which we return to the divine attribute of speech; in biblical and qurʾanic theology creating and revealing are the same, both are derived from God's speech.[30] Samer Akkach emphasizes that in Islam the sacred is not

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a singular lunar calendar was constructed; Gerhard Böwering, The concept of time in Islam, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 141/1 (1997), 63–4.

27   Which will be discussed further below in our analysis of Māturīdī's commentary on *sūra* 97.

28   Mircea Eliade, *The sacred and profane. The nature of religion* (New York), 44–65.

29   Ibid., 80–1. Time can be divided into: (1) universal and personal history, (2) daily routine, (3) sacred time which lies outside normal history and to which one wants to return constantly (cyclic) or which introduces new time (as new year); see Daniel Pals, *Eight theories of religion* (Cambridge 2006), 213.

30   In the Qurʾān nature, miracles, and the verses themselves are designated *āyāt*, "signs," which point towards God's existence, almightiness, and wisdom, and have all come about through His word (e.g. Q 2:99, 164 etc.). The biblical term *ʿOwth* is similarly used for nature, covenantal signs, and miracles (e.g. Genesis 1:14; 4:15; 9:12; 17:11; Exodus 4:28 etc.). The qurʾanic term is probably derived from the biblical term through Syriac, and in so doing retained its Semitic theological significance. In Western systematic theology, creation (the order of nature) is termed "general revelation," and verbal revelation (as in scripture) "special revelation." See *EQ*, 5:2–11; Arthur Jeffery, *The foreign vocabulary of the Qurʾān* (Leiden 2007), 72–3; Tariq Ramadan, *Radical reform. Islamic ethics and liberation* (Oxford 2009), 87–100; G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (ed.), *Theological dictionary of the Old Testament*, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids 1997), 1:167–88; Gerald O'Collins, *Rethinking fundamental theology. Toward a new fundamental theology* (Oxford 2011), 57–68.

mirrored in the profane. The world does not corrupt the sacred.[31] The Islamic sacred exists without a necessary profane. In Islam, *sacred time* and *space* are rarely designated through terms as *muqaddas* (holy) or *muḥarram* (taboo), but by *faḍāʾil*, meaning something with superior or special qualities or virtues.[32] It is this term we also encounter in the commentaries on Qurʾān *sūra* 97, which discuss why *Laylat al-qadr* is better than a thousand months. The rituals of Ramaḍān have, for the most part, been extensively stipulated in the Qurʾān and the prophetic *Sunna*, without major differences of opinion among the Sunnī schools of thought.[33] But on the timing and the stipulated acts of *Laylat al-qadr* there are many conflicting source texts and opinions. Are they linked with the ten-day retreat into the mosque in the last days of Ramaḍān (*iʿtikāf*, Q 2:187), or is it a separate *sacred time*? And how can a believer participate in this *sacred time* when there is no certainty about its exact timing?

2.1 *Laylat al-Qadr as Sacred Time in Sunnī Tafsīr*

In the following translation and analysis of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī's *tafsīr* of Q 97, I will discuss these issues surrounding *Laylat al-qadr*: What does its name mean, when was it sent down, what was sent down in it, why is it better than a thousand months, why is there peace in it, and most importantly, when is it? Al-Māturīdī's work has been chosen for this analysis because his approach as an orthodox-rational theologian (*mutakallimun*) provides a coherent summary of both the rational and traditional arguments in the Sunnī tradition on this *sūra*.[34] According to al-Māturīdī (d. 944 CE/333 AH), there are two methods of exegesis: (1) *tafsīr*, which, according to him, is based on the prophetic Sunna and the opinions of the prophetic Companions who know the reason of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*), from which the revealed command (*amr*) and

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31 Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and architecture in premodern Islam. An architectural reading of mystical ideas* (Albany 2005), 165. According to a well-known prophetic tradition, the whole earth was made a mosque, thus it is all sacred space, pure and uncorrupted; al-Zuhaylī, *al-Fiqh al-Islāmiyya wa-adillatuhu*, 1:561. We see this also in the Ḥanafī claim that the world and everything in nature is in its essence beneficial, permitted (*mubāḥ*), and pure. For a discussion on the Ḥanafī concept, see Arnold Yasin Mol, *Rational ethics and natural law in classical Islam. Examples from the Hanafi school* (2015), available at: <https://www.academia.edu/10939863/Rational_ethics_and_Natural_Law_in_classical_Islam_Examples_from_the_Hanafi_school/>.

32 Akkach, ibid., 165–8.

33 ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jazīrī, *al-Fiqh ʿalā l-madhāhib al-arbaʿa* (Cairo 1994), 1:487–562.

34 On the life, works, and methodology of al-Māturīdī (d. 944 CE), see Mustafa Ceric, *Roots of synthetic theology in Islām*, Malaysia 1995; Ulrich Rudolph, *al-Māturīdī and the development of Sunnī theology in Samarqand*, Leiden 2015.

intent (*murād*) can be derived; and (2) *taʾwīl*, the rational interpretations of the *fuqahāʾ*, who use reason (*rāʾy*) to extend the meaning and implications of this command and intent to its utmost.[35] Elsewhere he also states "*tafsīr* is the categorical (*al-qāṭiʿ*) conclusion that the meaning of the term in question is this, and the testimony before God Almighty that this is what He meant by the term in question; while *taʾwīl* is the preference (*tarjīḥ*) of one possibility over several others without categorical conclusion or testimony."[36] In his analysis of Q 97 both methods of exegesis are present. Also, to provide an overview of the many ways which Q 97 has been understood in the Sunnī tradition I have placed al-Māturīdī's exegesis alongside that of other classical Sunnī exegetes (see appendix I).[37]

2.1.1   Translation and Analysis of al-Māturīdī's *tafsīr* on Q 97[38]

$$ إِنَّا أَنزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ ٱلْقَدْرِ $$

97:1 We have sent it down (*anzalnāhu*) in the night of power/determination/decree (*Laylat al-qadr*).

$$ وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ ٱلْقَدْرِ $$

97:2 And what will make you perceive/know (*adrāka*) what the night of power is?

$$ لَيْلَةُ ٱلْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ $$

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35   Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, ibid., 1:349. *Tafsīr* is derived from *fasara* and literally means "to explain something." *Taʾwīl* is from *awala* and means "to return something to its first or original intended meaning." Early tafsīr works applied the term *taʾwīl* as a title, such as the works by al-Māturīdī and al-Tabarī (d. 923 CE), whereby it represented the rational-jurist interpretations and *tafsīr*. In later works (post-1200 CE) is *tāʾwīl* used for mystical interpretations. For the discussion on tafsīr genres, see ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Keys to the arcana (Mafātīḥ al-asrār wa-masābīḥ al-abrār). Shahrastānī's esoteric commentary on the Qurʾān*, translated by Toby Mayer (London 2009), 37–50, 104–8; Hussein Abdul-Raof, *Schools of qurʾānic exegesis. Genesis and development* (Abingdon, UK 2010), 84–110; Mannāʿ al-Qaṭṭān, *Mabāḥith fī ʿulūm al-Qurʾān* (Beirut 2009), 295–300.

36   Māturīdī, ibid., 1:185.

37   By classical I mean all pre-1800 works. For a discussion of this, see: Abdul-Raof, *Schools of qurʾānic exegesis*.

38   Māturīdī, *Tafsīr taʾwīlāt ahl al-sunna* (Beirut 2005), 10:583–7.

97:3 The night of power is better (*khayr*) than a thousand months.

$$\text{تَنَزَّلُ ٱلْمَلَـٰٓئِكَةُ وَٱلرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِم مِّن كُلِّ أَمْرٍ}$$

97:4 In it descend (*tanazzalu*) angels and the spirit (*al-rūḥ*) by leave of their Lord, with every command (*min kulli amr*).

$$\text{سَلَـٰمٌ هِيَ حَتَّىٰ مَطْلَعِ ٱلْفَجْرِ}$$

97:5 Peace (*salām*) it is until the rise (*maṭlaʿi*) of dawn.

Meccan.[39] "97:1" The people of *ta'wīl* say: That He says "We have sent it down," means: the Qur'ān.[40] And it is possible that "sent it down" means: *al-salām*, which is mentioned later in the *sūra*, where He says: "with every command, peace." Those who say He has sent down the Qur'ān in *Laylat al-qadr* disagree about it:

Some say: The Qur'ān was sent down in one piece (*jumla*)[41] to the lowest heaven from *al-Lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ* during this night and it is in the

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[39]   An opinion of Ibn ʿAbbās states this *sūra* was revealed in Mecca. Another tradition says Ibn ʿAbbās stated it was revealed in Medina. Al-Wāqidī says it was the first revealed *sūra* in Medina because fasting was only made an obligation (*farḍ*) after the Hijra. Al-Alūsī says this *sūra* was revealed when Muḥammad was sitting on the *minbar*, therefore it could only be revealed in Medina as he had no mosque or minbar in Mecca. The majority opinion states it is Medinan. Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* (Beirut 2003), 3:640–1; Ṭāhir ibn ʿĀshūr, ibid., 30:455–66; Alūsī, ibid., 15:521.

[40]   According to Rāzī, by using only the suffix – *hu* – for the Qur'ān it indicates its prestige and can be compared to how the revelation of the Qur'ān in Q 56:77–80 is mirrored to the moment of death (*al-waqt*) in Q 56:83. That it refers to the moment of death is not directly stated, but is clearly implied, thereby indicating the importance of the subjects not directly stated in these verses. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, ibid., 32:27. For an alternative reading of this suffix, see Micheal Sells, Sound, spirit and gender in *Sūrat al-Qadr, Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111 (1991), 239–59.

[41]   There are several opinions on whether: (1) Gabriel broughts parts of the Qur'ān down to the lowest heaven and the Prophet each *Laylat al-qadr*, or (2) the whole text was sent down to the Prophet all at once, after which parts were made known to him over a period of 20–25 years, (3) the majority of the Qur'ān was revealed during the months of Ramaḍān, (4) the whole Qur'ān was sent down to the lowest heaven (1st *tanzīl*) and after which sent down to Muḥammad over a period of 20–25 years (2nd *tanzīl*). The ritual of reciting the whole Qur'ān during Ramaḍān mirrors the descent and/or revelation of the Qur'ān during that month. See Abbas Jaffer and Masuma Jaffer, *An introduction to quranic sciences* (London 2009), 46–53; al-Alūsī, ibid., 15:523.

month of Ramaḍān, because He says "The month of Ramaḍān is when He sent down the Qurʾān (Q 2:185)," meaning: He sent it down from *al-Lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*, then from the lowest heaven unto the Messenger of God in separate parts according to the needs of command and prohibition, the permissible and forbidden, admonitions, and all that is necessary.[42] Some say: Only the amount that is necessary for the coming is sent down as a whole from *al-Lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ* in this night; afterwards, it is sent down onto the Messenger of God in separate parts, and God knows best.

Moreover, we do not know what makes this night virtuous (*al-faḍīla*): Because special worship occurs in it.[43] He tests creation in its pursuit of estrangement [from anything evil or worldly] (*al-taghrīb*) and civility (*al-adab*); or it is virtuous as a place where He tests the angels and makes them responsible for descending therein, and worshipping on earth, and sending down the Qurʾān and such.[44] Or the wisdom [behind not revealing how to know *Laylat al-qadr*] means the virtuousness does not appear[45] in one specific meaning.[46] There are certain

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42   This does not make the Qurʾān a reactive or *ad hoc* revelation, but an interactive revelation with a teleological focus. According to the *mutakallimūn* and philosophers of law (*uṣūliyyūn*) the Qurʾān was revealed through God's assisting grace (*luṭf*) and mercy (*raḥma*, Q 55:1–2), and for general human welfare. Bayḍāwī, *Anwār al-tanzīl* 1:129; Ṭāhir ibn ʿĀshūr, ibid 1:379–81; Māturīdī, ibid., 6:7; 8:536; Jaṣṣāṣ, ibid., 1:569.

43   Here *Laylat al-qadr* is portrayed as special because of man's worship in it. There are several acts and prayers recommended for *Laylat al-qadr*: (1) complete ritual purity (*ghusl*), (2) the giving of alms (*ṣadaqa*), (3) the pronouncement of the supplication (*duʿāʾ*): "God You are forgiving, You love forgiveness, so forgive me (*Allāhumma innaka ʿafuwwun tuḥibb al-ʿafwa fa-ʿffu ʿannī*)", (4) performing four *rakaʿāt* after the *ʿishāʾ* prayer. Some sources add more: (5) reciting *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* seven times (Q 1) and *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ* (Q 112), (6) the seventy or hundreds time repeating of the supplication: "God forgive me and I seek repentance with Him (*astaghfiru allāha wa-atūbu ilayhi*)," (7) to lay the Qurʾān on one's head while repeating several supplications, whereby the physical Qurʾān is used as a ritual object. Zuhaylī, *al-Fiqh al-Islāmiyya wa-adillatuhu* 3:1623–5, 1677–8; Abū Bakr al-Kāsānī, *Badāʾiʿ al-ṣanāʾiʿ tartīb al-sharāʾiʿ* (Beirut 1986), 1:285.

44   Here *Laylat al-qadr* is portrayed as special because of the duties of the angels, and not due to the acts of man.

45   Here Māturīdī mirrors the non-apparent knowledge with the rise of dawn in Q 97:5, by using a verb from the same root.

46   This is a typical form of *taʾwīl* discourse where multiple meanings are all seen as possibly true even though they are conflicting. Through this, the extend of the meaning of the Qurʾān is maximized, which is according to Māturīdī the exact purpose of *taʾwīl*, see note 36, above.

localities [in time or place] that are more virtuous for worship therein, as mentioned [in the *ḥadīth*]: "A single prayer in the Masjid al-Ḥarām is equal to a hundred thousand prayers elsewhere, and a single prayer in a mosque is equal to a hundred prayers elsewhere except [compared to] the Masjid al-Ḥarām." And God the Exalted says "and the mosques are God's (Q 72:18)," these localities have been distinguished from others in virtuousness because worship is performed in them.[47] Therefore, it is possible that certain times are more distinguished in virtuousness than others, for the worship [performed within] a locality is performed in [a certain timeframe], because these places are made distinct, but the special times are not manifested, thereby to be made distinct from other times,[48] so it is – and God knows best – that if it had been made manifest, and pointed out, then there would be no provisions necessary for the searching [of when these times are], because He preserves that time and that night in particular.[49] Concerning the position of the necessary provisions in arriving at that position, it is similar to what is inferred from [the fact that] the time the spirit of a man leaves his body is not made manifest. Because if it were made manifest and he knew when his life would end he would engage in great sin and disobedience (*maʿṣiya*) until the latter parts of his life, and then he would repent. So [the moment of death] it is not made manifest, so that he is always in a state of fear, warning, and hope. In the same way, this night is not made manifest, so that it is sought after from among all other nights, so they may celebrate [in it]. And God knows best.[50]

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47   See also the discussion on this in Jaṣṣāṣ, ibid., 3:640.

48   "*al-Waqt*, literally 'a period/point in time,' denotes, according to Ibn ʿArabī, a designation (*taqdīr*) of something that itself does not make clear what is being designated. It is an assumption, in other words, as is the case when one assumes a beginning, middle, or end in a sphere, while the spatiality of the sphere does not admit any of these definitions. With reference to a prophetic tradition that describes time (*zaman*) as being circular in form, Ibn ʿArabī argues that *al-awqāt*, as temporal assumptions, are meaningful only with reference to both human spatiality and man's centrality in the world. It is the correlation of the stellar movements with human spatiality that establishes the spatio-temporal order of the world." Akkach, ibid, 172.

49   Meaning that nowhere does the Qurʾān indicate what is required to know *Laylat al-qadr*, or how to find it. But indications are provided in prophetic traditions, see below.

50   According to al-Rāzī, *Laylat al-qadr* is hidden because of the reason (*sabab*) that mankind is rewarded for searching (*ṭalab*) the night, it proves the necessity and reward for personal interpretation (*ijtihād*) which night it is, and provides people hope (*rajāʾ*) comparable to

Then there is the question whether the Qurʾān is the revealed in this night; the proof (*dalīluhu*) [for this] is His statement: "Ḥā Mīm, by the clear Book, truly We sent it down on a blessed night … (Q 44:1–3)," and this inquiry is about *Laylat al-qadr* and is evidence (*al-Bayān*) for it. Then He says: "And what will make you perceive what the night of power is? (Q 97:2)," this has two aspects: First, He says: You will know only until He will let you know; such as His statement: "What We have revealed unto you, before this, neither you or your people knew it (*taʿlamuhā*)[51] … (Q 11:49)". And it is possibly obtained from His statement: "And what will make you perceive" [that it is] about the glory and amazement [one has] for it. And God knows best. And it is stated: The descent of this verse [Q 97:2] is with the meaning of consolation, it provides virtue for this night and the works performed in it, and then declares its virtuousness with: "The night of power is better than a thousand months (Q 97:3)," on which is disagreement (*ikhtilāf*): Some say: That the Prophet saw the Umayyad clan on his *minbar*, so it had become evil (*sāʾahu*), and after which He revealed [the whole of *Sūrat al-Qadr*] (Q 97:1–6), meaning: For a thousand months [the *minbar*, i.e. the caliphate] will be occupied by the Umayyad clan, O Muḥammad![52]

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the hope expressed in God's expression in Q 2:30 "**I know what you don't know**" which expresses the good, potential and future, God knows humanity has. He also compares the hiddenness of the moment (*al-waqt*) of *Laylat al-Qadr* with the moment of death; Rāzī, ibid., 32:28–9. In this way the unknowability of the exact moment of *Laylat al-qadr* and the searching of it have been incorporated into the ritual of *Laylat al-qadr*. Uncertainty and expectation concerning *sacred time* are in this way ritualized. Both Māturīdī and Rāzī refer to the ignorance of the angels in Q 2:30–2 as an example of how Muslims must deal with the uncertainty surrounding *Laylat al-qadr*. It is not clear where this similar exegesis comes from (I was unable to trace it; al-Māturīdī was known to al-Rāzī and cites him several times [Rāzī, ibid., 5:316, 14:353, 24:492, 27: 612], but it is unclear if he had access to al-Māturīdī's *tafsīr*). The similarity in exegesis could be coincidence, or there is a wider exegetical tradition of linking hidden knowledge to Q 2:30–2.

51   Here al-Māturīdī sees Q 97:2, "perceive (*adrāka*)," and Q 11:49 "knew (*taʿlam*)" as synonymous.

52   Through this reason of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) this *sūra* became a political statement, transcending the chronological context or any form of *sacred time*, responding to events after the death of the prophet. The Umayyad dynasty (661–750 CE) was, in the dream, portrayed as bad, but declared as divinely approved by linking it to Q 97:3. Rāzī provides a similar *sabab* tradition in which the Prophet sees, in his sleep, the Banī Umayyad ruling from his minbar one after the other and that this is the divine *qadr*, and after this dream *Sūra al-Qadr* was revealed, whereby the reign of the Umayyads is stated as being a thousand months, 83 years. After this al-Rāzī cites the Muʿtazilī ʿAbd al-Jabbār who responds to this *sabab* tradition by ridiculing it, saying God mentions noth-

And some say: "The night of power is better than a thousand months," meaning: The works in it are better than the works in a thousand months similar to it. And it is also stated: That the Messenger of God mentioned to his companions that a man from the Banī Isrāʾīl performed *jihād* in the path of God for a thousand months, and they had veneration [for this man]. And then the Exalted revealed "The night of power is better than a thousand months," meaning: the works therein are as good as the *jihād* of that man for a thousand months.[53] And from this it is possible that the thousand months is mentioned in the way of allegory (*al-Tamthīl*)[54] and is not meant as a time measurement (*al-tawqīt*). Meaning: better than a thousand months and more, because a measurement (*al-taqdīr*) is meant to demonstrate an essential quantity (*al-ʿadad nafsuh*), and to demonstrate that it distinguishes and emphasizes something. Therefore, it is not with the purpose (*al-gharaḍ*) of restricting (*al-qaṣr*) the quantity [to a thousand], and it is as His statement: "If you seek forgiveness for them seventy times, He will not forgive them (Q 9:80)," in such a manner.

Then there is disagreement in the naming of *Laylat al-qadr*. Some say: A night of judgement (*al-ḥukm*) and decree (*al-qaḍāʾ*), in which He judges and decrees as He wills what will be in the upcoming year (*al-ʿām al-maqbūl*).[55] Such as His statement: "Therein every wise command (*al-ḥakīm*) is made distinct (Q 44:4)." Or it is so named because this night is meant for determination (*qadr*) and distinct rank (*manzila*) with God

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ing good about the Umayyads, and that it was a horrible (*madhmūma*) thousand months. Rāzī rejects this opinion and praises the Umayyads for being great (*ʿaẓīm*) in worldly bliss and that it is nor forbidden to connect this *sūra* to them. Rāzī, ibid., 32:231. This *sabab* is a typical example of what is generally viewed as a fabricated tradition which presents the reign of the Banī Umayya as being divine *qadr*. Many theologians attacked them on this issue, including Ḥassan al-Baṣrī (d. 728 CE), who pointed out that God never wills injustice. See Michael Schwarz, The letter of al-Hasan al-Baṣrī, *Oriens* 20 (1967), 15–30.

53   For discussions and gradings of the reasons of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*), see Wahbah al-Zuhaylī, *al-Tafsīr al-munīr fī l-ʿaqīda wa-l-sharīʿa wa-l-minhaj* (Damascus 1418/1997), 30:331.

54   Al-Māturīdī explains *tamthīl* as being the opposite of *taḥqīq*: "It is allegorical and not literal." In his commentary on Q 31:33 he explains it as: "That which adds to the delusion of it (*adhāf al-taghrīr ilayhā*); in order, what is from the ornamentation (*al-tazyīn*) and beautification (*al-taḥsīn*) of the apparent [meaning] (*al-ẓāhar*), and the showing (*iẓhār*) of its splendor (*bahjatihā*) and its delight (*surūrahā*) and for [the display of] its essence if one were to use differentation (*al-tamyīz*) and reason (*al-ʿaql*) and understanding (*al-fahm*), and [so one sees] the reality of the ornamentation and beautification are a delusion, and so what belongs to [the way of] the apparent [meaning] is a delusion [and belongs to the way of] allegory (*al-Tamthīl*). Māturīdī, ibid., 8:527, 322.

55   Reference to the yearly descent of "fate," *qadr*, see below.

the Exalted, because something great is described with *qadr* and *man-zila*. And also the name *Laylat al-mubāraka*[56] [is used for *Laylat al-qadr*], because what is revealed therein has blessings (*al-barakāt*) and mercy (*al-raḥma*) from God the Exalted for His creation. Or it is a blessing (*mubāraka*) because of the many acts of worship performed in it.

And the Mighty and Majestic says: "In it descend angels and the spirit (*al-Rūḥ*) by leave of their Lord, with every command (Q 97:4)." Some say the *rūḥ* here is Gabriel (*as*), such as the Exalted says: "brought down by the Trustworthy *Rūḥ* (Q 26:193)." And some say: the angels charged with creation, such as the angels who are charged with the descendants of Adam. And it is possible that *Rūḥ* here is mercy (*al-raḥma*), meaning: the angels are sent down with mercy. And on what it designates: *Mubāraka* through what is sent down in it [the night] of blessings. Then there is a disagreement about His statement: "In it." Some say: Meaning, in the night the angels and the spirit were sent down. And it is said: "In it," meaning: in the angels. And the Mighty and Majestic says: "by leave of their Lord," meaning: they descend by the command of their Lord. And the Mighty and Majestic says: "with every command, peace,"[57] some say: meaning through every command it is decreed for that year on earth,[58] and as al-Qatabī said: "with every command, peace," meaning through every command [there] is peace. And it is said:[59] through every command God arranges it (*yudab-baruhu*), meaning the angels do not know what God the Exalted has determined for them, except what God informs them about. And the Mighty and Majestic says: "peace is (*salām hiya*)," it is said: the angels were sent down through their wings with peace, mercy, and forgiveness by God the Exalted. And some say: meaning it is a safe night because it doesn't bring about evil (*sharr*) and Satan is not dispatched (*yurasul*) in it until sunrise.[60] And some say: it is peace from the angels,

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56   Based on Q 44:3 "We sent it in a blessed night."

57   Through differences in recitation, differences in meaning can occur; these recitations (*qirā'āt*) are then used as forms of *tafsīr*. This is also why there is a difference of opinion as to whether this *sūra* has 5 or 6 verses; see Tāhir ibn ʿĀshūr, ibid, 12:455–56.

58   In this interpretation the angels descend with both revelation and the yearly *Qadr* from the Tablet. In this theological construct, fate is brought into the world in a cyclical fashion, as is typical for *sacred time* constructs.

59   *Qīl*, translated here as "it is said," generally relays opinions deemed weak, unconvincing, or coming from a minority.

60   This is a typical aspect of *sacred time* whereby that which corrupts the earth is taken away so the sacred can be fully present. From this point of view, it is Satan who represents the profane in Islam.

meaning, the greetings of peace from the angels unto all the believers. And some say: "with every command, peace," meaning, from all types of plague and affliction one is secure. And that is mentioned in the Exalted His saying: "For him there are attending angels to his front and rear, guarding him by God's command (Q 13:11)," as said by some: they protect against the punishment (ʿadhāb) from God. And some say: they protect against it by God's command. So these two similar aspects are obtained from His saying: "with every command peace." And His statement: "is until the rise of dawn" possibly means that the blessings that were mentioned are there until the rise of dawn. And it is possible that peace, which was mentioned, is there until the rise of dawn. And it is possible that the angels remain on earth until the rise of dawn. And it is related from Ibn ʿAbbās, may God be pleased with him, that he recited it as "with every command peace," and he said: meaning the angels.

Then some say: there is disagreement on the narrations from the Prophet on when *Laylat al-qadr* is. And there is also disagreement among the ṣaḥabā, may God be pleased with them, on this: it is related from ʿAbdallāh b. Anīs about the Prophet that he said: "Search in the last ten, and search in the uneven [days]." And it is related by ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd that he said: "The Messenger of God said: 'A night in the 19th of Ramaḍān, and the 21st night, and the 23rd night.'" And it is related by Ibn ʿUmar, may God be pleased with him, about the Prophet that he said: "They search *Laylat al-qadr* in the latter seven [days]." And it is related that it is in the 27th. And by ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar that: "The Prophet was asked about *Laylat al-qadr*, and I listened, and he said: 'It is in the whole of Ramaḍān.'" And by Zar that he said: "I said to Abī b. Kaʿb: 'Tell us about *Laylat al-qadr*, O father of al-Mundhir, because our companion ʿAbdallāh b. Masʿūd asked about it.' So he said: 'Whoever has the power (al-ḥawl) strives for it.' So he said: 'Yes, plead God for mercy, father of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, and God will certainly let it be known it is in Ramaḍān,' [stating] repeatedly to have trust, 'and by God that it is Ramaḍān, the 27th night.'" Then we don't have [knowledge] of it, and no one can point towards this night. Therefore it is stated: it is a night as the night of the 27th or the 29th, except that it is established by *tawātir*[61] about the Messenger of God

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61   A *mutawātir* report is a ḥadīth or saying (*khabar*) that is transmitted in every stage of the stages of the transmission-chain (*sanad*) by multiple transmitters (general agreed upon requirement is 10 transmitters), whereby it can be rationally be concluded that these transmitters could not have agreed upon a fabrication (*ikhtilāq*). It also provides necessary knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ḍarūrī*). Any ṣaḥīḥ tradition that doesn't confirm to these criteria, but has an authentic *isnād*, is of the status of *aḥād* (singular transmission), and

in that he informs by a sign (*bi-lishāra*) towards it,[62] and so that is pursued and is required in the nights [of Ramaḍān]. And this aspect [of the obligation for searching without certainty] is taken from the related traditions in conformity [with all of them] without rejection [of any tradition], as they are all authentic (*saḥīḥ*).[63] In one year it is in some nights, in the next year another night, and in another year the last ten [days] of Ramaḍān, and in another year the ten middle ones, and in another year the first ten.[64] And God knows best.[65] [end of the exegesis]

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thus only provides conditional knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-mutawaqqif*), and therefore needs further investigation. Maḥmūd al-Ṭaḥḥān, *Taysīr muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīth* (Riyadh 1425/2004), 23–5, 27.

62 According to a tradition from Ibn ʿAbbās people will know it is *Laylat al-qadr* because the night wasn't hot or cold, and because at dawn the sun at sunrise has a weak red glow. See a discussion on this, and the grading of these traditions, in al-Zuhaylī, *al-Fiqh al-Islāmiyya wa-adillatuhu*, 3:1625.

63 Al-Jaṣṣāṣ uses the exact same sentence and examples in his *tafsīr*. He does not mention al-Māturīdī directly by name, so it is unclear if he cites al-Māturīdī, or that both cite the same source or teaching that is unknown to us today; Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ, ibid., 3:640–1. Muhammad Mustafizur Rahman, in his thesis on al-Māturīdī's *tafsīr* states, that al-Jaṣṣāṣ's work must be a condensed version of al-Māturīdī's because of its similarity in topical sequence: Muhammad Mustafizur Rahman, *An edition of the first two chapters of al-Māturīdī's* Taʾwīlāt Ahl al-Sunna, Ph.D. diss., School of Oriental and African Studies (London 1970), 127–8.

64 Nowhere does al-Māturīdī link these ten days to the ritual ten-day mosque retreat, the *iʿtikāf*, which is also part of the Ramaḍān rituals. He discusses the requirements for *iʿtikāf* in his exegesis of Q 2:187 but doesn't discuss the presence or overlap of *Laylat al-qadr* in relation to the mosque retreat. Al-Māturīdī, ibid., 2:83–5. *Laylat al-qadr* and *iʿtikāf* are both *sacred time* and can overlap, but do not collapse into one another as each have their causes, requirements, rituals, and rewards. That these are two separate *sacred times* can also be seen by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jazīrī's (d. 1941 CE) comment that supplication in *Laylat al-qadr* surpasses everything, but does not circumvents the value of *iʿtikāf*. For the requirements and rituals of *iʿtikāf*, see Zuhaylī, ibid, 3:1749–84; Jazīrī, ibid., 451–6. According to Zuhaylī the 27th night is *Laylat al-qadr*, as is the majority opinion. For discussions on the prophetic traditions, see Zuhaylī, 3:1623–4; Alūsī, ibid., 15:523–5.

65 Therefore, according to al-Māturīdī, the only way to reconcile the different traditions on *Laylat al-qadr* is to accept that it doesn't occur on the same night in Ramaḍān every year, but can shift every Ramaḍān to a different night, thereby making it almost impossible for the believer to find it. Thus, the only obligation on the believers is to search it and hope for a sign that points towards it.

3 Conclusion

Our analysis shows how the Islamic tradition constructs God's interaction with the world as a *sacred cosmology* that encompasses both *sacred space* and a *sacred time*. The *sacred space* belongs to the unseen world (*ʿālam al-ghayb*) and is not accessible for the common man, but when an intersection occurs between the unseen and seen worlds a *sacred time* is created that is accessible for the whole of creation, as the whole of creation has a temporal aspect. Only God is atemporal. *Laylat al-qadr* is described as *sacred time* in the Qurʾān through three aspects:

1. Something supernatural is sent down in it (Qurʾān, angels, *Rūḥ*, God's decree)
2. It is better than a thousand months, thus being superior to normal time
3. It is the whole night, thus made accessible for normal humans

But nowhere does the Qurʾān inform us when *Laylat al-qadr* actually is. To solve this, intertextual connections were made within the Qurʾān, with prophetic narrations, and opinions of the first generations of Muslims. That the Qurʾān descended in it became the dominant position. In this way, *Laylat al-qadr* could be placed within the month of Ramaḍān. But the Islamic tradition encountered a problem that it rarely has: there are too many different traditions and opinions on when it is. Even though a dominant position formed that pointed to the 27th night as the most likely for *Laylat al-qadr*, all the other conflicting traditions could not be dismissed precisely because they were of the same historical authenticity. So the uncertainty of when the *sacred time* exactly is was incorporated into the ritual of Ramaḍān. Searching for *Laylat al-qadr* became just as important as worshiping in it. This concept was partially based on several traditions that refer to the obligation of searching for *Laylat al-qadr*, but it was also a solution constructed by the Islamic exegetical tradition itself. The pursued *sacred time* was, in this way, extended so that every believer with the right intention can participate in it. Because in the end, only God knows best.

Appendix 1

Comparative Table Commentaries on Sūra 97

In this comparative table I have provided short summaries of the important trends and diverse positions taken by the Sunnī *tafsīr* tradition. Al-Muqātil (d. 767 CE/150 AH) represents the earliest complete extant *tafsīr* in the Sunnī tradition, al-Māturīdī

(d. 944 CE/333 AH) and al-Rāzī (d. 1209 CE/604 AH) represent the orthodox *kalām* tradition, Abu al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 985 CE/375 AH) the Ḥanafī legal tradition, al-Māwardī (d. 1058 CE/450 AH) presents the opinions of the first generations of Muslims, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī (d. 1072 CE/465 AH) represents the Ṣūfī tradition, and the Ottoman *Shaykh al-Islām* Abū al-Suʿūd al-Efendī (d. 1574 CE/982 AH) presents a late-classical accumulation and preferred selection (*tarjīḥ*) from all the aforementioned traditions.

TABLE 5.2   *Comparative table commentaries on* sūra 97

Q 97:1	أَنْزَلْنا "We have sent it down"	ليلة القدر "night of power"
Al-Muqātil:[a]	The Qurʾān	
Al-Māturīdī:	The Qurʾān; peace (*salām*, Q 98:5)	*al-Laylat al-miqdār; Layla mubāraka* (Q 44:3); night of judgment (*ḥukm*) and decree (*qaḍāʾ*); latter 10, all odd-numbered days, 19th, 21st, 23rd, 7 latter ones, 27th, the whole of Ramaḍān, 29th, the 10 middle ones, the first 10
Al-Samarqandī:[b]	The Qurʾān; provision (*rizq*) from God	Night of decree
Al-Māwardī:[c]	Gabriel; Qurʾān	Last 10 uneven ones, the whole month, 21st, 23rd, 24th, 27th, one of the signs is the sun without rays
Al-Qushayrī:[d]	Mercy for [God's] saints (*al-raḥma li-awliyāʾih*)	The *qadr* from the ego's (*nufūs*) of the worshippers; the *qadr* of existence and the *qadr* of witness (i.e. the world); refers to the spread of *qadr* that night
Al-Rāzī:[e]	The Qurʾān; descent of custodianship (*khalīfa*, Q 2:30); remembrance (*dhikr*, Q 15:9)	*Qadr* existed before creation and *Laylat al-qadr* is when the book of *qadr* of all creation is sent down (Q 54:49); night of decree and rulings (*laylat al-taqdīr wa al-aḥkām*); 1st night of Ramaḍān, 17th, 19th, 20th, 23rd, 24th, 25th, 27th, 29th, last 3, last 9,
Abū l-Suʿūd al-Efendī:[f]	The Qurʾān	Last 10

Q 97:3	لَيْلَةُ ٱلْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ "better than a thousand months"
Al-Muqātil:	Works are rewarded a thousand times
Al-Māturīdī:	Thousand is metaphorical; is better because of the worship made in it; works in it are rewarded multiple times; a thousand months the Bani Umayyad shall rule
Al-Samarqandī:	Works are rewarded a thousand times
Al-Māwardī:	Works are rewarded a thousand times; *Laylat al-qadr* is better than to live for a thousand months; the reign of Prophet Sulaymān and Dhū l-Qarnayn were each 500 months, making a 1000 months, therefore works in *Laylat al-qadr* are equal to these two reigns combined
Al-Qushayrī:	*Laylat al-qadr* is better than a thousand months without *Laylat al-qadr*; it is a short night for the lovers (of God) to converse (with God)
Al-Rāzī:	Worship performed in it is worth a thousand months of worship; thousand months is equal to a long life of 80 years, therefore the sins of a lifetime can be forgiven; a thousand months the Bani Umayyad shall rule
Abū l-Suʿūd al-Efendī	The reign of Prophet Sulaymān and Dhū l-Qarnayn were each 500 months, making a 1000 months, therefore works in *Laylat al-qadr* are equal to these two reigns combined

Q 97:4	ٱلْمَلَائِكَةُ "angels"	ٱلرُّوحُ "spirit"	أمر "command"
Al-Muqātil:		A great creation; the angel *Malik*	Mercy (*raḥma*); the *Qadr* and *Qaḍāʾ* of the new year
Al-Māturīdī:	Angels responsible with creation	Gabriel (Q 26:193); mercy	By the command the angels descend; the *Qadr* of the new year
Al-Samarqandī:	The angels Isrāfīl, Gabriel, Mīkāʾīl, angel of death	A creation looking like an angel but with the face of a human; the spirit of man comes [or leaves his body] through the command of the Lord (Q 17:85)	The command of death (*amr al-mawt*)

TABLE 5.2   *Comparative table commentaries on* sūra *97* (cont.)

Q 97:4	ٱلْمَلَائِكَةُ "angels"	ٱلرُّوحُ "spirit"	أمر "command"
Al-Māwardī:		Gabriel; commanding angels; angels close to God; army of God which doesn't belong to the category of angels; mercy	Provision (*rizq*) for each period
Al-Qushayrī:		Gabriel; a mighty angel (*malak ʿaẓīm*)	
Al-Rāzī:	The angels close to God descend on the worshipper; you can only see angels during *Laylat al-qadr*	A mighty angel; Jesus; Qurʾān (Q 42:52); mercy (Q 12:87)	A veil over evil; by His command angels descend; *amr* is *qadr*
Abū l-Suʿūd al-Efendī:	You can only see angels during *Laylat al-qadr*	A creation belonging to the angels	All *amr* with the decree of God (*qaḍāʾ Allāh*) for the new year (Q 44:4); the length of people's life

Q 97:5	سلام "peace"
Al-Muqātil:	Peace; blessings and goodness
Al-Māturīdī:	The angels are sent with peace, mercy and forgiveness; night without evil or Satan through which people are safe (*sālim*); protection against the punishment from God;
Al-Samarqandī:	Safe from any sin, evil or Satan
Al-Māwardī:	Safe from any evil or Satan; is peace, goodness and blessings; the angels say peace unto the believers
Al-Qushayrī:	Peace unto the saints

Al-Rāzī:	Greetings of peace by the angels unto the obedient; safe against evil, calamities, or Satan; peace, blessings, and bliss
Abū l-Suʿūd al-Efendī:	God decrees (*yuqaddir*) only with safety (*salāma*) and goodness (*khayr*)

a   Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān* (Beirut 1423/2002), 4:771–2.

b   Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Tafsīr al-Samarqandī aw Bahr al-ʿulūm* (Beirut 1993), 3:601–2.

c   Al-Māwardī al-Baṣrī, ibid, 6:311–31.

d   ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* (Cairo n.d.), 6:311–4.

e   Al-Rāzī, ibid, 22:27–32.

f   Abū l-Suʿūd al-Efendī, *Tafsīr Abū Suʿūd, aw Irshād al-ʿaql al-salīm ilā mazāyā al-Kitāb al-Karīm* (Quetta 2011), 6:452–3.

Is There Covenant Theology in Islam?[1]

Tariq Jaffer

1 Introduction

The idea of a covenant (*mīthāq*) or contractual relationship between God and human beings is a historical theme that Islam shares with other cultural and religious traditions that emerged in the Ancient Near East and, later, in the Reformed tradition of Christianity. According to the entry on Covenant Theology in the *Encyclopedia of religion and ethics*, the idea of the covenant or testament within the Reformed tradition or Protestantism is used to express "God's gracious revelation to His people, both before and after Christ."[2] Within the social and political life of the Ancient Near East, the idea of a contractual relationship between God (or gods) and human beings was also prominent. The article on "covenant" in the *Anchor Bible* suggests that this theme runs through various historical stages of Near Eastern religion and culture, and that

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2 W. Adams Brown, Covenant Theology, in James Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of religion and ethics* (Edinburgh 1908–22; reprint. 1981), 4:216–24. Covenant theology has a threefold significance; it is a "theory of salvation," a "programme for conduct," and a "philosophy of history" (4:218). Two covenants were distinguished: the covenant of works made in Paradise with Adam as the federal head of the race, and the covenant of grace made with Christ, the second Adam, or with the elect who have Him as their representative. In the former, God reveals the substance of the moral law as the condition He prescribes for the attainment of salvation; in the latter, He acquaints men with the machinery He devised for the repair of Adam's fault (4:217). Indeed, the idea of the covenant or testament is used to express God's gracious revelation to His people, both before and after Christ. Two such revelations were distinguished, the Old Testament and the New Testament, agreeing in substance, but differing in administration, and the nature at once of the agreement and of the difference forms the subject of a special *locus* in early Protestant dogmatics (4:219). For a discussion of this idea within the Reformed tradition of Christianity, see the Brown, Covenant theology. On covenant theology within the Reformed tradition, see the essay by Geerhardus Vos, The doctrine of the covenant in reformed theology, in Geerhardus Vos (ed.), *Redemptive history and biblical interpretation* (Phillipsburg, N.J 2001), 234–67.

it may be used as a lens through which one can understand religious community and identity in the Bible.[3]

The idea of a covenant – a contractual relationship between God and humanity – is central to the qurʾanic worldview.[4] Recent scholarship by Rosalind Gwynne has argued that the covenant is "the logical key to the entire structure of the qurʾanic argument" and that "virtually every argument in the Qurʾān expresses or implies one or more of the covenantal provisions."[5] Gwynne conceives of the covenant as a "cosmic rule" that supplies the "structure of moral reasoning that God requires of human beings," arguing that it "validates commandments, defines the human condition, provides premises in categorical syllogisms, and so forth."[6] In her view, all qurʾanic arguments derive ultimately from the qurʾanic idea of covenant. Thanks to Gwynne's monograph, we know much more about the internal logic employed by the Qurʾān, including the manifold syllogistic arguments that it deploys to persuade its audience to recognize and to obey the obligations that God enjoins on human beings.[7]

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3   G. Mendenhall and G. Herion, Covenant, in D.N. Freedman (eds.), *The Anchor Bible dictionary* (New York 1992), 1:1179–1202. On covenant in the Old Testament, see Jon Douglas Levenson, *Sinai & Zion. An entry into the Jewish Bible*, Minneapolis 1985; Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant. The history of a biblical idea*, Baltimore 1969; Paul Kalluveetil, *Declaration and covenant. A comprehensive review of covenant formulae from the Old Testament and the ancient Near East*, Rome 1982.

4   The OED defines a covenant as "a mutual agreement between two or more persons to do or refrain from certain acts; a compact, contract, bargain; sometimes, the undertaking, pledge, or promise of one of the parties": Covenant, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1:1101, available at: http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/43328?rskey=bkeUHc&result=1#/. In the *Encyclopaedia of religion and ethics*: "A covenant is a bond or agreement entered into between two persons or groups of persons, or between a man or a group of men and a god or gods"; J.A. MacCulloch, Covenant, in Hastings (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of religion and ethics*, 3:206–9.

5   Rosalind W. Gwynne, *Logic, rhetoric, and legal reasoning in the Qurʾān. God's arguments* (London-New York 2004), 4.

6   Ibid., 24.

7   The first major study of the theme of Covenant in the Qurʾān was R.C. Darnell's unpublished dissertation, *The idea of divine covenant in the Qurʾān*, Ph.D. diss., Michigan, The University of Michigan, 1970. Darnell examined the expressions in the Qurʾān that carry the sense of covenant, bond, contract, or agreement (3), finding that the clearest expression of the theme of covenant is in *sūra* 5 of the Qurʾān (*Sūrat al-Māʾida*), which stipulates three different forms of covenant. He sees the fundamental notion of covenant in the Qurʾān as tied to grace (pages 43 and 48), arguing that the purpose of God's legislation is the fulfillment of His grace (50). In his study, Darnell finds further support for this idea in qurʾanic exegetical literature, citing al-Ṭabarī, who ties grace and contracts together (51), as well as grace to the notion of the giving of Islam as a religion (51).

2   Aim and Methodology

The Qurʾān formulates a contractual relationship between God and humans in a single verse commonly referred to as the Covenant Verse (Q 7:172). In Arberry's translation this verse reads as follows:

> And when your Lord extracted the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam, and made them testify touching themselves, "Am I not your Lord?" They said, "Yes, we testify." So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, "We were not aware of this," or, "It was our forefathers who, before us, ascribed partners to God, and we are only the descendants who came after them: will you destroy us because of falsehoods they invented?"[8]

The meaning and implications of the Qurʾān's covenantal formula were contested by Muslim intellectuals working within the genre of qurʾanic commentary.[9] The interpretations of the formula that commentators advanced were naturally diverse, but more importantly they were central to the way that Muslim intellectuals established their theological identities and developed their conceptions of monotheistic religion. This essay describes the features of these identities by tracing the seed of the idea of covenant within the history of Islam.

A preliminary investigation into the history of the Covenant Verse has already been carried out by Richard Gramlich in the pioneering article "Der Urvertrag in der Koranauslegung (zu Sure 7, 172–173)."[10] Gramlich mapped the history of

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8   A.J. Arberry, *The Koran interpreted*, London 1955. The term *mīthāq* is not mentioned in this qurʾanic verse but is in Q 57:8. On other occasions (33:7 and 3:81) the Qurʾān speaks of God enjoining a covenant with Muḥammad and other prophets such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus – all of whom have symbols of their covenantal relationship with God in the Qurʾān. See G. Böwering, Covenant, *EQ*; G. Böwering, Qurʾan, in G. Böwering (ed.), *The Princeton encyclopedia of Islamic political thought* (New Jersey 2013), 451–3; CE Bosworth, Mīthāq, *EI2*.

9   This is not to say that speculation about the Covenant Verse took place only within the genre of qurʾanic commentary. The writings of the Ṣūfī mystic Junayd (d. 298/910), to cite one example, are saturated with the theme of the Covenant: Abū l-Qāsim Junayd, Kitāb al-mīthāq, in ʿAlī Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Qādir (ed.), *Rasāʾil al-Junayd*, London 1962; cf. A.J. Arberry, Junayd, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3 (1935), 499–507; A.J. Arberry, Al-Djunayd, *EI2*.

10   Richard Gramlich, Der Urvertrag in der Koranauslegung (zu Sure 7, 172–173), *Der Islam* 60 (1983), 205–30. On the ways in which the Covenant Verse reflects contractual formulas from the Ancient Near East see Gwynne, *Logic, rhetoric, and legal reasoning in the Qurʾān*. Most recently, Lumbard has made a case for "covenantal pluralism" in the Qurʾān and has shown how certain interpretations of the Covenant Verse reaffirm earlier covenantal

interpretations of this verse within the vast literature of qurʾanic commentary (including Shīʿī exegesis) and studied how the multiple and diverse lines of interpretation converge and diverge at different points in the history of Islamic culture. In this essay I do not wish to take issue with Gramlich's analysis but rather to use it as a starting point for further exploration. In what follows I wish to argue that the Qurʾān's covenantal formula deserves to be analyzed against the cultural background of pre-Islamic Arabia and as an aetiological myth that offers an account of how human beings came into existence. Additionally, I wish to further elaborate on several themes surrounding the idea of a contractual relationship between God and human beings, and to further examine the debates that surrounded this idea within the genre of qurʾanic commentary. Ultimately, I would like to address one fundamental question: Is there covenant theology in Islam?

This exposition begins by situating the Qurʾān's formula of the Covenant within the category of myth. It interprets Q 7:172 against the cultural backdrop of ancient Arabia, showing how the qurʾanic covenant adopted ancient Arabian values and adapted them to fit its theocentric worldview. It subsequently analyzes the theological arguments that arose through exegesis of Q 7:172 and draws out their implications. Finally, it examines the strategies that Muslim commentators working within the theological tradition of Muʿtazilism deployed to demythologize Q 7:172, showing how such commentators argued for the rational impossibility of a "covenant theology" (at least in the strict and formal sense), and reinterpreted the Covenant Verse along unconventional lines that conformed to their principles of natural theology.

Since much is packed into the Covenant Verse itself, it is worth taking our time to dissect and expand on it before examining its history within the genre of qurʾanic commentary.

3 The Qurʾanic Data on the Covenant

The Covenant Verse is an aetiological account – a sacred story or myth that relates how human beings came into existence.[11] As noted by many historians

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theologies within Judaism and Christianity: Joseph E.B. Lumbard, Covenant and covenants in the Qurʾan, *Journal of qurʾanic studies* 17/2 (2015), 1–23. For the background on the covenant in Islam, see G. Böwering, Covenant, 1:464–7; Louis Massignon, Le "jour du covenant" (*yawm al-mīthāq*), *Oriens* 15 (1962), 86–92.

11 On aetiological myths, see the discussion in Hermann Gunkel, *Creation and chaos in the primeval era and the eschaton. A religio-historical study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12*, Grand Rapids-Cambridge 2006.

of religion, including Mircea Eliade, in the religions of the Ancient Near East and other cultural traditions, myths or sacred stories often relate "what has already taken place in the beginnings," since they narrate how a fragment of reality – for example, an island, plant, a kind of behavior, an institution (or even the entire cosmos) – came into being through the act of a supernatural being or beings.[12] Anthropologists, including Malinowski (d. 1942), have stressed the social function of such myths by arguing that they serve as "a charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom." In his words, a myth "expresses, enhances, and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of man."[13] Malinowski further stresses the social function of "myths of origin" or "narrative[s] of emergence" when he argues that one attains knowledge of myths by ceremonially recounting them or by performing the rituals that they justify.[14]

The Covenant Verse expresses the first event in cosmic history. It relates the initial relations between God and the human race in the formula of a contract that stipulates an obligation to serve God.[15] The question "Am I not your Lord?" conveys that God imposed an obligation on human beings to acknowledge His sovereignty. When God created humanity in pre-existence, He initiated a contract that enjoined all human beings to testify to His lordliness. By attesting that God is the sole divinity by using the expression ("Yes, we testify"), human beings accepted the responsibility to live in service of God.[16] Thus, from the perspective of the Qur'ān the first event in cosmic history is one that

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12   The qur'anic covenant (*mīthāq*) is a classic example of what Eliade would call a hierophanic event in the history of religions. See Mircea Eliade and Lawrence Sullivan, Hierophany, in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of religion* (New York 1987), 6:3970–4; Mircea Eliade, *The sacred and the profane. The nature of religion*, New York 1959; Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and history. The myth of the eternal return*, Princeton 1959; Mircea Eliade, *Myth and reality*, New York-Evanston 1963. On myth in religion and culture, see the following foundational works: Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, science and religion and other essays* (Garden City, NY 1954), 72–124; Edward B. Tylor, *Primitive culture. Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion language, art, and custom* (New York 1920), 1: chapters 8, 9, and 10. On myth in the Qur'ān, see Angelika Neuwirth, Myths and legends in the Qur'an? An itinerary through its narrative landscape, in Angelika Neuwirth (ed.), *Scripture, poetry and the making of a community. Reading the Qur'an as a literary text* (Oxford 2014), 385–413.

13   Malinowski, *Magic, science and religion and other essays*, 79.

14   Ibid., 89, 94.

15   Note that this verse does not use the qur'anic terms for covenant – *mīthāq* or *'ahd*.

16   In this regard, the qur'anic idea of covenant resembles the Sinaitic event. On the covenant at Sinai, see Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*; Hillers, *Covenant*.

establishes and binds together the monotheistic worldview and an ethos or program of conduct on earth for humanity.

As noted by Wadad Kadi, the final qurʾanic phrases of this verse relate that human beings will be judged at the end times in accordance with the promise that they made in the primordial covenant.[17] The idea here is that fulfillment of the moral law (a program of conduct) is a prerequisite for the attainment of salvation. The Qurʾān reasons that by willingly recognizing God as the sole deity, human beings disallowed all excuses (e.g. for idolatry or ascribing partners to God) that they might have provided at the end times – the "Day of Resurrection." They could not say, for example, that they were unaware of the contractual relationship with God that they undertook; and they could not make excuses for idolatry or for ascribing partners to God by saying that they were simply following the ways of their forefathers.[18]

As mentioned above, the Covenant Verse does more than just establish an ethical program that leads human beings to salvation. It also provides an answer to a fundamental question – how did human beings come into existence? The aetiological account that the Covenant Verse offers relates that the human race was willed into existence when God brought forth all generations of human beings from the loins of Adam – the first man – or from Adam's progeny, the Children of Adam.[19]

The prominence of Adam, who occupies the center stage of the Qurʾān's myth of origins, is significant. The Qurʾān places Adam as the instrument

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17   Wadad Kadi, The primordial covenant and human history in the Qurʾān, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 147/4 (2003), 333.

18   The ways in which Q 7:172 exhibits features from covenantal formulas that appear within Ancient Near Eastern cultures and religions are discussed by Gwynne; see *Logic, rhetoric, and legal reasoning in the Qurʾān*, 1–24.

19   As I shall show, the question of whether human beings issued forth from Adam's loins or from the loins of the Children of Adam was a significant point of contention between the Muʿtazila and the Ashʿariyya. On Adam, see Meir J. Kister, Ādam. A study of some legends in *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* literature, *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), 113–74; Meir J. Kister, Legends in *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* literature. The creation of Adam and related stories, in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān* (Oxford 1988), 82–114; Mustansir Mir, Adam in the Qurʾān, *Islamic culture* 62 (1988), 1–11; Cornelia Schöck, Adam and Eve, *EQ*; Cornelia Schöck, *Adam im Islam. Ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Sunna*, Berlin 1993; Howard N. Wallace, Adam, *The Anchor Bible dictionary* (New York 1992), 1:62–4; M. Fishbane, Adam, *Encyclopedia of religion*, 1:29–30. I was unable to read the following article by Michael Pregill before submission: *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, myth, and pseudepigraphy. Wahb b. Munabbih and the early Islamic versions of the fall of Adam and Eve, *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008), 215–84.

through which the human race comes into existence. When it does so, it replaces an old Arabian cultural value with a biblical ideal.[20] By proposing that human beings existed primordially in Adam's loins the Qurʾān replaces the old Arabian cultural value of tribal genealogy (*nasab*) with an alternative genealogy that recognizes Adam as the head of the human race.

There are additional ways in which the Qurʾān's myth of origins inherits ideas and values from ancient Arabia and reconfigures them to fit its theocentric worldview. The Qurʾān adopts the old Arabian idea – which seems to have been widespread in the Ancient Near East – that covenantal formulas cement bonds between contracting parties and prescribe obligations between them. In ancient Arabia, a covenantal formula (*ʿahd*) was a rite that traditionally cemented kinship between parties, often through some kind of ritual involving blood.[21] The obligations were either taken on by one of the parties in favor of the other, or imposed by one upon the other, or mutually accepted by both.[22]

How does the Qurʾān's myth of origins reconfigure the old Arabian sacred rite of the covenant, and perhaps broadly, covenantal ideas that emerged earlier within the Ancient Near East?

By adopting the idea that a Covenant establishes agreements between contracting parties, the Covenant Verse cements a bond between two parties – God and the human race. From the perspective of the Qurʾān's chronology of cosmic history, the Covenant Verse unites (for the first time) the transcendent sphere of the divine and the profane sphere of human beings.[23] This newly

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20   There are many examples where the Qurʾān replaces old Arabian cultural values with biblical ideals. On this subject, see Angelika Neuwirth, From tribal genealogy to divine covenant. Qurʾanic re-figurations of pagan Arab ideals based on biblical models, in *Scripture, poetry and the making of a community*, 53–75. For a discussion that traces the biblical ideas about Adam in the Qurʾān see Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, Hildesheim 1961.

21   The term *ʿahd* in the third form (used eleven times in the Qurʾān according to the *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*) is bilateral; according to Lane, *ʿahd* is "an injunction, a charge, a bidding, an order, or a command" (2:2182–4); Q 19:90 and 7:100.

22   Robertson Smith, *Kinship and marriage in early Arabia* (Boston 1885), 49; Ernest W. Nicholson, *God and His people. Covenant and theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford 1986), 20. See also J. Pederson (cited in Nicholson, 20), who defines covenant as a bond between parties with prescribed obligations: Pederson, *Der Eid bei den Semiten. In seinem Verhältnis zu verwandten Erscheinungen sowie die Stellung des Eides im Islam*, Strasbourg 1914.

23   To be sure, the divine act of creation described in the Covenant Verse does not mark the absolute beginning of human cosmic history. Within the Qurʾān's chronology of cosmic events, the divine act that brings forth human beings from Adam takes place after Adam is evicted from Paradise for his disobedience to God. The Qurʾān thus situates the event of the covenant *after* man's celestial existence in the Garden but *before* his terrestrial

established theological bond makes possible the reciprocal ethical obligations between God and humanity. Indeed, the program of conduct that God imposes on the human race through the Covenant – a program that (if fulfilled) will ultimately lead to humanity's salvation – assumes an initial contact between the transcendent sphere of the divine and the profane sphere of human beings.

In sum, the Covenant Verse exhibits several interrelated ideas that are central to Covenant Theology: (i) God's creation of human beings; (ii) a contractual relationship between God and humanity; (iii) a program of conduct for humanity; (iv) and the idea of salvation. Indeed, one could argue that the qur'anic formula of the covenant is remarkable because it establishes links between these ideas.

4 Exegetical Difficulties and Interpretive Possibilities

The Qur'ān's covenantal formula formed part of a comprehensive mythology that was contained in the vast literature of prophetic traditions. The formula featured prominently within the web of cultural myths that early traditionists spun when they explained how the cosmos and all living things came into being. An examination of the full range of forty-three traditions that al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) amassed in his qur'anic commentary (*Jāmiʿ al-bayān*) and his *History* – two works that mirror the views of the early Islamic community – shows that the early Islamic community elaborated a chronology of cosmic events using the Qur'ān and Prophetic Traditions, and that God's imposition of the Covenant occupied a pivotal place within that chronology. Within this order of events, the divine act that brought forth human beings from Adam takes place after Adam is evicted from Paradise for his disobedience to God.[24] The early Muslims thus situate the Covenant event *after* man's celestial existence in the Garden but *before* his terrestrial existence, an existence that will continue until the Day of Judgment.[25]

Naturally, early Muslims considered God's initiation of the covenant an event that took place within human history. Traditionists proposed that the covenant (*mīthāq*) took place at Naʿmān – or possibly ʿArafa. Moreover, they

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existence that extends until which ends with the Day of Judgment. For further discussion on the Qur'ān's chronology of cosmic events, see Kadi, Primordial covenant, 332–8.

24 Kadi, Primordial covenant, 333.

25 Ibid., 335. For a lengthy discussion about the chronology of cosmic events described by the Qur'ān and prophetic traditions, see al-Ṭabarī, *The history of al-Ṭabarī*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Albany, NY 1989), 165ff.

insisted that this occasion marked a critical moment in cosmic history. After God evicted Adam from Paradise He brought forth all future generations of human beings from Adam's loins (*ṣulb*), or from his back (*ẓahr*), according to some traditions, thus creating progeny.[26] He multiplied human beings, scattered them in front of Him like tiny atoms (*dharra*), and then spoke to them.[27] He imposed a covenant on them by enjoining them to acknowledge His lordship and unity.[28] After all human beings recognized God's unity and sovereignty by testifying their profession of faith "one after another,"[29] God returned the collective of the human race to Adam's loins.[30] For early Sunnī traditionists, the covenant thus served as a reminder of a time in the past when the entire human race – or even all living creatures, according to some traditions – recognized God's unity and sovereignty.[31]

Now to al-Ṭabarī's exegesis. The forty-three traditions amassed by al-Ṭabarī in his *tafsīr* reveal two major themes: (a) for traditionists (who represented a major current within the early Muslim community), the ideas of covenant and belief in predestination are inseparable;[32] and (b) for traditionists within the early Muslim community, the ideas of covenant and belief in Islam as the natural and original religion of humanity are inseparable. So, the questions that arise are as follows: How did covenant and belief in predestination come to be knotted together? And how did covenant and belief in Islam as the natural and original religion of humanity come to be linked to each other? I will deal with each of these in turn.

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26   The interpretation that all human beings come out of the loins of Adam was endorsed by a number of traditional authorities, including Ibn ʿAbbās, Saʿīd b. al-Musayyib, Saʿīd b. Jubayr, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, ʿIkrima, and al-Kalbī, as well as Shīʿī commentators.

27   Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān fī taʾwīl al-Qurʾān*, ed. M.M. Shākir and A.M. Shākir (Cairo 1954–69), 6: Nr. 15381.

28   Ibid., 6: Nr. 15371, 15377, 15379, 15381.

29   Ibid., 6: Nr. 15349, 15359, 15360, 15361, 15362, 15376. On the Arabic term *dharr* (sing. *dharra*, which is used in the Qurʾanic expression *mithqāl al-dharr* at 4:40; 10:61; 34:3; 24:2; 34:22; 99:7; 99:8), see Edward William Lane, *Arabic-English lexicon* (Cambridge 1992), 1:957.

30   Ibid., 6: Nr. 15371, 15378, 15379, 15381. See also Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 304.

31   Ibid., 6: Nr. 15350, 15351, 15353, 15354, 15357.

32   An analysis of the forty-three traditions collected by al-Ṭabarī in his exegesis of Q 7:172 reveals that the Covenant was just one of many qurʾanic symbols that were vehicles for the transmission of predestinarian ideas. Others include the divine pen (*qalam*) and the appointed time of death (*ajal musammā*). See Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 6: Nr. 15355, 15358, 15359, 15360, 15368.

4.1 Covenant is God's Foreordainment or Predestination (Qadar)

The Covenant Verse (cited above) and the tradition of predestination (cited below) express disparate ideas (although as I shall argue, they share a common element). The former is an aetiological account that relates how humanity came into existence (*khalaqa*); the latter relates that God predestined the fate of each human being. For the early Islamic community, however, the aetiological account and the idea that God preordained the destiny of each individual were already locked together in Muḥammad's lifetime.[33]

Traditions collected by al-Ṭabarī credit Ibn ʿAbbās (d. c. 68/688), the uncle of the Prophet and the grandfather of qurʾanic exegesis, with aligning the Covenant Verse with predestinarian ideas.[34] According to several traditions, Ibn ʿAbbās explained the ideas of covenant and predestination with reference to one another. Al-Ṭabarī reports:

> Abū Kurayb – Yaḥya b. ʿĪsā – al-Aʿmash – Ḥabīb b. Abī Thābit – Saʿīd ibn Jubayr – Ibn ʿAbbās, commenting on [the qurʾanic verse], "And when your Lord took from the backs of the children of Adam their progeny," as follows: **When God created Adam, He took his progeny from his back like tiny atoms. He took two handfuls and said to those on the right: Enter Paradise in peace! And He said to the others: Enter the Fire!**"[35]

In his *History* al-Ṭabarī records another report in which the ideas of covenant and predestination explain each other. This report quotes an alternative tradition that can ultimately be traced to a version found in the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* of Mālik ibn Anas.[36] It relies on the authority of ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, and it credits the Prophet with the tradition. In his *History* al-Ṭabarī reports:

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33   I am grateful to my friend and colleague David Hollenberg for helping me clarify this point.

34   Gramlich, *Der Urvertrag*, 206. On the theme of predestination, see the classic work by Josef van Ess, *Zwischen Ḥadīth und Theologie* (Berlin 1974), passim. On the *ḥadīth* of predestination, see A.J. Wensinck et al., *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (Leiden 1992), 2:23a. On Ibn ʿAbbās, see Claude Gilliot, Portrait mythique d'Ibn ʿAbbās, *Arabica* 32 (1985), 127–84; Andrew Rippin, Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās and criteria for dating early *tafsīr* texts, *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 19 (1994), 38–83; Andrew Rippin, Ibn ʿAbbās's *Gharīb al-Qurʾān*, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 46 (1983), 332–3; Andrew Rippin, Ibn ʿAbbās's *al-Lughāt fīʾl-Qurʾān*, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44 (1981), 15–25; Frederick S. Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's night journey. Tracing the development of the Ibn ʿAbbās ascension discourse*, Albany 2008.

35   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 6: Nr. 15355; *Taʾrīkh*, 1:305.

36   See Van Ess, *Zwischen Ḥadīth und Theologie*, 32ff.

Ibrāhīm b. Saʿīd al-Jawharī – Rawḥ b. ʿUbādah and Saʿd b. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Jaʿfar – Mālik b. Anas – Zayd b. Abī Unaysah – ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Zayd b. al-Khaṭṭāb – Muslim b. Yasār al-Juhānī: **When ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb was asked about this verse: "And [when] your Lord took from the backs of the children of Adam their progeny," he said: "I heard the Messenger of God say: 'God created Adam, then rubbed his back with His right hand and brought forth from it [his] progeny.' Then He said: 'I have created these for Paradise, and they will act as the inhabitants of Paradise. Then he rubbed his back with his left hand and said: 'I have created those for the Fire, and they will act as the inhabitants of the Fire.'** A man asked: 'O Messenger of God, how is that?' Muḥammad replied: 'When God creates a human being for Paradise, He employs him to act as the inhabitants of Paradise, and he will enter Paradise. And when God creates a human being for the Fire, He will employ him to act as the inhabitants of the Fire, and will thus make him enter the Fire.'"[37]

Al-Ṭabarī records the same tradition in his exegesis of Q 7:172:

God created Adam, then He rubbed his back with his right hand so that progeny issued forth. Then He said, "I have created these for the Fire, and they will act as the inhabitants of the Fire." Then He rubbed his back and progeny issued forth. And He said, "I created these for Paradise, and they will act as the inhabitants of Paradise." Then a man said: "How is that?" Muḥammad replied: "When God creates a human being for Paradise, He employs him to act as the inhabitants of Paradise, and he will enter Paradise. And when God creates a human being for the Fire, He will employ him to act as the inhabitants of the Fire, and will thus make him enter the Fire."[38]

These are just two instances in which the Covenant Verse is interpreted through the lens of the "ḥadīth of predestination." There are many other instances, however, that suggest that the Covenant Verse and the ḥadīth of predestination were used to explain one another in medieval Islam. To cite one example,

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37   Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 305–6. The prophetic tradition appears in the *Muwaṭṭaʾ* of Mālik b. ʾAnas. An alternative version of the ḥadīth is quoted by al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Cairo 1933), 15:46. Variants of this ḥadīth are mentioned by al-Ṭabarī in his *History*; see also the discussions in Van Ess, *Zwischen Ḥadīth und Theologie*, 1–74.

38   Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 6: Nr. 15368.

the Sunnī theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) mentions an alternative version of this *ḥadīth* when he elaborates on the Covenant Verse:

> I heard that [when] the Prophet of God was asked about this verse, he said: "God – glory be to Him and may He be exalted – created Adam and then rubbed his back; then He extracted progeny from him. Then He said: 'I have created these for Paradise, and they will act as the inhabitants of Paradise.' Then He rubbed Adam's back and extracted progeny from him. Then He said: 'I created these for the Fire and they will act as the inhabitants of the Fire.'"

It is plain to see that there was a tendency among Muslim traditionists (and even later Sunnī theologians) to explicate the Covenant Verse by referring to the *ḥadīth* of predestination. Naturally there are discrepancies between the traditions of predestination that I have cited. What is important here, however, is that for Muslim traditionists (and even later Sunnī theologians) the idea of predestination and the Covenant Verse dovetailed rather well, and these were brought into line with each other without much controversy.

It is plain to see why these two ideas adapted to one another so easily. Both traditions work on the assumption that Adam is the protoype of humanity and its progenitor and acknowledge him as the head of the human race.[39] The two traditions provide the same account of how human beings came into existence. Both traditions suggest that human beings, which the Qurʾān refers to as the Children of Adam, were brought into existence as a collective when God rubbed Adam's back – the Arabic term "back" (*ẓahr*) here is a euphemism for the region of the genitals or loins, the source of procreative power.[40] Moreover, both traditions insist that God predestined the providence of each human being when He extracted humanity from Adam.

Let me conclude this section with an observation about the position I have just described and a note about its implication. First, for one major current within medieval Islam, the idea of a contractual relationship between God and human beings derived its authority from an aetiological myth circulating within the vast literature of prophetic traditions – a myth that also recognized Adam as the head of the human race. Conversely, one could say that belief in God's predestination of human beings derived its authority from the idea of covenant.

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39   For a discussion of this theme and analysis of qurʾanic verses that relate to the creation of Adam, see Kister, *Ādam*.

40   On the Arabic verb *massaḥa*, see Lane, *Arabic-English lexicon*, 2:2713.

Secondly, and more significantly, the early Islamic community regarded the covenant as a universal contract and conceived of it in universal terms. Although it considered the event of the covenant to be tied to certain historical and social institutions (and to a locale – Naʿmān or ʿArafa), the early Islamic community deemed the covenant a contractual relationship that God imposed upon the collective of the human race. It considered the whole of humanity (all future generations) as having been created at the covenant through Adam; it considered all human beings to have testified to God's unity at that moment, and it naturally considered all human beings to be bound by the covenant.

4.2   *Universal Covenant and Natural Monotheism*

This brings us to a second theme within Sunnī theology and exegesis: universal covenant and natural monotheism. When Muslim traditionists and later Sunnī theologians interpreted the qurʾanic concept of covenant, they postulated that all human beings are endowed with a natural tendency for monotheistic belief. They proposed that this tendency was given to human beings in virtue of the covenant: When human beings were taken out of Adam's loins in pre-existence and made to testify to God's unity they were instilled with monotheistic belief.

How did the qurʾanic concept of the covenant get fused with the idea that human beings are endowed with a natural tendency toward monotheistic belief?[41] The answer lies in a key qurʾanic term – *fiṭra* – which means, roughly speaking, "a unique way that human beings are created" or "a created disposition, inclination, or tendency." (The term has been translated many ways, and its history deserves a separate study.) *Fiṭra* appears in Q 30:30: "So set thy face to the religion, a man of pure faith – God's original upon which He originated mankind. There is no changing God's creation. This is the right religion; but most men know it not." According to some commentators, the idea behind this verse is that there is an original and proper religion. God created human beings with a natural inclination toward that proper religion, which is simply and essentially monotheistic belief (*islām, dīn*).[42]

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41   For example, al-Ṭabarī cites several interpretations in which these ideas are tied together: Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 6:15363, 15364, 15373.

42   See the discussion in Gramlich, Der Urvertrag, 218ff.; D.B. Macdonald, fiṭra, *EI2*; J. Royce, Monotheism, *Encyclopaedia of religion and ethics*, 8:817–21; A.J. Wensinck, *Concordances* 5:179–80 (on the prophetic tradition and its many variants); A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim creed. Its genesis and historical development* (Cambridge 1932, reprint. London 1965), 42–4, 190–1; Van Ess, *Zwischen Ḥadīth und Theologie*, 101ff.; Camilla Adang, Islam as the inborn religion of mankind. The concept of *fiṭra* in the works of Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Qantara*

It was by appealing to the qur'anic notion of *fiṭra* that Sunnī commentators developed this interpretation of the covenant. Since the Qur'ān defined *fiṭra* as a unique way in which human beings were created, commentators only needed to take a small step to reinterpret the concept of covenant to align with this notion. When they took this step, Sunnī commentators formulated a novel claim: when human beings were extracted from Adam's loins they were endowed with a tendency toward monotheistic belief. To cite just one example: al-Rāzī links the ideas of *tawḥīd* and *fiṭra* in his *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* and interprets the qur'anic term *fiṭra* – the natural constitution that God created for human beings – to mean "the profession of God's unity" (*tawḥīd*).[43] To put the matter bluntly, in the eyes of Sunnī theologians and commentators, human beings are born monotheists.

What is significant about the Islamic accounts of the origins of human beings that I have described? Their significance may lie in what is conspicuously absent, and that is a crucial idea from the biblical narrative of Adam – namely that human beings inherit Adam's sin. None of the prophetic traditions collected by al-Ṭabarī allude to this idea. The other Sunnī commentaries that I consulted do not allude to it either. Instead of speaking about man's inheritance of Adam's sin, as one might expect, and affirming a biblical idea, the medieval Muslim sources formulate a novel idea of covenant. According to this account, integral to the history of man or to the Qur'ān's chronology of cosmic events, what all human beings inherit from Adam (and by virtue of the covenant in pre-existence) is not a propensity to sin but a tendency toward monotheistic belief. To put the matter baldly, in the eyes of Sunnī theologians and commentators, human beings are born monotheists, not sinners.

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21 (2000), 391–410. I was not able to obtain the following works before submission: A. Straface, La *fitrah* come espressione di iman, *Oriente Moderno* 11/72 , 7–12 (1992), 69–86; Yasien Mohammed, The interpretations of *fiṭrah, Islamic Studies* 34 (1995), 129–51; Yasien Mohammed, *Fiṭrah. The Islamic concept of human nature*, London 1996; G. Gobillot, L'epitre du discours sur la *fiṭra* (*Risāla fī-l-kalām ʿalā-l-fiṭra*) de Taqī-l-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Taymīya (661/1262–728/1328), presentation et traduction annotee, *Annales Islamologiques* 20 (1984), 29–53; Livnat Holtzman, Human choice, divine guidance and the *fiṭra* tradition. The use of hadith in theological treatises by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, in Y. Rappoport and S. Ahmed (eds.), *Ibn Taymiyya and his times* (Karachi 2010), 163–88.

43   See Rāzī's commentary on Q 30:30 in *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 25:119. The point is first alluded to by Gramlich.

5 Covenant is the Original Nature and Formation of the Human Being

I turn now to a third theme surrounding the covenant: Covenant is the natural origin and formation of the human being. How did the covenant come to be interpreted to refer to the natural or original nature of human beings?

The answer lies with the Sunnī theologian and Qurʾan commentator Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Writing in the late sixth/twelfth and early seventh/thirteenth century, al-Rāzī reformulated the covenant to make it conform to natural philosophy or natural reason. The key passage is as follows:

> God extracted his progeny, who are the children of Adam, from the loins of their fathers. [By extraction, what is meant is that] they were a sperm drop, [and that] then God extracted it in the wombs of their mothers, and he made it a blood-clot, then an embryo, then he made them to be fully-formed and [gave them] a full nature. Then God made them testify touching themselves to the proofs of his unity that he composed for them and the wonders of his creation. So, in testifying they became as though they said, "Yes, we testify," even though they did not testify with their tongues.[44]

In the excerpt above, al-Rāzī interprets the qurʾanic idea of covenant by appealing to the generative process of an embryo that is described in several passages of the Qurʾān. He proposes that the covenant is a natural act that occurs every time a human being comes into existence – not a one-time metaphysical that took place in pre-existence.[45]

Crucial to al-Rāzī's novel reformulation of the covenant is his interpretation of the qurʾanic verse, "And when your Lord extracted the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam." Rejecting the notion that this phrase refers to God's extraction of human beings from Adam's loins in pre-existence, al-Rāzī takes the phrase, "from the loins of their fathers," to refer to the natural propagation of human beings one from another and from one generation to the next. Furthermore, he understands the act by which God extracts progeny from "the loins of their fathers" to refer to the origin and natural development of the human being in the womb – from its origin as a sperm-drop through its developmental stages of blood-clot, embryo, and, finally, an upright human being.

Al-Rāzī does not consider the implications of his position, so let me try. We have seen that he asserts that human beings undertake the covenant in

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44   Ibid., 15:50.
45   Gramlich, Der Urvertrag, 229.

a prenatal state, and that they do so by affirming God's existence and by testifying to his unity in the womb. What he means to imply here is that human beings enter a contractual relationship with God while still in the womb. That contractual relationship demands moral duties and principles on the part of human beings. First and foremost among these acts of obedience is the duty to live in service to God. This responsibility, al-Rāzī implies, is grounded in the genesis and natural formation of human beings, not in a metaphysical event that took place in pre-existence.

6 Demythologizing the Covenant: The Muʿtazila

Not all intellectual currents in medieval Islam saw things this way. Countering the authority of Prophetic ḥadīth, the Muʿtazila interpreted the Covenant Verse from the subjective perspective of human intellect or reason (ʿaql). They devoted their efforts to demythologizing the Qurʾān's formula of the covenant, to undermining the traditional interpretations of it, and to demonstrating its rational impossibility.

The following, and final, section focuses on the methods and strategies that the Muʿtazila developed to accomplish these aims. An examination of the wealth of Muʿtazilī arguments recorded by the Sunnī intellectual Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī suggests that the Muʿtazila adopted a two-pronged strategy when they interpreted the Covenant Verse. The first was to point out discrepancies between the wording of Q 7:172 and the traditions that ḥadīth specialists invoked in order to explicate that verse. The second was to show that the traditional conception of the covenant amounted to a rational impossibility.

6.1 The Muʿtazilī Use of Philology

The Muʿtazila did not give much weight to the authority of prophetic traditions, and so it was easy for them to dismiss the ḥadīth of predestination as inconsequential and irrelevant.[46] Besides, the traditional interpretation that took the Covenant Verse to refer to predestination could not have been an option for them. This is because the idea that God predestined the fates of

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46 This is not to say that the Muʿtazila did not (when it suited their purposes) invoke the authority of prophetic traditions. On the Muʿtazilī attitude towards prophetic traditions, see Josef Van Ess, La notion d'autorité de la tradition prophétique dans la théologie muʿtazilite, in George Makdisi et al. (eds.), *La notion d'autorité au Moyen Age. Islam, Byzance, Occident* (Paris 1980), 211–26; Racha El-Omari, Accommodation and resistance. Classical Muʿtazilites on ḥadīth, *Journal of Near Eastern studies* 7 1/2 (2012), 231–56.

individuals and that He had an overall design for humanity was in contrast to the Muʿtazilī belief in free will.[47]

For the Muʿtazila, the traditional understanding of the Qurʾān's covenantal formula implied certain rational impossibilities; moreover, the formula itself, "And when your Lord extracted the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam," bore the stamp of anthropomorphism. For these reasons, the Muʿtazila developed strategies to show the falsity of the traditional interpretation, and they developed exegetical methods to reinterpret the qurʾanic formula along lines that conformed to their rational theology.

What were these strategies and methods? Philology will be the first place to begin.[48] The Muʿtazila deployed their philological skills to undermine the traditional interpretation of the covenant. Interpreting Q 7:172 through the lens of Arabic grammar, they rejected the idea that human beings are the actual physical offspring of Adam (anthropomorphism again!). This strategic method is evinced in three arguments that are preserved within the tradition of Sunnī qurʾanic commentary. Al-Rāzī states:

> The first argument is that the Muʿtazila held that in God's words, "from the children of Adam, from their loins," there is no doubt that His words, "from their loins," refers back to His words, "the children of Adam," so that the meaning here is: "When your Lord took from the loins of the children of Adam." On this supposition, God the exalted did not mention that He extracted anything from Adam's back.
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> The second argument is that if the intended meaning were that God Most High extracted something of his seed from Adam's back when He said, "from their loins," then it would be necessary that he say, "from his back," because Adam has only one back. The same goes for His words, "their seed." If this referred to Adam then He would have said, "his seed."[49]

The arguments above demonstrate that the Muʿtazila were quick to point out a discrepancy between the qurʾanic formula of the covenant and the prophetic tradition that implied that God brought forth all of humanity from Adam's

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47   The literature on free will and predestination in Islamic theology is vast. The two classic works are William Montgomery Watt, *Free will and predestination*, London 1948; Harry A. Wolfson, *The philosophy of the kalām*, Cambridge 1976.

48   On the history of philology in the Western tradition (and its role within the Humanities in academia, see James Turner, *Philology. The forgotten origins of the modern humanities*, Princeton 2014. See also the review by Eric L. Ormsby A kingdom in splinters, *The new criterion* 34/8 (April 2016).

49   Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 15:47.

back. The Muʿtazila discerned that the Qurʾān employs the plural pronoun when it speaks of "loins" and "progeny" at Q 7:172, and they consequently argued that if the Qurʾān intended to convey that progeny were taken from the loins of Adam, then it would have used the singular of loins (i.e. *his* loins) and the singular of progeny (i.e. *his* progeny).[50] Reading the qurʾanic phrase *min ẓuhūrihim* in apposition to *min banī Ādam*, the Muʿtazila interpreted this verse to mean "that God took human beings out of the loins of the children of Adam," as opposed to out of Adam's back or loins. They proposed that this verse implied that human beings issued from the offspring of Adam's *children* – and not from Adam's back.[51] They concluded that all the Qurʾān is referring to in this verse is the idea that human beings are generated from one another – the natural propagation of the species (father-son, father-son, and so on.)

6.2   *Covenant is Metaphysical Impossibility*
Such are the philological arguments. I turn now to the ways that the Muʿtazila subjected this verse to the critical judgment of human reason.

The Muʿtazila reject – without reservation – the interpretation of the covenant that was advocated by Muslim traditionists. They claimed that the idea that God imposed a covenant on human beings in pre-existence was false, and they argued vehemently against the strongly anthropomorphic idea that God brought the human race into existence by extracting human beings from Adam. In their commentaries on Q 7:172, the Muʿtazila focus mainly on the metaphysical implications of this traditional interpretation, and they argue that such metaphysical implications are problematic because they lead to rational impossibilities.

Abū ʿAlī al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915) and Abū-l Qāsim al-Kaʿbī (d. 319/931) were among the first Muʿtazilī theologians to challenge the way that traditionists interpreted the qurʾanic formula of the covenant. They tried to show that the traditional interpretation of the covenant implied rational impossibilities. Their commentaries focus on the reasoning that traditionists had applied to this verse. Al-Jubbāʾī seems to have been the first to do this. His position is preserved by his student Jishumī (d. 494/1101). Al-Jubbāʾī's argument against the possibility of the covenant can be best phrased in terms of a question: *How is it possible for the entire offspring of human beings to have been present in Adam when Adam's back cannot encompass that great whole?*

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50   Ibid. See also Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl* (Cairo 1307/1890), 2:129; Gramlich, Der Urvertrag, 209.

51   The Muʿtazila then interpreted qurʾanic phrase, "Our fathers were idolaters aforetime," to mean that the forefathers of the children of Adam were polytheists.

Among such arguments is the one that our master (*shaykh*) Abū ʿAlī [al-Jubbāʾī] mentioned, which is that the back of Adam cannot encompass that great whole. This is a preposterous doctrinal position.[52]

This argument is also preserved by al-Rāzī in his Qurʾān commentary. He writes:

The fifth argument is that all of mankind, who God created from the children of Adam, are a great number, so the sum total realized of those specks reaches a great number in *volume* and *measure*, but the loins of Adam because of their smallness make it impossible to encompass that whole.[53]

The Muʿtazilī argument above aims to undermine the traditional understanding of the covenant. As mentioned previously, Muslim traditionists had proposed that all human beings (including all future generations of souls) were brought into existence when they were extracted from Adam at time of the Covenant in pre-existence; consequently, human beings are the actual physical offspring of Adam.

To counter this thesis, the Muʿtazila appealed to a principle from their atomistic cosmology: an infinite number of parts cannot be contained in a finite entity. The essence of the Muʿtazilī argument is: (a) Adam's loins are finite; (b) but the collective of human souls (at the time of the covenant) is of a great size in terms of its volume, even being infinite; and so (c) the collective of human souls cannot possibly be contained within the finitude of Adam's loins.

From the perspective of the Muʿtazila, this argument succeeded in discrediting an idea that was pivotal to the worldview of Muslim traditionists, namely that human beings are the actual physical offspring of Adam. It therefore succeeded in demythologizing the qurʾanic covenantal account of how human beings came into existence.

The second way that the Muʿtazila went about demythologizing the traditional understanding of the covenant can also be phrased in terms of a question: *How is it possible for human beings to be charged with a religious obligation (to obey God) before they were endowed with intellects or the capacity for understanding?*

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52   Jishumī, *al-Tahdhīb fī l-tafsīr*, Rome, Vatican Library MS Arab 01026, fol. 90a–91b. I am grateful to my friend and colleague Suleiman Mourad for sharing Jishumī's manuscript with me and for our discussions about this verse.

53   Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 15:48.

This argument proceeds by pointing out a metaphysical difficulty with the traditional interpretation of the Qurʾān's covenantal formula. The Covenant Verse describes human beings as essences or seeds (*dhawāt*); but such seeds or essences are not endowed with intellects. Consequently, it is not possible for God to have charged those seeds or essences with religious obligation at that time. This difficulty was the subject of a debate that took place between two early Muʿtazilis, namely al-Kaʿbī (d. 319/931) and al-Zajjāj (d. ca. 337/949). Again, it is the Sunnī theologian al-Rāzī who preserves this debate:

> **The eighth argument: [Abū-l Qāsim] al-Kaʿbī held that at the moment of the covenant those offspring (*al-dhurrīya*) were not superior in understanding or knowledge to children. Now, since it is not possible to charge children with an obligation, how is it possible to charge those essences with an obligation?** Al-Zajjāj responded to this by saying that it is not impossible that God gave the ants intellect (*al-ʿaql*) as: He said, "an ant said, 'Ants, enter your dwelling-places!'" (Q 27:18) […] and that He gave mountains understanding (*al-fahm*), so that they praised God, as He said, "And with David we subjected the mountains to give glory …" (Q 21:79), and just as God gave intellect (*al-ʿaql*) to the camel so that it prostrated itself before the prophet, and to the date-palm so that it listened …[54]

In the passage above al-Kaʿbī asserts that the intellectual understanding of the seeds (*al-dhurrīya*) mentioned in the Qurʾān cannot be superior to the intellectual capacity of children. And since it is not possible to charge children with obligation to the law it is not possible for God to charge those specks [essences] (*dhawāt*) with religious obligation.[55]

A third way that the Muʿtazila challenge the traditional understanding of the Qurʾān's covenantal formula is by citing scriptural evidence. They note that several qurʾanic passages convey that human beings are initially created as embryos ("gushing water issuing between the loins and the breast-bones"). They take these verses to mean that the human intellect does not pre-exist the body; and therefore the idea that God charged human beings with religious

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54 Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 15:48.

