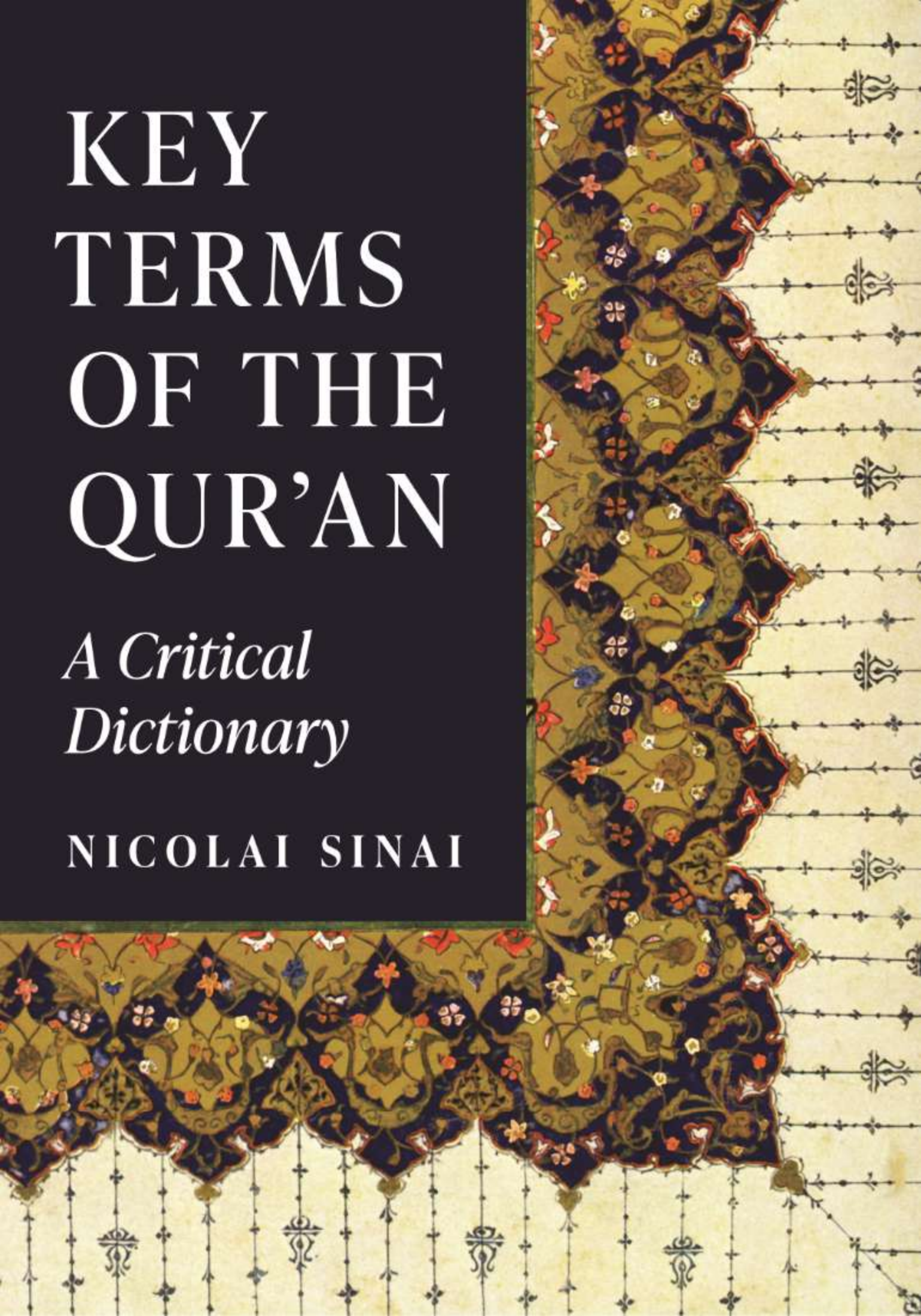


# KEY TERMS OF THE QUR'AN

*A Critical  
Dictionary*

NICOLAI SINAI



KEY  
TERMS  
OF THE  
QUR'AN



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# PREFACE



This book attempts to supply a historically oriented dictionary of key Qur’anic terms and phrases: I start with Qur’anic words and seek to grasp the concepts they denote and ultimately also to reconstruct the theology—which in this context means a certain vision of God, humans, and the cosmos—that arises from the interlacing of these concepts. The qualifier “historically oriented” is meant to signal that the book’s interest is in establishing, however hypothetically, what a given Qur’anic term would have meant to the Qur’an’s earliest recipients in early seventh-century western Arabia.

The book grew out of preliminary work towards a commentary on Surahs 1–3 that was undertaken in the framework of the research project *Qur’anic Commentary: An Integrative Paradigm (QuCIP)*, funded by the European Research Council under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 771047). As I discovered much more swiftly than I would have liked, a commentary volume of the sort I had in mind needed to include or be supplemented by an examination of a considerable number of frequently recurrent and theologically pivotal Qur’anic words, such as → *āyah* (meaning a natural or historical “sign” of God), → *kitāb* (“scripture”), or → *ittaqa* (“to be wary,” namely, of God). After initially attempting to meet this objective through a glossary of key terms, a self-standing book eventually imposed itself as the more appropriate format. For unlike ordinary dictionaries, I do not simply offer a certain number of approximate English equivalents of a given Arabic word. Rather, the entries that follow provide a discursive and, as per the book’s subtitle, “critical” account of how a particular Qur’anic word or phrase semantically functions in various scriptural contexts, and attempt to extract important aspects of Qur’anic theology that are bound up with the terms in question. In pursuing this objective, I work through diverse bodies of philological data and argue for or against a great number of interpretive claims, engaging with as much relevant prior scholarship as I have managed to track down and process. The dictionary’s entries therefore take the form of more or less concise scholarly essays on a certain word or group of words. This basic structure bears a certain resemblance to Mustansir Mir’s 1987 *Dictionary of Qur’anic Terms and Concepts*, although I have permitted myself to write at far greater length, reflecting the significant progress that the study of the Qur’an has made over the past thirty-five years.

As explained in more detail in the introduction, the dictionary’s basic approach is “concordantial,” which is to say that it aims to survey the way, or ways, in which a certain term or phrase is used across the entire Qur’anic corpus. This is essentially to practise what Muslim scholars have termed *tafsīr al-qur’ān bi-l-qur’ān*, “interpreting the Qur’an by means of the Qur’an.” In addition, and in contrast to the dictionary by Mir just mentioned, most of my entries cultivate a close interest in the connections between Qur’anic language and other textual corpora whose diction and content may be viewed as having had currency, in some shape or form, in the Qur’an’s historical milieu. These corpora principally include the Bible,

Christian and rabbinic texts, pre-Islamic Arabic poetry,<sup>1</sup> and Arabian epigraphy. I hope that my interest in identifying, where possible, close extra-Qur'anic parallels and precursors for the words and phrases I discuss will not come across as reductionist source-mongering, since I am concerned with ascertaining difference as much as similarity.<sup>2</sup>

As just noted, this is not a dictionary of the usual kind, which for Qur'anic Arabic has been superbly compiled by Arne Ambros (*CDKA*; see also Badawi and Abdel Haleem 2008). As a result, I have not felt obliged to produce an entry on every Qur'anic word, which would have turned this work into a multi-volume series. My general policy has been to concentrate on words and phrases that I deemed to carry significant theological, anthropological, or cosmological weight and that occur at least several times across different Qur'anic surahs, in many cases dozens or hundreds of times. For instance, the word → *āyah*, which designates sundry “signs” of God’s power and benevolence in nature and history but can also refer to textual units of the Qur’an, figures in more than 350 verses. Another example, of obvious theological significance, is → *allāh*, “God,” with almost 2,700 occurrences. Many other words that are extremely common are however omitted, such as the prepositions *min* and *fī* or the negator *lā*, all of which figure more than a thousand times. While my overarching preoccupation is with words that play a significant role in articulating the Qur’anic vision of God, humans, and creation at large, I have in some cases included entries on expressions that give rise to more narrowly linguistic problems if these have wider interpretive ramifications. Examples are → *la’alla* (“so that,” “perhaps”) and the demonstratives → *dhālika* and *tilka* (“that”). Even so, the present volume is silent on large parts of Qur’anic vocabulary. Other words are treated only in passing, in entries with which they are cross-referenced. Thus, the verbs *hawīya* and *ishtahā* (“to desire”) are briefly discussed under other headings, such as → *naḥs*, signifying the human “soul” or vital self, which the Qur’an presents as the wellspring of desires and appetites.

Despite my two guiding considerations of theological significance and frequency, the decision of which words and phrases to include has often been a subjective one. For instance, there is no entry on the verb “to say” (*qāla*). Admittedly, it has an abundance of occurrences, often precedes momentous statements attributed to the Qur’an’s opponents or historical protagonists, and also plays an important literary role in the way the Qur’an demarcates the voice of its divine speaker from that of its human conveyor, God’s “Messenger,” as well as the way in which the Qur’an stages debates between the Messenger and his audience (Ashraf 2018; *HCI* 12–14). But it seems to me that all of these matters are

1 On using reputedly pre-Islamic poetry in order to shed light on the Qur’an in a manner that minimises the danger of relying on fabricated material, see Sinai 2019b, 19–26 (with further references). For reasons of space, the present work will usually reference relevant poetic verses that are potentially pre-Islamic without seeking to come to a considered verdict on their authenticity.

2 For instance, with regard to Qur’anic verses affirming that God “sets a seal upon” the hearts of unbelievers I conclude that no meaningful antecedent has so far been identified in which the metaphor of heart-sealing is employed in the same sense as in the Qur’an (→ *khatama*). Another Qur’anic phrase that is hitherto unprecedent is the category of the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*), an umbrella term for Jews and Christians. Two further likely cases of Qur’anic conceptual innovation—and not, as some previous scholarship would have it (e.g., *NB* 23–25), of misunderstanding—are the application of the term → *furqān*, “salvation, deliverance,” to divine revelations and the Qur’anic reception of the rabbinic concept of God’s “dwelling” or presence in the world (Hebrew: *shākinah*), which is reconfigured as a divinely conferred sense of inward composure and tranquillity, denoted by Arabic → *sakinah*. Of course, one does well to remember the chestnut that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence: it is not impossible that seemingly unparalleled Qur’anic concepts or phrases nonetheless emerged prior to the Qur’an and that the latter is simply the earliest extant text documenting them.

more suitably dealt with in other formats of scholarly writing than a dictionary. Despite the criterion of frequency, I do cover some infrequent words closely bound up with other terms that more obviously meet my two conditions for inclusion. For example, the plural adjective → *ghulf* (“wrapped in foreskins” or “uncircumcised”) appears only in Q 2:88 and 4:155 but forms an important tessera in the Qur’an’s discourse about the human heart, thus complementing my entry on → *qalb*, “heart.” It also provides an important piece of evidence in favour of the broader claim that the Qur’anic concept of the heart, unlike that of the vital self or → *nafs*, shows a significant imprint of Biblical language.

The Qur’an furnishes the multiple strands of post-Qur’anic Islam with a distinctive and partially unifying lexicon (see already *GMK* 46), even though the component terms of this lexicon do of course undergo significant semantic development over time, in addition to exhibiting important synchronic differences between various authors, disciplines, and schools of thought. Some of the entries in this dictionary could, I imagine, usefully serve as the chronologically first stratum in a conceptual history of fundamental Islamic terms like *islām* (“self-surrender” or “self-dedication,” namely, to God), *shirk* (the illicit “association” of other beings with God), *nafs* (designating the human “soul” or “vital self”), or *jihād* (“contending” on behalf of God). Nonetheless, this book has no ambition to undertake a longitudinal study of the rich and absorbing post-Qur’anic reception history of the words discussed. This has not, however, prevented me from making limited use of premodern Islamic scholarship, such as a number of well-known Qur’anic commentaries, where this seemed helpful in elucidating the range of meanings that Qur’anic terms would have conveyed to the Qur’an’s initial addressees. The way I relate to premodern scriptural scholarship, in other words, is to treat it like “secondary literature,” as Patricia Crone once put it (*QP* xv). Indeed, against those tempted to dismiss traditional Islamic sources as largely irrelevant or even detrimental to the historical-critical study of the Qur’an, I would emphatically insist that practitioners of the latter are well advised to engage, albeit selectively and critically, with the sophisticated heritage of Islamic scriptural learning (see also Sinai 2017c, 104–105). This is vividly illustrated by Q 6:91, discussed in an excursus under → *ashraka* below. In the now dominant Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim reading of the Qur’an, this verse anomalously implies that the Qur’an’s pagan opponents recognised and transmitted the Bible. The puzzling anomaly disappears, however, if one gives preference to a textual variant transmitted in Islamic sources that turns a string of second-person verbs into the third person while leaving the text’s consonantal skeleton or *rasm* unchanged. Paying attention to the text-critical achievements of premodern Muslim scholarship thus helps dispel an ostensibly intractable interpretive problem.

I am therefore quite keen to avoid giving the indefensible impression that serious philological work on the Qur’an did not exist before the nineteenth century. I have tried to throw this point into occasional relief by acknowledging, at several junctures, views of premodern authors that remain pertinent for historical-critical research. A disadvantage of this approach is that it leads me to present only isolated snapshots from the Islamic tradition that happen to agree with my own culturally contingent sense of what is interpretively plausible. I can understand why some might frown upon what could be perceived as a wilful subjection of premodern scriptural scholarship to modern hermeneutical concerns. But this is precisely what treating premodern Islamic exegesis as secondary literature rather than as a primary object of study boils down to in practice; and while I would agree that the hermeneutical agenda of classical exegetes like al-Ṭabarī or al-Zamaksharī deserves careful

historical description in its own right, I also believe that the questions asked by modern historical-critical students of the Islamic scripture—e.g., what is the meaning of a given Qur’anic term, what was the putative historical context of a certain passage or surah, does a given surah include material dating to different periods?—have meaningful overlap with the interpretive concerns of their precolonial forebears, whose views therefore command attention. In fact, it is very likely that the premodern scholarly tradition would have had much more to offer than the present book is able to convey, if only I had permitted myself to spend more time looking. The best excuse I can proffer for having fallen short is that this work is already bursting at the seams.

I am conscious that my concern to foreground the need for a judicious measure of critical engagement with traditional Islamic scholarship is bound to be diluted by a concurrent effort, namely, my attempt to benefit from older European research that has tended to suffer from undeserved neglect or mere token acknowledgement, especially German scholarship of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Just like premodern Islamic works, such “Orientalist” publications can be punctuated by assertions that many contemporary scholars would be hesitant to repeat, such as a casual sense of European cultural superiority or naively disparaging remarks about Muhammad and the Qur’an. But as with premodern scholarship in Arabic, it is usually worth a contemporary researcher’s while to try to excavate the genuine philological and interpretive insights underneath the occasionally uninviting surface. As one particularly imposing figure among early Western scholars of the Qur’an, I would single out Josef Horowitz (d. 1931; see, e.g., Goitein 1935, Conrad 2002, Jäger 2008, and Johnston-Bloom 2018). His treatment of many of the Qur’anic terms also covered in the present book balances sensitivity to inner-Qur’anic usage with due attention to relevant Jewish and Christian precedents and, crucially, early Arabic poetry. In many respects, his ground-breaking work still forms a model of scholarly thoroughness and sound judgement, and the fact that Horowitz’s academic legacy was stymied, displaced, and dispersed in the wake of World War II and the Holocaust constituted a major setback for the modern study of the Qur’an. Fittingly, Horowitz is also the ultimate stimulator behind the concordance of pre-Islamic poetry that has served me as an important resource (Arazi and Masalha 1999; see *ibid.*, 7).

Another obvious and more recent source of inspiration is Toshihiko Izutsu (d. 1993; see Albayrak 2012). Izutsu, on whom the introduction has more to say, pioneered the analysis of Qur’anic “semantic fields” in light of pre-Islamic poetry. He also placed a generally welcome emphasis on the Qur’an’s reworking and reshaping of existing concepts. Arguably, Izutsu showed less interest than one might today wish in the fact that by the Qur’an’s time Arabic had for centuries rubbed shoulders with various forms of Aramaic and other ancient languages (but see *GMK* 106–119). As noted at several junctures in the present volume, it is possible or even likely that many of the Qur’an’s “ethico-religious concepts,” as Izutsu calls them, were coined by pre-Islamic Arabophone Christians and Jews and then radiated outward into syncretistically minded pagan (i.e., not self-avowedly Jewish or Christian) circles. A prime illustration for this is the verb → *ṣallā*, whose Qur’anic meaning “to pray” is sufficiently attested in early Arabic poetry in order to permit the confident claim that the word was already employed by pre-Qur’anic Jews and Christians, undoubtedly under the influence of its Aramaic cognate. Hence, some of the semantic differences between the language of pre-Islamic poetry and that of the Qur’an—such as the fact that the Qur’an employs the verb → *kafara* for unbelief in or “repudiation”

of God and his revelatory signs, rather than only in the sense of treating someone with ingratitude—may well be due to the fact that Qur’anic Arabic is continuous with registers and types of Arabic that are only incompletely reflected by pre-Islamic poetry.<sup>3</sup> But such quibbles aside, the questions asked by Izutsu and some of the ways in which he set about answering them are clearly foundational for the present work.

A final set of remarks, before closing this preface with a series of due acknowledgements, concerns the historical background assumptions that I bring to bear on the Qur’anic text. In line with previous publications of mine (especially *HCI* 40–77), I am reasonably optimistic that the Qur’anic corpus is by and large explicable within the broad parameters of the traditional Islamic narrative of origins, with some modifications and shorn of the profuse anecdotal, and often unverifiable, detail supplied by post-Qur’anic Islamic sources (see in more detail the synthesis in Sinai, forthcoming a). This means that I am content to approach the Qur’anic corpus as having emerged in early seventh-century Mecca and Medina and during the life of a charismatic preacher called Muhammad, though I would not *a priori* rule out the possibility that specific Qur’anic passages underwent a degree of early post-prophetic editing and expansion (see *HCI* 52–54 and under → *bayyana* as well as the somewhat similar model in Tesei 2019). I recognise that certain features of the Qur’an jar with the portrayal of its environment in the Islamic tradition and also with the present state of our archaeological and other historical knowledge. In particular, as Guillaume Dye and Tommaso Tesei have pointed out, the Qur’an’s extensive adaptation of Christian traditions and narratives sits somewhat uneasily with the lack of evidence for organised Christian communities in the immediate milieu in which the Qur’an’s genesis is supposed to have unfolded (Dye 2019, 772–776; Tesei 2021, 188–189). However, seeing that in the early seventh century the Ḥijāz had effectively become encircled by Christian centres in Najrān, in Ethiopia, in the northern borderlands of the Arabian Peninsula, and on the Gulf coast (e.g., Munt 2015, 252–253), I am not sufficiently unsettled by the dissonance just noted in order to be tempted to jettison the conventional paradigm of the Qur’an’s gestation—for instance, by decoupling extensive sections of the Qur’anic corpus from the career of Muhammad and his Ḥijāzī context (thus Dye 2019, 784, and Tesei 2021, 189).<sup>4</sup> I also adhere to a fairly conventional, though not undisputed, understanding of the Qur’an’s internal chronology, as a unilinear diachronic sequence leading from the Meccan surahs to

3 Sometimes pre-Islamic poetry may nonetheless contain valuable vestiges of such Jewish and Christian usage. Apart from the case of *ṣallā*, “to pray,” see, e.g., the poetic formula *bi-ḥamdi llāhi* and variants, whose likely link to Christian doxologies is briefly discussed in Sinai 2019b, 62.

4 The fact that some fundamental religious terms in Qur’anic Arabic have their most immediate ancestors in Classical Ethiopic—including → *al-injīl* (meaning the Gospel or the Christian Bible), → *al-ḥawāriyyūn* (denoting the apostles of Christ; see under → *rasūl*), *fāṭir* (“creator”; → *khalaqa*), and probably also → *al-shayṭān* (“the devil”) and → *jahannam* (“hell”)—certainly coheres very well with the supposition that the manifold Christian traditions found in the Qur’an passed through western Arabia. To previous arguments in favour of a Ḥijāzī origin of the Qur’an, one may now add van Putten’s detailed contention that the Qur’an’s canonical *rasm* tends to display morphological and phonological features that are associated with Ḥijāzī Arabic, such as the loss of the glottal stop or *hamzah* (van Putten 2022, 99–149). It must be conceded that our understanding of the idiosyncrasies of Ḥijāzī Arabic is often dependent on information supplied by Muslim scholars, who may at least on occasion have derived their understanding of Ḥijāzī Arabic from the Qur’anic text, even if one would also expect statements about dialectal features to have been to some degree controlled by common linguistic knowledge. But the possibility of circular inference does not apply to the elision of glottal stops, since in the post-Qur’anic Islamic tradition the Qur’an was usually recited with *hamzahs* (van Putten 2022, 150–181).



the Medinan ones, the point of transition from Meccan to Medinan being the “emigration” or *hijrah* of Muhammad and his followers (*HCI* 111–137).

In any case, while I would maintain that the hypothesis of a late closure of the Qur’an in the second half of the seventh century is bedevilled by severe explanatory challenges (see under → *jāhada*), it is not a primary concern of the present work to show that the scenario of the Qur’an’s genesis just intimated is true or superior to alternative models, even though I have on a few occasions allowed myself to comment on related matters (apart from the remarks under → *jāhada*, see also under → *arḍ* and the final section under → *kitāb*). In general, I trust that when I speak of Muhammad as a historical actor, of Mecca and Medina as historically concrete sites of his activity, and of Meccan and Medinan surahs, then more sceptically inclined readers will know to make appropriate subtractions from my statements in line with their own historiographical temperament. I would be equally pleased if something equivalent turned out to be possible for those Muslim readers who feel that my approach to the Islamic tradition is excessively, rather than insufficiently, sceptical.

As I have tried to signal, I am not dogmatically opposed to the hypothesis of a late closure of the Qur’anic corpus; I merely think that the hypothesis has so far run an explanatory budget deficit (but see, again, the careful argument for limited mid-seventh-century additions to the Qur’an in Tesei 2019). I am, however, convinced that the division of the Qur’an into the three principal groups of surahs and passages to which I appeal—early Meccan, later Meccan, and Medinan—is capable of being justified in terms immanent to the text itself, such as style, lexicon, and distinctive theological positions, and that such a subdivision accordingly does not require much faith in the historical accuracy of the early Islamic historical record. For instance, features permitting one to draw a fairly confident boundary between the Meccan and Medinan layers of the Qur’anic corpus include divergent conceptions of divine punishment, a Medinan turn towards militant activism, and different understandings of Muhammad’s prophetic role (Marshall 1999, 117–185; Sinai 2015–2016; Sinai 2018a; Durie 2018, 47–103; O’Connor 2022; Sinai 2022a). Hence, those who are wary of the geographical and historiographical implications that undeniably inhere in the traditional classifiers “Meccan” and “Medinan” may well opt to speak of “pre-transitional” and “post-transitional” surahs, like Mark Durie, but should nonetheless find it possible to accept that the scope of both textual groups is broadly similar to what is presupposed by me. Similarly, Tommaso Tesei has recently analysed a corpus of Qur’anic texts consisting in a majority of the early Meccan surahs as defined by Theodor Nöldeke (Tesei 2021). While Tesei sees promise in a non-standard account of the Qur’an’s origins and proposes to limit the proclamations delivered by Muhammad himself to the cluster of surahs studied by him, he agrees at least that this group of texts is stylistically and thematically coherent, and also that it forms the earliest layer of the Qur’an. This inspires some hope that Nöldekian talk of early Meccan surahs will to a considerable degree turn out to be translatable into an analytic idiom with different historical background assumptions. Given such alignment in the ways in which the Qur’anic corpus is partitioned into smaller textual groups, I am hopeful that the following attempts to ascertain the meaning of Qur’anic terms and thereby to track the contours of Qur’anic theology have value even for scholars who dispute some of my own historical and chronological views.

I am grateful to the other members of the *QuCIP* project based at Oxford University—Marianna Klar, Behnam Sadeghi, Nora K. Schmid, and Holger Zellentin—as well as to

the Oxford doctoral students Saqib Hussain and Ohad Kayam for many extraordinarily insightful and erudite comments and suggestions. While all remaining defects of the book weigh on my conscience alone, it could not have been written without the manifold stimuli, encouragements, and cordial scholarly challenges that I owe to this group of brilliant and generous colleagues during a fairly bleak period dominated by successive pandemic lockdowns. Saqib Hussain, moreover, undertook to read and comment on a full draft of the work, catching many mistakes and contributing important ideas and suggestions. To Ruth MacDonald, *QuCIP*'s project coordinator, I am grateful for putting her extraordinary administrative and financial prowess at the service of the project. Other colleagues who have kindly answered queries, have provided critical feedback, or have contributed additional references and comparative material are Ahmad Al-Jallad, Karen Bauer, Michael Cook, Ana Davitashvili, Mohsen Goudarzi, Frank Griffel, Dirk Hartwig, Jon Hoover, Christopher Melchert, Ulrich Rudolph, Alison Salvesen, Tilman Seidensticker, Peter Stein, and Yuhan Vevaina. Further debts are noted at specific places. To Michael Pregill I owe astute advice on the book's title, though I confess to having heeded it only in part, likely to my own detriment. Fred Appel of Princeton University Press was a source of gentle and patient encouragement, incisively probing questions, and precious counsel. Sara Lerner expertly steered the volume through production, and Jennifer Harris provided meticulous copyediting. At bottom, this dictionary is best seen as an attempt to do some justice to Marianna Klar's methodological insistence, expressed in numerous personal discussions and *QuCIP* meetings and modelled in her own research, that one cannot responsibly interpret or even translate a given Qur'anic verse or passage without systematically looking up all other occurrences of its constituent expressions elsewhere in the corpus. For better or for worse, the existence of this book (though not the inevitable flaws in its execution) is all Marianna's fault. Finally, I am obliged to the European Research Council for funding the research project that has produced this dictionary. The volume reflects only my own views, and the European Research Council is not to be held responsible for any of the claims expressed in it or for any use that may be made of the information it contains.



## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

While parts of this book are inevitably technical, I am hopeful that many sections (e.g., those concerned with explicating elements of Qur’anic theology) will be of interest to readers outside Qur’anic studies, narrowly conceived. However, the fact that the entries are arranged according to the Arabic alphabet inevitably poses a significant hurdle for readers whose command of the language is limited or non-existent. In order to circumvent this obstacle, I provide, at the end of the book, both an index of Qur’anic terms in English translation and an index of Arabic terms covered that is arranged according to the English alphabet. Thus, a reader who wishes to look up the verb *ashraka* (“to associate”) or the active participle *mushrik* (“someone who associates”) but who is unsure of its position in the main dictionary (namely, under the root *sh-r-k*) will be directed to the relevant page via the index of Arabic terms arranged according to the English alphabet.

As for the English index, it reflects in the first instance the translations of Arabic words that are adopted, and sometimes explicitly argued for, in the present dictionary. But the English index also includes some common English translations that I do not endorse myself, such as “to disbelieve” or “to be an unbeliever” for the Arabic verb *kafara* or “unlettered” and “illiterate” for *ummī*. Given the very considerable overlap between most current English renderings of the Qur’an, this should make it possible to use the present dictionary alongside different translations—at least for those Arabic terms that tend to be translated fairly consistently by the same English words. By way of an illustration, assume that you are reading the first verse of the first surah of the Qur’an, variously rendered “In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate” (Bell); “In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate” (Arberry, Droge); “In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful” (*Study Quran = SQ*); “In the Name of the Merciful and Compassionate God” (Jones); or “In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy” (Abdel Haleem). The English entries “God,” “Allāh,” “merciful,” and “compassionate” all redirect to the corresponding Arabic words (namely, *allāh*, *rahīmān*, and *rahīm*), which can then be looked up in the main dictionary or in the index of Arabic words arranged according to the English alphabet. This is not to rule out occasional gaps in coverage. For example, Abdel Haleem’s slightly idiosyncratic rendering of the Arabic words *al-rahīmān* and *al-rahīm* as “Lord of Mercy” and “Giver of Mercy” is not reflected in my English index. There is, however, an entry for “mercy” (corresponding to the Arabic noun *rahmah*), from which an interested reader will be able to pick up the thread. Still, it must be acknowledged that Abdel Haleem’s policy of frequently varying the manner in which one and the same Arabic expression is rendered into English makes it difficult to produce an English-Arabic glossary for his translation that is comprehensive yet remains within reasonable bounds.

Headings in the main dictionary are given in transliterated Arabic. In line with the standard practice for Arabic, these headings are generally arranged according to the

consonantal roots that underly most Arabic words. For example, the verb *ashraka*, “to associate” (namely, other beings with God), is found under the letter *shīn*, and the passive participle *muṭahhar* is located under the letter *ṭā*. Proper names like *isrā’īl*, “Israel,” and *al-ṭāghūt*, “false gods,” are incorporated into this system irrespective of their true etymology. As may go without saying, the definite article is to be disregarded: *al-naṣārā*, “the Christians,” is found under the letter *nūn*. In hard cases, I have generally followed the ordering of Ambros’s dictionary (*CDKA*). In particular, I adhere to his placement of geminate roots such that, for instance, *m-l-k* is placed before *m-l-l* rather than vice versa. Some words that may be, or have been, assigned to more than one consonantal root or that could give rise to confusion (e.g., *madīnah*, *malak*, or *mā’*) are deliberately listed in several places, with appropriate cross-references.

Where the heading of an entry encompasses more than one Arabic word, verbs precede nouns and adjectives. The same applies if there are several headings with the same consonantal root, meaning that the entry on the verb *ṣaddaqa* (“to hold or declare s.th. to be true, to confirm s.th.”) precedes that on the noun *ṣadaqah* (designating a charitable act or gift). Headings contain only a minimum of linguistic information, which is more fully supplied in *CDKA* and Badawi and Abdel Haleem 2008. Thus, I do not offer plural forms for words given in the singular, while verbs are cited only in the suffix conjugation (*māḍī*) without an accompanying prefix-conjugation (*muḍāri*) form.<sup>1</sup> I do however indicate, by means of the abbreviations “tr.” and “intr.,” whether a verb is ordinarily used transitively (i.e., with a direct or accusative object) or not, and if the latter whether the verb in question takes a prepositional object (e.g., “*ṣabara* tr.,” “*ṣabara* intr.,” “*kadhhaba* intr. *bi-*”). Entries on words that occur exclusively or predominantly in the plural have the plural form as their heading. Where the heading of an entry consists of more than one word, such as the phrase *azwāj muṭahharah* (“purified spouses”), cross-references employ the symbol ۞ in order to signal which of the component terms ought to be looked up. For instance, since the expression *azwāj muṭahharah* is discussed under *muṭahhar*, cross-references will take the form “→ *azwāj muṭahharah*.”

In quotations of multiple Qur’anic passages, the symbol ± followed by angle brackets <> indicates that the textual segment in brackets may or may not be present in the verses listed. In this way, the phrase *khalaqa l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa fī sittati ayyāmin* (“he created the heavens and the earth in six days”; e.g., Q 7:54) and its variant *khalaqnā l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa wa-mā baynahumā fī sittati ayyāmin* (“we created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six days”; Q 50:38) can be succinctly combined into *khalaqa/khalaqnā l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa ± <wa-mā baynahumā> fī sittati ayyāmin*. In Qur’anic references, a string like “Q 27:18.28.50” refers to verses 18, 28, and 50 of Surah 27, whereas “Q 27:18, 28, 50” would refer to verse 18 of Sura 27 in addition to Surahs 28 and 50. I make liberal use of abbreviations for many frequently cited works (such as various dictionaries, Qur’anic commentaries, and some secondary literature). These abbreviations are unscrambled in the bibliography at the end of the book.

As noted in the introduction, in some cases it was expedient to treat a number of non-cognate words in the same entry, thus allowing for a more coherent exploration of certain topics. Examples are the verbs *khalaqa*, *bara’a*, and *faṭara*, all of which refer to divine

<sup>1</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I also adhere to this practice where a certain verb is Qur’anicly attested only in the *muḍāri*’ (such as *ya’thā*, cited as *’athā*).



creation and are analysed under → *khalaqa*, and miscellaneous terms revolving around animal sacrifice, treated under → *dhabaha*, “to slaughter.” Again, cross-references direct the reader to the appropriate place. Since many entries include cursory comments on terms and expressions other than the word or words figuring in the main heading, it seemed useful to list these as a subheading introduced by “Further vocabulary discussed.” The order in which these secondary expressions are listed corresponds roughly to the order of their first appearance in the entry. Later appearances of the same term in the entry in question are not taken into account, which means that readers interested in such subsidiary terms will need to scan the entire remainder of the entry after its first occurrence. In determining which terms to include in subheadings, too, a certain degree of arbitrary selectiveness was inevitable; I have tried to be helpfully generous in granting admission without however listing every single Arabic word quoted in the entry. Regarding proper names of figures from Qur’anic sacred history (e.g., *fir’awn*, “Pharaoh”), my default policy was to include these in subheadings only if the entry at hand comments on the word itself (rather than merely mentioning the respective figure); but in some cases, such as that of Abraham (→ *ibrāhīm*), I have again sacrificed consistency for generosity of cross-references.



# ABBREVIATIONS

- acc. accusative  
ch. chapter  
coll. collective noun  
ditr. ditransitive (verb that takes two accusative objects)  
gen. genitive  
intr. intransitive (verb that does not take an accusative object but may take a prepositional object)  
l./ll. line/lines  
n. note  
o.s. oneself  
pl. plural  
sg. singular  
s.o. someone  
s.th. something  
tr. transitive (verb that takes a direct or an accusative object)  
v./vv. verse/verses  
~ indicates repetition of an entry's main heading as part of a compound expression  
→ cross-reference to another dictionary entry  
· indicates where to look up an expression consisting of more than one word  
±<> textual segment between angle brackets may or may not be present in the verses listed  
/ indicates alternative formulations  
// indicates verse dividers in Qur'anic, Biblical, or other quotations encompassing more than one verse (note that I do not mark the end of hemistichs in Arabic poetry)

For abbreviations in references, refer to the bibliography at the end of this volume.



# INTRODUCTION

Many Qur’anic surahs are densely punctuated by terms and phrases that occur multiple times across the entire corpus. For a cursory illustration of the phenomenon, one needs to look no further than the beginning of the Qur’an’s opening surah, the Fātiḥah (Q 1). As is well known, its opening invocation “In the name of God, the truly Merciful,” the so-called *basmalah*, prefaces all other surahs except for Surah 9. In addition, parts of the *basmalah*, such as references to God’s “name” and the appellation “the Merciful,” appear in a host of other Qur’anic passages (including v. 3 of the Fātiḥah). Subsequent verses of Q 1, too, are sprinkled with diction that has a plethora of further attestations in the Islamic scripture: the doxology “Praise be to God” and the epithet “Lord of the world-dwellers” (→ *rabb al-‘ālamīn*) in v. 2 (on the former, see, e.g., Q 6:1.45, 7:43, 10:10; on the latter, see, e.g., Q 2:131, 5:28, 6:45.71.162); the expression “judgement day” in v. 4 (e.g., Q 15:35, 26:82, 37:29); the concept of guidance (see under → *hadā*) and the metaphor of the “straight road” (→ *al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm*) in v. 6 (on the former, see, e.g., Q 2:2.5.16.26 etc. or 3:4.8.20 etc.; on the latter, see, e.g., Q 2:142.213, 3:51.101, 4:68.175); and the notions of divine wrath (see under → *ghaḍība*) and of going astray (see under → *dalla*) that appear in v. 7 (on God’s wrath, see, e.g., Q 2:61.90, 3:112, or 4:93; on going or leading astray, refer to, e.g., Q 2:16.26.108 etc. and 3:69.90.164).

The Qur’an is thus marked by a striking, perhaps even exceptional, degree of terminological recurrence, a fact that is clearly linked to its highly formulaic character (on which see Bannister 2014). Such terminological recurrence is in fact a boon for interpreters, since it is reasonable to assume that the different contexts in which a word or phrase occurs across the Qur’an will often illuminate one another. This is so even if one takes due care to avoid what James Barr has termed the mistake of “illegitimate totality transfer,” namely, the error of reading into a particular occurrence of a given term in a specific literary context the compound meaning that emerges from aggregating the totality of contexts in which the term is used in the respective literary corpus as a whole (Barr 1961, 218). Thus, there is no doubt that the verb → *jāhada*, “to contend,” is in many Qur’anic passages used in the sense of militancy and fighting; but as discussed in the relevant entry below, it would be quite inappropriate to read this militant sense of *jāhada*, which is a feature of its employment in Medinan surahs, into an earlier Meccan occurrence like Q 25:52. Nevertheless, it is frequently the case that the occurrence of a given word or phrase in verse A shares relevant contextual or phraseological features with verses B, C, D, etc. This includes cases in which verse B replaces the word in question by a different one, which may be an indication that the two expressions are at least partially synonymous. Conversely, even where closer examination reveals that some occurrences of a term exhibit relevant differences from others, this will engender the important insight that its Qur’anic usage falls into several distinct types, which may require different translations.

The need to ensure correct translation is perhaps the most immediate reason why what one might call a “concordantial” analysis of Qur’anic language is vital. Thus, the present dictionary embraces and argues for a certain number of translational decisions that are to some degree unconventional (though not always unprecedented), such as → *rabb al-‘ālamīn* = “Lord of the world-dwellers” (rather than “Lord of the worlds” or the like), → *ummī* = “scriptureless” (rather than “illiterate”), → *kafara* = “to repudiate” (rather than “to disbelieve”), → *al-rahmān al-rahīm* = “the truly Merciful” (rather than “the Merciful, the Compassionate”), → *al-ṣirāt al-mustaqīm* = “the straight road” (rather than “the straight path”), or → *jāhada* = “to contend” (rather than “to strive” or “to struggle”). It is a curious and rather lamentable state of affairs that there is both a comparative abundance of Qur’anic translations into English and other European languages and a general dearth of accompanying linguistic and semantic annotation and argument. To be sure, some translations do offer a generous selection of brief notes (e.g., Asad 1980 and more recently Droge 2013), and Rudi Paret’s German rendering (Paret 2001) is supplemented by a valuable volume of concise comments and Qur’anic cross-references (*KK*). Moreover, Arne Ambros has compiled an indispensable dictionary of Qur’anic Arabic (*CDKA*). Nonetheless, it remains a matter of educated guesswork why some translators choose to render, say, the phrase *kull nafs* as “every soul” (thus, among others, Arberry 1955) while others opt for “every human being” (thus Asad 1980), “every/each person” (Droge 2013), or simply “everyone” (Paret 2001 and also sometimes Droge 2013). The difference is not negligible: given that the phrase at hand is often found in Qur’anic statements about death and the afterlife, the translation “every soul” risks creating the inaccurate impression that the Qur’an envisages the afterlife as something experienced by disembodied souls rather than by concrete human beings who are, like pre-eschatological humans, endowed with bodies (see under → *nafs*).<sup>1</sup>

It is of course undeniable that some translational choices are bound to be a matter of subjective taste. Yet it would be wrong to start from the defeatist assumption that questions such as the correct way of rendering *rabb al-‘ālamīn* or *kull nafs* are beyond the ken of philological argument, or to reduce the challenge of translating the Qur’an to the mere task of conflating and stylistically improving upon existing renderings for the sake of more fluent readability. Instead, a concordantial examination of the Qur’anic corpus—one that does not limit itself to a verse’s immediate or wider context, but tries to understand particularly charged or difficult terms and phrases in light of other verses exhibiting relevant similarities in diction and phraseology—will often provide essential clues as to which of two or more translational options is more defensible.

A concordantial analysis of key Qur’anic terms and phrases is also of value beyond being an essential aid for the valid translation and interpretation of individual verses. Two seminal monographs by Toshihiko Izutsu have pioneered the approach that the Qur’an’s understanding of God, the cosmos, and humankind (which Izutsu describes as the Qur’an’s *Weltanschauung*, or world-view) is usefully studied by means of a holistic analysis of “semantic fields,” that is, groups of semantically related words (*ERCQ* and *GMK*; see also Madigan 2001, 79–85, and el Masri 2020, 7–8). Izutsu examines the semantic fields surrounding, and thereby also the meaning of, key Qur’anic terms like *īmān* (“belief”), *islām* (“self-surrender” or “self-dedication” to God), *kufīr* (“ingratitude” or “repudiation”), *taqwā*

<sup>1</sup> A recent contribution to Qur’anic translational criticism is Blankinship 2020. However, Blankinship’s focus is on the adequate rendering of various rhetorical features of the Qur’an rather than on semantic problems.

(“wariness” or “fear” of God), and *shirk* (the illicit “association” or “partnering” of other beings with God). By paying due attention to how such words behave in different Qur’anic contexts, an interpreter will be able to gain insight into crucial nodes in the conceptual network sustaining Qur’anic discourse, and thereby also into some of the Qur’an’s central theological, anthropological, and cosmological notions. Izutsuan semantic field analysis rests on the supposition that there is a correlation between the ideas and doctrines advanced by the Qur’an, on the one hand, and the semantics of the language—namely, Qur’anic Arabic—that is employed to articulate these ideas, on the other. Thus, the way in which the Qur’an tends to collocate certain terms and phrases (e.g., the fact that the word → *marād*, “sickness,” always co-occurs with → *qalb*, “heart”), relationships of full or partial synonymy and polarity (e.g., the opposition between “guidance,” → *h-d-y*, and “going astray,” → *d-l-l*), or the referential range of a given term in its various contexts of appearance (e.g., the fact that both natural and historical phenomena are designated as divine “signs” or → *āyāt*) are all potentially reflective of important facets of Qur’anic theology (see the valuable overview of what to look out for in semantic analysis in *ERCQ* 37–41). Of course, in tracking the behaviour of a given Qur’anic phrase or term one will come across passages that are beset by ambiguity. For instance, in the case of conjunctive statements—such as the stock phrase “those who believe and do righteous deeds” (*al-ladhīna āmanū wa-‘amilū l-ṣāliḥāti*; → *ṣāliḥ*)—it is often not immediately obvious whether the two concepts conjoined should be understood to be marked by semantic equivalence or at least overlap, on the one hand, or merely by some other, non-semantic link, on the other.<sup>2</sup> But in many cases, matters fall at least partially into place after one has examined a reasonable sample of relevant occurrences. Also pertinent to a better understanding of the Qur’anic world-view are other general observations that may be made about the behaviour of Qur’anic language, such as the frequency with which Qur’anic legal stipulations

2 One might baptise this the “equivocality of conjunction.” Consider, for example, the frequent combination of “performing prayer” (*aqāma l-ṣalāh*) and “giving alms” (*ātā l-zakāh*; e.g., Q 2:43.83.110), on the one hand, and the threat in Q 70:17–18 that the fire of hell “calls the one who has turned his back and turned aside (*man adbara wa-tawallā*) // and who has gathered and hoarded (*wa-jama’a fa-aw’ā*).” The latter passage clearly pairs up synonyms: the verbs *adbara* and *tawallā* are variant expressions for one and the same act (namely, rejecting God’s message), as are *jama’a* and *aw’ā* (namely, selfish and eschatologically short-sighted accumulation of earthly property). By contrast, prayer and almsgiving are two separate activities that are neither synonyms nor have any inherent semantic connection: the idea of the one does not entail the idea of the other at the level of linguistic meaning. In between these two poles, there are cases in which a conjunctive statement pairs up two expressions A and B that differ in meaning or sense but have the same referent. Thus, at Q 21:48 the Qur’an’s divine voice declares that “we gave Moses and Aaron salvific divine instruction (→ *al-furqān*), illumination, and reminding exhortation (*dhikr*; → *dhakkara*) for the God-fearing”; it seems quite possible or even likely that all three expressions are different descriptions of one and the same process of divine revelation. Hence, conjunctive statements can conjoin words that are partly or entirely identical in meaning, words that are identical in reference, or words that are linked merely in doctrinal or normative or empirical fact (e.g., because God demands that people both pray and give alms, or because prayer and almsgiving are in fact hallmarks of a pious disposition and therefore tend to co-occur in human individuals). The question then arises whether, say, the frequent combination of believing and doing righteous deeds amounts to a conjunction of semantically cognate concepts or whether they resemble the coupling of prayer and almsgiving, meaning that the two elements are conceptually separate but have some doctrinal, normative, or empirical link. It seems to me that the best general response to this quandary is to resist an overly rigid distinction between semantic and non-semantic conceptual conjunction. For example, even though prayer and almsgiving do not have a necessary semantic connection, the fact that the Qur’an so frequently couples them must indicate that the nexus between them, whether semantic or non-semantic, is real and robust: those who pray *ought* to give alms as well, and many of those who pray *are in fact* also almsgivers (e.g., Q 9:71). Moreover, the frequent combination of both concepts would have disposed hearers of the Qur’an to associate them with one another.

employ what Joseph Lowry has termed “exculpatory phrases” like *lā junāḥa ‘alā*, “it is no sin for . . .” (Lowry 2015–2016 and Sinai 2019c, 134–139).

To recommend that a systematic reconstruction of Qur’anic theology commence with close attention to Qur’anic language and semantics is not to posit an essential concurrence of theological and linguistic structures or to maintain that human conceptions of the world are determined by language. Clearly, one and the same language can be used to express radically incompatible world-views.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the meaning of words is shaped by the ways in which they are repeatedly and conventionally used; and it is certainly plausible to expect that important theological or anthropological tenets, such as the Qur’an’s binary division of humankind into believers and unbelievers, correlate with specific patterns of linguistic usage, such as the Qur’anic employment of *kafara* as an antonym of *āmana*. While it is often easy to read seemingly self-evident assumptions about, say, the Qur’anic understanding of human personhood into individual passages, a reasonably comprehensive attempt to track and work through, say, Qur’anic instances of the words → *qalb* (“heart”) and → *nafs* (which in many verses designates what one may call humans’ “lower” or “vital self”) as well as important terms that tend to be linked with them will provide vital safeguards against the overinterpretation or misconstrual of individual occurrences. Luckily, the Qur’anic corpus is both sufficiently large in order for the concordantial analysis of many terms and phrases to yield promising results, and sufficiently limited in scope in order for such an endeavour to remain feasible even without devoting a monograph-length study to each concept under investigation.

The preceding reflections suggest that a comprehensive historical-critical reading of the Qur’anic corpus will preferably proceed in two complementary dimensions: on the one hand, a sequential (or, to put it in Saussurian terms, syntagmatic) verse-by-verse and section-by-section analysis of entire surahs, following the basic parameters of a Qur’anic commentary (*tafsīr*); and, on the other hand, an examination of key vocabulary recurring throughout the Qur’an that may well draw inspiration from premodern Islamic dictionaries of the Qur’an like al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī’s *al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur’ān*. These two dimensions evidently link up to form a hermeneutic circle: a sound understanding of a given Qur’anic passage may require considerable concordantial research, but the latter will in turn depend on a sound understanding of individual passages, requiring at least a certain degree of sequential interpretation. All things considered, it seemed easier to break into the hermeneutic circle by beginning with a dictionary of key Qur’anic terms, especially given that parts of the Meccan Qur’an have now received a first commentarial treatment at the hands of Angelika Neuwirth (*PP* and Neuwirth 2017). I am nonetheless under no illusion that some of my conclusions in what follows will almost certainly require revision in light of future studies of specific verses and passages.

As illustrated by my nod to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī in the preceding paragraph, the importance and value of a concordantial analysis of scriptural language is far from a novel insight. Already the author of the earliest extant full commentary on the Qur’an, Muqātil ibn Sulaymān is linked with (although probably not himself the author of) an early Qur’anic

<sup>3</sup> These caveats are meant to acknowledge the need to frame Izutsu’s contribution in a manner that avoids inviting a Qur’anic reprise of James Barr’s trenchant criticism of the way in which Biblical scholars have sometimes deployed linguistic evidence in support of their understanding of Biblical theology (Barr 1961). Izutsuian semantic analysis does not require one to espouse “the idea that differences of thought structure will correspond to differences of language structure” (Barr 1961, 42). On Izutsu and the idea that language determines world view, see the remarks in Albayrak 2012, 76.



dictionary, the *Kitāb wujūh al-Qurʾān*, which catalogues the different semantic aspects (*wujūh*) of multiply recurrent Qurʾanic terms (Sinai 2009, 287–288). But in addition to such premodern forebears, the present work also has more recent role models. Modern Biblical scholarship in particular has taken a close interest in scriptural diction that is recurrent and theologically laden, as attested by multi-volume reference works such as the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, whose German original was edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich between 1933 and 1979. The politics of Kittel, a member of the Nazi party and author of a pamphlet on the “Jewish question,” were deplorable (Ericksen 1977; Ericksen 1985, 28–78; Gerdmar 2009, 417–530), and at least some contributions to the *TDNT* have been found to display anti-Semitic bias (Casey 1999; see also Rosen 1994 and Gerdmar 2009, 474–478). The work’s methodology has moreover attracted forceful criticism from James Barr (Barr 1961, 206–262). Nonetheless, the *TDNT* was pioneering in its attempt at comprehensively embedding New Testamental language in its complex historical setting: its entries survey how a particular word or word group are employed in ancient Greek texts, present equivalents in Biblical Hebrew and their rendering in the Septuagint, discuss relevant material from the Pseudepigrapha, the Qumran scrolls, and rabbinic and Hellenistic Jewish texts, and then go on to outline New Testamental usage, often distinguishing between different parts of the New Testament canon.<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew Bible has been the object of similar dictionary projects, such as the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament (TDOT)* and the *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis (NIDOTTE)*. Likewise, modern Western scholarship on the Qurʾan, though far more modestly staffed than its Biblical cousin, has investigated the continuity of Qurʾanic language with pre-Qurʾanic usage: pioneers like Josef Horowitz or Karl Ahrens have demonstrated that the meaning of key terms in Qurʾanic Arabic must be understood against the background of cognate words in Hebrew, Jewish Aramaic, or Syriac, as well as approximate semantic equivalents in Greek, while Izutsu pays particular attention to semantic shifts between the use of a given term in pre-Qurʾanic poetry and in the Qurʾan.<sup>5</sup>

The present book, therefore, is an attempt to undertake a concordantial and historically oriented analysis of key Qurʾanic terms, a “key” term being understood as one that is comparatively frequent (subject to the qualifications set out in the preface) and has what one may broadly call “religious or theological significance” (*TDNT* 1:vii). The essays making up the dictionary’s entries combine, in varying proportions, properly semantic investigations (i.e., attempts to delineate the putative meaning, or meanings, of a given Arabic word or phrase and to offer guidance on how best to translate it) with attempts at providing a succinct synthesis of what the Qurʾanic corpus as a whole says in employing the word or phrase in question.<sup>6</sup> Although the conceptual substructure of the Qurʾan often

4 See the remarks in *TDNT* 9:v on how the format of the dictionary evolved over the forty-year period of its genesis.

5 For a cautionary assessment of Arthur Jeffery’s view that the Qurʾanic lexicon contains numerous loanwords specifically from Syriac, see van Putten 2020b, 69–72, arguing that Aramaic loanwords in Qurʾanic Arabic predate important phonetic developments in Classical Syriac, especially *begadkepat* spirantisation. Even though it is not certain that we may expect loans from Syriac to exhibit *begadkepat* spirantisation (Al-Jallad 2020a, 163–168), I have sympathy for the claim that much of the Qurʾan’s Aramaic-derived vocabulary is very old. In any case, even words loaned from an early version of Aramaic and even words that are native to Arabic might still have been affected by the semantics of a Syriac cognate (see, e.g., under → *kafara*). The importance of Syriac Christianity for the Qurʾan is, in my view, sufficiently demonstrable simply on the basis of doctrinal and phraseological observations (see, e.g., under → *rūh*) and does not require corroboration by means of specifically Syriac loanwords.

6 Especially in view of Barr’s warning against the fallacy of “illegitimate totality transfer” (Barr 1961, 218), it is important to underline that these two are not the same thing. For instance, when my entry on “God” (→ *allāh*)

forms a systemic whole marked by a high degree of consistency, I do not take for granted that it is devoid of internal tensions or diachronic evolution. I therefore endeavour to combine a panoramic interest in patterns of meaning and usage across the entire Qur'an with sensitivity to semantic shifts and developments between different surah groups, i.e., between early and later Meccan surahs or between Meccan and Medinan ones.<sup>7</sup> But I do not invariably organise my data chronologically, since there are many cases in which a synchronic taxonomy is more illuminating. The understanding of inner-Qur'anic chronology and the criteria for dating Qur'anic surahs and passages relative to one another that is presupposed in the present volume is developed in detail elsewhere (*HCI* 111–137). In particular, it should be noted that my use of the category “early Meccan” marginally diverges from the well-known surah chronology of Weil and Nöldeke, in so far as it counts as “early Meccan” a number of surahs (e.g., Q 26 or Q 37) that Weil and Nöldeke classify as “middle Meccan” (see *HCI* 161). Throughout, I employ the expression “later Meccan” to refer to all Meccan surahs that are not early.

In keeping with the work of predecessors like Horovitz and Izutsu but also with the approach of the Biblical reference works named above, I pay relatively ample attention to possible antecedents of Qur'anic terms and phrases in Biblical and later Christian and Jewish literature, early Arabic poetry, or Arabian epigraphy. To forestall any misunderstanding of what I am hoping to achieve by including such comparative material, I would endorse the view that the putative etymology of a scriptural term and the meaning of its cognates in other languages do not normally settle its meaning in the scriptural corpus under consideration, an insight of James Barr's whose pertinence to Qur'anic studies has been duly underscored by Walid Saleh (see Barr 1961, 107–160; Saleh 2010, especially 653, citing Barr 1968, 90; Saleh 2015). The main evidential basis on which to ascertain the meaning of a Qur'anic term must be its usage within the Qur'an; and it is quite possible that in seeking to characterise a word's semantic role in the Qur'an the word's etymology will prove to be of little more than antiquarian interest.<sup>8</sup> However, there are instances in which the semantic role of a Qur'anic term remains ambiguous even after careful inspection of the relevant Qur'anic data or in which the Qur'anic data exhibit alignment or telling contrasts with the way in which the word at hand or a cognate of it function in texts that are prior to or contemporaneous with the Qur'an. In such cases, extra-Qur'anic usage can offer important clues for determining, or at least sharpening our understanding of, Qur'anic meaning.

Extra-Qur'anic parallels can, moreover, shed light on the question of whether a given term or phrase was in use prior to the Qur'an, an issue of some importance for anyone

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maintains that the Qur'an does not consider God to be an immaterial being, I do not mean to suggest that this is a feature of the very meaning of the Qur'anic word *allāh*; it is simply an important part of the various things the Qur'an says by using the word *allāh*. Indeed, I would concede that the basic linguistic meaning of the expression *allāh* in the Qur'an's late antique environment was the same irrespective of whether it was employed by Arabic-speaking Christians or Jews or pagans or Qur'anic believers, despite the fact that all four would have been committed to at least some conflicting theological views. Yet despite this caveat, it is nonetheless informative to place individual Qur'anic statements using the divine name *allāh* against the background of the full gamut of what the Qur'an has to say about God, especially if one assumes (as I think one ought to) that the Qur'anic community throughout all of the text's different periods retained a significant degree of familiarity with Qur'anic proclamations promulgated at earlier times.

<sup>7</sup> On the significance of chronological considerations for the semantic analysis of Qur'anic terms and the need to allow that semantic change across the Qur'anic corpus might be cumulative rather than a sequence of semantic shifts, see Waldman 1968, 442–443.

<sup>8</sup> For two examples, see Saleh 2015, 35–36.

interested in the intellectual history of late antique Arabia. The present work, for one, is animated by a strong interest in uncovering, wherever possible, glimpses of the historical emergence of the Qur'an's anthropological, cosmological, and theological lexicon. As recognised by scholars like Izutsu and, more recently, Alan Jones (*EAP*), pre-Islamic poetry can be particularly valuable as a contrastive foil to the Qur'an, since pivotal Qur'anic terms like → *ummah* ("community"), → *āyah* ("sign"), → *al-dunyā* ("proximate things" or, more freely, "this life"), → *dīn*<sup>2</sup> (in the sense of "religious worship"), or *rizq* (God's "provision"; see under → *razaqa*) are all attested in poems credibly attributed to pre-Islamic authors. A particularly good illustration of the importance of poetry is the notion of the → *nafs* or "vital self." Both the Qur'an and early Arabic poetry associate the *nafs* with a range of appetitive and aversive mental phenomena that human agents must strive to restrain and keep in check in order to assert their commitment to ethical or religious values and principles. Hence, the Qur'anic understanding of human psychology displays demonstrable continuity with that current in pre-Qur'anic poetry, despite the substantial difference that otherwise exists between the two corpora in terms of their general world views and their thematic preoccupations. Another germane example is the verb → *khalada*, "to be immortal, to remain forever." The Qur'an uses it in formulaic phrases stressing that the inhabitants of paradise and of hell will "perpetually remain" in their allotted eschatological station. Pre-Islamic poetry, by contrast, employs *khalada* and other derivatives of the same consonantal root in statements highlighting the ephemerality of human existence and humans' ultimately futile striving for permanence and immortality. As detailed in the relevant entry, the Qur'anic use of *khalada* is therefore a counterpoint to aspects of pre-Qur'anic poetic discourse in Arabic. Nonetheless, it is vital to assess every word on its own merit, as exemplified by the word → *rūh*, "spirit": although the term does figure in early poetry, its usage in the Qur'an is far more reminiscent of its Syriac cognate *rūhā*.

In extending one's comparative horizon beyond early Arabic poetry, Arabian epigraphy is an obvious supplementary resource, and one that is increasingly accessible beyond a narrow circle of specialists, thanks to databases like the *Online Corpus of the Inscriptions of Ancient North Arabia* (<http://krcfm.orient.ox.ac.uk/fmi/webd/ociana>), directed by Michael Macdonald and based at the Khalili Research Institute in Oxford, and the online *Sabäisches Wörterbuch*, directed by Norbert Nebes at the University of Jena (<http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/Sabaweb/>). Take, for example, the noun → *khalifah*, which the Qur'an applies to Adam (Q 2:30) in lieu of his Biblical characterisation as God's "image and likeness" (Gen 1:26). As is well known, the post-Qur'anic Islamic tradition informs us that *khalifah* can mean either "deputy" or "vicegerent," on the one hand, or "successor," on the other. Translators of the Qur'an have mostly taken their pick based on context and perhaps also based on other occurrences of the root *kh-l-f* in the Qur'an.<sup>9</sup> But it is only in light of epigraphic data that a compelling argument for one or the other choice becomes possible: as Ruben Schenzle has reminded us (Schenzle 2017, 141–142), an inscription by the South Arabian king Abraha from March 548 CE employs a Sabaic equivalent of the noun *khalifah* (spelled *h-l-f-t*) and its plural (*h-l-y-f*, corresponding to *khalā'if*) in a sense that scholars of Sabaic gloss as "viceroys," "governors," or "commanders"; and the same inscription contains a verb

9 For Q 2:30, "deputy," "vicegerent," or the like are generally the more popular option; but Paret 2001 at least opts for the German equivalent of "successor." As explained in the relevant entry, this choice is motivated by his awareness of other Qur'anic occurrences of the singular *khalifah*, its plurals *khalā'if* and *khulafā'*, and the verb *istakhlafa*.

corresponding to Arabic *istakhlafa* (*s'thlf*) in the sense of “to appoint s.o. as viceroy/governor.” This shows that the Qur’anic use of *khalifah*, “deputy,” and of the verb *istakhlafa*, “to appoint s.o. as a deputy,” has recourse to what seems to have been established political terminology, which is then transferred to the relationship between God and humans—a move that one might describe as the “theologisation” of a political concept (cf. Assmann 2000, 29–30). Another case where Sabaic epigraphy provides vital contextual background is the *basmalah* (→ *bi-smi llāhi l-rahmāni l-rahīm*).

The question of whether a given expression of Qur’anic Arabic was in use before the Qur’an is particularly relevant in cases in which the expression under consideration has an identifiable counterpart in a language utilised by late antique Christians and Jews, such as Hebrew, rabbinic Aramaic, or Syriac. Did the Arabisation of the concept at hand coincide with the Qur’anic proclamations, which would presuppose some kind of direct contact (whether oral or written) between members of the Qur’anic milieu and languages other than Arabic, or had the respective word entered the Arabic language at an earlier point in time?<sup>10</sup> As will become clear from many of my entries, it is often the second scenario that strikes me as the correct one: rather than itself being an important catalyst of Arabisation, the Qur’an is drawing on established religious language, albeit in order to articulate its own distinctive theology (though I hasten to add that this is not to argue against first-hand contact between the Qur’anic community, on the one hand, and Arabophone Jews and Christians, on the other). Not only are there reasons to assume that the Qur’an’s Biblical onomasticon is older than the Islamic scripture (see under → *isrā’īl*); my general sense is also that significant portions of the wider lexicon of Qur’anic Arabic preserve terminology and phraseology that had been coined, in the preceding century or centuries, among Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians, who would have orally articulated aspects of their beliefs and practices in Arabic even if they continued to worship and to read scripture in other languages (thus already Hoyland 2017, 39–40). Such a scenario certainly accords with the tendency of recent scholarship to emphasise Arabia’s gradual integration into the late antique world in the centuries preceding the Qur’an.<sup>11</sup> Although the entries that follow are mostly silent on the larger historical processes standing behind the assimilation of Biblical concepts and language into Arabic that made the Qur’anic proclamations possible, I would highlight that the study of key Qur’anic terms and phrases provides evidence for what Michael Pregill has called the “indigenization of monotheist scriptural and parascriptural traditions” (Pregill 2020, 32) in pre-Qur’anic Arabia. In this sense, I embrace the traditional premise that the Qur’an was proclaimed in Arabic, and that Qur’anic terms that are ultimately borrowed from other languages, especially from those used by late antique Jews and Christians, had by the time of Muhammad become part and parcel of the established lexicon of Old Arabic, even if our direct access to the latter remains fragmentary.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., the discussion in *FVQ* 19–22 and the comment thereon in van Putten 2020b, 70, n. 16.

<sup>11</sup> For an eloquent and admirably concise sketch of the Qur’an’s likely historical background, see Pregill 2020, 31, postulating “that the general integration of formerly more marginal societies into the Roman and Persian cultural and political spheres of influence that dominated the Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds provided the concrete circumstances under which the adaptation and assimilation of concepts, convictions, and identity markers associated with the dominant religious cultures of Late Antiquity occurred in Arabia.” For an attempt to spell out aspects of how I myself imagine the Qur’an’s historical milieu, see *HCI* 59–77, integrating much recent work by others.

<sup>12</sup> See especially the statement by Ibn ‘Atīyyah that is cited in al-Suyūṭī 1426 AH, 936 (*naw’* 38).

Some of the terms and phrases in point were no doubt shared by Arabophone Jews and Christians alike. Plausible candidates for this joint category are the verbs → *āmana*, “to believe,” and → *kafara*, “to repudiate” (even if Christians have generally been more preoccupied with definitions of correct belief than Jews) or the Biblical metaphors of “guidance” and “straying” and of God’s “path” (→ *hadā*, → *ḍalla*, → *ṣirāṭ*). Other Qur’anic terms, however, may be considered to be confessionally distinct. For instance, the adjective → *ummī*, “scriptureless,” and the nouns *kaffārah*, “expiation” (→ *kaffara*), and → *al-sakīnah*, used to mean something like “composure” in the Qur’an, are highly likely to derive from the language of Arabophone Jews. We may also assume that there was more than one pre-Qur’anic Christian Arabic lexicon, depending on the linguistic and doctrinal type of Christianity that had spread among a given section of the Arabian population. Comparing a Sabaic inscription by the Christian ruler Sumūyafa’ Ashwa’ from the early 530s with Abraha’s Mārib Dam inscription from 548 CE, Christian Robin notes a shift from Christian terminology that is derived from Ethiopic to terminology derived from Syriac (Robin 2015a, 153–154): in the former case “Christ” is called *kristos* (*krs<sup>3</sup>ts<sup>3</sup>*) and the “Holy Spirit” *manfas qaddūs* (*mnfs<sup>l</sup> qds<sup>l</sup>*), whereas Abraha employs Sabaic counterparts of Syriac *mshūhā* (*ms<sup>l</sup>h*) and *rūhā d-qūdashā* (*rḥ qds<sup>l</sup>*; CIH, no. 541, ll. 1–3). These latter two terms are what we find in Qur’anic Arabic (→ *al-masīh*, → *rūḥ al-quḍus*), but there is nonetheless a tangible Ethiopic imprint on some of the Qur’anic terminology relating to Christianity or religious matters more generally: the disciples of Jesus are called *al-ḥawāriyyūn*, from Ethiopic *ḥawārīyān*, never *rusul* (which would be the literal equivalent of Syriac *shliḥē*; see under → *rasūl*); one of the chief Qur’anic terms for hell, → *jahannam*, may well have its immediate ancestor in Ethiopic *gahannam* or *gāhannam*; and the Qur’anic word for “the Gospel” or perhaps the Christian Bible in its entirety, → *al-injīl*, was almost certainly mediated via Ethiopic *wangel*. There is no compelling reason to suppose that, say, *rūḥ al-quḍus* and *al-ḥawāriyyūn* belonged to one and the same Christian Arabic lexicon: they may well have reached the Qur’anic milieu from different Christian communities, some of which had been evangelised by Syriac-speaking missionaries while others were, or had at some point been, under Axumite or Ethiopic cultural influence. Overall, one might view the Qur’an as a linguistic fusion reactor merging various discrete strands of pre-Qur’anic Arabic—poetic language, language reflecting indigenous tribal values and native Arabian pagan cults, language common to different branches of the Biblical tradition, language specific to certain Jewish and Christian communities rather than others—into the foundational layer of the language of Islam as a discursive tradition stretching across time and space.

Although the present dictionary initially emerged from an interest in key terms and phrases that occur in the Qur’an’s first three surahs, all of the terms discussed in what follows are examined across the entire Qur’anic corpus. During the course of its gestation, the dictionary has, moreover, come to include many additional expressions that do not figure in Surahs 1–3. As highlighted in the preface, many words that have not been accorded independent entries of their own are discussed—sometimes cursorily, sometimes at much greater length—in connection with other terms with which they bear a close phraseological or semantic relationship. Thus, it proved convenient to make use of the entry on → *dhabaḥa* to review a range of Qur’anic expressions related to animal sacrifice, in the interest of permitting a more coherent view of the general topic of sacrifice in the Qur’an. No entries are devoted to individuals like Abraham or Moses; Qur’anic narratives will be treated in detail in a forthcoming volume entitled *Biblical Traditions in the Qur’an*, co-edited by Marianna



Klar, Gabriel S. Reynolds, Holger Zellentin, and myself. The present dictionary does, however, have articles on important group names, such as the Israelites (→ *banū isrāʿīl*), Jews (→ *al-yahūd*), and Christians (→ *al-naṣārā*).

Finally, given that the work at hand is meant to provide some groundwork for future translational and commentarial work on the Qurʾan, I should like to state my general preference for attempting, as far as possible, to render key Qurʾanic terms by the same English term throughout. Obviously, the meaning of words is crucially dependent on context, and there is no reason to make the optimistic assumption that the vocabulary of Qurʾanic Arabic can simply be matched, in a sort of pre-established harmony, to the vocabulary of contemporary English. The purpose of an English dictionary of, say, ancient Greek has been insightfully described as providing English word-substitutions for Greek terms ensuring that “in translating the Greek sentence into English the semantic contribution made by the Greek word will be approximately reproduced by the semantic contribution of the English word” (Barr 1961, 215). As Barr adds, there will be many cases in which one and the same Greek word—or, in our case, Arabic word—will need to be rendered by two or more English terms. Qurʾanic examples for this would be the noun *dīn*, which is used in the distinct senses of “judgement” and “religion” (→ *dīn*<sup>1</sup>, → *dīn*<sup>2</sup>), or the construct expression *dhikr allāh*, which depending on context can mean both reminding exhortation *by* God and invocation *of* God (→ *dhakara*, → *dhakkara*).

But even though some Qurʾanic terms must be rendered differently depending on their context of occurrence, there is a strong reason for trying to keep such variation to a minimum. This is because lexical recurrence—i.e., the repetition of complex phrases, individual words, and consonantal roots—is a singularly crucial literary feature of the Qurʾan: it ensures the lexical cohesion of verse groups, surahs, and also the Qurʾan as a whole; it demarcates a surah’s constituent sections by means of devices such as inclusio or parallelism; and it signals important links between non-adjacent passages in one and the same surah as well as allusions to chronologically earlier Qurʾanic proclamations (see, e.g., Zahniser 2000; Robinson 2001; Robinson 2003a, 201–223; Klar 2015; Reda 2017; Klar 2017a and 2017b; *HCI* 97–98 and 150–153; Sinai 2018b; Daood 2019; Sinai 2022b).<sup>13</sup> I would submit, therefore, that an adequate translation of the Qurʾan ought to opt for a unitary translation of one and the same Arabic term wherever this is possible without distorting content, in the interest of enabling an English reader to appreciate a basic feature of the Qurʾan’s literary structure. Overall, this is much more feasible than replicating another key literary feature of the Qurʾan, rhyme. Nonetheless, there are Qurʾanic words for which such an attempt at unitary translation is doomed to fail. They include, for example, the extraordinarily polyvalent term → *amr*, which is found in more than half of the verses of Surah 65 (vv. 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 12) yet carries several different meanings, such as “command,” “resolve,” “situation,” and “conduct.” This dictionary, then, is also an attempt to delineate the minimum degree of polyvalence that must be acknowledged and negotiated in striving to implement the literary desideratum of a maximally (but not mindlessly) consistent translation of key Qurʾanic terms into English.

13 On the related topic of etymological punning (that is, word play based on consonantal roots), primarily within individual verses and short verse groups, see Rippin 1994 and now also el Masri 2020 (e.g., 29–31, 69–70).

## CONVENTIONS AND STYLE

The form of the Qur’anic text used is generally the Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim reading of the standard *rasm* according to the Kufan verse division. This is not meant to imply that I believe this version to be inherently superior to others or to be an unfailingly accurate representation of the Qur’an’s original pronunciation. Apart from the fact that there is no reason for treating the Kufan verse division as *a priori* more authoritative than other systems (Neuwirth 2007, 11–62; Farrin 2019), linguistic research is now starting to show with increasing cogency that Qur’anic Arabic likely differed at least in some respects—such as its phonology or a lack of nunation and short case vowels—from Classical Arabic (Al-Jallad 2017b; van Putten 2017, 2018, and 2022; van Putten and Stokes 2018; see also Larcher 2020). There is accordingly no avoiding a principled distinction between the received manner (or manners) of pronouncing the Qur’an’s standard *rasm*, on the one hand, and the latter’s original pronunciation, on the other, which latter will for the foreseeable future remain a topic of scholarly debate and hypothetical reconstruction. Moreover, scholars have only begun to address whether and to what extent the standard *rasm* deserves to be privileged over non-standard recensions of the Qur’an, for which manuscript evidence is still very scarce (Sadeghi and Bergmann 2010; Sadeghi and Goudarzi 2012; see also Sinai 2020b and Hussain 2022a).

Since the objectives of the present dictionary are not linguistic or text-critical, I do not hesitate to rely on the dominant Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim reading as my default version of the Qur’an. This decision is motivated by convenience and not meant to fall foul of van Putten’s convincing plea that the remaining reading traditions of the Qur’anic *rasm*, with their noteworthy phonological and morphological features, are not simply “inconvenient noise to be ignored” (van Putten 2022, 7). While more extensive attention to textual variants would no doubt have been good scholarly practice, it would also have resulted in further inflating what is already a much more sizable volume than originally planned. Hence, I have only paid attention to textual variants when encountering significant interpretive problems. My hope is that the objectives of the present book are adequately served even without extensive consultation of reading variants and manuscripts. A crucial advantage of working primarily with the Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim text, moreover, is that it is conveniently searchable in a number of different ways. My most important resources in this regard were the print concordances of Muḥammad Fu’ād ‘Abd al-Bāqī (‘Abd al-Bāqī 1364 AH) and of Rudi Paret (*KK*), Hans Zirker’s electronic transliteration of the Qur’anic text (available at <http://duepublico.uni-duisburg-essen.de/servlets/DocumentServlet?id=10802>), and the database *Qur’an Tools* (<http://quran-tools.com>). *Qur’an Tools*, initiated by Andrew Bannister and formerly known as *Qur’an Gateway*, proved particularly valuable in affording the possibility of searching for verses that combine several words or consonantal roots. Thus, when I note, for instance, that particular verses collocate *kasaba* or *iktasaba* with

derivatives of the consonantal root *j-z-y*, the references provided have normally been identified with the aid of *Qur'an Tools*.

In the many cases in which I do not have a particular translational axe to grind, my English quotations from the Qur'an are freely adapted from the translations of Arberry, Jones, or Droge (which show a great deal of overlap between them). Since modern English unhelpfully employs the same pronoun "you" and identical imperative forms for the singular and the plural, I follow Jones in using the superscript letters <sup>s</sup> and <sup>p</sup> in order to signal the number of the Arabic verb, though I only have recourse to this device selectively, where necessary in order to dispel ambiguity. I do not capitalise pronouns referring to God, though I retain the convention when quoting printed translations of some primary sources.

English quotations of Biblical passages are generally based on the New Revised Standard Version, which I have on occasion felt free to modify. Names of Biblical books are abbreviated in accordance with *SBLH*<sup>2</sup> 124–125. Chapter and verse references follow the *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia* for the Hebrew Bible, the 28<sup>th</sup> edition of the Nestle-Aland edition for the New Testament, and the edition of Rahlfs and Hanhart for the Septuagint (all of which I have accessed via the software *Accordance XII*). As a consequence of this approach, my chapter-verse references to Biblical passages may sometimes exhibit minor divergences from current English translations. The text of the Targumim and of the Peshitta for the Hebrew Bible I have accessed via the digital *Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project* (<http://cal.huc.edu/>); for the New Testament Peshitta, I have consulted the website of *Dukhrana Biblical Research* (<https://www.dukhrana.com/peshitta/>). References to the Mishnah follow the text of the *Bar Ilan Responsa Project* (<https://www.responsa.co.il/default.aspx>).

My entries often accompany English citations of Qur'anic passages with generous dollops of transliterated Arabic, on the understanding that specialists will appreciate rapid access to the Arabic wording of the Qur'an alongside any translation. There is also a fair amount of words and phrases transliterated from Biblical and rabbinic Hebrew, from targumic and rabbinic Aramaic, and from Syriac, as well as occasional material from Classical Ethiopic (Gə'əz) and from inscriptions in Safaitic and Epigraphic South Arabian. Unfortunately, despite the fact that all of these are Semitic languages, transliteration conventions between them differ in some respects. A scholar whose primary interests are linguistic would no doubt have opted for a unitary and linguistically principled system of transliteration even at the price of going against entrenched disciplinary customs. Being a scholar of the Qur'an myself, I have instead started from a variant of the standard manner of transliterating Arabic in English-language publications, and then extended some of its features to the way I handle other Semitic languages. The result is the following system of transliteration conventions, which tries to strike a tolerable compromise between those perpetual foes, consistency and established practice.

For Arabic, I largely adhere to the *IJMES* transliteration chart rather than that of the *Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft* (e.g., "shams" rather than "šams," and "khatama" rather than "ḥatama"), and in keeping with this I do not represent assimilation of the definite article (e.g., "al-rabb" instead of "ar-rabb"). Word-initial glottal stops followed by a vowel are omitted in deference to ingrained habit, despite the entirely justified protestations of linguists that *hamzah* is a fully fledged letter. *Hamzat al-waṣl* is entirely ignored, as opposed to being marked by an apostrophe (e.g., I have "fī l-arḍ" rather than "fī 'l-arḍ"). I also disregard that certain syllabic contexts necessitate that vowels written



as long be pronounced as short (e.g., I have “*fī l-ard*” rather than “*fī l-ard,*” as found in the revised version of Hans Zirker’s transliteration of the Qur’an), and I apply this convention not only to the Qur’an but also to Arabic poetry, despite the fact that it misrepresents metre. I similarly do not transcribe the lengthening of the third-person singular personal suffixes *-hu* and *-hi* following an open or short-vowelled syllable (Fischer 2002, 7 and 142). I do, however, reflect the lengthening of short vowels at the end of verses of poetry (e.g., *ja’alā* instead of *ja’ala*). Against *IJMES* conventions, I render *tā’ marbūṭah* as *-ah* rather than *-a*. I have deliberately opted for “*nabiyy*” instead of the more customary “*nabī*,” but could not muster the reformationist fervour to extend the same logic to *nisbah* adjectives like *ummī* and *‘arabī*. Qur’anic and poetic verses and phrases are normally given with full desinential endings for all words except for Qur’anic verse closers, where rhyme generally requires that short desinential endings be omitted (e.g., the final word of Q 40:35 is to be pronounced *jabbār* rather than *jabbārin*, as written). Arabic phrases that are excerpted from inside a Qur’anic or poetic verse are normally cited in their contextual rather than pausal form, unless they are verse-final; thus, I have “*bi-smi llāhi*” rather than “*bi-smi llāh,*” but “*bi-smi llāhi l-rahmāni l-rahīm*” (since *rahīm* is the final word of Q 1:7 and loses its desinential ending in keeping with the principles of Qur’anic rhyme).<sup>1</sup> Single nouns and genitive constructions that are lifted from their syntactic context are often adduced without desinential endings.

In the interest of some uniformity, I have extended the omission of word-initial glottal stops from Arabic to Hebrew and Aramaic, though this may horrify Biblical scholars (e.g., “*ōl*” rather than “’*ōl*”). Otherwise, I handle Biblical Hebrew in accordance with the “academic style” outlined in *SBLH*<sup>2</sup> 56–58, which notably ignores *begadkepat* spirantisation. For post-Biblical (i.e., targumic, rabbinic, and modern) Hebrew, I simplify this approach by abandoning distinctions between long and short vowels other than *segol* and *ṣērē* (*e vs ē*) and between plene and defective spellings of vowels, and by replacing *š* by *sh* (thus, I refer to “*Midrash Tanḥuma*”). Vocal *shawa* and *ḥaṭṭep* vowels (*ā, ě, ō*) are however retained, and word-final *hē* is transliterated *-h* (e.g., “*torah*”). Unlike Biblical Hebrew, for post-Biblical Hebrew I also separate off the definite article, conjunctions, and prepositions by means of a hyphen, as customary for Arabic (e.g., “*ha-rahāman,*” in contrast with Biblical “*hasšā-mayim*”). Gemination, which is not pronounced in modern Hebrew, is retained for geminated verbs and associated forms (e.g., “*māshattēp*”) but not for the definite article (e.g., “*ha-māshattēpim,*” not “*ham-māshattēpim*”).

For Syriac, I mostly follow the system in Wheeler M. Thackston, *Introduction to Syriac: An Elementary Grammar with Readings from Syriac Literature* (Bethesda: Ibex Publishers, 1999), which dispenses with word-initial glottal stops and disregards spirantisation but retains gemination. I modify this by employing *sh* instead of *š*, as for Arabic and post-Biblical Hebrew, and by using *ī* and *ū* instead of *i* and *u* (which are invariably long). Following David Kiltz, I render the Syriac word meaning “God” *allāhā* rather than *alāhā* (Kiltz 2012, 41). As regards post-Biblical Jewish Aramaic, where vocalisation is often exceedingly uncertain anyway, I have normally opted for maximum simplicity: no distinction between long and short vowels, including *segol* and *ṣērē*; no distinction between plene and defective

<sup>1</sup> However, when referencing certain locutions in general, rather than citing a specific segment from a particular Qur’anic verse, I do adhere to pausal vocalisation for nouns in the genitive. For instance, the dictionary includes an entry whose heading is → *ṣāra fī l-ard* (rather than *fī l-ardī*). The reader may rest assured that most such apparent inconsistencies have been a source of due agony.

spelling; no *ḥaṭēp* vowels; and, ordinarily, no gemination (thus, “*milta*,” as opposed to Syriac “*melltā*”), though I would make an exception for geminated verbs like *ṣalli*, “to pray.” I also forego *shawas* (e.g., “*b-‘alma*” rather than “*bə-‘alma*”), though I make an exception for a title like “*Məkilta də-Rabbi Yishma‘ēl*.” For the sake of brevity, I do sometimes resort to hybrid expressions like “Syriac or Jewish Aramaic *melltā*,” rather than “Syriac *melltā* or Jewish Aramaic *milta*.”

Epigraphic material is generally transliterated as I have found it in the publications of specialised scholars, though I have striven for some unification. For Greek, I follow *SBLH*<sup>2</sup> 59–60. Finally, I adhere to British orthography throughout.

# DICTIONARY ENTRIES





### **ibrāhīm | Abraham**

See inter alia under → *ab*, → *arḍ*, → *isrāʿīl*, → *ḥarrama*, → *ḥanīf*, → *aslama*, → *mil-lah*, → *nabiyy*, and → *hājara*. For a more detailed and systematic treatment of Abraham in the Qurʾan with due references to earlier scholarship, refer to Sinai 2020a and Sinai, forthcoming b.

### **iblis | Iblis, the devil**

→ *shayṭān*

### **ab | father, forefather**

Further vocabulary discussed: *alladhīna kafarū*, *al-kāfirūn*, *al-kuffār* pl. | the repudiators *alladhīna ashtrakū*, *al-mushrikūn* pl. | the associators *mansak* | rite *ʿabada* tr. | to serve s.o. or s.th., to worship s.o. or s.th. *al-shayṭān* | the devil, Satan *ḍalla* intr. | to go astray *ṣanam* | idol *tamāthīl* pl. | images *ḍalāl* | being astray, going astray *ummah* | exemplary custom *mutraf* | affluent, spoilt by affluence *ashraka* intr. | to be an associator, to venerate associate deities, to attribute associates to God *dhurriyyah* | offspring *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *nazzala*, *anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down *shāʿa* tr./intr. | to wish or will (s.th.) *ḥarrama* tr. | to declare s.th. to be, or regard s.th. as, inviolable, sacred, or forbidden *millah* | religion, religious teaching

**The Qurʾanic pagans and their appeal to ancestral precedent.** In contrast to the Bible, the Qurʾan nowhere describes God as a father, and indeed one verse, Q 5:18, expressly criticises the Jews and Christians for doing so (see under → *allāh*). In the Qurʾan, the theological importance of the notion of fatherhood and paternal authority lies elsewhere: many passages polemically depict Muhammad’s pagan opponents—who are usually termed the “repudiators” or “associators” (→ *kafara*, → *ashraka*)—as invoking and inveterately adhering to the authority of ancestral tradition and precedent, preferring it over the divine revelations transmitted to Muhammad.<sup>1</sup> The Qurʾan does not name the forefathers in question, just as it almost never names the subsidiary deities worshipped by its “associating” adversaries (see again under → *ashraka*). It is a reasonable guess, though, that the Meccan progenitors would have included the legendary figure of Quṣayy: a verse by al-Aʿshā Maymūn portrays

<sup>1</sup> My awareness of the importance of this theme, whose link with the figure of Abraham I began to develop in 2017 (see Sinai, forthcoming b, and Sinai 2020a, 280–281), is also indebted to an unpublished paper by Hamza Zafer. Its main insights are now found in Zafer 2020, 103–137, which ought to be read alongside this entry.

him as the builder (or rebuilders?) of the Ka'bah, indicating that Quṣayy would have been remembered as a foundational figure in Meccan history already towards the end of the sixth century (Shahīd 1989, 394–397, citing Ḥusayn 1983, no. 15:44).

The Qur'anic pagans' esteem of and deference to their forefathers bears affinity with the world-view of pre-Islamic tribal poetry, which prizes noble descent and underlines the duty of progeny to live up to the lofty role model of their ancestors: "Whatever valuable qualities (*khayr*) they have been given, the forefathers of their forefathers passed them on as an inheritance before (*tawārathahu ābā'u ābā'ihim qablu*)," Zuhayr praises a tribe (*DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 14:40; cf. Jacobi 1971, 93–94). With similar devotion to their ancestors, the Qur'anic pagans insist on following "the custom of our forefathers" or, more literally, "that to which we have found our forefathers beholden/accustomed" (Q 2:170: *mā alfaynā 'alayhi ābā'anā*; 5:104, 31:21: *mā wajadnā 'alayhi ābā'anā*), rather than following "what God has sent down" (*mā anzala llāhu*).<sup>2</sup> The Qur'anic pagans' conviction that the practice of their forebears had normative force resonates with a verse from the Mu'allāqah of Labīd ('Abbās 1962, no. 48:81 = *EAP* 2:199; see Bravmann 1972, 165), in which the poet boasts of belonging to a "tribe (*ma'shar*) whose forefathers have established a pattern of behaviour for them (*sannat lahum ābā'uhum*); and every people has its pattern of behaviour (*sunnah*) and model (*imām*)."<sup>3</sup> It is, of course, in no way certain that the verse just cited predates the Qur'an, given that Labīd died in the early Islamic period. But the line does not anachronistically go beyond the deference to ancestral authority that the Qur'an ascribes to its pagan opponents and may accordingly reflect a general facet of pre-Qur'anic Arabian tribalism.<sup>3</sup>

The Qur'an does not on the whole offer compelling evidence of ancestor worship. Q 16:21 alleges that the deities venerated by the Qur'an's pagan opponents are in reality "dead, not alive, and do not know when they will be resurrected." As Crone notes, this could be read as presenting the deities in question as "mere human beings falsely deified" (*QP* 73); but even if that is correct, it only shows that the Qur'an is polemically casting the deities of its opponents as mere mortals, not that the opponents whose rites are attacked were themselves conscious of venerating mythical progenitors. Perhaps somewhat more convincingly, Q 2:200 might be understood to disclose that the pre-Qur'anic *hajj* ritual included an invocation of ancestors or ancestral spirits, but again it is impossible to be very confident.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the Qur'an mainly envisages the Meccans' forefathers as having

2 See also the treatment of Q 7:71, 12:40, and 53:23 (all of which condemn the usage or veneration of "names that you<sup>p</sup> and your forefathers have devised," *asmā' sammaytumūhā antum wa-ābā'ukum*) under → *ism*.

3 There is of course also the possibility of later insertion, but *EAP* 2:199 argues quite cogently, in my view, that this is not likely. Independence from the Qur'an is suggested especially by the verse's use of the term *sunnah*: while the word does occur in the Qur'an (e.g., Q 8:38, 17:77, 33:38), it usually means the customary manner in which God has treated previous generations of humans (namely, by punishing them if guilty of unbelief and wrongdoing and sparing them if prepared to repent). Thus, *sunnat al-awwalīm* (e.g., Q 8:38, 35:43) is not the exemplary behaviour that was instituted or adhered to by the ancients, as one might assume in light of the line by Labīd, but rather God's habitual manner of dealing with earlier generations. See *CDKA* 140.

4 According to this reading, Q 2:200 commands the Qur'anic community, after having performed their *hajj* rites (*manāsik*; see under → *dhabāḥa*), to "invoke God as you [used to] invoke your forefathers, or more so" (*fa-dhkurū llāha ka-dhikrikum ābā'akum aw ashadda dhikran*; → *dhakara*). At least the imperative *udhkurū* ought to be translated as "to invoke" rather than "to remember" or "to commemorate," since the remainder of Q 2:200 condemns an inappropriate way of invoking God ("And some people say, 'Our Lord, give to us in the proximate life!'" while the next verse instead recommends the formula, "Our Lord, give to us good in the proximate life and good in the hereafter, and protect us from the punishment of the fire" (Q 2:201)). Thus, the discussion revolves around concrete invocatory utterances rather than mere commemoration of God. Against this background, it is conceivable that the same understanding of *dhakara* also ought to govern our interpretation of the verbal noun

practised, and thereby guaranteeing the validity of, certain cultic practices rather than as being themselves the objects of ritual veneration. It is the continuation of such ancestral ritual precedent that Muhammad is perceived to endanger. He is accordingly rejected as “only a man who wants to turn you<sup>p</sup> away from what your forefathers were wont to serve” (Q 34:43: *mā hādhā illā rajulun yurīdu an yašuddakum ‘ammā kāna ya‘budu ābā’u-kum*). The Qur’anic proclamations in turn dismiss their opponents’ forefathers as devoid of knowledge (Q 18:5) and as heeding the call of the devil or Satan (→ *al-shayṭān*; Q 31:21). Muhammad’s preaching thus squarely rejected the Meccan ancestors’ authority to set valid precedents in religious matters. As the early Meccan passage Q 37:69–70 puts it with sardonic humour, the unbelievers “have found their forefathers going astray (*innahum alḥaw ābā’ahum ḍāllīn*) // and there they are being driven on in their footsteps (*fa-hum ‘alā āthārihim yuhra’ūn*)!” God, the text asserts, is not only “your<sup>p</sup> Lord,” but also “the Lord of your<sup>p</sup> ancient forefathers” (Q 44:8: *rabbu ābā’ikumū l-awwālīn*), insisting that vis-à-vis God all humans occupy the same station (see also Q 26:26 and 37:126, where the same phrase is used by Moses and Elijah).

**Ancestral precedent in Qur’anic messenger narratives.** The same tenacious attachment to ancestral tradition for which Muhammad’s opponents are taken to task is also ascribed to various communities in the past. Thus, in the early Meccan verse Q 26:74—which together with Q 37:69–70 chronologically precedes all of the other material discussed in this entry—the contemporaries of Abraham justify their veneration of idols (Q 26:71: *aṣnām*; see under → *dhabaḥa*) by saying that “we found our forefathers doing the same” (*qālū bal wajadnā ābā’anā ka-dhālika yaḥ alūn*). A parallel utterance is attributed to Abraham’s people in Q 21:53 (“We found our forefathers serving them,” *qālū wajadnā ābā’anā lahā ‘ābidīn*, namely, the “images” or *tamāthīl* mentioned in v. 52). Similar to Q 37:69, quoted above, Abraham here responds by dismissing his opponents and their ancestors as being “clearly astray” (Q 21:54: *fī ḍalālīn mubīn*). According to Q 10:78, the people of Lot ask him whether he has “come to turn us away from the custom of our forefathers” (*qālū a-ji’tanā li-talḥītanā ‘ammā wajadnā ‘alayhi ābā’anā*). Q 43:22–24 generalises that just as contemporary unbelievers are determined to “let themselves be guided” by the exemplary custom (→ *ummah*) of their forebears (vv. 22: *wajadnā ābā’anā ‘alā ummatīn wa-innā ‘alā āthārihim muhtadūn*; cf. again Q 37:70), so the same stance was inevitably taken by the affluent elite (*mutrafūhā*, on which see the remarks under → *khatama* and → *istaḍ’afa*) of each settlement or town (*qaryah*) to whom God has previously dispatched a warner (v. 23, repeating v. 22 but substituting *muhtadūn* by *muqtadūn*). The same historical generalisation is made in Q 14:10, where the “messengers” (*rusul*) sent to various past peoples are said to have faced the accusation of intending to “turn” their addressees “away from what our forefathers were wont to serve” (*an tašuddūnā ‘ammā kāna ya‘budu ābā’unā*; note the similarity to Q 34:43, quoted above). The opponents of the historic messengers Ṣāliḥ (sent to Thamūd), Shu‘ayb (sent to Madyan), and Hūd (sent to ‘Ād) are also faulted for appealing to “what our forefathers served” (*mā ± <kāna> ya‘budu ābā’unā*; see Q 11:62.87 and 7:70). Employing the verb → *ashraka*, “to associate” (namely, other beings with God), the allegedly universal human propensity to uphold ancestral traditions is moreover

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*dhikr* in the subsequent phrase *ka-dhikrikum ābā’akum*, though the alternative translation “invoke God as you commemorate your forefathers, or more so” can hardly be ruled out. On the former interpretation, the verse would demand that a hitherto customary practice of invoking ancestors be replaced by prayer to God.

anticipated in Q 7:173: “Already our forefathers associated, and we are their offspring (*wakunnā dhurriyyatan min ba’dihim*).” To belong to someone’s offspring (*dhurriyyah*) goes hand in hand with commitment to certain ancestral values, a notion that we will ultimately see the Qur’an transfer to the figure of Abraham.

In short, the Qur’an portrays humans as universally prone to derive normative—in particular, cultic or religious—orientation from inherited custom and tradition. This is presented as a chief obstacle to acknowledgement of the conflicting truth claims conveyed by prophetic messenger figures. The Qur’an thus articulates what Jan Assmann, following Theo Sundermeier, has described as the tension between “primary” and “secondary” religions—namely, the fact that “positive” or “founded” religions are “counter-religions” that “had to confront and to reject a tradition” (Assmann 1997, 169).<sup>5</sup> This tension is cast as a ubiquitous feature of religious history in the Qur’an.

**Ancestral tradition and divine endorsement in Q 7:28, 6:148, 16:35, and 43:20.** A noteworthy and interpretively problematic variant on the same theme is found in Q 7:28, where the Qur’an’s opponents are alleged to justify the perpetration of “abominable deeds” (*wa-idhā fa’alū fāḥishatan*) by declaring that this was “the custom of our forefathers” (*qālū wajadnā ‘alayhā ābā’anā*), which then appears to be equated with divine commandments (*wa-llāhu amaranā bihā*). Should one take this pronouncement to entail that the Qur’an’s opponents deemed their ancestral traditions to preserve and give access to divine revelations, just as the Qur’an considers the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*), i.e., Jews and Christians, to be recipients of past revelations that were subsequently handed down to the present (although perhaps not without distortion)?

In support of an affirmative answer, one may note that Muhammad’s pagan adversaries do seem to have subscribed to certain entrenched preconceptions about what genuine divine revelations would need to look like (→ *ashraka*). Nonetheless, it is overall unlikely to read Q 7:28 as manifesting a claim on the part of Muhammad’s antagonists that their ancestral tradition gave them access to divine revelations, in the same way in which Jews and Christians might claim to stand in a traditionally mediated link to revelation. After all, the Qur’an does not explicitly engage with any such claim on their part. Indeed, several of the verses cited above are predicated on a straightforward opposition between ancestral custom and “what God has sent down” (*mā anzala llāhu*; → *nazzala*), rather than on a distinction between direct and indirect access to divine revelation (i.e., between revelation conveyed through prophecy and through tradition). Rather, Q 7:28 is best read as implying a counterfactual argument that is reported in more detail in Q 6:148 and 16:35 (and similarly 43:20): “Had God willed, neither we nor our forefathers would have associated [anything with him], and we would not have declared anything to be forbidden” (Q 6:148: *law shā’a llāhu mā ashraknā wa-lā ābā’unā wa-lā ḥarramnā min shay’in*); “Had God willed, we would not have served anything besides him, neither we nor our forefathers, and we would not have declared anything besides him to be inviolable” (Q 16:35: *law shā’a llāhu mā ‘abadnā min dūnihi min shay’in naḥnu wa-lā ābā’unā wa-lā ḥarramnā min dūnihi min shay’in*).<sup>6</sup> Such passages present the pagans as responding to the Qur’anic Messenger’s

<sup>5</sup> For an earlier formulation of the same insight, see William Robertson Smith’s distinction between positive and traditional religions in Smith 1894, 1–2.

<sup>6</sup> On the meaning of *min dūnihi* here, see Ambros 2001, 11–12; see also briefly under → *ashraka*. On the verb *shā’a* and the theological counterfactual *law shā’a llāhu*, see under → *shā’a* and → *hadā*. On Q 6:148, 16:35, and 43:20, see also *QP* 65–66.



claim to be the recipient of divine revelations by insisting that their ancestral traditions are at least backed up by an indirect kind of divine endorsement: were these traditions opposed to God's will, God would have made sure that such customs had not persisted intact until the present (see also under → *harrama*).

In other words, passages like Q 6:148 show the Qur'anic pagans—who self-avowedly had not hitherto received a divine scripture or a “warner” from God (e.g., Q 6:157, 35:42)—scrambling to put in place some sort of secondary defence against the force of the Qur'an's persistent claim to be anchored in revelation. This defence notably concedes that divine revelation is ultimately superior to human tradition, but it seems likely that the Qur'anic pagans started out from the conviction that established custom is normative as such. They may tacitly have identified adherence to ancestral tradition with adherence to the will of God, but explicit recourse to the idea of divine endorsement of their inherited cultic practices would appear to have been a secondary phenomenon, triggered by Qur'anic attempts to establish a sharp opposition between human tradition and divine revelation.

**Abraham's development from anti-paternal rebel to paternal forbear.** While the Qur'an depicts a number of past messengers as being confronted by their audience's devotion to ancestral tradition, this topos is particularly tangible with regard to the figure of Abraham (Sinai, forthcoming b). Thus, several versions of the Qur'anic Abraham narrative recount the monotheistic exhortations that Abraham addressed not only “to his people” (*li-qawmihi*) but specifically “to his father” (*li-abīhi*; Q 6:74, 19:42, 21:52, 26:70, 37:85, 43:26). The conflict between Abraham and his father is particularly foregrounded in Abraham's sermon in Q 19:42–45, containing four occurrences of the vocative *yā-abati*, “O my father” (Sinai 2020a, 280), to which Abraham's father replies by underlining his commitment to his gods and by threatening his son with stoning (v. 46). The Qur'an thus portrays Abraham as the quintessential anti-paternal rebel, whose decisive break with ancestral tradition is deployed in direct connection with the appeals to ancestral tradition on the part of Muhammad's adversaries (Q 43:19–29, with a total of five occurrences of the words “father” or “fathers” in vv. 22, 23, 24, 26, and 29).

The Medinan surahs build on the Meccan image of Abraham as a paradigm of anti-paternal rebellion by elevating him to an effective founding figure of Qur'anic monotheism. Most importantly in the present context, Q 22:78 calls upon the community of believers to adhere to the “teaching of your<sup>p</sup> father Abraham” (*millat abikum ibrahīma*; → *millah*). In this appeal, the erstwhile anti-paternal rebel Abraham is himself recast as a figure of paternal authority. The formulation has strong Jewish and Christian precedent (e.g., *m. Qidd.* 4:14 and Rom 4:1.11–12), and Q 22:78 is no doubt concerned to assert that the Qur'anic believers' claim to Abraham is superior to that routinely staked out by Jews and Christians (see also Q 3:67–68). It is nonetheless striking that Q 22:78 expresses Abraham's paradigmatic importance for the Qur'anic community in paternal terms, given the Meccan surahs' strident criticism of their opponents' appeals to ancestral authority.<sup>7</sup> The idea that

7 Donner 2019, 138–139, raises the possibility that this verse or part of it is an insertion postdating the death of Muhammad. However, Q 22:78 is contained in the manuscript Bibliothèque nationale de France Arabe 328c, which has been identified as belonging to the same codex as Birmingham Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a (Fedeli 2011, 50). Since the latter has been radiocarbon-dated to 568–645 CE, with a probability of 95.4%, it is not unproblematic to associate the verse with 'Abd al-Malik, as tentatively proposed by Donner. See <https://corpuscoranicum.de/handschriften/index/sure/22/vers/78?handschrift=158> (accessed 15 March 2021).

Abraham and his immediate descendants function as a counter-paradigm to the ancestral custom on which the Qur’anic pagans base themselves also underlies Q 2:133, where Jacob’s sons promise their dying father that they will, after his death, continue to serve “your<sup>s</sup> God and the God of your fathers Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac (*ilāha ābā’ika ibrahīma wa-ismā’īla wa-ishhāqa*).” The same motif is already in evidence in Q 12:38, according to which Joseph professes his determination to “follow the teaching of my fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (cf. also Q 12:6).

Thus, by the Medinan period the Qur’anic revelations do not so much reject the concept of authoritative paternal tradition as such, but rather seek to neutralise the weight of the ancestral legacy of paganism with the monotheistic heritage of Abraham and the Biblical patriarchs. It is important to note that this counter-paradigm of a monotheistic Abrahamic heritage presupposes the understanding that the inhabitants of Mecca are literally the “offspring” (*dhurriyyah*) of Abraham (Q 2:128, 14:37.40; see Goudarzi 2019), just as the associators are literally the offspring of their forefathers (Q 7:173).<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, therefore, by clinging to the veneration of deities other than God, the pagan Meccans, despite their seeming obsession with ancestral precedent, are actually violating their true ancestral heritage, Abrahamic monotheism.

***atā* tr./intr. *bi-* | to bring s.th. (to s.o.)**

***ātā* tr./ditr. | to give s.th. (to s.o.)**

See briefly under → *āyah*, → *zakāh*, → *ṣadaqah*, → *ṣallā*, → *furqān*, → *malik*, and → *nazzala*.

***ajara* tr. | to serve s.o. for wages**

***ista’jara* tr. | to hire s.o. for wages**

→ *ajr*

***ajr* | wage; dower**

Further vocabulary discussed: *ajara* tr. | to serve s.o. for wages *ista’jara* tr. | to hire s.o. for wages *thawāb* | reward *jazā’* | recompense, requital *waffā* ditr. | to pay s.th. to s.o. in full; to repay s.o. for s.th. in full *aḍā’a* tr. | to neglect (to pay) s.th. *zāda* tr. | to give s.o. more *ghayr mamnūn* | rightfully earned *maghfirah* | forgiveness *kaffara* tr. ‘*an* | to absolve s.o. of s.th. *jazā* tr. | to recompense s.o., to reward or punish s.o.

The Qur’an exhibits a pervasive tendency to couch the relationship between God and humans in monetary and commercial terms (Torrey 1892; Rippin 1996). This is exemplified not only by its metaphorical usage of notions like purchasing and selling, divine “reckoning,” the accrual of good and bad actions, and loaning unto God (→ *sharā*, → *ḥisāb*, → *aqrāda*,

<sup>8</sup> Thus, a claim to direct descent from Abraham would likely have been confined to those members of the Qur’anic community who were of Meccan extraction; see the further remarks under → *ummah*.

→ *kasaba*), but also by numerous assurances of divine recompense or “wage” (*ajr*) in the hereafter, which will take centre stage in what follows. A second context in which the term *ajr* is prominently used, to be discussed at the end of this entry, is the assertion in the Meccan surahs that God’s emissaries do not demand a “wage” from their audience and that they will be exclusively remunerated by their divine sender.

*Ajr* = “wage.” Although the noun *ajr* is often translated as “reward,” it denotes more precisely a “reward given for service rendered” (Torrey 1892, 23), i.e., a “wage” (thus Arberry’s consistent rendering): *ajara* is “to serve for wages” (Q 28:27) and *ista’jara* “to hire for wages” (Q 28:26; see Torrey 1892, 24, and CDKA 21), and a number of Qur’anic passages employ *ajr* or its plural *ujūr* to mean wages or pay in this-worldly dealings between humans (Q 7:113, 18:77, 26:41, 28:25), including cases in which *ajr* refers to dower paid by a groom to the bride (Q 4:24–25, 5:5, 33:50, 60:10, 65:6). Indeed, Arabic *ajr* has an Aramaic cognate *agrā*, which similarly signifies “hire, wages, fee, payment” and the like (SL 8; DJBA 80–81).<sup>1</sup> Hence, while the word *ajr* is clearly an approximate synonym of *thawāb*, “reward” (e.g., Q 3:145.148.195, 18:31.44.46), or *jazā*, “recompense, requital” (e.g., Q 3:136, 4:93, 5:29.85, 9:95, 78:26.36), it is semantically distinctive in implicitly casting humans as labourers contracted by God, labourers who will receive their due pay in the world to come—“How excellent is the wage of those who labour!” (*ni‘ma ajru l-‘āmilīn*), three verses exclaim (Q 3:136, 29:58, and 39:7).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, whereas *thawāb* and *jazā* are readily used both for this-worldly and other-worldly reward (see, e.g., Q 3:145.148, 4:13 on the former, and 2:85.191, 5:33.38.95 on the latter), *ajr* is mostly reserved for eschatological recompense, although there are exceptions, as shown by Q 12:56 (Joseph’s “wage” seems to be equated with his God granting him an abode in Egypt) and 29:27 (stating that Abraham is not only among the righteous “in the hereafter” but that he also received “his wage in the proximate life,” *ātaynāhu ajrahu fī l-dunyā*).<sup>3</sup>

**Qur’anic pledges of eschatological “wage.”** Those who believe, do righteous deeds, give charity, and perform prayer, etc., are promised that “their wage is with their Lord” (Q 2:62.112.262.274.277, 3:199: *ajruhum ‘inda rabbihim*) or “is incumbent upon their Lord” (Q 4:100, 42:40: *fa-ṭ<sup>ṭ</sup>qad waqa‘a> ajruhu ‘alā llāhi*). The preposition ‘*inda*, “with,” in verses like Q 2:62 has an implication of eschatological communion with God (see in more detail under → *jannah*). Other passages announce that God will “pay” peoples’ eschatological wages “in full” (Q 3:57, 4:173: *fa-yuwaffihim ujūrahum*; see also 3:185, 35:30, 39:10, and in general Torrey 1892, 22–23) and that he will not “neglect to pay” (*aḍā‘a*) the wages of those who believe (Q 3:171; see also, without the term *ajr*, 2:143) and who do righteous or good deeds (Q 7:170, 9:120, 11:115, 12:56.90, 18:30; see also, without the term *ajr*, 3:195). Indeed, God will “give them more” than their due wage (Q 4:173, 35:30: *wa-yazīduhum/yazīdahum*; see also 24:38 and 42:26 for a similar use of *zāda*), and at least some people will receive their wages “twice over” (*marratayn*; Q 28:54 and 33:31).<sup>4</sup> A large

1 According to FVQ 49, *ajr* is a borrowing from Syriac. But *grt* (cf. Arabic *ijārah*) is already attested in Saffaitic; see Al-Jallad 2015, 261 (with KRS 1563) and 297. It is notable that in KRS 1563, *grt* refers to compensation asked from a deity.

2 The term *ajr* co-occurs with derivatives of ‘-*m-l* in other verses as well, e.g., Q 16:96.97, 3:195, or 18:30.

3 On the relationship between *ajr*, *thawāb*, and *jazā*, cf. Torrey 1892, 25–26, who rejects “any sharp distinction” between them as “artificial.”

4 See also Q 6:160 (a good deed will be rewarded tenfold) as well as 27:89 and 28:84 (a good deed will be rewarded by “something better”). Verses like Q 4:40 and 34:37 announce that God will “double” or “multiply” (*ḍā‘afa*, on which see under → *aqrada*) people’s rewards or give them “double recompense” (*jazā’ al-ḍif*; see

number of formulaic verse-endings highlight that the eschatological requital awaiting the pious will be “mighty” or “great,” using the adjectives *‘aẓīm*, which is predominant in Medinan passages (e.g., Q 3:172.179, 4:40.67.74.95.114 etc., 33:29.35), and *kabīr* (Q 11:11, 17:9, 35:7, 57:7, 67:12; see also 16:41). Other adjectives describing people’s eschatological wage are *ḥasan*, “good” (Q 18:2, 48:16), *karīm*, “generous” (Q 33:44, 36:11, 57:11.18), and *ghayr mammūn*, “not considered as an unearned favour” or “rightfully earned” (Q 41:8, 68:3, 84:25, 95:6; see CDKA 259).<sup>5</sup>

**Eschatological wage and divine forgiveness.** It is salient that promises of eschatological wages are repeatedly paired with promises of divine forgiveness (*maghfirah*; Q 5:9, 11:11, 33:35, 35:7, 36:11, 48:29, 49:3, 67:12; see also the occurrence of *ajr* in proximity to declarations that God is “forgiving,” *ghafūr*, in 4:100.152, 35:30, and 73:20). The underlying rationale is spelled out in three Meccan passages (Q 29:7, 39:35, 46:16) that proclaim God’s leniency towards “those who believe and do righteous deeds” (Q 29:7: *alladhīna āmanū wa-‘amilū l-ṣāliḥāt*) or who are God-fearing and do what is right (Q 39:33.34: *al-muttaqūn, al-muḥsinūn*): Q 39:35 declares that God will “absolve them of the worst of what they have done” (*li-yukaffira llāhu ‘anhum aswa’a lladhī ‘amilū*) and “recompense them with wage according to the best of what they have done” (*wa-yajziyahum ajrahum bi-aḥsani lladhī kānū ya‘malūn*; for more detail, see → *kaffara*), and the same point is made in Q 29:7 and 46:16. Two consecutive verses in Surah 16 also assert that God will “recompense” those who are patient (Q 16:96: *la-najziyanna lladhīna ṣabarū*) or who do righteous deeds (Q 16:97: *la-najziyannahum*) “with wage according to the best of what they have done” (*ajrahum bi-aḥsani mā kānū ya‘malūn*).

Hence, believers will receive the just compensation that is owed to them for their virtuous deeds, whereas any sins they may have committed will not be punished according to the dictates of strict justice but will instead be magnanimously effaced. Concomitant announcements of eschatological wage and of divine forgiveness (on which see also under → *al-raḥmān*) accordingly reflect that the believers’ salvation is not exclusively a consequence of their intrinsic desert, despite the repeated Qur’anic insistence that eschatological reward will be apportioned like contractually stipulated pay for services rendered. Rather, it is ultimately the fact that humans have previously entered into and maintained a believing relationship with God that guarantees divine effacement or disregard of their sins, which are thus prevented from tarnishing their other-worldly prospering.

**God’s “wage” in the Qur’an and the New Testament.** Precursors for the Qur’anic promise of eschatological reward are found in the New Testament (Torrey 1892, 27), such as Matt 5:12 and 6:1–6.16 and Luke 6:23.35. They employ the Greek word *misthos*, which like Arabic *ajr* means “hire, wages, payment” (e.g., Luke 10:7). Particularly significant are Matt 5:12 and Luke 6:23.35, according to which those who are persecuted like the prophets or who love their enemies, do good, and “expect nothing in return” will receive a “great (*polys*) wage,” recalling the frequent Qur’anic nexus between the noun *ajr* and the adjectives *‘aẓīm* and

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CDKA 168–169). But note that similar statements are also made about eschatological punishment (Q 7:38, 11:20, 25:69, 33:30.68, 38:61).

<sup>5</sup> An alternative interpretation would be to understand the verb *manna*, from which the passive participle *mammūn* is derived, to mean “to withhold,” yielding the translation “wages that are not withheld,” as proposed by Alan Jones based on a line in the Mu’allaqah of Labid (*EAP* 2:181–182). However, all non-participial occurrences of *manna* in the Qur’an mean “to bestow favours upon s.o.” (*manna ‘alā*) or “to consider it a favour to s.o. to do s.th.” (*manna ‘alā*, followed by *an* or an accusative); see CDKA 259.

*kabīr*. It is notable that the Syriac Peshitta renders *misthos* as *agrā*, the cognate of Arabic *ajr*. Meanwhile, Qur’anic verses describing God’s wage in the hereafter as something that is “rightfully earned” (*ghayr mammūn*) may involve a distant resonance of Paul’s affirmation in Rom 4:4 (in the context of his exegesis of Gen 15:6) that “to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift (*kata charin* ≈ *mammūn*?) but as something due.”

As these parallels demonstrate, the Qur’an shares its use of commercial-theological language “with the general urban imagery employed in religious literature of the monotheistic Near Eastern world” (Rippin 1996, 133; see also *CQ* 49–50), ultimately going back to important conceptual shifts in Second Temple Judaism like the understanding of sin as “a debt to be repaid” and of charitable deeds as “storable commodities” (see Anderson 2009 and 2013). This deep intertextual background undermines Torrey’s assessment that the Qur’anic use of commercial notions manifests the “deep-rooted commercial spirit” of “the Arab nature” (Torrey 1892, 50). A more relevant approach would be to focus on the theological ramifications of the Qur’anic recourse to monetary metaphors, such as conceiving of eschatological salvation as God’s payment of a rightful wage. God, in his dealings with human agents, will exercise unfailing and scrupulous justice—and indeed will go well beyond the expectations of fairness that are operative in human economic interactions: he pays his servants twice their due wage and does not make deductions for any outstanding debts.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in being prepared to remunerate a finite quantity of this-worldly righteousness with eternal reward, God offers uniquely favourable terms of trade. Finally, the Qur’an’s deployment of economic metaphors drives home that humans who construct their daily lives around belief in posthumous divine compensation are not taking an uncertain leap of faith but are instead making a profoundly rational choice.

**God’s messengers do not demand human pay.** A frequent trope linked to the word *ajr* is the recurrent insistence in Meccan surahs that Muhammad and God’s emissaries before him, such as Noah, did not or do not ask (*sa’ala*) for a “wage” from their respective audience in return for conveying God’s warnings (Q 6:90, 10:72, 11:29, 51, 12:104, 25:57, 26:109, 127, 145, 164, 180, 34:47, 38:86, 42:23; see also 36:21, 52:40, 68:46). Rather, God’s emissaries will be compensated by God himself (Q 10:72, 11:29, 34:47: *in ajriya illā ‘alā llāhi*; similarly 11:51 and 26:109, 127 etc.). Thus, God’s warners—unlike, for instance, the Egyptian sorcerers whom Pharaoh marshals to confront Moses (Q 7:113, 26:41)—are not in the service of humans but of God. Ahrens connects this with Matt 10:8, where Jesus orders his disciples to “give without payment,” as well as a passage in the second-century *Shepherd of Hermas* (Commandments 11:12) criticising the one “who receives wages for his prophecy” (*misthous lambanōn tēs propheteias autou*; Ehrmann 2003, 2:288–289; see *CQ* 161, *BEQ* 456, and Reynolds 2018, 659–660). This prophetological motif goes back as far as the Biblical condemnation of prophets who “give oracles for money” in Mic 3:11. That false prophets or teachers may be recognised by their acceptance or demand of material remuneration is also reiterated in other Christian texts, such as the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* 11:9, 12 (Ehrmann 2003, 1:434–437) and Ephrem’s sermon on Jonah and Nineveh (Beck 1970b, no. 1:701–702), where the Syriac word *agrā* is employed.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to Usman Shaikh for helping me understand this point.

<sup>7</sup> For another occurrence of the topos, see the refutation of Montanism that is cited in Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History* 5:18:2–11 (Eusebius 1926–1932, 1:486–493).

It is interesting to note that the Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum* argues to the contrary that “he who speaks to you the word of God” and dispenses “spiritual food and water and everlasting life” is to be offered “perishable and temporal food, for ‘the labourer (*pā’lā*) deserves his wage (*agreh*)” (Vööbus 1979, 37), quoting Luke 10:7. The argument evidently reflects the increasing institutionalisation undergone by the early Christian church and the consequent need to come to terms with some form of monetary remuneration for full-time ministers. By contrast, Muhammad’s authority was in principle grounded in his prophetic charisma and not, like that of a Christian cleric, in his belonging to an ecclesiastical hierarchy whose maintenance required regular financial support in return for the regular provision of religious teaching and other services.

In the Qur’an’s Medinan period, however, Muhammad acquired responsibility for the collection and redistribution of charitable donations (see Q 9:58–59.102–103 and 58:12–13; → *ṣadaqah*, → *zakāh*) and of military spoils (Q 8:1.41, 59:6–7). This could have made him vulnerable to the complaint that his Medinan role violated the Meccan doctrine that God’s messengers do not seek remuneration, which is perhaps the reason why statements denying that Muhammad or other emissaries “asked for a wage” do not recur in the Medinan Qur’an (even though it is reasonable to suppose that Meccan denials that divine emissaries might claim wages continued to be known to the Medinan community). The fact that a number of Medinan passages contain catalogues of the various categories of recipients who are entitled to receive charitable assistance or a share of military spoils (see under → *zakāh*) could also bespeak a desire to foreground that Muhammad’s acquisition of a quasi-fiscal role did not equate to “demanding wages” for himself, but instead served merely to support community members in need (Sinai 2018a, 15). In highlighting the social rationale for Muhammad’s new prerogatives in Medina, the Qur’an sets him in implicit opposition to Jewish and Christian dignitaries, “many” of whom are roundly condemned for “unjustly consuming people’s possessions” in Q 9:34. One might also consider whether the stress in Q 59:6–7 that the Messenger’s spoils are effectively a gift from God (*mā afā’allaḥu ‘alā rasūlihi*, “what God has granted his Messenger”) is to be read as an implicit appeal to the Meccan teaching that a warner’s legitimate wage will be disbursed by God himself.

## *ajal* | term

Further vocabulary discussed: *musammā* | named, specified, fixed *iqtaraba* intr. | to draw near *ḥisāb* | reckoning, account *wa’d* | promise; pledge *al-sā’ah* | the hour (of the resurrection) *akhkhara* tr. | to postpone s.th.; to reprieve s.o. *khalada* intr. | to remain forever *al-dunyā* | the proximate life *al-‘ājilah* | what is fleeting, what passes in haste *matā’ ilā ḥin* | enjoyment until a certain time *matta’a* tr. (*ilā ḥin*) | to grant s.o. enjoyment (until a certain time) *al-ākhirah* | what is final or last, the final state of things, the hereafter *dār al-qarār* | the abode of stability *umm al-kitāb* | the mother of the scripture, the mother-scripture (meaning either the celestial archetype of earthly scriptures or the Qur’an’s unequivocal core) *maḥā* tr. | to erase or delete s.th. *kashafa* tr. | to lift or remove s.th.

**Overview.** The noun *ajal* means a fixed time or term, such as the due date of a loan (Q 2:282), an antecedently stipulated length of employment (Q 28:28–29), or the waiting



period (*'iddah*) that must elapse before a woman's remarriage after a divorce or the death of her previous husband (Q 2:231–232, 234–235, 65:2.4). Apart from its occasional appearance in connection with mundane transactions or family matters, the word plays a crucial theological role, which will be described in more detail in what follows (see already succinctly Mir 1987, 17).<sup>1</sup>

Phraseologically, *ajal* often collocates with the attribute *musammā* (“named, specified, fixed”; CDKA 139), which accompanies it both in the mundane context of money-lending (Q 2:282) and in theological or anthropological affirmations (e.g., Q 6:2). In one case, *ajal* has the adjective *ma'dūd* (Q 11:104), “limited” (CDKA 184). God's “setting” (verb: *ja'ala*) of a “term” (*ajal*) also occurs in a poetic retelling of the creation of Adam attributed to the Christian poet 'Adī ibn Zayd (al-Mu'aybid 1965, no. 103:14; see Toral-Niehoff 2008, 247–248, and Dmitriev 2010, 373–374), although in a much less universal sense than in the Qur'an: according to the poem, God “cursed” the serpent that seduced “his creation”—namely, Adam and Eve—and did not place a time limit on this curse, meaning that the curse was perpetual.

**All of pre-eschatological creation has its term.** God's creation of humans and of the currently existing cosmos as a whole is Qur'anically understood to have involved the setting of an *ajal* or term of existence. Thus, God primordially fashioned humans “from clay” and “then set a term (*thumma qaḍā ajalān*)—there is a specified term with him (*wa-ajalun musamman 'indahū*)” (Q 6:2; for other occurrences of *ajal* in connection with the creation of humans, see 17:99 and 40:67). More generally, the divine voice avers that “we only created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in truth and with a specified term” (Q 46:3: *mā khalaqnā l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa wa-mā baynahumā illā bi-l-ḥaqqi wa-ajalīn musamman*; see also 30:8). With respect to the sun and the moon in particular, it is repeatedly said that “each runs its course until a specified term” (*kullun yajrī li-ajalīn musamman*; Q 13:2, 31:29, 35:13, 39:5). The preordained term of the cosmos as a whole is clearly the day of judgement, when the heavenly bodies, including the sun and the moon, will perish (Q 75:8–9, 77:8, 81:1–2, 82:2) and when humans will, by their own words, have “reached the term that you have set for us” (Q 6:128: *wa-balaghñā ajalānā lladhī ajjalta lanā*, harking back to 6:2.60). At the individual level, humans' “specified term” (*ajal musammā*) is the moment of their death (Q 6:60, 39:42, 40:67; see also 3:145, where an individual's death is called a *kitāb mu'ajjal*, which one might render as a “fixed-term decree”). After death, an individual's ethico-religious balance sheet, on the basis of which he or she will ultimately face God's final judgement, will remain unalterably fixed. Thus, as Mir notes, the Qur'anic idea of *ajal* stresses “the finiteness of the period of time allotted to individuals and nations for moral action” (Mir 1987, 17).

As the preceding quotation from Mir intimates, human communities, too, have their specified term (cf. Acts 17:26, noted in CQ 168 and BEQ 453), for which “they will be neither early nor late” (Q 7:34, 10:49: *li-kulli ummatīn ajalun ± <fa->idhā jā'a ajaluhum ± <fa->lā yasta'khirūna sā'atan wa-lā yastaqdimūn*, which is partly paralleled by 16:61; see also 15:5 and 23:43: *mā tasbiqū min ummatīn ajalāhā wa-mā yasta'khirūn*). Just as the “term” of an individual is not simply the moment of her demise but also the preamble to her resurrection and her being called to account, so the “term” of a human collective is not merely the

1 Such dual use is also encountered with other Qur'anic terms like → *ajr*, “wage,” and *rizq*, “provision” (→ *razaqa*).

moment at which they will “cease to exist on earth” (SQ 419) but rather the moment when they must face divine justice. This occurs either when a historical messenger figure, like Noah, urges a specific community to serve and obey God, on pain of immediate inner-historical retribution, or when God’s universal judgement finally irrupts into the world. This collective dimension of the term *ajal* is exemplified by Q 7:185, threatening “those who dismiss our signs as a lie” (v. 182) that “perhaps their term has drawn near” (*‘asā an yakūna qadi qtaraba ajaluhum*). Pertinently, the verb *iqtaraba*, “to draw near,” elsewhere collocates with God’s “reckoning” (→ *ḥisāb*; Q 21:1), with the “true pledge” (*al-wa‘d al-ḥaqq*; Q 21:97; see under → *wa‘ada*), and with “the hour” of the resurrection (→ *al-sā‘ah*; Q 54:1). “As for those who expect to meet God: God’s term is coming (*fa-inna ajala llāhi la-ātin*), and he is hearing and knowing,” declares Q 29:5, similarly employing the word *ajal* as a byword for the eschatological reckoning. Later on in the same surah (Q 29:53), it is said that “were it not for a specified term, the punishment would come upon them [immediately],” and a number of passages combine the word *ajal* with the verb *akhkhara* to express the idea that God has granted humans a temporary reprieve from his judgement and chastisement, thus enabling them to improve their prospects of passing eschatological muster (e.g., Q 11:104, 14:10).<sup>2</sup> Thus, Q 16:61 (see similarly 35:45) asserts: “If God were to chastise people for their wrongdoing, he would not leave behind any creature on earth (*mā taraka ‘alayhā min dābbatin*); yet he reprieves them until a specified term (*wa-lākin yu’akhkhiruhum ilā ajalīn musamman*). And when their term comes, they will not be early by an hour nor late.”

The Qur’an sometimes depicts pivotal theological truths as reflected or prefigured by natural phenomena. For instance, the dualism of moral right and wrong and of belief and unbelief, leading to two antithetical soteriological outcomes (namely, heaven and hell), is mirrored by cosmic dualities like day and night or male and female (Q 91:1–10, 92:1–10; see *PP* 224 and 233–234, as well as *SPMC* 122–124), and hierarchical distinctions of rank exist not only in nature and in pre-eschatological human society but also in paradise (see under → *darajah*). In a similar vein, the notion of a preset end point of the created order, to be followed by the hereafter, is applied to an inner-cosmic natural process like the maturation of the human fetus: “we place in the wombs whatever we will until a specified term (*wa-nuqirru fī l-arḥāmi mā nashā‘u ilā ajalīn musamman*) and then bring you<sup>p</sup> forth as children” (Q 22:5). Later in the same surah, the addressees are reminded that animals destined to be sacrificed during the *ḥajj* are “beneficial to you until a specified term, upon which their place of slaughter is near [or directed towards] the ancient house” (Q 22:33: *lakum fihā manāfi‘u ilā ajalīn musamman thumma maḥilluhā ilā l-bayti l-‘atīq*). Pre-eschatological being, one might be tempted to generalise in a Heideggerian register, is inevitably being-towards-a-term. All of the entities and processes constituting the presently existing cosmos are characterised by non-perpetuity, by built-in obsolescence: created beings are temporally finite not only *a parte ante*, in so far as they have a beginning in time, but also *a parte post*, in so far as they are destined to perish at some future time.<sup>3</sup> In this, God’s pre-eschatological creation contrasts with the cosmic renewal

2 On *akhkhara*, see generally *CDKA* 22. When used with a personal object, *akhkhara* is “to reprieve s.o.” (e.g., Q 63:11). When the object is the day of judgement of God’s *ajal*, the verb must be rendered “to postpone or delay s.th.” (Q 11:104, 71:4). On the two passages (Q 75:13, 82:5) that employ *akhkhara* as the antonym of *qaddama*, see → *qaddama*.

3 Q 7:20 suggests that angels (see under → *malak*) are an exception to this general principle.



following the eschatological judgement, since people's stay in paradise and hell will be eternal (→ *khalada*). This contrast is explicitly drawn: the present or "proximate" life (→ *al-dunyā*) is "fleeting" or "transient" (Q 17:18, 75:20, 76:27: *al-ʿajilah*), offering humans "enjoyment until a certain time" (Q 2:36, 7:24, 16:80, 21:111, 36:44: *matā' ilā hīn*),<sup>4</sup> while the "final state of things" (→ *al-ākhirah*) ensuing after the day of judgement is the "abode of stability" (Q 40:39: *dār al-qarār*).

**How unalterable is God's term?** In many cases, God's "term" appears to be envisaged as immutably fixed: "for every term there is a written decree" (Q 13:38: *li-kulli ajalīn kitāb*; see also 3:145). In Q 42:14, the respite that God is said to have granted those who have become "divided" after receiving divine knowledge is called a "preceding word from your<sup>s</sup> Lord [granting reprieve] until a specified term" (*kalimatun sabaqat min rabbika ilā ajalīn musamman*; see similarly 20:129, where this "preceding word" is equated with a "specified term").<sup>5</sup> But a statement like Q 42:14 only refers to the end of the world and thus to the term of the cosmos as a whole, which is indeed plausibly viewed as primordially inscribed into God's creation from the beginning, in line with statements like Q 6:2 and 46:3 (see above).<sup>6</sup> Should we suppose that the term of individuals and collectives is likewise unalterably and primordially fixed? The Qur'an holds that those who face divine punishment or death will sometimes plead for an extension with God (Q 14:44, 63:10, where the request is for God to grant them reprieve for a short while, *ilā ajalīn qarībin*; see also 4:77, where the same demand is uttered in response to the commandment to fight). Such pleas are not unfounded, in so far as some passages suggest that the arrival of God's term can be averted by human repentance and remorse. Thus, according to Q 14:10, God's messengers announce to their respective audiences that God "calls upon you<sup>p</sup> (*yad'ūkum*) so that he might forgive you some of your sins and reprieve you until a specified term (*wa-yu'akhkhirakum ilā ajalīn musamman*)."<sup>7</sup> The affirmation has a close parallel in Q 71:4, where Noah admonishes his people to serve God (v. 3) "so that he might forgive you<sup>p</sup> some of your sins and reprieve you until a specified term; when God's term comes, it will not be postponed." Thus, it is only when God's "term" has arrived that the subsequent judgement can no longer be delayed; up until this moment, however, deferrals remain possible. This is also spelled out rather clearly when the assertion that "for every term there is a written decree" in Q 13:38, cited earlier, is read together with the following verse. Q 13:39 adds that "God erases and sets down what he wills; with him is the mother-scripture" (*yamḥū llāhu mā yashā'u wa-yuthbitu wa-ʿindahū ummu l-kitāb*). The "mother-scripture" is the celestial book containing, among other things, God's decrees for the future (see under → *kitāb*), and Q 13:39 suggests that God is at liberty to alter this mother-scripture as he sees fit. Hence,

4 The noun *matā'* also occurs without the prepositional phrase *ilā hīn* in the same sense of "transitoriness and impermanence" (CDKA 251); see, e.g., Q 3:14.185 and 40:39. Elsewhere, *matā'* can mean "maintenance" (e.g., Q 2:240). The semantic link between the root *m-t-* and the noun *ajal* is confirmed by Q 11:3, urging the recipients to seek forgiveness from God so that he "may grant you good enjoyment until a specified term" (*yumatti'ukum matā'an ḥasanan ilā ajalīn musamman*). That God is the one who bestows upon humans enjoyment of the world is also asserted, by means of the verb *matta'a* + acc., in various other verses (e.g., Q 28:61 and 43:29). On the phrases *matta'a* + acc. + *ilā hīn*, "to grant s.o. enjoyment until a certain time" (Q 10:98 and 37:148) and *tamatta'a* + *ilā hīn*, "to enjoy o.s. until a certain time" (Q 51:43), see also under → *adhdhaba*.

5 Without the term *ajal*, the phrase *wa-law-lā kalimatun sabaqat min rabbika la-quḍiya baynahum* ("Were it not for a preceding word from your Lord, a decision between them would [already] have been taken") is also found in Q 10:19, 11:110, 41:45, in addition to 42:14.

6 Cf. also the striking statement in Q 7:187 that "the hour" of the resurrection (→ *al-sā'ah*) "weighs down the heavens and the earth" (*thaqulat fī l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi*).

even after a “term” has been set down in the heavenly mother-scripture, God remains sovereign and free to erase (*maḥā*) it.

One gathers, therefore, that when a community is threatened with divine retribution by a warner like Noah, a positive response to his preaching will entail postponement of their “term.” This prospect is confirmed by the story of the people of Jonah, who exceptionally believed the warner sent to them, as a result of which God “lifted from them the humiliating punishment in the proximate life and granted them enjoyment until a certain time” (Q 10:98: *lammā āmanū kashafnā ‘anhum ‘adhāba l-khizyi fī l-ḥayāti l-dunyā wa-matta’nāhum ilā ḥinin*; see also 37:148 and under → ‘*adhhaba*). Similarly, when the Egyptians seem to feel remorse after God has struck them with a number of preliminary plagues, such as flooding, locusts, and lice (Q 7:133–134), God lifts (*kashafa*) his punishment (→ *rijz*) from them until a certain term, although they subsequently break their promise to believe Moses and to release the Israelites (Q 7:135: *fa-lammā kashafnā ‘anhumu l-rijza ilā ajalīn hum bālighūhu idhā hum yankuthūn*; see also 43:49–50). The same sequence of human repentance and divine reprieve figures in Q 11:3, calling the addressees to “implore your<sup>p</sup> Lord for forgiveness and then to turn to him in repentance (*thumma tūbū ilayhi*), so that he might grant you good enjoyment until a specified term (*yumatti’kum matā’an ḥasanān ilā ajalīn musamman*) and accord his favour to those meant to receive it (*wa-yu’ti kulla dhī faḍlin faḍlahu*.)” Hence, the precise time at which a human community will face its “term” would seem to depend on whether it will prove responsive or impervious to the preaching of the messenger whom God may elect to send to them. Such latitude, however, falls away once God’s retribution (as opposed to such preliminary and pedagogical chastisements as the Egyptian locusts or lice) has begun to materialise (Sinai 2019a, 248–249): once the divinely specified term of an individual or a community has arrived, no further reprieve will be granted (Q 63:11, 71:4; see also 7:34, 10:49, 16:61). That is why the requests for an extension for a short while (*ilā ajalīn qarībin*) in Q 14:44 and 63:10 are doomed to go unanswered: “on the day on which the punishment comes upon them” (Q 14:44) or at the moment when “death comes upon one of you<sup>p</sup>” (Q 63:10) it will be too late to plead for any deferment.

***ittakhadha* tr. *sukhriyyan* | to compel s.o. to work**

→ *darajah*

***akhhara* tr. | to postpone or delay s.th.; to reprieve s.o.; to neglect to do s.th.**

→ *ajal*, → *qaddama*

***ākhir* | last, final**

***al-yawm al-~* | the final day**

***al-~ah* | what is final or last, the final state of things, the hereafter**

***al-dār al-~ah* | the final abode**

Further vocabulary discussed: *awwal* | first; ancient *yawm al-dīn* | judgement day

*khalada* intr. | to remain forever, to be immortal *āmana* intr. *bi-* | to believe in s.th.

*rajā* tr. | to hope for s.th.; to expect s.th. *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā* | the proximate life  
*al-‘ājilah* | what is fleeting, what passes in haste *dār al-qarār* | the abode of stability  
*al-ūlā* | what is first

**Overview.** The Qur’an employs the adjective *ākhir*—the opposite of *awwal*, “first, ancient”—both as an attribute of judgement day, which Medinan verses call *al-yawm al-ākhir*, “the final day,” and as a general label for the afterlife itself, which is frequently termed *al-ākhirah*, “the final state of things,” or *al-dār al-ākhirah*, “the final abode.” This dual use of the descriptor *ākhir* implies a close conceptual grouping together of the end of the world and the afterlife, making it especially fitting to speak of the Qur’anic presentation of God’s universal judgement and of paradise and hell as the Qur’an’s “eschatology,” namely, its teaching about “final things.”<sup>1</sup> The following will mainly focus on the terms *al-yawm al-ākhir* and *al-ākhirah*, while other uses of the adjective *ākhir*—such as the contrast between *al-awwalūn* and *al-ākhirūn*, “ancient” and “later” generations (e.g., Q 56:13–14, 77:16–17)<sup>2</sup>—remain largely outside the scope of the discussion. On *al-nash‘ah al-ākhirah/al-ukhrā*, “the final bringing-forth” (meaning the recreation or resurrection of humans in preparation for the final judgement) in Q 29:20 and 53:47,<sup>3</sup> see briefly under → *khalāqa*; on *al-millah al-ākhirah*, which one might render “contemporary religious teaching or belief,” see under → *millah*.

*Al-yawm al-ākhir.* Many Medinan verses refer to the “day of judgement (→ *dīn*)” that precedes people’s eternal (verb: → *khalada*) stay in heaven and hell (e.g., Q 2:25.39.81–82) as “the final day,” *al-yawm al-ākhir*. Most of the relevant passages identify the “final day” as a mandatory object of belief (→ *āmāna*), normally following directly after belief in God. Thus, six verses evoke the one “who believes in God and the final day” (Q 2:62.126.177, 5:69, 9:18–19: *man āmana* ± <*minhum*> *bi-llāhi wa-l-yawmi l-ākhiri*), a phrase continued in various ways, such as by reference to righteous deeds (Q 2:62, 5:69: *wa-‘amila* → *ṣāliḥan*) or by additional objects of belief (Q 2:177). The same phrase “believing in God and in the last day” is also found in a string of further verses (Q 2:8.228.232.264, 3:114, 4:38–39.59.136.162, 9:29.44–45.99, 24:2, 58:22, 65:2).<sup>4</sup> “Believing in God and in the last day” accordingly functions as a credal condensation of the Qur’anic community’s most basic doctrinal commitments. In addition, the expression *al-yawm al-ākhir* occurs as the object of the verb *rajā*, “to hope” or “to expect” (see also under → *wa‘ada*). Thus, in Q 29:36, the only Meccan occurrence of *al-yawm al-ākhir*, the messenger Shu‘ayb calls upon the people of Madyan, “My people, serve God, expect the final day, and do not cause mischief and corruption on earth” (*yā-qawmi ‘budū llāha wa-rjū l-yawma l-ākhirā wa-lā ta‘thaw fī l-arḍi muḥsidīn*). Two more Medinan verses similarly speak of the one who, as one might

1 My general understanding of Qur’anic eschatology is set out in *HCI* 162–169 and Sinai 2017a, based on pertinent previous scholarship, especially Andrae 1926. See also under → *jannah* and → *jahannam*.

2 For a statement permitting one to infer where the Qur’an locates the end of “ancient” history—namely, with the activity of Moses—see Q 28:43: “we gave Moses the scripture after we had destroyed the ancient generations” (*wa-la-qad ātaynā mūsā l-kitāba min ba‘di mā ahlaknā l-qurūna l-ūlā*).

3 The adjective *ukhrā* in Q 53:47 is in rhyme position and may therefore well be a substitute for *ākhirah*. There are other cases in which *ukhrā*—properly the feminine form of *ākhar*, “another”—functions as the feminine of *ākhir*, “final, last”: Q 3:153, 7:38.39 (*CDKA* 22).

4 Note that the catalogue of various objects of belief in Q 4:136 uniquely separates belief in God and belief in the “final day,” which is delayed to the end of the list. Cf. the different order in the partially overlapping catalogue in Q 2:177.

translate, “places his hope in God and the final day” (Q 33:21, 60:6: *man kāna yarjū llāha wa-l-yawma l-ākhirah*), again singling out God and the day of judgement as two credal pillars. The Medinan employment of *al-yawm al-ākhir* may have something to do with the fact that the early Meccan designation *yawm al-dīn*, “day of judgement” (e.g., Q 38:78, 51:12, 70:26, 82:15.17–18), ceases to be used in the later Meccan period (→ *dīn*<sup>1</sup>), even if the alternative → *yawm al-qiyyamah*, “the day of resurrection,” remains part of Medinan vocabulary (e.g., Q 2:85.113, 3:55.77). *Al-yawm al-ākhir* has a clear counterpart in New Testamental language (John 6:39–40.44.54, 7:37, 11:24 etc.: *en tē eschatē hēmera = b-yawmā ḥrāyā* in the Peshitta; see *CQ* 48),<sup>5</sup> which in turn harks back to the notion of an “end of days” (*aḥārīt hayyāmīm/yōmayyā*) in some passages of the Hebrew Bible (Ezek 38:16, Hos 3:5, Dan 2:28 and 10:14; see *TDOT* 1:210–212 and *TDNT* 2:697–698). Medinan references to the “final day” thus make explicit that the Qur’an subscribes to a Biblically based understanding of earthly history as finite and moving towards a culminating end point, an “end of days,” at which God will sit in judgement over all moral agents that have previously lived. (What the Qur’an lacks, however, is the conception of a millennial period of messianic peace and justice before the final judgement, as predicted in Rev 20:1–6.)<sup>6</sup>

***Al-ākhirah*.** In its feminine form, the adjective *ākhir* provides the standard Qur’anic term for the hereafter, encompassing heaven and hell (Lange 2016a, 37–38; see also the overview of various derivatives of *-kh-r* in pre-Islamic poetry in el Masri 2020, 117–131). Ambros maintains that *al-ākhirah* is short for either *al-dār al-ākhirah*, “the final abode,” or *al-ḥayāh al-ākhirah*, meaning the life to come (*CDKA* 22), but this is not entirely certain. A handful of later Meccan and Medinan verses do indeed have *al-dār al-ākhirah* (Q 2:94, 6:32, 7:169, 28:77.83, 29:64, 33:29), or its variant *dār al-ākhirah* (Q 12:109, 16:30; see Ṭab. 1:251). Yet given that the expression *al-ākhirah* is fully established already in the early Meccan period (Q 53:25, 68:33, 74:53, 75:21, 79:25, 87:17, 92:13, 93:4), well before the appearance of *al-dār al-ākhirah*, it is not obvious that one is entitled to interpret *al-ākhirah* as a truncation of *al-dār al-ākhirah*.<sup>7</sup> As for the possibility that *al-ākhirah* abbreviates *al-ḥayāh al-ākhirah*, this latter expression is not explicitly attested in the Qur’an. It is true that several passages, starting with the early Meccan couplet Q 87:16–17, employ *al-ākhirah* in close proximity to → *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā*, “the proximate life,” and this naturally suggests that *al-ākhirah*, too, presupposes the noun *ḥayāh*, “life” (see also, for instance, Q 2:86, 4:74, or 9:38). Still, the fact that there are no Qur’anic instances in which *ākhirah* is explicitly used as a modifying adjective of *ḥayāh*, even where one might have expected the text to exploit the opportunity for a parallelistic pairing of *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā* and *al-ḥayāh al-ākhirah* (see Q 10:64, 14:3.27, 16:107, 41:31), gives pause; the Islamic scripture consistently prefers coupling *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā* with simple *al-ākhirah*. In view of this, it is uncertain that *al-ākhirah* is abbreviatory. Translators wanting to capture the term’s antonomastic allusiveness may want to have recourse to makeshift renderings like “what is final” or “the final state of things.” Many existing English translations of the Qur’an, of course, opt for “the hereafter.” While this has the advantage of employing an established English expression that yields at least a reasonable semantic fit, it has the drawback of capturing neither

5 Other verses speak of “final days” in the plural, like Acts 2:17, 2 Tim 3:1, Jas 5:3, or 2 Pet 3:3.

6 I owe this observation to Saqib Hussain.

7 By contrast, it is more justifiable to consider the expression → *al-dunyā* to function as an ellipsis for *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā*, considering that the latter is the form that is exclusively found in the early Meccan period (Q 53:29, 79:38, 87:16).

*al-ākhirah*'s connotation of finality nor its link with the related phrases *al-yawm al-ākhir*, "the final day," and *al-dār al-ākhirah*, "the final abode."

By casting the afterlife as the "final" state of things, the Qur'an extends the Biblically based notion of a culminating final frame of history, an "end of days" or a "final day," to include the afterlife itself, that is, the ultimate outcome of salvation or damnation into which humans will be eternally and unalterably locked as a consequence of their earthly lives. As the Qur'an reminds its addressees, the "final state of things" or the "final abode" is not only "better than" the "proximate" life (e.g., Q 4:77, 6:32, 12:109; see also 93:4), which is said to be "fleeting" or "transient" (Q 17:18, 75:20, 76:27: *al-ʿājilah*), but is "the abode of stability" (Q 40:39: *dār al-qarār*; see also Q 14:29 and 38:60 as well as Lange 2016a, 38).<sup>8</sup> The final state of things is also irreversible, a fact dramatically depicted in a number of passages in which the evildoers, confronted with their impending punishment, vainly implore God to be permitted to return to their earthly existence so that they might do better (Q 6:27, 7:53, 23:99–100.107, 32:12, 35:37). The final state of things, therefore, is one that is insulated from any further change and is distinguished by its eminently enduring and non-ephemeral (or perhaps static) quality. The temporal sequentiality that is inherent in the notion of a "final state of things" may appear disrupted by occasional affirmations presupposing the possibility of immediate entry into paradise (→ *jannah*) even before the day of judgement (Q 2:154, 3:169, 36:26–28), which suggest that the Qur'an considers paradise to be in some sense contemporaneous with, rather than merely subsequent to, the present world (Lange 2016a, 39–43). But there is no genuine paradox here if one understands the term *al-ākhirah* to be relative to individuals: at least in some circumstances, one person may already have entered his or her *ākhirah* while others are still living their "proximate life."

**Correlates of *al-ākhirah*.** In several early Meccan verses (Q 53:25, 79:25, 92:13, and 93:4) and again in the later Meccan verse Q 28:70, *al-ākhirah* is paired with *al-ūlā*, "what is first," namely, present, pre-eschatological existence. Q 75:20–21, also early Meccan, and again Q 17:18–19 oppose *al-ākhirah* to *al-ʿājilah*, "what is fleeting" or "what passes in haste." Across the Qur'an as a whole, however, the standard antonym of *al-ākhirah* is → *al-dunyā* or *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā*, "the proximate life." The latter expression appears as a correlate of *al-ākhirah* in an early Meccan passage (Q 87:16–17) and then comes to be frequent in later Meccan and Medinan passages (for *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirah*, see, e.g., Q 2:114.130 etc., 3:22.45.56; for *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirah*, see, e.g., 2:86, 4:74, 13:26.34, 14:3.27). While *al-ūlā* and *al-ʿājilah* are both terms that connote temporal succession or change, the same is not true for *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā*: the attribute → *dunyā*, the feminine of *adnā* ("nearer, nearest"), is spatial rather than temporal (Lange 2016a, 37), casting the present, pre-eschatological sphere of existence as "proximate." *Al-dunyā* in the approximate sense of "this world" is attested in pre-Islamic poetry (for references, see under → *dunyā*), but does not seem to imply *al-ākhirah* as its counterpart there. The early Meccan fluidity in the various correlates of *al-ākhirah* (*al-ūlā*, *al-ʿājilah*, *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā*) is certainly striking and is best explained by assuming that the established *dunyā-ākhirah* dichotomy of the later Meccan and the Medinan proclamations is the outcome of a gradual process of phraseological consolidation over the course of the Meccan period rather than having crystallised already in pre-Qur'anic Arabic.

<sup>8</sup> On the non-perpetuity of the currently existing cosmos as opposed to God's eschatological second creation, see also → *ajal*.



**On the Jewish and Christian background of the Qur’anic *dunyā-ākhirah* dichotomy.** Nonetheless, the expression *al-ākhirah* as such may have had some currency in pre-Qur’anic Arabic: as noted, the expression has a significant number of occurrences in the early Meccan surahs (Q 53:25, 68:33, 74:53, 75:21, 79:25, 87:17, 92:13, 93:4), and in contrast with its shifting correlates does not really compete with any other terms in designating the afterlife.<sup>9</sup> In other words, *al-ākhirah* may already have been a reasonably well-established Arabic expression in the milieu of the earliest Qur’anic proclamations, even if it was not yet habitually paired with *al-dunyā*. It is tempting to speculate that *al-ākhirah* might have served Arabic-speaking Christians as a plausible equivalent of Syriac *ḥartā*, “the end” or “the *eschaton*” (e.g., Bedjan 1905–1910, 1:510, l. 7). In its Qur’anic use, of course, *al-ākhirah* refers to the hereafter—i.e., to people’s eternal residence in heaven or hell—rather than to the convulsive disintegration of the present world on the day of judgement. This semantic shift could be original to the Qur’an. Yet it is also conceivable that already pre-Qur’anic speakers of Arabic were wont to oppose *al-ākhirah* with *al-ūlā*, since this contrast is after all found in four early Meccan verses (see above) and thus has a better claim to reflecting pre-Qur’anic usage than the *ākhirah-dunyā* dichotomy that ultimately emerged as the Qur’anic standard. If it is the case that not only the expression *al-ākhirah* but also its opposition to *al-ūlā* were in use before the Qur’an, then this would entail that *al-ākhirah* had already come to refer to the hereafter prior to Muhammad’s preaching. The range of possibilities is impossible to narrow down without pre-Qur’anic Arabic prooftexts.

Functionally, the Qur’anic polarity of *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirah* is of course akin to the New Testamental contrast between “this age” and “the coming age” (Matt 12:32: *oute en toutō tō aiōni oute en tō mellonti*; Peshitta: ‘*ālmā hānā* vs ‘*ālmā da-’tīd*’; see also Mark 10:30 and Luke 18:30: *en tō aiōni tō erchomenō = b-’ālmā d-’ātē*, and Heb 2:5 and 6:5) and to the cognate juxtaposition of “this world” and “the coming world” (*ha-’olam ha-ba’*, ‘*alma d-ate*; DTTM 1052, 1084–1085; DJBA 867–868) in rabbinic language. It seems clear that this is the contrast that the opposition of *al-ākhirah* with *al-dunyā* or *al-ūlā* is intended to express in Arabic. The match is only partial, however: the New Testamental and rabbinic opposition comprises two terms that are explicitly temporal, and it qualifies one and the same noun (*aiōn*, ‘*olam*, ‘*alma*) by two contrasting adjectives.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the Qur’an, as we saw, opposes a spatial term (*dunyā*) to a temporal one (*ākhirah*), without a recurrent noun underpinning both elements of the antithesis. Designating the present and the eschatological age as “worlds” was not unknown in pre-Islamic Arabia, as indicated by a South Arabian inscription (*b-’lmn b’dn w-qrbn*, “in the far and the near world”; Mordtmann and Müller 1896, 287 and 289–290; CIH, no. 539, l. 2). It is noteworthy, therefore, that the Qur’an never employs ‘*alam* in the sense of New Testamental *aiōn*: the Qur’anic plural → *al-’ālamūn* (always used in the genitive) means “the world-dwellers,” not “the worlds.”<sup>11</sup> Instead, the Islamic scripture came to articulate the contrast between a present

<sup>9</sup> This is to ignore infrequent circumlocutions like “To your<sup>s</sup> Lord is the final end” (Q 53:42: *wa-anna ilā rabbika l-muntahā*), which do not seem to make use of established technical terminology.

<sup>10</sup> But note that Greek *eschatos* can also be used in a spatial sense: Acts 1:8 and 13:47.

<sup>11</sup> Of particular interest in this regard are Q 2:102.200 and 3:77, uttering the threat that various kinds of people have “no portion in the hereafter” (*lā khalāqa lahum fī l-ākhirati*). While this is likely to echo Mishnaic declarations that certain categories of persons have no “share in the world to come” (→ *khalāq*), the three verses at hand replace the rabbinic term “the world to come” with the Qur’anic *al-ākhirah* rather than employing Arabic ‘*alam*. Thus, even in a phraseological context in which a use of ‘*alam* in the sense of Greek *aiōn* or Hebrew ‘*olam* would have been expected, this does not materialise.

world or age and a coming one by a terminological pair that is relatively distinctive, with one element (*al-dunyā*) apparently repurposed from pre-Islamic poetic diction.

**God as the “first and the last.”** Besides the frequent application of the adjective *ākhir* to the day of judgement and to the afterlife, a Medinan verse exceptionally describes God himself as “the first and the last” (Q 57:3). The predication is a resonance of two passages from the Biblical book of Isaiah (44:6 and 48:12; see *BEQ* 445). To call God “the first” could underscore that he temporally precedes the world created by him, though Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī cautions that the priority in question does not necessarily have to be understood in a temporal sense (İskenderoğlu 2002, 71; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī 1981, 29:210–212). In fact, other Qur’anic verses give the impression that the creation of the cosmos proceeded from a pre-existing substrate (Q 21:30), and the Islamic scripture does not generally espouse the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in an unequivocal manner (see under → *khalāqa*). A possible, mildly Aristotelianising solution would be to propose that God’s firstness as asserted in Q 57:3 is compatible with the existence of unformed matter in so far as the latter, being devoid of all shape, does not yet qualify as a discrete and proper existent. As for God’s description as “the last,” contrary to the early theologian Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (Lange 2016a, 168–171), this probably does not signal that at some future time solely God will remain in existence, since the Qur’an frequently and explicitly envisages paradise and hell as being eternal (→ *khalāda*). More likely, the underlying rationale of calling God “the last” is that he, unlike other things, will never perish (Q 28:88, 55:26–27), whereas the inhabitants of paradise and hell, even though they will persist into the indefinite future, will have been resurrected from the dead, i.e., will have been “recreated” (e.g., Q 10:4.34, 27:64, 30:11.27: *yabda’u l-khalqa thumma yu’iduhu*; → *khalāqa*). Overall, then, when the Qur’an adopts the Isaianic phrase “the first and the last,” it highlights God’s uncreated and unique nature, as a result of which he alone continuously and unconditionally persists through all time.

***adhina* intr. li- | to give permission to s.o.**

***idhn* | permission**

→ *shā’a*, → *malak* (and briefly under → *arḍ*, → *amr*, → *jinn*, and → *samā’*)

***adhā* | harm**

→ *ṭahara*

***arḍ* | earth; land**

Further vocabulary discussed: *al-‘ālamūn* pl. | the world-dwellers *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā* | the proximate life *al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ* pl. | the heavens and the earth *rabb* | lord *mulk* | kingship, rulership *al-ghayb* | the hidden *khalāqa* tr. | to create *idhn* | permission *sabbaha* intr. li- | to glorify s.o. *sajada* intr. li- | to prostrate o.s. before s.o. *ṭaw’an wa-karhan* | willingly or (literally: and) by force *aslama* intr. (li-) | to surrender o.s. or dedicate o.s. (to s.o., namely, God) *sakhkhara* tr. (li-) | to make s.o. or s.th. subservient (to s.o.), to subject s.th. or s.o. (to s.o.) *dhallala*, *ja’ala dhalūlan* tr. li- | to subject s.th. to s.o., to make s.th. subservient to s.o. *anām* pl. |



animate beings *rizq* | provision *dābbah* | land animal *afsada* intr. (*fī l-ard*) | to wreak corruption (on earth / in the land) *nafa'a* tr./intr. | to benefit s.o.; to be of benefit *mahd*, *mihād* | s.th. spread out *basāṭa* tr., *daḥā* tr., *saṭaḥa* tr., *ṭaḥā* tr., *farasha* tr., *madda* tr. | to spread s.th. out *ja'ala/salaka subulan* | to make pathways *nahar* | river, stream *al-baḥr* | the sea *al-barr* | dry land *sayyara* tr. | to enable s.o. to travel *māda bi-* | to make s.o. sway *qarār*, *mustaqarr* | abode, stable abode, dwelling place *ahyā* tr. | to bring s.th. to life, to revive s.th. *balā* tr., *ablā* tr., *ibtalā* tr. | to assess, test, or try s.o. *shakara* intr. (*li-*) / tr. | to be grateful (to s.o., namely, God), to be grateful for s.th. *makkana* tr. *fī* | to establish s.o. on/in s.th., to give s.o. power over s.th. *'abada* tr. | to serve s.o. or s.th., to worship s.o. or s.th. *afsada* intr. (*fī l-ard*) | to wreak corruption (on earth / in the land) *khalīfah* | deputy, vicegerent *al-ard al-muqaddasah* | the Holy Land *al-ard allatī bāraknā fihā* | the land that we have blessed *akhraja* tr. | to expel s.o., to drive s.o. out *sāra fī l-ard* | to travel the earth, to journey through the land *waritha l-ard* | to inherit the earth, to inherit the land *ustuḍ'ifa fī l-ard* | to be oppressed on earth, to be oppressed in the land *ab* | father, forefather *jāhada* intr./tr. | to contend (against s.o.) *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *al-madīnah* | the town *jizyah* | tributary compensation

**Overview.** In Qur'anic Arabic, *al-ard* normally means “the earth,” sometimes in the specific sense of the soil or the ground (Q 2:71, 5:31, 30:9). Frequently, *al-ard* occurs as part of the merism *al-samāwāt wa-l-ard*, “the heavens and the earth,” which is discussed in detail in what follows. In contrast to the seven heavens, which the Qur'an mentions repeatedly (e.g., Q 2:29, 67:3, 71:15; → *samā'*), the Islamic scripture normally speaks of the earth in the singular, even though Q 65:12 seems to imply that God created as many layers of earth as heavens (Tabataba'i and Mirsadri 2016, 211). Depending on its context of use, the word *ard* can also refer to a particular portion or region of the earth, in which sense it is usually translated as “land.” Arabic *ard* shares this ambiguity with Hebrew *ereṣ* and Aramaic *ar'ā* (TDOT 1:393–405; DJBA 170–171; SL 104). The present entry will begin by examining the first, universal sense of the word, then outline some of the principal aspects of the Qur'anic portrayal of the earth, and finally consider how to navigate the word's earth-land ambiguity.

“**The heavens and the earth**” (*al-samāwāt wa-l-ard*). While Greek and, in its wake, Syriac have well-established terms for the totality of creation (namely, *ho kosmos*, corresponding to Syriac *'ālmā*), the same is not true for Qur'anic Arabic (see also Tabataba'i and Mirsadri 2016, 206–207). The Arabic word *'ālam*, perhaps the closest counterpart to Greek *kosmos*, is in the Qur'an only attested in the plural → *al-'ālamūn*, which is not used to mean “worlds” but rather “world-dwellers.” Another potential equivalent of *ho kosmos* that may spring to mind is → *al-dunyā*, often translated as “this world.” Yet in the Qur'an *al-dunyā* in fact functions as a concise variant of *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā*, “the proximate life,” and accordingly designates not the cosmos or universe but rather the pre-eschatological dimension of human existence, in opposition to → *al-ākhirah* or *al-dār al-ākhirah*, “the final abode.” Overall, the closest approximation to a comprehensive designation of the created order in the Qur'an is the merism “the heavens and the earth” (*al-samāwāt wa-l-ard*), which palpably parallels the Hebrew Bible's pairing of *haššamayim* and *hā'āreṣ* (e.g., Gen 1:1, 2:1.4, 14:19.22, Ps 115:15; Peshitta: *shmayyā* + *ar'ā*; see more generally TDOT 15:210

and *NIDOTTE* 1:519).<sup>1</sup> The Biblical formulation must have been current in Arabia, since it is also reflected in Epigraphic South Arabian, in divine titles such as “Lord of the heaven and the earth” (*mr’ s’myn w-’rdn*) or “owner of the heaven and the earth” (*b’l s’myn w-’rdn*; see Gajda 2009, 224–231, and Robin and Rijziger 2018, 278–282). As pointed out above, in the context of Qur’anic cosmology the plural *samāwāt* accords with the fact that a number of Qur’anic passages speak of seven heavens in particular (e.g., Q 67:3, 71:15; → *samā’*’).

A prominent thematic context in which the expression *al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ* occurs are hymnic statements underscoring the universal reach of God’s authority. First, Meccan surahs designate God as the “Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them” (*rabb al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ wa-mā baynahumā*; Q 19:65, 26:24, 37:5, 38:66, 44:7, 78:37; cf. also 23:86: *rabb al-samāwāt al-sab’*). Other passages have the bipartite variant “Lord of the heavens and the earth” (Q 13:16, 17:102, 18:14, 21:56, 43:82; cf. 45:36; see also under → *rabb*).<sup>2</sup> In terms of inner-Qur’anic chronology, the bipartite version comes into view later than the tripartite one.<sup>3</sup> Yet the shorter version is in fact the more ancient one: it goes back to Biblical literature (Gen 24:3: *YHWH ʾēlohē haššamayim wē’lōhē hā’āreš*, Peshitta: *māryā allāhā dashmayyā w-allāhā d-ar’ā*; Matt 11:25 and Luke 10:21: *kyrie tou ouranou kai tēs gēs*, Peshitta: *mārā dashmayyā w-d-ar’ā*) and, as just noted, also figures in Jewish (or Judaizing) and Christian inscriptions in Epigraphic South Arabian. A second formulation for God’s cosmic supremacy is found in later Meccan and Medinan passages crediting God with “kingship” (→ *mulk*) over the heavens and the earth (or over the heavens and the earth “and what is between them”; e.g., Q 2:107, 3:189, 5:17.18.40.120, 7:158, 9:116, 25:2, 39:44, 85:9).<sup>4</sup> Thirdly, and roughly during the same chronological period as the passages just enumerated, the Qur’an declares that God owns “everything (or everyone) in the heavens and on earth” (*li-llāhi/lahu mā/man fī l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi / wa-mā fī l-arḍi*; e.g., Q 2:116.255.284, 3:109.129, 4:126.131.132.170.171, 10:55.66.68, 14:2, 20:6, 21:19, 30:26).<sup>5</sup>

The heavens and the earth are furthermore paired in affirmations of God’s omniscience: to God belongs “what is hidden (→ *al-ghayb*) in the heavens and on earth” (e.g., Q 2:33, 11:23, 16:77, 18:26, or 35:38), and he “knows everything (or everyone) in the heavens and on earth” (e.g., Q 3:29, 5:97, 17:55, 34:3; see also 3:5, 10:18, 14:38, or 34:2.3). In other verses, “the heavens and the earth” (or “the heavens and the earth and what is between them”)

1 Cf. in particular the formulaic declaration that to God belongs all that is in the heavens and the earth (Q 2:116.255, 4:171, 10:68, 14:2, 16:52, 20:6, 21:19, 22:64, 30:26, 34:1, 42:4.53, 59:24: *lahu mā/man fī l-samāwāti wa-mā fī l-arḍi*) and 1 Chr 29:11 (*BEQ* 311).

2 Cf. also Q 43:84 (*wa-huwa lladhī fī l-samā’i ilāhun wa-fī l-arḍi ilāhun*).

3 The surah with the highest mean verse length containing the tripartite title is Q 19 (62.42 transliteration letters per verse), while the surah with the lowest mean verse length containing the bipartite title is Q 43 (61.78 transliteration letters). This indicates a development from the former towards the latter, perhaps via a brief period of overlap. Nonetheless, the tail *wa-mā baynahumā* does recur in several surahs with a higher mean verse length (though not as part of a genitive construction beginning with *rabb*): Q 5:17.18, 21:16, 25:59, 30:8, 32:4, 46:33. On “the heavens and the earth and what is between them,” see also O’Shaughnessy 1973, 212–213.

4 With regard to Q 85:9, it should be noted that while Surah 85 is early Meccan, v. 9 belongs to a section that has been identified as consisting of later insertions (Neuwirth 2007, 224; *PP* 332–333, 336).

5 It is interesting to observe that Q 20:6, probably the earliest occurrence of the formula, has the more extensive “to him belongs what is in the heavens and the earth and what is between them and what is underground.” The mean verse length of Surah 20 is 61.04 transliteration letters per verse, putting it at the same boundary, in terms of mean verse length, that witnesses the switch from the tripartite *rabb al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ wa-mā baynahumā* to the bipartite *rabb al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*. God’s ownership over the heavens and the earth is also conveyed by saying that “he holds the keys (*maqālīd*) to the heavens and the earth” (Q 39:63, 42:12).

figure as the product of God's creative activity (e.g., Q 2:117.164, 3:190.191, 6:1.14.73.79.101, 9:36, 12:101, 15:85, 38:27, 39:46, 46:3), with one passage speaking of a primordial sundering of the heavens and the earth (Q 21:30; see under → *khalāqa*). God's creation of the heavens and the earth is repeatedly said to have been accomplished "in six days," in line with Gen 1 (Q 7:54, 10:3, 11:7, 25:59, 32:4, 50:38, 57:4: *khalāqa/khalāqñā l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa* ± <*wa-mā baynahumā*> *fī sittati ayyāmin*).<sup>6</sup> After the primordial creation of heaven and earth, God continues to "hold back the heaven so that it does not fall down upon the earth, except by his permission (*idhn*)" (Q 22:65: *wa-yumsiku l-samā'a an taqa'a 'alā l-arḍi illā bi-idhnihi*; cf. similarly 35:41; see also 30:25).<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the created cosmos continues to depend on being divinely sustained, a notion that aligns with other Qur'anic statements presenting divine creation as a continuous reality rather than as a one-off act in the distant past (→ *khalāqa*).

Despite the Qur'an's acute awareness of human unbelief in and repudiation of God, several verses stress that "everything [or, according to a variant, everyone] in the heavens and on earth" is in some sense engaged in praising the creator (Q 24:41, 57:1, 59:1.24, 61:1, 62:1, 64:1: *sabbāḥa/yusabbihū li-llāhi/lahu man/mā fī l-samāwāti wa-mā fī l-arḍi / wa-l-arḍi*; see also 17:44; on *sabbāḥa*, see under → *ḥamd*). Similar affirmations employ the verb → *sajada*, "to prostrate o.s.": "everyone in the heavens and on earth prostrates himself/herself to God, willingly or [literally: and] by force" (Q 13:15: *li-llāhi yasjudu man fī l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi ṭaw'an wa-karhan*; see also 16:49 and 22:18), and Q 3:83 underscores that "everyone in the heavens and on earth surrender themselves (→ *aslama*) to him," again with the ominous rider "willingly or [and] by force." Such language should be taken metaphorically, in the sense that non-rational entities and creatures "praise" God by bearing witness to his power and wisdom and "prostrate themselves" to him by being subject to his sway (see in more detail under → *sajada*). This interpretation is supported by comparative evidence: Ps 19:2 declares that "the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork," while Jacob of Sarug says that "everything in its place raises up glory (*teshbūhtā*) to the Creator" (Mathews 2020, 18–19, l. 1932; cf. Mathews 2020, 28–29, l. 2016).<sup>8</sup> As regards human individuals who refuse to acknowledge God, they presumably come under the rubric of prostration or self-surrender "by force" (*karhan*), in so far as they will be brought to heel on judgement day at the latest.

**Anthropocentric portrayal of the earth.** As pointed out by Averroes, it is a characteristic feature of the Qur'an to render plausible the existence of an omnipotent and munificent creator by "drawing attention to the providence shown to humans (*al-'ināyah bi-l-insān*) and to the fact that everything that exists has been created for their sake" (Ibn Rushd 1964, 150 = Najjar 2001, 33). Thus, Q 45:13 declares that God "has made everything in the heavens and on earth subservient to you<sup>p</sup>" (*sakhkhara lakum mā fī l-samāwāti wa-mā fī l-arḍi jamī'an*; similarly 31:20; for the first part of the statement, see also 22:65). The formulation *sakhkhara lakum* ("he has made subservient to you<sup>p</sup> . . .") recurs with other

6 However, Surah 41 reports that the creation of the earth took two days (v. 9), then allocates four days to God's furnishing the earth with mountains and various kinds of "sustenance" (v. 10), and then proceeds to allot (another?) two days to the creation of the seven heavens (v. 12). On whether and how this passage may be harmonised with the statements quoted in the main text, see BEQ 8–9 and KK 433.

7 For more on God's permission (*idhn*), see under → *shā'a*.

8 Cf. also Mathews 2018, 32–37, ll. 1403–1436, elaborating upon Ps 19:2. For an overview of what Islamic exegetes make of the material at hand, see Tlili 2012, 166–175.

objects too, namely: ships, rivers, and the sea (Q 14:32, 22:65, 45:12); the alternation of night and day as well as the sun and the moon, with which the world's diurnal rhythm is of course closely bound up (Q 14:33, 16:12, the latter including the stars); and sacrificial animals (*al-budn*; Q 22:36–37).<sup>9</sup> These affirmations, in particular the recurrent indirect object *lakum* (“to you<sup>p</sup>, for you<sup>p</sup>”), indicate the far-reaching anthropocentrism of Qur’anic cosmology (see already O’Shaughnessy 1985, 59–60). A variant formulation of the same idea is found in Q 36:71–73 and 67:15, which remind the hearers that God has subjected (*dhallala, ja’ala dhalūlan*) to them livestock (*al-an’ām*) and the earth as a whole (see also the further discussion of Q 67:15 below). It is worth noting the contrast to Gen 1:28: there, God commands Adam and Eve to “subdue” the earth, whereas in Q 36:72 and 67:15 the agent of subjugation is God himself (*HCI* 172).<sup>10</sup> Hence, the Qur’an more pointedly casts humans as recipients of divine favour and solicitude rather than merely as empowered to carve out a livelihood for themselves. On the whole, however, Qur’anic cosmology resonates quite closely with the Biblical tradition, which likewise envisages the earth as a habitat that is custom-made for humans: “The heavens are the Lord’s heavens, but the earth he has given to human beings” (Ps 115:16, pointed out in *NIDOTTE* 1:519).<sup>11</sup> By contrast, the Qur’anic portrayal of nature is appreciably at odds with pre-Islamic poetry, which often depicts humans’ natural environment as desolate, inhospitable, and threatening (Neuwirth 2002, 300–303; see also *HCI* 172–173). It is quite striking, in fact, that the Qur’an by and large omits references to the many destructive aspects of nature that would surely have been a feature of the Qur’anic addressees’ experience of the world; explicit references to natural disasters, for instance, tend to figure only in narrative contexts, where they can be cast as acts of divine retribution (e.g., the Egyptian plagues at Q 7:130–133; see more generally Heemskerck 2006). The Qur’anic stance towards the natural world is thus unqualifiedly affirmative and articulates a profound sense of humans being at home in the world (see also under → *afsada*).

The anthropocentrism of Qur’anic cosmology is not unbridled. One verse, Q 55:10, declares that God has established the earth for all animate beings (*wa-l-arḍa waḍa’ahā li-l-anām*) rather than just for humans,<sup>12</sup> and Q 16:68–69 details how God has arranged shelter

9 For other instances of *sakhkhara li-*, see Q 38:36 (God makes the wind subservient to Solomon) and the first-person blessing cited in Q 43:13, after a reference to “ships and beasts that you ride” (v. 12: *wa-ja’ala lakum mina l-fulki wa-l-an’āmi mā tarkabūn*): “Praise be him who has made this subservient to us” (*wa-taqūlū subḥāna lladhī sakhkhara lanā hādihā*). For occurrences of *sakhkhara* that are not followed by *lakum* but in which the latter is arguably implied, see Q 13:2, 29:61, 31:29, 35:13, and 39:5 (*wa-sakhkhara l-shamsa wa-l-qamara*, “he made the sun and the moon subservient”), 16:14 (the object being the sea, “so that you may eat fresh fish from it and extract from it ornaments to wear”). Q 21:79 (*wa-sakhkharnā ma’a dāwūda l-jibāla yusabbiḥna wa-l-ṭayra*) and 38:18–19 (*innā sakhkharnā l-jibāla ma’ahu yusabbiḥna . . . // wa-l-ṭayra . . .*) would seem to employ *ma’a* in lieu of *li-*. As Saqib Hussain points out to me, this switch is likely due to the presence, in both cases, of the verb *yusabbiḥna* (“they glorify”), predicated of the mountains and the birds: they are *made subservient* to David and praise God together with him. In one case, *sakhkhara* is employed with subsequent *’alā*, “to harness s.th. [namely, a violent wind] against s.o.” (Q 69:6–7). See also the treatment in *CDKA* 130–131, who additionally notes various instances of the passive participle *musakhkhar*. For a recent discussion of the Qur’anic notion of *taskhīr*, see Tlili 2012, 92–115, who is concerned to show that the notion does not imply animals to be inherently inferior to humans.

10 Q 36:71–73 and related verses are discussed in Tlili 2012, 75–91.

11 Cf. also Jacob of Sarug’s description of the world as a house, palace, or city to be inhabited by Adam (Mathews 2020, 44–47, ll. 2135–2156). Note that notwithstanding the Qur’an’s prevalent depiction of the earth as the habitat of humans, it is, like heaven, occasionally personified (Q 11:44, 41:11, 44:29, 99:1–5).

12 Some exegetical traditions suggest that *al-anām* means (i) animals or specifically land animals (namely, “everything endowed with spirit,” *kull shay’ fīhī l-rūḥ*, or “everything that moves on the ground,” *kull shay’ dabba aw daraja*), while others maintain that the word signifies (ii) humans and the jinn (whom one might group

and sustenance for the bees. Indeed, it is stated explicitly that God’s provision (*rizq*; see under → *razaqa*) is not only bestowed upon humans but upon all other land animals as well (Q 11:6: *wa-mā min dābbatin fi l-arḍi illā ‘alā llāhi rizquhā*; see also 29:60): though the latter may have been put at mankind’s service, this does not deprive them of a legitimate claim to have their vital needs met.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the Qur’an’s insistence that humans are prone to inflict corruption (*afsada*) on the earth after God has put it in good order (Q 7:56.85; see further under → *afsada*) suggests that the way in which humans interact with their divinely gifted habitat, including perhaps the way in which they treat other animate beings in it, is subject to moral evaluation. Nonetheless, the Qur’an’s paramount stress remains on the fact that the earth is replete with phenomena that “benefit humans” (Q 2:164, 13:17: *mā yanfa’u l-nāsa*; other verses highlighting the utility of natural phenomena, employing the root *n-f-‘*, are 2:219, 16:5, 23:21, 36:73, 40:80, and 57:25; see also under → *nafa’a*). Tellingly, even the statement about bees just referenced finishes by underscoring their utility to humans: they produce honey, which has healing qualities (Q 16:69).

God’s optimisation of the earth for human residence encompasses two foremost aspects in particular, which are summarily intimated in Q 67:15’s reminder that God “has made the earth subject to you<sup>p</sup>, so walk on its shoulders and eat of his provision” (*huwa lladhī ja’ala lakumu l-arḍa dhalūlan fa-mshū fi manākibihā wa-kulū min rizqihī*). First, the invitation to “walk on” the earth’s “shoulders”—which fits the verse’s implicit portrayal of the earth as a domesticated animal<sup>14</sup>—draws attention to the fact that the surface of the earth is topographically suitable to being traversed, facilitating human mobility and transportation. Thus, God has “spread the earth out for you<sup>p</sup>” (Q 20:53, 43:10: *ja’ala lakumu l-arḍa mahdan*; see also 51:48 and 78:6),<sup>15</sup> an idea that is also expressed by means of other consonantal roots (Q 2:22 and 51:48: *f-r-sh*; 71:19: *b-s-ṭ*; 13:3, 15:19, 50:7: *m-d-d*; 79:30: *d-h-w*; 88:20: *s-ṭ-h*; 91:6: *ṭ-h-w*).<sup>16</sup> It is pertinent that God’s spreading out of the earth also figures in an Arabic poem about the creation of the world attributed to ‘Adī ibn Zayd (al-Mu‘ayyibid 1965, no. 103:5: *wa-basata l-arḍa baṣṭan*). This does not, incidentally, justify considering the poem to be dependent on the Qur’an, since the motif can be traced back to

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together as rational agents). See Tab. 22:179–281 and al-Tha‘labī 2015, 25:298, and the discussion in Tlili 2012, 111–112. Both options can be viewed as implicitly resting on contextual observations. Option (ii) would seem to be grounded in the fact that Q 55:14–15 mentions God’s creation of humans and jinn. Option (i), meanwhile, may be supported by pointing out that vv. 11–12 list several types of plants (fruit, palm-trees, grain, herbs), suggesting that the *anām* from v. 10 refer to those creatures who are, directly or indirectly, supported by the earth’s vegetation—that is, to animals. Neuwirth (*PP* 589) translates *al-anām* as “human beings,” but does not provide a justification. In fact, if Q 55:10 is juxtaposed with Ps 104:14 (“who causes the grass to grow for the animals, and plants for people’s labour, to bring forth food from the earth”), as proposed by her (*PP* 597), this lends plausibility to the view that *al-anām* as used in Q 55:10 encompasses both non-human animals and humans rather than just the latter. On balance, the point of Q 55:10 is therefore that God has established the earth, with the sundry kinds of vegetation sprouting on it (vv. 11–12), in order to provide sustenance to the earth’s fauna. This does not as such contradict other Qur’anic passages asserting that some of the earth’s fauna (i.e., non-human animals) are put at the service of others (i.e., humans).

13 On *dābbah*, see *CDKA* 95. For a digest of some exegetical voices on Q 11:6 and 29:60, see Tlili 2012, 147–149.

14 That the word *dhalūl* can refer to a tamed animal is clear from Q 2:71 (cf. also 36:72, with the cognate verb *dhallala*). I owe my awareness of the link between *dhalūl* and *manākib* to Saqib Hussain.

15 Note also Q 13:18, where it is hell that is sardonically called a *mihād*, a “resting-place spread out.”

16 Q 13:3, 15:19, 50:7 ought to be contrasted with 84:3 (*wa-idhā l-arḍu muddat*), where *madda* serves to describe the eschatological flattening of the earth. The use of the passive here—a Qur’anic version of what Biblical scholars call the *passivum divinum*—is in line with other eschatological passages (*HCI* 173).



the Hebrew Bible (Isa 42:5 and 44:24, Ps 136:6; see Dmitriev 2010, 358).<sup>17</sup> To return to the Qur'an, the earth's traversability is said to consist in the fact that God "has made pathways in it for you<sup>p</sup>" (Q 20:53, 43:10: *salaka/ja'ala lakum fihā subulan*; see also 16:15, 21:31, and 71:20). In addition, God has also provided for the possibility of shipborne transport by means of rivers (*anhār*; Q 13:3, 14:32, 16:15, 27:61, 71:12) and the sea (*al-baḥr*; see Q 2:164, 14:32, 16:14, 17:66.70, 22:65, 31:31, 35:12, 42:32, 45:12; see also 55:24).<sup>18</sup> God is thus "the one who enables you<sup>p</sup> to travel by land and sea" (Q 10:22: *huwa lladhī yusayyirukum fī l-barri wa-l-baḥri*; see also 17:70: *wa-ḥamalnāhum fī l-barri wa-l-baḥri*; → *sāra*).<sup>19</sup>

Related to the earth's traversability is its stability. The existence of "firmly implanted" mountains (*rawāsī*), which evidently impede human movement, is explained by their function of preventing the earth from "making you<sup>p</sup> sway" (Q 16:15, 21:31, 31:10: *an tamīda bikum*; see also 13:3, 15:19, 27:61, 41:10; see also Tabataba'i and Mirsadri 2016, 211–212). The immobility of the earth—which contrasts with the mobility of its human occupants—is further highlighted by verses describing it as a "stable abode" (*qarār, mustaqarr*) for humans and other land animals (Q 2:36, 7:24, 11:6, 27:61, 40:64; on *qarār*, see also 14:26).<sup>20</sup> Yet the earth's God-given stability must not be taken for granted (Q 67:16), and it will in fact cease to be firm and immobile when the end of the world arrives (Q 56:4, 69:14, 73:14, 89:21, 99:1). Once again, the frequency, in many of the above passages as well as others, of pronouns with a possessive suffix in the second person plural (*lakum, bikum*) is noteworthy and indicates the extent to which the Qur'an envisages nature and the basic structure of the cosmos in terms of human interests and needs.<sup>21</sup>

The second principal aspect of God's optimisation of the earth for human habitation, as condensed in Q 67:15, comes in the form of the invitation to "eat" of God's "provision" (*kulū min rizqihī*): the earth is furnished with vegetation and fauna that is suitable for human consumption. That God endows humans with generous provision is frequently reiterated throughout the Qur'an (→ *razaqa*), both in general terms and by means of specific examples. The sea, for instance, is not only invoked as affording opportunities for transport but also as having been supplied by God "so that you<sup>p</sup> may eat fresh fish (*lahman ṭariyyan*) from it and extract from it ornaments to wear" (Q 16:14; see also 35:12 and 5:96). By sending down rain, God causes the earth to bring forth vegetation (Q 10:24, 18:45, 20:53, 22:5, 26:7, 27:60, 31:10; see also 2:61, 15:19, 26:7, 36:36, 50:7, 71:17, 80:26–27) and "revives" it "after it has died" (Q 2:164, 16:65, 29:63, 30:19.24.50, 35:9, 45:5, 57:17: *aḥyā/aḥyaynā/yuḥyī ± <bihi> l-arḍa ba'da mawtihā / min ba'di mawtihā*; see

17 As Dmitriev notes, the Qur'an does not employ the verb *basāṭa* (Dmitriev 2010, 358). Q 71:19 arguably paraphrases it (*ja'ala lakumu l-arḍa bisātā*), but as the references in the main text show derivatives of other roots such as *f-r-sh*, *m-d-d*, and *m-h-d* are more common in this context.

18 On the availability of ships (*al-fulk*) as a divine grace, sometimes mentioned in parallel with beasts of burden, see also Q 10:22, 23:22, 29:65, 30:46, 40:80, 43:12.

19 Other expressions that are indicative of the Qur'an's emphasis on human travel are *daraba fī l-arḍ* (e.g., Q 2:273, 3:156), *sāḥa fī l-arḍ* (Q 9:2), and → *sāra fī l-arḍ*.

20 For a different use of *qarār*, see, e.g., Q 40:39: the true "abode of stability" (*dār al-qarār*) is the hereafter.

21 Apart from the phrase *sakḥkhara lakum*, discussed above, see also *ja'ala lakum*, "he has made for you<sup>p</sup> . . ." (e.g., Q 2:22, 6:97, 10:67, 16:81, 20:53, 25:47, 28:73, 40:61.64.79), *khalaqa lakum*, "he has created for you<sup>p</sup> . . ." (Q 2:29, 16:5, 26:166, 30:21), *anzala* (or *yunazzilu*) *lakum*, "he sends down for you<sup>p</sup> . . ." (e.g., rain or "provision"; Q 10:59, 27:60, 39:6, 40:13), *salaka lakum*, "he has paved for you<sup>p</sup> . . ." (namely, pathways; Q 20:53), *yunbitu lakum*, "he causes to grow for you<sup>p</sup> . . ." (Q 16:11), and *yuzjī lakum*, "he propels forward for you<sup>p</sup> . . ." (namely, boats in the sea; Q 17:66).

also 36:33), a process that prefigures God's revivification of the dead at the resurrection (Q 30:19.50, 41:39; → *ahyā*). The earth's God-given fertility is sometimes described in considerable detail (e.g., Q 13:4). As we saw above, the earth's vegetation also sustains animals; yet the ultimate beneficiaries of the food chains thus established are the earth's human incumbents.

The ultimate purpose of God's creation of the earth, however, is not to gratify humans, as if that were an end in itself, but rather "to test you<sup>p</sup>, [in order to ascertain] which one of you does better deeds" (Q 11:7: *li-yabluwakum ayyukum aḥsanu 'amalan*; similar statements using the verb → *balā* are found in 18:7, 67:2, and 76:2; see also O'Shaughnessy 1985, 60–61, who additionally draws attention to Q 10:4). The earth thus functions as the arena in which humans are to prove their moral merit, in preparation for God's final judgement. The fact that humans have been embedded in a supremely hospitable habitat thus comes with a corresponding set of moral and religious responsibilities towards God and other humans, grounded in the duty to be grateful (verb: *shakara*) to the creator: "We have established you<sup>p</sup> on the earth and provided you with livelihoods there; yet you are scarcely grateful" (*wa-la qad makkannākum fī l-ardī wa-ja'alnā lakum fihā ma'āyisha qalīlan mā tashkurūn*), the divine voice reproaches the Qur'an's recipients in Q 7:10 (→ *makkana*, with further references). The assertion that God "created the jinn and humans only so that they might serve" him (Q 51:56: *wa-mā khalaqtu l-jinna wa-l-insa illā li-ya'budūn*; see O'Shaughnessy 1985, 58–59, with further references) may be understood as a variation on the same theme. In response to his creative munificence, moral agents owe God certain religious-ethical responses, variously described as gratitude, as serving God, or as doing good deeds. Of course, humans and the jinn, uniquely among all creatures, may opt to defy their creator, but will then suffer due punishment. The same normative nexus between God's creation and benevolent furnishing of the earth, on the one hand, and the obligations resting upon its human inhabitants, on the other, also underwrites the frequent Qur'anic warnings against "wreaking corruption on earth" or "in the land" (→ *afsada fī l-ard*): to commit certain moral and religious transgressions is to go against the normative order that it behoves the residents of the earth to uphold. Those who nonetheless sin obstinately and egregiously will be obliterated by a cataclysmic divine intervention (or, in the Medinan surahs, suffer military defeat at the hands of the believers) and be replaced by other divinely appointed "deputies" (*khalā'if/khulafā*, singular: *khalīfah*) in their stead (see under → *istakhlafa*).

**"The earth" or "the land"?** As emerges from the material surveyed so far, many Qur'anic occurrences of *al-ard* have an undeniably universal and global purport that requires the translation "the earth." This is true not only for the merism *al-samāwāt wa-l-ard* but for many other verses as well (e.g., Q 2:36.51, 6:38.59, 10:24, 11:6.61, 13:3.18.31, 15:19, 16:15, 17:90, 18:7.45.47, 20:53, 31:27, 39:69, 71:17–19.26, 73:14). The term *ard* *allāh*, too, which occurs only in Q 4:97, 7:73, 11:64, and 39:10 (cf. 29:56), is best rendered "God's earth," in contrast to the use of *ereṣ* *YHWH*, "God's land," in Hos 9:3 (Peshitta: *ar'eh d-māryā*) to mean the land that God is said to have gifted to the Israelites. On the other hand, there are Qur'anic verses in which *ard* clearly denotes a specific portion of the earth and is accordingly to be rendered "land." For example, in Q 5:21 Moses commands the Israelites to enter "the Holy Land" (*al-ard al-muqaddasah*), while elsewhere the Qur'an's divine voice refers to the Holy Land as "the land that we have blessed" (Q 21:71.81: *al-ard allatī bāraknā*



*fihā*; see similarly 7:137 and 34:18).<sup>22</sup> Nor is the occurrence of *arḍ* in the restricted sense of “land” confined to what we would think of as Biblical Palestine. Thus, various Qur’anic scenes, including accounts of the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh, mention the threat or the fear that people might be “driven out from” (in the active: *akhraja min*) their own or somebody else’s land (Q 7:110, 14:13, 20:57.63, 26:35, all of which combine *arḍ* with a possessive suffix; see also 17:76, which lacks the suffix, and 28:57, where “our land” designates the region around the Qur’anic sanctuary). Another instance of this usage is Q 31:34, contrasting God’s omniscience with the fact that no human “knows in which land he will die” (*wa-mā tadri nafsun bi-ayyi arḍin tamūtu*). The threat of banishment *mina l-arḍi* in Q 5:33, too, must refer to banishment from the region around and controlled by Medina, however widely conceived, rather than to exile from earth altogether; the appropriate translation of *yunfaw mina l-arḍi* here is therefore “they are banished from the land.” To add a final example, in Q 12:55 Joseph asks the king of Egypt to appoint him overseer over “the storehouses of the land” (*qāla j’alni ‘alā khazā’ini l-arḍi*) rather than those of the entire earth.<sup>23</sup>

By way of a general rule of thumb, when *al-arḍ* occurs in statements that are explicitly or implicitly concerned with humanity at large, it ought to be translated as “the earth”; by contrast, if it figures in statements concerned with a certain subset of humanity or specific individuals, “the land” will often be the more appropriate translation. In navigating the ambiguity “earth” vs “land” that inheres in the word *arḍ*, it is therefore contextual observations that often provide vital clues. In particular, cases in which the word *arḍ* combines with a possessive suffix clearly necessitate the translation “land.” Examples are Q 7:110, where the Egyptian notables accuse Moses of “wanting to expel you<sup>p</sup> from your land” (*yurīdu an yukhrijakum min arḍikum*), and 33:27, reminding the Medinan believers that God has “made you<sup>p</sup> inherit the land, houses, and possessions” of their enemies from among the scripture-owners (*wa-awrathakum arḍahum wa-diyārahum wa-amwālahum*).

Nonetheless, there are various locutions for which it remains difficult to decide whether *al-arḍ* should be rendered “the earth” or rather as “the land,” understood in the unspecific sense of whatever region of the earth is contextually implied. Cases at hand are → *sāra fī l-arḍ*, “to travel the earth” or “to journey through the land”; → *afsada fī l-arḍ*, “to wreak corruption on earth” or “in the land”; *waritha l-arḍ*, “to inherit the earth” or “the land” (Q 7:100.128.137, 19:40, 21:105, 28:5, 39:74; also 33:27, cited above and discussed in more detail below); and *ustuḍ’ifa fī l-arḍ*, “to be oppressed on earth” or “in the land” (Q 4:97, 8:26, 28:5; see also 7:137; → *istad’afa*). In some verses, context favours the restricted option “in the land.” This is the case for Q 28:5–6, where *alladhīna stuḍ’ifū fī l-arḍi* (“those oppressed in the land”) are the Israelites reduced to servitude in Egypt and where the contrasting promise of “establishment” *fī l-arḍ* (“in the land”) pertains specifically to Egypt

22 Another reference to the Holy Land in similar terms is found at Q 17:1, mentioning “the distant place of prostration whose environs we have blessed” (*al-masjid al-aqṣā lladhī bāraknā ḥawlahu*), meaning the Jerusalem temple (see *SPMC* 227–232, 239).

23 For other cases in which *al-arḍ* without additional qualifications or the indeterminate *arḍ* signify a certain portion of the earth or “the land” that is contextually implied, rather than “the earth,” see Q 8:67, 7:137, and 12:9. See also Q 17:104, where the Israelites are instructed to “dwell in the land” (*uskunū l-arḍa*). The context as well as comparison with thematically parallel passages makes it clear that the land in question is (or at least includes) Egypt; see Sinai 2017b, 203.

(Sinai 2017b, 203–204). In other cases, context points in the opposite direction, as in Q19:40, where the divine statement *innā nahnu narithu l-arḍa wa-man ‘alayhā* ought to be rendered, “We will inherit the earth and everyone on it.” Yet not infrequently it is difficult to make up one’s mind one way or another.

“**The land**” = **the Holy Land**? It is however important to stress that even where a verse’s context supports rendering *al-arḍ* as “the land,” it would be unwarranted to opt for a default equation of such Qur’anic references with those seen in Biblical passages that employ the expression *hā’āreṣ*, “the land” (Peshitta: *ar’ā*), to denote the land conquered and colonised by the Israelites (e.g., Exod 23:29–31, Exod 34:15, Lev 18:25,27,28, Lev 19:23,29, Lev 25:2,6,18,19,23). It is not, in other words, exegetically licit to treat *al-arḍ* as a mere abbreviation for *al-arḍ al-muqaddasah* (“the Holy Land”) from Q5:21.<sup>24</sup> Rather, even where *al-arḍ* with the determinate article refers not to “the earth” as a whole, it normally stands for “the land” in an unspecific or general sense, at least in the absence of clear contextual signals pointing to the territory of the ancient Israelites in particular (as is arguable for the indictment of Israelite “corruption in the land” in Q17:4).

This is not merely a philological cavil but heralds a larger interpretive claim, namely, that the Qur’an, with the possible exception of an enigmatic remark in Q33:27 (see below), does not express a sustained and unequivocal claim, on behalf of the community of believers around Muhammad, to legitimate possession of the Holy Land. In this regard, the Qur’an stands in notable tension with an early non-Islamic portrayal of the Arab conquerors of the Middle East, the Armenian chronicle of Pseudo-Sebeos, which singles out the project of conquering the Holy Land as pivotal to Muhammad’s preaching: “Now you, you are the sons of Abraham, and God will realise in you the promise made to Abraham and his posterity. Only love the God of Abraham, and go and take possession of your country which God gave to your father Abraham,” Muhammad is quoted as urging the Arabs (Hoyland 1997, 129–131). Yet while the Qur’an does indeed once call Abraham the believers’ “father” (Q22:78; → *ab*),<sup>25</sup> its explicit territorial claims are generally limited to wresting control over the Meccan sanctuary from the associators (Q2:191 and 9:17–18,28; see under → *jāhada* as well as Sinai 2015–2016, 56–57, and *HCI* 50). As Reuven Firestone has duly stressed, the Qur’an does not articulate a message of territorial conquest (Firestone 2015), even though it does frequently incite the believers to militant action or “contending” (*jāhada*) “on God’s path.”

A potential exception to the claim that the Qur’an is generally uninterested in conquest of the Holy Land is Q33:27, which follows a comment on the believers’ victory over the local “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*) and continues by saying that God “gave you<sup>p</sup> as an inheritance their land (*awrathakum arḍahum*), houses, and possessions, and land / a land you have/had not yet trodden (*wa-arḍan lam taṭa’ūhā*)” (see Hoyland 1997, 130–131, and Shoemaker 2018, 156–157). While “their land” (*arḍahum*) must refer to the scripture-owners’ estates in or around the settlement inhabited by the Qur’anic believers, commonly and reasonably identified with the town of Yathrib/Medina,<sup>26</sup> the reference to

<sup>24</sup> Such an inference appears to underlie Shoemaker’s reading of the phrase *thumma ja’alnākum khalā’ifa fi l-arḍi min ba’dihim* (“we made you deputies over the land after them”) in Q10:14 to refer to the Biblical Holy Land (Shoemaker 2018, 157).

<sup>25</sup> Donner 2019, 138–139, wonders whether the verse or part of it might not date to the time of ‘Abd al-Malik, but early manuscript evidence is difficult to square with this. See n. 7 under → *ab*.

<sup>26</sup> See the occurrence of *yathrib* in Q33:13 and of *al-madīnah* in 33:60 and also under → *hājara*.

“a land you have/had not yet trodden” may be promising the future acquisition of regions that are located further afield. Perhaps the prospect held out in this verse is related to Q 9:29, which envisages that those recipients of the scripture (i.e., Jews and Christians) whose beliefs and practices fall short of Qur’anic standards are to be fought “until they humbly give tributary compensation (*al-jizyah*) without resistance (*‘an yadin*)” (see in more detail under → *jāhada*). Q 9:29 and 33:27 could be eyeing an expansion of the Qur’anic believers’ territorial hegemony to include Jewish-inhabited Arabian oases like Khaybar (Veccia Vaglieri 1978 and Munt 2021). It may also be that the land not yet trodden from Q 33:27 is land already acquired—land “that you *had* not yet trodden” rather than “land that you *have* not yet trodden.” Still, it is not impossible that Q 33:27 is an oblique reference to Byzantine Palestine or part thereof.

In any case, whatever the correct construal of this rather cursory remark in Q 33:27, it is difficult to marshal further Qur’anic evidence articulating an agenda of conquering the Holy Land, based on an Abrahamic claim of territorial inheritance along the lines of Pseudo-Sebeos (against Shoemaker 2018, 157–158). Additional Qur’anic verses like Q 2:114 that have been adduced to show that the Qur’an chimes with Pseudo-Sebeos and that a claim to the Holy Land was an integral component of Muhammad’s preaching are far from compelling.<sup>27</sup> Rather than focussing on the believers’ conquest of the Holy Land in particular, the Qur’an is concerned with God’s gift of the earth to humans in general, or of specific portions of it to specific communities of the past or present, and with the broad obligation of gratitude to God that is taken to follow from human usufruct of “the land.”

### *isrā’īl*: *banū* ~ pl. | the Israelites

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *al-yahūd*, *alladhīna hādū*, *hūd* pl. | the Jews *al-naṣārā* pl. | the Christians *ibrāhīm* | Abraham *ismā’īl* | Ishmael *mūsā* | Moses *‘īsā* | Jesus *jālūt* | Goliath *ṭālūt* | Saul *fir‘awn* | Pharaoh *yaḥyā* | John *dhikr* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation *zubur al-awwālīn* | the writings of the ancients

27 Shoemaker seeks to establish that the reference to God’s “places of prostration” (*masājid allāh*) in Q 2:114—which denounces “those who prevent God’s places of prostration from having his name invoked at them (*an yudhkarā fihā smūhū*) and strive for their destruction”—is to be identified with the Jerusalem Temple Mount (Shoemaker 2018, 157–158, based on Bashear 1989): “Surely if this verse were bound to the Meccan sanctuary from early on, we would not find a widespread reinterpretation that moved it to Jerusalem.” However, I have no difficulty countenancing a scenario in which the verse’s general allusion to destroying “God’s places of prostration” (note the plural!) might have brought to the minds of early exegetes the Jerusalem temple, which unlike the Meccan sanctuary had been razed to the ground in the pre-Islamic period, a fact that was known already in the Qur’an’s original environment (see Q 17:7, using the singular *masjid*). Engaging in their usual narrative guesswork, early interpreters then identified either the Christians or, alternatively, Nebuchadnezzar and his army as the culprits condemned by the verse (e.g., Muqātil 2002, 1:132; Ṭab. 2:442–444)—including the fantastic compromise version that the Christians were so consumed with hatred of the Jews that they aided Nebuchadnezzar in devastating the temple. Yet apart from the generic reference to “places of prostration” in the plural, the wording of Q 2:114 does not make it at all clear that any destruction has actually taken place: the verse might simply be reprimanding those with destructive designs on sanctuaries in general. The early interpreters’ leap from an ambition to destroy to actual destruction facilitates precisely the sort of dramatic concretisation that permeates much early narrative exegesis. “Anti-Christian/Byzantine sentiment” (Bashear 1989, 220, 221, 232) may be a further significant impetus that shaped the exegetical traditions in question. None of these narratives, however, bring us any closer to the original meaning of the verse or permit an argument that Q 2:114 documents the Qur’anic believers’ “concern for Jerusalem and its sanctuary, as well as, presumably, their determination to liberate both from Byzantine mistreatment” (Shoemaker 2018, 158).

*ashraka* tr. (*bi-*) | to associate s.o. (namely, a partner deity) with s.o. (namely, God), to venerate s.o. as a partner deity *ashraka* intr. (*bi-*) | to be an associator, to venerate associate deities, to attribute associates to God *al-rahmān* | the Merciful *mīthāq* | covenant, treaty *‘ahd* | agreement, contract, treaty, covenant *afsada* intr. *fī l-arḍ* | to wreak corruption on earth / in the land *maṣjid* | place of prostration, place of worship *ṭā’ifah* | faction, group *faḍḍala* tr. *‘alā* | to favour s.o. over s.o. *ni’mah* | grace, benefaction *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *ḥarrafa al-kalima ‘an mawāḍi’ihi* | to shift words from their places *ghaḍiba ‘alā* | to be angry at s.o., to be filled with wrath towards s.o. *ghaḍab* | wrath, anger *‘ahada ‘ahdan* | to conclude an agreement, contract, treaty, or covenant *ṭaba’a* intr. *‘alā* | to seal s.th. *ummah* | community *muqtaṣid* | moderate, middling

While Jews (→ *al-yahūd*) and Christians (→ *al-naṣārā*) do not explicitly figure in the Qur’an until the Medinan surahs, both Meccan and Medinan texts contain extensive references to the people of Israel, termed the “children of Israel” or Israelites (*banū isrā’īl*). The term ultimately goes back to Biblical usage (e.g., Gen 32:33, 36:31, 42:5 etc. or Exod 1:1.7.9.12.13 etc.). It may be further contextualised with the collective self-designation “Israel” (*yisra’ēl*) in rabbinic literature (e.g., *m. Sanh.* 10:1) and references to the “people” (*s<sup>2</sup>b*) of Israel (*y<sup>3</sup>r’l*) in Ḥimyarite epigraphy (e.g., Robin 2003, 125; Robin 2004, 844, 848–856). Two Qur’anic verses (Q 3:93, 19:58) employ *isrā’īl* as a personal name, presumably for the ancestor of the *banū isrā’īl*.<sup>1</sup> Later exegetes reasonably identify the individual in question with the patriarch Jacob (e.g., Zam. 1:584; see also JPND 154 and FVQ 61), in conformity with Gen 32:28–29, where Jacob is given the name *yisra’ēl* in commemoration of his nocturnal wrestling with a mysterious superhuman figure.

**The etymology of *isrā’īl* and the pre-Qur’anic origin of the Qur’an’s Biblical onomasticon.** The Qur’anic form *isrā’īl*, with the opening syllable *is-* rather than *yis-*, would seem to have been loaned via Syriac or Christian Palestinian Aramaic rather than directly from Hebrew *yisrā’ēl* (JPND 154–155; KU 91; CQ 176; FVQ 61). It is true that the word-initial glottal stop of *isrā’īl* also features in the Arabic names *ibrāhīm*, “Abraham,”<sup>2</sup> and *ismā’īl*,

1 The relevant segment of Q 3:93 (also discussed under → *tawrāh*) runs: “All food was permitted to the Israelites, except what Israel prohibited to himself (*illā mā ḥarrama isrā’īlu ‘alā nafsihi*), before the Torah was sent down” (see Witztum 2011, 277–278). It is the singular possessive pronoun in *‘alā nafsihi* that supports construing *isrā’īl* as the name of an individual rather than as a collective. In Q 19:58, the name *isrā’īl* stands in conjunction with Abraham.

2 As van Putten has noted, the Qur’anic *rasm* vacillates between the spellings *اِبْرَاهِم* and *اِبْرَاهِم* for Abraham (with some differences between the consonantal skeleton of current print editions and early manuscripts). *اِبْرَاهِم* is “an archaic spelling” of the name that reflects its Aramaic orthography (van Putten 2020a, 2) and largely corresponds to the variant reading *ibrāhām*, whose distribution is studied in detail in van Putten (2020a). Puin has suggested that the standard vocalisation *ibrāhīm* emerged from a misreading of the spelling *اِبْرَاهِم* whereby a denticle originally serving as a *mater lectionis* for *ā* was misconstrued as indicating *ī*. The original pronunciation would accordingly have been *abrāhām*, in line with the usual Jewish and Christian vocalisation of the name (Bothmer et al. 1999, 39–40). Serving as a *mater lectionis* for *ā* does indeed seem to have been a possible function of the denticle in early Arabic orthography (see the spelling of → *tawrāh* as *توریه* as well as Déroche 2009, 60, documenting the word *ilāh*, “god,” being spelled *الله*). Nonetheless, it is not likely that this is the original significance of the denticle when used in the Arabic name of Abraham, since the reading *abrāhām* may be ruled out for the simple reason that it would disrupt the rhyme at Q 15:51, 21:60.62.69, 26:69, and 37:83.104.109. Note that the data in van Putten (2020a) does not suggest that the spelling *اِبْرَاهِم* is limited to rhyme position (see, e.g., *اِبْرَاهِم* inside Q 33:7). Had this been the case, one might have argued that an original version *abrāhām* only underwent occasional variation to *abrāhīm* or *ibrāhīm* due to local constraints of rhyme, just as *ṭūr saynā*, “Mount Sinai” (Q 23:20), is in Q 95:2 adjusted to *ṭūr sīnīn* in order to satisfy the surah’s rhyme. In any case, the existence of the

“Ishmael.” The form *isrā’il* thus instantiates the Qur’an’s marked proclivity towards name patterning, whereby different Biblical names are made to conform to the same morphological structure, a tendency further exemplified by the pairs *mūsā*, “Moses,” and *īsā*, “Jesus,” or *jālūt*, “Goliath,” and *ṭālūt*, “Saul” (JPND 159–161; see also Dye and Kropp 2011, 190). This raises the question whether *isrā’il* might be sufficiently accounted for as a parallel formation to *ibrāhīm*, with whom it is paired in Q 19:58, rather than as an immediate carry-over from Syriac or Christian Palestinian Aramaic. However, the vowel structure of the name *ibrāhīm* itself departs significantly from its Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic counterparts and is best explained as having been patterned on *ismā’il* (JPND 160; KU 91–92; FVQ 44–46), whose word-initial glottal stop again conforms to Syriac and Christian Palestinian Aramaic rather than to Hebrew *yišmā’ēl* (JPND 155–156; KU 91–92; FVQ 64; Dye and Kropp 2011, 181–182).<sup>3</sup> This leads back to the view that the Arabic names *isrā’il* and *ismā’il* reflect some version of Christian Aramaic, such as Syriac, as do other Biblical proper names in the Qur’an, such as *fir’awn*, “Pharaoh” (JPND 169; KU 130–131).

The preceding discussion gives rise to the general observation that the Qur’an’s Biblical onomasticon is most likely considerably older than Muhammad rather than having been coined only in the early sixth century. For if *ibrāhīm* was patterned on *ismā’il*, then the form *ibrāhīm* must have emerged in a milieu in which Ibrāhīm = Abraham was associated with the figure of his son Ismā’il = Ishmael. Yet the chronologically earliest Qur’anic references to Abraham and Ishmael do not present them as father and son (Q 19:54–55, 21:85–86, 38:48; cf. Q 6:86; see KU 91 and Paret 1978), even if it is possible to understand some of the relevant textual data to reflect a diffuse awareness that Ishmael is of general Abrahamite descent (Goudarzi 2019, 473–474).<sup>4</sup> Given the lack of explicit Meccan indications that Abraham was the father of Ishmael, the form *ibrāhīm* likely predates the Qur’an rather than being a product of the Qur’an’s immediate milieu.<sup>5</sup> Likewise pre-Qur’anic, it seems,

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spelling *إسراء* in the Qur’an would seem to reflect a stage at which Abraham’s Arabic name had not yet undergone pattern assimilation to *ismā’il*. However, whether the corresponding archaic pronunciation ending in *-ām* rather than *-im* was still in use in the Qur’anic milieu seems less certain to me; perhaps *إسراء* is merely a scribal archaicism.

3 The Christian Palestinian Aramaic version of Ishmael’s name, as opposed to the Syriac one, also has an *s* rather than *sh* (cf. Greek *ismaēl*), yielding an even closer fit with the Arabic form. However, in Biblical names in the Qur’an, Hebrew or Syriac *sh* generally corresponds to *s* (e.g., *mūsā*, *sulaymān*, *īsā*). As recognised by Horovitz (KU 81; cf. JPND 155; see also Dye and Kropp 2011, 184), we may be confronted with a general phonetic rule here. It should also be noted that personal names very similar to the Qur’anic *ismā’il* are attested already in the pre-Qur’anic Arabian epigraphic record, such as *ys’m’l* in Sabaic and *ys’m’l*, *ys’m’l*, and *s’m’l* in Safaitic (e.g., Stein 2007, 42–43; see already JPND 155 and KU 92). Perhaps this pre-existing Arabic name meaning “God hears” or “May God hear” was secondarily equated or conflated with a similar Biblical one, a process that Ahmad Al-Jallad describes as “phonosemantic matching” (Al-Jallad and Al-Manaser 2021, 125–126). As for the alternative between Christian Palestinian Aramaic or Syriac, a rare case in which a derivation from Christian Palestinian Aramaic or Ethiopic, reflecting Greek, is clearly preferable to Syriac is *yūnus*, “Jonah,” who is called *yawnān* in Syriac, without an *s* (KU 154–155; JPND 170; CQ 176–177; Dye and Kropp 2011, 175). Another such case may be *ilyās*, “Elijah” (KU 99; JPND 171; CQ 176–177; but see Dye and Kropp 2011, 175).

4 For an alternative explanation of the absence of any explicit link between the characters called Ismā’il and Abraham in the Meccan surahs, see ‘Abd al-Rāziq 2021. She argues that the Meccan Ismā’il is to be identified with the Biblical Samuel and notes, among other things, that the Meccan Ismā’il twice appears together with Elisha (*al-yasa’*; Q 6:86, 38:48), suggesting that he is to be positioned well after the time of Abraham. However, the fact that in Q 6:85–86 Lot concludes a list of prophetic figures that also includes, earlier on, John the Baptist and Jesus should perhaps dispose one to be wary of invariably attributing historical implications to the order in which Qur’anic personalities are enumerated.

5 The only verse in a Meccan surah that explicitly pairs Ishmael and Isaac as Abraham’s sons is Q 14:39, where Abraham thanks God for the fact that he “gave me Ishmael and Isaac, despite [my] old age.” It has been



is the Qur’anic version of Jesus’s name, *‘isā*, which figures in a recently discovered Safaitic inscription (Al-Jallad and Al-Manaser 2021). A pre-Qur’anic emergence must also be assumed for the use of *yahyā* or *yahyē* (“he lives”) as the Arabic equivalent of the Biblical name *yôhānān* (Syriac: *yūhannān*) in Q 3:39, 6:85, 19:7,12, and 21:90, which is attested centuries prior to the Qur’an, in a Jewish inscription dated to 306 CE, JSNab 386 (Al-Jallad and Al-Manaser 2021, 126; see already *FVQ* 290–291 and cf. *CDKA* 311).

In light of the present state of our knowledge, therefore, morphological correspondence patterns such as *mūsā/‘isā* or *ibrāhīm/ismā‘il/isrā‘il* should generally be treated as predating the Qur’an. It is possible, of course, that there was more than one pre-Qur’anic Arabic version of a given Biblical name, and that the Qur’anic proclamations exercised a certain amount of choice among existing alternatives. The conjecture that there could have been cases of parallel nomenclature is supported by the fact that the Qur’an calls the devil both *iblis*, from Greek *ho diabolos*, and → *al-shayṭān*, very likely under the impact of Ethiopic *sayṭān*. In addition, Q 19:13—where the divine speaker reports having endowed John the Baptist, or the Qur’anic Yaḥyā, with *ḥanān*, “tenderness, compassion”—could be a pun ultimately going back to the Hebrew or Syriac version of the protagonist’s name (*yôhānān*, *yūhannān*). If so, the pun presupposes either that the Qur’anic addressees were familiar with the way in which the Qur’anic Yaḥyā was referred to in languages other than Arabic or that there was a variant Arabic version of his name that was closer to Syriac *yūhannān*.<sup>6</sup> But even if some Biblical or Biblically based figures may have had more than one name in pre-Qur’anic Arabic, the fact that one particular version ended up being preferred by the Qur’an could simply have been determined by the usage that was locally predominant rather than having any deeper theological significance.

**Contemporary Israelites in the Qur’an.** From early on, the Israelites figure in connection with the past, especially the career of Moses (e.g., Q 17:2–8, 26:17, 44:30, 45:16; cf. *KU* 91). On occasion, however, the Israelites appear to be or include contemporaries of the Qur’anic Messenger. These contemporary Israelites are most likely Jews.<sup>7</sup> For the Medinan surahs, given their explicit polemical engagement with Jews (→ *al-yahūd*), a contemporary usage of the term “Israelites” is scarcely remarkable. Thus, Q 2:211 commands, in the singular, “Ask the Israelites how many clear signs we gave them!,” while three earlier verses of Surah 2 (vv. 40, 47, and 122) exhort the Israelites (*yā-banī isrā‘īla*) in a manner suggesting that they form part of Muhammad’s audience.<sup>8</sup> But references to present-day Israelites occur

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suggested that the entire passage Q 14:35–41 might be a Medinan insertion. This is not certain (see Sinai 2009, 106–112), but it might still be the case that the original version of Q 14:39 had Abraham give thanks for God’s bestowal of Isaac alone and that the verse was secondarily expanded to include Ishmael. For a different reading that considers the reference to Ishmael to be original, see Goudarzi 2019, 476.

<sup>6</sup> I owe the point about the name of John to a comment by Saqib Hussain. It would of course be possible to read the consonantal sequence *y-ḥ-y-y*, written without diacritical dots, as *y-ḥ-n-y*, corresponding to *yūhannā* (*FVQ* 290). I am however persuaded by Jeffery’s option against this possibility in view of the epigraphic attestation of the name *yahyā*.

<sup>7</sup> Some scholars have argued that the Qur’an classes contemporary Christians, too, as Israelites. My own view, at the present moment, is that the reference of the expression *banū isrā‘il* does not include contemporary Christians (see in more detail under → *al-naṣārā*). However, this does not mean that I consider it in any way unlikely that there was not only a Jewish but also a Christian presence in Mecca. The issue at hand is merely who is being designated by the term *banū isrā‘il*.

<sup>8</sup> By contrast, the vocative addresses of the Israelites in Q 5:72, 61:6, and probably also 20:80 (on which see the excursus under → *ghaḍība*) are historical reminiscences addressed to the Israelites at the time of Jesus or Moses.

already in Meccan surahs (see in detail Zellentin, forthcoming, and also *QP* 332–335), and it would be patently circular to date all such passages to the Medinan period simply based on the extra-Qur’anic postulate that allusions to contemporary Israelites are inconceivable prior to the hijrah (*QP* 321). Two cases in point are Q 17:101, where the affirmation that God provided Moses with nine “clear signs” is followed by the interjection, “Ask the Israelites!” (cf. the similar command to “ask” the *ahl al-dhikr*, or “recipients of reminding exhortation,” in 16:43 and 21:7), and 27:76, averring that “this → *qur’ān* recounts to the Israelites most of that about which they are in disagreement.” To be sure, in Q 43:45 the divine voice instructs the Messenger to “ask those of our messengers whom we have sent before you whether we have appointed any gods to be served apart from the Merciful.” From this one may infer that not everyone whom the Qur’anic Messenger is bidden to “ask” is necessarily assumed to be currently alive. Even so, there is no compelling reason to suppose that the Israelites mentioned in Q 17:101 and 27:76 are considered to be defunct.

Two further Meccan allusions to contemporary Israelites are even more noteworthy. One is Q 26:196–197, which together with 44:30 may well contain one of the two chronologically earliest occurrences of the term *banū isrā’īl* in the Qur’an.<sup>9</sup> The passage maintains that “it”—meaning either the preceding punishment narratives or the Qur’anic revelations in general—is contained “in the writings of the ancients” (*fī zuburi l-awwālīn*; → *zabūr*) and that the “learned ones” among the Israelites “know it” (*an ya’lamahu ‘ulamā’u banī isrā’īl*): certain Israelites, the passage is saying, agree or are at least disposed to agree with what has been revealed to Muhammad. An even more explicit claim to Israelite agreement occurs at Q 46:10. The verse follows an assertion that the Qur’anic Messenger is not “an innovation among the messengers” (v. 9: *qul mā kuntu bid’an mina l-rusuli*) and that he only follows “what is conveyed” to him (*mā yūḥā ilayya*), upon which the Qur’anic adversaries are invited to consider the possibility that “it”—namely, the revelations conveyed to Muhammad—really might be “from God,” while “you<sup>p</sup> repudiate [it] (*wa-kafartum*), whereas a witness from among the Israelites bears testimony to something like it (*wa-shahida shāhidun min banī isrā’īla ‘alā mīthlihi*); he has espoused belief and you have behaved haughtily (*fa-āmana wa-stakbartum*).” The use of the singular here is striking: Q 46:10 would seem to allude to an individual Israelite (*shāhidun min banī isrā’īla*) whose identity was presumably known or knowable to the addressees. In general, there is a strong case for accepting that a statement like Q 46:10, in order to be rhetorically effective, presupposes that there were actual Israelites in the milieu of the Meccan Qur’an, Israelites who were known to hold views that concurred with some of the Qur’an’s teachings.

This scenario also fits with other Meccan statements claiming that those to whom God has previously “given the scripture” recognise, believe in, or rejoice in the Qur’anic revelations (Q 6:20.114, 10:94, 13:36, 28:52–53, and 29:47). At least some of these verses voice an unmistakable claim that contemporary scripturalists acknowledge the truth of the Qur’anic revelations. Thus, according to Q 28:53, when God’s word is recited to those who were formerly given the scripture (v. 52: *alladhīna ātaynāhumu l-kitāba min qablihi*), they say, “We believe in it; it is the truth from our Lord” (*āmannā bihī innahu l-ḥaqqu min rabbīnā*). It seems doubtful that one is entitled to brush such passages aside by positing

9 Nöldeke assigns both Surah 26 and Surah 44 to the second Meccan period, but their mean verse length (around thirty-six transliteration letters per verse) is comparable to that of surahs like Q 68 and 51 (see *HCI* 114–116), which are early Meccan by Nöldeke’s reckoning. In the absence of further considerations, they should therefore be classed as early Meccan.



that they are merely formulating the optimistic expectation that contemporary Israelites or scripture-bearers would or ought to endorse Muhammad's proclamations were they to be consulted on the matter and were they to give an honest opinion. More convincingly, already the Meccan community included, or at least encountered clear expressions of sympathy from, a certain number of Jews and/or Christians (though it may well have been the case that scripture-bearers present in the immediate Meccan milieu were isolated individuals rather than organised communities). Also relevant in this context is the allegation by anonymous opponents that the Qur'anic Messenger is being "taught by a human" (Q 16:103: *annahum yaqūlūna innamā yu'allimuhu basharun*): the fact that the Qur'anic opponents were able to voice this charge would make excellent sense if there was indeed some degree of interaction between the Qur'anic community and individual Jewish and/or Christian scripture-bearers, a claim that has recently been argued by Holger Zellentin (Zellentin, forthcoming).

The fact that Q 26:196–197 and 46:10 speak of Israelites in particular rather than more generally of scripture-bearers points to a presence specifically of Jewish interlocutors, at least on the assumption that the Qur'anic use of "the Israelites" does not include Christians but rather is limited to Jews.<sup>10</sup> This undermines the conventional supposition that it was only after the hijrah that the Qur'anic community came into sustained contact with exponents of the Jewish tradition. It is true that the eschatology of the Meccan surahs, which forms their undeniable kerygmatic centre, has strong affinities with Syriac Christianity (Sinai 2017a). At least two features of the Meccan surahs' theology, however, are more easily placed against a Jewish background. In the first instance, this applies to the Qur'anic critique of illegitimate "association" of God with other beings, which is prominent from the early Meccan period onwards and stands in continuity with rabbinic statements employing the Hebrew verb *shittēp* or cognates thereof (see under → *ashraka*). To be sure, the link could theoretically be an indirect one; but the rabbinic genealogy of the Qur'anic concept of associationism and also the midrashic character of some Meccan narratives and narrative motifs (e.g., Q 10:90–92, on which see Sinai 2019a) accords well with a reading of passages like Q 46:10 that holds them to indicate real and non-polemical interaction with contemporary Israelites. The same applies to the Qur'an's evident lack of discomfort with anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language about God (see under → *allāh*), which is well established already in the Meccan surahs and is arguably closer to rabbinic Judaism than to the mainstream of late antique Christianity. Finally, the conspicuous appearance of the divine name *al-rahmān* ("the Merciful") around the time of the transition from the early Meccan surahs to the later Meccan ones may also need to be placed against a rabbinic background, although in this case we can identify a fairly indisputable intermediate stage of transition via South Arabia (see in detail under → *al-rahmān*).<sup>11</sup>

10 See under → *al-naṣārā*, arguing that Q 61:14 does not entail that contemporary Christians qualify as Israelites. For the contrary view that the Qur'anic Israelites include Christians, see Zellentin 2013, 163–164, relying on the understanding of the Israelite people in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*.

11 But note that the Meccan surahs show at least one instance of striking terminological divergence from well-entrenched Jewish usage in a thematic context in which one might well have expected this usage to manifest itself: the Israelite temple is called a → *masjid*, or "place of prostration/worship" (Q 17:1.7), and a *mihrāb*, "sanctuary" (Q 19:11; see also, in the Medinan Qur'an, Q 3:37.39; for more detail, refer to → *bayt*); it is never explicitly described with an expression that could be linked to Hebrew *ha-miqdash* / *bēt ha-miqdash* or Aramaic *maqdash* or *be/bet maqdash* (DTM 829; DJBA 215, 701), such as the post-Qur'anic expression *bayt al-maqdis*. As regards Q 19:11, this likely reflects the fact that the narrative in question is a Christian one (Horowitz 1927,

**A précis of Israelite history in the Qur'an.** Israelite history as recounted in the Qur'an has a twin peak in the figures of Moses and Jesus (see in more detail Schmid, forthcoming a; Pregill, forthcoming; Reynolds, forthcoming). Moses is sent by God as a messenger to Pharaoh and, after God's unleashing of several plagues, frees the Israelites from slavery and oppression (e.g., Q 7:103–137, 20:9–98, 28:3–42). These events are followed by God's revelation on Mount Sinai and his conclusion of a covenant, called *mīthāq* (Q 2:63.83.84.93, 4:154.155, 5:12.13.70) or *'ahd* (Q 2:40; see under → *wāthaqa*), with the Israelites, but also by frequent instances of Israelite insubordination, discontent, and disobedience, including the Israelites' manufacturing and veneration of the Golden Calf (e.g., Q 2:47–61, 7:138–171, 20:80–98). Several passages speak of Israelite kings after Moses, specifically, Tālūt (= Saul; see *JPND* 162–163 and *KU* 123), David, and Solomon (e.g., Q 2:246–251, 27:15–44, 38:17–40); and according to Q 17:4–8 God twice punished the Israelites for “wreaking corruption (→ *afṣada*) on earth,” by sending against them enemy invaders who penetrated as far as the Israelites' place of worship (*masjid*; → *sajada*), which must be the Jerusalem temple. At an indefinite time after Moses, God sent Jesus “as a messenger to the Israelites” (Q 3:49; see also 61:6), triggering a veritable schism of the Israelites into two factions (singular: *ṭā'ifah*), a believing one and an unbelieving or “repudiating” one (Q 61:14; see in more detail under → *al-naṣārā*).

**Qur'anic polemics against the Israelites.** According to Q 2:47.122, God favoured the Israelites over all other world-dwellers (*wa-annī faḍḍaltukum 'alā l-'ālamīn*; see also under → *darajah*), and several verses remind them of the special grace (*ni'mah*; see under → *an'ama*) that God has bestowed on them (Q 2:40.47.122; see also 2:211 and 20:80–81) and of the blessings promised to them in return for adhering to a certain number of precepts (Q 5:12). The Qur'an's portrayal of the Israelites' behaviour in response to God's grace, however, is largely negative. Although the most detailed Qur'anic accounts of the Israelites' worship of the Golden Calf are found in two Meccan surahs (Q 7:148–154, 20:80–98), the majority of passages that are overtly critical of the Israelites' religious track record are Medinan. This forms a marked contrast with the Meccan verses surveyed above that cast the Israelites as real or potential witnesses to the truth of the Qur'anic revelations. Many of the Qur'an's polemical charges against the Israelites are paralleled by statements made regarding the Jews (→ *al-yahūd*, *alladhīna hādū*) and the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*), indicating considerable overlap between all three terms—an observation easily rationalised by positing that the Qur'an views the Jews as the contemporary descendants of the Mosaic Israelites and as forming, together with the Christians, one of the two principal branches of the scripturalists.

One of the specific accusations levelled against the Israelites is that they killed God's prophets (Q 2:61.87.91, 5:70). This is a trope of Christian anti-Jewish polemic (cf. Matt 23:30–31.37, Acts 7:52, or Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho* 16 = Roberts et al. 1995, 1:202; see *CQ* 156–157 and Reynolds 2012) that also occurs in connection with the scripture-owners (Q 3:112 and 4:155). In addition, the Israelites are alleged to have broken God's covenant (*mīthāq*; Q 5:13), also a charge that is directed against the scripturalists (Q 4:155).<sup>12</sup> Again

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261–262); but the same is not the case for the beginning of Q 17:4–8, which merely offer an allusive account of the two destructions of the Jerusalem temple. The word that is used for the Jerusalem temple here, *masjid*, would seem to have been a generic designation for a place of worship.

12 Regarding the identity of the group mentioned in Q 4:155, see the reference to the scripture-owners in v. 153. Q 4:160 then speaks of Jews (*alladhīna hādū*).

like the Jews, the Israelites are condemned for “turning words from their places” (*yuharrifūna l-kalima ‘an mawāḍi‘ihi*; Q 5:13). This echoes Christian allegations of Jewish misinterpretation of the Old Testament (e.g., Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho* 71–73, 84 = Roberts et al. 1995, 1:234–235.241, a parallel I owe to CQ 157; see also Reynolds 2010b, 196–200). In return for their disobedience, the Israelites, or a party among them, are on several occasions singled out as objects of divine wrath or threatened therewith (*gh-d-b*; Q 2:61.90, 7:152, 20:81.86; see Rubin 2003a, 25; → *ghaḍība*), a notion that is, once again, also found in connection with the scripture-owners (Q 3:112, 5:60). Apart from these general indictments, the Qur’an also narrates various episodes of Israelite or Jewish disobedience, ingratitude, or petulance. The most prominent of these is the episode of the Golden Calf, but it is by no means the only such story or scene (e.g., Q 2:57–61).

**The Israelites as a mixed bag.** Despite the starkly polemical nature of many Qur’anic treatments of the Israelites, several Qur’anic passages are clearly less concerned to condemn all past and present Israelites lock, stock, and barrel than to highlight that the Israelites encompassed and encompass both believers and repudiators (e.g., Q 61:14).<sup>13</sup> Side by side with stories of Israelite disobedience, the Qur’an also narrates instances of Israelite repentance and of God’s ensuing forgiveness (e.g., Q 2:52.54.64, 7:149–153).<sup>14</sup> Even the extended litany of Israelite sins in Q 2:40 ff. is interrupted by an emphatic promise of eschatological reward for Jews and Christians who “believe in God and the final day and do righteous deeds” (Q 2:62; see under → *aslama*), while a later verse (Q 2:100) maintains that whenever the Israelites or the scripturalists “conclude a covenant (*‘ahadū ‘ahdan*), part of them (*fariqun minhum*) cast it aside; no, most of them do not believe.” The following verse (Q 2:101) contains similarly differential language: “part of those who were given the scripture” (*fariqun mina lladhīna ūtū l-kitāba*) “cast it behind their backs.” A comparable concern to avoid condemnation of all Israelites is seen in Q 4:155, according to which God has “sealed” (*ṭaba‘a ‘alā*; see under → *khatama*) the hearts of the scripture-owners (who clearly stand in for the Israelites here), “so that they do not believe, except for a few.” Such language, moreover, matches two Medinan passages that declare outright that the “scripture-owners” (*ahl al-kitāb*) include a community (→ *ummah*) that “stands upright” (Q 3:113: *qā’imah*) or is at least “moderate” or “middling” (Q 5:66: *muqtaṣidah*; see under → *aslama*). The Qur’an accordingly portrays the Israelites, like the scripture-owners in general, as very much a mixed bag (see under → *ahl al-kitāb*).

Given the verses just presented, the primary objective of the Qur’an’s miscellaneous catalogues of Israelite sins may be less to denounce the Israelites in their entirety than to lodge forceful disagreement with the claim ascribed to the Qur’anic Israelites in Q 2:94 that “the final abode with God” is theirs alone, “to the exclusion of all other people” (cf. Q 2:111). In addition, God’s prolonged multi-generational engagement with the Israelites, spanning the period from Moses to Jesus, throughout the Qur’an continues to function as a potent paradigm of the human condition, a condition defined by the choice between belief and righteousness, on the one hand, and unbelief and sin, on the other, as well as by the constant need for, but also possibility of, human repentance. Nonetheless, there can

<sup>13</sup> See also Q 2:124, 37:113, and 57:26, insisting that Abraham’s descendants (*dhurriyyah*) include sinners (HCI 95).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. also Q 2:67–71, which finishes with the Israelites carrying out Moses’s command to sacrifice a cow, “although they almost failed to do so.”

be little doubt that the Qur'an considers the Mosaic experiment in building a community of righteous believers to have been far from a resounding triumph. As Q 5:12–13 make very clear, the Israelites have been guilty of multiple and egregious breaches of their covenant with God. They thereby form a warning example to the Qur'anic believers, who are called upon to discharge their covenantal obligations towards God more reliably (Q 5:7, 57:8; see under → *wāthaqa*).

**ism | name**

Look up under *s-m*.

**ismā'īl | Ishmael**

See, briefly, under → *isrā'īl* and → *nabiyy*. For a more detailed treatment, refer to Goudarzi 2019 and also Sinai, forthcoming b.

**uswah | exemplar, model**

→ *ummah*, → *al-ʿālamūn*

**iṣr | burden**

→ *ummī*

**ifk | lie, falsehood**

→ *asāṭir al-awwalīn*

**afala intr. | to set, to disappear**

→ *allāh*

**illā | except for**

→ *shayṭān*

**allāt | Allāt**

→ *ashraka*

**ʿ-l-r, ʿ-l-m, ʿ-l-m-r, ʿ-l-m-ṣ (surah-initial letter sequences)**

Further vocabulary discussed: *nazzala, anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down *kitāb* | scripture *qurʿān* | recitation *āyah* | sign; sign-pronouncement *dhālīka, tilka* | that *lawḥ mahfūz* | guarded tablet *umm al-kitāb* | the mother of

## the scripture, the mother-scripture (meaning either the celestial archetype of earthly scriptures or the Qur'an's unequivocal core)

**Overview.** A total of twenty-nine Qur'anic surahs commence with a string of what are traditionally called “disconnected letters” (*hurūf muqaṭṭa'ah*), which always follow directly upon the *basmalah* (→ *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm*). The meaning of these letter sequences constitutes one of the perennial enigmas of Qur'anic exegesis, and the present entry will present and critique some of the solutions proposed in earlier scholarship.

Before embarking on a discussion of the putative significance of the disconnected letters, it will be useful to run through two facts. First, if the letters are pronounced by their names (such that Surah 2's 'l-m, for instance, is recited *alif lām mīm*), eighteen of the letter sequences (62%) exhibit a rhyme or phonetic assonance with the next verse or with the remainder of the opening verse (Welch 1986, 414). Secondly, the verse or verses following the letter sequence display recurrent terminological peculiarities (Ibn Kathīr 1999, 1:160; Nöldeke 1892, 50–51; Schmid, forthcoming b, ch. 3). Thus, as illustrated by the table below, twenty surahs with introductory letter sequences employ the term → *kitāb* (“scripture”) within the first three verses, and a further surah features at least a general reference to writing (Q 68:1: “By the pen and by what they write down!”); nine surahs with introductory letters have the word *qur'ān* (→ *qara'a*) in the opening three verses; and only four surahs with introductory letters—namely, Surahs 19, 29, 30, 68—have neither *kitāb* nor *qur'ān* (both of which are highlighted in the table below) at the beginning. Moreover, twelve of the twenty-nine letter surahs feature the verbs → *nazzala* or *anzala* or a corresponding verbal noun in their first three verses (Surahs 3, 7, 12, 13, 14, 20, 32, 40, 41, 44, 45, and 46; see also 2:4, 26:4), and ten of the letter surahs have the plural *āyāt*, “signs” or “sign-pronouncements” (singular: → *āyah*) in the first three verses (Surahs 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 26, 27, 28, 31, 41; see also 3:4, 40:4).

The second circumstance just noted permits being cross-checked against surahs that contain similar terminology in their opening verses yet are devoid of initial letter sequences. As it turns out, their number is quite limited in comparison. For example, only seven of the eighty-five surahs that lack opening letter sequences contain the term → *kitāb* in the sense of “scripture” in their three opening verses (Surahs 17, 18, 39, 52, 59, 62, 98), and in two of these (Q 59:2 and 98:1) the word occurs as part of the construct expression → *ahl al-kitāb*, so in a rather different context. If these latter two occurrences are disregarded, then it emerges that of the twenty-five surahs whose opening three verses employ *kitāb* in the sense of “scripture,” twenty (80%) feature an initial letter sequence, while five (20%) do not. For the eleven surah-initial occurrences of the word *qur'ān*, the corresponding ratios are 82% (nine surahs that also have letter sequences) and 18% (two surahs that do not, namely, Surahs 55 and 72). There is, accordingly, a conspicuous and demonstrable correlation between the presence of letter strings, on the one hand, and the presence of key vocabulary in the ensuing verse or verses, on the other, and this correlation runs both ways. As will be argued below, this may help shed light on the likely meaning of the isolated letters.

A final preliminary remark, before embarking on a discussion of previous positions on the meaning of the Qur'anic letter strings, concerns Surah 39. It lacks a surah-initial letter sequence but its opening verse—*tanzīlu l-kitābi mina llāhi l-'azīzi l-ḥakīm*, “A sending-down of the scripture from God, the mighty and wise”—has very close surah-opening

parallels in Q 32:2, 40:2, 41:2, 45:2, and 46:2. These parallels all adhere to the same basic form *tanzīlu* ± <l-kitābi> *min* . . . (“A sending down ± <of the scripture> from . . .”) as Q 39:1 but, unlike 39:1, are preceded by letter strings.<sup>1</sup> The similarity is so striking that one may well be tempted to surmise that Surah 39, too, originally opened with the letters *ḥ-m* but that these were accidentally elided (Bauer 1921, 11). If this was indeed the case, then the correlation between surah-initial letter sequences and surah-initial affirmations of scriptural revelation would be even more robust than in the Qur’an’s standard recension. As Bauer notes, the conjecture that Surah 39 lost an initial letter sequence is strengthened by the fact that the recension of Ubayy reportedly prefixed the letters *ḥ-m* not only to Surahs 40–46 but also to Surah 39 (al-Suyūṭī 1426 AH, 419 = *naw*’ 18; see also Jeffery 1937, 160, and Dayeh 2010, 463), although this could perhaps also be explained as a case of secondary regularisation.

Surah no.	Opening verse(s) in transliteration	Rhyme or assonance?
Q 2	<sup>ʿ</sup> -l-m // <i>dhālika l-kitābu lā rayba fīhi hudan li-l-muttaqīn</i> //	yes
Q 3	<sup>ʿ</sup> -l-m // <i>allāhu lā ilāha illā huwa l-ḥayyu l-qayyūm</i> // <i>nazzala ‘alayka l-kitāba bi-l-ḥaqqi</i> . . .	yes
Q 7	<sup>ʿ</sup> -l-m-ṣ // <i>kitābun unzila ilayka fa-lā yakun fī ṣadrika ḥarajun minhu li-tundhira bihi wa-dhikrā li-l-mu’minīn</i> //	no
Q 10	<sup>ʿ</sup> -l-r tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-ḥakīm //	no
Q 11	<sup>ʿ</sup> -l-r <i>kitābun uḥkimat āyātuhu thumma fuṣṣilat min ladun ḥakīmīn khabīr</i> //	no
Q 12	<sup>ʿ</sup> -l-r tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-mubīn // <i>innā anzalnāhu qur’ānan ‘arabiyyan</i> . . .	no
Q 13	<sup>ʿ</sup> -l-m-r tilka āyātu l-kitābi wa-lladhī unzila ilayka min rabbika l-ḥaqqu wa-lākinna akthara l-nāsi lā yu’minūn //	no
Q 14	<sup>ʿ</sup> -l-r <i>kitābun anzalnāhu ilayka li-tukhrīja l-nāsa mina l-ẓulumāti ilā l-nūri bi-idhni rabbihim ilā ṣirāṭi l-‘azīzi l-ḥamīd</i> //	no
Q 15	<sup>ʿ</sup> -l-r tilka āyātu l-kitābi wa-qur’ānin mubīn //	no
Q 19	<i>k-h-y-‘-ṣ</i> // <i>dhikru raḥmati rabbika ‘abdahu zakariyyā</i> //	no
Q 20	<i>ṭ-h</i> // <i>mā anzalnā ‘alayka l-qur’āna li-tashqā</i> //	yes (if pronounced <i>ṭā-hā</i> , without glottal stops)
Q 26	<i>ṭ-s-m</i> // <i>tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-mubīn</i> //	yes
Q 27	<i>ṭ-s</i> <i>tilka āyātu l-qur’āni wa-kitābin mubīn</i> //	yes
Q 28	<i>ṭ-s-m</i> // <i>tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-mubīn</i> //	yes
Q 29	<sup>ʿ</sup> -l-m // <i>a-ḥasiba l-nāsu an yutrakū an yaqūlū āmannā wa-hum lā yuftanūn</i> //	yes
Q 30	<sup>ʿ</sup> -l-m // <i>ghulibati l-rūm</i> //	yes

*Continued on next page*

<sup>1</sup> For parallels to this basic statement form that do not occur at the beginning of surahs, see Q 41:42, 56:80, and 69:43 (all of which have *tanzīlun min* . . .).



Surah no.	Opening verse(s) in transliteration	Rhyme or assonance?
Q 31	ʾ-l-m // tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-ḥakīm //	yes
Q 32	ʾ-l-m // tanzīlu l-kitābi lā rayba fīhi min rabbi l-ʿālamīn //	yes
Q 36	y-s // wa-l-qurʾāni l-ḥakīm //	yes
Q 38	ṣ wa-l-qurʾāni dhī l-dhikr //	no
Q 40	ḥ-m // tanzīlu l-kitābi mina llāhi l-ʿazīzi l-ʿalīm //	yes
Q 41	ḥ-m // tanzīlun mina l-rahmāni l-rahīm // kitābun fuṣṣilat āyātuhu qurʾānan ʿarabiyyan li-qawmin yaʿlamūn //	yes
Q 42	ḥ-m // ʿ-s-q // ka-dhālika yūḥī ilayka wa-ilā lladhīna min qablaka llāhu l-ʿazīzu l-ḥakīm //	no (yes between vv. 1 and 3)
Q 43	ḥ-m // wa-l-kitābi l-mubīn //	yes
Q 44	ḥ-m // wa-l-kitābi l-mubīn // innā anzalnāhu fī laylatin mubārakatin . . .	yes
Q 45	ḥ-m // tanzīlu l-kitābi mina llāhi l-ʿazīzi l-ḥakīm //	yes
Q 46	ḥ-m // tanzīlu l-kitābi mina llāhi l-ʿazīzi l-ḥakīm //	yes
Q 50	q wa-l-qurʾāni l-majīd //	no
Q 68	n wa-l-qalami wa-mā yasturūn //	yes

**Views on the meaning of the letter sequences.** The meaning of the Qurʾanic letter sequences has been energetically debated both in premodern and modern scholarship. Medieval exegetes offer a wide range of views ranging from agnosticism to elaborate cosmological and numerological speculations, including attempts to view the letter sequences as abbreviations of particular phrases and expressions, such as divine names or attributes (GQ 2:69–72; Ayoub 1984, 56–62; SQ 13–14; see, e.g., Ṭab. 1:204–224 and al-Suyūṭī 1426 AH, 1372–1392 = *nawʿ* 43). Similar “abbreviationist” construals (Massey 2003, 473–474) have also been propounded by modern Western scholars, who have interpreted the letters as standing for specific Qurʾanic terms or phrases, such as ʾ-l-r for *al-rahmān* (Loth 1881, 609–610; Bauer 1921, 16–20), as abridged surah titles (Goossens 1923), or as indicating the persons whose transcripts of Qurʾanic material were utilised by Zayd ibn Thābit when he compiled the standard recension of the Qurʾanic text (Nöldeke 1860, 215–216; Hirschfeld 1902, 141–143; Massey 1996). The opinion that the letter sequences form decipherable abbreviations, however, has not gone unchallenged: abandoning his earlier view, Nöldeke concluded that the letter strings do not convey specific meanings but are “mystical allusions to the [Qurʾan’s] celestial textual original” (Nöldeke 1892, 51; see also Jones 1962). As I shall argue in the final section of this entry, this is indeed the most promising approach to the issue.

A second point of contention is the question whether the letter strings are integral parts of their respective surahs or secondary additions. The position that the letter strings designate the provenance of different textual witnesses collated by the Qurʾan’s redactor or redactors obviously entails that they were not originally part of the surahs to which they are now prefixed. This latter view can also be combined with other variations of the abbreviationist approach; for instance, Goossens posits that the letters were added after



the death of Muhammad yet prior to the final redaction of the Qur’anic corpus (Goossens 1923, 216–218). This hypothesis contains an important insight, namely, that the letter strings are unlikely to have entered the Qur’anic text at its final redactional stage. The reason for this is that the letter sequences appear to have caused the redactor(s) of the Qur’an’s standard recension to modify a default propensity of arranging surahs by roughly decreasing length: in a number of cases, surahs beginning with the same or very similar letter sequences were positioned next to one another even if from a purely quantitative perspective they ought to have been placed further apart (Bauer 1921, 1–15; Robinson 2003a, 260–263; *HCI* 26–29). The letter strings, in other words, were already part of the surahs when the Qur’an’s canonical surah order was determined. In fact, it is plausible to go back even further: given that surah-initial letter strings are demonstrably correlated with specific diction in the immediately following verses, as demonstrated above, there is a strong presumption that the letter sequences are original components of their respective surahs. This reasoning might be countered by positing that, perhaps, the addition of the letter strings was conditioned by, and therefore secondary to, the presence of surah-opening statements involving the terms *tanzil* or *kitāb*; but such a scenario, in which the letter sequences are effectively understood as serving to mark out surahs that open with invocations of scripture, revelation, or recitation, leaves open the crucial question of what might have motivated redactors to do so.

**The letter sequences as representations of the Qur’an’s celestial archetype.** The strongest argument against abbreviationist construals of the letter sequences, whatever their specific inflection, is surely that they have a disquieting air of guesswork. This makes Nöldeke’s revised view attractive that the isolated letters represent the Qur’anic revelations’ written celestial source or archetype (on which see in more detail under → *kitāb*). Nöldeke’s revised opinion also fits well with the fact that many of the letter sequences are followed by statements employing the terms *kitāb* and *tanzil*, at least if one accepts two subsidiary assumptions: first, that the demonstratives → *dhālika* or *tilka* that figure in some of the verses following letter sequences have an anaphoric significance and serve to refer back to the preceding letter string; and secondly, that the term *kitāb* in the surah introductions at hand designates the heavenly scriptural archetype of which the Qur’anic proclamations are considered to form an oral exposition (see Sinai 2006, 117–126, and under → *kitāb*). Accordingly, a statement like *tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-mubīn*, “Those are the signs of the clear scripture” (Q 28:2), refers back to the preceding letter sequence *ṭ-s-m* and describes it as representing the transcendent source document from which the Qur’anic revelations are held to derive, namely, the celestial scripture with its constituent “sign-pronouncements” (see in more detail under → *dhālika*).

The preceding theory is reinforced by the fact that the Qur’an asserts very explicitly that the oral proclamations delivered by Muhammad are somehow based on, or form an exposition of, a heavenly scripture (see in more detail under → *kitāb*). Thus, a handful of passages (all Meccan and thus anterior to or at least contemporary with the letter sequences) describe the Qur’anic texts as a “noble recitation” (*qur’ān karīm*; → *qara’a*) contained “in a sheltered scripture” (*fī kitābin makhnūn*; Q 56:77–78), as a “glorious recitation” that is stored “in a guarded tablet” (*fī lawḥin mahfūz*; Q 85:21–22), as a “reminder” inhering “in honoured sheets” (*fī ṣuḥufin mukarramah*; Q 80:11.13),<sup>2</sup> and as an “→ ‘arabī

2 On Q 56:77–78, 80:11.13, and 85:21–22, see in more detail under → *kitāb*.

recitation” archetypically stored “in the mother-scripture with us [i.e., God]” (Q 43:4: *fī ummi l-kitābi ladaynā*). Despite forming an open-ended series of oral addresses, the Qur’anic revelations are here presented as participating in the written nature of their celestial source document (Sinai 2006, 112–116). One of the passages just cited also provides a glimpse of how the heavenly archetype is considered to have been transformed into the Qur’anic proclamations, namely, by an act of divine “sending-down” (*tanzīl*; Q 56:80), a concept that reappears in twelve of the twenty-nine surah introductions catalogued in the figure above, such as Q 3:3, 7:2, 12:2, 13:1, 32:2, or 40:2.<sup>3</sup> We may thus assume that the term *kitāb* as used in these surah introductions does indeed refer to a celestial archetype rather than to the body of the Qur’anic revelations themselves, even if the latter are also described as forming a *kitāb* in their own right, one that is distinct from the *kitāb* revealed to Moses (e.g., Q 6:92.155, 46:12.30; see Sinai 2006, 129–133).

Nöldeke’s reconsidered position also coheres with two further features of the Qur’anic letter sequences. First, it has been observed the isolated letters include all basic undotted consonantal forms of the early Arabic script, which lends support to the contention that the disconnected letters symbolise the Arabic alphabet (Welch 1986, 414; Massey 2003, 472–473; Stewart 2011, 339–341; Schmid, forthcoming b, ch. 3). Secondly, the succession of individual characters in the Qur’anic letter sequences adheres to a specific order that aligns at least partially with the customary order of letters in the Arabic *abjad* (Massey 1996, 498–499; Stewart 2011, 341–343). The inference that the letter sequences are meant to evoke the alphabet, or perhaps the technique of writing in general, is plausibly contextualised by pointing to a wider late antique tendency to explore the cosmological significance and potency of the alphabet, an interest that can be detected both in Christian and rabbinic texts (Schmid, forthcoming b, ch. 3). Within the Qur’an, though, the principal point of the letter sequences would appear to be specifically to represent the written mode of storage (see Madigan 2001, 69–77) that the Qur’anic proclamations associate with the heavenly archetype from which they claim to derive. As Devin Stewart writes, “the mysterious letters are evidently intended to represent a distinctive or archaic alphabet associated with a scripture that is closely tied to the Biblical tradition, exists on a supernatural plane, and serves as the ultimate source for the revelations of the Qur’ān” (Stewart 2011, 341). Surah-initial letter strings accordingly amount to an act of surrogate display: unlike the scriptural codices and scrolls utilised and exhibited in Christian and Jewish services, the Qur’anic proclamations’ celestial archetype is not empirically accessible; it cannot be *pre*-sented but only *re*-presented; and the surah introductions under discussion here undertake to represent it in the shape of disconnected archigraphemic letter shapes.

To be sure, Nöldeke’s theory does not explain why some letter clusters are only found once (e.g., *y-s* at the beginning of Surah 36) while others occur in several surahs (e.g., <sup>2</sup>*-l-m* at the beginning of Surahs 2, 3, and 29–32), nor does it account for the fact that certain letter clusters are extensions of others (e.g., <sup>2</sup>*-l-m-r* and <sup>2</sup>*-l-m-ṣ* in comparison with <sup>2</sup>*-l-m*). It is possible that the same or related letter clusters are correlated with pertinent further

3 The process leading from the celestial *kitāb* to the earthly *qur’ān* is also described by the term *tafṣīl* (e.g., Q 41:3), roughly equivalent to an act of divine exposition or elucidation that adapts the contents of the celestial scripture to a specific audience of recipients (Sinai 2006, 120–126; see also under → *faṣṣala*). This casts doubt on Grimme’s claim that the Qur’anic revelations are an exact “transcript” (*Abschrift*) of the celestial book (Grimme 1895, 72–73), even if this is how the relationship between the two entities is understood in the medieval commentary tradition (see the use of *nasakha*, “to copy,” in Ṭab. 20:546–547 = Q 43:4).

links and similarities between the surahs in question: at least the bloc of *ḥ-m* surahs has been shown to exhibit specific formulaic parallels and thematic complementarity (Dayeh 2010), and a shared range of thematic preoccupations has also been detected in Q 10–15, opening with <sup>ʿ</sup>-*l-r* or <sup>ʿ</sup>-*l-m-r* (Saleh 2016). Hence, the presence of an identical letter cluster at the beginning of two different surahs could be indicative of further literary and contextual affinities and perhaps even of chronological proximity, though all of this requires further study.

***allaḥa* intr. *bayna* | to connect s.th., to reconcile s.th.**

→ *qalb*

***malak***

Though this is sometimes claimed to derive from the root <sup>ʿ</sup>-*l-k*, look up alphabetically under *m-l-k*.

***allāh* | God**

Further vocabulary discussed: *al-rahmān* | the Merciful *rabb* | lord *asāṭir al-awwālīn* pl. | writs of the ancients, ancient scribblings *khalaqa* tr. | to create s.th. *jaʿala* tr. | to make or establish s.th. *idhn* | permission *āyah* | sign *afala* intr. | to set, to disappear *sharik* | associate, partner deity *awwal* | first *ākhir* | last, final *abnāʿ* pl. | children *aḥibbāʿ* pl. | beloved ones *dīn* | judgement *rasūl* | messenger *nabiyy* | prophet *rahīm* | merciful *aḥabba* tr. | to love s.o. or s.th. *ghaḍiba ʿalā* | to be angry at s.o., to be filled with wrath towards s.o. *ghaḍab* | wrath, anger *ʿazīz* | mighty *intaqama* intr. *min* | to exact retribution from s.o. *dhūntiqām* | exacting retribution *makara* intr. (*bi-*) | to plot or scheme, to devise or execute a plot or scheme against s.o. or for the benefit of s.o. *nasiya* tr./intr. | to forget (s.th. or s.o.) *adraka* tr. | to attain s.th., to reach s.th. *al-ghayb* | the hidden *al-shahādah* | what can be witnessed, what is observable *istawā* intr. (*ilā*) | to stand up straight, to straighten o.s. up towards s.th. *istawā* intr. *ʿalā* | to sit down on s.th. *jasad* | figurative representation or lifelike apparition of a human or animal body *badan, jism* | (human) body *tajallā* intr. | to be radiant, to manifest o.s. *kufuw, kufuʿ, kuf* | equal in rank *samīʿ* | hearing *baṣīr* | seeing *nūr* | light *ẓulumāt* pl. | darkness *al-tawrāh* | the Torah *al-injīl* | the Gospel or the Christian Bible *ibtagħā* tr. | to seek s.th. *wajh* | face *yad* | hand *maghlūl* | fettered *ʿayn* | eye *ʿalīm* | knowing, knowledgeable *daʿā* tr. | to call upon s.o. *ajāba* tr., *istajāba* intr. *li-* | to respond to s.o.

*Allāh* is by far the most common Qurʾanic name of God, occurring well over 2,500 times, though it coexists with two other frequent designations of the divinity, “the Merciful” (→ *al-rahmān*) and “lord” (→ *rabb*) combined with a possessive suffix (e.g., “your Lord,” “his Lord”). The following entry opens with a succinct survey of what pre-Islamic Arabian inscriptions and pre-Islamic Arabic poetry have to say about the deity Allāh. This is followed by a synthesis of the Qurʾan’s general portrayal of God that relies on statements using all

three of the Qur'an's principal divine names, drawing together conclusions discussed in more detail in various other places in the dictionary. After summarily covering God's role as a creator and a moral judge, the entry argues in some detail that the Qur'an does not conceive of God as immaterial. This leads to a discussion of three anthropomorphic traits that the Qur'an recurrently ascribes to God: a face, hands, and eyes. Although some of the relevant formulations are clearly idiomatic, it is maintained that they cannot be reduced to mere metaphors. Rather, they serve to articulate essential aspects of divine personhood.

**Etymology and epigraphic attestation.** The Kufan school of Arabic grammar considers *allāh* to be a contraction of *al-ilāh*, “the god” (e.g., al-Tha‘labī 2015, 2:288), an etymology that remains linguistically plausible (Kiltz 2012). Minimally, an understanding of *allāh* as equivalent to *al-ilāh* appears to have presented itself already to pre-Islamic speakers of Arabic, seeing that poets like al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī or the Christian ‘Adī ibn Zayd use the two terms synonymously (e.g., *DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 1:23–24; see *GMK* 110–111 and Sinai 2019b, 7–9). Ancient North Arabian inscriptions, such as the corpus of Safaitic rock graffiti, employ *’lh* or *lh* as the proper name of a pagan deity who is occasionally enumerated together with other gods, such as Kahl and ‘Aththar or Ruḏā (e.g., Al-Jallad 2014a, 451; on epigraphic attestations in the region around Najrān, see now Robin 2020–2021, 86–90).<sup>1</sup> Bilingual inscriptions in Arabic and Greek establish that at least when occurring as part of theophoric names, *’lh* or *lh* were indeed pronounced *allāh* (Krone 1992, 58 and 461–463; Al-Jallad 2017a, 107, 132, 163, and 168). In Safaitic inscriptions, Allāh (*’lh/lh*) is petitioned for rain, security, or booty, but there is no readily apparent functional specialisation that would set him apart from other deities, some of whom—such as Ruḏā and Allāt—feature more frequently. South Arabian inscriptions from Ḥimyar invoke both *’ln/’lhn* (perhaps pronounced *’ilān* and *’ilāhān*) and “the Merciful” (*’rhmnn, raḥmānān*) as the master of heaven and earth (Gajda 2009, 224–232; Robin and Rijziger 2018, 278–281). Identifiably Christian inscriptions, including one in mostly Arabic script from 548 or 549 CE and found near Dūmah, show a preference for retaining the uncontracted form *’l-’lh (al-ilāh)* over the contracted version *’lh* (e.g., Nehmé 2017, 124–131 and 153–154, and Robin 2020–2021, 67 and 70–72; see also, for further references, Sinai 2019b, 7).

**Allāh in pre-Islamic poetry.** A different picture than that gleaned from Safaitic inscriptions emerges from pre-Islamic poetry, also composed by mostly pagan authors, where Allāh is invoked much more often than any other deity (Brockelmann 1922; Sinai 2019b, 19–63). Poetry credits Allāh with a wide range of functions, including the creation of the cosmos and of humans; control over the natural world, especially the provision of rain; control over the destiny of human individuals and collectives, a power often presented as inscrutable and ominous; omniscience; and the requital of moral infractions. There are also a fair number of references to a cult of Allāh connected with the Meccan Ka‘bah. Although the authenticity of individual lines of allegedly pre-Islamic poetry is often difficult to establish conclusively, the overall picture largely matches the beliefs about Allāh that the Qur'an ascribes to Muhammad's pagan opponents (on which see generally *QP*). The poetic evidence accordingly suggests that a pagan deity known as Allāh—an expression that presumably originated from the reverential epithet *al-ilāh*, which may increasingly have come to be used like a proper name (Robin 2012, 305)—underwent a steep rise in the centuries

<sup>1</sup> For a much more detailed treatment of the attestation of *allāh* in Ancient North Arabian epigraphy and pre-Islamic poetry, see Sinai 2019b, with additional primary and secondary references.

prior to the Qur'an's emergence, acquiring a number of core traits of the Biblical God and thereby enabling both pagan and Christian poets to recognise one another as referring to the same deity when speaking of Allāh or *al-ilāh*. This development may be seen as a process of discursive alignment with the theological koine of late antique culture, in which the idea of a supreme deity occupied a pivotal place (see generally Fowden 1993).

However much the pre-Islamic pagan Allāh was endowed with aspects of the Biblical God, at least one crucial disparity seems to have withstood this gradual process of assimilation: in contrast to standard late antique Jewish and Christian belief, pagan adherents of Allāh did not conceive him as resurrecting the dead and sitting in eschatological judgement over them. To be sure, a small number of pre-Islamic verses faintly reflect the prevalence of eschatological notions in late antique Christianity and Judaism (Sinai 2019b, 45–46). Thus, 'Adī ibn Zayd—who by virtue of being a Christian would naturally have taken for granted the idea of an eschatological judgement—alludes to “a day on which a servant [of God] will not be treated ungratefully for what he has stored up” (*yawma lā yukfaru 'abdun mā ddakhkhar*; al-Mu'aybid 1965, no. 8:17). But such eschatological ideas do not normally seem to have coloured the way in which non-Jewish and non-Christian inhabitants of Arabia conceived of Allāh. That the pagan understanding of Allāh generally lacked eschatological traits is also supported by the fact that the Qur'an presents its pagan or “associating” (→ *ashraka*) opponents as rejecting the resurrection or at least as being irredeemably unconcerned by it (*QP* 125–182). It is important to emphasise that this does not entail that the Qur'anic pagans lacked acquaintance with the idea of a final judgement. Rather, they simply did not consider it plausible and are portrayed in the Qur'an as dismissing it as “ancient scribblings” (→ *asāṭīr al-awwālīn*; see also under → *ashraka*).

**God as creator.** In attempting a synthesis of the Qur'an's own understanding of Allāh—or “God,” as the Arabic word should normally be translated in the Qur'an<sup>2</sup>—the obvious point to start is the claim that God is the “creator of all things” (*khāliq kulli shay'in*; Q 6:102, 13:16, 39:62, 40:62, similarly 6:101 and 25:2). While the notion of Allāh's creatorhood would not have been novel to a pagan Arabian audience, the Qur'an's pervasive emphasis on divine creation far outstrips the more peripheral occurrence of this theme in pre-Qur'anic poetry (see Sinai 2019b, 27–28). As shown in more detail elsewhere (→ *khalaqa*), the Qur'an envisages divine creation chiefly under the aspect of a bestowal of measure and proportion rather than under that of creation *ex nihilo*, which had emerged as a prominent Christian doctrine by the time of the Qur'an. From the Qur'anic vantage point, to say that God is the creator of all things means, in the first place, that God has established and continues to uphold a cosmos marked by wisdom and order rather than to vaunt God's ability to bring forth something from nothing. Incidentally, the Qur'an's lack of an unequivocal endorsement of creation *ex nihilo* does not call into question the Qur'an's commitment to a categorical distinction between God and the cosmos, for which latter the Qur'an employs the complex phrase “the heavens and the earth and what is between them” (see under → *ard*).

Related to this, the Qur'an does not confine God's creatorhood to the primordial past but frequently depicts it as an ongoing reality. God continues to sustain the heavens and the earth (Q 2:255) and holds them in place (Q 22:65 and 35:41), and he remains intimately involved with the way the natural world operates in the present, to the manifest benefit

2 It is however helpful to use “Allāh” rather than “God” when discussing the pagan belief in a pantheon of different deities, the supreme one of whom is picked out by the Arabic word *allāh*.

of humans (see also under → *ard*). In fact, some passages cast God as being so enmeshed in the world's causal fabric that the Qur'anic understanding of nature, while consistently emphasising its orderliness and anthropocentric functionality, at the same time comes close to being occasionalistic—which is to say that it exhibits a palpable tendency to attribute natural processes, like the falling of rain or the conception and maturation of human fetuses in the womb, directly to God rather than to inner-worldly causes.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the way in which the process of human conception and fetal development is summarised in passages like Q 23:12–14 or 40:67 presents each developmental stage as directly engendered (*khalaqa, ja'ala*) by the deity: God normally acts in a fixed and ordered sequence, but there does not seem to be any immanent causal relationship between one stage of the process and the next.

One might object that the reason why the Qur'an places such emphasis on divine agency in this particular case is to do with the fact that the text is suggesting an inference from God's creation of humans in the here and now to his recreation of them at the future resurrection (see under → *ahyā* and → *khalaqa*). Yet a similarly occasionalistic tendency can be observed in other cases. For instance, when the shadow cast by an object becomes longer or shorter over the course of the day, due to the changing elevation of the sun, it is really God who stretches the shadow out and takes it away (Q 25:45–46).<sup>4</sup> Even after having been fully set up, the natural realm is thus in no way causally independent of its creator, whom Q 55:29 describes as incessantly busy (*kulla yawmin huwa fi sha'n*, “everyday he is engaged in something”).<sup>5</sup>

3 On occasionalism in the post-Qur'anic Islamic tradition and in European philosophy, see generally Perler and Rudolph 2000 and Rudolph 2016b. In the interest of further delineating the Qur'anic position on the issue at hand, it is helpful to note that al-Ghazālī, at least on Rudolph's plausible interpretation, appears inclined to concede that an occasionalistic view of the cosmos is one that would severely compromise God's wisdom, in so far as it would strip the world of structure, coherence, and a significant degree of predictability (Perler and Rudolph 2000, 94–96 and 104). The reason for this is that al-Ghazālī adopts from Avicenna the idea that the universe is “an integrated system of entities and events bound together in an interlocking order of causes and intermediaries” (Frank 1992b, 18). From the Qur'anic vantage point, by contrast, the assumption that God is directly and extensively implicated in the causal fabric of the most everyday processes does not call into doubt that the world, as factually run and directed by God, displays supreme wisdom. This is so because the Qur'an does not equate a cosmos exhibiting divine wisdom with a largely self-governing apparatus whose wise design manifests itself precisely in the fact that it does not require constant divine micromanagement.

4 The picture is complicated by other processual descriptions in the Qur'an that do credit some stage of the process under consideration with at least an instrumental role in relation to a later stage or that invest some entity involved in the respective process with its own causal efficacy. Thus, Q 7:57 says that God “sends the winds” (*yursilu l-riyāḥa*), which carry (*aqallat*) rain clouds, which God then drives (*suqnāhu*) to dead land and “by means of” which he finally sends down (*fa-anzalnā bihi*) rain; other passages state that it is “by means of” rain (*bihi*) that God subsequently revivifies (→ *ahyā*) the earth (Q 2:164, 16:65, 29:63, 30:24, 45:5; cf. 35:9). Here, the preposition *bi-* would seem to indicate that clouds and rain serve at least as partial causes of what happens subsequently. The winds, moreover, are depicted as acting upon rain clouds (*aqallat*), which is also the case in Q 30:48 and 35:9, according to which God “sends the winds, which stir up clouds” (*yursilu/arsala l-riyāḥa fa-tuthiru saḥāban*). But even so, Q 7:57 and 30:48 still present God as the immediate cause of crucial developments in the overall process of precipitation: God drives the rain clouds to a certain spot (Q 7:57) and he spreads the clouds out “as he wills” (Q 30:48: *kayfa yashā'u*). Thus, at least at the literal level the Qur'an does not portray rainfall as an occurrence that is fully explicable by pointing to inner-cosmic occurrences, dispositions, or laws. For another passage implying that natural entities have at least a limited degree of causal efficacy, see Q 7:58, according to which the vegetation that grows in good soil “comes forth by the permission of its Lord” (*yakhruju nabātuhū bi-idhni rabbihī*). Here, a natural process is reconciled with divine omnipotence in the same manner that other Qur'anic passages apply to human agency (see under → *shā'a*): God retains ultimate sovereignty in so far as he could deny his permission and block the occurrence in question. See similarly Q 14:25.

5 The surah's rhyme suggests that the final word of the verse would have been pronounced *shān*. See van Putten 2018, 101, and van Putten 2022, 119.



Standing behind the countless events and processes unfolding in the natural world, therefore, God is the one running everything and exercising complete control: he is not only the designer and creator of the cosmos but also its managing director on a daily basis. (It is worth noting that the Qur’anic concern to foreground God’s ultimate control over nature is not unparalleled, as shown by Jacob of Sarug.<sup>6</sup>) Accordingly, God would be able to make the shadow of an object stand still if he so willed (Q 25:45: *wa-law shā’a la-ja’alahu sākinan*). It may be that this latter prerogative is one that is never going to be exercised (but see Josh 10:12–13). Yet it is clear that the Qur’anic God does on occasion employ his total control over the cosmos in order to disrupt and redirect the ordinary course of nature in a miraculous manner. For instance, when Abraham’s idolatrous people tried to burn him alive, God commanded the fire to be “coolness and safety” for its prospective victim (Q 21:68–69), thereby blocking its combustive effect (cf. with less detail Q 29:24 and 37:97–98).<sup>7</sup> Only human actions, it appears, do not directly come under the sway of divine causality, even if they are nonetheless within the scope of God’s omnipotence in so far as they could not proceed if God were to deny them permission (*idhn*; e.g., Q 10:100; see in more detail under → *shā’a*).<sup>8</sup>

From the Qur’anic perspective, the existence of a munificent and omnipotent creator, to whom humans owe gratitude and obedience, is evinced by sundry features of the natural world, which the Qur’an calls “signs” (singular: → *āyah*). In this regard, the Islamic scripture

6 Thus, Jacob stresses that any power possessed by a “nature” (*kyānā*)—e.g., any combustive power that one might attribute to fire—would be exclusively due to the fact that the power in question was granted by God (*māreh yab leh*; Mathews 2018, 20–21, l. 1279) and that consequently “the Lord of natures (*mārē kyānē*) is the ruler over His creation, and at His command everything proceeds according to its activity” (Mathews 2018, 22–23, ll. 1297–1298). While the Qur’an does not explicitly consider whether the fact that fire usually burns things is to be explained by appealing to its immanent nature or powers, both Jacob and the Qur’an are concerned to stress that God can impede or redirect the ordinary course of events, and indeed Jacob goes so far as to say that fire itself “has no power (*d-lā shalliṭ lāh*) either to burn or to die down, for fire has always had a ruler and a Lord” (Mathews 2018, 22–23, ll. 1293–2294; cf. also Mathews 2018, 20–21, l. 1288: “for to burn or not to burn does not belong to itself”). Hence, the position that Jacob adopts in this context has an occasionalistic tendency, similar to the Qur’anic passages discussed in the main text: in any given situation, God will either command fire to burn or not to burn; whether combustion occurs or not is to be explained in terms of a divine command rather than in terms of any immanent disposition of fire. One should note, however, that elsewhere Jacob evinces a different understanding of how God governs nature (Mathews 2018, 42–43, ll. 1483–1488). It is also pertinent to remark that Jacob’s interest in safeguarding God’s ability to interfere with the combustive power of fire in particular is clearly due to the fact that there are scriptural miracles at stake for him—namely, the claim in Dan 3:19–30 that the three men whom Nebuchadnezzar had thrown into a fiery furnace emerged unscathed and the claim in 1 Kgs 18:38 that the “fire of the Lord” that was summoned by Elijah in the context of his confrontation with the prophets of Baal consumed not only Elijah’s offering but also “licked up” the water that Elijah had ordered to be poured over the altar (Mathews 2018, 20–23, ll. 1285–1298). As explained further on in the main text, the Qur’an too reports a miracle similar to Dan 3:19–30 (Q 21:68–69). The question whether fire is combustive on account of its immanent nature was already debated by Hellenistic philosophers; see Perler and Rudolph 2000, 32–33.

7 On the prehistory of this Qur’anic motif, see Kugel 1998, 252–254.

8 The preceding exposition of the extent and limits of divine causality in the Qur’an is in broad agreement with basic features of a generic and simplified version of classical (and non-Baghdādi) Mu’tazilī theology: rational agents are the only creatures endowed with a power of secondary causation or *tawallud*; everything else—i.e., all seemingly “natural” occurrences—is engendered by God (see Perler and Rudolph 2000, 44). To be sure, it is arguable that certain strands of post-Qur’anic Islamic theology not only systematise but radicalise the Qur’anic understanding of God’s involvement in natural processes. Thus, al-Ash’arī taught that any change in the material world whatsoever, including human actions and their effects, and even the mere persistence in being of any entity other than God required the deity’s constant intervention (Perler and Rudolph 2000, 51–56; Rudolph 2016b). But at least the latter claim, which had already been championed by the Baghdādi Mu’tazilī Abū l-Qāsim al-Ka’bī al-Balkhī (Perler and Rudolph 2000, 46–51), is not alien to the Qur’an: according to Q 2:255, cited earlier in the main text, it is God who preserves the heavens and the earth.



continues a long tradition of establishing the existence of a supreme deity by means of teleological or design arguments, a tradition reaching back as far as Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and Philo (Wolfson 1962, 1:75–77). Specifically, and as explained in more detail elsewhere (→ *arḍ*), the Qur’an tends to focus on the variegated ways in which the earth functions as a hospitable habitat for its human residents—a line of reasoning that Averroes aptly terms “the argument from providence” (*dalīl al-‘ināyah*; Ibn Rushd 1964, 150 = Najjar 2001, 33). However, bearing in mind what was just said about God’s causal involvement in natural processes like the falling of rain, it is important to add that when the Qur’an is drawing attention to God’s “signs” in the world, this is not merely to point out that the cosmos must have been designed and produced by a uniquely wise and beneficent divine creator in the remote past; the Qur’an is also discerning the abiding and ubiquitous presence of this creator beneath the familiar and seemingly unremarkable surface of common natural phenomena. Hence, Qur’anic *āyāt*, like the falling of rain and the resulting revivification of parched land, are signs of a mediated kind of divine presence *in* the world rather than just signs of divine origination *of* the world (Frank 1992a, 23, n. 29).

The general movement of thought from the cosmos to a transcendent creator and manager thereof that the Qur’an seeks to elicit is dramatised in a scene from the life of the paradigmatic monotheist Abraham, which is recounted in Q 6:75–79 and builds on earlier traditions about Abraham’s proficiency in astronomy (Kugel 1998, 249–251). The passage depicts how Abraham, after having surveyed “the kingdom (*malakūt*; → *malik*) of the heavens and the earth” (Q 6:75), successively pays religious homage to a star, the moon, and the sun by acclaiming each one with the words, “This is my Lord” (Q 6:76–78: *hādhā rabbī*). Yet in each case, the heavenly body in question sets or vanishes from sight (*afala/afalat*; cf. *AEL* 70). Thus, the periodic occultation of all celestial bodies, which were of course established objects of religious veneration in the ancient world, causes Abraham to realise that even the most powerful entities in the world are finite beings that cannot therefore be identical with the world’s supreme sovereign. Abraham consequently arrives at the insight that the being truly deserving of human worship must completely transcend the cosmos and must consist in the one “who created the heavens and the earth” (Q 6:79: *alladhī faṭara l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa*).<sup>9</sup> The scene exemplifies in a particularly vivid manner how the Qur’an, like other descendants of the Biblical tradition, locates divinity beyond rather than within the world,<sup>10</sup> however much the latter bears witness to God’s miraculous activity.

The Qur’an maintains not only that the cosmos must have been brought forth and continue to be directed by a wise deity transcending it; it also rules out that there could be more than one such deity. This latter claim becomes explicit only from a certain point in the Qur’an’s early Meccan period; but the uncompromising monotheism that results quickly asserts itself as one of the main Qur’anic doctrines, leading to vigorous polemics against the view held by the Qur’an’s “associating” opponents that there were other deities besides Allāh (see under → *ashraka*). As part of such polemics, the Qur’anic proclamations formulate a rational argument for monotheism, known as the proof from “mutual frustration”

<sup>9</sup> On this passage and pre-Qur’anic parallels, see *BEQ* 124–128 and Lowin 2006, 88–98 (and also Sinai 2020a, 281–282).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Kaufmann 1961, 60, according to whom the “basic idea of Israelite religion” involves the claim that God “is utterly distinct from, and other than, the world.”