55 Kaʿbī's pointed question initiated internal debates within Muʿtazilism. In his response to al-Kaʿbī, al-Zajjāj adduces several qurʾanic verses that seem to imply that intellect is not the prerogative of human beings; furthermore, just as God bestowed intellect (*al-ʿaql*) on ants, granted a mountain "understanding" (*al-fahm*), and gave intellect (*al-ʿaql*) to a camel, it is equally possible that He bestowed Adam's offspring with religious obligation.

obligation in pre-existence – before they were embodied – is a metaphysical impossibility.

This argument is preserved by al-Rāzī as well. He states:

> The tenth argument: God's words, "So let man consider of what he was created; he was created of gushing water issuing between the loins and the breast-bones" (Q 86:5–7). Now if those specks were intellects with the capacity for full understanding, then they would have existed before they were gushing water, but the only meaning that properly belongs to the human being is that which we just mentioned, so at that time man is not created from gushing water, and that disproves the plain sense of the Qur'ān (*radd lil-naṣṣ al-Qur'ān*).[56]

In the excerpt above the Muʿtazila argue that the specks mentioned in Q 7:172 could not have been intellects endowed with the capacity for understanding, and they conclude that the specks could not count as human beings at the time of the primordial covenant. The argument proceeds on the scriptural supposition that human beings are created from "gushing water issuing between the loins and the breast-bones" (Q 86:5–7). It proposes that if the specks referred to in Q 7:172 were intellects, then such intellects would pre-exist the original state in which they were created as gushing water. But since human beings are essentially and originally gushing water, as is evidenced by Q 86:5–7, then the plain sense of the Qur'ān – the idea of pre-existent intellects charged with religious obligation – must be false.[57]

Thus far, we have seen that the Muʿtazila developed strategies and methods to undermine the way that Muslim traditionists interpreted the Qur'ān's covenantal formula, and that certain leading Muʿtazilis went so far as to dismiss the traditional understanding of the covenant as a rational impossibility. This does not lead to the conclusion, however, that the Muʿtazila rejected the qur'anic formula of the covenant as totally false or that they turned their backs on this notion that was so central to the qur'anic worldview.

With time, the Muʿtazila developed their own interpretation of the Qur'ān's covenantal formula, offering a positive doctrine, and formulated their own kind of Covenantal Theology. This was not until the twelfth century, when al-Zamakhsharī, a Muslim commentator from Central Asia, composed his Qur'ān commentary (*al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl*), a work that was widely

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56   Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 15:49.

57   See Gramlich, *Der Urvertrag*, 210–2.

read among Shīʿī and Sunnī scholars and extensively commented upon in Muslim institutions of learning.[58]

Al-Zamakhsharī departs from the traditional interpretations of the Covenant Verse by rejecting the idea that the verse explains how human beings were brought into existence. Moreover, he departs from the ways that his Muʿtazilī predecessors interpreted this verse by dismissing the idea that the covenant is a metaphysical impossibility.

How did al-Zamakhsharī resolve the exegetical difficulty of the covenant? And what is the significance of the Covenant Verse for him?

In his brief exegesis of the Covenant Verse, al-Zamakhsharī raises a theme we have not seen before: Covenant is God's act of endowing human beings with intellect and religious obligation.[59] The idea here is that at the Primordial Covenant, God granted human beings intellects. By testifying to God and confirming His unity at the Covenant (using the expression, "Yes, we witness"), human beings entered into a contractual relationship with God. They consequently became obligated to come to knowledge of God using natural reason (rather than revelation).[60]

Al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation of the Qurʾān's covenantal formula is inflected by two ideas that are foundational to the Muʿtazilī system of theology. The first is that the human intellect is autonomous. What the Muʿtazila meant by this is that the human intellect is capable of acquiring a natural knowledge of God and of distinguishing between praiseworthy and blameworthy acts without having recourse to God's revelation.[61] The second is that because

58   On this subject see Walid A. Saleh, The hashiya of Ibn al-Munayyir (d. 683/1284) on *al-Kashshāf* of al-Zamakhsharī, in Andrew Rippin and Robert Tottoli (eds.), *Books and written culture of the Islamic World. Studies presented to Claude Gilliot on the occasion of his 75th birthday* (Leiden 2015), 86–90; Walid Saleh, The gloss as intellectual history. The ḥāshiyahs on al-Kashshāf, *Oriens* 41 (2013), 217–59. On al-Zamakhsharī, see Andrew J. Lane, *A traditional Muʿtazilite Qurʾān commentary. The Kashshāf of Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144)*, Leiden 2006; Wilferd Madelung, The Theology of al-Zamakhsharī, in Wilferd Madelung, *Studies in medieval Muslim thought and history* (Aldershot UK, 2013), 485–95.

59   This was first pointed out by Ignaz Goldziher in *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (Leiden 1920), 134. Goldziher relies on al-Zamakhsharī, for whom this verse belongs in the category of *tamthīl wa-l-takhyīl* ("similitude and imaginative representation"); Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:129.

60   Thus al-Zamakhsharī writes that, "when God established the covenant with human beings … He showed them a proof of His Lordliness and unity." He further writes that when human beings responded to God, their intellects testified to God's Lordliness and confirmed his unity. See al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:129; Goldziher, *Die Richtungen*, 134.

61   According to Frank, it is by using this faculty that one is "capable of discovering and recognizing in individual acts those characteristics having which an act is obligatory or is bad or is good: what is praise worthy and what is blameworthy to do or to omit." See Richard M.

human beings are endowed with intellect, they are obliged to know God using natural reason. Thus, for al-Zamakhsharī, the Covenant Verse essentially serves as evidence for natural law – the idea that human reason is an autonomous source of knowledge. It enables one to distinguish praiseworthy acts from blameworthy acts and enables one to determine what one's obligations to God are.[62]

7   Conclusion

Admittedly, the place we have arrived at could have been predicted. After all, it is not surprising that the different ways that Muslim commentators interpret the Qur'ān's covenantal formula are naturally inflected by their specific theological ideas and principles. One might argue that it is to be expected that Muslim traditionists would interpret the Covenant Verse through the lens of predestination, that Sunnī theologians (like al-Rāzī) would interpret the verse in accordance with natural reason or philosophy, and that the Mu'tazila would reject traditional interpretations of the Covenant Verse and discover the idea of "natural law" in it. So, one might argue that all this study reveals is an old, recurring theme in religious traditions: interpretations of scripture on the one hand and theological ideas on the other are used to explicate and lend authority to one another.

But perhaps something can be gained from the commentators that have been studied in this essay by asking a different and more basic question: Is there Covenant Theology in medieval Islam? If so, what form did it take?

Let me return to scripture for a moment. There is no doubt that the Qur'ān contains the seeds of Covenant Theology. In Q 7:172 it succinctly formulates the idea of a contractual relationship between God and mankind. It specifies the constitutive elements of a kind of Covenant Theology, including: (i) God's creation of human beings; (ii) a contractual relationship between God and humanity; (iii) a program of conduct for humanity; and (iv) the idea of salvation.

Frank, Reason and revealed law. A sample of parallels and divergence in *kalām* and *falsafa*, in *Recherches d'Islamologie: recueil d'articles offert à Georges C. Anawati et Louis Gardet*, ed. S. Van Riet (Leuven 1978), 125–6.

62   I am grateful to my friend and colleague Frank Griffel for alerting me to this point. On the concept of natural law in Islam, see Anver M. Emon, Law, natural, in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim world* (New York 2016²), 2:649–51; Anver M. Emon, *Islamic natural law theories*, Oxford 2010.

But let me turn from scripture to commentary and use qur'anic commentaries to measure the extent to which medieval Muslims articulated their own form of Covenant Theology. Judging by the commentaries that I have examined it appears as though the seed of the qur'anic idea of covenant did not ever develop into a fully-fledged theory. Although Muslim traditionists and Sunnī theologians acknowledged the covenant as a fundamental premise of the Qur'ān and an idea that is foundational to the qur'anic worldview, and although they speculated about its meaning and implications, they did not deem the idea worthy of extensive elaboration. Indeed, the Covenant Verse did not engender isolated treatises or commentaries in the way that other qur'anic verses did in medieval Islam. Perhaps most importantly, as far as one can judge from the present state of the field, the idea of covenant was never used as a framework to interpret the Qur'ān in the way that Christianity used it to interpret the Bible.

PART 2

The Qurʾān and Qurʾanic Studies: Issues and Themes

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The Qur'ān's Enchantment of the World
"Antique" Narratives Refashioned in Arab Late Antiquity

Angelika Neuwirth

1 Preliminary Note

Andrew Rippin, whom we wish to honor with this Festschrift, is the unquestioned doyen of North American qur'anic studies. He was one of the first to contextualize qur'anic discourses with contemporary theological thought, being at the same time aware of the Qur'ān's Islamic exegetical embedding. I am grateful to him for uncountable inspiring ideas which I gained from his written works and some unforgettable conversations. More recently, I have become indebted to him for a most enlightening review of my keynote speech that had been meant to be held at the IQSA conference in San Diego in 2014. I am proud to find that he agrees with much of my scholarship and I feel challenged by his criticism and his doubts about two of my principle positions. They concern the reliability of historical research as a means to reconstruct the discourses of a bygone time and, more generally, my attachment to the concept of philology. Whereas I will obstinately stick to the conviction that intertextual/literary readings of the Qur'ān are apt to bring us closer to our shared Late Antique intellectual past, and indeed that the Qur'ān can be retrieved as a (sadly disregarded) "European legacy," I fully agree that the concept of philology in our times still deserves closer scrutiny. Its theoretical ambiguity had already been laid bare by Nietzsche a hundred years ago and was brought to our consciousness again by Pollock's manifesto.[1] It has recently received new critical attention by a collective of young authors[2] who hold that "in addition to exploring the sorts of philological practices and textual

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1 Sheldon Pollock, Future philology? The fate of a soft science in a hard world, *Critical inquiry* 35 (2009), 931–61.

2 The reference is to *Philological encounters*, a new peer-reviewed journal dedicated to the historical and philosophical critique of philology. The executive editor is Islam Dayeh, professor at Freie Universität Berlin who is also the supervisor of the research program *Zukunftsphilologie. Revisiting the canons of textual scholarship*, which began in early 2010 under the auspices of the Forum Transregionale Studien in Berlin, and which has been associated with the Freie Universität Berlin; see <http://zukunftsphilologie.de/>.

technologies that were present prior and during the encounter with European forms of knowledge, a critical philology must also examine the role of textual practices in forging and maintaining intellectual relations across vast and distant territories."[3] This is what we are aware of in our project *Corpus Coranicum*, in which we are presently involved in a process of re-establishing intellectual relations – not across vast and distant territories but across the soft borders between Western and Eastern qurʾanic scholarship. I am immensely grateful, dear Andrew, for your insightful criticism which will be taken up in this study – a study that is, it has to be admitted, yet another sample of my customary philippics against academic Eurocentrism, another invitation to my fellow scholars to rethink the causes of the "parting of the ways" that occurred between Eastern and Western scholarship during the last century.

2   Why Late Antiquity?

I will start with a defense of Late Antiquity as the cultural framework of the Qurʾān. This allocation is new and would hardly have been possible a few decades ago when Eurocentrism was still blooming. Meanwhile, a process of revision is going on. Global history studies have recently effected a change in evaluating the past: the earlier-held Eurocentric view, which claimed the Enlightenment was a specifically European achievement, has finally been realized to no longer be tenable. Whereas the monopolizing of the Enlightenment as an exclusively European cultural breakthrough used to be a household staple of still-cherished prerogatives of European historical superiority, there are other, less prominent examples of Eurocentrism that still subsist and which have attracted universal interest only more recently. Among them is the claim that Late Antiquity was an essentially Christian epoch. For some, the term itself already encapsulates such a bias, since in its common use as the designation for "the later phase of antiquity," it references the "golden age" of traditional Western thinking – a golden age which, in the understanding of many, was disrupted by the coming of Islam. There is indeed, in wider circles of historians, still hesitation to include Islam, or at least its beginnings, which chronologically coincide with relevant events in Judaism and Christianity, into Late Antiquity. Islamic phenomena that would fit with models of Late Antique thinking are instead considered as "imported" from the Christian world[4] or as

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3   Islam Dayeh, The potential of world philology, *Philological encounters* 1 (2016) 396–420, p. 408.

4   Peter Brown, *The world of Late Antiquity* (London 1971, repr. 2002), 191: "It was a stroke of genius on the part of Muhammad to turn this essentially foreign message into a principle on which the conflict-ridden society of the Hijaz could reorganize itself."

a sort of local mimicry of the older traditions.[5] The term thus seems ideologically charged, even if a growing number of studies do include the Qurʾān in Late Antiquity. Western scholars who venture to contextualize the Qurʾān with other Late Antique traditions often meet with reservations on the side of their Muslim colleagues who suspect attempts to co-opt elements of their heritage rather than to appreciate them as a shared legacy. Though new discourses have cropped up which undertake a closer synopsis of the cultures of Late Antiquity on both sides of the Mediterranean,[6] historical works have not yet carved out the role of the Qurʾān and earliest Islam as part of Late Antiquity, or indeed as an active player in the Late Antique culture of debate. Questioning and unravelling inherited periodizations appears a task not limited to modernity alone.

Where do the Qurʾān and early Islam belong? The answer will determine our way of reading the Qurʾān either as a hermeneutically familiar text of monotheist theology, virtually a part of the Western Judeo-Christian canon, or as the founding document of a foreign religious culture that arose out of the rich heritage of its specific geographical area, but was soon to differentiate itself, drifting away from Christian culture, as prominent historians like Peter Brown hold.[7] The Qurʾān is thus regarded as a document that prefigures the "other" culture of Islam. Both readings, though dedicated to one and the same text, follow different hermeneutic principles. Andrew Rippin in his review has aptly differentiated between understanding the Qurʾān "as a text" and "as scripture." It is here, in the hermeneutic realm, that the Western image of Islam as the enemy that was to prevail during the Middle Ages originally emerged. The Qurʾān was denied the rank and the character of a scripture but was read as a text compiled to undermine the truth of the Christian religion. One cannot fairly dissociate the presently incumbent task of accommodating Islam in world history from the peculiar history of Western engagement with the Qurʾān.

Western qurʾanic studies are burdened with a highly problematic record. They carry with them a heavy load of prejudices accumulated since the age of the Qurʾān's first fierce critic, John of Damascus (650–754).[8] Polemics since

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5   Ibid., 193: "In this sub-Christian guise the Arabs had found a place in the sun."

6   See, in particular, Sidney Griffith, *The Bible in Arabic. The scripture of the "People of the Book" in the Arabic language*, Princeton, NJ 2013.

7   Although Peter Brown, who has to be credited with initiating the discourse of Late Antiquity, assigned to it a comparably *longue durée*, up to the end of the Umayyad rule, 750 CE, he did not consider the Qurʾān as an active player in the formation of Late Antique culture; see Brown, *World of Late Antiquity*.

8   For his heresiological work, *Pege gnoseos*, where the message of the Qurʾān figures as a contemporaneous heresy, see Frederic H. Chase Jr., trans., *Saint John of Damascus. Writings*, Washington, DC 1958.

then have produced shockingly primitive mis-readings of the qur'anic text, based on the Qur'ān's alleged character of a "flat text," as a text to be understood only by the letter, completely lacking allegory and figurative speech. The famous refusal to understand *unzila min al-samā'* (Q 30) as "a scripture having been sent down from heaven," with instead its distorted literal interpretation, "a book that fell down from heaven," is perhaps the most telling example in view of the fact that almost the same phrase applied to Christ in the Nicaean creed, *katheltonta ek tou ouranou*, "he came down from heaven," was immediately understood as pointing to the movement of the *Logos*. There was no preparedness to realize that in the new scripture the *Logos* is reconfigured as *al-Qur'ān*.[9] It was this hermeneutic bias, the non-acceptance of figurative speech in the Qur'ān, that proved to be the most momentous obstacle in the way of appreciating Islam's sacred text. Although qur'anic studies today are booming, scholars are still far from recognizing the status of the Qur'ān as a new, indeed revolutionary manifestation of the particular literary genre that was considered of paramount authority in Late Antiquity: a mantic text, a scripture, a text that by definition relies on semantic ambiguity.

To restart and explore the status of the Qur'ān in an age when the ideological foundations of Western culture were laid is of course a highly political endeavor. The *proton pseudos* that has triggered the Qur'ān's downgrading to its present status of an epigonal text, the practice of exclusion, has still not been seriously rethought. It is worth noticing that the uprooting of the Qur'ān from the intellectual and theological milieu in which it originated and the refusal to accept its participation in the universe of scripture is not a unique figure of thought, as a similar exclusion had earlier been exercised against Jewish tradition.[10] What is needed today is to re-embed the Qur'ān in the discourses current in its epoch and, most importantly, to reread it through the lens of the scriptural hermeneutics that was prevalent at its time.[11]

To contextualize the Qur'ān in Late Antiquity and retrieve its status as an active player in an open epistemic space, the Berlin project *Corpus Coranicum*,[12]

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9   Daniel Madigan, God's word to the world. Jesus and the Qur'ān, incarnation and recitation, in Merrigan and Glorieux (eds.), *"Godhead Here in Hiding." Incarnation and the history of human suffering* (Leuven 2012), 157–72.

10   Maurice Olender, *The languages of paradise. Race, religion, and philology in the nineteenth century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, Cambridge, MA 1992, originally published as *Les langues du paradis. Aryans et Sémites, un couple providentiel*, Paris 1989.

11   A collective volume that embarks on the re-contextualization of the Qur'ān, *Denkraum Spätantike*, edited by Nora Schmidt, Nora Katharina Schmid, and Angelika Neuwirth, is currently in press.

12   The research project *Corpus Coranicum* was established at the Berlin Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften in 2007. This long-term research project investigates

apart from studying the transmission history of the text, tries to pursue the development of the Qurʾān as scripture on two tracks, as a monotheist proclamation, an oral message (*Verkündigung*) voiced by a messenger, and as a successively growing corpus of arguments reflecting a community's construction of identity. The first aspect highlights the Qurʾān as the document of a transfer of primarily biblical knowledge to Arab recipients, whereas the second targets the reverse process, the community's response from within Arabian Late Antiquity. Both processes – each reflected in one of the two principal genres of the Qurʾān, narrative and debate – are easily recognizable as charged with political tension. The Qurʾān does not simply reflect a massive conversion process from paganism to monotheistic faith but equally offers a re-writing of Arabian antiquity, of the rich literary and social heritage that is accessible to us in ancient Arabic poetry, as well as, more recently, in epigraphic and archeological findings.[13] How do these two rival canons, the biblical and the Arabian, interact? Or, more precisely, how does the audience or the later community reach a consensus about their respective validity? The fact that the Qurʾān in its final stage displays a successful amalgam of these two cultural heritages invites the question about the strategies applied to achieve this particular merger which – in my view – equals a revolutionary expansion of monotheistic religious thought in Late Antiquity.

This approach, which, last but not least, focuses on the traces of political tension among diverse traditions in order to highlight the process of their particular remolding into a new, politically significant form, contradicts the currently prevalent assumption of the text's genesis from a premeditated authorial process, its emergence in one piece, as it were, be it as a text authored by Muḥammad or the product of successive redactions carried out by a collective of anonymous individuals. It is hard to ignore the fact that scholarly interest in the Qurʾān today is primarily historical, involving historians of religions rather than scholars trained in Arabic literary studies. The literary character of the Qurʾān still waits to be explored. The Qurʾān presents the rare example of a text that, despite its universal significance, has not been systematically studied as a literary artifact. Instead, it is immediately subjected to speculations – often adventurous – as to its genesis, transmission, and relation to the religious traditions of its milieu. However, the Qurʾān is the only safely dateable Arabic

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the transmission of the text, its chronology and its Late Antique intertexts: www.corpuscoranicum.de.

13   The rich post-qurʾanic historical tradition, though codified only about a century later, also has to be scrutinized as to its information regarding the genesis of the Qurʾān; see Aziz al-Azmeh, *The emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allāh and his people*, New York 2014.

text of the first half of the seventh century.[14] It thus demands a fully-fledged analysis to rediscover all the textually and sub-textually conveyed information about its emergence that it possesses. The presently available readings, almost solely semantic, are not sufficient. As attested by its literary composition, the Qurʾān is a polyphonic text, one that is in no way merely a recasting of biblical narratives but one that, to an equal degree at least, is the transcript of debates which took place between various and often changing agents, a drama involving numerous protagonists. At present, Western scholars tend to privilege the narrative parts of the Meccan communications, marginalizing their discursive embedding and thus reducing the Qurʾān to a corpus of midrash-like re-readings of biblical traditions. Such a simple perception of the text as an uncontested given, one which ignores the disputes it entails, cannot, however tempting it may be, persist vis-à-vis the demands of modern philology that Sheldon Pollock recently outlined in his famous manifesto.[15] In Pollock's view, philology demands not only the analysis of the text under scrutiny, but equally the exploration of its context and the "recipients' response," which in our case is at least partly enshrined in the text itself, in the very debates that make up a considerable part of the Qurʾān. Last but not least, Pollock demands a third commitment: the carving out of "the philologist's meaning," i.e. an awareness of both the researcher's own historical predisposition and the text's implications that are relevant for today's intellectual discourse in which the individual researcher is involved.

To sever the text from its local societal context, then, is not a viable option. We must read the Qurʾān – while keeping relevant segments of Muslim traditional scholarship – as a document of the seventh century that originated from a historical event centered around the appearance of a prophet among pagan and/or syncretistic city- and oasis-dwellers, first in Mecca, and later in Medina. There is no alternative scenario that would fit as smoothly with the evidence of the text itself. Moreover, in view of the highly dialectic character of the text, we can assume that the Qurʾān did not arise from a prophetical monologue but from a communication process that accompanied and gradually shaped the social and intellectual developments within the community. This, of course, cannot be proven. Its assumption relies partly on our acceptance *grosso modo* of the reports of the genesis of the earliest community in the Islamic tradition and on the indications contained in the text itself. Seen from such a

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14   As to some contemporaneous non-Arabic texts see Robert Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it. A survey and analysis of the Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on Islam*, New Jersey 1997.

15   Pollock, Future Philology?

perspective the Qurʾān reflects a communication process whose chronology needs to be reconstructed, since the sequence of its individual communications is crucial. It is true that this reconstruction will not be entirely free from hypothetical elements, yet it has to be attempted to accommodate those glaring textual data that point to a gradual construction of the religious identity of the audience. Some examples will be presented in the second part of this study. It is the receivers of the Prophet's readings who need to be considered, since it was their approval, their acceptance of the individual messages, that ensured their transmission during the communication process. What undergoes a development in the course of time is not the mindset of the Prophet, but that of his audience, which needs to be imagined as constantly changing as it increases in number, in diversity, and in theological sophistication. From the very beginning the Qurʾān is connected to addressees who gradually acquire new insights that continuously demand discussion. The Qurʾān is – one might claim – essentially the "property" of a community. If this is so, the Qurʾān is not a text created by one author but the transcript of a process of interaction whose final literary shape probably goes back to the inspired mind of the Prophet.

3 The Transfer of Biblical Knowledge – An "Enchantment of the World"

The Qurʾān mirrors an extensive transfer of Late Antique knowledge, of post-biblical tradition as well as local poetic heritage. The transfer of biblical lore that is most significant will be at the center of the ensuing observations. It is, however, not a unilateral process but one complemented by a reciprocal movement. Even at an early stage the qurʾanic message bound its audience to a double narrative, biblical and indigenous Arabian. It disrupted the inherited understanding of the world as a tribally organized social universe by penetrating the local value system with new, biblical ideas. Though both processes often overlap, it is the biblicization of the Arabian worldview that informs the first phase of the Qurʾān's communication. It is no surprise, then, that this shift of perspective is diagnosed by the opponents of the Messenger as an attempt at manipulating, indeed of enchanting, reality.

The term "enchantment" as used in the following discussion, which in my view comes close to the qurʾanic *siḥr*, is, of course, a Weberian reminiscence. According to Max Weber,

> prophetic revelation involves for both the prophet himself and for his followers (…) a unified view of the world derived from a consciously

integrated and meaningful attitude toward life. To the prophet, both the life of man and the world, both social and cosmic events, have a certain systematic and coherent meaning. To this meaning the conduct of mankind must be oriented if it is to bring salvation, for only in relation to this meaning does life obtain a unified and significant pattern. (…) The conflict between empirical reality and this conception of the world as a meaningful totality, which is based on a religious postulate, produces the strongest tensions in man's inner life as well as in his external relationship to the world.[16]

Indeed, the prophet's opponents, who are staunch adherents of an empirically informed worldview, explicitly accuse him of *siḥr mustamirr*, of permanently practicing magic. It is worth looking at this allegation more closely: although the Prophet is accused of *siḥr* several times,[17] it is only in the Middle Meccan *sūrat al-Qamar*, Q 54, that the allegation is embedded in a dramatic incident. The *sūra* text starts with the exclamation: *iqtarabati l-sāʿatu wa-nshaqqa l-qamar*, "The hour has drawn nigh, the moon is split!"

Read in context, the verse expresses the claim that the splitting of the moon comes to affirm the earlier pronounced prediction that the closeness of the Hour, the Day of Judgment, can be known from particular prodigies. It will be presaged by the distortion of the heavenly bodies. Q 82:1–2 says: "When the heaven is split open and the stars are scattered," and similarly Q 81:1–2 reads, "When the sun shall be darkened, when the stars shall be thrown down." This is in keeping with other Late Antique annunciations of the end of time, such as Matthew 24:29–31, which says: "Immediately after the suffering of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven … Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven …"

Sūra 54 goes one important step further than the earlier predictions, asserting the factual occurrence of such a cosmic sign. The Prophet's opponents had demanded time and again that he presents the apocalyptic signs in their physical manifestations. Not all of them were sufficiently acquainted with the tradition the Prophet had adopted as a reference, biblical apocalyptic concepts, to be aware of the messianic dimension of the world and to recognize particular empirical phenomena as indications of more momentous supernatural events. They thus remained deaf vis-à-vis the new theology of signs. The phenomenon

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16   Max Weber, The Prophet, in David L. Petersen (ed.), *Prophecy in Israel* (Philadelphia 1987), 110–1.

17   For *siḥr* see early Meccan: Q 51:39, 52, middle Meccan: Q 54:2; Q 37:15; Q 38:4; Q 43:30, 49, late Meccan: Q 11:7; Q 6:7, Medinan: Q 27:13; Q 34:43; Q 46:5; Q 61:6; and Q 5:110.

of the splitting of the moon which appeared significant to the Prophet as a miracle affirming his eschatological message was rejected. The text goes on:

> *Wa-ʾin yaraw āyatan yuʿriḍū wa-yaqūlū siḥrun mustamirr*, "yet, if they see a sign they turn away and say: 'Magic continuous!'"

"Magic" in their response is not to be understood as a miracle that he should have worked, a factual mutilation of the moon, but it is meant in a more comprehensive sense: The Prophet is charged with the manipulation of the world as such – through the magic of speech, *siḥr al-bayān*, since he transforms the empirically perceived phenomenon of a lunar eclipse into something different from what it is, i.e. an eschatological sign. Any imbuing of reality with transcendent meanings appears to them as a manipulation, as magic, as a phantasm fabricated through rhetorical means. What we face here is a glimpse of the struggle between the two major lines of interpretation current in Late Antiquity: the reading of texts and of the world in the literal sense vis-a-vis their reading in a figurative sense, through typology and allegory.

According to the qur'anic *sūra* this struggle between the two worldviews in Mecca left the pagan literal reading victorious. The *sūra* goes on with the somewhat weary sounding statement: *wa-kadhdhabū wa-ttabaʿū ʾahwāʾahum*, "they have disbelieved and followed their own inclinations." This was the situation in Middle Mecca, where further persuasion was demanded to translate empirical reality into its more consummate form of a text-referential world.

At the end of the proclamation, however, the Prophet's *siḥr al-bayān*, his text-referential reading of the world – his embedding of the empirical realm into a primordially founded sign system – was to prevail. With the Qur'ān, a sacred text was canonized that is strongly imbued with text-referential thinking.

4 Techniques and Textual Strategies

The Qur'ān's charging the empirical world with text-referentiality can hardly be overestimated. It induces a biblicization of Arabian episteme. The reverse movement is equally distinctive: it is the Arabization of biblical concepts. What is striking is that both processes operate with a hermeneutical tool that was current in the Late Antique reckonings with heritage texts but which was obviously new in the Arabian context: the hermeneutics of a complex typology. Typology – as will become evident from the following – is a political device. For the sake of simplicity, it will be classified in our context as (1) the simple figure of re-enactment, the repetition of a biblical incident or a biblical experience in

the life of the community; (2) the more intriguing figure of promise and fulfil-
ment in which a biblical promise becomes real in the history of the commu-
nity; and (3) the psychologically-charged figure of mythopoiesis, the discovery
of biblical precedents as underlying established communal practices. In the
following I will try to trace the qurʾanic genesis along the sequence of these
figures of typology.

4.1   Re-enactments

The earliest perusal of biblical tradition in the Qurʾān can best be described
as a "staging" of biblical tradition, the re-enactment of the psalmodic chant in
qurʾanic recitation. The audience of the Prophet thereby establishes itself as a
liturgical community, re-embodying the ideal of the Psalms while at the same
time emulating the pious of the neighboring traditions who all praise God
through the medium of short poetic compositions. One of the earliest uses of
the word *al-qurʾān* (Q 73:1–10) points to a pre-existing practice of nightly recit-
als, of vigils:

> *O you enwrapped in the cloak,*
> *Keep vigil all the night, except a little*
> *A half of it, or diminish a little,*
> *Or add a little, and chant the Qurʾān distinctly.*
> *We shall cast upon you weighty speech,*
> *Surely the first part of the night is heavier in tread, more upright in speech,*
> *Surely during the day you have long business.*
> *Remember the Name of your Lord, and devote yourself unto him devoutly*
> *Lord of the East and West – there is not god but He, so take him for*
> *a Guardian.*

The liturgical frame of a vigil would, elsewhere, be filled with Psalm readings.
What is being read here is only vaguely determined as *al-qurʾān* – obviously
a new *genre* of liturgical texts not known before in the Arabic language. The
early *sūras*' close relationship to the biblical Psalms in terms of composition
and topics has been acknowledged in scholarship – but what about their rela-
tionship to indigenous Arabic poetry? Josef Horovitz thought of shared topics:
he assumed that the qurʾanic Paradise scenarios, so characteristic of the early
*sūra*s, reflect banquet scenes from ancient Arabic poetry.[18]

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18   Josef Horovitz, Das Koranische Paradies, *Scripta Universitatis atque Bibliothecae
Hierosolymitana* 6 (1923), 1–16, repr. in Rudi Paret (ed.), *Der Koran* (Darmstadt 1975), 53–73.

The oldest *sūra*s do indeed reflect a strong engagement with Ancient Arabian lore. It is, however, less a "borrowing" of particular motifs than a dialectic relationship to an entire outlook that is attested here. On closer examination, the qur'anic descriptions of Paradise prove to be less the reflection simply of an idyllic place comparable to the poetic banquet scenarios than a counter-image; the Paradise tableaus, portraying groups of men and women in a lush natural environment, surrounded by aesthetically refined artefacts, relate to another part of the standard Arabic poem, the *qaṣīda*: its elegiac initial section, the *nasīb*. They turn out to be the reverse image of the "landscape in ruins" depicted in the *nasīb*, in which the poet laments the ruined state of the campsites where he once enjoyed the company of his friends and his mistress. These ruins – symbolizing "the permanence of nature, and the impermanence of human culture – leave the poet in despair, overwhelmed by feelings of futility, of being abandoned to fate. His aporia finds expression in the compelling image of an unreadable inscription, a writing on a rock, which is part of that landscape.[19] It is, curiously, designated as *waḥy*, a non-verbal message that forces itself on the beholder, without, however, disclosing its meaning.

It is this aporetic perception of the world that the Qur'ān addresses: God Himself takes over the role of fate and reshapes the cyclical time of man, which now expands from creation to Judgment Day. The qur'anic description of Paradise thus not only reverses the poetical image of nature as bleak and threatening but also reinstalls reflections on history, not as a cycle of doomed human efforts but as a longue durée of meaningful divine-human communication: The unreadable signs of the enigmatic inscription, the *waḥy*, are thwarted by the intelligibility of the signs, *āyāt*, of scripture.[20] *Waḥy*, the emblem of pagan aporia, reappear as the inverted function of a divine revelation, in the biblical vein. The close relationship established here between the communication and its written source initiates the new text-referentiality, the relating of anything occurring in this world to a counterpart in Scripture. This again renders a new dimension to reality, changing cyclical time into a linear time that moves from primordial beginning to eschatological end. The world's extension in time and its close attachment to Scripture again charge the worldly phenomena with a massive increase of meaning and significance – a mutation that is perceived by the opponents, the deniers of a superhuman dimension of the world, as the "enchantment" of their world.

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19   See Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *The mute immortals speak. Pre-Islamic poetry and the poetics of ritual* (Ithaca 1993), 3–54.

20   Angelika Neuwirth, The "discovery of writing" in the Qur'ān. Tracing an epistemic revolution in Late Antiquity, in Nuha al-Shaar (ed.), *Qur'ān and adab*, Oxford, forthcoming.

4.2   *Promise and Fulfilment*

This connection, of the transcendent written text and the empirical world that needs to be accommodated in the new worldview, is implemented in the Middle Meccan *sūra*s. The covenant relation between God and man achieved in this stage of development is clearly expressed in particular innovations in the qur'anic lexicon. A telling example is the re-naming of man in the Middle Meccan *sūra*s. Early Meccan texts had entertained a pessimist view of man, often blaming man universally, *al-insān*, for being deficient; slow, sluggish, even a "loser." In Middle Meccan texts, this *topos* recedes into the background; man collectively continues to be mentioned often, no longer as *al-insān* but with a new collective name: *al-ʿālamūn*, "those of the two worlds." The phrase reflects the Hebrew *ribbon ʿolam*, "Lord of the world (including this and the one to come)" and recalls at the same time the oft-used Aramaic *ʿalmin*, the worlds, i.e. equally this world and that beyond. *Rabb al-ʿālamīn* seems to be a calque, built on the Hebrew and Aramaic notions of "the two worlds," to which man is now assigned. The morphological form of *ʿālamīn* should be a *nisba, ʿālamiyyīn* being contracted to *ʿālamīn*, "those that belong to the worlds," a unique lexical embedding of man in the new eschatological worldview.[21]

The awareness of participating in a shared liturgical practice with earlier communities or pious individuals, which was developed in Early Mecca, is now extended into the participation in their historically-rooted covenant status. Text-referentiality starts to play an important role. It comes about in response to the necessity of self-legitimation of the nascent community which arose in its situation of siege. The *sūra*s of the Middle Meccan period in particular attest to the community's attempt to dissociate itself from the Meccan cult center. Instead, it relocates itself in an imagined space, the lands of biblical history, privileged by the divine covenant concluded with Moses. This attachment is achieved through diverse textual strategies. The most striking is a new, increasingly narrative composition of the *sūra*. There is a ubiquitous re-narrating of biblical stories in the later *sūra*s, usually occupying the central part of the composition. Whereas the introduction and the conclusion of the longer *sūra*s deal with topical issues, consoling addresses to the Prophet, polemics, and admonitions, the biblical story at its center has a different status. It takes the listeners away, into a remote time and to remote places pertaining to the world of the Israelites, the *Banū Isrāʾīl*, which they in their situation of inner exile have adopted as their textual homeland. It is not irrelevant to notice that this

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21   Another new term introduced in the Qur'ān that, equally, attests a re-adjustment of the Arabic lexicon to the new worldview, is *dhurriya*, which replaces *banūn*, sons, see www .corpuscoranicum.de → commentary → Middle Meccan *sūra*s → Introduction.

particular position of the biblical narrative within the *sūra* matches the position of the *lectio* or the *qeriʾat Torah* in Christian and Jewish services respectively. Thus, the *sūra* at this stage may have served as a kind of libretto of a complete divine service. It is, therefore, not surprising to find that Scripture as such, the transcendent *kitāb*, is explicitly called upon, at the beginnings and the ends of the Middle Meccan *sūra*s, as the ultimate reference attesting to the truth of the proclaimer's message.

The idea of scriptural remembrance induced a massive expansion of collective consciousness in the later Meccan period. Firstly, the topography of relevant history was extended beyond Arabia to include the homeland of earlier messengers; thus, the Holy Land emerges as a particularly blessed region. At some point during this period, the orientation towards the world of the Israelites with its cultic center, the "furthest sanctuary," the Jerusalem Temple, *al-masjid al-aqṣā*, was implemented on the ritual level as well, with the community adopting the direction of prayer, the *qibla*, towards Jerusalem. This sealed the expansion of the Arabian community's symbolic horizon into the world of the *Banū Isrāʾīl*, the people of Moses.[22] This cultic reform is closely connected to a personal experience of the Prophet Muḥammad, that is, his experience of a dislocation to the sanctuary in Jerusalem. In Q 17:1, Jerusalem functions as the destination of a nocturnal journey, *isrāʾ*, of the Prophet:

> *Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night (*asrā*)*
> *from the Holy Sanctuary to the Further Sanctuary*
> *the precincts of which We have blessed,*
> *that We might show him some of Our signs. He is the All-hearing,*
> *the All-seeing.*

Though the destination is mentioned only obliquely, it is made unambiguous through its reference to the Holy Land, "the precincts of which We have blessed," which was familiar to the community from various biblical narratives. The Jerusalem Temple as the aim of the Prophet's dislocation is no longer the historical place but has been adapted to the Late Antique image of sanctuaries. The Jewish *bayit*, the Temple as the "House of God," is re-embodied as

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22   The institution of the *qibla* is not mentioned explicitly in the Qurʾān; it is, however, most plausibly contextualized with the liturgical reform that occurred with the introduction of *al-Fatiḥa* as the *introitus* of a new verbal service in Middle Mecca; see Neuwirth, Introduction to the Middle Meccan *sūra*s in www.corpuscoranicum.de, and also Angelika Neuwirth, The spiritual meaning of Jerusalem in Islam, in Nitza Rosovsky (ed.), *City of the great king. Jerusalem from David to the present* (Cambridge 1996), 93–116 and 483–95.

a *masjid*, a place where humans perform the ritual prayer. It is constructed as an *analogue* to the Ka'ba, the *masjid al-ḥarām*,[23] and thus virtually integrated into the Arabian space.

In contrast, the Prophet's dislocation into the Land of the Israelites has to be understood in biblical terms, as a mimesis of Moses. As Moses was raised to a high mountain to receive the Tablets,[24] so the Prophet is transferred to a sacred place – though no longer for a mythical encounter with God but for a spiritual arrival at the end point of his community's daily dispatch of prayers. The Moses typology is thus twofold. On the one hand, the Prophet re-stages Moses's translocation to receive a divine message. It is true that this is presented much less dramatically than the biblical *Mattan Torah* scene; the Prophet does not arrive at a trans-worldly place but at a historically significant place where earlier encounters between God and prophets had taken place. The scenario is presented in Late Antique terms, as the image of God, now perceived as strictly transcendent, no longer allows for a face-to-face encounter with a prophet. Sacredness is no longer personified but made accessible in a place, in Jerusalem, the center of the Holy Land. On the other hand, an Exodus typology is undeniable in the phrasing of the *isrā'*-verse, which recalls the divine order given to Moses in Q 20:77, Q 26:52, and Q 44:23: *'asri bi-'ibādī*, "Go out with My servants" (= Perform the Exodus). Though a real and collective exodus is not at stake, rather only a spiritual and individual one, the *isrā'* still resounds with the triumphal feeling of liberation that permeates the exodus report; thus, another Mosaic prerogative has been appropriated by the Prophet Muḥammad.

Is the projection of the biblical exodus onto the individual experience of the Prophet only a re-enactment, or is there a promise, a political perspective involved here? One might claim that there is. Moses' exodus, which is narrated in Mecca several times, appears completely emptied of its political dimension, as there are no Egyptian plagues needed, no catastrophes to endanger the state of Egypt, to move Pharaoh to let the people go. The exodus is depicted in the Qur'ān as the Prophet Moses's personal salvation, which also involves his adherents. However, in contrast to the biblical account, no nation-building is at stake. Rather, the qur'anic verse Q 17:1, equally telling about a personal exodus experience of a prophet, does have a political tint, since it implies a promotion of the local sanctuary *al-masjid al-ḥarām* to the rank of the great sanctuary as

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23   It is so named in a number of Medinan *sūra*s. Meccan references to the Ka'ba entail the designation *bayt*, Q 106:3; Q 52:4, or are presented indirectly, referring to Mecca as *hādha l-balad al-amīn*, Q 95:2.

24   Ex 24:12.

such, the Temple, *al-masjid al-aqṣā*. Seen from this angle, the Prophet's exodus, which is a mimesis of Moses, wins him and his community the attachment to the great symbol of monotheism, Jerusalem, which is regarded as equal with Mecca. At the same time, the translocation, which involves enigmatic divine signs, bestows on the Prophet and his community an additional blessing, one perhaps even matching the bringing down of the Tablets from Mount Horeb by Moses. Typologically, the biblical exodus ("liberation") and the Giving of the Torah ("divine blessing") merge into one experience, the *isrā*'.

Mecca's rise in status achieved here is mirrored in a prayer uttered by Abraham in a somewhat later *sūra*, one which puts Mecca on an equal footing with the "blessed Land" as the destination of the Israelites promised to them in Gen 15. Mecca, with its sanctuary, is predicted to become the birth place of a new monotheist creed. In Q 14 Abraham intercedes for his Arab progeny, asking for their subsistence not in a land flowing with milk and honey but in the barren region of Mecca whose dignity, however, is warranted by a sanctuary and which shall be the point of departure for a monotheist cult:

> *When Abraham said, my Lord. Make this land secure*
> *and turn me and my sons away from serving idols. (…).*
> *Our lord, I have made some of my seed to dwell in a valley where is no sown*
> *land by your Holy House. Our Lord, let them perform the prayer and make*
> *hearts of men yearn towards them, and provide them with fruits, haply they*
> *will be thankful (…)*
> *Praise be to God who has given me though I am old, Ishmael and Isaac;*
> *surely my lord hears the petition.*

Here, the project of an ideologically determined "nation" is clearly recognizable. In view of the real presence of the monotheist community *in situ*, this promise has already come true. Yet this new self-perception of the community as the fulfillers of an Abrahamic plea did not help to dissolve the conflict with their opponents. The community was soon after forced to move to Medina.

4.3 *Mythopoiesis*

The Jews of Medina, the city where the community exiled from Mecca settled, are usually presented as the arch-enemies of the new community.[25] It is not

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25 A.J. Wensinck, *Mohammed en de Juden te Medina*, Leiden 1908, and Jan Bouman, *Der Koran und die Juden: Die Geschichte einer Tragödie*, Darmstadt 1990, rely on Islamic tradition, where the actual doctrinal exchanges play no role. Against that Gordon Newby, *A history of the Jews of Arabia. From ancient times to their eclipse under Islam*, Columbia 1988,

the place here to recount the stages of the development that led to the crisis that tragically ended with the elimination of the Jews from Medina. We need, however, to keep in mind that it was preceded by an extended phase of more peaceful cohabitation – documented in the order of the community – and of an intellectual exchange that can be extracted from the qur'anic text itself. The qur'anic evidence supports the view that the Jews of Medina were significant interlocutors of the community who introduced new knowledge and essential new hermeneutical approaches to biblical texts, at least for a time.

Typology, particularly in its manifestation of a re-enactment, must be assumed to be one of the many principles of exegesis followed by Jewish readers of the Torah no less than it was by their Christian contemporaries. While the promise-fulfilment model that appears to prevail in Christian exegesis is less frequently applied in Jewish contexts, a third and most dramatic manifestation of typology stands out in Rabbinic exegesis: mythopoiesis,[26] the embedding of a given place or event in a mythic "original scene." It is this hermeneutic procedure that we find practiced in the Medinan *sūra*s of the Qur'ān. A particularly telling example is the Medinan revision of the concept of the remote sanctuary, *al-masjid al-aqṣā*, as the symbolic center of monotheism. One of the earliest reforms carried out in Medina was the transfer of the direction of prayer away from Jerusalem to Mecca. This momentous step throws light on a newly induced hermeneutical turn. Why is the Jerusalem *qibla* replaced by that of Mecca? In Medina, in the midst of a Jewish community, the Jerusalem sanctuary that had been cherished as the common center of monotheist believers, appeared in a new light.

It turned out to be no longer the universal *omphalos mundi*, as increasing knowledge of Jewish and Christian tradition changed its image substantially. Jerusalem became, more and more, laden with weighty divine promises concerning the Jewish people alone; it furthermore had, in rabbinic tradition, attracted a foundation history according to which it was built on the very foundations of the altar that Abraham together with Isaac had raised for the sacrifice on Mount Moriah. Against that view, Christians had conveyed to it the new form of a spiritual edifice associated with Golgatha, one which had equally "been erected" by means of a father-son-synergy, this time by God and Christ, the antitypes of Abraham and Isaac. This image of Jerusalem was no longer in keeping with the long time cherished *masjid al-aqṣā*, the

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has discussed relevant discourses that should have occupied both the Jews and the new community.

26   Maren Niehoff, The return of myth in Genesis Rabbah on the Akedah, *Journal of Jewish studies* 46 (1995), 69–87.

universal center of monotheism. Yet both these powerful traditions were obviously built on one and the same typological basis: monotheist sanctuaries need to be of Abrahamic origins and they are owed to a sacrifice offered synergistically by a father and a son. If so, if Abraham mythopoietically had to be considered the founder of both the Temple and the Church, he should also be the founder of the new Temple, the Kaʿba, from the perspective of the same hermeneutics. Abraham had already prayed for the future of Mecca as the center of a new Arab monotheist movement and was closely related to the Arabian space. He was the progenitor of the Arabs and had qualified as the most pious and god-fearing sacrificer in the biblical tradition. Sacrifice could serve as a link: it was Abraham's prerogative, but it was at the same time the central ritual performed during the Meccan pilgrimage. Why not identify that practice as a mimesis of Abraham and moreover as an act of foundation on the part of Abraham? Why should a sacrifice of his not have taken place in Mecca as well, where a sacrifice was still being performed as one of the rituals of the Ḥajj?

The Abrahamic sacrifice, the Akedah, acquired new momentum in the Medinan community. It had already been a topic of a Meccan *sūra*, in a story merely told to exult Abraham's utmost loyalty. Neither the victim's name nor the local setting of the act had mattered. Under the new circumstances in Medina, where the Akedah and the discourse of sacrifice in general possessed paramount significance, the story required reconsideration. To adjust it to the new situation, in which Abraham's sacrifice was known to have a nation-building dimension, important modifications had to make. Let us briefly look at the Meccan text (Q 37) and its Medinan extension, which is easily recognizable from the excessive length of its verse (102).

> *Then we gave him the good tidings of a prudent boy*
> *And when he had reached the age to perform the rite of al-saʿy with him*
>
> *Abraham said, my son, I see in a dream that I shall sacrifice you, consider what do you think?*
> *He said, My father do as you are bidden. You will find me – God willing – one of the steadfast.*
> *When both had surrendered and he flung him upon his brow, we called upon him: Abraham.*
> *You have confirmed the vision. Even so we recompense the good-doers.*
> *This is indeed the manifest trial.*
> *And we ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice*
> *And left for him among the later folk: "Peace be upon Abraham."*

The story without verse 102 matches Gen 18; Abraham is prepared to sacrifice this son but is ultimately spared the tragedy. The appended long verse 102, however, turns the text into an Arab origin myth. According to verse 102, Abraham and his son obviously were on their pilgrimage in Mecca, preparing for the performance of the *saʿy*, the ritual parcours between two small sanctuaries, al-Ṣafā and al-Marwa, a ritual that precedes the rite of sacrifice. It is at his point that the dream vision with the call to sacrifice the son occurs. Abraham – in keeping with rabbinic tradition – asks for the son's consent to be sacrificed, which he obtains. Both father and son prepare for the procedure. But whereas in rabbinic tradition the identity of the son as the patriarch Isaac is of central importance, in the Qurʾān the son remains unnamed in the later version as well. Why? His name is not needed because his identity is known from the foundation myth of the Kaʿba that had meanwhile emerged and is alluded to in the early Medinan *sūra* 2:128. This Kaʿba foundation story builds on the Jewish idea of the father-son synergy of Abraham and Isaac who, by building the altar for the sacrifice, laid the foundation of the later Temple. Accordingly, in the Qurʾān, Abraham, together with his son, lays the foundation of a sanctuary in preparing the sacrifice. But it is no longer the altar on Mount Moriah but the Kaʿba in Mecca which is established, and the son involved in the act is not Isaac, the ancestor of the Jewish people, but Ishmael, the ancestor of the Arabs.

> When Abraham, and Ishmael with him raised up the foundation of the House:
> Our lord receive this (sacrifice) from us. You are the all-hearing, the all-knowing.

The foundations of the Meccan sanctuary, the Kaʿba, are then laid in a manner strikingly analogical to those that Abraham – according to Rabbinic tradition – had laid for the Solomonic Temple. Mecca has thus become a new Jerusalem.

5   Conclusions

As such, while the emergence of the Qurʾān was laden with biblical symbolism it was also no less informed by Late Antique textual politics. The strategies applied were the "common property" of monotheist and even pagan exegetes in the Late Antique milieu. And yet up to now scholars have tended to differentiate between "genuine" biblical lore in the Qurʾān and those qurʾanic stagings of biblical figures that are not known from the Bible, and which are thus classified as legends. This way of grading betrays a Eurocentric theological

bias. Qur'anic stories such as the foundation of the Kaʿba through a sacrifice of Abraham and his son should be read as elaborations or "updates," as it were, of particular biblical texts, ones that follow models of Late Antique exegetical practices well known from rabbinic and ecclesiastical precedents.

It is true that these hermeneutical practices did bring about a significant change in the community's biblically imprinted worldview, which was in effect re-Arabized. The local rituals practiced around Mecca – in view of their mythopoietic relation to the original scene of sacrifice, the Aqedah – could be accepted into the emerging new religion, which earlier on had sidelined sacrifice in favor of verbal service. Through their relation to Abraham's practice, these rituals attained a monotheistic, if not biblical aura that allowed Muslim pilgrims to understand their *ḥajj* as a mimesis of Abraham. The qur'anic stratagem of extending biblical tradition into Arabia, which led to the establishment of Mecca as a new Jerusalem, eventually founded by Abraham, may appear particularly striking. But is it more daring than understanding that the Solomonian Temple was built on the foundation of the altar for Isaac's sacrifice or that the crucifixion of Christ was the *antitypus*, the fulfilment of the Akedah? All these ideas are based on the hermeneutical strategy of mythopoiesis cherished in Late Antiquity.

The community's worldview, however, not only became Arabized. Arabian sacrificial rituals were part and parcel, but ultimately not representative, of the new creed, which is substantially a liturgy-oriented religion. The new identity that emerged in Medina re-fashioned the image of Mecca as the new Jerusalem. That means that not only were Arabian but also Holy Land traditions to be cultivated there. To ensure that transformation, a completely new figure enters the prophetic prosopography of monotheism, the Prophet Muḥammad. He who had been the passive recipient of the divine word in Mecca became empowered to act as a leader and legislator in Medina. However, he no longer belonged to the Abrahamic age of ritual piety, but, as a Late Antique teacher in the vein of Jesus, was committed to the word, to verbal liturgy. His reformist role was the transformation of ancient Arabian ritual into a scriptural religion. In other words, he established a new text-referential perspective of the world, a perspective that his Meccan compatriots had suspected involved magic, an enchanting of the world. This role had already been announced by Abraham:

> Q 2:128
> *Our lord, send among them a messenger, one of them who shall recite to them your signs,*
> *and teach them the Scripture and the Wisdom and purify them;*
> *you are the all-mighty, the all-wise.*

Muḥammad's mission brought about both the biblicization of the Arabian and the Arabization of biblical tradition. To understand this peculiar movement back and forth we have to resort to philology, more precisely to comparative philology, to explore the hermeneutic strategies employed in the Qurʾān. Their striking similarity to particular strategies observable in rabbinic tradition cannot be ignored. We finally need to admit the Qurʾān into the textual and hermeneutical universe of Late Antiquity. We even may feel the need to re-examine the biblical Abraham-and Ishmael-texts and to finally take their intrinsic political dimension more seriously.

Messianism and the Shadow of History
Judaism and Islam in a Time of Uncertainty

Aaron W. Hughes

1 Introduction

Despite the fact that we know next to nothing about the Jews with whom Muḥammad ostensibly interacted, this has not stopped many from making historical pronouncements about them.[1] There exists no material or other archaeological remains that tell us how they lived, no contemporaneous textual evidence of what they believed, and thus little to no idea who they were, let alone how they conceived of Judaism. This historical aporia, however, has not prevented the subsequent projection of a later ethnic and religious normativity onto these "Jews." The transformative result of this Orientalist imaginary further sustains the myth of a monolithic "Judaism" present at the birth of "Islam," nudging it along and providing the prime monotheistic matter for its subsequent genesis. Indicative of this are the comments of Shlomo Dov Goitein (1900–85), the pioneering scholar and interpreter of the documents associated with the Cairo Geniza,[2] who could proclaim, against all the evidence, "that Judaism was a fully developed system at the time when the Arab Muslims made their first conquest."[3]

It is important to note, however, that Goitein inherited a basic narrative scripted by a generation of German Jewish intellectuals intent on showing

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1   This comprises a lengthy genre that goes back at least to Abraham Geiger's *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?*, Bonn 1833, which was translated into English as *Judaism and Islam*, trans. F.M. Young, Madras 1835, repr. New York 1970. More recent iterations include Gordon D. Newby, *A history of the Jews of Arabia. From ancient times to their eclipse under Islam*, Columbia, SC 1988, and, most recently, Haggai Mazuz, *The religious and spiritual life of the Jews of Medina*, Leiden 2014.

2   Shlomo Dov Goitein, *A Mediterranean society. The Jewish communities of the Arab world as portrayed in the documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 6 vols., Berkeley 1967–93.

3   Shlomo Dov Goitein, *Jews and Arabs. Their contact through the ages* (New York 1955[3]), 60. In this he developed the notion of "symbiosis" to describe the relationship between Judaism and Islam, a trope that was subsequently recycled by the likes of Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton 1984), e.g., xi, 77, 191, and Sarah Stroumsa, *Maimonides in his world. Portrait of a Mediterranean thinker* (Princeton 2011), 3–6.

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the universal significance of Judaism. Their goal was nothing less than to demonstrate how Judaism functioned as the bedrock from which Christianity and Islam were hewn.[4] Judaism, it is frequently assumed in this literature, bequeathed its message of unadulterated monotheism to these other religions, and today it can now stand alongside them as a *primus inter pares*.[5] The apologetic as opposed to historical intent of such an utterance, however, should be readily apparent.

Although scholars of Christian origins have begun to show how the emergence of Christianity and Judaism was much more complex than our traditional narrative would have us believe, there has been a surprising reluctance when it comes to "the parting of the ways" between Judaism and Islam in the century or so following the death of Muḥammad.[6] This is not to say that there have not been pioneering works devoted to the study of Islamic origins,[7] only that it is a topic that is surprisingly moribund within the larger context of Jewish studies.[8] Yet, if the field of Jewish studies is unwilling to examine the Arab-Jewish or Judeo-Arabic tribes of Arabia in its historical context, why is it content simply to recycle nineteenth-century tropes that reveal more about the people who coined them than the actual historical record?

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4 See Susannah Heschel, How the Jews invented Jesus and Muhammad. Christianity and Islam in the work of Abraham Geiger, in Theodore M. Vial and Mark A. Hadley (eds.), *Ethical monotheism, past and present. Essays in honor of Wendell S. Dietrich* (Providence, RI 2001), 49–73.

5 Ismar Schorsch, Scholarship in the service of reform, in Ismar Schorsch, *From text to context. The turn to history in modern Judaism* (Hanover 1994), 303–33; more specifically, see Susannah Heschel, *Abraham Heschel and the Jewish Jesus* (Chicago 1998), 50–75; Christian Wiese, *Challenging colonial discourse. Jewish studies and Protestant theology in Wilhelmine Germany*, trans. Barbara Harshav and Christian Wiese (Leiden 2005), 166–81.

6 I think, for example, of the pioneering work of Daniel Boyarin. See, for example, his *Border lines. The partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia 2014; Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish gospels. The story of the Jewish Christ*, New York 2012. More recently, see John G. Gager, *Who made early Christianity? The Jewish lives of the Apostle Paul*, New York 2015.

7 E.g. Patricia Crone and Michael A. Cook, *Hagarism. The making of the Islamic world*, Cambridge 1977; John Wansbrough, *The sectarian milieu. Content and composition of Islamic salvation history*, Oxford 1978; David S. Powers, *Muhammad is not the father of any of your men. The making of the last prophet*, Philadelphia 2009; Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The death of a Prophet. The end of Muhammad's life and the beginnings of Islam*, Philadelphia 2012; Michael Philip Penn, *Envisioning Islam. Syriac Christians and the early Muslim world*, Philadelphia 2015.

8 Though, see Michael E. Pregill, The Hebrew Bible and the Quran. The problem of Jewish "influence" on Islam, *Religion Compass* 1/6 (2007), 643–659; Michael E. Pregill, Isra'iliyyat, myth, and pseudepigraphy. Wahb b. Munabbih and the early Islamic versions of the Fall of Adam and Eve, *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008), 215–84.

Why, for example, is it maintained that the Jews of Arabia were normatively rabbinic and that their religious and ethnic stability was what provided the catalyst for Muḥammad's message? The essentialisms and reifications of this model are both disturbing and historically inaccurate. Not only do we not know who these Arabian Jews were, we do not even know with any greater certainty who the "Muslims" were, since Islam, like Judaism, was underdeveloped at that point. So while Judaism may well have been a "fully developed system" in some places and for some Jews in the sixth century, there is absolutely no evidence that this was the case for those with whom Muḥammad came into contact. Rather than claim that "the influence of Judaism on early Islam must have been very considerable, if not decisive,"[9] my contention is that we need a new paradigm, one that acknowledges and taxonomizes the fluidity of religious and ethnic identity. In what follows I hope to begin this process.

2   The Shadows of History

Unfortunately, however, the dark shadows of history provide us with little assistance. The period emerging after Late Antiquity, from roughly the death of Muḥammad in 632 CE to the death of Saadya Gaon, one of the most important framers of rabbinic Judaism and someone who wrote primarily in Arabic, in 942, are equally obscure. Despite Goitein's earlier confidence in the contours and contents of Arabian Judaism, even he was forced to admit that "the centuries both preceding and following the rise of Islam are the most obscure in Jewish history."[10] This, however, did not stop him or others from projecting later ideas onto this darkness. More often than not this has involved positing a normative rabbinic Judaism, defined by what was going on in the later caliphal center of Baghdad, and then assuming that it somehow existed at the time of Muḥammad and in such a manner that it was either entirely removed from or developed untouched by its immediate Arabo-Islamic environment.[11]

Despite the fact that well over three-quarters of world Jewry lived within Islamic lands until the tenth century, there is no getting around the disconcerting fact that our understanding of Jews during the Late Antique period is minimal at best.[12] Perhaps the one thing that it is possible to say with some

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9   Goitein, *Jews and Arabs*, 60–1.

10   Ibid., 95.

11   See Richard W. Bulliet, *Islam. The view from the edge* (New York 1994), 8.

12   Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew. The problem of symbiosis under early Islam* (Princeton 1995), 18. He derives this percentage from Jane Gerber, Judaism in the

confidence is that Judaism, not unlike Islam, was poorly or under-defined, with many groups – later written off as "heterodox" – exploring different paradigms of leadership and structures of authority.[13] Through later rabbinic and Muslim sources, it is possible to glean the existence of several of these paradigms, which ranged from the highly messianic and apocalyptic to what would eventually become normative. We also learn the names of individuals, groups, and institutions – Isawiyya, Karaites, Exilarchs, Khazars, Geonim – but since the latter carried the day and often treated their ideological enemies using *argumenti ex silentio*,[14] we know very little about them. While this study examines the contours of these groups, it certainly does not seek to provide histories of them. Rather, I use them as discursive sites to reveal a porosity between numerous Jewish and Muslim social groups responding, often in the same way, to the social, religious, and intellectual turmoil brought about by the rapid spread of Islam and the concomitant process of Islamicization.[15]

The cloud only begins to lift gradually upon the approach of the mediaeval period, the so-called "golden age" of Jewish-Muslim relations.[16] This period will witness, for example, rabbinic florescence, the emergence of an interlocking set of Judeo-Arabic cultural forms, and the rise of Jewish philosophical and other sciences that are usually explained away using the default metaphor of "symbiosis."[17] However, often passed over in these more general narratives are the struggles and contestations that went into making rabbinic Judaism

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Middle East and North Africa since 1492, in Mircea Eliade (ed.), *Encyclopedia of religion* (New York-London 1987), 8:157–64, p. 158.

13   See, for example, the comments in Avraham Grossman, *The Babylonian Exilarchate in the Gaonic period* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem 1984), 15–44; also ibid., Aliya in the seventh and eight centuries, *Jerusalem cathedra* 3 (1988), 65–94.

14   Louis H. Feldman, *Jew and Gentile in the Ancient World. Attitudes and interactions from Alexander to Justinian* (Princeton 1993), 35–8.

15   More generally, see the work of Averil Cameron, e.g., her *The Mediterranean world in Late Antiquity. AD 395–700* (London-New York 2012²), 168–90; also Aziz al-Azmeh, *The emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity. Allāh and His people* (Cambridge 2014), 1–46.

16   Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 17–8.

17   On the attempt to tell this story from the texts themselves, if not their immediate historical contexts, see Jacob Neusner, *Judaism. The classical statement. The evidence of the Bavli*, Chicago 1986; Jacob Neusner, *Judaism states its theology. The Talmudic re-presentation*, Atlanta 1993. On the rise of Jewish philosophy and other sciences, especially their interconnectedness to Islamic philosophy, see Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism. A history of Jewish philosophy from biblical times to Franz Rosenzweig*, trans. by David W. Silverman (New York 1964), 53–69; Colette Sirat, *A history of Jewish philosophy in the middle ages* (Cambridge-Paris 1985), 15–56; Raphael Jospe, *Jewish philosophy. Foundations and extensions. Volume 1. General questions and considerations* (Lanham, MD 2008), 5–54.

normative in the first place.[18] It is erroneous to assume that there existed a normative Judaism to which Jews throughout the Mediterranean world assented. These early contestations and struggles not only took place against an Arabo-Muslim backdrop, but also actively employed Arabo-Islamic terms and categories. Even Saadya's halakhic retrenchment, it is important to note, was written in Arabic and used terms and categories inherited from the Muʿtazilis. In effect, he successfully created an "Islamic Judaism." It is necessary to be cautious, then, of assuming that one side of the Jewish-Muslim dyad was somehow more stable than the other or that one somehow derived its monotheistic sustenance from the other.

Influence, and its synonym borrowing, has long plagued the academic study of religion. "Judaism is older than Islam," so the narrative goes, "and therefore it must have influenced it." Instead of such simplicity and monothetism,[19] we need a conceptual framework that is cognizant of the instability of both parts of the phrase "Jewish-Muslim," including perhaps just as importantly the hyphen that links them to one another.[20] If both sides of the dyad "Jewish-Muslim" are under-defined in the Late Antique era and in the period immediately after, why are so many simply content to posit a set of relations based on borrowings or influences?

Key to my analysis here is the towering rabbinic figure of Saadya Gaon (882–942). The conventional narrative transforms Saadya Gaon into the great consolidator of rabbinic authority in the light of numerous struggles with other groups who were then labeled as heterodox.[21] Keeping in mind the sparse nature of eighth-century Gaonic sources, and the problems associated with dating those that we do possess, such a narrative may well be premature if

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18   On the rise of rabbinic Judaism, see, *inter alia*, Jacob Neusner, The history of earlier rabbinic Judaism. Some new approaches, *History of religions* 16 (1977), 216–36; Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The beginnings of Jewishness. Boundaries, varieties, uncertainties* (Berkeley 2001), 198–237; Gabrielle Boccaccini, *Roots of rabbinic Judaism. An intellectual history, from Ezekiel to Daniel* (Grand Rapids, MI 2002), 1–40; Alexei M. Sivertsev, *Households, sects, and the origins of rabbinic Judaism*, Leiden 2005.

19   As a corrective see, for example, J.Z. Smith, Fences and neighbors. Some contours of early Judaism, in J.Z. Smith, *Imagining religion. From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago 1982), 1–18.

20   For an attempt to theorize the "hyphen" from the perspective of Judaism and Christianity, see Jean-François Lyotard and Eberhard Gruber, *The hyphen. Between Judaism and Christianity*, trans. Pascal-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Amherst, NY 1999).

21   For example, Henry Malter, *Saadia Gaon. His life and works* (Philadelphia 1921), 89–134; Salo Wittmeyer Baron, Saadia's communal activities, in *Saadia anniversary volume* (1943), 9–74; and more recently Robert Brody, *Saʿadiyah Gaon*, trans. Betsy Rosenberg (Oxford 2013), chapter 2.

not actually politically motivated as a way to make rabbinic authority catholic under the Babylonian Gaonate.[22]

My argument here is that in the time just prior to Saadya there existed a real diversity of Judaisms vying for authority, but they are all too frequently and neatly obscured by the term "Judaism" in the singular. While rabbinic Judaism will eventually emerge as regnant, in part thanks to Saadya, it is important to be aware of these other groups and, of course, how they were all being forged in the intellectual, social, and religious crucible of early Islam, which was undergoing its own set of related developments and sectarian struggles. Rather than regard Saadya as protecting an already established normativity, I wish instead to step back and argue that his synthesis may well betray an attempt to patch over an inchoateness with a newly imagined normativity, one that was, paradoxically, supplied by Islam.

3   Saadya Gaon

Saʿīd ibn Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī (882–942) was born about a hundred kilometers to the south of modern-day Cairo,[23] and he would go on to distinguish himself as one of the most important rabbinic leaders (*geonim*; sg. *gaon*) associated with the academies of Sura and Pumbedita. These academies were responsible for the codification of the Babylonian Talmud in the sixth century and subsequently for making it authoritative over Jewish communities throughout the Mediterranean. This process of rabbinic legitimation and consolidation, however, did not happen overnight; rather, it represents an end process, the culmination of many ideological struggles and even antagonistic institutions of authority. Saadya was a key figure in this process. The mediaeval Jewish polymath Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1167), for example, refers to him using the rabbinic title "the chief spokesperson in all matters of learning."[24] One of his modern biographers, Henry Malter, writes of him in equally glowing terms, all the while acknowledging that "the period in question is represented in Jewish

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22   On the historiographical problems associated with his period, see Gerson Cohen, The reconstruction of Gaonic history, in Jacob Mann (ed.), *Texts in Jewish history and literature* (New York 1972), 1:xiii–xcvii; see also Simha Assaf, *Tekufat ha-geonim ve-sifrutah*, Jerusalem 1955, and, more recently, Robert Brody, *The Geonim of Babylonia and the shaping of medieval Jewish culture* (New Haven 1998), 3–15.

23   Requisite biographical materials may be found in works mentioned in n. 21, above.

24   On Ibn Ezra as a polymath, see Isadore Twersky and Jay M. Harris (eds.), *Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra. Studies in the writings of a twelfth-century Jewish polymath*, Cambridge, MA 1994.

annals by an almost blank page, and there is but little hope that the page will ever be written upon."[25]

Saadya spent considerable time in Baghdad, the cosmopolitan center of the ʿAbbāsid caliphate and a hotbed of Islamic theological speculation (*kalām*) associated with the Muʿtazilī school of thought. Within this larger context Saadya was among the first important rabbinic figures to write extensively in Arabic, and he is generally considered to be one of the founders of Judeo-Arabic literature, and an important figure in the field that we today problematically define as "Jewish *kalām*."[26] He composed works on biblical and other interpretation,[27] linguistics,[28] and theology,[29] as well as writing a Hebrew-Arabic dictionary known as *Sefer ha-Egron*[30] and translating the Bible into Arabic. For the purposes of the present chapter it is important to note that he was heavily involved, like all *mutakallimūn* ("theologians"), in religious polemics, and he sought to articulate and defend an imagined normativity against the threats of others.[31]

Saadya and the Babylonian Geonim were responsible for leading the great Babylonian Jewish academies and, along with their Palestinian counterparts, represented the main religious and intellectual authority of Jewry. Although tensions certainly existed between the Babylonian and Palestinian Geonim over certain matters such as the calendar, there also existed another institution, the Exilarchate, that vied with the Babylonian Geonim for power at this time.[32] The Exilarch, leader of the exile (*rosh golah*; Ar. *raʾīs jalūt*), was the head

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25 Malter, *Saadia Gaon*, 16.

26 See Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Repercussions of the kalam in Jewish philosophy*, Cambridge, MA 1979. Our modern addition of the religio-ethnic adjective, however, would seem to imply that there is something qualitatively different between general *kalām* and its "Jewish" variant.

27 A selection of his exegetical work is conveniently collected in *Mpirushei Rav Saadya Gaon la-mikra*, Jerusalem 2004; see also his *tafsīr kitāb al-mabādī*, or Commentary to the *Sefer Yetsirah*, in Saadya Gaon, *Sefer Yezirah ʿim perush Rabbeinu Saadya ben Yosef Fayyumi*, ed. and Hebrew trans. Yosef Kafiḥ, Jerusalem 1972.

28 E.g., *Or rishon bi-ḥokhmah ha-lashon. Sefer siḥot lashon ha-ivrim le-Rav Saadya Gaon*, ed. A. Dotan, Jerusalem 1997.

29 E.g., *Kitāb amānāt waʾl-iʿtiqādāt*, ed. S. Landauer, Leiden 1880; trans. Samuel Rosenblatt as *The book of beliefs and opinions*, New Haven 1976.

30 *Ha-Egron. Kitāb ʿusūl al-shʿir al-ʿibrānī*, critical edition with intro. and comm. Nehemya Allony, Jerusalem 1969.

31 A convenient list of his polemical works on the Karaites and others may be found in Malter, *Saadia Gaon. His life and works*, 260–71.

32 See the important study of Brody, *Geonim of Babylonia*, 67–80.

of an institution that had a lengthy history in Babylonian Jewry that far pre-dated the rise of Islam in the area.[33] This position was largely hereditary and based on presumed descent from King David.[34] Under the Muslim caliphs, the institution was primarily responsible for the collection of taxes to be paid to the royal court, wherein the Exilarchs made their home. Interestingly, Exilarchs seem to have played a much larger role in the Muslim literary imagination than did the Geonim.

There existed tensions between the Geonim and the Exilarch in Babylonia despite the fact that the former officially appointed the latter. One Gaon refers to an Exilarch "who cannot control Bible or Talmud or make practical deci-sions but is powerful through money and closeness to the throne."[35] Another feud, with major intellectual consequences to be discussed below, arose when the Geonim overlooked Anan ben David (ca. 715–ca. 795), the oldest son of the recently deceased Exilarch, and instead appointed his younger brother Haninah. Legend has it that when Anan refused to recognize the new Exilarch and instead contested the succession he was thrown into jail, and released only after Abū Ḥanīfa (the founder of the Muslim legal school that bears his name) convinced him to tell the caliph that he would not only not contest the Geonic decision but also actively create his own religion.[36] Those associated with Anan ben David and his textual methods were subsequently called Ananites, the forbears of the Karaites, which offered a completely different paradigm of leadership and, indeed, of Judaism.[37]

Two important features emerge from these Gaonic/Exilarch and Gaonic/Karaite tensions. The first is that just prior to the rise of Saadya it is quite clear that there existed various understandings of Judaism that revolved around

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33   See the study in Avraham Grossman, *The Babylonian Exilarchate in the Gaonic period* (in Hebrew), Jerusalem 1984. I still remain impressed with Israel Friedlander, The Jews of Arabia and the Gaonate, *Jewish quarterly review* 1 (1910–1), 249–52, and ibid., Jewish-Arabic studies, *Jewish quarterly review* 1 (1910–1), 183–215; 2 (1911–2), 481–517; 3 (1912–3), 235–300.

34   W.J. Fishel, Resh Galuta (Ra'is al-Jalut) ba-Sifrut ha-'Aravit, in F.I. Baer et al. (eds.), *Sefer magnes. Qovets meḥqarim me-et anshei ha-universita ha-ivrit* (Jerusalem 1938), 181–7.

35   Daniel Jeremy Silver, *Maimonidean criticism and the Maimonidean controversy, 1180–1240* (Leiden 1965), 61.

36   For an account of the story, see Leon Nemoy, Anan ben David. A re-appraisal of the his-torical data, in Philip Birnbaum (ed.), *Karaite studies* (New York 1971), 309–18.

37   See, for example, Haggai Ben-Shammai, Between Ananites and Karaites. Observations on early Muslim-Jewish sectarianism, *Studies in medieval Jewish-Islamic relations* 1 (1993), 19–31; see also Daniel Frank, *Search scripture well. Karaite exegetes and the origins of the Jewish Bible commentary in the Islamic east* (Leiden 2004), 1–32.

issues of authority, definition of legitimacy, the nature and function of the Oral Torah, and so on. Second, as Wasserstrom duly noted some twenty years ago, within the context of early Islam we witness the creation of "the *only* important Jewish sects after the destruction of the Second Temple."[38]

This is why Saadya's paradigm becomes so important. He makes rabbinic Judaism normative by co-opting many of the intellectual innovations of the Karaites and, presumably, of others. What became rabbinic Judaism, then, was not imposed as normative overnight, but took centuries of contestation with rival groups at the center (e.g. the Karaites), to say nothing of other sectarian movements on the margins (e.g. groups such as the Isawiyya in Persia or the Khazars of Central Asia). This is why it is problematic, if not absurd, to maintain that the Jews of Arabia at the time of Muḥammad were somehow "rabbinic." Moreover, and despite this complexity, our dominant paradigm of orthodoxy-heterodoxy or who is really "Jewish" (e.g., the rabbis) and who is not (e.g., Karaites, the Isawiyya, the Khazars) focuses almost solely on rabbinic Judaism, thereby ignoring these rival Judaisms. It is also worth noting that every single version of Judaism that emerges under early Islam is in some way, shape, or form beholden to Islamic forms, which of course were also in a considerable degree of flux in this period. The burgeoning Islamic Empire, complete with the political volatility engendered by it, provided an instability that promoted numerous responses and, at the same time and perhaps paradoxically, a stability that nurtured the rise and fall of a dynamic if inchoate set of Judaisms.

4 The Isawiyya

The Late Antique period was awash with messianic and apocalyptic speculation,[39] into which the message of Muḥammad undoubtedly tapped and against which it must be situated.[40] As the likes of Friedlander and, more

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38 Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 31.

39 In terms of late antique Christianity, consult the sources found in James Howard-Johnston, *Witnesses to a world crisis. Historians and histories of the Middle East in the seventh century*, Oxford 2011. On the social context behind this, see Glen Warren Bowersock, *Empires in collision in Late Antiquity* (Waltham, MA 2012). For a general overview, see Guy G. Stroumsa, *The making of Abrahamic religions in Late Antiquity* (New York-Oxford 2015), 59–100.

40 Though, as Stroumsa has duly noted, we must also not forget the messianism associated with Manichaean texts, which also date to this period. This, of course, adds another layer to the puzzle and further attests to the need to avoid easy typologies; Guy G. Stroumsa,

recently, Wasserstrom have argued, there was a common semantic matrix from which emerged various groups – Jewish, Muslim, Jewish-Muslim, or Muslim-Jewish – many of which would later be written off as some version of the theme of heterodox pietism.[41] Such groups, as Pines argued, would have existed alongside Jewish-Christian communities in places such as Jerusalem at the time of Muʿāwiya (r. 661–80), the founder of the Umayyad caliphate.[42] Before all these groups were subsequently written off as heterodox, however, it is important to remember that they were mainstream. The messianism that produced Muḥammad and that would undoubtedly have led a large number of Jews, whatever this term might have meant in the early- and mid-seventh century notwithstanding, to accept his apocalyptic message, gave way in later centuries to a variety of Jewish messianic movements that only make sense within the larger context of the sectarianism associated with early Islamic history. To use the words of Averil Cameron, "Islam took shape within a context of extreme religious and cultural tension."[43] To this we must certainly add that so, too, did Judaism.

The Isawiyya's emergence corresponds with the fall of the Umayyad caliphate, the rise of the ʿAbbāsids, and the existence of a plethora of loosely connected and largely under-defined proto-Shīʿa *ghulāt* groups.[44] Pines, for example, argued that Abū ʿĪsā al-Iṣfahānī (late seventh/early eighth century), the leader of this – for lack of a better term – "Jewish sect," was most likely influenced by a combination of Jewish and Christian beliefs and that his movement, the Isawiyya, bore certain family resemblances to other apocalyptic texts such as the *Doctrina Iacobi*, a seventh-century Greek Christian text that records the existence of a prophet in Arabia at the time of the birth of Islam.[45]

Gnostics and Manichaeans in Byzantine Palestine, in Elizabeth A. Livingston (ed.), *Studia Patristica* 18 (Kalamazoo, Mich 1985), 273–8.

41   Friedlander, Jewish-Arabic studies; Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 47–8.

42   Shlomo Pines, Notes on Islam and on Arabic Christianity and Judaeo-Christianity, *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 4 (1985), 135–52.

43   Averil Cameron, The eastern provinces in the seventh century. Hellenism and the emergence of Islam, in Suzanne Saïd (ed.), *Hellēnismos. Queleques jalons pour une histoire de l'identité grecque: Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg. 25–27 octobre, 1989* (Leiden 1991), 287–313.

44   Most recently, see the important study in Mushegh Asatryan, *Cosmology and community in early Shiʿi Islam. The* ghulat *and their literature*, London 2016.

45   See Shlomo Pines, The Jewish Christians of the early centuries of Christianity according to a new source, in *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 2 (13) (Jerusalem 1966), 237–310. On the Jewish-Christian context of early Islam, see Patricia Crone, Jewish Christianity and the Qurʾān, *Journal of Near Eastern studies* 74 (2015),

But, again, note that Pines falls back on the language of "influences" and "borrowing." Moreover, he also wants to make this into an intellectual movement based on the reading of texts, when, if anything, the Isawiyya seem to have been the apocalyptic rebellion of a lower class. My brief analysis here relies on the important discussion of Wasserstrom, who has done more than anyone else to show not only the filiations between the Isawiyya and various sectarian Muslim groups, but also the far-reaching consequences of this group. For Wasserstrom, following the earlier study by Israel Friedlander,[46] the similarities between these *ghulāt* groups, some of whom would be eventually folded into what would emerge as normative Twelver Shīʿism, and the Isawiyya are more than coincidental, and most likely based on real historical interactions. For Wasserstrom,

> The early Muslims did not borrow their Messiah from Judaism, nor was Jewish Messianic imagery lent by a Jew to a Muslim in the sense that a lender lends to a debtor. Rather, Muslims consciously and creatively reimagined the Messiah. These Islamic rereadings, consonant with the decentralized pluralism of the Jewish redeemer myths, never pronounced one image of the Messiah as definitive. There were, of course, no councils of Judaism or Islam to rule on the officially proper Messiah.[47]

With no monolithic or monothetic sense of what or who a Messiah was or should be, Jewish groups could rely upon a prophetic vocabulary supplied by Muslim sectarian groups (some of which would eventually be labeled as "Shīʿī"), just as Muslim groups recycled Jewish motifs without necessarily knowing their origins. Neither, of course, were historians and neither were interested in ascertaining what was authentically "Jewish" or "Muslim." Nor were either interested in saying who had what first or who borrowed from whom. The result is that it is extremely difficult to untangle these messianic threads neatly from one another. What we do know, however, is that Abū ʿĪsā's quasi-political, quasi-religious sectarian creation, the Isawiyya, remained one of the most important sectarian movements in Judaism, along with the

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225–53; Guy G. Stroumsa, Jewish Christianity and Islamic origins, in Behnam Sadeghi et al. (eds.), *Islamic cultures, Islamic contexts. Essays in honor of Patricia Crone* (Leiden 2015), 72–96; Holger Zellentin, *The Qurʾān's legal culture. The* Didascalia Apostolorum *as a point of departure* (Tübingen 2013), 150–3; Emran El-Badawi, *The Qurʾān and the Aramaic gospel traditions* (London-New York 2013), 138.

46   Friedlander, Jewish-Arabic Studies.

47   Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 57.

Karaites (discussed below), until the seventeenth century. According to the Muslim heresiographer al-Shahrastānī (1086–1153), writing much later, Abū ʿĪsā claimed that

> He was a prophet [*nabī*] and a prophetic messenger [*rasūl*] of the awaited Messiah [*al-masīḥ al-muntaẓar*]; that the Messiah has five harbingers [*rusul*] who precede him one after the other … that the Messiah is the best of the children of Adam; that he is of a higher status than the foregoing prophets [*anbiyāʾ*]; and that since he is his own apostle, he is the most excellent of them. He enjoined faith in the Messiah, exalting the mission [*daʿwa*] of the harbinger; he believed that the harbinger is also the Messiah.[48]

It is worth noting that many of the Arabic terms in this paragraph have decidedly proto-Shīʿī valences. Abū ʿĪsā thus combines "Jewish" and "Muslim" messianic vocabularies in such a way that he is comprehensible to other groups on both sides of the Jewish-Muslim hyphen. Rather than say that one "influences" the other, it might be more apposite to imagine them as intimately linked. Again, according to Wasserstrom,

> They could be recognized as Jews by (Rabbanite and Karaite) Jews because they seemed Judaically orthoprax, and could be recognized as believers (by Karaite and Shiʿite) Muslims because they seemed Islamically orthodox. This was, perhaps, an unwieldy if not spurious symmetry.[49]

It is this paradoxical hyphen separating Jew and Muslim that makes groups such as the Isawiyya – and perhaps even other groups that have not yet come down to us – so interesting. Both Muslim and Jew, neither Muslim nor Jew, they occupy the margins of history. They become the groups that give definition to the center while at the same time being subject to further marginalization. So while the Isawiyya will rarely appear in so-called normative histories of Judaism or in classes on Jewish history, at the time they provided a valid socioreligious framework that only in retrospect became labeled as heterodox.

Abū ʿĪsā, for example, claimed to be the last of the five heralds from God announcing the arrival of the Messiah and the end of days.[50] He acknowledged

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48 Ibid., 68.
49 Ibid., 79.
50 Pines, The Jewish Christians of the early centuries of Christianity according to a new source, 237–50; Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 84–8; Stroumsa, *The making of Abrahamic religions in Late Antiquity*, 76–77.

Jesus and Muḥammad as true prophets, but only to their own followers – and here he seems to have been part of the same environment that produced works such as *Doctrina Iacobi* and the *Secrets of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai*, to be discussed shortly, though I do not want to reduce this simply to borrowings or influences. Abū ʿĪsā was not an antinomian and seems to have believed in some notion of Jewish law (*halakhah*). Insofar as it is possible to reconstruct his doctrines from later Muslim heresiographers (he was, after all, ignored by later Jewish sources), he forbade meat, fowl, and wine, and instituted a cycle of ten prayers (which includes the *shimoneh esrei*) in a twenty four-hour cycle.[51] It is interesting to note that the early Karaites made similar pronouncements. Also, at least according to al-Shahrastānī, members of the Isawiyya were allowed to marry rabbinic Jews because they shared a similar commitment to the *halakhah* and holy days.

After his messianic claims, Abū ʿĪsā led some sort of messianic uprising before dying in battle. This, however, was not the end of the Isawiyya. Indeed, according to Wasserstrom, they continued to exist as a discrete Jewish sect for at least another three centuries.[52] They were not, as some later scholars of Jewish-Muslim relations want to make out, a short-lived or anomalous messianic movement.[53] Indeed, they appear frequently in subsequent Muslim literature, especially heresiographies, where they receive more extensive treatment than both the Rabbanites and Karaites. However, as mentioned, one searches contemporaneous rabbinic literature in vain for any mention of the Isawiyya despite the fact that they represented the largest messianic movement between the Bar Kokhba revolt in the second century CE and Shabbetai Zvi in the seventeenth. Though the Isawiyya are frequently left out of the "Jewish" curriculum, the exemplar of rabbinic Judaism, Maimonides, writing in the twelfth century, could still write of Abū ʿĪsā and the Isawiyya that there

> was an exodus of a multitude of Jews, numbering hundreds of thousands from the East beyond Iṣfahan, led by an individual who pretended to be the Messiah. They were accoutered with military equipment and drawn swords, and slew all those that encountered them. According to the information I have received, they reached the vicinity of Baghdad. This happened at the beginning of the reign of the Umayyads.[54]

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51   See the studies of Pines and Wasserstrom in the previous note.

52   Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 89.

53   See, e.g., the comments in Gerson Cohen, Rabbinic Judaism (2nd–18th Centuries), *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed. (Chicago, 1974), 22:416–22.

54   Maimonides, Epistle to Yemen, in Abraham Halkin (trans.), *Epistles of Maimonides. Crisis and leadership* (Philadelphia 1985), 127.

Despite the fact that he mentions the revolt, Maimonides nowhere gives us the name of Abū ʿĪsā. Although Maimonides puts the date of the uprising earlier than al-Shahrastānī does, the messianic forces – on Maimonides' reading – are stopped by the caliph on the outskirts of Baghdad with a group of (normative?) Jewish sages, who ask the leaders of rebellion who their instigator was. They replied, "This man here, one of the descendants of David, whom we know to be pious and virtuous. This man whom we knew to be a leper at night, arose the following morning healthy and sound."[55] The sages subsequently inform Abū ʿĪsā's followers that they are incorrect in their interpretation and that, to them, he possesses none of the marks of the Messiah. The caliph then made them return home and "ordered them to make a special mark on their garments, the writing of the word *cursed*, and to attach one iron bar in the back and one in the front."[56]

Maimonides's retelling of the story neatly encapsulates the tensions between centers and margins in the Jewish world under early Islam. It is a rebellion, too, that neatly foreshadows the ʿAbbāsid revolution – an armed and messianic rebellion based on still inchoate Shīʿī doctrine then developing in the Eastern provinces of the burgeoning Empire.[57] Unlike the ʿAbbāsid revolution, which did succeed in gaining power at the center, Maimonides presents the Isawiyya as ignorant of rabbinic sources – which by the twelfth century are certainly normative – and, when informed of their ignorance, they politely agreed with the rabbis whom they acknowledge to be in the possession of the correct understanding. It is a retroactive story to be sure, one that portrays Jewish sectarian movements as ignorant of rabbinic Judaism and as easily correctible. The situation on the ground, however, was probably much more complex.

We get yet another glimpse of this Jewish-Islamic milieu in the apocalyptic *Secrets of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai*, also composed in the mid-eighth century, apparently in a Persian environment.[58] This work, written at the end of the

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55   Ibid., 128.

56   Ibid., 128.

57   Moshe Sharon, *Black banners from the east. The establishment of the Abbasid state. Incubation of a revolt* (Jerusalem-Leiden 1983), 17–28; Said Amir Arjomand, Abd Allah Ibn al-Muqaffaʾ and the Abbasid revolution, *Religion and society in Islamic Iran during the premodern era* 27 (1994), 9–36.

58   On the work see Moritz Steinschneider, Apocalypsen mit polemischer Tendenz, *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 28 (1874), 627–59; trans. in Bernard Lewis, An apocalyptic vision of Islamic history, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13 (1950), 308–38; Shoemaker, *Death of a prophet*, 28–31. On the role of Jerusalem in early Islam, see Ofer Livne-Kafri, The early Shiʿa and Jerusalem, *Arabica* 48 (2001), 112–20; ibid., Jerusalem in early Islam. The eschatological aspect, *Arabica* 53 (2006), 382–403.

Umayyad caliphate and at the beginning of the ʿAbbāsid one – i.e., a time of increased messianism and apocalypticism – identifies Muḥammad as the fulfillment of Jewish messianic speculation. The work ends with the hope for the restoration of the Temple in Jerusalem and the beginnings of the ʿAbbāsid revolution that will usher in an apocalyptic battle between Israel and Byzantium, followed by the Final Judgment. Near the beginning of the text, Metatron – an individual who figures highly in both Jewish and Islamic angelology[59] – informs Rabbi Shimon that

> because of their oppression of Israel, the Holy One, blessed be He, sends Ishmaelites against those who make war against them in order to save Israel from their hands. Then a crazy man possessed by a spirit arises and speaks lies about the Holy One, blessed be He, and he conquers the land, and there is enmity between them and the sons of Esau.[60]

The *Secrets of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai* is remarkable in the sense that an ostensibly "Jewish" document recycles Muslim apocalyptic speculation, some of which had already, and paradoxically, been recycled from Jewish sources by early Muslims. Again, rather than imagine this as borrowing or influence, we should see it as collective world-making in an environment in which ideas moved freely between porous boundaries. The result is that it is impossible to know with any degree of precision what is "Jewish" and what is "Muslim."

Sectarian groups like the Isawiyya and those responsible for the *Secrets*, if in fact they are different from one another, represent what Wasserstrom calls "a comparatively long-lived reaction to Islamicization."[61] I wish to challenge this thesis and to argue instead that rather than react to Islamicization, such groups were instead caught up in the very processes of Islamicization. The eastern reaches of the growing Islamic empire were a hotbed of messianic fervor and apocalyptic speculation, and in participating in this environment, Jews and Muslims, on the margins, did not differ from one another. Indeed, if anything they seem to have been indistinguishable since they both saw the other as invested in the same apocalyptic drama that focused on Jerusalem and the coming End of Days.

We see this clearly in the *Secrets of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai*, which shares a vocabulary of political uncertainty, messianic revolution, and armed revolt. Many of these motifs find expression in the *ghulāt* narratives that revolve

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59   See Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 181–205.
60   Lewis, Apocalyptic Vision, 313.
61   Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 89.

around the Shīʿī Mahdī-figure. Again, this was not a conscious borrowing in the sense that no one cared about or even knew who had what first. It was the case of a well-worn stock of themes, vocabularies, and motifs crossing porous boundaries. If the Muslim become part of the messianic redemption of Jews in the Holy Land,[62] not infrequently Jews are cast as the enemies of Islam in the cataclysmic upheavals associated with End of Days (e.g., the figure of the Dajjāl or the anti-Messiah).[63] Alongside such prophecies, there also exist those volumes like the *Secrets of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai* that portray Muslims as part of the larger story of the deliverance of the Jews, just as we possess Shīʿī messianic topoi that link the Mahdī as emerging from the House of ʿAlī, itself imagined as related to the House of Aaron.[64] Groups on each side of the imaginary hyphen thus seem to be using those on the other for their own purposes and ultimately their own self-definition.

5   The Karaites

The Karaites were another group that emerged in the pietistic and messianic environment associated with the eighth century. While this is certainly not the place to retell their story and historical development, I mention them because of their genesis within the aforementioned sectarian environment.[65] Karaism represents yet another response to Islam. If groups like the Isawiyya represented a messianic response to the social uncertainty associated with the spread of Islam,[66] the Karaite response was to ground authority in the writ-

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62   Shoemaker, *Death of a prophet*, 248–58.

63   See, for example, Suliman Bashear, Apocalyptic and other materials in early Muslim-Byzantine wars. A review of Arabic sources, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1–2 (1991), 173–207; David Cook, *Studies in Muslim apocalyptic* (Princeton, NJ 2002), 92–122; David Cook, *Contemporary Muslim apocalyptic literature* (Syracuse 2005), 1–12.

64   On the latter, see Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew*, 57.

65   Relevant literature on the Karaites include Leon Nemoy, *Karaite anthology. Excerpts from the early literature*, New Haven 1980; Meira Polliack, *The Karaite tradition of Arabic Bible translation. A linguistic and exegetical study of Karaite translations of the Pentateuch from the tenth and eleventh centuries CE*, Leiden 1997; Meira Polliack (ed.), *Karaite Judaism. A guide to its history and literary sources*, Leiden 2003; Fred Astren, *Karaite Judaism and historical understanding* (Columbia, SC 2004); Daniel Frank, *Search scripture well*; James T. Robinson, *The Arabic translation and commentary of Yefet Ben ʿEli the Karaite on the book of Joshua*, Leiden 2014.

66   It is important not to ignore the messianic impulse of the Karaites, however, who referred to themselves as the "mourners of Zion." In this regard, see Astren, *Karaite Judaism and historical understanding*, 65–100; Yoram Erder, The negation of the exile in the Messianic

ten as opposed to the oral Torah. While Anan ben David, whom we encountered earlier, is usually credited as the founder of this sectarian movement, it might be more apposite to refer to him, as Ben-Shammai notes, as the founder of a rival legal school (Ar. *madhab*) to the rabbis.[67] Within this context, it is worth noting that this was also the time of the codification of the four major legal schools in Islam (the Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī, and Ḥanbalī *madhab*s).[68] Regardless, it seems that many of Anan's immediate followers, the so-called Ananites, envisaged him as creating a new sect.

The Karaites seem to have emerged at the same time as Anan, either as an offshoot of the Ananites or as an independent group. Many of these Karaites, writing in the Islamic East, sought to create a rational and systematic approach to the Bible. In so doing, they drew upon genres developed in early Islamic circles – such as grammars, dictionaries, theological *summae*, and scriptural commentaries – and applied them to Judaism. Salo Wittmeyer Baron, aware of this, nevertheless warned against a theory of "pan-Karaitism" that was prevalent in nineteenth century scholarship. This "pan-Karaite vein," as he called it, was based on the mythology that "the rise of Karaism shook the Jewish community to its foundation, and that the great danger of a complete breakdown was averted only by the intervention of the militant and superlatively gifted Saadiah Gaon."[69] He continues

> Before long all the revolutionary discoveries of that period in Hebrew philology, Bible exegesis, and philosophy were ascribed to Karaites or, at best, to Rabbanites reacting to the rise of the new sect. These exaggerations of literary history have, as we shall see, been effectively disproved by more recent painstaking research, which, at times, went to the opposite extreme of denying even some indubitable pioneering merits of Karaite authors.[70]

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doctrine of the Karaite mourners of Zion, *Hebrew Union College annual* 68 (1997), 109–40; Daniel Frank, The *Shoshanim* of tenth-century Jerusalem. Karaite exegesis, prayer, and communal identity, in Daniel Frank (ed.), *The Jews of medieval Islam. Community, society, and identity* (Leiden 1995), 199–245.

67   Haggai Ben-Shammai, The Karaite controversy. Scripture and tradition in early Karaism, in Bernard Lewis and Friedrich Niewöhner (eds.), *Religionsgespräche im Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden 1992), 11–26, p. 20.

68   See Christopher Melchert, *The formation of Sunni schools of law, 9th–10th centuries C.E.*, Leiden 1997.

69   Salo W. Baron, *A social and religious history of the Jews* (New York-Philadelphia 1952–83²), 5:275.

70   Ibid., 5:275.

While Baron sought to minimize the influence of the Karaites, it is no exaggeration to say that their literary genres and their rationalist program – both derived largely from Islamic sources – changed the shape of rabbinic Judaism. According to Rina Drory, for example, many of these new genres were ones that a disproportionate number of Karaite authors used in the tenth-century.[71] One of the most important of these, as Daniel Frank has shown, was the Bible commentary,[72] a genre that would go on to define Rabbanism in later centuries.

6   Conclusions

By the time we reach Saadya Gaon, who is often constructed as the first Jewish philosopher and the figure who begins the era of mediaeval florescence, we witness a host of rival Judaisms, all of which are indebted in some way, shape, or form to Islam. These include the Isawiyya in Persia, the Khazars in Central Asia, the Karaites scattered throughout the regions of Islam but with an epicenter in the Land of Israel, and the Exilarchs entrenched in the caliphal court. All of these Jewish groups – some powerful, some powerless; some apocalyptic and messianic, others less so – took shape against the backdrop of Islam. It is important to remember, however, that this was not the Islam of later centuries. Instead, we have various Muslim groups – many of which are phenomenologically identical to the aforementioned Jewish groups and with whom they share a great number of family resemblances – that sought to define their own legitimacy by reconstituting Islamic authority. Some of these groups sought legitimacy in the House of ʿAlī, as a direct descendent of the Prophet, only parts of which that would later coalesce as Twelver Shīʿism; others sought it in the customs (*sunna*) and the community (*jamāʿa*), some of which would eventually emerge as so-called normative Sunnī Islam.

But none of this was clear in the period examined in the context of this study. The end of Late Antiquity signals, for both Jews and Muslims – be it in the caliphal center of Baghdad or in the furthest reaches of the burgeoning Empire – a sense of flux and motion. Sectarian movements in each tradition seem to have fed off one another as they simultaneously shared interreligious systems of meanings against a broader backdrop of political and social uncertainty. There is no getting around the fact that the history of Muslims and Islams, of Jews and Judaisms, in the first centuries after the death of Muḥammad,

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71   Rina Drory, The function of Karaite literature in the evolution of tenth-century Jewish literature (in Hebrew), *Dappim le Mehqar be-Sifrut* 9 (1994), 101–10.

72   Frank, *Search scripture well*, 257.

is covered in darkness. A paradigm that assumes two monolithic entities –
"Islam" and "Judaism" – that interact occasionally with one another cannot
account for the relevant data. Instead of a model predicated on symbiosis and
that implies discrete and distinct "species" interacting with one another, I pre-
fer a model that collapses such borders and instead emphasizes shared nar-
ratives of collective world-making. We thus need a new paradigm, one that
can account for the pluralism of voices and the porosity of borders between
these groups.

CHAPTER 9

Some Reflections on Borrowing, Influence, and the Entwining of Jewish and Islamic Traditions; or, What an Image of a Calf Might Do

Michael E. Pregill

I am extremely gratified to be able to contribute to this volume in honor of Andrew Rippin, as there are few scholars who have exerted as much of an impact on my own work and ideas as he has. When I entered graduate school some fifteen years ago Andrew's impressive body of publications on *tafsīr* constituted my introduction to the discipline at a time when it was not nearly as robust as it is today. His surveys of the field, his edited volumes, and his discussions of the work of Wansbrough remain invaluable for the clarity with which they show us what has already been accomplished, what is problematic about older approaches to the genre, and what work still remains to be done.[1] His magisterial treatment of the ubiquitous commentary misleadingly entitled *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* vividly demonstrates the need to approach texts and traditions of the *tafsīr* genre with a keen appreciation for the symbolic function of attribution, both as an authorizing device and as a means of shaping collective memory.[2] My own articles on the lost *tafsīr* of al-Kalbī and the corpus of

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1 Andrew Rippin has produced an invaluable body of work of a propaedeutic sort on the genre of *tafsīr*, which, when viewed in retrospect, allows us to see clearly the massive advances in the field over the last decades. See, e.g., The present status of *tafsīr* studies, *Muslim World* 72 (1982), 224–38; Literary analysis of *Qurʾān, tafsīr*, and *sīra*. The methodologies of John Wansbrough, in Richard C. Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam in religious studies* (Tuscon, AZ 1985), 151–63, 227–32; (ed.) *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān*, Oxford 1988; Studying early *tafsīr* texts, *Der Islam* 72 (1995), 310–23; Quranic studies, Part IV. Some methodological notes, *Method and theory in the study of religion* 9 (1997), 39–46; Tafsīr, *EI2*; (ed.) *The Qurʾān. Formative interpretation*, Aldershot 1999; foreword, translations, and annotations to John Wansbrough, *Quranic studies. Sources and methods of scriptural interpretation*, Amherst, NY 2004²; (ed.), *The Blackwell companion to the Qurʾān*, Oxford 2006; Tafsir, *Oxford bibliographies online research guide* (2011).

2 Andrew Rippin, *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* and criteria for dating early *tafsīr* texts, *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 18 (1994), 38–83. This article should be read in the context of a number of other studies Andrew published in the 1980s and 1990s that address the problem of extant texts implausibly attributed to major figures of the early tradition on the one hand, and the

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traditions attributed to Wahb b. Munabbih would have been impossible to conceive without Andrew's pioneering work.[3]

Today, *tafsīr* studies has clearly emerged as a field of inquiry distinct from the study of the Qurʾān, and it is hard to believe that this could have happened without Andrew's contributions. His various discussions of specific qurʾanic topoi and, especially, his work on the subgenre of *asbāb al-nuzūl* offer compelling evidence of why it is so crucial for scholars to recognize that there is far more going on in *tafsīr* than first meets the eye.[4] Along with his contemporaries Patricia Crone and Gerald Hawting, Andrew has for decades been a consistent (and insistent) voice for the necessity of distinguishing the Qurʾān's meaning in the originating contexts of Late Antiquity and the prophetic period – what we are increasingly comfortable calling an historical-critical approach to the text – from the massive edifice of almost 1,400 years of Muslim exegesis.

The idea of studying the Qurʾān on its own terms has now gained considerable traction in Anglo-American and European academic circles, to a degree unknown – and perhaps unforeseen – when Andrew and a handful of his peers began publishing in this vein some forty years ago.[5] However, in Andrew's work in particular, this perspective is constantly tempered by a complementary insistence on understanding *tafsīr* on its own terms as well – that is, with an appreciation for the way exegesis functions as an arena in which Muslim beliefs, behavioral norms, and values are expressed and

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subgenre of *tafsīr* works of a specifically lexical and periphrastic nature on the other; cf. Ibn ʿAbbās's *al-Lughāt fīʾl-Qurʾān, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44 (1981), 15–25; the short appendix Ibn ʿAbbās's *Gharīb al-Qurʾān, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 46 (1983), 332–3; al-Zuhrī, *Naskh al-Qurʾān* and the problem of early *tafsīr* texts, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 47 (1984), 22–43; and Lexicographical texts and the Qurʾān, in *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān*, 158–74.

3   Michael E. Pregill, Methodologies for the dating of exegetical works and traditions. Can the lost *tafsīr* of Kalbī be recovered from *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* (also known as *al-Wāḍiḥ*)?, in Karen Bauer (ed.), *Aims, methods and contexts of qurʾanic exegesis (2nd/8th–9th/15th c.)* (Oxford 2013), 393–453; idem, *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, myth, and pseudepigraphy. Wahb b. Munabbih and the early Islamic versions of the fall of Adam and Eve, *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008), 215–84.

4   See, e.g., Andrew Rippin: The function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* in qurʾanic exegesis, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 51 (1988), 1–20, which serves most directly to address a question raised by Wansbrough, viz., whether this material primarily has a legal ("halakhic") or narrative ("haggadic") function. The historiographical implications of Andrew's demonstration of the exegetical function of *asbāb al-nuzūl* are difficult to overlook, however.

5   On the current renaissance in critical studies of the Qurʾān, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, Introduction. The golden age of qurʾanic studies?, in Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.), *New perspectives on the Qurʾān. The Qurʾān in its historical context 2* (Abingdon, UK 2011), 1–21.

shaped, in stark contrast to an historical-critical approach to the Qur'ān that discards traditional exegesis as an impediment to getting at the "original" meaning of the text.

Andrew's work in qur'anic studies has not been as controversial as that of some others who have been dubbed "revisionists," though it has frequently been just as subversive. This is due, I think, to the careful, subtle, and non-polemical way in which he poses his arguments. He has not shied from asserting that traditional Muslim accounts of the Qur'ān's genesis are primarily hagiographical, reflecting the value system and conceptions of the mature Islamic tradition. But in his work, the point that *tafsīr* reflects not the historical, intrinsic, or "original" meaning of the Qur'ān is always tempered by the complementary point that it represents not an obfuscation, or a doctrinal imposition, or a mendacious fabrication, but rather a dynamic, creative attempt on the part of Muslim interpreters to make the Qur'ān comprehensible and vital in their particular time and place – that is, to render it into *scripture*, a living touchstone of meaning, and not just a collection of texts of antiquarian interest. Given his persistent emphasis on distinguishing Qur'ān from *tafsīr*, his importance in encouraging the emergence of both qur'anic studies and *tafsīr* studies as separate but complementary fields, and his direct impact on my own work, it seems wholly appropriate to dedicate the following reflections on the phenomenon of influence to him.

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Direct, face-to-face communication of ideas, especially through the transmission of oral or written texts, is the most obvious way knowledge passes from one individual, culture, or community to another. At least, it is the easiest for us to imagine, especially in a world of instant connectivity, when communication via the spoken or written word can occur almost instantaneously, defying all limitations of time and space, and practically any form of expression can be readily archived, broadcast, and given a limitless shelf-life. But this is also perhaps the least sophisticated way of conceiving of "influence," one party simply passively deriving information from another, or receiving and duplicating what the other has written or said, with the borrower then indebted to the original source, and both playing a clearly delineated role in what is ultimately a transactive rather than interactive relationship.

This conception of how cross-cultural communication works, privileging a rather flat and mechanistic idea of influence driven by a direct and one-dimensional process of imitation and borrowing, has long haunted our

imaginings of the origins and development of Islam.[6] This is first and foremost due to the titanic impact of the work of Abraham Geiger, who is justifiably credited with both initiating the modern discipline of qur'anic studies in the West in the first half of the nineteenth century and helping to foster a more objective and less overtly polemical approach to the life of Muḥammad.[7] Although Geiger sought to avoid the obvious biases operative in previous European scholarship on the Qur'ān and the Prophet, his approach to both centered on a conception of the former primarily as a pastiche of biblical and rabbinic traditions, and the latter as profoundly indebted to Jewish informants with whom he had direct and prolonged contact.[8]

In Geiger's view, Muḥammad's borrowing was initially motivated by his desire to appeal to the Jews of the Ḥijāz, who were in his estimation a 'learned people', in distinction to the Prophet's pagan Arab contemporaries, who were submerged in the state of ignorance that the Qur'ān calls *jāhiliyya*.[9] Geiger could not imagine any other possible source for the Qur'ān's extensive references to eschatology, cosmology, and the prophetic and patriarchal history of Israel than the biblical and midrashic traditions; nor could he imagine any other audience for Muḥammad's appropriations and adaptations of those traditions than the Jews he sought to woo to his cause, their recognition of his authenticity serving to validate his claims to prophecy.[10] Even after his schism with the Jewish tribes of Medina with whom he was initially allied, Muḥammad continued to tap into the rich vein of material his informants made available

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6   For a provocative attempt to excavate some of the theoretical underpinnings of ideas of "influence" in the study of Islam, see Steven Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew. The problem of symbiosis under early Islam*, Princeton, NJ 1995.

7   Geiger's 1832 Bonn thesis, *Was hat Mohamed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen*, has long been available in English as *Judaism and Islám*, trans F.M. Young, Vepery 1898.

8   See the summary of Geiger and his context in my The Hebrew Bible and the Quran. The problem of the Jewish "Influence" on Islam, *Religion Compass* 1 (2007), 643–59.

9   Cf. Q 5:50; 33:33; 48:26.

10   In reality, this is not entirely true, for Geiger does briefly acknowledge the fact that a tradition in the Qur'ān perceived as a borrowing from Judaism can only be securely identified as such if it is disqualified as a borrowing from Christianity – which implies, of course, that such might actually be the case. However, he dismisses such a broader comparative exercise as beyond the scope of his work (*Judaism and Islám*, 29–30). This points to a larger problem, which is that because his expertise was limited to ancient Judaism, there may be allusions to and borrowings of Christian tradition in the Qur'ān he was simply not equipped to recognize. Had he been trained in and conversant with the literature of Eastern Christianity, Geiger's work would likely have been quite different, as would the contours of the discipline of qur'anic studies in the West subsequently inspired by the resulting thesis.

to him one way or another – through direct consultation, by observing their practices and listening to their discourse, or even by assimilating and reversing their witty rejoinders to his preaching. That is, even their learned attacks on his claims became the basis of new revelations – influence exerted through polemic, reshaped through appropriation of and response to negative assertions about Muḥammad's ministry and message, rearticulated as what is now commonly called the counter-discourse of the Qurʾān.[11]

It has been almost two hundred years since Geiger's pioneering work in the field. Many scholars who came after him refined his analysis, seeking to introduce new philological or historical rigor into the quest for the sources of the Qurʾān, but they commonly maintained his basic thesis, namely that Muḥammad produced the Qurʾān by extensively borrowing from Jews, and thus that Islam was profoundly indebted to Judaism from its very foundation. The development of this genre of scholarship over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries often reflects changing political circumstances, as well as authors' particular concern to demonstrate the inferiority of Islam and the superiority of the Bible, Judaism, or Christianity – often abandoning the eirenic tone that made Geiger's work so progressive for its time.[12] A small minority of scholars, especially Tor Andræ, reacted against Geiger's approach by seeking to shift the emphasis from rabbinic Jewish to Eastern Christian sources – realigning the vectors of influence, but hardly altering the basic presuppositions.[13]

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11   A phenomenon now explored at length in Mehdi Azaiez, *Le contre-discourse coranique*, Berlin 2015.

12   Works of this sort have been produced for the better part of a century and a half; some major milestones of the genre across the 20th century include Gustav Weil, *Biblische Legenden der Muselmänner*, Frankfurt 1845, English trans. *The Bible, the Koran, and the Talmud*, London 1846; William St. Clair Tisdall, *The original sources of the Qurʾân*, London 1905; Charles Cutler Torrey, *The Jewish foundation of Islam*, New York 1933; Denise Masson, *Le Coran et la révélation judéo-chrétienne*, 2 vols., Paris 1958; Jacques Jomier, *Bible et Coran*, Paris 1959; and Katsh, *Judaism in Islām. Biblical and Talmudic backgrounds of the Koran and its commentaries, suras II and III* (New York 1954), reprinted as *Judaism and the Koran*, New York 1962. The most current adumbrations of this approach are Israeli: thus André C. Zaoui, *The Jewish sources of the Qurʾān* [Heb.], Jerusalem 1989; Bat-Sheva Garsiel, *Scripture, Midrash, and Qurʾān. An intertextual investigation into shared literary materials* [Heb.], Tel Aviv 2006. Recently, Haggai Mazuz has revived the attempt to determine the social and religious character of the Jews of Medina by identifying supposedly borrowed traditions in the Qurʾān and correlating them with rabbinic materials, essentially reverse-engineering an image of Muḥammad's Jewish contemporaries: *The religious and spiritual life of the Jews of Medina*, Leiden 2014, and see my comments in *Review of qurʾanic research* 2/2 (2016).

13   See Tor Andræ, *Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum*, Uppsala 1926, and *Mohamed. Sein Leben und seine Glaube*, Göttingen 1932; the latter was published in

While the exploration of Syriac Christian precursors to the Qurʾān and early Islam has recently exploded in popularity and become quite productive for advancing our sense of their literary, cultural, and religious contexts, few of these studies explicitly address the basic mechanism of influence that long informed scholarship on Islamic origins.[14] We have come to a point when it is instead simply more politic to dodge the question. That is, while Geiger and many of his followers took for granted a direct, face-to-face transmission of knowledge to Muḥammad from his informants, today scholars avoid making such assertions directly, for which we may be grateful. But few are willing to speculate as to how exactly precursor traditions – the oral or written corpora that illuminate the literary horizons of the Qurʾān and its audience – relate to the Qurʾān, or how knowledge of contemporary Jewish and Christian lore came to be communicated to the author or authors who produced the Muslim scripture. Whether they emphasize Jewish or Christian parallels to the Qurʾān, or rather remain completely agnostic about the communal orientation and probable origins of the proto-Islamic movement in the prophetic period, scholars today have simply abandoned the question of *how* – how the currents of Late Antique thought and religiosity that appear to have left a significant deposit in the Qurʾān flowed into Arabia, and under what circumstances.

Two factors are likely to be at play here; curiously, they seem to stem from completely different imperatives. Both are no doubt familiar to most readers of this volume (especially those conversant with the work of the scholar whom it honors). First, at least to some, the revisionist critique of the traditional sources available for the study of Islamic origins that emerged in the 1970s introduced an insurmountable degree of skepticism regarding our knowledge of the prophetic period; barring the discovery of new evidence, almost any attempt to write a positivist history of the beginnings of Muḥammad's movement, the life of the Prophet, or the origins of the Qurʾān now seems hopelessly suspect.[15] Second, the significant demographic changes in scholarship

English as *Mohammed, the man and his faith*, trans. Theophil Menzel, New York 1936. Despite the careful and sympathetic tone of these studies, Andræ's contemporary Johann Fück criticized his reliance on the language of influence and psychological determinism, anticipating much later critiques of such an approach; see his Die Originalität des arabischen Propheten, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 90 (1936), 509–25, published in English as The originality of the Arabian prophet, in Merlin Swartz (ed. and trans.), *Studies on Islam* (Oxford 1981), 86–98.

14   For an overview of recent studies exploring Syriac subtexts in the Qurʾān and their implications, see Emran El-Badawi, The impact of Aramaic (especially Syriac) on the Qurʾān, *Religion Compass* 8 (2014), 220–8.

15   Harald Motzki, Alternative accounts of the Qurʾān's formation, in Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to the Qurʾān* (Cambridge 2006), 59–75 offers a concise

in both Anglophone and European university cultures, particularly the influx of Muslim students and scholars as full participants in a scholarly world from which they were formerly largely excluded, has encouraged a countervailing sympathy for the conventional account of Islam's origins, at least in its broad contours. This sometimes entails aversion to discussions of the possible literary influences on the Qurʾān – to say nothing of the question of authorship.[16]

In short, although such an approach to the Qurʾān was once widespread in Western scholarship, explicit discussions of Muḥammad's role as the author of the Qurʾān, responding directly to the lore and learning of his Jewish (and/or Christian) contemporaries, are now completely unfashionable in the Western academy, among both revisionists and those opposed to revisionism alike. However, a new consensus regarding alternative ways of imagining and talking about the human agencies behind the creation and assemblage of the qurʾanic corpus as we have it today has simply not emerged. Accounts such as Andræ's description of Muḥammad imitating the prayer, vigils, and fasting practiced by Christian monks he saw on caravan journeys, or St. Clair Tisdall's ridiculing the Prophet for garbling the biblical stories he heard from the rabbis of Medina, now strike us as hopelessly retrograde and politically objectionable. Thankfully, few authors today would describe the formation of the Qurʾān in such a crude way; to do so seems irresponsible, if not blatantly reductionist.

The fact remains, however, that *someone* must have written the Qurʾān; we simply do not know who, or where they got their information, or how old the contents of the Qurʾān are, or where they came from. But as our understanding of the likely literary parallels to qurʾanic material continues to grow, scholars seem by and large helpless to articulate a sophisticated model for the actual development of the qurʾanic corpus, in stark contrast to the relative coherence of theories of the emergence of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament (although these remain perennially contested). The *textus receptus* of the Qurʾān must have had a pre-history, but we simply do not know anything

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overview of revisionist approaches as they have impacted the study of the Qurʾān, though his treatment is now out of date given the surge in activity in this field of research over the last decade.

16   I am not implying that a "closing of the Muslim mind" has stifled scholarly inquiry, as is sometimes alleged, but rather that the inclusion of Muslim voices in academic discourse has led to increasing recognition of the questionable motivations and political investments that have often impelled Euro-American perspectives on the origins of the Qurʾān. The new *Study Quran* edited by a team of scholars headed by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, New York 2015, represents an intriguing attempt to cultivate an academic approach to the Qurʾān anchored in the formidable edifice of traditional Muslim scholarship, a tradition that has often been blithely discarded wholesale by revisionists.

about it – though we may be quite certain that the picture is far more complicated than that which prevailed for a century and a half, when scholars commonly imagined Muḥammad simply repeating (and often distorting) what the Arabian Jewish rabbis or itinerant Christian monks who were his teachers and interlocutors taught him.

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Another area in which the question of models and mechanisms of influence comes to the fore is that of the so-called *Isrāʾīliyyāt*. Muslim tradition steadfastly denies the possibility of Jewish influence on the Qurʾān – precisely the phenomenon that Geiger placed at the heart of research into Islam's origins. However, the tradition does contain what has seemed to many observers to be direct evidence of a wholesale transfer of knowledge into Islam from Judaism via Jewish informants, converts, or, somewhat later, Muslim antiquarians who collected the lore of *Ahl al-kitāb* in the post-prophetic period. A significant body of *ḥadīth* and *akhbār* seems to testify to the role played by figures such as Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, ʿAbdallāh b. Salām, and Wahb b. Munabbih in channeling *kitābī* materials into Islam, first through their disciples and followers, and then through later generations of traditionists, exegetes, and historians who deployed them to comment on the Qurʾān, relate events from pre-Islamic history, illuminate juristic problems, or for a host of other purposes.

Here, too, a basic idea of direct, face-to-face transmission of knowledge prevails in most accounts of the dissemination of this material. The evolution of Muslim attitudes to the traditions of *Ahl al-kitāb* has been much discussed. Some early Muslims were clearly ambivalent about it, but while some statements of suspicion and distrust survive from the early period, there was evidently an equal amount of interest in encouraging the collection of this lore, expressed most famously in a prophetic *ḥadīth* authorizing the practice: "relate traditions from Banū Isrāʾīl, for there is no harm in it" (*ḥaddithū ʿan banī isrāʾīla wa-la ḥaraja*) – as long as said traditions are consonant with the Qurʾān and the Prophet's own teachings, at any rate.[17]

This early acceptance of "borrowing" from *kitābī*s stands in stark contrast to the open hostility with which later scholars confronted the phenomenon. The advent of an abiding concern to model a pure Islam based exclusively on the Qurʾān and the precedents set during the golden age of the Prophet and his successors, eventually known as Salafism, encouraged the denunciation of

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17   M.J. Kister, *Ḥaddithū ʿan banī isrāʾīla wa-lā ḥaraja*. A study of an early tradition, *Israel Oriental Studies* 2 (1972), 215–39.

any kind of "foreign" influences in Islam. Unsurprisingly, this critique of the received tradition as tainted by incursions from the lore of *Ahl al-kitāb* often accompanies an excessive concern with social and religious boundaries. That is, many of the critics of what came to be called *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, the lore of Israel (broadly defined) that had infiltrated the received tradition, have also tended to be acutely concerned with keeping various forms of social and cultural contamination at bay, whether coming from Jews, Christians, sectarians, or heretics. This is as true of medieval opponents of the *Isrāʾīliyyāt* like Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr as it is of the modern ideologues who took up this polemic, sharpened in the modern era by tensions surrounding colonialism, confrontations with Western powers, and the Arab-Israeli conflict.[18]

While earlier Western scholarship on *Isrāʾīliyyāt* took the description of this material and its origins drawn from mediaeval Muslim sources largely at face value, in the last two decades scholars have come to recognize that *Isrāʾīliyyāt* is fundamentally an ideological construct rather than an historical phenomenon *per se*. The polemic against *Isrāʾīliyyāt* seeks to establish a clear and unassailable boundary between what is original and authentic in Islam from what is foreign and unreliable, exploiting an image of Jews in particular as agents of subversion and corruption. That we are here talking about ideology and not a properly historical phenomenon is readily established: not everything in the tradition decried as *Isrāʾīliyyāt* is of demonstrable Jewish origin, and not everything in the tradition of demonstrable Jewish origin is decried as *Isrāʾīliyyāt*. That is, the term is deployed inconsistently, evaluated on the basis of highly questionable criteria, for conspicuously political ends. In short, the emperor has no clothes: there is no such thing as *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, at least as conventionally understood, and contemporary scholars who seek to employ it for objective textual analysis have mistaken an ideological tool, a discourse about authority cloaked in claims about authenticity, for a neutral historical category.[19]

Thus, the attribution of transmission of originally (or supposedly originally) Jewish, Christian, and biblical traditions – the sort of material inconsistently

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18   On this, see Ronald L. Nettler, Early Islam, modern Islam and Judaism. The *Isrāʾīliyyāt* in modern Islamic thought, in Ronald L. Nettler and Suha Taji-Farouki (eds.), *Muslim-Jewish encounters. Intellectual traditions and modern politics* (New York 1998), 1–14.

19   That is, the claim of a corrosive Jewish influence on Islam functions primarily as a form of anti-Jewish rhetoric; there may be some historical reality behind accounts of "borrowing," but the question of veracity is irrelevant to the larger ideological function that *Isrāʾīliyyāt* as a concept has played in Salafī discourse. My understanding of this phenomenon is deeply conditioned by David Nirenberg's methodology in his monumental *Anti-Judaism. The Western tradition*, New York 2013.

deemed to be *Isrāʾīliyyāt* at a much later date – to a handful of specific informants and scholars in the early tradition is likely to be pseudepigraphic, a largely symbolic gesture. In the early evolution of the Islamic tradition, materials were explicitly or implicitly marked as having *kitābī* origins through attribution to individuals who functioned as bridge figures due to their marginality or hybridity, especially converts or the disciples of converts. This served as a means of accounting for the presence of a range of material conserved in *ḥadīth, tafsīr*, and other genres that was deemed of lesser importance due to its perceptible proximity to *Ahl al-kitāb* on account of its subject matter (eschatology, cosmology, *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, etc.), but likely *independent of its actual historical origin*. Conversely, as has long been recognized, materials deemed to have greater importance were marked as such by being raised to the status of prophetic *ḥadīth* or associated with Companions of some stature, especially Ibn ʿAbbās. This observation allows us to reconceptualize the milieu in which this material was originally disseminated, as it was likely to have been diffused and assimilated through a variety of complex cultural processes, at a time when religious and social boundaries – the demarcation between insiders and outsiders, the purely "Islamic" and the foreign – were likely to have been quite fluid.[20]

Here we are more dependent on conjecture, but it is not impossible to imagine analogous processes behind the genesis of the Qurʾān as well. That is to say that while Geiger and his followers understood the narratives adumbrated in the *ḥadīth, tafsīr*, and *sīra* to provide literal accounts of the concrete contexts in which the palpably biblical, Jewish, and Christian material found in the Qurʾān made its way there – as documentation of the processes of influence that allowed Muḥammad to author his revelations – we might instead seek to read these narratives as symbolic, as literary encapsulations of much broader processes of cultural diffusion and assimilation. As with the narratives describing transmission of the *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, narratives describing Muḥammad's encounters with monks and rabbis similarly condense a complex historical situation into a simple representation of face-to-face, person-to-person transmission of ideas. As we break with the influence paradigm, other interpretive possibilities may open up for us.

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20 On the function of pseudepigraphy in the *ḥadīth* and associated report-based literatures as a means employed by later collectors to sort things out, reducing what were originally much more complex processes of diffusion of traditions, see Pregill, *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, myth, and pseudepigraphy, 237–41. I would now perhaps emphasize even more strongly the diversity of ways in which cultural "influences" are disseminated, on analogy with the complex models now utilized by historians of science to analyze the diffusion of new technologies.

Direct, one-to-one transmission of cultural goods – "influences" – from informant to recipient thus appears as an especially facile way to think about the composition of the Qurʾān or the influx of lore from older communities – that is, the very essence of Islam's relationship to its religious and cultural environment. Narratives about Muḥammad's interactions with his Jewish contemporaries or early Muslims consulting learned *kitābī*s on questions of ritual law, history, or scriptural interpretation must, in the final analysis, be understood as exegetical, pseudepigraphical, and even ideological in nature, expressions of the ways later generations of Muslims understood qurʾanic discourse to have evolved or their predecessors to have navigated the tricky terrain of negotiating their relationship to various religious others. This is ultimately not about historical veracity, but rather collective memory.[21]

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In later contexts, about which the tradition perhaps preserves more reliable historical information (that is, less likely to be swathed in hagiography), the importance of a direct communication of ideas cannot be denied. Throughout Islamic history, there are numerous examples of nameable, dateable authors who in their time contributed to significant improvements in Muslim understanding of other cultures though a premodern version of ethnography – direct observation of those cultures and interaction with "native informants" (to invoke a discredited anthropological term) – as well as by consulting their texts. One thinks, for example, of the Barmakid expedition to Central Asia, and the well-known reports of Jaʿfar al-Barmakī testifying to the varieties of Buddhism still in evidence in his day on the borders of Iran; early travelers to India like Abū Zayd al-Sīrāfī, whose accounts furnished Muslims with some of their earliest ideas about the subcontinent before Muslim political and military advances there; the sojourns of Ibn Faḍlān and Ibn Rustah in Northern and Eastern Europe; and, in the very heartlands of Islam, Ibn Waḥshiyya's accounts of Chaldaean and Egyptian culture and religion.

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21   For a different, but complementary, perspective see Thomas Sizgorich's discussion of Ibn Ḥanbal in his *Violence and belief in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia 2009), Chapter 8. Sizgorich shows that the extant sources attributed to the traditionists of Ibn Ḥanbal's era – that is, the major works of *ḥadīth*, jurisprudence, exegesis, and history of the early and classical periods – do not offer us an unmediated window onto the prophetic period, but rather (as Goldziher argued over a century ago) reflect the concerns of a later age – in this specific case, how later Ḥanbalīs imagined Ibn Ḥanbal imagining the conduct of the Prophet, a process that was necessarily less about securing historical facts than it was about fashioning the self and forging communal boundaries.

Direct (or putatively direct) observation of foreign cultures or more proximate "others" is certainly no guarantee of authenticity. For much of the information contained in these famous accounts we lack corroboration either from native sources or from other outside observers that would help us to gauge these authors' accuracy in describing what they saw or relating what they were told. As examples of the opposite situation, we might consider outsider accounts of Islam, for example that of John of Damascus, who famously claimed that Muslims are idolaters who worship Venus. This is a gross distortion that is clearly polemically motivated, as John – or Yuḥannā Manṣūr b. Sarjūn al-Dimashqī – had ample direct knowledge of Islam, given that he was a civil servant in the administration of the Umayyad Caliphate, and can thus hardly be considered an "outsider" at all.[22]

In other cases, when analyzing early Jewish, Christian, and other witnesses to the Arab conquests and the rise of Islam, the difficulty of distinguishing between what is accurate but anomalous, what is deliberate hyperbole, and what derives from pure ignorance poses a serious historiographic problem. When these accounts contain incongruous statements that are difficult to square with the conventional narratives preserved within Islamic tradition itself – for example, the identification of Muḥammad as king of the Arabs rather than the Prophet of the community of Muslims – we can often only conjecture about their possible significance.[23]

In cases like that of John of Damascus, the misrepresentations are disconcerting, as observers may be well positioned to produce accurate accounts, yet decline to do so, or approach their subject with a mix of candor and exaggeration, objectivity and bias. Another example is the thirteenth-century traveler Riccoldo de Montecroce: considering first his missionary agenda and second his brutal treatment at the hands of the Mongols, he admittedly had little motivation to attempt to be fair in his portrayal of Islam, having been captured and enslaved in the Ilkhanate during a sojourn in Iraq in the 1280s. But his account of his travels is frequently balanced and his depictions of Muslim society sympathetic, which makes his outright fabrications – viz., that Muslims believe that reciting the *shahāda* gets them into heaven automatically – rather jarring. Even more perplexing is Riccoldo's fidelity to the descriptions of Oriental "heresies" to be found in Thomas Aquinas, who never once set foot in the East,

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22   See John Tolan, *Saracens. Islam in the medieval European imagination* (New York 2002), 50–5.

23   These reports have been much discussed; see, e.g., Yehuda D. Nevo and Judith Koren, *Crossroads to Islam. The origins of the Arab religion and the Arab state* (Amherst, NY 2003), 129–31.

despite having had ample opportunity to observe Christian communities of Islamic lands firsthand.[24] Accuracy can hardly be expected of an observer with an unfriendly disposition; if anything, it can prove harmful in the hands of someone with hostile inclinations. This is clearly the case with the Andalusian Ibn Ḥazm's polemic against the Bible, which is, if anything, *too* well-informed; his polemic against the defamatory accounts of the misdeeds of prophets like David to be found therein reflects considerable familiarity with the text – the actual text of the Bible as known in his day – and not mendacious fabrication.[25]

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Over the centuries, Muslims and non-Muslims confronted each other, drew on each other's traditions, learned about each other, and, in seeking a *modus vivendi* in societies from Spain to China, founded a common civilization in which each community formed a distinct subculture. The Arab conquests and the establishment of a caliphal dominion stretching throughout the heartlands of ancient and classical civilization, integrating the eastern territories of the Roman Empire and the western territories of the Sasanian Empire, created the conditions for centuries of productive, though at times contentious, cultural exchange. We have already mentioned the questionable historical veracity of the varied literary responses to the rise of Islam produced as Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians confronted the new political and social order that emerged. These early responses often entailed distorted representations of what the first generations of Arab Muslims thought, believed, and claimed about themselves and their Prophet, and even heralded their arrival as the harbinger of the End Times. In turn, early Muslim responses to the new subaltern populations that provided the literal human resources for expansion of their community – whether through conversion or procreation – generally reflect similarly negative attitudes. The cultures of the *Ahl al-kitāb* were tacitly understood as inferior, their cultural and material resources ripe for exploitation and appropriation – when they did not elicit anxieties about Islam's position as the pure, original form of monotheism and the fulfilment of God's prophetic and covenantal relationship with humanity, or inspire fears of social, ritual, or doctrinal contamination.

Despite the inevitable anxieties and mistrust, over time a remarkable multifaceted synthesis emerged that many scholars have characterized as a shared

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24   Tolan, *Saracens*, 245–54.
25   On Ibn Ḥazm's biblical literacy, see Camilla Adang, *Muslim authors on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible* (Leiden 1996), 133–8.

"Islamicate" civilization. Practically every aspect of the emergent Arab-Islamic tradition was in some way shaped by a multitude of contacts between the early Muslims and members of the various communities drawn into the rapidly expanding *Dār al-Islam.* It is thus natural that these contacts had a palpable impact on numerous learned discourses. Various facets of the processes of synthesis and symbiosis that produced this common civilizational legacy have been explored in depth and given rise to whole subfields of inquiry in Islamic studies. For example, the world of belles-lettres in Islam is one that was open to participants from every religious community, drawn together in the pursuit of and love for forms of fine literary expression. Despite its intrinsically disputatious nature, the world of *kalām* was also one that was open to any participant learned enough to take part; here a common culture emerged specifically to enable spokesmen for each community to advocate for the truths of their religion against the claims of the others as equals. Philosophy and science provide other examples that are particularly relevant to questions of communication across communal boundaries due to their close connection to the phenomenon of translation and transmission of the Greek philosophical and scientific legacy. Here it is not unusual to speak of "Greco-Arabic" science and philosophy, which, however, is a misleading term since it obviates the role of Syriac-language scholars and intermediary translations.

One aspect of the shared Islamicate civilization that emerged in the early centuries after the Arab conquests has been relatively underexplored by scholars, however. This is the common discourse of scriptural interpretation, particularly manifest as part of the phenomenon of "Judeo-Arabic" or "Judeo-Islamic" learning that flourished so spectacularly in the geonic and early medieval periods, yet no doubt had roots in the period immediately after the Arab conquests, if not actually before.[26] It is true that we have little concrete evidence of either Jewish engagement with the Qurʾān or Muslim engagement with the Bible in the early centuries AH, though some scattered traces do survive. But in the bigger picture, Muslim exegesis of the Qurʾān and Jewish interpretation

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26 It has been suggested by some that the Jews of the Ḥijāz, whose traditions Muḥammad accessed in composing the Qurʾān, had both a specific dialect of Judaized Arabic they spoke, called *Yahūdiyya,* and a tradition of at least oral translation of scripture; see the classic account of Gordon D. Newby, Observations about an early Judaeo-Arabic, *Jewish quarterly review* 61 (1971), 212–21. In contrast, Haggai Ben-Shammai has conjectured that it was among the Jews of Ḥīra, a pre-Islamic urban center of southern Mesopotamia, that the earliest forerunner to what eventually became known as Judeo-Arabic may have emerged: Observations on the beginnings of Judeo-Arabic civilization, in David M. Freidenreich and Miriam Goldstein (eds.), *Beyond religious borders. Interaction and intellectual exchange in the medieval Islamic world* (Philadelphia 2012), 13–29, 162–72.

of the Bible in this period probably followed parallel tracks, constituting rival exegetical enterprises, each community striving to adapt its understanding of its canonical scripture to contemporary realities, and reshaping their narratives of the covenantal, prophetic, and messianic legacies of ancient Israel in order to assert their claim to those legacies and position their community as their inheritor and culmination.

One of the most important artifacts of this period, yet one that is still poorly understood, is the midrashic work *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, the "Chapters" of Rabbi Eliezer the Great. This text, likely to have been the product of a single author who attributed his work to the great *tanna* Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (fl. second half of the first century CE), has long been observed to reflect some exposure to Islam before it reached its final form sometime after the Arab conquests; famously, it gives the wives of Ishmael the names "Ayesha" and "Patumah," clear allusions to Muḥammad's wife ʿĀʾisha and daughter Fāṭima.[27] Nevertheless, the degree to which it actually reflects a substantial understanding of Islamic tradition or seeks to engage Islam has long been a subject of debate. What is relevant for our interests here is that scholars have long assumed that the bulk of the material therein dates to *before* the rise of Islam. Thus, since the time of Geiger, *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* has been repeatedly cited as a witness to Jewish traditions of the sort that likely informed the Qurʾān, and many scholars have followed Geiger in cataloguing the supposed Jewish "borrowings" in the Qurʾān on the basis of parallels between it and this text.[28]

Aside from the problematically reductive conception of influence that informs this approach, a distinct anachronism often prevails here as well. Viewed objectively, it is sometimes clear that many of the purported "influences" on Muḥammad and the Qurʾān presented by Geiger and his followers are actually traditions drawn from Jewish texts from the period *after* the Arab conquests, for which there are no known antecedents in older (and indisputably pre-Islamic) texts. (Geiger himself seems to acknowledge this, in stating that he will draw his material for comparison with the Qurʾān only from those works securely dated to before the rise of Islam – except that he

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27   For a detailed discussion of the Ishmael tradition in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* and the complex question of its relationship to Islamic parallels, see Carol Bakhos, *Ishmael on the border. Rabbinic portrayals of the first Arab* (Albany, NY 2006), 96ff.

28   A basic survey of Geiger's text indicates that *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* serves as the main source for several of his major treatments of the midrashic basis of qurʾanic narratives. The indices of both the German and English versions do not include a general listing of sources cited in the work. This makes it difficult to evaluate his specific degree of dependence on this text or other late sources systematically, but speaking unscientifically it seems accurate to say that Geiger relies as often on works that reached their final form after the rise of Islam as on those that are indisputably pre-Islamic.

provides himself a very large loophole, by way of the caveat that reliance on later works is admissible if "it is certain that such sayings, though only recently recorded, existed earlier in the synagogue."[29]) We then might reasonably question whether the parallels we observe between the Qurʾān and *tafsīr* on the one hand and late midrashim on the other might be due not to a borrowing of Jewish traditions in the Qurʾān (though there are indisputably qurʾanic passages that do engage with and reshape Jewish precursors), but rather to the coevolution of Jewish traditions of interpretation of the Bible and Muslim interpretation of the Quran in the post-conquest period – and even, perhaps, to the direct impact of Muslim exegesis on its Jewish counterpart. The question of how *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* fits into its milieu comes to the fore here.

The narrative of the Golden Calf provides us with what is perhaps the example *par excellence* of the phenomenon we have just described. As the qurʾanic account of the Calf is usually understood, especially the long version of the story found in Q 20:83–98, responsibility for the making of the idol appears to have shifted from Aaron, the maker of the Calf in the biblical precursor in Exodus, to a mysterious personage called *al-sāmirī*, generally understood to mean the "Samaritan" (mentioned three times in this passage, and nowhere else in the Qurʾān). When confronted by Moses upon his return from his communion with God on Sinai, the Samaritan confesses, *I perceived that which they did not. I picked up a handful from the track of the messenger and threw it in; I imagined this to be best* (v. 96).[30] The meaning of this statement is obscure, but the Samaritan's action appears to have resulted in the creation of an entity described in peculiar terms: *ʿijl jasad lahu khuwārun,* "a lowing image of a calf" (literally "a calf, a body that lows," Q 7:148; 20:88).

The commentators almost universally agree that this "Sāmirī," a member of the Israelite clan of the Samaritans (*Sāmirah*), was either a malevolent interloper among the Israelites or else a treacherous follower of Moses; for some sinister reason he made the calf and, usurping leadership of the people from Aaron, commanded the credulous, desperate people to worship it. There is likewise little disagreement that the qurʾanic reference to "a calf, a body that lows" is meant to indicate that, having built a calf of gold, the Samaritan induced the calf to imitate life by lowing like a real cow through magical means. Equally ubiquitous in the *tafsīr* is the explanation of the "handful from the track of the messenger," which is usually taken as a reference to the appearance of the angel Gabriel among the Israelites when they crossed the Red Sea after their escape from Egypt. At that time, the narratives state, he rode upon a horse that was so imbued with divine potency that everything it touched came to life.

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29   Geiger, *Judaism and Islám*, v.

30   All translations from Arabic and Hebrew primary sources here are my own.

Even taking just a bit of the earth it had trodden, the "track of the messenger," the Samaritan was able to induce the calf to low like a real cow or even to animate it, at least temporarily.

The narratives on this episode supplied in Qurʾān commentaries and other works latch a considerable amount of ancillary detail onto the brief, cryptic verses of Sūra 20 in order to make this story comprehensible. It is, however, quite unclear that this is what the story in the Qurʾān itself really means.[31] What is most germane to our concerns here is that this story of the magically animate Calf and the intervention of the sinister Samaritan is widespread in *tafsīr* and related genres, to the exclusion of virtually any other approach to the qurʾanic episode. The questions of greatest concern to the traditional exegetes are where the Samaritan had come from and what exactly happened when he brought the calf to life, or made it seem to be alive; there was significant debate over these questions, as is evident from many of the accounts in classical *tafsīrs* and related sources, as in this passage from al-Thaʿlabī's *Tales of the prophets:*

> In some accounts, it is said that when al-Sāmirī made the Calf and threw the handful into it, he bestowed consciousness upon it, and it ran around and lowed, for it had become flesh and blood. It is also related that it was Iblīs who lowed within it. It is also said that al-Sāmirī placed the rear end of the Calf facing towards a wall, and dug a pit on the far side of the wall, and made someone sit in the pit with his mouth on the Calf's posterior, and that this man lowed and spoke the words the Calf was supposed to say . . . Thus did he deceive the miserable ones among the Israelites, and those who were ignorant, until he led them astray.[32]

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31   In general, Western scholarly discussions of the qurʾanic story have tended to rely almost entirely on the explanations provided in *tafsīr*. The sole notes of caution regarding the evident divergence in meaning between the qurʾanic understanding of the story and the accounts in the *tafsīr* are found in two brief treatments. In his 1995 revision of Bernard Heller's article in the first *Encyclopedia of Islam* on the character of the Samaritan, Rippin expresses skepticism as to whether this narrative development genuinely predates the Qurʾān (al-Sāmirī, *EI2*). Likewise, in his 2001 article "Calf of Gold" in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, Hawting summarizes the positions of both the classical commentators and modern scholars on the story, but remains unsure as to the question of whether the portrayal of the episode in the *tafsīr* is intrinsic to the Qurʾān itself. I take up the question of the relationship of both Qurʾān and *tafsīr* to biblical and midrashic materials in my forthcoming *The living calf of Sinai. Bible and Qurʾān between Late Antiquity and Islam* (2017).

32   *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ al-musammā ʿArāʾis al-majālis* (Cairo 2001), 286; ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ, *or "Lives of the prophets" as recounted by Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Thaʿlabī*, trans. William M. Brinner (Leiden 2002), 346–7.

For Geiger and subsequent advocates of what I call the "influence paradigm," the most relevant midrashic parallel – implicitly understood as the source of the qur'anic story, which again lacks much of the detail that is central in the accounts of the *tafsīr* – is the following tradition from chapter 45 of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*. After recounting a number of details familiar from older midrashic tradition, especially those concerning Aaron's unwillingness to go along with the idolaters and his sneaky attempts to delay the affair, the narrative moves in a direction unseen in earlier rabbinic traditions on the Calf:

> Among the earrings, Aaron found a slip of gold [*tsîts shel zahav*] with the Holy Name written on it and an image of a calf engraved upon it. This alone he threw into the fire, as it is stated, *And they gave it to me* [*and I cast it into the fire, and out came this calf*] … (Ex. 32:24) "And I threw **them** into the fire …" is not written here, but rather, "And I threw **it** into the fire, and out came this calf…" – lowing (*gô'eh*), and all Israel saw.
>
> R. Judah said: Samael had entered it, lowing to lead Israel astray, as it is stated, *The ox knows his master* (Is. 1:3).[33] All Israel saw this, and they offered it libations, and bowed down before it, and sacrificed to it.[34]

There is no indication in the immediate narrative context where this "slip of gold" came from, or why Aaron threw it into the fire. The most superficial explanation for this development is a minor grammatical issue in the biblical text. In Aaron's statement "I threw it into the fire," referring to the gathered golden ornaments of the people, the objective suffix of the verb form *ashlikhehû* ("I threw it") is singular. While we can infer that the singular suffix refers to the gold as a collective – especially as this is how Aaron refers to it at the beginning of the verse, *I said to them, "Whoever has gold…"* – the author of the midrash offers a different solution, namely that the "it" Aaron threw into the fire was not the amassed golden ornaments, but rather the *tsîts* or golden slip he had in his possession with an image of a calf engraved upon it.

As is so often the case in midrash, a minor grammatical abnormality in a biblical verse provides a peg upon which an imaginative expansion can be hung, though it is hardly necessary for us to make sense of the narrative. Thus, we can recognize this supposed irregularity as a mere pretext. The main stimulus for the insertion of this detail about the golden slip here in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, I would argue, is the ubiquity of the story of the Samaritan's casting the handful of dirt from the track of the angel Gabriel's supernatural steed (the

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33 That is, Satan.

34 *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, ed. and trans. Dagmar Börner-Klein (Berlin 2004), 610–1.

reading of Q 20:96 in the *tafsīr*) in Islamic traditions in circulation in the milieu in which the author of this midrash lived and worked. That is, the appearance of this specific element here is a mimetic gesture, a reflex of a central feature of Muslim traditions of the qurʾanic version of the biblical episode (al-Sāmirī's casting of the magical *handful from the track of the messenger* into the fire to create *a calf, a body that lows*), adapted in the form of the "throwing" of a golden slip to induce Satan to make it come to life (specifically, as in the *tafsīr*, making it low like a real calf) and integrated into the matrix of older midrashic details on the episode. Needless to say, this tradition's probative value as evidence of a determinative Jewish "influence" on the qurʾanic story dissipates; it now stands as evidence of something else entirely.

While traditions on the Golden Calf episode in older (i.e., indisputably pre-Islamic) midrashic collections do exhibit a particular tendency towards apologetic in their representation of the role of Aaron in the affair, they do not go so far as to seek to exonerate him completely by attributing the making of the calf entirely to another party. Nor is the calf ever really understood as animate in older midrashim as it is in the *tafsīr*. In some pre-Islamic rabbinic traditions, outside interlopers do get involved from time to time: one asserts that the Egyptian sorcerers who dueled with Moses at Pharaoh's court had followed the Israelites out of Egypt, and that they used enchantments to make the Calf shudder before the credulous people; another, in the Babylonian Talmud, depicts Satan using an illusion to try to convince the Israelites that Moses had died while he was away on the mountain so that they would turn to the Calf as their savior.[35] Besides *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, only two other standard rabbinic sources posit that the Calf was animated by Satan or some other malefactor. As we will discuss shortly, these other accounts are not likely to be genuinely pre-Islamic either.

Midrashic accounts such as this one from *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* are clearly "post-Islamic"; that is, they reflect Jewish exegetes' appropriation of new developments in the story by Muslim exegetes. These Jewish exegetes apparently saw the trope of the animation of the calf by an outsider in *tafsīr* as totally congruous with their own understanding of the episode – especially since their tradition's approach to that episode was already heading in this direction, for midrashic accounts of the making of the Calf were already becoming more and more apologetic in tone over the centuries leading up to the rise of Islam. In some pre-Islamic traditions, Jewish exegetes emphasize that Aaron had not meant to indulge the people's idolatry by making the Calf, but rather had some other goal in mind, especially to delay the affair until Moses's return from Sinai (so that he could either allay the people's fears of his demise, or else

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35   *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 1.9.3 and *b. Shabbat* 89a respectively.

discipline and restrain them from their idolatrous impulses). Subsequently, other exegetes compounded the theme of Aaron's having ulterior motives by adding sinister interlopers to the mix: these nefarious characters are depicted as interfering in the affair, so that even though Aaron did not actually wish to make the Calf, these interlopers caused it to happen anyway. Nevertheless, in all of these accounts, it is unambiguous that Aaron is actually the maker of the Calf, though his true intentions were to actually prevent Israel from committing idolatry. Only in midrashic sources dating to after the rise of Islam do we find Jewish traditions that blame the actual making of the Calf on someone or something other than Aaron, or depict the Calf as having come to life or imitating life in a significant way, as is the case almost universally in the *tafsīr* literature.

This is but a small example of how Muslim approaches to the stories of the prophets and patriarchs in the Qurʾān gradually came to inform Jewish understandings of material on those figures and events in the Bible; these new or altered understandings were eventually textualized and preserved in compendious collections of rabbinic lore alongside much older themes. The omnivorous nature of authors and compilers who drew on a variety of oral and written texts, juxtaposing significantly older traditions with others of much more recent provenance, lent an impression of antiquity to the latter, although they had emerged quite late in the development of the midrash, specifically at a time when Jewish communities were quite permeable to claims and ideas circulating in a Near Eastern world dominated by Islam after the seventh and eighth centuries. As has often been noted, this encyclopedic or comprehensive quality is a hallmark of midrashic tradition.[36] It is this specific trait of rabbinic literature, weaving together materials that originated over the course of nearly a millennium, that encouraged scholars to draw stunningly anachronistic conclusions about midrash as a genre – thus the famous studies by Geiger, Ginzburg, Goitein, and many others who present "the midrash" as a uniform, timeless, quintessential expression of Jewish values and ideas apparently insulated from outside influences. As Geiger and his followers emphasize, midrash seems to furnish an endless supply of influences on Islam, seemingly without any reciprocal influence being channeled back. This implausible claim is clearly not borne out by scrutiny of the evidence, however.

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36   See Marc Bregman, Midrash Rabbah and the medieval collector mentality, *Prooftexts* 17 (1997), 63–76.

For the remainder of this essay, I will attempt to shed some light upon the unusual reference in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* to the golden slip (*tsîts shel zahav*) with the Holy Name and an image of a calf engraved upon it; this object not only caused the Calf to be created from the amassed golden ornaments belonging to the Israelites, but also, it seems, led to it being inspired by Satan and made to low like a living calf. It is striking that while the author of this midrashic tradition mimicked *tafsīr* traditions on the Samaritan's throwing of the magical dirt here, he selected a different medium for the supernatural power that brought the Calf to life. The identification of the object as a golden slip is no doubt deliberate, meant to evoke a specific subtext to the episode. As we shall see, investigating this subtext demonstrates the importance of the spread and sharing of traditions common to both Jewish and Muslim authors and transmitters in the early Islamic period.

The term *tsîts* has a biblical resonance: it refers to a golden plate inscribed with the phrase *Holy to the Lord* that is prescribed for the High Priest to wear as part of his vestments, specifically as part of the miter or headpiece.[37] One ironic resonance here is immediately obvious: in contrast to the *tsîts* of the priestly vestments, which symbolizes the High Priest's dedication to the divine service, this *tsîts* instead represents something completely opposite, for the worship of the calf is, if anything, an idolatrous defilement of the Name. However, there are other layers of meaning here.

This passage from *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* presupposes the assimilation of a biblical image to the ritual language of ancient Mediterranean magic. The use to which Aaron is said to put the object here in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* is reminiscent of the employment of a lamella, a thin plate or plaque of gold or other metal, in various ritual traditions in the ancient Mediterranean. For example, in the Greco-Roman context, lamellae seem to have typically been used for apotropaic purposes, and this is the function that is reflected in other Jewish texts that quite possibly could have been known to the author of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*. In a procedure represented in *Sefer ha-Razim*, an ancient Jewish ascent text containing instructions for numerous ritual procedures, the initiate into the text's mysteries is told that to rid a city of predatory beasts, a lamella with angelic names should be joined with a bronze effigy of an animal and buried.[38]

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37   Cf., e.g., Exodus 28:36, which is presumably why Börner-Klein chooses – rather oddly – to render *tsîts shel zahav* as *ein Diadem aus Gold* in her translation.

38   The specific term for the object here is *ṭaṣ*, meaning a shiny slip of metal (cf. *tessera*, a shiny bit of stone or foiled glass used for mosaics). On this specific passage and Greco-Roman parallels, see Christopher A. Faraone, *Talismans and Trojan Horses. Guardian statues in Ancient Greek myth and ritual* (Oxford 1992), 39–40, and Gideon Bohak, *Ancient*

Although *Sefer ha-Razim* is dated to the third or fourth century CE, the magical traditions therein are thought to be much older, at least as early as the Hellenistic era; however, the work continued to circulate widely in Jewish communities throughout the early Middle Ages, as evidenced by various witnesses from the Cairo Geniza.[39] Therefore, such traditions were likely in circulation in the author's milieu, and represent a basic concept with which he may have been familiar. The representation of the use of such an object to create and animate the Calf here in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* is somewhat surprising, given the apotropaic function attributed to it in these precursors. However, it should be said that the idea that an apotropaic image, especially of an animal, could be ritually animated is not wholly unprecedented in Greco-Roman culture.[40]

The appearance of the motif here is also linked to an older midrashic tradition, one that the audience of this work would surely recognize as a subtext. Aaron's action with the Calf and the *tsîts* appears to be an allusion to a corpus of traditions about the retrieval of Joseph's coffin from the Nile at the time of the Exodus. At the very end of the book of Genesis, Joseph makes the Israelites swear to take his remains out of Egypt when God fulfills His promise of redemption to them (Gen. 50:24–6); when the Israelites finally leave Egypt, Moses remembers this pledge and takes the bones of Joseph along (Ex. 13:19). Beginning relatively early in the evolution of rabbinic exegesis of the Exodus story, a corpus of colorful traditions emerged to explain what had happened to Joseph's remains in the intervening years between his death and the Israelites' redemption, as well as Moses' adventures and tribulations in trying to discover where Joseph's resting place in Egypt was located and how he could retrieve his remains to fulfill Israel's promise to the patriarch.

In a widely attested story, Moses stands on the shore of the Nile – where the Egyptians had sunk Joseph's coffin many years previous, presumably to conceal it – and calls out to Joseph, telling him that the time of Israel's redemption has come. The coffin then floats to the surface, lest Joseph be left behind in the land of Israel's bondage. In some variations on the story, Moses performs a ritual of some sort or utilizes a magical object in order to compel the coffin to

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Jewish magic. A history (Cambridge 2008), 149–55, for a discussion of the copious evidence of the use of *lamellae* as amulets among Jews of antiquity.

39 Notably, the modern reconstruction of the text is based on Geniza witnesses. Alexander Fodor has suggested that *Sefer ha-Razim* may have provided one of the main channels through which traditions of magic in circulation in Late Antiquity were transmitted to and adapted in Arab culture; see: An Arabic version of *Sefer Ha-Razim, Jewish studies quarterly* 13 (2006), 412–27.

40 See Faraone, *Talismans and Trojan Horses*, 18–21, on legends concerning the animate talismans created by the god Hephaestus.

rise. Overall, the story, which seems to have been in circulation as early as the third century CE, resonates quite sharply with another concerning the retrieval of remains out of the Nile, namely the myth of Isis and Osiris, given its most well-known expression in the work of the first-century writer Plutarch.[41] Here, however, we are more concerned with the permutations this tradition underwent over the centuries of its development in midrash.

The story of the retrieval of the coffin is repeated in numerous rabbinic sources in various forms, and the object in use seems to change from account to account. In what seems to be the oldest version of the story, preserved in *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Moses casts a small stone (*tserôr*) into the waters of the Nile as he utters an invocation.[42] However, the textual tradition representing this work is complex, and it is significant that in one of the witnesses to the *Mekhilta*, the object Moses uses is referred to as a golden tablet (*luaḥ shel zahav*) inscribed with the Tetragrammaton. This seems to represent the impact of later versions of the coffin story found in other rabbinic sources on the *Mekhilta* manuscript tradition.[43] For example, *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* (dated to the fifth to seventh century CE) identifies the object as a potsherd upon which Moses had written the Divine Name.[44]

It is not difficult to detect the intertextual symmetry between traditions that posit the means of Moses raising the coffin as a golden plate with the Tetragrammaton inscribed upon it and the portrayal of Aaron creating and animating the Calf by means of a golden slip with both the Tetragrammaton and an image of a calf on it.[45] The implication of the tradition in *Pirqe de-Rabbi*

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41   Holger Zellentin, How Plutarch gained his place in the Tosefta, *Zutot* 4 (2004), 17–26; Rivka Ulmer, Egyptian magic and the Osiris myth in Midrash, in Lieve M. Teugels and Rivka Ulmer (eds.), *Midrash in context. Proceedings of the 2004 and 2005 SBL consultation on Midrash* (Piscataway, NJ 2007), 139–71.

42   *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Běšallaḥ* 1:86–108ff., ed. and trans. Jacob Z. Lauterbach (Philadelphia 1933–35), 1:76–7; see discussion in Ulmer, Egyptian magic, 165ff.

43   See Ulmer, Egyptian magic, 165. The sole witness to the *Mekhilta* that describes the object as *tsîts* is the same Munich manuscript that is the basis of the widely used Lauterbach edition; one cannot recognize how anomalous this reading is without a broader view of the *Mekhilta* manuscript tradition as a whole.

44   *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* 11.12. This account is distinguished by an odd detail about two talismanic dogs, presumably magical guardians established by the Egyptians, who appear and begin barking at Moses (cf. *Exodus Rabbah* 20:19). The talismanic dogs are seemingly drawn from Homer (who refers to a pair of animate dog statues that guard the palace of Alkinous, *Odyssey* 7.91–4) or other Greek sources; Faraone, *Talismans and Trojan Horses*, 18–21.

45   Given that the golden plate with the Name is only mentioned in the Munich manuscript of the *Mekhilta*, it is probable that this manuscript of this early midrash was harmonized with some later version of the story. The use of a golden object to raise Joseph's coffin

Eliezer describing the latter is that the creation of the Calf was a sequel of sorts to the raising of Joseph from the Nile with that same object. A textual problem emerges here, however, for the episode of the raising of Joseph's coffin, where we would expect to find the author of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* describing the object Moses used there as *tsîts shel zahav*, is actually *missing* from this work. How do we explain this? Would this not suggest that the story of the raising of the coffin is *not* actually the subtext for or prequel to the appearance of the slip of gold in the Calf story in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*? However, a bit of textual detective work in fact vindicates our hypothesis about this intertextual allusion.

The depiction of this object in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* as the means through which the Calf was created appears to be quite novel, as is the detail about the calf engraved on the gold slip or plate along with the Divine Name. But there are two other sources in classical midrashic literature that depict the animation of the Calf in a similar way; both are roughly contemporary with the *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* account and thus similarly "post-Islamic." In glossing Aaron's statement in Exodus 32:24 (*I said to them, "Whoever has gold, remove it and give it to me"; then I threw it in the fire, and out came this calf*), *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* describes the animation of the Calf in similar terms, but omits any reference to the *tsîts*: "I threw it [e.g., the gold] in the fire, and Satan entered into it, and out of it came the likeness of this calf…"[46] Here we have a diabolical intervention to bring the Calf to life, though it seems that what Aaron is supposed to have thrown into the fire is actually just the amassed gold taken from the Israelites, as in the original biblical narrative.

Of greater interest to us is the recounting of the making of the Calf in the later recension of *Midrash Tanḥuma*, which combines elements of the story as known from *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* with a number of other tropes and themes from both earlier and later midrashic elaborations on the Exodus story.[47] Here it is said that when Aaron cast the gold the Israelites had brought him into the fire, "he looked heavenwards, and he said, *'Unto you, who dwells in heaven, I set my eyes* (Ps. 123:1) – You know all thoughts, and thus know that I do this only

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implies a link to the Calf episode, but *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* seems to be the earliest extant source suggesting this association. Bohak discusses the coffin story in the context of ancient traditions on the magical use of the *tsîts* (*Ancient Jewish magic*, 117–9), where he asserts that the association of a lamella with the story is tannaitic, presumably on the basis of the Munich witness to the *Mekhilta*.

46 *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan on the Pentateuch. Text and concordance*, ed. E.G. Clarke et al. (Hoboken, NJ 1984), 1:107. Like *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* preserves older exegetical material, but it must have reached its final form after the rise of Islam.

47 On the two major recensions of the *Tanḥuma*, see Marc Bregman, *The Tanhuma-Yelammedenu literature. Studies in the evolution of the versions* (Piscataway, NJ 2003).

because I am forced to . . .' He threw them [i.e. the people's golden ornaments] into the fire, and the sorcerers came and made [the Calf] with their sorceries."[48]

As is typical in midrash, the passage continues with an alternative account of the event, one in which the critical action creating the Calf is attributed to an Israelite named Micah, who is associated with the Calf episode in a number of later narratives. This passage seems to confirm that the account of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* presupposes that the golden slip Aaron used to make the Calf was the same object that had retrieved Joseph's coffin from the Nile, for it links the two events explicitly:

> [Micah] pulled out the tablet upon which Moses had written "Up, ox!" when he raised the coffin of Joseph. They cast it into the fire amidst the earrings, and out came the Calf, lowing as it leapt about. Then they began to say, "*These are your gods, O Israel . . .*" (Ex. 32:4)[49]

As in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, the object coopted to create the magically animate Calf is the gold lamella that Moses is supposed to have used to draw Joseph's remains out the Nile. However, here in the *Tanḥuma* the connection between the two events is cemented through a clever midrashic link: the inscription on the plate is not the Tetragrammaton with an image of a calf, as in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, but rather the words *'aleh shôr*, "Up, ox!" This phrase plays on an epithet given to Joseph in Deuteronomy 33:17, in which he is poetically described as an ox.[50]

In the *Tanḥuma* account, these words inscribed on the tablet are presumably what enabled Moses to use it to raise Joseph's coffin, and now the same object is directed to a more nefarious purpose because of that inscription, which enables it to create a lowing, leaping Golden Calf from the gathered ornaments of the people, thus commanding a very different ox to come forth! Notably, in the portrayal of the retrieval of Joseph's coffin that appears earlier in the *Tanḥuma* in its commentary on the Genesis narrative cycle, the object Moses uses is not a lamella (neither a slip nor a plate, *tsîts* or *luaḥ*) but rather a pebble, *tserôr*, as in the retrieval story found in most of the *Mekhilta* witnesses. However, here the phrase "up ox!" is said to have been inscribed upon it,

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48   *Midrash Tanḥuma, Kî-tissa* 19.

49   Ibid.

50   Ulmer discusses these words as the invocation uttered by Moses at the time of the retrieval of the coffin in: Egyptian magic, 162–4. It is attested in the depiction of this episode in a handful of minor, fragmentary midrashim as well as in the *Tanḥuma* account.

distinguishing it from the *Mekhilta* parallels.[51] Similar to the depiction of Aaron creating the Calf with the golden plate in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, the version of the Calf narrative found in the later *Tanḥuma* likewise seems to incorporate new details reflecting the centrality of the Samaritan in *tafsīr* – especially since here it is not Aaron himself, but rather another party, Micah, who is responsible for the transformative act of "throwing" that creates a living, or seemingly living, Calf.[52]

The version of the creation of the Calf in the later recension of the *Tanḥuma* directly acknowledges the link between this event and the retrieval of Joseph's coffin, both being achieved through the use of the same object. Similarly, it would have been quite obvious for the author of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* to refer to the use of the *tsîts* at the time of the Israelites' departure from Egypt, for this would then set the stage for its critical reappearance at the time of the making of the Calf; the account of the latter event in this text seems to presuppose the episode with Joseph's coffin, but is entirely missing from all of the witnesses to the text. One might thus wonder if the versions of this text that have come down to us are thus somehow deficient.[53]

There is another possibility, however. It is plausible that the link between the two episodes was made in an older source that both *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* and the later *Tanḥuma* drew upon, each elaborating upon it in somewhat different ways. While *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* incorporates only the second part of the story, the use of the slip to create the Calf – only using half of the original tradition, as it were, leaving the reader in the dark about the source of the

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51   *Midrash Tanḥuma, Beshallaḥ* 2.

52   While the fluidity of the corpus of material disseminated in various collections of material given the name *Tanḥuma* has long been recognized, scholars have generally emphasized the early core of material preserved in the Buber recension of *Midrash Tanḥuma* proper. There has been surprisingly little investigation into the later strata of the standard recension; while the Buber recension appears to be linked to a line of transmission associated with medieval Europe, the standard recension is distinctly Islamicate. It is thus unsurprising to find traditions that parallel *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, and arguably traditions from Islamic texts as well, here.

53   Scholars have long debated the question of the apparent incompleteness of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, even suggesting that the available editions represent only part of what supposedly became a fluid corpus not long after the original author's work; see Lewis M. Barth, Is every medieval Hebrew manuscript a new composition? The case of *Pirqé Rabbi Eliezer*, in Marc Lee Raphael (ed.), *Agendas for the study of Midrash in the twenty-first century* (Williamsburg, VA 1999), 43–62. However, the idea that portions of the text may have been lost in transmission has now been largely debunked. See Eliezer Treitel, *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer. Text, redaction, and a sample synopsis* [Heb.] (Jerusalem 2012), 27–39.

tsîts – the *Tanḥuma* includes both parts of the story, the emergence of this potent object at the time of the Exodus *and* the unfortunate denouement at the time of Israel's idolatry. We may conclude that both of these texts are likely to be dependent on an older source that made the innovative narrative step of transferring the detail about the use of the gold plate or slip inscribed with the Tetragrammaton from the story of the raising of the coffin of Joseph (again, a *topos* of considerable vintage in the midrash) to the new context of the making of the Calf because there is another source containing this narrative complex, but that, like *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, only relates half of it. Notably, while *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* has only the second half of the story (the making of the Calf), this source contains only the first (the raising of Joseph's coffin). However, in the same way that the *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* tradition seems to presuppose the earlier part of the story while relating the later, this other source presents the earlier part of the story in such a way as to foreshadow the later part, but then actually omits it.

Even more notably, this version of the coffin narrative is not found in a midrashic source at all, but rather in an Arabic work by a Muslim author, namely the chronicle of the Shīʿī author al-Yaʿqūbī (d. c. 905). A number of Islamic sources that relate episodes from Israelite history contain portrayals of the retrieval of Joseph's coffin that mirror some of the older midrashic versions of the episode. For example, the versions of this story in the chronicle of al-Ṭabarī and the major collection of tales of the prophets of al-Thaʿlabī resemble one version of the event as found in the *Mekhilta*, in which Moses finds Joseph's coffin with the assistance of an old woman who had been around since the time of Joseph's death. The *Mekhilta* identifies her as Ṣeraḥ bat Asher, the granddaughter of Jacob and thus the grand-niece of Joseph, though she is anonymous in the accounts of Ṭabarī and Thaʿlabī that refer to her. But these Arabic accounts omit any reference to a supernatural event connected with Moses' retrieval of the coffin, and thus lack any portrayal of a magical object connected with it.[54]

Therefore, Yaʿqūbī's account stands out among the Islamic treatments of this theme of his time. It begins, like the narratives in Ṭabarī and Thaʿlabī, with the story of Ṣeraḥ bat Asher:

> God commanded Moses to take the Israelites out of Egypt. When they were ready to go, he searched for the body of [Joseph ben Jacob], to carry him out with them, as Joseph had charged them to do. Then [Ṣeraḥ bat Asher ben Jacob] came to him, and said: "Do you promise to give me

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54   Al-Ṭabarī, *The history of al-Ṭabarī. Volume III. The children of Israel*, trans. William M. Brinner (Albany, NY 1991), 69; Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, trans. Brinner, 234–5, 326–7.

something left over so that I may live off of it?" He did so, and she jour-
neyed with him to a spot by the Nile, and she said, "This is the place!"

But the account then continues:

> So Moses took four plates of gold, and made an image of an eagle on one,
> and a lion, a man, and an ox on each of the others. Then he wrote the
> mightiest name of God on each plate as well. He threw them into the water,
> and the stone coffin that held the body of Joseph rose to the surface.

> But Moses had one gold plate left over, the one with the image of the ox.
> He gave it to Ṣeraḥ bat Asher ben Jacob, and then he bore the coffin away.[55]

The author does not tell us what happened to the plate after it was given to Ṣeraḥ
bat Asher, and so this detail about her request for a reward – in fact, the whole
description of Moses's creation of four plates with inscribed images of each of the
beings that bear the throne of God, with three employed in the retrieval of the
coffin and the fourth left over – seems rather pointless. However, if one knows
the story from *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* or the later *Tanḥuma*, this is a foreboding
moment indeed: it clearly foreshadows the moment not so far in the future when,
at the hands of Aaron or some sinister interloper, this object endowed with holy
power at the hands of a prophet would be used for a far more nefarious purpose.

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In her discussion of the various traditions associated with the retrieval of
Joseph's coffin, including the *topos* of the stone or lamella, Ulmer emphasizes
the numerous thematic connections between the midrashim on this episode
and ancient Egyptian mythology and ritual practice. Though her examination
of the numerous parallels between the depiction of Moses's ritual procedures
and ancient Egyptian magic is convincing, Ulmer does not address the subtler
aspects of the diachronic development of these narratives, nor the most
significant feature of that development in the period after the Arab conquests –
namely, the transfer of the theme of the magical object used to draw Joseph's
coffin out of the Nile to an entirely new narrative context, the making of the
Golden Calf. Thus, she overlooks the critical parallels between specific the-
matic elements linked to this episode found in later sources such as *Pirqe
de-Rabbi Eliezer* and *Midrash Tanḥuma* and Muslim exegesis of the Qurʾān,

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55   Al-Yaʿqūbī, *Ibn-Wāḍiḥ qui dicitur al-Jaʿqubī, Historiae*, ed. M.Th. Houtsma (Leiden 1883;
     repr. 1969), 1:34.

although, as we have shown, the various narrative strands in the midrash and *tafsīr* appear to be inextricably intertwined here.

At some point after the Arab conquests and the establishment of caliphal dominion over Palestine, Iraq, Egypt, and other centers of Jewish learning, the interpretation of biblical stories among Jews evolved to conform to or absorb certain narrative developments that had emerged in the *tafsīr* and come to permeate the environment. In the specific case we have examined here, an anonymous Jewish exegete projected the theme of the lamella (as depicted in *Sefer ha-Razim* and other sources) onto the biblical *tsîts* of the priestly miter, broadening its function from apotropaic ward to magical retrieval and even statuary animation; at the same time, he transferred the *topos* from one narrative setting, the raising of Joseph's coffin on the eve of the Exodus, to another, the making of the Golden Calf. It seems clear that this latter development is dependent upon, and a response to, the ubiquitous claim in the *tafsīr* that the Calf had been magically brought to life – a claim not found in *any* Jewish source that can be securely dated to the pre-Islamic period.

It also seems clear that the two-part narrative complex about the golden plate or slip must precede its partial appearance in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, for its author saw fit to make use of only the second half of the story, discarding the first, though it appears to be presupposed. In turn, the complementary account of Yaʿqūbī employs the first half of the story while discarding the second, though the second part as the denouement to the first likewise seems to be presupposed. These two sources, one Jewish and one Muslim, show us that authors could make use of part of that received narrative complex according to their particular requirements. In the case of the author of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, he seems to have had little need for the first part of the story, since he is very selective about the events leading up to the Israelites' exodus from Egypt he describes.[56] In the case of Yaʿqūbī, his decision for omitting the second part of the story is even more striking. Just a couple of pages after he recounts the story of the retrieval of the coffin, in the portion of his text in which he describes the events surrounding the revelation at Sinai, the version of the Calf story he relates is not that of the *tafsīr*, but rather an account that is essentially an Arabic translation or paraphrase of Exodus 32 as it is known from the Hebrew Bible.[57] Lacking any reference to the Samaritan, and keeping only the briefest reference to the Calf's lowing, Yaʿqūbī has no need whatsoever for the story of

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56   Notably, Ṣeraḥ bat Asher does appear in one passage in the text, in an episode connected to Moses's miracles leading up to the Exodus; see *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser*, ed. and trans. Börner-Klein, 664–7.

57   Yaʿqūbī seems to have been among the exegetes – the Muʿtazila most prominent among them – who rejected the idea that the Calf had been brought to life; consequently, he would have had little use for a narrative explaining the supernatural cause of its animation.

the golden tablet, and despite the ominous foreshadowing of his account of Ṣeraḥ bat Asher and the plate with the inscribed Name and engraved image of a calf, this potent object does not reappear in his account of the Israelites' wilderness wanderings. It is only in the later, encyclopedic account of *Midrash Tanḥuma* that we see the two parts of the narrative reunited, as the author cites each part in its appropriate place in his text.

The appearance of this midrashic account in the chronicle of Yaʿqūbī also serves to demonstrate that these newly reconfigured Jewish exegetical accounts – what we might call Judeo-Islamic or Islamicate midrash, which combine older midrashic themes with new exegetical developments in *tafsīr* – were accessible to both Jewish and Muslim authors in the Islamic imperial milieu. To return us to the theme with which we began in this essay, the problem of "influence" in early Islam, it is hardly irrelevant that Yaʿqūbī, best known for his geographical work *Kitāb al-buldān*, is known to have traveled extensively throughout the Islamic world gathering various sorts of lore, including biblical lore, from Jews and Christians, which he relates copiously in his chronicle. While at least some of his material comes from known literary works – for example, he relied on the *Cave of Treasures* for his accounts of the history of the protoplasts and patriarchs – Lazarus-Yafeh suggests that some of his knowledge of scriptural matters must have come from Jewish informants who transmitted midrashic traditions to him orally.[58] While claims of oral transmission invoked in scholarship often seem only to obscure matters or provide a crutch for arguments of dependence in the absence of evidence, here it seems quite reasonable to suppose that a direct, face-to-face communication of lore from an informant actually does inform Yaʿqūbī's quotation of this tradition on Joseph's coffin.

As an epilogue to this discussion, it is relevant to cite a later witness to this tradition, for another version appears in the *Kitāb āthār al-bāqiyya ʿan al-qurūn al-khāliyya* (or *Book of remaining traces of bygone eras*, also known as the *Chronology of ancient nations*) of Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048), an Iranian polymath who traveled extensively throughout the Islamic world gathering scientific and historical information. We can only speculate regarding the processes of diffusion that led to an anonymous Jewish exegete adapting the *tafsīr* accounts of al-Sāmirī and the animate Calf and assimilating them to the existing midrashic account of what he knew as a biblical rather than qurʾanic story; further, we are on only slightly firmer ground in supposing that

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58 Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined worlds. Medieval Islam and Bible criticism* (Princeton, NJ 1992), 114; cf. Adang, *Muslim writers on Judaism and the Hebrew Bible*, 36–9, 117–20. Yaʿqūbī was employed in the *barīd* (a combination courier and espionage service) under the Ṭāhirid dynasty of Khorasan, which gave him the opportunity to travel, and thus to collect information through direct observation and personal encounters.