(*tamānu*) among later Muslim theologians (e.g., Gimaret 1990, 252–254). According to Q 23:91, if there were several gods, “each god would make off with what he created” (*ladhahaba kullu ilāhin bi-mā khalaqa*) and there would be strife and conflict between them (see also Q 17:42). Similarly, Q 21:22 explains that the existence of deities other than God would cause heaven and earth to “go to ruin” (*lafasadatā*; see under → *afsada*), presumably because the world would end up being a battlefield of conflicting divine forces rather than a well-designed and smoothly interlocking system.<sup>11</sup> The counterfactual line of reasoning intimated here aspires to show that the hypothesis of a plurality of deities is incompatible with the factual orderliness and unity of the world (see also Mir 1987, 11, and Gwynne 2004, 176). Yet the argument will hardly have impressed Muhammad’s pagan adversaries, who subscribed to a hierarchical conception of the divine that intercalated various intermediary deities between Allāh and the human sphere (→ *ashraka*). To an argument of the sort put forward in Q 23:91, the Qur’anic associators could simply have responded that Allāh’s unquestionable supremacy over all other divine beings was sufficient to ensure cosmic orderliness and a clear chain of command. Why indeed should a divine hierarchy comprising different levels of power and authority necessarily engender chaos and strife? Provided that any gods and goddesses other than Allāh are deemed subordinate to him, why would they necessarily “seek a path to the incumbent of the throne” (Q 17:42: *la-btaghaw ilā dhī l-‘arshi sabīlā*)—that is, seek to displace him—or be bound to overpower one another (Q 23:91: *la-‘alā ba’duhum ‘alā ba’ḍin*)?

The reason why the Qur’an fails to countenance the possibility of a pantheon that is structured hierarchically, and therefore stable and compatible with an orderly and unitary cosmos, resides in a basic conceptual disagreement between the Qur’an and its pagan opponents, a disagreement that is astutely pinpointed by Crone: the Qur’anic Messenger “saw a stark contrast between God and everything else whereas the pagans saw divinity as a spectrum” (QP 61). The Qur’an, in other words, does not consider divinity, or the quality of being divine, to admit of gradation or degrees (unlike, say, colours), meaning that any being subordinate to Allāh must *eo ipso* be non-divine: only a being who sits at the very top of the cosmic hierarchy merits being classed as divine. For instance, angels, though acknowledged by the Qur’an to be supernatural beings with extraordinary powers, are not subsidiary gods but rather, as Q 43:19 insists, servants of the one God (see in more detail under → *malak*). God is categorically without equal (Q 112:4) or “associates” (*shurakā’*, singular: *sharik*; e.g., Q 6:22.94.100.136 etc.).<sup>12</sup> A diametrical opposition between God and all other entities also resonates in verses that underscore God’s tremendous and singular majesty (e.g., Q 59:23–24 and 45:36–37), his utter self-sufficiency and non-dependency on anything else (e.g., Q 2:263.267, 3:97, 6:133), his omnipotence (see under → *qadīr*, → *shā’a*), and his omniscience (e.g., Q 2:29.231.282, 4:32.176, 5:97, 6:101, 42:12). God’s uniqueness is furthermore expressed by saying that he is “the first and the

<sup>11</sup> The Qur’anic train of thought here bears a certain resemblance to what William Wainwright, in his overview of philosophical arguments for monotheism, calls the “argument from causal order”—namely, the argument that “the unity of the world, the fact that it exhibits a uniform structure, that it is a single cosmos, strongly suggests some sort of unity in its cause” (Wainwright 2018, section 4.1). But as Wainwright notes, quoting William Paley, the argument in fact “proves only ‘a unity of counsel’ or (if there are subordinate agents) ‘a presiding’ or ‘controlling will.’” This is precisely why the argument does not properly refute the belief that there exists a hierarchy of subordinate deities with Allāh at the top, as explained in what follows in the main text.

<sup>12</sup> On Q 112:4, and in particular on the word *kufū/kufiww*, see in more detail below. On Qur’anic condemnations of the view that God has *andād* (e.g., Q 2:22.165, 14:30, 34:33) or “equals,” see under → *ashraka*.

last” (Q 57:3: *al-awwalu wa-l-ākhiru*; see under → *ākhir*) and that unlike everything else he is imperishable (Q 55:26–27 and 28:88). From this vantage point, the possibility that there might exist beings that are divine yet nonetheless subordinate to Allāh, and thus not apt to disrupt his ultimate supremacy, is not so much eliminated on the basis of an argument as ruled out on definitional grounds.

Why does the Qur’an take for granted such a stark dualism of God and everything else? The reason would seem to be the essential role that the Qur’anic conception of divinity accords to creatorhood. “Is someone who creates like someone who does not create?” (*a-fa man yakhluqu ka-man lā yakhluqu*), Q 16:17 asks, highlighting what the Qur’an takes to be the key trait of God (see also Q 35:3.40 and 46:4). Other verses imply that lack of creative ability equates to being created (Q 7:191, 16:20, 25:3), thus precluding the existence of intermediary beings who are distinct from the one creator yet are nonetheless not simply creatures of his like humans. While the Qur’an’s pagan opponents were well acquainted with the idea that one particular god, Allāh, played the role of a cosmic creator, they did not elevate creatorhood into the essential definitional ingredient of divinity. The Qur’an, by contrast, assumes precisely that: to posit the existence of gods who lack creatorhood is effectively considered conceptually inconsistent (*QP* 60). Indeed, the extent to which the Qur’an treats the notions of divinity and creatorhood as equivalent is well illustrated by the particular manner in which the counterfactual claim in Q 23:91, cited above, is formulated: if there were more than one deity, the verse argues, each one would “make off with what he created”—that is, if the deities whose existence is here refuted are to count as deities at all, they must be considered creators of something.

**God as judge.** Unlike miscellaneous places in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Deut 1:31, 8:5, 14:1; Isa 43:6, 63:16, 64:7) and even more so in the New Testament (e.g., Matt 5:16.45.48, 6:1.4.6 etc.), the Qur’an does not explicitly call God a “father” (see also under → *ab*). Indeed, a Medinan verse, Q 5:18, explicitly rebuffs the Jews and Christians for styling themselves as God’s “children and beloved ones” (*nahnu abnā’u llāhi wa-aḥibbā’uhu*), an allegation that aptly captures certain facets of Jewish and Christian self-descriptions.<sup>13</sup> As the immediately following segment of Q 5:18 makes clear, the rationale underlying the Qur’an’s criticism of envisaging God as a paternal figure is that this would be incompatible with a second crucial aspect of the Qur’anic understanding of God besides his creatorhood, namely, God’s role as an equitable moral judge: “Why, then, does he punish you<sup>p</sup> for your sins? No, you are human beings, belonging to his creatures (*bal antum basharun mimman khalaqa*); he forgives whom he wills and punishes whom he wills.” God’s readiness to hold humans to account, the Qur’an insists, is not constrained by any sort of quasi-parental favouritism vis-à-vis some humans as opposed to others.<sup>14</sup> The Qur’anic God, then, is not only a creator;

<sup>13</sup> Thus, *m. Abot* 3:14 notes that Israel are especially “beloved” because Deut 14:1 calls them “sons” or “children” of God. For repeated references to the Israelites as a “beloved people” in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic poetry, see Sokoloff and Yahalom 1999, 158, 168, 172, 174, 186 = nos 21:1–2, 25:2, 26:29.47, 30:6. On the Christian side, one might adduce 1 John 3:1–2 (“See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, *tekna theou*; and that is what we are . . .”) or Rom 8:14–17 (*huiōi theou, tekna theou*). See also Zellentin 2016, 266, who cites a passage from the *Didascalia Apostolorum* in which the community is addressed as “God’s servants and children” (Vööbus 1979, 14, l. 15). The claim that a certain collective is as such “beloved” by God clashes with the Qur’anic assumption that God’s love for humans is commensurate with the latter’s moral merit (see further below and under → *al-rahmān*).

<sup>14</sup> This reading of Q 5:18 is corroborated by the Qur’an’s repeated critique that Jews and Christians are guilty of spurious eschatological optimism and complacency (see Q 2:80.94.111.135, 3:24, 62:6). Also pertinent is

he is also someone to whom human agents are morally answerable and who will exact flawlessly just retribution (e.g., Q 99:7–8; see under → *zalama* and → *al-rahmān*). Should God mercifully resolve to forego such requital, this will not be due to any emotional bias of the sort that might irresistibly dispose a parent to turn a blind eye to the offences or flaws of a beloved child. Thus, Surah 6 is adamant that God has “imposed mercy on himself” (Q 6:12.54: *kataba ‘alā nafsihi l-rahmata*): divine mercy is freely willed rather than rooted in something akin to parental instinct.<sup>15</sup>

In their ultimate and definite form, divine rewards and punishments will be meted out at a universal judgement (→ *dīn*<sup>1</sup>) following the resurrection of the dead (→ *ba‘atha*, → *ahyā*, → *qiyāmah*) that concludes the history of the world as presently existent. The Qur’an thus agrees with key aspects of late antique—and specifically Christian—eschatology (Lange 2016a, 56–70; *HCI* 166–169), and announcements of God’s final judgement are a staple of Qur’anic discourse virtually from the start. But even before the end of the world, God *qua* judge does not remain idle; rather, he intervenes in the world in order to discipline those humans who reject the prophetic messengers sent to them (see under → *adhhaba*). God’s messengers (singular: → *rasūl*) and prophets (singular: → *nabiyy*) themselves and their followers, meanwhile, are invariably delivered from the perils they encounter as a result of professing belief in God alone. Many of the human messengers and prophets that illustrate this general pattern of pre-eschatological divine intervention are familiar from the Bible and later Jewish and Christian tradition, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. There can accordingly be no doubt that the Qur’an understands Allāh to be identical with the God of the Biblical tradition, or, as Jacob’s sons put it in Q 2:133, to be identical with “your [i.e., Jacob’s] God, and the God of your fathers Abraham, Ishmael, and Isaac” (cf. Exod 3:15).

Although the Qur’an rejects the Jews’ and Christians’ application of paternal language to God, in his punitive and remunerative responses to human behaviour the Qur’anic God is nonetheless subject to various anthropopathic traits and emotions. Thus, he is often called “merciful” (*rahīm*) or “the Merciful” (→ *al-rahmān*) and is credited with love (e.g., Q 2:195.222, 3:31.76.134.146.148.159, 5:13.42.54.93, in all of which God is the subject of *aḥabba*, “to love”; see under → *al-rahmān*) and readiness to forgive (e.g., Q 2:173.182.192 etc., 3:31.89.129 etc., 53:32). Conversely, the Qur’an also attributes to God wrath (e.g., Q 2:61, 3:112, 4:93, 5:60; → *ghaḍība*) and the exacting of retribution (see Q 3:4, 5:95, 14:47, 39:37, all of which describe God as ‘*azīzun dhū ntiqām*, “mighty and exacting retribution”; see also the use of *intaqama min*, “to exact retribution from,” in 5:95, 7:136, 15:79, 30:47, 32:22, 43:25.41.55, 44:16). God is even said to be engaged in cunning scheming (→ *makara*). However, a strong case can be made that all of the emotional stances just mentioned are conditional upon, and proportionate to, the moral merits or demerits of humans, including

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Q 2:124, according to which God’s covenant with Abraham does not encompass those of his descendants who are “wrongdoers” (cf. also 2:134.141). The general concern emerging from all these passages is to stress that salvation is contingent on individual merit rather than communal belonging or genealogical descent; and Q 5:18 seems to reflect the understanding that applying paternal language to God is apt to dilute the eschatological individualism to which the Qur’an is so committed.

<sup>15</sup> One may wonder how Q 5:18 relates to statements that God has “favoured” the Israelites “over the world-dwellers” (Q 2:47.122, 7:140, 45:16: *faḍḍaltukum/faḍḍalakum/faḍḍalnāhum ‘alā l-‘ālamīn*). As explained under → *darajah*, this means only that God has bestowed manifold blessings on the Israelites, thereby putting them under the obligation to be appropriately grateful; it does not entail that God deems the Israelites to be more deserving of his blessings than others nor that he is more likely to overlook their sins than those of other humans.

their willingness to repent of prior misdeeds (Rahbar 1960, 141–175; for an attempt to qualify this, see Baljon 1988, 121–122). Indeed, the assumption that God’s responses to humans, despite having an unmistakable emotional dimension, are meticulously calibrated in accordance with human deserts is rhetorically foregrounded by statements like “they have forgotten (verb: *nasiya*) God, so he has forgotten them” (Q 9:67)—that is, by statements predicating one and the same verb first of humans and subsequently of God, by way of a response in kind (→ *nasiya*, → *makara*, → *tāba*). Human righteousness and sin have an emotional resonance in God, but this does not, from the Qur’anic vantage point, call into doubt the assertion that God is “the best of all judges” (Q 7:87, 10:109, 11:45, 12:80, 95:8).

Bearing in mind both God’s ongoing creative activity as well as his intimate involvement in human affairs, the Qur’anic God could aptly be characterised in the same words with which Richard Frank has captured the general understanding of God in pre-Ghazālian Islamic theology or *kalām*: God is “viewed as essentially an agent: an agent who acts and whose activity is directed outside Himself, not in the contemplation and knowing of Himself” (Frank 1971, 18). Frank’s statement involves an implicit contrast with the Aristotelian notion of the divine first cause as being absorbed in self-contemplation, as “thought thinking itself” (*noēsis noēseōs*; see *Metaphysics* 1072b and 1074b). The scriptural material surveyed so far hardly gives rise to any sort of temptation to project Aristotelian theology on the Qur’an. Yet as we shall see in the next section, it is not entirely trivial to insist that the Qur’anic concept of God must not unwittingly be viewed through the prism of certain Greek ideas about the divine that came to enjoy considerable popularity in all three Abrahamic religions and arguably still govern the interpretive reflexes of Qur’anic scholars.

**Is the Qur’anic God invisible and immaterial?** The Qur’anic tendency to stress God’s singular grandeur and to set him apart from all other beings and from the cosmos (i.e., “the heavens and the earth”) at large finds its most explicit expression in the statement that “nothing is like” God (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay’un*) in Q 42:11. Together with the assertion that “the eyes do not attain him, but he attains the eyes” (*lā tudrikuhu l-absāru wa-huwa yudriku l-absāra*; Q 6:103), this seemingly absolute exclusion of any similarity between God and other things can easily invite Platonising construals of the Qur’anic deity as being ontologically different from his creatures, as dwelling in a domain of being that is separate from that of material objects, making God intrinsically invisible and immaterial. In the Islamic tradition, an early explicit formulation of the view that God is an immaterial entity goes back to Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 745–746), who reportedly identified God as “that which is other than bodies” (*ghayr al-jism*; al-Ash’arī 1963, 346, l. 7; see Schöck 2016, 62). From an inner-Qur’anic perspective, however, it is unwarranted to understand God as immaterial and invisible. At least three considerations may be marshalled in support of this.

First, the Qur’an has no vocabulary to articulate a Platonic bifurcation of reality into two spheres, a material or corporeal and an immaterial or spiritual one; the contrast between “the hidden” (*al-ghayb*) and “the observable” (*al-shahādah*), which might be deemed to articulate such a distinction, is squarely epistemological rather than ontological (see under → *al-ghayb*). Secondly, God is said to have established himself on the throne, or literally to have “sat down straight” upon it, *istawā* (e.g., Q 7:54, 10:3; see O’Shaughnessy 1973, 208–214).<sup>16</sup> That the divine throne is materially real rather than a mere metaphor is

16 For other instances of the verb *istawā*, “to stand up or sit up straight” (+ *ilā*: “to straighten o.s. up towards”; + *alā*: “to sit down on”; see CDKA 142), as applied to God, see Q 2:29, 13:2, 20:5, 25:59, 32:4, 41:11,



strongly supported by Q 40:7 and 69:17, according to which the divine throne is carried by angels. According to Q 2:210, moreover, on the day of judgement God and the angels will “come to” the humans awaiting judgement “in overshadowing clouds” (cf. also 89:22), which on the face of it entails that the deity is capable of spatial displacement, however much some medieval commentators laboured to preclude such an understanding (Ayoub 1984, 211–215). The net implication is very much that the Qur’an considers God to occupy a particular spatial position to the exclusion of others, even if Q 2:115 emphasises that “wherever you turn, there is the face of God” (*fa-aynamā tuwallū fa-thamma wajhu llāhi*).<sup>17</sup> Thirdly, two early Qur’anic passages, if understood according to their most straightforward sense, promise that the blessed will see God in paradise (Q 75:22–23: “There will be faces on that day that are radiant, // gazing upon their Lord,” *ilā rabbihā nāzīrah*) and credit the Qur’anic Messenger with a theophanic experience (Q 53:5–18, on which see Bell 1934; for an overview of further secondary literature, both premodern and modern, see Williams 2008, 106–110).<sup>18</sup> There is no indication that talk of visually perceiving God must be construed in anything other than its literal sense.

The obvious reading of the material just surveyed is that the Qur’an considers God to be at least in principle visible and to be spatially located. The Qur’anic God cannot, therefore, be immaterial in any strict sense.<sup>19</sup> Against this, one could demur that a Christian author like Ephrem also posits a beatific vision of God in paradise, from which it would be rash to infer that he deems God to be material (see in more detail under → *jannah*). However, Ephrem signals clearly enough that portrayals of paradise in this-worldly or corporeal terms must not be interpreted literally, whereas the Qur’an is devoid of similarly explicit caveats about understanding its language according to its plain meaning. There is, accordingly, far more reason to take the Qur’anic statements presented earlier at face value. To be sure, it remains debatable whether this equates to the positive doctrine that God is a body, since the Qur’an does not have an abstract concept of physical bodies defined as entities that are composed of matter (of whatever kind) and positioned in space: all of the three Qur’anic terms that correspond to the English word “body”—namely, *jasad* (Q 7:148, 20:88, 21:8, 38:34),<sup>20</sup> *badan* (Q 10:92), and *jism* (Q 2:247 and 63:4)—appear to

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53:6 (perhaps the earliest occurrence), and 57:4. Speyer maintains that the frequent Qur’anic affirmation that after creating the world God “sat down on the throne” (Q 13:2, 25:59, 32:4, 57:4: *istawā ‘alā l-‘arshi*, inverted in 20:5) has rabbinic parallels (*BEQ* 24), although the precise date and provenance of the material merits re-examination. For further comments on *istawā*, see below and also under → *khalāqa*.

17 The understanding that God is positioned in space also accords with assertions that some of the blessed in paradise will be positioned “close” to God (*muqarrabūn*; see Q 3:45, 56:11.88, 83:21.28, and also 54:54–55). One could choose to interpret this particular term metaphorically, but a literal reading fits well with other scriptural data.

18 Kinberg 2004, 17, notes that further, albeit indirect, evidence for a paradisiacal theophany may be found in Q 83:15, according to which those who will roast in hell for rejecting God’s signs will be “veiled” or “separated by a screen” from their Lord (*kallā innahum ‘an rabbihim yawma’idhin la-mahjūbūn*).

19 A potential objection would consist in pointing out that the Qur’an presupposes that angels do not ingest food and to underline that this trait was traditionally understood to be linked to their immateriality; but it is not clear that the same reasoning may be imputed to the Qur’an (see under → *malak*).

20 In the Qur’an, the word *jasad* would seem to be deployed specifically in contexts in which reference is to lifelike apparitions or representations of human or animal bodies that lack full biological functioning. For instance, according to Q 21:8 God did not make previous messengers “a *jasad*, not eating food, and they did not remain forever,” *wa-mā ja’alnāhum jasadān lā ya’kulūna l-ṭā’ama wa-mā kānū khālīdīn*. Most likely, this responds to the expectation on the part of Muhammad’s opponents that a divine messenger would not be a mere human but a supernatural, angelic figure (see, e.g., Q 25:7.20, 23:33); and angels, according to the Qur’an, do not eat (see under → *malak*). On Q 7:148 and 20:88, describing the Golden Calf as a *jasad* that made a lowing sound,



revolve specifically around human or perhaps animal bodies rather than bodies in the sense of physical and material objects in general. Moreover, there is no suggestion that any of them might be applicable to the deity. Thus, the Qur'an itself does not place God and created beings within an overarching ontological class of material bodies, or indeed under any other joint rubric. Rather, as we saw above, the Qur'an assumes a consistent dualism of creator and created. But in so far as the properties of being visible and being spatially located do seem to be common to both God and his creatures, the Qur'anic portrayal of God is indeed that of an embodied being.

How is all of this to be reconciled with the verses quoted above that seem to suggest divine invisibility or immateriality? There is little difficulty in construing Q 6:103 ("the eyes do not attain him, but he attains the eyes") in a sense that is compatible with God's general visibility, as indeed the verse was read by many premodern Sunnī scholars (Williams 2008, 83–85). For example, one might understand Q 6:103 to declare that God is not *comprehensively* and *exhaustively* visible (Williams 2008, 84). A reading that does not take Q 6:103 to assert invisibility in principle is also consistent with Q 7:143, which reports how Moses, having been "spoken to" by God, demands to be permitted to see God ("My Lord, let me gaze upon you," *rabbi arinī anẓur ilayka*). God rebuts this request, however: "You will not see me (*lan tarānī*). But look upon this mountain; if it remains firm in its place, you will see me." God then "manifests himself" (*tajallā*) to the mountain, flattening it and striking Moses to the ground. As persuasively argued by W. Wesley Williams, this account does not depict God as being inherently invisible but rather illustrates the overpowering and potentially lethal nature of an unmitigated theophany, which cannot even be endured by a mountain (Williams 2008, 88–99; Williams 2009, 38). The same point is conveyed by Q 7:143's Biblical precursor, Exod 33:18–23 (*BEQ* 341–342), which "does not claim that God has no body for us to see; the point is rather that seeing God's body will lead immediately to death" (Sommer 2009, 3).<sup>21</sup>

As regards the statement that "nothing is like" God in Q 42:11, van Ess has appropriately highlighted that the verse does not actually "decide the question whether the dissimilarity between God and man was absolute or relative" (van Ess 2018, 610; see also Williams 2009, 33–36, *inter alia* pointing to the comparable contention in Isa 40:18: "To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him?"). For instance, the early exegete Muqātil ibn Sulaymān glosses the "nothing is like him" statement in Q 42:11 by succinctly adding "in power" (*fī l-qudrah*), thus specifying that God's difference from other beings is to be understood in a fairly specific manner rather than as total alterity (Muqātil 2002, 3:765). Contextually, this makes good sense, in so far as Q 42:11 opens by declaring that God is the creator of the heavens and the earth; the point of the "nothing is like him" statement may accordingly be simply that God is unlike anything else in so far as he is the creator of everything else, not that he has an ontological constitution that is absolutely

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*ʿijlan jasadān lahu khuwārun*, see Pregill 2020, 323–327, who glosses the phrase as signifying "a statue (or image) of a lowing calf" (citing p. 327). On Q 38:34, according to which God "cast a *jasad*" on Solomon's throne, see *BEQ* 399–401. In poetry, *jasad* can designate the blood of sacrificial animals (*DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 5:37); but a line from the poetic corpus of 'Abīd ibn al-Abrāṣ (Lyall 1913, 'Abīd, no. 24:21) employs the plural *ajsād* specifically to refer to lifeless bodies (Lyall translates "corpses"), said to be "under the earth." See on this verse Seidensticker 1989, 153.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. also Edmond Cherbonnier's statement that the Biblical God "is invisible simply as a matter of tactics. *De facto*, men seldom do see Him. Upon occasion, however, he does show himself" (Cherbonnier 1962, 199).

unlike that of the things created by him.<sup>22</sup> Such a non-totalising understanding of Q 42:11 is further supported by 112:4, claiming that God has no equal (*wa-lam yakun lahu kufiwan aḥad*). The Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim reading *kufiwan* here is a variant of *kufu’* or *kuf’*, also attested as variant readings (MQ 10:639–642, and MQQ 8:272–273; cf. van Putten 2022, 177), a word that means “of equal rank” (Ullmann 1970, 253–254; CDKA 239). Q 112:4 thus stresses the difference between God and all other entities without implying radical ontological alterity, which in turn corroborates a weaker interpretation of Q 42:11 than that to which contemporary readers are perhaps instinctively attracted. Such a weaker reading of the “nothing is like him” formulation in Q 42:11, finally, has the virtue of not generating a contradiction with the patently anthropomorphic predication following it, namely, that God is “the hearing and the seeing” (*wa-huwa l-samī‘u l-baṣīr*). Although Ibn ‘Arabī, for one, delights in the verse’s apparently paradoxical juxtaposition of divine “incomparability” (*tanzīh*) and “similarity” (*tashbīh*; see, e.g., Chittick 1989, 73–74, 111, 112), a good case can be made that the Qur’an’s original recipients, like other early Muslims such as Muqātil, would not have understood Q 42:11 to enunciate a paradox at all.

**God as luminous.** The Qur’an envisages its embodied deity as luminous, a notion that has a long ancient Near Eastern, including Biblical, pedigree (Williams 2008, 89–90; Williams 2009, 38–39). Thus, the verb *tajallā*, which describes God’s visual manifestation in Q 7:143, in addition to carrying the meaning of self-revelation,<sup>23</sup> also connotes splendour and radiance, as shown by Q 92:2 (*wa-l-nahāri idhā tajallā*, perhaps “By the day when it dawns in splendour”). There is also Q 39:69, a Meccan verse according to which the earth “will be resplendent with the light of its Lord” (*wa-ashraqati l-arḍu bi-nūri rabbihā*) on the day of judgement. To be sure, there are verses mentioning God in connection with light in which the latter is to be construed as a mere metaphor of divine guidance: the Qur’an condemns those who would “extinguish God’s light with their mouths” (Q 9:32, 61:8: *yurīdūna li-yutfi’ū / an yutfi’ū nūra llāhi bi-afwāhihim*); it repeatedly declares that God and his messengers seek to “bring” people “out” (*akhraja*) “from the darkness into the light” (*mina l-ḡulumāti ilā l-nūri*; Q 2:257, 5:16, 14:1.5, 33:43, 57:9, 65:11);<sup>24</sup> and it maintains that both the Torah (→ *al-tawrāh*) and the Gospel (→ *al-injīl*) contain “guidance and light” (Q 5:44.46; see also 6:91). Nonetheless, with regard to Q 39:69 it seems more likely that the verse speaks of literal light, given that the same context also mentions the blowing of the eschatological trumpet (v. 68) and the display of the celestial register of deeds in preparation for the judgement (v. 69). But if reference is to concrete light rather than to the metaphorical light of divine guidance, then it stands to reason that this is light emitted by God, who arrives in order to judge humans and other moral agents. Finally, there is the

22 See also al-Ash‘arī 1963, 152, l. 15–153, l. 3, and 209, ll. 7–9 (on which see van Ess 1991–1997, 5:224, and Williams 2009, 35): Muqātil ibn Sulaymān reportedly held both that God was a body (*jism*) with a human form (*‘alā ṣūrat al-īnsān*) and that he “does not resemble anything else, and nothing else resembles him” (*lā yushbihu ghayrahu wa-lā yushbihuhu*), an assertion that approximates the “nothing is like him” formulation from Q 42:11. Although one cannot assume that al-Ash‘arī’s testimony is fully and verbally accurate (see Sirry 2012), it does suggest that at least some early Muslims did not see any contradiction in subscribing simultaneously to divine anthropomorphism and to divine alterity or transcendence. It may be suggested that this archaic view is closer to that of the Qur’an than the immaterialism that came to dominate later *kalām*.

23 See the use of the second form *jallā* in the sense of “to make manifest” in Q 7:187 (see also 91:3), corresponding to Syriac *gallī*, “to reveal, to uncover,” which suggests that *tajallā*, too, might be parallelised with Syriac *eigli* or *eigallī*, “to be revealed.” See FVQ 91; on the Syriac verbs, see SL 235–236.

24 Cf. 1 Pet 2:9, describing God as the one “who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”

famous Light Verse (Q 24:35), calling God “the light (*nūr*) of the heavens and the earth.” Rather than reading this statement as an assertion that God is, say, the source of all guidance or the like, the Light Verse is reasonably understood to imply that God is a supremely luminous being and perhaps even the ultimate source of all light in the cosmos.<sup>25</sup> These results, it is true, need to be qualified by noting that God’s luminous, or rather dangerously luminous, nature is not yet in evidence in the early Meccan account of two theophanies experienced by the Qur’anic Messenger in Q 53:1–18. It is noteworthy that the Bible, too, does not invariably portray God as dangerously luminous; for example, according to Exod 33:11, “God spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (see the selection of references in Sommer 2009, 3–4).

**Anthropomorphic traits of the Qur’anic deity: God’s face, hands, and eyes.** Apart from hinting at God’s luminosity, the Qur’an portrays God as humanoid, in so far as various verses speak of his face, hands, eyes, or attribute visual and aural percipience to him. Before developing the point, it must be acknowledged that many of the relevant passages clearly have an idiomatic and figurative purport. Thus, Baljon has convincingly argued that Qur’anic references to “seeking” or “wanting” (*ibtaghā*) the “face” (*wajh*) of God (Q 2:272, 13:22, 92:20; cf. also 6:52, 18:28, 30:38–39, 76:9) are largely synonymous with the parallel phrases “seeking God’s satisfaction” (Q 57:27: *ibtighā’a riḍwāni llāhi*), “seeking mercy from your Lord” (Q 17:28: *ibtighā’a raḥmatin min rabbika*), and “seeking God’s satisfaction” (Q 2:207.265: *ibtighā’a marḍāti llāhi*; see Baljon 1988, 125–126). God’s hand, too, is in most cases invoked in an evidently idiomatic fashion, as in Q 3:73 (*inna l-faḍla bi-yadi llāhi*, literally: “favour is in the hand of God”; similarly 57:29) or 48:10 (*yadu llāhi fawqa aydihim*, “God’s hand is above their hands,” meaning, probably, that God acts as a guarantor of oaths of allegiance sworn to Muhammad).<sup>26</sup> That we are confronted by idiomatic language is particularly evident with regard to Q 5:64, which condemns “the Jews” for saying that “God’s hand is fettered” (*yadu llāhi maghlūlatan*), thereby employing a metaphor for niggardliness that is elsewhere applied to humans (Q 17:29: *wa-lā taj’al yadaka maghlūlatan ilā ‘unuqika*, “Do<sup>s</sup> not let your hand be fettered to your neck”; Baljon 1988, 124–125; see also under → *al-yahūd*).<sup>27</sup> God’s eye or eyes, finally, are only referenced in the formulaic prep-

25 Q 24:35 explicitly styles itself as a *mathal*, or similitude: “A similitude for his light is that it is like a niche in which there is a lamp . . .” Does this entail that Q 24:35’s description of God as light is to be read figuratively? No, since what the verse claims is that it provides a *mathal* for God’s light, not that describing God as light is itself a *mathal*. The view that the deity is a luminous body continued to resonate among early post-Qur’anic theologians, such as Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam (al-Ash’arī 1963, 31–32). But however archaic his views were bound to appear from the perspective of later theologians, beholden to a more Hellenised understanding of God as immaterial, Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam seems to have denied that God’s body had a humanoid shape and to have attributed to him the same length, width, and depth, perhaps to highlight the “absolute perfection” of God’s form (van Ess 2017–2020, 1:422–423). Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam is thus already one step removed from the Qur’anic conception of God as a luminous body who is also humanoid (see further below in the main text). On the other hand, some post-Qur’anic traditions go much further than the Qur’an in their anthropomorphism, by describing how God appeared to Muhammad in his sleep as “a young man with long hair” (Williams 2009, 41–43; van Ess 2017–2020, 4:425–427).

26 See also Q 3:26 (*bi-yadika l-khayru*, “in your hand is what is good”), 23:88 and 36:83 (*man/alladhī bi-yadihi malakūtu kulli shay’in*, “in whose hand is the kingship over everything”), and 67:1 (*alladhī bi-yadihi l-mulku*, “in whose hand is the kingship”).

27 Equally idiomatic is the reference to God’s side (*janb*) in Q 39:56: *an taqūla nafsun yā-ḥasratā ‘alā mā farrattū fī janbi llāhi* (“lest any soul should say, ‘Alas for me, in that I was remiss regarding God’”). And *pace* Böwering 2002, 323, Q 68:42 (*yawma yukshafu ‘an sāqin*, “on the day on which the leg will be bared”) does not expressly refer to God but simply describes the onset of the final judgement by invoking the act of readying oneself for a run or for battle. “On the day on which things come to a head” would be a perfectly adequate rendering. See also the treatment of this verse in al-Farāhī 2002, 234–235.

ositional phrase *bi-a'yūninā*, “under our eyes” (Q 11:37, 23:27, 52:48, 54:14), which is once varied to *alā 'aynī*, “under my eyes” (Q 20:39).<sup>28</sup> Mentions of God’s eyes tie in with recurrent verse-final predications to the effect that God is “hearing” (*samī'*; e.g., Q 2:127.137.181 etc.) and “seeing” (*baṣīr*; e.g., Q 2:96.110.233 etc.), two attributes signifying sensory perception that can either be paired with one another (e.g., Q 4:58.134, 17:1, 22:61.75) or combine with another epithet signifying knowledge, as in *samī' + 'alīm* (e.g., Q 2:127.137.181 etc., 3:34.35.121) or *baṣīr + khabīr* (Q 17:17.30.96, 35:31, 42:27; see also under → *samī'a*).<sup>29</sup> Such Qur’anic references to divine hearing and seeing, too, are strongly formulaic, raising the possibility that their point could simply be to highlight the unfailing exhaustiveness with which God is aware of events in the world, rather than resting on a precise epistemological distinction between divine sense perception and divine knowledge.

Nonetheless, from the observation that God’s countenance, hands, eyes, and sensory powers are often invoked in a manner that is idiomatic and formulaic it does not follow that the ascription of a countenance, hands, or sensory awareness to God are *mere* metaphors. After all, the fact that the Qur’an can metaphorically speak of a human guardian as the one “in whose hand resides the authority to tie a marriage” (*alladhī bi-yadihi 'uqdatu l-nikāḥi*; Q 2:237) does not entail that the person in question lacks a physical hand. Rather, the metaphorical usage builds on an anatomical fact. This is also supported by two Qur’anic verses whose literal sense implies that divine creation may have a manual dimension, even if figurative interpretations of them are by no means uncommon in the premodern exegetical tradition. There is, first, Q 36:71, where the divine voice subsumes livestock under “our handiwork” (*mimmā 'amilat aydīnā*). While it is perhaps not impossible to read this as a mere idiom or figure of speech, the second passage in question is more difficult to neutralise: in Q 38:75 God upbraids Iblīs for failing to “prostrate to what I have created with my hands,” *bi-yadayya*. As recognised by al-Ash‘arī (Gimaret 1990, 326), the point of God’s statement here is presumably to highlight a trait of Adam that endows him with peculiar dignity and elevates him over Iblīs—namely, the fact that God has formed Adam in a more intimate fashion than other creatures. Hence, although the Qur’anic God is perfectly capable of creating by verbal fiat, as maintained in places like Q 2:117 and 3:47 (when God “decides on [creating] something, he merely says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is,” *idhā qaḍā amran fa-innamā yaqūlu lahu kun fa-yakūn*), he can also create in what is literally a hands-on manner, by making use of his own limbs.<sup>30</sup> In passing, one may note that the claim that humans were fashioned manually has pre-Qur’anic parallels that lend further support to taking it quite literally. According to Aphrahat, Adam alone was created by God’s own hands while everything else was created by God’s word

28 Note also that there are a fair number of Qur’anic verses in which the word *'ayn* is clearly used as part of various idioms. Thus, the “cooling” of someone’s eye can stand for the provision of relief or consolation (see the collocation of *'ayn/a'yun* with the root *q-r-r* in Q 19:26, 20:40, 25:74, 28:9.13, 32:17, and 33:51; cf. CDKA 223). Further idiomatic usages are found in Q 43:71 (*wa-taladhdu l-a'yumu*) and 102:7 (*'ayna l-yaqīn*).

29 On verse-final divine epithets in general, see Robinson 2003a, 198–201.

30 According to Q 3:59, Jesus and Adam were both created by divine fiat: God “created him [namely, Adam] from earth, and then said to him, ‘Be,’ and he was” (*khalaqahu min turābin thumma qāla lahu kun fa-yakūn*). Does this contradict Q 38:75? Not necessarily: it is quite conceivable that the shaping of Adam from earth (= *khalaqahu min turābin*) that precedes God’s creative command in Q 3:59 is understood to involve God’s hands. If so, then maybe the divine fiat served to bring Adam’s body alive after God had shaped it from earth. This reading, while plausible, does however generate the follow-on question of how Adam and Jesus’s vivification by divine fiat, as per Q 3:59, is to be reconciled with God’s blowing “some of his spirit (→ *rūḥ*)” into Adam (Q 15:29, 32:9, 38:72) or into Mary, thus engendering Jesus (Q 21:91, 66:12). See further n. 16 under → *rūḥ*.

(*Demonstrations* 13:11 = Parisot 1894, 563–566, identified in *BEQ* 46). The same idea is developed at length by Jacob of Sarug (Mathews 2020, 46–51, ll. 2157–2194): whereas all other creatures were brought into existence by a divine “signal” (*remzā*; cf. Decharneux 2019, 244–245), Adam was uniquely created by God’s hands (l. 2169)—an instance of divine self-abasement that prefigures the incarnation of Christ (ll. 2189–2194). The *Cave of Treasures* also reports that Adam was shaped by God’s “holy hands” (Ri 1987, ch. 2:12; see Zellentín 2017, 109).<sup>31</sup>

The preceding suggests that it is because the Qur’an quite literally understands God to possess a countenance, sensory percipience, and limbs capable of touching, grasping, or imparting movement that the Islamic scripture employs various idioms and formulae involving these features. After all, there is no Qur’anic equivalent to Ephrem’s caveat that God only “put on the names of body parts”—i.e., speaks of himself in anthropomorphic and anthropopathic language—due to the weakness of human understanding (Beck 1955, no. 31:1–4). The Qur’anic God, therefore, is not merely a body but also, at least in some sense, an anthropomorphic body: he is endowed with a face, he is empirically receptive to worldly occurrences (rather than just knowing about them), and he can directly, with his own body, manipulate objects in the world. That the divine body has a fundamentally humanoid shape is further accentuated by the use of the verb *istawā*, “to stand up straight” or “to sit upright,” which is applied both to God, indicating the modality of his being located on the throne (Q 7:54, 10:3, 13:2, 20:5, 25:59, 32:4, 57:4),<sup>32</sup> and to humans, who are described as “sitting upright” in a boat or on the back of a mount (Q 23:28, 43:13; see *CDKA* 142).

Of course, the history of Islamic theology and exegesis makes it amply clear that exegetical temperaments have differed widely with regard to the question of how to interpret God’s anthropomorphic attributes in the Qur’an. Yet it seems fair to say that the main succour of an allegorical approach to the problem stems from the “deep seated antagonism to anthropomorphism about God” (Ferré 1984, 203) that many European and Islamicate thinkers alike have inherited from an influential strand of ancient Greek thought. As suggested above, a historical-critical exegete will be well advised to resist such an attitude. Nonetheless, it is important to underscore that Qur’anic anthropomorphism remains limited and guarded throughout and that the text supplies virtually no concrete details about God’s appearance. For instance, the humanoid predications just collated do not entail that the divine body is a body made of flesh and blood, especially since we saw that a number of Qur’anic verses hint that God is essentially luminous. In a similar manner, the Qur’anic text in no way rules out that God’s vision and hearing might operate very differently from their human counterparts and that the commonality between divine perception and human perception is functional (e.g., involving an ability to take in visual and acoustic information in real time) rather than physiological. The Qur’an does not accordingly permit one to specify the degree to which God’s face, eyes, and hands

31 It is worth remarking that the claim that God created only Adam with his hands is undermined by various Biblical verses, such as Ps 8:4, 19:2, 95:5; Isa 48:13 and 66:2; and Exod 15:17. On the date of the *Cave of Treasures*, see now Minov 2021, 18–48, including a very critical assessment of the adequacy of Ri’s edition (Minov 2021, 32–36). However, the statement that Adam was formed by God’s “sacred hands” appears in both of Ri’s manuscript groups.

32 The verb also figures in Q 53:6, in the context of a theophanic experience of the Qur’anic Messenger.



may be imagined to resemble the human faces, eyes, and hands with which readers of the Qur'an are familiar.<sup>33</sup>

Like God's luminosity, the limited set of humanoid features that the Qur'an ascribes to God may be set against an ancient Near Eastern background. Specifically, the Qur'an's muted anthropomorphism recalls Biblical (more precisely, priestly) notions of YHWH's *kābôd* or "glory," conceived as a radiant body with miscellaneous humanoid features (Sommer 2009, 60–61; see also Williams 2008, 59–63). Especially interesting is a comparison with the manner in which the book of Ezekiel describes the visionary appearance of YHWH's glory at Ezek 1:26 (on which see Williams 2009, 26–28): "and seated above the likeness (*damût*) of a throne was a likeness resembling the appearance of a human (*damût ka-mar'ê âdām*)." Not unlike the Qur'an, this passage combines a fundamentally humanoid characterisation of God's figure with a marked reticence to provide any concrete detail. Thus, the Qur'an stands in a tradition that has appropriately been called "transcendent anthropomorphism" (Williams 2009). To apply to the Qur'an language used by a Biblical scholar, God's appearance may be "more like that of man than of any other creature," but it nonetheless "defies adequate description" and any attempt at providing much concrete detail (Miller 1972, 292).

How to explain the fact that what is arguably the closest parallel to the Qur'anic vision of a humanoid and luminous deity should consist in a literal reading of certain Biblical passages that many Christian readers had long come to exegete as allegories?<sup>34</sup> The best hypothesis is perhaps to point to the Jewish tradition, which up until the early Islamic period deployed anthropomorphic discourse about God in a far more unbridled manner than the Qur'an—for instance, when portraying the deity as weeping or laughing (Stern 1992, 152, referencing, *inter alia*, *b. B. Maṣ. 59b*).<sup>35</sup> The Qur'an's unconflicted acceptance

33 One might compare this position to the interpretive balancing act enshrined in the classical Ash'arite demand that God's anthropomorphic attributes are to be considered true "without asking 'how?'" (*bi-lā kayf*), i.e., without giving them the concrete meaning they have when predicated of creatures (see Frank 1991, 154–168). This general attitude, which Ayman Shihadeh helpfully describes as "nonscognitivism" (Shihadeh 2006, 3–4), has roots in older traditionalist thought (Hoover, forthcoming, introduction). However, developed Ash'arite ontology is nonetheless unequivocal that God is not a corporeal being. Hence, my exposition of the Qur'anic understanding of God would no doubt strike an Ash'arite as veering into illicit *takyif* (qualifying God by physical properties) or *tashbih* (positing God to be similar to his creatures). A closer similarity exists with regard to Ibn Taymiyyah's treatment of divine attributes, which distinguishes between the known meaning (*ma'nā*) of the attributes that scripture predicates of God and their unknown modality or *kayfiyyah* (Hoover 2019, 111–118; see also Hoover 2007, 48–56 and 235–236; Hoover 2018; Hoover 2020, 197–204). As Hoover explains, Ibn Taymiyyah maintains that God is literally above certain entities, such as the divine throne, and he takes issue with arguments seeking to demonstrate God's incorporeality. On Ibn Taymiyyah's conception of God, see now also Hoover, forthcoming, arguing that Ibn Taymiyyah understands the deity to be a spatially extended yet indivisible being that surrounds the world. Despite Ibn Taymiyyah's refreshing critique of *kalām* incorporealism, his position is therefore still some way off from what I would consider to be the Qur'anic view that God is a luminous humanoid body.

34 Thus, to quote a study by Hieromonk Alexander, Jacob of Sarug identifies the object of Ezekiel's vision with the second person of the Trinity (Alexander 2007, 189) and maintains that the "manifestation of the Son and Glory of God in human form signals the paradox and promise of the Incarnation" (Alexander 2007, 193). As Alexander continues to paraphrase Jacob, had it not been for the incarnation, "the human figure on the chariot would have been cause for a genuine, theological scandal, and rightly criticized for giving shape to God who is infinite, without any limit or form" (Alexander 2007, 195). Jacob is thus clearly opposed to an anthropomorphically literal understanding of Ezekiel's vision.

35 As Stern notes, in the rabbinic tradition discomfort with anthropomorphic language about God only arose in the early medieval period, under the influence of Greek philosophical thought as mediated by Islamic culture (Stern 1992, 153).



of a moderate degree of divine anthropomorphism may thus belong together with a small number of other doctrinal features of the Meccan surahs that would seem to be due to the selective and theologically purposeful adaptation of identifiably Jewish motifs, such as the notion of illicit “associationism” (see under → *ashraka* and also under → *isrā’īl*).

**God’s face, eyes, and hand(s) as emblematic of divine personhood.** All three of the divine organs and limbs mentioned in the Qur’an are well established in Biblical discourse about God. For example, the Qur’anic phrases “seeking the face of God” (*ibtighā’ a wajhi llāhi/rabbihi/rabbihim*; Q 2:272, 13:22, 92:20) and “wanting (*arāda*) the face of God” (Q 6:52, 18:28, 30:38–39) have a literal Biblical counterpart (*BEQ* 446 and Baljon 1988, 126; e.g., Ps 24:6, 27:8, 105:4, which have *biqqēš + pānīm*; the Peshitta has the verb *b’ā*). Regarding God’s eyes, one may refer to Gen 6:8 or Ps 11:4 and 33:18, while God’s hand or hands figure, inter alia, at Exod 15:17, Isa 48:13 and 66:2, and Ps 8:4, 19:2, 89:14, and 95:5. God’s face, hands, and eyes are however not the only divine limbs that are invoked in the Bible, which also speaks of God’s finger (see Exod 31:18), feet (Zech 14:4), or back (Exod 33:23). In the Qur’an, this wider range of anthropomorphic figures of speech about God is trimmed down to a small core, namely, God’s eyes, hands, and countenance. That at least some measure of selectivity is at play here is indicated by the fact that the Qur’an retells the scene from Exodus featuring God’s back in a manner that does not involve any reference to divine body parts (cf. Exod 33:18–23 and Q 7:143).

By way of conjecturing a rationale for this particular selection, the eyes, hands, and face may be viewed as emblematic of essential aspects of personhood. This is clear enough for the eyes, representing sensory percipience, and the hands, representing unmediated physical agency. As for God’s face, various Qur’anic verses use the term *wajh* in the context of interpersonal relations. Humans can turn their faces to God (e.g., Q 2:112, 6:79; see under → *aslama*) and can engage in charitable spending, pray, and be steadfast because they “seek” or “want” God’s face (Q 2:272, 6:52, 13:22, 18:28, 30:38–39, 76:9, 92:18–20), meaning perhaps that they aspire to proximity to him. It is, specifically, the *faces* of the blessed that will “gaze upon” their Lord, according to Q 75:22–23 (cf. also the additional references to the faces of the blessed in 3:106–107, 10:26, 80:38–39, 83:24, and 88:8–11). Moreover, many eschatological scenarios single out the humiliation and torment that will be inflicted upon the faces of the damned (Q 3:106–107, 8:50, 10:27, 14:50, 17:97, 18:29, 21:39, 23:104, 25:34, 27:90, 33:66, 39:60, 47:27, 54:48, 67:27, 75:24–25, 80:40–41, 88:2–5; see also 4:47 and under → *jahannam*).<sup>36</sup> This interpersonal import of the face is also evident in the purely human sphere: Joseph’s brothers express the hope to one another that as a result of killing Joseph, “the face of your<sup>p</sup> father will be turned towards you alone” (*yakhlu lakum wajhu abīkum*; Q 12:9), and the faces of the repudiators give away their rejection of God’s signs (Q 22:72).<sup>37</sup> Thus, the notion of God’s face is solidly embedded in the Qur’an’s “symbolism of personal responsibility” (Rippin 2000) and epitomises God’s capacity for interpersonal relations: to have a countenance is to be able to encounter other persons. A similar understanding of the face, including the face of God, has been attributed to the

<sup>36</sup> See also Q 17:7, threatening the Israelites that their foes, unleashed by God, will specifically afflict “their faces” (*li-yasū’ū wujūhakum*). When Q 20:111 announces that “the faces will be humbled before” (*‘anati l-wujūhi li-*) God, this would seem to refer to the faces of the blessed and damned alike.

<sup>37</sup> By contrast, Q 48:29 remarks that Muhammad’s followers bear marks of prostration on their faces.

Hebrew Bible (*TDOT* 11:607): “As an organ more expressive than the hand and more inclusive than the eye—which, however, belongs to it—the *pānīm* was well suited to represent the entire human person by a kind of synecdoche. . . . Because of its ability to express emotions and reactions, *pānīm* denotes the subject insofar as it turns (*pnh*) to ‘face’ others, i.e., insofar as it is the subject of relationships. The term *pānīm* describes relationships.” In sum, by crediting God with eyes, hands, and a face, the Qur’an underscores core attributes of his personhood (which, again, is not to suggest that the three features in question are reducible to mere metaphors).<sup>38</sup>

The Qur’an’s general preoccupation with God’s personhood, in the sense of God’s interpersonal relatability, coheres with the Qur’anic emphasis on God’s proximity to pious and righteous humans and his responsiveness to them, a theme whose importance has been recently underlined by Usman Shaikh.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the Medinan verse Q 2:186 addresses the Messenger, “When my servants ask you<sup>s</sup> about me, I am near (*qarīb*), responding to the one who calls upon me (*ujību da’wata l-dā’i idhā da’āni*).” This echoes earlier Meccan reminders of God’s closeness and responsiveness like Q 11:61 (*inna rabbī qarībun mujīb*, “My Lord is near and responsive”) and 40:60 (*wa-qāla rabbukumu d’ūnī astajīb lakum*, “Your<sup>p</sup> Lord has said, ‘Call upon me and I will respond to you’”). Many further Qur’anic verses similarly characterise God with the words *ajāba* and *istajāba*, “to respond”; as in Q 2:186 and 40:60, these verbs can combine with a derivative of the root *d’-w*, such as *da’ā* + acc., “to call upon s.o.,” or some synonym thereof.<sup>40</sup> As is clearly stated in Q 42:26, those to whom God responds are “the ones who believe and do righteous deeds” (*wa-yastajību lladhīna āmanū wa-‘amilū l-ṣāliḥāti*), just as God’s merciful forgiveness is available to those who maintain a functioning relationship with him (see under → *al-rahmān*). These are in fact the ones who have themselves “responded” (verb: *istajāba* or *ajāba*) to the call of God (Q 3:172, 6:36, 8:24, 11:14, 13:18, 14:44, 28:50.65, 42:38.47, 46:31.32). The overall cycle of responsiveness that is inferable from the Qur’an is therefore one in which humans who respond to the call of God’s messengers before the day of judgement (Q 42:47) may in turn rely on God’s readiness to respond to them. Qur’anic anthropomorphisms reside within this general vision of a cycle of interpersonal responsiveness between God and humans. Its ultimate fulfilment and completion is eschatological: the eternal state of communion with God, and also with one another, that will be the reward of the righteous in paradise (see under → *jannah*).

38 A similar point has been made about the Hebrew Bible (Clines 1968, 70–71): “the anthropomorphisms used of Yahweh in the Old Testament do not enable us to construct an identi-kit picture of Yahweh’s physical appearance, as in the case, for example, with Greek deities described in Homer, but rather they concentrate attention on the personhood of Yahweh.”

39 Some of the following observations, especially my attention to the verbs *ajāba* and *istajāba*, are indebted to Shaikh’s Oxford MPhil thesis, submitted in 2021, on “God’s Responsiveness in the Qur’an,” which he may develop further.

40 In addition to the references given in the main text, see Q 3:195, 8:9, 10:89, 12:34, 21:76.84.88.90, 27:62, and 37:75. By contrast, Q 7:194, 11:14, 13:14, 18:52, 28:64, 35:14, and 46:5 contend that the associators’ false deities are unable to respond to human calls for assistance. Many of the pertinent passages are already catalogued in *KK* 40 (on Q 2:186).

**allāt** | Allāt

→ *ashraka*

**ālā'** pl. | wondrous deeds

→ *afsada*

**amara** tr. / intr. *bi-* | to command (s.o. to do) s.th.; to enjoin (s.o. to do) s.th., to urge (s.o. to do) s.th.

→ *ma'rūf*

**i'tamara** intr. | to consult together, to deliberate

See n. 5 under → *amr*

**amr** | command; resolve; decision, decisive intervention; matter, affair, situation; conduct, course of action

Further vocabulary discussed: *ka-lamḥ bi-l-baṣar* | like the glance of an eye *ajma'a amrahu* | to resolve on one's course of action, to make up one's mind *dhāqa wabāla amrihi* | to taste the bad consequences of one's actions *tanāza'a* tr., *tanāza'a* intr. *fī* | to quarrel about s.th. *qaḍā amran* | to decide, decree, or settle a matter, to decide on (creating) s.th. *tanazzala* intr. | to descend *dabbara* tr. | to direct s.th., to execute s.th. *'araja* intr. | to ascend *awḥā* tr. *ilā* | to convey s.th. to s.o. *laylat al-qadr* | the night of foreordainment *idhn* | permission *rūḥ* | spirit

The Qur'anic employment of *amr* (on which see generally CDKA 28) is exceedingly multifarious, making it perhaps one of the most polyvalent expressions in the Qur'anic lexicon and posing significant obstacles to any attempt at confining its semantic role to a limited number of English equivalents. The following entry has two objectives: first, to review, circumscribe, and rationalise the main senses of the word, commencing with its basic meaning “command, order”; and secondly, to interrogate and ultimately reject the assumption of many scholars that several Qur'anic verses referring to God's *amr* turn an aspect of the deity—his command—into a semi-independent figure or hypostasis mediating between God and the cosmos.

**Amr as “command.”** That *amr* can mean “command, order” is attested clearly enough, not only with regard to divine commands (e.g., Q 7:77, 18:50, 51:44, 65:8) but also regarding human ones, as in Q 11:59, 20:90.93, 26:151 (see also 4:59.83: *ulī l-amri minkum/minhum*, “those in command over you<sup>P</sup>/them”). According to Q 21:81 and 38:36, God made the wind subservient to Solomon such that it would “run according to his”—that is, Solomon's—“command” (*tajrī bi-amrihi*), while Q 21:26–27 insist that the beings (perhaps angels) who are erroneously considered God's offspring are in reality only his servants who “act according to his command” (*bi-amrihi ya'malūn*). Other passages name specific

entities held to be subject or to act according to God's command (*bi-amrihi*), namely, the celestial bodies (Q 7:54, 16:12) and ships sailing on the sea (Q 14:32, 22:65, 30:46, 45:12).<sup>1</sup> Q 30:25 says that heaven and earth subsist by God's command (*an taqūma l-samā'u wa-l-arḍu bi-amrihi*). The claim, which is probably equivalent to affirmations that God prevents the heaven from collapsing upon the earth (Q 22:65; cf. 35:41) or that he has propped up the heaven "without a pillar that you<sup>P</sup> can see" (Q 13:2, 31:10; → *samā'*), articulates the intuition that God has not only primordially brought the cosmos into existence but continually preserves it in existence (Baljon 1958, 9; see under → *khalaqa*). The cosmos, then, is wholly pervaded by and subservient to God's sovereignty: "when he wants something, his command is merely to say to it, 'Be,' and it is" (Q 36:82: *innamā amruhu idhā arāda shay'an an yaqūla lahu kun fa-yakūn*). As we shall see below, evocations of God's *amr* can occasionally seem to take on an almost hypostatic guise, although this impression will ultimately turn out to be misleading. From a comparative perspective, it is noteworthy that the phrase *bi-amrihi*, referring to God's command, is also attested in a poem attributed to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt that may be authentic: God's angelic messengers, the text says, "traverse the heaven by his command" (Schulthess 1911a, no. 25:33 = al-Saṭlī 1974, no. 10:33; cf. Seidensticker 2011b, 47–49).

**God's *amr* as his authoritative and decisive intervention.** In other cases, *amr* signifies a decisive divine intervention more generally rather than specifically a divine command. A good example is the declaration, in Q 9:106, that some people will be "deferred to God's *amr*, whether he will punish them or relent towards them" (*murjawna li-amri llāhi immā yu'adhdhibuhum wa-immā yatūbu 'alayhim*). Paret and Ambros render the term *amr* in such cases as "decision" (e.g., Q 2:275: *amruhu ilā llāhi*, "the decision about him is God's"), which at least sometimes may be modified to "decisive intervention." This signification of the term *amr* is particularly associated with the verbs *jā'a* and *atā*, "to come" (CDKA 28).<sup>2</sup> Thus, in recounting the story of Noah the divine voice describes the onset of the deluge as the moment "when our decisive intervention (*amr*) came" (Q 11:40, 23:27), and the same phrase is used in connection with God's deliverance of the messengers Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shu'ayb (Q 11:58.66.94) as well as his punishment of the people of Lot (Q 11:76.82; see also 11:101). Such decisive divine interventions have occurred in the distant past, and Medinan verses suggest that they are also a feature of the present (Q 57:14, probably also 5:52). In other cases, though, the coming or bringing of God's *amr* refers to the end of the world and God's final judgement (Q 16:1.33, perhaps also 2:109 and 40:78; see Shoemaker 2018, 138–139).<sup>3</sup> This usage is already present in early Meccan texts: in Q 54:50 the divine voice states that "our decisive intervention is only a single act, like the glance of an eye" (*wa-mā amrunā illā wāḥidatun ka-lamḥin bi-l-baṣar*; see Baljon 1958, 10, n. 2), while Q 82:19

1 Baljon 1958, 10, points out the parallel between Q 31:31 (*anna l-fulka tajrī fī l-baḥri bi-nī'mati llāhi*) and 22:65 (*wa-l-fulka tajrī fī l-baḥri bi-amrihi*), which shows that God's command and God's grace (on which see under → *an'ama*) can be substituted for each other.

2 Paret 2001 mostly opts for *Entscheidung*.

3 Shoemaker proposes that God's *amr* in the Qur'an is to some degree equivalent to God's eschatological "reign" or "kingdom" as familiar from the Christian tradition, although he admits, presumably in view of non-eschatological occurrences like Q 11:58.66, that this usage is not consistent. It should also be noted that the Qur'an does contain a few cases in which the root *m-l-k*, which is more directly connected to the idea of kingly rule, has an evident eschatological context (e.g. Q 6:73; → *malik*). Thus, the Christian notion of God's eschatological kingdom is more clearly reflected by a different Qur'anic term than the word *amr*.

announces that “on that day, the decision” or “decisive intervention” is God’s (*wa-l-amru yawma’idhin li-llāh*).<sup>4</sup>

**Amr as the “will to act” in poetry.** The reason why *amr* can have this broader meaning of a decisive or an authoritative intervention is illuminated by Bravmann’s study of the semantics of *amr* in early Arabic (Bravmann 1972, 39–63). Reviewing a range of pre-Islamic and early Islamic poetry, Bravmann argues that *amr* can refer to “the serious action of a man, frequently of war-like character, towards which the energetic intention of a man (his ‘command to himself’) or a group (a tribe) is directed” (Bravmann 1972, 62). At several junctures, therefore, Bravmann suggests that someone’s *amr* is best rendered as his “will to action” or “energetic action” (e.g., Bravmann 1972, 46, 48–55). As alluded to in the preceding quotation, Bravmann proposes that this meaning of *amr* is to be derived from the notion of a mental command directed to oneself (Bravmann 1972, 48, 52–53).<sup>5</sup> Qur’anic references to God’s *amr* can be understood to transfer such pre-Islamic evocations of a warrior’s vigorous resolve onto the deity (see Anthony, forthcoming). While Qur’anic passages speaking of the coming of God’s *amr* or the like are focused not just on God’s energetic resolve to act but also on the manifestation of this resolve in reality, some Qur’anic verses do in fact foreground the former aspect. Thus, Q 4:47 and 33:37 announce *wa-kāna amru llāhi maf’ūlā* (cf. 8:42.44), which should probably be translated “God’s resolve will be enacted” rather than “God’s command will be carried out” or the like, while Q 65:3 proclaims *inna llāha bālighu amrihi*, “God will attain his purpose” or “realise his resolve.” As Bravmann notes, Q 65:3 resembles a phrase in the Mu’allaqah of al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥillizah, *wa-amru llāhi balghun*, which Bravmann renders “God’s will to action (or: God’s energetic action) attains (its end)” (Bravmann 1972, 54–55, citing Lyall 1894, 138, v. 62).<sup>6</sup> Other Qur’anic instances in which the meaning of *amr* seems to incline towards an agent’s intention or resolve to act rather than the action itself are two verses combining *amr* with the verb *ajma’a*, namely, Q 10:71 (Noah to his opponents: *ajmi’ū amrakum*, “resolve on your course of action,” “make up your minds”) and 12:102 (with respect to Joseph’s brothers: *idh ajma’ū amrahum wa-hum yamkurūn*, “when they made up their minds and plotted”). This collocation too has a parallel in poetry (DSAAP, Zuhayr, no. 20:25, discussed in Bravmann 1972, 53–54). Its contrary is *tanāza’ū amrahum baynahum*, “they quarrelled among themselves about their course of action” (Q 18:21, 20:62; on *tanāza’a* + *amr*, see also below).

**Amr in the generic senses of “conduct” and “matter, affair.”** In some cases, *amr* seems to have evolved from denoting someone’s resolve to act or the ensuing action to a designation of his or her general conduct, as in the idiom *dhāqa wabāla amrihi*, “to taste the bad consequences of one’s actions” (Q 5:95, 59:15, 64:5, 65:9; see Baljon 1958, 8, and CDKA 283; → *dhāqa*). In other instances, *amr* fades into the generic sense of “matter, affair”

4 Potentially also eschatological is Q 9:48, which speaks of God’s *amr* becoming manifest (*zāhara*).

5 Bravmann maintains that this is in fact the basic meaning of the eighth-form verb *itamara*, which he glosses as “to command oneself,” “to impose something, especially a task, upon oneself” (Bravmann 1972, 46–47). However, at least the Qur’anic occurrences of *itamara* must clearly be translated as “to consult together, to deliberate” (Q 28:20, 65:6; CDKA 27); they convey a discussion within a group (in Q 28:20, the Egyptian notables or → *mala’*) rather than an individual act of mental resolve.

6 Against Nöldeke’s doubts about the authenticity of this verse, Bravmann accepts it as pre-Qur’anic, arguing that the following sentence *yashqā bihi l-ashqiyā* expresses the “decidedly ‘pagan’ idea” that “the *ill-fated* become through it wretched” (Bravmann’s italics).

(Bravmann 1972, 63), perhaps by virtue of being applied to a situation that is, or requires, being dealt with by means of decisive or energetic action.<sup>7</sup> Such a shift is observable, for instance, in Q 47:21, where *'azama l-amru* means “when the matter is settled” (CDKA 188). Similarly, in Q 3:159 the Qur’anic Messenger is urged to consult with the believers “in the matter” at hand (*shāwirhum fī l-amri*), which appear to be considerations of military strategy; and in Q 47:26 the apostates are accused of saying to those who hate God’s revelations, “We will obey you in part of the matter [at hand]” (*sa-nuṭī’ukum fī ba’ḍi l-amri*). Similarly, *tanāza’tum fī l-amri* in Q 3:152 and 8:43 could be understood to mean either “you<sup>p</sup> quarrelled about the course of action [to be adopted]” or “you<sup>p</sup> quarrelled about the matter [at hand]” (cf. Q 22:67: *fa-lā yunāzi’unnaka fī l-amri*, “they are not to argue with you about the matter”). The same generic meaning “matter, affair” may furthermore be operative in the phrase *qaḍā amran*, “to decide or settle a matter,” in the sense of dealing with a situation that is objectively given and in need of resolution. Thus, according to Q 33:36, “when God and his Messenger have decided (*qaḍā*) a matter (*amr*),” it does not befit any believing man or woman “to have a choice in their course of action” (*an yakūna lahumu l-khiyaratu min amrihim*). In many other cases, however, the phrase *qaḍā amran*—whose grammatical subject is, apart from Q 33:36, always God alone (Q 2:117, 3:47, 8:42.44, 15:66, 19:35, 28:44, 40:68)—appears to refer to a future state of affairs that God has resolved to bring about. Thus, when God “decides on [creating] something, he merely says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is” (Q 2:117, 3:47, 19:35, 40:68: *idhā qaḍā amran fa-innamā yaqūlu lahu kun fa-yakūn*).<sup>8</sup> The collocation of *qaḍā + amr* also figures in the passive as *quḍiya l-amru*, “the matter was settled.” The latter can signify the arrival of the *eschaton* (Q 2:210, 6:8.58, 14:22, 19:39), which precludes humans from making any further changes to the moral balance of their lives, although an eschatological sense does not apply at Q 11:44 and 12:41 (cf. also *wa-kāna amran maqḍiyyā* in 19:21, which is probably a variant on *quḍiya l-amru* motivated by rhyme).

**God’s *amr* or command as a hypostasis mediating God’s cosmic rule?** A small cluster of Qur’anic passages give the appearance of depicting God’s *amr* in a personified or reified fashion, as originally argued by Hubert Grimme (Grimme 1895, 50–53) and subsequently endorsed by a string of influential scholars, including Heinrich Speyer and Rudi Paret (*BEQ* 4, 24–26, and *KK* 25; see now also Decharneux 2019, 249–254, and Anthony, forthcoming). One of the clearest prooftexts for this view is the Medinan verse Q 65:12: God has “created seven heavens and their like of the earth, and God’s command (*al-amr*) descends (*yatanazzalu*) between them, so that you<sup>p</sup> might know that God is endowed with power over everything and that God encompasses everything in knowledge.” At least at first sight, the verse does indeed give the impression that the *amr* is a vicarious hypostasis of God that is at liberty to roam through the cosmos, ensuring a direct and immediate link of communication between God and different components of the created order while simultaneously safeguarding the deity’s ontological distance and transcendence. The same impression emerges from the Meccan passage Q 32:4–5, which relates how God, after creating the heavens and the earth, sat down on the throne (see also under → *allāh*), whence

<sup>7</sup> Note Paret’s astute remark that *amr* can signify “matter, affair” in so far as the latter is “somehow conceived as subject to authoritative resolution” (*KK* 25).

<sup>8</sup> Cf. the parallels at Q 16:40 and 36:82, which speak of God “wanting” or “willing” something (36:82: *idhā arāda shay’an*).



he “directs (*yudabbiru*)<sup>9</sup> the *amr* from the heaven to the earth, upon which it [the *amr*] ascends (verb: *araja*) to him on a day whose measure is a thousand years according to your<sup>p</sup> counting.” Here too God’s *amr*, his commanding governance of the world, would seem to be envisaged as undergoing spatial displacement away from and back towards the deity, covering immense cosmic distances in the process, and thus looks like an entity that is in some sense independent of God (cf. O’Shaughnessy 1953, 36).<sup>10</sup>

Scholars who have been persuaded of a hypostatic understanding of verses like Q 32:5 have tended to link it to the targumic concept of God’s *memra* or “word” (Grimme 1895, 51; *JPND* 188–190; *BEQ* 4 and 24–26; Ahrens 1935, 133–134; O’Shaughnessy 1953, 39–40). It is however important to note, with Sean Anthony, that this supplementary genealogical conjecture is separate from the basic interpretive problem of whether or not the Qur’an does indeed express a hypostatic understanding of God’s *amr* (Anthony, forthcoming), a question that will be explored in the following section. Moreover, the question whether targumic references to God’s *memra* have a hypostatic significance or are merely reverential circumlocutions is itself highly controversial (see, e.g., McNamara 2010, 146–148, 154–166, and Boyarin 2004, 112–127). It has also been questioned whether Arabic *amr*, given its inner-Arabic semantics, would really have been a plausible rendering of *memra* (Leemhuis 1977, 46–47). In any case, alternative antecedents to the Qur’anic notion of God’s “directing the *amr*” are found in Syriac texts, including the claim that the heavenly spheres are “at the command (*pūqdānā*) of God” (Vööbus 1979, 253; see Decharneux 2019, 251–252, and Anthony, forthcoming, both crediting the parallel to Zellentin). As observed not only by Decharneux and Anthony but also decades ago by Fred Leemhuis (Leemhuis 1977, 48), Syriac expresses God’s “governance” of the world by the noun *mdabbrānūtā* (e.g., Vööbus 1979, 252), whose corresponding verb *dabbar* (“to rule, to govern”; see *SL* 272) is cognate with the Arabic verb *dabbara* employed in Q 32:5 and its parallels 10:3.31 and 13:2.

**A non-hypostatic reading of Q 32:5 and 65:12 in light of 41:12 and 97:4.** Does the Qur’an, then, formulate a hypostatic or reified understanding of God’s *amr*? Upon closer examination it is far from certain that this can be assumed to be the case (see already Baljon 1958, 16). The Meccan verse Q 41:12, for one, implies a very different scenario. Like Q 32:4–5 and 65:12, it occurs in a context to do with divine creation, and like 65:12 it mentions God’s bringing forth of seven heavens. Q 41:12 then goes on to say that God “conveyed” to every heaven its *amr* (*wa-awhā fī kulli samā’in amrahā*). This could indicate that each of the heavens, after having been created, received a general divine command determining its specific nature and compartment—a reading that is supported by the manner in which Jacob of Sarug describes God’s governance of the sun (Mathews 2018, 42–43, ll. 1483–1488): God gave it an initial “impetus” (*hēpā*), after which “there was no need for Him to command it again (*d-tūb nepqod*) to continue its course.”<sup>11</sup> Alternatively, the idea may be that God governs the behaviour of each heaven, and indeed of each being in the world, by means of

9 I assume that Arabic *dabbara* is here largely equivalent with its Syriac cognate *dabbar* (“to rule, to govern”), on which see below (and from which it may well have been loaned, as suggested in *CDKA* 95).

10 A further three passages resemble Q 32:5 in casting God as “directing the *amr*” (Q 10:3.31, 13:2: *yudabbiru l-amra*). Even if they do not explicitly testify to the *amr*’s capability of spatial separation from the deity, one’s default approach should clearly be to translate them analogously to Q 32:5.

11 See also Baljon 1958, 8, who takes *amr* in Q 41:12 to be the heavens’ “destiny and task, indicated to them by the Creator.”

a continuous string of particular commands relevant to how a given entity is to behave in a given situation. This would be more in line with the Qur’anic tendency elsewhere to envisage God as exercising a direct causal role in individual occurrences of natural processes like the falling of rain (see under → *allāh*).<sup>12</sup> In either case, Q 41:12 does not depict a unitary and quasi-hypostatic divine *amr* moving around the cosmos and deputising for God in administering a multitude of created beings. Instead, it portrays God as governing each heaven, and probably each created being, by means of particular commands that are transmitted through an act of communicative conveyance (→ *awḥā*) and dictate their behaviour. All of this is further borne out by Q 16:68, according to which God conveys (*awḥā*) to the bees to construct their hives in mountains, trees, and buildings.

A similarly non-hypostatic scenario emerges from Q 97:4: during the mysterious “night of foreordainment” (*laylat al-qadr*; see Sinai 2012 and CDKA 220), the angels and the spirit are said to “descend” (*tanazzalu*) “by permission (*idhn*) of their Lord due to many a [divine] command” (*bi-idhni rabbihim min kulli amrin*).<sup>13</sup> What this means is clarified by Q 44:3–5, where the divine voice says, ostensibly about the same night, that in it “many a wise command is determined” (v. 4: *fiḥā yuḥḍu kullu amrin ḥakīm*), “as a command proceeding from us” (v. 5: *amran min ‘indinā*). Our best guess at the underlying notion is that of an annually recurrent night in which God ordains (all or some of) the events that will take place during the following year, an idea that has Jewish and Babylonian parallels (Wensinck 1925, 3–5; see also Wagtendonk 1968, 83–86, 106–108, and Lohmann 1969, 281–282).<sup>14</sup> Q 97:4 thus seems to be saying that during the *laylat al-qadr* the angels and the spirit descend in order to transmit God’s decrees or commands to the created order. Like Q 41:12, God’s governance of the world is here mediated by means of a multiplicity of individual *amrs* rather than via a unitary and hypostatic cosmic *amr*.

This scenario may in fact be extended to Q 32:4–5 and 65:12, the primary prooftexts for a hypostatic understanding of God’s *amr*. Although both speak of *al-amr* in the singular, it is well known that the Arabic definite singular can have a generic meaning. Thus, *al-fulk* means “ships” in general rather than any specific ship in Q 2:164, 14:32, or 45:12 (in contrast to places like 7:64 or 10:73, where reference is indeed to a specific ship, namely, Noah’s ark), and *al-naḥl* in Q 16:68 are “the bees,” not “the bee” (unless one were to employ the singular in a generic meaning that is uncommon in contemporary English). In view of this, the phrase *yatanazzalu l-amru baynahunna* (namely, between the seven

12 It would also correspond to the way in which Jacob of Sarug describes God’s control over the combusive effect of fire (Mathews 2018, 20–23, ll. 1281–1298).

13 My translation assumes that the preposition *min* designates what Wright calls the “causal point of departure” here (Wright 1974, 2:131–132). This also seems to be the understanding of Wagtendonk, who translates *min* as “by virtue of” and remarks that “the angels descend as a result of the *amr*” (Wagtendonk 1968, 83–84, with n. 5). Cf. also Q 13:11, where *yahfazūnahu min amri llāhi* means “they watch over him by [or due to] God’s command.” In a more *ad hoc* fashion, al-Zamakhshari paraphrases *min* by *min ajli* (Zam. 6:410), while Neuwirth (PP 102) suggests that *min* may here be equated with *fi*. On *kull* + indefinite singular, see Bauer 2010, 706–715. On Q 97:4 being a later insertion, see Lohmann 1969, 283; PP 96–97; Sinai 2012, 23–25, 28–30. On the lexeme *qadr*, see also Caskel 1926, 20–21, and el Masri 2020, 69–70.

14 Wagtendonk maintains that the *laylat al-qadr* was a night of divine reckoning and judgement, which I find less cogent than Wensinck’s view. Wagtendonk’s principal piece of evidence seems to be that Q 78:38 mentions a joint appearance of the angels and the spirit in connection with the eschatological judgement. Other parallels adduced by him, such as Q 70:4, are even less conclusive. Despite these reservations, I would provisionally accept Wagtendonk’s argument that the pre-Islamic *laylat al-qadr* would probably have been celebrated in Rajab rather than in Ramaḍān.

heavens) in Q 65:12 may legitimately be translated as “[God’s] commands descend between them,” thus rendering the definite singular *al-amr* as a plural, while Q 32:5 can be understood to say that God “directs [his] commands from the heaven to the earth, upon which [i.e., after their fulfilment] they ascend [back to him] on a day whose measure is a thousand years according to your<sup>p</sup> counting.” At least based on this alternative reading, the point of describing God as “directing the *amr*” (*yudabbiru l-amra*) in Q 10:3.31, 13:2, and 32:5 is not ontological, i.e., to posit an individual and independent entity acting as an intermediary between God and the world, but simply to assert that God continues to exercise commanding sovereignty over the world that he has created: as Q 7:54 puts it in the form of a rhetorical question, God is the one who creates and commands (*a-lā lahu l-khalqu wa-l-amru*). Unlike the questionable link between God’s “directing the *amr*” and the targumic *memra*, the Syriac precursors noted by Anthony remain pertinent to such a non-hypostatic reading of the Qur’anic material. In addition, in gauging the full semantic purport of *yudabbiru l-amra* one should furthermore take into account the early Meccan verse Q 79:5 (*fa-l-mudabbirāti amrā*), occurring in an oath passage depicting a raid (see *SPMC* 106–107), where *dabbara amran* must mean something like “to execute a resolve,” along the lines set out by Bravmann. Hence, when the later Meccan verses Q 10:3.31, 13:2, and 32:5 apply the phrase *yudabbiru l-amra* to God, this would also have connoted the vigorous and energetic manner in which God implements his decrees and designs (see also Anthony, forthcoming). A translation of *yudabbiru l-amra* that reflect this polyvalence might be to say that God “directs his commanding resolve.”

**God’s command and “the spirit.”** A final set of verses mentioning God’s *amr* and calling for brief discussion are Q 16:2, 17:85, 40:15, and 42:52. All four describe “the spirit” (see in more detail under → *rūḥ*) as being “of” or “originating from” (*min*) God’s *amr*. The “spirit” can sometimes figure as a quasi-angelic being tasked with the conveyance of revelations (cf. Q 16:102, 26:193). The verses at hand too are concerned with divine inspiration, even if they do not in a similarly unequivocal fashion present the spirit as an independent agent. The point of describing the spirit as being “of God’s *amr*” is presumably to underline his subordinate and merely executive nature: the spirit operates only “by” or “due to God’s command,” at least if we parse the preposition *min* in a causal sense here (as does Durie 2018, 170), in line with the above translation of *min kulli amrin* in Q 97:4 as “due to many a [divine] command” (cf. Muqātil 2002, 2:459, glossing *min amrihi* at Q 16:2 as *bi-amrihi*, while *Jal.* 973 offers *bi-irādatihi*).<sup>15</sup> To review the four verses in more detail, according to Q 16:2 and 40:15 God “sends down the angels with the spirit, [acting] by his command (*bi-l-rūḥi min amrihi*)” or “casts the spirit [acting] by his command” (*yulqī l-rūḥa min amrihi*) “upon whomsoever he wills from among his servants,” while in Q 42:52 the divine voice affirms, “Thus do we convey to you<sup>s</sup> a spirit [acting] by our command” (*wa-ka-dhālika awḥaynā ilayka rūḥan min*

<sup>15</sup> Once again, note that the causal meaning of *min* is obvious in Q 13:11: *yahfaẓūnahu min amri llāhi*, “they watch over him by [or due to] God’s command.” Fazlur Rahman proposes to equate God’s *amr* in places like Q 16:2 with “what the Qur’ān calls the ‘Preserved Tablet’ or the ‘Mother of the Books’” (see Rahman 2009, 98, alluding to Q 85:22 and 43:4), but this hypothesis has no obvious textual support. According to Grimme, the verses under consideration express the Neoplatonically tinged idea that “the spirit” emanates from the divine *amr*, understood as a hypostatic intermediary between God and the world (Grimme 1895, 51–52). Eichler too rules out that *amr* might mean “command” in the passages under consideration; he appears to be arguing that even without the *min amrihi* qualification, the verses under discussion already make it sufficiently clear that God is the sender of the spirit (*DTEK* 124–125).

*amrinā*; → *awḥā*).<sup>16</sup> Finally, Q 17:85 responds to an audience query about the spirit (“They ask you<sup>s</sup> about the spirit”) by instructing the Messenger to proclaim that “the spirit is by the command of my Lord” (*al-rūḥu min amri rabbī*)—meaning, most probably, that the spirit acts *by* or *under* God’s command. This verse too shares the revelatory context seen in Q 16:2, 40:15, and 42:52, in so far as the following verse, Q 17:86, mentions revelatory communication with the Qur’anic Messenger (*awḥaynā ilayka*).

The preceding interpretation of the four verses combining *rūḥ* with *min amri* . . . is supported by considering the most likely background to the question cited in Q 17:85, which challenges the Qur’anic Messenger with regard to “the spirit.” It is likely that the question is adversarial.<sup>17</sup> Examining chronologically earlier Qur’anic statements about “the spirit,” the query cited in Q 17:85 may well have been triggered by verses casting “the spirit” as an independent agent, such as Q 26:193 (claiming that it is “the trustworthy spirit,” *al-rūḥ al-amīn*, who transmits revelations to the Qur’anic Messenger) and 19:17 (recounting how God dispatched his spirit, *rūḥanā*, to Mary, “and it appeared to her as a shapely human”). The point of the question posed in Q 17:85 would accordingly have been the charge that the Qur’anic revelations’ refusal to countenance “associate” deities besides God (e.g., Q 17:111; → *ashraka*) was inconsistent with their evocation of “the spirit,” which could easily have been perceived as substantially akin to the subordinate deities worshipped by Muhammad’s opponents. Against this line of attack, Q 17:85 would then have insisted, together with Q 16:2, 40:15, and 42:52, that the Qur’an’s revelation-bearing “spirit” merely executes God’s commands and cannot therefore be considered an autonomous would-be deity. In sum, what seems the most satisfactory manner of interpreting the *rūḥ-min-amrihi* cluster does not require us to view them as tantalising glimpses of an emanationist ontology of the kind familiar from the Neoplatonic tradition.

### ***ammārah bi-* | perpetually commanding s.th.**

On the statement that the human soul or vital self (*nafs*) “perpetually commands evil” (Q 12:53: *inna l-nafsa la-ammāratun bi-l-sū’i*), see → *nafs*.

### ***umm:***

~ *al-qurā* | the mother of settlements, the mother-town

~ *al-kitāb* | the mother of the scripture, the mother-scripture (meaning either the celestial archetype of earthly scriptures or the Qur’an’s unequivocal core)

On *umm al-qurā*, see under → *rasūl*, → *‘arabī*, and → *al-‘ālamūn*. On *umm al-kitāb*, see under → *bayyana* and → *kitāb*.

<sup>16</sup> It may be appropriate to highlight that I am assuming that *amr* takes a different meaning in Q 16:2 than in the immediately preceding verse, which opens *atā amru llāhi fa-lā tasta’jilūhu*, “God’s decisive intervention has come, so do not seek to hasten it.” Given the polyvalence of the term, this is not surprising. For a similar sequence of occurrences of *amr* in several different meanings that defy any attempt at concordant translation, see Surah 65 (namely, vv. 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, and 12).

<sup>17</sup> For other Meccan occurrences of *yas’alūnaka ‘an*, “they ask you about . . .,” see Q 7:187, 18:83, 20:105, and 79:42. Of these, at least the first and the last occurrences are clearly adversarial. Moreover, the second half of Q 17:85 (“you<sup>p</sup> have only been given little knowledge”) implies that the verse at hand is to be situated in a polemical exchange.

*ummah* | community; model, exemplar, exemplary custom; period of time

Further vocabulary discussed: *ab* | father, forefather *imām* | model, exemplar, exemplary custom *uswah* | exemplar, model *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *qawm* | people *ajal* | term *shahīd* | witness *al-  
asbāt* pl. | the descendants of Jacob; the tribes of Israel *aslama* intr. (*li-*) | to surrender o.s. or dedicate o.s. (to s.o., namely, God) *banū isrā'īl* pl. | the Israelites *al-nās* | the people *amara bi-l-ma'rūf* | to command or enjoin what is right *nahā* 'an *al-munkar* | to dissuade from what is reprehensible, to forbid wrong *ikhtalafa* intr. (*fī*) | to disagree, to fall into disagreement (about s.th.) *muqtaṣid* | moderate, middling *mansak* | rite *ḥajj* | pilgrimage *jāhada* intr./tr. | to contend (against s.o.) *dīn* | religion, religious worship 'arabī | Arabic *dhurriyyah* | offspring *millah* | religion, religious teaching *al-anṣār* pl. | the helpers *al-muhājirūn* pl. | the emigrants *it-  
taba'a* tr. | to follow s.th. or s.o. *ummī* | scriptureless, not hitherto endowed with a scriptural revelation *laḥiqa* intr. *bi-* | to join s.o.

**Overview.** The prevalent meaning of the noun *ummah* in the Qur'an (on which see generally Denny 1975 and Zafer 2020) is "community." To be sure, some instances of the word clearly require a different translation: in Q 11:8 and 12:45 *ummah* seems to refer to a period of time, and in Q 43:22.23 the word must mean "exemplary custom or manner of proceeding" or the like, since Muhammad's opponents and others before them are quoted as saying that they found their forefathers "adhering to an *ummah*" (*wajadnā ābā'anā 'alā ummatin*) and that they would follow in their ancestors' footsteps (see also under → *ab*). Q 16:120 describes Abraham as an *ummah*, which again means "model" or "exemplar" here. This is supported by parallel statements in Q 2:124, which has *imām*, derived from the same consonantal root as *ummah*, and 60:4.6, employing *uswah*.<sup>1</sup> The significations "exemplar" and "exemplary custom" are related to the Arabic verb *amma* + acc., "to direct oneself towards s.o./s.th." (JPND 190), whose participle appears in Q 5:2 (*āmmīna l-bayta l-ḥarāma*, "those heading for the sacred house"). We shall return to this connotation of the root 'm-m below.

The preceding occurrences apart, however, it is normally clear that the word *ummah* signifies a group or community of people in the Qur'an. An inconspicuous example is Q 28:23, where Moses encounters "a group of people" (*ummatan mina l-nāsi*) at the Midianite well where he meets his future wife. In this dominant sense, *ummah* is loaned from Jewish Aramaic *uma/umta* or Syriac *ūmmtā*, "nation, people," corresponding to Hebrew *ummâ* (JPND 190; FVQ 69; CDKA 29).<sup>2</sup> Like Arabic *ummah*, these Aramaic and Hebrew

1 Horowitz and Paret, though, are content to accept that *ummah* means "community" (i.e., "a community unto his own") in Q 16:120 (JPND 190; KK 294). On *imām*, see CDKA 29; for a verse of early (though not necessarily pre-Islamic) Arabic poetry in which *imām* means "model" or "exemplar," see 'Abbās 1962, no. 48:81 = EAP 2:199 (from the Mu'allaqah of Labīd; see also under → *ab*). Another Qur'anic occurrence of *uswah*, besides Q 60:4.6, is 33:21, though here the word is applied to Muhammad rather than Abraham. All three Qur'anic instances of the word *uswah* (Q 33:21, 60:4.6) are followed by the adjective *ḥasanah*, "good." Q 2:124, 16:120, and 60:4.6 should also be compared with 43:59, calling Jesus a → *mathal* (here perhaps: "exemplar") for the Israelites.

2 For attestations in Syriac and Jewish Aramaic, see DJPA 39–40, DJBA 91, and SL 17. For instance, a poem in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic calls the people of Israel "a beloved people (*umma rḥīma*), chosen from all peoples" (Sokoloff and Yahalom 1999, 158 = no. 21:1–2; cf. *ibid.*, 168 = no. 25:2).



cognates are etymologically related to the word for “mother” (Aramaic/Syriac: *emmā*; Arabic: *umm*) and involve connotations of common descent and kinship. These also hold for many occurrences of *ummah* in the Qur’an that will be discussed in what follows. However, the Qur’an also documents a different modulation of the word, in which it designates a community that is not or not primarily defined by kinship but rather by shared religious commitments (similarly Zafer 2020). This usage emerges in the Medinan surahs, though it is rooted in aspects of prior Meccan usage, and it reflects the gradual transformation of the Medinan population into a community united by recognition of the Qur’anic revelations and of Muhammad’s prophetic authority. A crucial step in this development would have been the expulsion of the Medinan “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*) that is alluded to in Surah 59 and in Q 33:26–27.

The word *ummah* must have been present in Arabic prior to the Qur’an, since it occurs in a poem of al-Nābighah (*DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 17:21): somebody who is *dhū ummah* would not voluntarily commit a sin, such as swearing a false vow. Wellhausen avers that al-Nābighah uses *ummah* to refer to a community of a religious nature (Wellhausen 1889, 74), and indeed the word is standardly glossed as *dīn* in the verse at hand (e.g., al-Ḥittī 1991, 125, n. 22). However, the context is too meagre to allow a conclusive verdict. In fact, it is not impossible to interpret al-Nābighah’s *dhū ummah* as “someone who adheres to his ancestors’ exemplary conduct,” in line with Q 43:22.23 (*KU* 52).

***Ummah as a community of kinship.*** Qur’anic occurrences of *ummah* often preserve the ethnic connotations of its Aramaic cognate. Thus, comparison between Q 13:7 (*li-kulli qawmin hād*, “every people has a guide”), on the one hand, and Q 10:47 (*li-kulli ummatin rasūlun*, “every community has a messenger”) and 16:36, on the other, shows that *ummah* can at least sometimes operate as a synonym of *qawm*, which often (but by no means always) refers to a community (possibly imagined) of kinship, a “people.”<sup>3</sup> The same is shown by Q 40:5, where *qawm* and *ummah* figure in close proximity and appear to be interchangeable. Qur’anic passages in which the word *ummah* designates a community of kinship may be deemed to include the following statements: land animals and birds divide into different “communities” like humans (Q 6:38),<sup>4</sup> as do demons or the → *jinn* (Q 7:38, 41:25, 46:18); God has sent messengers to previous human communities (Q 6:42, 16:63), and indeed every community has its dedicated messenger or warner (Q 10:47, 16:36, 35:24; → *rasūl*), yet these messengers were invariably accused of lying (Q 23:44; cf. 27:83, 29:18, 40:5); every community has its “term” (→ *ajal*; Q 7:34, 10:49, 15:5, 23:43); and on the day of judgement God will produce a “witness” (*shahīd*) from among every community to testify against it, this witness being the respective community’s messenger, just as Muhammad will bear witness against his community (Q 4:41, 16:84.89, 28:75; cf. also 45:28).<sup>5</sup> As the preceding references show, the use of *ummah* in the sense of a “people” is overwhelmingly Meccan, though it continues to reverberate in at least one Medinan verse, Q 4:41. A second potentially Medinan occurrence is Q 7:160, which glosses the twelve

3 To cite just one of many examples where *qawm* simply means a group of people irrespective of whether they are united by ties of kinship, see Q 5:84, according to which the Christians are quoted as saying that “we are eager for our Lord to let us enter [paradise] together with the people who are righteous (*ma’a l-qawmi l-ṣāliḥīn*).” That *qawm* refers to a kinship community may generally be presumed for instances in which the word occurs in a genitive construction or with a possessive suffix (e.g., Q 2:54.60.67, 46:21).

4 On the way in which this verse is treated by Muslim commentators, see Tlili 2012, 139–146, and *SQ* 352–353.

5 In Q 2:143 and 22:78, the word *shahīd* seems to have a different significance; see under → *al-‘ālamūn*.



“tribes” (*asbāt*) into which God divided the Israelites as *umam*, “communities,” who must evidently also be communities of descent here (see also Q 7:168).<sup>6</sup>

**The Medinan *ummah* as a community distinguished by a shared religious stance.** Although an ethnic usage of the word *ummah* is not entirely absent from the Medinan Qur’an, pivotal statements in the Medinan Surahs 2 and 3 apply the term *ummah* to the community of believers adhering to the Qur’anic revelations and following Muhammad. Thus, Abraham and Ishmael pray to God to bring forth a “community that surrenders itself to you<sup>s</sup>” (Q 2:128: *ummatan muslimatan laka*). A bit further on in the same surah, the divine voice states that he made the believers a “middle community” (Q 2:143: *wa-ka-dhālika ja’alnākum ummatan wasaṭan*), “so that you<sup>p</sup> might be witnesses set up over the people (*li-takūnū shuhadā’a ‘alā l-nāsi*) and the Messenger might be a witness (*shahīd*) set up over you.”<sup>7</sup> This most likely means that the Qur’anic *ummah* is to function as an exemplary beacon of true belief and righteousness for humankind at large, a sort of “light to the nations,” to put it in Biblical language (for more detail, see under → *al-‘ālamūn*). The context of the verse is consistent with the assumption that the Qur’anic *ummah* is here conceived in distinction to Jews and Christians, who are mentioned in v. 140 (cf. also the further references to the “scripture-owners” in vv. 145–146). The reading of Q 2:128.143 just outlined is further corroborated by the extensive attention that earlier sections of Surah 2 devote to the manifold lapses and transgressions of the Israelites (→ *banū ‘isrā’īl*), who clearly function as a negative counterpart to the Qur’anic *ummah*, exemplifying how a divinely chartered community of believers ought *not* to operate. The significance of the Qur’anic *ummah* for humankind or “the people” at large (*al-nās*; see again under → *al-‘ālamūn*) is also underlined in Q 3:110, where the addressees are called “the best community ever brought forth for people” (*kuntum khayra ummatin ukhrijat li-l-nāsi*), “enjoining right and dissuading from wrong and believing in God.” Hence, in Q 2:128.143 and 3:110 the *ummah* is clearly a community of believers, set apart from other human groups by their stance of self-surrender to God and invested with a critical role in God’s stewardship of human history going forward.<sup>8</sup> (Incidentally, members of the Medinan community may well have believed that there was not much history left prior to the resurrection and eschatological judgement; see under → *sā’ah*.)

One aspect of the inner workings of the Medinan *ummah* that deserves note in this context is the fact that the Qur’an seems to envisage its individual members as being engaged in reciprocal acts of moral and religious counsel, admonishment, and fortification. This is foregrounded in verses like Q 90:17 and 103:3 and may also be implied by the formula “enjoining right and dissuading from wrong” (see in more detail under → *ma’rūf*). In addition to being guided by Muhammad, therefore, the *ummah* of the believers is also understood to be at least to some degree self-guiding or self-correcting. *Ex negativo*, the importance of communal self-criticism is glimpsed in Q 5:79, which condemns the

6 As explained elsewhere, there is some ground for suspecting that Q 7:160–168 or parts of it are a later Medinan insertion (see under → *al-asbāt*), though the issue is not settled.

7 The segments *yakūna l-rasūlu shahīdan ‘alaykum* and *takūnū shuhadā’a ‘alā l-nāsi* also recur in Q 22:78, which does not however use the word *ummah*. On the phrase “middle” or “intermediate community,” see under → *al-‘ālamūn*.

8 For a relatively recent plea in favour of the centrality of the *ummah* in the Qur’an, see Anjum 2012, 50–51. See also *ibid.*, 61–63, maintaining that the early Islamic political vision “places the *umma*, the community of all the believers, as the recipient of the Prophet’s mission to humankind.”

Israelites for not “dissuading one another from the reprehensible things they did” (*kānū lā yatanāhawna ‘an munkarin fa’alūhu*; see again under → *ma’rūf*), and 2:44, where the Israelites are rebuked for “commanding people to be righteous while forgetting yourselves” (*a-ta’murūna l-nāsa bi-l-birri wa-tansawna anfusakum*).<sup>9</sup> A scene in which some Israelites do live up to the duty of dissuading their peers from evil (*alladhīna yanhawna ‘ani l-sū’i*) and are accordingly spared divine chastisement is narrated in Q 7:163–166, the episode of the Sabbath-breakers.<sup>10</sup>

The Medinan use of the term *ummah* as a community of believers just sketched builds on aspects of previous Meccan usage. Pertinent Meccan data include the assertion that had God wanted he could have made humans a “single community” (*ummatan wāḥidatan*; see Q 11:118, 16:93, 42:8; cf. also 43:33 and the Medinan parallel 5:48). This should probably be understood to mean that God could have *maintained* them as a single community, given that Q 10:19 says that humans did in fact form a single primordial community but subsequently fell into disagreement (*fa-khtalafū*), an idea reprised in the Medinan verse 2:213 (people formed “a single community,” upon which God sent prophets in order to “adjudicate between people concerning what they disagreed about,” *li-yahkuma bayna l-nāsi fī mā khtalafū fīhi*). Muslim interpreters who took Q 2:213 and 10:19 to assert a primordial unity of humankind understood the unity in question to be of a religious nature (Friedmann 2003, 14–19). This is cogent, given that the verb *ikhtalafa* (“to disagree, to fall into disagreement”) that is found in both verses tends to refer specifically to discord concerning religious matters, as illustrated not only by Q 2:213 itself but also by various other occurrences (e.g., Q 2:176, 27:76, 39:3, 41:45, 43:63; for more detail on *ikhtalafa*, see under → *bayyana* and → *ḥizb*). Hence, the single human community that is attributed to the remote past or whose establishment is affirmed as being within God’s power is not, or not primarily, a community united by kinship and descent but rather one that is not riven by conflict in religious matters (see also Q 5:48 and 11:118, which like 2:213 and 10:19 contrast the “single community,” *ummah wāḥidah*, with the verb *ikhtalafa*, “to disagree”; cf. 21:92–93 and 23:52–53).<sup>11</sup> Given that a number of the verses just cited are Meccan, the Qur’anic use of the noun *ummah* to designate a community sharing a certain ethico-religious outlook is therefore already encountered prior to the hijrah.

The same nuance may also be detected in Q 7:159, which states that “among the people (*qawm*) of Moses there is a community (*ummah*) who guide according to the truth and act justly according to it”: within the ethnically or genealogically defined collective of the Israelites, there is or was a smaller subgroup sharing a commitment to religious truth and its moral implications. Two Medinan passages make similar use of the term *ummah* to refer

9 Of course, it is also possible to read Q 2:44 as formulating the complaint not that the Israelites are failing to *admonish* one another to be righteous but rather that they are failing to *practise* righteousness.

10 The significance of such statements is reinforced by the notorious fact that the Qur’an fails to give explicit instructions about who is to assume leadership of the *ummah* after Muhammad’s death, even though Muhammad is unequivocally seen as mortal and the possibility of his demise prior to the end of the world is expressly envisaged (see Q 3:144, 10:46, 13:40, 40:77, 43:41–42; see also *HCI* 52). Given this state of affairs, it would not be indefensible for a Muslim theologian to look to the Qur’an’s implicit assumption of communal self-correction as one important mechanism by which the *ummah* must operate after Muhammad’s demise. This has been argued to be the view of Ibn Taymiyyah (Anjum 2012, 229–232).

11 Although Q 16:93 and 42:8 contain the expression *ummah wāḥidah* but not the verb *ikhtalafa*, it seems clear at least for the latter verse that the lack of unity at stake is also of a moral or religious nature. Moreover, *ikhtalafa* appears at the end of Q 16:92 and in 42:10.

to a subsection of the “scripture-owners” that “stands upright” (Q 3:113: *qā’imah*) or is at least “middling” (Q 5:66: *muqtaṣidah*, on which see under → *ahl al-kitāb*)—a subgroup that is favourably contrasted with their coreligionists (see also under → *aslama* and Sinai 2015–2016, 79–80). The complex redactional history of Surah 7 has not yet been adequately unravelled (see under → *ummī* and → *al-asbāṭ*), and it cannot necessarily be taken for granted that Q 7:159 is indeed part of the surah’s original Meccan layer. But a parallel formulation occurs later on in the same surah, in Q 7:181, where there is perhaps less reason to entertain Medinan editing: “Among those whom we created there is a community who guide according to the truth and act justly according to it.” Here, too, the word *ummah* is used for a group united by a shared religious and ethical outlook.

Very likely, this use of the word *ummah* to describe a group of people subscribing to the same ethico-religious outlook—i.e., its use in contrast to *qawm* (Q 7:159) rather than as a synonym of it (e.g., Q 10:47 and 16:36)—is informed by the semantics of the Arabic root *’-m-m*, which imply literal or metaphorical orientation towards, and imitation, of something or someone. This conjectured connotation certainly fits very well with Q 3:110, discussed above, where the Qur’anic community is said to be the best *ummah* “ever brought forth for people, enjoining right and dissuading from wrong and believing in God” (cf. also Q 3:104): just as Abraham in his time served as an “exemplar” (*imām*) “for people” (*li-l-nāsi*), according to Q 2:124 (cf. 16:120, employing the term *ummah*, and 60:4.6), so the Qur’anic believers too now form an exemplar (*ummah*) “for people” (*li-l-nāsi*), though a collective rather than individual one. In a verse like Q 3:110, one may accordingly go so far as to translate *ummah* not just as “community” but as “communal exemplar” or “model community.” Still, this connotative resonance of the term *ummah* was evidently not stable enough in order to prevent the Meccan verse Q 27:83 from deploying the word on precisely the opposite side of the distinction between a community defined by their shared ethnic origin and a group defined by their ethico-religious outlook: on the day of judgement, God will assemble “from every community (*ummah*, here equivalent to *qawm* or *ethnos*) a group (*fawj*) of those who used to dismiss our signs as lies.”

Two interesting occurrences of *ummah* that amalgamate the two broad significations of the word just distinguished—an ethnic and a religious one—are found in Q 22:34.67. In both verses, which Nöldeke and Schwally assign to the Medinan stratum of Surah 22 (*GQ* 1:213; *HCI* 129), the divine speaker asserts that “for every community we have appointed a rite” or *mansak* (*li-kulli ummatin ja’alnā mansakan*; on *mansak*, see under → *dhabaḥa*). Q 22:34 continues with the rationale “so that they might invoke God’s name over the livestock animals that he has provided for them” (*li-yadhkurū sma llāhi ‘alā mā razaqahum min bahīmati l-an‘āmi*), followed by the reminder that “your<sup>p</sup> God is one God, so surrender yourselves to him.” Q 22:34 is surrounded by comments to do with the *ḥajj* ritual (see under → *ḥajja*) and the attendant sacrifices, which Q 22:26–29 trace back to Abraham and which are clearly understood to be normative for the Qur’anic community as well. Especially noteworthy is the fact that Q 22:28, which is part of a divine address to Abraham to call people to perform the *ḥajj*, contains a parallel to the segment *li-yadhkurū sma llāhi ‘alā mā razaqahum min bahīmati l-an‘āmi* just cited from 22:34. Thus, Q 22:28 says that people are to perform the *ḥajj* “so that they might witness benefits for them and invoke God’s name, on certain days, over the livestock animals that he has provided for them.” Against this background, the affirmation that God has “appointed a rite (*mansak*) for every *ummah*” in Q 22:34.67 underscores that every community has access to religious,

and specifically sacrificial, rituals that give expression to the unadulterated monotheism expected of them. The universality of the formulation (*li-kulli ummatin . . .*) links it to Meccan statements like Q 7:34 (every *ummaḥ* has its term) or 10:47 (every *ummaḥ* has a messenger). On the other hand, in so far as Q 22:34’s affirmation that every *ummaḥ* has access to a sacrificial cult that is expressive of monotheism is embedded in statements to do with the *ḥajj*, it is clear that the verse presupposes the understanding of Q 2:128.143 that Muhammad’s believing followers constitute an *ummaḥ* in their own right.

**From *ummaḥ* as a “people” towards *ummaḥ* as a religious community.** A crucial transitional step in the gradual emergence of *ummaḥ* as a religious rather than ethnic concept must have been the conclusion of the treaty conventionally termed the “Constitution of Medina.” It unites “those who believe and surrender themselves [to God] from among Quraysh and Yathrib, and those who follow them and join them and contend (→ *jāhada*) together with them” into “one community to the exclusion of everyone else” (*ummatun wāḥidatun min dūni l-nās*; Lecker 2004, §§ 1–2).<sup>12</sup> The Medinan *ummaḥ* founded by this document is thus a transtribal collective that was not—at least not as far as the Constitution of Medina allows us to glimpse—undergirded by any explicit claim to kinship or common descent, but rather a collective united by a shared religious attitude, namely, belief and self-surrender to God, in keeping with the “community that surrenders itself” to God (*ummaḥ muslimah laka*) for which Abraham and Ishmael pray in to Q 2:128.<sup>13</sup> The choice of the term *ummaḥ* at the beginning of the Constitution of Medina resonates with Q 7:159, discussed above, and also with the combination of *ummaḥ* and the adjective “one,” *wāḥidah*, in verses like 10:19.

Nonetheless, at the stage of Muhammad’s Medinan activity that is documented by the Constitution, the proto-Islamic *ummaḥ* does not yet seem to have been a monoreligious community: the treaty explicitly includes a number of Jewish clans as forming one “*ummaḥ* together with the believers” (but see Lecker 2004, 139–147, in favour of a variant reading) and enshrines their right to retain a separate religious cult or manner of worship (→ *dīn*) from those who “surrender themselves” to God (§ 28).<sup>14</sup> It was only with the violent expulsion of the Medinan Jews or “scripture-owners,” alluded to in Q 33:26–27 and 59:2–17 (see under → *ahl al-kitāb*), that the Medinan *ummaḥ* became coextensive with the *dīn* of the Qur’anic believers. As analysed in more detail elsewhere (see under → *al-‘ālamūn*), various Medinan passages attribute to this mature Medinan *ummaḥ* a crucial role in God’s plan for humanity at large, consisting in the embodiment of a communal role model of belief and righteousness, in functioning as a sort of light to the nations that will make God’s revelatory guidance available even to those who are not directly addressed by the “Arabic (→ *‘arabī*) Qur’an” disseminated by Muhammad (e.g., Q 12:2, 43:3).

The Qur’an and the Constitution of Medina reflect the halting crystallisation of a concept of the *ummaḥ* as a community conceived in primarily religious terms (meaning,

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *min dūni l-nās* at Q 2:94 and 62:6, and see Ambros 2001, 10.

<sup>13</sup> On the fact that this *ummaḥ muslimah* is at the same time said to belong to Abraham and Ishmael’s offspring (*min dhurriyyatinā*), see below.

<sup>14</sup> For a somewhat different understanding of § 28 of the Constitution of Medina, see Goudarzi 2019, 435–436: “What the text indicates is that these Jews joined hands with the believers to form a larger coalition, not that the Jews were a subset of the believers.” I would modulate this by suggesting that the Constitution of Medina envisages a “unitary *ummaḥ*” (§ 2) that is constituted of Qur’anic believers and Jews. Thus, on my reading, the Jews, while not being subsumed under the Qur’anic believers, are nonetheless part of the overarching *ummaḥ* whose charter the treaty is.

in this context, in terms of their stance vis-à-vis God) rather than in primarily ethnic or genealogical ones. The Qur’anic evidence shows that it was entirely possible for the term *ummah* to be employed in an ethnic sense, but it also establishes that the word had latent connotations of ideological and moral concord, which underwrite its use in Surahs 2 and 3 and in the Constitution of Medina. Perhaps this second usage also owed something to the fact that in Jewish Aramaic the people of Israel—which is after all not merely a community of descent but also a community that has concluded a covenant with God—can be referred to with the Aramaic word *uma* (Sokoloff and Yahalom 1999, 158, 168, 238 = nos 21:1–2, 25:2, and 39:12). At the same time, one should not exaggerate the degree to which the Medinan conception of the *ummah* as a community bound together by a shared religious outlook replaced, rather than complemented, the notion of communal affiliation through kinship. After all, post-Qur’anic Muslims continued to think of their religion as intimately bound up with an ethnically Arabic identity for a significant period of time after Muhammad.<sup>15</sup> And even within the Qur’an, the “*ummah* that surrenders itself to God” for which Abraham and Ishmael pray according to Q 2:128 is explicitly said to be *min dhurriyyatinā*, “from among our offspring,” while Q 22:78 calls Abraham the believers’ forefather when it speaks of *millat abikum ibrahīm*, “the teaching of your father Abraham” (see under → *millah* and also Goudarzi 2019, 432). Rather than viewing the Qur’anic conception of the *ummah* to be that of a religious community to which ethnic ties are entirely immaterial, it may therefore be more adequate to understand the *ummah* as a community whose members have made a commitment to live up to the religious and ritual legacy bequeathed to them by their ancestor Abraham.

It is noteworthy, however, that no such claim to descent from Abraham is found in the Constitution of Medina. Indeed, seeing that it appears to be exclusively the inhabitants of Mecca whom the Qur’an styles as Abraham’s offspring (Q 14:37), it is unlikely that the “helpers” (*anṣār*) from among Yathrib/Medina’s indigenous population, who formed a significant part of the Medinan *ummah* together with the Meccan “emigrants” (*al-muhājirūn*; see Q 9:100.117 and under → *hājara*), were understood to be descendants of Abraham.<sup>16</sup> The Medinan *ummah* therefore seems to have been open to new joiners from outside its original Abrahamite kernel, in so far as the Constitution defines the *ummah* as being composed not just of “those who believe and surrender themselves [to God] from among

15 On Arab identity in early Islam, see generally Webb 2016, though Webb argues that the formation of an Arab ethnic identity was a result rather than a cause of the emergence of Islam. On this issue, see under → *‘arabī*.

16 According to Goudarzi 2019, 480, “the scope of Ishmaelite descent is not entirely clear in the Qur’an. The Prophet may have envisioned as Ishmaelites 1) all Arabians, 2) the residents of Ḥijāz, 3) the population of Mecca (perhaps together with Medina), or 4) only the Qurayš” (quoted with emended numbering). Goudarzi acknowledges that Q 14:37 would seem to favour the third and fourth options, but notes that Mecca may have been “seen less as an enclave and more as a launching pad for the wider dissemination of Ishmaelites.” Still, the Qur’an lacks any explicit reference to non-Meccan descendants of Ishmael; the mention of “your<sup>p</sup> father Abraham” in Q 22:78 is sufficiently explicable as being based on the Abrahamite descent ascribed to the Meccan members of the *ummah*. There is of course the fact that the fifth-century authors Sozomen of Gaza and Theodoret of Cyrus mention Arabs who had come to consider themselves descendants of Abraham via Ishmael (Shahīd 1989, 154–160 and 167–180; Fisher, Wood, et al. 2015, 367–372; Goudarzi 2019, 481, n. 253). But the apparent fact that some tribes in some regions of the late antique Near East had adopted an Ishmaelite self-understanding, by internalising Biblical genealogy, does not amount to positive evidence that such a genealogical self-definition extended across the entire Ḥijāz or the Arabian Peninsula as a whole (which is not, it should be stressed, what Goudarzi is arguing). Overall, the appropriately cautious approach is to take Q 14:37 at face value and to consider the Qur’an to posit Ishmaelite descent only for the inhabitants of Mecca (or for some of them).



Quraysh and Yathrib,” but also of “those who follow them (*man tabi’ahum*) and join them (*fa-laḥiqqa bihim*) and contend together with them.”<sup>17</sup> The same three-tiered community structure is reflected in Q 9:100, speaking of “the emigrants and the helpers and those who follow them in doing good (*alladhīna ttaba’ūhum bi-iḥsānin*).” Q 9:117 only mentions “the Prophet and the emigrants and the helpers who follow him in the hour of difficulty,” yet here too we encounter the concept of “following,” expressed by the verb → *ittaba’a* and signalling the community’s openness to new joiners. Hence, the Medinan *ummah*, though built around an Abrahamite or Ishmaelite nucleus, would seem to have been viewed as in principle extendible to anyone who was prepared to pledge himself or herself to its religious and behavioural values. This model is borne out by the hymnic opening of Surah 62, which praises God for having “sent forth among the scriptureless (*al-ummiyyūn*; → *ummū*) a messenger from among them, to recite his signs to them and purify them and teach them the scripture and wisdom, even if they were previously in manifest error” (Q 62:2), and then goes on to stress that Muhammad’s ministry is aimed at “others among them who have not yet joined them” (Q 62:3: *wa-ākharīna minhum lammā yalḥaqū bihim*). One observes that Q 62:3 employs the same verb for joining the Medinan *ummah* (*laḥiqqa bi-*) that is also found at the beginning of the Constitution of Medina.

To put this dialectic interplay of ethical and religious notions of communal belonging in a wider context, it is relevant to recall that in the ancient world a person’s ritual or cultic allegiances, the gods one worshipped and the way in which one did so, were generally understood to be linked to one’s ethnic identity.<sup>18</sup> Although this link between ethnic and ritual belonging was disrupted by the spread of gentile Christianity, early Christians continued to articulate their identity in ethnically tinged terms for some time (BeDuhn 2015, 253–256; Nongbri 2013, 53–57).<sup>19</sup> Even the Christian concept of the “church” (Greek: *ekklēsia*, Syriac: *’ēdtā*, Christian Palestinian Aramaic: *knīshṭā*), a term already found in the New Testament, mostly with reference to local Christian congregations (e.g., Matt 16:18, 18:17, Acts 5:11, 8:1, or Rom 16:1.4–5.16.23), is not inherently free of ethnic connotations. *Ekklēsia* denotes the popular assembly of a Greek city, while the New Testamental use of *ekklēsia* in particular is widely considered to hark back to the Biblical notion of the “assembly” (*qāhāl*) of the Israelites (TDOT 12:546–561; NIDOTTE 3:888–892), a term that the Septuagint often translates as *ekklēsia* (e.g., Deut 23:2–9, defining who may or may not be admitted to the “assembly of the Lord” = *qāhal YHWH*, *ekklēsia kyriou*). The evolution of the semantics of *ummah* in the Qur’an bears witness to a parallel process of enunciating religious notions of communal belonging within a cultural context in which

17 For a different view, see Goudarzi 2019, 482: “Even if we attribute a ‘universal horizon’ to the Qur’an’s Abrahamic exceptionalism, however, this does not necessarily imply that everyone could be a full member of the Muslim community—with its characteristic cultic, ritual, and legal correlates—regardless of their genealogical background.”

18 On occasion an individual might join a different *ethnos*, but in so doing he or she would be assumed to acquire the concomitant set of ritual customs, as expressed by Ruth’s famous words to her mother-in-law: “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (Ruth 1:14; see Smith 1894, 35–36). This ancient alignment of ethnic and ritual affiliation is manifested, for instance, by the use of the term *ioudaismos* in the second-century BCE book of 2 Maccabees, which does not mean “Judaism” in the modern sense of a religion among others but rather a drive to reinstate Judean laws and customs; *ioudaismos* is loyalty to the ancestral traditions that are concomitant with a Judean ethnicity, as against *hellēnismos*, the adoption of Greek ways and customs (Mason 2007; Nongbri 2013, 46–50).

19 Thus, 1 Pet 2:9–10 describes Christians as a “chosen race (*genos*),” a “holy nation (*ethnos*),” and “God’s people (*laos*).”



the predominant forms of articulating collective identity were still based on kinship and descent, whether factual or fictitious.

### ***ummī* | scriptureless, not hitherto endowed with a scriptural revelation**

Further vocabulary discussed: *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *kitāb* | scripture *talā* tr. | to recite s.th. *asāṭir al-awwālīm* pl. | writs of the ancients, ancient scribblings *ummah* | community *al-tawrah* | the Torah *al-injīl* | the Gospel or the Christian Bible *‘azzara* tr. | to support or help s.o. (namely, a messenger of God) *iṣr* | burden *ḥizb* | faction, party; (gentile or scriptureless) people or nation; troop *khalāq* | share *ummiyyah* | wish

Muslim exegetes generally take the phrase *al-nabiyy al-ummī*, predicated of the Qur’anic Messenger in the Medinan passage Q 7:157–158, to mean “the illiterate prophet” (e.g., Ṭab. 2:153–154 on Q 2:78 and Ṭab. 10:491 on Q 7:157; see Günther 2002 and also Dayeh 2019, 47).<sup>1</sup> This understanding is tied to the post-Qur’anic argument that Muhammad’s illiteracy constitutes one of the miraculous proofs supporting his prophetic standing, an idea that has been connected to Christian statements highlighting the illiteracy of the apostles (Wensinck 1924, 192). Beginning with Nöldeke, modern scholarship has compellingly rejected this traditional reading of the phrase *al-nabiyy al-ummī* (Nöldeke 1860, 10–11; GQ 1:14; Wensinck 1924, 191–192; JPND 190–191). A preferable translation, as we shall see, is “the prophet of those not hitherto endowed with scripture” or “the prophet of the scriptureless.”

***Al-ummiyyūn* in opposition to the “scripture-owners.”** The modern reappraisal of what is meant by the adjective *ummī* crucially hinges on the occurrence of the plural *ummiyyūn* in Q 3:20.75, where it is evidently employed as the contrary of → *ahl al-kitāb*, meaning the “scripture-owners” or the recipients of previous scriptural revelations, and consequently designates those not, or not yet, endowed with a scripture, and in Q 2:78, where the *ummiyyūn* are effectively glossed as those “who do not know the scripture” (*lā ya’lamūna l-kitāba*).<sup>2</sup> Understanding the *ummiyyūn* to be those who are not or not yet in possession of a scripture is also plausible for Q 62:2, according to which God “sent forth among the *ummiyyūn* a messenger from among them.” As regards the crucial statement in Q 7:157–158, the only place in the Qur’an that features the singular *ummī* (twice), nothing about these two verses requires the word *ummī* to have a meaning that differs from that of the plural *ummiyyūn* in Q 3:20.75 and 62:2. This makes a unitary understanding of the word distinctly preferable (thus Nöldeke 1860, 10). When Q 7:157–158 call Muhammad “the *ummī* prophet,” then, this is not a comment on his educational attainment. Rather, the passage

1 On the Medinan date of Q 7:157–158, see below.

2 A proper appreciation of the polemical intent of Q 2:78 (which is further discussed below in the main text) is vital. The verse belongs to a polemical litany of the past misconduct of the Israelites. According to v. 78, some of them are “*ummiyyūn* who do not know the scripture but only wishful thinking; they are engaged in nothing but conjecture” (*ummiyyūna lā ya’lamūna l-kitāba illā amāniyya wa-in hum illā yaẓunnūn*). Some of the Israelites, who are supposed to be guided by Moses’s receipt of the scripture (v. 53), are here polemically assigned to the category opposed to that of the *ahl al-kitāb*, namely, to that of the *ummiyyūn* who lack any real acquaintance with scripture. Properly construed, then, Q 2:78 does not present the *ummiyyūn* as a subset of the Israelites, who belong to the → *ahl al-kitāb*, but rather presupposes the same opposition between the *ahl al-kitāb* and the *ummiyyūn* that can be gleaned from Q 3:20.75.

underscores, in line with Q 62:2–3, that Muhammad’s mission marks the expansion of scriptural prophecy beyond the narrow confines of the *ahl al-kitāb*, the “scripture-owners,” consisting in the Israelites and the Christians (see also Cole 2020, 620).<sup>3</sup>

**Q 29:48 as evidence of Muhammad’s illiteracy?** Against the foregoing argument, someone seeking to uphold the traditional translation of “the *ummī* prophet” as “the illiterate prophet” could adduce Q 29:48, which consequently deserves brief comment. The verse addresses the Qur’anic Messenger and says that prior to receiving “the scripture” (*al-kitāb*; see v. 47), “you<sup>s</sup> did not use to recite any *kitāb* nor write it down with your right hand” (*wa-mā kunta tatlū min qablihi min kitābin wa-lā takhuṭṭuhu bi-yamīnika*). Yet even on the supposition that this statement is indeed meant to assert Muhammad’s inability to read or write, the passage would not settle the question of the meaning of the attribute *ummī* in Q 7:157–158, considering that the word is absent from 29:48. Moreover, it is evident that Q 29:48 does not employ the noun → *kitāb* in the general sense of a piece of writing but rather in the more specific meaning “scripture,” which is undoubtedly what the word signifies in the immediately preceding verses 45–47. Accordingly, the point of Q 29:48 is to insist that prior to the beginning of God’s revelations to him, the Qur’anic Messenger did not have access to scriptural revelations, leaving him unable to recite or transcribe them.

A weighty piece of evidence in favour of such a weaker reading of Q 29:48 is 25:5, where Muhammad’s opponents accuse him of “writing down” or “causing to be written down” the “writs of the ancients” (*asāṭir al-awwālīn*), which were allegedly dictated to him “in the morning and the evening” (see generally the discussion in Günther 2002, 7–9). The dispute that may be glimpsed via Q 25:5 and 29:48, therefore, seems to have been about whether Muhammad’s preaching was based on genuine revelation or merely on some form of readerly access to existing religious writings (whether mediated by external assistance or not). Note, moreover, that the verb *talā*, employed in Q 29:48 and translated as “to recite” above, does not simply mean “to read” but rather tends to refer to the audible declaiming of a religious text or the promulgation of divine revelations (see in more detail under → *qara’a*). Finally, it is entirely plausible to understand Q 29:48 to be implying that while Muhammad did not previously recite any scripture nor write it down, God’s conveyance of “the scripture” to him has now enabled him to do both. That is, just as Muhammad is now patently understood to be engaged in “reciting” (*talā*) a *kitāb*, so he is now also understood to be engaged in transcribing the scriptural revelations granted to him. Thus construed, the verse presumes that in the wake of God’s revelatory address, the Qur’anic Messenger is displaying at least a basic level of literacy. In sum, Q 29:48 is at best immaterial to the question of Muhammad’s illiteracy but could well be adduced in favour of his literacy.

**On the pre-history of the word *ummī*.** Some well-known English translations of the Qur’an that do not adhere to the traditional interpretation of *al-nabiyy al-ummī* as

3 In line with Goudarzi 2019, 483, it cannot be conclusively ruled out that in its Qur’anic use, the *ummiyyūn* are not the scriptureless or non-Israelite portion of humanity at large, but only the hitherto scriptureless descendants of Abraham via Ishmael. However, it seems likely to me that even after having been co-opted into Qur’anic discourse, the Jewish-derived term *al-ummiyyūn* (see below) would have continued to designate all the nations of the world (i.e., Greek *ta ethnē*) that had not previously been granted scriptural revelations rather than just the Ishmaelite strand of Abraham’s progeny. See also the further remarks on the question of the universality or non-universality of Muhammad’s ministry under → *al-ālamūn* as well as the discussion of the general openness of the Medinan *ummah* to new joiners under → *ummah*.

“the illiterate prophet” (sometimes varied to “unlettered”; e.g., Asad 1980) understand *al-ummiyyūn* to signify the “common people” or “common folk” (thus Bell 1937, on Q 2:73 = 2:78, as well as Arberry 1955 and Droge 2013, on Q 2:78), in the wake of which *al-nabiyy al-ummī* becomes “the prophet of the common folk/people” (e.g., Arberry 1955 and Droge 2013) or “the native prophet” (Bell 1937).<sup>4</sup> This approach is ultimately anchored in a speculative link to the rabbinic phrase *‘am ha-areṣ*, “the (uneducated) folk of the land” (see Bell 1937, 1:11, n. 3), a connection that goes back to Friedrich Schwally (*GQ* 1:14).<sup>5</sup> But this is hardly more than a random guess; it was already rejected by Horovitz (*JPND* 190) and has little to recommend it beyond residual attachment to the traditional idea, unsupported by the Qur’an, that *ummī* must have something to do with educational attainment after all.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the semantic role that the word *ummī* plays in the Qur’an, as elucidated above, is best captured by periphrastic renderings such as “not endowed with a scripture,” “scriptureless,” or “unscriptured” (thus Zirker 2018). Still, this leaves open the very real question of how the word *ummī* is to be linguistically derived and how it might have come to acquire its Qur’anic valence as the opposite of the scripture-owners. It is not unreasonable to assume that *ummī* is to be connected with → *ummah*, “community” (rather than with *umm*, “mother”), but how precisely is this to be squared with the meaning of “scriptureless” that *ummī* factually has in the Qur’an? The only way to shed light on this further question is indeed by means of hypothetical etymological reconstruction, though not via *‘am ha-areṣ*.

The crucial insight in this regard is due to Horovitz (*JPND* 190–191; *KU* 51–53), building on Wensinck (Wensinck 1924, 191; Wensinck 1932, 6). Horovitz realised that the Qur’anic opposition between the *ahl al-kitāb* and the *ummiyyūn* is reminiscent of, and quite likely descended from, the Biblical contrast between the people of Israel and “every people on the face of the earth” (thus Exod 33:16). The same distinction is also reflected in the New Testament—for instance, when Matt 10:5–6 has Jesus instruct his twelve disciples to “go nowhere among the gentiles (*eis hodon ethnōn*, Peshitta: *b-ūrḥā d-ḥanpē*)” and to “enter no town of the Samaritans,” but rather to go “to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”; or when Rom 2:14 speaks of “gentiles, who do not possess the [Mosaic] law” (*ethnē ta mē nomon echonta*, Peshitta: *‘ammē d-nāmūsā layt lhon*).<sup>7</sup> Horovitz notes in particular that in rabbinic parlance the gentiles are referred to as the *ummot ha-‘olam*, “the nations/peoples of the world” (*JPND* 190–191; *KU* 52–53; e.g., *b. B. Bat.* 10b). The Hebrew expression *ummot ha-‘olam* must have emerged sufficiently early in order to have its literal reflection in the Greek formulation *ta ethnē tou kosmou* in Luke 12:30 (cf. *KU* 52). Given the evident affinity of the Qur’anic term *ummiyyūn* with *ummot ha-‘olam* (on which see also Rubin 1995, 24), one may conjecture that Arabic-speaking Jews in the Qur’anic milieu referred to a non-Jew or a gentile—i.e., to a member of the *ummot ha-‘olam*—by using the cognate word *ummī*.<sup>8</sup> In doing so, Arabophone Jews would have employed an adjective derived

4 Cf. Jones 2007: “the prophet of his community,” clearly taking *ummī* to derive from *ummah*.

5 The connection is not found in Nöldeke 1860, 10–11, n. 3, so was added by Schwally. On *‘am ha-areṣ* in relation to the Qur’anic term *ummī*, see further Dayeh 2019, 49.

6 The expression *‘am ha-areṣ* certainly does not provide a convincing etymology, given the presence of the letter *‘ayin* in the Hebrew.

7 See also Luke 2:32, from the prayer of Simeon upon seeing Jesus, which calls God’s salvation as manifest in Christ “a light for revelation to the gentiles (*ethnōn*)” and a “glory to your [= God’s] people Israel.”

8 Syriac generally expresses “gentile” or *ethnikos* with the words *ḥanpā* (de Blois 2002, 21–22 and *SL* 473; see also under → *ḥanīf*) and *‘ammāyā* (*SL* 1112). It is not impossible to imagine that Arabophone Christians converted

from the Arabic noun → *ummah*, “community,” which, as shown by a number of Meccan passages (e.g., Q 10:47, 16:36), could be used in early seventh-century Arabic in a sense corresponding to Greek *ethnos* (“people, nation”). Hence, the adjective *ummī* would make for an eminently plausible Arabic equivalent of Greek *ethnikos* in the sense of “gentile, non-Jewish” (Wensinck 1924, 191; Wensinck 1932, 6; see, e.g., Matt 5:47 and 6:7). Within rabbinic discourse, this hypothetical pre-Qur’anic meaning of *ummī* would have corresponded to Hebrew *goy*, “gentile” (*DTTM* 220; see Rosen-Zvi 2016).

**Ummī as a Medinan term.** The hypothesis that the Qur’anic term *ummī* has a Jewish origin accords well with the fact that Q 3:75 employs *al-ummiyyūn* in an utterance attributed to the *ahl al-kitāb*. It is also supported by the observation that Qur’anic recourse to *ummī* or *ummiyyūn* is confined to the Medinan period. This is clear for Surahs 2, 3, and 62, which are standardly accepted as Medinan compositions. The only other Qur’anic occurrences of the word *ummī* are in Q 7:157–158; though Surah 7 as a whole is Meccan, the couplet under consideration has been convincingly identified as a Medinan insertion or part of one (*GQ* 1:159–160; *JPND* 222–223; Bijlefeld 1969, 15; O’Connor 2022; see also Pohlmann in Amir-Moezzi and Dye 2019, 2:318–320). This is most obviously confirmed by the fact that v. 157 in particular exhibits a striking concentration of diction that is otherwise limited to Medinan texts, including not only the word *ummī* but also the names → *al-tawrāh* (“the Torah”) and → *al-injīl* (“the Gospel”), the verb *‘azzara* (“to support, to help,” namely, one of God’s messengers; see Q 5:12 and 48:9 as well as *FVQ* 213–214), and the noun *iṣr* (“burden”; see Q 2:286 and 3:81).<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the distinctly Medinan character of the term *al-ummiyyūn* is thrown into relief by the Meccan verse Q 13:36. It may be read as opposing “those to whom we gave the scripture” (*alladhīna ātaynāhumu l-kitāba*) to *al-aḥzāb*, meaning peoples or nations who have not received scriptural revelation (see in more detail under → *ḥizb*). Thus, prior to the Medinan period the Ethiopic-derived term *al-aḥzāb* figures in approximately the sense that later on comes to be expressed by the Jewish-derived term *al-ummiyyūn*. Given that it was in the Medinan period that the Qur’anic community came to have close interactions with a local Jewish community (see under → *al-yahūd*), the fact that *ummī* is so neatly datable to the Medinan period fits the conjecture that the word was originally a Jewish term, just like the noun → *khalāq*, referring to a “share” in the afterlife.<sup>10</sup>

**Why Qur’anic *ummī* does not mean “gentile.”** A translator wanting to convey the original Jewish resonance of the word *ummī* might plump for “gentile” rather than

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by missionaries from the Syriac sphere could have rendered either of these words with Arabic *ummī*, but *ummot ha-‘alam* is obviously a closer fit. A further consideration in favour of positing that *ummī* has a specifically Jewish background is that in the Qur’an the word comes into view only in the Medinan period, which generally seems to have been marked by a close confrontation between the Qur’anic believers and a local Jewish community.

<sup>9</sup> Apart from such lexical considerations, O’Connor 2022 also draws attention to the contrast between the prophetological assumptions of Q 7:157–158, on the one hand, and the rest of Sura 7, on the other. It remains to be ascertained whether the insertion at hand begins only at v. 157 or earlier, perhaps including vv. 155–156. It is equally unclear, for the time being, how far the addition extends at the other end. There are reasons to suspect that the section on the “tribes” of Israel in Q 7:160–168 is Medinan (→ *al-asbāt*) and the same goes for 7:171–174 (Hartwig 2008, 192–193). By contrast, the intervening passages Q 7:159 and 7:169–170 could be part of Surah 7’s original Meccan layer (see also Pohlmann in Amir-Moezzi and Dye 2019, 2:318, noting that Q 7:159 and 7:160 ff. are unlikely to be part of the same textual stratum due to their different assessments of the Israelites). But in the absence of a detailed analysis of the surah’s redactional anatomy, all of this remains conjectural.

<sup>10</sup> According to Horovitz, it was the expression *ummot ha-‘alam* that Muhammad learnt from the Medinan Jews, upon which he coined the word *ummī* “in accordance with this term” (*JPND* 191). But since the Medinan Jews would presumably have spoken Arabic in their daily life, it seems far more probable that the Arabic word originated with them.

“scriptureless.” For example, Rudi Paret renders *ummī* as *heidnisch* or *Heide*, here meaning “gentile” rather than “pagan” (Paret 2001), and Uri Rubin’s translation into modern Hebrew has *ha-nabi’ ish ummot ha-‘olam* (“the prophet from the nations of the world”) for *al-nabiyy al-ummī* at Q 7:157–158 (Rubin 2016).<sup>11</sup> However, at least when used in a Biblical context, the meaning of “gentile” is very much “non-Jewish.” As a result, translating *ummī* as “gentile” is apt to engender misapprehension: mainstream Christianity is predominantly a gentile phenomenon and has generally been acknowledged to be such both by Christians and non-Christians, however much Christians may also have laid claim to constitute the “true Israel”; yet the Qur’an unmistakably subsumes Christians (→ *al-naṣārā*) under the rubric of “scripture-owners” rather than *ummiyyūn*. Thus, to call Muhammad *al-nabiyy al-ummī* is not to say that he is God’s prophet to the non-Jews but rather God’s prophet to those who are not Jews or Christians. Moreover, at Q 2:78 it would not be apt to render *ummiyyūn* as “gentiles”: the verse condemns the Israelites by saying that some of them are *ummiyyūn* “who do not know the scripture” (*lā ya‘lamūna l-kitāba*). This must mean that some Israelites know so little of their own scripture that they are effectively no better than the scriptureless. The thrust of the accusation is similar to Q 2:101, where some of “those who were given the scripture” are accused of casting God’s scripture “behind their backs.” It seems clear, therefore, that *ummiyyūn* does not primarily have the ethnic sense of “non-Israelite” at Q 2:78, even though this meaning could punningly be in play as well. A functional though free translation of Q 2:78, therefore, might run: “And some among them are [effectively] people without scripture, knowing nothing of it but wishful thinking; they are only engaged in conjecture” (*wa-minhum ummiyyūna lā ya‘lamūna l-kitāba illā amāniyya wa-in hum illā yazunnūn*).<sup>12</sup> Parenthetically, the combination of *ummiyyūn* and *amānin* (the plural of *umniyyah*, “wish”) may be a case of quasi-alliterative wordplay.<sup>13</sup> As for Q 7:157–158, rendering *al-nabiyy al-ummī* as “the prophet of the unscriptured” or “the prophet sent to those who have not hitherto received scriptural revelations” coheres well with the stress that Q 29:48 places on Muhammad’s erstwhile lack of access to a *kitāb* (see above).

It follows that in adopting the Jewish term *ummī*, the Qur’an is effecting a significant semantic shift, by converting a word that had previously functioned as the opposite of “Israelite” to the opposite of the “scripture-owners” (itself most likely a category coined by the Qur’an; see under → *ahl al-kitāb*). As a result, the emphasis of the Qur’anic use of *ummī* is on access to scripture rather than on ethnicity: the Qur’an is not just adopting the lexeme *ummī* but also transforming its meaning from “gentile” or “non-Israelite” to “not hitherto endowed with a scripture.” It stands to reason that translators ought to respect this shift by rendering Qur’anic *ummī* as “scriptureless” or the like rather than “gentile.” A defensible exception to this policy is Q 3:75, though, where the plural *al-ummiyyūn* occurs in an utterance attributed to the scripture-owners: “There is no recourse against us among

11 On translations that render *ummī* as “gentile,” see also Dayeh 2019, 48–50. Interestingly, Abdel Haleem 2010, 105, n. a (on Q 7:157), allows that *ummī* may mean either “unlettered” or “gentile,” making him one of the few English translators reflecting (probably indirectly) Horovitz’s point.

12 Horovitz allows that the meaning of *ummiyyūn* at Q 2:78 may be informed by ‘*am ha-areṣ*’ after all (*JPND* 191; *KU* 53), but this strikes me as uncertain.

13 That revelation does not conform to humans’ wishful thinking is a theme present in other Medinan passages as well (Q 2:111, 4:123, 22:52, 57:14).



the *ummiyyūn*” (*laysa ‘alaynā fī l-ummiyyīna sabīlun*). It seems quite likely that the term’s original sense of “the gentiles” is preponderant here.

### ***imām* | model, exemplar, exemplary custom**

→ *ummah*

***āmana* intr. *bi-* | to believe in s.th.**

***āmana* intr. | to be a believer**

***āmana* tr. | to render s.o. secure**

***alladhīna āmanū, al-mu’minūn* pl. | the believers**

Further vocabulary discussed: *kafara* intr. *bi-* | to repudiate s.o. or s.th. *kafara* intr. | to be a repudiator *šaddaqa* intr. *bi-* | to hold s.th. true, to believe in s.th. *qalb* | heart *iṭma’anna* intr. (*bi-*) | to be or come to be secure (in), to be or come to be at peace (in) *tawakkala* intr. *‘alā* | to rely upon s.o., to entrust o.s. to s.o. *ittaqa* intr. | to be God-fearing *‘amila l-šāliḥāt/šāliḥan* | to do righteous deeds *fasaqa* intr. (*‘an*) | to sin or transgress (against), to act immorally *aslama* intr. (*li-*) | to surrender o.s. or dedicate o.s. (to s.o., namely, God)

**Overview of Qur’anic usage.** Almost all occurrences of the verb *āmana* in the Qur’an are satisfactorily accounted for by the conventional assumption that its prevalent meaning is “to believe,” like that of its Semitic cognates Hebrew *he’ēmūn*, Aramaic *haymen*, and Ethiopic *amna*, corresponding to Greek *pisteuein* (JPND 191; KU 55–56; FVQ 70–71; Pautz 1898, 153, n. 2).<sup>1</sup> Thus, Qur’anic *āmana* frequently occurs with a prepositional phrase introduced by *bi-*, which often names God and “the final day” (e.g., Q 2:8.62.126.177.228.232.264, 3:114, 4:38–39.59, 5:69, 9:18.19 etc.; see Donner 2010, 58–59).<sup>2</sup> In other verses, the prepositional objects of *āmana* consist in divine revelations, “signs,” and messengers, specified either in general terms (e.g., Q 2:4.41.85.91.285, 3:53.72.81.84.119.179.199, 4:47.60.152, 6:54.118 etc.) or by means of a list of individual prophetic figures, such as at Q 2:136: “Say, ‘We believe in God and what was sent down to us and what was sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the descendants of Jacob (→ *al-ashbāt*), and what was given to Moses and Jesus and what was given to the prophets from their Lord; we do not make differences between any of them, and we surrender ourselves to him [= God]” (cf. Q 3:84 and see generally Donner 2010, 59–60). A cluster of occurrences of *āmana* specifically conjoin God and “his Messenger,” “the Messenger,” or “the Prophet” (Q 4:136, 5:81, 7:158, 24:47.62, 48:9.13, 49:15, 57:7–8, 58:4, 61:11, 64:8; → *rasūl*, → *nabiyy*). Exceptionally, the prepositional objects of *āmana* can also include the angels (Q 2:177.285). The antonym of *āmana* is → *kafara* (*bi-*), “to be a repudiator, to repudiate s.o. or s.th.” (cf. the “God and his Messenger” verses just listed with Q 9:80.84, both of which speak of “repudiating God and his Messenger”; see

1 On the Hebrew and Greek terms, see TDOT 1:292–323, TDNT 6:174–228, and Lindsay 1993. On *haymen*, see SL 341 and DJBA 379–380.

2 God can also figure as an object of belief by himself, e.g., in Q 3:110.193, 4:175, or 7:121, while other verses, such as 6:92.113.150 and 16:22.60, mention only the “final abode” without explicitly including God.



also the juxtaposition of *āmana* and *kafara* in Q 11:17 or 12:37). There is also a widespread absolute usage without any prepositional object: “those who *āmanū*” or similarly (e.g., Q 2:9.14.25.26), which is an ellipsis.<sup>3</sup> The customary equation *āmana* = “to believe” is further supported by the fact that the verb appears with the preposition *li-* followed by a person, clearly in the sense of “to believe somebody,” as opposed to “in something” (see Q 2:55, 3:73.183, 7:134, 10:83, 17:90, 29:26).

**Cognitive, affective, and practical dimensions of the Qur’anic concept of belief.** It has been noted that in early Qur’anic usage, → *ṣaddaqa bi-*, “to hold true,” is employed as an effective synonym of *āmana*, “to believe” (e.g., in Q 70:26), although the verb *āmana* is early too (e.g., Q 83:29.34, 84:20). Unlike *āmana*, this usage of *ṣaddaqa bi-* fades in later proclamations, even if isolated instances of it persist as late as Q 66:12. In any case, the semantic proximity of *āmana* and *ṣaddaqa* in the early surahs confirms that the Qur’anic understanding of belief involves cognitive assent to a certain number of doctrinal propositions (Ringgren 1951, 11–12). As we just saw, the objects of belief involved in these propositions include God (involving presumably his existence and omnipotence and the gratitude due to him), God’s Messenger (meaning belief in Muhammad’s prophetic status and the truth of the Qur’anic revelations), and the final day (meaning belief in the reality of the resurrection and of the eschatological judgement).

Yet the Qur’anic notion of belief is not confined to such a cognitive dimension (Ringgren 1951, 15). For instance, Q 13:28 associates belief with a state of composure of the heart (→ *qalb*), by referring to “those who believe and whose hearts are at peace in God’s reminding exhortation” (*alladhīna āmanū wa-taṭma’innu qulūbuhum bi-dhikri llāhi*; see also Q 16:106 and 2:260 as well as Grimme 1895, 118–119, and Bravmann 1972, 27–28). Similarly, Q 49:14 makes a distinction between belief as a quality that enters people’s hearts, on the one hand, and mere outward expressions of self-surrender (verb: *aslama*) to God, on the other (see in more detail under → *aslama*). Belief is also paired with trust in or exclusive reliance upon God (verb: *tawakkala*; e.g., Q 5:23, 10:84, 16:99, 42:36, or 67:29; see Ringgren 1951, 16–17) and with fear of God (→ *ittaqa*; see Q 2:103, 5:65.93, 7:96, 10:63, 12:57, 27:53, 41:18, 47:36). Indeed, in Q 2:212 and also 38:28, “those who believe” and “those who fear God” (*alladhīna ttaqaw, al-muttaqūn*) seem to be employed as downright synonyms. It would seem that recognition of an omnipotent divine judge who will inescapably hold humans to account is expected to have a deep emotional resonance within the believer (see generally Bauer 2017).

In this regard, it is illuminating to consider Wilferd Madelung’s attempt to explicate the concept of belief held by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who he says identified the “gist of belief” with fear of God, which in turn “must so overwhelm humans as to render them incapable of disobeying God’s commandments” (Madelung 1965, 12). With certain qualifications, this is quite aptly carried over to the Qur’an. The Qur’an certainly presumes that those who believe are also those who “do righteous deeds,” as shown by the extremely frequent concatenation of *āmana* with → *‘amila l-ṣāliḥāt/ṣāliḥan* (e.g., Q 2:25.62.82.277, 19:60.96; see in more detail under → *ṣāliḥ*). To be sure, the Qur’an does not suggest that believers are entirely shielded from all moral lapses, and thus considers them to remain in need of repentance and divine forgiveness (→ *tāba*, → *al-rahmān*). Yet the close link between

<sup>3</sup> For other instances of elliptical usage, see → *kafara*, “to repudiate” (arguably used in lieu of *kafara bi-*) and → *aslama*, “to surrender oneself” (arguably used in lieu of *aslama li-*).

belief and moral righteousness that is implied by the Qur'an suggests that genuine belief will naturally engender a commitment to moral rectitude, and will therefore manifest itself in moral action and an inhibition to sin, fuelled by eschatological hope and fear. That belief and righteous deeds are intimately connected—whether at the conceptual level or simply in so far as they are psychologically intertwined and equally demanded by the divine judge—also accords with the fact that the verbs → *kafara*, “to repudiate,” and *fasaqa*, “to sin, to act immorally” are closely associated as well, thus replicating the nexus between belief and righteousness *ex negativo* (ERCQ 157–162, inter alia citing Q 2:99: only the sinners, *al-fāsiqūn*, will repudiate the “clear signs” sent down to Muhammad). Two further behavioural concomitants of genuine belief are assiduous prayer and charitable giving (e.g., Q 2:3.153.227, 5:55, 9:71, 14:31; see also under → *ṣadaqah*, → *ṣallā*, and → *zakāh*).

**Semantic development of Arabic *āmana*.** The consonantal root of the verb *āmana*, 'm-n, connotes security (see in detail Ringgren 1951), and the Qur'an still shows traces of a native Arabic usage of the fourth-form verb *āmana* in the sense “to render secure,” namely, in the early Meccan verse Q 106:4 (God *āmanahum min khauf*, “granted them security from fear”) and in the Medinan verse Q 59:23 (where God is described as *al-mu'min*, “the one who grants security”). The same sense of *āmana* is also attested in pre-Islamic poetry (DSAAP, al-Nābighah, no. 5:38, and Zuhayr, no. 3:13, both referenced in Bravmann 1972, 29; see also Ringgren 1951, 8–9 and 16). By contrast, the predominant meaning of *āmana* in the Qur'an, “to believe,” is likely rooted in the semantic impact of its Aramaic cognate *haymen*. This is not exclusive to the Qur'an: the Christian poet 'Adī ibn Zayd describes himself as “somebody whose breast is filled with belief (*mu'min al-ṣadr*), hoping to be set free on a day on which a servant will not be treated ungratefully for what he has stored up (*yawma lā yukfaru 'abdun mā ddakhkhar*)” (al-Mu'aybid 1965, no. 8:17; see AHW 119). It would appear that at some time before the Qur'an, the Arabic verb *āmana* came to be harnessed to express the Judaeo-Christian notion of belief as an existential commitment to, and trust in, God and an espousal of essential religious truths (cf. the discussion of Hebrew *he'ēmîn* in TDOT 1:298–309).

By contrast, Bravmann maintains that the Qur'anic usage of *āmana* is fully explicable as an inner-Arabic development, via a posited original meaning of *āmana* = “to be or feel secure from danger” (Bravmann 1972, 26–31). We saw above that the Qur'an does sometimes highlight that tranquillity of the heart is an integral component of belief (Q 2:260, 13:28, 16:106, all of which contain both the verb *āmana* and the verb *itma'anna*, “to be or come to be secure” or “to be or come to be at peace,” with the human heart as the latter's grammatical subject; see Bravmann 1972, 27–28). Nonetheless, there is little positive support for Bravmann's theory, for unlike the causative meaning *āmana* = “to render secure,” the Qur'an never uses *āmana* to convey a generic, non-religious sense of feeling secure that approximates the meaning of the first-form verb *amina* (e.g., Q 7:97–99; see also the critique in Ringgren 1951, 8–9). A more likely scenario is therefore the semantic realignment of an existing Arabic word under the influence of non-Arabic terminology, a phenomenon that linguists call a “loanshift” (see Cole 2019, 408, and Cole 2020, 616).<sup>4</sup> This scenario is supported by the fact that the same development is also observable in the case of other key Qur'anic terms, such as → *kafara*, “to repudiate,” or → *ṣallā*, “to pray.”

4 Note, however, Jepsen's construal of Hebrew *he'ēmîn* as having the basic meaning of “to become steadfast (stable)” in TDOT 1:309, which resembles Bravmann's understanding of the Arabic verb.

“**The believers**” as a collective designation. The Qur’an frequently employs the verb *āmana* as part of the set expressions *alladhīna āmanū*, literally “those who believe” or perhaps “those who have espoused belief” (e.g., Q 2:9.14.25.26), and *al-mu’minūn*, the corresponding active participle plural (e.g., Q 2:285, 3:28). The two phrases, which are effectively synonymous (Reuschel 1996, 143–156), are attested from an early point in the Qur’an’s emergence (e.g., Q 83:29.34 and 51:55; see Ringgren 1951, 9). They form the standard Qur’anic designation for the community of Muhammad’s followers, as illustrated by Q 2:62, 5:69, and 22:17 (Ringgren 1951, 1; Donner 2010, 57–58; Dakake 2019, 359–360), even if Muhammad’s adherents are on occasion also referred to as “those who surrender themselves” or “dedicate themselves” (*al-muslimūn*; see Q 22:78 and cf. 2:128; → *aslama*), which came to impose itself as the paramount community name in the post-Qur’anic period. In many contexts, it would accordingly be appropriate to capitalise “the Believers” in order to signal that the expression functions as a collective name. Nonetheless, the term’s general descriptive content remains present throughout, which can create ambiguity. Take, for instance, Q 2:62, according to which “those who believe (*alladhīna āmanū*), and the Jews, the Christians, and the → *ṣābi’ūn*—whoever believes in God and the final day (*man āmana bi-llāhi wa-l-yawmi l-ākhirī*) and does righteous deeds, they will have their wage with their Lord and no fear will be upon them and they will not know grief.” Like Q 5:69 and 22:17, the verse envisages “the believers,” or rather “the Believers,” as a concrete collective body distinct from other religious communities, like Jews and Christians. But the verse then goes on to concede that some of the latter might also qualify as believers. Thus, we have a community whose name is “the Believers,” and we have members of other communities who also count as “believers,” even though they do not belong to “the Believers.” A similar ambiguity is seen with the collective expression “the repudiators” (*alladhīna kafarū*), which usually designates the Meccan pagans but which can on occasion be used in a more abstract fashion (e.g., Q 98:1.6, referring to repudiating scripturalists and repudiating associators).

In cases like Q 2:62, recourse to capitalisation undoubtedly adds clarity, but its wholesale application would require a translator to make numerous interpretive choices that are perhaps best addressed at the level of explicit exegesis. For instance, Q 2:8–9 say: “And there are some people who say, ‘We believe in God and in the final day,’ but they are not believers. // They try to deceive God and the believers (*alladhīna āmanū*), yet only manage to deceive themselves; but they are not aware.” Q 2:8 criticises persons who outwardly affiliate themselves with the community of “the Believers,” but lack the crucial attribute of sincere belief, as a result of which they are not really “believers.” This is most likely the same Believer-believer ambiguity seen in Q 2:62, even if it would not be impossible to understand the second half of Q 2:8 to say that the persons in question are not really “Believers,” i.e., should not be treated as proper members of the Qur’anic community *qua* concrete social body. But the question whether to capitalise or lowercase “believers” is even more difficult to decide for the following verse, Q 2:9: it might be read as saying either that the fake Believers just condemned are trying to deceive others who are genuine believers, or that they are seeking to deceive the other members of the Qur’anic community of “the Believers.” The difference between these two alternative construals is admittedly very minor, since all members of the Believers who are not frauds will necessarily be genuine believers; but the problem remains that it is difficult and perhaps impossible to decide between the two readings, whereas use of capitalisation for collective terms such as “the Believers” or “the Associators” would consistently force a translator’s hand. In order to avoid the prob-

lem from becoming a perennial quandary, the present work therefore opts for a consistent “down” style in this regard.

*Alladhīna āmanū* / *al-mu’minūn* corresponds to Syriac *mhaymnē* (singular: *mhaymnā*) and Greek *hoi pistoi* (singular: *pistos*) = “the believers, the faithful.” The Greek and Syriac expressions function as designations for the Christian community in a manner that is very similar to Qur’anic references to “the believers” (e.g., Vööbus 1979, 9 and 27; see also Cole 2019, 418). The Syriac phrase *aylēn da-mhaymnīn*, “those who believe,” used at 1 Thess 2:13, corresponds exactly to *alladhīna āmanū*, and the title *rēsh da-mhaymnē*, “head of the believers,” was used for the office of the secular leader of East Syrian Christians (Payne 2015, 101–102). Especially against the background of the paucity of references to belief in late antique rabbinic Judaism, the Qur’an’s diction thus has a tangible affinity with Christian usage in this respect. Of course, Christian references to “the believers” primarily intend faith in Christ (e.g., Eph 1:1), whereas the phrase as repurposed in the Qur’an hinges on belief in God and the last judgement, in divine revelations and messengers in general, and in the Qur’anic Messenger in particular.

### ***amanah* | security, a sense of security and calm**

→ *sakīnah*, → *nazzala*

### ***amānah* | trust, entrusted good**

→ *wāthaqa*

### ***al-injīl* | the Gospel (corresponding either to the New Testament or to the Christian Bible in its entirety)**

Further vocabulary discussed: *al-tawrāh* | the Torah *nazzala*, *anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down *hudā* | guidance *nūr* | light *maw’izah* | admonition *muṣaddiq* | confirming *ṣaddaqa* tr. | to fulfil s.th., to make s.th. come true; to confirm or corroborate s.th. or s.o. *ḥakama* intr. *bi-* | to judge according to s.th. *aqāma* tr. | to perform or observe s.th. *mathal* | similitude *kitāb* | scripture *ḥikmah* | wisdom *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture

**Etymology and overview of Qur’anic usage.** The word *injīl* stems from Greek *euangelion*, probably not through Syriac but via Ethiopic *wangel*, which is bisyllabic like the Arabic term (*NB* 47; *KU* 71; *CQ* 24; *FVQ* 71–72). The name *injīl* is attested in an Arabic poem on the creation of the world attributed to the pre-Islamic Christian poet ‘Adī ibn Zayd of al-Ḥīrah (al-Mu’aybid 1965, no. 103:17). Doubts have been raised about the particular verse in question on account of the unlikelihood that a Mesopotamian Christian would have used an Ethiopic loanword for his holy scripture (*KU* 71 and Toral-Niehoff 2008, 248–249). Nonetheless, at least one scholar deems it possible that the word entered Arabic at an early date and was then transmitted from the Arabian Peninsula to al-Ḥīrah (Dmitriev 2010, 376). For Qur’anic *injīl* there is also the variant reading *anjīl*, ascribed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, which is even more similar to Ethiopic *wangel* (*MQ* 1:462–463;

*MQQ* 2:6).<sup>1</sup> This vocalisation was criticised for not conforming to Arabic morphology, suggesting that *anjil* is an earlier (since less Arabised) form of the word. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that the word was pronounced *anjil* by Muhammad and his followers, who may already have used *injil*.

Like the Torah (→ *al-tawrah*), the *injil* is exclusively mentioned in Medinan verses; the two are standardly paired (Q 3:3.48.65, 5:66.68.110, 7:157, and 9:111; see also 48:29).<sup>2</sup> The Qur'an depicts the *injil* as a scripture that God "gave" to Jesus (Q 5:46, 57:27), just as Moses or David, among others, were also "given" revelatory texts (e.g., Q 2:53.87, 4:163, 17:55). The *injil*'s divine origin is furthermore expressed by statements to the effect that God "taught" it to Jesus (Q 3:48, 5:110) or that he "sent down" the *injil* and the Torah (Q 3:3.65), just as the Qur'anic revelations were "sent down" (→ *nazzala*). According to Q 5:46, the *injil* contains "guidance" (*hudā*) and "light" (*nūr*) as well as "admonition" (*maw'izah*) for the God-fearing" (see Schmid 2021, 340–341). Similar language is applied both to the Torah, which is said to provide guidance and light (Q 5:44, 6:91), and to the revelations received by Muhammad (see Q 4:174, 5:15, 7:157, 42:52, 64:8 on light, and 3:138, 10:57, 11:120, and 24:34 on admonition), bearing out the fundamental affinity that the Qur'an discerns between all three texts (see Q 3:3 as well as 9:111, briefly discussed below). By way of a further characterisation of the *injil*, the phrase "confirming" (*muṣaddiq*; → *ṣaddaqa*) what precedes me/him/it of the Torah" (*muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayya/yadayhi mina l-tawrāti*), which thrice figures as an epithet of Jesus (Q 3:50, 5:46, 61:6), is once applied to the *injil* in particular (Q 5:46). This suggests that the *injil* enshrines Jesus's message of far-reaching endorsement of the Torah. One may suppose that the Qur'anic *injil* is additionally understood to back Jesus's abolition of some of the prohibitions that God had previously imposed on the Israelites (Q 3:50). The content of the *injil* would thus seem to combine a reaffirmation of the Torah's teachings with certain divinely authorised adjustments.<sup>3</sup> The Qur'anic revelations and Muhammad, too, are said to confirm "what precedes it" (e.g., Q 6:92) or "what is with" the Israelites (e.g., Q 2:41.89.91.101; see under → *ṣaddaqa*), and some passages make it clear that the scripture "confirmed" by the Qur'an is the scripture vouchsafed to Moses (Q 6:91–92, 46:12.30). Thus, the *injil* appears to relate to the Torah in the same way in which the Qur'an relates to the Torah: both the Qur'an and the *injil* are Torah-confirming scriptures.<sup>4</sup>

**The contents of the *injil*.** In light of its etymology, it is customary to translate *al-injil* as "the Gospel." Yet it has to be stressed that the Qur'an does not exhibit any palpable sense that the *injil* narrates the life of Jesus and imparts the "good news" of his ministry: Jesus receives the *injil* rather than constituting its main subject matter. Moreover, the Qur'an speaks of one *injil* rather than four, in light of which van Reeth has argued that the Qur'anic *injil* is to be identified with the Diatessaron, an early Christian harmonisation of the canonical gospels (van Reeth 2004). One verse, Q 5:47, calls upon the "owners of the *injil*"—i.e., the Christians—to "adjudicate according to what God has sent down therein"

1 I am grateful to Saqib Hussain for bringing this to my attention.

2 This statement presupposes that Q 7:157 is a Medinan insertion; see also under → *ummī*.

3 My understanding of the *injil*'s continuity with the Torah specifically in a legal respect has benefited from a paper entitled "Between Triumphalism and Pluralism: The Qur'an's Legal Philosophy" that Mohsen Goudarzi gave at an online workshop entitled "Late Antique Legal Instruction and the Qur'an" on 30 April 2021.

4 See also the overlap between Q 5:46 and 5:48, which characterise the *injil* and the scripture sent down to Muhammad as "confirming what precedes it of the Torah" or "confirming what precedes it of the scripture," respectively.



(*wa-l-yahkum ahlu l-injili bi-mā anzala llāhu fihī*). This implies that the *injil* can serve as a basis for concrete rulings like the Torah (Q 5:43–45) and the Qur’an (Q 5:48–50). It must accordingly have some legislative content. The same impression emerges from Q 5:66.68, calling the “scripture-owners” to “perform” or “observe” (verb: *aqāma*) “the Torah and the *injil* and what was sent down to them from their Lord.”<sup>5</sup> Incidentally, *aqāma* in the sense of “to perform” or “to observe” normally takes as its object prayer (*al-ṣalāh*; e.g., Q 5:12.55, 20:14, 27:3, 29:45, 42:38), which likely reflects Syriac phraseology (see under → *ṣallā*), though Q 42:13 has *aqāma l-dīn*, “to observe religious worship (→ *dīm*<sup>2</sup>).” It seems quite likely that the phrase “to observe the Torah and the *injil*” in Q 5:66.68 is derived from this far more widespread Qur’anic use.<sup>6</sup>

More detailed indications of the content of the *injil* are confined to three passages. First, Q 7:157, probably a Medinan insertion (→ *ummī*), claims that both the Torah and the *injil* prophesy the future appearance of a “prophet of the scriptureless,” namely, Muhammad.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, Q 9:111 maintains that the Torah and the *injil*, as well as the Qur’an, promise paradise to those who give their lives and possession by “fighting on God’s path” and “killing and being killed.” Although this claim does not have an explicit New Testament equivalent, it does resonate with late antique Christian invocations of the virtue of militant zeal on behalf of God, which are in turn rooted in the Hebrew Bible (*HCI* 192–196). Thirdly, according to Q 48:29 the *injil* contains a similitude (→ *mathal*) for Muhammad’s followers comparing them to a seed growing into a strong plant. This is the only statement about the content of the *injil* that distinguishes the *injil* from the Torah, which allegedly contains a different similitude: Muhammad’s followers bear the “trace of prostration” on their faces. The agricultural character of the first image, and the motif of the growing seed in particular, are reminiscent of some of the parables that are attributed to Jesus in the New Testament, even if the canonical Gospels do not contain any precise counterpart of the Qur’anic *mathal* (cf. Matt 13:8, as per Buhl 1924a, 5, and Mark 4:27–28, as per *CQ* 165 and *BEQ* 457; see also Rudolph 1922, 19).

**The *injil* = the Christian Bible?** The preceding suggests that in seeking to circumscribe which textual corpus the Qur’anic *injil* might be referring to, we should begin by explicitly letting go of any assumption that Qur’anic statements about the contents of the *injil* must map onto a specific and identifiable literary work, whether that be the New Testament Gospels or the Diatessaron. Instead, one does well to allow that Qur’anic statements about the *injil* are quite likely to reflect the tendency of many Jews and Christians throughout the ages to assume that their scriptural canon contains all sorts of later interpretations and elaborations that are assumed to be normative but whose anchoring in the text of scripture is at most tenuous. For example, it is possible that Q 5:32 presents a quotation from the Mishnah as being contained in the → *tawrāh*; and a verse like Q 9:111 (see above) similarly suggests that the Qur’an might project onto the *injil* (or rather follow the tendency of its addressees to project onto the *injil*) elements of later Christian tradition.

5 Q 5:68 transposes this to the second person plural. As Mohsen Goudarzi has pointed out to me, “what was sent down to them from their Lord” could refer to the Qur’anic revelations (thus, e.g., Ṭab. 8:562–563).

6 Similarly, Q 2:229.230 have “to observe the limits set by God” (*aqāma + ḥudūd allāh*).

7 See also Q 2:129.151, claiming that Abraham prayed for the future appearance of Muhammad, and 61:6, where Muhammad—punningly referred to as a messenger “whose name is most praiseworthy (*aḥmad*)”—is predicted by Jesus. On Q 61:6, see Anthony 2016, 273–277.



It is also clear that in Qur’anic usage, the *injil*—whatever its etymology—cannot simply be equated with the New Testament Gospels, since the *injil* is conceived as a unitary scripture given to Jesus rather than bearing testimony to his life and salvific death. Accordingly, despite the prevalent translation of *al-injil* as “the Gospel,” it would perhaps be more apposite to think of the *injil* as corresponding to the entire New Testament—though, again, without inferring from this that Qur’anic statements about the contents of the *injil* must map onto specific New Testament passages. The proposal that the *injil* corresponds, roughly, to the New Testament and what an average Christian contemporary of the Qur’an might have assumed it to contain would certainly resonate with the Qur’an’s frequent pairing of “the Torah and the *injil*,” which is apt to recall the way in which Christians speak of the Old and New Testaments as a bipartite unity. Nonetheless, the Qur’an does not actually provide clear evidence that it deems the Christians to possess a two-part scriptural canon made up of the Torah and the *injil*.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the Torah is expressly associated only with the Israelites or the Jews (Q 3:93, 5:43–44; see also 62:5, followed by an address of the Jews in 62:6); and even though Jesus is reported to have “confirmed” the Torah (Q 3:50, 5:46, 61:6) or to have been “taught” the Torah together with the *injil* (Q 3:48: *wa-yu’allimuhu l-kitāba wa-l-ḥikmata wa-l-tawrāta wa-l-injil*; 5:110: *wa-idh ‘allamtuka l-kitāba wa-l-ḥikmata wa-l-tawrāta wa-l-injila*), the Christians as a contemporary collective are nowhere in the Qur’an said to subscribe to both the Torah and the *injil*. Rather, Q 5:47 merely calls them “the owners of the *injil*.”

It is of course conceivable that the phrase “the owners of the *injil*” is simply meant to highlight the distinguishing mark between the Jewish scriptural canon and the Christian one, consisting as it does in the Christian acceptance of a supplementary corpus of scriptural material in addition to the Hebrew Bible or Old Testament. But given the Qur’anic lack of support for associating the Christians with the *tawrah*, it is equally possible that the expression “the owners of the *injil*” in fact circumscribes the full extent of the Christian canon, in which case the *injil* would need to be equated not with the New Testament but rather with the Christian Bible in its entirety. From this perspective, even though the *injil* clearly postdates the Torah, we might think of it not as a sort of sequel to the Torah, to be conjoined with it into a bipartite Christian canon, but rather as an updated re-edition of the Israelite scripture: it reprises at least parts of the Israelite Torah, just as the Qur’an reprises certain narratives and other content from the Hebrew Bible, yet it also comprises a degree of divinely mandated supplementation and revision of the Torah, given that Jesus is said to have abrogated certain previous Israelite prohibitions (Q 3:50). On this interpretation, the scriptural corpus of the Qur’anic Christians will be the *injil* alone, even if the latter in some way replicates or reformulates the Torah. This way of accounting for the relationship between the Torah and the *injil* would elegantly accommodate both the fact that Q 7:157 and 9:111 imply the Torah and the *injil* to have some parallel content and the fact that Q 48:29 entails the simultaneous existence of variant content.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Q 9:111

8 Q 2:113 might be understood to entail that both Jews and Christians are committed to the Mosaic *kitāb*. If so, then Q 2:113 taken together with 5:47, where the Christians are called “the owners of the *injil*,” would yield a bipartite Christian canon reasonably similar to the Old and New Testament. However, this understanding of Q 2:113 is not without alternative; see n. 2 under → *ahl al-kitāb*.

9 Obviously, Q 7:157, 9:111, and 48:29 cannot be assumed to faithfully reflect versions of the Torah and the *injil* that actually circulated among Jews and Christians in the Qur’anic milieu. My point is rather that we should

is of particular interest in so far as it ascribes parallel content not only to the Torah and the *injil* but also to the Qur'an. This reinforces the conjecture that we ought to understand the *injil* to constitute not merely one wing of the Christian canon but rather its totality, just as the emergent scriptural canon of the Qur'anic community was presumably limited to the revelations conveyed by Muhammad rather than including the Torah as well. The hypothesis just proposed would also, of course, explain why Q 5:47 calls the Christians "the owners of the *injil*" and why the same verse assumes the *injil* to provide a basis for adjudication (cf. also Q 5:66.68), although these latter two statements by themselves are not incompatible with identifying the *injil* only with the New Testament or parts thereof.

If the conjecture just formulated is correct, then the Qur'an's frequent pairing of "the Torah and the *injil*" should be understood to specify the irreducibly dual shape in which the "scripture" (→ *kitāb*) that God has "sent down before" the Qur'an (Q 4:136: *al-kitāb alladhī anzala min qablu*) is available in the Qur'an's own time, namely, as either the Jewish Bible or the Christian one. Of course, according to Q 3:48 and 5:110 Jesus himself was taught both the Torah and the *injil*, in addition to "the scripture"—presumably the celestial scripture on which both the Torah and the *injil* are based (see under → *kitāb*)—and "wisdom" (→ *al-ḥikmah*). Yet it does not follow from this that the same familiarity with the Bible in duplicate, as it were, must apply to Jesus's Christian followers as well. Rather, Jews and Christians qualify as "scripture-owners" (→ *ahl al-kitāb*) because depending on their confessional affiliation they have access to the celestial scripture either in the form of the Torah (i.e., the original "scripture of Moses," *kitāb mūsā*; Q 11:17, 46:12) or in the form of the *injil* (i.e., the Torah's divinely mandated re-edition as conveyed to Jesus). When Q 5:66.68 calls on the "scripture-owners" to "observe (*aqāma*) the *tawrāh* and the *injil* and what was sent down to them / to you<sup>p</sup> from their/your Lord," therefore, this is best read in a partly disjunctive sense: Jews are challenged to apply the Torah and Christians the *injil*, while both are probably also obliged to heed the Qur'anic dispensation ("what was sent down to them from their Lord").

### ***ins* | human beings, humankind**

→ *jinn*

### ***unās, al-nās* | people, the people**

See under → *al-ʿālamūn* and also under → *jinn*.

### ***anām* pl. | animate beings**

→ *arḍ*

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seek to account for the immanent logic of the fact that the Qur'an evidently imagines the Torah and the *injil* to have both parallel and divergent content. This, I would contend, sits more easily with the view that the Qur'an conceives of the *injil* as a reformulation of the Torah (involving both a degree of replication and a degree of supplementation and revision) rather than as a scriptural supplement or annexe to it.

## *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture

Further vocabulary discussed: *kitāb* | scripture *al-tawrah* | the Torah *al-injil* | the Gospel, the Christian Bible *dhikr* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation *āmana* intr. | to be a believer *alladhīna āmanū, al-mu'minūn* pl. | the believers *ashraka* intr. (*bi-*) | to be an associator, to venerate associate deities, to attribute associates to God *alladhīna ashrakū, al-mushrikūn* pl. | the associators *kafara* intr. | to be a repudiator *alladhīna kafarū, al-kāfirūn, al-kuffār* pl. | the repudiators *al-yahūd, alladhīna hādū* pl. | the Jews *al-naṣārā* pl. | the Christians *waritha* | to inherit s.th. *awratha* ditr. | to bequeath s.th. to s.o. *shakk murīb* | disquieting doubt *al-ummiyyūn* pl. | the scriptureless, those not hitherto endowed with scriptural revelation *katama* tr. | to conceal s.th. *akhfā* tr. | to hide s.th. *nabadha* tr. | to cast s.th. *akhraja* tr. | to expel s.o., to drive s.o. out *muqtaṣid* | moderate, middling

**Overview.** In line with an argument by Saqib Hussain, the expression *ahl al-kitāb*—usually translated as “the people of the scripture” in English—is best rendered simply as “scripture-owners” or “recipients of the scripture.”<sup>1</sup> The Medinan surahs frequently employ *ahl al-kitāb* and the synonymous periphrasis “those who were given the scripture” (*alladhīna ūtū l-kitāba*) as umbrella terms referring to Jews and Christians in their capacity as the inheritors of earlier scriptural revelations, with all the concomitant commonalities this might involve (such as the recitation of scripture in prayer and worship, and exegetical recourse to scripture in order to ground doctrinal truth-claims). Only one occurrence of the term *ahl al-kitāb* is found in a Meccan surah (Q 29:46), and the respective verse is very likely a Medinan insertion (see the excursus below). Nonetheless, as shown below, the use of *ahl al-kitāb* in Medinan surahs does need to be placed against the background of terminological developments in the Meccan portions of the Qur’anic corpus. While the concept of scripture is well attested in pre-Qur’anic traditions, there appears to be no pre-Qur’anic antecedent specifically for the term “scripture-owners” (Künstlinger 1928, 246). Hence, the expression *ahl al-kitāb* may well be a Qur’anic coinage, drawing on the Qur’an’s complex understanding of the category of scripture (→ *kitāb*).

As Devin Stewart points out, the Qur’an does not apply the expression *ahl al-kitāb* to the Qur’anic believers, despite the fact that there are passages in which the Qur’an itself is called a *kitāb* (Stewart 2021, 59; e.g., Q 2:89, 6:92, 46:12). This could indicate that the *ahl al-kitāb* are not just possessors of scripture in general—which is, after all, a category that ought to include the Qur’anic community alongside Jews and Christians—but rather that the *ahl al-kitāb* are to be understood as the bearers of the Mosaic scripture in particular, in line with Qur’anic references to “the scripture brought by Moses” (Q 6:91: *al-kitāb alladhī jā’a bihi mūsā*) or “the scripture of Moses” (Q 11:17, 46:12: *kitāb mūsā*). Stewart accordingly recommends that *ahl al-kitāb* be translated as “the people of the Bible.” Yet one should perhaps be cautious to attribute to the Qur’an the seemingly self-evident assumption that Jews and Christians share a substantial part of their scriptural canon, in the form of the

<sup>1</sup> See Hussain 2022b, 136, n. 11. Hussain compellingly argues that an expression such as *ahl al-shā’* ought to be translated as “owners of sheep” (*DSAAP*, 205, no. 27:1, attributed to Imru’ al-Qays). His own preferred rendering is “those with scripture.” Note that in German-language scholarship, *Schriftbesitzer* has long been an established equivalent of *ahl al-kitāb* (e.g., *GQ* 1:156).

Hebrew Bible/Old Testament or, Qur'anically speaking, "the scripture brought by Moses."<sup>2</sup> Rather, as shown elsewhere, Q 5:43–44.47 may be read as implying that Jews subscribe to the Torah (→ *al-tawrah*) while Christians subscribe only to the → *injil*, which latter text is conceivably to be equated with the Christian version of the Bible as a whole. The present book therefore retains the customary understanding that in the expression *ahl al-kitāb* the second element *al-kitāb* does not mean the Bible in particular but either has a generic sense ("scripture" as a general category) or, which I find more likely, refers to the celestial scripture that forms the archetype of earthly scriptures (see under → *kitāb*). As for the fact that the Qur'anic believers are never included in the category of *ahl al-kitāb*, it will be suggested that this is satisfactorily explicable by positing that the phrase *ahl al-kitāb* functions as an abbreviation of temporally indexed expressions such as "those to whom the scripture was given *beforehand*" (Q 57:16: *lladhīna ūtū l-kitāba min qablu*), "those to whom we gave the scripture *before it*" (Q 28:52: *alladhīna ātaynāhumu l-kitāba min qablihi*), and "those who recite the scripture *before you*"<sup>3</sup> (Q 10:94: *alladhīna yaqra'ūna l-kitāba min qablīka*).

**Meccan references to previous recipients of divine revelation.** In the Meccan surahs, the proprietors of earlier scriptural revelations are referred to by a range of different circumlocutions. These include "the recipients of reminding exhortation" (*ahl al-dhikr*, Q 16:43 = 21:7; → *dhakkara*) and "those to whom knowledge was given before it" (*alladhīna ūtū l-'ilma min qablihi*, Q 17:107), namely, before the Qur'anic revelations (which are mentioned in the preceding verse, Q 17:106). According to Q 17:107–109, "those to whom knowledge was given before it fall down on their chins" in tears and glorify God when Muhammad's revelations are recited to them. As regards the *ahl al-dhikr*, the doublet Q 16:43 = 21:7 instructs the Qur'anic addressees to consult them should they "not know" that all previous messengers sent by God were human. The positive light in which all three passages (Q 16:43 = 21:7 and 17:107–109) place the recipients of earlier revelations forms a notable contrast with the much more polemical tone struck in many Medinan statements.

The same observation holds true for the most frequent Meccan phrase referring to the possessors of earlier revelations, namely, "those to whom we gave the scripture" (*alladhīna ātaynāhumu l-kitāba*; Q 6:20.89.114, 13:36, 28:52, 29:47). These recipients of the scripture are clearly assumed to be distinct from the Meccan Qur'an's primary addressees, namely, the "believing" (→ *āmana*) followers of Muhammad and their "associating" (→ *ashraka*) or "repudiating" (→ *kafara*) opponents. As has been thoughtfully noted, such references

2 The weightiest potential proof-text in support of the supposition that the Qur'an does consider Jews and Christians to share a significant portion of their scriptural canon is Q 2:113. The verse criticises the Jews and Christians for rejecting each other as having no ground to stand on "even though they both recite the scripture" (*wa-hum yatlūna l-kitāba*)—that is, despite reciting, or perhaps claiming to recite, one and the same scripture. Goudarzi aptly summarises the verse by saying that it "deems the antagonism between Jews and Christian absurd, because they read the same scripture yet attribute profoundly different teachings to it" (Goudarzi 2018, 246, n. 129), and he appears inclined to infer from this that *al-kitāb* must mean the Mosaic scripture here. Devin Stewart is similarly persuaded that *al-kitāb* must mean the Bible in this passage (Stewart 2021, 62). Yet a different interpretation is feasible: the assertion that Jews and Christians recite "the scripture" might simply proceed from the Qur'anic vantage point that both the Torah and the *injil* derive from the same celestial archetype—a transcendent scripture in which the Qur'an takes all Jewish and Christian claims to having received divine revelation to be ultimately grounded (but of which Jews and Christians are by no means deemed faithful expositors). In other words, the scripture that is common to Jews and Christians and in light of which their mutual denunciations appear as spiteful and unfounded bickering is not necessarily any earthly document. Q 2:113 does not therefore provide unequivocal evidence that the Qur'anic Christians have a scriptural canon that includes the Jewish Torah (which is not to rule out that the Qur'anic → *injil* might be understood as an updated and expanded re-edition of the Torah).

to the recipients of scriptural revelation as a collective entity, which become even more prevalent in the Medinan period, pick out “scripturalism” as “actually determinative of group identity,” conceivably reflecting the cultural importance of the gradual processes of “scripturalisation” that were under way in late antique Arabia (Pregill 2020, 37 and also 33–34).

In concrete terms, Meccan mentions of those given the scripture, like references to those who have received “knowledge” or “reminding exhortation,” highlight their role as alleged guarantors of the Qur’anic revelations, contending that they “recognise” or acknowledge (Q 6:20.114), rejoice in (Q 13:36), and believe in (Q 28:52–53, 29:47) what is proclaimed by Muhammad. At Q 10:94, it is the Qur’anic Messenger himself who is bidden to ask “those who recite the scripture before you<sup>s</sup>” (*alladhīna yaqra’ūna l-kitāba min qablīka*) should he be “in doubt about what we have sent down to you,” presumably so that the scripture-reciters can allay such doubts: “the truth from your<sup>s</sup> Lord has come to you, so do not be one of those who harbour misgivings,” the verse continues. One might query whether such statements must necessarily reflect factual recognition of the Qur’anic proclamations by contemporary scripture-bearers: could they be confident posits, designed to bolster the credibility of the Qur’anic Messenger in the context of polemical disputes with his Meccan opponents? Still, some of the relevant material resists such a reading (e.g., Q 28:52–53, 46:10), making it quite plausible that already in the Meccan period there was direct contact between the Qur’anic community, on the one hand, and individual scripture-bearers, on the other (see in more detail under → *isrā’īl*).

In verses referring to “those to whom we gave the scripture,” the *kitāb* in question is probably the celestial scripture that the Qur’an depicts as the archetypal source both of the “scripture of Moses” (*kitāb mūsā*; Q 11:17 and 46:12; see also 6:91) and of the revelations imparted to Muhammad, which despite their oral and serial mode of delivery are likewise conceptualised as “a scripture” (Q 6:92.155, 46:12.30; → *kitāb*). That these two earthly scriptures are manifestations of a joint celestial archetype is illustrated, for instance, by utterances that Q 6:156–157 counterfactually place in the mouth of the Qur’anic believers: God has sent down the scripture lest the believers should say that “the scripture was only sent down upon two factions before us” (*innamā unzila l-kitābu ‘alā ṭā’ifatayni min qablinā*), an allusion to Jews (→ *al-yahūd*) and Christians (→ *al-naṣārā*), and lest they should say, “If only the scripture had been sent down upon us, we would have been better guided than they.” It seems clear that it is one and the same transcendent scripture here that is first revealed to Jews and Christians and subsequently to the Qur’anic believers. Although it is acknowledged that Jews and Christians—neither of whom are explicitly named in the Meccan Qur’an—have real access to the celestial scripture, access that is anchored in past revelations, they are not its exclusive proprietors anymore, as the scripture has now become available to the Qur’anic community as well.

An extended list of past individuals who were granted revelatory insight into “the scripture” is given in Q 6:89, where the label “those to whom we gave the scripture, judgement, and prophecy” includes past prophets such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and Solomon, featuring in vv. 83–86, in addition to “some of their forefathers and their offspring (*dhurriyyāt*) and their brothers” (v. 87). That present scripture-bearers are genealogically descended from the recipients of prior divine revelations similarly follows from Q 40:53. The verse maintains that God “gave the scripture as an inheritance to the Israelites” (*wa-awrathnā banī isrā’īla l-kitāb*), implying that knowledge of the scripture is passed down



among them from generation to generation.<sup>3</sup> Apart from Q 40:53, three further verses in Meccan surahs that may be somewhat later (Q 7:169,<sup>4</sup> 35:32, 42:14) also accentuate that those who have been given the scripture owe their claim to it to transgenerational bequeathal, in so far as these passages speak of those who have “inherited” (verb: *waritha*) the scripture or of the scripture having been “bestowed as an inheritance” (verb: *awratha*). Prefiguring the more polemical Medinan passages discussed in the following section, both Q 7:169 and 42:14 are critical of the inheritors of the scripture (though the Meccan or Medinan date of 7:169 remains to be determined), and Q 35:32 too highlights that among the inheritors of the scripture are “some who wrong themselves” (*fa-minhum ḡālimun li-nafsihi*), i.e., who hurt their own eschatological prospects by committing misdeeds (see further below). Having access to the scripture by means of bequeathal and tradition does not therefore preclude falling into “disquieting (*murīb*; → *irtāba*) doubt about it” (Q 42:14; cf. the doublet 11:110 = 41:45, also denouncing the emergence of “disquieting doubt” subsequent to Moses’s receipt of the scripture).<sup>5</sup>

**Medinan developments.** In the Medinan period, the variegated Meccan spectrum of expressions designating proprietors and inheritors of previous scriptural revelations undergoes a noticeable degree of formulaic standardisation. The succinct term *ahl al-kitāb*, “scripture-owners,” now establishes itself as dominant, especially in Surahs 2–5 (Q 2:105.109, 3:64.65.69.70.71.72.75.98.99.110.113.199, 4:123.153.159.171, 5:15.19.59.65.68.77). In parallel, the Medinan employs the passive periphrasis “those who were given the scripture” (*alladhīna ūtū l-kitāba*; e.g., Q 2:101.144.145, 3:19.20.100.186.187, 4:47.131, 5:5.57, 9:29)<sup>6</sup> and its less favourable variant “those who were given a portion (*naṣīb*) of the scripture” (Q 3:23, 4:44.51: *alladhīna ūtū naṣīban mina l-kitābi*). “Those to whom we gave the scripture” (*alladhīna ātaynāhumu l-kitāba*) also continues to occur, though only in Q 2:121.146. The seemingly equivalent usage of *ahl al-kitāb* and of “those who (*alladhīna*) were given (a portion of) the scripture” corresponds to the interchangeable employment of *al-mu’minūn* (“the believers”) and *alladhīna āmanū* or of *al-mushrikūn* (“the associators”) and *alladhīna ashrakū*. As suggested above, a possible reason why the category of the *ahl al-kitāb* never includes the Qur’anic community is that Medinan references to the “scripture-owners” function as a conventional abbreviation for those to whom God has given the scripture “before it” (*min qablihi*, Q 28:52; cf. also 10:94), namely, before the Qur’anic revelations. That this temporal qualifier is still very much implicit in Medinan statements about the scripturalists is confirmed by several verses in which the periphrastic “those who were given the scripture” is unequivocally expanded by “before you<sup>b</sup>” or simple “before” (*min qablikum*, *min qablu*; Q 3:186, 4:131, 5:5.57, 57:16).

Although the Medinan surahs make explicit mention of the Jews (→ *al-yahūd*, *alladhīna hādū*) and Christians (→ *al-naṣārā*), the abstract terms “scripture-owners” and “those who were given the scripture” are nonetheless more frequent. This likely indicates the Medinan Qur’an’s comparative lack of interest in doctrinal or ritual features specific to either Judaism or Christianity, and its corresponding preoccupation with behaviours and

3 Cf. also Q 26:196–197, which may be understood to presume that “the learned ones from among the Israelites (→ *banū isrā’īl*)” are familiar with the “ancient writings” (*zabur al-awwalīn*; → *zabūr*) and are thus able to confirm the Qur’anic revelations’ correspondence with earlier revelations.

4 Note that the question of the extent of potential Medinan additions to Surah 7 has not yet been settled.

5 On Meccan passages that are implicitly critical of Jews and Christians, see also *HCI* 178.

6 *Alladhīna ūtū l-kitāba* also figures in Q 74:31, which is a Medinan insertion (see, e.g., Sinai 2017c, 73–75).



doctrines, especially blameworthy ones, that are deemed to encompass both branches of the scripturalists (see, e.g., the pairing of objectionable statements attributed to the Jews and Christians in Q 2:113, 120, 5:18, and 9:30).<sup>7</sup> As a result of this generalising tendency, the expressions “scripture-owners” or “those who were given the scripture” can sometimes be employed in contexts in which the concrete interlocutors at hand are best understood to be Israelites or Jews in particular (e.g., Q 3:75, 187, 4:153–155), or Christians in particular (Q 4:171). Q 3:75, for example, attributes to the *ahl al-kitāb* an utterance in which the term *al-ummiyyūn*, “the scriptureless” or “the gentiles” (→ *ummi*), appears to operate as an umbrella term for outsiders, which is redolent of Jewish usage. Q 4:171, meanwhile, opens with a vocative addressed to the “scripture-owners” and then stresses that Jesus was no more than a messenger, followed by an apparent rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity. Another passage in which “those who were given the scripture” has been argued to stand for the Jews in particular is Q 5:5, which permits to the members of the Qur’anic community “the food of those who were given the scripture” (see Griffith 2007, 87\*, n. 18; Griffith 2011, 315–316) and vice versa.<sup>8</sup>

Overall, Medinan references to the scripturalists are considerably more polemical and confrontational than their Meccan counterparts. For instance, Q 2:146 chastises a group (*farīq*) of scripture-owners for knowingly “concealing” (*katama*) the truth (see also Q 3:71, 187; on concealment in connection with the Israelites, see, e.g., 2:42, 72), and other Medinan passages accuse the scripturalists of “hiding” (*akhfā*) parts of the scripture (Q 5:15),<sup>9</sup> of “casting” (*nabadha*) the scripture “behind their backs” (Q 2:101, 3:187), of fabricating scriptural revelations (Q 3:78; cf. 2:79), and of general untrustworthiness (Q 3:75). The impression that the scripture-owners cannot be relied upon to be sincere custodians of the revelatory deposit entrusted to them is further heightened by Q 5:68, reprimanding them that “you<sup>p</sup> have no ground to stand on until you observe the Torah and the Gospel and what was sent down to you from your Lord” (*lastum ‘alā shay’in ḥattā tuqimū l-tawrāta wa-l-injīla wa-mā unzila ilaykum min rabbikum*; cf. also Q 5:66).

7 For a different emphasis, see Pregill 2020, 37, who suggests that the Qur’anic preference for the term *ahl al-kitāb* over references to Jews and Christians “at least partially reflects the indeterminate origins of traditions in circulation in the Arabian environment; these traditions could exhibit a diffusely scripturalist character but perhaps lacked a more specific communal inflection.”

8 Crone has objected that it would have been inappropriate in a legislative context for the Qur’anic Messenger to employ “a term bracketing Jews and Christians if he meant the Christians to be excluded” (QP 240). I have myself proposed an interpretation of Q 5:5 that would consider the expression “those who were given the scripture” here to encompass both Jews and Christians, and thus to permit the Qur’anic believers to refrain from vetting Christian food for its conformity to the Qur’anic prohibition of pork (Sinai 2017c, 85–89). Such relaxedness about strict adherence to the prohibition of pork would tally with a certain tendency in the Medinan surahs to de-emphasise the ultimate significance of the literal and unfailing observance of specific behavioural rules—a tendency embodied by the exemptive clauses in Q 5:3, 6, which under certain circumstances suspend the Qur’an’s dietary rules and the requirement of ablution before prayer (see Sinai 2019c and under → *ṭahara*), or by Q 2:177, 189, which emphasise that righteous conduct (*al-birr*) is not to be conflated with performance of certain external rites (see under → *dhabāḥa*). Nonetheless, I would now acknowledge more readily that verses like Q 3:75 and 4:171 lend support to Griffith’s proposal. But note that later on in the same surah, in Q 5:68, the “scripture-owners” clearly encompass both Jews and Christians, given that the scripture-owners are exhorted to “observe the Torah and the Gospel.”

9 The accusation of hiding portions of scripture also appears in Q 6:91, although the interlocutors there might be understood to be the Meccan pagans, given that the verse begins by accusing the opponents of maintaining that “God has not sent down anything upon a mortal” (QP 110–111; see also under → *ashraka*). According to Nöldeke and Schwally, the verse may well be Medinan (GQ 1:161–162), but this is based on their acceptance of the standard exegetical view that the relevant part of the verse is directed against the Jews (see QP 111).

At some point, tensions with the scripture-owners evidently came to a head and verbal attacks gave rise to violence, for Surah 59 documents that the “repudiators” among the Medinan “scripture-owners” were “driven out” (verb: *akhraja*) from their abodes (Q 59:2: *huwa lladhī akhrajā lladhīna kafarū min ahli l-kitābi min diyārihim*), in retaliation for their opposition to “God and his Messenger” (Q 59:4: *dhālika bi-annahum shāqqū llāha wa-rasūlahu*). Q 33:26, too, refers to violent conflict with local scripture-owners: “some of them you<sup>p</sup> killed, and some of them you captured” (*farīqan taqtulūna wa-ta’sirūna farīqā*). Very few details of the conflict may be ascertained from the Qur’an itself, although one learns that the Medinan scripturalists enjoyed support from other sections of the Medinan population (Q 59:11–12) and that the fighting involved the destruction of houses (Q 59:2) and the cutting-down of palm trees (Q 59:5) as well as captives and casualties (Q 33:26, just cited). In the wake of the conflict, the Qur’anic believers appropriated the scripturalists’ land, dwellings, and possessions (Q 33:27; cf. 59:6). Finally, one verse, Q 9:29 (discussed under → *jāhada*), enjoins the Qur’anic believers to exact tribute from unbelieving scripturalists who have been fought and subjugated. In so far as this manner of proceeding—subjugation in situ in return for tribute, rather than expulsion and expropriation—differs from the fate that seems to have befallen the Medinan scripture-owners, it may be that Q 9:29 is looking further afield, at scripturalist populations outside Medina, and that the verse is to be dated after the events alluded to in 33:26 and in Surah 59.

Despite the Medinan polemics against the “scripture-owners” and the hostilities to which such condemnations eventually gave rise, there is nonetheless some nuance in the Medinan material. Q 2:62 and 5:69 are unequivocal in affirming the possibility of salvation for Jews and Christians, even if this presumably requires them to accept the principal Qur’anic doctrines, including the Qur’an’s rigorous understanding of monotheism, and to recognise Muhammad’s prophetic authority (see in more detail under → *aslama*). Q 3:64 accordingly invites the scripture-owners to “come to a word common between you<sup>p</sup> and us,” consisting in unadulterated monotheism (of which the mainstream Christian understanding of Christ as God’s son and as a member of the Trinity would presumably fall foul; see Q 4:171, 5:72–77.116). Q 5:59 shows how this common-denominator approach can be given an openly polemical turn: “Say<sup>s</sup>, ‘O scripture-owners, do you resent us for anything other than the fact that we believe in God and what was sent down to us and what was sent down before, and that most of you are sinners?’” The ecumenicalism expressed by Q 2:62 and 5:69 therefore comes with conditions attached. It is, nonetheless, not presented as merely a theoretical possibility, for some of the scripturalists in the Qur’an’s environment are indeed considered to qualify as genuine believers (Q 3:110.113–115.199, 4:162, 5:66). At the same time, other scripture-bearers, perhaps even “many of them” or “most of them” (Q 5:66 and 3:110; see also 5:59), are branded as repudiators (Q 2:105, 59:2.11, 98:1.6) and as sinners (Q 3:110, 5:59).

In the Medinan surahs, then, the “scripture-owners” appear as a distinctly mixed and ambivalent bag, as a group who include both believers like Muhammad’s followers and repudiators like his pagan opponents, with more or less emphasis on the latter. This mixed-bag view of the “scripture-owners” is in fact present as early as the Meccan statement Q 35:32, partially cited above, which sets out a tripartite ethico-religious taxonomy of those who were “given the scripture as an inheritance”: they include those who “wrong themselves” (*fa-minhum ḡālimun li-nafsihi*), those who are “middling” or “moderate” (*wa-minhum*

*muqtaṣidun*),<sup>10</sup> and those who “with God’s permission race on ahead in good works” (*wa-minhum sābiqun bi-l-khayrāti bi-idhni llāhi*). The renewed uptake of the attribute *muqtaṣid* in Q 5:66, which concedes the existence of a “middling community” (*ummah muqtaṣidah*) among the scripture-owners (i.e., a group who are at least not downright unbelievers), illustrates how the differential approach of Q 35:32 continues to resonate in the Medinan period, despite the latter’s more confrontational attitude towards the scripture-bearers.<sup>11</sup>

The Medinan increase in stridency towards the scripture-owners is reasonably explained by the assumption that following the hijrah the Qur’anic community came to encounter a rivalling community of scripturalists at close quarters. Unlike Meccan interactions with Jews and/or Christians, which may have been confined to individuals, this Medinan encounter generated significant polemical pressure and engendered a much more disapproving attitude to the beliefs and practices of the scripture-owners, even if the Meccan Qur’an is not entirely devoid of critical remarks regarding the inheritors of the scripture either (e.g., Q 42:14). Thus, the Medinan arraignment of the scripturalists and the Israelites for malicious concealment of God’s truth would seem to respond to the fact that at least some of the Medinan scripture-owners did not in fact “believe” or “rejoice” in the Qur’anic revelations, as posited by sundry Meccan verses. Especially if it is assumed that, as the Medinan addition Q 7:157 maintains,<sup>12</sup> Muhammad’s appearance is predicted in the Torah and in the Gospel (see also Q 48:29 and 61:6), accusations of deliberate concealment offered a ready explanation for scripturalist reluctance to acknowledge Muhammad’s claim to prophecy (Rubin 2003a, 25). It should be borne in mind that the need to supply credible rejoinders to the Medinan scripturalists was not an academic problem but would have been of crucial importance in avoiding a dissipation of Muhammad’s prophetic authority under post-hijrah conditions (*HCI* 196–209). As attested by Q 2:109 and 3:69.99–100 (cf. also 3:69), there must have been a real danger that some of the scripture-owners, who would undoubtedly have possessed significant prestige in the eyes of the Qur’anic believers, would cause the latter to “revert to being repudiators after having espoused belief” (Q 2:109 and 3:100: *yaruddūnakum min ba’di imānikum kuf-fāran / yaruddūkum ba’dā imānikum kāfirīn*).

### Excursus: A Meccan Occurrence of the Term *ahl al-kitāb* in Q 29:46?

The only occurrence of the expression *ahl al-kitāb* in a Meccan surah is found in Q 29:46. The present version of Q 29:46 has been suspected of being the result of Medinan revision (Nöldeke 1860, 116; *GQ* 1:155–156), leading one scholar to state categorically that “*ahl al-kitāb* is only found in Medinan surahs” (Künstlinger 1928, 238). Given that it is of some

<sup>10</sup> Q 31:32, where the attribute *muqtaṣid* seems to refer to those who renege on their commitment to worship God alone (*mukhlīṣīna lahu l-dīna*), suggests that *muqtaṣid*—which in Q 35:32 functions as a term of distinctly faint praise—can also have a negative sense.

<sup>11</sup> See also Q 7:159 (among the people of Moses is a community, *ummah*, “who guide according to the truth and act justly according to it”), which should be compared with 3:113 and 5:66. The distinction between Meccan and Medinan material in Surah 7 requires further study, however (see under → *ummī* and n. 2 under → *al-ṣbāt*). For another instance of Meccan-Medinan continuity in phraseology associated with the scripture-owners, cf. Q 6:20 and 2:146, both of which say that the scripture-bearers “recognise it as they recognise their own children” (*ya’rifūnahu ka-mā ya’rifūna abnā’ahum*).

<sup>12</sup> On the Medinan date of Q 7:157, see under → *ummī*.

interest to determine whether the phrase is attested before the hijrah, an excursus on the verse's putative date seems warranted.

Q 29:46 is part of a polemical sequence encompassing vv. 44–52, whose thematic focus is on affirming the Qur'anic Messenger's receipt of divine revelations and rebutting the doubts of opponents. The passage opens the third panel of Sūrat al-'Ankabūt, following its narrative middle panel (vv. 14–43; Neuwirth 2007, 302). Whether or not v. 46 is a later insertion, the component verses of the sequence are in many respects tightly enmeshed: the section is bracketed by occurrences of *al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*, “the heavens and the earth,” in v. 44 and v. 52, and further integrated through multiple recurrences of several terms and phrases.<sup>13</sup> The passage commences with an affirmation that God's creation of the heavens and the earth is a “sign (*āyah*) for the believers” (v. 44), followed by a command to the Messenger to “recite” (*utlu*) “what has been conveyed to you<sup>s</sup> of the scripture” (*mā ūhiya ilayka mina l-kitābi*; v. 45) and to perform prayer.

V. 46, the verse containing the expression *ahl al-kitāb*, then shifts to the second person plural and thus would seem to turn to the Qur'anic community at large: “Only dispute<sup>p</sup> with the scripture-owners (*ahl al-kitāb*) in the best manner (*bi-llatī hiya aḥsanu*), except for those of them who are guilty of wrongdoing (*illā lladhīna ḡalamū minhūm*).” What this “best manner” consists in is fleshed out in a creed-like statement underscoring the Qur'anic community's recognition of revelations formerly imparted to the scripturalists: “Say<sup>p</sup>, ‘We believe in what was sent down to us and was sent down to you<sup>p</sup>; our God and your God is one, and we surrender ourselves to him.’” The intended effect of this prescribed utterance may have been to engender rhetorical pressure on the scripture-owners to match what one might call the Qur'anic believers' revelatory dimorphism and to corner them into extending equivalent recognition to Muhammad's revelations. Alternatively, the utterance could have been meant as a conversation-stopper, effectively clarifying that the “best manner” of disputing with the scripturalists consists in not doing too much disputing at all, but rather in stating one's convictions and avoiding being drawn into further debate.

In v. 47, the divine voice returns to the second person singular, claiming that the scripture-bearers believe in the Qur'anic revelations: “Thus we have sent down the scripture to you<sup>s</sup>, and those to whom we gave the scripture believe in it; and among these people here (*wa-min ḡā'ulā'i*) are some who believe in it; our signs are only denied by the repudiators (*wa-mā yajḡadu bi-āyatīnā illā l-kāfirūn*).” In this verse, the phrase *min ḡā'ulā'i*—which I have translated “among these people here,” following Birnstiel 2010, 172—must refer to a group who are different from the scripture-bearers, since the statement that “*min ḡā'ulā'i* are some who believe in it” would otherwise partially duplicate and partially clash with the immediately preceding affirmation that “those to whom we gave the scripture believe in it.” Plausibly, the demonstrative *ḡā'ulā'i* intends the general audience of the Meccan surahs, some of whom espoused belief in Muhammad's revelations.<sup>14</sup> Verse 48 continues

13 Notably, *āyah/āyat*, “sign/signs,” in vv. 44, 47, 49, and 50 (with vv. 47 and 49 also sharing the entire phrase *mā yajḡadu bi-āyatīnā illā . . .*, “our signs are only denied by . . .”); the verb *talā*, “to recite” + *kitāb*, “scripture,” in vv. 45, 48, and 51; the verb *ḡalama*, “to do wrong,” and *al-ḡālimūn*, “the wrongdoers,” in vv. 46 and 49; several occurrences of the verbs *āmana*, “to believe,” in vv. 46, 47, and 52, and *anzala*, “to send down,” in vv. 46, 47, 50, and 51; and the root *b-ḡ-l* in vv. 48 (*al-mubḡilūn*, perhaps “those who declare [God's revelations] to be void”) and v. 52 (“those who believe in what is void, *al-bāḡil*”).

14 Cf. Muqātil 2002, 3:386, explaining that this segment of the verse refers to “the Muslims of Mekka,” and al-Zamakhsharī's gloss “from among the Meccans” (*min aḡli makkah*; Zam. 4:554). Birnstiel interprets the verse very similarly, even though he has shown that the demonstrative → *dhālika/tilka* often has an anaphoric meaning

to address the Messenger, reminding him that he was not wont to “recite” any scripture “before it” (*wa-mā kunta tatlū min qablihi min kitābin*) nor did he “write it down with your right hand”; had this been a case, it would have been a source of doubt for his detractors (*idhan la-rtāba l-mubṭilūn*). In v. 49, the passage reaches a preliminary conclusion when “it”—namely, the Qur’anic revelations—is characterised as “clear signs (*āyāt bayyināt*) in the breasts of those endowed with knowledge”; the verse ends in a final flourish similar to v. 47 (“our signs are only denied by the wrongdoers,” *wa-mā yajḥadu bi-āyātina illā l-ẓālimūn*). Verses 50–52 then cite and respond to an objection by opponents that picks up the concept of divine signs, also invoked in vv. 44 and 49: “They say, ‘Why have no signs from his Lord been sent down upon him?’”—to which the Messenger is ordered to reply that “the signs are with God” and that he is only a warner. Verse 51 reasserts that God has “sent down upon you<sup>s</sup> the scripture so that it is recited to them,” while v. 52 closes out the whole sequence with another *qul* command addressed to the Messenger.

In contending that v. 46 is a Medinan addition, Nöldeke highlights that the injunction to “dispute” with the “scripture-owners” (*ahl al-kitāb*) “in the best manner, except for those of them who are guilty of wrongdoing” implies that the wrongdoers among them may be fought, a view that is allegedly inconceivable before the hijrah (Nöldeke 1860, 116). This is hardly convincing: it is entirely possible that the point of v. 46 is merely that disputing with wrongdoing scripturalists is futile and should therefore be avoided.<sup>15</sup> Nöldeke further argues that v. 46’s status as a secondary addition is indicated by its tension with v. 47, according to which “those to whom we gave the scripture” do in fact believe in the Qur’anic revelations. This second argument is far more plausible, since the credal formula that the Qur’anic believers are ordered to utter in Q 29:46 (“Say<sup>p</sup>, ‘We believe in what was sent down to us and was sent down to you<sup>p</sup> . . .’”) does seem to be designed to corner scripturalists who did not readily profess belief in “what was sent down to” the Qur’anic community. Thirdly, a footnote reminds Nöldeke’s readers that the phrase *ahl al-kitāb* is not otherwise attested in Meccan surahs, the implication being that v. 46 is terminologically out of character. This, too, is pertinent, though of course not conclusive, since one cannot rule out that v. 46 forms the chronologically earliest occurrence of the term *ahl al-kitāb* and that the word subsequently went on to attain formulaic dominance in the Medinan Qur’an.

Schwally’s reworking of Nöldeke’s original treatment (*GQ* 1:155–156) adds complexity by including the conjecture that it might only be the exceptive clause “except for those of them who are guilty of wrongdoing” (*illā l-ladhīna ẓalamū minhum*), which Schwally considers to be syntactically disruptive and whose only parallel occurs in the Medinan verse Q 2:150, that is Medinan. This would pre-empt Nöldeke’s understanding that Q 29:46 authorises violence against wrongdoing scripturalists and would consequently remove one reason for excising the entire verse as an insertion. On this hypothesis, the term *ahl al-kitāb*, which occurs slightly earlier in the verse, could still be Meccan. It remains the case, of course, that all other occurrences of *ahl al-kitāb* are Medinan, but as Schwally points out, this is

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in the Qur’an, referring back to something mentioned before. As regards Q 29:47, he considers *hā’ulā’i* to refer “to the people present in the deictic space in an enlarged sense,” and he renders *wa-min hā’ulā’i man yu’minu bihi* as “there are some among these people here who believe in it” (Birnstiel 2010, 172).

<sup>15</sup> It bears pointing out that the view that those who have inherited the scripture include wrongdoers is also asserted in Q 35:32, whose Meccan date Nöldeke and Schwally do not impugn (*GQ* 1:158); even in the Meccan period, the scripture-bearers are therefore not envisaged as a monolithic block.



counterbalanced by the fact that all other instances of the phrase *bi-llatī hiya aḥsanu*, “in the best manner,” occur in Meccan surahs (Q 6:152, 16:125, 17:34, 23:96, 41:34),<sup>16</sup> and none of them is compellingly excised as a Medinan insertion (although Nöldeke and Schwally cast doubt on the verses immediately preceding Q 16:125; see *GQ* 1:145–147).

Yet there is an additional consideration that reinforces Nöldeke’s original suspicion and thereby sways the balance of evidence in favour of a Medinan addition. As we saw above, Q 29:46 commands the recipients to address the scripturalists by professing belief in “what was sent down to us and was sent down to you<sup>p</sup>” (*alladhī unzila ilaynā wa-unzila ilaykum*). The verse thereby deploys a bipartite credal formula evoking belief in “what was sent down to you<sup>s</sup>/us” (*mā unzila ilayka/ilaynā*) and in “what was sent down before you<sup>s</sup> / before” (*mā unzila min qablīka/qablu*) that is, like all other attestations of the phrase *ahl al-kitāb*, solidly Medinan (Q 2:4, 4:60.162, 5:59). Of these parallels, Q 5:59 is particularly close to 29:46, in so far as both are utterances in the first person plural and are directly addressed to the scripture-owners. Also relevant are Q 2:136 and 3:84, forming a virtual doublet with each other in which the second component of the bipartite formula just highlighted is expanded into a catalogue of names: “We believe in God and what was sent down upon [3:84 has ‘*alā* here, 2:136 *ilā*] us and what was sent down upon Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the descendants of Jacob (→ *al-asbāt*), and what was given to Moses and Jesus and ± <what was given> to the prophets from their Lord. . . .” Like Q 5:59, 2:136 and 3:84 are formulated in the first person plural. Q 3:199, moreover, lauds some of the scripturalists for “believing in God and what was sent down to you<sup>p</sup> and what was sent down to them.” Finally, there is a Medinan verse, Q 2:91, in which opponents (apparently, the Israelites) are quoted as believing only “in what was sent down upon us” and repudiate “what came after it” (*qālū nu’minu bi-mā unzila ‘alaynā wa-yakfurūna bi-mā warā’ahu*). By contrast, Meccan surahs, apart from Q 29:46, confine themselves to employing the first component of the bipartite formula, namely, “what was sent down to you<sup>s</sup>/you<sup>p</sup>” (Q 13:1.19.36, 34:6: *alladhī/mā unzila ilayka*, 7:3, 39:55: *mā unzila ilaykum*). On occasion, a similarly monopartite usage is found in Medinan texts as well (see the third-person variant *mā unzila ilayhi / ilā l-rasūli* in Q 2:285, 5:81.83; see also *mā unzila ilayka* in 5:64.67.68, although vv. 66.68 allude to “what was sent down” to the scripture-owners).

The cumulative evidence indicating that Q 29:46 is indeed a Medinan insertion is therefore considerable, consisting both in key diction and in an appreciable tension between v. 46 and the following v. 47. Moreover, even though abrupt changes of grammatical addressee are pervasive throughout the Qur’an, by way of an auxiliary consideration one may point out that v. 46 is the only verse in the entire sequence vv. 44–52 that employs the second person plural, being sandwiched in between verses addressing the Qur’anic Messenger in the second person singular (vv. 45 and 47–48). The presumptive reason for weaving v. 46 into the text would have been the Qur’anic community’s realisation, after the hijrah, that v. 47’s optimistic assertion that “those to whom we gave the scripture believe in it” did not prove to be the case in Medina.<sup>17</sup> Verse 46 accordingly advises the Qur’anic believers on how to confront a group of scripturalists who were by no means generally

<sup>16</sup> Q 17:53 has, “Tell my servants to say that which is best,” *yaqūlū llatī hiya aḥsanu*; note that Q 16:125, like 29:46, combines the phrase with the verb *jādala*.

<sup>17</sup> It is true, though, that other Meccan statements containing similarly optimistic statements about the scripture-bearers, such as Q 28:52–53, did not attract equivalent insertions.



willing to profess belief in Muhammad’s prophetic status (e.g., Q 2:91), even if some of them evidently did (e.g., Q 3:199). Verse 46 may therefore be seen as a chronologically later restriction of v. 47, inserted before rather than after its latch-on point and thus constituting a case of what one might call redactional “anteponition” (Sinai 2021, 373). As is often the case, the inserted verse employs, probably purposefully, diction occurring in the environment in which it was embedded (e.g., the verb → *ḡalama*, “to wrong s.o., to do wrong,” and *al-ḡālimūn*, “the wrongdoers,” in vv. 46 and 49).

### ***awwal* | first; ancient**

See under → *ākhir* as well as the remarks on *al-millah al-ākhirah* (“contemporary religious teaching or belief”) under → *millah*. Specifically on the phrase *asāṭir al-awwalīn*, “writs of the ancients,” see under → *asāṭir*.

### ***ta’wīl* | explanation, interpretation; ultimate outcome**

→ *bayyana*

### ***ma’wā* | refuge**

→ *jannah*

### ***āyah* | sign; sign-pronouncement**

Further vocabulary discussed: *bayyin* | clear *talā* tr. | to recite s.th. *dhakkara* tr. (*bi-*) | to remind s.o. (of s.th.) *nazzala, anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down *arā* ditr. | to show s.o. s.th. *bayyana* tr. (*li-*) | to clarify s.th. (to s.o.) *ṣarrafa* tr. (*li-*) | to explain s.th. in various or varied ways (to s.o.) *faṣṣala* tr. | to set s.th. out or expound s.th. in clear detail *atā* tr. / intr. *bi-* | to bring s.th. (to s.o.) *ātā* ditr. | to give s.th. to s.o. *kadhhaba* intr. *bi-* | to dismiss s.th. as a lie *jaḥada* intr. *bi-* | to deny s.th. *kafara* intr. *bi-* | to repudiate s.o. or s.th. *jādala* intr. *fī* | to dispute about s.th. *a’raḍa* intr. *‘an* | to turn away from s.th. *ghafala* intr. *‘an* | to be heedless of s.th. *ishtarā bi-āyāti llāhi thamanan qalīlan* | to sell God’s signs for a small price *tadabbara* tr. | to reflect on s.th. *āmana* intr. *bi-* | to believe in s.th. *‘aqala* tr./intr. | to understand (s.th.) *burhān* | proof *‘ibrah* | lesson *manfa’* | benefit *sāra fī l-arḍ* | to travel the earth, to journey through the land *‘āqibah* | outcome *sulṭān* | authority *mundhir, nadhir* | warner *tābūt* | ark, chest, casket *kitāb* | scripture *baddala* tr. | to alter s.th., to exchange s.th. *nasakha* tr. | to cancel s.th., to abrogate s.th. *sajada* intr. (*li-*) | to prostrate o.s. (before s.o.)

**Etymology and use in pre-Qur’anic poetry.** The Qur’anic term *āyah*, attested in more than 350 verses, is consistently translatable as “sign” or, in some cases, “sign-pronouncement” (see below). This is in line with the word’s presumptive descent from Aramaic *ātā* (FVQ 72–73), even if it remains to be explained how this putative etymology is to be reconciled with the internal consonant *y* of Arabic *āyah* (CDKA 32). The word must in any case have

entered the Arabic language well before the Qur'an, since it occurs in pre-Islamic poetry, where it serves as one of the terms used for the traces of deserted campsites, which *qū* "signs" point to former abodes and the erstwhile presence of the poet's beloved (e.g., Ḥusayn 1983, no. 18:3; DSAAP, al-Nābighah, no. 17:3, Ṭarafah, no. 12:2.4, Zuhayr, no. 11:2, and Imru' al-Qays, no. 65:1).<sup>1</sup> The word is found in other thematic contexts as well, confirming the common meaning of *āyah* as an empirically accessible indicant pointing beyond itself: in an elegy attributed to Zuhayr, the poet, who portrays himself as an old man, speaks of "encountering a sign reminding me of some of the things I have forgotten" (*lāqaytu āyatan tudhakkirunī ba'da lladhī kuntu nāsiyā*; DSAAP, Zuhayr, no. 20:8); al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥillizah, in his Mu'allaqah, refers to three "signs" that the king 'Amr ibn Hind has had of "the good" inherent in the poet's tribe (Lyll 1894, 139, v. 69); 'Abīd mentions a "sign of aversion" shown to him by his wife (Lyll 1913, 'Abīd, no. 13:7); and a lament by Mutammim ibn Nuwayrah on his dead brother asserts the poet's inability to contain the grief triggered by the "signs I see [of you]" (*EAP* 1:112 = Lyll 1918–1924, no. 67:17).<sup>2</sup> Two poems from the Hudhali corpus, meanwhile, employ the phrase *bi-āyati mā* in the approximate sense of "as indicated by . . ." (Farrāj and Shākīr 1963–1965, 584 = 'Amr Dhū l-Kalb et al., no. 6:10, on which see *EAP* 1:43–44 and al-Farāhī 2002, 135; Farrāj and Shākīr 1963–1965, 113 = Abū Dhū'ayb, no. 9:6). Standing apart from all of these occurrences is a poetic account of the creation of the world by the Christian 'Adī ibn Zayd, which describes the creation in terms of God "acquainting us with his first signs" (*wa-'arrafanā āyātihi l-uwalā*; al-Mu'aybid 1965, no. 103:2; see Dmitriev 2010, 353 and 355–356). This usage, which may be presumed to be influenced by the Biblical notion of a "sign" as a miraculous divine deed (see below), provides a close precedent for the Qur'an's prevalent usage of the term *āyah* to denote manifestations of God's power and grace in the created world.

**God's signs in the Qur'an: overview.** Unlike most of the poetic data just rehearsed, the vast majority of occurrences of the term *āyah* in the Qur'an designate signs that are vouchsafed by God. Thus, the word is frequently part of the genitive construction *āyāt allāh* (e.g., Q 2:61.231.252, 3:4.6.19.21 etc., 30:10, 40:4.35.56 etc., 45:6; 19:58 has *āyāt al-raḥmān*) or accompanied by a possessive suffix referring to God (e.g., Q 2:39.41.73.129.151 etc., 78:28, 83:13, 90:19).<sup>3</sup> God's signs, which are often modified by the adjective *bayyin*, "clear" (→ *bayyana*; e.g., Q 2:99.211, 3:97, 10:15, 17:101, 19:73, 28:36; see Rahman 2009, 72–73), are "recounted" or "recited to" (*tutlā* or, in one case, *tuliyat 'alā*) humans (e.g., Q 3:101, 8:2.31, 10:15, 19:58, 68:15, 83:13; see Rahman 1980, 72, and Boisliveau 2014, 74–75, as well as under → *qara'a*), or humans are "reminded" (→ *dhakkara*) of them (e.g., Q 18:57). Where the verb *talā* is used in the active, it is primarily divine messengers who appear as its grammatical subject (Q 28:59, 39:71), especially the Qur'anic one (Q 2:129.151, 3:164, 7:175, 62:2, 65:11), to whom the signs are in turn recounted or recited

1 The Zuhayr verse is also quoted in al-Farāhī 2002, 136. The reference to Imru' al-Qays I owe to Dmitriev 2010, 356, n. 42.

2 The first three prooftexts are also cited in al-Farāhī 2002, 134–135. The poem by Mutammim ibn Nuwayrah is linked to the *riddah* wars that took place after Muhammad's death, but Lyll and Jones both make a credible case that it does not betray Islamic influence (see Lyll 1918–1924, 2:205–207; *EAP* 1:102–103).

3 For a rare case in which the word does not refer to a divine sign but presumably to a waymark erected by humans, see Q 26:128 (*CDKA* 32). At Q 17:12, the moon and the sun are called "the sign of the night" and "the sign of the day," respectively (cf. Gen 1:14); although they are clearly also divine signs, these two formulations would seem to intend primarily that the moon and the sun are indicators of night and day (see also Graham 2014, 264–265).

by God himself (Q 2:252, 3:58.108, 45:6).<sup>4</sup> Other terms used for God’s imparting of his signs are → *nazzala/anzala*, “to send down” (e.g., Q 2:99, 6:37, 24:1.34.46, 28:87); *arā*, “to show” (e.g., Q 2:73, 17:1, 20:23.56, 27:93, 43:48); → *bayyana*, “to make clear” (e.g., Q 2:118.187.219.221.242.266, 3:118, 5:75.89, 24:18.58.59.61);<sup>5</sup> *šarrafa*, “to explain in various or varied ways” (Q 6:46.65.105, 7:58, 46:27);<sup>6</sup> → *faṣṣala*, “to set out in detail, to expound in detail” (e.g., Q 6:55.97.98.126, 7:32.174, 9:11); or simply *ātā* and *atā bi-*, “to give” and “to bring” (e.g., Q 2:106.211), the latter also being used of human messengers (Q 2:145, 6:35, 13:38, 40:78, 43:47). Humans, however, will often dismiss as a lie (→ *kadhhaba*; e.g., Q 2:39, 3:11, 5:10.86, 54:42, 78:28), deny (*jahada*, e.g., Q 6:33, 7:51, 11:59, 40:63, 46:26), and repudiate (→ *kafara*; e.g., Q 2:61.99, 3:4.19.21 etc., 4:56.140.155, 19:77, 39:63, 90:19) God’s signs, gratuitously dispute about (*jādala fī*) them (Q 40:4.35.56.69, 42:35), turn away from (*a’raḍa ‘an*) them (Q 18:57, 32:22, 54:2), be heedless of (*ghafala ‘an*) them (Q 7:136.146, 10:7.92), sell them for a small price (*ištarā bi-āyāti llāhi thamanan qalīlan*; Q 2:41, 3:199, 5:44, 9:9; → *sharā*), or otherwise dismiss them (e.g., Q 8:31, 31:7, 43:47, 45:8.9.25.31.35, 46:7, 68:15, 74:16, 83:13). As many verses affirm, rejection of God’s signs will incur divine retribution (e.g., Q 3:4.21, 4:56, 6:49.157, 16:104, 20:127, 45:8.9.11) while those who believe in God’s signs will be rewarded (e.g., Q 6:54, 7:156, 23:57–61, 43:68–70). On the other hand, humans may also respond positively to God’s signs, for instance, by reflecting on (*tadabbara*) them (Q 38:29) or believing (→ *āmana*) in them (Q 6:54.118, 7:126.156, 23:58, 27:81, 30:53, 32:15, 43:69).

**The disputational or argumentative function of God’s signs.** Statements of the form “In X there are signs (*āyāt*) for people (*li-qawmin*) who . . .” (e.g., Q 2:164, 6:99, 10:6.67, 30:21.23.24.37, 45:3–5) throw into relief that God signs are signs for (*li-*) an audience: God clarifies, expounds, and explains his signs so that people might “know” (e.g., Q 6:97.105) or “have certainty” (Q 2:118). Although the literal meaning of *li-qawmin ya’lamūn* and the like is “for people who know” etc., a case can be made that the intended purport of the phrase is rather “so that people might know” (see under → *faṣṣala*). This has the theologically significant consequence that the intended addressees are not confined to those who already possess knowledge or understanding.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the collocation of God’s signs with the verb *jādala* in verses like Q 40:4.35.56.69 highlights the fact that Qur’anic *āyāt* are generally conceived as something discursive, something that can be adduced as a compelling argument (Gwynne 2004, 26, and Abrahamov 2006, 3; see already *FVQ* 73).<sup>8</sup> To reject these signs, then, is a failure of reason or rational comprehension, as marked by the verse-final concatenation of the noun *āyah* with the verb *‘aqala* (“to understand”)

4 Two verses that predicate the recounting or reciting of God’s signs of ordinary humans are Q 3:113 and probably also 22:72. At least in the former case, reference must be to scriptural recitation (see below). In Q 6:130 and 7:35, God’s signs figure as the object of the verb *qaṣṣa*, “to narrate,” probably used approximately in the same sense as *talā*.

5 The collocation of *bayyana* + *āyāt* is exclusively Medinan.

6 On the meanings that Arabic lexicographers assign to *šarrafa*, see *AEL* 1681 (the basic meaning given being the “turning of the winds . . . from one state or condition, to another; . . . or from one direction, or course, or way, to another”).

7 A convenient way of capturing this insight in translation without departing too much from the Arabic syntax would be to render *li-qawmin ya’lamūn* as “for people who would have knowledge.”

8 Jeffery contends that this argumentative connotation is also present in Syriac *ātā* and cites *TS* 413 to corroborate this, but the two Biblical passages adduced there are hardly sufficient support.

in more than a dozen cases (Q 2:73.164.242, 3:118, 13:4, 16:12.67, 24:61, 29:35, 30:24.28, 45:5, 57:17).<sup>9</sup>

The discursive dimension of Qur’anic signs is particularly clear in Q 28:32, where the term *burhān*, “proof,” occurs in a context in which the parallel verses 20:22 and 27:12 have *āyah* instead.<sup>10</sup> Another term that is at least partially synonymous with *āyah* is the word *‘ibrah*, “lesson” (see Abrahamov 2006, 5, and Graham 2014, 263–265). Thus, in Q 3:13 a battle between believers and repudiators is described both as an *āyah* at the beginning of the verse and as an *‘ibrah* at the end, thereby underscoring that an *āyah* is something that has a “lesson”—specifically, a lesson to do with God—to impart, which in the case of Q 3:13 is that “God aids with his help whom he wills (*man yashā’u*; → *shā’a*).” A partial synonymy of the terms *āyah* and *‘ibrah* can also be inferred from observing how the phrase *wa-inna lakum fī l-an’āmi la-‘ibratan* (“There is a lesson for you<sup>p</sup> in livestock”) in Q 16:66 (see also 23:21) is surrounded by similar phrases employing the word *āyah* (Q 16:65.67.69: *inna fī dhālika la-āyatan li-qawmin . . .*, “In that there is a sign for a people who . . .”).<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere, too, the phrase *inna fī dhālika la-‘ibratan* (“There is a lesson in that . . .”) occurs in relation to phenomena that are otherwise categorised as “signs” (see Q 24:44, with regard to the alternation of day and night, and 79:26, with regard to God’s punishment of Pharaoh).

If Qur’anic signs are arguments, what is their precise content? As earlier scholars have observed, the Qur’an understands God’s signs to encompass natural phenomena to do with the creation and continued functioning of the cosmos in its present state, on the one hand, and divine acts in history, on the other (e.g., KU 4; Watt 1970, 121–126; Rahman 2009, 68–73; Graham 2014, 264–267). Both categories are designated with the word *āyah* from very early on in the Qur’an’s genesis, as demonstrated by the early Meccan Surah 51. According to Q 51:20–21, “signs for those endowed with certainty” are found “in the earth” and “in yourselves,” both of which are probably an allusion to the theme of natural signs (which include the gestation of the human embryo and fetus in the womb and various features of the world that benefit humans). A later verse in the same surah, Q 51:37, then applies the term *āyah* to what is, in Biblical terms, God’s destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. The following discussion will begin by unpacking these two principal categories of Qur’anic signs, turning first to cosmic signs and then to historical ones. This is followed by a discussion of Qur’anic passages exhibiting a Biblically tinged use of the word *āyah* in relation to confirmatory prophetic miracles. The entry’s final two sections explore two specific senses of the term *āyah* that are secondary expansions of its basic meaning, namely, its application to textual segments of the Qur’anic revelations and to divine commandments.

9 According to Fazlur Rahman, the Qur’an “does not ‘prove’ God but ‘points to’ Him from the existing universe”: God, he maintains, is discovered rather than inferred (Rahman 2009, 10 and 11; see also *ibid.*, 3 and 70). Yet the phenomena classed as “signs” in the Qur’an (see below) are quite plainly assumed to have considerable probative weight, and the terminological fact that they are referred to as “signs” is not sufficient to refute that they are deemed to be cogent arguments that are in principle expected to sway even those who are not yet convinced of the Qur’an’s teachings. This is not, of course, to insist that Qur’anic arguments qualify as demonstrative proofs in a technical philosophical sense.

10 The functional proximity of *āyah* and *burhān* is noted in Abrahamov 2006, 3, and Graham 2014, 270. On *burhān* and its etymology (from Ethiopic *bərḥān*, “light”), see NB 58–59, FVQ 77–78, Rahman 2009, 73–74, and CDKA 37–38. Ambros notes that at Q 4:174 (where *burhān* is paired with “clear light,” *nūr mubīn*) and 12:24 “the word may still be used in its original [Ethiopic] meaning . . . of ‘spiritual illumination.’”

See also Q 45:25, where the Qur’an’s opponents counter God’s “clear signs” with an “argument” (*hujjah*) of their own, albeit one deemed to be specious.

11 On *li-qawmin* + verb in the prefix conjugation, see briefly above and under → *faṣṣala*.

**Cosmic signs.** Natural phenomena that are labelled divine signs or that appear next to explicit references to God's signs include the following (but note that there are many other Qur'anic passages treating these themes in which the word *āyah* does not occur): the creation of (or of the entities in) the heavens and the earth in general (Q 2:164, 3:190, 10:6, 21:30, 29:44, 30:22, 42:29; → *khalaqa*); God's raising of the heavens (Q 13:2, 21:32); his stretching out of the earth and his implanting of mountains in it (Q 13:3, 20:53, 21:31); the creation of humans (Q 6:98, 20:55, 30:20, 45:4), including spousal relations between them (Q 30:21); God's establishment of heavenly bodies from which humans can take their bearings and which measure time, with the "alternation of night and day" sometimes being singled out for mention (Q 2:164, 3:190, 6:96–97, 10:5–6.67, 13:3, 16:12, 17:12, 27:86, 36:37–40, 41:37, 45:5); the sending down of rain and, by means of it, the vivification of the earth and the production of multifarious vegetation and fruit (Q 2:164, 6:99, 13:3–4, 16:10–11.65.67, 20:53, 26:7–8, 30:24, 36:33–36, 41:39, 45:5; see Ambros 1990, 312); livestock (Q 16:66, 20:54, 40:79–80); honeybees (Q 16:68–69); winds and seafaring (Q 2:164, 30:46, 31:31, 36:41–44, 40:80, 42:32–34, 45:5.12); the endowment of humans with garments (Q 7:26); sleep (Q 30:23, 39:42); lightning (Q 30:24); and the fact that birds are suspended in mid-air and that "no one holds them but God" (Q 16:79; see Decharneux 2019, 259–263, with compelling parallels from the works of Jacob of Sarug).

The Qur'an thus exhibits an untiring concern to habituate its addressees to perceive worldly events as manifestations of God's unceasing presence and activity in the cosmos in general and of God's beneficial care for humans in particular: to be properly attuned to the world, according to the Qur'an, is to experience it as an arena in which a transcendent deity is continuously at work. The Qur'anic concept of signs, therefore, makes it possible to articulate how a creator god who is unambiguously set apart from the world created by him is nonetheless in some sense ubiquitously present in it. In having recourse to semiotic terminology, the Qur'an would seem to recognise that there is some distinction to be made between what indicates and what is being indicated—that is, between one's experience of natural occurrences as such (vegetation, wind, rain), on the one hand, and one's construal of these occurrences as divine acts, on the other. Moreover, Qur'anic appeals to experience nature as a system of divine signs bespeak an obvious awareness that the natural occurrences in question are in fact being construed differently by some humans, who fail to (or refuse to) detect in them the same, or perhaps any, religious surplus meaning. At the same time, however, Qur'anic passages combining the noun *āyah* with the verb *'aqala* ("to understand") or passages condemning those who are heedless or in denial of God's signs make it very clear that to interpret worldly events in purely immanent terms, without reference to a transcendent creator and ruler, would by the Qur'an's reckoning be manifestly deficient, irrational, and invalid.<sup>12</sup>

12 The preceding sentences are inspired by Taylor 2007, 11. Taylor contrasts the modern condition of secularity with a premodern condition in which there was no distinction between one's experience of the world, on the one hand, and its construal in terms of religious or supernatural categories, on the other. By contrast, in the modern situation of secularity "we cannot help but be aware that there are a number of different construals, views which intelligent, reasonably undeluded people, of good will, can and do disagree on." It seems to me that the Qur'an occupies an intermediate position between these two poles: the Qur'anic concept of divine signs amounts to an acknowledgement that there is a certain distinction or gap between experience, on the one hand, and its construal in theistic terms, on the other (an acknowledgement that likely reflects the high degree of religious controversy in the Qur'anic environment); yet it would be difficult to maintain that the Qur'an accepts alternative construals of the phenomena in question as defensible. See also Taylor 2007, 329,



The natural phenomena adduced as divine signs by the Qur'an serve to inculcate and exemplify fairly specific theological claims going beyond the general proposition that there is a divine creator and governor of the world. These claims involve, first, God's omnipotence, specifically his ability to bring to life what is seemingly dead, and, secondly, God's generous solicitude for human wellbeing, expressing itself in the fact that he has established, and continues to maintain, a world designed to meet human needs, a cosmos in which God "has made what is in the heavens and what is on earth subservient to you" (Q 31:20, 45:13; cf. 22:65) and which is replete with "benefits" (*manāfi'*; → *nafa'a*) for humans (Q 16:5, 23:21, 36:73, 40:80, 57:25; Radscheit 1996a, 66; see in more detail under → *ard*).<sup>13</sup> In addition, some passages rehearsing natural signs exhibit a stress on natural contrasts (Q 7:58, 30:37, 39:52) or reversals (Q 10:24, 36:33.37) that would appear to anticipate God's differential passing of judgement and the unexpected swiftness with which he may intervene in human affairs. The discretionary dimension of God's power is highlighted when one and the same natural situation or phenomenon is depicted as leading to diametrically opposed outcomes: adjacent tracts of land that receive the same irrigation may bear different quantities of crops (Q 13:4; see also under → *darajah*); someone falling asleep may either wake up again or die in accordance with God's decree (Q 39:42); ships may be propelled across the ocean by the wind or experience a lull (Q 42:32–34); seafarers may drown or be spared by God's mercy (Q 36:43–44).

The Qur'an's pervasive appeal to natural phenomena as being pointers and indications that are laden with theological purport has strong Christian precedent (see generally Decharneux 2021). For instance, according to the second-century Christian writer Theophilus of Antioch, God has "given you many indications (*tekmēria*) for believing him," that is, for believing the doctrine of a future resurrection of the dead, and these indications are said to include "the resurrection (*exanastasis*) of seeds and fruits, occurring for the benefit (*eis tēn chrēsin*) of mankind" (*Ad Autolyicum* 1:13 = Theophilus 1970, 16–17). This corresponds directly to the Qur'anic propensity to infer God's power to raise the dead from his factually obvious revivification of dead earth (e.g., Q 41:39). At the terminological level, the Greek word *tekmērion* provides a compelling equivalent of Arabic *āyah*, while Theophilus's invocation of benefit (*chrēsis*) recalls the Qur'anic employment of derivatives of the root *n-f'*. The argument for the resurrection from the growth of crops is already found in Clement of Rome's *Letter to the Corinthians* (1 *Clement* 24 = Ehrmann 2003, 1:80–81; see Lehmann and Pedersen 1914, 55), and it may be inspired by a passage in Paul explaining the resurrection of the dead with reference to the sowing of grain (1 Cor 15:35–49; cf. also John 12:24). The Qur'an's general recourse to natural phenomena as theological indicants, meanwhile, has been persuasively linked to Ephrem's understanding that nature, like scripture, "testifies

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distinguishing between a premodern awareness of God's presence and power that is "experience-near" and a modern approach according to which God's presence and power have to be "discerned in the design of things." For a philosophical account of religion as experience (as opposed to a system of assumptions by which we explain and enframe our experiences), see Hick 1989, 129–171. Hick's argument is grounded in the Kantian claim that all intentional experience is experiencing-as: all experience fuses raw sensory awareness with concepts that enable us to classify, identify, and recognise what we are experiencing: for example, we perceive a bird by classifying a certain sensory pattern of shape and movement, perhaps also of sound, as a bird. Against this background, Hick suggests that religious concepts can be similarly woven into our experience of the world. Unlike Taylor, Hick is not interested in sketching a historical transformation by which a premodern stance of experiencing the world in religious categories becomes, in the modern age, a set of religious hypotheses about the world.

13 See also Rahman 2009, 78–79; Ambros 1990, 293, 309–310, 311; Peterson 2001, 473; *HCI* 172–174.



to the creator” (Madigan 2001, 202–205, citing inter alia Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 5:2; see also Beck 1970a, no. 3:357–388).<sup>14</sup> Overall, it seems a fair conjecture that not only the Qur’anic proof of the resurrection from God’s creation of human fetuses in the womb (on which see generally Lehmann and Pedersen 1914 and also under → *khalaqa*) but also the Qur’an’s general propensity to enumerate a multitude of cosmic phenomena as indications of theological truths develops elements of Christian missionary preaching.<sup>15</sup>

But the preceding genealogy should not lead one to overlook the distinctive inflection that the Qur’an gives the general idea that nature bears witness to its divine originator. For the Qur’an envisages God not, or not merely, as the creator and designer of a cosmic system that subsequently operates more or less autonomously; rather, it depicts the deity as intimately involved in the causal structure of such regular natural processes as the falling of rain or the conception and gestation of children (see under → *allāh*). For instance, God is the one said to spread out rain clouds “as he wills” (Q 30:48) and to direct them to the precise location where they will discharge their load (Q 7:57). God is therefore directly present in the operations of the natural world, and Qur’anic “signs” reveal not only God’s primordial role as the world’s creator but also “the overwhelming, effective presence of the transcendent God” (Frank 1992a, 23, n. 29) in the world as it presently exists. Consequently, Qur’anic *āyāt*, like the falling of rain and the resulting revivification of parched land, are not just indications of divine design and creation in the past but also quasi-miraculous deeds of God in the here and now. As we will see below, the Qur’an applies the word *āyah* not only to cosmic and historical indicants of God but also to prophetic miracles. The preceding remarks shed light on how this signification is linked to the one presently under discussion: the Qur’an is seeking to instil in its recipients a vivid sense that God is miraculously at work in even the most everyday occurrences, such as the facts that birds do not drop from the sky (Q 16:79) or that the sky does not collapse upon the earth (Q 22:65).

**Historical signs.** By contrast with cosmic signs, historical ones have a more consistently sinister thrust and often centre on God’s punitive obliteration of previous communities, accounts of which are customarily termed “punishment legends” (*KU* 10–32; Marshall 1999, 27–115; *HCI* 169–172). Thus, the word *āyah* appears in connection with the deluge that engulfed the contemporaries of Noah (Q 23:30, 25:37, 26:121, 29:15, 36:41, 54:15), the annihilation of the sinful compatriots of Lot (Q 15:75, 77, 26:174, 29:35, 51:37), the drowning of Pharaoh and the Egyptians during their pursuit of the Israelites (Q 10:92, 26:67; see Sinai 2019a, 239–240), and the destruction of several non-Biblical peoples (Q 26:139, 158, 190, 27:52, 34:15, 19). Undoubtedly, the semiotic character of such past punishments resides to a significant degree in the fact that they prefigure God’s eschatological punishment in the future. This would seem to be the reason why accounts of past divine punishments are in a number of cases followed by affirmations to the effect that “in this” (*fī dhālika*) there is a sign “for those who fear the punishment of the hereafter” (Q 11:103) and the like

<sup>14</sup> This theme is also found in Jacob of Sarug; see Mathews 2020, 3 and 16–20. On Jewish and Christian parallels to the Qur’an’s theologically charged portrayal of the natural world, see also *BEQ* 6–8.

<sup>15</sup> Lehmann and Pedersen more cautiously allow for the possibility that the primary background of the Qur’anic argument for the resurrection from the creation of embryos was Jewish rather than Christian (Lehmann and Pedersen 1914, 60). However, it seems to me that the quantity of Christian parallels they present as well as the explicitly argumentative character of these parallels justifies plumping for the Christian alternative.

(Q 15:75-77, 26:67.121.139.158.174.190, 27:52): the past event at hand is the indicator, and God's coming judgement is the indicated.<sup>16</sup>

The very fact that the Qur'an subsumes both general features of the present cosmic order and divine acts of devastation in the past under the rubric of "signs" underlines that it would be inappropriate to impose on the Qur'an a strong distinction between these two subgroups of signs. The connection that exists, from the Qur'anic perspective, between cosmic signs and traces of past divine devastations is particularly clear from Q 40:79–85, combining a reminder of some common natural signs (vv. 79–80) with a general reference to the destruction of earlier peoples (vv. 82–85), after an explicit exhortation that God "shows you<sup>p</sup> his signs" in the preceding verse (v. 81). This bracketing together of past acts of divine retribution with features of the natural order as it functions in the present may involve a certain affinity with the usage of the word *āyah* in poetic evocations of deserted campsites. Some Qur'anic passages imply that God's retaliatory eradication of past communities is attested by material remains in the present (see Q 14:45, 20:128, 22:45–46, 27:52, 28:58, 29:38, 32:26, 37:137–138, perhaps also 46:25.27), similar to the traces of deserted tribal abodes that figure in poetry. Hence, in cases in which God's past actions consisted in a devastation of entire settlements, the consequences of these divine interventions are presumed to be at least sometimes available for empirical inspection in the here and now, as evidenced by the Qur'an's appeals to its audience "to travel the earth" (verb: → *sāra fī l-ardī*) and "behold" (verb: *naẓara*) the "end" (*'āqibah*) of previous sinners and evildoers (Q 3:137, 6:11, 12:109, 16:36, 27:69, 30:9.42, 35:44, 40:21.82, 47:10).<sup>17</sup> The Qur'an thus bespeaks a profound awareness of inhabiting a landscape dotted with ruins that have a theological lesson to impart, just as the cosmic order, too, has theological lessons to impart.

Two final passages that deserve brief mention before concluding the present discussion of historical signs are the Meccan verses Q 7:73 and 11:64. Both describe the "she-camel of God" that the people of Thamūd were prohibited from harming (a command they failed to heed) as a sign for Thamūd (*lakum āyatan*)—rather than, as might have been expected, casting the subsequent destruction of Thamūd as a sign for the Qur'an's own audience. The operative meaning of a divine sign would here seem to be an empirically verifiable fact to which humans are bidden to respond in the right manner, on pain of catastrophic punishment. The she-camel is evidently not a *historical* sign for Thamūd nor does it form a general aspect of the operation of the cosmos—or, for that matter, amount to a clearly miraculous occurrence like those worked by Moses (see below). Similar to Q 40:79–85, 7:73 and 11:64 accordingly illustrate the limitations of an overly rigorous attempt to discern a limited number of neatly demarcated subcategories of signs in the Qur'an.

**Signs as confirmatory miracles.** We saw above the possible relevance of the poetic usage of the term *āyah* to the its semantics in the Qur'an. However, when the word *āyah* is used in the context of prophetic history its Qur'anic employment goes back to the Biblical concept of a sign (Hebrew: *ōt*, Peshitta: *ātā*, Greek: *sēmeion*), which can mean a miraculous attestation of God's presence and a vindication of the truthfulness of a human claimant to prophecy (FVQ 73; see also HALOT 26 and TDOT 1:167–188; TDNT 7:200–261 also

16 As noted in KK 243–244, the formula *inna fī dhālika la-āyatan/āyāt li- . . .* is also frequent with respect to natural signs and in other contexts.

17 Calls to behold the end of previous sinners, without reference to travel, are even more frequent.

discusses related Biblical terms). This notion of divinely produced sign-events is perhaps most notable in the Pentateuchal account of Moses and the Exodus (Exod 4:8–9.17.28.30, 7:3, and 10:1–2), but it is also very much in evidence in the New Testament (see, e.g., John 2:11, 4:54, 6:2.14, Acts 2:22, and 2 Cor 12:12). In the Qur’an, too, references to “signs” are particularly prominent in connection with Moses, who together with his brother Aaron is reported to have been sent to Pharaoh “with our/my signs,” *bi-āyātīnā/bi-āyātī* (Q 7:103, 10:75, 11:96, 14:5, 20:42, 23:45, 26:15, 28:35–36, 40:23, 43:46–47). Moses’s signs, which are quantified as nine (Q 17:101, 27:12), include two confirmatory miracles with which he is equipped during his prophetic commission (Q 7:106–108, 20:17–23, 27:12), also labelled “signs” in Exod 4:8–9, in addition to the Egyptian plagues (Q 7:130–135; see *KK* 307–308). The declaration that Moses was sent “with” God’s signs may additionally be informed by the fact that the Qur’an depicts Moses, like Noah (Q 10:71 and 71:10–20), as invoking some of the Qur’an’s standard cosmic signs for God’s power and benevolence (Q 20:50.53–55, significantly followed in v. 56 by the statement that Pharaoh was shown all of God’s signs). Moses thus emerges as comprehensively equipped both with discursive and miraculous signs. An explicit reflection of this comprehensive empowerment of Moses may be detected in verses expanding the assertion that he was sent “with” God’s signs by a reference to the “clear authority” (→ *sulṭān mubīn*) invested in him (Q 11:96, 23:45, 40:23; see also 28:35). In addition to Moses, Jesus too is credited with producing miraculous sign-events (Q 3:49; cf. 5:110, though without the term *āyah*). Moreover, the miraculous sending-down of a laid table upon the disciples of Jesus is also termed a “sign” (Q 5:114).

It is noteworthy that a Biblically tinged understanding of divine *āyāt* as confirmatory miracles also informs statements ascribed to the Qur’an’s opponents (see also under → *ashraka*), who are portrayed as challenging Muhammad to vindicate his claim to be a divine messenger by a miracle (Q 2:118, 6:37, 7:203, 10:20, 13:7.27, 20:133, 21:5, 29:50), “like previous messengers” (Q 21:5; see also 6:124 and 28:48)—a request similar to those allegedly put to Jesus (see especially Matt 12:38 and 16:1, Mark 8:11, Luke 11:16).<sup>18</sup> In implicit debate with such polemical demands, the Meccan proclamations maintain that ample signs are in fact available “in the heavens and on earth” (Q 10:101), but understands these to be not spectacular one-off occurrences but rather commonly accessible natural phenomena, like the falling of rain or the alternation of night and day, that support the content of Muhammad’s preaching.<sup>19</sup> To be sure, two passages attribute to the Qur’anic messenger visions of God’s “signs” (Q 17:1 and 53:18), but neither strictly speaking conforms to the public miracle-working demanded by his adversaries. Instead, at least the Meccan surahs insist that Muhammad’s claim to being a divinely sent “warner” (*mundhir, nadhīr*; e.g., Q 13:7, 29:50; see under → *bashshara*) is sufficiently validated by the cogency of his recounting of God’s signs in nature and history. The audience’s expectation of a miraculous sign-event akin to the confirmatory miracles granted to Moses (Q 28:48) is thus deflected.

This is not to say, however, that the Qur’an disavows the general possibility that God might “send down a sign from heaven” to Muhammad’s contemporaries (Q 26:4 and similarly 6:37; note that the formulation “a sign from heaven” is also found in Matt 16:1,

<sup>18</sup> This demand is mirrored by the audience of the messenger Ṣāliḥ (Q 26:154). See also, regarding Moses, Q 7:106 and 26:31 (*KK* 370).

<sup>19</sup> See Abrahamov 2006, 4: “Muhammad’s prophecy is not proved directly by *āyāt*; rather it is proved through legitimating his message by *āyāt*. When the message is demonstrated to be genuine, the messenger is a true prophet.” Cf. also Rahman 2009, 77–78.

Mark 8:11, and Luke 11:16). This explicit reservation accords with the fact that even beyond the career of Moses, God's signs in history include miraculous acts responding to human petitions, such as the sending down of a table to Jesus and the Apostles (Q 5:114) or the temporary muteness of Zechariah after receiving the promise that he will have a son (Q 3:41, 19:10). In a similar vein, Q 2:248 describes the Israelite ark (*al-tābūt*) as a sign of Saul's kingship, in so far as it confirms the prior claim by an anonymous Israelite prophet (Samuel, in Biblical terms) that "God has appointed Saul as your<sup>p</sup> king" (Q 2:247). Other historical persons and events that are described as divine signs, presumably in so far as they exemplify God's workings and unbridled liberty to intervene in the world that he has created, are Joseph and his brothers (Q 12:7), the "Companions of the Cave" (Q 18:9.17), Jesus and Mary (Q 19:21, 21:91, 23:50), and God's deliverance of Abraham from being burnt by his compatriots (Q 29:24). Q 2:67–73 recounts, and labels as one of God's "signs" (v. 73), the story of how Moses instructed the ancient Israelites to revivify a murder victim with part of a slaughtered yellow cow (cf. Deut 21:1–9 and Num 19:2; see *BEQ* 345–346). Here, too, a sign is a doctrinally laden divine deed in the past, whose theological purport is duly explicated in a concluding comment: "Thus does God bring the dead to life and show you his signs, so that you may comprehend" (Q 2:73). The same understanding underlies the story of an anonymous traveller whom God resurrected a hundred years after his demise, also called a sign (Q 2:259).<sup>20</sup> Perhaps building on the notion of a divine sign as a critical divine intervention on behalf of the righteous that can be discerned in Q 29:24 (God's rescue of Abraham), Medinan verses frame not only the Israelites' God-given victory over Goliath (Q 2:252) as a divine sign but also God's assistance of the Qur'anic believers in battles with their Meccan foes (Q 3:13, 48:20).

**The plural *āyāt* as a designation for textual segments of revelation.** In the later Meccan and the Medinan surahs, the Qur'anic notion of signs acquires additional layers. First, and most importantly, the term *āyāt* begins to be employed to refer to textual units or segments of revelation, thus foreshadowing its post-Qur'anic meaning "verses" (see, e.g., *CDKA* 32; Abrahamov 2006, 6–7; Graham 2014, 267–269; Boisliveau 2014, 75–76). In so far as a substantial part of the Qur'anic proclamations is dedicated to recounting God's signs in nature and history, it is understandable how the term "sign" could secondarily come to designate portions of these proclamations themselves. For instance, when Q 38:29 states that God has sent down the celestial scripture to the Qur'anic messenger (→ *kitāb*) so that his hearers "may contemplate its *āyāt*," this can be taken to refer both to the "signs" that are recounted in the scripture and also to the "sign-pronouncements" (see also under → *dhālika*) that constitute it (similarly Q 41:44).<sup>21</sup> The semantic shift towards a textual meaning of the word *āyah* is already visible in surah introductions like Q 10:1, 11:1, 12:1, 13:1 etc., evoking the "sign-pronouncements" of the celestial scripture, and becomes undeniable in the Meccan verse Q 16:101, commenting on God's "altering" or "exchanging" (verb: *baddala*) of one revelatory sign-pronouncement for another, as well as in the Medinan verses Q 2:106 (God may abrogate, *nasakha*, some sign-pronouncements or cause them to be forgotten), 3:7 (some of the scripture's constituent sign-pronouncements are unambiguous, others

<sup>20</sup> Note that here (and in the Abraham episode narrated in the following verse, Q 2:260), God responds to a prior human profession of doubt or at least a demand for a sign, as in Q 3:41, 5:114, and 19:10.

<sup>21</sup> Regarding the proposal that *āyah* in its textual meaning be rendered "sign-pronouncement," see already the remarks in Grimme 1895, 74, rendering *āyāt* als *Einzelmitteilungen*.

ambiguous), and 3:113 (where *yatlūna āyāti llāhi ānā'a l-layli wa-hum yasjudūn* must refer to scriptural recitation in prayer: “they recite God’s sign-pronouncements during the night while prostrating themselves”).

**“Signs” used in relation to normative guidance.** A second semantic development of the term *āyah* in the Medinan period consists in the fact that some passages apply the word to legal ordinances or at least broadly normative instructions, which are sometimes followed by clausulae invoking God’s “making clear of his signs” or the like (Abrahamov 2006, 7, and Goudarzi 2018, 284; see, e.g., Q 2:187.219.221, 5:89, 9:11, 24:58.59.61). As Goudarzi comments, this usage would seem to be rooted in the connotation that a divine “sign” is “something that is instrumental to human guidance, whether it be a fact of nature, a historical narrative, or a legal injunction.” Perhaps this Medinan usage also builds on Q 7:73 and 11:64 in particular (see above), where the camel sent by God is labelled a sign for Thamūd (*lakum āyatan*), coming as it does with the clear instruction to let it graze freely and not to harm it (*fa-dharūhā ta'kul fī arḍi llāhi wa-lā tamassūhā bi-sū'in*) and with a concomitant threat of punishment in case of non-compliance (*fa-ya'khudhakum 'adhābun qarīb*).

***ayyada* tr. (bi-) | to fortify s.o. (with s.th.)**

→ *rūḥ*

# b

***al-baḥr*** | the sea

→ *arḍ*

***badī' al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*** | the originator of the heavens and the earth

→ *khalaqa*

***baddala*** tr. | to alter s.th., to exchange s.th.

→ *āyah*

***istabdala*** tr. | to make s.o. a substitute (for s.o. else)

→ *istakhlafa*

***badan*** | (human) body

→ *allāh*

***budn*** pl. | sacrificial animals

→ *dhabaḥa*

***bara'a*** tr. | to create s.th.

***bārī'*** | creator

***al-bariyyah*** | the creatures

→ *khalaqa*

***burūj*** pl. | towers; constellations (of stars)

→ *samā'*

***birr*** | righteousness, righteous conduct

→ *dhabaḥa*



***al-barr* | dry land**→ *arḍ*, → *afsada****bāraka* tr. | to bestow blessing upon s.o. or s.th.*****bāraka* intr. ‘*alā/fī* | to bestow blessing upon s.th. or s.o.*****tabāraka* intr. | to be blessed**→ *arḍ*, → *bayt*, → *ism*, → *qaddasa****burhān* | proof**→ *āyah****baṣaṭa* tr. | to spread s.th. out**→ *arḍ****bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm* | In the name of God, the truly Merciful**

The invocation *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm* (“In the name of God, the truly Merciful”), which the post-Qur’anic tradition terms the *basmalah*, precedes all Qur’anic surahs except for Surah 9. Its component expressions are discussed elsewhere (→ *ism*, → *allāh*, → *al-raḥmān*). Structurally, the *basmalah*’s tripartite shape recalls the Christian invocation “In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost” that originates in Jesus’s baptismal command in Matt 28:19 (Neuwirth 2010, 241; *HCI* 143). The *basmalah*, of course, does not enumerate three distinct divine persons but rather identifies God and “the Merciful” as constituting one and the same divine being. The *basmalah* formula may thus be considered an assertion of the Qur’an’s rigorous monotheism. At the same time, the *basmalah* ties together two divine names of ultimately independent origin, → *allāh* and → *al-raḥmān*, which are discussed in separate entries. The following entry pays particular attention to the link between the *basmalah* and South Arabian epigraphy and to the chronological question of whether the *basmalah* predates or postdates Q 27:30, the *basmalah*’s only occurrence inside a Qur’anic surah.

**The date of the *basmalah*, Q 27:30, and South Arabian inscriptions.** The divine name “the Merciful” (*al-raḥmān*) does not occur in the earliest Qur’anic proclamations. Since the *basmalah* includes the expression *al-raḥmān*, it is likely that its prefatory use at the beginning of every surah except for Surah 9 is a secondary innovation that postdates the emergence of *al-raḥmān* as a divine name around the middle of the Meccan period (Nöldeke 1860, 88). The two earliest occurrences of *al-raḥmān* outside the *basmalah* are Q 55:1 and 26:5, with a mean verse length of 32.97 and 36.71 transliteration letters, respectively; somewhat later, a cluster of surahs whose mean verse length is located in the relatively narrow range from 55 to 75 transliteration letters makes strikingly frequent use of the divine name “the Merciful” (see under → *al-raḥmān*). It is tempting to guess that the emergence of the *basmalah* formula falls somewhere around the same time as the surahs just referenced; but this consideration is hardly sufficient to rule out that the *basmalah* may only have surfaced at a later moment in time. Are there other pieces of evidence that might allow us

to confirm a middle Meccan date for the Qur’anic appearance of the *basmalah*? Schwally draws attention to Q 27:30, where the *basmalah* is cited as the opening of a letter that the queen of Saba’ (see Q 27:22–23) receives from Solomon (GQ 1:117). The verse could be construed as providing a *terminus ante quem* for the *basmalah* by virtue of appearing to evidence a moment in the Qur’an’s genesis at which a prefatory use of the *basmalah* in documents of broadly religious significance had come to be assumed as a formulaic given (Neuwirth 2010, 241; PP 268; Neuwirth 2016c, 40). Since Surah 27 has a mean verse length of 78.19 transliteration letters, an understanding of Q 27:30 as the *terminus ante quem* of the *basmalah* would neatly confirm a middle Meccan dating of the formula.

Yet it is conceivable that what Q 27:30 reflects is not the prior emergence of the *basmalah* in Qur’anic usage but merely the invocatory conventions of South Arabian epigraphy (see also Ghaffar 2020, 102–110). For example, the opening and closing invocations in a Christian inscription from the realm of Ḥimyar, datable to the 530s CE, contain the phrase “In the name of the Merciful” (*b-sʼm rḥmnn*; see Robin 2015a, 163–164; Robin and Rijziger 2018, 281). The same phrase recurs at the end of another Christian inscription (Ryckmans 1946, 167 and 172: “In the name of the Merciful and his son Christ, the Victorious”) and in the notice commemorating what appears to have been the final maintenance of the dam of Mārib in 558 CE during the reign of Abraha (Robin 2015a, 170–171).<sup>1</sup> This Christian use of “In the name of the Merciful” constitutes a functional and structural variant of a more general formulaic convention in epigraphic Sabaic: other inscriptions, both from before and after Ḥimyar’s abolition of traditional South Arabian polytheism, employ closing formulae that commence with the preposition *b-* followed by the name of a deity or a ruler, often with intervening terms like “power” (*hyl*), “assistance” (*rdʼ*), or “authority” (*mqm*; Robin and Rijziger 2018, 286–287; Stein 2013, 93–95). An invocatory employment of the preposition *b-* is also attested for Qatabanian, another dialect of Epigraphic South Arabian (Ricks 1989, 19). It is true that third- and fourth-century Sasanian inscriptions include a phrase similar to the *basmalah*, “In the name of the gods” (*pad nām ī yazdān*; Gignoux 1990). Yet it is not certain that the Iranian evidence may count as a direct antecedent of the Qur’anic *basmalah* (Shaked 1992, 152). Minimally, it may be submitted that the South Arabian material just surveyed provides precursors that are both sufficient and geographically more proximate, leaving no immediate explanatory role for Sasanian epigraphy.

**The Jabal Dhabūb inscription and the identity of Allāh/God and *al-rahmān* (“the Merciful”).** A particularly captivating potential antecedent of the *basmalah* is found in a possibly pre-Qur’anic inscription from Jabal Dhabūb in a late form of the South Arabian cursive script. Its first line, as read by its original editors (*b-sʼmlh rḥmn rḥmn rb sʼmwt*), may contain the full *basmalah*—namely, if one reads the second word as *rahmān* without the suffixed Epigraphic South Arabian article *-ān* and the third one as *rahīmān*, with the *-ān* suffix (al-Ḥājj and Faqʿas 2018, 19 and 21–22). However, Ahmad Al-Jallad has more convincingly argued for a revised interpretation according to which the introduction encompasses only two components, *b-sʼmlh rḥmn*, “In the name of God, the Merciful (*rahmān*),” followed by the plea “have mercy upon us (*rḥmn = irḥamnā*), O Lord of the heavens (*rb sʼmwt*)” (Al-Jallad, forthcoming). The upshot of this re-reading is that the

<sup>1</sup> These instances of “In the name of the Merciful” are not the only Sabaic inscriptions from the sixth century that combine an invocatory *b-* with the divine name “the Merciful” (*rḥmn*, presumably pronounced *rahmānān*). Thus, one of the inscriptions of Abraha begins, “With the power of the Merciful and of his Messiah” (Robin 2015a, 153, 164, 169; Robin and Rijziger 2018, 281).

inscription, while possibly pre-Qur’anic,<sup>2</sup> does not amount to a full attestation of the tripartite Qur’anic *basmalah*. Nonetheless, and despite its chronological uncertainty, the Jabal Dhabūb inscription is the only evidence currently available to the effect that a combination of the *basmalah*’s first two elements, “In the name of Allāh/God” and “the Merciful,” might predate the Qur’an. The closest parallels to the *basmalah* in the South Arabian epigraphic record are otherwise confined to the phrase “In the name of the Merciful,” without a preceding mention of Allāh.<sup>3</sup>

As argued below and in a separate entry (→ *al-rahmān*), the *basmalah*’s final adjective *al-rahīm*, which according to Al-Jallad’s interpretation is absent from the Jabal Dhabūb inscription, is explicable as facilitating the common Qur’anic rhyme *ī/ū + m/n*. The third element of the *basmalah*, consisting in the definite adjective *al-rahīm*, is therefore reasonably taken to be a Qur’anic supplement (thus also Al-Jallad, forthcoming). As regards the fact that the Qur’anic *basmalah*, like the Jabal Dhabūb inscription, includes an opening reference to Allāh, in contrast with the Christian epigraphic formula “In the name of the Merciful,” this is best explained as serving to codify the identity of the North Arabian deity Allāh with the monotheistic Ḥimyarite deity “the Raḥmān” (Al-Jallad, forthcoming). If the Jabal Dhabūb inscription is indeed pre-Qur’anic, this equivalence must predate Muhammad. One reason why such a scenario is attractive is the fact that there is some purportedly pre-Islamic poetry in which *al-rahmān* and Allāh would already seem to be employed interchangeably (or which is at least consistent with this supposition): the two divine names occur in consecutive verses of a poem from the corpus of al-A’shā Maymūn (Ḥusayn 1983, no. 15:36–37; see Sinai 2019b, 20 and 59); a Hudhalī poet refers to *al-rahmān* as the provider of rain, a role that pre-Islamic poets otherwise attribute to Allāh (Farrāj and Shākīr 1963–1965, 742, al-Burayq, no. 1:6; Sinai 2019b, 29); and Salāmah ibn Jandal describes the inscrutable and sovereign impact that “the Merciful” has on human fates in terms that very much resemble what other poets say about Allāh (Qabāwah 1987, 182–184, no. 3:36–38; Sinai 2019b, 34). Thus, the fusion of Allāh and *al-rahmān* that is documented in and presupposed by the Qur’an appears to have begun to surface well before Muhammad, which adds plausibility to a pre-Qur’anic dating of the Jabal Dhabūb inscription.<sup>4</sup>

**Q 27:30 as the original Qur’anic occurrence of the *basmalah*.** That the *basmalah* harks back to South Arabian epigraphic conventions, as proposed above, is substantiated by a closer examination of its only occurrence within a Qur’anic surah, in Q 27:30. After all, the

2 Al-Ḥājj and Faq’as envisage the possibility that this undated inscription dates from the early Islamic period (al-Ḥājj and Faq’as 2018, 26–31).

3 As Ahmad al-Jallad has pointed out to me in a personal correspondence, the opening invocation *bi-smi-ka llāhumma / rabbanā* appears in a number of hitherto unpublished Arabic inscriptions from the Ḥijāz dating to the sixth century CE. See <https://twitter.com/mohammed93athar/status/1342890836531544068?s=20> (accessed 8 March 2021) and also Al-Jallad and Sidky 2021, 9.

4 It is true that Q 17:110 (“Say, ‘Call upon Allāh/God or call upon the Merciful; whichever you call upon, to him belong the most excellent names’”) could indicate that the referential equivalence of *allāh* and *al-rahmān* was not self-evident. However, on a more likely reading of the verse, it merely addresses the question which of the two principal Qur’anic divine names should be deemed to take precedence over the other in prayer (→ *ism*). Jomier maintains that there was resistance to the divine name *al-rahmān* in the Ḥijāz and that this divine name was new to the Meccans (Jomier 1957, 365–370). However, apart from Q 17:110 and other ambiguous Qur’anic verses (Q 13:30, 21:36, 25:60; see *QP* 66–68), Jomier argues mainly on the basis of post-Qur’anic traditions, whose depiction of Meccan paganism can hardly be accepted as objective fact. As duly underscored by Crone, a serious difficulty with Jomier’s position is that the Qur’an sometimes presents its pagan opponents themselves as speaking of “the Merciful” as their god (*QP* 67; the most straightforward case is Q 21:26).

recipient of the letter by Solomon that is cited in Q 27:30–31 is none other than the queen of Saba’ (Ghaffar 2020, 105), which fits the *basmalah*’s putative South Arabian resonance eminently well. Solomon’s missive shares with the Epigraphic South Arabian material reviewed earlier the quality of constituting a written expression of royal authority, and indeed both aspects—writing and authority—would appear to be explicitly reflected in Q 27:29, where the queen of Saba’ says that she has received “a noble writing” (*kitāb karīm*). Quite possibly, then, the specific wording of the *basmalah* was first coined in Q 27:30, modelled on Sabaic epigraphic conventions. That the *basmalah* was subsequently excerpted from this verse, rather than being presupposed by it, is further supported by the observation that the *basmalah* formula is well integrated into the literary context of Q 27:30, since the expansion of the divine name *al-raḥmān* by the cognate adjective *al-raḥīm* ensures conformity with Surah 27’s rhyme in *ī/ū + m/n*. This is in fact true for all other cases apart from the *basmalah* in which the Qur’an concatenates *al-raḥmān* with the cognate adjective *al-raḥīm* (Q 1:3, 2:163, 41:2, and 59:22; → *al-raḥmān*). This indicates that the primary function of expanding *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmān* by appending *al-raḥīm*, apart from adding emphasis (“the truly Merciful”), is to facilitate rhyme.

There is, in sum, much to recommend the hypothesis that the prefixing of the *basmalah* to Qur’anic surahs postdates, rather than antedates, Q 27:30. It is not inconceivable that this prefatory use of the *basmalah* at the beginning of almost all Qur’anic surahs could be post-prophetic. In favour of this, one might note the striking popularity and subsequent desuetude of the divine name → *al-raḥmān* in the Qur’an. As explained in the relevant entry, *al-raḥmān* is conspicuously frequent in a certain group of later Meccan texts that are aptly called the “*raḥmān* surahs,” but subsequently disappears almost completely inside surahs. Thus, *al-raḥmān* is only twice found within Medinan texts (Q 2:163, 59:22, both of which contain the frequent Qur’anic profession of monotheism *lā ilāha illā huwa*, “There is no god but him,” as well as the verse-final predication *huwa l-raḥmānu l-raḥīm*, “He is the truly Merciful”). This almost complete absence, throughout the entire Medinan period, of the erstwhile extremely popular divine name *al-raḥmān* is perhaps not what one would have expected had the use of the *basmalah* become routine at a time when new Qur’anic compositions were still coming into being. Rather, one might have imagined that regular use of the *basmalah* would have acted to stabilise *al-raḥmān* as a divine name or epithet in chronologically later layers of the Qur’an.

On the other hand, surah-initial *basmalahs* are attested in early manuscripts such as Birmingham University Library Mingana Islamic Arabic 1572a (containing the beginning of Surah 20) and the lower layer of the Sanaa Palimpsest (Sadeghi and Goudarzi 2012, 52–53, 63, 72, 83). Assuming that presently available radiocarbon datings of these manuscripts are accurate, this requires the *basmalah* to have come to be incorporated into the Qur’anic text within approximately a decade after Muhammad’s death at the latest. A likely scenario is perhaps that a prefatory use of the *basmalah* emerged when a written compilation of the corpus of Muhammad’s revelations was first produced. According to the Islamic tradition, what was later on to become the standard recension of the Qur’an was created within two years after the Prophet’s death, during the caliphate of Abū Bakr (Motzki 2001), and it may be that this was indeed the time when the prefatory *basmalah* asserted itself as the scribal adaptation of an originally epigraphic formulaic convention, inspired by the formula’s original Qur’anic appearance in Surah 27 and perhaps reinforced by the occasional verse-final collocation of *al-raḥmān* and *al-raḥīm* in Q 1:3, 2:163, 41:2, and 59:22.

The grammatical status of the *basmalah*. Unlike the phrase *bi-smi rabbika* (→ *ism*), which figures as the prepositional complement of the verbs *sabbaha*, “to praise” (e.g., Q 56:74.96; see under → *ḥamd*), and → *qara’a*, normally “to recite” (Q 96:1), the *basmalah* has the status of an isolated prepositional syntagm lacking a governing verb. Muslim exegetes subintellect contextually appropriate verbal clauses such as “I recite” or “I commence reciting” (e.g., Ṭab. 1:112–116). A different solution is intimated by al-Qurṭubī, who reports that “the scholars” construe the formula as a divine oath (*qasamun min rabbinā*; al-Qurṭubī 2006, 1:142). However, this understanding (which is espoused in Samji 2018, 52; see also Graham 2001, 208) does not conform to the phraseological characteristics of Qur’anic oaths as attested elsewhere in the corpus. Oaths in the Qur’an take two forms: they either consist in an explicit *uqsimu bi-*, “I swear by . . .” (e.g., Q 56:75 or 69:38) or, more frequently, simply employ *wāw al-qasam* (i.e., the oath-introducing use of *wa-*) followed by a noun in the genitive, as in Q 91:1–7.<sup>5</sup> Leaving aside the disputed case of the *basmalah*, there are thus no instances in which a Qur’anic oath lacks the explicit *uqsimu*, “I swear,” yet includes the preposition *bi-* that normally follows this verb. There is consequently no inner-Qur’anic support for understanding the *basmalah* as an oath. This makes it all the more apt to accept the argument put forward above that the *basmalah*’s verb-less *bi-* is to be linked with the invocatory *b-* that occurs in Epigraphic South Arabian, where it opens similarly “asyntactic” invocations (Stein 2013, 93–94) like “In the name of the Merciful” (*b-<sup>s</sup>m rḥmnn*).

***bashshara* tr. (*bi-/anna/bi-anna*) | to give glad tidings to s.o. (of s.th. / that . . .)**

***istabshara* intr. (*bi-*) | to rejoice (in s.th. or s.o.)**

***mubashshir, bashīr* | bringer of glad tidings**

***bushrā* | glad tidings**

Further vocabulary discussed: ***andhara* intr./tr./ditr. | to utter a warning, to warn s.o., to warn s.o. of s.th. *mundhir, nadhīr* | warner *nadhīr* | warning**

**Qur’anic messengers as bearers of warnings and glad tidings.** Both Meccan and Medinan verses define the function of Muhammad or the Qur’anic revelations as being that of a “warner” (*nadhīr*)<sup>1</sup> and a “bringer of good tidings” (*bashīr, mubashshir*; see Q 2:119, 5:19, 7:188, 11:2, 17:105, 25:56, 33:45, 34:28, 35:24, 41:4, 48:8). Other verses combine the corresponding verbs *andhara*, “to warn,” and *bashshara*, “to give glad tidings” (Q 10:2, 18:2, 19:97, 36:11; see also 46:12). Earlier messengers, too, are said to have conveyed a dual message of warning and glad tidings: “We only send the messengers as bearers of good tidings (*mubashshirīn*) and as warners (*mundhirīn*)” (Q 6:48, 18:56; see also 2:213 and 4:165). That the Qur’anic Messenger, like his predecessor Noah, is only a “warner” or “a clear warner” (*nadhīr mubīn*) is also stressed (e.g., Q 7:184, 11:12.25, 13:7, 22:49, 26:115, 29:50, 35:23, 38:65.70, 46:9, 51:50–51, 67:26, 71:2, 79:45). What people are being warned of are, inter alia, God’s violent retribution (*ba’s shadīd*; Q 18:2), the fire of hell (Q 92:14), a

<sup>5</sup> For a comprehensive inventory of Qur’anic oaths, see *SPMC* 129–133.

<sup>1</sup> *Nadhīr* (plural: *nudhur*) can mean not only “warner” but also “warning” (e.g., Q 67:17; *CDKA* 265).



“punishment that is nigh” (Q 78:40), the eschatological “day of assembly” (*yawm al-jam‘*), when some will be sent to paradise and others to the blazing fire (Q 42:7), a “thunderbolt like that of ‘Ād and Thamūd” (Q 41:13), and other circumlocutions for divine retaliation and eschatological perdition. Conversely, the messengers’ glad tidings consist in the promise of divine forgiveness and eschatological “wage” or reward (→ *ajr*; Q 18:2, 36:11) and the possibility of deliverance in paradise (Q 42:23).

According to Q 4:165, God’s rationale for sending messengers to convey warnings and glad tidings is “so that the people would not have an argument against God after [the sending of] the messengers” (*li-allā yakūna li-l-nāsi ‘alā llāhi ḥujjatun ba‘da l-rusuli*). The idea is clearly that humans would have ground to complain against God were they to be held eschatologically responsible for their earthly actions without having been previously apprised of this in clear terms. This is not far from the Mu‘tazilite claim that the sending of revelations (*al-taklīf al-sam‘ī*, “imposing obligations through revelation”) is, as Richard Frank has put it, “morally necessary on God’s part” (Frank 1971, 15).

**Non-eschatological and sarcastic uses of *b-sh-r*.** *Bashshara* or the corresponding noun *bushrā*, “glad tidings,” can also be used for joyous announcements that are non-eschatological, especially of the future birth of a child (Q 3:39, 45, 11:69, 71, 74, 15:53–55, 16:58–59, 19:7, 29:31, 37:101, 112, 43:17, 51:28). In Q 61:6, Jesus gives the Israelites the glad tidings “of a messenger coming after me whose name is most praiseworthy (*ismuhu aḥmad*)” (Q 61:6; cf. Anthony 2016, 273–277), an allusion to Muhammad that puns on the identical root consonants of *aḥmad* and the name *muḥammad*. In a number of passages, derivatives of *b-sh-r* are applied to a natural phenomenon, namely, wind indicating impending rainfall: God sends the winds “as bearers of glad tidings (*mubashshirāt*) and so that they might give you<sup>p</sup> a taste of his mercy” (Q 30:46; see also 7:57, 25:48, 27:63). The implicit parallel with God’s sending of messengers as bearers of glad eschatological tidings ties in with a tendency discernible in other Qur’anic passages to posit an analogy between the ways in which God acts in the natural world and the ways in which he acts in history and at the end of it. Perhaps the clearest example is the Qur’anic inference leading from God’s revivification of land that is “dead” to his ability to revive and judge deceased humans (see Q 30:19, 50, 35:9, 41:39, 50:11, and also under → *āyah*).