Yaʿqūbī came to know this midrashic tradition through Jewish informants somewhere on his travels. But a century and a half after Yaʿqūbī, we move to yet firmer ground with Bīrūnī's account, as he is actually rather specific about his source, giving us a name and a location; he thus provides us with explicit confirmation that he received his knowledge of the Islamicate midrash on the golden tablet by way of direct, face-to-face transmission.

Perhaps it is inevitable given the vicissitudes of oral communication that details are lost or transformed as narratives flow from one context to another and wend their way through the centuries. Although it still resembles the tradition as we know it from older witnesses, Bīrūnī's version of the lamella narrative bears clear signs of having been transmuted from an exegetical account into a folktale, and thus, ironically enough, no longer mentions a lamella at all:

> The Jews say that it was Aaron who made the Calf, and so it is related in the Torah. The Jew Yaʿqūb b. Mūsā al-Niqrisī related the following to me in Jurjan:
>
> Moses wanted to leave Egypt together with the Israelites, but Joseph had ordered that they should take his coffin along with them. As he, however, was sunk in the bottom of the Nile and submerged beneath the flowing water, Moses could not take him away. Now, Moses took a piece of a paper and cut it into something like the shape (*hay'a*) of a fish; over this he recited some words, breathed upon it, wrote upon it, and threw it into the Nile. He remained there, awaiting the result, but no trace of it appeared.
>
> So Moses took another piece of paper and cut it into the image (*ṣūra*) of a calf, and he wrote upon it, recited some words over it, and breathed upon it. Then, when he was just about to throw it into the water as he had done the first time, the coffin appeared. So he threw away the figure of the calf which he had just had in his hand, and it was taken up by one of the bystanders . . .

The story then shifts to the event of the Israelites' making of the Calf, describing, as is familiar from many older midrashic accounts, the people's anxiety at Moses's absence and Aaron's various subterfuges to delay the affair. But finally:

> The people fetched Aaron and he melted the ornaments and poured them into a mold; but the result was nothing but broken chunks of metal. The same work he repeated in a hurry (*taʿjīlan*), hoping for the return of Moses or some news of him.

Now Aaron happened to have with him right then that very same image of a calf. He said to himself: "From the image of a fish a wonderful miracle once appeared; behold now what the image of a calf might do!" He took the image and threw it among the molten gold; when the molten mass was then poured into a mold, it formed a calf that lowed. Thereby the people were tempted away from belief, without Aaron having intended it.[59]

• • •

When the earliest Muslim rewritings of the qurʾanic Golden Calf episode began to be disseminated in the eighth century – perhaps even earlier – they stimulated the reshaping of Jewish understandings of the biblical Calf episode as well, catalyzing new approaches to the narrative that both drew on older midrashic themes and assimilated aspects of *tafsīr* drawn from the larger Islamic milieu. As a shared Judeo-Islamic or Islamicate tradition continued to evolve in the period after the Arab conquests, Jewish sources came more and more to reflect new perspectives on this and other biblical stories, renovating and revitalizing approaches to scriptural interpretation and paving the way for the emergence of systematic commentary on the Bible among Jews of Islamic lands. But Western scholarship on the Qurʾān has frequently misappraised this material. The assumption that Islam was generally grounded in the textual traditions of Judaism has often colored the perception of discernible parallels within Jewish and Islamic literature, with priority consistently awarded to Jewish traditions; the possibility that such traditions that mirror or resemble Islamic counterparts had actually been shaped through a reciprocal process of dynamic interaction between Muslims and Jews has seldom been countenanced. Like the more famous example of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*'s portrayal of the episode of Abraham's encounter with Ishmael's wives, the scene of the making of the Calf in this text and its parallels are conspicuously "post-Islamic," developing in tandem with or even in response to early traditions on the Qurʾān.[60]

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59   Yaʿqūb b. Mūsā appears as an informant twice in this section of Bīrūnī's work (the discussion of Jewish feast and fast days) and nowhere else in the text; nothing else is known of him. Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī, *Chronologie Orientalischer Völker von Albêrûnî*, ed. C. Eduard Sachau (Leipzig 1878), 276. The similarities between the accounts of Yaʿqūbī, Bīrūnī, and *Midrash Tanḥuma* were first observed by M. Grünbaum, *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sagenkunde* (Leiden 1893), 151–2, though he omits reference to the version of this narrative in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*.

60   There has been significant interest in the diversity of sources drawn upon by the author of this work, including material from the Pseudepigrapha that is not attested in older

There are numerous other examples of such parallels to be explored in Jewish and Islamic materials of this period. Another avenue for exploration opens up when we examine the broader context of another reference to the use of a lamella within *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*. This *topos* was apparently a kind of narrative lodestone, attracting textual elements from the Islamic milieu that could be interwoven into older exegetical traditions, for in another passage of the midrash a lamella appears as part of the author's explanation of the teraphim or family gods of Laban stolen by Jacob in Genesis 31. Here, the author describes the teraphim as made from a preserved human head with a golden slip inscribed with a name of an impure spirit (*tsîts zahav shem ruaḥ ṭûm'ah*) placed under its tongue. Its devotees are said to light candles and recite incantations before it, and it then divines the future for them.[61]

This portrayal of the use of the lamella to animate the teraphim derives from a trope about necromantic divination using preserved human heads that is widely attested in early Islamicate culture (and eventually medieval European culture as well), distributed in many different sources of the period, in Syriac and Arabic in addition to *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* and other midrashim in Hebrew. The wide diffusion of this tradition compels us to conclude that it must simply have been common knowledge of the day, rather than having a specific traceable textual genealogy.[62] Tellingly, this necromantic depiction of the teraphim is also found in both *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (*ad* Gen. 31:19) and the later recension of the *Tanḥuma* (*Vayyetze'* 12), which, like *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, seem to have been compiled well after the period of the Arab conquests, reflecting the absorption of considerable amounts of material in circulation in the Islamic milieu. In the case of both the teraphim and the Calf,

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midrashim, as well as certain Eastern Christian sources. It thus goes without saying that not all of the material in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* lacking a classical rabbinic precedent must necessarily be linked to Islam. However, given that traditions on the living Golden Calf are completely unattested in *any* unambiguously pre-Islamic work, Jewish or Christian, the source of this narrative development in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* is likely to be the ubiquitous appearance of this claim in early *tafsīr* on the qur'anic story.

61   *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer*, ed. and trans. Börner-Klein, 452–3. Here she renders *tsîts* as *Platte*.
62   Various scholars have commented on different aspects of this tradition, but there is as yet no single comprehensive treatment of it. See Joseph Dan, Teraphim. From popular belief to a folktale, *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 27 (1978), 99–106; Daniel Sperber, *Teraphim*. Mummified red men, in *Magic and Folklore in Rabbinic Literature* (Ramat-Gan 1994), 115–8; John Reeves, A Manichaean "blood-libel"?, *Aram* 16 (2004), 217–32. Strikingly, the theme of the necromantic teraphim described in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* and other midrashic sources of this period is later conjoined with the tradition of the animate Golden Calf as it is found in some medieval Jewish commentaries on the Hebrew Bible.

the author of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* has incorporated a reminiscence of ancient magic, mediated through undetermined literary sources from the larger environment, to vividly enrich his exegesis.

More research will undoubtedly further demonstrate the extensive interpenetration of traditions registered in both Jewish and Islamic texts of the early centuries *anno hegirae*. The mutual permeability of midrash and *tafsīr*, each absorbing stimuli from the other and fostering the growth of a common exegetical discourse, is an area of research ripe for reevaluation. Further, while scriptural exegesis is perhaps the most obvious sphere in which we might expect to discern the results of a Judeo-Islamic synthesis in the reconfiguration and reimagining of themes pertaining to biblical history in particular, as the parallels we have examined here demonstrate, one must often search further afield to discover the textual artifacts of the coevolution of scriptural themes in the early Islamic period – in relatively marginal witnesses to late midrashic creativity on the one hand, and a variety of genres of Islamic literature on the other.

To revisit the theme with which this essay opened, it is quite evident that the profound interpenetration of Jewish and Islamic tradition in the early centuries AH defies the conventional model of a clearly demarcated process of one-directional influence from the former to the latter. Rather, a general diffusion of themes and motifs that permeated the culture at large is more likely to inform the parallel trajectory of midrash and *tafsīr* in this era. The elaboration of a shared narrative complex linking Joseph's coffin and the Golden Calf is not an isolated incident. Rather, viewed through the proper lens, the fruits of Muslim and Jewish exegetical activity in the caliphal period testify not only to parallelism between them, but an actual community of opinion resulting from the emergence of a rich Islamicate culture among communities in Palestine, Egypt, Iraq, Central Asia, and Europe, the far-flung domains in which the conjoined discourses of this Judeo-Islamic tradition evolved. We must recognize that a variety of complex processes underlie the formation of this shared tradition; at the same time, in at least some cases, the role of direct, personal encounters, a face-to-face communication of ideas, should not be wholly discounted, though its impact in the circulation of traditions and exchange of "influences" has at times surely been overstated.

Inheriting Egypt: The Israelites and the Exodus in the Meccan Qurʾān[1]

Nicolai Sinai

1   Introduction

As an early article of Andrew Rippin felicitously reminds us, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are religions that have "a stake in history."[2] Their truth claims are intimately bound up with claims about God's intervention in past history and, conversely, the latter retains a crucial relevance for present believers. This applies to the Qurʾān no less than to the post-qurʾanic Islamic tradition; the Qurʾān is interested in stories from the past because they illustrate general patterns of God's dealings with man that are understood to be applicable to its own audience. The doctrinal and contemporary significance of historical events, therefore, exerts a much more profound impact on their presentation in the Islamic scripture than any antiquarian preoccupation with the accurate preservation of self-standing historical facts.

In light of this insight the present contribution will examine a number of qurʾanic accounts of the Exodus that exhibit a noteworthy conflation of Egypt and the Promised Land: after Pharaoh and his followers drown in the sea, the Israelites are seemingly given possession of the land of Pharaoh rather than migrating abroad. This peculiarity was already pointed out by Aloys Sprenger,[3]

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1   My quotations from the Qurʾān are adapted from Alan Jones (trans.), *The Qurʾān*, Cambridge 2007. Some aspects of the present contribution overlap with Walid A. Saleh, The Psalms in the Qurʾān and the Islamic tradition, in William P. Brown (ed.) *The Oxford handbook of the Psalms* (Oxford 2014), 281–96. Unfortunately, I discovered this publication only after my own chapter had been submitted.

2   Andrew Rippin, Literary analysis of *Qurʾan, tafsīr*, and *sīra*. The methodologies of John Wansbrough, in R.C. Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam in religious studies*, Tucson, AZ 1985), 151–63 and 227–32 (repr. as ch. 2 in Andrew Rippin, *The Qurʾān and its interpretative tradition*, Aldershot, UK 2001). Rippin's point here is the methodological warning that the "stake" that the three religions in question have in history must not lead scholars to give in to a naive emphasis on conclusively proving or disproving religious claims about "what really happened."

3   Aloys Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre des Moḥammad nach bisher grösstentheils unbenutzten Quellen bearbeitet* (Berlin 1869²), 2:445–7.

even though it has occasionally – and, in my view, incorrectly – been denied.[4] Somewhat predictably, Sprenger quickly went on to ascribe the idea that the Israelites took control of Egypt to a "mistake" on the part of Muḥammad. In what follows, I shall revisit the relevant material in greater detail and hopefully offer a somewhat more sophisticated treatment, without aiming to discount the seminal contribution made by scholarly pioneers like Sprenger.

Before beginning, I should point out two crucial premises underlying my approach to the Qurʾān: I accept both (i) Gustav Weil and Theodor Nöldeke's assumption that the mean verse length of qurʾanic *sūra*s increased over time, and (ii) the feasibility of subdividing (almost all of) the qurʾanic corpus into two chronologically consecutive textual layers, one Meccan, the other Medinan.[5] Throughout this chapter, I shall mostly limit my attention to *sūra*s commonly dated to the Meccan period. Furthermore, I shall not address the question of how the Islamic exegetical tradition grappled with the passages discussed below, which may well merit separate treatment.

2 Moses, Pharaoh, and the Exodus in the Meccan Qurʾān

The story of the Ten Plagues, the Israelites' miraculous escape from Egypt, and the drowning of Pharaoh in the Sea of Reeds is recounted in chapters 5–14 of the Book of Exodus. The Meccan Qurʾān makes numerous references to this sequence of events, and it will be helpful to commence with an overview of the relevant material.[6]

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4   Hartwig Hirschfeld, *Beiträge zur Erklärung des Ḳorân* (Leipzig 1886), 34, n. 1; Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Hildesheim 1988), 341 and 348 (see below).

5   The Weil-Nöldeke chronology is presented in Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The history of the Qurʾān*, trans. Wolfgang H. Behn (Leiden 2013), 47–188. On the general possibility of reconstructing the diachronic order of the qurʾanic proclamations see Nicolai Sinai, Inner-qurʾanic chronology, in Muhammad Abdel Haleem and Mustafa Shah (eds.), *The Oxford handbook of qurʾanic studies*, Oxford, forthcoming. In what follows, quantitative statements about the mean verse length of specific *sūra*s are based on this handbook chapter. On the distinction between a Meccan and a Medinan portion of the Qurʾān see Nicolai Sinai, The unknown known. Some groundwork for interpreting the Medinan Qurʾān, *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph* (forthcoming).

6   For an exhaustive list of the qurʾanic references to Moses and the Exodus see Rudi Paret, *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz*, Stuttgart 2001, on Q 7:103–37. A detailed study of the qurʾanic Moses pericopes according to Nöldeke's relative chronology is undertaken in Angelika Neuwirth, *Scripture, poetry and the making of a community. Reading the Qurʾān as a literary text* (Oxford 2014), 277–305; see especially the detailed breakdown of where different motifs of the story of Moses appear in the Qurʾān on pp. 282–3.

Some of the passages at hand are extremely short and involve merely the barest outline. According to one early couplet, an anonymous messenger was sent to Pharaoh, Pharaoh rebelled, and God "seized him with a fierce grasp" (Q 73:15–6). That the messenger was Moses and that Pharaoh's sin consisted of self-deification is stated in another early passage, Q 79:15–26. It is conspicuous that these and other qur'anic reminiscences of the story of Moses lack explicit references to the Exodus as such: Pharaoh's punishment is described only in general terms (cf. also Q 54:41–2), and there is no indication that Moses led the Israelites out of captivity. Even the relatively detailed account in Q 43:46–56, which is marked by a considerably higher mean verse length than those just discussed and would therefore appear to be chronologically later, describes only the confrontation between a solitary Moses, on the one hand, and "Pharaoh and his notables (*mala'*)," on the other (43:46).[7] The latter mock God's "signs" (43:47), which would appear to be an allusion to the Egyptian plagues, as it is stated that "every sign that We showed them was greater than the other" (43:48).[8] Pharaoh and his notables then implore Moses to intercede with God on their behalf and promise to let themselves be guided, yet subsequently break their pledge and "induce to frivolity" (*istakhaffa*) Pharaoh's entire people (*qawm*) (Q 43:49–54). As a punishment, the latter are all drowned (43:55–6). In Q 23:45–8, Moses is accompanied by his brother Aaron (23:45), and the confrontation is once again with "Pharaoh and his notables," who "were arrogant and haughty" (23:46), deem Moses and Aaron to be liars, and are consequently destroyed (23:48: *fa-kadhdhabūhumā fa-kānū mina l-muhlakīn*). Incidentally, other qur'anic messengers are also faced with a hostile, boastful, and unbelieving group of notables (*mala'*).[9] Q 11:96–9, too, provides only the most general sketch of Moses' mission to "Pharaoh and his notables" (11:97) and hints that the latter are subject to punishment both in this world and the hereafter (11:98–9). Again, no reference is made to Moses' leading the Israelites out of Egypt.

Q 40:23–46 contains a much longer account. It places Pharaoh in the company of Hāmān and Qārūn, who seem to play the role of viziers (40:24, 40:36–7;

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7   On the term *mala'* see Arne Ambros (with the collaboration of Stephan Procházka), *A concise dictionary of koranic Arabic* (Wiesbaden 2004), 258.

8   Other qur'anic passages exhibit an even more unequivocal awareness of the Egyptian plagues: see Q 7:130–5; 17:101–2; and 27:12.

9   This includes Noah (Q 7:60; 11:27, 38; 23:24), Hūd (Q 7:66), Ṣāliḥ (Q 7:75), Shuʿayb (Q 7:88, 90), and another anonymous messenger (Q 23:33). In addition, Q 38:6 applies the word to some of Muḥammad's opponents. In many cases, this inimical *mala'* is explicitly linked with unbelief (Q 7:66, 90; 11:27; 23:24, 33: *al-mala' alladhīna kafarū*) or haughtiness (Q 7:75, 88: *al-mala' alladhīna stakbarū*).

see also Q 28:6–38).[10] Here, Moses is presented as having had a group of followers, for Pharaoh orders that the "sons of those who believe with him [Moses]" be killed and only their women be spared (Q 40:25). This is of course an echo of Exodus 1:15–22, although Q 40 moves Pharaoh's command from before the birth of Moses to a later point in the narrative and thus gives it the dramaturgical function of a climactic threat triggered by Moses' preaching.[11] Strikingly, the collective that *sūra* 40 associates with Moses is not defined in ethnic but in religious terms, as "those who believe with him." In its qur'anic rendering, the story of Moses thus illustrates a recurrent historical situation, namely, God's assistance of the faithful, a moral that is explicitly drawn in Q 40:51: "We assist (*nanṣuru*) Our messengers and those who believe in the life of this world and on the day when the witnesses arise." We may also observe that *sūra* 40's focus on "those who believed with" Moses has the consequence that the latter becomes a decidedly secondary figure: he is only accorded a brief line in Q 40:27, whereupon the pericope segues into an exchange between Pharaoh and an anonymous "believing man from Pharaoh's people who concealed his belief" (*rajulun mu'minun min āli fir'awna yaktumu īmānahu*; Q 40:28).[12] In the end, the believer is "protected" by God against the "evil plotting" of his compatriots, while the people of Pharaoh are "encompassed by an evil punishment" (*fa-waqāhu llāhu sayyi'āti mā makarū wa-ḥāqa bi-āli fir'awna sū'u l-'adhāb*; Q 40:45). Moses' ministry is thus presented as dividing the people of Pharaoh into two factions, a majority of unbelievers led by Pharaoh and his notables, on the one hand, and a small band of believers led by Moses, on the other.

Although Moses' biblical function of liberating the Israelites is not explicitly mentioned in the passages just surveyed, it is not absent from the Meccan Qur'ān. In *sūra*s 20 and 26 – which Nöldeke would assign to the middle

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10 On the qur'anic Pharaoh and Hāmān see Adam Silverstein, Hāmān's transition from the Jāhiliyya to Islam, *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008), 285–308; Adam Silverstein, The qur'anic Pharaoh, in Gabriel S. Reynolds (ed.), *New perspectives on the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān in its historical context 2* (Abingdon, UK 2011), 467–77.

11 The same command is also mentioned in Q 2:49; 7:127, 141; 14:6; and 28:4. In the latter case, the command to kill the male children is positioned before the infant Moses is abandoned by his mother, in line with the biblical storyline.

12 Might the "believing man" not be identical with Moses? This seems unlikely, given that Moses is explicitly named in v. 27, whereupon v. 28 shifts to the generic description "a believing man from Pharaoh's people …" – That the expression *āl fir'awn*, used in v. 28 and again in vv. 45 and 46, here means the people of Pharaoh rather than his immediate family is implied by the fact that it seems to be used interchangeably with the word *qawm*: the anonymous believer is credited with an extended exhortation to acknowledge and fear God that is addressed to "my people" (*yā qawmi*, see Q 40:29, 30, 32, 38, 39, 41).

Meccan period, like *sūra* 44[13] – God instructs Moses and Aaron to demand of Pharaoh: "Let the Israelites go with us (*arsil maʿanā banī isrāʾīla*)!" (Q 20:47; 26:17).[14] A variant of this command recurs in the later *sūra* 7 (v. 105). Of course, the designation *banū isrāʾīl* conveys a clear connotation of common descent, which ties in with the fact that Q 7:127 juxtaposes "Pharaoh's people" and "Moses and his people." Furthermore, Q 26:22 confirms the biblical scenario that Pharaoh had "enslaved" the Israelites. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that Q 44:18 reformulates Moses' request as "Hand over God's servants to me!" (*addū ilayya ʿibāda llāhi*). Several verses in which Moses is commanded to lead the Israelites out of Egypt likewise refer to them as God's "servants": "Lead my servants (*ʿibād*) away by night, for you will be followed!" (Q 26:52; similarly, 20:77 and 44:23). Such diction reinforces the sense gained from Q 40:25 that Moses is associated with a collective primarily demarcated by their faith in God and only secondarily by their descent. That the crucial characteristic of the Israelites was their belief in God is also made clear in Q 10:83: "The only ones to believe Moses were descendants from his people, fearing Pharaoh and their [= the Egyptians?] notables, namely, that he [= Pharaoh?] would subject them to trials (*fa-mā āmana li-mūsā illā dhurriyyatun min qawmihi ʿalā khawfin min firʿawna wa-malaʾihim an yaftinahum*)." In the Meccan *sūra*s, the Israelites thus figure as a paradigm of the beleaguered faithful who benefit from a divine act of deliverance. All of this would appear to closely mirror the situation of Muḥammad and his own adherents and hence would have conveyed an eminently consolatory message to them.[15] Indeed, the fact that the term "God's servants (*ʿibād*)" is applied both to the Israelites at the time of Moses and used as a universal designation for all believers across history indicates that during the Meccan period the qurʾanic community closely identified with the oppressed Israelites (even though Q 17:4–7 adopts a distinctly critical note by accusing the Israelites of having "caused corruption in the land" and applies the term God's "servants" to the enemies whom God appointed to chastise the Israelites).[16]

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13   Nöldeke et al., *History of the Qurʾān*, 100–7.

14   There is also a highly unspecific reference in Q 37:115–6: "We delivered the two of them [= Moses and Aaron] and their people from the great distress. / We aided them, and they emerged victorious."

15   On the Qurʾān's tendency to portray the situation of past messengers as corresponding to the situation of Muḥammad and his followers, see e.g. Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin 1926), 8–9, 18.

16   See Q 37:40, 74, 81, 111, 122, 128, 132, 160, 169, 171 and Q 15:40, 42, 49, as well as the comments in Neuwirth, *Scripture*, 207.

3 The Israelite Takeover of Egypt

Let us now turn to the issue at the center of this study, namely, the fact that a substantial number of qur'anic passages unmistakably imply that the Israelites were given possession of the very same land over which Pharaoh had reigned before. This is clearly signaled by the end of the Moses pericope in *sūra* 26 (vv. 57–9):

57   We brought them [the people of Pharaoh] out of gardens and springs
58   and treasures and a noble place.
59   Thus it was; and We caused the Israelites to inherit them [= the gardens and the springs etc.].

That the Israelites take over the land of Pharaoh rather than migrating elsewhere is also unequivocally implied by the end of the brief Moses pericope in Q 17:101–4:

103   He [Pharaoh] wished to chase them away from the land (*al-arḍ*),
        but We drowned him and all who were with him.
104   And after him We said to the Israelites,
        "Dwell in the land!
        And when the announcement of the next world comes to pass,
        We shall bring you forward as a motley crowd."[17]

Similarly, the Moses narrative in Q 28 is preceded by the following summary:

4   Pharaoh became haughty in the land
     and divided its people into factions,
     seeking to weaken a party among them
     by slaying their sons and sparing their women.
     He was one of those who wreak mischief.
5   We wished to show favor to those who had been oppressed in the land
     and to make them examples
     and to make them the inheritors,
6   and to give them a place (*numakkinu lahum*) in the land,
     and to show Pharaoh and Hāmān and their hosts
     what they feared from them.[18]

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17   On the word *lafīf* see Ambros, *Dictionary*, 246–7.
18   *Sūra* 44 is more elliptical: v. 25 refers to the "gardens and springs" left behind by the people of Pharaoh, and v. 28 states that God gave these as an inheritance to "another people."

What Pharaoh and his notables fear is being displaced from their land: in
Q 20:57, Pharaoh asks Moses whether "you have come to drive us from our land
by your sorcery" (*li-tukhrijanā min arḍinā bi-siḥrika*), and the same apprehen-
sion resonates in Q 20:63 ("They said, 'These two men are sorcerers who wish
to drive you from your land by means of their sorcery'...") as well as in Q 26:35
and 7:110. The inference that it is Pharaoh and his followers rather than the
Israelites who are removed from "the land" is also supported by other verses
from the extended Moses narrative in Q 7:103–74. According to Q 7:128, Moses
exhorts his people to "seek God's help and be patient; for the land belongs to
God, and he gives it as an inheritance to whom he wishes," and in the following
verse Moses consoles his people by saying that "perhaps your Lord will destroy
your enemy and appoint you as successors (*yastakhlifakum*) in the land."

There are thus ample indications in a considerable number of Meccan *sūra*s
that the Israelites are given control over Pharaoh's former domain. Some verses
might nonetheless be taken to imply the more familiar model of a migration
of the Israelites abroad. According to Sprenger, this is the case for the Moses
narrative in *sūra* 10, which encompasses vv. 75–93.[19] Although Sprenger does
not elaborate on his claim, the relevant verses would appear to be Q 10:87–93.
According to v. 87, Moses and Aaron were instructed by God to "take [dual]
houses in Egypt as a home for your people (*tabawwaʾā li-qawmikumā bi-miṣra
buyūtan*), make [plural] your houses places to which one turns in prayer
(*wa-jʿalū buyūtakum qiblatan*), perform [plural] prayer, and give [singular]
good tidings to the believers." In v. 90, the divine voice reports that "We made
the Israelites pass through the sea (*jāwaznā bi-banī isrāʾīla l-baḥra*)," while
Pharaoh drowned in pursuit of them.[20] Finally, v. 93 asserts that "We gave
the Israelites a home in a truthful place (*wa-la-qad bawwaʾnā banī isrāʾīla
mubawwaʾa ṣidqin*) and gave them good things as their provision." It is not at
all implausible to construe this sequence of verses as speaking of a preliminary
settlement of the Israelites in Egypt (v. 87) and a second, permanent settle-
ment in Palestine (v. 93) following their crossing of the sea (v. 90).[21]

In view of the passages from Q 26, 17, and 28 that have just been quoted, it stands to
reason that this "other people" are in fact the Israelites. The Moses pericope in *sūra* 44
has a general tendency towards the allusive: even Moses himself is not named but simply
referred to as "a noble messenger" (v. 17).

19   Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre*, 2:445.

20   On Pharaoh's repentance *in extremis*, as narrated in Q 10:90–2 see Nicolai Sinai, Pharaoh's
submission to God in the Qurʾān and in Rabbinic literature. A case study in qurʾanic inter-
textuality, forthcoming in a volume edited by Holger Zellentin (Abingdon, UK).

21   Thus Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 341.

Yet closer scrutiny of the passages reveals that a different interpretation is entirely feasible. After Moses' people have confessed their trust in God (vv. 84–6), v. 87 summons them to settle in Egypt and freely practice their religion ("make your houses places to which one turns in prayer, perform prayer, and give good tidings to the believers"). In v. 88 Moses objects that the wealth that God has granted Pharaoh and his notables enables them to lead others astray from the path of God, and implores God to "obliterate their wealth and harden their hearts, so that they do not believe until they see the painful punishment." God then assents to this request (v. 89). The main objective of the Israelites' passing through the sea, as recounted in v. 90, is thus to set a trap for "Pharaoh and his hosts" rather than to relocate Moses and his followers. Within the context of *sūra* 10, there is nothing to rule out that the Israelites' journey is merely a temporary roundtrip serving to eliminate their persecutors, after which they safely return to their place of departure. Arguably, it is only by reading the biblical Exodus narrative into Q 10:87–93 that one might infer that the "truthful home" (*mubawwa'a ṣidqin*) at which the Israelites are ultimately said to reside is located somewhere beyond the sea.[22]

There are further observations supporting such an understanding of *sūra* 10's version of the Exodus. First, it seems difficult to understand v. 87 as a command that is meant to be immediately implemented: how *could* Moses and Aaron "take houses in Egypt as a home for their people" and make these houses "places to which one turns in prayer," given that the earlier v. 83 highlighted the believers' fear of Pharaoh and his notables? The most reasonable understanding of v. 87 would therefore be to view it as a divine promise, as announcing a state of affairs that God undertakes to bring about at some future time. This reading is supported by the lexical overlap between v. 87 and v. 93, which describes the final settlement of the Israelites: "We gave the Israelites a home in a truthful place (*wa-la-qad bawwa'nā banī isrā'īla mubawwa'a ṣidqin*)." After Pharaoh and his hosts have been annihilated, the Israelites are safely able to settle down in Egypt and practice their religion without the fear referred to in v. 83. The curious phrase "a truthful home" (*mubawwa' ṣidq*) also suggests that v. 93 is to be understood as claiming fulfilment of a promise made in v. 87: the Israelites' ultimate place of residence evinces God's "truthfulness" because

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22   Ibid. The linguistic similarity between the qur'anic phrase *mubawwa'a ṣidqin* (on which see below) and the "habitation of justice" (*něwê ṣedeq*) mentioned at Jeremiah 31:23 is relevant, but insufficient to establish that in its qur'anic guise the designation could not refer to the Israelites' settlement in Egypt.

it makes good on an antecedent promise.[23] But if v. 93 fulfils v. 87, it must refer to settlement in Egypt rather than elsewhere. Contra Sprenger, then, *sūra* 10 depicts the Israelites as implanting themselves in Egypt.

Matters are no less complicated with regard to the extended Moses narrative in Q 7:103–74. As we saw above, in Q 7:128–9 Moses appears to promise the Israelites that they will inherit the land of Pharaoh. Q 7:137 suggests that this is indeed what came to pass: "And We caused the people who had been oppressed (*al-qawm alladhīna kānū yustaḍʿafūna*) to inherit the eastern and western parts of the land that We have blessed (*mashāriqa l-arḍi wa-maghāribahā llatī bāraknā fīhā*); and the fair word of your Lord was fulfilled for the Israelites in return for their patience."[24] What might give rise to puzzlement here is the fact that the land inherited by the Israelites is referred to as the "land that We have blessed." Qurʾanic references to the "Blessed Land" are reasonably taken to be the equivalent of the "Promised Land" of the Bible.[25] Speyer therefore assumes that Q 7:137 must refer to the Israelites' inheritance of Palestine.[26] Such a reading of the verse might be deemed to receive further support from what follows: Q 7:138 states that "We made the Israelites pass through the sea (*jāwaznā bi-banī isrāʾīla l-baḥra*) and they came to a people who were devoted to idols of theirs," upon which the Israelites demand of Moses: "Make for us a god as they have gods!" Moses refuses, of course, and the narrative continues with the episode of the Golden Calf (vv. 142–57).[27] Thus, it seems undeniable that *sūra* 7 portrays the Israelites as moving into new territory after the Exodus, rather

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23   See also Q 54:55, where the God-fearing are said to be "in a truthful abode (*fī maqʿadi ṣidqin*)." Here, too, the reference would seem to be to the fulfilment of an anterior divine promise (namely, that of paradisiacal reward for the pious).

24   Jones translates the verse more literally as speaking of "the eastern and western parts of the land, on which We had bestowed blessing."

25   Q 17:1 locates this blessed region around the "distant place of prostration." In view of Q 17:4–7, which allude to the destruction of the Israelite sanctuary by the Babylonians (who are not named), the Israelite "place of prostration" mentioned in Q 17:1 and also 17:7 is clearly the qurʾanic equivalent of the Jerusalem temple. Note that Weil considered Q 17:1 to be a post-prophetic interpolation, a view to which my attention has been drawn by Devin Stewart (see Nöldeke et al., *History of the Qurʾān*, 111–2). For another qurʾanic reference to the Blessed Land see Q 21:71, which states that God "delivered Lot to the land that We had blessed for the inhabitants of the world."

26   Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 348.

27   Neuwirth has argued that this part of the *sūra* includes later Medinan additions; see Angelika Neuwirth, Meccan texts – Medinan additions? Politics and the re-reading of liturgical communications, in Rüdiger Arnzen and Jörn Thielmann (eds.), *Words, texts, and concepts cruising the Mediterranean sea. Studies on the sources, contents, and influences of Islamic civilization and Arabic philosophy and science* (Leuven 2004), 71–93.

than retiring to Pharaoh's former domain. Indeed, the same might be said of *sūra* 20, in which the drowning of Pharaoh is likewise followed by reminiscences of the Israelites' wandering in the desert, including God's provision of manna and quails and the veneration of the Golden Calf (Q 20:80–99).[28] So how are we to reconcile these allusions to the Israelites' post-Exodus travels with verses like Q 20:57 and 63, and Q 7:128–9 and 137, which imply that the Israelites displaced the people of Pharaoh?

The most promising solution, in my view, is to assume that the Qurʾān's original audience would have detected no contradiction here: the Israelites are given control over the former domain of Pharaoh as a home base yet continue to expand further. Qurʾanic references to the "Blessed Land" should probably be taken to encompass a number of places and regions that the Hebrew Bible treats as distinct, namely: (i) the site of Moses' prophetic call in "the holy valley Ṭuwā" (e.g. Q 20:10ff.); (ii) Egypt or the land of Pharaoh; and (iii) the territory that was explored, and perhaps also colonized, by the Israelites after the Exodus, including the region of the idolatrous people mentioned in Q 7:138 and the mountain at which Moses concluded a covenant with God and where the Israelites worshiped the Golden Calf (see Q 7:142–57 and 20:80–98).[29] Where exactly, from the qurʾanic perspective, we should place the Israelite sanctuary, or *masjid*, mentioned at Q 17:1 and 17:7 is impossible to say given the brevity of the reference.[30] In any case, the Qurʾān's Blessed Land would appear to fuse Egypt, the Sinai, and Palestine into one sacred landscape that is understood to provide the setting for biblical history and all of which, it seems, the Israelites came to inherit.[31] This rather expanded nature of the qurʾanic Blessed Land might be reflected in Q 7:137, which intimates a distinction between its "eastern and western parts." Conceivably, the western half of the Blessed Land is to be identified with the territory previously ruled by Pharaoh.[32] It should be

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28 Manna and quails also figure in *sūra* 7, but after the Golden Calf episode (v. 160).

29 See Neuwirth, Meccan texts – Medinan additions?, on the possibility that both retellings of the Golden Calf episode might contain Medinan insertions.

30 On Q 17:1, 7 see above, n. 25. The alternation between Israelite "corruption" and divine punishment in Q 17:4–7 recognizably echoes the historical theology underlying the biblical books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings (the so-called Deuteronomistic History).

31 This geographical vision might also underlie Q 23:20, which associates Mount Sinai with olive trees; Q 95:1–3 names figs, too. See also the comments in Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 124.

32 Another peculiarity that characterizes the Qurʾān's understanding of biblical geography consists in the fact that the Nile and the biblical "Sea of Reeds" (Exodus 13:18, 15:4 and 22) may be viewed as the same body of water, given that the word *al-yamm* (ultimately derived from its Aramaic cognate) is used both in the context of the infant Moses being

noted that such a synthetic vision of the "Blessed Land" seems to be peculiar to the Meccan layer of the Qurʾān, for the Medinan *sūra*s 2 and 5 exhibit a much more tangible sense that the Israelites departed Egypt for good and entered a different geographical space.[33]

4   God's Bequeathal of the Land

As the discussion above demonstrates, the Meccan Qurʾān presents a very peculiar version of the biblical Exodus narrative, one centered on the idea that God bequeathed to the Israelites the land of Pharaoh. It would be shallow to ascribe this simply to a misunderstanding on the part of Muḥammad and his followers. Rather, the Qurʾān recasts the traditional Exodus narrative in a manner that accords with what the Qurʾān takes to be a recurrent pattern of divine agency in history: if a people refuse to heed a messenger sent to them, God will annihilate them and replace them with a different people.[34] Some qurʾanic verses employ the verb *istakhlafa*, "to appoint someone as a successor," as a quasi-technical term to designate such a divine act of replacement.[35] For instance, Q 7:129, quoted above, has Moses tell the Israelites that "perhaps your Lord will destroy your enemy and appoint you as successors (*yastakhlifakum*) in the land." Q 11:57 ascribes a similar statement to the prophet Hūd, who warns his compatriots that "my Lord will appoint another people than you as [your] successors (*yastakhlifu rabbī qawman ghayrakum*)."[36] Presenting the Israelites

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placed in the ark (Q 20:39; 28:7) and the Exodus (Q 20:78; 28:40). See Arthur Jeffery, *The foreign vocabulary of the Qurʾān* (Leiden 2007), 293. Note that in connection with the Exodus, *al-baḥr* is used interchangeably with *al-yamm* (Q 7:136, 138; 20:77, 78).

33   See Q 2:58, 61, 246; 5:21–6.

34   On the paradigmatic sequence of prophetic preaching, rejection, and divine retribution, as evident in many Meccan *sūra*s, see David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the unbelievers. A qurʾanic study* (Richmond, UK 1999), 39–115.

35   See Ambros, *Dictionary*, 90 and in much more detail Wolfdietrich Fischer, Das geschichtliche Selbstverständnis Muhammads und seiner Gemeinde. Zur Interpretation von Vers 55 der 24. Sure des Koran, *Oriens* 36 (2001), 145–59, who also highlights pertinent comments by Wadad al-Qadi and Karl Prenner (ibid., 148).

36   The verb *istakhlafa* also occurs in Q 6:133 and in Q 24:55 (Medinan), according to which "God has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that he will appoint them as successors in the land, in the same way in which he appointed as successors those who came before them." As Fischer notes, the Qurʾān also employs the phrase *jaʿala* + accusative + *khalīfatan/khulafāʾ* in a near-synonymous sense, e.g. at Q 7:69 (Fischer, Das geschichtliche Selbstverständnis, 148–9).

as taking possession of Egypt rather than migrating abroad thus ensures that the Exodus is reconciled with the principle of divine *istikhlāf*, understood as a general rule of God's compensatory intervention in the world. In this sense, the Meccan Qurʾān's modification of the biblical Exodus narrative conforms to its overarching theology of history. We are confronted not with a random distortion of the biblical Exodus narrative, but with its subordination to a different theological paradigm.

It must be observed, though, that explicit occurrences of the concept of *istikhlāf* in the Meccan corpus are limited to *sūra*s 6, 7, 10, 11, and 35, all considered to be late Meccan by Nöldeke.[37] Indeed, the *sūra*s just enumerated all exhibit a higher mean verse length than *sūra*s 20, 26, 44, and 17, in which the Israelites are already depicted as gaining possession of Egypt. Hence, an explicit notion of divine *istikhlāf* as a universal historical pattern only emerged after the Qurʾān's recasting of the Exodus narrative had already taken place: the former is a secondary systematization that builds on the latter, rather than vice-versa. There is, however, a similarly general concept that informed earlier qurʾanic retellings of the Exodus. This is the notion of God's bequeathal of the land to the believers or the righteous. It is perhaps most prominent in *sūra* 7, occurring in vv. 100, 128, and 137,[38] but it also figures in other, and putatively earlier, qurʾanic retellings of the Exodus. The relevant verses have already been reviewed above: according to Q 26:59, God "caused the Israelites to *inherit*" the Egyptians' gardens and springs; Q 28:5 states that God wished "to show favor to those who had been oppressed in the land … and to make them the *inheritors*"; and Q 44:28 asserts, more opaquely, that God "*bequeathed (awrathnā)*" the Egyptians' gardens, springs, and other possessions to "another people," probably a reference to the Israelites.[39] Several *sūra*s thus present the Israelite

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37   Nöldeke et al., *History of the Qurʾān*, 117–33.

38   The concept of inheritance first occurs in a paraenetic interlude occurring between *sūra* 7's Shuʿayb and Moses pericopes (vv. 85–93 and vv. 103–74 respectively). According to v. 94, when God sends a prophet to a settlement, he unleashes "misery and adversity" against its inhabitants "so that they might become humble." Unfortunately, the "inhabitants of the settlements" (*ahl al-qurā*) invariably deemed their prophets to be liars, whereupon God "seized them on account of what they used to commit" (v. 96). V. 100 then appeals to "those who inherit the land after its [previous] inhabitants" (*alladhīna yarithūna l-arḍa min baʿdi ahlihā*) and reminds them that they, too, could be "smitten for their sins." As pointed out above, the concept of inheritance recurs prominently in the subsequent Moses narrative, in v. 128 ("the land belongs to God, and he gives it as an inheritance to whom he wishes") and v. 137 (God "caused the people who had been oppressed to inherit the eastern and western parts of the land that We have blessed").

39   See above, n. 18.

takeover of Pharaoh's land as evincing the principle that the oppressed will ultimately inherit the land in which they have previously been mistreated.[40]

It is in this context that Sprenger highlights Q 21:105: "We have written in the Psalms after the Reminder that My righteous servants will inherit the land (*wa-la-qad katabnā fī l-zabūri min baʿdi l-dhikri anna l-arḍa yarithuhā ʿibādiya l-ṣāliḥūna*)." As various scholars have observed, this is a verbatim quotation of Psalm 37:29: "The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein forever."[41] As a matter of fact, the concept of inheritance permeates all of Psalm 37, appearing not only in v. 29, but also in vv. 9, 11, 22, and 34.[42] Echoes of the idea that God will bequeath "the land" to "the righteous" or those who "love" Him recur elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, too, namely, in Isaiah 60:21 and Proverbs 8:21, which are in turn cited in the Mishnah (Sanhedrin 10:1 and Uqṣin 3:12).[43] Furthermore, v. 11 of the psalm ("the meek shall inherit the earth") is quoted in one of the Beatitudes introducing the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:5): "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Thus, Q 21:105 does not merely quote an isolated Psalmic verse or even an individual Psalm but invokes a recurrent and presumably well-known biblical and post-biblical *topos*. The latter reverberates in a further qurʾanic verse, Q 39:74, according to which the saved will say, "Praise belongs to God who has been true to us in His promise and has made us inherit the land so that we may dwell (*natabawwaʾu*) where we wish in the Garden."[44] Hence, that God has promised a certain group of persons "inheritance of the land" is assumed to be a familiar proposition by the Qurʾān.[45]

The slogan "the righteous will inherit the land" is capable of being interpreted in different senses. Q 39:74 gives it an eschatological spin: to "inherit the land" is equated with being granted access to Paradise. The same would appear

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40   Thus Sprenger, *Das Leben und die Lehre*, 2:445. On the qurʾanic tendency to view individual historical episodes as exemplifying general historical patterns see also the remarks in Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic origins. The beginnings of Islamic historical writing* (Princeton 1998), 84.

41   Apart from Sprenger, the Psalmic verse is pointed out in Hirschfeld, *Beiträge*, 34 and Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen*, 449.

42   Hirschfeld, *Beiträge*, 34.

43   Ibid.

44   Given that *sūra* 39 has a considerably higher mean verse length than *sūra* 21 (98.4 as opposed to 67.08 transcription letters), Q 39:74 is reasonably construed as referring back to the explicit Psalmic quotation in Q 21:105.

45   Note that the Peshitta renders biblical passages such as those just cited by using the verbs *ireṯ* ("to inherit" = Hebrew *yārash*, also *nāḥal*) and *awreṯ* ("to bequeath" = Hebrew *hinḥîl*), which are of course cognates of the qurʾanic terms *waratha* and *awratha*.

to apply to Q 21:105, which follows a verse group about the saved that commences at Q 21:101. Yet such an eschatological understanding of the promise of inheritance does not rule out that it might also have a this-worldly application, just as the Qur'ān envisages unbelievers to be punished both in this world and the hereafter (see, for instance, Q 11:60, 99; 28:42). The way in which the concept of divine bequeathal of the land is utilized in the Moses narratives of *sūra*s 7, 26, 28, and 44 highlights precisely such a this-worldly aspect of the divine promise quoted in Q 21:105.

The link between the Exodus and the idea of divine bequeathal that is observable from a fairly early stage of the Qur'ān's genesis is certainly not a qur'anic innovation. Already the Hebrew Bible deploys the notion of inheritance in order to describe the Israelites' conquest of the Promised Land: "Little by little I will drive them out from before you [singular], until you become fruitful and inherit the land," God promises the Israelites in Exodus 23:30. Of course, inheritance of the land is understood here as a foundational turning point of biblical history, and the land is a very specific one, namely, the land promised as an inheritance to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (cf. Exodus 32:13), i.e. Palestine rather than Egypt. The Qur'ān, in contrast, retains the application of the idea of divine bequeathal to the Exodus narrative, yet relentlessly universalizes it: the reward imparted to the Israelites illustrates how God aids the believers throughout history, and the land that will be bequeathed could, presumably, be any land in which believers are oppressed: "We wished to show favor to those who had been oppressed in the land (*alladhīna stuḍʿifū fī l-arḍ*) and to make them examples (*aʾimmatan*) and to make them the inheritors, / and to give them a place (*numakkinu lahum*) in the land . . ." (Q 28:5–6).

The qur'anic retelling of the story of Moses and Pharaoh in *sūra*s such as Q 20, 26, and 44 thus builds on a pre-existing nexus between the biblical *topos* of God's bequeathal of the land and the Exodus narrative. The present contribution will not attempt even a cursory study of this notion in post-biblical Jewish and Christian literature. We do need to ask, however, why it is that, against the consensus of the Jewish and Christian traditions, the qur'anic Israelites inherit Egypt rather than a Promised Land beyond the sea. The obvious answer is that the *sūra*s in question are motivated by contemporary paraenetic concerns: just as God assisted the Israelites and "made them the inheritors" (Q 28:5), so, it is implied, He will assist the qur'anic community and make them the inheritors of their current place of residence, where they, like the Israelites, are "oppressed" on account of their religious convictions. The Qur'ān reconfigures the standard Exodus narrative in order to make it relevant to its own audience, who would naturally have identified with the Israelites. As observed above, such identification of the Meccan community with the ancient Israelites is palpable as

early as the Moses pericope in Q 40:23–46, which highlights God's assistance (*n-ṣ-r*) to the believers both in this world and the Hereafter.[46]

The earliest texts in which this paraenetically motivated recasting of the Exodus narrative is attested are most likely *sūra*s 44 and 26. Judging by their mean verse length, they must be earlier than *sūra* 21, in which the promise of inheritance of the land is explicitly quoted in a manner reminiscent of scriptural proof texts.[47] The latest of the Meccan Exodus accounts discussed in this chapter is Q 7:103ff.: not only does *sūra* 7 have a higher mean verse length (117.87 transcription letters) than *sūra*s 17, 20, 26, 28, and 44, but, as highlighted above, it also utilizes an explicit notion of divine *istikhlāf*. We can certainly assume that the original audience of *sūra* 7 would have understood its references to God's bequeathal of the land against the background of Q 21:105. All of this endows *sūra* 7 with a considerable conceptual density: it synthesizes the entire Meccan discourse about God's deliverance of the Israelites.

5   A Medinan Outlook

The material reviewed in this chapter shows that the Meccan Qur'ān generally assumes that the Israelites "inherited" Egypt rather than (just) a Promised Land beyond the sea, although some passages do seem to portray them as expanding into other territory as well. This recasting of the established Exodus narrative was simultaneously motivated by theological and paraenetic concerns: it served to integrate the Exodus narrative into a unified paradigm of how God governs human history, and equally provided consolation to Muḥammad's followers and reinforced their expectation that a conclusive divine intervention

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46   Also relevant in this regard would be the portrayal of the Israelites as having been "oppressed" (*istaḍʿafa*) at Q 28:4, 5 and 7:137; see also Q 7:75, set in the context of Ṣāliḥ's confrontation with the unbelieving notables of his people. For an explicit application of the term to Muḥammad's contemporaries see Q 4:75 and 8:26 (Medinan). Unfortunately, even a cursory discussion of the qurʾanic semantics of *istiḍʿāf* and its relationship to other terms associated with poverty and a low socio-economic status – especially *miskīn* and *masākīn* – is beyond the scope of this chapter. A superficial glimpse at the material suggests that *miskīn* functions as a largely descriptive term, whereas the concept of *istiḍʿāf* is frequently bound up with questions of religious belief and unbelief. It is tempting to link the term to the piety of poverty articulated in many biblical passages; cf. J. David Pleins and Thomas D. Hanks, Poor, poverty, in David N. Freedman (ed.) *The Anchor Bible dictionary* (New York 1992), 5:402–24.

47   Q 44 and 26 have a mean verse length of 36.61 and 36.71 transcription letters respectively, whereas that of Q 21 is 67.08. Q 20, at 61.04, ranges somewhat below Q 21.

would make them, too, "the inheritors" of their unbelieving compatriots (cf. Q 28:5).[48]

However, later parts of the Qurʾān document that, at least at first, actual events followed a very different course: the qurʾanic community was "expelled" from its "homes" (Q 3:195 and elsewhere) and forced to "emigrate" (*hājara*) to Medina. As Walid Saleh has shown, as early as the late Meccan *sūra*s the Qurʾān grapples with the problem that the divine punishment announced by numerous previous qurʾanic proclamations had so far failed to materialize.[49] The fact that Muhammad and, indirectly, all of his adherents, are enjoined not to be in doubt (Q 10:94; 11:17; 11:109) may be taken to indicate that such doubts were in fact increasingly prevalent in the late Meccan community.[50] Adopting once more the register of historical generalization, one *sūra* even affirms that God is only wont to intervene when "the messengers have despaired" and have begun to suspect that they "have been deceived" (Q 12:110):[51] God's decisive "assistance" (*fatḥ*) will only arrive, it seems, once the community has been engulfed by utter hopelessness. The profound "crisis of divine tarrying"[52] that is palpable in such statements would have been considerably heightened by the promises of divine bequeathal examined above: for a certain period prior to the emigration and also thereafter, it could easily have appeared that God would not, after all, make Muḥammad's followers the "successors" and "inheritors" of the unbelievers. The qurʾanic community may well have wondered whether history had falsified the promise of divine *istikhlāf*, just as early Christians would have struggled to reconcile the imminent eschatological expectations expressed by certain New Testament passages with the fact that the world continued to operate as usual.

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48 For a thorough study of the Meccan paradigm of a direct divine intervention against the unbelievers see again Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the unbelievers*.

49 Walid A. Saleh, End of hope. *Sūra*s 10–5, despair and a way out of Mecca, in Angelika Neuwirth and Michael A. Sells (eds.), *Qurʾānic studies today* (Abingdon, UK 2016), 105–23.

50 I owe my awareness of these verses to Saleh, End of hope, 109.

51 Ibid., 114. The wording of Ḥafṣ ʿan ʿĀṣim is *wa-ẓannū annahum qad kudhibū* ("they supposed that they had been deceived, had been lied to"), but the tradition also preserves the variant *kudhdhibū* ("had been deemed liars"). As noted by Paret and Saleh, the former reading implies a much more radical claim, as the messengers are portrayed as suspecting that they have been deluded and misled by God. Given that the verb in question is preceded by *wa-ẓannū annahum qad*...("they supposed that..."), the variant *kudhdhibū* appears unlikely: surely it would be obvious to the messengers that they are being dismissed as liars. See Saleh, End of hope, 122, n. 27, as well as Paret, *Kommentar und Konkordanz*, on Q 12:110, who notes the further variant *kadhabū* ("that they had lied").

52 Saleh, End of hope, 121.

This far-reaching disruption of the Meccan community's understanding of history is only resolved in the substantially refurbished and reconstructed theology of the Medinan *sūra*s. For instance, the *topos* of divine bequeathal reappears in Q 33:26–7, where the expulsion of the Medinan Scripture people is presented as fulfilling God's promise that the qurʾanic community will be made to inherit the land. The Medinan Qurʾān also renews the pledge that God will "make successors" of the believers (Q 24:55, see also Q 57:7).[53] One is reminded of the manner in which *sūra* 8 presents a major victory by Muḥammad and his followers – traditionally identified with the battle of Badr mentioned at Q 3:123 – as fulfilling the Qurʾān's earlier threats of divine retribution against the unbelievers.[54] Meccan promises and threats were thus not simply discarded after the *hijra* but were reinterpreted as having now been vindicated by the qurʾanic believers' military successes. One can only agree with Saleh's observation that militancy – more precisely, *successful* militancy – has a profound theological significance in the Medinan Qurʾān.[55] Lest this be simplistically juxtaposed with the alleged peacefulness of Christianity, it is important to remember the importance of imperial success in the theology of an author like Eusebius of Caesarea: it seems likely that the Medinan Qurʾān's vindication of earlier Meccan promises and threats is to be placed against the backdrop of Late Antique imperial ideology if it is to be properly understood.

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53   Fischer, Das geschichtliche Selbstverständnis, 157–8.

54   Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the unbelievers*, 133–44.

55   Saleh, End of hope, 105–7 and 119–21.

CHAPTER 11

Re-examining Textual Boundaries
Towards a Form-Critical Sūrat al-Kahf

Marianna Klar

1 Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

> in the early days of Islam, the Qurʾan 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 Qurʾan, it is hard to detect a change in subject matter unless there is a verbal cue, for instance a stereotyped formula of the sort that introduce the narratives. On the other hand, the listener may often sense a transition in the discourse on the basis of verbal cues, regardless of whether or not these are followed by obvious changes in subject matter.[3]

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

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3   Robinson, Hands outstretched, 2–3.

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

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

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

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5   Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, 240.

6   Mohammed Arkoun, Lecture de la sourate 18, *Annales. Économies, sociétés, civilisations* 35 (1980), 418–35.

7   Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, 268.

8   Mustansir Mir, *Coherence in the Qur'ān. A study of Iṣlāḥī's concept of* naẓm *in* Tadabbur-i Qur'ān, Indianapolis 1986.

9   Ian R. Netton, Towards a modern *tafsīr* of *Sūrat al-Kahf*. Structure and semiotics, *Journal of qur'ānic studies* 2 (2000), 67–87.

10   Hannelies Koloska, *Offenbarung, Ästhetik, und Koranexegese. Zwei Studien zu Sure 18 (al-Kahf)*, Wiesbaden 2015. The division of the *sūra* proposed by Arthur Droge in his *The Qur'ān. A new annotated translation* (Sheffield 2013), 185–92 is in many ways compatible with that of Koloska. Droge proposes the following named units: "The purpose of the Qur'ān" (verses 1–8), "The story of the men of the cave" (verses 9–26), "Encouragement to

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

13 Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, 242.

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

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

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

Key: ▢ narrative material ▨ non-narrative material

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

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

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

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

16   Mir, *Coherence in the Qurʾān*, 34.

17   Ibid., 42.

18   Ibid., 68.

19   Ibid., 68.

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

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

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

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

22   Ibid., 30–1.

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

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

2   The Form-Critical Boundaries of the *Sūra*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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26   Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*, 261.
27   Koloska, *Offenbarung, Ästhetik, und Koranexegese*, 31.
28   Ibid., 32.
29   Ibid., 32ff.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

34 This border is also observed by Droge; see Droge, *The Qurʾān*, 192.

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

3   Conclusions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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36   Muilenberg, Form criticism and beyond, 5.

Philology and the Meaning of *Sūrat al-Burūj*

Bruce Fudge

> *Monsieur, surtout pas de philologie, la philologie mène au pire…*
> IONESCO, *La Leçon*

⁙

1   Introduction

In his response to Angelika Neuwirth's keynote speech at the International Qur'anic Studies Association (IQSA) conference of 2014, Andrew Rippin heartily recommends an article by Sheldon Pollock entitled "Future philology? The fate of a soft science in a hard world."[1] It is an erudite discussion of the history and future of the ill-defined and oft-maligned discipline known as philology.[2] Pollock gives us his own "rough-and-ready working definition" as "the discipline of making sense of texts,"[3] which certainly sounds relevant to those of us who study the Qur'ān. He also gives us a vision of how the discipline might be rehabilitated and how it should be practiced today. So what exactly might it mean "to make sense of" a qur'anic passage? In what follows, I attempt to test and contemplate Pollock's propositions through a case study of how one short *sūra* has been read in various circles and how one might improve on those readings. I begin with two examples.

Sayyid Quṭb's (1906–66) *Maʿālim fī l-ṭarīq* ("Milestones on the path" [1964]) is his major statement on the need for the creation (or re-creation) of a true Islamic society. The book has been hugely influential, and it is not uncommon to hear of it described, rightly or wrongly, as the Islamist equivalent of Lenin's

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1 Andrew Rippin, Angelika Neuwirth and philology: A response to the keynote lecture, available at <https://iqsaweb.wordpress.com/publications/papers/>.

2 Sheldon Pollock, Future philology? The fate of a soft science in a hard world, *Critical inquiry* 35 (2009), 931–61.

3 Pollock, Future philology?, 934.

What is to be done?[4] In the final chapter of *Maʿālim fī l-ṭarīq*, Quṭb writes the following:

> The story of the People of the Trench, as presented in *Sūrat al-Burūj* [Q 85], is a story that all believers who proclaim God's word, everywhere, in every generation, should contemplate. With its introduction and its asides, with its statements and its directives, the Qurʾān presents the story in a style that etches a deep, sharp image of what the call to God is like and what man's role in that call should be. It shows us the immense range of possibilities and consequences of that call, consequences going well beyond this world and this life. It draws for the believers the signposts along the path before them, preparing their souls for whatever may be decreed for them according to that hidden wisdom known only to God.
>
> It is the story of a group who believed in their Lord and who made known the truth of their faith. Then they faced the ordeal at the hands of ruthless, tyrannical enemies, obsessed with denying man's freedom to believe in what is right and true and to have faith in the Mighty and Praiseworthy God. They wanted to crush the dignity He granted to human beings, without which they may be playthings of tyrants who take pleasure in their pain and suffering and enjoy watching them as they are tortured by the fire!
>
> But the faith they held in their hearts raised them above this ordeal and belief triumphed over life. They did not surrender to the threats of the cruel despots. They did not stray from their religion, even as they burned and died in the fire.
>
> These hearts were liberated from the servitude of this material world. They were not disgraced by a desire to remain in this world, even as they found themselves facing an unspeakable death. Their hearts broke free from earthly chains, from all its temptations, as belief triumphed over life.
>
> Against these noble, pious hearts were ranged evil, unbelieving men, and these sat by the edge of the fire to watch the torture and suffering of the believers. They sat down to enjoy the spectacle of human life being devoured by the flames, of noble human beings being reduced to dust and ashes. And whenever they threw another believer into the fire, whether man or woman, young or old, the vile joy increased in their souls and the crazed frenzy for blood and butchery grew fiercer.

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4   E.g. John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the origins of radical Islamism* (London 2010), 231.

This horrible incident shows how the depths to which that company of despots had sunk, how they took pleasure in this scene of brutal torture, with a baseness that not even a wild beast could achieve, since the beast kills only to feed itself, not out of meanness, simply to take pleasure in another's pain.[5]

Let us now look at another description of the same passage. Rudi Paret's *Der Koran. Kommentar und Konkordanz*, originally published in 1977, is an extremely useful aid for understanding the Qurʾān, the relationship of its different verses to each other, and to a number of topics that have traditionally been of interest to European scholars of Islam. On *Sūrat al-Burūj*, Paret has this to say:

> The expression *Aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* ("the people of the trench") had previously been associated with the Christian martyrs who were said to have met their end in a fiery pit in 523 at Najrān under the Jewish king of South Arabia Dhū Nuwās. The legend of the men in the furnace (Daniel 3) was also occasionally called upon to explain the reference. However, as Hubert Grimme (*Mohammed* II, Münster 1895, 77 n4) established and J. Horowitz (*Koranische Untersuchungen*, 12, 92 f.) further elaborated, the *Aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* are meant to be the sinners doomed to Hellfire. [Richard] Bell subsequently accepted this meaning as well. In the foreword to his translation of Sūra 85 he remarked, "The reference of 1–9 to the persecution of the Christians of Najrān, which I formerly favoured, can hardly be maintained. 'The fire fed with fuel' must be the fire of Gehanna. It may be that in 'the fellows of the pit' there is a subreference to the Quraysh slain at Badr, whose bodies were thrown into a well." See R. Paret, art. "Aṣḥāb al-Ukhdūd" EI2, I p. 692. Marc Philonenko, "Une expression qoumrânienne dans le Coran," *Atti del Terzo Congresso di Studi Arabi e Islamici, Ravello 1–6 settembre 1966*, (Naples 1967), 553–556, 555 : "The Qumran texts explicitly call the impious *běnē haš-šaḥaṯ*, 'sons of the ditch' or, even better, *aněšē haš-šaḥaṯ*, 'men of the ditch,' by which we understand the damned, those destined for the infernal Ditch."
> ...
> *Wa-hum ʿalā mā yafʿalūna bil-muʾminīna shuhūdun* (Q 85: 7) ["and were themselves witnesses of what they did with the believers"] In place of the imperfect *yafʿalūna* one would expect the perfect *faʿalū* or at least the combination *kānū yafʿalūna*. Horowitz paraphrases thus: "the sinners

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5 Sayyid Quṭb, *Maʿālim fī l-ṭarīq* (Cairo 1979), 173–4.

destined to Hellfire must on the Day of Doom bear witness to what they themselves do to their believing Meccan compatriots." He adds, "One may also translate: While they (the sinners) must watch how the believers are dealt with (in Paradise)", but this seems to me less likely. Also, in the translation given in the text, the imperfect *yafʿalūna* receives its due: Muhammad's sigh is occasioned by what happens to his supporters; it is for him so present, he sees it incarnate before him" (*Koranische Untersuchungen*, 12).[6]

One would hardly think that Quṭb and Paret were discussing the same text. You will object, rightly, that they have completely different viewpoints, backgrounds, goals, and audiences. Yes, but let us not accept that as self-evident. Let us remind ourselves that this is a very short *sūra* and that both Paret and Quṭb are working with a knowledge of the Qurʾan and of Muslim tradition and both are concerned with what they consider the true meaning of the passage. Their strikingly divergent views raise the question, in my mind anyway, as to whether there is a way in which scholars should approach the Qurʾān that can comprehend this diversity.

In the pages that follow, I will briefly discuss Pollock's article, before turning to the understanding of *Sūrat al-Burūj*, and especially the section on the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*, and to what we should understand by the philologist's goal of "making sense of texts."

2   "Future Philology?"

The title of Pollock's piece refers to its starting point: *Future philology*! (*Zukunftsphilologie*!) was the title of an 1872 pamphlet penned by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorff in response to Friedrich Nietzsche's *The birth of tragedy*. The dispute, as Pollock reminds us, did not concern the importance of philology: on that there was absolute agreement. Rather, the conflict arose over "the method and meaning of classical studies," with Wilamowitz arguing for the careful observation of all possible historical detail, well detached from contemporary concerns or prejudices. Nietzsche had argued that this traditional historicist approach stripped the classical past of all that made it worth studying. He saw the combination of the rational and the emotional, the Apollonian and the Dionysian, and the genre of tragedy as the full embodiment of the human experience. The dry and nonjudgmental scholarly view of antiquity had no relevance and entirely missed the point of the exercise. More

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6   Rudi Paret, *Der Koran. Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart 1993[5]), 505–6.

broadly, in Pollock's words, the crisis, which led to Nietzsche's resignation from his chair at Basel, was

> ... a struggle between historicists and humanists, *Wissenschaft* and *Bildung*, scholarship and life, of a sort not unique to European modernity (Sanskrit pandits often recite the verse, "when the hour of death is at hand, no grammatical paradigm will save you").[7]

The historicism of Wilamowitz carried the day, but the subsequent century would see philology's fortunes dwindle to near extinction. And as Pollock usefully demonstrates, this was a global, not merely a Western, phenomenon. He notes the historical difficulty of reaching a definition of the term philology itself, whence his own: "the discipline of making sense of texts ... the theory of textuality as well as the history of textuality itself."[8]

There is far more in Pollock's essay than can or should be summarized here. I can only echo Rippin's advice: "If you have not read the essay yet, you should – it is well worth the time."[9] I do, though, want to draw attention to Pollock's three-fold theory of meaning in history, a schema by which he hopes that philology might consolidate itself.

The schema begins with a distinction between (1) textual meaning and (2) contextual meaning, distinguishing between an original meaning ("true" in an absolute sense) and the meanings that people over time have attributed to a text (what people have held to be "true"). To these Pollock adds (3) the philologist's meaning, in which the practitioner attempts two crucial operations. The first is to take into account and mediate between the textual and contextual meanings, the second is to take account of his own historicity, to recognize that the present moment, too, is historically conditioned: "A double historicization is required, that of the philologist – and we philologists historicize ourselves as rarely as physicians heal themselves – no less than that of the text."[10]

The example above of two wildly divergent approaches to the same short text of *Sūrat al-Burūj* (Q 85) prompts me to ask if Pollock's theory can help us formulate an approach to a section of the Qurʾān.[11] The theory is appealing, but what would it mean in practice? And does the theory forged in European and

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7   Pollock, 934.

8   Ibid.

9   Rippin, Angelika Neuwirth and philology, 2.

10   Pollock, 958.

11   Pollock does mention the Qurʾān in his article, referring to "Christoph Luxenberg's" claim of an ancient Syriac stratum in the text (Ibid., 952). This is, of course, an attempt at a "textual" or original meaning, irrespective of what subsequent generations have held.

Sanskrit furnaces need to be modified for Arabic philology and particularly when applied to the Qurʾān?[12]

3   The Orientalist Tradition

By "Orientalist" here I mean the European study of Middle Eastern texts, and more specifically the philologically-oriented tradition that prevailed until, say, the 1980s. It is characterized by a heavy emphasis on language and linguistic training, a particular interest in origins, and an attempt to integrate Islam into what was known about the Near Eastern monotheist traditions. I do not intend the pejorative associations the terms has acquired, but there does not seem to be any alternative shorthand for this scholarly tradition.

The text by Rudi Paret cited above sets the tone for much of what has been done. As already mentioned, *Sūrat al-Burūj* has received relatively little scholarly attention to date, and the main interest it raises is the identity of the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* mentioned in the fourth verse. As Roberto Tottoli rightly points out, this is the only element of the *sūra* to evoke any differences of opinion.[13] In the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Paret stated that they were "unbelievers, who will go into the hell fire, as punishment for what they did to the believers (verse 7)."[14] A common opinion was that the verse refers to the persecution and subsequent martyrdom of the Christians of Najrān in the early sixth century, but on this opinion was divided. Richard Bell originally adhered to the Najrān thesis, but then changed his mind, as noted in the passage above from Paret, opting instead for a more generic hellfire. He also admits the possibility of "a sub-reference to the Quraish slain at Badr, whose bodies were thrown into a well."[15] Régis Blachère considered the Najrān hypothesis a legitimate one, but was more moved by the similarity to the Book of Daniel. Claiming that the more standard definition of *ukhdūd* was "furrow" or "trace left by a whip," he wondered if one should not understand here "People of the Oven," which would be supported by the following verse, "the fire abounding in fuel." Though the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* appear at first to be either the tortured or the torturers, Q 85:7 confirms that it is the latter: "and were themselves witnesses of what

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12   Tellingly, Pollock makes relatively little reference to biblical philology (see below), which would no doubt be more analogous to the qurʾānic situation.

13   Roberto Tottoli, People of the ditch, *EQ*.

14   R. Paret, Aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd, *EI2*.

15   Richard Bell, *The Qurʾān, translated, with a critical re-arrangement of the surahs* (Edinburgh 1937), 2:646.

they did with the believers," and with this the reference to Daniel 3:20 is "beyond any doubt."[16] The Daniel connection is given further credibility by the discovery of Qumran texts in which the Hebrew *shaḥaṭ*, "ditch," is repeatedly used for Hell in phrases such as "men of the ditch," which would correspond exactly to the qurʾanic *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*.[17]

Outside of these efforts to identify the Trench and its people, there are two other overlapping examples of Orientalist preoccupation: language and what might be termed literary style. The first is seen in the extract from Paret's *Konkordanz und Kommentar*, where he muses that the perfect or past continuous would have been preferable to the imperfect; the second we see in remarks of Blachère and Bell to the effect that the *sūra* is not a single piece but is, rather, composed of at least two distinct sections (Bell) or an unspecified number of "textes anciens juxtaposés" (Blachère). Neither gives much detail here, but on the whole this type of commentary is based on vocabulary, thematic content and coherence, and formal qualities such as rhyme and metrics. One should add though, that these qualities and characteristics serve not to evaluate (in literary terms) the text so much as to distinguish and identify different sections (a sort of textual archeology).

In all of these we can detect an overarching project: a quest for origins, for the original sense of what the text means, and where it came from. This corresponds, of course, to Pollock's "textual meaning." How do our European philologists go about determining this "original" meaning? With what tools? First, we note a tendency to identify the necessary referents, in this case the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*. Of use here are Christian histories, specifically of the martyrs of Najrān, as well as knowledge of pre-Islamic history and Semitic languages in general.

It is telling, of course, that these scholars are relatively disinterested in what Muslim scholars themselves have traditionally had to say about the *sūra*. There is some overlap between the Muslim and Orientalist traditions: both mention Najrān as a possible location for the Trench, and the story of Daniel is evoked as a possible referent by both[18] (though that is not to say that this is always the case, that the Orientalists disregard the "indigenous" interpretations, but it is indeed so here[19]).

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16   Régis Blachère (ed. and trans.), *Le Coran* (*al-Qorʾân*) (Paris 1980), 644–5.

17   As in Paret, *Kommentar*, and see also Christian Julien Robin, [al-]Ukhdūd, *EQ*.

18   Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* (Beirut 1995), 15:167.

19   Obviously, when dealing with sections relating to the life of the Prophet, they made good use of the indigenous sources.

If one is really only concerned with the sources of such a text, then perhaps this disinterest in Muslim sources is understandable and justified. Although one should not discount them out of hand, it is certain that conventional Muslim sources for the history of the qur'anic text offer a perspective more limited than that of the multi-lingual, multi-disciplinary Orientalism. As Pollock notes: "It may not be fashionable to say so these days, but the lies and truths of texts must remain a prime object of any future philology." We have largely lost sight of how high the stakes were perceived to be back in "the heroic age of positivist philology," when J.J. Scaliger (1540–1609) could claim that "all religious strife arises from an ignorance of grammar."[20] The world has changed considerably: if only religious strife could be resolved by supplementary grammar lessons! At root here is the idea, now almost quaint, that religious adherence is a simple matter of faith in historical facts, that the most important question to be asked of religious texts was that of their historical origins, rather than the beliefs they espouse and how believers have acted upon them.

The Orientalist tradition here (and elsewhere) is attempting to determine the "pre-history" of the text. A perfectly valid and necessary exercise, but one deaf to what the original intentions of the text might have been and what it was attempting to do. There was a tendency to judge qur'anic references to biblical characters in terms of their conformity to the Judeo-Christian versions. Today we are more aware that the Qur'ān possesses its own internal coherence, and it is in this light that its biblical references are best understood, not to mention the fact that we are less certain as to whether the conventional biblical versions are the best yardstick by which to measure the status of these narratives in Late Antiquity.

In any case, we need not accept all the conclusions of our Orientalist forbearers, and the historicizing reading Pollock calls for means we can understand them in their own context. As he says, "We should not throw out the baby of textual truth, however, with the bathwater of Orientalism past or present."[21] But what may be too often missing from "textual truth" is a sense of why these texts were important, why they were valued, and what they might have meant to their first audiences. In short, a sense of why these texts are worth studying in the first place. It is curious to observe that some of the qualities of Orientalist scholarship are shared with the Muslim tradition of premodern Qur'ān commentary, to which we now turn.[22]

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20   Pollock, 951.
21   Ibid., 952.
22   By "premodern" I mean up to the thirteenth/nineteenth century, although the temporal boundaries are not distinct. There was, of course, a good deal of variation in the genre up to this point, but before the modern age continuity was more prevalent than change.

4   The Muslim Tradition

When we talk about the interpretation of the Qurʾān, or how Muslims have understood their text of revelation, we are usually talking about *tafsīr*, the genre of Qurʾān commentary. For better or worse, this genre dominates the discussion.

The first thing to note about the Muslim tradition of interpreting *Sūrat al-Burūj* is the similarity to what we have called the Orientalist approach. Both are strongly philological in nature in that they are concerned above all with a correct understanding of the text's language. And both are concerned primarily with uncovering the original meaning. Yet despite these fundamental similarities, the results are drastically different.

Let us survey what the *tafsīr* tradition has to tell us about this *sūra*. Rather than list the topics addressed, it is perhaps more useful to consider the kinds of questions the exegetes pose.

a. Most basic is the lexical definition, the essential building block of philology: What are *al-burūj*? What is an *ukhdūd*? When Q 85:6 reads *idhhum ʿalayhā quʿūd*, does this mean they sat *by* the fire, or *on* the fire, as the preposition *ʿalā* would seem to indicate?

b. The second category would be identification, in which the lexical sense of a term is known, but the particular referent needs to be determined. For example, for Q 85:2 there is no dispute that *wa-l-yawmi l-mawʿūd* means "and by the promised day." The question remains as to what day this would be (there is near unanimity that "the promised day" is the Day of Judgment). Similarly, with regard to *wa-shāhidin wa-mashhūd* in the next verse: what is meant by "witness and witnessed"? (and here, more possibilities are offered[23]). Or the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* of Q 85:4: "People of the Trench" is the literal sense, obviously, but who are they?

c. The third type of explanation is grammatical, and this may consist of identifying the parts of speech, or clarifying the syntax of a passage or the morphology of a word. More often though, it is a question of explaining why the

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23   Among the works consulted are: Ṭabarī, 15:159–65; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* (Beirut 1995), 4:716; al-Qāsimī, *Tafsīr al-Qāsimī al-musammā maḥāsin al-taʾwīl* (Beirut 2002), 7:294–5; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr al-Baghawī l-musammā muʿālim al-tanzīl* (Beirut 2002), 366–7; al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ al-bayān* (Beirut n.d.), 9:704–5, 707–9; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Beirut n.d.), 11:106–8; al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān*, (Beirut n.d.), 10:315–6; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr al-ṣāfī* (Tehran 1996), 308. For reasons of space I will not repeat the whole range of sources cited while summarizing the commentaries; readers will have no difficulty locating the relevant passages.

language of the Qurʾān appears to be at odds with the conventional norms of classical Arabic. In *Sūrat al-Burūj* the main such question concerns the oath at the beginning: *By heaven of the constellations, by the promised day, by the witness and the witnessed* (Q 85:1–3). The commentators are at pains to explain the apparent absence of the complement of the oath (*jawāb al-qasam*). (There are three main responses: the complement is elided, it is Q 85:12, or it is Q 85:4, with elision of *la-qad*.[24])

The main question is the identification of the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*. The verses that follow make it clear that a group of people were punished for their faith by being burned in a pit. Muslim tradition associates three main narratives with the People of the Trench. One version has Yūsuf Dhū Nawās, the Judaizing king of Yemen, hearing of a group of Christians in Najrān and demanding they renounce their faith. Those who refuse are then burned in a fiery pit.

A second narrative has a Magian king getting drunk and sleeping with his sister. The king is full of regret and despair but she persuades him that all he needs to do is proclaim to the people that God has sent down a revelation permitting incest. This he does, and those who fail to accept that this can be God's will are burned in a fiery pit.

The third tale, the longest and the most common, is the most unusual. It tells the tale of a young boy who, while taking lessons from a magician at the behest of a king, meets a monk and receives instruction from him. Eventually he heals the sick with his newfound knowledge. The king is enraged by this and tries in vain to kill the youth, eventually succeeding but only by uttering the name of God while using one of the youth's own arrows. The people are so impressed by all this that they convert to the religion of the youth and the monk. The king, further enraged, demands that they renounce their new faith. Those who refuse are burned in a fiery pit. The story ends with a young woman hesitating to throw herself into the pit of fire. Her infant child miraculously speaks and urges her on, saying that death is preferable to going back on her beliefs.[25]

The commentators' concerns remain largely philological, in Pollock's terms of "making sense of texts," and, with that, are largely focused on the language. For example, the Qurʾān is ambiguous as to whether the *aṣḥāb* are the victims or the perpetrators, and this has implications for how one is to understand

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24   For example, Ṭabarī, 15:169–70; Zamakhsharī, 4:717.

25   In addition to the commentaries, see David Cook, *Martyrdom in Islam* (Cambridge 2007), 20, 172–3, and, more thoroughly, David Cook, The *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*. History and *ḥadīth* in a martyrological sequence," *Jerusalem studies in Arabic and Islam* 34 (2008), 125–48, which is an excellent analysis of the different narrative strands and points out well the difference between historical plausibility and importance to the Islamic tradition.

the verb *qutila*. If the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* are those doing the killing, then we can read it as "may they be killed," invariably paraphrased by the commentators as "Accursed be the People of the Trench!" A qurʾānic analogy would be Q 80:17, *qutila l-insānu mā akfara-hu* ("Perish Man! How ungrateful he is!), or Q 51:10, *qutila l-kharrāṣūn* ("Perish the conjecturers!"). The second possibility is simply that the verse is informing us that those persecuting the believers were themselves killed by the fire. Thirdly, it may be that the murdered believers were the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*, and thus the sentence is simply enunciative (a *khabar*), i.e. "the men of the trench were killed."[26] Here the narrative is given in terms of the function of the verb.

On the one hand, this is not much different from the Orientalist tradition: a desire to seek the original and correct meaning along with close attention to language and how to read the text. Definition, identification, and grammar (broadly defined) are the main areas of inquiry, and there is a concern to cite one's sources and a reluctance to speak directly of thematic issues.

But there are also differences. First, Muslim scholars working in the *tafsīr* genre used different sources. They used, it would appear, sources exclusively in Arabic: *ḥadīth* or other narrative reports (*akhbār*), transmitted in the conventional manner by recognized authorities.[27] For linguistic norms, they have recourse to (a) the Qurʾān itself; (b) pre- and early Islamic poetry; (c) grammarians' opinions; and (d) examples from what would appear to be regular usage. Of course, the Orientalist tradition had access to all these sources as well, but the difference lies in the sources the Muslims did *not* have access to, in their conceptions of history, and in the faith they had in the reliability of those they did possess.[28]

The most important difference between the Orientalist and the *tafsīr* tradition of qurʾanic interpretation is the goal. *Tafsīr* does attempt to explain or reveal the meaning of the qurʾanic text, but that is not all. It also has as its

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26   Many *tafāsir* contain all these elements. This brief summary paraphrases the remarks of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, 11:110.

27   It is true that for reports of pre-Islamic prophets and matters not pertaining directly to doctrine or ritual the rules for transmission and the concern for verifiable authenticity were somewhat relaxed; see, for example, Bruce Fudge, Qurʾānic exegesis in medieval Islam and modern orientalism, *Die Welt des Islams* 46 (2006), 119–23. However, the form and means of transmission were essentially the same.

28   On Orientalist use of early poetry, see, for example, A.F.L. Beeston, Ships in a quranic simile, *Journal of Arabic literature* 4 (1973), 94–6, and, more ambitiously, Thomas Bauer, The relevance of early Arabic poetry for qurʾānic studies, including observations on *kull*, and on Q 22:27, 26:225, and 52:31, in Nicolai Sinai and Michael Marx (eds.), *The Qurʾān in context. Historical and literary investigations into the qurʾānic milieu* (Leiden 2010), 699–732.

unstated goal the preservation of certain ways of interpretation, as well as ensuring that the interpretation conforms to acceptable doctrinal standards, although this aspect of maintaining conformity is not especially evident in the treatment of *Sūrat al-Burūj*, in which the doctrinal stakes are low. Of course, the *tafsīr* tradition permits a divergence of opinions, but only within fairly limited parameters. This is a point to which I will return below, but the Qurʾān is a far richer text than the *tafsīr* literature would lead us to believe. *Tafsīr* is an extremely conservative genre, and even in the modern period it is not a place where one finds remarkable innovation or creativity. However much we value diversity today, the guardians of orthodoxy were more wary of it and more concerned to uphold correct or acceptable understandings of the text of revelation.[29]

Andrew Rippin highlights one of the main goals of the genre:

> The genius of Muslim *tafsīr* is perhaps best seen in its historicisation of the text through the general tools of narrative provided by prophetic history, both of the distant past as found in the *ḳiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, and of the contemporary as found in the *sīra* of Muhammad. In that manner, the extraction of law was facilitated, the sense of moral guidance was emphasised and the "foreign" made Islamic. Whether this was a matter of filling in the details on the life of the former prophets with incidents to which Muslims could relate, a concern with identifying the unknown within the context of the life of Muhammad (*taʿyīn al-mubham*), or a polemical impulse from the context of Sunnī-Shīʿī interaction, historicisation of the text was comprehensive and compelling. Of course, this is not the history of contemporary historians, but a history which is both controlled by, and productive of, the meaning of the text of the Ḳurʾān.[30]

This is an excellent summary of the ways in which Muslim scholars' attempts to explain the Qurʾān were conditioned by religious and/or ideological concerns.[31]

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29   I am not stating that change did not occur, that *ʿulamāʾ* were not themselves at times agents of transformation or that diversity of opinion is not tolerated in Islam. I am merely saying that the premodern *tafsīr* genre was not the site of intellectual or religious innovation.

30   Andrew Rippin, *Tafsīr, EI2*.

31   It would be naïve to assume the Orientalists were not also subject to their own ideological concerns, but for the most part these were less explicit than the faith-claims of Islam.

Sheldon Pollock is unambiguous about the relationship of philology to religion, although one wishes he had treated it at greater length. He approvingly cites Spinoza and his

> . . . historical and critical analysis and resulting desacralization of biblical discourse. For Spinoza, the method of interpreting scripture is the same as the method of interpreting nature. To understand the text of the Bible there can be no appeal to authority beyond it; the sole criterion of interpretation is the data of the text and the conclusions drawn from them. Nor does the Bible have any special status over against other texts; it is equally a human creation, produced over time and in different styles and registers. Close attention must therefore be paid to "the nature and properties of the language in which the biblical books were composed."[32]

Now, Muslim scholars had of course been paying close attention to qur'anic language for centuries; in philological terms they were very advanced. But God was very much present, and the dogma of the Qur'ān as direct revelation from God precludes any type of source criticism. Muslims themselves did allow for certain types of criticism regarding the transmission of the text, such as the existence of variant readings (*qirā'āt*, and especially the recourse to non-canonical readings[33]), as well as accepting that certain verses were revealed separately from those around them (mainly the division between Meccan and Medinan verses). But the criteria for determining interpolated verses rested on the fact of the tradition saying so. If the tradition, that is, previous generations of scholars, was silent, there was nothing to be done. Thus the unity of *Sūrat al-Burūj* is not an issue for Muslims, but Bell and Blachère could state confidently that it is a pastiche of distinct passages.[34]

But to recognize the limitations of *tafsīr* does not mean we should disregard it, as early Orientalists were wont to do.[35] Let us ask, how would it fit into the schema of Pollock's three types of reading? Some of it, the definitions, for instance, could certainly count as "textual" meaning, attempts to uncover the original sense of a word or phrase. Some of the grammatical explanations, too, might fit here, for example in noting the existence of parallel phrases in the

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32   Pollock, 937; citation from Spinoza, *Theological-political treatise*, trans. Michael Silverthorne and Jonathan Israel, ed. Jonathan Israel (Cambridge 2007), 100.

33   On this see Claude Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue et théologie en Islam* (Paris 1990), 145–51.

34   Bell, 2:646; Blachère, 644–5.

35   See Fudge, Qur'ānic exegesis, esp. 132–7.

Qurʾān. To demonstrate similarities of *qutila aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* with Q 80:17 and 51:10 is to note that presumably contemporary texts contained the same forms.

Much of what we find on *Sūrat al-Burūj*, though, must fall under Pollock's second category of "contextual" meaning, "the certitudes people have at various stages of their history and that provide the grounds for their beliefs and actions" or "vernacular mediations – competing claims to knowledge about texts and worlds available in past traditions."[36] In this category fall, for instance, the various explanations of "witness and witnessed" (*shāhid wa-mashhūd*) in Q 85:3. These include Friday and the day of ʿArafa during the pilgrimage (*yawm al-jumʿa* and *yawm ʿarafa*).[37] Other possibilities include Muḥammad and the Day of Judgment (*al-qiyāma*), or Muḥammad and Allah.[38] None of these identifications is particularly convincing, and the disparity of interpretations indicates that from the earliest times there was no agreement as to how to explain the terms *shāhid* and *mashhūd* in this verse.

The traditional explanations for the *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* are also "vernacular meditations" on the meaning of the text and can hardly be said to represent actual historical events, even if there is a possibility that the verse does indeed allude to the Christian martyrs of Najrān.[39] But one should be careful here. Even if the details are fantastical, the idea that the verses refer to the horrible persecution of believers seems beyond doubt, though one should, nonetheless, keep in mind the firm opinion of Paret, Bell, and others that the fire of the "Trench" is in fact that of Gehenna. Surely there is a sense in which persecution and punishment constitute the main message or point of the *sūra*, and we must recognize that there is more to an "original" meaning than the dry historicism of the Orientalists. But here we arrive at a curious paradox: neither Orientalists nor *mufassirūn* liked to speculate on the thematic meaning. Obviously the moral or the message of the story is more evident with the Muslim commentators, but even there it is not as evident as one might expect.[40] The *tafsīr* tradition resembles the Orientalist philology in this reluctance to speculate.[41] Both share, for apparently different reasons, a desire to narrow down the meanings of a verse into smaller and smaller units, a historical positivism that puts matters into a specific context, be it ancient Near Eastern history or the life of the

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36   Pollock, 951, 954.

37   See, for example, *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* (Cairo n.d.), 533.

38   E.g. Baghawī, 4:467.

39   On which see Cook, *Aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd*.

40   For an example, see Bruce Fudge, The men of the cave. *Tafsīr*, tragedy and Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm, *Arabica* 54 (2007), 67–93.

41   And no doubt classicist philology as well.

Prophet. Thus do we find, for example, a discussion of what the "fuel" (*waqūd*) consisted of in Q 85:5.[42] This is, in some ways, the negative stereotype of philology: a descent into minutiae at the expense of the broader meaning.

The precision of such commentary bears some similarity to the Orientalist penchant for historicization, and it is interesting that both are at odds with the dominant qurʾanic style, which does not purport to present detailed, historically grounded events in the manner of the Hebrew Bible, but seems rather, even consciously, to be writing in a different mode, allusive rather than direct, timeless rather than historically grounded. It is instead a matter of typology of events (prophecy, warning, persecution, punishment, reward) rather than a series of discrete incidents. The search for a theme, something perhaps not mentioned explicitly in the text, is something that philological tradition, whether premodern Muslim or European, has largely eschewed, but it surely deserves a place in the quest for "textual meaning" alongside the pre-history of the Orientalists.[43]

There are two conclusions to be drawn here. The first is that it would seem wrong to exclude the thematic from the "textual" meaning. The second is that there are many similarities between the Orientalist and *tafsīr* traditions: despite fundamentally different goals and methodological constraints, their methods remain quite similar. That Orientalists betrayed the text with their arrogant philology is not an uncommon complaint; what is less well known but no less valid is that the same accusation can be, and has been, levelled at the *tafsīr* genre as well. The commentarial tradition sought to limit and control the potential of the text. Rather than dwell on the thematic possibilities and rhetorical potential of the revelation, commentators tended to go in the opposite direction, deeper and deeper into lexical and morphological minutiae.

Such resistance to speculation, sobriety, and meticulousness does a disservice to the power of scripture (and, in Nietzsche's mind, to the Greeks). Whatever the formal weaknesses of the Qurʾān, and despite the legitimate doubts concerning its history and composition, it is nonetheless an extraordinary piece of literature. It is extraordinary in its beauty, its allusiveness, its fascinating rhetorical techniques, its refrains. But one would not really know this from the *tafsīr* tradition. Some of the literature on the inimitability of the Qurʾān (*iʿjāz*) brings out these aesthetic elements, but much of it is firmly

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42 E.g. Rāzī, 11:110–1.

43 For an accessible overview of European philology as a scientific or quantitative discipline, as well as the strong feelings it aroused, one may consult Tom Shippey, *The road to middle earth* (New York 2003), 6–23. Obviously, this quest for precision and accuracy did not lend itself to thematic interpretations.

theoretical or theological, accessible only to specialists, and less concerned with conveying the literary qualities of the Qurʾān than one might expect. (Similarly, one might add that if European scholars did not come to a literary appreciation of the Bible until relatively recently, poets, painters, and composers had long had a fruitful engagement with the scripture.)

There is, in academe at least, a perhaps inevitable tendency to over-privilege the sober tradition of *tafsīr*. On the face of it, this privileging is perfectly reasonable: who better to entrust with explaining the Qurʾān than those great Muslim scholars of history who devoted great energy to doing so? But several difficulties remain: there is the fact that the *tafsīr* genre aims not just at explaining but at establishing conformity to certain norms; there is the fact that much of the literary and rhetorical power of the Qurʾān is taken for granted; there is little attempt to explain these features to a *tafsīr* audience (no doubt in part because they did not need to); there is the fact that the Qurʾān found its way into secular poetry, literature, and rhetoric and made its presence felt; there is the *topos* of one who converts to Islam upon hearing the beauty of its recited verses. All of this is absent from the dry and sober commentaries. The reliance of scholars on this genre does not do any favors to the revelation. Take, for instance, the treatment of *Sūrat al-Burūj* in *The Study Quran* (2015), a recent work produced by academics aimed at a wide audience: its translation and line-by-line exegesis of this *sūra* is perfectly accurate and reasonable, but equally lifeless and flaccid.[44] This English-language epitome of Arabic-oriented commentaries produces a pale summary that neither exposes the potential meanings and force of the text nor engages in a close philological reading of its language. Its main achievement is to make, for once, bedfellows of sobriety and flaccidity.

4.1 *Beyond* Tafsīr

So how, then, do we get from *tafsīr* to Sayyid Quṭb's use of *Sūrat al-Burūj* in *Maʿālim fī l-ṭarīq*? On the one hand, it is quite a leap: Quṭb gives his imagination full rein to fill in whatever is blank and round out his vision of the People of the Trench as he sees fit. After reading the conventional commentaries, there is something exhilarating about Quṭb's unbridled enthusiasm. But if Quṭb is a little too free with his interpretation of the story, there is a compelling logic to what he is doing. The Qurʾān is a message from God. What is this message? Quṭb tells us in no uncertain terms. And it seems equally certain that the message of the *sūra* has more to do with what Quṭb is telling us than with

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44   *The study Quran*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. (New York 2015), 1497–9.

mediaeval exegetes agonizing over the apparent absence of the complement to the oath.[45]

Another example is that of Michael Sells, whose translations of and commentary on the early Meccan *sūra*s are, in ideological terms, diametrically opposed to Quṭb's reading. His is an elegant translation (though it sacrifices the rhyme) and the commentary dwells primarily on the *sūra*'s imagery and its reception by the initial Arabian audience. His imaginative rendering is methodologically similar to that of Quṭb; both extrapolate from qurʾānic allusions to specific images:

> . . . after insufferable heat, dust, and glare, the air suddenly becomes fragrant with blossoms and fruit. The sounds of birds and the rippling of streams replace the howl and lash of wind-whipped sand.
>
> A sense of intimacy and peace is overwhelming. The glare and bleached out environs give way to the deep, velvet red of pomegranate blossoms . . .[46]

Sells's commentary is idiosyncratic in its own way, a more irenic reading than most, but it, like Quṭb's, is more compelling than those of academe, and brings out some of the life and force that are no doubt part of the reason for the Qurʾān's success.

In an early work entitled *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī fī l-Qurʾān* ("Artistic imagery in the Qurʾān"), Sayyid Quṭb himself voiced harsh criticism of the *tafsīr* genre, how it completely neglects the aesthetic element, the "artistic beauty" of the Qurʾān. He notes how the richness of his own personal experience with the text from childhood onwards was nowhere to be found. The commentators reduced the revelation to a dull series of grammatical points (though he does make a partial exception for al-Zamakhsharī [d. 538/1153]).[47] It is worth noting that Quṭb composed this work in the 1940s, well before his full conversion to

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45 Quṭb's emphasis on the thematic aspects of the Qurʾān, rather than the grammatical, theological, etc., has some roots in the modern period. Beginning probably with Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Rashīd Riḍā's commentary, one sees a slight but marked increase in "holistic" readings of passages, in particular of complete *sūra*s. For a short *sūra*, such as Q 85 (*al-Burūj*), this is less of an issue, but what is most important to me is, in any case, the explicitly thematic interpretation. I have benefitted from a forthcoming paper by Nicolai Sinai, *Reading Sūrat Al-Anʿām with Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1935) and Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1966)*, in Elisabeth Kendall and Ahmad Khan (eds.), *Reclaiming Islamic tradition. Modern interpretations of the classical heritage* (Edinburgh 2016).

46 *Approaching the Qurʾan. The early revelations*, introduced and translated by Michael Sells (Ashland, Oregon 1999), 64–7.

47 Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī fī l-Qurʾān* (Cairo 1994), 27–8.

radical Islamic activism. It is striking today to read Quṭb's introduction to his book, where he claims that the ʿulamāʾ have failed to account for the beauty of the Qurʾān, and how one must look at the revelations from the early Meccan period to understand the enchanting effect it had on listeners. These pages are intriguing because Quṭb says that it was the verses first revealed at Mecca that captivated the hearts and minds of those who heard them, such as ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. Later verses, mainly those revealed at Medina, do not possess the same magical effect. Now, one of the things that makes Quṭb's reading convincing is precisely his judgment. The fact that he recounts his own experience and pronounces his own opinion, stating that certain verses have a captivating effect and others do not (though these others may have different merits) lends weight to his words. The doctrine of the inimitability (*iʿjāz*) of the Qurʾān, as well as its directly divine origins, has rendered the Qurʾān immune to criticism both from without and comparatively, since obviously one cannot explicitly elevate one section over another. This immunity to criticism serves well its theological purpose, but is less satisfying in other ways.

I give this attention to Sayyid Quṭb because, whatever one thinks of the content of his writings, his stance is, as such, at odds with the very conservative tradition of *tafsīr*. His is a Muslim critique of Muslim scholarship and the firm grip it had on what could be said and written about the Qurʾān. *Tafsīr* is a tradition that, in its own way, is as blinkered as that of nineteenth century Orientalism in its limited reading of the revelation. Few academics today would leave the interpretation of the Qurʾān to Theodore Nöldeke and Richard Bell, but we have few such reservations, it seems, about giving the floor to the *tafsīr* genre.

5   The Philologist's Meanings

Pollock argues that we, philologists of the present in search of meaning, stand to gain from "contextual" readings, the vernacular meditations that communities have made on their texts. They are unlikely to help us with the historical element (the historicism in question being "an invention of the early modern conceptual revolution") but:

> A careful and reflexive search for both textual and contextual truth can help us recover not only dimensions of shared humanity but the occluded and productively disruptive otherness of the noncapitalist non-West. Such otherness cannot just be imagined; it must be laboriously exhumed from the depths of the textual past.[48]

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48   Pollock, 955.

If Pollock's customary clear and jargon-free prose has briefly eluded him here, the point holds nonetheless. We stand to learn from *tafsīr* even if the genre does not share our historiographical principles. What we learn from *tafsīr* or other "vernacular" traditions we cannot know in advance, and it may not conform to our own scientific categories.[49]

Pollock characterizes his own undergraduate education as "a hard Wilamowitzian historicism" that neglected even the existence of alternative commentaries, and he noted both how formative this was as well as incomplete: "How different my first experience of reading Virgil would have been had I read him through Donatus-Servius rather than through Conington-Nettleship."[50] The responsible philologist must take into account the plurality of interpretations, for that plurality is itself part of the meaning.

I confess I am not entirely certain what the "philologist's meaning," Pollock's third category and desired goal, of *Sūrat al-Burūj* would look like. Nonetheless, this brief survey of material and Pollock's article does give me some signposts for being a better, or more thorough, reader of the passage. That is to say, to fulfil the philologist's goal of making sense, as much sense as possible, of texts.

The preceding pages have touched on, broadly speaking, three different categories of reading. First, a textual-historicist meaning that seeks not just the original meaning but the origins, the pre-history of the passage. This is represented by the "Orientalist" tradition. Second, we have the conventional Muslim view of the *sūra*, as found in premodern Qurʾān commentary (*tafsīr*), a genre to which one conventionally turns when seeking the meaning of a qurʾānic verse. Third, we have two examples of what we might call truly "vernacular" interpretations, unfettered by tradition or convention, in a passage by Sayyid Quṭb and the commentary of Michael Sells. The ideal reading of *Sūrat al-Burūj* would comprise all of these. Each is valid in its own terms, and the *sūra* itself would seem incomplete without any one of them. And yet this kind of inclusive reading is exceedingly uncommon, in part for disciplinary reasons.

The Orientalist reading, for all its broad focus on the world beyond and before Islam, is hobbled by a narrow historicism. The *tafsīr* tradition has what might be called theological limitations: its sources and methods are limited, and one of its (unspoken) briefs is to reinforce a certain version of orthodoxy. The third category, represented by Sayyid Quṭb, could comprise any number of non-canonical/non-commentarial versions: poetic, mystic, mythic, but which remain equally partial readings. One should add here that it is very difficult,

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49   I would fully concur with Rippin (Response to the keynote, 4–5) that the "contextual" meaning is too easily neglected, and I would argue, as this essay should make clear, for a very broad conception of what constitutes contextual meaning.

50   Pollock, 954–5.

if not impossible, to escape the *tafsīr* tradition. Even Quṭb's vision of *Sūrat al-Burūj* is based on a single interpretation of *aṣḥāb al-ukhdūd* found in the sources of which he was so critical. His understanding of the text's essential message is perfectly consistent with the tradition.

As I have indicated, a weakness, or at least a lacuna, in the Orientalist and *tafsīr* traditions is the reluctance to treat thematic meanings. For a divine revelation, one would think that this would be an essential aspect. What I propose is a reading that will supplement the overly historicist or orthodox readings: a literary one, which adds to the above a reading sensitive to both formal and thematic qualities. It is odd to note how rare such readings are. To my mind, one of the most sensitive and accurate descriptions of the Qur'ān is that of Régis Blachère, certainly a dry and sober Orientalist of the old school. A surprise is that this description comes not in his work on the Qur'ān itself, but in his *Histoire de la littérature arabe*.[51] Over 25 clear and lucid pages, Blachère gives us not only a survey of the changing content over the Meccan and Medinan periods, but of the rhetorical styles and devices that characterize each period. The result is a far more compelling account than the more common summary of theological messages and prophetic history. It is a true philologist's reading, one that makes sense of the text at all levels, precisely by treating it *as literature*. To the historicist and the religious should be added the literary, which is, after all, how many readers of the text experience it. Blachère was also guilty of excessive historicism, most obviously in his insistence on re-numbering the *sūra*s, but that should not diminish the merits of his work. Today's philologist must historicize the colleagues of yesterday, not reject them out of hand.

And of course we must historicize ourselves. However, this should not obviate the need for judgment and critique. One of the convincing moments of Blachère's analysis is his brief comparison of the biblical and qur'anic Joseph stories, where he is not afraid to pronounce firmly on the superiority of the latter. Perhaps because this is unexpected for such an Orientalist, it carries more weight, more legitimacy. But it also serves as a reminder of how little critique there is. *Tafsīr* commentators occasionally pronounce on the beauty of elegance of a phrase, but not very often, and they are prohibited from offering criticism. It is true that Orientalists were full of unkind remarks on the text, but these stemmed not from literary judgment but from historicist or linguistic prejudices. Can one render judgment free of prejudice and chauvinism? Probably not, but does that mean we have to give it up entirely? Can we be good readers, good philologists while always withholding judgment? As Pollock says, objectivity should not imply neutrality.

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51   Régis Blachère, *Histoire de la littérature arabe* (Paris 1980), 2:205–30.

I would not advocate the overthrow of traditional philological methods in favor of some kind of romantic or imaginative program of reading. I do think, though, that it is wise for those of us who study the Qurʾān and Islamic texts to keep the Wilamowitz-Nietzsche spat in mind. Just as Nietzsche argued for inclusion of both the Dionysian and the Apollonian, today's scholars of the Qurʾān would do well to allow for a degree of interpretation that allows for a more complex range of meanings. Obviously we must remember the Orientalists and the Muslim commentators, but we should also keep in mind that these same *sūra*s can inspire the likes of Sayyid Quṭb to far more radical conclusions, and that this power is one of the essential qualities of the Qurʾān.

A Flawed Prophet? Noah in the Qur'ān and Qur'anic Commentary

Gabriel S. Reynolds

1   Introduction

Few scholars have done more than Andrew Rippin to highlight the richness and diversity of the Islamic exegetical tradition. Among other things, Professor Rippin has highlighted the ways in which the dogmatic concerns of Muslim scholars shape their interpretations. The present article involves an example of one such concern, namely how notions of the exalted status – and indeed infallibility/ʿiṣma – of prophets have shaped commentaries on the figure of Noah in the Qur'ān.

In this study I will focus on two passages. The first of these is in *al-Taḥrīm* (Q 66): "Allah draws an example for the faithless: the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were under two of our righteous servants, yet they betrayed them (*khānatāhumā*)"[1] (Q 66:10).[2] The second, longer, passage is in *Hūd* (Q 11):

40   When Our edict came and the oven gushed [a stream of water], We said, "Carry in it a pair of every kind [of animal], along with your family – except those [of them] against whom the edict has already been given – and those who have faith." And none believed with him except a few.

41   He said, "Board it: In the Name of Allah it shall set sail and cast anchor. Indeed, my Lord is all-forgiving, all-merciful."

42   And it sailed along with them amid waves [rising] like mountains. Noah called out to his son, who stood aloof, "O my son! Board with us, and do not be with the faithless!"

43   He said, "I shall take refuge on a mountain; it will protect me from the flood." He said, "There is none today who can protect from Allah's edict,

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1   Qur'ān translations are from Quli Qara'i unless otherwise noted: A. Quli Qara'i, *The Qur'an. With a phrase-by-phrase English translation* (Elmhurst, NY 2011²).

2   This precedes a passage (Q 66:11–2) in which the wife of Pharaoh and Mary are held up as examples of faithfulness.

except someone upon whom He has mercy." Then the waves came between them, and he was among those who were drowned.

44   Then it was said, "O earth, swallow your water! O sky, leave off!" The waters receded; the edict was carried out, and it settled on [Mount] Judi. Then it was said, "Away with the wrongdoing lot!"

45   Noah called out to his Lord, and said, "My Lord! My son is indeed from my family. Your promise is indeed true, and You are the fairest of all judges."

46   Said He, "O Noah! Indeed He is not of your family. Indeed he is [personification of] unrighteous conduct. So do not ask Me [something] of which you have no knowledge. I advise you lest you should be among the ignorant."

47   He said, "My Lord! I seek Your protection lest I should ask You something of which I have no knowledge. If You do not forgive me and have mercy upon me I shall be among the losers" (Q 11:40–7).

Here I will address two different questions that the *mufassirūn* asked about these passages. First, what exactly does the Qurʾān mean when it alludes to the betrayal of Noah's wife (Q 66:10)? Secondly, did Noah err when he interceded with God on behalf of his son (Q 11:45)? We will see that, in addressing these questions, the *mufassirūn* often connected these two passages. We will also see that their convictions about prophetic infallibility are central to the answers they offered.

In my discussion of each question I examine the views of a small yet diverse group of commentaries, namely those of: *Tafsīr Muqātil*,[3] *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās*,[4]

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3   Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, ed. ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad al-Shiḥāta (Beirut 2002 [Reprint of: Cairo n.d.]). Regarding the complex origin and development of *Tafsīr Muqātil* see Isaiah Goldfeld, Muqātil Ibn Sulaymān, *Bar-Ilan Arabic and Islamic studies* 2 (1978), 13–30; C. Versteegh, Grammar and exegesis. The origins of Kufan grammar and the *Tafsīr* Muqātil, *Der Islam* 67 (1990), 206–42; Claude Gilliot, Muqātil, grand exégète, traditionniste et théologien maudit, *Journal asiatique* 279 (1991), 39–92; Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra* (Berlin 1991–7), 2:516–32.

4   *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* (Beirut 2000); trans. M. Guezzou (Louisville, KY 2008). On the authorship and dating of this work, which is perhaps best attributed to ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak al-Dināwārī (d. 308/920), see Michael E. Pregill, Methodologies for the dating of exegetical works and traditions. Can the lost tafsir of al-Kalbi be recovered from *Tafsir Ibn Abbas* (also known as *al-Wadih*)?, in Karen Bauer (ed.), *Aims, methods and contexts of qurʾanic exegesis* (*2nd/8th–9th/15th C.*), (Oxford 2013), 393–453.

al-Qummī (d. after 307/919),[5] al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035),[6] al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144),[7] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210),[8] al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273),[9] and al-Biqāʿī (d. 885/1480).[10] Before turning to the questions at hand, however, I begin with a brief discussion of the Qurʾān's presentation of Noah.

2   Noah in the Qurʾān

The Qurʾān includes seven significant Noah accounts,[11] and it mentions Noah in numerous other passages.[12] Unlike Genesis, the Qurʾān's principal interest in Noah is not the flood itself but rather the confrontation between Noah and his opponents that precedes it. In terms of their shape, the accounts of Noah in the Qurʾān are like those of the other prophets of the so-called "punishment-stories" or *Straflegenden*.[13] Like the accounts of Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, Lot, Shuʿayb, and Moses, the qurʾanic accounts of Noah follow a pattern by which: (a) the prophet is called; (b) the prophet preaches to his people and warns them of divine punishment; (c) the prophet debates with his people; and (d) God destroys the unbelievers and saves the prophet together with a small group of believers.

The Qurʾān, one surmises, chose to reflect on the biblical narrative of Noah (and that of Lot, and that of Moses) because the plot-line of this narrative, ending as it does with the protagonist and his family being saved while

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5   Abū l-Ḥasan Ibrāhīm al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* (Beirut 1412/1991).

6   Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, ed. Abū Muhammad b. ʿĀshūr (Beirut 1422/2002).

7   Abū l-Qāsim b. ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ḥusayn Aḥmad (Beirut 1987).

8   Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, ed. Muḥammad Baydūn (Beirut 1421/2000).

9   Abū ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbd al-Razzāq al-Mahdī (Beirut 1433/2012).

10   Ibrāhīm al-Biqāʿī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa-l-suwar*, ed. ʿAbd al-Razzāq Ghālib al-Mahdī (Beirut 1432/2011).

11   Q 7:59–64; 10:71–4; 11:25–49; 23:23–30; 26:105–22; 54:9–17; 71:1–28.

12   Q 3:33; 4:163–5; 6:84–90; 9:70; 14:9–15; 17:3, 17; 19:58; 21:76–7; 22:42; 23:23–30; 25:37; 29:14–5; 33:7; 37:75–82; 38:11; 40:5, 31; 42:13; 50:12; 51:46; 53:52; 57:26; 66:10. In all, Noah is mentioned in 26 *sūra*s. On Noah see most recently Viviane Comerro, *Un Noé coranisé*, *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 232 (2015), 623–43, and Carlos A. Segovia, *The quranic Noah and the making of the Islamic Prophet* (Berlin 2015).

13   On this term see Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (Berlin-Leipzig 1926), 10–32.

everyone else is destroyed, would have been easily adapted into the schema of the *Straflegenden* that was used to advance its religious exhortations. At the same time, however, the details of the biblical narrative of Noah (like those of Lot, and those of Moses) become necessary elements of the qurʾanic account. The Qurʾān could not, for example, have the people of Noah destroyed by fire or wind instead of water (or the people of Lot destroyed by water, or the followers of Pharaoh destroyed in the desert and not in the sea). Yet the role of biblical narratives in shaping the qurʾanic *Straflegenden* is, while salient, ultimately ornamental. The Qurʾān is more concerned with making a religious point to the people of its own time by asking the question *ubi sunt qui ante nos fuerunt* than it is concerned with retelling a story about the time of the prophets gone by.

In its material on Noah the Qurʾān is not in conversation with the Bible itself as much as it is in conversation with the later Midrashic development of biblical narratives. This is evident from the way it emphasizes the confrontation of Noah with his opponents.[14] Whereas the Qurʾān refers repeatedly to Noah's preaching to his people (Q 7:59–63; 10:71–2; 11:25–34, 42–3; 14:9–13; 23:23–5; 26:106–16; 71:2–20), in Genesis Noah does not speak a single word until he has left the Ark and started a new life. Noah's preaching in the Qurʾān follows from the writings of later Jewish and Christian authors who, reflecting on the Genesis account of Noah, generally assumed that Noah must have said something to his countrymen who were on the brink of annihilation. Thus, whereas Genesis describes Noah only as a "good" and "upright" man,[15] the author of

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14   Another significant difference between the Hebrew Bible and the Qurʾān is the way that the Qurʾān relates that the flood begins with a furnace (*tannūr*) pouring forth hot water (Q 11:40; 23:27), a detail which seems to follow from midrash; on this see Heinrich Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran* (Hildesheim 1961; reprint of Gräfenhainichen 1931), 103. A further contrast is in the name that the Qurʾān gives to the mountain upon which the Ark landed, *al-jūdī* (Q 11:44), a name that reflects post-biblical Jewish and Christian traditions on the name of Noah's mountain (Genesis [8:4] states only that the Ark landed "in the mountains of Ararat"). On this see Gabriel S. Reynolds, A reflection on two qurʾānic words (*Iblīs* and *Jūdī*) with attention to the theories of A. Mingana, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124 (2004), 675–89.

15   Genesis 6:9: "This is the story of Noah: Noah was a good man, an upright man among his contemporaries, and he walked with God."

2 Peter (2:5) describes Noah as a "preacher of uprightness." Later Jewish[16] and Christian[17] texts describe Noah's preaching to his people in more detail.

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16 See Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrīn*, 108a, which alludes to Job 24:18: "The righteous Noah rebuked them, urging, 'Repent; for if not, the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring a deluge upon you and cause your bodies to float upon the water like gourds, as it is written, He is light [i.e. floats] upon the waters. Moreover, ye shall be taken as a curse for all future generations." With reference to Amos 5:10 ("They hate the man who teaches justice at the city gate and detest anyone who declares the truth."), *Genesis Rabbah* 31:3 has Noah declare to his generation: "Ye good-for-nothings! Ye forsake Him whose voice breaks cedars and worship a dry log!'" (trans. H. Freedman et al., London 1983). Noah's preaching is also found in the *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* (see section 22 on Noah's preaching), which dates from the eighth century but contains earlier material. See the introduction to *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser*, ed. and trans. D. Börner-Klein (Berlin 2004), The *Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* (the earliest version of which was likely composed in the sixth or seventh century CE), relates:

"Noah arose, repented his sins, and planted cedar trees. They asked him: 'What are these cedars for?' 'The Holy One, blessed be He, intends to bring a flood upon the earth, and He has ordered me to build an ark so that I and my family might escape,' he replied. They laughed at him and ridiculed his words. Nevertheless he tended the trees till they grew large. Once again they asked him: 'What are you doing?' He repeated what he had told them previously, but they continued to mock him. After some time, he cut down the trees and sawed them into lumber. Again they inquired: 'What are you doing?' He warned them once again as to what would happen, but they still refused to repent."

Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedunu, trans. S.A. Berman (Hoboken, NJ 1996), 52; cf. the similar tradition in *Genesis Rabbah* 30:7. See also *Leviticus Rabbah*, which dates from around the period of the Qur'ān's origins, 27:5.

17 For example: In Greek: Theophilus of Antioch (d. 181), *Ad Autolycum* 3:19, trans. M. Dods in James Donaldson and Alexander Roberts (eds.), *Ante-Nicene fathers. Fathers of the second century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria* (*entire*), (New York, NY 2007; originally published 1885), 2:116b. In Syriac: Ephrem (d. 373), *Commentary on Genesis* (6:9), trans Edward G. Mathews and Joseph P. Amar (Washington, CD 1994), 138–9; Syriac text in: Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis and Exodus*, ed. R.-M. Tonneau, Leuven 1955, and ibid., *Hymns on faith* (56:2), ed. and trans. in E. Beck, *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*, Leuven 1955–67. Narsai (d. 503), *Homily on the flood*, ll. 227–30, in Judith Frishman, *The ways and means of the divine economy*, Ph.D. thesis (Leiden 1992), 33. Jacob of Serugh (d. 521), *Homélies contre les juifs*, ed. and trans. by M. Albert in *PO* 174 (Turnhout 1976), 70, Homily 2, ll. 37–40. See also idem, *On the flood*, in P. Bedjan (ed.), *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* (Paris 1905–10), 4:(1–61) 23–4.

2.1 The Infidelity of Noah's Wife

In Q 66 the Qurʾān, like 2 Peter,[18] associates Noah with Lot. However, whereas in 2 Peter the two are linked by their righteousness (in the midst of unrighteous people), in Q 66 they are linked instead by their wives who "betray them."[19] The betrayal of Lot's wife, one imagines, is an allusion to her disobedience to the divine command not to look back at Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:26, and alluded to in Q 7:83; 11:81; 15:59–60; 26:170–1; 27:54–8; 29:32–3; 37:134–5). What the Qurʾān means by the betrayal of Noah's wife, however, is less clear.[20] One could, perhaps, suggest that the Qurʾān is using these two wives as specific examples to illustrate the general principle of Q 64:14: "O you who have faith! Indeed, among your spouses and children you have enemies; so beware of them. And if you excuse, forbear and forgive, then Allah is indeed all-forgiving, all-merciful." This, however, hardly explains why Noah's wife in particular would be chosen along with Lot's wife as an example.

Many *mufassirūn* sought to explain the presence of Noah's wife here by referring to the passage involving Noah's lost son in Q 11. In that passage the Qurʾān (v. 45) has God declare, referring to that son: "O Noah! Indeed, he is not of your family" (Q 11:46). According to one tradition (though one not actually supported by any of our *mufassirūn*), this son was indeed not Noah's but rather the fruit of an illicit relationship between Noah's wife and another man (hence the "betrayal" of Q 66:10). Noah only learned of this when God informed him (Q 11:46) that the one who refused to get in the Ark was not of his family. Roger Arnaldez explains the logic behind this position: "Ce personnage ne serait pas fils de Noé au sens propre, car il n'est pas convenable qu'un prophète ait un

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18   After alluding to Noah's righteousness (2:5), 2 Peter turns immediately to the righteousness of Lot (2:6–8).

19   The verse in question (Q 66:10) is connected by most *mufassirūn* to the beginning of *sūra* 66. The opening verse of the *sūra* ("O Prophet! Why do *you* disallow [yourself] what Allah has made lawful for *you*, seeking to please *your* wives? And Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful.") is usually explained with a story by which ʿĀʾisha and Ḥafṣa, two wives of the Prophet, objected to the entrance of Mariam the Copt into the Prophet's harem. The reference to unfaithful women (v. 10) and pious women (vv. 11–2) was accordingly meant as a lesson to his wives. Thus, for example, *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* explains (p. 677): "Allah warned ʿAʾisha and Hafsa because they hurt the Prophet by mentioning the example of the wives of Noah and Lot."

20   Geiger considers this report to be simply a product of confusion. Abraham Geiger, *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen* (Leipzig 1902; reprint of Bonn 1833), 109. Bell wonders if there has been some confusion with the wife of Job (who is reprimanded by her husband in Job 2:10, something alluded to in Q 38:44); Richard Bell, *A commentary on the Qurʾān* (Manchester 1991), 2:399.

fils infidèle."[21] However, this position engendered a new problem: "Pourtant la question rebondit: comment les prophètes peuvent-ils avoir des femmes qui les trahissent?"[22]

Indeed, this question seems to have figured strongly in the exegetical mind. All of the exegetes I studied agree that the figure in Q 11 certainly was Noah's biological son, although some cite traditions to the contrary. Some of them explicitly argue that prophets are protected from the shame of being cuckolded.

Tafsīr Muqātil, after explaining that Noah's son was named Kanʿān and that Noah called out to him seven times, adds that this was Noah's son "from his loins [*min ṣulbihi*]."[23] Thaʿlabī relates a tradition from Saʿīd b. Jubayr (d. 95/714): "He was [Noah's] son but he opposed him in intention and work and religion."[24] This, of course, raises the problem of why Noah – a prophet of God who prayed for the unbelievers to be destroyed (Q 71:26) – would yearn for the salvation of an unbelieving son (Q 11:42, 45). The answer, according to al-Qurṭubī (and al-Rāzī), is that Noah's son was a hypocrite (*munāfiq*): He "kept his unbelief secret while pretending to believe."[25] Noah, in other words, never knew that his son was an unbeliever.

In *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās* we find the explicit declaration that no prophet has ever had a wife who betrayed him: "[The wives of Noah and Lot] did not betray their husbands in the sense that they committed adultery, for no wife of a prophet has ever done this."[26] Al-Zamakhsharī seems to make this a dogmatic principle. He explains that the shame of being a cuckold is "a disgrace against which prophets are protected (*ʿuṣimat*)."[27] It is, of course, important that

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21   Roger Arnaldez, *Le Coran* (Paris 1983), 103.

22   Ibid., 104.

23   *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 2:283, ad Q 11:42. The idea that Noah's son was named Kanʿān is widespread among the *mufassirūn* (see also *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās*, 231; Zamakhsharī, 2:396; Biqāʿī, 3:532). This idea is derived ultimately from Genesis 9, according to which Canaan was Noah's grandson (through Ham), whom Noah curses (Genesis 9:26). An alternative tradition (noted by, among others, Zamakhsharī, 2:396) gives this son the name Yām, no doubt derived from Ham, father of Canaan in Genesis 9.

24   Thaʿlabī, 5:172–3, ad Q 11:41–8. The tension around the identity of the son in question is resolved in the English Qurʾān translation of the Iranian Ṭāhereh Ṣaffārzādeh. She renders Q 11:46 as follows, "Surely, he is not of your [spiritual] family"; see T. Saffarzade, *The Holy Quran. Translation with commentary* (Tehran 2007). I am grateful to Majid Daneshgar for this reference.

25   Qurṭubī, 9:42; Rāzī, 17:185, ad Q 11:42–3.

26   *Tafsīr Ibn ʿAbbās*, 677, ad Q 66:10.

27   Zamakhsharī, 2:396.

al-Zamakhsharī chooses to use the verb *ʿuṣimat*, as it suggests that he sees this as a question of prophetic *ʿiṣma* (infallibility).

Al-Qurṭubī notes this opinion, and attributes it to Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/687): "No woman ever cuckolds a prophet. He was his son from his loins."[28] For their part, al-Thaʿlabī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī cite a different tradition from Ibn ʿAbbās, which explains that when the Qurʾān speaks of the betrayal of Noah's wife it means only that she accused him of being crazy.[29]

Al-Zamakhsharī, al-Rāzī, and al-Qurṭubī variously attributed to ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (al-Zamakhsharī) or Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 117/735) and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728; al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī) the suggestion that Q 11:42 should not be read *nādā Nūḥ ibnahu* ("Noah called his son") but rather *nādā Nūḥ ibnahā* ("Noah called *her* son").[30] Such a reading would make the point that the boy was not *his* son. Al-Rāzī also notes the opinion that Q 66:10, with its reference to the betrayal of Noah's wife, implies that she was guilty of adultery. None of them, however, ultimately agree with this opinion.[31]

Indeed, al-Rāzī insists that a clear reading of the Qurʾān indicates that the lost son was a biological son of Noah. He argues that those who disagree "do so only because they seek to distance themselves from the idea that the son of an infallible messenger would be an unbeliever."[32] Al-Rāzī, however, insists that they are wrong to be concerned with such a thing: if both the father of Abraham (whom the Qurʾān presents as an unbeliever) and the father of Muḥammad (who, according to the *sīra*, died before Muḥammad proclaimed Islam in pagan Mecca) were unbelievers, then the son of Noah could be an unbeliever as well: "It is confirmed that the father of our Messenger was an

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28   Qurṭubī, 9:42.

29   Thaʿlabī, 5:172, ad Q 11:41–8; Rāzī, 17:185, ad Q 11:42–3 (cf. Qurṭubī, 9:43). In so doing Noah's wife acted as did the unbelievers who accused Noah of insanity (Q 23:25; 54:9).

30   According to another alternative reading, attributed to Muḥammad al-Bāqir (again) and ʿUrwa b. al-Zubayr (d. ca. 94/712), which avoids the necessity of adding an *alif*, the text should read here *nādā nūḥ ibnaha* (the *fatḥa* on the *hāʾ* taking the place of the *alif*); see Rāzī, 17:185, ad Q 11:42–3, and Zamakhsharī, 2:396. Qurṭubī also notes this grammatical explanation but (like Rāzī) rejects it. To this end he cites the grammarian Abu Jaʿfar al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/950), who writes: "That which Abū Ḥātim [al-Sijistānī (d. 255/869)] said is not possible according to the teachings of Sibawayhi [d. ca. 180/796–7] because the *alif* is light (*khafīf*) and cannot be elided"; Qurṭubī, 9:35–6.

31   Later, Rāzī notes the view of those who hold that the boy was "a child of fornication" and calls it "completely false"; Rāzī, 18:4, ad Q 9:45–7. A similar tradition is reported by Thaʿlabī, 5:172, ad Q 11:41–8.

32   Rāzī, 17:184, ad Q: 11:42–3.

unbeliever, and the father of Abraham was an unbeliever, according to the text of the Qurʾān. Here we have something similar."[33]

In a tradition found in the *tafsīr*s of al-Thaʿlabī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Qurṭubī, the question of whether Noah's lost son was his biological son becomes the subject of a debate between al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and Qatāda (d. 117/735). According to al-Thaʿlabī:

> Qatāda said, "I asked al-Ḥasan about [the lost son] and he said, 'By God, he was not [Noah's] son,' and he read *khānatāhumā* [Q 66:10]." [Qatāda] said, "God has said of him, that he said: 'My son is from my family [Q 11:45],' and [God] said, 'Noah called his son,' [Q 11:42] and you say, 'It was not his son,' but the People of the Book agree that he was [Noah's son]." Al-Ḥasan said, "Who takes his religion from the People of the Book? They are liars."[34]

Al-Biqāʿī writes of Noah's lost son: "[His name was] Kanʿān and he was from his loins."[35] He adds that Kanʿān was an unbeliever, explaining that when the Qurʾān has God declare (before the flood): "None of your people will believe except those who already have faith" (Q 11:36), the son was not included among their number.[36]

The position of the *mufassirūn* on this issue does seem to develop over time. The view that Noah had been cuckolded (associated primarily with al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī) appears first in the work of al-Thaʿlabī (among the *mufassirūn* I surveyed). However, it is true that even the earliest works, including *Tafsīr Muqātil*, insist that he had not, which implies that this debate existed from the earliest period of Islamic exegesis. Of all of the *mufassirūn* I surveyed, only al-Qummī never addresses this debate. Yet the categorical insistence that a prophet could never be betrayed by his wife appears first with al-Zamakhsharī. Indeed,

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33   Ibid.

34   Thaʿlabī, 5:172, ad Q 11:41–8. Cf. Zamakhsharī, 1:504, ad Q 11:42–4; Qurṭubī 9:42–3. The appeal to the People of the Book here is strange, seeing that the account of Noah's lost son is not found in the Bible. Nevertheless, this appeal, and al-Ḥasan's response, reflects the dispute of the *mufassirūn* over the permissibility of turning to Jews and Christians in order better to understand the Qurʾān. On the origin of this qurʾanic account see my study, Noah's lost son in the Qurʾān, in progress, and Comerro, Un Noé coranisé, esp. p. 624.

35   Biqāʿī, 3:532.

36   Ibid., 3:535.

his view might be considered an expansion of the general idea of prophetic infallibility.[37]

2.2   *Noah's Complaint to God*

A second exegetical debate surrounding Noah and his son involves the question not of whether Noah's wife committed a misdeed but rather of whether he himself did so by complaining to God about his son. This problem is raised by Q 11:45: "Noah called out to his Lord, and said, 'My Lord! My son is indeed from my family. Your promise is indeed true, and You are the fairest of all judges.'" At the center of this debate was how to read a phrase in the following verse (Q 11:46): "Said He, 'O Noah! Indeed, He is not of your family, *innahu ʿamalun ghayru ṣāliḥin*. So do not ask Me [something] of which you have no knowledge. I advise you lest you should be among the ignorant."[38]

In this translation Quli Qaraʾi renders the Arabic phrase *innahu ʿamalun ghayru ṣāliḥin* so that the pronoun *hu* refers to Noah's son: "Indeed he is [the personification of] unrighteous conduct." This implies that the son acted in unrighteous ways (and accordingly was killed). A similar perspective is found with a number of other translators: Yusuf Ali: "His conduct is unrighteous"; Pickthall: "He is of evil conduct"; Blachère, "Il a fait un acte impur"; Asad: "he was unrighteous in his conduct." Others, however, render the phrase in a manner that impugns Noah himself; they make the *hu* refer instead to Noah's act (*ʿamal*) of complaining to God: Paret: "Das (d.h. daß du dich bei mir für ihn einsetzt) ist nicht recht gehandelt"; Khalidi: "It is an act unrighteous"; Droge:

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37   One modern *mufassir*, the Tunisian Ibn ʿĀshūr (d. 1973), seems to take a compromise position on the debate surrounding Noah's son. In his *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr* Ibn ʿĀshūr describes Noah's lost son as the "fourth of his sons from Noah's second wife whose name was Wāʿila, and who drowned." Ibn ʿĀshūr, *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-l-tanwīr*, (Beirut 1420/2000), 11:262, ad Q 11:43.

38   David Marshall argues that Noah's prayer to God here shows that his paternal feelings for his son overcame his religious convictions as a prophet. He maintains further that Noah's disposition is a projection of Muḥammad himself in the late Meccan period. On this, Marshall refers to Sayyid Quṭb, *al-Taṣwīr al-fannī fī l-Qurʾān* (Cairo 1993[14]), 58. See David Marshall, *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers* (Richmond, UK 1999), 99. According to the standard Cairo edition Q 11 was the 52nd *sūra* proclaimed. Nöldeke puts it somewhat later, towards the beginning of the third Meccan period (the 75th *sūra*; Blachère makes it 77). See Theodor Nöldeke et al., *The history of the Qurʾān*, ed. and trans. Wolfgang H. Behn (Leiden 2013), 118–26 (corresponding to the second edition of the German, originally published in 1909: 1:144–54).

"Surely it is an unrighteous deed."[39] David Marshall notes that the way in which Abraham is later rebuked (v. 76) for interceding for Sodom suggests that this is indeed a rebuke of Noah.[40]

We will see that this division among translators has its roots in *tafsīr. Tafsīr Muqātil* reads the phrase in question not as *innahu 'amalun* ("it is a deed") but rather *innahu 'amila* ("he did"), and he explains (referring to Noah's son): "He engaged in polytheism" (*'amila shirkan*).[41] *Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās* notes two possibilities. Either the text is to be read *innahu 'amila*, meaning "he engaged in polytheism" (the reading of *Tafsīr Muqātil*) or *innahu 'amalun*, meaning that Noah's complaint to God on behalf of his son is unacceptable since he is "not deserving of being saved."[42]

Al-Zamakhsharī, who insists that this passage shows that "nearness in religion is more encompassing than nearness in relation,"[43] argues that the expression suggests that Noah's son, by being an unbeliever, has "made himself an unrighteous deed (*'amalan ghayra ṣāliḥin*)."[44] He continues, however, by noting the debate over the pronoun *hu* in the expression *innahu 'amalun ghayru ṣāliḥin*. Some connect the *hu* with Noah and explain that his calling out to God (Q 11:45) was an unrighteous act; others read instead *innahu 'amila ghayra ṣāliḥin* and explain that Noah's son was guilty of doing something unrighteous.[45]

Al-Rāzī also considers both readings, and asks whether the *hu* in *innahu* refers to Noah, or to his son.[46] Without taking sides on this issue, he insists that Noah's calling out to God does not make him guilty of sin (*dhanb*) or rebellion (*ma'ṣiya*). Al-Rāzī explicitly makes this an issue of prophetic infallibility (*'iṣma*). After noting six different arguments that those who seek to "defame the infallibility of the prophets" point to as proofs, he concludes that Noah's calling out to God involved only "neglecting the most preferred or perfect" conduct, rather than sin.[47]

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39   Droge adds in a note: "Noah's intercession for his disbelieving son is (lit.) 'a deed other than righteous,' even though it was on behalf of a member of his own family. Religious affiliation supersedes family ties." Arthur J. Droge, *The Qurʾān. A new annotated translation* (Bristol 2013), 136, n. 56.

40   Marshall, 102.

41   *Tafsīr Muqātil*, 2:285.

42   *Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās*, 232, ad Q 11:46.

43   Zamakhsharī, 2:399, ad Q 11:45–46.

44   Ibid.

45   Ibid. Al-Zamakhsharī also insists that when Noah called out to God the son had not yet died in the flood; Zamakhsharī, 2:400, ad Q 9:45–6.

46   Rāzī, 18:3–6, ad Q 11:45–7.

47   Ibid., 18:4–5, ad Q 11:45–7.

Al-Qurṭubī gives a list of those who support the reading *innahu ʿamila ghayra ṣāliḥin*: Ibn ʿAbbās, ʿUrwa, ʿIkrima, Yaʿqūb, and al-Kisāʾī.[48] He also notes the opinion that (if one were to follow the reading *innahu ʿamalun ghayru ṣāliḥin*) the Qurʾān means *dhū ʿamal* ["doer of an act"] even if it only states *ʿamal*, the idea being that Noah's son is "a person of unrighteous deeds." However, al-Qurṭubī also mentions the position that, with this verse, the Qurʾān has God rebuke Noah: "It could be that the *hāʾ* [in *innahu*] refers to the question, meaning: 'Your request to me that I save him is an unrighteous act.'"[49] He then turns to a third position, namely that the pronoun *hu* is a reference to the act of unfaithfulness by Noah's wife through which this son was born: "Qatāda said that al-Ḥasan said, 'The meaning of the "unrighteous act" is that he was a "son of his bed" but not his son.' Mujāhid also said this."[50] Al-Qurṭubī also explains that the reason for Noah's complaint to God was God's earlier command to have his family ("except those [of them] against whom the edict has already been given") board the Ark (Q 11:40). Noah never knew that his son was among those already condemned, because his son was a hypocrite who hid his unbelief. God, however, "knows the unseen."[51]

Al-Biqāʿī, like al-Qurṭubī before him, does not accept the idea that Noah was at fault. He blames the son for the misdeed, and in particular his secret unbelief. When the Qurʾān has God declare *innahu ʿamalun ghayru ṣāliḥin*, al-Biqāʿī explains that the pronoun *hu* refers to "the one who did the act (*dhū ʿamal*)." In other words, he continues, it refers to the son: "He was a hypocrite who pretended to believe."[52]

3   Dogma, Noah, and the Qurʾān

The influence of dogmatic notions of prophetic privilege is evident in the way the *mufassirūn* surveyed in this modest study answer the two questions at hand, i.e. the infidelity of Noah's wife and the meaning of *innahu ʿamalun ghayru ṣāliḥin* in Q 11:46. With regard to the first question, they all come to

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48   Qurṭubī, 9:42.

49   Ibid.

50   Ibid. This possibility is also raised, and then rejected, by Rāzī: 18:4, ad Q 9:45–7.

51   Ibid.

52   Biqāʿī, 3:532. In his *Commentary*, Bell (1:359) notes that al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286) also takes *hu* as referring to Noah's son, and interprets the phrase as *innahu dhū ʿamalin*: "These interpretations are probably due to Moslem aversion to ascribing an unrighteous deed to a prophet, the real interpretation being that 'it (i.e. the questioning of Allah about the loss of a relative) is an unrighteous deed.' Islam breaks all ties."

the conclusion that Noah's lost son was not the fruit of his wife's relations with another man, and indeed that her infidelity was not sexual at all. One might detect a certain development in the way this conclusion was justified in the declaration of al-Zamakhsharī that prophets are "protected" from the disgrace of being a cuckold. Nevertheless, maintaining this dogmatic position involves conceding another point: the possibility that a prophet's son might be an unbeliever. Al-Rāzī justifies this possibility, as we have seen, by noting how the cases of Abraham and Muḥammad show that a prophet's father could be an unbeliever (although it can certainly be maintained that this is not really the same thing). In any case, with al-Zamakhsharī at least, the dogmatic notion that a prophet could not be cuckolded is an extension of the idea of prophetic infallibility (ʿiṣma). Indeed, inasmuch as all of the exegetes studied here resist the idea that Noah's wife cheated on him, we might also see them as implicitly accepting this expansive notion of ʿiṣma. In other words, these Muslim exegetes are concerned not only with the things that prophets said and did, but also with their honor. It was, in the end, inconceivable that God would allow a prophet to be shamed by the dishonor of a wife's betrayal.[53] Of course, there is nothing in the Qurʾān to this effect,[54] but then (and as has been pointed out in earlier scholarship) there is nothing in the Qurʾān to the effect that prophets are infallible, either.[55]

With regard to the second question the commentators are less unified. Some of them at least allow for the possibility that the phrase *innahu ʿamalun ghayru*

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53   This idea contrasts dramatically with the story of Hosea in Bible, whereby God marries Hosea (a prophet) to a prostitute so that Hosea will learn how God feels by the repeated betrayals of Israel (and appreciate God's mercy in forgiving her). "The beginning of what the Lord said through Hosea: The Lord said to Hosea, 'Go, marry a whore, and have children with a whore; for the country itself has become nothing but a whore by abandoning the Lord'" (Hos 1:2). By the end of Hosea the lesson comes full circle as God extends his mercy to Israel: "I shall cure them of their disloyalty, I shall love them with all my heart, for my anger has turned away from them. * I shall fall like dew on Israel, he will bloom like the lily and thrust out roots like the cedar of Lebanon" (Hos 14:5–6).

54   It should be noted, however, that al-Rāzī defends this principle by noting how the Qurʾān commands that the unrighteous should only marry other unrighteous people. He quotes two verses to make the point: "Corrupt women are for corrupt men, and corrupt men for corrupt women. Good women are for good men, and good men for good women" (Q 24:26a; modified translation); and "The fornicator shall not marry anyone but a fornicatress or an idolatress, and the fornicatress shall be married by none except a fornicator or an idolater, and that is forbidden to the faithful" (Q 24:3); see Rāzī, 17:185, ad Q 11:42–3.

55   "The term and the concept of ʿiṣma do not occur in the Ḳurʾān or in canonical Sunnī Ḥadīth"; Wilferd Madelung and E. Tyan, ʿIṣma, EI2.

ṣāliḥin refers to the appeal that Noah made to God on behalf of his unbelieving son. After all, this act would seem to contradict the Qurʾān's call elsewhere to have no sympathy for unbelievers "even though they be their fathers or their sons or their brethren or their clan" (Q 58:22). In light of this, and in light of the parallel case in the same *sūra* whereby Abraham is reprimanded for appealing to God on behalf of Lot's people (Q 11:76), it is notable that most *mufassirūn* do not embrace the possibility that God is reprimanding Noah in Q 11:46. Most instead look for ways to connect *innahu ʿamalun ghayru ṣāliḥin* with Noah's son. The grammatical awkwardness of doing so meant that a variant reading (*ʿamila* for *ʿamalun*) became an attractive option.

With this question, too, we can detect a certain hardening of the dogmatic position over time. Rāzī vigorously defends Noah against the possibility that he sinned, while al-Qurṭubī and al-Biqāʿī argue unambiguously for the position that Noah's son, and not Noah himself, was at fault. Thus, these exegetical debates over Noah illustrate the significant place that dogma regarding prophets came to have in the exegetical thinking of the classical *mufassirūn*.[56]

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56 One might note, by way of contrast, the work of the modern (Marxist) Egyptian poet Amal Dunqul (d. 1983), "A special interview with Noah's son," in which Dunqul makes not Noah but the son of Noah into a hero for his willingness to remain with the people and not flee from them onto the Ark: Amal Dunqul, *Muqābala khāṣṣa maʿa Ibn Nūḥ*, in *Dīwān Amal Dunqul* (Cairo 1983), 393–4.

PART 3

Islam, Qur'ān, and Tafsīr: Modern Discussions

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An Asiatic and Moslem Jesus
Deracinating and Reracinating Jesus by Drew Ali

Herbert Berg

Noble Drew Ali, the founder of the Moorish Science Temple of America (MSTA), claimed his religion to be Islam and that he was a "Moslem." Yet Jesus was featured almost exclusively in his writings, whereas Muḥammad barely appears. Even more surprisingly, a comparison of his narratives about the figure of Jesus with those in the Qurʾān and the Bible reveals that Drew Ali felt no need to conform to, or draw upon, the material from these older accounts. Drew Ali, ironically, used Jesus to convince African Americans to abandon the racially inappropriate European religion of Christianity by making him an "Asiatic" and a Moslem. Simultaneously, Jesus was presented in a manner that allowed him to serve as a model for Drew Ali's own prophetic claims and mission.

1   Noble Drew Ali

Timothy Drew claimed to be born in 1886 to former slaves living in North Carolina. There is much legend and speculation about his ancestry, his father's connections to Islam, and his early life.[1] Perhaps as a merchant seaman, he is said to have gone to Egypt where he passed a test in the Pyramid of Cheops and was renamed Sharif Abdul Ali or Noble Drew Ali. Fathie Ali Abdat argues that this is all a romanticized Moorish myth of "a gutsy African-American who constantly reinvented himself from a struggling agricultural and port laborer in Norfolk and Richmond, Virginia into Professor Drew, an Oriental Scientist before his final metamorphosis into Noble Drew Ali, an Asiatic Moslem Prophet in Newark, New Jersey."[2]

Drew Ali is often said to have founded the Canaanite Temple in Newark, New Jersey, a proto-MSTA Temple, in 1913. Abdat argues that it was actually founded by Abdul Hamid Suleiman, a Sudanese immigrant, as part of the

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[1] See the brief summary by Peter Lamborn Wilson, *Sacred drift. Essays on the margins of Islam* (San Francisco 1993), 15–6.

[2] Fathie Ali Abdat, Before the fez. The life and times of Noble Drew Ali, 1886–1924, *Journal of race, ethnicity and religion* 5/8 (August 2014), 2.

network of black Mohammedan-Masonic movements operating in the 1910s and 1920s.[3] Drew Ali was probably just a member, not a founder, but he was clearly influenced by Suleiman in several ways, "especially those that connected Islam to Masonry, the Canaanites, and racial uplift, from Suleiman's teachings or symbols to use in his forming of the MST."[4] When Drew Ali formed his own Moorish Science Temple of America, Inc. in Chicago a little over a decade later his own biography and the movement's origins were reinvented. But he also went further than his predecessor, for he styled himself as Allah's prophet. In 1927 his "prophethood" was evidenced by a book: *The Holy Koran of the Moorish Science Temple of America*[5] (to avoid confusion, *The Holy Koran* of Noble Drew Ali will be referred to as the *Circle seven Koran*, its more common name that refers to the symbol on the cover). The symbol seems to come from Chapter 48 of *The Aquarian gospel*, which Drew Ali did not include in his *Circle seven Koran* (see below). After Jesus takes the vow of the secret brotherhood of the temple in Heliopolis,

> The master took down from the wall a scroll on which was written down the number and name of every attribute and character. He said, "The circle is the symbol of the perfect man, and seven is the number of the perfect man; The Logos is the perfect word; that which destroys, and that which saves. This Hebrew master is the Logos of the Holy One, the Circle of the human race, the Seven of time." And in the record book the scribe wrote down, The Logos-Circle-Seven; and thus was Jesus known.[6]

Although this self-published book presents itself as a new revelation, Chapters I to XIX of the *Circle seven Koran* seem, at first glance, to be very lightly edited selections from Levi H. Dowling's *The Aquarian gospel of Jesus the Christ*, published in 1908.[7] Chapters XX to XLIV come from a Rosicrucian book by

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3   Abdat, *Before the fez*, 35.

4   Patrick Bowen, Abdul Hamid Suleiman and the origins of the Moorish Science Temple, *Journal of race, ethnicity and religion* 2/13 (September 2011), 52.

5   Wilson agrees that the book had no printed edition prior to 1927, but states that claims were made that it was first published in 1916. Wilson, *Sacred drift*, 16.

6   Levi H. Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel of Jesus the Christ. The philosophical and practical basis of the religion of the Aquarian age of the world and of the Church Universal, transcribed from the book of God's remembrances, known as the Akashic records* (London 1930 [1908]), 88 (48:1–5). Whether Drew Ali was claiming to be the "perfect man" or whether he was simply employing yet another mystifying symbol (as was his wont) is unclear.

7   This fact was, as far as I can ascertain, first noted in an F.B.I. report from 1943. Federal Bureau of Investigation, Moorish Science Temple of America (Noble Drew Ali), F.B.I. file 62-25899-90, 2 April 1943.

Sri Ramatherio entitled *Unto thee I grant*, whose 1925 revision seems to be the one similarly adapted by Drew Ali.[8] Both of these sources are (most likely) 19th-century pseudepigrapha; the former claims to recount Jesus's ministry in India and Egypt prior to that in Galilee, while the latter consists of instructions on social and communal relationships, morality, and theology. An examination of the former, how Drew Ali selected and edited some of the chapters, and an analysis of the final four chapters, which were penned by Drew Ali himself, reveal how he created an Asiatic and Moslem Jesus.

2 The Jesus of The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ

According to Peter Lamborn Wilson, "Drew Ali made only a few changes in the sections of *Aquarian Gospel* he used, for instance changing 'God' to 'Allah' and removing the description of Jesus as blond and blue-eyed."[9] To these minor emendations one could add: changes in capitalization, use of American spelling, altering tenses and pluralizations, and creating titles (usually by reproducing a selection of Dowling's chapter summaries). Given the large number of minor differences, it is difficult at times to determine if they are editorial changes or editorial errors. In fact, the revisions were far more complex, and Drew Ali could be a fairly heavy-handed editor. This is particularly evident in his selection of materials. To see this, it is first necessary to survey the portrayal of Jesus within *The Aquarian gospel of Jesus the Christ.*

The Aquarian gospel purports to be a transcription of the "Akashic records" of the life of Jesus and serve as "the philosophic and practical basis of the religion of the Aquarian age of the world." The full title of the book, according to Eva Dowling, is "The Aquarian age gospel of Jesus, the Christ of the Piscean age." An "age" is a little more than the 2,100 years it takes the solar system to travel 1/12 of its 26,000-year orbit (or "Zodiac") around the "central sun." Adam lived during the Taurian Age, Abraham during the Arian age, and we are at the cusp of the Piscean-Aquarian Ages. Levi, apparently, was the messenger prophesied by Elihu of Zoan almost 2,000 years ago: "And when the world is ready to receive, lo God will send a messenger to open up the book and copy from its sacred pages all the messages of Purity and Love. Then every man of earth will read the words of life in language of his native land, and men will see the light, walk in the light and be the light. And man again will be at one with God."[10]

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8   Wilson, *Sacred drift*, 21.
9   Ibid., 21.
10   Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 10–1, 15, and 40 (7:26–8).

The first third of the gospel is the most unique, outlining the first 30 years of the life of Jesus. The gospel begins with the story of Mary's birth and early life, then that of John the "Harbinger" and Jesus. Both Mary and her sister Elizabeth were educated in Zoan, in Egypt,[11] in order to prepare their sons for their missions. Likewise, both John and Jesus were educated, the former by a hermit of Engedi named Matheno, the latter by Hillel in Jerusalem. Their lessons included the conflict between the higher spiritual and lower carnal selves of humanity, the triune God, and how all religions have their origins in God, whether called Tao, Brahm, or Ahura Mazda. John's lessons focused on sin, forgiveness, and his role as harbinger, whereas Jesus learned what Mary had been taught and also read Vedic hymns, the Avesta, the Psalms, and the Jewish books of prophecy. Then, for 18 years, Jesus lived in India, Tibet, Persia, Assyria, Greece, and Egypt, learning from the great sages, teaching parables to the common people, and regularly angering priests. In Egypt he met with his mother's and aunt's teachers, Elihu and Salome, from 25 years earlier. In Zoan he entered the temple of Heliopolis where he received his seven degrees, including the last and highest, "the Christ."[12] Then, after addressing the seven sages from around the world, Jesus returned to Galilee to begin his mission.[13]

It is here that *The Aquarian gospel* returns to material similar to that found in the four canonical gospels and beginning of the Acts of the Apostles; the ministry of John and Jesus' three-year "Christine" ministry, his betrayal and arrest, his trial and execution, his resurrection and ascension, and the Pentecost and establishment of the "Christine" Church are all described in detail. All of the canonical parables, miracles, and events are related, though many are given different interpretations, and the gospel has a far more consistent narrative and theological framework. The basic theology of *The Aquarian gospel* posits

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11   Zoan is mentioned in the Bible seven times: Num. 13:22; Ps. 78:12 and 43; Isa. 19:11 and 13; and 30:4; and Ezek. 30:14. Dowling used it because of these biblical references (since he preferred Zoan, which comes from the Hebrew instead of Tanis which comes from the Greek) and because of its status as the ancient pharoanic capital of the 21st and 22nd dynasties. Drew Ali highlighted Zoan as well, but he was more interested in it because of its location in Egypt, and so in Africa.

12   The first six degrees are sincerity, justice, faith, philanthropy, heroism, and love divine. Jesus was man, whereas Christ is "the Love of God." After 30 years of preparation, the body of Jesus was fit to be the "temple of Love," which took full possession of it, allowing Christ to be manifest to humanity. Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 14 and 110 (68:12). The parallels with Drew Ali's claim to have passed a test in the Temple of Cheops are unlikely to be coincidental.

13   These seven were: Philo of Alexandria, Meng-tse from China, Vidyapati from India, Kaspar from Persia, Ashbina from Assyria, Matheno from Egypt, and Apollo from Greece. Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 97 (56:7).

a triune God: Father-God who is the power of heaven and earth, Mother-God who is the Holy Breath and thought of heaven and earth, and their son Christ, who is love.[14] Jesus came to manifest Christ, that is, this love to men. The death and resurrection served to demonstrate that man has the power to conquer death, "for every man is God made flesh."[15]

That is to say, the Christ is universal love, and Jesus was a man who, by overcoming temptation and trials, manifested the Christ formed within every man.[16] Though God and man are one, by carnal thoughts, words, and deeds, man debased himself and was separated from God. The Holy Breath seeks to restore unity, which can only be done through love. Thus, by ignoring the passions of the selfish, lower, carnal self by renouncing sin, by having faith in Christ, and most of all by seeing and serving each man as the son of God that he is (even if it means death),[17] all men can likewise manifest Christ. And, by feeling the Holy Breath and by speaking the "omnific Word,"[18] all the miracles and powers of the Christ are at the command of the Christine disciples.

3   The Jesus of the Circle Seven Koran

The *Circle seven Koran* omits much of this material, using only a small portion of *The Aquarian gospel*'s introduction[19] and 36 of its 182 chapters. It claims to be:

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14   The godhead is somewhat more complex, for it consists of "the One, the Three, and the Seven." The former is the primordial state, "just Spirit, Universal Breath." When it breathed, Fire (Father-God) and Thought (Mother-God) were manifest. The union of their breath gave rise to their son: Love or the Christ. The breath of this Triune God brought forth the seven creative spirits, the Elohim, who created man; Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 42 (9:14–20) and 240–1 (163:31–4). This "trinity" is also manifested in Jesus's favorite apostles: Peter represents God to Jesus's flock, James the Holy Breath, and John the Christ; Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 265 (179:12–20).

15   Ibid., 241 (163:37).

16   Ibid., *The Aquarian Gospel*, 110 (68:13).

17   For the most detailed discussion of the two selves, see ibid., 40–1 (8:5–22).

18   This "Word" is never identified, though it may be "*Jahhevahe*." Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 199 (138:21).

19   According to Wilson, "Chapter 1, a poetic metaphysics of human nature and divine nature, may have been written by Noble Drew Ali himself (at least, I've been unable to trace any source for it.)"; Wilson, *Sacred drift*, p. 21. Chapter 1 is drawn from the pages 17–9 of the "Introduction," which was written by "Eva S. Dowling, A. Ph.D. scribe to the messenger." In it, however, she claims to be drawing from "among the many great lessons, that Levi has been permitted to gather from the Akashic Records, or Universal Mind." The

> The Geneology [*sic*] of Jesus with eighteen years of the events, life, works and teaching in India, Europe and Africa. These events occurred before he was thirty years of age. These secret lessons are for all of those who love Jesus and desire to know about His life works and teaching.

After exhorting readers to learn and teach these "lessons," Drew Ali explained their secrecy up to that time:

> The reason these lessons have not been know is because the Moslems of India, Egypt and Palestine had these secrets, and kept them back from the outside world, and when the time appointed by Allah they loosened the keys and freed the secrets, and for the first time in ages have these secrets been delivered in the hands of the Moslems of America.[20]

Gone was Dowling's mystical Akashic record, only to be replaced by another secret, epoch-awaiting source. In both cases, the tactic allowed the "prophet" to claim access to a more pristine, detailed, and direct source for Jesus than the Bible.

As the passage above makes clear, the *Circle seven Koran* explicitly states that it deals with Jesus' ministry in India, Europe, and Africa; that is, India (among "the Moslems") and Egypt (among "the Gentiles").[21] Given these claims it is odd that his only European stop as given in *The Aquarian gospel*, Greece, is omitted, along with Jesus' sojourns to Tibet, Persia, Assyria, and Babylon. In keeping with the goal of presenting hitherto unknown stories of Jesus, Drew Ali ignored all chapters related to the canonical accounts except four: John's ministry and the baptism of Jesus, Jesus' temptations immediately afterward, Pilate's third attempt[22] to save Jesus, and Jesus' resurrection. Why include these

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      lesson on "Man," which Eva Dowling reproduces in full in the "Introduction," was edited by Drew Ali.

20   Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 3.

21   See also ibid., 22, in which Jesus is said to have returned to India, Europe, and "Africa in the land of Egypt" after his resurrection. As for describing Indians as Muslims, it is most likely that Drew Ali's anachronism comes from his own ignorance or wishful thinking. The passages in *The Aquarian gospel* and the subset of them appearing in the *Circle seven Koran* about Jesus in India mention only Hindus and Buddhists.

22   According to *The Aquarian gospel* Pilate secretly conferred with Jesus just prior to the events at the Garden of Gethsemane. The Roman governor informed Jesus how he had defended Jesus to the Jews and now warned him of the dangers in Jerusalem. He urged Jesus to flee on horseback with some of his guards. When Jesus refused, declaring that he must die, Pilate proclaimed, "It shall not be; the sword of Rome will be unsheathed to

four chapters? Drew Ali did not seem particularly interested in John the Baptist, given that he ignored so many chapters of *The Aquarian gospel* that deal with John.[23] Rather, John's or, more accurately, his mentor Matheno's, connection to Egypt mattered – both chapters in which John appears mention Egypt.[24] Also, Drew Ali made Marcus Garvey his "forerunner" as John the Baptist was

save your life." But Jesus disappeared from the guards Pilate had ordered to protect him. Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 240 (163:9–24). Pilate tried again when Jesus was brought before him to confirm the death sentence of Sanhedrin. While the Jews had the right to execute criminals, they sought the "the most humiliating death – the death upon the cross" – for which Roman sanction was required. Pilate refused to rule on the case since Jesus was a Galilean, but sent Jesus to Herod (who happened to be in Jerusalem). He ruled Jesus guilty, but deferred to Pilate's greater authority, who wept at the prospect of having to execute Jesus. Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 246–9 (167). His third attempt to save Jesus was to offer the Jewish people him as the annual scapegoat – who would be driven into the wilds or foreign lands after conferring the people's sin upon him. Instead, they chose Barabbas a man sentenced to die for murders and rapine. Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 249 (168:1–16) Thus, the goal of *The Aquarian gospel* is not only to blame Jews solely for the death of Jesus, but also completely absolve the Romans. The anti-Semiticism of this text is obvious in the repeated predictions that the death of Jesus at their hands would lead to the wrath of God resting upon them "evermore," to the slaying of children and the destruction of the Temple, and to becoming a cursed nation. Also, this gospel claims, "A superstitious people are the Jews" and echoes the accusation in Matthew 27:25, "And then the Jews exclaimed, And let his blood be on our hands and on our children's hands." Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 215 (147:15), 220 (151:20–2) and 227 (156:19–20), 240 (162:20), and 249 (168:1 and 15), respectively.

23   Drew Ali ends the narrative section of the *Circle seven Koran* with what seems to be an unfinished, crude, and rambling summary of the events recorded:

These events occurred before He was 30 years of age, and the events after He had risen from the dead, He appeared back to India, Europe and Africa in the land of Egypt, and made Himself known unto the world. These events are the 18 years which are absent in your "Holy Bible."
The Events of John the Baptist.
John taught by the Egyptian sage.
The meaning of Baptism and how to baptize himself.
And after he was baptized, he was taken at the age of twelve years into Africa, the land of Egypt, and he remained in Egyptian Schools 18 years.
And there he learned his duty as "Fore-runner of Jesus." Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 22.

In fact, it is little more than a terse recapitulation of the chapter about John the Baptist. Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 8–9 (IV). Its presence at the end of the narrative seems to be an editorial oversight.

24   Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran* (n.d.), 8–9 (IV) and 22–23 (XIV). Also, Drew Ali adds "Egypt" to the title of Chapter 11, making it clear that Zoan is in Egypt. Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 5 (II).

for Jesus.[25] Pilate was of even less interest to Drew Ali, but he comes part and parcel of the narrative of the death and resurrection of Jesus, which are central to the story.

This still left much material from *The Aquarian gospel* that, while not in the canonical gospels, Drew Ali chose not to include. In almost all cases, he omitted whole chapters, not just a few verses. Only rarely did Drew Ali omit whole verses. Three such verses occur in one chapter. The first, "He comes the Prince of Peace, the king of righteousness and love; his kingdom is within the soul," may have been too spiritual for Drew Ali, or too "Christ"-ian. The other two, "The common people stood in his defence; they said, 'The hermit speaks truth.' And then the priests, the doctors and the scribes were sore afraid; the said no more; they hid themselves away" contain nothing unusual.[26] In another chapter, Drew Ali also omitted "And Jesus was the first of all the human race to demonstrate the resurrection of the dead."[27] It would be tempting to read something about Drew Ali's understanding of the human race or of resurrection into this omission, but the previous two verses read, "And the Nazarite [i.e. Jesus] appeared and stood upon a sacred pedestal on which no man had ever stood. This was an honour that had been reserved for him who first would demonstrate the resurrection of the dead." These two verses state much the same things.[28] I suspect that their absences were merely oversights. Such certainly seems to be the case with the verse: "The wise men rose and bowed their heads and said, All hail!" Drew Ali does not even renumber the verses: as such, there is no verse 9 for Chapter XIX.[29] One can only speculate why these chapters that do not closely mirror the Gospels were omitted. This material includes the elaborated stories of Mary, Elizabeth, and Zacharias, the education of the women by Salome and Elihu, and the births and early education of Jesus and John. These lessons include material on the equality of men and women, as well as on the triune God, the seven spirits, and the corruption of the concept of God in India and Persia.[30] The neglected chapters about Jesus in

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25   Ibid., 59 (final unnumbered chapter: 2–3). See also below.

26   Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 102 (61:15) and 104 (61:33–4).

27   Ibid., 264 (178:33).

28   Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 264 (178:31–3); Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 27 (XVII: 31–2).

29   Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 260 (176:9); Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 30 (XIX).

30   For Dowling, the figure of Abraham is important. Elsewhere in the world, God is known as Great Tao and Brahm. In Ur, so devoted was this father of the "Hebrew race" to the Brahmic faith that he was known as Abrahm. Part of this tale should have appealed to Drew Ali, for it mentions Zoan and Egypt, where Abrahm both taught science and learned wisdom. Persia began with a similar religion, but when it grew corrupt, Zarathustra came. The Buddha likewise came to India when Brahm had been forgotten there. Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 42–4 (10–1). Dowling had little regard for Hinduism or Judaism – though

India would seem useful, for there Jesus speaks much of the injustice of caste, color, and slavery, and states that "all men to equal be."[31] Why only chapters 26, 27, 28, 32, and 33 were selected remains unclear. It makes for awkward reading within the *Circle seven Koran* because it results in a disjointed narrative and unexplained characters. The whole sections describing Jesus in Western India, Tibet, Persia, Assyria, Babylon, and Greece were omitted too. Again, it is not the content, I believe, but the *religio-ethnicity* and *location* that mattered. These peoples were not perceived by Drew Ali to be "Moslems" (see below); perhaps he thought them all to be Indo-*Europeans*. However, the same cannot be said for the extensive section on Jesus in Egypt, the last stage of his journey before returning to Galilee. Egypt's importance to Drew lay in its location in Africa. Yet, the first chapter, which brings Jesus to Egypt and the home of Elihu and Salome, was included, while the remaining thirteen chapters were not. They deal with the seven degrees he receives, culminating with "The Christ"[32] – a term and concept, as I will demonstrate, Drew Ali systematically expunged from the material adapted into his *Circle seven Koran.* Most of the 100-plus remaining chapters that were omitted simply parallel the canonical gospels too closely to be qualify as events that "are absent in your 'Holy Bible'." Only at the end do chapters from *The Aquarian gospel* reappear. Some of them, such as those describing Jesus's post-resurrection appearances in India and Persia, and in Greece, Rome, and Egypt were included, whereas his appearances to his mother, Miriam, Mary of Magdala, Peter, James and John, to his other Apostles and Disciples multiple times, and at the temple in Jerusalem, were not. Not surprisingly, the last two chapters that deal with the "Establishment of the Christine Church" (that is, the Pentecost) were left out of the *Circle seven Koran* as well.[33]

When it comes to editing the included material, much of it barely merits comment: he preferred American to British spelling (though he was hardly consistent in that regard), he made many changes in capitalization, punctuation, tense, and pluralization (for which I can see no pattern and many instances when this was done incorrectly), he removed Dowling's prefaced chapter summaries (though very often used part of them for his chapter titles), and he occasionally renumbered the verses. Other changes may be significant, but I have yet to figure out why: For example, thrice he changed "Fiat" to

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there is respect for the scriptures, particularly the Vedas and the Hebrew prophets, which Jesus is said to have studied as a child.

31   Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel* 60 (24:11) and more generally, 58–62 (23–5), 65–9 (29–31), and 72–4 (34–5).

32   Ibid., 87–102 (47–60).

33   Ibid., 267–70 (181–2).

"Fate."[34] However, so numerous are the typographical errors and so frequent the miscopying that it is best to focus on obvious, systematic alterations. Some of these emendations can be described as de-Christianizing: "God" and "Lord" became "Allah,"[35] and "church" was substituted with "temple" throughout the text. Dowling's adjective "Christine" is replaced; thus Jesus's "Christine ministry" became his "Devine [or divine] ministry."[36] Similarly, the title "Christ" was replaced with the name "Jesus."[37] When he could not employ such simple substitutes, as with Dowling's "Jesus, who was called the Christ," Drew Ali simply omitted the relative clause.[38] See Table for examples of these editorial changes.

TABLE 14.1   *Examples of Drew Ali's redaction of* The Aquarian gospel

Levi Dowling's *The Aquarian gospel*	Drew Ali's *Circle seven Koran*
Chapter 20; verse 5: And then they went up to the temple courts and asked the guards, Have you seen Jesus, a fair-haired boy, with deep blue eyes, twelve years of age, about these courts?	Chapter V; verse 5: And Mary asked the guards had they seen Jesus, a little boy about the twelve years old.
Chapter 15; verse 22: This rite of cleansing and this church are but symbolic of the cleansing of the soul by purity in life, and the kingdom of the soul, which does not come with outward show, but is the church within.	Chapter IV; verse 22: This rite of cleansing and this temple are but symbolic of the soul, which does not come with outward show, but is the temple within.

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34   Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 4 (1); Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 17.

35   Once, "ᴀᴍ" is transformed into "Allah"; Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 261 (176:29); Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran* 31 (XI:29).

36   Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 107; Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 23 (XV and XV:1).

37   Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 263–4 (178:6, 12, 17, 24, and 25) and 255 (172:26); Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 26–7 (XVII:6, 12, 17, 24, and 25) and 29 (XVIII:26). The last one is particularly jarring: "At midnight every Jewish soldier heard a voice which said, 'Adon Mashich Cumi,' which meant, Lord Jesus areise [*sic*]."

38   Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 250 (168:18); Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 25 (XVI:18).

Levi Dowling's *The Aquarian gospel*	Drew Ali's *Circle seven Koran*
Chapter 65, title, and verses 1, 7–8: NUN. *The Christine Ministry of Jesus – Introductory Epoch.* Chapter 65.... The harbinger had paved the way; the Logos had been introduced to men as love made manifest, and he must now being his Christine ministry.... 7 And Jesus said, Who is it that demands a test? It is no sign that one is son of God because he does a miracle; the devils can do mighty things. 8 Did not the black magicians do great things before the Pharaohs?	Chapter xv, introduction, and verses 1, 7–8: CHAPTER xv. Devine Ministry of Jesus . . . 1. The harbinger had paved the way; the Logos had been introduced to men as love made manifest, and he must now being his divine ministry. . . . 7. And Jesus said, "Who is it that demands a test? It is no sign that one is a Son of Allah because he does a miracle; the devils can do mighty things. 8. Did not the Gentiles magicians do great things before the Pharoah?

It is also not surprising that Drew Ali reversed Dowling's attempt to make Jesus white: "a fair-haired boy, with deep blue-eyes."[39] Oddly, though Jesus is often described as Jewish, once Drew Ali has Jesus as a "Gentile prophet" instead of a "Hebrew prophet."[40] India was identified with Muslims by altering Dowling's section title "Life and work of Jesus in India" by appending "among the Moslems."[41] Given that two chapters later he had Jesus addressing Hindus in Benares,[42] it is possible Drew Ali recognized that both Muslims and Hindus live in India (but obviously not that Islam only got there some 700

39 Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 55 (20:5); Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 10 (v:5). See Table.

40 Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 260 (176:10); Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran* 30 (xix:10). See Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 11 (vi:18), where Jesus is described as "Jewish." Twice Drew Ali described Jesus as "Hebrew." Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 71 (32:41 and 43); Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 19 (xi:41 and 43).

41 Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 56; Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 11 (v). Later Drew Ali altered Dowling's chapter summary, "Jesus reveals to the people the emptiness of Brahmic rites," to become his chapter title "Jesus reveals to the people of their sinful ways." Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 26 (62); Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 13 (viii). Since he did not alter the name Krishna, this may not have been an attempt to Islamicize the people of India in Jesus's time, but merely an attempt to remove a word that most of his readers would not have recognized.

42 Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 16 (x).

years after Jesus). As we shall see, he considered Moslem a racial and religious category. Oddly, Drew Ali did not do the same for Egyptians. When he again adapted one of Dowling's section titles, "Life and works of Jesus in Egypt," for a chapter title, it became "Life and works of Jesus in Egypt among the Gentiles."[43] Similarly, the "black magicians" of the Pharaohs become "Gentile magicians."[44] Of course, Drew Ali may have understood the adjective "black" to be a racial description of the magicians instead of the devilish, sinister magic that they practiced. And, Egyptians are descendants of Canaanites (that is, Gentiles) for him. In either case, it is not surprising that he changed it.

Despite all this omitted material and revisions of the material he did include, Drew Ali never rearranged any material, except once. That is to say, only once did he alter the sequence of events in the narrative established by Dowling; he placed Dowling's chapter 178 before 172 and 176. Drew Ali's story ignored almost all of Jesus' ministry to the Jews; he jumped from Jesus' forty days in the wilderness (Dowling's chapter 65) to Pilate's attempt to free Jesus and Simone of Cyrene's carrying of his cross (Dowling's chapter 168). Next, Jesus appears fully materialized in Greece, Rome, and Egypt (chapter 178). Then he returns to Jesus' resurrection as witnessed by the Jewish soldiers (chapter 172) and has him appear in India and Persia (chapter 176). Drew Ali thus ensured that Jesus made his last appearance among "Moslems" or Canaanites, and not among those whom he felt invented Christianity.

A little over half of *The circle seven Koran* reproduces 25 chapters from Ramatherio's *Unto thee I grant*. The preface, subtitled "The strange story of this book," claims that "an eminent English scholar" with a letter of support from the "Emperor of China," received permission from the Dalai Lama in 1749 to translate a manuscript that the latter claimed to be in his order's possession since 731. For various reasons, Ramatherio was convinced that it had been written by the pharaoh Amenhotep IV between 1360 and 1350 BCE or one of his successors in the school of mysticism called the Secret Brotherhood. (Any parallels between this work and scriptures of other religions stems from the incorporation of his writings into "the Christian Bible … and many sacred writings of the East.") Jesus, too, is said to have been influenced by these early Rosicrucians via the Essenes.[45] Drew Ali drew on none of this legend. He simply selected 25 consecutive chapters starting with those that deal with family

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43   Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 87; Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 21 (XII). As discussed below, Egypt was said to be settled by Canaanites and Moabites, which may have been synonymous with "Gentiles" for Drew Ali.

44   Dowling, *The Aquarian gospel*, 107 (65:8); Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 23 (XV:8).

45   Sri Ramatherio, *Unto thee I grant* (Montana 2003), ii–vii.

relations, social duties, and the nature of humanity. He added verse numbers, substituted "Allah" or "the Father" for "God," employed American spelling, and often replaced the word "soul" with "spirit," "nature," or "reason" – though not consistently. Why the initial 12 and final 11 chapters were omitted is unknown, for they are thematically consistent with the others. None of the ones included were ascribed to Jesus in the original; in fact, 18 of the 25 chapters are re-titled to include the phrase "Holy instructions of the Prophet," and several others "Holy instructions." A close comparison of the two texts shows that Drew Ali edited the text more thoroughly than it first appears. Some of the differences are doubtless due to typographical errors by the publisher.

In the final chapters of the *Circle seven Koran* (XLV to XLVII and the unnumbered final chapter) Drew Ali returns to the subject of Jesus. These final four chapters paint a different figure from that constructed within the edited chapters from *The Aquarian gospel*. With their more numerous spelling and grammatical errors, they seem to have been composed by Drew Ali himself. In the three numbered chapters, Drew Ali outlined his view of Moorish history, including the origin of the Asiatic nation, the birth of Christianity in Rome, and the Canaanite origin of Egypt, the capital of the "Empire of the dominion of Africa." While the confused grammar makes the connections between various modern and ancient peoples unclear, ultimately the ancient Hamitites [*sic*], Canaanites, Hititites [*sic*], and Moabites, and the modern Moors, Egyptians, Arabians, Turks, Japanese, Chinese, Hindus, Brazilians, Argentinians, Chileans, Columbians, Nicaraguans, Salvadorans, Mexicans, and (native) North Americans are all Moslems. This confused passage in full states:

> The Egyptians who were the Hamathites, and of a direct descendant of Mizraim, the Arabians, the seed of Hagar, Japanese and Chinese. The Hindoos of India, the descendants of the ancient Canaanites, Hittites, and Moabites of the land of Canaan. The Asiatic nations of North, South, and Central America: the Moorish Americans and Mexicans of North America, Brazilians, Argentinians and Chilians in South America. Columbians, Nicaraguans, and the natives of San Salvador in Central America, etc. All of these are Moslems. The Turks are the true descendants of Hagar, who are the chief protectors of the Islamic Creed of Mecca; beginning from Mohammed the First, the founding of the uniting of Islam, by the command of the great universal God–Allah.[46]

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46   Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 57 (XLV: 2–7).

At the beginning of the *Circle seven Koran*, Drew Ali also states:

> The industrious acts of the Moslems of the northwest and southwest Africa. These are the Moabites, Hamathites, Canaanites, who were driven out of the land of Canaan, by Joshua, and received permission from the Pharaohs of Egypt to settle in that portion of Egypt. In later years they formed themselves kingdoms. These kingdoms are called this day Morocco, Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, etc.[47]

In Chapter XLVII Drew Ali fleshes out this history. Africans are descendants of the Canaanites. Cush and his family, who came from Canaan, were the first to inhabit Africa. Later, they were joined by his father Ham and his family. The son ruled the northeast and southeast, the father the northwest and southwest of Africa. Later the Moabites, with the permission of the pharaohs, came to the northwest of Africa along with their Canaanite, Hittite, and Amorite brethren. Thus, the Moroccan Empire, the Moors, are descendants of these Moabites. The dominion of this empire extended to South, Central, and North America and "the Atlantis Islands. Before the great earthquake, which caused the great Atlantic Ocean."[48] The point of this history seems to be that "there is no negro, black, or colored race attached to the human family, because all the inhabitants of Africa were and are of the human race, descendants of the ancient Canaanite nation from the holy land of Canaan. What your ancient forefathers were, you are today without doubt of contradiction."[49] African Americans, therefore, must return to the principles and creed of their forefathers. And had they honored these, they would not have been enslaved.

He closed the final chapters with an assertion of his prophetic mission. There is nothing particularly Islamic in all this, and much more was said about Jesus and Christianity than about Muḥammad and Islam. The contents of the *Circle seven Koran* owe nothing to the Qurʾān or even Islam, for Drew Ali included nothing except for the use of the name Allah and two minor references to Muḥammad as the "founder of uniting of Islam" and as he who "fulfilled the works of Jesus of Nazareth".[50] In fact, elsewhere, Muḥammad was even listed with Confucius as one of Drew Ali's predecessors. Drew Ali wrote: "... the Islamic Creed from the East was brought to the Asiatics of American by the Prophet, NOBLE DREW ALI ... [H]e has brought the only remedy

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47   Ibid., 3.
48   Ibid., 58 (XLVII: 2–7).
49   Ibid., 58 (XLVII: 9–10).
50   Ibid., 57 (XLV: 7 and XLVI: 4).

for the nations. The remedy brought by Jesus, Mohammed, Confucius, and all the other prophets, which remedy is truth."[51] There is only one reference to the Qur'ān in the *Circle seven Koran*: "The fallen sons and daughters of the Asiatic Nation of North America need to learn to love instead of hate; and to know their higher self and lower self. This is the uniting of the Holy Koran of Mecca, for teaching and instructing all Moorish Americans, etc."[52] This passage might actually be speaking of the *Circle seven Koran* but, since Muhammad had also been mentioned as the founder of the *uniting* of Islam, this "Holy Koran of Mecca" is probably a reference to the Qur'ān.