On occasion, the verb *bashshara* is used ironically or sarcastically (Stewart 2015, 196–198). One example is found in Q 9:3: “Give the repudiators the glad tidings of a painful punishment!” (similarly in Q 3:21, 4:138, 9:34, 31:7, 45:8, and 84:24; see also 16:59). Based on these references, classical Arabic lexicographers suggest that *bashshara* can sometimes mean simply “to convey tidings” rather than “to convey glad tidings,” a position accepted by Arne Ambros (*CDKA* 39). However, as pointed out by Ambros himself, it is undeniable that *bushrā* in Q 25:22 (on the day of judgement there will be no *bushrā* for the evildoers) must mean “glad tidings” rather than merely “tidings” (*CDKA* 39; cf. also other uses of *bushrā*, such as Q 57:12; the point is also made in Stewart 2015, 197). Devin Stewart’s unitary construal of the verb *bashshara* is therefore preferable. It also fits the non-eschatological uses of *b-sh-r* just surveyed, where reference is clearly to joyous announcements, and the fact that *istabshara* is “to rejoice (in s.th.)” (e.g., Q 9:124, 30:48, 80:39).

**Diachronic remarks.** The use of *andhara* commences already in the early Meccan period (e.g., Q 74:2, 78:40, 79:45, 92:14), while *bashshara* is at first employed only sarcastically (Q 84:24) and in relation to the promise received by Abraham that he is to have a son (Q 37:101, 51:28). The frequency of references to the delivery of eschatological warnings



and glad tidings throughout all periods of the Qur'an's gestation, from early Meccan to Medinan, indicates the pivotal role that eschatology plays in the Qur'anic understanding of messengerhood and prophecy. Against the backdrop of such continuity, however, the Medinan surahs evince a considerable broadening of Muhammad's functions beyond warning of the danger of eternal damnation, proclaiming the good news of possible eschatological salvation, and uttering reminders (→ *dhakkara*) of God's existence, power, and benevolence. Expanding Muhammad's function beyond the role of an eschatological preacher, the Medinan surahs credit him with the comprehensive role of a religio-political leader to whom the believers owe unconditional obedience (e.g., Q 4:59.80), who constitutes a "good exemplar" for his followers (Q 33:21), and who mediates God's forgiveness (e.g., Q 4:64, 63:5–6; see generally Sinai 2018a).

***abṣara* tr. | to see s.th.**

***abṣara* intr. | to see, to have eyesight**

***baṣar* | eyesight**

***baṣīr* | seeing, having eyesight**

See under → *allāh*, → *khatama*, → *sami'a*, → *'amiya*, → *al-ghayb*, → *qalb*. On the simile *ka-lamḥ al-baṣar* or *ka-lamḥ bi-l-baṣar*, "like the glance of an eye," see under → *amr* and → *sā'ah*.

***bāṭilan* | in a futile manner**

→ *balā*, → *ḥikmah*

***ba'atha* tr. | to send s.o. forth; to resurrect s.o.**

***ba'th* | resurrection**

Further vocabulary discussed: *aḥyā* tr./intr. | to bring (s.th. or s.o.) to life or back to life, to revive (s.th. or s.o.) *ḥashara* tr. | to gather s.o., to assemble s.o. *arsala* tr. | to send s.o. *anshara* tr./intr. | to resurrect (s.o.) *ḥashr* | gathering, assembly *nushūr* | resurrection *yawm al-dīn* | the day of judgement *yawm al-qiyāmah* | the day of resurrection

**Verbal expressions for the resurrection (*ba'atha*, *anshara*, *ḥashara*).** The Qur'anic terminology for the resurrection of the dead that precedes God's eschatological judgement displays some diversity. As far as verbal usage is concerned, the most prominent expressions are → *aḥyā*, "to bring (back) to life," *ba'atha*, "to resurrect," and *ḥashara*, "to gather." *Ba'atha* can have a non-eschatological meaning, "to send forth" or "to raise up," referring to the appointment of messengers, prophets, kings, arbiters, and the like, whether by God or by humans, and is at least occasionally synonymous with *arsala*, "to send" (e.g., Q 2:129.213.246.247, 3:164, 4:35, 5:12, 7:103, 10:74–75, 16:36; → *rasūl*).<sup>1</sup> But in many cases,

<sup>1</sup> For other instances in which *ba'atha* does not mean "to resurrect," see, inter alia, Q 5:31 (God "sends forth" a raven), 6:65 (God "sends forth" punishment), and 7:167 and 17:5 (God "sends forth" anonymous people or "servants" to afflict the Israelites).

*ba'atha* signifies God's resurrection of deceased humans (e.g., Q 2:56: *thumma ba'athnā-kum min ba'di mawtikum*, "then we resurrected you<sup>p</sup> after you had died," and 2:259: *fa-amātahu llāhu . . . thumma ba'athahu*, "then God caused him to die . . . and resurrected him"). Where *ba'atha* means "to resurrect," a usage already established in early Meccan surahs (see Q 15:36, 26:87, 37:16.144, 56:47, 83:4), it effectively functions as an Arabic equivalent of Syriac *naḥḥem* (on which see *SL* 908). Much less frequently, "to resurrect" is expressed by the verb *anshara* (Q 21:21, 44:35, 80:22), which like → *ahyā* is also used for God's restoration of "dead land" by means of rain (Q 43:11).

By contrast, *hashara* is "to gather, to assemble," corresponding to Syriac *kannesh* (Sinai 2017a, 261; e.g., Beck 1972a, no. 1:501). It too can be employed non-eschatologically, as shown by Q 20:59, 27:17, or 79:23. Unlike *ba'atha*, *hashara* focuses not on the miracle of God returning life to decomposed bodies (as foregrounded, e.g., in Q 17:49.98, 23:82, 37:16) but on God's universal rounding up of all humans to await trial "without leaving out any one of them" (Q 18:47: *fa-lam nughādir minhum aḥadā*). The general scenario resembles Matt 25:32, according to which "all the nations will be gathered (*synachthēsontai*, Peshitta: *netkannshūn*) before" the Son of Man, who will "separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats." There is of course the difference that in the Qur'an it is God rather than Jesus who functions as the eschatological judge (Rudolph 1922, 36; El-Badawi 2014, 7, 185–186; Sinai 2017a, 246–247, n. 109; *HCI* 167).

**Nominal usage.** The noun *ba'th*, "resurrection," occurs notably less often than the corresponding verb and only appears in Q 22:5, 30:56 (which has two instances of *yawm al-ba'th*, "the day of resurrection"), and 31:28. The same is true for the noun *hashr*, "assembly" (only in Q 50:44; see also 59:2, where "the first assembling" may foreshadow the second, eschatological one). Slightly more frequent is *nushūr*, "resurrection" (Q 25:3.40, 35:9, 67:15; see also 25:47). Far more regularly, the Qur'anic proclamations have recourse to *al-dīn*, "the judgement," or *yawm al-dīn*, "the day of judgement" (→ *dīn'*), both of which fall into desuetude in the later Meccan period, and to → *yawm al-qiyaamah*, "the day of resurrection," which loans an established Christian Aramaic expression and remains in use throughout all periods of the Qur'an's genesis.

***ba'īd* | spatially distant; temporally distant; far-fetched, implausible, improbable**

→ *ashraka*

***baghtatan* | suddenly**

→ *sā'ah*

***baghdā'* | hatred**

→ *ṣadr*

***ibtaghā tr.* | to seek s.th.**

On "seeking" the face of God, see under → *allāh*.

**abkam** | mute

→ *'amiya*

**balāgh** | message; transmission, delivery (of a message)

→ *bayyana*, → *dhālīka*

**balā** tr., **ablā** tr., **ibtalā** tr. | to discern, ascertain, or come to be acquainted with s.th.; to assess, test, or try s.o.

**balā'** | test

Further vocabulary discussed: *bāṭilan* | in a futile manner *'abathan* | for sport *da-rajah* | rank *ummah* | community *na'ama* tr. | to bestow grace upon s.o. *rizq* | provision *al-shayṭān* | the devil, Satan *jāhada fī sabil allāh* | to contend on God's path *fatana* tr. (*'an*) | to smelt s.th.; to put s.o. to the test; to lead s.o. into temptation, to entice s.o. (away from s.th.); to afflict s.o. *fitnah* | trial; temptation; affliction *al-shayṭān* | the devil, Satan *mathal* | similitude, likeness, example; exemplar; characterisation, saying *shajarat al-zaqqūm* | the ingurgitation tree

The present entry examines two roots that express God's testing of the moral merit of humans, *b-l-w* and *f-t-n*. They are treated one after the other.

**The basic meaning of *balā*, *ablā*, and *ibtalā*.** Extrapolating from Qur'anic usage, the basic sense of the root *b-l-w* is discerning assessment and acquaintance. For example, Q 4:6 instructs the addressees to "assess orphans" (*wa-btalū l-yatāmā*) and to ascertain whether they are of sound mind (*rushd*) before letting them take control of their inheritance; according to Q 10:30, on the day of judgement "everyone will come to be acquainted with what he has done previously" (*hunālika tablū kullu nafsin mā aslafat*); and Q 86:9 describes God's final judgement as "the day on which the secrets will be ascertained" (*yawma tublā l-sarā'iru*). In line with this, a poem from the corpus of al-Nābighah employs the noun *balā'* in the sense of "acquaintance" (DSAAP, al-Nābighah, no. 26:2; cf. al-Ḥittī 1991, 179, n. 3, glossing *balā'* with *al-ikhtibār wa-l-tajribah*). Similarly, in a poem ascribed to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt, the serpent is said to have "experienced" or to "have become acquainted with" God's punishment (*wa-qad balathu*; Schulthess 1911a, no. 28:6–7 = al-Saṭlī 1974, no. 69:6–7; on the poem, see Seidensticker 2011b, 49–50).

**Moral testing as the supreme purpose of God's creation.** The Qur'an is unequivocal that God did not create the world or humans in particular without a purpose (Q 3:191, 23:115, 38:27: *bāṭilan*, *'abathan*) or for play (Q 21:16, 44:38: *lā'ibīn*; see also under → *ḥikmah*). Against this background, the verbs *balā*, *ablā*, and *ibtalā* play the vital theological role of articulating the importance of moral discernment and discrimination in God's cosmic plan. Thus, Q 11:7 and 67:2 declare that the ultimate objective of God's creation of the heavens and the earth or of life and death is to "put you<sup>p</sup> to the test, [in order to discern] which one of you will act best" (*li-yabluwakum ayyukum aḥsanu 'amalan*), a point that is appropriately amplified by al-Māturīdī (al-Māturīdī 2005–2007, 7:133). Further affirmations that God is engaged in probing humans' moral value and that his creation

of the world and of humans is a means to this end are found in Q 18:7, 23:30, and 76:2 (see also under → *ard*). Other passages single out specific aspects of the created order that serve the aim of moral testing. Thus, according to Q 6:165, God “has raised some of you<sup>p</sup> over others in rank (→ *darajah*) in order to test you (*li-yabluwakum*) with respect to what he has given you,” and Q 5:48 invokes the same rationale in order to explain that God did not create humans as a single community (→ *ummah*). One Medinan verse, Q 33:72 (on which see under → *wāthaqa*), hints that humans have somehow primordially consented to bearing the burden of moral responsibility that sets them apart from other parts of the created order. The point here seems to be that the pre-eschatological human condition of being unremittingly subject to divine testing is something that humans can and ought to view as freely willed by themselves rather than as something externally imposed on them.

**Dual testing by means of adversity and comfort.** Q 89:15–16 teaches that divine testing (verb: *ibtalā*) comes in two general types: God may either “honour” someone and “bestow grace upon him” (*akramahu wa-na‘amahu*; see under → *an‘ama*), for which the deity presumably expects appropriate gratitude; or God may curtail someone’s “provision” (*rizq*; see under → *razaqa*), that is, subject him or her to deprivation and hardship. The succinct description of human existence in Q 21:35 involves the same notion of dual testing: “Everyone will taste death; and we test you<sup>p</sup> with bad things and good things (*nablūkum bi-l-sharri wa-l-khayri*), by way of a trial (*fitnatan*); and to us will you be returned” (cf. Q 7:168, treated further below). The contention that is here intimated, that hardship and adversity serve as a means by which God establishes the moral and religious merit and fortitude of humans, is the principal Qur’anic response to the question of how a just and omnipotent creator can permit or even bring about the manifold types of pain and suffering that beset human existence and cannot be explained as resulting from the sinful choices of free agents (see also under → *ṣabara* and → *zalama*).<sup>1</sup> Such “natural evil,” as philosophers and theologians often term it, may also be caused by the devil (Q 38:41), but as shown in the respective entry, the Qur’anic devil (→ *al-shaytān*) is best understood as an agent who serves an overarching divine plan, however unwittingly, rather than as a genuine antagonist of the deity. As for the Qur’anic categorisation not only of adversity but also of acts of divine grace as a “test,” this may not be original to the Islamic scripture, given that similar language is attested by a poem from the Zuhayr corpus: in return for the good they have done, a tribe’s leaders are said to have been “tested” by God “in the best way” (*DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 14:29: *fa-ablāhumā khayra l-balā’i lladhī yablū*).<sup>2</sup>

**God’s testing of Abraham and the Israelites.** Several Qur’anic passages allude to God’s testing of past individuals and groups. With one exception, consisting in the indeterminate “owners of the garden” (*aṣḥāb al-jannah*) mentioned in Q 68:17, all of these instances relate to the Israelites and their patriarch Abraham. In the case of the latter, it is God’s command to sacrifice his son that is identified as “the clear test” (Q 37:106: *al-balā’ al-mubīn*; see also Q 2:124 and cf. Beck 1975a, 111–112), a statement echoing the opening of the Biblical

1 However, there are also verses, such as Q 42:30, that seem to suggest that inner-worldly suffering is a divine punishment. See n. 2 under → *zalama*.

2 I am grateful to Saqib Hussain for drawing my attention to this verse.

account of Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son Isaac: "After these things God tested (*nissâ*, Peshitta: *nassi*) Abraham" (Gen 22:1). As for Abraham's Israelite descendants, it is above all their deliverance from Egyptian oppression that is cast as a "mighty test from your<sup>P</sup> Lord" (Q 2:49, 7:141, 14:6: *fî dhâlikum balâ'un min rabbikum 'aẓîm*; cf. 44:33). This too reflects the idea that divine testing may come in the guise of something positive. The same emerges from a scene in the life of Solomon that is narrated in Q 27:40: when the throne of the queen of Saba' is miraculously transported before him, Solomon exclaims, "This a favour from my Lord, to test me whether I will be grateful or ungrateful (*li-yabluwanî a-ashkuru am akfuru*)." Finally, the dual form of divine testing is articulated once again in Q 7:168, which reports, similar to 21:35, that "we tested them"—namely, the Israelites—"with things good and bad" (*wa-balawnâhum bi-l-ḥasanâti wa-l-sayyi'âti*).<sup>3</sup>

**God's testing of the Medinan believers.** The Qur'anic concept of divine testing receives a novel inflection in Medinan passages that invoke divine testing in order to rationalise the Qur'anic believers' experience of hardship, struggle, failure, and death (Q 2:155, 3:152.154.186, 33:11, 47:4.31). For instance, Q 2:155 announces to the believers that God will test them (*la-nabluwannakum*) "with fear and hunger and loss of possessions and lives and fruit; but give<sup>S</sup> glad tidings to those who are steadfast" (→ *bashshara*, → *ṣabara*). The idea of dual testing by things good and bad, too, reappears in a military context: Q 8:17 reminds the hearers that their victory in an armed encounter with their enemies constituted a "good" or "benign test" (*li-yubliya l-mu'minîna minhu balâ'an ḥasanan*), the likely implication being once again that God's aid demands appropriate gratitude. In the Medinan Qur'an, God's testing of the believers' moral mettle thus comes to incorporate the dauntless confrontation of martial peril. It is true that even in the Medinan Qur'an divine testing is by no means confined to military matters: Q 5:94 casts the prohibition of killing game while in a state of ritual consecration during the pilgrimage as a divine trial, presumably because it amounts to God denying the believers a certain privilege. But the Medinan verses just cited do demonstrate that the Meccan notion of divine testing was now infused with the novel expectation that "true believers" will be prepared to "contend" (→ *jâhada*)—i.e., take militant action—"on God's path" (Q 8:74): the believers are not just expected to be unwaveringly expectant that a decisive divine intervention, perhaps akin to the Noahic deluge, will chasten the repudiators and deliver the pious; the believers come to be understood as agents enacting God's deliverance rather than just forming its passive objects.

**Divine testing in Q 47:4.** A particularly interesting intersection between this activist turn and the notion of divine testing is found in Q 47:4 (Marshall 1999, 155–156; on this verse, see also under → *jâhada*). Reflecting the Medinan turn to militant activism, the first half of Q 47:4 exhorts the believers to fight "when you meet the repudiators," though the military objectives set out in what follows are still fairly limited and do not yet require the repudiators to convert to the Qur'anic religion (*HCI* 190). The second half of the verse then adds a theological comment: "If it were God's will (*law* → *shâ'a llâhu*), he would be able to help himself against them (*la-ntaşara minhum*). It is only so that he might test some of you<sup>P</sup> by others (*wa-lâkin li-yabluwa ba'dakum bi-ba'dîn*). As for those who are killed on God's path, he will not lead their works astray." This second half of Q 47:4 addresses a theological worry that might generally arise from the Medinan turn to activism: is God

3 Divine testing of the Israelites also figures in Q 7:163 and 2:249.

unable to avenge himself without human help? In the passage at hand, this worry is made even more acute by the fact that a slightly later verse, Q 47:7, expressly urges the believers to “help God so that he might help you” (*in tanṣurū llāha yanṣurkum*). Forestalling an overly literalist misunderstanding of this directive, Q 47:4 clarifies that God’s call for human action should not be taken to imply divine helplessness. Rather, God’s enlisting of human aid in implementing his designs merely serves his overarching purpose of gauging the true extent to which human agents are committed to his cause.<sup>4</sup>

***Fitnah* as a divine trial.** A second root used to express the notion of God’s testing of human moral worth is *f-t-n*, encompassing the verb *fatana* and the noun *fitnah*. According to classical Arabic lexicographers, *fatana* refers to the process of putting gold or silver (or rather their ores) in a fire in order to separate the metal from the dross (*AEL* 2334; al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 2009, 623). The process is described, albeit without the root *f-t-n*, in Q 13:17.<sup>5</sup> That *fatana* has the basic sense of “to smelt” is borne out by the early Meccan verse Q 51:13, where this meaning yields the most satisfactory understanding: *yawma hum ‘alā l-nāri yuf-tanūn*, “the day on which they are smelted over the fire.” Given the express reference to fire, it would not be apposite to understand *fatana* in this verse to have only the more abstract meaning “to put s.o. to the test,” even if this is undeniably the appropriate rendering for many other occurrences of *fatana*. After all, the deniers of the judgement who are threatened with perdition in this passage have already demonstrated, during their earthly lives, that they do not belong to the “God-fearing,” who are treated from Q 51:15 onwards. There is thus no properly moral testing left to be done on those whom the divine judge has already dispatched to hell; the only thing that might be left to test is the sinners’ ability to endure the never-ending torment of being roasted over the fire of hell. Q 51:13 thus presupposes rather clearly that the basic signification of *fatana* is “to smelt.”

Much more so than derivatives of *b-l-w*, those of *f-t-n* take not only God as an agent but also humans (see below). Nonetheless, Q 21:35, already quoted above, shows that there exists at least partial synonymity between the two roots: “we test you<sup>p</sup> (*nablūkum*) with bad things and good things, by way of a trial (*fitnatan*).” Moreover, Q 39:49, in expressing the above-mentioned doctrine of dual divine testing through affliction as well as blessings, uses the term *fitnah*, and the idea that worldly goods might form a *fitnah* recurs in Q 8:28 and 64:15 (*annamā/innamā amwālukum wa-awlādukum fitnatun*; cf. also 20:131). This corroborates that at least where God figures as the agent of the verb *fatana* and the noun *fitnah*, they should be translated as “to put s.o. to the test” and “trial,” rather than as “to lead s.o. into temptation”: God orchestrates situations in which humans must prove their value as moral agents, but there is no suggestion that he is actively pushing humans towards failure or confronting them with insuperable odds. The fact that Q 7:27 predicates the verb *fatana* of the devil (→ *al-shayṭān*) receives its explanation from several Qur’anic passages asserting that the devil’s activity as a constant tempter of humankind rests on divine permission (e.g., Q 15:36–43; see under → *shayṭān*). That God may employ the devil

4 Pohlmann posits that the second part of Q 47:4 can only be an insertion that was secondarily added to the first part (Pohlmann 2018, 96–97 and 172–173); but I see no difficulty in considering the verse to form a cohesive utterance dating to one and the same point in time. This does not rule out the possibility, which would have to be examined in a more detailed study, that Q 47:4 as a whole could be a later addition designed to preclude a problematically literalist understanding of the call to “help God” in 47:7. The recurrence of *n-ṣ-r* in Q 47:4.7 is perceptively noted in Pohlmann 2018, 172.

5 I owe my awareness of Q 13:17 in this context to Saqib Hussain.



as an instrument of *fitnah* also emerges from Q 22:53, discussed below. Somewhat similarly, Q 2:102 casts two enigmatic angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, as acting in the same capacity of instruments of divine testing (see *QP* 183–198 and also under → *jinn*). Both in Q 7:27 and 2:102, therefore, it is really God who functions as the ultimate source of *fitnah*.

Q 54:27 shows that a usage of *fitnah* in the sense of a divine trial of humans' moral mettle is already early Meccan: God sent the she-camel that he commanded the tribe of Thamūd to leave unmolested “as a trial for them” (*fitnatan lahum*). Another Meccan passage, Q 29:2–3, affirms that divine testing is God's standard procedure across history, in line with some of the statements using the root *b-l-w* examined above: “Do people think that they will be left to themselves simply because they say, ‘We have espoused belief,’ and that they will not be put to the test (*wa-hum lā yufītanūn*)? // We certainly put to the test (*fatannā*) those before them, and God will indeed come to know those who are truthful and those who are liars.” Specific individuals subjected to such divine trials who are identified in passages utilising the root *f-t-n* include Moses (Q 20:40), the Israelites (Q 20:85.90), David (Q 38:24), and Solomon (Q 38:34), but also the “people of Pharaoh” (Q 44:17).

***F-t-n* in connection with divine revelations.** A distinctive aspect of *f-t-n* as opposed to *b-l-w*, when used to describe God's testing of humans, consists in the suggestion that certain revelatory statements may function as a *fitnah*, or a means of divine discernment between believers and unbelievers. An example is the affirmation in Q 74:30 that there are nineteen angels or demon-like minions who have been set up over the fire of hell. This seems to have triggered queries or objections, for the following verse (Q 74:31), a secondary addition to the surah, explains that the curiously precise quantification given in v. 30 was meant to function as a “trial (*fitnatan*) for the repudiators” (see Sinai 2017c, 73–75, and also the remarks on Q 74:31 under → *bayyana* and → *mathal*). As Q 74:31 explains, the appropriate response to the trial constituted by the preceding verse is to “have certainty” and to “increase in belief”; yet “those in whose hearts is sickness” (→ *allādhīna fī qulūbihim marādun*) and the repudiators (*al-kāfirūn*; → *kafara*) respond by saying, “What did God intend by employing this [namely, the statement in Q 74:30] as a *mathal*?” (*mādhā arāda llāhu bi-hādhā mathalan*), which is obviously understood as the incorrect response. The word *mathal* can express a fairly wide range of meanings in the Qur'an. Though it is often translatable as “similitude” or “likeness,” in Q 74:31 it is probably best understood to mean merely a divine statement designed to elicit a differential response, a connotation that is also present in 2:26 and 29:43, though in these latter two verses the *mathal* in question has the character of a similitude as well. The word's employment in Q 74:31, despite the fact that it does not refer back to a proper similitude, is likely grounded in the fact that some passages in the New Testament attribute a similarly discerning effect to the parables of Jesus (see under → *mathal*). For present purposes, all of this confirms the sense in which the noun *fitnah* is applied to divine revelations: they generate interpretive difficulties that serve to distinguish the good from the bad.

An analogous case is the Meccan verse Q 37:63. It states that the “tree of → *al-zaqqūm*” or “ingurgitation tree,” whose fruit the denizens of hell will be forced to eat according to a number of passages (Q 37:64–66, 44:43–46, 56:52–53) is only meant to serve as a “trial (*fitnatan*) for the wrong-doers.” Taking inspiration from an undoubtedly apocryphal piece of narrative guesswork in the commentary literature (El-Awa 2006, 571–572; Radscheit 2010, 101), one may conjecture that the putatively earliest reference to “trees of *zaqqūm*” in Q 56:52–53 proved bewildering to some of the Qur'anic hearers, which then led 37:63

to underline that it is part and parcel of the function of divine revelations to elicit a differential reaction from their audience, by way of a litmus test of the latter's ethico-religious stance, with responses ranging from resistance and a lack of comprehension to acceptance. A further implicit reference to the "tree of *al-zaqqūm*" is found in Q 17:60, which similarly instructs the Messenger that a certain dream vision that God had shown him (perhaps the experience of being transported to Jerusalem mentioned in Q 17:1; cf. *SPMC* 235 and 239) and "the tree cursed in the *qur'ān*" (*al-shajarah al-mal'ūnah fī l-qur'āni*) were intended to serve as a "trial (*fitnatan*) for the people." A similar use of *fitnah* is seen in the Medinan passage Q 22:52–53: none of God's messengers or prophets is immune to having the devil (→ *al-shayṭān*) cast fake inspirations into his mind; God, however, will retrospectively annul such Satanic promptings, "to make the devil's castings a trial (*fitnatan*) for those in whose hearts is sickness and those whose hearts are hardened." In all three passages just discussed in which *fitnatan li-X* occurs with a negative qualifier such as "the wrongdoers" or "the repudiators" (namely, Q 22:53, 37:63, 74:31), the force of the preposition *li-* is probably best interpreted to mean "serving to identify X" rather than just "directed at X."<sup>6</sup>

A final passage in which the term *fitnah* is found in connection with the understanding of divine revelations is Q 3:7, which censures "those in whose hearts is deviation" (*alladhīna fī qulūbihim zayghun*) for "following" the ambiguous portions of God's scripture, "seeking *fitnah* and seeking its explanation" (*ibtighā'a l-fitnati wa-btighā'a ta'wīlihi*). Unlike Q 17:60, 22:53, 37:63, and 74:31, however, the ultimate responsibility for *fitnah* is not unequivocally imputed to God here but rather to humans. This occurrence is therefore more appropriately discussed in the following section.

**Humans as agents of *fitnah*.** Unlike derivatives of *b-l-w*, *fatana* and *fitnah* often occur with agents other than God. In many such cases, a suitable translation of *fatana* will be "to lead s.o. into temptation," though as I shall argue at the end of the entry there are also occurrences for which "to afflict s.o." is a preferable rendering. We saw above that Q 7:27 warns the children of Adam not to let the devil (→ *al-shayṭān*) tempt them; but in most cases of non-divine *fitnah* the perpetrators are other humans who are in some way pitted against the Qur'anic believers, either as external enemies of the believers' community or as subversive elements on the inside. Such human-on-human *fitnah* is virtually always viewed negatively and considered to stem from malevolent and sinful motifs: to subject humans to moral testing is evidently treated as a divine prerogative,<sup>7</sup> although God may of course enlist other agents like the devil to serve as instruments of moral testing on his behalf (see above).

*Fatana* and *fitnah* in the sense of humans leading other humans into temptation is in evidence from the Meccan period onwards. Q 37:161–162 address the Messenger's adversaries by saying, "You<sup>p</sup> and that which you serve // will not be able to tempt anyone against him (*mā antum 'alayhi bi-fātinīn*)," namely, against God (but see *KK* 419 and *CDKA* 208, who

6 This consideration may also illuminate the occurrence of *fitnatan li-* in Q 10:85 and 60:4–5, where those following Moses and Abraham pray that God might not make them "a *fitnah* for the wrongdoers/repudiators" (see *KK* 227).

7 A possible exception is Q 9:49, where some people are said to demand of the Qur'anic Messenger *lā taftinnī*, which in this context must express a plea to be spared from combat and should probably be translated "Do not put me to the test." However, the text does not confirm that the Messenger is indeed engaged in such testing. The continuation of the verse plays on the different meanings of *f-t-n* by accusing the people in question of having themselves "fallen into *fitnah*" (*a-lā fī l-fitnati saqatū*). Read in context, this is best understood to mean "having fallen into the activity of stirring up temptation," since this is what the preceding two verses criticise.

prefer an alternative construal). In addition, according to Q 17:73 the Messenger's opponents "almost succeeded" in "tempting" or "luring him away from" God's revelations (*wa-in kādū la-yaftinūnaka 'ani lladhī awḥaynā ilayka*). In two Medinan passages containing negative comments on those "desiring *fitnah*," *fitnah* would also seem to signify nefarious human attempts to plant doubts and foster dissension among the believers, the objective being to tempt or lure them away from divine truth (Q 3:7, 9:47–48). In Q 3:7, "seeking *fitnah*" (*ibtighā'a l-fitnati*) is said to motivate those who deliberately cling to and press those Qur'anic passages that are ambiguous (see also under → *bayyana*), while 9:47–48 complain that a certain group of persons who proved averse to embarking on what appears to be a military campaign would have "sought to stir up temptation" among the believers (v. 47: *yabghūnakumu l-fitnata*) had they joined them. Indeed, the prospective culprits are said to have done so before (v. 48: *la-qadi btaghawu l-fitnata min qablu*). Another case in which *fitnah* clearly means "temptation" is the phrase *su'ilū l-fitnata*, "to be incited to [give in to] temptation," in Q 33:14.

In other instances in which humans, and specifically unbelievers, figure as grammatical subjects of the verb *fatana*, the meaning of the latter would seem to be something like "to put s.o.—specifically, the believers—to the test by subjecting them to harassment and persecution." More concisely, this may be rendered as "to afflict s.o.," though many English translators opt for "to persecute" (which can be contextually appropriate). *Fatana* in the sense of "to afflict s.o." is already found in Meccan passages, as shown by Q 29:10 (where *fitnat al-nās* is "being afflicted by the people," in opposition to "God's punishment," *adhāb allāh*) and 10:83 (where the Israelites fear that Pharaoh and his notables "might afflict them," *an yaftinahum*).<sup>8</sup> The same meaning is operative in the Medinan verses Q 2:191.217. They justify the injunction to fight the repudiators and to "expel them from where they expelled you," if needs be by conducting war during the sacred season (→ *ḥarrama*), by asserting that *fitnah*—i.e., afflicting, harassing, or persecuting believers—"is worse than killing" (*al-fitnatu ashaddu/akbaru mina l-qatli*). In both cases, the text would seem to be weighing up the ways in which the unbelievers have previously harassed, mistreated, and oppressed the believers against the violence that the latter are now urged to inflict in response. It is likely that in Q 2:193 and 8:39, too—where the believers are urged to fight "until there is no more *fitnah* and religious worship is directed at God" or "religious worship in its entirety is directed at God" (*wa-qātilūhum ḥattā lā takūna fitnatun wa-yakūna l-dīnu ± <kulluhu> li-llāhi*; see also under → *jāhada*)—*fitnah* means affliction suffered by those who profess belief in God.<sup>9</sup> Another case in which *fatana* is "to afflict" is Q 4:101, which justifies

8 Q 16:110, which similarly employs the passive *fatana* in the sense of "to be afflicted," is a Medinan insertion (see also Neuwirth 2007, 301). The same applies to Q 85:10, threatening with damnation those who "afflict the believing men and women and then do not repent" (PP 336–337).

9 The alternative would be to understand both verses to refer to the elimination not merely of the threats or "affliction" emanating from an enemy community but of the general danger of believers being led into temptation by other humans practising a different *dīn* (cf. Tab. 3:299–300, glossing *fitnah* as *shirk*). However, we can be reasonably confident that Q 2:191 uses *fitnah* in the sense of "affliction," making it likely that the same meaning is in play two verses later. In addition, Medinan pronouncements about the "hypocrites" (→ *al-munāfiqūn*) and "those in whose hearts is sickness" (→ *alladhīna fī qulūbihim maraḍ*) imply that nominal membership of the community of believers as such does not at all ensure full compliance with the commands of "God and his Messenger" that is demanded by the Qur'anic proclamations. Indeed, Q 9:47–49 clearly imply that *fitnah* or temptation can arise from within the circle of those who profess outward loyalty to the Messenger while their hearts continue to harbour doubt. Thus, Medinan discourse more generally gives no reason to make the optimistic assumption that eliminating the repudiators or associators as an enemy party and as a cultic alternative to the

the shortening of prayers on journeys (perhaps on military campaigns) by invoking the fear that “the repudiators might afflict you” (*in khiṭṭum an yaḥṭinakuṃ lladhīna kafarū*). Clearly, “to lead s.o. into temptation” would not work as a translation for *fatana* here. Incidentally, in this context at least “to persecute” does not fit either, considering that the believers are assumed to be armed and thus capable of ensuring their own defence.

***banā* tr. | to build s.th.**

→ *samā'*, → *khalaqa*

***ibn* | son**

***banū isrā'īl* pl. | the Israelites**

On Q 5:18, accusing the Jews and Christians of deeming themselves to be God’s beloved children (*naḥnu abnā'u llāhi wa-aḥibbā'uhu*), see under → *allāh*. On Jesus as the son of God, see under → *al-naṣārā*. On *banū isrā'īl*, see under → *isrā'īl*.

***bawwa'a* tr. *fī l-ard* | to give s.o. an abode in the land / on earth**

→ *afsada*, → *makkana*

***bayt* | house; temple**

Further vocabulary discussed: *al-ka'bah* | the Ka'bah *ḥarām*, *ḥarām* | inviolable, sacred *al-bayt al-ma'mūr* | the house at which cultic worship is performed (?); the house visited (by pilgrims) (?) *masjid* | place of prostration, place of worship *sajada* intr. (*li-*) | to prostrate o.s. (before s.o.) *ṣallā* intr. (*li-*) | to pray (to s.o.) *raka'a* intr. | to bow (in prayer) *ṭāfa*, *taṭawwafa* intr. (*bi-*) | to perform a ritual circumambulation, to circumambulate (s.th.) *bāraka* tr. | to bestow blessing upon s.o. or s.th. *al-ard allatī bāraknā fihā* | the land that we have blessed *miḥrāb* | palace; sanctuary

**The Meccan Ka'bah as God’s “house”:** overview. Arabic *bayt* means “house” in general, in the sense of an ordinary human or even animal domicile (e.g., Q 4:15.100, 8:5, 12:23, 17:93, 29:41, 51:36, 71:28), but *al-bayt* or “the house” (e.g., Q 2:125.127.158, 3:97, 8:35, 22:26, 106:3) is a common Qur'anic name for the Meccan Ka'bah, a designation that Q 5:2.97 expand to *al-bayt al-ḥarām*, the “inviolable” or “sacred” house (→ *ḥarrama*; see also Q 14:37, which uses *muḥarram*).<sup>1</sup> The Ka'bah and “the house” or “the inviolable house” are explicitly equated in Q 5:97 (see also Q 5:95 and Hawting 2019, 103–104). More anomalous is Q 3:96, which says that “the first house [of worship] established for the people” is that *bi-bakkata*, though the occurrence of *bi-bakkata* instead of the expected *bi-makkata*

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Qur'anic believers, by vanquishing them militarily, would remove the general danger that some humans might attempt to lead others into temptation.

<sup>1</sup> For a more doubtful assessment of the question whether the Qur'anic *bayt* is invariably to be identified with the Meccan Ka'bah, see Hawting 2019, 103–109.

could perhaps be explained as a very unusual case of progressive assimilation.<sup>2</sup> In some cases, *bayt* takes a possessive suffix referring to the Qur’anic deity (Q 14:37, 22:26). This accords with an early Meccan verse implying that the Qur’anic God is the “Lord of this house” (Q 106:3: *rabb hādihā al-bayt*; cf. also 27:91, which has *rabb hādhihi l-baldati lladhī ḥarramahā*, “the Lord of this town, who declared it to be inviolable”) as well as a string of passages, both Meccan and Medinan, in which God figures as the one responsible for establishing the Meccan shrine or the town’s sacred status (Q 2:125, 5:97, 22:26, 27:91, 28:57, 29:67; see also 3:96, which is in the passive voice but plausibly taken to imply divine establishment as well). Several of the verses just referenced associate the origin of the Meccan sanctuary with the figure of Abraham (Q 2:125–127, 3:97, 14:37, 22:26–29). In Q 22:29.33, the “house” accordingly takes the epithet ‘*atīq*, “ancient,” while the early Meccan verse Q 52:4 calls it *al-bayt al-ma’mūr*, perhaps “the house visited [by pilgrims]” (see under → ‘*amara*).

In the Hebrew Bible, the Jerusalem temple is at least on one occasion described as the dwelling place of God or of his “glory” (*kābôd*; 1 Kgs 8:10–13, but see 1 Kgs 8:27; cf. Ps 132:14). It may be that a similar notion originally underpinned Arabian references to the Ka’bah as God’s “house”; but it is unlikely that by the time of the Qur’an the Meccan sanctuary was still understood to be God’s dwelling place in any literal sense, seeing that God is explicitly described as “he who is in heaven” (Q 67:16–17: *man fī l-samā’i*). Instead, the Meccan “house” is characterised in terms of its ritual and other roles for human worshippers (e.g., Q 2:125, 3:96–97, 5:97).<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the clearest confirmation of this observation is the fact that the second principal designation of the Meccan shrine, apart from formulations employing the word *bayt*, is “the inviolable/sacred place of prostration” (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*; e.g., Q 2:144.149.150; → *sajada*, → *ḥarrama*). In line with this, prostration (verb: → *sajada*) figures among the ritual acts that worshippers at God’s house are said to perform (Q 2:125, 22:26). In addition, rituals that are in some sense connected with the Meccan sanctuary include circumambulation (see below), prayer (Q 2:125, 8:35; → *ṣallā*), bowing (verb: *raka’a*; see Q 2:125, 22:26), but also animal sacrifices (see Q 2:196, 5:95, 22:32–33, 48:25; → *dhabāḥa*). The latter aspect, it is worth noting, stands in tension with what became the standard practice in post-Qur’anic Islam, according to which “it is not usual to offer an animal at all when making an ‘*umrah*, and the animals that are slaughtered as part of the *ḥaḡḡ* ritual are killed at Minā outside Mecca” (Hawting 2019, 102). Most likely, the Qur’anic text here reflects an archaic state of affairs that was gradually superseded (see also the early post-Qur’anic evidence for the Ka’bah as a place of animal sacrifices that is noted in Hawting 2019, 102–103).

2 Carlos Segovia would presumably disagree with this deflationary solution of the problem; see Amir-Moizzi and Dye 2019, 2:154. It must be conceded that the hypothesis of assimilation of *bi-makkata* to *bi-bakkata* is unabashedly *ad hoc*, in so far as the Qur’an’s canonical *rasm* is by no means devoid of cases in which *bi-* is followed by a word beginning with the letter *mīm* (though there is also no occurrence of *bi-makkata*; Q 48:24 has *bi-baṭni makkata*). One might also object that assimilation in Classical Arabic is predominantly regressive (as exemplified by the behaviour of the definite article, which in many cases assimilates to the initial consonant of the following word) rather than progressive (Alfozan 1989, 80–83). Still, at least the general phenomenon of progressive assimilation is not entirely absent from Arabic (Ryding 2014, 23–25). This is illustrated by the behaviour of infixed *t* in eighth-form verbs (*ifta’ala*) whose consonantal roots begin with certain letters (e.g., *iddaghama* < \* *idtaghama*; see also Fischer 2002, 27). On Q 3:96, see also the comment in Sinai 2014, 520.

3 A similar shift of emphasis can perhaps be seen in the manner in which Q 22:37 reconceptualises the rationale for offering sacrifices to God (see under → *dhabāḥa*).



*Al-bayt* = “the temple”? Given that the Qur’anic “house” is a sanctuary devoted to and established at the behest of God, it has been suggested that *bayt*, when used to refer to the Meccan shrine, is to be idiomatically translated as “temple” (thus Stewart 2021, 30–32). As Stewart argues, this adequately reflects the Arabic word’s ostensible “weight of veneration” and also the fact that the Hebrew Bible, in line with ancient Near Eastern terminology more generally, commonly refers to the Jerusalem temple by using the cognate word *bayit* (e.g. 1 Kgs 3:1; see *TDOT* 2:111–113). Jacqueline Chabbi has expressed reservations against rendering *bayt* as “temple,” in so far as the cult at the Ka’bah mainly seems to have taken place on the outside of the building, involving ritual circumambulation (Q 2:125.158, 22:26.29: *tāfa/tatawwafa*) as an important element (Chabbi 2020, 38–39, 51).<sup>4</sup> However, whether one considers the idea of a temple to imply regular cultic activity on the inside is perhaps a matter of definition, and whether we have adequate knowledge of what, if anything, went on inside the Ka’bah is in any case open to doubt (see also Stewart 2021, 32). In favour of rendering *al-bayt* as “the temple,” moreover, one may point to two Medinan passages, Q 2:124–129 and 3:96–97, that are clearly concerned to cast the Meccan sanctuary as equivalent or even superior to the Jerusalem temple (*HCI* 205–206). For example, Q 3:96–97 speak of the Meccan sanctuary as “the first house [of worship] established for the people” and describe it as “blessed” (*mubārak*), an attribute recalling earlier Qur’anic allusions to the Holy Land, or “the land that we have blessed” (Q 21:71.81: *al-arḍ allatī bāraknā fihā*; cf. Q 7:137, 17:1, 34:18; see under → *arḍ* and → *qaddasa*). The point of calling the Meccan sanctuary—which according to the Qur’an was founded by Abraham (Q 2:125–127, 3:97, 22:26)—the “first house” is presumably to credit it with seniority over the Jerusalem temple, whose establishment the Biblical tradition associates only with David.<sup>5</sup>

Against Stewart’s recommended policy, however, it can be objected that no Qur’anic passage explicitly applies the term *bayt* to the Israelite sanctuary in Jerusalem: in Q 17:1.7, the latter is called a → *masjid*, a “place of prostration,” while Q 3:37.39 and 19:11 refer to it by using the term *mihrāb*, whose original meaning in early Arabic may have been “palace” or “throne room” but which in Surahs 3 and 19 is best rendered as “sanctuary” (Horovitz 1927, 261–262).<sup>6</sup> The evidence that the Jerusalem temple was commonly referred to as a *bayt* by speakers of Arabic at the time of the Qur’an is thus not conclusive. It is true, as noted earlier, that certain Qur’anic passages are concerned to draw a parallel between the Meccan Ka’bah and the Jerusalem temple; yet such a parallelisation should not be

4 On ritual circumambulation in the Qur’an, see also Christiansen 2019.

5 One might compare this with Jacob of Sarug’s attempt to establish the priority of Edessa over Jerusalem (Popa 2019).

6 For an overview of the debate about the word’s etymology and original meaning, see Fehérvári 1993, 7; for attestations in pre-Islamic and early post-Qur’anic poetry and an analysis of Qur’anic usage, see, among others, *NB* 52, n. 3, and Horovitz 1927, 260–263. The word also occurs in Q 38:21, describing how two disputants sought out David in the *mihrāb* to ask him to adjudicate between them. While one might expect the scene to take place in David’s palace rather than the temple (cf. 2 Sam 12, where David only departs to the “house of the Lord” in v. 20, after which he returns to his own house), the Qur’anic narrative could well be set in the temple in its entirety. However, Ambros (following Horovitz 1927, 261, and Paret 2001) translates *mihrāb* at Q 38:21 as “palace,” alongside 34:13 (which has the plural *maḥārib*; *CDKA* 68). That *mihrāb* could mean a palace or throne room seems clear from the poetic testimonies adduced by Horovitz and others. According to Horovitz, the use of *mihrāb* as a designation for the Israelite temple in Q 3:37.39 and 19:11 is a secondary expansion of this original meaning. This hypothesis remains highly plausible, as does Horovitz’s conjecture that the development may have taken place under the impact of the similar-sounding Ethiopic word *māk<sup>w</sup>rāb* (“temple, sanctuary, synagogue”; Leslau 1991, 341). It is important to highlight that Horovitz is not claiming that *mihrāb* is to be etymologically derived from *māk<sup>w</sup>rāb*.



regarded as entailed merely by calling the former a *bayt*. This is not to rule out, however, that a Medinan passage like Q 3:96–97 with its tangible polemical subtext builds on an awareness among some of its recipients that in Jewish tradition the Jerusalem temple is commonly called *bēt ha-miqdash* in Hebrew or *be/bet maqdsha* in Aramaic (*DTTM* 829; *DJBA* 215 and 701). But this is a plausible guess rather than a certainty. In sum, though there are some valid reasons for translating *al-bayt al-ḥarām* etc. as “the sacred temple,” legitimate scope for disagreement remains.

**The Meccan sanctuary: a contextual sketch.** That Mecca was the site of a sacrificial sanctuary of transtribal significance is confirmed by allusions in pre-Qur’anic poetry, which also refers to “God’s house” (*bayt allāh*) or the “Lord” (*rabb*) of “the house” and of Mecca (Sinai 2019b, 52–53). The Meccan sanctuary was moreover located in the vicinity of Mount ‘Arafah or ‘Arafāt, the point of departure of the annual → *ḥajj* ritual, which may have begun to fuse with the cult of the Meccan sanctuary already in the pre-Qur’anic period. It would appear that the Quraysh, who seem to have gained control over Mecca at some point in the fifth century (Peters 1994b, 10–18; see also Sinai, forthcoming a), made deliberate efforts to augment the sacrality of Mecca, or to engage in what Jacqueline Chabbi has termed a “capitalisation of the sacred” (Chabbi 2020, 50). They are, for instance, reported to have moved the “black stone,” a betyl (i.e., an aniconic sacred stone) now forming part of the Ka’bah, from a nearby mountaintop to the site of the Meccan shrine (Rubin 1986, 118–124). The theology of subordination that the Qur’an attributes to Muhammad’s pagan opponents, according to which other deities—such as the trio Allāt, al-‘Uzzā, and Manāt (Q 53:19–22)—were recognised as intermediaries between humans and Allāh, the patron deity of the Meccan shrine, and as his daughters (→ *ashraka*),<sup>7</sup> may likewise have been a means of asserting Mecca’s ultimate supremacy over competing sanctuaries and of ensuring its appeal to as large a cultic constituency as possible. The result of such endeavours would seem to have been a “polybetylic” ensemble (Chabbi 2020, 48) accumulating a plurality of sacred stones, figures, and sacrificial stones, to go by post-Qur’anic Islamic sources (Rubin 1986, 104–106), but which in its entirety was believed to be under the custody of Allāh, the “Lord (*rabb*) of the house,” whose protective solicitude for Mecca, its sacred precinct (*ḥaram*), and its inhabitants is emphasised in several Qur’anic passages (Q 27:91, 28:57, 29:67, 106:4).

It is noteworthy that a verse by the Christian poet ‘Adī ibn Zayd presupposes that the “Lord of Mecca” is identical with the “Lord of the cross,” i.e., with the Biblical God (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 3:10; see Sinai 2019b, 52). In view of this, it may well be the case that the Meccan sanctuary was recognised not only by pagans but also by some Christians and Jews (for some possible traces of this in post-Qur’anic literature, see Rubin 1990, 109). This hypothesis would fit the observation that Islamic sources exhibit isolated traces of a Christian presence in Mecca, such as a “cemetery of the Christians” (Shahīd 1989, 387, 390–392). The Ka’bah’s acceptance by tribes professing (some version of)

7 On the question of whether the patron of the Ka’bah was Allāh or Hubal, see Sinai 2019b, 52–53 and 58, n. 283 (tending towards the supposition that Hubal was secondarily co-opted into the Ka’bah cult, in addition to the sanctuary’s true patron deity Allāh). On accounts to the effect that the Ka’bah contained a statue of Hubal, see now also O’Meara 2020, 109–110. As O’Meara remarks, it is striking that most reports of Muhammad’s destruction of the idols within the Ka’bah upon his gaining control of Mecca do not mention Hubal (O’Meara 2020, 113). This could be an indication that the Islamic source’s stress on Hubal’s importance in rituals performed in and around the pre-Islamic Ka’bah is an exaggeration.

Judaism or Christianity would certainly have been facilitated by, and may even have been a consequence of, the notion that the Ka‘bah was etiologically linked to Abraham. It is therefore conceivable, though not provable, that a general association of the Ka‘bah with the figure of Abraham (whether or not this association also involved Abraham’s son Ishmael) was present already in pre-Qur’anic Meccan local tradition rather than being only a Qur’anic innovation (Rubin 1990, 103–107; Firestone 1991; *HCI* 70; Goudarzi 2019, 477).<sup>8</sup> This conjecture does not, incidentally, entail that an association of the Meccan sanctuary with Abraham would have been the prevalent consensus; there may well have been a range of different etiological narratives, similar to the situation obtaining at other ancient sanctuaries (Smith 1894, 17–18).

***bayyana* tr./intr. (li-) | to clarify s.th. (to s.o.), to make things clear (to s.o.)**  
***bayyin, mubīn, mubayyin* (?), *mustabīn* | clear**  
***bayyinah* | clear sign, clear proof**  
***bayān* | clear speech**

Further vocabulary discussed: *āyah* | sign *balāgh* | message; transmission, delivery (of a message) *kitāb* | scripture *qur’ān* | recitation *‘arabī* | Arabic *nazzala, anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down *‘aduww* | enemy *ḍalāl* | being astray, going astray *ikhtalafa* intr. (*fī*) | to disagree, to fall into disagreement (about s.th.) *āmana* intr. | to be a believer *kafara* intr. | to be ungrateful; to be a repudiator *ḥakama* intr. *bayna* (*fī*) | to judge or adjudicate between s.o. (with regard to s.th.) *qaḍā* intr. *bayna* (*fī*) | to decide between s.o. (with regard to s.th.) *faṣala* intr. *bayna* (*fī*) | to decide between s.o. (with regard to s.th.) *nabba’a* tr. bi- | to announce s.th. to s.o. *tafarraqa* intr. | to become divided, to fall into division *nadhīr* | warner *‘allama* ditr. | to teach s.o. s.th. *sulṭān* | authority *mutashābih* | resembling one another; indistinguishable; ambiguous *muḥkam* | firmly crafted *umm al-kitāb* | the mother of the scripture, the mother-scripture (meaning either the celestial archetype of earthly scriptures or the Qur’an’s unequivocal core) *ta’wīl* | explanation, interpretation; ultimate outcome *fitnah* | trial *al-rāsikhūn fī l-‘ilm* pl. | those firmly grounded in knowledge

**Overview.** Numerous Qur’anic passages associate divine revelation with the notion of clarity, expressed by the root *b-y-n*. Thus, the “signs” (*āyāt*) bestowed by God are often qualified by the adjective *bayyin*, “clear” (e.g., Q 2:99.211, 3:97, 10:15, 17:101, 19:73, 28:36; → *āyah*). The feminine *bayyinah* also appears as an independent noun, both in the singular and the plural, designating the “clear sign(s)” or “clear proof(s)” revealed by God and communicated by his envoys (e.g., Q 2:87.92, 6:157, 7:73, and 20:72.133; see *CDKA* 47). The task of the Qur’anic Messenger, too, consists in “clear transmission” or “clear delivery” (*al-balāgh*

8 Moubarac 1958, 77, infers the same from the casual address of Abraham and his wife as *ahl al-bayt* in Q 11:73. But cf. Q 33:33, where the same title is applied to the female members of Muhammad’s household, without an implicit link to the Ka‘bah being likely. The question whether the figures of Abraham and his son Ishmael were known in pre-Qur’anic pagan circles in the Ḥijāz has given rise to vigorous controversy. For an excellent synthesis of the history of the problem, see now Goudarzi 2019, 457–472.

*al-mubīn*) of God’s message (Q 5:92, 16:35.82, 24:54, 29:18, 36:17, 64:12),<sup>1</sup> and the attribute “clear” (*mubīn*; see in more detail below) is furthermore applied to the celestial archetype of all scriptural revelations (→ *kitāb*; e.g., Q 27:1.75, 28:2, 34:3, 43:2, 44:2) as well as specifically to “the recitation” (*al-qur’ān*; → *qara’a*) revealed to Muhammad (Q 15:1 and 36:69) and to the “Arabic language” in which the Qur’anic revelations are composed (Q 16:103, 26:195; see under → *‘arabī*).

Besides the adjectives *bayyin* and *mubīn* and the noun *bayyinah*, the Qur’an also expresses the clarity inhering in, and furnished by, divine revelations by employing the second-form verb *bayyana* + acc. (*li-*), “to make s.th. clear (to s.o.)” or intransitive *bayyana* (*li-*), “to make things clear (for s.o.)” (e.g., Q 2:118.159.187.219.221.230.242.266). The direct object of God’s clarifying activity often consists in “his signs” or “the signs”; the (distinctly Medinan) formulation that God “clarifies” or “renders clear” his signs for someone (*bayyana āyātihi li-*) is probably equivalent to the statement that he “sent down clear signs” (*nazzala/anzala āyātīn bayyinātīn/mubayyinātīn*; e.g., Q 2:99, 24:1.34.46, 57:9, 58:5; see also 22:16). Less frequently, the grammatical subjects of *bayyana* are human agents, such as Jesus (Q 43:63), the Qur’anic Messenger (Q 5:15.19, 16:44.64), or God’s messengers in general (Q 14:4).<sup>2</sup> In such cases, the point would seem to be that God’s emissaries faithfully communicate the immanent clarity of the divine message, in line with verses attributing to the Qur’anic Messenger the task of “clear delivery” (*al-balāgh al-mubīn*). A peculiar feature of the Medinan surahs, which is discussed elsewhere (see under → *al-‘ālamūn*), consists in the fact that Muhammad is bidden to “make things clear” (*bayyana*) not just to the scriptureless but also to the custodians of prior scriptural revelations, that is, to Jews and Christians (Q 3:20, 5:15.19; see also the likely Medinan insertion Q 16:44).<sup>3</sup>

In a few cases (Q 2:118.230, 6:105), the verb *bayyana* occurs as part of a verse-final flourish together with a prepositional syntagm introduced by *li-qawmīn*. An example is the divine voice’s statement in Q 2:118 that “we have indeed clarified the signs to people who have certainty (*li-qawmīn yūqīnūn*).” This syntactic pattern is also found with other verbs, and as shown elsewhere is probably equivalent with a consecutive clause that would disrupt the rhyme (see in detail under → *faṣṣala*), meaning that “we have indeed clarified the signs to people who have certainty” has the same purport as “we have indeed clarified the signs so that people might have certainty.” The theologically significant implication of this analysis is that verse-final occurrences of *li-qawmīn* + verb in the prefix conjugation cannot be adduced to show that the target audience of divine clarification is confined to those who have already espoused belief.

**The meaning of *mubīn* and *mubayyin*.** Some of the translations in the preceding section presuppose that the active participle *mubīn*, derived from the fourth-form verb *abāna*, does not have a transitive force in Qur’anic usage, such that it would mean “clarifying” (see the overview of common interpretations of *mubīn* in Birnstiel 2018, 47–53). Rather, as argued in detail by Devin Stewart, Qur’anic *mubīn* functions as a verse-final equivalent of *bayyin* (Stewart, forthcoming). In fact, the Qur’an’s sole verbal occurrence of *abāna* in Q 43:52 (which is also verse-final) is intransitive, with the meaning “to express o.s. clearly”

1 *Balāgh* denotes both God’s “message” and its “transmission” or “delivery” by divinely chosen emissaries such as Muhammad; see CDKA 44.

2 See also Q 3:187, where it is the scripture-owners who are charged to “make it”—i.e., the scripture—“clear to the people and not to conceal it.” See on this verse the remarks under → *wāthaqa*.

3 For a tentative argument in favour of Q 16:44 being Medinan, see again under → *al-‘ālamūn*.

(CDKA 46). It may be that this exhibits a general semantic potential of the Arabic fourth verbal form, which Fred Leemhuis describes as an “internal causative” (Leemhuis 1977, 38–65), a meaning that is captured by formulations such as “to show oneself to be s.th.,” “to allow o.s. to be or do s.th.”<sup>4</sup> If that is correct, then the use of *abāna* and *mubīn* in the sense of “expressing o.s. clearly” or “showing o.s. to be clear” (see Leemhuis 1977, 50–51) would exhibit a regular sense of the fourth-form verb *abāna* rather than forming a case of poetic licence or “cognate substitution” (on which see Stewart 2009, 20–25). In any case, the fact that *mubīn* is not “clarifying” but “clear” is also evident from verses in which the word figures as an adjective joined to nouns like *‘aduww*, “enemy” (e.g., Q 2:168.208, 4:101, 6:142), and *dalāl*, “going astray” (e.g., Q 3:164, 6:74, 7:60, 12:8.30), where reference is clearly not to any act of transitive clarification.

More problematic than *mubīn* is the second-form participle *mubayyin*: unlike *abāna*, *bayyana* is undeniably a transitive verb in the Qur’an (e.g., Q 2:68–70.118.159); yet in the Medinan phrases *fāḥishah mubayyinah* (Q 4:19, 33:30, 65:1) and *āyāt mubayyināt* (Q 24:34.46, 65:11), the active participle *mubayyin* is best understood as an equivalent of *bayyin* or *mubīn* (cf. the phrase *āyāt bayyināt* in Q 2:99.211, 3:97, 10:15, 17:101 etc.). Thus, *fāḥishah mubayyinah* is presumably “a clear abomination,” while *āyāt mubayyināt* are “clear signs,” notwithstanding the fact that a literal translation might run “clarifying abomination” and “clarifying signs.” As Leemhuis suggests, adopting the reading variants *mubayyanah/mubayyanāt*, which replace the active participle by a passive one, would be one way of removing the problem (Leemhuis 1977, 52–53; see, e.g., *MQQ* 2:120). Such a passive reading receives further support from a verse in the poetic corpus of Ṭarafah, which has *al-ẓulm al-mubayyan* for “manifest wrongdoing” (*DSAAP*, Ṭarafah, no. 1:4; cf. Jacobi 1971, 146). Against the background of Qur’anic usage, however, one might of course rather expect a feminine form of the fourth-form active participle *mubīn*. While the Qur’an’s Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim reading is entirely devoid of the feminine form *mubīnah*, early Qur’anic manuscripts lacking diacritics would have spelled both *mubayyinah/mubayyanah* and *mubīnah* identically as *مبينه*. As noted by Stewart, it is therefore conceivable that the original wording was *mubīnah*, especially given that all Qur’anic occurrences of *mubayyinah* and *mubayyināt* are verse-internal and the choice is therefore unconstrained by rhyme. It must, however, be said that the *qirā’āt* literature offers only isolated evidence for the reading variant *mubīnah* instead of *mubayyinah* (*MQQ* 1:120 and *MQ* 2:42, on Q 4:19).<sup>5</sup>

A different non-transitive interpretation of *mubīn* is advocated by Daniel Birnstiel (Birnstiel 2018), to whom Stewart is responding. Based on a detailed review of other Qur’anic occurrences of *mubīn*, Birnstiel argues that the Qur’anic claim to have been revealed *bi-lisānin ‘arabiyyin mubīn* (Q 26:195) does not mean “in clear Arabic language” but rather “clearly in Arabic,” in the sense that the Qur’an’s Arabicness is readily apparent and easily ascertainable. Such an adverbial manner of parsing the meaning of Qur’anic *mubīn* is frequently

4 As Leemhuis explains, internal causatives “form a sub-group of the causative; they only do not indicate that the subject causes someone else to be, or do, something, but that the subject causes itself to be, or do, something. The omission of the object (or of one of the objects) that is expected serves as the indication that subject and object are identical (except of course when the unmentioned object is clearly understood from the context) which explains why both sorts of meanings can be found for the H stem of one and the same lexical root” (Leemhuis 1977, 40–41).

5 On the problem of the second-stem participle, see also Birnstiel 2018, 84–88, who opts for textual variants that read *mubayyinah* as *mubayyanah*. Stewart prefers to emend *mubayyinah* to *bayyinah*.

compelling, as for the statement that Satan is a *'aduwu mubīn* to the Qur'anic addressees in Q 2:168.208 etc., where “clearly an enemy” is a contextually suitable rendering, and for the phrase *fī dalālin mubīn* in Q 3:164 etc. (“clearly astray”). Nonetheless, it is doubtful whether Birnstiel’s approach can be generalised across all Qur’anic occurrences of *mubīn*. Thus, the suggestion that *al-balāgh al-mubīn* (e.g., Q 5:92, 16:35.82) is “a conveyance which can be identified as such” (Birnstiel 2018, 72) seems unpersuasive. A similar reservation holds for *al-kitāb al-mubīn* in Q 12:1 and elsewhere, for which Birnstiel proposes “the scripture that can be identified as such” (Birnstiel 2018, 73). More likely, whether the adjective *mubīn* serves to ascribe the property of clarity to its accompanying noun itself or whether it merely presents the quality implied by the noun (e.g., being an enemy or being a mistake) as one that is clearly apparent (see Birnstiel 2018, 69–71) is simply dependent on context rather than being determined by the morphological difference between *bayyin* and *mubīn*.<sup>6</sup> Specifically with regard to the proposal to interpret Q 16:103 and 26:195 as maintaining that the Qur’anic revelations are “clearly in Arabic” rather than “in clear Arabic,” the former interpretation raises the question why the Qur’an’s Arabicness would be a pertinent feature to highlight at all, if not for the ready comprehensibility entailed by it.<sup>7</sup>

**Clarity and disagreement (*ikhtilāf*).** Some Qur’anic verses present the clarity and clarification vouchsafed by revelation as the antidote to human disagreement and squabbling: God “only sent down the scripture to you<sup>s</sup>”—namely, to the Qur’anic Messenger—“so that you might clarify to them that about which they disagree” (*wa-mā anzalnā ‘alayka l-kitāba illā li-tubayyina lahumu lladhī khtalafū fīhi*; Q 16:64; cf. 27:76), and in Q 5:15.19 the Qur’anic Messenger is given the role of “making things clear” to the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*), whom 5:15 accuses of “hiding” the scripture. Similarly, Jesus was sent to provide clarity regarding “some of the things regarding which you<sup>p</sup>”—namely, his Israelite audience—“are in disagreement” (Q 43:63). Yet the lucidity of God’s revelations does not produce unfailing human assent, for past recipients of God’s revelations are said to have “fallen into disagreement” (*ikhtalafa*) even after clear signs or scriptural revelations had come to them (Q 2:213.253, 3:105; cf. also 3:19, 11:110, 19:37, 41:45, and 45:17).<sup>8</sup> The perspicuity of divine communications, therefore, does not preclude that some of its human addressees may nonetheless wilfully and culpably misconstrue God’s signs. Indeed, Q 2:253 makes it clear that those who “fall into disagreement” in the wake of God’s clear signs divide into believers (*man* → *āmana*) and repudiators (*man* → *kafara*; cf. also Q 3:19 and 19:37): whether humans allow themselves to be infused by the clarity of God’s address is, in the last instance, a volitional act, a decision between belief and unbelief. It is only at God’s final judgement that there will be no further room for human misunderstanding, for on

6 Like Stewart, I see little reason to follow Birnstiel’s assessment that *bi-sulṭānīn bayyīnīn* at Q 18:15 has a subtly different meaning from verse-final occurrences of *bi-sulṭānīn mubīn* (e.g., 14:10, 27:21; see Birnstiel 2018, 80–81); and I would agree with Stewart’s claim that the crucial difference between the two cases is whether the adjective is in verse-final position (in which case rhyme may require *mubīn*) rather than in verse-internal position.

7 One might of course respond to this challenge by positing that Arabic was a language characterised by mantic prestige, a language associated with supernatural inspiration of some kind; but such a theory would effectively need to be read into the Qur’an, which offers little support for it. For a slightly different take on the meaning of *mubīn*, see Larcher 2020, 116–118. Larcher suggests that the fourth-form verb *abāna*, of which *mubīn* is the active participle, is implicitly reflexive (which would yield a sense like “self-clarifying”) and that *mubīn* is equivalent with *mustabīn* at Q 37:117, for which a reflexive sense is morphologically expected. My main reservation with regard to Larcher’s treatment is that it fails to consider rhyme.

8 On *ikhtalafa* and related terms, see also under → *ummah*, → *ḥizb*, and → *al-naṣārā*.



the “day of resurrection” God himself will “make clear to you<sup>9</sup> that about which you were in disagreement” (Q 16:92: *wa-la-yubayyinanna lakum yawma l-qiyāmati mā kuntum fīhi takhtalifūn*; see also 16:39). A string of further passages predicts a similar eschatological resolution of human discord in religious matter by using *ḥakama/qaḍā/faṣala bayna . . . fī*, “to judge or adjudicate between s.o. with regard to s.th.,” “to decide between s.o. with regard to s.th.,” or *nabba’a* + acc. *bi-*, “to announce s.th. to s.o.” instead of *bayyana* (Q 2:113, 3:55, 5:48, 6:164, 10:19.93, 16:124, 22:69, 32:25, 39:3.46, 42:10, 45:17).

The preceding data establish that the general Qur’anic appraisal of human disagreement and discord in the wake of being exposed to God’s signs is squarely disapproving (Paret 1979, 523–524), even if Q 5:48 implies that the existence of different religious communities in the present period of history is divinely willed (see under → *ummah*). The proper response to the clarity of divine revelation, though a response to which previous humans have consistently failed to live up, is communal concord. The Qur’anic believers are accordingly admonished not to follow the negative precedent of earlier generations: “Hold fast to God’s rope, all together, and do not become divided” (*wa-taṣimū bi-ḥabli llāhi jamī’an wa-lā tafarraquū*), Q 3:103 says,<sup>9</sup> and two verses on (Q 3:105), we find the further exhortation, “Do not be like those who fell into divisions and disagreement (*tafarraquū wa-khtalafū*) after the clear signs had come to them; those will have a great punishment” (cf. Q 98:4).<sup>10</sup> The Qur’anic awareness that the unity of the believers is a precious good whose loss will entail the danger of eschatological perdition persisted well into the post-Qur’anic period; even the well-known dictum attributed to Muhammad that “disagreement in my community is an expression of divine mercy” (*ikhtilāf ummatī raḥmah*) may not originally have been meant to vaunt pluralism but rather to formulate the hope that the emergence of reprehensible disagreement within the Muslim *ummah* would be treated leniently by God (Paret 1979; van Ess 2017–2020, 4:731–732).

**Scriptural clarity in the Qur’an and in the Christian tradition.** The Qur’anic stress on the clarity of divine revelations is usefully compared with Christian reflections on the clarity of scripture (though the topic no doubt deserves a more sustained treatment than is possible here). Proto-orthodox Christians and those following in their wake were committed both to the canonical status of the Hebrew Bible and to various doctrines (e.g., that the death of Jesus was the crucial soteriological event in human history and that Jesus was simultaneously human and divine) that are not literally enunciated by the Hebrew Bible, at least not from the perspective of a reader not yet beholden to the truth of Christianity. As a result, an early Christian thinker like Irenaeus of Lyon was forced to admit that Biblical prophecies, before their fulfilment in Christ, are enigmatic and ambiguous; yet “when the time has arrived, and the prediction has come to pass, then the prophecies have a clear and certain exposition.” To the Jews, however, the “law” is “like a fable; for they do not possess the explanation of all things pertaining to the advent of the

9 Paret links the metaphor of “God’s rope” in Q 3:103 with the expression “grasping the firmest handhold” (*istamsaka bi-l-urwati l-wuthqā*) in Q 2:256 and 31:22 (KK 76). Note, though, that “grasping the firmest handhold” is only a metaphor for belief in God rather than for preserving the unity of the community of believers.

10 For another occurrence of *tafarraqa*, “to become divided,” in a warning against religious divisions, see Q 42:13–14, perhaps also 6:153. Q 6:159 and 30:32 have *farraqū dīnahum*, “they introduced divisions into their religion” (see under → *ḥizb*). Another Qur’anic term for blameworthy disunity and discord in religious matters is *taqaṭṭa’ū amrahum baynahum*, “they became divided among themselves over their affair” at Q 21:93 and 23:53 (see CDKA 227 and also under → *zabūr*). A group of people resulting from sectarian disunity is called → *ḥizb* or *shī’ah* (e.g., Q 30:32).



Son of God, which took place in human nature; but when it is read by the Christians, it is a treasure, hid indeed in a field, but brought to light by the cross of Christ, and explained” (Roberts et al. 1995, 1:496–497 = Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 4, ch. 26:1). The meaning of scripture, then, is fully capable of elucidation—provided that scripture is read from a Christian vantage point. As a result, scripture’s true meaning, despite being potentially lucid, does not command universal assent: “the entire Scriptures, the prophets, and the Gospels, can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all, although all do not believe them” (Roberts et al. 1995, 1:398 = Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 2, ch. 27:2). Mainstream Christianity, of whom Irenaeus is an early representative, is thus disposed to recognise that scriptural prophecies were not clearly intelligible to humans at the point of delivery and require subsequent fulfilment in order to become fully comprehensible. By way of an illustration, according to Jacob of Sarug it was only with the nativity of Christ that “all the words of prophecy have come into effect, and the Hidden Mystery (*rāzā kasyā*) has appeared openly (*etā l-gelyā*) to show itself” (Kollampampil 2010, 196–197, ll. 91–92). By contrast, the Qur’an—with the exception of one passage, to be discussed at the end of the entry—is able to claim perfect clarity already at the point of delivery. Yet like Irenaeus, the Islamic scripture nonetheless anticipates that “all do not believe” God’s clear signs: whether one opens oneself up to God’s clear address or not is, ultimately, a decision between belief and unbelief that may go either way, irrespective of the intrinsic lucidity with which God communicates.

**Early Meccan passages to do with the clarity of God’s revelations.** The prevalent Qur’anic association between divine revelations and clarity forms a constant of Qur’anic theology throughout all stages of the text’s emergence and is fully established already in the early Meccan period. This is worth illustrating in more detail. Thus, Q 51:50–51 declares—in the form of a first-person statement that is evidently meant to be an utterance of the Qur’anic Messenger rather than of God—that “I am a clear warner (*nadhīr mubīn*; → *bashshara*) from him,” namely, from God, “to you<sup>9</sup>.” This has another early Meccan parallel in Q 15:89, while the early Meccan verse Q 26:115 attributes a similar self-identification to Noah (“I am only a clear warner”). Subsequently, declarations to the same effect recur in several later Meccan verses, both as statements by or about the Qur’anic Messenger and as utterances of Noah (Q 7:184, 11:25, 22:49,<sup>11</sup> 29:50, 38:70, 46:9, 67:26, 71:2). The importance attaching to the concept of God-given clarity already in the early Meccan period is further illustrated by Q 55:4, affirming that it was God who “taught” humans “clear speech” (*‘allamahu l-bayān*), and Q 26:195, one of a handful of Qur’anic verses stressing that Muhammad’s revelations are “in clear Arabic language” (*bi-lisānin ‘arabiyyin mubīn*; → *‘arabī*). Moreover, two other early Meccan verses, Q 52:38 and 37:156, challenge the Messenger’s adversaries to produce “clear authority (→ *sulṭān*),” while Q 51:38 contends that Moses was sent to Pharaoh with precisely such “clear authority” (see also the chronologically later references to “clear authority” in Q 4:91.144.153, 11:96, 14:10, 23:45, 27:21, 40:23, 44:19; 18:15 has *sulṭān bayyin*). Finally, the later Meccan references to the “clear scripture” that were briefly mentioned above are foreshadowed by the early Meccan pronouncement in Q 37:117 that God gave the people of Moses and Aaron (i.e., the

<sup>11</sup> This verse occurs in a surah that is often dated to the Medinan period but may contain substantial Meccan portions (see *HCI* 127–130).

Israelites) “the clear scripture” (*al-kitāb al-mustabīn*; on the exceptional use of *mustabīn* instead of *mubīn*, see Stewart, forthcoming).<sup>12</sup>

A particularly interesting early Meccan passage to do with the clarity of God’s revelations is Q 75:16–19. Here, the divine voice warns the Messenger not to be hasty in announcing the revelations he receives (cf. also Q 20:114). Instead, the Messenger is to await and then “follow” God’s recitation (Q 75:18). Q 75:19 adds that it will then be incumbent upon God to “clarify” what he has revealed (*thumma inna ‘alaynā bayānah*).<sup>13</sup> This equates to the promise that God’s revelations will, if necessary, be interpreted by later ones: the divine speaker himself will see to it that his messages are clearly understandable. This programmatic statement is remarkable because there is good literary evidence elsewhere in the Qur’an that this is indeed what happened: it can be shown that various Qur’anic statements that seem to have given rise to interpretive queries were retrospectively elucidated or modified in chronologically subsequent proclamations, either by means of a later insertion into the passage at stake or by means of targeted allusions in other surahs (Sinai 2018b and *HCI* 150–153; see also Sinai 2021, 367–373, 378–380, 384–386). In this sense, the Qur’anic revelations were engaged in maintaining and curating their own clarity, by having recourse to certain techniques of self-interpretation that allow for precise philological description. We shall have reason to return to this observation in the next and final section of the entry.

**Q 3:7 and scriptural ambiguity.** As shown by many of the preceding references, the idea that divine revelation is both inherently clear and a source of clarity continues to be prominent throughout the later Meccan and Medinan stages of the Qur’an’s genesis. An arresting exception to this general stance, however, is found in Q 3:7. The verse concedes that some of the “signs” revealed to the Qur’anic Messenger are in fact ambiguous (*mutashābih*, literally “resembling one another”),<sup>14</sup> as opposed to other signs that are “firmly crafted” (*muḥkam*) and form the unequivocal core of God’s scripture, or the “mother of the scripture” (*umm al-kitāb*; see also under → *kitāb*). This, the verse alleges, enables “those in whose hearts is deviation” to create discord and confusion in the community by seeking the “explanation” (*ta’wīl*)<sup>15</sup> of such ambiguous portions of God’s revelations, despite the fact that their understanding is limited to God alone.<sup>16</sup> The correct attitude, by contrast, is modelled by those “firmly grounded in knowledge” (*al-rāsikhūna fī l-‘ilmi*), who are depicted as proclaiming: “We believe in it; all of it”—i.e., whether clear or ambiguous—“is

12 Overall, Surah 37 contains five verses that have either *mubīn* or, once, *mustabīn* in rhyme position (vv. 15, 106, 113, 117, 156).

13 *Bayān* is the verbal noun corresponding to the first-form verb *bāna*, which is not attested in the Qur’an. Given that Q 75:19 employs the noun *bayān* with an object suffix whereas *bāna* is usually intransitive, one suspects that *bayān* here operates as a cognate substitute for the second-form verbal noun *tabyīn* (corresponding to the transitive verb *bayyana*). This would make Q 75:19 the inverse of 105:2, where the second-form verbal noun *taḍlīl* stands in for *ḍalāl* (Müller 1969, 46–50; Stewart 2009, 21). In both cases, the reason is clearly the maintenance of rhyme.

14 That the root *sh-b-h* can connote a perceived absence of clarity is confirmed by Q 2:70, where the Israelites, whom Moses orders to sacrifice a certain cow, demand additional divine clarification (verb: *bayyana*) since to their eyes all cows allegedly “resemble one another” or “are indistinguishable from another” (*inna l-baqara tashābaha ‘alaynā*).

15 On *ta’wīl* in the sense of “explanation” or “interpretation” (e.g., of dreams), see also 12:6.21.36.37.44.45.100.101, 18:78.82. As Ambros notes (*CDKA* 31), in some of its occurrences the word can or must mean something like “ultimate outcome” (e.g., Q 4:59, 17:35) rather than “explanation,” though one can see how its basic sense of returning something to its origin could have given rise to both of these more specific senses.

16 See also the remarks on Q 3:7 and the term *fitnah* under → *balā*.

from our Lord” (*āmannā bihi kullun min ‘indi rabbīnā*).<sup>17</sup> Remarkably, the verse does not merely concede that certain portions of God’s revelation are ambiguous and require “explanation” (*ta’wīl*), like the dreams interpreted by Joseph (e.g., Q 12:36–37); it also makes the rather defeatist point that the explanation of ambiguous parts of God’s revelation is beyond human reach, which certainly stands out against the reassuring declaration in Q 75:18–19 that God’s revelations will receive subsequent divine clarification. The discrepancy between Q 3:7 and the Qur’an’s otherwise pronounced insistence on the immanent clarity of God’s signs is striking.

Comparison with Q 75:19 throws into relief what is perhaps the most salient feature of Q 3:7: the latter verse does not anticipate that the acknowledged need of certain revelations for “explanation” will be met by further revelations. It is relevant here to reiterate the observation made above that the Qur’anic corpus comprises a considerable number of examples for the kind of scriptural self-interpretation envisaged in Q 75:19. This makes it all the more notable that Q 3:7 does not expect cases of scriptural ambiguity to be settled by means of the Qur’an’s well-established repertoire of techniques of retrospective self-clarification. An attractive way of accounting for this fact, and also for Q 3:7’s general incongruity with the Qur’anic topos of the clarity of God’s revelations, is to contemplate that Q 3:7, or rather the verse group containing it (Q 3:7–9), postdates the end of Muhammad’s proclamatory activity and reflects a situation in which the Qur’anic corpus was by and large considered to have reached closure (Chabbi 2020, 88; *HCI* 52–54). If so, Q 3:7 would document how members of the very early post-prophetic community took stock of the scriptural canon that had emerged during Muhammad’s lifetime and grappled with the discrepancy between the Qur’an’s frequent claims to clarity, on the one hand, and the factual equivocity of some of its component passages, on the other. It bears underlining that this scenario implies that the author or authors of Q 3:7 must have assumed that large-scale expansion or revision of the Qur’anic corpus—i.e., the wholesale addition of longer passages and entire surahs, or significant rewriting of the existing scriptural stock—was not feasible anymore, for otherwise cases of scriptural ambiguity could simply have been dealt with by means of appropriate additions to or alterations of the particular passages at hand. Moreover, if Q 3:7 is indeed post-prophetic, manuscript evidence requires it to have been incorporated into the Qur’anic corpus within a few years of Muhammad’s death, at least if currently available radiocarbon datings are accepted (*HCI* 54). Thus, the overall impression that the Qur’anic corpus was closed very soon after Muhammad’s demise (Sinai 2014, 520) would continue to stand even if Q 3:7 were classed as post-prophetic.<sup>18</sup>

17 There is a well-known dispute over where to pause in reciting Q 3:7, which affects the question whether the understanding of ambiguous portions of God’s scripture is confined to God or also extends to those who are “firmly rooted in knowledge.” See the overview in Wild 2003, which references previous studies. Unlike Wild, who considers both readings of the verse to be equally viable, I continue to hold that the first interpretation is more plausible than the second one (Sinai 2006, 128–129).

18 In addition to Q 3:7’s strikingly idiosyncratic position on the clarity of divine revelation, the verse also exhibits a certain terminological discontinuity with the rest of the Qur’an, but this is probably less conclusive. For instance, as noted in *HCI* 53, Q 3:7 uses the expression *umm al-kitāb* (“the mother of the scripture”) in a different sense than its two earlier occurrences in 13:39 and 43:4: there, the “mother” or perhaps “source” of the scripture is the celestial scripture that functions both as a comprehensive record of everything that has happened and will happen and as the archetype of the Qur’anic revelations (see under → *kitāb*), while Q 3:7 applies the phrase *umm al-kitāb* to the “firmly crafted” and unequivocal core of the Qur’anic corpus. However, as Saqib Hussain plausibly objects, the fact that Q 13:39 and 43:4 are both Meccan opens up the possibility of viewing the different meaning

A further passage that is relevant in this context is Q 74:30–31,<sup>19</sup> which belongs to a surah that is mostly early Meccan. Q 74:30 caps off an enigmatic and ominous description of hell-fire by saying that there are “nineteen” unspecified beings set up over it. The following verse, Q 74:31, is clearly a later addition (Sinai 2017c, 73–75) and explains that the nineteen beings in question are angels who function as masters or guardians of hell-fire (*wa-mā ja‘alnā aṣṣāba l-nāri illā malā’ikatan . . .*). What seems to have happened is that the curiously specific piece of information that the number of the angelic guardians of hell is nineteen in Q 74:30 occasioned interpretive queries among the Qur’an’s addressees, which in turn necessitated a subsequent comment that was inserted at 74:31. As noted above, similar interpretive comments and additions are found in other Qur’anic passages, too (Sinai 2018b); yet Q 74:31 does not merely provide retrospective clarification for a certain Qur’anic statement but also intimates a general rationale why God’s revelation might give rise to interpretive queries in the first place. Similar to Q 3:7, this rationale revolves around the claim that some of God’s revelatory communications form a “trial” (*fitnah*) for those whose hearts are diseased (*alladhīna fī qulūbihim zayghun/maraḍun*), an idea that is already seen, albeit in a more succinct form, in the Meccan verse Q 37:63 (see the remarks on *fitnah* under → *balā*; see also under → *mathal*).<sup>20</sup> Moreover, both Q 74:31 and 3:7 insist that the ultimate meaning or rationale of the revelatory utterance or utterances in question is known only to God (Q 3:7: *wa-mā ya‘lamu ta’wīlahu illā llāhu*; 74:31: *wa-mā ya‘lamu junūda rabbika illā huwa*).<sup>21</sup> Against the background of such commonalities, however, Q 3:7 goes further than 74:31 by articulating a systematic subdivision of scriptural statements into clear and ambiguous, a taxonomy that is absent from 74:31.

It is difficult to decide what all of this means for the question whether Q 3:7 postdates the death of Muhammad. The preceding parallels between Q 3:7 and 74:31 certainly raise the possibility that the explicit admission of scriptural ambiguity in the former verse arose from incipient hermeneutical reflections of the sort that are also attested in Q 74:31. One might conclude, therefore, that the bipartite taxonomy of scriptural utterances found in Q 3:7 could feasibly have emerged during the lifetime of Muhammad, by way of a further development and systematisation of 74:31 (and also 37:63). Still, there remains a notable discrepancy between the emphasis that many Meccan and Medinan statements place on the clarity of God’s revelations, on the one hand, and the recognition of irresolvable scriptural ambiguity in Q 3:7, on the other. In fact, in so far as Q 74:31 clarifies the meaning of the immediately preceding verse, by explaining that the “nineteen” beings that are set up over hell-fire (as per v. 30) are angels, v. 31 is precisely an instance of the type of Qur’anic self-interpretation that is programmatically announced in Q 75:19. Q 3:7, by contrast, would seem to be bracing its readers for the recognition that the Islamic scripture contains at least some ambiguous passages for which revelatory self-interpretation of the kind exemplified by Q 74:31 is simply not available. This is a distinct perspective that could very well reflect the situation of the earliest post-prophetic community. As for the indubitable

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of the expression *umm al-kitāb* in 3:7 merely as a case of discontinuity between Meccan and Medinan language rather than as indicating a post-prophetic insertion.

19 I owe this observation to comments by Saqib Hussain on a draft version of the present entry.

20 Cf. also the use of *fitnah* in Q 22:52–53, noted under → *balā*.

21 In addition, both Q 3:7 and 74:31 conclude by stressing that the utterances in question function as revelatory reminders (*wa-mā yadh dhakkaru illā . . . / wa-mā hiya illā dhikrā li- . . .*). My awareness of all of these phraseological overlaps between Q 3:7 and 74:31 is due to Saqib Hussain.

affinity between Q 3:7 and 74:31, it seems natural to assume that in coming to terms with the facticity of scriptural ambiguity, members of the Qur'anic community who survived Muhammad would have had recourse to established Qur'anic notions, such as the idea of hermeneutical "temptation" (*fitnah*) from Q 37:63 and 74:31.<sup>22</sup>

A final remark to make regarding Q 3:7 concerns its notable similarity to a comment found towards the end of a relatively obscure New Testamental epistle, the Second Epistle of Peter.<sup>23</sup> In 2 Pet 3:15–16, the author looks back to the letters composed by "our beloved brother Paul" and remarks that "there are some things in them hard to understand (*dysnoēta tina*), which the ignorant and unstable (*hoi amatheis kai astēriktoi*) twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures (*kai tas loipas graphas*)." The allusion to "the other scriptures" would seem to entail that the Pauline letters are here envisaged as having attained something resembling scriptural status. Similarly to Q 3:7, 2 Pet 3:16 acknowledges that the scriptural corpus recognised by the author contains ambiguities that afford his opponents unwelcome exegetical ammunition; and the Qur'anic reference to those "firmly grounded in knowledge" (*al-rāsikhūna fī l-'ilmi*), who refrain from pressing the equivocal portions of scripture, looks like the positive mirror image of those "lacking in knowledge and in stability" (*hoi amatheis kai astēriktoi*), whom 2 Pet 3:16 accuses of malevolently twisting difficult passages in the letters of Paul.<sup>24</sup> At the very least, the parallel demonstrates that the manner in which Q 3:7 seeks to come to terms with the presence of irreducible ambiguity in the Qur'anic corpus is not unprecedented. In addition, however, the Second Epistle of Peter has long been suspected of pseudonymity (for an overview of the debate on the date of 2 Pet, see, e.g., Ehrmann 2012, 485–487, and Barton and Mudiman 2001, 1270–1272). The hypothesis of pseudonymity certainly explains very neatly why 2 Pet 3:15–16 can look back to the letters of Paul as a textual corpus that is sufficiently authoritative in order to be exegetically contentious. But if 2 Pet is indeed most convincingly dated some time after the Pauline corpus, this lends credence to the supposition that a similar gap obtains between Q 3:7 and the remainder of the Qur'an.

22 Another permutation would be to consider a post-prophetic dating for Q 74:31 as well.

23 See already Wild 2006a, 18 (crediting the present author).

24 There is only one other Qur'anic occurrence of "those firmly grounded in knowledge." It comes in Q 4:161–162, a passage distinguishing between two groups of Jews: those who are "repudiators" (v. 161) and "those of them who are firmly grounded in knowledge and believers" (v. 162: *al-rāsikhūna fī l-'ilmi minhum wal-mu'minūna*). The latter are said to believe not only in pre-Qur'anic revelations but also in "what was sent down to you<sup>s</sup>," i.e., to the Qur'anic Messenger.

# t

**tābūt** | ark, chest, casket

→ āyah, → sakīnah, → malak

**tabī'a** tr., **ittaba'a** tr. | to follow s.th. or s.o.

Further vocabulary discussed: *hadā* tr./intr. | to guide (s.o.) *ḍalla* intr. ('an) | to go astray (from s.th.) *ṣirāṭ* | road *sabīl* | way, path *hājara* intr. | to emigrate *hawā* | desire *ẓann* | conjecture, speculation, opinion *ab* | father, forefather *khuṭuwāt al-shayṭān* pl. | the footsteps of the devil *anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down *āyah* | sign *millah* | religion, religious teaching *awḥā* tr. *ilā* | to convey s.th. to s.o.

**Overview.** The idea of ethico-religious “following,” in the sense of an active commitment to (or against) divine guidance and those who summon to it, abounds throughout the Islamic scripture. Together with the notions of guidance (→ *hadā*), straying (→ *ḍalla*), and God’s road (→ *ṣirāṭ*) or path (→ *sabīl*), that of followership belongs to a pivotal Qur’anic family of concepts that encode right and wrong in spatial terms: God and his messengers offer guidance and orientation, but it remains up to humans to set out in the direction indicated and to resist the specious appeal of alternative sources of orientation, such as ancestral precedent or one’s desires (see below).<sup>1</sup> The Qur’anic idea of followership may have Biblical roots like the condemnation of “going after” other Gods (e.g., Deut 4:3, 6:14) and the New Testamental habit of describing discipleship of Jesus as “following” him (*akoloutheō*, which usually becomes *ezal bātreh* in the Peshitta; see, e.g., Matt 4:18–22, 8:10.18–22.23; for an overview of the Biblical data, refer to *TDNT* 1:210–215). However, the Qur’anic notion of following God’s guidance and messengers is arguably more pervasive than in the Bible. It also lacks the connotation of *instabilitas loci* that characterises discipleship of Jesus, even if being prepared to leave home and kin for the sake of God did become a prominent aspect of the Qur’anic ideal of belief in the wake of the Qur’anic believers’ hijrah or emigration to Medina (see under → *hājara*).

**Objects of *tabī'a* and *ittaba'a*.** In the Qur’an, ethico-religious “following” is expressed by the verbs *tabī'a* and, more frequently, *ittaba'a* (on both of which see the overview in *CDKA* 48). Thus, Noah complains that his people follow the wealthy rather than him (Q 71:21), and Muhammad’s contemporaries, too, refuse to follow a mere human from among their own ranks (Q 54:24). Warnings against, or condemnations of, following human “desires” (*ittaba'a* + *hawā*)—either one’s own desires or those of others—are found

<sup>1</sup> Another, and perhaps equally foundational, Qur’anic constellation of concepts encodes right and wrong in commercial terms; see under → *ajr*, → *ḥisāb*, → *sharā*, → *aqrāḍa*, and → *kasaba*.



throughout all periods of the Qur'an's emergence (e.g., Q 4:135, 5:48.49.77, 18:28, 20:16, 28:50, 30:29, 38:26, 42:15, 54:3; on *hawā*, see also under → *nafs* and → *qalb*). Other verses denounce following “conjecture” or mere “opinion” (*al-ẓann*) as opposed to real knowledge (Q 4:157, 6:116.148, 10:36.66, 53:23.28), uncritically following the customs of one's ancestors (Q 2:170, 31:21; → *ab*), and following “the footsteps of the devil” (*khuṭuwāt al-shayṭān*; see Q 2:168.208, 6:142, 24:21; see also 2:102, 4:83, 22:3 as well as 7:18, 15:42, 17:63, 34:20, 38:85; see also under → *jinn*). Instead, the Qur'an's addressees are bidden to follow God's guidance (*hudā*; see Q 2:38, 20:47.123), the revelations that God has “sent down” (→ *anzala*; see Q 2:170, 6:155, 7:3, 31:21, 39:55), God's signs (singular: → *āyah*; Q 20:134, 28:47), and God's road (→ *ṣirāṭ*, Q 6:153) or path (→ *sabīl*, Q 31:15, 40:7) rather than the path of the unbelievers and sinners (Q 4:115, 7:142, 10:89). Further recommended objects of following include the Qur'anic Messenger or Prophet and his precursors (Q 2:143, 3:53, 7:157–158, 8:64, 12:108, 14:44, 36:20; see also 26:215) and the “teaching” (→ *millah*) of Abraham (Q 3:95, 4:125, 16:123; see also 12:38 and, without the term *millah*, 3:68). The Qur'anic Messenger himself is urged to follow, or instructed to profess that he is merely following, God's revelation (Q 6:50.106, 7:203, 10:15.109, 33:2, 46:9, all of which collocate *ittaba'a* and the verb *awḥā*, referring to God's conveyance of revelations to Muhammad).

***atrāb* pl. | maidens of the same age**

→ *ḥūr*

***atrafā* tr. | to spoil s.o. by affluence**

***mutraf* | affluent, spoilt by affluence**

→ *ab*, → *khatama*, → *istaḍ'afa*

***taqwā* | fear of God**

→ *ittaqā* (under *w-q-y*)

***tilka* | that**

→ *dhālika*

***talā* tr. (*'alā*) | to recite s.th. (to s.o.), to recount s.th. (to s.o.)**

→ *āyah*, → *qara'a*

***tāba* intr. (*ilā llāh*) | to repent, to turn to God in repentance (said of humans)**

***tāba* intr. *'alā* | to turn to s.o. in forgiveness (said of God)**

***tawwāb* | ever-relenting; ever-repentant, penitent**

***tawbah* | repentance, the act of turning to God in repentance; forgiveness, the act of God's turning to humans in forgiveness**

***tawb* | repentance**

Further vocabulary discussed: *tawallā* (‘an) | to turn away (from s.o.), to turn one’s back (to s.o.) *istaghfara* tr. | to ask for s.o.’s forgiveness *anāba* intr. (*ilā llāh*) | to entrust o.s. to God, to turn or return to God *aṣlahā* intr. | to put things right, to act righteously, to do righteous deeds ‘*amila ṣālihan* | to do righteous deeds *ghafara* tr./intr. (*li-*) | to forgive (s.o.) (s.th.) *raḥima* intr./tr. | to have mercy (upon s.o.) *raḥīm* | merciful *makara* intr., *kāda* intr. | to plot or scheme, to devise or execute a plot or scheme *nasiya* tr./intr. | to forget (s.th. or s.o.) *nabiyy* | prophet *alladhīna hājarū*, *al-muhājirūn* pl. | the emigrants *al-anṣār* pl. | the helpers *zāgha* intr. | to swerve *qalb* | heart *istaghfara* intr. *li-* | to ask for forgiveness for s.o. or s.th. *fāḥishah* | abomination *ṣadaqah* | gift or act of charity

**Overview of Qur’anic usage.** The Qur’an employs the verb *tāba* in two distinct but complementary meanings, both of which revolve around the notion of God and humans re-turning to one another (Zirker 1993, 100). First, *tāba ilā llāh* is “to turn to God in repentance” (Q 2:54, 5:74, 7:143, 11:3.52.61.90, 24:31, 25:71, 46:15, 66:4.8). Sometimes *tāba* is used without a prepositional complement introduced by *ilā*, in which case it means “to repent” *simpliciter* (Q 2:160.279, 3:89, 4:16.17.18.146, 5:34.39, 6:54, 7:153, 9:3.5.11.74.126, 11:112, 16:119, 19:60, 20:82, 24:5, 25:70.71, 28:67, 40:7, 49:11, 85:10). That *tāba* has a connotation of spatial turning is confirmed not only by the preposition *ilā*, but also by several verses in which *tāba* or *tāba ilā* are opposed to *tawallā*, “to turn away” (Q 9:3.74, 11:3.52). *Tāba ilā llāh* is close in meaning to *istaghfara llāha*, “to ask for God’s forgiveness,” as shown by the pairing of *tāba* and *istaghfara* in Q 5:74 and 11:3.52.61.90 (for other verses combining *t-w-b* and *istaghfara*, see Q 4:64 and 40:7, and 110:3).<sup>1</sup> Another formulation that is at least partially synonymous is *anāba (ilā llāh)*, “to entrust o.s. to God, to turn or return to God,” which in some—but by no means all—cases (Q 38:24.34, 39:54) “follows upon the commitment of a sin; in these places an addition of ‘repentantly’ is justified” (CDKA 276).<sup>2</sup> *Tāba* in the sense of human repentance is frequently coupled with derivatives of the root *ṣ-l-h* that refer to doing righteous deeds, such as *aṣlahā* (e.g., Q 4:16.146, 5:39, 6:54, 16:119, 24:5) or ‘*amila* ± <‘*amalan*> → *ṣālihan* (e.g., Q 19:60, 20:82, 25:70.71, 28:67, many of which also include believing, on which see under → *āmana*). This indicates that repentance has not only a retrospective dimension, consisting in the acknowledgement of past failures, but also and perhaps more importantly a forwards-looking dimension, a resolve to do better in the future.

Secondly, *tāba ‘alā* is said of God as the grammatical subject and takes humans as the prepositional object. It signifies God’s compassionate and forgiving “turning towards” a human sinner (Q 2:37.54.128.160.187, 3:128, 4:17.26.27, 5:39.71, 9:15.27.102.106.117.118, 20:122, 33:24.73, 58:13, 73:20). This second use of *tāba* is semantically close to *ghafara* (+ acc.) *li-*, “to forgive s.o. (s.th.),” and *raḥima* + acc., “to have mercy upon s.o.” Thus, according to Q 7:23 Adam and Eve, after having eaten from the forbidden tree, plead with God to “forgive” them and to “have mercy” upon them, and two other passages would seem to report the fulfilment of this request by saying that God “turned towards” Adam

1 For a Palaeo-Arabic inscription containing the phrase *yastaghfiru rabbahu*, “he asks for God’s forgiveness,” see Al-Jallad and Sidky 2021, 9.

2 Note also that in Q 38:24, *anāba* is placed in a sequence of three verbs beginning with *istaghfara rabbahu*, “he asked God for his forgiveness.”

in forgiveness (Q 2:37, 20:122: *fa-tāba ‘alayhi*).<sup>3</sup> The general semantic proximity between the roots *t-w-b*, *r-h-m*, and *gh-f-r* is furthermore indicated by the frequent combination of the divine epithets *tawwāb* (“ever-relenting, ever engaged in compassionately turning to humans”)<sup>4</sup> + *raḥīm* (“merciful”; → *al-rahmān*) or *ghafūr* + *raḥīm* at the end of verses employing *tāba* or the noun *tawbah* (Q 2:37.54.128.160, 3:89, 4:16, 5:34.39.74, 6:54, 7:153, 9:5.27.102.104.118, 16:119, 24:5, 25:70, 33:24.73, 73:20; see also 4:64, combining *istaghfara*, *tawwāb*, and *raḥīm*, and 110:3: *wa-staghfirhu innahu kāna tawwābā*, “ask him for forgiveness, for he is ever-relenting”). It is in part this observable association of *t-w-b*, *r-h-m*, and *gh-f-r* that justifies the paraphrastic rendering of *tāba ‘alā* by “to turn to s.o. in forgiveness or in compassion.”

**The relationship between human repentance and divine relenting.** Both the Meccan and the Medinan corpus affirm that God “accepts repentance from his servants” (Q 9:104, 42:25: *yaqbalu l-tawbata ‘an ‘ibādihī*; see also 40:3, describing God as “the forgiver of sins and the one accepting repentance,” *ghāfirī l-dhanbi wa-qābili l-tawbi*) and in consequence “erases evil acts” (Q 42:25: *wa-ya’fū ‘ani l-sayyi’āti*). Already in Q 20:82, likely earlier than the three passages just referenced, the divine voice affirms that “I forgive those who repent and do righteous deeds and then allow themselves to be guided” (*wa-innī la-ghaffārun li-man tāba wa-āmana wa-‘amila ṣāliḥan thumma htadā*). As borne out by the double use of *tāba* or other derivatives of *t-w-b* in Q 2:54.160, 4:16.17, and 5:39, the human act of “turning towards” (*tāba ilā*) God typically precedes God’s forgiving “turning towards” (*tāba ‘alā*) humans: divine forgiveness thus responds to human repentance.<sup>5</sup> This impression is corroborated by further verses in which divine clemency follows upon human penitence (Q 3:89, 5:34.74, 6:54, 7:153, 9:102, 16:119, 24:5, 25:70, 66:8; see also 110:3). It is noteworthy that the same general pattern—a human action followed by a divine response in kind—is also exemplified by affirmations that human scheming (*k-y-d*, *m-k-r*) will be countered by divine scheming (e.g., Q 3:54 or 86:15–16; see under → *makara*) or that human forgetfulness of God will give rise to divine forgetfulness of humans (e.g., Q 9:67; → *nasiya*).<sup>6</sup>

In one Medinan passage, however, the standard sequence of human remorse and subsequent divine pardon is exceptionally inverted and it is God’s relenting that precedes human repentance rather than vice versa: according to Q 9:118 (on which see also Reynolds 2020, 105), God “turned towards” three unnamed individuals who had been “left behind” (*khullifū*) so that they would “turn to God” (*thumma tāba ‘alayhim li-yatūbū*). If this statement is picked out in isolation, it appears to depict God as the one who initiates the process of repentance and forgiveness, perhaps implying a loose Qur’anic equivalent

3 I am thus suggesting that Q 2:37 and 20:122 are best read as presupposing that God’s turning towards Adam was preceded by Adam’s repentant turning towards God. This reading is not invalidated by the fact that Q 20:122 is, in my view, chronologically earlier than Q 7:23, given that Surah 7 has a significantly higher mean verse length.

4 Exceptionally, the term *tawwāb* (in the plural) is applied to humans Q 2:222, requiring the meaning “those ever ready to repent.”

5 The Qur’an does not strictly present human penitence as forming a necessary condition for obtaining divine pardon, since Q 9:15.27 assert that God “turns in forgiveness to whomever he wills.” In a similar vein, Q 33:24 holds open the possibility that God might decide to relent towards the hypocrites. Yet those whom God does in fact will to forgive may well be those who deserve to be forgiven, on account of prior repentance (see also under → *shā’a* and → *hadā*), and this may also be tacitly envisaged as a requirement for divine forgiveness towards the hypocrites in Q 33:24. A similar reading is viable for Q 9:106 (God may either punish or turn in forgiveness).

6 See also Q 17:8 (*wa-in udtum ‘udnā*) and 47:7 (*in tanṣurū llāha yanṣurkum*). Another case where the nexus between human action and a divine response in kind takes a positive form is Q 2:152: “remember me, and I shall remember you” (*fa-dhkurūnī adhkurkum*).

of the theory of *sola gratia*. It is however pertinent to remember that the preceding verse, Q 9:117, begins by affirming that “God turns (or has turned) in forgiveness to the Prophet and the emigrants and the helpers (*la-qad tāba llāhu ‘alā l-nabiyyi wa-l-muhājirīna wa-l-anṣārī*) who followed him [the Prophet] in the hour of difficulty.” Although Q 9:117 adds that the hearts of some of them “had almost swerved” (*min ba‘di mā kāda yazīghu qulūbu farīqin minhum*), God’s “turning towards” humans in Q 9:117–118 clearly takes place vis-à-vis a group of persons who have amply demonstrated their firm commitment to God and his revelation. Divine relenting here seems to become almost a byword for God’s general fortification of those who have previously rallied to his cause, as a result of which their hearts are shielded from subsequent swerving.<sup>7</sup> In fact, going back a bit further in the text, Q 9:112 contains a list of what appear to be the various positive attributes of the believers, which is opened by “those who turn in repentance” (*al-tā‘ibūn*). God’s turning towards “the Prophet, the emigrants, and the helpers” in v. 117 and then again to some of them in v. 118 may thus be deemed to react to the believers’ penitence as specified a few verses earlier. In fact, Surah 9 as a whole, fittingly called Sūrat al-Tawbah, is marked by a very high incidence of derivatives of *t-w-b* from beginning to end (Q 9:3.5.11.15.27.74.102.104.106.112.117.118.126), interlacing multiple instances of human and divine turning. In view of this, it seems unlikely that Q 9:118 should be considered to articulate a general claim to the effect that the dynamic of human repentance and divine forgiveness might commence with the latter.

**Divinely sent messengers and the question of vicarious pleading for divine forgiveness.** Some verses suggest that the Qur’an accords divinely appointed messengers like Muhammad the ability to seek divine forgiveness on behalf of others, especially on behalf of those who follow them (*istaghfara li-*; Q 3:159, 4:64, 24:62, 47:19, 48:11, 60:12, 63:5). However, other verses make it very clear that this is not an unconditional power of vicarious intercession (see Reynolds 2020, 107–109): God will not forgive those who “find fault” with and deride believers even if Muhammad were to ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Q 9:79–80 insist (see also Q 63:6), and according to Q 9:113 both the Prophet and the believers are subject to a general interdiction on asking for divine forgiveness on behalf of unbelievers or associators even if the latter should be relatives. Human pleas for forgiveness on behalf of someone else accordingly seem to require personal involvement of the individual to be forgiven. A messenger may supplement and amplify genuine expressions of remorse by his followers: if people who have committed wrong “ask for God’s forgiveness and the Messengers asks for forgiveness on their behalf” (Q 4:64: *fa-staghfarū llāha wa-staghfara lahumu l-rasūlu*), then God will prove himself to be ever-relenting and merciful. But a messenger may not, as it were, override a sinner’s determined rejection of God.<sup>8</sup> Parenthetically, the doctrine that one must not seek divine forgiveness on behalf of repudiators, which is specifically Medinan, stands in tension with Meccan passages recounting how Abraham promised his idolatrous father to ask God to forgive him (Q 19:47; see also 14:41 and 26:86). This tension is negotiated in Medinan comments on the scene

7 A similar dynamic of initial human commitment to God and subsequent divine fortification may perhaps be perceived in the sequence of believing (*āmana*) in God and the believer’s heart then “coming to be secure” or “at peace” (*iṭma’anna*) in his belief as a result of divine fortification (Q 2:260 and 5:111–113). See in more detail under → *qalb*.

8 On verses according to which the angels are engaged in pleading for forgiveness on behalf of humans (e.g., Q 42:5), see under → *malak*.

in question (see Sinai 2018b, 264–265, and Reynolds 2020, 109): according to Q 9:114, Abraham did not hesitate to sever all links with his father when it “became clear to him that his father was an enemy of God,” and a similar attempt to neutralise Abraham’s intercession on behalf of his father is found in Q 60:4.

**Towards a casuistry of repentance.** In a limited number of places, the Qur’an seems concerned to circumscribe more precisely the conditions that govern whether human repentance is acceptable to God. Three passages, Q 4:17 (occurring in a Medinan surah) as well as Q 6:54 and 16:119 (occurring in Meccan surahs),<sup>9</sup> stipulate that it is in particular those who have committed an evil action (*al-sū’a* or *sū’an*) “in ignorance” (*bi-jahālatin*) and subsequently repent who may count on God’s pardon (on Q 6:54 see also under → *al-rahmān*). What could be the chronologically latest one of these three passages, Q 4:17, adds the further proviso that the culprits are to repent soon after their misstep (*min qarībin*).

Inversely, two further Medinan verses specify cases in which God will refuse to accept human penitence. One of them, Q 3:90, pertains to apostates and insists that those who have relapsed into repudiation after having been believers and who have subsequently “increased further in repudiation” (*thumma zdādū kufran*) will not have their repentance accepted. The other verse is Q 4:18, which follows one of the above statements about committing a sin “in ignorance” (see also Reynolds 2020, 106). Q 4:18 rules out that God’s lenient “turning towards” humans might benefit (*wa-laysati l-tawbatu li-*), first, someone who has deliberately delayed repenting until the moment of his death, evidently in the hope of tapping into God’s forgiveness without having to bear any practical consequences, and, secondly, those who die as repudiators, i.e., without any act of repentance at all.

Taken together, the Medinan couplet Q 4:17–18 thus bespeaks a concern to delineate with increasing precision the conditions of valid repentance.<sup>10</sup> It is relevant to note that what occasions this discussion of the parameters of valid and invalid repentance in its immediate literary context is the preceding pronouncement in Q 4:16 that two community members who are guilty of unspecified “abominations” (*al-fāḥishah*; see CDKA 209) are not to be punished if they “repent and act righteously” (*fa-in tābā wa-aṣlahā*). Q 4:16 thus shows that in the Medinan setting some form of public repentance could have the consequence of averting penal liabilities. The same holds for Q 5:33–34 and 5:38–39, where repentance is said to avert the harsh punishments for “waging war against God and his Messenger” and for theft.<sup>11</sup> It would seem, therefore, that the incipient casuistic approach to the problem of valid repentance that is visible in Q 4:17–18 and also in 3:90 is to be located in a social context in which Qur’anic values and notions increasingly informed the ways in which deviance from certain behavioural expectations was concretely enforced. That penitence was an act with a tangible practical dimension is, by the way, also confirmed by the provision that the Qur’anic Messenger is to exact a gift of charity

9 At least for Q 16:119, a Meccan dating cannot be treated as self-evident, seeing that the preceding verse group 16:114–118 is almost certainly a later insertion (Sinai 2019c, 130–131).

10 One might compare this with Q 9:113, also Medinan, where it is stipulated that one must not seek God’s forgiveness (verb: *istaghfara*) on behalf of associators, “even if they are kinsfolk”: here, too, the text exhibits a preoccupation with circumscribing with greater precision the conditions under which what might be deemed a personal act of prayer is legitimate and efficacious. See also Reynolds 2020, 109.

11 Note that in the former case, pardon is to be granted only if repentance takes place “before you<sup>p</sup> overpower them” (*min qabli an taqdirū ‘alayhim*).

(→ *ṣadaqah*) from those who confess their sins (Q 9:102–103) in order to “cleanse” and “purify” them thereby.

**Qur’anic *tāba* and *tawbah* in relation to Biblical diction.** *Tāba* and *tawbah* in the sense of human penitence are clearly reminiscent of the way in which the New Testament uses the verb *metanoēō* (literally, “to change one’s mind”) and the corresponding noun *metanoia* (e.g., Matt 3:2.8.11, 4:17, 11:20). *Tāba* and *tawbah* also recall the Biblical Hebrew verb *šāb*, “to turn around, to turn back, to repent,” sometimes used with the preposition *el*, “to” (namely, God; e.g., 1 Kgs 8:33.48 and Isa 44:22; see HALOT 1429–1430 and the detailed overview of relevant Biblical and extra-Biblical material in TDNT 4:975–1008 and NIDOTTE 4:55–59). *Šāb el* and its Syriac equivalent *tāb lwāt* (SL 1625–1626) are cognates of Arabic *tāba ilā*, although it should be noted that in rendering passages whose Hebrew original has *šāb*, the Peshitta often opts for *etpnī* rather than *tāb* (not so at 1 Kgs 8:33, however). The verses from Matthew just cited, in any case, do employ *tāb* and the corresponding noun *tyābūtā*, and the Jewish Aramaic Bible translations *Targum Onqelos* (on the Pentateuch) and *Targum Jonathan* (on the Prophets) are more consistent in using *tāb* for Hebrew *šāb*.<sup>12</sup> What follows is a brief concluding attempt to assess the likely pedigree of Qur’anic *tāba* and *tawbah* in light of the lexical correspondences just highlighted. A more in-depth exploration of late antique notions of repentance and penitence in comparison with the Qur’an remains a desideratum.

Perhaps the most compelling indication that the Qur’anic use of *tāba* is continuous with and rooted in Biblical diction is the observation that in the Hebrew Bible, as in the Qur’an, it is not only humans who engage in penitent turning, but also God (cf. NIDOTTE 4:57–58). For instance, Zechariah proclaims, “Thus says the Lord of hosts: turn back to me (*šûbû ēlay*; Peshitta: *etpnaw lwāt*), says the Lord of hosts, and I will turn back to you (*wə’āšûb ālêkem*; Peshitta: *w-etpnē ‘laykon*), says the Lord of hosts” (Zech 1:3), and the same slogan—“Turn back to me, and I will turn back to you”—is found in Mal 3:7. The correspondence with Qur’anic statements in which the human act of penitently “turning towards” (*tāba ilā*) God precedes God’s forgiving “turning towards” (*tāba ‘alā*) humans is unmistakable here (as concisely noted already in BEK 39).<sup>13</sup> Moreover, even though the Peshitta on Zech 1:3 and Mal 3:7 does not render *šāb* by its Syriac cognate *tāb* but uses *etpnī* instead, it arrestingly departs from the Hebrew text of the Bible by employing different prepositions for human and divine turning, namely, *lwāt* and *‘al*. This neatly maps onto Qur’anic Arabic.<sup>14</sup>

As regards the Arabic noun *tawbah*, it obviously corresponds to *tashuba* in rabbinic Hebrew (BEK 39) and Syriac *tyābūtā* (FVQ 87; see SL 1641). Yet the morphological pattern *fa’lah* on which the word *tawbah* is formed is by no means exceptional in Arabic, as shown by examples like *ḍarbah*, “an act of hitting” (see Wright 1974, 1:110.122–123). Most likely, *tawbah* is a regular Arabic derivation from the verb *tāba*, designating literally “an act of turning.” One may speculate that among pre-Qur’anic Arabophone consumers of Biblical literature and discourse (i.e., Christians and Jews), *tāba* and the noun *tawbah* had come to establish themselves as the Arabic equivalents of Hebrew *šāb*, Syriac *tāb/etpnī*,

12 I am obliged to Alison Salvesen for pointing this out to me.

13 For other passages from the Hebrew Bible in which divine turning responds to human turning, see Joel 2:13–14 and Jonah 3:9–10.

14 For another case of *etpnī ‘al*, see the Peshitta on Zech 1:16, but here the Hebrew text itself has *‘al* (according to HALOT 1430, *šāb el* and *šāb ‘al* are equivalent in Hebrew, as evidenced by 2 Chr 30:9).



and the corresponding nouns *tashuba* and *tyābūtā*. Here, it is *tāba* that is the loanword, while the verbal noun *tawbah* is fully explicable within the standard derivational mechanisms of Arabic.

## *al-tawrāh* | the Torah

Further vocabulary discussed: *al-injīl* | the Gospel or the Christian Bible *nabiyy* | prophet *ḥakama* intr. *bi-* | to judge according to s.th. *rabbāniyyūn* pl. | rabbis *aḥbār* pl. | rabbinic scholars *kitāb* | scripture *kaffārah* | expiation, atonement *kataba* tr. *‘alā* | to impose s.th. upon s.o., to prescribe s.th. to s.o. *aqāma* tr. | to perform or observe s.th. *mathal* | similitude

**The *tawrāh* as characterised in Q 5:43–45.** The word *tawrāh*, archaically spelled *تورته*,<sup>1</sup> is obviously descended from Hebrew *tôrâ*. It appears exclusively in Medinan verses (JPND 193–194; KU 70–71; FVQ 95–96), like references to the → *injīl* or “Gospel.” The most informative Qur’anic characterisation of the *tawrāh*’s function and content is found in Q 5:43–45. Verse 43 declares, inter alia, that the *tawrāh* contains “God’s judgement” (*fihā ḥukmu llāhi*). This is further elucidated in v. 44: God “sent down” the *tawrāh*, which contains “guidance and light” (cf. v. 46, where the same qualification is applied to the Gospel) and “by which” (*bihi*) the “prophets” (*al-nabiyyūn*) who had “surrendered themselves” to God “judged” (*yaḥkumu*) the Jews, as did the “rabbis” (*al-rabbāniyyūn*) and the “scholars” (*al-aḥbār*; on this term and the preceding one, see under → *al-yahūd*), “by that part of God’s scripture (→ *kitāb*) with which they had been entrusted and to which they were witnesses.”<sup>2</sup> Although the verse is grammatically complex, it presents the *tawrāh* primarily as the basis for adjudication, a function that v. 47 extends to the “Gospel,” thereby suggesting a considerable functional similarity between the *tawrāh* and the *injīl*.

This adjudicatory role of the *tawrāh* is further accentuated by the fact that Q 5:45 offers an explicit quotation from it. In the *tawrāh*, the divine voice declares, “we have imposed upon them: a life for a life (*anna l-nafsa bi-l-nafsi*), an eye for an eye, a nose for a nose, an ear for an ear, a tooth for a tooth, and wounds entail retaliation (*wa-l-jurūḥa qiṣāṣun*); but if someone foregoes it as an act of charity (*fa-man taṣaddaqa bihi*), it will be an act of atonement (→ *kaffārah*) for him.” This amounts to a reasonably accurate restatement of the Biblical principle of talion (Exod 21:24–25; Lev 24:19–20; Deut 19:21), with an added flourish recommending clemency that could either be intended to belong to the preceding quotation or, alternatively, to be a Qur’anic supplement. The quotation is followed by a concluding appeal to “judge by what God has sent down” that parallels the end of vv. 44 and 47 (*wa-man lam yaḥkum bi-mā anzala llāhu fa-ulā’ika hum . . .*). Interestingly, the same formula of citation introducing the Biblical law of talion in Q 5:45—*katabnā ‘alā*, “we have

1 On the use of the denticle as a *mater lectionis* for *ā* here, see Bothmer et al. 1999, 39–40. Déroche 2009, 60, cites an instance in the manuscript Bibliothèque nationale de France Arabe 328 a, where *ilāh* (“god”) is spelled *الله*, in line with one of the examples provided by Puin, too. I am however doubtful about Puin’s conjecture that this function of the denticle is at play in the spelling *الله*, whose original pronunciation would accordingly have been *abrāhām* or the like rather than the standard Arabic form *ibrāhīm* (see n. 2 under → *isrā’īl*).

2 Alternatively, one might understand *bi-mā stuḥfiḏū* as a *mā maṣdariyyah* and translate “because they had been entrusted with God’s scripture and were witnesses to it.”

imposed upon . . .” —also appears in an earlier verse of the same surahs, in Q 5:32 (*katabnā ‘alā banī isrā’īla annahu . . .*), where it precedes a quotation from the Mishnah (*m. Sanh.* 4:5; see *WMJA* 102–103, *KU* 71, and *BEQ* 459). Unlike v. 45, this earlier passage does not reference the source document from which the quotation in question is supposed to be taken. Given that the Qur’an does not explicitly mention any rabbinic works, such as the Mishnah or the Talmud—in contrast to Qur’anic allusions to the Torah or the “Gospel” (*injīl*)—this opens up the possibility that at least aspects of the way in which Biblical law was elaborated and interpreted in post-Biblical rabbinic tradition and literature are here retrojected onto the Torah itself (cf. *BEK* 65), the proper role of the “rabbis” and “scholars” being confined to applying the Torah.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, Q 5:43–45 presents the *tawrāh* as a revelatory corpus that is based on the celestial scripture (→ *kitāb*) and lends itself to quasi-legal application, a use that was initially overseen by the Israelite prophets and then by the scholars who succeeded them. In keeping with Biblical salvation history, the Qur’an accordingly assumes the opposite of the modern critical slogan *lex post prophetas* (approximately, “pentateuchal law is later than the Bible’s literary prophets”). This understanding of the *tawrāh*’s adjudicatory role is also reflected later on in Surah 5, when the “scripture-owners” are urged to “observe (*aqāma*) the *tawrāh* and the *injīl*” (Q 5:66.68). A final point to note about Q 5:43–45 is the connection between the Torah and the Jews (see the reference to *alladhīna hādū* in 5:41.44). This illustrates that the Qur’an seems to assume that the *tawrāh* is the scripture of the Jews in particular rather than also constituting part of the Christian canon (see under → *injīl*).

**Further references to the *tawrāh* outside Surah 5.** The explicit coupling of “the *tawrāh* and the *injīl*” seen in Q 5:66.68 is encountered in other passages as well, such as Q 3:3, declaring that God has “sent down the *tawrāh* and the *injīl*” (for further references, see under → *injīl*). Both the *tawrāh* and the *injīl*, it is claimed, foretell the appearance of Muhammad (Q 7:157) and promise eschatological reward in return for fighting on God’s path (Q 9:111), and both contain descriptions, albeit variant ones, of the mettle of Muhammad’s followers (Q 48:29; see in more detail under → *injīl*). As far as statements that are specific to the *tawrāh* are concerned, Q 3:50 may be read as implying that the *tawrāh* includes some prohibitions that were subsequently abolished by Jesus. Some Jewish dietary prohibitions, however, are apparently considered to lack any support in the Torah at all. Thus, Q 3:93 reports that “all food was permitted to the Israelites, except what Israel prohibited to himself (*illā mā ḥarrama isrā’īlu ‘alā nafsihi*), before the Torah was sent down” (see also under → *isrā’īl* and → *ḥarrama*). The verse continues by challenging the addressees—presumably the Jews or Israelites—to “bring<sup>p</sup> the *tawrāh* and recite it, if you speak the truth,” which is best understood as a gauntlet thrown down to contemporary Jews to demonstrate that certain unspecified food taboos do in fact rest on scriptural support rather than being human constructs. The following verse, Q 3:94, utters a threat against those who would “fabricate lies against God,” that is, who falsely pretend that certain non-scriptural prohibitions are based on divine revelation.

Finally, Q 62:5 develops a similitude (→ *mathal*) attacking the contemporary bearers of the Torah: “A similitude for those who have been made to carry the *tawrāh* and then

3 But note the observation in Pregill 2021, 188: “It may at first appear that there is some confusion between the canonical Bible and the Mishnah here, but in Late Antiquity, rabbinic Jews would have considered the Mishnah genuine revelation, communicated orally rather than in writing as the canonical scriptures were.”

failed to carry it (*alladhīna ḥummilū l-tawrāta thumma lam yaḥmilūhā*) is that they are like a donkey carrying tomes.” In keeping with the Qur’an’s linking of the *tawrāh* with the Jews in particular, this image precedes a direct address to the Jews, in Q 62:6, that criticises them for their alleged claim to be specially favoured by God (*in za’amtum annakum awliyā’u li-llāhi min dūni l-nāsi*). In the fashion of Christian anti-Jewish polemics, the Qur’an’s Jewish interlocutors are here charged with possessing a revealed scripture yet failing to comprehend and live up to it. The image of the burden-carrying donkey is one that is also present in rabbinic discourse, although with a positive significance (*WMJA* 90; *BEQ* 441; Mazuz 2016, 295). Thus, *b. ‘Abod. Zar.* 5b states: “One should always apply oneself to the words of the Torah like an ox to a yoke and a donkey to a burden.” The Qur’anic *mathal* pointedly subverts the original sense of this comparison, thereby turning an element of Jewish tradition against its bearers, a technique also found elsewhere in the Qur’an (see under → *sami’a*). The passage conveys a sense of the polemical energy that was necessary in order to elevate Muhammad’s prophetic status over the religious prestige accruing to the Jews by virtue of their possession of, and exegetical expertise in, the *tawrāh*.

**Is the *tawrāh* identical with the Pentateuch?** In line with an argument made in the entry on → *injil*, it would not be indefensible to contemplate rendering *al-tawrāh* simply as “Jewish scripture” and *al-injil* as “Christian scripture.” Nonetheless, the conventional translation of *tawrāh* as “Torah” is probably too entrenched and too etymologically compelling in order to brook revision. But even if one chooses to translate *tawrāh* as “Torah,” one must certainly not make the automatic inference that the *tawrāh* can without further ado be identified with the Pentateuch (Goudarzi 2018, 219–225). The Qur’an repeatedly says that God “gave Moses the scripture” (Q 2:53.87, 6:154, 11:110, 17:2, 23:49, 25:35, 28:43, 32:23, 41:45: *ātaynā mūsā l-kitāba*) and mentions “the scripture of Moses” (*kitāb mūsā*; Q 11:17, 46:12) or “the scripture brought by Moses” (Q 6:91: *al-kitāb alladhī jā’a bihi mūsā*). Yet it is never unequivocally stated that Moses received the *tawrāh* in particular. This observation leads Mohsen Goudarzi to suggest “that at least in some passages *al-tawrāh* may refer to the entirety of Israelite prophetic teachings” (Goudarzi 2018, 224), in line with Hirschfeld’s suggestion that the Qur’anic concept of the *tawrāh* includes the Mishnah and the Talmud (*BEQ* 65).

The Qur’an does, however, in two places mention the “scripture of Moses” (*kitāb mūsā*; see Q 11:17 and 46:12), and one of these goes on to refer to the Qur’an as a “confirming scripture” (Q 46:12: *wa-hādhā kitābun muṣaddiqun*), resembling the affirmation in Q 3:3 that the scripture revealed to Muhammad “confirms” the Torah and the Gospel. A third passage, Q 6:91, evokes “the scripture brought by Moses as light and guidance (*nūran wa-hudan*) for the people,” thus overlapping with Q 5:44, according to which the Torah contained “guidance and light” (see also 5:46, saying the same about the Gospel). Q 6:92 then continues, like 46:12, by insisting that “this” is a “scripture” that “confirms what precedes it” (*muṣaddiqu lladhī bayna yadayhi*). There is at least circumstantial evidence, therefore, that the “scripture of Moses” and the *tawrāh* are one and the same entity. This does not, of course, show that the understanding of the *tawrāh*’s content that can be gleaned from the Qur’an faithfully agrees with the transmitted text of the Pentateuch. Most likely, the Qur’anic understanding of what is in the Torah reflects the fact that many if not most of Muhammad’s addressees would have derived their notions about Jewish and Christian scripture from oral tradition rather than close textual study.

# th

***thabbata fu'ādahu* | to make s.o.'s heart firm**

→ *qalb*

***thaman* | price**

See under → *sharā*.

***mathānī* pl. | utterances-to-be-repeated**

Further vocabulary discussed: *qur'ān* | recitation *kitāb* | scripture *mutashābih* | resembling one another *dhikr* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation *mathnā* | in twos, in pairs *kawthar* | abundance *kitāb* | scripture *furqān* | salvific divine instruction *dhikr* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation *ḥikmah* | wisdom *ummī* | scriptureless, not hitherto endowed with a scriptural revelation *al-tawrah* | the Torah *kaffārah* | expiation, atonement *minhāj* | custom *rabbāniyyūn* pl. | rabbis *aḥbār* pl. | rabbinic scholars *qara'a* tr. | to recite s.th.

**Introduction.** The plural *mathānī* occurs twice in the Qur'an, in Q 15:87 and 39:23. In the former verse, the divine voice reminds the Messenger that “we gave you<sup>8</sup> seven *mathānī* (*sab'an mina l-mathānī*) and the mighty recitation (*wa-l-qur'āna l-'azīm*),” while Q 39:23 states that “God has sent down the best discourse, a scripture whose *mathānī* resemble one another (*kitāban mutashābihan mathāniya*), which makes the skins of those who are afraid of their Lord shiver, upon which their skins and their hearts soften to God's reminding exhortation (*dhikr*).”<sup>1</sup> It is unclear from the Qur'an itself what exactly the singular of *mathānī* might look like. Q 4:3, 34:46, and 35:1 employ the distributive adjective *mathnā*, “in twos” or “in pairs” (Wright 1974, 1:262–263; Burge 2008, 58), though, and going by the usual morphology of Arabic one might expect the singular of a broken plural of the pattern *mafā'il* to conform to the noun pattern *maf'al* (i.e., *mathnā*).

The importance of excavating the putative meaning of the term *mathānī* stems largely from the fact that parts of the Islamic exegetical tradition understand Q 15:87 to refer to the Qur'an's opening surah, the brief communal prayer known as the Fātiḥah (e.g., Ṭab.

<sup>1</sup> There are several possibilities of analysing the grammar of the Arabic phrase *allāhu nazzala aḥsana l-ḥadīthi kitāban mutashābihan mathāniya*, on which see Zam. 5:300. My translation takes *mathāniya* to be an accusative of specification (*tamyīz*) linked to *mutashābihan*: “a scripture that is self-similar in terms of *mathānī*.” Other construals are possible; for instance, one might consider the accusative object *aḥsana l-ḥadīthi* to be followed by two consecutive appositions (*kitāban mutashābihan* and *mathāniya*), yielding “God has sent down the best discourse, [namely,] a self-similar scripture, [namely,] *mathānī*.”

1:105, 107; al-Tha'labī 2015, 2:262–263; Ibn Kathīr 1999, 1:101–103): the “seven *mathānī*,” it is claimed, are the seven verses making up the Fātiḥah, even if the commentators entertain different ways of subdividing Surah 1 into precisely seven verses (Ṭab. 1:106–107; Zam. 1:99; Ibn Kathīr 1999, 1:101). By way of rationalising this reading of the expression “seven *mathānī*,” it is observed that the verses of the Fātiḥah are “repeated” (*tuthannā*) in the canonical prayer ritual (e.g., Ṭab. 1:107; Zam. 1:99; Ibn Kathīr 1999, 1:102), such that they are appropriately described as *mathānī*, meaning something like “verses to be frequently repeated.”<sup>2</sup> If this understanding of Q 15:87 is correct, it entails that the Fātiḥah—which is not safely datable by the stylistic parameter of mean verse length (*HCI* 131)—has a *terminus ante quem* at a fairly early point in the Meccan period. In addition, interpreting Q 15:87 to allude to Surah 1 has the important consequence of making the Fātiḥah the only Qur’anic surah that is explicitly referenced as a whole—as it were, by name—within the Qur’an itself.<sup>3</sup> Q 15:87’s distinction between the seven *mathānī* and “the mighty *qur’ān*” would, moreover, manifest a captivating awareness that the Fātiḥah stands apart from the revelatory addresses that make up the bulk of the Qur’anic corpus, perhaps by virtue of being a collective prayer formulated in the voice of the Qur’anic community. Against the background of these larger stakes, the following will, with some caveats, argue that the “seven *mathānī*” are best interpreted as “a handful of utterances-to-be-repeated,” and advocate Theodor Nöldeke and Angelika Neuwirth’s view that Q 15:87 does indeed form an inner-Qur’anic reference to the Fātiḥah. I begin with a detailed survey of earlier views.

**The meaning of *mathānī* in previous scholarship.** The Fātiḥah is not the only candidate proposed as the referent of the seven *mathānī* (see, e.g., Ṭab. 14:107–126; for a comprehensive overview, refer to Rubin 1993). One alternative suggestion is that the seven *mathānī* are the Qur’an’s seven longest surahs (*al-sab’ al-tuwal/al-tiwāl*). Yet given that Surah 15 must be chronologically earlier than any of the long surahs, most of which are Medinan, this alternative view is dismissed as anachronistic already by a voice in the medieval commentary tradition.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, equating the seven *mathānī* with the Fātiḥah does not give rise to similar anachronism. The question of the precise purport of the enigmatic term *mathānī* is, however, further complicated by the second occurrence of the *mathānī* in Q 39:23. Here, many premodern Muslim exegetes are inclined to construe the word as a descriptor or appellation pertaining to the Qur’an as a whole. According to al-Zamaksharī’s commentary on Q 39:23, *mathānī* is the plural of a singular *mathnā* that refers to something “reiterated” or “repeated” (*muraddad, mukarrar*; Zam. 5:300).<sup>5</sup> Al-Zamaksharī goes on to explain that the term may either connote the Qur’an’s thematic and phraseological repetitiveness or the frequent reiteration of Qur’anic verses in recitation.<sup>6</sup>

2 This is not the only etymologisation of the word *mathānī* found in Islamic commentaries; for alternatives, see Rubin 1993.

3 However, inner-Qur’anic allusions and back-references are found in many other instances as well (Sinai 2018b, 265–288; *HCI* 150–153).

4 See the objection ascribed to one Abū l-‘Āliyah in Ṭab. 14:116 (and mentioned in Rubin 1993, 144): “This [verse, namely, Q 15:87] was sent down when nothing of the seven long surahs had yet come down” (*la-qad unzilat hādhihi wa-mā nazala mina l-tuwali shay*’).

5 The word’s singular is also conjectured to be *mathnāh* (al-Azharī [1964–1976], 15:138).

6 To quote, he proposes that the use of the term *mathānī* is “due to what is repeated of its [= the Qur’an’s] narratives and tidings and judgements and commandments and prohibitions and [eschatological] promises and threats and admonishments” (*li-mā thuniyyā min qīṣāṣihi wa-anbā’ihi wa-aḥkāmihī wa-awāmīrihi wa-nawāhihi wa-wa’dīhi wa-wa’īdihī wa-mawā’izihī*). This is followed by the alternative view that the word *mathānī* indicates the Qur’an’s constant repetition in recitation.

European scholars (whose views are helpfully surveyed by Tommaso Tesei in Amir-Moezzi and Dye 2019, 2:602–605) have tended to be sceptical of the widespread Islamic view that the “seven *mathānī*” in Q 15:87 are to be equated with the Fātiḥah. The main difficulty adduced against the traditional position is that it is by no means evident that the text of the Fātiḥah comprises exactly seven verses: if the *basmalah*, the introductory invocation “In the name of God, the truly Merciful” (→ *bi-smi llāhi l-rahmāni l-rahīm*), is not considered to be part of the surah, the text is more convincingly seen to encompass six rather than seven verses (GQ 1:115–116; see also Spitaler 1935, 31). Many Western students of the Qur’an have therefore preferred to consider the “seven *mathānī*” to denote the narratives about previous messengers and the punishments inflicted on their unbelieving opponents that are a standard component of a considerable number of Meccan surahs (Sprenger 1869, 1:462–464; Müller 1896, 46–47, n. 2; Grimme 1895, 77; KU 26–27; Watt 1970, 134–135; KK 279–280). This proposal is bolstered by the observation that there is a core of approximately seven main punishment narratives, figuring, for instance, in the narrative cycles at the centre of Surahs 7, 11, and 26 (JPND 194).<sup>7</sup> Since these narratives recur in more than one surah, they could reasonably be designated as *mathānī*, in the sense of narratives that are reprised and repeated, in both Q 15:87 and 39:23. The traditional assumption that the Qur’anic term *mathānī* carries a connotation of repetition or reiteration is thus retained, even if Western scholars since Abraham Geiger have also proposed that the word’s ultimate etymological origin goes back to Hebrew *mishnah* or its Aramaic equivalent *matnita* (WMJA 57–58; Nöldeke 1910, 26; FVQ 257–258).<sup>8</sup>

Yet there are problems with this view, too. Construing the seven *mathānī* as the Qur’anic punishment narratives invites the objection that the sum total of such narratives that are related in various surahs is higher than seven. A champion of the punishment-narrative position will accordingly find it necessary to limit the expression’s reference in Q 15:87 to a group of principal Qur’anic punishment narratives, as opposed to more peripheral ones. This is not impossible, of course, but the defence does seem somewhat *ad hoc*. A further difficulty arises from the fact that to many readers Q 15:87 would appear to conceive of the seven *mathānī* and “the mighty *qur’ān*” as two separate entities, in so far as the two phrases are joined by the conjunction “and” (*wa-*) rather than standing in apposition. Such a two-entity construal of Q 15:87 is not easily squared with the proposal that the seven *mathānī* refer to something that forms part and parcel of many Qur’anic recitations, namely, narratives about past messengers and their audience. Bell and Watt attempt to counter this objection by conjecturing that the punishment narratives might originally have had a “separate existence” (Watt 1970, 135), but this presupposes Bell’s highly speculative views about the redactional pre-history of Qur’anic surahs.

One might, of course, opt to grasp the nettle and contend that “seven *mathānī* and the mighty *qur’ān*” simply designate one and the same thing. Such a one-entity approach to

<sup>7</sup> As Horovitz notes, in all three surahs these seven narratives centre on the figures of Moses, Abraham, Noah, Hūd, Šāliḥ, Lot, and Shu’ayb (although the order differs).

<sup>8</sup> Quite obviously, the word *mathānī* in Q 15:87 and 39:23, whatever its purport, does not refer to the Jewish Mishnah. Yet a semantic realignment of a word whose ultimate origin is non-Arabic in keeping with its assumed Arabic consonantal root can be witnessed elsewhere in the Qur’an, too; see, for instance, under → *al-tāghūt*. Thus, the claim that the word *mathānī* is ultimately derived from *mishnah/matnita* is perfectly compatible with the idea that already the Qur’an’s initial audience, rather than just its later exegetes, could have understood the word in light of the Arabic root *th-n-y*.



Q 15:87 is already found in the premodern exegetical literature (Rubin 1993, 146–149) and is endorsed by Uri Rubin: “the *Mathānī* and the ‘Qur’ān’ are the two names used here for the repetitive prophetic revelations with which Muḥammad must be content” (Rubin 1993, 150). The main question then becomes what Q 15:87 might mean by calling the Qur’an not just “the *mathānī*” but rather, to translate very literally, “seven of the *mathānī*” (*sab’an mina l-mathānī*). Rubin denies that this should be taken to imply that there are other *mathānī* besides the seven here named, taking the *min* to be a clarifying *min* (*li-l-bayān*) rather than a partitive one (*li-l-tab’īḍ*); and he understands the number seven to be a “symbol of multitude and abundance,” such that the purport of the phrase “seven *mathānī*” is merely “plenty” of *mathānī* (Rubin 1993, 150). While Rubin does not make it clear what kind of entity the (non-attested) singular of the term *mathānī* might signify, he does maintain that the word connotes the phraseologically and thematically “repetitive” nature of Muhammad’s proclamations. One may accordingly paraphrase his understanding of the phrase “seven *mathānī*” as equating to “plenty of repetitive revelations” or the like.

**Nöldeke and Neuwirth on the seven *mathānī*.** Two dissenting voices rejecting the predominant Western view that the *mathānī* are the Qur’anic punishment narratives are Nöldeke and Neuwirth, both of whom champion the traditional identification of the seven *mathānī* from Q 15:87 with the Fātiḥah (Nöldeke 1860, 87–88; *NB* 26; *SPMC* 173–175). A strong argument in favour of this position is that it is easy to see how the Fātiḥah, forming as it does a communal prayer to be uttered *by* the Qur’anic community rather than a revelatory divine address directed *at* the Qur’anic community, might be juxtaposed with “the mighty *qur’ān*,” meaning those revelatory addresses that Muhammad had proclaimed prior to Surah 15. To the objection that the Fātiḥah very likely contains not seven but only six verses, Neuwirth replies that Q 15:87 does not necessarily deploy the number seven with a precise numerical valence, just as one might loosely refer to a set of eleven or thirteen items as a dozen. The general symbolic significance of the number seven both in the Qur’an and in its wider Near Eastern cultural context (Conrad 1988; see also Rubin 1993, 150–151) makes this rejoinder quite compelling. Accordingly, the semantic force of the phrase “seven *mathānī*” may simply be “a handful of *mathānī*.” This makes it immaterial whether the Fātiḥah can be analysed to yield exactly seven verses.

Arguably somewhat less felicitously, Neuwirth combines Nöldeke’s traditional understanding of Q 15:87 with the view that the second Qur’anic occurrence of the term *mathānī* in Q 39:23 does nonetheless refer to the punishment narratives, which she maintains coheres best with the emotional impact with which this latter verse credits the *mathānī* (*SPMC* 174).<sup>9</sup> The upshot of this hybrid position is that she ends up ascribing two rather different meanings to one and the same term, namely, “verses to be liturgically repeated in prayer” in Q 15:87 and “narratives repeated in different Qur’anic surahs” in Q 39:23. It is true that Q 15:87 is likely to be significantly earlier than Q 39:23, which would allow for some semantic development between the two occurrences.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, one may feel that at least in the absence of incontrovertible evidence to the contrary a unitary account of the meaning of the word *mathānī* is preferable. Neuwirth’s position also engenders the

9 Neuwirth here echoes Watt 1970, 135: “the punishments cause fear, while the deliverance of the messengers and their followers may be said to soften the hearts.”

10 See *HCI* 114–115, showing that the mean verse length of Surah 39 is more than twice that of Surah 15 (98.4 transliteration letters as opposed to 43.12).

slight oddity that the equation of the *mathānī* with the punishment legends was originally proposed by way of making sense of the number seven in Q 15:87, whereas she does not consider this verse to reference the punishment narratives at all.

***Mathānī* as “utterances-to-be-repeated.”** Following this doxographic overview of previous interventions, the remainder of the present entry will attempt to chart a course through the wide-ranging debate on the meaning of the word *mathānī* and arrive at some tentative conclusions. It is appropriate to commence by asking whether the two entities that God, according to Q 15:87, has given the Qur’anic Messenger—namely, “seven *mathānī*” and “the mighty *qur’ān*”—must necessarily be interpreted as both being of a textual nature. After all, it would be conceivable that the first of the two gifts mentioned in Q 15:87 is to be understood along the lines of the statement in Q 108:1 that the Qur’an’s divine speaker has given the Messenger an “abundance” of unspecified benefactions (*innā a’ṭaynāka l-kawthar*).<sup>11</sup> Perhaps following a similar line of reasoning, Paul Casanova understands Q 15:87 to mean that God has given the Qur’anic Messenger “seven benefactions and the glorious Qur’an” (Casanova 1911–1924, 1:37), a translation that he justifies by alluding to the fourth-form verb *athnā ‘alā*, “to praise s.o.” Casanova’s proposal, to be sure, respects what to many would seem the most straightforward understanding of Q 15:87, namely, that the verse names two separate entities. But it does require the word *mathānī* to have undergone a major semantic leap between Q 15:87 and 39:23, since the latter passage uses it as a descriptor for the scripture communicated to Muhammad and accordingly associates it with a textual phenomenon rather than employing it with the non-textual meaning of benefactions. Nor does the link with the fourth-form verb *athnā ‘alā* seem very convincing. Against Casanova, there is good reason for retaining the assumption that the *mathānī* are indeed something textual. Of course, this still leaves open whether the *mathānī* constitute units of texts or rather something contained in texts, such as recurrent narratives.

Is there any way of further narrowing down the range of viable interpretations of the seven *mathānī*? It is tempting to try to do so by relying on one’s instincts about whether Q 15:87 enumerates two separate entities, which Nöldeke considers to be axiomatic (NB 26), or whether the verse may conceivably be making use of two alternative designations for one and the same thing: if it were the case that the most natural interpretation of Q 15:87 is indeed a two-entity reading, then it would be relatively easy to eliminate the hypothesis that the *mathānī* are narratives reprised in more than one surah and also Rubin’s proposal that the expression “seven of the *mathānī*” is equivalent with “plenty of repetitive revelations” (in the sense of an alternative appellation for the Qur’anic revelations in their

<sup>11</sup> For extra-Qur’anic evidence of the use of *kawthar* in early Arabic, see GQ 1:92 and Ullmann 1970, 66. In my view, this material demonstrates that there is nothing especially problematic about the word *kawthar* other than its relative rarity, and thereby obviates any need to speculate, with Luxenberg, that *kawthar* derives from a Syriac word (*kūttārā*) said to mean “persistence, steadfastness” (Luxenberg 2007, 292–297), even if the dictionaries suggest that the Syriac term means only the act of “remaining, staying” or a “duration” of time (TS 1860; SL 617) rather than designating the virtuous character trait of patience or steadfastness (which in Syriac might be expressed by words like *sūybārā*, *msaybrānūtā*, *msharrārūtā*, or *naggīrūt rūḥā*). There is in fact nothing mysterious about the meaning of Q 108:1–2 in its conventional reading: the Qur’an’s singular addressee has been accorded divine benefits (v. 1) and in response is bidden to show his gratitude to God, by prayer and sacrifice (v. 2). The same train of thought, expressed in different terminology, also underlies Surahs 93 and 94 (early Meccan like Surah 108) and recurs in later expressions of the view that humans owe God gratitude (*sh-k-r*) in return for the favour (*faḍl*) or grace (*ni’mah*) that he has bestowed upon them (e.g., Q 45:12, 46:15; see also under → *an’ama*). For a more positive assessment of Luxenberg’s interpretation and a general overview of Western scholarship on *kawthar*, see Neuenkirchen in Amir-Moezzi and Dye 2019, 2:2259–2261.

entirety). However, despite the considerable intuitive appeal of a two-object reading of Q 15:87, several Qur’anic parallels demonstrate that it cannot in fact be regarded as self-evident. Thus, at Q 2:53 the divine voice asserts that “we gave Moses the scripture (→ *al-kitāb*) and salvific divine instruction (→ *al-furqān*),” and 21:48 similarly states that “we gave Moses and Aaron salvific divine instruction (*al-furqān*), illumination, and reminding exhortation (*dhikr*; see under → *dhakkara*) for the God-fearing.” It is by no means obvious that the expressions conjoined in the two verses just cited need refer to different entities: for example, Moses’s reception of “the scripture” in Q 2:53 is very likely the very same process as his reception of “salvific instruction.” An equivalent consideration applies when Q 38:20 reports that God granted David “wisdom and decisive speech” (*wa-ātaynāhu l-ḥikmata wa-faṣla l-khiṭāb*; see under → *ḥikmah*). In general, what is technically called an “exegetic” or “clarifying” use of the conjunction *wa-* (*al-ʿatf al-tafsīrī*) is well attested in the Qur’anic corpus (Hussain 2022b, 129; see also Reckendorf 1921, 324, with some non-Qur’anic examples). Consequently, one cannot hope to narrow down the available options for the meaning of the word *mathānī* by appealing to intuitions about whether Q 15:87 is to be given a one-entity construal or a two-entity one.

What next, then? As Anne-Sylvie Boisliveau has perspicaciously noted (Boisliveau 2014, 87), the interpretive problem raised by the word *mathānī* derives from the fact that most other Qur’anic occurrences of the root *th-n-y* (on which see CDKA 54) are not immediately helpful in elucidating the meaning of the term under consideration. Specifically, many occurrences of the root *th-n-y* refer to the number two (cf. *mathnā* at Q 4:3 etc., noted above), although one verse, Q 11:5, more interestingly employs the imperfect of the first-form verb *thanā* in the sense of folding something up (namely, one’s chest, in order to hide from God). But overall, the amount of semantic information on the root *th-n-y* and its derivatives that can be extracted from the Qur’an is, like the question of the precise meaning of the conjunction in Q 15:87, insufficient to answer our question. This makes it virtually inevitable for interpreters who are not prepared to resign themselves to agnosticism to take their bearings from extra-Qur’anic data, whether that be the Arabic second-form verb *thannā*, “to repeat,” or a conjectured etymology going back to Hebrew *mishnah*. In short, if we want to arrive at any sort of English translation for the Qur’anic word *mathānī*, we have no choice but to mount the delicate balance beam of speculation.

It is encouraging, at least, that there is no need to view the two pieces of extra-Qur’anic information just noted—the potential link with the verb *thannā* and the conjectural Hebrew or Aramaic etymology of *mathānī* first tabled by Geiger—as pointing in different directions. Angelika and Karl Neuwirth, in the course of their argument that the seven *mathānī* are identical with the Fāṭiḥah, compellingly render the Arabic word as *Wiederholverse* or “verses-to-be-repeated” (Neuwirth and Neuwirth 1991, 341). Bearing in mind that the scope of the textual units concerned is not obvious, this is preferably modified to something less specific like “utterances-to-be-repeated” or “dicta-to-be-repeated,” which incidentally converges with Nöldeke’s observation that the Qur’anic *mathānī* are “something like ‘dicta’ or even short portions (verses) of revelation” (NB 26). The provisional translation “utterances-to-be-repeated,” though stylistically awkward, has the advantage of matching both the link with Arabic *thannā* that is posited by Muslim exegetes while also being reconcilable with Geiger’s idea that the plural noun *mathānī* ultimately derives from Hebrew *mishnah* / Aramaic *matnita*.

In order to appreciate this latter point, it is helpful to try to restate Geiger's etymological hypothesis in such a way as to trace a plausible semantic evolution over time, rather than implying that Muhammad arbitrarily dragged a Hebrew word into Arabic while missing or wilfully distorting part of its established meaning. Specifically, one may posit, first, that Arabophone Jews in the Qur'anic environment used a hypothetical singular *mathnāh* in order to render Hebrew *mishnah*. This sense of the word *mathnāh* is attested in the *ḥadīth*, where the *mathnāh* is associated with the "scripture-owners" and cited as a warning example for committing to writing anything other than the Qur'an (Goldziher 1907, 865–869; Cook 1997, 502–504; see also al-Azharī [1964–1976], 15:139). Of course, the reports in question only give us an early post-Qur'anic *terminus ante quem* for the arrival of the word in Arabic; Cook, for one, is inclined to place material opposing the writing down of prophetic tradition in the early second century of Islam. But the supposition that *al-mathnāh* = "the Mishnah" was already coined by pre-Islamic Arabophone Jews fits the fact that Jews in the Qur'anic milieu clearly employed what Torrey calls "mongrel words, partly Aramaic (or Hebrew) and partly Arabic" (Torrey 1933, 51). Though Torrey's formulation is unfashionable, the Arabisation of religious terminology originating from Hebrew or Jewish Aramaic is well supported by Qur'anic terms like → *ummī* ("scriptureless"), → *al-tawrah* ("the Torah"), *kaffārah* ("expiation"; → *kaffara*), *minhāj* ("custom"; see under → *al-yahūd*), and the designation of Jewish dignitaries as *rabbāniyyūn* and *aḥbār* (see again under → *al-yahūd*).<sup>12</sup> As shown elsewhere, the Jews in the Qur'anic milieu were familiar with at least some rabbinic traditions, and in one place (Q 5:32) are quoted as paraphrasing a specific passage from the Mishnah (see under → *al-yahūd*); it is reasonable to assume, therefore, that they would have had an Arabic name for the Mishnah, as they did for the Torah. In a second step, it may be surmised that the conjectured Jewish usage of Arabic *mathnāh* to render *mishnah* is what underlies the Qur'anic plural *mathānī*. This second claim coheres with the fact that Arabic lexicography floats the same word *mathnāh* as the underlying singular of the Qur'anic *mathānī* (al-Azharī [1964–1976], 15:138).

Now, the rabbinic term *mishnah/matnita* does not just designate the Mishnah as a literary document but also its constituent traditions, i.e., individual tannaitic or "Mishnaic" statements (*DJBA* 722–723), in so far as these are repeated, learnt, and recited or reported. The latter are all possible meanings of the *pe'al* verb of the root *t-n-y* in rabbinic Aramaic (*DJBA* 1218–1221) that could easily have mapped on to the Arabic verb *thannā*. Taking another step on the balance beam of speculation, we may choose to posit that the word *mathnāh*, as hypothetically used by Arabic-speaking Jews prior to the Qur'an, would have designated not only the Mishnah as a whole but also individual Mishnaic traditions that are repeated and recited (cf. Torrey 1933, 51, who based on similar considerations translates *mathānī* as "teachings"). By extension, the word *mathnāh* could therefore have become available to mean any brief unit of text, or of textual content, that is credited with religious authority and is taught, learnt, and repeated by a community—an activity conceivably designated by the Arabic verb *thannā*, cognate with Aramaic *tnā*.<sup>13</sup> The Qur'anic use of the root *th-n-y* in connection with duality and doubling up would be at least compatible

<sup>12</sup> Despite my general agreement with the phrase cited from Torrey, I am not tempted to follow his suggestion that the word *sab'* in Q 15:87 is not an Arabic numeral but rather derives from Aramaic *sib'a* or *šab'a/šub'a*, "plenty" (on which see *DTTM* 951 and *DJBA* 1188).

<sup>13</sup> One may add that Syriac *tnā*, "to repeat," can also mean "to recite" (*TS* 4464–4465; *SL* 1654–1655).

with this supposition. Moreover, it is really only the application of *mishnah/matnita* to the Mishnah's constituent traditions that explains the Qur'anic plural *mathānī*, if indeed the latter is to be etymologically derived from *mishnah*: "the Mishnah" as a literary work does not have a plural.

Based on these etymological conjectures, our best guess at the meaning of the plural *mathānī*, then, is that it signifies textual units, or perhaps traditions or narratives, that are repeatedly recited. Factoring in the likely symbolic meaning of the number seven, the seven *mathānī* are therefore "a handful of utterances-to-be-repeated," "a handful of dicta-to-be-repeated," or "a handful of traditions-to-be-repeated." To be sure, the interpretive space left by these tentative attempts at translation still encompasses a range of possibilities, including perhaps the view that the seven *mathānī* are narrative accounts of the ministry of earlier messengers and the destruction of their peoples. But one wonders why Muhammad's being granted cautionary accounts of God's obliteration of past communities should warrant the sort of triumphal and gratitude-inspiring announcement that Q 15:87 is clearly meant to make. Qur'anic narratives about previous messengers can of course have a consolatory upshot: the wicked are punished, but the righteous are delivered. Yet if the plural *mathānī* is indeed an Arabisation of *mishnah/matnita*, in the sense of a tannaitic tradition or dictum, one would expect the *mathānī* to refer to fairly brief units of text rather than potentially extended narrative accounts like those found in, say, Surah 26 (which could well be earlier than Surah 15). With regard to Rubin's opinion that the seven *mathānī* are an alternative designation of the Qur'anic corpus as a whole, it must be pointed out that the number seven, even if understood as a symbolic number, is nonetheless a relatively low number in this context. Given its mean verse length, Surah 15 must be one of the latest early Meccan surahs (see *HCI* 161), which means that it may be estimated to have been preceded by at least thirty or forty other Qur'anic compositions. Hence, the number seven would not be an appropriate symbol of "multitude and abundance" (Rubin 1993, 150) even if the *mathānī* are understood to be entire surahs. The objection gains in force if, in line with the etymological considerations above, the plural *mathānī* is taken to refer to shorter units of texts, such as individual verses or verse groups.

By contrast with such latent doubts, Nöldeke and Neuwirth's neo-traditional identification of the "handful of utterances-to-be-repeated" from Q 15:87 with the Fātiḥah yields a very plausible contextual fit. For one, the Fātiḥah is in important respects a text that stands formally apart from most other Qur'anic surahs: although quite a few of them contain human prayers that are embedded in various polemical, narrative, hymnic, or other contexts,<sup>14</sup> there are only four surahs that are explicitly and entirely formulated in a first-person human voice (Q 1, 109, 113–114); and within this small group the Fātiḥah stands out by its employment of the first person plural rather than singular.<sup>15</sup> As duly stressed by Neuwirth, the Fātiḥah is the Qur'an's communal prayer *par excellence*. Meanwhile, the supposed difficulty that the Fātiḥah does not consist of exactly seven verses is convincingly addressed by Neuwirth's rejoinder that the number seven in Q 15:87 is not to be understood

14 One example for such attributed communal prayer is the request for divine forgiveness and mercy with which the believers are charged at the end of Sūrat al-Baqarah (Q 2:285–286). For other instances of attributed communal prayers employing the address "Our Lord (*rabbānā*)," see Q 2:127–129, 200–201, 250, 3:7–9, 16, 53, 191–194 etc.

15 There are, however, two brief communal prayers that Islamic sources report to have been included in the Qur'anic recension of Ubayy ibn Ka'b, Sūrat al-Khal' and Sūrat al-Ḥafd; see Anthony 2019.



in a numerically precise sense.<sup>16</sup> Finally, the hypothesis that Q 15:87, a Meccan verse, does indeed refer to the Fātiḥah is eminently congruent with the fact that the Fātiḥah itself lacks any traces of distinctly Medinan diction or doctrine, while many of its key phrases have ample parallels in Meccan surahs.<sup>17</sup> All of this yields the fascinating corollary that at the time of Surah 15 the Fātiḥah was not considered to belong to the corpus of the Qur’anic recitations properly speaking (even though Q 15:87 does attribute a divine origin to both). Quite likely, it was only when Muhammad’s revelatory legacy was transmitted as a closed corpus after his death that this initial distinction between the Fātiḥah (and presumably other prayers of the Qur’anic community as well), on the one hand, and the main body of the Qur’anic revelations, on the other, was obliterated.

Finally, there is no reason to resist extending the above understanding of the word *mathānī* as meaning “utterances-to-be-repeated” to Q 39:23. It is certainly possible, even likely, that the emotional impact of the Qur’anic proclamations described in Q 39:23 is ascribed to Qur’anic discourse in general, i.e., to all Qur’anic *mathānī*, rather than just to the Qur’anic punishment narratives.<sup>18</sup> The fact that Q 39:23 envisages the entire Qur’anic corpus and not merely the Fātiḥah to consist of *mathānī*, or utterances-to-be-repeated, is also easily accounted for: even while Muhammad was still active, Qur’anic surahs must already have continued to circulate beyond the time of their first delivery (*HCI* 150–151; Sinai 2018b, 264), and communal recitation would have been one, and perhaps the most important, vehicle for ensuring their continued presence within the Qur’anic community. One may add that the fact that Qur’anic material was recited *by* the Qur’anic community rather than just *to* it is clearly presupposed by the Medinan verse Q 73:20, commanding the audience to “recite<sup>p</sup> of the Qur’anic recitations what is easy [for you]” (*fa-gra’ū mā tayassara mina l-qur’āni*).<sup>19</sup> I finish by conceding, however, that the entire argument just made would be even more compelling if the Qur’anic terminology for communal recitation included, in addition to → *qara’a*, a verb derived from the root *th-n-y*.

## ***thawāb* | reward**

→ *ajr*

<sup>16</sup> Rubin 1993, 149, partly dismisses the Fātiḥah interpretation of Q 15:87 because “the fixed numbering of the quranic verses in general is secondary to the quranic text.” However, the subdivision of Qur’anic discourses into verses, demarcated by recurrent verse-final assonances, is an integral part of the Qur’an’s literary fabric rather than an artificial later imposition on it (*HCI* 16–20). This makes it entirely conceivable that an explicit awareness of this fact might already be reflected by the Qur’an itself.

<sup>17</sup> Phraseology in Surah 1 that is attested in Meccan surahs (without therefore being necessarily absent from Medinan ones) includes the reference to “praise” (→ *ḥamd*) of God and the epithet “Lord of the world-dwellers” (*rabb al-‘ālamīn*; see under → *rabb* and → *al-‘ālamūn*) in v. 2, the portrayal of God as the “king” (see under → *malik*) of “judgement day” (*yawm al-dīn*; → *dīn*<sup>1</sup>) in v. 4, the verb *ista’āna*, “to turn for help to s.o.” (namely, God) in v. 5 (see Q 7:128, 12:18, 21:112), and the reference to divine wrath in v. 7 (→ *ghaḍība*).

<sup>18</sup> It should also be noted that the masculine pronoun that connects the description of how “those who are afraid of their Lord” respond to the Qur’anic proclamations with the beginning of the verse (*taqsha’irru minhu . . .*) does not directly link back to the word *mathānī*, which would require a female pronoun, but rather to either *aḥsana l-ḥadīthi* (“the best discourse”) or to *kitāban mutashābihan* (“a self-similar scripture”). This in itself indicates that the rhetorical impact detailed thereafter is considered to inhere in the Qur’anic recitations as a whole rather than just their narrative sections.

<sup>19</sup> For evidence of Qur’anic recitation by the Messenger to the community, see Q 17:106 and 84:21 (although the latter verse has a third-person passive rather than a second-person singular active verb).



# j

## ***jālūt* | Goliath**

See briefly under → *isrāʿīl*.

## ***jabbār* | powerful**

Further vocabulary discussed: **ʿazīz | mighty**

Q 59:23 calls God, among a string of other epithets (see under → *ism*), *al-ʿazīz al-jabbār al-mutakabbir*, “the mighty, the powerful, the exalted.” The word *jabbār* is otherwise applied to humans, as a term of opprobrium (e.g., Q 5:22, 11:59, 14:15, 19:14). Q 40:35 combines it with *mutakabbir*, like 59:23, but again does so in reference to sinful humans rather than to God. The use of *jabbār* as a divine attribute in Q 59:23 does, however, have precedent in passages in which Jacob of Sarug predicates the cognate word *gabbār/gabbārā* of the divine creator. Thus Jacob says that creation “bears witness to how mighty (*gabbār*) the Creator is, and from what He fashioned one learns how wise (*ḥakkīm*) He is” (Mathews 2020, 16–17, l. 1923), and maintains that the “mighty one (*gabbārā*) made Orion and the Pleiades” (Mathews 2018, 32–33, l. 1395). Jacob also frequently refers to Christ as “the mighty one” (*gabbārā*; e.g., Kollampampil 2008, 6–7, l. 5; see also, among other places, *ibid.*, 10–11, l. 46, 22–23, l. 146, 24–25, l. 171, and 26–27, l. 195).<sup>1</sup>

## ***jaḥada* intr. *bi-* | to deny s.th.**

→ *āyah*, → *ankara*

## ***jaḥīm* | blaze**

→ *jahannam*

## ***jādala* intr. *fī* | to dispute about s.th.**

→ *āyah*

<sup>1</sup> Kollampampil’s translation has “the Valiant One” or “valiantly” in all these places.

**ajrama** tr. | to commit (a sin)  
**ajrama** intr. | to commit a sin or sins, to be a sinner  
**mujrim** | sinner, evildoer  
→ *aslama*

**jarā** intr. | to flow  
On the formula “gardens underneath which rivers flow” (*jannāt tajrī min taḥtihā l-anhār*), see → *jannah*.

**jazā** tr. | to recompense s.o., to reward or punish s.o.  
**jazā'** | recompense, requital  
**jizyah** | tributary compensation  
See generally under → *ajr* and → *kasaba*; on *jizyah* in Q 9:29, see briefly under → *jāhada*.

**jasad** | figurative representation or lifelike apparition of a human or animal body  
→ *allāh*

**jism** | (human) body  
→ *allāh*

**ja'ala** tr. | to make or establish s.th.  
**ja'ala** ditr. (*li-*) | to make s.th. s.th., to appoint s.th. as s.th. (for s.o.)  
See briefly under → *allāh* and → *khalāqa*. For an overview of the full range of meanings of this verb in combination with various prepositions, refer to *CDKA* 59–60. Specifically on *ja'ala subulan*, see under → *arḍ*.

**tajallā** intr. | to be radiant, to manifest o.s.  
→ *allāh*

**ajma'a amrahu** | to resolve on one's course of action, to make up one's mind  
→ *amr*

**jumlah: jumlatan wāḥidatan** | as a single whole, all at once  
→ *furqān*, → *nazzala*

***ijtanaba* tr. | to avoid s.th. or s.o.**

→ *al-tāghūt*

***junub* | polluted**

→ *tahara*

***jinn, jinnah* coll. | demons, jinn**

***jānn* | demon, jinni**

***majnūn* | jinn-possessed**

Further vocabulary discussed: *janna* tr. ‘*alā* | to cover s.th. or s.o. *shayṭān* | devil *ins* | human beings, humankind *al-nās* | people ‘*abada* tr. | to serve s.o. or s.th., to worship s.o. or s.th. *ummah* | community *al-ghayb* | the hidden *al-mala’ al-a’lā* | the assembly on high *ṣalaḥa* intr. | to be righteous *aslama* intr. (*li-*) | to surrender o.s. or dedicate o.s. (to s.o., namely, God) *sami’a* tr./intr. | to hear (s.th.) *istama’a* tr./intr. (*li-, ilā*) | to listen (to s.o. or s.th.) *sharik* | associate, partner deity *dhikr* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation *fitnah* | trial; temptation; affliction *idhn* | permission *shā’ir* | poet *kāhin* | soothsayer *sāḥir* | sorcerer *rasūl* | messenger *iftarā* tr. | to fabricate s.th. (e.g., a lie) *rajīm* | deserving to be pelted; accursed (?) *tanazzala* intr. *bi-* | to bring s.th. down *tanazzala* intr. | to descend

**Overview and ancient Arabian background.** The jinn are a class of supernatural, demon-like spirits who are only mentioned in Meccan surahs. The term *jinn* is perhaps to be explained by the root *j-n-n*’s connotation of veiling, covering, and concealment (e.g., *RAH* 148, *DTEK* 9–10, and *Awn* 1983, 30–31; see *Q* 6:76, where *janna* ‘*alā* means “to cover”).<sup>1</sup> The collective *jinn* and the singular *jānn* would seem to be connected with Classical Ethiopic *gānen*, “demon, evil spirit” (*NB* 63; see also Leslau 1991, 198),<sup>2</sup> but the precise relationship between the Arabic and the Ethiopic words remains unclear, and a recent review of the debate about the etymology of *jinn* reiterates the view that a derivation from outside Arabic cannot be proven (*Nünlist* 2015, 22–26). Like other spirits, the jinn figure in early Arabic poetry as threatening spectres haunting desolate places (e.g., *DSAAP*, Ṭarafah, no. 3:1, on which see *RAH* 149–150; for a general digest of how ancient Arabian demons are portrayed in mostly Islamic sources, refer to *Al-Azmeh* 2014, 205–212). The pantheon of Palmyra included a class of beings termed *gny*’, who functioned as tutelary gods and who have been described as resembling both the Arabic *jinn* and the *genii* of Roman religion (*Teixidor* 1979, 77–80; *Grasso*, forthcoming).<sup>3</sup>

Based on material first analysed by Goldziher, it is often said that pre-Islamic Arabs considered poets to be inspired by personal jinnis (*Goldziher* 1896, 1–44). The evidence

1 This root meaning is probably also operative in *Q* 53:32, where *idh antum ajinnatun fī buṭūni ummahātikum* means “when you<sup>P</sup> were fetuses [hidden] in your<sup>P</sup> mothers’ wombs.” Cf. *AEL* 403, according to which *janīm* refers to “anything veiled, concealed, hidden, or covered.”

2 On *jānn* as a singular, see *CDKA* 63 (agreeing with *RAH* 148 and against the position advanced in *DTEK* 11).

3 As *Grasso* notes, it is unlikely that there is an etymological connection between the words *gny*’ and *genius*, but their phonetic similarity may well have encouraged a subsequent merger of the concepts.

for this warrants some caution (Bauer 2010, 721 and 728–729), and indeed the idea that poetry emerges from demonic inspiration may have begun to fade well before the Qur’an, as already noted by Goldziher himself (Goldziher 1896, 24). Nonetheless, it is possible to muster at least a few verses in direct support of the idea (*EAP* 1:223–224), including several instances in the poetic corpus of al-A’shā Maymūn that refer to the latter’s demonic companion Miṣḥal (Ḥusayn 1983, nos 15:43, 20:27, and 33:32–33; see also *GMK* 170).<sup>4</sup> It seems, therefore, that at least some pre-Islamic jinn were believed to have a benevolent nature. The Palmyran *gny*, too, are protective rather than threatening beings, and some of them, such as Abgal and Ashar, are explicitly called “good” (*gny’ ṭb’*; see Grasso, forthcoming, and Teixidor 1979, 80–84). Perhaps taking such ambient notions of benevolent and protective spirits a step further, the Qur’an (and particularly Q 72, conventionally called *Sūrat al-Jinn*) distinguishes between malicious jinn, on the one hand, and righteous and believing jinn, on the other. As we shall see below, this forms a notable contrast with the predominantly negative understanding of demons in late antique Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

From a terminological perspective, it is important to observe that the Qur’an sometimes uses the term *jinn* interchangeably with *al-shayāṭīn*, “the devils” (cf., e.g., Q 72:8–9 with 15:17–18 and 37:7–10). As argued elsewhere in this dictionary, this is best explained by positing that “the devils” are a subclass of the jinn, namely, those jinn who are malicious (→ *shayṭān*). Qur’anic narratives about the creation and fall of Adam foreground one particular member of the jinn, Iblīs or Satan / “the devil” (→ *al-shayṭān*), humankind’s sworn enemy and tempter. Unlike the jinn as a collective, he continues to appear in Medinan texts and is discussed in an independent entry.

**The nature and character of the jinn in comparison to humans.** Throughout the Meccan surahs, “humans and jinn” (*al-ins wa-l-jinn*) are frequently paired to designate the totality of subcelestial (i.e., non-divine and non-angelic) rational agents (e.g., Q 6:112.130, 7:38.179, 17:88, 27:17, 55:33, 72:5; 11:119, 32:13, and 114:6 have *al-jinnah wa-l-nās*, while 55:39.56.74 combine the collective *ins* with the singular *jānn*, clearly in order to meet the surah’s prevalent rhyme in *-ān*). This formulaic coupling of humans and the jinn has parallels in early poetry (e.g., Ḥusayn 1983, no. 33:33, and *EAP* 1:179).<sup>6</sup> At least as far as the Qur’an is concerned, the pairing of humans and the jinn is indicative of important similarities between the two groups: the jinn share with humankind the fact that God created them for

4 That Miṣḥal is a jinni becomes clear from Ḥusayn 1983, no. 33:33. Jones also cites Lyall 1918–1924, no. 40:100.104–107 (where the genius of an opposing poet is called “his *shayṭān*”). Although the author is said to have lived into the second half of the first Islamic century, Goldziher’s view that early Islamic allusions to inspirational demons are a survival from the pre-Islamic period remains the most plausible account of the origin of the notion. This is not to rule out that the diction of the passage just referenced—especially the author’s reference to his opponent’s *shayṭān* (v. 100)—might be influenced by Q 26:221–226, which refers to the descending of the *shayāṭīn* or “devils” on liars and sinners and then accuses poets of “saying what they do not do” (see also below in the main text). But it does not look likely that all poetic allusions to inspirational demons are merely echoes and amplifications of Q 26:221–226.

5 Guillaume Dye hints at a very different understanding of the Qur’anic jinn when he speaks of their “diabolisation” in the Qur’an, in line with Christian demonology, although he duly notes the existence of passages casting the jinn in a more positive light, such as Q 46:29 ff. and Surah 72 (Dye 2019, 781). However, the book chapter in which Dye develops his position (see Dye 2019, 780, n. 1) does not yet seem to be out.

6 The latter occurrence is in the *Lāmiyyat al-‘arab* attributed to al-Shanfarā. On the contested question of this poem’s authenticity, see, e.g., *EAP* 1:139–140 (in favour of authenticity) and el Masri 2020, 24 (conceding inauthenticity but nonetheless holding that the poem is a non-anachronistic “replica” of pre-Islamic poetic language and themes). For another early (though probably post-Qur’anic) occurrence in a poem by al-Khansā, see *EAP* 1:92.

the sole purpose of “serving” or “worshipping” (*‘abada*) him, as asserted already in the early Meccan verse Q 51:56 (*wa-mā khalaqtu l-jinna wa-l-insa illā li-ya‘budūn*);<sup>7</sup> and as further explained below, the jinn, like humans, are capable both of righteous and of sinful actions (see also Nünlist 2015, 59–60). Moreover, humans and jinn are both divided into “communities” or “people” (singular: → *ummah*; Q 7:38, 41:25). Important differences between the two species are however recognised: while humans were created from clay (Q 15:26, 23:12, 32:7, 55:14), the jinn were created from fire (Q 15:27, 55:15).<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps this difference in material constitution that explains the jinn’s possession of certain extraordinary abilities (*DTEK* 36), such as, presumably, invisibility and not being earthbound (e.g., Q 72:8). Two Qur’anic verses describing the snake into which Moses’s rod was miraculously transformed as “wriggling like a jinni” (Q 27:10, 28:31: *tahtazzu ka-annahā jānnun*) may intimate an affinity between the jinn and reptiles (see also under → *shayṭān*). However, the point of comparison could also be a particular rapidity and suddenness of movement.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Qur’an credits the jinn with at least some superhuman powers, they nonetheless do not occupy a fundamentally different position in the Qur’anic world-view than humans. For one, the jinn do not have knowledge of future events (Q 72:10) or of “the hidden” (→ *al-ghayb*; Q 34:14), and when a wicked jinni or → *shayṭān* attempts to eavesdrop on what is being said in God’s celestial council or “the assembly on high” (→ *al-mala’ al-a‘lā*), he is chased away with a shooting star (Q 15:16–18, 37:6–10, 67:5, 72:8–9; see also 26:210–212.223, discussed in more detail below, and generally Hawting 2006). Moreover, the jinn are bidden not to utter falsehoods about God (Q 72:5), and according to one verse have even been sent their own messengers (Q 6:130; see the discussion in *DTEK* 35). Like humans, the jinn will face eschatological judgement (Q 6:128, 37:158, 55:39), as a result of which they may suffer eternal perdition (Q 7:38.179, 11:119, 32:13, 72:15). Some jinn, on the other hand, are said to have “listened to” and “believed in” the Qur’anic revelations, inspiring them to return to their people as “warners” (Q 46:29–32). Consequently, some jinn qualify as righteous (Q 72:11: *minnā l-ṣāliḥūna*) and as surrendering themselves to God (Q 72:14: *minnā l-muslimūna*; → *aslama*). It seems significant that the Qur’an employs the verbs → *sami‘a*, *istama‘a*, and other derivatives of the root *s-m-‘* in order to refer both to some jinn’s listening to, and heeding of, the Qur’anic proclamations (Q 46:29.30 and 72:1.13) as well as to the illicit and inevitably unsuccessful attempts of other jinn to overhear the deliberations of the divine council (Q 15:18, 26:212, 37:8, 72:9). Just like humans, the jinn are expected to recognise their epistemic limitations and to accept the divine revelations that alone convey some measure of insight into “the hidden.” Overall, the Qur’anic jinn may appropriately be characterised as “doubles” or “doppelgangers” of humankind (*DTEK* 36). The jinn, in other words, function as a potent mirror image held up to the Qur’an’s human addressees: despite being superhumanly powerful creatures who have been fashioned from

7 That the jinn were created by God is also concisely mentioned in Q 6:100, though without any indication of the ultimate purpose of the act.

8 Q 15:27 does not just say that the jinn were created from fire but *min nāri l-samūm*. Since *al-samūm* is said by lexicographers to mean a scorching wind (*AEL* 1420), Chabbi argues that Q 15:27 envisages the jinn to consist of scorching air (*air brûlant*) rather than fire properly speaking (Chabbi 2020, 190–194). However, the two other Qur’anic instances of *samūm* both occur in references to punishment in hell (Q 52:27: *‘adhāb al-samūm*; 56:42: *fi samūmin wa-ḥamīm*). This strongly suggests that the word means “blaze” in the Qur’an and that Chabbi’s view is mistaken.

9 That the rod was transformed into a snake is reported in Q 7:107 and 26:32 (*fa-alqā ‘aṣāhu fa-idhā hiya thu‘bānun mubīn*) as well as 20:20 (*fa-alqāhā fa-idhā hiya ḥayyatun tas‘ā*).

fire and who are able to soar up to the lower reaches of heaven (Q 72:8), they nonetheless confront precisely the same existential choice between belief and unbelief, righteousness and sin, salvation and damnation that is also faced by humans.

**The Qur’anic jinn in the context of late antique demonologies.** Late antique Jews and Christians, like the Qur’an, considered demons to be part of the world created by God and even to have been created directly by him (e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 7:5). As shown by literary texts but also by incantation bowls and amulets, Christians and Jews saw demons as a source of affliction, possession, and temptation who needed to be repelled and exorcised (see, e.g., Bohak 2017; Lunn-Rockcliffe 2018a and 2018b). It is true that spirits could become powerful allies if conjured and harnessed, and the rabbinic tradition can depict demons as neutral or even benevolent (Bohak 2017, 122–123; Ronis 2018). The Neoplatonist Porphyry went so far as to recognise the existence of morally good demons (Lunn-Rockcliffe 2018a, 499). But at least to Christians, demons very much tended to be inherently malicious (Muehlberger 2013, 30): “for many early Christians, the three classes of rational beings”—humans, angels, and demons—“were not just ontologically different, variant in their natures, but also morally different. Human beings were morally ambivalent, angels good, and demons evil.”<sup>10</sup> How did Jews and Christians reconcile the existence of evil spirits with the creator’s axiomatic goodness? Among the different etiologies put forward were the following two origin stories: demons are the offspring of angels who had lustfully mated with human females in the run-up to the Biblical deluge; or demons are spirits who had fallen from God’s presence together with the devil, when the latter refused to prostrate himself to the newly created Adam (e.g., Lunn-Rockcliffe 2018a, 497–498, and Lunn-Rockcliffe 2018b, 278; see also under → *shayṭān*).<sup>11</sup>

Against this general background, the Qur’anic insistence that the jinn are subject to the same religious norms and other-worldly rewards and punishments as humans and that at least some jinn are genuine believers stands out. The New Testament does report that demons exorcised or about to be exorcised by Jesus recognised him as the Son of God or the like (see Mark 1:24 and 3:11, Matt 8:29, or Luke 4:41), and the Epistle of James explicitly refers to believing demons (Jas 2:19): “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder.”<sup>12</sup> However, in neither case is there a suggestion that the demons in question are meritorious.<sup>13</sup> As Ephrem puts it, it was not “in truth” that the demons acknowledged Jesus as the Messiah (Beck 1970a, no. 2:1449–1450), and the argument of the passage from the Epistle of James is that “faith apart from works is barren” (Jas 2:20); the demons are consequently invoked to exemplify someone who believes in God’s existence and power yet lacks works, and therefore falls short of what is required (Barton and Muddiman 2001, 1259). A more pertinent parallel to the Qur’an’s interest in demons as moral and religious agents may be the recent insight that the Babylonian Talmud occasionally constructs demons as “beings with responsibility and agency who

10 David Frankfurter observes that in the early Jewish tradition demons “oscillated, or had the potential to oscillate, between beneficial and malevolent functions” (Frankfurter 2011, 127) and then argues that a remnant of “demonic ambiguity” (Frankfurter 2011, 128) is also present in the Christian tradition, despite its general emphasis on demons as implacable foes (see also Lunn-Rockcliffe 2018a, 504–505, and Lunn-Rockcliffe 2018b, 269–270, 285).

11 For a succinct list of further Jewish etiologies of demons, see Bohak 2017, 128.

12 I owe this reference to Holger Zellentin.

13 As Saqib Hussain points out to me, one might compare this to Q 59:16, where Satan, after having successfully tempted a human, disowns his victim and confesses that even he is afraid of (*akhāfu*) God. This does not seem to alter the negative verdict of Satan expressed in other Qur’anic contexts.



exist *within* the halakhic system,” who possess rights and responsibilities and are subject to rabbinic jurisdiction (Ronis 2018, 15–19, quoting p. 16). Such an assimilation of demonic and human agency at least anticipates aspects of Qur’anic demonology.

Despite the peculiar moralistic inflection of Qur’anic demonology, the Qur’anic jinn are undoubtedly continuous with demonological conceptions current in the wider late antique world. One such aspect of continuity is the notion that demons are able to gain knowledge of future events by eavesdropping on God’s council. This is paralleled, for example, by the *Testament of Solomon*, where one demon explains to Solomon that he and his ilk “go up to the firmament of heaven, fly around among the stars, and hear the decisions which issue from God concerning the lives of men” (Charlesworth 1983, 983 = ch. 20). Even if the emergence and final dating of the *Testament of Solomon*, which exists in more than one recension, continues to be debated (see Schwarz 2007), the idea at hand is safely regarded as pre-Qur’anic, seeing that it is also reflected in the Babylonian Talmud. Thus, according to *b. Hag. 16a*, demons have wings like ministering angels, enabling them to fly from one end of the world to the other, and possess knowledge of the future since they “listen from behind the curtain, like ministering angels.”<sup>14</sup> The Qur’an presupposes this idea, but additionally holds that demonic attempts to overhear God’s decrees will always fail, since the divine creator has secured the celestial realm against any unauthorised interlopers by chasing the latter away with shooting stars (*HCI 89*). This is not to say that the view that shooting stars serve to dispel demons from the upper reaches of heaven is necessarily a Qur’anic creation, for it appears in two lines of poetry attributed to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt that fit the rhyme and metre of an extended poem about God’s creation of the heavens and the earth (Schulthess 1911a, no. 25:27–28, corresponding to al-Saṭlī 1974, no. 10:27–28): “And you see devils turning aside, forced to take refuge (*tarūghu muḍāfatan*), scattered apart when they are driven away (*idhā mā tuṭradū*). // Upon them are cast (*tulqā ‘alayhā*) disgrace in heaven and stars (*kawākib*), by which they are pelted (*turmā bihā*), causing them to flee (*fa-tu’arridū*).”<sup>15</sup> Incidentally, the inaccessibility of the seventh heaven is also evoked in another verse of the same poem (Schulthess 1911a, no. 25:15 = al-Saṭlī 1974, no. 10:15), though without explicit reference to the fending off of inquisitive demons.

Overall, however, the continuities between Qur’anic and late antique demonologies are counterbalanced by significant disparities. Late antique Jews and Christians inhabited “a world thronged with demons” (Lunn-Rockliffe 2018b, 269), a world in which demons

14 Also relevant is *b. Giṭ. 68a–b*, recounting that Ashmedai, the king of the demons, ascends to heaven on a daily basis to study in the heavenly academy. As a result, he is aware of information about specific individuals that has been “proclaimed in the heavenly firmament,” causing him to engage in various good deeds (*DTEK 32*; Hawting 2006, 30–31). However, Ashmedai comes across as having proper clearance to visit the heavenly realm here rather than as illegitimately snatching up information to which he is not meant to be privy.

15 This is the couplet referenced, at one remove, in *RAH 137*, n. 6. For a survey of different verdicts on its authenticity, see Seidensticker 2011b, 47–49. The degree of lexical overlap with relevant Qur’anic parallels is limited to *shayāṭīn* and *kawākib*, which makes al-Saṭlī’s assessment that the two verses are “Islamic in meaning” at least debatable. My translation follows al-Saṭlī in reading *shattā* rather than *ṣ-b-r* as per Schulthess. Al-Saṭlī glosses *muḍāfatan* as meaning “in fear,” while Schulthess translates *kopftos*. According to the lexica, *aḍāfa min* does indeed mean “to fear s.th.” (*AEL 1813*), but of course the verse has the passive participle rather than the active one. Perhaps *aḍāfa* is here used in the sense of “to force s.o. to seek recourse or take refuge” (i.e., “to make s.o. a *ḍayf*”; see *AEL 1814*, where *aḍāfahu ilayhi* is glossed as “he made him to have recourse to it, or to betake himself to it for refuge”). It may also be that *aḍāfa* is employed as the causative of *ḍāfa*, “to turn away from (‘an) s.th.” (in which case *muḍāfatan* would simply amplify the meaning of *rāgha*) or as the causative of *ḍāfa*, “to fear.” I am grateful to Tilman Seidensticker for help with this passage.

formed a ubiquitous danger not only to human rectitude but also to basic human well-being, in a way that may be compared to contemporary notions of germs (Bohak 2017, 119–133). According to Jewish sources, demons “are more numerous than we are and they surround us like the ridge around a field” (*b. Bər.* 6a; Bohak 2017, 121; Lunn-Rockcliffe 2018a, 501; Lunn-Rockcliffe 2018b, 274–275; Ronis 2018, 17–19); failure to wash one’s hands before eating or urinating between a palm tree and a wall make one vulnerable to demonic assault (Bohak 2017, 120 and 123–124; see *b. Yoma* 77b, *b. Hul.* 107b, and *b. Pəsaḥ.* 111a); and demons may cause headache or be called down upon a victim to make him “bellow like a pig” (Bohak 2017, 116–117 and 118–119). By contrast, the Qur’an does not convey a comparably urgent sense that the jinn pose a formidable threat to humans: the Qur’anic jinn “are neither able to harm or benefit humans; they are fully occupied with looking after themselves, for they, too, are subject to God’s judgement” (*DTEK* 34). It is quite apt, therefore, to say that the jinn have been “dispossessed” in the Qur’an (Chabbi 2020, 185–211). A different way of putting this point would be to say that the Qur’anic cosmos is characterised by a fairly advanced, though certainly not complete, state of disenchantment, meaning a state of being drained of demonic, magical, and suchlike forces that are taken to exist alongside the supreme power of the divine creator.<sup>16</sup> The principal reason why evil jinn or “devils” (*al-shayāṭīn*) can pose a danger to the Qur’an’s addressees is because they are sources of moral temptation, by swaying them to commit misdeeds that will be punished by the divine judge, not because demons are associated with objective forces that might make themselves felt independently of human action, such as the power to inflict illness.

It is precisely against the background of the jinn’s dispossession that a number of Qur’anic passages condemn those who would mistake the jinn for beings deserving cultic veneration. Thus, Q 6:100 accuses those who have “assigned to God the jinn as associates (singular: *sharik*; → *ashraka*), even though he has created them” (*wa-ja’alū li-llāhi shurakā’a l-jinna wa-khalaqahum*), and in Q 34:41 the angels defend themselves against God’s question whether they have been objects of human veneration by accusing the culprits of having served the jinn instead. Another passage complains that “some humans

16 It is true that Surah 113 invokes God’s protection against “the evil of women blowing on knots” (Q 113:4); this looks like a magical practice that is meant to be kept in check by God but whose basic efficacy is taken for granted. Other Qur’anic passages that acknowledge magic as a real phenomenon locate it in the past. Thus, the Qur’an repeatedly recounts Moses’s confrontation with the Egyptian magicians (e.g., Q 7:103–126); here, not unlike Surah 113, God, as represented by Moses, overcomes magic, which of course presupposes that the latter has some degree of reality (cf. Q 7:116). Moreover, as discussed below in the main text, Solomon is reported to have been given control of the jinn and their powers, while Q 2:102 alludes to malevolent demons or devils (*al-shayāṭīn*) contemporary with Solomon who transmitted magical knowledge. Most Qur’anic references to magic, however, are merely concerned with castigating an alleged human penchant for writing off God’s revelations and signs as mere magic (e.g., Q 54:2, 74:24). On the Weberian category of “disenchantment” (deployed in the main text) and its problematic polysemy, see Joas 2019, 201–277. In describing the Qur’anic cosmos as being, to some degree, disenchanting, I associate an enchanted world with one that is imbued with spirits, demons, and “moral forces,” following Charles Taylor (Taylor 2007, 26, 29–41). Note, though, that elsewhere Taylor links the concept of disenchantment specifically with a “denial of the sacred”—meaning a denial of the distinction between sacred and profane things, places, and times (Taylor 2007, 77). Disenchantment in this sense is not straightforwardly applicable to the Qur’an, since the latter does expressly recognise certain places and times as sacred, even though their sacrality would in most cases seem to be due to divine designation rather than to any intrinsic powers or qualities (see under → *harrama*). As Joas argues, it is imperative to disentangle the various aspects that tend to be conflated in the category of disenchantment, including a rejection of magic, a rejection of the distinction between sacred and profane, and the rejection of a transcendent sphere of reality. Such an analytic disentanglement helpfully permits one to recognise that the various processes in question do not form an indivisible package and can be present or absent separately (Joas 2019, 254).

have sought the protection of some of the jinn” (Q 72:6: *wa-annahu kāna rijālun mina l-insi ya’ūdihūna bi-rijālin mina l-jinni*).<sup>17</sup> Yet such pronouncements are not sufficient to warrant the inference that there was explicit jinn worship in the Qur’anic milieu.<sup>18</sup> It is at least equally likely that the passages are to be placed against the background of the Qur’an’s attempt to make sense of rituals and sacrifices that were, from the emic perspective of their participants, addressed to divine recipients while the Qur’an itself denied these addressees’ divine status (see *QP* 72–77 and the more detailed discussion under → *ashraka*). Read along these lines, the verses just examined are insisting that what may appear, from the inside, to be worship of divine beings really amounts to worship of demons. After all, the Qur’an also warns against venerating “the devil,” → *al-shayṭān* (Q 19:44, 36:60; see also 4:117), which hardly implies the existence of Satanic rituals in pre-Islamic Arabia. Such a demonological account of rituals that were deemed idolatrous from a monotheistic perspective has Biblical precedent (see 1 Cor 10:20 and Deut 32:17; Hawting 1999, 51).

Even more enigmatic than the verses just discussed is Q 6:128, where the divine judge addresses the jinn by saying that they have “obtained” or “sought to obtain many humans” (*qadi stakthartum mina l-insi*). This could mean that the jinn, or some of them, are engaged in actively seducing humans to venerate them (*DTEK* 16). This would fit with the presumption that the beneficiaries of illicit polytheistic worship are likely to be in some sense complicit in the ritual behaviour of their devotees, a presumption that is also manifested by Q 25:17 (see under → *ashraka*). But it may also be that Q 6:128 is merely a generic reference to demons as sources of moral temptation. This latter theme is certainly well exemplified by passages according to which God assigns malicious demons or “devils” (*al-shayāṭīn*) as companions to those humans who have rejected his reminding exhortation (*dhikr*), thereby reinforcing them in their wickedness (e.g., Q 43:36–38; → *shayṭān*). To reiterate, from the Qur’anic perspective any danger emanating from the jinn would seem to hinge on moral temptation rather than physical harm to life, limb, and property or even mental possession. The Qur’anic depiction of the jinn is therefore moralistic in a double sense: not only in so far as the jinn themselves are constructed as moral subjects but also in so far as their impact on human subjects is understood in moral terms.

**Solomon and the jinn.** Another obvious point of continuity between the Qur’anic jinn and earlier demonological conceptions are Qur’anic resonances of the idea, widespread in late antique thought, that demons can be yoked to human benefit. The relevant verses of the Qur’an are all limited to passages dealing with Solomon, whom God is said to have given control over the jinn (Q 34:12; see also 27:17, 39) or over “the devils” (*al-shayāṭīn*; 21:82, 38:37–38).<sup>19</sup> The topos that Solomon was an expert conjurer of spirits is found as early as the *Wisdom of Solomon*, which forms part of the Septuagint canon, and

17 Also relevant is Q 37:158, which may be interpreted to mean that the Qur’an’s opponents declared the jinn to be God’s offspring.

18 On the question of jinn worship, see *DTEK* 16–18. The evidence for jinn worship in pre-Islamic Arabia is generally scant. One case is al-Kalbī 1914, 34 (a reference that I owe to Al-Azmeh 2014, 210). Here, the information that a certain tribe used to “serve the jinn” (*ya’budūna l-jinna*) is given in explanation of a Qur’anic verse, though the latter is not Q 34:41, which shares with al-Kalbī the phrase *ya’budūna l-jinna*, but 7:194. Nonetheless, there is a manifest possibility that al-Kalbī’s piece of information is derived from the Qur’an.

19 Q 27:39 reports that one of the members of Solomon’s court was an *‘ifrīt min al-jinn*. Rather than considering *‘ifrīt* to name a certain subclass of the jinn, it seems more likely that the word’s force here is to underline the particular powers or cunning of an individual jinni. The word *‘ifrīt* is a Qur’anic *hapax legomenon*. For the ways in which it is explained by Arabic lexicographers, see *AEL* 2089–2090.

Josephus, and is also attested in the rabbinic tradition (Salzberger 1907, 8–12, 92–94; *DTEK* 18–23; *BEQ* 386–387; see also Schwarz 2007, 207–208). The Qur’an makes it plain that it was not by any special magical prowess that Solomon was able to rely on the services of the jinn but solely by God’s permission (Q 34:12: *wa-mina l-jinni man ya’malu bayna yadayhi bi-idhni rabbihī*). This claim is paralleled by the so-called *Second Targum* on the book of Esther (Salzberger 1907, 93–94; Grossfeld 1994, 26, 31 = Esth 1:2; Ego 1996, 67, 73, 74). A poem from the *dīwān* of al-Nābighah al-Dhubayānī, too, reflects the idea that God endowed Solomon with dominion over the jinn: the deity, according to the poem attributed to al-Nābighah, encouraged Solomon to “subdue the jinn” (*khayyis al-jinna*) and gave the latter permission (*qad adhintu lahum*) to build Tadmur, apparently on Solomon’s behalf (*DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 5:22–23, noted in *KU* 117 and *BEQ* 387; see also Stetkevych 2017 and Grasso, forthcoming). While the Qur’an similarly insists that Solomon’s rule over the jinn was predicated on divine permission, the Islamic scripture additionally makes it explicit that Solomon’s mastery over the jinn was an exceptional state of affairs: in Surah 38, God’s conferral upon Solomon of control over the wind and “the devils” (*al-shayāṭīn*; Q 38:36–38) responds to the latter’s prayer for “kingly rule that will not be appropriate for anyone after me” (Q 38:35: *hab lī mulkan lā yanbaghī li-aḥadin min ba’dī*).<sup>20</sup> Consequently, any attempt to replicate Solomon’s powers, perhaps by means of arcane magical arts, is futile; human dominion over the spirits is not a contemporary prospect anymore.

**Solomon, demons, and angels in Q 2:102.** An even more unequivocal Qur’anic rejection of magic—which can for present purposes be defined as the attempt to coerce superhuman powers other than God into serving human interests—emerges from an isolated Medinan resonance of the theme of Solomon’s association with powerful spirits. This is found in Q 2:102, containing the only Medinan reference to “the devils” (*al-shayāṭīn*) in the plural (see *QP* 193–196). Taken together with the preceding verse, Q 2:101, the passage accuses the Israelites (who are addressed from v. 83 onwards) of discarding “God’s scripture” in favour of “that which the devils recited during the reign of Solomon.”<sup>21</sup> “That which the devils recited” is sorcery, and by indicting the Israelites for preferring sorcery over revelation the verse polemically exploits what Crone calls the “well-attested phenomenon” of Jewish magic (*QP* 194–195). The devils at hand, meanwhile, may be assumed to be the demons over whom God gave Solomon control according to passages like Q 21:82. These devils, Q 2:102 continues, are guilty of “repudiating” (→ *kafara*) God, while Solomon himself is expressly exempted from this charge (*wa-mā kafara sulaymānu wa-lākinna l-shayāṭīna kafarū*). The point must be that the seemingly miraculous powers enjoyed by Solomon do not make him guilty of unbelief, considering that these powers were granted by God himself. As regards the demons or devils, Q 2:102 goes on to assert that they were engaged in “teaching people magic” (*yu’allimūna l-nāsa l-siḥra*) “and that which was sent

20 I am grateful to Saqib Hussain for alerting me to the importance of Q 38:35.

21 I assume that the preposition ‘*alā*’ in the phrase *mā tatlū l-shayāṭīnu ‘alā mulki sulaymāna* is not to be understood in the sense of “against” (thus disagreeing with the translation given in *DTEK* 115–116). See, for instance, Zam. 1:305, who glosses ‘*alā mulki sulaymāna*’ as ‘*alā ‘ahdī mulkihi wa-ḥī zamānihi*’, and similarly *Jal.* 48. For modern scholars endorsing this understanding, see Paret 2001, who renders ‘*alā*’ as “during” (*während*) and *CDKA* 328. Arberry 1955 and Jones 2007 somewhat unhelpfully opt for a bland “over.” On the possible temporal sense of ‘*alā*’, see also Wright 1974, 2:169–170 (including the example *dakhala l-madīnata ‘alā ḥīni ghaflatīn min ahlihā*, “he entered the city at a time when its inhabitants were off their guard”) and Fischer 2002, 163 (§ 302, n. 1).

down upon the two angels in Babel, Hārūt and Mārūt” (see also under → *malak*). Like Solomon, the angels Hārūt and Mārūt are cleared of any impropriety: “they do not teach anyone before saying: ‘We are a trial (*fitnah*; see under → *balā*); so do not become guilty of repudiation (*fa-lā takfur*)!’” Consequently, the reason why the devils are guilty of repudiating God must be that they were receptive to the magical knowledge peddled by Hārūt and Mārūt despite the religious health warning attached to it. The verse then provides an example for the illicit knowledge at stake by referring to the sowing of discord between a man and his spouse.

The scenario presented by Q 2:102 is one according to which the magical practices that the Israelites allegedly prefer over “God’s scripture” are traced back to the wicked demons over whom Solomon exercised divinely mandated authority, while the demons in turn derive their magical expertise from two angels peddling illicit knowledge by way of a divinely orchestrated test—a test that the demonic transmitters of magical spells and incantations are understood to have failed, like those following in their footsteps. Whatever exceptional powers Solomon enjoyed by virtue of his God-given authority over the demons is thus presented as occupying a fundamentally different moral position than contemporary sorcery. Moreover, similar to what is said in connection with Solomon at Q 34:12 (see above), any efficacy that magical spells and incantations might possess is made contingent upon God: it is, in fact, only “by God’s permission (*idhm*)” that those acquiring the dark arts from Hārūt and Mārūt are able to inflict harm on people (Q 2:102: *wa-mā hum bi-ḡārrīna bihi min aḥadin illā bi-idhni llāhi*).

**Muhammad defended against the accusations of being possessed or a poet etc.** One of the most prominent motifs associated with the jinn is the Qur’anic opponents’ formulaic accusation, cited or refuted in a considerable number of early and later Meccan passages, that Muhammad is jinn-possessed (*majnūn*, applied to Muhammad in Q 15:6, 37:36, 44:14, 52:29, 68:2.51, 81:22, or *bihi jinnatun / mā bi- . . . min jinnatin*, found in 7:184, 23:70, and 34:8.46).<sup>22</sup> This denunciation is sometimes concomitant with a dismissal of Muhammad as being a mere poet (*shā’ir*; Q 37:36 and 52:29–30; see also 21:5 and 69:41) or a soothsayer (*kāhin*; Q 52:29; see also 69:42). Muhammad is also accused of being a sorcerer (*sāḥir*; Q 10:2, 38:4), an invective that can likewise combine with *majnūn* (namely, in Q 51:39.52, although not with respect to Muhammad). As so often, this aspect of Muhammad’s ministry is said to resemble the experience of his predecessors. Thus, even though it is exclusively Muhammad who is denigrated as a mere poet, the accusation of being jinn-possessed is reported to have been directed at Noah (Q 23:25, 54:9) and Moses (Q 26:27, 51:39), and indeed one verse generalises that every one of God’s previous messengers (singular: → *rasūl*) has been called “a sorcerer or someone possessed” (Q 51:52).<sup>23</sup> Especially in light of this universalising statement it is noteworthy that in the New Testament both John the Baptist (Matt 11:18, Luke 7:33) and Jesus (John 7:20, 8:48–49.52, 10:20) are scorned as demoniacs (*DTEK* 23).

22 Eichler makes the perceptive observation that verses employing *majnūn* are early Meccan, while those employing *bihi jinnatun* or *mā bi- . . . min jinnatin* are later Meccan (*DTEK* 23). I would add that this correlation only holds fully if the early Meccan surahs are demarcated as proposed in *HCI* 161 (namely, as consisting of those surahs who have a mean verse length below that of Q 50). By contrast, if one adopts Weil and Nöldeke’s definition of the early Meccan period, quite a few verses that have *majnūn* (15:6, 26:27, 37:36, 44:14) are not early but middle Meccan.

23 The accusation of sorcery is also prominent in connection with Moses; see, e.g., Q 40:24, 43:49, 51:39.



What did Muhammad’s opponents mean to say by calling him *majnūn*? At least to some, the force of the vituperation may have been nothing more than “mad” or “crazy.” The fact that one Qur’anic verse combines *majnūn* with *shā’ir* (Q 37:36) has sometimes been connected to the idea that poets were inspired by demons (see above), but this probably misunderstands the context of the statement (Bauer 2010, 721). The following verse insists that Muhammad “brings the truth” (v. 37: *bal jā’a bi-l-ḥaqqi*), which implies that the main overlap between denigrating Muhammad as a poet and as being *majnūn* was the allegation that he could not be relied upon to speak the truth—either because he was not in full possession of his faculties (i.e., he was mad) or because he deliberately and creatively made things up, like poets. Pertinently, explicit accusations that Muhammad has merely “fabricated” (*iftarā*) the Qur’anic proclamations are frequent in Meccan surahs (Q 10:38, 11:13, 35, 16:101, 21:5, 25:4, 32:3, 34:8, 43, 46:8), and Q 34:8 (adduced in *DTEK* 25), where the charges of fabricating lies and of being possessed figure side by side, confirms that there was semantic proximity between these allegations: Muhammad, his accusers were saying, was either purposefully making preposterous claims or was unable to help it. This understanding of the commonality between being *majnūn* and being a poet is confirmed by Q 26:226, accusing poets of “saying what they do not do” (*yaqūlūna mā lā yaf’alūn*). Poets, it seems, had a reputation for indulging in outrageous boasting that did not merit being taken seriously (*DTEK* 27 and Bauer 2010, 725–730; on the entire passage Q 26:224–226, see also Seidensticker 2011a, Neuwirth 2010, 716–722, and *PP* 429–432). It is likely that it was precisely in this sense that Muhammad was scorned as a poet. Similarly, to call Muhammad *majnūn* may simply have been to allege that he was raving mad rather than to impute to him the sort of supernatural inspiration that was occasionally associated with pre-Islamic poets (thus already *DTEK* 25).<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, two passages from the early Meccan surahs Q 26 and 81 suggest that maybe the Qur’an did need to defend itself specifically against the imputation of originating from demonic inspiration. Thus, Q 81:25 maintains that Muhammad’s pronouncements are “not the speech of a devil (→ *shayṭān*) deserving to be pelted (→ *rajīm*).” The affirmation comes only a few verses after a denial that “your<sup>p</sup> companion”—to wit, Muhammad—is “jinn-possessed” (*majnūn*) in Q 81:22. This creates a likelihood that vv. 22 and 25 can be taken to explicate each other, which would point to a link between jinn-possession and inspiration. The second passage is Q 26:210–212. It avers, like Q 81:25, that what Muhammad proclaims “has not been brought down by the devils” (*wa-mā tanazzalat bihi l-shayāṭīn*) and then goes on to explain that the devils could not have done so (v. 211: *wa-mā yastaṭī’ūn*) since they are “prevented from listening” (v. 212: *innahum ‘ani l-sam‘i la-ma’zūlūn*). The latter statement must allude to the Qur’anic claim, discussed above, that the divine council is robustly insulated from unauthorised eavesdropping. Later in the same surah (Q 26:221–223), the topic of demonic inspiration receives further attention: “the devils,” we learn, “descend upon many a wicked fabricator of falsehoods” (v. 222: *tanazzalu ‘alā kulli affākin athīm*). As v. 223 adds, demons attempt to eavesdrop on the celestial council in order to gain information otherwise inaccessible to them, yet “most of them are liars,” that is, cannot be relied upon to divulge truth (*yulqūna l-sam‘a wa-aktharuhum kādhībūn*). It is salient that both in Surah 26 and in Surah 81 the denial that the Qur’anic revelations have been transmitted by demons (Q 26:210–212, 81:25)

24 See Bauer 2010, 723: “there is not necessarily a connection between being a poet and being possessed.”



contrasts with a preceding affirmative statement, claiming that the Qur’anic recitations have in fact been relayed by a quasi-angelic figure (Q 26:193, 81:19; see under → *malak*). Unlike Q 81:25, the refutation of demonic inspiration in Q 26:210 ff. is not preceded by any suggestion that Muhammad was accused of being *majnūn*, but the latter expression does occur in an earlier verse of the same composition, in Q 26:27, where Pharaoh applies it to Moses. Taken together, both Surah 81 and Surah 26 therefore lend some support to the understanding that calling Muhammad *majnūn* or “possessed” did not merely convey a general allegation of mental derangement but also implied reliance on untrustworthy demonic inspiration. If that is correct, then the accusation of being jinn-possessed both acknowledged Muhammad’s claim to be tapping into some form of supernatural inspiration and simultaneously deflated this claim in such a manner as to avoid conceding that he was imparting theological truth and positing valid behavioural norms.

Whatever one makes of the two passages just discussed, the common denominator of classifying Muhammad as “jinn-possessed” and as a poet, and probably also of calling him a soothsayer or a sorcerer, was to dismiss his claim to articulate propositions and norms that deserved to be taken seriously. In other words, all of the four labels in question should be considered to be polemical; they do not constitute uncomprehending but sincere attempts by Muhammad’s hearers at categorising his claim to be a recipient of prophetic revelations in accordance with the only categories of supernatural inspiration available to them (thus Noth 1994, 19–20). There is, after all, no compelling reason to assume that Muhammad’s Meccan audience was unacquainted with Jewish and Christian notions of divine revelation. To the contrary, as has been observed by more than one scholar, Muhammad’s recipients must have had a reasonably firm grasp of Biblical narratives (*HCI* 62), and they also seem to have been familiar enough with the notion of divine revelation in order to confront Muhammad’s claim to prophecy with objections that were not obviously silly (see under → *malak* and → *ashraka*). Another reason to assume that the point of classing Muhammad as possessed, a poet, or a soothsayer was straightforwardly polemical rather than an honest attempt at conceptualising the unfamiliar is the fact that the Qur’anic opponents also accuse Muhammad of having invented or copied his alleged revelations (e.g., Q 16:103, 25:5, 32:3). It seems highly probable that an accusation of fabrication or derivation from untrustworthy sources was also the main thrust behind the labels under consideration.<sup>25</sup>

## *jannah* | garden

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *nahar* | river, stream *na’im* | delight, bliss *’adn* | Eden *khuld* | immortality *ma’wā* | refuge *firdaws* | paradise *zamharīr* | excessive cold *ittaka’ā* intr. | to recline *razaqa* ditr. | to provide s.o. with s.th. *mutashābih* | resembling one another; indistinguishable *ishtahā* tr. | to desire s.th.

<sup>25</sup> One might argue that classifying Muhammad as a soothsayer, or *kāhin*, could at least rely on certain literary affinities between the Qur’an and the utterances of ancient Arabian diviners, namely, the use of *saj’* or rhymed and rhythmic prose (on which see Stewart 1990). But no equivalent argument from literary affinity could seriously be made with respect to the allegation that Muhammad was a poet (Bauer 2010, 713–715, 722–723). The upshot is again that at least the poetic label, and probably also the mantic one, was not a neutral attempt at phenomenological classification.

*al-muqarrabūn* pl. | those brought near (to God) *ajr* | wage *akrama* tr. | to honour s.o. *salām* | (salvific) safety or security *mutaqābilūn* pl. | facing one another *jahannam* | hell *ghill* | rancour *nādā* tr. | to call out to s.o. *hijāb* | partition, screen *a'rāf* | heights, elevations *khalada* intr. | to remain forever, to be immortal *habaṭa* intr. | to descend, to go down

**Overview of the Qur'anic nomenclature for paradise.** *Jannah*, “garden,” is a frequent Qur'an term for the eschatological paradise but can also designate earthly gardens (Q 6:99.141, 18:32–42) as well as the paradise of Adam and Eve (Q 2:35, 7:19.22.27; CDKA 63). The Qur'an presumably considers the latter to be identical with the eschatological paradise, as does, for instance, Ephrem (see Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, nos 5:5 and 8:10). In reference to the eschatological paradise, the Qur'an employs both the singular *al-jannah*, “the garden” (e.g., Q 2:82.111.214), in use from the early Meccan period onwards (see Q 81:13, 88:10, 89:30), and the plural *jannāt* (e.g., Q 3:15), which is equally attested from early on (see Q 74:40, 78:16). Very often, the plural *jannāt* is found as part of the formula *jannāt tajrī min taḥtihā l-anhār*, “gardens underneath which rivers (singular: *nahar*) flow,” which is treated in more detail below, and as a component of the constructs *jannāt al-na'im*, “the gardens of delight” (e.g., Q 5:65, 10:9, 22:56) and *jannāt 'adn* (e.g., Q 9:72, 13:23, 16:31).<sup>1</sup> Two further constructs containing the plural *jannāt*, which are however rare, are *jannat al-khuld*, “the garden of immortality” (Q 25:15; → *khalada*), and *jannāt al-ma'wā*, “the gardens of refuge” (Q 32:19; cf. 79:41; see Horovitz 1975, 61, and Künstlinger 1931, 620–622). Usage of *firdaws*, derived from Greek *paradeisos*, is very sporadic in the Qur'an (Q 18:107, 23:11; see Horovitz 1975, 61–62, and Künstlinger 1931, 624), despite the fact that, as Horovitz notes, Syriac *pardaysā* is a common term for the eschatological paradise and the preferred designation for it in Ephrem's *Hymns on Paradise* (Beck 1957a).

**Terminological precursors in Jewish and Christian parlance.** The word *jannah* may be a loan from Aramaic, but if so it is one that predates the Qur'an, since *jannah* = “garden” is attested already in ancient Arabic poetry (JPND 196; Horovitz 1975, 60; see also NB 42).<sup>2</sup> *Jannāt 'adn* in particular is obviously descended from the Biblical “garden of Eden” (Hebrew: *gan 'ēden*; Gen 2:8.15, 3:23.24).<sup>3</sup> Strikingly, the Qur'an never uses the expression *'adn* in connection with Adam and Eve (WMJA 99; Horovitz 1975, 61; Künstlinger 1931, 617–618). As for *jannāt al-na'im* or *jannat na'im* (Q 56:89, 70:38; 52:17 has *jannāt wa-na'im*; see Horovitz 1975, 60–61, and Künstlinger 1931, 619–620), the two expressions are, in effect, literal translations of *gan 'ēden* (JPND 196), in so far as Hebrew *'ēden* can mean “bliss” or “delight” (HALOT 792), even if Gen 2:8 clearly uses the expression as a place name. Most likely, *jannāt al-na'im* / *jannat na'im* reflects the Septuagint's rendering of *gan 'ēden* as *paradeisos tēs tryphēs*, “the paradise of delight” (Künstlinger 1931, 619; see Gen 3:23.24, Joel 2:3, and Ezek 31:9), which has also left traces in Syriac.<sup>4</sup> As Horovitz remarks,

1 It is noteworthy that *jannāt 'adn* seems to appear somewhat later in Qur'anic discourse than *jannāt al-na'im*, which has a number of early Meccan occurrences (37:43, 56:12, 68:34). By contrast, the earliest occurrences of *jannāt 'adn* are probably Q 19:61, 20:76, and 38:50 (see Horovitz 1975, 60–61).

2 See also Al-Jallad 2017a, 145 and 171, documenting the diminutive *gonainath* in a Graeco-Arabic papyrus from the early 500s.

3 Onqelos and other targums have *ginta d-'ēdan* (Künstlinger 1931, 617); the Peshitta, however, uses *pardaysā da-'den* at Gen 2:15 and 3:24.25.

4 As pointed out by Brock and Kiraz in Ephrem 2006, 12–13, n. 5 (commenting on Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 5:14), Ephrem's expression *ganntā d-gewātā*, “garden of delights” would seem to reflect the Septuagint's

it is specifically in Jewish parlance that the expression *gan ʿeden* customarily functions as a term for the heavenly paradise (JPND 196–197; see *DTTM* 1045). There may consequently be a Jewish background to the term *jannāt ʿadn* (JPND 196–197).<sup>5</sup> However, the Qurʾan’s frequent absolute usage *al-jannah* for the heavenly paradise corresponds most closely to Syriac *ganntā*, “the garden,” which can have the same eschatological sense (Mingana 1927, 85; *FFQ* 103–104), as exemplified by Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise* (Beck 1957a, nos 7:28–29, 8:1.10–11, 10:14, 11:5.10, and 12:9). By contrast, rabbinic texts only rarely call the eschatological paradise “the garden” *simpliciter* (Künstlinger 1931, 618).

**The general features of paradise in the Qurʾan.** The Qurʾanic portrayal of paradise (on which see generally Horovitz 1975 and Wild 2010) is that of an idyllic and temperate location in which the God-fearing rest “in the shade and by springs” (Q 77:41: *inna l-muttaqīna fī ḡilālīn wa-ʿuyūn*)<sup>6</sup> and where they are “will not see”—i.e., are not exposed to—“[scorching] sun nor severe cold” (Q 76:13: *lā yarawna fihā shamsan wa-lā zamharīrā*). The phrase just quoted has a literal parallel in a poem by al-Aʿshā Maymūn (Ḥusayn 1983, no. 12:17: *lam tara shamsan wa-lā zamharīrā*; see also Horovitz 1975, 69–70, and Bitsch 2020, 335–336); but specifically with regard to the hereafter, the same point is also made in Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise*, where it is denied that there is any “harmful frost” or “scorching heat” in paradise (Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 11:2, noted in Bitsch 2020, 348). Elsewhere, too, Ephrem stresses the perfectly balanced climate of paradise (Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 10:2). The idea is ancient, as shown by similar statements in the Avesta (Bitsch 2020, 340–343).<sup>7</sup>

Within this bucolic setting, the Qurʾan, especially the Meccan Qurʾan, depicts paradise as a banquet. The inhabitants of paradise are adorned with bracelets and dressed in fine garments (Q 18:31, 22:23, 35:33, 44:53, 76:12.21), and like the guests invited to a feast recline (*ittakaʿa*) on couches (Q 18:31, 36:56, 38:51, 52:20, 55:54.76, 56:15–16, 76:13),<sup>8</sup> attended by eternally youthful cup-bearers (Q 52:24, 56:17–19, 76:19; see also 37:45, 43:71, and 76:15–17).<sup>9</sup> Different kinds of food, especially fruit but also meat and drink, including wine, are available to them in boundless abundance (Q 13:35, 36:57, 37:42, 38:51, 43:73, 44:55,

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*paradeisos tēs tryphēs*. It is conceivable that an epithet like *jannat al-naʿīm* was current for paradise already in pre-Qurʾanic Arabic.

<sup>5</sup> But note that on occasion, Ephrem, too, uses the name Eden in connection with the heavenly paradise (Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, nos 5:5, 9:2, and 11:12).

<sup>6</sup> For shade in paradise, see also Q 4:57, 13:35, 36:56, 56:28–30, 76:14; for the springs of paradise, see also 15:45, 44:52, 51:15, 55:50, 76:6.18, 83:28, and 88:12 (cf. also 56:31).

<sup>7</sup> Neuwirth 2017, 503, translates *zamharīr* as “scorching heat” (see also *ibid.*, 512). Her commentary adduces a footnote by Horovitz that questions whether *zamharīr* really means “cold” (Horovitz 1975, 70, n. 11) and suggests that its original meaning might be the same as Syriac *zahrīrā*, “ray, beam” (see *SL* 368–369). It bears noting, though, that Horovitz himself is considerably more cautious than Neuwirth makes him out to be. Further in support of *zamharīr* = “heat,” Neuwirth references Rev 7:16 (noted in Rudolph 1922, 14, and *BEQ* 458), which says about those allowed to worship before God’s throne that “the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat.” However, the parallel to Q 76:13 that is provided by Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise* 11:2 makes it far less compelling to read the Qurʾanic verse as corresponding to the double negation of excessive heat in Rev 7:16, at the price of discarding the transmitted meaning of *zamharīr*. For a detailed study of the term *zamharīr*, its interpretation in the post-Qurʾanic Islamic tradition, and the chill of hell in Zoroastrian and other literature, see now Bitsch 2020, who endorses the understanding that Q 76:13 refers to heat and cold (Bitsch 2020, 350).

<sup>8</sup> Note the use of *muttakaʿa* for a this-worldly banquet in Q 12:31. On the couches of paradise, see also Q 15:47, 37:44, 56:34, 83:23.35, and 88:13.

<sup>9</sup> Q 13:23 conveys the impression that the inhabitants of paradise are served by angels. Perhaps this is an attempt to clarify that the youthful cup-bearers appearing in chronologically earlier passages are angels. See also Grimme 1895, 160, according to whom the cup-bearing youths “are transformed into angels.”

47:15, 52:19.22, 56:17–21.32–33, 69:23–24, 76:5–6.17–18, 77:42–43, 83:25–28).<sup>10</sup> A Medinan verse, Q 2:25, may be read as a forceful denial of there being any appreciable difference between earthly or pre-eschatological fruit and fruit in the afterlife (Ṭab. 1:408–412): “This is what we have been provided with before,” the believers will exclaim when eating of the fruit of paradise (*qālū hādihā lladhī ruziqnā min qablu*);<sup>11</sup> “it is given to them in an indistinguishable fashion” (*utū bihi mutashābihan*), the verse adds.<sup>12</sup> A number of mostly early Meccan verses furthermore promise the residents of paradise the companionship of attractive maidens (e.g., Q 44:54, 56:22–23; → *ḥūr*), who in later surahs morph into the believers’ pre-eschatological spouses (e.g., Q 43:70; → *azwāj muṭahharah*).

As Horovitz has shown, various aspects and accessories figuring in Qur’anic descriptions of the paradisiacal banquet have close parallels in scenes of secular feasting from early Arabic poetry (Horovitz 1975, 64–72), suggesting a deliberate attempt to surpass and outdo the worldly pleasures evoked by contemporary poets.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, the Qur’an’s recourse to such poetic motifs also develops and amplifies themes present in Christian eschatological discourse. Thus, Syriac texts like Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise*—whose pertinence to the Qur’anic portrayal of paradise was recognised as early as Hubert Grimme (Grimme 1895, 160–161)—similarly employ banquet motifs and repeatedly associate paradise with abundant fruit (e.g., Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, nos 5:15, 6:11–13.15, 7:3.16–18.21.26, 9:4–6; see Andrae 1932, 71–72, and Sinai 2017a, 265). As we saw above, Ephrem also praises the temperate climate of paradise and its freedom of frost and heat, recalling Q 76:13. The notion of paradisiacal feasting figures in Jewish texts as well (Künstlinger 1931, 626–627), and as Künstlinger notes a Talmudic dictum denying that there will be eating, drinking, or procreation in the world to come presupposes that contrary views were not unheard of (*b. Bər. 17a*).

Against the background of the preceding parallels from Syriac literature, it may be proposed that the ostensible insistence that the fruit of paradise is exactly like earthly fruit in Q 2:25 is in conversation with the claim developed in one of Ephrem’s hymns that the food of paradise is “spiritual” and is carried by fragrant breezes (Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 9:7–17), in contrast with corporeal food that ends up as excrement (Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 9:13, opposing *ṭ’ūmā d-pagrānē* and *ṭ’ūmē d-rūḥānīn*; see also *ibid.*, no. 9:23). Towards the end of the same passage, Ephrem suggests that it is actually the vision (*ḥezwā*) of God that will provide the souls with nourishment in paradise (Beck 1957a, no. 9:18.22–29; cf. 1 Cor 13:12), just as Moses was sustained by the vision of God while he sojourned on Mount Sinai (Exod 34:28)—a Biblical antetype that puts to shame those who would “greedily covet” (verb: *etya*“an) the prospect of being supplied with material food in paradise (Beck 1957a, no. 9:22). Another one of Ephrem’s hymns expands further on the spiritual nature of paradise and on the resulting inadequacy—but also inevitability—of describing it in corporeal terms (Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 11:4–8). Accordingly, the

<sup>10</sup> Specifically regarding the statement in Q 47:15 that the rivers of paradise carry water, milk, wine, and honey, see Grimme 1895, 161 (pointing to a passage in Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise* that corresponds to Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 10:6), and Horovitz 1975, 64.

<sup>11</sup> For an alternative interpretation, which al-Ṭabarī labours to refute with great ingenuity, see *KK* 15: the fruits of paradise are so perfect that they are indistinguishable from one another. See also *SQ* 19.

<sup>12</sup> The literal meaning of *mutashābih* is “resembling one another.” However, the assumption that the word can also have the strong sense of indistinguishability is confirmed by Q 2:70, where *tashābaha* ‘alā is “to be indistinguishable to s.o.”

<sup>13</sup> For an entirely unconvincing rejection of Horovitz’s results, see Künstlinger 1931, 631–632.

point of Q 2:25 could be to forestall the worry that the food of paradise is food merely in an allegorically attenuated fashion, i.e., that it is somehow less real than earthly food.<sup>14</sup> This reading of Q 2:25 is consistent with the fact that the Qur'an, unlike Ephrem, does not subscribe to a layered ontology distinguishing a corporeal dimension of being from spiritual or incorporeal existence (see in more detail under → *allāh*, → *al-ghayb*, and → *nafs*). Overall, the Qur'anic paradise is a place of sensory, including erotic, gratification (Wild 2010, 626–627, 630, 642–643), and the God-fearing are promised posthumous enjoyment of everything that their souls or vital selves (singular: → *nafs*) desire (*ishtahā*; Q 21:102, 41:31, 43:71).<sup>15</sup> The contrast between such statements and Ephrem's denial that there will be corporeal desires in paradise (Beck 1957a, no. 9:20–23) is clear, however loquaciously Ephrem otherwise talks of eschatological fruit and banqueting. The Qur'anic paradise is thus emphatically continuous with, and intelligible in terms of, humanity's present state of existence, which features miscellaneous phenomena providing a foretaste of the delights of paradise, such as divinely given “gardens and springs” (Q 26:57.134.147, 44:25; see also 36:34)<sup>16</sup> or shade (Q 16:81). One might counter this assessment with a dictum attributed to Ibn 'Abbās, according to which the only thing that this world and paradise have in common is mere names (*laysa fī l-dunyā shay'un mim mā fī l-jannati illā l-asmā'u*; e.g., Ibn Qutaybah 1973, main text, 80; see also Hoover 2007, 65–66). Yet the Qur'an does not generally endorse such discontinuity, even if Q 32:17 does say that “no one knows” the delights that God holds in store for the pious (Lange 2016a, 2–3).

The pleasures of the Qur'anic paradise must not lead one to overlook that paradise is also, and perhaps most importantly, a place of proximity to and communion with God: according to one passage, the residents of paradise will “look towards” their Lord (Q 75:22–23; on the issue of divine visibility, see also → *allāh*), and elsewhere the eschatologically blessed, or some of them, are called “those brought near” (*al-muqarrabūn*; Q 56:11.88, 83:21.28; see also 3:45), namely, to God. Q 33:44 speaks auspiciously of the day on which the believers will “meet” God (*yawma yalqawnahu*).<sup>17</sup> In its own way, the Qur'an therefore fully endorses Ephrem's expectation that the blessed will be engrossed in a beatific vision of God. Eschatological propinquity to God is likely also conveyed by the frequent promise that the righteous and God-fearing will receive eschatological reward or wages (→ *ajr*) “with” (*inda*) their Lord (Q 2:62.112.262.274.277, 3:15.169.199, 6:127, 8:4, 10:2, 39:34, 42:22, 43:35, 68:34, 98:8; see also 54:55): especially in light of the verses referenced earlier, it stands to reason that such eschatological *'inda* affirmations do not merely specify the source of the believers' heavenly rewards but convey spatial closeness to God. Even the paradisiacal pleasures as such have a relational significance beyond their immanent enjoyability, in so far as they signal divine recognition: the blessed in paradise are said to be “honoured” by God (Q 37:42, 70:35: *mukramūn*; see also 36:27). In general, the status of the residents of paradise is that of respected guests entertained by a divine host who is supremely solicitous to meet their every need. It is on behalf of their divine

14 I am not suggesting that this is necessarily Ephrem's view, as he makes it clear that the soul will only enter paradise together with the body (Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 8:3–11).

15 Cf. also the promise that the blessed are going to be given whatever they “wish” for (Q 16:31, 25:16, 39:34, 42:22, 50:35) or whatever they “request” (Q 36:57, 41:31).

16 Note that Q 44:52 uses the same phrase in the context of paradise.

17 I owe my awareness of this verse to Usman Shaikh. For a threatening prediction of meeting God, see Q 9:77.



host, too, that the blessed are formally and courteously invited to enter paradise in safety (Q 10:10, 13:24, 14:23, 15:46, 16:32, 19:62, 21:103, 25:75, 33:44, 36:58, 39:73, 50:34, 56:26.91; see the parallels listed in *KK* 218).<sup>18</sup> Although at least some verses make it clear that this welcome is uttered by angels (Q 16:32, 39:73; see also 13:23–24 and 21:103), Q 36:58 explicitly specifies that the greeting of salvific safety or security (→ *salām*) is delivered “as a message from a merciful Lord” (*salāmun qawlan min rabbīn raḥīm*). All in all, the various delights and comforts bestowed on the residents of paradise thus have a distinctly interpersonal purport: they are the outward form that is taken by a completed relationship with God.<sup>19</sup>

One may add that the relational aspects of paradise encompass communion between God’s guests themselves: in reclining on their couches, they “face one another” (Q 15:47, 37:44, 44:53, 56:16: *mutaqābilīn*). As one scholar has put it, “in the community of paradise, there is no harsh word or strife” (Wild 2010, 627): in contrast with the bitter arguments that play out among the denizens of hell (→ *jahannam*), God has removed all rancour (*ghill*) from the breasts of the residents of paradise (Q 7:43, 15:47: *wa-naza’nā mā fī ṣudūrihim min ghillīn*), turning them into brothers (Q 15:47).<sup>20</sup> Paradise is not, therefore, a mere aggregation of individual pods of pleasure but a place of joint feasting in the presence of God, predicated on the effacement of all antisocial human emotions towards fellow paradise-dwellers.<sup>21</sup>

**Visual and verbal contact between paradise and hell.** A peculiar feature of the Qur’anic paradise—which two Medinan verses say is as wide as the heavens and the earth (Q 3:133, 57:21; see also Künstlinger 1931, 624–625)—is the fact that at least parts of it appear to adjoin hell (→ *jahannam*) and to be located within earshot of it, allowing the saved and the damned to converse with one another (Q 7:44.50), albeit by “calling out” (*nādā*). Given that the blessed inquire with the damned about how the latter are faring (Q 7:44), one might infer that there is no direct visual contact between heaven and hell, but an early Meccan passage clearly maintains that the occupants of paradise are in fact

18 Paret argues, plausibly, that verses like Q 10:10 speak of the greeting addressed to the blessed rather than of a greeting uttered by them. This is in any case clear regarding Q 15:46 and 50:34.

19 While it is important to acknowledge this interpersonal, communion-centred dimension of the Qur’anic afterlife, I would refrain from describing it as radically transformative in comparison to pre-eschatological human existence. As much of the textual data treated earlier shows, human existence is completed, fulfilled, made whole in paradise (e.g., by the removal of scarcity and by the removal of interhuman aggression, as briefly discussed in what follows), and entering paradise amounts to deliverance from the unspeakable horror of eternal perdition, making the pursuit of paradise insuperably momentous. Yet it is eminently arguable that the Qur’anic vision of the afterlife does not involve the radical remaking of human existence into something else entirely, such as John Hick’s “limitlessly better possibility” (e.g., Hick 1989, 32); the degree of commensurability that obtains between pre-eschatological and eschatological existence is high in the Qur’an. See also Zirker 1993, 92–121, arguing that the Qur’anic teaching is not soteriological in the same sense as Christianity. (In line with what I say in the main text, I would however take issue with Zirker’s incidental claim that the path to be followed by humans according to Islam “is meant to lead to fulfilled communion between humans, not to communion with God”; see Zirker 1993, 110.) But one’s answer to the question of whether the Qur’anic afterlife is transformative or not will undoubtedly depend on how one is inclined to weigh some of the textual evidence. For instance, should one emphasise that even the inhabitants of paradise will continue to have a vital self or → *nafs* and to experience desire (Q 21:102, 41:31, 43:71), or should one rather accentuate a verse that may be read as promising that the vital self will in the afterlife be transmuted into a “soul that is at peace” (Q 89:27, also discussed under → *nafs*)?

20 Although Wild does not cite Q 7:43 and 15:47, they provide much better evidence for his claim than 56:25–26, which he takes to say that the blessed greet one another with the words “peace, peace.” In fact, it seems more likely that this refers to the welcome extended to them according to parallels like Q 15:46, 50:34, and 56:91.

21 Note also Q 59:10, where a subgroup of the believers is portrayed as praying precisely for such removal of rancour towards fellow believers.



able to look straight down into hell (Q 37:51–55; see Gwynne 2002, 415).<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the question in Q 7:44 should therefore be interpreted as sarcasm. But Surah 7 goes on to state that the domains of paradise and hell are separated by a partition (Q 7:46: *ḥijāb*), and Q 57:13 similarly says that the believers and the hypocrites will be separated by a “wall with a gate,” which is here understood to encompass paradise and keep the sinners outside (cf. Q 15:43–44; see also Horovitz 1975, 58–59, and under → *al-rahmān*). Again according to Surah 7, the “heights” (*al-a’rāf*) of the partition between paradise and hell are occupied by “men,” probably angelic guards (*DTEK* 113–114), who in their turn likewise “call out” both to the residents of paradise and of hell (Q 7:46–49).<sup>23</sup> It is not obvious how this image of paradise as a walled and guarded enclosure surrounded by hell is to be reconciled with the image of paradise as an elevated garden on a mountaintop that is implied by other passages (see below) and that may also form the background to Q 37:51–55. However, one should note that other traditions, too, such as Syriac Christian literature, deploy more than one set of images for paradise (Minov 2016).

The Qur’anic assumption that there is a possibility of verbal communication between the inhabitants of paradise and of hell is presumably a variation on the New Testamental parable about the rich man tormented in hell, who looks up to see a pauper called Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham (Luke 16:19–31; see already Rudolph 1922, 15; *DTEK* 114; *CQ* 166; Ahrens 1935, 104). Particularly striking is the fact that both in the Qur’an and in the parable from Luke, the inmates (or inmate) of hell request being cooled by water from paradise (cf. Q 7:50 and Luke 16:24). Like other aspects of the Qur’anic portrayal of paradise, the scene from Luke also figures in Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise* (Beck 1957a, nos 1:12–13 and 7:27).<sup>24</sup> The link is further substantiated by the fact that both the Qur’an (Q 83:34) and Ephrem, in amplifying Luke 16:19–31, hold that the blessed will mock the inmates of hell (Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 1:14).

“Gardens underneath which rivers flow” (*jannāt tajrī min taḥtihā l-anhār*). More than thirty Qur’anic verses promise the righteous access to “gardens underneath which rivers flow,” a formula that is often followed by the tail *khālidīna fihā* or *khālidīna fihā abadan*, “remaining there forever” (→ *khalada*), as in Q 2:25. The garden-river formula makes its appearance already in some Meccan surahs (Q 13:35, 14:23, 16:31, 18:31, 20:76, 25:10; cf. also 29:58 and 39:20)<sup>25</sup> but is particularly frequent in Medinan ones (e.g., Q 2:266,

22 For another possible piece of evidence in favour of direct visual contact, see Q 83:34–35: the believers will mock the repudiators while resting on couches, “looking about” (v. 35: *‘alā l-arā’iki yanẓurūm*; see Gwynne 2002, 415).

23 For a different understanding of the “men” (*rijāl*) stationed on the “heights” (*al-a’rāf*; Q 7:46.48) of this partition wall, see Horovitz 1975, 62, according to whom these form an intermediate category of individuals who merit neither paradise nor damnation. But this is difficult to square with the fact that the men in question “recognise everyone by their sign” (Q 7:46: *ya’rifūna kullān bi-simāhum*), which rather fits the theory that the men on the heights are guardians.

24 According to Luke, there is visual contact between heaven and hell, as in Q 37:54–55, although the rich man only sees Lazarus and Abraham from “far away” (Luke 16:23). Rather than by a partition wall, paradise and hell are here separated by a “great chasm” making it impossible to cross between the two domains (Luke 16:26). Both aspects also figure in Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise* (Beck 1957a, no. 1:12; on visual contact between paradise and hell, see also no. 7:29). Ephrem adds that the chasm also cuts through any affection and empathy that the blessed might otherwise have felt for relatives of theirs who have ended up in hell, so as to preclude that the blessed might be pained by the sight of tormented children, brothers, and relatives (no. 1:13).

25 Q 85:11 also has the formula, but the verse has been convincingly identified as a later insertion (Neuwirth 2007, 223–224). It may well be Medinan (*PP* 342).

3:15.136.195.198, 4:13.57.122, 5:12.85.119, 9:72.89.100).<sup>26</sup> We may take for granted that the phrase does not mean that the rivers of paradise run through underground channels (Ṭab. 1:406–407 and *KK* 14). More likely, the expression bespeaks an understanding of paradise as stretched out along an upwards slope, rising above streams of water further below (*KK* 14–15). In fact, the early Meccan verses Q 69:22 and 88:10 explicitly describe the garden of paradise as being “elevated” (*‘āliyah*; Ahrens 1935, 107), and Adam, Eve, and the devil are told to “descend” or “go down” (*habāṭa*) from paradise (Q 2:36.38, 7:13.24, 20:123). All of this accords with Ephrem’s portrayal of paradise as being located on a lofty mountain (Grimme 1895, 159, n. 11; Reynolds 2010a, 59–60; Reynolds 2018, 33–34; Lange 2016a, 60; see Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 1:4). This image persists in the *Cave of Treasures* (Minov 2016, 147, citing, inter alia, Ri 1987, ch. 3:15). As Sergey Minov notes in a general overview of the motif of paradise as a cosmic mountain in Syriac literature, the idea—which makes it possible to attribute to paradise both terrestrial and celestial aspects (cf. Lange 2016a, 58–59)—is particular to Syriac Christianity and partly draws on Iranian traditions (Minov 2016, 144–155).

An alternative understanding would be to interpret the phrase “gardens underneath with rivers flow” as employing “gardens” metonymically in the sense of the “trees, fruit, and plants” of paradise rather than its “ground,” such that “gardens underneath with rivers flow” is equivalent to “gardens underneath whose trees, fruit, and plants rivers flow” (Ṭab. 1:406). In favour of this understanding, one might marshal Q 2:266 (pointed out in Reynolds 2018, 34), where the formula is applied to earthly gardens, which as such cannot necessarily be presumed to be located on an elevation (note also Q 6:6 and 43:51, which speak of “rivers flowing underneath” humans, such as Pharaoh, in a non-eschatological context). However, it may also be that the three verses in question are simply derivative from the Qur’an’s routine epithet for paradise and are rhetorically intended to endow the earthly gardens in question with a paradisiacal allure.

### ***jāhada* intr./tr. | to contend (against s.o.)**

Further vocabulary discussed: *qātala* tr./intr. | to fight (s.o.) *alladhīna kafarū, al-kāfirūn, al-kuffār* pl. | the repudiators *ashraka* tr. (*bi-*) | to associate s.o. (namely, a partner deity) with s.o. (namely, God), to venerate s.o. as a partner deity *fī sabīl allāh* | on God’s path *āmana* intr. | to be a believer *hājara* intr. | to emigrate *māl* | wealth, possessions *nafs* | person, life *qa’ada* intr. | to remain sitting, to stay home and fail to participate in fighting *zalama* tr. | to injure or harm s.o. or s.th.; to wrong s.o. *akhrāja* tr. | to expel s.o., to drive s.o. out *dīn* | religion, religious worship *al-masjid al-ḥarām* | the sacred place of prostration *ṭahhara* tr. | to purify s.o. or s.th. *najas* | filth *rijs* | filth, impurity, abomination *jizyah* | tributary compensation *‘an yad* | without resistance *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture

**Overview and basic meaning.** The verb *jāhada* and its corresponding noun *jihād* are commonly translated as “to strive” or “to struggle.” Many Medinan occurrences bear out their traditional association with religiously motivated warfare. However, while militancy

<sup>26</sup> Q 9:100 has the variant *tahtahā* instead of *min tahtihā*.

is indeed an important feature of the Medinan surahs (*HCI* 188–192), a diachronically sensitive examination of the Qur’anic employment of *jāhada* shows that the word’s development into an effective synonym of *qātala*, “to fight,” is a secondary development. As argued below, the translation “to contend” is best suited to convey the term’s basic meaning in the Qur’an, which centres on the believers’ readiness to face and overcome opposition to the Qur’anic kerygma, whether by discursive means or, as in the Medinan surahs, by force of arms.<sup>1</sup> This use of Arabic *jāhada* in the sense of confronting religious opposition could be original to the Qur’an, although it is noteworthy that the Qur’anic concept of “contending” has been connected with agonistic and athletic metaphors deployed in ancient Christian texts, such as the idea that ascetics are engaged in struggling and fighting on behalf of Christ (Schmid, forthcoming b, ch. 4). The verb *jāhada* occurs in a poem from the *dīwān* of al-Nābighah, which describes a female onager attempting to outrun a male chasing her: “when she contends against him in running (*idhā jāhadathu l-shadda*), he exerts himself (*jadda*)” (*DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 21:9; see also Bauer 1992, 2:61). Similar to the Qur’an, the word here connotes determined struggle against an opponent of sorts, but the struggle at hand is not a clash of opposing convictions but a male onager’s aggressive pursuit of a potential mate.

**Usage in the Meccan surahs.** The chronologically first Qur’anic occurrences of the verb *jāhada* are in five Meccan verses, Q 25:52, 29:6.8.69, and 31:15.<sup>2</sup> The putatively earliest one of these, Q 25:52, commands the Qur’anic Messenger “not to obey the repudiators” (*fa-lā tuṭī’i l-kāfirīna*; → *kafara*) and to “zealously contend against them by means of it” (*wa-jāhidhum bihi jihādan kabīrā*).<sup>3</sup> The meaning of *jāhada* here is clearly to do with religious or ideological opposition: the Messenger is bidden to confront those who are ungrateful for God’s favours (v. 50) and who serve other beings than God (v. 55). The free-floating, antecedent-less “it” of Q 25:52 (which occurs already in v. 50) refers either to the Qur’anic proclamations or perhaps to the basic message of the surrounding passage, rehearsing sundry aspects of God’s power and beneficence.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the manner in which the Messenger is meant to oppose the repudiators in Q 25:52 is by broadcasting the divine revelations granted to him or by preaching their general message. “Contending” being a discursive act here, the customary translations “to strive against” or even “to struggle against” (e.g., Arberry 1955 or Jones 2007) are not entirely satisfactory.<sup>5</sup>

The same connotation of ideological conflict is unmistakable in Q 29:8 and 31:14–15, too. They form a partial doublet affirming that God has “charged humans to treat their parents well” (Q 29:8: *wa-waṣṣaynā l-insāna bi-wālidayhi ḥusnan*; 31:14 lacks *ḥusnan*), which is then restricted by the proviso that “if they contend against you<sup>s</sup> to make you associate (verb: → *ashraka*) with me something of which you have no knowledge, then do not obey them” (Q 29:8: *wa-in jāhadāka li-tushrika bī mā laysa laka bihi ‘ilmun fa-lā tuṭī’humā*; 31:15 has *‘alā an tushrika*). Here, too, the confrontation implied by *jāhada*

1 See the use of “to contend” in *AEL* 474, where *jāhada* is glossed as “using, or exerting, one’s utmost power, efforts, endeavours, or ability, in contending with an object of disapprobation.”

2 Q 16:110 is a Medinan insertion.

3 For other occurrences of the *lā tuṭī’* command, see Q 68:8 (early Meccan) and 33:1.48 (Medinan).

4 It is not unusual for the Qur’an to use a pronoun without clear antecedent (“it”) to refer to the corpus of revelations received by Muhammad or their general content. See, for instance, Q 36:69, 38:86–87, 53:4, 81:27.

5 In an earlier publication, I endorsed “to struggle” over “to strive” (*HCI* 210, n. 5).

is one between opposing religious stances.<sup>6</sup> Note also that in both verses, like Q 25:52, *jāhada* stands in contrast with *aṭā'a*, “to obey,” and that in all three verses, as in the verse by al-Nābighah quoted above, *jāhada* takes an opponent or a group of opponents as its accusative object (thus also in the Medinan verses Q 9:73 = 66:9). The transitive use of *jāhada*, then, should be treated as basic, resembling other third-form verbs that take an accusative complement, such as *qātala* + acc., “to fight s.o.” or *lāyana* + acc., “to treat s.o. gently” (see Wright 1974, 1:32–34; cf. Larcher 2020, 132). Consequently, *jāhada* does not merely signify an individual expending of effort and exertion, but rather the determined confronting of an antagonist—specifically, in the Qur’an, of an antagonist committed to a conflicting belief system (*HCI* 210, n. 5). The remaining two Meccan occurrences of *jāhada* in Q 29:6 and 29:69 are less informative, although the latter verse is noteworthy for linking the verb with the preposition *fī*, by speaking of *alladhīna jāhadū fīnā*, “those who contend for our [namely, God’s] sake.”<sup>7</sup> As we shall presently see, a similar combination of *jāhada* with *fī* is found in many Medinan verses.

**The Medinan surahs’ shift to militant activism.** The Medinan Qur’an contains far more occurrences of *jāhada* than the Meccan surahs (thirty-one as opposed to five). In many Medinan passages, *jāhada* collocates with the prepositional phrase *fī sabīl allāh*, “on God’s path” (→ *sabīl*). The effective significance of the phrase would seem to be “for God’s cause,” as shown by the use of *fī* followed by a direct reference to God rather than to God’s path in Q 29:69 (see above) and in 22:78 (*jāhidū fī llāhi haqqa jihādihī*, “contend for God’s sake as behoves him”). Medinan verses enjoin the believers to “contend on God’s path” (*jāhada fī sabīl allāh*), laud those who do so, or otherwise imply that “contending” is a crucial aspect of what it means to be a believer (e.g., Q 2:218, 4:95, 5:35.54, 8:72.74, 9:19). The impression that “contending on God’s path” was a core component of the Medinan community’s collective identity, or is at least presented as such by the Qur’an, is particularly strengthened by five Medinan occurrences of the triad “those who believe and emigrate and contend on God’s path” (*alladhīna āmanū wa-hājarū wa-jāhadū fī sabīl llāhi*; see, with occasional minor variants, Q 2:218, 8:72.74.75, 9:20).<sup>8</sup> Other verses also imply a close link between believing and contending on God’s path (see Q 4:95, placing believers who contend above those who “remain sitting,” and 9:19.44.86.88, 49:15, 61:11).

While Meccan verses clearly envisage contending for the sake of God as a discursive activity, there are compelling reasons to suppose that the Medinan concept of “contending on God’s path” hinged on militancy, whose general profile in the Medinan surahs bears considerable similarity to late antique Christian notions of militant piety (*HCI* 192–196). It is true that some Medinan occurrences of the verb *jāhada* do not by themselves necessitate an association with fighting or warfare (see Landau-Tasserón 2003 for a detailed examination). Nonetheless, several considerations support a general construal of the Medinan notion of contending on God’s path as giving pride of place to a readiness to engage in military action. First, some verses employing *jāhada* contain clearly martial language (Landau-Tasserón

6 Cf. Q 46:17–18, where the roles are inverted: an unbelieving child resists parents who urge him to believe in the resurrection. However, this verse does not employ *jāhada*.

7 With regard to the compositional structure of Q 29, it is pertinent to observe that the verb *jāhada* ties together the surah’s opening panel (where it occurs twice, in vv. 6 and 8) and its final verse, v. 69.

8 A much more frequent expression is the dyad *alladhīna āmanū wa-‘amilū l-ṣāliḥāt*, “those who believe and do righteous deeds,” with over fifty occurrences in both Meccan and Medinan surahs (e.g., Q 2:25.82.277, 3:57, 4:57.122.173, 19:96, 38:24.28). The triad of belief, emigration, and contending may build on the link between belief in God and emigration that is implied by the Meccan verse Q 29:26 (on which see *HCI* 180–181).

2003, 36), as illustrated by Q 9:41: “March<sup>p</sup> out, light and heavy, and contend on God’s path by means of your possessions and your lives (*wa-jāhidū bi-amwālikum wa-anfusikum fī sabīli llāhi*).” Similarly, Q 4:95 and 9:86 contrast those who contend and those who “remain sitting” (*al-qā’idūn*; cf. also the use of *maq’ad* in Q 9:81), which further buttresses the understanding that “to contend” is to embark on military campaigns. Moreover, several passages employ *jāhada* in proximity to *qātala*, “to fight” (Q 2:217.218, 3:142.146, 9:14.16, 9:81.83; see also 61:4.11), even if the two never occur in the same verse. In addition, the prepositional complement *fī sabīl allāh*, “on God’s path” (or the variant “on his path”), which is paired with *jāhada* (or the corresponding participle or verbal noun) in a total of fourteen verses, is also very frequently collocated with the verbs *qātala* and *qatala*, “to kill” (see in more detail under → *sabīl* and cf. Larcher 2020, 133–135). Finally, references to those who “contend by means of their possessions and their lives” (*jāhadū bi-amwālihim wa-anfusihim*; Q 4:95, 8:72, 9:20.41.44.81.88, 49:15, 61:11) confirm that to “contend” was to put oneself at considerable risk.<sup>9</sup>

The reconfigured semantics of *jāhada* in the Medinan surahs reflect the Medinan Qur’an’s distinctive shift to a more activist understanding of the believers’ role in the world. Rather than being expected to await God’s intervention while bearing testimony to his supremacy and oneness, the believers are now charged with the role of enacting God’s punishment of those who repudiate him, such that God’s triumph over the repudiators would arrive “at the hands” of the believers (Q 9:14: *bi-aydikum*; HCI 181, 188–189; see also Durie 2018, 58–59, who additionally references Q 2:251). This seminal shift in Qur’anic theology, it is worth noting, is explicitly acknowledged in Q 4:77: the believers were initially commanded to “restrain” their “hands” (*kuffū aydiyakum*), and only at a subsequent point in time “was fighting imposed on them” (*kutiba ‘alayhimu l-qitālu*).<sup>10</sup> It is true that the final verse of the early Meccan surah Q 26 contains a passing reference to militant self-help when it speaks of those who “believe, do righteous deeds, invoke God much, and help themselves after having been wronged (*wa-ntaşarū min ba’di mā ḡulimū*)” (Q 26:227), yet this verse is likely a Medinan addition (Neuwirth 2010, 721–722, and PP 431–432). The activist stance just described is therefore distinctly Medinan.

**Further reflections on the Medinan employment of *jāhada*.** The expression *qātala fī sabīl allāh* (“to fight on God’s path”) occurs approximately as frequently as *jāhada fī sabīl allāh* in the Qur’an (about a dozen times).<sup>11</sup> Why does the Qur’an not give consistent preference to the former phrase, seeing that it signifies fighting and warfare in a much more unequivocal fashion? A plausible answer is to conjecture a deliberate concern to present Medinan militancy as standing in substantial continuity to the non-militant contending of the Meccan period. As we just saw, the Qur’an itself acknowledges that the Medinan prescription of fighting was an innovation. At the same time, the Medinan proclamations display efforts to soften some of the doctrinal discontinuities that arose after the hijrah, by

<sup>9</sup> For a poetic parallel to the frequent *bi-amwālihim wa-anfusihim*, see DSAAP, Zuhayr, no. 20:2 (quoted in AHW 142–143), declaring that people’s “lives and possessions” (*nufūsuhum wa-amwāluhum*) must fade.

<sup>10</sup> For a very different understanding of Qur’anic militancy, attributing its scriptural expressions to post-prophetic warriors whose outlook was at odds with the eschatological piety of Muhammad and his original followers, see Pohlmann 2018.

<sup>11</sup> The tally is slightly complicated by cases in which *qātala* and *fī sabīl allāh* occur in close proximity and in the same thematic context but without the prepositional phrase standing in an unequivocal grammatical link to the verb (see Q 3:146.195).



couching novel ideas in established Meccan language (see the example in Marshall 1999, 134–137). The Medinan recourse to the notion of contending may be seen as serving the same goal: the newly prescribed duty of religious militancy, rather than being presented as a fundamental innovation, is cast as merely constituting the circumstantially appropriate manner of living up to earlier calls for the uncompromising confrontation of religious opposition. A second consideration is that *jāhada*, given its broader semantic load, is arguably “more suited than *qātala* to playing the role of what one may call a virtue term—that is, a term that does not just descriptively specify a certain behaviour, such as *qātala*, but also implies that the behaviour in question is exemplary and paradigmatic” (*HCI* 191).

Both of the preceding considerations render it unsurprising that the Medinan surahs, despite their tendency to use *jāhada* in martial contexts, retain traces of a more general notion of “contending” that is not specifically confined to warfare but consists in the confrontational upholding of Qur’anic doctrine in general. This is most clearly the case in Q 22:78, urging the addressees to “contend for God’s sake as behoves him” (*wa-jāhidū fī llāhi ḥaqqa jihādihī*). As has been noted, the passage exhibits no contextual indications pointing to fighting and warfare (Landau-Tasserone 2003, 38).

**The principal objective of Medinan militancy: a monotheistic purging of the Meccan sanctuary.** What are the concrete aims that the Medinan believers’ militant activism is supposed to realise? Some passages adopt a language of self-defense and just retribution: the believers have been “wronged” (verb: → *zālama*) by having been unjustly expelled (verb: *akhraja*) from their homes merely on account of their faithful monotheism, and God will now aid them against their unbelieving foes (Q 22:38–40, 60:1). Q 4:75 summons the Qur’anic addressees to fight on behalf of oppressed believers who are pleading with God to liberate them from a “town whose inhabitants are wrongdoers” (*alladhīna yaqūlūna rabbanā akhrijnā min hādhihi l-qaryati l-ẓālimi ahlukhā*) and who are praying for God to send them protection (see also under → *istad’afa*). In this apparent allusion to believers who had remained behind in Mecca, militancy is framed in terms of a sort of humanitarian intervention on behalf of those who are being oppressed and harassed on account of their faith (cf. Q 34:33, briefly discussed under → *istad’afa*). Other passages, by contrast, give more straightforwardly religious and specifically cultic reasons for militancy, by suggesting that the associators or repudiators are to be fought until they convert to the Qur’anic religion (Q 9:5; see also below) or until “all religious worship (→ *dīn*<sup>2</sup>) is directed at God” (Q 8:39: *wa-yakūna l-dīnu kulluhu li-llāhi*; similarly 2:193).<sup>12</sup> At the other end of the spectrum, one Medinan verse, Q 47:4, is strikingly silent on any ambition of rooting out polytheism by force of arms and seems to aim merely for a decisive military defeat of the repudiators, after which any prisoners of war may apparently be released without being required to change their beliefs or cultic behaviour (see *HCI* 190 and also under → *balā*).

Is the demand that the believers are to fight until “all religious worship” is directed at God tantamount to calling for a global military campaign against polytheism, wherever it may rear its head? Despite the overt universalism of the phrase, it is questionable whether the Qur’an is looking much beyond the localised aim of imposing a monotheistic reform on the Meccan sanctuary. After all, one of the two verses setting out the objective of ensuring

<sup>12</sup> In both Q 2:193 and 8:39, the phrase “until ± <all> religious worship is directed at God” is preceded by *ḥattā lā takūna fitnatun*, “until there is no more affliction”; see in more detail under → *balā*, towards the end. On the assertion that there is “no compulsion in religion” (*lā ikrāha fī l-dīni*) in Q 2:256 that may be felt to conflict with 2:193, 8:39, and 9:5, see *QP* 351–421.



that worship be directed at God alone, Q 2:193, is preceded by an appeal to the believers to “expel” their unbelieving foes “from where they have expelled you<sup>p</sup>” (Q 2:191: *akhrijūhum min haythu akhrajūkum*). This is best read as calling for a takeover of the Meccan sanctuary, the “sacred place of prostration” (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*; see under → *ḥarrama*), which is mentioned immediately afterwards in the same verse and to which the believers are repeatedly said to have been denied access (Q 2:217, 5:2, 22:25, 8:34, 48:25). Regarding the other of the two verses about ensuring universal worship of God alone, Q 8:39, too, it is clear that the specific opponents to be fought are “the repudiators” (*alladhīna kafarū*), who are mentioned immediately before in v. 38 and who are generally quite a specific group in the Qur’an, namely, the pagan inhabitants of Mecca who had previously ousted the Qur’anic believers (see under → *kafara*). Finally, the notion that the believers are bidden to engage in a global monotheistic campaign would seem to be explicitly disavowed by a verse towards the end of Surah 9, which calls upon the believers to “fight those of the repudiators who are near you” (Q 9:123: *qātilū lladhīna yalūnakum mina l-kuffāri*).

The Qur’anic corpus documents that the goal of conquering the “sacred place of prostration” was eventually realised: according to Q 9:17–19.28 (on which see under → *‘amara* and also → *ṭahara*), the Qur’anic believers’ “associating” or “repudiating” opponents are divested from control over the “sacred place of prostration” and are henceforth forbidden to approach it. In implementing this commandment, the Qur’anic believers led by Muhammad can be seen as re-enacting God’s commandment to Abraham to ensure the purity (verb: *ṭahhara*) of God’s “house” (→ *bayt*), as recounted in Q 2:125 and 22:26 (see under → *ṭahara*). This nexus is further tightened by the fact that Q 9:28 justifies the ban on associators approaching the sacred place of prostration by saying that they are “filth” (*najas*), while 5:90 and 22:30 inveigh against the “impurity” (*rijs*; see under → *rijz*) of pagan ritual; the metaphorical evocation of impurity here complements the use of *ṭahhara*, “to purify,” in Q 2:125 and 22:26.

Now, given the predominant preoccupation with the Meccan sanctuary that emerges from the preceding material, it is by no means improbable that the contextually primary point of Q 2:193 and 8:39’s call for religious worship (*dīn*), or for all religious worship, to be directed at God is to urge a monotheistic purge specifically of the Ka’bah cult rather than to mandate a global monotheistic campaign.<sup>13</sup> One way of rationalising the explicitly universal language employed especially in Q 8:39 (*wa-yakūna l-dīnu kulluhu li-llāhi*) would be to speculate that the Qur’anic addressees were well aware that the Meccan sanctuary was an archaic polytheistic island holding out against a regional environment in which different forms of monotheism were increasingly the norm. A monotheistic purge of the Meccan sanctuary may therefore have been understood to be a crucial final push in ensuring a global dominance of at least a nominal kind of monotheism in the Qur’an’s wider world (even if the Qur’an’s repeated criticism of Jews and Christian makes it clear that Muhammad and his followers were quite dissatisfied with certain contemporary manifestations of monotheism).

<sup>13</sup> This particularising way is how Q 2:193 and 8:39 are understood in Abdel Haleem 2010, 21–22 and 112. Abdel Haleem provides virtually no argument for this interpretation and I have accordingly criticised it in *HCI* 210, n. 10. However, in light of the material surveyed in the main text I would now consider his reading of the two verses under discussion to be much more defensible. Still, I continue to hold that it is inaccurate to deny that some Qur’anic passages do envisage conversion by force of arms (against Abdel Haleem 1999, 61).

The preceding discussion also shows that the Medinan shift to militant activism cannot be regarded as equivalent to an ideology of substantial territorial conquest (see Firestone 2015 and under → *ard*). That Mecca was to be seized and that worship at God’s “house” there was to be reformed by force is clear enough; but there is little Qur’anic evidence for any territorial claims beyond this, apart from a fairly obscure allusion in Q 33:27 that promises the Qur’anic believers possession of “land” or “a land” that “you<sup>P</sup> have not yet trodden” (see in more detail the final section under → *ard*). In particular, there is no explicit Qur’anic warrant for a program of conquest of the Holy Land and of further regions outside the Arabian Peninsula, that is, for the campaigns into Byzantine and Sasanian territories that put the early Muslims in control of large swathes of the Middle East within a decade of Muhammad’s death. This fact remains a significant challenge for any attempt to date substantial parts of the Qur’an to the age of the Arab conquests (Sinai 2014, 515–516). There is, however, one verse in a Medinan surah, Q 9:29, that does foreshadow the tribute-based structure of the early post-Qur’anic Arab state, made up of an elite of tribal warriors who extracted taxes from a subject population comprising large numbers of fellow monotheists. This verse therefore merits a closer look in the next and final section of the entry.

**Q 9:29 and the injunction to exact tribute (*jizyah*) from subjugated scripture-owners.** According to Q 9:29, the Qur’anic addressees are to fight (verb: *qātala*) “those who do not believe in God and in the final day, do not deem forbidden what God and his Messenger have declared to be forbidden, and do not adhere to the true religion, from among those who were given the scripture (*mina lladhīna ūtū l-kitāba*), until they humbly give tributary compensation (*al-jizyah*) without resistance (*‘an yadin*).”<sup>14</sup> “Those who were given the scripture” must be equivalent to the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*), a standard Medinan periphrasis for Jews and Christians. Presumably, defeated Jews and Christians whose beliefs and practices were deemed objectionable in light of Qur’anic teachings were expected to pay tribute in return for their lives and possessions being spared and for not being restricted in their religious beliefs and practices in line with Qur’anic norms. In this regard, the treatment of unbelieving Jews and Christians that is mandated by Q 9:29 differs quite markedly from that of the pagan associators, who according to 9:5 will only remain unmolested if they repent, perform prayer, and give the *zakāh*—effectively a metonymy for full conversion to the Qur’anic religion. The verses following Q 9:29, vv. 30–33, then provide further detail about the allegedly unacceptable Jewish and Christian doctrines and institutions that motivate the verdict of unbelief in v. 29, such as the accusation that Christians illicitly deify Jesus (see further under → *ashraka*, → *al-naṣārā*, and → *al-yahūd*).

Q 9:29 follows in a somewhat abrupt manner on the ban on any pagan presence in Mecca in the preceding verse (Q 9:28), and some scholars have surmised the present

14 The enigmatic expression *hattā yu’ṭū l-jizyata ‘an yadin wa-hum ṣāghirūn* has attracted much scholarly attention. See the digest of older scholarship in KK 199–200 as well as Bravmann 1972, 199–212, and Rubin 2006. My own rendering of *‘an yadin* is informed by the poetic data that Rubin has collected. Bravmann argues for the translation “until they give the reward due for a benefaction (since their lives are spared), while they are ignominious (namely, *for not having fought unto death*)” (Bravmann 1972, 199; italics in the original). As for *jizyah*, Jeffery proposes to derive it from Aramaic *gzītā* (FVQ 101–102), which is attested both in Syriac and in Jewish Babylonian Aramaic in the sense of “tax, tribute” (SL 225 and DJBA 275). Pahlavi has *gztyk’/gazīdag* (MacKenzie 1971, 36). Whatever the ultimate provenance, it is likely that Qur’anic *jizyah* would at least in part have been governed by the sense of compensation that generally adheres to the Arabic root *j-z-y*. My rendering “tributary compensation” aims to capture this interplay.

wording of 9:29 to be the result of secondary revision (e.g., Bell 1937, 1:171 and 1:177; see the overview in *KK* 199). Bell nonetheless places the verse in the context of Muhammad's career. This is certainly not implausible. After all, post-Qur'anic Islamic sources report that Muhammad himself led an expedition against the Jewish oasis of Khaybar and that he permitted its inhabitants to remain on the land in return for tributary payments (Veccia Vaglieri 1978 and Munt 2021). Muhammad is also reported to have sent or led campaigns against Mu'tah and Tabūk in northwestern Arabia, bringing him into direct conflict with Byzantine forces (e.g., Buhl 1993; Blair 2000; Hoyland 2015, 38, 39). While it is no concern of the present discussion to determine the historical accuracy of these accounts, there is certainly nothing generally unlikely or anachronistic about them, and such expansionist probings northwards would have continued earlier cases of Arab raiding inside Byzantine territory (Hoyland 2015, 41). All of this would provide a reasonable context for Q 9:29 during the lifetime of Muhammad.

At the same time, it is undeniable that Q 9:29 resonates in an unusually clear fashion with what one may assume to have been an overriding concern of the post-Qur'anic Arab conquerors, namely, to justify why they deserved to rule over and be funded by a subject population encompassing many Christians and Jews, whose status as legitimate targets of warfare was not necessarily entailed by Medinan injunctions to fight the pagan associators. The answer that Q 9:29 provides is that many Jews and Christians do not in fact qualify as properly believing in God, rendering it justifiable to combat them like the associators or repudiators discussed in preceding verses of Surah 9. But Q 9:29 also intimates that vis-à-vis Jews and Christians, unlike vis-à-vis the associators, it is not the Qur'anic believers' responsibility to ensure full conformity with Qur'anic norms and that tributary subjugation, rather than full conversion, is sufficient. Thus, Q 9:29 is the rare case of a Qur'anic statement that may be viewed as addressing, in a relatively straightforward manner, what must have been a pressing concern of the conquest period. Scholars prepared to entertain the hypothesis of conquest-age additions to the Islamic scripture may accordingly find it attractive to posit that the current shape of Q 9:29 is a result of post-prophetic insertion or at least revision.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, in line with what was said above, there is no compelling reason to suppose that Q 9:29 could not date to the lifetime of Muhammad. The verse does not, for instance, stand out from the rest of the Qur'an on terminological grounds; the fact that it envisages the existence of scripture-owners who do not live up to Qur'anic standards of proper belief is paralleled by other Medinan passages that mention repudiating scripturalists (Q 2:105, 59:2.11, and 98:1.6; see also under → *kafara*).

Overall, what is most important about Q 9:29 and also 33:27 (discussed under → *ard*) is the fact that these two verses highlight all the more starkly the absence of further material in the Qur'an confirming that the Medinan call for militant "contending on God's path" aimed at a program of substantial conquest beyond the Meccan sanctuary, and in particular at expansion into the Holy Land (see also n. 27 under → *ard*). Hence, the Arab conquerors' project of subjugating and exacting tribute from an agriculturalist monotheistic population of the sort encountered in Byzantine Palestine, while resonant with Q 9:29 and 33:27, has only a weak scriptural foundation. It is, moreover, hardly in strict accordance with the appeal in Q 9:123, quoted above, that the believers are to "fight those of the repudiators

<sup>15</sup> The entry on → *bayyana* explores the hypothesis that Q 3:7 may be a post-prophetic addition, but limits itself to dating it within the first decade or so of Muhammad's demise.

who are near you” (*qātilū lladhīna yalūnakum mina l-kuffāri*)—an injunction that, tellingly, did not engender a later insertion attempting to neutralise or qualify it in accordance with later developments, a technique that is by no means absent from the Qur’an (see Sinai 2018b and Sinai 2021). Of course, conquest movements do not need scriptural support to get going; but had the Qur’an remained in a significant state of textual flux well into the conquest period, one would certainly have expected it to elaborate quite a bit more on the Muslims’ entitlement to Byzantine territory and on the struggles and surprisingly swift triumphs involved in conquering it. In any case, the preceding discussion makes it clear that even after the Medinan surahs introduced a militant notion of “contending on God’s path,” expansion to the north did not form a major plank of Muhammad’s prophetic message (as opposed to a contingent opportunity that temptingly presented itself in view of Byzantine disarray due to Heraclius’s protracted war against the Sasanians).

## *jahannam* | hell

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *dīn* | judgement *nār* | fire, hell-fire *jaḥīm* | blaze *sa‘īr* | blaze *saqar* | the scorching *ṣaliya* tr. | to roast in s.th. *waqūd* | fuel *wajh* | face

**The Qur’anic nomenclature for hell.** On the day of God’s eschatological judgement (→ *dīn*<sup>1</sup>), the resurrected will either be rewarded with the perpetual delights of paradise or punished with eternal torment (see under → *ajr*, → *jannah*, → *khalada*, → *adhhaba*). Similar to the Jewish and Christian traditions, the Qur’an’s prevalent terminology for damnation is related to fire and combustion (see generally O’Shaughnessy 1961 and Gwynne 2002). Thus, from the early Meccan to the Medinan period, well over a hundred Qu’anic verses speak of the “fire” (*nār*) of hell (e.g., Q 2:24.39.80 etc., 3:10.16.24 etc., 87:12, 90:20, 92:14, 101:11, 104:6).<sup>1</sup> A smaller number of passages mention the “blaze” of hell, corresponding to the Arabic words *jaḥīm* (e.g., Q 2:119, 5:10.86, 26:91, 81:12, 82:14, 83:16, 102:6; see O’Shaughnessy 1961, 451–455, though with a highly speculative etymology) and *sa‘īr* (e.g., Q 4:10.55, 67:5.10–11, 76:4, 84:12; O’Shaughnessy 1961, 455–457),<sup>2</sup> or, in the Medinan surahs, to “the punishment of burning” (*adhāb al-ḥarīq*; e.g., Q 3:181; see also under → *adhhaba*). Apart from these and other pyromorphous designations of hell, such as *saqar*, “the scorching” (Q 54:48, 74:26.27.42),<sup>3</sup> hell is in seventy-six cases—again encompassing all periods of the Qur’an’s genesis—called *jahannam*, a noun treated as feminine (e.g., Q 2:206, 3:12.162.197, 50:30, 52:13, 55:43, 72:15.23, 78:21, 85:10, 89:23).<sup>4</sup>

1 Use of the word *nār* to refer to an ordinary fire is rare but not absent from the Qur’anic corpus (e.g., Q 2:17, 3:183, 5:64, 20:10), but most of its Qur’anic occurrences refer to the fire of hell.

2 For an exceptional case in which *al-jaḥīm* is not applied to the fire of hell but rather to the pyre on which Abraham’s opponents seek to burn him, see Q 37:97. It is possible that the word underlines the hybris of Abraham’s foes, who arrogate to themselves the right to inflict a punishment that ought to be a divine prerogative.

3 Unlike *al-nār*, *al-jaḥīm*, and *al-sa‘īr*, none of the four occurrences of *saqar* has the definite article. This, and probably also the fact that Q 74:28–30 treat it as feminine, which is unusual for a verbal noun of the morphological pattern *fa‘alun* (e.g., ‘amal, harab, ṭalab), endow *saqar* with the character of an enigmatic proper name.

4 O’Shaughnessy 1961, 457–458, posits that occurrences of *jahannam* in early Meccan surahs are all later interpolations, relying in part on Bell, but this claim is very doubtful. I cannot, for instance, see any justification for considering Q 52:13 or 55:43 secondary insertions.

As recognised by various scholars (FVQ 105–106), *jahannam* goes back to Hebrew *gê/gê' hinnôm*, “the Valley of Hinnom.” The expression is contracted into *gehinnam* in rabbinic Hebrew and also Aramaic (e.g., DJBA 278), while Syriac has *gehannā/gehannā* (SL 229) and Classical Ethiopic *gahannam* or *gāhannam* (Leslau 1991, 186). The “Valley of Hinnom” or “Valley of the Son/Sons of Hinnom” (e.g., 2 Kgs 23:10) was originally a site of human sacrifice in Jerusalem, which apocalyptic texts and in their wake the New Testament (e.g., Matt 5:22.29–30, 10:28, 18:9, 23:15.33; Mark 9:43–47) transformed into a standard name for the place of the sinners’ eschatological torment (see generally TDNT 1:657–658). While the Syriac and also the Greek form *geenna* lack the final *m* appearing in Arabic *jahannam*, this does not apply to the Ethiopic form *gahannam*, which may accordingly well have been the immediate ancestor of the Arabic word (NB 47; FVQ 106). The genitive construct *nār jahannam*, “the fire of hell,” which appears several times in Surah 9 (9:35.63.68.81.109) and in a few other places (Q 35:36, 52:13, 72:23, 98:6), parallels a similar combination of both nouns in the New Testament (Matt 5:22 and 18:9: *eis tēn geenan tou pyros*, “into the Gehenna of fire”) and the Talmud (*b. B. Māṣ. 85a: nura d-gehinnam*, “the fire of Gehenna”). Given the repeated concatenation of *nār* and *jahannam* (cf. also Q 40:49), it can probably be assumed that Arabic *jahannam* connoted a place of eternal torment in which fire plays a paramount role. If that is so, then the word *jahannam*, too, forms part of the Qur’an’s predominantly pyromorphous nomenclature for hell.

**Some aspects of hell in the Qur’an.** As the terminology just reviewed indicates, combustion and conflagration are prominent and vivid features of the Qur’anic portrayal of damnation, a state of affairs well exemplified already by the description of the flames of hell engulfing the sinners in the early Meccan passage Q 104:4–9. The details given are consistently gruesome: the evildoers will perpetually “roast in” (*ṣaliya* + acc., never in the suffix conjugation) hell-fire (e.g., Q 4:10, 14:29, 17:18, 36:64, 37:163, 92:15, 111:3),<sup>5</sup> they will form its “fuel” (*waqūd*; Q 2:24, 3:10, 66:6, 85:5), and “whenever their skins are cooked we will give them other skins” (Q 4:56). Hell is thus envisaged as a process of total annihilation that never attains its natural consummation and is instead perpetually prolonged: the denizens of hell “will not be finished off and die” (35:36), despite begging to be disposed of for good (Q 43:77; cf. 69:27), and they will “neither die in it [namely, in hell] nor live” (Q 20:74, 87:13).

Continuing on from scenes of eschatological judgement that describe the blackened, dismal, or disgraced faces (singular: *wajh*) of the condemned on the day of resurrection (e.g., Q 3:106, 17:97, 39:60, 67:27, 75:24, 80:40, 88:2; see also the remarks on God’s face under → *allāh*), faces are a particular focus of torment in hell: the convicts’ faces will be thrown headlong into the fire (Q 27:90), they will be dragged through the fire on their faces (Q 54:48), their faces will be turned over in the fire (Q 33:66), the fire scorching the sinners’ faces will cause them to bare their teeth in a tortured grin (Q 23:104), and when the wrongdoers call out for help their faces will be scalded with boiling water “like molten brass” (Q 18:29).<sup>6</sup> Apart from the pain involved, disfigurement of the face in hell encapsulates the sinners’ utter humiliation (see similarly O’Shaughnessy 1961, 459–460). This contrasts with the honours that are bestowed on the blessed (e.g., Q 37:42; see also

<sup>5</sup> See also the ditransitive derivatives from the same root, *ṣallā* and *aṣlā* + acc. + acc., “to roast s.o. in s.th.,” in Q 69:31 and in 4:30.56.115, 74:26.

<sup>6</sup> See additionally Q 25:34.

under → *jannah*), whose faces emanate “the radiance of bliss” (Q 83:24: *taʿrifu fī wujūhihim naḍrata l-naʿīm*) and are covered “neither by dust nor humiliation” (Q 10:26).