Drew Ali racializes religion, and Christianity is a white religion. Unlike earlier in the *Circle seven Koran*, Chapter XLVI blames the Roman nations for crucifying Jesus and creating a religion around him:

> The foundation of Christianity began in Rome. The Roman nations founded the first Church, of whom crucified Jesus of Nazareth for seeking to redeem His people from under the Roman yoke and law. Jesus himself was of the true blood of the ancient Canaanites and Moabites and the inhabitants of Africa. Seeking to redeem His people in those days from the pressure of the pale skin nations of Europe, Rome crucified Him according to their law. Then Europe had peace for a long time until Mohammed the first came upon the scene and fulfilled the works of Jesus of Nazareth. The holy teaching of Jesus was to the common people, to redeem them from under the great pressure of the hands of the unjust. That the rulers and the rich would not oppress the poor. Also that the lion and the lamb may lay down together and neither would be harmed when morning came. These teachings were not accepted by the rulers, neither by the rich; because they loved the principles of the ten commandments. Through the ten commandments the rulers and the rich live, while the poor suffer and die. The lamb is the poor people, the lion is the rulers and the rich, and through Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom, and Justice all men are one and equal to seek their own destiny; and to worship under their own vine and fig tree. After the principles of the holy and divine laws of their forefathers. All nations of the earth in these modern days are seeking peace, but there is but one true and divine way that peace may be obtained in these days, and it is through Love, Truth, Peace, Freedom, and Justice being taught universally to all nations, in all lands.[53]

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51 Drew Ali, *Moorish Literature*, 8–9.
52 Drew Ali, *The Holy Koran*, 56 (XLV: 1).
53 Ibid., 57 (XLVI: 1–9).

Though he did not state it, if there is to be any harmony between these chapters, Jews must also be Asiatic, though they are not Moslems (or, obviously, Canaanites and Gentiles). In any case, Jesus was not a redeemer from sin, except insofar that his people were ruled by Rome because of sin and disobedience.

As noted earlier, Drew Ali expunged any use of "Christ" and "Christine" from the material he adapted from Dowling. His need to do so, and his need to make Jesus someone other than a founder of Christianity, is obvious given the explicit denunciation of Christianity as European from the last chapter of the *Circle seven Koran*:

> We, as a clean and pure nation descended from the inhabitants of Africa, do not desire to amalgamate or marry into the families of the pale skin nations of Europe. Neither serve the gods of their religion, because our forefathers are the true and divine founders of the first religious creed, for the redemption and salvation of mankind on earth. Therefore we are returning the Church and Christianity back to the European Nations, as it was prepared by their forefathers for their earthly salvation. While we, the Moorish Americans are returning to Islam, which was founded by our forefathers for our earthly and divine salvation.[54]

Clearly, religions are racial: one must follow the religion appropriate to one's skin color. Moreover, these two religions should not be understood as equals: Christianity offers only "earthly salvation," while Islam offers one that is both "earthly and divine."

Why, then, write a *Koran* about Jesus? The first verses of last numbered chapter (XLVII) make clear the true importance of Jesus as presented in the preceding chapters; what was key for Drew Ali was the prophetic model Jesus provided:

> The last Prophet in these days is Noble Drew Ali, who was prepared divinely in due time by Allah to redeem men from their sinful ways; and to warn them of the great wrath which is sure to come upon the earth. John the Baptist was the fore runner of Jesus in those days to warn and stir up the nation and prepare them to receive the divine creed which was to be taught by Jesus. In these modern days there came a forerunner, that was divinely prepared by the great God-Allah and his name is Marcus Garvey, who did taught [*sic*] and warn the nations of the earth to prepare to meet the coming Prophet; who was to bring the true and

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54   Ibid., 59 (final unnumbered chapter: 6–8).

divine Creed of Islam, and his name is Noble Drew Ali: who was prepared and sent to earth by Allah, to teach the old time religion and the everlasting gospel to the sons of men. That every nation shall and must worship under their own vine and fig tree, and return to their own and be one with their Father God-Allah.[55]

Not only is Jesus a metaphor for Drew Ali, but the people of Jesus are also a metaphor for Drew Ali's Moors:

Through sin and disobedience every nation has suffered slavery, due to the fact that they honored not the creed and principles of their fathers. That is why the nationality of the Moors was taken away from them in 1774 and the word negro, black and colored was given to the Asiatics of America who were Moorish descent, because they honored not the principles of their mother and father, and strayed after the gods of Europe whom they know nothing of.[56]

Knowing oneself, and being true to that self, is the key.

4 Drew Ali's Jesus outside of the Circle Seven Koran

The figure of Jesus appears in two other writings by Noble Drew Ali. The first, *Moorish literature*, is a pamphlet collection of short messages from Drew Ali. The references to Jesus are few and offer little that is new: "Still he [Prophet Noble Drew Ali] has the only remedy for the nations. The remedy brought by Jesus, Mohammed, Confucius, and all the other prophets, which remedy is truth." Similarly, he wrote:

Coming as he does with a message for the nations in somewhat the same manner as did Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Confucius and other prophets of their day. Only the things of this prophet's day differ from the ills of the days of the past; and yet the remedy for the ills of today is about the same as the remedies for the days past; all turning about the pivot Love – love for humanity.[57]

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55 Ibid., 59 (final unnumbered chapter: 1–3).
56 Ibid., 59 (XLVII:16–17).
57 Drew Ali, *Moorish literature* (n.d.), 9.

Koran questions for Moorish Americans is a little more interesting. Of the 101 questions, only 17 deal directly with Jesus. The answers to the questions make it clear that Jesus was a prophet who came to save the "Israelites" from oppression by the "pale-skin" nations of Europe. His ancestry was not just Jewish, but also Moabite and (as Drew Ali claimed the *Circle seven Koran*) Canaanite, just like that of African Americans. Drew Ali reiterated the *Circle seven Koran*'s narrative of Jesus's 18 years of teaching in India, Africa, and Europe, and of his death. Perhaps most odd was the assertion that Jesus was reincarnated as the Prophet Muhammad. These questions about Jesus succinctly highlight that Drew Ali's goal in the *Circle seven Koran* was to create an "Asiatic Jesus":

24. Who was Jesus? He was a Prophet of Allah.
25. Where was he born? In Bethlehem, of Judah, in the House of David.
26. Who were His Father and Mother? Joseph and Mary.
27. Will you give in brief the line (genealogy) through which Jesus came? Some of the Great Fathers through which Jesus came are: Abraham, Boaz by Ruth, Jesse, King David, Solomon, Hezekiah and Joseph by Mary.
28. Why did ALLAH send Jesus to this earth? To save the Israelites from the iron-hand oppression of the pale-skin nations of Europe, who were governing a portion of Palestine at that time.
29. How long has that been? About two thousand years ago.
30. What was the nationality of Ruth? Ruth was a Moabitess.
31. What is the modern name for Moabites? Moroccans. . . .
35. Where do we get the name Jesus? From the East.
36. What does the name Jesus mean? Jesus means Justice.
37. Did the Angel give to the Child that was called Jesus a Holy name? Yes, but it cannot be used by those who are slaves to sin.
43. At what age did Jesus begin to preach? At age twelve.
44. Where did he teach? India, Africa and Europe.
45. How long did he teach? Eighteen years.
46. What did Jesus say that would make you free? TRUTH. . . .
77. When was His [the Devil's / lower self's] time declared out? When He nailed Jesus to the cross.
78. What were the last words Jesus uttered? It is finished.
79. What did He have reference to? He had reference to the end of Satan.
80. Did Jesus say that He would return to conquer Him? Yes.
81. What is the first name of the person into whom Jesus was first reincarnated? Prophet MOHAMMED, the Conqueror.[58]

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58   Drew Ali, *Koran questions for Moorish Americans* (n.d.), 2–5. It is unclear what Drew Ali thought reincarnation was. By whatever understanding, this is an odd claim to make.

In constructing this Jesus, Drew Ali was clearly not being particularly bibli-cal. If anything, his Jesus was largely an extra-biblical figure. In other words, almost all sayings and events ascribed to Jesus by the four canonical gospels (as reworked by Dowling) were systematically excluded. He deracinated Jesus and replanted him as a Canaanite – likely as a crude redeployment of the "Hamitic curse" employed in White racist rhetoric of the time (and "providing a biblically-based unique genealogy for African Americans."[59]) Of course, this implies that Drew Ali was likely reasonably familiar with the Bible in general and the gospels in particular. This strategy of exclusion allowed him to create a new Jesus: not a Jewish Jesus and certainly not a Christian one, but rather an Asiatic one – where that term clearly implied Jesus was not "pale skinned." And, this Asiatic Jesus opposed pale skinned European oppression and had nothing to do with the European religion that was created in his name. As such, Jesus, the prophet of Allah, served as a model for his more recent prophet, Noble Drew Ali.

That Drew Ali consciously modeled himself on Jesus, or that he consciously modeled Jesus on himself, is also evident in a poster for an event held on May 16, 1927. This "Great Moorish Drama" declared, "The Prophet Noble Drew Ali will be bound with several yards of rope, as Jesus was bound in the temple at Jerusalem and escaped before the authorities could [take] charge of Him; So the Prophet Drew Ali pef[…] the same act, after being bound by anyone in the audience and will escape in a few seconds."[60] It is somewhat ironic, there-fore, that Drew Ali was imprisoned on false charges and, for his followers, died a martyr in 1929. Even his final recorded words seem to recall statements by Jesus: "Though I am now in custody for you and the cause, it is all right and is well for all who still believe . . . I have redeemed you all and you shall be saved, all of you, even with me. I go to bat Monday, May 20, before the Grand Jury. If you are with me, be there. Remember my laws and love one another. Prefer not a stranger to thy brother. Love and truth and my peace I leave you all. Peace from your Prophet, Noble Drew Ali." He was released on bond before the trial and died, some say from a police beating, others at the hands of rivals.[61]

Either he believed Muḥammad the Prophet was alive in 1453, when the head of Satan "(Byzantine)" was taken off, or he believed that the Ottoman sultan Mehmed II the Conqueror was also a prophet.

59   Bowen, Abul Hamid Suleiman, 27.

60   Wilson, *Sacred drift*, 30. The poster also claims Drew Ali would heal people in the audi-ence by touching them.

61   Ibid., 34.

5   Conclusions

The Christology of Drew Ali was one that insisted that Jesus was not the
"Christ" and certainly not the founder of Christianity. Europeans had created
Christianity in his name. He was merely a prophet and a model for his own
prophethood. Therefore, Drew Ali simply urged African Americans to return
to their race's innate religion and to leave Europeans to theirs.

For Drew Ali the concept of Jesus was not to be abandoned, however. Based
on his writings, it is the biblical figure of Jesus and its importance to African
American Christians that gave this figure such prominence. So, Jesus could not
be relinquished, but he could certainly be reinterpreted. Drew Ali made him
an Asiatic prophet who had been sent 1,900 years earlier to free his people from
pale-skin oppression – just as Drew Ali was doing now. It is always easier to
conform to the image and likeness of an ancient prophet, if one constructs the
prophet in one's own image and likeness. To do this Drew Ali formulated a new
narrative about Jesus. This narrative actively sought to ignore the narratives of
Jesus found in the Bible. He also ignored the narratives in the Qur'ān (though it
seems unlikely that Drew Ali even knew about the qur'anic Jesus). The biblical
Jesus was so central to the religious worldview of Drew Ali that his Jesuses can
only be understood in the context of, and in relation to, the Jesus of the Bible –
the very figure and scripture he demanded that African Americans reject.

Reading the Qurʾān Chronologically

An Aid to Discourse Coherence and Thematic Development

Peter G. Riddell

1 Introduction

Specialists in qurʾanic studies learn to engage with the content of Islam's sacred text in ways that do justice to the meaning of the text on multiple levels: word, verse, chapter, and whole book. This can take years of study, involving detailed research into the various sub-disciplines of qurʾanic studies.

Emmanuelle Stefanidis considers the process of drawing meaning from the Qurʾān:

> The Qurʾān can be appropriately described as an "open" text: a text whose loose structure and multifaceted content strongly invite the reader to participate in the creation of meaning.[1]

This statement places a positive spin on the task of drawing meaning from the Qurʾān, but Stefanidis fails to highlight that, while the specialist reader can create meaning in valid ways, for the non-specialist it can be far more challenging to interpret the Qurʾān's meaning in ways that do justice to the overall text.

A key element in this discussion relates to the ordering of the *sūra*s of the Qurʾān. The standard edition, issued in Cairo in 1924, forms the basis for most readily available copies of the Qurʾān in bookshops, online, and elsewhere, yet this edition did not order the *sūra*s chronologically.[2]

For non-Muslim readers, this absence of chronological ordering of the qurʾanic *sūra*s can be a cause of great confusion. Andrew Rippin speaks of

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[1] Emmanuelle Stefanidis, The Qurʾān made linear. A study of the *Geschichte des Qorâns'* chronological reordering, *Journal of qurʾanic studies* 10/2 (2008), 1.

[2] This edition was prepared by an Egyptian government committee led by Muḥammad b. ʿAlī al-Ḥusaynī al-Ḥaddād and was released on 10 July 1924. Slightly revised versions were published later in 1924 and 1936, the latter of which became known as the Fārūq edition after the reigning King Fārūq of Egypt. It quickly assumed almost universal authority status, though originally only intended to serve as a uniform text for Egypt's religious education system. Cf. Gabriel Said Reynolds (ed.), *The Qurʾān in its historical context* (London 2007), 2.

"its apparent random character and seeming arbitrary sense of organization which immediately strikes most first-time readers." He then follows up with a rhetorical question: "How did the Qurʾān come to look the way it does, with the subject matter within individual chapters jumping from one topic to the next, with duplications and apparent inconsistencies in grammar, law and theology abounding?"[3]

The Iraqi translator and scholar Nessim Joseph Dawood (1927–2014) alluded to such difficulties resulting from an absence of chronological ordering of *sūra*s when he wrote as follows:

> It is unfortunate that in preparing the contents of the Koran for book-form its editor or editors followed no chronological sequence.[4]

This can have the effect of discouraging students. In a private email, a student who took a course on the Qurʾān I have run for many years commented: "I had already read the Qurʾān cover to cover before I began the module, and found it the most excruciatingly boring book …"[5]

Furthermore, non-specialists of the Qurʾān may be tempted to engage in proof-texting; namely, citing individual verses at random, divorced from their broader textual context, in order to support a particular point they wish to make. Such proof-texting can lead to broad claims being made about the whole qurʾanic text with little regard for a far more nuanced discussion and understanding that emerges from a more sophisticated engagement with the text.[6]

Two verses that are regularly quoted out of context in a proof-texting fashion are Q 2:256 and Q 9:5:[7]

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3   Andrew Rippin, *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices* (London 2005[3]), 33–4.

4   Nessim Joseph Dawood, Introduction to *The Koran* (Harmondsworth, UK 1974[4]), 10.

5   This present paper is in part the product of class discussions held over two decades in my postgraduate subject, variously called *Understanding the Qurʾān* and *Qurʾanic and post-qurʾanic interpretation* and taught at the London School of Theology, Melbourne School of Theology, and Columbia International University. I am grateful to all the students who took this subject, and acknowledge their role in the formulation of many of the ideas in this paper. I am also very grateful to Dr Mark Durie and Dr Gordon Nickel for their comments and suggestions on a draft of this paper.

6   Needless to say, proof-texting can also occur when a chronologically-ordered Qurʾān is used. However, such a Qurʾān lends itself more readily to an examination of individual verses within their broader qurʾanic context.

7   All translations into English of qurʾanic verses in this paper are taken from Abdel Haleem, *The Qurʾān. A new translation*, Oxford 2004.

Q 2:256: There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error, so whoever rejects false gods and believes in God has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one that will never break. God is all hearing and all knowing.

Q 9:5: When the [four] forbidden months are over, wherever you encounter the idolaters, kill them, seize them, besiege them, wait for them at every lookout post; but if they turn [to God], maintain the prayer, and pay the prescribed alms, let them go on their way, for God is most forgiving and merciful.

The first verse above is sometimes quoted to argue that Islamic doctrine and practice allows for absolute freedom of belief and worship for all people, with no regard given to other verses or, indeed, *ḥadīth* references that suggest a more restrictive understanding. In contrast, Q 9:5 is sometimes cited to argue that the Qurʾān advocates killing non-Muslims, with no regard given to other verses that impose clear limits on military engagement with non-believers.

2   The Importance of a Chronological Reading

Simply put, the standard, non-chronological ordering of the qurʾanic *sūra*s too easily facilitates proof-texting and veils a broader sense of textual cohesion and discourse-level meaning. In order to grasp discourse-level cohesion more easily, it is important to read the Qurʾān according to the chronological ordering of the *sūra*s.[8]

This need is becoming increasingly recognized by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars, as evidenced by the emergence of new published editions of the Qurʾān that present the *sūra*s in chronological order. Of considerable interest are the rapidly-emerging online translations of the Qurʾān, with many sites allowing users to switch between the standard order of the *sūra*s and a chronological one. For example, the qurʾanic translation at www.qran.org is promoted as "an easy way to read and recite the Quran." Similarly, al-quran.info offers the reader the facility to choose from a standard or chronological order in engaging with the qurʾānic text.

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8   Of course, there are other ways of reading the Qurʾān, such as thematically or following the *sūra*s in reverse order. Like a chronological reading, these alternative approaches provide options for overcoming the sense of randomness that many readers may encounter if reading according to the traditional order of the *sūra*s.

Nicolai Sinai emphasizes the importance of taking account of a relevant timeline in reading the Qurʾān when he says: "...a truly historical reading of the Qurʾān...must approach the Qurʾān not as a monolithic textual corpus that is read in a basically synchronic fashion but rather as a diachronic series of individual texts."[9]

In the following discussion, the approach to the textual meaning of the Qurʾān will be focused on the text's internal cohesion. While affirming Rippin's statement that "in no sense can the Qurʾan be assumed to be a primary document in constructing the life of Muḥammad,"[10] the present task is to grasp a sense of the thematic development of the revealed message for which Muḥammad was the key actor. To achieve that goal, there will be no significant recourse made to *Sunna* or *tafsīr* materials, which often play a key role in informing discussions about the issue of qurʾanic chronology. Instead, the following discussion will let the qurʾanic text speak for itself.[11]

3   Selecting a Chronology

Several different chronologies for the *sūra*s of the Qurʾān have been formulated over the centuries. The primary ingredients that inform discussions about chronological ordering are threefold.[12] The first is based on intra-qurʾanic considerations of verse abrogation, on which a key, pioneering work was *al-Nāsikh wa-l-mansūkh* by Abū ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Salām (d. 838 CE).

The second key ingredient is extra-qurʾanic and is provided by the copious *Asbāb al-nuzūl* ("occasions of revelation") genre of literature, drawn from the Qurʾān, *Sīra, ḥadīth*, and *maghāzī* resources.

Thirdly, *tafsīr* literature serves as a crucial resource in settling the chronology of the Meccan and Medinan material. Much of this latter material is traced

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9   Nicolai Sinai, The Qurʾān as process, in Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, and Michael Marx (eds.), *The Qurʾān in context. Historical and literary investigations into the qurʾānic milieu* (Leiden 2011), 415.

10   Andrew Rippin, Muhammad in the Qurʾān. Reading scripture in the 21st century, in Harald Motzki (ed.), *The biography of Muhammad. The issue of the sources* (Leiden 2000), 307.

11   Gabriel Said Reynolds insists that decisions about chronology should be based on what the Qurʾān says about itself, not on structures imposed through a consideration of associated literature. With that we wholeheartedly agree. However, he reaches a very different conclusion to our present study, taking a skeptical approach to arguments for chronological readings; cf. Gabriel Said Reynolds, Le problème de la chronologie du Coran, *Arabica* 58 (2011), 477–502.

12   G. Böwering, Chronology and the Qurʾān, *EQ*.

back to Ibn ʿAbbās (d. 688 CE), but it was only in the late mediaeval period that discussions assumed something approaching their final form, with the writings of al-Bayḍāwī (d. 1286 CE) and al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505 CE).

A key name in terms of recent Muslim scholarship on the chronology of the qurʾanic material is Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Zanjānī (1892–1941), an Iranian religious scholar who wrote in Arabic. His *magnum opus* was *Taʾrīkh al-Qurʾān*,[13] considered by Karimi-Nia to be "the first independent work on the history of the Qurʾan by a Muslim scholar."[14]

Al-Zanjānī argues that Q 96:1 was the first verse revealed, on the authority of Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*. He goes on to cite a range of works in his discussion of the order of revelation of verses and *sūra*s, including Abū ʿUbaydah's *Faḍāʾil al-Qurʾān* and Abū l-Ḥasan b. Ḥaṣṣār's *al-Nāsikh wa-l-Mansūkh*. He asserts that "the major part of the Quran was revealed verse by verse . . . On the other hand some of the surahs of the Quran were revealed in their complete forms at a time, such as *al-Fātiḥah, al-Ikhlāṣ . . .*"[15]

Al-Zanjānī allows for composite *sūra*s (e.g. Q 6, 8–12, 14, 15, 18, 31, 46 etc.), in which the *sūra*s were allocated to Mecca or Medina according to where the majority of the verses within them were revealed. He presents a chronological list of *sūra*s, drawing on Ibrāhīm b. ʿUmar al-Biqāʿī, Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, and an unnamed work by the fifth/eleventh century scholar Abū l-Qāsim ʿUmar b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Kāfī al-Nīsābūrī.[16] The work of Ibn ʿAbd al-Kāfī was also referenced in the chronological order given by the standard, 1924 Egyptian edition of the Qurʾān.

Al-Zanjānī's study of qurʾanic chronology represents an accessible and reliable survey of centuries of discussion by earlier Muslim scholars about the subject. Muslim interest in the chronological ordering of the Qurʾān has gained a new lease of life in the late-twentieth century. The modern Iranian scholar Abdolali Bazargan (b. 1943) developed a chronology of the *sūra*s based on

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13   Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Zanjānī, *Taʾrīkh al-Qurʾān*, Cairo 1353/1935. Excerpts of this work have been translated into English and published as: Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Zanjānī, The history of the Quran, *al-Tawḥīd* 4/3 (1987), 21–45; 5/1 (1987), 17–26; 5/2 (1987–8), 13–28; 5/3 (1988), 5–18. These excerpts in English are widely available on the internet; e.g. http://tanzil.net/pub/ebooks/History-of-Quran.pdf.

14   Morteza Karimi-Nia, The historiography of the Qurʾan in the Muslim world. The influence of Theodor Nöldeke, *Journal of qurʾanic studies* 15/1 (2013), 46.

15   Zanjānī, *al-Tawḥīd* 4/3 (1987), 21–45.

16   Zanjānī, *al-Tawḥīd* 5/1 (1987), 17–26. Note that there is some minor inconsistency between his initial list, which goes through the *sūra*s in their standard order, and the chronological listing given several pages later.

stylistic analysis,[17] while the "stylometric" approach of Behnam Sadeghi was based on a relative chronology of *sūra*s in seven phases, with Sadeghi also arguing that the Qurʾān had a single author.[18]

Non-Muslim scholars have shown interest in the chronology of the Qurʾān since the mid-nineteenth century. The pioneer in this was the German scholar Gustav Weil (1808–89), who drew on a chronological listing in al-Diyābakrī's *Taʾrīkh al-khamīs* when developing his own chronology in his 1844 work *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in den Koran.* Although superseded by later chronologies, Weil's work left a lasting legacy in its division of the qurʾanic materials from Muḥammad's years in Mecca into three sub-periods.

Weil's slightly younger English contemporary William Muir (1819–1905) carried forward non-Muslim research into this topic, proposing six sub-periods of revelation, from early Meccan to late Medinan. Muir was circumspect in offering his proposals, commenting that "[a]ny attempt to arrange the Suras in true chronological order can at the best be approximate; but there are guides which, within certain limits, may be depended upon."[19] The "guides" upon which he drew for his architecture of the qurʾanic text were style, development of doctrine, and references to historical landmarks.

The next generation of German Orientalists was to produce a chronology of qurʾanic *sūra*s that has come to serve as the default position among non-Muslim scholars, and as a respected point of reference among many Muslim scholars. Theodor Nöldeke (1836–1930) produced the first edition of his *Geschichte des Qorâns* in 1860, on the basis of the doctoral thesis he had completed four years earlier. In it he built on Weil's pioneering analysis of qurʾānic chronology and, focusing particularly on the stylistic features of the qurʾānic text, presented compelling arguments for his architecture of the Qurʾān based on three Meccan and one Medinan period. Like Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Zanjānī, Nöldeke drew on the unnamed work of Abū l-Qāsim ʿUmar b. Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Kāfī al-Nīsābūrī in shaping his chronology.

Nöldeke's *magnum opus* appeared in a revised, second edition in 1909, edited and enlarged by his student Friedrich Schwally. More recently it has been translated into English and Arabic, a testament to its enduring influence.[20]

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17   Available online at: http://www.bazargan.com/abdolali/.

18   Behnam Sadeghi, The chronology of the Qurʾān. A stylometric research program, *Arabica* 58 (2011), 210–99.

19   William Muir, *The Corân, its composition and teaching and the testimony it bears to the Holy Scriptures* (London 1878), 41–2.

20   Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, G. Bergsträsser, O. Pretzl, *The history of the Qurʾān*, ed. and trans. by Wolfgang Behn, Leiden 2013.

Nicolai Sinai affirms the broad approach of this work, remarking "Nöldeke's approach to dating qurʾanic passages is largely sound."[21] Morteza Karimi-Nia suggests that Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Zanjānī also had a high regard for Nöldeke: "[al-Zanjānī's] work clearly manifests the influence of Nöldeke's *Geschichte des Qorâns* in both structure and content."[22]

Non-Muslim attempts to devise a chronology of the qurʾanic material continued after Nöldeke. The Anglican clergyman John Medows Rodwell (1808–1900) produced an English translation of the Qurʾān in 1861, which followed Nöldeke's chronology but with minor adaptations.[23] Hubert Grimme (1864–1942) suggested an arrangement of the *sūra*s on the basis of doctrinal characteristics. Régis Blachère (1900–73) also offered a chronology, again based on several Meccan and one Medinan periods, sub-dividing the Meccan *sūra*s still further.[24] Perhaps the most radical alternative approach was that adopted by Richard Bell, who discarded the Meccan/Medinan periodization and developed a verse-by-verse dating system.[25] More recently, N.J. Dawood's translation into English for Penguin offered a slightly different chronological ordering of the qurʾanic *sūra*s. A new Arabic annotated edition of the Qurʾān, with the *sūra*s arranged in chronological order, has been prepared by the Christian Palestinian scholar Dr. Sami Awad Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh,[26] who has also prepared a new French translation of the book. Also worthy of note is Mark Durie's forthcoming alternative approach to the Mecca-Medina model, based on a theological approach.[27]

The field of qurʾanic chronology is largely dominated by two methods: the traditional Muslim chronology, ably articulated in the work of al-Zanjānī, and

21   Sinai, Qurʾan as process, 415.

22   Karimi-Nia, Historiography of the Qurʾan, 51.

23   J.M. Rodwell (trans.), *The Koran translated from the Arabic*, London 1909.

24   Blachère considered that the early Meccan *sūra*s could be sub-divided into four periods according to theme: (a) 96, 74, 106, 93, 94, 103, 91, 107 (b) 86, 95, 99, 101, 100, 92, 82, 87, 80, 81, 84, 79, 88, 52, 56, 69, 77, 78, 75, 55, 97, 53, 102 (c) 70, 73, 76, 83, 111, 108, 104, 90, 105, 89, 85 (d) 112, 109, 1, 113, 114. Cf. Régis Blachère, *Introduction au Coran* (Paris 1966), 11ff.; also available at http://www.mehdi-azaiez.org/La-chronologie-de-Regis-BLACHERE?lang=fr#nh2.

25   *The Qurʾān*, 2 vols., Edinburgh 1937–9.

26   Sami Awad Aldeeb Abu-Sahlieh, *Koran in Arabic in chronological order: Modern, Koranic and Koufi orthography, with reference to variations, abrogations, Jewish and Christian … and stylistic mistakes* (Createspace 2015), 201.

27   M.J. Durie, *Qurʾānic theology and biblical reflexes in the Qurʾān*, Th.D diss., Melbourne School of Theology 2016.

the prominent non-Muslim chronology developed by Nöldeke.[28] The discussion of qur'anic content that follows will draw essentially on these two systems.

3.1 *Comparing the Chronologies*

A diagrammatic representation of our two preferred chronologies side by side appears as follows:

TABLE 15.1   *Muslim and Nöldeke chronologies compared*

Periodisation	al-Zanjānī	Nöldeke	Periodisation
Meccan (86 *sūra*s)	96, 68, 73, 74, 1, 111, 81, 87, 92, 89, 93, 94, 103, 100, 108, 102, 107, 109, 105, 113, 114, 112, 53, 80, 97, 91, 85, 95, 106, 101, 75, 104, 77, 50, 90, 86, 54, 38, 7, 72, 36, 25, 35, 19, 20, 56, 26, 27, 28, 17, 10, 11, 12, 15, 6, 37, 31, 34, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 51, 88, 18, 16, 71, 14, 21, 23, 32, 52, 67, 69, 70, 78, 79, 82, 84, 30, 29, 83	96, 74, 111, 106, 108, 104, 107, 102, 105, 92, 90, 94, 93, 97, 86, 91, 80, 68, 87, 95, 103, 85, 73, 101, 99, 82, 81, 53, 84, 100, 79, 77, 78, 88, 89, 75, 83, 69, 51, 52, 56, 70, 55, 112, 109, 113, 114, 1	First Meccan (48 *sūra*s)
		54, 37, 71, 76, 44, 50, 20, 26, 15, 19, 38, 36, 43, 72, 67, 23, 21, 25, 17, 27, 18,	Second Meccan (21 *sūra*s)
		32, 41, 45, 16, 30, 11, 14, 12, 40, 28, 39, 29, 31, 42, 10, 34, 35, 7, 46, 6, 13	Third Meccan (21 *sūra*s)
Medinan (28 *sūra*s)	2, 8, 3, 33, 60, 4, 99, 57, 47, 13, 55, 76, 65, 98, 59, 24, 22, 63, 58, 49, 66, 64, 61, 62, 48, 5, 9, 110	2, 98, 64, 62, 8, 47, 3, 61, 57, 4, 65, 59, 33, 63, 24, 58, 22, 48, 66, 60, 110, 49, 9, 5	Medinan (24 *sūra*s)

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28   Many scholarly studies in the field since the work of Nöldeke analyze the Qur'ān by reading it chronologically. Examples that follow Nöldeke's chronology are Daniel Madigan's *The Qur'ān's self-image. Writing and authority in Islam's scripture*, Princeton 2001, and David Marshall's *God, Muhammad and the Unbelievers*, London 2014. Many of Angelika Neuwirth's studies adopt this method, as do the commentaries of the *Corpus Coranicum* Project: http://corpuscoranicum.de/.

An examination of the comparative table presented above results in a number of observations. First, there is some variation in the ordering of the Meccan *sūra*s between the two chronologies. Color-coding allows us to see how some of Nöldeke's First Meccan *sūra*s appear at a later point in the traditional Muslim chronology, and some *sūra*s that are Second and Third Meccan for Nöldeke occur at a relatively different point in the ordering of the chronology presented by al-Zanjānī.

However, Nöldeke himself seemed to be somewhat flexible on the question of the precise order and timing of Meccan *sūra*s, commenting with regard to his Meccan chronology: "Some of my claims, which at the time seemed quite certain, upon new and careful scrutiny turned out to be uncertain."[29] Writing a century and a half later, Stefanidis speaks in similar terms: "If the rationalisation of the three Meccan periods is justified, the reasons for the actual order of Meccan *sūra*s within each period, however, remain obscure."[30] In that context, while the division into three Meccan periods is extremely helpful in considering chronology, it would be unwise to be too literal in the application of this periodization at the precise level of dating individual *sūra*s vis-à-vis other *sūra*s, especially given the broad recognition that some Meccan *sūra*s include Medinan verses and vice-versa.

Of greater significance is the fact that four *sūra*s are considered to be Medinan by the traditional Muslim chronology but Meccan by Nöldeke. Of these, *sūra* 13 is considered by the latter as the very last Meccan *sūra*, so there is no need to place too much store in that difference. However, *sūra*s 99 and 55 are considered Medinan in the Muslim chronology but First Meccan by Nöldeke, while *sūra* 76, appearing as Medinan in al-Zanjānī's scheme, is counted as Second Meccan by Nöldeke.

In the following analysis this difference is inconsequential, since *sūra*s 55, 76, and 99 do not need to be drawn on to demonstrate the argument of thematic progression. Furthermore, the discussion of chronology will take the *sūra* as the basic unit of analysis, which is, as Rippin observes, "the dominant trend in scholarship today."[31] Finally, the Meccan periods will be referred to as early, middle, and late to allow for greater flexibility in drawing on the two preferred systems of chronology.

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29   Nöldeke et al., *History of the Qurʾān*, 61.

30   Stefanidis, Qurʾān made linear, 7.

31   Andrew Rippin, Contemporary scholarly understandings of qurʾānic coherence, *al-Bayān* 11/2 (2013), 3ff. Furthermore, limitations of space do not allow a consideration of Meccan verses in Medinan *sūra*s and the reverse.

3.2   *A Chronological Reading and Thematic Progression*

Stefanidis issues an important challenge in calling for a thematic response to discussions about chronology:

> A diachronic approach to the Qurʾān … appears indispensable. Thematic chronological studies should be pursued, just as the *Geschichte des Qorâns* contribution to the field should be valued. The challenge lies, rather, in working with imperfect tools and on the basis of approximate premises, and keeping in mind their limitation.[32]

Böwering's article on qurʾanic chronology in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* anticipates Stefanidis's challenge by considering four themes: disconnected letters, ritual prayer, the name of God, and the figure of Abraham.[33] He demonstrates clearly the value of considering qurʾanic chronology by highlighting a progressive development of these themes. Sinai's study also takes a thematic approach by considering the early qurʾanic narratives about Abraham, and Rippin issues an important call: "one must decide upon a reading strategy as the first step in understanding – and thus teaching and studying – the Qurʾān."[34]

The reading strategy in this study will be based on a consideration of three themes (with sub-themes) that emerge from a chronological reading of the Qurʾān: the authority of the Messenger; resurrection and judgment; and believers and unbelievers. Our examination will draw on the chronology by Nöldeke as the primary reference, making lateral reference to the traditional Muslim system presented by al-Zanjānī as a control. Unless otherwise indicated, the Meccan verses cited will be drawn from similar periods in the traditional Muslim and Nöldeke schemes.

4   Evolving Chronological Themes

If we take a thematic approach to reading the Qurʾān according to a chronological order of its *sūra*s, it will be helpful to consider key thematic contours of the three Meccan and the Medinan periods on a macro scale. This should precede a closer examination of certain selected themes.

The early Meccan period carries diverse themes. Central to this period of Muḥammad's early ministry, represented roughly by the years 610–7, was a

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32   Stefanidis, Qurʾān made linear, 15.

33   Böwering, Chronology and the Qurʾān, 326ff.

34   Rippin, Contemporary scholarly understandings of qurʾānic coherence, 13.

confident affirmation of the unity of God, in contradistinction to the polytheism that he saw all around him. In calling his audience to the acceptance of monotheism, the Messenger of Islam issued warnings to his opponents, and these are very evident in the early *sūra*s. Given that Muḥammad encountered opposition to his call from the outset, it is not surprising that the early chapters and verses include expressions of reassurance for the Messenger, giving him the confidence to announce the impending Last Day and the rewards and punishments that will follow the great Judgment.

Nöldeke's system attributes 48 *sūra*s to the early Meccan period. Of the vast collection of verses falling into this period, a helpful summary of the themes can be found in verses in 11–16 of *sūra* 85:

> But for those who believe and do good deeds there will be Gardens graced with flowing streams: that is the great triumph. [Prophet], your Lord's punishment is truly stern – it is He who brings people to life, and will restore them to life again – and He is the Most Forgiving, the Most Loving. The Glorious Lord of the Throne, He does whatever He will.

The middle Meccan period, according to the Nöldeke scheme, includes 21 *sūra*s and, roughly, covers the years AD 617–9. Central to these *sūra*s is an ongoing and confident affirmation of the sovereignty of God accompanied by a declaration about the validity of the qur'anic revelation. Muḥammad continues to face vocal opposition, and he is reassured in his responses to those who reject his message, all of which contributes to consolidating his claims as the Messenger. In this period he is seen to be aligned with God's earlier prophets. Also central to the message is the ongoing contrast between the righteous character of believers and the corruption of disbelievers.

Verses 89–94 of *sūra* 15 encapsulate some of the core themes of this middle Meccan Period:

> Say, "I am here to give plain warning," like the [warning] We have sent down for those who divide themselves into bands and abuse the Qur'ān – by your Lord, We will question them all about their deeds. So proclaim openly what you have been commanded [to say], and ignore the idolaters.

The late Meccan Period equates roughly to the years AD 619–22 and, in the Nöldeke scheme, includes 21 *sūra*s. This period serves as a bridge between Mecca and Medina in the life of the Messenger. There is a general affirmation of the themes from the two earlier periods, with the glorious sovereignty of God further underlined, which draws the believer's attention to an afterlife

that is in contrast with the limited earthly existence. Links introduced earlier between the Qurʾān and earlier scriptures are further developed. The tension between Muḥammad and his rejecters is exacerbated, and the ascendancy of believer vis-à-vis disbeliever emphasized.

In the Medinan *sūra*s – 24 in the Nöldeke scheme and 28 in the traditional Muslim chronology – the authority of the Messenger is finally affirmed and clarified. His message of Islam is distinguished from earlier faiths in two key ways: first, instructions and regulations are given to believers to fulfil the requirements of the new faith; second, a critique of the earlier faiths is proffered. Furthermore, the doctrine of *jihād* in all its complexity is introduced as a mechanism by which the new faith of Islam can claim its place in the world.

While such an overview is helpful, it is necessary to look more closely at individual themes that emerge from the pages of the Qurʾān to gain a better insight into how a chronological reading of the text enhances the sense of thematic progression. In the following sections we will consider three macro themes: the authority of the Messenger; resurrection and judgment; and believers and unbelievers.

4.1   Theme: The Authority of the Messenger

In the early Meccan period we are presented with an early claim to authority for Muḥammad, issued to a skeptical audience. Q 53:1–12 captures this sense of calling everyone to accept the message of the revealed Qurʾān:

> By the star when it sets! Your companion has not strayed; he is not deluded; he does not speak from his own desire. The Qurʾān is nothing less than a revelation that is sent to him.... [The Prophet's] own heart did not distort what he saw. Are you going to dispute with him what he saw with his own eyes?

Given that the Messenger encountered opposition and ridicule from the outset, something that represented a challenge to his authority, these early chapters of the Qurʾān respond by instructing him to "give warning" to the unbelievers. This sets in motion a process that was to increase in intensity in subsequent periods.

The middle Meccan period devotes itself to consolidating Muḥammad's claims as Messenger. As opposition to him and his message intensifies, he is increasingly reassured of the truth of his message in these *sūra*s. He is given responses to address to those who reject his call, and his Messenger credentials are reinforced by a progressive alignment between Muḥammad and previous prophets.

> Q 21:41: Messengers before you [Muḥammad] were also ridiculed, but those who mocked them were overwhelmed in the end by the very thing they had mocked.

In the late Meccan Period, the Messenger becomes more and more distressed by the continuing rejection of his message: "If you find rejection by the disbelievers so hard to bear … bring them a sign" (Q 6:35).[35] Distress on his part increasingly turns to emphatic warnings to those who stand against the message.

> Q 45:7–8: Woe to every lying sinful person who hears God's revelations being recited to him, yet persists in his arrogance as if he had never heard them – Prophet bring him news of a painful torment!

Nevertheless, at this stage the duty of the Messenger is still linked to methods of persuasion: " … if they turn away … your only duty is to deliver the message clearly" (Q 16:82).

It is noticeable that there is growing reciprocal interaction between Muḥammad and his contemporaries. What, on face value, appear as rhetorical questions are, in fact, pointers to continuing instructions from Muḥammad to his audience and their rejection of them. The tendency in earlier *sūra*s simply to state that people do not believe in the resurrection becomes a dynamic exchange:

> Q 41:9: How can you disregard the One who created the earth in two days? How can you set up other gods as his equals?

And further:

> Q 10:34: Can any of your partner gods originate creation, then bring it back to life again in the end?[36]

In the Medinan *sūra*s, the role of Muḥammad as the Messenger of God reaches its maturity. A key feature is that the authority of the Messenger increases exponentially, and the juxtaposition of references to God and to Muḥammad is noticeable. His believing audience is repeatedly instructed to "Obey God and His Messenger" (Q 33:33; 4:49); both command loyalty, as in the declaration

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35   Q 6:35 appears at the mid-point of the Meccan *sūra*s in the traditional Muslim chronology.
36   Q 10:34 appears at the mid-point of the Meccan *sūra*s in the traditional Muslim chronology.

that "[t]hose who pledge loyalty to you [Prophet] are actually pledging loyalty to God Himself – God's hand is placed on theirs" (Q 48:10); while dire warnings are issued to those who do not accept the Divine and His prophetic seal – "...those who disobey God and His Messenger...will be consigned by God to the Fire, and there they will stay" (Q 4:14). Furthermore, "God and his Messenger" may make decisions together which are to be undisputed (Q 33:36).

Such references are plentiful in the Medinan *sūra*s, especially in *sūra*s 9 and 5, two of the latest *sūra*s in terms of qur'anic chronology in both the traditional Muslim and Nöldeke chronologies.

By the Medinan period, Muḥammad's credentials as Messenger have reached a point of clarity and detail far beyond that of the early Meccan. *Sūra* 58 specifies how believers should conduct themselves in his presence; Q 49:2 insists that believers must not raise their voice above his or their "[good] deeds may be 'cancelled out.'" Q 33 declares that the Messenger is closer to believers than they are to themselves, and his wives function as their mothers. The prayers of Muḥammad facilitate access to God's mercy, so believers should be generous in their charity to earn the Messenger's favor (Q 9:99). With regard to his status vis-à-vis earlier messengers and prophets, Q 33:40 introduces an element of finality to Muḥammad's role:

> Muhammad is not the father of any one of you men; he is God's Messenger and the seal of the prophets: God knows everything.

4.1.1   Sub-theme: The Method of the Messenger – *Jihād*

The development of the Messenger's responses to the rejection of the disbelievers provides one of the clearest examples of the advantages of reading the Qur'ān chronologically. While his approach to the disbelievers in the Meccan periods was based on call, argumentation, and persuasion, the dramatic change in approach to encompass a more forceful *jihād* that is evident in the Medinan period represents a clear development in approach.

It is important to note that *jihād* itself was a process, not simply a product. The battles fought by the Medinan community under Messenger's leadership against their Meccan Quraysh opponents – Badr (Q 3:123ff.; 8:11ff.), Uḥud (Q 3:121ff.; 165ff.), and the Trench (Q 33:12ff.) – helped shape an evolving understanding of the need for a more forceful response to the disbelievers, one that went beyond call, argumentation, and persuasion.

By the Medinan period, after more than a decade of rejection and ridicule by his opponents, the Messenger had little tolerance for "hypocrites" who are referred to as "liars" (Q 63:1). In order to earn God's forgiveness, it is no longer

sufficient to simply call others to the truth of the Qur'ān; rather it is necessary to struggle more forcefully for God's cause (Q 8:74). Those who engage in this struggle are promised a "high rank" and "tremendous reward" (Q 4:95–6), with Q 4:95 suggesting that God prefers those who fight "in God's way." This path involves engaging in mortal combat (Q 4:92–4; 2:191), though with restrictions; it is prohibited to fight during the "sacred month" (Q 2:217) (though there are certain exceptions to this instruction), and a similar prohibition relates to fighting at al-Masjid al-Ḥarām (unless engaging in self–defense against attack; Q 2:191). Fighting in God's way requires full participation, with the menace of Hell awaiting those believers who "stay behind" (Q 9:81), and full commitment; "Believers, when you meet the disbelievers in battle, never turn your backs on them" for fear of Hellfire (Q 8:15–6).

4.2   *Theme: Resurrection and Judgment*

While the first theme examined, that of the Messenger's authority, shows a clear and rich development through the pages of the Qur'ān when it is read chronologically, our second theme, that of resurrection and judgment, seems much more stable from the early Meccan period to the Medinan.

The essence of Muḥammad's message was, from the outset of his ministry, apocalyptic. Not only is a Day of Judgment referenced repeatedly in the early Meccan *sūra*s, but its presence is also enhanced by the stylistic device of a rich collection of synonyms. It is a "Day of Resurrection" (Q 75:1), a "Day of decision" (Q 77:38), "the Imminent Hour" (Q 53:57), and "the Promised Day" (Q 85:2). Some of the alternative titles for this day are quite graphic; it will be a day of a "Crashing Blow" (Q 101:1ff.) and a "Day of Anguish" (Q 74:8). Beyond the specific title used, the *sūra*s from the early Meccan period report that "the earth and the mountains will shake" (Q 73:14) and on this day "the secrets are [laid] bare" (Q 86:9).

Such graphic portrayals of the end times serve as the context for the repeated menu of promised rewards and warnings of punishment. The early Meccan *sūra*s set the scene with an apocalyptic message of two ages, emphasizing the contrast between "the present life and the life to come" (Q 53:25), rebuking the Meccans for their ignorance: "you . . . love this fleeting world and neglect the life to come" (Q 75:20–1).

With such a detailed portrayal of the apocalyptic theme in the early Meccan *sūra*s, it is not surprising that *sūra*s from later Meccan and Medinan periods essentially affirm and consolidate the framework outlined in the early Meccan ones, providing copious references to the Day of Judgment and its diverse synonyms, and promising splendid rewards to believers and painful punishments to disbelievers in ever-expanding quantities. The two-age contrast is frequently

affirmed: "We would have made you taste a double punishment in this life, and a double punishment after death" (Q 17:75); and "All of these are mere enjoyments of this life; your Lord reserves the next life for those who take heed of Him" (Q 43:35).

Overall, resurrection and judgment form a stable hub around which other themes revolve and develop over time. This was the case with the first theme considered, the authority of the Messenger, whose articulation of and approach to his core apocalyptic message showed clear progression. Such is also the case with the next theme, believers and unbelievers, whose fate is inextricably tied to the final resurrection and judgment.

4.3   *Theme: Believers and Unbelievers*

The early Meccan Period *sūra*s set the scene for this theme. *Sūra* 56[37] provides a framework that is developed in *sūra*s from subsequent periods. Muḥammad's audience is analyzed according to a three-way taxonomy. The best of believers are brought near to God; the ordinary believers are those on the right; and the disbelievers are those on the left.[38] This taxonomy reflects a fundamental bipolarity between believers and disbelievers.

The Meccan *sūra*s are replete with descriptive phrases that provide an insight into the actions that earn the contemptuous title of "disbeliever." Those guilty of this term are "ungrateful to God" (Q 100:6).

> Q 52:11–14: Woe on that Day to those who deny the Truth, who amuse themselves with idle chatter: on that Day they will be thrust into the Fire of Hell. This is the Fire you used to deny.

In the *sūra*s of the middle and late Meccan periods, the invective against disbelievers grows in intensity. Even Satan, the great deceiver, will renounce the disbelievers with a sneer on Judgment Day:

> Q 14:22: When everything has been decided, Satan will say, "God gave you a true promise. I too made promises but they were false ones: I had no power over you except to call you, and you responded to my call, so do not blame me; blame yourselves. I cannot help you, nor can you help me. I reject the way you associated me with God before." A bitter torment awaits such wrongdoers.

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37   Middle Meccan in the traditional Muslim chronology.
38   Abdel Haleem, *The Qurʾān. A new translation* (Oxford 2004), 356.

Meanwhile, the lure of the rewards of belief are emphatically stressed and articulated throughout the Meccan *sūra*s. In Q 25:63ff., the character of the believer is described in exemplary terms:

> The servants of the Lord of Mercy are those who walk humbly on the earth, and who, when the foolish address them, reply, "Peace"; those who spend the night bowed down or standing, worshipping their Lord, who plead, "Our Lord, turn away from us the suffering of Hell …" They are those who are neither wasteful nor niggardly when they spend, but keep to a just balance; those who never invoke any other deity beside God, nor take a life, which God has made sacred, except in the pursuit of justice, nor commit adultery.

By the Medinan period *sūra*s the contrast between believers and unbelievers has been crystallized. The final period carries a strong warning to believers to stay the course, and there are clear calls for unity among the believers:

> Q 3:105: Do not be like those who, after they have been given clear revelation, split into factions and fall into disputes: a terrible punishment awaits such people.

Furthermore, believers are urged not to compromise in their acceptance and implementation of the core of the Qurʾān:

> Q 2:85–6: So do you believe in some parts of the Scripture and not in others? … These are the people who buy the life of this world at the price of the Hereafter: their torment will not be lightened, nor will they be helped.

4.4   *Sub-theme: Faiths of the Book*

The Qurʾān has much to say about the Faiths of the Book throughout the various Meccan and Medinan periods. It could be considered as a sub-category of the Believer and Unbeliever theme because a transformation in attitude to the earlier faiths emerges when reading the Qurʾān chronologically.

The middle Meccan period is marked by the increasing presence of stories about earlier prophets. Muḥammad carries forward their prophetic responsibilities, proclaiming God's reward and warning audiences of the impending Day of Judgment. Most of these earlier prophetic figures appear in the previous revelations: Torah (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Moses, etc.), Psalms (David), Gospel (Zechariah, Jesus). So these figures potentially serve as a

powerful bridge between the communities of the earlier revelations and the new Islamic community.

However, just as the earlier prophets are rejected by their communities, so Muḥammad is subjected to scorn and ridicule, as seen in Q 21:41, cited above.

In the middle and late Meccan *sūra*s, Muḥammad thus finds affirmation through the earlier prophets by reference to the old Scriptures. By the late Meccan period the view of the Messenger towards the earlier faiths has become more ambiguous. By this period there is an increasingly clear perception on the part of the Messenger that the faith that he proclaims is a new religion:

> Q 10:104: Prophet, say: People if you are in doubt about my religion, I do not worship those you worship other than God, but I worship God who will cause you to die, and I am commanded to be a believer.

At this point, Muḥammad emphasizes that his knowledge of the earlier prophets is via the revealed word, not having previously encountered Noah (Q 11:49), Joseph (Q 12:3, 102), and Moses (Q 28:44). Gradually the new faith is seen as superseding the earlier ones.

> Q 45:16–9: We gave scripture, wisdom, and prophethood to the Children of Israel; We provided them with good things and favored them above others; We gave them clear proof in matters [of religion]. They differed among themselves out of mutual rivalry, only after knowledge came to them: on the Day of Resurrection your Lord will judge between them regarding their differences. Now We have set you [Muhammad] on a clear religious path, so follow it. Do not follow the desires of those who lack [true] knowledge – they cannot help you against God in any way.

In the Medinan period the separation of the Islamic faith from its predecessors is completed. This process has both positive and negative dimensions. The positive separation is achieved by the establishment of ritual duties specific to the new Muslim community, especially in the early Medinan *sūra* 2. The pillars of the faith are articulated relating to prayer (Q 2:142ff.) and the *qibla* (Q 2:144), fasting during Ramadan (Q 2:183ff.), charitable giving (Q 2:261–81), pilgrimage (Q 2:196ff.), and fighting (Q 2:190–4, 216–8). Matters of family legal practice are addressed, such as marriage to disbelievers (Q 2:221) and divorce (Q 2:228–32). Gender-focused regulations are presented covering sexual relations (Q 2:223), menstruation (Q 2:222), and breastfeeding (Q 2:233). Ethical matters are considered, including care for widows (Q 2:234) and orphans (Q 2:220), the swearing of oaths (Q 2:224–7), refugees (Q 2:243), and suffering

(Q 2:214–5). Certain prohibitions are also articulated, such as those relating to gambling (Q 2:219–20).

At the same time, the new faith is delineated not only according to what it is but also in terms of what it is not. In this context, the view of the faiths of the book is generally less favorable than in earlier, Meccan periods. The earlier appeals by the Messenger to the People of the Book are less frequent, giving way to a discourse of rebuke and warning, and articulating the aforementioned practices that set the new faith apart from those of the book. Believers are told not to take Jews and Christians as friends (Q 3:28) because they cannot be trusted and will lead believers astray (Q 3:69–75). The "People of the Book," a term increasingly collocated with "disbeliever," will experience the fires of Hell if they reject the call of the Messenger (*sūra* 98). By *sūra* 9, among the very latest parts of the qurʾanic text in both chronological systems, the two terms are often almost synonymous; thus, calls to fight the disbelievers are taken to encompass those People of the Book who do not accept the Messenger and the Qurʾān (Q 9:29).

Nevertheless, the delineation between the new faith and the faiths of the Book is not exclusive. Indeed, the People of the Book themselves are categorized into those who accept the new faith and those who reject it; thus, there is room for Christians and Jews to qualify as believers (Q 3:75ff., 3:199–200).

5   Conclusion

The Scottish philosopher and writer Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881) described the Qurʾān as follows:

> I must say, it is as toilsome reading as I ever undertook. A wearisome, confused jumble, crude, incondite, endless iterations, long-windedness, entanglement … Nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through the Koran.[39]

Carlyle's failure to perceive a sense of thematic progression and overall coherence in the Qurʾān was in no small part due to the practice of Islamic authorities through the ages of presenting the printed Qurʾān in a non-chronological fashion. While there are some differences between the various chronologies, both Muslim and non-Muslim, that are available, they are of a relatively

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39   Norman Oliver Brown, Jerome Neu, and Jay Cantor, *The challenge of Islam. The prophetic tradition. Lectures, 1981* (Berkeley, CA 2009), 50.

marginal nature and do not negate the advantages in comprehensibility of offering a chronological ordering of the *sūra*s.

In this examination, several themes have been considered to demonstrate how a chronological reading achieves a sense of thematic progression through the pages of the Qurʾān that is lost in the traditional arrangement of the *sūra*s. That arrangement lends itself to proof-texting, surely by both Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Proof-texting does not do justice to any book, let alone a text considered sacred by one of the world's great religions. The increasing emergence of editions of the Qurʾān ordered according to one of the chronologies, both in print and online, represents a trend that could increase understanding of this powerfully influential book.

The Fig, the Olive, and the Cycles of Prophethood
Q 95:1–3 and the Image of History in Early 20th-Century Qurʾanic Exegesis

Johanna Pink

[وَالتِّينِ وَالزَّيْتُونِ ١ وَطُورِ سِينِينَ ٢ وَهَـٰذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ ٣]

1 By the fig and the olive, **2** and the *Ṭūr Sīnīn*, **3** and this secure city!

1   Introduction[1]

The period of the late 19th and early 20th centuries is commonly recognized as a time of fundamental change, particularly in Muslim exegesis of the Qurʾān. Exegesis in this period showed new thematic interests and an increased willingness to propose new interpretations and experiment with new hermeneutical approaches. It was also a period in which the Qurʾān took on a central role in Muslim discourses, not only about religion but also about social and political reform. Yet our knowledge of this important period is surprisingly superficial. Of the Arabic Qurʾān commentaries that were written in the early 20th century, before World War I, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī's (1866–1914) *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl* has not been studied in any depth, nor has Muḥammad ʿAbduh's (1849–1905) *Tafsīr juzʾ ʿamma*. Even the existing works on Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā's (1860–1935) *Tafsīr al-Manār*, an influential Qurʾān commentary that incorporated and publicized further exegetical material by Muḥammad ʿAbduh, offer no more than an assessment of certain ideas about reason, the natural sciences, and legal and social reform, with little interest in methods and sources of scriptural interpretations.[2]

How, though, do these scholars deal with exegetical problems that are not directly related to the state of the Muslim world and the need for reform? What

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[1] The idea for this paper and its execution would not have been possible without the thinking space provided by a fellowship from the Freiburg Institute for Advanced Study (FRIAS), for which I am profoundly grateful.

[2] See, e.g., J.J.G. Jansen, *The interpretation of the Koran in modern Egypt*, Leiden 1974; Jacques Jomier, *Le commentaire coranique du Manâr. Tendances modernes de l'exégèse coranique en Egypte*, Paris, 1954.

is their hermeneutical approach? What sources, modern and pre-modern, do they appropriate, and why?

This study aims to shed light on these issues by taking a closer look at the beginning of *Sūrat al-Tīn* (Q 95). The oath at the beginning of the *sūra*, "by the fig and the olive, and the *Ṭūr Sīnīn*, and this secure city!", has puzzled exegetes from an early period. By the fourth/tenth century, there was an established exegetical discourse on the possible meanings of this oath. Yet when Muḥammad ʿAbduh approached this question in his *Tafsīr juzʾ ʿamma*, published in 1904,[3] and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī did the same in his *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, completed in 1911,[4] both exegetes decided not to content themselves with reproducing this discourse, but either proposed new opinions or adopted interpretations that had hitherto been marginal. These decisions, and the probable reasons behind them, are the topic of this study. In order to be able to situate them, however, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the exegetical discourse on *Sūrat al-Tīn* that ʿAbduh and al-Qāsimī were dealing with.

2   The Fig and the Olive in Pre-20th Century Exegesis

No agreement seems ever to have existed over the meaning of the oath at the beginning of the *sūra*, and especially that of the first verse, i.e. the mention of the fig and the olive. Thus, most exegetes discussed the issue extensively. As mentioned above, by the fourth/tenth century a set of opinions and supporting traditions had been established that later exegetes drew upon, sometimes selectively, sometimes stating a preference, and only occasionally adding to them.[5] These opinions are summed up concisely in Abū l-Ḥasan al-Māwardī's (364–450/974–1058) Qurʾān commentary *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn*:[6]

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3   Johanna Pink, ʿAbduh, Muḥammad, *EQ*.

4   In manuscript form. The work was published posthumously by one of his sons from 1957 to ca. 1970; cf. Ẓāfir al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī wa-ʿaṣruhū* (Damascus 1965), 679–85.

5   I am excluding Shīʿī and Ṣūfī allegorical interpretations of Q 95:1–3, which are abundant, from this discussion for the simple reason that they are not relevant to early 20th-century Sunni exegetes. In the Shīʿī case, the reasons are obvious; in the case of Ṣūfī interpretations, their virtual disappearance from the discourse of *tafsīr*, alongside *kalām* and *falsafa*, would deserve a study of its own. To gain an overview of the pre-20th-century exegesis of Q 95, I have made use of the online platform http://altafsir.com. I provide individual references to printed editions for all exegetes whose interpretation I quote or discuss in detail.

6   The list of opinions provided by al-Māwardī is almost, but not completely, exhaustive. For example, a few exegetes see a connection to Kūfa which they consider a holy place, almost

God's speech "By the fig and the olive" consists of two oaths, and there are eight opinions on their meaning:

1. They are the fig and the olive that are foodstuffs, which is the opinion of al-Ḥasan, ʿIkrima, and Mujāhid.[7]
2. The fig is Damascus and the olive Jerusalem, which is the opinion of Kaʿb al-Aḥbār and Ibn Zayd.
3. [missing]
4. The fig is a place of worship (*masjid*) in Damascus and the olive a place of worship in Jerusalem, which is the opinion of Ḥārith and Ibn Zayd.
5. A mountain on which fig trees grow, and a mountain on which olive trees grow, which is the opinion of Ibn Qutayba. They are two mountains in the Levant (*al-Shām*) one of which is called Ṭūr Zaytā and the other Ṭūr Tīnā, which is the interpretation of al-Rabīʿ. Ibn al-Anbārī said that they are two mountains between Ḥilwān [in Kurdistan] and Hamadān, which is far-fetched.
6. The fig is the place of worship of the People of the Cave, and the olive is Elijah's place of worship, which is the opinion of Muḥammad b. Kaʿb.
7. The fig is the place of worship that Noah built on Jūdī [his place of descent after the flood], and the olive is the place of worship in Jerusalem, according to Ibn ʿAbbās.
8. Both of them refer to God's blessings on His servants, of which figs and olives are a part, because the fig represents food and the olive fat [as a nutrient].

The third oath is by *Ṭūr Sīnīn*. There are two opinions on its meaning:

1. It is a mountain in the Levant [*Shām*], according to Qatāda.
2. It is the mountain upon which God spoke to Moses, according to Kaʿb al-Aḥbār.

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certainly under the influence of Shīʿī interpretations. Nonetheless, the opinions summed up by al-Māwardī are the most common.

7 The authorities al-Māwardī quotes as supporting the various opinions do not come in the form of a complete list. For example, there are more early authorities who were said to have understood the fig and the olive as foodstuffs than the three mentioned by al-Māwardī; al-Ṭabarī provides a dozen traditions to support this opinion and al-Thaʿlabī has nine. Many exegetes, such as al-Zamakhsharī and al-Rāzī, mention Ibn ʿAbbās as being among those who adopted it.

On the word *Sīnīn*, there are four opinions: one, that it is an Ethiopian word meaning "good," also used by the Arabs [...]; two, that it means "blessed" [...]; three, that it is the name of the sea [...]; four, that it is the name of the trees growing on it [the mountain] [...].[8]

"And this secure city": By the city, He means Mecca. [...][9]

Two divergent trends are discernible in this list of exegetical opinions. One is to insist on understanding the fig and the olive in a literal sense as foodstuffs because, as al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) says, "This is the common usage among the Arabs (*huwa l-maʿrūf ʿind al-ʿArab*)"[10] and because there is no authoritative tradition that would support a different interpretation. This is very succinctly expressed by Muḥammad al-Shawkānī (1173–1250/1760–1835):

I wish I knew what drove these scholars to deviate from the true meaning in the Arabic language towards those interpretations that are far from the meaning and built upon fantasies that have no basis in reason nor tradition.[11]

This rejection of non-literal interpretations is repeatedly based on the authority of linguists such as al-Farrāʾ (d. 207/822) and Ibn al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/950). It is much more frequently corroborated by numerous references to the nutritional and medical qualities of the fig and the olive, including a *ḥadīth* according to which Muḥammad praised the fig as a heavenly fruit that has no stone, cures haemorrhoids, and is generally medically useful, and another *ḥadīth* according to which Muḥammad declared *siwāk*s made of olive tree branches the best type of *siwāk*, the *siwāk* of the prophets.[12]

The second trend is obviously driven by a desire to establish coherence between Q 95:1, on the one hand, and 95:2–3, on the other, although this desire is rarely explicitly stated. Since verses 2–3 are commonly thought to

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8   Many later exegetes mention, or consider likely, the possibility that Sīnīn is simply a synonym for Sīnāʾ, i.e. Sinai; others, such as al-Zamakhsharī, are very much concerned with arabizing the morphology of the word.

9   Abū l-Ḥasan al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-l-ʿuyūn. Tafsīr al-Māwardī*, ed. al-Sayyid b. ʿAbd al-Maqṣūr b. ʿAbd al-Raḥīm (Beirut n.d.), 6:300–1.

10   Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī. Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo 2001), 24:504.

11   Muḥammad al-Shawkānī, *Fatḥ al-qadīr*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿAmīra (Cairo 1994), 5:623.

12   These *aḥādīth* are found in a large number of Sunni *tafsīr* works. Their source might be al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035); see Abū Isḥāq al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, ed. Muḥammad b. ʿĀshūr and Naẓīr al-Sāʿīdī (Beirut 2002), 10:238–9.

refer to geographical places or places of worship, it obviously seemed plausible to many exegetes since an early period that the fig and the olive also denote place names, possibly by way of an ellipsis, i.e. "the place where fig trees grow and the place where olive trees grow." They are often connected to the Levant (*al-Shām*), especially to Damascus and Jerusalem, but no particular reason for this is given. Some exegetes even go so far as to transform them into place names that are supposedly Syriac analogies to *Ṭūr Sīnīn*, i.e. *Ṭūr Tīnīn*, *Ṭūr Zaytīn*, and, in al-Thaʿlabī's case, *Ṭūr Yatmānā* for Mecca. This remains on the level of a formal adaptation, though, without any attempt to explain the underlying logic. An alternative strategy to provide coherence is discernible in al-Māwardī's last option for the term *Sīnīn*, which is to interpret it in a way that has some relation to trees and thus connects it with the fig and the olive. This opinion, however, mentioned by al-Thaʿlabī and al-Qurṭubī among others, is fairly marginal.

Starting in the sixth–seventh/twelfth–thirteenth centuries, a new theme emerges alongside the existing opinions that exegetes continue to quote and endorse: that of prophethood. Prophets had been mentioned before, of course: Noah and Elijah in connection with the fig and the olive, and Moses as the prophet who received a revelation on *Ṭūr Sīnīn*. But this had never really been cast as the common theme of all three verses despite numerous references to the "Holy Land" or holy places. That was different in the Persian Ṣūfī Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's (522–606/1128–1209) *ʿArāʾis al-bayān fī ḥaqāʾiq al-Qurʾān.* Rūzbihān understood the oath, as a whole, to indicate places in which God had manifested himself to prophets: The tree that Adam was forbidden from approaching was a fig tree, he claimed, and the burning bush in which Moses encountered God was an olive tree. Mount Sinai points to Moses as well, and Mecca to God's sanctuary. Rūzbihān added a quotation from an unnamed prophet: "The Lord came from Sinai, and appeared from Sāʿīr, and he shone forth from the mountains of Fārān."[13] This quotation is biblical. It comes from Deut. 33:2, and the prophet who utters it is Moses, but none of this is apparent in Rūzbihān's commentary; whether the Bible, to him, is a source that his recipients might be familiar with is unclear.

It is noteworthy that the connection between the fig and Adam, which would be fairly obvious from a biblical point of view Gen. 3:7, is made by only a few pre-modern Muslim exegetes. Even in Rūzibhān's case, the reference is not to fig leaves, but to a speculative identification of the forbidden tree with a fig tree. Rūzbihān's contemporary Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (ca. 543–606/1149–1209)

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13   Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *Tafsīr ʿarāʾis al-bayān fī ḥaqāʾiq al-Qurʾān*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī (Beirut 2008), 3:516.

mentions in passing Adam and the fact that he covered himself with fig leaves, but this is clearly based on an extra-biblical narrative source, as part of a list of qualities that are meant to give figs a special, exalted status among fruit. He has a similar list for olives without reference to any prophet and sees no larger prophetic theme at work in the oath.[14] Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), on the other hand, says that God swears by the fig because its leaves covered Adam in paradise (cf. Q 7:22); in a similar vein, he connects the olive tree to Abraham, referring to the "blessed olive tree" in the Light Verse (Q 24:35). Like Rūzbihān, he thus considers the whole oath a metaphor for various prophets.[15]

Several scholars of the eight/fourteenth and ninth/fifteenth centuries explore this theme more systematically. Al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310) writes:

> The meaning of swearing by these things is to clarify the exaltedness of the blessed sites as well as the good and the blessings that occurred in them, seeing as they were the homesteads of prophets and of men who were close to God (*awliyāʾ*). The place where figs and olives grow is the land to which Abraham emigrated and where Jesus was born and grew up. The *ṭūr* is the place in which Moses received his calling, and Mecca is the site of the house that serves as guidance to mankind, birthplace of our prophet and the place to which he was sent, God's prayers be upon all of them. Or the first two [i.e., the fig and the olive] are an oath by the site of reception (*mahbiṭ*) of God's revelation upon Jesus, and the third [by the site of God's revelation] upon Moses, and the fourth [by the site of God's revelation] upon Muḥammad.[16]

These ideas might have been part of a wider discourse by the time al-Nasafī wrote; if not, they were about to be. Abū Ḥayyān al-Gharnāṭī al-Andalusī (654–745/1256–1344) followed al-Nasafī's first theory, the one that includes a reference to Abraham besides Jesus, Moses, and Muḥammad, to the letter. Abū Ḥayyān's contemporary and compatriot Ibn Juzayy al-Kalbī (693–741/1294–1340), in his *al-Tashīl li-ʿulūm al-tanzīl*, seems to agree with the second theory,

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14   Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr al-Fakhr al-Rāzī al-mashhūr bi-l-tafsīr al-kabīr wa-mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Damascus 1981), 32:9. Ismāʿīl Ḥaqqī Bursāwī (d. 1137/1725) copied his interpretation almost verbatim.

15   Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-aḥkām al-Qurʾān*, ed. ʿAbdallāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Beirut 2006), 365.

16   Abū l-Barakāt ʿAbdallāh b. al-Nasafī, *Tafsīr al-Nasafī al-musammā bi-madārik al-tanzīl wa-ḥaqāʾiq al-taʾwīl*, ed. Sayyid Zakariyyā (Riyadh n.d.), 4:1336.

thus excluding Abraham. Quoting the same verse from the Old Testament that Rūzbihān had made use of, he reasons:

> The most obvious [interpretation of the fig and the olive] is that both of them are places in Syria, those where Jesus was born and lived. This is because God mentions hereafter the mountain on which he spoke to Moses and the city from which he sent forth Muḥammad. This verse is the counterpart of the verse in the Torah: "God came from Sinai, and rose from Sāʿid [*sic*], which is Jesus's place, and he appeared from the mountains of Bārān," which is Mecca. God swears by these places that he mentioned in the Torah because of their exalted status due to the afore-mentioned prophets.[17]

In the context of al-Andalus at the time, reading the verse as a reference to the history of Abrahamic religions, including parallels to an older scripture, was not at all far-fetched. Why this might have been the case becomes explicable when looking at Ibn Kathīr's (d. 774/1373) commentary. Having quoted the usual interpretations, Ibn Kathīr goes on to summarize the opinion of "one scholar" whom he does not name. The scholar is his teacher Ibn Taymiyya (661–728/1263–1328) who comments on Q 95:1–3 in his work of anti-Christian apologetics *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*, a book that might have been known to Abū Ḥāyyān and al-Kalbī. Ibn Taymiyya writes:

> He swears by the three noble, exalted places in which His light and guidance manifested themselves and in which He sent down the three [scriptures]: The Torah, the Gospel, and the Qurʾān. Likewise, he mentions the three in the Torah: "God came from Sinai and he shone forth from Sāʿīr, and he appeared from the mountains of Fārān." When He tells us about them in the Torah, he does so in chronological order, the earliest [revelation] coming first. The Qurʾān, however, [...] swears by them in hierarchical order, rank by rank, concluding it with the one that ranks highest [...] because the noblest books are the three: The Qurʾān, then the Torah, then the Gospel, and likewise the prophets."[18]

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17   Abū l-Qāsim b. Juzayy al-Kalbī, *al-Tashīl fī ʿulūm al-tanzīl*, ed. Muḥammad Sālim Hāshim (Beirut 1995), 2:587–8.

18   Taqī l-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ*, ed. ʿAlī b. Ḥasan b. Nāṣir, ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz b. Ibrāhīm al-ʿAskar, and Ḥamdān b. Muḥammad al-Ḥamdān (Riyadh 1999²), 5:207–8.

Ibn Taymiyya then proceeds to demonstrate that the principle of using a hierarchical order is generally at work in oaths and to substantiate the identification of "Fārān" with Mecca and, by the same token, with Hagar's and Ismāʿīl's place of refuge. Ibn Kathīr does not present his teacher's detailed and extensive argument in its entirety, though, but merely presents a summary of the paragraph just quoted.

Ibn Taymiyya's interpretation clarifies why Deut. 33:2 was so important and so well-known to many exegetes: In interreligious polemics, it served to counter the Christian claim that Muḥammad could not be a real prophet because his coming was not predicted in the Bible.[19] According to Ibn Taymiyya and many other Muslim apologetic writers, Deut. 33:2 clearly states that God would reveal himself in the mountains of Paran, which is Mecca. The parallel at the beginning of *Sūrat al-Tīn* only serves to strengthen this argument. Obviously, interreligious polemics, in the time between Rūzbihān and Ibn Kathīr, constituted a genre influential enough to cause many exegetes, most notably in al-Andalus, immediately to associate the book of Deuteronomy with *Sūrat al-Tīn*.

The only important exegete after Ibn Kathīr to read the oath as a reference to prophethood was al-Biqāʿī (809–85/1406–80), who was extremely interested in the Bible, but in a rather different way from Ibn Taymiyya.[20] Al-Biqāʿī explained that the land of figs and olives is Greater Syria, *Bilād al-Shām*, where nearly all prophets from Abraham to Jesus lived. The only exceptions were Moses, Aaron, Ismāʿīl, and Muḥammad, and those are alluded to in Q 95:2–3.[21] Thus, the oath refers to the collective of prophets – a category that al-Biqāʿī clearly limits to the Judeo-Christian genealogy of prophets with the addition of Muḥammad. His interpretation, in which all these prophets are collectively addressed by the oath without any distinction between them, throws into sharp relief the peculiarity of Ibn Taymiyya's and Ibn Kathīr's reading: these two scholars are the only exegetes who do not read the oath as a metaphor for prophethood, instead using it to establish a hierarchy, a tool to distinguish between the prophets and their scriptures.

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19 This is a common claim in Muslim apologetics. See, for example, Samawʾal b. Yaḥyā b. ʿAbbās al-Maghribī, *Badhl al-Majhūd fī ifḥām al-yahūd*, ed. ʿAbd al-Wahhāb Ṭawīla (Damascus 1989), 67. His view was shared by, among others, Ibn Ḥazm; cf. Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam. The heresy of the Ishmaelites* (Leiden 1972), 80, n. 3. The use of Deut. 33:2 in order to point to the prediction of Muḥammad in the Bible was an early theme; cf. Diego R. Sarrió Cucarella, *Muslim-Christian polemics across the Mediterranean. The* splendid replies *of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 684/1285)* (Leiden 2015), 217, n. 3.

20 Walid A. Saleh, *In defense of the Bible. A critical edition and an introduction to al-Biqāʿī's Bible treatise*, Leiden 2008.

21 Burhān al-Dīn al-Biqāʿī, *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa-l-suwar* (Cairo 1992), 22:135.

3   A New Cycle of Engagement with Pre-Islamic Religions

There was a distinct surge of interest in reading Q 95:1–3 as a reference to prophets and, possibly, their scriptures during the time of the crusader states and the reconquista. This might have correlated, in some cases, with a height-ened interest in the notion of the "Holy Land." However, none of the inter-pretations that related the oath to the history of prophethood became part of the mainstream of the *tafsīr* tradition. The opinions of al-Nasafī, the Andalusī scholars Abū Ḥayyān and Ibn Juzayy, Ibn Taymiyya, his disciple Ibn Kathīr, and al-Biqāʿī might have met the needs of their time, but they were not sup-ported by any early authorities, and the fact that they operated with biblical quotations instead, which was unusual in itself, could obviously not make up for that shortcoming. Thus, they did not receive the status of opinions impor-tant enough to be included in the lists of possible interpretations that were drawn up by later exegetes. Up to and including the 19th century, the opinions quoted and discussed by exegetes did not differ much from those presented by al-Māwardī.

Around the late 19th or early 20th century, this changed. Even ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ (1844–1921), one of the founding fathers of the Bahāʾī faith, wrote a tablet in Ottoman Turkish on the interpretation of *Sūrat al-Tīn* at an unknown date as a response to a request. He briefly summarizes the literal interpretation of the fig and the olive and confirms its validity, but then moves on to discuss an additional, inner, and "far-reaching" meaning. According to this meaning, Mount Tīnā and Mount Zaytā are situated in the Holy Land and are places where unspecified prophets have received revelations and inspiration. Mount Sinai and Medina – not Mecca! – refer to Moses and Muḥammad, of course. The latter verses prove, ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ argues, that the fig and the olive must also refer to such sacred sites. Furthermore, the oath, by pointing to the blessings of prophethood, strengthens the subsequent verse "we have created man in the fairest stature" (Q 95:4).[22] ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ thus seeks coherence within the *sūra* beyond the three verses containing the oath. He presents his interpretation as a Muslim one, without any mention of the Bahāʾī faith, but his emphasis on the Holy Land as the site of a number of unspecified prophets would easily allow for the inclusion of his father, the prophet of the Bahāʾī faith, who spent the last decades of his life in Palestine, without being specific enough to offend Muslims.

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22   Necati Alkan, "By the fig and the olive." ʿAbduʾl-Bahá's commentary in Ottoman Turkish on the qurʾánic sura 95 – notes and provisional translation, *Baháʾí studies review* 10 (2001), 116–28, esp. 127–8.

'Abd al-Bahā's tablet is not simply a veiled attempt to legitimize a new religion and connect it to Islam, though. It fits into the spirit of a time that is characterized both by a renewed and original engagement with the Qur'ān on the part of Muslim scholars and intellectuals and by an intense climate of interreligious debate and polemics. British and French imperialism in the Middle East, the activities of Christian missionaries, and the claims of Orientalists about the mundane origins of Islam provoked responses that found their expressions in all areas of Muslim religious thought, including the interpretation of the Qur'ān. This is exemplified by both Muḥammad 'Abduh's and al-Qāsimī's exegetical approaches to the problem of the fig and the olive.

4   Muḥammad 'Abduh: A Vision of History

Muḥammad 'Abduh's *Tafsīr juz' 'amma* was conceived as a schoolbook. He wrote it in Geneva in 1903, presumably without access to much, if any, Muslim exegetical literature.[23] His interpretation of Q 95:1–3[24] starts in a way that is not entirely unconventional, but then becomes rather original, striving for a coherent reading not only of the oath but also of the entire *sūra*.

Muḥammad 'Abduh first discusses verses 1–3 in reverse order, thereby highlighting the theme of holy sites from the outset. He identifies the "secure city" as Mecca, where the light of Islam first emerged, and *Ṭūr Sīnīn* as the place where God spoke to Moses. Muḥammad 'Abduh explains the unusual form *Sīnīn* instead of the Arabic *Sīnā'* as South Arabian, which seems to be an idea he came up with himself. Then he lists five established opinions concerning geographical places that the fig might symbolize, from a place of worship in Damascus to Mount Jūdī, where Noah's Ark landed. He remarks that it might be conceivable to see the oath as a reminder of Noah's story and the lesson that can be learned from it, but that he does not understand the inherent wisdom or logic in interpreting it as a reference to Damascus. He briefly mentions the option that the olive might signify a mountain in Jerusalem or the city itself. Moving to his main argument, one that is based on a key element of his hermeneutical approach, he says that "a small number of exegetes" claim that the fig and olive might actually be understood in a literal sense on account of the many benefits of these plants. But what, then, would be the connection (*munāsaba*) between them, on the one hand, and *Ṭūr Sīnīn* and the secure city on the other? There would be none, and that makes this option, in Muḥammad

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23   Pink, 'Abduh.

24   Muḥammad 'Abduh, *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm. Juz' 'amma* (Cairo 1322/1904), 118–21.

'Abduh's opinion, very unlikely. It thus seems reasonable to assume that the fig and the olive are metaphors. On this basis, Muḥammad 'Abduh develops his own interpretation of the oath that is not based upon any established opinion:

> It might also be likely that they [the fig and the olive] denote the two respective types of trees, but not because of their beneficial properties, as the exegetes have said; rather, because they call to mind great and important events that have left a lasting impression upon human affairs. [...] God wants to remind us of four chapters in the long book of [the history of] mankind from its first origins to the time of the Prophet Muḥammad's mission.[25]

First, the fig, according to Muḥammad 'Abduh, represents the era of the first man who, together with his wife, covered himself with fig leaves when they were living in the garden and becoming aware of their nakedness. The olive stands for the era of Noah during which mankind was destroyed and reborn out of Noah's descendants. Muḥammad 'Abduh gives a precise account of the story of Noah who, on his Ark with the whole earth flooded by water, sent off birds until finally one came back with an olive leaf as a sign that the water was receding. Both stories are obviously taken from the Old Testament, not from the Qur'ān. This very likely makes Muḥammad 'Abduh the first exegete after Ibn Kathīr who brought up the Bible in this context, but in a manner that is very different from that of earlier exegetes. The connection between the fig leaf and Adam had been made in qur'anic commentaries before his, but always with reference to an extra-biblical story from the Muslim tradition, and the name of Noah had only ever occurred in connection with the fig, not the olive, since the biblical story of the dove and the olive twig had apparently not been known to earlier exegetes or had not been something they associated with the mention of olive trees.

Ṭur Sīnīn, according to Muḥammad 'Abduh, stands for the era of law-giving prophets that began with Moses and ended with Jesus, and Mecca points to Muḥammad, who was a gift from God meant to end a history of confusion, discordance, misinterpretation of scriptures, and illicit innovation, and to start history again with a new era for mankind. It is striking that Muḥammad 'Abduh calls neither Adam nor Noah a prophet. He does not even mention Adam by name, but talks instead of "the first man" (*al-insān al-awwal*) and his wife. Noah's name is mentioned several times, but only once with the eulogy usually connected with prophets, and he is never called "the prophet Noah."

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25   Ibid., 119.

The real history of prophethood, for Muḥammad ʿAbduh, seems to begin with Moses and the reception of a divine revelation, with which he comes very close to Judeo-Christian conceptions of prophethood, conceptions to which he was likely to have been exposed through his reading of European literature.

Muḥammad ʿAbduh then moves on to connect this interpretation of the oath with the rest of the *sūra*:

4 We have created man in the fairest stature,
5 then we have rendered him to the lowest of the low,
6 except for those who believe and do righteous deeds – they will have an unbroken reward.
7 What will call you a liar after that concerning the true religion (*dīn*)?[26]
8 Is not God the most just of judges?

For Muḥammad ʿAbduh, the central message of the *sūra* is the fact that God endowed man with dignity (*karāma*), a quality that is intimately connected to his capacity for rational thought. In the era of Adam, man was in the state of original perfection with which God created him, without flaws (v. 4), like the fig that can be eaten completely without waste – here, Muḥammad ʿAbduh draws on an aspect that some earlier exegetes had already brought up in connection with the beneficial properties of the fig. In the era of Noah and at various later stages, man forfeited this perfection by giving in to his lower instincts, thereby losing his dignity and sinking to the lowest possible state (v. 5). In the era of Moses and later prophets, a law was introduced that enabled all men to regain their dignity by following the teachings of the prophets and doing good; and finally, Muḥammad once again called humans to true religion.

> God is the most exalted of rulers in His wisdom. So He laid down religion to the human species in order to preserve the status of dignity that He had prepared it for by its nature. Then man descended from his high status to the lowest stages because of his ignorance and because he was drawn to follow his base instincts. Therefore, God sent the prophets, from Noah and those who came after him up to Muḥammad.[27]

Muḥammad ʿAbduh was not the first exegete to establish some sort of coherence between the segments of the oath or between one of its segments and

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26   *Dīn* is commonly understood to refer to the Last Judgment in this verse, but Muḥammad ʿAbduh explicitly rejects that interpretation; cf. ʿAbduh, *Juzʾ ʿamma*, 121.
27   Ibid., 121.

v. 4 ("we have created man in the fairest stature"), but he is the first who treats the *sūra* as a closed unit with an overarching structure that includes the oath, which exactly parallels the subsequent verses. Such a structuralist reading was only to be taken up at a much later point by the proponents of literary exegesis.

Maybe the most striking aspect of ʿAbduh's exegesis, besides his quest for coherence and the unabashed re-introduction of the Bible into *tafsīr*, is the way in which he links the Qurʾān to human history.[28] Again, he is not the first to link the *sūra* to the theme of prophethood, but he is the first to read the history of prophets as an account of human evolution; and that evolution is a history of progress, of human development towards the goals of truth and spiritual and ethical perfection that are entirely attainable because God has provided humans with the potential for perfection. This way of seeing the world is typical of the 19th century, but novel to Muslim qurʾanic exegesis.

5 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī: A Hierarchy of Religions

Al-Qāsimī, scion of a family of Muslim scholars, was the most prominent Damascene religious reformer and the most important local proponent of fundamentalist hermeneutics around the turn of the century.[29] His extensive work *Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, an exegetical endeavor that he undertook towards the end of his life, is different from Muḥammad ʿAbduh's commentary on the Qurʾān in many ways. It is a commentary on the entire Qurʾān, not just part of it, and it is not a work meant for students, but for scholars or intellectuals. As such, it is more erudite and more expansive, and it focuses on the reproduction and evaluation of existing exegetical opinions to a much greater extent. Yet al-Qāsimī and ʿAbduh were contemporaries, they knew each other personally,[30] and they shared many of the same concerns.

Al-Qāsimī's commentary mostly consists of paraphrases and quotations of other scholars' opinions, yet his choices are obviously very conscious ones and result in a clear picture of his own view of the verses in question. He states at

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28　This is generally a central theme in Muḥammad ʿAbduh's exegesis; cf. Pink, ʿAbduh.

29　See David Dean Commins, *Islamic reform. Politics and social change in Late Ottoman Syria* (Oxford 1990), 42–4, 65–88. Commins also points to al-Qāsimī's role in rediscovering the legacy of Ibn Taymiyya; cf. 59–60.

30　Cf. Itzchak Weismann, *Taste of modernity. Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden 2001), 280. See also a letter by Muḥammad ʿAbduh to al-Qāsimi written in 1904, in Ẓāfir al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī*, 495–6.

the outset of his commentary on the oath in *Sūrat al-Tīn*[31] that the exegetes are unanimous in identifying the "secure city" with Mecca, but disagree on the other parts of the oath; he then presents several established opinions going back to early authorities (*salaf*) and concludes that the verse must mean either the actual trees or two mountains or two places of worship. He then quotes al-Ṭabarī, who articulated a preference for the first option based on the common usage of the words *tīn* and *zaytūn* among the Arabs, while there were – according to al-Ṭabarī – no mountains bearing such names. Al-Qāsimī points out that there is, in fact, a Mount of Olives in Palestine, and quotes a – probably contemporary – source to prove it.

A further argument that al-Qāsimī thinks makes a literal understanding of the fig and the olive unlikely is taken directly from Muḥammad ʿAbduh's *Tafsīr juzʾ ʿamma*, namely the lack of a connection between a literally understood fig and olive on the one hand, and two holy sites on the other. Therefore, he considers it probable that they signify two holy places or – and here, al-Qāsimī departs from Muḥammad ʿAbduh's argument completely – one holy place, meaning that each of the first three verses refers to one holy site.

Following this logic, al-Qāsimī quotes Ibn Kathīr's interpretation that relates the fig and the olive to Jesus, *Ṭūr Sīnīn* to Moses, and the "secure city" to Muḥammad, compares this with Deut. 33:2, and explains that the Qurʾān ranks the three prophets according to their place in the hierarchy of prophets. Al-Qāsimī proceeds to identify Ibn Kathīr's source as Ibn Taymiyya and quotes his *Jawāb ṣaḥīḥ* extensively across three pages of the printed edition, first on Deut. 33:2 and the identification of the places mentioned in it, and then on *Sūrat al-Tīn* itself.[32]

Here, for the first time, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr become major exegetical authorities with respect to this segment of the Qurʾān; this says much about the efforts that al-Qāsimī and many of his contemporaries made to move *salafī* ideas from the margins to the center of the Muslim intellectual tradition.[33] Ibn Kathīr's work is a qurʾanic commentary and therefore a source that one might expect al-Qāsimī to use, although it had obviously not been of interest to previous commentators on *Sūrat al-Tīn*. Ibn Taymiyya's work, on the other hand, is an apology for Islam and a polemic against Christianity, one intended to

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31   Muḥammad Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Tafsīr al-Qāsimī al-musammā Maḥāsin al-taʾwīl*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī (Cairo n.d. [c. 1970]), 17:6194–201.

32   Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 5:199–204, 207–8.

33   On the reception of Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathīr in qurʾanic exegesis, see Walid A. Saleh, Preliminary remarks on the historiography of *tafsīr* in Arabic. A history of the book approach, *Journal of qurʾanic studies* 12 (2010), 6–40.

prove that Muḥammad was predicted in the Bible and that Islam is superior to Judaism and especially Christianity, which Ibn Taymiyya ranks as the lowest of the three religions. Interestingly, more than half of al-Qāsimī's quotation of Ibn Taymiyya does not actually comment on *Sūrat al-Tīn*, but on Deut. 33:2. Thus, just like Muḥammad ʿAbduh, he reintroduces the Bible into the interpretation of the oath, but in an entirely different manner, from a different source, and for a different purpose.

Al-Qāsimī does not stop with quoting al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad ʿAbduh, and Ibn Taymiyya, however. He adds what is probably the most interesting aspect of his commentary on the *sūra* in the form of another verbatim quotation. That quotation is merely ascribed to an unnamed "contemporary." The source is, in fact, an article published in the Egyptian journal *al-Manār*, edited by Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, with whom both Muḥammad ʿAbduh and al-Qāsimī[34] had close relations.[35] The article was written by Muḥammad Tawfīq Ṣidqī (1881–1920) and brings entirely novel ideas and sources into the exegesis of the *sūra*. Al-Qāsimī quotes it almost in full and without comment except for adding the standard phrase "and God knows best" (*wa-llāhu aʿlam*).

6   Muḥammad Tawfīq Ṣidqī: The Fig and the Buddha

Ṣidqī, an Egyptian physician, was a regular contributor to *al-Manār* and published a great number of books and articles, including a plea to take the Qurʾān as the only source of Islam, to the exclusion of the Sunna or most of it, which was rather controversial and may have been the reason al-Qāsimī does not explicitly mention his name;[36] but his main topic was the defense of Islam against Christianity and the deconstruction of Christian beliefs in direct

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34   See Weismann, *Taste of modernity*, 280; Ẓāfir al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī*, 442–64.

35   The article was published in the March 1913 issue of *al-Manār*, well after al-Qāsimī had completed his *tafsīr*. Nevertheless, it is almost certainly the source. According to his son and biographer, al-Qāsimī had continued correcting his commentary and adding to it until his death in 1914; cf. Ẓāfir al-Qāsimī, *Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī*, 679, 684. Since al-Qāsimī was a regular reader of *al-Manār* and the quotation he provides in his Qurʾān commentary fully matches the wording of the 1913 article in *al-Manār*, it is very probable that he simply added it to his manuscript in 1913, which also explains its position at the end of the commentary on Q 95:1–3.

36   Muḥammad Tawfīq Ṣidqī, al-Islām huwa l-Qurʾān waḥdahū, *al-Manār* 9 (1324/1907), 515ff., available at http://shamela.ws/browse.php/book-6947/page-1798.

response to the efforts of Christian missionaries.[37] Practically all of his works have to be read in this context, be it his medical explanation for the Islamic ban on alcohol or his emphasis on the inimitable, miraculous nature of the Qurʾān (*iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*) not only in terms of poetry, but also in terms of scientific correctness[38] and structural coherence, a theme that is reminiscent of Muḥammad ʿAbduh's reading of *Sūrat al-Tīn*.

Ṣidqī's commentary on the oath in Q 95:1–3 is an appendix, labelled as a "noteworthy excursus," to a two-part article series on crucifixion and resurrection in Christianity that was meant to demonstrate that these beliefs are ahistorical, implausible, and contradictory.[39] The segment on *Sūrat al-Tīn* seems to have been included by association because the Mount of Olives had been mentioned before in connection with the crucifixion story. Ṣidqī's interpretation is so intriguing that it deserves to be quoted in full.

> The fig is the tree of Buddha, the founder of the Buddhist religion whose original truth was corrupted [*taḥarrafat*] considerably because Buddha's teachings were not written down in his times, but transmitted in the form of oral traditions and only written down afterwards when the number of his adherents had increased. In our opinion, it is likely, nay, certain – if our interpretation of this verse is correct – that he was a true prophet. He was called Sakyāmūnī or Gawtāma. In the beginning, he went to a mighty fig tree to seek shelter, and under it revelation came upon him and God sent him as a messenger. The devil came in order to tempt[40] him there, but did not succeed, just as it had happened to Christ in the beginning of his prophethood (see Lk. 4:1–13).[41] This tree is very famous among the Buddhists; they call it "the holy fig tree" (*al-tīna al-muqaddasa*)[42] or in their language "Ajapala."

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37   For a very detailed and insightful discussion of Ṣidqī's anti-Christian contributions to *al-Manār* and his relationship with Rashīd Riḍā, see Umar Ryad, *Islamic reformism and Christianity. A critical reading of the works of Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā and his associates (1898–1935)* (Leiden 2009), 243–76.

38   Cf. Jansen, *Interpretation of the Koran*, 43–4.

39   Muḥammad Tawfīq Ṣidqī, Naẓariyyatī fī qiṣṣat ṣalb al-Masīḥ wa-qiyāmatihī min al-amwāt, *al-Manār* 16 (1331/1913), 113ff., 193ff., available at: https://ar.wikisource.org/wiki/الأموات/1. https://ar.wikisource.org/من_وقيامته_المسيح_صلب_قصة_في_المنار/نظريتي_مجلة_مقالات wiki/الأموات_من_وقيامته_المسيح_صلب_قصة_في_المنار/نظريتي_مجلة_مقالات/2.

40   Ṣidqī has *yujarribahū* while al-Qāsimī has *yaftinahū*, which is the only difference in wording between the two versions.

41   The comparison with the temptation of Christ is omitted in al-Qāsimī's commentary.

42   This is probably a verbatim translation of *ficus religiosa*.

In this verse, God mentions the four greatest religions of mankind through which God revealed himself for men's guidance and welfare in their religion and worldly affairs. [...] The adherents of these four religions are still the greatest communities on Earth, the most numerous and advanced.

The sequence in which they are mentioned in the verse is according to the degree of authenticity in relation to their original sources. Thus, God begins the oath with Buddhism because it ranks lowest with respect to its authenticity and is the one whose foundations have been corrupted the most; just as people begin their oaths by something small and then move upwards to something higher in order to strengthen [their statement].

Then comes Christianity, which has a lower degree of corruption, then Judaism, which is more authentic than Christianity, and then Islam, which is the most truthful of them all[43] and furthest from corruption and alterations; actually, there was no change whatsoever in its foundational source, the Scripture and the Living Sunna.[44]

Another merit of this noble verse is that it first mentions the two religions of grace (*faḍl*), Buddhism and Christianity, and then the two religions of justice (*ʿadl*), Judaism and Islam, in order to point to the wisdom of first educating people through grace and forgiveness and then through sternness and justice. Likewise, Islam began with mildness and forgiveness, and then came sternness and punishment. To scholars, the striking resemblance between Buddha and Jesus and their respective religions has not remained hidden, and likewise the resemblance between Moses and Muḥammad and their religions. Therefore, the first two were put together and the other two as well.

Buddhism is placed before Christianity because it emerged first, just as the Mosaic religion is placed before the Muḥammadan one for the same reason. Among the merits of the verse is also the symbolic allusion to the two religions of mercy (*al-raḥma*) by two types of fruit and to the

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43   Here, Ṣidqī has a footnote pointing to the German philosopher Arthur Drews's *Witnesses to the historicity of Jesus*, the English translation of which was only published in 1912, showing how remarkably up-to-date Ṣidqī was on English literature about the life of Jesus and the history of Christianity. Drews claims here that Islam is the only great religion whose founder can be said with certainty to have been a historical person.

44   Ṣidqī talks here of the *sunna ʿamaliyya mutawātira* by which he means the living practice of the faith transmitted through a multitude of transmitters or, rather, complete social groups, e.g. on the details of prayer; it is to be clearly distinguished from individual *ḥadīth* reports.

two religions of justice by mountains and a hilly city, Mecca, which is meant by the "secure city." One aspect of the wonderful interconnection between the words of the verse is the fact that the fig and olive trees often grow on mountain slopes such as on the Mount of Olives in Syria or on Mount Sinai, both of which are famous for this. This verse swears by the first sites of revelation and the noblest places of divine manifestation to the four prophets whose religious laws are extant until this day; God sent them in order to guide men whom he created "in the fairest stature."

This interpretation introduces an entirely new prophet into the discourse. Ṣidqī had already maintained in a 1905 publication that God sent prophets to every people, some of them known and others unknown.[45] The sole purpose of this claim had been the refutation of Christian claims that the biblical elements in the Qurʾān were results of Muḥammad's superficial knowledge of pre-Islamic religions and that the differences between Qurʾān and Bible were due to ignorance, mistakes, or conscious alterations on Muḥammad's part. Instead, Ṣidqī argued that resemblances between earlier prophets' messages and the Qurʾān were due to their origin from the same divine source, but that previous scriptures were corrupted or incorrectly transmitted over time. The context of his interpretation of *Sūrat al-Tīn* is equally apologetic, but reveals genuine knowledge of and interest in Buddhism. It also demonstrates Ṣidqī's preoccupation with the inimitability (*iʿjāz*) of the Qurʾān: the *sūra*, according to him, is marvelous in its structural equilibrium and – this is the subtext – even more so through its inclusion of information about a religion that its original recipients could not have known about.

The question arises of where Ṣidqī obtained his information about Buddhism, a subject that was hardly standard knowledge among Egyptians of his time. Even a cursory look at his sources reveals that most of the literature he drew upon in his writings was written in English. By 1913, Buddhism had already been popular in England for quite some time,[46] partly inspired by Edwin Arnold's long poem *The light of Asia* (1879).[47] A wealth of Buddhist sources had been edited and translated into English in the late 19th century.[48]

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45   Muḥammad Tawfīq Ṣidqī, *al-Dīn fī naẓar al-ʿaql al-ṣaḥīḥ* (Cairo 1346/1927[?]²), 113; cf. Jansen, *Interpretation of the Koran*, 43–4.

46   Cf. Philip C. Almond, *The British discovery of Buddhism*, Cambridge 1988.

47   "…that holy man, who sate so rapt under the fig-tree by the path," in Edwin Arnold, *The light of Asia* (Boston 1890), 145.

48   Cf. the article on Buddhism in the 10th edition of the *Encylopaedia Britannica*, which is an update of the 9th edition entry of 1876 (vol. IV) and describes the literature that had been published since then: 2/26 (Cambridge 1902), 430–4.

Information about the life of Buddha and his enlightenment under the tree was readily available in various encyclopedias, although only the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* mentions the Buddha in its entry on "fig";[49] Ṣidqī might have used it since he refers to an unspecified English encyclopedia in his article. The list of books that Ṣidqī explicitly quotes in his articles in *al-Manār* contains no publications about Buddhism, but he mentions Frederick James Gould's *Concise history of religion*, the first volume of which has a chapter on Buddhism.[50] Besides, he was well-read in the English literature about Christianity, especially the genre that was critical of the historicity of sources on the life of Jesus. Some of the books he cites[51] mention the Buddha, alongside Krishna, in order to highlight similarities between the stories about these two figures and the biographical accounts of Jesus, thereby highlighting the mythological character of the respective literature. None of these sources contains all the details and terms that Ṣidqī presents in his exegesis of Q 95:1–3, though, and specifically the identification of the tree as a fig tree and its designation as "Ajapala." Some contemporary sources on Buddhism do, but in a rather more complex manner than Ṣidqī presents the matter.[52] Ṣidqī might have gained his information from a journal article; in any case, he apparently had an in-depth interest in Buddhism and no qualms about classifying Buddha as a genuine prophet without recourse to any existing Islamic tradition on the status of Buddhism.

Again, this interpretation of the *sūra* reveals a deep interest in history, in this case in the history of religions, which is cast as a history of progress from corrupt to authentic scriptures, from permissiveness to strict observance.

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49 See *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910[11]), 10:333; the information about the relevance of the fig to Buddhism goes back to the 9th edition (vol. IX, 1879). The *Dāʾirat al-maʿārif* and the Larousse did not mention a relation of the fig to Buddhism, only to Vishnu.

50 Frederick James Gould, *A concise history of religion* (London n.d. [1893], 1:112–9.

51 *Supernatural religion* by an anonymous author, probably Walter Cassels (1874); Samuel Laing, *Human origins* (1892); Ernest Renan, *The life of Jesus* (English translation published in 1897); John M. Robertson, *Christianity and mythology* (1900); the *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (1903); Philip Sidney, *The truth about Jesus of Nazareth* (1904); Walter Jekyll, *The Bible untrustworthy* (1904); George H. Rouse, *Old Testament criticism in New Testament light* (1905); William Harry Turton, *The truth of Christianity* (1908); Drews, *Witnesses* (see no. 38; 1912).

52 See Hermann Oldenberg's then-standard work *Buddha. His life, his doctrine, his order*, London 1882, and Subhádra Bhikshu, *Buddhist catechism*, New York 1920[2]; first edition 1890. Both, in contrast to Ṣidqī, do not conflate the tree under which enlightenment occurred with the fig tree Ajapala under which the temptation took place.

7   What is New in Early 20th-Century Qurʾanic Exegesis?

Several common features emerge when one compares Muḥammad ʿAbduh's, al-Qāsimī's, and Ṣidqī's approaches to interpreting the oath in *Sūrat al-Tīn*. All three demonstrate a heightened interest in pre-Islamic religions for the first time since the period between the sixth/twelfth and ninth/fifteenth centuries. Even though some of that interest is motivated by interreligious polemics, just as it had been in the previous cycle of interreligious debate, the extent to which the exegetes quote the Bible at length and provide information about Buddhism also reveals a genuine interest in and profound knowledge of other religions. This engagement, in turn, has to be read in light of the exegetes' perspective on history.

The early 20th-century exegetes subjected the Qurʾān to a historical reading that was entirely absent from their predecessors' commentaries and very much influenced by European views of history that, in turn, were based on the impression of overwhelmingly rapid scientific and technological developments. Thus, they conceive of human history not as a timeless continuum, but as a story of evolution and progress. This becomes immediately apparent when they are contrasted with Ibn Taymiyya's interpretation, in which the religions have varying degrees of nobility, with Islam being both the last and the noblest; but unlike in the early 20th-century Qurʾān commentaries, this perspective has no systematic temporal dimension. It is not based on an idea of development, and it is far from Ṣidqī's reflections on historical processes that might have led to varying degrees of authenticity of scriptures.

Among the early 20th-century exegetes, Muḥammad ʿAbduh is the one for whom the theme of human history is most important. In his vision, God has a plan for mankind that aims to enable man to realize his full intellectual potential in order to attain the dignity that God has endowed him with. Ṣidqī, too, sees such a divine plan at work, but in his case this plan concerns the emergence of religions in a specific sequence that matches the growing capacity of man to deal with God's laws.[53]

Another common feature among the exegetes is the increased interest in identifying the inner logic of Q 95 and reading it as a coherent unit. This goes back to Ibn Taymiyya, who was the first to discuss the reasons for the arrange-

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53   There is a certain resemblance to the Bahāʾī conception of religion, represented by the above-quoted ʿAbd al-Bahāʾ, here. For Bahāʾis, religion evolves, along with mankind, through prophetic cycles. However, in contrast to the Bahāʾī faith, for Muslim exegetes the history of revelation ends invariably with Muḥammad while the history of human progress might very well continue.

ment of the elements of the oath. However, both Muḥammad ʿAbduh and Ṣidqī take this a step further, Muḥammad ʿAbduh by incorporating the whole *sūra* into his argument and Ṣidqī by introducing a fourth religion into the equation and then proposing various facets of logic inherent in their arrangement. This way of seeking structural coherence in the Qurʾān has proved extremely influential and has characterized many later Arab[54] exegetical efforts, not only in the literary exegesis of the Qurʾān proposed by Amīn al-Khūlī (d. 1967) and his disciples, but also in Islamist Qurʾān commentaries such as those by Sayyid Quṭb (1906–66) and Saʿīd Ḥawwā (1935–89). This preoccupation with the complex structure of the qurʾanic discourse serves the goal of demonstrating the *iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*, the inimitable and miraculous nature of the Qurʾān, from yet another angle.[55]

All the early 20th-century interpretations analyzed here keep a balance between innovative approaches and certain elements of the *tafsīr* tradition. In al-Qāsimī's commentary this is predominantly accomplished by his selection of sources. He carefully chooses and quotes a mixture of old and contemporaneous sources in order to suit his own concerns which, as his strong reliance on Ibn Taymiyya suggests, might have had a lot to do with apologetics. That reliance on Ibn Kathīr and Ibn Taymiyya is revealing in itself. In al-Qāsimī's time, these were not commonly cited pre-modern exegetical authorities; rather, al-Qāsimī pulled their interpretations of *Sūrat al-Tīn* from the dustbin into the limelight of qurʾanic exegesis. He thereby reintroduced an old interest in the Bible, specific to Ibn Taymiyya's period of time, into the exegetical discourse.

Ṣidqī's and Muḥammad ʿAbduh's dealings with the *sūra* are more ostensibly innovative – and through them, also al-Qāsimī's, who quotes both. Still, few of the elements that make them innovative are completely new: neither the biblical quotations, nor the theme of prophethood, nor the search for a connection between the elements of the oath. A few earlier exegetes had mentioned or implicitly made the point that the first verse of the *sūra* must have a connection to the subsequent ones; but none of them – with the possible exception of Ibn Taymiyya, who had not written a Qurʾān commentary – had claimed as strongly and radically as Muḥammad ʿAbduh, Ṣidqī, and al-Qāsimī did that the whole oath or even the whole *sūra* must "make sense," must have an inner logic

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54   There was also a strong trend towards identifying structural coherence in the Qurʾān in South Asia, as described by Mustansir Mir in many publications, but whether that was in any way influenced by early 20th-century Arabic exegesis is impossible to say within the scope of this paper.

55   However, unlike some later Qurʾān commentaries, none of the early 20th-century exegetes addresses the notion of "scientific miracles" in connection with *Sūrat al-Tīn*.

(*ḥikma*) that explains the words and concepts it uses as well as their sequence. Thus, the early 20th-century exegetes highlight hitherto fairly marginal elements of the tradition, systematize them, take them to a level that none of the previous exegetes had taken them to before, and fit them into a very modern vision of evolution and progress.

Despite the innovative aspects of their approaches, both Muḥammad ʿAbduh and al-Qāsimī are completely in line with the tradition of *tafsīr* in that they do not attempt to completely dismiss or ignore existing interpretations in favor of their own. They mention the range of exegetical opinions, and when they present their own approaches, they do not claim to have found the only correct exegesis, but only the most likely one, leaving it to God to "know best" (*wa-llāhu aʿlam*). Thus, they firmly situate their works in the history of *tafsīr* in an epistemological sense.

At the same time, they situate them in a history of Christian-Muslim polemics and apologetics, but they write in a context that is very different from that of Ibn Taymiyya, al-Nasafī, or the scholars of al-Andalus. Not only that, but the positions of Muḥammad ʿAbduh on the one hand, and al-Qāsimī and Ṣidqī on the other, also differ greatly from each other. Muḥammad ʿAbduh, while known to have written distinctly apologetic pieces in defense of Islam against Orientalist claims,[56] has no desire to refute Christianity or to prove the inaccuracy of the Bible. Al-Qāsimī and Ṣidqī, on the other hand, certainly pursue these aims, but to the same paradoxical effect that could be observed in Ibn Taymiyya: in the attempt to set Islam above other religions, they have to engage with these religions. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, early 20th-century exegetes introduce the scriptures, central figures, and self-conception of non-Muslim religions into the discourse – and thus bring them into conversation with the Qurʾān.

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56   Cf. Pink, ʿAbduh.

The "Scientific Miracle of the Qurʾān"

Map and Assessment

Stefano Bigliardi

1   Introduction

According to a popular exegetical trend, the Qurʾān is characterized by the presence of scientific notions that are described with amazing accuracy despite the fact that those very notions were completely unexplored in the Prophet's time; as such, they are believed to be evidence of the text's divine origin. This trend, which has antecedents in nineteenth century Egypt, was popularized by the works of a French physician, Maurice Bucaille (1920–98), and a Canadian embryologist, Keith Moore (b. 1925), and currently flourishes on the Internet as well as in TV programs. The line of interpretation it follows reformulates the traditional doctrine of the formal inimitability of the Qurʾān (*iʿjāz*) in terms of "scientific inimitability" or "scientific miraculousness" (*iʿjāz ʿilmī*), and it is sometimes widened to include the *ḥadīth* as well. On the one hand, it is a fact that there are allusions to natural phenomena in the Qurʾān, and the producers of this line of interpretation (who usually lack formal theological training) express a genuine and laudable desire to harmonize religion and science. On the other hand, their methods have major methodological flaws and they have made significant error, and so have been criticized from their earliest works.

This study, after developing a precise classification of *iʿjāz ʿilmī*, summarizes and discusses the criticism levelled at it, and examines how the *scientific interpretation* of the Qurʾān is liable to blend with pseudo-science to the detriment of a solid harmonization of science and religion and a genuine appreciation of natural science (here meant as the construction of knowledge about the natural world through repeatable experiments, mathematical models, and acceptance of results after peer review). Furthermore, the study offers some ideas that can be implemented in order to address *iʿjāz ʿilmī* in the Muslim world effectively and fairly.

The first section traces a taxonomy of *iʿjāz ʿilmī*, with a particular focus on material that can currently be located on the Internet; the second summarizes different aspects of criticism of *iʿjāz ʿilmī*; and the third highlights the main conclusions and contains some proposals concerning how to address *iʿjāz ʿilmī*.

2   One or Many Scientific Miracles?

Classically, the term *iʿjāz* indicates the "invalidation of a challenge," i.e. the impossibility of imitating the Qurʾān in both content and form. In other words, the term refers to the theological doctrine according to which a sign of the divinity of the Qurʾān is its incomparability or the impossibility of replicating it; the like of the Qurʾān could not be produced even in a joint effort by human and supernatural beings. This teaching is rooted in passages such as Q 17:88: "Say, 'If mankind and the *jinn*[1] gathered in order to produce the like of this Qurʾān, they could not produce the like of it, even if they were to each other assistants.'"

In the contemporary debate over Islam and science, *iʿjāz* is mainly used as a short form of *iʿjāz ʿilmī*. The adjective *ʿilmī* derives from the noun *ʿilm*, which traditionally refers to knowledge (*al-maʿrifa*) and can be interpreted as specifically referring to natural science. The expression *iʿjāz ʿilmī* can thus be translated as the "scientific miracle" (or "scientific miraculousness") of the Qurʾān. It denotes an exegetical trend rather than a specific theological teaching. From now on I will use such expressions interchangeably.

In the *iʿjāz ʿilmī* the traditional doctrine of the inimitability of the Qurʾān (*iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*) is reformulated in terms of "scientific inimitability." In other words, the exegetes who uphold and highlight *iʿjāz ʿilmī* identify a correspondence between a passage or passages of the Qurʾān and what they perceive or present as "scientific data" or "facts" in order to argue that such correspondence is proof of the divine origin of the Qurʾān itself. The basic line of the argument is that, given that such accuracy (or the specific piece of information) could not have been available to, or arrived at, either by the Prophet or by the most scientifically informed people at the time of the revelation, the text clearly must have a divine origin. A "scientific miracle," therefore, is not a supernatural deed (an example of a supernatural miracle can be Moses's or his brother Aaron's staff turning into a serpent, mentioned in both the Old Testament and the Qurʾān[2]) but the structure of the argumentation in which "scientific" and supernatural miracles are presented is *analogous*. In both cases there is an extraordinary, amazing occurrence (cf. the etymology of the word *miracle*, Latin *mirari*, "to be amazed") that cannot or could not be performed nor repeated by human beings alone, and whose occurrence implies or demonstrates the existence and power of the divine.

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1   Cf. the English word "genie"; inhabitants of the immaterial (or subtly material) world into which ours is plunged.

2   Exodus 7:8–12 and Q 7:107.

By the word "occurrence," one should understand in this context the perceived *match* between a qur'anic passage and a particular piece of "scientific information" and *not* the specific content of the "scientific information" *per se*. In other words, the "scientific miracle" of the Qur'ān is *not* aimed at the description of natural phenomena as miracles of God (albeit this kind of statement is *also* present at various levels of the debate over Islam and science, including *i'jāz*). It should also be emphasized that *i'jāz 'ilmī* is *not* an attempt to explain the events reported in miraculous narratives as natural processes either (for example, arguing that the parting of the Red Sea was a natural albeit extraordinary or unique hydrogeological phenomenon). Furthermore, *i'jāz 'ilmī* is *not* a theory according to which a scientist who is confronted with alternative theories should choose the most qur'anic-compatible one, nor is it related to the discussion of religious guidelines for the ethics of scientific research.

The specific points made, or lines followed, by advocates of *i'jāz 'ilmī* vary according to what they present or perceive as "scientific." They can be classified as follows:[3]

a. The Qur'ān contains passages coinciding with scientific *theories*, such as the theory of an expanding universe.[4]
b. The Qur'ān contains passages that describe *natural phenomena* currently ascertained by science but unknown at the time of revelation, such as the development of the fetus in the mother's womb.[5]
c. The Qur'ān contains passages that accurately describe *specific, circumscribed facts, events*, or *occurrences* currently ascertained by scientific investigation (possibly but not necessarily unknown at the time of the revelation), such as the preservation of the mummy of the Pharaoh who pursued Moses.[6]

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3   I am here drawing upon the taxonomy proposed in a previous essay, but I correct, expand on, and refine some points; Stefano Bigliardi, What we talk about when we talk about *I'jāz, Social epistemology review and reply collective* 4, no. 1 (2015), 38–45.

4   For instance, http://www.miraclesofthequran.com/scientific_02.html; http://www.speed-light.info/miracles_of_quran/expanding_universe.html.

5   For instance, http://scienceislam.com/quran_human_embryonic_development.php.

6   For instance, http://www.miraclesofthequran.com/predictions_02.html. It is important to remark that the nature of the "facts" referred to can vary significantly. As we will observe later, some interpreters maintain that the Moon's splitting evoked in the Q 54:1 was a real event whose signs have been observed by NASA astronauts. In this case we have a miracle proper (i.e. a supernatural event) whose narrative allegedly matches current scientific observations (the scientific miracle of the Qur'ān). Yet there is also a naturalistic interpretation of the event (i.e. the splitting is said to have happened according to natural laws) still framed

d. The Qurʾān contains passages that foretell *contemporary scientific-technological developments or inventions*, such as the exploration of space.[7]

e. The Qurʾān displays numerical patterns that correspond to the *numerical patterns exhibited by natural phenomena and/or occurring in scientific laws*. This might be called *iʿjāz ʿadadī*.[8]

f. Qurʾanic/*ḥadīth* prescriptions concerning, for example, hygiene and diet have a medical rationale that contemporary medicine can explain.[9]

There are also further cases, ones that we might call cognate, that should be highlighted here as relevant in the contemporary debate on Islam and science (at least at a popular level) but are less apt to be categorized under *iʿjāz* since they to do not directly reference the Qurʾān. The first is when it is claimed that *permanent or widespread natural phenomena* (such as the shape of the continents or of an animal's skeleton) match some proper *symbols* or *terms* of Islam, such as the *shahāda* (i.e. the declaration of belief in the oneness of God and the acceptance of Muḥammad as His Prophet), the name of God, or the positions required for prayer.[10] The second case, analogous but distinct, is the one in which it is claimed that *specific configurations of circumscribed natural phenomena are said to recall or match symbols or terms proper of Islam* (for instance, when the name of God is said to appear in a sliced fruit or in the

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in the *iʿjāz ʿilmī* discourse. For different interpretations see Andreas Görke, Die Spaltung des Mondes in der modernen Koranexegese und im Internet, *Welt des Islams* 50 (2010), 60–116.

7   For instance, http://www.miraclesofthequran.com/predictions_05.html.

8   See for instance, https://makashfa.wordpress.com/2011/11/03/very-interesting-numerology-in-holy-quran/. The author of this entry holds that the terms for "sea" and "land" occur, in the Qurʾān, in the same numerical proportion as sea and land are actually present on earth. Yet numerology can also match the Qurʾān and significant dates, for instance, here Q 54:1 is interpreted as pointing at the year of Moon landing: http://www.miraclesofthequran.com/mathematical_02.html). For the last couple of years, the University of Malaya's Centre of Quranic Research (CQR) has paid particular attention to the numerical miracles and organized conferences on the "numerical miracles in the Holy Qurʾān," in Malaysia and Belgium (http://cqr.um.edu.my/?modul=Events_and_Activities&pilihan=Numerical_Miracle); (see also: http://cqr.um.edu.my/?modul=artikel&pilihan=papar&id=3305).

9   See, for instance, http://islam.ru/en/content/story/why-eating-pork-pig-meat-forbidden-islam.

10   See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEF6PmeAKSs (Tyrannosurus Rex testifies that Allah is the only GOD) and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvfPRIEgHbo (Planet Earth prays to Allah [god] the same way as we do in Islam).

clouds).[11] One might call these "*iʿjāz* without Qurʾān." We must also register those cases in which *supernatural* (*or at least highly anomalous*) *phenomena are said to recall symbols and terms proper of Islam*, such as the case of the narrative, circulating on the Internet in early 2009, of qurʾanic verses appearing on a baby's skin in Dagestan.[12]

For the sake of completeness, mention should also be made of the existence of discussions of qurʾanic *para-* or *pseudo-technology*: it has been claimed, for example, that the Qurʾān has special powers that can be intercepted, channeled, transmitted, and used through technological devices.[13] Similarly, there is the application of medical "techniques" that are actually unwarranted empirically but allegedly "Islamic," such as cupping.[14]

If we consider points from (a) to (f) it can be seen that *iʿjāz* (*ʿilmī*) and the "scientific miracle of the Qurʾān" (or "of Islam") appear to be umbrella expressions under which various lines of exegesis can be pursued. Each interpreter can emphasize one or more of the points above. For instance, one might highlight the alleged accuracy of some descriptions of natural phenomena in the Qurʾān but ignore (or even reject) numerological interpretations thereof. It should also be pointed out that different lines can merge due to the nature of the (allegedly) scientific matter mentioned (that, for instance, may involve theoretical as well as factual elements that are not always separable).

A point frequently (though not exclusively) made in the context of *iʿjāz* is that the Qurʾān invites people to behold natural phenomena and to consider and comprehend them as signs of God. The mention of natural phenomena as

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11 See the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ipKFFefL_0 (Allah written on things, wonder of allah, wunder islam [*sic*]).

12 See: Koran verses "appear" on skin of miracle Russian baby, *The Telegraph* online, October 22, 2009, available online at http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/6401541/Koran-verses-appear-on-skin-of-miracle-Russian-baby.html. Needless to say, I am only mentioning this as an example for a general category and I refrain from discussing the veracity of such a narrative here.

13 Nidhal Guessoum, *Islam's quantum question. Reconciling Muslim tradition and modern science* (London-New York 2011), 5–6. The typology might be expanded because of the discovery or development of new lines. For example, I am not personally aware of the existence of any interpreters who claim a match between *phonetic* patterns in the Qurʾān and natural ones, but they may eventually emerge.

14 For instance, "Islamic cupping" was recently adopted by a famous sportsman and criticized by medical experts (Marvin France, Few benefits to Sonny Bill Williams's *hijama* cupping treatment, say medical experts, *Stuff.co.nz*, November 10, 2015: http://www.stuff.co.nz/sport/rugby/all-blacks/74466844/few-benefits-to-sonny-bill-williams-hijama-cupping-treatment-say-medical-experts.

signs (Ar. *āyāt*) in the Qurʾān is a fact, but advocates of *iʿjāz* often emphasize the frequency of such references as well as their accuracy. It can be debated whether such points, taken in isolation, are *sufficient* to detect the presence of the *iʿjāz* discourse. One might also ask, especially after considering point (a): if an author believes, for instance, in biological evolution and he or she states that the Qurʾān *supports* it, or that it is in *harmony* with it, is that classifiable as an expression of *iʿjāz*? A possible response to such questions is that we may only talk of *iʿjāz stricto sensu* when it is explicitly stated or implied that there is a *match* between the Qurʾān and "science," and that such match *demonstrates* the divine origin of the Qurʾān.

The thesis of the scientific precision of the Qurʾān can be supported together with the thesis that Jewish and Christian scriptures are not as accurate or are even untenable from a logical or scientific perspective, because of the errors interpolated by the humans who have transmitted or manipulated such texts. In this sense, *iʿjāz ʿilmī* can go hand in hand with the doctrine of *taḥrīf*, the "distortion" or "alteration" of Jewish and Christian scriptures.[15] However this is not always the case.

It is believed that the first attempts to read the Qurʾān scientifically date back to the efforts of Arab physicians such as Aḥmad al-Iskandarānī , who wished to show the comprehensiveness of the Qurʾān. Although he only interpreted particular verses, the official reading of the whole Qurʾān, one in combination with Western scientific theories and events, was achieved through the efforts of the Egyptian *Shaykh* Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī (d. 1940) in his 26-volume work of *tafsīr* entitled *Jewels in the interpretation of the Holy Qurʾān, containing marvels of the beauties of the creation and wonderfully luminous divine signs*. However, as Daneshgar has shown, such a reading is not necessarily the same as subscribing to the thesis of "scientific miraculousness." What Jawharī was engaged in, according to Daneshgar's interpretation, is that Muslims unschooled in both Islam and universe may understand the meaning of qurʾanic verses, and particularly those related to nature and the cosmos, through scientific data;[16] it is, however, likely that an enthusiastic or unsophisticated reader could easily confuse the theoretical framework and purpose of the two interpretations.[17]

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15   Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Taḥrīf, *EI2*.

16   Majid Daneshgar, Tantāwī. Western-Eastern discoveries embedded in Islam, *Social epistemology review and reply collective* 3/12 (2014), 113–5; see also Majid Daneshgar, An approach to science in the Qurʾān. Re-examination of Ṭanṭāwī Ǧawharī's exegesis, *Oriente moderno* 95/1–2 (2015), 32–66.

17   The kind of exegesis developed by Tantāwī Jawharī, as Daneshgar describes it, resembles what Guessoum labels "scientific interpretation" (see below).

Another term used almost interchangeably with *i'jāz* (*'ilmī*) is Bucaill(e)ism, from the name of the French physician Maurice Bucaille (1920–1998) who, in his immensely popular book *The Bible, the Quran, and science* (1976), as well as in other writings and conferences, expressed the idea that there is a harmony between qur'anic content and "scientific" data with unprecedented clarity and the aura of a Western convert and successful medical doctor.[18]

Bucaille stressed particularly that the Qur'ān was astonishingly accurate about the causes of the death of the Pharaoh who pursued Moses during the exodus, and whose mummy he was convinced he had identified among those conserved in the Egyptian museum in Cairo. Bucaille was also an advocate of the thesis of the corruption of Jewish and Christian scriptures, which he emphasized in his works. The identity of the mummy and the match with qur'anic verses is presented in his main book as his own finding, but his works contain plenty of examples of a match between qur'anic verses and scientific information that he could have taken from pre-existing texts, such as those mentioned above. We are not currently in a position to establish to any extent which other works may have influenced Bucaille, but it seems clear that he did rely on earlier studies. However, it should be emphasized, in the interest of accurate scholarship and historical reconstruction, that *i'jāz 'ilmī* is *not* Bucaille's invention, that the ideas he popularized in his writings *included, but were not limited to*, those of the "scientific miraculousness" of the Qur'ān, and also that Bucaille *did not pursue all of the exegetical lines* listed above. For example, numerological speculation is absent from his writings.[19]

Bucaille's work inspired a flood of similar ones, usually produced by authors trained in the natural sciences or engineering, and who therefore lacked any formal theological training. Analogous to Bucaille's case, and still referred to, is Keith L. Moore (b. 1925), a Canadian anatomist who, in 1986, having worked on the Embryology Committee of King Abdulaziz University in Saudi Arabia, published a paper arguing that the Qur'ān contains precise embryological notions that cannot be explained in light of human knowledge at the time of the revelation.[20]

Nowadays *i'jāz* is a popular genre, one that is flourishing not only in print but also on TV and the Internet. Successful and highly visible contemporary

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18 Stefano Bigliardi, The strange case of Dr. Bucaille. Notes for a re-examination, *The Muslim world* 102/2 (2012), 248–63.

19 Stefano Bigliardi, *Islam and the quest for modern science* (Istanbul 2014), 181–3.

20 Keith L. Moore, Scientist's interpretation of references to embryology in the Qur'an, *Journal of the Islamic medical association* 18 (1986), 15–7.

advocates of *i'jāz* include: the Egyptian geologist and TV personality Zaghloul El-Naggar (b. 1933), who even works within a Commission *ad hoc* funded, *inter alia*, by the Egyptian government;[21] the Turkish religious leader and TV preacher Harun Yahya (the pen-name of Adnan Oktar, b. 1956), who mixes his contributions to spreading such ideas with vocal criticism of Darwinism;[22] and the Indian preacher (who has a background in medicine) Zakir Naik (b. 1965).[23] At the time of writing (January 2016), a simple Internet search for "scientific," "miracle," and "Quran" yields 354,000 results. Conferences are regularly organized on the topic in a number of Muslim countries.[24] *I'jāz*-related discussions (as well as, more generally, pseudo-medicine in Islamic garb) have occasionally found their way into peer-reviewed publications proper, although more as a result of a failure of the peer-review process on the part of editors and referees than because of the scientific acceptance of the claims contained within such pieces,[25] as well as in second-rate journals that *appear* to be peer-reviewed.[26]

3   Criticism of *I'jāz*, Old and New

I'jāz has been studied and criticized by Muslim and non-Muslim authors alike. One of its earliest academic observers, Johannes J.G. Jansen, stated that:

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21   Bigliardi, *Islam and the quest for modern science*, 103–32. Official website: http://www .elnaggarzr.com/en/. Interestingly, El-Naggar stated that he favors the expression "scientific precision" over "scientific miracle" (cf. Bigliardi, *Islam and the quest for modern science*, 112). He also defends the fact that the genre is developed by authors overstepping their disciplinary boundaries with an appeal to avoiding "overspecialization," but at the same time recognizes that this can cause mistakes (Bigliardi, *Islam and the quest for modern science*, 114–5).

22   Official website: http://www.harunyahya.com/. See also Bigliardi, *Islam and the quest for modern science*, 41–52; Stefano Bigliardi, Who's afraid of theoscientography? An interpretative hypothesis on Harun Yahya, *Zygon* 49/1 (2014), 66–80; Anne Ross Solberg, *The Mahdi wears Armani. An analysis of the Harun Yahya enterprise* (Huddinge 2013); Martin Riexinger, Propagating Islamic creationism on the internet, *Masaryk University journal of law and technology* 2/2 (2008), available online at http://www.digitalislam.eu/article.do?articleId=1980/.

23   Biography available at: http://www.irf.net/drzakirnaik.html.

24   Nidhal Guessoum, Islam and science. The next phase of debates, *Zygon* 50/4 (2015), 854–76.

25   Marios Loukas, R. Yosuf Saad, Shane Tubbs, and M. Shoja Mohammadali, The heart and cardiovascular system in the Qur'an and hadeeth, *International Journal of Cardiology* 140/1 (2010), 19–23.

26   See, for example, Asif Ahmed, Innovative energy standard of curative cupping/*hijama*, *Journal of basic and applied sciences* 11 (2015), 445–53; Alireza Ahmadi, David C. Schwebel, and Mansour Rezaei, The efficacy of wet-cupping in the treatment of tension and migraine headache, *American Journal of Chinese medicine* 36–7 (2008), 37–44.

one cannot help admiring the courage of certain scientific exegetes of the Koran. Whereas in Christianity it took centuries before the Churches "admitted" certain scientific truths, often after bloody struggles, many modern Moslem scientific exegetes of the Koran boldly claim that the Koran, the backbone of Islam, already contains the modern sciences and their principles, and all this with a courage and vigour that deserves a nobler aim.[27]

A harsh critic of *i'jāz* from a Muslim background is Ziauddin Sardar (b. 1951), according to whom Bucailleism is "apologia of the worst type."[28] More specifically, Bucaille's first book was "essential reading for Muslims with a larger-than-life inferiority complex."[29] Sardar followed several, albeit complementary, lines of criticism directed at Bucailleism. First of all, according to him, Bucailleism relied on a positivistic vision of science as neutral, static, and universal, and made the supposed demonstration of the Qur'ān's divinity dependent on shaky scientific truths or facts. Secondly, and conversely, it sacralized science and undermined any criticism of it. Thirdly, Bucailleism often resulted in far-fetched interpretations of the lexicon of the Qur'ān that went hand-in-hand with oversimplified (or simply wrong) notions presented as scientific; the Qur'ān should not be treated as a database, Sardar pointed out, as it provides motivation for the pursuit of knowledge and the beginning of that pursuit but it does not end in it.[30]

Taner Edis, who is rather critical about the possibility of harmonizing religion and science, states that Bucailleism reduces science to a "stamp collection."[31] Edis's position is very similar to that of Pervez Hoodbhoy who, both in his monograph *Islam and science. Religious orthodoxy and the battle for rationality*[32] and numerous press articles, has been attacking rampant pseudoscience, especially in Pakistan.[33]

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27   Johannes J.G. Jansen, *The interpretation of the Koran in modern Egypt* (Leiden 1974), 54.

28   Ziauddin Sardar, *Explorations in Islamic science* (London-New York 1989), 31.

29   Ibid., 33.

30   Ibid., *Explorations*, 30–7; see also Ziauddin Sardar, Between two masters. Qur'an or Science?, *Inquiry* 2/8 (1985), 37–41, available online at http://ziauddinsardar.com/2011/02/quran-science/.

31   Taner Edis, *An illusion of harmony. Science and religion in Islam* (Amherst, NY 2007), 101.

32   Pervez Hoodbhoy, *Islam and science. Religious orthodoxy and the battle for rationality* (London-New Jersey 1991).

33   Pervez Hoodbhoy, Jinns invade Pakistani campuses, originally published on Oct 2, 2015 in *Dawn*, (Karachi, Pakistan), also available online in the *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* http://social-epistemology.com/2015/11/02/an-exchange-on-science-and-the-supernatural-in-pakistani-universities/.

Recently, a group composed of the physicists Mehdi Golshani (b. 1939), Mohammed Basil Altaie (b. 1956), Bruno Guiderdoni (b. 1958), and Nidhal Guessoum (b. 1960) has been defined as a "new generation" of authors engaged in the debate over Islam and science who, with their competence as natural scientists, aim for a theistic interpretation of science based on Islamic concepts rather than at a reformation of the scientific method.[34] All such authors take a somewhat critical stance towards *iʿjāz*. Golshani warns about the identification of scientific notions in the Qurʾān for at least three interlinked reasons: he points out that this kind of exegesis should not be favored over direct investigation of the natural world; he remarks that it wrongly provokes the treatment of the Qurʾān as a catalogue of scientific facts and not as a book of guidance; and he recalls that scientific theories change, so that the supposed correspondence of the Qurʾān and science cannot be taken as decisive validation of the Qurʾān itself. Altaie mainly criticizes the incompetence of those authors who embark on the identification of scientific notions in the Qurʾān and, concerning various (not better-specified) claims by El-Naggar, the Iraqi physicist observes that some are not verifiable, some are correct if contextualized, and others are plainly wrong. In particular, Altaie expands on the problem that, more often than not, the facts supposedly harmonized with the Qurʾān or *ḥadīth* are not scientific at all, such as the alleged finding of a giant skeleton that demonstrated the size of humans in Adam's times as mentioned in the tradition.[35] Altaie also states that the Bucailleist approach has allowed a majority of "ordinary" people to acknowledge "the Qurʾān's scientific and intellectual expression." Guiderdoni maintains that Bucaille was sincere in his approach, but describes Bucailleism as shallow or "bad science" and "bad theology" that inverts "the way things should be done." According to Guiderdoni, scientific facts should be the object of a properly scientific enterprise, and, in turn, theology should not be exclusively reduced to the identification of scientific notions in the Qurʾān.[36]

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34   Guessoum, Islam and science. The next phase; Taner Edis, On harmonizing religion and science. A reply to Bigliardi, *Social epistemology review and reply collective* 3/2 (2014), 40–3; Stefano Bigliardi, The contemporary debate on the harmony between Islam and science. Emergence and challenges of a new generation, *Social epistemology* 28/2 (2015), 167–86: doi:10.1080/02691728.2013.782583; Salman Hameed, Walking the tightrope of the science and religion boundary, *Zygon* 47/2 (2012), 337–42; Bigliardi, *Islam and the quest for modern science*.

35   This piece of news was published, for instance, in a Bangladeshi newspaper: Saalim Alvi, Giant human skeleton found in Saudi Arabia, *The new nation*, 22 April 2004, available online at http://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/sumer_anunnaki/anunnaki/anu_11.htm.

36   Bigliardi, *Islam and the quest for modern science*, 189–91.

Guessoum has a more articulate interpretation, one that has been evolving over the last few years. In a 2008 article published in *Zygon*, Guessoum insisted on the distinction between "scientific interpretation" (*tafsīr 'ilmī*) and "scientific miracle" (*i'jāz 'ilmī*) in the Qur'ān. The former is a kind of exegesis aimed at illuminating the content of at least some qur'anic passages that mention natural phenomena by referring to modern scientific knowledge; the latter is the identification of specific scientific notions, inventions, and discoveries supposedly foretold in the Qur'ān. However, Guessoum recognizes that Bucaille stands midway between these two. He also acknowledges that some advocates of the latter trend are highly educated and sincere in their approach, and as such describes *i'jāz* as like "a snowball that started out small and white but then rolled and collected rubbish (ignorant contributions); it has become a mass of dirty ice that easily melts under the intense light of objective and methodical scrutiny"; at the same time, Guessoum believes that it is possible to salvage, clean up, and redirect such an approach, "at least for the general public," by rejecting "all extreme positions." Guessoum's position is also interesting by virtue of the way in which he brings some counter-objections against other critics of the scientific interpretation and scientific miracle of the Qur'ān; namely, he summarizes several "classical" objections to the approach. Other critics, Guessoum points out, have stated that it leads to assigning untenable meanings to qur'anic vocabulary, that it downplays occasions of revelation as well as the socio-cultural context of revelation, that it projects onto the perfect Qur'ān the imperfection of human science, and that it is elitist. However, Guessoum regards all of these objections as "not serious" since, in his view, they disregard the fact that the Qur'ān is not bound to the specific context of seventh-century Arabia and that it is always open to multiple interpretations by readers with different intellectual inclinations or mindsets.[37] A few years later, in conversation with me, this Algerian physicist recognized that Bucailleism can have an "allure" for less scientifically informed minds, as he himself was before taking up the study of physics. In this sense, and given that a sophisticated comprehension of both science and religion is not open to everybody, Bucailleism seems, in his reconstruction at least, to fulfil or express a cultural role or need. However, in that very conversation Guessoum made some harsh comments about the "scientific miraculousness" of the Qur'ān that he defines as "dangerous philosophically and intellectually, even dangerous Islamically."[38] More recently, Guessoum has described *i'jāz* as a major challenge for the "new generation," emphasizing the pseudo-facts that are cited in this kind of

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37   Nidhal Guessoum, The Qur'an, science, and the (related) contemporary Muslim discourse, *Zygon* 43/2 (2008), 411–31.

38   Bigliardi, *Islam and the quest for modern science*, 155.

exegesis, as well as the institutional and academic support that *iʿjāz* enjoys in Muslim countries.[39]

In my own research I have analyzed the logic behind Bucaille's discourse and have emphasized that it is particularly contradictory regarding the concept of a miracle. Whereas the French author states that he scrutinized the sacred scriptures with a scientific mind, he is also eager to take supernatural narratives at face value.[40] I have also examined Harun Yahya's works, pointing out how his use of pictures and stylistic elements typical of scientific popularization proper characterizes the works by the Turkish author as a new and more sophisticated form of *iʿjāz*.[41] Finally, I pointed out the nuances in the new generation's positions concerning *iʿjāz*, describing their discussion, because of the subtle arguments employed, as a "Mikado match" rather than a "titanic struggle." I also invited fellow-scholars to collect more sociological data concerning the consumption and production of *iʿjāz* in order to avoid generalizations. In particular, I pointed out that data about state funding allocated to conferences and publications dedicated to *iʿjāz* are still a *desideratum*.[42]

Even more recently, Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, who has conducted fieldwork at an *iʿjāz*-dedicated conference in Tetouan, Morocco (*3rd Conference on the Scientific Miracles of the Qurʾān and the Sunna*, Faculty of Sciences, University Abdelmalek Essaadi, 17–19 September 2010), not only pointed out how *iʿjāz* itself goes hand in hand with anti-Darwinism, but also that it has a deep, *implicit anthropocentrism*. Commenting upon the words of one of the conference delegates, a professor who had stated *inter alia* that everything in the universe from planets to particles moves anti-clockwise around a center analogously to the pilgrims around the Kaʿba, Mateo Dieste observes:

> During the interview I could also detect the usual criticism of Darwinism employed by most of the authors who produce this kind of literature, characterized by a remarkable pedagogical effort at synthetizing and popularizing, with the same argumentations repeated over and over again in self-produced booklets and brochures provided with illustrations and frequent caricatures of Darwin with an ape's body. However, some aspects emerged in the interview that are not always easy to identify in the materials and written documents examined: for example, the

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39   Guessoum, Islam and science. The next phase of debates.

40   Stefano Bigliardi, Snakes from staves? Science, scriptures and the supernatural in Maurice Bucaille, *Zygon* 46/4 (2011), 793–805.

41   Bigliardi, Who's afraid of theoscientography?

42   Bigliardi, *Islam and the quest for modern science*, 191–3.

idea that the world has been designed by God for the humans. There emerges in this discourse, in my opinion, an unsuspected anthropocentrism although formulated in terms of "divine objectivity."[43]

4 Conclusions

The emergence and enduring success of *i'jāz* is explainable by a number of historical and social factors. The present study is more concerned with theoretical issues, but we can at least advance some hypotheses here, especially drawing upon the criticisms that we have just observed. The demonstration of the alleged presence of science in the Qur'ān serves an important cultural function in the postcolonial Muslim world: it apparently bypasses the perception of contemporary science and technology as being Western/non-Muslim ("non-Muslims have technology and science; but Muslims have had them all along"). It also projects onto the Qur'ān the prestige of natural science, which is perceived to be the highest form of knowledge and the yardstick of truth (as has been seen, Bucaille complemented the discovery of scientific notions in the Qur'ān with the deconstruction of the Old and the New Testament in the light of science itself). Furthermore, finding science in the Qur'ān is a relatively easy exegetical exercise open to authors not trained in theology. Such ease has been immensely expanded by the encyclopedic possibilities made available to non-specialists by the Internet: whereas an author like Bucaille needed at least a smattering of different disciplines acquired through reading and conversation, access to the Internet allows one to rapidly "fish" "scientific information" from the most diverse sources and to pair it with qur'anic passages that can, in turn, be rapidly selected through a search by relevant terms. Software whose use requires minimal skills allows a rapid and plethoric production of texts that can be immediately sent out into the virtual world and made available to everybody, bypassing peer- and editorial review. In particular, what I have called "*i'jāz* without Qur'ān" seems to be a rather amateurish, homemade product still popular in the Muslim world; it requires minimal or even nonexistent theological and scientific knowledge or training to be produced, and its existence and emergence can be related to the increasing availability of

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43   Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, Anthropocentrism and divine objectivity. Some observations on the logic behind the "scientific miracle of the Qur'an," *Social epistemology review and reply collective* 4/10 (2015), 8–9; see also Josep Lluís Mateo Dieste, La fórmula del genio de la lámpara. Milagros científicos en el Corán en el último cuarto del siglo xx, *Revista de ciencias de las religiones* 19 (2014), 127–46.

computer programs that allow for the easy manipulation and circulation of images. *I'jāz* producers can be students, practitioners, or professionals, who, in creating and spreading this kind of discourse, can feel that they are re-appropriating religion after having pursued a career that has taken them far from the study of the sacred text. This kind of exegesis can also be perceived as more efficacious a tool in proselytizing, especially when the Qur'ān is preached to non-Arabic speakers who are unable to perceive the hiatus between qur'anic language and ordinary Arabic, and hence are less likely to understand the doctrine of *i'jāz*, which is classically formulated as linguistic inimitability.

The production and consumption of any piece of pseudo-scientific *i'jāz* narrative might well stem from a sincere intention to harmonize religion and science, and correspondingly fulfil a psychological function. In this sense one might be tempted to deem *i'jāz* harmless or even positive for non-experts in things scientific. In fact, this is the view sometimes expressed by some representatives of the "new generation." On closer inspection, though, one notices that what is gained in terms of reassurance is lost in terms of correct understanding of scientific methods (not to mention the specific pseudo-scientific information that *i'jāz* consumers end up believing).

There is no evidence that the Muslim world is more affected by pseudo-science than any other part of the world. However, *i'jāz* is a typical and widespread kind of pseudo-science rampant in the Muslim world.[44] As I have pointed out previously, *i'jāz* as a cultural and social phenomenon demands deeper scholarly understanding. However, we should not pass over in silence the fact that *i'jāz* is not only the vehicle for specific pseudo-scientific *notions* but also of deeply pseudo-scientific *forms of thinking.*

It is unlikely that *i'jāz* can really and radically be eradicated in the short term; given the ease with which it may be produced, *i'jāz* is always liable to be written in enormous quantities. Yet it seems safe to state that, in the long run, the appeal of *i'jāz* can radically fade away only as a result of wider educational policies. Such policies should encourage a genuine appreciation of natural science as methodologically based on mathematical models and emerging through experimental investigations and peer-review rather than from the intuition of the "individual genius." Scientists and educational authorities in the Muslim world should be courageous enough to present research in the natural sciences as a fascinating and worthwhile enterprise, without scientistic undertones but also without spurious connections with the sacred scriptures. Of course, one

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44 In fact, *i'jāz* bears a strong resemblance to the "science in saffron" of India, as it is described and criticized by Meera Nanda: *Science in saffron. Skeptical essays on history of science* (Palm Vihar, Gurgaon 2016).

may add that scientific enterprise is perfectly in line with a Muslim's life path and ethical code, but it does not have to mean getting entangled in any "scientific exegesis" whatsoever of the sacred text of Islam itself. Theologians should also make a communicative effort; for instance, by spreading the idea that *the amazement of miracles* (however they be defined in theological or philosophical terms) *is not one and the same thing as a scientific demonstration* (the very overlap of the concepts of "miracle" and "sign" in qur'anic language might help in such task). This should be complemented by the idea that *distinguishing demonstrations in the natural sciences from other forms of demonstration is not tantamount to (implicitly) deeming the former as more worthwhile than the latter.* An advantage of these perspectives is that they refer to shared values on which Muslim thinkers and educators can converge, despite perhaps differing on other philosophical points, as is the case with the representatives of the "new generation."

Locating the "Esoteric" in Islamic Studies

Feras Hamza

1 Introduction

A workshop held at Cambridge in 2006 on "the Esoteric Interpretation of the Qurʾān" brought together a group of Islamicists who presented, from a variety of Muslim sources – Sufi, philosophical, Shīʿī, Ismāʿīlī, and Ḥurūfī – the various hermeneutical approaches of these traditions.[1] At the beginning of the introduction to the now-published proceedings of this workshop, the editors say, "However, even if we acknowledge the commonly accepted sense of the word esoteric as 'being designated for a small number or inner circle of people' (from the Greek *esoterikos*), its relevance for these hermeneutic approaches still holds, since they have all been intended for a specialized audience of initiates." The reader senses a slight misgiving on the part of the editors. They add, "This does not mean, however, that we are assuming the term 'esoteric' to be necessarily associated with 'esotericism.'" Notwithstanding the epistemological difficulty of distinguishing "esoteric" from "esotericism," it is clear that the editors want to distance themselves from the suggestion that in these proceedings they sought to bring together examples of "Muslim esotericism." But why the wariness? The answer may be partially suggested by briefly stepping outside the field of Islamic Studies altogether.

About the same time as the Cambridge workshop, Brill published a *Dictionary of western esotericism and gnosis*,[2] and in 2010 a paper by Michael Bergunder, a religious historian, appeared with the title, "What is esotericism?"[3] Commenting on the status of religious studies in the West, Bergunder elaborated on the ongoing debate in the field of Western religious studies over how to establish the parameters for an academic subject such as "esotericism." Academic research into this question in the West, the author argued, had been working with a disputed definition of the subject, and this failure to estab-

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[1] Forthcoming as *The spirit and the letter. Approaches to the esoteric interpretation of the Qurʾān*, eds. Annabel Keeler and Sajjad Rizvi, Oxford-London 2016.

[2] Wouter Hanegraaff (ed.), *Dictionary of western esotericism and gnosis*, Leiden 2006.

[3] Michael Bergunder, What is esotericism? Cultural studies approaches and the problems of definition in religious studies, *Method and theory in the study of religion* 22 (2010), 9–36.

lish a clear epistemology for the study of esotericism had resulted in a lack of differentiation between the subject's own definition of the concept – what it meant for historical groups or individuals to subscribe to an esotericism – and the religious studies definition of the term. Without such an epistemological distinction, Bergunder offered, "there would be no more differentiation between the esoteric implications in the subject's definition and an esotericist agenda for the religious studies research."[4] Something similar may be said to be plaguing current research in Islamic Studies, particularly in the areas of qur'anic and *tafsīr* studies.[5] The same concerns expressed by recent Western religious studies research into Gnosticism, namely whether a clearly identifiable religious current of the same name ever existed in the 2nd century CE, might usefully be reiterated with regard to "esotericism" in Islamic studies. One might consider as a starting point the following: The famous 1966 Messina colloquium on Gnosticism[6] attempted to arrive at some methodological middle ground for defining Gnosticism by positing a definition that drew on historical and typological factors, that is to say, on the basis of historically knowable and recorded (subject-given) references to "gnosis" as a specific kind of knowledge (relating to divine mysteries, reserved for an elite, and essential to salvation) and other related typological traits that were shared by such groups in the 2nd century CE. As Bergunder has remarked,[7] Antoine Faivre, a well-known scholar of Western esotericism, probably relied on the same methodological convenience in arriving at his famous typological description of esotericism as consisting of the following characteristics:

> (1) a belief in invisible and non-causal "correspondences" between all visible and invisible dimensions of the cosmos, (2) a perception of nature

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4 Ibid., 10.

5 There is no full study of the concept of esotericism in Islam as such, merely a recognition that such a mode of thought is manifested across the various textual traditions of the historical community and is to be found in the writings of certain groups who have made explicit claims to "esoteric" knowledge (note the circular problem of using this term to make an identification when the term itself persists without a formal definition), usually through some reference to the concept of *bāṭin*. Works like E. Blochet's *Études sur l'ésotérisme musulman*, Paris 1979, and M.A. Amir-Moezzi's *The divine guide in early Shi'ism. The sources of esotericism in Islam*, trans. David Streight, New York 1994, are not examples of full studies of esotericism in Islam, but symptomatic of the trend in Islamicist scholarship to attribute esotericism to Islamic mysticism and Shī'ism without either a working definition or a scholarly consensus on epistemology.

6 U. Bianchi (ed.), *Le origini dello gnosticismo. Colloquio di Messina 13–18 April 1966*, Leiden 1970.

7 Bergunder, *What is esotericism?*, 10–5.

as permeated and animated by a divine presence or life-force, (3) a concentration on the religious imagination as a power that provides access to worlds and levels of reality intermediary between the material world and God, (4) the belief in a process of spiritual transmutation by which the inner man is regenerated and re-connected with the divine, (5) the belief in a fundamental concordance between several or all spiritual traditions, and (6) the idea of a more or less secret transmission of spiritual knowledge.[8]

However, and as Bergunder has noted,[9] one problem with typologies is that they can be extended and taken out of their strict historical parameters, resulting in a kind of phenomenology of esotericism that is de-historicized and might arbitrarily be re-discovered, while another problem is that such an approach runs the risk of being interpreted as exhibiting a religious-agenda approach to religious studies.[10]

One possible way forward for arriving at an Islamic Studies definition of Muslim esotericism would be to combine the historical record with a typology that would not fall into the trap of Faivre's de-historicization of the concept. In the case of Islamic Studies, one is better placed to come up with such a definition, since Muslim "esoteric phenomena" could be connected through a direct historical record and thus justifiably be studied typologically given the common cultural setting. In the present state of affairs, and given that no clear definition has been stated by scholars working in the field of Islamic Studies, the location of "esoteric" instances in Muslim tradition is merely arbitrary. As things stand, even a cursory examination of the known doctrinal stances, exegetical traditions, and general religious worldviews of traditions such as Shīʿism and Sufism produce nothing meaningful about the dynamics of how, either in relation to one another or discursively, each of these traditions defined the parameters of religious knowledge and, in this instance, the boundaries of *tafsīr*. This essay seeks to reflect on the discipline's use of an oft-encountered taxonomical binary, namely that of "exoteric vs. esoteric," and simply asks whether, in this instance, one is able to distinguish between what ought to be two independent fields of discourse. One discourse is that of, and within, the Muslim genre itself, that is to say, how, when, and why Muslim commentators make a

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8   Hanegraaff, *Dictionary*, 339–40.
9   Bergunder, What is esotericism?, 14ff.
10   Cf. Andreas Görke and Johanna Pink (eds.), *Tafsīr and Islamic intellectual history. Exploring the boundaries of a genre* (Oxford-London 2014), 7ff., and Karen Bauer (ed.), *Aims, methods and contexts of Qurʾānic exegesis* (2nd/8th–9th/15th c.), (Oxford-London 2013), 9ff.

hermeneutical distinction between two aspects of qur'anic exegesis, the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin* (i.e. the examination of what the early commentators understood esoteric and exoteric to mean within their particular historical context),[11] and a second discourse that involves the use of these terms by Islamicists to contrast differing hermeneutical approaches within the genre and to classify the content of such approaches accordingly, that is, the examination of the expedient definition given to esotericism by later scholars in the field of *tafsīr* studies. A major suggestion of this essay is that this taxonomy seems to inhabit neither discourse exclusively. To clarify this issue, one might consider the relationship between the Muslim text/author and the Islamicist scholar as representing respectively the participant and the observer.[12] While scholarship is free to choose between adopting the perspective of the participant (*emic*) or that of the observer (*etic*) in generating meaningful analyses of religious constructs and ideas, the categories of analysis given by the *emic* perspective should not be taken as *etic* ones, nor should the *etic* perspective assume *emic* categories for its epistemology. The current use of the category "esoteric" in Islamic Studies seems to be problematic, primarily because of the lack of clarity in its epistemological application. On the one hand, Muslim exegetes' contrasting of one particular mode of interpretation with another, that is, of the *bāṭin* reading as being qualitatively different from that of the *ẓāhir* is purely relational (and at times simply tendentious); on the other hand, if Islamicist scholarship chooses to adopt "esoteric" because it is analytically substantive (standing for *bāṭin*-based exegesis), that is, it furthers our understanding of the internal workings of the genre of Muslim *tafsīr* and, from the perspective of comparative religious study, in a historically meaningful way, then there is a need for a clearer definition of what this term stands for. But no such definition has been made explicit. One is left with the understanding that the signification of the term "esoteric" should be assumed from its academic application in the context of the study of Western esotericism, which, as has been pointed out, is itself problematic.

To sum up, it will be argued here that although in the distinction between *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* levels of qur'anic signification Islamicists have generally sought

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11   This itself is problematic: cf. Paul E. Walker, Bāṭiniyya, *EI3*: "there are, however, serious problems with what a given group holds as the relationship between the esoteric and the exoteric, between the *bāṭin* and the *ẓāhir*, and how, when and on whose authority a shift from one to the other is allowed or becomes necessary."

12   I am here drawing on the well-known distinction in cultural anthropology between *emic* and *etic*, that is, between, participant and observer, as elaborated in Marvin Harris, *Cultural materialism. The struggle for a science of culture*, New York 1979.

to reflect a distinction made by Muslim exegetes themselves in their herme-neutical approach to the text of the Qurʾān, there may be compelling reasons for revisiting or, at the very least, rethinking how modern scholars use terms such as exoteric and esoteric. The problem, as suggested here, is posed more by the term esoteric than exoteric, for what should be obvious reasons: (1) In the context of *tafsīr*, the "exoteric" has been sufficiently identified by Islamicists and is dealt with under numerous subcategories such as "grammatical," "legal," "lexicographical," and so on –[13] in this respect "exoteric" does not enjoy a semantic (nor indeed a taxonomical) symmetry with "esoteric"; (2) the term "esoteric" is mostly only applied in the context of Shīʿī and Sufi *tafsīr*, with-out any discursive analysis of why this should be so;[14] (3) the term "esoteric," derivative as it is from the field of the Western study of esotericism, might, for that very reason, have political and cultural specificities that would not allow for a straightforward mapping of this taxonomy onto material deriving from an Islamic context.[15]

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13   This is not to say that these categories are ideal, but at least we have some nuanced sense of what such *tafsīr*s contain. No one would think to compose a monograph on "Muslim exotericism," since that is clearly meaningless as a category, as useful as saying that Ibn Sīnā's approach is philosophical or that Muʿtazilis thought theologically. However, one could conceivably compose a monograph on "Muslim esotericism," since it would pre-sumably be taken to signify a particularistic mode of thought within religious writing; but it could only signify this because of its association with Western esotericism. However, I suggest that such an effort would remain problematic.

14   In other words, it is not enough to use "esoteric" simply where Muslim exegetes intimate their predilection for *bāṭin*-based knowledge. These intimations need to be addressed within a wider discursive domain that examines the relationship between these groups on such issues with the wider community. For one, there is no Sunnī esotericism *per se*, but there are Sunnī Sufis. Certain philosophical works might contain "esoteric moments," be based on an esoteric doctrine, or contain extended esoteric commentary, but more often than not these are works that have some connection to Shīʿī or Sufi circles while overtly occupying the intellectual domain of the Sunnī literary tradition (thus the works of Ibn Sīnā and al-Shahrastānī).

15   This has been noted by Jamal Elias, Ṣūfī *tafsīr* reconsidered. Exploring the development of a genre, *Journal of qurʾanic studies* 12 (2010), 41–55. There is considerable literature on the polemics of the Western academy's encounter with religious history. The entry point into this debate is Hanegraaff's, *Dictionary of western esotericism*, who notes two problems in the Western approach to esotericism: (1) historically it has been marginalized as part of a polemical discourse by which the Western academy has asserted its own cultural priorities by pitting irrational and folkloric forms of thought (viz. esotericism) against rationalistic and enlightened mainstream "orthodox" currents when historically examin-ing its Western religious heritage; (2) many of those pioneers of the Western academy's

There is, as stated above, a related methodological ambiguity (driven by the conflation of *emic* and *etic* perspectives) in the use of "esoteric" by modern Islamicists, which is that on occasion it is not clear whether they are referring to an epistemological Muslim category (explicitly accepted and elaborated upon by Muslim exegetes) or whether they are intending a separate academic epistemological category that objectively distinguishes between two modes of hermeneutics. What this means is that Islamicist scholarship should be careful to distinguish between when a text implies that something is esoteric and when we, as Islamicists, say that a text or an exegesis is esoteric without qualification, so that we have adopted a subject's own epistemological category as our epistemology. Clearly, such a conflation would suggest that a religious bias is at work in the writings of Islamicist scholars.[16] To pick up again on the thread of this paper's aforementioned concern, it is suggested here that a much more nuanced and systematic analysis is required of those texts/traditions that might readily assume the label of "esoteric/-ism" in the categorizations of Islamicists studying Muslim *tafsīr*, in order to understand more fully (be it in doctrinal or rhetorical terms) what those texts/traditions share that could meaningfully be called "esoteric," and why. Evidently, what is being suggested here is that in order to understand better the dynamics of "esoteric" thought in Islam, we should go beyond correlating the terms "exoteric" and "esoteric" with what Muslim tradition identifies as *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin*. This is not merely to quibble about what, in the opinion of many, is simply a terminology of

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study of esotericism were themselves motivated by a personal religious agenda (here the name of Corbin and the Eranos circle is instructive for connecting the two disciplines, that of Western comparative religious studies and Western Islamic studies). For an exposition of these points, see Hanegraaff's Forbidden knowledge. Anti-esoteric polemics and academic research, *Aries* 5/2 (2005), 225–54, and more recently his *Esotericism and the Academy. Rejected knowledge in western culture*, Cambridge-New York 2012. A more sober approach, which might be usefully adapted for, and adopted by, Islamic Studies is given in Bergunder, What is esotericism?, 20–36. Ironically, Western Islamicists (Muslims included) are in danger of being accused, as rationalist scholars, of showing a preference for "irrational" modes of thought in this case when making the case for "Muslim esotericism."

16   In fact, one can detect such a problem in much of the scholarly analyses associated with an "Eranos" pedigree. I have in mind here, of course, the immensely influential work of the late Henry Corbin and several of those who came in contact with him or his writings. One could point out numerous other Islamicists whose scholarly writings about Islam are underpinned by a manifest personal appreciation for the "truth of esotericism," and this should be evident to most in the field. It is not, however, the purpose of this paper to polemicize, but merely to point out the methodological imperative of distinguishing between personal convictions and objective scholarly analysis.

convenience, for surely convenience is not the most that methodology should aspire to. Suffice it to say that it should allow for a clearer understanding of the dynamics of what constitutes (if we are to allow for it) "esotericism" in Islam.

2 The Ambiguity of the "Esoteric" in Islamic Studies

In his three-volume history of religious ideas, Mircea Eliade noted that the "esoteric" current in Islam was preserved by Shīʿism and Sufism.[17] Indeed, for most of the history of modern comparative religious studies' interest in Islam, scholars have consistently referred to esotericism in the context of these two major traditions. One popular articulation of this position can be found in the work of Henry Corbin,[18] yet this perspective on "Shīʿī and Sufi esotericism" extends chronologically in both directions to include some of the earliest scholarship on Muslim exegesis,[19] as well as some of the most recent work in Islamicist scholarship. Meir Bar-Asher's work on early Imāmī exegesis surveys the techniques by which, according to him, early Imāmī exegetes sought to conceal their Imamologies from "Sunnī rule."[20] But this begs the questions of: 1) how fully formed and distinct were confessional identities such as Sunnism and

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17 Mircea Eliade, *A history of religious ideas. Volume 3. From Muhammad to the age of reforms* (Chicago 1985), esp. 113–33. Most of his narrative takes its cue from Corbin's work, including the latter's translations of key texts.

18 For the comparativist side, in addition to Eliade in the previous note, see F.E. Peters. *Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The classical texts and their interpretation. Volume 1. From covenant to Community* (Princeton 1990), 386–7, where the only clue to the "esotericism" of this section of his book is the index entry "Esotericists." Again, Henry Corbin's work, such as *En Islam iranien. Aspects spiritual et philosophiques*, especially I: *Le shīʿisme duodécimain* (Paris 1971–2), 3–51, and III: *Les fidèles d'amour, shīʿisme et soufisme*, as well as his chapter on Ismāʿīlī gnosis in the collection *Cyclical time and Ismaili gnosis*, trans. Ralph Manheim and James Morris, London 1983, which was originally published as *Temps cyclique et gnose ismaélienne*, Paris 1982.

19 This perspective is found in Ignaz Goldziher's *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung*, Leiden 1920, trans. Wolfgang H. Behn as *Schools of Koranic commentators* (Wiesbaden 2006), esp. 116–66, which focuses on Sufi exegesis and Neoplatonic influence in works such as those of the anonymous *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*. Curiously, these musings on "esoteric" exegesis precede the separate section Goldziher dedicates to "sectarian exegesis," where, according to current taxonomy, we should also expect to find the "esoteric" at work.

20 Meir M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and exegesis in early Imāmī-Shiism* (Leiden 1999), 1–25, esp. 7–10. Bar-Asher notes in summary, "the use of secret codes and language is a typical characteristic of esoteric circles and religious groups operating on the fringes of society [*sic!*]," even as he notes that the very same Imāmī exegetes in fact very often chose

Shī'ism in the period examined by Bar-Asher; and 2) what the nature of the relationship was between the authorities (caliph and government) and *'ulamā'* belonging to both camps. The eventual 'Abbāsid decision to align themselves with the Sunnī *'ulamā'* was not inevitable from the outset, and this begs the question of whether the perceived danger for the Imāmī exegetes was from Sunnī theologians or the 'Abbāsid authorities. As for what this type of exegesis meant for Shī'ism's own identity and formation, this is left unanswered. Amir-Moezzi's work has, in particular, focused on identifying the essence of Shī'ism as stemming from an "esoteric" impulse associated with proto-Shī'ī radical groups (*ghulāt*).[21] This last point certainly informs Heinz Halm's discussion of the term *bāṭiniyya*, which he understands as an antinomian (*ibāḥa*) tendency amongst certain early proto-Shī'ī currents in Iraq during the second/eighth century. Bernd Radtke's discussion of the concept of *bāṭin* points to the same tendency. Yet neither author uses the term "esoteric" or "esotericism" in their entries in the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.[22] Even so, the association with *bāṭin*-type knowledge and "antinomianism" would still not explain why the term "esoteric" is used by Islamicists in connection with wider Shī'ī exegetical literature ("antinomianism" would also fail to satisfactorily explain why we should use "esotericism" to refer to Sufi exegesis). *Pace* Halm's *ghulāt*, most Imāmī Shī'ī authors were at pains to insist on their adherence to the Law. After all, the very premise of the Imam's privileged position was that he knew the Law and could explain it to his followers. In fact, classification of Shī'ī exegesis as providing examples of "esoteric" exegesis usually, however, are perfunctorily premised on the ubiquitous presence of the *ẓāhir* vs. *bāṭin* contrariety in Shī'ī exegesis.[23]

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not to hide derogatory references to the caliphs Abū Bakr and 'Umar by using obscure appellations.

21   See Amir-Moezzi's, *Divine guide; The spirituality of Shi'i Islam. Beliefs and practices*, London 2011, and his *Le Coran silencieux et le Coran parlant. Sources scripturaires de l'islam entre histoire et ferveur*, Paris 2011.

22   See Heinz Halm, Bāṭenīya, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 3/8 (1998), 861–3, where he does not use the term "esoteric" or "esotericism" even once. Likewise, Bernd Radtke, bāṭen, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica* 3/8 (1988), 859–61, also does not employ either of these terms.

23   See also Mahmoud Ayoub, The speaking Qur'ān and the silent Qur'ān. A study of the principles and development of Imāmī Shī'ī *tafsīr*, in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford 1988), 177–98. For Sufi exegesis the same principles of concern for the *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* are highlighted by Pierre Lory in his introduction to Kāshānī's *Ta'wīlāt. Les commentaires ésotériques du Coran d'après 'Abd al-Razzâq al-Qâshânî*, Paris 1980. Similar articulations can be found throughout Todd Lawson (ed.), *Reason and inspiration in Islam. Theology, philosophy and mysticism in Muslim thought. Essays in honour of Hermann Landolt*, London 2005, especially in the

Almost all of these works of comparativist and Islamicist scholarship offer one of two positions as an explication of why Shīʿī and Sufi hermeneutics engage in what is called "esoteric" exegesis: (a) that a particular author, and the community to which he belonged, subscribed to two levels of meaning in the qurʾanic text, the "outer" level, the *ẓāhir*, and an inner dimension, the *bāṭin*; (b) *bāṭin*-inspired exegesis (*taʾwīl*) was driven by political expedience in an environment where exegetical allegory, typology, and metaphor at large were vehicles for expressing dissent or elaborating "heterodox" ideas and concepts.

At this point, it will be useful to reflect once again on the Cambridge workshop on esoteric interpretation of the Qurʾān that was mentioned earlier. Beyond exposing the sheer variety of what might be called "non-exoteric commentary," the workshop, in presenting various works from the traditions of Shīʿism, Sufism, Ḥurūfism, philosophy, and Ismāʿīlism, clearly also intended to discover what constituted "esoteric interpretation of the Qurʾān". One way of delineating the field of esoteric interpretation is to contrast it with what is often referred to as the exoteric interpretation of the Qurʾān. The problem is that, beyond pointing out that esoteric commentaries tend to be much more selective in their use of verses and draw far more modestly on the traditional instruments of qurʾanic hermeneutics such as grammar, law, poetic attestations, and *ḥadīth*, it was very difficult to arrive at a defining difference between exoteric and esoteric commentaries: the difference at this level did not go beyond the dimensions of the physical texts involved. To be sure, esoteric commentaries do draw on the same traditional resources that we more readily associate with exoteric ones, but it was not clear how, in the method of applying these same resources, esoteric commentaries were qualitatively distinct from so-called exoteric ones.

Another way in which the aforementioned workshop approached the problem of defining "esoteric" approaches to qurʾanic interpretation was by suggesting that esoteric commentaries can be found in those Muslim communities in which esoteric teachings have a place (i.e. they are linked to the worldview of that tradition) and in which they tend to be communicated through literary works.[24] Classically, the communities identified as producing such esoteric texts were the Sufis, the Twelver Shīʿa, and the Ismāʿīlis. But what, specifically, is it about their teachings that makes them "esoteric" and, by extension, what is intrinsically esoteric about the communities that produce those commentaries? The workshop's other finding was that all of these traditions

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essays by James Winston Morris, Bulbul Shah, Faquir Muḥammad Hunzai, and Shigeru Kamada.

24   See the Introduction to Keeler and Rizvi (eds.), *Esoteric interpretation of the Qurʾān.*

shared the idea of the existence of an inner reality (a *bāṭin*).[25] However, can we not presume that all Muslim commentarial traditions ultimately subscribe to such a central, and obvious, concept? Do the Sunnī commentators, for example, simply ignore this concept in their hermeneutics and in their exegeses? And if so, why?

Binary oppositions may be useful tools for succinctly capturing the contrast, and distinguishing in the broadest terms, between objects, concepts, or activities that at first encounter belong to one of two immediately recognizable dimensions of the thing itself. However, frequently they do not provide an insight into the working dynamics of that thing, let alone into the manner in which these two dimensions of the one thing interact to produce a definition of that very thing itself. The categorization of one particular exegesis as esoteric and another as exoteric requires more justification than any simplistic contrast, since, if left at that, it would be merely a repetition of what Muslim exegetes are saying about their own hermeneutical approaches. Although much of our working classifications necessarily draw on terminology given by the tradition being studied, it is imperative that these classifications remain, and are stated as being, reflective of the tradition's own epistemology. All too frequently, however, with the term "esoteric" one finds that its presence in the discourse and writings of Islamicists is not always clearly intended to represent a classification internal to the Muslim tradition. Consider that when Islamicists use terms such as *mutashābih* or *ḥadīth qudsī*, clearly they are drawing on technical terms provided by the texts of the tradition, but one would not then expect Islamicists to adopt these terms in their theoretical analysis of that Muslim discourse.[26] Similarly, when Muslim exegetes make the distinction between *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* readings of the Qurʾān, these should not then become our own taxonomy when we wish to discuss the dynamics, content, and boundaries of the Muslim exegetical tradition.

Since it is not possible to do justice to the large variety of Muslim texts in which an inquiry about the meaning of the term esoteric may be valid, the present discussion will focus solely on the use of this terminology by contemporary scholarship in the context of the genre of Muslim writing called *tafsīr*. Reiterating the questions, then, we might ask the following: When contemporary scholarship refers to a particular *tafsīr*, or *tafsīr*s, as "esoteric," or to certain traditions of qurʾanic commentary as "Islamic esotericism," what features of the actual commentary (the narrative) might demonstrate that

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25   Ibid., 1.

26   In other words, they do not really need to believe that those traditions are actually "holy" or "ambiguous."

it is an "esoteric" commentary?[27] Is the "esotericism" of a particular passage of qurʾanic commentary, or, indeed, of an entire *tafsīr*, located in some structural, linguistic, or rhetorical device? Is such a narrative "esoteric" because of an explicit (or implicit) hermeneutic that can be traced throughout a work or that can be inferred from the commentator's approach, or indeed from his own confessional affiliation? If we were to align ourselves *epistemologically* with the taxonomy of qurʾanic exegesis as given by Muslim scholars and commentators, would that not detract from the academic objectivity expected of Islamicists? To respond with the claim that any exegesis that departs from the literal text is, by nature, esoteric is to adopt a circular argument.

Again, to suggest simplistically that wherever there are exegetical discussions that include terms such as *taʾwīl* or *bāṭin* there will be an "esoteric" interpretation is quite misleading. Al-Ṭabarī refers to a *bāṭin* of a verse, but probably means no more than that the *ẓāhir* is not particularly elucidatory, thus forcing him to resort to *taʾwīl*,[28] even as Islamicists acknowledge that in Ṭabarī's case *taʾwīl* is barely more than a synonym for (exoteric) *tafsīr*. That exegetical vocabulary is not a measure of the "esoteric" content of a commentary can also be seen in the case of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, when, having mused on the philosophical implications (realities) behind the passage of the *kursī*-verse (Q 2:255), he reminds the reader: "Now that you know these mysteries (*asrār*), let us return to the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) [aspect] of the commentary."[29] That is not to say that the use of *sirr/asrār* in the conceptual language of a commentary ought not reflect an "esoteric" approach: al-Shahrastānī's *Mafātīḥ al-asrār* is certainly an "esoteric" commentary by the current standards of what is esoteric and what is exoteric.[30] But again, it cannot be premised on the subject text's

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27   To my mind, the nearest to some kind of an answer to this question might be garnered from the substantive analyses of exegetical language presented in the volume edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Barry D. Walfish, and Joseph W. Goering: *With reverence for the word. Medieval scriptural exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Oxford 2003, and particularly by two articles, one by Gerhard Böwering, The scriptural "senses" in medieval Ṣūfī Qurʾān exegesis, 346–65, and the other by Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, Are there allegories in Ṣūfī Qurʾān interpretation?, 366–75.

28   Noted in Haggai Ben-Shammai, The tension between literal interpretation and exegetical freedom, in McAuliffe et al. (eds.), *With reverence for the word*, 38.

29   Feras Hamza and Sajjad Rizvi, with Farhana Mayer (eds.), *An anthology of qurʾanic commentaries. Volume I: On the nature of the divine* (London 2008), 189 (ad commentary to Q 2:255).

30   On al-Shahrastānī's "esoteric" commentary, see Toby Mayer, *Keys to the Arcana. Shahrastānī's esoteric commentary on the Qurʾān*, London 2009.

use of specific categories or lexicon unless we want to adopt those ourselves, with all of the attendant risks for objective scholarship.

In thinking about how we use terms such as esoteric, it should certainly not be the case that unqualified criteria such as that of confessional affiliation automatically determine a choice of epistemological terminology, particularly when such terminologies derive from dichotomized structures that do not allow for a nuanced and richer picture of the complexity of discursive networks or domains in religious communities. Moreover, such simplistic dichotomies are patently inadequate, unless one is somehow to isolate traditions such as Ismāʿīlīsm from Shīʿism, or Ḥurūfism from Sufism.

For now, given the unreflective nature of the field's current approach to esotericism, particularly as it relates to qurʾanic commentary, it would seem that the only criterion for qualifying something as "esoteric" is a negative one, that is, whatever is not "exoteric." In other words, it is to perpetuate the same analytically impoverished structures of dichotomy.