The manifold horrors of the Qurʾanic hell (on which see in more detail Gwynne 2002) also include other types of torment besides burning. Apart from chains and fetters (Q 13:5, 14:49, 34:33, 36:8, 40:71, 73:12, 76:4) and shirts of pitch (Q 14:50; see *FVQ* 241–242), culinary tortures stand out: those convicted to hell will be forced to fill their bellies with the fruit of the nightmarish → *zaqqūm* or “ingurgitation” tree (Q 37:62–66, 44:43–46, 56:52–53) and to drink scalding water (Q 6:70, 10:4, 37:67, 38:57, 47:15, 56:54). This depiction of hell in the form of a macabre banquet—perhaps an echo of Zoroastrian eschatology (Bitsch, forthcoming)—inverts the situation in paradise, which is frequently portrayed as a divinely sponsored feast to which the blessed are invited as esteemed guests (→ *jannah*). Hell also has a social, or more properly antisocial, aspect, in so far as its terrors will erase all interpersonal solidarity: whereas the blessed in paradise will be fraternally devoid of any rancour (Q 7:43, 15:47; → *jannah*), the inmates of hell will curse, blame, and quarrel with one another and call down even harsher punishment on their fellow convicts (Q 7:38–39, 26:96, 29:25, 33:67–68, 38:61, 40:47, 41:29; see Gwynne 2002, 416). The inverse symmetry that is generally detectable between the Qurʾanic portrayals of paradise and hell (Gwynne 2002, 417) is thrown into particular relief in some early Meccan passages like Q 56:30.43–44 and 77:30–33.41, which juxtapose the refreshing shade of paradise with the shade of hell, terrifying and affording no protection against the flames, and 88:5.12, contrasting the “boiling hot spring” from which those sentenced to damnation are given to drink with the “flowing spring” of paradise.

***ajāba* tr./ditr. | to respond to s.o.; to reply s.th. to s.o.**

***istajāba* intr. *li-* | to respond to s.o.**

***istajāba* intr. *bi-* | to respond by doing or saying s.th.**

→ *allāh*, → *al-rahmān*

***tajāwaza* intr. *ʿan* | to overlook s.th.**

→ *kaffara*



# h

***aḥabba* tr. | to love s.o. or s.th.**

***aḥibbā'* pl. | beloved ones**

→ *allāh*, → *al-rahmān*

***aḥbār* pl. | rabbinic scholars**

→ *al-yahūd*

***ḥijāb* | partition, screen**

→ *jannah*

***ḥajja* tr. | to perform the pilgrimage to somewhere**

***ḥajj*, *ḥijj* | pilgrimage**

Further vocabulary discussed: *ḥaram* | inviolable or sacred precinct *afāḍa* intr. | to pour forth *'umrah* | cultic visit (of the Ka'bah) *manfa'* | benefit *al-mash'ar al-ḥarām* | the sacred place of ritual *i'tamara* tr. or intr. | to undertake a cultic visit to somewhere (namely, to the Ka'bah); to perform the *'umrah* *taṭawwafa* intr. *bi-* | to circumambulate s.th. *bayt* | house

The pre-Islamic *ḥajj* as described in extra-Qur'anic sources. Pilgrimage rites are attested in some Safaitic inscriptions, which employ the verb *ḥgg* (corresponding to Arabic *ḥajja*) in the sense of “to perform a pilgrimage” and the noun *ḥg* for “pilgrimage” (cf. Arabic *ḥajj*; see Al-Jallad 2015a, 322, and Al-Jallad 2022, 41–44). The verb *ḥgg* is also found, in the same sense, in Dadanitic (e.g., Hidalgo-Chacón Díez 2016, 73 and 76). Sabaic, too, has the verb *ḥgg*, “to perform a pilgrimage,” and the corresponding noun (Beeston et al. 1982, 66; Maraqtan 2021, 434). Ceremonial visits to sanctuaries—perhaps undertaken at times of seasonal change (Al-Jallad 2022, 42–43)—thus formed part of the range of religious ceremonies known and performed in the Qur'an's Arabian environment. A mainly Aramaic inscription in Nabataeo-Arabic script, UJadhNab 538, is dated to Passover (*ḥg'l-ptyr*) of the year corresponding to 303 CE (Nehmé 2018, 185–186); the Arabic phrase *ḥg'l-ptyr* shows that Arabic *ḥajj* (or *ḥijj*), though not a loanword, could also be used as an equivalent of Hebrew *ḥag*, “festival.”

For more concrete insights into the *ḥajj* ritual presupposed by the Qur'an, we are largely dependent on extra-Qur'anic traditions relayed by Muslim authors rather than being able to rely on archaeological data. Muslim sources describe the *ḥajj* as an annual transtribal

pilgrimage festival held outside Mecca. Beginning on the ninth day of the month of Dhū l-Ḥijjah, it revolved around a type of procession departing from the plain of Mount ‘Arafah or ‘Arafāt (Rubin 2009a; Chabbi 2020, 358–360), located to the east of Mecca outside the sacred precinct or *ḥaram* (see under → *ḥarrama*), and leading via al-Muzdalifah to Minā (RAH 79–84; Wensinck et al. 1971; Chabbi 2020, 357–371; Ammann 2001, 21–25). Subsequent to a ritual “standing” (*wuqūf*) on the plateau of ‘Arafah until sunset, pilgrims embarked on a downhill “run” or “pouring forth” (*ifāḍah*) to al-Muzdalifah. At sunrise, following a further *wuqūf*, celebrants continued on another *ifāḍah* to Minā, where they performed a stone-throwing ritual and animal sacrifices. After having their heads shaven, participants in the *ḥajj* re-entered profane life and spent the following days feasting at Minā.

With minor modifications, the basic structure of the pre-Islamic *ḥajj* was taken over by Islam. Yet despite such continuity at the level of ritual behaviour, the original pagan significance of the *ḥajj* rituals is not clearly stated by Islamic sources. We are consequently reduced to etiological speculation. The most plausible conjecture is that the *ḥajj*, which may originally have been held in the early autumn (RAH 94–101), marked the end of the summer season and served to anticipate or ensure hibernal rainfall. Broadly seasonal understandings of the *ḥajj* are already current in older scholarship, such as the proposal that the initial *ifāḍah* from ‘Arafah constituted a “persecution of the dying sun” while the vigil at al-Mudalifah was meant to call forth the thunder-god Quzaḥ, who may have been believed to reside atop a nearby mountain by the same name (Wensinck et al. 1971, 32). The most compelling attempt at reconstructing the erstwhile significance of the *ḥajj* as a “ritual of demanding rainfall” (Chabbi 2020, 358) is Jacqueline Chabbi’s. She proposes that the *wuqūf*, an act of self-exposure to the searing sun, aimed to propitiate the sun-goddess to permit abundant precipitation, while the double *ifāḍah* from ‘Arafah and then from al-Muzdalifah, leading down a canyon, was an anticipatory imitation of the hoped-for floods (see Chabbi 2020, 361–365). As she notes, the root *f-y-d*, underlying the noun *ifāḍah*, is associated with flooding and spilling over.

According to Wellhausen, the pre-Qur’anic *ḥajj* did not involve Mecca or the Ka’bah sanctuary (RAH 79–84, restated in Crone 1987, 172–176; see also Chabbi 2020, 364 and 368): even though the Islamic *ḥajj* begins in Mecca and includes a final circumambulation of the Ka’bah after the sacrifice at Minā, both visits to the Meccan sanctuary may well have been “added to an originally independent ritual” (Crone 1987, 174). Wellhausen considers these secondary supplements of the original *ḥajj* ritual, designed to make the *ḥajj* “an appendix to the cult of the Ka’bah” (RAH 83), to be Islamic. Qur’anic statements linking the *ḥajj* and the Ka’bah will be considered in the next section; but it may be noted here that a pre-Islamic drift towards linking the *ḥajj* with the Meccan sanctuary is already manifest in extra-Qur’anic reports about a tribal association known as the *ḥums*, who included Quraysh. Apart from adhering to distinctive taboos while in the state of ritual consecration that pilgrims were required to observe during the *ḥajj*, the *ḥums*—unlike other tribes known as *ḥillah*—remained inside the Meccan *ḥaram* during the *ḥajj* and boycotted the *wuqūf* of ‘Arafāt, instead performing it at al-Muzdalifah (Ammann 2001, 23–25; see also RAH 85–86; Kister 1965, 131–141; Rubin 1982, 255–256; Rubin 1986, 125–127). Such reports suggest that a tendency to sideline ‘Arafāt in the interest of augmenting the religious prestige of the Meccan *ḥaram* was already present prior to the Qur’an.

Besides the *ḥajj*, there was also a pilgrimage ritual proper to the Meccan “house,” namely the *‘umrah*, literally a ritual “visit” to, or “stay” at, the Ka’bah (see below and

under → ‘*amara*). Mostly based on early Islamic testimonies, Wellhausen maintains that the pre-Islamic *‘umrah* pilgrimage was chiefly associated with the month of Rajab, the principal sacred month of the ancient Arabian (or Meccan) calendar (*RAH* 78–79, 84, 98–100).

**The Qur’anic data.** The Qur’an unequivocally associates the *hajj* with Allāh and gives no hints that it might originally have had a seasonal significance or have been linked with some other deity. According to Q 2:196, both the *hajj* and the *‘umrah* are to be performed “for God” (*li-llāhi*). Similarly, Q 3:97 asserts that “pilgrimage to the house is an obligation that people owe to God” (*li-llāhi ‘alā l-nāsi hijju l-bayti*), while Q 22:27 has God commission Abraham to convoke people for the *hajj*. In tandem with this presentation of the *hajj* as a human obligation towards God, however, the Qur’an also stresses that the *hajj* involves “benefits” (*manāfi*, singular: *manfa*) for its human participants (Q 22:28.33). The institution of the pilgrimage thus fits into the general Qur’anic conviction that the world created by God operates in a way that is generously geared to maximising human advantage and convenience (see under → *nafa’a*).<sup>1</sup>

When it comes to concrete ritual detail, the Qur’an alludes only to a few aspects of the *hajj* ritual described in the previous section (see in more detail under → *harrama* as well as the overview of the relevant Qur’anic data in Firestone 1991, 373–377, and Hawting 2004). For example, Q 2:198–199 refer to the performance of the *ifādah* from ‘Arafāt and command the audience to invoke God at a place called “the sacred place of ritual” (*al-mash‘ar al-ḥarām*), conventionally identified with al-Muzdalifah. An earlier verse in the same surah, Q 2:158, gives licence to “those who perform the *hajj* to the house or undertake a cultic visitation [of it]” (*man hajja l-bayta awi ‘tamara*)<sup>2</sup> to circumambulate al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah, two sites in the vicinity of the Ka‘bah (*fa-lā junāha ‘alayhi an yaṭṭawwafa bihimā*). The general impression arising from such allusions is that the Qur’an presupposes existing pilgrimage rites and that its express pronouncements on the topic are limited to endorsing or modifying these existing practices in specific respects.

Interestingly, both Q 3:97 (cited in the preceding paragraph) and 2:158 assume that it is God’s “house” (→ *bayt*) in Mecca that formed the focal point of the *hajj* (or *hijj*) rituals (Q 2:158: *man hajja l-bayta*; 3:97: *hijj al-bayt*; see also Hawting 2019, 99–101). A verse group in Surah 22 implies that this nexus dates back as far as Abraham, whom God commissioned to “purify” his “house” (Q 22:26) and to convene the *hajj* (Q 22:27–29), which is to be concluded by circumambulating (verb: *ṭaṭawwafa bi-*) the “house” (v. 29). Although assessment of the issue is inevitably subjective, in none of these three places does the Qur’anic text come across as needing to present an extended or polemically sharpened argument in support of the point that the *hajj* is in fact centred on the Meccan “house.” Hence, if the incorporation of the Ka‘bah into the *hajj* ritual is indeed a secondary expansion of a ritual that was originally conducted entirely outside Mecca, this expansion could well predate the Qur’an, contrary to Wellhausen’s opinion. That the Qur’an presupposes, rather than introduces, a connection between the *hajj* and the Ka‘bah is also supported by the fact that Q 2:196 instructs those wishing to combine the *hajj* with the *‘umrah*, with an intervening interruption of the state of consecration required for both rituals (*fa-man tamatta‘a bi-l-‘umrati ilā l-hajji*), to perform a compensatory sacrifice or

1 For a couplet from the *ḍiwān* of ‘Amr ibn Qamī‘ah that similarly connects the term *hajj* with the root *n-f-*, see Lyall 1919, no. 2:9–10 (cited under → *dm²*).

2 On *i‘tamara*, see under → *amara*.

fast. This implies not only that performance of the *‘umrah* was not limited to the month of Rajab and had come to be severed from a specific seasonal anchorage; it also takes for granted that *hajj* pilgrims might wish to perform rituals in the vicinity of the Ka‘bah, in line with the command in Q 22:29 to end the *hajj* by circumambulating the Meccan sanctuary. This could indicate that by the time of the Qur’an the *hajj* ceremonies held at ‘Arafāt, al-Muzdalifah, and Minā had already begun to fuse with worship at the intramural Meccan sanctuary.

**Allāh as the Lord of the pre-Islamic *hajj*.** If indeed it was already prior to the Qur’an that performance of the *hajj* began to coalesce with worship at the Ka‘bah, this could have led at least some participants in the *hajj* to reinterpret it as directed at Allāh, the patron deity of the Meccan sanctuary. As we saw above, the Qur’an certainly takes the view that the *hajj* is part of the cult of Allāh, and the relevant verses are consistent (although not exclusively so) with the conjecture that an understanding of the *hajj* as directed at Allāh predates them. There is, furthermore, some poetic support for this hypothesis (Sinai 2019b, 53). First, al-A‘shā swears “by the Lord of the [sacrificial] animals dancing towards Minā” (Ḥusayn 1983, no. 15:30), and subsequent verses make it clear that the lord in question is in fact Allāh or “the Merciful.” Secondly, a poem attributed to ‘Awf ibn al-Aḥwaṣ swears “by him to whose sacred sites the Quraysh perform the *hajj* (*wa-lladhī hajjat qurayshun maḥārimahu*), and by that which Ḥirā’ gathers together” (Lyall 1918–1924, no. 35:4; see also Kister 1965, 139). It seems likely that this oath, too, intends Allāh.<sup>3</sup> Of course, the verses just quoted do not entail that there was a general consensus to the effect that the *hajj* rites were devoted to Allāh: just as the distinction between the *ḥums* and *ḥillah* tribes indicates a degree of ritual diversity, so different groups of *hajj* celebrants could have held different beliefs about the primary deity involved.<sup>4</sup>

### ***ḥijr* | prohibited, taboo**

→ *ḥarrama*

### ***ḥadīth* | discourse**

→ *dhālika*, → *sūrah*

### ***ḥudūd allāh* pl. | God’s boundaries**

→ *dhālika*, → *ḥalama*

<sup>3</sup> The second part of the verse may refer to pilgrims, offerings, or sacrifices, and it implies that Mount Ḥirā’—which does not form part of the Islamic pilgrimage route—counted as a pre-Islamic sacred site that *hajj* pilgrims visited in addition to ‘Arafāt, al-Muzdalifah, Minā, and the Ka‘bah itself.

<sup>4</sup> An additional consideration is that the seasonal significance that putatively defined the original significance of the *hajj* could well have faded from consciousness by the time of the Qur’an’s emergence if we accept the customary assumption that the pre-Islamic Meccan lunar calendar was not reliably synchronised with the solar year (RAH 94–101). If this is correct, then a tendency to associate the *hajj* with Allāh would have provided a ready alternative to its erstwhile seasonal significance. However, a recent attempt at reconstructing the pre-Islamic Meccan calendar posits that synchronisation of the lunar months with the solar year was in fact carried out “regularly and correctly” up until the hijrah (de Blois 2021, 204 and 207).

**miḥrāb** | palace; sanctuary

→ *bayt*

**ḥaraj** | fault; difficulty

→ *ṭahara*

**ḥurr** | freeman, free person

**tahrīr raqabah** | freeing a neck, manumitting a slave

→ *darajah*

**ḥarrafa al-kalima ‘an mawāḍi‘ihi** | to shift words from their places

→ *banū isrā’īl*, → *ṣaddaqa*, → *al-yahūd*

**ḥarīq** | burning (n.)

→ *‘adhhaba*

**ḥarrama tr.** | to declare s.th. to be, or regard s.th. as, inviolable, sacred, or forbidden

**ḥarām, muḥarram** | inviolable, sacred

**ḥurum pl.** | inviolable, sacred; being in a state of ritual consecration

**ḥaram** | inviolable or sacred precinct

**ḥurumāt pl.** | sacred rites or interdictions

Further vocabulary discussed: *muqaddas* | holy *fāḥishah* | abomination *ḥalāl, ḥill* | permitted *masjid* | place of prostration, place of worship *bayt* | house *ḥajj* | pilgrimage *al-mash‘ar al-ḥarām* | the sacred place of ritual *afāḍa* intr. | to pour forth *hady* coll. | offerings *qalā’id* pl. | ritual necklaces hung on sacrificial animals or animals marked out thereby (?) *ḥalla* intr. | to quit the state of ritual consecration *mansak* | rite *sha‘ā’ir allāh* pl. | God’s observances *ṭāfa, ṭatawwafa* intr. (*bi-*) | to perform a ritual circumambulation, to circumambulate (s.th.) *ḥalla* intr. | to be permissible or lawful *aḥalla* tr. | to permit s.th.; to treat s.th. as profane *nafs* | person, life *ṭayyibāt* | good things *rizq* | provision *razaqa* ditr. | to provide s.o. with s.th. *iftarā* tr. (*‘alā*) | to fabricate s.th. (e.g., a lie) (against s.o., namely, God) *nī‘mah* | grace, benefaction *sharik* | associate, partner deity *ashraka* tr. (*bi-*) | to associate s.o. (namely, a partner deity) with s.o. (namely, God), to venerate s.o. as a partner deity *ḥijr* | prohibited, taboo *dhakara* tr. | to invoke s.o. or s.th. (namely, God or God’s name) *shā’a* tr./intr. | to wish or will (s.th.) *ab* | father, forefather *kitāb* | scripture *sultān* | authority *‘ahd allāh* | God’s covenant *aḥl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *al-yahūd* pl. | the Jews *al-tawrāh* | the Torah

**Overview.** There are two Qur’anic roots, *ḥ-r-m* and *q-d-s*, that map onto aspects of the rich tangle of notions conveyed by the words “sacred” and “holy” (on which see generally Oxtoby 2005, 4097–4100).<sup>1</sup> Derivatives of *q-d-s*, which are analysed in more detail under → *qaddasa*, are relatively infrequent, being limited to ten verses overall; they are confined to contexts discernibly connected with the Biblical tradition. By way of an approximation, derivatives of *q-d-s* may be said to express holiness in Rudolf Otto’s sense of the numinous, awe-inspiring quality of the divine (Otto 2014), which in a secondary manner also devolves upon entities and phenomena closely associated with God, such as the venue of his revelatory address of Moses (Q 20:12, 79:16: *bi-l-wādi l-muqaddasi tuwā*).

By contrast, the root *ḥ-r-m* has a larger presence in the Qur’anic corpus, appearing in seventy-one verses. Since its derivatives are sometimes used in explicit connection with pagan rituals, it stands to reason that they served to articulate indigenous ideas of the sacred in pre-Islamic Arabia (Durie 2018, 180–182). This supposition accords with the long-standing use of *ḥ-r-m* in Sabaic epigraphy, where derivatives of the root may refer to a sanctuary (*ḥrmt*) or express the placement of settlements or persons under a ban of annihilation.<sup>2</sup> When the Qur’an employs derivatives of *ḥ-r-m*—especially the adjective *ḥarām*—in a way that is appropriately translatable as “sacred” or the like (cf. Munt 2014, 25–26), the operative idea of the sacred is close to the Durkheimian understanding of “sacred things” as entities and phenomena whose extraordinary status is marked out and maintained in so far as they are “set apart” (*séparées*) and “forbidden” (*interdites*) in consequence of certain communal beliefs and practices (Durkheim 1912, 65): “sacred things are those that are protected and isolated by interdictions” (Durkheim 1912, 56; for a valuable clarification of the concept of the sacred, see Evans 2003). To be *ḥarām*, in its native Arabian sense, is to be surrounded and regulated by taboos, as already noted by Izutsu (*ERCQ* 237). This is the sense in which the Qur’an applies the adjective *ḥarām* to the Meccan sanctuary, as discussed in more detail below. It is important to add, however, that several verses (Q 5:97, 27:91, 28:57, 29:67; cf. 14:37) make it clear that the sacredness of Mecca is grounded in nothing more than an act of divine designation: God has conferred upon the Ka’bah a special status by virtue of which humans are bidden, on pain of punishment, to observe various taboos in their interactions with it. Some currents in later Muslim thought attribute to the Ka’bah an immanent sacredness, for instance, by casting it as the world’s navel (O’Meara 2020). The Qur’an, by contrast, does not explicitly derive the Ka’bah’s sacredness from any intrinsic quality or any power objectively present in it; rather, its sacredness is merely a consequence of an act of positive divine stipulation. In this sense, the Qur’anic distinction between sacred (in the sense of *ḥarām*) and profane is exclusively dependent on the legislative will of a transcendent deity, not on any qualitative distinctions inhering in the world as such. This links up with the Qur’anic insistence that God’s creative activity may be ubiquitously and homogeneously encountered in a wide range of natural processes and even in the world’s basic persistence in being (see under → *āyah* and → *khalaqa*).

1 On a third root expressing the general idea of sanctity, *b-r-k*, see under → *arq*, → *bayt*, → *ism*, and → *qaddasa* (commenting on the verbs *bāraka* and *tabāraka*).

2 See the sources and secondary literature that can be found on the root *ḥ-r-m* at <http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/Sabaweb/> (accessed 8 December 2021).



It is consistent with the preceding that many Qur'anic occurrences of the root *h-r-m* do not have special connotations of sacrality and simply refer to divinely imposed prohibitions. As just intimated, the Qur'anic God is a legislator along the lines of the Biblical one, a deity who commands, permits, and forbids. For example, according to Q 6:151, the things proscribed by God include worshipping beings other than him, killing one's children, and "abominable deeds" (*al-fawāḥish*), designating most likely unspecified sexual abominations (CDKA 209). These prohibitions do not serve to ensure the sacred status of some particular place, time, or activity like the Meccan sanctuary or the pilgrimage rituals performed there: they simply identify acts that are illicit and for which humans will incur divine punishment.<sup>3</sup> Divine prohibitions, as well as human assumptions about what is subject to them, are expressed by the second-form verb *ḥarrama*, "to declare s.th. to be forbidden, to regard s.th. as forbidden." This verb will be treated in some detail after a discussion of the two principal entities or phenomena to which the Qur'an applies the adjective *ḥarām*, namely, the Meccan sanctuary and a number of "sacred months."

**The "sacred place of prostration" (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*).** Of the seventy-one Qur'anic verses containing the root *h-r-m*, twenty-five employ the singular adjective *ḥarām* or its plural *ḥurum*, sometimes together with other derivatives of *h-r-m*. In accordance with what has just been said, the word *ḥarām* is normally translatable as "inviolable, sacred," in the sense of being subject to and regulated by special prohibitions. Its opposite is *ḥalāl* (Q 10:59, 16:116) or *ḥill* (Q 3:93; see also 5:5 and 60:10), "permitted." In Q 5:1.95.96 the plural *ḥurum* is applied to persons and signifies being in a state of ritual consecration (see below), but this too is easily reducible to a general sense of *ḥarām* as governed by special prohibitions. More problematic is Q 21:95, which in the Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim reading runs *wa-ḥarāmun 'alā qaryatin ahlaknāhā annahum lā yarji'ūn*. Many Muslim commentators maintain that *ḥarām* means "forbidden" here, which can involve positing that the Arabic contains a semantically redundant double negative ("It is forbidden to a town we have destroyed that they should return"; see Rippin 1979, 44–46, and SQ 826). However, in line with various translations (e.g., Bell 1937, Arberry 1955, or Jones 2007), a good case can be made that the phrase should in fact be translated, "A ban is upon any town that we have destroyed, such that they will not return" (Rippin 1979). It is moreover at least debatable whether the consonantal sequence *h-r-m* should really be read *ḥarām* here.<sup>4</sup>

3 One may object that at least the first of the three prohibitions under discussion upholds the general sacrality of God himself, while the second one follows from the sacrality of human life, which is explicitly said to have been made inviolable by God (Q 6:151, 17:33, 25:68: *al-naḥs allatī ḥarrama llāhu*). But it is far from clear how this line of thinking would supply a rationale for Q 6:151's prohibition of sexual improprieties or for other divine prohibitions in the Qur'an, such as the food taboos enumerated in Q 2:173 and its parallels.

4 Rippin convincingly suggests that *ḥarām* in Q 21:95 might be standing in for Hebrew *ḥērem*, denoting a "ban" of destruction in the Hebrew Bible, e.g., at Isa 43:28 (Rippin 1979, 52–53; on the concept in general, see TDOT 5:180–199). This meaning is also attested for Jewish Aramaic *ḥirma* or Syriac *hermā* (DJBA 459 and 483–484; SL 492–493), making it quite conceivable that it might also have attached itself to an Arabic word derived from the same consonantal root. Note also that there are quite a few variant readings for *ḥarām* at Q 21:95 (MQ 6:55–57; MQQ 4:150–151; Rippin 1979, 48–51). A particularly widespread variant is *ḥirm*, which is among others attributed to some of the canonical readers. It is not impossible that Aramaic *ḥirma* or *hermā* might have become *ḥirm* in Arabic. On the other hand, the noun *ḥrm* = "interdiction, prohibition" is also attested in Sabaic (Robin 2015b, 186, with a transliteration and translation of Ḥaṣī 1, l. 11), and there is also Sabaic evidence documenting that the root *h-r-m* was used to express the placing of a city under a ban of destruction, which goes back to the first millennium BCE (e.g., Robin 2018, 104, on DAI Širwāḥ 2005–50). It is therefore not necessary to consider Q 21:95 to reflect Biblical influence.

As intimated above, among the things that are called *ḥarām* in the Qur'an is, first of all, the Meccan sanctuary, normally described as the “sacred place of prostration” (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*; e.g., Q 2:144.149.150.191.196.217, 8:34, 9:7.19.28, 22:25; → *sajada*) and “the house” (→ *al-bayt*; e.g., Q 2:125.127.158, 3:97, 8:35, 106:3) or “the ancient house” (Q 22:29.33: *al-bayt al-‘atīq*). Two verses (Q 5:2.97) conflate these two appellations into “the sacred house” (*al-bayt al-ḥarām*). Although most of the relevant prooftexts are Medinan, there is at least one Meccan occurrence of *al-masjid al-ḥarām* (Q 17:1), while Q 14:37, which is likely also Medinan (Sinai 2009, 106–112), speaks of God’s “sacred house” (*inda baytika l-muḥarrami*), using the passive participle of the verb *ḥarrama*, “to declare or regard s.th. as inviolable or sacred” (see below) in the same sense as the adjective *ḥarām*.<sup>5</sup> According to Q 5:97, “God has instituted the Ka‘bah, the sacred house, as a means of support for people” (*ja‘ala llāhu l-ka‘bata l-bayta l-ḥarāma qiyāman li-l-nāsi*).<sup>6</sup> This bears out the assumption that the “sacred place of prostration” and the “sacred house” may generally be identified with the Meccan Ka‘bah.<sup>7</sup> In the later Islamic tradition, some Qur’anic occurrences of *al-masjid al-ḥarām*—notably, Q 17:1 and 9:28—are taken to designate the entire sacred precinct surrounding the Ka‘bah (Hawting 1982, 37), an area to which two Qur’anic verses apply the term *ḥaram* (Q 28:57, 29:67; see below). There is in fact no reason to rule out, or to consider it a major anomaly, that the Qur’an might on occasion have recourse to such an extended usage, derived from the primary reference of *al-masjid al-ḥarām* to the Ka‘bah or “the house.”

Judging by the Qur’an, the “sacred place of prostration” or the “house” was a pilgrimage destination (→ *hajja*) at which sacrificial rites were performed (e.g., Q 48:25; → *dhabaḥa*)—the latter aspect forming a contrast with what became normative post-Qur’anic practice (Hawting 2019, 101–102). It is the presence of the Ka‘bah sanctuary that would seem to account for the “sacred precinct” (*ḥaram*) of whose safety and divine origin the Qur’an’s Meccan addressees are reminded in Q 28:57 and 29:67.<sup>8</sup> Other verses (Q 2:126, 3:97, 14:35) also stress the security of the Meccan settlement and its sanctuary, whose establishment, like that of the *hajj* pilgrimage, the Qur’an traces back to Abraham (Q 2:124–129, 22:26–29; see also 3:96–97 and 14:35–41). One infers that the sanctuary’s inviolability prominently entailed an interdiction on violent conflict in its vicinity, which is supported by a Medinan injunction against fighting at the “sacred place of prostration” unless the opponents attack first (Q 2:191). It is of interest that a similar prohibition of carrying weapons during a pilgrimage festival is documented by a Sabaic inscription (Maraqten 2021, 449).

5 For other Meccan occurrences of the term *bayt*, “house,” see Q 52:4 and 106:3.

6 As noted in CDKA 232, the meaning of *ja‘ala* + acc. *qiyāman li-* in Q 5:97 is best understood in light of 4:5. Presumably, the way in which humans derive support from the Ka‘bah consists in, or at least includes, the safety and prosperity underpinned by its sacred status (Q 28:57, 29:67).

7 The Ka‘bah is also mentioned in Q 5:95. See also Q 48:24–25, which refer to an encounter between the believers and their opponents *bi-baṭni makkata*, “in the valley of Mecca,” and then accuse the latter of barring the believers from the “sacred place of prostration.” Also relevant is Q 3:96–97, according to which “the first house (*bayt*) that was established for the people” is located *bi-bakkah*, which could mean “in Mecca” (see n. 2 under → *bayt*).

8 Q 28:57: “Have we not established a safe and sacred precinct for them, to which all kinds of fruit are brought, as a provision from us?” (*a-wa-lam numakkin lahum ḥaraman āminan yujbā ilayhi thamarātu kulli shay‘in rizqan min ladunnā*); 29:67: “Have they not seen that we have made a safe and sacred precinct for them, while people all around them are being snatched away?” (*a-wa-lam yaraw annā ja‘alnā ḥaraman āminan wa-yutakhaṭṭafu l-nāsu min ḥawlihim*). See also Q 27:91: “I have only been commanded to serve the Lord of this town, who declared it to be inviolable” (*innamā umirtu an a‘buda rabba ḥādhihi l-baldati lladhī ḥarramahā*).

It is clear that the Meccan sanctuary was deemed sacred not only by the Qur'anic believers but also by their pagan adversaries, the “repudiators,” since the latter are accused of denying the believers access to (*ṣadda ‘an*) the “sacred place of prostration” and of preventing them from worshipping there (Q 5:2, 8:34, 22:25, 48:25). One verse speaks in a derogatory manner of the “prayers” that the repudiators are wont to perform at the “house” (Q 8:35), and it is only in a late Medinan surah that the “sacred place of prostration” is explicitly declared to be off limits to the pagan repudiators or associators (Q 9:17–19.28). Once, in the context of a passage to do with the *ḥajj* pilgrimage (Q 2:196–200), the attribute *ḥarām* is applied to a cultic site called *al-mash‘ar al-ḥarām*, “the sacred place of ritual,” which seems to be a stopping point in the processional “pouring forth” (verb: *afāda*) of worshippers from ‘Arafāt (Q 2:198–199). *Al-mash‘ar al-ḥarām* is traditionally identified with al-Muzdalifah, a station on the → *ḥajj* route as described by extra-Qur’anic sources (Hawting 2004, 95–96). Q 2:198 expresses approval of invoking God at this place (*fa-dhkurū llāha ‘inda l-mash‘ari l-ḥarāmi*). What is noteworthy are v. 198’s concessionary phrasing (“It is no sin for you<sup>p</sup> to . . . ,” *laysa ‘alaykum junāḥun an*) as well as v. 199’s command to “pour forth from where people [are wont to] pour forth” (*thumma afīdū min ḥaythu afāda l-nāsu*). Both expressions reveal that the cultic significance of the “sacred ritual site” and the procession leading there from ‘Arafāt are being presupposed as a well-established practice in the Qur’anic environment, whatever the exact location of the “sacred place of ritual” or the precise nature of the actions performed there. The same understanding that a pre-existing practice is being given Qur’anic approval is applicable to Q 2:158’s permission to circumambulate the sites of al-Ṣafā and al-Marwah while performing the *ḥajj* or the *‘umrah* (see Firestone 1991, 375, and Hawting 2019, 98–99).

**The “sacred months” (*al-ashhur al-ḥurum*).** Apart from the Ka‘bah sanctuary, the second main entity to which the Qur’an prominently applies the attribute *ḥarām* are calendar months. Some of the relevant passages use the singular “the sacred month” (Q 2:194.217, 5:2.97: *al-shahr al-ḥarām*), a phrase also found in a poem from the corpus of al-Nābighah (DSAAP, al-Nābighah, no. 28:3). One verse speaks of “the sacred months” in the plural (Q 9:5: *al-ashhur al-ḥurum*) and another one gives the number of calendar months as twelve and says that four of them are “sacred” (Q 9:36: *minhā arba‘atun ḥurumun*). This agrees with extra-Qur’anic traditions reporting that on the eve of Islam the town of Mecca and other parts of the Arabian Peninsula adhered to a calendar beginning with the month of Muḥarram and ending with Dhū l-Ḥijjah, and containing the sacred months Rajab (no. 7), Dhū l-Qa‘dah (no. 11), Dhū l-Ḥijjah (no. 12), and Muḥarram (no. 1; see, e.g., RAH 94–101; Bonner 2011, 16–17; Robin 2019a, 18–19; de Blois 2021). The only one of these months that is expressly named in the Qur’an is Ramaḍān (Q 2:185). Q 5:2.97 speak of the “sacred month” in connection with the “sacred house” (*al-bayt al-ḥarām*) and aspects of the pilgrimage ritual performed there—namely, “offerings” (vv. 2, 97: *al-hady*), sacrificial animals marked out by ritual necklaces (vv. 2, 97: *al-qalā‘id*; see under → *dhabaḥa*), and “those heading for the sacred house (*āmmīna l-bayta l-ḥarāma*), seeking favour and satisfaction from their Lord” (v. 2). This confirms that at least some of the sacred months in question were a time of seasonal cultic activity at the “sacred house.” “The sacred month” in the singular could refer to the month of Rajab, during which the *‘umrah* pilgrimage may originally have been performed (RAH 100). Yet given the close link that the Qur’an posits between the “house” and the *ḥajj* (see above), it may also be that “the sacred month” in the singular refers to Dhū l-Ḥijjah, the month of the *ḥajj* pilgrimage. Q 2:197 says that “the *ḥajj*

is in specific months” (*al-ḥajju ashhurun ma’lūmātun*), thus employing the plural rather than the expected singular. The expression probably refers to the “sacred trimester” that is constituted by the consecutive months of Dhū l-Qa’dah, Dhū l-Ḥijjah, and Muḥarram (RAH 100), thus positioning the *ḥajj* in a wider time frame without necessarily precluding that it was specific to one of the months in question.

A number of prohibitions to do with the sanctuary are set forth in explicit connection with the “sacred month” or the *ḥajj* and were accordingly restricted to a certain time of the year. Q 5:2 cautions the believers against “committing aggression” while mingling with their foes during the “sacred month” at the “sacred house.” Q 2:197 prohibits quarrelling (*jidāl*) during the “specific months” of the *ḥajj*. To be sure, these statements tie in with the general and temporally unqualified topos of the security of the Meccan sacred precinct, and Q 2:191 (“Do<sup>p</sup> not fight them at the sacred place of prostration until they fight you there”) implies that warfare in the vicinity of the sanctuary was generally considered to be unacceptable. But the sacred months seem to have entailed a general truce that extended beyond the sanctuary, as becomes clear from Q 2:217. The verse responds to an audience query about the legitimacy of fighting during “the sacred month”; while the addressees seem to assume that this is categorically prohibited, the Qur’an stresses that certain exceptional circumstances may justify it. In fact, a passage in Procopius’s *History of the Wars* confirms that the “Saracenes” were wont to observe a general truce during certain sacred months (Robin 2010, 237–238, citing Procopius 1914, 400–403 = book 2:16:17–18; see already RAH 100–101). Even at the sanctuary itself, certain prohibitions were evidently limited to the sacred months. Thus, according to Q 5:1–2 and 5:95–96 participants in the *ḥajj* festival were barred from hunting while in a state of ritual consecration (*ḥurum*; see vv. 1, 95, 96), but this interdiction lapsed after one had quite the state of ritual consecration (verb: *ḥalla*) and returned to profane life (v. 2: *wa-idhā ḥalaltum fa-ṣṭādū*). Q 2:197 also proscribes sexual intimacy (*rafath*; see CDKA 114) during the *ḥajj*. The Qur’an furthermore prohibits participants in the *ḥajj* rites from shaving their heads until they have offered a concluding sacrifice (Q 2:196; see also 48:27).

Although it does seem clear that there was an existing disapproval of warfare during the sacred months, it is not always evident to what extent Qur’anic interdictions relating to the sacred months simply continue existing pagan *ḥajj* practices or go beyond them. But in general, one may reasonably suppose that participants in the pre-Qur’anic *ḥajj* observed various—and, as noted in Firestone 1991, 374, quite possibly heterogeneous—taboos of abstinence marking the temporary suspension of normal human life. Some of these are reflected and adopted in the Qur’an, while others are modified or discarded: for instance, Q 2:189 rejects the prohibition of entering houses by the front door. Besides observing such taboos, *ḥajj* celebrants no doubt performed a number of more or less well-defined ritual acts, which the Qur’an subsumes under the general rubrics of *manāsik* (singular: *mansak*), “rites” (Q 2:128.200; see also 22:34.67; see under → *dhabaḥa*), and *sha’ā’ir allāh*, “God’s observances” (Q 2:158, 5:2, 22:32.36). Unfortunately, the Islamic scripture offers only tantalising glimpses of such contemporary pilgrimage observances (for more details, gleaned from extra-Qur’anic sources, see under → *ḥajj*). Apart from sacrificial rituals (Q 5:2), they appear to have included circumambulation (verb: *taṭawwafa* or *ṭāfa*; see under → *bayt*) of the “house” (Q 2:125, 22:26.29) and also of other Meccan landmarks, which Q 2:158 encourages or at least permits in a manner that again comes across as reflecting prevailing custom (see also Hawting 2019, 98–99). In any case, one may conclude that what the

“sacred month” or “months” share with the “sacred place of prostration” is their status of being “protected and isolated by interdictions,” to use Durkheim’s phrase. Such sacred interdictions or interdiction-governed rites may be what the Qur’an calls *hurumāt*, a term that is used in connection with “the sacred month” (Q 2:194) and with the “ancient house” and the *hajj* (Q 22:30).

Like the “sacred place of prostration,” the material just surveyed suggests that respect for the “sacred months” was not exclusive to Muhammad and his adherents but was recognised by the latter’s “associating” adversaries as well. After all, the sanctuary and the “sacred month” are closely conjoined in Q 5:2.97, indicating that they were bound up with one another in ritual practice. Moreover, Q 2:217 concedes the sanctity of “the sacred month” and then explains that in exceptional cases it may nonetheless be licit to conduct war during it. This is best interpreted by assuming that respect for the “sacred month” or months—whose standing is expressly acknowledged in Q 9:36—was part of the Qur’anic addressees’ cultural background, and that Q 2:217 is only concerned to allow for exceptional circumstances under which it may nonetheless be legitimate to fight during this sacred season.

**The verb *ḥarrama* and the Meccan surahs’ criticism of unwarranted pagan taboos.** The Qur’anic pagans seem to have observed further interdictions and taboos beyond those endorsed by the Qur’an, which may not have been directly linked to the Ka’bah sanctuary and the ceremonies of the *hajj*. This emerges most clearly from a passage in the Meccan Surah 6 (vv. 136–153) that criticises a number of allegedly unwarranted human interdictions on certain animals and crops, a passage studded with the second-form verb *ḥarrama* and its passive participle *muḥarram* (vv. 138, 139, 140, 143, 144, 145, 146, 148, 150). Before turning to this text, it will be useful to undertake a brief survey the Qur’anic use of the verb *ḥarrama* in general and to examine two thematically cognate passages that are considerably shorter, Q 10:59 and 7:31–33.

Unsurprisingly, *ḥarrama* has the general sense of rendering something, or declaring it to be, *ḥarām*, that is, unavailable, inaccessible, forbidden, or inviolable. Its antonym is *aḥalla*, “to permit, to declare s.th. to be permitted” (Q 2:275, 3:50, 4:160, 5:87.96, 7:157, 9:37, 66:1; see also *ḥalla* = “to be permitted” in 2:228–230 or 4:19). In lieu of *ḥarrama* and *aḥalla*, Q 10:59 has *ja’ala ḥarāman wa-ḥalālan*, “to make forbidden and permitted,” thus establishing the basic meaning of *ḥarrama* and *aḥalla* as just posited (see also Q 16:116).<sup>9</sup> At the most general level, *ḥarrama* is to place restrictions on human access to, use of, or control over something. Thus, in Q 5:72 *fa-qad ḥarrama llāhu ‘alayhi l-jannata* means that God denies access to paradise to those who associate other beings with him, or restricts them from paradise, and Q 7:50 quotes the inhabitants of paradise as stating that God has denied to the repudiators the amenities that he metes out to the blessed (*inna llāha ḥarramahumā ‘alā l-kāfirīn*). A similarly general use of *ḥarrama* is found in Q 28:12, according to which God denied Moses the care of wet nurses (*wa-ḥarramnā ‘alayhi l-marāḍī’a min qablu*). Shading into the sense of moral prohibition, three verses condemn the killing of “a

9 Q 10:59 combines *ḥ-r-m* and *r-z-q*, as do 6:140 and 7:32, where the former root takes the form of *ḥarrama* rather than of *ja’ala ḥarāman*. Moreover, Q 10:59 and also 16:116 combine *ḥ-r-m* and *f-r-y*, as do Q 6:138.140.144, again with *ḥ-r-m* appearing in the form of *ḥarrama*. These phraseological links confirm the thematic connections between all these passages and support the claim that *ja’ala ḥarāman* in Q 10:59 corresponds to *ḥarrama* in other passages.



human person (*nafs*), which God has rendered inviolable, except when justified” (Q 6:151, 17:33, 25:68, all of which combine *qatala* with *al-nafsa llati ḥarrama llāhu illā bi-l-ḥaqqi*).

In the Qur’an, the grammatical subject of *ḥarrama* is predominantly God, who is also the implicit agent of the passive formulation *ḥurrima/ḥurrimat ‘alaykum*, “forbidden to you<sup>p</sup> is/are . . .,” in places like Q 4:23 and 5:3.96. But *ḥarrama* can also be used for humans who deem certain things to be prohibited (Q 5:87, 6:140, 9:29.37), just as Q 5:2 employs *aḥalla* for a human attitude, namely, for failing to uphold the sacredness of “God’s observances” and of the “sacred month,” that is, for profaning them (*lā tuḥillū sha‘ā’ira llāhi wa-lā l-shahra l-ḥarāma*). Behind this stands a wider debate regarding the validity of sacred prohibitions that have been transmitted through ancestral tradition (on which see under → *ab*), and the Qur’anic claim that the sole legitimate source of such interdictions is God: humans are to conform—that is, they are not to fall short of but also not to go beyond—divine interdictions as conveyed through God’s prophetic spokesmen. It may seem surprising that in demanding conformity to divine prohibitions, the Qur’an’s focus is often not on human permissivism—as in Q 9:29’s condemnation of those who “do not deem forbidden what God and his Messenger have declared to be forbidden” (cf. under → *jāhada*)—but rather on a perceived human tendency to be excessively proscriptive: believers must not “deem forbidden the good things (*tayyibāt*) that God has permitted (*aḥalla*) to you<sup>p</sup>,” as the Medinan verse Q 5:87 puts it.

This Qur’anic critique of unwarranted man-made prohibitions is a theological theme that first emerges in Meccan surahs. Thus, Q 10:59 declares, after reminding people of God’s favour and mercy (vv. 57–58), that the deity “sends down provision (*rizq*; → *razaqa*)” to humans, yet the latter “make some of it forbidden and permitted” (*fa-ja‘altum minhu ḥarāman wa-ḥalālan*) despite lacking any divine authorisation for doing so (*qul ā-llāhu adhina lakum*, “Say, ‘Has God given you permission . . .’”). This stance is castigated as amounting to “fabricating” (verb: *iftarā*) lies against God (*am ‘alā llāhi taftarūn*, “. . . or are you fabricating something against God?”).<sup>10</sup> Read by itself, Q 10:59 condemns any attempt to restrict consumption of God’s gifts in terms of their immanent character, such as their alleged purity or impurity: to hold that some of the natural resources that God has benevolently placed at the disposal of his human creatures are impure or prohibited, the verse avers, is theologically incompatible with God’s beneficence and generosity. Q 10:59 and other passages make it likely that the Meccan surahs espouse a position of dietary antinomianism that bears resemblance to New Testamental statements like 1 Tim 4:4 (“everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving”) and elements of later Christian tradition (Sinai 2019c, 124–127).

It is worth stressing in this context that the dietary antinomianism of the Meccan period does not entail rejection of the idea that some entities are validly described as *ḥarām*, since the Qur’anic sanctuary is called *al-masjid al-ḥarām* as early as the Meccan verse Q 17:1. It is however made clear that the sacrality of the Meccan shrine derives not from human convention but from God, as per Q 27:91 (God is *rabb hādhihi l-baldati lladhī ḥarramahā*, “the Lord of this town, who declared it to be inviolable”). God is furthermore singled out

10 In many other verses, including some from Surah 10, the verb *iftarā* takes the accusative object *al-kadhība*, e.g., Q 3:94, 4:50, 7:37.89, 10:17.60.69, 11:18, 16:105.116, 18:15, 20:61. Although the verb can also take other direct objects (e.g., Q 4:48: *ithman ‘azīman*), many verse-final occurrences of *yaftarūn/taftarūna*, as in Q 10:59, should be understood as an ellipsis of *iftarā l-kadhība*. In any case, whatever the object of *iftarā*, the verb by itself already signifies untruthful concoction.



as the one who conferred inviolability upon human life (Q 6:151, 17:33, 25:68: *al-nafs allatī ḥarrama llāhu*). Neither of these two cases of sacred inviolability that are accepted in the Meccan Qur'an restricts human access to God's natural provision, unlike the distinction between permitted and prohibited foodstuffs that is rejected in Q 10:59. Indeed, God's sanctification of the Meccan sanctuary is presented as an act of divine munificence rather than as privative in character. Thus, Q 28:57 asks, "Have we not established a safe and sacred precinct for them, to which all kinds of fruit are brought, as a provision from us (*rizqan min ladunnā*)?" and Q 29:67 classes God's establishment of the Meccan *ḥaram* as an instance of divine grace or *ni'mah* (→ *an'ama*).

The same outlook expressed by Q 10:59 also informs 7:31–33. Verse 31 encourages the "children of Adam" to wear adornments "at every place of prostration" (*khudhū zīnatakum 'inda kulli masjidin*) and to "eat and drink," but commands them to do so temperately (*walā tusrifū*). Given the word *masjid*, this may be directed specifically against the observance of sartorial and dietary taboos in connection with the Meccan sanctuary (in which case the verse may stand in tension with the later Medinan passages Q 5:1–2 and 5:95–96). The following verse, Q 7:32, poses the polemical question, "Who deems forbidden (*man ḥarrama*) God's adornment, which he has brought forth for his servants (*zīnata llāhi llatī akhraja li-'ibādihī*), and the good things that he provides (*al-ṭayyibāti mina l-rizqi*)?" Those who believe, v. 32 continues, are entitled to full enjoyment of the adornment and good things provided by God, both in the proximate life and on the day of resurrection; and v. 33 declares that God has "only forbidden" (*innamā ḥarrama rabbiya*) "abominable deeds, whether open or hidden" (*al-fawāḥisha mā zahara minhā wa-mā baṭana*), sin (*al-ithma*), unjust covetousness (*al-baghya bi-ghayri l-ḥaqqi*), unwarranted association of other beings with God, and "saying about God what you<sup>p</sup> do not know." Like Q 10:59, 7:31–33 rejects man-made taboos restricting consumption of specific foodstuffs and other earthly resources: to declare some of God's provision to be forbidden is equivalent to "saying about God what one does not know," just as Q 10:59 considers it to be a case of "fabricating lies against God."

**Human and divine interdictions in Q 6:136–153.** As noted earlier, the dispute about unwarranted human taboos is most clearly foregrounded in the pivotal passage Q 6:136–153 (on which see Lowry 2011 and also Gräf 1959, 39–44). In its canonical version, this text likely contains a later Medinan insertion, consisting in vv. 145–146 or 145–147. These added verses secondarily recognise a small number of dietary taboos that became standard in the Medinan period (Sinai 2019c, 128–129), such as the prohibition of blood and pork, and thereby tones down the Meccan Qur'an's original dietary antinomianism. When read without this addition, the discursive arc of the passage moves from a polemical refutation of the excessive prohibitions that humans have arbitrarily contrived (vv. 136–150) to an exposition of the reasonable prohibitions that God has in fact imposed on them (vv. 151–153).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> As noted by Lowry, vv. 151–153 function as the culmination or climax of the entire sequence beginning in v. 136 (Lowry 2011, 22, 23, 26). This observation further corroborates the claim that vv. 145–146 or 145–147 are a Medinan insertion (a position developed in Sinai 2019c, 128–129). In the passage's original version, the climactic turning point in its movement from polemic to exposition—what one might call the peripety of the argument—would have come only at the beginning of v. 151: *qul ta'ālaw attu mā ḥarrama rabbukum 'alaykum*, "Say, 'Come<sup>p</sup> and I will recite what your Lord has [really] forbidden to you . . .'" Yet in the surah's canonical version, this culminating peripety is preceded by an analogous turning point in v. 145 (*qul lā ajidu fi mā ūḥiya ilayya muḥarraman 'alā ṭā'imīn yaṭ'amuhu illā an . . .*, "Say, 'I do not find in what has been conveyed to me anything forbidden to someone eating it except for . . .'"), after which the text returns to further polemics against the opponents'

Verse 136 opens by condemning those who assign a certain portion of their crops and livestock to God and another portion to “their associates” (*li-shurakā’ihim*; singular: *sharīk*), that is, to subordinate deities who are venerated besides God (→ *ashraka*; cf. Q 16:56, where the same practice is criticised). Moreover, the opponents are accused of practising infanticide (vv. 137, 140). In v. 138, the discussion moves on to the opponents’ custom of declaring some livestock and crops to be forbidden (here: *hijr*),<sup>12</sup> which is to say that certain persons are—arbitrarily, from the Qur’anic perspective—denied the right to consume them (*lā yaṭ’amuhā illā man nashā’u bi-za’mihim*). The opponents, moreover, consider the backs of certain animals to be prohibited (*wa-an’āmun hurrimat zuhūruhā*), meaning that they cannot be ridden or used as beasts of burden.<sup>13</sup> In addition, the opponents do not invoke God’s name over some livestock, presumably when slaughtering them (*wa-an’āmun lā yadhkurūna sma llāhi ‘alayhā*); perhaps they were instead accustomed to invoking the associate deities from v. 136 on this occasion. Similar to Q 10:59, all of this is repeatedly declared to be tantamount to “fabricating lies against” (*iftirā’an ‘alā*) God (vv. 138, 140; see also *mā ± <kānū> yaftarūn* at the end of vv. 137 and 138). Q 6:139 then provides further detail on the opponents’ objectionable taboos, such as the offspring of certain animals being reserved for men and “forbidden” (*muḥarram*) to women. From v. 141 onwards, the text affirms God’s creation of gardens and plants, enjoining the recipients to “eat of their fruit when they bear fruit” and to give “what is due” of it “on the day of its harvest,” which may be a demand to practise charity (SQ 394) or to set aside a thanksgiving offering for God (Lowry 2011, 24). The following verse instructs the addressees with regard to livestock to “eat of that with which God has provided you” (v. 142: *kulū mim mā razaqakumu llāhu*). Verses 143–144 then pose a series of polemical questions that the opponents are apparently assumed to be incapable of answering (e.g., has God forbidden male sheep and goats, or female ones, or the offspring of female ones?), thereby demonstrating the absurdity of the idea that God might have “forbidden” (*ḥarrama*) the use and consumption of specific animals. Verse 144 ends by reiterating the accusation that adherence to unwarranted dietary taboos amounts to “fabricating lies against God” (*fa-man azlamu mimmani ftarā ‘alā llāhi kadhiban*).

Skipping over the Medinan insertion in Q 6:145–146 or 145–147, vv. 148–150 address and dismiss a defense attributed to the Qur’an’s associating opponents: “Had God willed, neither we nor our forefathers would have associated [anything with him], and we would

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taboos. The canonical version of the text is thus marked by what one might call a false climax. However, when read without vv. 145–146 or 145–147 the passage is defensibly seen as possessing a higher degree of structural transparency and rhetorical effectiveness, which provides supplementary confirmation that v. 145 does indeed open a secondary addition. A further indication to the same effect consists in the fact that Q 6:136–153 without vv. 145–146 or 145–147 is structurally analogous to Q 7:31–33, which likewise moves from a critique of unfounded man-made taboos (vv. 31–32) to an exposition of God’s true prohibitions (v. 33). For a general description of redactional arguments like the preceding one, which are not devoid of a certain degree of subjectivity, see Sinai 2017c, 71 (where they figure as “Class 2 arguments”).

12 Cf. the use of *hijran mahjūrā* in Q 25:22.53 (CDKA 67), especially the latter verse, which coordinates the expression with *barzakh*, “barrier.” The context of Q 6:138 certainly justifies taking *hijr* to be equivalent to *hurrimat* in the same verse and to *muḥarram* in v. 139.

13 Cf. also the narrative about the killing of a she-camel consecrated to God by the people of Thamūd, despite the fact that they had been commanded to let it roam freely, eat, and drink (Q 7:73, 11:64, 26:155, 91:13). The tabooisation of living animals was clearly culturally familiar to the Qur’anic addressees. It is standardly understood to be reflected in Q 5:103 as well, which enumerates four categories of what are taken to be consecrated camels that were not to be ridden, burdened, or milked (see SQ 329 and Gräf 1959, 58–59).

not have declared anything to be forbidden” (v. 148: *law shā’a llāhu mā ashraknā wa-lā ābā’unā wa-lā ḥarramnā min shay’in*). Assuming that the argument that Q 6:148, and similarly 16:35 and 43:20 (which also have *law shā’a llāhu/al-raḥmānu mā . . .*), attribute to the Qur’anic opponents is not a complete fiction, it illustrates how the Qur’anic preacher and his adherents managed to shift the argumentative ground underneath the feet of their pagan antagonists. From the Qur’anic vantage point, any valid interdiction of foodstuffs needs to rest on divine prohibition. It is far from obvious that this equation of normative validity with divine endorsement had initially been shared by the Qur’anic associators, who are stereotypically presented as maintaining that they are following “the custom of our forefathers” (Q 2:170: *mā alfaynā ‘alayhi ābā’anā*; 5:104, 31:21: *mā wajadnā ‘alayhi ābā’anā*; → *ab*). There is little reason to suppose that the Qur’anic adversaries considered their ancestral tradition to preserve and channel some sort of historic divine revelation; more likely, they simply assumed that established custom was normative as such.<sup>14</sup> Yet once the Qur’anic preaching had explicitly insisted that valid norms must be grounded in divine revelation, the associators seem to have struggled to respond by admitting that the interdictions observed by them were *not* based on divine endorsement. Instead, Q 6:148 has them invoke an indirect manner of divine endorsement: were ancestral tradition opposed to God’s will, God—being omnipotent—would surely have found a way to exercise his power of veto and to end the customs in question.

The associators’ argument is one from silence: considering the fact that God has not curtailed our ancestral custom, it must be agreeable to him. Such a rejoinder, however, implicitly concedes that normative validity is predicated on divine endorsement, and thereby lays the Qur’anic pagans open to being pressed to go beyond the argument from silence rehearsed in v. 148 and supply positive proof that their customary interdictions do in fact reflect God’s will. Thus, the Messenger is instructed to ask his opponents, “Do you have any knowledge? If so, show it to us! You only follow mere opinion and engage in conjectures” (v. 148), and to say to them, “Bring your<sup>p</sup> witnesses who can testify that God has forbidden this (*anna llāha ḥarrama ḥādhā!*)” (v. 150). There would have been little that the associators could have retorted to this further challenge, given that they claimed neither to be in possession of a scriptural corpus (→ *kitāb*) that would have bestowed “clear authority” (→ *sulṭān mubīn*) upon their beliefs and practices (Q 37:156–157; see also 54:43, 68:37–38) nor to be direct recipients of divine communications, as Muhammad claimed to be. The associators’ ultimately self-defeating response in Q 6:148, 16:35, and 43:20, which concedes that binding practices must rest on some sort of divine endorsement, may be an indication that no matter how beleaguered the position of the Qur’anic believers was prior to the hijrah, they were ultimately able to marshal an epistemology of normative validity that was felt to be cogent, perhaps in the wake of sufficient prior exposure of the Qur’anic milieu to Jewish and Christian ideas.

As noted above, the entire sequence culminates in vv. 151–153, which set out a decalogue-like list of the things that God has truly forbidden. Each of these three climactic verses ends in a partially identical closer underscoring that the Qur’anic proclamations convey positive, direct, and unequivocal divine commandments, thus clearly surpassing the opponents’ indirect and diluted claim to divine endorsement: “thus does he”—namely, God—“charge

<sup>14</sup> On Q 7:28, which attributes to the opponents an utterance that would explicitly seem to equate ancestral custom with God’s command, see → *ab*.

you<sup>p</sup> so that you may understand / may heed God's hortatory reminders / may be God-fearing" (*dhālikum waṣṣākum bihi la'allakum ta'qilūn/tadhakkarūn/tattaqūn*). The catalogue is headed by the prohibitions of associating (→ *ashraka*) anything else with God, of treating one's parents in any other way than with kindness, of killing one's children for fear of poverty (cf. vv. 137 and 140), of "abominable deeds, whether open or hidden" (*al-fawāḥisha mā ḡahara minhā wa-mā baṡana*), and of the killing of "a human person, which God has rendered inviolable (*ḡarrama*), except when justified (*illā bi-l-ḡaqqi*)."<sup>15</sup> Verse 152 additionally proscribes infringing upon the property of orphans, fraudulent measuring, and false testimony, and commands fulfilment of "God's covenant" (*'ahd allāh*). It is noteworthy that the phrase *al-fawāḥisha mā ḡahara minhā wa-mā baṡana* from v. 151 has its only other Qur'anic instance in Q 7:33, discussed above, where it occurs (together with the prohibition of associating other beings with God) as part of the climax of a structurally parallel, though much briefer sequence: what God has truly forbidden are not arbitrary sartorial or dietary taboos that constrict God's provision (vv. 31–32) but rather the veneration of other beings besides God as well as immoral behaviour towards one's fellow humans (v. 33).<sup>15</sup>

**Divine permission and prohibition in the Medinan surahs.** The Medinan layer of the Qur'an is marked by a shift towards an understanding of divine revelations as a source of detailed behavioural prescriptions (*HCI* 202–205 and Sinai 2015–2016, 51–52 and 66–67). This means that God and his prophetic spokesmen, such as Jesus or Muhammad, are more frequently than in the Meccan surahs depicted as permitting (*aḡalla*) and prohibiting (*ḡarrama*) certain things or behaviours (see Q 3:50 on Jesus, 7:157 on Muhammad, and 9:29 on "God and his Messenger").<sup>16</sup> To review some of the relevant commandments, God permits trade but prohibits usury (Q 2:275); he prohibits to the believers the consumption of carrion, blood, pork, and what has been sacrificed to other deities (Q 2:173, 5:3, 6:145, 16:115); the believers are permitted commensality with "those who were given the scripture" and also intermarriage with their females (Q 5:5; see under → *ahl al-kitāb* and Sinai 2017c, 85–89);<sup>17</sup> God has punished the Jews (→ *al-yahūd*) by imposing onerous dietary prohibitions on them (Q 4:160, 6:146, 16:118);<sup>18</sup> and he prohibits the believers from marrying various kinds of blood relatives (Q 4:23–24) and women guilty of fornication or adultery (Q 24:3), while another passage enumerates the kinds of women whom the Prophet is permitted to marry (Q 33:50–52).

In parallel with various divine prohibitions, however, the Medinan proclamations continue to stress that God and his Prophet permit consumption of "the good things" (*al-ṡayyibāt*; Q 5:4.5.87, 7:157). Q 3:93 would seem to account for at least some parts of Jewish dietary law as resulting from the human tendency towards self-imposed interdictions that is castigated in the Meccan passages discussed above: "all food was permitted (*ḡill*) to the Israelites, except what Israel [= the Biblical patriarch Jacob; → *isrā'il*] prohibited to himself, before the Torah was sent down" (see also under → *tawrāh*). In Q 66:1, in the context of a domestic dispute, it is the Qur'anic Messenger himself who is admonished not to forbid what God has permitted to him (*li-ma tuḡarrimu mā aḡalla llāhu laka*) in order

15 The commandment list in Q 6:151–152 has further parallels in the Qur'an, including the much longer passage Q 17:22–39; see Lowry 2011, 32–36, which contains a synoptic table.

16 On the Medinan dating of Q 7:157, see → *ummī*.

17 Note the contrast with Q 2:221, forbidding intermarriage with both female and male associators.

18 On the Medinan dating of Q 6:146 and 16:118, see Sinai 2019c, 128–131. See also above with n. 11.

to please his wives.<sup>19</sup> Such statements are in line with a wider Medinan emphasis on the easiness of Qur’anic law, and they ensure that the theology of the Medinan surahs retains a significant measure of continuity with the dietary antinomianism of the Meccan period (Sinai 2019c, 135–136).

### **ḥizb | faction, party; (gentile or scriptureless) people or nation; troop**

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *al-shayṭān* | the devil, Satan *ikhtalafa* intr. | to disagree, to fall into disagreement *taqaṭṭa’ū amrahum baynahum* | they became divided among themselves over their affair *farraqū dīnahum* | they introduced divisions into their religion *shī’ah* | group, faction *kitāb* | scripture *ummah* | community

As Ambros explains in a concise and illuminating taxonomy (CDKA 70), the Qur’anic word *ḥizb* has the basic sense of a “group of people sharing a common interest or with a common cause, faction, party.” This general acceptance is exemplified by references to “God’s party” (*ḥizb allāh*) at Q 5:56 and 58:22 and to “the party of the devil” (*ḥizb* → *al-shayṭān*) at 58:19 and 35:6. Ambros then differentiates three more specific meanings of the plural *al-aḥzāb*, which may be regarded as variations on the basic sense just delineated.

**Ḥizb as a sectarian faction.** The first of these plural meanings, in Ambros’s words, consists in “certain religious groupings or factions.” A *ḥizb* in this sense is a group resulting from culpable sectarian disagreement (Q 19:37, 43:65: *ikhtalafa*) in the wake of, and indeed in spite of, prior divine revelation, such as the preaching of Jesus (see also under → *al-naṣārā*). Passages employing the word *ḥizb* in this manner include not only Q 19:37 and 43:65, which have the plural *aḥzāb*, but also 23:53 and 30:32 with the singular. In the latter two verses, religious discord and dissension are described not with the verb *ikhtalafa* but with the phrases *taqaṭṭa’ū amrahum baynahum*, “they became divided among themselves over their affair” (Q 23:53; see under → *zabūr*), and *farraqū dīnahum*, “they introduced divisions into their religion” (Q 30:32; for two other instances of → *dīn*<sup>2</sup> and *f-r-q*, see 6:159 and 42:13).<sup>1</sup> As the preceding verses make clear, a *ḥizb* in the sectarian sense implies both communal discord and wilful dismissal of divinely revealed truth (see under → *bayyana*). Q 30:32 and 6:159 (and perhaps also 19:69?) establish that a possible synonym of *ḥizb* in its sectarian meaning is *shī’ah* (CDKA 155), though the latter term can also have a positive acceptance (Q 37:83) or simply refer to a people or ethnic group (Q 15:10, 28:15).

The Qur’an’s rich terminology for religious conflict and disagreement suggests that its milieu of origin was indeed a “sectarian” one, as one might phrase it with a nod to a well-known book title (Wansbrough 1978). A number of passages tie religious disagreement to differences over the meaning of “the scripture” (→ *al-kitāb*), which God is said to have previously given to Moses (Q 2:176, 11:110, 41:45, all of which have *ikhtalafa* or its passive). Sectarian disagreement in the Qur’anic milieu thus had an exegetical dimension. This is

<sup>19</sup> By contrast, Q 9:37 denounces the practice of intercalation (*al-nasī*; see SQ 517 and Robin 2019a, 19–23) in terms of “permitting what God has forbidden” (*fa-yuḥillū mā ḥarrama llāhu*). Q 9:37 thus employs the inverse of the formulation “forbidding what God has permitted” in Q 5:87 and 66:1. Similar to Q 9:37, cf. also 9:29, condemning those who “do not deem forbidden what God and his Messenger have declared to be forbidden” (*wa-lā yuḥarrimūna mā ḥarrama llāhu*; on this verse, see also under → *jāhada*).

<sup>1</sup> On *farraqa* more generally, see CDKA 212.



presumably reflective of the deep divisions about the correct understanding of the Hebrew Bible / Old Testament between and among late antique Jews and Christians.

The Qur'anic vocabulary for and portrayal of sectarianism may itself owe something to Judaeo-Christian nomenclature. Jeffery makes the insightful observation that *ḥizb* in the meaning presently under discussion recalls the New Testamental description of the Sadducees and the Pharisees as a *hairesis* (FVQ 108; see Acts 5:17, 15:5, 26:5), a usage that is also found in Josephus and that follows in the wake of the application of the word *hairesis* to philosophical schools in Hellenistic Greek texts (see generally TDNT 1:180–184). The way in which the term *hairesis*—which the Ethiopic Bible renders as *ḥəzb* (FVQ 108)—figures in Acts 5:17, 15:5, and 26:5 is admittedly more neutrally descriptive than the Qur'an's polemically charged notion of a sectarian *ḥizb*. But patristic authors went on to employ *hairesis* as a label for various “heretical” teachers and groups (see generally Le Boulluec 1985), i.e., for those who “do not merely fail to attain to the truth; under the malignant influence of the devil they actively repudiate it” (Runia 1988, 188). This strong connotation of culpability and wilful denial of divine truth yields an even closer fit with the Qur'anic statements referenced above. The sectarian sense of Qur'anic *ḥizb* is therefore most likely informed by Christian heresiological discourse. This is not to ignore the crucial difference that the *aḥzāb* who, according to Q 19:37 and 43:65, fell into disagreement after Jesus are not set in opposition to a unified Christian church preserving true doctrine, as in Christian heresiology, but rather seem to encompass those who ignore Jesus's teaching that God is “my Lord and your<sup>p</sup> Lord” and is alone worthy of being served (Q 19:36, 43:64: *inna llāha ± <huwa> rabbī wa-rabbukum fa-'budūhu*). The *aḥzāb*, in other words, seem to encompass those who believe Jesus to be the son of God. In its Qur'anic adaptation, the Christian category of “the heretics” has therefore come to be generalised in such a way as to engulf mainstream Christianity itself.<sup>2</sup>

**Ḥizb in the sense of an ancient gentile or scriptureless nation.** Ambros's second meaning of *al-aḥzāb* are “certain pagan peoples of the past,” meaning ancient communities who were punished for rejecting a messenger sent by God, such as the peoples of Lot and of Pharaoh and the tribes of 'Ād and Thamūd (Q 38:11–13 and 40:5.30). For instance, Q 40:5 declares that Muhammad's opponents were preceded, in their denial of divine revelations, by “the people (*qawm*) of Noah and subsequent peoples (*al-aḥzābu min ba'dihim*),” and then goes on to employ → *ummah*, which can refer to an ethnic community, as an apparent synonym of *ḥizb*. Q 38:12–13 voice a similar accusation and explicitly include the people of Noah among “the *aḥzāb*.” This is not incompatible with Q 40:5, given that the latter only distinguishes between the people of Noah and “the peoples *after them*” (*al-aḥzāb min ba'dihim*). In both Surah 38 and Surah 40, the *aḥzāb* are ethnic communities from the ancient or pre-Mosaic period of Qur'anic history: while Q 38:12–13 includes Pharaoh among the *aḥzāb*, 40:30 has a believing contemporary of Pharaoh look back upon the sorry fate of “the *aḥzāb*.” When Q 15:10 makes reference to the “ancient communities” (*shiyā' al-awwālīn*), this is almost certainly an approximate equivalent of *al-aḥzāb* in 38:11–13 and 40:5.30.

Against Ambros and following Paret (KK 233), the second acceptance of *al-aḥzāb* should be taken to include Q 13:36, where the *aḥzāb* are contrasted with “those to whom we

2 Another case in which the Qur'an redirects a Christian polemical motif against Christianity is the Qur'anic claim to be recapitulating the pristine creed of Abraham, who was “neither a Jew nor a Christian” (Q 3:67). This bears similarity to Paul's invocation of Abraham as a way of bypassing the authority of the Mosaic law. See HCl 202 and also under → *ḥanīf*.



gave the scripture” (*alladhīna ātaynāhumu l-kitāba*).<sup>3</sup> Here, and also in Q 11:17, the *aḥzāb* seem to designate contemporaries of the Qur’an who have not hitherto received a scripture (→ *kitāb*), making the term an approximate equivalent of the Medinan word → *ummī*. Translators might provisionally opt to render *al-aḥzāb* as “the peoples without scripture,” “the pagan peoples,” or even “the gentiles” (i.e., meaning non-Israelite nations) in Q 11:17 and 13:36, whereas in 38:11.13 and 40:5.30 with their clear focus on pre-Mosaic communities it may be preferable to use “the ancient peoples.” It should be noted, though, that according to the Qur’an the ancient pre-Mosaic peoples in question are of course simultaneously peoples who, despite having been sent warners and messengers, did not or not yet receive scriptural revelations, which only enter the historical scene with Moses. Hence, the immanent semantic link between all the passages just bracketed together remains intelligible.

***Ḥizb* as a military troop or contingent.** Finally, the third meaning of *al-aḥzāb* distinguished by Ambros are “the Meccan-led allied pagan forces attacking Medina in the War of the Trench of 627 AD.” This sense is confined to Q 33:20.22, where the *aḥzāb* are clearly troops attacking Medina. Though it is open to debate whether the name and date of the military conflict that is presupposed by Surah 33 are as factually certain as Ambros implies, it is obvious that we are here confronted with a distinct usage. Its patent military connotations link it to the use of *ḥzb* in Sabaic, which designates military contingents of the Abyssinian army (*FVQ* 108–109; Beeston et al. 1982, 75; Robin 1995, 228).<sup>4</sup>

**Etymology.** Sabaic *ḥzb* would seem to be loaned from Ethiopic *ḥəzb*, whose various meanings Leslau enumerates as “nation, people, tribe, sect, multitude, crowd; partisans, gentiles, pagans, heathens” (Leslau 1991, 253). Clearly, the different senses of the Qur’anic word taxonomised above can be mapped onto various facets of Ethiopic *ḥəzb*, including the sectarian sense of Arabic *ḥizb* ≈ *hairesis* (see above) and also the meaning “gentile or scriptureless nation” (*KU* 19). This makes it very likely that Qur’anic *ḥizb* is ultimately a loanword from Gəʿəz (see *FVQ* 108–109), as Jeffery holds against Nöldeke and Horowitz (*NB* 59–60, *KU* 19), rather than being a native Arabic word that merely went on to acquire some of the meanings of Ethiopic *ḥəzb*. Jeffery maintains that the word passed through South Arabia, which is plausible in principle. Nonetheless, it is striking that the spectrum of meanings of Qur’anic *ḥizb* is considerably wider than that of Sabaic *ḥzb*, as currently attested, and that the Qur’anic verses in which *ḥizb* is closest to its Sabaic meaning, Q 33:20.22, are Medinan and therefore later than most of its other occurrences. It is not impossible that the ostensibly limited semantic spectrum of the Sabaic word is simply due to the predominantly military and political focus of South Arabian inscriptions. The alternative, and potentially more exciting, interpretation would be to deem the good semantic fit between Arabic *ḥzb* and Ethiopic *ḥəzb* an indication of direct contact between the Ethiopic tradition and Old Arabic.

***ḥāsaba* tr. | to call s.o. to account**  
→ *ḥisāb*

<sup>3</sup> Ambros assigns both Q 11:17 and 13:36 to the first, sectarian meaning.

<sup>4</sup> See now also <http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/SabaWeb/Suche/Suche/SearchResultDetail?idxLemma=1518&showAll=0> (accessed 6 November 2021), the reference to which I owe to Robin 1995.

## *ḥisāb* | reckoning, account

Further vocabulary discussed: *ḥāsaba* tr. | to call s.o. to account    *waffā* ditr. | to pay s.th. to s.o. in full; to repay s.o. for s.th. in full    *waffā* tr. *ilā* | to repay s.th. to s.o. in full  
*kitāb* | writ; written record, record book

**Overview of Qur’anic usage.** In line with the Qur’an’s tendency to couch God’s allocation of other-worldly rewards and punishments in commercial metaphors (→ *ajr*, → *sharā*, → *aqraḍa*, → *kasaba*), the Qur’an frequently describes the eschatological judgement as a “reckoning” or a “calling to account” (*ḥisāb*; CDKA 70), from early Meccan proclamations (e.g., Q 84:8 and 88:26) to Medinan ones (e.g., Q 2:202.212). Accordingly, the day of resurrection (→ *qiyāmah*) and judgement (→ *din*<sup>1</sup>) is in two Meccan surahs called the “day of reckoning” (*yawm al-ḥisāb*; Q 38:16.26.53, 40:27). God is “swift of reckoning” (*sarī al-ḥisāb*; Q 2:202, 3:19.199, 5:4, 13:41, 14:51, 24:39, 40:17); he calls humans to account (*yuhāsibkum*) even for what they might conceal (Q 2:284);<sup>1</sup> and he “fully repays” (*waffā*) everyone for his or her deeds (e.g., Q 11:15.111, 16:111, 39:70, 46:19), “fully pays” to the believers their due eschatological wages (e.g., Q 3:57, 4:173: *fa-yuwaffihim ujūrahum*), and “fully settles” the balance of a sinner’s moral “account” or debit-credit balance (Q 24:39: *fa-waffāhu ḥisābahu*). God’s reckoning is a thoroughly individualistic one: “nothing of their reckoning is upon you<sup>s</sup>, and nothing of your reckoning on them” (*mā ‘alayka min ḥisābihim min shay’in wa-mā min ḥisābika ‘alayhim min shay’in*), the Messenger is addressed with regard to those heeding his preaching (Q 6:52; see also 6:69). The unfailing accuracy of God’s eschatological reckoning is underscored by linking it to individual “writs” or “record books” (singular: → *kitāb*) that register virtuous and sinful human deeds (Q 69:19–20.25–26). God himself, by contrast, is not subject to any reckoning (Q 2:212, 3:27.37, 24:38: “God gives provision to whom he wills, without being subject to reckoning”; *allāhu yarzuqu man yashā’u bi-ghayri ḥisāb*).

When it is stated that the blessed in paradise are rewarded “without reckoning” (*bi-ghayri ḥisāb*; Q 39:10, 40:40), the meaning is not that the reward of the blessed is unrelated to their earthly conduct or that they are not subject to an eschatological vetting of their this-worldly performance at all. Rather, *ḥisāb* must in this context stand for the threatening and negative prospect of divine retribution or the “bad reckoning” (*sū’ al-ḥisāb*) with which the evildoers are threatened elsewhere (Q 13:18.21). Specifically, the point may be that God “erases” the believers’ evil acts (Q 42:25) or “absolves” them of their misdeeds (Q 39:35; see in more detail under → *ajr* and → *kaffāra*).

**Pre-Qur’anic background.** In casting God’s judgement as a calling to account, the Qur’an presupposes the reconceptualisation of sin as “a debt to be repaid” that Gary Anderson has identified as a seminal legacy of the Second Temple period, a conceptual shift that is attested both in the New Testament and in the rabbinic tradition (Anderson 2009). Thus, cognate expressions of the Qur’anic term *ḥisāb* are found in rabbinic and Christian texts, namely, Hebrew *heshbon* (*m. Abot* 3:1; Torrey 1892, 9) and Syriac *hūshbānā*. The latter appears, for instance, in the Peshitta’s rendering of Matt 18:23, a parable in which God is likened to a king who “wished to settle accounts” or to “have a reckoning” (*nessab*

<sup>1</sup> The third-form verb *ḥāsaba* is relatively rare; apart from Q 2:284, see 65:8 and 84:4. The discontinuous diachronic spread—namely, one early Meccan occurrence (Q 84:4) and two Medinan ones, with nothing in between—is noteworthy here but may be coincidental.

*ḥūshbānā*) “with his servants,” and by Ephrem (Beck 1970a, no. 3:221.227.230.247.253). Ephrem in particular unfolds the term’s underlying commercial logic in considerable detail: the “debts” that sinners incur during their lives are meticulously recorded and will be called in by the eschatological judge, while the righteous will receive “good remuneration” (*ḥūblā ṭābā*; Beck 1970a, no. 3:101–152; → *ajr*). Just as the Qur’an frames one’s other-worldly fate as being consequent on the transactional choices one has made during one’s earthly life (→ *sharā*), so Ephrem’s sermon avers that whoever has “exchanged one thing for another” (*meddem b-meddem en ḥallept*; Beck 1970a, no. 3:217) or has “given something for a nothing” (*yāheb meddem ḥlāp lā meddem*; Beck 1970a, no. 3:264) will encounter a meticulous and unfailing “reckoning” (*ḥūshbānā*; Beck 1970a, no. 3:247–248).

***aḥsan*: *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* pl. | the most excellent names (of God)**

→ *ism*

***ḥashara* tr. | to gather s.o., to assemble s.o.**

***ḥaṣhr* | gathering, assembly**

→ *ba’atha*

***ḥāṣib* | storm of pebbles**

→ *’adhhaba*

***ḥafīẓa* tr. | to watch over s.o.**

***ḥāfiẓ* | (angelic) watcher**

***ḥifẓ* | safeguarding, preservation**

→ *malak*, → *khalaqa* (on *ḥifẓ* in Q 2:255)

***ḥakama* intr. | to judge or adjudicate**

→ *injīl*, → *bayyana*, → *tawrāh*

***muḥkam* | firmly crafted**

→ *bayyana*

***ḥikmah* | wisdom**

***ḥakīm* | wise**

Further vocabulary discussed: *wajh* | face *ghaḍab* | wrath, anger *kitāb* | scripture *qur’ān* | recitation *mulk* | kingship, rulership *maw’iẓah* | admonition *āyah* | sign *naba’* | tidings, tidings *nadhīr* | warning *awḥā* tr. *ilā* | to convey s.th. to s.o. *ashraka* intr. (*bi-*) | to be an associator, to venerate associate deities, to attribute associates to

God *wa‘aḏa* tr. | to admonish s.o. ‘*alīm* | knowing, knowledgeable ‘*azīz* | mighty *bāṭilan* | in a futile manner ‘*abathan* | for sport *ṣabara* intr. | to be steadfast *ṣabr* | self-restraint, steadfastness *raḥmah* | mercy; act of mercy

**God as the paradigm and wellspring of wisdom.**<sup>1</sup> The Qur’an depicts God and humans as sharing various corporeal features, such as having a face or countenance (*wajh*; see under → *allāh*), and certain emotional responses, such as anger (*ghaḏab*; see under → *ghaḏiba*).<sup>2</sup> But a more important trait that humans may aspire to share with God is wisdom or *ḥikmah*, a word that is to be derived from Syriac, and more generally, Aramaic, *ḥekmtā* (*KU* 72–73; *FVQ* 111). Wisdom thus resembles the attribute of mercy, which can also be exemplified by humans (see under → *al-raḥmān*); to borrow from Ibn ‘Arabī, both are “names of similarity” (Chittick 1989, 58). It is evident that divine wisdom is paradigmatic and prior in relation to its human counterpart: the vast majority of the Qur’an’s 97 occurrences of the adjective *ḥakīm* (from Aramaic/Syriac *ḥakkīm/ ḥakkīmā*), which is usually employed in verse-final position, pertain to God, who is said to be wise or the one who is supremely wise (*al-ḥakīm*; e.g., Q 2:32.129, 3:6.18.62.126). This state of affairs, too, is similar to what one finds with regard to the attribute of mercy or compassion, since most Qur’anic derivatives of *r-ḥ-m* likewise refer to God.

The very limited number of entities other than God to which the qualifier “wise” is applied include “the scripture” (→ *al-kitāb*; Q 10:1, 31:2), meaning the Qur’anic revelations’ celestial archetype, and “the recitation” (*al-qur’ān*, on which see under → *qara’a*), the body of Arabic revelations that make the celestial scripture available to Muhammad’s addressees (Q 36:2, 43:2–4).<sup>3</sup> Despite the prevalent association of wisdom with God, however, wisdom is also a quality that can be displayed by humans: David was given kingship (*mulk*; see under → *malik*) and wisdom (*ḥikmah*), Q 2:251 says (cf. similarly 38:20); Luqmān, too, received wisdom from God (Q 31:12); and Q 2:269 generalises that God gives wisdom to whomever he wills (*yu’tī l-ḥikmata man yashā’u*). Human wisdom derives from God: according to a significant number of verses, what humans may ideally hope to gain from God is both access to the celestial scripture (*al-kitāb*) and to wisdom (*al-ḥikmah*): Muhammad is said to teach or to have received both (Q 2:129.151.231, 3:164, 4:113, 62:2), as did the descendants of Abraham (Q 4:54: *fa-qad ātaynā āla ibrahīma l-kitāba wa-l-ḥikmata*), Jesus (Q 3:48, 5:110),<sup>4</sup> and indeed all prophets (Q 3:81).

**Wisdom and revelation.** If Luqmān was, apparently, given wisdom without simultaneously being made privy to “the scripture” (Q 31:12), could one be given “the scripture”

1 My understanding of wisdom in the Qur’an is bound to be influenced, in more ways than I am retrospectively able to disentangle, by Saqib Hussain’s MPhil and DPhil research, done under my supervision at Oxford since 2017 (Hussain 2022b). Hence, even though the following does not endorse all of the conclusions reached in the latest version of Hussain’s doctoral thesis that I have seen, where my claims do intersect with Hussain’s results it will be safest to assume that the arrow of influence runs from him to me rather than vice versa.

2 This is not to deny that the relevant traits may take a different form depending on whether they are realised in God or humans. For example, God’s love and anger are perfectly proportionate to prior desert (see under → *ghaḏiba* and → *al-raḥmān*), whereas this is evidently often not true, or perhaps never fully true, of human love and anger.

3 Q 3:58 speaks of *al-dhikr al-ḥakīm*, “wise exhortation” (see under → *dhakkara*) that is imparted to the Qur’anic Messenger. In Q 44:4, it is God’s commands or decrees that are described as wise (*fihā yuḥḥiqu kullu amrin ḥakīm*); see under → *amr*.

4 Uniquely in the case of Jesus, the pair “the scripture and wisdom” is expanded by “the Torah (→ *al-tawrah*) and the Gospel (→ *al-injīl*)” (Q 3:48, 5:110). See on these two passages *KK* 68 and Goudarzi 2018, 218–241.

without wisdom? An affirmative answer might be suggested by the fact that it is repeatedly affirmed that God gave Moses “the scripture” without any accompanying reference to wisdom (Q 2:53,87, 6:154, 11:110, 17:2, 23:49, 25:35, 28:43, 32:23, 37:117, 41:45; cf. 6:91). However, we saw above that Q 10:1 and 31:2 apply the adjective “wise” to the celestial scripture itself, which implies that wisdom is an inherent aspect of the latter (Goudarzi 2018, 226). It follows that when Moses is reported to have been given the scripture, this implies that he also partook of God’s wisdom. This view is, moreover, consistent with the fact that Q 7:145 considers the tablets bestowed upon Moses to have contained “admonition” (*maw‘izah*; Schmid 2021, 336), which is a term that Q 16:125 links with wisdom (see below). Indeed, that Moses, too, shared in God’s wisdom is only what one would expect given the affirmations that the descendants of Abraham and the prophets in general received “the scripture and wisdom” (Q 4:54, 3:81). Most likely, the celestial scripture is to be understood as the consummate manifestation of divine wisdom, even if God may also choose to dispense wisdom to someone who is, like Luqmān, not simultaneously granted scriptural revelations proper.

The figure of Luqmān in Surah 31 clearly functions as a spokesman of Qur’anic doctrine, as illustrated in more detail below. This suggests that what one might call the “natural” (i.e., non-revelatory) rational faculties of humans are deemed capable of arriving at least at some of the hallmarks of Qur’anic revelatory instruction. It would be less appropriate to qualify the Qur’anic understanding of natural reason as “unaided,” however, since Luqmān is said to have received his wisdom from God (Q 31:12). If a human is truly wise, this must be reckoned to be a divine gift, even if the wisdom in question was not transmitted via revelation. The logic behind this position must be that any event in the world, such as the gestation of human embryos from sperm (e.g., Q 75:37), the falling of rain (e.g., Q 6:99), or the fact that birds do not drop from the sky (Q 16:79), is in the final instance to be credited to God. Moreover, the fact that the deliverances of Luqmān’s natural reason overlap so closely with the content of divine revelation is in line with the extent to which the Qur’an is concerned to highlight that pivotal theological truths are bolstered by a great number of “signs” (singular: → *āyah*) that an open-minded human observer may discern in the cosmos and in human history.

**Towards a profile of Qur’anic wisdom.** What, then, is the Qur’anic understanding of wisdom? A full answer is beyond the confines of this entry and forms the subject of a recent doctoral thesis by Saqib Hussain, which also examines links between the Qur’an and the sapiential legacy of Biblical and subsequent Judaeo-Christian literature (Hussain 2022b). But three provisional remarks can be made.

First, in line with the foregoing conclusion that the Qur’an does not conceive of wisdom as something that is distinct from the celestial scripture, the content of wisdom in the sense of a body of insights that may be attained by humans coincides to a significant degree with the content of revelation and vice versa. Thus, as Goudarzi notes (Goudarzi 2018, 225), Q 54:4–5 describes the deterrent “tidings” (*naba’*) that have reached the Qur’anic opponents—that is, information about God’s punitive obliteration of past nations, about the eschatological judgement, or about both—as “compelling wisdom” (*hikmah bālighah*) and associates the latter with divine “warnings” (*nudhur*; singular: *nadhīr*, on which see under → *bashshara*). Wisdom consequently overlaps with the Qur’anic kerygma of an inevitable eschatological reckoning, which the Qur’an presents as something for which contemplation of the natural world provides weighty indicators (e.g., Q 86:5–9). The same conclusion of substantial overlap between wisdom and revelation also arises from

Q 17:22–39, an extended Decalogue-like passage that inter alia prohibits the veneration of other deities (Q 17:22–23), demands kindness to one’s parents (Q 17:23–24), and enjoins being generously, but not ostentatiously, charitable (Q 17:26–30). The concluding verse of this passage, Q 17:39, says that the preceding “belongs to the wisdom that your<sup>S</sup> Lord has conveyed (→ *awḥā*) to you” (*dhālika mim mā awḥā ilayka rabbuka mina l-ḥikmati*). Wisdom thus includes standard Qur’anic norms like monotheism and charity, again indicating substantial common ground between the content of sapiential and revelatory teaching. Another piece of evidence pointing in the same direction is the extended testamental address by Luqmān that is quoted in Q 31:13–19 (Schmid 2021, 328–333), which briefly changes into the divine voice in vv. 14–15. Key pieces of advice given by Luqmān are the need to steer clear of associating partners (verb: → *ashraka*) with God (Q 31:13), divine omniscience (Q 31:16), the imperative of performing prayer (Q 31:17), and an appeal to cultivate the virtues of steadfastness and humility (Q 31:17–19). There is, again, little here that might not also figure as a straightforward divine command. This is very neatly illustrated by the fact that, as just noted, Q 31:14–15, which set out the need to be kind to one’s parents, briefly slip into the divine voice, in keeping with a number of close Qur’anic parallels (Q 2:83, 4:36, 6:151, 17:23–24, 29:8, 46:15).<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, to describe certain utterances or teachings as constituting “wisdom” involves an emphasis on their intelligibility by and persuasiveness to human recipients, or at least to human recipients who are rightly disposed and not obdurately impervious. Supporting this contention, Q 16:125 counsels the Qur’anic Messenger to “call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and with fair admonition (*al-maw’izah al-ḥasanah*), and dispute with them in the fairest manner (*wa-jādilhum bi-llatī hiya aḥsanu*).” Luqmān, too, who is singled out as a recipient of wisdom in Q 31:12, is portrayed as “admonishing” (verb: *wa’aḏa*; see Schmid 2021) his son in 31:13, while 2:231 refers to “what God sent down of the scripture and the wisdom in order to admonish you<sup>P</sup> thereby” (*mā anzala ‘alaykum mina l-kitābi wa-l-ḥikmati ya’izukum bihi*). Hence, the Qur’an recurrently links wisdom with hortatory communication, expressed by the root *w-‘-z*: Qur’anic wisdom is no esoteric gnosis reserved for a select few but rather involves an emphasis on discursive outreach. Moreover, Q 38:20, in recounting God’s blessings upon David, pairs wisdom with “decisive speech” (*wa-āṭaynāhu l-ḥikmata wa-faṣla l-khiṭāb*). Taken together, the verses just surveyed show that a possessor of wisdom is somebody who is able to speak, instruct, and advise authoritatively and persuasively. This is also borne out by the fact that the Decalogue-like list of commandments in Q 17:22–39, which is categorised as constituting “wisdom” in its concluding verse, exhibits a noticeable concern to spell out “the rationale behind its commandments” (Goudarzi 2018, 226, n. 95; see also Hussain 2022b, 176–229). All of this is separated by some distance from the distinction that Paul makes between the wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world (1 Cor 1:18–2:16 and 3:18–20). From the Qur’anic vantage point, genuine worldly wisdom is not in tension with divine wisdom but expressive of it.

Thirdly, and perhaps most crucially, in what sense does the Qur’an ascribe wisdom to God? The formulaic nature of Qur’anic predications of the attribute *ḥakīm*, “wise,” makes it difficult to answer this question with much precision, since the degree to which verse-final theological predications in the Qur’an correlate with preceding statements remains

<sup>5</sup> To illustrate the phraseological similarities between these passages, Q 29:8, 31:14, and 46:15 have *waṣṣaynā l-insāna bi-wālidayhi* ± <*ḥusnan/iḥsānan*>. Q 2:83, 4:36, 6:151, and 17:23 shorten this to *bi-l-wālidayni iḥsānan*.



to be established. Most frequently, the predicate *ḥakīm* is coupled with ‘*alīm*, “knowing, knowledgeable” (e.g., Q 2:32, 4:11.17), and ‘*azīz*, “mighty” (e.g., Q 2:129.209.220). God, then, is qualified by knowledge, power, and wisdom. While these three attributes should probably not be regarded as neatly separable from one another, it is plausible to interpret God’s wisdom as bridging his knowledge and his power: God’s wisdom, one may propose, is not a purely cognitive trait, like his knowledge; rather, it signifies the active exercise of God’s all-encompassing supremacy over all things in a way that reveals knowledge and purpose, and is amenable to being recognised as such by humans. As a handful of passages declare, God did not create the world “for mere play” (Q 21:16, 44:38: *lā ‘ibīn*), “in a futile manner” (Q 3:191, 38:27: *bāṭilan*), or “for sport” (Q 23:115: *‘abathan*; see also under → *balā*). That God is wise, therefore, entails that his actions are at least broadly comprehensible as wise by human agents.<sup>6</sup> After all, as we saw above, when wisdom manifests itself on the human plane, it is associated with intelligible and persuasive communication; and the Qur’an certainly speaks sufficiently often of a bestowal of wisdom upon humans in order to undercut the suggestion that God’s wisdom is in principle inaccessible to mortals. Understanding divine wisdom to involve the basic intelligibility of God’s deeds, moreover, fits well with the Qur’an’s persistent concern to establish two fundamental points: that manifold natural phenomena evince God’s generous solicitude for humans and the sagacious manner in which human welfare is served by the divinely orchestrated course of nature (see under → *arḍ* and → *āyah*); and that the general standards by which God judges the moral performance of his creatures display conformity with human ethical intuitions (see under → *al-rahmān*, → *ḡalama* and → *ma’rūf*).

**The mystery of God’s ways (Q 21:23, 18:65–82).** But it is vital to signal counterpoints to the preceding. Most importantly, one Qur’anic verse states quite plainly that God “is not interrogated about what he does,” unlike humans (Q 21:23: *lā yus’alu ‘ammā yaf’alu wa-hum yus’alūn*; see Zirker 1993, 204–220): it is not for humans to sit in judgement over God. This pronouncement coheres with the general fact that the Qur’an, in contrast to the Hebrew Bible, does not portray figures of indisputable religious and moral integrity agonising in good faith over how the factual state of the world and of human affairs can be reconciled with the general postulates of God’s wisdom and goodness (Zirker 1993, 204–220, and Alexander 2006, 380; see also the remarks on theodicy under → *ḡalama*). While the Qur’an unequivocally proclaims God’s wisdom and justice, often formulaically so, there is little sustained attempt to defend these traits in the face of ostensibly countervailing evidence. Q 21:23 suggests that this is quite deliberate. The verse does not, it is worth adding, necessarily point to a voluntarist or theistically subjectivist account of value, according to which God may define the content of normative concepts like “good,” “just,” or “wise” in whichever way he pleases (see, e.g., Hourani 1985, 57–66); the verse merely asserts that no one is endowed with such authority and insight as to be capable of objectively finding God to be in breach of the requirements of goodness, justice, or wisdom.

The general lesson of Q 21:23, that God is not answerable for what he does, is further unpacked in Q 18:65–82, a memorable passage relating Moses’s travels in the company of an anonymous “servant” of God who performs three acts that initially appear inexplicable or outrageous but are subsequently revealed to have produced a morally optimal outcome (see Zirker 1993, 211–213, and under → *ṣabara*). According to Haim Schwarzbaum, the

<sup>6</sup> Based on the work of Ulrich Rudolph, it may be suggested that the same insight is also articulated by al-Māturīdī (Rudolph 1997, 330–334; Rudolph 2012; Rudolph 2016a, 289).

story belongs to a wider class of “theodicy legends” also found in the Jewish and Christian traditions: a human protagonist initially struggles to comprehend how certain earthly events conform to God’s justice; yet the deity is vindicated when some angelic, prophetic, or saintly figure offers a retrospective explanation (Schwarzbaum 1960; see also Paret 1968 and Reynolds 2018, 465). While the root *ḥ-k-m* is absent from Q 18:65–82, the passage conveys a basic message that is topically relevant to the present entry: even a person of the religious standing of Moses may easily fail to show an appropriately “steadfast” (*ṣ-b-r*) trust in God’s mercy (Q 18:65.82: *raḥmah*; see under → *al-raḥmān*) and in God’s knowledge (Q 18:65.66: *‘-l-m*; 18:68: *kh-b-r*)—divine qualities that in the narrative at hand are mediated by Moses’s enigmatic companion. If one applies this general moral to the Qur’anic insistence on God’s wisdom, it follows that even though God’s wisdom is evident from many aspects of the world surrounding us, in many situations it is nonetheless bound to remain mysterious how exactly the actual course of events realises divine knowledge, mercy, and wisdom.

To enlist an image, one might call this the iceberg model of God’s wisdom, justice, and mercy: the divine attributes in question are to some extent held to be manifest and humanly comprehensible; yet in other respects they are assumed to remain inaccessible under water, as it were, making it partially necessary to take them on trust. (A strong case can be made that a monotheistic world-view will, *ceteris paribus*, gain in stability by espousing some version of the iceberg model: if God’s wisdom or goodness are held to be entirely inaccessible, God risks appearing inept or malicious, which can spark theological innovation; but if God’s wisdom or goodness are held to be entirely accessible and comprehensible, it is highly likely that at least some facts about the world will appear to serve God’s assumed purposes in a less than optimal fashion.) The iceberg model may be identified as a chief reason for why the Qur’an exhibits a palpable tendency to block detailed theodicean discourse rather than presenting it as a legitimate thread in the tapestry of human belief in God (see also under → *ḡalama*). The rationale underlying this Qur’anic stance can perhaps be explicated as follows: there is no way of dispensing humans from having to accept that their understanding of God’s wisdom has real and poignant limits; it is therefore a religious virtue to be able to restrain oneself from seeking to peek behind these limits, or from railing against them, in the first place.

***ḥalla* intr. | to be permitted; to quit the state of ritual consecration**

***aḥalla* tr. | to permit s.th.; to treat s.th. as profane**

***ḥalāl, ḥill* | permitted**

***maḥill* | place of sacrifice**

See under → *ḥarrama*; on *maḥill*, see under → *dhabaḥa*.

***ḥ-m, ḥ-m-‘-s-q* (surah-initial letter sequences)**

→ *‘-l-r*

***ḥamida* tr. | to praise s.o.**

→ *ḥamd*

*ḥamd* | praise  
*ḥamīd* | praiseworthy  
*maḥmūd* | praiseworthy

Further vocabulary discussed: *ghaniyy* | free from any needs *faqīr* | poor, needful  
*sabbaha* tr. | to glorify s.o. or s.th. (such as God or God's name) *sabbaha* intr. *li-/bi-* | to glorify s.o. or s.th. (such as God or God's name) *sabbaha* intr. | to be engaged glorifying God, to utter prayers of praise *sabbaha* intr. *bi-ḥamdi* . . . | to glorify and praise s.o. (namely, God) *subhāna* . . . (e.g., *subhāna llāhi*, *subhānahu*) | Glory be to . . . (e.g., Glory be to God, Glory be to him) *ta'ālā* intr. *'an* | to be exalted above s.th. *ḥamida* tr. | to praise s.o.

**Qur'anic terms for praising God: the roots ḥ-m-d and s-b-ḥ.** To believe (→ *āmana*) in God involves being grateful to him for all that he has bestowed on humans (see under → *kafara*) and to internalise that he is “free from any needs (*ghaniyy*), praiseworthy (*ḥamīd*),” as a number of later Meccan and Medinan verse closers put it (Q 2:267, 4:131, 14:8, 31:12, 64:6; 22:64, 31:26, 35:15, 57:24, 60:6 have *al-ghaniyy al-ḥamīd*). Humans, by contrast, are needful of (*fuqarā' ilā*) God (Q 35:15; cf. 47:38).<sup>1</sup> Humans give expression to this realisation by praising and glorifying God, activities that the Qur'an designates by derivatives of the roots *ḥ-m-d* and *s-b-ḥ*. Both speech acts are virtually exclusively directed at God in the Qur'an, even if Q 17:79 promises the Qur'anic Messenger a “praiseworthy rank” (*maqām maḥmūd*).<sup>2</sup>

Commands to “glorify” (verb: *sabbaha*) God or God's name (→ *ism*) are already prominent in early Meccan surahs (Q 15:98, 52:48.49, 56:74.96, 69:52, 87:1, all of which have the singular imperative *sabbih*).<sup>3</sup> A preferred time for such glorification seems to have been at night (Q 20:130, 50:40, 52:49, 76:26) as well as in the morning and evening (Q 3:41, 19:11, 20:130, 33:42, 38:18, 40:55, 48:9, 50:39). Moreover, the activity of glorifying God must have been accompanied by prostration (verb: → *sajada*), which is repeatedly paired with *sabbaha* (Q 7:206, 15:98, 32:15, 76:26). Glorifying God is thus to be viewed as a ritual act performed at specific times and involving set bodily postures and movements. It is, in other words, a form of, or tantamount to, prayer (*ṣalāh*; → *ṣallā*). As regards the root *ḥ-m-d*, the Qur'an predominantly employs it in the form of the attribute *ḥamīd*, “praiseworthy,” applied exclusively to God, and the noun *ḥamd*, “praise.” The latter is especially frequent in the exclamation *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi*, “Praise be to God,” which has twenty-three occurrences (e.g., Q 1:2, 6:1.45, 7:43, 37:182, 39:29.74.75, 40:65). Although *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi* is limited to Meccan surahs, the opening verse of the Medinan Surah 64 declares that God's is “the kingdom and to him belongs praise” (Q 64:1: *lahu l-mulku wa-lahu l-ḥamdu*).<sup>4</sup>

1 See also Q 3:181, condemning an utterance by anonymous (perhaps Jewish) contemporaries who reprehensibly inverted this state of affairs by calling God poor (*faqīr*) and humans rich (*aghniyā'*).

2 See also Q 3:188, briefly referenced below.

3 *Sabbaha* can either take a direct object (e.g., Q 7:206: *yusabbihūnahu*) or a prepositional one, whether introduced by *li-* (e.g., Q 17:44: *tusabbihū lahu l-samāwātu l-sab'u wa-l-arḍu wa-man fihinna*) or *bi-* (e.g., Q 69:52: *fa-sabbih bi-smi rabbika l-'azīm*). There is also an absolute usage of *sabbaha* without direct or prepositional object, “to be engaged in praising God, to utter prayers of praise,” which is elliptical (e.g., Q 3:41, 19:11).

4 The entire second half of Q 64:1 runs *lahu l-mulku wa-lahu l-ḥamdu wa-huwa 'alā kulli shay'in qadīr*. If one is prepared to depart from the reasonable policy of rendering *ḥamd* as “praise” throughout, one might translate this verse as “his is the kingdom, and his is the glory, and he is endowed with power over everything.”

An approximate equivalent of *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi* would seem to be *subḥāna* followed by a personal suffix (e.g., Q 2:32, 3:191, 5:116: *subḥānaka*), by a genitive noun (e.g., Q 12:108, 21:22, 23:91: *subḥāna llāhi*), or by a relative clause referring to God (Q 17:1, 36:36.83, 43:13). *Subḥāna* exclamations may be used to express contrition (Q 21:87, 68:29) or in indignant denials of some claim or stance that is deemed disrespectful of God (e.g., Q 5:116, 34:41, 39:4), in which latter case they often include the preposition ‘*an*, as in Q 52:43: *subḥāna llāhi ‘ammā yushrikūn*, “Glory be to God, who is above their associating,” namely, of other beings with him (see similarly, e.g., Q 37:159.180, 43:82, 59:23; Baumstark 1927, 239–241). Ambros (*CDKA* 127) conjectures that this use of *subḥāna* + ‘*an* is due to contamination with *ta‘ālā ‘an*, “he [namely, God] is exalted above . . .,” both of which occur together in a number of verses (e.g., Q 6:100: *subḥānahu wa-ta‘ālā ‘ammā yaṣifūn*, “Glory be to him; he is above what they allege”; see similarly 10:18, 16:1, 17:43, 28:68, 30:40, 39:67). In other cases, *subḥāna* . . . seems straightforwardly equivalent with *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi* (e.g., Q 17:1.108, 27:8, 36:36.83, 43:13). That there is at least partial synonymity between both phrases is illustrated by Q 30:17–18, where a *subḥāna* exclamation (v. 17: *fa-subḥāna llāhi*, “Glory be to God”) is continued by a statement employing *ḥamd* (v. 18: *wa-lahu l-ḥamdu fi l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi*, “and praise be to him in the heavens and on earth”). The semantic intersection between the roots *ḥ-m-d* and *s-b-ḥ* is also evident from the phrase *sabbāḥa bi-ḥamdi* X (on which see also below), with X consisting either in a possessive suffix referring to God (e.g., Q 2:30, 13:13, 17:44, 25:58) or in *rabbī* + possessive suffix, “your/his Lord” (e.g., Q 15:98, 20:130, 32:15, 39:75). A literal rendering of *sabbāḥa bi-ḥamdi* X might run “to glorify X by praising him,” though “to glorify and praise X” is arguably more elegant.

It is notable that a finite form of the verb *ḥamida*, “to praise s.o.,” is attested only once in the Qur’an, in Q 3:188, which criticises those “who love to be praised for what they have not done” (*wa-yuḥibbūna an yuḥmadū bi-mā lam yafalū*). Apart from Q 9:112, which lauds “those who utter prayer of praise” (*al-ḥāmidūn*), the standard Qur’anic manner for expressing “to praise God” is always the complex phrase *sabbāḥa bi-ḥamdi* X instead of simple *ḥamida*. Thus, in Q 2:30 the angels express the fact that they are engaged in praising God by the words *naḥnu nusabbiḥu bi-ḥamdika* rather than by *naḥnu naḥmaduka*. The reason for this marked preference for *sabbāḥa* or *sabbāḥa bi-ḥamdi* over *ḥamida* can only be conjectured, but it is relevant to note that *sabbāḥa* is a loanword from Syriac *shabbāḥ* (*FVQ* 161–162) and may as such have connoted liturgical praise of God in particular, given that the loan is likely to have arisen among Arabophone Christians who were exposed to Syriac religious terminology. Building on a suggestion made by Goitein, it is possible, therefore, that the Qur’anic penchant for *sabbāḥa bi-ḥamdi* is predicated on an implicit distinction between ordinary professions of praise whose object may well be humans, designated by simple *ḥamida* (as illustrated by Q 3:188), and ritually schematised praise of God, designated by *sabbāḥa bi-ḥamdi* (Goitein 1966, 75–76). The latter activity is not only demanded of humans but is also modelled by the angels surrounding God’s throne, who “glorify and praise God and believe in him and ask for forgiveness on behalf of the believers” (Q 40:7: *yusabbiḥūna bi-ḥamdi rabbihim wa-yu’minūna bihi wa-yastaghfirūna*

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which amounts to a permutation of the traditional conclusion of the Lord’s Prayer, as attested by part of the manuscript tradition for Matt 6:13: “For yours is the kingdom (*hē basileia*) and the power (*hē dynamis*) and the glory (*hē doxa*) forever. Amen.” *Lahu l-ḥamdu* has only three more Qur’anic occurrences (Q 28:70, 30:18, 34:1, all of which are later Meccan) and is thus relatively rare, certainly in comparison with the greater number of verses that have *subḥāna* + possessive suffix.

*li-lladhīna āmanū*; → *malak*). Indeed, the Qur’an stresses that everything and everyone in the heavens and on earth is in some sense engaged in glorifying God (Q 17:44, 24:41, 57:1, 59:1.24, 61:1, 62:1, 64:1; see under → *arḍ* and → *sajada*, and cf. the parallel in Jacob of Sarug found in Mathews 2020, 18–19, l. 1932).

**Pre-Qur’anic background.** *Al-ḥamdu li-llāhi*, like its approximate equivalent *subḥāna llāhi*, is an Arabisation of Greek *doxa tō theō* or Syriac *teshbūhtā l-allāhā* (GQ 1:112, n. 1). Such doxologies widely permeate the Christian tradition, whether in the third person or in the second-person form “Glory be to you,” *doxa soi* (Baumstark 1927, 234–236), whose functional counterpart in the Qur’an would be *subḥānaka*. The *doxa tō theō* formula is most famously represented by the angels’ song of praise at the Nativity (Luke 2:14: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours”), which subsequently grew into the prayer called the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* or the “Great Doxology,” a Greek version of which is cited in the fourth-century *Apostolic Constitutions* 7:47 (Metzger 1985–1987, 3:112–113; for a Syriac version according to an eighteenth-century manuscript, see Ebied 2017). The phrase *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi* and its variants *bi-ḥamdi llāhi* and *bi-ḥamdi l-ilāhi* occur already in pre-Islamic poetry (Sinai 2019b, 31, 53), including the Christian poet ‘Adī ibn Zayd (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 6:19; Tamer 2008, 74). One infers that the Arabic formula *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi* had become established prior to the Qur’an’s emergence, presumably among Arabophone Christians, whence it penetrated into wider usage (Sinai 2019b, 62). But it should be noted that the root *ḥ-m-d* is used for praise of a deity already in pre-monotheistic Sabaic inscriptions (e.g., Arbach 1996, 244).<sup>5</sup>

### ***ḥanīf* (li-) | fervently devoted (to God or to worshipping God)**

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *millah* | religion, religious teaching    *dīn* | religion, religious worship    *muslim* | one who surrenders himself or dedicates himself (to God)    *al-mushrikūn*, *alladhīna ashrakū* pl. | the associators    *fiṭrah* | creaturely disposition, creaturely constitution

**Overview.** The singular *ḥanīf* and its plural *ḥunafā’* occur in a total of twelve Qur’anic verses, both Meccan and Medinan. The word always appears in the accusative and frequently accompanies references to Abraham or Abraham’s → *millah* or religious teaching, even though this is not the case for what may be the chronologically earliest instance of the term, in Q 30:30 (*fa-aqim wajhaka li-l-dīni ḥanīfan*, “set your face towards religion, as a *ḥanīf*”; see KU 56). Q 3:67 makes it particularly clear that the term *ḥanīf* is a descriptor applying to Abraham himself: “Abraham was not a Jew or a Christian (*mā kāna ibrahīmu yahūdīyyan wa-lā naṣrāniyyan*); rather, he was a *ḥanīf* who surrendered himself to God (*wa-lākin kāna ḥanīfan musliman*), and he was no associator (*wa-mā kāna mina l-mushrikīn*).” Q 3:67 also illustrates that the word *ḥanīf* is often followed by the tail *wa-mā kāna mina l-mushrikīn* (→ *ashraka*) or some variant thereof (e.g., an imperative version in Q 10:105: “Do not be an associator”).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Ahmad Al-Jallad for drawing my attention to the inscription at hand.

<sup>1</sup> Luxenberg proposes that what appears to be the accusative ending in the singular *ḥanīfan* goes back to a misconstrual of the Syriac emphatic state, such that *ibrāhīm ḥanīfan*—whose original pronunciation in the mixed Arabic-

By way of aiding the following discussion of the meaning of *ḥanīf* and its likely etymology, the table that follows provides an overview of the word's twelve occurrences in the Qur'an and some of their most important features.

Qur'anic verse	Accusative (singular, unless otherwise specified)	Qualifies Abraham or Abraham's <i>millah</i>	In combination with <i>wa-mā kāna mina l-mushrikīn</i> or variant
2:135	×	×	×
3:67	×	×	×
3:95	×	×	×
4:125	×	×	
6:79	×	× (occurs in first-person declaration by Abraham)	× (transposed into first person)
6:161	×	×	×
10:105	×		× (imperative)
16:120	×	× (without <i>millah</i> )	× ( <i>wa-lam yaku . . .</i> )
16:123	×	×	×
22:31	× (pl., combines with <i>li-llāhi</i> )	(Abraham addressed in vv. 26 ff.)	× ( <i>ghayra mushrikīna bihi</i> )
30:30	×		
98:5	× (pl.)		(preceded by <i>mukhlisīna lahu l-dīna</i> , “restricting worship to God”; see under → <i>dīn</i> <sup>2</sup> )

***Ḥanīf* and the connotation of turning and inclining.** In Q 22:31, the plural *ḥunafā'* is followed by the prepositional object *li-llāhi*, “to God.”<sup>2</sup> This prepositional usage may indicate that the Qur'anic use of *ḥanīf* is at least tinged by the connotation of inclining that the lexicographic tradition associates with the Arabic root *ḥ-n-f*: the verbs *ḥanafa* and *tahannafa ilā* are parsed as “to incline to s.th.” and *ḥanafa/tahannafa 'an* as “to incline away from s.th.” (see, e.g., *AEL* 658; *FVQ* 113–114; Sirry 2011, 348).<sup>3</sup> The same undertone

Syriac language posited by Luxenberg would presumably have been something like *ibrāhīm ḥanīfā*—corresponds, in proper Arabic, to *ibrāhīm al-ḥanīf* (Luxenberg 2007, 55–56). However, it should be noted that this hypothesis does not fully explain the exclusive appearance of the word in the accusative throughout the Qur'an, as there are also two instances of the accusative plural (Q 22:31, 98:5). Furthermore, not all occurrences of *ḥanīfan* follow directly upon *ibrāhīm* (Q 3:67, 6:79, 10:105, 16:120, 30:30); and in all of these latter cases at least, the presence of the accusative makes grammatical sense in Arabic. Hence, it is doubtful that Luxenberg's Syriac emendation *ḥanīfan > ḥanīfā* provides a sufficiently compelling explanation for the whole gamut of Qur'anic data.

2 For another case in which *ḥanīf* figures in close proximity to the preposition *li-*, see Q 30:30 (*fa-aqim wajhaka li-l-dīni ḥanīfan*, “set your face towards religion, in devotion [to God or his worship]”). In Q 16:120 (*inna ibrahīma kāna ummatan qānitan li-llāhi ḥanīfan*), the preposition *li-* belongs together with the participle of *qanata* (“to be obedient”); cf. Q 2:116, 3:43, 30:26, 33:31.

3 Even if *ḥanīf* is ultimately considered to be a loanword, this does not preclude that the Qur'anic audience may have understood it in light of the established meaning of its Arabic root. See similarly under → *nabiyy*, on the possibility that the Qur'anic recipients associated the loaned noun *nabiyy*, “prophet,” with the root *n-b-* and the verb *nabba'a*, “to announce, to tell.”



of orienting oneself towards God could also be present in Q 6:79, 10:105, and 30:30, in all of which the term *ḥanīf* is preceded by the image of turning one's face to the creator or to his worship (→ *dīn*<sup>2</sup>; see Sirry 2011, 352). Of course, the fact that neither *ḥanafa* nor *tahannafa* occur in the Qur'an gives reason to be cautious about such etymological considerations. But it does make good contextual sense to assume that the prepositional complement *li-llāhi* from Q 22:31 explicates a Godward attitude that is implicit in other Qur'anic occurrences of *ḥanīf* and *ḥunafā'* as well. Based on its Qur'anic usage, the term *ḥanīf* may thus be supposed to have the approximate significance of being wholly or fervently devoted to or oriented towards God.

**Does *ḥanīf* denote monotheism?** The tentative gloss just offered raises the further question whether we can further specify how *ḥanīf*-like devotion to God manifests itself. A forthcoming study by Mohsen Goudarzi argues that the word *ḥanīf* denotes in particular a “cultic worshipper” of God, meaning “a person who worships God through rites such as cultic prayer, sacrifice, and pilgrimage” (Goudarzi, forthcoming). Alternatively, the core meaning of *ḥanīf* could be located in monotheism, i.e., the disavowal of any deities other than Allāh, an assumption that is prominent in Izutsu's understanding of the term *ḥanīf* (*GМК* 112; *ERCQ* 191). While these two aspects are of course compatible, it is clear that the former does not necessarily entail the latter and that engagement in the cult of a particular deity, even intense engagement in it, does not as such imply the theological claim that no other deities exist. As Goudarzi notes, his interpretation is strengthened by the fact that several verses containing the term *ḥanīf* also include the noun → *dīn*<sup>2</sup>, which designates not just religion in general but specifically religious worship (Q 4:125, 6:161, 10:105, 30:30, 98:5). Moreover, on Goudarzi's hypothesis, the persistent link between the word *ḥanīf* and the figure of Abraham would be readily explicable in so far as a number of Qur'anic passages portray Abraham as the founder of the Meccan sanctuary and of the rituals performed there (Q 2:125–129, 3:96–97, 22:26–29; cf. also 14:35–41).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the Qur'anic Abraham is equally identified with rigorous monotheism. While it seems difficult to settle the question about the precise connotations of *ḥanīf* on the basis of the Qur'anic data alone, we will further below encounter some poetic evidence that supports Goudarzi's hypothesis.

The question whether a *ḥanīf* is first and foremost someone who is cultically devoted to God, perhaps with particular intensity or ardour, or rather someone who is exclusively and credally devoted to him will also have a bearing on how one judges the semantic link between the word *ḥanīf* and the frequent addendum *mā kāna mina l-mushrikīn*, “he was no associator.” On the understanding that a *ḥanīf* is someone who denies other deities, the *mā kāna mina l-mushrikīn* refrain will be a formulaic pleonasm reinforcing the basic meaning of *ḥanīf*; in other words, the state of being *ḥanīf* will be one that is essentially opposed to associating other beings with God and to diluting one's recognition of the deity's supremacy and sole entitlement to be worshipped. Alternatively, the semantic relationship between the predicate *ḥanīf* and the ensuing statement *wa-mā kāna mina l-mushrikīn* might be taken to be not pleonastic but rather synthetic, i.e., the refrain might be understood to add information not already entailed by the word *ḥanīf*. On this reading,

4 While I would date the passages from Surahs 2, 3, and 22 to the Medinan period, it seems quite likely to me that this material reflects and endorses pre-existing Meccan traditions about a close link between the Ka'bah and Abraham (which do not need to have formed a Meccan consensus, however). See under → *bayt*.

to say that Abraham was a *ḥanīf* and not an associator (e.g., Q 3:67) is to make two claims that are not fully equivalent: first, that Abraham was assiduously dedicated to the cultic veneration of God; secondly, that he was wholly and exclusively devoted to God, i.e., that he disavowed all other deities.<sup>5</sup>

**Qur’anic *ḥanīf* and the *ḥunafā’*.** The debate about the meaning of *ḥanīf* in the Qur’an is complicated by the fact that post-Qur’anic sources describe a number of pre-Islamic non-Jewish and non-Christian Arabian monotheists as *ḥanīfs* or as following *al-ḥanīfiyyah*, “*ḥanīfism*.” The authenticity of such reports remains controversial, though Rubin has underscored that some of the individuals are depicted as opponents of Muhammad, which in his view makes it unlikely that the material is merely a product of apologetic invention (Rubin 1990; see also Sirry 2011, 362–365). Still, the Qur’an affords no evidence for the existence of an indigenous Arabian monotheistic movement whose members were standardly termed *ḥanīfs*. For instance, a group called *al-ḥunafā’* does not figure in any of the Medinan verses that catalogue the religious communities apparently present in the Qur’anic environment (Q 2:62, 5:69, 22:17; → *al-ṣābi’ūn*), at least one of which (Q 22:17) includes not only Jews and Christians but also the syncretistic Meccan pagans whom the Qur’an calls “the associators” (*alladhīna ashrakū*). As the table above shows, the Qur’an employs *ḥanīf* and *ḥunafā’* in order to highlight a special quality of devotion to God, a virtue whose importance is impressed upon the Qur’anic Messenger (Q 10:105, 30:30) and is said to have been paradigmatically exhibited by Abraham. While it is not unlikely that there were persons in pre-Islamic western Arabia who professed some form of monotheism and recognised Abraham as a cultic forebear yet did not affiliate themselves with Christianity or Judaism, to describe such individuals as committed to *al-ḥanīfiyyah* or to speak of them as “the *ḥunafā’*,” as if this were an established collective identity, is to step beyond the text of the Qur’an.

It is true that in Q 3:67 Abraham’s being a *ḥanīf* is expressly contrasted with being Jewish or Christian: “Abraham was not a Jew or a Christian; rather, he was a *ḥanīf* who surrendered himself to God (*kāna ḥanīfan musliman*), and he was no associator.” The same goes for Q 2:135: “They say, ‘Be Jews or Christians so that you will be rightly guided.’ No! [Follow] the teaching of Abraham, a *ḥanīf*; he was no associator.”<sup>6</sup> These two verses could be taken to mean that being a *ḥanīf* is as such tantamount to treading a third path distinguished from Judaism and Christianity. However, in both cases it is feasible and indeed preferable to read *ḥanīf* as denoting not a concrete collective affiliation on the same level as Judaism or Christianity but rather as helping to convey a general ideal of righteousness, assiduous devotion, and monotheism—an ideal previously embodied by Abraham and now re-enacted by the Qur’anic Prophet and his believing followers, who according to Q 3:68 are presently “the people closest to Abraham” (*awlā l-nāsi bi-ibrāhīma*), i.e., those who most fully live up to the ideal exemplified by Abraham. But just as it would not be unconceivable for a Jew or a Christian to merit the predicate *muslim*, or of somebody

5 On the relationship between the predicate *ḥanīf* and the ensuing statement *wa-mā kāna mina l-mushrikīn*, see also Sirry 2011, 353, who suggests that “Muḥammad himself was aware of the fact that *ḥanīf* could be taken to mean ‘heathen,’ and therefore he sought to clear Abraham from such a possible association.” On this reading, the addendum serves to neutralise one possible sense of the word *ḥanīf*. On *ḥanīf* and the possible significations “heathen, pagan,” see below.

6 Understanding the accusative *millata ibrahīma* to be implicitly governed by the imperative *attabi’* is justified in view of other verses that explicitly combine → *ittaba’a* and → *millah* (Q 2:120, 3:95, 4:125, 12:38, 16:123).

who “surrenders himself/herself” to God, so it would not be inconceivable for a Jew or a Christian to merit the label *ḥanīf* (cf. the phrase *kāna ḥanīfan musliman* at Q 3:67). Indeed, according to Q 98:5 “those who were given the scripture”—i.e., Jews and Christians—were commanded to worship God “as *ḥanīfs*.”<sup>7</sup> Further corroboration of this interpretation is provided by Q 30:30, which links the stance of a *ḥanīf* with conformity to the “God-given creaturely disposition” (*fiṭrat allāh*) with which humans have been innately endowed by their creator (*allatī faṭara l-nāsa ‘alayhā*).<sup>8</sup> Devotedly orienting oneself to God, therefore, is to realise and fulfil an inherent teleology of human nature; it is not necessarily to join a concrete community of *ḥunafā*.<sup>9</sup>

But it may be unwise to carry scepticism about the post-Qur’anic accounts of *ḥanīfs* contemporary with (and opposed to) Muhammad too far. As we shall see below, it is quite likely that the word *ḥanīf* emerged in Arabic prior to the Qur’an. Moreover, if—taking inspiration from, but also some liberty with, Goudarzi’s above-mentioned study—we consider the label *ḥanīf* to describe a particular intensification of ritual practice, especially of ritual practices linked to the Meccan sanctuary, then there may well be some kernel of truth to reports that certain contemporaries of Muhammad were called, or reportedly described themselves, with the attribute *ḥanīf*. For instance, Rubin cites a poem that Ibn Ishāq attributes to a Medinan opponent of Muhammad called Abū Qays ibn al-Aslat, who was allegedly known as *al-ḥanīf* (Rubin 1990, 90, 91). This poem, after qualifying “our *dīn*” as being *ḥanīf*, goes on to refer to sacrificial animals, presumably those destined to be slaughtered at the Ka’bah. Other material discussed by Rubin similarly posits a link between *ḥanīf*-ness and the Meccan sanctuary. Given that Rubin’s main source is the *sīrah* literature, it is impossible to rule out that the Qur’anic label *ḥanīf* is here being applied retrospectively and that the poetry cited is pseudoepigraphic. But even so, it is conceivable that the rituals performed at and around the Meccan sanctuary could have led, in some people, to an intensification of religious practice that was perhaps inspired by, and sought to rival, the ascetic commitment of Christian holy men; it is notable that one of Muhammad’s alleged *ḥanīfī* opponents, the Medinan Abū ‘Āmir, is said to have worn hair shirts and to have been called “the hermit” (*al-rāhib*; Rubin 1990, 87). An ascetically minded intensification of cultic worship in the Meccan milieu is also suggested by post-Qur’anic traditions to the effect that certain individuals, including but not limited to Muhammad, used to withdraw into solitude atop Mount Ḥirā’ near Mecca for certain periods of time, the main Arabic term used being the verb *taḥannatha* or its corresponding noun (Kister 1968). Such intensification of ritual practice may well have gone hand in hand with a

7 This is not to deny that during Muhammad’s Medinan period the Qur’anic community was increasingly viewed as a religious denomination that was distinct from Judaism and Christianity (*HCI* 200–202), a development that is clearly documented by the fact that Q 2:62, 5:69, and 22:17 list the Qur’anic “believers” besides a number of other religious communities, such as Jews, Christians, and the enigmatic → *ṣābi’ūn*. Indeed, that the Qur’anic community was separate from Judaism and Christianity is also reflected by the reference to “this Prophet and those who believe” in Q 3:68, following immediately upon one of the occurrences of *ḥanīf* cited at the beginning of the paragraph. My point in the main text is therefore simply that the communal separateness of the Qur’anic believers, though inferable from some Qur’anic data, is not entailed by the meaning of *ḥanīf*.

8 As recognised already by Nöldeke (*NB* 49), Arabic *fiṭrah* corresponds to Ethiopic *fəṭrat*, whose meanings include not only “creation” but also “nature, character, disposition, constitution” (Leslau 1991, 172).

9 To avoid misunderstanding, it may be added that Q 30:30 does not entail that humans will instinctively gravitate towards monotheism if left to their own devices, for the Qur’an also posits a contrary tendency to be forgetful of God (→ *nasiya*) and to fall into the cardinal sin of associating (→ *ashraka*) other beings with him; the Qur’anic understanding of human nature is decidedly conflictual.

certain receptivity to monotheistic and Biblically based ideas, especially the assumption that the Meccan sanctuary was historically connected to the figure of Abraham. It may be, therefore, that the main respect in which the post-Qur'anic sources studied by Rubin go beyond the historical reality is only by reifying such incipient tendencies into a quasi-confessional entity called *al-ḥanīfiyyah* (a reification that may also have produced some spurious poetry).

**Reconstructing the semantics of *ḥanīf* in pre-Qur'anic Arabic.** As intimated above, the word *ḥanīf* as such does not seem to be a Qur'anic coinage. This is suggested by Horowitz's overview of a small number of poetic prooftexts that had been identified by the 1920s (*KU* 56–59).<sup>10</sup> The most important ones are two occurrences in the poetic corpus of the Banū Hudhayl. First, a poem attributed to Ṣakhr al-Ghayy (Sezgin 1975, 144–145) compares a rain cloud to “carousing Christians” (*naṣārā yusāqawna*) who come across a *ḥanīf* in the desert (*RAH* 239; Grimme 1892, 13; *NB* 30; *KU* 57; for the verse, refer to Farrāj and Shākir 1963–1965, 297 = Ṣakhr al-Ghayy and Abū l-Muthallam, no. 17:11). As Faris and Glidden insightfully comment (Faris and Glidden 1975, 258): “What the poet sought to do was to convey the contrast between the moist, rain-laden cloud (the ‘wet’ Christians) and the parched plain (the ‘dry’ *ḥanīf*).” To be sure, Faris and Glidden class the verse with a number of other instances in early Arabic poetry up until the early Islamic period in which *ḥanīf* stands in opposition to “Christian.” Yet it is not evident that the verse at hand must employ *ḥanīf* in the sense of “pagan” or “non-Christian,” for the opposition that Faris and Glidden persuasively discern in the verse will be at least as effective if *ḥanīf* is taken to mean “ascetic”: even if early Arabic poetry associates Christians with wine (as already observed in Grimme 1892, 13), this hardly means that all non-Christians were considered to be teetotallers. It would be more apposite, therefore, to contrast wine-drinking ordinary Christians with holy men abstaining from various pleasures and comforts, including wine. This line of thought aligns with the understanding of Wellhausen, Nöldeke, and Horowitz, who are all to some degree inclined to consider *ḥanīf* to refer to an ascetic here. By way of a supplementary consideration, it is worth drawing attention once more to Muhammad's alleged opponent Abū 'Āmir, whom post-Qur'anic sources both class as a *ḥanīf* and report to have been called “the hermit” (*al-rāhib*); whatever one makes of the historicity of this material, it indicates a certain proximity between the two words.

The same supposition that *ḥanīf* means “hermit, ascetic” also fits another Hudhalī poem, by Abū Dhu'ayb (d. c. 649). It opens by evoking the former abode of his love interest Umm al-Rahīn, where she used to reside “in the manner of a *ḥanīf* during the two months of Jumādā and the two months of Ṣafar” (Farrāj and Shākir 1963–1965, 112–113 = Abū Dhu'ayb, no. 9:3; see again *RAH* 239; *NB* 30; *KU* 57).<sup>11</sup> Grimme maintains that *ḥanīf* can be interpreted as “pagan” or “heathen” in both Hudhalī prooftexts (Grimme 1892, 13),<sup>12</sup> but especially with regard to the one by Abū Dhu'ayb this cannot be accepted. Umm al-Rahīn's former abode is an idyllic desert pasture in temporary bloom: she has erected a tent by a river of fresh water (v. 2) and she is said to have a special preference for “the milk of the [camels] grazing

10 For an opposing voice, see Rudolph 1922, 70–71, who doubts the probative force of the poetic evidence.

11 The “two months of Ṣafar” are Muḥarram and Ṣafar; they stand for the autumn (*RAH* 95–97).

12 This may also be the opinion of de Blois, who maintains that “all the genuinely pre-Islamic attestations of *ḥanīf* in Arabic poetry” can be interpreted to mean “pagan,” although he does not discuss any of the relevant prooftexts in detail (de Blois 2002, 19).

on *arāk* trees” (v. 4; see also the translation in Hell 1926, 25).<sup>13</sup> Under the aspect of temporary residence in the wilderness, one may gloss *ḥanīf* as “hermit” or “recluse” in this second instance, too (thus also de Blois 2021, 203–204). Hence, both Hudhalī verses support the assumption that the term *ḥanīf* could be applied to “a person of a certain religious standing” (NB 30), i.e., to someone displaying a noteworthy or unusual degree of religious devotion, as manifested by solitary withdrawal into the wilderness and by abstention from wine.

The general impression is that the figure of the *ḥanīf* in the two Hudhalī poems is of a piece with other allusions to Christian hermits and holy men in pre-Islamic poetry (see the summary remarks on attestations of the word *rāhib* under → *al-naṣārā*). Perhaps some pre-Islamic speakers of Arabic understood the term *ḥanīf* in an etymologising sense as someone who had “turned” towards God or away from society. While Wellhausen thinks that the word may originally have signified a Christian holy man in particular (RAH 239–240), calling somebody a *ḥanīf* in the sense of a hermit or ascetic may not have entailed stressing a particular communal affiliation, given that pre-Islamic poetry does not generally exhibit much interest in the beliefs of the hermits or ascetics it occasionally invokes. What is particularly noteworthy at this point is that both poetic attestations just discussed support the idea that the label *ḥanīf* refers first and foremost to an intensification of religious practice, whether or not such intensification was underpinned by a doctrinal commitment to monotheism. Thus, one can see how cultic devotion may have included withdrawal to and residence at a specific place, as per the poem by Abū Dhu’ayb. (It is immaterial in this context whether such withdrawal reflected the intrinsic holiness of the place in question or was simply a way of leaving behind human society.) *Ḥanīf*-like devotion to God could also have involved a permanent or periodic observation of certain dietary taboos, such as abstention from wine in the poem by Ṣakhr al-Ghayy. A *ḥanīf*, then, is somebody who is intensely “into” religion, by subjecting his or her behaviour to cultic prescriptions and limitations that are not followed by ordinary persons. In this sense, poetry backs Goudarzi’s hypothesis as summarised above (although it must be said that Goudarzi himself does not operate with the notion of intensification).<sup>14</sup>

A different use of the word *ḥanīf* is exemplified by an exclamation that al-Mubarrad and others attribute to a dying Christian, in which *ḥanīf* must mean “pagan” or “apostate,” in opposition to “Christian” (Grimme 1892, 12–13; NB 30; KU 57; for the text, see Wright 1874–1892, 1:131, l. 4). Faris and Glidden present additional material from early Islamic poetry in which *ḥanīf* stands in opposition to “Christian” (Faris and Glidden 1975, 257–258).<sup>15</sup> Such a use of the word fits the fact that *ḥanīf* is most likely etymologically derived from Syriac *ḥanpā*, “gentile, heathen” (SL 473), an etymological hypothesis voiced as early as al-Mas‘ūdī (de Blois 2002, 20, and Sirry 2011, 346; on the word’s Syriac origin, see also NB 30 and FVQ 115). Specifically, one may imagine the singular *ḥanīf* to have arisen by way of “a back-formation from the plural *ḥunafā*”, which, for its part, could represent a borrowing of the Aramaic plural *ḥanpē*, remodelled to fit a regular Arabic plural pattern” (de Blois 2002, 23, crediting Bell 1953, 12; see already Bell 1930, 120–121).

<sup>13</sup> Note that Wellhausen, Grimme, Nöldeke, and Horovitz’s acquaintance with this verse was still confined to its decontextualised quotation in the lexicographic literature, such as the *Lisān al-‘arab*. It was only with Hell 1926, published in the same year as *KU*, that the entire poem became accessible to European scholars.

<sup>14</sup> I am grateful to Goudarzi for helping me see the link between the poetic evidence and his hypothesis.

<sup>15</sup> As noted above, Faris and Gliden would assign the verse by Ṣakhr al-Ghayy speaking of Christians encountering a *ḥanīf* to the same category.



**How did *ḥanīf* come to be a complimentary label?** While the preceding derivation is very plausible from an etymological perspective, it does require the term *ḥanīf* to have undergone significant semantic development: an Arabic word that has a markedly positive sense in the Qur'an, and to some degree also in the two verses from the Hudhālī *dīwān* discussed above, turns out to be descended from a Syriac word that often has a distinct pejorative ring (“heathen”), even if it can also serve as a more neutral and descriptive classifier (“gentile”).<sup>16</sup> A possible account for how this semantic development might have occurred has been put forward in a much-quoted article by François de Blois (de Blois 2002, 20–25). De Blois notes that Paul, in a seminal passage of the Epistle to the Romans, underscores that Abraham was considered righteous and faithful by God before undergoing circumcision, thus demonstrating that Abraham was justified not through the law but through faith (Rom 4; see already Margoliouth 1903, 478–479, and *FVQ* 115; cf. Luxenberg 2007, 56–57). From this, it could have been inferred that Abraham was a righteous and devoted believer already while being a gentile or a *ḥanpā*, and in fact de Blois identifies a passage in a Syriac life of Clement of Rome that states explicitly that “Abraham believed in God while still being a *ḥanpā*” (Mingana 1917, 34, ll. 12–13 of Syriac text; see the translation on p. 10). While de Blois carefully avoids committing himself to any specific dating of this Syriac text, it is plausible to surmise that the figure of Abraham may have functioned as an associative pivot facilitating the word’s shift from meaning “pagan” to meaning something like “devoted to God in an exemplary fashion.”<sup>17</sup> If so, the link between the epithet *ḥanīf* and the figure of Abraham would not be a Qur’anic innovation but rather would document a pre-Qur’anic context of usage, very likely Christian, for which we otherwise have no direct Arabic evidence. The development may have been facilitated by the use of *ḥanpā* to signify a “gentile candidate for salvation in Christ” that is occasionally found in the Peshitta, e.g., in Acts 18:4, where Paul preaches to “Jews and gentiles” (de Blois 2002, 21–22, 24). At the same time, as we saw above, the Qur’anic use of *ḥanīf* has probably also been “semantically enriched” by the indigenous Arabic meaning of Arabic *ḥanafa ilā*, “to incline to s.th.” (Sirry 2011, 352).

There is one loose end in this scenario that remains to be tied up. In the Hudhālī proof-texts discussed above, the semantic focus of *ḥanīf* would seem to be the notion of an above-average degree of piety and cultic devotion, and the same goes for what may be the word’s earliest Qur’anic occurrence in Q 30:30; in neither case do we find an explicit link to Abraham, as de Blois’s hypothesis might lead one to expect. One could, however, make the auxiliary assumption that once *ḥanīf* had established itself as a label for righteousness and pious devotion to God, due to its postulated link with Abraham, *ḥanīf* could serve as an approximate synonym of *rāhib*. This would have made the word available to mean “recluse,” “hermit,” “ascetic,” as attested by Hudhālī poetry. By contrast, the majority of

<sup>16</sup> See already Rudolph 1922, 70, n. 42. De Blois puts the issue thus: the Qur’anic use of the word *ḥanīf* confronts us with “the dilemma that a word which in some Arabic contexts is used to mean ‘pagan,’ and which is manifestly cognate with words having similarly negative connotations in other Semitic languages, is, in the Quran, used to qualify the patriarch Abraham and other followers of the true religion” (de Blois 2002, 20).

<sup>17</sup> The markedly formulaic manner in which the Qur’anic employs *ḥanīf* in connection with Abraham followed by the *mā kāna mina l-mushrikīn* refrain invites the conjecture that the Qur’an has recourse to a pre-existent stock phrase about Abraham here. However, the theory does not easily cohere with the likely Jewish origin of the Qur’anic use of the verb → *ashraka* to refer to the worship of Gods other than Allāh. This strengthens the alternative hypothesis that the formula only emerged during the Qur’an’s genesis.



the word's attestations in the Qur'an—though not the early occurrence Q 30:30 and the later verses 10:105 and 98:5—preserved its pre-existing association with Abraham.

An alternative and somewhat simpler account of how *ḥanīf* could have evolved from a pejorative or at least neutrally descriptive term to a complimentary one is entertained by Mohsen Goudarzi (Goudarzi, forthcoming). He suggests that *ḥanīf* (in the sense of “pagan,” reflecting Syriac *ḥanpā*) was initially a label that was applied by Christians and/or Jews to those who engaged in Hijāzī cultic rituals like animal sacrifice and the Meccan pilgrimage, which would have had a distinctly pagan look to Biblically based monotheists. Over time, the word *ḥanīf* came to be associated with the performance of these cultic rituals and thus shifted its meaning from “pagan” to “somebody engaged in cultic worship.” The advantage of Goudarzi's scenario is that it does not require the figure of Abraham as a pivot, for which evidence is scarce in Syriac and currently non-existent in pre-Qur'anic poetry. Having taken on the meaning of somebody preoccupied with cultic worship, the term *ḥanīf* could then have evolved to function in the manner illustrated by the two pieces of Hudhalī poetry discussed earlier.

### ***ḥājah* | (feeling of) need**

→ *ṣadr*, → *nafs*

### ***ḥūr* pl. | gazelle-eyed fair maidens**

Further vocabulary discussed: *atrāb* pl. | maidens of the same age *kawā'ib* pl. | maidens full of bosom *al-majūs* pl. | the Magians *'in* pl. | wide-eyed maidens

**The Qur'anic virgins of paradise: overview.** According to a bundle of mostly early Meccan verses (Q 37:48–49, 38:52, 44:54, 52:20, 55:56.58.72.74, 56:22–23.35–37, 78:33), the amenities of paradise (→ *jannah*) include female companions, who are the subject of recent studies by Stefan Wild and Ana Davitashvili (Wild 2010, 627–644; Davitashvili 2021, 28–89).<sup>1</sup> Among other things, these female companions are said to “restrain their glances” (Q 37:48, 38:52, 55:56), to be “of the same age” (*atrāb*; Q 38:52, 56:37, 78:33),<sup>2</sup> to be “full of bosom” (*kawā'ib*; Q 78:33), to resemble treasured eggs or gems (Q 37:49, 55:58, 56:23), and to be in a divinely vouchsafed state of virginity (Q 55:56.74, 56:36). Horovitz and, more recently, Davitashvili have conclusively demonstrated that the Qur'anic descriptions of these virgins of paradise exhibit palpable intersections with the portrayal of female beauty in ancient Arabic poetry, which employs some of the same attributes, such as the epithets *atrāb* or *kawā'ib* (Horovitz 1975, 67–69; Davitashvili 2021, 53–66).

Erotic undertones are also on occasion present in Ephrem's *Hymns on Paradise* (Minov 2016, 156–161, discussing Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, nos 2:1 and 7:18). Given that Ephrem is clearly speaking in a metaphorical vein, it is unlikely that his hymns might form the

<sup>1</sup> Wild's article includes a trenchant critique of Christoph Luxenberg's outlandish transformation of the Qur'anic houris into grapes, relieving the present entry from any need to discuss the matter further.

<sup>2</sup> The point would seem to be that the female companions of the blessed all have the same ideal age as one another rather than the same age as their male counterparts. See also Davitashvili 2021, 41 and 55–56.

principal source of the Qur’anic virgins of paradise (Beck 1975b, against Andrae 1932, 72). Nonetheless, Syriac traditions could conceivably have played an ill-defined subsidiary role in the Qur’anic transposition of poetry’s ideally desirable females from the earthly plane to paradise. An equivalent conjecture may be voiced with regard to Zoroastrian eschatology: as Evgenii Berthels has pointed out, the Avestan *Hādōkht nask* describes how the soul of the faithful will posthumously encounter his *daēnā*—the personification of his earthly deeds—in the shape of a beautiful maiden of fifteen (Berthels 1925; see also Minov 2016, 160, and Davitashvili 2021, 20–22, who helpfully references König 2010, 118).<sup>3</sup> It is not inconceivable, though hardly certain, that this idea, refracted through the prism of popular traditions that are not available to us anymore, could have morphed into a parallel of the Qur’anic promise that the virtuous will be eschatologically rewarded with supremely attractive mates. Interestingly, Minov surmises that the erotic undertones of some of Ephrem’s statements about paradise may themselves have an Iranian background (Minov 2016, 160). However, even though one Medinan verse cursorily mentions “the Magians” (*al-majūs*; Q 22:17) and even though Qur’anic Arabic has quite a few loanwords that can be traced back to Middle Persian (e.g., → *dīn*<sup>2</sup>), often for items of material culture (see generally Cheung 2017), it remains to be corroborated by future research whether Zoroastrian traditions should be credited with a direct impact on the Qur’an. For example, the Avestan-descended angelic names *hārūt* and *mārūt* in the Medinan verse Q 2:102 seem to have reached the Qur’an via the waystation of Jewish magic (*QP* 194–196). The current lack of Qur’anic evidence for direct contact with Zoroastrianism does not increase the likelihood that the Qur’anic maidens of paradise are to be placed against a Zoroastrian background.

**On the meaning of *hūr* ‘in.** A total of four Qur’anic verses (Q 44:54, 52:20, 55:72, 56:22) describe the female mates of the inhabitants of paradise as *hūr* or *hūr* ‘in (hence “houris”). The plural adjective ‘in (singular: *a’yan*, ‘*aynā*’) means “wide-eyed” (*AEL* 2218). More problematic is *hūr* (singular: *aḥwar*, ‘*haurā*’), another female epithet in the Qur’an for which poetry offers parallels (Davitashvili 2021, 59–60). The word is generally linked with the idea of whiteness and is usually understood to describe a feature of someone’s eyes, namely, an intense contrast of black and white (*AEL* 666; *CDKA* 80). Yet Wendell and Davitashvili note that the attribute *hūr* may also refer to a white complexion of the skin (Wendell 1974, 35–41; Davitashvili 2021, 36–38), expressing an “insistence on the quality of ‘whiteness’ as a desirable, and desired, attribute of the beauty, male or female” (Wendell 1974, 35). Indeed, al-Azharī stipulates that “a woman is not called *haurā*’ unless in addition to exhibiting an intense contrast of black and white in her eyes the skin of her body is also white” (al-Azharī [1964–1976], 5:229).<sup>4</sup> There is, moreover, compelling poetic evidence that a fair complexion, described by derivatives of the root *b-y-ḍ* (*abyaḍ*, *bayḍā*, *bīḍ*), was esteemed as a marker of aristocratic status; and it is mostly possible to understand poetic verses employing derivatives of *ḥ-w-r* to have this sense, too. To be sure, ‘Abid ibn al-Abraṣ speaks of *hūr al-‘uyūn* (Lyll 1913, ‘Abīd, no. 7:24; see Wendell 1974, 39, and Davitashvili 2021, 60); given the explicit reference to eyes, ‘*uyūn*, it seems necessary to construe *hūr* as a property of the eyes here. Wendell argues that *hūr*, when used of the

3 The Zoroastrian material is summarised in Lincoln 2021, 77–80. For the relevant Avestan passage and an overview of the pertinent secondary literature, one may now also refer to an entry in the intertextual database of the *Corpus Coranicum* project: <https://corpuscoranicum.de/kontexte/index/sure/37/vers/48/intertext/1407/redirect/1> (by Sebastian Bitsch; accessed 30 June 2021).

4 I owe my awareness of this statement to Davitashvili 2021, 37, n. 106.

eyes, is best interpreted to mean “women the pupils of whose eyes are so large and so black as to reduce the white of the eyeball to a minimum,” with “gazelle-eyed” providing a serviceable English equivalent (Wendell 1974, 39). Overall, it is reasonable to assume, in line with the statement by al-Azharī quoted above, that *ḥūr* simultaneously brought to mind blackness (of the eyes) and whiteness (of the skin), “evoking an image of gazelle-eyed and pale-skinned beauty” (Wendell 1974, 40).<sup>5</sup>

**Further developments.** On how the motif of female companions in paradise develops in later Meccan and Medinan verses, see under → *azwāj muṭahharah*.

### ***al-ḥawāriyyūn* pl. | the apostles**

→ *rasūl*

### ***maḥīḍ* | menstruation**

→ *ṭahara*

### ***ḥīn* | point of time, moment in time**

On the phrase *matā' ilā ḥīn*, “enjoyment until a certain time,” as well as *matta'a* + acc. + *ilā ḥīn*, “to grant s.o. enjoyment until a certain time” and *tamatta'a* + *ilā ḥīn*, “to enjoy o.s. until a certain time,” see under → *ajal* and → *adhdhaba*.

### ***aḥyā* tr./intr. | to bring (s.th. or s.o.) to life or back to life, to revive (s.th. or s.o.)**

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *amāta* tr./intr. | to cause (s.o.) to die *ba'atha* tr. | to send s.o. forth; to resurrect s.o. *ḥashara* tr. | to gather s.o., to assemble s.o. *a'āda l-khalqa* | to recreate, to create again

**God as vivifier and revivifier in the Qur'an.** God is not only himself supremely alive (*ḥayy*; Q 2:255, 3:2, 40:65, 20:111), meaning that he “does not die” (Q 25:58), he also exercises total control over life and death: he is “the one who created death and life” (Q 67:2), he is the creator of every living thing (Q 21:30), and he is the one who “brings to life” (*aḥyā*) and “causes to die” (*amāta*; e.g., Q 3:156, 9:116, 10:56, 15:23, 50:43, 53:44; cf. 1 Sam 2:6) or who “brings forth something alive from something dead, and something dead from something alive” (Q 3:27, 6:95, 10:31, 30:19: *tukhriju/yukhriju l-ḥayya mina l-mayyiti wa-tukhriju/wa-yukhriju l-mayyita / wa-mukhriju al-mayyiti mina l-ḥayyi*). By sending down rain, God revives (*aḥyā*) dead land (Q 36:33: *al-arḍ al-maytah*; 25:49 and 50:11: *baldataṅ maytan*; cf. 43:11) or land “after it has died” (e.g., Q 2:164, 30:24, 45:5, 57:17; → *arḍ*).<sup>1</sup> He similarly “revives” the dead (*al-mawtā*) so that they can stand eschatological judgement

<sup>5</sup> For an Iranian etymology of *ḥūr 'īn*, which strikes me as forced, see Cheung 2017, 324–326.

<sup>1</sup> See also the remarks about the Qur'an's quasi-occasionalistic portrayal of nature under → *allāh*.

(e.g., Q 42:9, 46:33, 75:40), and some verses draw an explicit inference from the former to the latter (Q 30:50, 41:39; see also 30:19, 35:9, 43:11, 50:11).<sup>2</sup>

By describing the resurrection with the verb *ahyā* (in contrast with its approximate equivalents → *ba'atha*, literally “to send forth,” and also → *hashara*, “to assemble”), the Qur'an casts the resurrection as an event that is continuous with and presaged by natural processes within the cosmos as it presently exists rather than being a supernatural occurrence lacking empirically familiar precedent. A similar concern to present the resurrection as an extension of present realities is detectable when God's engendering of humans is called the “first” creation (Q 6:94, 17:51, 18:48, 21:104, 36:79, 41:21, 50:15), implying that the resurrection will be a second one, or when the resurrection is expressly described as an act of recreation (e.g., Q 10:4.34: *yabda'u l-khalqa thumma yu'iduhu*; see in more detail under → *khalafa*). In all these cases, the Qur'an is evidently addressing an audience who agree that it is God who sends down rain and who is the creator of humans (see also under → *ashraka*), which then becomes the point of departure for persuading the addressees to accept an eschatological resurrection too.

**Judaean-Christian antecedents.** Talk of God's “revivification of the dead” is common in Judaism (Hebrew: *təḥiyyat ha-mētim*; see *DTTM* 1661 and *DJBA* 453–454) but can also be found in Syriac literature (e.g., Beck 1970a, no. 6:328, which should be compared in particular with *muḥyi l-mawtā* in Q 30:50 and 41:39; see also Beck 1959, *De Nativitate*, no. 4:170; Beck 1972a, no. 1:520; O'Shaughnessy 1985, 84–85, quoting Parisot 1894, 545–546, ll. 3–4 of Syriac text = Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 13:2).

## **ḥayāh: al-~ al-dunyā | the proximate life**

→ *dunyā*

<sup>2</sup> The parallelism between resuscitating dead land and dead humans also underpins the fact that Q 43:11 describes the revivification of dead land by the verb *anshara*, which is otherwise used for the resurrection of the dead (→ *ba'atha*).

# kh

*khatama* intr. ‘*alā* | to seal s.th.

*khātam* | seal

Further vocabulary discussed: *qalb* | heart *ghishāwah* | covering *sam‘* | (sense of) hearing *baṣar* | eyesight *ṭaba‘a* intr. ‘*alā* | to seal s.th. *ja‘ala qāsiyatan* tr. | to harden s.th. (hearts) *shadda* intr. ‘*alā* | to harden s.th. *ghulf* pl. | uncircumcised, wrapped in foreskins *zāda* ditr. | to increase s.o. in s.th. *zāgha* intr. | to swerve *azāgha* tr. | to cause s.th. to swerve *qarīn* | companion (demon) *mutraf* | affluent, spoilt by affluence *muṣaddiq* | confirming

**Divine incapacitation of the human heart and senses.** In Q 2:7, 6:46, 42:24, and 45:23, God is said to set a seal (*khatama*), or to be able to set a seal, on human hearts. Given that the Qur’an considers the heart to be the seat of conscious thought and processing (→ *qalb*), this means that God incapacitates the ability of humans to ponder and reflect, the result being that “it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them; they do not believe” (Q 2:6). In many cases, references to divine incapacitation of the heart are accompanied by incapacitation of the two principal senses of sight and hearing. Thus, in Q 45:23 the patient’s hearing figures as a second object of *khatama*, while the organ of sight is said to be put under a “covering” (*ghishāwah*), as in 2:7, and 6:46 has the same triad of heart, hearing, and sight (“If God takes away your<sup>p</sup> hearing and your sight and puts a seal on your hearts,” in *akhadha llāhu sam‘akum wa-abṣārakum wa-khatama ‘alā qulūbikum*). Other verses describe God’s sealing of human hearts by employing the verb *ṭaba‘a*, in one case again with the triad heart, hearing, and sight: *ulā’ika alladhīna ṭaba‘a llāhu ‘alā qulūbihim wa-sam‘ihim wa-abṣārihim*, “those are the ones upon whose hearts, hearing, and eyes God has set a seal” (Q 16:108; see also 4:155, 7:100.101, 9:87.93, 10:74 etc.).<sup>1</sup> God’s incapacitation of the senses of hearing and sight is plainly not meant to indicate literal blindness and deafness but rather a lack of rational responsiveness to and comprehension of the perceptual data that these two senses deliver to the heart (see also under → *sami‘a* and → *amiya*).

**Biblical precursors.** The motif of divine blockage of heart, vision, and hearing is reminiscent of Biblical verses reporting God’s hardening of the hearts of Pharaoh, his officials, and the Egyptian army pursuing the Israelites through the sea (Exod 4:21, 7:3, 9:12, 10:1.20.27, 11:10, 14:4.8.17; see Räisänen 1976, 52–56). A number of Qur’anic verses similarly speak of a hardening of human hearts, e.g., Q 5:13 with regard to the Israelites (*wa-ja‘alnā*

<sup>1</sup> The triad appears in Q 7:179 as well; see additionally 22:46. God’s incapacitating impact on human hearts is also described as an act of covering (Q 6:25, 17:46, 18:57: *wa-ja‘alnā / innā ja‘alnā ‘alā qulūbihim akinnatan*; see also 41:5). As Seidensticker notes, Q 9:87 and 63:3 have the passive *ṭub‘a*, but it is clear that God is to be understood as the agent (AHW 75).

*qulūbahum qāsiyatan*, “and we hardened their hearts”) and 10:88 with reference to Pharaoh and the Egyptians (*wa-shdud ‘alā qulūbihim*, “and harden their hearts”; → *qasā*). An even closer parallel to the Qur’anic statements about divine sealing surveyed above is Isa 6:9–10 (Katsh 1954, 15), which features the same triad of hearts, ears, and eyes that is found in Q 2:7, 6:46, 16:108, and 45:23: “Go and say to this people: ‘Hear, but do not comprehend; see, but do not understand.’ // Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and blind their eyes, so that they may not see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and comprehend with their hearts, and turn and be healed.”<sup>2</sup> The passage is cited several times in the New Testament, such as Matt 13:14–15 (see also Mark 4:11, Luke 8:10, John 12:40, and Acts 28:26–27; cf. also Rom 11:8; see CQ 162, AHW 183–184, and Koloska 2020, 40–41). In addition, it reverberates in later Christian texts like the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Vööbus 1979, 161 and 246; see Zellentin 2013, 147, n. 26).<sup>3</sup>

While the Qur’anic triad of hearing, seeing, and the heart evidently has a Biblical resonance, the Qur’an’s formulaic recourse to the metaphor of God’s “sealing” (*ṭaba’a*, *khatama*) of the hearts and senses of unbelievers is distinctive. The Islamic scripture certainly deploys the notion of sealing in a very different manner than, e.g., Song of Songs 8:6 (“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm”). Especially the Christian tradition accords a markedly positive valence to the notion of divine sealing, which is often used as a metaphor for baptism.<sup>4</sup> For instance, 2 Cor 1:21–22, which states that God has “anointed us by putting his seal on us and giving us his spirit in our hearts,” provides a tangible contrast to the Qur’an’s consistently negative deployment of the notion of divine heart-sealing.<sup>5</sup> Ahrens claims to have identified a Syriac parallel in a passage from John of Ephesus (Land 1868, 2:172, l. 12, and 2:128, l. 1 = Brooks 1923, 230, l. 1, and 231, ll. 1–2; see CQ 47). Yet while the statement “Our heart is *ṭbī*” does indeed make use of an adjective that is cognate with Qur’anic *ṭaba’a*, Syriac *ṭba’* can also mean “to sink, to be immersed” and not only “to seal” (see SL 511). The second one of Ahrens’s two occurrences in fact makes it clear that the intended meaning must be “Our heart is sunk” (thus

2 For a brief analysis of this passage, see Räsänen 1976, 58–63. Another Biblical precedent for the same triad is Jer 5:21 (Reynolds 2018, 32), where the prophet is instructed to declare, “Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears, but do not hear”; this is followed, in v. 23, by the accusation, “But this people has a stubborn and rebellious heart; they have turned aside and gone away.” However, as noted in Räsänen 1976, 62, God here does not figure as the cause of people’s inability to see and hear. See also Isa 42:20, 43:8, 44:18.

3 Note that in the latter case Isa 6:9–10 is combined with the motif of the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart from Exodus.

4 For general overviews of the sealing metaphor in Biblical, early Christian, and Manichaean literature, see Stroumsa 1986, 63–69; see also TDNT 7:939–953. The Pauline letters are noticeably fond of the notion of sealing. See, for instance, Rom 4:11 (Abraham was circumcised as “a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised”), and Eph 1:13 (in Christ the addressees “were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit”) and 4:30 (the addressees are sealed in the Holy Spirit); see also Rom 15:28, 1 Cor 9:2, 2 Cor 1:21–22 (cited in the main text), and 2 Tim 2:19. For a scatter of later Christian invocations of the metaphor of sealing, see Beck 1959, no. 1:99; Schaff and Wace 1995, 1:151.253.556, corresponding to Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, books 3:23:8 and 6:5:6 (Eusebius 1926–1932, 1:244–245 and 2:26–27) and to Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, book 4:62; Schaff and Wace 1995, 10:103.112.141.370–371 (Ambrose). There is a loose Manichaean parallel to the Qur’anic notion of heart-sealing, mentioned by Augustine: *signaculum sinus*, “the seal of the bosom,” but it “symbolizes the encratism of the Manichaean elects, their prohibition of wedding and sexual relations” (Stroumsa 1986, 67–68, who also cites another Manichaean text—equally irrelevant for Qur’anic purposes—that combines references to sealing and “our hearts”).

5 On Q 33:40, which calls Muhammad the “seal of the prophets” and thus employs the concept of sealing in an eminently positive sense, see below.



the translation by Brooks) rather than “Our heart is sealed.” Ahrens’s alleged parallel is therefore a false friend.

**Does God’s sealing of human hearts have a predestinarian significance?** The Qur’an’s employment of the metaphor of heart-sealing raises the question whether it has deterministic or predestinarian implications. Does God, by some arbitrary and inscrutable decree, render some humans incapable of responding to his guidance and then punish them for something they are fundamentally unable to help? While a predestinarian reading of the Qur’an is not grotesque, there are ultimately important considerations that militate against it, as shown in more detail elsewhere (see under → *shā’a* and → *hadā*). As regards specifically the notion of heart-sealing, al-Ṭabarī interprets it to indicate God’s final confirmation of a deficient moral state resulting from copious prior wrongdoings, thereby locking a person in sinfulness and unbelief without any prospect of moral or epistemic reform (Ṭab. 1:266–267). Thus construed, God’s sealing of a person’s heart amounts to preventing an individual with a flagrantly negative moral or religious track record from any future characterial betterment: God’s sealing of someone’s heart is a *consequence* of a prior turning away from God rather than its original *cause*.<sup>6</sup> A similarly consequentialist understanding of the metaphor is put forward by al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, according to whom God’s sealing of human hearts conveys “the sort of prevention”—of future change, we may supply—“that occurs when books or chapters are sealed” (*mā yaḥṣulu mina l-man’i bi-l-khatmi ‘alā l-kutubi wa-l-abwāb*; al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 2009, 275).<sup>7</sup> What both attempts at parsing the metaphor have in common is that God’s sealing of an unbelievers’ heart is viewed as the culminating point in a negative moral and religious trajectory at which the latter becomes irreversibly fixed. Sealing, in other words, follows prior misdeeds (thus also Mir 1987, 193–194).

There is good inner-Qur’anic support for such an interpretation of divine heart-sealing as “a consequence rather than a cause” (SQ 16; see already Goldziher 1910, 93–94, and Rahman 2009, 19–20). Q 4:155 reports the Israelites’ alleged utterance that their hearts are “wrapped in foreskins” (→ *ghulf*) and then announces that God has set a seal on their hearts “on account of their repudiation” (*bi-kufrihim*). The phrase *bi-kufrihim* makes it clear that the Israelites’ unbelief precedes God’s final sealing up of their hearts.<sup>8</sup> Also pertinent is Q 40:35, according to which God “sets a seal on the hearts of arrogant oppressors” (*yaṭba’u llāhu ‘alā kullī qalbi mutakabbirin jabbār*); here, too, one understands that it is only after somebody has shown himself or herself to be an arrogant oppressor that his/her heart is sealed (see similarly Q 7:101 and 10:74). The same causal sequence recurs with regard to other terms used for God’s incapacitation of human hearts. Thus, according to Q 2:10 some people have “a sickness in their hearts,” upon which God “increases them in sickness”

6 It is important to highlight that this understanding of the sealing metaphor does not necessarily imply that God will not hold humans to account for something that is beyond their capability; indeed, al-Ṭabarī explicitly considers the Qur’an to endorse the doctrine of *taklīf mā lā yuṭāqu* here, i.e., of moral responsibility for actions that are beyond an individual’s ability: an unbeliever who is sealed in his rejection of God’s message is not thereby excused from the obligation to heed it and will be punished accordingly (Ṭab. 1:268–269).

7 Expressing himself in Aristotelian terms, al-Rāghib takes the sealing metaphor to indicate that “when a human reaches the utmost degree of unsound belief and forbidden actions . . . , this endows him with a habitual state accustoming him to approve of acts of disobedience, and it is as if a seal has been set upon his heart.” The naturalistic flavour of this comment is palpably at odds with al-Ṭabarī, who is unequivocal that the sealing is an act of God rather than an act of the unbelievers (Ṭab. 1:268).

8 The only other place in the Qur’an that cites the *qulūbunā ghulfiun* phrase, Q 2:88, follows it with a very similar condemnation yet substitutes God’s sealing of the Israelites’ hearts by his cursing of them for their repudiation (*la’anahumu llāhu bi-kufrihim*).

(SQ 16; see also the remarks on the verb *zāda*, “to increase,” under → *hadā*); Q 61:5 says that when the contemporaries of Moses “swerved,” God “caused their hearts to swerve” (*fa-lammā zāghū azāgha llāhu qulūbahum*), meaning presumably that he increased their swerving further or locked them into a state of swerving; and a number of passages (e.g., Q 43:36–38) teach that God assigns companion demons (singular: *qarīn*) to those who reject his reminding exhortation (see under → *shayṭān*). As Heikki Räisänen has demonstrated in a comprehensive study, it is plausible to extend a consequentialist reading to numerous other Qur’anic references to God’s leading astray of, or hardening the hearts of, humans (Räisänen 1976, 13–44; see already Goldziher 1910, 91–94), since the Qur’an often signals that “those led astray by God have *deserved* this fate” (Räisänen 1976, 24). Many of the Qur’an’s more ambiguous statements on the issue are therefore defensibly read in light of statements implying a consequentialist position.

Finally, a consequentialist understanding of divine heart-sealing in the Qur’an is also historically likely, since it is in line with Christian and Jewish attempts to construe Biblical statements about the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in a non-deterministic manner, thereby safeguarding human free will (see the brief discussion of select Greek, Latin, and Syriac authors in Langston 2006, 86). For instance, Ephrem takes advantage of the fact that the Biblical account of the ten plagues does not always explicitly name God as the agent who caused Pharaoh’s heart to harden (Ephrem 1955, 135, 137 = Ephrem 1994, 238–239, 241, commenting on Exod 7:14 and 8:15; see also Schmid, forthcoming a). A similarly non-deterministic reading, justified by means of the same textual observation, is found in the midrashic tradition, namely, in *Exodus Rabbah* (Shinan 1984, 243 = ch. 11:6) and *Midrash Tanḥuma* (*Wā-ērā’* 3): after the fifth plague, God decides that he will henceforth preclude any future possibility of remorse, and accordingly the Biblical text from now on employs the active formulation “the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Exod 9:12, 10:20, 10:27, 14:8).<sup>9</sup> It would appear that the Qur’an, like late antique Jewish and Christian readers of the Bible but unlike some strands of post-Qur’anic Islamic theology, presupposes at least some degree of human free will.

To be sure, the Islamic scripture does sometimes employ language with a markedly predestinarian or deterministic ring, which is not always easy to explain away. For instance, Q 17:16 depicts God as inciting particular humans to sin, thus providing him with what may appear as little more than a pretext for the punitive obliteration of an entire city: “When we want to destroy a town, we command its affluent inhabitants to sin in it (*amarnā mutrafihā fa-fasaqū fihā*); then the word comes true against it (*fa-ḥaqqā ‘alayhā l-qawlu*) and we completely destroy it.” But even here, one might go on to ask why it is that God would “want” to destroy a town if not on account of its preceding moral and religious lapses. This line of thought is supported by the observation that the word *mutraf* has consistently negative connotations in the Qur’an: it does not merely describe economic prosperity, but rather designates someone whose indulgence in a life of affluence has had a corrosive impact on his moral and religious integrity. Thus, “those spoil by affluence,”

9 As so often in the case of rabbinic literature, a pre-Qur’anic dating of both works as a whole is uncertain; both may well have undergone their final editing in the Islamic period (see Stemmerger 1996, 305–306 and 308–309; Bregman 2003; Graves 2011, 8, n. 32). Bregman 2003, 142–143 (Hebrew section), maintains that the version of the tradition that is preserved in *Exodus Rabbah* is earlier than that in *Midrash Tanḥuma*, which develops the former into a general rule that is not entirely accurate (namely, that *all* of the first five plagues have the passive and *all* of the second five plagues have the active).

as one might translate the plural of *mutraf*, are usually depicted as refusing to believe in God's messengers (e.g., Q 23:33, 34:34, 43:23; see also under → *istad'afa*). In light of this, an attentive reader of the Qur'an is unlikely to understand those whom God goads into sin according to Q 17:16 to be innocent victims randomly lead astray but will instead be disposed to view them as people corrupted by their wealth: *mutrafis* is not a morally neutral term for economic privilege but instead indicates moral culpability. If that is so, then God's incitement of those "spoilt by affluence" to plunge headlong into ever more egregious sins is structurally analogous to the notion of divine heart-sealing.<sup>10</sup>

**Muhammad as the "seal of the prophets."** One Qur'anic passage exceptionally employs the metaphor of sealing—though not of sealing *hearts*—in a positive sense: Q 33:40 famously calls Muhammad "the seal of the prophets" (*khātam al-nabiyyin*). The aptness of the traditional construal of Q 33:40 as expressing the finality of Muhammad's mission has been questioned by a considerable number of Western scholars (e.g., *KU* 53; see in more detail Rubin 2014a). Extra-Qur'anic evidence indicates that *khatama* could be used in early Arabic to mean confirmation without a connotation of finality and that some early interpreters of Q 33:40 did not take the verse to entail that Muhammad was the last prophet (Friedmann 1986). From this one might infer that the point of Q 33:40 is merely to highlight that Muhammad's preaching agrees with and corroborates that of earlier prophets, a claim that the Qur'an frequently makes by using the term *muṣaddiq*, "confirming" (→ *ṣaddaqa*). Within the Qur'an, however, the act of sealing (*khatama*) is plausibly understood to imply closure (*CDKA* 83 and Rubin 2014a, 74–76). Thus, in addition to the material reviewed above, Q 36:65 says that on the day of judgement God will "seal" the mouths of the sinners, leaving them unable to speak except by their hands.<sup>11</sup> It is also arguable that the unique assertion in Q 33:40 that Muhammad is the "seal of the prophets" is likely to mean something above and beyond the much more frequent Qur'anic statements that he or one of his forerunners are "confirmers" (*muṣaddiq*) of their predecessors (Rubin 2014a, 74), a claim attested from the early Meccan period onwards (Q 37:37). It is accordingly quite possible and even probable that Q 33:40 does indeed present Muhammad as the last prophet. This would fit the general tendency of Surah 33 to exalt Muhammad's status, a thrust that is particularly manifest in Q 33:7, where Muhammad heads an otherwise chronological list of prophets from Noah to Jesus (*HCI* 209). In addition, as we shall see forthwith, the putative use of the sealing metaphor to connote finality in Q 33:40 has Biblical precedent.

<sup>10</sup> Another verse that may seem to undermine the consequentialist position is Q 9:127. It describes how when "a surah is sent down," some members of the Qur'anic audience "turn away" (*inṣarafū*), and then adds that "God has turned away their hearts because they are a people who do not understand" (*ṣarafa llāhu qulūbahum bi-annahum qawmun lā yafqahūn*). This is plausibly read as presenting God's transitive "turning away" of the addressees' hearts as the cause, rather than a consequence, of their intransitive "turning away" from the Qur'anic revelations. An alternative interpretation would be to construe *ṣarafa llāhu qulūbahum . . .* as an imprecation: "May God turn away their hearts!" (e.g., *Zam.* 3:110; see also *SQ* 541). Yet a more promising way of reconciling Q 9:127 with the consequentialist evidence set out in the main text is to emphasise the continuation of the *ṣarafa llāhu qulūbahum* phrase: God has "turned their hearts away" on account of and in response to the fact that they did not previously show themselves capable of "understanding" (*bi-annahum qawmun lā yafqahūn*). The final clause of the verse thus restates the same consequentialist nexus that one finds elsewhere in the Qur'an.

<sup>11</sup> Colpe, however, thinks that the meaning of *kh-t-m* in Q 33:40 does not conform to Qur'anic usage elsewhere (Colpe 1984–1986, 72). There is, of course, the undeniable difference that Q 33:40 employs the notion of sealing in a positive rather than an ominous sense; but it is not implausible that underlying this difference is a basic semantic unity to the Qur'anic use of the verb *khatama* and the noun *khātam*.

There are two compellingly close antecedents to the Qur’anic phrase “seal of the prophets,” but on closer inspection both turn out to be problematic. First, Muslim authors such as al-Bīrūnī report that Mani was called the “seal of the prophets” (*KU* 53–54; Stroumsa 1986, 62–63). Yet this may well be a retrojection of Qur’anic terminology (Stroumsa 1986; Colpe 1984–1986, 74–76).<sup>12</sup> Secondly, the Samaritan *Memar Marqah* or *Tibat Marqe* calls Moses the “seal of the prophets” (Fossum 1993, 151–152, citing Macdonald 1963, 1:123 and 2:201 = *Memar Marqah* 5:3, corresponding to Ben-Ḥayyim 1988, 318 and 319 = end of fol. 259b). This expresses the Samaritan denial of any prophets after Moses and thus utilises the expression in the same sense of finality that is operative in Q 33:40. Unfortunately, the dating of the different parts of *Tibat Marqe* is not certain (see generally Hjelm 2016). Its Hebrew editor and translator estimates that books 3–6 were composed at some point between the sixth and tenth centuries CE, as they contain “linguistic elements which seem to have been influenced or even are directly borrowed from Arabic” (Ben-Ḥayyim 1988, v). In keeping with this, a footnote by Ben-Ḥayyim explicitly identifies the application of the title “seal of the prophets” to Moses as having been transferred from Muhammad to Moses (Ben-Ḥayyim 1988, 318). It seems safest to follow this cautionary approach.

Given the elimination of these two close parallels, the only thing that can currently be said about the background of the Qur’anic “seal of the prophets” title is that it was probably redolent of Christian language describing Christ as “sealing”—i.e., both fulfilling and closing off—the succession of prophets who foretold his appearance, based on Dan 9:24’s reference to the “sealing” of “vision and prophet” (*laḥtōm ḥāzōn wə-nābīʾ*), which Christian interpreters applied to Jesus (Colpe 1984–1986, 76–79). In particular, Colpe draws attention to a passage by Tertullian (*Adversos Iudaeos* 8; see Roberts et al. 1995, 3:160), who links Dan 9:24 to Christ and accordingly describes the latter as “the seal of all the prophets” (*signaculum omnium prophetarum*; Colpe 1984–1986, 77–79). Colpe’s suggestion that Q 33:40 repurposes Christian language should not be dismissed due to the geographic and linguistic distance separating Tertullian from the Qur’anic milieu, since similar treatments of Dan 9:24 are found in Greek texts. Thus, John Chrysostom’s *Against the Jews* (5:9) interprets the “sealing of vision and prophet” in Dan 9:24 as referring to the time when “prophecies shall cease,” by explicitly equating “to seal” (*sphragisai*) with “to bring to a standstill” (*stēsai*) and by associating the verse with Matt 11:13, where Jesus states that “all the prophets and the law prophesied until John [the Baptist] came” (Chrysostom 1979, 132; for the Greek, see Migne 1857–1866, 48:898).<sup>13</sup> Theodoret of

12 Two scholars who have recently expressed more confidence that al-Bīrūnī et al. can be taken at face value are Fossum 1993, 151–152, and de Blois 2004, 46. Fossum asserts, perhaps a bit sweepingly, that “the Muslim authors cannot be understood as attributing titles of Muḥammad to Mani.” De Blois notes that the *Cologne Mani Codex* 72 (Koenen and Römer 1988, 50) calls the disciples of previous apostles or messengers the “seal of their apostleship” (*sphragis autou tēs apostolēs*), and he infers that the Qur’an and Manichaeism both inherited the phrase “seal of the prophets” from Jewish Christianity. Thus, while accepting that “seal of the prophets” is pre-Islamic Manichaean language, de Blois does not imply that the Qur’an’s original recipients would have connected Q 33:40 to Mani. Against this hypothesis, I find it more convincing to consider Mani’s use of the phrase *sphragis autou tēs apostolēs* a borrowing from 1 Cor 9:2, in line with Stroumsa 1986, 70–71. Moreover, to say that Muhammad or Mani was the “seal of the prophets” (as per Q 33:40 and al-Bīrūnī) has a very different meaning from describing the disciples of Paul or of some prophetic messenger, respectively, as the “seal” of their master’s “apostleship” (as per 1 Cor and the *Cologne Mani Codex*): disciples stand in a derivative relationship to their teachers, which is not how the Qur’an understands the relationship of Muhammad to his prophetic forerunners.

13 Note that the Greek text of Daniel cited by Chrysostom is not the Septuagint one but rather the version attributed to Theodotion, which has the more literal wording *sphrangisai horasin kai prophētēn* (Colpe 1984–1986, 82, n. 45).

Cyrus too applies Dan 9:24 to Christ, who “as it were seals (*sphrangizei*) and confirms what was foretold by the prophets, doing and suffering everything foretold by them” (Theodoret 2006, 242–243).<sup>14</sup> It is worth underscoring that the Biblical background just outlined neatly supports the argument above that in Q 33:40 the metaphor of sealing has a connotation of finality.

***kharaja* intr. | to go out or forth**  
***akhraja* tr. | to expel s.o., to drive s.o. out**  
→ *ahl al-kitāb*, → *jāhada*, → *hājara*

***khazanah* pl. | keepers, guardians**  
→ *malak*

***khazā'in* pl. | treasures, stores**  
→ *malik*

***khizy* | humiliation**  
→ *'adhdhaba*

***khāsafa l-arḍa bi-* | to cause s.o. to be swallowed up by the earth**  
→ *'adhdhaba*

***khashiya* tr./intr. | to fear or be afraid of s.th. or s.o.; to be afraid**  
→ *qalb*, → *ittaqa*

***khuṭuwāt al-shayṭān* pl. | the footsteps of the devil**  
→ *tabi'a*

***khaffafa* tr. *'an* | to lighten s.th. for s.o.**  
→ *khalada*

***akhfā* tr. | to conceal s.th.**  
→ *ahl al-kitāb*, → *ṣadr*

<sup>14</sup> Like Chrysostom, Theodoret cites the Greek translation associated with Theodotion.

***khalada* intr. | to remain forever, to be immortal**  
***akhlada* tr. | to make s.o. immortal**  
***khuld* | immortality, eternal life**

Further vocabulary discussed: *khaffafa* tr. ‘an | to lighten s.th. for s.o. *ajal* | term

In the Qur’an, the root *kh-l-d* mainly occurs in statements about the perpetual existence of paradise and hell. Such affirmations must be placed against the background of ancient Arab poets’ stress on the futility of human striving for persistence (*kh-l-d*) and on the inevitability of settling, at most, for some attenuated surrogate of it. Before turning to Qur’anic usage, it will therefore be helpful to examine relevant poetic data.

**The root *kh-l-d* in pre-Islamic poetry.** The notion of indefinite persistence into the future, expressed by derivatives of the root *kh-l-d*, is a prominent aspect of the conceptual fabric of pre-Qur’anic Arabic poetry (*ERCQ* 47–54; Müller 1981, 97–110). Preoccupied by a keen sense of human ephemerality, ancient Arabic poetry highlights the unattainability of such permanence: there is “nothing enduring and remaining in the face of life’s fateful vicissitudes” (*lā arā ‘alā l-ḥawādithi bāqiyān wa-lā khālidān*) except for “the mountains firmly implanted,” the sky, the land, “our Lord,” and the alternation of days and nights, says a poem that is attributed (though not uncontroversially so) to Zuhayr (*DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 20:10–11; see Sinai 2019b, 34–37). The natural backdrop against which human existence plays out will endure forever, then, but not so humans themselves: “I know that man is not immortal” (*wa-a‘lamu anna l-mar’a ghayru mukhalladī*), says Durayd ibn al-Ṣimmah (*EAP* 1:76), and a poem in which ‘Abīd ibn al-Abraṣ laments the demise of his people declares: “I have remained after them (*fa-khaladtu ba’dahum*), yet I will not remain forever (*wa-lastu bi-khālidīn*); the destructive course of time (*al-dahr*) is full of changes and hues” (Lyll 1913, ‘Abīd, no. 16:9; cited in *ERCQ* 47; cf. *EAP* 1:65). It would be illusory to think, like a fictional female interlocutor haranguing al-Mukhabbal, that it is wealth that grants people infinite remaining (*inna l-tharā’a huwa l-khulūdu*): not even a hundred camels “will make me remain forever” (*tukhallidūnī*), the poet retorts, and nothing will deliver him from his doom (*al-maniyyah*; Lyll 1918–1924, no. 21:36–39; cited in Müller 1981, 100, and *ERCQ* 48).<sup>1</sup>

Having resigned himself to the realisation that indefinite persistence into the future is not humanly attainable, the poetic hero turns to martial exploits and to ostentatious prodigality instead (*DSAAP*, Ṭarafah, no. 4:54–55; cited in *ERCQ* 50 and *PP* 148–149): “O you<sup>s</sup> who scold me because I attend the uproar of war and partake in pleasures, can you make me remain forever (*hal anta mukhlidī*)? // So if you are unable to avert my doom (*maniyyatī*), let me hasten towards it with what my hand possesses.” While the pursuit of permanence is here abandoned as futile, other verses suggest that conformity to the heroic ethics of ancient Arabic poetry offers at least the hope of a surrogate kind of immortality, consisting in the glory consequent upon heroic deeds. Thus, ‘Urwah ibn al-Ward announces his intention to exchange his life for “fame that endures, even if young men do not remain forever” (*aḥādītha tabqā wa-l-fatā ghayru khālidīn*; Nöldeke 1863, no. 3:2–3, and *EAP* 1:129). The usage of *baqiya* as an effective synonym of *khalada*, just as in the Zuhayr verse quoted above, deserves to be noted. Zuhayr himself, in another

1 On this poem, see Sinai 2019b, 38–39, with further references.



poem, links the idea of posthumous renown to the sons who will outlive the addressee of his panegyric, again by juxtaposing *khalada* and *baqiya* (*DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 3:42–44): “If praise made people remain forever (*yukhlidu l-nāsa*), you would not die; yet praising people does not make [them] remain forever (*laysa bi-mukhlidī*). // Yet it [namely, praiseworthy acts] does engender enduring effects, by way of inheritance (*wa-lākinna minhu bāqiyātīn wirāthatan*); so bequeath (*fa-awrith*) to your sons some of them, and prepare yourself—// prepare yourself for the day of death, for even if the soul abhors it, it is the final appointment (*ākhiru maw’idī*).”

**Eternity in the Qur’an.** Like poetry, the Qur’an presents the basic human condition as imprinted by mortality: no human has ever attained eternal existence (*khuld*) in the sense of straightforward immortality (Q 21:34; see Müller 1981, 106), not even divine messengers (Q 21:8). Rather, “everyone will taste death” (Q 3:185, 21:35, 29:57; see under → *dhāqa*).<sup>2</sup> The Qur’an moreover shares the poetic assumption that humans will naturally strive to overcome their innate state of evanescence: Q 26:129 alludes to the attempt to achieve immortality through monumental buildings (Müller 1981, 105); similar to poetry, Q 104:3 criticises the misconception that it is wealth that causes one to remain forever (*akhlada*; see *PP* 148–149); and Adam is successfully tempted by the devil to eat of the “tree of immortality” (*shajarat al-khuld*), presumably because he is deeply attracted by the promise of gaining *khuld* (Q 20:120; cf. 7:20).

Yet from the Qur’anic perspective, it is only the eschatological admission to God’s other-worldly paradise—to the “garden of immortality (*jannat al-khuld*) that was promised to the God-fearing” (Q 25:15; → *jannah*)—that will satisfy the innate human quest for eternal life. The kind of *khuld* that is available to humans, then, does not consist in eluding death indefinitely but rather leads through death, resurrection, and God’s ensuing eschatological judgement. In fact, once the resurrection and the judgement are factored in, the Qur’an presents indefinite future persistence as downright inescapable, in so far as the damned, too, face the prospect of eternal perdurance, though they will spend it undergoing infernal torment: God’s “enemies” will have as their “eternal abode” (*dār al-khuld*) the fire of hell, Q 41:28 says (see also under → *jahannam*). Accordingly, some verses expressly insist that the inmates of hell will not die (Q 14:17, 35:36; cf. 43:77 and 69:27), even if they cannot properly count as being alive either (Q 20:74, 87:13: *lā yamūtu fihā wa-lā yahyā*), presumably due to the abundance of their suffering and misery. The Qur’an’s binary or “polarized” (Stetkevych 1994, 101) vision of human permanence, consisting either in eternal fulfilment and community with God or in eternal torment, is underscored by the frequent and often verse-final formula that humans will “forever remain” (*khālidūn/-īn*) in paradise or in hell (e.g., Q 2:25.39.81.82.162.217.257.275), a phrase that begins to appear already fairly early in the Meccan period (e.g., Q 20:76.101, 23:11.103, 72:23).

The Qur’an’s explicit insistence on the perpetuity of damnation agrees with the apparent sense of New Testamental statements about the “eternal fire” of hell and the like (see Matt 18:8 and 25:41.46, 2 Thess 1:9, Rev 20:10). At the same time, it stands in contrast to

2 Cf. also Q 28:88: everything perishes except for God’s countenance (*kullu shay’in hālikun illā wajhahū*) and similarly 55:26–27. Q 7:20—where the devil tells Adam and Eve that eating from the prohibited tree will make them “angels or immortal” (*an takūnā malakayni aw takūnā minā l-khālidīn*)—seems to imply that angels at least are not mortal. Taking this into account, the point of Q 28:88 and 55:26–27 may only be to assert the general perishability of all things other than God rather than to predict their factual perishing.

two Mishnaic dicta that limit the human sojourn in hell to twelve months or to the length of time between Passover and Pentecost (*m. 'Ēd. 2:10*). This view, incidentally, is likely reflected in Q 2:80 and 3:24, according to which the Israelites or some of the scripture-owners maintained that the fire of hell would only touch them for “a [small] number of days” (Mazuz 2014, 70–71). Q 11:107–108 may be read as softening the perpetuity of damnation and paradise with the qualifier “unless your<sup>s</sup> Lord wills otherwise” (*illā mā shā'a rabbuka*; see also Q 6:128). This could be deemed to support the view of Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah that damnation in hell will not in fact be eternal (Reynolds 2020, 148–150, and Khorchide 2012, 56–57; see in more detail Hoover 2009, Hoover 2013, Hoover 2019, 137–139, and Lange 2016a, 168–171). However, the evident Qur'anic assumption that everything, including the existence of paradise and hell, depends on God's power and sovereign will does not necessarily entail that God will in fact change course: there is an important distinction to be made between what God can do and what he does in fact do (see in more detail under → *shā'a*). Indeed, other passages make the Taymiyyan reading of Q 11:107–108 unlikely, in so far as it is explicitly maintained that the inmates of hell will not have their eschatological punishment “lightened” (Q 2:86.162, 3:88: *lā yukhaffafu 'anhumu l-'adhābu*; similarly 16:85, 35:36, and 40:49–50; see Ahrens 1935, 104).<sup>3</sup>

Altogether, the Qur'an exhibits a pointed inversion of the state of affairs depicted in the initial quotation by Zuhayr above. According to the Qur'an, the seemingly imperishable natural backdrop of human life—mountains, the sky, the land—is not in fact eternal but destined for eschatological obliteration (*HCI* 173; e.g., Q 77:8–10); not only the life span of human agents but the existence of the cosmos as a whole, including the sun and the moon, has its divinely appointed “term” (→ *ajal*; e.g., 13:2, 30:8, 31:29, 46:3). Human subjects, on the other hand, rather than being forced to reconcile themselves to the fact that they will at some point fade into irreversible non-existence, cannot evade the eternal consequences of their earthly deeds, one way or another.

***akhlaṣa* tr. | to single out s.th. or s.o.**

***akhlaṣa l-dīna/dīnahu li-llāh* | to restrict (one's) worship or religious allegiance to God, to worship God alone**

***mukhlaṣ* | elect**

→ *shayṭān*, → *dīn*<sup>2</sup>

***khalafa* tr. | to act in s.o.'s stead**

***khalafa* intr. *min ba'dihi* | to succeed s.o.**

***khallafa* tr. | to leave s.o. behind**

→ *istakhlafa*

***ikhtalafa* intr. (*fī*) | to disagree, to fall into disagreement (about s.th.)**

→ *ummah*, → *bayyana*, → *ḥizb*, → *al-naṣārā*

3 On the lack of support for a doctrine of universal salvation in the Qur'an, see also under → *al-rahmān*.

*istakhlafa* tr. (*fī*) | to appoint s.o. as a deputy or vicegerent (over s.th.)  
*khalīfah* (*fī*) | deputy, vicegerent (over)  
*ja'ala* tr. *khalā'ifa/khulafā'a* (*fī*) | to appoint s.o. as deputies or vicegerents  
(over s.th.)

Further vocabulary discussed: *ard* | earth; land *khalafa* tr. | to act in s.o.'s stead  
*khalafa* intr. *min ba'di* | to succeed s.o. *khallafa* tr. | to leave s.o. behind *adhaba*  
tr. | to remove s.o. *istabdala* tr. | to make s.o. a substitute (for s.o. else) *afsada* intr.  
*fī l-ard* | to wreak corruption on earth / in the land *makkana* tr. *fī* | to establish s.o.  
on/in s.th. *taqwīm* | constitution (?); posture (?) *ṣūrah* | shape, form *ṣawwara*  
tr. | to shape s.o., to endow s.o. with a shape (specifically, humans)

**Overview.** According to Q 2:30 and 38:26, God made or appointed (*ja'ala*) Adam (or perhaps humankind in general) and David a *khalīfah* “on the earth” or “in the land” (*fī l-ardi*; see also under → *ard*). Whether the singular noun *khalīfah* means “successor” or “vicegerent” is a long-standing crux of Qur’anic interpretation, whose importance is reinforced by the Umayyad use of the title *khalīfat allāh*, “deputy of God” (Crone and Hinds 1986; see also the critique in Rubin 2003b, 87–99). A purely inner-Qur’anic examination of the root *kh-l-f*, as undertaken most comprehensively by Rudi Paret and presented in the next section, could suggest that the concept of a *khalīfah* does indeed turn on the idea of succession. The present entry nonetheless goes on to argue that by widening the scope to include relevant data in Epigraphic South Arabian or Sabaic, “deputy” emerges as the more likely sense in the Qur’an’s historical milieu, with the verb *istakhlafa* being denominal and meaning “to appoint s.o. as a deputy.” At the same time, Qur’anic occurrences of *istakhlafa* and the frequent phrase *ja'ala* + acc. *khalā'ifa/khulafā'a* (“to make a group of people *khalīfahs*”) may well, by virtue of the underlying Arabic root *kh-l-f*, preserve connotations of succession and the substitution of a particular sinful human collective by another, in the expectation that the latter will more satisfactorily live up to God’s moral and religious expectations. The entry continues by showing that the designation of Adam as a *khalīfah*, i.e., as God’s vicegerent or deputy, in Q 2:30 functions as a deliberate alternative to the Biblical statement that Adam was created in God’s “image and likeness” in Gen 1:26–27. The Qur’anic phrase in Q 2:30 is surmised to have a dual task: first, to avoid what could have been perceived to be an excessively anthropomorphic image of the deity; secondly, to side with one particular understanding of Gen 1:26–27, according to which humanity’s creation in God’s likeness consists in their God-given dominion over the earth.

***Khalīfah* as “successor”: Paret’s root-based approach.** In at least two of its five Qur’anic occurrences, in Q 7:169 and 19:59, the first-form verb *khalafa* means “to succeed”: the Biblical Israelites (Q 7:169) or the prophetic descendants of Adam and Abraham (Q 19:59), the text says, “were succeeded by others following them” (*fa-khalafa min ba'dihim khalfun*), which successors are then accused of various offences.<sup>1</sup> That *khalafa* + acc. can have the sense of “to succeed s.o., to follow s.o., to come after s.o., to remain behind after s.o.” is widely reported in premodern Arabic dictionaries (*AEL* 792–793), and this lexicographical claim is consistent with various other Qur’anic de-

<sup>1</sup> The other three instances of *khalafa* are Q 7:142.150 and 43:60, which will be discussed later in the entry. For the participle *al-khālīfūn*, see immediately below.

rivatives of *kh-l-f*: in Q 9:83 the active participle plural *al-khālīfūn* are “those who stay behind” (*fa-q’udū ma’a l-khālīfīn*, “Remain<sup>p</sup> sitting with those who stay behind”; see also *al-khawālīf* in Q 9:87.93); *khallāfa* is “to leave behind” (Q 9:118) and *al-mukhallafūn* are “those left behind” (Q 9:81, 48:11.15.16);<sup>2</sup> and the preposition *khalfa* or *min khalfi*, of course, means “behind” and “after” (e.g., Q 2:66.255, 4:9; see CDKA 90).

Assuming the usual behaviour of the classical Arabic system of roots and stems, all of this creates a strong prima facie case for understanding the noun *khalīfah* (plural: *khalā’if* or *khulafā’*) and the tenth-form verb *istakhlafa* by appealing to an assumed root meaning of *kh-l-f* to do with the notions of following and succession. Thus, the singular *khalīfah*, which is applied to Adam in Q 2:30 and to David in 38:26, might be considered to operate like an active participle of *khalafa* and to mean “successor” (e.g., Paret 2001 and CDKA 90). The locution *ja’ala* (+ acc.) *khalīfatan fī l-arḍi*, which appears in both Q 2:30 and 38:26, will then have the sense “to appoint (s.o. as) a successor on the earth / in the land.”<sup>3</sup> In its plural form, the same phrase figures in a number of late Meccan verses (Q 6:165, 10:14.73, 35:39: *ja’al-akum/ja’alnākum/ja’alnāhum khalā’ifa ± <l-arḍi / fī l-arḍi>*; 7:69.74, 27:62: *ja’alakum/yaj’alukum khulafā’a ± <l-arḍi>*), for all of which the translation “to make you<sup>p</sup>/them”—i.e., the Qur’anic believers or some past group like Noah and his fellow flood-survivors—“successors on the earth / in the land” is contextually apt.<sup>4</sup> Finally, the tenth-form verb *istakhlafa* + acc. (Q 6:133, 7:129, 11:57, 24:55; see also 57:7) is reasonably considered to be synonymous with *ja’ala* + acc. *khalīfatan/khalā’ifa/khulafā’a*, which would give it, too, the sense “to make s.o. a successor, to appoint s.o. as a successor.”

Such a unitary and root-based construal of *khalafa*, *istakhlafa*, and *khalīfah* as revolving around the basic notion of succession, which has been carefully developed by Rudi Paret (Paret 1970; see also Fischer 2001, 148–150), undoubtedly has great systematic appeal. It is not difficult, moreover, to rationalise God’s statement to David in Q 38:26 that “we have appointed you<sup>s</sup> as a successor in the land” by noting that David would certainly have been understood to follow in the footsteps of previous rulers, whether Israelite or not.<sup>5</sup> However, Paret’s unitary approach runs into manifest problems at Q 2:30, where God declares to the angels that “I am establishing a *khalīfah* on the earth” (*innī jā’ilun fī l-arḍi khalīfatan*). Whom is Adam supposed to be succeeding if indeed *khalīfah* means “successor” (al-Qāḍī 1988, 401; Schenzle 2017, 140–141)? The post-Qur’anic Islamic tradition posits that prior to the creation of Adam the earth was populated by jinn and subsequently also by certain angels (al-Qāḍī 1988, 399–400, and SQ 21–22; e.g., Muqātil 2002, 1:96), but there are no explicit Qur’anic statements supporting this notion nor is there any late antique precedent for the idea of angels inhabiting the earth prior to Adam.<sup>6</sup> Still, within

2 The general impression is that the passive of *khallāfa* connotes being left behind due to unreliability. Paret thinks that “the ones remaining behind” (*al-khālīfūn*) mentioned in Q 9:83 are those who have a legitimate excuse for not participating in military excursions (KK 209), but it deserves consideration whether Q 9:81 ff. might not be employing *al-mukhallafūn* (v. 81), *al-khālīfūn* (v. 83), and *al-khawālīf* (vv. 87, 93) synonymously.

3 On the ambiguity “earth/land,” see under → *arḍ*.

4 Assuming that mean verse length is a useful indicator of chronological priority, Q 27:62 (with a mean verse length of 78.19 transliteration letters per verse) may be the earliest of these passages.

5 Indeed, the Median passage Q 2:246–251, which postdates Surah 38, makes it clear that David was preceded by Saul or Tālūt.

6 Even though the creation account in Genesis does not expressly say when God brought the angels into being, their creation was routinely assumed to predate that of Adam on the sixth day of creation (e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 1:3, 3:8, 11:9; see also Kugel 1998, 48–51). But this view is clearly not equivalent with the claim that the angels who were created during one of the first six days of creation inhabited *the earth*. The idea that at some point in the early

Paret's approach the only available solution to the quandary of Adam's successorship is to understand God's announcement that "I am establishing a successor on the earth" to presuppose that "Adam (and with him the human race) will from now on replace the angels (or spiritual beings more generally) as inhabitants of the earth" (Paret 1970, 215; thus also Fischer 2001, 158, and Schreiner 2003, 35). Though this is not an impossible suggestion, its lack of confirmation in the Qur'an and pre-Qur'anic literatures makes it seem unsatisfyingly *ad hoc*.

**A Sabaic reading of *khalīfah* and *istakhlafa*.** There is, however, an alternative interpretation of *khalīfah* and *istakhlafa* that sidesteps the dilemma just outlined. Importantly, it respects Paret's important insights that *ja'ala* + acc. *khalā'ifa/khulafā'a* is equivalent to *istakhlafa* + acc. and that in the absence of countervailing evidence the singular *khalīfah* ought to be assumed to have the same meaning as its plural forms *khalā'if* and *khulafā'*. As Ruben Schenzle has pointed out (Schenzle 2017, 141–142), Abraha's inscription by the dam of Mārib (CIH, no. 541) from March 548 CE employs the noun *hlft*, corresponding to Arabic *halifah*, as well as the plural *hlyf*, corresponding to *khalā'if*, in a sense that has been glossed as "viceroy," "governor," or "commander," and the verb *s'thlf* to mean "to appoint s.o. as viceroy/governor" (ll. 11–13, 36; see Beeston 1982, 60, and, for an English translation of the inscription, Robin 2015a, 164–167). The verb *s'thlf* recurs in the same sense in one of Abraha's inscriptions at Murayghān, known under the siglum Ry 506 (l. 8; see Robin 2015a, 169).<sup>7</sup> If the meaning of Arabic *khalīfah* is equated with that of Sabaic *hlft*, then the Qur'anic term does not first and foremost mean "successor" but rather designates somebody whom a royal superior has set up as his representative or deputy. The Sabaic data thus confirm those voices in the Islamic exegetical tradition who maintain that a *khalīfah* is a vicegerent, deputy, or lieutenant acting in God's stead (e.g., Ṭab. 1:480 and *Jal.* 16) rather than a successor.<sup>8</sup>

As it turns out, "deputy" or "vicegerent" in fact yields a good contextual fit for all Qur'anic occurrences of *khalīfah* and its plurals *khalā'if* and *khulafā'*, though it must be underlined that Qur'anic references to human deputies of God do not imply an absence of their divine overlord. Qur'anic *istakhlafa*, too, is convincingly equated with Sabaic *s'thlf* and rendered as "to appoint s.o. as a *khalīfah* or deputy," i.e., may be regarded as a denominal verb whose meaning derives from that of the noun *khalīfah*. This makes particularly good sense where *istakhlafa* collocates with the preposition *fī*, as in Q 57:7, which enjoins the Qur'anic addressees to "spend from that over which he"—namely, God—"has appointed you as deputies" (*anfiqū mim mā ja'alakum mustakhlafīna fīhi*; see also Q 7:129 and 24:55). In fact, even though the prepositional complement *fī l-arḍ* is in many cases appropriately translated as "on the earth/land" (e.g., *ista'mara* + acc. *fī l-arḍ*, "to settle s.o. on the earth," in Q 11:61; → *makkana*), when following *istakhlafa* or *khalīfah* it should probably be treated not primarily, or at least not exclusively, as a localising expression but also as

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history of the world—namely, before the flood—angels descended to the earth is not unfamiliar in the Biblical tradition, based on the enigmatic notice about sexual unions between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of humans" in Gen 6:1–4 (Kugel 1998, 179–183 and 194–199). However, this antediluvian angelic presence on earth does not predate the creation of Adam.

7 See also the results for the root *h-l-f* under [sabaweb.uni-jena.de](http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de). That Qur'anic *khalīfah* has a Sabaic background seems to have been first proposed in Grimme 1912, 160.

8 The question whether *hlft* is originally Sabaic or inversely a loanword from Arabic may be left open in the present context (Schenzle 2017, 142). Whatever the origin of the word, its use in royal Sabaic discourse would presumably have left an imprint on the subsequent use of Arabic *khalīfah*.



identifying the domain over which authority is conferred (“over the earth/land”).<sup>9</sup> As for the various Qur’anic occurrences of *ja’ala* + acc. *khalā’ifa/khulafā’a*, they too may readily be understood as equivalent with Sabaic *s’tħlf* and to mean “to appoint s.o. as a deputy or vicegerent.” Incidentally, in connection with this expression too the syntagm *fī l-ard* is best parsed as “over the earth/land.”<sup>10</sup>

A Sabaic-derived construal of Qur’anic *khalīfah* and *istakhlafa* is additionally buttressed by the fact that *khalafa* + acc. is at least twice in the Qur’an employed in what seems to be the denominal sense of acting in someone’s stead or as someone’s *khalīfah* (Q 7:142.150). Thus, before Moses departs to encounter God on Mount Sinai, he appoints Aaron as his proxy by charging him, “Be my deputy over my people” (Q 7:142: *wa-qāla mūsā li-akhīhi hārūna khluḥnī fī qaumī*), and after Moses returns to discover the Israelites’ idolatry, he incriminates them with the words, “How evil have you acted as my deputies, in the wake of my departure!” (Q 7:150: *bi’samā khalaftumūnī min ba’dī*). By way of an aside, Q 7:142 provides a further illustration of the remit-identifying rather than localising employment of *fī* following a derivative of *kh-l-f*. The same denominal understanding may be extended to another occurrence of *khalafa*, in Q 43:60 (*wa-law nashā’u la-ja’alnā minkum malā’ikatan fī l-ardī yakhlufūn*): “If it were our will, we would bring forth from you<sup>p</sup> angels to function as deputies/vicegerents over the earth.”<sup>11</sup>

In sum, the Qur’anic lexemes *khalīfah* and *istakhlafa* as well as the phrase *ja’ala* + acc. *khalīfatan/khalā’ifa/khulafā’a* are manifestly political terms referring to the delegation of rulership and power by a higher authority. With the exception of Q 7:142.150, the direct source of such delegation is God, the ultimate sovereign of the cosmos, and the Qur’anic employment of the verb *istakhlafa* and the noun *khalīfah* may accordingly be considered to tie in with the royal traits with which the Qur’an generally invests the deity (Schenzle 2017, 132–133; see under → *malik*). As will presently emerge, being deputised by God and retaining this position is conditional on piety and righteousness.

**God’s replacement of sinful deputies by others.** We have seen that Sabaic epigraphic data strongly support translating Qur’anic *khalīfah* as “deputy” or “vicegerent” rather than “successor.” However, we also saw that the notions of succession and following are an important part of the native Arabic semantics of the root *kh-l-f*. This creates the possibility that the expressions *istakhlafa* + acc. and *ja’ala* + acc. *khalīfatan/khalā’ifa/khulafā’a*, despite their primary meaning of appointing a deputy, harbour simultaneous overtones of succession and sequentiality. If so, then the Sabaic-inspired interpretation of *khalīfah* and *istakhlafa* should not be regarded as incompatible with aspects of Paret’s inner-Qur’anic analysis.

9 In the two Sabaic occurrences of *s’tħlf* mentioned above, this remit-identifying role is performed by the preposition *’ly*.

10 That *fī l-ard* does not primarily have a localising function is perhaps also suggested by the fact that two instances of *ja’ala* + acc. *khalā’ifa/khulafā’a* are not followed by *fī l-ard* (as in Q 10:14 and 35:39) but rather by a genitive *nomen rectum* of *khalā’if/khulafā’a*: *ja’alakum khalā’ifa l-ardī* (Q 6:165), *yaj’alukum khulafā’a l-ardī* (Q 27:62), literally “he made/makes you<sup>p</sup> deputies of the earth.”

11 Ambros prefers “to be a successor” here (CDKA 89). But the syntagm *fī l-ard* supports bracketing Q 43:60 together with the various Qur’anic instances of *istakhlafa fī l-ard* and *khalīfah/khalā’if/khulafā’a fī l-ard*, all of which hinge principally on deputyship. It is in any case likely that the specific wording of *la-ja’alnā minkum malā’ikatan fī l-ardī yakhlufūn* in Q 43:60 is in part motivated by rhyme and approximately equates to *la-ja’alnā malā’ikatan khalā’ifa/khulafā’a l-ardī min ba’dikum*. As regards Q 7:169 and 19:59 (*fa-khalafa min ba’dihim khalifun*), might *khalafa* have the denominative sense of “to act as s.o.’s *khalīfah*” here too? The noun *khalif* at least must mean “successors,” which makes the translation “They were succeeded by others following them who . . .” more likely than “After them, the task of deputyship was performed by successors who . . .”



The possibility just raised is strengthened by explicit Qur'anic statements making clear that being deputised by God often involves taking the place of predecessors who were obliterated due to their egregious sins (see also al-Qāḍī 1988, 400). For instance, Q 10:13–14 runs: “We destroyed generations before you<sup>p</sup> when they did wrong and their messengers came to them with clear proofs and they would not believe. Thus do we recompense people who sin. // Then we made you<sup>p</sup> deputies over the earth/land after them (*thumma ja'alnākum khalā'ifa fi l-arḍi min ba'dihim*), so that we might see how you would act.” The fact that being designated as God's deputies tends to involve replacing unsatisfactory fore-runners is also evident from passages employing the verbs *adhaba* + acc., “to remove s.o.,” such as Q 6:133, asserting God's ability to “remove you<sup>p</sup> and appoint whomever he wills as deputies after you, just as he produced you from the offspring of another people” (*in yasha' yudhhibkum wa-yastakhlif min ba'dikum mā yashā'u ka-mā ansha'akum min dhurriyyati qa-wmin ākharin*; for other relevant cases of *adhaba*, see Q 4:133, 14:19, 35:16). Other verses threaten the Qur'anic addressees that God might put in their stead (*istabdala*; CDKA 35) some other people should they fail to live up to God's expectations (Q 9:39 and 47:38; see al-Qāḍī 1988, 402, and Fischer 2001, 151). A linear historical sequence of such replacements is specified in the narrative middle section of Surah 7: 'Ād were appointed deputies “after” (*min ba'di*) the people of Noah (v. 69), and Thamūd were appointed deputies after 'Ād (v. 74; see al-Qāḍī 1988, 400, and Fischer 2001, 150–151). Later in the same surah, Moses addresses the Israelites, who are suffering under Pharaoh, with the words, “Perhaps your Lord will destroy your enemy”—to wit, Pharaoh and his notables (→ *mala'*)—“and appoint you as deputies over the land, so that he might see how you will act” (Q 7:129: *qāla 'asā rabbukum an yuhlika 'aduwwakum wa-yastakhlifakum fi l-arḍi fa-yanzura kayfa ta'malūn*). The Israelites under Moses are thus described as succeeding Pharaoh and his supporters in their sway over the land of Egypt (Sinai 2017b).<sup>12</sup> Overall, then, the Qur'anic employment of *istakhlafa* + acc. and *ja'ala* + acc. *khalā'ifa/khulafā'a* is accompanied by a prominent stress on sequentiality and succession, and at least some of the Qur'anic recipients may well have associated this aspect with the root *kh-l-f* itself.

The moral and religious misdeeds that might lead to a people being substituted for another one and to be appointed deputies in their stead are often summarily designated as “wreaking corruption on earth” (→ *afsada fi l-arḍ*). A synoptic reading of the Qur'an brings to light the understanding that history is governed by a responsive cycle consisting in God's munificent “establishment” or “settlement” (→ *makkana, askana, ista'mara, bawwa'a*) of humans “on the earth” or “in the land,” which is potentially followed by human “wreaking of corruption” therein, which in turn results in God's appointment of other humans as the culprits' successors (see under → *afsada*). The scheme is predicated on the triple supposition, familiar from the Hebrew Bible and subsequent Jewish and Christian tradition, that God holds total sway over human history, that usufruct of God's earth or a part of it is conditional on satisfactory moral and religious performance, and that history, by virtue of being intelligible in terms of recurrent patterns of human transgression and divine retribution, is invested with profound theological significance.

<sup>12</sup> The ministry of Moses is expressly dated after the destruction of the people of Noah, 'Ād, the people of Lot, and Thamūd (Q 7:103: “Then after them we sent Moses to Pharaoh and his notables with our signs,” *thumma ba'athnā min ba'dihim mūsā bi-āyātīnā ilā fir'awna wa-mala'ihī*). However, Pharaoh and his notables are not explicitly said to have succeeded 'Ād or Thamūd, perhaps because the geographical setting of the Pharaoh narrative is different from the locale of 'Ād and Thamūd.

The wider contours of the Qur'anic theology of the earth in which this scheme is rooted is discussed elsewhere (→ *ard*).

**Adam as God's "deputy" in Q 2:30 and the creation of humans in "God's image and likeness" in Gen 1:26–27.** The remainder of the entry will focus on one particular occurrence of the term *khalīfah*, the characterisation of Adam as God's deputy (*khalīfah*) in Q 2:30, and its relationship to older Jewish and Christian traditions. The narrative context of this occurrence of *khalīfah* is a divine announcement that would seem to precede the creation of humankind: "I am establishing a deputy over the earth" (*innī jā'ilun fī l-ardi khalīfatan*), God tells the angels, who then raise the objection that God's new creature will "wreak corruption (→ *afsada*) on earth" and "shed blood." As has been observed previously (e.g., Schreiner 2003, 34–37; Crone 2004, 40; Reynolds 2010a, 51; Reynolds 2018, 35), this pre-creation announcement recalls Gen 1:26, according to which God declared, in a similar narrative context prior to bringing forth Adam, "Let us make man in our image (*ṣelem*), according to our likeness (*dāmūt*); and let them have dominion (*wayirdū*) over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."<sup>13</sup> The following verse, Gen 1:27, doubles down on the idea of human theomorphism by reiterating that "God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them." A strand of rabbinic exegesis takes God's utterance in Gen 1:26 with its puzzling plural ("Let *us* make man") to be addressed to the angels,<sup>14</sup> and *Genesis Rabbah* reports how God gave the angels a demonstration of Adam's superior wisdom by inviting him to name the animals previously created (*Gen. Rab.* 17:4). Q 2:30–33 manifestly reprocesses this scene (*BEQ* 52–54; Reynolds 2010a, 47; *HCI* 148–150). There is, accordingly, a palpable link between Q 2:30 and the reception history of Gen 1:26. At the same time, the Qur'anic passage does not repeat the Biblical assertion that humans were made in God's "image" and "likeness," instead describing man as God's "deputy." Are we entitled to consider this Qur'anic omission of the *imago dei* phrase a deliberate eschewal?

An affirmative answer to this question is supported by the fact that a number of further Qur'anic verses, too, do not adopt the Biblical concept of humankind's creation in God's image or indeed voice implicit rebuttals of it. Thus, the early Meccan passage Q 95:4–5 declares that God created or creates man "in the best constitution" or perhaps "in the best posture" (*fī aḥsani taqwīm*), after which God "reduces him to the lowest of the low" (*thumma radadnāhu asfala sāfilīn*), a reference to human decrepitude in old age (see in more detail under → *taqwīm*). At least prior to their inevitable decline, then, God has fashioned humans in an optimal form; yet this form or constitution is not characterised in theomorphic terms. Similarly, according to another early Meccan passage, Q 82:6–8, God has fashioned humans in a harmonious and balanced manner (v. 7: *alladhī khalaqaka fa-sawwāka fa-'adalak*) and in "whatever shape he willed" (v. 8: *fī ayyi ṣūratin mā shā'a*

13 The idea of human theomorphism is reprised in Gen 5:1 and 9:6 (the latter justifying the prohibition of shedding human blood by the fact that man was created "in God's image").

14 This view is explicitly rebuffed by Jacob of Sarug, for whom the plural in Gen 1:26 reflects non-linguistic communication between God the Father and God the Son; see Mathews 2020, 52–55, ll. 2211–2244. Note that the view that the plural was addressed to the angels is not the only position taken by rabbinic interpreters; see Fossum 1985a, 208–220, and Schreiner 1993, 132–133.

*rakkabak*; for a comparison of this passage with Gen 1:26, see Schreiner 2003, 29–31).<sup>15</sup> A severing of Adam’s shape or form from God (while preserving the Biblical exaltation of Adam’s constitution in its own right) continues to be manifest after the early Meccan period: according to Q 40:64 and 64:3, God “shaped you<sup>p</sup> and gave you beautiful shapes” (*wa-ṣawwarakum fa-aḥsana ṣuwarakum*). Q 82:8 is, moreover, echoed by the Medinan verse Q 3:6: God “shapes you in the wombs as he wills” (*huwa lladhī yuṣawwirukum fī l-arḥāmi kayfa yashā’u*).

Interestingly, the noun *ṣūrah* (“shape” or “form”), found in Q 82:8 and also, in the plural, in 40:64 and 64:3, reappears in the post-Qur’anic Islamic adaptation of Gen 1:26 in the *ḥadīth* corpus, where it is reported that God created Adam “in his”—presumably, God’s—“shape” or “form” (*‘alā ṣūratihī*; Schöck 1993, 69–72; Schreiner 2003, 32–33; Melchert 2011). It is eminently conceivable that already prior to the Qur’an, the Biblical notion of human theomorphism was expressed in Arabic via the loanword *ṣūrah*.<sup>16</sup> Specifically, Arabic *ṣūrah* would have been a reasonable counterpart to the Biblical word *ṣelem* that is found, in combination with *dāmūt*, in Gen 1:26 and then twice more in the following verse Gen 1:27 (“So God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them”). In fact, one version of the *Samaritan Targum* renders Gen 1:26 by employing *ṣura*, the Aramaic cognate of Arabic *ṣūrah* (Salvesen 1991, 5); Jacob of Sarug says of Adam that “his form” (*ṣūrteh*) declared God’s wisdom (Mathews 2014, 16–17, l. 9); and the Samaritan work known as *Memar Marqah* or *Tibat Marqe*, too, speaks of Adam’s “form” by using *ṣurta* (Fossum 1985a, 223–224, citing Macdonald 1963, 1:86 = *Memar Marqah* 4:2).<sup>17</sup> These comparative data make it quite compelling to read the Qur’anic assertion that humans were created “in whatever shape (*ṣūrah*)” God “willed” (Q 82:8)—rather than, as one might add, in God’s own shape—and its subsequent echoes in Q 3:6, 40:64, and 64:3 as a pointed revision of the idea of theomorphic creation from Gen 1:26–27.

The preceding reading may be complemented by the observation that the Qur’anic use of the noun *ṣūrah* (only found in Q 40:64, 64:3, and 82:8) and the verb *ṣawwara* (only found in Q 3:6, 7:11, 40:64, and 64:3; 59:24 has the active participle *al-muṣawwir*) is virtually confined to the context of God’s creation of humankind (Dmitriev 2010, 361).

15 Schreiner argues that Q 82:8 is continuous with de-anthropomorphising tendencies in some of the targumim and also in the Greek translation of Symmachus, which renders the Hebrew text corresponding to “God created man in his image” (Gen 1:27) as “God created man in a different image (*en eikōni diaphorō*), upright he created him” (Schreiner 2003, 30–31; see also Salvesen 1991, 2–3 and 6; my translation of *diaphorō* follows Salvesen rather than Schreiner, who opts for “excellent”). Symmachus does faithfully render the possessive suffixes in Gen 1:26 (“in *our* image, according to *our* likeness”; Salvesen 1991, 2–4). But as Schreiner explains, v. 26 was less problematic than the explicit reference to man’s creation “in the image of God” in v. 27, since the suffixes in v. 26 could be taken to refer to the angels whom God was understood to address here (see also Salvesen 1991, 5, and Schreiner 1993, 136).

16 Arabic *ṣūrah* may be loaned from its Aramaic cognate *ṣurta* (Syriac: *ṣūrta*), although *ṣur*, “image,” is also attested in Sabaic. See Fraenkel 1886, 272–273; *FVQ* 201; <http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/SabaWeb/Suche/Suche/SearchResultDetail?idxLemma=5230&showAll=0> (accessed 19 March 2021). Ambros, however, considers it more probable that Arabic *ṣūrah* is “a cognate, not a loan” (*CDKA* 165).

17 There are further occurrences of *ṣurta* in connection with Adam; e.g., Macdonald 1963, 1:88 and 2:142 = *Memar Marqah* 4:2; Macdonald 1963, 1:46 and 2:73 = *Memar Marqah* 2:10. According to Ben-Ḥayyim, it cannot be excluded that books 3–6 of *Memar Marqah* / *Tibat Marqe* might date to the early Islamic centuries. Books 1 and 2 he is prepared to date to the lifetime of Marqah, although he notes that book 2 contains “several interpolated sections written in a language and style characteristic of the eleventh to thirteenth centuries” (Ben-Ḥayyim 1988, v; on the composition and date of the work in general, see also the relevant section of Hjelm 2016). For the passage from *Memar Marqah* 2:10 in the edition of Ben-Ḥayyim, see Ben-Ḥayyim 1988, 142 and 143 = fol. 94a.

The meaning of *ṣūrah* and *ṣawwara* may therefore be more specific than to point to God's fashioning of created beings in general. The Christian poet 'Adī ibn Zayd, too, uses the verb *ṣawwara* in connection with God's creation of Adam (al-Mu'aybid 1965, no. 103:7: *ṣawwara l-rajulā*), and Dmitriev credibly posits that this is to be understood in line with Gen 1:26 as creation in God's image (Dmitriev 2010, 360–362). At Q 59:24 (*huwa llāhu l-khāliq l-bārī'u l-muṣawwiru*), it is admittedly plausible to consider *al-muṣawwir* to be synonymous with the preceding two participles, which refer to divine creatorhood in general (*al-khāliq, al-bārī'*; see under → *khalaqa*). Yet a more specific reading of *al-muṣawwir* in the sense of “the shaper of humans” is not contextually impossible, and arguably preferable in light of the other Qur'anic instances of *ṣūrah* and *ṣawwara*. Hence, the divinely bestowed shape designated by *ṣūrah* and *ṣawwara* appears to be the shape of humans in particular, reinforcing the supposition that Q 82:8 and the other verses examined above employ language that had come to be an established way of rendering the scene of Adam's creation from Gen 1:26–27 in Arabic.

The interim conclusion that arises from the preceding, in any case, is that passages like Q 2:30, 82:8, and 95:4 bespeak a Qur'anic reluctance to explicitly espouse the notion of creation in the image of God. This notion may safely be presumed to have been known among Arabophone Jews and Christians, given that the idea is a prominent part of the rabbinic narrative repurposed in Q 2:30–33 and that 'Adī ibn Zayd appears to be alluding to it as well. Thus, instead of asserting that humans were fashioned in a “shape” (*ṣūrah*) corresponding to that of God himself, various Qur'anic passages conspicuously limit themselves to underlining that the creator endowed humans with an optimal constitution, in line with God's sovereign will. Why might the Qur'anic texts display such a guarded stance vis-à-vis the idea of theomorphic creation? Gen 1:26 has been interpreted in a wide variety of ways, and from Philo on many Biblical interpreters have located the likeness obtaining between humans and God in certain rational or spiritual aspects of human personhood, such as endowment with reason (e.g., Colson and Whitaker 1929, 54–57 = Philo, *On the Creation* 69–71; see succinctly Clines 1968, 54–55; de Lacey 1979, 13–14; Schreiner 1993, 137–138; Janowski et al. 2000). In the rabbinic tradition, however, the *imago dei* phrase is understood to involve not only mental or spiritual features of human existence but also the latter's corporeal dimension; it has, moreover, been argued that for tannaitic interpreters the creation of humans in God's image entailed that God was in some way present in his human image (Lorberbaum 2015; see also Schreiner 1993, 134–135). Indeed, a prominent strand of modern Biblical research agrees that the original sense of the *imago dei* phrase from Gen 1:26 was to posit a corporeal resemblance between God and humans (e.g., Gunkel 1922, 112; see also Clines 1968, 55–59, and Miller 1972, 291–293).<sup>18</sup> In light of this, it is

18 In favour of his contention that the creation of Adam in God's “image” and “likeness” implies corporeal resemblance, Gunkel compellingly points to Gen 5:3, according to which Adam begot a son “in his likeness, according to his image.” It is vital to add that despite my argument that the Qur'anic engagement with Gen 1:26–27 and its interpretive tradition displays a concern to rule out a high degree of corporeal similarity between God and humans, the divine-human corporeal resemblance that ancient readers gleaned from Gen 1:26–27 could have been quite vague, and thus not dissimilar to the Qur'an's own “transcendent anthropomorphism” (see under → *allāh* and further on in the main text). This caveat is supported by Ezek 1:26–28, a theophanic account that overlaps with Gen 1:26 in the crucial term *damūt*: “and seated above the likeness (*damūt*) of a throne was a likeness resembling the appearance of a human (*damūt ka-mar'eh ādām*)” (Ezek 1:26). This passage from Ezekiel, it seems, accepts that there is a basic corporeal resemblance between God and humans, but at the same time suggests that “the appearance of God's glory defies adequate description” (Miller 1972, 291).

very likely that the Qur’anic reluctance to adopt the *imago dei* phrase was informed by the fact that Gen 1:26, if read in a straightforwardly literal sense, is suggestive of a high degree of concrete similarity between God and human bodies.

That the *imago dei* phrase could engender such anxiety is illustrated by Origen’s assertion that the man whom Gen 1:26 states to have been created “in God’s image” is not a corporeal being, lest one “appear to represent God himself as made of flesh and in human form”—a view that Origen denounces as “most clearly impious” (Origen 1982, 63, referenced in Reynolds 2010a, 51).<sup>19</sup> Targumic literature, too, is concerned to limit the anthropomorphic implications of Gen 1:26–27 (Altmann 1968, 235–240; Schreiner 1993, 136; Morgenstern 2011, 43–44). To be sure, the Qur’an is itself not free of anthropomorphic tendencies: despite the declaration that “nothing is like” God (Q 42:11: *laysa ka-mithlihi shay’un*), the Qur’an depicts God as an embodied being and as having certain humanoid traits, such as a face, eyes, and hands (see under → *allāh*). Nonetheless, Qur’anic anthropomorphism remains cautious and fairly abstract throughout and is appropriately qualified as “transcendent anthropomorphism” (Williams 2009). Notably, the Qur’an gives no indication of considering God’s body to be a body *made of flesh* and instead appears to envisage God as a luminous being (see Q 7:143, 24:35, 39:69). Moreover, the general point of Qur’anic anthropomorphisms would seem to be to stress God’s personhood rather than to convey any precise sense of his corporeal appearance (see again under → *allāh*). Hence, it would very much accord with the Qur’an’s general theological profile to shun established Biblical language that could be taken to imply an undue degree of concrete similarity between God and his human creatures, or language that might give succour to quasi-theophanic depictions of the newly created Adam along the lines of what one finds in the *Cave of Treasures*, which stresses Adam’s dazzling splendour (Ri 1987, ch. 2).<sup>20</sup>

Assuming that Q 2:30 deliberately replaces the notion that humans were created in God’s image by the notion of human deputyship, how radical a break with the Biblical tradition does this constitute? In assessing the issue, it is helpful to bear in mind that apart from attempts to locate humankind’s affinity with God in certain corporeal or intellectual-spiritual attributes, humankind’s similarity to God could also be identified with dominion over the world. This understanding is set out, for example, in Ephrem’s *Commentary on Genesis*. Ephrem argues that humanity’s creation in God’s image and likeness, as formulated at the beginning of Gen 1:26, is in fact explicated by the rest of the verse, in which God declares that humans are to “have dominion” (Hebrew: *wəyirdū*, Peshitta: *neshlṭūn*) over the animals populating the earth (Ephrem 1955, 23 = Ephrem 1994, 94): “It is the dominion (*shūlṭānā*) that Adam received over the earth (*‘al ar‘ā*) and over all that is in it that constitutes the likeness of God, who has dominion over the heavenly things and the

19 See also Chrysostom 1986, 109, attacking those who, based on the formulation “in our image” would “speak of the divine in human terms, which is the ultimate example of error, namely, to cast in human form him who is without shape, without appearance, without change, and to attribute limbs and forms to the one who has no body.”

20 Q 2:34 and other Qur’anic passages share with the *Cave of Treasures* the motif of angelic prostration to Adam; but in the Qur’an, the rationale is not Adam’s immanent glory but rather the fact that God orders the angels to fall down before Adam (e.g., Q 2:34). The scene of the angels’ prostration is thus recast as a test in obedience to God (see *HCI* 145–147). On the date, provenance, and fluid textual transmission of the *Cave of Treasures*, see now Minov 2021, 18–48, which complicates use of this source by Qur’anic scholars.



earthly things.”<sup>21</sup> Incidentally, an understanding Gen 1:26 that hinges on the concept of dominion has also been attractive to modern scholars (e.g., *NIDOTTE* 1:969–970; Clines 1968, 95–99; Janowski et al. 2000, 1159).<sup>22</sup> The view may be seen to receive inner-Biblical support from the fact that Ps 8:5–9 present dominion over the earth as the distinguishing characteristic of humans (see Clines 1968, 95–96): “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? // Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honour. // You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet, // all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, // the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas.”

We might describe the view just set out as a functionalist interpretation of the Biblical assertion that humans were made in God’s “image” and “likeness”: it is their appointment as rulers over the animals and the earth in general that makes humans “like” God, not any sort of corporeal (or intellectual-spiritual) resemblance. This functionalist position was reasonably current among late antique Christians. Thus, Chrysostom similarly maintains that the first half of Gen 1:26 is to be understood in light of the second half, although he identifies human dominion specifically with creation in God’s “image” (Chrysostom 1986, 110): “So ‘image’ refers to the matter of control (*archē*), not anything else, in other words, God created the human being as having control of everything on earth, and nothing on earth is greater than the human being, under whose authority (*exousia*) everything falls.” The view that creation in God’s image refers to human dominion was also espoused by other figures associated with the school of Antioch, including Diodore of Tarsus and Theodoret of Cyrus (McLeod 1981, 459–460, n. 13). Moreover, as Ana Davitashvili has pointed out to me, Narsai explicitly declares that God set Adam up as a “steward,” “vicegerent,” or “deputy” (*apetropā*, from Greek *epitropos*) over his creation (McLeod 1981, 459, translating from Mingana 1905, 1:17; see in particular l. 13). This statement forms an especially riveting counterpart to the Qur’anic term *khalifah*. Jacob of Sarug, too, repeatedly underscores Adam’s dominion and rulership over the world (Mathews 2020, 70–73, ll. 2376–2378, 2385, 2395–2400).<sup>23</sup>

The Qur’anic description of Adam as God’s *khalifah* unmistakably stands in the tradition of this Biblical and Biblically based emphasis on human dominion (thus already Cragg 1968, 27). More specifically, when Q 2:30 substitutes the Biblical *imago dei* phrase by the term *khalifah*, this achieves several things. First, Q 2:30 overwrites the Biblical *imago dei* phrase and thereby avoids any suggestion that there might be concrete and far-reaching corporeal similarity between God and humans, or that Adam is to be considered a sort of replica of his divine creator. Secondly, Q 2:30 does so by drawing on established Qur’anic

21 Reynolds discerns a similar view in the *Cave of Treasures* (Reynolds 2010a, 51), although it is less explicit there than in Ephrem’s commentary. See in particular Ri 1987, Eastern manuscript group, ch. 2:19, according to which God “gave dominion” (*ashlet*) to Adam.

22 In the post-Qur’anic period, this view was also embraced by Saadia Gaon (Schreiner 2003, 33–34). For some words of caution regarding the merits of this position, see Miller 1972, 294–297, who notes that “the motif concerning man’s dominion over the animals could be transmitted and expounded without any reference at all to his creation in the ‘image of God’” (see Ps 8:5–9), while Gen 9:6 (where the prohibition of shedding human blood is justified by humankind’s creation in God’s “image”) demonstrates that “the motif of man’s similarity to God could be transmitted without any reference to his dominion over the other creatures” (Miller 1972, 296–297). This suggests that Gen 1:26 is putting forward two separate (though perhaps linked) notions.

23 These references to Jacob are likewise due to Ana Davitashvili.



terminology around the root *kh-l-f*, thus recasting God’s announcement from Gen 1:26 in a manner that is terminologically well integrated into the general Qur’anic theme of human deputyship. Thirdly, the manner in which the Qur’an replaces the Biblical *imago dei* phrase in fact enshrines one particular understanding of it, namely, the functionalist interpretation that human likeness to God consists in human dominion over the world. Fourthly, by having recourse to the term *khalīfah*, Q 2:30 effectively highlights the derivative nature of human dominion: a *khalīfah* does not only wield authority, but is himself subordinate to a superior authority. By contrast, when Ephrem invokes the concept of human “dominion” (*shūltānā*), the crucial aspect that this dominion is derivative or vicarious requires being additionally stated. The Qur’anic concept of a *khalīfah* thus foregrounds God’s ultimate supremacy over humans and the fact that their exalted position is rooted in an act of delegation that may be revoked at any moment.

It is instructive in this regard to juxtapose Q 2:30 with the manner in which the idea of human dominion over the world is formulated by the Christian Arabic poet ‘Adī ibn Zayd, according to whom God made humans “lords over creation” (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 103:18: *li-yaj’alanā fawqa l-bariyyati arbāban*).<sup>24</sup> Unlike ‘Adī, the Qur’an does not present humans as “lords” in their own right—the title → *rabb* being mostly reserved for God in the Qur’an<sup>25</sup>—but casts them merely as deputies of the true Lord, God. Much closer to the Qur’anic understanding of what it means for Adam, and through him humankind at large, to be God’s *khalīfah* is a statement by Philo. He remarks, on the general subject of man’s dominion (*hēgemonia*), that God made man “as a sort of driver and pilot, to drive and steer the things on earth, and charged him with the care of animals and plants, like a governor subordinate (*hyparchos*) to the chief and great King” (Colson and Whitaker 1929, 70–73 = Philo, *On the Creation* 88, cited in Papoutsakis 2017, 77).<sup>26</sup> Eusebius subsequently transfers the title of *hyparchos* to Constantine (Crone 2004, 194; Papoutsakis 2017, 77), a link recalling the fact that the Qur’an casts not only Adam as a *khalīfah* but also a prominent subsequent ruler, David. But of course, as noted earlier, Philo does not explicitly identify man’s creation in God’s “image” and “likeness” with this human station of governorship, preferring instead to equate man’s likeness to God with the human mind or *nous* (Colson and Whitaker 1929, 54–57 = Philo, *On the Creation* 69–71).

There is one more terminological link to consider. The Qur’anic application of the term *khalīfah* to Adam may be compared with a passage from Jacob of Sarug’s verse homily on Tamar (conveniently edited and translated in Brock 2002). When Adam was created, Jacob says, he was given the “likeness” of Christ, so that by virtue of it he might “reign” (*namlek*) over God’s creatures; and by breathing into him, as recounted in Gen 2:7, God “anointed” Adam so that the latter might function as a “vicar” or a “place-keeper” (*nāṭar dukktā*) in the world until the coming of the true anointed one, Christ (ll. 41–46; see Papoutsakis 2017, 7 and throughout).<sup>27</sup> As Papoutsakis explains in a monograph-length study of the passage, Jacob here “glosses ‘image’ with ‘vicarius’” (Papoutsakis 2017, 140), by making use of a Syriac

24 But note that Toral-Niehoff 2008, 249, considers it possible that this verse is a later Islamic addition.

25 At Q 12:41.42.50 (perhaps also at 12:23), *rabb* is exceptionally used for a human “master.”

26 For a detailed analysis of the term *hyparchos*, as used by Philo and Eusebius, see Papoutsakis 2017, 75–77. For a further occurrence in Philo, awareness of which I owe to Marianna Klar, see Colson and Whitaker 1929, 116–117 = *On the Creation* 148 (where the word is rendered “viceroys”).

27 Brock’s translation differs from Papoutsakis’s by rendering *mshīḥā* ‘*abdeh*’ as “Christ made him” rather than “he [God] made him anointed” = “he anointed him.”

expression (*nāṭar dukktā*) that is a calque on Greek *topotērētēs*, a Roman administrative term (Papoutsakis 2017, 74–75). Papoutsakis moreover identifies a place in Ephrem’s commentary on Genesis (specifically, on Gen 49:10) where the label “vicars” (*nāṭray dukktā*) is applied to David and his descendants, on the logic that they reigned in lieu of the coming Son of God (Papoutsakis 2017, 55–69; see also Ephrem 1955, 113–114 = Ephrem 1994, 203–204). Papoutsakis himself is aware of the potential contribution that the material studied by him might make to elucidating the Qur’anic employment of *khalīfah* (Papoutsakis 2017, 194). Taking up his clue, one is bound to be struck by the parallelism between the Qur’an’s theological uptake of what seems to have been a technical military term (Abraha’s *hlft*), on the one hand, and Ephrem and Jacob’s theological uptake of a technical administrative term (Greek: *topotērētēs*, Syriac: *nāṭar dukktā*), on the other. Whether the parallelism indicates real historical contact remains unclear for the time being, given that the use of political language in a theological context is a general phenomenon.<sup>28</sup> Irrespective of the issue of dependence, however, it is clear that the Qur’an’s rationale in calling Adam and David a *khalīfah* “over the earth” or “over the land” (*fī l-ard*; Q 2:30, 38:26) is at least partly similar to that which informs Ephrem and Jacob’s use of the concept of a “vicar” or “place-keeper” (*nāṭar dukktā*): Adam and David were not kings in their own right, seeing that it is only God who is the “true king” (Q 20:114, 23:116: *al-malik al-ḥaqq*; see under → *malik*). Though Adam and David are equipped with the plenitude of kingly authority over the earth (or perhaps, in the case of David, over the Israelite realm), the authority conferred upon them is irreducibly vicarious. Human rulership is thus subjected to a terminological “downgrading or diminution” (Papoutsakis 2017, 192; cf. *ibid.*, 74).

A difference remains, however. When Ephrem and Jacob speak of human “vicars” or “place-keepers,” this points forwards in time to the eschatological coming of Christ the King. The Qur’an, too, posits that God’s kingship will most fully manifest itself on the day of judgement (e.g., Q 40:16; see under → *malik*); but this eschatological expectation is not explicit when Adam and David are called a *khalīfah* in Q 2:30 and 38:26. Instead, at least in the latter case the focus is unequivocally on David’s responsibility to discharge the authority conferred upon him in a morally satisfactory fashion (Q 38:26): “O David, We have made you a deputy over the land; so judge between the people in truth according to what is right (*fa-ḥkum bayna l-nāsi bi-l-ḥaqqi*) and do not follow desire, for it will lead you astray from God’s path. Those who go astray from God’s path will have a violent punishment for having forgotten the day of reckoning.” What occupies the centre stage here is the moral accountability that follows from being God’s *khalīfah*, not a *khalīfah*’s eventual relief by the divine king; and the eschatological aspect that is undeniably present in Q 38:26 pivots on the danger of damnation, not on the expectation of immediate divine rulership. This is entirely in tune with the general Qur’anic use of the root *kh-l-f* and the theme of God’s replacement of sinful deputies that was analysed above. The Qur’anic concept of a *khalīfah* thus lacks the temporal dimension that Papoutsakis convincingly discerns in Ephrem and Jacob’s use of *nāṭar dukktā* (Papoutsakis 2017, 76–77). In this respect, the notion of a *khalīfah* is closer to Philo’s description of man as a subordinate governor (*hyparchos*) of God and to Narsai’s description of man as God’s steward or deputy (*apētrōpā*).

<sup>28</sup> See, for instance, the aforementioned case of Philo’s recourse to the Greek word *hyparchos* (“subordinate governor”) in order to categorise the station of Adam with regard to God above him and the rest of creation below him.

***khalaqa* tr./intr. | to create (s.th.)**

***khāliq* | creator**

Further vocabulary discussed: *qadar, qadr* | measure; ordainment, decree *qad-dara* tr. | to endow s.th. with measure *mahada* tr./intr. | to spread (s.th.) out *dahā* tr. | to spread s.th. out *ja'ala* tr. | to make or establish s.th. *ja'ala* ditr. (*li-*) | to make s.th. s.th. (for s.o.), to appoint s.th. as s.th. (for s.o.) *ansha'a* tr. | to produce s.th., to bring s.th. forth *bara'a* tr., *faṭara* tr. | to create (s.th.) *fātir* | creator *fiṭrah* | creaturely disposition, creaturely constitution *bāri'* | creator *al-bariyyah* | the creatures *badi' al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ* | the originator of the heavens and the earth *ratq* | an act of sewing together or fusing *fataqa* tr. | to tear s.th. apart *dābbah* | land animal *'arsh* | throne *mā'* | water *istawā* intr. *'alā* | to sit down on s.th. *sawwā* tr. | to endow s.th. or s.o. with an even or uniform shape *ṣawwara* tr. | to shape s.o., to endow s.o. with a shape (specifically, humans) *ḥifẓ* | safeguarding, preservation *a'āda l-khalqa* | to recreate, to create again

Similar to standard Jewish and Christian belief, the idea of God as a cosmic creator is a pivotal aspect of the theology of the Qur'an throughout all its developmental stages (see generally *BEQ* 1–49; Arnaldez 1978; Peterson 2001). God is “the creator of all things” (*khāliq kulli shay'in*; Q 6:102, 13:16, 39:62, 40:62; cf. *ho pantōn ktistēs* in 2 Macc 1:24 and similarly Sir 24:8), and the power to bring something into existence is an exclusive prerogative of his (e.g., Q 35:3: “Is there a creator other than God?”). By contrast, the partner deities venerated by the Qur'an's pagan adversaries (→ *ashraka*) are denied any creative efficacy (e.g., Q 7:191: “Do they venerate as partner deities something that does not create anything but is itself created?”). Since the Qur'an's general conception of God is treated elsewhere (→ *allāh*), the present entry focusses on the diction employed in affirmations of divine creation. The entry begins with an overview of the Qur'an's three main verbs of creation *khalaqa*, *bara'a*, and *faṭara*. This is followed by discussions of the Qur'an's lack of any unequivocal statement to the effect that God's creation of the cosmos proceeded *ex nihilo* or from nothing, of the Qur'anic tendency to understand divine creation as an ongoing and present reality, and of the link between creation and resurrection. The Qur'an's eschewal of the Biblical notion that humans were created in God's “image” and “likeness” (Gen 1:26) is treated under → *istakhlafa*.

***Khalaqa***. Usage of the verb *khalaqa* to denote divine creation, especially of humans, is already attested in some credibly pre-Islamic verses of Arabic poetry (Sinai 2019b, 27–28). Moreover, judging by the Qur'an's portrayal of the pagan “associators,” they too accepted the notion of a divine creator (*QP* 54–55; → *ashraka*, → *allāh*). Unsurprisingly, therefore, the general outlines of the Qur'anic doctrine of divine creation are in place already in the early Meccan surahs, which contain frequent reminders that God has “created” (*khalaqa*) humans (Q 15:28.33, 26:78.166.184, 37:11.96, 51:56, 53:45.46, 55:3.14, 56:57.59, 70:19.39, 74:11, 79:27, 90:4, 75:38, 77:20, 78:8, 80:18–19, 82:7, 86:5–6, 90:4, 92:3, 95:4, 96:1–2). Less often, early Meccan surahs highlight God's creation of other beings, such as camels (Q 88:17) and the jinn (Q 55:15), and assert that he “built” or “created” the heavens (Q 67:3, 78:12, 79:27; see also 91:5). Q 15:85 and 44:38 first articulate the tripartite claim that God “created the heavens and the earth and what is in between them” (cf. also Q 52:36), a formula that is reminiscent of Gen 1:1 (“In the beginning, God created the heavens and

the earth”) and goes on to recur as a whole (e.g., Q 21:16, 25:59, 30:8, 32:4, 50:38) or in part (e.g., Q 2:164, 3:190.191, 6:1.73, 7:54, 9:36) in numerous later Qur’anic verses (see under → *ard*). In line with the Biblical account of creation in Gen 1, several verses maintain that God’s creation of the cosmos occurred in six days (e.g., 50:38; see also below and under → *ard*).

The Qur’an presents God’s creation as a perfectly crafted system that is free from faults and defects (Q 67:3–4 and also 50:6; see Zirker 1993, 95, 215, and → *afsada*; cf. Neuwirth 2010, 439). A similar faith in the perfection of the cosmos, understood in the sense of consummate proportionality, lies behind the early Meccan verse Q 54:49: God “created everything according to a specific measure” (*innā kulla shay’in khalaqnāhu bi-qadar*),<sup>1</sup> an affirmation that resonates in Q 25:2 (*wa-khalaqa kulla shay’in fa-qaddarahu taqdīrā*, “He created everything and endowed it with measure”; cf. 6:101).<sup>2</sup> Another early Meccan generalisation about divine creation is found in Q 51:49, which declares that God “created everything in pairs” (*wa-min kulli shay’in khalaqnā zawjayni*; see Ambros 1990, 294), tying in with other verses stressing that humans were created “male and female” (Q 53:45, 75:39, and 92:3; cf. Gen 1:27) and that fruit-bearing plants too were made in pairs (Q 13:3, 55:52). As will be further illustrated below, the Qur’an consistently highlights the perfect symmetry and proportion of God’s creation, obviating any need to hope that creation will, as Paul puts it, “be set free from its bondage to decay” after having been “groaning in labour pains” (Rom 8:21–22; cf. Zirker 1993, 95). Despite its perfection, of course, the cosmic edifice that God has crafted will ultimately be dismantled when the eschatological “hour” comes (*HCI* 173), in order to be replaced by a new and eternal habitat, paradise and hell, which will accommodate the eschatological disaggregation of the morally mixed lot of contemporary humanity into the righteous and the sinners.

**Other verbs for divine creation, especially *faṭara* and *bara’a*.** Apart from *khalaqa*, the Qur’an deploys a considerable range of further expressions for acts of divine creation. They comprise not only action verbs whose meaning, at least in the human domain, is relatively concrete, such as *banā* (“to build”), *mahada* and *dahā* (“to spread out,” namely, the earth; see Q 51:48, 79:30, and under → *ard*), or *akhraja* (“to bring out, to bring forth”; e.g., Q 2:22.61, 3:27, 6:95.99, 7:57); Qur’anic verbs of creation also include a number of more general terms that are marked by considerable semantic overlap with *khalaqa*, such as *ja’ala*, “to make” (e.g., Q 2:22, 77:25.27, 78:6.9.10.11.13; see Peterson 2001, 477–478) and *ansha’a*, “to produce, to bring forth,” an exclusively Meccan expression (e.g., 6:6.98.133.141, 11:61, 13:12; see Peterson 2001, 478–479).

Especially close to *khalaqa*, and difficult to render in any other way than as “to create,” are the verbs *faṭara* and *bara’a*. Like *ansha’a*, *faṭara* is conspicuously limited to the Meccan period. It occurs stereotypically as the active participle *fāṭir* in the phrase *fāṭir al-samāwāt wa-l-ard*, “the creator of the heavens and the earth” (Q 6:14, 12:101, 14:10, 35:1, 39:46, 42:11).

1 Cf. also 65:3 (*qad ja’ala llāhu li-kulli shay’in qadrā*, “God appointed a measure for everything”). As noted in CDKA 220, *qadar* and *qadr*—which in the Qur’an can mean not only “measure” but also God’s “ordainment” or “decree” (Q 33:38; see also the discussion of *laylat al-qadr* in Q 97:1.3 under → *amr*)—are probably “to be considered merely as variants of one lexeme.” On how these two meanings might be linked, see el Masri 2020, 69–70; on *qadar* in the pre-Islamic sense of “ordainment, decree,” see Caskel 1926, 20–21.

2 On *qaddara*, see CDKA 220 and also below, at the end of the section entitled “Creation as divine bestowal of form and shape. . . .” Elsewhere, such as Q 15:60 and 27:57, *qaddara* must mean “to ordain, to decree,” although this may be thought of as the ordainment of the right *time*, rather than measure or amount, for something (CDKA 220).

*Fāṭir* corresponds to Ethiopic *faṭārī*, “creator” (NB 49; FVQ 221), an active participle like its Arabic counterpart. Derived from this usage, conjugated forms of the verb *faṭara* can be employed in the denominal sense of “to create,” as in Q 6:79 (God *faṭara l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa*, “created the heavens and the earth”) or 36:22 (where God is described as *alladhī faṭaranī*, “he who created me”), while the noun *fiṭrah* (“creaturely constitution”) denotes the natural religious disposition with which the divine creator has endowed humankind (Q 30:30; see under → *ḥanīf*). The fact that other verses have *khalaqa* instead of *faṭara* in similar contexts (e.g., Q 6:1.73, 7:54, 9:36, 10:3, 11:7, according to which God “*khalaqa* the heavens and the earth”) confirms the two verbs’ far-reaching semantic equivalence.

Nonetheless, the synonymy of *faṭara* and *khalaqa* may not be complete. After all, the native Arabic meaning of the consonantal root *f-ṭ-r* has to do with cleaving or being cleft, as indicated by the use of various derivatives of it (namely, *tafaṭṭara* and *infataṭara*, “to be split,” and *fuṭūr*, “cracks”) in Q 19:90, 42:5, 67:3, 73:18, and 82:1. In view of these verses, one may surmise that the original recipients of the Qur’an may have understood *faṭara* = “to create” to have semantic overtones of cleaving and sundering. This conjecture is far from novel, in so far as Muslim exegetes sometimes gloss the verb *faṭara* as *shaqqa*, “to split” (Burge 2008, 56–58; see, e.g., Ṭab. 9:175–176, on Q 6:14). The hypothesis that Qur’anic *faṭara* has a connotation of cleaving receives significant support from the assertion in Q 21:30 that “the heavens and the earth were fused together” before God “tore them apart” (*fa-fataqnāhumā*). This important verse will be discussed in more detail below.

Whereas *faṭara* is limited to Meccan surahs, occurrences of *bara’a*, “to create” (Q 57:22), of the corresponding participle *bārī*, “creator” (Q 2:54, 59:24), and of the definite noun *al-bariyyah*, “the creatures” (Q 98:6.7), are all Medinan. Given that other Arabic derivatives of the root *b-r-* do not signify creation, the terms just enumerated are evidently used under the semantic impact of Hebrew *bārā’* or Aramaic *brā* (FVQ 75–76; see also Mingana 1927, 88), which figure prominently in the creation accounts of Genesis, whether in the Hebrew Bible, the targums, or the Peshitta (Gen 1:1.21.27, 2:3, 5:1, 6:7). Thus, *al-bārī* would seem to be an Arabisation of Syriac or Jewish Aramaic *bāryā*, “the creator” (cf. Hebrew *borē*, from which CQ 20 would derive *bārī*), while *bariyyah* may be linked with Syriac *brītā*, “creation,” “world,” and “creature,” and also Hebrew *bəri’ah/bəriyyah*, “creation,” and Hebrew/Aramaic *biryah/biryta*, “creature” (see TS 600–601; SL 189; DTTM 193, 194; DJPA 112–113; DJBA 245). Although Jeffery argues for a Syriac provenance of Qur’anic *bara’a*, *bārī*, and *bariyyah*, the Medinan date of all their Qur’anic occurrences suggests rather that they reflect rabbinic diction as mediated by Medina’s Jewish residents, among whom the Arabic terms in question may well have been in use. This fits well with the fact that Q 2:54 employs the term *bārī* in the context of an address that is uttered by Moses after having discovered the Israelites’ worship of the Golden Calf. It is noteworthy that the Hebrew verb *bārā’* was also loaned into Sabaic, as demonstrated by a Jewish inscription found close to the Ḥimyarite capital Ṣafār (Beeston et al. 1982, 30; Robin 2000, 49–50; Gajda 2009, 233 and 235).

**Creation as divine bestowal of form and shape rather than as creation *ex nihilo*.** Already the relatively common combination of *khalaqa* with the preposition *min*, “from,” throughout the Qur’an (e.g., Q 3:49.59, 4:1, 5:110, 6:2, 55:14.15, 70:39) signals that the Qur’an does not generally assume that divine creation proceeds *ex nihilo*. A similar observation emerges from Q 75:38, where the verb *khalaqa* clearly designates a subsequent stage in the formation of a human fetus rather than its initial genesis: “then he [the human



embryo] was a clot [of blood]; and then he [God] created [him] and endowed [him] with an even shape” (*thumma kāna ‘alaqatan fa-khalaqa fa-sawwā*).<sup>3</sup> Indeed, it is generally doubtful that there is any explicit and conclusive Qur’anic support for the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* (O’Shaughnessy 1985, 1–9; Peterson 2001, 474–480)—an insight expressed already by such medieval luminaries as Averroes (Ibn Rushd n.d., 42–43; Ibn Rushd 2010, 28–29 and 183–184), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī 1987, 4:29–33; İskenderoğlu 2002, 69–73), and Ibn Taymiyyah (Hoover 2007, 90–91; Hoover 2019, 121–122).<sup>4</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, moreover, opens his discussion with the apposite general observation that none of the “divine scriptures”—by which he means the Qur’an and the Torah—“contain an explicit declaration that the world is created in time both in its matter and in its form.” As will be further stressed below, the apparent agreement between the Qur’an and the Hebrew Bible in this regard is quite remarkable, given that it runs counter to what by the time of the Qur’an had become the prevalent Christian understanding that God’s creation proceeded *ex nihilo* (May 1994). Given the importance of the issue, it is appropriate to undertake a more detailed review of some of the Qur’anic prooftexts that may be adduced for or against creation *ex nihilo*.

One of the Qur’anic expressions that has been linked to the notion of creation from nothing is the epithet *badī‘ al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*, “the originator of the heavens and the earth,” which is twice (Q 2:117, 6:101) used instead of the more common phrase *fāṭir al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*, “the creator of the heavens and the earth” (Q 6:14, 12:101, 14:10, 35:1, 39:46, 42:11). However, it is difficult to marshal any positive evidence that the word *badī‘* necessarily connotes creation from nothing (van Ess 2017–2020, 4:504). A more promising argument for creation *ex nihilo*, at least on the face of it, is provided by another phrase in Q 2:117: when God “decides on [creating] something (*idhā qaḍā amran*), he merely says to it, ‘Be,’ and it is (*yaqūlu lahu kun fa-yakūn*).” The phrase has close parallels in Q 3:47, 19:35, and 40:68, and the latter part of the formula—*kun fa-yakūn*, “‘Be,’ and it is”—recurs in a number of further verses (Q 3:59, 6:73, 16:40, 36:82). The idea that God creates by, as it were, commanding entities into being is bound to recall the series of existence-inducing utterances that God utters in Gen 1:3.6.9 etc., such as the order “Let there be [*≈ kun*] light,” followed by the statement that there “was [*≈ fa-yakūn*] light” (cf. also *m. Abot* 5:1). The Qur’anic *kun fa-yakūn* topos also recalls a statement by Aphrahat, who is concerned to show that God was not wearied by creating the world (cf. Q 2:255 and 50:38) and who claims that when God “made (*‘bad*) all of his creatures by the word of his mouth (*b-mellat pūmeh*), he spoke and they came into existence (*emar wa-hway*)” (*Demonstrations* 13:11 = Parisot 1894, 565–566; translation from Lehto 2010, 300). However, even this resemblance falls short of establishing that the Qur’an is presupposing creation *ex nihilo*: it is quite feasible to read Gen 1 as having creation proceed from a watery chaos (see below), and the claim that the Qur’an is not espousing such a position would require an additional argument.

In fact, while the Qur’anic *kun fa-yakūn* passages did facilitate the Islamic reception of the idea of creation from nothing (van Ess 2017–2020, 4:502–503),<sup>5</sup> they too on closer

3 See also the remarks on divine creatorhood and the Qur’an’s occasionalistic portrayal of natural processes under → *allāh*. Specifically on *sawwā*, see below (at the end of the section entitled “Creation as divine bestowal of form and shape . . .”).

4 Ibn Taymiyyah was a reader of Averroes; see Hoover 2018.

5 Van Ess discerns in the idea of divine creation by fiat a “first step to the *creatio ex nihilo*.”



examination turn out to be at most inconclusive. To be sure, in Q 16:40 the divine voice declares, “When we want to bring something into existence, we only say to it (*innamā qaw-lunā li-shay’in idhā aradnāhu an naqūla lahu*), ‘Be,’ and it is” (similarly Q 36:82). This must refer to God’s bringing into being something previously non-existent; but even so it remains unclear whether in doing so God operates on a prior substrate or not. Indeed, in Q 40:68 the context militates against reading the *kun fa-yakūn* formula to entail creation *ex nihilo*, considering that the preceding verse, 40:67, details how God creates humans “from earth [namely, the first human Adam], then from a drop [of sperm], then from a clot [of blood]” etc. Accordingly, at least in Q 40:68 the creative power of God’s word is likely to pertain to the transformation (albeit the instantaneous, immediate, and wondrous transformation) of something into something else and not to God’s bringing something into being without any prior substrate of change. The same impression arises from Q 3:59, where Jesus and Adam are described as having been created by divine fiat: God “created him [namely, Adam] from earth, and then said to him, ‘Be,’ and he was”: once again, creation by fiat would seem to operate on and transform a pre-existing substratum, earth.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to the absence of any unequivocal Qur’anic statement in favour of creation *ex nihilo*, there are in fact two later Meccan passages, Q 21:30 and 11:7, that come close to affirming the opposite, i.e., creation from some kind of primal matter or substrate. According to Q 21:30, “the heavens and the earth were fused together (*kānatā ratqan*)<sup>7</sup> and we tore them apart (*fa-fataqnāhumā*); and we made every living thing from water (*wa-ja’alnā mina l-mā’i kulla shay’in ḥayyin*).” Here, creation manifestly proceeds via a divine act of sundering (verb: *fataqa*) some amorphous and primordial substrate, resulting in the formation of the heavens and the earth.<sup>8</sup> The immediately following reference to creation from water allows for two interpretations. On what is perhaps the most literal reading, “we made *every living thing* from water” is strictly delimitative and conveys that it is only plants and animals—i.e., beings who manifestly require water to survive—that are created from water. This understanding is not implausible, given that two other verses reiterate the same point specifically for terrestrial animals and humans (Q 24:45: God “created every land animal from water,” *wa-llāhu khalaqa kulla dābbatin min mā’in*; 25:54: God “created humans from water,” *wa-huwa lladhī khalaqa mina l-mā’i basharan*).<sup>9</sup> If the delimitative reading is correct, then

6 On Q 3:59, see also n. 16 under → *rūh*. Another verse that might be read as implying creation *ex nihilo* yet probably shouldn’t be is Q 52:35; see O’Shaughnessy 1985, 4–5 and 55.

7 According to Muslim lexicographers, *rataqa* means the mending or closing of a breach (*ilḥām al-fatq wa-iṣlāḥuhu*; al-Azharī [1964–1976], 9:53; cf. *AEL* 1027). Al-Ṭabarī glosses *kānatā ratqan* as meaning “there was no interstice between them; rather, they clung together” (*laysa fihimā thaqbun bal kānatā multaṣiqatayn*; Ṭab. 16:254). It would seem that the verbal noun *ratq* (or the variant *rataq*; *MQ* 6:16 and *MQQ* 4:134) is used in the sense of the passive participle *martūq* or rather its feminine dual *martūqatayn* (Zam. 4:140; cf. *AEL* 1027).

8 The verb *fataqa* may be compared with a line in the creation poem attributed to Adī ibn Zayd (al-Mu’aybid 1965, no. 103:3; see Dmitriev 2010, 356–357), according to which the primal mixture of water, wind, and darkness was devoid of any rent (*fatq*) or gap (*khalal*).

9 It is not immediately clear how Q 25:54 is to be reconciled with other passages describing the creation of humans from clay (e.g., Q 6:2, 7:12). One might solve the problem by proposing a distinction between the *ultimate* origination of humans and land animals from water (as per Q 24:45 and 25:54) and their *proximate* origination from some other substance (as per Q 6:2 etc.). This would fit with the understanding, developed in what follows in the main text, that Q 21:30 and 11:7 present water as the ultimate substrate of everything, not just of living beings. Alternatively, one might point to Q 32:8, 77:20, and 86:6, where the creation of humans “from lowly water” or “from gushing water” (*min mā’in mahīn*, *min mā’in dāfiq*) plainly means “from sperm.” (Q 32:7–8 combines the creation of the first human from clay with the subsequent creation of his descendants from sperm-water.) In view of these three verses, one could infer that Q 24:45 and 25:54 are not about

the primordial substrate separated out into the heavens and the earth is distinct from the water said to form the ultimate origin of living beings; water would only enter the picture at a secondary stage of the creative process, presumably after the original hyllic substrate in which the heavens and the earth had been “fused together” (*kānatā ratqan*) was subsequently separated out into the heavens, the earth, and the sea.

An alternative interpretation would be to identify the original substrate of creation in Q 21:30 with water, and to consider the phrase “we made *every living thing* from water” to highlight only some of the entities—namely, living beings—among the sum total of beings fashioned from the primal waters. This second interpretation is supported by Q 11:7, according to which God “created the heavens and the earth in six days, while his throne was upon the water” (*wa-huwa lladhī khalaqa l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa fī sittati ayyāmin wa-kāna ‘arshuhu ‘alā l-mā’i*). With Paret, the phrase *wa-kāna ‘arshuhu ‘alā l-mā’i* is best construed as a circumstantial or *ḥāl* clause that specifies a state of affairs simultaneous with the main action described (*KK* 231–232). If this is correct, then the scenario evoked would seem to be one in which the process of creation commences with the creator being in the presence of a primordial watery hyle, from which he subsequently brought forth the heavens and the earth.<sup>10</sup> As Geiger notes (*WMJA* 64), Q 11:7 recalls the first creation account in the book of Genesis, which can be summarised as saying that a “pre-existent watery waste (1:1–2) was divided into two by the creation of a solid dome or vault (the sky, 1:6–8), so that there was water both above and below it” (Barton and Muddiman 2001, 42).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, at least some ancient interpretations of Gen 1:2 took the statement that “the earth was a formless void (*tōhū wābōhū*)” to allude to primordial waters (Kister 2007, 237–238).<sup>12</sup> Similarly, according to 2 Pet 3:5–6 (referenced in *BEQ* 5), “by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water (*ex hydatos kai di’ hydatos*), // through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished” (referring to the flood of Noah). Here, at least the earth (though apparently not heaven) is held to have been formed from water. In view of all this, it is attractive to combine Q 11:7 and 21:30 and

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water as a primordial substrate at all but rather about generation from sperm (*KK* 361, on Q 24:45). Against this interpretation, however, Speyer notes that the sperm-water figuring in Q 32:8, 77:20, and 86:6 is always qualified by an adjective (*mahīn, dāfiq; BEQ* 45). By contrast, Q 24:45 and 25:54 speak of creation from water without an adjective, in one case also with the definite article. Q 25:54 (*mina l-mā’i*) shares both features with Q 21:30 (*wa-ja’alnā mina l-mā’i kulla shay’in ḥayyīn*), where reference to a primordial substrate is contextually appropriate. Overall, a primordial rather than seminal reading of Q 24:45 and 25:54 remains likely, in my view.

<sup>10</sup> The alternative to Paret’s construal would be to consider the statement that God’s throne was “upon the water” (*wa-kāna ‘arshuhu ‘alā l-mā’i*) in Q 11:7 to detail a state of affairs following the creation of the heavens and the earth: God first generates the heavens and the earth, after which act he resides above the waters that are in turn located above the celestial dome (see Droge 2013, 133, n. 12). However, the parenthetical position of *wa-kāna ‘arshuhu ‘alā l-mā’i* deserves to be noted: God “created the heavens and the earth in six days—his throne being upon the water (*wa-kāna ‘arshuhu ‘alā l-mā’i*)—in order to put you<sup>p</sup> to the test, [in order to discern] which one of you will act best (*li-yabluwakum ayyukum aḥsanu ‘amalan*).” The parenthetical status of the throne clause goes well with Paret’s view that it forms a circumstantial clause.

<sup>11</sup> Awareness that Gen 1:1–2 could be read to imply creation from some sort of pre-existing matter persisted even after the emergence of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*: this is how the passage is interpreted by Julian the Apostate, in an attempt to undermine Christian dogma, and also by a pagan philosopher figuring in a literary debate with Gamaliel II in *Gen. Rab.* 1:9 (Niehoff 2006, 45–46; Kister 2007, 250). On the possibility of reading Gen 1:1–2 as expressing the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, see Bockmuehl 2012, 255. See also Kister 2007, 241–247, who notes that *Jubilees* stresses that there were no uncreated elements (VanderKam 1989, ch. 2:2: among the things created on the first day were “the heavens that are above, the earth, the waters,” and “the depths”).

<sup>12</sup> Note, though, that some of this material, such as a passage from *Tibat Marqe*, identifies God as the creator of *tōhū wābōhū*.

infer that the ultimate substrate of God’s creative activity in general—that is, matter in its most disorganised and inchoate state—was water or water-like.<sup>13</sup> This would entail that not only living beings but also inanimate substances and entities (e.g., fire, mountains) are the result of God’s transformation of a primordial watery abyss.<sup>14</sup> Incidentally, it may not be a coincidence that the Qur’an envisages sperm to be water-like (Q 32:8, 77:20, 86:6): if the primordial waters were replete with the potential to be transformed into all things under the impact of God’s creative action, then it would be appropriate for sperm to share this character.<sup>15</sup>

Making a confident choice between the two options just presented—i.e., between a hyllic substrate that is completely amorphous and one that is watery—is nonetheless difficult. In fact, one cannot even take it for granted that Q 21:30 and 11:7 necessarily describe one and the same scenario. It may be that Q 11:7 considers water to be the primal element from which everything else was derived, while 21:30 envisages an even more indeterminate and formless substrate of creation, similar to an oft-quoted statement from the Hellenistic Jewish *Wisdom of Solomon* 11:17 that the “almighty hand of God” created the cosmos “out of formless matter” (*ex amorphou hylēs*; see May 1994, 6).<sup>16</sup>

Though a definite solution remains elusive, it is nonetheless illuminating to further contextualise Q 21:30 with a homily on creation by Jacob of Sarug. Unlike the Qur’an, Jacob is explicit that the cosmos came into being “from nothing” (*men lā meddem*; Mathews 2020, 20–21, l. 1942; see also Mathews 2009, 22–29, ll. 133–135, ll. 139–140, and ll. 167–177, or Mathews 2019, 12–13, l. 1575, and 14–15, ll. 1585–1586). But Jacob also stresses that what God first created was a “great something” (*meddem rabbā*) that he describes as a primordial blend from which the “entire world” would subsequently come forth (Mathews 2009, 46–47, ll. 363–368). In particular, Jacob stresses that the four elements fire, water, earth, and earth, despite being “contrary” (*saqqūblāyē*), were “mixed in” with one another before being assigned their natural places according to Aristotelian cosmology (ll. 369–370). Jacob moreover ties this original state of fusion to the statement in Gen 1:2 that “the earth was a formless void” (ll. 371–374). The primordial “great something” from which everything else was fashioned, according to Jacob, looks similar to the original agglomerate envisioned in Q 21:30, even though in the Qur’anic case there is no equivalent stress that the primordial mixture was brought into being *ex nihilo*. Jacob’s primordial “great something,” of course, is not water but rather a fusion of all four elements.

13 Other Qur’anic verses distinguish between two kinds of water, sweet and salty (Q 25:53, 35:12; see also 27:61, 55:19–20, and 77:27). Conceivably, the primordial water that appears to figure in Q 11:7 contains both of these empirical varieties of water.

14 Another verse that could be connected to the question of the primordial stuff on which the creator operated is Q 41:11, which describes a stage in the process of creation at which the sky was still smoke (*dukhān*; see also BEQ 15). However, this does not appear to be the ultimate substrate from which the sky was crafted, since the previous verses mention God’s creation of the earth and the mountains (vv. 9–10). Hence, the sky must already have been fashioned prior to Q 41:11, and its being in a state of smoke or vapour must be a transitional one, perhaps preceding the creation of the celestial bodies. Note that Q 44:10 predicts a day of reckoning on which the sky will emit smoke.

15 As regards fire, several verses state that the jinn, or Iblis in particular, were created from it (*nār*; see Q 7:12, 15:27, 38:76, 55:15). If the Qur’an considers primordial water to be the ultimate substrate of all created beings, the fire from which the jinn were fashioned would itself need to have emerged from water (perhaps by heating?). Plato’s *Timaeus* (56c–57c) puts forward an account of how at least some of the elements can be transformed into others (e.g., water into fire); the hypothesis that fire, too, was created from primordial water is therefore not impossible or anachronistic. Unfortunately, the Qur’an is silent on such subtleties of natural philosophy.

16 This was also the view held by Philo; see Niehoff 2006, 43–44, and also Kister 2007, 246–247.

Does the preceding discussion entitle us to attribute to the Qur'an a downright denial of creation out of nothing? No. Just as the Qur'an does not explicitly assert creation *ex nihilo*, so it does not unequivocally deny it: to borrow Markus Bockmuehl's description of how Jews and Christians ultimately came to understand the primal chaos portrayed in Gen 1:1–2, it is not impossible to interpret the aboriginal state (or states) of affairs described in Q 11:7 and 21:30 as “*already the product* of the act of creation, rather than merely its material cause” (Bockmuehl 2012, 255). This is, for instance, how al-Zamaksharī reads Q 11:7: the throne and the water must have been created prior to the heavens and the earth (Zam. 3:184; cf. also the traditions in Ṭab. 12:330–331). An equivalent reading of Gen 1:1–2 is found in the poem on creation attributed to ‘Adī ibn Zayd (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 103:3; see Dmitriev 2010, 356–357).<sup>17</sup> As for al-Zamaksharī's interpretation of Q 11:7, it may be reinforced by noting that the divine throne, too, is nowhere in the Qur'an said to have been created, even though it seems clear that it must have been.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the Qur'an explicitly calls God “the creator of all things” (*khāliq kulli shay' in*; Q 6:102, 13:16, 39:62, 40:62), which *prima facie* militates against attributing to it the notion of an uncreated substrate.<sup>19</sup> Even if none of this clinches the issue (perhaps the eternal substrate of God's creation is so amorphous that it does not strictly speaking qualify as “a thing”?), it will make one wary of employing arguments from silence in order to infer the uncreatedness of certain entities in the Qur'an (whether it be the primordial waters from Q 11:7, the primordial mixture from 21:30, or the divine throne).

Despite such considerations, however, it remains arresting that the Qur'an lacks any unequivocal endorsement of creation *ex nihilo* at a time when the latter had come to be explicitly affirmed as standard Christian doctrine and had also begun to manifest itself in the rabbinic tradition: *Gen. Rab.* 1:9 has Gamaliel II reject a philosopher's allegation that Gen 1 represents chaos, darkness, water, and wind as uncreated raw materials of the divine creator (Niehoff 2006; Kister 2007, 247–256), and *b. Hag.* 12a includes formlessness and void (*tōhū wābōhū*), wind, and water among the ten things created on the first day of the hexaemeron (Kister 2007, 243–244).<sup>20</sup> In contrast with such precedents, the Qur'an— notwithstanding its general stress on God's power and supremacy (see under → *qadīr*)—is, minimally, conspicuously unconcerned to avoid the impression that God's creation of the cosmos acted upon a pre-existing hylic substrate. The sense of surprise just formulated is, if anything, heightened by the fact that the Qur'an stereotypically maintains that God's creation of the cosmos was accomplished “in six days” (Q 7:54, 10:3, 11:7, 25:59, 32:4, 50:38, 57:4).<sup>21</sup> This has an obvious Biblical background. The same goes for the Qur'an's

17 According to this poem, the hexaemeron began with a constellation of raging water, wind, and darkness that was devoid of any rent (*fatq*) or gap (*khalal*); but as Dmitriev notes, this constellation of primal elements is, in the preceding verse, described as God's “first signs,” which suggests that they are products of divine creation.

18 The Babylonian Talmud, at least, explicitly declares God's throne to have been created (*b. Nəd.* 39b).

19 Cf. also Q 57:3, calling God “the first and the last,” and the discussion thereof under → *ākhīr*.

20 However, Niehoff also notes that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* “is not systematically maintained throughout *Genesis Rabbah*,” since *Gen. Rab.* 10:3 teaches that God “took two balls, one of fire and the other of snow, and worked them into each other, and from these the world was created” (Niehoff 2006, 47). On creation *ex nihilo* in Judaism, see generally Kister 2007 and Bockmuehl 2012, who qualify the view that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* “has no substantial foothold in Judaism prior to the Middle Ages” (Bockmuehl 2012, 257). For instance, according to Bockmuehl, already Qumranic texts show that “the covenanters' belief in the supreme Creator God is thoroughgoing and all-inclusive, so that all that exists was created by him” (Bockmuehl 2012, 263).

21 Q 41:9–12 could be understood to imply that the primordial creation lasted eight days. For two attempts to reconcile this with the standard time span of six days, see *BEQ* 8–9 and *KK* 433.

explicit rejection of the allegation, strongly implied by a literal reading of Gen 2:2, that on the seventh day God needed to rest: according to the Qur'an, after the six days of creation God simply "sat down upon the throne" (Q 7:54, 10:3, 25:59, 32:4, 57:4: *istawā 'alā l-'arshi*),<sup>22</sup> and two verses expressly deny God's susceptibility to weariness (Q 50:38, 2:255). The latter point, incidentally, is anticipated by Aphrahat (*Demonstrations* 13:11 = Parisot 1894, 563–566), who quotes Isaiah 40:28: "He does not faint or grow weary." The Qur'an is therefore undeniably and quite intimately in conversation with Biblically based conceptions of cosmic creation; yet it is devoid of an explicit uptake of the prevalent Christian understanding that God's creation proceeded *ex nihilo*.

Rather than presenting God as having brought forth being from absolute nothingness, the focus of Qur'anic references to divine creation is on God's wise bestowal of shape, order, measure, and proportion (O'Shaughnessy 1985, 7). This emerges not only from the statement in Q 54:49, quoted above, that God created everything *bi-qadar*, "according to a specific measure," but also from other creation references employing the verbs *qaddara*, "to endow s.th. with measure" (Q 10:5, 25:2, 36:39, 41:10, 73:20, 80:19),<sup>23</sup> and *sawwā*, perhaps "to endow s.th. or s.o. with an even or uniform shape" (Q 2:29, 15:29, 18:37, 32:9, 38:72, 75:4, 38, 79:28, 82:7, 87:2, 91:7; see CDKA 142).<sup>24</sup> Again, one might draw attention to Q 75:38, where *khalaqa* and *sawwā* jointly designate God's transformation of an embryo (or a "clot of blood") into a fully formed human (see similarly Q 82:7 and 87:2). The same stress on the form and order of the created world may also be in play where God's creative activity is described with the verb *ṣawwara*, "to shape" (Q 3:6, 7:11, 40:64, 59:24, 64:3), even if there is good reason to posit that this word refers specifically to God's shaping of humans in particular (see under → *istakhlafa*). Only in the post-Qur'anic period did this Qur'anic concept of creation as a bestowal of measure, shape, and form become "radicalised" (van Ess 2017–2020, 4:505) into the notion of origination from nothingness. This will almost certainly have occurred due to contact with Christian theology, where the idea was, on the whole, conceptually explicit earlier than in rabbinic Judaism.

Should one say, then, that the Qur'an simply prioritises an emphasis on the marvellous and perfectly crafted structure of the existing cosmos over an emphasis on the absolute dependence of all things on God alone? Another look at Jacob of Sarug illustrates that creation *ex nihilo* is by no means incompatible with stressing God's wise bestowal of shape and form on the cosmos (see, e.g., Mathews 2009, 48–49, l. 385, and 50–51, l. 396). Hence, the puzzle to which the lack of endorsement of creation *ex nihilo* in the Qur'an gives rise is not fully solvable in the way just intimated; especially given the demonstrable imprint of Syriac Christian traditions on Qur'anic eschatology (Sinai 2017a), it remains the case

22 On *istawā*, see also the remarks under → *allāh*.

23 In addition to the passages listed in the main text, see also Q 77:23, for which there is a widespread reading variant *qaddarnā* instead of *qadarnā* (MQQ 8:37; MQ 10:244–245). This is contextually very appropriate, although therefore hardly the *lectio difficilior*. In any case, the second-form verb *qaddara* does not accord with the participle *al-qādirūn* at the end of the verse. The tradition does mention an isolated and anonymous second-form reading *al-muqaddirūn* (MQ 10:245), which obviously involves a divergence from the canonical *rasm* and may have arisen as a secondary attempt at aligning the received text with the second-form reading *qaddarnā*. One might contemplate the possibility that Q 77:23 is simply employing the first-form *qadara* in the causative sense of *qaddara*, but there is no reason for resorting to poetic licence here, as *muqaddirūn* would have suited the operative rhyme perfectly well (note that Q 77:24 ends in *mukadhhibin*).

24 Note that Q 91:14 uses *sawwā* in the context of divine destruction rather than creation, as in 91:7. At Q 26:98, *sawwā* X *bi-Y* is used in the distinct though related meaning of "to deem X to be the equal of Y."



that one would have expected the Qur'an to adopt an approach closer to that of Jacob of Sarug in ruling out that the divine creator was working with uncreated materials. Given this tension with contemporary Christian thought, the Qur'an's non-committal stance on creation *ex nihilo* is perhaps one among several features of Qur'anic theology that are best placed against a Jewish rather than a Christian background (see also under → *isrā'il*). After all, in the rabbinic tradition an extensive adoption of Greek concepts, which arguably underpins the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, took place only under the impact of post-Qur'anic Islamic thought. An alternative theory would be to surmise that the Qur'an resonates with pagan Arabian notions of cosmic creation, though there is precious little we can say about what these may have looked like. Be that as it may, the Qur'an's comparative lack of concern with driving home that divine creation proceeded *ex nihilo* does not entail that the Qur'an therefore accepts "the archaic sense that there existed a consubstantiality between God, nature, and man," to employ a formulation by Francis Oakley (Oakley 2006, 54): the Qur'anic creator unmistakably stands over and apart from the world he creates, in so far as he is "the Lord of the heavens and the earth and what is between them" (e.g., Q 19:65; see under → *ard*).

**Divine creation as an ongoing reality.** One important feature of the Qur'anic understanding of divine creation that deserves more detailed comment is the fact that the Islamic scripture has a strong tendency to portray divine creation as an ongoing and present reality rather than simply as a series of foundational acts in the primordial past (see also under → *allāh*). Thus, when reference is specifically to the creation of humans, God's creation is not confined to his fashioning of Adam from clay at the beginning of the world (e.g., Q 15:28 and 55:14) but extends to subsequent generations, for the gestation of human fetuses in the maternal womb, too, is conceived as an act of divine creation rather than merely as the unfolding of an autonomous natural chain of causes and effects (e.g., Q 2:228, 19:9, 23:14, 53:45–46, 77:20; see Peterson 2001, 472, 476; *HCI* 173–174). Echoes of such a view are already found in pre-Islamic poetry (Sinai 2019b, 28–29), and the idea that the formation of a human fetus was an instance of divine creation seems to have been shared by the Qur'an's pagan opponents (Q 43:87; *QP* 54). Still, the Qur'an's tendency to envisage God as causally involved in many natural processes goes much further and inclines towards what one might call an occasionalistic understanding of nature that attributes a host of seemingly ordinary occurrences to direct divine causality (see under → *allāh*). Indeed, even the mere maintenance of things as they are requires divine involvement: God holds in place (*amsaka*) the heavens and the earth (Q 22:65 and 35:41), and he is the one ensuring that birds remain poised in mid-air (Q 16:79, on which see Decharneux 2019, 259–263). God is thus continually engaged (cf. Q 55:29) in "preserving" the heavens and the earth, without being wearied thereby (Q 2:255: *lā ya'ūduhu ḥifẓuhumā*; Peterson 2001, 472), and heaven and earth only "subsist by his command" (Q 30:25: *an taqūma l-samā'u wa-l-ardū bi-amrihi*; Baljon 1958, 9). A basic intuition of the Qur'an, therefore, is that the ongoing operation and existence of the cosmic edifice rests on its active preservation (Q 2:255: *ḥifẓ*) by God. It is arguable that the Islamic version of atomism whose foundations were laid by Abū l-Hudhayl (d. 841; see van Ess 2017–2020, 3:241–264 and 4:514–534) is, at bottom, a bona fide attempt to explicate and articulate this scriptural motif.

**Creation and resurrection.** Besides highlighting God's entitlement to gratitude and worship (e.g., Q 87:1–4; see Peterson 2001, 472), a primary function of Qur'anic references to divine creation is to repel doubts about the reality of a universal judgement at the end



of history. God's creative acts in the past and present establish his ability to bring about a future resurrection of deceased humans for the purpose of making them stand eschatological trial. As the early Meccan passage Q 86:5–9 reasons—based on an argument found as early as 2 Macc 7:22–23 (Lehmann and Pedersen 1914) and subsequently deployed by assorted Christian writers including Theophilus of Antioch (*Ad Autolyicum* 1:8 = Theophilus 1970, 12–13) and Aphrahat (*Demonstrations* 8:6 = Parisot 1894, 369–370, identified in O'Shaughnessy 1985, 73)—the same deity who creates man from sperm surely “has the power to bring him back (*innahu 'alā raj'ihī la-qādir*) // on the day on which the secrets will be ascertained” (Q 86:8–9; for another early Meccan formulation of the same argument, see 75:37–40). It is not, in other words, a tenable position to concede a divine creator of the cosmos, as the Qur'an's adversaries in the Meccan surahs seem to have done (→ *allāh*), yet deny that this divine creator will act as an eschatological judge, since the resurrection and the last judgement require nothing more of God than a renewed exercise of the same creative powers that God is so amply displaying already in the present. Later Meccan passages express the claim of an integral link between God as creator and God as resurrector (on which see generally O'Shaughnessy 1985, 70–89) by describing God's bringing humans into existence as the “first time” he created them, implying that their resurrection equates to nothing more than a second creation (Q 6:94, 18:48, 41:21: *khalaqnākum/khalaqakum awwala marratin*; 17:51: *faṭarakum awwala marratin*; 36:79: *ansha'ahā awwala marratin*; see also *awwal khalq / al-khalq al-awwal* in 21:104 and 50:15 and *al-nash'ah al-ūlā* in 56:62). Other verses declare, to the same end, that God “creates to begin with and then recreates” (Q 10:4,34, 27:64, 29:19, 30:11,27: *yabda'u/yubdi'u ± <llāhu> l-khalqa thumma yu'iduhu*; similarly 21:104 and, more elliptically, 85:13; see also under → *aḥyā*).<sup>25</sup>

A different terminology appears in Q 50:15, which contrasts “the initial creation” (*al-khalq al-awwal*) with “the new creation” (*khalq jadīd*): “Were we wearied by the first creation? Yet they are uncertain about a new creation.” The only other verses in which the resurrection is termed a “new creation” are in fact objections attributed to the Qur'an's adversaries (Q 13:5, 17:49,98, 32:10, 34:7). This makes it probable that Q 50:15 should likewise be understood to reflect the language of the Qur'anic opponents, as if the verse contained implicit quotation marks: “Yet they are uncertain about [what they call, presumably scoffingly,] a ‘new creation.’” The inference is substantiated by the fact that the Qur'an's own voice employs the term *khalq jadīd* in a slightly different sense, namely, in order to designate the prospect of a punitive replacement of present creatures with others, who may prove worthier (Q 14:19, 35:16: *in yasha' yudhhibkum wa-ya'ti bi-khalqin jadīd*; cf. the variants in 4:133 and 6:133). What Muhammad's adversaries term a “new creation” corresponds, in the Qur'an's own diction, to an eschatological “recreation” of humans (*a'āda + khalq*) or to the “the final bringing-forth” (Q 29:20: *al-nash'ah al-ākhirah*; Q 53:47: *al-nash'ah al-ukhrā*; → *ākhir*). Hence, it is at least occasionally possible to discriminate rather clearly between the language of the Qur'an or the Qur'anic preacher, on the one hand, and that of his opponents, on the other. Incidentally, the Qur'anic opponents' use of the expression *khalq jadīd* has a fairly accurate parallel in a statement by Jacob of Sarug, which also links the notion of a “new creation” with the reconstitution of individual human

25 At least Q 10:4 and 30:11 make it explicit that recreation serves the purpose of meting out rewards and punishments or of “returning” humans to their divine judge. One is accordingly entitled to assume that what God recreates are the same humans whom he created initially.

bodies: “At the resurrection the body will rise as a new creation (*brītā ḥdattā*), as it will no longer be subservient to weakness or change” (Mathews 2014, 56–57, ll. 431–432). Perhaps the Qur’anic doubters picked up the term “new creation” from Christian missionary preaching and then used it in a sarcastically inflected fashion in utterances casting doubt on the claim of an eschatological reconstitution of defunct, decomposed, and dispersed human bodies.<sup>26</sup>

## *khalāq* | share

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *ummī* | scriptureless, not hitherto endowed with a scriptural revelation *bara’a* tr. | to create (s.th.) *al-ākhirah* | what is final or last, the final state of things, the hereafter

Q 2:102.200 and 3:77 threaten various kinds of people with having “no share in the hereafter” (*mā lahu fī l-ākhirati min khalāqin* or *lā khalāqa lahum fī l-ākhirati*). The noun *khalāq* also occurs, in the general sense of “portion, share,” in Q 9:69, where it refers to people’s “share” of goods in the present life. *Khalāq* may reasonably be suspected of being a loanword, given that it stands apart from the otherwise prevalent semantics of the Arabic root *kh-l-q* to do with creation (thus in the Qur’an; see under → *khalāqa*) or, outside the Qur’an, with smoothness or with being old and worn out (AEL 800). Moreover, the word’s morphological pattern *fa’āl* is usually associated with verbal nouns (e.g., *fasād*, *dhahāb*) and adjectives (e.g., *jawād*, *jabān*).

What might be the word’s ancestor, then? Syriac *ḥelqā* means one’s allotted fate (FVQ 124–125; SD 460) and does not appear to be used in an eschatological context. Instead, at least at Q 2:102.200 and 3:77 the Qur’an’s diction is convincingly linked with a rabbinic turn of phrase (BEK 87; Hirschfeld 1902, 114; JPND 198–199; FVQ 124–125; BEQ 459). The latter is exemplified, for instance, by a Mishnaic declaration that all of Israel have “a share (*ḥēleq*) in the world to come (*la-’olam ha-ba*),” followed by a catalogue of various groups of sinners said to have “no share in the world to come” (*m. Sanh.* 10). The expression “a share in the world to come” (*ḥēleq la-’olam ha-ba*) has two more occurrences in the Mishnah (*m. Abot* 3:11 and *m. Sanh.* 6:2) as well as a great number of further attestations in the Tosefta (e.g., *t. Sanh.* 9:5), the two Talmuds (e.g., *b. B. Maṣ.* 59a), and *Genesis Rabbah* (e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 1:5). Hence, Q 2:102.200 and 3:77, while certainly reflecting rabbinic diction, are unlikely to be a targeted allusion specifically to *m. Sanh.* 10.

26 Describing the resurrection as a “new creation” recalls God’s creation of a new heaven and a new earth that is predicted in Isa 65:17 (see also Isa 66:22). Two other parallels are 1 *Enoch* 72:1 (Charlesworth 1983, 50), 2 *Baruch* 32:6 (Charlesworth 1983, 63; both are pointed out in O’Shaughnessy 1985, 85), and 4 *Ezra* 7:75 (Charlesworth 1983, 539). Still, all of these passages refer to a moment of creative renewal on a cosmic scale, rather than to a recreation specifically of deceased humans, as in Q 13:5 etc. (even though 4 *Ezra* 7:75 at least is concerned with the posthumous fate of humans). The parallel from Jacob of Sarug is thus considerably stronger. Crone notes that Christians reserve the term “new creation” for the resurrection of Christ (e.g., 2 Cor 5:17: “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!”; QP 148–149); but this needs to be qualified in light of the citation from Jacob (for which others may be able to marshal further parallels). It must be said, though, that the latter also uses the expression “new creation” in connection with the resurrection of Christ (Kollampampil 2008, 12–13, l. 51).

The claim that the three verses at hand echo a rabbinic turn of phrase is strengthened by the Medinan provenance of all Qur’anic occurrences of *khalāq*. To be sure, one may query why Hebrew *hēleq* should become Arabic *khalāq*. As regards the long *ā* vowel, Horovitz notes that the Hebrew word corresponds to Jewish Aramaic *hūlaqa* (*DJPA* 191; *DJBA* 439), which is morphologically closer to the Arabic form (*JPND* 198–199). Like Hebrew *hēleq*, Aramaic *hūlaqa* is employed to refer to an individual’s share in this world and in the next in the so-called *Second Targum* on the book of Esther (*hūlaqa b-‘alma haden wa-b-‘alma d-ate*; Grossfeld 1994, 42 = Esther 2:7; Ego 1996, 88; the passage is pointed out in *JPND* 198–199).<sup>1</sup> As regards the transition from word-initial *h* to *kh*, there is at least some evidence that such a shift was not impossible: Arabic *khardal*, “mustard” (Q 21:47, 31:16), is descended from Aramaic or Syriac *hardlā* (Fraenkel 1886, 141; Pennachio 2013, 94), and Arabic *khamr*, “wine” (e.g., Q 2:219, 5:90–91), is generally derived from *hamrā* (Fraenkel 1886, 160–161; *FVQ* 125–126; Pennachio 2013, 91–92). In sum, it seems safe to posit that the word *khalāq* was employed, and very likely coined, by Arabophone Jews in order to render a common rabbinic idiom about the prospect of salvation in the world to come.<sup>2</sup> Like → *ummī*, “scriptureless,” or *bara’a*, “to create” (→ *khalaqa*), *khalāq* would seem to be a case of the Qur’an employing terminology current among the Medinan Jews.

What about the second component of the *khalāq* formula, namely, → *al-ākhirah*, the standard Qur’anic expression for the hereafter? It cannot be regarded as certain that Jews in the Qur’anic milieu, in Arabising the Hebrew phrase *ha-‘olam ha-ba* or its Aramaic equivalent, had recourse to *al-ākhirah*. Rather, it may be that the Qur’an is here resorting to its own established nomenclature for the afterlife, whereas the original Jewish version of the *khalāq* formula ran differently.

***khāfa* tr. | to fear or be afraid of s.th. or s.o.**

***khāfa* intr. | to be afraid**

***khawf* | fear**

→ *ittaqa*

1 Attempts to date the text have ranged from the fourth century to around 1200 CE, but Beate Ego has assigned it to the late seventh or early eighth century (Ego 1996, 21–25, with a survey of earlier views; see also the passing assessment in Kister 2018, 401). In any case, even if the work cannot without further ado be considered to be pre-Qur’anic, it may safely be ruled out that the formulation under consideration betrays Islamic influence.

2 Against the need to posit a loan, one might point out that Safaitic has a derivative of the same root—namely, *hlqt*—in the sense of a period (i.e., a “portion”) of time (Al-Jallad 2014b, 223–224, citing C 974 and C 2820). Moreover, the classical lexica report that Arabic *khalaqa* can signify measuring and determining the proportion of a thing (*AEL* 799–800). Still, the morphological similarity between *khalāq* and its suggested Aramaic ancestor as well as the contextual similarity between the Qur’anic and rabbinic phrases are compelling indications supporting a linguistic loan.

# d

***dābbah* | land animal**

→ *arḍ*, → *khalaqa*

***dabbara* tr. | to direct s.th.; to execute s.th.**

→ *amr*

***tadabbara* tr. | to reflect on s.th.**

→ *āyah*, → *dhakkara*

***dahā* tr. | to spread s.th. out**

→ *khalaqa*, → *arḍ*

***darajah* | rank**

Further vocabulary discussed: *faḍḍala* tr. ‘*alā* | to favour s.o. over s.o. *qawwām* ‘*alā* | maintaining s.o., taking care of s.o. *balā* tr. | to assess, test, or try s.o. *ittakhadha* tr. *sukhriyyan* | to compel s.o. to work *sakhkhara* tr. (*li-*) | to make s.o. or s.th. subservient (to s.o.), to subject s.th. or s.o. (to s.o.) *qiṣāṣ* | retaliation *ḥurr* | freeman, free person ‘*abd* | slave *tahrīr raqabah* | freeing a neck, manumitting a slave *fakk raqabah* | releasing a neck, manumitting a slave *mā malakat aymānuhum* | what their right hands possess *faḍl* | favour *fath* | decision; decisive success or victory (granted by God) *al-muqarrabūn* pl. | those brought near (to God)

The Qur’an presents hierarchy and inequality as a ubiquitous feature of human existence and of the world in general. The theme is often broached in statements employing the noun *darajah*, “rank,” as well as the verb *faḍḍala* + acc. ‘*alā*, “to favour s.o. over s.o.” (on which latter see also under → *an’ama*).<sup>1</sup> Gender relations—which are discussed in much more detail in Bauer and Hamza, forthcoming—provide a case in point and will be raised first. The entry will then go on to consider socio-economic disparities more generally, including some Qur’anic comments on the institution of slavery, and the universal cosmic fact that God bestows a greater amount of favours on some creatures than on others. Apart from

<sup>1</sup> On Qur’anic occurrences of *faḍḍala* and the views of a range of Muslim commentators thereon, see Tlili 2012, 230–237.

disparities in the distribution of this-worldly blessings, however, there are also disparate “ranks” of eschatological reward. Unlike this-worldly benefits, such ranks of eschatological recompense are said to be apportioned on the basis of moral merit.

**Men occupy a “rank above” women.** Q 2:228 says that women have both rights and obligations, as determined by what is customarily recognised to be right and proper (*lahunna mithlu lladhī ‘alayhinna bi-l-ma‘rūfi*), but goes on to add that men nonetheless occupy a “rank” above them (*li-l-rijāli ‘alayhinna darajatun*; see Bauer 2015, especially 168). What this means is further clarified in Q 4:34: men “are maintainers of women (*al-rijālu qawwāmūna ‘alā l-nisā’i*) by virtue of the fact that God has favoured some of them over others (*bi-mā faḍḍala llāhu ba‘ḍahum ‘alā ba‘ḍin*) and by virtue of what they spend of their possessions (*wa-bi-mā anfaquū min amwālihim*).”<sup>2</sup> Unsurprisingly for a premodern text, the Qur’an presupposes that gender relations are hierarchical, at least in the particular historical milieu addressed by Muhammad’s proclamations (see generally Bauer 2015 and succinctly Cook 2014, 171). Q 2:228, cited above, and other verses, such as the miscellaneous commandments pertaining to the treatment of women in Surah 4, make it clear that this does not mean that women are stripped of concrete and substantial rights and entitlements. Nor are they denied the status of fully fledged religious and moral subjects (Rahman 2009, 49–50), as illustrated by the fact that the assurances of eschatological reward in Q 3:195, 4:124, 16:97, and 40:40 contain the explicit proviso “whether male or female” (*min dhakarīn aw unthā*). The same point emerges from Q 33:35, promising divine forgiveness and wage to “men and women who surrender themselves, men and women who believe” etc. (*inna l-muslimīna wa-l-muslimāti wa-l-mu‘minīna wa-l-mu‘mināti . . .*).

Still, such religious equality does not lead to an explicit demand that existing disparities between men and women be abolished. Thus, women are expected to be obedient to their husbands (Q 4:34, especially the phrase *fa-in aṭa‘nakum*), and the Qur’an even permits husbands, as an *ultima ratio*, to enforce this expectation by physical violence.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the testimony of a woman is worth half that of a man, ostensibly because she is considered to be more prone to error (Q 2:282: *an taḍilla iḥḍāhumā fa-tudhakkira iḥḍāhumā l-ukhrā*; see Rahman 2009, 48–49); and with regard to the division of inheritances Q 4:11 lays down the general principle that daughters inherit half the share of sons (*li-l-dhakarī mithlu ḥaẓẓi l-unthayni*).<sup>4</sup>

**Socio-economic hierarchies in general, including slavery.** The pronouncements on gender relations just surveyed illustrate that the Qur’an assumes, as a factual given, that human individuals and collectives differ in social status, control over economic resources, and political clout. God’s rationale for creating such disparities is made explicit in Q 6:165: God “has raised some of you<sup>p</sup> over others in rank in order to test you with regard to what he has given you” (*rafa‘a ba‘ḍakum fawqa ba‘ḍin darajātīn li-yablūwakum fī mā ātākum*). Inequality and disparities in social, economic, and political rank, one may explicate, form

2 My rendering of *qawwāmūn* is inspired by Bauer 2015, 10 (see also *ibid.*, 169). Support for it may be found, for instance, in *AEL* 2995, according to which *qāma ‘alā* can mean “to take care of s.th. or s.o.” and also, specifically, “to maintain s.o.” (namely, a woman). For a more detailed analysis, refer to Hussain 2021, 67–72. In justification of taking *mā* to be *maṣḍariyyah*, see Hussain 2021, 95, n. 6.

3 For recent studies of the exegesis of Q 4:34, dealing in particular with the question whether the verse permits the striking of disobedient women, see Chaudhry 2013 and Bauer 2015, 161–269.

4 For an attempt at providing a systematic restatement of the complex inheritance rules in Q 4:11–12.176, see Sinai 2021, 389–392.

part and parcel of the divinely orchestrated totality of circumstances under which human agents must prove their moral worth and thereby qualify for eschatological salvation or damnation (see under → *balā*). It is noteworthy how unapologetically the verse just cited attributes human inequality to the creator. The Islamic scripture does not expressly raise the problem that such divinely produced inequality might be felt to be incompatible with God's justice or goodness (see also under → *ḡalama*). The reason for this is clearly that the temporary circumstances under which humans undergo the moral testing that determines their lot in the afterlife are considered to be of no ultimate importance.

That the God-given disparities between humans include economic differences in particular is highlighted in Q 43:32: it is God who has “distributed” people’s “livelihoods among them in the proximate life (*qasamnā baynahum ma’ishatahum fī l-ḡayāti l-dunyā*), and we have raised some of them over others in rank (*wa-rafa’nā ba’ḡahum fawqa ba’ḡin darajātin*), so that they may compel one another to work (*li-yattakhidha ba’ḡuhum ba’ḡan sukhriyyan*).” A literal rendering of the phrase *li-yattakhidha ba’ḡuhum ba’ḡan sukhriyyan* is “to take one another as a *sukhrī*,” with the noun *sukhrī*—said to mean “someone who is compelled to work without recompense” (*AEL* 1324)—being explicable with reference to the verb → *sakhkhara*, “to make s.o. or s.th. subservient to (*li-*) s.o.” (thus in Ṭab. 20:586).<sup>5</sup> More concretely, the phrase I have translated as “so that they may compel one another to work” has been interpreted as referring to the contrast between free persons (*al-aḡrār*) and slaves (*al-‘abīd*; Muq. 3:794; cf. Ṭab. 20:586). This reading coheres with the fact that the Qur’an is clearly cognisant of the distinction between free persons and slaves, for Q 2:178 stipulates that the law of talion or retaliation (*al-qīṣās*) in cases of murder is to be applied differentially based on legal status: “a freeman for a freeman (*al-ḡurru bi-l-ḡurri*), a slave for a slave (*wa-l-‘abdu bi-l-‘abdi*), and a woman for a woman (*wa-l-unthā bi-l-unthā*).”

Slavery—i.e., ownership of a human person by one or more other person or persons (see Q 16:75, containing the expression *‘abd mamlūk*, and also 39:29)—is of interest in the present context because it constitutes the most extreme case of socio-economic inequality, which is presumably why it is singled out for mention in Q 43:32.<sup>6</sup> The institution of slavery as one aspect of the world created by God is also taken for granted in Q 16:71: “God has favoured (*faḡḡala*) some of you over others in provision (→ *rizq*); and those who have been favoured do not pass on their provision to that which their right hands possess (*mā malakat aymānuhum*)”—i.e., to their slaves—“such that they would be equal with regard to it” (*fa-hum fīhi sawā’un*). That the Qur’an presupposes slavery as a social reality, in the same way in which it presupposes the reality of gender-based disparities, is further confirmed by multiple other Qur’anic verses containing commandments relevant to the treatment

<sup>5</sup> *Ittakhadha sukhriyyan* must not be confused with the similar-sounding expression *ittakhadha sikhriyyan*, “to ridicule or mock s.o., to treat s.o. as a laughing stock” (Q 23:110, 38:63). For a brief discussion of how Q 43:32 figures in discussions about social inequality in premodern Islamic culture, see Crone 2004, 341–342.

<sup>6</sup> For an erudite and comprehensive examination of slavery in Islamic law and practice, see Brown 2019. Brown rehearses the difficulties confronting attempts to forge a definition of slavery that is universally and transhistorically applicable. But as Brown also points out, the Islamic tradition is quite close to the Western one in conceptualising slavery as hinging on the legal status of being owned in contrast to that of being “free” (cf. Q 2:178). It is important to bear in mind that, as Brown demonstrates, the legal status of being owned by another person can have very different concrete implications, depending on the concept of property that is operative in a given culture and the way in which this concept is applied to human persons in particular. In any case, Q 16:75, by paraphrasing an “owned servant” as someone who “has no power over anything” (*lā yaqḡiru ‘alā shay’in*), shows that being owned by another person is assumed to place extraordinarily grave limitations on personal agency. See also under → *qadīr*.



of slaves (see the overview in Brockopp 2006). Such passages include, for example, the instruction that unwed members of the Qur'anic community may be married, or ought to be married, to righteous male and female slaves (Q 24:32: *al-ṣāliḥīna min 'ibādikum wa-imā'ikum*; cf. 4:25 and also 2:221).<sup>7</sup> The Qur'an also stipulates that the manumission of slaves, or of believing slaves in particular, provides a way of expiating certain sins like unintentional manslaughter (Q 4:92, 5:89, 58:3). One passage presents manumission as a paradigmatically charitable act, together with feeding orphans or the poor (Q 90:13). Manumitting slaves—in Qur'anic idiom, “freeing” or “releasing” a “neck” (*tahrīr/fakk raqabah*)—is thus deemed a deed of high moral merit. Moreover, Q 24:33 prohibits the believers from forcing slave girls into prostitution (Cook 2014, 173).

Why might God have allowed or even intended slavery to arise? Given that, according to Q 6:165, social inequality (whether manifesting itself in relations of bondage or in social disparities between men and women) is a divinely ordained moral test, the most likely answer is that slavery provides humans with an opportunity to acquire moral merit or to atone for misdeeds by undertaking acts of manumission and also of ordinary kindness towards slaves, like various other categories of socially vulnerable persons (e.g., Q 4:36). This does not, on the other hand, warrant imputing to the Qur'an a positive demand that institutionalised bondage be retained or that it be restored once abolished. Modernist interpreters like Fazlur Rahman have gone further and maintained that Qur'anic injunctions to manumit slaves, like the restrictions that the Qur'an places on the practice of polygamy (see Q 4:3.129), formulate a “moral ideal towards which the society was expected to move” (Rahman 2009, 48): immediate abolition of polygamy or slavery not being a realistic possibility, the Qur'an nonetheless expresses real dissatisfaction with the status quo. While this may be a feasible way of coming to terms with the tension between contemporary values and the social realities of seventh-century Arabia reflected in the Qur'an, from a purely exegetical perspective two remarks must be made. First, and rather self-evidently, the modern idea that human social structures are dynamic and capable of being consciously reshaped and re-engineered, rather than falling into static patterns like natural processes, is not overtly present in the Qur'an. Secondly, the Islamic scripture does not seem to demand, or indeed to consider it possible, that socio-economic inequalities in the present world be eradicated altogether. Though its manifestations could perhaps change, verses like Q 6:165 imply that a measure of inequality and injustice is hardwired into the structure of pre-eschatological human society, serving to confront human agents with sufficiently challenging circumstances in order to be able to demonstrate a real commitment to abiding by the moral demands that God makes of them. Even if the Qur'an does not explicitly rule out that specific historic forms of inequality and exploitation could and should be overcome, from the vantage point of Qur'anic theology one would predict that alternative forms of inequality and exploitation will then take their place. In other words, and again unsurprisingly, the Qur'an does not envisage a social utopia this side of judgement day.

**Disparity and inequality as a feature of cosmic order.** Socio-economic inequalities like slavery are only a particular manifestation of the general fact that the world God has created is one that abounds with disparities between beings and entities that are similar in their essential properties and entitlements. This general fact, which is repeatedly formulated by

<sup>7</sup> This does not mean that the Qur'an rejects the legitimacy of non-marital sexual relations with female slaves (see Q 23:5–6 and 70:29–30).

means of the verb *faḍḍala* + acc. *‘alā*, “to favour s.o. over s.o.,” is perhaps most memorably illustrated with regard to the domain of vegetation: God “favours in yield” (*wa-nufaḍḍilu ba‘dahā ‘alā ba‘ḍin fī l-ukuli*) some crops and palm trees over others even though they are irrigated with the same water (Q 13:4).<sup>8</sup> According to Q 17:70, humans, whom God has “caused to be carried on land and sea”—namely, by providing them with ships and mounts—have been “favoured” over other creatures (*faḍḍalnāhum ‘alā kathīrin mimman khalaqnā tafḍilā*). This alludes to the frequent Qur’anic theme that the world is optimised for human habitation and that the divine creator has made plants and animals subservient to human needs (see in more detail under → *arḍ*). Significantly, there is no suggestion in Q 17:70 that the favour received by humankind is due to human superiority.

As far as disparities among humans themselves are concerned, the gifts unequally apportioned by God are not limited to material goods but also include religious favours. Thus, after describing how Abraham discovered the existence of a divine creator transcending the heavenly bodies, Q 6:83 presents Abraham’s God-given “argument” (*hujjah*) as exemplifying the general truth that God “raises in rank whomever he wills” (*narfa‘u darajātin man nashā‘u*; see also 12:76). The Israelites too are said to have been “favoured” by God “over the world-dwellers” (Q 2:47.122, 7:140, 45:16: *faḍḍaltukum/faḍḍalakum/faḍḍalnāhum ‘alā l-‘ālamīn*), by having received “the scripture” and prophecy but also divine provision (Q 45:16). Having been “favoured over the world-dwellers” is also predicated of a line of individual figures from Biblical history, such as Ishmael, Lot, David, and Solomon (Q 6:86, 27:15). Even within the exclusive group of God’s messengers it is said that he has “favoured some of them over others; to some of them God has spoken, and some of them he has raised in ranks” (Q 2:253: *faḍḍalnā ba‘dahum ‘alā ba‘ḍin minhum man kallama llāhu wa-rafa‘a ba‘dahum darajātin*; cf. also 17:55).

All such instances of divine favour (*faḍl*), it must be reiterated, are not necessarily based on any intrinsic merit of the receiving party. This important insight has been lucidly formulated by Sarra Tlili (Tlili 2012, 229; see also *ibid.*, 232–233): “God’s *faḍl* refers to the bounties that He extends to humans purely out of His generosity and not in return for deeds they perform or because of personal merit they possess.” Disparities in divine favour between humans or other beings in the world are not, or at least not unfailingly, amenable to being rationalised in terms of the immanent desert or merit of the advantaged party over the disadvantaged, though this is not to deny that the Qur’anic God will most definitely punish sinners already in the present world rather than just in the hereafter (see under → *istakh-lafa*, → *adhhaba*, and → *afsada*). But the general focus of Qur’anic statements about this-worldly divine favours is not on what qualifies someone to receive a certain amount of divine blessings but rather on the way in which the recipients of divine favour will respond to it—to wit, whether they will show appropriate gratitude to God and whether they are prepared to share the bounties they have generously received with persons who have fared less favourably, through charitable giving (see under → *razaqa*, → *zakāh*, and → *ṣadaqah*). This is why the Qur’an can maintain both that the Israelites have been divinely “favoured over the world-dwellers” yet deny the claim imputed to Jews and Christians that they are especially “beloved” to God (Q 5:18, also discussed under → *allāh*): while God has bestowed manifold blessings on the Israelites, such as granting them prophets and delivering

8 On the Qur’anic assumption that certain theological truths are mirrored or prefigured in the natural world, see also under → *ajal*.

them from Pharaoh, this only puts them under a special obligation to show appropriate gratitude; it is not grounded in an intrinsic superiority of the Israelites over other humans or a particular divine predilection for them over other communities.

The way in which humans are expected to respond to the universal cosmic fact of disparity and inequality is further elucidated in Q 4:32. Apparently commenting on the stipulation that different groups of heirs are to receive different inheritance shares (Q 4:32–33; see also 4:11–12.176),<sup>9</sup> the verse impresses upon the Qur’anic believers the general principle that people must not “covet that by which God has favoured some of you over others (*wa-lā tatamannaw mā faḍḍala llāhu bihi ba’ḍakum ‘alā ba’ḍin*): men have a share of that which they have accrued and women have a share of that which they have accrued.” To be sure, one may “ask God for some of his favour (*faḍl*),” as a later segment of the verse says, meaning that one may hope and petition God for a greater share of inner-worldly bounties. But inequality and disparity being a universal feature of the natural and social world, humans must not feel envy and rancour towards those who have received greater blessing. Instead, human agents are to set their sight on attaining eschatological reward and a high rank in the hereafter, a theme examined in the next and final section of this entry.

**The hierarchy of socio-economic fact and the hierarchy of eschatological merit.** As Q 17:21 declares, God has “favoured” some humans over others (*unzur kayfa faḍḍalnā ba’ḍahum ‘alā ba’ḍin*)—one may add: with regard to inner-worldly goods—yet “the hereafter holds higher ranks and greater favours” (*wa-la-l-ākhiratu akbaru darajātin wa-akbaru tafḍīlā*). What is of ultimate consequence, then, are not the ephemeral amenities by which God has contingently singled out some individuals over others in this world but to merit preferment in the afterlife. In addition to socio-economic disparities, which form a hierarchy of brute and contingent fact, the Qur’an accordingly assumes a hierarchy of ethico-religious merit, corresponding to different ranks in the hereafter. As Q 3:162–163 affirms, those who strive to please God are not equal to those who incur divine anger (v. 162), and people will accordingly “have [different] ranks with God” (v. 163: *hum darajātun ‘inda llāhi*). These eschatological ranks, unlike socio-economic ranks in the present world, will be allocated according to the merits or demerits that individuals have accrued during their earthly lives: “for everyone there are ranks determined by what they have done” (Q 6:132 and 46:19: *wa-li-kullin darajātun mimmā ‘amilū*).

As one would expect, those who believe and do righteous deeds will have “the highest ranks” (Q 20:75: *fa-ulā’ika lahumu l-darajātu l-‘ulā*). But there also seem to be differences of rank among the believers themselves. For instance, God “favours in rank” (*faḍḍala . . . darajatan*) those who “contend (→ *jāhada*) by means of their possessions and their lives” over those who remain sitting at home (Q 4:95–96; cf. also 9:20), and according to Q 57:10, those who have “spent and contended before the decisive success (*al-fath*)”—meaning probably before the conquest of Mecca<sup>10</sup>—are “greater in rank” than those who only did so afterwards. It follows that disparities of merit among believers must correspond to different levels of eschatological reward. It is true that the Qur’an is never quite as explicit as

<sup>9</sup> Note also the proximity of Q 4:32 to 4:34, partially quoted above.

<sup>10</sup> See CDKA 207 and KK 167 (on Q 7:89). The word’s basic meaning would seem to be “decision” (as in Q 8:19, 26:118, 32:28–29), which secondarily developed into the sense of a decisive success or victory that God bestows upon (*li-*) the believers or Muhammad (e.g., Q 4:141, 5:52, 48:1, 110:1). The exegetical tradition identifies *al-fath* in Q 57:10 with the conquest of Mecca.

the hadith asserting that “there are a hundred ranks in paradise” (*inna fī l-jannati mi’ata darajatin*; al-Bukhārī 1400 AH, 2:303–304 = *kitāb al-jihād wa-l-siyar*, *bāb* 4 = no. 2790). Still, Q 56:10 ff. expressly describes the heavenly rewards of a group who are called “the foremost ones” (*al-sābiqūn*) and “the ones brought close” (*al-muqarrabūn*) to God, who differ not only from the “companions of the left” or the damned (Q 56:9.41) but also from the “companions of the right” or ordinary occupants of paradise (Q 56:8.27). Hence, when Q 8:4 promises the true believers, whose virtues are enumerated in vv. 2 and 3, “ranks with their Lord” (*lahum darajātun ‘inda rabbihim*), this would seem to mean that different degrees of ethico-religious merit entail different degrees of eschatological recompense. The same understanding is plausible for Q 58:11, promising that God will “raise” those who believe and have been given knowledge “in [different?] ranks” (*darajāt*). That paradise comprises different ranks or orders, incidentally, is also asserted by Ephrem (Beck 1957a, *De Paradiso*, no. 2:10–13), and the vocabulary he employs in this context includes the Syriac word *dargā*, obviously a cognate of Arabic *darajah*.

The two hierarchies just distinguished—a this-worldly hierarchy of socio-economic privilege, which is at least to some degree bestowed arbitrarily, and a hierarchy of merit leading to eschatological recompense—exist in parallel. No necessary link obtains between the one and the other; and not letting the former distract one from the latter is crucial if one is successfully to pass the moral testing to which God subjects human agents. At the same time, it is surely no coincidence that the Qur’an understands both the pre-eschatological world and the hereafter to consist of hierarchical tiers, just as the eschatological antithesis of salvation and damnation is prefigured by the pervasiveness of dualities in the pre-eschatological cosmos, such as the opposition of day and night or of male and female (see also under → *ajal*). A similar mode of thought may be discerned when Ephrem maintains that the ranked configuration of paradise has various typological prefigurations in sacred history, such as Noah’s ark (Beck 1957a, *De Paradiso*, no. 2:13). In the Qur’an, the stratified nature of nature and human society similarly anticipates the stratified nature of the hereafter.

Eventually, of course, the eschatological hierarchy of merit will override the earthly hierarchy of socio-economic privilege, and on occasion the Qur’an stipulates behavioural norms that ensures that this crucial axiological fact becomes visible already in the present world: believing slaves, whether male or female, are better than free men or women who associate other beings with God, which is why the former make for preferable spouses (Q 2:221: *wa-la-amatun mu’minatun khayrun min mushrikatin, wa-la-‘abdun mu’minun khayrun min mushrikin*); and in so far as the distinction between free persons and slaves is transcended by the common bond of being believers (Q 4:25: *ba’dukum min ba’din*; see Brockopp 2006, 57), it is possible for believing freemen to marry believing slave girls, and also conversely for believing free women to marry believing male slaves (Q 24:32). By attaching at least some tangible social consequences to the notional equality of believers *qua* believers, such statements go somewhat further than Paul’s affirmation in Galatians 3:28 that “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”: although rhetorically more rousing than Q 4:25, it seems quite unlikely that Paul’s declaration was meant as a demand for the implementation of complete social equality between men and women or slaves and freemen.

***adraka* tr. | to attain s.th., to reach s.th.**

→ *allāh*

***da‘ā* tr. | to call upon s.o.**

See under → *allāh*, → *dīn*<sup>2</sup>, → *millah*, and → *nafa‘a*.

***dunyā*: *al-ḥayāh al-~*, *al-~* | the proximate life**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *al-ākhirah* | what is final or last, the final state of things, the hereafter *al-dār al-ākhirah* | the final abode**

**Overview and questions of translation.** “The proximate life,” *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā* (e.g., Q 2:86.204.212, 3:185, 4:74, 6:32.70.130), forms the Qur’anic opposite of → *al-ākhirah*, literally “what is final,” or *al-dār al-ākhirah*, “the final abode.” Within the Qur’an, simple *al-dunyā* (e.g., Q 2:130.200.201.217.220) is defensibly treated as an abbreviation of *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā*, which is the form appearing in early Meccan texts (Q 53:29, 79:38, 87:16; CDKA 100). This makes “the proximate life” an acceptable English equivalent of simple *al-dunyā* as well,<sup>1</sup> and it permits rendering the phrase *fī ḥādhihi l-dunyā* (Q 7:156, 11:60, 16:30, 28:42, 39:10), combining *al-dunyā* with a demonstrative, as “in this proximate life.” A more idiomatic rendering would be “the present life,” but this has the disadvantage of obscuring that *dunyā*—the feminine of *adnā* (“nearer, nearest”; see Q 30:3 and 53:9)—is a spatial rather than temporal term. Another translation of *al-dunyā* that is frequently encountered in English translations of the Qur’an is “this world.” While this can be a legitimate translational choice, it is important to stress that no Qur’anic passage explicitly describes the pre-eschatological stage of human existence and the afterlife as a sequence of two “worlds” (Greek: *aiōn*, Hebrew: *‘olam*, which would correspond to *‘ālam* in Arabic; see in more detail under → *ākhir*).

**The use of *al-dunyā* in poetry and by the Qur’an’s pagan opponents.** The term *al-dunyā* occurs already in pre-Qur’anic poetry (Bravmann 1972, 32–38), even if quite a few allegedly pre-Qur’anic verses employing it are likely dependent on, and consequently later than, the Qur’an (el Masri 2020, 321–341). The original meaning of *al-dunyā* may simply have been “what is near” in space as opposed to “what is far away” (*al-ba‘ad*), an opposition documented in a verse by Ṭarafah (*DSAAP*, Ṭarafah, no. 3:6; see Bravmann 1972, 32 as well as el Masri 2020, 94–95 and 330).<sup>2</sup> But pre-Qur’anic poetry also contains

1 By contrast, it is less obvious that *al-ākhirah* abbreviates *al-dār al-ākhirah*, considering that the latter expression only appears chronologically later than the former (→ *ākhir*).

2 El Masri translates the terms *al-dunyā* and *al-ba‘ad* in this verse as “the here and now” and “the beyond,” giving them a partly temporal and even implicitly transcendent slant. Yet Bravmann’s spatial understanding of the line (“They are men of noble striving, from a stem that leaves the near-by region and grows forth into the distance”) is well substantiated by other verses cited by him that invoke the same heroic trope of striking out into the geographical distance. These parallels include a verse from the *Lāmiyyat al-‘arab* attributed to al-Shanfarā that contains the expression *dhū l-bu‘dah* (Bravmann 1972, 33), which el Masri renders as someone who “subscribes to ‘the beyond,’” meaning “one whose concern is for the future or what lies beyond immediate concerns in general, not the ‘here and now’ of the *dunyā*” (el Masri 2020, 98–99). However, I see no compelling



some possibly authentic occurrences in which *al-dunyā* can be understood to mean “proximate things” in general, that is, human existence as bounded by death, endowing it with the semantic force of “this world” (*DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 9:33; *DSAAP*, Imru’ al-Qays, no. 63:13; *DSAAP*, ‘Antarah, no. 20:8).<sup>3</sup> However, usage of the term *al-dunyā* does not necessarily entail commitment to the notion of an afterlife (Sinai 2019b, 46–47, against *GMK* 86).

The claim just made is corroborated by the fact that the Qur’an depicts its resurrection-denying opponents as employing the word, too: “There is nothing except our proximate life” (*in/mā hiya illā ḥayātunā l-dunyā*), they are quoted in Q 6:29, 23:37, and 45:24. On the face of it, the Qur’an might here be putting its own diction into the mouth of Muhammad’s adversaries. But it is equally conceivable, and in accordance with the occurrence of *al-dunyā* in poetry, that the Qur’anic resurrection deniers did indeed operate with the term *al-dunyā*, without employing it as what Izutsu calls a “correlation word” that implies its counterpart *al-ākhirah*, just as “husband” implies “wife” (*GMK* 85).<sup>4</sup> Instead, it would seem that it is only in the Qur’an that this correlation becomes established. The Qur’anic deployment of *al-dunyā* or *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā* in opposition to *al-ākhirah* (e.g., Q 2:86.114.130.200 etc., 23:33, 42:20, 43:35), which emerges as a persistent feature of Qur’anic language only after the early Meccan period, thus induces a dichotomy that replicates similar oppositions in New Testamental and rabbinic language, which are discussed elsewhere (→ *ākhir*).

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reason against simply glossing *dhū l-bu’dah* as “one who covers great distances’ (and exposes himself to danger in doing so)” (thus *EAP* 1:173–174).

<sup>3</sup> Zuhayr no. 9:33 is discussed and accepted as authentic in el Masri 2020, 329 (see also Jacobi 1971, 94–95). The verse has *ḥayyun mina l-dunyā*, “somebody alive in this world.” By contrast, el Masri is sceptical about the authenticity of Imru’ al-Qays, no. 63:13 (which includes the hemistich *tamatta’ mina l-dunyā fa-innaka fānin*, “Enjoy this world, for you shall pass away”). However, el Masri’s contention that the ninth-century philologist al-Sukkarī singled this verse out as having been “added later by al-Aṣma’ī” (el Masri 2020, 333) does not seem to be true; al-Sukkarī merely notes that vv. 13 ff. are specific to the recension of al-Aṣma’ī, without casting any express doubt on the latter’s editorial integrity (*wa-rawā ba’dahu l-aṣma’iyyu*; Abū Suwaylim and al-Shawābkaḥ 2000, 505). El Masri’s supplementary observation that the language of the verse is “uncharacteristically flat” seems too subjective to stand. It is true that the collocation of *al-dunyā* with *m-t-* is also Qur’anic (e.g., Q 3:14.185, 4:77, 9:38, 10:23.70.98, 13:26, 28:60.61); yet the stress there is generally that the enjoyment of the “present life” pales in comparison to the final abode, a point that is not explicitly made in the verse attributed to Imru’ al-Qays. It is possible, therefore, that the Qur’anic affirmations just illustrated rely on an established collocation of *al-dunyā* and *m-t-* as exhibited by the poetic passage, a collocation that the Qur’an recasts from an eschatological angle. Bravmann presumes that the verse in question is genuine but maintains that *al-dunyā* merely means “a life of pleasure” here (Bravmann 1972, 36). I am doubtful that this will do as an adequate translation but would emphatically second Bravmann’s general point that *dunyā* should not automatically be presumed to presuppose *al-ākhirah*, and thus to have “religious”—or, more precisely, eschatological—implications. As regards ‘Antarah, no. 20:8 (expressing the possibility that there might be fairer women than the poet’s beloved *fī l-dunyā*, “in this world”), this passage is likewise deemed “questionable” in el Masri 2020, 331–332, though only for the somewhat generic reason that the poetry of ‘Antarah is “notoriously suspicious.” The verse is part of al-Aṣma’ī’s recension of the poetry of ‘Antarah that has recently been re-edited on the basis of several manuscripts by James Montgomery (see no. 7:8 in Montgomery 2018a and 2018b). For two other relevant occurrences of *al-dunyā*, see Lyall 1913, no. 30:28 (also combining *al-dunyā* and *m-t-*), which is cited in *GMK* 87 (and rejected as inauthentic, due to textual uncertainty and overlap with Qur’anic phraseology, in el Masri 2020, 326–327), as well as Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī 1927–1974, 3:105 (l. 3 and also l. 7, first identified in Margoliouth 1925, 438). The latter two verses, from a poem attributed to Dhū l-Iṣba’ al-‘Adwānī, are examined in el Masri 2020, 325–326, who shares Margoliouth’s impression that the passage is dependent on Qur’anic diction. On *al-dunyā* in reputedly early poetry, see also *EAP* 2:163.

<sup>4</sup> For an argument to the effect that the Qur’anic presentation of the views of Muhammad’s resurrection-denying opponents can at least sometimes be trusted to preserve the opponents’ own diction, see under → *asāṭir al-awwalīn*.



***dār: al-~ al-ākhirah* | the final abode**

→ *ākhir*

***dūnahu, min dūnihi* | instead of; besides**

→ *ashraka*

***dīn*<sup>1</sup> | judgement**

***yawm al-~* | judgement day**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *ḥisāb* | reckoning, account    *yawm al-qiyāmah* | the day of resurrection    *al-yawm al-ākhir* | the final day**

***Dīn* as a homonym.** In Qur’anic Arabic, word *dīn* is a homonym carrying two distinct meanings (thus already *BEḲ* 44–45), which are never present in one and the same passage or even surah. Later Meccan and Medinan surahs use the term in the approximate sense of “religion” (→ *dīn*<sup>2</sup>). By contrast, in early Meccan passages the noun *dīn* denotes the eschatological judgement at which God will mete out eternal damnation or salvation based on individual merit, an event for which the Qur’an employs both *al-dīn* and *yawm al-dīn* (e.g., Q 51:6, 70:26, 74:46, 82:9.15.17.18, 83:11, 95:7, 107:1).<sup>1</sup> The curious fact that *dīn* conveys two distinct meanings in the Qur’an is to be explained by the confluence of two words of different origin, namely, Aramaic/Syriac *dīnā*, “judgement,” and Middle Persian *dēn* (*BEḲ* 44–45; *KU* 62; *FVQ* 131–133). Since *dīn* as an analogue of “religion” is attested in pre-Qur’anic poetry (→ *dīn*<sup>2</sup>), it would be wrong to suppose that this meaning of the Arabic word was unavailable at the time of the early Meccan surahs. Instead, the exclusive prevalence in them of *dīn* = “judgement” is primarily indicative of the early Qur’an’s dominant preoccupation with eschatology.

Although eschatological notions remain important throughout the Islamic scripture, the phrase *yawm al-dīn* and indeed any use of *dīn* to designate the eschatological judgement disappear from Qur’anic usage in the later Meccan period: *dīn* = “judgement,” which is still found in Q 38:78, does not occur in any surah whose mean verse length exceeds 52 transliteration letters.<sup>2</sup> Instead, later texts refer to God’s “reckoning” (→ *ḥisāb*) or the “day of resurrection” (→ *yawm al-qiyāmah*), while Medinan texts additionally speak of “the final day” (→ *al-yawm al-ākhir*).<sup>3</sup> *Dīn* = “judgement” is thus a distinctively early Meccan

1 On Qur’anic eschatology, see in more detail *HCI* 162–169 and Sinai 2017a, with further references. On *yawm al-dīn* in particular, see also Haddad 1974, 115–117.

2 The chronologically latest occurrences of *dīn* = “judgement” are likely to be Q 15:35 (mean verse length: 43.12) and 38:78 (mean verse length: 51.98), the latter of which narrowly falls outside the early Meccan surah group as here understood (*HCI* 161).

3 *Yawm al-qiyāmah* is infrequently found already in surahs whose mean verse length is well below the point at which *dīn* = “judgement” ceases to be used (Q 75:1.6, 68:39), but is mostly found in surahs with a higher mean verse length. God’s reckoning (*ḥisāb*) too is already mentioned in surahs whose mean verse length is below 52 transliteration letters (e.g., Q 69:20.26, 88:26). Another expression for the resurrection, which is almost exclusively Meccan (though not just early Meccan), is → *al-sā’ah*, “the hour.”

expression, like some others.<sup>4</sup> One should however bear in mind that the early Qur’anic proclamations likely continued to be in communal use well after their initial promulgation (*HCI* 150–153). Consequently, even after the early Meccan period the Qur’anic community would have remained exposed to the early Qur’anic employment of *dīn* to mean “judgement.”

**Jewish and Christian precursors.** The Arabic phrase “judgement day” (*yawm al-dīn*) is continuous with previous Jewish and Christian usage. Its cognate counterpart *yawmā d-dīnā* occurs in the Syriac New Testament (El-Badawi 2014, 189–190), e.g., in Matt 10:15 and 11:22.24 or 2 Pet 2:9 and 3:7, in all of which it renders Greek *hēmera kriseōs*. *Yawmā d-dīnā* is also common in later Syriac works, such as the writings of Jacob of Sarug (Sinai 2017a, 258), and is found in rabbinic literature (*DJBA* 530). There does not appear to be any Arabic poetry with a compelling claim to being pre-Qur’anic that depicts God as an eschatological judge (Sinai 2019b, 20–22, 45–47, 62–63). This fits with the fact that the Qur’an’s pagan opponents denied the doctrine of an eschatological resurrection (*QP* 125–182). Nonetheless, the Arabisation of *yawmā d-dīnā* into *yawm al-dīn* is likely to have occurred prior to the Qur’an, most likely among Arabophone Christians and Jews. It is relevant in this context that early Arabic can use the verb *dāna* to mean “to requite” (see *GMK* 221–222, citing a verse of poetry found in al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī 2000, no. 2:4, and the participle *madīn*, “judged,” “subject to judgement,” in Q 37:53 and 56:86; see also *AEL* 943). This meaning of the verb *dāna* could be denominally derived from *dīn* < *dīnā*, “judgement.”

## *dīn*<sup>2</sup> | religion, religious worship

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *mala’* | assembly; community leaders, notables *mil-lah* | religion, religious teaching *‘abada* tr. | to serve s.o. or s.th., to worship s.o. or s.th. *da‘ā* tr. | to call upon s.o. *akhḷaṣa l-dīna/dīnahu li-llāhi* | to restrict (one’s) worship or religious allegiance to God, to worship God alone *shara’a* tr. *li-* | to institute or establish s.th. for s.o. *islām* | self-surrender or self-dedication (to God)

**Overview.** As detailed in the preceding entry, early Meccan verses employ the noun *dīn* to designate the eschatological judgement at which God will mete out eternal damnation or salvation based on individual merit, an acceptance derived from Aramaic/Syriac *dīnā* (→ *dīn*<sup>1</sup>). In other passages, virtually all of which have a much higher mean verse length and are accordingly to be dated to the later Meccan period (e.g., Q 16:52, 29:65, 30:30.32.43, 31:32, 40:14.26.65) or to the Medinan one (e.g., Q 2:132.193.217.256, 3:19.24.73.83.85), the word *dīn* approximates aspects of the modern notion of religion, which can therefore provide a serviceable translational analogue of the Arabic expression<sup>1</sup>—at least on the assumption that “religion” is not narrowly equated with what has been claimed to be the prevalent modern understanding of the concept, namely, “a kind of inner disposition and concern

4 On the phenomenon of lexical discontinuity between the early Meccan surahs and the rest of the Islamic scripture, see in more detail the final section under → *kitāb*.

1 My use of the expression “analogue” here is inspired by Abbasi 2020, 190, who in turn draws on Jonathan Z. Smith.

for salvation conceived in opposition to politics and other ‘secular’ areas of life” (Nongbri 2013, 24).<sup>2</sup>

The general trend according to which *dīn* in the approximate sense of “religion” or “(manner of) religious worship” is limited to surahs with a comparatively high mean verse length is bucked by Surahs 109 and 110. The former instructs a generic Qur’anic believer to demarcate himself (or herself) from the “repudiators” (*al-kāfirūn*; v. 1) by declaring that he/she does not serve or worship ( $\rightarrow$  ‘*abada*) what the repudiators worship (vv. 2–5), culminating in the climactic utterance, “You<sup>p</sup> have your mode of worship and I have mine” (*lakum dīnukum wa-liya dīn*). Q 110:2, meanwhile, alludes to the moment when humans will “enter into the worship of God (*fī dīni llāhi*) in crowds.” It is not clear, however, that mean verse length can be relied upon as a chronological indicator in the case of Surahs 109 and 110 (HCI 131). If these two texts are disregarded, occurrences of *dīn* in the sense of “judgement” and occurrences in the sense of “religion” are only found in surahs separated by a substantial gap in mean verse length.<sup>3</sup> Thus, *dīn* is not only a homonym in Qur’anic Arabic, but faded out of Qur’anic use in one meaning and then, after some time, faded back into use with a new one.<sup>4</sup>

A good introductory illustration of the Qur’anic employment of *dīn* in the sense of “religion” or “religious worship” is Q 40:26, where Pharaoh justifies his intention to kill Moses by expressing his alarm that the latter might “change the *dīn*” of the Egyptians (*akhāfu an yubaddila dīnakum*). However indeterminate the meaning of *dīn* may at first appear to be in this utterance, one would expect the word to have a more direct bearing on some elements of Egyptian culture and society than others. Moreover, the elements

2 Nongbri 2013 charts the emergence of the modern concept of religion and argues that it has no equivalents in ancient discourses, refusing to countenance it as an adequate rendering of Latin *religio*, Greek *thrēskeia*, or Arabic *dīn* (on which see Nongbri 2013, 39–45). Nongbri’s book continues a line of thinking going back at least to Fitzgerald 2000, who deconstructs the concept of religion as a valid analytic category in cross-cultural interpretation reaching as far as India and Japan. On this general question, I find myself squarely in agreement with Bruce Lincoln’s statement that “the absence of a signifier does not imply the absence of the signified” (Lincoln 2021, 71). As regards specifically the meaning of Qur’anic *dīn*, I would readily concede that it does not signify religion in the privatised sense outlined in the quotation in the main text, a sense that requires drawing hard boundaries around an opposing domain of the secular; but I would dispute that this invalidates translating the word as “religion,” since the latter term, understood in a fairly unsophisticated everyday manner, surely includes communal ritual practice addressed to a deity or a plurality of deities, and in this sense can function as a reasonable approximation of Arabic *dīn*. An equivalence of *dīn* and religion is also denied in Ahmed 2016, 187–188, citing W. Montgomery Watt’s explanation that the Qur’anic concept of *dīn* denotes “a whole way of life.” In line with my reservations about Nongbri’s argument, I do not agree that this would disqualify rendering *dīn* as “religion”—at least if a reasonable effort is made to allow for a notion of religion that does not, like post-Enlightenment European Christianity, require as its counterpart the existence of a well-defined secular sphere that is to be rigorously insulated from religious claims. For a general treatment of the Qur’anic and later Islamic understanding of *dīn* in the sense of religion, see Smith 1991, 80–118. On Qur’anic *dīn* in relation to the category of religion, see also Dakake 2019, who accepts that *dīn* may correspond to “religion.” On the post-Qur’anic Islamic usage of *dīn* and of the adjectival opposition of *dīnī* vs *dunyāwī*, see Abbasi 2021 and Abbasi 2020, respectively, arguing that “premodern Muslims did indeed possess a concept akin to the modern sense of ‘religion’ long before the rise of the modern West” (Abbasi 2021, 1).

3 The chronologically latest occurrences of *dīn* = “judgement” are likely to be Q 26:82 (mean verse length of the surah: 36.71 transliteration letters), 15:35 (mean verse length: 43.12), and 38:78 (mean verse length: 51.98). By contrast, the chronologically earliest occurrences of *dīn* = “religion” are likely to be Q 30:30.32.43 (mean verse length: 87.2) and 40:14.26.65 (mean verse length: 89.2). Hence, the gap in mean verse length between the two senses is minimally around 35 transliteration letters. This is substantial enough in order to be deemed chronologically significant.

4 For a diachronic study attempting to trace how the Qur’anic employment of *dīn* can be seen as a process of “progression of and accretion to its meaning,” see Haddad 1974 (citing p. 114).

on which it has the most direct bearing must be those practices or beliefs that are potentially negated by Moses's claim to have been mandated by a divine "Lord."<sup>5</sup> Indeed, several Qur'anic passages depict Pharaoh as arrogating divine status to himself (Q 26:29, 28:38, 79:24), and another verse has "the notables (→ *mala'*) of Pharaoh's people" voice the concern that Moses might "abandon you<sup>s</sup> and your gods" (Q 7:127: *wa-yadharaka wa-ālihataka*). Hence, the fear that Pharaoh expresses by referring to the *dīn* of his subjects in Q 40:26 is the fear that Moses—who was sent with "clear authority" and conveys divine "truth," according to Q 40:23.25—will undermine the Egyptians' allegiance to their traditional gods and also to Pharaoh himself as a divine figure. This is not to rule out that the Qur'anic understanding of the *dīn* of the Egyptians may also encompass norms governing relations between humans: at least according to one possible construal, Q 12:76 says that Joseph would not have been able to "seize his brother according to the king's *dīn* (*mā kāna li-ya'khudha akhāhu fī dīni l-maliki*) had God not willed it."<sup>6</sup> But it is of course common for the gods to lay down how humans are to behave towards one another and for violations of such rules to be deemed insults to their divine guarantors. Overall, "religion" and "religious worship" remain sensible glosses of the meaning that *dīn* would seem to convey at Q 40:26.

**Pre-Qur'anic background.** *Dīn* in the sense of "religion" or "religious worship" is credibly held to derive from Middle Persian *dēn* (*KU* 62; *CQ* 34–35; *FVQ* 131–133; by contrast, *GMK* 225 prioritises an inner-Arabic derivation). According to one scholar at least, the Avestan word *daēnā*, from which Middle Persian *dēn* is borrowed, had by the Young Avestan period come to serve as a designation for the entire Zoroastrian system of rituals and beliefs (Lankarany 1985, 149–158 and 170–171; more cautiously Rezaia 2020, §§ 9–22).<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, Mani and his early successors in third-century Iran elevated the word *dēn* to an umbrella term for a range of different cultic practices, thereby leading to a "crystallization of the concept of 'religion'" that was ultimately inherited by Islam (BeDuhn 2015 and Rezaia 2020, §§ 24–70 and 89–96; see also the classic treatment in Smith 1991, 92–102; for a more sceptical note, see Nongbri 2013, 69–72). Unlike the third-century Zoroastrian—or, more accurately, Mazdayasnian—priest Kartīr, who left behind several inscriptions (see Skjærvø 2011; Smith 1991, 96–98; BeDuhn 2015, 263–266; Rezaia 2020, §§ 71–74), Manichaeans "did not avoid calling other traditions *dēn*, even in the context of critiquing them; and therefore they could speak in the plural of *dēnān*" (BeDuhn 2015, 269; again, see already Smith 1991, 94).<sup>8</sup> In Pahlavi literature, at least some of which is post-Qur'anic, *dēn* means "both the entire religious tradition of Zoroastrianism, a *Weltanschauung* or world-view in its most expansive sense, as well as signifying the corpus of sacred wisdom and learning" (Vevaina 2015, 214).

5 Note that Q 40:26 has Pharaoh declare, immediately before the segment just cited, "I will kill Moses—let him call upon his Lord (*wa-l-yad'u rabbahu*)!"

6 Izutsu renders the phrase "he could not have kept his brother in the *dīn* of the Egyptian king" (*GMK* 224) and surmises that *dīn* means "obedience" here. This is a possible meaning of the word, as shown by Zuhayr's use of the phrase *fī dīni 'amrin*, "in a state of obedience to 'Amr" (see below). I am nonetheless unsure that this meaning applies at Q 12:76. My interpretation agrees with Paret 2001. Jones 2007 and *SQ* have "under the king's law," similarly Zirker 2018.

7 For further glimpses of the relevant scholarship, which is far too extensive to be reviewed here and also transcends my competence, see Vevaina 2015, 213–214; Skjærvø 2015, 412; Lincoln 2021, 70–89.

8 By contrast, Nongbri writes that Mani uses the plural of *dēn* to refer to "social groups, not disembodied 'religious' systems" (Nongbri 2013, 69–70).

As regards the etymology specifically of Arabic *dīn* in the sense treated in this entry, Horovitz contemplates a direct borrowing from Middle Persian (*KU* 62). By contrast, Jeffery identifies Syriac as the likely intermediary (*FVQ* 133; on the Syriac word, see also Ciancaglini 2008, 152). However, it remains to be assessed how frequent Syriac *dēn* actually is and whether it was indeed employed as an umbrella term for different religious communities or systems of belief and cultic practice rather than being primarily associated with the “*dēn* of magianism” (see *SL* 268 and the occurrences of *dēn* in Syriac martyr texts cited in Becker 2009, 322 and 325).<sup>9</sup>

***Dīn* in poetry.** Although *dīn* in the approximate meaning of “religion” or “religious worship” does not come into view before the later Meccan surahs, it is attested in pre-Qur’anic poetry and must accordingly be assumed to have become established in Arabic prior to the Qur’an. Thus, a poem by ‘Urwah ibn al-Ward mentions the “*dīn* of the Jews,” which the poet dismissively portrays as involving “crawling” (*ḥabā*) and “braying” (*nahīqa*; Nöldeke 1863, no. 13:1, referenced in *KU* 62). Nöldeke plausibly wonders whether this could be a reference to prostration in prayer (Nöldeke 1863, 79, n. 1). Al-Nābighah al-Dhubayānī, meanwhile, praises the Christian Ghassānids for possessing a divinely granted scripture (*majallah*) and a *dīn* that is upright or straight (*wa-dīnuhum qawīmun*; *DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 1:24; see also Sinai 2019b, 47, noting a variant)—a formulation that intriguingly foreshadows the Qur’anic combination of *dīn* with an attribute derived from *q-u-m*, such as *al-dīn al-qayyīm* (Q 6:161, 9:36, 12:40, 30:30.43, and 98:5; see also *CQ* 34–35). The term *dīn* also occurs with regard to pagan cults: an oath by Aws ibn Ḥajar swears “by Allāt and al-‘Uzzā and who adheres to their *dīn* (*man dāna dīnahā*), and by Allāh; verily, Allāh is greater than they” (Geyer 1892, no. 11:2),<sup>10</sup> while al-Nābighah says, in the context of embarking on a pilgrimage journey, that “*al-dīn* has become our resolve (*qad ‘azamā*)” (*DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 23:6; see also *GMK* 227–228 and Sinai 2019b, 54–55).<sup>11</sup> A passage that is attributed, probably correctly, to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt describes the killing of a sacred camel by the people of Thamūd as a disobedient assault on “the *dīn*” (*tafattakati l-dīna ‘utiyyan*; Schulthess 1911a, no. 34:23 = al-Saṭṭī 1974, no. 31:23; on the question of authenticity, see Sinai 2011b and Seidensticker 2011b, 54–56). In addition, a poem attributed to Aws ibn Ḥajar opposes *al-dīn* to *al-qusūṭ*, “injustice” (Geyer 1892, no. 32:7). A final proof-text by ‘Amr ibn Qamī’ah will be presented forthwith.

Taken together, the preceding poetic proof-texts warrant the claim that *dīn* signifies a set of practices undertaken—and, as shown by Umayyah, taboos observed—in order to worship, implore, sway, propitiate, retain the benevolence of, or otherwise interact with some deity. It is quite apt, therefore, to gloss *dīn* as “a system of ritual practices,” with Izutsu (*GMK* 227).<sup>12</sup> In

9 Becker argues that in the texts analysed by him it is the concept of “fear” (*dehltā*)—and not the term *dēn*—that functions as a “general category to refer to both Christianity and Zoroastrianism” (Becker 2009, 309). On the other hand, the Syriac translation of *Kalila and Dimna* from Middle Persian seems to employ *dīnīg* < Middle Persian *dēnīg* (see *SL* 297 and Ciancaglini 2008, 152) to refer to an Indian ascetic or Brahmin, so apparently in the general sense of a “man of religion” (Schulthess 1911b, 1:104–105.108–109; see also Schulthess 1911b, 2:209, n. 367). But would Syriac speakers who did not also have a command of Middle Persian necessarily have perceived *dīnīg* as etymologically related to *dēn*?

10 *Dāna dīnan* also occurs in Q 9:29 (*lā yadīnūna dīna l-ḥaqqi*, “they do not observe the true religion”). According to *KU* 62, *dāna* in the sense of observing or adhering to a *dīn* may be a secondary derivation from the noun.

11 On ‘*azama l-amru* = ‘*uzima ‘alayhi*, see *AEL* 2037.

12 Izutsu occasionally expands this paraphrase by a reference to credal aspects when he speaks of *dīn* as “a whole system consisting of a certain number of creeds and ritual practices that are shared by a community” or “a formal system of creeds and rituals” (*GMK* 228). However, it is arguable that the credal dimension of religion is



this regard, one may consider Arabic *dīn*, as used in poetry, to map more or less onto Greek *thrēskeia* (on which see Nongbri 2013, 34–38). In so far as *dīn* refers to a set of traditionally established and socially approved behaviours, it is understandable that the poem by Aws ibn Ḥajar can employ it as an apparent proxy for “virtue” or “piety.” References to the *dīn* of the Jews or that of the Ghassānids moreover suggest that the ritual behaviour in question was understood to be communally shared and communally distinctive. All aspects of this semantic hypothesis are very neatly corroborated by a passage from the *dīwān* of ‘Amr ibn Qamī’ah: the poet has been driven away by his people despite the fact that “I see that my *dīn* agrees with theirs (*wa-innī arā dīnī yuwāfiqū dīnahum*) when they engage in [sacrificial?] rites (*nasakū*),<sup>13</sup> both as to [the offering of] firstlings (*afrā’uhā*) and [other] sacrifices (*wa-dhabihuhā*); // and I am familiar with many other pilgrimage stations (*manzilatīn bi-l-ḥajjī ukhrā*), which bring benefit (? *nuḥāh*) and departure from which is not permitted” (Lyall 1919, no. 2:9–10, with minor modifications of the translation).<sup>14</sup>

Beyond a generic equation of *dīn* with “religion,” the poetic evidence thus supports understanding the word more specifically as referring to communal cultic practice, encompassing such diverse acts as prayer, pilgrimage, animal sacrifices, and the tabooing of animals consecrated to a god (see similarly Goudarzi, forthcoming). When the term *dīn* carries a possessive suffix referring to a deity (as in Aws ibn Ḥajar’s *man dāna dīnahā*, harking back to Allāt and al-‘Uzzā), reference is to the intended divine addressee or addressees of the rituals in question and the word connotes ritual allegiance. By contrast, when *dīn* stands in a possessive relationship with human individuals or collectives (e.g., *dīn al-yahūd*, *dīnī*, *dīnuhum*),<sup>15</sup> this specifies the human subjects who habitually engage in the ritual practices at hand. The transreligious application of the term *dīn* to Judaism, Christianity, and pagan cults, in line with Manichaean usage, deserves note. *Dīn*, it seems, is identifiable as a general dimension of human culture that may take a variety of specific forms.

The pre-Qur’anic usage of *dīn* does harbour some additional complexities. Thus, an elegy by Sā’idah ibn Ju’ayyah describes the poet’s ongoing grief by saying *‘awadani dīmī*, “I am again overcome by my habitual state” (Farrāj and Shākir 1963–1965, 1165, no. 4:2; the verse is cited in *GMK* 221).<sup>16</sup> *Dīn* can thus have the sense of “custom” or “habit” (see also *AEL* 944). In addition, *dīn* can signify “obedience,” “allegiance,” or “submissiveness,” corresponding to the verb *dāna li-*, “to obey s.o.,” “to serve s.o.,” “to submit to s.o.” (*GMK* 222–229; see also *AEL* 942 and 944). This acceptance is illustrated by a verse by Zuhayr (*DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 10:32), where *fī dīnī ‘amrin* means “in a state of obedience to ‘Amr” (or “in the service of ‘Amr”), the king of al-Ḥīrah (*GMK* 223). There are different ways of relating these additional meanings of *dāna* and *dīn* (namely, “habit, custom” and “obedience”) to *dīn* as religion or

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more germane to the term → *millah*; it is certainly the case that when the term *dīn* in a religious sense appears in poetry and is accompanied by specific details, the latter tend to relate to ritual behaviour (e.g., the performance of the pilgrimage or the “crawling” and “braying” that ‘Urwah ibn al-Ward attributes to the *dīn* of the Jews) rather than to the espousal of doctrinal tenets. Izutsu also thinks that al-Nābighah’s *wa-dīnuhum qawīmun* (cited above) may be employing *dīn* in the sense of personal faith rather than in respect to the Ghassānids’ communal rituals (*GMK* 227). Yet he does not produce any poetry or Qur’anic material in which *dīn* must mean personal faith. See also below on the phrase *akhlaṣa l-dīna/dīnahu li-llāhi*.

13 On the root *n-s-k* in the Qur’an, see under → *dhabāḥa*.

14 On the question of whether the ritual described here might be the Meccan *ḥajj*, see Miller 2016, 104, n. 330.

15 This feature is also seen in Manichaean and Syriac usage: for Mani’s reference to “my *dēn*,” see the passage cited in BeDuhn 2015, 271, and Nongbri 2013, 69; for a Syriac occurrence of “our *dēn*,” uttered by a Zoroastrian religious scholar, see Bedjan 1890–1897, 2:576, l. 6 (summarised and partially translated in Becker 2009, 322).

16 Al-Sukkarī glosses *dīmī* as *ḥālī llatī kānat ta’tādunī*.



religious (especially ritual) practice. If we assume the latter to be a loan, whether direct or indirect, of Middle Persian *dēn*, then it is conceivable that the connotations of established custom and obedience to a superior that were latent in the idea of religious ritual subsequently made it possible for the noun *dīn* to be used in order to pick out these concomitant aspects in particular. Alternatively, one or both of the two additional meanings of *dāna* and *dīn* just discussed (“habit” and “obedience”) could have preceded the borrowing of Middle Persian *dēn* and perhaps even paved the way for it. Thus, we might envisage a native Arabic meaning of *dīn* in the sense of “obedience,” “submission,” “service,” onto which an additional meaning, derived from Middle Persian *dēn*, was secondarily layered.

The end result, in any case, is likely to have been a strong semantic colouring of the word *dīn* by associations of entrenched custom, on the one hand, and allegiance to a higher authority, on the other. Thus, rather than positing a clear semantic demarcation between *dīn* as religious practice (derived from *dēn*) and *dīn* as obedience (as assumed, e.g., in Donner 2019, 136), it seems quite likely that these two significations would have blended into one another when the issue at hand was obedience to or worship of a deity, with the one or the other nuance being paramount according to the context at hand. A translator might capture such fluid overtones by occasionally resorting to paraphrasis, and there is bound to be some scope for subjective decisions here. Thus, when Q 16:52 states *lahu l-dīnu wāṣiban*, this could justifiably be rendered in more than one way: “it is to him [namely, God] that religious worship/devotion/obedience/allegiance is always due” (cf. *GMK* 224).

**Qur’anic usage.** The semantic contours of *dīn* discerned so far match Qur’anic usage, even if the latter can only be adumbrated selectively here. (The question of the semantic equivalence or distinction between *dīn* and *millah*—both of which have been held to mean “religion”—is treated under → *millah*.) One pertinent observation, exemplified inter alia by Surah 109 (see above), is that *dīn*, when used in the general sense of “religion” or “religious worship” rather than “judgement,” often occurs in proximity to the verbs *‘abada*, “to serve, to worship” (see Q 10:104, 12:40, 39:2.3.11.14, 98:5; see *GMK* 225–226) and *da‘ā*, “to call upon” (namely, God; Q 7:29, 10:22, 29:65, 31:32, 40:14.65). This supports the view that *dīn* signifies religion *qua* something that one does rather than *qua* something that one believes. Moreover, in line with the poetic usage described above, in the Qur’an the word *dīn* frequently carries possessive suffixes referring to humans (e.g., Q 2:217, 3:24.73, 4:146.171, 5:3.54.57.77, 49:16, 109:6), but can also stand in a possessive relationship with God, in the phrase *dīn allāh*, “worship of God” or “religious obedience/allegiance to God” (Q 3:83, 24:2, 110:2). More precisely, *dīn allāh* might be paraphrased as “practices mandated by, and expressing exclusive allegiance to, God.” After all, the Qur’an clearly teaches that certain modes of *dīn*, as opposed to others, are divinely commanded (Q 2:132, 3:19, 5:3, 9:33, and 42:13),<sup>17</sup> and it stipulates that ritual veneration or service (*al-dīn*)—or, as one verse puts it even more explicitly, “religious worship in its entirety” (*al-dīn kulluhu*)—ought to be addressed “to God” (*li-llāhi*) alone (Q 2:193, 8:39, 16:52, 39:3).<sup>18</sup>

17 For an alternative perspective on Q 2:132, see Donner 2019, 136. Donner argues that *dīn* is here best read in the sense of “custom,” “service,” “obedience” (see Zuhayr’s *fī dīni ‘amrin*), which he considers to be the most frequent meaning of the word in the Qur’an. However, as noted above, I am unsure that a clear semantic line can be drawn between *dīn* in the sense of worship, on the one hand, and *dīn* in the sense of obedience, on the other.

18 With regard to Q 2:193, Donner deems “custom,” “service,” “obedience” to yield a better sense than “religion” (Donner 2019, 136). See, again, the remarks above on the likely semantic blending of *dīn qua* religious worship and *dīn qua* obedience.

Particularly noteworthy is the phrase *akhlaṣa l-dīna/dīnahu li-llāhi* (Q 4:146, 7:29, 10:22, 29:65, 31:32, 39:2.11.14, 40:14.65, 98:15), which occurs in some of the chronologically earliest Qur’anic verses employing *dīn* in the approximate sense of “religion.” Against the background of the preceding, the phrase is reasonably rendered “to restrict (one’s) religious worship/allegiance exclusively to God” (Q 39:3 features the variant *li-llāhi l-dīnu l-khālīṣu*, “religious worship/allegiance is exclusively due to God”).<sup>19</sup> The phrase betrays the assumption that *dīn* or human ritual activity is an anthropological given: humans exhibit diverse manners of venerating, invoking, and obeying miscellaneous superhuman beings, giving rise to the reasonable generalisation that each human individual and collective will have his, her, or their established mode of *dīn*. The crucial follow-on question then is to which of the various available candidates for religious worship human action and allegiance is to be properly and efficaciously directed. While the Qur’anic Messenger’s pagan opponents spread worship out among a plurality of divine beings, the Qur’an urges that one’s *dīn* ought to be confined (*akhlaṣa*) to the one creator god, Allāh.

As illustrated by some of the preceding passages, the Qur’an can employ *al-dīn* with the definite article in a way that resembles the indefinite English term “religion,” namely, as the general label for a certain sphere of human beliefs and practices, or as a “genus” that contains a number of different species (Dakake 2019, 347–348; see also the verse by Umayya ibn Abī l-Ṣalt cited above). For example, Q 42:21 poses the polemical question whether the Qur’an’s opponents have partner deities or “associates” (*shurakā*) who have “established for them precepts of religious worship that God has not permitted” (*shara’ū lahum mina l-dīni mā lam ya’dhan bihi llāhu*).<sup>20</sup> The individual species contained within the genus *dīn* would be the distinctive ritual traditions and customs of different communities, which individual humans may decide to uphold, opt into, or opt out of. Thus, when Q 3:24 condemns some of the scripture-owners for the fabrications that have “deceived them in their religion” (*gharrahum fī dīnihim mā kānū yaftarūn*), “their *dīn*” comes close to “their religion” in the sense of one particular religion among others, though a less reified translation like “their mode of religious worship/allegiance” could still be defended. Similarly, Q 3:73 speaks of “those who follow your<sup>p</sup> mode of religious worship” or “religion” (*man tabi’a dīnakum*). The frequency of *dīn* + possessive suffix referring to human individuals or collectives, noted above, confirms the impression that the general human activity or cultural dimension of *dīn* comes in a multitude of different inflections that are either individually or communally distinctive.

Unsurprisingly, however, the Qur’anic religion is deemed to be more than one peculiar manifestation of human religious practice and is labelled “the true mode of religious worship” or even “the true religion” (*dīn al-ḥaqq*, literally “the religion of truth”), in contrast with “all [other] kinds of religious worship” (*al-dīn kulluhu*; Q 9:33, 48:28, and 61:9; see

<sup>19</sup> On *akhlaṣa* and its passive participle *mukhlaṣ*, see also under → *shayṭān* and CDKA 89. According to Izutsu, in the phrase *akhlaṣa l-dīna/dīnahu li-llāhi* “the word *dīn* cannot but mean personal faith in God” (GMK 228). But it seems perfectly satisfactory to construe *dīn* as meaning “religious worship” here, although the point of the phrase is of course a personal commitment to abstain from serving beings other than God. Given that Izutsu does not advance any poetic or Qur’anic prooftexts in which *dīn* must refer to individual faith, Ockham’s razor would seem to dictate that we make do with those meanings of the term that are unequivocally attested. The phrase is also discussed in Haddad 1974, 117–119, who translates *mukhliṣan/mukhliṣina lahu l-dīna* as “in total commitment” or “in devoted commitment” to God.

<sup>20</sup> On the verb *shara’a*, see n. 34 under → *aslama*.

also 9:29, which only has *dīn al-ḥaqq*).<sup>21</sup> Q 3:19 equates this true religion, “the mode of religious worship that is valid before God” (*al-dīn ‘inda llāhi*), with *al-islām*, an attitude of total devotion or self-surrender to God that is understood to entail full recognition of his prophetic emissary Muhammad (→ *aslama*). Other verses similarly present *al-islām* as a particular, albeit decisively privileged, kind of *dīn* (Q 3:83.85, 4:125, 5:3; cf. also 2:132). Hence, even though the Qur’an is plainly not envisaging all forms of human religion as equal, it does indeed position the “true *dīn*” squarely within a wider genus of human religious activity, whose different manifestations are categorised as functionally and phenomenologically kindred phenomena.

### ***al-madīnah* | the town**

→ *ard*, → *hājara*

<sup>21</sup> Q 24:25 utters a threat combining *dīn* and *ḥaqq* that is not straightforward to understand: *yawma’idhin yuwaffihimu llāhu dīnahumu l-ḥaqqa*. In light of the other Qur’anic occurrences of *dīn al-ḥaqq*, one might interpret this to mean that “on that day God will fully repay them for their [adherence or lack of adherence to the] true religion.” Ambros notes the possibility of translating “will repay them for [what they maintained to be] their true religion” (CDKA 292; cf. also Paret 2001, giving two alternative translations of which the first one corresponds to “for the religion they truly endorse”). But it is more likely that *dīn* is here either synonymous with *dayn*, “debt” (CDKA 102), or that the consonantal skeleton *d-y-n* should be vocalised as *dayn* in the first place. The statement’s meaning, then, would be that God will see to it that people’s “true debt” is “fully settled,” which in the context of Q 24:25 has the ominous purport that God will unfailingly exact any outstanding moral dues (see also Q 24:39, which says in a similarly threatening context that God will “fully settle” an unbeliever’s “account,” *fa-waffāhu ḥisābahu*). This reading of Q 24:25 corresponds to the alternative translation given in Paret 2001 (“*wird Gott ihnen ihre wahre Schuld (?) voll heimzahlen*”). Unfortunately, consultation of two modern *qirā’āt* encyclopaedias does not produce evidence that a variant reading *dayn* ever existed (see MQ 6:250–251 and MQQ 4:245). Still, the conjecture that *d-y-n* in Q 24:39 should be read *dayn* is attractive because it is text-critically plausible that the presence of *al-ḥaqq* should have occasioned conflation with false parallels like Q 9:29.33.

# dh

*hādhā, hādhīhī* | this

*dhālika, tilka* | that

Though derived from *dhā*, look up under *dh-l-k*.

*dhabaḥa* tr. | to slaughter s.o. or s.th., to sacrifice s.o. or s.th.

*dhibḥ* | sacrifice

Further vocabulary discussed: *naḥara* intr. | to perform an animal sacrifice *qarraba qurbānan* | to offer up a sacrifice *nuṣub* | sacrificial stone *ṣanam, wathan* | idol *‘abada* tr. | to serve s.o. or s.th., to worship s.o. or s.th. *‘akafa* intr. *‘alā* | to cling to s.o. or s.th., to be devoted to s.o. or s.th. *budn* pl. | sacrificial animals *hady* coll. | offerings *qalā’id* pl. | ritual necklaces hung on sacrificial animals or animals marked out thereby (?) *maḥill* | place of sacrifice *nusuk* | animal sacrifice *man-sak* | rite *sha’ā’ir allāh* pl. | God’s observances *ghaniyy* | free from any needs *birr* | righteousness, righteous conduct

According to Guy Stroumsa, “animal sacrifices—‘the quintessential ritual complex of ancient civilizations,’ in Fritz Graf’s words—are precisely what disappears from ritual ubiquity in Late Antiquity, in the Near East as well as around the Mediterranean” (Stroumsa 2009, xvi).<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the Qur’an reflects a ritual milieu in which animal sacrifice was still widely practised and not merely remembered as a feature of the ancient past, as in the Qur’anic account of Abraham’s vicarious slaughter of an unspecified animal in lieu of his son (Q 37:107; cf. Gen 22:13). With a view to presenting the circumstantial evidence in favour of this claim, the present entry will review the main terms associated with animal sacrifice in the Qur’an.

**Verbs referring to animal sacrifice (*dhabaḥa, naḥara, qarraba qurbānan*).** The two Qur’anic verbs designating the act of sacrificial slaughter are *dhabaḥa* and *naḥara*. The latter only figures in Q 108:2, an early Meccan verse charging the Messenger to “pray to your<sup>s</sup> Lord and sacrifice” (*fa-ṣalli li-rabbika wa-nḥar*). Given its early date, this commandment must endorse participation in the pre-Qur’anic Meccan cult (PP 108), in which the veneration of Allāh played at least some role (→ *ashraka*). The verb *dhabaḥa*—which is already attested in Safaitic inscriptions (Al-Jallad 2015a, 312; Al-Jallad 2022, 17–26)—is somewhat more frequent. Apart from verses in which it operates as a synonym for “to kill” in a non-ritual sense (Q 27:21),<sup>2</sup> *dhabaḥa* or some cognate word are used both in

<sup>1</sup> For the quotation from Graf, see Graf 2002, 116.

<sup>2</sup> The second-stem form *dhabbaḥa* can also mean “to slaughter” in a non-ritual sense (Q 2:49, 14:6, 28:4).

connection with Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son (Q 37:102; 37:107 has the noun *dhibh*, "sacrifice") and with God's demand that the Israelites sacrifice a yellow heifer (Q 2:67.71; see BEQ 345–346). With regard to the Qur'an's own present, the verb *dhabaha* occurs in Q 5:3, prohibiting consumption of "that which has been slaughtered on sacrificial stones" (*wa-mā dhubiḥa 'alā l-nuṣubi*; on sacrificial stones, see below).

A third verbal phrase that is once used for the act of sacrifice is *qarraba qurbānan* (Q 5:27). The context of this occurrence—namely, the different offerings made by Cain and Abel, or Qur'anically speaking by "the two sons of Adam" (Q 5:27)—does not make it clear that reference is specifically to animal sacrifice; after all, Gen 4:3–5 specifies that Cain brought "of the fruit of the ground," whereas Abel "brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions." Other Qur'anic occurrences of *qarraba* do not refer to sacrifice and are generally translatable as "to bring s.o. or s.th. near" (Q 19:52, 34:37, 39:3), and the same goes for the passive participle *muqarrab* (e.g., Q 56:11.88; see also under → *azwāj muṭahharah*).<sup>3</sup> The noun *qurbān*, on the other hand, means "sacrifice" not only at Q 5:27, but also at 3:183. However, it must have a different sense at Q 46:28, where something like "way of approaching" fits better, drawing on the root *q-r-b*'s connotation of nearness (CDKA 222; cf. Q 39:3 and the line of poetry cited in Hussain 2020, 106–107). It seems clear that *qurbān* in the sense of "sacrifice" rather than "proximity" or the like is derived from Aramaic, probably Syriac (FVQ 235), and the same holds for Arabic *qarraba* = "to sacrifice," seeing that this is one of the established senses of Syriac *qarreb* (e.g., Beck 1970a, no. 2:1179).

Thus, in the context of the Biblical story of Cain and Abel, we find the Qur'an expressing the idea of sacrifice by means of what may be described as a Syriacism rather than by one of the two usual Qur'anic words for sacrifice (*dhabaha*, *naḥara*), which are also employed—though not exclusively so—in contexts dealing with contemporary Arabian sacrificial rites (e.g., Q 5:3). The suspicion that the occurrence of *qarraba qurbānan* in Q 5:27 is not coincidental is confirmed by the fact that 3:183, the other Qur'anic instance of *qurbān* in the sense of "sacrifice," may also have a Biblical background (BEK 74). In fact, the Aramaicising expression *qarraba qurbānan* is only one among a number of lexical and other similarities between the Qur'anic account of Cain and Abel, on the one hand, and a number of Syriac texts elaborating upon the same events, on the other (Witztum 2011, 143–144). The Qur'an thus documents that in late antique Arabic one and the same ritual act, animal sacrifice, could either be referred to with an expression that had a tangibly Biblical ring (*qarraba qurbānan*), and accordingly seems to have been used primarily for sacrificial acts in the Biblical past, or could be designated in a more generic fashion that applied to contemporary sacrificial rites as well (*dhabaha*, *naḥara*). This lexical dualism is reminiscent of the observation made elsewhere that the Qur'anic corpus attests two distinct notions of holiness or sacrality, expressed by the roots *ḥ-r-m* and *q-d-s*, one of which is associated with contemporary Arabian ritual life while the other has clear Biblical associations (see under → *ḥarrama* and → *qaddasa*).

**Sacrificial stones (*anṣāb*) vs idols (*aṣnām*, *awthān*).** Sacrificial stones or altars (singular: *nuṣub*, plural: *anṣāb*) are mentioned not only in Q 5:3, referenced above, but also in 5:90 and probably 70:43 as well. Verses from the *dīwāns* of Ṭarafah and al-Nābigha use the plural *anṣāb* in connection with the spilling of blood (DSAAP, Ṭarafah, no. 18:1, and

<sup>3</sup> Even in Q 51:27, where a slaughtered calf is involved, the meaning required by the context is only "to place s.th. before or near to s.o."

al-Nābigha, no. 5:37),<sup>4</sup> and a poem attributed to Zuhayr employs the variant form *maṣṣab* in speaking of “the sacrificial altar, whose top is bloodied by the sacrificial animal” (*DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 10:24: *ka-maṣṣabi l-‘itri dammā ra’sahu l-nusukū*; cf. *RAH* 101). Such parallels confirm that the *anṣāb* were stones functioning as sacrificial altars. The nouns *nṣb* and *mṣb* (with the variants *mṣb* and *mṣbt*), “cult stone,” and the corresponding verb *nṣb*, “to set up a cult stone,” also occur in Safaitic inscriptions (Al-Jallad 2015a, 331).<sup>5</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, stones set up as altars and resembling the Arabian *anṣāb* are designated by the word *maṣṣēbā* (e.g., Gen 28:18.22 and Deut 7:5); both words would seem to be derived from the same Semitic root *n-ṣ-b*, connoting erecting or raising up (*RAH* 101; *QP* 69; Chabbi 2020, 468–469). Nabataean inscriptions similarly employ the words *nṣb* and *mṣb*’ (Wenning 2001, 80).

It is important to note that sacrificial betyls of the kind referred to by Arabic *nuṣub* would have differed in function and appearance from carved or hewn statues of deities, or idols, designated by the terms *ṣanam* and *wathan* (*RAH* 102). The word *ṣanam* is probably cognate with the Semitic root *ṣ-l-m* (*FVQ* 199; Scagliarini 2007, 255) and specifically with the word *ṣlm*, “statue,” that is found in various corpora of Arabian inscriptions, such as Epigraphic South Arabian, Nabataean, and Dadanitic (Scagliarini 2007, 253–255). The Qur’anic usage of the plurals *aṣnām* (Q 6:74, 7:138, 14:35, 21:57, 26:71) and *awthān* (Q 22:30, 29:17.25) is consistent with the understanding that they are functionally distinct from sacrificial stones: unlike the *anṣāb*, the *aṣnām* and *awthān* figure as objects of veneration, indicated by formulations such as ‘*abada* + acc., “to serve or worship s.o. or s.th.” (Q 14:35, 26:71, 29:17) or ‘*akafa* ‘*alā* + gen., “to cling or be devoted to s.o. or s.th.” (Q 7:138, 26:71). That Arabic *awthān*, whatever the word’s etymology,<sup>6</sup> were representations of some kind is also indicated by a verse of al-A’shā Maymūn in which *bayt al-wathan* designates a Christian church or chapel, perhaps on account of the icons or religious statues it contained (→ *al-naṣārā*). In the Qur’an, the terms *aṣnām* and *awthān* appear almost always in connection with Abraham, in one case in connection with an idolatrous people—presumably corresponding to the Biblical Canaanites—encountered by the ancient Israelites (Q 7:138; see *FVQ* 199). Given their similar contexts of occurrence, predominantly the life of Abraham, the Qur’an does not afford evidence of a palpable semantic distinction between *aṣnām* and *awthān* (against Chabbi 2020, 52; see also Linnhoff 2020, 24–25 and 48).<sup>7</sup> There is one verse in which the *awthān* figure as a contemporary reality, Q 22:30, urging the Qur’anic addressees to “shun the impurity of idols” (*fa-jtanibū l-rijsa mina l-awthāni*). But it is

4 On the latter verse, see Sinai 2019b, 53.

5 It is by no means the case that Safaitic inscriptions containing these words always mention sacrifices. Rather, at least sometimes the impression is that a *mṣb*/*mṣb* is simply a memorial stone (e.g., KRS 2914 in Al-Jallad 2015a, 264: “came upon the cult stone”). See Macdonald 2012, 291, who suggests that standing stones or *anṣāb* were set up “as an act of piety or as a memorial of an encounter with the divine, as in the story of Jacob after wrestling with the angel”; subsequently, he suggests, such stones “may have come to be identified as representing the divine being.” Nonetheless, there are also inscriptions whose authors “erected [a cult stone] and sacrificed” (HH 1 and JaS 100.1; see Al-Jallad 2022, 20 and 28–29, as well as [krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA\\_0052449.html](http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0052449.html)).

6 Arabic *wathan* has a cognate in Epigraphic South Arabian (*FVQ* 286–287), for which Beeston et al. 1982, 166, give the meaning “stela; boundary stone, boundary mark; boundary, frontier”; see also Scagliarini 2007, 256. The semantic development was likely “boundary stone” > “boundary idol” > “stone idol,” as posited by Walter Müller (Leslau 1991, 622).

7 See also Scagliarini 2007, 255, with comments on post-Qur’anic Arab lexicographers and on usage in Ibn al-Kalbī.



conceivable that the concept of idols here stands in for the altar stones of Q 5:3 (*QP* 69). Hence, the Qur'an does not provide unequivocal evidence that the Meccan cult involved idols properly speaking, as opposed to stone altars (Chabbi 2020, 52).<sup>8</sup>

**Other Qur'anic terms relating to animal sacrifice (*budn*, *hady*, *qalā'id*, *n-s-k*).** Animals destined to be sacrificed are called *budn* in Q 22:36 (which together with the following verse contains sufficient detail in order to confirm that the word does indeed carry this sense). Somewhat less certain are the meanings of the collective noun *hady* and of the plural *qalā'id*, which are coupled in Q 5:2.97, with *hady* also occurring in Q 2:196, 5:95, and 48:25. The plural *qalā'id* is usually taken to refer either to necklaces by which sacrificial animals were marked out (e.g., in Arberry 1955) or to the respective animals themselves (*KK* 113 and *CDKA* 229). *Al-hady* too is normally understood to mean sacrificial animals, but given its literal meaning "offering" (cf. *hadiyyah*, "gift, present," in Q 27:35.36), *hady* could well refer to offerings in general, whether votiver offerings or sacrificial animals. That *hady* at least encompasses the latter category, even if it may not be restricted to it, is suggested by Q 5:95. The verse stipulates different manners of atoning for the intentional killing of game while in the pilgrim state, and the first option set out is that the culprit is to offer up "livestock that is equivalent to what he has killed, as judged by two just men from among you<sup>p</sup>, by way of an offering (*hady*) that is to reach the Ka'bah" (*fa-jazā'un mithlu mā qatala mina l-na'ami yaḥkumu bihi dhawā' adlin minkum hadyan bāligha l-ka'bati*). Q 48:25 condemns those who prevent offerings (*al-hady*) from reaching their *maḥill*; assuming that the latter word does indeed denote a "(lawful) place of slaughter of animals as a sacrifice" (*CDKA* 77; similarly, Badawi and Abdel Haleem 2008, 232), which is consistent with its occurrence in Q 2:196 and 22:33, *hady* in 48:25 too would specifically refer to animal sacrifices. In view of all this, the pair *hady* and *qalā'id* in Q 5:2.97 may perhaps be understood to overlap rather than denoting two distinct categories, and could be rendered "sacrificial offerings and animals marked out by ritual necklaces." Incidentally, animals in the Qur'anic milieu do not only seem to have been sacrificed but also to have been subject to other taboos, as entailed by the conventional reading of Q 5:103 (on which see Gräf 1959, 58–59).

A final root connected with sacrificial rites is *n-s-k*. Q 2:196 instructs those who are forced to violate the prohibition of shaving one's head during the *ḥajj* to atone by means of a fast, a charitable gift, or a *nusuk* (*fa-fidyatun min ṣiyāmin aw ṣadaqatin aw nusukin*). It would make contextual sense here for *nusuk* to refer to an act of sacrifice or to an animal sacrificed (cf. the use of *nusuk* in *DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 10:24, cited above). In support of the same conjecture one may also point to Q 6:162, combining the terms *ṣalāh* (→ *ṣallā*), "prayer," and *nusuk*: "Say, 'My praying and my *nusuk*, my living and my dying are all devoted to God, the Lord of the world-dwellers'" (*qul inna ṣalātī wa-nusukī wa-maḥyāya wa-mamātī li-llāhi rabbi l-'ālamīn*). It is plausible to interpret the pair *ṣalāh* and *nusuk* here to refer to the two principal types of ritual worship that were presumably known in the Qur'anic milieu, namely: prayer, in the sense of worship by means of words and bodily movements such as prostration (→ *sajada*), and the offering of sacrifices, in particular of animal sacrifices.<sup>9</sup>

8 Some translators render the noun → *al-tāghūt* as "idols," in which case one might cite some of the occurrences of this word in support of the existence of idols properly speaking in the Qur'anic environment. However, as explained in the respective entry, it may be preferable to translate *al-tāghūt* more abstractly as "false gods." See also Linnhoff 2020, 32.

9 Thus construed, Q 6:162 would parallel the coupling of prayer and sacrifice in 108:2, quoted above.

As for the four Qur’anic occurrences of the singular *mansak* and its plural *manāsik*, derived from the same root *n-s-k* (Q 2:128.200, 22:34.67), they may express the concept of a religious rite or set of rites in general, although Q 22:34 at least would seem to speak specifically of sacrificial rites. Taking into account that the context of at least three of these occurrences (Q 2:128.200, 22:34) is concerned with the Meccan “house” (→ *bayt*) or the *hajj* (→ *hajja*), it is also conceivable that a *mansak* is chiefly a rite associated with a sanctuary; there is in fact reason to assume a degree of equivalence between *mansak*, *manāsik* and the plural phrase *sha’ā’ir allāh*, “God’s observances” (see under → *har-rama*), both of which are employed in close proximity in Surah 22 (Q 22:32.34.36; see also 22:67).<sup>10</sup>

**The Qur’an’s interiorisation of the rationale of sacrifice.** The Qur’an evidently presupposes an environment in which sacrificial ceremonies were a regular part of ritual life. Unlike Christianity and rabbinic Judaism, the Qur’an admits animal sacrifice in the literal sense as a legitimate part of God’s cult. At the same time, one Medinan passage, Q 22:36–37, radically transforms the religious rationale of the sacrificial act in comparison to what we may surmise it to have been in pre-Qur’anic ritual (Sinai 2019c, 135–136, n. 68; Christiansen 2019, 138–139). Q 22:36 affirms that God has appointed sacrificial animals (*al-budn*) as part of his ritual observances (*sha’ā’ir allāh*) and calls upon the addressees to “invoke God’s name” upon them and to share their meat with other members of the community. Q 22:37 then adds that “neither their meat nor their blood reaches God (*lan yanāla llāha luḥūmuḥā wa-lā dimā’uhā*); rather, it is your<sup>p</sup> pious fear that reaches him (*wa-lākin yanāluhu l-taqwā minkum*). Thus God has made them subservient to you (*sakhkharahā lakum*) so that you may magnify God for the guidance he has granted you (*li-tukabbirū llāha ‘alā mā hadā-kum*).” Accordingly, the point of sacrifice is not to bestow a gift on the deity, who is repeatedly said to be free from any needs (*ghaniyy*; e.g., Q 22:64; see under → *ḥamd*), but rather to manifest human piety: sacrificial animals have been made available to humans so that the latter might “magnify God” and also in order to provide an occasion for charitable sharing. An expressivist explication of the rationale of animal sacrifice, according to which the practice is a ritual vehicle by which humans are able to manifest and externalise their inward piety, is also suggested by an earlier verse in the same surah, Q 22:32, according to which respect for “God’s observances” (*sha’ā’ir allāh*) is due to or indicates “pious fear in people’s hearts” (*fa-innahā min taqwā l-qulūb*). The essence of sacrifice, therefore, is not to be located in the external act itself but rather in the inner disposition giving rise to it and finding expression in it. It is worth adding that similarly interiorising comments on certain cultic acts, which emphasise that righteous conduct (*al-birr*) is not identical with particular outward observances, are found in two other Medinan verses, Q 2:177.189 (which share the phrase *laysa l-birra an / laysa l-birru bi-an . . .*, “righteous conduct does not consist in . . .”).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> On Q 22:34.67, see under → *ummaḥ*.

<sup>11</sup> Together with Q 22:32, these two verses are insightfully referenced in Paret’s concordance on Q 22:37 (KK 350). Note that in the case of Q 2:177 at least (righteous conduct is not identical with observing a specific direction of prayer), the observance in question is one mandated elsewhere in the same surah (Q 2:144.149–150). Hence, just as Q 22:37 is not doing away with sacrifices altogether but simply relativising the ultimate significance of outward ritual acts, so Q 2:177 is not revoking the commandment to pray towards the Meccan sanctuary but is simply relativising the significance of individual ritual acts in comparison to such long-term virtues as belief in God etc., charity, regular prayer, almsgiving, honouring agreements, and patience in adversity.

This simultaneously interiorising and expressivist manner of rationalising animal sacrifice ensures that the Qur’anic endorsement of sacrifice is not vulnerable to theological objections that might arise from the Biblical prophets’ critique of the sacrificial cult, such as the declaration in Hos 6:6 that God desires “steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of Gd rather than burnt-offerings” (cf. also Mic 6:6–8, Amos 5:21–24, Isa 1:11–17, or Ps 50:7–13; see Sinai 2019c, 135–136, n. 68). Late antique Christians certainly denied unequivocally that God had any need of sacrifices, meaning that it is not surprising to find the Qur’an anticipating potential objections to its endorsement of animal sacrifice. For instance, Justin declares that “we have received by tradition that God does not need the material offerings which men can give, seeing, indeed, that He Himself is the provider of all things” (*First Apology* 10 = Roberts et al. 1995, 1:165). The Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum*, meanwhile, is concerned to show that God’s true law did not comprise sacrifices, of which God had “no need”; rather, sacrificial commandments were only imposed on the Israelites as part of God’s punitive “second legislation” in the wake of the Israelites’ worship of the Golden Calf (Vööbus 1979, 243–245).

However, mainstream Christians, unlike the Marcionites, were committed to a scriptural canon that included the Old Testament with its detailed sacrificial instructions. At least some Christians, therefore, did not find it attractive simply to dismiss all sacrificial rites as pointless or as being a potential instrument of divine punishment. Thus, a hymn by Ephrem addresses the apparent contradiction between Biblical statements implying that God craved animal sacrifices, such as Gen 8:21, and others denying that he had any desire for or need of them (Beck 1957b, no. 30:2). Ephrem resolves the ostensible conflict by intimating an interpretation of the Hebrew Bible’s sacrificial commandments that bears considerable resemblance to the Qur’anic position outlined above, in so far as sacrificial rituals are valorised as a positive divine gift to humans rather than a human gift to God: God enjoined sacrifices in order to encourage human prayer and repentance, which tend to be concomitant with the offering of sacrifices; and it was only due to such concomitant manifestations of human piety that God rejoiced in sacrifices (Beck 1957b, no. 30:10–12). There is, accordingly, no question of God himself deriving any benefit from sacrifices; rather, it was God who “by means of the sacrifices aided the sinner” (Beck 1957b, no. 30:11; cf. also nos 32:3, 33:5, 36:13, 50:3). The Qur’anic explication of the rationale of animal sacrifice in Q 22:36–37 may therefore be regarded as drawing on theological resources that are ultimately rooted in Christian reflections on the purpose of Pentateuchal sacrificial instructions.

### ***dhurriyyah* | offspring**

→ *ab*, → *ummah*, → *rabb*, → *shayṭān*, → *azwāj* *muṭahharah*, → *nabiyy*

***dhakara* tr. | to remember s.th. or s.o.; to heed s.th.; to mention s.th. or s.o.; to invoke s.o. or s.th. (namely, God or God’s name)**

***dhikr* | invocation**

Further vocabulary discussed: *nasiya* tr./intr. | to forget (s.th. or s.o.) *‘alīm* | knowing, knowledgeable *ism* | name *rabb* | lord *ni’mah* | grace, benefaction *qalb* | heart *al-mash’ar al-ḥarām* | the sacred place of ritual *nafs* | soul, (vital) self *ṣalāh* |

prayer *alhā* tr. ‘an | to divert s.o. from s.th. *sabbaha* tr. | to glorify s.o. or s.th. (such as God or God’s name) *sabbaha* intr. li-/bi- | to glorify s.o. or s.th. (such as God or God’s name) *sabbaha* intr. | to be engaged in glorifying God, to utter prayers of praise

**Overview.** Derivatives of the root *dh-k-r* (see generally CDKA 103–104) are particularly frequent throughout the Qur’an. They can be grouped into two broad semantic clusters, one to do with human remembrance and invocation of God, treated in the present entry, and a second one to do with God’s exhortation of humans, treated under → *dhakkara*. There is an evident theological complementarity between these two broad sets: as becomes particularly manifest in Q 37:13, 74:54–56, and 80:11–12, God’s revelatory reminders (verb: *dhakkara*, noun: *tadhkirah*) demand and call forth a human response involving, among other things, inward awareness of God as well as outward invocation of him (*dhakara*). In many cases, it is morphologically evident whether a word belongs to one or the other of the two clusters just distinguished: thus, the first-form verb *dhakara* is mostly “to remember” or “to invoke” God, applied to humans as the grammatical subject, while the second-form verb *dhakkara*, in line with its causative connotation, is “to cause s.o. to remember,” “to remind s.o.,” with God serving as the grammatical subject. A notable case of ambiguity, however, is constituted by the noun *dhikr*, which can both refer to the act of invoking God (discussed further below in this entry) and to the hortatory reminders that God addresses to humans (in which sense it is discussed under → *dhakkara*). In the course of examining the Qur’anic use of the root *dh-k-r*, further ambivalences—e.g., the question when *dhakara* designates inward remembrance or outward invocation—will also need to be addressed.

Prior to a more detailed review of Qur’anic occurrences of *dhakara* and *dhikr* in what follows, it is relevant to note that the Qur’an’s numerous allusions to human remembrance and divine reminding interlock with the Qur’anic assessment that humans are continually disposed to “forget” (→ *nasiya*) God or vital religious truths. God, by contrast, does not forget (Q 19:64, 20:52) or, alternatively, will only forget humans by way of a proportionate penalty for their prior forgetfulness of him or of the last judgement (e.g., Q 7:51, 9:67). Interestingly, in the Qur’an it is almost never God who figures as the agent of the verb *dhakara*. The only exception to this is Q 2:152, where the divine voice declares, “Remember me, and I shall remember you” (*fa-dhkurūnī adhkurkum*); but even here divine remembrance of humans is merely invoked as God’s proportionate response to human remembrance of him, thus inverting the nexus of forgetfulness underscored in verses like Q 7:51 and 9:67.<sup>1</sup> The Qur’an’s almost complete lack of references to divine remembering (as opposed to divine reminding, on which see under → *dhakkara*) is especially notable when compared against Arabian epigraphy. For instance, Safaitic inscriptions beseech Allāt to “remember” or “be mindful” (*ḍkrt*) of certain humans (e.g., AAUI 406 and JaS 189.2 in Al-Jallad 2015a, 221 and 252), and the Aramaic part of the first- or second-century CE Ein Avdat inscription contains the petition “May he who reads this be remembered for good (*dkyr b-ṭb*) before Obodas (*ḥdt*) the god” (Macdonald in Fiema et al. 2015, 400). Similar pleas for divine remembrance continue in a monotheistic context: a pre-Islamic inscription in Arabic script, dated to 548/549 CE and probably Christian, contains the formula *ḍkr l-’lh* + name, “May God remember . . .” (Nehmé

1 For the responsive nexus between certain human actions and a divine response in kind, see Q 2:160 and other verses (predicating the verb → *tāba* both of humans and of God), 17:8 (*wa-in udtum ‘udnā*), and 47:7 (*in tanṣurū llāha yanṣurkum*). The same responsive nexus between human action and divine reaction is also found with negative verbs such as → *makara*, “to plot, to scheme,” and → *nasiya*, “to forget.” See, e.g., Q 3:54 and 9:67.

2017, 125–126, on DaJ144PAR1), and the same phrase probably opens the Zabad inscription from 512 CE (Macdonald in Fiema et al. 2015, 410–411).<sup>2</sup> Why, then, is the Qur’anic God not normally implored to “remember” humans? The most likely answer is that it is simply taken for granted that God will “remember” or, more generally, be unfailingly aware of what humans do: it is a prominent Qur’anic posit that God “has knowledge of all things” (*bi-kulli shay’in ‘alim*; e.g., Q 2:29.231.282, 4:32.176), and to ask God to “remember” specific human individuals or collectives could easily have given rise to the misunderstanding that there was a risk that he might otherwise be forgetful of them.

**The meanings of *dhakara*.** The first-form verb *dhakara* can generally signify (i) the mental act of remembering or thinking of something or someone or (ii) its verbal expression, the act of mentioning or speaking of something or someone. Meaning (i) is represented, for example, by Q 7:69, 8:26, or 19:67, in all of which *dhakara* is “to remember, to think of, to bear in mind” (CDKA 103). Three early Meccan passages, already referenced above, employ *dhakara* immediately after an occurrence of the second-form verb → *dhakara* or its verbal noun *tadhkirah* (Q 37:13, 74:54–56, 80:11–12). *Dhakara* here designates the appropriate human response to divine reminders and exhortation, and is therefore best translated as “to heed s.th.,” a meaning otherwise conveyed by the fifth-form verb *tadhakkara* (see under → *dhakkara*). This employment of *dhakara* is clearly related to meaning (i), though human remembrance is not a one-time mental act here but rather a permanent stance of being mindful of God’s reminding exhortation, of living by it. The second basic meaning of *dhakara*—namely, “to mention”—is exemplified by Q 47:20, which condemns the less than enthusiastic way in which some community members react to a divine revelation “in which fighting is mentioned” (*dhukira fihā l-qitālu*).

But *dhakara* can also carry the further meaning of (iii) mentioning or calling upon God in a ritual or devotional setting, that is, of “invoking” him. The earliest Qur’anic occurrences of *dhakara* in this sense take “the name of your<sup>s</sup>/his Lord” (*isma rabbika/rabbihi*) as their accusative object (Q 73:8, 76:25, 87:15; see also under → *ism*). Chronologically later verses have the variant *dhakara sma llāhi* (“to invoke the name of God”) rather than *dhakara sma rabbika/rabbihi* (Q 2:114, 5:4, 6:118.119.121.138, 22:28.34.36.40, and 24:36). In these later passages, the context is often the pronouncement of God’s name over (*‘alā*) food and specifically slaughtered meat (thus in Q 5:4, 6:118.119.121.138, and 22:34.36). It would perhaps not be impossible to regard this invocatory usage of *dhakara* as an evolutionary offshoot of meaning (ii). However, the collocation of *dhakara* with God or God’s name clearly amounts to an Arabisation of Biblical diction (CQ 39), corresponding to the employment of cognate verbs like *zākar* or *hizkîr* in Biblical Hebrew (see TDOT 4:64–82). For example, Deut 8:18 (pointed out in CQ 39) commands the Israelites to “remember the Lord your<sup>s</sup> God,” with *zākar* in the Hebrew text, *dkar* in *Targum Onqelos*, and *etdakkār* in the Peshitta.<sup>3</sup> It will have been under the influence of these cognates, rather than by way of an independent semantic development of meaning (ii), that Arabic *dhakara* came to be used for religious invocation. Beyond such terminological links, it is not impossible

2 Nehmé 2017 also documents various inscriptions in Nabataean script that contain the formula *dkyr* + personal name, “May . . . be remembered” (Nehmé 2017, 136–138, 141; see also Nehmé in Fiema et al. 2015, 417–421). But these do not contain an explicit reference to a deity as the agent of remembrance.

3 See also Isa 26:13, where the Hebrew text has *hizkîr* and the Peshitta again employs *etdakkār*, and cf. Ps 20:8, 119:55.



that the ritual acts standing behind Qur’anic references to invoking God or God’s name might be historically related to the monastic practices subsumed under the concept of *mnēmē theou* or “remembrance of God” (on which see Bitton-Ashkelony 2003, 217–221, and Bitton-Ashkelony and Kofsky 2006, 176–182), whose literal translation into Arabic would be *dhikr allāh*. After all, the early Qur’anic practice of vigils also bears resemblance to monastic prayer (see under → *ṣallā*).

***Dhakara* as a mere act of the mind?** If it is the case that at least some occurrences of *dhakara* clearly refer to acts of the mind, as noted above, how sure can we be that other Qur’anic verses do indeed use *dhakara* in the sense of outwardly invoking God, as assumed in the preceding paragraph, rather than merely in the sense of internal remembrance and mindfulness of God? At least for the phrases *dhakara sma rabbika/rabbihī* and *dhakara sma llāhi*, contextual observations suggest that they are indeed to be understood as outward and to some degree audible speech acts of “calling upon” God. Thus, Q 76:25 commands its addressee to engage in the activity described by *dhakara sma rabbika* “in the morning and in the evening” (*bukratan wa-aṣīlā*). This rules out at least that reference is to a general attitude of being mindful of God. In principle, morning and evening prayer might of course have taken the form of entirely silent meditation; but this would neither be in keeping with the strong affinities between Qur’anic prayer, on the one hand, and Judaeo-Christian forms of prayer, on the other; nor would it sit well with the combination of *dhakara sma llāhi* with the preposition ‘*alā*, which surely refers to the *invocation* of God’s name over food rather than to silent moments of inward remembrance. When Q 2:114 (on which see n. 27 under → *ard*) and 22:40 associate the phrase *dhakara sma llāhi* with places of worship (*masājīd allāh*), this too is likely a reference to the performance of communal rites and prayers that involve concrete speech acts.

More difficult to determine is the question whether the predominantly Medinan formulation *dhakara llāha*, without reference to God’s name, should likewise be understood to denote invocation as opposed to an interior state of God-awareness (see Q 2:198.200.203.239, 3:41.135.191, 4:103.142, 8:2.45, 22:35, 26:227,<sup>4</sup> 33:21.41, 62:10; the only Meccan occurrence is 39:45, but see also 18:24, which has *wa-dhkur rabbaka*). After all, where *dhakara* takes as its object God’s “grace” (*ni’mah*, on which see under → *an’ama*; Q 2:40.47.122.231, 3:103, 5:7.11.20.110, 14:6, 33:9, 35:3, 43:13),<sup>5</sup> *dhakara* is fittingly translated as “to remember,” raising the possibility that *dhakara llāha* too could be a mental disposition or act. But at least for some occurrences of *dhakara llāha* such a reading would clearly not be tenable. For instance, Q 8:2, 22:35, and 39:45 share the temporal clause *idhā dhukira llāhu* (“when God is mentioned”) followed by a description of the response exhibited by the “hearts” (*qulūb*) of those who believe (Q 8:2, 22:35) or who do not believe (Q 39:45).<sup>6</sup> In all three cases, reference must be to a speech act that is audible to others present, although “to mention” seems contextually more fitting than “to invoke” here. Similarly, in the Meccan verse Q 18:24 *dhakara rabbaka* must mean “to mention” or “to invoke,” given that it describes the utterance of a short supplication comprising the expression “my Lord” (*rabbī*; see below); and when Q 2:198

4 Q 26:227 is very likely a Medinan insertion (*GQ* 1:127–128; Neuwirth 2010, 721–722; Neuwirth 2017, 397).

5 Q 43:13 speaks of the grace of “your<sup>p</sup> Lord” (*ni’mat rabbikum*) rather than of *ni’mat allāh*. Q 7:69.74 have *ālā’ allāh*, “God’s wondrous deeds” (see under → *afsada*).

6 For other verses combining *dhakara*, *dhakkara*, or *dhikr* with a reference to human hearts (*qulūb*) besides Q 8:2, 22:35, and 39:45, see 5:13, 13:28, 17:46, 18:28.57, 39:22–23, 45:23, 50:37, and 57:16.



commands the recipients to engage in the activity described as *dhakara llāha* at “the sacred place of ritual” (*al-mash’ar al-ḥarām*), presumably one of the cultic sites that formed part of the Meccan pilgrimage customs, this is likely to refer to public and communal worship, similar to Q 2:114 and 22:40 (see above), rather than to silent individual contemplation. One verse, Q 7:205, combines *dhakara rabbaka* with the prepositional phrase *fī nafsika*, “in your soul” (see under → *nafs*), which appears to signal that the type of invocation at hand cannot be readily overheard: “And invoke your<sup>s</sup> Lord in your soul, humbly and in fear, without raising your voice, in the mornings and in the evenings” (*wa-dhkur rabbaka fī nafsika taḍarru’an wa-khīfatan wa-dūna l-jahri mina l-qawli bi-l-ghuduwwi wa-l-āsāli*). In view of Q 17:110—“Do not raise your voice during prayer nor perform it in a whisper (*wa-lā tajhar bi-ṣalātika wa-lā tukhāfit bihā*); rather, seek a path in between this”—Q 7:205, too, should not be understood to refer to a completely silent act of internal meditation or inward remembrance; rather, the point is to discourage prayer that is ostentatiously loud.<sup>7</sup> Overall, it is preferable to render *dhakara llāha* as “to invoke God” or, in some contexts, “to mention God, to speak of God,” rather than “to remember God.”

***Dhikr* in the sense of invocation of God rather than exhortation by God.** As intimated above, a peculiar ambiguity besets the verbal noun *dhikr* and the genitive construction *dhikr allāh* (“God’s *dhikr*”). In many Meccan passages, *dhikr* means revelatory exhortation provided by God rather than remembrance or invocation of God (→ *dhakkara*). However, in at least some Medinan instances of *dhikr allāh* (Q 5:91, 24:37, 62:9) God is clearly not the subject of *dhikr* but rather its object, since these verses feature *dhikr allāh* in close connection to prayer or *ṣalāh* (see also below and CDKA 104). Like Q 24:37, 63:9 too employs *dhikr allāh* together with the verb *alhā’an*, “to divert from.” This commonality makes it plausible to carry over the understanding of *dhikr allāh* as invocation of God to Q 63:9 as well. By contrast, the context of two other Medinan instances of *dhikr allāh*, in Q 57:16 and 58:19, does not suffice to rule out *dhikr*-as-exhortation. In fact, given that Q 57:16 coordinates *dhikr allāh* with *mā nazala mina l-ḥaqqi*, “what has come down of the truth,” one may prefer to equate *dhikr allāh* with divine revelation here. In any case, for those verses in which *dhikr allāh* is unlikely to refer to divine exhortation, the preceding remarks on *dhakara llāha* make it preferable to translate *dhikr allāh* as “invocation of God” rather than “remembrance of God,” in order to underline that the Qur’an is likely referring to a concrete act of invocation rather than merely to a general inward disposition to be mindful of God. Arabic *dhikr* is here equivalent to Hebrew *zēker* or Syriac *dūkrānā*, which in Biblical passages like Ps 30:5, 97:12 or 145:7 refer to the liturgical affirmation of God’s holiness or abundant goodness.

**Invocation and prayer (*ṣalāh*).** What is the relationship between “invoking” God, as designated by the verb *dhakara* and at least occasionally by the noun *dhikr*, and the Qur’anic community’s regular diurnal prayer ritual, that is, between *dhikr* and *ṣalāh* (→ *ṣallā*)? At Q 20:14, God commands Moses to invoke him in prayer (*aqimi l-ṣalāta li-dhikrī*), which suggests, minimally, that the activities of invoking God and of performing prayer show some overlap. This is also the obvious implication of Q 7:205 when read in

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Saqib Hussain for pointing out the relevance of Q 17:110 to understanding 7:205. For explicit criticisms of ostentatious prayer, see Q 4:142 and 107:6. Ostentatious piety, though not specifically with regard to prayer, is also condemned in Q 2:264, 4:38, and 8:47, which employ *ri’ā’a l-nāsi*, “in order to be seen by people” (see under → *ṣadaqah*).

parallel with 17:110 (see above). Pointing in the same direction, the Medinan passages Q 3:41 and 33:41–42 couple the injunction to engage in plentiful invocation of God (3:41: *udhkur rabbaka kathīran*, 33:41: *udhkurū llāha dhikran kathīrā*) with the injunction to utter prayers of praise (*sabbaḥa*; see under → *ḥamd*) “in the evening and the morning” (3:41: *bi-l-‘ashiyyi wa-l-ibkār*, 33:42: *bukratan wa-aṣīlā*).<sup>8</sup> In view of the similarity to the Meccan verse Q 76:25 (*wa-dhkuri sma rabbika bukratan wa-aṣīlā*; the following verse employs *sabbaḥa*) it makes sense to interpret Q 3:41 and 33:41–42 as employing pleonasm and to construe invoking God and praising him as one and the same thing.<sup>9</sup> The existence of a three-way nexus between *dhikr*, praise, and prayer (*ṣalāh*) is implied by Q 24:36–37, according to which “men who are not diverted by commerce and trade from invoking God, performing prayer, and giving alms” (*lā tullīhim tijāratun wa-lā bay‘un ‘an dhikri llāhi wa-iqāmi l-ṣalāti wa-ītā’i l-zakāti*) are engaged in praising (*sabbaḥa*) God “in the mornings and the evenings” (*bi-l-ghuduwwi wa-l-aṣāl*). That the regular diurnal prayer ritual counts as a form of *dhikr allāh* is supported by two further Medinan verses: Q 5:91 pairs *dhikr allāh* and *al-ṣalāh*, and 62:9 even employs the former as a synonym for the latter: “O believers, when there is a call to prayer on the day of assembly (*idhā nūdiya li-l-ṣalāti min yawmi l-jumu‘ati*), then hasten to the invocation of God (*fa-s‘aw ilā dhikri llāhi*).”

On the other hand, Q 4:103, also Medinan, would seem to imply some kind of distinction between *ṣalāh* and invocation, and to position the latter as something that takes place or may take place after or outside the former: “when you<sup>p</sup> have completed the prayer, invoke God standing and sitting and [lying] on your sides” (*fa-idhā qaḍaytumu l-ṣalāta fa-dhkurū llāha qiyāman wa-qu‘ūdan wa-‘alā junūbikum*).<sup>10</sup> As highlighted by Rivlin, Q 2:200 similarly charges the addressees to invoke God (*fa-dhkurū llāha*) “when you<sup>p</sup> have completed” (*idhā qaḍaytum*) the pilgrimage rituals. Rivlin therefore suggests that *dhikr allāh* designates the concluding part of the Medinan prayer ritual, similar to the Jewish Qaddish (Rivlin 1934, 109).<sup>11</sup> However, this is on balance not the most likely reading. Both Q 4:103, just cited, and also 3:191 enjoin the believers to engage in the invocation of God “standing and sitting and [lying] on your<sup>p</sup>/their sides” (*qiyāman wa-qu‘ūdan wa-‘alā junūbikum/junūbihim*). The point of cataloguing these different postures must be to urge the believers to engage in the “invocation of God” in a wide range of daily situations, that is, constantly. Indeed, the formulation may well be an allusive reflection of Deut 6:6–7, where the divine voice commands the Israelites to “keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart,” and to “talk about them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise”; the entire passage Deut 6:4–9 became part of the Shəma‘ Yisra’el prayer, uttered as part of the daily

8 One might consider construing *bi-l-‘ashiyyi wa-l-ibkār* and *bukratan wa-aṣīlā* to be merisms meaning “all the time” and point to Q 25:5 in support of this. But in view of the Qur’an’s familiarity with the practice of regular diurnal prayer times (→ *ṣalāh*), it seems more likely that this meristic understanding of the phrase is to be limited to Q 25:5.

9 On recurrent diurnal times of praising God, see also Q 20:130, 40:55, 50:39–40, 52:48–49.

10 A Meccan verse that could be read as implying a distinction between *dhikr* and prayer is Q 29:45, which first enjoins the addressee to perform prayer and then proceeds to say that “God’s *dhikr* is greater/greatest.” But it is quite possible that *dhikr allāh* here has the sense of exhortation by God, as it does in other Meccan verses (e.g., Q 39:22–23).

11 On Q 2:200, see also under → *ab*.

Jewish morning and evening services.<sup>12</sup> Also relevant, perhaps, is Paul’s advice to “pray without ceasing” in 1 Thess 5:17.

Hence, Q 3:191 and 4:103 probably aim to encourage a constant weaving of pious prayers or benedictions into one’s daily habits and everyday life, by way of cultivating a permanent awareness of God. If so, the most likely purport of *idhā qaḍaytum l-ṣalāta* in Q 4:103 is merely “outside the *ṣalāh* ritual” rather than literally “immediately after performing the *ṣalāh*.” This understanding is confirmed by Q 62:10: “when prayer has been completed” (*fa-idhā quḍiyati l-ṣalātu*), the verse addresses its recipients, “then disperse in the land and seek God’s favour, and invoke God much (*wa-dhkurū llāha kathīran*), so that you may prosper.” As for Q 2:200’s command to invoke God “when you<sup>p</sup> have completed your rites” (*idhā qaḍaytum manāsikakum*), this too does not cast invocation as the concluding element of the pilgrimage rites but rather urges pilgrims to engage in additional devotions after the end of the pilgrimage proper. The most convincing way of accounting for the material just examined, then, is to say that at least in the Medinan surahs, invoking God or *dhikr allāh* functions as a general category that includes, but is not limited to, the regular diurnal prayers. Invocation of God being the purpose of the *ṣalāh* ritual, the former concept can stand in for the latter (Q 62:9), but invocation may and should also take place outside the *ṣalāh* (Q 62:10). In fact, Q 4:142 provides a good illustration that outward participation in the *ṣalāh* does not invariably count as achieving the ritual’s underlying objective: when the hypocrites rise to pray (*idhā qāmū ilā l-ṣalāti*), they do so “lazily, [merely] in order to be seen by the people, and they invoke God only a little (*wa-lā yadhkurūna llāha illā qalilā*).”

Invoking God outside the *ṣalāh* ritual may have consisted in the enunciation of brief situational blessings, prayers, and formulae at different junctures throughout the day, as familiar from Jewish and also later Islamic practice. It is unfortunately difficult to ascertain whether the Medinan practice of *dhikr* involved a range of fixed phrases and what these might have been. A potential glimpse at the issue is afforded by brief paradigmatic utterances that some Qur’anic verses attribute to believers or other contemporaries. For instance, Q 18:23–24 instructs the hearers to condition statements of intent, such as “I am going to do this tomorrow,” with the proviso “if God wills” (cf. also 18:39); those who forget to add this proviso are told to “invoke your<sup>p</sup> Lord” (*wa-dhkur rabbaka idhā nasīta*) by saying, “Perhaps my Lord will guide me to something that is closer than this to the right course of conduct” (*wa-qul ‘asā an yahdiyani rabbī li-aqraba min hādhā rashadā*). It is admittedly a moot point whether this verse should be regarded as reflecting a pronouncement that had acquired, or subsequently came to acquire, significant circulation

<sup>12</sup> That each of the three components of the Qur’anic phrase has a counterpart in Deut 6:7 is illustrated in the table that follows.

Deuteronomy 6:7	Q 3:191, 4:103 (reordered, numbering indicates original order)
when you <sup>s</sup> sit in your house	(ii) sitting ( <i>qu’ūdan</i> )
when you <sup>s</sup> walk on the road	—
when you <sup>s</sup> lie down	(iii) on your <sup>p</sup> /their sides ( <i>‘alā junūbikum/junūbihim</i> )
when you <sup>s</sup> rise ( <i>bə-qūmekā</i> , Syriac: <i>mā d-qā’em att</i> )	(i) standing ( <i>qiyāman</i> )

among the members of the Medinan community.<sup>13</sup> But even so, the verse illustrates the sort of speech act that one should perhaps associate with the term *dhikr allāh* outside the *ṣalāh* ritual, namely, brief confessional, benedictory, petitionary, or other exclamations, as opposed to more extended forms of prayer.<sup>14</sup>

Another passage that could be adduced to confirm this hypothesis is Q 2:200–202, already referenced earlier. Verse 200 instructs the addressees that after completing the pilgrimage rites they are to “invoke God as you [used to] invoke [or commemorate?] your forefathers, or more so” (*fa-dhkurū llāha ka-dhikrikum ābā’akum aw ashadda dhikran*; see also under → *ab*), upon which the text condemns those who merely say, “Our Lord, give to us in the proximate life!” (*rabbānā ātinā fī l-dunyā*) by threatening them with not having a “share” (→ *khalāq*) in the hereafter. The following verses, vv. 201–202, then promise eschatological reward to those who instead say, “Our Lord, give to us good in the proximate life and good in the hereafter, and protect us from the punishment of the fire (*rabbānā ātinā fī l-dunyā ḥasanatan wa-fī l-ākhirati ḥasanatan wa-qinā ‘adhāba l-nār*).” This criticism of a manner of “invoking God” that is not sufficiently eschatologically minded and its replacement by a formulation that gives due attention to the hereafter (see also Samji 2018, 81) bears out the impression that the Medinan practice of “invoking God” outside the *ṣalāh* involved set utterances and exclamations.

***dhakkara* tr. (bi-) | to remind s.o. (of s.th.)**

***dhakkara* intr. | to utter hortatory reminders**

***tadhakkara, iddakara* intr. | to heed God’s hortatory reminders**

***dhikr, dhikrā, tadhkirah* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation**

Further vocabulary discussed: *andhara* intr./tr./ditr. | to utter a warning; to warn s.o.; to warn s.o. of s.th. *wa’aḏa* tr. | to admonish s.o. *āyah* | sign *qur’ān* | recitation *‘aqala* tr./intr. | to understand (s.th.) *faqiha* tr./intr. | to understand (s.th.) *ta-dabbara* tr. | to reflect on s.th. *ihtadā* intr. | to be guided *wa’ā* tr. | to consider s.th. attentively *la’alla* + subordinate clause | so that *qalb* | heart *nasiya* tr./intr. | to forget (s.th. or s.o.) *maw’iḏah* | admonition *nazzala, anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down *kitāb* | scripture *zabūr* | writ, writing, written record *a’raḏa* intr. *‘an* | to turn away from s.th. *tawallā* intr. *‘an* | to turn away from s.o., to turn one’s back to s.o.

**Overview of *dhakkara* in the Qur’an.** The verb *dhakkara* is derived from the root *dh-k-r*, whose first-form verb, *dhakara*, means “to remember or think of s.th./s.o.” and “to mention or speak of s.th./s.o.” (see CDKA 103–104 and the separate entry on → *dhakara*). From early on, *dhakara* can also denote the invocation of God or God’s name in prayer (e.g., Q 73:8, 76:25, 87:15; see under → *dhakara*). *Dhakkara* in the second verbal stem has the basic meaning “to remind,” in line with the causative significance of many other second-form

13 Note that the utterance fits the prevalent rhyme or verse-final assonance of the surah. This could indicate that the formulation was designed to fit its Qur’anic context, meaning that it may simply form an *ad hoc* illustration of the required attitude of contrition. It is also conceivable that the expression was communally adopted only after the promulgation of Surah 18.

14 See also some of the material collected in Samji 2018, 54–82.

verbs. *Dhakkara* can be employed in the mundane sense of jogging someone's memory (Q 2:282); but in the Qur'an it normally figures in a theologically charged capacity, referring to the reminders of God's benevolence, omnipotence, and eschatological reckoning that Muhammad or the prophets and messengers preceding him are bidden to address to their hearers (e.g., Q 6:70, 14:5, 50:49, 51:55, 52:29, 87:9, 88:21; the latter verse also applies to the Messenger the participle *mudhakkir*). When used in this manner, *dhakkara* is semantically close to verbs like → *andhara*, "to warn," and *wa'aḏa*, "to admonish" (e.g., Q 2:231, 16:90, 26:136; see Schmid 2021).

There are relatively few instances in which *dhakkara* takes an explicit prepositional object specifying the content of the exhortation at hand, forming the construction "to remind s.o. of (*bi-*) s.th." In most of these cases, the prepositional object consists in the plural of → *āyah*, "sign" (see Q 18:57, 25:73, 32:15.22; 10:71 combines *bi-āyāti llāhi* with the verbal noun *tadhkīr*).<sup>1</sup> This usage is to be distinguished from an instrumental use of *bi-*, "to utter hortatory reminders by means of (*bi-*)," in which case the prepositional object is either *al-qur'ān*, "the Qur'anic recitations" (Q 50:45), or a free-floating, antecedent-less pronoun ("it") that also refers to the revelations proclaimed by Muhammad (Q 6:70).

**Tadhakkara, "to heed God's hortatory reminders."** The addressees of God-given reminders and signs are expected to pay heed to them, an attitude described by the fifth-form verb *tadhakkara* (e.g., Q 2:221.269, 3:7, 38:29, 40:13, 45:23, 69:42, 80:4, 87:10, 89:23).<sup>2</sup> The Qur'an would seem to operate a general distinction between the passive *dhukkira* ("to be reminded"), describing a human subject's exposure to God's hortatory reminders, and *tadhakkara*, signifying his or her active internalisation of these reminders.<sup>3</sup> In the refrain punctuating much of Surah 54, the stance of paying heed to God's sign-acts in history or to the divinely revealed "recitation" (*al-qur'ān*) is described with the active participle *muddakir*, derived from the eighth-form verb *iddakara* (e.g., Q 54:15.17.22 etc.).<sup>4</sup> The first-form verb *dhakara* too is sometimes used as an equivalent of *tadhakkara* (Q 37:13, 74:54–56, 80:11–12; see CDKA 103). When *dhakara*, *tadhakkara*, or *iddakara* are employed to describe human receptiveness to religious truths, they show partial synonymity with a range of other verbs such as *'aqala* and *faqiha* ("to understand"; for *'aqala*, see, e.g., Q 2:44.73.75.76.164.170.171.242, 37:138, 43:3, 45:5; for *faqiha*, see, e.g., 4:78, 6:25.65.98, 7:179, 8:65, 9:81.87.127), *tadabbara* ("to reflect on"; Q 4:82, 23:68, 38:29, 47:24), *ihtadā* ("to be guided"; → *hadā*), or *wa'ā*, "to consider attentively" (Q 69:12). Like *tadhakkara*, these verbs often appear in verse-final "so that" (→ *la'alla*) clauses (for *la'allakum tadhakkarūn* or *la'allahum yatadhakkarūn*, see, e.g., Q 2:221, 6:152, 14:25, 28:43.46.51, or 51:49).

**Revelation as recall.** The Qur'anic use of *dhakkara*, *tadhakkara*, and *iddakara* manifests an understanding of revelation whereby the latter's function is not to present humans with original knowledge not otherwise available to them but rather to recall a set of theological and moral insights that are taken to be reasonably evident to any careful observer of the

1 In Q 14:5, the prepositional object is *bi-ayyāmi llāhi*, "God's days."

2 In the prefix conjugation (*muḏāri*), the standard text has both *yatadhakkaru/-ūn* (e.g., Q 2:221, 13:19, 14:25) and *yadhakkaru/-ūn*, with assimilation (e.g., Q 2:269, 3:7, 6:126; see CDKA 104).

3 While *tadhakkara* is usually intransitive in the Qur'an, one verse, Q 79:35, employs *tadhakkara* as a transitive verb in the ordinary meaning "to remember" (thus CDKA 104 and many translations, including Arberry 1955). But even here, *tadhakkara* denotes an act of the mind involving the conscious direction of attention and is therefore not equivalent to the passive of *dhakkara*.

4 Like *tadhakkara*, *iddakara* can also have the non-theological sense "to remember," as shown by Q 12:45.



cosmos and of human history—but which nonetheless tend to be buried and submerged in most human minds or, rather, in most human hearts, given that it is specifically the heart (→ *qalb*) that would appear to be charged with processing and internalising God’s reminders in the Qur’an. Divine exhortation counteracts the human tendency to forget (→ *nasiya*) essential religious truths, a disposition that is explicitly asserted in both Meccan and Medinan verses; and indeed the roots *n-s-y* and *dh-k-r* sometimes figure in clear opposition, as in the collocation *nasū mā dhukkirū bihi / nasū ḥazzan mimmā dhukkirū bihi*, “to forget that (or part of that) of which one has been reminded” (Q 5:13,14, 6:44, and 7:165; for other verses juxtaposing *n-s-y* and *dh-k-r*, see 6:68, 12:42, 18:24,57,63, 23:110, 25:18, and 58:19). An equally important concomitance obtains between the root *dh-k-r* and the concept of God’s signs (→ *āyāt*), which like the notion of divine reminders is present from the early Meccan surahs onwards (see Q 54:2,15,42, 83:13, 90:19). We saw above that *dhakkara* sometimes takes God’s “signs” as its prepositional object, and other verses too combine *dh-k-r* with the word *āyah* in close proximity (e.g., Q 2:221,231, 3:58, 6:126, 7:26, 16:13, 24:1, 33:34, 38:29, 54:15). Thus, God’s signs, God’s exhortation, and human forgetfulness form a triangular conceptual nexus: humans are confronted with abundant natural and historical indications pointing to an omnipotent divine creator and judge; yet their propensity to disregard and neglect these clues necessitates the provision of revelatory reminders. The Medinan surahs expand this early Qur’anic understanding of revelation in important ways, by adding the task of providing humans with specific, quasi-legal norms and stipulations (*HCI* 202–205). Nonetheless, what one might call the mnemonic dimension of the Qur’anic understanding of revelation persists after the hijrah, as demonstrated by the fact that *dhakkara* and *tadhakkara* continue to figure in Medinan surahs.<sup>5</sup>

**Verbal nouns associated with *dhakkara*: *tadhkīr*, *tadhkirah*, *dhikrā*.** The verbal nouns of *dhakkara* are *tadhkīr*, a Qur’anic *hapax legomenon* (see Q 10:71, where Noah mentions his activity of uttering hortatory reminders of God’s signs, *tadhkīri bi-āyāti llāhi*), and *tadhkirah*. The latter is employed as a descriptor of the Qur’anic revelations at a very early stage (e.g., Q 56:73, 69:48, 74:49,54, 80:11) and thus forms one of the first Qur’anic self-designations (Sinai 2006, 110–112), appearing around the same time as the term *qur’ān*, “recitation” (e.g., Q 84:21, 85:21; → *qara’a*). But unlike *qur’ān*, occurrences of *tadhkirah* do not endure much beyond the end of the early Meccan period, the latest appearances of *tadhkirah* being Q 76:29 and 20:3 (in the latter case paired with *qur’ān* in v. 2).<sup>6</sup> In some cases, *tadhkirah* signifies not the homiletic activity of hortatory reminding but rather the cosmic or historical phenomena to which such reminding draws attention: Q 56:73 describes firewood as a *tadhkirah* and 69:12 applies the word to Noah’s ark. In both cases, *tadhkirah* appears in contexts where other passages employ → *āyah*, “sign” (cf. Q 69:12 with 29:15). This too indicates that the Qur’anic notions of God’s hortatory reminders and of his signs are intimately intertwined.

<sup>5</sup> It is noteworthy that almost all later Meccan and Medinan occurrences of *dhakkara* in a religious sense (thus excluding Q 2:282) are in the passive, whereas in the early Meccan period it is the active that is dominant (see Q 51:55, 52:29, 87:9, 88:21, and also the marginally later verse 50:45; the earliest appearance of the passive may be the early Meccan verse Q 37:13). The trend towards a passive use of *dhakkara* begins already in the later Meccan surahs; two rare active occurrences are Q 6:70 and 14:5.

<sup>6</sup> One also observes that *tadhkirah* mostly figures as a predicate (Q 69:48, 73:19, 74:54, 76:29, and 80:11: “this/it is reminding exhortation,” *inna hādhihi / innahā / innahu tadhkiratun/la-tadhkiratun*) or otherwise functions as a qualifier of some other grammatical subject (Q 20:3, 56:73, 69:12); only a single verse has *al-tadhkirah* with the definite article (Q 74:49), as opposed to almost fifty occurrences of *al-qur’ān*, starting as early as Q 84:21.



An apparent synonym of *tadhkirah*, which continues beyond the early Meccan period, is the noun *dhikrā*. It may serve as the verbal noun or *maṣḍar* of the first-form verb *dhakara* and mean something like “announcement” (e.g., Q 79:43; CDKA 104); but in other cases it would seem to stand in for the *maṣḍar* of *dhakkara* in the second stem form, making it an effective synonym of *tadhkirah* (e.g., Q 87:9: *fa-dhakkir in nafa’ati l-dhikrā*, “So utter reminders, if there is any use to reminding”; see similarly Q 51:55 or 80:4).<sup>7</sup> Given that what may be the three earliest Qur’anic instances of the word *dhikrā* occur in verse-final position (Q 80:4, 87:9, 89:23), this use of *dhikrā* in lieu of *tadhkirah* probably exemplifies the widespread Qur’anic phenomenon of cognate substitution in the interest of maintaining rhyme (see generally Stewart 2009, 20–25). Occurrences of *dhikrā* in the sense of “reminding” or “reminding exhortation” continue until the later Meccan period, beyond the time at which *tadhkirah* fell into disuse (e.g., Q 6:68.69.90, 7:2; see also the later insertion 74:31). Like *tadhkirah*, *dhikrā* is sometimes used synonymously with *āyah*, as one may infer from comparing Q 39:21 and 50:37, which have the phrase *inna fī dhālika la-dhikrā li-*, “in that there is reminding exhortation for . . .,” with the much more frequent formula *inna fī dhālika la-āyatan/āyātin li-*, “in that there is a sign / are signs for . . .” (e.g., Q 2:248, 3:49, 10:67, 11:103, 13:3.4, 14:5, 15:75.77, 16:11.12.13.65.67.69.79). Q 11:120 couples *dhikrā* with *maw’iẓah*, “admonition,” confirming the proximity of meaning between the verbs *dhakara* and *wa’aza* noted above.

**Dhikr in the sense of divine exhortation.** A third noun that is in many verses appropriately rendered as “reminding exhortation” is *dhikr*. As would be morphologically expected, *dhikr* can simply function as the *maṣḍar* of *dhakara* and express the act of mentioning or speaking of something or someone, as in Q 12:42 or 18:70.83. In Q 94:4 *dhikr* refers to the Messenger’s standing or reputation, constituted by the way in which he is cumulatively spoken of by others. But in many passages, *dhikr* clearly signifies divine revelation, as in statements about God’s “sending down” (→ *nazzala*) of *dhikr* (Q 15:6.9, 16:44, 21:10.50, 38:8, 65:10; see also 54:25, which has *alqā’alā*, “to cast upon,” instead of *nazzala/anzala*). In many verses, *dhikr* could thus be construed as a synonym of *tadhkirah*, as in Q 36:11: “you<sup>s</sup> only warn those who follow the reminding exhortation (*al-dhikr*).” It is possible that we are here confronted with yet another case of cognate substitution; but if so, the latter is not easily explicable by considerations of rhyme, given that only a small proportion of all occurrences of *dhikr* are verse-final (Q 37:3, 38:1, 65:10, 77:5).<sup>8</sup> This use of *dhikr* in the sense of “reminder” or “reminding exhortation” commences already in early Meccan verses: the Qur’anic revelations are “a reminder for the world-dwellers” (*dhikrun li-l-‘ālamīn*), according to Q 68:52 and 81:27 (for latter occurrences of this phrase, see Q 12:104 and 38:87; 6:90 has *dhikrā li-l-‘ālamīn*).

In some verses, *al-dhikr* with the definite article, literally “the reminder,” comes close to operating as a name for the corpus of revelations conveyed by Muhammad. This applies in particular to statements about the “sending down” (*nazzala, anzala*) of “the reminder” (*al-dhikr*), such as Q 15:6.9 (see also the use of *al-dhikr* in Q 54:25 or 68:51). But on the whole, it is preferable to take *al-dhikr* to refer to the general divine activity of providing

7 A case in which *dhikrā* appears to stand in for the Qur’anicly unattested verbal noun of the fifth stem form, *tadhakkur*, is Q 89:23 (see, e.g., Tab. 24:390). Of course, *tadhakkur* would break the rhyme.

8 See also Q 94:4; but as noted earlier, *dhikr* here means “reputation.”

humans with hortatory reminders rather than to a specific textual corpus resulting from this activity. Thus, the proprietors of earlier revelations are in a Meccan doublet referred to as “the recipients of reminding exhortation” (*ahl al-dhikr*, Q 16:43 = 21:7;<sup>9</sup> → *ahl al-kitāb*), whom the Qur’anic addressees are urged to consult should they “not know” that all previous recipients of divine inspiration were human (rather than immortal beings, such as angels, who do not eat food; see Q 21:8). The two verses are unlikely to be claiming that Jews and Christians are in possession of the exact same corpus of revelations that is now conveyed to Muhammad, which is elsewhere designated as *al-qur’ān*, “the recitation.” Rather, Jews and Christians are being cast as inheritors of hortatory divine proclamations whose essential communicative function is the same as that of the Qur’anic texts (see also Q 21:48.50).<sup>10</sup> In line with this interpretation, in Q 21:10 the divine voice states that “we have sent down to you<sup>p</sup> a scripture containing hortatory reminders for you” (*la-qad anzalnā ilaykum kitāban fihi dhikrukum*). Also relevant in this context is Q 21:105, which introduces a psalmic statement (cf. Ps 37:29) as something that God has “written” or “decreed” (*katabnā*) “in the → *zabūr*” (which is almost certainly the same *zabūr* or “writing” that is associated with David in Q 4:163 and 17:55) “after the *dhikr*.” This may mean that like the scripture revealed to Muhammad’s audience (see Q 21:10), the textual corpus granted to David contained *dhikr*, divine exhortation. Alternatively, Q 21:105 positions the revelatory corpus bestowed upon David as being chronologically later than the Mosaic revelation, which in an earlier verse of the same surah (Q 21:48) is explicitly described as *dhikr* (Goudarzi 2018, 106).

At first blush, this use of *dhikr* in the sense of divine exhortation is largely Meccan and has only residual Medinan reverberations (Q 3:58, 65:10). A clear assessment of the issue is however complicated by the ambiguity surrounding the occurrence of *dhikr* as the first element of a genitive construction whose second term is God (e.g., *dhikr allāh* in Q 29:45 and 39:22.23, *dhikr al-raḥmān* in 43:36, and *dhikr rabbihī* in 72:17) or in combination with a possessive pronoun referring to God (e.g., *dhikrī* in Q 38:8.32 and *dhikrinā* in 18:28 and 53:29). In at least some of the relevant verses, the sense would seem to be equivalent to the more explicit formulations *dhikr min rabbikum/rabbihim* (“a *dhikr* from your<sup>p</sup>/their Lord”; Q 7:63.69 and 21:2) or *dhikr min al-raḥmān* (“a *dhikr* from the Merciful”; Q 26:5): the preposition *min* makes it clear that God’s *dhikr* here is exhortation dispensed by (*min*) God. On the other hand, the verb *dhakara* is from early on also used for human invocation of God (→ *dhakara*). Possibly, then, some occurrences of *dhikr allāh* or the like designate human invocation of God (making *dhikr allāh* an objective genitive) rather than God’s exhortation of humans (making it a subjective genitive; see CDKA 104).<sup>11</sup> Indeed, a number of Medinan instances of *dhikr allāh* are contextually likely to mean invocation of God (Q 5:91, 24:37, 62:9), by way of a nominalisation of the verbal phrase *dhakara llāha* (e.g., Q 33:41). This buttresses the initial observation made above

9 The only difference between the two verses is the use of *min qablaka* in Q 16:43 as opposed to *qablaka* in 21:7. The opening of the two verses also recurs in Q 12:109.

10 Note that immediately following the reference to the *ahl al-dhikr* in Q 16:43, v. 44 affirms that “we have sent down reminding exhortation (*al-dhikr*) to you<sup>s</sup> so that you might clarify to the people what was sent down to them.”

11 *Dhikr* + possessive suffix can also denote the recipient to whom an act of *dhikr* is addressed (see Q 12:42, 21:10, 23:71).

that *dhikr*-as-exhortation is mainly Meccan, even though it may persist in some Medinan verses like Q 57:16 (→ *dhakara*).

But even if *dhikr*-as-exhortation is mainly Meccan, this does not necessarily entail that Meccan occurrences of *dhikr allāh* must therefore invariably mean divine exhortation. To be sure, for Q 13:28 and 39:22–23 there is a good argument in favour of a subjective reading of *dhikr allāh*, that is to say, as meaning “God’s reminding exhortation,” and the same holds for *dhikrī* in Q 38:8 and for *dhikr al-raḥmān* in Q 43:36.<sup>12</sup> Yet in other Meccan cases, such as Q 38:32 (*dhikr rabbī*), both “reminding exhortation by my Lord” and “invocation of my Lord” seem feasible (see also Q 29:45). Moreover, verses like Q 13:28 and 39:22–23, which describe the responses of believers and unbelievers to *dhikr allāh* (see also Q 57:16), could be parallelised with similar verses that would seem to employ the temporal clause *idhā dhukira llāhu* instead of *dhikr allāh* (Q 8:2, 22:35, 39:45). *Idhā dhukira llāhu* could mean “when God is invoked” but also “when God is mentioned” (cf. the use of *dhukira* in Q 47:20). This gives rise to yet another possibility of construing *dhikr allāh*, namely, as mentioning God. But at least the Meccan collocation “to turn away from God’s *dhikr*” (*a’raḍa/tawallā ‘an dhikr* + suffix / *‘an dhikr rabbihi* / *‘an dhikri rabbihim* . . . ; Q 20:124, 21:42, 53:29, 72:17; see also 23:71 and 26:5) should probably be understood to mean disregard of God’s revelatory reminders rather than as insufficient invocation of God in prayer or insufficient mentioning of him: *a’raḍa ‘an* also combines with the noun *tadhkirah* (Q 74:49) and with God’s signs or *āyāt* (Q 18:57, 32:22), and one occurrence of *a’raḍa ‘an* + *dh-k-r* has the unequivocal *dhikr min al-raḥmān*, “a *dhikr* from the Merciful” (Q 26:5). Although the matter could plainly do with a more detailed analysis, it may be provisionally suggested that the progression from Meccan to Medinan texts coincides with a tendency (though not one devoid of exceptions) to shift from the hortatory sense of *dhikr allāh* and similar phrases to an invocatory one.

Despite the necessity of attempting to pinpoint as far as possible whether a given instance of *dhikr* is more appropriately translated as “reminding exhortation” provided by God or as “invocation” of God, it is important to appreciate that the word *dhikr* is not simply a homonym expressing different meanings that are entirely unrelated. At least when Qur’anic verses containing the noun *dhikr* and other derivatives of *dh-k-r* are heard and read synchronically, as they probably began to be already during the lifetime of Muhammad, the text evokes the sense that there is a cycle of *dhikr* connecting God and humankind: God “sends down” *dhikr*-as-exhortation to humans, and humans who let themselves be reminded and exhorted by God will practice *dhikr*-as-invocation—and also, presumably, *dhikr*-as-mentioning, in the sense that they will speak and preach of God. The fact that, shorn of context, *dhikr allāh* can have any one of these three senses is therefore not without potential significance, and it should not be ruled out that there might be Qur’anic statements for which it is ultimately more fitting to let the ambiguity stand than to seek to resolve it.

12 Q 39:23 speaks of divine revelation before describing the appropriate response of human “hearts” (*qulūb*) to *dhikr allāh*; this creates a contextual likelihood that the term *dhikr allāh* in vv. 22 and 23 is to be understood as *dhikr* provided by God. Q 13:28 too focuses on the response of human hearts to God’s *dhikr*, and due to its thematic resemblance to 39:22–23 is best understood along the same lines. As regards Q 38:8, “my *dhikr*” is preceded by the statement *unzila ‘alayhi l-dhikru* (“the *dhikr* was sent down upon him”), making it clear that *dhikr* here refers to divine revelation rather than human invocation.

## *dhālika, tilka* | that

Further vocabulary discussed: *kitāb* | scripture *hādhā, hādhihī* | this *qurʾān* | recitation *balāgh* | message; transmission, delivery (of a message) *ḥadīth* | discourse *dhikr, tadhkirah* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation *āyah* | sign; sign-pronouncement *ḥudūd allāh* pl. | God’s boundaries *nabaʾ* | tiding *al-ghayb* | the hidden *ʾibrah* | lesson *awḥā* tr. *ilā* | to convey s.th. to s.o. *ḥikmah* | wisdom

The present entry does not aim at a comprehensive linguistic analysis of the Qurʾanic use of demonstrative pronouns, which has been undertaken by Daniel Birnstiel (Birnstiel 2010, 124–229). Rather, the following discussion is limited to the use of demonstratives in surah openings, such as Q 2:2. Its main conclusions accord with and build on Birnstiel’s insight that *dhālika/tilka* deixis usually serves an anaphoric function in the Qurʾan: *dhālika* “refers in most cases to the propositional content of the preceding discourse or to an actant or object characterized therein” (Birnstiel 2010, 191).

**The use of *dhālika/tilka* deixis at the beginning of Q 2 and other surahs.** Surah 2 opens with three isolated Arabic letters, “Alif, Lām, Mīm” (→ ’-*l-m*; v. 1), and then continues, in v. 2: “That is the scripture (*dhālika l-kitābu*) about which there is no doubt, guidance for the God-fearing.”<sup>1</sup> Early Muslim exegetical authorities are credited with the view that *dhālika l-kitābu* is equivalent with *hādhā l-kitābu*, “This is the scripture” or “this scripture” (Ṭab. 1:228–229). This is in fact a rather natural construal of Q 2:2 that interprets it as a sort of superscript for the remainder of the Qurʾan. However, according to traditional presentations of Arabic grammar *dhālika* (masculine) and *tilka* (feminine), conventionally characterised as “far” or “distal” demonstratives, refer to something that is located at a spatial or temporal distance from the speaker, in contrast with *hādhā* and *hādhihī*, “this.” The wording *dhālika l-kitābu* therefore occasioned debate (e.g., Ṭab. 1:229–230; Zam. 1:141): if the meaning of Q 2:2 is that *this*—to wit, the following—is “the scripture,” why does the verse not run *hādhā l-kitābu* rather than *dhālika l-kitābu*? To be sure, there is no *a priori* reason to suppose that the standard distinction between near and far demonstratives is necessarily applicable to Qurʾanic Arabic (Birnstiel 2010, 124–127). Still, many self-referential Qurʾanic statements employ *hādhā*, including sixteen occurrences of “this *qurʾān*” (*hādhā l-qurʾān*, e.g., Q 6:19, 10:37, 12:3, 17:9.41.88.89, 18:54, 25:30, 27:76, 59:21; → *qaraʾa*), three instances of “this (*hādhā*) is a scripture that . . .” (Q 6:92.155 and 46:12),<sup>2</sup> over a dozen cases where the Qurʾan’s opponents are quoted as saying, “This is nothing but . . .” (*in hādhā illā . . .*; e.g., Q 5:110, 6:25, 25:4, 74:24–25), and a significant number of further cases in which “this” (*hādhā, hādhihī*) is combined with terms like

1 The phrase *dhālika l-kitābu* can be parsed as a complete nominal sentence (“That is the scripture”) or as forming only a grammatical subject whose predicate consists in the ensuing phrase *lā rayba fīhi* (Zam. 1:143). This latter construal would yield the translation “That scripture, there is no doubt in/about it.” However, in view of the parallel *tilka āyātu l-kitābi* (Q 10:1, 12:1, 13:1, 15:1, 26:2, 28:2, and 31:2), “Those are the signs of the scripture,” the first alternative is clearly preferable (KK 13). *Lā rayba fīhi* is then best viewed as forming an asyndetic relative clause dependent on *al-kitāb* (“in/about which there is no doubt”; see also under → *irtāba*). Given the definiteness of the antecedent, one might of course have expected a relative pronoun, but there are further instances in the Qurʾan where *lā rayba fīhi* has a definite antecedent yet lacks a preceding pronoun. On asyndetic clauses with definite antecedents more generally, see Jones 2005, 146, and n. 34 under → *ashraka*.

2 Q 45:29, which is superficially similar, refers to the divine record book displayed at the last judgement.

*balāgh* (denoting both God’s “message” and its “transmission” or “delivery” by divinely chosen emissaries such as Muhammad; see CDKA 44), *ḥadīth* (“discourse”), or *dhikr/tadhkirah* (“hortatory reminder”; → *dhakkara*; see Q 14:52, 18:6, 21:50.106, 38:49, 45:11, 53:59, 56:81.95, 68:44, 73:19, 76:29). It remains apt, therefore, to wonder why Q 2:2—and also the parallel formulation *tilka āyātu l-kitābi* in Q 10:1, 12:1 etc.—do not conform to this usage. What, if anything, is conveyed by *dhālika/tilka* here that would not have been conveyed by *hādihā/hādihī*?

**Surah-initial *dhālika/tilka* deixis as a case of anaphora.** Both al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamakhsharī suggest that Q 2:2 employs *dhālika* in order to refer back to something preceding, such as the letter sequence immediately before (Ṭab. 1:229–230; Zam. 1:141). Loth assumes a similar backwards-looking construal for the phrase *tilka āyātu l-kitābi* (Loth 1881, 603–604). Schwally takes Loth to imply that *āyāt* must therefore mean “letters” in Q 2:2 and similar surah introductions, and he objects that the word *āyah* does not have this sense anywhere else in the Qur’an (GQ 2:74–75). Yet while this is a valid objection as far as the Qur’anic meaning of *āyah* goes, there are nonetheless good grounds for supposing that the demonstratives in both *dhālika l-kitābu* and *tilka āyātu l-kitābi* do indeed look backwards rather than forwards.

For one, neither formulation ever occurs without a preceding letter sequence, unlike other superscripts such as “A sending-down of the scripture” (*tanzīlu l-kitābi*; → *nazzala*), which is found in Q 39:1 without a foregoing letter string, or “A surah that we have sent down and decreed, and in which we have sent down clear signs” (*sūratun anzalnāhā wa-faraḍnāhā wa-anzalnā fihā āyātīn bayyinātīn*) at the beginning of Surah 24. This raises the possibility that the referent of the demonstratives *dhālika* and *tilka* is indeed the respective antecedent letter sequence. Secondly, and more importantly, an overview of other Qur’anic passages establishes that *dhālika* and *tilka* are regularly employed anaphorically, i.e., to refer back to a preceding statement or passage or to something mentioned therein (see in more detail Birnstiel 2010, 190–224). For instance, when Q 45:6 says that “those are the signs of God that we recite to you<sup>s</sup> in truth” (*tilka āyātu llāhi natlūhā ‘alayka bi-l-ḥaqqi*), this comments on the natural signs rehearsed in vv. 4–5 (which are preceded by the announcement that “in the heavens and on earth there are signs for the believers” in v. 3). A similarly backward-looking usage of the formula *tilka āyātu llāhi natlūhā ‘alayka bi-l-ḥaqqi* may be perceived in Q 2:252 and 3:108, even if Schwally doubtfully takes the phrase to refer to what follows here (GQ 2:75, n. 1).<sup>3</sup> Six verses use the formula *tilka ḥudūdu llāhi*, “those are God’s boundaries,” with respect to a preceding legal prescription (Q 2:187.229.230, 4:13, 58:4, and 65:1).<sup>4</sup> A functionally similar employment of *tilka* in conjunction with *anbā’ al-ghayb*, “tidings of the hidden,” is found in Q 11:49 (“Those belong to the tidings of the hidden that we reveal to you”), pointing to the foregoing narrative about Noah (vv. 25–48; see also under → *asāṭīr al-awwālīn*); and Q 29:43 says that “those are the similitudes that we relate for humans,” with reference to the preceding comparison of taking patrons besides God with the frailty

3 Schwally may be considering Q 3:108 to preface v. 109: “And to God belongs what is in the heavens and the earth . . .” (*wa-li-llāhi mā fi l-samāwāti wa-mā fi l-arḍi . . .*). However, it is more likely that vv. 108–109 close out and retrospectively categorise vv. 100–107 (note especially the occurrence of *talā*, “to recite,” + *āyāt* in v. 101 as in v. 108). As regards Q 2:252, the verse clearly functions as a closer of the preceding account of the Israelite’s defeat of “Goliath and his hosts.”

4 On *ḥudūd*, see CDKA 67–68.



of spider-webs (v. 41).<sup>5</sup> *Dhālīka* can play the same backwards-looking role, as in Q 3:13 (*inna fī dhālīka la-ibratan li-ulī l-abṣār*, “In that [namely, the previous reminder of divine assistance in battle] is a lesson for those possessed sight”), 3:44 (*dhālīka min anḅā’i l-ghaybi nūhīhi ilayka*, “That [namely, the preceding account of the annunciation of Jesus to Mary] belongs to the tidings of the hidden that we reveal to you”), 3:49 (*inna fī dhālīka la-āyatan lakum*, “In that [namely, the preceding list of miracles by Jesus] is a sign for you”), or 17:39 (*dhālīka mimmā awḥā ilayka rabbuka mina l-ḥikmati*, “That [namely, the preceding rendering of the Decalogue] belongs to the wisdom that your<sup>s</sup> Lord has conveyed to you”; see also under → *ḥikmah*). In Q 20:99, retrospective discourse-deictic *dhālīka* occurs as part of the compound expression *ka-dhālīka*, “thus” (*ka-dhālīka naquṣṣu ‘alayka min anḅā’i mā qad sabaqa*, “Thus do we recount to you<sup>s</sup> some of the tidings of the past”; for a similar employment of *ka-dhālīka*, see Q 2:242).

In view of the Qur’an’s wider usage of demonstratives, therefore, the statement “That is the scripture in/about which there is no doubt” from Q 2:2 is defensibly read as a discourse-deictic reference to the preceding sequence of isolated Arabic letters <sup>2</sup>-*l-m*. Such enigmatic letter sequences may in turn be understood to represent the Qur’anic proclamations’ celestial archetype, as argued in more detail elsewhere (→ <sup>2</sup>-*l-m*). What Q 2:2 says, consequently, is that the preceding letter sequence (*dhālīka*) stands for the transcendent scripture (*al-kitāb*) that is not empirically accessible to humans and therefore admits, at most, of a kind of surrogate display by means of isolated letter symbols. An analogous construal can be extended to the phrase *tilka āyātu l-kitābi* (“Those are the signs of the scripture”) in Q 10:1, 12:1 etc. These passages additionally involve the term → *āyah*, whose basic meaning is a “sign” of God’s existence and power. Verses like Q 2:106 or 3:113 establish that the word *āyah* can also designate a passage of divinely revealed text, presumably because such revelations accord a fundamental importance to manifestations of God in nature and history. When used in this textual sense, the plural *āyāt* is best rendered as “sign-pronouncements.” If we place the surah-opening phrase *tilka āyātu l-kitābi* against this background, it refers back to the preceding letter sequence and identifies it as representing the “sign-pronouncements” contained in the celestial scriptural archetype. The purport of a statement like *tilka āyātu l-kitābi l-mubīn*, “Those are the sign-pronouncements of the clear scripture,” would accordingly be roughly equivalent to “That is the clear scripture with its sign-pronouncements.” Finally, there is the complex expression *tilka āyātu l-kitābi wa-qur’ānīn mubīn*, “Those are the sign-pronouncements of the scripture and of a clear recitation” in Q 15:1 and, in a different permutation, in 27:1 (*tilka āyātu l-qur’āni wa-kitābin mubīn*). Q 15:1 and 27:1 express the notion that the Qur’anic recitations and their celestial source are in some sense identical (Sinai 2006, 124), just as we might think of a novel and its film or theatre adaptation as instantiations of one and the same artistic work. Accordingly, Q 15:1 and 27:1 may be paraphrased along the lines of “That is the scripture with its sign-pronouncements, made accessible through a corpus of clear recitations.”

**An alternative interpretation: *dhālīka/tilka* deixis in surah superscripts as referring to what follows.** If one were to balk at the preceding analysis of surah introductions like Q 2:2, 10:1, or 15:1, the obvious alternative would be to hold that *dhālīka* and *tilka* in

5 For another such case of *tilka*, see Q 6:83: *wa-tilka ḥujjatunā ātaynāhā ibrahīma ‘alā qawmihi*, “That is our proof; we gave it to Abraham against his people.”



such superscripts can only intelligibly refer to the following rather than to the preceding (thus Sinai 2006, 129–130, n. 102). The function of *dhālīka/tilka* would, accordingly, be cataphoric rather than anaphoric here (Birnstiel 2010, 209), and verses like Q 2:2 would act as a superscript or heading for the following body of text. A proponent of this view would need to maintain that the fact that many self-referential occurrences of *dhālīka* and *tilka* inside surahs, such as Q 45:6 (*tilka āyātu llāhi natlūhā ‘alayka bi-l-ḥaqqi*, “Those are the signs of God that we recite to you<sup>s</sup> in truth”), look back to the immediately preceding verse or verses does not constitute the essential semantic property of *dhālīka/tilka* in the Qur’an. Rather, the core semantic property shared by *dhālīka* and *tilka* as used in self-referential surah openings like Q 2:2 and in surah-internal self-referential statements like 45:6 would be merely that both point to an adjoining portion of text, whether preceding or ensuing.

***dhallala, ja’ala dhalūlan* tr. li- | to subject s.th. to s.o., to make s.th. subservient to s.o.**

→ *ard*

***adhaba* tr. | to remove s.o.**

→ *istakhlafa*

***dhāqa* tr. | to taste s.th.**

***adhāqa* ditr. | to cause s.o. to taste s.th., to let s.o. taste s.th.**

**Further vocabulary discussed: ‘*adhāb* | torment; punishment, chastisement *khizy* | humiliation *wabāl amrihi* | the bad consequences of one’s conduct**

**Overview.** The verb *dhāqa* + acc., “to taste s.th.,” is used literally in the story of Adam and Eve (Q 7:22), but otherwise has the metaphorical significance of having direct experience of something. The most frequent object of experiential tasting is God’s “torment” or “punishment,” ‘*adhāb* (→ ‘*adhdhaba*; e.g., Q 3:106.181, 4:56, 6:30, 22:9.22.25, 34:12.42, 38:8, 41:16.27.50, 46:34). This usually means God’s punishment in the hereafter, although Q 39:26 and 41:16 illustrate that the things God can “cause s.o. to taste” (*adhāqa*) also include “humiliation (*al-khizy*; → ‘*adhdhaba*) in the proximate life” (see also Q 16:112, 17:75, 32:21, referenced in Durie 2018, 51–52).<sup>1</sup> This widespread Qur’anic metaphor of tasting divine punishment is already found in early Meccan texts (Q 37:31.38, 54:37.39.48). As Durie has noted (Durie 2018, 48), the rhetorical stress would seem to be on being subjected to a direct experience of something that an individual has previously denied, as evident from Q 32:20 and 34:42 (“Taste the punishment of fire that you used to dismiss as a lie!,” *dhūqū ‘adhāba l-nāri lladhī/llatī kuntum bihi/bihā tukadhdhibūn*) or from Q 3:106, 6:30, 8:35 and 46:34 (“Taste the punishment for having repudiated, *bi-mā kuntum*

<sup>1</sup> Employment of the fourth-form verb *adhāqa* is peculiar to later Meccan surahs (e.g., Q 6:65, 11:9.10, 16:112, 17:75, 25:19, 32:21; see Durie 2018, 51–52, 67–68, and 97). It also occurs in Surah 22 (vv. 9.25), which may conflate Meccan and Medinan sections (HCI 127–130).

*takfurūn!*)<sup>2</sup> Other things tasted are “the bad consequences of one’s conduct,” *wabāl am-rihi*, an expression that figures in four Medinan passages (Q 5:95, 59:15, 64:5, 65:9), but occasionally also positive objects, such as God’s mercy (Q 10:21, 11:9, 30:33.36.46, 41:50, 42:48) and comfort or bliss that he has granted (Q 11:10; see Durie 2018, 52).

**Precursors.** The Qur’anic employment of the metaphor of tasting is distinctive in its pervasiveness though not without precedent. When a number of Qur’anic verses predict that “everyone will taste death” (Q 3:185, 21:35, 29:57; see also 44:56), this makes use of a New Testamental idiom (Rudolph 1922, 14; *CQ* 43; *BEQ* 451; El-Badawi 2014, 168–170). For instance, according to John 8:52 the Jews say to Jesus: “Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste (*mē geusētai*, Peshitta: *lā ne’am*) death.’” The same formulation is also found in Matt 16:28, Mark 9:1, Luke 9:27, and Heb 2:9. Nonetheless, the Biblical ring of Qur’anic *dhāqa* should probably not be exaggerated and the metaphor may well have been standard in pre-Qur’anic Arabic. The verb *dwq* in the sense of “to experience” seems to occur in a Safaitic inscription reporting an outbreak of smallpox,<sup>3</sup> and a verse in the Mu‘allaqah of Zuhayr speaks of “tasting” war, with *dhāqa* employed in combination—i.e., as a pleonastic synonym of—*‘alima* (*DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 16:28).<sup>4</sup> Specifically the notion of tasting death (*dhāqa l-mawta*) occurs in a poem found in the *dīwān* of al-Nābighah (*DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 27:28, pointed out in *CQ* 43 and *BEQ* 451).<sup>5</sup> A poetic fragment attributed to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt describes the serpent as having “tasted” (*dhāqat*) the seriousness of God’s punishment, presumably for having seduced Adam (Schulthess 1911a, no. 28:7 = al-Saṭlī 1974, no. 69:7). Given that the preceding verse refers to God’s chastisement of the snake by employing the verb *‘adhdhaba*, the Umayyah fragment recalls the frequent Qur’anic collocation of *dhāqa* and *‘adhāb* that was noted above. Nonetheless, the Umayyah passage has generally been felt to have a good claim to authenticity (Seidensticker 2011b, 49–50), so the parallel is significant.

<sup>2</sup> See also Q 8:14, 10:70, 41:27.50, 64:5.

<sup>3</sup> See SIJ 730 at [krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA\\_0017439.html](http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0017439.html) (accessed 10 December 2021). I am grateful to Ahmad Al-Jallad for pointing me to this inscription.

<sup>4</sup> Although the two immediately preceding verses of the poem are probably a post-Qur’anic accretion (Sinai 2019b, 20–22), the tasting verse appears unsuspecting.

<sup>5</sup> The poem is however not included in al-Aṣma‘ī’s version of the *dīwān*. See *DSAAP* 111 (English pagination) and Ibrāhīm [1977], no. 24:28.

# r

**ra'ā tr. | to see s.th.**

→ *al-ghayb*

**arā ditr. | to show s.o. s.th.**

→ *āyah*

**ri'ā'a l-nās | in order to be seen by people**

→ *ṣadaqah*

**rabb | lord**

Further vocabulary discussed: *allāh* | God *al-rahmān* | the Merciful *'abada* tr. | to serve s.o. or s.th., to worship s.o. or s.th. *'abd* | slave; servant *dhurriyyah* | offspring *ghafala* intr. *'an* | to be heedless of s.th. *bayt* | house *rabb al-'ālamīn* | Lord of the world-dwellers

God as the “Lord” (*rabb*) and humans as his “servants” (singular: *'abd*). Expressions involving the noun *rabb*, “lord,” are one of the Qur’an’s three primary ways of designating the deity, the other two being the divine names → *allāh* (“God”) and → *al-rahmān* (“the Merciful”). What one might call a secular use of *rabb* for a human master is rare in the Qur’an though not entirely absent (Q 12:41.42.50, probably also 12:23). To call God a *rabb* is to mark him out as the only being meriting human service and worship (verb: *'abada*; see Q 2:21, 3:51, 5:72.117, 6:102, 10:3, 15:99, 17:23, 19:36.65, 21:92, 22:77, 27:91, 43:64, 106:3).<sup>1</sup> The divine title *rabb* is thus the complement of *'abd*. In an interhuman context, the latter word can mean “slave” (Q 2:178.221, 16:75, 24:32),<sup>2</sup> but when describing the relationship between humans and God it is best rendered “servant”: this translational choice is both in line with established English usage, since Hebrew *'ebed hā-ēlōhīm* / *'ebed YHWH* and Greek *doulos theou* are commonly rendered “servant of God / the Lord” rather than “slave of God,” and reveals what an *'abd* of God is expected to do, namely: to “serve” (*'abada*)

1 On *'abada*, “to serve, to worship,” see *JPND* 213–214 and *CQ* 20. Ahrens considers the verb and its corresponding noun *'ibādah* to be loaned from Hebrew *'ābad* and *'ābōdā* (on which see *TDOT* 10:376–405 and *NIDOTTE* 3:304–309), but this seems uncertain to me.

2 On slavery in the Qur’an, see briefly under → *darajah*.

God.<sup>3</sup> Since God is the only true Lord, one must not, for instance, set up other human beings or angels as “lords” (*arbāb*) in his stead (Q 3:64.80 and 9:31, on which latter verse see under → *al-naṣārā*) or, conversely, request of other humans, “Be servants to me besides God” (Q 3:79; cf. Ambros 2001, 11–12).

It is useful to observe that the word *‘abd*, when applied to the relationship between humans and God, figures in a dual capacity in the Qur’an, a universal one and a more exclusive one (Mir 1987, 3; see also under → *al-rahmān*; cf. Chittick 1989, 310–312). In one sense all humans are “servants” of God, in so far as they have been created by him, receive manifold divine blessings from him, are unconditionally subject to God’s power, and therefore ought to serve him (e.g., Q 17:5, 19:93, 34:13, 39:46, 41:46, 42:27).<sup>4</sup> Servants of God in the proper sense, however, are only those humans who actually do serve God, who do so exclusively, and who will accordingly receive eschatological reward (e.g., Q 17:65, 43:68, 76:6, 89:29).

**God’s lordship in Q 7:172–173.** As just pointed out, all humans are God’s servants because they ought to serve him; and all humans are considered capable of realising this basic truth. This becomes particularly clear in Q 7:172–173, which famously posit that God extracted the “offspring” (*dhurriyah*) of the “children of Adam” from their “backs” or loins (*wa-idh akhadha rabbuka min banī ādama min zuhūrihim dhurriyyatahum*),<sup>5</sup> apparently before the descendants in question were conceived, and to have “made them testify” (*ashhadahum*) that he is their Lord (*rabb*). The rationale given for this divine act is to preclude humans, on the day of the resurrection, from defending their failure to live up to the requirements of Qur’anic monotheism by claiming to be the offspring (*dhurriyyah*) of polytheistic ancestors and therefore to have been “heedless” of their divine Lord (*an taqūlū yawma l-qiyāmati innā kunnā ‘an hādihā ghāfilīn*).<sup>6</sup> The upshot is that all humans are deemed to have undertaken a prenatal personal commitment to God’s lordship, quite irrespective of the rituals and beliefs to which their biographical descent has factually and contingently exposed them.<sup>7</sup> Read in context, the universal reach of the covenantal scene from Q 7:172–173 contrasts with the preceding verse, 7:171, describing how God threatened the Israelites by shaking Mount Sinai above their heads and urged them to “hold

3 Parenthetically, while the Qur’an insists on exclusive worship of the Lord, a religious use of *‘abd* is not of course confined to a monotheistic context; thus, the author of a Safaitic inscription identifies himself as a servant (*‘bd*) of Allāt (Mu 550 in Al-Jallad 2015a, 275).

4 As Mir remarks, in Q 17:5 the word *‘abd* is “used as a value-free term”: God’s “servants”—an allusive reference to the Babylonians conquering Jerusalem—are called thus “not because they were particularly righteous, but simply because they served as an instrument for executing a certain divine scheme” (Mir 1987, 3).

5 Note the recurrence of references to the “children of Adam” in Q 7:26.27.31.35.172. Surah 7 is in fact the only surah containing a series of *banū ādam* references.

6 On the Islamic reception history of this passage, see Gramlich 1983; for a historical-critical analysis, see Hartwig 2008. Hartwig makes the compelling proposal that the entire verse group Q 7:171–174 might be a Medinan insertion (Hartwig 2008, 192–193). Although he does not elaborate on his rationale, it should be noted that the parallels to the raising of the mountain over the Israelites in Q 7:171 (namely, Q 2:63.93 and 4:154) are also Medinan.

7 The scene described in Q 7:172–173 is often described as a “primordial” or “pretemporal” (thus SQ 467) covenant between God and humans. This reflects a later *ḥadīth* that transfers the scene into a “state of pre-existence” in which God extracts all of future humanity from the loins of Adam immediately after the latter’s creation (Gramlich 1983, 205–207). Yet as some Islamic exegetes duly point out, the wording of Q 7:172 speaks of the loins of the “children of Adam” rather than of Adam (Gramlich 1983, 209). The scene accordingly seems to presuppose not only the creation of Adam but also the existence of a collective entity that can be referred to as the “children of Adam.” If so, the scene will have to be set, at the earliest, in the generation of Adam’s “two sons” (Q 5:27).

fast to what we have given you<sup>P</sup>” (see Hartwig 2008 and Neuwirth 2010, 667–669). The point contextually made in Q 7:172–173, therefore, is that recognition of God’s exclusive lordship is a normative demand that applies not only to the recipients and inheritors of the Mosaic revelation (in contemporary terms, to Jews and Christians) but legitimately encompasses all of humankind.<sup>8</sup>

**Diachronic observations.** While the divine name *al-rahmān* only emerges at a secondary stage of the Meccan Qur’an, *rabb* is frequent already in the early Meccan surahs. It is very often combined with a possessive suffix, as in “your<sup>S</sup> Lord” (*rabbuka*; Q 84:6, 85:12, 87:1, 89:6.13.14, 93:3.5.11, 94:8, 96:1.3.8, 99:5, 108:2; for other early Meccan instances of *rabb* + possessive suffix, see, e.g., Q 83:15, 84:2.5.15, 87:15, 89:15, 91:14, 92:20, 100:6.11). God’s role as the patron deity of the Meccan sanctuary is reflected in the title “Lord of this house,” *rabb hādhā l-bayt* (Q 106:3; → *bayt*). It is worth underlining that the prominence of *rabb* + suffix in the early Meccan corpus does not mean that the divine name *allāh* is unattested in this layer of the Islamic scripture (e.g., Q 82:19, 84:23, 85:20, 87:7, 88:24, 91:13, 96:14, 104:6). Some early Meccan surahs in fact alternate between *rabb* + possessive suffix and *allāh*.<sup>9</sup> They should consequently be taken to refer to the same divine being. Overall, the early Meccan data warrant the assumption that the early Qur’an’s dual nomenclature for God was well established in the Qur’anic milieu prior to the beginning of Muhammad’s activity, which is further borne out by poetic evidence (see below). *Rabb* + suffix remains common in the Medinan period (e.g., Q 2:5.21.26.30.37.46.49.61.62.68 etc., 3:7.8.9.15.16.35 etc.).

**God as *rabb* in pre-Qur’anic Arabic.** It has been suggested that the Arabic word *rabb* was borrowed from Aramaic (*FVQ* 136–137), but as in many similar cases such a transfer would need to have occurred before the Qur’an. Early Arabic poetry indicates that the term *rabb* had become part and parcel of conventional religious language. For instance, a poem about the creation of the world by ‘Adī ibn Zayd of al-Ḥīrah refers alternatively to “the god of creation” (*ilāh al-khalq*; al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 103:2), Adam’s “Lord” (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 103:10), and *allāh* (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 103:14; see also Dmitriev 2010, 353, 360, 366, 373); and a synonymous employment of *rabb* + suffix and *allāh* is also found in a poem from the corpus of Zuhayr (*DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 20:11–12; see Sinai 2019b, 34–35). Another verse attributed to ‘Adī ibn Zayd famously swears by “the Lord of Mecca and of the cross” (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 3:10; see Sinai 2019b, 52). ‘Antarah invokes “the Lord of the house” (*rabb al-bayt*; *DSAAP*, ‘Antarah, no. 21:10; see Sinai 2019b, 53), resembling Q 106:3, where God is referred to as “the Lord of this house” (*rabb hādhā l-bayt*).<sup>10</sup> These poetic attestations receive additional credibility from a Palaeo-Arabic inscription north of al-Ṭā’if that has recently been reinterpreted as containing the invocation “May our Lord bless you” (*brk-[k]m rb-n*; Al-Jallad and Sidky 2021) and from another Palaeo-Arabic inscription, also from the Ḥijāz, that combines *allāh* and *rabb* (Al-Jallad and Sidky 2021, 9).

8 See also Q 30:30, positing an innate “creaturely disposition” (*fitrah*) towards monotheism (see under → *hanif*). The Qur’anic assumption that all of humankind may validly be judged with the yardstick of monotheism is of course also grounded in the Qur’anic claim that every human community (→ *ummah*) has been sent a divinely authorised messenger dispensing monotheistic instruction (→ *rasūl*), as Q 10:47 and other verses maintain.

9 According to Welch, the “absence of the name Allah is striking in passages that date from the beginning of Muhammad’s public ministry” (Welch 1979, 734). Yet this is doubtful. Especially Surah 104, which mentions *nār allāh*, “God’s fire,” in v. 6, may well belong to the very earliest group of Qur’anic proclamations.

10 For other occurrences of *rabb* with possessive suffix or in a genitive construction in believably pre-Islamic poetry, see Sinai 2019b, 27, 31 (n. 144), 32, 33, 49, 51, 53.

Moreover, the Jabal Dhabūb inscription invokes the “Lord of the heavens” (*rb s<sup>l</sup>mwṭ*; see Al-Jallad, forthcoming). At least when the word *rabb* is used by a Christian like ‘Adī ibn Zayd, it would seem to echo Biblical references to “the Lord” (Hebrew: *ādōnāy*, Greek: *kyrios*, Syriac: *māryā*; see *TDOT* 1:59–72; *NIDOTTE* 1:275; *TDNT* 3:1039–1098; cf. Al-Jallad and Sidky 2021, 10). But *rabb* as a divine title was clearly in use beyond self-confessedly Jewish or Christian communities.

***Rabb al-‘ālamīn*, “Lord of the world-dwellers,” and other genitive constructions.**

Apart from combining with possessive suffixes, *rabb* can also occur in genitive constructions. As we saw above, an early Meccan surah speaks of “the Lord of this house” (Q 106:3) and a later Meccan verse has “the Lord of this settlement” (Q 27:91). But God is not only the master of a specific locale, his sovereignty has a universal cosmic extent: he is “the Lord of the throne” (Q 9:129, 21:22, 23:86.116, 27:26, 43:82; on the divine throne, see generally O’Shaughnessy 1973), “the Lord of the east and the west ± <and what is between them>” (Q 26:28, 73:9: *rabb al-mashriq wa-l-maghrib* ± <*wa-mā baynahumā*>; cf. 37:5, 55:17, and 70:40), and the “Lord of the heavens and the earth” (*rabb al-samāwāt wa-l-ard*; e.g., Q 13:16, 17:102, 18:14; see in more detail under → *ard*). Perhaps most importantly, God is called *rabb al-‘ālamīn*, a staple of Qur’anic terminology from the early Meccan period (Q 26:16.23.47.77.98.109.127.145.164.180.192, 37:87.182, 56:80, 69:43, and 83:6) until the Medinan one (Q 2:131, 5:28), with particular frequency in the later Meccan surahs (e.g., Q 6:45.71.162, 7:54.61.67.104.121, 10:10.37, 27:8.44, 45:36). As shown elsewhere (→ *al-‘ālamūn*), the appropriate rendering of *al-‘ālamīn* in the Qur’an is undoubtedly “inhabitants of the entire world” or “world-dwellers” rather than “worlds.” In fact, the Qur’an nowhere makes use of the singular *‘ālam* to mean the world or cosmos in its entirety, for which the Islamic scripture normally employs the merism “the heavens and the earth ± <and what is between them>.” Hence, irrespective of the pre-Qur’anic evidence to be reviewed in the next section, Qur’anic usage leaves one no choice but to translate *rabb al-‘ālamīn* as “Lord of the world-dwellers”: the point of the title is to assert divine lordship over persons rather than over the cosmos (for which latter notion the Qur’an deploys other epithets).

It is possible that the peculiar Qur’anic use of the phrase *rabb al-‘ālamīn* to signify “Lord of the world-dwellers” rather than “Lord of the worlds” was facilitated by the fact that *‘ālmā*, “world,” can also mean “everyone” in Jewish Aramaic (*DJBA* 867), a similar usage being found in Syriac (*TS* 2899–2900: *‘ālmā d-bnay nāshā* = “a multitude of people”; *kolleh ‘ālmā* = “everyone”; see also *SL* 1105). To be sure, even this conjecture would lead one to expect *rabb al-‘ālam*, with the second element of the construct in the singular. But it is striking that with one exception (Q 25:1) all of the Qur’an’s seventy-odd occurrences of *al-‘ālamīn*, whether or not preceded by *rabb*, occur in verse-final position (which is also the case for the verse by Labīd cited under → *al-‘ālamūn*). This suggests that at least part of the reason for the Qur’an’s preference of *rabb al-‘ālamīn* over a hypothetical *rabb al-‘ālam* is a concern with rhyme, which has been shown to be a factor in Qur’anic diction and word order elsewhere too (Stewart 2009).

**Precursors for the divine epithet *rabb al-‘ālamīn*.** The expression *rabb al-‘ālamīn* is reminiscent of Jewish and Christian titles for God, which Nöldeke and Schwally document in some detail (*GQ* 1:112, n. 1; see also *BEK* 37), though in confronting this material it is imperative to bear in mind that the Qur’anic employment of *rabb al-‘ālamīn* revolves around divine lordship over persons rather than over the cosmos. To begin with the Bible, Jer 10:10 has *melek ‘ōlām*, “ruler of the world,” which the Peshitta translates as *malkā d-‘ālmē*.



The title reappears as *basileus tōn aiōnōn* in 1 Tim 1:17 (Peshitta: *malkā d-‘ālmē*; see TDNT 1:201). Even closer to the Qur’an is Aramaic *mare ‘alma*, “Lord of the world,” which is found, for example, in Qumran (4Q529) and in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan’s* rendering of Gen 9:6 or 22:1.5,<sup>11</sup> and is also used by Syriac Christian authors like Jacob of Sarug (Bedjan 1905–1910, 1:628, l. 1: *māreh d-‘ālmā*).<sup>12</sup> Epigraphically, the Aramaic phrase is attested as *mry ‘lm’* in an inscription in what seems to be a mix of Nabataean Aramaic and Arabic from 267 CE that has been found in Madā’in Šāliḥ or Hegra, JSNab 17, l. 7: “And may the Lord of the world (*mry ‘lm’*) curse anyone who desecrates [or alters] this grave and anyone who opens it” (Healey and Smith 2011; see also Healey 2002 and Macdonald in Fiema et al. 2015, 402–405). The phrase *mry ‘lm’* is also contained in another inscription in Nabataeo-Arabic script that is dated to Passover of the year corresponding to 303 CE, UJadhNab 538 (Nehmé 2018, 185–186).<sup>13</sup> Rabbinic Hebrew has both *ribbono shel ‘olam*, “Lord of the world” (*b. Bər. 9b*), and *ribbon ha-‘olamim*, “Lord of the worlds” (*b. Yoma 87b*). But it seems clear that the epithet “Lord of the world” could also be employed in pagan contexts: it occurs as an epithet of Baal Shamin in Palmyra as early as 114 CE (Healey and Smith 2011, 7–8; Drijvers 1976, 14; Teixidor 1977, 84; Fox and Lieu 2005, 35 and 81), and in the epitaph JSNab 17 referenced above the expression has been conjectured to refer to Dushara or Baal Shamin (Healey 2001, 95; Healey and Smith 2011, 7–8).

It is in particular the inscriptions JSNab17 and UJadhNab 538, coming as they do from north-west Arabia, that suggest the possibility that an Arabic equivalent of *mry ‘lm’* (namely, *rabb al-‘alam*, “Lord of the world”?) might have been current in the Qur’an’s regional environment and have formed an immediate precursor of the Qur’anic *rabb al-‘alamīn*, “Lord of the world-dwellers.”

### ***rabbāniyyūn* pl. | rabbis**

→ *al-yahūd*

### ***rabaṭa ‘alā qalbihi* | to strengthen s.o.’s heart**

→ *qalb*

### ***ribā* | usury**

→ *ṣadaqah*

### ***ratq* | an act of sewing together or fusing**

→ *khalaqa*

<sup>11</sup> On the date of *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, see Hayward 1989a and Hayward 1989b (maintaining that a post-Qur’anic dating of the text is not certain). The issue of the text’s dating is, in any case, not directly relevant to the present discussion, given the existence of other attestations for *mare ‘alma*.

<sup>12</sup> I owe this reference to Yousef Kouriyhe; see <https://corpuscoranicum.de/kontexte/index/sure/1/vers/2/intertext/1246>.

<sup>13</sup> I am grateful to Ahmad Al-Jallad for pointing me to this inscription.

**rattala tr. | to declaim s.th.**

→ *ṣallā*

**rijz/rujz | punishment**

Further vocabulary discussed: *‘adhāb* | torment; punishment, chastisement *kashafa* tr. | to lift or remove s.th. *anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down *rijs* | filth, impurity, abomination *ghaḍab* | wrath, anger *hajara* tr. | to shun, avoid, forsake, or abandon s.th. or s.o.

*Rijz* in the approximate sense of “punishment.” That the word *rijz* is at least a partial synonym of *‘adhāb*, “torment” or “punishment” (→ *‘adhdhaba*), emerges most clearly from a comparison between Q 7:135 (*fa-lammā kashafnā ‘anhumu l-rijza . . . idhā hum yankuthūn*, “and when we lifted the *rijz* from them . . . , there they were breaking their promise”) and 43:50 (*fa-lammā kashafnā ‘anhumu l-‘adhāba idhā hum yankuthūn*, “and when we lifted the *‘adhāb* from them, there they were breaking their promise”). In other verses, too, both God’s *rijz* and his *‘adhāb* figure as the direct object of lifting or removing (*kashafa*) in response to human expressions of remorse (see Q 10:98 and 44:12 for *kashafa* + *‘adhāb*, and 7:134 for *kashafa* + *rijz*; for more detail on the theological background, see under → *ajal* and → *‘adhdhaba*). Moreover, Q 34:5 and 45:11 threaten those who strive against God’s signs or who repudiate them with “a punishment of painful *rijz*” (*lahum ‘adhābun min rijzin alīm*), which also indicates a close semantic link between the words *rijz* and *‘adhāb*. Of course, the two words’ interchangeability in verses like Q 7:135 and 43:50 does not entail their full synonymity. But minimally, virtually all Qur’anic occurrences of the noun *rijz* (with the exception of Q 8:11, discussed below) are contextually compatible with a conjectured signification “punishment.” Thus, when God sends or sends down upon the wrongdoers *rijz* “from the sky” or “from heaven” (Q 2:59, 7:162: *anzalnā/arsalnā ‘alā . . . rijzan mina l-samā’i*; similarly 29:34), the word is comfortably translatable as “punishment.”

It is however notable that the noun *‘adhāb* is never qualified by the addition *mina l-samā’i* nor does it ever figure as the accusative object of the verbs → *anzala*, “to send down,” or *arsala*, “to send,” unlike *rijz*. Such minor differences in the phraseological behaviour of *‘adhāb* and *rijz* suggest that the former is best understood as a general term encompassing a broad variety of different types of divine punishment, not all of which befall their victims from above, as would seem to be the case with *rijz* punishments. This is substantiated, for instance, by Q 16:45, where being swallowed up by the earth appears to be singled out as a particular kind of *‘adhāb*, as well as the many verses in which the torments of hell are termed an *‘adhāb*, as is the case, e.g., in phrases like “the punishment of the fire” (*‘adhāb al-nār*; e.g., Q 2:126.201) or “the punishment of burning” (*‘adhāb al-ḥarīq*; e.g., Q 3:181, 8:50). *Rijz*, by contrast, would seem to signify a particular type of punishment that descends vertically. This distinction is also reflected, albeit without use of the word *rijz*, in Q 8:32, where the repudiators are quoted as challenging God to either let stones “rain down” upon them “from the sky” (*fa-amṭir ‘alaynā ḥijāratan mina l-samā’i*), corresponding to a *rijz*-type punishment, or to strike them down with a “painful punishment” (*awi ‘tinā bi-‘adhābin alīm*), that is to say, with *some other* kind of punishment.<sup>1</sup> This attempt at specifying the

1 I owe my awareness of the pertinence of Q 8:32 to Saqib Hussain.

semantic relationship obtaining between the words *‘adhāb* and *rijz* has the additional virtue of making excellent sense of the phrase *‘adhābun min rijzin alim*, “a punishment of painful *rijz*,” which we encountered in Q 34:5 and 45:11: rather than containing a pleonasm, both verses would be announcing a painful punishment of a particular kind, namely, a *rijz* punishment, whatever that might be in more precise terms.

What must at least for now remain a matter of speculation is whether and how the operational meaning of *rijz* in the Qur’an that has just been traced can be derived from the root meaning of *r-j-z*, which one early Arabic dictionary glosses as “continuous movement” (*tatābu‘ al-ḥarakāt*; al-Azharī [1964–1976], 10:610). Perhaps the basic significance of *rijz* is indeed “commotion, agitation, convulsion,” as posited by other lexicographers (*AEL* 1036); but given that the Qur’anic corpus does not, for instance, employ any verbal derivatives of the same root, it is difficult to be sure. As we shall see below, it is in any case highly likely that the Qur’anic semantics of *rijz* was also affected by a Syriac cognate meaning “wrath.”

***Rijz, rijs, and rujz.*** The semantics of *rijz* are further complicated by the fact that the Qur’an’s canonical *rasm* shows some evidence of conflation between *rijz* and the similar-sounding noun *rijs*. It is obvious that the latter term properly signifies “filth, impurity, abomination.” *Rijs* is used to formulate the categorical prohibition of a limited range of substances (such as wine and pork) as well as of certain activities and objects that seem to be linked to pagan ritual (namely, the game of *maysir*, sacrificial stones, divining arrows, idols; see Q 5:90, 6:145, 22:30), and the word can also be used metaphorically to vituperate those unwilling to participate in the Prophet’s military campaigns or those whose hearts are said to be diseased (Q 9:95.125).<sup>2</sup> However, when Q 7:71 has the messenger Hūd declare to the people of ‘Ād that “*rijs* and wrath (*ghaḍab*; → *ghaḍiba*) have come upon you<sup>P</sup> (*waqa‘a ‘alaykum*) from your Lord,” it is virtually certain that *rijs* is here being used in the meaning normally associated with *rijz*, “punishment” (see *KK* 163 as well as Abū ‘Ubaydah 1955–1962, 1:218, and *Jal.* 572, equating *rijs* with *‘adhāb*).<sup>3</sup> The understanding that *rijs* is being used in the sense of *rijz* is also plausible for Q 6:125 and 10:100, though it is striking that the phrase *ja‘ala l-rijsa ‘alā* (“to impose punishment on s.o.”?) is peculiar to these two verses and that *rijz* in the sense of punishment never figures as a direct object of *ja‘ala*. The opposite situation obtains at Q 8:11, where *rijz* is employed in the sense of *rijs*, “filth” (*wa-yudhhiba ‘ankum rijza l-shayṭāni*, “and to remove the filth of Satan from you”; cf. Q 33:33, where *adhaba ‘ankum* takes as its direct object *al-rijs*; see also *KK* 184).

At least for Q 8:11, the Islamic tradition also documents the non-canonical textual variant *rijs* instead of *rijz* (*MQ* 3:270–271; *MQQ* 2:441). Hence, it is conceivable that both in Q 7:71 and 8:11 the transmission history of the Qur’an’s canonical *rasm* suffered from minor errors caused by inaccurate transcription from oral dictation, a phenomenon for which the lower layer of the Sanaa Palimpsest provides additional evidence (Sadeghi and Bergmann 2010, 384–390; Sinai 2020b, 197).<sup>4</sup> The alternative scenario would be to

2 Cf. also Q 9:28, reviling the associators as “filth” (*najas*).

3 In support of this, cf. Q 7:71 with 7:134, where the same verb *waqa‘a ‘alā* is used with *rijz*, “punishment,” as the grammatical subject. I owe this observation to Zellentin 2022, 297, n. 26, though Zellentin himself does not think that *rijs* in Q 7:71 should be equated with *rijz* and proposes to gloss the meaning of the word as a “propensity to sin.”

4 Unfortunately, the lower layer of the Sanaa Palimpsest, as edited by Sadeghi and Goudarzi, does not contain either Q 7:71 or 8:11 (see the overview in Sadeghi and Goudarzi 2012, 37–39). Yet as shown in Zellentin 2022, 300, n. 31, other Qur’anic manuscripts have *rijs* at Q 8:11.

posit that the Qur'anic *rasm* simply evidences the fact that by the time of Muhammad's preaching the words *rijz* and *rijs* had begun to undergo a measure of semantic convergence due to their far-reaching phonetic similarity.<sup>5</sup> This second hypothesis better accounts for the observation that even when *rijs* is employed in the sense of punishment it seems to retain a degree of phraseological distinctiveness from *rijz*: as we saw above, *rijs* can figure as the accusative object of *ja'ala* (Q 6:125, 10:100) rather than *anzala* ("to send down") or *arsala* ("to send"), which appear together with *rijz* (Q 2:59, 7:162, 29:34). This observation supports the contention that the Qur'anic *rijs/rijz* ambivalence is not just a result of minor and random inaccuracies in the Qur'an's textual transmission but rather is rooted in a facet of pre-Qur'anic language.<sup>6</sup>

A final passage entering into the issue is Q 74:4–5, where according to the Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim reading of the Qur'anic text the Messenger is commanded to "purify his clothes" (v. 4) and to "shun *al-rujz*" (v. 5: *wa-l-rujza fa-hjur*). *Rujz*, with a *u* vowel, is a *hapax legomenon* in the Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim version of the Qur'an, but there were scholars like Ibn Muḥayṣin who reputedly advocated reading the consonantal ductus *r-j-z* as *rujz* rather than *rijz* in other places as well (see *MQ* 1:108–109 and *MQQ* 1:61, on Q 2:59, or *MQ* 3:143 and *MQQ* 2:395 on Q 7:134). With regard to Q 74:5, too, there is some textual uncertainty, in so far as Islamic sources report that some of the canonical readers embraced the alternative reading *rijz* instead of *rujz* here (*MQ* 10:158; *MQQ* 7:259). Accordingly, the distribution of the vocalisations *rijz* vs *rujz* in the Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim text may be largely accidental. It is therefore tempting to posit that all nominal occurrences of *r-j-z* ought to be vocalised identically, whether one gives preference to *rijz* or as *rujz*. If one assumes the canonical *rasm* of Q 74:5 to be correct, the verse would need to be understood to mean "and shun the punishment (*al-rijz/al-rujz*)." However, the reference to purification in the preceding verse 4 (*wa-thiyābaka fa-ṭahhir*, "and purify your<sup>s</sup> clothes") might well lead one to read Q 74:5 as exhorting the Messenger to shun moral impurity rather than divine punishment; and the fact that transitive *hajara* means "to shun, avoid, forsake, or abandon s.th. or s.o." (*CDKA* 278) is also more easily reconciled with the grammatical object in Q 74:5 being impurity.<sup>7</sup> Such an understanding of Q 74:5, which arguably maximises contextual coherence, would fit most organically with a hypothetical emendation of the consonantal ductus of Q 74:5 from *r-j-z* to *r-j-s*, unless one is prepared to adopt the view provisionally intimated above that the nouns *rijz* and *rijs* had already undergone a partial semantic merger in the Qur'anic milieu. Against this line of reasoning, it is possible to object that *r-j-z* in the sense of punishment is the more difficult and hence putatively original text for Q 74:5, seeing that it entails a certain disruption of contextual expectations arising from the preceding verse. However, given the confusion surrounding Qur'anic occurrences of *r-j-s* and *r-j-z* it is not immediately clear that customary *lectio difficilior* arguments are applicable here.

***Rijz/rujz* and Syriac *rūgzā*.** Coming finally to the issue of a potential non-Arabic etymology, it has been suggested that the word *rujz* may derive from Syriac *rūgzā*, "wrath." As originally noted by Richard Bell, the Peshitta employs *rūgzā* in rendering John the Baptist's denunciation of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to be baptised by him in Matt 3:7

5 See also Ṭab. 10:280, on Q 7:71, citing the view that *rijz* and *rijs* have the same meaning and that *rijs* developed into the variant *rijz*.

6 This develops a point made to me by Saqib Hussain.

7 Cf. the translation of Q 74:5 in Arberry 1955 ("and defilement flee!") and similarly Paret 2001.

(Bell 1926, 88–89; *CQ* 28–29; Ahrens 1935, 22; *FVQ* 139): “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” Originally, Bell proposed a loan from Syriac *rūgzā* only with reference to Q 74:5, in part because he was struck by the possibility of understanding the verb *hajara* in Q 74:5 as an equivalent of *pheugō* (“to flee”; Peshitta: *raq*) in Matt 3:7. This is however the most questionable aspect of Bell’s conjecture, in so far as other Qur’anic occurrences of *hajara* (Q 4:43, 19:46, 23:67, 73:10) are consistently amenable to being translated as “to shun, avoid, forsake, abandon” rather than “to flee.” Especially when taking into consideration the general uncertainty besetting the alternative vocalisations *rijz* vs *rujz* across different readings of the Qur’an’s consonantal skeleton, it seems reasonable to sever Bell’s proposal from the particular context of Q 74:5 and to extend it to all occurrences of *r-j-z*, as already envisaged by Ahrens (*CQ* 28–29). The approximate rendering of *rijz* (or *rujz*) as “punishment” or a particular type of punishment delineated at the beginning of this entry could certainly encompass undertones of divine wrath.

This line of thought is buttressed by further comparative data. That Qur’anic *rijz/rujz* and Syriac *rūgzā* can function in a roughly equivalent capacity is demonstrated by the fact that Ephrem applies the Syriac word to the divine punishment narrowly escaped by the people of Nineveh (Beck 1970b, no. 1:732.1262; see also Beck 1970a, no. 2:87, and Beck 1970b, no. 2:303). Even more compellingly, Witztum has collated various Syriac and other Aramaic parallels that employ *rūgzā* or other derivatives of the root *r-g-z* in very similar contexts to the Qur’an (Witztum 2020, 461–466). This includes, for example, the rendering of Gen 18:23–24—dealing with the impending destruction of Sodom—in *Targum Onqelos* and the Peshitta, which Witztum convincingly links with the announcement in Q 29:34 that “*rijz* from heaven” will descend on the wicked inhabitants of the “settlement” (*qaryah*) of Lot. Finally, we saw that Q 7:71 explicitly couples *rijs*—in the sense normally associated with *rijz* (or *rujz*)—with the term *ghadab*, “wrath,” which is precisely the meaning of the Syriac term under discussion. The conjecture that the Qur’anic semantics of *rijz/rujz* is at least informed by its Syriac cognate is therefore highly plausible. It is in fact quite conceivable that *rijz/rujz* is an outright loan, though it would be of interest to undertake a wider attempt to trace derivatives of *r-j-z* in early Arabic texts, in order to ascertain whether the Arabisation of Syriac *rūgzā* might have been facilitated by the immanent semantics of the Arabic root.

### ***rijs* | filth, impurity, abomination**

→ *rijz/rujz*

### ***rajama* tr. | to stone s.o., to pelt s.o. with stones**

→ *rajīm*

### ***rajīm* | deserving to be pelted; accursed (?)**

Further vocabulary discussed: *shayṭān* | devil *al-shayṭān* | the devil, Satan *jinn* coll. | demons, jinn *rajama* tr. | to stone s.o., to pelt s.o. with stones *rujūm* pl. | projectiles

The adjective *rajīm* (on which see in detail Reynolds 2010a, 54–64) is a Qur’anic attribute of the devil (Q 3:36, 15:34, 16:98, 38:77) or of wicked demons in general (Q 15:17, 81:25). In all six verses in which it occurs, *rajīm* combines with the noun → *shayṭān*, which in the Qur’an can function both as a proper name, in the definite form *al-shayṭān*, “the devil” or “Satan,” or as a common noun designating malevolent demons or → *jinn*. *Rajīm* has long been linked with Classical Ethiopic *rəgum*, “accursed” (NB 25 and 47; CQ 39; FVQ 139–140; Kropp 2007, 336–337; for the Ethiopic word, refer to Leslau 1991, 465). But quite independently of any etymological considerations, even from a purely inner-Qur’anic perspective the word *rajīm* exhibits a tangible semantic vacillation between pelting or stoning, on the one hand, and cursing, on the other, a fact that is succinctly registered already by Ahrens (CQ 39). Thus, the verb *rajama* is well attested in the sense of “to stone” or “to pelt with stones” (Q 11:91, 18:20, 19:46, 26:116, 36:18, 44:20), and Q 67:5 speaks of the *rujūm* or “projectiles” by which the devils or *shayāṭīn* are repelled from heaven (see in more detail under → *jinn*). All of these verses would support interpreting the attribute *rajīm*, especially when applied to demons in general in Q 15:17 and 81:25, in the sense of “pelted” or “deserving to be pelted.” It is pertinent to note in this context that Talmudic evidence suggests that late antique Jews too sometimes employed language implying “that Satan could be warded off by throwing things at him” (Silverstein 2013, 22–23).<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, in two Qur’anic passages Satan or the devil is denounced by God as being *rajīm* (Q 15:34, 38:77), followed by the words, “The curse / my curse shall be upon you<sup>s</sup> until the day of judgement” (Q 15:35, 38:78: *wa-inna ‘alayka l-la’nata/la’nati ilā yawmi l-dīn*). It would not be unreasonable to take this latter utterance to explicate the meaning of *rajīm*, giving us the equivalent “cursed,” which is in fact a gloss preserved as part of the early Islamic exegetical record (Ṭab. 14:67, on Q 15:35).

One way of explaining these shifting semantics of Qur’anic *rajīm* would be to posit, with Adam Silverstein, that *al-shayṭān al-rajīm* reached the Qur’anic milieu as a fixed but semantically opaque formula, with *rajīm* forming a sort of “fixed ‘surname’” of the devil whose original meaning had been forgotten and was therefore amenable to being reconstructed in different ways, whether as “accursed” or as “pelted” (Silverstein 2013). Silverstein additionally hypothesises that the original meaning of *al-shayṭān al-rajīm*, or of whatever non-Arabic phrase stands behind it, was “Satan the accuser” (Silverstein 2013, 28–32). It bears underscoring, in any case, that Arabic *rajīm* was apt to be understood as a perfectly regular passive verbal adjective derived from *rajama*, just as *qatīl* or *dhabīḥ* mean “killed” and “slaughtered” (Wright 1974, 1:136). In fact, *rajīm* occurs in exactly this meaning at the beginning of a poem from the *dīwān* of al-A’shā Maymūn, which laments that during his entire life man is “a target of pelting (*rajīm*) by the uncertainties of destructive fate (*rayb al-manūn*) and by disease befalling his family and grief” (Ḥusayn 1983,

1 Kropp’s objection that the “invisible Satan can hardly be stoned” (Kropp 2007, 336–337), however convincing at first sight, should accordingly be qualified. In fact, while late antique demons were invisible, this does not mean that they were entirely immaterial, as illustrated by a Talmudic passage describing how some porters unwittingly place a barrel of wine on the ear of a demon, who responds by causing the barrel to burst (Ronis 2018, 15–16). Also of interest are two occurrences of the attribute *rgīma* in Mandaic incantations designed to ward off curses and evil forces, which are noted by Silverstein (Silverstein 2013, 25, citing Yamauchi 1967, 228–229 = no. 20:19, and 274–275 = no. 27:14). *Rgīma* is predicated of “evil mouths” here, next to “muzzled” and “closed,” and Yamauchi renders *rgīma* as “stoned” in both cases. However, Silverstein argues that “petrified” would be more appropriate to the literary context.



no. 2:2).<sup>2</sup> It does not appear, therefore, that the word *rajīm* was an entirely frozen epithet that combined exclusively with *shayṭān*.

***rajā* tr. | to hope for s.th.; to expect s.th.**

→ *ākhir*, → *wa‘ada*

***raḥīma* intr./tr. | to have mercy (upon s.o.)**

→ *al-raḥmān*, → *tāba*

***al-raḥmān* | the Merciful**

***raḥīm* | merciful**

***raḥmah* | mercy; act of mercy**

Further vocabulary discussed: *allāh* | God *rabb* | lord *ruḥm* | affection, tender love *marḥamah* | mercy, compassion *raḥīma* intr./tr. | to have mercy (upon s.o.) *ghaḍab* | wrath, anger *āyah* | sign *istajāba* intr. *li-* | to respond to s.o. *ghafara* tr./intr. (*li-*) | to forgive (s.o.) (s.th.) *ghafūr* | forgiving *aḥabba* tr. | to love s.o. *wadūd* | affectionate, loving *mawaddah* | affection *‘adhdhaba* tr. | to torment s.o.; to punish or chastise s.o. *‘adhāb* | torment; punishment, chastisement *zalama* tr. | to injure or harm s.o. or s.th.; to wrong s.o. *qisṭ* | fairness, equity *ajr* | wage *maghfirah* | forgiveness *tāba* intr. (*ilā llāh*) | to repent, to turn to God in repentance (said of humans) *istaghfara* tr. | to ask for s.o.’s forgiveness *ashraka* tr. (*bi-*) | to associate s.o. (namely, a partner deity) with s.o. (namely, God), to venerate s.o. as a partner deity *‘abd* | servant *ummī* | scriptureless, not hitherto endowed with a scriptural revelation *alladhīna ashrakū*, *al-mushrikūn* pl. | the associators *alladhīna kafarū*, *al-kāfirūn*, *al-kuffār* pl. | the repudiators *aslama* intr. (*li-*) | to surrender o.s. or dedicate o.s. (to s.o., namely, God)

**Overview of Qur’anic usage and plan of the entry.** *Al-raḥmān*, “the Merciful,” is one of the three principal Qur’anic designations of the deity, next to → *allāh*, “God,” and → *rabb* (e.g., *rabbuka*, “your<sup>s</sup> Lord”). That the Qur’anic God is supremely merciful and compassionate (see generally Reynolds 2020, 91–154) is underlined not only by the divine name *al-raḥmān* but also by other derivatives of the consonantal root *r-ḥ-m* (on which see CDKA 110). For example, while *ruḥm* (“affection,” “tender love”; Q 18:81) and *marḥamah* (“mercy, compassion”; Q 90:17), two *hapax legomena*, refer to human qualities, the word *raḥmah*, which occurs 114 times, almost always designates divine mercy or acts of mercy.<sup>1</sup> God is “the most merciful among all those showing mercy” (Q 7:151, 12:64.92, 21:83). The

2 For a similar statement to the effect that every people (*qawm*) is exposed to being pelted (*marjūm* rather than *rajīm*) by “the boulders of evil,” see DSAAP, ‘Alqamah, no. 13:29. On *al-manūn* (used in the verse by al-A’shā), see Caskel 1926, 39–42.

1 Exceptions are Q 17:24, 30:21, and 57:27, where *raḥmah* is a quality exhibited by humans. A similar state of affairs holds for the quality of wisdom: though it can be shared by humans, most Qur’anic occurrences of the word *ḥakīm*, “wise,” pertain to God (see under → *ḥikmah*).

magnitude of God's mercy is further stressed in references to "the treasures of my/your Lord's mercy" (*khazā'in raḥmat rabbī/rabbika*) in Q17:100 and 38:9. The verb *raḥīma* ("to have mercy"; e.g., Q 2:286, 3:32, 6:16.155, 67:28), too, invariably has God as its explicit or implied subject. The centrality of divine mercy or compassion to the Qur'anic conception of God receives particular stress at Q 6:12.54, which programmatically declare that God has "imposed mercy on himself" (*kataba 'alā nafsīhi l-raḥmata*). This may mean that the deity freely wills to deal with humans in a compassionate fashion rather than being constrained to do so by some irresistible characterial disposition. The Qur'anic God is, after all, eminently capable of wrath (→ *ghaḍab*), too.

Explicit Qur'anic statements about God's mercy occur from the end of the early Meccan period onwards (see further below on issues of inner-Qur'anic chronology) and remain very frequent thereafter: even if the *basmalah*—the surah-initial invocation → *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm*, "In the name of God, the truly Merciful"—is excluded from the count, the root *r-ḥ-m* appears in over three hundred Qur'anic verses, making mercy and compassion one of the most common theological notions in the Qur'an.<sup>2</sup> Mining this material in an inevitably condensed fashion, the present entry begins with a general explication of the Qur'anic conception of divine mercy. Subsequently, the focus is specifically on the divine name *al-raḥmān*: after reviewing the wider background against which the Qur'an's use of this appellation must be placed, the article tracks its Qur'anic emergence towards the end of the early Meccan period and its frequent employment in a particular subset of the later Meccan surahs, the so-called "*raḥmān* surahs." Finally, the entry examines the semantic relationship between *al-raḥmān* and the adjective *raḥīm*, "merciful," which are most prominently combined in the *basmalah*.

**God's mercy in the Qur'an: a synopsis.** With regard to the concept of compassion or mercy in the Hebrew Bible, it has aptly been said that compassion is "something that goes beyond what ought to be given" (*NIDOTTE* 3:1094). The Qur'an, too, understands God as someone who consistently bestows more than he rightfully owes (see also under → *an'ama*). God's mercy is evidenced, inter alia, by his sending of messengers and revelations (→ *nazzala*; see also under → *rasūl* and → *nabiyy*), instances of which are expressly described as acts of divine mercy (*raḥmatan*; e.g., Q 7:52, 21:107, 45:20, 46:12). The underlying rationale would seem to be that the preaching of messengers like Muhammad provides their recipients with reminders (see under → *dhakkara*) of God and his expectations, reminders that draw attention to the manifold cosmic "signs" (singular: → *āyah*) of God's existence, power, and grace, and that offer humans precious assistance in passing the moral scrutiny to which God subjects them during their earthly lives (see under → *balā*).<sup>3</sup> Some scholars also consider the very act of creating the world, set up in such a way as to benefit humans, to manifest God's mercy (Rahman 2009, 6; Marshall 1999, 79; Reynolds 2020, 97–101).<sup>4</sup> While this connection is less overt in the Qur'an than the merciful quality of God's sending of messengers, the general idea is plausible. It is, moreover, supported by the opening of Surah 55, which announces not

2 In the list of Qur'anic roots by frequency that is available on *Qur'an Tools*, the root *r-ḥ-m* occupies the twenty-first position, before other significant roots such as *k-t-b*, *h-d-y*, *z-l-m*, or *dh-k-r*.

3 On revelation as a manifestation of divine mercy, see Marshall 1999, 79; Khorchide 2012, 33; Reynolds 2020, 101–104.

4 For a late antique expression of the link between divine mercy and creation, see Mathews 2009, 18–19, ll. 101–102, where Jacob of Sarug asserts that mercy "rose up" in God, causing him to "bring forth creatures" even though God "has no need of creatures."

only that “the Merciful” (*al-rahmān*) “taught the recitation (*al-qur’ān*)” but also that he “created man” and “taught him clear expression,” and then draws attention to various aspects of the cosmic order established by God (cf. also Q 48:28–29). Another passage that detects divine mercy in the workings of nature is Q 7:57, which casts the winds bringing rain-bearing clouds as heralds of God’s mercy.

A more explicit aspect of divine mercy in the Qur’an is God’s compassionate intervention in the life of deserving individuals, such as God’s granting the prayer of “his servant Zechariah” for a child (Q 19:2–15) or his merciful response (verb: *istajāba*) to Job’s call for relief from his suffering (Q 21:84; see also the remarks on *ajāba* and *istajāba*, “to respond,” under → *allāh*). Finally, God’s mercy shows itself in his readiness to pardon sins (verb: *ghafara*) when humans beseech him for forgiveness (see also Reynolds 2020, 104–107). This is indicated by the frequent collocation of the divine attributes *ghafūr*, “forgiving,” and *rahīm*, “merciful” (e.g., Q 2:173.182.192 etc., 12:53.98, 14:36), and also by seven verses in which *ghafara*, “to forgive,” and *rahīma*, “to have mercy,” figure in pleonasm like “forgive us and have mercy on us” (Q 2:286: *wa-ghfir lanā wa-rhamnā*; see also Q 7:23.149.155, 11:47, 23:109.118).<sup>5</sup>

The notions of divine mercy and divine forgiveness are furthermore bound up with that of divine love, expressed by the roots *ḥ-b-b* and *w-d-d*. All three concepts—divine love, divine forgiveness, and divine mercy—intersect in the Medinan verse Q 3:31: the Messenger is commanded to urge those who “love God” to “follow me, so that God will love you<sup>p</sup> [in return] and forgive you your sins (*fa-ttabi’ūnī yuḥbibkumu llāhu wa-yaghfir lakum dhunūbakum*); and God is forgiving (*ghafūr*) and merciful (*rahīm*).” One infers that God’s compassionate clemency towards certain persons is motivated by the fact that he loves them: mercy-as-forgiveness is grounded in divine love. The association between divine mercy, divine forgiveness, and divine love is also discernible in other passages. Thus, God is given the epithet “loving” or “affectionate” (*wadūd*) in Q 11:90, together with *rahīm*, and in Q 85:14, together with *ghafūr*, while Q 19:96 promises that “the Merciful will assign affection” to those who believe and do righteous deeds (*sa-yaj’alu lahumu l-rahmānu wuddā*; Jomier 1957, 377–378). This may be a promise that the inhabitants of paradise will be recipients of divine love.<sup>6</sup> The fact that Q 3:31 casts divine love as a reaction to those who manifest their love for God by following the Qur’anic Messenger is significant, for the Qur’an generally depicts God’s love for humans as commensurate with their ethico-religious desert (Rahbar 1960, 172–175; Reynolds 2020, 160–161). In the later Meccan and the Medinan surahs, this nexus of human merit and divine love (or, conversely human culpability and the absence of divine love) is inexorably driven home by verse-final affirmations that “God loves the X” (*inna llāha yuḥibbu l-X*; e.g., Q 2:195.222, 3:76.159, 5:13.42), where X stands for some collective virtue term like “those who do good deeds” (*al-muḥsinīn*) or “those who fear God” (*al-muttaqīn*), and by the opposite formula “God does not love the X” (*inna llāha lā yuḥibbu l- . . .*; e.g., Q 2:190, 3:32.57.140), where X refers to some normatively objectionable trait.<sup>7</sup> It is therefore quite clear that God’s love

5 For a verse combining other derivatives of *gh-f-r* and *r-h-m*, see Q 3:157. On the noun *maghfirah*, see also under → *ajr*.

6 For the association between *w-d-d* and *r-h-m*, see also Q 30:21, which speaks of the affection (*mawaddah*) and the mercifulness or compassion (*rahmah*) that God has created between human spouses.

7 For a detailed study of verse-final assertions that God “loves” or “does not love” certain groups of people, see now Christiansen 2020.

of humans is not unconditional.<sup>8</sup> With Ibn Taymiyyah, one ought to resist the temptation of reducing God's love, as predicated throughout the Qur'an, to some other divine attribute that seems less objectionably anthropopathic, such as God's will (see Hoover 2016, 637). Understood in a non-reductionist fashion, the Qur'an's attribution of love to God plays an important theological role: it explains why the omnipotent creator of the cosmos should be sufficiently invested in human affairs in order to reward righteousness and punish sins, rather than passing over them in sage indifference. God, the Qur'an is adamant, is emotionally attuned to and affected by the moral status of human actions (see also under → *ghaḍība*).

The opposite of divine mercy and forgiveness is divine punishment, as illustrated by statements in which *rahīma* and *'adhhaba* ("to torment, punish, or chastise") or *rahmah* and *'adhāb* ("torment, punishment, chastisement") function as antonyms (see Q 7:156, 17:54-57, 29:21.23, 57:13, 76:31). As intimated earlier, in tandem with stressing God's mercy the Qur'an also portrays God as susceptible to wrath (*ghaḍāb*; → *ghaḍība*) and as chastising sinners and unbelievers (see under → *rijz/rujz* and → *'adhhaba*). Such divine retribution takes the form of inner-historical punishments like the annihilation of the people of Lot (i.e., Sodom and Gomorrah; e.g., Q 29:33–35) and of God's condemning many humans and jinn to eternal torment in hell at the end of time (see under → *khalada* and → *jahannam*). Yet as many Qur'anic verses underscore, nobody suffering divine punishment has reason to complain that he or she has thereby been "wronged" (verb: → *zalamā*): "we did not wrong them; rather, they wronged themselves" (Q 11:101: *wa-mā zalamnāhum wa-lākin zalamū anfusahum*; similarly, 16:118 and 43:76). The basic point is that inveterate unbelievers and sinners merely receive the penalty appropriate to their prior misdeeds. God's judgement is unfailingly just (see Rahbar 1960 and Marshall 1999, 78–89, and also under → *ḥisāb*), as underscored already in the early Meccan passage Q 99:7–8: "Whoever does a speck's weight of good will see it, // and whoever does a speck's weight of evil will see it." It is true that the Qur'an has a marked tendency to express God's justice in negative terms, e.g., by denying that he might do wrong rather than by predicating of him the positive attribute "just" (Fakhry 1994, 14–15). But positive assertions of God's "fairness" (*qist*) are not entirely lacking (Q 3:18, 10:4.47.54; see under → *zalamā*), and generally speaking the Qur'an's emphasis on divine justice is clear and consistent throughout.

God's justice raises the question of the scope that God has for proving himself merciful and compassionate: is the Qur'anic God adequately described by an "unlimited readiness to forgive," as maintained by a contemporary Muslim theologian (Khorchide 2012, 32)? An affirmative answer might be inferred from Q 39:53: the Qur'anic Messenger is commanded to tell those of God's "servants" who have "become guilty of excess to their own detriment" (*qul yā-'ibādīya lladhīna asrafū 'alā anfusihim*) that they must not "despair of God's mercy" (*lā taqnaṭū min rahmati llāhi*), for God "forgives all sins" (*yaghfiru l-dhunūba jamī'an*).<sup>9</sup> This would seem to point to an unlimited and unconditional notion of divine mercy, and the fact that in Q 7:156 the divine voice affirms that "my mercy comprehends all things" (*wa-rahmatī wasī'at kulla shay'in*) could be taken to point in the same direction (see Khorchide 2012, 45). On the other hand, the fact that God is not, as we saw earlier,

8 This is also confirmed by Q 5:18, which condemns the Jews and Christians for considering themselves God's "beloved" children (*abnā'u llāhi wa-aḥibbā'u hu*; see in more detail under → *allāh*).

9 Cf. also Q 15:56, where Abraham says that one must not "despair" of God's mercy.

unconditionally loving suggests that God’s mercy, too, has certain prerequisites and limits: for how could God be compassionate towards those whom he does not love? The suspicion that the Qur’anic conception of divine mercy must, for the sake of theological consistency, be of a conditional nature is borne out by a broader consideration of the mature theology of the later Meccan and of the Medinan surahs, undertaken in the following paragraphs, which yields the result that divine mercy has clearly specifiable preconditions and that entrenched repudiators and sinners are excluded from it (thus already Marshall 1999, 78–89). In examining the issue, it is vital to bracket any instinctive temptation to regard unconditional and limitless mercy as a self-evidently superior divine trait than a conditional and limited conception of mercy.

A first observation to make is that despite the Qur’anic stress on divine justice, God is not represented as a niggardly accountant. Rather, God’s unfailing justice is exercised first and foremost where it benefits humans. Consequently, those who live a life that is characterised, or at least predominantly characterised, by belief and righteousness, will receive from God the just “wage” (→ *ajr*) that they have merited by virtue of their good deeds, or even more than their just wage. Their evil deeds, by contrast, will be graciously cancelled out (e.g., Q 29:7; see under → *kaffāra*). This is why, as registered elsewhere, promises of eschatological wage are often joined with promises of divine forgiveness (*maghfirah*; e.g., Q 67:12; see again under → *ajr*). The upshot is that at least after the early Meccan period, and quite possibly already before this time (cf. Q 99:6–8 and 101:6–9), it is not assumed that true believers will be able to steer absolutely clear of some measure of minor or inadvertent wrongdoing. God, however, will mercifully forgo to take them to task for it.<sup>10</sup> With regard to those who have acquired a claim to eschatological wage, God therefore compassionately goes beyond what he owes.

At the same time, the Qur’an makes it clear that God’s forgiveness and cancelling out of evil deeds must not be taken for granted as if they were an automatic entitlement. Rather, the availability of divine forgiveness alongside eschatological wages means that God is open to human repentance and pleas for divine forgiveness. Thus, Q 6:54 (one of the two verses proclaiming God’s self-imposition of mercy that was partially quoted above; see also Reynolds 2020, 96) states: “whoever of you does evil in ignorance and then repents (→ *tāba*) afterwards and puts things right—he [namely, God] will be forgiving and merciful.” Hence, God’s mercy is available to those sinners (specifically, inadvertent sinners) who sincerely repent of their misdeeds, plead for God’s forgiveness (*istaghfara*; e.g., Q 3:135, 4:110, 5:74), and take concrete remedial action. Even if one has “mixed righteous and evil actions” (*khalatū ‘amalan ṣāliḥan wa-ākhara sayyi’an*), as Q 9:102 memorably puts it, those who “penitently turn” (→ *tāba*) to God will find that God will turn to them in forgiveness. But it is crucial to appreciate that none of this means that God’s readiness to forgive is unlimited or unconditional. Accordingly, the Qur’an sometimes declares certain offences to be unpardonable or beyond repentance, such as the sins of “partnering” or “associating” (→ *ashraka*) some other being with God (Q 4:48.116) or of relapsing into repudiation after having espoused belief (Q 3:90; see again under → *tāba*). Moreover, humans are expected to ask for God’s forgiveness in good time rather than leaving it until the moment of their death (Q 4:17–18).

<sup>10</sup> However, note that the Medinan verse Q 3:30 still avers that at the final judgement everyone will be confronted by the good and the evil he or she has done (*yawma tajidu kullu nafsin mā ‘amilat min khayrin muḥḍaran wa-mā ‘amilat min sū’in*).



Already in the Meccan Surah 10, the figure of Pharaoh, who only submitted to God when faced by the imminent prospect of divine punishment, exemplifies an act of conversion that simply came too late in order to be effective (Q 10:90–92; see Sinai 2019a). Other passages, too, discount it as insufficient to believe in God only when “seeing” the deleterious consequences of one’s unbelief materialise (Q 6:158, 32:29, 40:84–85).

Accordingly, the Qur’anic understanding of God’s mercy does not entail that God is unconditionally and limitlessly forgiving (Marshall 1999, 82; Reynolds 2020, 97), just as he is not unconditionally loving. But what, precisely, are the factors that condition and limit God’s mercy? The announcement in Q 39:53, quoted above, that God’s “servants” may hope that God will “forgive all sins” offers a clue: it is those who in principle succeed in maintaining a functioning and meaningful relationship with God who are bidden not to despair of his mercy. Similarly, Q 15:49 commands the Messenger to “announce” to God’s “servants” that God is “the one who forgives, the one who is merciful” (*nabbi’ ‘ibādī annī anā l-ghafūru l-raḥīm*). As noted elsewhere (→ *rabb*), the word ‘*abd*, “servant,” has a dual meaning in the Qur’an, designating both humans in general, by virtue of the fact that they ought to serve God, and those humans in particular who actually do serve God. It stands to reason that in Q 15:49 and 39:53 it is the latter meaning of “servant” that is applicable.<sup>11</sup> Hence, qualifying as one of God’s “servants” in the sense that is contextually relevant may be surmised to require monotheistic belief, a commitment to righteousness, and a disposition to turn to God in genuine repentance when appropriate and to plead with him to “forgive” and “have mercy” on one, as the believers pray in Q 2:286. By contrast, obdurate repudiators and sinners who choose not to cultivate an ongoing relationship with God will not benefit from his merciful remission of sins.<sup>12</sup> This interpretation is corroborated by a closer look at Q 7:156, briefly referenced above, where the divine voice affirms, “With my punishment I strike whomever I will, and my mercy comprehends all things. I will decree it (*sa-aktubuhā*) for those who are God-fearing, who give the alms, and who believe in our signs.” The verse makes it unequivocally clear that God’s mercy is bestowed on those who are already and demonstrably, though not necessarily unflinchingly, committed to living a godly life.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Q 7:56 encourages the hearers to “call” on God “in fear and longing”

11 For other verses combining ‘*abd* and the root *r-ḥ-m*, see Q 9:104 (on which see below), 18:65, 19:2, 23:109 (cf. also 21:84). In Q 27:19, Solomon prays to God to “let me enter, by your mercy, among your righteous servants” (*wa-adkhillnī bi-rahmatika fī ‘ibādika l-ṣāliḥīn*). Read literally, this implies that God’s mercy or compassion may already act upon somebody who is not yet among God’s “servants” in the narrower sense. But this does not raise any difficulties for the interpretation here developed, for it is clear that some aspects of divine mercy—such as the sending of messengers—do indeed attain all humans. It is only mercy-as-forgiveness that would seem to be confined to those who have already embarked on a godly life.

12 As Marshall notes, unbelievers participate in God’s mercy only in the indirect way that they, too, receive, and would have been able to benefit from, certain “universal expressions of the divine mercy,” such as God’s sending of prophets (Marshall 1999, 83).

13 That Q 7:156 does not undermine the general impression that God’s mercy has preconditions is confirmed by another verse combining the noun *rahmah*, “mercy,” with the root *w-s-’*, namely, Q 6:147, which affirms that God is “endowed with comprehensive mercy (*dhū rahmatin wāsi’atin*), but his violent force will not be averted from those people who are sinners (*wa-lā yuraddu ba’suhu ‘ani l-qawmi l-mujrimīn*).” A third verse commenting on God’s comprehensive mercy is Q 40:7, where the angels supplicating on behalf of the believers and petitioning God to forgive those who repent commence their plea by saying, “Our Lord, you comprehend all things in mercy and knowledge (*wasi’ta kulla shay’in rahmatan wa-’ilman*).” As regards specifically the comprehensiveness or universality of God’s mercy, expressed by collocating *rahmah* and *w-s-’*, there is no need to understand this to imply that God is unconditionally and limitlessly merciful and forgiving. With respect to humans, the universality of divine mercy might, for instance, manifest itself in God’s sending of prophetic messengers and in the fact that he generally provides humans with ample signs and reminders to guide them (see also Marshall 1999, 83).



and then adds that “God’s mercy is near those who do good” (*inna raḥmata llāhi qarībun mina l-muḥsinīn*). In light of this, when Q 9:104 affirms that “God accepts repentance from his servants” (*anna llāha huwa yaqbalu l-tawbata ‘an ‘ibādihī*), the word “servants” ought to be again understood in its more exclusive sense.

The precondition for receiving divine mercy-as-forgiveness, then, is a prior commitment to God, or being one of his “servants” in the more exclusive sense of the word; one cannot hope to tap into the “treasures” (Q 17:100, 38:9) of divine compassion and forgiveness from outside a confessional and moral rapport with God. This bond need not date back far into the past, though: as Usman Shaikh has convincingly observed,<sup>14</sup> the Qur’anic account of the Egyptian sorcerers’ conversion to God, in the wake of their inability to match the confirmatory miracles of Moses and Aaron (Q 7:120–126, 20:70–73, 26:46–51), strongly implies a positive assessment of the sorcerers and the subsequent fulfilment of their supplication for divine forgiveness (Q 20:73, 26:51; cf. Abraham’s statement in 26:82). A courageous act of conversion prior to the final judgement, therefore, can be sufficient to establish the rapport with God that permits someone to hope for the latter’s compassionate forgiveness. Nonetheless, even so God’s merciful forgiveness is not unconditional. Inversely, certain objectionable acts, which are explicated in Q 4:17–18.48.116, will eliminate the basis for receiving divine forgiveness: if one neglects to repent of one’s missteps in a timely fashion, it will erode one’s relationship with God; and if one goes so far as to “partner” or “associate” God with other allegedly divine beings, it will terminate one’s bond of servanthood with God altogether.

Does the preceding entail that access to divine mercy is guaranteed by and confined to outward membership in the Qur’anic community, to the exclusion of other religious communities? One might conclude this from the promise of divine mercy to “those who are God-fearing, who give the alms, and who believe in our signs” in Q 7:156, discussed above, since it is followed by the further specification that the recipients of God’s mercy are those who “follow the prophet of those not hitherto endowed with scripture” (*al-nabiyy al-ummī; → ummī*), namely, Muhammad (Q 7:157). Yet the fact that Muhammad’s followers are, unsurprisingly, assured of divine mercy is not necessarily equivalent to the proposition that God’s mercy is bestowed *only* on Muhammad’s followers. It certainly seems clear enough that Q 7:156–157 does not apply retrospectively, since the Qur’an presents figures who lived well before Muhammad as beneficiaries of divine mercy (e.g., Q 7:72.151). As we just saw, this would seem to include even the Egyptian sorcerers. With regard to Muhammad’s contemporaries, too, some Qur’anic data call into doubt an exclusivist reading of Q 7:156–157. For one, Q 7:157 is part of a Medinan insertion to Surah 7 (see under *→ ummī*), whereas the Meccan surahs do not draw hard communal boundaries between different monotheistic confessions (*HCI* 177–179). This makes it unlikely that a Meccan verse like Q 15:49, when first proclaimed, would have presupposed a confessionally narrow notion of God’s servants. As regards the Medinan layer of the Qur’an, too, certain statements tip the scales away from a confessionally exclusivist understanding of access to divine mercy. In particular, two Medinan verses, Q 2:62 and 5:69, unequivocally promise eschatological reward not only to the Qur’anic “believers,” but also to Jews, Christians, and *→ ṣābi’ūn* who “believe in God and the final

<sup>14</sup> The observation is made in Shaikh’s unpublished Oxford MPhil thesis on divine responsiveness in the Qur’an.

day and do righteous deeds” (see in more detail under → *aslama*). Other verses, such as Q 3:110.113–114.199, similarly presuppose that there are at least some believers among the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*), i.e., among Jews and Christians. Such statements reflect what one might call the Qur’an’s mixed-bag assessment of contemporary Jews and Christians (see further under → *ahl al-kitāb*). In the present context, the patent assumption that there are believing Jews and Christians lends support to the contention that the “servants” of God who may count on his compassionate forgiveness include at least some members of the communities who are promised eschatological reward in Q 2:62 and 5:69, especially given the repeated association of eschatological wage (*ajr*) with divine forgiveness (*maghfirah*).

This is not to overlook that the Qur’an does seem to expect Jews and Christians who are to be credited with genuine belief in God, and who may consequently hope for divine reward and forgiveness, to adopt a rigorous version of monotheism incompatible with belief in the divinity of Jesus and to subscribe to a prophetology incompatible with denying Muhammad’s prophethood (see again under → *aslama*). But generally speaking, the only religious community in the Qur’anic environment whose adherents are *eo ipso* deemed to have no immediate access to divine forgiveness are the pagan “associators” (*alladhīna ashrakū, al-mushrikūn*) or “repudiators” (*alladhīna kafarū, al-kāfirūn, al-kuffār*; → *kafara*). Even they, of course, have some access to divine mercy, namely, by “surrendering themselves” (→ *aslama*) to the one God and becoming believers. Those, whoever, who miss the opportunity and consequently end up in hell will indeed be irrevocably placed outside the sphere of God’s mercy: as Q 57:13 says, in the afterlife the believers will be surrounded by a “wall with a gate, on the inside of which there will be mercy and on the outside of which, opposite it, there will be punishment (*bāṭinuhu fīhi l-raḥmatu wa-ẓāhiruhu min qibalīhi l-‘adhāb*).”<sup>15</sup> The claim that in the hereafter (→ *al-ākhirah*) many humans will be permanently cut off from any hope of divine compassion is surely the starkest limitation that the Qur’an places on God’s mercy. Yet the fact that the Qur’anic text offers virtually no compelling support for the idea of universal salvation (a claim denied in Khorchide 2012, 47–57; see also under → *khalada*) is entirely consistent with the Islamic scripture’s pervasive insistence that the present life is a temporally limited prelude to an eternity of consequences: the finite number of choices that humans make during the finite span of their earthly existence is credited with infinite significance.

**“Merciful” as a divine epithet prior to the Qur’an.** The remainder of this entry will turn from the Qur’an’s general understanding of divine mercy to the Qur’anic use of the divine name *al-raḥmān* in particular. It is worthwhile to begin by probing this epithet’s chequered prehistory of a millennium and a half before the Qur’an, which illustrates the depth of the Islamic scripture’s enrootedness in Near Eastern religious history. The word is first documented in the Akkadian-Aramaic inscription of Tall al-Fakhariyyah from the ninth century BCE, whose Aramaic text calls the god Hadad a “merciful god” (*ʿlh rḥmn*; see Greenfield 2000, 381–382). In Palmyrene inscriptions, *rḥmn*’ is employed both as an adjective (“merciful”) and as a noun (“the Merciful”), and the term is applied to Baal Shamin, ‘Azīzū, and the unnamed deity “whose name is blessed forever” (Fox and Lieu 2005, 80 and 82; Greenfield, 385; see also under → *ism*). A squarely nominal usage is found in

15 On the depiction of paradise as a walled enclosure, which competes with the image of paradise as a mountainous garden, see under → *jannah* and Horovitz 1975, 58–59.

rabbinic literature, both Babylonian and Palestinian, where the Hebrew term *ha-rahāman* or its Aramaic equivalent *rahmana* function as a divine name (*BEK* 38; Greenfield 2000, 384–385; for extensive references to primary sources, see *DJPA* 522 and *DJBA* 1069–1070). The rabbinic employment of “the Merciful” as a divine name is partly rooted in the string of divine attributes that God reveals to Moses in Exod 34:6–7, containing the so-called thirteen attributes of mercy that are recited in Jewish penitential prayers or *səliḥot* (Schoenfeld 2019, 191). The first of these two verses includes a description of YHWH as “a merciful and gracious god” (*ēl rahūm wəḥannūn*; see also Joel 2:13). *Targum Onqelos* and *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* render this by translating *rahūm* as *rahmana*.<sup>16</sup>

The word *rahmānā* also figures in Syriac Christian literature: Ephrem prays that “the Merciful One” (*rahmānā*)—i.e., God—might “cleanse” heretics (Beck 1957b, no. 22:16);<sup>17</sup> Jacob of Sarug explains that God, on account of being merciful (*mraḥḥem*), is called “the Merciful One” (*rahmānā*; Bedjan 1905–1910, 1:628, l. 10);<sup>18</sup> and elsewhere Jacob depicts Mary as imploring her unborn son to reveal to Joseph the truth about her virginal conception with the words, “O Merciful One (*rahmānā*), merciful as you are (*da-kmā rahmān*), have pity on his [i.e., Joseph’s] righteousness” (Kollamparampil 2010, 86–87, l. 676 of Syriac text = l. 675 of English translation). Nonetheless, it appears that *rahmānā* does not have the same status of a major divine name in Syriac literature as in rabbinic discourse; according to some scholars, it appears less frequently than the form *mraḥḥmānā* (*GQ* 1:112–113, n. 1; Greenfield 2000, 385–386), which is, for instance, the Peshitta’s rendering of *rahūm* at Exod 34:6 and Joel 2:13 (see also *SL* 831).<sup>19</sup> The background to the Qur’anic divine name *al-rahmān* may therefore surmised to be rabbinic, even if the general theme of God’s mercy is of course frequent in the Christian tradition as well.<sup>20</sup>

Within the Qur’an’s more immediate Arabian environment, the currency of *al-rahmān* in Qur’anic discourse is reminiscent of, and most likely historically linked to, the use of *rhmn* = *rahmānān* (“the Merciful”) in Jewish (or Judaising) and Christian Ḥimyarite inscriptions from the late fourth or early fifth century CE onwards (Greenfield 2000, 387–389; Robin 2000, 57; Gajda 2009, 224–232; Robin and Rijziger 2018, 280–283). It was very probably from South Arabia that the term *rahmān* entered Old Arabic.<sup>21</sup> This development predates the Qur’an, since *al-rahmān* is already attested in poetry that has a good claim to being either pre-Qur’anic or at least contemporary with (but not impacted by) the Qur’an (e.g., Wellhausen 1884, no. 165:6, and Qabāwah 1987, 182, no. 3:36, both of which are cited in Brockelmann 1922, 106; see al-Farāhī 2002, 185–189; Greenfield 2000, 389–390; Sinai 2019b, 20, 29, 34, 53, 59). The poetic data reinforce, and are in turn

16 On the date of *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan*, see Hayward 1989a and Hayward 1989b, who casts doubt on the claim that the work must be post-Qur’anic.

17 I owe this reference to *SL* 1457.

18 I owe this reference to Yousef Kouriyhe; see <https://corpuscoranicum.de/kontexte/index/sure/1/vers/2/intertext/1246> (accessed 6 November 2021). For another instance in which Jacob calls God *rahmānā*, see Bedjan 1905–1910, 1:460, l. 1 (which has *abā rahmānā*, “merciful father”). This latter reference goes back, via Robin 2020–2021, 77, to Jack Tannous.

19 Christian use of the divine name *rahmānā* is also reported or at least implied in texts describing the martyrdom of the Christians of Najrān in 523 CE, such as the *Book of the Ḥimyarites* (Robin 2020–2021, 75–77). This may reflect peculiarities of local usage, namely, the prominence of the divine name *rahmānān* in Yemen, as documented by Sabaic inscriptions from the monotheistic period (see below in the main text).

20 See, for instance, the liturgical invocation “Lord, have mercy” (*kurie eleēson*; e.g., Matt 17:15), or the quotation of Joel 2:13 in *Apostolic Constitutions* 7:33 = Metzger 1985–1987, 3:67, describing God as *eleēmōn* and *oiktirmōn*.

21 Greenfield 2000, 389–390, is more doubtful and accentuates contact with the Jewish tribes of Yathrib.

rendered plausible by, Crone’s rejection of the conventional view that the divine name *al-raḥmān* was unfamiliar to Muhammad’s audience (e.g., Nöldeke at al. 1909–1938, 1:112, n. 1). As Crone points out, the designation *al-raḥmān* figures in utterances that the Qur’an ascribes to Muhammad’s pagan opponents, and verses that have often been understood as documenting the Qur’anic pagans’ lack of familiarity with the name *al-raḥmān*, such as Q 25:60, do not in fact warrant this inference (QP 66–68). It is true that Q 17:110 finds it necessary to underscore that it is one and the same whether one calls upon *allāh* or upon *al-raḥmān*: “Say, ‘Call<sup>p</sup> upon God or call upon the Merciful; whichever you call upon, to him belong the most excellent names.’” Nonetheless, the equivalence that the Qur’an assumes between the terms *allāh* and *al-raḥmān* cannot have been novel, since a poem from the corpus of al-A’shā Maymūn speaks interchangeably of *al-raḥmān* and of Allāh (Ḥusayn 1983, no. 15:36–37; Sinai 2019b, 20 and 59).<sup>22</sup>

**The emergence of the divine name *al-raḥmān* towards the end of the early Meccan period and the “*raḥmān* surahs.”** In the Qur’an, the divine name *al-raḥmān* occurs most often and most prominently as part of the *basmalah*. However, the *basmalah* may well be a secondary addition to at least some surahs (see under → *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm*). If it is disregarded, the expression *al-raḥmān* is completely absent from a significant number of early Meccan compositions, which indicates that it did not initially form part of the Qur’anic lexicon. Possibly the earliest occurrence of the name comes in the opening verse of the early Meccan Surah 55, aptly known as Sūrat al-Raḥmān (vv. 1–4): “The Merciful! // He has taught the recitation (*al-qur’ān*), // has created man, // has taught him clear exposition.” If, as argued elsewhere (→ *mathānī*), Q 15:87 is a retrospective allusion to the first surah of the Qur’an, the Fātiḥah, then Surah 1 will qualify as another early Meccan attestation of *al-raḥmān*, since the latter appears in Q 1:3.<sup>23</sup> Surah 15 itself does not make use of *al-raḥmān*, but includes two verses with other derivatives of the root *r-ḥ-m* (Q 15:49,56), the first one of which, quoted above, promises to God’s “servants” that the deity is “forgiving” (*ghafūr*) and “merciful” (*raḥīm*). Two more early occurrences of *al-raḥmān* are found in Q 26:5 (early Meccan) and 50:33 (somewhat later). Surah 26, moreover, includes multiple instances of the refrain “Your<sup>s</sup> Lord is the mighty one, the merciful one (*al-raḥīm*),” which generally concludes accounts of historical acts of divine punishment (vv. 9, 68, 104, 122, 140, 159, 175, 191; see also v. 217).

Judging by their mean verse length, which can serve as a rough and ready indicator of the Meccan surahs’ relative chronology (*HCI* 113–124), the instances of *al-raḥmān* just cited straddle the transition from the early Meccan period to the later Meccan one: Surahs 55, 26, and 15 have a mean verse length of 32.97, 36.71, and 43.12 transliteration letters, respectively, putting them at the upper end of the early Meccan texts, while Surah 50 (50.82 transliteration letters) has the lowest mean verse length after what is conveniently definable as the numerical cut-off point for early Meccan surahs (see *HCI* 161).<sup>24</sup> Approximately around the same time—namely, relatively soon after the transition to the later Meccan surahs—Surah 76 (mean verse length: 52.65 transliteration letters), though devoid of the

22 See also the discussion of the Jabal Dhabūb inscription under → *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm* as well as that of God’s “most excellent names” under → *ism*.

23 And also, of course, in Q 1:1, as part of the *basmalah*; but the *basmalah* may not be an integral part of the Fātiḥah (*GQ* 1:116).

24 The divine name *al-raḥmān* is also used in Q 78:38–39, in a surah whose mean verse length is below that of Surah 55; but these verses are part of a later insertion encompassing 78:37–40 (*GQ* 1:104; *PP* 455).

divine name *al-rahmān* itself, affirms that God “causes to enter into his mercy whomever he wills” (*yudkhilu man yashā’u fī rahmatihī*) but has “prepared a painful punishment for the wrongdoers” (Q 76:31).<sup>25</sup> This confirms the point made further above that God’s mercy is not unconditional: God’s being merciful does not mean that he will fail to chastise inveterate and unrepentant wrongdoers.<sup>26</sup> Two further references to God’s mercy (*rahmah*), which may date to approximately the same time, come in Q 38:9.43. Both Surah 76 and Surah 38 thus reinforce the sense that by the close of the early Meccan period, divine mercy has emerged as a topic of Qur’anic theological reflection, and that at this time important facets of the Qur’an’s conception of divine mercy—such as the association of mercy with forgiveness and its bestowal upon God’s “servants” (Q 15:49) and the duality of God’s mercy, on the one hand, and his stern justice towards wrongdoers, on the other (Q 26:9.68 etc., 76:31)<sup>27</sup>—have come into view.

A handful of subsequent compositions then employ the divine name *al-rahmān* with conspicuous frequency. Foremost among them is Surah 19, with sixteen occurrences of *al-rahmān* (vv. 18, 26, 44, 45, 58, 61, 69, 75, 78, 85, 87, 88, 91, 92, 93, 96) and several further instances of the root *r-h-m* (vv. 2, 21, 50, 53). Surah 19’s dual emphasis on divine mercy and on the introduction of a novel female protagonist, Mary, has been underlined by Neuwirth (Neuwirth 2016c, 31–33) and may bear further study.<sup>28</sup> Other Meccan texts punctuated by the divine name *al-rahmān* are Surah 20 (vv. 5, 90, 108, 109), Surah 21 (vv. 26, 36, 42, 112), Surah 25 (vv. 26, 59, 60, 63), Surah 36 (vv. 11, 15, 23, 52), Surah 43 (17, 19, 20, 33, 36, 45, 81), and Surah 67 (vv. 3, 19, 20, 29). Weil and Nöldeke place all of these texts in the so-called “middle Meccan” phase (*GQ* 1:121), and there is indeed reason to accept that all of them were composed and promulgated during the same approximate period of time, given that their mean verse length is concentrated between 55 and 75 transliteration letters.<sup>29</sup> In fact, there are only a few surahs in this range that do *not* exhibit a repeated employment of the term *al-rahmān*—most importantly, Surah 23 (which does however have several occurrences of other derivatives of *r-h-m* in vv. 75, 109, and 118) and Surah 72.<sup>30</sup> There are a few additional isolated occurrences of *al-rahmān* in surahs with an even higher mean verse length (see Q 2:163, 13:30, 17:110, 27:30, 41:2, 59:22). But generally speaking, at some time in the later Meccan period the divine name *al-rahmān* appears to have faded out of Qur’anic usage, at least outside the *basmalah*. This is not to overlook, of course, that even thereafter God’s mercy remained an important Qur’anic topic, as illustrated by some of the material quoted earlier in this entry.

25 Cf. similarly Q 42:8 and also 48:25.

26 For another early Meccan allusion to divine mercy, see Q 52:28, where God is called *al-rahīm*. The context has to do with God’s having protected the righteous ones, who were previously fearful of damnation, against the punishment of hell (Q 52:26–28).

27 This duality is of course also enshrined in the Fātiḥah: God is merciful (Q 1:3); but he is also the “king (→ *malik*) of judgement day” (1:4), and the final verse evokes those who are subject to God’s wrath (*al-maghḍūb ‘alayhim*; see also under → *ghaḍība*), identified with those who go astray (*al-ḍāllīn*).

28 Neuwirth describes Surah 19 as “the first *Rahmān*-Sura, i.e. a text that throughout uses *al-Rahmān*” (Neuwirth 2016c, 32). But the question of the precise diachronic relationship between Surah 19, on the one hand, and Surahs 20, 21, 25, 36, 43, and 67, on the other, cannot be regarded as settled.

29 Surahs 19, 20, 21, 25, 36, 43, and 67 have a mean verse length of 62.42, 61.04, 67.08, 75.25, 55.01, 61.78, and 67.47 transliteration letters, respectively.

30 Strictly speaking, the surahs in question are Q 23, 72, 73, and 98. However, Surah 73 has a much lower mean verse length if the later addition Q 73:20 is excluded from the computation. Surah 98, meanwhile, is anomalous in other regards as well (*HCI* 130–131).



The reasons for the striking prevalence of the divine name “the Merciful” in a relatively distinct subgroup of later Meccan surahs remain to be elucidated. Do these surahs, for example, share certain distinctive theological preoccupations? Angelika Neuwirth has provisionally discerned a focus on a “particularly intimate relationship between God and the believers” in them (Neuwirth 2016c, 33), an important hypothesis that merits being explored further. Another issue in need of more research arises from the fact that the subgroup of *rahmān* surahs just adumbrated are by no means devoid of the divine names *allāh* (e.g., Q 19:30.35.36.48.49.58.76.81 and 43:63.64.87) and *rabb* + possessive suffix (e.g., Q 19:2.3.4.6.8.9.10.19.21 etc. and 43:13.14.32.35.46 etc.).<sup>31</sup> This observation entails the question whether the concurrent use of these three divine names obeys any perceptible patterns. *Rabb* + suffix, of course, lends itself to use in petitions or direct addresses (e.g., Q 19:3.4.6.8.9.10). But the alternation between *al-rahmān* and *allāh* in particular requires closer analysis. For instance, why does Q 19:58 employ both *al-rahmān* and *allāh*, in different segments of the verse?

***Al-rahmān* as a proper name.** It is common to find translations of the *basmalah* along the lines of “In the name of the merciful and compassionate God” (e.g., Jones 2007). Yet the Qur’an does not normally use *rahmān* as an adjective (Jomier 1957, 362–363), despite the fact that there are of course many Arabic adjectives formed on the morphological pattern *fa’lān* (Wright 1974, 1:136, 184, 241). The case for a nominal understanding of *rahmān* is succinctly made in Graham 2001, 209 (see already van Ess 1975, 158–159): even outside the *basmalah*, the term *rahmān* never occurs without the definite article and is generally best construed as meaning “the Merciful,” in contrast with its adjectival cognate *rahīm*, which appears both with and without the article (e.g., Q 2:173: *inna llāha ghafūrun rahīm*, “God is forgiving and merciful”; 46:8: *wa-huwa l-ghafūru l-rahīm*, “he is the one who is forgiving and merciful”). This analysis has the additional advantage of according with the use of *rahmana* and *rahmānān* as a divine name (“the Merciful”) in Jewish Aramaic and Epigraphic South Arabian. Thus, Qur’anic usage and extra-Qur’anic comparative evidence indicate concurrently that the primary difference between *rahmān* and *rahīm* is a distinction of grammatical category, between noun and adjective.<sup>32</sup> *Al-rahmān* is not, therefore, a divine attribute but rather a proper name for God. This supports a rendering of the *basmalah* that treats *al-rahmān* as a second noun standing in apposition to *allāh*, with *rahīm* functioning as an attribute of *al-rahmān*.<sup>33</sup> That the latter is a proper name is also illustrated by verses in which God is called *al-rahmān* without God’s mercy being contextually in focus (Reynolds 2020, 95). Pertinent examples are Q 19:45, where Abraham voices his fear that his idolatrous father might suffer “a punishment from *al-rahmān*,” and 36:23, which stresses that no one’s intercession will be of any avail “if *al-rahmān* intends something harmful for me” (*in yuridni l-rahmānu bi-ḍurrin*). On the other hand, we saw above that various Qur’anic lexemes derived from the root *r-ḥ-m* semantically revolve around the notions of mercy and

31 According to Neuwirth, during the *rahmān* period the divine name *al-rahmān* “was in almost exclusive use” (Neuwirth 2016c, 33), but this is an overstatement. Cf. also the more cautious wording in *GQ* 1:121: *al-rahmān* is “occasionally more frequent than the usual *allāh*.”

32 On the question whether the two words might also have a subtly different semantic content, see below.

33 Nonetheless, if one limits oneself to considering the *basmalah* in isolation from the remainder of the Qur’an, it is grammatically possible to construe *al-rahmān* as playing an adjectival function. To be sure, there is no support for such an adjectival usage of the word anywhere else in the Qur’an; but one could argue that the point of the *basmalah* is precisely to demote the term from a noun to an adjective (Böwering 2002, 318, building on van Ess 1975, 159–160).



compassion. Together with the fact that many Qur’anic verses do explicitly stress God’s mercy, this makes it likely that the proper name *al-rahmān* would have conveyed some connotation of divine mercy even in contexts that foreground the punitive aspects of God’s interaction with humans. It is, accordingly, appropriate to render name *al-rahmān* as “the Merciful” rather than leaving it untranslated (“the *rahmān*”).

**Are *rahmān* and *rahīm* synonymous?** The relationship between the terms *rahmān* and *rahīm* as concatenated in the *basmalah* may also be examined from the perspective of their semantic relationship rather than that of grammatical categories. Do the two terms, by virtue of their shared derivation from the consonantal root *r-h-m* connoting mercy, convey the same semantic content? The question has occasioned much comment in Islamic exegesis (see also Mir 2016, 46–47). Some scholars opt in favour of synonymity. For example, the early commentator Abū ‘Ubaydah suggests that the use of *rahīm* is a rhetorically deliberate case of pleonasm (*li-ttisā’i l-kalām*), a device illustrated by various examples from ordinary Arabic speech and poetry (Abū ‘Ubaydah 1955–1962, 1:21; al-Tha’labī 2015, 2:298–299). An opposing view assumes that divine speech cannot contain semantically redundant repetition (*takrār*) and accordingly posits subtle semantic differences between the two terms, e.g., by maintaining that the former term expresses God’s mercy with regard to all of creation whereas the latter term expresses God’s mercy specifically with regard to humanity (Ṭab. 1:125–130; al-Tha’labī 2015, 2:300–312; *SQ* 6–7). Many of these distinctions are patently retrospective constructs that have little support in the Qur’anic text, even if placing the word *rahmān* against the background of classical Arabic morphology does allow one to credit it with a hyperbolic connotation that *rahīm* lacks (Zam. 1:108–109).<sup>34</sup> Also pertinent is the observation, made for instance by al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, that *rahmān* can only be predicated of God while *rahīm* may also be applied to other beings, an observation that he corroborates by adducing Q 9:128, where *rahīm* is used to characterise the Prophet (al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 2009, 347). That *al-rahmān* should be reserved for the deity, of course, is explicable by the term’s origin in an ancient Aramaic and Epigraphic South Arabian divine name. As we saw above, the main distinction between *rahmān* and *rahīm*, as far as it can be delineated based on Qur’anic data, is ultimately that *al-rahmān* is a noun functioning in many respects like a proper name whereas *rahīm* is its cognate adjective. In line with this, *rahīm* can appear as part of the twin divine predications that often conclude Qur’anic verses (e.g., Q 2:143: *inna llāha bi-l-nāsi la-ra’ūfun rahīm*; 2:182: *inna llāha ghafūrun rahīm*; 4:16: *inna llāha kāna tawwāban rahīmā*). Q 9:128, reflecting the Medinan surahs’ elevation of Muhammad’s status, exceptionally applies this predicatory convention to the Qur’anic Prophet (Marshall 1999, 164–175; *HCI* 206–207). There is no reason to suppose that *rahīm* here means anything other than the adjective “merciful.”

As regards the collocation *al-rahmān* + *al-rahīm*, it is relatively rare outside the *basmalah* and only occurs in Q 1:3, 2:163, 41:2, and 59:22, in addition to 27:30, which has the full *basmalah* formula (see under → *bi-smi llāhi l-rahmāni l-rahīm*). In all these cases, *rahīm* occupies a verse-final position. Hence, the primary function of *rahīm* when coupled with *al-rahmān* would appear to be to permit verse-final use of the latter term in a context rhyming in *ī/ū* + *m/n* rather than to convey a special semantic nuance that is not already expressed by

<sup>34</sup> However, the contention that the morphological pattern *fa’lān* can simply be equivalent to *fa’il* may be supported by citing a line of early Arabic poetry that employs *nadmān* in lieu of *nadīm*, “boon companion” (*EAP* 1:113–114).

*al-rahmān*. At the same time, *rahīm*, by virtue of being derived from the same root, certainly plays a reinforcing or emphatic function (cf. *GQ* 113), in line with Abū ‘Ubaydah’s suggestion that we are confronted with rhetorically deliberate pleonasm. All of this supports rendering *al-rahmān al-rahīm* as “the truly Merciful.”<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, there is an Epigraphic South Arabian precedent (dated to 504 CE) for combining the divine name *rahmānān*, “the Merciful,” with an adjective derived from the same root: *rhmn mtrhmn* (Gajda 2009, 75–76 and 228; Robin and Rijziger 2018, 280; see already van Ess 1975, 158).

***radda* tr. | to return or bring back s.o. or s.th.**

→ *taqwīm*

***ardhal* | more/most contemptible, lower/lowest**

On *al-ardhalūn*, “the dregs” (of society) and *arādhilunā*, “the dregs among us,” at Q 26:111 and 11:27, respectively, see under → *istad’afa* and → *mala’*.

***razaqa* ditr. | to provide s.o. with s.th.**

***rizq* | provision**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *anfaqa* tr./intr. | to spend (s.th.) *iftarā* tr. (‘alā) | to fabricate s.th. (e.g., a lie) (against s.o., namely, God) *ṭayyibāt* pl. | good things**

The Qur’an makes frequent use both of the verb *razaqa*, “to provide,” and the noun *rizq*, designating someone’s allotted “provision” or “sustenance.” In almost all cases, it is God who figures as the subject of the verb *razaqa* and the supplier of *rizq*. Nonetheless, there are a few cases where *razaqa* and *rizq* refer to human, rather than divine, support of socially vulnerable persons, such as divorced mothers or orphans (Q 2:233, 4:5.8).<sup>1</sup> This application of *razaqa* and *rizq* to inter-human maintenance arrangements may be a vestige of its pre-Islamic usage as attested by early poetry (*DSAAP*, Ṭarafah, no. 8:3; Zuhayr, no. 14:36; Imru’ al-Qays, no. 55:14; see also Arazi and Masalha 1999, 514).<sup>2</sup> Such a non-theological use of *rizq* and the verb *razaqa* also accords with the etymological fact that they are ultimately descended from Middle Persian *rōzīg*, “daily ration, daily bread.” The word probably entered Arabic via Syriac *rūzīqā* (*FVQ* 142–143; Ciancaglini 2008, 255; MacKenzie 1971, 72; *TS* 3847; *SL* 1445), although it also exists in Jewish Aramaic (*DJBA* 1063–1064). Overall, it is not inapt to compare Qur’anic *rizq* to the “daily bread” requested in the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:11).<sup>3</sup>

35 Cf. the suggestion in Mir 2016, 46, that on one reading of *al-rahmān al-rahīm*, the function of *rahīm* would be comparable to that of “pitch” in “pitch dark.” My discussion should also be compared with Blankinship 2020, 103–104, who maintains that *al-rahmān* “is stronger or wider than *al-rahīm* in meaning” and concludes that an adequate English rendering of the phrase is impossible.

1 Other terms that exhibit a similar mundane-theological double use are → *ajal* and → *ajr*.

2 Medieval scholars raised doubts about the authenticity of Ṭarafah no. 8; see *DSAAP*, 111 (Latin pagination).

3 “Our daily bread” is *lahmā d-sunqānan* in Syriac (“the bread we need”), i.e., does not involve a cognate of Qur’anic *rizq*.

**Antecedents for a theological usage of *rizq* and *razaqa*.** While I have been unable to locate a religious use of Syriac *rūzīqā*, the Arabic noun *rizq* figures in a theological context in a verse from the poetic corpus of al-A‘shā Maymūn (Ḥusayn 1983, no. 34:35), which boasts of the “inexhaustible provision” that God has granted the poet’s tribe. A verse from the *dīwān* of the Christian ‘Adī ibn Zayd describes God with the participle *qā’it*, “sustainer, nourisher” (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 6:47; cf. the use of *q-w-t* at Q 41:10).<sup>4</sup> God as the munificent provider of humans and of creation as a whole is also a Biblical theme, expressed in Hebrew by derivatives of the root *ś-b-‘* connoting satiety and satisfaction (NIDOTTE 3:1209–1214). For instance, God is the one who gives the wandering Israelites “meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning (*wāleḥem babbōqer lišbōa’*)” (Exod 16:8), and it is God who sees to it that the earth, the trees, and animate creatures are all “sated” (Ps 104:13.16.28: *tišba’*, *yišbā’ū*, *yišbā’ūn*) and who “gives” the latter “their food in due season” (Ps 104:27).<sup>5</sup> The theme of the generous sustenance that God grants his animate creatures is also developed in considerable detail by Jacob of Sarug (Mathews 2020, 26–31, ll. 1989–2026).<sup>6</sup> Quite possibly, Arabic *rizq* and *razaqa*, apart from designating support granted by one human to another, at some point came to function as a lexical vehicle for this Biblical trope in the language of pre-Qur’anic Jews and/or Christians—just as ‘Adī ibn Zayd appears to have had recourse to *qāta* (“to nourish, to sustain”) instead of *razaqa*. This conjecture fits well with a petition for divine provision in a late Sabaic inscription that is possibly pre-Qur’anic (Al-Jallad, forthcoming, revising the reading proposed in al-Ḥājj and Faq‘as 2018). According to Al-Jallad’s re-reading, the text opens with the words “In the name of God, the Merciful” (*b-s’mlh rḥmn*; → *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm*), pleads for God’s mercy, and then entreats the deity to “grant us provision from your favour” (*rzqn m-fḏlk*, corresponding to Arabic *urzuqnā min faḏlika*).<sup>7</sup> Al-Jallad links this supplication with Ps 90:14 (“Satisfy us in the morning with your mercy,” *śabbā’ēnū babbōqer ḥasdekā*).