Clearly, any meaningful analysis of the concept of esotericism and its relevance to Muslim tradition must begin with a clear definition of what the term "esoteric," as an epistemological label, signifies. Such a task would require a much broader and more detailed investigation than this essay can offer. The discussion here has merely sought to provide exploratory reflections on why we might rethink our current application of this term, especially given its connotations in the history of Western religious studies. It is not enough that Islamicists base their application of such a concept on the fact that a particular text or textual tradition subscribes to a *bāṭin*-level of meaning or believes in an ontological dichotomy of *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* (for no Muslim author would deny such a distinction). Nor is it enough to say that "esoteric" *tafsīr* is *tafsīr* that draws on elements other than the traditional tools of grammar or *ḥadīth* or *asbāb al-nuzūl* to interpret verses.[31] For to say as much would leave us with nothing more than the text itself to justify "esotericism," and we would be using the text's own religious worldviews to inform our own. Without clarifying what

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31   Just as an example, the exegetical work of Muḥammad Shaḥrūr (b. 1938) entitled *al-Kitāb wa-l-Qurʾān*, might plausibly be considered "esoteric," if by that we mean only that it is fairly inaccessible (at least on a first reading). And yet this commentary was composed by a self-professed Sunnī, drawing on the technical narratives of contemporary astrophysics and biological science, and employing linguistics. Moreover, it is premised, as he argues, on something as simple as a precise and faithful understanding of Arabic grammar and etymology: a hermeneutical approach that, in the field of qurʾanic studies, is so readily a criterion for considering something *exoteric*. For this work, see Suha Taji-Farouki, *Modern Muslim intellectuals and the Qurʾan* (Oxford 2004), 263–95.

we mean by exoteric and esoteric, we cannot begin to ask the more interesting questions such as: how does a given exegetical tradition affirm a distinct socio-religious identity by using dichotomies such as *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* (or indeed trichotomies, where there is a belief in *bāṭin al-bāṭin*) even as that tradition participates in the wider discursive domain of Muslim *tafsīr*? The current taxonomy in Islamic Studies and, in particular, the epistemology underpinning *tafsīr* studies, might merit more reflection.

Western Non-Muslim Qur'anic Studies in Muslim Academic Contexts

On Rippin's Works from the Middle East to the Malay-Indonesian World

Majid Daneshgar

1 Introduction[1]

Classical Muslim thinkers and traditionalists like al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) were critical of non-Muslim *peripatetic* philosophy. This was despite the fact that al-Ghazālī and many others, including Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), adopted many aspects of their theological arguments from Aristotelian philosophy. Referring to non-Islamic sources in developing Islamic theological arguments and illustrating the uniqueness of Islam became a regular practice of mediaeval Muslims. This *re*-emerged in the nineteenth century, when Muslims again found themselves competing with Europeans in science and industry.

The Pan-Islamic movement originally led by Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897), as well as similar trends throughout the Middle East, South- and Southeast Asia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, stimulated Muslim thinkers and social activists to highlight the importance of the intellect and reasoning in Islam and direct their pens against non-Muslim approaches to nature and materialism, especially those critical of the divine origin of humankind.[2]

For many, the majority of Europeans were equal to disbelievers as well as being invaders. Shaykh Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī (d. 1940), for instance, known to some as the founder of the scientific interpretation of the Qur'ān in the Muslim world, frequently attempted to dismiss the Europeans' *major* role in nineteenth-century discoveries. According to Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, Islam can demonstrate the origin of all things discovered in European and American laboratories. He also believed that Darwin's theory of evolution had been previously discussed by classical Muslim thinkers, including Ibn Miskawayh (d. 1030),[3]

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1 Due to a lack of time I will skip the Turkish sources in this study. Different translations of the Qur'ān have been used, all of which are available at: http://quran.com/.

2 Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghani, *La réfutation des matérialistes*, trans. A.M. Goichon, *Les joyaux de l'orient*, volume 11, Paris 1942.

3 A Persian polymath.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 1406).[4] Following his predecessors, Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī was considerably influenced by his non-Muslim contemporaries, including John Lubbock, widely known as Lord Avebury (d. 1934), and European philosophers such as Immanuel Kant (d. 1804) and Herbert Spencer (d. 1903). He admired Kant greatly, as demonstrated in his writings dealing with pedagogy and educational training.[5] Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī combined Kant's ideas with Islamic views to urge young Muslims to compete with Europeans.

Nonetheless, Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī maintained that Egyptians can know everything about the universe from the Qurʾān or the achievements of Golden Age of Islam, which primarily refers to the Abbasid period. To bring Muslims to light and obscure Europeans, he frequently referred to the specific status of Muslims with respect to God. In line with classical thinkers, Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī endeavored to prove that Islam is a divine denomination, free from the superstition and incorrect information that taint other religions, and that Muslims are true believers who read precise information and accounts from the Qurʾān. Regarding the final verse of *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa* (Q 1:7) "the path of those whom your blessings are upon," Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī [following classical thinkers] maintained that "those whom" refers to the prophets, truthful people, martyrs, and the righteous. He also firmly believed that *al-ladhīna anʿamta ʿalayhim* ("those whom your blessings are upon") refers to the Muslim *umma* (nation). Moreover, he contended that "not of those who have evoked [Your] anger" refers to Jews and "nor of those who have gone astray" refers to Christians, which is a common view.[6]

After World War II, with the significant Western progress in various aspects of science, including the humanities and social sciences, the formation of the state of Israel in the Middle East, the partial autonomy of Eastern Asian communities as well as other socio-political factors, such anti-Jewish and anti-Christian movements became anti-colonial movements and later on gradually transformed into anti-Westernization movements.[7] Another phenomenon worth mentioning is the emergence of the *anti-Orientalist* movement in the Muslim world. Although Europeans began learning about the Orient long ago, the term "Orientalist" became a symbol of systemic plunder, which is at least one step beyond Edward Said's "Orientalism."

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4 A great Arab historian. See Martin Hartmann, Schaich Tantawi Dschauhari. Ein Moderner egyptischer Theolog und Naturfreund, *Beitrage zur Kenntnis des orients* 13 (1916), 54–82.

5 Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī translated Kant's *education* into Arabic: Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, *Kitab al-tarbiyya lil Ḥakīm al-Ālmānī Kānt*, Cairo 1936/7.

6 Ṭanṭāwī Jawharī, *al-Jawāhir fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-Karīm* (Cairo 1933), 3:205–9.

7 This does not mean these movements are necessarily related to each other but at least shows the possibility of bad feelings among Muslims.

I thought that to the extent that Darwin's *Origin of species* could awaken sleepy disputations on science and religion among creationists in Europe, the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (*EQ*) edited by Jane Dammen McAuliffe could *re*-activate heated discussions on Orientalism (*al-istishrāq; khāvarshināsī*) in the Muslim world in the 21st century. The *EQ* is widely recognized as a Western academic publication. However, deliberations on the *EQ* and its editors/contributors have led to three results: (a) one-sided criticism; (b) critical analysis; and (c) a translation movement in the Muslim academic context. Before going further, it is necessary to analyze the features of the academic context in the Muslim world.

2   Muslim Academic Context and Western Islamic Studies

In Muslim-majority countries in general, and Middle Eastern and some Southeast Asian societies in particular, Islam is neither critically nor historically examined but is rather read conservatively. Owing to its perceived uniqueness, Islam is not even compared with other religions. For many years, biblical literature has not been included in subjects studied or taught by Muslim Islamic scholars in academic institutes,[8] which "are [basically] sites for students for intellectual inquiry and research, and therefore one of their chief goals is the pursuit of truth and pedagogical projects of conveying the truth as one discovers it and conceives it in one's research, and to set students on the path of discovering further truths in the future on their own."[9]

Moreover, the reflection of respect to Islamic sanctities is a key factor that should be fulfilled in Muslim "academic" works and careers. For instance, many qur'anic studies (*al-dirāsāt al-qur'aniyya*) graduates from reputed universities in Muslim countries are called *Khādim al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* ("the servant of the Holy Qur'ān"), and academic and non-academic journals are obliged to print standard blessings after Muḥammad or his Companions' names.[10] It is thus understood that establishing a new genre of qur'anic studies in the West (as symbolized, for example, by the *EQ*) would hardly be well received by Muslim academics.

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8   [This is to my modest knowledge,] although some religious thinkers, including Āyatullāh Aḥmad Bihishtī, did provide Iranian readers with biblical-Islamic issues, and a few scholars, such as Aʿẓam Pūyā, attempted to create a connection between Iranian qur'anic studies and biblical literature in the 1990s.

9   Akeel Bilgrami, *Secularism, identity, and enchantment* (Cambridge, MA-London 2014), 76.

10   I.e. SAW: *ṣallā Allāh ʿalayh wa-sallam*; AS: *ʿalayhi/hā/him al-salām*; and RA: *raḍiya allāhu ʿanhu*.

In addition, the publication of the *EQ* was not supported by some Muslims residing in the West (e.g. Muzaffar Iqbal). To understand the reason, the progress of Islamic-qurʾanic studies in recent decades should be analyzed. Interreligious and Islamic studies programs have progressively surfaced in various North American and Western universities, particularly after 9/11.[11] Although Western Islamic studies scholars and liberal Muslims are occasionally inclined to present an apologetic image of Islam, many still have an academic outlook towards the study of Islam in universities, one which declares that the origin of Islam – as with other religions – should be scrutinized from the lens of its immediate historical context without simply relying on its primary sources (*Qurʾān* and *ḥadīth*) or Islamic teachings, many of which are from much later. This approach is often lacking in Middle Eastern and Southeast Asian universities. Academically speaking, however, if Islamic studies is to be a viable and non-apologetic discipline, it ought not to be curtailed by apologetic agendas that have the potential to prevent interaction with more historical and analytical methodologies. This *Islamic studies* is the study of history, culture, and language, carried out in order to assess various aspects of Islam; it is NOT aimed at prove the *existence* or *uniqueness* of God, Muḥammad, the Qurʾān, etc., to appreciate or refute *halidom*, or/and to claim whether the increase in Muslim communities in the West is helpful or not. In short, Islamic studies is not a *daʿwa* program, nor does it address common matters such as "proving" the *compatibility* of Islam or the Qurʾān with science.

The line between *daʿwa* and the *study of Islam* is very thin in Muslim countries. While *daʿwa* is compellingly presented by apologists, the academic study of Islam ought not to be beholden to such partisan interests. Aaron W. Hughes, for example, warns against conflating the two, and he critiques "the largely apologetic claims put forth by scholars of Islam who work under the larger canopy of religious studies" and not the philological and historical studies of Islam carried out by Islamicists in other disciplines.[12] Besides, Islamic *religious* study (which is not the academic study of Islam) leans towards Islamic perspectives on particular topics, such as Islam and modern science or modernity, between which scholars usually attempt to build a peaceful relationship.[13] Indeed, some Muslims and religious devotees presume that any critical and academic approach to Islam is tantamount to destroying Islamic values, so

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11   See Aaron W. Hughes, *Theorizing Islam. Disciplinary deconstruction and reconstruction* (London-New York 2014), 1.

12   Hughes, *Theorizing Islam*, 3.

13   Ibid., 109.

agitated Muslims attempt to modify the track of Islamic studies to an apologetic reading of Islam.

The significant increase in *Arabo/Imāmī-centric* Islamic centers and organizations attached to Western academic institutes, mainly after 2001, has also influenced the declining academic study of Islam.[14] These centers' financial support of propagating the friendly bond between Islam and other religions and [*mis-*]using the notion of "dialogue" between religions (*al-ḥiwār bayn al-adyān*) has not only led to scholars being "careless" in their studies of the origins of Islam, and the history of early Muslims and Late Antiquity, but has also drawn the attention of scholars to marginal issues as well as to contemporary social, political, and anthropological matters dealing with Muslim communities in the West.

In fact, the post-9/11 publication of the *EQ*,[15] at a time when both Muslim and Western academic institutes were preferring a quasi-apologetic approach to Islamic studies, can be deemed one of the most important critical works of the century in qur'anic studies.

Some Muslims, whether in the West or the Islamic world, assume that the *EQ* represents a cold war against Islam, a way for non-Muslims to seize authority of the Qur'ān.[16] These opponents of the *EQ* may be placed in the category of one-sided critics, something apparent in a controversial article by Iqbal. Iqbal's essay was initially published in the *Journal of qur'anic research and studies* in Saudi Arabia in 2008 and later re-published as a book by the Malaysian Islamic Book Trust (Kuala Lumpur) in 2009. It caused both Arab and Malay scholars to adopt a polemical view towards the *EQ* and its editors. However, a few adherents of critical analysis and particularly the translation movement in the Muslim academic context used this opportunity to familiarize themselves with Western scientific methodologies and *what is going on in the West*.

Both the *EQ* and its editors/contributors' names have captured readers' attention in the Muslim world. The editors' works were more quickly translated and analyzed upon the publication of the *EQ*. On this subject, Andrew Rippin is among the most influential qur'anic scholars of the West, whose publications are still discussed in the majority of Muslim academic institutes. The following is a report on the status of his publications in different parts of the Muslim

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14   A reliable source informed the author of this chapter that some universities in Oceania made representations to Islamic countries to attract budgets to launch Islamic *religious* programs.

15   It should be noted that editors started their works on the *EQ* in 1990s.

16   *Gharb talāsh mīkunad marjaʿiyyat-e ʿilmī dar qurʾān rā az mā bigīrad*, available at: http://www.iqna.ir/fa/print/1428402/.

world, one which allows us to see that Andrew Rippin's works were important elements used by some Muslims to replace "Orientalist qur'anic studies" with "Western non-Muslim qur'anic studies."

3 Andrew Lawrence Rippin's (b. 1950) Publications in the Muslim World[17]

The popularity of Rippin's ideas worldwide has led Muslim editors of Islamic-qur'anic journals to add him to their lists of editorial/advisory boards.[18] However, his contribution, alongside that, of other Western scholars of Islam in producing the EQ, as well as his many publications on Islam, the Qur'ān, and *tafsīr* (many of which are freely available on the Internet) have put him under the scrutiny of Muslim scholars more than ever before. Rippin's name is found in different orthographical styles throughout Arabic and Persian texts, Andirīyū Rībīn, Andiriyya Rībān, Āndirū Rīpīn, or disordered, like Lawrance Andrew Rippin in some Malay works.

Although Rippin's MA and Ph.D. supervisors were Willem Bijlefeld and Charles Adams respectively, he went to London to develop his research program, and work with John Wansbrough. This fact, along with his specific notes on literary analysis, have led many Muslims to recognize Rippin as a student/devotee (*murīd*) of Wansbrough.[19]

3.1 *Arab World*
Indeed, upon the publication of the EQ, some Muslims re-launched a project aimed at scrutinizing "Orientalists'" viewpoints on the correctness of entries related to the Qur'ān. Although it is difficult to find a reliable translation of Rippin's works in Arab academic contexts, the names of Rippin and other non-Muslim Islamic scholars are frequently seen in Arabic articles and blogs. Yet apparently they are not called researchers (*bāḥithūn*), but orientalists (*mustashriqūn*).

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17   To see the Turkish translation of Rippin's work, please refer to the appendix of this volume.

18   Since 2012 he has been a member of the: editorial Advisory Committee of *al-Bayān journal of Qur'ān and ḥadīth* belonging to the University of Malaya and published by Brill; advisory Board of *Ilahiyat fakültesi dergisi* (Ankara University) and *Ilahiyat Studies* (Turkey); and the International Advisory Board of *Muṭālaʿāt Qurʾānī va-rivāʾī* (Qazwin, Iran).

19   http://www.nabilfayad.com/أبحاث661-هدية-رأس-السنة-إلى-القرّاء.html.

The Islamic Centre for Strategic Studies, apparently based in Iraq, recently created a section called *al-istishrāq* ("Orientalism"), which introduces the names and publications of Western scholars. Rippin is one of them, and his academic career is described and his publications translated into Arabic.[20]

A 2006 article on Orientalists' qurʾanic studies during the first quarter of the 15th century AH refers to five topics: (a) the movement of Orientalists' qurʾanic studies beginning in the 15th century; (b) Orientalists' qurʾanic study works since the early 15th century; (c) Orientalists' activities dealing with qurʾanic studies; (d) the decreasing studies on Orientalism regarding the Qurʾān during this period; (e) the most famous Orientalists interested in qurʾanic studies in the first part of the 15th century. According to this article, the progress of Orientalism in recent decades falls into three categories. The first is a classical or traditional movement; the second is the new Orientalism; the last one is "journalistic Orientalism." This study also divided qurʾanic publications of Western scholars into (i) the translation of the Qurʾān; (ii) encyclopedic works; (iii) academic writings; and (iv) investigations, indexing, and cataloguing.

Renowned Orientalists (*ashhar al-mustashriqīn*) are divided into two groups. The first group comprises those interested in qurʾanic codices and manuscripts, including Solange Ory, Frédéric Imbert, and François Déroche. The second group of scholars are those who engage in qurʾanic studies (*al-dirāsāt al-qurʾaniyya*) and include Angelika Neuwirth, Claude Gilliot, Andrew Rippin, and Sergio Noseda.

The author (ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Ismāʿīl) contends that Rippin is not really one of the common category of Orientalists (*lam yakun Andiriyya Rībān "mustashriqan" bi l-maʿnā al-mutadāwal*), because he began writing on Islam through teaching history and civilization while working at a Canadian university sometime before becoming an expert on Islamic civilization.[21] Regardless of Rippin's membership of the Orientalist school, the author did not notice that Rippin's MA and Ph.D. theses deal with the Qurʾān. To answer a question by Abdurrahman Abuo al-majd, "what made you take up qurʾanic studies?," Rippin refers to his MA thesis, which addressed the term *ḥaram* in the Qurʾān. Moreover, his Ph.D. thesis at McGill University covered *asbāb al-nuzūl* material.[22]

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20 Andirū Rībīn, Birīṭānī: http://www.iicss.iq/?id=2252.

21 ʿAbd al-Razzāq b. Ismāʿīl, al-Dirāsāt al-qurʾaniyya ʿind al-mustashriqīn. Khilāl al-rubʿ al-awwal min al-qarn al-khāmis ʿashara lil-hijra, *Majalla al-buḥūth wa-l-dirāsāt al-qurʾaniyya* 3/6 (2006), 95–152.

22 *Andrew Rippin and Abdur-Rahman Abou-al-majd in dialogue about qurʾanic studies*, available at: http://muslimconditions.com/andrew-rippin-and-abdur-rahman-abuo-almajd-in-dialog-about-quranic-studies.html.

Apart from his qurʾanic views, Rippin's notions, as outlined in his well-known monograph *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices*, were assessed in a Master's thesis by Ḥamāda Muḥammad Basyūnī in Egypt in 2014. In the thesis, the author set out to analyze Rippin's suspicions and doubts about Islam. The doubts concern the oral tradition of the Qurʾān, belated collection of the Qurʾān, inconsistencies in verses, repetition, and contradictions in the Qurʾān, and qurʾanic exegesis and its connection with biblical literature.[23]

3.2 *Iranian Academic Context*

A long-lasting, modern translation movement (i.e. "the Modernization Movement") was begun in Iran during the second half of the 19th century.[24] This modern movement not only led scholars to translate European works into Persian, but later, and particularly after the Islamic revolution of 1979, they translated (and supported the translation of) several Persian Shīʿī works into European and Asian languages.

Apart from the translation movement's importance to the Persian Constitutional Revolution, connections with Euro-American academic institutions and scholarship programs available for outstanding students motivated Iranian thinkers to familiarize their compatriots with modern (scientific) achievements in the West.[25] The attempts of 20th-century thinkers like Aḥmad Ārām (d. 1998), ʿAbbās Zaryāb Khūʾī (d. 1994), Najaf Daryābandarī (b. 1929), ʿIzzatullāh Fūlādvand (b. 1935), Bahāʾiddīn Khurramshāhī (b. 1945), and others to offer Iranian communities translations of philosophical, mystical, and historical works and treatises of Western scholars were developed by subsequent generations, and can be divided into several branches. A young branch, one with a particular focus on modern Western qurʾanic studies, was officially established after the Islamic revolution and peaked in the late 1990s.

Morteza Karimi-Nia is one of the first Iranian scholars to have spent considerable time translating modern qurʾanic-study pieces into Persian. Apart from the importance of Rippin's works for him, Karimi-Nia also referred to

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23   Ḥamāda Muḥammad Basyūnī, *Shubahāt Andirū Rībīn ḥawl al-Islām fī Kitāb al-Muslimūn. Muʿtaqadātuhim wa-mumarisātihim al-dīniyya. Dirāsa taḥlīliyya naqdiyya*, master's thesis, Alexandria University 2014. Also, Rippin's work: Syriac in the Qurʾān. Classical Muslim theories, in Gabriel S. Reynold's *The Qurʾan in its historical context* (London 2008), 249–61, has been translated into Arabic. See also the list of Rippin's publications in the appendix section.

24   For more see Hossein Bahri, The role of translation movements in the cultural maintenance of Iran from the era of Cyrus the Great up to the Constitutional Revolution, *Translation journal* 15 (2011), available at: <http://translationjournal.net/journal/58movement.htm/>. Egyptians and other Muslim communities were also impressed by colonial officers in the 19th century; they translated French and English texts into the Arabic language.

25   Ibid.

Rippin's essays in order to be able to translate John Wansbrough's ideas better. Among his early Persian translations of Rippin's works is "Literary analysis of the Qurʾān, *tafsīr*, and *sīra*. The methodologies of John Wansbrough," in 2000. Later, other young scholars including Mehrdād ʿAbbāsī, Sayed ʿAlī Āqāʾī, and Muḥammad Kāẓim Raḥmatī translated some of Rippin's works.

Apparently, the first Persian biography of Rippin was written by Raḥmatī and forms part of a section dedicated to "qurʾanic studies scholars of the world" in the *Golestān-e Qurʾān*, edited by Gholāmriḍā Nūʾī, in 2000.[26] It can be claimed that it was on account of these translations and writings that the Iranian public became familiar with the modern qurʾanic studies works of Rippin and his colleagues before other Muslim communities.[27] Moreover, the publication of the *EQ* and the growing translations and discussions on Western works about Islam and the Qurʾān by the aforementioned Iranian scholars drew attention to encyclopedia entries. Here, two types of translation were found. The first is a pure translation, with no analysis, while the second entails appraisals or critical translations, in which the author adds some notes to critically analyze such European-language works on the Qurʾān.

Regarding the first type, prior to translation, a scholar does not usually address Westerners' views on the "divinity," "accuracy," and "history" of the Qurʾān and revelation. On this subject, ʿAbbāsī was the first officially to establish a school of translation dedicated to encyclopedia entries and Western qurʾanic publications. Today, he, along with his colleagues Ḥossein Khandaqābādī, Masʿūd Ṣādiqī, and Amīr Māziyār, leads the editorial team at Hikmat Publications Inc., Tehran, with the academic translation of the *EQ* into Persian.

ʿAbbāsī, Karimi-Nia, Āqāʾī, and others have been trying to change public perceptions of such western scholars from being seen as Orientalists to being regarded as Western qurʾanic studies scholars by emphasizing their literature, methodology, and innovations, rather than their nationality, religion, or affiliation. Before reaching this position, ʿAbbāsī's first attempt was to translate Rippin's *tafsīr* entry that appeared in *EI2*, and in this, ʿAbbāsī declared that Rippin had aptly used various reliable sources and provided readers with fully-developed bibliographical data.[28]

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26   *Golestān-e Qurʾān* was/is a pioneering analytical journal which, along with similar journals such as *Pazhūhash-hā-yi Qurʾānī*, *Bayyināt* and others, have paid particular attention to new qurʾanic studies works worldwide.

27   It should be noted that, unlike, some Muslim communities, the Iranian public's general unfamiliarity with the English language was another reason for their eagerness to read the translated works of Western scholars.

28   Mehrdād ʿAbbāsī, Murūrī bar tārīkhcha-yi tafsīr va tafsīr nigārī, *Pazhūhash-hā-yi Qurʾānī* 35–6 (1382/2001), 200–25. Morteza Karimi-Nia also re-published the Persian translation

The second type of translation involves a critical reading of Westerners' works. Such scholars hold the view that most works in Islamic-qurʾanic studies written by Westerners deserve to be analyzed through the lens of Islamic teachings. A very early critical work on Rippin in Iran was by Aḥmad ʿAlī Ṣāhib Nāsī, who wrote an MA thesis in Persian entitled *A translation and review of some of Andrew Rippin's works*. The thesis addresses the second volume of Rippin's work *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices. The contemporary period*, and two articles written by David S. Powers and Issa J. Boullata in Rippin's *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān*.

Although it is unusual to find a Persian critical analysis of a Western qurʾanic work without translation, it is occasionally evident that some critical essays published in peer-reviewed journals (*ʿilmī pazhuhashī*) analyze the methodologies of western qurʾanic scholars. In an essay entitled "Analysis and criticism of Orientalists' qurʾanic studies," the authors argue that by analyzing Rippin's works, it becomes apparent he did not use reliable sources. They opine that Rippin was inattentive to Shīʿī exegetical works when attempting to elaborate on *taʾwīl* in his *tafsīr* entry and critique him for not referring to modern Iranian qurʾanic commentaries either. According to this essay, Rippin's main sources are *Isrāʾiliyyāt* acquired from early exegetical works such as the *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī or the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* of al-Kisāʾī. For instance, they argue that Rippin's reference to Noah's intoxication and the cursing of Ham for laughing loudly at his father Noah's nakedness is based on the works of al-Ṭabarī and al-Kisāʾī,[29] which are very weak compared to other Islamic sources. The authors questioned why Rippin did not mention that al-Ṭabarī is the only Islamic thinker who noted such trifling points. This part of the article ironically ends with: "these cases were merely some apparent sample works of a "scholar" who has been writing on qurʾanic studies since 1978 and is considered a prominent scholar in the West."[30]

Other works in the Iranian academic context attempt to analyze Rippin's view on the historiography of historical exegesis texts in line with John Wansbrough. It is argued that, according to Rippin, scrutinizing the *sanad* is not a *very* reliable criterion for dating a text. However, such scholars are confident that Rippin was significantly influenced by Wansbrough in terms of the

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of some of Rippin's works in a volume entitled *Zabān-e Qurʾān, tafsīr-e Qurʾān. Majmūʿa maqālāt-e Qurʾān-pazhūhi-yi gharbiyān* (Tehran 1392/2013), 187–219; 237–50; 303–14; 315–32.

29   B. Heller, and A. Rippin, Yāfit̲h̲, *EI2*.

30   Parvīz Āzādī and Majīd Maʿārif, Taḥlīl va naqd-e muṭāliʿāt-e Qurʾānī-yi mustashriqān, *Qurʾān-shinākht* 5/1 (2012), 125–54.

literal analysis which, according to the authors, is not sufficient for dating a text. In order to assess Rippin's statement regarding the similarity of the text of an interpretation ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās, one which is found with various titles, four different manuscripts are examined: (a) *Tafsīr al-Kalbī* (Istanbul, Hagia Sophia Library MS 118); (b) *Tanwīr al-miqbās min tafsīr ibn ʿAbbās*, ascribed to Fīrūzābādī, published in Beirut in 2006; (c) *Tanwīr al-miqbās min Tafsīr ibn ʿAbbās*, not ascribed to Fīrūzābādī but written in the margin of the Qurʾān; and (d) *Tafsīr Ibn Wahb al-musammā al-Wāḍiḥ*, ascribed to Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Wahb al-Dīnawarī, published in Beirut in 2003. In so doing, they confirmed the accuracy of Rippin's opinion that the texts of these *tafāsīr* are the same, with the differences being only due to transcription mistakes or printing errors.[31]

3.2.1 A List of the Persian Works on Rippin

(a) Persian Translations:

– Morteza Karimi-Nia, Taḥlīl-e adabī-ye Qurʾān, tafsīr va sīra. Nigāhī bi ravish-shināsi-yi Jān Wansbirū, *Pazhūhash-hā-yi Qurʾānī* 23/24 (1379/2000), 188–217 (translation of Rippin's "Literary analysis of Qurʾān, *sīra* and *tafsīr*. The methodologies of John Wansbrough")

– Muḥammad Kāẓim Raḥmatī, Vaḍʿiyat-e fiʿlī-yi muṭalaʿāt-e tafsīrī, *Kitāb-e māh-e dīn* 53/54 (1380–1/2001), 102–12 (translation of Rippin's "The present status of *tafsīr* studies")

– Aḥmad ʿAlī Ṣāhib Nāsī, *Tarjuma va naqd va barrasi-yi bakhsh-hā-yī az āthār-e Āndirū Rīpīn*, master's thesis, University of Qum, 1381/2002 ("Translation and review of some of Andrew Rippin's Works," part of which includes a partial translation of Rippin's *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices. Volume II. The contemporary period*)

– Mehrdād ʿAbbāsī, Murūrī bar tārīkhcha-yi tafsīr va tafsīr nigārī, *Pazhūhash-hā-yi Qurʾānī* 35–6 (1382/2003), 200–25. ("A review on the history of *tafsīr* and its writings"; translation of Rippin, Tafsīr, *EI2*)

– Morteza Karimi-Nia, Vazhigān-e dakhīl va taʿīn-e zabān-e khārijī-yi ānhā dar tafsīr-e Qurʾān, *Tarjumān-e Waḥy* 13 (1382/2003), 39–53 (translation of Rippin's *The designation of "foreign" languages in the exegesis of the Qurʾān*)

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31 Muḥammad ʿAlī Mahdavī Rād and Nuṣrat Nīlsāz, Tārīkhgudhāri-yi tafsīr-e mansūb bi Ibn ʿAbbās. Naqd-e ravish-e taḥlīl-e adabī-yi Wansbirū va Rīpīn, *Taḥqīqāt-e ʿulūm-e Qurʾān va ḥadīth* 3/6 (1385/2006), 27–64.

– Morteza Karimi-Nia, Nukāt-e Ravish-shinākhtī darbāra-yi faṣl-e chahārum-e kitāb-e muṭalaʿāt-e qurʾānī, *Taḥqīqāt-e ʿulūm-e Qurʾān va ḥadīth* 1 (1383/2004), 146–57. (translation of Rippin's *Quranic studies, part IV. Some methodological notes*)

– Sayed ʿAlī Āqāʾī, Qurʾān pazhūhī dar gharb, *Khirad-nāma hamshahrī* 21 (1386/2007), 63–5 (translation of Rippin's *Western scholarship and the Qurʾān*)

– Vaḥīd Ṣafarī, Dar ḥadīth-e dīgarān. Tafsīr-e Kitāb-e Muqaddas az tarīq-e Qurʾān *Khirad-nāma hamshahrī* 22 (1386/2007), 12 (translation of Rippin's *Interpreting the Bible through the Qurʾān*; also appeared in the Persian translation of *Approaches to the Qurʾān*, edited by A.A.M. Shareef and G. Hawting, entitled *Rahyāft-hā-yī bi Qurʾān* edited by Mehrdād ʿAbbāsī)

– Morteza Karimi-Nia, Shutur yā rīsmān. Ḥattā yalij al-jamal fī samm al-khiyāṭ, Aʿrāf 40, *Tarjumān-e Waḥy* 24 (1387/2008), 37–45 (translation of Rippin's: Qurʾān 7.40: Until the camel passes through the eye of the needle)

– Morteza Karimi-Nia, Dīdgāh-e Zarkashī va Suyūṭī dar bāb-e rivāyāt-e asbāb al-nuzūl *Tarjumān-e Waḥy* 27 (1389/2010), 92–107 (translation of Rippin's "al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī on the occasion of revelation' material")

– Abūlfaḍl Ḥurrī, Hunar-e jinās-sāzī dar Qurʾān, *Pazhūhash-hā-yi Qurʾānī* 17/67 (1390/2010), 70–99 (translation of Rippin's "The poetics of qurʾānic punning")

– Sayed ʿAlī Āqāʾī, Maqbūliyyat-e Dānish-pazhūhī-yi Urūpāyī-Āmrīkāʾī dar Bāb-e Qurʾān va Tafsīr, *Kitāb-e māh-e dīn* 16/192 (1392/2012), 66–9 (translation of Rippin's "The reception of Euro-American scholarship on the Qurʾān and tafsīr. An overview")

– Mehrdād ʿAbbāsī (ed.), *Rūykard-hā-yī bi Tārīkh-e Tafsīr-e Qurʾān*, Tehran 1392/2013 (translation of the whole of Rippin's edited volume *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān*)

– Mehrdād ʿAbbāsī, Iblīs, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān, the Persian translation of the EQ*, edited by Ḥossein Khandaqābādī, Masʿūd Ṣādiqī, Mehrdād ʿAbbāsī, and Amīr Māziyār (Tehran 1392/2013), vol. 1 (translation of Rippin, Iblīs, *EQ*)

– Mehrdād ʿAbbāsī, Abū Bakr, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān*, vol. 1 (translation of Rippin, Abū Bakr, *EQ*)

– Mehrdād ʿAbbāsī, Abū Lahab, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān*, vol. 1 (translation of Rippin, Abū Lahab, *EQ*)

– Morteza Karimi-Nia, Pīsh-guftār in *Bibliography of qurʾānic studies in European languages* (Qum 2013), 7–8 (translation of Rippin's *Foreword* to Karimi-Nia's volume).

– Sayed ʿAlī Āqāʾī, Asbāb nuzūl, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān*, vol. 1 (translation of Rippin, Occasions of revelation, *EQ*)

– Sayed ʿAlī Āqāʾī, Bāzargānī, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān*, vol. 1 (translation of Rippin, Trade and commerce, *EQ*)

– Ḥasan Riḍāʾī, Ashaʿyāʾ/Ishaʿyā, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān*, vol. 1 (translation of Rippin, Isaiah, *EQ*)

– Muḥammad Ṭāhir Riyāḍī, Aʿdād va shumārish, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān*, vol. 1 (translation of Rippin, Numbers and enumeration, *EQ*)

– Ḥasan Riḍāʾī, Tadhīn, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān, the Persian translation of the EQ*, edited by Ḥossein Khandaqābādī, Masʿūd Ṣādiqī, Mehrdād ʿAbbāsī, and Amīr Māziyār (Tehran 1393/2014), vol. 2 (translation of Rippin, Anointing, *EQ*)

– Amīr Māziyār, Ḥudaybiya, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān*, vol. 2 (translation of Rippin, Ḥudaybiya, *EQ*)

– Saʿīd ʿAdālat-nizhād, Shahādat, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān, the Persian translation of the EQ*, edited by Ḥossein Khandaqābādī, Masʿūd Ṣādiqī, Mehrdād ʿAbbāsī, and Amīr Māziyār (Tehran 1394/2015), vol. 3 (translation of Rippin, *Witness to faith*, *EQ*)

– Ḥossein Khandaqābādī, Shayṭān, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān*, vol. 3 (translation of Rippin, Devil, *EQ*)

– Amīr Māziyār, Sabbat, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān*, vol. 3 (translation of Rippin, Sabbath, *EQ*)

– Sayyida Zahrā Muballigh, Rang-hā, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān*, vol. 3 (translation of Rippin, Colors, *EQ*)

– ʿAbbās Ḥāj Zaynul-ʿābidīnī, Dīdan va shanīdan, *Dāʾira al-maʿārif-e Qurʾān*, vol. 3 (translation of Rippin, Seeing and hearing, *EQ*)

– Sayed ʿAlī Āqāʾī, Zuhrī, naskh al-Qurʾān va muʿḍal-e mutūn-e tafsīrī-yi kuhan, *Āyina Pazhūhash* 26/156 (1394/2016), 12–24 (translation of Rippin's "al-Zuhrī, naskh al-Qurʾān and the problem of early tafsīr texts")

– Muḥammad ʿAlī Ṭabāṭabāʾī, Chi chīzī tafsīr-e Shīʿī-yi (pīshā-mudirn) rā taʿrīf mīkunad?, in Muḥammad ʿAlī Ṭabāṭabāʾī (ed.), *Tafsīr-e imāmiyya dar pazhūhash-hā-yi gharbī* (Tehran 1395/2016) (translation of Rippin's "What defines a (pre-modern) Shiʿi *tafsīr*? Notes towards the history of the genre of *tafsīr* in Islam, in light of the scholarly study of the Shiʿi contribution")

(b)   On Andrew Rippin and His Works:

– Muḥammad Kāẓim Raḥmatī, Shakl gīrī–yi dānish-e tafsīr-e Qurʾān, *Golestān-e Qurʾān* 116 (1381/2002), 29–30 (this is a note on Rippin's edited volume: *The Quran. Formative interpretation*)

– Muḥammad Kāẓim Raḥmatī, Qurʾān pazhūhān-e jahān 3. Andirū Rīpīn, *Golestān-e Qurʾān* 117 (1381/2002), 16–8 (an introduction to Andrew Rippin)

- Akbar Ṣādiqī, Murūrī bar pazhūhash-hā-yi Qurʾānī-yi Andirū Rīpīn, *Kitāb-e māh-e dīn* 70/71 (1382/2003), 76–81 (A review of Andrew Rippin's work on qurʾanic studies)
- Javād Qāsimī, Muʿarrifī va naqd-e kitāb. chakīdiʾī az kitāb-e sākhtār-hā-yi adabī-yi mafāhīm-e dīnī dar qurʾān, *Mishkāt* 79 (1382/2003), 139–46 (A review of Boullata's edited volume *Literary structures of religious meaning in the Qurʾān*, in which the Rippin's chapter "'Desiring the face of God.' The qurʾānic symbolism of personal responsibility" is reviewed)
- Muḥammad ʿAlī Mahdavī Rād and Nuṣrat Nīlsāz, Tārīkhgudhārī-yi tafsīr-e mansūb bi Ibn ʿAbbās. Naqd-e ravish-e taḥlīl-e adabī-yi Wansbirū va Rīpīn, *Taḥqīqāt-e ʿulūm-e Qurʾān va ḥadīth* 3/6 (1385/2006), 27–64 ("Dating a commentary ascribed to Ibn ʿAbbās. A critical view of the literary analysis method of Wansbrough and Rippin")
- Parvīz Āzādī, Naqd va barrisī-yi naẓariyyi-yi tafsīrī-yi Andirū Rīpīn darbāra-yi āya 95-e Sūri-yi Anbiyāʾ, *Pazhūhash-nāma-yi ʿulūm va maʿārif-e Qurʾān-e karīm* 2 (1388/2009), 31–46 ("A review assessment of interpretative account of Andrew Rippin dealing with verse 95 of *Sūrat al-Anbiyāʾ*")
- Samar Pūrmuḥsin, Barrisi-yi dū kitāb-e dānish-nāma-yi Qurʾān, vīrāsti-yi Ulīvir Līman; Rāhnamā-yi Qurʾān-e Bilakvil, vīrāsti-yi Andirū Rīpīn, *Kitāb-e māh-e dīn* 149 (1388/2009), 38–41 (Persian Translation of a "Review on two encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān edited by Oliver Leaman, Blackwell companion to the Qurʾan, edited by Andrew Rippin")
- Sayed Mūsavī, Zandagī nāma-yi Andirū Rīpīn ("Biography of Andrew Rippin" [online source])

3.3 *The South- and South East Asian Context*[32]

Towards the East, a number of translated essays have apparently been published by South Asians. Although far fewer than those produced by Iranians, they have published some critical essays targeting the methodology or perspective of "Orientalists." Some of these refer to the *mis*guidance, *mis*understanding, and *mis*reading of Westerners.[33] However, a few informative essays familiarize Pakistani-Indian scholars with the efforts of Rippin. For instance, Tauseef Ahmad Parry emphasized Rippin's and McAuliffe's important contributions to the history of Islamic interpretations in:

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32   It is possible that there are a larger number of works on Rippin and his publications in the Malay-Indonesian World than I have found for, and discussed in, this study.

33   See, for example: Hafiz Muhammad Ajmal et al., Qurʾanic diacritical marks and dot-system and the Orientalists. A critical study," *Hazara Islamicus* 4/1 (2015), 1–18.

– Western scholarship on qur'anic studies in 21st century. A brief study of the contribution of Jane D. McAuliffe and Andrew Rippin, *Hazara Islamicus* 1/2 (2012), 1–10.

Not surprisingly, it is very hard to find informative essays about, or translations of, works by Western qur'anic studies scholars in the Malay-Indonesian world, where local scholars and students mostly see Western qur'anic studies scholars as Orientalists who attempt to *deny* the divinity of the Qur'ān. This could be related to the significant influence of Arabo-centric sources/institutes on Malay Islamic works as well as the historical Malay connection with Azharis and Meccan scholars, groups that have both shaped an inflexible, one-sided perspective on Islam with an emphasis on tradition (*naql*). An example of this one-sided viewpoint is the translation of the Arabic *Mawsū'a al-mustashriqīn* (*Encyclopaedia of Orientalists*) into Indonesian in January 2003. Although the original Arabic work is mostly a biographical/bibliographical sketch of Western scholars of Islam,[34] the cover of the translated version reveals what the Malay-Indonesian popular [*anti-*]Orientalist concept is. The cover shows a man wearing a coat and tie with a bilateral face, one side being a human face and the other side a monster's (or pig's) head.[35] Also, the primary source at some Malaysian universities for teaching a course on "The Qur'ān and Orientalists" is the Malay translation of 'The sublime Quran and Orientalism" by Mohammad Khalifa, one that presents a very critical view of Western scholars of Islam.
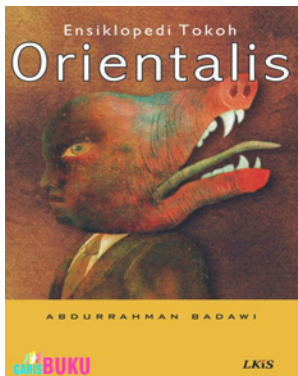
FIGURE 19.1
Book cover of Ensiklopedi Tokoh Orientalis (English translation: *Encyclopaedia of Orientalists*) *demonstrating an anti-Orientalist concept in the Malay-Indonesian World. This book is the Indonesian translation of the original work in Arabic by Abdurrahman Badawi, published by Penerbit LKis, 2005.*
COVER DESIGNED BY NURUDDIN.

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34   'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Mawsū'a al-mustashriqīn*, Beirut 1993².

35   'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, *Ensiklopedi tokoh orientalis*, trans. Amroeni Drajat, Yogyakarta 2003.

Furthermore, because of the socio-political supervision by the religious authorities, the translation process of Western qur'anic works is slow in the Malay-Indonesian world in general and Malaysia in particular. It is important to note the fact that, despite Darwin's work being available in original languages in Malaysia's bookstores, the distribution of translated copies to the general public, and particularly to the younger generation, is banned.[36]

However, their slightly more flexible context (due to different factors) allows Indonesians to translate the Islamic-qur'anic works of non-Muslims. As in Iran, a very early Indonesian translation of Rippin's work is his chapter pertaining to John Wansbrough's methodology, which is included in R.C. Martin's *Approaches to Islam in religious studies*, translated by Zakiyuddin Bhaidhawy in 2001:

– Andrew Rippin, Analisis sastra terhadap al-Qur'an, tafsir, dan sirah. Metodologi John Wansbrough, in Richard C. Martin (ed.), *Pendekatan kajian Islam dalam studi Agama*, trans. Zakiyuddin Bhaidhawy (Surakarta 2001), hlm 201.

As mentioned earlier, Rippin is known as a *murīd* of his master Wansbrough, which is why his views are often found under the canopy of studies on Wansbrough. In a Malay classification of Orientalists' "attacks" on *ḥadīth* (*serangan orientalis terhadap hadits*), Rippin's name is mentioned after Wansbrough:[37]

TABLE 19.1   *A Malay-Indonesian classification of "Orientalist" attacks on* ḥadīth

Ḥadīth *and its* Text	Ḥadīth *and its* Isnād	Ḥadith, *History and* Sīra	Ḥadīth, *Islamic Law and* Fiqh	Tafsīr (tafsīr ḥadīthī)
Sprenger	Horovitz	Kister	Schacht	Wansbrough
Muir	Schacht	Scholler	Powers	Rippin
Goldziher	Juynboll	Motzki	Calder	Gilliot

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36   *Why are some books banned in Malay but allowed in English*: <http://www.malaysia-today.net/why-are-some-books-banned-in-malay-but-allowed-in-english/>.

37   Syamsuddin Arif, *Orientalis dan diabolisme pemikiran* (Jakarta 2008), 44.

The works of Rippin, which do not outnumber those of other editors and some contributors of the *EQ*, are frequently seen in the Indonesian context. The following, related to his fellows' works, include Rippin's studies as well:

– Toha Hamim, *Menimbang kejujuran akademik kaum orientalis dalam kajian keislaman*, UIN Surabaya 2008 ("Considering the academic integrity of Orientalists in Islamic studies")
– Ihwan Agustono, *Sejarah perkembang framework orientalis barat dalam studi al-Qur'an* (*kajian atas pendekatan angelika neuwirth dalam analisis teks al-qur'an*), Ph.D. diss., UIN Sunan Ampel 2011 ("A study of the approach of Angelika Neuwirth in the analysis of qur'anic texts")
– Lien Iffa Naf'atu Fina, *Pre-canonical reading of the Qur'an. Studi atas metode Angelika Neuwirth dalam analisis teks al-Qur'an berbasis surat dan intertekstualitas*, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, 2011 ("Pre-canonical reading of the Qur'ān. A study of Angelika Neuwirth's methodology in qur'anic text analysis according to chapter and intertextuality")

There is also an article on Rippin that claims he is a follower of Wansbrough in literary analysis but that he is in disagreement with the latter's emphasis on the theological-historical approach:

– A. Faisal Bakti, Diskursus al-Qur'ān dan neo-Orientalisme. Apresiasi dan kritik terhadap kajian Andrew Rippin, *Jurnal studi al-Qur'ān* 1/2 (2006) 75–86 ("A discourse on the Qur'ān and neo-Orientalism. Appreciation and criticism of Andrew Rippin's Studies")

The popularity of blogs and online non-academic sources in the Malay-Indonesian World leads to a large online database of Rippin's thoughts, including the following:

– A. Faisal Bakti, Paradigma Andrew Rippin dalam studi tafsir ("Andrew Rippin paradigm in *tafsīr* studies"), available at https://c3huria.wordpress.com/2015/01/30/paradigma-andrew-rippin-dalam-studi-tafsir/.
– Andrew Rippin dan William Montgomery Watt ("Andrew Rippin and William Montgomery Watt"), available at: http://sangperaihimpian.blogspot.co.nz/2012/02/tokoh-tokoh-orientalisme-andrew-rippin.html/.
– Kritik Andew Rippin terhadap *asbab an-nuzul* al-Qur'an ("Andrew Rippin's criticism of *asbāb al-nuzūl* al-Qur'ān"), available at: http://oimbocahmanut.blogspot.co.nz/2014/05/kritik-andew-rippin-terhadap-asbab.html/.

– Hasnan Adip Avivi, Lawrence Andrew Rippin beserta pemikiran Orientalisnya ("Andrew [Lawrence] Rippin and his Orientalist thought"), available at: <http://hasnanadip.blogspot.co.nz/2015/05/lawrenceandrew-rippin-beserta-pemikiran.html/>.

– Tokoh-Tokoh, Orientalis ("Orientalists"), available at: <http://santribloggerr .blogspot.co.nz/2013/08/tokoh-tokoh-orientalis.html/>.

In a volume entitled *Kajian Orientalis terhadap al-Qurʾan dan hadis* ("Orientalist study of the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth*"), the editor begins by mentioning that although some ideas originating from Orientalists are not accurate and are against the nature of Islam, the value of the Qurʾān as a guide for all human beings is not reduced in the eyes of Muslims.[38] The second part of the book consists of several chapters, one of which is *Andrew Rippin dan kajian kritik sastra terhadap al-Qurʾān* ("Andrew Rippin and the critical study of the literature of the Qurʾān").

This study distinguishes Rippin from other Orientalists, in that, unlike them, "Rippin has visited Islamic regions such as Egypt and Turkey. He is also proficient in the Arabic language. He is quite critical not only of Muslim exegetes of the Qurʾān but also of Orientalists." This study indicates that although Rippin inherited many of his ideas from Wansbrough, in contrast to Wansbrough, he keenly used works written by Muslims, such as Ibn Isḥāq and Ibn ʿAbbās in his studies:

– M. Thoharul Fuad and Abdul Basit, Andrew Rippin dan kajian kritik sastra terhadap al-Qurʾān, in Mohammad Anwar Syarifuddin (ed.), *Kajian Orientalis terhadap al-Qurʾān dan hadits* (Jakarta 2012), 105–8.

4   Final Remark

Despite the one-sided criticism, there are currently some Muslim scholars attempting to reconcile Western works with the Qurʾān and Muslim academia. To replace the notion of "Orientalists" with that of "Western qurʾanic studies scholars," Iranians initially founded an unbiased translation movement to familiarize Iranian readers with Western publications, while the multi-racial and cultural context of the Malay-Indonesian World assisted a new genera-

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38   Mohammad Anwar Syarifuddin (ed.), *Kajian Orientalis terhadap al-Qurʾān dan hadits* (Jakarta 2012), vol. 1.

tion of scholars to study the original works of Western scholars. In this regard, Andrew Rippin presented a collection of "careful, subtle, and non-polemic"[39] works that are currently well-received, translated, and analyzed by Muslims in varying parts of the Muslim world. Now, his works are in the right place at the right time![40]

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39   As Pregill has mentioned in his chapter in this volume.

40   This is the expression he would use when I obtained new positions (you are in the right place at the right time).

A Concluding Appreciation

Jane McAuliffe

In April 1985, Andy Rippin hosted a conference in Calgary, Canada. It was an ambitious undertaking, gathering a group of internationally-renowned scholars for three days of papers and presentations on "The history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān." Those who participated included many of the leading figures in the field. They arrived from the United States, from Canada, and from Europe: Charles Adams, Mahmoud Ayoub, Issa Boullata, Gerhard Böwering, Fred Denny, M.J. Kister, Fred Leemhuis, and David Powers, among others. Most of their presentations were later reworked as chapters in an influential book, *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān* (Oxford 1988).

Andy himself was then a recently-tenured Associate Professor at the University of Calgary, eager to introduce his university and his newly-adopted city to those of us who had never ventured to the province of Alberta. My (admittedly fallible) memory tells me that this was the first time that I ever met Andy. It was certainly not, however, the first time that I had ever heard about him. In those years, the 1970s and 1980s, Canada could boast of two major graduate programs in Islamic Studies, one in Toronto, the other in Montreal. I was a student in the Toronto program, the Department of Middle East and Islamic Studies (MEIS) at the University of Toronto. This department was launched in the 1960s by a group of Oxbridge and SOAS expats, and included such luminaries as Roger Savory (Persian history), G.M. Wickens (Arabic and Persian literature), Eleazar Birnbaum (Turkish literature), Michael Marmura (Islamic philosophy and theology), and G.M. Meredith-Owens (Islamic art). Visiting scholars frequently supplemented this cohort of permanent faculty, invited either by MEIS or by the neighboring graduate Centre for Religious Studies. I especially enjoyed seminars that I took with both Peter Brown and William Montgomery Watt.

As students at Toronto, we were keenly aware of our sister department in Montreal, the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University. The Institute was founded about a decade before Toronto's MEIS and from its inception it housed an excellent departmental library, a major asset for any graduate program. The vision of the Institute was shaped by some of its first faculty, scholars such as Wilfred Cantwell Smith (comparative religion and founder of the Institute), Charles Adams (Islamic religion), Issa Boullata (Arabic literature), Hermann Landolt (Sufism), and Donald Little (Mamlūk history). Andy, who benefited from the opportunity of working with these scholars, received his

Ph.D. from McGill's Institute of Islamic Studies in 1981 with a dissertation entitled *The Quranic* asbāb al-nuzūl *material. An analysis of its use and development in exegesis*. By the time his degree was conferred, he was already well-known beyond the city limits of Montreal. Certainly, his reputation as a young star in qur'anic studies had reached those of us at the University of Toronto who were also writing dissertations on the Qur'ān and its commentaries.

In his introduction to the aforementioned volume, Andy linked the 1984 Calgary conference to the lectures that Ignace Goldziher had prepared for presentation in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1913. Although never actually delivered, Goldziher's lectures were published in 1920 as *Die Richtungen der islamishchen Koranauslegung*, the most influential volume on qur'anic *tafsīr* to be published in the early twentieth century. Recognizing that Goldziher's work had been supplemented by the studies of others, but never superseded, Andy embraced the challenge of bringing *tafsīr* studies to a new level of coordination and comprehensiveness. Rereading this introduction after the passage of almost thirty years, I was struck by the way it provides a prelude and prolegomena to the major themes and topics of Andy's subsequent scholarly achievements.

For scholars in the humanities, particularly those in literary studies, the 1980s saw an explosion of interest in critical theory. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Andy wading into issues like "the author's intention" and the quest for the "original" or "real" meaning of a text, as he embarks upon the project of reassessing the Islamic exegetical enterprise. Acknowledging the complexity of these hermeneutical dilemmas within the domain of qur'anic studies, Andy takes the concept of "reader reaction" or "reader response" – that is, "the notion that a text does not exist in any real sense without a reader to react to and with the text"[1] – as a promising perspective on the study of the Qur'ān:

> To re-create a history of the reaction to the Qur'ān in terms of what people have actually thought it means, through an analysis of exegetical texts, appears to be a most appropriate, intellectually convincing, and rewarding task for the modern scholar of the Qur'ān.[2]

Andy imagined *Approaches* to be the first step in such a monumental project, an overview of qur'anic exegesis, not, in the manner of Goldziher, as a single-authored monograph, but rather as a multi-authored collection of essays that

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1 Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qur'ān* (Oxford 1988), 4.
2 Ibid.

could chart the research trajectories that would guide the future development of the field.

The Calgary conference and subsequent publication of its papers were part of a late twentieth-century increase in scholarly attention devoted to qurʾanic commentary as an enduring aspect of Islamic intellectual endeavor. A proliferation of research and publication began to draw increasing numbers of graduate students to this topic, assuring a bright future for the field. As attention to *tafsīr* was growing, so was the larger field of qurʾanic studies.

The decade immediately preceding the Calgary conference had seen the publication of several studies on the Qurʾān's origins that sought to overturn the prevailing scholarly consensus. Among the most influential was John Wansbrough's (d. 2002) *Quranic studies*, first published in 1977. It was a watershed work that cut a chronological cleavage through the field and proposed a significant methodological reorientation. Andy had studied with Wansbrough and was thoroughly conversant with his scholarship in all of its complexity. In 2004, nearly 30 years after its first appearance, Prometheus Books republished *Quranic studies*. Andy's introduction to this reissue allowed him to revisit the controversy that the original publication stimulated and so place the project within a larger context. Starting with the nineteenth-century scholarship of Abraham Geiger and Theodor Nöldeke, and noting their debt to contemporaneous philological and biblical studies, Andy pointed to three influential volumes from the 1970s and 1980s, each of which "opened up a new range of approaches, a new inventory of questions to be asked, and a new set of paths to be followed" by future scholars of the Qurʾān.[3] The first of these was written by Toshihiko Izutsu (d. 1993), whose semantic analyses triggered much subsequent work on qurʾanic vocabulary. The second was by Angelika Neuwirth, who identified structural elements in the Qurʾan that argue for a liturgical background to the text. The third was, of course, by Wansbrough himself, who built upon the legal scholarship of Joseph Schacht and Ignaz Goldziher, as well as the manuscript studies of Fuat Sezgin, to raise anew the questions of the Qurʾān's stabilization and authorization. Looking back over almost three decades of "reader response" to Wansbrough's important volume, Andy suggested a more complex and time-tested reading of it, one that bridges the simplistic bifurcation between "trusting traditionalists" and "skeptical revisionists."

Andy's deep interest in the Islamic exegetical tradition and his thorough familiarity with the emerging trends in qurʾanic studies made him a perfect partner for a project that I launched in the late 1990s, the creation of a major

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3   John Wansbrough, *Quranic studies. Sources and methods of scriptural interpretation*, with foreword, translations, and expanded notes by Andrew Rippin (Amherst, NY 2004), x.

new reference work. The renewed attention in qur'anic studies that occurred in the late twentieth century was matched by an increasing awareness that relatively few reference works were available to support the field. Unlike the cognate area of biblical studies, which could boast of a new encyclopedia, dictionary, or concordance project every few years, qur'anic studies found itself severely under-resourced. Consequently, Brill Publishers in the Netherlands approached me with the idea of producing a dictionary or encyclopedia of the Qur'ān.

My first step in this undertaking was to recruit a group of colleagues who would be willing – and eager – to collaborate on the endeavor. Andy was the first person I called, soon followed by Claude Gilliot, Wadad al-Qadi, and Bill Graham. Within a few months we found ourselves in Leiden engaged in two days of intense, productive discussion. We sketched the shape of the project and decided that it would be interdisciplinary, it would be summative, it would draw upon a multiplicity of scholarly perspectives, and it would be an encyclopedia rather than a dictionary. The latter decision grew out of an awareness that we wanted to combine alphabetically-arranged lemmata on all the major themes, individuals, places, and topics of the Qur'ān with a series of much longer essays. These would be comprehensive, state-of-the-field surveys on subjects such as "Archaeology and the Qur'ān," "Literature and the Qur'ān," and "Politics and the Qur'ān."

This Leiden meeting fixed the direction of the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (*EQ*) and began to shape the subsequent editorial decisions that we made. A key decision was to aim for broad academic accessibility. We wanted to produce a reference work that would benefit scholars and students of Islamic studies and those from other fields, such as religious studies, political science, comparative literature, sociology, and anthropology. We also wanted the work to be usable by the general, educated reader. A year later we met in Toronto and refined the vision. We debated matters of format (volumes or fascicles?) and timing (sequential or simultaneous publication?). We argued vigorously over language: should our entry words be in transliterated Arabic, as had been the custom with the first two editions of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, or should they be in English? Eventually, the earlier Leiden decisions about accessibility carried the day. If we wanted the *EQ* to be useful to a wide audience of scholars and non-scholars, we needed English-language lemmata. Finally, we had to grapple with the scope of the project. Should we restrict ourselves to the Qur'ān, or include its commentary tradition (*tafsīr*) as well. Here, the constraints of print publication prevailed. At least for the first edition of the *EQ*, we kept the focus on the Qur'ān while realizing, of course, that authors would draw extensively on the *tafāsīr* in the composition of their articles.

Andy's was a key voice in each of these decisions and his influence was felt at every turn of the project's development. It gave me great pleasure, therefore, to open the first volume of the EQ upon its publication in 2001, and see that the author of the very first article (Aaron) was Andy himself. He would go on to contribute 18 more articles to the EQ's five volumes, covering such topics as anointing, colors, John the Baptist, and tools for the study of the Qur'ān.

These nineteen articles, however, represent only a fraction of Andy's productivity. By any standards, his scholarly output has been prodigious. Here are the counts from his most recent CV: 23 books, 41 book chapters, 31 journal articles, 185 book reviews, and 100s of entries in encyclopedias and reference works (including 66 in Routledge's *Encyclopaedia of Islam* alone). While it would be impossible in a short reflection to do justice to this wealth of publication, I would like to draw attention to a few areas: (1) Andy's efforts to expand the range of primary source material available to teachers; (2) his role in honoring the legacy of Norman Calder; and (3) his service to our field by making seminal articles of qur'anic studies more easily available.

In 1986, Andy published, in collaboration with his co-editor Jan Knappert, *Textual sources for the study of Islam* (Manchester University Press). I still keep that slim volume on my shelf and vividly recall the pleasure with which I first opened it. Like previous anthologies of Islamic religious texts prepared as introductory textbooks, this one had the expected selections from the Qur'ān, the canonical collections of *ḥadīth*, and the writings of al-Ghazālī. But, unlike earlier efforts, it also introduced students to Swahili prayer-songs, the Baha'i leader Shogi Effendi, and extracts on *taṣawwuf* from an ancient Indonesian manuscript. *Textual sources* arrived on the scene just as the field was rapidly expanding its geographical gaze beyond the core lands of the Middle East and, in the manner of Cifford Geertz's *Islam observed*, exploring the world-wide variety of "Islams."

A few years later, Andy published two introductory textbooks that also marked an innovative move within that genre. The first volume of *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices* was entitled *The formative period*, and was published in 1990. The second, *The contemporary period*, came out three years later (a revised second edition, combining both volumes, was published in 2001).[4] Unlike other textbooks ordinarily assigned for introductory courses to Islam, these sought to make the more contemporary scholarly understandings

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4 Andrew Rippin, *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices*, London-New York 2001². The two volumes of the first editions are *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices. Volume 1. The formative period*, London-New York 1990, and *Volume 2. The contemporary period*. London-New York 1993.

of Islamic origins accessible to students at the beginning of their studies. Andy recognized the growing disconnect that had developed in the 1980s and 1990s between the work being done by scholars of early Islam and the depiction of this period in college textbooks. He lamented the flaws that characterized most introductory works – the naïve historicism, the lack of critical analysis, and the unwillingness to acknowledge the ideological and theological presuppositions of the classical sources. In quite simple terms, Andy suggested that "the attempt to write a very general textbook such as this, one which paints its picture in very large brush strokes and suggests – in some places at least – a modified view of the accepted version of the emergence, development and future directions of Islam, is worthwhile and potentially fruitful for students."[5]

Norman Calder was a brilliant British Orientalist who died in 1998, just two years shy of his fiftieth birthday. His books and articles sparkled with literary allusions and linguistic erudition. The brief biography that prefaces a Festschrift[6] published after Calder's death sketches the story of a young Scotsman who studied Arabic and Persian at Oxford, lived and travelled in the Middle East, and eventually found himself at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London. At SOAS his studies with the renowned Persianist Ann K.S. Lambton culminated in a thesis on Imāmī Shīʿī jurisprudence, while his work with John Wansbrough shaped further directions in his scholarship. Andy's contribution to Calder's memorial volume[7] pays particular homage to the latter's work in *tafsīr* studies, with special praise accorded to the long article that Calder wrote for a collection edited by G.R. Hawting and A.K.A. Shareef, a piece that remains an important assessment of the genre's literary structures.[8]

Six years after the publication of this Festschrift, Andy collected Norman Calder's journal articles and book chapters, including two that had been published posthumously, into a Variorum volume co-edited with Jawid Mojaddedi. While Andy's introduction to this publication does not replicate the Festschrift's biographical essay, it generously conveys the esteem, admiration, and affection for Norman Calder that prompted his effort to make Calder's writing more conveniently available. While exploring the intellectual influences on Calder and

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5 Rippin, *Muslims* (2nd ed.), 2.

6 Gerald R. Hawting, Jawid A. Mojaddedi, and A. Samely (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern texts and traditions in memory of Norman Calder*, Oxford 2000.

7 Andrew Rippin, The exegetical literature of abrogation. Form and content, in Hawting et al (eds.) *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern texts and traditions*, 213–31.

8 Norman Calder, Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr. Problems in the description of a genre, illustrated with reference to the story of Abraham, in G.R. Hawting and A.K.A. Shareef (eds.), *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān* (Oxford 1988), 101–40.

the emergence of his "distinctive writing style and methodology," this introduction also seeks to capture some sense of the engaging personality that drew colleagues to Norman Calder. Andy does so by quoting from a personal letter that he received from Calder, a quotation that reveals as much about the recipient's sense of humor as it does that of the writer. Elegantly expressing his frustration with an early computer, Calder writes: "You then have to placate, cajole and persuade it to action; a process that usually ends in depriving it of electricity as the only way of stopping it from getting over-excited and quite mad. This Firm Disciplinary Training has so far had no discernible effect on the manners or general deportment of my machine." The willingness to reproduce this missive says much about Andy's desire to keep Norman Calder's whimsical personality, as well as his significant scholarship, available to a new generation of readers.

A third area of scholarly publication that Andy has pursued also involves collecting and categorizing significant contributions to qur'anic studies. At the turn of the millennium he produced two volumes for Ashgate Publishing, *The Qur'an. Formative interpretation* (1999), and *The Qur'an. Style and contents* (2001).[9] The articles in the first volume range from Claude Gilliot's masterful overview of early *tafsīr*, first published in the *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée*, to John Burton's famous article about Q 53 that initially appeared in the *Journal of Semitic Studies*.[10] Andy's introduction to this collection expands upon some of the themes first expressed in his 1988 conference volume. Recognizing that the field of *tafsīr* studies continues to be stimulated by the publication of early texts, he quickly highlights, however, the varying scholarly quality of recent editions and the subsequent debates surrounding authenticity and dating. This is especially prominent with that subset of publications that attempt to reconstruct very early *tafāsīr* on the basis of attributions found in later texts.

The second Ashgate volume shifted the focus from the Qur'ān's interpretation to the text itself. Again, Andy assembled a significant group of studies that deal with such matters as the sources of the Qur'ān, its philological and semantic analysis, and attempts to understand the relationship of the Qur'ān, in its

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9   Andrew Rippin (ed.) *The Quran. Formative interpretation*, Aldershot, UK-Burlington, VT 1999. and *The Qur'an. Style and contents*, Aldershot, UK-Burlington, VT, 2001. Mention should also be made of Andy's own Variorum collection: *The Qur'ān and its interpretative tradition*, Aldershot, UK-Burlington, VT 2001.

10   Claude Gilliot, Les débuts de l'éxègese coranique, trans. Michael Bonner in *Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée* 58 (1990), 82–100; John Burton, Those are the high-flying cranes, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 15 (1970), 246–65.

considerable stylistic variety, to other early Arabic literary productions. As a turn-of-the-millennium effort, it is particularly interesting to revisit the predictions for future scholarly directions with which his introduction to the volume concludes. He points to the articles of Mohammed Arkoun (d. 2010), Michael Sells, and Norman O. Brown (d. 2002) as suggestive of new lines of investigation, and notes with dismay the way in which contemporary Islamist understandings of the Qurʾān collapse a rich and diverse exegetical heritage into a single, monological reading. I admire Andy's willingness to conclude the volume with the trenchant critique of Euro-American scholarship on the Qurʾān penned by Parvez Manzoor for the *Muslim World Book Review*.[11] Nothing better demonstrates Andy's ecumenical attitude to scholarly approaches and his willingness to welcome all informed voices to the discussion.

In 2007, Andy issued another collection of readings, this time under the imprint of the London publisher Equinox. Here the focus is "Islam" as a conceptual category and the multiple ways in which "Islamic" phenomena can be studied and understood. Category formation proceeds on multiple trajectories, depending on whether Islam is understood as a religion, a civilization, a people, or a culture. Consequently, Andy assembled a representative range of readings, cast a wide methodological net, and produced an interesting and relevant volume suited for both classroom instruction and a more general readership.[12]

As a supplement to – and a consequence of – his strenuous publishing program, Andy has been an indefatigable lecturer and conference participant. Over the years that I have been active in the field, I cannot recall ever attending a conference or symposium dedicated to the study of the Qurʾān where I did not encounter Andy. I am sure, of course, that I participated in only a fraction of all the meetings at which he was present. The world-wide range of his scholarly activity is also notable and worth detailing. Andy keeps a geographically-segmented list on his comprehensive CV, and although he does not explain his ordering principle, I am going to guess that it is chronological. Restricting the list to destinations beyond North America, here it is: in Europe – Manchester, London, Leeds, Cambridge, Oxford, Exeter, Groningen, Leiden, Bonn, Berlin, Frankfurt, Nijmegen, Aix-en-Provence, Bologna, Copenhagen, and Caen (France); beyond Europe – New Delhi, Jerusalem, Carthage, Kairouan, Alexandria, Sharjah, Dunedin (New Zealand), Istanbul, Ankara, Bursa, and Melbourne.

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11 S. Parvez Manzoor, Method against truth. Orientalism and qurʾānic studies, *Muslim World Book Review* 7 (1987), 33–49.

12 Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Defining Islam. A reader*, London 2007.

In addition to our common history as Canadian graduate students, our collaborative work on the *EQ*, and our frequent connection at conferences and symposia, Andy and I share another piece of professional history: academic administration. For more than 15 years (1994–2000), Andy was a dean. From 1994 – 1999 he was the Associate Dean (Student Affairs) of the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Calgary. In 2000, he moved from that post to become Dean of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Victoria. That latter position coincided almost exactly with my move from the University of Toronto to Georgetown University, where I became Dean of Arts and Sciences. During those years, whether we found ourselves together at scholarly conferences or at *EQ* editorial meetings, I know that our conversations not infrequently wandered from the intellectual intricacies of qur'anic studies to the triumphs and tribulations of academic deaning.

With these conversations in my memory, I was delighted to stumble upon a blog that Andy kept in the last two years of his decade as a humanities dean and then for several years thereafter. His first entry for this online diary is aptly called "The Dean's First Blog." Fortunately, it is not a record of administrative trivia and travails but rather a reflection on backpacking or, or more precisely, the books one might profitably tote along on a hiking trip. Later entries regale the reader with travelogues written from spots as far apart as a city-center hotel in Copenhagen, a ski-lodge in British Columbia, and the BA lounge at Heathrow. But I especially enjoyed those musings that touch upon his final days as a dean. These range from the snappy response to questions about what he will do after deaning – "A lot of hiking and kayaking" – to the simple logistics of downsizing from a large office and figuring out "what to do with the journals." And then there is the priceless piece penned on his very last day in office, a day that finds Andy looking forward to a promising future. The first bright spot on the horizon is the realization that stepping out of an administrative role will mean "no more Mr. Neat and Tidy!" The button down shirts, pressed pants, and – *mirabile dictu* – dress suit can be relegated to the back of the closet. An even happier anticipation is the forthcoming leave, a leave that Andy has calculated in full: 24 months or 731 days (including, as he carefully notes, the extra day provided by a leap year.)

I cannot resist closing this reflection, however, with my all-time favorite quote from Andy's blogging days: "I've always said that if I had to do my career over again I would choose to be a rock star." When I read that, I laughed out loud because I have long thought of Andy as the "Willie Nelson of Islamic Studies." Now, admittedly, Willie is country music not rock but anyone who sets Willie's picture next to that of Andy's will understand the comparison (and he did entitle one of his blog posts "On the Road Again"!). More importantly,

I find a larger truth in Andy's self-teasing comment. While he may not strut a stage Mick Jagger-style, Andy has been among the leading scholars in the field of Islamic studies for decades. His contributions have nurtured new forms of scholarly work, inspired both students and colleagues, and put the study of the Qurʾān squarely at the center of the field. In my book, that fully satisfies the requirements for "rock star."

Andrew Rippin : La sainte sagesse et le saint silence (Ἁγία Σοφία, Ἁγία σιγή)*

Claude Gilliot

J'ai rêvé d'élever une église au Silence, comme Sainte Sophie est dédiée à la Sagesse[1]

Si la mémoire ou le temps qui passe inexorablement n'a pas abîmé ou contrefait le souvenir, l'occasion de notre première rencontre avec Andrew Rippin fut une lettre que ce collègue, qui allait devenir bientôt un ami, nous écrivit de l'Université de Calgary, le 1er décembre 1984, alors que nous étions nousmême assistant du Professeur Mohammed Arkoun, de vénérée mémoire (*requiescat in pace !*), à l'Université Paris III, Sorbonne nouvelle. Loin d'une bibliothèque adaptée aux besoins d'un arabisant et d'un islamologue, Andrew faisait toujours de son mieux pour se tenir au courant des dernières parutions et des dernières éditions de textes arabes. Il s'est également toujours montré généreux dans l'envoi de ses tirés-à-part.

He wrote :

> Dear Prof. Gilliot : I have read your review of Werkmeister's book in *Studia Islamica*.[2] Thank you very much for including my work in the list of those calling into question Sezgin's theories ; it is always nice to discover that someone is reading the things I write.
>
> I was interested in the reference to your article 'Portrait "mythique" d'Ibn ʿAbbās' ; I would greatly appreciate receiving an offprint (or typescript) of this paper from you, if possible. I have enclosed, for your reference, offprints of some of my recent works.

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* Prononcé en français : *Haguia Sophia, haguia siguè*.
1 Maurice Zundel (1897-1975), *Notre Dame de la sagesse* (Paris 1983), 58 ; *Our Lady of wisdom*, trans. Francis Joseph Sheed (New York 1940), beginning of chap. IV.
2 Compte rendu par Claude Gilliot de : Walter Werkmeister, *Quellenuntersuchungen zum Kitāb al-ʿIqd al-farīd des Andalusiers Ibn ʿAbdrabbih (246/860-328-940). Ein Beitrag zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte* (Berlin 1983), *in Studia Islamica* 59 (1984), 193-5, où nous mentionions, 195 et n. 1 : Andrew Rippin, Ibn ʿAbbas' al-lughāt fī'l-Qurʾān, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44 (1981), 15-25.

Depuis lors ces échanges de tirés-à-part, mais aussi d'idées, n'ont jamais cessé entre nous. Nous nous sommes rencontrés lors de plusieurs colloques. Andrew nous a rendu visite pour la première fois à Paris le vendredi 27 février 1987 ; ce fut un grand événement, pour lequel nous louons la sainte Sagesse (Ἁγία Σοφία) et le saint silence (Ἁγία σιγή). En effet, nous avons été immédiatement frappé par le calme et la capacité d'attention de notre interlocuteur. Cette impression s'est vérifiée aussi lors des congrès ou des rencontres où nous nous retrouvions ensemble, par exemple pour la fondation de l'*Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, à Toronto, chez Jane Dammen McAuliffe, puis à Leiden chez Peri Bearman. Andrew sait attendre pour écouter et pour réfléchir, avant de prendre la parole.

Ce trait de caractère se montre notamment dans ses importantes contributions aux études musulmanes et, en particulier, coraniques. Ses analyses sont fines, les critiques qu'il adresse à ses collègues sont toujours retenues, mesurées et courtoises. Tout cela émane d'une âme contemplative et réfléchie en même temps que déterminée, par exemple, dans la recherche des meilleures éditions de sources arabes. Il était un lecteur assidu de nos « Textes arabes anciens édités en Egypte », avant que certains à l'IDEO du Caire ne décidassent de mettre fin à ce travail qui paraissait régulièrement dans le *MIDEO*, depuis 1954, à l'initiative du Père Georges Chéhata Anawati (*requiescat in pace !*).

Son regard à lui seul sait admirer, s'étonner, en véritable amant de la sainte Sagesse. Mais notre homme n'est pas pour autant un écoute-s'il-pleut[3] que fait reculer le moindre obstacle, car le caractère méditatif chez lui va de pair avec des activités sportives dans les torrents et sur les pentes neigeuses, au Canada ou ailleurs.

Le séjour que Andrew Rippin fit à Aix-en-Provence durant plusieurs mois en 1999 avec son épouse Beth fut un grand *kairos* intellectuel et humain pour nous-même. Andrew fait partie de ces hommes qui renforcent dans la conviction et la certitude que l'Homme, tout homme, est créé à l'image de Dieu (וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ /*et ait* [*Deus*] *faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram*, Gen. 1:26).

En ces temps de confusion intellectuelle, logique, et morale, de « selfisme » (*i.e.* narcissisme et « show business »), de relativisme, de chienlit, de massacres, à notre collègue et ami nous redisons avec le psalmiste ce que Dieu est pour lui à tout jamais, *in actu signato* et *in actu exercito*, mais aussi pour l'Homme, pour tout homme, avec l'une des métaphores si osées et si intimement vraies des psaumes : *Scapulis suis obumbrabit tibi* (*Dominus*) *et sub pennis ejus sperabis* (*Vulgata*, Ps. 90:4 ; *Dominica ad completorium*) (« He [the Lord] shall cover thee with his feathers, and under His wings shalt thou trust », Ps. 91:4).

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3   Peut-être en anglais : « somebody waiting for a dead man's shoes » !

Publications by Andrew Rippin[1]

Books

1. *Guide to Islam*, co-authored with David Ede, Leonard Librande, Donald P. Little, Richard Timmis, and Jan Weryho, Boston 1983.
2. *Textual sources for the study of Islam*, co-authored with Jan Knappert, Manchester 1986; reprint. Chicago 1990.
3. *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān* (ed.), Oxford 1988.
4. *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices. Volume 1. The formative period.* London-New York 1990.
5. *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices. Volume 2. The contemporary period.* London-New York 1993.
6. *The Qurʾan. Formative interpretation* (ed.), Aldershot, UK 1999.
7. *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices*, London 2001[2].
8. *The Qurʾan. Style and contents* (ed.), Aldershot, UK 2001.
9. *The Qurʾan and its interpretative tradition* (ed.), Aldershot, UK 2001.
10. *Classical Islam. A sourcebook of religious literature*, ed. Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, London 2003.
11. *Quranic studies. Sources and methods of scriptural interpretation*, by John Wansbrough, with foreword, translations, and expanded notes by Andrew Rippin, Amherst, NY 2004.
12. *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices*, London 2005[3].
13. *Blackwell companion to the Qurʾan* (ed.), Oxford 2006.
14. N. Calder, *Interpretation and jurisprudence in medieval Islam*, ed. J. Mojaddedi and A. Rippin (including 5-page Introduction), Aldershot UK, 2006.
15. *Defining Islam. A reader* (ed.), London 2007.
16. *Coming to terms with the Qurʾan. A volume in honor of Issa Boullata, McGill University* (ed. with Khaleel Mohammed), North Haledon, NJ 2008.
17. *The Islamic world* (ed.), London 2008.
18. *World Islam. Critical concepts in Islamic studies* (ed.), 4 vols., London 2008.
19. *Islam in the eyes of the West* (ed. with Tareq Ismael), London 2010.
20. *Muslims. Their religious beliefs and practices*, London 2012[4].
21. *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾan* (ed.), reprint. with new preface (pp. iii–iv) and minor corrections, Piscataway, NJ 2012.

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[1] Mainly based on Rippin's own CV, available at: http://web.uvic.ca/~arippin/.

22.   *Classical Islam. A sourcebook of religious literature*, Norman Calder, Jawid Mojaddedi, and Andrew Rippin, London 2013².

23.   *Books and written culture of the Islamic World. Studies presented to Claude Gilliot on the occasion of his 75th birthday* (ed. with R. Tottoli), Leiden 2014.

24.   *The Qurʾān in the Malay-Indonesian world. Context and interpretation* (ed. with Majid Daneshgar and Peter G. Riddell), London-New York 2016.

Book Chapters

1.   Literary analysis of Qurʾān, *sīra* and *tafsīr*. The methodologies of John Wansbrough, in R.C. Martin (ed.), *Approaches to Islam in religious studies* (Tucson, AZ 1985), 151–63, 227–32; reprint. Oxford 2001; reprint. in Ibn Warraq (ed.), *The origins of the Koran* (Amherst, NY, 1998), 351–63, 403–8.

2.   Saʿadya Gaon and Genesis 22. Aspects of Jewish-Muslim interaction and polemic, in William M. Brinner and Stephen D. Ricks (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Judaic traditions* (Atlanta 1986), 33–46.

3.   Introduction, in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān* (Oxford 1988), 1–9.

4.   Lexicographical texts and the Qurʾān, in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *Approaches to the history of the interpretation of the Qurʾān* (Oxford 1988), 158–74.

5.   RḤMNN and the Ḥanīfs, in Wael Hallaq and Donald P. Little (eds.), *Islamic studies presented to Charles J. Adams* (Leiden 1991), 153–68.

6.   Editor of "Islam" entries in John Hinnells (ed.), *Who's who of world religions*, London-New York 1992; reprint. as *Who's who of Religions*, Penguin 1996.

7.   Interpreting the Bible through the Qurʾān, in A.A.M. Shareef and Gerald Hawting (eds.), *Approaches to the Qurʾān* (London 1992), 249–59; a revised and enlarged version of the entry "Muslim interpretation of the Bible" in *A dictionary of Bible interpretation*, London 1990.

8.   The commerce of eschatology, in S. Wild (ed.), *The Qurʾan as text* (Leiden 1996), 125–35.

9.   Three commentaries on *surat al-Fatiha*, the opening, in J. Renard (ed.), *Windows on the house of Islam* (Berkeley 1998), 29–34.

10.   Introduction, in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *The Qurʾan. Formative interpretation* (Aldershot, UK 1999), xi–xxvii.

11.   "Desiring the face of God". The qurʾānic symbolism of personal responsibility, in I.J. Boullata (ed.), *Literary structures of religious meaning in the Qurʾān* (London 2000), 117–24.

12.   Muḥammad in the Qurʾān. Reading scripture in the 21st century, in Harald Motzki (ed.), *The biography of Muḥammad. The issue of the sources* (Leiden 2000), 298–309.

13. The exegetical literature of abrogation. Form and content, in G. Hawting, J. Modaddedi, and A. Samely (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Middle Eastern texts and tradition in memory of Norman Calder* (Oxford 2000), 213–31.

14. Introduction, in Andrew Rippin (ed.) *The Qurʾān. Style and contents* (Aldershot, UK 2001), xi–xxxiii.

15. Introduction, in Andrew Rippin (ed.) *The Qurʾān and its interpretative tradition* (Aldershot, UK 2001), ix–xix.

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21. Syriac in the Qurʾān. Classical Muslim theories, in Gabriel S. Reynolds (ed.), *The Qurʾan in its historical context* (London 2008), 249–61.

22. Metaphor and the authority of the Qurʾān, in K. Mohammed and Andrew Rippin (eds.), *Coming to terms with the Qurʾān. A volume in honor of Issa Boullata, McGill University* (North Haledon, NJ 2008), 47–62.

23. The Qurʾān (with Gordon Nickel), in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *The Islamic world* (London 2008), 145–56.

24. Introduction. Why should we study "World Islam," in Andrew Rippin (ed.), *World Islam. Critical concepts in Islamic studies* (London 2008), 1–11.

25. Introduction. Negotiating boundaries – crossings and defining the human and the divine, in R.S. Sabbath (ed.), *Sacred tropes. Tanakh, New Testament, and Qurʾan as literature and culture* (Leiden 2009), 143–5.

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33. Qurʾānic studies, in C. Bennett (ed.), *The Bloomsbury companion to Islamic studies* (London 2013), 59–74.

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41. Reading the Qurʾān on jihād. Two early exegetical texts, in Robert Gleave and István Kristo-Nagy (eds.), *Violence in Islamic thought from the Qurʾān to the Mongols* (Edinburgh University Press 2015), 31–46.

42. Introduction (with Majid Daneshgar and Peter G. Riddell) in Majid Daneshgar, Peter G. Riddell and Andrew Rippin (eds.), *The Qurʾān in the Malay-Indonesian world. Context and interpretation* (London-New York 2016), 1–6.

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45. Academic scholarship on the Qurʾan, in M. Shah and M. Abdel Haleem (eds.), *The Oxford handbook to the Qurʾan*, forthcoming.

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3. Ibn ʿAbbās's *al-Lughāt fīʾl-Qurʾān, Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 44 (1981), 15–25; reprinted in A. Rippin (ed.), *The Qurʾan. Formative interpretation*, Aldershot, UK 1999.

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13. Al-Zarkashī and al-Suyūṭī on the "occasion of revelation" material, *Islamic culture* 59 (1985), 243–58; reprinted as The function of the occasion of revelation material, in M. Taher (ed.), *Studies in Quran* (New Delhi 1997), 148–62.

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   al-Ṭabarī (14:231–3)
   tafsīr (14:236–44) [reprinted in A. Rippin, *The Qurʾān and its interpretative tradition*]
   al-Zamakhsharī (15:554–5)

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      London 1990.
      Muslim interpretation of the Bible (473–6)

3.   Articles in: *Who's who of world religions* (ed. John Hinnells), London 1992
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      ʿAbd al-Jabbār
      al-Ashʿarī●
      al-Bāqillānī
      al-Bayḍāwī
      Elijah Muhammad
      Ibn ʿAbbās
      Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb
      Ibrāhīm
      Iqbal
      Īsā
      Malcolm x
      al-Māturīdī●
      Mawdūdī
      Muḥammad●
      Mūsā
      al-Naẓẓām
      Sayyid Quṭb
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      Nāfiʿ al-Laythī   7:878
      sabt   8:689
      sadjda   8:740
      al-Ṣāffāt   8:798
      Ṣāliḥ   8:948
      Salsabīl   8:999
      Sām   8:1007

al-Sāmirī	8:1046 (revision of entry by B. Heller)
Sāra	9:26–7
sarāb	9:27
Shamsūn	9:300
Shamwīl	9:300
Shaʿyā	9:382–3
Shayṭān	9:408–9
Shuʿayb	9:491
Ṣiddīḳ	9:534–5
al-Sidjistānī	9:546–7
sidrat al-muntahā	9:550
tafsīr	10:83–8
tashahhud	10:340–1 (revision of entry by A.J. Wensinck)
taṣliya	10:358–9
al-Thaʿlabī	10:434
Ubayy	10:764–5
Waḥy	11:53–6 (revision of entry by A.J. Wensinck)
Warsh	11:152
Yāfith	11:236–7 (revision of entry by B. Heller)
Yaḥyā b. Zakariyyā	11:249
Yūnus b. Matta	11:347–9 (revision of entry by B. Heller)
Yushaʿ b. Nūn	11:351 (revision of entry by B. Heller)
Zakariyyāʾ	11:405–6 (revision of entry by B. Heller)
al-Zarkashī	12:842

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     Daʿwa, 129–30
     Fundamentalism (Islamic), 178–80
     Americas, Islam in, 27–9

6.   Articles in: *Encyclopaedia of Arabic literature* (ed. J. Meisami and P. Starkey),
     London 1998
     al-Bukhārī, 162
     Koran, 453–6
     Muslim, 556–7
     al-Zamakhsharī, 820–1

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     William Montgomery Watt, 1281

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	(English version: *Religion past and present* [Leiden 2008], Exegesis IX: Islam, 4:745–6)

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	Aaron, 1:1–2
	Abu Bakr, 1:20
	Abu Lahab, 1:20
	Anointing, 1:102–3
	Colors, 1:361–5
	Devil, 1:524–7
	Foreign vocabulary, 2:226–37
	Hudaybiya, 2:464
	Iblis, 2:473
	Isaiah, 2:562–3
	Jacob, 3:1–2
	John the Baptist, 3:51–2
	Numbers and enumeration, 3:549–54
	Occasions of revelation, 3:569–73
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