**Divine provision in the Qur’an.** As already noted, in the Islamic scripture it is the theological usage of *r-z-q* that is the prevalent one. The Qur’an is adamant that God is “the best provider” (*khayr al-rāziqīn*; Q 5:114, 22:58, 23:72, 34:39, 62:11) and identifies him as the primary originator of all human and animal sustenance (Q 11:6): “there is no creature on earth whose sustenance does not depend on God.” God allocates ample provision “to whom he wills” (*yabsuṭu l-rizqa li-man yashā’u*) while to others he gives only sparingly (*wa-yaqdiru*, on which see CDKA 220; Q 13:26, 17:30, 28:82, 29:62, 30:37, 34:36.39, 39:52, 42:12; see also 16:71). Divine provision is both this-worldly (e.g., Q 2:172: “O believers, eat of the good things that we have provided for you and be grateful to God”; see also 5:88, 6:142, 7:160 etc.) and eschatological (e.g., Q 2:25, on which see under → *jannah*, and 3:169, 22:58, or 40:40), and it is bestowed not only upon humans but also on animals (Q 11:6, 29:60). Qur’anic evocations of God’s provision frequently appear together with

4 I am grateful to Nadja Abuhusein for alerting me to the verse by ‘Adī ibn Zayd.

5 I owe these Biblical references to NIDOTTE 3:1211. The Peshitta employs cognate derivatives of *s-b-‘* at Exod 16:8 and Ps 104:13.16.28; see also Mathews 2020, 28–29, ll. 2011–2012. My general awareness of the affinity between Qur’anic *r-z-q* and Biblical *ś-b-‘* is indebted to Al-Jallad’s proposal that part of the Jabal Dhabūb inscription is reminiscent of Ps 90:14 (see below).

6 One plausible Syriac equivalent to Arabic *razaqa*, among others, would be the verb *zān* (SL 373; e.g., Mathews 2019, 44–45, ll. 1869–1870).

7 I have adapted Al-Jallad’s translation to accord with my rendering of Qur’anic diction.

injunctions to “spend” (→ *anfaqa*) part of what God has granted, thereby establishing a hierarchical connection between divine and human giving (see Q 2:3.254, 4:39, 8:3, 13:22, 14:31, 16:75, 22:35, 28:54, 32:16, 34:39, 35:29, 36:47, 42:38, 63:10, and 65:7). As Q 34:39 puts it, “whatever you spend, he [namely, God] will replace it.”

Some Meccan passages suggest that to place restrictions and prohibitions on God’s natural provision, such as the distinction between permitted and forbidden foodstuffs (e.g., Q 10:59), is tantamount to “fabricating” (*iftarā*) lies against God and theologically incompatible with God’s generosity and benevolence (see under → *ḥarrama*). This stance is subsequently toned down in the Medinan surahs, which embrace a limited number of dietary taboos, such as the prohibition of pork, carrion, and blood (e.g., Q 2:173 and 5:3; see more generally Sinai 2019c). At the same time, the Medinan surahs continue to encourage the believers to “eat of the good things” that God has “provided” for them (e.g., Q 2:57.172: *kulū min ṭayyibāti mā razaqnākum*; cf. 2:60, 5:88),<sup>8</sup> an injunction already found in Meccan surahs (Q 7:160 and 20:81; see also 6:142, 34:15, and 67:15).<sup>9</sup> Hence, despite the Medinan Qur’an’s adoption of some dietary prohibitions, it remains an important Qur’anic motif to invite humans to enjoy God’s provision, provided that they are appropriately grateful for it and engage in charitable spending from it.

***al-rāsikhūn fī l-ilm* pl. | those firmly grounded in knowledge**

→ *bayyana*, → *aslama*, → *al-yahūd*

***arsala* tr. | to send s.o.**

→ *rasūl*, → *sulṭān*

***rasūl*, *mursal* | messenger**

Further vocabulary discussed: *arsala* tr. | to send s.o. *talā* tr. (‘*alā*) | to recite s.th. (to s.o.), to recount s.th. (to s.o.) *āyah* | sign *andhara* intr./tr./ditr. | to utter a warning, to warn s.o., to warn s.o. of s.th. *bashshara* tr. (*bi-/anna/bi-anna*) | to give glad tidings to s.o. (of s.th. / that . . .) *ummah* | community *shahīd*, *shāhid* | witness *umm al-qurā* | the mother of settlements, the mother-town ‘*arabī* | Arabic *al-ummiyyūn* pl. | the scriptureless, those not hitherto endowed with scriptural revelation *al-ḥawāriyyūn* pl. | the apostles *al-anṣār* pl. | the helpers *malak* | angel

**Overview and pre-Qur’anic attestation.** The most common Qur’anic term for a human envoy commissioned by God to deliver prophetic preaching is the word *rasūl*, “messenger,” which can also refer to angelic messengers (see below; on the semantic relationship between *rasūl* and *nabiyy*, “prophet,” see under → *nabiyy*). There is only one Qur’anic instance of *rasūl* in a non-religious sense, namely, to describe an emissary sent by the

<sup>8</sup> See also Q 16:114, a Medinan insertion (Sinai 2019c).

<sup>9</sup> According to Neuwirth 2004, Q 20:81 is a Medinan addition to the surah, but this is far from certain (see under → *ghaḍība*).

king of Egypt in Q 12:50. Qur'anic occurrences of *rasūl* number over three hundred and range from the early Meccan period (see Q 15:11, 26:16.27.107.125.143.162.178, 44:13.17–18, 51:52, 69:10,<sup>1</sup> and 91:13) to the Medinan one (e.g., Q 2:87.101.108 etc., 3:32.49). Much less frequently, some thirty times, the passive participle *mursal*, “somebody sent” (from *arsala*, “to send s.o.”), is employed as a synonym (Q 2:252, 6:34.48, 7:6.75.77, 13:43, 15:80, 26:21.105.123.141.160.176 and elsewhere; see O'Connor 2019, 184–185).<sup>2</sup> Where the Qur'an uses the term *rasūl* in the definite state—*al-rasūl*, “the Messenger”—or as a part of the construct *rasūl allāh*, “God's Messenger,” reference is generally to Muhammad, who is explicitly identified as “God's Messenger” in Q 33:40 and 48:29 (see also 3:144), even if both expressions are on occasion also used for earlier messengers, such as Moses and Jesus (e.g., Q 3:53, 4:171, 61:5.6, 73:16, or 91:13).

According to the premodern lexicographic tradition, *rasūl* was originally a verbal noun like *qabūl* and a synonym of *risālah*, “message,” and subsequently came to designate the bearer of a message (*AEL* 1083, 1084; Wright 1974, 1:136). If this is indeed what happened, the development must predate the Qur'an, since *rasūl* = “messenger” is attested in early poetry: ‘Alqamah bemoans that his love affair has ended due to the “signs of [= the things said by?] the deceiving messenger” (*āyāt al-rasūl al-mukhabbib*; *DSAAP*, ‘Alqamah, no. 1:12).<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the word *rs'l* appears in an inscription by the South Arabian king Abraha from 548 CE (*CIH*, no. 541, ll. 90–91), where it refers to Lakhmid and Ghassanid ambassadors (Beeston et al. 1982, 117; Robin 2015a, 166),<sup>4</sup> recalling Q 12:50. The Sabaic word is borrowed from Arabic *rasūl* (Beeston 1994, 43).

**Human messengership in the Meccan surahs.** A Qur'anic *rasūl* or *mursal* is a human who has been dispatched by God and charged with “reciting” (*talā*; see under → *qara'a*) or “recounting” (*qaṣṣa*) God's “signs” (Q 6:130, 7:35, 28:59, 39:71; → *āyah*) and with conveying warnings (*andhara*) and glad tidings (verb: → *bashshara*), namely, of eschatological punishment and reward (Q 4:165, 5:19, 6:130, 25:7, 39:71, 46:9). The Meccan proclamations include more or less detailed narratives about a certain number of particular messengers prior to Muhammad (see in general Marshall 1999), such as Noah (called a *rasūl* in Q 26:107; see also 25:37), Moses (called a *rasūl* in Q 20:47, 26:16.27, 43:46, 44:17.18, and 73:15.16, sometimes together with his brother Aaron), or Ṣāliḥ, sent to Thamūd (called a *rasūl* in Q 26:143 and 91:13). In addition, it is repeatedly made clear in the Meccan surahs that God sees to it that every “community” (→ *ummah*) receives its own messenger (Q 10:47, 16:36, 23:44, 40:5; Wensinck 1924, 172; Ahrens 1935, 129; Bijlefeld 1969, 19–20; see also Q 17:15 and 28:59) and “warner” (Q 26:208 and 35:24), who will also function as God's prosecutorial “witness” (*shahīd*) at the final judgement (Q 16:84.89, 28:75; 73:15 has *shāhid*; cf. the Medinan parallel 4:41). That the Qur'anic proclamations assume the existence of messengers beyond those who are explicitly named in them emerges from Q 40:78, referring to previous messengers “about some of whom we have told you<sup>5</sup> [namely, Muhammad] and about some of whom

1 The word also occurs in another verse of Surah 69, Q 69:40 (*innahu la-qawlu rasūlim karīm*, “It is the speech of a noble messenger”). On this verse, see n. 28 under → *malak*.

2 The verb *arsala* is not only used for God's dispatching of messengers, but also for God's “sending” of various kinds of punishments (see Q 7:162, 17:69, 29:40, 33:9, 41:16, 51:41, 54:34, 105:3).

3 Even if the context is non-religious, the co-occurrence of the terms *rasūl* and *āyāt*, which frequently appear together in the Qur'an, is striking.

4 See also <http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/SabaWeb/Suche/Suche/SearchResultDetail?idxLemma=4914&showAll=0> (accessed 15 November 2021). My awareness of this occurrence is due to Saqib Hussain.

we have not told you.” God’s messengers are on several occasions said to be “from” or “from among” (*min* or *min anfus*) the community or people to whom they preach (Q 6:130, 7:35, 16:113, 23:32, 39:71; see also 10:74 and 30:47), and they express themselves in the latter’s language (Q 14:4; Bijlefeld 1969, 21). Muhammad is explicitly presented as conforming to this nativist pattern: he is charged to “warn the mother-town and those dwelling around it” (Q 6:92, 42:7: *li-tundhira umma l-qurā wa-man ḥawlahā*),<sup>5</sup> his revelatory proclamations are in Arabic rather than in a foreign tongue (e.g., Q 12:2, 16:103, 41:44, 43:3; see under → ‘*arabī*’), and he is “from” his addressees (Q 16:89). Especially the Meccan Qur’an therefore envisages human messengership in the service of God as a universal historical phenomenon that has a range of discrete localised manifestations.

**Muhammad’s messengership in the Medinan Qur’an.** Medinan surahs retain aspects of the above theology of messengership, e.g., by reasserting a messenger’s responsibility for “reciting” or “bringing” (*jā’a bi-*) God’s signs (Q 2:129.151, 3:49.164, 62:2, 65:11), by stressing Muhammad’s origin from among his addressees (Q 2:129.151, 3:164, 9:128, 62:2) and by repeating the principle that he is the divinely appointed “witness” (*shahīd*) of his community (→ *ummah*; Q 4:41).<sup>6</sup> A plurality of past messengers, some of whom are not mentioned in the Qur’anic revelations, continues to be presupposed (Q 4:164, closely resembling 40:78). At the same time, there is an almost complete disappearance of references to God’s destruction of previous communities who rejected their messengers (KU 25–26; Marshall 1999, 157–164). In addition, Medinan texts exhibit a novel tendency to universalise the scope of Muhammad’s ministry, casting him as God’s messenger or prophet to “the scriptureless” (*al-ummiyyūn*) in general and in some cases extending his remit to the “scripture-owners” as well (Q 3:20, 5:15.19; see in more detail under → *ummī* and → *al-‘ālamūn*).

A distinct feature of Medinan phraseology is Muhammad’s promotion to *the* Messenger *par excellence*, referred to as *al-rasūl* (“the Messenger”) or *rasūl allāh* (“God’s Messenger”).<sup>7</sup> Specifically Medinan too are recurrent bipartite references to “God and his Messenger” (e.g., Q 2:279, 4:13.14.100.136, 5:33.55.56, 8:1.13.20.46, 9:1.3.24.29.59.62.63.65.71.74.80.84.90.91.94.105.107). They induce a phraseological proximity of God and Muhammad that has aptly been described as a “Godward movement” of the latter (Marshall 1999, 164–175). It is noteworthy that the phrase “God and his Messenger” is extremely frequent in Surah 9, probably one of the latest Medinan texts,<sup>8</sup> while occurring only once in Surah 2 (v. 279). This

5 The traditional equation of *umm al-qurā* with the settlement in which the Meccan Messenger is active, and which based on other verses can be inferred to be Mecca (HCI 49), is sound. For another verse using *umm* in the sense of a metropolitan town surrounded by other settlements, see Q 28:59, where the state of affairs intimated in 6:92 and 42:7 is generalised: “Your<sup>s</sup> Lord did not destroy any of the settlements until having sent to their mother-town a messenger who would recount our signs to them (*wa-mā kāna rabbuka muhlika l-qurā ḥattā yab’atha fī ummihā rasūlan yatlū ‘alayhim āyātina*); and we did not destroy any of the settlements unless its inhabitants were wrongdoers.”

6 In Q 2:143 and 22:78, the word *shahīd* seems to have a different significance; see under → *al-‘ālamūn*.

7 This is anticipated in the Meccan verses Q 25:27.30, where *al-rasūl* is plausibly identified with Muhammad, given that the latter verse has “the messenger” complain that his people have shunned “this *qur’ān*.” Both verses would seem to pick up from the reference to “this messenger” (*hādihā l-rasūl*) in v. 7. By contrast, in Q 29:18 (“The only thing incumbent upon the messenger is to transmit clearly,” *wa-mā ‘alā l-rasūli illā l-balāghu l-mubīn*), *al-rasūl* must be construed generically (“the messenger” = “messengers in general”), since the statement occurs in a speech attributed to Abraham.

8 In support of this assessment, note that Q 9:28 reserves access to the sanctuary exclusively to the believers while banning the associators (see in more detail under → *ṭahara* and → ‘*amara*’). This would seem to reflect the



may indicate that the Messenger’s “Godward movement,” and therefore also the authority claimed on his behalf, increased over the course of the Medinan period, which would certainly be a plausible trajectory. The most remarkable manifestation of the Messenger’s proximity to God comes in the penultimate verse of Surah 9 (Q 9:128), which applies to the Messenger two attributes, kindness and mercy (on which see under → *al-rahīmān*), that are otherwise (e.g., Q 2:143) reserved for the deity (*KK* 216) and thereby implies the Messenger’s “participation in divine characteristics” (Marshall 1999, 170–173).

**Antecedents of the Qur’anic concept of human messengership.** The Qur’an’s predominant usage of *rasūl* for a human envoy dispatched by God has been connected to the New Testamental notion of apostleship, given that *rasūl* forms a literal counterpart of Greek *apostolos* and Syriac *shliḥā* (Wensinck 1924, 173–174; *QP* 110; for a nuanced evaluation, see O’Connor 2019, 186–196; an exemplary New Testamental occurrence is Matt 10:2). The Qur’anic phrase *rasūl allāh*—used for a predecessor of Muhammad as early as Q 91:13 and very common in the Medinan surahs—has an exact parallel in Syriac *shliḥā/shliḥeh d-allāhā*, occurring in the Syriac *Acts of Thomas* (Wensinck 1924, 174, and Fossum 1993, 152; see Wright 1871, 1:178, l. 16, 1:207, l. 1, and 1:264, l. 13, translated in 2:152.179.229) and in the *History of Philip* (Wright 1871, 1:94, l. 10, 1:96, l. 18, translated in 2:88.90). As Wensinck highlights, the Apostle Thomas preaches to the people of India just as a Qur’anic messenger preaches to his assigned audience. This should not lead one to overlook important differences between Qur’anic messengership and Christian apostleship, however. Most conspicuously, the disciples of Jesus are Qur’anicly labelled *al-ḥawāriyyūn* (Q 3:52, 5:111–112, 61:14), from Classical Ethiopic *ḥawārāyān* (singular: *ḥawārāyā*; *NB* 48 and *FVQ* 115–116), and are never called *rusul* (Widengren 1955, 15; Bijlefeld 1969, 12, n. 54; Fossum 1993, 151). From a Qur’anic perspective, the title *rasūl* applies to Jesus himself rather than to his disciples (see Q 2:87, 3:53, 4:157.171, 57:27, 61:6). Of course, the Qur’an also applies the title of *rasūl* to much earlier figures such as Noah or Moses. This has been compared to Origen, Procopius, and Chrysostom, who widen the New Testamental notion of apostleship beyond the disciples of Jesus, extending it to Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and John the Baptist (Wensinck 1924, 173–174).

Despite the preceding, it cannot be taken for granted that the Qur’anic use of *rasūl* must have a specifically Christian background. Thus, a late antique Jewish liturgical poem in Palestinian Aramaic, recovered from the Cairo Genizah, has Moses self-identify as God’s “messenger” (Rodrigues Pereira 1997, 315–316 and 398–400, pointed out in O’Connor 2019, 187; see also *DJPA* 553). A Samaritan text known as *Memar Marqah* or *Tibat Marqe* similarly calls Moses God’s “messenger” and refers to his “messengership” (Fossum 1985b, 145–146; see also Fossum 1993, 151–152, citing Macdonald 1963, 1:123 and 2:201 = *Memar Marqah* 5:3, although this particular section of the work may not be pre-Islamic). In both cases, application of the title to Moses may have arisen from Exod 3:13 and 4:28, which speak of God’s “sending” of Moses (Widengren 1950, 47). Mani, too, styled himself as an *apostolos* or *shliḥā* (Fossum 1993, 151; *Cologne Mani Codex*, 45, 63, 66, 71 = Koenen and Römer 1988, 28, 42, 44, 48), although not apparently as a prophet (Stroumsa 1986, 70),<sup>9</sup> and he also applied the title of *apostolos* to his predecessors (*Cologne*

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Qur’anic community’s takeover of the sanctuary that the traditional (non-Qur’anic) timeline of Muhammad’s life places towards the end of his prophetic activity.

<sup>9</sup> Stroumsa explains this as being due to Mani’s copying of Pauline language.

*Mani Codex*, 48 and 71 = Koenen and Römer 1988, 30 and 48). Similar to the Qur'an, some Manichaean texts include Adam, Noah, and Jesus among the messengers prior to Mani (Stroumsa 1986, 71; Tardieu 2008, 15; Fossum 1993, 157).<sup>10</sup>

In sum, while the precise filiation of the Qur'anic universalisation of the notion of messengership is difficult to discern, it does intersect with various late antique trajectories. At the same time, it is clear that such pre-existing trends are modified in accordance with Qur'anic doctrine. This is exemplified by the fact that the Qur'an, contradicting Christian usage, excludes the disciples of Jesus from the category of messengership. Specifically, this reclassification of the disciples may be viewed as a consequence of the Qur'an's demotion of Jesus from a divine figure to the status of a mere messenger, which may then have entailed a knock-on demotion of Jesus's disciples from the status of apostles or messengers to mere *ḥawāriyyūn* and "helpers" (*anṣār*; Q 3:52, 61:14).

**Rasūl and mursal referring to angelic messengers.** Although the Qur'an principally applies the terms *rasūl* and *mursal* to humans, they can also be applied to angels (*DTEK* 83–84; Hawting 2011, 385; O'Connor 2019, 185). Thus, *rasūl* refers to an angelic messenger in Q 19:19, 42:51, and 81:19,<sup>11</sup> and the plural *rusul* occurs in the same capacity in Q 6:61, 7:37, 10:21, 11:69.77.81, 22:75, 29:31.33, 35:1, 43:80, and probably also 2:98.<sup>12</sup> Of course, the Arabic term *rasūl* may be viewed as an equivalent not only of Greek *apostolos* but also of Greek *angelos*, "messenger, envoy," which by virtue of becoming increasingly confined to supernatural messengers ultimately turned into Latin *angelus* or English "angel." Nonetheless, the Qur'anic term for an angel in the conventional sense—i.e., for a supernatural intermediary between God and humans—is → *malak*, and even though *malak* and *rasūl* can be referentially equivalent in certain Qur'anic verses they are never proper synonyms: *rasūl* designates a being carrying out a certain function, that of an "emissary" or perhaps also of an "authorised agent" more generally (see *DTEK* 83–84), while *malak* designates an angel in the sense of a certain kind of supernatural being.<sup>13</sup> The overlap arises because the latter can act as the former, as the Qur'an itself makes explicit: God has appointed "angels (*al-malā'ikah*) as messengers (*rusulan*)," Q 35:1 says, and according to Q 22:75 "God chooses messengers from the angels and from humans" (*allāhu yaṣṭafī mina l-malā'ikati rusulan wa-mina l-nāsi*).

The Qur'an's concurrent use of *malak* and *rasūl* with the meanings just outlined is probably not novel. Successive verses of a poem credited to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt refer to God's angels both as *malā'ik* and as *rusul* (Schulthess 1911a, no. 25:32–33 = al-Saṭlī 1974, no. 10:32–33; cf. Seidensticker 2011b, 47–49). The same distinction between the terms *malak* (designating a supernatural intermediary between God and humans) and *rasūl* (meaning "messenger" in general) is one that also seems to have been observed by Muhammad's pagan opponents, the "associators" (→ *ashraka*), at least in so far as the utterances attributed to them employ both words (e.g., Q 25:7). It would therefore seem that Qur'anic usage is here in line with established Arabic usage more generally.

10 See also *QP* 300–304, pointing to the similarity between the Qur'anic chain of prophets or messengers and those recognised by various strands of Jewish Christianity.

11 On Q 81:19, see the discussion under → *malak*.

12 For *mursalūn* in the sense of angelic messengers, see Q 15:57.61. For contrasting cases in which the plural *rusul* clearly means human messengers, see Q 7:43.53, 11:59, or 23:44.

13 One might compare the sense in which *b. Ta'an.* 2a uses Hebrew *shaliaḥ* to refer to an intermediary by means of whom God executes his will.

**ruʿb** | terror

→ *qalb*

**murāgham** | place of withdrawal or refuge

→ *hājara*

**raqabah** | neck; slave

→ *darajah*, → *zakāh*

**raqiya, irtaqā** intr. | to ascend

→ *nazzala*

**rakaʿa** intr. | to bow (in prayer)

→ *sajada*, → *ṣallā*

**rahbah** | fear

→ *ṣadr*

**ruhbān** pl. | God-fearers, bishops

**rahbāniyyah** | the institution of the episcopate (“God-fearingness”)

→ *al-naṣārā*

**rūḥ** | spirit

**rūḥ al-quḍus** | the holy spirit

Further vocabulary discussed: *nazala* intr. *bi-* | to bring s.th. down *nazzala, anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down *malak* | angel *tanazzala* intr. | to descend *laylat al-qadr* | the night of foreordainment *ʿaraja* intr. | to ascend *nafakha* tr. *fī* | to blow s.th. into s.th. *ayyada* tr. (*bi-*) | to fortify s.o. (with s.th.) *amr* | command

**Pre-Qurʿanic attestations and overview of Qurʿanic usage.** The noun *rūḥ* is attested in pre-Islamic poetry. For instance, a poem transmitted from ʿAntarah describes a steed’s nostrils as “the place in his face where his breath (*rūḥ*) exits” (*wa-ka-anna makhraja rūḥihi fi wajhihi . . .*; DSAAP, ʿAntarah, no. 20:25),<sup>1</sup> while a hemistich from the corpus

<sup>1</sup> Durie maintains that “there is no evidence that *rūḥ* (or *rīḥ*) was used to refer to breathing” in early Arabic and insists that any apparent occurrences carrying this meaning refer “to *blowing*, that is, generating a wind with one’s breath” (Durie 2018, 166–167). I am unsure that this is tenable, though I am in full agreement with Durie and Macdonald’s view that the semantics of Qurʿanic *rūḥ* are not the result of an internal development within Arabic alone (see below).

of al-Nābighah appears to employ *rūḥ* in close connection with → *nafs*, “soul” or “vital self,” an association not seen in the Qur’an (*DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 6:15 = Fayṣal 1968, no. 31:15; see Jacobi 1971, 144): “And I/you calmed my soul (*sakkantu/sakkanta nafsī*) after its spirit had fluttered (*tāra rūḥuhā*).” As Seidensticker has shown, there is a small number of further lines from poems attributed to early Islamic and pre-Islamic authors in which *rūḥ* refers to the “spirit” departing a human body at the point of death (Seidensticker 1989). Especially interesting are two verses credited to Imru’ al-Qays and ‘Abīd ibn al-Abrāṣ (the latter of which is edited and translated as no. 24:21 in Lyall 1913) that oppose *rūḥ*, “spirit,” and *jasad*, “body” (Seidensticker 1989, 152–153, including a convincing critique of Lyall’s rendering). In the Qur’an, too, the word *rūḥ* (for general discussions of which see O’Shaughnessy 1953 and Durie 2018, 164–175) is generally translatable as “spirit,” though the spirit in question is, as we shall see, never that of a human individual. There is, accordingly, an arresting discontinuity between the poetic use of the noun *rūḥ* and the Qur’an, where it is only the → *nafs* that departs the human body at death (Seidensticker 1989, 141–142).<sup>2</sup> In fact, the meaning of *rūḥ* in Qur’anic Arabic, rather than continuing pre-Qur’anic poetic usage, would seem to exhibit a strong semantic imprint of its Syriac cognate *rūḥā* (*SL* 1445–1446), and it has aptly been said that the term *rūḥ* reached the Qur’anic milieu as a “theological *terminus technicus*” (Macdonald 1932, 30). Parenthetically, one may add that this makes “spirit” a particularly fitting English translation of Qur’anic *rūḥ*, given the Latin origin of “spirit.”<sup>3</sup>

Qur’anic instances of the noun *rūḥ* convey what would at first sight seem to be two rather different conceptions, discussed under (i) and (ii) below: a personal or agentive one, representing the *rūḥ* as a quasi-angelic figure who functions as a representative of God, and an impersonal one, representing the *rūḥ* as a vivifying or fortifying principle originating from or bestowed by God (see, e.g., *DTEK* 123–124). The contrast between both uses runs largely parallel to a grammatical distinction, namely, whether the noun *rūḥ* functions as a grammatical subject, as in most verses allocated to group (i), or as a direct or prepositional grammatical object, as in group (ii), the grammatical subject at hand being God himself. This parallelism is, however, not complete, and some passages in which the spirit figures as an object of divine action are at least reconcilable with an agentive interpretation. Most of these passages are presented as a separate category (iii) below.

**(i) The spirit as a quasi-angelic intermediary or agent of God.** Two Meccan passages speak of “the spirit” as an intermediary figure who “brings down” (*nazala bi-* or → *naz-zala* + acc.) divine revelations to Muhammad (Q 26:192–195 and 16:102) and is given the epithets “trustworthy” and “holy” (Q 26:193: *al-rūḥ al-amīn*; 16:102: *rūḥ al-quḍus*; see

2 As the data compiled by Seidensticker show, both the *ḥadīth* corpus and Umayyad poetry use *rūḥ* to mean the individual human spirit (Seidensticker 1989, 142–151), thus resuming what appears to have been the word’s pre-Qur’anic meaning.

3 Durie questions a general policy of translating Qur’anic *rūḥ* as “spirit,” and at one point suggests that Qur’anic statements according to which God “blew” (*nafakha*) “some of his spirit” (*min + rūḥ* + possessive suffix) into Adam or Mary are best translated simply as “to blow into” (Durie 2018, 174–175; see also 171–172). Durie’s rationale is that Qur’anic occurrences of *rūḥ*, while constituting “reflexes of Biblical materials,” exhibit “a loss of theological content”; as he puts it slightly earlier, there is “no Qur’anic Theology of *rūḥ* as the breath of life” (Durie 2018, 174–175). Yet however limited the number of Qur’anic verses speaking of God’s *rūḥ* are in comparison with other topics, it does seem very likely that in the kind of Arabic spoken in the Qur’anic milieu the word *rūḥ* had become the standard term for conveying Biblical and Christian notions about God’s spirit. The matter is discussed further below in the main text.

in more detail under → *malak*). The expression “the holy spirit” in Q 16:102 reflects the Christian theme that it is the “Holy Spirit” (*to pneuma to hagion*; Syriac *rūhā d-qūdshā*) who “speaks through the prophets” (*to lalēsan dia tōn prophētōn*), as codified in the Nicene Creed (PP 101), against the background of pertinent Biblical statements (e.g., 2 Sam 23:2; Acts 1:16, 4:8, 28:25; 2 Pet 1:21).<sup>4</sup> That the expression *rūh al-qudus* would have had a Christian assonance is confirmed by a South Arabian inscription from 548 CE. Commissioned by the Ḥimyarite ruler Abraha, it opens with an invocation of the Christian Trinity in which the Holy Spirit is designated by an expression that is cognate with the Qur’anic *rūh al-qudus*, namely, *rh qds<sup>l</sup>* (Sima 2004, 25 and 28; Robin and Rijziger 2018, 281). By contrast, an inscription by a predecessor of Abraha from less than two decades earlier employs *mnfs<sup>l</sup> qds<sup>l</sup>*, loaned from Classical Ethiopic *manfas qaddūs* (Robin 2015a, 153).<sup>5</sup>

Three further passages exhibiting a personal or agentive understanding of the spirit are the early Meccan verses Q 70:4, 78:38, and 97:4. Each of them specifies some action that is jointly ascribed to the spirit and the angels, and thereby implies that the spirit bears substantial affinity with the latter. For instance, Q 78:38 prophesies that on the day of judgement “the spirit and the angels” will “stand in ranks” (*yawma yaqūmu l-rūhu wal-malā’ikatu ṣaffan*). The other two verses have “the angels and the spirit” move up and down between heaven and earth, and associate this movement with an extended or even stupendous period of time (see PP 438–439). Thus, Q 97:4 says that the angels and the spirit “descend” (*tanazzalu*) during the mysterious “night of foreordainment” (*laylat al-qadr*; see in more detail under → *amr*), which according to the preceding verse is “better than a thousand months” (Q 97:3), and Q 70:4 (on which see also PP 438–439) maintains that the angels and the spirit “ascend” (*ta’ruju*) back to God “on a day whose length is 50,000 years,” presumably in order to underscore that the vast cosmic distances covered are beyond the scope of human comprehension.<sup>6</sup>

A final passage exhibiting an agentive understanding of the spirit is Q 19:17. The verse recounts that God “sent” his spirit to Mary, upon which the spirit “appeared to her as a shapely human” (*fa-arsalnā ilayhā rūhanā fa-tamaththala lahā basharan sawiyyā*). This is followed by a dialogue between Mary and the spirit (vv. 18–21), who says that he has been sent in order to “give” Mary a “pure boy” (v. 19: *li-ahaba laki ghulāman zakiyyā*).<sup>7</sup> Mary then falls pregnant with Jesus (v. 22: *fa-ḥamalathu*). The scene evidently harks back, in some form, to the encounter between Mary and the angel Gabriel that is narrated in Luke 1:26–38, where Gabriel announces to Mary that “you will conceive in your womb and bear a son” (Luke 1:31) and, shortly afterwards, that “the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you” (Luke 1:35), even if Luke, unlike Surah 19, keeps apart the announcer of Mary’s pregnancy (Gabriel) from the agent causing it (the

4 On the evident etymological link between *rūh al-qudus* and Syriac *rūhā d-qūdshā*, see already Macdonald 1932, 28; CQ 29; FVQ 232; Durie 2018, 168.

5 The Christian connotations of the phrase *rūh al-qudus* also emerge from three Medinan verses, discussed under category (ii), according to which God “fortified” (*ayyada*) Jesus with the “holy spirit” (Q 2:87.253, 5:110).

6 O’Shaughnessy 1953, 18, quotes two passages from Ephrem that he considers to form parallels to these three Qur’anic verses, but none of them couples “the angels and the spirit” in exactly the same manner as the Qur’an.

7 A significant number of variant readings have *li-yahaba* instead of *li-ahaba* for Q 9:17, thus piously diluting the fact that what is presumably the original wording of the text presents God’s spirit as the agent of Mary’s impregnation. See MQ 5:348 and MQQ 4:36.

Holy Spirit).<sup>8</sup> Despite the fact that Q 19:17 positions the spirit as the grammatical object of God's sending (cf. Luke 1:26: Gabriel "was sent," *apestalē*), God's spirit is clearly an agent in his own right in this Qur'anic account, as indicated by the fact that *rūḥanā* ("our spirit") forms the anaphorically implied subject of the verbs *tamaththala*, to "appear" (v. 17), *qāla*, "to say" (vv. 19, 21), and *wahaba*, "to give" (v. 19).

(ii) **The spirit as a vivifying or fortifying principle emanating from God.** In other Qur'anic passages, by contrast, the "spirit" is more closely identified with God, by virtue of standing in a possessive relationship with him, and appears to be an aspect or emanation of the deity rather than an independent agent. Thus, God is said in three Meccan surahs to have "blown" (*nafakha*; see Durie 2018, 171–172) "some of his spirit" (*min + rūḥ + possessive suffix*) into Adam (Q 15:29, 32:9, 38:72: *wa-nafakha fihi min rūḥihi / nafakhtu fihi min rūḥi*). Similarly, a Meccan and a Medinan verse report that God blew some of his spirit into Mary, presumably at the moment of Jesus's conception (Q 21:91, 66:12: *fa-nafakhnā fihā / fihi min rūḥinā*, with *fihi* in 66:12 referring back to *farj*). The idea that it was an insufflation of God's spirit that caused Mary to fall pregnant may also be reflected in another Medinan statement about Jesus, Q 4:171, according to which Jesus is—meaning, perhaps, "is created from" (or perhaps "is endowed with")—God's spirit (*rūḥun minhu*).<sup>9</sup> In the cases of both Adam and Jesus, God's spirit is "an impersonal thing, a breath of life, originating with Allah and animating the human body" (O'Shaughnessy 1953, 25). A similar understanding of the spirit as an impersonal reality imparted by God emerges from Medinan affirmations that God has fortified the believers with his spirit (Q 58:22: *wa-ayyadahum bi-rūḥin minhu*)<sup>10</sup> or

8 The link between Luke and Q 19:17 may, of course, have been mediated by intervening texts and traditions. This is well illustrated by Q 19:17. The verse is normally understood to say that God's spirit appeared to Mary "as a shapely human" (*basharan sawiyyā*). By contrast, the annunciation passage in Luke 1 does not specify the appearance of Gabriel (even though one may argue that Mary's perplexity in Luke 1:29 suggests that Gabriel was not immediately identifiable as an angel). The Qur'anic account therefore stands out from Luke by virtue of the additional motif of God's superhuman messenger to Mary being expressly said to have appeared in a human guise. But this motif is traceable in pre-Qur'anic Christian tradition: Yousef Kouriyhe has drawn attention to Ephrem's statement in his *Hymns on the Nativity* that Gabriel took on the appearance of a "comely" or "splendid" (*hdīrā*) and "honourable" (*myattbā*) old man when appearing to Mary, so as not to frighten her (e.g., by appearing as an angel, or indeed as a young man, whom she might have perceived as a threat). See Beck 1959, *De Nativitate*, no. 2:19, and <https://corpuscoranicum.de/kontexte/index/sure/19/vers/17> (accessed 15 July 2021). Specifically, both the Qur'an and Ephrem do not just note the human form of Mary's interlocutor but also accentuate his handsome and pleasant aspect (Arabic: *sawiyy*, Syriac: *hdīrā*). What the Qur'anic account lacks, of course, is the notion that the spirit takes the form specifically of an old man, so as to avoid seeming like a threat.

9 Of course, *rūḥun minhu* literally means only "a spirit of/from him," but it is defensible to equate *rūḥun minhu* with *rūḥuhu* here—just as Jesus can be described, apparently interchangeably, both as "God's word" (Q 4:171: Jesus is "God's messenger and his word," *rasūlu llāhi wa-kalimatuhu*) and as "a word of/from God" (Q 3:39.45: *bi-kalimatī mina llāhi / bi-kalimatī minhu*). The use of *min* to paraphrase a genitive of possession is well attested in Arabic (Reckendorf 1921, 258–259), and so is a phenomenon that Reckendorf calls "emphatic indetermination," often found in poetry: despite the fact that a given context of speech would lead one to expect a determinate noun, a poet may nonetheless employ an indeterminate noun instead, leaving it to the recipient to work out that reference is to one specific individual (Reckendorf 1895–1898, 163–164). As Reckendorf writes, "the impact of such an instance of indetermination rests on the fact that one's imagination is seemingly given a certain leeway to individualise [the expression], yet frequently a certain compulsion is nonetheless brought to bear on the hearer to determine [the expression] in the manner intended by the speaker." In view of this general phenomenon as well as the fact that other Qur'anic passages speak explicitly of God's spirit by directly combining *rūḥ* with a possessive suffix (e.g., Q 15:29, 66:12), I therefore propose to construe *rūḥun minhu* in Q 4:171 and also *bi-rūḥin minhu* in 58:22 (on which see below in the main text) as instances of emphatic indetermination. The two expressions should accordingly be rendered "his spirit" rather than "a spirit of his / from him" in order to avoid giving the inaccurate impression that there could be more than one spirit of God.

10 On *bi-rūḥin minhu* as an instance of emphatic indetermination, see the previous note.



that he fortified (*ayyada*) Jesus “with the holy spirit,” *bi-rūhi l-quḏusi* (Q 2:87.253, 5:110). While these latter verses do not employ the verb *nafakha*, they are appropriately grouped together with passages like Q 15:29 in so far as the *rūh* is only cast as an object of divine action rather than also as an agent in his own right.<sup>11</sup>

The Qur’anic formula *nafakha* (with God as subject) + *fī* + *min rūhi* + possessive suffix referring to God, found in verses like Q 15:29 or 21:91, deserves additional comment. As O’Shaughnessy has recognised (O’Shaughnessy 1953, 26), the phrase must be placed against the background of Gen 2:7, according to which God created Adam and then “breathed (*wayyippah*, Peshitta: *npah*) into his nostrils the breath of life (*nišmat hayyīm*).” O’Shaughnessy adds that this divinely infused “breath of life” from Gen 2:7 is in other Biblical passages called *rūah hayyīm*, “spirit of life,” which becomes *rūhā d-hayyē* in the Syriac Peshitta (Gen 6:17, 7:15.22), thus taking us even closer to Qur’anic phraseology. Hence, even if the Qur’an does not explicitly state that the *rūh* that God blows into Adam and Mary is life-giving (Durie 2018, 172), the Qur’anic collocation of *nafakha* and *rūh* may be considered to deploy Biblically informed diction.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, O’Shaughnessy manages to identify a remarkably exact equivalent of the Qur’anic phrase *wa-nafakha fīhi min rūhihi* in the Syriac writer Aphrahat: *wa-npah beh men rūheh* (*Demonstrations* 17:7 = Parisot 1894, 799–800; see also variations of the same formulation in *Demonstrations* 17:6 = Parisot 1894, 793–794, and *Demonstrations* 23:58 = Parisot 1907, 117). O’Shaughnessy additionally quotes the same phrase from the *Book of Steps* (O’Shaughnessy 1953, 29). This confirms that the Qur’an is not specifically citing Aphrahat here but rather is picking up Syriac diction that enjoyed wider currency. Particularly compelling is the presence in Syriac of a counterpart to the Qur’an’s conspicuous *min*, whose putative point is to emphasise that humans are at most participants in God’s spirit rather than in full possession of it. Intriguingly, a poem describing God’s creation of Adam that is attributed to the Christian ‘Adī ibn Zayd also mentions God’s “blowing of the spirit” into Adam’s body (*bi-nafkhati l-rūhi fī l-jismi*; al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 103:8; Dmitriev 2010, 360 and 364). Apparently, the notion was current in Arabic by the end of the sixth century.

To indulge in a brief digression, it is worth noting that O’Shaughnessy’s discovery throws interesting light on the emergence of Qur’anic formulaic language more generally. If one adheres to a conventional understanding of the Qur’an’s internal chronology that places the Meccan surahs before the Medinan ones, it appears that the Qur’anic compositions’ propensity to employ formulaic language increased over time (see Bannister 2014, 143).<sup>13</sup> This development can be accounted for by positing that the Qur’anic proclamations, rather than relying on a well-established repository of formulaic phraseology from the

11 To be sure, Durie subsumes these passages under “*rūh* as an angelic being” (Durie 2018, 168–169). Yet the only thing that might conceivably incline one to view the *rūh* as an angelic agent here is the collocation with *al-quḏus*, recalling Q 16:102.

12 According to Durie, Q 15:29 “does not mean that Allāh ‘breathed the breath of life’ into Ādam, but that he blew a puff of air into him, thereby bringing him to life.” However, this deflationary reading fails to do justice to the possessive pronoun suffixed to *min rūh*, which makes explicit that what is being blown into Adam is God’s spirit rather than just air.

13 Unlike me, Bannister considers this result a glaring anomaly that calls into doubt the standard view of the Qur’an’s genesis and chronology (Bannister 2014, 145–146). His rationale is the assumption that a higher degree of formulaic density indicates a higher likelihood of having emerged from oral composition: “Why should those suras commonly said to date from later in Muhammad’s prophetic career apparently display *more* of the hallmarks of orality than those supposedly from the earlier phase of his ministry?”

outset, only gradually fashioned and accumulated their own formulaic thesaurus (Sinai 2018b, 279–280). One may describe this as a process of formulaic consolidation.<sup>14</sup> The chief motor of the process was the tendency of later Qur’anic proclamations to echo the phraseology of earlier ones; but the process also drew on existing formulaic language of miscellaneous provenance. This latter point is well illustrated by O’Shaughnessy’s Syriac parallels to the formulaic system consisting of *nafakha* + *fī* + *min rūḥi* + possessive suffix: his parallels show that at least some of the individual elements that entered into the Qur’an’s formulaic thesaurus derived from pre-existing discursive traditions, such as Syriac Christian or, in other cases, rabbinic language.<sup>15</sup> In the course of the Qur’an’s process of formulaic consolidation, these elements of diverse provenance then became fused together into what we would now think of as distinctively Qur’anic language.

In adopting existing phraseology, one may add, the Qur’anic proclamations sometimes introduced discernible inflections of meaning and usage. This, too, is neatly exemplified by the *nafakha* + *rūḥ* cluster. The parallels from Aphrahat all relate to God’s primordial blowing of his spirit into the newly created Adam. The Meccan verse Q 21:91, however, transfers this motif from the creation of Adam to that of Jesus. This is plausibly viewed as a shift that is original to the Qur’an. It is true that Luke 1:35 has Gabriel announce to Mary that “the Holy Spirit will come upon you,” meaning that the Qur’anic position of involving the “spirit” in Mary’s impregnation is not unprecedented (Reynolds 2018, 519). Moreover, contrastive links between Adam and Jesus are a well-established Christian motif (e.g., Rom 5:14–21 and 1 Cor 15:21–22; see *BEQ* 43–44 and O’Shaughnessy 1953, 26–27 and 60). Yet the Qur’an puts this standard association between Adam and Jesus to very distinctive use, by deploying it in such a way as to undercut the mainstream Christian insistence on the divinity of Jesus: Jesus is created, not begotten—or rather, the way in which his begetting is described in Q 21:91 utilises language that is highly, and presumably deliberately, suggestive of the chronologically earlier Qur’anic account of the creation of Adam in the early Meccan verse 15:29, the objective being to highlight that Jesus, like Adam, is only a creature of God rather than his consubstantial son.<sup>16</sup> This conjectured rationale

14 This description only seeks to capture a general drift; it should be borne in mind that the Qur’an exhibits at least some formulaic systems that emerge in Meccan surahs but are discontinued in the Medinan ones, and others that only emerge in the Medinan Qur’an to begin with. For instances of the former category, see examples 1, 2, and 4 in Bannister 2014, 220–221.

15 For a similar case, in which the antecedent is however rabbinic rather than Christian, see the parallels adduced for the Qur’anic use of → *khalāq* in Q 2:102.200 and 3:77. Another Qur’anic formula for which one might want to countenance a pre-Qur’anic origin, though without the existence of an undeniable pre-Qur’anic parallel, is the disobedience formula *fa-sajadū illā iblīsā* from the Qur’anic Adam narrative, “and they [the angels] prostrated themselves [to Adam]; not so Iblīs”; see under → *shayṭān*.

16 A similar approach—associating Adam and Jesus for the purpose of highlighting the latter’s humanity and createdness—is seen in Q 3:59, declaring that Adam and Jesus were both created by divine fiat: “With regard to God, Jesus is like Adam; God created him [Adam] from earth, and then said to him, ‘Be,’ and he was” (*inna mathala ‘īsā ‘inda llāhi ka-mathali ādama khalaqahu min turābin thumma qāla lahu kun fa-yakūn*). It is not immediately evident how the scenario of vivification by an infusion of God’s spirit that emerges from verses like Q 15:29 and 21:91 is to be reconciled with the scenario of vivification by divine fiat in Q 3:59, which postdates the Meccan *nafakha fīhi min rūḥi* passages. On the other hand, harmonisation does not seem downright impossible either; and as we saw, the insufflation paradigm is repeated in one Medinan verse, Q 66:12, which may suggest that the co-existence of the two motifs was not felt to be a problematic case of Qur’anic self-contradiction. As for Q 3:59, what the verse does is to describe the creation of Adam and Jesus in line with a general notion of divine creation by fiat that is already in evidence in Meccan verses (e.g., Q 36:82: “when he”—God—wants something, his command is merely to say to it, ‘Be,’ and it is”; see similarly the Meccan verses Q 6:73, 16:40, 19:35, 40:68). More particularly, Q 3:59 may be regarded a development specifically of Q 19:35 (on which see

is supported by the fact that assorted other Qur'anic passages contain explicit denials of different aspects of the Christian doctrine of divine sonship (Q 4:171, 5:17.72–73.116, 9:30, 19:35; see under → *al-naṣārā*).<sup>17</sup>

(iii) **The *rūḥ-min-amrihi* bundle.** More difficult to allocate than all the *rūḥ* passages considered so far are the later Meccan verses Q 16:2, 17:85, 40:15, and 42:52, all of which belong to surahs with a mean verse length between 89 and 100 transliteration letters (*HCI* 114–115) and are therefore likely to be chronologically close to one another. According to Q 16:2 and 40:15, God “sends down the angels with the spirit, [acting] by his command (*bi-l-rūḥi min amrihi*)” or “casts the spirit [acting] by his command” (*yulqī l-rūḥa min amrihi*) “upon whomsoever he wills from among his servants.” In Q 42:52, meanwhile, the divine speaker declares, “Thus do we convey to you<sup>s</sup> a spirit [acting] by our command” (*wa-ka-dhālika awḥaynā ilayka rūḥan min amrinā*). On terminological grounds, this *rūḥ-min-amrihi* bundle (on which see under → *amr*) should also be deemed to include Q 17:85, which responds to an audience query about the nature of the spirit (“They ask you<sup>s</sup> about the spirit”) by describing the spirit as being under God’s command (*al-rūḥu min amri rabbī*). In so far as Q 16:2, 40:15, and 42:52 cast the spirit as an object of divine action, they fulfil the principal grammatical criterion for allocation to category (ii) that was tentatively stipulated above, and it does not seem impossible to interpret them according to an impersonal rather than agentive understanding of the spirit. Nonetheless, the *rūḥ-min-amrihi* verses differ from passages such as Q 15:29 (God blows some of his spirit into Adam) or 58:22 (God has fortified the believers with his spirit) because at least some of them are also easily compatible with an agentive reading. After all, even an agent of God may well be “sent down” by the deity, as per Q 16:2, just as 19:17, quoted under (i), first mentions God’s spirit as an object of divine sending (*fa-arsalnā ilayhā rūḥanā*) but then has the spirit act in an independent capacity (*fa-tamaththala lahā basharan sawiyyā*). The *rūḥ-min-amrihi* bundle thus exhibits an ambiguity that justifies separating it out from the previous two categories.

**A development from an agentive to an impersonal understanding of the spirit?** Most of the passages falling under category (i) are early Meccan, while Medinan verses are exclusively limited to category (ii). This makes it attractive to conjecture a broad diachronic development from a personal or agentive conception of the spirit to an impersonal one.<sup>18</sup> The chronological pattern is however not without disruption: the first, agentive category (i) does contain two later Meccan passages, namely, Q 16:102 (which identifies “the holy spirit” as the conveyor of the Qur’anic revelations) and Q 19:17 (where God’s spirit appears to Mary), while category (ii) includes an early Meccan passage, Q 15:29.<sup>19</sup> In addition, it

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also the following note), where the *kun fa-yakūn* phrase is already used in connection with Jesus. At the same time, of course, Q 3:59 harks back to 3:47, where the *kun fa-yakūn* formula serves to convey God’s omnipotence to Mary, who remarks that no man has “touched” her yet.

17 Most of these explicitly anti-Christological or anti-Trinitarian statements in the Qur’an date to the Medinan period. Yet Qur’anic disapproval of Christian theology predates the hijrah. This is shown by Q 19:35, belonging to an insertion that encompasses 19:34–40 and is probably contemporary with the Meccan passage Q 43:57–65 (*HCI* 186, n. 87).

18 This is at least suggested in O’Shaughnessy 1953, 25, commenting on the shift between the early and middle Meccan surahs according to the chronology of Weil and Nöldeke. O’Shaughnessy’s treatment of the material subsequently complicates matters, however, as he ends up positing a relatively untidy vacillation between different notions of the spirit whose underlying doctrinal coherence O’Shaughnessy does not succeed in bringing out (see, e.g., his conclusion in O’Shaughnessy 1953, 67–68).

19 This verse is early Meccan only according to the definition of the early Meccan surahs put forward in *HCI* 161, not according to the chronology of Weil and Nöldeke (who date Surah 15 to the middle Meccan period).

merits noting that in Q 19:17, assigned to category (i) above, the noun *rūḥ* carries the possessive suffix that is otherwise primarily associated with category (ii), and that the phrase “the holy spirit” (*rūḥ al-quḍus*) figures both under (i) and under (ii). There is accordingly some phraseological and lexical overlap between the agentive and the impersonal sets (i) and (ii). Also noteworthy is the fact that Surah 16 comprises both a verse in which the spirit is patently invoked in an agentive fashion (Q 16:102) and another verse that was treated under (iii), namely, Q 16:2 (God “sends down the angels with the spirit, [acting] by his command”). All of these observations cast doubt on an overly categorical demarcation of two consecutive evolutionary stages.

Against the background of the preceding observations, some form of harmonising the Qur’an’s two manners of representing the spirit looks preferable to a strict developmental hypothesis. It is significant that the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit similarly envisages the latter as a separate person of the Trinity but also as something that will be “poured out upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17, citing Joel 3:1–2). There was, accordingly, a pre-Qur’anic model for speaking of “the spirit” from two different yet complementary vantage points, namely, as a personal reality that is in some sense conceptually separable from God the Father and as a vivifying or fortifying principle that God bestows upon his creatures. It is therefore defensible to credit the Meccan Qur’an with a similarly integrative notion of God’s spirit, which would have made it possible to envisage the spirit both in a personified fashion, as in Q 78:38 (according to which on the day of judgement “the spirit and the angels stand in ranks”), and as an impersonal principle imparted by God, as in Q 15:29 (where the creator blows “some of his spirit” into Adam). Such a person-principle duality, according to which the spirit may with equal validity be described both as a personal agent and as a divinely imparted principle of vivification or fortification, also proves helpful in making sense of the fact that the Meccan surahs put forward two scenarios of the conception of Jesus that are superficially rather different: on the one hand, Q 19:17–21 recounts a dialogue between Mary and God’s spirit leading up to her impregnation; on the other hand, Q 21:91 portrays the conception of Jesus as involving God blowing “some of his spirit” into Mary. In line with the preceding remarks about the Qur’anic notion of the spirit being rooted in a person-principle duality, we cannot rule out that the Qur’anic addressees found it possible to suppose that the personified spirit who appeared to Mary according to Q 19:17 was the very same being that was subsequently insufflated into her womb, as per 21:91. After all, the most straightforward reading of the spirit’s statement in Q 19:19 that he has been instructed to “give” (*li-ahaba*) Mary a “pure boy” is that the agent of Mary’s impregnation was precisely God’s spirit himself.<sup>20</sup>

Still, a general Qur’anic drift from speaking of the spirit *qua* separate agent to speaking of the spirit *qua* fortifying inspiration emanating from God—the latter being predominant in Medinan passages—is hard to deny. In such a qualified diachronic scheme, which only claims to track a relatively superficial change in emphasis rather than a drastic reversal in the spirit’s ontological nature, the repeated assertion in the *rūḥ-min-amrihi* verses (Q 16:2, 17:85, 40:15, and 42:52) that the spirit is “due to” or operating under God’s command (*amr*) may be understood to pave the way for the lasting shift towards an impersonal depiction of the spirit that is observable in the Medinan surahs. That such a shift occurred

20 Note also that on stylistic grounds the two passages at hand are unlikely to be separated by a significant period of time: the mean verse length of Surah 19 is 62.42, while that of Surah 21 is 67.08.

is supported by Q 2:97, singling out Gabriel as the figure who “brings down” revelations upon Muhammad’s heart (*nazzalahu ‘alā qalbika*). This is palpably a resonance of the early Meccan statement Q 26:193–194 (*nazala bihi l-rūḥu l-amīn // ‘alā qalbika*); yet 2:97 avoids calling the superhuman transmitter of God’s revelations “the spirit,” replacing this designation by the name of Gabriel instead. The reason for this substitution may be that “the spirit” had by now become much more univocally associated with an impersonal quality bestowed by God.

To summarise, what the material analysed in the present entry suggests is an evolutionary drift leading from an integrative conception of the spirit, according to which the latter could be envisaged both as a vivifying or fortifying principle originating from God and as a divine hypostasis capable of manifesting itself in the guise of an independent agent, to a more narrowly impersonal view. What caused this gradual narrowing of the Qur’anic notion of the spirit? Although the textual data do not permit us to go beyond speculation, the narrowing just described could have been spurred by objections to the effect that early Qur’anic verses casting the spirit as an independent agent were guilty of violating the Meccan Qur’an’s own strictures against “associationism” (*shirk*; see under → *ashraka*). In other words, it is possible to surmise that uncharitable addressees of the Qur’anic proclamations would have gratefully exploited the opportunity to assimilate the Qur’anic spirit to a quasi-divine figure besides God, and to use this as polemical leverage allowing them to accuse the Qur’anic proclaimer and his adherents of doctrinal inconsistency. As argued elsewhere (→ *amr*), the audience question cited in Q 17:85 (“They ask you<sup>s</sup> about the spirit”) may manifest just such an adversarial criticism, and the fourfold emphasis that the spirit is subject to God’s *amr* or command in Q 16:2, 17:85, 40:15, and 42:52 is best read as serving to repel an objection along these lines.

***arāda* tr. | to want, intend, or will s.th.**

***arāda* tr. *bi-* | to intend s.th. for s.o.**

***arāda an/li-* | to want to do s.th.**

→ *shā’a*

***irtāba* intr. | to be in doubt**

***rayb* | doubt**

***rībah* | cause of doubt**

***murīb* | disquieting**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *shakk* | doubt   *kitāb* | scripture   *qalb* | heart   *al-sā’ah* | the hour (of the resurrection)   *ajal* | term**

The root *r-y-b* generally denotes a state of mental disquiet, agitation, and suspicion (*AEL* 1197–1199). It appears, for instance, in the active participle *murīb*, “disquieting,” which is almost always used as an adjective qualifying *shakk*, “doubt,” namely, about the preaching of divine messengers or with regard to the Mosaic “scripture” (*kitāb*; see Q 11:62.110, 14:9, 34:54, 41:45, 42:14, nearly all of which are formulaically closed by the assertion that a certain group “is in disquieting doubt about X,” *la-fī shakkīn min X murīb*). The only verse



in which *murīb* is not coupled with *shakk* is Q 50:25, where it describes the prototypical unbeliever. It is quite conceivable that the word is employed intransitively rather than transitively here, i.e., in the sense of harbouring, rather than inducing, disquiet and doubts (e.g., Ṭab. 21:439; Zam. 5:599–600). This would make it one of many instances of cognate substitution in the Qur’an (see generally Stewart 2009, 20–25).

Derived from the same root, the intransitive verb *irtāba* describes being in a state of disquiet occasioned by uncertainty and is therefore appropriately rendered as “to doubt” (a translation also supported by the recurrent association of *r-y-b* with the word *shakk*). Thus, Q 65:4 decrees that divorced wives who are post-menopausal are to abide by a waiting period of three months before a subsequent marriage, if the Qur’anic addressees are in doubt (*ini rtabtum*)—presumably, as to whether the woman in question might nonetheless be pregnant; Q 2:282 demands that debts be recorded in writing so that “you<sup>p</sup> may not be in doubt”; and Q 5:106 stipulates that witnesses to a deathbed bequest are to be made to confirm the truthfulness of their testimony by an oath, “if you<sup>p</sup> are in doubt” (*ini rtabtum*). More often, though, *irtāba*—like the expression *shakk murīb*—is used for doubt in religious rather than mundane matters. For instance, Q 9:45 employs the phrase *irtābat qulūbuhum*, “their hearts are in doubt,” as an antonym of belief in God and the final day; Q 49:15 says that the believers are “those who believe in God and his Messenger and then do not doubt (*lam yartābū*) and contend on God’s path with their possessions and their lives”; and according to Q 57:14, doubting is one of the traits of the damned (see also Q 24:50, 29:48, and 74:31). The Qur’an’s persistent association of doubt with unbelief is reminiscent of the antithesis between belief (Greek: *pistis*, Syriac: *haymānūtā*) and doubt that can be seen in Matt 14:31 (“O you who has little belief, why did you doubt?”), Matt 21:21 (“if you have belief and do not doubt”; see also Mark 11:23), and in later Christian discourse, such as Chrysostom’s comments on the incredulity of Thomas in John 20:24–29 (Schaff 1995, 14:327 = Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John*, no. 87).<sup>1</sup>

An especially frequent Qur’anic derivation of the root *r-y-b* is the noun *rayb*. Considering the fact that Q 9:45 pleonastically conjoins the phrase *irtābat qulūbuhum*, “their hearts are in doubt,” with “they waver in *rayb*” (*fa-hum fī raybihim yataraddadūn*), *rayb* too designates a state of disquiet due to uncertainty and, in line with general practice, is best translated as “doubt,” effectively functioning as the verbal noun corresponding to *irtāba*. (There is one occurrence, in Q 9:110, of the noun *ribah*, which seems to signify a particular cause of doubt here.) The term *rayb* prominently appears in the phrase *lā rayba fīhi*, “in/about which there is no doubt,” which attaches predominantly to the “day” or “hour” of resurrection (Q 3:9.25, 4:87, 6:12, 18:21, 22:7, 40:59, 42:7, 45:26.32; see also under → *sā’ah*), thus illustrating the crucial importance of eschatological expectation throughout all of the Qur’an. Two Meccan verses (Q 10:37, 32:2) and a Medinan one (Q 2:2) link the formula *lā rayba fīhi* with the celestial scripture, probably by way of underscoring the latter’s status as the undisputable source of the Qur’anic proclamations (→ *kitāb*). In one case, the phrase *lā rayba fīhi* describes the divinely specified term (*ajal*) of human life (Q 17:99), the meaning here being that human life is undoubtedly finite in line with a prior divine decree.<sup>2</sup>

1 I am grateful to Nora K. Schmid for contributing the latter reference.

2 On *lā rayba fīhi*, see also n. 1 under → *dhālika*.



# Z

*zabūr* | writ, writing, written record

Further vocabulary discussed: *kitāb* | scripture *ḥizb* | faction, party *taqaṭṭa'ū amrahum baynahum* | they became divided among themselves over their affair *al-tawrāh* | the Torah *al-injīl* | the Gospel or the Christian Bible *bayyinah* | clear sign, clear proof

**Zabūr in early Arabic poetry.** While the main Qur'anic word for "scripture" is → *kitāb*, a similar meaning is conveyed by the much more infrequent noun *zabūr* (see generally *JPND* 205–206; *FVQ* 148–149; Horovitz and Firestone 2002). Before examining the word's Qur'anic occurrences, it is convenient to take note of two verses from the *dūwān* of Imru' al-Qays evoking the "*zabūr* script" or "*zabūr* writing" (*khatt al-zabūr* or *khatt zabūr*) that is found "on the palm-leaf stalk of a Yemeni" (*fī 'aṣībi yamānī*; *DSAAP*, Imru' al-Qays, no. 63:1; see Stein 2021, 50)<sup>1</sup> or "in the codices of God-fearing hermits" (*fī maṣāhifi ruhbanī*; *DSAAP*, Imru' al-Qays, no. 65:2). The plural *zabur* occurs, moreover, in the Mu'allaqah of the later poet Labīd ('Abbās 1962, no. 48:8 = *EAP* 2:168–169), where it is fairly clear that it means "pieces of writing" (Noja 1988, 5; Müller 1994, 38).

Significantly, a considerable cache of palm-leaf stalks inscribed in a cursive or minuscule form of the South Arabian script has now been studied in detail, providing us with a good understanding of the writing practices underlying the occurrence of *zabūr* in the poetic verses just cited (Stein 2021). In these palm-stalk documents, the Sabaic verb *zbr* means "to write" or perhaps more narrowly "to sign," while the noun *zbr*, which is so far attested only once, is a "writing" or a "signed document" (Stein 2021, 38–43; Müller 1994, 36). "To write" is also one of the meanings reported for the Arabic verb *zabara* (*AEL* 1210; see also Müller 1994). Especially given the express reference to Yemeni palm-leaf stalks in one of the two verses just cited, Imru' al-Qays's reference to "*zabūr* script" evokes a style of writing that is identical with or at least in some sense similar to the minuscule script employed on South Arabian palm-stalk leaves (Müller 1994, 38).<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, it is salient that the second Imru' al-Qays passage associates "*zabūr* script" with the "codices of God-fearing hermits," which one may presume to have been written in a very different script and indeed language. The notion conveyed by the expression "*zabūr* script" may consequently reduce to the general fact of writing rather than signifying a specific script or style of writing to the exclusion of others. This would also fit the verse by Labīd.

<sup>1</sup> Stein translates *ka-khatti zabūrin fī 'aṣībi yamānī* as "the script of a record on a palm-leaf stalk in the hands of a Yemeni."

<sup>2</sup> It has also been conjectured that *zabūr* could refer to the implement used, namely, a stylus (Noja 1988, 4–5; but see Müller 1994, 38).

As we shall see in the next section, in the Qur'an too the noun *zabūr* is construable in the general sense of "writing" or "writ," especially a writing of a religious nature. The latter aspect forms a contrast with the fact that actual South Arabian palm-leaf stalks often discuss mundane and everyday topics, such as legal or business matters (Stein 2021, 34–35). Yet as we saw above, one of the two Imru' al-Qays verses examined above likewise associates "zabūr script" with religious manuscripts. The final section of the entry will present a hypothesis raised in earlier scholarship that is able to account for this religious shift of the term in early Arabic.

**Zabūr and zubur in the Qur'an.** To examine the Qur'anic occurrences of the word *zabūr* in a roughly diachronic order, the plural *zubur* appears in the early Meccan verse Q 26:196, where the "writings of the ancients" (*zubur al-awwalīn*) are said to contain the same revelatory content that is now communicated to Muhammad (see in more detail under → *kitāb* and also under → *asāfir al-awwalīn*). Other early Meccan instances of *zubur* are found in Q 54:43, where the term may again designate pre-Qur'anic scriptures (quite possibly intending the Biblical canon in particular), and 54:52, which alludes to celestial records of "everything they have done" (*wa-kullu shay'in fā'alūhu fī l-zubur*, "Everything they have done is documented in the written records"). Paret equates *al-zubur* with the scriptures of earlier generations here, presumably in light of Q 26:196 and also the earlier verse in the same surah, 54:43 (see Paret 2001, on Q 54:52). Yet a more compelling parallel, which supports the understanding that reference is to a transcendent divine ledger, is Q 78:29: "We have enumerated everything in a written record," *wa-kulla shay'in ahṣaynāhu kitābā*.

Both the plural *zubur* and the singular *zabūr* continue to figure in a small number of later Meccan and Medinan passages. In these later periods of the Qur'an's genesis, however, occurrences of *zabūr* are overtaken in frequency by the term → *kitāb*, which establishes itself as the standard Qur'anic expression for the category of scripture. As explained in the respective entry, the word *kitāb* is throughout the Qur'an applied both to the celestial archetype of all scriptural revelations and to earthly scriptures deriving from this archetype, such as "the scripture brought by Moses" (Q 6:91) or the Qur'anic proclamations. By contrast, later Meccan and Medinan occurrences of *zabūr* or the plural *zubur* are all amenable to being construed as designating textual corpora on the human plane alone, thereby standing out from the use of *zubur* for celestial records in the early Meccan verse Q 54:52. Thus, according to Q 17:55 (later Meccan) and 4:163 (Medinan), God gave David "a *zabūr*," and 21:105 (later Meccan) introduces the pronouncement that God's righteous servants will inherit the earth or land (cf. Ps 37:29) as something that God has "written" or "decreed" (*katābnā*) "in the *zabūr*." In all three verses, David's *zabūr* or "the *zabūr*" are presumably the Psalms in their capacity as a prominent religious "writing," though one that seems to play a far less momentous role in religious history than the Mosaic scripture.

Another occurrence of *zubur* comes at Q 23:53. The verse complains that after the revelation of the scripture (*al-kitāb*) to Moses (v. 49) and after the ministry of Jesus (v. 50) humans divided into different sects or factions (singular: → *ḥizb*) and makes an enigmatic reference to *zubur* in this context: "They became divided among themselves over their affair (*taqaṭṭa'ū amrahum baynahum*)<sup>3</sup> with regard to writings (*zuburan*), every

3 On the question whether *taqaṭṭa'a* is transitive or, as one might expect on morphological grounds, intransitive in Q 21:93 and 23:53 (both of which share the phrase *taqaṭṭa'ū amrahum baynahum*), see CDKA 227. Other Qur'anic expressions for communal discord and disunity in religious matters are *ikhtalafa* and *tafarraqa* (see under → *bayyana*) and *farraqū dīnahum* (see under → *ḥizb*).

faction rejoicing in what it possesses (*kullu hizbin bi-mā ladayhim fariḥūn*).” This could refer to disputes about the meaning of the scripture (*al-kitāb*) that was given to Moses according to v. 49, which is a motif that is on display elsewhere, though without reference to *zubur* (Q 2:176, 11:110, 41:45). Still, it is difficult to decide whether the *zubur* are to be equated with the scriptural canons of Jews and Christians here—i.e., with the Torah (→ *al-tawrah*) and the → *injīl*—or instead allude to non-scriptural or parascriptural literature in the Biblical tradition. Things are clearer for the later Meccan verse Q 35:25 and the Medinan one 3:184. Both declare that previous messengers brought “clear signs (*bayyināt*), writings (*al-zubur*), and the illuminating scripture (*al-kitāb al-munīr*).”<sup>4</sup> The fact that the *zubur* are conveyed by messengers entails that at least in Q 35:25 and 3:184 they cannot be religious texts of a post-revelatory origin. The most plausible construal of Q 35:25 and 3:184 is therefore a pleonastic one, according to which the “clear signs,” the “writings,” and the “illuminating scripture” are alternative expressions referring to one and the same phenomenon, namely: divine revelations that derive from the celestial archetype of all scriptural revelation (“the illuminating scripture”), that contain “clear signs” by means of which God admonishes humans, and that might be set down in and transmitted as religious writings (*zubur*). Overall, in the later Meccan and Medinan surahs the word *zubur* seems to function as a fairly generic term for written texts of a religious nature. Despite their origin in divine revelation, Q 23:53 hints that such writings or *zubur* play a role in the disputes between the different factions into which the human addressees of God’s revelations have culpably split.

**A semantic merger of Arabic *zabūr* with Hebrew *mizmôr* and/or its Aramaic cognates?** How do we explain the fact that almost all Qur’anic occurrences of the word *zabūr* (with the possible exception of Q 54:52), and incipiently also one of the two Imru’ al-Qays verses, apply it to texts of a religious kind? A viable conjecture is that the word *zabūr* underwent semantic confluence with the similar-sounding words *mizmôr* (Hebrew), *mazmôrā* (Syriac), or *mazmor/mazmora* or *mizmor/mizmora* (Jewish Aramaic), all of which mean “psalm” (FVQ 149; Müller 1994, 38; for dictionary entries, see DTTM 755, DJBA 654, DJPA 298, and SL 735). This hypothesis is especially pertinent in view of the explicit Qur’anic association of David—traditionally believed to be the author of the Psalms—with a *zabūr* in Q 4:163 and 17:55 as well as the fact that 21:105 quotes a Psalmic promise as being contained “in the *zabūr*.” It is likely that this merger was not due to misunderstanding on the part of Muhammad (thus JPND 205) but rather that it occurred in the language of Arabophone Jewish and Christian communities prior to the Qur’an, as suggested by Jeffery (FVQ 149). Even Jeffery, however, describes the hypothetical merger between *zabūr* and *mazmôrā* etc. as a case of “confusion,” which from a linguistic perspective is unduly judgemental. More appropriately, Stein speaks of a “mingling” of *zabūr* with *mizmôr* (Stein 2021, 7, n. 25).

Notwithstanding the pertinence of the preceding conjecture, there are only three Qur’anic passages in which *zabūr* or *al-zabūr* would be translatable as “a corpus of psalms” (Q 4:163, 17:55) or “the Psalms” (Q 21:105). Other Qur’anic occurrences, by contrast, show beyond doubt that the word remained available to refer to a piece of writing or a written text more generally. Even if the merger just described took place, therefore, the word *zabūr* did not evolve into a downright proper name for the Psalms. In recognition of this, it seems preferable to follow a general policy of rendering Qur’anic *zabūr* as “writing” or the like

4 See also Q 16:44, which lists only “clear signs” and *zubur*.

throughout. The *zabūr* with a definite article, as encountered at Q 21:105, might then be understood as “the Davidic writing,” to be equated with the Book of Psalms.

## *zaqqūm*: *shajarat al-~* | the ingurgitation tree

### Further vocabulary discussed: *sijjīn* | *Sijjīn*

One of the punishments inflicted on the inhabitants of hell (→ *jahannam*) is that they are condemned to fill their bellies with the fruits of the terrifying *zaqqūm* tree (Q 37:62–66, 44:43–46, 56:52–53), which are said to resemble the “heads of devils” (Q 37:65). The same tree would also seem to figure in Q 17:60, which speaks of “the tree cursed in the Qur’an” (*al-shajarah al-mal’ūnah fī l-qur’āni*; see generally El-Awa 2006 and Radscheit 2010; on Q 37:63 and 17:60 in particular, see also under → *balā*). The use of the collective expression *shajar min zaqqūm* in Q 56:52 raises the possibility that the Qur’an is speaking not of one individual tree but rather of a certain type of tree (see also Radscheit 2010, 103). *Zaqama* is said to mean “to gobble s.th. up” and *tazaqqama* “to swallow s.th.” (*AEL* 1238–1239; see also Radscheit 2010, 100). The noun *zaqqūm* is likely to be an enigmatic proper name of sorts, similar to the expressions *sijjīn*, *‘illiyyīn*, and *tasnīm* in Q 83:7–8.18–19.27 or *salsabīl* in Q 76:18. At least in some cases, such enigmatic proper names may convey diffuse semantic connotations by virtue of their root consonants. For instance, *sijjīn*—in line with its presumptive root *s-j-n*—is plausibly associated with infernal imprisonment (O’Shaughnessy 1961, 444). Following this line of thought, the “tree of *zaqqūm*” might perhaps be rendered “the ingurgitation tree.”<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that the morphological pattern *fa’ūl* generally functions as an intensifying adjective (Wright 1974, 1:137–138; see also Radscheit 2010, 121). Parsing the “tree of *zaqqūm*” as “the ingurgitation tree” also coheres with Q 37:66 and 56:53, both of which affirm that the denizens of hell “fill their bellies with it” (*fa-māli’ūna minhā l-butūn*; cf. also Q 44:45).<sup>2</sup>

Wensinck hypothesises that the Qur’anic *zaqqūm* tree (or trees) might ultimately be descended from the forbidden “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” from Gen 2:16–17 (Wensinck 1921, 34). This hypothesis is endorsed and further developed by Radscheit and Bumazhnov (Radscheit 2010, 107–118; Bumazhnov 2018). Thus, Radscheit cites passages from the *Acts of Thomas* and the *Acts of Peter* that may be understood to describe the forbidden tree of paradise as “bitter” and to associate it with Satan (Radscheit 2010, 115–117; more circumspcctly, see Bumazhnov 2018, 48), and Bumazhnov presents further Christian, Gnostic, and Manichaeic materials dwelling on the bitterness or even poisonous nature of the tree of knowledge. However, as Radscheit himself concedes, the Qur’an places the *zaqqūm* tree in a very different context, namely, the punishment of sinners in hell (Radscheit 2010, 118). This vital difference in context and the lack of any real descriptive parallels make the Wensinck-Radscheit hypothesis difficult to verify in any compelling fashion. All

1 I am grateful to Shawkat Toorawa for helping me think about different ways of translating the difficult word *zaqqūm*.

2 Within his theory that the Qur’anic *zaqqūm* tree may have developed out of the Biblical “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (see below), Radscheit attempts to derive *zaqqūm* from Greek *sykon*, “fig,” via Syriac (Radscheit 2010, 119–125). Yet the complexity of his derivation is such as to make it very questionable, in my view, whether it is a superior explanatory model to the inner-Arabic etymologisation just outlined.

things considered, it seems far more likely to adopt an alternative proposal also entertained by Wensinck, namely, that “the tree owes its origin to the well known symmetricising tendency” of the Qur’an (Wensinck 1921, 34–35). Wensinck himself seems to place the *zaqqūm* tree primarily in contrast with the celestial *sidr* tree that is perhaps mentioned in Q 53:14 and figures more certainly in 56:28 (Wensinck 1921, 31; see also Hussain 2020, 122–123). More likely, however, is that the *zaqqūm* tree or trees stand in antithetical correspondence to the inexhaustible abundance of culinary pleasures with which those admitted to paradise are delighted (e.g., Q 77:42–43, 83:25–28; see also under → *jannah*).

***zakkā* tr. | to purify s.o. or s.th.**

***tazakkā* intr. | to purify o.s., to keep o.s. pure**

→ *zakāh*

***zakāh* | alms**

Further vocabulary discussed: *anfaqa* tr./intr. | to spend (s.th.) *razaqa* ditr. | to provide s.o. with s.th. *ṣadaqah* | gift or act of charity *ātā* tr. | to give s.th. *ṣalāh* | prayer *zakiyy* | pure *zakkā* tr. | to purify s.o. or s.th. *tazakkā* intr. | to purify o.s., to keep o.s. pure *ṭahhara* tr. | to purify s.o. or s.th. *kaffara* tr. ‘an | to absolve s.o. of s.th. ‘*afw* | surplus, surplus property *faqīr* | poor, needful *miskīn* | indigent *al-mu’allafah qulūbuhum* pl. | those whose hearts are (to be) reconciled *raqabah* | neck; slave *fī sabīl allāh* | on God’s path *ibn al-sabīl* | wayfarer *yatīm* | orphan *al-muhājirūn* pl. | the emigrants

**Overview of Qur’anic usage.** Apart from general appeals to “spend” (*anfaqa*) from what God has “provided” (→ *razaqa*), charitable giving is designated by two different nouns in the Qur’an, *ṣadaqah* and *zakāh*. The former expression, which is treated separately (→ *ṣadaqah*) is confined to Medinan verses. By contrast, *zakāh*—whose usual spelling زكوة in the Qur’an’s received consonantal text may indicate a pre-classical pronunciation *zakōh* (Al-Jallad 2017b; van Putten 2017, 64–67)—has over thirty occurrences in both Meccan and Medinan surahs (e.g., Q 2:43.83.110 etc., 4:77.162, 23:4, 27:3, 30:39). Perhaps the most striking feature of the Qur’anic use of *zakāh* is its markedly formulaic character in comparison to *ṣadaqah*.<sup>1</sup> Thus, *zakāh* has no Qur’anically attested plural, is virtually always preceded by the definite article,<sup>2</sup> occurs almost always as the object of *ātā*, “to give,”<sup>3</sup> and is almost always found next to exhortations to perform prayer, *al-ṣalāh* (e.g., Q 2:43.83.110 etc. and elsewhere: *aqīmū l-ṣalāta wa-ātū l-zakāta* = “perform prayer and give the *zakāh*”; → *ṣallā*).<sup>4</sup>

1 Another word pair exhibiting a similar contrast between more and less formulaically constrained usage is *ṣirāt* and → *sabīl*.

2 The only verse in which *zakāh* refers to almsgiving and does not have the definite article is Q 30:39: *mā ātaytum min zakātin*, “what you give in alms,” contrasted with *mā ātaytum min riban*, “what you give in usury.”

3 The only verses in which *zakāh* refers to almsgiving but does not figure as the object of *ātā* are Q 19:31.55 and 23:4.

4 The only verses in which *zakāh* refers to almsgiving and which lack a reference to prayer are Q 7:156, 23:4, 30:39, and 41:7. But note that Q 23:4, a very short verse, is preceded by a reference to prayer in 23:2. More frequent are references to prayer (*ṣalāh*) that are not accompanied by one to *zakāh*, e.g., Q 29:45, 30:31, 31:17, 108:2.

Semantically, the distinction between *zakāh* and *ṣadaqah*—as far as it may be discerned from the Qur’an alone—is not, as in later Islamic law, one between obligatory and voluntary giving. Rather, *zakāh* would in most cases seem to refer to almsgiving as a general practice, as opposed to individual gifts or acts of charity that are called → *ṣadaqah*.

Two verses, Q 18:81 and 19:13, use the word *zakāh* for “purity” rather than almsgiving. This is in line with the fact that other derivatives of the root *z-k-w/y*, too, convey the notion of purity (see CDKA 121–122), such as the adjective *zakiyy*, “pure” (Q 18:74, 19:19), the verb *zakkā*, “to purify” (e.g., Q 2:129.151.174, 53:32, 91:9), and *tazakkā* “to purify o.s., to keep o.s. pure” (e.g., Q 20:76, 80:3.7, 92:18).<sup>5</sup> Against the background of the distinction between ritual and moral impurity proposed by the Biblical scholar Jonathan Klawans (Klawans 2002), it is notable that in the Qur’an derivatives of the consonantal root *z-k-w/y* other than *zakāh* can almost always be understood to refer to moral purity (but see Q 18:19, referring to pure food).<sup>6</sup> To return to the term *zakāh* in particular, its exceptional use to mean “purity” (specifically, moral purity) in Q 18:81 and 19:13 cannot be adduced to posit an inner-Qur’anic semantic development from a general sense of purity to the more restricted and concrete sense of alms, since another verse of Surah 19 has *zakāh* in the latter meaning (v. 55). Indeed, *zakāh* = “alms” appears already in Surah 23 (v. 4), which given its somewhat lower mean verse length is perhaps earlier than Surah 19.

**Etymology.** Etymologically, the noun *zakāh* stems from (rabbinic) Hebrew *zəkūt* or Judaeo-Aramaic *zakuta*, “merit” (CQ 21; FVQ 153; Zysow 2002, 407; on the Hebrew term and its cognates, see Anderson 2009, 135–137; DJBA 412–413; DJPA 176–177). Although the nouns *zəkūt* and *zakuta* in rabbinic texts do not specifically signify “charity” (NB 25), the verb *zka* can mean “to give alms” in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic (Horovitz 1918; DTTM 399; DJPA 177). Moreover, the targums use *zakuta* or *zaku* to render Biblical occurrences of the word *ṣādāqā*, which in rabbinic Hebrew became the standard term for charity (Zysow 2002, 407; see, e.g., *Targum Onqelos* on Deut 6:25; on the semantic development of *ṣādāqā*, refer to Anderson 2009, 141–142, Gardner 2015, 26–32, and Gray 2019). Rabbinic texts can go so far as to interpret Biblical occurrences of *ṣādāqā* to mean “charity” against the grain of their original meaning (Gardner 2015, 27–29). I have been unable to identify any rabbinic evidence that the correlated targumic term *zakuta* underwent a similar concretisation from a meritorious deed in general to the giving of charity in particular (on the putative logic that almsgiving is the merit-generating act *par excellence*). Nonetheless, somewhere

5 That *tazakkā* is not a denominal verb derived from *zakāh*, unlike *taṣaddaqa*, “to give a *ṣadaqah*” (see under → *ṣadaqah*), is especially clear from Q 92:18, “who gives his possessions (*yu’ṭī mālahu*) *yatazakkā*,” where the rendering “who gives his possessions in order to purify himself” is clearly preferable to “who gives his possessions, thereby performing the *zakāh*.” None of the other Qur’anic occurrences of *tazakkā* support translating *tazakkā* in the concrete sense of “to give alms” rather than the general one of “to purify o.s.” It cannot be ruled out that in Q 87:14–15 (“Surely prosper will he who *tazakkā* // and invokes the name of his Lord and prays”), the contextual reference is to self-purification by means of almsgiving, in which case 87:14–15 would anticipate the standard Qur’anic pair of prayer and almsgiving (see also Q 35:18, which like 87:14–15 has *tazakkā* in close proximity to a mention of prayer). But even so, this would not entail that *tazakkā* has the lexical meaning of “to give the *zakāh*” in the same way in which *taṣaddaqa* is “to give a *ṣadaqah*.” It should also be noted that Q 87:14 (*qad aflaha man tazakkā*) has a close parallel in Q 91:9 (*qad aflaha man zakkāhā*, “surely prosper will he who purifies it”—namely, the → *nafs* or human person mentioned in Q 91:7–8), where the idea of purification represents a comprehensive pursuit of virtue in general. See also Snouck Hurgronje 1957, 155–156, who sees no reason to limit the meaning of *tazakkā* in Q 87:14 to almsgiving in particular.

6 Instances of the root *ṭ-h-r*, too, are predominantly non-ritual, even if at Q 2:222 and 5:6 the root is linked to ritual impurity. See under → *ṭahara*.



along the developmental path leading from *zakuta* to Arabic *zakāh*, perhaps among users of Arabic rather than Aramaic, this must be precisely what happened.<sup>7</sup>

One might have expected Aramaic *zakuta* to give rise to an Arabic word ending in *-ūt*, as did other loanwords from Aramaic terms with the termination *-uta*, such as *malakūt* or *jabarūt*, a consideration that also applies to Jewish Aramaic / Syriac *šlotā*, “prayer,” which became Arabic *šalāh/šalōh* (Rabin 1951, 109). What seems to have occurred instead is that *zakuta* and *šlotā* were fully assimilated to native Arabic words like *najāh/nagōh*, “salvation,” and *ghadāh/ghadōh*, “tomorrow” (Rabin 1951, 109; Al-Jallad 2017b). Just as the morphological analogy between the names *ibrāhīm*, “Abraham,” and *ismā’il*, “Ishmael,” or *jālūt*, “Goliath,” and *šālūt*, “Saul” is presumably reflective of some association between these figures (JPND 159–161; → *isrā’il*), so *zakāh* and *šalāh*, which are frequently paired throughout the Qur’an, may have undergone this process of assimilation to native Arabic words in tandem.<sup>8</sup> In fact, a close conceptual link between almsgiving and prayer can already be discerned in pre-Qur’anic Jewish and Christian tradition: almsgiving and prayer, together with fasting, belong to a virtuous triad that stands at the centre of Matt 6:1–18 and also manifests itself in earlier Second Temple traditions (Anderson 2013, 124–126, 136–148); and according to a dictum recorded in the Jerusalem Talmud (*y. Ta’an. 2:1, 65b* = ed. and trans. Guggenheimer, 51), prayer and charity, together with repentance, form a triad of virtues that annuls the “harsh decree.”<sup>9</sup> The morphological similarity between *zakāh* and *šalāh* could therefore be anchored in frequent co-occurrence predating the Qur’an.

The ultimate etymological origin of *zakāh* in Aramaic *zakuta* does not preclude that the Qur’an’s original recipients would have associated *zakāh* with the idea of purity (Snouck Hurgronje 1957, 155; al-Farāhī 2002, 190; Nanji 2001, 66). After all, we saw above that other derivatives of *z-k-w/y* convey the notion of purity and that the noun *zakāh* itself is occasionally employed to mean “purity.”<sup>10</sup> An association of almsgiving with purity would also seem to be manifested by the fact that the Qur’an expressly asserts charitable giving to have a purifying effect. Thus, Q 9:103 instructs the Messenger to “take a charitable donation” (*šadaqah*) from the possessions of those who have confessed misdeeds, so as to “cleanse and purify them thereby” (*tutaħhiruhum wa-tuzakkihim bihā*). Indeed, the connection between almsgiving and purification emerges already very early during the Qur’an’s genesis, since the early Meccan verse Q 92:18 promises that he “who gives his possessions (*yu’ti mālahu*) in order to purify himself (*yatazakkā*)” will be spared the fire of hell. The underlying valuation of almsgiving that can be glimpsed here resembles Christian

7 *Zakuta* would also seem to have been loaned into Epigraphic South Arabian, as *zkt*, but there must mean something like God’s favour or grace, as attested, e.g., by a Jewish inscription containing the phrase “with the aid and *zkt* of his Lord who created his *nfs!*” (Robin 2000, 49–50 and 58; Gajda 2009, 234; see also Beeston et al. 1982, 170).

8 See already Brockelmann 1927, 14, who proposes to explain the development from *zakuta* to *zakāh* as being due to the latter’s rhyme with its frequent Qur’anic correlate *šalāh*.

9 See also *b. Rosh Hash. 16b* (noted in Guggenheimer’s commentary on *y. Ta’an. 2:1, 65b*). There, charity and prayer are enumerated as part of four things on account of which somebody’s sentence is torn up. What is interesting is that they are designated by two expressions that rhyme and are morphologically parallel, just like *šalāh* and *zakāh*, namely, *šadaqah* and *šā’aqah* (literally, “crying out”).

10 The later tradition links the word *zakāh* both to the idea of cleansing and to that of growth and augmentation (al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 2009, 380–381; Tab. 3:269), the latter via the verb *zakā*, “to increase” (AEL 1240). While the Qur’an does not have any clear occurrences of the root *z-k-w/y* in the sense of growth, it is worth noting Q 30:39, pointed out to me by Saqib Hussain, where the failure of usury (*ribā*) to generate “increase” (*r-b-w*) “with God” is contrasted with the promise that what is given in alms (*zakāh*) will be multiplied in reward.

and rabbinic notions of redemptive almsgiving (on which see, e.g., Garrison 1993), and indeed one verse asserts that secret gifts of charity (*ṣadaqāt*) will “absolve you of some of your evil deeds” (Q 2:271: *yukaffiru ‘ankum min sayyi’ātikum*; → *kaffara*; on the verse, see also under → *ṣadaqah*).

**Zakāh as a tax?** The Islamic tradition considers the institution of the *zakāh* as a proper alms tax—in the sense of a regularised levy with specific tariffs—to date back to the Medinan period of Muhammad’s activity (Zysow 2002, 408–409). The Qur’an offers only limited corroboration for this. It is true that Q 9:60 suggests that there were “agents” (*‘āmilūn*) charged with the collection and redistribution of charitable gifts (*ṣadaqāt*), a captivating allusion that will be further discussed below. But the Medinan surahs do not, for instance, stipulate, or even hint at the existence of, precise and mandatory tax rates on particular types of property or income, nor do they specify the minimum amounts on which the *zakāh* would have been payable (Snouck Hurgronje 1957, 158–167). Thus, with regard to almsgiving there is no Qur’anic equivalent to verses spelling out specific inheritance shares (Q 4:11–12.176). This runs counter to what one might have expected had the *zakāh* become a tax-like levy already during Muhammad’s lifetime.

The argument is of course from silence, and it could be countered by positing that Muhammad may simply have imposed the applicable rates in extra-Qur’anic pronouncements. Still, it does remain significant that the Qur’an confines itself to moralistic exhortations to give or “spend” what is possible. Thus, Q 2:267 (cf. Snouck Hurgronje 1957, 166) urges the believers to “spend from the good things you have accrued and from what we have brought forth from the earth for you; and do not have recourse to what is inferior of it, to spend it, when you would not take it yourselves without shutting your eyes to it.” Q 2:219 cites an audience query as to what the Qur’anic believers are to spend (*yas’alūnaka mādhā yunfiqūna*), and responds by instructing them to spend “the surplus” (*al-‘afw*),<sup>11</sup> while Q 9:34 warns against amassing gold and silver (cf. Snouck Hurgronje 1957, 161; see also Q 24:22). All of these verses are in line with ancient Arabian notions, as articulated in pre-Islamic poetry, that one’s surplus property (*faḍl al-māl*) be shared out among one’s kin and the fellow members of one’s tribe (Bravmann 1972, 229–253). In a similar vein, tannaïtic sources also “do not specify precisely how much one should give”: charity, “by nature, is an obligation that is imperfectly defined” (Gardner 2015, 163–164). In this regard, ancient Arabian, rabbinic, and Qur’anic statements contrast with the post-Qur’anic Islamic tradition, which does stipulate precise tax rates.

**Recipients of charity in the Qur’an.** A greater degree of specificity is encountered with regard to the question of who is meant to benefit from communal alms, which will be examined in the final section of this entry. It is true that the pertinent material only rarely employs the word *zakāh*, perhaps due to the formulaic constraints governing its use in the Qur’an, and might accordingly equally well have been treated under → *ṣadaqah*.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, an overview of the beneficiaries of communal charity who are envisaged in the Qur’an is undoubtedly relevant to a fuller understanding of almsgiving and charity in the Medinan community.

11 For early exegetical dicta on the meaning of *al-‘afw* in Q 2:219, see Tab. 5:560–568. In favour of *‘afw* = surplus property, see the Qur’anic and poetic data adduced in Bravmann 1972, 231–237. Bravmann argues that the other Qur’anic occurrence of *‘afw* in Q 7:199 has the same meaning as in 2:219 (Bravmann 1972, 229–230 and 233–234).

12 Q 2:177 does include a reference to the giving of *zakāh*.

According to Q 9:60, charitable gifts (*al-ṣadaqāt*) are “for the poor and the indigent (*li-l-fuqarā’i wa-l-masākīni*), those who are at work with regard to them (*al-‘āmilīna ‘alayhā*), those whose hearts are [to be] reconciled (*al-mu’allaḥati qulūbuhum*),<sup>13</sup> with regard to slaves (*fi l-riqābi*) [i.e., to release slaves from bondage]<sup>14</sup> and those in debt (*al-ghārimīn*), and with regard to God’s path (*fi sabīli llāhi*) and wayfarers (*ibn al-sabīl*)—a prescription imposed by God (*farīḍatan mina llāhi*); God is knowing and wise.” Partially overlapping lists are found elsewhere. Q 2:177 encourages the giving of wealth to “relatives (*dhawī l-qurbā*), orphans (*al-yatāmā*), the indigent (*al-masākīn*), wayfarers (*ibn al-sabīl*), beggars (*al-sā’ilīn*), and with regard to slaves (*fi l-riqābi*)”; and Q 2:215 responds to the same audience query already quoted from 2:219 (“They ask you what they are to spend,” *yas’alūnaka mādhā yunfiqūna*) by proclaiming: “Whatever good you spend, do so for parents (*li-l-wālidayni*), relatives (*al-aqrabīn*), orphans (*al-yatāmā*), the indigent (*al-masākīn*), and wayfarers (*ibn al-sabīl*).” Q 24:22 exhorts “those of you who have received favour and abundance” (*ulū l-faḍli minkum wa-l-sa’ati*)<sup>15</sup> to give to “relatives” (*ulū l-qurbā*), to “the indigent” (*al-masākīn*), and to “those who emigrate on God’s path” (*al-muhājirīna fi sabīli llāhi*; see under → *hājara*). Finally, Q 8:41 and 59:7–8 include similar catalogues in the context of regulating the distribution of booty, though unlike the lists of recipients of charity just referenced both of these latter passages begin by according the right to receive booty to “God and the Messenger.”

If one tabulates the different groups of persons said to be entitled to charity and also to booty, a significant measure of overlap between the various lists just rehearsed comes to light, as shown in the table that follows.

Recipients	Charity				Booty	
	Q 2:177	Q 2:215	Q 9:60	Q 24:22	Q 8:41	59:7–8
Parents ( <i>al-wālidān</i> )	—	×	—	—	—	—
Relatives ( <i>dhū l-qurbā</i> / <i>dhawū l-qurbā</i> / <i>al-aqrabūn</i> / <i>ulū l-qurbā</i> )	×	×	—	×	×	×
Orphans ( <i>al-yatāmā</i> )	×	×	—	—	×	×
The poor ( <i>al-masākīn</i> / <i>al-fuqarā’</i> + <i>al-masākīn</i> )	×	×	×	×	×	×
Collectors of the alms ( <i>al-‘āmilūn ‘alā al-ṣadaqāt</i> )	—	—	×	—	—	—
“Those whose hearts are [to be] reconciled” ( <i>al-mu’allaḥati qulūbuhum</i> )	—	—	×	—	—	—
Wayfarers ( <i>ibn al-sabīl</i> )	×	×	×	—	×	×

13 On the phrase *al-mu’allaḥati qulūbuhum*, see also below.

14 The singular is *raqabah*, literally “neck.” On slavery in the Qur’an, see also under → *darajah*.

15 Bravmann argues that Q 24:22 uses *faḍl* in the sense of “surplus property” (Bravmann 1972, 244). But there is no compelling reason that militates against translating *faḍl* here in its usual Qur’anic sense of an inner-worldly divine “favour” that manifests itself, for instance, in material prosperity.

Recipients	Charity				Booty	
	Q 2:177	Q 2:215	Q 9:60	Q 24:22	Q 8:41	59:7-8
Beggars ( <i>al-sā'ilūn</i> )	×	—	—	—	—	—
Slaves ( <i>al-riqāb</i> )	×	—	×	—	—	—
Debtors ( <i>al-ghārimūn</i> )	—	—	×	—	—	—
Emigrants on God's path ( <i>fī sabīl allāh / al-muhājirūn fī sabīl allāh / al-fuqarā' al-muhājirūn</i> )	—	—	×	×	—	×

Strikingly, not only do a number of categories feature in more than one passage but they also appear in the same order: where relatives and orphans are mentioned, the former always occur before the latter, and the same is true for orphans and the poor as well as the indigent and wayfarers. In fact, the sequence composed of relatives, orphans, and the indigent figures in a handful of additional Qur'anic verses (in addition to Q 8:41 and 59:7, see 2:83 and 4:8.36), sometimes preceded by parents (Q 2:83, 4:36) or followed by wayfarers (thus in Q 8:41 and 59:7), while Q 17:26 and 30:38 have relatives, the poor, and wayfarers.<sup>16</sup> Rather than explaining this exclusively by appealing to the fact that later Qur'anic proclamations often replicate, elaborate on, or abridge earlier ones, it is conceivable that the fivefold list of parents, relatives, orphans, the indigent, and wayfarers found in Q 2:215 reflects and explicates traditional, pre-Qur'anic ideas about the categories of persons entitled to charitable support by the community and about the relative strength of their claims.

Q 9:60 and to a lesser degree also 24:22 vary and expand the Qur'an's usual catalogue of legitimate recipients of charity in accordance with specific historical circumstances. Thus, Q 9:60 mandates gifts of charity (*ṣadaqāt*) “on God's path” (*fī* → *sabīl allāh*). In view of the general association of the phrase *fī sabīl allāh* with militancy (e.g., Q 2:154.190.244.246, 3:13.146.157.167.169), this could be interpreted as indicating that charitable gifts were used to fund military endeavours (Snouck Hurgronje 1957, 164), just as the appeal to “spend (*anfaqa*) on God's path” can aim at securing contributions to the equipment of fighters (Q 8:60; see under → *sabīl* and cf. Q 2:195, where spending on God's path is mentioned immediately after a sequence dealing with fighting, in vv. 190–194). However, Q 24:22 and especially 59:8 suggest otherwise, since the former verse speaks specifically of “those who have emigrated on God's path” (*al-muhājirūn fī sabīl allāh*) while the latter assigns a share of booty to “the emigrant poor who have been expelled from their homes and their possessions” (*li-l-fuqarā' i l-muhājirīna lladhīna ukhrijū min diyārihim wa-amwālihim*). One might infer, therefore, that resources received as charitable donations or as booty were deployed in order to mitigate the straitened economic circumstances of those who had lost their homes and their possessions due to their loyalty to God's cause. Another probable reflection of specific historical circumstances consists in Q 9:60's mention of “those whose hearts are to

<sup>16</sup> Most of these verses are enumerated in *KK* 94. There are further passages listing only orphans and the poor, namely, Q 89:17–18, 90:15–16 (although v. 15 mentions *yatīman dhā maqrabah*, thus combining orphanhood and kinship), and 107:2–3. Q 76:8 has *miskīn* before *yatīm* (and is followed by *asīr*, “prisoner”).

be reconciled” (*al-mu'allafah qulūbuhum*), who may have been newly acquired allies whose allegiance needed to be secured by gifts (e.g., Ṭab. 11:519–523 and Zam. 3:60).<sup>17</sup>

The most intriguing aspect in Q 9:60, in any case, is its reference to a group of persons who are “at work (*‘āmilūn*) regarding (*‘alā*)” charitable gifts, most likely by being responsible for their collection and distribution. This suggests a certain degree of “fiscal organisation,” perhaps linked to the extension of Medinan dominance over surrounding tribes (Snouck Hurgronje 1957, 165; cf. Cook 2014, 175). Charity towards orphans and the poor etc. would already have been practised before the hijrah, as attested by various Meccan passages singling out these categories of persons as meriting special support; but there is no indication that such support took any other form than private initiative. The Medinan period, by contrast, witnessed an institutionalisation and centralisation of such charitable aid (which is not as such equivalent to the imposition of a fixed levy). At the centre of this institutionalisation stood the Qur’anic Messenger, whom Q 9:102–103 instructs to “take charitable gifts from the wealth of” (*khudh min amwālihim ṣadaqatan*) community members who have committed sins (cf. also Q 58:12–13). The same emerges from Q 9:58–59, according to which some people “find fault” with the Messenger “with regard to charitable gifts” (*man yalmizuka fī l-ṣadaqāti*). Instead, they are urged to be content with “what God and his Messenger have given them” (*mā ātāhumu llāhu wa-rasūluhu*). After the hijrah, Muhammad, by virtue of his religious and political authority, became a nexus in the redistribution of wealth and also, as shown by Q 8:41 and 59:6–8, of spoils, within the Medinan polity (see Sinai 2018a, 14–15). To judge by Q 9:60, he was assisted in this capacity by a group of fiscal agents (*‘āmilūn*) who were compensated for their efforts with some of the receipts from the community’s charitable donations.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, despite the role that Muhammad evidently played in receiving and redistributing charitable donations, Q 2:271 encourages the secret giving of alms, which still appear to pass directly from the donor to the poor here. Private charity must accordingly have continued to play a role even in the Medinan period.

### **zamharīr** | excessive cold

→ *jannah*

### **zawwaja** tr. | to pair s.o. or s.th. up; to divide s.o. or s.th. up into kinds

**zawwaja** tr. *bi-* | to wed s.o. to s.o.

→ *azwāj* *muṭahharah*, → *nafs*

### **zawj** | pair; kind; spouse

In the Qur’an, *zawj* (pl. *azwāj*) can both mean a pair, hence also a species or kind (e.g., Q 22:5, 56:7), and one individual member of a pair. The word routinely signifies female spouses or

<sup>17</sup> On *allafa* in connection with the heart, see also under → *qalb*; specifically on the phrase at hand, see n. 14 there.

<sup>18</sup> It merits consideration whether the manner in which Muhammad and his agents would have operated in collecting and distributing charitable gifts may have borne some similarity to how charity collectors are (norma-

wives (e.g., Q 2:35.102.234.240, 4:12.20, 7:19, 20:117, 21:90, 33:4.6.28.37.50.52.53.59; cf. van Putten 2022, 111), although a *zawj* can also be a male spouse, i.e., a husband (Q 2:232, 58:1).<sup>1</sup> On Qur’anic passages placing the inhabitants of paradise in the company of their spouses (*azwāj*), see under → *azwāj muṭahharah*.

***zāda* tr. | to give s.o. more**

***zāda* ditr. | to increase s.o. in s.th.**

→ *ajr*, → *hadā*

***zāgha* intr. | to swerve**

***azāgha* tr. | to cause s.th. to swerve**

See under → *qalb* and briefly under → *tāba*.

***zayyana* tr. | to adorn s.th.**

***zayyana* tr. li- | to make s.th. appear good, fair, alluring, or desirable to s.o.**

→ *samāʿ*, → *shayṭān*

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tively) depicted in early rabbinic sources; see Gardner 2015, 157–179. But note that the Qur’anic provision that those “at work” on the collection and distribution of alms be granted a share of the charitable gifts administered by them (Q 9:60) contrasts with early rabbinic sources, which seek to preclude that charity supervisors derive any material benefit from their role (Gardner 2015, 176–179).

<sup>1</sup> For a full overview of the meanings associated with the root *z-w-j* and specifically the noun *zawj*, see CDKA 123.



# S

**sabab** | rope, cord; pathway, conduit

→ *samā'*, → *nazzala*

**sabbaha** tr. | to glorify s.o. or s.th. (such as God or God's name)

**sabbaha** intr. *li-/bi-* | to glorify s.o. or s.th. (such as God or God's name)

**sabbaha** intr. *bi-ḥamdi* . . . | to glorify and praise s.o. (namely, God)

**sabbaha** intr. | to be engaged in glorifying God, to utter prayers of praise  
**subḥāna** . . . (e.g., *subḥāna llāhi*, *subḥānahu*) | Glory be to . . . (e.g., Glory  
be to God, Glory be to him)

→ *ḥamd*, → *ism*

**al-asbāt** pl. | the descendants of Jacob; the tribes of Israel

Further vocabulary discussed: **ummah** | community **ummī** | scriptureless, not hitherto endowed with a scriptural revelation **anzala** tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down **awḥā** intr. *ilā* | to convey revelations to s.o.

At least in Q 7:160, the internal plural *asbāt*—derived from Hebrew *šēbeṭ* or its Aramaic cognate (*BEḲ* 40–41; *KU* 90; *FVQ* 57–58)—clearly designates the twelve tribes of Israel: “we divided them”—namely, the “people of Moses” mentioned in the preceding verse—“into twelve *asbāt*, communities (*umam*; → *ummah*),” the divine voice reports. Yet as we shall see, elsewhere the word may have a different sense. The exclusively Israelite context of *asbāt* in the Qur'an, together with its etymology, suggests that the word may derive from the language of Arabophone Jews, like the term → *ummī*, “scriptureless.”

**Chronological considerations.** The term *al-asbāt* is probably specific to the Qur'an's Medinan stratum. The occurrences at Q 2:136.140, 3:84, and 4:163 are all contained in surahs that are generally recognised to be Medinan. The only possible exception to this pattern is Q 7:160, found in a surah that is normally regarded as Meccan. However, Surah 7 is not devoid of Medinan insertions, as exemplified by Q 7:157–158 (see under → *ummī*) and probably also by 7:171–174 (Hartwig 2008, 192–193). One may conjecture, therefore, that the section on the Israelites tribes in Q 7:160–168 (which is demarcated by an inclusio created by verse-initial *wa-qatta'nāhum*, “and we divided them,” in vv. 160 and 168) is likewise Medinan.<sup>1</sup> The polemical stridency of vv. 160–168 is certainly more reminiscent

<sup>1</sup> Pohlmann (in Amir-Moezzi and Dye 2019, 2:320) considers the overlap between Q 7:160 and 7:168 to indicate “different hands” and fails to consider, in characteristic fashion, that there might be such a thing as

of Medinan attacks on the Israelites than of the otherwise relatively measured or even positive tone of Meccan comments about the Israelites. Nonetheless, deciding the issue requires a much more detailed analysis of the redactional history of Surah 7 than is feasible in the present context.<sup>2</sup>

**Does the term *asbāt* convey a consistent meaning across all of its Qur’anic occurrences?** Jeffery observes that in Q 2:136.140, 3:84, and 4:163, unlike in 7:160, the *asbāt* figure in lists of Israelite recipients of divine revelation beginning with Abraham; three of these occurrences (Q 2:136, 3:84, and 4:163) make use of the verbs → *anzala*, “to send down” or → *awḥā*, “to convey revelations.” Jeffery’s own proposal that Q 2:136 etc. erroneously apply the plural *al-asbāt* to the minor prophets is hardly compelling; but there is a real question mark over the extent to which the word’s use in Q 2:136 and parallels, where the *asbāt* are enumerated among exemplary prophetic figures, is fully consistent with 7:160–168, where the Israelite tribes are charged with serial disobedience of God. There is certainly nothing about Q 2:136.140, 3:84, and 4:163, if not immediately harmonised with 7:160, that would compel one to understand the *asbāt* as a plurality of tribal groups here rather than as a plurality of individuals, such as the sons of Jacob. Another arguable anomaly is that Q 2:136 and its parallels all place the *asbāt* after Jacob and, in two cases, before Moses (Q 2:136, 3:84), whereas 7:160 ff. strongly implies that the *asbāt* were contemporary with Moses. It is admittedly uncertain that Qur’anic catalogues of names may be treated as implying historical sequentiality. Moreover, according to Biblical genealogy the twelve tribes of Israel are of course descended from the sons of Jacob, which might explain why the *asbāt* are listed immediately following Jacob. Even so, however, it remains notable that Q 2:136 and its parallels envisage the *asbāt* as pious descendants of Jacob who inherited his prophetic standing, whereas 7:160–168 cast them as unruly ingrates. Overall, there is good reason to translate *al-asbāt* in Q 2:136.140, 3:84, and 4:163 as “the descendants of Jacob.”

A possible explanation for the discrepancies just noted would be (i) to posit that Q 7:160–168 are indeed a Medinan insertion into Surah 7, in line with the tentative conjecture put forward above, and (ii) to date this addition to Surah 7 later than all other Qur’anic occurrences of the word *asbāt*. Assuming these two conjectures hold up, one of the concerns of Q 7:160–168 might be to ensure that earlier statements on the *asbāt* were read in light of their Biblically correct understanding as the twelve tribes of Israel rather than as the sons of Jacob from whom these tribes were believed to be descended. After all, it is striking that Q 7:160 both supplies an in-text gloss on the meaning of the word *asbāt*

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compositionally deliberate phraseological repetition. That we are confronted with an intentional inclusio is supported, in my view, by the fact that Q 7:160, in the wake of the introductory *wa-qaṭṭa’ nāhum* phrase, moves into a concrete narrative episode, whereas 7:168, following the second *wa-qaṭṭa’ nāhum* opening, provides a concluding summary assessment of the Israelites’ moral standing.

2 The considerations that would need to be properly explored and weighed in such a study are numerous. For example, one might feel that the positive appraisal of the Israelites in Q 7:159—according to which the “people of Moses” include “a community (*ummaḥ*) who guide according to the truth and act justly according to it” (*wa-min qaumi mūsā ummatun yahdūna bi-l-ḥaqqi wa-biḥi ya’dilūn*)—jars with the bitterly critical assessment of the tribes in vv. 160–168. Note also that it seems possible to read v. 159 and v. 169 (which begins by saying that “they were succeeded by people who inherited the scripture,” *fa-khalafa min ba’dihim khalfun warithū l-kitāba*) in direct sequence. This would permit extricating vv. 160–168 as a later addition, with v. 159 forming part of the surah’s original Meccan layer. Another observation that would need to be accommodated by any attempt to make sense of the redactional history of Surah 7 is the far-reaching parallelism between Q 7:159 and 7:181 (*wa-minman khalaqnā ummatun yahdūna bi-l-ḥaqqi wa-biḥi ya’dilūn*, as opposed to v. 159’s *wa-min qaumi mūsā . . .*). But such phraseological overlap between different verses of a surah does not, of course, entail contemporaneity.

and, exceptionally, gives their number as twelve: “We divided them into twelve *asbāt*, [namely,] communities (*umaman*).”<sup>3</sup>

## *sabīl* | way, path

Further vocabulary discussed: *ṣirāṭ* | road *mustaqīm* | straight *sawīyy* | even *sawā* | evenness *hadā* tr./intr. | to guide (s.o.) *ḍalla* intr. (‘an) | to go astray (from s.th.) *aḍalla* tr. | to lead s.o. astray *hawā* | desire *ṣadda* tr. ‘an | to turn s.o. away from s.th. *mujrim* | sinner, evildoer *afsada* intr. | to wreak corruption *al-tāghūt* | false gods *hājara* intr. | to emigrate *jāhada* intr./tr. | to contend (against s.o.) *qātala* tr./intr. | to fight (s.o.) *qatala* tr. | to kill s.o. *anfaqa* tr./intr. | to spend (s.th.) *māl* | wealth, possessions *naḥs* | person, life *ṣadaqah* | gift or act of charity

*Sabīl*, “way, path” vs *ṣirāṭ*, “road.” The concepts of divine guidance on and straying from God’s path are core Qur’anic metaphors with a substantial Biblical pedigree (see under → *hadā*, → *ḍalla*, → *ṣirāṭ*). Although the Qur’anic terms *sabīl* and *ṣirāṭ* belong to the same general semantic field, they are not synonymous and appropriately rendered, respectively, “path” and “road” (→ *ṣirāṭ*). While *ṣirāṭ* is virtually always employed in a metaphorical capacity (except for Q 7:86), *sabīl* is relatively frequently encountered in a concrete sense, such as in connection with the trope that God has put pathways (*subul*) in the earth (Q 16:15, 20:53, 21:31, 43:10, 71:20; see under → *arḍ*).<sup>1</sup> *Sabīl* can also be a “reason, possibility or occasion to take measures against s.o.,” as Ambros puts it (see Q 3:75, 4:34.90; CDKA 128); and *khalla sabīlahu* is “to set s.o. free” (Q 9:5). Overall, in the Qur’an *sabīl* is a term that is significantly more frequent, more semantically heterogeneous, and phraseologically more versatile than *ṣirāṭ*.<sup>2</sup> Despite having originally been loaned from Aramaic (FVQ 162), *sabīl* must have been a fully Arabised word by the time of the Qur’an. Even its metaphorical employment to refer to a life that is pleasing to God is not a secondary development within the Qur’an, since it occurs as early as Q 80:20 or 68:7.

*Sabīl* and *ṣirāṭ* also exhibit some collocational differences. It is only the latter term, never the former, that appears with the adjective “straight” (*mustaqīm*), even though both God’s “path” and his “road” can be specified by the notion of evenness, expressed by the root *s-w-y* (for *sawā*’ *al-sabīl*, see Q 2:108, 5:12.60.77, 28:22, and 60:1; for *ṣirāṭ sawīyy* / *al-ṣirāṭ al-sawīyy* / *sawā*’ *al-ṣirāṭ*, see 19:43, 20:135, and 38:22).<sup>3</sup> Mentions of God’s “straight road” (*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*) often pair up with the notion of guidance, expressed by the root *h-d-y* (e.g., Q 1:6, 2:142.213, 37:118), but never with the root *ḍ-l-l*, connoting straying and leading astray.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Which further objectives one ascribes to Q 7:160–168 will in part depend on one’s position regarding the question whether the surrounding verses 159 and 169 are Meccan or Medinan. For instance, if one considers Q 7:159.169 to be part of the surah’s Meccan stratum, then the account of the disobedience of the tribes in 7:160–168 might be considered to amplify the allusion in 7:169 that some post-Mosaic Israelites did not live up to God’s expectations.

<sup>1</sup> For other concrete occurrences of *sabīl*, see Q 18:61.63 and 29:29 as well as the expression *ibn al-sabīl*—on which see under → *zakāh*—for “wayfarer” at 2:177.215, 4:36, 8:41, 9:60, 17:26, 30:38, and 59:7; see also 4:43.

<sup>2</sup> For another pair of words that are partly synonymous yet one of which is notably more formulaic than the other, see → *zakāh* and → *ṣadaqah*.

<sup>3</sup> See also Q 67:22 for “walking evenly on a straight road,” *man yamshī sawīyyan ‘alā ṣirāṭin mustaqīm*.

<sup>4</sup> The only two verses that have both *ṣirāṭ* and a derivative of *ḍ-l-l* are Q 1:7 and 6:39, but in neither case does the text explicitly speak of straying from the *ṣirāṭ*.

By contrast, when the Qur'an speaks of straying from the divinely commanded course, it is always *sabīl* that serves as the prepositional (or, less frequently, direct) object. Thus, according to the early Meccan verse Q 68:7, “your<sup>s</sup> Lord (*rabbaka*) knows best who strays from his path (*man ḍalla ‘an sabīlihi*), and he knows best those who allow themselves to be guided” (similarly Q 6:117, 16:125, and 53:30), and in Q 38:26, which marginally postdates the early Meccan period, David is warned not to let passion or desire (*al-hawā*) lead him astray (*aḍalla*) “from God’s path” (*‘an sabīli llāhi*). Together with derivatives of *ḍ-l-l*, the prepositional complement *‘an sabīli llāh* (or the variant *‘an sabīli* + suffix) recurs in other Meccan and Medinan verses (e.g., Q 6:116.117, 10:88, 14:30, 22:9, 31:6). Other formulations involving the term *sabīl* as opposed to *ṣirāṭ* are the late Meccan and Medinan phrase “to turn away from God’s path” (*ṣadda ‘an sabīli llāh*; e.g., 2:217, 3:99, 4:160.167, 7:45.86, 11:19, 14:3, 16:88.94) and its exclusively Meccan variant “to turn away from the path” (*ṣadda ‘ani l-sabīl*; e.g., Q 13:33, 27:24, 29:38, 40:37), which is attested as early as Q 43:37.<sup>5</sup>

**The two paths.** The Qur'an generally envisages only a single “road” (*ṣirāṭ*), which is that of God. In Q 6:153, God’s path—which the verse also terms God’s “straight road”—is opposed to a plurality of paths (*al-subul*; see also under → *ṣirāṭ*). But there are also verses speaking not only of God’s “path” (*sabīl*) but also of the contrary “path of the sinners” (Q 6:55: *sabīl al-mujrimīn*), the “path of those causing corruption” (Q 7:142: *sabīl al-mufsidīn*; → *afsada*), the “path of those who have no knowledge” (Q 10:89), or the “path of false gods” (Q 4:76: *sabīl al-ṭāghūt*; → *ṭāghūt*).<sup>6</sup> Q 7:146 opposes the “right path” (*sabīl al-rushd*) and the “path of error” (*sabīl al-ghayy*).<sup>7</sup> At least implicitly, this dualism of two antithetical life-paths is already found in Q 76:3 and 90:10 (in the latter case using the word *najd* rather than *sabīl*). The metaphor of the two ways is reminiscent of the juxtaposition of the “way of the just” and the “way of the wicked” in Ps 1:6 (Cuypers 2015, 173) or the “way of life” and the “way of death” in Jer 21:8 (which is cited, for instance, in the *Apostolic Constitutions* 7:1 = Metzger 1985–1987, 3:24–25).<sup>8</sup> Overall, however, the dualistic image of God’s path in opposition to the path of the sinners is overshadowed in the Qur'an by the alternative opposition of guidance along vs straying away from the one road or path that is God’s (Frolov 2004, 29–30).

**“On God’s path” (*fī sabīl allāh*).** Distinctly Medinan is the prepositional phrase *fī sabīl allāh*, “on God’s path,” whose only occurrence in a Meccan surah is Q 73:20, a later insertion (GQ 1:98; Sinai 2018b, 259). Most frequently, the syntagm *fī sabīl allāh* accompanies the verbs → *hājara*, “to emigrate,” and → *jāhada*, “to contend.” In light of several occurrences of *hājara fī sabīl allāh*, “to emigrate on God’s path” (Q 4:89.100, 22:58, 24:22), it stands to reason that when the Qur'an refers to “those who believe and emigrate (*hājarū*) and contend (*jāhadū*) on God’s path (*fī sabīl allāh*)” (see, with minor variants, Q 2:218, 8:72.74,

5 As shown by Q 3:99, 4:160, 7:86, 13:33, 27:24, 29:38, 40:37, and 43:37, *ṣadda ‘an sabīl allāh* / *‘an al-sabīl* is transitive. However, many occurrences of the phrase leave the accusative object implicit. On the other hand, there is also an intransitive use of the verb *ṣadda* (+ *‘an* or *min*), “to turn away (from), to turn one’s back (on)” (CDKA 158; see Q 4:61, 43:57, 63:5).

6 See also Q 4:115, which speaks of the one who “follows a path other than that of the believers” (*wa-yattabi‘ ḡayra sabīli l-mu‘minīna*). On the two paths, see also Frolov 2004, 29.

7 Cf. Q 40:38, which has *sabīl al-rashād*, in line with the verse-final morphological pattern *u/i/a* + consonant (or two consonants) + *ā* + consonant that is prevalent in the surrounding verses.

8 On the two-ways metaphor in the Didache and other ancient literature, see now Wilhite 2019, with a detailed appendix listing occurrences of the idea.

9:20), the prepositional syntagm *fī sabīl allāh* should be understood to qualify both of the preceding verbs, rather than just the second one (for *jāhada/mujāhid/jihād fī sabīl allāh* by itself, see Q 4:95, 5:35.54, 9:19.24.41.81, 49:15, 60:1, 61:11).<sup>9</sup> The meaning of the preposition *fī* in all these cases is to specify that for the sake of which an action is undertaken, as shown by Q 29:69 (*wa-lladhīna jāhadū fīnā*) and 22:78 (*wa-jāhidū fī llāhi ḥaḡḡa jihādihī*). The basic meaning of *fī sabīl allāh* is therefore well captured by the non-literal translation “for God’s cause.”<sup>10</sup> Talk of emigrating and contending “on God’s path” implies that these activities “could also be performed in a non-religious vein (as warfare obviously could)” (Crone 1994b, 355). In many cases, “on God’s path” furthermore complements the verbs *qātala*, “to fight,” and *qatala*, “to kill” (Q 2:154.190.224.246, 3:13.157.167.169.195, 4:74–76.84, 9:111, 22:58, 47:4, 61:4, 73:20) or other verbs connoting danger to life and limb, such as *aṣāba*, “to befall” (Q 3:146, 9:120) and *ādhā*, “to harm” (Q 3:195).<sup>11</sup> One verse mentions the command to “march out on God’s path” (*idhā qīla lakumu nfirū fī sabīli llāhi*; Q 9:38; see also 9:41.81). Similarly, the extra-Qur’anic treaty known as the “Constitution of Medina” has two occurrences of the phrase “on God’s path,” both of which occur in thematic connection with warfare; in the first case the text expressly speaks of “fighting on God’s path” (*qitāl fī sabīl allāh*; Lecker 2004, §§ 19 and 21).<sup>12</sup>

The preceding yields the general impression that the Medinan surahs tend to associate the metaphor of God’s path with embarking on military raids and campaigns (→ *jāhada*; on Medinan militancy in general, see *HCI* 188–196). This understanding is also plausible for Q 4:94, instructing believers who “journey on God’s path” (*idhā ḡarabtum fī sabīli llāhi*) to refrain from casually accusing somebody offering them a greeting of being an unbeliever (which would make him a military target and a source of spoils). Similarly, at Q 2:273 the addressees are encouraged to spend on “the poor who are constrained on God’s path, being unable to travel in the land” (*li-l-fuḡarā’i lladhīna uḡsirū fī sabīli llāhi lā yastaṭr’ūna ḡarban fī l-arḡi*). It is plausible that the kind of travel “on God’s path” that is envisaged here is military campaigning. Nonetheless, a link between the phrase *fī sabīl allāh* and campaigning is not automatic: when Q 24:22 exhorts those with ample means to support relatives, the poor, and “those who have emigrated on God’s path” (*al-muhājirūn fī sabīl allāh*), the reference to emigration “on God’s path” is clearly a reference to religious exile and to the vulnerable economic situation entailed by it.<sup>13</sup> What being expelled “on God’s path” and campaigning

9 That the second and third verb in the triad of believing, emigrating, and contending are closely connected with one another is also supported by the fact that in Q 2:218 the relative pronoun *alladhīna* is only repeated before the first and second element of the triad: *inna lladhīna āmanū wa-lladhīna ḡajarū wa-jāhadū fī sabīli llāhi*.

10 Asad 1980 translates *fī sabīl allāh* as “in God’s cause,” the drawback being that the terminological link between fighting/emigrating/contending on God’s path and other formulations involving *sabīl*, such as “turning [others] away from God’s path” (*ṣadda ‘an sabīl allāh*), becomes undetectable. The formulation “in God’s cause” is also occasionally adopted in Abdel Haleem 2010, but with puzzling inconsistency (see Q 4:74.75, where *qātala fī sabīl allāh* is, in one and the same context, first rendered as “to fight in God’s way” and then as “to fight in God’s cause”).

11 As pointed out by Ambros, most occurrences of *ādhā* refer to verbal injury, but there are some cases where the context implies physical harm (*CDKA* 23). Interestingly, the Armenian chronicle of Pseudo-Sebeos speaks of “dying . . . on the divine highway” in the context of holy war (Marsham 2009, 45). For an attempt to explain the intriguing links between the Qur’an and Armenian war propaganda, see Tesei 2019.

12 See also § 56, which refers to *man ḡaraba fī l-dīn*. This is probably synonymous with *qitāl fī sabīl allāh* (Lecker 2004, 148).

13 This becomes especially clear when Q 24:22 is compared with 59:8, which enjoins sharing booty with “the emigrant poor who have been expelled from their homes and their possessions” (*li-l-fuḡarā’i l-muhājirina lladhīna ukhrijū min diyārihim wa-amwālihim*; see also under → *zakāh*).



“on God’s path” have in common is, of course, the general aspect of mobility. Adhering to God’s path, then, involves being ready to literally displace oneself, to abandon one’s home or at least temporarily to leave it behind. Medinan recourse to the conventional metaphor of God’s “path” accordingly comes to introduce a tangible aspect of *instabilitas loci* into the Qur’an’s implicit understanding of genuine religious commitment.

“**Spending on God’s path.**” A final verb that appears with *fī sabīl allāh* is → *anfaqa*, “to spend” (e.g., Q 2:195.261.262, 8:60, 9:34, 47:38, 57:10). *Anfaqa* is sometimes used in contexts in which reference is clearly to charitable giving (e.g., Q 2:215.264; see also verses like Q 2:3 or 35:29). This raises the possibility that “spending on God’s path” is a byword for charity. On the other hand, the phrase “spending on God’s path” might also, or perhaps even primarily, intend the contribution of material resources to the Qur’anic community’s military efforts (see also under → *zakāh*). This is supported by miscellaneous references to those who “contend (→ *jāhada*) by means of their possessions and their lives” (*jāhadū bi-amwālihim wa-anfusihim*; Q 4:95, 8:72, 9:20.44.81.88, 49:15, some of which also contain the syntagm *fī sabīl allāh*): “to contend by means of one’s possessions” may well be the same thing as “to spend on God’s path.” Still, some injunctions to “spend on God’s path” are quite generic, making it possible to consider them to be mere references to charity. Thus, in Q 2:261.262 “spending one’s possessions on God’s path” seems to be equivalent to “spending one’s possessions seeking God’s satisfaction” (*ibtighā’a mardāti llāhi*) from 2:265, while 2:263.264 use the word *ṣadaqah*, “gift or act of charity.” What the inconclusively seesawing character of the discussion indicates is perhaps above all that it is questionable to presuppose an overly clear-cut distinction between charitable giving, on the one hand, and backing the Qur’anic community’s military struggle against the Meccans, on the other: both entail supporting God’s cause at the expense of one’s private resources, whatever the specific use that is being made of the donation at hand, just as the repudiators are in Q 8:36 said to “spend their possessions in order to turn [others] away from God’s path” (*inna lladhina kafarū yunfiqūna amwālahum li-yaṣuddū ‘an sabīli llāhi*).

**sajada** intr. (*li-*) | to prostrate o.s. (before s.o.)  
**masjid** | place of prostration, place of worship

Further vocabulary discussed: *raka’a* intr. | to bow (in prayer) *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *‘abada* tr. | to serve s.o. or s.th., to worship s.o. or s.th. *ṣalāh* | prayer *istakbara* intr. | to deem o.s. great, to behave haughtily *ṭaw’an wa-karhan* | willingly or (literally: and) by force *sabbaḥa* intr. *li-/bi-* | to glorify s.o. or s.th. (such as God or God’s name) *aslama* intr. (*li-*) | to surrender o.s. or dedicate o.s. (to s.o., namely, God)

**Introduction.** Prostration has been described as “the heart and essence” of the Qur’anic prayer ritual (Katz 2013, 15). Prayer (*ṣalāh*) in general being discussed elsewhere (→ *ṣallā*), the present entry is limited to the verb *sajada*, which is cognate with the Aramaic verb *sged* (BEK 41 and FVQ 162–163), and the noun *masjid*, used as a general term for sites of human prayer and also—in the expression *al-masjid al-ḥarām*, “the sacred place of prostration”—as a designation for the Meccan sanctuary. A more infrequent word that tends to be associated with *sajada* is *raka’a*, “to bow” (see already Wensinck 1908, 104). Thus, six out



of the ten verses employing the root *r-k-* pair *raka'a* or its active participle with *sajada* or its active participle (Q 2:125, 3:43, 9:112, 22:26.77, 48:29). This does not necessarily indicate that *raka'a* is a downright synonym of *sajada*. More likely, the link between the two verbs reflects the fact that the Qur'anic prayer ritual, like the post-Qur'anic Islamic one, involved both prostration and bowing, as a result of which the two words are sometimes paired up or can metonymically stand in for each other.<sup>1</sup>

**Prostration in the Qur'anic milieu.** By the time of the Qur'an, prostration had long been established as a potent symbolic gesture in different contexts. In the Hebrew Bible, prostration figures both as an act of religious worship and as a gesture of homage to other humans (e.g., Gen 18:2, 19:1, 22:5, 48:12, and Exod 4:31, all of which the Syriac Peshitta translates by employing *sged*; see generally *TDOT* 4:248–255; *NIDOTTE* 2:42–44; Ehrlich 2004, 38). Reverential prostration also formed part of Byzantine and Sasanian court protocol (Canepa 2009, 150–153; see also Tottoli 1998, 6–7 and 12–15).<sup>2</sup> That prostration as a sign of submission and respect was known in pre-Islamic Arabia, too, is confirmed by evidence from early Arabic poetry (Tottoli 1998, 9–11). Q 3:113 associates prostration in prayer specifically with the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*): among them, the verse maintains, is “a community standing upright who recite God’s signs during the night while prostrating themselves.” This is likely an allusion to Christians rather than to Jews: although prostration was prominent in Jewish temple rituals, the rabbinic tradition exhibits a “reluctance to employ prostration in statutory daily prayer” and gave a more prominent role to bowing (Ehrlich 2004, 29–63, quoting p. 43; see also Mittwoch 1913, 17). By contrast, ritual prostration in prayer was part of Christian monastic practices (Wensinck 1908, 104–105; Katz 2013, 14).

It would nonetheless be unwarranted to infer that prostration was considered an exclusively Christian or Judaeo-Christian practice in the Qur'an's environment, since two verses use the verb *sajada* in connection with the worship of celestial bodies: the subjects of the queen of Saba' are reported to have practised prostration before the sun (Q 27:24: *yasjudūna li-l-shamsi min dūni llāhi*) and Q 41:37 admonishes the Qur'anic addressees not to prostrate themselves to the sun and the moon but to their creator (cf. Deut 4:19). Even assuming that *sajada li-* might be functioning merely as a *pars pro toto* equivalent of *'abada*, “to serve,” in these two verses,<sup>3</sup> there is no reason to posit that this would have entailed a loss of the verb's literal significance. Accordingly, prostration to beings or entities other than the Biblical God must have been an intelligible and sufficiently widespread cultic act in the Qur'anic milieu.

Tottoli maintains that prostration was not part of established rituals of worship in the Qur'an's Meccan milieu (Tottoli 1998, 16). It is true that reports preserved in Islamic exeget-

1 The remaining occurrences of *r-k-* are Q 2:43, which resembles 3:43 (both have the command *wa-rka'ū/wa-rka'ī ma'a l-rāki'in*), 5:55, 38:24 (David “fell down bowing and entrusted himself to God,” *wa-kharra rāki'an wa-anāb*), and 77:48 (the deniers are told to bow yet refuse to do so, *wa-idhā qīla lahumu rka'ū lā yarka'ūn*). The only Meccan occurrences of *raka'a* are Q 38:24 and 77:48. Q 77:48 may be compared to Meccan verses that either command the Qur'anic recipients to “prostrate” themselves (Q 25:60, 41:37: *usjudū*; 96:19: *usjud*) or complain that they fail to do so (Q 53:62, 84:21: *lā yasjudūn*). This, too, heightens the impression that *raka'a* and *sajada* are closely associated and can therefore stand in for each other.

2 On the Greek verb *proskyneō*, corresponding to Hebrew *hishtahāwā* and Aramaic *sged*, in the Septuagint, the New Testament, and outside the Bible, see *TDNT* 6:758–766.

3 See also Q 53:62: *fa-sjudū li-llāhi wa-'budū*. The combination of prostration and worship is frequent in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Deut 4:19, 30:17; see *TDOT* 4:254).

ical and historiographical sources portray the tribe of Thaḳīf as well as Muhammad’s uncle Abū Ṭālib as loath to practise prostration because they allegedly considered the posture to be demeaning (Kister 1979, 3–4, 5–7). The historical value of such post-Qur’anic reports is however notoriously difficult to judge, and it does not seem impossible that later cultural assumptions about the fierce pride of pre-Islamic Arabs played a role in the emergence of such material. More compelling are some relevant Qur’anic data. Thus, an early Meccan verse faults the Qur’an’s addressees for failing to prostrate “when the recitation is recited to them” (Q 84:21: *wa-idhā qur’ā ‘alayhimu l-qur’ānu lā yasjudūn*), and Q 25:60 takes the Qur’anic opponents to task for failing to heed the command to fall down before “the Merciful” (*al-raḥmān*) and for refusing to prostrate “to what you<sup>s</sup>”—namely, Muhammad—“order us to” (*wa-idhā qāla lahumu sjudū li-l-raḥmāni qālū wa-mā l-raḥmānu a-nasjudu li-mā ta’murunā*; see Tottoli 1998, 17–18). Both verses could indicate a general aversion to prostration among the Qur’an’s recipients. However, they could equally well pertain to the refusal of parts of the Qur’anic audience to recognise that Muhammad was transmitting divine revelations and that he possessed the authority to dispense binding doctrinal and ritual instructions in the name of a supreme deity. It is not inconceivable that seemingly historical traditions expanding on the aversion of Muhammad’s contemporaries to prostration are at least in part narrative amplifications of these two Qur’anic verses.

There are also two passages, Q 2:125 and 22:26, that indicate that the pre-Qur’anic Ka’bah cult included prostration. Q 2:125 recounts how God established the Meccan sanctuary, here called “the station of Abraham” (*maqām ibrahīm*), as a “place of prayer” (*muṣallā*), commanding Abraham and his son Ishmael to “purify my house for those performing circumambulation [around it], who are devoted [to it], who bow and who prostrate themselves” (*an ṭahhirā baytiya li-l-ṭā’ifina wa-l-ākifina wa-l-rukka’i l-sujūd*). A close variant of the same divine command, albeit in the singular rather than the dual, is found in Q 22:26 (*wa-ṭahhir baytiya li-l-ṭā’ifina wa-l-qā’imīna wa-l-rukka’i l-sujūd*). It seems likely that both passages are meant to endow the rites customarily performed at the Meccan sanctuary with an Abrahamic etiology rather than to stipulate novel rites. The first element of this cultic catalogue, ritual circumambulation, certainly formed part and parcel of the rituals traditionally performed at the Meccan sanctuary (see under → *bayt*), and this creates a distinct likelihood that the same holds for prostration. Moreover, the fact that not only the prayer ritual of the Qur’anic community but also the rites practised by their pagan opponents could apparently be designated by the term *ṣalāh*, “prayer,” lends further credence to the assumption that the two must have shared some relevant behavioural components, of which prostration may well have been one (see under → *ṣallā*). Hence, the reason why Q 27:24 and 41:37 (see above) envisage prostration in the context of non-monotheistic worship may well be that cultic prostration was practised by Muhammad’s fellow Meccans and did not form an alien cultic import distasteful to their dignity.

**Prostration in the Qur’an.** The significance of prostration in the Hebrew Bible has been held to convey a “sense of disparity” and of “absolute submission” (*TDOT* 4:251; see also Ehrlich 2004, 45–46). Prostration to God in the Qur’an would seem to have a similar significance. Several verses employing the verb *sajada* explicitly contrast it with pride and haughtiness, expressed by the verb *istakbara* (Q 2:34, 7:206, 16:49, 32:15, 38:75; see Tottoli 1998, 28–29, and Katz 2013, 16). Prostration is thus “a form of voluntary self-humiliation that reflects created beings’ inherent subordination to God” (Katz 2013, 16). Yet while the Qur’an is adamant that the only being deserving of religious worship is God, it is not the

case that God is the only legitimate addressee of prostration in the Qur'an (Katz 2013, 16): the angels and the jinni Iblīs are ordered by God himself to prostrate themselves to the newly created Adam (e.g., Q 2:34; → *al-shayṭān*), which is surely not intended to be a command to venerate Adam as a divine being, and Joseph's parents and brothers prostrate themselves to him (Q 12:100, referring back to 12:4; see Tottoli 1998, 26–28). Especially the latter instance stands in clear tension with the vigorous ban on prostration to any human being in the *ḥadīth* and *sīrah* literature (Tottoli 1998, 23–25; Katz 2013, 17–18). This later ban, which may have served to demarcate the Arab-Muslim conquerors from the customs of subject populations, bespeaks a more immediate equation between prostration and religious veneration than found in the Qur'an itself.

**Cosmic prostration.** The significance that the Qur'an attaches to the act of prostration also emerges from the way in which several Qur'anic verses expand it into a cosmic phenomenon (see also under → *ard*).<sup>4</sup> The motif of cosmic prostration is already found in the early Meccan verse Q 55:6, according to which “stars and trees prostrate themselves” (*wa-l-najmu wa-l-shajaru yasjudān*), namely, to God. Three later passages then generalise that everything and everyone “in the heavens and on earth” are engaged in prostration to God (Q 13:15, 16:49, 22:18: *wa-li-llāhi yasjudu / annā allāha yasjudu lahu man/mā fī l-samāwāti wa- ± <mā fī> l-ardī*), “willingly or [literally: and] by force” (Q 13:15: *ṭaw'an wa-karhan*). One of these three verses, Q 22:18, adds an illustrative list of the entities concerned, which harks back to Q 55:6: “the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the land animals, and many humans; and many [other humans] have become liable to punishment (*wa-kathīrun ḥaqqā 'alayhi l-'adhābu*).” Q 16:48, which immediately precedes one of the verses just referenced, offers the movement of shadows as evidence of the phenomenon of cosmic prostration (cf. also Q 13:15): “Have they not looked at the things that God has created, whose shadows move to the right and to the left, humbly prostrating themselves to God (*yatafayya'u ḡilāluhu 'ani l-yamīni wa-l-shamā'ili sujjudan li-llāhi wa-hum dākhīrūn*)?” Not everything that exists casts a shadow, of course, which means that Q 16:48 is best read as providing a mere indication, rather than a comprehensive definition, of what the prostration of all things to God consists in. The larger point made must be that everything is subject to God's power and sway. This reading is confirmed by the fact that an equivalent cosmic dimension, expressed in similar phraseology, is also given to the act of praising God, where the movement of shadows obviously does not enter into the issue: “everything/everyone in the heavens and on earth glorifies (*sabbāha*) God” (Q 24:41, 57:1, 59:1.2.4, 61:1, 62:1, 64:1: *sabbāha/yusabbihū li-llāhi/lahu man/mā fī l-samāwāti wa-mā fī l-ardī / wa-l-ardī*; see also 17:44; → *ḥamd*). A third verb that is used in a similar phraseological context is → *aslama*, “to surrender oneself”: “everyone in the heavens and on earth surrender themselves to him, willingly or by force, and to him will they be returned” (Q 3:83).

The rider “willingly or by force” (*ṭaw'an wa-karhan*) in Q 13:15 and also in 3:83 is clearly designed to take note of the fact that some of God's creatures—namely, humans and also the → *jinn*—are endowed with the ability to make moral and religious choices and may accordingly refuse to prostrate themselves, just as Iblīs refused to prostrate himself when commanded by God (see under → *shayṭān*). This is also reflected in Q 22:18, quoted above,

<sup>4</sup> See also the discussion of the verses reviewed in what follows and of Muslim commentaries thereon in Tlili 2012, 172–175.

where humans are the only class of entities who are not portrayed as being invariably engaged in prostration to God (“... and many humans; and many [other humans] have become liable to punishment”; cf. Q 68:43, 84:21). However, as Q 19:93 puts it, “There is none in the heavens and on earth who does not come [or perhaps who will not come] to the Merciful as a servant” (*in kullu man fī l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi illā ātī l-raḥmāni ‘abdā*).<sup>5</sup> We may connect the dots by saying that those humans who refuse to prostrate to God voluntarily (*ṭaw’an*) will be reduced to submission by force (*karhan*), when confronted by divine judgement and retribution.<sup>6</sup> What is perhaps most interesting in the present context is the implication that a believer who practices prostration in prayer consciously and voluntarily (*ṭaw’an*) enacts, appropriates, and assents to the world’s universal and inevitable subordination to its creator. The believer’s act of prostration is therefore embedded in a total cosmic context that simultaneously underscores humans’ integration into a world created and ruled by God and their special status as creatures who are capable of understanding and consenting to God’s dominion.

**The noun *masjid*, “place of prostration.”** One of the two chief Qur’anic designations of the Meccan sanctuary, apart from “the house” (→ *al-bayt*), is “the sacred place of prostration” (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*; → *ḥarrama*). The expression is prevalent in Medinan passages (Q 2:144.149.150.191.196.217, 5:2, 8:34, 9:7.19.28, 22:25, 48:25.27) and occurs only once in a Meccan surah: according to Q 17:1, God “made his servant”—i.e., Muhammad—“travel by night from the sacred place of prostration to the distant place of prostration whose environs we have blessed” (*asrā bi-‘abdihi laylan mina l-masjidi l-ḥarāmi ilā l-masjid al-aqṣā lladhī bāraknā ḥawlahu*). The contextually most convincing identification of the destination of this nocturnal translation is to equate it with the Israelite *masjid* mentioned in v. 7 and to identify both with the Jerusalem temple (see also *SPMC* 227–232, 239). Apart from the expression *al-masjid al-ḥarām*, the Qur’an employs *masjid* as a common noun in the general sense of a site of prayer or worship (*FVQ* 264).<sup>7</sup> For example, Q 72:18 maintains that “places of prostration belong to God; so do not invoke anyone else together with God” (*wa-anna l-masājida li-llāhi fa-lā tad’ū ma’a llāhi aḥadā*), and the same generic usage is seen in further Meccan and Medinan verses (Meccan: Q 7:29.31, 18:21; Medinan: 2:114.187, 9:17.107–108, 22:40).<sup>8</sup> Consequently, what Q 17:1 implies by referring to the Meccan Ka’bah and the Jerusalem temple as the “sacred place of prostration” and the “distant place of prostration” is that the two are members, albeit particularly eminent ones, of a wider set of human ritual sites.<sup>9</sup> Q 72:18 factually presupposes that such sites of prayer of prostration may or may not be devoted to the supreme creator god Allāh. Hence, just as there is reason to assume that in the Qur’anic milieu prostration was by no means alien to pagan rituals, so the word *masjid* would seem to have been in use for pagan ritual sites.

<sup>5</sup> The specific context here is a refutation of the claim that God might have offspring.

<sup>6</sup> But see the early Meccan verse Q 68:42: on the day of judgement the unbelievers will be called to prostrate themselves to God, and will presumably be very much minded to oblige, yet “they are unable to do so.” As the following verse makes clear, the point is that they have missed their chance to worship God when there was still time.

<sup>7</sup> One Medinan verse, Q 2:125, would seem to employ the term *muṣallā*, derived from the verb → *ṣallā*, in roughly the same meaning; but *masjid* is certainly far more frequent in this sense.

<sup>8</sup> On Q 2:114, see n. 27 under → *arḍ*.

<sup>9</sup> In addition, the diction of Q 17:1 suggests a close link between Mecca and Jerusalem, which is further developed in the Medinan surahs (*HCI* 205–206).

**Precursors of the Qur’anic employment of the term *masjid*.** Seeing that the expression *al-masjid al-ḥarām* is only found in a single Meccan passage, should we deem it a coinage that is original to the Qur’an? On this hypothesis, the expression would have been employed for the first time in Q 17:1, with a view to putting the Meccan sanctuary on a par with the Jerusalem temple, and would only subsequently, in the Medinan period, have gone on to impose itself as a standard designation by which the Qur’anic believers referred to the sanctuary to which they laid claim against the pagan Meccans. By contrast, the general pre-Islamic name for the Meccan sanctuary would have been “the house” or “God’s house,” which are documented by pre-Islamic poetry (see Sinai 2019b, 52–54, and → *bayt*; see also the Meccan passages Q 14:37, 52:4, 106:3). Against this conjecture stands a verse by the pagan Medinan poet Qays ibn al-Khaṭīm, reportedly killed in 620 CE, who swears “by God, of the sacred place of prostration” (Kowalski 1914, no. 5:14: *wa-llāhi dhī l-masjidi l-ḥarāmi*, *KU* 140–141).<sup>10</sup> A single attestation is however not above suspicion of being a later accretion drawing on Qur’anic diction. Hence, short of identifying further occurrences of *al-masjid al-ḥarām* in the early poetic record, one may prefer to remain agnostic as to whether or not the expression was indeed in use prior to the Qur’an.

A higher degree of confidence is warranted with regard to the Qur’an’s employment of *masjid* as a common noun, which certainly reflects a well-established manner of referring to cultic sites via the act of prostration. In the *Damascus Document* (11:21) discovered at Qumran, the Hebrew expression *bēt hishtaḥwut*, literally “house of prostration,” is used for the “designated gathering place for divine worship, a name evidently derived from the dominant ritual posture in this setting” (Ehrlich 2004, 39; see also Nitzan 1994, 62–63). The Aramaic counterpart of the phrase, *bet sigda*, refers to Midianite shrines in *Targum Onqelos* on Num 31:10 (*DTTM* 953). Even closer to the Qur’anic term *masjid*, Nabataean inscriptions and Jewish Aramaic papyri employ the word *msgd’* (*masgda*) in the general sense of a place of worship or of an altar or monument that has been erected at such a place (Schwally 1899, 134; *KU* 141; *FVQ* 263; Nebe 1991, 239–241; Robin 2003, 121, n. 129). The Aramaic term was also loaned into South Arabian (Nebe 1991; Robin 2000, 57; Robin 2003, 121), further confirming its circulation in pre-Islamic Arabia.

### ***sijjīn* | Sijjīn**

→ *zaqqūm*

### ***sāḥir* | sorcerer**

→ *jinn*

### ***sakhkhara* tr. (li-) | to make s.o. or s.th. subservient (to s.o.), to subject s.th. or s.o. (to s.o.)**

→ *arḍ*, → *darajah*

<sup>10</sup> For a similar oath from the same *dīwān*, see Kowalski 1914, no. 13:12: *al-ḥamdu li-llāhi dhī l-baniyyati*, “Praise be to God, of the edifice.” This, too, is reasonably taken to refer to the Ka’bah, on the understanding that *al-baniyyah* supplies a metrically suitable equivalent of *al-bayt*.

**sukhrī: ittakhadha tr. sukhrīyyan | to compel s.o. to work**

→ *darajah*

**asarra tr. | to conceal s.th.**

→ *ṣadr*

**saṭaḥa tr. | to spread s.th. out**

→ *ard*

**saṭara tr. | to write s.th. down**

**maṣṭūr, mustaṭar | written down**

→ *asāṭir al-awwalīn*

**asāṭir al-awwalīn pl. | writs of the ancients, ancient scribblings**

Further vocabulary discussed: *ifk* | lie, falsehood *iftarā* tr. (*alā*) | to fabricate s.th. (e.g., a lie) (against s.o., namely, God) *saṭara* tr. | to write s.th. down *maṣṭūr, mustaṭar* | written down *zabūr* | writ, writing, written record *ṣuḥuf* pl. | written sheets, writings *alladhīna ashrakū, al-mushrikūn* pl. | the associators

**Overview.** In nine verses, almost all of them Meccan, the preaching of the Qur’anic Messenger, especially the idea of an eschatological resurrection, is dismissed by his adversaries or by some figure representing them as being mere “*asāṭir* of the ancients (*al-awwalīn*)” (Q 6:25, 8:31, 16:24, 23:83, 25:5, 27:68, 46:17, 68:15, 83:13).<sup>1</sup> *Asāṭir* is clearly an internal plural, even if the corresponding singular is unattested in the Qur’an. The force of the objection is, first, that the Messenger’s preaching rehashes familiar content devoid of any informational novelty, as illustrated by Q 23:83 and 27:68: “we and our forefathers have received this pledge before” (*la-qad wu’idnā ± <hādhā> nahnu wa-ābā’unā ± <hādhā> min qablu*). This content is, secondly, dismissed as false. Thus, in Q 46:11 the unbelievers or repudiators would seem to use the expression “an old lie” (*ifk qadīm*) in approximately the same sense as *asāṭir al-awwalīn* (QP 137), and in Q 25:4 the accusation that the Messenger is relaying lies (*ifk*) occurs immediately before one of the *asāṭir al-awwalīn* statements just referenced.<sup>2</sup> All of this ties in with the opponents’ allegations elsewhere that the Messenger has “fabricated” (*iftarā*) the Qur’anic revelations (e.g., Q 10:38, 11:13; see also under → *jinn*).

**The root s-ṭ-r and the idea of writing.** The word *asāṭir* itself likely connotes the idea of writing, given that the first-form verb *saṭara* (Q 68:1) and the participles *maṣṭūr* and *mustaṭar* (Q 17:58, 33:6, 54:53; see also 52:2) mean “to write” and “written down.” That

1 On *awwal*, see under → *ākhir* as well as the remarks on *al-millah al-ākhirah* (“contemporary religious teaching or belief”) under → *millah*.

2 For a further verse in which the Messenger is accused of disseminating *ifk*, see Q 34:43.



*asāṭir* are something that has been drawn from or committed to writing is confirmed by Q 25:5, where the Messenger is accused of having “written down” (or perhaps of having “had written down”) the *asāṭir al-awwalīn*, which are said to be “dictated to him in the morning and the evening” (*iktatabahā fa-hiya tumlā ‘alayhi bukratan wa-aṣīlā*).<sup>3</sup> In Sabaic, too, *sṭr*, when used as a verb, is “to write,” and as a noun means “writing, inscription, document” (Beeston et al. 1982, 129; see also Stein 2021, 39). It may be that Qur’anic *asāṭir* is related to Aramaic/Syriac *shṭārā*, “deed, writ, document” (see *GQ* 1:16; *KU* 69–70; *FVQ* 56–57; *KK* 137; for the Aramaic and Syriac terms, see *DJBA* 1130 and *SL* 1549). Overall, *asāṭir al-awwalīn* is perhaps best rendered as “writs of the ancients” or, to bring out its pejorative force, as “ancient scribblings” (cf. Nöldeke 1860, 13, who proposes *Geschreibsel*).

**Writing and authority.** Following Horowitz (*KU* 70) it may be noted that *asāṭir al-awwalīn* has a degree of semantic affinity with two other Qur’anic expressions, namely: *zubur* (singular: → *zabūr*) *al-awwalīn*, “the writings of the ancients,” which according to Q 26:196 contain the same message as the revelations vouchsafed to Muhammad, and the synonymous expression *al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*, “ancient writings,” which figures in Q 20:133 and 87:18–19 (cf. also the reference to *ṣuḥuf mūsā* in Q 53:36; for more on *ṣuḥuf*, see under → *kitāb*). All three phrases evoke the idea of writing, designated by one of the roots *s-ṭ-r*, *z-b-r*, or *ṣ-h-f*, and the notion of being ancient, which is in all three cases expressed by the adjective *awwal*. Nonetheless, the rhetorical valence of *asāṭir al-awwalīn* is diametrically opposed to that of *zubur al-awwalīn* and *al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*: When the Qur’an’s own voice maintains that Muhammad’s revelations are contained in or agree with the ancient *ṣuḥuf* and *zubur*, this presumes that the Qur’an’s accord with earlier scriptures indicates its authority and trustworthiness; scripturality is viewed as a hallmark of revelatory status. By contrast, when the Qur’anic opponents deploy the expression *asāṭir al-awwalīn*, they understand written knowledge to be something that is readily available and therefore apt to be copied and parroted—as the Qur’anic adversaries put it in Q 8:31, “If we wanted (*law nashā’u*), we could say something like it.” The Meccan surahs thus afford us glimpses of two very different appraisals of writing that were present in the Qur’anic milieu. Moreover, these different stances towards the authority of writing are couched in distinctive diction: the expression *asāṭir al-awwalīn* is always attributed to opponents and never employed by the Qur’an’s own voice. It seems that at least in this case the Qur’an preserves an accurate impression of the language characteristic of its antagonists rather than reformulating their objections and attacks in Qur’anic terminology (which may be the case elsewhere).

It is worth adding that the preceding contrast between two opposing attitudes to the authoritativeness of written transmission is not invalidated by Q 74:52, where the Qur’anic voice complains that “everyone of them”—i.e., all those who turn away from the Qur’anic proclamations (v. 49)—“demands to be given sheets of writing (*ṣuḥuf*) spread out” (*bal yurīdu kullu mri’in minhum an yu’tā ṣuḥufan munashsharah*). The verse could mean that Muhammad’s adversaries demanded textual proof for the assertion made in Q 87:18–19 that “this”—namely, the eschatological kerygma preached by Muhammad—“is in the ancient writings (*al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*) // the writings of Abraham and Moses.” Alternatively, as noted by Neuwirth (*PP* 372), Q 74:52 could be saying that Muhammad’s opponents are refusing to believe until they have witnessed the Qur’an’s announcements of an eschatological resurrec-

<sup>3</sup> The accusation that the Messenger is drawing on human sources is also articulated, in different language, in Q 6:105, 16:103, 25:4, and 44:14 (see also 29:48).

tion and universal judgement come true—predictions according to which written records would be “spread out” in preparation for God’s sentencing of the virtuous and the sinners (Q 81:10: *wa-idhā l-ṣuḥufu nushīrat*).<sup>4</sup> On either one of the two preceding interpretations, Q 74:52 reflects a dialectical manoeuvre: Muhammad’s opponents attempted to best him in argument by taking him at his word. The verse does not, therefore, show that the Qur’anic opponents were themselves inclined to accept scriptural documents as truly authoritative, and it does not call into doubt the rather contemptuous attitude to the probative force of written tradition that comes through in the *asāṭīr al-awwālīn* passages.<sup>5</sup>

**The Qur’anic opponents’ familiarity with eschatological ideas.** Perhaps the most important observation to be derived from the *asāṭīr al-awwālīn* verses is that they clearly show the Qur’an’s Meccan opponents, the so-called “associators” (*al-mushrikūn*; → *ashraka*), to have been familiar with the notion of an eschatological resurrection (see also *QP* 136–137): “We and our forefathers have received this pledge before; it is nothing but ancient scribblings,” Muhammad’s adversaries are quoted as saying in Q 23:83 and 27:68. Incidentally, the Qur’anic opponents’ recourse to the term “ancient scribblings” implies only that they considered the doctrine of an eschatological resurrection, and perhaps also other aspects of the Qur’anic kerygma, to be contained and transmitted in written documents, not that they themselves had direct access to such documents. Thus, it may well be the case that their understanding of what was contained in the ancient scriptural corpora to which they were alluding was mediated orally. It could, for instance, have been derived from Christian missionary preaching.

A potential objection to the hypothesis that the Qur’anic opponents were broadly familiar with core aspects of Judaeo-Christian eschatology and of Biblical history arises from Q 11:49, which is thematically relevant to the preceding discussion even if it does not mention the *asāṭīr al-awwālīn*. The verse closes a narrative cycle that includes, among other stories, an account of Noah’s flood, and it declares that the preceding “belongs to the tidings of the hidden that we convey to you<sup>5</sup>; you had no previous knowledge of them, neither you nor your people” (*tilka min anba’i l-ghaybi nūḥīhā ilayka mā kunta ta’lamuhā anta wa-lā qawmuka min qabli hādihā*).<sup>6</sup> The statement could be taken to entail that Qur’anic narratives about Biblical protagonists like Noah or Moses were furnishing the Qur’anic Messenger and his hearers with genuinely novel and hitherto unavailable information. This would of course not strictly speaking contradict the claim, derived from the *asāṭīr al-awwālīn* passages, that the Qur’anic recipients were familiar with the idea of an eschatological resurrection; but one would expect acquaintance with elements of Jewish and Christian eschatology and acquaintance with the rudiments of Biblical history to go hand in hand. However, the literal reading of Q 11:49 just set out is overall improbable. After all, early Qur’anic references to such Biblical figures are extremely allusive (e.g., Q 79:15–26, 85:17–18) and require their audience to possess significant background knowledge in order to be intelligible at all. A more likely interpretation of Q 11:49, therefore, is that the Messenger

4 A third option, suggested to me by Mohsen Goudarzi, is that the opponents demanded that Muhammad retrieve a book from heaven (a challenge explicitly documented in Q 17:93) rather than merely delivering speeches.

5 See also Q 68:37, which poses to the Qur’anic opponents the rhetorical question whether they have “a scripture in which you study” (*am lakum kitābun fīhi tadrusūn*). The answer presupposed here is evidently negative.

6 On the anaphoric use of *tilka* in this verse, see under → *dhālika*.

and his addressees did not so far possess authoritative knowledge about the protagonists in question, knowledge that had only now become reliably available by means of divine inspiration. That is, the verse is telling the Messenger that he did not truly *know* about these events and protagonists, as opposed to being reliant on human tradition.<sup>7</sup>

**sa'īr | blaze**

→ *jahannam*, → *'adhdhaba*

**saqar | the scorching**

→ *jahannam*

**saqf | roof**

→ *samā'*

**askana ditr. | to let s.o. dwell somewhere**

On Q 14:14, see → *makkana*; for a general overview of the Qur'anic use of *askana*, see CDKA 136.

**sakīnah | composure, tranquillity**

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down  
*qalb* | heart    *amanah* | security, a sense of security and calm    *tābūt* | ark, chest, casket

**Overview.** The noun *sakīnah* occurs in six Medinan verses (Q 2:248, 9:26.40, 48:4.18.26), in four of which it stands in a possessive relationship with God (Q 2:248, 9:26.40, 48:26). Given that the root *s-k-n* is generally associated with the notions of rest, repose, and motionlessness (CDKA 136), the word *sakīnah* may be conjectured to refer to a divinely granted state of composure and tranquillity, sometimes in the face of an external threat (Durie 2018, 179). This understanding works well for at least five of the term's occurrences (Q 9:26.40, 48:4.18.26), in all of which "the *sakīnah*" or God's *sakīnah* form accusative objects of the verb → *anzala*, "to send down," with God as the grammatical subject. That God's *sakīnah* is an inward state of divinely bestowed fortification is clearest in Q 48:4, according to which God "sent down the *sakīnah* into the believers' hearts (singular: → *qalb*) so that they might increase in belief in addition to their [existing] belief."<sup>1</sup> Interestingly,

<sup>7</sup> See the similar comments in Q 3:44, 12:102, and 28:44–46 (referenced in *KK* 236), which emphasise that the Messenger was not an eyewitness to the events recounted in Qur'anic narratives. Here, too, the stress is on reliable and authoritative knowledge about the protagonists in question, knowledge whose validity is guaranteed by God and which is therefore epistemologically equivalent to autopsy.

<sup>1</sup> In Q 48:18, the *sakīnah* is associated with the believers' hearts in a more indirect manner: God "knew what was in their hearts, and he sent down the *sakīnah* upon them." Loynes takes a more cautious line (Loynes 2021, 32): "The Arabic semantic overtones of this word, i.e., that of peace and serenity[,] enable us to imagine the form

Q 3:154 speaks of God’s sending down (*anzala*) not of the *sakīnah* but of “security” or “a sense of security” (*amanah*; cf. also Q 8:11). This too supports the understanding that “the *sakīnah*” or God’s *sakīnah* in Q 48:4 and its parallels refers to a divinely wrought allaying of fear pertaining to some external threat.

The sixth occurrence of the word *sakīnah* comes at Q 2:248, according to which the Israelite “ark” (*al-tābūt*; see *FVQ* 88–89) contained “a *sakīnah* from your<sup>p</sup> Lord.” Here, too, it is at least feasible to read the word in the sense of an inward state of fortification, in so far as the ark, which is expressly called a divine “sign” of Saul’s royal authority, assuages the Israelites’ doubts about God’s appointment of a king who is devoid of wealth (Q 2:247).

**Origin of the word.** Etymologically, the word is descended from rabbinic Hebrew *shakīnah* or its Aramaic equivalent (*WMJA* 53–55; *NB* 24–25; *JPND* 208–209; *CQ* 21; *FVQ* 174; Stewart 2021, 42–54), which in targumic and rabbinic texts designate God’s “dwelling” or “presence” in the world and can on occasion appear as a downright hypostasis of the deity (see *DTTM* 1573 and *DJBA* 1145 as well as the overview in Unterman et al. 2007). The Qur’anic use of *sakīnah*, a word that was presumably adopted from the language of the Medinan Jews, is an evident case in which the semantics of a loanword underwent far-reaching adjustment in accordance with the meaning of its Arabic root *s-k-n*, conveying rest and calmness. As a result, the Qur’anic *sakīnah*, though explicitly identified as being God’s, has a distinctly psychological slant and does not convey the presence of God at a particular place, as does the rabbinic concept (Durie 2018, 178–179). One may surmise that the Jews of Medina employed the word *sakīnah* to describe God’s presence in the ark of the covenant (Q 2:248). This would be in line with God’s statement in Exod 25:8 that he will “dwell” in the Israelites’ sanctuary, which the *Targum Onqelos* renders, “And I shall cause my presence (*shkinti*) to dwell among them.” The Qur’an, by contrast, integrates the term into the theme of God’s reassuring impact on the believers’ hearts, into which the *sakīnah* is sent down according to Q 48:4 (see *AHW* 67 and under → *qalb*). Thus, while the concept’s original doctrinal context was a theology of God’s presence at particular places and times (see Durie 2018, 179), in its Qur’anic reception it is absorbed into what one might call the Islamic scripture’s theology of divine fortification: the prime arena in which God can be experienced as present, above and beyond his universal role as the world’s creator and sustainer (→ *khalaqa*), is the human heart.

### ***miskīn* | indigent**

→ *zakāh*

### ***sulṭān* | authority**

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *arsala* tr. | to send s.o.    *al-shayṭān* | the devil, Satan

**Overview of Qur’anic usage.** The Qur’an frequently accuses its pagan adversaries, the “repudiators” (→ *kafara*) or “associators” (→ *ashraka*), as well as the opponents of

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of this divine support. Unfortunately, the Qur’anic contexts do not allow us to judge if the divine support takes a concrete manifestation or is an abstract concept.”

previous messengers of lacking “authority” (*sulṭān*) for their beliefs and practices, especially for associating other beings with God (e.g., Q 3:151, 6:81, 7:33, 71, 10:68, 12:40, 18:15, 30:35, 37:156), and some verses suggest that lack of authority is in fact lack of knowledge (Q 7:33, 10:68, 22:71). The Qur’an appears to envisage two principal forms that such authority might take: either a divinely inspired scriptural corpus from which one might discern God’s will (Q 37:156–157, 54:43, 68:37–38) or a God-given ability to perform evidentiary miracles of the sort vouchsafed to Moses (Q 4:153, 11:96, 23:45, 28:35, 40:23, 44:19, 51:38). A slightly different sort of authoritative knowledge is hypothetically posited in Q 52:38, which asks whether the Qur’anic adversaries dispose of a “ladder on which they can listen,” i.e., a means of ascending to heaven and becoming privy to divine secrets (on ascent into heaven, see also under → *nazzala*). If so, the verse continues, “let anyone among them who is able to listen bring clear authority” (*fa-l-ya’ti mustami’uhum bi-sulṭānin mubīn*).<sup>1</sup>

Overall, the Qur’an presents authority, *sulṭān*, as a divinely bestowed attribute of God’s messengers (DTEK 83–84), even though this God-given authority may be doubted by their opponents (Q 14:10). As intimated above, it is especially with regard to Moses that the Qur’an repeatedly stresses that he was sent (*arsala*) with God’s authority (Q 11:96, 23:45, 40:23, 51:38; see also 4:153; see also the discussion of confirmatory miracles under → *āyah*). The Qur’an recognises that “authority” is also a feature of human and this-worldly human relationships, as implied by Q 69:29, where a paradigmatic eschatological convict bewails the fact that “my authority has perished” (*halaka ‘annī sulṭāniyah*). Ultimately, though, it appears that legitimate authority must be granted by God: even the right of blood vengeance for those killed unjustly is described as an authority or right bestowed by the deity (Q 17:33: *wa-man qutila maḥlūman fa-qad ja’alnā li-waliyyihi sulṭānan*). This is also confirmed by another context in which the concept of authority comes up, namely, affirmations to the effect that the devil has no authority over God’s “elect servants” (see under → *shayṭān*).

**Christian antecedent.** The Qur’an’s widespread deployment of the concept of “authority,” *sulṭān*, is a development of the New Testamental notion of *exousia*, which is given to Jesus and distinguishes him from mere scribes (Matt 7:29; see also, e.g., Matt 9:6, 8, 10:1, 28:18). In its ordinary Greek usage, the word *exousia* has been glossed as meaning “the possibility granted by a higher norm or court, and therefore ‘the right to do something or the right over something’” (TDNT 2:562), making “authority” a generally fitting translation. In Matt 21:23, 24, 27, the chief priests and the elders demand to know by whose authority Jesus is working miracles, just as God’s messengers in the Qur’an are challenged to evidence their authority (Q 14:10–11). *Exousia* is normally translated as *shulṭānā* in the Syriac Peshitta (Matt 7:29 has *mshallṭā*, “someone given authority”), from which Arabic *sulṭān* is etymologically derived (FVQ 176–177; see also NB 39). In a Safaitic inscription (LP 1013), *s’lṭn* may refer to the settled “authorities” from which a writer hopes to be safe (Al-Jallad 2015a, 271 and 342). This confirms that the Arabic word predates the Qur’an by a considerable time, even if the Qur’anic use is imbued by religious connotations that are absent from the Safaitic attestation.

1 On the adjective *mubīn*, see under → *bayyana*.

**aslafa** tr. | to do s.th. beforehand

→ *qaddama*

**salaka subulan** | to make pathways

→ *arḍ*

**aslama** tr. | to surrender, give up, or abandon s.th. or s.o.

**aslama** intr. (*li-*) | to surrender, abandon, or dedicate o.s. (to s.o., namely, God)

**aslama wajhahu li-llāh / ilā llāh** tr. | to face God in self-surrender

**istaslama** tr. | to capitulate, to surrender, to be forced to surrender

**muslim** | one who surrenders, abandons, or dedicates himself (to God)

**islām** | self-surrender or self-dedication (to God)

**bi-qalb salīm** | with a sound heart

Further vocabulary discussed: *wajh* | face *nafs* | soul, (vital) self; person, life *ḡalama nafsahu* | to wrong o.s. *sharā nafsahu* | to sell o.s., to give o.s. up *salām* | (salvific) safety or security *āmana* intr. | to be a believer *kadhhaba* intr. | to be guilty of dismissing divine revelation as a lie *kafara* intr. | to be ungrateful; to be a repudiator *āyah* | sign; sign-pronouncement *mujrim* | sinner *qasaṭa* intr. | to act unjustly *ajrama* intr. | to commit a sin or sins, to be a sinner *kufr* | repudiation *ashraka* tr. (*bi-*) | to associate s.o. (namely, a partner deity) with s.o. (namely, God), to venerate s.o. as a partner deity *jāhada* intr./tr. | to contend (against s.o.) *alladhīna āmanū, al-mu'minūn* pl. | the believers *dīn* | religion, religious worship *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *ummah* | community *millah* | religious teaching *bayyana* tr./intr. (*li-*) | to clarify s.th. (to s.o.), to make things clear (to s.o.) *al-ummiyyūn* pl. | the scriptureless, those not hitherto endowed with scriptural revelation *muqtaṣid* | moderate, middling *al-rāsikhūn fī l-'ilm* pl. | those firmly grounded in knowledge *al-tawrah* | the Torah *al-injīl* | the Gospel or the Christian Bible *shir'ah* | established practice or custom *minhāj* | custom *al-a'rāb* pl. | the Bedouin

The fourth-form verb *aslama* and its derivatives play an essential role in the Qur'an's articulation of the ideal human stance towards God in both Meccan and Medinan texts. Partly due to the fact that the verbal noun *islām* and the participle *muslim* came to function, in the post-Qur'anic period, as names for the religion of Islam and its adherents, the precise semantics of *aslama* within the Qur'an require careful reconstruction in order to avoid projecting onto it later usage. Further complicating factors are a plethora of potentially relevant material in pre-Islamic poetry and in Jewish and Christian literatures as well as extensive debate in the scholarly literature. The present entry, which subscribes to a fairly standard understanding that Qur'anic *aslama* signifies a state of complete and trusting self-surrender to God, commences by establishing the basic meaning of *aslama*. After moving on to consider *aslama* and cognate Aramaic and Hebrew verbs in pre-Qur'anic



traditions, the entry seeks further to flesh out the Qur’anic understanding of self-surrender to God. Finally, I turn to the noun *islām* and the question whether the Medinan surahs employ it to identify a particular religion that is distinct both from pagan polytheism, on the one hand, and from Judaism and Christianity, on the other.

**The basic meaning of *aslama*: “to hand over, give up, surrender.”** The lexicographical sources assert that *aslama* (as well as the second-form verb *sallama*), when used transitively, can mean “to give up, hand over, deliver s.th. or s.o. to (*li-*) s.o.” (*AEL* 1412–1413; see also al-Rāghib al-Isfahānī 2009, 423, where *aslamtu l-shay’a ilā fulānin* is glossed as *akhrajtuhu ilayhi*).<sup>1</sup> More importantly, this signification of *aslama* is satisfactorily documented in pre-Islamic poetry (Margoliouth 1903, 470–472; Lyall 1903, 781–782; Ringgren 1949, 13–17). Thus, a poem by Zuhayr describes a falling bucket as being “abandoned by the rope” (*aslamahā l-rishā*; *DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 1:21; see *AEL* 1413; Lyall 1903, 781–782; a variant use of the metaphor is quoted in Ringgren 1949, 16), and a brief piece attributed to Ṭarafah complains that “a/my people have abandoned me” (*aslamanī qawmun/qawmī*; *DSAAP*, Ṭarafah, no. 2:1; cf. also Lyall 1903, 782). Elsewhere in the Zuhayr corpus, *aslama* forms a synonymous parallelism with *khadhala*, “to forsake, leave, desert” (*DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 15:29).<sup>2</sup> Ringgren lists a number of cases in which *aslama* occurs not only with an accusative object, denoting the object or person being handed over or given up, but also with a prepositional object introduced by *li-* and denoting the recipient (Ringgren 1949, 14; e.g., Farrāj and Shākir 1963–1965, 1208 = Abū Khirāsh, no. 5:2, where the poet is handed over or surrendered to the grave). The basic transitive meaning *aslama* = “to give up, hand over s.th. or s.o.” persists in post-Qur’anic Arabic. It is evident, for example, in a panegyric on ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr by the Hudhalī poet Abū Dhū’ayb (d. after 647; see Sezgin 1975, 255–256), who states that “my heart rebelled against me [presumably, by remaining attached to his distant beloved], so I abandoned it” (*‘aṣānī l-fu’ādu fa-aslamtuhu*, the latter word being glossed as *khallaytuhu wa-taraktuhu*; Farrāj and Shākir 1963–1965, 196, no. 25:2; see Ringgren 1949, 16).

It has been conjectured that *aslama* in the sense of handing over or giving up someone or something may derive from Aramaic *ashlem* (*KU* 55; see also Ringgren 1949, 32; for *ashlem* in Syriac and Jewish Babylonian Aramaic, refer to *SL* 1567 and *DJBA* 1151; for an inner-Arabic derivation, see Lyall 1903, 781). But the loan, if it is one, must be very old: the verb under discussion is already found in a Safaitic inscription in which *’s’lm* has been interpreted to mean “he surrendered,” in the sense of “he gave himself up” (see Al-Jallad 2015a, 251 = HCH 194).<sup>3</sup>

1 Ringgren 1949, 7, and Bravmann 1972, 19, observe that the Qur’an occasionally employs *sallama* synonymously with *aslama* (see Q 4:65, 33:22). But in both cases, *taslīmā* is the final word of the verse, meaning that these could be cases of poetic licence due to rhyme. On the other hand, as Mohsen Goudarzi points out to me, the Qur’an does not refrain from combining verbs and nouns that belong to different forms, thus *tabattal ilayhi tabtilā* at Q 73:8. Hence, Q 4:65 could conceivably have run *wa-yuslimū taslīmā* rather than *wa-yusallimū taslīmā*. The *rasm* is of course undistinguishable anyway.

2 Bravmann 1972, 11–12, adduces yet another verse by Zuhayr that praises the addressee for “delivering [yourself] up” or “abandoning [yourself]” in battle (*mā aslamta fī l-najadāti*; *DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 4:20). However, Bravmann’s construal presupposes a textual variant (see *DSAAP*, 39, according to European pagination), and Bravmann’s translation itself is also open to doubt (Ringgren 1949, 20).

3 In this inscription, *’s’lm* occurs between the verbs *nfr*, “he fled,” and *jlt*, “he escaped,” yielding a likely sequence consisting in an unsuccessful attempt to escape followed by surrender and subsequent escape. According

*Aslama wajhahu li-llāh / ilā llāh* = “to face God in self-surrender.” The poetic proof-texts just rehearsed yield a strong presumption in favour of taking Qur’anic *aslama* to have the basic meaning “to hand over, give up,” or indeed “to surrender” in its transitive sense (defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “to give up, resign, abandon, relinquish possession of, esp. in favour of or for the sake of another”).<sup>4</sup> With this in mind, we can now move on to the Qur’an itself. What may seem the most convenient point of departure for ascertaining the meaning of *aslama* in the Islamic scripture are four verses in which *aslama* governs the direct object *wajh* + possessive pronoun, “one’s face,” and is followed by the prepositional complement *li-llāh*, “to God” (Q 2:112, 3:20, 4:125) or *ilā llāh* (Q 31:22). In view of the evidence marshalled in the preceding section, the standard translation of *aslama wajhahu li-llāh* (of which *ilā llāh* in Q 31:22 is probably a variant, notwithstanding Bravmann 1972, 23) as “to surrender one’s face to God” is a defensible, albeit very literal, starting point. As we shall see below, the attitude described may be characterised as a stance of total acquiescence in God’s will and of complete devotion or dedication to the deity; but for the time being, we are still concerned with linguistic surface meaning and translational considerations rather than with the underlying concept.

As regards the accusative object *wajhahu* (“his face”), Bravmann maintains that early Arabic can use *wajh* interchangeably with *nafs*, signifying the human self (Bravmann 1972, 22–23; Bravmann 1977, 434–438; see also Künstlinger 1935, 137, and Ringgren 1949, 22–23). The same view is already put forward, e.g., in al-Māturīdī’s treatment of Q 2:112 (al-Māturīdī 2005–2007, 1:211–212), where *aslama wajhahu* is paraphrased as *aslama nafsa*.<sup>5</sup> Bravmann’s equation of *wajh* with *nafs* is however open to question, both on account of some of the poetic proof-texts concerned and because it is doubtful whether *wajh* + possessive suffix is anywhere else in the Qur’an synonymous with *nafs* + possessive suffix (Baneth 1971, 187–188). In fact, *nafs* as a reflexive pronoun is well attested in the Qur’anic corpus (e.g., → *ḡalama nafsa*, “to wrong o.s.” in Q 2:54.57.231, 3:117.135, 4:64.110, 16:118 etc., → *ḡarā nafsa*, “to sell o.s.” in 2:102.207, *qatalū anfusahum*, “to kill one another,” in 2:54.85 and 4:29.66,<sup>6</sup> and *ḡarrama ‘alā nafsihi*, “to forbid s.th. to o.s.,” in 3:93; → *nafs*). There is consequently no reason why the verb *aslama* too should not have been conjoined with *nafs* rather than *wajh* had the intended meaning been simply “to surrender oneself.” Reflexive uses of *wajh*, by contrast, either have a literal significance (e.g., Q 51:29: *fa-ḡakkat wajhahā*, “she hit herself in the face”; 5:6: *fa-ḡhsilū wujūhakum*, “wash your<sup>p</sup> faces”; 2:144.149.150.177: *walli wajhaka / wallū wujūhakum*, “turn your<sup>s</sup> face / your<sup>p</sup> faces”) or, alternatively, deploy *wajh* in a metaphorical function in which the word’s basic anatomical significance is nonetheless clearly and meaningfully apparent (e.g., Q 6:79, where Abraham says, *innī wajjahtu wajhiya li-lladhī faṡara l-samāwāti wa-l-arḡa*, “I hereby turn my face to the creator of the heavens and the earth”; 30:43: *aqim wajhaka li-l-dīni l-qayyimi*, “set your face towards the right religion”; 10:105 and 30:30 have the variant *aqim wajhaka li-l-dīni ḡanīfan*).

to Al-Jallād, *ʔlt* is preceded by *w-b’d*, “and afterwards.” See also [http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA\\_0003047.html](http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0003047.html) (accessed 6 November 2021).

<sup>4</sup> See *OED Online*, s.v. “surrender, v.,” <https://www.oed.com> (accessed 14 February 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Al-Māturīdī justifies the claim that “the face (*al-wajh*) may be mentioned in the sense of the self (*al-dhāt*)” by reference to Q 28:88: “Everything will perish except for his”—namely, God’s—“face” (*wajh*). But this is not a conclusive proof-text, because its probative force is anchored in the questionable presupposition that God, being immaterial, could not literally have a countenance (→ *allāh*).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Exod 32:27.

There is, accordingly, a strong case for rendering *aslama wajhahu* in such a way as to signal that the accusative object's literal meaning is "one's face" rather than simply turning it into a general reflexive ("oneself"). The phrase *aslama wajhahu* evokes the submissive or trusting exposure of a vulnerable body part that is emblematic of personal identity, which receives further support from the explicit reference to facing God in Q 6:79, just cited. It is significant that God too is Qur'anically described as possessing a face that humans can seek out (e.g., Q 2:272, 92:20; → *allāh*). An important connotation of Qur'anic references to the countenance of God and of humans may therefore be their ability to countenance each other (see especially Q 75:22–23: "There will be faces on that day that are radiant, // gazing upon their Lord"). In fact, a few verses on from Q 2:112, one of the occurrences of *aslama wajhahu li-llāhi* cited above, it is said that "wherever you<sup>p</sup> turn, there is the face of God" (Q 2:115: *fa-aynamā tuwallū fa-thamma wajhu llāhi*). Despite all of this, however, "to surrender one's face" is hardly very idiomatic English. The best solution may therefore be to render *aslama wajhahu li-llāhi* in a slightly paraphrastic manner as "to face God in self-surrender," which effectively understands the phrase to combine the idea of self-surrender to God, to be discussed further below, with that of facing (*wajjaha wajhahu li-*) God. This is essentially to adopt Horovitz's view that *aslama wajhahu ilā llāh / li-llāh* is to be explained as resulting from a "contamination" with *wajjaha wajhahu li-* at Q 6:79 and with other phraseology evoking the turning of the human face (*KU* 54). If this is correct, then occurrences of *aslama* without an explicit accusative object should not be considered to be abbreviations of *aslama wajhahu*. Having thus gotten *aslama wajhahu* out of the way, it is to such object-less instances of *aslama* that we must turn in the next section.

***Aslama* without accusative object as implicitly reflexive.** The four Qur'anic verses just examined, in which *aslama* is accompanied by the accusative object *wajhahu*, are dwarfed by numerous instances in which *aslama* or its active participle *muslim* are used intransitively, i.e., lack a direct accusative object. Such intransitive occurrences encompass both cases in which *aslama*, though not governing a direct object, occurs with the preposition *li-*, followed by a designation of God (2:128.131.133.136, 3:83.84, 6:71, 22:34, 27:44, 29:46, 39:54, 40:66), and cases in which *aslama* or *muslim* are used absolutely, without any direct or prepositional object at all (e.g., Q 2:132, 3:52.64.80 etc., 5:111, 6:14, 7:126, 10:84, 16:81, 37:103; for two particularly early cases, see 51:36 and 68:35). Should the transitive meaning of *aslama* that is indisputably present in Q 2:112, 3:20, 4:125, and 31:22 be assumed to extend to such intransitive cases? In other words, should we treat absolute *aslama* and *aslama li-* without an accusative object (e.g., Q 6:71: *umirnā li-nuslima li-rabbi l-'ālamīn*) as an elliptical equivalent of *aslama nafsahu li-* (thus, e.g., Bravmann 1972, 13)?

It is not self-evident that the answer to this question must be affirmative. For instance, Mark Lidzbarski holds that the Qur'an's frequent occurrences of absolute *aslama* reflect a more archaic usage in which *aslama* derived from → *salām*, understood to be an equivalent of Greek *sōtēria*, "salvation," and consequently functioned as an intransitive verb like *aṣbaḥa* ("to enter upon the time of morning") or *aḥrama* ("to enter upon the sacred state of a pilgrim"). Intransitive *aslama* would consequently mean something like "to enter upon the state of salvation" (Lidzbarski 1922).<sup>7</sup> A more recent intervention questioning an elliptical construal of absolute *aslama* is Juan Cole's proposition, based on an idea first suggested by

7 For a brief refutation of Lidzbarski's thesis, see Ringgren 1949, 4. While I agree that *aslama* is unlikely to mean "to enter upon the state of salvation," I do accept that the Qur'anic use of → *salām* has overtones of salvation.

Emran El-Badawi (El-Badawi 2014, 50), that the Qur’anic noun *islām* forms the equivalent of Syriac *mashlmānūtā*, “tradition,” assumed to refer specifically to the tradition of monotheism. Cole correspondingly translates various absolute occurrences of *aslama* along the lines of “to become an upholder of the monotheist tradition” (Cole 2019, 419–423) and posits a considerable semantic distance between simple *aslama*, on the one hand, and *aslama li-* (“to submit to”), on the other. By way of a linguistic parallel, Cole points to the semantic gap that obtains in English between simple transitive verbs (e.g., “to drop s.th.”) and phrasal verbs (e.g., “to drop in on a friend”; Cole 2019, 407).

Yet the simplest solution remains nonetheless to assume a basic unity of meaning across all Qur’anic occurrences of *aslama* or *muslim*.<sup>8</sup> From this perspective, the basic significance of *aslama* is one and the same in all three categories of Qur’anic usage previously registered, namely:

- (i) explicitly transitive occurrences, such as *man yuslim wajhahu ilā llāhi* (“whoever surrenders his face to God”) at Q 31:22;
- (ii) statements like *umirnā li-nuslima li-rabbi l-‘ālamīn* (Q 6:71; “We have been commanded to surrender ourselves to the Lord of the world-dwellers”), where *aslama* is accompanied by a prepositional object but not by an accusative one; and
- (iii) assertions like *qul innī umirtu an akūna awwala man aslama* (Q 6:14; “Say, ‘I have been commanded to be the first of those who surrender themselves [to God]’”), where *aslama* occurs absolutely, i.e., neither with an accusative object nor with a prepositional one.

The supposition of a unitary significance of *aslama* across all three of these categories is buttressed by the fact that absolute *aslama* (category [iii] above) and *aslama li-* (category [ii] above) sometimes occur in similar phraseological contexts, as illustrated by the two verses just quoted from Surah 6, and by further passages in which it is contextually certain that absolute *aslama* can indeed function as an ellipsis for *aslama li-*, to wit, Q 2:131 (“When his Lord said to him: ‘*aslim*’, and he said: ‘*aslamtu* to the Lord of the world-dwellers’) and 3:20 (where the Messenger is first commanded to say, “*aslamtu* my face to the Lord of the world-dwellers,” and then to ask the scripture-owners, “*aslamtum?*”; “and if they *aslamū*, they are guided”). Moreover, if at least *aslama li-* (category [ii] above) is to be understood in the customary sense of surrendering, devoting, or submitting *one-self* to God (thus treating it as elliptical), which Cole accepts, then one will in principle need to recognise an occasional need for tacitly supplementing the verb with some kind of reflexive object where such an object is not explicitly present. Hence, the decision to understand absolute *aslama* in a different vein than *aslama li-* and *aslama wajhahu li-* cannot be justified by dismissing such an elliptical construal as generally invalid. Indeed, already the Safaitic inscription adduced above confronts us with just such an ellipsis. Finally, a construal of *aslama* without an explicit accusative object as “implicitly reflexive” (Larcher 2020, 116–117, 126, 138) is supported by the cases of → *āmana bi-*, “to believe in,” → *kadhhaba bi-*, “to dismiss as a lie,” and → *kafara bi-*, “to repudiate,” all three of

<sup>8</sup> Cole 2019 discusses a number of Qur’anic passages for which he maintains that the standard translation *aslama* = “to surrender” yields interpretive difficulties (e.g., Q 39:22 and 61:6, discussed in Cole 2019, 407 and 415–416), but I am not persuaded that these alleged difficulties are quite as intractable.

which also have Qur’anic occurrences without an explicit prepositional object that are cogently construed as elliptical: absolute *āmana* is “to be a believer,” absolute *kadhhaba* is “to be guilty of dismissing divine revelation as a lie,” and absolute *kafara* is both “to be ungrateful” and “to be a repudiator.”<sup>9</sup>

It is not possible to be entirely certain about the precise wording of the reflexive object that is presupposed by the intransitive uses of *aslama* classified under (ii) and (iii). Given what was said earlier, the implicit reflexive is unlikely to be *wajhahu*, which only appears at a fairly advanced moment in the Qur’an’s genesis, in the late Meccan verse Q 31:22. Quite possibly, absolute *aslama* and *aslama li-* are to be treated as equivalent to *aslama nafsahu* and *aslama nafsahu li-*, even though the phrase *aslama nafsahu* is completely absent from the Qur’anic corpus (see, e.g., al-Tha’labī 2015, 4:136, reporting that ‘Aṭā’ paraphrased God’s command *aslim* in Q 2:131 as *aslim nafsaka ilā llāhi wa-fawwiḍ amraka ilayhi*, “surrender yourself to God and entrust your affairs to him”).<sup>10</sup> Or perhaps *aslama* is an ellipsis for *aslama amrahu* (Larcher 2020, 117, 126, 138). Yet another possibility—that the implied accusative object of *aslama* could be *qalbahu*—will be raised below. In any case, what is more significant than speculating about the precise reflexive that is presupposed by intransitive *aslama* is to note just how solidly entrenched this implicitly reflexive usage of *aslama* is from the verb’s putatively earliest Qur’anic occurrences in Q 51:36, 68:35, and 72:14, which straddle the boundary between the early Meccan and later Meccan surahs. All three of these early occurrences have the active participle plural *al-muslimūn*, “those who surrender themselves,” while the third verse additionally employs *man aslama*, “he who surrenders himself.” As a consequence of this deeply rooted ellipsis, which was inherited rather than created by the Qur’an (note again the Safaitic inscription adduced earlier), the originally transitive verb *aslama* effectively behaves like an intransitive verb in almost all of its Qur’anic occurrences.

In English translation, of course, the implied reflexive must be supplied. The alternative solution of employing the intransitive verb “to surrender” is not feasible, since intransitive “to surrender” would convey a sense of capitulation and admitting defeat, especially in a military context, that would arguably misrepresent the Qur’anic semantics of *aslama* when used to describe the ideal human stance vis-à-vis God. By contrast, “to surrender oneself” more accurately captures the notion of self-abandonment to God, of handing oneself over and entrusting oneself to him, which seems to be at the heart of the Qur’anic use of *aslama*.

**Intransitive *aslama* vs *istaslama*.** It is remarkable that the Qur’an nowhere collapses this quasi-intransitive elliptical use of *aslama* into the tenth-form verb *istaslama*, literally

9 On the elliptical usage of verbs that normally take direct or prepositional objects, see also Seidensticker 2011a, 158–159. An example for a verb that is implicitly reflexive drawn from contemporary English would be “to shave”—namely, oneself (Larcher 2020, 135). For a somewhat different perspective, see Leemhuis 1977, 41, who maintains that a verb like *aslama* “with a zero object that has an internal causative meaning need not necessarily be explained as originally resulting from an elliptical construction”; rather, “the construction with an explicit object that denotes the self can very well be considered as used for emphasis only, the construction with the zero object being prior.” What supports Leemhuis’s assessment is the existence of other fourth-form verbs that may be understood as “internal causatives” (Leemhuis 1977, 38–65), including *abāna*, “to show o.s. to be clear” (see under → *bayyana*).

10 Especially interesting in this regard is Q 27:44: *innī ḡalamtu nafsī wa-aslamtu ma’a sulaymāna li-llāhi rabbi l-‘ālamīn*, “I have wronged myself, and together with Solomon I surrender myself to the Lord of the world-dwellers.” Given that *aslamtu* here occurs immediately after *innī ḡalamtu nafsī*, one might have expected *aslamtuhā*.



“to surrender o.s.,” whose morphological form is grammatically suggestive of reflexivity in a way that *aslama* is not.<sup>11</sup> *Istaslama* appears only once in the Qur’an, in an early Meccan verse describing how the sinners will resign themselves to their impending damnation (Q 37:26: *bal humu l-yawma mustaslimūn*). The context of this statement makes it very clear that the kind of self-surrender at stake in Q 37:26 is starkly different from the stance of unconditional trust in God prior to the eschatological judgement that the Qur’anic proclamations seek to inculcate in their recipients. The sinners in Q 37:26 are surrendering to God only after having been miraculously resurrected and in the face of imminent perdition; as a later Meccan verse puts it, they merely and unmeritoriously believe upon “seeing our might” (Q 40:85). From the Qur’anic perspective, such a belated act of capitulation is emphatically not the same stance as coming to believe in God’s unbridled ability to hold humans to account *before* God’s punishment actually begins to unfold, a stance that the Qur’an would have humans adopt based on the sundry “signs” (singular: → *āyah*) of God’s omnipotence and munificence that are distributed all over the cosmos (Sinai 2019a, 248–249). In view of this distinction, a translator might consider bringing out the difference between *istaslama* at Q 37:26 and the ordinary Qur’anic use of *aslama* by rendering the former not as “to surrender oneself,” which is best reserved for absolute *aslama*, but rather as “to capitulate” or “to be forced to surrender.”

So why does the Qur’an express the virtue of trusting self-surrender to God in the present life by an elliptical use of the originally transitive verb *aslama* rather than by the explicitly reflexive tenth-form verb *istaslama*? Apart from the fact that there is a valid conceptual distinction to be made between the two types of self-surrender to God that have just been outlined, the well-established use of the cognate verb *ashlem* to denote a religious virtue in Jewish Aramaic and Syriac, to be reviewed in the following section, surely supplies an important part of the answer.<sup>12</sup>

**Cognate terminology in pre-Qur’anic traditions.** Assuming a unitary understanding of *aslama* as “to surrender,” can we further flesh out the connotations of the kind of self-surrender and self-abandonment that is at stake? Bravmann argues that the notion should be seen as tantamount to the heroic defiance of death that is also articulated by the formulation → *sharā nafsahu* (“to sell one’s soul”; see Q 2:102.207) or its extra-Qur’anic relatives *ahāna nafsahu* (“to scorn one’s soul”) and *badhala nafsahu* (“to squander one’s soul”; Bravmann 1972, 19–23; see also Bravmann 1977, 434–454). Bravmann accordingly maintains that Qur’anic *aslama* expresses the same demand for religious militancy that is Qur’anicallly referred to as “contending (→ *jāhada*) on God’s path (→ *sabīl*).” However, a fatal problem with this suggestion (apart from Bravmann’s reliance on post-Qur’anic

11 Nevin Reda poses the question why the Qur’an should employ absolute *aslama*, rather than the tenth-form verb *istaslama* with its established reflexive connotation, in order to express the idea of self-surrender to God; her solution is to propose that Qur’anic *aslama* should be translated not as “submission” but rather as “wholeness-making, peace-making, safety-making and well-being-making,” based on the meaning of other derivatives of the root *s-l-m* (Reda 2012, 243–245). However, this founders on the early Arabic evidence presented above to the effect that *aslama* means “to surrender, abandon, forsake, deliver up.” A supplementary objection to Reda’s hypothesis is the fact that Q 4:35.128 and 49:9–10, which explicitly address issues of reconciliation in a marital and a military context, use *aṣlahā* rather than *aslama*.

12 According to Pierre Larcher, the “implicitly reflexive” fourth-form verb *aslama* corresponds to the “explicitly reflexive” tenth-form verb *istaslama* (Larcher 2020, 116–117, 126, 138). I have no quarrel with the contention that the two words are linguistically equivalent; yet I consider it nonetheless significant that the Qur’an reserves *istaslama* for a sort of self-surrender that is palpably different from the meritorious faith-based self-surrender to God that qualifies one for eschatological reward.



prooftexts, such as poetry from the *sīrah*<sup>13</sup>) is that the verb *aslama* and the participle *muslim* are attested well before the hijrah, in the early Meccan period (Q 15:2, 51:36, 68:35),<sup>14</sup> when active militancy was not yet part of the Qur’anic conception of religious virtue (*HCI* 188–196). Moreover, unlike the poetic prooftexts adduced above, which deploy the verb *aslama* in various secular contexts, Qur’anic instances of the word have a very clear religious sense, in so far as they concern the attitude humans are bidden to adopt towards God (Lyll 1903, 782; Ringgren 1949, 22).<sup>15</sup> In attempting to gauge the wider cultural background to the Qur’anic understanding of handing oneself over to God, it is therefore pertinent to extend our attention to Hebrew and Aramaic, which like the Qur’an use cognates of Arabic *aslama* in explicitly religious contexts (for an erudite survey, refer to Kister 2018, but see already *KU* 55).

As highlighted by Leopold Zunz and again by Shulamit Elizur, the idea of surrendering one’s self or soul is not infrequent in late antique *piyyuṭ*, or Jewish liturgical poetry (Zunz 1865, 641–642; Elizur in El’azar berabbi Qillir 2014, 106–108). For instance, several Hebrew poems by the seventh-century author El’azar berabbi Qallir (or Qillir; see Münz-Manor 2019) apply the notion of surrendering one’s self or soul to Isaac’s willingness to be sacrificed by his father Abraham (e.g., El’azar berabbi Qillir 2014, 307: *ha-mashlim bā-‘ēqed nepesh*; cf. Kister 2018, 399). Similar diction is found in Aramaic poetry (Sokoloff and Yahalom 1999, 264 = no. 45:15: *napshēh ashlem*), and indeed Hebrew *hishlim nepesh* would seem to be a calque of its Aramaic equivalent (Rand 2006, 500–501). Both in Hebrew and Aramaic, the phrase is not only used in the context of self-sacrifice for the sake of God but can also refer to the natural death of pious individuals like Sarah or Moses (Elizur in El’azar berabbi Qillir 2014, 106). Thus, after living for 930 years, Adam “surrendered his soul (or himself) to” God (Sokoloff and Yahalom 1999, 286 = no. 52:4; cf. Rand 2006, 500). As regards the related phrase “to surrender one’s heart” (*hishlim lēb*), it connotes neither sacrifice of one’s life nor a natural death but rather, as Elizur notes, “wholehearted veneration of God” (Elizur in El’azar berabbi Qillir 2014, 107, n. 30). This would seem to be the sense in which the poet Yannai affirms that Jacob “surrendered himself (*‘ašmo hishlim*) to you,” namely, to God (Rabinovitz 1985–1987, 1:213, cited in Kister 2018, 386) or in which *Midrash Tanḥuma* describes proselytes as “surrendering themselves to” (*mashlim ‘ašmo lā-*) God (*Lek lākā* 6, cited in Kister 2018, 387; Berman translates differently).<sup>16</sup> It is worth adding that Jewish Aramaic can also employ the verb *ashlem* in a mundane sense, e.g., to refer to the handing over of money (*DJBA* 1151).

13 For a critical assessment of some of the poetic prooftexts cited in an earlier Hebrew version of Bravmann’s argument, see Ringgren 1949, 4–5 and 18–22.

14 The occurrence of *aslama* in Q 37:103 could be the result of secondary revision (*HCI* 94).

15 Lyll allows that a religious significance may not apply to Q 27:31.38, which are part of the story of Solomon and the queen of Saba’ (Lyll 1903, 782, n. 1). See also Kister 2018, 400–404, who conjectures that Q 27:31 reflects the meaning that *aslama* had in an antecedent tradition on which the Qur’anic passage at hand is dependent. See also Ringgren 1949, 28–29. Another Qur’anic occurrence of *aslama* that could be read as referring only or primarily to secular surrender is Q 48:16.

16 As so often for rabbinic literature, a pre-Qur’anic dating of *Midrash Tanḥuma* is uncertain. Stemberger 1996, 305–306, tentatively accepts Böhl’s dating of the substance of the work to around 400 CE, though he explicitly notes the possibility of “further development.” For a more detailed analysis positing early traditions going back to amoraic times, a bulk of material created and edited in the sixth and seventh centuries, and subsequent geonic additions, see Bregman 2003. In any case, given that the idea of self-surrender is attested in liturgical poetry, there is no reason to suspect Islamic influence on the wording of *Midrash Tanḥuma* here.

Syriac makes similar use of *ashlem*. Particularly reminiscent of some of the Jewish proof-texts reviewed above are Aphrahat’s statement that Jesus “surrendered himself to death on the cross” (*ashlem napsheh l-mawtā da-šlibā*; *Demonstrations* 6:9 = Parisot 1894, 277, ll. 17–18) and a passage in the Syriac version of Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History* describing how an anonymous martyr “surrendered his soul (*ashlem napsheh*) clothed in victory” while suffering gruelling torture (Wright and McLean 1898, 329, l. 6 = book 8:6:4), corresponding to *paredōke tēn psychēn* in the Greek version (Eusebius 1926–1932, 2:266–267; see also *TS* 4187). At the same time, we also find self-surrender in the sense of wholehearted devotion rather than acceptance of death for the sake of God: the Syriac version of Sirach 49:3 characterises Josiah as someone who *ashlem l-allāhā lebbeh* (Kister 2018, 387), corresponding to *kateuthynen pros kyrion tēn kardian autou*, “he directed his heart to God” in the Septuagint. Incidentally, just as in Jewish Aramaic, the notion of self-surrender is not confined to religious contexts in Syriac. For example, Aphrahat describes a labourer who hires himself out to an employer as having “surrendered himself to” (*ashlem napsheh l-* him (*Demonstrations* 20:3 = Parisot 1894, 897, l. 21).<sup>17</sup>

As Kister notes, the Hebrew original of Sirach 49:3, just cited in Syriac and Greek, employs the root *t-m-m*, indicating completeness (Kister 2018, 387): “he devoted his heart entirely to God” (*HALOT* 1754). The idea of wholehearted devotion is also attested in the Qur’an, in two early Meccan verses (Q 26:89, 37:84) that speak of those who will be saved at the eschatological judgement and of Abraham as coming to God *bi-qalbin salīm*, conventionally rendered “with a sound heart.” As various scholars have pointed out (*CQ* 50; Künstlinger 1935, 129; Ringgren 1949, 8–10; *AHW* 180–181; Kister 2018, 399–400), the phrase forms a conspicuous cognate of the Hebrew phrase *bā-lēb/lēbāb šālēm*, “with a whole heart” or “whole-heartedly” (Isa 38:3; 1 Chr 12:39, 28:9, and 29:9; 2 Chr 19:9, 25:2; see *HALOT* 1538 and *TDOT* 7:410). Also pertinent are Biblical verdicts to the effect that the hearts of miscellaneous kings of Judah were or were not “whole (*šālēm*) with”—i.e., wholly devoted to—the Lord (1 Kgs 8:61, 11:4, 15:3.14; 2 Kgs 20:3; 2 Chr 15:17; see also 1 Chr 29:19).<sup>18</sup> Seeing that Q 26:89 and 37:84 may well precede the earliest Qur’anic instances of the participle *muslim* (Q 51:36, 68:35, 72:14), one may wonder whether the implicit object of absolute *aslama* or *muslim* might not be *qalbahu*, such that a *muslim* is someone who surrenders specifically his heart (corresponding to Syriac *ashlem l-allāhā lebbeh*).<sup>19</sup> This conjecture would work best if *bi-qalbin salīm* were taken to mean not “with a sound heart,” but rather to convey approximately the same content as Hebrew *bā-lēb/lēbāb šālēm*, namely, “with a heart wholly devoted” to God. This is not inconceivable, and in fact not too far away from an exegetical gloss explaining that *bi-qalbin salīm* at Q 26:89 means with

17 Another seeming Syriac parallel is provided by Jeffery, who cites the phrase *ashlem napsheh l-allāhā wa-l-īdteh*, “to submit o.s. to God and his church” (*FVQ* 63). Though he fails to provide a reference, it would seem that his source is *TS* 4187 (see Ringgren 1949, 32). But the reference given there is to Bar Hebraeus, who is clearly far too late to be probative in an argument about the Qur’an.

18 As Kister notes, another relevant parallel is *Targum Neofiti* on Gen 22:8, which employs the Aramaic equivalent of *bā-lēb šālēm* in order to amplify the Biblical statement that Abraham and Isaac “walked on together.” Q 37:84, too, applies the phrase to Abraham, but not in connection with the binding of his son. However, a later verse in the same surah, v. 103, states that Abraham and his son *aslamā*, “surrendered themselves,” similar to Jewish praise of Isaac’s self-surrender as quoted above.

19 In support of an implicit link between *aslama* and the heart (*qalb*), see Q 39:22, opposing those “whose breast has been opened up to self-surrender” with the “hard of heart.”

a heart that was “free from associationism” (*khālīṣ min al-shirk*; Ibn Qutaybah 1978, 318; cf. Ṭab. 17:596).

**The semantics of Qur’anic *aslama*.** As Kister duly points out, the Qur’anic phraseology of *aslama* does not fully map onto the Jewish and Syriac parallels just examined. In the Qur’an, the only explicit accusative object that appears together with *aslama* is *wajhahu*, not *nafsahu* or *qalbahu*, as the Aramaic and Hebrew parallels might have led one to expect (Kister 2018, 406); and there is only very limited precedent for the characteristic Qur’anic prevalence of *aslama* without an explicit accusative object.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, it is credible that the Qur’anic employment of *aslama* as a term denoting a core religious virtue would have been at least vaguely informed by the rabbinic and Christian precursors surveyed above—a conjecture voiced, on the basis of far fewer available sources, already by Horowitz (*KU* 55).<sup>21</sup> This is not, of course, to propose that the semantics of Qur’anic *aslama* simply replicate those of Aramaic *ashlem* or Hebrew *hishlim*. The link with the Hebrew and Aramaic cognates is perhaps most obvious in Q 37:103, where *aslama* occurs in connection with the near-sacrifice of Abraham’s son (*fa-lammā aslamā*, “when the two of them surrendered themselves [to God]”). Given the foregoing precedents for describing Isaac as *mashlim nepesh* in Jewish texts, Q 37:103 could be taken to buttress the claim that Qur’anic *aslama* can at least on occasion denote a readiness to embrace death for the sake of God. However, unlike Isaac, Abraham is clearly not embracing his own death here. Consequently, *aslama* in Q 37:103 more likely signifies a general attitude of acquiescence in the divine will. In light of this observation, and despite my general policy of rendering *aslama* as “to surrender,” I see merit in the argument, put to me by Mohsen Goudarzi, that the positive, active, and voluntary quality of Qur’anic *aslama* is well captured by the translations “to devote oneself to God” or “to dedicate oneself to God” (cf. also Abdel Haleem 2010, 15, n. b, in favour of “to devote oneself”).

This general understanding of self-surrender or devotion to God is borne out by most other Qur’anic instances of *aslama* or its active participle *muslim*. Thus, when Abraham urges his sons and his grandson Jacob to die belonging to those who “surrender themselves,” namely, to God (Q 2:132: *fa-lā tamūtunna illā wa-antum muslimūn*), he is plainly impressing on them the need for lifelong pious devotion to God. The same conclusion is supported by Q 68:15, opposing *muslim* to *mujrim*, “sinner, evildoer,” and by the antithetical parallelism in Q 72:14 (*wa-annā minnā l-muslimūna wa-minnā l-qāsiṭūna*, “that there are among us those who surrender and those who act unjustly”; see Hirschfeld 1902, 13–14, and *KU* 54).<sup>22</sup> A handful of verses contrasts self-surrender to God with repudiation of God or his signs (verb: → *kafara*; see Q 3:19.52.80, 9:74, 15:2). In so far as *ajrama* (“to commit

<sup>20</sup> But note that Syriac *ashlem* can mean “to surrender” in its intransitive sense (*SL* 1567; the same can be true for Hebrew *hishlim*, as illustrated in Kister 2018, 403). See also the line by Yannai quoted in Kister 2018, 386 (Rabinovitz 1985–1987, 1:213). Another case of *hishlim* without reflexive accusative object occurs in *Midrash Təhillim* (Kister 2018, 386, n. 23), but the date of this work is too uncertain to set much store by the parallel.

<sup>21</sup> For an opposing voice, see Ringgren 1949, 32–33, who maintains that Qur’anic use is explicable as the independent development and religious adaptation of “a common Arabic word.”

<sup>22</sup> On *qasaṭa* in the sense of acting unjustly, see NB 98, referencing a line from a poem attributed to Aws ibn Ḥajar in which *al-qusūṭ* is opposed to *al-dīm* (Geyer 1892, no. 32:7). Puzzlingly, the meaning of the fourth-form verb *aqsaṭa* is the opposite of the alleged meaning of *qasaṭa*, namely, “to be fair, to act justly” (cf. also *qist*, “fairness, equity”; see briefly under → *zalama* and → *ma’rūf*). However, the context of Q 72:14 makes it certain that *qasaṭa* has a negative meaning here, since the *qāsiṭūn* are said to be condemned to hell (Q 72:15). We thus find the root *q-s-ṭ* used both for justice and for injustice. A comparable case, incidentally, is presented by the root ‘*d-l*. The first-form verb ‘*adala* usually means “to act justly or fairly” or the like (e.g., Q 4:3.129, 5:8, 42:15),

sins”) and *kafara* can also be used in contrast to → *āmana*, “to believe” (e.g., Q 30:47 and 83:29; see Ringgren 1951, 9), there is tangible semantic proximity between the notions of belief and self-surrender in the Qur’an. This is further confirmed by the early Meccan passage Q 51:35–36, where *āmana* and *aslama* are employed as synonyms. Also instructive is the Medinan passage Q 22:34–35, which associates self-surrender with humility, fear of God, and steadfastness (Ringgren 1949, 27–28), which are all what one might call long-term virtues. In another cluster of passages, the opposite of self-surrender to God consists in illicitly associating (→ *ashraka*) other beings with God (Q 3:64.67, 6:14.163). To surrender oneself to God, it seems, is to surrender oneself to him *exclusively*. There is a further instance in which the root *s-l-m* would seem to express a connotation of exclusivity: Q 39:29 (Baneth 1971, 185–186), juxtaposing “a man belonging to partners who disagree” (*rajulan fihi shurakā’u mutashākisūna*) and “a man who is the exclusive property of one man [only]” (*rajulan salaman li-rajulin*).<sup>23</sup> It is worth noting that premodern exegetical voices likewise consider the Qur’anic concept of self-abandonment to God to hinge on surrendering oneself to God *exclusively* (see, e.g., Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī 1981, 11:57, on Q 4:125–126, according to which “facing God in self-surrender” means that one “surrenders oneself to God and not anyone else”).

In sum, the Qur’anic notion of self-surrender to God, which is closely integrated into its overarching system of ethical concepts (GMK 198–215), is best interpreted as denoting a general stance of wholehearted, unconditional, and exclusive self-abandonment to God—in the words of philosopher John Hick, as “the Muslim form of the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness” (Hick 1989, 48). This is not a mere case of human self-abasement before God but includes “total confidence” in him (Ringgren 1949, 13 and 33; see also Andrae 1932, 55). On occasion, one of the facets that are discernible in the Qur’anic notion of self-abandonment to the deity may indeed be self-sacrifice, whether in the sense of submission to persecution or, as Bravmann maintains, in the sense of heroic death-defiance in battle. Thus, the late verse Q 22:78 (on which see Ringgren 1949, 28) could perhaps be read as associating self-surrender to God with militant striving, in view of the fact that the verse also employs → *jāhada*, “to contend,” which in the Medinan Qur’an tends to have a militant signification. On the other hand, Q 22:78 does not actually make any unequivocal reference to fighting, and the preceding verse enumerates several non-martial virtues like bowing and prostration in prayer, serving God, and doing good (Q 22:77). It is therefore not justified to follow Bravmann in viewing self-sacrifice, and in particular militancy, as the core of the Qur’anic notion of self-surrender.

**The noun *islām* and the question of salvation outside the Qur’anic *ummah*.** Apart from various finite forms of the fourth-form verb *aslama* and the active participle *muslim*, the Qur’an also employs the corresponding verbal noun *islām*. Post-Qur’anic Arabic often uses *aslama* and *muslim* in a quasi-denominative sense, as if they were derived from the noun *islām*, understood as the proper name of a specific religion distinct from others (i.e., *aslama* = “to profess or adopt Islam”; *muslim* = “one who professes or has adopted Islam”). But it cannot be taken for granted that Qur’anic instances of *islām* and *muslim*

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but there are also instances in the Qur’an where ‘*adala* or ‘*adala bi-* are obviously employed in a negative sense (e.g., Q 6:1, 27:60; see CDKA 184 and Hourani 1985, 32–33).

<sup>23</sup> My rendering adopts the wording proposed in CDKA 138, which I take to be inferable from the context. On Q 39:29, see also Larcher 2020, 127.

are adequately rendered as “Islam” and “Muslim” (see also Dakake 2019, 357–359, and Donner 2019); and the paramount Qur’anic name for Muhammad’s followers is, in any case, “the believers” (*alladhīna āmanū, al-mu’minūn*; → *āmāna*) rather than “Muslims” or “those who surrender themselves” (*alladhīna aslamū, al-muslimūn*; see Donner 2010, 57–58).<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, three Medinan verses do speak of *al-islām* as the “religion” (→ *dīn*<sup>2</sup>) that is exclusively acceptable and pleasing to God (Q 3:19.85, 5:3), and a number of further passages intimate the same point by combining the term *dīn* with finite forms of *aslama* (Q 2:132, 3:83, 4:125). Especially noteworthy is perhaps Q 22:78, according to which Abraham “called you”<sup>p</sup>—that is, the addressees—“those who surrender themselves’ before and in this” (*sammākumu l-muslimīna min qablu wa-fi hādihā*).<sup>25</sup> The statement alludes to Abraham and Ishmael’s prayer, as reported in Q 2:128, that God bring forth from their descendants “a community that surrenders itself to you” (*ummatan muslimatan laka*). The Medinan verses just surveyed make it possible to construe the term *al-islām* as designating the Qur’anic religion in particular, in contrast to Judaism, Christianity, or pagan cults—in other words, to construe *al-islām* as “reified Islam” in the sense of “the making of Islam as a separate confessional identity” (Sirry 2014, 69).<sup>26</sup>

Nonetheless, in Qur’anic usage it is the verb *aslama* rather than the noun *islām* that is semantically primary (thus already Smith 1991, 111–113). Thus, the basic meaning of the verbal noun *islām* is the act designated by the verb *aslama*, namely, a stance of unconditional human self-surrender to God and total acquiescence in his will. This is clearest in the two chronologically earliest occurrences of the verbal noun *islām* in the Meccan verses Q 6:125 and 39:22. Both speak of God “opening up someone’s breast up to self-surrender” (*sharaḥa llāhu ṣadrahu li-l-islāmi*), thereby asserting that the human act of self-abandonment to God requires divine aid and assistance. In both verses, it is contextually appropriate to interpret *islām* as the human act of delivering oneself up to God, as an inner state of wholehearted belief and devotion: the metaphor of a divine expanding and, in Q 6:125, constricting of the human breast (*yaj’ al ṣadrahu ḍayyiqaḥ ḥarajan*) implies as much, and Q 39:22 opposes those whose breast has been opened up to self-surrender with “those whose hearts are hardened against God’s reminding exhortation” (*al-qāsiyah qulūbuhum min dhikri llāhi*).

This use of the noun *islām* to refer to a general religious stance is not surprising in the Meccan surahs, since the latter do not yet exhibit any sustained boundary-making between the Qur’anic religion, on the one hand, and Judaism and Christianity, on the other (*HCI* 178–179 and 196–206). But even for Medinan passages like Q 3:85 (“Whoever desires a religion other than *al-islām*, it will not be accepted from him, and he will be one of the losers in the hereafter”), it is on balance preferable to opt for a non-reified understanding of *al-islām* and to consider the noun to pick out merely an ideal attitude of unconditional self-surrender to God.<sup>27</sup> This is so because two other Medinan verses, Q 2:62 and 5:69, clearly allow for the eschatological salvation of adherents of other religions, like Judaism

24 This is seen very clearly in Q 2:62, 5:69, and 22:17, in all of which “the believers” figure in an enumeration of religious communities that also includes the Jews and the Christians.

25 Donner 2019, 138–139, raises the possibility that Q 22:78 or part of it might date to the time of ‘Abd al-Malik, but early manuscript evidence makes this unlikely; see n. 7 under → *ab*.

26 Sirry’s use of the idea of reification of course harks back to Smith 1991 (as acknowledged in Sirry 2014, 204).

27 As Mun’im Sirry has shown, such a non-reified understanding of *al-islām* is, to different degrees, endorsed by many reformist interpreters, such as Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā and Mawlana Abul Kalam Azad (Sirry 2014, 65–99).



and Christianity, if they “believe in God and the final day and do righteous deeds” (see also under → *al-naṣārā*). That there are in fact Christians and Jews who meet the Qur’an’s criteria for proper self-surrender to God is affirmed in Q 3:199, stating that some of the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*)—i.e., some Jews or Christians—do “believe in God and in what was sent down to you<sup>p</sup> and what was sent down to them.”<sup>28</sup> Hence, if one were to take a statement like Q 3:85 to mean that no one outside the Qur’anic community (→ *ummah*) can hope for salvation, one would end up generating a significant doctrinal tension not only within the Qur’an, but within the Medinan surahs in particular.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, the assumption that even in the Medinan period a non-reified understanding of *aslama* and *islām* remains primary is confirmed by Medinan verses that describe Abraham and his immediate descendants as having “surrendered themselves” to God (Q 2:131–133, 3:67) or make a passing reference to Jewish “prophets who surrendered themselves” (Q 5:44: *al-nabiyyūna lladhīna aslamū*). Throughout the Qur’an, then, being *muslim* and the act of *islām* are primarily attributes describing a certain religious stance rather than a particular communal affiliation in contrast to others. In principle, then, one must understand the Qur’an to allow for the existence of *muslim* Israelites, *muslim* Jews, and *muslim* Christians (even if a *muslim* associator would of course be an oxymoron).

Still, there can be little doubt that the Medinan proclamations are imbued by a strong conviction that the required attitude of self-surrender to God is, in Muhammad’s historical environment, paradigmatically and most fully realised by the Qur’anic *ummah*, whose beliefs are identical with the “teaching” (→ *millah*) of the exemplary monotheist Abraham (Q 22:78).<sup>30</sup> The Qur’anic *ummah* is accordingly commended as “the best community ever brought forth for people” (Q 3:110: *kuntum khayra ummatin ukhrijāt li-l-nāsi*). Moreover, those who would genuinely surrender themselves to God are undoubtedly expected to accept the Qur’an’s stringent interpretation of monotheism, which would appear to exclude mainstream Christian Trinitarianism, and to recognise Muhammad’s prophetic authority (Sinai 2015–2016, 50–51 and 78–80). That is to say, it seems doubtful whether a Christian who, against the Qur’an’s explicit strictures (see under → *al-naṣārā*), persists in maintaining that Christ is the son of God and a member of the Trinity may be considered to meet the standards for salvation invoked in Q 2:62 and 5:69. As regards acknowledgement of Muhammad, the latter is explicitly given the task of “providing clarity” to the “scripture-owners” (Q 5:15.19: *yā-ahla l-kitābi qad jā’akum rasūlunā yubayyinu lakum . . .*), and Q 3:20 charges him with preaching not just to the “scriptureless” (*al-ummiyyūn*; → *ummī*) but also to “those who were given the scripture,” i.e., Jews and Christians (*qul li-lladhīna ūtū l-kitāba wa-l-ummiyyīna a-aslamtum*). Another Medinan passage, Q 7:158, calls upon “the people” (*al-nās*) “in general” (*jamī’an*) to “believe in God and his Messenger, the prophet of the scriptureless,” and to “follow him so that you may be guided” (*wa-ttabi’ūhu la’allakum tahtadūn*).<sup>31</sup> It does not appear, then, that acceptance of Muhammad as a

28 For another cursory reference to believing members of the “scripture-owners,” see Q 3:110.

29 That Medinan passages, or even passages within one and the same Medinan surah, might contradict one another is of course far from impossible. But given the ready availability of an interpretive alternative, it arguably ought not to be our preferred exegetical choice.

30 For other occurrences of *millat ibrahīm*, see Q 2:130.135, 3:95, 4:125, 6:161, 16:123. Cf. also Q 42:13, asserting the fundamental identity of the *dīn* enjoined upon the Qur’anic community with that imposed on Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.

31 On the Medinan date of Q 7:157–158, see under → *ummī*.



prophet is something from which Jews and Christians are exempt, just as the Qur’anic believers do not “make distinctions” between God’s messengers (Q 2:285: *lā nufarriqu bayna aḥadin min rusulihī*).

As we have seen, it is deemed possible to fulfil the Qur’an’s doctrinal and other demands—in other words, to count as one of those who surrender themselves to God—while retaining a primary communal affiliation with Judaism or Christianity. The pagan associators, to be sure, are unquestionably expected to relinquish their erstwhile religious and ritual identity and fully to merge into the Qur’anic community of believers. But conceptual space is made for the existence of *muslim* Christians and *muslim* Jews who do not by virtue of their self-surrender to God automatically become members of the Qur’anic *ummah*.<sup>32</sup> This is clearest in Q 3:113 and 5:66 (Sinai 2015–2016, 79–80; similarly Goudarzi 2019, 435). Both verses posit that among the “scripture-owners” there is a “community” (→ *ummah*), or rather subcommunity, that “stands upright” (*qā’imah*) or who is at least “middling” (*muqtaṣidah*, on which see under → *ahl al-kitāb*). Q 3:113–114 in particular describe the members of this scripturalist subcommunity in markedly positive terms, inter alia crediting them with belief in God and the final day (cf. also Q 7:159). Similarly, Q 4:162 allows for Jews who are “firmly grounded in knowledge and believers” (*al-rāsikhūna fī l-‘ilmi minhum wa-l-mu’minūna*; cf. Q 3:7, discussed under → *bayyana*). Also relevant is the Medinan verse Q 5:48, which presents a plurality of religious communities as a divinely willed feature of the world: “Had God willed, he would have made you a single community” (*wa-law shā’a llāhu la-ja’alakum ummatan wāḥidatan*).<sup>33</sup> As becomes clear from the surrounding verses (Q 5:41–50.66.68), the three religious communities in question—the Jews, the Christians, and the Qur’anic believers—are envisaged as being in possession of, and “judging by,” different scriptures, namely, the Torah (→ *al-tawrah*), the Gospel (→ *al-injīl*), and the Qur’an. Perhaps for this reason, Q 5:48 implicitly portrays these communities as being legitimately distinguished by different normative practices (singular: *shir’ah*) and customs (singular: *minhāj*).<sup>34</sup>

32 See similarly Goudarzi 2019, 435: “Even Jews and Christians who acknowledged Muḥammad as a God-sent messenger did not automatically enter the ranks of the Prophet’s followers but remained outsiders.”

33 A survey of how Q 5:48 is interpreted by some premodern and modern Muslim authors is provided in Sirry 2009.

34 *Shir’ah* is reasonably understood as something that has been authoritatively established or instituted, against the background of the phrase *shara’a li-X min al-dīn*, approximately “to establish or institute religious precepts for X” (Q 42:13.21), perhaps to be derived from the use of *shara’a* + acc. to mean “to guide to the watering-place” (namely, cattle) or “to make manifest” (namely, a road; AEL 1534). Note that the grammatical subject of *shara’a* is either God or the deities venerated by the Meccan pagans. *Shir’ah* is often interpreted as “religious law” (see, e.g., the exegetes quoted in Sirry 2009, 425–426), but it seems preferable to avoid an overly specific translation that is informed by equating *shir’ah* with the cognate term *sharī’ah*, understood in its post-Qur’anic sense of the divine law that legal scholars are seeking to approximate. In the context of Q 5:48, it is quite possible that *shir’ah* and *minhāj* form a pleonasm. On the Hebrew or Aramaic etymology of *minhāj*, see BEK 89, JPND 225, and FVQ 273. The word was probably drawn from the language of the Medinan Jews (see under → *al-yahūd*) and may accordingly have connoted not simply custom in general but rather customs of the sort that set one religious community (e.g., Jews) apart from another (e.g., Christians or other non-Jews). For two interesting parallels to Q 5:48, see 22:34.67 (*li-kulli ummatin ja’alnā mansakan*, “for every community we have appointed a *mansak*”), which are discussed in more detail under → *ummah*. *Mansak* seems to mean something like “religious rite,” probably of a sacrificial nature (see under → *dhabaḥa*). One might speculate that Q 5:48 uses the terms *shir’ah* and *minhāj* rather than *mansak* because the surrounding discussion concerns Judaism and Christianity in particular, both of which (at least in their normative guises) had come to reject animal sacrifices by the seventh century CE.

Where legitimate communal diversity is inadmissible, however, is with regard to foundational beliefs such as God’s oneness (cf. similarly al-Qurṭubī 2006, 8:39).<sup>35</sup> Thus, Q 5:72–73 condemn those who hold that “God is Christ” (*la-ḡad kafara lladhīna ḡālū inna llāha huwa l-masīḡu bnu maryama*) or that “God is one of three” (*la-ḡad kafara lladhīna ḡālū inna llāha thālithu thalāthatin*), while Q 3:64 invites the scripture-owners to “come to a word common between you<sup>p</sup> and us,” namely, “that we will not serve anyone but God and associate nothing with him.” Hence, the degree of specifically doctrinal disagreement with the Qur’an, and in particular Qur’anic monotheism, that is deemed compatible with being a *muslim* Jew or a *muslim* Christian has evident limits.<sup>36</sup> One may accordingly wonder how the step by which a Jew or a Christian became a *muslim* Jew or Christian—presumably, by aligning his or her theology, eschatology, and prophetology with that of the Qur’an, including recognition of Muhammad’s prophetic status—would in practical and phenomenological terms have differed from an act of conversion. Still, based on Q 5:48, one may surmise that such *muslim* Jews and Christians would have continued to be distinguished from full-scale members of the Qur’anic community by adhering to certain established Jewish or Christian customs and rituals, including the keeping of different dietary rules.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, if the transition by which a Christian or Jew become a *muslim* (i.e., somebody surrendering himself/herself to God) resembled a conversion of sorts, it will nonetheless have been an act of conversion within the boundaries of a religious community—an act of awakening, as it were.

***Aslama* in the sense of outward submission to or entry into the Qur’anic *ummah*.**

Despite the general argument of the preceding section, there is a small number of Qur’anic verses in which the verb *aslama* does seem to have taken on the concrete significance of outward submission to or entry into Muhammad’s community rather than just the general stance of surrendering oneself to God (*KU* 54; *FVQ* 62).<sup>38</sup> Leaving aside Q 48:16, which calls certain Bedouin (*al-a’rāb*) to fight until or unless their opponents surrender (*tuḡātilūnahum aw yuslimūna*), this meaning of *aslama* is most obvious in Q 49:14 (see also v. 17), where the Bedouin are criticised for saying, “We hereby espouse belief” (*āmannā*) and instead are instructed to say, “We hereby surrender ourselves” (*aslamnā*). In so far as the verb *aslama* means something inferior to fully fledged belief here, it likely signifies a performative speech act expressing capitulation to or integration into the Qur’anic community. Given that obedience to the Qur’anic Messenger is, according to Q 4:80, equivalent to obedience to God, it is not surprising that submission to the Medinan *ummah* could be framed as surrender to God. Hence, the reificatory process leading from *al-islām* (in the sense of a general religious stance that may in principle be found outside the Qur’anic

35 Al-Qurṭubī identifies monotheism (*al-tawḡīd*) as the root or foundation (*aṡl*) about which there is to be no disagreement (*lā khtilāfa fīh*) between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. I owe my awareness of this statement to Sirry 2009, 426.

36 The Qur’an does however fully acknowledge the fact of far-reaching doctrinal disagreement between different religious communities—disagreement which, according to Q 5:48 and 22:17, will ultimately be resolved by God.

37 For a comment on how the Qur’anic believers’ dietary rules relate to those of the scripture-owners, see Q 5:5 (asserting that scripturalist food is permissible to Qur’anic believers and vice versa) and the brief discussion of this verse under → *ahl al-kitāb*.

38 See also the distinction between two senses of *aslama* in al-Rāghib al-Iṡfahānī 2009, 423, as well as Ringgren 1949, 31, and *ERCQ* 189–190.

*ummah*) to Islam (in the sense of a distinct confessional identity) is nascent already within the Qur’anic corpus. This, too, reinforces the temptation to construe the noun *al-islām* in verses like Q 3:19 or 3:85 in a reified, confessional sense, or of understanding the call to surrender oneself that is directed both at “the scriptureless” and at “those who were given the scripture” in Q 3:20 (*qul li-lladhīna ūtū l-kitāba wa-l-ummiyyīna a-aslamtum*) as a call to join the Qur’anic *ummah*. As we saw in the preceding section, there are reasons to resist such an interpretation when it comes to Jews and Christians and to suppose instead that the Qur’an does not consider the stance of self-surrender to God to be incompatible with continued affiliation with Judaism or Christianity. But the Bedouin who are addressed in Q 49:14.17 were in all likelihood pagans, like the Meccan associators. As a result, in their case self-surrender to God would have directly entailed joining the Qur’anic *ummah*.

### ***salm* (variant: *silm*) | peace**

→ *salām*

### ***salām* | (salvific) safety or security**

#### **Further vocabulary discussed: *salm* (variant: *silm*) | peace**

*Salām* is a verbal noun corresponding to the verb *salima*, “to be or become safe or secure” (*AEL* 1412; cf. Q 68:43 with the active participle *sālim*). The verb is also attested in Safaitic (Al-Jallad 2015a, 270 with LP 643, 342). The basic meaning of the noun *salām* is therefore “security” or “safety.”<sup>1</sup> Larcher identifies a core connotation of “preservation” and notes a certain proximity to the semantics of Latin *salus* (Larcher 2020, 125, 139), while Ambros offers the paraphrase “state of being unimpaired and unendangered, well-being, safety” (*CDKA* 138). *Salām*, then, designates the general condition of being unharmed, intact, and unthreatened. It follows that the almost instinctual tendency to translate Qur’anic *salām* as “peace,” which suggests a much narrower meaning—namely, an absence of violent conflict between human parties—deserves to be bracketed, even if it is of course evident how the word could take on this more specific sense. Interestingly, at least if one goes by the Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim reading of the Qur’anic *rasm*, two passages (Q 8:61 and 47:35) that do clearly speak of “peace” in the sense of the opposite of war do not employ *salām* but rather another verbal noun, *salm* (Larcher 2020, 121–122 and 140–141, noting the use of *ḥarb* at Q 8:57; cf. *CDKA* 138).<sup>2</sup> One must of course remember that both *salām* and *salm* share the

<sup>1</sup> For a Safaitic attestation of the noun *silm*, see [krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA\\_0002895.html](http://krc.orient.ox.ac.uk/ociana/corpus/pages/OCIANA_0002895.html) (HCH 42, accessed 5 May 2022), where two deities are petitioned for “safety and a reunion with loved ones.”

<sup>2</sup> The reading of Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Āṣim has *salm* at Q 8:61 and 47:35 and *silm* at 2:208 (which latter verse urges the believers to “enter *al-silm*”). The meaning of *silm* at Q 2:208 is more difficult to pinpoint than that of *salm* at Q 8:61 and 47:35. Frequently, *al-silm* is equated with *al-islām* (Larcher 2020, 126 and 140). Ringgren accepts this, but the poetic prooftexts that he cites from Ibn Hishām hardly warrant much confidence (Ringgren 1949, 11–12). When Paret 2001 tentatively translates *al-silm* as “the state of salvation” (*Zustand des Heils*), he positions the word in proximity to the eschatologically charged employment of *salām* that is surveyed further below in the main text. Of course, both *silm* and *salām* share the same consonantal skeleton, which makes the latter in principle a viable reading of the text, though not one that appears to have left traces in the *qirā’āt* literature. It seems clear, in any case, that *al-silm* at Q 2:208 does not merely refer to peace *qua* the opposite of war, given that the

same consonantal skeleton, *s-l-m*. This makes it conceivable that the impression of a tidy contextual distribution between *salm* in the sense of intrahuman peace and *salām* in the more general sense of safety and protection from harm is a result of systematising efforts by the Qur'an's early transmitters.<sup>3</sup>

Coming now to *salām*, the word can be used to designate safety from harm in inner-worldly settings. For example, Abraham and the mysterious guests who will go on to announce the future birth of his son exchange the greeting *salām* (Q 11:69, 15:52, 51:25), and when Abraham's idolatrous foes attempt to burn him alive, God orders the fire to be "coolness and safety" (*bardan wa-salāman*) for him (Q 21:69). Other verses, too, portray humans as exchanging greetings of *salām* (Q 6:54, 19:47, 25:63, 28:55, 43:89), which one should perhaps translate along the lines of "May you remain safe/unharmful!" in lieu of the conventional "Peace be upon you!" Q 97:5 describes the "night of foreordainment" (*laylat al-qadr*; → *amr*) as being "safety until the rise of dawn" (*salāmun hiya ḥattā maṭla'i l-fajr*), and Noah is told by God to alight from the ark "in safety vouchsafed by us and with blessings upon you" (*bi-salāmin minnā wa-barakātin 'alayka*). In many other verses, however, the word *salām* is unmistakably linked specifically with eschatological salvation. Thus, Q 6:127 and 10:25 describe paradise as "the abode of safety" (*dār al-salām*; e.g., Q 6:127: *lahum dāru l-salāmi 'inda rabbihim*, "they partake of the abode of security in the presence of their Lord"). Moreover, it is with greetings involving the noun *salām* that the inhabitants of paradise are frequently addressed on God's behalf (Q 7:46, 10:10, 13:24, 14:23, 15:46, 16:32, 19:62, 25:75, 33:44, 36:58, 39:73, 50:34, 56:26.91; see Horovitz 1975, 59, and also under → *jannah*). Accordingly, it is by entering paradise that one achieves ultimate integrity and safety from harm. This pattern of usage lends support to Lidzbarski's hypothesis that Arabic *salām* may in certain contexts function as an equivalent of Greek *sōtēria*, "salvation" (Lidzbarski 1922, 87–88; → *aslama*). Nonetheless, even in these contexts the word should preferably be rendered in such a way as not to obscure its basic meaning, perhaps as "salvific security." At Q 59:24 (on which see under → *ism*), the divine epithet *al-salām* is best paraphrased as calling God a *bestower* of salvific security or safety.

### ***salīm*: *bi-qalb* ~ | with a sound heart**

→ *aslama*, → *qalb*

### ***sulaymān* | Solomon**

→ *jinn*

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continuation of the verse cautions against "following the footsteps of the devil (→ *al-shayṭān*)."

The situation is further complicated by the existence of textual variants for all three verses under discussion. For Q 8:61 and 47:35, readings other than Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim have *silm* rather than *salm* (MQ 3:322 and 9:33; MQQ 2:460 and 6:197), while for 2:208 some readers (including Nāfi', Ibn Kathīr, and al-Kisā'ī) reportedly read *al-salm* rather than *al-silm* (MQ 1:282–283; MQQ 1:158). In light of this, it cannot be ruled out that *silm* and *salm* are really just variants of one and the same lexeme rather than expressing distinct meanings, whatever they might be.

3 Note that I have only spot-checked the existence of reading variants for *salām* in some of the verses about to be quoted in the main text (and come away with a nil return). One piece of evidence suggesting at least the possibility of uncertainty between *salām* and other nouns sharing the same consonantal skeleton *s-l-m* is the fact that according to Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim, *alqā* + *al-s-l-m* (which must mean something like "to offer a greeting") is normally vocalised as *alqā al-salama* (Q 4:90.91, 16:28.87), but at Q 4:94 is instead read as *alqā al-salāma*. Other readers have *alqā al-salama* for Q 4:94 as well (MQ 2:132; MQQ 2:154; see also Larcher 2020, 141–142).

*sami'a* tr./intr. | to hear (s.th.)

*istama'a* tr./intr. (*li-*, *ilā*) | to listen (to s.o. or s.th.)

*sam'* | (sense of) hearing

*samī'* | hearing (adjective)

Further vocabulary discussed: *āyah* | sign; sign-pronouncement *dhikr* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation *baṣar* | eyesight *'alīm* | knowing, knowledgeable *baṣīr* | seeing *'aṣā* tr./intr. | to disobey s.o. or s.th.; to be disobedient

**Hearing in the Qur'an.** Throughout the Qur'an, listening and seeing represent receptivity to persuasive preaching (e.g., Q 7:198, 39:18, 50:37) and to the "signs" (→ *āyāt*) of God's presence and power in nature and history.<sup>1</sup> In many cases, however, humans "hear" God's "reminding exhortation" (e.g., Q 68:51: *lammā sami'ū l-dhikra*) yet reject it nonetheless: to listen is not necessarily to heed. A lack of the ability to draw the proper religious consequences from one's aural and visual perception is sometimes represented as divinely wrought incapacitation of the senses of hearing and sight: just as God has endowed humans with "hearing, sight, and hearts so that they might be grateful" (Q 16:78: *wa-ja'ala lakumu l-sam'a wa-l-abṣāra wa-l-af'idata la'allakum tashkurūn*; see similarly 23:78, 32:9, and 67:23, as well as 10:31, 46:26, and 76:2), so God can take away the ability to access religious truth through empirical engagement with the world and reflection thereon (see under → *khatama* and also under → *qalb*).

God himself is repeatedly described not only as "knowing" (*'alīm*) but also as "hearing" (*samī'*; e.g., Q 2:127.137.181, 3:34.35, or 26:220, combining *samī'* and *'alīm*) and "seeing" (*baṣīr*; e.g., Q 4:58.134, 17:1, 58:1, combining *samī'* and *baṣīr*). This is in line with Qur'anic statements that God has a face and eyes (see under → *allāh*). God, then, is not merely an intellect with cognitive access to all true propositions but has the sort of immediate awareness of goings-on in the world, such as prayers addressed to him, that characterises sense perception (Q 3:38, 14:39: God is *samī'u l-du'ā'* or "hears prayer"). Qur'anic references to human and divine hearing and seeing would no doubt merit more detailed analysis.<sup>2</sup>

**The Israelites' statement "We hear and disobey."** It is against the general background of human hearing as receptivity to religious truth in the Qur'an that one must place Q 2:93 and 4:46, which impute to the Israelites or Jews the utterance *sami'nā wa-aṣaynā* ("we hear and disobey"). The phrase bears a high degree of phonetic similarity to the Biblical expression *wə-šāma'nū wə-āšimū* ("and we will hear and do [it]"), which is credited to the Israelites in Deut 5:27 as an expression of their willingness to carry out God's commandments (*BEK* 63–64; Hirschfeld 1902, 109; *KU* 220; *BEQ* 301–303; Obermann 1941, 31–34 and 40–47). The Jews' alleged utterance would seem to be a punning inversion that transforms a Hebrew declaration of obedience—which Obermann proposes may have figured in contemporary Jewish homilies—into an Arabic sentence that means precisely the opposite. In the Qur'an, the Biblical affirmation is thus polemically turned on its head

1 The ability to "hear" God's guidance is not limited to humans but also encompasses the → *jinn* (Q 71:1.9.13).

2 As Ahmad Al-Jallad points out to me, an inscription from the temple of Allāt in Qaryat al-Fāw asserts that the goddess "listened" to the commissioner (Al-Said 2018, 406). The inscription, which the editor dates to the first or second century BCE, shows how ancient the notion of divine hearing is in Arabia. However, in the inscription the operative meaning of divine hearing is clearly the answering of prayer rather than divine omniscience, or rather omnipercipience, as in the Qur'an.

and becomes a telling self-indictment anticipating the Jews' inveterate disobedience.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, the Qur'anic believers are presented as uttering the formula *sami'nā wa-aṭa'nā*, "we hear and obey" (Q 2:285, 5:7, 24:51), which in Q 4:46 is also held up as the correct answer to the Jews. A possible further allusion to the pun is found in Q 8:21: "Do<sup>p</sup> not be like those who said, 'We hear,' yet they do not hear." The technique of inverting a motif of Jewish tradition against its bearers is also encountered elsewhere in the Medinan Qur'an (see the remarks on Q 62:5 under → *tawrāh*).

### **samk** | roof

→ *samā'*

### **samā'** | heaven, sky

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *ṭibāqan* pl. | in layers *banā* tr. | to build s.th. *saqf*, *samk* | roof *'amad* | pillar *idhn* | permission *sabab* | rope, cord; pathway, conduit *zayyana* tr. | to adorn s.th. *burūj* pl. | towers; constellations (of stars)

**Introduction.** The Qur'an subscribes to the Ancient Mesopotamian cosmological model of seven heavens (Q 2:29, 17:44, 23:17, 23:86, 41:12, 65:12, 67:3, 71:15, 78:12; see *BEQ* 11–13; Neuwirth 2001, 442–446; Janos 2012b; Tabataba'i and Mirsadri 2016, 209). Two verses describe the seven heavens as being superimposed "in layers" (*ṭibāqan*; Q 67:3, 71:15). This could indicate that the heavens are stacked on top of one another like level planes (see Janos 2012b, 216–217, and Tabataba'i and Mirsadri 2016, 221), though as we shall see below the alternative position according to which they form a domed vault also merits consideration. Like the earth, the heavens are God's creation, though quite possibly not *ex nihilo* but from a pre-existing substratum (see in more detail under → *khalaqa*). The phrase *al-samāwāt wa-l-ard*, "the heavens and the earth," designating the Qur'anic cosmos in its entirety, is discussed elsewhere (→ *ard*).

**Details on the heavenly edifice.** In Qur'anic statements pertaining to the heavens, architectural imagery is prevalent. Heaven or the sky is depicted as an edifice (*binā'*) and as resulting from divine "building" (verb: *banā*; see Q 2:22, 40:64, 50:6, 51:47, 78:12, 79:27, 91:5; see also 13:2, 55:7, and 88:18, according to which the heaven or heavens were "raised up"). Twice the sky is called a "roof" (Q 21:32: *saqf*; 79:28: *samk*; see also 52:5). Possibly like a dome, the heavens are propped up "without a pillar (*'amad*) that you<sup>p</sup> can see" (Q 13:2, 31:10), and God prevents the sky from collapsing upon the earth without his permission or *idhn* (Q 22:65: *wa-yumsiku l-samā'a an taqa'a 'alā l-ardī illā bi-idhmihi*). As we shall see in the following section, all of this is strongly reminiscent of Biblical and Christian cosmology.

The sky is equipped with what appear to be pathways or conduits, called *asbāb* (singular: *sabab*), that lead up to the top of the cosmic dome and which Pharaoh vainly aspires

<sup>3</sup> Hirschfeld thinks that the Qur'anic verses at hand reflect an Arabising misunderstanding of the Hebrew wording, but it seems far more plausible to me that the transposal is a deliberate polemical move. This assessment resembles, but is not identical with, Obermann's view that we are faced with a case of what he calls "wishful mishearing" on Muhammad's part (Obermann 1941, 46).



to ascend in order to look upon God (Q 40:36–37; cf. 38:10 and 22:15; see van Bladel 2007, 228–230).<sup>1</sup> These heavenly pathways, aptly glossed as “sky-ways” (Tesei 2014, 280), would also seem to be intended in Q 18:84.85.89.92, which recount the travels of Dhū l-Qarnayn via different *sababs* that facilitate his extraordinary displacement from the place where the sun sets (Q 18:86) to the place where it rises (Q 18:90) to yet another place at the far edge of the civilised world (Q 18:93).<sup>2</sup> Assuming that the word *sabab* carries the same significance in Surah 18, on the one hand, and in Q 38:10 and 40:36–37, on the other, the heavenly pathways would seem to run not only vertically upwards to the top of the heavenly dome but also to connect distant locations on the periphery of the earth, perhaps resembling cross beams traversing the lower reaches of the heavenly dome. The literal meaning of *sabab*, of course, is “rope” or “cord,” and the underlying idea may be that the sky is a tent, with vertical and transverse ropes forming part of its “girding or structure” (van Bladel 2007, 234–235). Though there is plainly some tension between picturing the sky as a solid edifice and as a tent, it is quite conceivable that the Qur’an attests to different manners of imagining the heavenly dome that were current in its cultural milieu. That the idea of heavenly *asbāb* had a wider circulation in the Qur’anic environment is, in any case, demonstrated by two verses of early Arabic poetry that van Bladel cites from a poem by al-A’shā Maymūn and from the Mu’allaqah of Zuhayr, both of which make reference, in parallel phraseology, to ascending “the *asbāb* of heaven (*asbāb al-samā’*) with a ladder (*bi-sullam*)” (Ḥusayn 1983, no. 15:32, and *DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 16:54; see van Bladel 2007, 231–232).<sup>3</sup>

The sky, or the lowest heaven in particular, is “adorned” (verb: *zayyana*) with stars, constellations (*burūj*), or “lights” (15:16, 37:6, 41:12, 50:6, 67:5).<sup>4</sup> The sun and the moon, too, are affixed to or embedded in the seven heavens (Q 71:16; see also 78:13, likewise following a reference to the seven heavens). Apart from their aesthetic value, the stars serve humans as a means of orientation (Q 6:97, 16:16), while the sun and the moon dictate the diurnal rhythm of day and night and also endow humans with a way of measuring longer spans of time (e.g., Q 6:96, 10:5, 17:12; see also 55:5; cf. Gen 1:14–15 as well as *BEQ* 17–18). Such statements illustrate the anthropocentric nature of the Qur’anic cosmos (→ *ard*). The heavens also act as

1 Van Bladel bases his claim that the Qur’anic *asbāb* are heavenly conduits or pathways on three bodies of evidence: an alleged parallel between Q 18:89 and a passage from the Syriac *Alexander Legend*, examination of the word’s use in the Qur’an, and two verses of early Arabic poetry. While I find van Bladel’s general claim plausible, I have reservations about the cogency of the Syriac parallel.

2 On an alternative, traditional reading, the word *sabab* in Q 18:84.85.89.92 functions only as a general metaphor for a “means” or “way” (see, e.g., *KK* 319 and Koloska 2015, 146). This position entails that the manner in which *sabab* functions in the story of Dhū l-Qarnayn has little to do with Q 38:10 and 40:36–37, which speak of “ascending on the *asbāb*” or “reaching the *asbāb* of the heavens” (cf. also Q 22:15). I would agree with van Bladel, however, that it is attractive to understand the meaning of *sabab* in Q 18:84.85.89.92 in light of these inner-Qur’anic parallels. This is so despite the fact that the focus in Surah 18 is on Dhū l-Qarnayn’s miraculous movement from one terrestrial location to another rather than on his access to the celestial realm as such, which is at stake in Q 38:10 and 40:36–37. From the Qur’anic perspective, the celestial realm remains generally out of reach to humans (see under → *nazzala*).

3 Note that the verse from al-A’shā expresses the notion of ascending to heaven with the root *r-q-y*, as do Q 17:93 and 38:10.

4 As Janos remarks, this would seem to contrast with the Ptolemaic cosmological model (see below), according to which the planets are located at different distances from the earth (Janos 2012b, 221). On the signs or constellations of the zodiac, see Q 25:61 and 85:1 (in addition to 15:16, referenced in the main text). On the term *burūj*, literally “towers” (as in Q 4:78), see *FVQ* 78–79, identifying them with the constellations of the zodiac. More sceptically, Tabataba’i and Mirsadri propose that the *burūj* refer to all of the constellations, whether zodiacal or not (Tabataba’i and Mirsadri 2016, 215, n. 57). However, see Al-Jallad 2014b and 2016 on the constellations of the zodiac in Safaitic inscriptions.

a barrier to demons attempting to overhear the divine council (e.g., Q 37:6–10; → *jinn*). The sky has “gates” (7:40, 15:14, 54:11, 78:19), and it was the opening of these gates that caused the flood eradicating the contemporaries of Noah (Q 54:11–12; cf. Gen 7:11 and 8:2). This would seem to presuppose the Biblical notion that the firmament separates the waters below from the waters above (Gen 1:6–7).<sup>5</sup> The Noachian flood illustrates that the sky is not only the source of vivifying precipitation (e.g., Q 2:22, 30:24, 43:11, 45:5, 50:9, 71:11) but can also be a source of divine punishments (apart from Q 54:11, see 2:59, 7:162, 8:32, 18:40, 29:34, and 67:17).<sup>6</sup> On the day of judgement, the flawless (Q 50:6, 67:3–4) and seemingly imperturbably stable celestial edifice will be utterly demolished (*HCI* 173): the heaven will sway to and fro (Q 52:9), it will melt (Q 70:8), it will be rolled up like a scroll (Q 21:104, 39:67), it will tear or be split open (Q 25:25, 55:37, 69:16, 73:18, 77:9, 82:1, 84:1), it will be stripped away (Q 81:11), or it will be opened up (Q 78:19). This eschatological splitting or opening up of the celestial structure allows the divine judge and his angelic hosts to descend upon earth (see Q 25:25) in order to judge the resurrected.

**The heavenly dome in pre-Qur’anic Christian texts.** The Qur’an’s presentation of the sky as a divinely crafted edifice has identifiable late antique precursors, a link that is also demonstrated in recent publications by Julien Decharneux (Decharneux 2019 and 2021). Thus, an architectural portrayal of the sky is espoused, based on Biblical data, by a number of Syriac writers, like Narsai and Jacob of Sarug, who like the Qur’an call the heaven the world’s “roof” (McVey 1983, 98–99, 114–116, 117–118; van Bladel 2007, 225–226; see also Mathews 2020, 32–33, l. 2037, and 44–45, l. 2136).<sup>7</sup> The main competitor of this conception was the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic model according to which the heavens form revolving spheres around a spherical earth, a model that was to become dominant among post-Qur’anic Islamic philosophers and scientists (van Bladel 2007, 224–225 and 241–243; see also Janos 2012a, 26–30, and Neuwirth 2001, 445). Strikingly, a Syriac hymn dating to the middle of the sixth century and presenting the cathedral church of Edessa as a microcosm also stresses that its dome is “without columns” (*d-lā ‘amūdē*; cf. Qur’anic *‘amad*), as do Cosmas Indicopleustes and Jacob of Sarug (McVey 1983, 99 and 115; see strophe 5 of her edition and translation; see also Decharneux 2019, 240–242). Such parallels make it unlikely that Q 13:2 and 31:10—according to which God “raised” or “created” the heavens “without a pillar (*‘amad*) that you<sup>p</sup> can see”—refer to an invisible pillar, as maintained in Tabataba’i and Mirsadri 2016, 209, 216–217, and 220–221 (see also van Bladel 2007, 233). Also recalling the Qur’an, the same strophe of the Syriac hymn just mentioned invokes the notion that the cosmic firmament is “decorated” (verb: *šabbet*) with stars (*kawkbē*; cf. especially the combination of *zayyana* and *kawākib* in Q 37:6).<sup>8</sup>

Given the fairly compelling parallels just rehearsed, it is attractive to conjecture that the Qur’an, too, understands the celestial ceiling to be a dome or vault (see also van Bladel

5 It is tempting to connect Gen 1:6–7 with Qur’anic references to “two bodies of water” (*al-baḥrān*), one salty and one “sweet,” that are separated by a barrier in Q 25:53, 27:61, 35:12, 55:19–20 (Neuwirth 2001, 443 and 445–446). However, it is possible to understand these two bodies of water to be located on earth (thus Tabataba’i and Mirsadri 2016, 213).

6 Q 23:18 and 43:11 say that God sends down rain *bi-qadarin*, “in due measure” (see also Q 13:17), perhaps indicating the difference to the devastating inundation that obliterated the adversaries of Noah.

7 Also relevant to a full contextualisation of Qur’anic cosmology are references to divine “building,” such as Mathews 2020, 46–47, l. 2147.

8 For another Syriac statement to the effect that God has “decorated” or “adorned” (*šabbet*) the heavens “with every beauty,” by Jacob of Sarug, see Mathews 2018, 32–33, l. 1404.

2007, 233–235). One should nonetheless bear in mind that the Islamic scripture does not unequivocally state this to be the case, and that the opposite position—according to which the Qur’an understands the cosmic edifice to be flat-roofed—has been vigorously argued as well (Tabataba’i and Mirsadri 2016, 218–234).

### ***musammā* | named, specified, fixed**

→ *ajal*

### ***ism* | name**

Further vocabulary discussed: *tabāraka* intr. | to be blessed *rabb* | lord *sabbaḥa* intr. *bi-* | to glorify s.o. or s.th. (such as God or God’s name) *sabbaḥa* tr. | to glorify s.o. or s.th. (such as God or God’s name) *dhakara* tr. | to invoke s.o. or s.th. (namely, God or God’s name) *qara’a* tr. | to recite s.th. *qara’a bi-smi rabbihi* | to proclaim or invoke the name of his Lord *al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā* pl. | the most excellent names (of God) *samī’* | hearing *‘alīm* | knowing, knowledgeable *‘azīz* | mighty *mathal* | similitude, likeness, example; exemplar; characterisation, saying *al-raḥmān* | the Merciful *sulṭān* | authority

The Qur’an mentions God’s “name” (*ism*) in a variety of contexts, most prominently in the surah-initial formula “In the name of God, the truly Merciful,” known as the *basmalah* and treated in a separate entry (→ *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm*). Qur’anic verses that “invoke” (→ *dhakara*) or “praise” (*sabbaḥa*; see under → *ḥamd*) God’s name stand in a discursive tradition that ultimately reaches back to the Hebrew Bible, where references to God’s “name” are widespread (Parke-Taylor 1975, 11–17). In placing the Islamic scripture against this traditional background, it is expedient to begin with a brief overview of God’s name in Biblical literature and in pre-Qur’anic inscriptions before inspecting the main types of usage in the Qur’an itself. The present entry will confine itself to Qur’anic statements about God’s name or names as well as the names of other deities venerated in the Qur’anic milieu. Hence, statements about the naming or names of created entities (Q 2:31–33) and human individuals like John the Baptist and Mary (Q 3:36, 19:7, 61:6) will not be considered.

**God’s “name” in pre-Qur’anic traditions.** Generally speaking, “the term ‘name’ in ancient Near Eastern cultures can refer to the essence of any thing and hence can be a cipher for the thing itself” (Sommer 2009, 59; see also *NIDOTTE* 4:147–149). Biblical literature accordingly preserves many examples in which God and God’s name figure synonymously (see, in addition to the examples quoted by Sommer, *TDOT* 15:136 and Grether 1934, 35–43). A different usage is characteristic of the book of Deuteronomy, which treats God’s “name” as a hypostasis of God that is tied to the Jerusalem sanctuary, described as “the place in which God will cause his name to dwell” (e.g., Deut 12:11, 13:12, and 14:23). The implicit distinction between God and his “name” that undergirds such language resolves the potential tension between God’s transcendence, on the one hand, and his presence at a particular place, on the other, and thereby helps avoid unduly anthropomorphic depictions of God (Grether 1934, 31–35; Weinfeld 1992, 193–200; Barton and Muddiman 2001, 145).

Especially the Psalms, but also certain passages in the prophetic books, establish a close connection between God's "name" and personal piety, by frequently employing God's name as the object of praise, invocation, remembrance, and blessing (e.g., Ps 7:18, 105:1, 113:1.2, 119:55, 148:5; see also Grether 1934, 37–38, and *TDOT* 15:137–141.144).

In Greek and Syriac translation, the Hebrew expression *šēm YHWH* becomes "the name of the Lord" (Peshitta: *šmeh d-māryā*, Septuagint: *to onoma kyriou*), from which the Qur'anic phrase *ism rabbika*, "the name of your<sup>S</sup> Lord," is recognisably descended. Greek and Syriac usage here reflects the fact that from a certain point in time the tetragrammaton *YHWH* was deemed to be too sacred to be pronounced and was accordingly substituted by the Hebrew word *ādōnāy* (Parke-Taylor 1975, 79–88; Gese 1975, 88–89). Hellenistic and rabbinic Jewish writings attest to the awesome power that was believed to reside in God's name, a power that could give rise to magical practices (Urbach 1987, 1:124–134). Liturgically, God's name is prominently invoked at the beginning of the Lord's Prayer ("Hallowed be your name"; e.g., Matt 6:9) and in the Jewish Qaddish prayer, whose core blessing ("May his great name be blessed forever and all time") has Biblical precursors (Daniel 2:20, Ps 113:2) and is attested as a formula of response already in *b. Bər. 3a* (see Elbogen 1931, 93).

In the late antique period, invocations of God's "name" are detectable well beyond the Jewish and Christian traditions. Palmyrene epigraphy documents worship of an unnamed god who is periphrastically referred to as "the one whose name is blessed forever" (*bryk šmh l-'lm'*) and who is perhaps to be identified with Baal Shamin or Yarḥibol (Drijvers 1976, 15; Teixidor 1977, 122–130; Greenfield 2000, 385; Healey 2001, 96; Fox and Lieu 2005, 82). Chronologically and spatially even closer to the Qur'an are Sabaic inscriptions from the realm of Ḥimyar subsequent to the abandonment of its traditional polytheism in favour of a Judaising version of monotheism. One inscription entreats God to grant the builders of a synagogue "fear of his name" (Robin 2015a, 135), while another one opens with the eulogy "Blessed and praised be the name of the Merciful who is in heaven" (*brk utbrk sim rḥmnn dḃsimyn*; Abdallah 1987, 4–5; Gajda 2009, 232 and 247; Gajda 2017, 253). The latter phrase bears some resemblance to the first half of Q 55:78: *tabāraka smu rabbika*, "Blessed by the name of your Lord."<sup>1</sup> Finally, an unpublished Palaeo-Arabic inscription from the Ḥijāz opens with the words "In your name, Allāh" (*b-smk 'llhm*; see Al-Jallad and Sidky 2021, 9).

**Early Meccan references to "the name of your<sup>S</sup> Lord" (*ism rabbika*).** In the Islamic scripture, the phrase *ism rabbika*, "the name of your<sup>S</sup> Lord," occurs almost exclusively in the early Meccan surahs.<sup>2</sup> In continuity with ancient Near Eastern usage, Qur'anic references to the Lord's "name" are "a cipher for the thing itself" (to quote Sommer 2009, 59), such that, for instance, the command to "praise (*sabbih bi-* or *sabbih* + acc.) the name of your<sup>S</sup> Lord" (Q 56:74.96, 69:52, 87:1; see also under → *ḥamd*) may be treated as seman-

1 Abdallah 1987, 5, points to Q 67:1 (*tabāraka lladhī bi-yadihi l-mulku*, "Blessed be he in whose hand is the kingship"), which unlike Q 55:78 functions as an opening formula, similar to the inscription at hand. For a different translation of the inscription, see Robin 2015a, 133: "May he bless and be blessed, the name of the Merciful who is in heaven." By contrast, Abdallah 1987, 5, interprets the initial *brk* as the Hebrew *bārūk* (cf. also Gajda 2017, 253). One might perhaps also consider construing it as an internal passive (on which see Stein 2011, 1059, and Stein 2013, 85), along the lines of *būrika* in Q 27:8. This reasoning would appear to underlie Beeston et al. 1982, 31. I am grateful to Peter Stein for answering queries on this difficult passage.

2 Of the pertinent verses Q 55:78, 56:74.96, 69:52, 73:8, 76:25, 87:1.15, and 96:1, the only surah that is not early Meccan as defined in *HCI* 161 is Surah 76. Its mean verse length (52.65 transliteration letters per verse) exceeds my proposed cut-off point of 43.12 (corresponding to Surah 15) for the early Meccan texts.

tically equivalent to “praise your<sup>S</sup> Lord” (see, e.g., Q 7:206, 17:44, 20:33, 24:41, 33:42, 41:38, 48:9, where *sabbaha* takes as its direct or prepositional object God itself rather than his “name”). Other verbs collocating with “the name of your Lord” are *tabaraka*, “to be blessed” (Q 55:78, quoted above), and → *dhakara*, “to invoke” (Q 73:8, 76:25, 87:15), both of which also occur with God directly rather than only with his name (for *tabaraka*, see, e.g., Q 7:54, 23:14, 25:1.10.61; for *dhakara*, see, e.g., Q 2:152.198.200.203, 17:46, 18:24). Finally, in Q 96:1 “the name of your<sup>S</sup> Lord” combines with → *qara’a*, which normally means “to recite” but may have a special sense here (see below). After the early Meccan period, the Qur’anic proclamations tend to supplant the expression *ism rabbika* by references to God himself, even if some later passages do feature the phrase *ism allāh* rather than *ism rabbika* (see below).<sup>3</sup>

Early Meccan passages mentioning “the name of your Lord” have a discernibly Psalmic flavour (see Baumstark 1927, 232, pointing out the particularly striking similarity between Ps 113:2 and Q 55:78, and *PP* 256, in connection with Q 87:1). This Psalmic ring is reinforced by the fact that some of the Arabic verbs associated with the phrase *ism rabbika* have Hebrew or Syriac cognates that appear in passages like Ps 105:1, 113:1.2, and 119:55, namely, Hebrew *qārā’* / Syriac *qrā* (cf. Arabic *qara’a*), Syriac *shabbah* (cf. Arabic *sabbaha*), and Hebrew *zākar* (cf. Arabic *dhakara*). “Blessing,” “praising,” and “invoking” God’s name are all human speech acts, possibly performed at regular diurnal prayer times, as shown by Q 76:25: “Invoke the name of your<sup>S</sup> Lord in the morning and in the evening.” This putative Psalmic background contrasts with the Deuteronomistic conception of the Lord’s name as a divine hypostasis, which seems far less pertinent to the Qur’an.

***Iqra’ bi-smi rabbika*, “Proclaim the name of your<sup>S</sup> Lord” (Q 96:1).** In four places, the phrase *ism rabbika* is governed by the preposition *bi-*: Q 96:1 has *iqra’ bi-smi rabbika*, while Q 56:74.96 and 69:52 all have *sabbih bi-smi rabbika l-‘azīm*. In the latter three cases, it is natural to construe *ism rabbika* as a prepositional object of the preceding verb *sabbaha*, yielding the translation “Praise the name of your<sup>S</sup> mighty Lord”: *sabbih bi-smi rabbika* in Q 56:74.96 and 69:52 is evidently synonymous with *sabbih sma rabbika* in Q 87:1, where *sabbaha* takes a direct object rather than a prepositional one. The same understanding is naturally extended to Q 96:1, such that *iqra’ bi-smi rabbika* would mean “Recite/proclaim/call upon the name of your<sup>S</sup> Lord.” In support of the same conclusion, Hirschfeld points to Q 96:1’s isomorphism with the Hebrew phrase *qārā’ bəšēm YHWH* (Peshitta: *qrā b-shmeh d-māryā*; Hirschfeld 1902, 18–19 and 32), used in the Hebrew Bible as a metonymy for the worship of YHWH in general (e.g., Gen 4:26, 12:8, 13:4, and 21:33; see also Grether 1934, 18–19; Gese 1975, 86–88; *TDOT* 15:155). The alternative position, adopted by Schwally, is to render Q 96:1 as “Recite in the name of your<sup>S</sup> Lord,” given that the general meaning of → *qara’a* in the Qur’an (e.g., in Q 16:98, 17:93, 69:19 etc.) is “to recite” (*GQ* 1:32–33 and 81–82). Schwally quite correctly highlights that Hirschfeld’s interpretation would result in attributing to Q 96:1 “an entirely isolated use of language.” It remains nonetheless attractive to conjecture that Q 96:1 Arabises the injunction to “call upon” God’s “name” that is found, e.g., in Ps 105:1 (Hebrew: *qir’ū bišmō*, Peshitta: *qraw shmeh*), resulting in an exception to the ordinary Qur’anic meaning of *qara’a*. In any case, the primary issue at stake is not the

<sup>3</sup> Two other expressions that are also largely limited to the early Meccan surahs are *shuhuf* for the concept of scripture, which later surahs designate by the noun → *kitāb*, and → *dīn* in the sense of “judgement” rather than “religion.” On the phenomenon of lexical discontinuity between the early Meccan surahs and the rest of the Islamic scripture, see in more detail the final section under → *kitāb*.



exact semantics of *qara'a* but rather the grammatical status of *bi-smi rabbika*, and Schwally's position arguably fails to take into sufficient account the evident equivalence between *sabbiḥ bi-smi rabbika* (Q 56:74, 96, 69:52) and *sabbiḥi sma rabbika* (Q 87:1).<sup>4</sup>

**“In the name of God” (*bi-smi llāhi*).** A second characteristic Qur'anic usage of the noun *ism* in relation to God is to pair it not with *rabbika*, “your<sup>S</sup> Lord,” but with the divine name *allāh*. The resulting expression *ism allāh*, “God’s name,” is, unlike *ism rabbika*, not limited to early Meccan passages. It can figure as the direct object of the verb → *dhakara*, “to invoke”—for instance, in commandments to invoke “God’s name” over slaughtered animals (e.g., Q 5:4, 6:118–119, 121, 138, 22:28, 34, 36; for other contexts, see 2:114, 22:40, and 24:36). *Isim allāh* can also be governed by the preposition *bi-*, yielding the phrase *bi-smi llāhi*. The latter occurs most frequently in the surah-initial *basmalah* (→ *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm*), in addition to two further occurrences inside surahs, Q 27:30 and 11:41. Q 27:30 has the full *basmalah* formula, opening a letter by Solomon to the queen of Saba'. As argued in my treatment of the *basmalah* as a whole, Q 27:30 likely constitutes the phrase's original occurrence in the Qur'an and echoes the invocatory conventions of South Arabian inscriptions. Specifically, the “asyntactic” character of the full *basmalah* formula in Q 27:30 is likely related to the opening *b-* of South Arabian inscriptions (Stein 2013, 93–94). It was from Q 27:30 that the *basmalah* invocation was subsequently excerpted to function as a prefatory invocation preceding almost all Qur'anic surahs.

Q 11:41, which postdates 27:30, recounts how Noah invites members of his family and other believers to board his ark, adding that “it will run its course and find anchorage in God’s name” (*bi-smi llāhi majrāhā wa-mursāhā*).<sup>5</sup> This is the only Qur'anic instance in which the formula *bi-smi llāhi* may be understood to be syntactically integrated into a complete sentence, even if a different grammatical analysis is possible (Ṭab. 12:413–414; see also Zam. 3:199–200). *Bi-smi llāhi* has a clear counterpart in Biblical usage, namely, Hebrew *bəšēm YHWH* / Syriac *b-shmeh d-māryā* / Greek *en onomati kyriou*, although it is notable that the Bible only uses the phrase with accompanying verbs (GQ 1:116–117). Examples include Deut 18:22 (in combination with *dibbēr*, “to speak”; see also Exod 5:23), 1 Sam 17:45 (with *bā*, “to come”), 1 Kgs 18:32 (in connection with building), and Col 3:17 (“whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus”), as well as the Psalmic benediction “Blessed be he that comes in the name of the Lord” (Ps 118:26), which is cited in Matt 21:9 and 23:39 and thence penetrated into Christian liturgy.

**God’s “most excellent names.”** Apart from the singular usage discussed so far (*the name of God*), the Qur'an also evinces an awareness that God is in fact referred to by a plurality of linguistic expressions. “To God belong the most excellent [or: most beautiful] names” (*li-llāhi/lahu l-asmā'u l-ḥusnā*), four verses declare (Q 7:180, 17:110, 20:8, 59:24).

4 In favour of Hirschfeld's understanding of *bi-smi rabbika* as forming a prepositional object, one may also point out that in the rendering favoured by Nöldeke and Schwally (“Recite in the name of your Lord”), the command expressed by Q 96:1 patently lacks an object: what, precisely, is to be recited? Of course, if one were to read Surah 96 in light of the well-known extra-Qur'anic narrative about Muhammad's first revelation atop Mount Ḥirā' (Schoeler 2011, 38–79), then the object of recitation is the writing contained on a piece of brocade (*namaṭ min dibāj fīhi kitāb*) that the angel Gabriel allegedly presented to Muhammad (Wüstenfeld 1858–1860, 1:152). Yet given that this narrative detail has no presence in the Qur'anic text (see already Nöldeke 1860, 64), it is preferable to consider the object of recitation, invocation, or proclamation to be specified by *bi-smi rabbika*, hence: “Proclaim/call upon the name of your Lord.”

5 I am here departing from the reading *majrēhā* that is attributed to Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āšim, e.g., in Ibn Mujāhid 1972, 333.



In Q 59:24, the affirmation caps off a string of different hymnic epithets of the deity in vv. 23–24. Omitting various surrounding and intervening segments of text, this sequence of “excellent names” in Q 59:23–24 can be partitioned as follows:

- *al-malik al-quddūs*: “holy king” (see under → *qaddasa*; cf. the parallel in Q 62:1);
- *al-salām al-mu’min al-muḥaymin*: “[bestower of?] salvific safety, trustworthy granter of security” (→ *salām*, → *āmana*, → *muḥaymin*);
- *al-‘azīz al-jabbār al-mutakabbir*: “the mighty, the powerful, the exalted” (→ *jabbār*);
- *al-khāliq al-bāri’ al-muṣawwir*: “the creator, the maker, the shaper [of humans]” (→ *khalaqa*; on *ṣawwara*, see under → *istakhlafa*).

One infers that God’s “most excellent names” are attributes (Böwering 2002, 319) expressing his holiness and numinous power as well as salient aspects of his relationship to humans. It seems likely that the hymnic predications that close out many Qur’anic verses—such as the affirmation that God is “the one who hears and knows” (*al-samī’ al-‘alīm*) or, without the definite article, “hearing and knowing” (e.g., Q 2:127.137.181.224.227, 3:34.35.121)—may likewise be considered to fall under the rubric of God’s “most excellent names” (for an overview of such verse-final epithets, refer to Robinson 2003a, 198–201; see also Neuwirth 2007, 161–163, and the enumeration of Qur’anic divine attributes in Böwering 2002, 320–322). After all, at least *‘azīz*, one of the epithets from Q 59:24, is also frequent in verse-final hymnic predications (e.g., Q 2:129.209.220.228, 3:4.6.18.62; note again the partial overlap between 59:24 and 62:1). God’s “most excellent names” are therefore hymnic epithets articulating divine qualities like holiness, power, omniscience/omnipercipience, or beneficence. Grammatically, the expressions in question function as predicates, whose associated subject terms are usually → *allāh*, “God,” “your<sup>s</sup> (or my or his etc.) Lord” (*inna* → *rabbī/rabbaka . . .*), or simply the third-person singular pronoun “he” (see the linguistic taxonomy in Neuwirth 2007, 161–162). Unlike later attempts to quantify and exhaustively enumerate God’s “most excellent names” (van Ess 2017–2020, 4:479–480), the Qur’an nowhere indicates that such predicates or attributes of divine excellence are to be drawn from a finite list.

An even more important observation to make, in view of the frequency of such divine predications in the Qur’an and also in view of the four verses mentioning God’s “most excellent names,” is to note that the Islamic scripture does not evince any sort of principled uneasiness over the application of human language to the divine, uneasiness of the sort that might be cultivated by Neoplatonically inspired proponents of a more apophatic or negative approach to discourse about God.<sup>6</sup> Rather, the Qur’an positively urges its recipients to “call upon God” by his “most excellent names” (Q 7:180; cf. 17:110): expressions that designate what is a perfection for human agents, one might reformulate, are readily transposable—and indeed ought to be transposed—to the divine. Ibn Taymiyyah derives a similar principle from Q 16:60 (cf. 30:27), according to which “to God belongs the loftiest characterisation” (*li-llāhi l-mathalu l-a’lā*; Hoover 2007, 58–59)—to translate freely, “Of God, one must only say the best” (see also under → *mathal*). The point of predicative

<sup>6</sup> This is so despite the statement in Q 42:11 that “nothing is like” God (see under → *allāh*) and despite the Qur’an’s condemnation of its opponents for employing mere “names that you<sup>p</sup> and your forefathers have devised” and that lack divine authorisation (see below).

statements about God, in any case, is presumably not to articulate rigorous metaphysical truth but rather to give expression to human devotion and piety, to praise and laud God: in Q 59:24 the affirmation that “to God belong the most excellent names” is followed by the statement that “everything in the heavens and on earth glorifies him” (*yusabbiḥu lahu mā fī l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi*), which is in turn followed by two of the “most excellent names,” *al-‘azīz* (“the might”) and *al-ḥakīm* (“the wise”).<sup>7</sup>

The great number of Qur’anic predicates of divine excellence contrasts with the very limited number in the Qur’an of what one might call divine names proper, or expressions that are capable of serving as grammatical subjects. These are limited to → *allāh*, → *rabb* + personal suffix, and → *al-raḥmān*, “the Merciful” (e.g., Q 19:61.75.88.96, 20:5). Nonetheless, Q 17:110 invokes the principle that God merits “the most excellent names” specifically in connection with the question which of the two divine names *allāh* and *al-raḥmān*—which seem to have begun to coalesce into alternative designations of the creator deity already in the pre-Islamic period (→ *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm*)—is preferable: “Say, ‘Call upon God or call upon the Merciful; whichever you call upon, to him belong the most excellent names.’ And do not say<sup>s</sup> your prayer too loudly nor whisper it, but adopt a middle course.” Q 17:110 is not the chronologically earliest occurrence of the most-excellent-names principle, which is also found in Q 20:8 (“God—there is no God but him; to him belong the most excellent names”). What Q 17:110 does, therefore, is to apply the most-excellent-names principle to apparent uncertainty regarding which one of the Qur’an’s main divine names, “God” or “the Merciful,” should take precedence over the other. The issue in the background may have been specifically how God ought to be addressed in prayer.<sup>8</sup>

“Only names that you<sup>p</sup> have devised.” As we have seen, the Qur’an treats *allāh* and *al-raḥmān* as referentially equivalent and as equally capable of picking out the one true divine creator and judge. This is not the case for other elements of human religious language, for several passages charge the opponents of the Qur’anic Messenger with employing mere names or “empty concepts” (QP 74) that have no referential correspondence in reality. Thus, three passages (Q 7:71, 12:40, 53:23) charge the Qur’anic adversaries with using or worshipping “names that you<sup>p</sup> and your forefathers have devised” (*asmā’ sammaytumūhā antum wa-ābā’ukum*; → *ab*) and for whom “God has not sent down any authority” (*mā nazzala/anzala llāhu bihā min sulṭānin*; → *sulṭān*), while a later verse in Surah 53 accuses those who “do not believe in the hereafter” of “calling the angels by female names” (Q 53:27:

7 In post-Qur’anic Islamic thought, the frequency of divine predication in the Qur’an and the overt call to make use of God’s “most excellent names” provided an important anti-apophatic impetus, culminating in the Ash’arite doctrine of a plurality of entitative attributes that are additional to God’s essence and eternally subsist in him (van Ess 2017–2020, 4:477–478). In view of what has just been said, this kind of theorising—whatever its specific formulations and the concomitant theoretical impasses—arguably preserves aspects of the Qur’an’s general anti-apophatic spirit.

8 Note the density of diction associated with worship in vv. 107–111, such as *kharra*, “to fall down,” *sujjad* (the plural of *sajid*, “prostrating”; → *sajada*, *subḥāna* . . . (“Praise be to . . .”; see under → *ḥamd*), *da‘ā*, “to call upon,” → *ḥamd*, “praise,” and *kabbara*, “to magnify.” According to an alternative and stronger reading of Q 17:110, it reflects uncertainty over the referential equivalence of the two divine names in question, i.e., it addresses the question whether they designate one and the same deity. However, such a reading is primarily rooted in extra-Qur’anic traditions of doubtful authenticity, according to which the pagan Meccans, when overhearing Muhammad invoke both “God” and “the Merciful,” misunderstood him to be appealing to two different deities (e.g., Ṭab. 15:123–124; see also Jomier 1957, 366). Especially in view of the evidence presented elsewhere (→ *bi-smi llāhi l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm*) that a confluence of the two designations *allāh* and *al-raḥmān* had begun to emerge already in the pre-Qur’anic period, this stronger reading seems far less likely than the one intimated in the main text.

*la-yusammūna l-malā'ikata tasmiyata l-unthā*; cf. 43:19, also 4:117, 17:40, 37:150)—meaning that angels, whom the Qur'an accepts as being ontologically real, are misunderstood by the unbelievers as the female pagan deities al-Lāt, al-'Uzzā, and Manāt, mentioned in Q 53:19–20 (see *QP* 73, 74). Thus, one of the different (and possibly incompatible) manners in which the Qur'an accounts for the existence of the pagan cults that it criticises so vehemently (see *QP* 72–77) is that these cults result from the divinely unauthorised human employment of words or mere “names” that are referentially unsuccessful, i.e., that fail to pick out objectively existing beings or at least incorrectly imply that the beings to which they do in fact refer (namely, angels) have traits that they do not in fact possess (such as being female). It is characteristic for the Qur'an that such unauthorised religious language is, like the human stipulation of unwarranted dietary taboos (see under → *ḥarrama*), portrayed as resulting from an uncritical reliance on ancestral tradition as opposed to divine revelation (see further under → *ab*).

### ***sunnah* | customary manner of proceeding**

See briefly n. 3 under → *ab* and the verse of poetry cited beforehand.

### ***sūrah* | surah**

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *nazzala, anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down *āyah* | sign; sign-pronouncement *ḥadīth* | discourse *kitāb* | scripture *qur'ān* | recitation

**Meaning in the Qur'an.** The Qur'an uses the term *sūrah* to refer to units of divine revelation that are “sent down” (*nazzala, anzala*; Q 9:64.86.124.127, 24:1, 47:20; → *nazzala*) and have a specifiable propositional and illocutionary content, such as apprising the addressees of “what is in their hearts” (Q 9:64) or enjoining them to “believe in God and contend together with his Messenger” (Q 9:86; cf. 47:20). The plural *suwar* occurs only once (Q 11:13). Usage of the word *sūrah* is primarily Medinan, the only Meccan occurrences being Q 10:38 and 11:13 (*JPND* 211). There are few indications in the Qur'anic text that permit one to infer the length of the textual units in question and to confirm that the word is being used in the conventional sense of a complete Qur'anic composition like *Sūrat al-Baqarah*. However, at least the superscript Q 24:1, which calls the following a *sūrah* “in which” (*fīhā*) God has “sent down clear signs (*āyāt*),” provides a strong indication that it is the whole of *Surah 24* that qualifies as a *sūrah* rather than merely some part of it. The same verse also suggests that the word *sūrah* refers a piece of text more extensive than one designated by the word → *āyah* (e.g., Q 2:106). It is admittedly not certain that Q 24:1 employs *āyah* in a textual sense; the verse could simply be saying that the *sūrah* to follow recounts God's signs. Still, it is notable that when the singular *āyah* occurs in a manifestly textual sense at Q 16:101, it is plausibly understood to designate a segment of text that might be fairly short, in contrast to the singular use of *sūrah* in Q 24:1.

**Etymology.** It is not immediately obvious how the meaning of *sūrah* just outlined might be elucidated by linking it to other words of Qur'anic Arabic that share its consonantal root, such as *sūr*, “wall” (Q 57:13), or *tasawwara*, “to enter a building by climbing over

its walls” (Q 38:21; *CDKA* 141). Western scholars have therefore made various attempts to derive the word *sūrah* from Hebrew or Syriac (*NB* 26; *GQ* 1:30–31; *JPND* 211–212; Bell 1926, 52; *FVQ* 180–182; Watt 1970, 58). Specifically, Syriac *sūrṭā*, derived from the root *s-r-ṭ*, means a line, including a line of writing (*SL* 990–991; *sraṭ* is “to scratch, to write”). This leads Jeffery to declare this Syriac word the most probable ancestor of the Qur’anic one. Earlier scholars, by contrast, link *sūrah* to the rabbinic Hebrew term *shurah*, belonging to the consonantal root *sh-w-r* and signifying “line” or “row” and also “line of conduct” (*DTTM* 1542).<sup>1</sup> In Babylonian Jewish Aramaic, too, *shurta* means a “row” (*DJBA* 1125; on its Palestinian Aramaic counterpart, see *DJPA* 542).

While it is hardly impossible to produce a speculative narrative about how either the Syriac or the Hebrew word might have given rise to an Arabic term that subsequently morphed into a Qur’anic designation for a unit of divine revelation, one is tempted to side with Ambros that none of the derivations hitherto proposed are fully satisfactory (*CDKA* 141). Rather than pursuing an etymological crux that may ultimately be insoluble, it seems safer to confine oneself to noting the partial synonymity between the terms *sūrah*, *ḥadīth* (“discourse”), → *kitāb* (“scripture”), and also *qur’ān* (“recitation”; → *qara’a*), which are, for instance, employed interchangeably in a number of passages challenging the Qur’anic addressees to “bring” a *sūrah*/discourse/scripture that is “like” the Qur’anic proclamations or “provides better guidance” (e.g., Q 2:23, 28:49, 52:34; Radscheit 1996a, 95; Radscheit 1996b, 123; cf. also Q 17:88, asserting the impossibility that humans and the jinn might join forces to “bring something like this *qur’ān*”). Despite the etymological enigma attaching to the word *sūrah*, therefore, we have at least a reasonably firm grasp of its semantic value in Qur’anic usage.

## ***sā’ah* | hour**

### ***al-sā’ah* | the hour (of the resurrection)**

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *yawm al-dīn* | the day of judgement *ḥisāb* | reckoning, account *yawm al-qiyāmah* | the day of resurrection *rayb* | doubt *qarīb* | near *iqtaraba* intr. | to draw near *baghtatan* | suddenly *ka-lamḥ al-baṣar* | like the glance of an eye *ashrāt* pl. | signs, portents

**Overview of Qur’anic usage.** *Sā’ah* means “hour,” both in the sense of a short period of time and in that of a specific (though temporally extended) moment in time (e.g., Q 7:34, 9:117, 10:45.49). “The hour,” with the definite article, is a predominantly Meccan designation of the eschatological resurrection and judgement, also referred to by other expressions like *yawm al-dīn*, “the day of judgement” (→ *dīn*<sup>1</sup>), God’s “reckoning” (→ *ḥisāb*), or the “day of resurrection” (→ *yawm al-qiyāmah*). Q 30:55 puns on this double meaning of the word by saying that “on the day on which the hour [or resurrection] will arise (*yawma taqūmu l-sā’atu*), the sinners will swear that they only lingered [in their graves] for an hour (*mā labithū ghayra sā’atin*)” (Rippin 1994, 197). “The hour” figures from the early Meccan period onwards (Q 15:85, 54:1.46, 79:42). Three occurrences of “the hour” in a *surah* customarily dated to the Medinan period come at Q 22:1.7.55, but

<sup>1</sup> On *šūrā* in Biblical Hebrew (Job 24:11), see *HALOT* 1453–1454 and *NIDOTTE* 4:73–74.

parts of Surah 22, including the verses at hand, have been rather convincingly dated to the Meccan stage (*HCI* 127–130). This only leaves Q 33:63 and 47:18 as plausible Medinan occurrences of “the hour.”

**A digest of Qur’anic statements about the eschatological “hour.”** It is repeatedly stressed that the hour of resurrection and judgement will certainly come (Q 15:85, 20:15, 22:7, 40:59: *inna/anna l-sā’ata ± <la->ātiyatun*). There can be “no doubt about” it, four verses aver (Q 18:21, 22:7, 40:59, 45:32: *lā rayba fihā*; see also under → *irtāba*), while others warn that “the hour” may be (→ *la’alla*) “near” (*qarīb*; Q 33:63, 42:17) or, as the early Meccan verse Q 54:1 puts it even more categorically, that “the hour” has in fact “drawn near” (*iqtarabat*). The coming of the hour will be sudden (Q 6:31, 7:187, 12:107, 16:77, 22:55, 43:66, 47:18: *baghtatan*),<sup>1</sup> “like the glance of an eye” or even faster (Q 16:77: *wa-mā amru l-sā’ati illā ka-lamḥi l-baṣari aw huwa aqrabu*; cf. 54:50). One of the passages just cited, the Medinan verse Q 47:18, additionally maintains that the “portents” (*ashrāt*) of the hour have already come to pass (*qad jā’a*). This indicates that the imminent eschatological expectation that shines through in the early Meccan verse Q 54:1 cannot be assumed to have faded after the hijrah (see also under → *ittaḡā*). It is true that other Meccan and Medinan passages insist that no one but God knows the exact time of the hour’s coming (Q 7:187, 31:34, 33:63, 41:47, 43:85, 79:42–45). Yet in Jacob of Sarug, too, agnosticism about the precise timing of the end of the world can combine with anticipation that the end is impending (Sinai 2017a, 237); the two positions are not incompatible, and one cannot assume that the former entails a dilution of the latter. Overall, passages like Q 54:1 and 47:18 make it necessary to concur with Stephen Shoemaker that the importance of imminent eschatological expectation as a likely catalyst of Muhammad’s prophetic preaching should not be downplayed (Shoemaker 2012, 121–127 and 158–171).<sup>2</sup> In any case, regardless of when precisely the world will come to an end, from a subjective perspective God’s eschatological judgement is as near to everyone as his or her individual demise, since to the resurrected it will appear that the period of time intervening between their death and their rising from the grave was only a single night or even an hour (e.g., Q 10:45, 79:46; see Andrae 1926, 156–163; O’Shaughnessy 1969, 69–70; Sinai 2017a, 238).<sup>3</sup>

**New Testamental background.** Qur’anic references to “the hour” have patent parallels in New Testamental language, which have been noted as early as Ahrens (*CQ* 165, 167). When the Qur’an announces that the hour “is coming” (*ātiyah*), this may be considered an Arabic counterpart of John 5:25 (*hoti erchetai hōra*, “that the hour is coming”). The Peshitta’s rendering of this Biblical formulation, by *d-ātyā shā’tā*, is particularly close to the Qur’anic motto that “the hour is coming,” cited above. The proposition that knowledge of “the day and the hour” is reserved for God the Father alone is asserted in Matt 24:36 and Mark 13:32, similar to Qur’anic verses like Q 7:187 (see also El-Badawi 2014, 188–189), and is discussed by Ephrem and by Jacob of Sarug (Beck 1955, nos 77–79; Sinai 2017a, 249). The frequent Qur’anic threats that the hour or God’s punishment will come suddenly (*baghtatan*) may be related to Mark 13:36, which in the context of a parable about

1 Cf. also Q 6:44.47, 7:95, 21:40, 26:202, 29:53, 39:55, where *baghtatan* qualifies the coming of God’s “punishment” (*adhāb*) or the like.

2 But see the reservations about details of his analysis that are expressed in Sinai 2017a, 237, n. 75.

3 To give a more comprehensive list of Qur’anic passages, see Q 10:45, 46:35, 79:46 (*lam yalbathū illā sā’atan / ‘ashiyatan aw ḡuḡāhā*), 17:52, 20:103.104 (*in labithum illā qalīlā / qalīlan / ‘ashrā / yawmā*), as well as 23:112–114 and 30:55.

a master going on a journey warns that his servants may find that he will return “suddenly” (*exaiḫnēs*, Peshitta: *men shelyā*). Other relevant statements in the New Testament Gospels about the “hour” of the coming of the Son of Man are found at Matt 24:44 and Luke 12:40. Finally, the memorable comparison that God’s judgement will arrive “like the glance of an eye” in Q 16:77 and 54:50 bears obvious resemblance to Paul’s description of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15:51–52, which recurs in the homiletic poems of Ephrem and Jacob of Sarug (Andrae 1926, 142; *BEQ* 454; Sinai 2017a, 260; Reynolds 2019, 57–59; Decharneux 2019, 256–259). All of these parallels substantiate the hypothesis that Qur’anic eschatology, one of the chief thematic strands of Qur’anic discourse from the early Meccan period onwards, has a very strong Christian imprint—a diagnosis that need not preclude concurrent appreciation of the distinctive character of the Qur’an’s eschatological kerygma and its literary expression (Sinai 2017a, 246–254).

***sā’iq* | usher, someone driving someone else on**

→ *malak*

***sawwala* intr. *li-* | to persuade s.o.**

***sawwala* tr. *li-* | to persuade s.o. of s.th.**

→ *shayṭān*, → *ṣabara*, → *nafs*

***sawwā* tr. | to endow s.th. or s.o. with an even or uniform shape**

→ *khalaqa*

***istawā* intr. *’alā* | to sit down upright upon s.th.**

***istawā* intr. *ilā* | to straighten o.s. up towards s.th.**

→ *allāh*, → *khalaqa*

***sawiyy* | even**

***sawā’* | evenness**

→ *sabīl*, → *ṣirāṭ*

***sāḥa fī l-ard* | to travel the earth, to journey through the land**

→ *sāra fī l-ard*

***sāra fī l-ard* | to travel the earth, to journey through the land**

***sayyara* tr. | to set s.th. in motion; to enable s.o. to travel**

Further vocabulary discussed: *ḍaraba/sāḥa fī l-ard* | to travel the earth, to journey through the land *’āqibah* | outcome *āyah* | sign



*Sāra fī l-ard* (Q 3:137, 6:11, 12:109, 16:36, 22:46, 27:69, 29:20, 30:9.42, 35:44, 40:21.82, 47:10), like *ḍaraba fī l-ard* (Q 2:273, 3:156, 4:101, 5:106, 73:20), is one of the expressions conveying the theme of humans' God-given ability to traverse the earth (→ *ard*).<sup>1</sup> The expression *sāra fī l-ard* in particular is frequent in invitations to the Qur'an's audience to behold the devastating "outcome" (*'āqibah*) engendered by the sins of previous communities (Q 3:137, 6:11, 12:109, 16:36, 27:69, 30:9.42, 35:44, 40:21.82, 47:10: *unẓurū/yanẓurū kayfa kāna 'āqibatu l-mukadhdhibīn / al-mujrimīn / alladhīna min qablihim* or the like), thus recasting the ruins of abandoned or destroyed settlements as "signs" of God's power to hold humans to account and to exact punishment from them (→ *āyah*).

The second-form verb *sayyara* occurs once in a statement praising God for facilitating human travel "by land and sea" (Q 10:22; → *ard*), but more commonly describes how God will "set in motion" the seemingly immovable mountains as part of the world's eschatological disintegration (Q 18:47, 78:20, 81:3; see also 13:31).

<sup>1</sup> See also Q 9:2 (*sāha fī l-ard*).

# sh

***mutashābih*** | resembling one another; indistinguishable; ambiguous

→ *bayyana*, → *mathānī*, → *jannah*

***shadda*** intr. *‘alā* | to harden s.th. (hearts)

See under → *qasā* (and note the semantic difference from *shadda* + acc., “to strengthen s.th.”; CDKA 146).

***sharaḥa ṣadrahu*** | to widen or open up s.o.’s breast

→ *ṣadr*, → *qalb*

***ashrāṭ*** pl. | signs, portents

→ *sā‘ah*

***shara‘a*** tr. *li-* | to institute or establish s.th. for s.o.

***shir‘ah*** | established practice or custom

See n. 34 under → *aslama*.

***ashraka*** tr. (*bi-*) | to associate s.o. (namely, a partner deity) with s.o. (namely, God), to venerate s.o. as a partner deity

***ashraka*** intr. (*bi-*) | to be an associator, to venerate associate deities, to attribute associates to God

***alladhīna ashrakū*, *al-mushrikūn*** pl. | the associators

***shirk*** | share; the sin of associating God with illicit partner deities, associationism

***sharīk*** | associate, partner deity

Further vocabulary discussed: *ghafara* tr./intr. (*li-*) | to forgive (s.o.) (s.th.) *fiṭrah* | creaturely disposition, creaturely constitution *alladhīna kafarū*, *al-kāfirūn*, *al-kuffār* pl. | the repudiators *al-mukadhdhibūn* pl. | the deniers, those who dismiss s.th. (namely, the resurrection and the afterlife) as a lie *alladhīna āmanū*, *al-mu‘minūn* pl. | the believers *al-yahūd* pl. | the Jews *al-naṣārā* pl. | the Christians *nuṣub* | sacrificial stone *ṣanam*, *wathan* | idol *al-ṣābi‘ūn* pl. | converts (to Manichaeism?) *al-majūs* pl. | the Magians *min dūn allāh* | besides God; instead of God *allāt* | Allāt

*al-‘uzzā* | *al-‘Uzzā* *manāt* | *Manāt* *jinn* coll. | demons, jinn *malak* | angel *mal-akūt* | kingship *andād* pl. | equals, rivals *walad* | offspring *shafa’a* intr. (‘*inda, li-*) | to intercede (with s.o., on behalf of s.o.) *shafī* | intercessor *qarraba* tr. *ilā* | to bring s.o. near s.o., to allow s.o. to come near s.o. *al-dunyā* | the proximate life *asātīr al-awwalīn* pl. | writs of the ancients, ancient scribblings *ba‘īd* | spatially distant; temporally distant; far-fetched, implausible, improbable *qarīb* | near *ghafala* intr. ‘*an* | to be heedless of s.th. *ghaflah* | heedlessness *kadhhaba* intr. *bi-* | to dismiss s.th. as a lie *tawallā* intr. (‘*an*) | to turn away (from s.o.), to turn one’s back (to s.o.) *āyah* | sign *nazzala, anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down *ab* | father, forefather *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *banū isrā’īl* pl. | the Israelites

**Overview.** Much of the Qur’an, especially the Meccan Qur’an, is engaged in polemical altercations with a group of opponents who are accused of “associating” or “partnering” (*ashraka*) other gods with Allāh and on whom Gerald Hawting and Patricia Crone have done pivotal work (Hawting 1999, 45–66; *QP*). By contrast with the Qur’an’s own insistence, from the end of the early Meccan period onwards, that Allāh is the only divine being to be served and venerated, the opponents attacked in the Meccan surahs worship a plurality of divine partner gods or “associates” (*shurakā*’; e.g., Q 13:16.33, 16:27.86, 28:62.64.74; for the singular *sharīk*, see Q 6:163, 17:111, and 25:2). As two Medinan verses stress, “associating” or “partnering” some other being with God is the one cardinal sin that God will not forgive (Q 4:48.116: *inna llāha lā yaghfiru an yushraka bihi wa-yaghfiru mā dūna dhālika li-man yashā’u*). From the vantage point of the late Qur’an, therefore, the transgression of associationism ranks in severity above any other human misdeed, and “whoever associates [anything] with God, God will deny him the garden [of paradise], and his refuge will be the fire” (Q 5:72: *innahu man yushrik bi-llāhi fa-qad ḥarrama llāhu ‘alayhi l-jannata wa-ma’wāhu l-nāru*). The error or, as one might say, heresy of associationism is an ancient one (Linnhoff 2020, 20): it blighted the religious praxis of “most” earlier communities (Q 30:42; see also 40:82–84), including the people of Pharaoh (Q 40:42), and miscellaneous past figures like Abraham, Joseph, Hūd, and Luqmān are accordingly depicted as steadfastly refusing to “associate” anything else with God (e.g., Q 6:78–81, 11:54, 12:38, 16:123, 22:26, 31:13). Indeed, the tendency to lapse into associationism appears almost like a congenital human weakness, a disastrous predisposition to deny God’s uniqueness that conflicts with and continuously threatens to undermine humans’ immanent teleological orientation towards monotheism, which Q 30:30 describes as their divinely given “creaturely constitution” (*fiṭrah*; see under → *ḥanīf*).

It is clear that the Qur’an’s interest in highlighting past cases of associationism and of resistance to it stems from its polemical dispute with contemporary associators. These figure both as *al-mushrikūn* (e.g., Q 2:105.135.221, 41:6, 42:13) and as *alladhīna ashrakū* (e.g., Q 2:96, 3:186, 5:82, 16:35.86), two expressions that are effectively synonymous (Reuschel 1996, 143–156). References to “the repudiators” (*alladhīna kafarū*; → *kafara*) and also to “the deniers” (*al-mukadhhibūn*; e.g., Q 52:11, 77:15.19.24 etc., and 83:10; → *kadhhaba*) are reasonably considered to be alternative designations of roughly the same group.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> The proximity of *kafara* and *ashraka* emerges, e.g., from Q 3:151, 24:55, 40:42, or 52:42–43. See also Q 9:3, which refers both to “the associators” and “the repudiators.” On the proximity of *sh-r-k* and *kadhhaba*, see Q 6:148, 40:70.73, or 68:41.44.

noun *mushrik*, “associator,” occurs once in the so-called Constitution of Medina (Lecker 2004, § 23), in opposition to *mu'min*, “believer” (see under → *āmana*), and apparently with regard to pagan inhabitants of Medina. This is reminiscent of the manner in which “the believers” and “the associators” figure as separate collective identities in the Medinan verses Q 2:221, 5:82, 9:28.113, or 22:17.<sup>2</sup> Elsewhere in the Constitution of Medina (§ 15), “believers” are opposed to “repudiators,” which further supports the referential equivalence of “associators” and “repudiators.” A number of Medinan verses unequivocally distinguish “the associators” from Jews (→ *al-yahūd*) and from Christians (→ *al-naṣārā*; e.g., Q 5:82; see also Gimaret 1997, 485). This bolsters the claim, further developed below, that when the Qur’an speaks of “the associators” as a concrete collective, the expression is not merely a cipher for Jews or Christians who are deemed to fall short of the Qur’an’s own conception of monotheism.

Given the length of the present entry, it is expedient to supply an introductory epitome of the ground to be covered in what follows. After beginning with an examination of the chronologically earliest Qur’anic occurrences of the root *sh-r-k*, I go on to discuss the deities venerated by Muhammad’s associating opponents and to identify particular beliefs that were likely held or rejected by these opponents. Based on this doxographic profile, and in line with an earlier publication (*HCI* 65–72), I infer that the Qur’anic associators are best viewed as syncretistic pagans. This general line of argument, it must be conceded, presupposes that we may responsibly attempt to combine what different Qur’anic passages say about Muhammad’s “associating” or “repudiating” opponents into a unitary theological profile, rather than supposing from the outset that we are faced with distinct groups of antagonists who held different and potentially incompatible beliefs.<sup>3</sup> Still, the assumption that the Qur’an is by and large concerned with the same set of associating adversaries throughout is, I would submit, retrospectively borne out by the fact that the approach just described yields a reasonably coherent theology, even though the possibility of some measure of doctrinal heterogeneity among the associators will be duly noted.

The following analysis, then, accepts—at least for the sake of argument—that the Qur’anic habit of referring to “the associators” as if they constitute a fairly unitary group of opponents sharing the same basic outlook on things divine does not speciously lump together a variety of doctrinally heterogeneous factions. It is nonetheless vital not to overlook that the label as such is very unlikely to be a neutral reflection of the manner in which the opponents in questions were wont to define themselves: the notion of illicit “association,” like that of “repudiation,” is a polemical concept, and it is in fact quite probable that the associators did not primarily identify themselves in religious (as opposed to tribal) terms at all.<sup>4</sup> This makes it pertinent to wonder whence the Qur’an’s polemical

2 “Believing” in God or in his signs and “associating” other beings with him function as antonyms already in Meccan passages like Q 23:58–59, 29:7–9, 40:84, or 72:2. But see Q 12:106: “Most of them do not believe in God without associating [other beings with him].” This could suggest that associationism is not as such incompatible with some measure of belief in God, even though it will of course gravely taint such belief.

3 This premise is astutely identified in Linnhoff 2020, 33.

4 Linnhoff observes that Q 6:148 has the associators themselves employ the language of association, by anticipating that they “will say” (*sa-yaqūlu lladhīna ashrakū*), “Had God willed, neither we nor our forefathers would have associated [anything with him], and we would not have declared anything to be forbidden” (*law shā’a llāhu mā ashraknā wa-lā ābā’unā wa-lā ḥarramnā min shay’in*; Linnhoff 2020, 34–35). But even if the associators did indeed express themselves in the very same terms quoted in Q 6:148, it is likely that the utterance is reactive and adopts Qur’anic diction. It should also be noted that Q 16:35 and 43:20 cite what is in substance the same

notion of associationism may have originated, and the final sections of this entry will attempt to show, based on an observation by Josef Horowitz, that the closest parallels to the Qur’anic concept of associationism are found in rabbinic literature. An important aspect of the Qur’anic use of *ashraka* that is discussed elsewhere in this dictionary is the word’s recurring appearance in opposition to the religious stance of Abraham, who is repeatedly said to have been “no associator” (Q 2:135, 3:67.95, 6:79.161, 16:120.123; *wa-mā kāna mina l-mushrikīn* or similarly; see under → *ḥanīf*).

**“Polytheist,” “idolater,” or “associators”?** Before embarking on a more detailed analysis, a remark concerning my preferred translation of *mushrik* as “associator” is in order. Many English translations opt for “polytheist” or “idolater” instead. Thus, Arberry and Droge generally render *alladhīna ashrakū* and *al-mushrikūn* as “the idolaters,” even if they employ “to associate” for other occurrences of the verb *ashraka*. Their general policy may be a carry-over from Bell, even though the latter vacillates between “idolater” and “polytheist” (e.g., Bell 1937, 1:51, on Q 3:60 = 3:67, and Bell 1937, 1:173, on Q 9:1–7). Yet as Hawting observes quite rightly, the literal meaning of the verb *ashraka* or the noun *shirk*, which is twice in the Qur’an employed as if it were the verbal noun of *ashraka* (Q 31:13, 35:14),<sup>5</sup> is neither “idolatry” nor “polytheism” (Hawting 1999, 48–49; see also Linnhoff 2020, 22).

“Idolatry,” of course, is an intrinsically inimical and also imprecise category. But even if one were to disregard this and seek to define the term analytically as the religious worship of statues or other artefacts, there is little positive evidence in the Qur’an that artefact-worship was in fact the most prominent aspect of the associators’ ritual life: though they are linked with sacrificial stones (singular: *nuṣub*), references to “idols” properly speaking (singular: *ṣanam* or *wathan*) are almost exclusively confined to the distant past, the one possible exception being a call to “shun the impurity of idols” in Q 22:30 (for more detail, see under → *dhabāḥa*). This is not necessarily to say that statues representing deities and worshipped as such did not have a place in the cultic practices current in the Qur’anic milieu; but it is vital to avoid giving English readers of the Qur’an the mistaken impression that the question whether Muhammad’s Meccan adversaries were engaged in practices qualifying as “idolatrous” (whatever that might be) can be settled merely by pointing to the Qur’an’s frequent mentions of *alladhīna ashrakū* and *al-mushrikūn*. The fact that the Qur’anic notion of *shirk* cannot be equated with idolatry in any literal sense is, moreover, evident in verses that apply the concept of *shirk* to the Christian divinisation of Jesus Christ (Q 5:72, 9:31) and to an alleged Jewish and Christian penchant to set up religious dignitaries as “lords besides God” (*arbāban min dūni llāhi*; Q 9:31; cf. 3:64).<sup>6</sup> The accusation at stake is evidently not that Christians worship graven images of Jesus but rather that they posit the existence of a divine being other than the creator Allāh.

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argument (to wit: God, being omnipotent, could have put a stop to the worship of other deities; therefore, their cult may be regarded to have received God’s approval), but do so without recourse to the verb *ashraka*, employing *‘abada* (“to serve, to worship”) instead. In light of this, it is conceivable that in employing the verb *ashraka*, Q 6:148 is reformulating the associators’ argument in Qur’anic language. The same would seem to be the case in Q 16:86, where the associators are depicted, at the moment of their posthumous judgement, as pointing out to God “our associates (*shurakā’unā*), upon whom we used to call besides you.” On Q 6:148, 16:35, and 43:20, see also under → *ab*.

<sup>5</sup> But see Q 34:22, 35:40, and 46:4, where *shirk* refers to the false deities’ non-existing “share” or “partnership” in the heavens and the earth. On *shirk* in the sense of *ishrāk*, see also Gimaret 1997, 485, noting that it is the *ḥadīth* “which has imposed the usage of *shirk* in the factive (and religious) sense of the term.”

<sup>6</sup> On the phrase *min dūn allāh*, see generally Ambros 2001 and also below.

Other reservations apply to the word “polytheist.” It is true that the Qur’anic *mushrikūn* are unequivocally portrayed as upholding the existence of a plurality of deities (*ālihah*; e.g., Q 6:19, 38:5–6, 43:58), and in this sense calling them “polytheists” has a greater degree of explicit textual backing than calling them “idolaters.” But even so, “polytheism” is apt to evoke the idea of a pantheon whose members could at least in principle act in discord and at cross-purposes, similar to the mythical squabbles between the gods of ancient Greece. Yet as we shall see below, the deities besides Allāh who were worshipped by the Qur’anic *mushrikūn* have a squarely subordinate and intermediate status that is more reminiscent of angels or Christian saints than of the waywardness of classical Greek gods. Hence, the translation “polytheist,” too, has disadvantages, quite apart from the fact that it fails to signal that the Arabic expressions *alladhīna ashrakū* and *al-mushrikūn* are derived from the verb *ashraka*. A more satisfactory approach, therefore, is to adopt periphrastic translations like “those who associate others with God” (Jones 2007) or “those who ascribe divinity to other beings beside God” (Asad 1980).<sup>7</sup> The present work follows a similar approach, though I abbreviate “those who associate others with God” to “the associators.”

**The earliest Qur’anic occurrences of *ashraka* and *mushrik*.** Assuming that mean verse length is an approximate indicator of the relative chronology of Qur’anic surahs, the earliest occurrences of the verb *ashraka* and the plural noun *shurakā*, “associates,” may well be the early Meccan verses Q 52:43 and 68:41.<sup>8</sup> The former passage asks whether “they”—i.e., the Qur’anic opponents whom the preceding verse, v. 42, also describes as “the repudiators” (*alladhīna kafarū*; → *kafara*)—“have a god other than God” and then adds, “Glory be to God above what they associate [with him]” (*subhāna llāhi ‘ammā yushrikūn*). Q 68:41, meanwhile, interrogates the Qur’anic opponents whether they have “associates” and then challenges them to “produce their associates if they speak the truth” (*am lahum shurakā’u fa-l-ya’tū bi-shurakā’ihim in kānū ṣādiqīn*). Both verses are roughly contemporary with passages reflecting the early Qur’an’s seminal shift to explicit assertions of monotheism and an unequivocal denial of deities other than Allāh (Q 37:4, 51:51, 53:19–22, 73:9; see Paret 1957, 62, 92–94, and *HCI* 174–176).<sup>9</sup> Within the Qur’an, therefore, the concept of an illicit “partnering” of God with other beings surfaces in close temporal conjunction with the Qur’an’s incipient criticism of worshipping beings other than Allāh. It is very clear already from the passages just examined that the concept of “associating” or “partnering” has a polemical thrust: the label is one that is deployed from the vantage point of Qur’anic monotheism.

The emergence of the collective label “the associators” is secondary to the first appearance of the verb *ashraka* and the plural *shurakā* in the context of anti-polytheistic polemics. The putatively earliest occurrence of a plural form of the active participle *mushrik* is Q 15:94,<sup>10</sup> commanding the Messenger to “turn away from those who associate” (*wa-a’riḍ ‘ani l-mushrikīn*), whom v. 96 further describes as “those who set up some other god with God.” This is in fact the only early Meccan occurrence of *mushrik*, and subsequent references to

7 Similarly Zirker 2018. On a few occasions, Jones does plump for “the polytheists” instead (e.g., Jones 2007, on Q 9:1.3–7.17.28, 98:1.6). This could be due to the residual influence of Bell’s translation.

8 The mean verse length of Surah 52 (excepting v. 21, which is probably an addition) is 38.35 transliteration letters, while that of Surah 68 is 37.04 (see *HCI* 114–117).

9 The mean verse length of Surah 37 is 31.20 transliteration letters, that of Surah 51 is 37.77, that of Surah 53 (not taking into account vv. 23 and 26–32) is 24.09, and that of Surah 73 (excluding v. 20) is 41.11.

10 The mean verse length of Surah 15 is 43.12 transliteration letters.



“those who associate” (*al-mushrikūn*) all occur in surahs with a considerably higher mean verse length (e.g., Q 30:31.42).<sup>11</sup> It merits noting that all three occurrences of the plural participle *al-mushrikūn* just referenced (Q 15:94 and 30:31.42) do not necessarily reference “the *mushrikūn*” as a reified collective label yet, and it would be contextually quite appropriate to render the word simply as “people who associate” in these passages. By the Medinan period, however, this has changed, as illustrated by Q 22:17, where “the associators” figure alongside a number of other religious communities, namely, the Qur’anic “believers,” the Jews, the → *ṣābi’ūn*, the Christians, and the “Magians” or Zoroastrians (*al-majūs*; cf. Syriac *mgūshē*). Hence, it is almost certainly Qur’anic discourse that progressively constructs “the associators” as a quasi-communal identity on a par with Judaism or Christianity. That this corresponded in any way to the self-understanding of the associators themselves is, at the very least, uncertain.

**Which partner deities did the Qur’anic associators worship?** As Crone has underlined, the Qur’anic charge of illicit theological association does not mean that the associators accorded no veneration at all to Allāh. Rather, they venerated their partner deities together “with” (*ma’a*) him (Q 6:19, 15:96, 17:22.39, and 72:18; see *QP* 52–101, especially 61–64). Other passages condemn the worship of deities *min dūn allāh*, which for contextual reasons is often best understood as “besides God” (i.e., as roughly equivalent to *ma’a*) rather than “instead of God” (e.g., Q 11:54–55, 16:35, and 39:3.43; see Ambros 2001 and also *QP* 61–62).<sup>12</sup> In fact, as we shall see in more detail below, the associators clearly recognised Allāh as the creator and supreme deity and would sometimes appeal directly to him rather than to their partner deities.

Who were the associate gods worshipped besides Allāh? They are almost never identified, which is likely to be a deliberate device (cf. Chabbi 2020, 54). Two exceptions are Q 53:19–20 and 71:23. The former passage lists three goddesses who according to extra-Qur’anic sources had designated sanctuaries in the wider region around Mecca, namely, Allāt (worshipped at al-Ṭā’if by the tribe of Thaḳīf, among others), al-‘Uzzā (whom the Quraysh worshipped at a tree sanctuary at Nakhlah, between Mecca and al-Ṭā’if), and Manāt (worshipped at Qudayd between Mecca and Medina, inter alia by the Medinan tribes of Aws and Khazraj). Literary and epigraphic sources show that Allāt in particular was venerated well beyond the Ḥijāz, for instance, by the Nabataeans or the authors of the Safaitic inscriptions (*RAH* 24–45; Krone 1992; Ammann 2001, 21; Dost 2017, 27–44). A second Qur’anic passage containing names of pagan deities, Q 71:23, enumerates a number of gods allegedly venerated by the people of Noah. They include the South Arabian deity Wadd and should probably also be considered “local Arabian deities” who are retrojected to the time of Noah (Dost 2017, 44–50; see also *RAH* 13–24; for some references to Wadd/Wudd in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, see Sinai 2019b, 19, 23, and 54–55). In sum, the Qur’an offers at least limited evidence that the beings revered by its associating opponents were pagan—i.e., non-Jewish and non-Christian—Arabian and Near Eastern deities. To the two passages just discussed one might add two others providing indirect evidence that the worship of celestial bodies was not unknown in the Qur’anic milieu (*QP* 56): Q 41:37 warns against prostrating oneself before the sun and the moon (cf. Deut 4:19), and Q 27:24

<sup>11</sup> The mean verse length of Surah 30 is 87.2 transliteration letters.

<sup>12</sup> However, there are also cases in which “instead of God” is the more appropriate rendering of *min dūn allāh*, such as Q 4:119 and 18:50 (Ambros 2001, 11).

reports that the subjects of the queen of Saba' prostrated themselves to the sun besides, or instead of (*min dūn*), God (see Ambros 2001, 12). Some form of astral worship may also form the background to Q 53:49, which declares that God is "the Lord of Sirius" (*rabb al-shi'rā*), perhaps by way of rejecting worship of the star itself.<sup>13</sup>

While the Qur'an contains only scant data allowing us to glimpse the identity of the associators' deities in terms that would have been employed by Muhammad's opponents themselves, the Islamic scripture intimates quite frequently how the social fact of polytheistic worship is to be construed from a Qur'anic vantage point. As Crone points out (QP 72–77), we are in fact confronted with more than one such account (though these explanations are not necessarily incompatible, in so far as different construals could be applied to different cults). One approach, which one might have expected to be the dominant one, is simply to dismiss the associators' false deities as non-existent figments of the human imagination. This is, however, relatively infrequent: three verses call the false deities mere "names that you<sup>p</sup> have devised, you and your forefathers" (Q 7:71, 12:40, 53:23: *asmā' sammaytumūhā antum wa-ābā'ukum*), and Q 40:74 predicts that the associators will eventually, at the last judgement, admit that what they used to call upon was in fact nothing (*bal lam nakun nad'ū min qablu shay'an*; see QP 75).<sup>14</sup> More commonly, the Qur'an does not deny that the beings whom the associators regard as deities do in fact exist and only takes issue with the divine status imputed to them (Welch 1979, 738; Hawting 1999, 51). This is obvious, for instance, in Q 25:3 (discussed in Welch 1979, 738), where it is said that the deities who are worshipped besides God "create nothing and are themselves created." The declaration that the associators' objects of worship are themselves "created" recurs in Q 7:191 and 16:20, in the former case followed by the statement, in 7:194, that "those whom you<sup>p</sup> call upon besides God are servants [of him] like you" (*inna lladhīna tad'ūna min dūni llāhi 'ibādun amthālukum*).<sup>15</sup> What the associators worship, then, is not simply nothing; rather, what they worship are other rational agents, that is, beings who will face divine judgement just like their devotees.

That the false deities exist, albeit not *qua* deities, is entailed with particular clarity by a number of passages depicting how the associators will, again on the occasion of the eschatological judgement, be brought face to face with the "associates" (*shurakā'*) they used to worship, who are portrayed as disowning their erstwhile votaries and as failing to respond to their appeals for help (Q 10:28–29, 16:86–87, 18:52, 19:81–82, 28:62–64, 30:13, 35:14, 46:5–6; cf. also 6:22–23, 16:27, 37:22–23, 41:47–48; see on this material Welch

13 Cf. also the scene in Q 6:76–79, where Abraham briefly pays homage to a star, the moon, and the sun. Another potentially relevant verse is Q 37:125, where Elijah (*ilyās*) asks his people, "Do you call upon Baal?" In view of an inscription in mixed Safaitic-Hismaic script that may contain echoes of the myth of Baal (Al-Jallad 2015b), it is conceivable, therefore, that Q 37:125, like 71:23, could tell us something about the deities venerated in the Qur'anic milieu, despite being set in the past. I owe this point to Saqib Hussain.

14 Crone also references Q 37:86 and 46:28, which denounce the associators' belief in other deities as a lie (*ifk*), but this is less unequivocal (cf. the use of *ifk* in Q 37:151). The lie involved might simply consist in untruthfully identifying certain beings as deities rather than in untruthfully positing the existence of beings that do not exist in the first place.

15 On the meaning of *min dūn allāh* here, see Ambros 2001, 12–13 (inclining marginally towards "instead of"). As Crone notes (QP 73–74), Q 7:191 occurs in connection with language that is reminiscent of Biblical polemics against idols as impotent human artefacts (cf. Q 7:195 and Ps 115:4–8, 135:15–18, for which Crone credits Joseph Witztum). However, to say that the false deities are "servants" of God (Q 7:194) or that they will be resurrected (Q 16:21) clearly presupposes that they are more than just artefacts. As Crone puts it, the Qur'an is here "using the old language of polemics against idolatry in a situation in which physical idols are no longer the issue" (QP 74).

1979, 737–738). An interesting variant of this motif is found in Q 34:40–41: on the day on which God will assemble everyone for judgement, God will ask the angels whether it is they whom those destined for damnation used to worshipped; the angels, however, will protest that the real objects of the unbelievers’ veneration were the jinn or demons (on which see under → *jinn*). A similar dialogue between God and the angels is staged in Q 25:17–18.<sup>16</sup> That the Qur’an is identifying the real objects of the associators’ rituals with the jinn also emerges from other verses, such as Q 6:100, 37:158, and 72:6 (see again under → *jinn*). Moreover, it tallies well with Q 21:98–99 and 37:22–23. In both of these passages, the wrongdoers are dispatched to hell together with “that which they used to serve” (Q 37:22: *mā kānū ya’budūn*; 21:98: *mā ta’budūna min dūni llāhi*); the point being made is surely not that it is the angels who will be sentenced to damnation. In addition, the Qur’an sometimes reveals a certain presumption that the recipients of illicit polytheistic worship are likely to have been complicit in the veneration accorded to them. Thus, Q 25:17 has God interrogate the angels whether they bear responsibility for having misled polytheistic worshippers (*a-antum aḍlaltum ‘ibādī hā’ulā’i am hum ḍallū l-sabīlā*). This presumption of complicity fits the jinn—who like humans can be righteous or wayward (see under → *jinn*)—much better than angels, whom the Qur’an considers to be invariably obedient to God (see under → *malak*). The upshot, in any case, is that the Qur’an is construing the associators’ rituals not as targeting, as it were, pure nothingness but rather as addressing beings who are real but do not deserve veneration. As Hawting aptly notes, such an account of polytheistic rituals has Biblical precedent (Hawting 1999, 51): “what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons” (1 Cor 10:20; cf. Deut 32:17).

Other passages, though, give the impression that the objects of the associators’ worship are not jinn but rather angels (*QP* 74). Thus, Q 43:19 complains that the opponents “turn the angels, who are servants of the Merciful, into females,” while 53:27 protests that “those who do not believe in the hereafter call the angels by female names (*la-yusammūna l-malā’ikata tasmiyata l-unthā*).” The charge of worshipping female angels, belief in whom is also denounced in Q 17:40 and 37:149–153, fits the fact that, judging by Q 53:19–20, at least some of the associators’ deities—Allāt, al-‘Uzzā, and Manāt—were female. Yet why would the Qur’an equate the associators’ goddesses with angels, though angels misconstrued as females, or at least entertain such an equation? Most likely, the concept of angels entered into the debate about what, if anything, the associators were really worshipping because it was the associators themselves who cast their female deities as angels (against Welch 1979, 740; see also the discussion under → *malak*). In fact, the supposition that the associators conceptualised their female deities as angels cogently accounts for three different types of Qur’anic statements: it explains why the Qur’an finds it necessary to maintain that the associators’ rituals are directed at non-angelic, demonic beings (e.g., Q 6:100) rather than at real angels, who are presumably not female (Q 34:40–41); it explains why Q 25:17–18 raise, and rule out, the possibility that the angels might have encouraged the worship they receive; and it explains why the Qur’an repeatedly accuses the associators of having a faulty—specifically, a misgendered—conception of the nature of angels (e.g., Q 43:19).

<sup>16</sup> God’s interlocutors are not explicitly identified as angels in Q 25:17–18, but the wording of the interlocutors’ response in Q 25:18 (*qālū subḥānaka mā kāna yanbaghī lanā an nattakhidha min dūnika min awliyā’a*) is sufficiently similar to 34:41 (*qālū subḥānaka anta waliyyunā min dūnihim*) in order to warrant identifying them with the angels mentioned in 34:40.

**The associators' recognition of Allāh as a supreme deity.** Despite the trenchancy of the Qur'an's polemical attacks on the associators, it is crucial to appreciate that the theological views attributed to them agree with Qur'anic doctrine in one important respect: as noted above and observed already by Muḥammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (Hawting 1999, 81–82), the associators were by no means opposed to recognising Allāh as a supreme deity. Thus, several verses formulaically assert that the Messenger's antagonists believed God to be the creator of the world: "If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they will say, 'God'" (Q 31:25 and 39:38: *wa-la-in sa'altahum man khalaqa l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa la-yaqūlunna llāhu*; see similarly 29:61 and 43:9). In a similar manner, the Messenger's adversaries are depicted as conceding that God has created humans (Q 43:87), that he "made the sun and the moon subservient" (Q 29:61), that he "sends down rain from the sky" (Q 29:63), and that he reigns over the earth and the heavens and exercises kingly dominion (*malakūt*) over everything (Q 23:84–89). In view of such verses, the Qur'anic associators do not seem to have considered the partner deities venerated by them to have been involved in the creation of the cosmos (*QP* 59–61), even if Q 7:190 accuses the Qur'anic opponents of crediting their associate deities with bestowing children. Thus, when verses like Q 13:16 ask, "Have they assigned associates to God who have created as he has created?" (*am ja' alū li-llāhi shurakā'a khalaqū ka-khalqihī*; see also Q 10:34, 35:40, 46:4), the point is probably not that the opponents maintain that there are co-creators with Allāh; rather, the Qur'an is arguing that if there were any other deities besides Allāh, they would thereby need to be considered co-creators, a conclusion assumed to be absurd even from the associators' own perspective.<sup>17</sup>

In a handful of passages, the Qur'an condemns those who "assign equals to God" (*ja'ala li-llāhi andādan*; see Q 2:22, 14:30, 34:33, 39:8, 41:9; cf. also 2:165: *man yattakhidhu min dūni llāhi andādan*). The *nidd* of someone or something is commonly said to be his or its "like" (e.g., *AEL* 2778), and translators tend to render the plural *andād* as "equals" or "rivals." This may generate the impression that the Qur'anic verses just referenced are contending with opponents who recognised a plurality of deities who were credited with the same rank and authority as Allāh. However, closer analysis reveals that the phrase *ja'ala li-llāhi andādan* should not be pressed to yield insight into the structure of the associators' pantheon. For the Qur'an otherwise supplies fairly unequivocal evidence that the associators considered their partner deities to rank below Allāh. Thus, apart from the fact that Allāh's status as the world's creator appears to have gone unchallenged, some opponents are taken to task for ascribing "offspring" (*walad*) or daughters to Allāh (e.g., Q 16:57, 21:26, 43:16; see *QP* 57).<sup>18</sup> Whether or not this involved any literal notion of genealogical descent, to call certain deities "daughters of Allāh" would have been a way of casting them as divine yet inferior to Allāh (*RAH* 24; *HCI* 68). Moreover, we saw above that the Qur'anic adversaries are presented as positing and venerating female angels, which also points to a theology of subordination. It stands to reason that such talk of Allāh's daughters and of female angels primarily intended the pagan goddesses Allāt, al-'Uzzā, and Manāt, whose names we encountered in Q 53:19–22.<sup>19</sup> Likewise suggestive of subordination are verses

17 As Crone puts it, the Qur'anic Messenger is here "confronting his opponents with the (to him) absurd implications of their own beliefs," since to him "absence of creative powers implied absence of divinity" (*QP* 60).

18 The claim that God has no offspring (*walad*) can also be directed against the Christians. This seems clearest in Q 4:171 and 19:35.

19 Bowersock holds that there is no reason to assume that Allāt, al-'Uzzā, and Manāt were seen as Allāh's daughters (Bowersock 2013, 99). It is true that the idea is not attested in the rather extensive amount of epigraphic

according to which the associators describe their partner deities as “our intercessors (*shufa’ā*, singular: *shafī*) with God” (Q 10:18; see also, e.g., 6:94, 30:13, 39:43–44, and 43:86) and as serving to bring humans closer (*qarraba*) to him (Q 39:3, cf. 46:28; *QP* 58–59).<sup>20</sup> The ideas of intercession and mediation would have been readily applicable to deities other than Allāt, al-‘Uzzā, and Manāt, thus enabling the associators to uphold Allāh’s primacy over a pantheon that was in principle capable of unlimited expansion. In view of all this, it stands to reason that the charge of “setting up equals with God” involves polemical hyperbole: from the Qur’anic perspective, to accord worship to any other being than Allāh is to posit an intolerable rivalry between the true God and a range of pseudo-deities, however much the latter’s adherents might have accepted that Allāh occupied a supreme rank.

Despite the associators’ general tendency to approach God through intermediaries, they also appealed directly to Allāh. They are, for instance, portrayed as seeking Allāh’s assistance on sea voyages and in situations of distress (Q 6:63–64, 10:22–23, 17:67–69, 29:65, 31:32; see *QP* 62–63).<sup>21</sup> God was also asked to grant healthy children (Q 7:189–190). Sacrifices of agricultural produce and of livestock were divided up between Allāh and the partner deities imputed to him (Q 6:136), which means that to the associators Allāh was by no means a *deus otiosus*, or a high god who is not an object of direct worship (*QP* 80; see also Sinai 2019b, 30 and 51–52). Given Allāh’s status as a creator, the intermediary and subordinate position of other deities, Allāh’s ability to intervene directly in the world, and the possibility of appealing directly to Allāh rather than going through subordinate gods, it is not indefensible to characterise the Qur’anic associators too as espousing a type of monotheism (e.g., *QP* 63, 77), though their understanding of the divine exhibits crucial differences from the Qur’anic one: “the [Qur’anic] Messenger saw a stark contrast between God and everything else whereas the pagans saw divinity as a spectrum” (*QP* 61; see also under → *allāh*).

**The associators’ denial of and/or lack of concern with the resurrection.** Apart from the associators’ graded conception of the divine, which the Qur’anic proclamations only begin to reject in an explicit fashion from the end of the early Meccan period onwards, the Qur’an’s doctrinal disagreement with the associators centres on two further issues. The first one is the Meccan opponents’ rejection of the Qur’anic Messenger’s claim to convey divine revelations (e.g., Q 10:2; see *HCI* 177). The second one, which requires more detailed discussion, is the opponents’ denial of an eschatological resurrection and divine judgement (*QP* 125–182). According to a number of passages, Muhammad’s Meccan

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data that is available for these three goddesses. However, the notion is implied rather unequivocally by Q 53:21–22 (thus also *QP* 56, dismissed without a convincing argument in Bowersock 2013, 100). I have elsewhere conjectured that an explicit subordination of Allāt, al-‘Uzzā, and Manāt to Allāh was likely a local Meccan development, serving to uphold the primacy of the Meccan sanctuary and its patron deity Allāh over other gods and associated cultic sites (*HCI* 69–70 and Sinai 2019b, 56; see also the following section of the entry). For an assertion of Allāh’s supremacy over Allāt and al-‘Uzzā in a poem attributed to Aws ibn Ḥajar, see Geyer 1892, no. 11:2 (briefly discussed in Sinai 2019b, 55). This poetic proof-text is admittedly isolated and therefore not above suspicion.

20 Although various Qur’anic passages address the question of intercession with God in the context of the eschatological judgement (e.g., Q 43:86), this does not show that the associators considered the intercessory powers they attributed to their subordinate deities to be eschatological, seeing that they did not accept the notion of a resurrection and eschatological judgement (see below). See also Q 36:23, which makes clear that the general issue at stake is that the intercession of any alleged deities other than or besides God will be of no avail “if the Merciful intends something harmful for me” (*in yuridni l-rahmānu bi-durrin*).

21 This has been described as “temporary monotheism” (*GMK* 102), but this notion is convincingly critiqued by Crone (*QP* 63).



adversaries were adamant that “there is nothing except our proximate life” (Q 6:29, 23:37, 45:24: *in/mā hiya illā ḥayātunā l-dunyā*) and that they would not be resurrected (Q 6:29, 23:37: *mā naḥnu bi-mab’ūthīn*). Q 16:38 complains that “they”—presumably linking back to the explicit reference to “the associators” (*alladhīna ashrakū*) in v. 35—“swear by God their strongest oaths that God does not resurrect someone who dies” (*wa-aqsamū bi-llāhi jahda aymānihim lā yab’athu llāhu man yamūtu*). The Meccan opponents are also frequently and formulaically quoted as posing the rhetorical question whether they are going to be recreated or raised from the dead after having become “earth” or “bones and fragments,” the thrust being clearly that such a scenario involves manifest absurdity (e.g., Q 13:5: *a-idhā kunnā turāban a-innā la-fī khalqin jadīdin*, and 17:49.98: *a-idhā kunnā ‘izāman wa-rufātan a-innā la-mab’ūthūna khalqan jadīdā*).<sup>22</sup> The Meccan surahs, one gathers, were faced with a wall of eschatological doubt, and indeed from very early on the Qur’anic proclamations attack those guilty of “dismissing the judgement as a lie” (e.g., Q 82:9, 83:10–12; → *kadhhaba*). The cause for this dispute was not, it must be underlined, that the associators were unfamiliar with the notion of an eschatological judgement, for Muhammad’s opponents frequently dismiss this idea as “ancient scribblings” (e.g., Q 23:82–83, 27:67–68; → *asāfir al-awwalīn*) and as something that “has been pledged to us and our forefathers before” (Q 23:83, 27:68; see also *HCI* 164–165). Parenthetically, the associators’ denial of an eschatological resurrection does not preclude that they may have accepted that the spirit of a deceased human was capable of a spectre-like afterlife and might, for instance, continue to haunt his grave in the form of an owl crying out to be avenged. This belief, which is well attested in pre-Islamic poetry (Homerin 1985), should not be conflated with the Judaeo-Christian idea of a universal resurrection of the dead at the end of history and a subsequent moral judgement by God, leading to reward in paradise and punishment in hell.

That denial of the resurrection was a universal characteristic of the Qur’anic opponents has been questioned by Crone, who maintains that “there were infidels who believed in the day of judgement without paying much attention to it” (*QP* 125–126). Her weightiest piece of evidence is Q 70:6–7: “They see it as something distant; // we see it as something near” (*innahum yarawnahu ba’idā // wa-narāhu qarībā*). *Qarīb* must certainly mean “temporally near” here, in line with quite a few other verses (e.g., Q 21:1.97.109, 33:63, 42:17, 54:1, 72:25, 78:40; see also under → *sā’ah*), and Q 21:109 clearly opposes *qarīb* and *ba’id* in the sense of “temporally near” and “temporally distant.”<sup>23</sup> This would support taking *ba’id* to mean “temporally distant” in Q 70:6 as well. On the other hand, in Q 50:3, a parallel also acknowledged by Crone, *ba’id* is best understood construed to mean “far-fetched,” “improbable,” or “implausible.” Here, the Qur’anic adversaries declare, “When we have died and become earth—that would be a far-fetched return!” (*a-idhā mitnā wa-kunnā turāban dhālika raj’un ba’id*). The statement is elliptical, in so far as it omits the sceptical question “Shall we be resurrected?” (*a-innā la-mab’ūthūna*) that follows the temporal clause introduced by *a-idhā* in many other verses. In view of the relevant parallels, the speakers in Q 50:3 must be deniers of the resurrection rather than merely proponents of the view that the resurrection was perfectly real but simply a long way off. In light of Q 50:3, therefore, 70:6 is best taken to mean, “They see it as something far-fetched” rather than “as something

<sup>22</sup> See also Q 23:35.82, 27:67, 37:16.53, 50:3 (discussed further below), and 56:47.

<sup>23</sup> On *ba’id*, see *CDKA* 41.



that is a long way off.” Viewed from this perspective, the couplet Q 70:6–7 may involve a pun on the ambiguity of *baʿīd*: after relaying the opponents’ dismissal of God’s eschatological judgement as something improbable, v. 7 not only asserts its facticity but in fact its proximity, by employing a qualifier (*qarīb*) that is the antonym of *baʿīd* in its sense of spatial or temporal distance (though not in its sense of unlikeliness). Accordingly, one ought to resist the temptation to press the Qur’anic wording for univocality here and instead accept that *baʿīd* in Q 70:6 blends connotations of temporal distance and improbability.

It is in any case not likely that denial of the resurrection had a downright credal status for the Qur’anic opponents. More probably, the adversaries occupied different positions along a spectrum or sliding scale shading from resolute denial of the resurrection into grave doubts about it into an agnostic lack of concern with it. The latter end of this spectrum would seem to be documented by Q 18:36 and 41:50 (see *QP* 126). These two verses depict unbelievers who declare that they “do not consider the hour [of resurrection] to be coming” (*mā aẓunnu l-sāʿata qāʾimatan*) but then go on to profess that if they are ever returned to their Lord (*wa-la-in rudidtu ilā rabbī / wa-la-in rujiʿtu ilā rabbī*) they expect only good to come of it. A similar position might be deemed to be reflected in the accusation that Muhammad’s opponents are oblivious and unmindful (*gh-f-l*) of the world to come: “they are heedless of the hereafter” (Q 30:7: *wa-hum ʿani l-ākhirati hum ghāfilūn*; see also Q 19:39, 21:1.97, and 50:22, which have *fī ghāflatin*, “in a state of heedlessness”).<sup>24</sup> But it may also be that Qur’anic polemic is sometimes conflating the view that the resurrection is unproven or improbable, on the one hand, with a lack of due concern with it, on the other—that is, with a morally culpable unwillingness to recognise what is assumed to be an undeniable fact for anyone prepared to consider the matter rationally and without bias. Thus, from the perspective of the Qur’anic conviction that the resurrection is a certainty, “dismissing” it “as a lie” (→ *kadhhaba*) will not primarily have appeared as an erroneous belief but rather as tantamount to wilfully “turning one’s back” (*tawallā*) on an indubitable reality (Q 92:16, 96:13; see *HCI* 164). But even an attitude of eschatological heedlessness that is not accompanied by an explicit dismissal of the judgement’s reality would not be properly describable as *belief* in the resurrection. This makes Crone’s formulation that some associators “believed in the day of judgement without paying much attention to it” prone to misunderstanding.

**The associators and the idea of revelation.** A final aspect of the associators’ profile of beliefs is their stance towards the concept of divine revelation. This is not entirely straightforward to ascertain. For starters, Muhammad’s pagan adversaries seem to have held certain entrenched preconceptions about divine revelation, especially the view that genuine revelations would have to be relayed by an angel (→ *malak*) capable of working miracles rather than by an ordinary human like Muhammad, “who eats food and walks about in the marketplaces” (Q 25:7; for a detailed study, refer to *QP* 102–124).<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the associators are depicted as assessing Muhammad’s claim to convey divine warnings against the track record of earlier prophetic figures. Thus, Q 6:124 complains, “And when a sign comes to them, they say, ‘We shall not believe until we are given the same as what

24 Charges of heedlessness are also uttered with regard to other objects, such as God’s signs (Q 7:136.146, 10:7.92).

25 For different manifestations of this premise (though in some cases partial ones or statements made about the audience of past messengers), see Q 6:8–9.111, 11:12.27, 17:94–95, 21:7–8, 23:24.33–34, 25:20–21, 36:15, 41:14, 54:24.

God's messengers were given (*lan nu'mina ḥattā nu'tā mithla mā ūtiya rusulu llāhi*),” meaning that Muhammad's adversaries demanded that he produce a “sign (→ *āyah*) from his Lord” (Q 6:37, 13:7,27, 20:133, and 29:50), by which they clearly intended spectacular confirmatory miracles (cf. the catalogue of examples in Q 17:90–93). Q 6:124 moreover makes it explicit that such a confirmatory miracle would have to measure up to the miracles attributed to earlier messengers: whenever the Qur'anic audience is given a “sign” (*āyah*), they declare that they will not believe “until we are given what God's [previous] messengers were given” (*ḥattā nu'tā mithla mā ūtiya rusulu llāhi*; see also Q 21:5). Specifically, Muhammad is challenged to replicate the achievements of Moses (Q 28:48: *law-lā ūtiya mithla mā ūtiya mūsā*, “why was he”—i.e., Muhammad—“not given the like of what Moses was given?”). The Qur'anic opponents seem to deploy Moses as a benchmark of what a credible claimant to prophecy ought to look like. Hence, as Crone notes, the Qur'anic pagans appear to have “accepted Moses as a prophet” and to have regarded him as “paradigmatic” (QP 112–113, citing 112)—or at least to have accepted him as a prophet for the sake of argument, in the interest of discrediting the Qur'anic Messenger as failing to measure up to him.

The material just surveyed could suggest that Muhammad's associating adversaries acknowledged the general possibility of divine revelation as long as such revelations were mediated by angels. According to Q 6:91, the Qur'anic opponents maintain that “God has not sent anything down on a human” (*mā anzala llāhu 'alā basharin min shay'in*; cf. the parallel phraseology in Q 36:15 and 67:9: *mā anzala/nazzala l-raḥmānu/llāhu min shay'in*). In line with the proposal just made, this does not need to be read as a categorical denial of any sort of revelatory communication from God; rather, if one puts the stress on “human,” the statement might simply express the assumption that only angels are worthy to be direct recipients of divine revelation. Alternatively, one might stress “send down” and interpret Q 6:91 to manifest the belief that human prophets would have to *ascend* to heaven rather than receiving revelations descending from above (QP 119–123; on prophetic ascent to heaven, see also under → *nazzala*). Either reading would be compatible with the understanding that the associators were genuinely committed to the idea of divine revelation and that their disagreement with the Qur'anic proclamations only concerned modalities.

Ultimately, though, it seems unlikely that the associators endorsed the idea of divine revelation, whether it be revelation mediated by angels or revelation mediated through prophetic ascent. The associators certainly do not seem to have claimed to be in possession of revelations themselves: many Qur'anic passages presuppose quite unequivocally that Muhammad's associating opponents had not previously received from God “scriptures to study” (Q 34:44: *wa-mā ātaynāhum min kutubin yadrusūnahā*; see also 35:40, 37:156–157, 43:21, 46:4, 54:43, and 68:37).<sup>26</sup> This is so despite the fact that the Qur'an takes the associators to task for ignoring “the clear proof that is contained in the ancient writings” (Q 20:133: *a-wa-lam ta'tihim bayyīnātu mā fī l-ṣuḥufi l-ūlā*). Crone considers this to presuppose that “ancient books with probative value were already in circulation, presumably among the polytheists themselves” (QP 146), but this paraphrase is problematic. Undoubtedly, the Qur'anic addressees must have been familiar with the concept of revealed scripture and must have had sufficient exposure to Christianity and Judaism in order to render intelligible the Qur'anic view that they had had ample opportunity to let themselves be persuaded by certain foundational tenets

<sup>26</sup> See also Q 29:48, stating that the Qur'anic Messenger did not have access to a scripture prior to the Qur'anic revelations. The verse is discussed under → *ummī*.

associated with the Biblical tradition—specifically, the reality of an eschatological judgement and the exclusive existence of one deity. But this does not mean that the associators must have deemed the scriptural and parascriptural texts in which these doctrines were contained, or assumed to be contained, to be part of their own cultural patrimony or that they were wont to consult and invoke such texts in regular and detailed interpretive fashion. While Crone argues that Q 6:91 (part of which was quoted above) shows that the associators recognised and transmitted the “scripture brought by Moses” (*QP* 110–114), her understanding of the verse is questionable, as shown in the excursus below.<sup>27</sup>

In general, therefore, it would seem that when Muhammad’s opponents protest against non-angelic messengers or demand Mosaic signs, they are making dialectical moves in order to discredit Qur’anic prophetology and cannot be assumed to express their own positive beliefs.<sup>28</sup> The associators, in other words, were sufficiently familiar with Biblically based notions of divine revelation in order to exploit this knowledge to the end of casting doubt on the particular way in which the Qur’an understands the process of divine revelation (namely, as something that God “sends down” upon select mortals; → *nazzala*); but the Qur’anic associators do not seem to have relied on the quotation and interpretation of any specific textual corpus in defense of their own doctrines and practices. Instead, what they are routinely portrayed as adducing in support of their veneration of other deities is ancestral tradition, “that to which we have found our forefathers (singular: → *ab*) beholden and accustomed” (e.g., Q 31:21: *mā wajadnā ‘alayhi ābā’anā*; see also the contrast between scriptural and ancestral authority in 43:21–22).

**The associators as syncretistic pagans.** Considering what has been said so far, it seems likely that the Qur’anic associators were pagans (i.e., persons who did not formally profess and habitually practise some form of Judaism or Christianity) of a syncretistic bent who did not hesitate to appropriate a certain number of notions that were also a staple of Jewish and Christian discourse, such as the concept of angels (→ *malak*). Another example is the associators’ apparent reliance on the idea of intercession with a supreme deity (*HCI* 69–72).<sup>29</sup> It is moreover quite conceivable that the associators’ cultic practices, too, integrated elements of Jewish and Christian ritual (→ *ṣallā*). Yet, as intimated above, none of this warrants the conclusion that the associators are a mere cipher for Jews or Christians, since Medinan verses squarely juxtapose the associators with Jews and Christians (Q 5:82, 22:17) or with the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*), the Qur’anic umbrella term for Jews and Christians (Q 2:105, 3:186, 98:1.6). This presupposes that the Qur’an is envisaging all of these entities as different collectives. While the prooftexts just adduced are relatively late, there is nothing in the Meccan surahs to suggest that Muhammad’s associating antagonists hail from Jewish or Christian ranks.

27 Crone does, however, show quite compellingly that the way in which the associators expressed themselves according to the Qur’an exhibits traces of Biblical diction (*QP* 139–149). This meshes with the idea, advocated in the next section of the main text, that the Qur’anic associators, though worshipping traditional pagan deities, were prepared to adopt certain elements of the Biblical tradition. But it does not require the associators to have been avid readers and interpreters of scriptural and parascriptural texts.

28 This possibility is duly set out and considered, though ultimately dismissed, in *QP* 112.

29 This is so even though intercession among humans figures in early Arabic poetry and must accordingly have been a known aspect of social interaction in Arabian tribal societies and of the ways in which one might relate to rulers and patrons (Riad 1981, 39–44). However, Riad 1981, 53, thinks that the religious employment of intercession was “calqued on the profane use of the word.” This implicitly contradicts my conjecture that the associators’ ideas about intercession with the supreme deity adopt a Jewish or Christian motif.

There is, moreover, a significant degree of correspondence between the views about Allāh that the Qur'an attributes to the associators and the portrayal of Allāh in pre-Qur'anic Arabic poetry (Sinai 2019b). This shows that the beliefs the Qur'an attributes to the associators could indeed have been held by Arabian pagans. The fit with poetry is not complete, though, since the poetic corpus contains almost no traces of the Qur'anic associators' well-articulated theology of subordination, which classed deities other than Allāh as his offspring, as angels, or as playing a mediating role (Sinai 2019b, 55–56, citing one exception). This can be explained by the assumption that the associators' theology of subordination was a specifically Meccan development, possibly a relatively recent one, whose key objective was to buttress the superiority of the Meccan sanctuary over regional competitors, such as the sanctuary of Allāt at al-Ṭā'if (*HCI* 69–70; Sinai 2019b, 56).

**The root *sh-r-k* in poetry and Epigraphic South Arabian.** Does the Qur'an's distinctive usage of derivatives of *sh-r-k* in the context of religious polemics have a background in earlier discourses? Ancient Arabic poetry affords no hitherto identified precedent (Zaytūnī 1987, 204; Hawting 1999, 70), although this is hardly astonishing given that the bulk of pre-Qur'anic poetry is not, like the Qur'an, committed to a Biblically based insistence on God's oneness. Where derivatives of *sh-r-k* do occur in pre-Islamic verse, they have a generic, non-theological sense (e.g., *DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 20:21), which is occasionally also the case in the Qur'an: Q 4:12 refers to the brothers and sisters of a deceased as “sharing in” (*fa-hum shurakā'u fi*) a third of the estate; 20:32 reports Moses's demand that God make his brother Aaron share in his prophetic task (*wa-ashrikhu fi amrī*); and a parable in Q 39:29 speaks of a “man,” presumably a slave, who is the property of “partners who disagree” or “quarrelling sharers” (*shurakā' mutashākisūn*). A more pertinent antecedent than poetry is a fragmentary South Arabian inscription that has been construed as employing the noun *s<sup>2</sup>-r-k* in a sense equivalent to Qur'anic *shirk* (Mordtmann and Müller 1896, 287 and 290–291; *CIH*, no. 539, l. 3; see also *KU* 61; Ahrens 1935, 46–48; *FVQ* 186). The text is however difficult to translate with certainty. Other Sabaic inscriptions show that the root *s<sup>2</sup>-r-k*, used both verbally and as a noun, has the same basic meaning of sharing and association as Arabic *sh-r-k* (Beeston et al. 1982, 134; Hawting 1999, 70; see also Hayajneh 2011, 140).<sup>30</sup> A specialised religious usage of Sabaic *s<sup>2</sup>-r-k* would therefore be conceivable. Yet in the absence of further attestations, a proximate origin of the Qur'anic notion of theological “association” in South Arabia remains uncertain (Hawting 1999, 69–70).

**Qur'anic *ashraka* and rabbinic *shittēp*.** Whether or not the Qur'anic use of *ashraka* and *shirk* has Sabaic precedent, the ultimate source of the concept is likely Jewish. This is historically plausible in so far as the Ḥimyarite turn to monotheism was informed by a deliberate appeal to the people of Israel and to Jewish terms and concepts (see, e.g., Gajda 2009). Specifically, as noted by Horovitz (*KU* 61), rabbinic texts employ the Hebrew verb *shittēp* (Aramaic *shattēp* or *shawtēp*) to denote the “association” or “joining” of another being with God (see *DTTM* 1639; *DJBA* 1186), allowing Uri Rubin's modern Hebrew translation of the Qur'an to render *alladhīna ashrakū* and *al-mushrikūn* as *ha-məshattēpim* throughout (Rubin 2016). Just like Arabic *sh-r-k*, the Hebrew and Aramaic root *sh-t-p* occurs not only as a verb (*shittēp*, *shattēp*, *ashraka*) but also as a noun, with Arabic *sharīk*, “associate, partner,” corresponding to Hebrew *shuttap* (see *DTTM* 1544) and Aramaic *shuttapa* (*DJBA* 1126).

<sup>30</sup> I am however doubtful about Hayajneh's proposal, based on the South Arabian material adduced by him, that the word *shurakā'* in Q 6:136 should be translated as “(crop-)sharers.”

While Hebrew and Aramaic *sh-t-p*, like Arabic *sh-r-k*, can be employed in non-religious contexts, such as the joint property of land (*b. Bər. 59b*), some of their rabbinic occurrences are highly germane to the Qur'an's prevalent use of *ashraka* and *shirk* in relation to God's oneness and his exclusive entitlement to religious worship.

Most striking are two passages in the Babylonian Talmud citing an extra-Mishnaic tannaitic tradition to the effect that “whoever joins (or associates; *mashattēp*) the heavenly name with something else shall be uprooted from the world” (*b. Sanh. 63a* and *b. Sukkah 45b*). This claim is then scripturally anchored in Exod 22:19 (“Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the Lord alone, shall be devoted to destruction”). Here, “associating” God with other beings operates as a label for violating God's exclusive entitlement to cultic veneration, just as the Qur'anic associators are castigated for including subordinate deities in their worship. Also relevant is a denial articulated in *Genesis Rabbah*, via a midrash on Isa 44:24, that any of the angels might have been God's “associates” in creation (*Gen. Rab. 1:3* and *3:8*; see Fossum 1985a, 225–226). A similar impetus inheres in a tradition preserved both in the Babylonian Talmud and in the Tosefta, according to which Adam was the last being created by God “so that the heretics might not say that the Holy One, blessed be he, had an associate in the work of creation” (*b. Sanh. 38a*; with a variant wording, though including the term *shuttap*, *t. Sanh. 8:7*; see Segal 2002, 111–112). As we saw above, the Qur'an is similarly explicit that God does not have “associates” (*shurakā'*) “who have created as he has created” (*khalaqū ka-khalqihī*; Q 13:16). Hence, the link between Qur'anic *sh-r-k* and the theme of creation, and more generally the notion that God's uniqueness and lack of any associates is manifested by his exclusive power of creation, is one that is anticipated by rabbinic material—though one might add that denials of the notion that God had a “partner” or “associate” in creation also occur in Samaritan literature (Macdonald 1963, 1:48 and 2:78 = *Memar Marqah* 2:10, corresponding to Ben-Ḥayyim 1988, 150 and 151 = fol. 100b).<sup>31</sup> All of this has the significant consequence that the impression emerging from certain Meccan passages, such as Q 46:10, that the Qur'anic community interacted with “Israelites” (→ *banū ʾisrāʾīl*) is confirmed by a core aspect of Qur'anic theology, the polemic against associationism.

However, rabbinic references to the “association” of God's name with something other than God or to the notion that God might have “associates” are not invariably negative. Thus, the Jerusalem Talmud states that “the Holy One, blessed be he, associated his great name with Israel” (*y. Ta'an. 2:6, 65d* = ed. and trans. Guggenheimer, 72), alluding to the theophoric etymology of the name *yisrāʾēl* (Gen 32:29: “for you have striven, *śārītā*, with God and with humans”). In the treatment of Exod 18:13 (according to which Moses judged the Israelites “from the morning unto the evening”) in the *Məkilta dā-Rabbi Yishmaʿel*, it is claimed that the similarity between Exod 18:13 (Moses “sat as judge for the people, while the people stood around him from morning until evening”) and Gen 1:5 (“God called the light day, and the darkness he called night; and there was evening and there was morning, the first day”) demonstrates that somebody who “renders a true judgement is considered as if he had been an associate of the Holy One, blessed be he, in the work of creation” (Lauterbach 2004, 2:281; see also the parallels in *b. Shabb. 10a* and in the *Məkilta dā-Rabbi Shim'on bar*

<sup>31</sup> I owe my awareness of Samaritan parallels to Fossum 1985a, 224–227, who cites Macdonald 1963, 1:97 and 2:161 = *Memar Marqah* 4:7, and Macdonald 1963, 1:131 and 2:213 = *Memar Marqah* 6:1. However, books 3–6 of *Memar Marqah / Tibat Marqe* were composed at some point between the sixth and tenth centuries CE, making a pre-Qur'anic date uncertain (Ben-Ḥayyim 1988, v; see also the relevant section of Hjelm 2016).



Yohay=Nelson 2006, 203). *Genesis Rabbah* reports how God told Abraham that he would henceforth regard him “as though you were associated with me in the creation of the world,” due to Abraham’s efforts to spread God’s name among his creatures (*Gen. Rab.* 43:7). Indeed, a passage in *Genesis Rabbah* asserts downright that “from the beginning of the creation of the world, the Holy One, blessed be he, desired to make for himself a partnership [or association; *shuttaput*] with the beings below,” a partnership that is then assumed to have been realised in the inauguration of the Israelite tabernacle as described in Numbers 7 (*Gen. Rab.* 3:9). Interestingly, a line in Jacob of Sarug’s homily on creation similarly claims that Adam, in giving names to God’s creatures, became an “associate” (*shūtāpā*) in the divine task of creation (Mathews 2020, 70–71, ll. 2361–2362). Though the matter requires further investigation, it is not impossible that Jacob is here taking up a Jewish theme.<sup>32</sup> If so, it would provide scholars of the Qur’an with a gripping illustration of how the rabbinic discourse of partnering and associating radiated into another religious community.

What the preceding shows, in any case, is that rabbinic literature contains quite a few positive references to association or partnering between God and human: God does not have associates, and humans must not attribute associates to him on their own initiative; yet God may well take the initiative himself and bestow on certain humans the honour of elevating them to associate status (though even so it will be tacitly understood that this does not amount to deification). By contrast with this subtly nuanced notion of partnering in the rabbinic tradition, the Qur’anic employment of the notion of *shirk* is uniformly confrontational, giving no hint that God might decide to “associate” other beings with himself. Hence, if the Qur’anic polemic against associationism was the adaptation of a rabbinic theme, which is currently the most plausible contextualisation of the Qur’anic use of *ashraka*, the adaptation involved a tangible recalibration: a complex notion that could serve both to articulate an uncompromising commitment to monotheism and to posit a special communion between God and humans (albeit one established entirely on God’s terms) morphed into an instrument of sweeping doctrinal criticism, deployed with great effect in challenging the pagan addressees who refused to heed the Qur’an’s eschatological appeals (*HCI* 174–176).<sup>33</sup> The catalyst of the theological innovation that is represented by the Qur’anic adaptation—or rather weaponisation—of the rabbinic notion of partnering or associating, then, was most likely the eschatological agnosticism of the Qur’an’s initial target audience, who came to be condemned as “those who associate.”

### **Excursus: Does Q 6:91 Imply That the Associators Recognised and Transmitted the “Scripture Brought by Moses”?**

According to the Ḥafṣ ‘an ‘Aṣim reading of the verse, Q 6:91 begins by reporting the opponents’ claim that “God has not sent anything down on a human” (*mā anzala llāhu ‘alā*

<sup>32</sup> For a pioneering overview of Jewish traditions in Syriac Christian literature, see Brock 1979. On Jewish traditions in the *Cave of Treasures*, see now Minov 2021, 55–60, questioning direct acquaintance with rabbinic traditions. On the presence of Jewish communities in the Mesopotamian context of Jacob of Sarug, see generally Popa 2019, 168–171.

<sup>33</sup> I hasten to add that this diagnosis ought not to become an occasion for wheeling out the tired cliché that the Qur’anic deity is more distant than the Jewish or Christian one; see generally under → *al-rahmān* and, on communion between God and humans in paradise, under → *jannah*.



*basharin min shay'in*). To this, the Messenger is bidden to respond by asking his antagonists, “Who sent down the scripture that Moses brought as a light and guidance to the people? You<sup>P</sup> turn it into sheets of papyrus, revealing them and hiding much (*taj'alūnahu qarāṭisa tubdūnahā wa-tukhfūna kathīran*); and you<sup>P</sup> were taught what you did not know, you and your forefathers.” Given the beginning of the verse, it must be directed against the pagans or associators, leading Crone to infer that “the polytheists accepted that Moses, a human being, had received revelation, which they themselves were in the habit of copying on papyrus sheets” (QP 111). However, the condemnation of “concealing” or “hiding” (*katama, akhfā*; see under → *ahl al-kitāb*) scripture is otherwise found in the context of Qur'anic polemics against the Jews or the “scripture-owners” rather than in connection with the associators (Q 2:146, 3:187, 5:15; see also 2:159.174, which are reasonably taken as directed against the “scripture-owners,” although the verses themselves or their immediate context do not explicitly signal this). There are moreover a number of passages that make it quite clear that the Qur'an's pagan opponents have not yet been given a scripture by God (e.g., Q 34:44, 43:21, 68:37), even though they are expressly portrayed as being familiar with the figure of Moses and “that which was given to him” (Q 28:48; see above). Statements like Q 34:44 would be incomprehensible if indeed the pagans had been routinely engaged in copying down “the scripture brought by Moses.” Accordingly, Paret, too, finds the verse problematic (KK 147), as does Reynolds (Reynolds 2018, 235; Amir-Moezzi and Dye 2019, 2:253).

The foregoing difficulties make it distinctly preferable to opt for an alternative reading of the verse's *rasm* (attributed *inter alios* to Ibn Kathīr and Abū 'Amr) that has the third-person plural verbs *yaj'alūnahu, yubdūnahā, and yukhfūna* instead of the second-person plural ones *taj'alūnahu, tubdūnahā, and tukhfūna* (MQQ 2:292–293; MQ 2:483–485; see already Goudarzi 2018, 145–146). All three verbs could then be parsed as an asyndetic relative clause whose antecedent is *al-nās*, “the people.”<sup>34</sup> Read thus, the segment “they turn it into sheets of papyrus” is best understood as a passing reference to the scripture-owners that sits within an address of the pagan associators. All of this would produce the following translation: “Say<sup>S</sup>, ‘Who sent down the scripture that Moses brought as a light and guidance to the people (*nūran wa-hudan li-l-nāsi*), who turn it into sheets of papyrus, revealing them and hiding much (*yaj'alūnahu qarāṭisa yubdūnahā wa-yukhfūna kathīran*)? And you<sup>P</sup> have [by virtue of the Qur'anic revelations] been taught what you did not know, you and your forefathers (*wa-'ullimtum mā lam ta'lamū antum wa-lā ābā'ukum*).’” This interpretation (whose existence is briefly acknowledged, though without further discussion, in QP 111) is effectively identical with the preferred option in Ṭab. 9:397–398.

But why did the second-person readings *taj'alūnahu, tubdūnahā, and tukhfūna* arise in the first place? The reason was presumably that they brought the three verbs in question in line with the second person plural that is undeniably present from *wa-'ullimtum* (“and you were taught”) onwards. There is, accordingly, a reasonable contextual explanation for the emergence of the second-person reading, despite the fact that it ended up giving rise to a grave interpretive difficulty. It is important, though, to appreciate that Q 6:91 makes unproblematic sense even if, as I have just argued, it involves a shift from the third person

34 According to the grammar of classical Arabic, asyndetic relative clauses ordinarily require an indefinite antecedent except in a narrow range of cases (Wright 1974, 317–318). However, this rule does not seem to be applicable in the Qur'an (Jones 2005, 146). See, for instance, Q 4:87, 6:12, and 45:26: *la-yajma'annakum/yajma'ukum ilā yawmi l-qiyāmati lā rayba fīhi*, “he will indeed assemble you<sup>P</sup> to the day of resurrection about which there is no doubt.”

to the second one: Muhammad is instructed, first, to pose to his addressees a rhetorical question about the Mosaic scripture (the correct answer that is clearly assumed being that the latter was sent down by the same God who has now bestowed new revelations upon Muhammad) and, secondly, to inform his audience that the arrival of the Qur’anic revelations amounts to new revelatory knowledge that they and their ancestors had previously lacked.<sup>35</sup>

*sharā* tr. | to sell s.th.

*ishtarā* tr. *bi-* | to purchase s.th. for s.th.

*ishtarā bi-. . . thamanan qalīlan* | to sell s.th. for a small price

Further vocabulary discussed: *nafs* | person, life *māl* | wealth, possessions *al-jannah* | the garden (i.e., paradise) *āyah* | sign *anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down *kitāb* | scripture *mīthāq* | covenant, treaty; the act of concluding a covenant or treaty *‘ahd* | agreement, contract, treaty, covenant

The metaphors of purchasing and selling are prime examples of the Qur’an’s pervasive tendency to couch the relationship between God and humans in commercial terms. As shown elsewhere, this is a feature that the Qur’an shares with previous Jewish and Christian discourse (→ *ajr*, → *ḥisāb*, → *aqrada*, → *kasaba*; cf. also Q 2:16 and Mark 8:36). It is in this theological context that the verb *ishtarā*, which in its basic sense designates a transactional exchange in which one thing is given away for another, tends to be employed in the Qur’an. Depending on the context, *ishtarā* can mean either “to sell” (for which the Qur’an also uses *sharā*) or “to buy, to purchase” (CDKA 148). The wider theological issues at stake in the Qur’an’s use of commercial metaphors being discussed in the entries cross-referenced above, the following is largely limited to syntactic remarks and questions of translation.

The two foremost syntactic structures formed with *ishtarā* are the following:

- (i) *ishtarā* X *bi*-Y: “to purchase X for Y”
- (ii) *ishtarā bi*-X *thamanan* / *thamanan qalīlan*: “to sell X for a price / for a small price”

Category (i) tends to be used in threatening or condemnatory statements in which X is transparently less valuable than Y (Q 2:16.86.175, 3:177). Some verses belonging to this group lack the prepositional object Y (Q 4:44, 12:21, 31:6), and in one of these occurrences the verb *ishtarā* may only carry the generic meaning “to acquire” (Q 2:102). In one case, structure (i) occurs with God as the subject (Q 9:111: *inna llāha shtarā mina l-mu’minīna anfusahum wa-amwālahum bi-anna lahumu l-jannata*, “God has purchased from the believers their lives and their possessions in exchange for the garden being theirs”); here the negative connotation of other instances of (i) is lacking. Category (ii) is exemplified by Q 3:199: *lā yashtarūna bi-āyāti llāhi thamanan qalīlan*, “they do not sell God’s signs for a cheap price.” Unlike the verb *sharā*=“to sell,” following which the object sold appears in the accusative (see Q 2:102.207, 4:74, 12:20), statements falling under (ii) instead

<sup>35</sup> Thus, *‘ullimtum* should not be taken to refer to the time of Moses but rather to the more recent historical moment of Muhammad’s prophetic appearance.

feature the entity sold as a prepositional object introduced by *bi-*.<sup>1</sup> In verses belonging to this second set (Q 2:41.79.174, 3:77.187.199, 5:44.106, 9:9, 16:95), the prepositional object X—i.e., the thing sold—is normally explicitly associated with God, such as God’s signs (*āyāt*; Q 2:41, 3:199, 5:44, 9:9; → *āyah*), “what God has sent down of the scripture” (Q 2:174: *mā anzala llāhu mina l-kitābi*), agreements, oaths, and testimonies that are concluded, sworn, or delivered in God’s name (Q 3:77, 5:106, 16:95), or the “covenant” (*mīthāq*) that God has imposed on “those who were given the scripture” (Q 3:187; → *wāthaqa*). In all these examples, the prepositional object X is clearly intended to be more valuable than the “small price” that is received in return for it. As for almost all instances of category (i), structures of type (ii) form condemnations, threats, or prohibitions and negations. Hence, the Qur’an generally uses *ishtarā* as a “term of reproach” (Torrey 1892, 36), although Q 9:111, noted above, forms an exception.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Chronological considerations and poetic attestations of the purchasing metaphor.**

Most of the Qur’an’s frequent occurrences of *ishtarā*, and also three of its four instances of *sharā* (Q 2:102.207, 4:74), are metaphorical (Torrey 1892, 35–40), although a literal meaning of *sharā* and *ishtarā* is found in Q 12:20.21 (*CDKA* 148). Perhaps the earliest occurrence of the buying-selling metaphor is in Q 16:94–95, a later Meccan passage enjoining its addressees to keep their oaths and exhorting them, “Do not sell God’s covenant for a small price” (*wa-lā tashtarū bi-’ahdi llāhi thamanan qalīlan*). A similarly metaphorical usage of *ishtarā* is attested in pre-Qur’anic poetry. Thus, a verse from the *diwān* of ‘Alqamah states that “praise” (*al-ḥamd*) is only “purchased” (*yushtarā*) for a “price” (*thaman*; *DSAAP*, ‘Alqamah, no. 13:32; Torrey 1892, 37), while ‘Urwah ibn al-Ward announces his intention to purchase glory in return for his life or self (*nafs*; Nöldeke 1863, no. 3:2; Torrey 1892, 39; *EAP* 1:129). The occurrence of *thaman* in the former example is of course particularly reminiscent of category (ii) above.

#### ***shā’ir* | poet**

→ *jinn*

#### ***shā’ir* pl. | ritual observances**

#### ***mash’ar* | place where a ritual is performed**

→ *ḥajja*, → *ḥarrama*, → *dhabaḥa*

#### ***shafa’a* intr. (‘*inda, li-*) | to intercede (with s.o., on behalf of s.o.)**

#### ***shafā’ah* | intercession**

#### ***shafī’* | intercessor**

→ *ashraka*, → *malak*, → *nafa’a*

1 Cf. Q 12:20 (*wa-sharawhu bi-thamanin bakhsin*, “they sold him for a paltry price”) and the accusative *thamanan* or *thamanan qalīlan* that characterises category (ii).

2 The syntax of *ishtarā* is complicated by one verse in which it would seem to mean “to sell,” as in category (ii), but in which what is being sold figures in the accusative rather than as a prepositional object introduced by *bi-* (Q 2:90: *bi’samā shtaraw bihi anfusahum*, “how bad is that in exchange for which they have sold their selves”). Effectively, *ishtarā* is here employed in exactly the same way as *sharā* (cf. Q 2:102: *wa-la-bi’sa mā sharaw bihi anfusahum*).

**shakara** intr. (*li-*) / tr. | to be grateful (to s.o., namely, God), to be grateful for s.th.

→ *arḍ*, → *kafara*, → *la'alla*, → *an'ama*

**shakk** | doubt

→ *irtāba*, → *ahl al-kitāb*

**shāhid, shahīd** | witness

See the remarks under → *ummah*, → *rasūl*, and → *al-'ālamūn*.

**al-shahādah** | testimony; what can be witnessed, what is observable

→ *al-ghayb*

**ishtahā** tr. | to desire s.th.

→ *jannah*, → *nafs*

**shūrā** | consultation

→ *ma'rūf*

**shā'a** tr./intr. | to wish or will (s.th.)

Further vocabulary discussed: *arāda* tr. | to want, intend, or will s.th. *arāda* tr. *bi-* | to intend s.th. for s.o. *arāda an/li-* | to want to do s.th. *hadā* tr./intr. | to guide (s.o.) *aḍalla* tr. | to lead s.o. astray *ḡalama* tr. | to injure or harm s.o. or s.th.; to wrong s.o. *idhn* | permission

Divine volition and intentionality, expressed by the verbs *shā'a* and also *arāda* (e.g., Q 2:26.185.253, 3:108.176, 4:26.27.28, 51:57, 85:16), are important themes in many Qur'anic statements about God that deserve further study. By way of a preliminary contribution to the topic, the present entry will focus on the vital theological question whether Qur'anic references to divine volition entail a deterministic or predestinarian vision of God's relation to humans, i.e., whether they imply that God directly causes human actions, such as sinful and righteous behaviour. What is at stake is ultimately the question, much debated in later Islamic theology, whether divine justice requires human free will, i.e., the ability of humans to choose between contrary courses of action, such as righteousness and sin or belief and unbelief.

God “guides whom he wills” but does not “do wrong” (*ḡalama*). Various Qur'anic passages maintain that God will “guide (→ *hadā*) whom he wills” and “lead astray (→ *aḍalla*) whom he wills” (Q 7:155, 14:4, 16:93, 35:8, 74:31; see also 13:27 and 39:23). The former phrase or variants thereof also occur separately (e.g., Q 2:142.213.272, 6:149, 10:25, 16:9).

Such statements are reminiscent of Paul’s declaration in Rom 9:17–18 that God “has mercy on whomsoever he chooses (*hon thelei*, Peshitta: *man d-ṣābē*)” and “hardens whomsoever he chooses” (Thyen 1989, 212–213; see also Boyd 1923, 154, and Reynolds 2020, 195–196 and 218). Together with the general assertion that God “does what he wants” (Q 2:253, 22:14: *yafʿalu mā yurīd*; see also 11:107 and 85:16: *faʿālun li-mā yurīd*), one might well infer from such Qur’anic verses that God arbitrarily and inscrutably selects some humans for guidance and others for error and unbelief. Further confirmation of such a view might be discerned in Q 6:125: “whom God wills to guide, he opens up his breast to self-surrender (*fa-man yuridi llāhu an yahdiyahu yashrah ṣadrahu li-l-islāmi*), and whom he wills to lead astray, he makes his breast narrow and constricted.”

Yet a more detailed analysis, undertaken in the entry on → *hadā*, makes such a predestinarian reading of Qur’anic references to divine volition on balance unlikely: even if God guides whom he wills, it would seem that those whom he *in fact* elects to guide are those who *deserve* to be guided, given the frequent assertions that God “does not guide the people who are wrongdoers/repudiators/sinners” (*lā yahdī l-qawma l-ẓālimīn/kāfirīn/fāsiqīn*; e.g., Q 2:258.264, 5:108). Moreover, it is categorically and repeatedly asserted that God does not inflict wrong upon humans (e.g., Q 3:108.182; for more detail, see under → *ẓalama*). The Qur’an, then, simultaneously ascribes untrammelled omnipotence to God and maintains that God responds to righteousness and sin with humanly comprehensible fairness. Hence, God *could* bestow guidance upon those who do not merit it, making it true to assert that he “causes to enter into his mercy whomever he wills” (Q 42:8, 76:31: *yudkhillu man yashāʾu fī rahmatihī*; similarly 48:25); yet God nonetheless appears to refrain from using this power in a manner that would violate basic human intuitions of justice and freely binds his actions to intelligible standards of equity. Divine omnipotence is therefore located not in the domain of the factual but rather in the domain of the potential, in the realm of what God *could* do—without necessarily doing it in reality. There are, in other words, unrealised divine possibilities, an idea that recalls Augustine’s phrase *potuit sed noluit* (God “was able to but did not want to”; see Knuuttila 2020, 68–69, and cf. Courtenay 1973, 80–81).

The important role that counterfactual or, as philosophers might say, “modal” aspects play in the Qur’anic understanding of divine omnipotence in relation to human agency is also exemplified by statements like Q 6:35, according to which God could have made everyone conform to his guidance if only he “had willed” (*law shāʾa llāhu*). God, that is, would have been perfectly able to ensure that all humans behave as they ought to, yet chose not to realise this possibility, presumably because he instead decided to create and maintain a world that can serve as an effective testing ground geared to ascertaining moral merit (see under → *balā*). Other occurrences of the theological counterfactual “had God willed” (*law shāʾa llāhu*) are similarly capable of being understood in a way that steers clear of divine predestination, even though there is arguably scope for exegetical debate (see in more detail under → *hadā*).

#### **The dependence of human volition on divine volition in Q 74:56, 76:30, and 81:29.**

Perhaps the most difficult interpretive impediment to a non-predestinarian reading of the Qur’an is posed by Q 74:56, 76:30, and 81:29. Like the passages just examined, these verses employ the verb *shāʾa* with God as the grammatical subject, and each of them follows what seems to be a clear affirmation of human freedom of will. Thus, the immediately preceding verses Q 74:55, 76:29, and 81:28 state that “whoever wills” (*man shāʾa*) may heed God’s exhortation, may embark on the path to his Lord, or may “keep a straight course” (see

similarly Q 18:29, 73:19, 74:37, 78:39, 80:12). In each case, however, the subsequent verse then makes such human volition dependent on divine volition: “you<sup>p</sup> will not will [to do so] unless God, the Lord of the world-dwellers, wills [it]” (*wa-mā tashā’ūna illā an yashā’a llāhu rabbu l-‘ālamīn*), Q 81:29 pronounces, and the same point is made in Q 74:56 and 76:30, which likewise include the phrase *illā an yashā’a llāhu*.<sup>1</sup> It would appear that Q 74:56, 76:30, and 81:29 are concerned to restrict or even cancel out the seemingly unqualified espousal of human free that immediately precedes, making it clear that ultimately God’s will stands behind and determines all seemingly free human actions. The three verses in question are often, and plausibly, considered to be secondary interpolations, probably later Meccan (e.g., *PP* 293, 302, 364, 373; Neuwirth 2017, 505 and 516–517). But this redactional claim does not of course settle the interpretive question of what precisely is being said in the passages under discussion. In what sense, then, do Q 74:56, 76:30, and 81:29 assert a dependence of human volition on divine volition?

A common response to the question, attractive to interpreters who are persuaded by a predestinarian interpretation of at least some Qur’anic passages, is that at least from the later Meccan period onwards the Qur’an teaches that even the most incipient human movement towards God is predetermined by the latter’s inscrutable will (see, e.g., the understanding of Q 10:100 in Grimme 1895, 119, and Ringgren 1951, 20). On this interpretation, a passage like Q 81:28–29 at once recognises that human agents experience themselves to be freely choosing between alternative courses of action (in v. 28) yet proceeds to subordinate this psychological truth to the ultimate metaphysical truth of divine determinism (in v. 29). The ostensible conflict between these two perspectives could then be defused by saying that whether the Qur’an considers matters “from a human vantage point” (Andrae 1932, 53) or whether it instead adopts the vantage point of divine determinism depends simply on “that which is in each case the aim of the revelation” (Ringgren 1951, 20)—namely, whether the text is exhorting its addressees to change their ways (an objective encouraging an emphasis on human freedom of will) or is seeking to provide an explanation for the fact that so many of these addressees fail to heed Muhammad’s preaching (which would be served by positing divine determinism). On such a dual-perspective reading, Q 74:56, 76:30, and 81:29 provide particularly cogent prooftexts that the Qur’an ultimately endorses a hard divine determinism. This interpretation, finally, could be tied to yet another occurrence of the formula *illā an yashā’a llāhu*: according to Q 18:23–24, any announcement of future intentions, such as “I shall do this tomorrow,” ought to be made dependent on the proviso “unless God wills [otherwise]” (*wa-lā taqūlanna li-shay’in innī fā’ilun dhālika ghadā // illā an yashā’a llāhu*). This could be taken to mean that humans simply have no reliable way of anticipating, and no control over, what God will *make them do* tomorrow.

It might be unwise to posit that all Qur’anic passages with a deterministic or predestinarian ring are amenable to being reinterpreted in a non-predestinarian manner. Yet, as argued both in the present entry and elsewhere (see under → *khatama*, → *ḡalla*, and → *hadā*), non-predestinarian readings of such Qur’anic data can turn out to be far more

1 For further occurrences of *illā an yashā’a llāhu*, see Q 6:111, 7:89, 12:76, 18:24 (and similarly 6:80); for *in shā’a llāhu*, see Q 2:70, 10:99, 18:69, 28:27, 37:102, 48:27. For an approximate Syriac parallel of *illā an yashā’a llāhu*, though not in connection with human action but rather regarding the effects of a natural element, see Mathews 2018, 20–21, ll. 1284: fire would not be able to burn anything, Jacob of Sarug says, “unless the Lord—its Lord—wills it” (*kad lā šābē mārāyā mārāh*; translation modified).



compelling than one would initially suppose.<sup>2</sup> In such a vein, it is quite feasible to consider verses containing *illā an yashā'a llāhu* provisos such as Q 81:29 to articulate not a hard divine determinism but merely the weaker claim that the human exercise of free will, and especially the choice to accept God's guidance, is predicated on some form of divine endorsement or the absence of divine hindrance, resembling what Ramon Harvey describes as al-Māturīdī's "concurrentist" understanding of human choice (Harvey 2018, 32). Such an understanding finds strong support in Q 10:100: "no one has the power to believe except with God's permission" (*wa-mā kāna li-nafsin an tu'mīna illā bi-idhni llāhi*). Thus, even if divine endorsement of human stirrings towards belief could in principle be withheld, meaning that God could choose to prevent anything that humans might strive to do, this does not as such render God a determining cause of human acts and decisions. Rather, the point is merely that the occurrence of any human act, whether external or mental, requires that God abstain from counteracting or overriding it. On this reading, the Qur'an is only concerned to reserve for God a ubiquitous power of veto over all human actions, without implying that God is therefore the sufficient cause of what humans actually choose to do. In contrast to natural processes, therefore, in which God is causally enmeshed on a permanent basis (see under → *allāh*), rational agents like humans are endowed with a certain sphere of autonomous action, even if God retains the power to override their agency.

**Human action and divine "permission" (*idhn*).** The preceding interpretation of the Qur'anic *illā an yashā'a llāhu* proviso is buttressed by the fact that the appeal to divine "permission" in Q 10:100, cited in the preceding paragraph, is far from an isolated case. References to divine "permission" are in fact a proper topos in the Islamic scripture: over thirty verses, both Meccan and Medinan, stress that particular actions or events happen, have happened, or will happen only "with God's permission" (*bi-idhni llāhi* or its pronominal variant *bi-idhnihi*; e.g., Q 2:102.213.249.251, 3:49.152, 13:38, 40:78, 58:10, 59:5; see also Decharneux 2019, 246–248). Although the phrase is predominant with regard to human actions, it is sometimes extended to the natural domain as well: vegetation comes forth "with the permission of its Lord," Q 7:58 says (cf. also 14:25), and it would only be with God's "permission" that the sky (→ *al-samā'*) might collapse upon the earth (Q 22:65).

Against the background of this frequent Qur'anic use of the noun *idhn*, "permission," we may contrast a deterministic reading of passages like Q 81:28–29, which stands in tension with Qur'anic denials of divine wrongdoing and unfairness, with a "permissivist" one: seeing that God is in principle capable of thwarting or overriding any human action, those actions that do in fact materialise can be inferred to have received God's tacit approval or "permission," in the sense that God must have chosen not to exercise his power to intervene and to impede or redirect the actual course of occurrences. If God can inhibit any event or action in the world, then mental acts such as "willing to keep a straight course," too, must be subject to a second-order divine volition to let the human volition at hand unfold without hindrance (Q 81:28–29). This does not, however, entail that it is God who prompted the act in question in the first place. Q 10:100 in particular provides good evidence supporting such a permissivist construal over a predestinarian one, since the assertion that "no one has the power to believe except with God's permission" is followed by the statement that God "imposes punishment on those who do not understand" (*wa-yaj'alu l-rijsa 'alā lladhīna lā*

2 See especially the discussion of Q 17:16, a verse that looks starkly deterministic, under → *khatama*.

*ya'qilūn*).<sup>3</sup> This underscores once more that the manner in which God relates to humans is dependent on and reactive to, rather than the cause of, human acceptance or rejection of God's call. It is also notable that quite a few assertions of human volition—e.g., Q 73:19: “whoever wills takes the path to his Lord” (*fa-man shā'a ttakhadha ilā rabbihi sabilā*; see also Q 18:29, 74:37, 78:39, 80:12)—are not followed by caveats that explicitly subject them to a second-order divine volition of the sort that figures in Q 74:56, 76:30, and 81:29. This, too, suggests that the point of qualifiers like Q 81:29 is not to deny human freedom as such—i.e., the ability to do X or to omit it (or do something else in its stead)—or to convey that it is God who *makes* humans want whatever they want. Rather, Q 81:29 and its parallels serve to stress that not only external actions on which humans might resolve but also the very act of coming to a mental resolution itself depend on a divine decision to abstain from intervention, each and every time a human agent comes to such a resolution.

According to the “permissivist” interpretation just developed, God, though omnipotent, engages in almost incessant self-restraint towards the human agents he has created, desisting from exercising his absolute power to prevent or redirect what they might resolve to do and granting them the exercise of autonomous agency. Read thus, the Qur'an reconciles divine omnipotence and human freedom by asserting that divine agency *could* in principle always override and blot out any other source of agency. Once again, the conclusion is that with regard to human agency, divine omnipotence resides in the realm of the possible or counterfactual, not in the realm of the actual. Alternatively, one might say that when it comes to human actions, the Qur'anic God is *omnipotent* (i.e., able to do anything that is not a logical impossibility) but not *omnificent* (i.e., causing everything that actually happens).

**God's delegation of agency to humans in early post-Qur'anic theology.** By way of an addendum, it is appropriate to acknowledge that the preceding exposition of how divine omnipotence relates to human agency in the Qur'an is not dissimilar to the way in which the early Mu'tazilite Abū l-Hudhayl appears to have envisaged the matter. According to al-Ash'arī's doxography of early Islamic theologians, Abū l-Hudhayl held that God delegates to humans the power (*yuqaddiru 'alā*) to accomplish certain effects (al-Ash'arī 1963, 549, ll. 10–11; see also al-Ash'arī 1963, 378, ll. 8–13).<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Abū l-Hudhayl was evidently concerned to uphold divine omnipotence as well: for example, he reportedly declared it to be possible (*jawwaza*) that God might cause a piece of cotton to be located next to fire without being consumed by it (al-Ash'arī 1963, 312, ll. 10–12; Rudolph 2016b, 350). Nonetheless, to cite Ulrich Rudolph's explication of Abū l-Hudhayl's

3 My translation assumes that *rijs* (literally, “filth”) is here employed in the sense of the phonetically similar word *rijz*. As shown elsewhere (→ *rijz/rujz*), other Qur'anic passages also attest to a certain degree of conflation between the two terms.

4 I owe my awareness of both passages to van Ess 1991–1997, 5:402–404. Note, however, that al-Ash'arī's testimony adds that this view was coupled with the claim that God could not therefore be described as possessing power (*qudrah*) over things over which he has empowered his servants, since “it is impossible that one and the same object of power”—i.e., one and the same event or course of action—“might come under the power of two agents” (al-Ash'arī 1963, 549, ll. 10–11: *lā yūṣāfu l-bārī'u bi-l-qudrati 'alā shay'in yuqaddiru 'alayhi 'ibādahu wa-muḥālun an yakūna maqdūrun wāḥidun li-qādirayn*). This inference stands in tension with the literal wording of the frequent Qur'anic assertion that God is “endowed with power over all things” (see under → *qadir*). However, it would be easy to make appropriate qualifications and say that God is intrinsically, originally, or absolutely endowed with power over all things, but that he “relinquishes” or “divests himself of” his executive power over human actions (van Ess 2017–2020, 3:298). Presumably, God could also revoke this delegation of agency to humans, which means that his original or absolute power remains in place.

position, “God does not make permanent use of His omnipotence”; rather, he “*could* do everything and *could* produce any kind of effect (even the unexpected) if He only wanted to do so” (Rudolph 2016b, 350; see also van Ess 2017–2020, 3:298–299). Thus glossed, Abū l-Hudhayl’s position approximates the same counterfactual understanding of divine power in terms of omnipotence, rather than omnificence, that arguably yields the best fit for the Qur’anic data as well, in so far as it is compatible with a robust understanding of human free will (conceived as the ability to resolve either on carrying out certain acts or on omitting them).

***shay’*: *kull* ~ | everything**

→ *qadīr*

***shayṭān* | devil**

***al-shayṭān* | the devil, Satan**

Further vocabulary discussed: *waswasa* intr. | to whisper *sawwala* intr. *li-* | to persuade s.o. *nafs* | soul, (vital) self *nasiya* tr./intr. | to forget (s.th. or s.o.) *jinn* coll. | demons, jinn *al-mala’ al-a’lā* | the assembly on high *rajīm* | deserving to be pelted; accursed (?) *mārid*, *marīd* | defiant *qayyaḍa* tr. *li-* | to assign s.o. to s.o. *qarīn* | companion (demon) *zāda* ditr. | to increase s.o. in s.th. *iblis* | Iblīs, the devil *sajada* intr. (*li-*) | to prostrate o.s. (before s.o.) *illā* | except for *aghwā* tr. | to seduce s.o. *mukhlaṣ* | elect, singled out *sulṭān* | authority *ṣarafa* tr. | to turn s.th. away *tawallā* tr. | to take s.o. as an ally or close associate *khāfa* tr. | to fear or be afraid of s.th. or s.o. *ittaba’a khuṭuwāt al-shayṭān* | to follow the footsteps of the devil *zayyana* tr. *li-* | to make s.th. appear good, fair, alluring, or desirable to s.o. *dhurriyyah* | offspring

**Overview of Qur’anic usage and précis of the entry.** The Qur’an exhibits a dual use of the word *shayṭān*. First, the definite singular *al-shayṭān* designates an individual diabolic tempter—“the devil” or “Satan”—whom God has given leave to attempt to incite humans to evil, thus helping to separate God’s faithful “servants” from the rest of humanity. *Al-shayṭān* or the devil is said to seduce humans by “whispering” to them (*waswasa*; Q 7:20, 20:120; see also 114:4–5) or by “persuading” them (*sawwala li-*) to apostasy (Q 47:25). Both *waswasa* and *sawwala* are also applied to the human vital self or → *nafs* (Q 12:18.83, 20:96, 50:16; see Witztum 2011, 134–136), which accordingly emerges as the primary psychological breach exploited by the devil. The devil can, moreover, cause humans to forget (*ansā*) God’s reminding exhortation (Q 58:19: *fa-ansāhum dhikra llāhi*; see also Q 6:68, 12:42, 18:63),<sup>1</sup> thus exploiting the innate human tendency to forget (→ *nasiya*) vital religious truths. This Qur’anic tempter figure is recognisably an iteration of the heavenly “adversary” or “accuser” (Hebrew: *haśśātān*, Syriac: *sāṭānā*, Gə’əz: *sayṭān*) appearing in Job 1–2 (*NIDOTTE* 3:1231–1232), whose primordial fall from God’s presence and role in the fall of Adam and Eve are narrated in pre-Qur’anic sources like the *Life of Adam and Eve*, popular among

<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, *dhikr allāh* might mean the obligation of invoking God here; see under → *dhakara*.

Christians (on which see, e.g., Anderson and Stone 1994 and de Jonge and Tromp 1997). As we shall see below, the Qur'an contains similar accounts.

Secondly, the word *shayṭān* can behave not as a proper name but as a common noun: the definite plural *al-shayāṭīn* (and on occasion also the indefinite singular *shayṭān*; e.g., Q 37:7, 81:25) designates malevolent demons or → *jinn*, in contrast to believing and righteous ones (e.g., Q 72:1–2). Although there is a strong etymological argument for translating the definite *al-shayṭān* as “Satan,” a consistent rendering of the word *shayṭān* as “devil” enables English readers to appreciate the lexical connection that must have suggested itself to the Qur'an's recipients between *al-shayṭān*, “the devil” *par excellence*, and *al-shayāṭīn*, “the devils,” meaning evil demons.<sup>2</sup>

Since the Qur'an's general portrayal of the → *jinn* is treated elsewhere, the present entry begins by examining the relationship between the *shayāṭīn* or “devils” and the *jinn* in general, substantiating the foregoing claim that the plural *shayāṭīn* normally signifies malevolent *jinn*. The focus then turns to one particularly important function of the *shayāṭīn*, that of serving as companion demons whom God assigns to tempt those who have rejected him. This is followed by a fairly detailed investigation into “the devil” *par excellence* or Satan, *al-shayṭān*, whom the Qur'an also calls *iblis*. Special attention is commanded by the problem whether the Qur'an understands Iblis to have originally been an angel, in line with certain Christian traditions. The answer given below is negative; Iblis is identified as one of the *jinn* in Q 18:50, and this appears to be the consistent Qur'anic assessment of him. After having been expelled from God's presence due to insubordination, the principal function of Iblis or *al-shayṭān* is to serve as a source of moral temptation, similar to the companion demons mentioned earlier. Following some remarks on the relationship between Satan (*al-shayṭān*) and the devils (*al-shayāṭīn*), the final section of the entry pursues the thorny and partially inconclusive question of the etymological origin of the word *shayṭān* and its meaning in pre-Qur'anic Arabic.

**“The devils” (*al-shayāṭīn*) and the *jinn*.** There are at least some Qur'anic passages in which the expressions “the *jinn*” and “the devils” (*al-shayāṭīn*) are employed interchangeably. Thus, the text states that God's celestial council or “the assembly on high” (→ *al-mala' al-a'lā*) is protected both against eavesdropping *shayāṭīn* (Q 15:17–18, 26:212, 37:7–10, 67:5) and against eavesdropping *jinn* (Q 72:8–9; see under → *jinn*). In connection with Solomon's God-given rule over supernatural beings, too, the Qur'an speaks both of the *jinn* (Q 27:17, 39, 34:12) and of the *shayāṭīn* (Q 21:82, 38:37–38; see again in more detail under → *jinn*). This apparent interchangeability could be taken to indicate that the two words are equivalent (Chabbi 2003, 44; see also Chabbi 2020, 187). More likely, however, is that *al-shayāṭīn* or “the devils” picks out the subclass of *jinn* who are malicious, as opposed to the believing *jinn* who appear, for instance, in Q 72:1–19 (see Welch 1979, 744–745, and also Nünlist 2015, 60–61).<sup>3</sup> Unlike the morally neutral species term *jinn*, the word *shayṭān* evidently has a negative valence throughout the Qur'an: even in cases where it is used as a common noun rather than to name the devil or Satan (*al-shayṭān*), it is connected with the attributes → *rajīm*, “deserving to be pelted” (Q 15:17, 81:25), and *mārid*

2 Speaking from a purely etymological viewpoint, it is the Qur'anic proper name Iblis that is related to the English word “devil,” given its connection with Greek *ho diabolos*, “the devil” (FVQ 47–48).

3 The link between the *shayāṭīn* and the *jinn* is also pointed out in Durie 2018, 183–184, who notes, much like my own understanding, that the “*shayāṭīn* are not a different order of created being, unlike humans or the *jinn*, but a role which can be played by either.” On human *shayāṭīn*, see below.

or *marīd*, “defiant” (see Q 22:3, 37:7).<sup>4</sup> Conversely, passages in which the jinn figure in a positive capacity do not refer to them as *shayāṭīn*.<sup>5</sup>

In fact, the plural *shayāṭīn* can refer not only to wicked jinn but also to wicked humans, thus confirming that the Qur’an uses the term primarily in a moral capacity (Q 6:112): “Thus have we assigned an enemy to every prophet: devils from among humans and the jinn (*shayāṭīna l-insi wa-l-jinni*).” The same use of *shayṭān* is seen in Q 2:14, which describes how those “in whose hearts is sickness” feign belief vis-à-vis the believers but then proceed to mock the latter once they “are alone with their *shayāṭīn*.”<sup>6</sup> Abū ‘Ubaydah trenchantly glosses the semantic force that *shayṭān* has in these two verses by noting, regarding Q 2:14 (Abū ‘Ubaydah 1955–1962, 1:32), that “everyone who is arrogant and rebellious, whether belonging to the jinn or to humans or to the animals, is a *shayṭān*.”

**Companion demons.** One noteworthy function of the Qur’anic devils or *shayāṭīn*, which echoes the late antique Christian understanding of demons as a source of moral temptation (see under → *jinn*), is to bedevil those who have turned away from God (Q 43:36): “Whoever is blind to the reminding exhortation (→ *dhikr*) of the Merciful, we assign to him (*nuqayyid lahu*) a devil to be his companion (*qarīn*).” These devils, the following verse (Q 43:37) continues, “turn” their victims “away from the path” (*la-yaṣuddūnahum ‘ani l-sabīli*; → *sabīl*) while encouraging them in the delusion that they are in fact guided (*wa-yaḥsabūna annahum muhtadūn*). When confronted with the divine judge, however, a companion demon will disavow his human counterpart (Q 43:38). The idea that “God’s enemies” (Q 41:19) have been assigned (*qayyada*) “companions” (*quranā*) whose task is to confirm sinners and unbelievers on the path to hell is also found in Q 41:25. The Qur’anic contention that it is God who assigns these companion demons can be contrasted with the observation that rabbinic literature never maintains that demonic afflictions are sent by God and instead assumes that demonic assault is due to an “element of randomness” (Bohak 2017, 129–131).

Q 50:23–27 (on which see DTEK 108–110) cite a brief address delivered by one such companion demon or *qarīn* on the occasion of the eschatological judgement, the gist of the speech again being disavowal of his human victim. The address climaxes in the assertion that the latter bears full moral responsibility for his own moral record (Q 50:27): “Our Lord, I did not cause him to transgress (*mā atḡhaytuhu*); rather, he has [himself] gone far astray (*wa-lākin kāna fī ḍalālīn ba‘īd*).” Although the passage clearly understands the companion demon to merit divine punishment as well, the latter’s defence underlines a point also made in Q 43:36, namely, that God will only allot companion demons to those humans who have already rejected his exhortation.<sup>7</sup> This is in line with other Qur’anic

4 Note that the cognate root *m-r-d* is employed to characterise Satan and his minions in the *Cave of Treasures* (Ri 1987, ch. 3:3; see also ch. 3:1 in Ri’s Eastern manuscript group).

5 For the negative valence of *al-shayāṭīn*, see also Q 19:68.83.

6 The *shayāṭīn* of Q 2:14 could also be the companion demons discussed further below. However, given that the verse reports an exchange between the sick of heart and their *shayāṭīn*, it seems more likely that both parties here are human. This is further supported by the parallel between Q 2:14 and 2:76 (to which I was alerted by Saqib Hussain).

7 Also relevant in this context is Q 6:137, where the Qur’anic associators’ partner deities (*shurakā*) are said to be responsible for making infanticide appear alluring or desirable (*zayyana*) to the associators, and Q 41:25, which predicates the same verb (on which see further below) of the companion demons. On the notion that God’s alleged partner deities are really demons or jinn, see QP 75–77, citing inter alia Q 6:100 (“They have made the jinn God’s partners,” *wa-ja’alū li-llāhi shurakā’a l-jinna*) and the accusation of jinn worship in 34:41.



passages affirming that God will “increase” (*zāda*) in guidance those who accept his guidance while he will “increase the wrongdoers in being astray” (Q 71:24; see in more detail under → *hadā*). In other words, God does not arbitrarily lead humans astray, but he will at some point deprive those who persistently go astray of the ability to retrace their steps and lock them into unbelief and sin (see also under → *khatama*).

**Iblīs / the devil.** In addition to a multitude of demonic fiends or devils, the Qur’an devotes considerable narrative space to Satan or “the devil” *par excellence*, *al-shayṭān*, who also figures under the designation *iblis*, which is descended from Greek *ho diabolos*, “the devil” (WMJA 98; BEK 41; FVQ 47–48) and should perhaps be treated as a proper name of sorts. After refusing to obey God’s command to prostrate himself (→ *sajada*) to the newly created Adam, Iblīs is expelled from God’s retinue and subsequently retaliates against his nemesis Adam by persuading him and Eve to eat from the forbidden tree (e.g., Q 2:34–39, 7:11–25, and 20:115–124; for more detail, see BEQ 54–60; HCI 143–148; Zellentin 2017).

It is only after his expulsion, when acting as mankind’s tempter and arch-enemy, that Iblīs is called *al-shayṭān* (cf. Q 2:34 with 2:36, 7:11 with 7:20.22, and 20:116 with 20:120). From this, one might infer that the Qur’an is operating a terminological distinction between the devil *qua* rebel, called *iblis*, and the devil *qua* tempter, called *al-shayṭān* (Reynolds 2010a, 40 and 54). This apparent “onomastic shift” has an ostensible parallel in the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* (Tesei 2016, 67–68; see also Radscheit 2010, 110, and Zellentin 2017, 104): the “chief” of the “lower order” of angels or spiritual beings refused to venerate Adam, the antetype of Jesus, and thus “separated himself from God” out of his “own free will”; therefore, the *Cave of Treasures* explains, the primordial rebel was called “Satan,” a name that is folk-etymologically derived from either *asī* or *ṣā*, two verbs meaning “to turn aside,” “to go astray” (Ri 1987, ch. 3:1–6; see BEQ 57–58 and HCI 145–147).<sup>8</sup> The same etymology also features in Jacob of Sarug, at a comparable point in the storyline, namely, after the devil became envious of the newly created Adam (Mathews 2020, 90–91, ll. 2531–2534): “Immediately he fell from among the holy ones and the beautiful ones, // and he went astray (*asī*) to corrupt [Adam]; for this reason he is called Satan (*sātānā*). // For the Lord did not create him ‘Satan’ when He created him, but because he went astray (*asī*), he was given the name ‘Satan.’”<sup>9</sup>

Despite being *prima facie* compelling, however, the parallel just presented is open to challenge,<sup>10</sup> for the impression that the Qur’anic Adam narratives exhibit an “onomastic shift” from *iblis* the rebel to *al-shayṭān* the tempter is exclusively a consequence of the fact that the name *iblis* is strongly associated with the formula *fa-sajadū illā iblīsa*, “and they [the angels] prostrated themselves [to Adam]; not so Iblīs”: nine of the Qur’an’s eleven occurrences of *iblis* consist in this set phrase (Q 2:34, 7:11, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116), in close variants thereof (Q 15:30–31, 38:73–74), or in an immediately following divine address of Iblīs (Q 15:32, 38:75: *yā-iblisu*, “O Iblīs”). As for the two remaining occurrences of

8 For the most recent examination of the date and provenance of the *Cave of Treasures*, see Minov 2021, 18–48. Minov is particularly critical of Ri’s edition and the latter’s grouping of the extant manuscripts into two recensions, a Western and an Eastern one (Minov 2021, 32–36). Satan’s “onomastic shift” is found in both of Ri’s recensions, thus satisfying the criterion stipulated in Minov 2021, 35.

9 Cf. Mathews 2020, 32–33, l. 2051, stating that before the creation of Adam and subsequent events there was “no Satan” yet.

10 I owe the following reservations against the onomastic-shift hypothesis and the alternative hypothesis put forward in its place to Marianna Klar.



*iblis*, moreover—that is, Q 26:95 (mentioning *junūd iblis*, “the hosts of Iblīs”) and 34:20 (which says that most humans except for the believers “follow” Iblīs)—they rather undermine the claim that the devil *qua* tempter, after his refusal to obey God’s command to prostrate himself, is invariably called *al-shayṭān* in the Qur’an. The phenomenon to be explained, then, is less an onomastic shift between two subsequent narrative episodes than the formulaic combination of the prostration formula (*fa-sajadū . . .*) with the name *iblis* rather than with *al-shayṭān*. Yet the parallels from the *Cave of Treasures* and Jacob of Sarug do not offer much help in accounting for this formulaic feature. If anything, the folk-etymological link they posit between the name “Satan” and the notion of deviation might have led one to expect the formula to include *al-shayṭān* rather than *iblis*. The best explanation one can construct is perhaps to conjecture that the formula *fa-sajadū illā iblīsa* reached the Qur’anic milieu as a set phrase that had been coined in prior Arabophone narrative traditions. If that is the case, then *iblis* and *al-shayṭān* were most likely simply variant Arabic designations for the devil that surfaced in different regions or circles or Arabic speakers, the one under the impact of Greek *diabolos*, the other likely under the impact of Ethiopic *sayṭān* (see below). The hypothesis just put forward is strengthened by the fact that there is at least one other Qur’anic narrative formula for which a similar pre-Qur’anic origin can be established, namely, the phrase that God “blew some of his spirit into” Adam or Mary (*nafakhtu/nafakha/nafakhnā fihi/fhā min rūḥi/rūḥihi/rūḥinā* ; e.g., Q 15:29, 21:91; see under → *rūḥ*).

**Was Iblīs originally an angel?** The Qur’an’s standard formula for reporting Iblīs’s disobedience is of interest for a second reason as well: it may give the initial impression that prior to his fall Iblīs belonged to the angels (e.g., Ṭab. 1:535–543, *DTEK* 120, and Chabbi 2020, 198; see also Awn 1983, 26). Thus, the Arabic phrase *qulnā li-l-malā’ikati sjudū li-ādama fa-sajadū illā iblīsa* (Q 2:34, 7:11, 17:61, 18:50, 20:116; see also 15:30–31 and 38:73–74) is naturally rendered, “We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate yourselves to Adam,’ and they prostrated themselves, except for Iblīs.” This reading would be in line, for instance, with the view of Jacob of Sarug, who unequivocally declares Satan to have been an angel (Mathews 2020, 88–89, l. 2515; see in more detail below). However, one of the Qur’anic passages just referenced explicitly adds that Iblīs was in fact one of the jinn (Q 18:50: *fa-sajadū illā iblīsa kāna mina l-jinni*). At least on the premise that angels and jinn are distinct species—an assumption borne out by Q 34:40–41, where they are treated as two separate and non-overlapping groups—Q 18:50 entails the Qur’an does not consider Iblīs to be a fallen angel. In fact, the understanding that Iblīs was a jinni would seem to be implicit in the Qur’an as early as Q 38:76 (see also 7:12), where Iblīs justifies his refusal to prostrate to Adam by citing his own creation from fire, as opposed to Adam’s creation from the inferior substance of clay: his rationale clearly harks back to Q 55:14–15 and 15:26–27, which juxtapose the creation of humans from clay with that of the jinn from fire.<sup>11</sup> A further reason to suppose that the

<sup>11</sup> Note that Q 15:26–27 directly precedes another Qur’anic retelling of the disobedience of Iblīs, thereby reinforcing the link between this narrative and 55:14–15 (*HCI* 151–152). The *Cave of Treasures* preserves a close parallel to Iblīs’s protestation at being ordered to bow to Adam (Q 7:12 and 38:76: “I am better than him; you have created me from fire and him from clay”): “It is appropriate that *he* should worship *me*, because I am fire and spirit” (Ri 1987, Western manuscript group, ch. 3:2, and similarly in British Museum, Add. Mss. 25875 = Ri’s “Or<sup>A</sup>”; see *BEQ* 57–58; *HCI* 146; Tesei 2016, 67; Zellentin 2017, 104 and 108). The objection also appears in Ri’s Eastern manuscript group, though there it is voiced collectively by the “rebel order.” There is Biblical precedent for the position that angels were fashioned from fire and spirit (see Heb 1:7, citing Ps 104:4). The view is accepted in later Jewish sources (Ahuvia 2021, 5), and in the Christian tradition too angels are associated with

Qur'anic Iblīs did not begin his career as an angel, already advanced by premodern Muslim scholars, consists in various Qur'anic affirmations suggesting that angels are invariably obedient to God (see Awn 1983, 27–29, and also under → *malak*).

One solution to the problem is to construe the particle *illā* in Q 2:34 and its parallels (*fa-sajadū illā iblīsā*), including Q 18:50 itself, as what Muslim grammarians call a “discontinuous” exception (*istithnā’ munqaṭi’*), which does not imply that the entity excepted (in this case, Iblīs) is of the same kind as that from which it is excepted (namely, the angels).<sup>12</sup> Such an analysis might yield the following translation, which effectively construes *illā* as an adversative particle: “We said to the angels, ‘Prostrate yourselves to Adam,’ and they prostrated themselves. Not so Iblīs.”<sup>13</sup> The same understanding is feasibly extended to Q 15:30–31 and 38:73–74, which—in keeping with the ambient rhyme—expand the formula found in 2:34 and its parallels to *fa-sajada l-malā’ikatu kulluhum ajma’ūn // illā iblīsā abā/stakbara . . .* (“And the angels prostrated themselves, all of them together. // Not so Iblīs. He refused / behaved haughtily . . .”). A slight difficulty with this approach, however, is that there is a batch of verses in the Qur'anic Lot narratives that exhibit a very similar use of *illā* (Q 7:83, 11:81, 15:59–60, 26:170–171, 27:57, 29:32.33, 37:134–135) but which are most straightforwardly construed as exceptive rather than adversative.<sup>14</sup> These ostensible syntactic parallels may well incline one to favour an exceptive reading of *illā* in the context of the Iblīs narrative as well, even if the carry-over could of course be resisted.

In any case, even if one does opt for the exceptive rather than the adversative reading—or, in the terminology of Arabic grammarians, for construing *illā* as a “continuous” exception (*istithnā’ muttaṣil*)—it is not necessarily a foregone conclusion that Iblīs must have been an angel. Thus, al-Zamaksharī espouses a continuous construal of *illā* (though he admits that a discontinuous one is also possible) in his commentary on Q 2:34 (Zam. 1:254) and later on explains, apropos of Q 15:30–31 (Zam. 3:405): “Iblīs was excepted from the angels because he was among them, having been commanded to prostrate himself together with them (*ma’mūran ma’ahum bi-l-sujūd*). Thus, the term ‘angels’ was predominant, and he [Iblīs]

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fire (see, e.g., Muehlberger 2013, 35–36, on Evagrius of Pontus, who says that in angels fire is predominant over other elements). It is not impossible that the Qur'an similarly assumes that angels have a fiery nature, but this is never explicitly stated. In the later Islamic tradition, one finds the contention that while the jinn were created from fire, the angels were created from light (Burge 2012, 100, 114–115).

12 See al-Māturīdī 2005–2007, 1:83, who adduces the following example (although he does not use the technical term *munqaṭi’*): “The people of Kufa entered this house, but not so (*illā*) one of the inhabitants of Medina.” It should be noted that the Islamic tradition transmits both the readings *illā iblīsā* in the accusative and *illā iblīsū* in the nominative; in the latter case, *illā* is said to be equivalent to the sentence-opening conjunctions “and” or “but” (MQ 1:80; see also MQQ 1:46). However, this should not be considered to provide additional confirmation in favour of understanding *illā* as discontinuous, over and above the arguments put forward in the main text, since the reading in the nominative could simply reflect secondary exegetical speculation. On *istithnā’ munqaṭi’*, see also Blankinship 2020, 72–78.

13 See also EAP 2:39, proposing that *illā* in the Qur'an frequently has the meaning “though this is not the case with.” For two adversative cases of *illā* (which I owe to Ohad Kayam), see Q 26:89 and 37:40.

14 The relevant passages fall into two groups. First, Q 7:83, 27:57, and 29:32.33 all state that God has delivered or will deliver Lot and his family, “except for his wife; she remained behind” or similarly (*illā mra’atahu/mra’ataka kānat/qaddarnāhā mina l-ghābirin*; see also Q 11:81). Secondly, Q 15:59–60, 26:170–171, and 37:134–135 vary the preceding by employing enjambment and making use of *ajma’ūn* as a rhyme word, similar to 15:30–31 and 38:73–74. For instance, Q 26:170–171 reports that “we delivered Lot and his entire family // except for an old woman who stayed behind” (*fa-najjaynāhu wa-ahlahu ajma’ūn // illā ‘ajūzan fi l-ghābirin*). Obviously, the old woman at hand is Lot’s wife, who according to Gen 19:26 looked back when fleeing Sodom and Gomorrah and was turned into a pillar of salt. In all of these passages, *illā* is most naturally understood as having an exceptive function, since Lot’s wife is a member of his family.

was subsequently excepted given this predominance.”<sup>15</sup> With al-Zamaksharī one could hold, therefore, that the rationale for the Qur’anic use of *illā* is not that Iblīs was angelic in origin or nature but simply that he had been commanded to prostrate to Adam *together with* (al-Zamaksharī: *ma’a*) the angels. The upshot is that whether *illā* is discontinuous or continuous, it is not linguistically impossible to understand the particle in a manner that avoids the inference that Iblīs belonged to the same species as the angels.

At the same time, it ought to be conceded that were it not for Q 38:76 and 18:50, the most straightforward and uncontrived reading of *fa-sajadū illā iblīsa* and its variants would surely be “they prostrated themselves, except for Iblīs,” including the implication that Iblīs was indeed one of the angels. At least to some degree, then, the conundrum remains, despite the considerable grammatical ingenuity displayed by Muslim exegetes. Ultimately, a more satisfactory manner of resolving the problem is to revisit the hypothesis developed earlier that the formula *fa-sajadū illā iblīsa* might be a residue of pre-Qur’anic narrative tradition that was only adopted by the Qur’an, not coined by it. For this conjecture opens up the possibility that the disobedience formula might originally have been at home in a version of the Adam story in which the devil was squarely taken to be a fallen angel, with the phrase *fa-sajadū illā iblīsa* being understood in the straightforward and uncontrived sense just noted. Subsequently, however, the formula was inherited by the Qur’anic proclamations, which at least from Q 38:76 onwards cast the devil as a jinni and also presuppose fairly consistently that angels do not disobey God (see under → *malak*). Against the background of these additional Qur’anic commitments, the meaning of *illā* in the set phrase *fa-sajadū illā iblīsa* would then quite naturally have been interpretively adjusted in such a way as to be compatible with Iblīs’s identity as a jinni. This reinterpretation would have been operative at least from Q 38:73–76 onwards and quite possibly as early as the chronologically earliest version of the story of Iblīs’s insubordination in Q 15:28–43.

The separateness from the angels with which the Qur’an endows Iblīs is, in any case, not completely unprecedented. As Tommaso Tesei has observed, the fact that the Qur’anic accounts of the fall of Iblīs place him in close proximity to the angels while nonetheless identifying him as a jinni may be connected to a certain ambivalence with which the nature of Satan and his minions is characterised in the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* (Tesei 2016, 76). Thus, some manuscripts of the *Cave of Treasures* introduce the future Satan as the “chief” of the “lower order” (*tegmā*; Ri 1987, Western manuscript group, ch. 3:1),<sup>16</sup> meaning a lower order of angels. At first sight, the main inference one is likely to draw from the statement is that Satan is a fallen angel, a view unequivocally endorsed by Jacob of Sarug (Mathews 2020, 88–89, l. 2515).<sup>17</sup> Yet one must not overlook the concomitant distinction between different classes or “orders” (singular: *tegmā*) of angels, a distinction also found in Jacob, who speaks of an “exalted” order, a “lesser one,” and a “lowly one, which is the rank that fell” (Mathews 2009, 30–31, ll. 197–198). It was clearly possible for

15 Al-Zamaksharī illustrates this phenomenon of discursive predominance by pointing to the use of the masculine pronoun for a group that also includes a female (*ra’aytuhum illā hindan*).

16 The reference to the “chief of the lower order” is also contained in the manuscript British Museum, Add. Mss. 25875 (Ri’s “Or<sup>AB</sup>”). Cf. similarly Mathews 2020, 88–89, ll. 2517–2524.

17 At one point, some manuscripts of the *Cave of Treasures* expressly describe Satan as “one of the cherubim who fell” (Ri 1987, Western manuscript group, no. 18:15; Tesei 2016, 76). On Satan as a former angel, see also the Latin recension of the *Life of Adam and Eve* (§§ 12–13, 15; Charlesworth 1985, 262, and Anderson and Stone 1994, 10–12).

the narrative traditions that are fluidly documented by the various manuscripts of the *Cave of Treasures* or by the homiletic works of Jacob of Sarug to be recounted in such a way as to endow those angels who obediently bowed to Adam with a tangible difference from another, and inferior, class of angels or spiritual beings, who fell together with Satan.<sup>18</sup> In the Qur'an, this distinction between two "orders" of spiritual or angelic beings, the lower one of whom end up employing their free will in order to turn away from God, hardens into a more clear-cut discrepancy between the angels and the jinn as two distinct species, even though the Qur'anic scene reporting the disobedience of Iblīs does of course place him in close proximity to the angels.<sup>19</sup> Similar to the lower or lowest order of angels in the *Cave of Treasures* and Jacob of Sarug, in the Qur'an it is only the jinn who, like humans, are capable of disobeying God or at least concretely likely to do so. Still, it bears underlining that the Qur'anic jinn remain overall much more neutral than Satan's demonic minions in the Christian tradition: rather than having made a primordial choice against God as a result of which they are irrevocably embroiled in evil, the jinn occupy a morally ambiguous zone, enabling at least some of them to become believers (see under → *jinn*).

**The devil's "authority" (*sultān*).** Subsequent to his expulsion from the company of God and the angels, God grants Iblīs respite from damnation and Iblīs announces that he will seek to seduce (*aghwā*)<sup>20</sup> and waylay as many humans as he can; those who succumb to him will be doomed to hell (Q 7:14–18, 15:36–43, 17:62–65, 38:79–85). By contrast, God's true or "elect" (*mukhlāṣ*)<sup>21</sup> "servants" are exempted from such diabolical temptation (Q 15:40, 38:83), and the devil is said to have no "authority" (→ *sultān*) over them (Q 15:42, 17:65). Such statements are reminiscent of the declaration in Col 1:13 that God "has rescued us from the authority (*ek tēs exousias*, Peshitta: *men shūltāneh*) of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved son," illustrating the general conceptual continuity that obtains between Qur'anic *sultān* and New Testamental *exousia*.<sup>22</sup> The exemption from the devil's authority that the Qur'an promises to God's servants could be taken to mean that some humans enjoy special divine protection against temptation, as illustrated by Q 12:24, where God "turns away" (*ṣarafa*; see CDKA 160–161) evil from Joseph, thus fortifying him to resist being seduced by the wife of his Egyptian master (see also Q 12:33–34). Yet God's

18 Even more supportive of such an understanding is the edited text of the so-called Eastern manuscript group of the *Cave of Treasures*, which sets the scene for Satan's fall by narrating how Adam was envied by the "rebellious order" (*haw tegmā mārodā*), who are glossed as "one of the orders of spiritual beings" (Ri 1987, Eastern manuscript group, ch. 3:1). This phrasing allows for the understanding that the future Satan belonged to a class of spiritual beings who were different in nature from the angels rather than just forming a special subclass of them. Tesei also points out that a later passage in the *Cave of Treasures* contrasts the saintly descendants of Seth with "the order of demons who fell from heaven" (Ri 1987, ch. 7:4; Tesei 2016, 76). The statement could be construed to mean that the "lower order" was non-angelic or demonic to begin with. However, it is equally possible to interpret the phrase in the sense of "the beings who fell from heaven and as a result turned into demons."

19 Tesei suggests that the Qur'anic Iblīs/Satan has a "twofold angelic and demoniac nature," i.e., that he is both a demon and an angel (Tesei 2016, 76).

20 The verb *aghwā* also occurs in a poem on the creation of the world by 'Adi ibn Zayd (al-Mu'aybid 1965, no. 103:14), in a retrospective description of Adam and Eve's seduction by the serpent.

21 On *akhlaṣa*, see CDKA 89. *Akhlaṣa dīnahu/al-dīna li-llāhi* is "to restrict (one's) religious worship or allegiance exclusively to God" (e.g., Q 4:146; → *dīn*<sup>2</sup>). The passive participle *mukhlāṣ*, which almost always functions as an attribute of God's servants (Q 12:24, 15:40, 37:40.74.128.160.169, 38:83; but see 19:51) would seem to mean "singled out, elect." Hence, the transitive verb *akhlaṣa* may be generally parsed as meaning "to single out s.th. or s.o.," a meaning that is clear in Q 38:46 (*innā akhlaṣnāhum bi-khālīṣatin dhikrā l-dār*, "We singled them out with a special quality, [namely,] exhortation about the [final] abode"; cf. CDKA 104).

22 On the authority of the devil, see also Acts 26:18. Zellentin 2017, 106, notes that the *Clementine Homilies*, too, deny the devil "authority" or *exousia* over those who are devoted to God.

fortification of Joseph does not arrive out of the blue, for in the previous verse, Q 12:23, Joseph explicitly seeks refuge with God (*ma'ādha llāhi*) and asserts that wrongdoers will not flourish (*innahu lā yuflihu l-zālimūn*). Whatever assistance against temptation God affords him, therefore, is predicated on Joseph's own determination to resist temptation. Similarly, when it is said that God's true or "elect" are exempt from the devil's authority, this likely presupposes significant moral effort on the latter's part to withstand the devil's endeavours to sway them, even if such moral effort can perhaps be supplemented by some sort of divine fortification.

This interpretation is corroborated by comments on the issue of the devil's authority over humans that occur outside the Qur'anic retellings of the fall of Iblīs. According to Q 16:99–100, the devil has no authority over those who believe and who entrust themselves to God; rather, the devil's authority only extends to those who "take him as an ally" (*tawallā* + acc.) and who are guilty of associationism or *shirk*. This is only superficially contradicted by Q 14:22, where the devil delivers an eschatological address to the sinners in which he denies possessing any real "authority" (*sultān*) over anyone: "I did not have any authority over you<sup>p</sup>; it was only that I called you and you responded to me" (*wa-mā kāna liya 'alaykum min sultānin illā an da'awtukum fa-stajabtum li*; see also Q 34:20–21). The common assumption underlying Q 14:22 and 16:99–100 is clearly that Satan or the devil only acquires "authority" over a person if this person willingly cedes it, by "responding to" the devil or by "taking him as an ally." Unlike the famous exchange between God and Satan in Job 1, where Satan is given permission to destroy all of Job's possessions with a view to ascertaining the sincerity of his commitment to God (Job 1:10–12), it is therefore not clear that the Qur'anic devil secures any real concession from God at all in passages like Q 17:62–65: since putting humans to the test is said to be the ultimate purpose for which God has created the world (Q 11:7; → *balā*), the devil's moral assaults on Adam and his descendants merely serve God's prior objective. Similarly, when Job laments to God that "Satan has touched me with hardship and torment" (Q 38:41: *annī massaniya l-shayṭānu bi-nuṣbin wa-'adhāb*), which the Qur'an seems to accept as an accurate description of Job's situation, this presupposes that Satan can deploy adversity and misfortune in order to lure humans away from God; but elsewhere it is made clear that God himself may test humans by subjecting them to suffering and misfortune (e.g., Q 21:35: *nablūkum bi-l-sharri wa-l-khayri fitnatan*; see under → *balā*). Once more, Satan appears to be merely an agent or instrument serving God's ultimate purpose.

The Qur'anic retellings of the dialogue between God and Iblīs, which may be described as a primordial divine licensing of the devil's role as humanity's tempter, therefore underscore that the devil is far from a genuine opponent of God: rather than frustrating God's design, he plays a well-defined role in it (Pohlmann 2012, 119–120; Tesei 2016, 71–73; *HCI* 147–148). Q 59:16 goes so far as to portray how Satan disowns his victims and professes his own fear of God, though the verb used is *khāfa* and not → *ittaqa* (which would carry implications of practical righteousness): "I am quit of you; I am afraid of God, the Lord of the world-dwellers."

It is above all in this function as a divinely licensed tempter that the devil is present in the later Meccan and Medinan surahs, which warn the believers not to "follow the footsteps of the devil" (Q 2:168.208, 6:142, 24:21: *lā tattabi'ū khuṭuwāti l-shayṭāni*; see also under → *tabi'a*) and remind them that the devil is humankind's "clear enemy" (*'aduww mubīn*; see Q 2:36.168.208, 6:142, 7:22, 12:5, 17:53, 28:15, 35:6, 36:60, 43:62). It is therefore



not so much the indistinct and impersonal multitude of malevolent jinn or “the devils” (*al-shayāṭīn*) of whom the Qur’anic community must be perpetually wary, notwithstanding the doctrine of companion demons outlined above and the devils’ role as a source of temptation. Rather, humans must above all beware of the machinations of one particular jinni, the arch-tempter Satan or “the devil” *par excellence*; although his activity as a tempter accords with God’s overarching cosmic objective of moral discrimination, Satan’s backstory makes him a remorseless foe of humankind who is intent on dragging as many humans with him to hell as he can contrive (e.g., Q 2:268, 3:155, 4:38.60.76.83.117–121, 5:90–91, 8:11.48, 58:10.19, 59:16; on the devil’s activity as a tempter and seducer, see in more detail *DTEK* 64–72). Indeed, it is precisely because of his personal backstory and the rancour engendered by it that the devil is able to function so efficiently as God’s agent of temptation.

“The devil” (*al-shayṭān*) and “the devils” (*al-shayāṭīn*). As just intimated, both “the devil” or Satan (*al-shayṭān*) and “the devils” (*al-shayāṭīn*) function as sources of temptation, and their activity is sometimes described in similar terms. Thus, a string of verses describes the devil’s activity with the verb *zayyana* + acc. *li-*, “to make s.th. appear fair, alluring, or desirable to s.o.” (Q 6:43, 8:48, 15:39, 16:63, 27:24, 29:38), and in Q 41:25 the grammatical subject of *zayyana* consists in the companion demons (*quranā*), whom Q 43:36 identifies as recruited from among the devils (see also the occurrence of *zayyana* in Q 6:137).<sup>23</sup> Moreover, both “the devil” and “the devils” are linked with the attribute → *rajīm*, “deserving to be pelted” (cf. Q 3:36, 15:34, 16:98, 38:77 with 15:17, 81:25). Finally, the way in which the devil will ultimately disown those who have followed him and shift the blame for their misdeeds back onto them (Q 14:22) bears a general resemblance to the way in which the companion demons are described as doing the same (Q 50:27).

Given such parallels and the evident fact that *al-shayāṭīn* is the plural of *al-shayṭān*, recipients of the Qur’an would likely have inferred that the devil is in some sense to be envisaged as the chief of the evil demons, conforming to late antique precedent. Nonetheless, the precise relationship between the devil and other demons remains largely implicit in the Qur’an (*DTEK* 62). One verse mentions Iblīs’s “offspring” (*dhurriyyah*, Q 18:50), raising the possibility that the descendants in question are to be identified with wicked demons, and Q 26:95 speaks of the “hosts (*junūd*) of Iblīs” being cast into hell.<sup>24</sup> Especially since these hosts are mentioned in addition to “those who have gone astray” (*al-ghāwūn*), who would seem to refer to human sinners, the “hosts of Iblīs” are probably to be understood as the latter’s demonic minions. Yet the Qur’an never explicitly confirms that Iblīs was expelled together with an entire group of subordinates, as narrated, for instance, in the *Cave of Treasures* (Ri 1987, ch. 3:4); and the Qur’anic devil is generally represented as operating in an individual capacity rather than as the head of an array of subordinates. It is possible that this lack of an explicit connection between Iblīs or the devil as a narrative protagonist, on the one hand, and the *shayāṭīn* as wicked demons, on the other, reflects the fact that both terms were at home in different strands of ancient Arabian discourse: the former in Christian narratives around the figure of a fallen member of God’s heavenly entourage who is identical with the heavenly “accuser” or “adversary” (*haṣṣāṭān*) of the

23 The verb can also take God as its subject (Q 6:108, 27:4), highlighting that the temptations originating from Satan and companion demons are all parts of God’s ultimate purpose of subjecting humans to trials in order to ascertain their moral merit (→ *balā*). Other occurrences of *zayyana* in the meaning under discussion are in the passive (Q 2:212, 3:14, 6:122).

24 Q 17:64, too, presents Iblīs/Satan as commanding an army (Zellentin 2017, 105).



Bible, and the latter in a broader pre-Qur'anic usage in which the Arabic word *shayṭān* had become naturalised as a common noun referring to a malicious or cunning spirit in general—a possibility explored in the next and final section of the entry.

***Shayṭān* in pre-Qur'anic Arabic.** In concluding this overview of Qur'anic statements about the devils and devilish demons, some comments on the putative history and usage of the word *shayṭān* prior to the Qur'an are in order, even though the topic permits little more than speculation. The Qur'anic *al-shayṭān* is usually taken to have its immediate origin in Classical Ethiopic *sayṭān*, “Satan” (RAH 232, n. 1; NB 47; Rudolph 1922, 34–35; KU 120–121; see also Leslau 1991, 522–523). Yet the reverse etymological relationship has also been maintained, with *shayṭān* being a native Arabic word that was subsequently loaned into Ethiopic (Praetorius 1907, 619–620). Aspects of this latter account, long sidelined as a result of Nöldeke's rejection, have recently been championed and further developed by Mark Durie (Durie 2018, 182–195). Durie maintains that the indigenous Arabic word *shayṭān*, originally referring to the Arabian horned viper, was secondarily enlisted, in a case of “phono-semantic matching,” as the Arabic name of the Biblical Satan, whom Jewish and Christian texts designated by the phonetically similar words *haśśāṭān* (Biblical Hebrew), *śaṭan* (rabbinic Hebrew), *ho satanas* (Greek), or *sāṭānā* (Syriac).<sup>25</sup> Kropp, too, assumes that there was an indigenous Arabic word *shayṭān*, which he holds to have subsequently blended with a designation for the Biblical Satan loaned from Old Ethiopic (Kropp 2007, especially 339); unlike Durie he does not think that the diphthong *-ay-* in Ethiopic *sayṭān* is linguistically inexplicable unless assumed to derive from Arabic *shayṭān* (cf. Durie 2018, 191, and Kropp 2007, 335–336 and 338–339).

In deciding between these conflicting theories, it would be crucial to know whether it is indeed the case, as asserted by Muslim scholars and lexicographers reaching back at least as far as al-Jāhīz, that *shayṭān* can mean “snake” or a certain species thereof (AEL 1552; e.g., FVQ 188 and Durie 2018, 186; see also Radscheit 2010, 111). The textual evidence for this contention is not exactly compelling, since one of the two verses that Jeffery cites in support of *shayṭān* signifying “snake”—attributed to Ṭarafah and going back to al-Jāhīz's *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* (al-Jāhīz 1965, 1:153.300, 4:133, 6:192; see already van Vloten 1893, 175)—is not found in the poet's *dūwān*. Nonetheless, at least the weaker claim that *shayṭān* was already part of the Arabic language before the Qur'an can be accepted with a sufficient degree of confidence. The word occurs in a two-verse fragment of poetry that al-Jāhīz attributes to Aws ibn Ḥajar (Geyer 1892, no. 44:2), accusing a woman of having *al-shayṭān* “perched on the back of her neck” (*idhā l-shayṭānu qaṣṣa'a fī qafāhā*),<sup>26</sup> and a similar reference to *al-shayṭān* is found in a poem that the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* assign to the *mukhaḍram* poet al-Muzarrid (Lyll 1918–1924, no. 17:68).<sup>27</sup> A couplet ascribed to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt (Schulthess 1911a, no. 25:27–28 = al-Saṭlī 1974, no. 10:27–28), moreover, speaks of *shayṭān*, “devils,” who are repelled from heaven by means of shooting stars; although these verses

<sup>25</sup> A third account is Puin's proposal that the medial *y* of Arabic *shayṭān*, which on the face of it militates against direct derivation from Hebrew *śāṭān* or Syriac *sāṭānā*, is due to a misreading of the *mater lectionis yā'*, which occasionally represents the sound *ā* in early Qur'anic manuscripts (von Bothmer et al. 1999, 39–40; see also the discussion in Reynolds 2010a, 57, n. 93). However, the unanimity with which the Islamic tradition, and not just those parts of it that are explicitly concerned with the Qur'an, report that the word is *shayṭān*, with no apparent mention of a variant form *shāṭān*, poses a problem for Puin's theory.

<sup>26</sup> On *qaṣṣa'a*, see al-Azhari [1964–1976], 1:176 (*wa-qaṣṣa'a l-raǰulu fī baytihi idhā lazimahu wa-lam yabrahhu*).

<sup>27</sup> On the poet, who reportedly converted to Islam at an advanced age in 630, see Sezgin 1975, 241.

resemble Qur'anic passages like Q 15:17–18 and 37:7–10, they may well be authentic (see in more detail under → *jinn*). Finally, *shayṭān* is credibly reported to have been a pre-Islamic personal name (Goldziher 1891, 685, n. 2; Goldziher 1896, 106; *KU* 120).

In speculating on the semantic development of *shayṭān* in pre-Qur'anic Arabic, it is best to work backwards in time. A defensible starting point is to surmise that already prior to Muhammad's preaching the word had come to signify a spirit or demon, perhaps a cunning or malicious one, seeing that this meaning is so clearly attested in the Qur'an. The reported use of *shayṭān* as a proper name could then be explained as having had a complimentary sense connoting possession of superhuman abilities, just as we might today describe someone as "fiendishly" cunning (see also van Vloten 1893, 176). Alternatively, the name *shayṭān* may have been apotropaic, i.e., may exemplify the tendency to call children by derogatory names in order to protect them from malicious forces. In view of two Qur'anic verses suggesting an affinity between snakes and the jinn (Q 27:10, 28:31; → *jinn*), there might, moreover, have been a general cultural association in pre-Islamic Arabia between snakes and demons. This would be one way of making sense of al-Jāhīz's claim that *shayṭān* can mean "snake" in Arabic. (An alternative explanation, which I ultimately find more attractive, is suggested below.)

It is striking, though, that the verse attributed to Aws ibn Ḥajar has *al-shayṭān* with the definite article, which does invite the translation "Satan" or "the devil." How to account for this? It is not implausible that pre-Qur'anic speakers of Arabic, especially Christian ones, would have heard of the figure of a malevolent tempter and corrupter who was called, under the influence of Ethiopic *sayṭān*, "Satan" or *al-shayṭān*. In fact, one may even go further and suppose that stories about the fall of *al-shayṭān* and his responsibility for seducing Adam and Eve had begun to circulate among Arabophone Christians prior to the Qur'an, thus preparing the ground for Qur'anic narratives about this sequence of events. Admittedly, I am unable to produce a pre-Qur'anic Arabic *locus probans* in which Adam and Eve's seduction is blamed on the devil rather than just the serpent. Instead, a poetic retelling of the Biblical account of the creation of Adam that is attributed to the Christian poet 'Adī ibn Zayd differs from the Qur'an by omitting any reference to Satan or the devil and only imputes the temptation of Adam and Eve to "the serpent" (*al-ḥayyah*), in faithful correspondence to Gen 3 (Toral-Niehoff 2008, 249–251, and Dmitriev 2010, 366–367; see al-Mu'ayyid 1965, no. 103:11–15).<sup>28</sup> Nonetheless, the Christian tendency to link or conflate the Biblical serpent from Gen 3 with Satan is well attested (e.g., Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 15:14; see also Ephrem 1955, 34 = Ephrem 1994, 107–108; see also Witztum 2011, 93). This makes it fairly unproblematic to posit that there may have been pre-Qur'anic Arabic retellings of the fall of Adam and Eve that did feature Satan and not just the serpent—in contrast to 'Adī ibn Zayd, who may deliberately have confined himself to a relatively faithful versification of the Biblical text to the exclusion of extra-scriptural amplifications involving Satan (Toral-Niehoff 2008, 252–255). Indeed, one could even suggest that the reported use of *shayṭān* to mean "snake" is best explained as a distant lexical reflection of the Christian conflation of the Biblical serpent with Satan.

<sup>28</sup> This noteworthy discrepancy constitutes an important argument for the basic authenticity of 'Adī ibn Zayd's text. A poetic fragment that is attributed, probably correctly, to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣālt similarly appears to presuppose that responsibility for the fall of Adam lies with the serpent (*al-ḥayyah*), though the passage is more allusive than the 'Adī ibn Zayd poem (Schulthess 1911a, no. 28:6–7 = al-Saṭī 1974, no. 69:6–7; see Seidensticker 2011b, 49–50).

Assuming that pre-Qur'anic speakers of Arabic did hear of Satan or the devil under the name of *al-shayṭān*, did this hypothetical pre-Qur'anic usage of *al-shayṭān* merge with an indigenous Arabic lexeme *shayṭān* as a common noun for demons (or, perhaps, snakes)? It seems at least as likely, if not simpler, to posit that *shayṭān* in the sense of “demon” evolved from *al-shayṭān* = “Satan,” resulting from the fact that the Arabic word came to be used not only as a proper name of the devil but also as a common noun for demonic beings more generally. Such a generic extension of the word would not have been unprecedented: Classical Ethiopic *sayṭān* has a plural that means “demons” (Leslau 1991, 522–523; Kropp 2007, 333), and Jewish incantation bowls, too, document a plural use of the noun *saṭana* in the sense of “demons” (DJBA 799).<sup>29</sup> Moreover, as suggested in the preceding paragraph, the application of *shayṭān* to snakes, too, could be explained in a manner that does not require us to posit the existence of an indigenous Arabic word that secondarily merged with the loanword *al-shayṭān* = “Satan.” Hence, if the possibility of deriving Arabic *shayṭān* from Ethiopic *sayṭān* is admitted, the use of Arabic *shayṭān* as a species term for demons, and conceivably also for snakes, does not necessitate the further postulate that there also existed a native Arabic word *shayṭān* that was coincidentally identical with the Arabic name of Satan.

### ***shī'ah* | group, faction**

→ *ḥizb*

<sup>29</sup> This contradicts Durie 2018, 186, who states that the Qur'anic use of *shayṭān* as a common noun is unparalleled “in contemporary Jewish or Christian writings.”

# Ş

## ş (surah-initial letter)

→ ʾ-l-r

### *al-şābiʿūn* pl. | converts (to Manichaeism?)

Further vocabulary discussed: *al-yahūd*, *alladhīna hādū*, *hūd* pl. | the Jews *al-naşārā* pl. | the Christians *alladhīna āmanū*, *al-muʿminūn* pl. | the believers *al-majūs* pl. | the Magians *alladhīna ashrakū*, *al-mushrikūn* pl. | the associators

Q 2:62, 5:69, and 22:17 enumerate *al-şābiʿūn* as one of several religious communities, in all cases together with the Jews (*alladhīna hādū*; see under → *al-yahūd*) and the Christians (→ *al-naşārā*). No further details about their doctrines or practices are given anywhere else in the Qurʿan. Earlier proposals to ascertain the meaning of *al-şābiʿūn* considered the word to stem from the Aramaic verb for “to baptise” (ş-b-ʿ) and equated the *şābiʿūn* with Mandaeans (e.g., *KU* 121–122; see now also van Putten 2022, 167). More recently, François de Blois has argued that the word is to be derived from the Arabic verb *şabā ilā*, “to be enamoured of, to incline towards,” used in a similar sense as “to convert” in modern English (de Blois 1995, including a detailed overview of previous scholarship).

De Blois further proposes that what the *şābiʿūn* had converted to was specifically Manichaeism, seeing that all the other religions present in the Qurʿanic milieu can be mapped onto less enigmatic terms in Qurʿanic Arabic (de Blois 1995, 50). Thus, the most comprehensive Qurʿanic catalogue of religious communities in Q 22:17 lists *alladhīna āmanū* = the Qurʿanic “believers” (→ *āmana*), *alladhīna hādū* = the Jews, *al-naşārā* = the Christians, *al-majūs* = the “Magians” or Zoroastrians, and *alladhīna ashrakū* = the pagan “associators” (see under → *ashraka*). By elimination, the one remaining item in the list, *al-şābiʿūn* or “the converts,” might then be identified with Manichaeism, which was after all a major missionary religion in late antiquity. It is true, however, that at least as far as we can currently tell, there is no clear Manichaean impact on the Islamic scripture.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, the fact that the Qurʿan says nothing of substance about the Sabians’ beliefs or practices leaves considerable space for further conjectures. Thus, a forthcoming article by Adam Silverstein surmises that the Sabians are to be identified with a subgroup of the Samaritans called the Sabuaeans (Silverstein, forthcoming). This would have the virtue of

<sup>1</sup> On the phrase “seal of the prophets” in Q 33:40, which has often been taken to reflect Manichaean language, see under → *khatama*.

tallying with Silverstein's finding that elements of the Joseph narrative in Surah 12 reflect Samaritan notions.

**ṣabara** tr. | to restrain s.th. (namely, one's soul)

**ṣabara** intr. | to be steadfast

**ṣabara** intr. *li-* | to await s.th. steadfastly

**ṣabara** intr. *'alā* | to endure s.th. steadfastly

**ṣabr** | self-restraint, steadfastness

Further vocabulary discussed: *nafs* | soul, (vital) self *sawwala* tr. *li-* | to persuade s.o. of s.th. *tawakkala* intr. *'alā* | to rely upon s.o., to entrust o.s. to s.o. *jāhada* intr./tr. | to contend (against s.o.) *balā* tr. | to assess, test, or try s.o.

**Pre-Qur'anic background and overview.** In ancient Arabic poetry, the virtue of steadfastness (*ṣabr*) is the poet-hero's ability to restrain (*ṣabara*) his vital self (*nafs*) and unflinchingly to face the manifold dangers and hardships to which he must expose himself (see the material discussed under → *nafs*; for a further verse boasting of steadfastness in battle, see Lyall 1918–1924, no. 106:6). Qur'anic residues of this general link between the virtue of steadfastness and mastery of the vital self or *nafs* consist in Q 18:28, where the noun *nafs* is the direct object of transitive *ṣabara*, similar to some poetic verses, and 12:18.83, where Jacob recommends steadfastness as the way to overcome the persuasive promptings (verb: *sawwala*) of one's *nafs*. Nonetheless, the Meccan surahs exhibit a significant conceptual reconfiguration of the virtue of steadfastness in line with their general emphasis that the believers must patiently await God's judgement. The Medinan surahs subsequently enrich this largely passive Meccan concept of forbearance with more activist aspects.

**Steadfastness in the Meccan Qur'an.** The Meccan surahs transform the heroic virtue of steadfast self-restraint in the face of peril and hardship that is seen in poetry into a patient awaiting of God's retributive intervention in the face of adversity and rejection. For example, the early Meccan verses Q 52:48 and 68:48 as well as the slightly later verse 76:24 demand that the Messenger “steadfastly await the judgement of your<sup>s</sup> Lord” (*wa-ṣbir/fa-ṣbir li-ḥukmi rabbika*; see also the early Meccan exhortations to steadfastness in Q 70:5 and 74:7), and according to Q 20:130, 38:17, 50:39, and 73:10 the Messenger must “steadfastly endure what they”—namely, his opponents—“say” (*fa-ṣbir/wa-ṣbir 'alā mā yaqūlūna*). Other types of adversity, too, ought to be endured patiently (e.g., Q 31:17) and indeed unquestioningly, as exemplified by the paradigmatic figure of Job (Q 21:83–84, 38:41–44; see Alexander 2006, 380–381 and also under → *ḥalāma*). Hardship and misfortune are, after all, an important means by which God ascertains the moral merit of humans (see under → *balā*). In return for exhibiting such patience, the believers are promised eschatological reward “because they were steadfast” (Q 76:12: *wa-jazāhum bi-mā ṣabarū jannatan wa-ḥarīrā*; cf. the use of *bi-mā ṣabarū* in 7:137, 23:111, 25:75, 28:54). From the ability to exercise self-restraint in the interest of embarking on and persevering in heroic action, the virtue of *ṣabara* is thus remoulded into passive forbearance and patient endurance towards an eschatological vanishing point. Decisive action is not the preserve of humans but of God. As illustrated by the preceding references, the living exemplar of such steadfast endurance is the Qur'anic Messenger, whom the Meccan proclamations

frequently address with the imperative *fa-ṣbir/wa-ṣbir* (see, in addition to the verses just cited, Q10:109, 11:49.115, 16:127, 30:60, 40:55.77, 46:35, and 70:5; see also 31:17, where the addressee of the imperative is the son of Luqmān).<sup>1</sup>

**Steadfastness in Q 18:65–82.** A vital Meccan passage that helps flesh out the concept of steadfastness is Q 18:65–82 (see also under → *ḥikmah*), which recounts Moses’s travels in the company of an anonymous “servant” of God who performs a number of shocking actions that are retrospectively explained as prudently serving intelligible moral objectives. Derivatives of *ṣ-b-r* are found in Q18:67.68.69.72.75.78.82, making this the passage with the highest incidence of occurrences of the root *ṣ-b-r* in the Qur’an. Unlike Job, whom God found to be “steadfast” (Q 38:44), Moses’s aspiration to prove himself steadfast (Q 18:69) fails due to his inability to refrain from passing judgement on his companion’s actions, despite the fact that the latter is expressly introduced as participating in God’s mercy and knowledge (Q 18:65). The passage may be considered a negative counterpart to the Qur’anic portrayal of Job and like it confirms that steadfastness is not limited to the mere endurance of outward adversity; it also involves an inner attitude of trust in God and the ability to desist from questioning and doubting the creator’s mercy and wisdom even when faced with seemingly contrary experiences. Steadfastness or *ṣabr* thus includes the ability to withstand and brace oneself against cognitive dissonance. The fact that the Qur’anic understanding of steadfastness encompasses this aspect of inner trust also illuminates why the Meccan verse Q 29:59 couples the concept of steadfastness with that of total reliance (verb: *tawakkala*) upon God, by referring to “those who are steadfast and who rely upon their Lord” (*alladhīna ṣabarū wa-‘alā rabbihim yatawakkalūn*; cf. Q 16:42).<sup>2</sup>

**Steadfastness in the Medinan Qur’an.** The Meccan notion of steadfastness or *ṣabr*, which is largely passive, undergoes a certain shift back to activism in Medinan passages. Some of them combine the virtue of steadfastness with references to “contending” (verb: → *jāhada*; see Q 3:142, 16:110, 47:31),<sup>3</sup> which in the Medinan surahs becomes a byword for militancy. A number of additional Medinan verses reference the virtue of steadfastness in contexts that are clearly martial (Q 2:249–250, 3:125.146, 8:65). This shift consorts with the general transition from passivism to activism that marks the progression from the Meccan to the Medinan surahs (→ *jāhada*). Nonetheless, the development just sketched by no means amounts to a complete reconstruction of the concept of steadfastness, since there is a substantial number of Medinan verses in which derivatives of *ṣ-b-r* continue to function in broad accordance with their Meccan usage (e.g., Q 2:45.177, 3:17, 22:35, 33:35). A good illustration of the way in which both aspects of the virtue of steadfastness are synthetically integrated is Q 2:153–157. The passage begins by charging the believers to have recourse to steadfastness and prayer (v. 153), then admonishes them not to deem those killed on God’s path dead (v. 154), and subsequently broadens out into the general affirmation that God will test (→ *balā*) the Qur’anic community with experiences of “fear” and “hunger” and with “loss of possessions and lives and crops,” upon which the Messenger is commanded to “give good tidings to those who are steadfast” (v. 155), that

1 For Meccan passages in which the command to exhibit steadfastness is addressed to a collective (*fa-ṣbirū/wa-ṣbirū*), see Q 7:87 (where the speaker is Shu‘ayb, who is preaching to his people) and 7:128 (Moses to his people).

2 Q 16:41–42 are almost certainly a Medinan insertion; see *GQ* 1:145–146 and Neuwirth 2007, 300.

3 Q 16:110 is Medinan despite occurring in a mostly Meccan surah (see again *GQ* 1:145–146 and Neuwirth 2007, 301).



is, who bear misfortune without swerving from their conviction that “we belong to God, and to him we shall return” (v. 156). Steadfastness is here presented as devout endurance of the manifold trials that God imposes in order to ascertain humans’ moral merit and religious commitment; and while there is no call to militant action as such, mortal danger in battle figures as one of the experiences by means of which God may choose to put the believers to the test and which believers must accordingly be prepared to face. The pivotal role that steadfastness occupies in the Qur’anic canon of virtue is perhaps most explicitly articulated by the closing verse of Sūrat Āl ‘Imrān, Q 3:200, which charges the believers to be steadfast and to vie in steadfastness (*iṣbirū wa-ṣābirū*).

**ṣuḥuf** pl. | written sheets, writings, written records

→ *kitāb*, → *asāṭir al-awwālīn*

**ṣadda** tr. ‘*an sabīl allāh* | to turn s.o. away from God’s path

→ *sabīl*

**ṣadr** | breast

Further vocabulary discussed: *qalb* | heart *nafs* | soul, (vital) self *rahbah* | fear *dāqa* intr. | to become straitened, tightened, or narrow *sharaḥa ṣadrahu* | to widen or open up s.o.’s breast *islām* | self-surrender or self-dedication (to God) *ghill* | rancour *baghdā’* | hatred *ḥājah* | (feeling of) need *akhfā* tr., *asarra* tr., *akanna* tr. | to conceal s.th.

In the Qur’an, the breast, like the heart (→ *qalb*) and soul or vital self (→ *nafs*), represents certain aspects of the interior life of human persons. In the first place, the breast is associated with emotions of distress and anguish (*AHW* 122–123). Apart from Q 59:13, locating the fear (*rahbah*) of the believers’ opponents in their breasts, three verses combine the noun *ṣadr* with derivatives of the root *ḍ-y-q*, yielding the notion of a “straitening,” “tightening,” or “narrowing” of the breast (Q 11:12, 15:97, 26:13; see also 6:125 and 7:2; 4:90 has *ḥaṣīra* instead of *dāqa*).<sup>1</sup> The same collocation *ṣadr + dāqa*, “to become straitened or tightened,” is also attested in poetry (e.g., al-Mu‘ayyid 1965, no. 16:35, cited in *AHW* 118). The opposite sensation to a tightening of the chest is its “widening” or “opening.” In two scriptural verses, this would seem to be a divinely granted sense of relief and encouragement (Q 20:25, 94:1); by contrast, when Q 6:125 and 39:22 expand the phrase *sharaḥa ṣadrahu* by the prepositional syntagm *li-l-islām*, the resulting locution “to open up s.o.’s breast to self-surrender” is effectively a synonym for the bestowal of divine guidance (→ *aslama*, → *hadā*).<sup>2</sup> The Qur’an also depicts the breast as the seat of hate and rancour

1 The noun *ḍayq*, “tightness, narrowness,” in Q 16:127 and 27:70 would appear to be synonymous, even though it is not explicitly linked with the breast. See also *dāqa bi- . . . dhar’an* in the sense of “to be distressed on account of s.o.” in Q 11:77 and 29:33 (see *CDKA* 171).

2 An exceptional case in which the grammatical subject is not God is Q 16:106, where *man sharaḥa bi-l-kufri ṣadran* is someone who “opens his own breast up to repudiation.”

(*ghill*, at Q 7:43, 15:47; see also 3:118, where the breast is mentioned in close proximity to *al-baghdā'*, “hatred”), for which there are again poetic parallels (AHW 118–119).

The Qur'an generally presupposes a relatively clear distinction between the psychological functions of the heart (*qalb*) and the soul (*nafs*). The breast, however, can on occasion function as a substitute for either of them.<sup>3</sup> Thus, God knows (*'alima*) what is in people's hearts (Q 4:63, 8:70, 33:51, 48:18; see also 2:204, 8:24, and 9:64; → *qalb*), just as he knows what is in their souls (*anfus, nufūs*; Q 2:235, 11:31, 17:25; see also 2:284 and 5:116) or breasts (*ṣudūr*; e.g., Q 3:29.119.154, 5:7, 8:43, 11:5, 27:74, 29:10). The rationale behind evoking the breast as a stand-in for the heart is made explicit in Q 22:46, speaking of “the hearts that are in the breasts” (*al-qulūb allatī fī l-ṣudūr*), while at the end of Q 3:154, the phrases *mā fī ṣudūrikum* (“what is in your breasts”) and *mā fī qulūbikum* (“what is in your hearts”) would seem to form a bipartite pleonasm, confirming the impression that the breast and the heart can be evoked interchangeably. This, too, has precedent in poetry (Lyll 1918–1924, no. 27:13.15, where *fu'ād* and *ṣudūr* function as synonyms). As we saw above, God is sometimes described as directly acting upon a human's breast by “widening” it or “opening it up”; a similar theme of direct divine action on the inner states of a person is also found with regard to the heart (→ *qalb*). As regards the breast and the soul, various Qur'anic expressions appear in connection with both *ṣadr* and *nafs*. Q 12:67 speaks of a “feeling of need in Jacob's soul that he satisfied” (*ḥājatan fī nafsi ya'qūba qaḍāhā*), while 40:80 and 59:9 locate feelings of need (*ḥājah*) in people's “breasts” (*ṣudūr*; see AHW 125; cf. also AHW 120). Moreover, humans may conceal (*akhfā, asarra, akanna*) the contents of their souls (*akhfā*: Q 2:284, 3:154, 33:37; *asarra*: 5:52, 12:77; *akanna*: 2:235) and of their breasts (*akhfā*: Q 3:29.118 and 40:19;<sup>4</sup> *asarra*: 11:5, 64:4, 67:13; *akanna*: 27:74, 28:69). Finally, just as the breast may experience straitening or narrowing (*d-y-q*; see above), so may the soul (Q 9:118).

**ṣadaqa** ditr. | to be sincere to s.o. in s.th., to fulfil s.th. to s.o.

→ *ṣaddaqa*

**ṣaddaqa** intr. *bi-* | to hold s.th. true, to declare s.th. to be true, to believe in s.th.

**ṣaddaqa** intr. | to be a believer

**ṣaddaqa** tr. | to fulfil s.th., to make s.th. come true; to confirm or corroborate s.th. or s.o.

**muṣaddiq** | confirming

**taṣḍīq** | confirmation

Further vocabulary discussed: *kadhhaba* intr. *bi-* | to dismiss s.th. as a lie *āmana* intr. *bi-* | to believe in s.th. *kitāb* | scripture *nazzala, anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down *al-tawrah* | the Torah *muhaymin* (or *muhayman*) *'alā* | entrusted

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Ohad Kayam for alerting me to some of the phraseological parallelisms between the breast and the soul that are noted in what follows.

<sup>4</sup> See also Q 11:5, which has another derivative of *kh-f-y, istakhfā*.

with authority over s.th. *ḥarrafa al-kalima ‘an mawāḍi‘ihi* | to shift words from their places *bayyana* tr./intr. (*li-*) | to clarify s.th. (to s.o.), to make things clear (to s.o.) *al-injīl* | the Gospel or the Christian Bible *ṣadaqa* ditr. | to be sincere to s.o. in s.th., to fulfil s.th. to s.o.

The present entry examines the second-form verb *ṣaddaqa* and the notions of belief and confirmation conveyed by it. The fifth-form verb *taṣaddaqa*, “to be charitable, to make gifts of charity,” is treated under → *ṣadaqah*.

**Use in the Meccan Qur’an.** *Ṣaddaqa bi-* is the antonym of → *kadhhaba bi-*, “to dismiss s.th. as a lie” (see Q 75:31–32, 92:6.9). In the early Meccan surahs, *ṣaddaqa bi-* (Q 70:26, 92:6) plays the same semantic role that subsequently devolves on → *āmana bi-*, “to believe in s.th.,” and the early Meccan Qur’an also attests to a corresponding absolute employment of *ṣaddaqa* without accusative object, “to be a believer” (Q 37:52, 75:31, 56:57; CQ 59; Ahrens 1935, 110–111; Ringgren 1951, 10–11). Isolated occurrences of *ṣaddaqa bi-*, “to hold s.th. true, to declare s.th. to be true,” persist as late as Q 66:12 (see also 39:33). At the same time, as noted by Ringgren, in later Meccan and Medinan surahs *ṣaddaqa* is generally used with a direct object to signify “to confirm s.th. or s.o.” Thus, Moses asks God to let his brother Aaron accompany him, “as a support and to confirm me” (Q 28:34: *fa-arsilhu ma‘iya rid’an yuṣaddiqunī*). Although there is one case in which *ṣaddaqa* + acc. must mean “to fulfil s.th., to make s.th. come true” (Q 37:105: Abraham is praised for having fulfilled the dream in which God commanded him to sacrifice his son; see CDKA 159), the dominant use of *ṣaddaqa* and especially its active participle *muṣaddiq* in later Meccan surahs is to articulate the Qur’anic proclamations’ confirmatory relationship to prior revelations. This notion is already expressed in an early Meccan verse, Q 37:37, according to which Muhammad “brings the truth and confirms the [earlier] messengers” (*jā’a bi-l-ḥaqqi wa-ṣaddaqa l-mursalīn*). In later Meccan passages, the Qur’anic revelations are described as a “scripture” that was “sent down after Moses” and “confirms what precedes it” (Q 46:30: *kitāban unzila min ba’di mūsā muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayhi*; see also 6:92, 35:31, 46:12) or as a “confirmation of what precedes it” (Q 10:37, 12:111: *taṣdīq allādhī bayna yadayhi*). Especially Q 6:91–92 and 46:12.30 make it clear that the scripture confirmed by the Qur’an is specifically the Mosaic scripture.

**Medinan developments.** The participle *muṣaddiq* is even more frequent in a number of Medinan surahs, generally in the context of anti-Jewish polemics. Thus, the divine voice exhorts the Israelites and “those who were given the scripture” to “believe in what I/we have sent down confirming what is with you<sup>p</sup>” (Q 2:41, 4:47: *mā anzaltu/nazzalnā muṣaddiqan li-mā ma’akum*; → *nazzala*), and God is said to have obliged “the prophets” to believe in a subsequent “messenger who confirms what is with you<sup>p</sup>” (Q 3:81: *rasūlun muṣaddiqun li-mā ma’akum*; see similarly 2:101), this messenger evidently being Muhammad. Other verses reiterate that the Qur’anic revelations do in fact “confirm what is with” the Israelites (Q 2:89.91), and the older Meccan phrase “confirming what precedes it” also recurs (Q 2:97, 3:3, 5:48). Similar to Muhammad, Jesus too is said to have come to “confirm what precedes me/him of the Torah” (Q 3:50, 5:46, 61:6: *muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayya/yadayhi mina l-tawrāti*). But Jesus also “permitted some of the things that had been prohibited” to the Israelites (Q 3:50: *wa-li-uḥilla lakum ba’da lladhī ḥurrima ‘alaykum*). This suggests that confirmation is not to be confused with mere reiteration but may involve a degree of authoritative modification and rectification.

Other Qur’anic verses point in the same direction. Q 5:48 declares not only that what is being revealed to Muhammad “confirms what precedes it of the [celestial] scripture” (*muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayhi mina l-kitābi*; → *kitāb*), but also that it is *muhayminan* (or, according to a variant reading, *muhaymanan*) ‘*alayhi*, which is plausibly read as meaning “entrusted with authority over it,” i.e., forming an unimpeachable standard for the validity of statements about the content and meaning of prior revelations (→ *muhaymin*). This reading of Q 5:48 coheres well with the fact that the Medinan surahs undeniably claim the authority to determine what the revelatory deposit of Jews and Christians actually means and consists in. This is exemplified by accusations that the Jews or Israelites “shift (*yuharrifūna*) words from their places” (Q 4:46, 5:13.41: *yuharrifūna l-kalima ‘an / min ba’di mawāḍi’ihi*; cf. 2:75; see Reynolds 2010b, 193–195, and CDKA 291), “conceal” parts of the truth revealed to them (e.g., Q 2:42.140.146, 3:71; cf. also 3:187, 5:15, 6:91<sup>1</sup>), and misattribute human compositions or utterances to God (Q 2:79, 3:78; for a detailed study of these motifs, see Reynolds 2010b). The Qur’anic proclamations style themselves as the decisive corrective against such inaccurate citation and interpretation of God’s revelations: “O scripture-owners, our Messenger has come to you, making clear (→ *bayyana*) to you much of what you have been hiding of the scripture” (Q 5:15: *yā-ahla l-kitābi qad jā’akum rasūlunā yubayyinu lakum kathīran mim mā kuntum tukhfūna mina l-kitābi*; cf. similarly 5:19). In sum, the Qur’anic claim to a confirmatory relationship with previous scriptures is coupled with a claim to constituting the ultimate arbiter, vis-à-vis Jews and Christians, of what these previous scriptures are saying. This is in fact not surprising, since the Meccan verse Q 27:76 already voices a kindred claim, albeit without an overt reference to earlier scriptures: “this → *qur’ān* recounts to the Israelites (→ *banū isrā’īl*) most of that about which they are in disagreement (verb: *ikhtalafa*).”

**Confirmation and fulfilment.** Qur’anic claims to “confirm” previous scriptures recall the New Testamental notion that Jesus “fulfils” (*plēroō*, Peshitta: *mallī*) “the law and the prophets” (Matt 5:17; see also Matt 1:22, 2:15.17.23 etc.). Seeing that the Qur’an holds Muhammad’s appearance to have been foretold by the Torah and the Gospel (Q 7:157 and 48:29, on which see under → *ummī* and → *injīl*) as well as by Abraham and Jesus personally (Q 2:129.151, 61:6), should the Qur’anic concept of confirmation, expressed by the verb *ṣaddaqa*, perhaps be deemed to be more or less equivalent to the New Testamental idea of fulfilment, i.e., to convey the claim that Muhammad’s advent realises an outstanding divine promise enshrined in previous scriptures? After all, Q 37:105 employs *ṣaddaqa* in order to describe Abraham’s fulfilment of a dream vision, and a number of additional verses have the first-form verb *ṣadaqa* followed by two accusatives in the similar sense of “to be sincere to s.o. in s.th.” or “to fulfil s.th. to s.o.” (Q 3:152, 21:9, 39:74, 48:27; see CDKA 159). However, as we saw above, the contention that Muhammad “confirms” previous messengers appears as early as the early Meccan verse Q 37:37, whereas explicit assertions to the effect that Muhammad’s appearance is predicted in previous scriptures or by his precursors Abraham and Jesus are all Medinan. Hence, at least for the Meccan data reviewed above the idea of confirmation may be assumed to focus more narrowly on the assumed identity of the Qur’an’s message with that of earlier revelations rather than on the contention that Muhammad fulfils earlier scriptural prophecies. To paraphrase Q 37:37, it is because Muhammad “brings the truth” that he “confirms” previous messengers (*jā’a bi-l-ḥaqqi*

1 On this verse, see the excursus under → *ashraka*.

*wa-ṣaddaqa l-mursalīn*). Most likely, the same basic emphasis remains in place throughout the Medinan period.

***taṣaddaqa* intr. | to be charitable, to make gifts of charity**

→ *ṣadaqah*

***ṣadaqah* | gift or act of charity**

Further vocabulary discussed: *zakāh* | alms *anfaqa* tr./intr. | to spend (s.th.) *razaqa* ditr. | to provide s.o. with s.th. *taṣaddaqa* intr. | to be charitable, to make gifts of charity *ātā* tr./ditr. | to give s.th. (to s.o.) *farīdah* | ordinance, prescription *riʿāʾa l-nās* | in order to be seen by people *rizq* | provision *waffā* tr. *ilā* | to repay s.th. to s.o. in full *ṭahhara* tr., *zakkā* tr. | to purify s.o. or s.th. *kaffara* tr. *ʿan* | to absolve s.o. of s.th. *ribā* | usury

Qurʿanic references to charitable giving take several terminological forms. In both Meccan and Medinan surahs, there are frequent injunctions to “give the → *zakāh*” and to “spend” (→ *anfaqa*) from what God has “provided” (→ *razaqa*) for the addressees (e.g., Q 2:3.254, 4:39, 8:3, 13:22, 14:31). Specifically the Medinan surahs also utilise the noun *ṣadaqah* or its plural *ṣadaqāt* (Q 2:196.263.264.271.276, 4:114, 9:58.60.79.103.104, 58:12.13). That all three manners of expression refer to the same broad practice of charitable giving is supported by their co-occurrence in some Medinan passages: thus, Q 2:261–281 and 63:10 employ the noun *ṣadaqah* or the verb *taṣaddaqa* and mention the “spending” of property, while 2:276–277 and 58:13 refer to charitable gifts (*ṣadaqāt*) and the giving of *zakāh*. As a result of such entwinement, it is not feasible to treat Qurʿanic statements about *zakāh*, *ṣadaqah*, or charitable “spending” in neat separation, occasioning some overlap and cross-references between the present entry and those on → *ṣadaqah* and → *anfaqa*; all three are best read together.

**The basic meaning and etymology of *ṣadaqah* and *taṣaddaqa*.** Etymologically, *ṣadaqah* goes back to Hebrew *ṣādāqâ* (BEK 89; FVQ 194; Weir and Zysow 1995, 708–709), which originally meant “righteousness” but came to be a standard term for charity or almsgiving (see generally Anderson 2009, 141–142, and Gardner 2015, 26–32; for an illustration of its use with the latter acceptation, see *m. Abot* 5:13). Apart from occurrences of the noun *ṣadaqah*, the Qurʿan also contains a number of Medinan verses that have the verb *taṣaddaqa* or a participle (Q 2:280, 4:92, 5:45, 9:75, 12:88, 33:35, 57:18, 63:10). *Taṣaddaqa* is generally construable as a denominal verb derived from *ṣadaqah*, “to practise charity, to be charitable,” though sometimes in the contextually specific application of waiving an existing entitlement (namely, to an outstanding debt, as in Q 2:280, or to blood money or talion, as in 4:92 and 5:45; see Weir and Zysow 1995, 709). The only non-Medinan occurrence of the root *ṣ-d-q* in relation to charity (as opposed to truth or truthfulness) is Q 12:88, where Joseph is beseeched by his brothers, “Be charitable to us; God recompenses those who are charitable” (*wa-taṣaddaq ʿalaynā inna llāha yajzi l-mutaṣaddiqīn*). Given the Hebrew etymology of *ṣadaqah*, one would assume the words *ṣadaqah* and *taṣaddaqa* to have been introduced into Arabic by Jewish speakers of the language, although non-Jews

may subsequently have picked them up. The Qur'an's predominantly Medinan usage of *ṣadaqah* and *taṣaddaqa* could reflect ongoing usage among the Jewish tribes inhabiting Medina. It is in any case likely that the two terms entered Arabic prior to the Qur'an (Weir and Zysow 1995, 709).

**Ṣadaqah vs zakāh.** Phraseologically, *zakāh* and *ṣadaqah* behave very differently. *Zakāh*, when referring to almsgiving, is deployed in a highly formulaic manner, occurring almost always as the object of *ātā*, “to give,” and in close proximity to exhortations to perform prayer, *al-ṣalāh* (see under → *zakāh*). Neither generalisation applies to the Qur'anic use of *ṣadaqah* (even though it is once used with *ātā*, in Q 2:271; 58:12 has *qaddama*), which is deployed in a significantly less constrained fashion.<sup>1</sup> For instance, verses using *ṣadaqah* give detailed prescriptions for specific circumstances: Q 2:196 stipulates that the compensation for premature shaving during the pilgrimage consists in a fast, a *ṣadaqah*, or a sacrifice; Q 9:103 instructs the Messenger to “take” a *ṣadaqah* from the possessions of those who have confessed misdeeds, so as to purify them thereby, and to pray for them (*khudh min amwālihim ṣadaqatan tuṭahhiruhum wa-tuzakkīhim bihā wa-ṣalli ‘alayhim*; see also under → *tāba*); and Q 58:12 urges the addressees to offer up a *ṣadaqah* before private audiences with the Messenger. In contrast with *zakāh*, *ṣadaqah* in the singular never appears with the Arabic definite article, which can convey a generic meaning, as when *al-insān* denotes humans in general (e.g., Q 96:2.5.6, 99:3, or 100:6). This, together with the fact that *ṣadaqah*, unlike *zakāh*, has a Qur'anically attested plural, indicates that *ṣadaqah* designates an individual gift or act of charity whereas *al-zakāh* signifies the general practice of almsgiving. The definite plural *al-ṣadaqāt*, however, as found in verses like Q 2:271.276, 9:60, and elsewhere, would seem to communicate the same meaning of almsgiving as a general and habitual practice that is expressed by *al-zakāh*. Thus, in Q 9:60, which enumerates the intended recipients and uses of “gifts of charity” (*innamā l-ṣadaqātu li-l-fuqarā'i wa-l-masākīni . . . ; → zakāh*), *al-ṣadaqāt* seems broadly equivalent to *al-zakāh* (see, for instance, *Jal.* 702, on Q 9:60, where *al-ṣadaqāt* is glossed as *al-zakawāt*). It may be suggested that the principal reason why Q 9:60 begins, “The *ṣadaqāt* are for . . .” (*innamā l-ṣadaqātu li- . . .*) rather than “The *zakāh* is for . . .” (*innamā l-zakātu li- . . .*) resides in the formulaic constraints that appear to govern the Qur'anic use of *zakāh* (namely, co-occurrence with *ṣalāh* and employment as the object of *ātā*, “to give”).

It seems clear, in any case, that one cannot, without further argument, project onto the Qur'an the developed legal distinction between *ṣadaqah* as voluntary alms and *zakāh* as an obligatory and precisely regulated alms tax (for an overview of the relevant later doctrines, see Weir and Zysow 1995 and Zysow 2002).<sup>2</sup> Some modern researchers have nonetheless held that the Qur'anic meaning of *ṣadaqah* is a voluntary donation, in contrast to the obligatory nature of the *zakāh* (e.g., *BEK* 89; Weir and Zysow 1995, 709). Others, however, have denied such a distinction between *ṣadaqah* and *zakāh* and maintained a basic synonymy between the two terms in the Qur'an (Snouck Hurgronje 1957, 159–160; Rudolph 1922, 61; Nanji 2001, 65). An important proof-text here is Q 9:60, which declares “gifts of charity” (*al-ṣadaqāt*) to have been ordained by God (*farīdatan mina llāhi*), just as the Qur'anic rules of inheritance are labelled a *farīdah* in Q 4:11 (see also 4:24). The

1 For a word pair that displays a somewhat similar contrast between more and less formulaically constrained usage, see → *ṣirāt* and → *sabīl*.

2 But note that even in post-Qur'anic Islam *ṣadaqah* can also be used for *zakāh* (Zysow 2002, 407).



interpretation of *ṣadaqah* specifically and exclusively as a *voluntary* gift of charity is difficult to maintain in view of this verse, although Q 9:79—mentioning “those who find fault on account of charitable gifts with believers who make voluntary efforts” (*alladhīna yalmizūna l-muṭṭawwī’īna mina l-mu’minīna fī l-ṣadaqāti*)—unquestionably demonstrates that some charitable gifts were undertaken voluntarily.<sup>3</sup>

**Qur’anic statements on charity.** Among the themes attaching to Qur’anic references to charitable donations is the condemnation of giving ostentatiously (Q 2:264, 4:38: *ri’ā’a l-nāsi*, “in order to be seen by people”) and a stress on the preferability of giving in secret (Q 2:271). These injunctions resemble a demand from the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 6:1–4), and the rabbinic tradition also views ostentatious almsgiving with some reservation (Gardner 2015, 164–165). At the same time, it may be that the Qur’an is taking issue with the ideal of ostentatious liberality and squandering that is upheld in pre-Islamic poetry and is reconfiguring it into a more restrained form of charity whose motive is gratitude for God’s “provision” (*rizq*; → *razaqa*) rather than heroic self-aggrandisement (see, e.g., ERCQ 75–83 and under → *khalada*). While the Qur’anic proclamations unequivocally insist on the need to give to others, this should not be done for show, and while the believers are told not to niggardly “keep your<sup>s</sup> hand chained to your neck” (*wa-lā taj’al yadaka maghlūlatan ilā ‘unuqika*), they are simultaneously discouraged from “opening it fully, lest you<sup>s</sup> are forced to sit down blameworthy and impoverished” (*wa-lā tabsuṭhā kulla l-baṣṭi fa-taq’uda malūman maḥsūrā*; Q 17:29). As an earlier verse in the same surah (Q 17:26) puts it, “give to relatives what they deserve and to the poor and to wayfarers; but do not squander” (*wa-āti dhā l-qurbā ḥaqqahu wa-l-miskīna wa-bna l-sabīli wa-lā tubadhdhir tabdhīrā*; for another demand that the believers adopt a golden mean between prodigality and miserliness, see Q 25:67).<sup>4</sup> Charitable gifts should also not be vitiated by extolling one’s own generosity and insulting the recipient (Q 2:263–264).

As Q 2:272 says, the charitable “spending” of money is ultimately spending on one’s own behalf (*mā tunfiqū min khayrin fa-li-anfusikum*), since such spending will be “repaid in full” (*wa-mā tunfiqū min khayrin yuwaffa ilaykum*; cf. also the announcement of reward

3 *Al-muṭṭawwī’īna mina l-mu’minīna fī l-ṣadaqāti* is rendered “believers who give alms of their own accord” in Weir and Zysow 1995, 709, but Paret makes a compelling argument that the prepositional phrase *fī l-ṣadaqāti* complements the verb *yalmizūna*, as it does in Q 9:58 rather than *al-muṭṭawwī’in* (KK 208). Regardless of which construal one adopts, however, Q 9:79 shows only that the Qur’an, unsurprisingly, has a concept of voluntary charity, not that this is part of the core meaning of the concept of *ṣadaqah*. In support of the contention that the Qur’an “does make a distinction between voluntary alms and *zakāt*,” Weir and Zysow 1995, 709, also adduce Q 2:177 and 58:13. According to Q 2:177, the defining features of righteous conduct (*al-bīrr*) include the giving away of property to relatives, orphans, the poor etc. (*wa-ātā l-māla ‘alā ḥubbihi dhawī l-qurbā wa-l-yatāmā wa-l-masākīna wa-bna l-sabīli wa-l-sā’ilīna wa-fī l-riqābi*) as well as the performance of prayer and the giving of *zakāh*; Q 58:13 first continues the point made in 58:12 that the hearers are to offer a *ṣadaqah* in advance of private audiences with the Messenger and then urges those who have failed to live up to this demand yet have received divine forgiveness (*wa-tāba llāhu ‘alaykum*) to perform prayer and give *zakāh*. There is certainly reason to consider construing these two verses as presupposing a distinction between *zakāh* and another kind of charity; this would readily account for the fact that Q 2:177, after having already referred to charitable giving, goes on to mention *zakāh*, while Q 58:13 switches from speaking of *ṣadaqah* to speaking of *zakāh*. However, an alternative explanation consists in pointing to the formulaic concatenation of the phrases *aqāma l-ṣalāh* and *ātā l-zakāh*, already highlighted above. Thus, the fact that Q 2:177 adds the latter to the former may simply reflect a widespread phraseological proclivity of the Qur’an rather than implying that the giving away of property to relatives and the poor etc. that is mentioned earlier in the verse is different from the *zakāh*. The same phraseological proclivity also accounts quite satisfactorily for the switch from *ṣadaqah* to *zakāh* in Q 58:13, which again occurs in the standing formula *aqīmū l-ṣalāta wa-ātū l-zakāta*.

4 Q 17:26.29 and 25:67 are discussed in ERCQ 77–78.

for almsgiving in Q 2:274; → *waffā*). What this means is that charitable donations will have a purifying (*ṭahhara*, *zakkā*) effect (Q 9:103) and will “absolve” their giver of evil deeds (Q 2:271: *yukaffiru ‘ankum min sayyi’ātikum*; → *kaffara*), an idea that has been described as “redemptive” or “atoning” almsgiving in a Christian or Jewish context (e.g., Garrison 1993; Downs 2016).<sup>5</sup> Hence, charitable giving is a more effective way of ensuring increase (*r-b-w*) than usury (*ribā*, literally meaning “increase”; Q 2:276; cf. 30:39, employing *zakāh* rather than *ṣadaqah*, but otherwise hinging on the same contrast).

Some members of the Medinan community are accused of finding fault with the Messenger on account of the question of who was entitled to receive charitable gifts, which the Messenger is explicitly described as distributing (Q 9:58–59). While this entails that the Messenger had a significant degree of control over the distribution of charitable gifts, the latter is unlikely to have taken the shape of a regularised levy with precisely defined rates (see under → *zakāh*).

### **ṣirāṭ: al-~ al-mustaqīm | the straight road**

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *hadā* tr./intr. | to guide (s.o.) *sabīl* | way, path *jaḥīm* | blaze *ḍalla* intr. (‘an) | to go astray (from s.th.) *aḍalla* tr. | to lead s.o. astray

**Ṣirāṭ** = “road.” The climactic supplication of the Qur’an’s opening surah, the Fātiḥah, petitions God to “guide us on the straight road” (*ihdīnā l-ṣirāṭa l-mustaqīm*; Q 1:6), and many other verses similarly join the notion of divine guidance, expressed by the root *h-d-y* (→ *hadā*), with the metaphor of God’s “straight road” (e.g., Q 2:142.213, 3:101, 4:68.175, 5:16, 37:118, 42:52) or his “path” (→ *sabīl*; e.g., Q 4:51.88.98.115.137, 6:117, 68:7, 76:3). Unlike *sabīl*, occurrences of the word *ṣirāṭ* are almost exclusively metaphorical, with the exception of Q 7:86, where the messenger Shu‘ayb exhorts his people not to “sit around on many a road (*wa-lā taq’udū bi-kulli ṣirāṭin*), uttering threats and turning away from God’s path (*sabīl*) those who believe in him.” *Ṣirāṭ* is ultimately descended from Latin (*via*) *strata*, probably through Greek and Aramaic (FVQ 195–196; CDKA 160; van Putten 2022, 124–125). It is therefore arguable that *ṣirāṭ* connotes not just a path, like *sabīl*, but more specifically a Roman imperial road. This may well be the reason why *ṣirāṭ* is so frequently—namely, in 33 out of a total of 45 verses—joined with the adjective *mustaqīm*, “straight” (e.g., Q 1:6, 2:142.213, 3:51.101, 4:68.175, 5:16, 36:4.61, 48:2.20, 67:22; see CQ 48), which is never the case for *sabīl* (although both God’s “path” and his “road” can be equally specified by the notion of evenness, expressed by the root *s-w-y*; → *sabīl*).<sup>1</sup> Reflecting this, and in line with al-Zamaksharī’s elucidation of *al-ṣirāṭ* as *al-jāddah* (Zam. 1:121), *ṣirāṭ* lends itself to being translated as “road,” in contrast with → *sabīl*, “path” (contrary to GMK 146 and Saleh 2010, 666).<sup>2</sup>

5 See in particular the distinction between “meritorious” and “atoning” almsgiving proposed in Downs 2016, 6–11 (with the Qur’an offering examples for both categories). Another relevant Qur’anic verse is Q 5:45, where the charitable waiving of one’s entitlement to blood vengeance is described as an “act of atonement” (*kaffārah*; see under → *kaffara*). Moreover, according to Q 2:196, a charitable gift, like fasting, may act as a *fidyah*, as a “ransom” or “redemption” (see also Q 2:184, where the same applies to the feeding of a poor, which is patently a case of charity although not explicitly called thus).

1 There is, however, one instance of *ṭariq* + *mustaqīm* (Q 46:30).

2 Saleh argues that *ṣirāṭ* denotes “not a straight path but a path, any path, and that is why the adjective ‘straight’ is always added” (in line with Ṭab. 1:171). But if *ṣirāṭ* were equivalent to *sabīl*, one would at least on

The semantic difference between *ṣirāṭ* and *sabīl* is not inconsequential: a path may well be difficult to discern, as opposed to a Roman road. The word *ṣirāṭ* thus drives home the idea that the divinely sanctioned course is clear for everyone to see, or at least for those who care to make the minimal effort of casting their eyes around. This difference is particularly palpable in Q 6:153, where the divine voice proclaims, “This is my road, straight (*hādihā ṣirāṭī mustaqīmān*). Follow<sup>p</sup> it and do not follow [other] paths (*al-subul*), lest they cause you to scatter away from his [God’s] path (*fa-tafarraqa bikum ‘an sabīlihi*).” Accordingly, God’s path alone is a *ṣirāṭ*, distinguished from other paths by its conspicuousness and straightness. This is confirmed by the fact that *ṣirāṭ*, when occurring in its usual metaphorical function, is always employed in a positive sense. As an exception, one might point to Q 37:23, where the angels or minions of hell are commanded to “guide” the sinners to the “road of the blaze” or, as one might say, usher them forwards on the highway to hell (*fa-hdūhum ilā ṣirāṭi l-jahīm*). But the verse’s employment of → *hadā*, “to guide,” which accompanies the noun *ṣirāṭ* not only in Q 37:118 but also in many chronologically later passages (e.g., Q 1:6, 2:142.213, 3:101, 4:68.175, 5:16, 6:87.161, 10:25, 16:121), is clearly a sardonic inversion of ordinary usage, making it likely that the same applies to its use of *ṣirāṭ*. Thus, the Qur’an does not envisage that there could be an alternative to God’s “straight road” that is equally deserving of being termed a *ṣirāṭ*.<sup>3</sup> That the words *ṣirāṭ* and *sabīl* are not fully synonymous is moreover indicated by the fact that the root *ḍ-l-l*, signifying straying (→ *ḍalla*) or leading astray (*aḍalla*) from the divinely prescribed course, always collocates with the word *sabīl* as its prepositional object (e.g., Q 68:7: *man ḍalla ‘an sabīlihi*, “who strays from his [God’s] path”) and never with *ṣirāṭ* (see in more detail under → *sabīl*). By way of an explanation, one may conjecture that the connotations that are putatively peculiar to *ṣirāṭ*—namely, being conspicuous, prominent, and difficult to overlook or miss—did not easily go together with the metaphor of straying and losing one’s way.

**Biblical precursors.** The Qur’an’s recurrent invocation of God’s “road” or “path” and its stress on the straightness of God’s road has important Biblical, New Testamental, and rabbinic antecedents (on which see generally *TDOT* 3:270–293 and *TDNT* 5:42–114). The general metaphor of “God’s path” is found, for instance, in the request to “teach me your path (Hebrew: *derek*, Peshitta: *ūrḥā*), O Lord,” in Ps 27:11, in the call to “keep to” the Lord’s “path” in Ps 37:34, or in the Pharisees’ admission that Jesus is teaching “the path of God” (*hē hodos tou theou*) in Matt 22:16 (Pohlmann 2018, 135, n. 614). As for the more specific metaphor of the straightness of God’s path, it occurs in Biblical passages like Ps 5:9 (“O Lord, guide me in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me”), Jer 31:9 (“I will lead them to brooks of water, on a straight path on which they shall not stumble”), and the famous pronouncement opening Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 40:3: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God”). The image of God’s straight path subsequently reverberates in the New Testament and later Christian and Jewish literature. For instance, Isa 40:3 is prominently cited towards the beginning of the synoptic Gospels (Matt 3:3, Mark 1:3, Luke 3:4), and

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occasion expect the latter, and not only the former, to combine with the attribute *mustaqīm*. It is therefore preferable to construe *mustaqīm* not as expressing a feature that is external to the semantic content of *ṣirāṭ* but rather as explicating a feature inherent in it. Taking note of the Latin ancestor of *ṣirāṭ* is not, therefore, fallaciously to privilege etymology over Qur’anic usage; rather, the two point in the same direction, in so far as they suggest that the meaning of *ṣirāṭ* is not identical with *sabīl*.

3 This is not to deny that the text does envisage more than one “path,” as shown under → *sabīl*.

the concept of “the straight path” (*derek yasharah*) opens the second chapter of the Mishnaic tractate *Pirqē Abot* (*m. Abot* 2:1). 2 Pet 2:15 condemns the sinners for having left “the straight path” (*eutheian hodon*, Peshitta: *ūrḥā trīṣtā*) and for “going astray” (*eplanēthēsan*, Peshitta: *shgaw*; → *ḏalla*), and Heb 12:13 admonishes the readers to “make straight paths for your feet.”<sup>4</sup> The metaphor of the straight path is not uniquely Biblical, though, and also figures in the Zoroastrian tradition (e.g., Boyce 1975, 235 and 239).

Ps 5:9, cited in the preceding paragraph, also illustrates that Biblical usage anticipates the Qur’anic combination of the notion that God’s path is distinguished by straightness or levelness with the topos of divine guidance (→ *hadā*). The communal plea for divine guidance in Q 1:6 (“Guide us on the straight road”) has a reasonably close parallel in Ps 27:11: “Teach me, O Lord, your way, and lead me on a level [or straight] path because of my enemies” (*BEḲ* 27; *GQ* 1:114; see also Ps 107:7, referring to God’s “leading on a straight path”). Where the Hebrew original of Ps 27:11 speaks of a “level path” (*oraḥ mīšōr*), the Peshitta has *shbīlayk trīṣē* and the Septuagint *en tribō eutheia*; although the Peshitta’s plural complicates the picture, the Greek and Syriac adjectives *euthus* and *trīṣā* (the latter of which is also employed in the Peshitta’s rendering of Jer 31:9, again in the plural, and of 2 Pet 2:15, quoted above) correspond directly to *mustaqīm*.<sup>5</sup>

**ṣarafa tr. | to turn s.th. away**

→ *shayṭān*

**ṣarrafa tr. (li-) | to explain s.th. in various or varied ways (to s.o.)**

→ *āyah*, → *faṣṣala*

**ṣaff | rank, row**

→ *malak*

**iṣṭafā tr. (‘alā) | to choose or elect s.o. or s.th. (over s.o. or s.th.), to prefer s.o./s.th. over s.o./s.th.**

→ *al-‘ālamūn*

**ṣalaha intr. | to be righteous**

See under → *ṣālih* and also under → *jinn* and → *azwāj muṭahharah*.

**aṣlahā intr. | to put things right, to act righteously, to do righteous deeds**

**aṣlahā tr. | to put s.th. right, to put s.th. in good order, to let s.th. prosper**

<sup>4</sup> I owe this last reference to Hussain 2022b, 81 (who also points out that the metaphor of the straight path occurs at the beginning of the *Maxims of Saḥdona*).

<sup>5</sup> The word *shbīlā*, of course, is the cognate of Arabic *sabīl*.

On *aṣṣalāḥa* as the antonym of *afṣada*, see under → *afṣada*; on its association with repentance, see under → *tāba*. For a brief but comprehensive overview of the verb’s different transitive and intransitive usages, refer to *CDKA* 163.

**ṣāliḥ: ‘amila l-~āt / ‘amila ± <‘amalan> ~an | to do righteous deeds**

**Further vocabulary discussed: āmana intr. | to be a believer tāba intr. (ilā llāh) | to repent, to turn to God in repentance (said of humans)**

The expression occurs predominantly as part of the stock phrase “those who believe and do righteous deeds” (*alladhīna āmanū wa-‘amilū l-ṣāliḥāti*; e.g., Q 2:25.82.277, 3:57, 4:57.122.173, 18:30.107, 19:96) or its singular variant “he who believes and does righteous deeds” (*man āmana wa-‘amila ṣāliḥan*; Q 18:88, 19:60, 20:82, 28:67.80, 34:37; see *ERCQ* 204).<sup>1</sup> A more expansive variant of ‘*amila ṣāliḥan* is ‘*amila ‘amalan ṣāliḥan* (Q 18:110, 25:70). The stereotypical coupling of righteous deeds with believing (→ *āmana*) throughout the Qur’an highlights that belief, in its Qur’anic understanding, encompasses not only cognitive and emotional dimensions but is also closely associated with moral action, described by one scholar as “the necessary supplement of belief” (Pautz 1898, 154; see also Ringgren 1951, 18–19). Apart from the formulaic expression “those who believe and do righteous deeds,” other passages express a similar nexus. For instance, Izutsu quotes Q 18:110, which pairs righteousness and exclusive veneration of God: “Let him who hopes to meet his Lord do righteous deeds and not associate anyone with the worship of his Lord” (*fa-man kāna yarjū liqā’a rabbihi fa-l-ya‘mal ‘amalan ṣāliḥan wa-lā yushrik bi-‘ibādati rabbihi aḥadā*; see *ERCQ* 205 and below). Ringgren draws attention, among other verses, to Q 7:153, where the opposite of belief does not seem to be repudiation (*kufṛ*) but sin: God will forgive “those who do evil deeds (*wa-lladhīna ‘amilū l-sayyi’āti*) and then repent (*thumma tābū min ba’dihā*) and believe (*wa-āmanū*)” (Ringgren 1951, 19). Belief, it appears, must here be understood to involve at least an anticipatory commitment to avoiding future transgressions. Incidentally, the coupling of righteous action with repentance, implied by the verse just cited, is also frequent throughout the Qur’an: just as belief entails or must be supplemented by concrete moral action, the same holds for repentance (see under → *tāba*).

It does seem likely that the frequent coupling of belief and righteous works would have reliably predisposed the Qur’anic audience to associate one with the other even when mentioned singly. Nonetheless, it is not entirely straightforward to decide whether the Qur’an views the link between belief and righteous deeds as a conceptual one, such that at least one of them entails and encompasses the other, or whether their close association is simply grounded in the normative fact that God demands both and/or the psychological fact that belief and righteousness are mutually reinforcing in empirical reality.<sup>2</sup> Thus, Izutsu (*ERCQ* 204) remarks that the frequent coupling of belief and righteous deeds might either be taken to indicate “that these two elements are so inseparably

1 For cases in which the doing of righteous deeds is not explicitly coupled with belief, see, e.g., Q 11:11, 18:110, 23:51.100, 25:71, or 27:19; an implicit association would however seem to be assumed.

2 See also the remarks on the equivocality of conjunction in n. 2 of the introduction.

tied together that ‘faith’ is inconceivable without ‘good works’” or, alternatively, “that these are in fact two different things,” for why did God “separate them from each other conceptually if they were an unanalyzable whole?” Similarly, one may wonder whether Q 18:110, quoted above, really portrays refraining from illicit associationism itself as a “righteous deed” (*‘amalan ṣālihan*), as Izutsu thinks (*ERCQ* 205, translating *fa-l-ya‘mal ‘amalan ṣālihan* as “let him do good work”), or whether righteous action and monotheism are rather enumerated as two conceptually separate entities that combine to form a dual precondition for salvation.

But even a proponent of conceptual or semantic separability—a view that the Islamic tradition subsumes under the term *irjā’*, “deferral”—will need to admit, if he or she is to do the Qur’anic data justice, that there is an intimate soteriological nexus between belief and righteousness.<sup>3</sup> Based on what is said in the entry on → *āmāna*, “to believe,” my own assessment would be that the Qur’anic understanding of belief goes beyond cognitive assent to certain doctrinal propositions and additionally requires that the convictions in question have a certain affective resonance in the believer’s psyche. A genuine believer will, accordingly, not only find peace in God’s reminding exhortation (Q 13:28) but will also be imbued with eschatological fear and wariness to such a degree as to be inhibited from significant moral transgressions. It is important to add, however, that the Qur’an does not generally suppose that believers are absolutely shielded against any moral lapses (→ *tāba*, → *al-rahmān*).

**ṣallā intr. (li-) | to pray (to s.o.)**

**ṣallā intr. ‘alā | to pray on behalf of s.o.; to say blessings over s.o.**

**ṣalāh | prayer**

**aqāma l-ṣalāh | to perform or observe prayer**

Further vocabulary discussed: *zakāh* | alms *naḥara* intr. | to perform an animal sacrifice *sajada* intr. (li-) | to prostrate o.s. (before s.o.) *raka’a* intr. | to bow (in prayer) *sabbaha* tr. | to glorify s.o. or s.th. (such as God or God’s name) *sabbaha* intr. li-/bi- | to glorify s.o. or s.th. (such as God or God’s name) *sabbaha* intr. | to be engaged in glorifying God, to utter prayers of praise *ḥamd* | praise *dhakara* tr. | to invoke s.o. or s.th. (namely, God or God’s name) *qara’a* tr./intr. | to recite (s.th.) *talā* tr. | to recite s.th. *qur’ān* | recitation *rattala* tr. | to declaim s.th. *ista’ādha* intr. bi- | to seek s.o.’s protection *al-shayṭān* | the devil, Satan

3 Thus, Abū Ḥanīfah is reported to have held that belief is definable merely as “knowledge of God and acknowledgement of God, and knowledge of the Messenger, and the general acknowledgement of what has come from God, without entering into details” (*al-ma’rifah bi-llāh wa-l-iqrār bi-llāh wa-l-ma’rifah bi-l-rasūl wa-l-iqrār bi-mā jā’a min ‘inda llāhi fī l-jumlah dūna l-tafsīr*; al-Ash’arī 1963, 138, ll. 12–14). Yet in his epistle to ‘Uthmān al-Battī, he makes the supplementary point that belief is nonetheless meant to be accompanied by practical obedience to God’s commandments and that both are required if one is to be sure of attaining salvation: obedience to God’s commandments is “action that goes together with belief” (*‘amalan ma’a l-īmān*), and admittance to paradise is only certain for those who “obey God, may he be exalted, in all the commandments together with (*ma’a*) belief” (al-Kawtharī 1368 AH, 35, l. 12, and 37, l. 2; see van Ess 2017–2020, 1:221–229, and also Schöck 2010). As for believers who fail to keep God’s commandments, they may either be punished by God or be forgiven (al-Kawtharī 1368 AH, 37, ll. 3–6).



**Etymological and linguistic remarks.** The Qur’anic word for prayer, *ṣalāh*, and the corresponding verb *ṣallā*, “to pray,” are derived from Syriac / Jewish Aramaic *ṣlotā*, “prayer,”<sup>1</sup> and *ṣallī*, “to pray” (*FVQ* 198–199). Their original Qur’anic pronunciation may have differed from the classical one: thus, *ṣallā* was likely pronounced *ṣallē*, in line with the argument in van Putten 2017 that *alif maqṣūrah* (a word-final *yā’* that is classically pronounced *ā*) was phonetically different from word-final *ā*. As for the noun *ṣalāh*, it used to be thought that its customary spelling *صلوة* in the Qur’an’s received consonantal text (except when carrying a personal suffix; e.g., Q 6:92, 11:87, 17:110) reflects Aramaic orthography (Spitaler 1960); but a recent reassessment of the issue concludes that the word’s Qur’anic orthography instead reflects a pre-classical pronunciation *ṣalōh*, which may in turn have developed from the form *ṣalawah* (Al-Jallad 2017b; van Putten 2017, 64–67).<sup>2</sup> Neither Aramaic *zakuta*, which became Arabic → *zakāh*, nor Jewish Aramaic / Syriac *ṣlotā* produced an Arabic word ending in *-ūt*, as might have been expected (cf. *malakūt*). Instead, the two words were assimilated to a native Arabic noun pattern (Rabin 1951, 109; Al-Jallad 2017b). Given their frequent combination in the Qur’an, it is quite likely that *ṣalāh* and *zakāh* underwent this development in tandem (see in more detail under → *zakāh*).

There can be no doubt that the noun *ṣalāh* and the verb *ṣallā* entered Arabic prior to the Qur’an. *Ṣallā* occurs in early Arabic poetry (*NB* 29; *GMK* 149; Katz 2013, 14). For instance, two passages in the poetic corpus of Muhammad’s contemporary al-A’shā Maymūn describe a Jewish wine merchant pronouncing a blessing (*ṣallā*) over a jar of wine (Geyer 1905, 58–59 and 203; Ḥusayn 1983, nos 4:11 and 55:4; see Lichtenstadter 1940, 187–188; cf. *AEL* 1085), and elsewhere al-A’shā portrays his daughter as exclaiming, “O my Lord (*yā rabbi*), spare my father weariness and pain!”—a speech act that a slightly later verse describes as prayer (verb: *ṣallā*; Ḥusayn 1983, no. 13:9.12). The Christian poet ‘Adī ibn Zayd uses the verb, too (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 8:15). The Aramaic word for prayer was also loaned into Epigraphic South Arabian: in a small number of monotheistic inscriptions from Ḥimyar—one of which, found close to the Ḥimyarite capital Zafār and datable to around 400 CE, is explicitly Jewish—it appears as *ṣlt* (Robin 2000, 49–52; Gajda 2009, 234; see also Beeston et al. 1982, 143). The connection between the Judaizing tendency of Ḥimyarite monotheism and the explicitly Jewish context of two of the prooftexts from the poetry of al-A’shā Maymūn is conspicuous. The word is also attested in Safaitic, again as *ṣlt* (Al-Jallad 2017b, 83).

1 In Jewish usage, the noun *ṣlota* designates specifically the *šamoneh ‘esrēh* prayer (Mittwoch 1913, 7–8).

2 The full developmental trajectory posited by Al-Jallad seems plausible for native Arabic words, such as *najāh*, “salvation”: *nagāwatu* > *nagāwah* > *nagōh*. With regard to the Arabisation of Syriac or Jewish Aramaic *ṣlotā*, however, the question arises whether it was indeed reworked into an original Arabic morphological pattern *CaCaWatu*, as posited in Al-Jallad 2017b, 83, or whether the Aramaic word may not have directly become Arabic *ṣalōh*, assuming that the development *nagawah* > *nagōh* had already taken place for native Arabic words. It may be added that Al-Jallad constructs his hypothesis around the fact that the *rasm* of printed editions of the Qur’an spells *ṣalāh* + personal suffix with a medial *alif* rather than *wāw* (Al-Jallad 2017b, 84; e.g., Q 11:87 has *صلاتك*). To accommodate this, Al-Jallad posits that the original triphthong *awa* of Proto-Arabic underwent different shifts depending on whether and where it carried a stress: *áwa* > *ō*, but *awa/awá* > *ā*. The addition of a personal suffix would have moved the stress to a later syllable, e.g., *nagāwatu* > *nagōh* but *nagawátika* > *nagátika*. Early manuscripts with the spelling *صلت* + suffix are compatible with this, given the general orthographic uncertainty over whether the long vowel *ā* is to be spelled defectively or *plene* (Al-Jallad 2017b, 84, n. 10). To be sure, the early manuscript record preserves some cases in which suffixed forms do indeed have a *wāw*. Thus, for Q 11:87, British Library Or. 2165 as transcribed on [www.corpuscoranicum.de](http://www.corpuscoranicum.de) has *صلوتك*, while Staatsbibliothek Wetzstein II 1913 has *صلوبك*. Yet such isolated examples may not invalidate the general theory.

**Semantic issues.** Throughout the Qur'an, *ṣalāh* and *ṣallā* can normally be rendered as “prayer” and “to pray.” However, there are two Qur'anic occurrences of *ṣallā 'alā* that have God and the angels as their grammatical subject and for which the translation “to say blessings over s.o.”—namely, over the believers and the Qur'anic Prophet (Q 33:43-56)—imposes itself. By contrast, in Q 9:84.103 *ṣallā 'alā* is simply “to pray on behalf of s.o.” It is currently impossible to judge whether the way in which *ṣallā 'alā* functions at Q 33:43-56 continues a pre-existing usage of the verb or is merely an *ad hoc* variation.

A second general remark worth making in connection with the semantics of the term *ṣalāh* in the Qur'an is that it indicates that use of the word to denote human worship of a deity had, by the time of the Qur'an, radiated beyond Jewish and Christian communities. Thus, Q 8:35 applies the noun *ṣalāh* to what would appear to be pagan rituals performed at the Meccan sanctuary: “their prayer at the house is mere whistling and clapping of hands” (*wa-mā kāna ṣalātuhum 'inda l-bayti illā mukā'an wa-taṣḍiyatan*). One may be tempted to query whether the verse really affords evidence that the Qur'anic pagans themselves employed the word *ṣalāh* to refer to their rituals. Yet the early Meccan verses Q 107:4–5 illustrate that there was nothing incongruous about describing the Qur'anic pagans as engaging in prayer: the passage pronounces a woe upon “those who pray, // who are heedless of their prayer” (*fa-waylun li-l-muṣallīn // alladhīna hum 'an ṣalātihim sāhūn*). Given the early date of Surah 107, this must refer to a prayer ritual predating the crystallisation of a Qur'anic community of believers, most likely the existing prayer ritual of the Qur'an's pagan audience. In light of this, Q 8:35 is most straightforwardly understood to mean that what the opponents preposterously call “prayer” is really nothing of the sort. Seeing that animal sacrifice was a prominent element of the existing cult at the Meccan sanctuary (→ *dhabaḥa*), the pre-Qur'anic use of the word *ṣalāh* may well have encompassed the invocation and veneration of a deity through sacrificial rituals rather than only through verbal praise and invocations. This is consistent with the early Meccan verse Q 108:2, containing a second-person singular commandment to “pray to your Lord and sacrifice” (*fa-ṣalli li-rabbika wa-nḥar*; see SPMC 147; Böwering 2004, 218; on the verb *nahara*, see under → *dhabaḥa*). Like Q 107:4–5, this injunction almost certainly refers to an established ritual that predates the Qur'anic proclamations.

**Aqāma l-ṣalāh, “to perform prayer.”** In referring to the activity of prayer, the Qur'an shows a distinct preference for the complex expression *aqāma l-ṣalāh*, which has over forty occurrences, over simple *ṣallā*, which only appears in a dozen verses. Like the similarly bipartite phrase *ātā l-zakāh*, “to give alms,” with which it is standardly coupled (→ *zakāh*), *aqāma l-ṣalāh* is already attested well before the hijrah (e.g., Q 20:14, 27:3, and 30:31). It is obvious that in this collocation *aqāma* must mean “to perform” rather than “to establish.” The phrase *aqāma l-ṣalāh* is to some degree reminiscent of the locution “standing in prayer” (see also Q 4:142 and 5:6: *idhā qāmū/qumtum ilā l-ṣalāti*, “when they/you<sup>p</sup> rise to pray”), found both in Christian and rabbinic parlance (WMJA 84–85; Wensinck 1908, 105; Mittwoch 1913, 16; but cf. Rivlin 1934, 93).<sup>3</sup> But a passage from Barḥadhbbāshabbā's *Ecclesiastical History* shows that the Qur'anic expression has an even more specific correlate in Syriac, namely, *aqīm ṣlotā*, which like *aqāma l-ṣalāh* employs the root *q-w-m* in a causative stem (Brockelmann 1915, 319–320, citing Nau 1913,

3 See, e.g., TS 3524; Vööbus 1979, 140, l. 16, and 144, l. 5; *m. Ta'an.* 2:2; *Gen. Rab.* 75:12.

615, l. 1; see the translation in Becker 2008, 72).<sup>4</sup> The Qur'an's diction accordingly has a distinctly Christian ring here.

**The Qur'anic community's prayer ritual and its relationship to pre-Qur'anic Meccan ritual.** Moving beyond matters of etymology and phraseology, what can we learn from the Qur'an about the nature and significance of prayer in the Qur'anic community? As already noted, prayer is very frequently linked with almsgiving (→ *zakāh*). Q 27:2–3 and 31:3–4, for instance, underline that “the believers” (*al-mu'minūn*) are “those who do good deeds” (*al-muḥsinūn*) as “those who perform prayer, give alms, and are certain of the hereafter” (*al-ladhīna yuqīmūna l-ṣalāta wa-yu'tūna l-zakāta wa-hum bi-l-ākhirati hum yūqinūn*). Regular prayer and almsgiving, therefore, seem to be the two primary behavioural markers of being a member of the Qur'anic community as well as the most natural outward expressions of belief in the last judgement. Prayer and charity also have the further affinity that just as the latter is said to have a purifying effect, according to the Medinan verses Q 2:271 and 9:103 (→ *ṣadaqah*), so 11:114 expands an admonishment to pray by declaring that “good deeds remove bad deeds” (*inna l-ḥasanāti yudhhibna l-sayyi'āti*).<sup>5</sup>

It is far from obvious that the Qur'an attests to the five daily prayers of later Islamic ritual (Horowitz 1927, 249–250; Rivlin 1934, 95–101; Böwering 2004, 219–228), although the ambiguous nature of some of the scriptural data does allow for harmonising readings (Goitein 1966, 84). A string of passages mentions two daily occasions for invoking or praising God, one in the morning and the other in the evening (Q 6:52, 7:205, 18:28, 24:36, 33:42, 40:55), and Q 24:58 (Medinan) names “the morning prayer” (*ṣalāt al-fajr*) and “the evening prayer” (*ṣalāt al-ishā'*).<sup>6</sup> Other verses allude to extended nocturnal devotions in addition to these two daytime prayers (Q 11:114, 17:78–79, 20:130, 50:39–40, 76:25–26; see also 52:48–49, where the evening prayer is omitted).<sup>7</sup> The importance of prayer vigils especially during the Meccan period is confirmed by additional pronouncements (Q 25:64, 39:9, 51:17–18, 73:1–4), while the later insertion Q 73:20 shows a decrease of this practice after the hijrah, when the Qur'anic community became a more socially inclusive body (Rivlin 1934, 99–100 and 102; Neuwirth 2010, 383–384; Sinai 2017a, 230–231; Sinai 2018b, 261).<sup>8</sup> Early Qur'anic vigils have been convincingly linked with the practice of Christian monks and hermits (Wensinck 1908, 106; Andrae 1926, 191–196; Horowitz 1927, 249), and indeed one Qur'anic verse, Q 3:113, explicitly associates vigils and prostration with the “scripture-owners” (Madigan 2001, 200; Böwering 2004, 222).<sup>9</sup> The receding of nocturnal prayer in the Medinan period may be concomitant with the introduction of a third daytime prayer, the “middle prayer” (*al-ṣalāh al-wuṣṭā*), in Q 2:238, even if some form of

4 See also *TS* 3528: *aqīmet-ennēn b-ṣlotā*, “he made them stand up in prayer,” and *aqīm shlāmā*, “he [the deacon] recited the *pax vobiscum*.” See also *SL* 1332. For an alternative explanation of *aqāma l-ṣalāh*, see Rivlin 1934, 93. Muslim exegetes connect the collocation *aqāma l-ṣalāh* to *qāmat al-sūq*, “the market was under way,” and *aqāma l-sūq*, presumably “to hold a market” or “to keep it in full swing” (Ṭab. 1:247 and Zam. 1:154; cf. Brockelmann 1915, 317, who points to the occurrence of the phrase in *DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 27:10: *fī sūqin muqāmī*).

5 Another passage reflecting an association between prayer and charity is Q 11:87.

6 See also Q 3:41, 19:11, and 38:18, occurring in the context of accounts about Zechariah and David.

7 On Q 17:78–79, see *KK* 305.

8 As pointed out to me by Saqib Hussain, Q 17:79 explicitly describes nocturnal devotions (here designated by the verb *tahajjada*) as an additional or supererogatory devotional practice (*nāfilah*). It is, moreover, imposed in the singular, i.e., on the Qur'anic Messenger alone. This could indicate that the recession of nocturnal vigils began already in the late Meccan period.

9 See also the remark on the monastic practice of *mnēmē theou* or “remembrance of God” under → *dhakara*.

prayer around noon is already alluded to in the significantly earlier passage Q 30:17–18.<sup>10</sup> Possibly modelled on the Jewish *minḥah* service, the addition of a “middle prayer” may have yielded a trio of daytime prayers reminiscent of Judaism (Mittwoch 1913, 11; Rivlin 1934, 100–101). In other respects, too, Medinan texts show a progressive institutionalisation and formalisation of the Qur’anic community’s prayer practice, such as the establishment of an official summons to prayer (Q 5:58, 62:9), the prescription of preparatory ablutions (Q 4:43, 5:6), and a mandatory congregational prayer on Fridays (Q 62:9–11).

The nature of the Qur’anic community’s prayer ritual can only be ascertained in very broad terms. The evidence is sufficient to suggest an observance of “prayer as an institution, consisting of set texts to be recited with precisely fixed movements of the body at prescribed times” (Goitein 1966, 74), in broad accordance with Jewish and Christian customs. Thus, Qur’anic passages mention bodily postures like prostration (verb: → *sajada*), bowing (*raka’a*; see briefly under → *sajada*), and standing (*qāma*), and also speech acts like glorifying (*sabbāḥa*) and praising God (noun: → *ḥamd*), invoking (→ *dhakara*) him, and reciting (→ *qara’a*, *talā*) the revelations conveyed by the Qur’anic Messenger (Rivlin 1934, 92–96 and 107–109; Böwering 2004, 219–222; Sinai 2017a, 230; e.g., Q 2:43, 25:64, 29:45, 39:9, 52:48–49, 76:25–26, 84:21). One is tempted to assume that these different components of the Qur’anic *ṣalāh* ritual were modelled on contemporary Jewish and Christian practices and that their reliance on standardised bodily movements and verbal utterances formed a contrast to the predominantly sacrificial rituals performed at the Meccan Ka’bah. However, we saw above that the concept of prayer or *ṣalāh* seems to have been applied to pre-Qur’anic pagan rites, too. This opens up the possibility that at least some of the postures and movements of the Qur’anic *ṣalāh* were continuous with aspects of pre-Qur’anic cultic practices in Mecca. Such a line of thought would be consistent with Uri Rubin’s hypothesis that thanksgiving prayers at sunrise (*ṣalāt al-ḍuḥā*) were already a feature of pre-Islamic pagan ritual (Rubin 1987, 40–53). Angelika Neuwirth goes even further and proposes that the early Meccan surahs were proclaimed in a situation of cultic community between the Qur’anic Messenger and the wider Meccan public, which could have been the existing *ṣalāh* ritual at the Ka’bah (SPMC 146–147). To put it with due caution, the fact that both the prayer ritual of the Qur’anic community and that of their “associating” (→ *ashraka*) opponents could be designated by the terms *ṣalāh* and *ṣallā* points to a degree of behavioural overlap. It is possible that the curt dismissal of pagan prayer in Q 8:35 as vacuous whistling and hand-clapping (see above) is animated by a concern to minimise such similarity.

As briefly intimated in the preceding paragraph, the recitation of material from the Qur’anic corpus itself came to establish itself as an important part of the Qur’anic prayer ritual as it evolved through the Meccan period (Mittwoch 1913, 10; Goitein 1966, 82; Böwering 2004, 221). This will have formed a clear hallmark of the Qur’anic community’s increasing cultic separateness from the associators. Thus, Q 17:78 describes the morning prayer as “the morning recitation” (*qur’ān al-fajr*; but cf. Rivlin 1934, 100–101; → *qara’a*); Q 35:29 links performance of the prayer with reciting God’s scripture (*alladhīna yatlūna kitāba llāhi wa-aqāmū l-ṣalāta*);

<sup>10</sup> Q 30:17–18 presents the additional difficulty that it would seem to list two evening prayers: “Glory be to God when you<sup>p</sup> enter upon the time of evening (*ḥīna tumsūna*) and upon the time of morning; // to him belongs praise in the heavens and on earth; and in the evening (*wa-’ashiyyan*) and when you enter upon the time of noon.” However, it is conceivable that *ḥīna tumsūna* and *wa-’ashiyyan* here refer to one and the same prayer. This reading would have the advantage of bringing Q 30:17–18 more in line with the manifold other verses alluding to two daytime prayers.

Q 73:1–4 stipulates that vigils are to be devoted to declaiming (verb: *rattala*) *al-qur’ān* (v. 4), which is confirmed by the later Medinan addition 73:20 (*fa-qra’ū mā tayassara mina l-qur’āni*, “so recite<sup>p</sup> of the Qur’an what you find easy”); and a number of additional verses articulate the expectation that the addressees of the Qur’anic revelations, and of divine revelations in general, ought to respond by performing liturgical acts such as prostration and glorification (Q 17:107–109, 19:58, 32:15, 84:21), indicating an intertwining of prophetic proclamation and communal worship. It would be implausible to understand these verses to imply that the Qur’anic community’s daily prayers routinely coincided with the proclamation of new revelations. More likely, prayer involved a reiteration of previously imparted revelations. Such recitations were probably declaimed to, rather than declaimed by, the attending congregation (cf. the use of *talā ‘alā* and *qara’a ‘alā* in Q 17:107, 19:58, and 84:21). Q 16:98—“If you recite the Qur’an, seek God’s protection (verb: *ista’ādha bi-llāh*) against the devil, who deserves to be pelted (see under → *shayṭān* and → *rajīm*)”—may reflect the development of some form of apotropaic opening incantation prior to the recitation of Qur’anic texts, possibly related to Surahs 113 and 114. A significant aspect of audience participation may have emerged with the Qur’an’s opening surah, the Fātiḥah, which given its usage of the first person plural may well have been pronounced by the entire congregation (Goitein 1966, 82–84; *SPMC* 175–176).<sup>11</sup> In the Medinan period, finally, communal prayers may have come to include prophetic intercessions on behalf of the Qur’anic community (Sinai 2018a, 16; e.g., Q 4:64, 24:62).<sup>12</sup>

**ṣaliya tr. | to roast in s.th.**

→ *jahannam*

**ṣamma intr. | to be deaf**

**aṣamm | deaf**

→ *‘amiya*

**ṣanam | idol**

→ *ab*, → *dhabaḥa*

**ṣawwara tr. | to shape s.o., to endow s.o. with a shape (specifically, humans)**

**ṣūrah | shape, form**

→ *istakhlafa*, → *khalaqa*

**al-ṣayḥah | the cry**

→ *‘adhhaba*

<sup>11</sup> The alternative is to assume a prayer-leader speaking on behalf of the congregation.

<sup>12</sup> Prophetic intercession on behalf of the congregation would also be one way of understanding the phrase *fā-aqamta lahumu l-ṣalāta* in Q 4:102 (“and when you perform prayer on their behalf”). For a different understanding, see Brockelmann 1915, 318, who construes this in the sense of “when you lead them in prayer.”

# d

***ḍaraba fī l-ard* | to travel the earth, to journey through the land**

→ *sāra fī l-ard*

***ḍaraba mathalan* | to put forward or make use of a similitude, saying, or characterisation**

→ *mathal*

***ḍarra* tr. | to harm s.o.**

→ *nafa'a*

***ḍā'afa* tr. | to double s.th., to multiply s.th.**

→ *aqrada*

***istaḍ'afa* tr. | to deem or treat s.o. as weak, to oppress s.o., to press s.o. hard  
*ḍa'if* | weak; socially or economically powerless**

Further vocabulary discussed: *istakbara* intr. | to deem o.s. great, to behave haughtily  
*atrafa* tr. | to spoil s.o. by affluence *mutraf* | spoiled by affluence *zalama* intr. | to do wrong, to be guilty of wrongdoing *mala'* | assembly; community leaders, notables  
*al-ardhalūn*, *arādhilunā* pl. | the dregs (of society), the dregs from among us

**Lexical and semantic considerations.** The literal meaning of *istaḍ'afa* is “to deem s.o. to be weak,” where “weak” means someone who lacks protection and is socially powerless or inferior (cf. the use of *ḍa'if* in Q 2:266.282, 4:9, 9:91, 11:91; see Serjeant 1987 and CDKA 169). *Istaḍ'afa*, then, is to treat somebody as inferior, powerless, and unable to defend himself, and in this sense is at least sometimes best translated as “to oppress” (CDKA 169). For example, Q 7:137 calls the Israelites whom Moses liberated from their bondage under Pharaoh *al-qawm alladhīna kānū yustaḍ'afūn*, “the people who were oppressed,” and Q 28:4 reports that Pharaoh “oppressed” the Israelites by killing their male offspring yet sparing their women. Moreover, in Q 7:150 Aaron justifies his failure to prevent the Israelites from manufacturing the Golden Calf by saying that “the people pressed me hard and almost killed me” (*inna l-qawma staḍ'afūnī wa-kādū yaqtulūnānī*). It seems clear in all these cases that *istaḍ'afa* involves actual mistreatment or at least serious threats. Consequently, an overly literal translation that renders the verb as merely expressing a mental attitude (“to think s.o. weak”; thus Jones 2007) is misleading.



In some cases, the theme of oppression intersects with the problem of religious coercion and the question whether the divine judge will admit exposure to such coercion as a valid excuse. Thus, Q 34:32–33 predicts a dialogue between two sets of sinners on judgement day, those who deemed themselves great and behaved haughtily (*alladhīna stakbarū*) and those who were oppressed (*lladhīna studʿifū*). The exchange presupposes that the former were in a position to “order” the latter “to repudiate God and to set up equals to him” (*idh taʿmurūnanā an nakfura bi-llāhi wa-najʿala lahu andādan*). The issue comes up again in the Medinan passage Q 4:97–98: it is not a sufficient excuse for those who die in sin (or rather, for those “whom the angels take from life in a state of wronging themselves,” *alladhīna tawaffāhumu l-malāʾikatu ḡālimī anfusihi*) that they were “oppressed in the land,” unless they really had no way of escaping their plight.<sup>1</sup>

**The oppressed and other indications of socio-economic inequality.** It is noteworthy that the verse following the eschatological dialogue between the haughty (*alladhīna stakbarū*) and the oppressed in Q 34:32–33—namely, 34:34—speaks of those inhabitants of a town who are “spoiled by affluence” (*mutrafūhā*) as an apparent synonym for the haughty. In other passages, too, it is the “affluent” inhabitants of a town who are considered the primary perpetrators of sin (Q 17:16),<sup>2</sup> who are the initial or principal victims of God’s punishment (Q 23:64), and who spearhead the opposition to God’s messengers in the name of ancestral tradition (Q 43:23; see under → *ab*). In fact, the consistently negative undertones adhering to the passive participle *mutraf* and its corresponding active verb *atrafā* + acc. justify translating the latter not just as “to grant s.o. affluence,” but rather as “to spoil s.o. by affluence”: those who were *mutraf* during their earthly lives are depicted as ending up in hell (Q 56:45), and being granted a life of affluence (*utrifa*) is closely associated with wrongdoing (→ *ḡalama*) and sinning (*ajrama*; Q 11:116). The Qur’an thus seems to posit a triangular nexus between wealth, political power, and ethico-religious corruption. This three-way link is clearly discernible in Q 23:33, describing the “notables” (*al-malaʾ*) of an anonymous post-Noahide community—who are condemned for repudiating God and for dismissing the eschatological judgement as a lie—as having been granted, or rather as having been spoiled by, a life of affluence (*atrafnāhum fī l-ḡayāti l-dunyā*).

The verbs *istadʿafa* and *istakbara* accordingly interlock with other terminology expressing differences in political or economic status, including the term → *malaʾ*, designating the communal leaders or notables who are often depicted as the primary opponents of Qur’anic messengers. Moreover, in Q 26:111 Noah’s people are reported to say, “Shall we believe you<sup>s</sup>, when it is only the dregs (*al-ardhalūn*) who follow you?” and in 11:27 the repudiating notables of Noah’s people (*al-malaʾu lladhīna kafarū min qawmihi*) again remind him that he is only being followed by “the dregs among us” (*arādhilunā*). These verses, too, bespeak a preoccupation with social status. It is reasonable to suppose that such allusions shed light on the social circumstances of Muhammad’s own preaching even when they are ostensibly concerned with the situation of earlier messengers. This is so both because one passage expressly mentions the notables or community leaders of Muhammad’s own opponents (Q 38:6–8) and because the adversaries of past messengers often duplicate the objections voiced by the Qur’an’s contemporary antagonists (→ *malaʾ*).

1 Cf. also Q 4:75 (also briefly discussed under → *jāhada*), where the “oppressed men, women, and children” are said to exclaim, “Our Lord, bring us forth from this town whose inhabitants are wrongdoers and appoint for us a patron and helper from you!”

2 On this verse in particular, see the discussion under → *khatama*.

In view of this, one may with due caution extrapolate two things. First, post-Qur’anic Islamic traditions may well deserve some trust when they maintain that the original nucleus of the Meccan community included individuals who were socially, politically, or economically marginalised or disadvantaged (although it cannot be ruled out altogether that such reports are reliant on an attentive reading of the Qur’an itself rather than on genuine historical memory).<sup>3</sup> Secondly, socio-economic disadvantage appears to have exposed the Qur’an’s nuclear community to conformist pressures that jeopardised their doctrinal and ritual commitments. In fact, such pressures are in evidence as early as Q 96:9–10, where a prototypical sinner is condemned for banning a servant from prayer: in the scenario that is here intimated, the offender must have enjoyed a certain position of authority or social prestige vis-à-vis the victim concerned, enabling the former to interfere with the latter’s cultic behaviour.

***ḍalla* intr. (‘an) | to go astray (from s.th.)**

***ḍalla* tr. | to stray from s.th.**

***aḍalla* tr. | to lead s.o. astray**

***ḍalāl, ḍalālah* | being astray, going astray**

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *hadā* tr./intr. | to guide (s.o.) *ihṭadā* intr. | to be guided  
*sabīl* | way, path *khatama* intr. ‘alā | to seal s.th.

**Overview and related concepts.** “To go astray,” *ḍalla*, functions as the antonym of receiving God’s guidance (→ *hudā*) or “being guided,” “allowing o.s. to be guided” (*ihṭadā*; e.g., Q 2:16). Like *hadā* (“to guide”) and *ihṭadā*, occurrences of *ḍalla* are found from early Meccan texts onwards (e.g., Q 68:7 and 93:7; see Räsänen 1976, 14–17). Normally, *ḍalla* is intransitive, and that from which someone strays or is led astray—namely, God’s “path” (→ *sabīl*)—is preceded by the preposition ‘an (e.g., Q 5:60.77, 6:116.117, 39:8, 53:30, 68:7); but there are also cases in which *ḍalla* takes the accusative (Q 2:108, 4:44, 5:12, 25:17, 60:1). Subjects of the act of “leading astray” include not only humans (e.g., Q 3:69, 4:113, 5:77, 6:116.119.144, 20:79.85, 26:99) or the devil (Q 4:60.119, 36:62) but frequently also God (e.g., Q 2:26, 4:88.143, 6:39.125, 7:155.178.186, 9:115, 30:29). The idea of divine leading astray, like that of God’s “sealing” of the sinners’ hearts, could be perceived to have deterministic implications (see the relevant sections of the entries on → *khatama* and → *hadā*). Alternatively, divine leading astray merely responds to, consolidates, and reinforces prior human going astray. After all, as Räsänen notes, many Qur’anic verses expressly assert that “those led astray by God have *deserved* this fate” (Räsänen 1976, 13–44, quoting p. 24; see also Ahrens 1935, 84). On the phrase *fī ḍalālin mubīn*, “clearly astray,” see under → *bayyana*.

**Relevant Biblical diction.** Like their antonyms *ihṭadā* and *hadā*, the verbs *ḍalla* and *aḍalla* belong to a layer of the Qur’an’s terminological fabric that is profoundly continuous with Biblical language. The verbs *ḍalla* and *aḍalla* do occur in pre-Islamic poetry (Arazi and Masalha 1999, 672; e.g., *DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 15:38), and in Safaitic *ḍll* can, for instance, refer to the straying of a dog (Al-Jallad 2015a, 251 = HCH 131; see also Al-Jallad 2015a, 313).

3 For an early attempt to mine the relevant extra-Qur’anic material, see Watt 1953, 86–99 and 170–179.

Yet their Qur'anic deployment in the context of the relationship between God and humans would primarily seem to be informed by the semantics of such Biblical expressions as *šāgâ* (also *šāgag*), “to go astray” and *hišgâ*, “to lead astray” (*HALOT* 1413), as well as *ṭā'â*, “to go astray” and *hiṭ'â*, “to lead astray” (*HALOT* 377). For instances of the former two verbs, see 1 Sam 26:21 (Saul confesses, “I have gone astray”), Ps 119:10 (“Do not lead me astray from your commandments”), Prov 28:10 (threatening “those who lead astray the upright into evil ways”), and Job 6:24 (Job demands, “Make me understand where I have gone astray”); for *ṭā'â* and *hiṭ'â*, see, for instance, Ezek 13:10 (accusing false prophets of having “misled my people”), Ezek 14:11, 44:10.15, 48:11 (speaking of Israel’s going astray), and Ps 58:4 (“The liars go astray from the womb”). The Peshitta mostly renders these passages by employing the verbs *ṭ'ā*, “to go astray” (Ezek 14:11, 44:10.15, 48:11, Ps 58:4, and Job 6:24; see *SL* 540–541 and *TS* 1492), and *aṭ'i*, “to lead astray” (Gen 3:13, Ezek 13:10, Prov 28:10, Ps 119:10; see *SL* 541 and *TS* 1493); but the Syriac Bible also uses *skal*, “to act foolishly,” and the related causative *askel* (1 Sam 26:21; see *SL* 1009–1010 and *TS* 2627–2629). Syriac *aṭ'i* (or the derivative *maṭ'yānā*, “causing to go astray”) furthermore translates *hiššî*, “to deceive” (*HALOT* 728) at Gen 3:13 (Eve accuses the serpent of having deceived her) and *hiznâ*, “to entice to fornication” (*HALOT* 275) at Exod 34:16 (Canaanite wives will make the sons of the Israelites “lust after their gods”). Looking at the New Testament, Syriac *ṭ'ā* translates Greek *planaomai* at Matt 18:12 and 1 Pet 2:25 (both of which speak about straying sheep), although not at 2 Pet 2:15 (on which see also under → *širāṭ*), where the Peshitta instead employs *shgā*. The causative *aṭ'i*, “to lead astray,” meanwhile, renders *planaō* at Matt 24:4.11.24 (Jesus warns his disciples not to let themselves be “led astray”) or Rev 12:9, 19:20, and 20:10 (according to which the devil or a false prophet will lead people astray).

At least on first impressions, then, the Peshitta is marked by a higher degree of terminological uniformity than the original text of the Bible, thereby potentially foreshadowing the even more formulaic character of Qur'anic diction.<sup>4</sup> One may hypothesise that already prior to the Qur'anic proclamations the Arabic verbs *ḍalla* and *aḍalla* were utilised by Arabophone Christians to render Syriac *ṭ'ā* and *aṭ'i* with their rich Biblical semantic payload. The same may of course apply to pre-Islamic Jews as well, given that the two verbs also exist, with the same meanings of “to go astray” and “to lead astray,” in Jewish Aramaic, and indeed are employed by the targums in a very similar way to the Peshitta (*DJPA* 227–228; *DJBA* 509).

***aḍā'a* tr. | to neglect s.th., to neglect to pay s.th.**

→ *ajr*

***dāqa ṣadruhu* intr. | his breast became straitened or tightened**

***dāqa* intr. *bi-*. . . *dhar'an* | to be distressed on account of s.o.**

***ḍayyiq* | narrow, tight**

→ *ṣadr*, → *naḥs*

<sup>4</sup> For a similar observation with regard to the Peshitta’s use of derivatives of the root *d-ḥ-l*, see Becker 2009, 314.

# ṭ

**ṭabaʿa** intr. ʿalā | to seal s.th.

→ *khatama*

**ṭibāqan** pl. | in layers

→ *samāʿ*

**ṭahā** tr. | to spread s.th. out

→ *arḍ*

**ṭ-s, ṭ-s-m** (surah-initial letter sequences)

→ ʿ-l-r

**al-ṭāghūt** | false gods

Further vocabulary discussed: *āmana* intr. *bi-* | to believe in s.th. *kafara* intr. *bi-* | to repudiate s.o. or s.th. *ijtanaba* tr. | to avoid s.th. or s.o. *sabīl* | way, path *waliyy* | patron *ʿabada* tr. | to serve s.o. or s.th., to worship s.o. or s.th. *ṣanam, wathan* | idol

The definite noun *al-ṭāghūt* occurs in a total of eight Qurʿanic verses (Q 2:256.257, 4:51.60.76, 5:60, 16:36, 39:17). It tends to stand in opposition to God: believing (→ *āmana*) in God or turning to him is equivalent to repudiating (→ *kafara*) or avoiding (*ijtanaba*) *al-ṭāghūt* (Q 2:256, 16:36, 39:17); those who repudiate God are the allies of *al-ṭāghūt* (Q 2:257); and fighting in the path (→ *sabīl*) of God is contrasted with fighting in the path of *al-ṭāghūt* (Q 4:76). Although the word is grammatically a singular, it can have a plural or collective meaning (NB 48; see also KK 97 on Q 4:60). Thus, in Q 2:257 *al-ṭāghūt* are described as the “patrons” (*awliyāʿ*; singular: → *waliyy*) of the repudiators, and the word takes a plural verb. Elsewhere, though, the Qurʿan employs singular pronouns, both masculine and feminine, to refer back to *al-ṭāghūt* (Q 4:60: *wa-qad umirū an yakfurū bihi*; Q 39:17: *walladhina jtanabū l-ṭāghūta an yaʿbudūhā*), although the feminine singular might of course be understood to refer to an inanimate plurality.

Etymologically, the word has been derived from Classical Ethiopic *ṭāʿot* (NB 35, 48; FVQ 202–203), whose meaning is glossed as both “idol” and “ungodliness” (Leslau 1991, 584). The Ethiopic word has itself an Aramaic origin, *ṭaʿuta*, literally “error.” Aramaic *ṭaʿuta* and occasionally also its Hebrew cognate *ṭaʿut* can be employed to refer to idols

in targumic and rabbinic literature (*DTTM* 542 and *DJPA* 227; see already *WMJA* 55 and 201; *FVQ* 203; Köbert 1961). This makes it possible to argue that adjudication between an Ethiopic and an Aramaic etymology is not possible (van Putten 2020b, 69). The reason why the Qur’anic text has *ṭāghūt* rather than *ṭā’ūt* is presumably that the Ethiopic (or Aramaic?) term, when borrowed into Arabic, came to be associated with the Arabic root *ṭ-gh-w/y*, denoting excess, immoderation, and a transgression of proper boundaries (see Kropp 2008, 210; on *ṭ-gh-w/y* in the Qur’an, refer to *CDKA* 173).

Whatever its precise etymology, Qur’anic *al-ṭāghūt* should clearly be rendered in such a way as to accord with the fact that *al-ṭāghūt* figures as an object of veneration (verb: ‘*abada*) in Q 39:17 (see also 5:60). This rules out the abstract noun “idolatry.” “Idols” or “the idols” is viable (e.g., Arberry 1955 and Paret 2001), but as Jones remarks in a footnote, the rendering “false gods” is equally feasible (Jones 2007, 58, n. 40). In fact, the latter seems marginally preferable, since “idols” may well be overly specific: to speak of “idols” implies not just a veneration of non-divine entities that are erroneously considered to be divine, such as the “gods” (*ālihah*) or “partner deities” (*shurakā’*) invoked by the Qur’an’s “associating” opponents (see under → *ashraka*), but more particularly a veneration of statues and images of the sort that other Qur’anic passages call *aṣnām* or *awthān*, chiefly in the context of narratives about Abraham’s confrontation with his idolatrous compatriots (see under → *dhabaḥa*). The more abstract translation “false gods” certainly chimes with the contrast between serving or believing in God (*allāh*) and serving or believing in *al-ṭāghūt* that emerges from verses like Q 2:256 or 16:36. Moreover, “false gods” resonates not only with Aramaic *ṭa’uta*, “error,” but also with the connotations of excess, transgression, and disobedience inhering in the Arabic root *ṭ-gh-w/y*.

### **ṭālūt | Saul**

See briefly under → *isrā’īl*.

### **aṭla’a tr. ‘alā | to give s.o. insight into s.th., to inform s.o. of s.th.**

→ *al-ghayb*

### **iṭma’anna intr. (bi-) | to be or come to be secure (in), to be or come to be at peace (in)**

→ *qalb*, → *malak*, → *nafs*

### **ṭ-h (surah-initial letter sequence)**

→ ‘-l-r

### **ṭahara/ṭahura intr. | to be or become pure or clean**

### **ṭahhara tr. | to purify s.o. or s.th.**

### **ṭaṭahhara intr. | to purify o.s.; to keep o.s. pure**

### **ṭahūr | pure**

Further vocabulary discussed: *junub* | polluted *ghasala* tr. | to wash s.th. *masaḥa* intr. *bi-* | to wipe s.th. *lāmasa* tr. | to touch s.o. *ḥaraj* | fault; difficulty *massa* tr. | to touch s.o. *ighsasala* intr. | to wash o.s. *maḥīd* | menstruation *adhā* | harm *qariba* tr. | to approach s.o., to come near s.th. *qalb* | heart *ṣadaqah* | gift or act of charity *bayt* | house; temple *azwāj muṭahharah* | purified spouses *rijs* | filth, impurity, abomination *najas* | filth *al-masjid al-ḥarām* | the sacred place of prostration

**Overview.** The root *ṭ-h-r* expresses meanings to do with ritual purity and purification not only in Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic (*HALOT* 369–370; *DJBA* 494–495) but also in Sabaic (Beeston et al. 1982, 153; Maraqtan 2021, 446–448) and in a Safaitic inscription (MA 1 in Al-Jallad 2015a, 272, and Al-Jallad 2022, 46). Practices of ritual purity were consequently well known in the Qur’an’s Arabian environment. It is unsurprising, therefore, that in the Qur’an, too, the root *ṭ-h-r* (on which see generally Lowry 2004) can appear in contexts that one might classify as “ritual.” This is most obviously the case in the two Medinan verses Q 5:6 and 2:222, which will be treated first. Yet as the entry will go on to show, other occurrences of the root *ṭ-h-r* play a distinctly non-ritual, ethical role. The entry will finish by widening the scope and examining the general significance that the language of purity plays in the Qur’an. It will be argued that ritual purity is of comparatively subordinate importance in the Qur’anic world-view and that the Islamic scripture is marked by a tendency to employ the notion of purity in a figurative and moralising sense.

**The root *ṭ-h-r* and ritual purity in Q 5:6.** Q 5:6 tells the addressees that before “rising to pray” (*idhā qumtum ilā l-ṣalāti*) they must perform a ritual of partial ablution, consisting in washing their faces and hands and wiping their heads and feet (*KK* 115–116, with a detailed discussion of an important reading variant).<sup>1</sup> Let us call this segment (a) of the verse. The following portion of text, segment (b), adds that “if you<sup>p</sup> are polluted (*junub*), then purify yourselves (*fa-ṭṭahharū*).” It might be felt that segment (b) deems *junub* impurity, whatever it may be (see below), to require a more thorough form of washing that involves not just one’s face, head, hands, and feet but also the rest of one’s body. If so, the distinction that later Muslim scholars make between a partial ablution termed *wuḍū’* and a full ablution termed *ghusl* (see generally Katz 2002, 2, and Maghen 2007) would be at least implicitly present in the Qur’an, despite the fact that the latter nowhere employs the word *wuḍū’* itself.<sup>2</sup> At least equally likely, however, is the interpretation that segment (a) merely voices a strong recommendation that any prayer be preceded by a minimal kind of lustration, perhaps for reasons of caution, upon which segment (b) stresses further that purification

1 Against the view of later Muslim scholars, I am assuming that the phrase “to rise to prayer” (*qāma ilā l-ṣalāh*) means “to get ready to pray” rather than “to rise from sleep to pray” (see Maghen 2007, section 2). The former interpretation of *qāma ilā l-ṣalāh* is also preferable for Q 4:142.

2 Thus, Rivlin thinks that *ṭaṭahhara* in Q 5:6 means “a special type of purification, probably of the entire body” (Rivlin 1934, 88). Contextually, one might put forward the following argument from redundancy: given that segment (a) requires that anyone getting ready to pray must perform a minimum form of ablution involving the face, head, hands, and feet, what sense would it make for segment (b) to then go on to prescribe the very same ritual for a specific case (namely, for those who are ritually impure) that is already sufficiently covered by the preceding rule (which seemingly applies to everyone)? The argument aims to show that the only way to avoid treating segment (b) as redundant is to take *ṭaṭahhara* to mean something different than the ritual of partial ablution described in segment (a). But as the main text goes on to argue, we cannot take for granted that the imperatives in segment (a) of Q 5:6 must necessarily be interpreted to convey strict obligation. This possibility obviates the threat of redundancy entailed by equating the verb *ṭaṭahhara* from segment (b) with the ritual of ablution prescribed in segment (a).



by washing is particularly indispensable if someone is aware of being in a state of impurity or pollution. In other words, the imperatives “wash” (*fa-ghsilū*) and “wipe” (*wa-msahū*) in segment (a) could designate something short of categorical obligation, a potential use of the imperative of which later Muslim scholars were duly aware (Weiss 2010, 329, 343–344). If so, then the verb *ṭaṭahhara*, “to purify oneself,” in segment (b) need not refer to a more extensive kind of washing than the minimal type of ablution detailed in segment (a).

Can we say anything about what it meant to be *junub* in the Qur’anic milieu? Q 5:6 contains a further stipulation, segment (c), that may offer a clue: “If you<sup>p</sup> are sick or on a journey, or one of you comes from the privy or you have touched women (*aw lāmastumu l-nisā’a*) and you cannot find water, have recourse to good soil (*fa-tayammamū ṣa’īdan ṭayyiban*) and wipe your faces and your hands with it.” This is followed by a final flourish, segment (d), which asserts that God does not wish to “place any difficulty (*ḥaraj*)” upon the addressees and that he desires to “purify” them (*yurīdu li-yuṭāhhirakum*). As the use of *ḥaraj*, “difficulty” (CDKA 68; Lowry 2015–2016, 102–103), in segment (d) makes explicit, the preceding segment (c) serves as an exemptive hardship clause similar to the one that is found a few verses earlier in Q 5:3, where the believers are granted permission to violate the Qur’an’s dietary rules—i.e., to eat carrion, blood, pork, or sacrificial meat—in emergency situations (see generally Sinai 2019c). God, desiring ease rather than hardship (cf. Q 2:185; cf. Matt 11:30), has provided the believers with a means of maintaining their ritual purity even in exceptional circumstances in which no water is to hand, thus shielding them from undue difficulty: in case of necessity, ablutions may be performed with clean soil instead of water, a provision that has a parallel in the Babylonian Talmud, at *b. Bər. 15a* (GQ 1:199; see also WMJA 86).

What matters most in the present context is that the concessionary segment (c), at least if read without too many preconceptions, would appear to imply that coming from the privy and having “touched” (*lāmastum*) women are two of the situations that necessitate some form of symbolic ablution (namely, wiping one’s face and hands with soil). It is tempting, therefore, to seize on these two incidents as two Qur’anic examples of *junub* impurity, though this will only be viable if the acts of washing and wiping described in segments (a) and (c) are indeed equated with the purification required by segment (b), which is where the term *junub* figures in the verse.<sup>3</sup> Assuming this interpretive step, what does it mean to “touch” women? There is vivid debate in the Islamic tradition whether the phrase is a euphemism for sexual contact or whether it means literal touching between the genders (Maghen 2005, 137–142; see also Katz 2002, 86–96 and 149–155). The former view, championed by the Ḥanafī school, can appeal to other Qur’anic passages that similarly refer to sexual intercourse in euphemistic terms—for instance, by employing the verb *massa*, “to touch” (e.g., Q 19:20, 33:49), whose literal meaning is synonymous with that of *lāmasa*, or the verb *qariba*, “to approach,” in Q 2:222 (see below).<sup>4</sup> Hence, although the

3 To consider defecation an event that induces *junub* impurity would, of course, contradict the later Islamic understanding that the state of *janābah* or of being *junub* is only occasioned by one of the “major polluting events” (*al-aḥdāth al-kubrā*) like menstruation or a discharge of semen. For a concise overview of the classical understanding, see Maghen 2007, section 1.

4 Cf. also the sixth-form verb *tamāssa*, “to touch each other,” in Q 58:3–4, where reference must also be to intercourse. For a more detailed overview of such arguments as given by Ḥanafī scholars, see Maghen 2005, 147–148. However, Katz makes the relevant point that the first-form verb *lamasa* does signify literal touching in Q 6:7 (Katz 2002, 87).

exegetical situation is hardly clear-cut, there are reasons to consider the Qur’anic use of *junub* to encompass both defecation and intercourse. If that is correct, then *junub* in its Qur’anic sense subsumes two circumstances that in classical Islamic law fall into different categories of polluting events.

The exegetical problems surrounding Q 5:6 are compounded by its partial overlap with another verse, Q 4:43, whose chronological relationship to 5:6 is treated in some detail in the excursus at the end of this entry. In the context of the present discussion, however, the only important piece of evidence that Q 4:43 adds is the observation that it employs *ighatasala*, “to wash oneself,” instead of *ṭaṭahhara*, thus confirming the impression that in Q 5:6 “purifying oneself” refers to ablution. In sum, *ṭaṭahhara* as used in Q 5:6 probably refers to purification by a minimal form of ablution, which serves to remove ritual impurity that might, for instance, be occasioned by defecation or sexual contact. Despite the inevitable vagueness and precariousness of this interpretation, it fits well with the fact that washing prior to undertaking certain religious rites, such as entering a temple, performing a pilgrimage, or making a sacrifice, is also attested in Sabaic and Safaitic inscriptions (Al-Jallad 2022, 44–46; Maraqtan 2021, 447–448). While a Safaitic inscription employs *ṭhr* to refer to such ablutions (see MA 1 in Al-Jallad 2015a, 272, and Al-Jallad 2022, 46), recalling the Qur’anic *ṭaṭahhara* from Q 2:222 (see below) and 5:6, Sabaic uses the verb *ḡsl* (CIH, no. 523, l. 7, and no. 533, l. 5) that is cognate with *ighatasala* in Q 4:43 and *ghasala* in Q 5:6.

**Q 2:222.** The second Qur’anic passage in which *ṭ-h-r* is used in a ritual sense, Q 2:222, describes menstruation (*al-mahīḍ*) as a “harm” (*adhā*) and commands the Qur’anic community, “So avoid (*fa-tazilū*) menstruating women (*al-nisā’a fi l-mahīḍi*), and do not approach them (*wa-lā taqrabūhunna*) until they have become pure again (*ḥattā yaṭḥurnā*); when they have purified themselves (*fa-idhā ṭaṭahharna*), then come to them as God has commanded you.” This is presumably a ban on intercourse during menstruation, with “to approach” (*qariba*) serving as a euphemism for sexual contact just as *lāmasa* appears to do in Q 5:6. The prohibition has a Biblical parallel in Lev 18:19 and 20:18. Yet intercourse with a menstruating woman was a taboo in South Arabian culture as well; two Sabaic inscriptions already cited use the verb “to approach” (*qrb*) in this context (CIH, no. 523, l. 2, and no. 533, l. 3), probably also for intercourse (see the translation of CIH, no. 533 in Maraqtan 2021, 448; see also Beeston et al. 1982, 106, and Robin 2015a, 111).<sup>5</sup> Unlike the Hebrew Bible, the Qur’an does not specify a statutory length for a woman’s period (cf. Lev 15:19) nor does it spell out whether menstruating women can pass on impurity by contagion (cf. Lev 15:19–24), but such matters could be presupposed (see also Rivlin 1934, 86–87). While the verse does not set out any detailed rituals of post-menstrual purification, such as the rabbinic requirement of immersion in a ritual bath or *miqweh*, in Q 2:222 too the verb *ṭaṭahhara* likely refers to the performance of some sort of ablution, in line with the preceding discussion of Q 5:6 (thus also Rivlin 1934, 87). Although Q 2:222 does not use the term *junub*, it would seem that the common element necessitating purificatory washing according to 2:222 and 5:6 is bodily discharge—whether due to defecation, ejaculation (which Q 5:6 probably presupposes as a normal component of sexual contact), or menstruation.

**Non-ritual uses of root *ṭ-h-r*.** Despite the two unmistakably ritual uses of the root *ṭ-h-r* that have just been discussed, other Qur’anic verses employ it in an ethical sense

<sup>5</sup> I owe my awareness of both inscriptions to <http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/SabaWeb/Suche/Suche/SearchResultDetail?idxLemma=4414&showAll=0> (accessed 20 May 2021).

(but see Zellentin 2022, 282–319).<sup>6</sup> Occurrences belonging to this latter category are in fact quantitatively paramount in the Qur’an, and a similar state of affairs also holds for the root *z-k-w/y* (see under → *zakāh*), whose semantic valence seems to be largely the same as that of *t-h-r* (see the parallel usage of derivatives of both roots in Q 2:232 and 9:103). A non-ritual, ethical usage of *t-h-r* is even present in Q 2:222, discussed above, in so far as the verse ends in the coda, “God loves those who are repentant and loves those who keep themselves pure” (*inna llāha yuḥibbu l-tawwābīna wa-yuḥibbu l-muṭaṭṭahhirīn*); the coupling of the verb *ṭaṭaḥhara* with repentance suggests that it conveys a broader moral sense here than earlier on in the same verse, where reference was to the performance of post-menstrual ablutions (but see Zellentin 2022, 305). Another pertinent example is Q 9:108, where *ṭaṭaḥhara* (“to keep oneself pure”) and the corresponding active participle *al-muṭṭaḥḥirūn* (“those who keep themselves pure”) function as synonyms for righteousness in general. Similarly, Q 33:53 describes the requirement that the Prophet’s wives remain screened from ordinary believers as conducive to purity of heart (→ *qalb*) on the part of all parties concerned (*dhālikum aṭharu li-qulūbikum wa-qulūbihinna*). In Q 7:82 and 27:56, too, where the verb *ṭaṭaḥhara*, “to keep o.s. pure,” is used by the compatriots of Lot to describe the latter’s rejection of “approaching men in lust rather than women” (Q 7:81, 27:55), the root’s moral sense is probably dominant: the suggestion is hardly that whatever homosexual practices are being condemned in these two place occasion ritual impurity that could be removed by, say, ablution.

The fifth-form verb *ṭaṭaḥhara* can thus mean either ritual purification, probably by ablution (Q 2:222, 5:6), as well as keeping oneself morally pure. By contrast, it is less clear that the second-form verb *ṭaḥhara* (“to purify”) ever has what one might call a ritually concrete sense in the Qur’an. The verb can certainly designate the cleansing effect of almsgiving (Q 9:103: *khudh min amwālihim ṣadaqatan ṭaṭaḥhiruhum wa-tuzakkīhim bihā*), but the point here must be that charitable renunciation is a means of attaining divine forgiveness (see also under → *ṣadaqah*). Twice, *ṭaḥhara* takes God’s “house” (→ *bayt*) as its object (Q 2:125, 22:26): Abraham is instructed to “purify” God’s house “for those performing circumambulation [around it], who are devoted [to it], who bow and who prostrate themselves” (*an ṭaḥḥirā baytiya li-l-ṭāʾifina wa-l-ʿāḳifina wa-l-rukkaʿi l-sujūd*). Although this could be read as saying that Abraham is to maintain the Meccan sanctuary in a ritually pure condition, it is more convincing to assume that Abraham is bidden to ensure the Kaʿbah’s status as a site of untainted, pure monotheism, considering that in Q 22:26 the commandment just cited is preceded by a divine admonishment not to “associate anything with God” (*an lā tushrik bi shayʿan*; see Zellentin 2022, 287). In line with this, Q 9:28 (on which see below) explicitly describes those who associate other beings with God as “filth” (see also under → *jāhada*). In other cases, the verb *ṭaḥhara* with God as the grammatical subject would simply seem to mean that someone is being rendered or deemed worthy of being admitted to God’s presence (e.g., Q 3:42). This is probably also the sense in which Q 2:25, 3:15, and 4:57 promise the Qur’anic believers “purified spouses” (→ *azwāj muṭaḥḥarah*), an expression treated in a separate entry following the present one. Finally, the adjective *ṭaḥūr*, “pure,” too, may not have a ritual sense either. Q 76:21 says that the blessed in paradise will be given “a pure drink” (*sharāb ṭaḥūr*), while Q 25:48 refers to God’s sending down of “pure water” (*māʿan*

6 On the contrast between ritual and moral impurity in the Hebrew Bible, see Klawans 2000.

*tahūrā*) from the sky. Possibly, the adjective means simply “wholesome” or “salubrious” rather than denoting the trait of being a ritually pure substance (although earthly wine is of course declared to be “filth,” *rijs*, in Q 5:90).

**General remarks on purity in the Qur’an.** To attempt a general assessment of the importance of purity in the Qur’an, we saw that the Islamic scripture endorses a limited range of practices, probably pre-existing ones, that are concerned with managing impurity and pollution, by mandating ablutions before prayer and some form of washing after defecation and in cases of male and female genital discharge (Q 2:222, 4:43, 5:6). The Qur’an also declares certain foodstuffs, such as wine and pork, to be categorically prohibited by calling them “filth” (*rijs*; see Q 5:90, 6:145, and under → *rijz/rujz*). Nonetheless, the Qur’anic religion can hardly be said to be particularly preoccupied with or apprehensive about issues of ritual purity, especially if one compares the scant amount of material just catalogued with the frequency with which the Qur’anic believers are urged to pray (→ *ṣallā*), give alms (→ *razaqa*, → *zakāh*, → *ṣadaqah*), or “contend on God’s path” (→ *jāhada*). In many cases, one would be excused for considering the Qur’an’s recourse to notions of purity and impurity to function as (undoubtedly potent) metaphors, in the sense that they amount to a secondary transference of the vocabulary of purity from the ritual realm to the ethical one.<sup>7</sup>

**The impurity of the associators (Q 9:28).** By way of a final example for this Qur’anic tendency to employ vocabulary associated with ritual purity as potent metaphors, one might point to Q 9:28, where the believers are told that “the associators are filth” (*innamā l-mushrikūna najasun*) and are accordingly forbidden from approaching the sacred place of prostration (*al-masjid al-ḥarām*; see under → *sajada* and → *ḥarrama*) after the present year. The root *n-j-s* seems to be associated with ritual impurity in Sabaic (Beeston et al. 1982, 93, and Maraqtan 2021, 449, with a transliteration and translation of *CIH*, no. 548, l. 3). Yet the net point made in Q 9:28 is not that interaction with those who worship other deities than Allāh is subject to a set of precise rules serving to manage impurity at the level of concrete ritual behaviour—say, by commanding the believers to perform ablutions after having come in contact with associators or to perform some sort of purification ceremony that will cleanse the Meccan Ka’bah from idolatrous pollution. Rather, the point made in Q 9:28 is simply that those who hold false beliefs and engage in reprehensible cultic practices are thereby disqualified from worshipping at the Meccan sanctuary. In Q 9:28, the Qur’anic rejection of associationism is expressed by recourse to what seems to have been an existing Arabian term for ritual impurity, but this is hardly more than a metaphorical variation on the countless other Qur’anic passages dismissing the worship of false deities in epistemic terms (it is based on false belief) or in ethical ones (it amounts to ingratitude and disobedience towards the creator). For example, an earlier passage in Surah 9, Q 9:17–18 (on which see in more detail under → *amara*), abolishes the associators’ control over, or perhaps even their very access to, the Meccan sanctuary without making any reference to the associators’ impurity, simply on the ground that they are guilty of repudiation (*kufr*; v. 17).

7 Klawans 2000 rejects the position that Biblical passages that speak of what he classifies as “moral purity” are adequately described as metaphorical or figurative (see especially Klawans 2000, 32–36). But it would require a separate argument to show that the same holds true for the Qur’an (e.g., by demonstrating that the Qur’an persistently conceptualises sin as an occurrence of defilement whose effects and remedies are only intelligible in terms of an underlying logic of purity).

## Excursus: On the Relationship of Q 5:6 to 4:43

As briefly noted in the preceding, Q 5:6—one of the two passages exhibiting a ritual use of the root *t-h-r*—has a close parallel in Q 4:43, even though the latter does not contain any derivatives of *t-h-r*. It makes sense, therefore, to supplement the above discussion with a brief examination of the relationship of these two passages, both Medinan.

Q 4:43—which is positioned at the very end of Surah 4’s opening panel (Sinai 2021, 373–374)—begins by calling on the believers not to “approach prayer” (*lā taqrabū l-ṣalāta*) in two states: first, while intoxicated “until you<sup>8</sup> know what you are saying”; and secondly, while polluted (*junub*) until “you have washed yourselves” (*ḥattā taḥtasilū*). Those who only happen to pass by (*illā ‘ābirī sabīlin*) are excepted from the latter proscription, meaning probably that there is no ban on those who are impure coming physically near a place of prayer (KK 95).<sup>8</sup> This initial segment of the verse is followed by an almost verbatim parallel of Q 5:6’s concessionary segment (c), permitting ablution with soil if water is not to hand and making up the bulk of 4:43. The only difference in wording between Q 4:43 and 5:6 here consists in the fact that 5:6 eliminates a minor source of potential ambiguity: the believers are not merely instructed to find clean soil and “wipe your faces and your hands” (Q 4:43) but rather to “wipe your faces and your hands with it (*minhu*).” This minor addition has the effect of clarifying beyond any residual doubt that the “good soil” (*ṣa’īdan ṭayyiban*) mentioned before is to serve not as the *place at which* substitute ablutions are to take place but rather as the *instrument with which* they are to be performed. Q 4:43 ends with a brief clausula asserting God’s readiness to forgive.

Rivlin very plausibly proposes that Q 4:43 is chronologically earlier than 5:6 (Rivlin 1934, 88). Lined up in this temporal sequence, Q 4:43 does not yet urge a default performance of ablution before praying and limits the demand that one must wash before prayer to those who are *junub*. Q 5:6 then goes further and commands, or at least strongly recommends, that anyone preparing to pray perform a partial or minimal form of ablution while also reiterating that self-purification is particularly essential if one is *junub*. Moreover, Q 5:6 specifies which limbs and body parts are to be included in the default form of minimal ablution prescribed. Finally, Q 5:6 recaps the emergency clause previously articulated in 4:43 to the effect that water may under certain circumstances be replaced with soil. One reason why Rivlin’s relative dating of Q 4:43 and 5:6 is convincing is the fact that it has the consequence of making Q 5:6 an instance of a more general Qur’anic pattern that I have proposed to call “specification” or “interpretive spawning” (Sinai 2021, 367–373): a chronologically earlier passage (in the present case, Q 4:43) may be conjectured to have given rise to an audience query (what, precisely, counts as sufficiently “washing” oneself in order to remove impurity?), which query is then answered in a chronologically later Qur’anic statement (namely, Q 5:6). Note that Rivlin himself proposes that Q 5:6 “in a certain sense abrogates” 4:43, given that the former verse introduces default ablutions for anyone getting ready to pray rather than only for the impure, thus imposing additional

<sup>8</sup> By contrast, Rivlin thinks that the exception pertains to travellers, meaning that the prohibition to “approach prayer” when *junub* would be entirely waived for those who are on a journey (Rivlin 1934, 88). But note that this understanding creates a contradiction with the provision to perform ablutions with soil rather than water later on in the verse: this permission presupposes that even travellers must ensure their ritual purity while praying; the only concession made concerns the manner in which impurity is to be removed, not the basic demand *that* it be removed.



requirements over and above 4:43. But it is of course perfectly conceivable that Q 5:6 might play both a specifying and an abrogating role with regard to 4:43.

One may highlight two further observations supporting Rivlin’s contention that Q 5:6 is the later of the two passages. First, in Q 5:6 the permission to use soil instead of water is followed, in segment (d), by an explicit theological rationale invoking God’s wish to avoid placing undue difficulty (*ḥaraj*) on the believers; rather, God wants to “purify” the believers and to complete his “grace” (*ni’mah*; → *an’ama*) upon them. Such an explicit rationale is largely absent in Q 4:43, where the concessionary stipulation permitting ablutions with soil rather than water is followed only by a very brief predication of two divine attributes to do with God’s disposition to forgive. Surah 5 may thus be considered to adopt the concessionary stipulation from Q 4:43 while expanding it with an explicit theological reflection and placing it in close proximity to a similar concession in dietary matters (Q 5:3). Secondly, as we saw above, the way in which the concession to use soil instead of water is phrased in Q 5:6 removes a potential misunderstanding of 4:43. Both the more explicitly theological character of Q 5:6 and its greater clarity in one specific practical respect tally well with Rivlin’s hypothesis that 5:6 is chronologically later than 4:43. The fact that Q 5:6 explicitly casts the requirement to wash before prayer as conducive to purity, by employing two derivatives of *t-h-r*—namely, the fifth-form verb *ṭaṭahhara* in segment (b) and the second-form verb *ṭahhara* in segment (d)—further confirms the impression that 5:6 is terminologically more developed.

Incidentally, as I have argued elsewhere, the version of the Qur’anic dietary prohibitions that is found in Q 5:3 is also likely to be later than its three other Qur’anic parallels (Sinai 2019c, 132), and the impetus to clarification that may be perceived in Q 5:6’s addition of *minhu* (“with it”) to the concessionary stipulation from 4:43 resembles similar clarificatory concerns in the dietary regulations set out in 5:3–4 (Sinai 2019c, 116–117). It appears, therefore, that the opening passage of Surah 5 quite deliberately draws together chronologically earlier commandments while surrounding them with theologising commentary and expanding them with miscellaneous practical elucidations.

### ***muṭahhar*: *azwāj* ~ *ah* | purified spouses**

Further vocabulary discussed: *zawj* | spouse *jannah* | garden *khalada* intr. | to remain forever, to be immortal *ḥūr* pl. | gazelle-eyed fair maidens *zawwaja* tr. *bi-* | to wed s.o. to s.o. *ṣalaḥa* intr. | to be righteous *dhurriyyah* | offspring *ṭahhara* tr. | to purify s.o. or s.th. *qarraba* tr. | to bring s.o. near, to allow s.o. to come near *al-muqarrabūn* pl. | those brought near (to God)

**From the early Meccan houris to the Medinan “purified spouses.”** Three Medinan verses—Q 2:25, 3:15, and 4:57—promise the inhabitants of paradise or the “garden” (→ *jannah*) *azwāj muṭahharah*, “purified spouses” (see also under → *zawj*). Apart from the expression *azwāj muṭahharah*, Q 2:25, 3:15, and 4:57 also share the phrases *jannāt tajrī min taḥtiḥā l-anhār* (“gardens underneath which rivers flow”; → *jannah*) and *khālidīna fīha / fīhā khālidūn* (“forever remaining in them”; see under → *khalada*). The three verses therefore form a highly formulaic cluster that is distinctly Medinan. This cluster must, however, be placed against the background of a considerable number of prior Meccan statements.



Modifying and supplementing a preceding overview by Neal Robinson (Robinson 2003a, 87–89; see also Horovitz 1975, 54–58, and Lange 2016a, 51–52), this earlier Meccan material may be arranged into the following three groups:

(i) First, there is a bundle of mostly early Meccan verses (Q 37:48–49, 38:52, 44:54, 52:20, 55:56.58.72.74, 56:22–23.35–37, 78:33) according to which the amenities of paradise include female companions described as “gazelle-eyed fair maidens” (→ *ḥūr*). Two verses out of these four houri references (Q 44:54 and 52:20) specify that God will “pair” or “wed” (*zawwaja*) the blessed with the houris.<sup>1</sup> With the exception of Surah 38, all the passages just enumerated have a mean verse length below that of Surah 15 (43.12 transliteration letters) and therefore fall below the cut-off value for the early Meccan surahs that I have proposed elsewhere (*HCI* 161). Surah 38, in view of its higher mean verse length of 51.98 transliteration letters, contains a slightly later reverberation of the early Meccan houri descriptions.<sup>2</sup>

(ii) In the later Meccan period, Q 36:55–56 places the “inhabitants of the garden” (*aṣḥāb al-jannah*) in the company of their “spouses” (*azwāj*): “They and their spouses (*azwājuhūm*) are in shades, reclining on couches.” Q 43:70, also later Meccan, similarly depicts how the blessed are invited to enter paradise together with their *azwāj*: “Enter the garden, you [masculine plural] and your spouses.” Especially Q 43:70 makes it certain that reference here is to the believers’ earthly wives rather than to new spouses acquired only in the hereafter (Horovitz 1975, 57). Both Q 36:56 and 43:70 thus introduce the noun *zawj* into the context of paradise, even if the underlying root *z-w-j* is already present in two verses from category (i), Q 44:54 and 52:20, which promise that God will “pair” the blessed with houris. Given that the mean verse length of Surahs 36 and 43 is 55.01 and 61.78 transliteration letters, respectively, Q 36:56 and 43:70 are very likely later than the statements in category (i), although the gap to Q 38:52 (51.98 transliteration letters) is too small to rule out some diachronic overlap.

(iii) Two further relevant Meccan statements are Q 40:8 and 13:23. Q 40:7–8 report an angelic prayer imploring God to lead the believers into paradise in addition to “those of their fathers and spouses and offspring who are righteous” (*man ṣalaḥa min ābā’ihim wa-azwājihim wa-dhurriyyātihim*). The same formula recurs in Q 13:23. Both verses thus retain the eschatological usage of the term *azwāj* already seen in group (ii), yet take important steps towards doctrinal systematisation. First, the believers’ spouses are now complemented by two further categories of family members, parents and children. Secondly, Q 13:23 and 40:8 add the crucial proviso that any relatives who are to enter paradise must themselves have been righteous (*man ṣalaḥa min . . .*). This rules out that a believer’s spouse, parents, or children might be admitted into paradise simply on account of the moral and religious merit accumulated by the current head of the family, a possibility that is at least left open by the wording of the passages surveyed under (ii). The progress in systematisation and doctrinal reflection seen in Q 40:8 and 13:23 accords with the fact that the mean verse length of Surahs 40 and 13 (89.20 and 126.16) is higher than that of any the surahs containing

1 In favour of *zawwaja* = “to wed,” see inter alia the use of *azwāj* = “spouses” in Q 26:166 (my awareness of which I owe to Davitashvili 2021, 46). Since Surah 26 has about the same mean verse length as Surah 44, the meaning of *zawwaja* in Q 44:54 and also in 52:20 is legitimately construed in light of the meaning of *azwāj* in Q 26:166.

2 According to Horovitz 1975, 57 (echoed in Lange 2016a, 51), the chronologically latest verse mentioning the houris is Q 44:54; but the mean verse length of Surah 44 (36.61 transliteration letters) is palpably lower than that of Surah 38 (51.98).

passages assigned to groups (i) and (ii) above. Q 40:8 and 13:23 should therefore be dated later than all other Meccan statements about paradisiacal mates and spouses. A third verse to be included in group (iii) is Q 52:21, which shares with Q 40:8 and 13:23 the noun *dhurriyyah* and pledges that the believers will be eschatologically reunited with those of their “offspring” (*dhurriyyah*) who “follow them in belief” (Horovitz 1975, 57, and Lange 2016a, 52). This matches Q 40:8 and 13:23’s demand that anyone entering paradise must qualify on his or her own merit. Surah 52 is an early Meccan composition, but the verse at hand, or at least the bulk of it, has been convincingly identified as a later insertion (*GQ* 1:105; Horovitz 1975, 57; Neuwirth 2007, 203; *PP* 690–691; Davitashvili 2021, 85–89). It seems likely that Q 52:21 echoes, and is therefore posterior to, Q 40:8, perhaps also to 13:23. Indeed, Davitashvili argues, based on a cumulation of lexical observations, that the verse is Medinan (Davitashvili 2021, 86–87).

To summarise the developmental trajectory thus outlined, in progressing from (i) to (ii) Qur’anic discourse substitutes the prospect that the (male) believers will be eschatologically “coupled” (*zawwaja*) with beautiful virgins, presented as part of the delightful amenities of paradise, by the prospect of an other-worldly union between the believers and their earthly wives (Horovitz 1975, 68; Robinson 2003a, 89). It is possible that this involved a re-reading of the early Meccan virgins of paradise as being identical to the believers’ spouses, in so far as the root *z-w-j* also occurs in category (i).<sup>3</sup> In subsequently moving on to category (iii), the Qur’anic proclamations aver that the believers’ spouses will themselves need to earn admission to paradise by having led a life of righteousness. Together, categories (ii) and (iii) amount to a decisive shift away from an androcentric perspective according to which women in the hereafter are chiefly envisaged as an appendage to the male occupants of paradise and towards viewing women as full moral and eschatological subjects in their own right, a shift that continues to resonate in subsequent Medinan passages (e.g., Q 4:124, 9:72, 33:35, 48:5, 57:12, 66:10–12).<sup>4</sup>

**In what sense are the paradisiacal spouses “purified”?** Having thus reviewed the Meccan background to the “purified spouses” (*azwāj muṭahharah*) mentioned in the Medinan verses Q 2:25, 3:15, and 4:57, we may move on to consider the meaning of the attribute “purified.” Al-Ṭabarī, basing himself on a range of early exegetical authorities, glosses the attribute to mean “that they are purified from every impurity and defilement and matter giving rise to suspicion that is found among the women of this world, such as menstruation, childbirth, excrements, urine, mucus, saliva, and [female] sperm, and similar impurity, blemishes, suspicious matters, and loathsome things” (Ṭab. 1:419). Such a construal implies that, as one of the statements reported by al-Ṭabarī puts it, “the wives of this world are not purified,” expressing the view that women in their natural, this-worldly state are afflicted with a wide range of impurities, a state of affairs explained by the disobedience of Eve (Ṭab. 1:419). In support of al-Ṭabarī’s understanding of the attribute *muṭahhar*, one might adduce a statement by Ephrem that the bodies of the blessed will be purified from blood and bleeding (Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 9:19).

3 The main argument for such a re-reading is the secondary insertion of Q 52:21—promising the believers that they will be eschatologically united with their believing offspring (*dhurriyyah*)—immediately after a verse (Q 52:20) mentioning the believers’ pairing or marriage (*z-w-j*) to the houris. This is plausibly linked with the combination of the believers’ *spouses* (rather than houris) and offspring in Q 40:8 and 13:23.

4 A similar development is posited in Bauer and Hamza, forthcoming, who undertake a comprehensive examination of Qur’anic comments on women across all periods of the text.

Despite the ostensible parallel from Ephrem, however, an examination of the Qur'an's general employment of derivatives of the root *t-h-r* makes it unlikely that al-Ṭabarī's interpretation captures the original Qur'anic sense of the attribute *muṭahhar* in connection with other-worldly spouses. Building on what is said elsewhere (→ *tahara*), it is particularly relevant to consider occurrences of the geminated verbal stem *ṭahhara* that pertain to God's purification of, or refusal to purify, certain humans or their hearts (Q 3:42.55, 5:6.41, 8:11, 33:33): to be "made pure" (verb: *ṭahhara*) by God here would seem to mean being found acceptable to God and being admitted into his proximity, a sense that is well illustrated by God's announcement to Jesus that he will "take you away and raise you to me and purify you of the repudiators" (Q 3:55). As regards specifically the passive participle *muṭahhar*, "purified," it appears not only in references to the believers' purified spouses, as in Q 2:25, but is also applied to celestial objects or beings that are located particularly close to the deity: in Q 56:79, the privilege of "touching" the celestial scripture is reserved for "the purified," *al-muṭahharūn*, who can either be construed as angels here or alternatively as the inhabitants of paradise (Davitashvili 2021, 67, n. 219); and in Q 80:13–14, the "sheets" of the Qur'an's celestial archetype are themselves called "purified," *muṭahharah* (cf. also Q 98:1). In sum, there is substantial Qur'anic evidence for use of the verb *ṭahhara* and its passive participle *muṭahhar* to describe a general state of agreeability and closeness to God. To call the believers' spouses "purified," then, is most likely not a reference to the removal of particular female bodily functions, but simply affirms that the believers' spouses are worthy of residing in God's presence, of being "brought near" (*qarraba*; see also under → *dhabaha*) to God like other denizens of paradise (cf. the designation of the blessed, or a subcategory of them, as "those brought near" or "those allowed to come near," *al-muqarrabūn*, in Q 56:11.88 and 83:21.28).

**Earthly wives must gain entry to paradise on their own merit.** Thus construed, the Medinan introduction of the attribute "purified" to describe the believers' spouses in the hereafter ties in with the requirement voiced in Q 13:23, 40:8, and 52:21 that family members admitted to paradise must themselves have believed in God and have led a righteous life. This demand obviously opens up the possibility that some earthly spouses may not meet the criteria for entry to paradise, a situation that is expressly envisaged in Q 66:10–11: the wives of Noah and Lot, two of God's righteous servants, will be sentenced to damnation, while the wife of Pharaoh, an archetypal unbeliever and sinner, aspires to gain admission to paradise.<sup>5</sup> Against this background, one may surmise that the promise of "purified" other-worldly spouses in Q 2:25, 3:15, and 4:57 aims to reassure believers that even if their this-worldly spouses do not reach the moral threshold for entry to paradise they will nonetheless experience conjugal happiness in the afterlife. Clearly, wives who have proven themselves to be righteous in their earthly lives will be reunited with their husbands, provided the latter are equally worthy of eschatological reward. One may further conjecture that husbands whose wives fail the criterion of righteousness laid down

<sup>5</sup> One Qur'anic version of the Noah narrative illustrates how not only spouses but also descendants can fall short of the requirement of righteousness and belief that Q 13:23, 40:8, and 52:21 stipulate for entry to paradise: according to Q 11:40–48, Noah had a son who preferred to seek refuge from the flood on a mountain rather than boarding his father's ark and abjuring unbelief, and who drowned as a result. See also Q 46:17–18, which speaks in general terms about conflict between believing parents and an unbelieving child, and cf. Q 29:8 and 31:14–15 (discussed under → *jāhāda*), where it is the parents who are unbelievers. On the Qur'anic story of Noah's unbelieving son, see, e.g., Marshall 1999, 97–105, and Reynolds 2017.

in Q 40:8 and 13:23 and believers who have died unmarried will either be endowed with consorts specially created by God or will be matched with women whose husbands have not made it to paradise. As Q 24:26 says, in an ostensibly eschatological context, “wicked women are for wicked men (*al-khabīthātu li-l-khabīthīna*), and wicked men are for wicked women, and good women are for good men (*wa-l-ṭayyibātu li-l-ṭayyibīna*), and good men for good women.” The net effect is that all believers can expect to have “purified spouses” in the afterlife. Consequently, the promise of other-worldly erotic fulfilment that is initially articulated, in a patently androcentric manner, in verse group (i) above is retained while eschatological space is being made for righteous women.

**ṭawwa‘a tr. li-** | to suggest s.th. to s.o., to prompt s.o. to do s.th.

→ *nafs*

**ṭaw‘an wa-karhan** | willingly or (literally: and) by force

→ *arḍ*, → *sajada*

**ṭāfa, taṭawwafa** intr. (*bi-*) | to perform a ritual circumambulation, to circumambulate (s.th.)

→ *bayt*

**ṭā‘ifah** | faction, group

→ *al-naṣārā*

**ṭayyibāt pl.** | good things

→ *ḥarrama*, → *razaqa*

## Z

*zalama* tr. | to injure or harm s.o. or s.th.; to wrong s.o.

*zalama* intr. (*bi-*) | to do wrong, to be guilty of wrongdoing (against s.th.)

*zulm* | wrongdoing

*zallām li-* | (guilty of) inflicting wrong on s.o.

Further vocabulary discussed: *iftarā* tr. (*‘alā*) | to fabricate s.th. (e.g., a lie) (against s.o., namely, God) *kadhhaba* intr. *bi-* | to dismiss s.th. as a lie *āyah* | sign; sign-pronouncement *ḥudūd allāh* pl. | God’s boundaries *shirk* | the sin of associating God with illicit partner deities, associationism *ḥakīm* | wise *qadīr (‘alā)* | endowed with power (over s.th.) *waffā* ditr. | to pay s.th. to s.o. in full; to repay s.o. for s.th. in full *waffā* tr. *ilā* | to repay s.th. to s.o. in full *ḥāsaba* tr. | to call s.o. to account *‘adala* intr. | to be just, to act justly *‘adala* intr. *bayna* | to treat s.o. justly *‘adl* | justice *aqsaṭa* intr. (*ilā, fī*) | to be fair or equitable (to s.o.) *qisṭ* | fairness, equity

**Overview and basic meaning.** The verb *zalama*—on which see generally CDKA 178–179 and Christiansen 2016—is “one of the most important negative value words in the Qur’ān” (ERCQ 164), occurring over a hundred times from the early Meccan to the Medinan period. *Zalama* is already attested in Safaitic (Al-Jallad 2015a, 355) and, like the noun *zulm*, in ancient Arabic poetry (e.g., DSAAP, Ṭarafah, no. 1:3–4). In the Qur’an, the verb and the noun are normally applied to humans, as in the plural phrase “those who are guilty of wrongdoing” (*alladhīna zalamū*; e.g., Q 2:59.150.165, 51:59, 52:47). In addition, the Qur’an contains statements denying that God can be an agent or patient of *zulm*, which will form the object of special attention below. These statements are in turned linked to a reflexive use of *zalama* in the expression “to wrong oneself” (*zalama nafsahu*), which will also be addressed later in this entry.

According to Izutsu and Reinhart, the core meaning of *zalama* in the Qur’an is “to encroach upon the right of another person” (ERCQ 165) or “undeserved conduct vis-à-vis another” (Reinhart 2002, 64). This makes “to wrong s.o.” an apt English rendering, to which I shall largely adhere throughout. Some premodern lexicographers posit an even more basic sense, namely, to put something in the wrong place (see, e.g., AEL 1920; cf. ERCQ 164–165 and Hourani 1985, 30). But the paraphrases just cited from Izutsu and Reinhart adequately account for many Qur’anic occurrences of *zalama* and *zulm* and therefore provide a valid point of departure. For instance, the theft of the king’s goblet in the story of Joseph is classed as an act of *zulm* or wrongdoing (Q 12:75; ERCQ 166), and some passages refer to the followers of Muhammad as having been “wronged” by their adversaries (Q 16:41, 22:39, 26:227). Now, wronging somebody, in the sense of violating his or her rights, will usually involve inflicting actual harm or injury upon the victim, and the verb *zalama* indeed appears to encompass both semantic aspects, that of wronging

and that of harming (Hourani 1985, 30 and 55–56). In accordance with this, Muhammad’s followers are said to have been “wronged” in so far as they have been “unjustly expelled from their abodes” merely on account of professing belief in God (Q 22:39–40; see also under → *jāhada*). The sense of concrete harm is particularly palpable at Q 18:33, where the verb *zalama* is exceptionally not employed in the context of an interaction between moral agents (Hourani 1985, 55): two gardens are said to have “yielded their produce, not causing any of it to come to harm” or, more freely, to have “yielded their produce unblighted” (*ātat ukulahā wa-lam tazlim minhu shay’an*). As will become clear below, bearing in mind this potential double meaning, of wronging and injuring, is vital to making good sense of some of the word’s uses in the Qur’an. Whether one or the other of the two senses just distinguished is primary may be left undecided here.

If *zalama* is to violate what is due to another, in particular to another person, then the transitive use of the verb with an accusative object, referring to the victim, is semantically basic (e.g., Q 38:24, 42:42). But in the Qur’an, there is not invariably an obvious victim of *zulm*, or at least an obvious human victim. For example, Abraham’s idolatrous compatriots describe the destruction of their gods as an act of *zulm* (Q 21:59; cf. *ERCQ* 168). One might submit that the implied victims here are the broken idols or their worshippers; but it is more likely that *zalama* can at least on occasion simply designate any action that is deemed to breach a valid moral or religious norm, whether or not this amounts to wronging or injuring any particular human other. Thus, *zalama* can simply have the force of committing an evil or sinful act, a sense adequately captured by the English expression “to do wrong, to be guilty of wrongdoing” (cf. Christiansen 2020, 98).

**God does not wrongfully injure humans; rather, humans injure themselves.** Many Qur’anic passages deny that God does or might inflict wrong (verb: *zalama*) upon humans (*ERCQ* 165–166). For instance, God “does not intend to wrong the world-dwellers” (Q 3:108: *wa-mā llāhu yurīdu zulman li-l-‘ālamīn*; see also 40:31), he does not “inflict wrong on his servants” (Q 3:182, 8:51, 22:10, 41:46, 50:29: *laysa bi-ḡallāmin li-l-‘abīd*), and no one will be wronged on the day of judgement (e.g., Q 2:281, 3:25, 21:47, 43:76, 45:22, 46:19). According to Q 6:131, if and when God destroys towns he does not do so “wrongfully” (*bi-ḡulmin*; similarly Q 11:117). The animating concern in all of these verses is clearly to uphold the immaculate justice that characterises the divine judge. While the underlying issue is, broadly speaking, to reconcile human suffering with divine justice, the Qur’an is not treating the problem of theodicy in its customary sense here, for the suffering at hand is generally not the present inner-worldly suffering that is an ineluctable feature of human experience (e.g., illness, famines and natural disasters, or other mishaps resulting in death or injury) but rather the anticipated eschatological suffering of the wicked.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the Qur’anic God unleashes not only eschatological but also inner-historical punishment (see under → *adhhaba*). This means that the Qur’anic denial of divine wrongdoing also encompasses certain past acts of inner-worldly devastation, such as the flood that wiped out those who rejected the preaching of Noah. Among the verses cited earlier, those in which this pre-eschatological dimension is in the foreground include Q 40:31, where the assertion that God does not wrong his servants comes directly after a reference to the people of Noah and other victims of divine retribution in the past (see also, e.g., Q 9:70). Similarly, Q 6:131 speaks of God’s destruction of towns prior to the final judgement

1 On famine in the Qur’an, see Waines 2002; on suffering in general, see Heemskerk 2006.



(cf. Q 11:117 and 28:59). But apart from such cataclysmic acts of divine retribution in the past, what the Qur'an has to say about human suffering in the pre-eschatological world is often limited to the contention that adversity is something by which God tests ( $\rightarrow$  *balā*, *ablā*, *ibtalā*) humans or by which he realises other unfathomable purposes and which therefore ought to be steadfastly endured (e.g., Q 21:35, 31:17; see also under  $\rightarrow$  *ṣabara*).<sup>2</sup> Generally speaking, the core aspect of the problem of theodicy as conventionally posed—namely, how can an omnipotent and supremely good creator allow or, worse yet, directly cause those types of suffering and pain that cannot be explained as resulting from unconstrained human choice?—is “warded off” by the Qur'an, as Hans Zirker has put it (Zirker 1993, 204–220): God “is not interrogated about what he does,” in contrast to his human creatures (Q 21:23).<sup>3</sup> Such a principled rejection of theodicean doubt is linked to the Qur'an's far-reaching stance of cosmic affirmation: God's creation is categorically declared to be free from any defects (Q 67:3–4; see also under  $\rightarrow$  *khalaqa* and  $\rightarrow$  *afsada*). Even the fact that the human social order is marked by systemic inequalities that cannot be rationalised in terms of antecedent desert is unapologetically attributed to God and is in no way treated as incompatible with his goodness or justice (e.g., Q 6:165; see in more detail under  $\rightarrow$  *darajah*). The notion of wrongdoing, in any case, is not salient in the context of such Qur'anic statements of broadly theodicean purport, with the one exception noted earlier (past acts of inner-worldly divine punishment).

Denials of divine wrongdoing of the sort referenced above can be accompanied by the addition that it is rather sinful humans who “wrong themselves” (e.g., Q 9:70, 3:117, 11:101, 16:118, 30:9), namely, by incurring God's just reckoning: whatever retribution God exacts is no wrongful torment imposed by a cruel despot but rather the appropriate penalty for prior human misdeeds (see also under  $\rightarrow$  *al-raḥmān* and  $\rightarrow$  *makara*). As George F. Hourani has argued, “wronging oneself” is best understood in the specific sense of hurting, harming, or injuring oneself rather than in the sense of inflicting injustice upon oneself, which would be conceptually puzzling if taken literally (Hourani 1985).<sup>4</sup> An appropriate paraphrase of the affirmations of human self-wronging at hand would therefore be this: God does not wrongly injure humans; rather, whatever injury humans suffer at the hands of the divine judge is entirely deserved and ultimately self-inflicted. Given the Qur'anic posit of a universal and omnipotent divine judge, any human act of wrongdoing will ultimately cause injury to the offending agent himself or herself. Elsewhere, too, this point is made by

2 Some Qur'anic passages intimate a different position than the one just adumbrated, by casting affliction and misfortune as forms of divine retribution rather than a divine test. Such a penal construal of suffering is put forward most explicitly in Q 42:30, affirming that “whatever misfortune befalls you<sup>p</sup> (*mā aṣābakum min muṣibatīn*) is on account of what your hands have accrued; still, he [God] forgives much” (see also Q 3:165 and 4:79). If Q 42:30 is taken as a universal gloss on the full panoply of human misery and suffering, it is difficult to see how it could be reconciled with the exceedingly plausible contention that at least in some cases it is innocent persons who suffer, a claim that would seem to be presupposed both by the Qur'an's portrayal of Job and by the Qur'anic concept of suffering as a divine test.

3 See also the discussion of Q 18:65–82 under  $\rightarrow$  *ḥikmah* and Alexander 2006, 380, who remarks that in comparison to the Biblical book of Job the corresponding Qur'anic accounts (Q 21:83–84, 38:41–44) are not “plagued by the problem of theodicy” and that the Qur'anic Job never attributes his suffering directly to God. Charles Taylor notes that the problem of theodicy becomes more acute if there is an assumption that the purposes God is seeking to achieve are open to detailed explication, making it possible to measure the actual order of things against the ultimate aims pursued (Taylor 2007, 306). The Qur'an certainly preserves a clear sense that God's objectives, while indubitably merciful, just, and wise, are not fully amenable to human comprehension.

4 I shall nonetheless translate *ḡalama naṣṣahu* as “to wrong oneself” rather than as “to injure oneself,” in order to signal that the same Arabic word is being used as in non-reflexive instances of *ḡalama*.

means of a reflexive use of the word → *nafs*, as in Q 41:46: “whoever does righteous deeds (*man ‘amila ṣāliḥan*) does so to his own benefit (*fa-li-nafsihi*), and whoever does evil (*waman asā’a*) does so to his own detriment (*fa-‘alayhā*)” (cf. similarly Q 4:111, 10:108, 17:7.15, 27:92, 30:44, 34:50, 39:41, 45:15, 48:10). Such reflexive language throws into relief one of the Qur’an’s most fundamental approaches to justifying its moral and religious demands, an approach aptly characterised as “prudential” (Reinhart 2002, 57, 58): an important motive for moral behaviour is eschatologically enlightened self-concern.

Against the preceding background, the expression “to wrong/injure oneself” (*ḡalama nafṣahu*) can simply function as a casual synonym for transgressing against God’s moral expectations. This is well illustrated by Q 3:135, which speaks of people who “commit an abomination or wrong themselves” (*wal-ladhīna idhā fa’alū fāḥishatan aw ḡalamū anfusahum*), and by Q 4:110, referring to “the one who commits an evil act or wrongs himself” (*man ya’mal sū’an aw yazlim nafṣahu*). Similarly, when Q 37:113 underscores that the descendants of Abraham and Isaac are a mixed bag including righteous and sinful individuals, it is taken for granted that the latter are not just wrongdoers but inflictors of wrong upon themselves (*wamin dhurriyyatihimā muḥsinun wa-ḡālimun li-nafsihī mubīn*); and Q 9:36 describes violation of the sacred months (see under → *ḡarrama*) as self-wronging. The firm presupposition that anybody guilty of wrongdoing is ultimately self-harming can, moreover, be seen at Q 7:23, where Adam and Eve ask for God’s forgiveness by saying, “Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves,” which has the same communicative purport as “Our Lord, we have sinned.” A singular version of the same formula of confession—namely, “I have wronged myself” (*ḡalamtu nafṣī*)—is uttered by the queen of Saba’ (Q 27:44) and by Moses after having killed an Egyptian who quarrelled with a fellow Israelite (Q 28:16). In none of these three places, it may again be noted, is there any sense that the protagonists are displaying an unduly self-centred concern with their own prospects: “wronging oneself” simply means committing a sinful act for which one is liable to divine punishment.

**Can God suffer *ḡulm*?** As noted above, not all acts of *ḡulm* in the Qur’an have an obvious human victim. For example, Adam and Eve are told that approaching the forbidden tree would make them wrongdoers (Q 2:35, 7:19: *walā taqrabā ḡādhihi l-shajarata fatakūnā mina l-ḡālimīn*). Here, there are no other humans around who might be wronged by Adam and Eve’s action, and the wrong in question consists entirely in disobeying an unequivocal divine command. Elsewhere it is made clear that the most egregious case of *ḡulm* is in fact for someone to “fabricate (verb: *iftarā*) lies against God and dismiss (verb: → *kadhhaba*) his signs (singular: → *āyah*) as a lie” (Q 6:21; cf. the similar *man aḡlamu* questions at 6:93.144.157, 7:37, 10:17, 11:18, 18:15.57, 29:68, 32:22, 39:32, 61:7, and see *ERCQ* 170). Associating another being with God (*shirk*; see under → *ashraka*), too, is classed as wrongdoing (Q 31:13; cf. 5:72 and 35:40), and so is the Israelites’ worship of the Golden Calf (Q 2:51.54.92, 7:148). Moreover, two Medinan verses, Q 2:229 and 65:1, link *ḡulm* with transgression of “God’s boundaries” (*ḡudūd allāh*) in the context of divorce (see also *ERCQ* 167): even wronging another person, it would seem, is here cast as an offence against God, who functions as the ultimate arbiter and guarantor of what humans owe to one another.

From passages like the preceding, it might be inferred that the wronged party in such cases must be God. Yet, as highlighted earlier, *ḡalama* has distinct connotations of inflicting harm and injury. One can therefore appreciate why it would have been theologically problematic to envisage God as an object of the act of *ḡulm*: surely God is too lofty to

suffer actual harm from human disobedience, however much he is emotionally invested in human righteousness and however much human wrongdoing is apt to spark his righteous wrath (see under → *ghaḍība*). This train of thought explains why God never figures as an explicit accusative object of *zālama* in the Qur'an.<sup>5</sup>

Two verses go even further and expressly insist that a particular human collective who defied God did not in fact inflict *ẓulm* upon him. This is the second purpose for which the Qur'an employs the reflexive phrase "to wrong oneself" (*zālama nafsahu*): according to Q 2:57 and 7:160, the waywardness and obstinacy of the Mosaic Israelites did not inflict harm upon God but simply rebounded upon the Israelites themselves (*wa-mā zālamūnā walākin kānū anfusahum yazlimūn*). In line with this, Q 2:54 calls the Israelites' worship of the Golden Calf not just an act of wrongdoing, like 2:51.92 and 7:148, but an act of self-wronging. Like Surah 2, Q 7:160 may well date to the Medinan period (see under → *al-asbāt*); given that the first use of the reflexive formulation "to wrong oneself," serving to exculpate God from the suspicion of wrongdoing, is already found in Meccan surahs (e.g., Q 30:9), the way the expression is deployed in Q 2:57 and 7:160 is almost certainly a chronologically secondary variation on its earlier exculpating use. It deserves further thought why it was specifically God's interaction with the Mosaic Israelites that triggered this adaptation of an established Meccan phrase. Possibly, the objective is to counteract the impression that God's forbearance in the face of serial Israelite insubordination and disobedience is due to a profound attachment to the Israelites in particular, an attachment making God vulnerable to rejection by his chosen people. Such a reading is supported by Q 5:18, discussed under → *allāh*, which criticises the alleged claim of the Jews and Christians to be "God's children and beloved ones."

Summarising the present section and the preceding one, we may say that the Qur'anic corpus taken as a synchronic whole strongly suggests that acts of *ẓulm* or wrongdoing cannot, as it were, cross over between the divine sphere and the human one: God *will not* wrong, or wrongly injure, humans, even though he does subject sinners to eschatological torment; and humans *cannot* wrong God in the sense of harming him, even if in some sense any human transgression is an offence against the deity. The reflexive expression "to wrong oneself" (*zālama nafsahu*) plays an important role in articulating both parts of the preceding statement. The expression thus contributes to a Qur'anic propensity to set God apart from his creatures and to uphold his singular and untouchable majesty (which does not preclude the simultaneous assertion of meaningful interaction between God and humans).

**Denials of divine wrongdoing and the general issue of God's justice.** The Qur'an's recurrent disavowal that God could be an agent of wrongdoing illustrates a general proclivity observed by Majid Fakhry, namely, the Qur'anic tendency to articulate God's justice in negative terms rather than by employing positive attributes meaning "just" (Fakhry 1994, 14–15; see also van Ess 2017–2020, 4:565). There is indeed a striking contrast here with the frequent use of adjectival predicates for other divine traits, like "wise" (*ḥakīm*; see under → *ḥikmah*) or "endowed with power" (→ *qadīr*). Yet this stylistic predilection, however it is to be explained, does not call into doubt that justice is nonetheless a core facet

5 Izutsu maintains that Q 5:39 speaks of *ẓulm* committed against God (*ERCQ166*), but this is not compelling. The infraction in question is theft, as in Q 12:75, and it is not made explicit that the victim of the wrong in question is God rather than the person stolen from; note that the suffix in *ẓulmihi* almost certainly refers to the agent, not the patient (which Izutsu seems to accept). See also Reinhart 2002, 64, who distinguishes between wronging God in the sense of "doing wrong by him," and harming him.

of the Qur’anic portrayal of God. It must also be noted that the Qur’an does in fact characterise God’s retributive and compensatory activity by means of affirmative statements, e.g., by using verbs like *waffā* (“to repay in full”) and *ḥāsaba* (“to call to account”), which are just as suggestive of divine justice and equity as negations comprising the verb *zalamā* (see further under → *ḥisāb*). The issue at hand, then, is not so much whether God’s justice is described in affirmative terms or in negative ones but rather whether it is described in terms of seemingly static divine properties (what God is) as opposed to divine actions (what God does, or what he does not do).

Later theologians make the Qur’anic stress on divine justice explicit by recourse to derivatives of the root ‘*d-l*, especially the noun ‘*adl*, “justice.” In the Qur’an, by contrast, the word ‘*adl* and the verb ‘*adala* (“to act justly”) generally qualify interactions among humans (e.g., Q 2:282, 4:3.58.129, 5:8) rather than designating an immanent trait of the deity, even though according to Q 16:90 it is God who “enjoins justice” (*ya’muru bi-l-‘adli*) and 6:115 declares that “God’s word is perfectly truthful and just” (*wa-tammam kalimatu rabbika ṣidqan wa-‘adlan*). A predominant application to humans rather than to God also holds true for the verb *aqsata* (“to be fair or equitable”; e.g., Q 4:3) and the noun *qist* (“fairness, equity”; e.g., Q 3:21; see also under → *ma’rūf*). Still, Q 10:4.47.54 affirm that God judges “fairly” (*bi-l-qisṭi*), while 3:18 describes God as someone who “upholds fairness” (*qā’iman bi-l-qisṭi*; cf. also Q 21:47). However, even in the case of these latter passages the Qur’anic focus, unlike that of later theologians, is on justice as something that God enacts rather than on justice as an inherent divine property. The relative lack of explicit Qur’anic affirmations that God *is just*, as opposed to behaving or proceeding justly, may therefore be reflective of the fact that the Qur’an envisages God as a personal agent rather than as a metaphysical substance characterised by attributes; accordingly, the certainty that God will exhibit and enact justice is grounded in interpersonal trust (see also under → *ṣabara*) rather than in God being the equivalent of an object possessing fixed properties and predictable dispositions.<sup>6</sup>

### **ẓulumāt pl. | darkness**

→ *allāh*

### **ẓann | conjecture, speculation, opinion**

→ *tabi‘a*

<sup>6</sup> On the personal nature of the Qur’anic God, see further under → *allāh*.

## Ā

**‘abathan | for sport**

→ *balā*, → *ḥikmah*

**‘abada tr. | to serve s.o. or s.th., to worship s.o. or s.th.**

→ *dhabaḥa*, → *rabb*, → *sajada*, → *al-tāghūt*

**‘abd | slave; servant**

→ *darajah*, → *rabb*

**‘ibrah | lesson**

→ *āyah*, → *mathal*

**‘athā intr. *fī l-ard mufsidan* | to cause mischief and corruption on earth**

→ *afsada*

***al-‘ājilah* | what is fleeting, what passes in haste**

→ *āakhir*, → *ajal*

***a‘jamī* | non-Arabophone, (linguistically) foreign**

***al-a‘jamūn* pl. | speakers of languages other than Arabic, (linguistic) foreigners**

→ *‘arabī*, → *al-‘ālamūn*

**‘adala intr. | to be just, to act justly**

**‘adala intr. *bayna* | to treat s.o. justly**

**‘adl | justice**

See under → *ḥalama* and n. 22 under → *aslama*. For other meanings and derivatives associated with this root, consult *CDKA* 184.

**‘adn | Eden**

→ *jannah*

‘*aduww* | enemy

→ *bayyana*

‘*adhhaba* tr. | to torment s.o.; to punish or chastise s.o.

‘*adhāb* | torment; punishment, chastisement

Further vocabulary discussed: ‘*iqāb* | retaliation, punishment ‘*āqaba* intr. | to retaliate *rijz/rujz* | punishment *hāšib* | storm of pebbles *al-ṣayḥah* | the cry *ḥasafa l-arḍa bi-* | to cause s.o. to be swallowed up by the earth *al-nār* | the fire (of hell) *ḥarīq* | burning (n.) *sa‘īr* | blaze *adnā* | proximate *khizy* | humiliation *al-dunyā* | the proximate life *al-ākhirah* | what is final, the final state of things, the hereafter *matta’a* tr. (*ilā ḥīn*) | to grant s.o. enjoyment (until a certain time) *kashafa* tr. | to lift or remove s.th.

**Overview.** Moral testing being the supreme purpose of divine creation (→ *balā*), God differentially responds to humans’ righteous and evil deeds by rewards (→ *ajr*) and punishments, both in this world and the next. The most prominent Qur’anic terms expressing divine punishment in all its shapes are the noun ‘*adhāb* and the corresponding verb ‘*adhhaba*, “to torment, to punish.” Q 38:41 exceptionally speaks of the ‘*adhāb* that Satan has inflicted on Job; reference here is clearly to the hardship and adversity suffered by Job, which makes “torment” the contextually appropriate translation. But normally, the words ‘*adhāb* and ‘*adhhaba* figure in connection with divine retribution, whether in the afterlife or in the present world (e.g., Q 52:47; see in more detail below). In most cases, ‘*adhāb* and ‘*adhhaba* can therefore defensibly be rendered as “punishment” and “to punish” or perhaps, following Arberry 1955, as “chastisement” and “to chastise.”<sup>1</sup> It is especially in verses like Q 52:47, which employ ‘*adhāb* to refer to a pre-eschatological act of swift divine chastisement, that translating ‘*adhāb* as “torment” rather than “punishment” would be ungainly. At the same time, a careful translator may wish to avoid using “punishment”/“to punish” for both ‘*adhāb* and ‘*adhhaba*, on the one hand, and for ‘*iqāb*, “retaliation, punishment” (e.g., Q 2:196.211, 3:11), and its corresponding verb ‘*āqaba*, “to retaliate” (Q 16:126, 22:60, 60:11), on the other.<sup>2</sup> ‘*Ādhab* and ‘*adhhaba* largely parallel the Syriac verbs *shanneq* and *aḥḥesh*, as used, for instance, in descriptions of hell by Ephrem (Beck 1970a, no. 5:256.264.281.288; for further references, see Sinai 2017a, 264), and nouns like *tashnīqā* (see Matt 25:46, where this is the Peshitta’s rendering of Greek *kolasis*; see also El-Badawi 2014, 193–195) and *shūnāqā* (Beck 1970a, no. 6:45, which has the plural). Of course, these equivalences do not call into doubt the fact that ‘*adhāb* and ‘*adhhaba* are native Arabic terms.<sup>3</sup> Lexically more difficult than ‘*adhāb* is its partial synonym → *rijz/rujz*, which is discussed in a separate entry.

1 But Arberry also has “to chastise” for ‘*āqaba*; see his rendering of Q 16:126 and 22:60.

2 At Q 16:126 and 22:60, the phrase ‘*āqaba bi-mithli mā ‘ūqiba* must be treated as an idiom meaning “to punish in accordance with what one has previously suffered” or better yet “to retaliate proportionately” (*KK* 295 and Paret 2001, on Q 16:126 and 22:60; cf. Abdel Haleem 2010, 174). By contrast, a literal translation such as “to punish as one has been punished” (e.g., Jones 2007, 260) seems contextually inappropriate, since it would imply that the injury previously suffered was itself inflicted by way of punishment.

3 The verb ‘*adhhaba*, with God as the grammatical subject, occurs in a poetic fragment attributed to Uma-yyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt (Schulthess 1911a, no. 28:6 = al-Saṭṭī 1974, no. 69:6) that previous scholarship has tended to consider authentic (Seidensticker 2011b, 49–50).



**The doctrine of dual punishment.** In the Qur'an, divine retribution takes two general forms, a pre-eschatological or inner-historical one and an eschatological one. To begin with the former, the Meccan surahs' so-called punishment narratives (on which see *KU* 10–32 and Marshall 1999) recount how God castigated and destroyed various sinful and unbelieving communities in the past, such as the people of Noah, 'Ād and Thamūd, the people of Lot, and the Egyptians under Pharaoh (e.g., Q 54:9–42). These inner-historical or temporal acts of divine devastation come in a variety of guises, some of which are catalogued in Q 29:40: “Each one of them we seized for his misdeeds; against some of them we sent a storm of pebbles (*ḥāṣīb*); some of them were seized by the cry (*al-ṣayḥah*); some of them we caused to be swallowed up by the earth (*wa-minhum man khasafnā bihi l-arda*); and some of them we drowned.” Stories about temporal or pre-eschatological punishments are not mere recollections of past events but have a contemporary significance, in so far as Muhammad's contemporaries too are sometimes cautioned that they may be struck down like 'Ād or Thamūd (Q 41:13), be swallowed up by the earth (Q 16:45, 67:16), or fall victim to a storm of pebbles (Q 67:17; see Marshall 1999, 53–62, and *KU* 30–31).

In addition to such inner-historical or, as one might say, temporal divine punishments, God will also hold a universal eschatological judgement (→ *dīn*<sup>1</sup>) of the resurrected at the end of the world, leading to eternal reward of the pious in paradise and eternal torment of the sinners and unbelievers in hell (*HCI* 162–169; → *ajr*, → *jannah*, → *jahannam*, → *khalada*). God's eschatological retribution—sometimes called the “punishment of the fire” (Q 2:126.201, 3:16.191, 8:14, 32:20, 34:42, 59:3: *adhāb al-nār*), the “punishment of burning” (Q 3:181, 8:50, 22:9.22, 85:10: *adhāb al-ḥarīq*),<sup>4</sup> or the “punishment of the blaze” (Q 22:4, 31:21, 34:12, 67:5: *adhāb al-sa'ir*)—is described in considerable and gruesome detail throughout the Qur'an (for an overview, see Gwynne 2002). Literary parallels between the Qur'anic portrayal of particular inner-worldly punishments and God's universal eschatological reckoning throw into relief that the former prefigure and anticipate the latter, thereby demonstrating God's total power to inflict devastation and suffering on those who spurn him and his messengers (*KU* 31–32; Marshall 1999, 62–65; *HCI* 171–172).

The distinction between temporal and eschatological punishment is terminologically explicit from the early Meccan period onwards. For instance, Q 52:45–47 threatens the opponents with “a day on which their cunning will avail them nothing and they will have no help” (v. 46), which must refer to the eschatological day of universal judgement. In addition, the “wrongdoers” are then assured of “a punishment before this” (v. 47: *wainna li-lladhīna ḡalamū 'adhāban dūna dhālika*), which would seem to be a limited inner-historical chastisement similar to those that annihilated 'Ād or Thamūd.<sup>5</sup> Another early Meccan verse, Q 68:33, concludes an account of how God disciplined a group called the “garden-owners” (*aṣḡāb al-jannah*; Q 68:17)—which is clearly not a reference to the garden of paradise—by devastating their crops: “Such is the punishment; and the final punishment (*adhāb al-ākhirah*) is greater, if only they knew!” Q 88:23–24 similarly announces that those who “turn away” from God's message and “repudiate” it will fall victim to “the greater punishment” (v. 24: *fa-yu'adhḡhibuhu llāhu l-'adhāba l-akbar*). In the later Meccan verse Q 32:21 the divine voice declares that “we shall make them taste the proximate

4 As noted in O'Shaughnessy 1961, 445, *adhāb al-ḡarīq* is limited to Medinan surahs.

5 On the temporal function of *dūna* in Q 52:47 and also in 32:21, cited further along in the main text, see Ambros 2001, 9.

punishment before the greater punishment” (*wa-la-nudhīqannahum mina l-‘adhābi l-adnā dūna l-‘adhābi l-akbari*); here, too, the “greater punishment” alludes to eternal damnation, while the adjective *adnā*, “proximate,” has the effective meaning “this-worldly” (→ *dunyā*). Other later Meccan passages describe God’s temporal punishment by employing the noun *khizy*, “humiliation”: Q 39:26 proclaims that the evildoers will suffer “humiliation in the proximate life” as well as the “final punishment,” which is again said to be “greater” than the former (*fa-adhāqahumu llāhu l-khizya fī l-ḥayāti l-dunyā wa-la-‘adhābu l-ākhirati akbaru*). Similar terminology recurs in Q 41:16, contrasting “the punishment of humiliation in the proximate life” (*adhāb al-khizyi fī l-ḥayāti l-dunyā*) and the even more humiliating “final punishment” (*adhāb al-ākhirah*). Echoing Q 39:26, just cited, a number of Medinan verses formulaically announce to various kinds of sinners or opponents that “theirs will be humiliation in the proximate life and a mighty punishment in the hereafter” (Q 2:114, 5:33.41: *lahum fī l-dunyā khizyun / lahum khizyun fī l-dunyā wa-lahum fī l-ākhirati ‘adhābun ‘azīm*; similarly 2:85 and 22:9). Announcements of double punishment in the present world and the hereafter are found in other verses too, both Meccan and Medinan (Q 3:56, 9:74, 13:34; cf. also the contrast between a “humiliating” and a “lasting” punishment in 11:39 and 39:40).<sup>6</sup>

**More on the relationship between this-worldly and eschatological punishment.**

Some further remarks on the relationship between temporal and eschatological punishment may be added. First, double threats of humiliation in this life and eschatological punishment in the hereafter make it clear that suffering an inner-worldly cataclysm does not have any purgatory effect, whereby a malefactor might be deemed to have served at least part of his eschatological sentence. For example, Pharaoh and his adherents are punished by drowning, but he will also “precede his people on the day of resurrection and lead them into the fire” (Q 11:98; *KU* 32). Secondly, it is not always clear whether the Meccan surahs threaten Muhammad’s antagonists with the end of the world and judgment day itself (e.g., 54:1, 70:6–7; see *HCI* 164) or only with “a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt of ‘Ād and Thamūd” (Q 41:13: *fa-qul andhartukum šā‘iqatan mithla šā‘iqati ‘ādin wa-thamūd*), that is, with a spatially limited inner-worldly calamity. Such ambivalence would not as such have posed a doctrinal difficulty, though the fact that over time neither the former nor the latter kind of punishment materialised certainly did amount to a grave theological challenge (Saleh 2016; *HCI* 179–180). This dilemma then entailed, thirdly, a significant theological reorientation in the Qur’an’s Medinan stratum, according to which God’s temporal punishment was now considered to be delivered by the militant actions of the believers rather than in the form of a thunderbolt, a storm of pebbles, a deluge, or the like (Marshall 1999, 153–157; → *jāhada*).

A fourth and final remark concerns the fact that “whereas the Last Day is a fixed and immovable reality for all people, divine punishment in this world is not inevitable” (Marshall 1999, 63). In other words, temporal punishments can be averted and delayed by human contrition and repentance (see also under → *ajal*). This possibility is represented by the people of Jonah, who respond to the preaching of the messenger sent to them by espousing belief, upon which God “grants them enjoyment until a certain time” (Q 37:148: *fa-āmanū fa-matta’nāhum ilā ḥin*). A later and more elaborate variant on this outcome stresses the exceptional nature of Jonah’s missionary success (Q 10:98): “Why was there no settlement

6 For the link between punishment and humiliation, see also Q 9:14 and 11:93.

that believed and benefited from its belief other than the people of Jonah? When they believed, we lifted the humiliating punishment in the proximate life from them (*kashafnā ‘anhum ‘adhāba l-khizyi fī l-ḥayāti l-dunyā*) and granted them enjoyment until a certain time (*wa-matta’nāhum ilā ḥīn*).<sup>7</sup> That God “lifted” (*kashafa*) his punishment (‘*adhāb* or → *rijz/rujz*) in response to a human expression of remorse, even one that would turn out to be insincere, is also reported in Q 7:134–135 and 43:49–50, where the Egyptians seek to avert further plagues yet subsequently backslide (see also Q 44:12–15, set in the Qur’anic present). However, once God’s punishment has fully become manifest, any further promises of penitence and pleas for forgiveness will be fruitless. This is exemplified by the fate of Pharaoh, who professes belief in God in the face of his impending death, yet whose conversion *in extremis* is deemed to have come too late (Q 10:90–92; see Sinai 2019a, especially 248–250).

### ‘*arabī* | Arabic

**Further vocabulary discussed:** *qur’ān* | recitation *a’jamī* | non-Arabophone, foreign *faṣṣala* tr. (*li-*) | to set out s.th. or expound s.th. in clear detail (for s.o.) *lisān* | tongue; language; reputation *al-a’jamūn* pl. | speakers of languages other than Arabic, foreigners ‘*aqala* tr./intr. | to understand (s.th.) *āyah* | sign *umm al-qurā* | the mother of settlements, the mother-town

**Overview.** From a certain point in the Meccan period, a cluster of verses joins the noun *qur’ān*, “recitation,” an important Qur’anic self-descriptor (→ *qara’a*), with the attribute ‘*arabī* (see generally Wild 2006b). One example is Q 43:3: “We have made it an ‘*arabī* recitation (*innā ja’alnāhu qur’ānan ‘arabiyyan*) so that you<sup>p</sup> might understand (*la’allakum ta’qilūn*).” Similar references to an “‘*arabī* recitation” (always in the accusative) occur in Q 12:2, 20:113, 39:28 (on which see Al-Jallad 2020c, 75), 41:3, and 42:7. Q 41:44 introduces the adjective *a’jamī* as an ostensible contradictory of ‘*arabī*, by counterfactually envisaging what the addressees’ response might have been had God “made it an *a’jamī* recitation” (*wa-law ja’alnāhu qur’ānan a’jamiyyan*): they would have said, “Why have its signs not been clearly set out?” (*law-lā fuṣṣilat āyātuhu*; see under → *faṣṣala*), and would have inquired, “*a’jamī* and ‘*arabī*?” (*a-a’jamiyyun wa-‘arabiyyun*), meaning perhaps “A message that is *a’jamī* and a messenger who speaks, or who ought to speak, ‘*arabī*?” (cf. Ṭab. 20:446–448 and *Jal.* 1700).<sup>1</sup> Q 13:37 varies the foregoing pattern by saying that God sent “it down as an ‘*arabī* judgement” (*wa-ka-dhālika anzalnāhu ḥukman ‘arabiyyan*) rather than as an ‘*arabī* recitation.

7 A variant of the phrase *matta’a* + acc. *ilā ḥīn* occurs in Q 51:43 (*tamatta’ū ḥattā ḥīn*, “enjoy yourselves until a certain time”) in the context of the story of Thamūd, where it does not describe the positive consequences of missionary success but rather serves to emphasise that the addressees will receive their deserved punishment even if the latter may only materialise after a slight delay. A nominal variant of the phrase *matta’a* + acc. *ilā ḥīn* is found in Q 2:36, 7:24, 16:80, 21:111, and 36:44, according to which God granted or grants humans *matā’ ilā ḥīn*, “enjoyment until a certain time.” The contextual emphasis in Q 21:111 is close to 51:43, since the Messenger suggests to his adversaries that the failure of God’s punishment to materialise might simply be a temporary (and undeserved) extension that does not alter the prospect of an impending punishment. In the other verses just referenced, the fact that God has assigned to humans “enjoyment until a certain time” articulates the general fact that all human existence is what one might call being-towards-a-term, a circumstance that the Qur’an also expresses by using the noun → *ajal*, “term.”

1 For a different interpretation, see Al-Jallad 2020c, 76.

Apart from the passages just enumerated, the word ‘*arabī*’ occurs in three more Meccan verses that combine it with the noun *lisān*, meaning “tongue,” “language,” or “reputation” (CDKA 246; Wild 2006b, 148 and 154–155; Larcher 2020, 107–119). Two of these verses confirm the impression given by Q 41:44 that ‘*arabī*’ is opposed to *a‘jamī*. Q 16:103 proclaims that “this is clear ‘*arabī*’ language” (*wa-hādhā lisānūn ‘arabiyyun mubīn*; see also under → *bayyana*), in contrast with the *a‘jamī* tongue of an anonymous person whom the Qur’an’s opponents allege to be Muhammad’s teacher (cf. Q 41:44, which also opposes ‘*arabī*’ and *a‘jamī*, and similarly 26:195,198, discussed next).<sup>2</sup> Q 26:195 similarly maintains that the revelations granted to Muhammad are “in clear ‘*arabī*’ language” (*bi-lisānīn ‘arabiyyin mubīn*). This is followed, in vv. 198–199, by a counterfactual claim that resembles Q 41:44: had God sent his revelation down “upon one of the *a‘jamūn*” (*‘alā ba‘dī l-a‘jamīn*)<sup>3</sup> and had the latter recited it to “them,” meaning to the Qur’an’s adversaries, they would not have believed in it. Finally, Q 46:12 contains another self-referential statement to the effect that “this is a scripture that confirms”—namely, confirms the “scripture of Moses” mentioned immediately beforehand—“in ‘*arabī*’ language” (*wa-hādhā kitābun muṣaddiqun lisānan ‘arabiyyan*).

The purpose clause “so that you<sup>p</sup> might understand” (*la‘allakum ta‘qilūn*) that sets out the reason why God revealed an “‘*arabī*’ recitation” in Q 12:2 and 43:3 is interesting. The “understanding” at stake here is a theologically charged notion that transcends semantic comprehension and amounts to grasping God’s “signs” (singular: *āyah*) in the world and to being heedful of one’s divine creator and ultimate judge (see the remarks on *‘aqala* under → *āyah* and → *dhakkara* as well as → *qalb* and → *la‘alla*). At the same time, a precondition for engendering such religious understanding is evidently that God’s revelation should possess a basic degree of intelligibility (cf. Al-Jallad 2020c, 74). Comprehensibility would also seem to be in focus in Q 16:103 and 26:195, which underline that the Qur’anic revelations are in “clear ‘*arabī*’ language” (*lisān ‘arabī mubīn*), and in 41:44, which implies that a non-‘*arabī*’ revelation would not have counted as “clearly set out” (verb: *faṣṣala*). Though the conclusion is not undisputed, the preceding observations converge to suggest that the Qur’anic revelations’ being ‘*arabī*’ or “in ‘*arabī*’ language” is assumed to facilitate their being understood by the audience they seek to convert. This meshes very well with the general emphasis that many Qur’anic passages place on the supreme clarity of divine communication (see under → *bayyana*).<sup>4</sup> The following will add further arguments in favour of the traditional position that ‘*arabī*’ means “Arabic,” in the sense of identifying a specific language in opposition to others. If this interpretation is correct, then the Meccan surahs attach explicit significance to the fact that their linguistic medium is Arabic, a language that had not so far served as an established

2 According to Daniel Birnstiel, when the Qur’an claims to have been revealed *bi-lisānīn ‘arabiyyin mubīn*, this does not mean “in clear Arabic language” but rather “clearly in Arabic language” (Birnstiel 2018, 74: “in a language that is recognizably Arabic”). But see the reservations presented under → *bayyana*.

3 The expected singular of *a‘jamūn* would of course be *a‘jam* rather than *a‘jamī*, but it seems very safe to treat these two words as equivalent.

4 The contention that being in ‘*arabī*’ language serves to “facilitate understanding linguistically” is expressly denied in Retsö 2003, 47; see further below on his views. Kropp, too, doubts that the reference to “evident Arabic language” in Q 16:103 and 26:195 intends comprehensibility. Inspired by Federico Corriente, he detects a parallel to *Jubilees* = VanderKam 1989, ch. 12:25–26, where God teaches Abraham to speak Hebrew, which is literally described as a language that is “evident,” apparently in the sense of being “revealed” (see Kropp 2015, 280–282). Based on this, Kropp holds that *mubīn* as used in connection with the language of the Qur’an is a calque from Ethiopic (Kropp 2015, 286). I find none of this remotely compelling.

idiom of monotheistic scripture and tradition. This interpretation accords with Ahmad Al-Jallad's recent argument that *'arabī* "meant simply the local vernacular language as opposed to traditional monotheistic liturgical idioms" (Al-Jallad 2020c, 73–77, citing 73; cf. also van Putten 2022, 217).<sup>5</sup> As briefly explained in the entry's final section, emphasis on the Qur'anic revelations' Arabicness fades in the Medinan surahs, which attribute a more ecumenical remit to Muhammad's mission.

**Does *'arabī* mean "Arabic"?** The customary rendering of *'arabī* as "Arabic" has not escaped questioning, most recently by Peter Webb (Webb 2016, 115–126). Webb demonstrates that pre-Islamic poetry yields only limited evidence to the effect that the term *'arab* functioned as a marker of ethnic belonging, and instead suggests that it was the name *ma'add* that "emerges as a label of collective identity across pre-Islamic poetry" (Webb 2016, 60–109, quoting p. 70).<sup>6</sup> Whether or not this assessment is correct, the opposition between the adjectives *'arabī* and *a'jamī* as found in Q 16:103 is best interpreted as a dichotomy between speakers of different languages, with *a'jamī* meaning someone who speaks an unintelligible or, as it were, barbarian tongue. For Q 26:195–199, too, it makes good sense to construe the contrast between *'arabī* and *a'jamī* as a linguistic dichotomy. As concisely summarised above, the passage first declares that Muhammad's revelations are "in clear *'arabī* language" and then entertains how the Qur'an's hearers would have responded had God's revelations been conveyed by "one of the *a'jamūn*": they would not have believed in it, v. 199 says, which may be taken to mean that their inability to understand the preaching of a hypothetical *a'jamī* messenger would have impaired their ability to absorb God's message (thus also Wild 2006b, 154, against Retsö 2003, 45–46). After all, the more explicit objection entertained in the similar counterfactual scenario at Q 41:44 centres on the notion that a non-*'arabī* revelation would not have been "clearly set out" (*law-lā fuṣṣilat āyātuhu*). Hence, the cumulative logic of Q 16:103, 26:195–199, and 41:44 is compatible with, and even supportive of, the traditional notion that the *a'jamūn* are "foreigners" in the sense of speakers of languages other than Arabic, notwithstanding the conflicting views of Webb, Matthias Radscheit (Radscheit 1996a, 45–46), and Jan Retsö (Retsö 2003, 44–47).<sup>7</sup>

5 I became aware of Al-Jallad's argument and his criticism of Retsö and Webb, which anticipates points also made by me, only while the present volume was already in press.

6 It is interesting to compare Webb's argument to Hoyland's deflationary assessment of the scarcity of the category "Arab" in poetry: "The term is extremely rare in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, but that may be just because the poets tend mostly to be focusing on their own tribe or allied/rival tribes" (Hoyland 2015, 60).

7 While in general sympathy with Webb's sophisticated critique of problematic assumptions about Arab ethnogenesis, I am unconvinced by his treatment of the Qur'anic opposition between *'arabī* and *a'jamī* in Q 16:103 and also 26:195.198 (Webb 2016, 119): "The Qur'an's *a'jamī* connotes something nonsensical or a sullied message of a non-divinely inspired messenger, whereas the verse [= Q 16:103] affirms that *'arabī* connotes a transcendently clear koine from God, not a terrestrial vernacular." Radscheit equates the distinction between *'arabī* and *a'jamī* with the general contrast between "intelligible" and "unintelligible" and considers *'arabī* to be pleonastically equivalent with *mubīn* (Radscheit 1996a, 45–46). Jan Retsö denies that Qur'anic *a'jamī* means "non-Arabic" in today's sense and suggests that the *a'jamī* recitation counterfactually envisaged in Q 41:44 is one that "would not have conformed to the demands of the rhymed prose of the *'arabī* language," based on his view that *fuṣṣilat* in this verse means "to compose s.th. in rhymed prose" (Retsö 2003, 44–46). Thus, an *a'jamī* recitation might well be linguistically Arabic. Retsö concludes that the "purpose of the use of *'arabī* is to authorize the message, not to make it linguistically comprehensible" (Retsö 2003, 47), and he thinks that *'arabī* referred not to a language in the modern sense but to a special linguistic register that was originally employed in mantic discourse and was thus set apart from everyday speech (Retsö 2003, 591–595). For a response to Retsö, see Wild 2006, 140 and 152–154. On the meaning of the verb → *faṣṣala*, see the respective entry in this dictionary.



There is an array of supplementary reasons for interpreting the contrast of *‘arabī* and *a‘jamī* as a linguistic one in the sense just developed. First, the Qur’an shows clear awareness of a diversity of human languages in Q 30:22 (*ikhtilāf alsinatikum*; see Wild 2006b, 137), and it also maintains that God “has never sent any messenger except in the language (*lisān*) of his people” (Q 14:4; cf. 19:97 and 44:58; see Wild 2006b, 153 and 154–155). The conventional interpretation of the *‘arabī* vs *a‘jamī* contrast as pertaining to the use of a specific language fits these Qur’anic background assumptions. Secondly, the foregoing understanding of *a‘jamī* and *a‘jamūn* accords with the data rehearsed in the works of Muslim lexicographers, from which one gathers that the root *‘-j-m* connotes chewing and, by extension, a lack of clarity, distinctness, or intelligibility in speech (CDKA 307; AEL 1966–1968). Even if the more specific definitions offered for words like *‘ajam* and *a‘jam* should be taken with a grain of salt, their consonantal root does seem to be associated with a consistent basic meaning.<sup>8</sup> Thirdly, as noted above, the view that the Meccan surahs draw explicit attention to their Arabicness coheres with the fact that the textual records of previous scriptures extant at the time of the Qur’an were in languages other than Arabic. Finally, equating *‘arabī* with “Arabic” explains not only why statements describing the Qur’anic proclamations as being in Arabic would seem to foreground their consequent comprehensibility but also why Q 42:7 underscores the Qur’an’s fit with a particular local or regional context: “Thus have we conveyed an *‘arabī* recitation to you<sup>s</sup> in order that you might warn the mother-town and those dwelling around it (*li-tundhira umma l-qurā wa-man ḥawlahā*).”<sup>9</sup>

Notwithstanding the rarity of the category “Arab” in pre-Islamic poetic discourse, therefore, the Qur’anic data makes it probable that the dichotomy of *‘arab* vs *‘ajam*, which likely underlies the contrast between “the *‘arabī* language” and “the *a‘jamūn*” in Q 26:195.198 and that between *‘arabī* and *a‘jamī* at Q 16:103 and 41:44, had some currency in the pre-Islamic period. At least as far as the dichotomy presents itself through the Qur’an, it would most likely have hinged on the contrast between speakers of (some version, or versions, of) Old Arabic and kindred idioms, on the one hand, and speakers of languages that were perceived as substantially different and not readily intelligible to Arabophones, such as Greek or Syriac, on the other. In this sense, Jan Retsö is right to stress that the original concept of Arabness revolved around language rather than kinship and descent (Retsö 2003, 27–28; similarly Wansbrough 1977, 98), though of course both aspects could have been seen as closely connected.

**Arabness before the Qur’an.** The Qur’anic use of *‘arabī* is a resonance of ethnic terminology that had circulated around the Near East for over a millennium by the time of Muhammad. The terms “Arab” and “Arabia” are attested in Assyrian inscriptions from the ninth century BCE onwards and in the Hebrew Bible (see Hoyland 2001, 59–62, and for more detail Retsö 2003, 105–202). Thus, 1 Kgs 10:15 or 2 Chr 9:14 speak of “Arab kings” who paid tribute to Solomon. When the Romans annexed the Nabataean kingdom in 106 CE, they called the new province “Arabia” (see generally Bowersock 1983). At some point, inhabitants of this province may have begun to refer to themselves as “Arabs” (Hoyland 2015, 22–23; see also Macdonald 2009, 297–303). But instances of Arab self-identification

8 For a detailed discussion of the lexicographic data on *‘ajam*, *‘ajamī*, *a‘jam*, and *a‘jamī*, see Retsö 2003, 24–28. As Retsö notes, the distinction that is made between *‘ajam* and *a‘jam* seems artificial (Retsö 2003, 26).

9 See similarly Al-Jallad 2020c, 76. *Umm al-qurā* is traditionally identified with Mecca, which I see no reason to doubt (HCI 40–77). Even less doubtful is the weaker claim that the expression refers to the same settlement (*balad*) that is alluded to in Q 2:126, 14:35, and 90:1–2, wherever one might choose to locate it.



are already found earlier, in Greek documents from Ptolemaic Egypt (Macdonald 2009, 285–290).<sup>10</sup> While the interpretation of the pertinent ancient data is fraught with uncertainty and the significance attached to the term “Arab” may well have differed depending on the historical period in question and between different groups of users, the extra-Qur’anic evidence is compatible with the supposition that in the centuries prior to the Qur’an the label “Arab” did operate as a collective self-designation among some speakers of Old Arabic and related languages or dialects—a scenario that makes the best sense of the Qur’anic distinction between “the *‘arabī* language” and “the *a‘jamūn*.” This also tallies with the fact, recently reiterated by Al-Jallad, that there are cases in which non-Arabic sources report certain expressions from the “language of the Arabs” or the like that do in fact match Arabic words (Al-Jallad 2020b, 430–431). For instance, according to *Gen. Rab.* 87:1 in the language of “Arabia” the word *pty*—corresponding to Arabic *fatā*—is said to mean “youth” (Rabin 1951, 117).

A final piece of evidence to be mentioned in the present context are two recently published Safaitic inscriptions that would seem to employ the word *ʿrb*, without a definite marker, as a group name (Al-Jallad 2020b). Al-Jallad argues against the hypothesis that *ʿrb* has the generic sense of “nomads” here (cf. Arabic *a‘rāb*; e.g., Q 9:101.120), since one would in this case have expected the word to have the definite article (Al-Jallad 2020b, 427). Instead, Al-Jallad remarks that the absence of the definite article is reminiscent of collective names like *yhd*, “the Jews” (e.g., HAU 125 and RSIS 324 in Al-Jallad 2015a, 249 and 277), and he concludes that *ʿrb* may have “referred to the broader complex of language and culture” that united the different tribal groups who produced the Safaitic inscriptions (Al-Jallad 2020b, 429; cf. Macdonald 2009, 296–297). This would certainly be consistent with the hypothesis that the Qur’anic adjective *‘arabī* picks out the vernacular linguistic character of the Qur’an and perhaps also reflects a certain awareness of transregional linguistic affinity. However, it remains salutary to note, with Al-Jallad, that someone endorsing the semantic hypothesis defended above—namely, that Qur’anic *‘arabī* has a linguistic meaning—is by no means committed to the further claim the initial addressees of the Qur’an must therefore have possessed a developed Arab identity in the sense familiar from later periods (Al-Jallad 2020c, 77), i.e., must have prominently self-defined as belonging to the same ethnic and cultural collective as other speakers of (some version of) Arabic.

**The absence of references to the Qur’an’s Arabicness in the Medinan surahs.** Reminders of the Arabic nature of the Qur’anic proclamations are limited to the Meccan surahs and do not recur in the Medinan ones. Tracking the Qur’an’s diachronic development, one observes a development leading from references to the ethnic and/or linguistic specificity of Muhammad’s revelations in the Meccan surahs to a more universalist emphasis on their ecumenical remit in the Medinan Qur’an—a widening of Muhammad’s constituency that is described in more detail elsewhere (see under → *al-‘ālamūn*). In this sense, the post-Qur’anic tension between Islam as God’s dispensation for speakers of Arabic, on the one hand, and as a universal religion for humankind at large, on the other, has roots in the Islamic

<sup>10</sup> There is also, of course, the famous Namārah epitaph of one Imru’ al-Qays ibn ‘Amr, located southeast of Damascus, dated to 328 CE, and composed in Arabic but written in the Nabataean script. It is usually understood to describe the deceased as “king of all the Arabs” (*mlk ‘l-ʿrb klh*). Zwettler revises this to “king of the entire territory of ‘Arab,” meaning “the extensive cis- and trans-Euphratean region of central and southern Iraq and the eastern Syro-Arabian desert” (Zwettler 1993, 18; see also Macdonald in Fiema et al. 2015, 405–409). Two earlier studies of this inscription are Beeston 1979 and Bowersock 1983, 138–147.

scripture itself, even though the Qur'an itself nowhere envisions a global missionary effort aimed at converting all humans to membership of the Qur'anic *umma*.

***al-a'rāb* pl. | the Bedouin**

→ *aslama*

**'*araja* intr. | to ascend**

***ma'ārij* pl. | stairs**

See briefly under → *amr*, → *rūḥ*, and → *nazzala*.

***a'raj* | lame**

→ *'amiya*

**'*arsh* | throne**

→ *khalaqa*, → *malak*, → *malik*

***a'raḍa* intr. '*an* | to turn away from s.th.**

→ *āyah*, → *dhakkara*

**'*arafa* tr. | to recognise s.th. or s.o.**

→ *ma'rūf*

***al-ma'rūf* | what is recognised to be right**

Further vocabulary discussed: '*arafa* tr. | to recognise s.th. or s.o. *ankara* tr. | to fail to recognise s.o.; to reject s.th. *al-munkar* | what is rejected, what is reprehensible *amara* tr./intr. *bi-* | to command (s.o. to do) s.th.; to enjoin (s.o. to do) s.th., to urge (s.o. to do) s.th. *nahā* tr./intr. '*an* | to forbid (s.o.) from s.th.; to restrain (s.o.) from s.th. *ṣadaqah* | gift or act of charity *qisṭ* | fairness, equity *umma* | community *tawāṣā* intr. *bi-* | to charge one another with s.th., to urge one another to do s.th. *tanājā* intr. | to talk to one another in private, to engage in intimate conversation *shūrā* | consultation

“What is recognised to be right” (*al-ma'rūf*) vs “what is reprehensible” (*al-munkar*): overview and usage in poetry. The verb '*arafa*, “to recognise,” is the opposite of → *ankara*, “to fail to recognise s.o.” and also “to reject s.th.” (e.g., Q 12:58, 23:69). The passive participle *al-ma'rūf* denotes “what is recognised to be right,” or, as Izutsu puts it, “what is regarded as known and familiar, and, therefore, also socially approved” (*ERCQ* 213), while its antonym *al-munkar* is “what is rejected, what is reprehensible” or “what is disapproved precisely because it is unknown and foreign” (*ERCQ* 213). The antonyms *al-ma'rūf* and *al-munkar* are repeatedly

paired in a formula whose literal translation would be “to command what is recognised to be right (*amara bi-l-ma'rūf*) and to forbid what is rejected (*nahā 'an al-munkar*),” or more succinctly, “to command right and forbid wrong” (Q 3:104.110.114, 7:157, 9:71.112, 22:41, 31:17; cf. also the polemical inversion of the phrase in 9:67; see in detail Cook 2001). Apart from Q 31:17, these are all Medinan verses,<sup>1</sup> making 31:17—belonging to Luqmān’s exhortation of his son—the formula’s chronologically earliest occurrence in the Islamic scripture.

While the *ma'rūf-munkar* formula is likely to strike contemporary readers as a signature feature of Qur’anic diction, early Arabic poetry indicates that the concepts of *al-ma'rūf* and *al-munkar* were an established part of the moral lexicon of pre-Qur’anic Arabic (see already ERCQ 213–214). For example, a verse from the gnomic final section of Zuhayr’s Mu‘allaqah recommends shielding and augmenting one’s honour by doing “what is recognised to be right” (*al-ma'rūf*; DSAAP, Zuhayr, no. 16:52; see Arberry 1957, 117), and the penultimate verse of a poem from the *dīwān* of al-Nābighah declares, “God accepts only justice and faithfulness; wrong (*al-nukr*) is not right (*ma'rūf*), and right (*al-'urf*) will not go unrequited (*dā'i*)” (DSAAP, al-Nābighah, no. 17:32; see also Sinai 2019b, 45). The second example is particularly intriguing inasmuch as it presupposes the opposition of *ma'rūf* and *munkar* that is also reflected by the Qur’an (see also ERCQ 216): just as *al-'urf* evidently functions as a metrical alternative for *ma'rūf*, so *al-nukr* must be doing duty for *al-munkar*.<sup>2</sup>

**On the putative significance of commanding right and forbidding wrong.** Commanding right and forbidding wrong tend to have a communal dimension in the Qur’an: as Michael Cook has observed, in most of the relevant scriptural verses the duty to command right and forbid wrong is collectively discharged by the community of believers or by some of the “scripture-owners” (Q 3:104.110.114, 9:71.112, 22:41), while in Q 7:157 it is the Qur’anic Prophet who engages in commanding right and forbidding wrong towards the community of his followers (Cook 2001, 13–14). In the latter case it would make good sense to understand the verbs *amara* and *nahā* quite literally, as denoting orders and prohibitions that a person of authority issues to a subordinate, and this is evidently how one ought to translate *amara* and *nahā* in Q 16:90, according to which God “commands (*ya'muru bi-*) justice, doing good, and giving to one’s kin, and forbids (*yanhā 'an*) abominations, what is reprehensible, and rapaciousness.” Yet in cases where the *ma'rūf-munkar* formula is applied to the believers at large or to Luqmān’s son (Q 31:17), who is not introduced as possessing either political clout or prophetic authority, *amara* and *nahā* would seem to have the sense of emphatically urging others to act in a certain manner or seeking to dissuade or restrain them from it. As regards *amara*, this signification is also exemplified by Q 3:21, which mentions “people who enjoin equity (*qist*)” or who “urge [others] to be equitable” (*alladhīna ya'murūna bi-l-qisti mina l-nāsi*; CDKA 27; see also under → *ḡalama*). *Nahā* in a sense other than literal prohibition is illustrated by Q 29:45: prayer “restrains from abominations and what is reprehensible” (*tanhā 'ani l-faḥshā'i wa-l-munkari*; see CDKA 276).<sup>3</sup> In general, to say that someone enjoins what is recognised to be right and dissuades

1 On the Medinan dating of Q 7:157, see under → *ummī*.

2 See also Q 7:199, where the command *wa-'mur bi-l-'urfi* is perhaps equivalent to *wa-'mur bi-l-ma'rūfi*. In Q 18:74.87, 54:6, and 65:8, verse-final *nukr* or *nukur* may be replacing *munkar*, albeit in the strong sense of “terrible” or “hideous” (see also ERCQ 216–217).

3 For another passage in which *amara bi-* and *nahā* + acc. seem to mean “to enjoin s.th.” and “to restrain s.o. (from doing s.th.),” see Q 96:9–10.12. Cook 2001, 15, notes that “there are locutions elsewhere in the Koran of

from what is reprehensible must be to underscore that his or her ethical sensibilities, as manifested by acts of moral counsel, approval, and disapproval, align with what is generally and validly acknowledged to be right and proper. What this means in more concrete terms can perhaps be glimpsed from Q 4:114, a verse commending “someone who enjoins acts of charity (→ *sadaqah*) or what is recognised to be right or reconciliation (*iṣlāḥ*) between people.” Although it is debatable to what extent the three concepts here deployed—urging charitable behaviour, urging what is right, and urging reconciliation—should be seen as separate categories, impressing on others the need to be charitable or working towards reconciliation must have pertinent affinity with “enjoining what is right.”

Enjoining what is right and dissuading from what is wrong has aptly been described as the principal “mission” that the Qur’an gives to the community of believers (Anjum 2012, 245). Is this mission directed at outsiders or rather at other believers? The former is suggested by Q 3:110, which underlines the Qur’anic community’s status as a sort of beacon for humanity at large, “the best community (→ *ummah*) ever brought forth for people (*ukhrijat li-l-nāsi*), enjoining right and dissuading from wrong.”<sup>4</sup> Here and a few verses earlier, in Q 3:104, the *ma’rūf-munkar* formula serves to express the Medinan *ummah*’s divinely intended function of providing a global role model of piety and righteousness, resembling the Isaian concept that the people of Israel are to be a “light to the nations” (see in more detail under → *al-‘ālamūn*). This stress, it should be noted, fits well with the semantics of the root *’-m-m*, which connotes orientation and guidance (see in more detail under → *ummah*).

But in parallel to the Qur’anic *ummah*’s function of serving as a collective role model for humanity at large, it is likely that enjoining good and dissuading from wrong also involves reciprocal acts of moral counsel, admonishment, and encouragement among the Qur’anic believers themselves. That the Qur’an considers such mutual moral fortification and correction to be vital emerges from Q 90:17 and 103:3, two later insertions into early Meccan surahs (PP 156–157 and 238). They portray “those who believe and do righteous deeds” as “charging one another” (*tawāṣā*) with “what is true” (Q 103:3: *bi-l-ḥaqqi*), with steadfastness (Q 90:17, 103:3: *bi-l-ṣabri*), and with compassion or mercy (Q 90:17: *bi-l-marḥamah*). In a similar fashion, Q 5:79 may be read as condemning the Israelites for not “dissuading one another from the reprehensible things they did” (*kānū lā yatanāhawna ‘an munkarin fa’alūhu*).<sup>5</sup> Indeed, already the second verse of the same surah, Q 5:2, calls upon the believers “to cooperate in righteousness and fear of God,” rather than “cooperating in sin and enmity” (*wa-ta’āwanū ‘alā l-birri wa-l-taqwā wa-lā ta’āwanū ‘alā l-ithmi wa-l-‘udwāni*). In partly identical diction, Q 58:8–9 condemns the act of “intimately conversing in sin, enmity, and disobedience to the Messenger” (v. 8: *yatanājawna bi-l-ithmi wa-l-‘udwāni wa-ma’ṣiyati l-rasūli*) and instead demands that believers are to “converse in righteousness and fear of God” (*tanājaw bi-l-birri wa-l-taqwā*). Finally, when an oft-quoted Meccan verse,

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the form ‘commanding X’ and ‘forbidding Y,’ where X and Y are similarly broad-spectrum ethical terms,” e.g., Q 2:44 (*amara bi-l-birr*) or 3:21 (*amara bi-l-qist*).

4 On the Qur’anic understanding of the Medinan *ummah*, see also under → *al-‘ālamūn*.

5 Cook questions whether *tanāhā* should be interpreted in a reciprocal sense here, on the ground that it is also attested as a synonym of *intahā*, which is in fact reported as a minority variant reading of the verse (Cook 2001, 15–16; see MQ 2:330). This is a valid objection, but in view of Q 90:17 and 103:3 I would incline in favour of reciprocity. As Cook observes later on, Islamic exegetes exhibit a certain preference for the reciprocal understanding of Q 5:79 (Cook 2001, 26–27).

Q 42:38, describes the believers as “conducting their affairs by consultation” (*wa-amruhum shūrā baynahum*), this may point in the same direction and refer to moral deliberation in general rather than more narrowly to the managing of political affairs (which would at most have been a limited prospect in the Meccan period anyway).

Several Qur’anic passages, then, bespeak some awareness that communal patterns of virtuous or vicious behaviour are bolstered by the interactions that take place within the community in question, and in particular by acts of moral appraisal, encouragement, and deliberation between individuals. It is plausible that this view resonates in the *ma’rūf-munkar* formula as well. Perhaps by way of a counterweight, however, Q 5:105 strikes a different tone and seems concerned to discourage or at least limit meddling prying in other people’s moral affairs (see Cook 2001, 30–31): “O believers, look after yourselves (*‘alaykum anfusakum*)! Someone who has gone astray cannot harm you if you are guided. You will all return to God, and he will announce to you what you have done.”

**“In line with what is recognised to be right” (*bi-l-ma’rūf*): Qur’anic legislation and moral common sense.** Outside the *ma’rūf-munkar* formula, the prepositional phrase *bi-l-ma’rūf* features in quasi-legal commandments, as noted already by Izutsu (*ERCQ* 214–215). These instruct the Qur’anic believers, for instance, to make bequests (Q 2:180), deal with past, present, and future spouses (e.g., Q 2:228–229.231–233, 4:19.25, 65:2), or make personal use of a warden’s property (Q 4:6) “in line with what is recognised to be right.” The phrase *bi-l-ma’rūf* plays a similar role in the Constitution of Medina: the different kinship groups that make up the Medinan *ummah* are to handle the payment of blood money and the ransoming of captives “according to what is recognised to be right and what is equitable,” *bi-l-ma’rūf wa-l-qist* (Lecker 2004, §§ 3 ff.), and someone who is burdened by debt is to be aided “according to what is recognised to be right (*bi-l-ma’rūf*) in matters of ransom or blood money” (Lecker 2004, § 12; see also *ibid.*, 105–100). In such prescriptive contexts, the specification *bi-l-ma’rūf* serves to signal what one might call a standard requirement of conformity with moral common sense, thereby obviating the need for explicit stipulation of the different forms that equity might take in a host of different casuistic permutations. Issues to which this requirement of conformity with moral common sense could be applied in the Qur’anic milieu were clearly variegated, ranging from blood money (as in the Constitution of Medina and in Q 2:178) to marriage and divorce (as in some of the Qur’anic passages just cited).

The important consequence of the Qur’anic employment of *bi-l-ma’rūf* is that the Islamic scripture does not presume to supply a system of behavioural rules that is both exhaustive and exclusively descriptive, i.e., not couched in ethically laden terminology. Instead, Qur’anic legislation expressly relies on its addressees’ existing understanding of what is fair and equitable (see also Christiansen 2019, 129). Thus, even after the Medinan Qur’an’s turn towards concrete behavioural rules and a “legalistic” type of piety (Sinai 2015–2016, 51–52 and 66–67; *HCI* 202–205),<sup>6</sup> the Qur’an does not envisage the concrete behavioural guidance it provides as forming an exhaustive legal codex that could be understood and applied without recourse to considerations of moral common sense.<sup>7</sup> This

6 My use of the descriptor “legalistic” is indebted to Fred Donner, as explained in Sinai 2015–2016, 67.

7 To put it in terms of a concept recently employed by Sohaira Siddiqui, the Qur’an does not articulate a position of “scriptural universalism,” meaning the view “that every action has a legal and moral value derived directly from scripture or through reasoning on the basis of scripture” (Siddiqui 2019, 106; cf. *ibid.*, 187, n. 3,

diagnosis chimes with Ramon Harvey’s recent plea in favour of “a neo-Māturīdī natural law reading of the Qur’an, in which a moral realist position is derived from God’s eternal wisdom,” involving the claim that humans have non-revelatory access to basic moral norms (Harvey 2018, 191).<sup>8</sup>

The injunction to deal with certain situations *bi-l-ma’rūf* consequently presupposes that the values prevalent in the Qur’an’s social environment are valid moral and ethical benchmarks, rather than being systematically defective, and that humans can safely rely on their moral common sense (cf. Reinhart 2002, 55–56, 66, 77). This is not necessarily the position one might expect the Qur’an to take. After all, especially the early Meccan surahs unsparingly drive home humankind’s ethical flaws, rebuking them for their greed and ingratitude to God (e.g., Q 100:6.8; see also Reinhart 2002, 56–57). Later surahs are, moreover, persistently critical of the theological views and ritual practices that must have been held by a sizable number of Mecca’s inhabitants (see under → *ashraka*). Nonetheless, the preceding considerations establish that the Qur’an does not go so far as to suggest that such complaints call into doubt humankind’s awareness of basic moral values: however misguided human beliefs about God may be, however much human self-understanding can be clouded by arrogance and hubris (see the remarks on *istakbara* under → *istaḍ’afa*), and however appallingly human behaviour may fall short of God’s expectations, there is no doubt that at some fundamental level humans do have a sound grasp of the moral standards to which they ought to live up.

### ***a’rāf* | heights, elevations**

→ *jannah*

### **‘azzara tr. | to support or help s.o. (namely, a messenger of God)**

→ *ummī* and also → *aqraḍa*

### **‘azīz | mighty**

→ *allāh*, → *jabbār*, → *ḥikmah*, → *ism*

### ***al-‘uzzā* | al-‘Uzzā**

→ *ashraka*

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acknowledging Sherman Jackson). See also the contrast between Ibn Surayj’s view that “Revelation spoke to all human activity” and the Zāhiri limitation of the scope of revelation in Reinhart 1995, 16–17.

8 See also Reinhart 1995, 177–178, according to whom the Mu’tazilī idea of objective moral values that are accessible independently of revelation represented an “archaic form of Muslim thought” and had its original context in a historical situation in which Muslims were a missionary minority; when this ceased to be the case, a subjectivist understanding of values as deriving from divine decree became more attractive. Reinhart plausibly maintains that the Mu’tazilī conception of values is continuous with the Qur’an, “itself at its beginning a product of a minoritarian missionary environment.” See similarly Hourani 1985, 45.



**‘aṣā tr./intr. | to disobey s.o.; to be disobedient**

On the utterance *sami‘nā wa-‘aṣaynā* (“We hear and disobey”), which two verses impute to the Israelites or Jews, see under → *sami‘a* and also under → *ghulf*. On the question whether angels are capable of disobeying God, see under → *malak*.

**‘afw | surplus, surplus property**

→ *zakāh*

**‘āqaba intr. | to retaliate**

**‘iqāb | retaliation, punishment**

**‘āqaba bi-mithli mā ‘ūqiba | to retaliate proportionately, to punish in accordance with what one has suffered**

→ *‘adhhaba*

**‘āqibah | outcome**

→ *āyah*, → *sāra fī l-ard*

**‘aqala tr./intr. | to understand (s.th.)**

→ *āyah*, → *dhakkara*, → *‘arabī*, → *qalb*, → *la‘alla*

**‘akafa intr. ‘alā | to cling to s.o. or s.th., to be devoted to s.o. or s.th.**

→ *dhabaḥa*

**‘allama tr. | to teach s.o.; to teach s.th., to convey knowledge of s.th.**

**‘allama ditr. | to teach s.o. s.th.**

See briefly under → *bayyana*, → *qara’a*, and → *nazzala*.

**‘alīm | knowing, knowledgeable**

→ *allāh*, → *ḥikmah*, → *dhakara*, → *sami‘a*, → *ism*, → *qadīr*

**al-‘ālamūn pl. | the world-dwellers**

Further vocabulary discussed: *faḍḍala* tr. *‘alā* | to favour s.o. over s.o. *iṣṭafā* tr. (*‘alā*) | to choose or elect s.o. or s.th. (over s.o. or s.th.), to prefer s.o./s.th. over s.o./s.th. *unās*, *al-nās* | people, the people *umm al-qurā* | the mother of settlements, the mother-town *‘arabī* | Arabic *‘ajamī* | non-Arabophone, (linguistically) foreign *ummah* | community *shahīd* | witness *ummī* | scriptureless, not hitherto endowed with a scriptural revelation *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients

of scripture *bayyana* tr. (li-) | to clarify s.th. (to s.o.) *khātam al-nabiyyīn* | seal of the prophets *amara bi-l-ma'rūf* | to command or enjoin what is right *nahā 'an al-munkar* | to dissuade from what is reprehensible, to forbid wrong *ummah wasaṭ* | a middle community, an intermediate community *uswah, imām* | exemplar, model *shirk* | the sin of associating God with illicit partner deities, associationism *dīn* | religion, religious worship *al-anṣār* pl. | the helpers

“World-dwellers,” not “worlds.” The plural *‘ālamūn* is only ever employed in the genitive in the Qur’an, e.g., in the phrase *rabb al-‘ālamīn* (→ *rabb*). The underlying singular is presumably *‘ālam*, “world,” which is not however attested in the Qur’anic corpus. A monotheistic South Arabian inscription speaks of “the far and near world” (*b-‘lmm b’dn w-qrbn*; Mordtmann and Müller 1896, 287 and 289–290; *CIH*, no. 539), reflecting the common rabbinic contrast between “this world” and “the coming world” (→ *ākhir*).<sup>1</sup> One might therefore be tempted to understand the Qur’anic term *‘ālamīn* to signify the present world and the hereafter. Yet given that the so-called sound plural ending *-ūn/-īn* in Arabic is normally confined to persons, it is problematic to understand *‘ālamīn* as “worlds” and as equivalent to Hebrew *‘olamim* (see, e.g., *b. Bēr.* 51a, speaking of “two *‘olamim*, this world and the coming world”).

This initial reservation is in fact fully borne out by a closer examination of Qur’anic usage, for the corpus contains a significant number of passages in which the word *al-‘ālamīn* plainly refers to persons, such as denials containing the phrase “anyone of the *‘ālamīn*” (Q 5:20.115, 7:80, and 29:28) or references to divine election or favouring (*ikhtāra/fadḍala/iṣṭafā*) “over the *‘ālamīn*” (Q 2:47.122, 3:42, 6:86, 7:140, 44:32, and 45:16).<sup>2</sup> The appropriate rendering of *al-‘ālamīn* in the Qur’an is therefore “the inhabitants of the entire world,” “the world-dwellers,” or simply “all people” rather than “the worlds” (thus already *KK* 12).<sup>3</sup> It is presumably in view of the evidence just surveyed that Abū ‘Ubaydah glosses *al-‘ālamīn* as *al-makhlūqāt*, “created beings” (Abū ‘Ubaydah 1955–1962, 1:22). He also cites a pertinent parallel from the poetry of Labīd, although it is not certain that the verse’s diction is independent of the Qur’an: “I have not seen nor heard of anyone like them among the world-dwellers (*fī l-‘ālamīnā*)” (‘Abbās 1962, no. 49:6).

**Does the term “world-dwellers” imply that Muhammad’s preaching has a universal remit?** From early on, the Qur’anic proclamations style themselves as a “reminder for the world-dwellers” (*dhikrun li-l-‘ālamīn*; see Q 68:52 and 81:27 in the early Meccan period and Q 6:90, 12:104, and 38:87 in later Meccan surahs), and Muhammad is said to have been sent “as a mercy for the world-dwellers” (*raḥmatan li-l-‘ālamīn*; Q 21:107) and as a “warner”

1 See also Robin 2000, citing another Sabaic occurrence of *‘lm* in Ry 508, l. 11 (which has *w-trḥm ‘ly kl ‘lm*, “and bestow mercy upon all the world”).

2 See also Q 26:165 (referring to “the males among the *‘ālamīn*”) and 29:10 (speaking of the “breasts of the *‘ālamīn*”) as well as 15:70. On *ikhtāra* and *iṣṭafā*, see Firestone 2011, 399–400 and 401–402.

3 Neuwirth nonetheless opines that *rabb al-‘ālamīn* should be credited with an eschatological dimension, in view of its relationship to *ribbono shel ‘olam / ribbon ha-‘olamim* and in view of the fact that the meaning “Lord of the world’s inhabitants” could have been expressed by *rabb al-nās*, found in Q 114:1 (Neuwirth 2017, 90). However, it is methodologically problematic to privilege the semantic connotations of a pre-Qur’anic antecedent over the semantic implications of Qur’anic usage. Moreover, verse-final *rabb al-‘ālamīn* could hardly be replaced by *rabb al-nās* without seriously compromising rhyme, meaning that the Qur’anic preference for the former expression over the latter does not carry much weight. In addition, the one Qur’anic instance of *rabb al-nās* does not suffice to establish the term as an entrenched part of the Qur’an’s formulaic lexicon; most likely, it is simply a one-off variant for the usual *rabb al-‘ālamīn*. *Rabb al-nās* is also employed in a verse by al-A’shā Maymūn (Ḥusayn 1983, no. 55:34), though this observation has no obvious bearing on the argument at hand.

(*nadhīr*) for them (Q 25:1). At least *prima facie*, such statements create a strong impression that Muhammad's preaching had a universal outlook from the start. After all, when the Qur'an calls God *rabb al-‘ālamīn* (see under → *rabb*) or when the divine voice reminds the Israelites that "I have preferred you over the *‘ālamīn*" (Q 2:47.122), *‘ālamīn* can hardly mean anything other than *all* of the world-dwellers. Such a universalist reading could be further buttressed by adducing verses according to which Muhammad's preaching or revelations are directed at "the people" or "humans" (*li-l-nās*), such as Q 7:158 (instructing Muhammad to say, "O people, I am God's messenger to you all," *qul yā-ayyuhā l-nāsu innī rasūlu llāhi ilaykum jamī’an*), 34:28 ("We only sent you<sup>s</sup> as a bringer of good tidings and a warner for all the people, yet most people have no knowledge," *wa-mā arsalnāka illā kāffatan li-l-nāsi bashīran wa-nadhīran wa-lākinna akthara l-nāsi lā ya‘lamūn*), and 39:41 ("We have truly sent down upon you<sup>s</sup> the scripture for the people," *li-l-nāsi*).<sup>4</sup>

However, as noted by Ahrens (Ahrens 1935, 129), other Meccan verses attribute a much more localised remit to Muhammad's ministry and present him as a messenger who has been sent to warn "the mother-town" (*umm al-qurā*)—i.e., Mecca—"and those dwelling around it" (Q 6:92, 42:7),<sup>5</sup> or even as somebody who is to warn merely his "close kin" (Q 26:214). Indeed, assuming the general rule that God "has never sent any messenger except in the language of his people" (*wa-mā arsalnā min rasūlin illā bi-lisāni qawmihi*; Q 14:4),<sup>6</sup> it appears axiomatically impossible that the "Arabic (→ *‘arabī*) recitation" granted to Muhammad (Q 12:2, 20:113, 39:28, 41:3, 42:7 etc.) could be intended to address a non-Arabophone audience (Buhl 1926, 145). The tension between universal and parochial statements is heightened by the fact that they can occur in close proximity, namely, in Q 6:90 ("This is only a reminder for the world-dwellers," *in huwa illā dhikrā li-l-‘ālamīn*) and 6:92, one of the two verses cited earlier that define Muhammad's role as preaching to "the mother-town and those dwelling around it" (*li-tundhira umma l-qurā wa-man ḥawlahā*; see Buhl 1926, 144).

One could, of course, decide to let the tension stand and posit that at least in the Meccan surahs a universalist and a parochial strand of thought compete with one another. But is it really impossible to reconcile the apparent contradiction? One way of doing so would be to construe seemingly parochial statement in light of more universal ones. For instance, when Muhammad is told to admonish his kinsfolk or the "mother-town," this may only identify the immediate starting point of his preaching rather than to set limits on his ultimate missionary outreach (thus Goldziher 1910, 25). It is admittedly difficult to discern with any precision how extensive the "people" (*qawm*) to whom Muhammad is supposed to have been sent are understood to be. But if we consider their defining characteristic to be use of the Arabic language, then the Qur'anic target audience must extend well beyond Mecca and the region surrounding it. Still, even if we expand Muhammad's intended remit to a pan-Arabophone public, some tension between universalism and parochialism will

4 Among the c. fifty Qur'anic occurrences of *li-l-nās*, see in addition especially those in Q 2:185, 3:4, 4:79, 6:91, 14:52, 16:44, 17:89, 18:54, 30:58, and 39:27. As shown by places like Q 2:60 (*kullu unās*) or 7:82, the indefinite form corresponding to *al-nās* is *unās* (cf. *insān*; CDKA 30).

5 Q 43:31 refers to "the two settlements," perhaps Mecca and al-Ṭā'if. Q 7:96–98 thrice mention the "inhabitants of the settlements" (*ahl al-qurā*), though at least v. 96 suggests that reference is to a sinful collective punished in the past rather than to the Qur'an's contemporary addressees (but see Marshall 1999, 55, n. 20).

6 The same point is made, albeit less unequivocally, in Q 19:97 and 44:58, according to which God has "rendered easy" the Qur'anic recitations in the Messenger's own language (*yassarnāhu bi-lisānika*). For a defence of this reading, see Wild 2006, 154–155.

remain, in so far as the Qur'an itself opposes speakers of Arabic with those who are *a'jamī*, or linguistically "foreign" (Q 16:103, 26:198, 41:44). Of course, those who are not speakers of Arabic, or not native or fluent speakers thereof, will still count as belonging to the sum total of "world-dwellers." Hence, even if Muhammad is considered God's messenger to all speakers of Arabic, how is this to be squared with statements in which he is apparently said to be a warner to all world-dwellers (e.g., Q 25:1)?

Rather than reading ostensibly parochial statements in light of universal ones, one might also adopt the opposite, or perhaps complementary, strategy of qualifying ostensibly universal statements in light of more parochial ones. In concrete terms, this would mean resisting the view that the phrases *li-l-'ālamīn* and *li-l-nās* attribute an expressly universal reach to Muhammad's preaching (against, e.g., Goldziher 1910, 25–26) and restricting their contextual reference in line with other verses (thus Buhl 1926, 143–145). It is true that some occurrences of *al-nās* clearly have a universal scope, such as Q 2:213, according to which "people" (*al-nās*) once formed a single primordial community (see under → *ummah*). Nonetheless, in other contexts the phrase *li-l-nās* could feasibly be understood to mean "not 'to mankind' but 'to men,' in the sense of 'to everybody'" (Snouck Hurgronje 1916, 49), or rather to everybody within a given context.<sup>7</sup> That this is at least a possible signification of *li-l-nās* emerges very clearly from Q 10:2 and 26:39, where the expression designates a general public within a highly specific setting—namely, the local milieu of Muhammad himself and the Egyptian populace witnessing Moses's encounter with Pharaoh. There is nothing in principle to rule out extending such a construal of *li-l-nās* even to the more emphatic *kāffatan li-l-nās* in Q 34:28 (*mā arsalnāka illā kāffatan li-l-nāsi bashīran wa-nadhīran*), "We only sent you<sup>s</sup> as a bringer of good tidings and a warner for everyone"—that is, for the general public of Muhammad's appointed constituency, which might either consist in the inhabitants of Mecca and "those dwelling around it" (Q 6:92) or in the totality of all speakers of Arabic.

Similarly, the phrase *li-l-'ālamīn*, too, does not necessitate that the Qur'anic proclamations envision Muhammad's audience to be humanity at large (thus already Snouck Hurgronje 1916, 49). After all, as Buhl remarks, Jesus is expressly said to have been a "messenger to the Israelites" (Q 3:49; see also 61:6) while nonetheless being described, in a chronologically earlier verse, as forming a "sign *li-l-'ālamīn*" together with his mother (Q 21:91). A persuasive way of interpreting Q 21:91, therefore, is to parse *li-l-'ālamīn* as synonymous with *li-l-nās*, i.e., as meaning simply "for people."<sup>8</sup> Equating the force of *li-l-'ālamīn* with *li-l-nās* is rendered especially attractive in view of Q 19:21, forming a parallel to 21:91 that describes Jesus as a sign *li-l-nās* rather than *li-l-'ālamīn*, but with no discernible difference in meaning. It seems pertinent that *'ālamīn* occurs virtually always in verse-final position,<sup>9</sup> which suggests that employment of *li-l-'ālamīn* rather than *li-l-nās* could simply be due to considerations of rhyme rather than to any semantic difference between the two

7 See also Wild 2006, 145, and Stewart 2022, 224 (quoting the latter): "it is likely that in most if not all cases, *nās* refers to the generality of people in the immediate audience in their capacity as humans, and not to all humanity."

8 One might, of course, also contemplate an evolutionary account of the relationship between Q 21:91, on the one hand, and 3:49 and 61:6, on the other: perhaps it is only in the Medinan surahs that Jesus is understood to be a messenger to the Israelites? However, this would not solve the problem that Muhammad, too, is said to convey a reminder *li-l-'ālamīn* while simultaneously being depicted as addressing a localised context. Since the relevant verses about Muhammad, inspected above, are all equally Meccan, it does not seem likely that the apparent contradiction between Q 21:91, on the one hand, and 3:49 and 61:6, on the other, is to be solved diachronically.

9 The only one of the word's seventy-three occurrences in the Qur'an that is not verse-final is in Q 25:1.

phrases.<sup>10</sup> Just as *li-l-nās* may be read as signifying “for the benefit of the general public in a given context,” so the same may well apply to *li-l-‘ālamīn*, whether the phrase characterises the remit of Jesus or that of Muhammad.

Finally, the general strategy of resolving the tension between parochial and universalist statements about Muhammad’s mission by qualifying the latter might be complemented by a distinction between the universal validity of the Qur’anic proclamations’ basic message, on the one hand, and the linguistically and culturally specific sphere to which Muhammad is bidden to convey this general message, on the other: Muhammad, so one might read the Qur’an, imparts doctrinal and moral truths that are valid for all humans, but his primary task is nonetheless to transmit these general truths to a specific subset of all the “world-dwellers” to whom they apply, while others will receive the same teaching via other messengers (thus Buhl 1926, 146). Hence, in so far as Muhammad preaches one universal and unchanging divine message—namely, to worship and show fitting gratitude to the divine creator and to expect an eschatological reckoning—the Qur’anic proclamations express a “reminder for the world-dwellers” in general (e.g., Q 81:27), despite the fact that by virtue of being in Arabic they are directed at a particular linguistic group among others.

**Medinan developments: the Qur’anic *ummah* as “witnesses set up over the people.”** The preceding discussion having largely been confined to Meccan data, it is appropriate to devote a separate section to the question of the Qur’an’s assumed remit in the Medinan surahs. These lack statements implying that Muhammad’s intended audience is confined to his hometown and its surrounding region. They also give significant hints that Muhammad’s missionary role is ultimately intended to extend well beyond a constituency of Arabic-speaking pagans. For instance, while the original nucleus of the Qur’anic community of believers, the *ummah*, is understood to be drawn from the Meccan descendants of Abraham and Ishmael (Q 2:128, 14:37), the Medinan *ummah* appears to have been open to new joiners from outside Ishmael’s Meccan progeny (for more detail, see under → *ummah*). In addition, Q 2:143 says that God brought the Qur’anic *ummah* into existence “so that you<sup>p</sup> might be witnesses set up over the people (*li-takūnū shuhadā’a ‘alā l-nāsi*; cf. 22:78) and the Messenger might be a witness (*shahīd*) set up over you”; and Q 3:110 defines the Medinan *ummah* as “the best community ever brought forth for people” (*kuntum khayra ummatin ukhrijat li-l-nāsi*). Of course, given what was just said about the meaning of *al-nās*, one cannot without further ado assume that the “people” in question here must amount to all of humanity rather than, say, to all speakers of Arabic. Yet given that the Medinan surahs do not contain reminders of the Arabic nature of the Qur’anic proclamations nor reiterate the principle that every messenger is sent “in the language of his people” (Q 14:4), a universal reading of Q 2:143 and 3:110 is, minimally, more persuasive than for similar Meccan passages.

The impression that Muhammad’s remit undergoes considerable expansion in the Medinan surahs is further reinforced by the fact that Medinan passages give him the task of serving as God’s messenger to the *ummiyyūn*, i.e., to the “scriptureless” in general (Q 7:157–158, 62:2–3; see under → *ummi*): Muhammad, it appears, is charged with reaching out to all those parts of humankind who have hitherto remained outside God’s revelatory engagement with the ancient Israelites and their Jewish and Christian successors. To be

<sup>10</sup> The dominant position of *‘ālamīn* as a rhyme word is perceptively noted in Snouck Hurgronje 1916, 49, though I would not follow him in calling the expression “misused.”

sure, one may wonder whether the *ummiyyūn* mentioned in Q 62:2 might not be limited to the scriptureless descendants of Abraham through Ishmael.<sup>11</sup> However, if, as seems likely, the word *ummī* is an Arabisation of the Jewish category of *ummot ha-‘olam*, “the [non-Israelite] nations of the world,” it stands to reason that narrowing the Qur’anic term’s reference down to Abrahamites ought to be anchored in more explicit textual support than is in fact available.

A further aspect of the Medinan surahs’ arguable enlargement of Muhammad’s remit consists in the fact that, as Q 3:20 suggests, Muhammad’s constituency actually transcends the scriptureless and additionally includes “those who were given the scripture” (*wa-qul li-lladhīna ūtū l-kitāba wa-l-ummiyyīna a-aslamtum*), that is, Jews and Christians. Similarly, in Q 5:15.19 the divine voice characterises “our Messenger” as having been sent to the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*) in order to provide them with clarity (*yā-ahla l-kitābi qad jā’akum rasūlunā yubayyinu lakum*) about “much of what you<sup>p</sup> have been hiding of the scripture” (v. 15: *kathīran mimmā kuntum tukhfūna mina l-kitābi*). Parenthetically, the claim that Qur’anic revelations are meant to “make things clear” (→ *bayyana*) to the recipients of previous revelations is also intimated in Q 16:44, which occurs in a Meccan surah; but this verse is quite likely to be a Medinan insertion.<sup>12</sup>

It follows, then, that the Medinan surahs in particular present Muhammad’s prophetic mission as aimed at the scriptureless and the scripture-bearers alike, and in this sense cast it as universal. Such a universal understanding of Muhammad’s remit, moreover, accords with the tripartite historical scheme underlying Surah 2, leading from the primordial lapse of Adam to the contrasting establishment of a positive standard of righteousness and piety by Abraham to the communal embodiment of this Abrahamic exemplar in the form of the Medinan *ummah* (HCI 103–104). The Medinan *ummah* is thus correlated with the individual ancestor of all of humanity, Adam, and in this sense takes on a world-historical role—especially if one accepts that Q 33:40, calling Muhammad the “seal of the prophets” (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*), casts him as God’s final messenger (see under → *khatama*).

Yet even if Muhammad assumes a world-historical role in the Medinan Qur’an, this does not entail that the implicit objective of the Medinan surahs was a scenario in which the

11 Thus, according to Mohsen Goudarzi, Muhammad’s ministry had the “goal of broadening the remit of divine election to include all of Abraham’s children—descendants of Ishmael as well as those of Isaac and Jacob” (Goudarzi 2019, 483). If that is correct, then even in the Medinan surahs non-Abrahamite humanity would simply remain outside the Qur’an’s focus.

12 Following on from a statement about previous messengers (Q 16:43) that is virtually identical with Q 21:7, 16:44 apprises the Qur’anic Messenger that he has received “reminding exhortation” so that he might “make clear to the people what was sent down to them” (*wa-anzalnā ilayka l-dhikra li-tubayyina li-l-nāsi mā nuzzila ilayhim*). Though Surah 16 as a whole is Meccan, it is clear that it contains other Medinan insertions as well, such as the allusions to emigration in Q 16:41–42.110 (GQ 145–146; Neuwirth 2007, 300–301) and the dietary rules in 16:114–118 (Sinai 2019c, 130–131). As regards Q 16:44, the verse sits oddly in its immediate context. The immediately preceding verse, Q 16:43, instructs the addressees to seek authoritative confirmation from “the recipients of reminding exhortation” (*ahl al-dhikr*), who must be the Jews and/or Christians. Yet Q 16:44 then goes on to present the recipients of prior revelations as themselves standing in need of clarifying instruction, which would seem to undercut the function they are supposed to play according to v. 43. Also noteworthy is the phrase *li-tubayyina li-l-nāsi* from Q 16:44, since all other occurrences of the verb *bayyana* together with the prepositional object *li-l-nās* are found in Medinan surahs (Q 2:159.187.221, 3:187; cf. 22:5; 3:138 has *bayāmun li-l-nāsi*). If Q 16:44 is indeed a Medinan insertion, its presumptive function would be to counteract the apparent recourse to Jews and Christians as a source of authoritative knowledge in the preceding verse: the Qur’anic Messenger, rather than deriving his authority from Jewish and/or Christian recognition, as Q 16:43 might seem to imply, is in fact endowed with the authority to instruct Jews and Christians too.



ranks of the Qur’anic *ummah* were to be swollen by ever more global converts, the intended outcome being that the Qur’anic *ummah* would eventually encompass all of humankind (cf. Jesus’s command to “make disciples of all nations” or *ethnē* in Matt 28:19). There is no unequivocal textual warrant for attributing to the Medinan Qur’an the vision of establishing a proselytising world religion of the kind eventually exemplified by post-Qur’anic Islam. Instead, it is preferable to understand the assumed universal role of Muhammad and his followers in line with Q 2:143, 22:78, and 3:110: the Qur’anic believers are to function as an exemplary beacon for the rest of humanity, as “the best community ever brought forth for people, enjoining right and dissuading from wrong” (Q 3:110: *kuntum khayra ummatin ukhrijat li-l-nāsi ta’murūna bi-l-ma’rūfi wa-tanhawna ‘ani l-munkari*), and as a “middle” or “intermediate” community (*ummah wasat*) who will be “witnesses” over the remainder of humankind, just as the Qur’anic Messenger functions as a “witness” (*shahīd*) over the Qur’anic believers (Q 2:143, similarly 22:78). As other passages make clear, the Prophet’s role in relation to his believing followers is that of a “good exemplar” (Q 33:21: *uswah ḥasanah*) who will model to them a righteous and pious life, just as “Abraham and those with him,” too, provide the believers with a “good exemplar” (Q 60:4.6; cf. also 2:124 and 16:120, employing the apparent synonyms → *ummah* and *imām*).<sup>13</sup> Humans wanting to live a life apt to pass eschatological scrutiny, the Qur’an assumes, require concrete role models to emulate, and just as Abraham and also Muhammad functioned or function as an individual role model (*ummah, imam, uswah*) for “the people,” *li-l-nāsi* (Q 2:124), so the believers are to serve as a collective model—as a communal exemplar or *ummah*—for “the people,” *li-l-nāsi* (Q 3:110), that is, for all those who are not, or not yet, part of the *ummah* (cf. Denny 1975, 55).

Bearing all of this in mind, it is interesting to take another look at the meaning of *shahīd* in Q 2:143 and 22:78. Both verses call the Qur’anic believers “witnesses over the people” (*shuhadā’ ‘alā l-nāsi*). The sense that these two passages would seem to attach to the word is not that of someone who will function as a witness of divine prosecution at the eschatological judgement, as in other passages (see under → *ummah* and → *rasūl*), but rather that of someone who bears authoritative testimony regarding God and the life that he would have humans lead. Corroborating this interpretation, the description of the Qur’anic community as “witnesses” in these two verses may well be a deliberate echo of Isa 43:10, where the people of Israel are called YHWH’s “witnesses” (*‘ēday*, Peshitta: *sāhday*; see also Isa 44:8).<sup>14</sup> The global or universal role of the Qur’anic *ummah* in human history is thus conceived in terms very similar to the function of a “light to the nations” that is ascribed to the people of Israel elsewhere in the book of Isaiah (Isa 42:6, 49:6). Indeed, the Qur’an hints that the Israelites were given a similar task, in so far as Q 3:187 relates that “those who were given the scripture” were charged with “making the scripture clear to the people and not concealing it” (*la-tubayyinunnahu li-l-nāsi wa-lā taktumūnahu*).<sup>15</sup> Here, the prepositional syntagm *li-l-nās*, “to the people,” is the same one also encountered in Q 3:110, cited above, even though 3:187 makes it very clear that the previous recipients of God’s scripture failed to carry out what was expected of them.

<sup>13</sup> See also Q 43:59, which may be casting Jesus, too, as a model and exemplar, though the term used here is → *mathal*.

<sup>14</sup> I owe my awareness of the Biblical parallel to Levenson 1996, 155. By way of a supplementary remark on Q 2:143 and 22:78, see Sinai 2018a, 25, surmising that the application of the word *shahīd* to Muhammad may here have connotations of episcopal oversight.

<sup>15</sup> On *katama*, see under → *ahl al-kitāb*.

The preceding also throws additional light on the famous assertion that God has made the Qur’anic believers a “middle community” (Q 2:143: *ummatan wasaṭan*). This means probably not, or not merely, that their beliefs and practices chart out an ideally moderate course (e.g., Ṭab. 2:626–627),<sup>16</sup> but also that they are to function as a global focal point exemplifying the qualities of piety and righteousness that God intends other humans to emulate. Taking inspiration from the Pakistani scholar Jāwēd Aḥmad Ghāmīdī, we might say that the Qur’anic community is one that is supposed to *mediate* between God and the rest of humanity by bearing witness to him.<sup>17</sup> Another expression for this exemplary standing of the Qur’anic *ummah*, it seems, is the recurrent phrase “enjoining right and dissuading from wrong” (see under → *ma’rūf*): similar to Q 3:110, quoted above, a slightly earlier verse in the same surah, 3:104, addresses the believers by saying that “from you<sup>p</sup> shall come to be a community summoning to good, enjoining right, and dissuading from wrong” (*wa-l-takun minkum ummatun yad’ūna ilā l-khayri wa-ya’murūna bi-l-ma’rūfi wa-yanhawna ‘ani l-munkari*).

All of this bears out the claim that the implied aim of Muhammad’s ministry is not a global proselytising effort by means of which all humans will ultimately be inducted into the Medinan *ummah*. Indeed, other Medinan passages make it perfectly clear that a plurality of human communities, set apart by different practices and customs (although not by substantially different religious beliefs), is an inevitable feature of the present cosmic order (Q 5:48) and that the members of other religious communities than the Qur’anic *ummah* are by no means precluded from achieving eschatological salvation (Q 2:62, 5:69; see in more detail under → *aslama*). Drawing on a book chapter by Jon Levenson whose conceptual importance to students of the Qur’an has recently been underscored by Goudarzi (Goudarzi 2019, 481–482), one may summarise the preceding by saying that the Qur’anic *ummah*’s divinely intended role in history lay not in absorbing the other human communities existing alongside it but rather in opening up a “universal horizon” (Levenson 1996) serving to orient the rest of humankind during the period of time—quite possibly believed to be limited—that was left until the resurrection (see under → *sā’ah*). To be sure, the Qur’an’s tolerance for pluralism and diversity has unequivocal limits: any “association” or “partnering” (*shirk*; see under → *ashraka*) of other beings with God is to be eradicated, if needs be by force of arms (see under → *jāhada*), and all religious worship (→ *dīn*<sup>2</sup>) must be directed at God alone (Q 2:193 and 8:39: *wa-qātilūhum ḥattā lā takūna fitnatun wa-yakūna l-dīnu ± <kulluhu> li-llāhi*; see also 9:33, 48:28, 61:9: *huwa lladhī arsala rasūlahu bi-l-hudā wa-dīni l-ḥaqqi li-yuḥhirahu ‘alā l-dīni kullihī*). But while this means that the Qur’anic *ummah* is tasked with modelling and enforcing true belief in and worship of God, it does not set out the homogenising vision of uniting all humans in one global community.

<sup>16</sup> In favour of this understanding of the phrase “middle community,” one could cite Q 5:66 (*KK* 35), referring to a “moderate community” (*ummah muqtaṣidah*) among the scripture-owners. But as Q 35:32 shows (see under → *ahl al-kitāb*), the attribute *muqtaṣid* is relatively faint praise and probably means “middling” rather than “ideally balanced.” That, of course, is still something; but it does undermine the ability of Q 5:66 to function as a parallel to Q 2:143, which must have a more unequivocally positive purport.

<sup>17</sup> See <https://www.javedahmedghamidi.org/#!/quran?chapter=2&paragraph=65&type=Ghamidi>, no. 350 (accessed 23 November 2021), pointed out to me by Saqib Hussain. According to the English version of Ghāmīdī’s commentary, the Qur’anic *ummah* is “intermediate” in the sense of standing between God and the nations of the world.

The Medinan surahs thus provide at least the cornerstones of a theology of the *ummah*.<sup>18</sup> The importance that the Qur’anic *ummah* takes on in this vision also explains why the verses immediately surrounding Q 3:104—namely, 3:103 and 3:105—express such concern that the community of believers might fall into disagreement and divisions (see the remarks on *ikhtalafa* under → *bayyana*): if the instrument by which God reaches out to humanity at large is to be the *ummah*, then preserving the latter’s unity and continuing existence until the final judgement are crucial stepping-stones in God’s larger plan with humanity. It deserves to be added that this idea at least partly suffices to circumvent the question how a linguistically specific set of revelations—namely, the “Arabic Qur’an” brought by Muhammad (e.g., Q 12:2, 43:3)—might have a universal significance for humankind at large. After all, even after the hijrah, Meccan statements like Q 12:2 or 14:4 (every messenger is sent “in the language of his people”) would have continued to be known to Muhammad’s followers. Still, Medinan intimations that Muhammad and the Qur’anic *ummah* have an ecumenical role to play do not engender a proper contradiction with these earlier Meccan topoi: though the Qur’anic proclamations may be customised to speak to an Arabophone audience, those unable to receive God’s guidance in its Qur’anic form will still be able to observe the “community summoning to good, enjoining right, and dissuading from wrong” (Q 3:104) that has come to be from Muhammad’s revelations, and will accordingly have access to a communal, rather than textual, embodiment of God’s will. Muhammad and the Qur’anic revelations mediate God’s guidance to his immediate followers, while the community of the believers that has formed around him mediates God’s guidance to the rest of the ecumene.

What the foregoing makes clear, in any case, is that the Medinan Qur’an can justifiably be said to articulate a more universalist understanding of Muhammad’s mission than the Meccan surahs, in which the horizon of Muhammad’s preaching does not transcend an Arab or Arabophone audience. It may well be that from the Medinan Qur’an’s more universalist vantage point, earlier Meccan statements defining the remit of the Qur’anic revelations as being *li-l-‘ālamīn* and *li-l-nās* would have been construed by Muhammad’s followers in a more verbatim sense than their presumptive original force. As we saw, the “people” (*nās*) for whom the Qur’anic *ummah* is to function as an exemplary beacon according to Q 2:143 and 3:110 is likely to be humankind at large. Against this background, when a Medinan addition to a Meccan surah instructs Muhammad to say, “O people (*yā-ayyuhā l-nāsu*)! I am God’s Messenger to you all (Q 7:158: *innī rasūlu llāhi ilaykum jamī’an*),”<sup>19</sup> one might understand this quite literally. It would seem, therefore, that the Qur’anic believers’ relocation to Medina, where they were joined by non-Qurashī “helpers” (*anṣār*; Q 9:100.117) and came to rub shoulders with a local Jewish community (→ *al-yahūd*), coincided with a palpable widening of the Meccan surahs’ preoccupation with “the mother-town and those dwelling around it” (Q 6:92, 42:7). This broadening of Muhammad’s mission did not however lead to a negation of the singular importance of the Meccan sanctuary (see under → *bayt*). Instead, like the Qur’anic *ummah*, that sanctuary was now given, in Q 3:96, a universal role in God’s dealings with humanity at large, in so far as it came to be described as “the first house [of worship] established for the people” (again, *li-l-nāsi*) and as “guidance for the world-dwellers” (see *HCI* 205–206).

<sup>18</sup> One might consider this a Qur’anic analogue of Christian ecclesiology, though the Qur’anic *ummah* is of course a political community as well.

<sup>19</sup> On the Medinan date of Q 7:157–158, see under → *ummī*.

**‘alā** intr. *fī l-ard* | to rise high in the land / on earth

→ *afsada*

**ta‘ālā** intr. *‘an* | to be exalted above s.th.

→ *ḥamd*

**‘amad** | pillar

→ *samā’*

**‘amara** tr. | to inhabit a place, to stay at a place, to visit a place; to cultivate s.th., to maintain or administer s.th., to bear responsibility for keeping s.th. in good repair

**i‘tamara** tr. or intr. | to undertake a cultic visit to somewhere (namely, to the Ka‘bah); to perform the *‘umrah*

**‘umrah** | cultic visit (to the Ka‘bah)

Further vocabulary discussed: *ḥajj* | pilgrimage *masjid* | place of prostration, place of worship *al-masjid al-ḥarām* | the sacred place of prostration *bayt* | house *ḥajja* tr. | to perform the pilgrimage to somewhere

The first-form verb *‘amara*. Muslim lexicographers gloss *‘amara* + acc. as meaning, among other things, “to inhabit, to stay at” as well as “to cultivate, to keep in good repair” (*AEL* 2154). Safaitic *‘mr* + acc. can similarly be taken to mean “to inhabit, to stay at” (see C 2953 and MKWS 8 in Al-Jallad 2015a, 238 and 273). The aptness of the general semantic range thus circumscribed is confirmed by Q 30:9, where *‘amara* must have the sense of cultivating, namely, the earth (*CDKA* 194). It is worth noting that in the second one of the Safaitic attestations just cited, the stay in question is a short one of a mere six days. This invites the hypothesis that Arabic *‘amara*, too, can signify a brief visit and not only long-term residence. This, in turn, explains why the term *‘umrah*—which in Q 2:196 figures next to the → *ḥajj*—designates the so-called minor pilgrimage, or rather “visit,” to the Meccan sanctuary.

Some uncertainty arises with regard to two further occurrences of *‘amara* and its verbal noun *‘imārah* in Q 9:17–19. Assuming the translation “to maintain, to administer,” for which I shall argue in what follows, the passage declares that the associators are not entitled to “administer God’s places of prostration” (*an ya‘murū masājid allāh*), given that they “bear witness against themselves that they are repudiators” (*shāhidīna ‘alā anfusihim bi-l-kufri*; v. 17). Rather, only someone who believes in God and in the final day, performs prayer, gives alms, and fears only God is allowed to “administer God’s places of prostration” (v. 18). Q 9:19, in commenting further on this, employs the verbal noun *‘imārah*, and links “administering (*‘imārah*) the sacred place of prostration” with “giving water to the pilgrims” (*siqāyat al-ḥājj*). This pairing in particular makes it compelling to understand *‘amara* and its verbal noun *‘imārah* to mean “to maintain, to take care of, to administer” in Q 9:17–19. The point of the passage, therefore, is to strip the associators of the right to oversee and manage the Meccan sanctuary (see *KK* 197), i.e., to divest them of control over it.

Other translators, however, take ‘*amara* to mean “to inhabit, to dwell at” in Q 9:17 ff. (e.g., Arberry 1955 and Droge 2013). On this reading, the issue under discussion is not administrative control over the sanctuary but rather the more basic right to reside there—or perhaps even the right to attend it at all, as suggested by Jones 2007, who translates ‘*amara* as “to visit.” A general prohibition on the associators coming near the sanctuary is articulated slightly later in Surah 9, in Q 9:28 (discussed under → *ṭahara*), and this might dispose one to construe Q 9:17–19 in the light of this subsequent verse. But it is also conceivable that Q 9:28 voices a further tightening of the restrictions placed on the associators in 9:17–19, perhaps because 9:28 postdates 9:17 ff. Q 9:28 does not, accordingly, sway the balance of argument over the meaning of ‘*amara* in Q 9:17–19 either way. The aforementioned observation that Q 9:19 combines “*imārah* of the sacred place of prostration” with providing pilgrims with water, however, remains salient and affords at least circumstantial evidence that the applicable sense of ‘*amara* in 9:17–19 has to do with logistical and organisational responsibility for running the sanctuary.

The problem of the meaning of ‘*amara* receives little further illumination from the early Meccan reference to *al-bayt al-ma‘mūr* in Q 52:4, which could in principle accommodate all of the different translations just entertained, such as “the house [continuously?] inhabited” (see Arberry 1955 and Droge 2013), “the house [assiduously?] frequented [by worshippers]” (see Paret 2001 and Jones 2007), or “the house that is well maintained” (corresponding to the alternative translation provided in Paret 2001).

**The eighth-form verb *i‘tamara*.** The only Qur’anic occurrence of the eighth-form verb *i‘tamara* is found at Q 2:158, containing the segment *fa-man ḥajja l-bayta awi ‘tamara*. This likely parallels a phrase in Q 2:196, enjoining the addressees to “perform the *ḥajj* and the ‘*umrah*,” such that *man ḥajja l-bayta awi ‘tamara* in 2:158 ought to be rendered “those who perform the *ḥajj* to the house or undertake a cultic visitation (‘*umrah*) [of it].” *I‘tamara* could be construed as implicitly transitive here, just as ‘*amara* is transitive in Q 9:17–18, although one might in this case have expected *awi ‘tamarahu* rather than *awi ‘tamara*<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, *i‘tamara* could be intransitive, “to perform the ‘*umrah*.”

***ista‘mara* tr. *fī l-ard* | to settle s.o. on the earth**  
→ *makkana*

**‘*amila l-ṣāliḥāti/ṣāliḥan* | to do righteous deeds**  
→ *ṣāliḥ*

**‘*amiya* intr. | to be or become blind**  
**‘*amā* | blindness**  
***a‘mā* | blind**  
**‘*amūn* pl. | blind**

<sup>1</sup> Still, a transitive use of *i‘tamara* is confirmed by the lexica, according to which *i‘tamara* means “to visit” (AEL 2154).

Further vocabulary discussed: *qalb* | heart *waqr* | heaviness *akinnah* pl. | covers *šamma* intr. | to be deaf *ašamm* | deaf *abkam* | mute *bašīr* | sighted, having eyesight *abšara* intr. | to see, to have eyesight *ḡalālah* | being astray, going astray *hudā* | guidance *khatama* intr. ‘*alā* | to seal s.th. *ṭaba‘a* intr. ‘*alā* | to seal s.th. *bašar* | eyesight *marīḡ* | ill, sick *a‘raj* | lame *tazakkā* intr. | to purify o.s., to keep o.s. pure *tadhakkara* intr. | to heed God’s hortatory reminders

**Blindness, deafness, and muteness as metaphors for unbelief.** Similar to the human heart (→ *qalb*), the Qur’an often describes the senses of hearing and sight as impervious to divine exhortation. For instance, Q 6:25, 17:46, 31:7, and 41:5.44 speak of ears suffering from heaviness or dullness (*waqr*), sometimes in conjunction with hearts that are “under covers” (*fī akinnah*). In many other verses, too, blindness (‘*m-y*), deafness (*š-m-m*), and also muteness (*b-k-m*) serve as metaphors for inveterate unbelief, while being “sighted” (*bašīr*) or “seeing” (*abšara*) represent the ability to grasp God’s guidance (e.g., Q 2:18.171, 5:71, 6:39.50.104, 7:64, 8:22, 11:24, 13:16.19, 16:76, 25:73, 27:66).<sup>1</sup> Several verses tell the Messenger that he is unable to “guide the blind” (see Q 10:43, 27:81, 30:53, 43:40), sometimes with the addition “out of their astrayness” (*‘an ḡalālatihim*; → *ḡalla*), or to “cause the deaf to hear” (Q 10:42, 27:80, 30:52, 43:40; cf. 21:45), meaning that his preaching will not sway hardened repudiators. Q 41:17 explicitly opposes “blindness” (*‘amā*), clearly employed in the figurative sense of religious blindness, to “guidance” (*hudā*; → *hadā*). Moreover, those who turn away from God’s address, and thereby prove themselves to be blind in this world, are threatened with literal blindness, muteness, and deafness on the day of resurrection (Q 17:72.97, 20:124–126).

In some statements, God is explicitly identified as the one responsible for blocking or “sealing” (→ *khatama* or *ṭaba‘a ‘alā*) the hearing and sight of humans, in the sense of making them unresponsive to divine signs and revelations. As explained elsewhere, this does not necessarily have predestinarian implications (see under → *khatama* and → *qalb*).

**Literal disability in the Qur’an.** The metaphorical invocations of disability just presented must be kept distinct from the Qur’an’s treatment of literal disability. The distinction between metaphorical blindness and literal blindness is expressed rather clearly in Q 22:46: after posing the rhetorical question whether the Qur’anic opponents lack “hearts with which to understand” and “ears with which to hear,” the final segment of the verse underlines that “it is not the eyes that are blind but the hearts in the breasts” (*fa-‘innahā lā ta‘mā l-abšāru wa-lākin ta‘mā l-qulūbu llatī fī l-šudūr*; see also under → *qalb*). As regards bodily illness and disability, a number of Medinan passages (Q 2:184.185.196, 4:43.102, 5:6, 9:91, 24:61, 48:17, 73:20) contain special provisions and alleviations of certain commandments for those who are literally ill (*marīḡ*; see also under → *marāḡ*), blind, or lame (*a‘raj*). Moreover, the association between blindness and other disabilities, on the one hand, and insufficient moral or religious performance, on the other, that arises from the material discussed in the previous section is to some degree counterbalanced by the early Meccan passage Q 80:1–10. It reprimands the Qur’anic Messenger for turning away from a blind man who, the Qur’an say, may go on to “purify himself” (*tazakkā*; see under → *zakāh*) and “heed God’s hortatory reminders” (*tadhakkara*; → *dhakkara*). This too drives home that literal blindness and metaphorical blindness to God’s guidance are two different matters.

1 On statements predicating the attribute “seeing” (*bašīr*) of God, see under → *allāh*.



**‘ahida** intr. *ilā (an)* | to impose an obligation or obligations on s.o. (to do s.th.)

**‘ahida** intr. *‘inda* | to enter into an agreement, contract, treaty, or covenant with s.o.

**‘āhada** tr. (*‘alā*) | to conclude an agreement, contract, treaty, or covenant with s.o. (entailing a commitment to do s.th.)

**‘ahd** | agreement, contract, treaty, covenant

→ *wāthaqa*

**a‘āda l-khalqa** | to recreate, to create again

→ *aḥyā*, → *khalaqa*

**ista‘ādha** intr. *bi-* | to seek s.o.’s protection

→ *ṣallā*

**‘īsā** | Jesus

See the remarks under → *isrā’īl*, → *rasūl*, → *al-masīh*, and → *al-naṣārā*. For a more detailed and systematic treatment of the Qur’anic Jesus narratives, see Reynolds, forthcoming.

**‘ayn** | eye

On Qur’anic statements about God’s eyes, see → *allāh*.

**‘īn pl.** | wide-eyed maidens

→ *ḥūr*

# gh

**ghasala** tr. | to wash s.th.

**ighsasala** intr. | to wash o.s.

→ *tahara*

**ghishāwah** | covering

→ *khatama*

**ghaḍiba** ‘*alā* | to be angry at s.o., to be filled with wrath towards s.o.

**ghaḍab** | wrath, anger

Further vocabulary discussed: *al-rahmān* | the Merciful *intaqama* intr. *min* | to exact retribution from s.o. *rijz/rujz* | punishment *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *la‘ana* tr. | to curse s.o. *la‘nah* | curse *tawallā* tr. | to take s.o. as an ally or close associate *tāba* intr. (*ilā llāh*) | to repent, to turn to God in repentance (said of humans) *tāba* intr. ‘*alā* | to turn to s.o. in forgiveness (said of God) *nasiya* tr./intr. | to forget (s.th. or s.o.) *makara* intr., *kāda* intr. | to plot or scheme, to devise or execute a plot or scheme ‘*adhāb* | torment; punishment, chastisement ‘*adhhaba* tr. | to torment s.o.; to punish or chastise s.o.

**Overview.** Notions of divine wrath, contrasting with and complementing divine mercy, play an important role in ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and late antique conceptions of the divine (e.g., Kratz and Spieckermann 2008; see also Reynolds 2020, 165–166). The Qur’an stands squarely in this broad tradition of anthropopathic theological discourse, just as the Qur’anic deity is implied to be corporeal and humanoid (→ *allāh*). Thus, the Qur’an includes, for instance, retellings of a prominent Biblical episode of divine anger, the Israelites’ worship of the Golden Calf, in the wake of which Moses had to dissuade God from letting his wrath “burn hot against” the Israelites and from “consuming” them (Exod 32:10–14). What follows is a succinct overview of Qur’anic references to God’s wrath, subdivided into Meccan and Medinan surahs and concluded by some general remarks on the way in which the various anthropopathic traits that the Qur’an ascribes to God—such as mercy and love, on the one hand, and wrath and retaliatory scheming, on the other—relate and respond to antecedent human righteousness or sin.

**Divine wrath in the Meccan surahs.** In the Meccan Qur’an, the dialectic of God’s mercy (see under → *al-rahmān*) and wrath is prominently signalled in Sūrat al-Fātiḥah, which both calls God the “truly Merciful” (Q 1:3: *al-rahmān al-rahīm*) and concludes by evoking those who are subject to his wrath (Q 1:7: *al-maghḍūb ‘alayhim*). Other references to God’s

wrath in Meccan surahs are found in Q 7:71.152, 16:106, 20:81.86, and 42:16. Of these verses, Q 7:152 and 20:81.86 occur in the context of the Israelites' wanderings after the Exodus and especially their veneration of the Golden Calf, continuing the Biblical link between this episode and God's wrath. In addition, Q 7:150.154 refer to the wrath of Moses against the worshippers of the Golden Calf, which clearly mirrors God's wrath from v. 152.<sup>1</sup> Especially in Surah 7's recounting of the Israelites' veneration of the Golden Calf and of a following encounter between God and seventy Israelites, one observes that the allusions to anger in vv. 150, 152, and 154 are surrounded, interspersed, and counterbalanced by multiple pleas for and evocations of divine mercy (*r-h-m*; see vv. 149, 151, 153, 154, 155, and 156). Like the Fātiḥah, this foregrounds God's dual capacity to be both merciful and angry. It has been argued that references to God's wrath in the context of the Golden Calf narratives from Surahs 7 and 20 are later insertions that reflect only a subsequent Medinan "discovery of divine wrath" (Neuwirth 2010, 518), but as shown in the excursus below this hypothesis is open to grave objections. Despite the prominence of divine wrath in the Qur'anic accounts of the incident of the Golden Calf, moreover, one must note that the Israelites are by no means the only targets of God's anger in Meccan surahs: in Q 7:71 it is the people of 'Ād who are threatened with God's wrath, while Q 16:106 announces God's wrath against those who revert to repudiation after having believed in God (see also Q 42:16). Divine ire is thus a stance whose potential objects can be any human miscreant rather than one exclusively associated with the Israelites (against Neuwirth 2017, 345; see also Reynolds 2020, 167–168).

Although Neuwirth's Medinan dating of the Qur'an's "discovery of divine wrath" is not tenable, the hypothesis that at some point in the Qur'an's genesis there was such a "discovery" is apt, since there are no early Meccan occurrences of the root *gh-d-b*, with the sole exception of the final verse of the Fātiḥah (Q 1:7). Assuming that the Fātiḥah dates to the early Meccan period, based on what is probably a retrospective reference to it in Q 15:87 (see under → *mathānī*), Q 1:7 emerges as the chronologically first explicit Qur'anic reference to divine wrath. Conceivably, this earliest invocation of God's anger serves to counterbalance what is also one of the earliest Qur'anic occurrences of the divine name → *al-raḥmān*, "the Merciful," in Q 1:3.

It is true, of course, that early Meccan surahs make statements about God or rather about his actions that to some degree imply his propensity to just ire. Thus, apart from stirring threats of eschatological torment (e.g., Q 74:8–30) and allusions to various divine chastisements in previous history (e.g., Q 73:15–16), Q 15:79 describes God as exacting retribution (*fa-ntaqamnā minhum*). Another early Meccan statement that likely had at least a connotation of divine wrath is Q 74:5. It urges the Messenger to "shun" → *al-rujz/al-rijz*, approximately translatable as "punishment." As noted in the respective entry, *rujz/rijz* is cognate with, and likely derived from, Syriac *rūgzā*, "wrath," and indeed in Q 7:71 its variant *rijs* is paired with *ghaḍab*.<sup>2</sup> Still, the Qur'anic use of *rujz/rijz* would seem to foreground the external expressions of divine wrath (i.e., the punishment ensuing from it) rather than the mental or emotional state giving rise to it. In fact, none of the early

1 Cf. the similar symmetry between Exod 32:11–13 (Moses assuages the wrath of God) and Exod 32:22 (Aaron assuages the wrath of Moses).

2 Apart from Q 74:5, *rijz/rujz* also figures in the later Meccan verses 7:134.135.162, 10:100, 29:34, 34:5, and 45:11 (cf. also 6:125 with *rijs*).

Meccan material just reviewed expressly adopts a language of anthropopathic emotional characterisation. Explicit statements about divine wrath like Q 1:7 therefore mark an appreciable development in Qur’anic theology, an anthropopathic enrichment of the Qur’an’s conceptual resources for representing the deity.

**Divine wrath in the Medinan surahs.** The Medinan portions of the Qur’an include further references to God’s wrath. Three surahs continue the association of God’s wrath specifically with the Israelites or with the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*; Q 2:61.90, 3:112, 5:60; see also Reynolds 2020, 166–167 and 169–171). But once again, others, too, run the risk of incurring God’s anger if they intentionally kill a believer (Q 4:93), are guilty of cowardice before the enemy (Q 8:16), or are hypocrites or associators who “think evil thoughts of God” (*al-zānnīna bi-llāhi ḡanna l-saw’i*; Q 48:6). Q 24:6–9 outline an ordeal-like procedure for situations in which a husband accuses his wife of adultery without being able to produce any witnesses other than himself. It is stipulated that the husband is to call down God’s “curse” upon himself should he lie (v. 7: *anna la’nata llāhi ‘alayhi in kāna mina l-kādhībīn*), but that the accused wife can avert human punishment by invoking God’s “wrath” on herself should he tell the truth (v. 9: *anna ḡhaḡaba llāhi ‘alayhā in kāna mina l-ṣādiqīn*). The operative assumption is clearly that if either of the two parties is culpable, he or she will fall victim to God’s ire either in the present world or in the hereafter, thus obviating the need for human intervention. The same association of God’s wrath and his curse (verb: *la’ana*, noun: *la’nah*) is also seen in some other Medinan verses, namely, Q 4:93, 5:60, and 48:6. Two further, more enigmatic Medinan references to divine wrath are found in Q 58:14 and 60:13, according to which one must not “take as allies” (*tawallā*) “a people who are subject to God’s wrath” (*qawman ḡhaḡiba llāhu ‘alayhim*). It is conceivable that this is a reference to the Israelites/Jews or the scripture-owners, given other verses that depict them as subject to divine wrath (thus, e.g., Reynolds 2020, 290, n. 29).

**General remarks on divine wrath and mercy in the Qur’an.** The overall impression emerging from Qur’anic statements about divine wrath is that God’s anger, like his love and mercy (see again under → *al-rahmān*), is proportionate to the ethico-religious standing of the individuals who form its objects: divine anger is presented throughout as a response—no doubt an emotional response (Reynolds 2020, 162)—to grave prior wrongdoing, such as the Israelites’ worship of the Golden Calf. The fact that God’s stance towards humans is a commensurate reaction to the stance that humans adopt towards God, and also to other humans, explains why there is ultimately no contradiction between God’s ability to be merciful and to be wrathful: both are differential responses to different human behaviours. God’s differential and proportionate responsiveness to human actions is, in fact, an important general Qur’anic theme that manifests itself with regard to other concepts as well. It is, for instance, reflected in bipartite statements employing the verbs → *tāba* (said either of penitent human “turning” towards God or God’s forgiving “turning” towards humans), → *nasiya* (“to forget”), and → *makara* (“to plot or scheme”) or its synonym *kāda*: if humans penitently turn to God, he will forgivingly turn to them; if they forget God, he will forget them; if they plot or scheme against God or his messengers, God will outscheme them.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, while the Qur’anic deity is credited with a wide range of anthropopathic states, these states are ultimately expressive of a divine commitment to justice that surpasses any

3 See also Q 17:8 (*wa-in udtum ‘udnā*).

human equivalent: as illustrated by the ordeal procedure from Surah 24, God's ability to feel wrath ensures that he will dispense justice where human judges, who may be hampered by finite insight, would be unable to do so. In sum, it would be a mistake to view Qur'anic (or, for that matter, Biblical) ascriptions of divine wrath as primitive residues that are progressively to be stripped away by loftier conceptions of the divine, or to think of divine emotions as something that is bound to cloud God's justice (as suggested in Reynolds 2020, 162). Rather, attributing to God emotional states like love and wrath plays the vital role of explaining why an omnipotent, omniscient, and eternal divine being would sufficiently care about rights and wrongs in the human sphere in order to do anything about them. The implied answer to this question is that human deeds have an emotional resonance in God, thereby disposing him to react to them in specific ways. God is not "hurt or wronged" by unbelief and sin, which from the Qur'anic perspective would inacceptably imply his vulnerability (Marshall 1999, 86).<sup>4</sup> But the Qur'anic God is nonetheless emotionally attuned to and affected by the moral valence of human actions.

This entry is appropriately concluded by noting that Qur'anic recourse to the notion of divine wrath remains overall much less significant in quantitative terms than statements about the objective consequences of such wrath, both in the present world and the hereafter. This is clearly shown by comparing the Qur'an's 24 occurrences of the root *gh-d-b* with its more than 300 instances of the noun *'adhāb*, "punishment," and the 41 occurrences of the verb → *'adhdhaba*, "to punish," both of which are found from the early Meccan to the Medinan surahs. This apparent tendency to affirm the basic applicability of anthropomorphic language to God while keeping statements about God's interior states within relatively narrow limits resembles the Qur'an's similarly cautious and selective espousal of anthropomorphic language (see under → *allāh*).

### Excursus: Are the References to God's Wrath in Surahs 7 and 20 Insertions?

As noted above, Angelika Neuwirth has claimed that the references to God's wrath found in the accounts of the Israelites' worship of the Golden Calf in Surahs 7 and 20 are Medinan additions (Neuwirth 2004; Neuwirth 2010, 518–524; Neuwirth 2017, 342–344). In the present context, the relevant verses that she identifies as Medinan are Q 20:80–82 and 7:152–153. With regard to Q 20:80–82, her main argument is that the vocative "O Israelites" (*yā-banī isrā'īla*) opening v. 80 is most likely an address of the Medinan Jews, leading her to infer that the entire verse group is therefore Medinan (Neuwirth 2004, 79; Neuwirth 2010, 522–523; Neuwirth 2017, 342–343). Neuwirth furthermore highlights the reference, in Q 20:80, to God's bestowal of "manna and quails" upon the Israelites (*wa-nazzalnā 'alaykumu l-manna wa-l-salwā*), and the demand, in Q 20:81, that the Israelites eat of the "good things" that God has "provided" for them without "committing excess" with regard to them (*kulū min ṭayyibāti mā razaqnākum wa-lā taṭghaw fīhi*), which she also considers to speak to a Medinan context (Neuwirth 2017, 342–343).

The presence of Medinan insertions in later Meccan surahs undeniably requires further analysis. It is likely or even probable, for instance, that Surah 7 does indeed include

<sup>4</sup> In support of the Qur'anic assumption of divine invulnerability, Marshall references Q 3:177 and 11:57. See also Q 3:144.176, 9:39, and 47:32.

Medinan additions, such as Q 7:157–158 (see under → *ummi* and → *al-asbāt*). The secondary nature of Q 20:80–82 and 7:152–153, however, cannot be accepted as having been proven to any standard of probability. For one, the presence of a vocative address of the Israelites in Q 20:80 is in no way conclusive. To be sure, of the six Qur’anic occurrences of “O Israelites,” five are found in Medinan surahs (Q 2:40.47.122, 5:72, 61:6). Yet Q 20:80 is amenable to being read as a divine address of the historical Israelites at the time of Moses, just as the divine voice addresses Moses himself in v. 83 (“What caused you to hasten away from your people, O Moses?,” *wa-mā a’jalaka ‘an qaumika yā-mūsā*).<sup>5</sup> Thus interpreted, the address in Q 20:80 is comparable to cases in which Qur’anic depictions of the last judgement shift to a direct divine address of the saved (see Q 43:68 and 89:27; cf. also 82:6 and 84:6, although these latter two verses are more ambivalent). One might also note God’s direct address of the Israelites in Q 7:141 (“And [remember] when we delivered you<sup>p</sup> from the people of Pharaoh”) and Q 17:4 (“And we decreed to the Israelites in the scripture, ‘Twice you<sup>p</sup> will wreak corruption in the land and rise to great height’”). Moreover, even if it were granted that the addressees of Q 20:80 are contemporary rather than historical Israelites, it is not obvious that this is inconceivable prior to the hijrah (see *QP* 321, citing Q 27:76), however much it remains true that the Meccan proclamations lack the same degree of detailed discursive engagement with and polemical confrontation of Jews and Judaism that is seen in the Medinan surahs (see under → *al-yahūd*).

Another problem is that extricating Q 20:80–82 would leave behind a jarring gap in the text, namely, a sudden leap from v. 79 (“Pharaoh led astray his people and did not guide [them]”) to v. 83 (“What caused you to hasten away from your people, O Moses?”). The Israelites’ deliverance from their pursuers, to be sure, is alluded to in v. 78, but the narrative setting required by Moses’s discovery of the Israelites’ worship of the Golden Calf in vv. 83 ff. is only supplied by v. 80 (“we made an appointment to meet you<sup>p</sup> on the right side of the mountain,” *wa-wā’adnākum jāniba l-ṭūri l-aymana*).<sup>6</sup> There are, moreover, significant lexical links between the verse group Q 20:80–82, on the one hand, and what precedes and what follows, on the other: vv. 81 and 86 threaten the Israelites with the “alighting” (*ḥalla*) of God’s “wrath” (*ghaḍab*; cf. also the use of *ghaḍbān* in v. 86); derivatives of the root *w-‘-d* occur in vv. 80, 86, 87, and 97; the root *gh-f-r* in v. 82 echoes v. 73; and the root *t-w-b* occurs in vv. 82 and 122, in both cases followed, at the end of the respective verse, by derivatives of *h-d-y*. There is also the correspondence between the vocative addressing the Israelites at the beginning of v. 80 (*yā-banī isrā’īla*) and the vocative addressing Moses at the end of v. 83 (*yā-mūsā*), creating a sequence in which the divine voice first turns to the Israelite public and then to their leader individually. All of this generates a robust prima facie impression that vv. 80–82 are well integrated into their present literary environment.

5 Neuwirth correctly notes that the speaker of the address “O Israelites” is unlikely to be Moses, who employs the vocative “O my people” (*yā-qaumī*) in Q 20:86 (Neuwirth 2017, 342). But the fact that the speaker of Q 20:80–82 is evidently God (which emerges even more clearly from the use of the first person plural *anjaynākum*) does not preclude that the addressees are the ancient Israelites.

6 In Neuwirth’s most recent analysis of Surah 20, an objectionable narrative leap between Q 20:79 and 20:83 is avoided by her auxiliary claim that the Medinan insertion at hand is not limited to vv. 80–82 but includes vv. 77–79 as well (Neuwirth 2017, 341–342). But apart from the fact that the diction of vv. 77–79 is completely inconspicuous in a Meccan surah, this widening of the alleged interpolation only shifts the narrative leap to the transition from v. 76 (which concludes Moses’s confrontation with the Egyptian sorcerers) to v. 83. In fact, the resulting gap is even more severe.



Of course, neither the narrative leap that would result from excising vv. 80–82 nor the wider passage’s lexical cohesion make it strictly impossible to posit an addition. Qur’anic narrative can move by leaps and bounds, and lexical recurrence across a Qur’anic passage could be the result of a later insertion echoing terminology already present in the literary context into which it was embedded. But the explanatory cost entailed by excising vv. 80–82 is unnecessarily high, given that these three verses exhibit little give-away Medinan terminology. For instance, it is by no means the case that the notion of repentance or of God’s conciliatory “turning towards” humans (*t-w-b*; see vv. 82 and under → *tāba*) is exclusively Medinan (see, e.g., Q 11:3.52.61.90.112, 40:7, and 46:15, in addition to 20:122). The same goes for the concatenation of “to believe” (*āmana*) and “to act righteously” (→ *‘amila ṣāliḥan*) in v. 82, which appears already in some Meccan surahs (e.g., Q 28:67.80 and 34:37); and there are also further Meccan verses employing the notion of God’s wrath (*ghaḍab*), namely, Q 7:71, 16:106, and 42:16. Moreover, the affirmation that God “delivered” the Israelites from (*anjaynākum min*) their enemies in Q 20:80 has a parallel in 7:141 (cf. also 14:8 and 26:65), and the statement that God “made an appointment” (*wā’ada*) with the Israelites at Mount Sinai, also in Q 20:80, is paralleled, in more detail, by Q 7:142.<sup>7</sup>

The one element of Q 20:80–81 whose Qur’anic parallels are likely to be exclusively Medinan is God’s sending down of manna and quails (v. 80), followed by the injunction to eat of the “good things” that God has provided (v. 81). The only other Qur’anic verses in which this combination is found are Q 2:57 and 7:160. Of these two verses, the former belongs to a surah generally accepted as Medinan, while the latter may well be a Medinan insertion (see under → *al-asbāt*). But at least appeals that God has “provided” (→ *razaqa*) humans in general and the Israelites in particular with “good things” (*ṭayyibāt*), which must not be arbitrarily spurned and declared to be forbidden, occur in Meccan passages as well (e.g., Q 7:32, 45:16; for more detail, see under → *ḥarrama*). The reference to the Israelites’ receiving manna and quails in Q 20:80 is therefore not obviously out of place in a Meccan surah, even if the narrative detail as such, which is evidently Biblical (see Exod 16 and Num 11 as well as BEQ 294), has no other Meccan counterpart.

In sum, the claim that Q 20:80–82 are Medinan is unproven. Similar objections may be raised against the position that Q 7:152–153 are Medinan. For instance, the root *gh-d-b*, found in Q 7:152, also occurs in vv. 150 and 154; and the verbs *‘amila*, *tāba*, and *āmana* from v. 153 are by no means characteristically Medinan, as shown by the references given above.

***ghafara* tr./intr. (li-) | to forgive (s.o.) (s.th.)**

***istaghfara* tr. | to ask for s.o.’s forgiveness**

***istaghfara* intr. li- | to ask for forgiveness for s.o. or s.th.**

***ghufrān*, *maghfirah* | forgiveness**

***ghafūr* | forgiving**

→ *ajr*, → *tāba*, → *al-raḥmān*, → *malak*

<sup>7</sup> Note that Q 7:141.142 are not among the verses that are singled out as Medinan additions in Neuwirth 2004, 80–85.

**ghafala** intr. ‘an | to be heedless of s.th.

**ghaflah** | heedlessness

→ āyah, → rabb, → ashraaka, → nasiya

**ghulf** pl. | uncircumcised, wrapped in foreskins

Further vocabulary discussed: **qalb** | heart **akinnah** pl. | covers **sami’a** tr./intr. | to hear (s.th.) **‘aṣā** tr./intr. | to disobey s.o. or s.th.; to be disobedient

Two Medinan verses condemn the Israelites for saying, “Our hearts are *ghulf*” (Q 2:88 and 4:155; → *qalb*). On the most likely construal, *ghulf* is a plural adjective whose Qur’anicly unattested singular is *aghlaf*, which is standardly glossed as “enwrapped in a covering” (e.g., Ṭab. 2:228–230). Both al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamaksharī hold that *aghlaf* can also, or primarily, mean “uncircumcised” (Ṭab. 2:227; Zam. 1:294; see also *AEL* 2284), and al-Zamaksharī explicitly identifies the application of the word *aghlaf* to the Israelites’ hearts as a metaphor (*musta’ārun mina l-aghlaḥi lladhī lam yukhtan*; see also the discussion in Reynolds 2010a, 149–151). The reliability of the equation of *aghlaf* specifically with “uncircumcised,” rather than just “covered,” has been questioned (*AHW* 74 and 184–185); but it is found as early as Abū ‘Ubaydah, who explains that *aghlaf* is “anything that is in a covering (*ghilāf*), and it is said, ‘a sword that is in a covering’ (*sayf aghlaf*) and ‘a bow that is in a covering’ (*qaws ghalfā*), and ‘a man who is in a covering’ (*rajul aghlaf*), when he has not been circumcised (*idhā lam yukhtatin*)” (Abū ‘Ubaydah 1955–1962, 1:46; see also Ibn Qutaybah 1978, 57).

An important further datum bearing on the meaning of the word *aghlaf* is the fact that the formulation “Our hearts are *ghulf*” from Q 2:88 and 4:155 resembles a Meccan passage describing the obduracy of what are presumably Muhammad’s pagan adversaries, Q 41:5: “They say, ‘Our hearts are separated by covers from that to which you are calling us’” (*wa-qālū qulūbunā fī akinnatin mim mā tad‘ūnā ilayhi*; see *SQ* 42–43 and 1158–1159). This inter-Qur’anic link gives rise to two basic interpretive possibilities. First, one might consider *ghulf* in Q 2:88 and 4:155 to be synonymous with *fī akinnah*, “under covers,” in Q 41:5, in accordance with those Muslim exegetes who simply employ the latter formulation as a gloss in order to elucidate the former (see, e.g., Ṭab. 2:228, quoting Ibn ‘Abbās as equating *ghulf* with *fī akinnah*). On this reading, “Our hearts are *ghulf*” would have no distinctive meaning over and above “Our hearts are under covers” from Q 41:5 (thus, apparently, the preference in *AHW* 184–185). Alternatively, one might instead suppose, with Abū ‘Ubaydah and others, that the different formulation used in Q 2:88 and 4:155 has a partially distinctive semantic content from 41:5, in so far as it evokes a glans enveloped by foreskin, thus representing the coveredness of the Israelites’ hearts by an extraordinarily concrete physiological metaphor.

The interest of the question stems largely from the fact that on the second option, the Israelites’ alleged utterance “Our hearts are uncircumcised” could be understood as an echo of Biblical accusations attributing an “uncircumcised” (*‘ārēl*, Peshitta: *‘ūrlā*) heart to God’s people (e.g., Lev 26:41 and 9:25; cf. Jer 4:4; see *WMJA* 12; *JPND* 186–187; *CQ* 157–158; *BEQ* 444; Reynolds 2010a, 152–155; on circumcision of the heart in the Bible, see also *TDOT* 7:433–434). It is not far-fetched to assume that the Medinan Jews would have been familiar with this striking Biblical image, making it a reasonable conjecture that Q 2:88 and

4:155 polemically repurposed it by dramatising it into an expression of Israelite obstinacy and defiance. This attack would have been founded on the verifiable textual fact that the Jews' very own scriptures accuse their bearers of having uncircumcised hearts. A similarly polemical exploitation of a specific Biblical formulation can be seen in the Jews' alleged statement *sami'nā wa-aṣaynā*, "We hear and disobey" (Q 2:93, 4:46), which turns a Biblical declaration of fidelity to God's law (Deut 5:27: *šāma'nū wa-āšīnū*, "We will hear and do [it]") into another expression of Israelite defiance (→ *sami'a*).

It must be stressed that when al-Ṭabarī and al-Zamaksharī suggest that *aghlaf* means "uncircumcised," they demonstrate no awareness that this lexical piece of information tallies with a reading of Q 2:88 and 4:155 as alluding to a Biblical trope. Moreover, there is no evident reason why early Muslim exegetes would have been tempted to invent the lexical piece of information that *aghlaf* can mean "uncircumcised," rather than confining themselves to glossing the word as "covered." Given the Biblical background just intimated, it does not seem to be an accident that the term *ghulf* is employed specifically in connection with the hearts of the Israelites, whereas Q 41:5, which seems to be directed against non-Jewish opponents, opts for different diction. At the same time, it is likely that the Qur'an's original readers would have heard the phrase "Our hearts are *ghulf*" as a variant on Q 41:5's "Our hearts are under covers," *qulūbunā fī akinnatin*. Quite possibly, the term *ghulf* was deliberately chosen for its multivalence, connoting both covering and lack of circumcision. A translation along the lines of "wrapped in foreskins" gives due prominence to both semantic factors at play.

The contention that Q 2:88 and 4:155 put a Biblical trope to polemical use is further strengthened by the fact that Christian discourse offers pertinent precursors, as noted already by Karl Ahrens and documented in further detail by Gabriel Reynolds (CQ 157–158; Reynolds 2010a, 153–155). For instance, Stephanus, in his speech before the high priest in Acts 7:1–53 that ends in his stoning, addresses his hearers as "you stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears" (*aperitmētoi kardiais kai tois ōsin*, Peshitta: *d-lā gzirīn b-lebbhon wa-b-mashma'thon*; Acts 7:51), and Lev 26:41 is explicitly cited in Justin's apologetic dialogue with a fictional Jewish interlocutor (*Dialogue with Trypho* 16 = Roberts et al. 1995, 1:202). As Reynolds shows, the trope of uncircumcised hearts is also deployed by Origen and John Chrysostom as well as by Syriac authors like Aphrahat and Ephrem, often in anti-Jewish contexts. Particularly noteworthy about the parallel from Acts is that Stephanus's address of his hearers as "uncircumcised in hearts and ears" is followed by the charge that the addressees' ancestors persecuted and killed the prophets (Acts 7:52). The same combination of uncircumcision of the heart and killing the prophets is also found in Q 2:87–88 and 4:155 (Reynolds 2010a, 154), providing yet further confirmation that the use of *ghulf*, in contrast with Q 41:5's *fī akinnah*, taps into anti-Jewish polemical language.

***maghlūl* | fettered**  
→ *allāh*, → *al-yahūd*

***ghill* | rancour**  
→ *jannah*, → *ṣadr*

**ghaniyy** | free from any needs

→ *ḥamd*, → *dhabāḥa*

**aghwā tr.** | to seduce s.o.

→ *shayṭān*

**ghāba intr.** | to be absent, hidden, concealed

→ *al-ghayb*

**al-ghayb** | the hidden

Further vocabulary discussed: *ghāba* intr. | to be absent, hidden, concealed *al-shahādah* | testimony; what can be witnessed, what is observable *aṭla'a* tr. *'alā* | to give s.o. insight into s.th., to inform s.o. of s.th. *awḥā* tr. *ilā* | to convey s.th. to s.o. *nabba'a* tr. *bi-/an* | to announce s.th. to s.o., to give to s.o. tidings of s.th. *āmana* intr. *bi-* | to believe in s.th. *abṣara* tr. | to see s.th. *ra'ā* tr. | to see s.th.

**Overview of Qur'anic usage.** *Al-ghayb* is the verbal noun corresponding to *ghāba*, “to be absent, hidden, concealed.” In its Qur'anic usage, the term encompasses various categories of things that are empirically inaccessible to humans (and also, according to Q 34:14, to the → *jinn*) yet are fully transparent to God, who is repeatedly said to be “the one who knows what is hidden and what is observable” (*'ālim al-ghayb wa-l-shahādah*; Q 6:73, 9:94.105, 13:9, 23:92, 32:6, 39:46, 59:22, 62:8, 64:18)<sup>1</sup> or, emphasising the comprehensive reach of his knowledge, to know “what is hidden in the heavens and on earth” (Q 2:33, 35:38, 49:18; cf. similarly 11:123, 16:77, 18:26). Other verses explicitly assert the exclusiveness of God's access to *al-ghayb* (see Q 6:59, 10:20, 27:65). In this sense, the distinction between the hidden and what can be witnessed is “a distinction made purely from the human point of view, for, from the standpoint of God, there can be no *ghayb* at all” (*GMK* 83).

God being the one who has sole and full knowledge of the things that are concealed from humans, it is his prerogative to inform them of it. Such communication of *al-ghayb* is described with the verbs *aṭla'a*, “to give s.o. insight into s.th.” (Q 3:179), → *awḥā*, “to convey” (Q 3:44, 11:49, 12:102), and *nabba'a*, “to announce (Q 9:94.105, 62:8). God does not make his grasp of *al-ghayb* apparent to anyone (*fa-lā yuḥirū 'alā ghaybihi aḥadā*), except for such messengers as he is pleased with (*illā mani rtaḏā min rasūlin*; Q 72:26–27). The Qur'anic proclaimer accordingly disavows any pretension to being endowed with independent knowledge of *al-ghayb* (e.g., Q 6:50, 7:188, 11:31), although he is also cleared from any suspicion of withholding those insights into *al-ghayb* that have been imparted to him (Q 81:24). To believe, in the Qur'anic understanding, is to believe (→ *āmana*) in things that are “hidden” (Q 2:3), such as the coming of an eschatological judgement, and the Qur'an accordingly condemns those who will only believe

<sup>1</sup> The basic meaning of *shahādah* is “testimony, witnessing” (see Q 5:106); see *CDKA* 153.

when they see (Q 2:55, 10:88.96–97, 26:201, 40:84–85; see Ringgren 1951, 14–15, and also Sinai 2019a, 248–249).<sup>2</sup>

What are the things that the Qur'an subsumes under "the hidden"? One usage of the term *ghayb* is in connection with events in the remote past. Thus Q 3:44, 11:49, and 12:102 refer to accounts of Mary, Noah, and Joseph as belonging to *anbā' al-ghayb*, "tidings of the hidden,"<sup>3</sup> and Q 18:26 asserts God's knowledge of "what is hidden in the heavens and on earth" in connection with the precise number of years that the "Companions of the Cave" spent asleep.<sup>4</sup> The hereafter also comes under the rubric of the hidden: in Q 19:61, God is said to have promised his servants the Gardens of Eden *bi-l-ghayb*, plausibly taken to mean while these gardens are not yet present or not yet objects of human visual perception (see Zam. 4:34). It would appear to be by the same logic that other verses praise those who fear God *bi-l-ghayb* (Q 5:94, 21:49, 35:18, 36:11, 50:33, 67:12), namely, those who fear him despite the fact that he is not an object of ordinary human perception and therefore is hidden (although he is of course presumed to be a possible object of human knowledge).<sup>5</sup> Given that Q 21:49 pairs fear of God *bi-l-ghayb* with being afraid (*ashfaqa*) of the eschatological hour, one may speculate that God's hiddenness or absence from visual perception, his being in a state of *ghayb*, is a condition obtaining specifically as long as the hour has not yet come to pass; when it does, the divine judge will be fully apparent and, indeed, visible (cf. Q 75:22–23 and see under → *allāh*). The *ghayb* to which God has unrestricted access also includes interior human states: Q 35:38 predicates of God knowledge of "what is hidden in the heavens and on earth" and then goes on to say that he knows "what is in the breasts," and Q 5:116 makes a similar connection between God's knowledge of what is hidden and his knowledge of what is in humans' souls. In Q 2:33, God's knowledge of "what is hidden in the heavens and on earth" is evoked in connection both with his knowledge of the names of the creatures subsequently taught to Adam and of what the angels might be concealing from him. In Q 49:18, God's knowledge of the *ghayb* of the heavens and the earth figures next to his full knowledge of "what you are doing" (see also Q 62:8).

The preceding synchronic digest of the Qur'anic notion of "the hidden" may be complemented by two diachronic remarks. First, the term *ghayb* appears already in a number of early Meccan verses (Q 52:41, 53:35, 68:47, 81:24), and in this sense is part of the Qur'anic lexicon virtually from the outset. Secondly, however, the early Meccan proclamations do not yet oppose *al-ghayb* to *al-shahādah*. Instead, one early Meccan oath, Q 69:38–39, expresses the contrast between visible and invisible things in entirely different terminology: "No, I swear by what you see (*mā tubṣirūn*) // and by what you do not see (*mā lā tubṣirūn*)!"<sup>6</sup> The earliest passage employing the contrast between *al-ghayb* and *al-shahādah* is perhaps Q 23:92, which postdates the transition to the later Meccan surahs (mean verse length: 56.86 transliteration letters) and is one of the verses calling God "the one who knows what is hidden and what is observable" (*‘ālim al-ghayb wa-l-shahādah*).

2 As Ringgren notes, these verses are highly reminiscent of New Testamental statements contrasting faith and sight like 2 Cor 5:7 or John 20:29 (see also below).

3 On Q 11:49 in particular, see also under → *asāfir al-awwālīn*.

4 See also Q 18:22, where different human views about the number of the Companions of the Cave are described as *rajm bi-l-ghayb*, roughly "casting guesses at the hidden."

5 At Q 12:52—where Joseph declares that he has not betrayed his master *bi-l-ghayb*—the phrase is amenable to being paraphrased as "in his absence."

6 I owe this reference to Saqib Hussain.

**The Qur’anic understanding of “the hidden” against the background of earlier tra-  
ditions.** The Qur’anic use of the term *ghayb* to denote what is absent or epistemologically  
inaccessible to humans is broadly continuous with its occurrence in pre-Islamic poetry.  
For instance, a line from the Zuhayr corpus describes a wild cow searching out “what is  
hidden in many a tangle of trees” (*ghayba kulli khamīlatin*; DSAAP, Zuhayr, no. 3:19; for  
other occurrences, see Arazi and Masalha 1999, 818, and GMK 84),<sup>7</sup> while ‘Abīd ibn al-  
Abraṣ avers: “Everyone absent on a journey (*kullu dhī ghaybatin*) can return, but the one  
whose absence is caused by death (*ghā’ib al-mawt*) will not return” (Lyll 1913, no. 1:16;  
EAP 1:37).<sup>8</sup> Going back to a far earlier period, the first millennium BCE, the deity *dġbt*  
(Dhū Ghaybat), “Master of the Unseen” (?), was worshipped in a sanctuary near Dadān/  
al-‘Ulā in the northern Ḥijāz (Al-Jallad 2022, 2).

If we turn our attention to the Qur’anic opposition between *al-ghayb* and *al-shahādah*  
in particular, however, the relevant comparative material turns out to be Christian rather  
than Arabian. Specifically, the contrast between *al-ghayb* and *al-shahādah* is reminiscent  
of the juxtaposition of “all things visible and invisible” (Greek: *ta horata kai ta aorata*, Syr-  
iac: *koll d-methzē w-koll d-lā methzē*) in the ancient Christian hymn cited in Col 1:16 (“For  
in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . .”),  
whence the dichotomy also found its way into the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed (for  
more on *horatos* vs *aoratos*, see TDNT 5:368–380). Effectively the same contrast, which the  
Syriac Peshitta renders almost identically, is found in 2 Cor 4:18, according to which “we  
look not on those that are seen (*ta blepomena, hālēn d-methazyān*), but at those that are  
not seen (*ta mē blepomena, hālēn d-lā methazyān*).” Also relevant is Heb 11: after defining  
faith as “the conviction of things not seen” (*pragmatōn elenchos ou blepomenōn*; v. 1),<sup>9</sup> the  
author goes on to maintain that “that which is seen” (*to blepomenon*) did not come to be  
“from things that are apparent” (*ek phainomenōn*; v. 3). Here, too, the Peshitta standardises  
the diction, stating that “the things that are visible” (*hālēn d-methazyān*) came to be from  
“the things that are invisible” (*aylēn d-lā methazyān*).<sup>10</sup> The merit of belief without seeing  
is also stressed at the end of the New Testamental narrative of the incredulity of Thomas  
(John 20:29), where Jesus blesses “those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.”  
The theme of faith in things unseen continues to pervade post-Biblical Christian discourse,  
such as Chrysostom’s interpretation of John 20:29, which ties the verse to Heb 11:1 (Schaff  
1995, 14:327 = Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St John*, no. 87), or Augustine’s *On Faith  
in Things Unseen* (Augustine 1947, 443–469).<sup>11</sup> Incidentally, both Heb 11:1 and John 20:29  
strongly resonate not only with the Qur’anic notion of belief in *al-ghayb* but also with the  
Qur’anic critique of those who will not believe “until they see (verb: *ra’ā*)” in verses like  
Q 26:201 (see already Ringgren 1951, 14–15, who additionally quotes 2 Cor 5:7).

Despite the pertinence of the preceding parallels, the Qur’anic understanding of *al-  
ghayb* is nonetheless distinctive. The New Testamental statements just rehearsed evoke, or

7 Another verse cited by Izutsu, attributed to ‘Antarah, does not seem to be contained in the recension of  
al-Shantamarī edited by Ahlwardt.

8 See also Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī 1927–1974, 14:154, l. 11.

9 The Peshitta has *gelyānā d-aylēn d-lā methazyān*, “a revelation of the things not seen.”

10 For a similar observation regarding the Syriac root *d-ḥ-l*, used in the Peshitta to render a variety of Hebrew  
and Greek terms to do with fear and thereby “causing a focalization on one term,” see Becker 2009, 311–317 and  
329–330 (citing p. 314).

11 I am grateful to Nora K. Schmid for drawing my attention to the latter two texts.



are at least strongly suggestive of, a bifurcation of reality into two domains, a visible and material one, on the one hand, and an invisible and spiritual one, on the other; according to one of the passages from the letters of Paul cited in the preceding paragraph, the things that are seen are temporal (*proskaira*) while those that are not seen are eternal (*aiōnia*; 2 Cor 4:18). To hazard a generalisation, when Christian texts contrast visible and invisible things they can often be understood to employ an epistemological distinction in order to represent what is ultimately an ontological one, recalling the way in which Plato opposes things that are visible (*horaton*) and things that are intelligible (*noēton*; *Republic*, book 6, 509d). The Qur'anic understanding of *al-ghayb*, by contrast, does not invite such an ontological reading: *al-ghayb* is explicitly said to encompass historical events unfolding in the human sphere, whose hiddenness is simply due to the fact that no contemporary of the Qur'an has reliable first-hand access to them anymore; and in the Qur'an the contrast of *al-ghayb* vs *al-shahādah* only ever figures in the formulation *'ālim al-ghayb wa-l-shahādah*, "the one who knows what is hidden and what is observable." The Qur'anic concept of "the hidden," consequently, is squarely epistemological. Genealogically, it may very well be a resonance of the phraseology of Col 1:16 and similar passages; but the formulation is nonetheless woven quite organically into the Qur'an's non-dualistic ontology.

# f

***fu'ād*** | heart

→ *qalb*

***fath*** | decision; decisive success or victory (granted by God)

→ *darajah*, → *furqān*

***fataqa*** tr. | to tear s.th. apart

→ *khalaqa*

***fatana*** tr. (*'an*) | to smelt s.th.; to put s.o. to the test; to lead someone into temptation, to entice s.o. (away from s.th.); to afflict s.o.

***fitnah*** | trial; temptation; affliction

→ *balā*

***fāḥishah*** | abomination

→ *tāba*, → *ḥarrama*

***fiḍyah*** | ransom, compensation, redemption

→ *kaffara*

***firdaws*** | paradise

→ *jannah*

***farasha*** tr. | to spread s.th. out

→ *arḍ*

***farīdah*** | ordinance, prescription

→ *ṣadaqah*

### ***fir'awn* | Pharaoh**

See briefly under → *isrā'īl*, → *āyah*, → *balā*, → *khatama*, → *istakhlafa*, → *istad'afa*, → *'adhdhaba*, → *qasā*, → *mala*'. For a more detailed treatment, refer to Schmid, forthcoming a.

### ***faraqa* tr. | to separate or divide s.th.**

***faraqa/farraqa* intr. *bayna* | to distinguish between s.th.**

→ *furqān*

***tafarraqa* intr. | to become divided, to fall into division**

***farraqū dīnahum* | to introduce divisions into one's religion**

→ *bayyana*, → *hizb*

### ***furqān* | deliverance; salvific divine instruction**

Further vocabulary discussed: *nazzala*, *anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down *kitāb* | scripture *al-tawrah* | the Torah *al-injil* | the Gospel or the Christian Bible *hudā* | guidance *ātā* tr./ditr. | to give s.th. (to s.o.) *dhikr* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation *qur'ān* | recitation *bayyinah* | clear sign, clear proof *kaffara* tr. 'an | to absolve s.o. of s.th. *fath* | victory *āyah* | sign; sign-pronouncement *najāh* | salvation *faraqa/farraqa* intr. *bayna* | to distinguish between s.th. *nabiyy* | prophet *nabba'a* tr. *bi-/'an* | to announce s.th. to s.o., to give to s.o. tidings of s.th. *al-ṭāghūt* | false gods *faraqa* tr. | to separate or divide s.th. *'alā mukth* | in an abiding manner *jumlatan wāḥidatan* | as a single whole, all at once

The noun *furqān* occurs in seven Qur'anic verses, twice in Meccan surahs (Q 21:48, 25:1) and five times in Medinan ones (Q 2:53.185, 3:4, 8:29.41). According to a long-standing scholarly hypothesis whose foundations were laid in 1833 by Abraham Geiger, Qur'anic *furqān* reflects Aramaic, and perhaps specifically Syriac, *pūrqānā*, “deliverance, salvation” (*WMJA* 55–56; Sprenger 1869, 2:337–338; *GQ* 1:34; *NB* 23–24; Rudolph 1922, 39–40; *JPND* 216–218; *KU* 76–77; *FVQ* 225–229). More recently, this theory has been substantially modified by one scholar (Donner 2007) and discarded by another (Saleh 2015). The present entry will nonetheless endorse the conventional link between *furqān* and *pūrqānā*. Before attempting to delineate the likely meaning of the word *furqān*, however, it will be helpful to commence with a descriptive catalogue of its Qur'anic usage. To this effect, one may distinguish two general thematic contexts of the term: in five verses, the definite singular *al-furqān* is associated with the phenomenon of divine revelation, while two other verses would seem to apply *furqān* to a military triumph or an act of divine deliverance through victory in battle (*NB* 23–24; Lidzbarski 1922, 91; *CDKA* 212).

**References to *al-furqān* in connection with divine revelation.** The word's link with divine revelation is clearest in Q 25:1 and 3:3–4. According to the former verse, God “sent down (*nazzala*) the *furqān* upon his servant”—i.e., upon Muhammad—“so that he might be a warner to the world-dwellers.” Similarly, Q 3:3–4 proclaims that God “sent down” (→ *nazzala*) “the scripture” (→ *al-kitāb*) upon the Qur'anic Messenger after having previ-

ously “sent down” (*anzala*) the Torah (→ *al-tawrāh*) and the Gospel (→ *al-injīl*), thereby providing humans with guidance (*hudan li-l-nāsi*), and then adds that God “sent down” (*anzala*) the *furqān*.” Two further instances in which *al-furqān* figures in a revelatory context are Q 21:48 and 2:53. According to Q 21:48, God “gave” (*ātaynā*) Moses and Aaron “the *furqān*, illumination (*ḍiyā*), and reminding exhortation (*dhikr*; → *dhakkara*) for the God-fearing.” In Q 2:53, meanwhile, the divine voice addresses the Israelites by affirming that “we gave Moses the scripture and the *furqān*, so that you<sup>p</sup> might be guided (*la’al-lakum tahtadūn*).” The fifth and last occurrence of *al-furqān* in connection with divine revelation is found later on in Surah 2, in Q 2:185. Here, the addressees are told that it was in the month of Ramaḍān that “the Qur’anic recitations were sent down” (*unzila fīhi l-qur’ān*), “as guidance for the people and as clear signs of guidance and of the *furqān*” (*hudan li-l-nāsi wa-bayyinātin mina l-hudā wa-l-furqāni*). As Fred Donner has observed, it would seem that in Q 2:185 *al-furqān* “constitutes the intent or purpose of revelation—just as guidance (*hudā*), with which it is more or less equated, is the goal or purpose of the Qur’ān” (Donner 2007, 280). In other words, unlike *al-tawrāh* and *al-injīl*, *al-furqān* is not the proper name of a specific scripture, as one might have concluded from Q 25:1 or 3:3–4 taken in isolation, but rather stands for something more general that is conveyed or realised through individual scriptures or revelations.

The five occurrences just examined share a number of lexical and thematic commonalities apart from the noun *furqān* itself, thus reinforcing the sense that they form a cluster of thematically and lexically associated passages. Specifically:

- (i) In Q 3:4 and 25:1, “the *furqān*” is the direct object of the verbs *nazzala* and *anzala*, “to send down,” and a more indirect connection between *anzala* and “the *furqān*” obtains in Q 2:185.
- (ii) In Q 2:53 and 21:48, “the *furqān*” is the direct object of *ātā*, “to give,” with the recipient of the *furqān* in both cases being Moses.
- (iii) In Q 2:53, 185, “the *furqān*” is linked with a derivative of the root *h-d-y*, which also occurs in Q 3:4. Moreover, that God’s sending down of the *furqān* served a broadly hortatory aim is also affirmed in Q 25:1 (“so that he might be a warner to the world-dwellers”), while Q 21:48 couples “the *furqān*” with God’s revelatory reminders (*dhikr*).

***Furqān* as an event.** Somewhat apart from the verses just surveyed stand the two instances of *furqān* in Q 8:29, 41, which are located in relatively close proximity. The former verse is an appeal to the believers urging them to fear God so that he might “bring about a *furqān* for you<sup>p</sup> (*yaj’al lakum furqānan*) and absolve (→ *kaffara*) you of your evil deeds and forgive you.” In v. 41, the Qur’an instructs the addressees that a fifth of all battle spoils are to be reserved for the Messenger and for charitable purposes, “if indeed you<sup>p</sup> believe in God and in what we sent down upon our servant on the day of the *furqān*, when the two hosts met (*yawma ltaqā l-jam’āni*).” In both cases, “a *furqān*” (v. 29) or “the *furqān*” (v. 41) would seem to refer to a kind of event or occurrence rather than to divine revelation or some general objective achieved through it. This is particularly clear with respect to Q 8:41, according to which “the day of the *furqān*” was an encounter between two unidentified groups. The additional details given about this encounter in vv. 42–44 suggest that we are dealing with one of the military clashes

between the Medinan believers and their Meccan foes, to which some of the earlier sections of the surah also allude (e.g., Q 8:15). The phrase “the day on which the two hosts met” (*yawma ltaqā l-jam’āni*), furthermore, recurs in Q 3:155.166, where it also evokes a military encounter.<sup>1</sup> As for the question what, precisely, it is that God is said to have “sent down upon our servant on the day of the *furqān*,” as v. 41 puts it, Walid Saleh has made the convincing suggestion that this refers to the angels who according to Q 8:9.12 aided the Qur’anic believers in battle (Saleh 2015, 68). It is true that in neither verse are these angels explicitly described as having been “sent down,” but the collocation of the verbs *anzala* or *nazzala* with angels is attested elsewhere (e.g., Q 6:8.111).

***Furqān* and *pūrqānā*.** The obvious similarity between Arabic *furqān* and Jewish Aramaic / Syriac *pūrqānā* (on which see *DTTM* 1148; *DJBA* 893; *DJPA* 427; *SL* 1172–1173) makes the claim that the former is a loanword derived from the latter morphologically unproblematic. The primary challenge that such an Aramaicising derivation of the term will have to meet is to show that the Qur’anic use of *furqān* has intelligible semantic continuity with its alleged Aramaic or Syriac predecessor. This is unproblematic for Q 8:29.41, the two *furqān*-as-event verses. In the Aramaic targums of the Bible and in the Syriac Peshitta, *pūrqānā* translates Hebrew *yāšū’ā* or *tāšū’ā*, “salvation, redemption, deliverance,” which can refer to God’s intervention in situations of individual or communal distress (see *TDOT* 6:441–463, especially 456, and *NIDOTTE* 2:556–562). For example, both *Targum Onqelos* and the Peshitta render Jacob’s profession “I wait for your salvation (*yāšū’ā*), O Lord” in Gen 49:18 with the word *pūrqānā*. Biblical diction, moreover, affords precedent for the phrase *yawm al-furqān* from Q 8:41. Thus, 1 Sam 11:13 has Saul declare after his victory over the Ammonites that “today the Lord has brought (*’āsā*, *Targum Jonathan* and Peshitta: *’bad*) deliverance (*tāšū’ā*, *Targum Jonathan* and Peshitta: *pūrqānā*) to Israel,” and Isa 49:8 speaks of a “day of salvation” (*yôm yāšū’ā*), which the Peshitta renders as *yawmā d-furqānā* (Lidzbarski 1922, 91–92; *JPND* 216; *FVQ* 226). Another relevant Biblical passage is Exod 14:13, where Moses encourages the Israelites, who will shortly be crossing the Red Sea, with the words, “See the deliverance (*yāšū’ā*, *Targum Onqelos* and Peshitta: *pūrqānā*) that the Lord will accomplish for you today” (Donner 2007, 289). Against this background, it seems reasonably certain that Q 8:29.41 are employing the word *furqān* in order to refer to an act of divine deliverance of the sort that figures in 1 Sam 11:13 or Exod 14:13, with the verb *ja’ala* in Q 8:29 corresponding to Hebrew *’āsā* and Aramaic *’bad*.<sup>2</sup> The general meaning of *furqān* in Q 8:29.41 is consequently similar to that of the phrase *fathun mina llāhi*, “a divinely granted victory,” in Q 4:141 (see also 5:52 or 48:1.18.27, 110:1).<sup>3</sup> Such an understanding is

1 As Donner notes, it is not impossible to understand *yaj’al lakum furqānan* in Q 8:29 to allude to the theme of divine revelation (Donner 2007, 280), perhaps by rendering the phrase as “so that he might grant you a *furqān*-revelation” here. But *ja’ala* is not usually employed by the Qur’an in order to refer to God’s granting of revelations, and one would tend to assume that the word *furqān* has the same meaning in Q 8:29 as it does twelve verses later, in 8:41, at least barring compelling reasons to posit the contrary.

2 I consider it improbable, though, that in light of Exod 14:13 we should understand Q 8:41 to refer to the Israelites’ crossing of the Red Sea, as suggested by Donner 2007, 289. While it is true that the verse has lexical overlap (namely, the dual *al-jam’ān*, “the two hosts”) with Q 26:61, which does belong to a Qur’anic retelling of the Red Sea episode, neither 8:41 nor the surrounding verses make any mention of the Israelites. What seems far more likely is that Q 8:41 is describing a military encounter experienced by the Medinan believers in diction that was meant to recall the earlier Meccan account of the Israelites’ confrontation with Pharaoh and his army (see also Rubin 2009b, 427–428).

3 Note that in Q 48:27 the noun *fath*, “victory,” figures as the object of *ja’ala*, inviting comparison with *yaj’al lakum furqānan* in Q 8:29.

also reflected in the Islamic exegetical literature, in which *furqān* at Q 8:29 attracted the glosses *makhraj*, “means of escape,” and *najāh*, “deliverance” (Donner 2007, 284–285).

The foremost difficulty besetting the hypothesis that *furqān* means “salvation” or “deliverance” is the question whether and how this meaning might be carried over to the group of Qur’anic verses in which *al-furqān* figures in connection with divine revelation, such as Q 25:1. To put it in the words of Horovitz (*JPND* 217): “And yet how did it happen that a Jewish or Christian expression meaning ‘help,’ ‘salvation,’ was employed by Mohammed himself in the signification of ‘revelation,’ which meaning is known of even in the [chronologically] first passages which employ the term?” Donner, for one, does not think that this challenge can be met and instead proposes to emend at least three of the revelatory occurrences of *al-furqān*—namely, Q 2:53, 21:48, and 3:3–4, all of which name Moses or the Torah—to *al-fuqdān*, to be derived from Syriac *pūqdānā*, “commandment” (Donner 2007, 288–294). But even if one were to agree that this yields a feasible understanding of the three passages in question, to resolve an interpretive difficulty by means of an emendation that has no support in manuscripts or transmitted textual variants is quite a radical step, an interpreter’s *ultima ratio*. Donner’s hypothesis, moreover, would require one to disregard the lexical affinity between Q 3:4, where he advocates emending *furqān* to *fuqdān*, and 25:1, where he is disinclined to do so, at least provided that the “servant” upon whom the *furqān* is sent down according to 25:1 is identified with Muhammad (Donner 2007, 293).

In fact, the question posed by Horovitz is not as intractable as it may seem. It is certainly not the case that the discrepancy between *furqān*-as-revelation and *furqān*-as-event forces one to treat one and the same word as designating two different concepts. After all, the Qur’anic term → *āyah*, “sign,” can span a similarly broad spectrum, being applied not only to revelatory divine communications but also, among other things, to certain divine acts in history. More specifically, there is nothing incongruous about the Qur’anic revelations attributing a salvific status to themselves as well as to the Torah. It is, after all, by heeding God’s warnings and commandments that humans will attain eschatological salvation: within Qur’anic theology, God’s soteriologically decisive intervention in human history is his conveyance of revelations by means of various prophetic spokesmen. Just as a solitary believer among the Egyptians is, in Q 40:41, reported to have addressed his people by saying, “I call you<sup>p</sup> to salvation while you call me to the fire” (*ad’ūikum ilā l-najāti wa-tad’ūnanī ilā l-nār*), so God’s revelatory guidance, as contained in the Torah and the Qur’an, “calls to salvation.” It would accordingly make good theological sense for the Qur’an to describe God’s revelations with a “theological *terminus technicus*” (Sprenger 1869, 2:337) referring to salvation or deliverance. As we saw above, *furqān*, when used in connection with divine revelation, is closely associated with the root *h-d-y*, signifying divine guidance (Q 2:53.185, 3:4), and with divine exhortation and warning (Q 21:48, 25:1). When the Qur’an speaks of God’s sending down of *al-furqān*, therefore, as in Q 25:1, this may be deemed to be approximately equivalent to the affirmation that he has “sent down clear signs and guidance” (Q 2:159: *mā anzalnā mina l-bayyināti wa-l-hudā*), a formulation closely resembling the statement in Q 2:185 that the Qur’anic recitations were sent down “as guidance for the people and as clear signs of guidance and of *al-furqān*.” Overall, in passages like Q 25:1 or 3:3–4 *al-furqān* denotes “the enlightenment and guidance given by God to man, especially through the medium of revelation” (Obermann 1941, 38; see similarly Sprenger 1896, 2:339), and a reasonable translational approximation would therefore



be “salvific divine instruction” or “salvific guidance,” in the sense that such guidance assists humans in achieving salvation (provided they appropriately respond to it).

The Qur’an’s transference of the term *furqān* to divine revelations has been surmised to be a Gnostic legacy (Lidzbarski 1922, 91). But there is little else to corroborate Gnostic influence on the Qur’an, and it is entirely conceivable that an expansion of the term *furqān* from “salvation” to “salvific revelation” was an independent Qur’anic development, given that it is in line with the general thrust of Qur’anic theology. The Qur’an’s application of *furqān* to divine revelation may also owe something to the morphological congruence of *furqān* and *qur’ān*, “recitation” (→ *qara’a*),<sup>4</sup> both of which can figure as an accusative object of the verbs *nazzala* or *anzala* (for *furqān* + *n-z-l*, see Q 3:4 and 25:1; for *qur’ān* + *n-z-l*, see Q 2:185, 5:101, 12:2, 17:82.106, 20:2.113, 25:32, 43:31, 59:21, 76:23). Extending the meaning of *furqān* from “salvation” to “salvific revelation” would in any case hardly have been a drastic conceptual shift. In Ephrem’s sermon on Jonah and Nineveh, *pūrqānā* means “deliverance” not in the sense of a divine intervention fending off some worldly threat or danger, as in 1 Sam 11:13, but rather signifies God’s abstention from obliterating sinful Nineveh. “Deliverance” or “salvation” here means the granting of divine pardon in view of the Ninevites’ sincere penitence; it refers to the salvific consequence of the Ninevites’ response to the preaching of Jonah (see Beck 1970b, no. 1:86.220.876.911.1052). The Qur’an, then, simply retrojects the term “salvation” from the final outcome of this causal sequence (the avoidance of divine wrath) to the act of divine communication that initiates the sequence (the dispatch of Jonah or, for that matter, of Muhammad as prophetic warners).

***Furqān* and the Arabic root *f-r-q*.** In the Islamic commentary tradition, the term *furqān* tends to be parsed in terms of the Arabic root *f-r-q*: *furqān* is usually construed as the verbal noun derived from the first-form verb *faraqa* and glossed, for instance, as something by means of which God “distinguished (*faraqa*) between truth and falsehood” (e.g., Ṭab. 5:182–184, on Q 3:4; see generally Donner 2007, 281–286, and Saleh 2015, 51–60). That the semantic payload of Qur’anic *furqān* might at least be partly determined by the meaning of the Arabic root *f-r-q* has also been admitted by a number of Western scholars who accept the basic derivation of *furqān* from Aramaic or Syriac *pūrqānā* (e.g., Sprenger 1869, 2:339–340; Rudolph 1922, 39; NB 24). In defense of this position, it is generally plausible to assume that the Qur’anic audience would have tended to understand the meaning of a loanword in line with its perceived Arabic root. For instance, it may well be the case that the Qur’an’s addressees, and not only post-Qur’anic lexicographers, associated the noun → *nabiyy*, “prophet,” loaned from Hebrew *nābî’* or Aramaic/Syriac *nbīyā*, with the Arabic root *n-b-’* and the verb *nabba’a*, “to announce, to tell.” Similarly, in the case of → *al-ṭāghūt*, a collective noun that is best translated as “false gods” and descended from Ethiopic *ṭā’ot* (“idol, ungodliness”) or Aramaic *ṭa’uta* (“error”), it would seem that the precise Qur’anic form of the word bespeaks an association with the Arabic root *ṭ-gh-w/y*, conveying the general notion of transgression, excess, and disobedience.

Nonetheless, there is no explicit and specific Qur’anic evidence supporting the claim that a *furqān* was indeed understood to be the act or a means of distinguishing between, say, truth and falsehood or belief and unbelief: none of the Qur’anic verses in which the first-form verb *faraqa* or even the second-form verb *farraqa* (which appears, e.g., in Q 2:102.136.285 and 4:150.152) are combined with the preposition *bayna* and in which *faraqa* or *farraqa* mean

4 I owe this observation to Behnam Sadeghi.

“to distinguish between” contains the word *furqān*, nor are any of the things between which such distinguishing takes place really suitable candidates for being associated with the noun *furqān*. Most pertinent is Q 5:25, where Moses asks God to “distinguish” between himself and his brother Aaron, on the one hand, and the Israelite sinners who refused to enter the Holy Land, on the other (*fa-fruq baynanā wa-bayna l-qawmi l-fāsiqīn*). Based on this sole Qur’anic occurrence of *faraqa bayna* + gen., one could perhaps propose that a *furqān* is a divine act of separating out believers from unbelievers. But Q 5:25 is a Medinan verse, whereas the word *furqān* appears already in Meccan surahs. Taking into consideration the additional fact that no Qur’anic instance of *furqān* actually involves a prepositional complement introduced by *bayna*, “between,” the exegetes’ explanation of *furqān* appears like an ingenious piece of linguistic theorising without much basis in the actual text of scripture (see also Boisliveau 2014, 96). In sum, the proposed link between *furqān* and *faraqa bayna*, “to distinguish between . . .,” is insufficiently explicit in order to justify translating *furqān* as God’s “distinguishing guidance” or the like, rather than as “salvific instruction,” reflecting the semantic contribution of the word’s Aramaic cognate.

Walid Saleh, too, advocates construing the term *furqān* in terms of its Arabic root *f-r-q*, though he does so in a markedly different manner than the traditional approach just set out (Saleh 2015). Specifically, Saleh anchors his position in one particular occurrence of *faraqa*, “to separate, to divide,” in Q 17:106, which describes the Qur’anic revelations as “a recitation that we have divided (*qur’ānan faraqnāhu*) so that you may recite it to the people in an abiding manner (*‘alā mukthīn*).”<sup>5</sup> Against the background of this important statement, Saleh submits that the noun *furqān*—which he considers to be either a verbal noun derived from *faraqa* or “a plural of *farq* or *furq* (in the sense of a section)”<sup>6</sup>—articulates the “piecemeal” nature of the Qur’an’s revelation (Saleh 2015, 41–42), namely, the fact that Muhammad proclaimed the Qur’an in a serial manner over a considerable period of time.

However, the problem with this proposal is that it locates the meaning of *al-furqān* in what is probably understood to be a distinctive feature of the Qur’anic revelations as opposed to other divine revelations like the Torah or the Gospel. To be sure, the Qur’an does not expressly rule out that when Moses was “given the scripture” (e.g., Q 2:53.87, 6:154, 11:110, 17:2, 23:49) or when Jesus was “given” the Gospel (Q 5:46, 57:27), this could have happened in serial instalments. But there is no positive confirmation of this possibility either, which contrasts with statements in which Muhammad’s revelations are unequivocally said to have been “divided up” (Q 17:106) and not to have been conveyed as a “single whole” (*jumlātān wāḥidātān*; Q 25:32). This creates the impression that the Qur’an does not consider the Torah to have been conveyed in the same “piecemeal” manner as Muhammad’s revelations. Yet as we saw above, the Qur’an is quite unequivocal that Moses, too, and not just Muhammad, received *al-furqān* (Q 2:53, 21:48; see already Boisliveau 2014, 96). This connection with Moses poses a significant obstacle to Saleh’s proposal that *furqān* signifies a “piecemeal revelation.”

***Furqān* = “dawn”?** Yet another attempt to interpret at least some Qur’anic occurrences of *furqān* in the sense of a native Arabic word has been made by Uri Rubin (Rubin 2009b).

5 On *‘alā mukthīn*, see CDKA 257 and Saleh 2015, 41–43 (opting for the translation “as you live among them”). The verb *makatha* (“to remain”) is well attested in the Qur’an (Q 13:17, 18:3, 20:10, 27:22, 28:29, 43:77).

6 On plural nouns conforming to the pattern *fu’lān*, see Wright 1974, 1:217–218 (e.g., *dhīb*, *dhūbān*). When Saleh allows that *al-furqān* could mean “the sections” or the like, corresponding to the plural of Hebrew *pereq* or Aramaic *pirqa*, “section, chapter” (Saleh 2015, 65–66), this harks back to a suggestion first made by Hirschfeld (who also references Q 17:106) and Margoliouth (Hirschfeld 1902, 68; Margoliouth 1905, 145). See also the discussion in JPND 217–218.

Rubin draws attention to the fact that the premodern lexicographical literature holds that *furqān* can mean “dawn” (Rubin 2009b, 422–424). For instance, al-Azharī reports an utterance by an anonymous Bedouin in which *saṭa‘a l-furqān* is used to mean “the dawn rose,” with *al-furqān* being glossed as *al-saḥar*, the usual word for “dawn” (al-Azharī [1964–1976], 11:488; cf. *AEL* 2385). Rubin reasons that when al-Azharī equates *al-furqān* with *al-saḥar*, this is highly unlikely to be a piece of lexical speculation constructed around the Qur’an, especially seeing that the gloss just cited is not found under the lemma *furqān* itself but in explanation of *ḍafaza bi-*, “to have intercourse with s.o.,” without any obvious link to scripture. Rubin therefore infers that these lexicographic data provide us with genuinely early, and perhaps even pre-Islamic, Arabic usage. On this basis, Rubin argues that when Q 2:185 or 3:3–4 describe divine revelations as *al-furqān*, they do so in the sense that “scripture is a source of guiding light that leads one out of the darkness of ignorance” (Rubin 2009b, 424–425)—a metaphor that, he adds, is explicit in verses like Q 42:52, where the Qur’anic revelations are described as a “light by which we guide those whom we will of our servants.” Rubin’s discovery that there may have been a native Arabic meaning of *furqān* could probably be integrated with most of what has been said so far: perhaps the transference of *furqān* to a revelatory context was facilitated by the fact that the word, or rather a homonym of it, could also refer to the dawn.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, before fully committing oneself to this scenario one may prefer to await further evidence, in particular evidence directly drawn from collections of pre-Islamic poetry, that *furqān* was indeed employed to denote the daybreak.

***iftarā* tr. (‘alā) | to fabricate s.th. (e.g., a lie) (against s.o., namely, God)**

***iftarā* intr. | to fabricate lies**

→ *jinn*, → *ḥarrama*, → *ḡalama*

***fasada* intr. | to become corrupted or ruined, to go to ruin**

→ *afsada*

***afsada* tr. | to corrupt s.th.**

***afsada* intr. (*fī l-arḍ*) | to wreak corruption (on earth / in the land)**

***fasād* | corruption**

Further vocabulary discussed: *fasada* intr. | to become corrupted or ruined, to go to ruin *aṣlaḥa* intr. | to put things right, to act righteously, to do what is right *aṣlaḥa* tr. | to put s.th. right, to put s.th. in good order, to let s.th. prosper *‘athā* intr. *fī l-arḍ* *mufsidan* | to cause mischief and corruption on earth *‘alā* intr. *fī l-arḍ* | to rise high in the land *takabbara/istakbara* intr. *fī l-arḍ* | to behave haughtily on earth / in the land *al-barr* | dry land *al-baḥr* | the sea *dīn* | religion, religious worship *sakḥkhara* tr.

<sup>7</sup> Note that Rubin does not doubt that besides the native Arabic word *furqān* = “dawn” there was also an Arabic loanword *furqān*, derived from Aramaic *purqana*, which in his view appears in Q 2:53 or 21:48 (Rubin 2009b, 426–428).

(*li-*) | to make s.o. or s.th. subservient (to s.o.), to subject s.th. or s.o. (to s.o.) *dhallala*, *ja'ala dhalūlan* tr. *li-* | to subject s.th. to s.o. *makkana* tr. *fī*, *makkana* intr. *li-*. . . *fī* | to establish s.o. on/in s.th., to give s.o. power over s.th. *bawwa'a* tr. *fī l-arḍ* | to give s.o. an abode in the land / on the earth *istakhlafa* tr. | to appoint s.o. as a deputy *ja'ala* tr. *khalā'ifa/khulafā'a (fī)* | to appoint s.o. as deputies (over s.th.) *balā* tr. | to assess, test, or try s.o. *ālā'* pl. | wondrous deeds

**Overview of the Qur'anic use of *f-s-d*.** The first-form verb *fasada* (“to become corrupted or ruined, to go to ruin”) appears only three times in the Qur'an, its grammatical subject being either the earth (Q 2:251), “the heavens and the earth” (Q 21:22; cf. 21:19), or “the heavens and the earth and everyone in them” (Q 23:71). The fourth-form verb *afsada* can take an accusative object and mean “to corrupt s.th.,” as shown by Q 27:34 (see below). Most conspicuously, however, the root *f-s-d* is employed in almost thirty verses, both Meccan and Medinan (e.g., Q 2:11.27.30.60.205.251, 7:56.74.85.127, 11:85.116), that collocate either the fourth-form verb *afsada* (“to wreak corruption”) or the noun *fasād* (“corruption”) with the prepositional phrase *fī l-arḍ* (“on earth” or “in the land”; → *arḍ*). The resulting expression “wreaking corruption on earth,” which unlike Q 27:34 employs *afsada* in an intransitive manner, appears as early as Q 26:151–152, where the messenger Ṣāliḥ calls upon the people of Thamūd not to obey those who “wreak corruption on earth and do not put things right (*wa-lā yuṣliḥūn*).” Q 26:152 illustrates that most Qur'anic instances of the verb *afsada* and of its active participle *mufsid* are in the plural, thus conveying the distinct impression that the wreaking of corruption has a prevalent communal dimension.<sup>1</sup>

Q 26:152 additionally establishes that the antonym of *afsada* is *aṣlaḥa*, “to act righteously, to put things right,” or, when used transitively, “to put s.th. right, to put s.th. in good order.” The contrast between *afsada* and *aṣlaḥa* recurs in other passages (Q 2:11.220, 7:56.85.142, and 27:48). Particularly interesting among them are two later Meccan verses warning against “wreaking corruption on earth after it has been put in good order” (Q 7:56.85: *wa-lā tufsidū fī l-arḍi ba'da iṣlāḥihā*). This alludes to the flawlessness of God's creation, a tenet that is stressed throughout the Qur'an (see especially Q 67:3–4 and under → *khalaqa*). As further explained below, God has placed humans in a habitat that is supremely good and conducive to human flourishing, yet human actions may fall woefully short of corresponding to this divinely set standard of perfection. An important aspect of this train of thought is that the mood of cosmic alienation that pervades Gnosticism (Jonas 1988) and has also left a significant imprint on the Christian tradition (e.g., Rom 8:20–22, cited in Zirker 1993, 95) is entirely absent from the Qur'an; the world as such is unreservedly good; corruption only enters it at the hands of humans.

Qur'anic occurrences of *afsada* or of the noun *fasād* that are unaccompanied by the prepositional syntagm *fī l-arḍ* are relatively rare (e.g., Q 2:220, 27:34).<sup>2</sup> Most such instances are probably due to the fact that the plural participle *mufsidīn* is a convenient rhyme word (Q 3:63, 7:86.103.142, 10:40.81.91, 16:88, 27:14, 28:4, 29:30), such that the absent syntagm *fī l-arḍ* may almost be considered to have a virtual presence here.

<sup>1</sup> I owe this observation to Holger Zellentin.

<sup>2</sup> At Q 2:12, *al-mufsidūn* comes immediately after the occurrence of *lā tufsidū fī l-arḍi* in the preceding verse; 30:41 says that corruption (*al-fasād*) has appeared “ashore and at sea” (*fī l-barri wa-l-baḥri*). Q 89:11–12 would seem to employ *fī l-bilād* where later passages might have *fī l-arḍ*, for reasons of rhyme.

Sometimes *afsada fi l-ard* is amplified by the verb *'athā*, in the injunction *wa-lā ta'thaw fi l-ardi mufsidīn*, “Do not cause mischief and corruption on earth / in the land” (Q 2:60, 7:74, 11:85, 26:183, 29:36; see CDKA 182). This makes it possible to combine verse-final *mufsidīn* with a prepended *fi l-ard*. Three verses employ *sa'ā fi l-ardi fasādan* (Q 5:33.64) or *sa'ā fi l-ardi li-yufsidā fihā* (Q 2:205) as paraphrastic equivalents of *afsada fi l-ard*. As Paret suggests, these variants mean “to roam the earth (or the land) intending to wreak corruption” or “to strive to wreak corruption” (KK 43; see also CDKA 134). Formulations derived from other verbal roots that are semantically close to *afsada fi l-ard* are *'alā fi l-ard*, “to rise high in the land / on earth” (Q 10:83, 17:4, 28:4.83),<sup>3</sup> and *istakbara fi l-ard*, “to behave haughtily in the land / on earth” (Q 28:39, 29:39, 35:43, 41:15, 46:20; 7:13.146 have *takabbara*).

**The spectrum of human corruptive behaviour.** “To wreak corruption on earth” designates what one scholar has aptly described as “expressions of fundamental hostility to and subversion of God’s created order” (Denny 2001, 440). That “wreaking corruption” is to stand an existing order on its head emerges with particular clarity from Q 27:34, where the queen of Saba’ states, “When kings enter a town, they inflict corruption on it (*afsadūhā*) and humble its mighty (*wa-ja'alū a'izzata ahlihā adhillatan*).” Such an inversion of order could in principle play out on a truly cosmic scale: according to counterfactual statements in Q 21:22 and 23:71, if the theological views of the Qur’an’s adversaries were true—specifically, if there were more than one God, as per Q 21:22—then heaven and earth would be doomed to corruption (verb: *fasada*).<sup>4</sup> It is thus the dominion of the one God, who has “put the earth in good order” (Q 7:56.85), that ensures a continued orderly functioning of the cosmos. This also emerges from Q 2:251, which concludes the story of David’s victory over Goliath by saying, “Were it not for God’s repelling of some people by means of others, the earth would go to ruin (*la-fasadati l-ardu*)”: human aggression, unless checked by divine counter-measures, might easily overwhelm the world.

The statement just cited indicates very clearly where the Qur’an locates the source of corruptive assaults on the divinely instituted cosmic order: in humankind. According to Q 30:41, corruption (*al-fasād*) can appear not only ashore but also at sea (*fi l-barri wa-l-bahri*), “on account of the doings of people’s hands” (*bi-mā kasabat aydī l-nāsi*): wherever humans act, corruption may rear its head. That the potential for causing corruption is a concomitant of humans is explicitly raised in Q 2:30, in the context of the angels’ objection to God’s declared intention to appoint Adam, or humankind in general, as a → *khalīfah* or “deputy” on earth. It is true that the angels are subsequently put in their place when God challenges them to inform him of the names of the things that he has created, a challenge that the angels are unable to meet (Q 2:31–33). Nonetheless, this does not entail that the angels’ initial assessment of humankind’s corruptive potential is mistaken. Rather, when the angels subsequently acknowledge the limits of their knowledge (Q 2:32) and God reiterates the same message (Q 2:33), the Qur’an would seem to be alluding to the fact that God’s creation of a being so manifestly capable of causing corruption has a hidden purpose, which is elsewhere identified as God’s plan to subject humans to moral scrutiny (see under → *balā* and below).

<sup>3</sup> The synonymy between *'alā fi l-ard* and *afsada fi l-ard* is clear from Q 28:83 (and probably also 17:4).

<sup>4</sup> Q 23:91 and 17:42 contain alternative expressions of the same basic argument: a plurality of deities could not preside over an ordered and harmonious cosmos. See also under → *allāh*.



Human wreaking of corruption may involve a violation of basic moral principles. For instance, Q 7:85, 11:85, and 26:182–183 associate the causing of corruption with fraudulent weighing; Q 12:73 links it with theft; Q 47:22 pairs it with “breaking the ties of kinship”; Q 2:30 conjoins it with the shedding of blood; and Q 5:32 signals that wreaking corruption may constitute a valid excuse for killing the culprit. Wreaking corruption on earth can furthermore have an explicitly religious dimension, in so far as it is employed as the opposite of invoking God (Q 7:56) or of serving God and expecting the “last day” (Q 29:36). Wreaking corruption is also placed alongside breaking God’s covenant and disobeying him (Q 2:27, 13:25) and tied to unbelief and turning people away from God’s path (Q 16:88). When Q 5:33 casts the act of waging of war against “God and his Messenger” as an instance of wreaking corruption, deserving punishment by crucifixion, maiming, or exile, this is clearly predicated on equating resistance to the Messenger with resistance to God. The religious aspect of wreaking corruption is even invoked by the Qur’anic Pharaoh, who in Q 40:26 seems to equate it with a change of his people’s established religion: “I fear that he,” namely, Moses, “will change your religion (*dīn*) or cause corruption to appear on earth / in the land (*aw an yuḏhira fī l-arḏi l-fasād*).” Similarly, in Q 7:127 the Egyptian notables address Pharaoh by voicing the fear that Moses and his people “will wreak corruption on earth / in the land” and that he “will forsake you and your gods.” Wreaking corruption is here conceived as defiance of a theologico-political complex of authority encompassing both Egypt’s ruler and its established cult.

Finally, while the moral and religious aspects of wreaking corruption are generally predominant, wreaking corruption can also apparently involve physical devastation, in so far as Q 2:205 links it to the destruction of crops (*al-harṭh*) and “offspring” (*al-nasl*), which could here mean specifically animal “offspring” or livestock. It is not surprising that the Qur’an, by virtue of being a late antique document, nowhere anticipates the potential of modern scientific technology to devastate and annihilate the very ecosphere on which human survival depends. Nonetheless, the Qur’anic motif that humans are prone to corrupt and pervert a world that the creator has put in good order (Q 7:56.85) offers an obvious scriptural springboard for an ethics of responsible ecological stewardship of the earth. At the very least, the idea is apt to counterbalance Qur’anic affirmations that God has made the world or specific entities within it subservient or subject (*sakḥkhara*, *dhallala*, *ja’ala dhalūlan*) to humans (e.g., Q 67:15; see in more detail under → *arḏ*), statements that might otherwise imply that humans are free to exploit and manipulate the ecosphere in whatever way they deem fit.

**Gods, humans, and the earth.** The prepositional phrase “on the earth” or “in the land” (*fī l-arḏ*) also occurs with a number of other verbs, such as → *makkana* + acc. *fī l-arḏ*, “to establish s.o. on the earth / in the land,” *bawwa’a* + acc. *fī l-arḏ*, “to give s.o. an abode on the earth / in the land” (CDKA 45), and → *istakhlafa* + acc. *fī l-arḏ* / *ja’ala* + acc. *khalā’ifa fī l-arḏ*, “to appoint a certain group deputies over the earth/land.” Underpinning this terminological nexus is a general conception of the relationship between God, humans, and the earth. God settles humans on the earth as a perfectly hospitable abode (→ *arḏ*). As already intimated earlier, God’s ultimate purpose in doing so is to “test you<sup>9</sup> with regard to what he has given you” (Q 6:165: *li-yablūwakum fī mā ātākum*; see also 11:7 and → *balā*), namely, to ascertain whether the human beneficiaries of his blessings will act in keeping with the religious and moral obligations that are taken to follow from receiving generous usufruct of God’s earth. Should humans act counter to these norms by “wreaking corruption on the



earth,” despite inhabiting a divinely gifted homestead, then divine retribution will ensue, as detailed by Qur’anic narratives about the punishment suffered by various ancient “settlements” or “towns” (*qurā*; e.g., Q 7:96–102; on Qur’anic punishment stories in general, see in detail Marshall 1999). Thus, in Q 11:84–85 the messenger Shu’ayb calls upon the people of Madyan to serve the one God, to shun fraudulent measuring and weighing, and to avoid “causing mischief and corruption on earth” (v. 85: *wa-lā ta’thaw fī l-arḍi muḥsidīn*; see also 7:85). A similar plea is conveyed by Ṣāliḥ to the people of Thamūd (Q 7:74): “Remember<sup>5</sup> how God appointed you as deputies (*ja’alakum khulafā’a*) after ‘Ād and gave you an abode in the land (*hawwa’akum fī l-arḍi*), such that you established fortresses in its plains and hewed mountains into houses. Remember God’s wondrous deeds (*ālā*),<sup>5</sup> and do not cause mischief and corruption on earth (*wa-lā ta’thaw fī l-arḍi muḥsidīn*).” Yet like other communities, both the people of Madyan and Thamūd failed to heed these warnings and were consequently obliterated and replaced by a different population, whom God made “deputies over the earth/land” in their stead (see under → *istakhlafa*). The Qur’an accordingly envisages a reactive historical cycle in which God’s munificent bestowal upon humans of an earthly abode is potentially followed by the human wreaking of corruption in their divinely gifted habitat, to which God in turn responds by replacing the culprits by other “deputies.” He will then observe how these successors will act in their turn (Q 7:129 and 10:14: *li-yanẓura/li-nanẓura kayfa ta’malūn*).

**Biblical assonances.** The notion of causing corruption on the earth in Q 2:30 in particular, where it forms part of the angels’ protest against God’s plan to create man—“Will you establish on it [namely, on the earth] someone who will wreak corruption there and shed blood?”—has been connected to Gen 6:11–13 (Reeves 2003, 54; *QP* 198–200). According to the Biblical passage, at the time of Noah “the earth was corrupt (*wattīššāḥēt*, Peshitta: *ethabblet*) before God” and was “filled with violence.” As Reeves notes, the Bible’s unspecific reference to violence here is concretised to illicit bloodshed in *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* (see *1 Enoch* 9:1.9 = Charlesworth 1983, 16–17, and *Jubilees* = VanderKam 1989, ch. 7:23–25), thus paralleling the angels’ second accusation against humans as reported in Q 2:30. The theme of the earth’s antediluvian corruption also figures prominently in the way in which Gen 6:11–13 is retold in *Jubilees* 5:2–3. Unlike the Bible, however, the Qur’an does not associate the corruption of the earth with one particular historical moment but rather presents it as a constant risk besetting human behaviour at any time. This is reflected by the fact that the wreaking of corruption on earth is a comparatively frequent Qur’anic trope, thus contrasting with the singular character of the Biblical comparandum.

Another, and more frequent, Biblical theme that is potentially pertinent is the notion that various sexual transgressions, bloodshed, and idolatry defile the Promised Land and cause it to “spew out its inhabitants” (e.g., Lev 18:24–30, Num 35:33–34, and Ps 106:34–40; see Klawans 2000, 26–33), an idea that the subsequent rabbinic tradition takes quite literally (Klawans 2000, 118–135).<sup>6</sup> To be sure, there is no justification for narrowly equating

5 On *ālā*, see al-Farāhī 2002, 125–133 (who cites relevant poetic prooftexts). The meaning given is usually “blessings” (*CDKA* 27), but as al-Farāhī notes, this does not fit at Q 53:55 and also, arguably, for some of the term’s many occurrences in Surah 55, where *ālā* figures in the refrain. The word should probably be considered closer in meaning to → *āyah*, which can similarly encompass divine acts of punishment, than to *nī’mah* (on which see under → *an’ama*). In view of this, and based on al-Farāhī, a more neutral rendering than “blessing,” such as “wondrous deeds,” recommends itself.

6 I am grateful to Holger Zellentin for helping me understand this connection (which is also discussed in Zellentin 2022, 319–327). A link between the Qur’anic notion of wreaking corruption on earth or in the land, on

Qur’anic references to *al-ard* (“the land” or “the earth”) with the Promised Land of the Hebrew Bible; the Qur’anic perspective is universal and encompasses the entire earth or any “land” or portion of it in which God may allow humans to reside and flourish (see under → *ard*). Moreover, defilement is clearly not the same as corruption, meaning that in terms of phraseological similarity Gen 6:11–13 makes for a closer parallel. On the other hand, the hortatory impetus animating Biblical calls to avoid defilement of the land bears a functional resemblance to the Qur’an’s strictures against wreaking corruption on earth or in the land. That the latter might involve at least a resonance of the Biblical theme of defilement of the land is supported by the fact that both are linked with bloodshed (Q 2:30) and failure to serve God (e.g., Q 29:36).

Especially noteworthy in this regard is the Meccan passage Q 17:4–8, where causing corruption is explicitly connected to the ancient Israelites: twice they were guilty of wreaking corruption on earth or in the land (Q 17:4), and in both cases they were punished by foreign conquest of their “dwellings” and sanctuary (Q 17:5,7), reference being presumably to the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and the Romans.<sup>7</sup> Similar to Pentateuchal threats cautioning the Israelites against defiling the Promised Land, the more universal Qur’anic discourse about God’s “earth” or “land” rests on the assumption that God will see to it that his “land” is populated by worthy occupants, if needs be by swapping an entire population against another. It is worth underlining that even in the Qur’an, neither of the Israelites’ two episodes of wreaking of corruption as sketched in Q 17:4–8 leads to their eradication. As has been previously observed (Ghaffar 2020, 18), this forms an arresting contrast with other sinful collectives in Qur’anic punishment legends, such as the people of Noah, ‘Ād, the people of Lot, and Thamūd (e.g., Q 7:59–93). The anomaly no doubt reflects Biblical salvation history, predicated as it is on the survival of Israelite identity through repeated historical crises—which the Biblical narrative casts as divine chastisements—up to and beyond the Babylonian destruction of the Jerusalem temple.

***fasaqa* intr. (‘an) | to sin or transgress (against), to act immorally**

→ *āmana*, → *kafara*

***faṣala* intr. *bayna* (fī) | to decide between s.o. (with regard to s.th.)**

→ *bayyana*

***faṣṣala* tr. (li-) | to set out s.th. or expound s.th. in clear detail (for s.o.)**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *āyah* | sign *qur’ān* | recitation *kitāb* | scripture *faraqa* tr. | to separate or divide s.th. *li-qawmin ya’lamūn* | for people who would**

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the one hand, and the Biblical theme of defiling the Promised Land, on the other, was independently posited in a talk given by Daniel Bannoura at the 2019 Annual Meeting of the International Qur’anic Studies Association (San Diego, 22–25 November 2019), entitled “The Promised Land in the Qur’an.”

<sup>7</sup> On Qur’anic charges of wreaking corruption that are directed against the Israelites and Jews, see Pregill 2021, 206–210. Note especially the Medinan verses Q 2:60, where Moses admonishes the Israelites against wreaking corruption, and 5:64, where it is the Jews who are accused of wreaking corruption.

have knowledge, so that people might know *li-qawmin yafqahūn* | for people who would understand, so that people might understand *li-qawmin yadhhdhakkārūn* | for people who would heed God's hortatory reminders, so that people might heed God's hortatory reminders *bayyana* tr. (*li-*) | to clarify s.th. (to s.o.) *šarrafa* tr. (*li-*) | to explain s.th. in various ways (to s.o.) *la'alla* + subordinate clause | so that

**Overview and putative meaning.** The semantic value of the transitive verb *faṣṣala* is best approximated by renderings like “to set s.th. out in clear detail” or “to expound s.th. in clear detail” (cf. CDKA 213). *Faṣṣala* often takes as its grammatical object God's “signs” (→ *āyāt*; e.g., Q 6:55.97.98.126, 7:32.174, 9:11, 10:5.24, 13:2). In these verses, the agent of expounding is always the Qur'an's divine speaker, who sets out his signs for the benefit (*li-*) of a human audience so that the latter might “know” and “understand” the theological significance of these signs. The assumption that *faṣṣala* is to make something understood also yields a feasible, though perhaps not the only possible, construal of Q 41:44: “Had we made it a non-Arabic recitation, they would have said, ‘Why have its signs not been clearly set out?’” (*wa-law ja'alnāhu qur'ānan a'jamiyyan la-qālū law-lā fuṣṣilat āyātuhu*).<sup>1</sup> In some cases, the object of God's expounding (*tafṣīl*) is “everything” (*kull shay*; Q 6:154, 7:145, 12:111, 17:12), which should probably be taken to mean that God extracts from the sum total of things that exist the theological gist that is relevant for humans to internalise.<sup>2</sup> At Q 6:119, it is divine prohibitions that form the object of *faṣṣala*: God “has expounded to you<sup>p</sup> in detail (*faṣṣala lakum*) what he has forbidden to you, except for things to [the consumption of] which you are compelled.” This is a retrospective allusion to the Qur'an's dietary taboos (carrion, blood, pork, and food over which another deity than God has been invoked), which are catalogued in four other verses, Q 2:173, 6:145, 16:115, and 5:3 (Sinai 2019c).

The verb *faṣṣala* is, furthermore, associated with the archetypal celestial “scripture” (→ *kitāb*) from which the Qur'anic proclamations claim to derive and which is in some sense understood to contain the manifold signs rehearsed by the Qur'an. Thus, in Q 11:1, it is the “signs” of “the scripture” that are expounded by God (*kitābun uḥkimat āyātuhu thumma fuṣṣilat min ladun ḥakīmin khabīr*), while Q 41:3 affirms that the “signs” of the “scripture” have been “expounded as an Arabic recitation so that people might know” (*kitābun fuṣṣilat āyātuhu qur'ānan 'arabiyyan li-qawmin ya'lamūn*).<sup>3</sup> Q 10:37 similarly calls “this recitation” (*hādhā al-qur'ān*) an “expounding of the scripture” (*tafṣīl al-kitāb*). Thus, it is via an act of divine exposition or *tafṣīl* that the celestial scripture, which as such is beyond human reach, is transformed into revelatory proclamations in Arabic that are intelligible to a particular audience. In Q 7:52, the divine speaker avers that “we brought them a scripture that we knowledgeably expounded in detail, as guidance and mercy so that people might believe” (*wa-la-qad ji'nāhum bi-kitābin faṣṣalnāhu 'alā 'ilmin hudan wa-raḥmatan li-qawmin yu'minūn*).<sup>4</sup> Here, the scripture at hand is most likely not the celestial archetype

1 On *a'jamī*, “non-Arabic,” see under → *'arabī*.

2 Note that in Q 6:154 and 12:111, *tafṣīlan li-kulli shay'in* / *tafṣīla kulli shay'in* (“as an expounding of everything”) as an adverbial accusative clarifying the purpose of divine revelation is followed by *wa-hudan wa-raḥmatan* (“and as guidance and mercy”). This suggests that God's objective is not to bestow a universal register of sorts but rather to guide his addressees on the path to salvation. Similarly, Q 7:145 says that the tablets given to Moses contained “an admonition about everything and an expounding of everything” (*wa-katabnā lahu fī l-awāḥi min kulli shay'in maw'izatan wa-tafṣīlan li-kulli shay'in*).

3 The liberal rendering of *li-qawmin ya'lamūn* (literally, “for people who know”) is justified below.

4 On the use of “so that” in this translation, see again below.

of Muhammad’s proclamations but rather the Qur’anic corpus itself, which is sometimes also called a scripture or *kitāb* (e.g., Q 6:92.155; see further under → *kitāb*). Nonetheless, it remains true that the verb *faṣṣala* generally designates the process of elucidatory conversion by which the celestial scripture is mediated and rendered accessible to humans—in a shape and form that may be assumed to be intimately geared to the intended audience, in so far as it respects their cultural and linguistic requirements. This process of conversion is comparable to God undertaking to deliver a revelatory “targum,” or interpretive translation, of the celestial scripture (Sinai 2006, 120–126).<sup>5</sup>

The precise purport of *faṣṣala* is sufficiently enigmatic in order to have generated alternative interpretations. For example, Jan Retsö proposes that *faṣṣala* is to render a discourse in rhymed prose (Retsö 2003, 44–45). However, apart from the fact that the post-Qur’anic tradition uses the noun *fāṣilah* to designate the rhyme-word of a Qur’anic verse or of a unit of rhymed prose in general (AEL 2407; Stewart 2013, 28, 31, 32, 36), there is little justification for attributing such a specific sense to *faṣṣala*, or even for the underlying assumption that *faṣṣala* primarily designates literary form rather than the intelligible conveyance of content. Yet another understanding of *faṣṣala* is advocated by Walid Saleh. He maintains that *faṣṣala* is largely synonymous with the first-form verb *faraqa*, “to divide up,” which Q 17:106 employs in order to express the “piecemeal” nature of the Qur’anic revelations (Saleh 2015, 43–50; see also Loynes 2021, 49–50, and under → *furqān*). This understanding of *faṣṣala* is problematic at least for Q 6:119. As noted above, the verse is a retrospective allusion to earlier verses setting out the Qur’an’s dietary taboos. Yet all four passages that Q 6:119 might feasibly be referring back to give a full run-down of these food taboos rather than presenting them in an accumulating series of successive instalments. Hence, Saleh’s proposed equation of *faṣṣala* with *faraqa* does not fit Q 6:119. Also worth a closer look is Q 7:133, which Saleh argues utilises the participle *mufaṣṣal* in order to highlight “the serial occurrence of the ten plagues of the Egyptians” (Saleh 2015, 46). But when Q 7:133 states that God sent down various calamities “as *āyāt mufaṣṣalāt*,” this could equally respond to the Egyptians’ assertion in the previous verse (Q 7:132) that they will not believe Moses whatever “sign” he might produce (*mahmā ta’tinā bihi min āyatin*). The point made in Q 7:133 may accordingly be that the natural disasters that subsequently befell the Egyptians constituted “signs clearly expounded” in the sense of supplying what the Egyptians ought to have accepted as conclusive proof that Moses was indeed God’s messenger (cf. Moses’s self-description in Q 7:104). Such a reading entails that the question whether Moses delivered his signs serially or wholesale is not the issue here.

***Faṣṣala* followed by *li-qawmin* + verb in the prefix conjugation (e.g., *li-qawmin ya’lamūn*).** As illustrated by some of the examples quoted earlier, *faṣṣala* is often followed by a prepositional syntagm introduced by *li-qawmin*, such as “for people who know” (Q 6:97, 7:32, 9:11, 10:5, 41:3: *li-qawmin ya’lamūn*), “for people who understand”

5 The preceding interpretation might also be compared with a passage in Jacob of Sarug’s homily on creation, which discusses at length how God “divided up” (*paliget*) his revelations regarding the mysteries of creation in accordance with the prophetic gift accorded to different individuals, such as Moses, David, Isaiah, or Ezekiel. As a consequence, these prophets gave different yet ultimately complementary accounts of God’s creation of the world and the beings in it (Mathews 2009, 36–47, ll. 255–362). Thus, Moses limited itself to an explicit account of God’s corporeal creation, leaving the creation of the angels to later prophets. It is at least intimated that the reason for such selectiveness has to do with the needs of the respective addressees: when Moses recorded the events of creation, “every creature was being worshipped by mankind” and people did not know that they had a creator at all (Mathews 2009, 46–47, ll. 349–352).

(Q 6:98: *li-qawmin yafqahūn*), or “for people who heed God’s hortatory reminders” (Q 6:126: *li-qawmin yadhhdhakkārūn*). Such *li-qawmin* complements are also found with the verbs → *bayyana* + acc., “to clarify s.th.” (e.g., Q 2:230, 6:105), or *ṣarrafa* + acc., “to explain s.th. in various ways” (Q 7:58), and generally appear in cases in which the object of divine clarification or variation are also God’s “signs.” Thus, verbs like *faṣṣala* and *bayyana* refer to God’s effort to make humans understand that nature and history are replete with theologically charged indicants (→ *āyah*), and the activities they denote are intrinsically oriented towards recipients, as indicated by the prepositional syntagm *li-qawmin*. Also relatively frequent (nineteen occurrences) are statements of the form “In X there are signs (*āyāt*) *li-qawmin* . . .” (e.g., Q 2:164, 6:99, 10:6.67, 30:21.23.24.37, 45:3–5).

One might understand such *li-qawmin* supplements to reveal that the recipients addressed by God’s signs are only those humans who already recognise, or are disposed to recognise, certain cosmic or natural phenomena as pointing to God’s presence, omnipotence, and ability to inflict retribution. Such a reading invariably engenders the question whether it makes much sense to posit that human understanding, knowledge, and heedfulness precede God’s expounding of his signs, as opposed to being engendered by it. One might respond by saying that perhaps the signs in questions are only addressed to those humans whom God has predestined to believe in them. However, other verses combine a main clause referring to the display or expounding of God’s signs with a consecutive clause introduced by → *la’alla*, “so that,” such as Q 2:73, 2:178, and 13:2: God “shows you<sup>p</sup> his signs so that you might understand (*la’allakum ta’qilūn*)”; God “clarifies his signs to the people so that they might be God-fearing (*la’allahum yattaqūn*); and God “expounds the signs so that you might have certainty about meeting your Lord.” In all of these statements, we encounter the expected sequence that communication of God’s signs is meant to prompt human insight rather than presupposing it, and it is quite clear that God’s signs are directed at “the people” (*al-nās*) at large (Q 2:187; similarly 2:221) rather than at the small subset of people who are already converted.<sup>6</sup> It is therefore attractive to conjecture, with Daniel Madigan, that *li-qawmin* syntagms are to be understood as equivalent to such *la’alla* clauses (Madigan 2001, 100–101) and to construe phrases like *li-qawmin ya’lamūn* as having the approximate sense of “so that people might come to know” rather than “for people who [already] have knowledge.”

Naturally, *li-qawmin ya’lamūn* does not literally mean “so that people might know.” But it merits noting that all Qur’anic instances of *li-qawmin* + verb in the prefix conjugation occur in verse-final position. Given that it has been shown that the Qur’an often accommodates a passage’s prevailing rhyme by miscellaneous devices, such as modifying the expected word order or replacing an expected expression by a cognate substitute (Stewart 2009), the conjecture that *li-qawmin ya’lamūn* is functionally equivalent to a non-rhyming variant like *li-ya’lama qawmun* or *li-ya’lama l-nāsu* coheres well with a more general feature of Qur’anic style. In any case, the philological liberty of rendering an asyndetic relative clause by a consecutive clause is mitigated if one opts for translations like “for people who would have knowledge,” “for people who would have understanding,” etc., which make it clear that knowledge and understanding are an intended result rather than a precondition of being exposed to God’s signs.

6 For more detail on *al-nās*, see under → *al-‘ālamūn*.

***faḍḍala* tr. ‘alā | to favour s.o. over s.o.**

***faḍl* | favour**

→ *isrā’īl*, → *darajah*, → *an‘ama*

***faṭara* tr. | to create s.th.**

***fāṭir* | creator**

***fiṭrah* | creaturely disposition, creaturely constitution**

See under → *khalaqa* and, on *fiṭrah*, under → *ḥanīf*.

***faqīr* | poor, needful**

See under → *zakāh* and also briefly under → *ḥamd*.

***faqiha* tr./intr. | to understand (s.th.)**

→ *dhakkara*, → *faṣṣala*, → *qalb*

***tafakkara* intr. | to reflect**

→ *la‘alla*

***fakk raqabah* | releasing a neck, manumitting a slave**

→ *darajah*

***aflaḥa* intr. | to prosper**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *qad* | surely, certainly**

The verb *aflaḥa*, “to prosper,” can refer to success in this-worldly affairs, as illustrated by Q 20:64, where the Egyptians declare, in the context of Moses’s contest with the Egyptian magicians, that “the one who gains the upper hand will surely prosper today” (*wa-qad aflaḥa l-yawma mani sta‘lā*). (The particle *qad* here likely serves to express emphatic confirmation rather than the completion of a temporally prior action, as it would according to post-Qur’anic grammar.<sup>1</sup>) But in many other instances, *aflaḥa* clearly has an eschatological

<sup>1</sup> In Q 91:9–10, too, *qad* is best taken to express emphatic affirmation rather than connoting temporal priority: “He who purifies it”—referring back to → *nafs* in v. 7, signifying the human person—“will surely prosper (*qad aflaḥa man zakkāhā*) // and he who sullies it will surely be reduced to destitution (*wa-qad khāba man dassāhā*).” The same applies to the other two Qur’anic occurrences of *qad aflaḥa* in Q 23:1 (*qad aflaḥa l-mu‘minūn*, “The believers will surely prosper”) and Q 87:14 (*qad aflaḥa man tazakkā*, “he who purifies himself will prosper”). On all four verses, see also Reuschel 1996, 136. What seems to be happening in these Qur’anic occurrences of *qad aflaḥa* (there are no variant occurrences that combine *qad* with a prefix-conjugation form of *aflaḥa*) is that the suffix conjugation corresponds to a general present, to which *qad* then adds further reinforcement. For a verse in which *qad* is more likely to express temporal priority, see Q 50:28 (*wa-qad qaddamtu ilaykum bi-l-wa‘īd*, “I have previously”—namely, prior to the eschatological judgement—“conveyed my threatening pledge to you”).



or other-worldly significance (e.g., Q 7:8, 23:102.117, 87:14). Quite possibly, Qur’anic occurrences of *aflaḥa* should therefore be understood to carry a general soteriological undertone, evoking the attainment of eschatological salvation,<sup>2</sup> even if in specific contexts the notion of inner-worldly flourishing may also be present. Interestingly, the occurrence of *aflaḥa* in the Egyptians’ utterance in Q 20:64 contrasts with God’s encouragement of Moses a few verses later that “sorcerers will not prosper anywhere” (*wa-lā yuflīḥu l-sāḥīru ḥaythu atā*; Q 20:69).<sup>3</sup> Given that the speaker of this statement is God, it would be entirely appropriate for *aflaḥa* to predict not only the magicians’ impending defeat in their confrontation with Moses here, but also to express a concomitant threat of damnation.

### ***afāḍa* intr. | to pour forth**

→ *ḥajja*, → *ḥarrama*

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For the standard account of *qad* in classical Arabic, see, e.g., Wright 1974, 1:286. The disparity between the use of *qad* in the Qur’an and in early poetry, on the one hand, and later grammatical norms, on the other, is even more pronounced when *qad* combines with the imperfect or prefix conjugation; see *EAP* 1:72 and *CDKA* 328.

<sup>2</sup> This is well captured by Paret’s translation of Q 23:1 (*qad aflaḥa l-mu’minūn*): *Selig sind die Gläubigen*.

<sup>3</sup> The assessment that Q 20:68–69 contrasts with and rebuts 20:63–64 is strengthened by the occurrence of *s-ḥ-r* and *‘l-w/y* in both passages.

# q

**q** (surah-initial letter)

→ 'l-r

**mutaqābilūn** pl. | facing one another

→ *jannah*

**qatala** tr. | to kill s.o.

**qātala** tr./intr. | to fight (s.o.)

→ *jāhada*, → *sabīl*, → *aqraḍa*

**qad** | surely, certainly

→ *aflaḥa*

**qadara** intr. 'alā | to have power over s.th. or s.o.; to be able to do s.th.

→ *qadīr*

**qaddara** tr. | to endow s.th. with measure

**qadar**, **qadr** | measure; ordainment, decree

**laylat al-qadr** | the night of foreordainment

See under → *khalāqa* and, on *laylat al-qadr*, under → *amr*.

**qadīr**: 'alā *kull shay'* ~ | endowed with power over all things

Further vocabulary discussed: **qadara** intr. 'alā | to have power over s.th. or s.o.; to be able to do s.th. **arāda** tr. | to want, intend, or will s.th. **shā'a** tr./intr. | to wish or will (s.th.) **bi-kull shay'** 'alīm | knowledgeable about everything **malakūt kull shay'** | kingship over everything

Verse-final use of **qadīr** in the sense of **qadīr**. More than thirty Qur'anic verses, both Meccan and Medinan, affirm that God is "endowed with power over everything" ('alā *kullī shay'in qadīr*; e.g., Q 2:20.106.109 etc., 3:26.29.165.189, 35:1, 41:39, 42:9, 67:1). The phrase occurs mostly in verse-final rhyme position, although there is one exception (Q 65:12).

The corresponding verbal phrase *qadara 'alā*, “to have power over s.th. or s.o.,” is found, for instance, in Q 16:75.76 and 21:87. Verse-internal affirmations of divine power show a preference for the active participle *qādir* (Q 6:37.65, 17:99, 36:81, 46:33, 75:40; see also 75:4 with the plural), and even some verse-final statements have *qādir* or its plural *qādirūn* where this is in keeping with the surrounding rhyme pattern (Q 23:18.95, 70:40, 86:8). Conversely, the only verse-internal occurrences of *qadīr* are in Q 60:7 and 65:12, both of which are late and likely to reflect the set phrase *'alā kulli shay'in qadīr*. Use of the *fa'il* form *qadīr* in the sense of the cognate *fā'il* form is therefore to be regarded as motivated by rhyme (see generally Müller 1969 and Stewart 2009, 20–25).<sup>1</sup> This conclusion is further supported by the analogous cases of Q 95:3 and 44:51, where verse-final *amīn* occurs in lieu of the active participle *āmin*, also due to rhyme (Müller 1969, 54–59).

**God's supremacy over all things.** The phrase *'alā kulli shay'in qadīr* recalls the Greek epithet *pantokratōr*, which is conventionally rendered “almighty” but perhaps more accurately translated “ruler of all things” (see *TDNT* 3:914–915).<sup>2</sup> Should we, then, take the Qur'anic predication *'alā kulli shay'in qadīr* to assert God's “supremacy over all things,” as one scholar has explained the purport of Greek *pantokratōr* (*TDNT* 3:915)? *Qadara 'alā* (or being *qādir 'alā*) can mean having power over someone or something (e.g., Q 5:34, 10:24, 16:75, 21:87, 57:29, 90:5), but *qadara 'alā*—in the construction *qādir 'alā an* + subordinate clause—can also refer to someone's ability to do something, i.e., to execute a certain action (e.g., Q 6:37: *inna llāha qādirun 'alā an yunazzila āyatan*, “God is able to send down a sign”; see also 6:65, 17:99, 36:81, 46:33, 75:4.40). Against this background, *'alā kulli shay'in qadīr* could be taken to mean, not divine supremacy over all things, but rather God's ability to do anything (or anything that is not logically impossible), as explicitly stated in Q 2:253, 11:107, 22:14, 85:16: God “does what he wants” (*yaf'alu mā yurīd* or *fa'ālun li-mā yurīd*; see under → *shā'a*). This way of parsing *'alā kulli shay'in qadīr* is implied, for instance, when the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn* glosses *'alā kulli shay'in* (“over everything”) in Q 2:20 as *'alā kulli shay'in shā'ahu* (“over everything he wills”; see Jal. 10), perhaps based on the occurrence of the same verb → *shā'a* earlier in the same verse (*wa-law shā'a llāhu la-dhahaba bi-sam'ihim wa-abṣārihim*, “If God willed, he would take away their hearing and their sight”). According to this reading, the universal quantifier “everything” in *'alā kulli shay'in qadīr* would range over conceivable divine actions rather than over the entities populating the world.

Yet a number of observations instead support what one might call the cosmic supremacy interpretation of Qur'anic *'alā kulli shay'in qadīr* affirmations, according to which it attributes to God supremacy over all things. Most importantly, the meaning of *kull shay'* in other contexts is consistently amenable to being elucidated as “everything that exists.” Thus, when it is repeatedly declared that God is *bi-kulli shay'in 'alīm*, “knowledgeable about all things” (e.g., Q 2:29.231.282, 4:32.176), this must mean that God is comprehensively knowledgeable about the entities existing in the world, including their states and the events involving them, and not that God has full knowledge of all the things he might possibly want to do or to create. The same applies when God is described as “the creator of all things” (*khāliq kulli shay'in*, Q 6:102, 13:16, 39:62, 40:62; see also 6:101, 25:2: *khālaqa*

1 Cf. also the variant *'alā kulli shay'in muqtadīrā* in Q 18:45, in line with the rhyme.

2 Being common in the Septuagint, *pantokratōr* is also employed in 2 Cor 6:18 and, mostly in the form *kyrios ho theos ho pantokratōr* (“the Lord God, ruler of all things”), several times throughout the book of Revelation (Rev 1:8, 4:8, 11:17, 15:3, 16:7.14, 19:6.15, 21:22). The Peshitta almost always renders *pantokratōr* by *ahīd koll*, an expression that continues to resonate in later Christian texts (e.g., Vööbus 1979, 9, l. 2, 11, l. 12, and 63, l. 12).

*kulla shay'in*; see similarly 54:49) or when God is said to be in possession of *malakūtu kulli shay'in*, “kingship over all things” (Q 23:88, 36:83): *kull shay'* clearly refers to everything in existence here, i.e., to the beings inhabiting and occupying the cosmos (such as celestial bodies, trees, animals, or humans), rather than to all possible states of affairs or courses of divine action. The contrary of God being *'alā kulli shay'in qadīr*, then, is the expression *lā yaqdiru 'alā shay'in*, “he does not have power over anything,” which Q 16:75 seems to employ to describe a slave’s lacking the legal power of disposal over anything (rather than in the sense of lacking the ability to do anything).<sup>3</sup> Hence, the formula *'alā kulli shay'in qadīr* is not equivalent to the affirmation that God is capable of doing, or indeed does, “what he wants” (*mā yurīd*; e.g., Q 2:253), which does indeed refer to potential states of affairs or conceivable courses of divine action.

Against such a cosmic supremacy reading of *'alā kulli shay'in qadīr*, one might cite Q 46:33, where *'alā kulli shay'in qadīr* is immediately preceded by the following rhetorical question: “Have they not seen that God, who created the heavens and the earth without being tired by their creation, is able to revive the dead (*bi-qādirin 'alā an yuḥyiya l-mawtā*)?” This, of course, is the second meaning of *qadara 'alā* distinguished above, namely, someone’s ability to do something or to undertake a certain action. But while it would admittedly be contextually appropriate for the *'alā kulli shay'in qadīr* clausula to mean “God can do anything” here, the reading “God is endowed with power over everything in the world” is equally fitting: God holds power over everything in the world, including corpses, and he is accordingly able to reimburse them with life.

***qaddasa* intr. li- | to declare s.o. (namely, God) to be holy**  
***muqaddas* | holy**  
***rūḥ al-quḍus* | the holy spirit**  
***quddūs* | holy**

Further vocabulary discussed: *ḥarrama* tr. | to declare s.th. to be, or regard s.th. as, inviolable, sacred, or forbidden *ḥarām, muḥarram* | inviolable, sacred *bāraka* tr. | to bestow blessing upon s.o. or s.th. *bāraka* intr. *'alā/fī* | to bestow blessing upon s.th. or s.o. *sabbaḥa* intr. *bi-ḥamdi . . .* | to glorify and praise s.o. (namely, God)

Similar to the root *ḥ-r-m*, the root *q-d-s* expresses the general notion of holiness or sacredness in the Qur’an. But while derivatives of *ḥ-r-m* would seem to have their *Sitz im Leben* in native Arabian pagan ritual (→ *ḥarrama*), derivatives of *q-d-s* exhibit a consistent association with the Biblical tradition (Durie 2018, 180–182).<sup>1</sup> This is obvious for the term *rūḥ al-quḍus*, “the holy spirit” (Q 2:87.253, 5:110, 16:102), which patently corresponds to the Christian concept of the “Holy Spirit” (*to pneuma to hagion*), even if the Qur’an does

<sup>3</sup> The phrase also occurs in the following verse, Q 16:76, where the potential meaning “is incapable of doing anything” is less obviously inapplicable.

<sup>1</sup> For a similar case of lexical dualism, cf. the contrast between → *dhabaḥa* (“to slaughter, to sacrifice”) and *naḥara* (“to perform an animal sacrifice”), on the one hand, and *qarraba qurbānan* (“to offer up a sacrifice”), on the other: all three terms refer to sacrifice, in particular or at least including animal sacrifice; but the latter has a distinctly Biblical ring that would seem to be absent from the former two verbs. See in more detail under → *dhabaḥa*.

not of course espouse Christian Trinitarianism (see in more detail under → *rūh*). The remaining occurrences of *q-d-s* will be briefly surveyed in what follows.

***Muqaddas and quddūs.*** Confirming the preceding observations, the passive participle *muqaddas* (“holy” or perhaps “worthy of being declared to be holy”) is exclusively used in connection with Biblical places and narratives. Thus, in Q 20:12 and 79:16, the attribute *muqaddas* qualifies the “valley of Ṭuwā,” where the Qur’an locates Moses’s vision of the burning bush and his prophetic initiation (cf. Exod 3:1–4:17; on the term *ṭuwā*, which may not be a proper name, see Rubin 2014b, 75–81). The Qur’anic characterisation of the site of the burning bush as being “holy,” *muqaddas*, may reflect the fact that Exod 3:5 explicitly describes Moses as standing on “holy ground” (JPND 218; Rubin 2014b, 73 and 75). The third and final Qur’anic occurrence of *muqaddas* comes in Q 5:21, where Moses encourages the Israelites to enter “the holy land” (*al-arḍ al-muqaddasah*), the equivalent of the Biblical Canaan.<sup>2</sup> As Rubin notes (Rubin 2014b, 74), an alternative designation for the Holy Land is “the land that we”—namely, God—“have blessed” (Q 21:71.81: *al-arḍ allatī bāraknā fihā*; see similarly 7:137 and cf. 17:1, 34:18), and the site of Moses’s commission is similarly said to have been “blessed,” *mubāarak* (Q 28:30; cf. 27:8).<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the holiness of both places would seem to be grounded in a special link with God, the fount of all holiness.

Fittingly, the Qur’an expresses the inherent and non-derivative holiness of God himself not by the passive participle *muqaddas* but by the epithet *quddūs*, employed in Q 59:23 and 62:1 as part of the divine title *al-malik al-quddūs*, “holy king” (see Rubin 2014b, 75; → *ism*). *Al-malik al-quddūs* corresponds to Hebrew *ha-melek ha-qadosh*, an epithet that according to the Babylonian Talmud features in the Jewish *‘amidah* prayer during the ten days before the Day of Atonement (*b. Bār.* 12b) and may echo Ps 89:19 (BEḲ 40 and JPND 219). One may add the etymological note that the specific form *quddūs* derives from Classical Ethiopic *qaddus* rather than directly from Hebrew *qādōš* (JPND 219). Application of Ethiopic *qaddus* is not confined to the deity (see Leslau 1991, 423). In view of this, one might envisage a scenario whereby Ethiopic *qaddus* (conceivably mediated via Sabaic) gave rise to the Arabic word *quddūs* as an epithet reserved for God. The Arabic divine epithet *quddūs* may then have spread to Arabophone Jews, who employed it in Arabising Hebrew *ha-melek ha-qadosh* as *al-malik al-quddūs*.

**The verb *qaddasa*.** The last occurrence of *q-d-s* to be reviewed is Q 2:30, where the angels profess to be engaged in declaring God’s holiness (*nuqaddisu laka*; see under → *malak*). This, too, is likely to have a Biblical background, namely, the angels’ exclamation in Isa 6:3, “Holy (*qādōš*), holy, holy is the Lord of hosts” (see also Rev 4:8), an exclamation that figures both in the Jewish *qadushah* prayer (Elbogen 1931, 61–67; see JPND 219) and in the Christian Sanctus hymn. In fact, Syriac *qaddesh* can have the specific meaning “to recite the Sanctus” (*SL* 1320). Interestingly, one of the prooftexts that is cited in *SL*, found in a hymn by Jacob of Sarug (Bedjan 1905–1910, 3:5, l. 13; see the translation in Mathews 2009, 16–17,

<sup>2</sup> The fact that both the site of the burning bush and the land promised to the Israelites are characterised by the same attribute *muqaddas* is significant. It implies either that the Qur’an considers Mount Sinai—in whose vicinity both the Qur’an and the Bible place the burning bush—to be situated in the land of the Israelites (Sinai 2017b, 207–208) or at least that the Qur’an considers Mount Sinai and the land of the Israelites to share the same kind and degree of holiness (Rubin 2014b, 74–75).

<sup>3</sup> The verb *bāraka* is now, it seems, attested in a Palaeo-Arabic inscription from north of al-Ṭā’if (Al-Jallad and Sidky 2021).

l. 83), combines a derivative of the verb *qaddesh* with one of the verb *shabbeḥ* (cognate with Qur’anic *sabbaha*, “to glorify”) in connection with the angels, just as Q 2:30 conjoins *qaddasa* and *sabbaha bi-ḥamdi*, “to glorify and praise” God. This is not an isolated case in Syriac (see also Mathews 2009, 30–31, ll. 190–192, and 34–35, l. 229).<sup>4</sup>

**Concluding remarks on *q-d-s* and *ḥ-r-m*.** In sum, as previously stressed by Mark Durie, all occurrences of the root *q-d-s* in the Qur’an display an obvious connection with Biblical history and geography or can be meaningfully linked to a Biblical intertext (Durie 2018, 180). In contrast to the root *ḥ-r-m*, which expresses sacrality in the Durkheimian sense of inviolability, of things “set apart” and “forbidden” by virtue of being subject to special taboos and restrictions (→ *ḥarrama*), the root *q-d-s* conveys the numinous, awe-inspiring nature of the deity himself (see generally Otto 2014) and the special quality of the Biblical Holy Land, presumably by virtue of being a region particularly associated with salvific divine manifestations and interventions in history.<sup>5</sup> While the Arabic root *q-d-s* was almost certainly borrowed from Jewish and/or Christian usage (*FVQ* 232), this would seem to have occurred well before the Qur’an, since a poem attributed to Imru’ al-Qays compares hunting dogs sinking their teeth into the legs of a wild ox to children tearing at the robe of a *muqaddis*, perhaps a Christian monk or priest celebrating mass (*DSAAP*, Imru’ al-Qays, no. 31:12; *JPND* 218).<sup>6</sup>

***qaddama* intr./tr. *li-* | to make preparations for s.th., to prepare s.th. for s.th.  
*qaddama* tr. (*li-nafsihi*) | to accomplish s.th. previously (on behalf of o.s.)**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *nafs* | soul, (vital) self    *aslafa* tr. | to do s.th. beforehand  
*akhkhara* tr. | to postpone or delay s.th.; to reprieve s.o.; to neglect to do s.th., to fail to accomplish s.th.**

**Overview of Qur’anic usage.** The Qur’an frequently employs the second-form verb *qaddama* with the plural *aydin* or the dual *yadān* (“hands”), followed by a possessive suffix, as its grammatical subject (e.g., Q 2:95: *mā qaddamat aydihim* and 78:40: *mā qaddamat yadāhu*; see also 3:182, 4:62, 8:51, 18:57, 22:10, 28:47, 30:36, 42:48, and 62:7). On occasion, *qaddama* combines with a prepositional phrase introduced by *li-*, such as *li-anfusikum*, “for yourselves” or “on behalf of yourselves” (Q 2:110.223, 73:20). In three cases, *anfus* or its singular → *nafs* (“self,” but also “soul”) figure as the grammatical subject of *qaddama* (e.g., Q 5:80: *mā qaddamat lahum anfusuhum*; see also 59:18 and 82:5). Q 12:48, according to which Joseph tells the Egyptians that they will face “seven hard [years] that will eat what you have prepared for them (*mā qaddamtum lahunna*),” shows that *qaddama li-* can designate the making of provisions for some future eventuality (see also *CDKA* 221). Most

4 On *qaddasa* in Q 2:30, see also Zellentin 2017, 85–86 and 125.

5 Durie links the root *q-d-s* with “the idea of separation” (Durie 2018, 181). While agreeing with his general insistence on the difference between two conceptions of holiness in the Qur’an, a native Arabian one corresponding to *ḥ-r-m* and a Biblical one corresponding to *q-d-s*, I am very doubtful that it is accurate to identify the Qur’anic valence of *q-d-s* with the notion of separation. Note that the only piece of evidence that Durie adduces in this regard is *AEL* 2496, according to which *qadasa* means “to go far away” (Durie 2018, 245, n. 44). But this is not of course a Qur’anic piece of lexical information.

6 See also Fraenkel 1886, 270, arguing against the traditional identification of the *muqaddis* as a pilgrim entering Jerusalem.



of the Qur’anic occurrences of *qaddama*, however, do not intend the making of mundane preparations but have an eschatological purport. For example, the Israelites are accused of being afraid of dying “on account of what their hands *qaddamat*” (*bi-mā qaddamat aydihim*; Q 2:95), and the believers are urged, “*qaddimū* for yourselves and fear God” (*qaddimū li-anfusikum wa-ttaqū llāha*; 2:223).

**Qaddama in early poetry.** As shown by Bravmann, the verb *qaddama* is also found in early Arabic poetry (Bravmann 1972, 95–104). For instance, a poem from the *dīwān* of Ṭufayl ibn ‘Awf has the phrase *mā qaddamat lahu yadāhu* (Krenkow 1927, Ṭufayl, no. 19:1, discussed in Bravmann 1972, 95–96); just as in some of the Qur’anic verse surveyed above, the grammatical subject of the verb *qaddama* is “his hands” here. Bravmann argues that the phrase is best rendered “what his hands have accomplished for him” or “on his behalf,” expressing the heroic notion that “a man’s deed becomes part of his permanent record and his warlike ‘past’” (Bravmann 1972, 98). Also pertinent is a line from the *dīwān* of ‘Alqamah alluding to “the evil” that the members of a certain group have perpetrated or brought upon themselves (*mā qaddamū li-nufūsihim mina l-sharri*; DSAAP, ‘Alqamah, no. 10:6, discussed in Bravmann 1972, 96). Similar to Q 2:110.223 and 73:20, the verb *qaddama* here combines with the preposition *li-* followed by the plural of *nafs*. Moreover, as Bravmann highlights, the ‘Alqamah verse shows particularly clearly that *qaddama* can refer not only to the doing of virtuous or reputable deeds but also to committing ignominious ones. In fact, ‘Alqamah’s *mā qaddamū li-nufūsihim mina l-sharri* forms a strikingly neat counterpart to *mā tuqaddimū li-anfusikum min khayrin* in Q 2:110 and 73:20.

**Qaddama = “to accomplish previously”?** Qur’anic *qaddama* is often understood in a literal sense as designating the “forwarding” of one’s deserts or transgressions to one’s final judgement. Thus, al-Ṭabarī glosses Q 2:110 (*mā tuqaddimū li-anfusikum min khayrin tajidūhu ‘inda allāhi*) as meaning, “Whatever righteous deeds you do in the days of your life, such that you are sending them forward prior to your death as a supply for yourselves in the hereafter, you will find its reward with your Lord on the day of resurrection” (Ṭab. 2:426; see also Mir 1989, 268, as well as the Arberry 1955 and Jones 2007, both opting for “to forward” or “to send forward”). In favour of *qaddama* meaning “to send s.th. ahead,” one may point to Q 50:28 (*wa-qad qaddamtu ilaykum bi-l-wa‘id*, “I have previously conveyed my threatening pledge to you”; see CDKA 221). On the other hand, Bravmann’s discussion of the semantics of *qaddama* makes it attractive to consider rendering *qaddama* as “to accomplish” (Bravmann 1972, 96), in the interest of bringing out the semantic continuity between Qur’anic *qaddama* and its poetic usage, which certainly does not imply an eschatological reckoning to which one’s deeds are literally “forwarded.” In light of Q 10:30 and 69:24, which employ *aslafa* + acc., “to do s.th. beforehand,” in an eschatological context in which one might otherwise have expected *qaddama*, one might revise Bravmann’s proposed translation into “to accomplish s.th. previously.”

Still, such a Bravmann-inspired approach cannot be implemented across the board without some contextual variation and modification. For instance, in Q 12:48 (quoted above) *qaddama* can hardly be rendered other than by “to prepare,” “to make advance provisions,” or the like. Another verse for which the general translational policy of rendering *qaddama* as “to accomplish” requires variation is Q 59:18, where *wa-l-tanzur nafsun mā qaddamat li-ghadin* might be rendered as “Let everyone behold what he has accomplished in preparation for tomorrow.” For Q 2:223 (*qaddimū li-anfusikum wa-ttaqū llāha*) one may suggest “store up accomplishments for yourselves and fear God.” Moreover, the English verb “to accomplish”

can only take positive achievements as its object, unlike *qaddama*. Thus, while *mā tuqaddimū li-anfusikum min khayrin* in Q 2:110 and 73:20 is acceptably rendered “whatever good you accomplish on your own behalf,” ‘Alqamah’s *mā qaddamū li-nufūsihim mina l-sharri* necessitates recourse to a different English verb (e.g., “the evil that they have committed” or even “by which they have tarnished themselves”). Finally, two verses juxtapose *qaddama* and *akhkhara* (Q 75:13, 82:5). Although *akhkhara* can clearly mean “to postpone,” “to delay” (e.g., Q 71:4; see CDKA 22 and under → *ajal*), the rhetorically effective antithesis between *q-d-m* and *’-kh-r* in Q 75:13 and 82:5 is perhaps best approximated by rendering Q 82:5 as “everyone will come to know what he/she has accomplished and neglected to accomplish” (*’alimat nafsun mā qaddamat wa-akhkharat*).<sup>1</sup>

Of course, in contrast to pre-Islamic poetry, the actions whose accomplishment is invoked in the Qur’an are not merely the constituent elements of a man’s track record of displaying miscellaneous heroic virtues. Rather, they derive their ultimate significance from the fact that they accord, or fail to accord, with the moral norms enforced by a divine judge who will mete out eternal posthumous rewards and punishments. From this vantage point, a human’s deeds do not only add to his or her individual record of achievements but will also determine his/her chances of withstanding divine muster “on the day on which man will behold what his hands have accomplished” (*yawma yanẓuru l-mar’u mā qaddamat yadāhu*; Q 78:40). Similarly, Q 2:110 and 73:20 aver that “whatever good you accomplish for yourselves you will find with God” (*wa-mā tuqaddimū li-anfusikum min-khayrin tajidūhu ’inda llāhi*). In this sense, the Qur’an clearly invites associating the verb *qaddama* with providing for one’s afterlife (cf. Q 89:24: *yā-laytanī qaddamtū li-ḥayātī*, “Would that I had made preparations for my life [after death]”), just as the Egyptians in Q 12:48 “provide for” seven lean years. But even if the eschatological perspective with which Qur’anic *qaddama* is bound up is absent from pre-Islamic poetry, “both usages can be considered as having one element of meaning in common which is not specifically religious: the idea that good and noble, as well as bad and ignominious achievements are indestructible, in other words, that their existence is not over with their actuality, and that they can be accumulated, like a capital” (Bravmann 1972, 100).

As pointed out by Ahrens (CQ 49), a passage from the Syriac *Lives of the Eastern Saints* by the sixth-century author John of Ephesus describes a rich woman who decides to give away all of her possessions as “sending ahead everything that you own” (*mshaddrā att qdāmayk koll meddem d-īt lek*; Land 1868, 270, ll. 2–3 = Brooks 1926, 195, l. 10). This could be deemed to validate the conventional rendering of Qur’anic *qaddama* as “to send forward, send ahead” or the like. However, the phraseological similarity of the Qur’anic usage with the two poetic prooftexts cited earlier—namely, the strong tendency displayed by Qur’anic *qaddama* to collocate with “hands” (*aydin, yadān*) as well as its combination with *li-* + plural of *nafs*—supports a default recourse to the translation “to accomplish” where the context allows it, based on Bravmann’s analysis of the use of *qaddama* in early Arabic poetry. This does not, of course, mean that the Qur’an is residually committed to the heroism of pre-Islamic poetry. Rather, the Qur’an repurposes an idiom associated with a heroic canon of values and integrates it into a world-view in which the ultimate significance of human actions is determined by the will and eschatological verdict of a

1 An antithetic use of the roots *q-d-m* and *’-kh-r* also appears with other verb forms; see, e.g., Q 7:34, 15:24, 48:2, 74:37.

divine judge. As Izutsu has shown, other Qur’anic concepts exhibit a similar repurposing of ancient Arabic vocabulary (ERCQ 74–104).

***qara’a* tr./intr. (‘alā) | to recite (s.th.) (to s.o.)**  
***qur’ān* | recitation**

Further vocabulary discussed: *qara’a bi-smi rabbihi* | to proclaim or invoke the name of his Lord *kitāb* | scripture; written record, record book *talā* tr. (‘alā) | to recite s.th. (to s.o.), to recount s.th. (to s.o.) *al-tawrāh* | the Torah *āyah* | sign *naba’* | tidings, tidings *dhikr, tadhkirah* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation *lawḥ mahfūz* | guarded tablet *sūrah* | surah ‘*allama* tr. | to teach s.th., to convey knowledge of s.th. ‘*arabī* | Arabic *al-injīl* | the Gospel or the Christian Bible

**Overview of *qara’a*.** The verb *qara’a* has cognates in Aramaic (*qrā*) and Hebrew (*qārā’*), from which it may have been borrowed into Arabic (GQ 1:33 and FVQ 233). In Qur’anic Arabic, *qara’a* generally means “to recite” rather than “to read,” even less “to read silently” (GQ 1:32–33). This emerges from its combination with the preposition ‘*alā*, “to,” followed by a designation of the respective audience (Q 17:106, 26:199, 84:21), and by the unequivocal reference to audition in Q 7:204: “And when the recitation is recited (*idhā qurī’a l-qur’ānu*), then listen<sup>p</sup> to it (*fa-stami’ū lahu*) and be quiet, so that you may receive mercy!” (KU 74). An exception is Q 96:1, where *qara’a*—here governing the prepositional object *bi-smi rabbika*—may preserve the meaning of the cognate Hebrew phrase *qārā’ bāšēm YHWH* (Peshitta: *qrā b-shmeh d-māryā*), which is to say that *qara’a* may in this instance have the unusual meaning “to proclaim,” “to invoke” (see in detail under → *ism*).

The Qur’an seems to associate the activity designated by *qara’a* with religious texts (GQ 1:82): as Jeffery observes (FVQ 233), the objects of *qara’a* are predominantly the revelatory proclamations conveyed by Muhammad and, in two cases, “the scripture” (→ *al-kitāb*; Q 10:94) or “a scripture” to be brought down from heaven (Q 17:93). Three verses have *qara’a* in connection with the individual record books, also called *kitāb*, that will be read out on the day of judgement (Q 17:14.71, 69:19; see Graham 1984, 368, and Welch 1986, 400).

***Talā* as a synonym.** A synonym of *qara’a* is *talā*. Like *qara’a*, *talā* (whose verbal noun *tilāwah* occurs in Q 2:121) can take as its object a scripture (*kitāb*) or “the scripture” (Q 2:44.113.121, 4:127, 18:27, 29:45.48.51, 35:29), in one case also the Torah (Q 3:93), twice “a recitation” (*qur’ān*) or “the recitation” (Q 10:61, 27:92). In such cases, the rendering “to recite” imposes itself, with Q 10:61 and 27:92 corroborating that *qara’a* and *talā* can be virtually equivalent. The same applies to verses commanding the Messenger to recite (*talā*) “what we have conveyed to you from the scripture of your Lord” (Q 18:27: *wa-tlu mā ūḥiya ilayka min kitābi rabbika*; similarly, 13:30 and 29:45), in so far as at least two of these three passages (Q 18:27, 29:45) involve a reference to God’s scripture. But even more frequently, the object of *talā* consists in God’s “signs” (*āyāt*; e.g., Q 2:129.151.252, 3:58.101.108.113.164, 8:2.31, 10:15, 19:58.73, 68:15, 83:13) or some revelatory “announcement” or “tiding” (*naba’*, Q 5:27, 7:175, 10:71, 26:69, 28:3). In passages falling into the latter two categories, there is a good case for translating *talā* as “to recount,” given that the contextual implication may not be word-for-word repetition.

**The noun *qur'ān* and its various senses.** The noun *qur'ān* is derived from the same consontal root as *qara'a* (*KU* 74; *GQ* 1:32–33; Graham 1984, 364). Since its morphological pattern *fu'lān* is also attested for other verbal nouns (Wright 1974, 1:111), an inner-Arabic derivation of the noun *qur'ān* from the verb *qara'a* faces no major obstacles, and the word accordingly signifies, in the first instance, the act of reciting. At the same time, modern Western scholars have noted the similarity between Arabic *qur'ān* and Syriac *qeryānā*, and have proposed that *qur'ān* is in fact an Arabisation of the latter, patterned on the *maṣdar* structure *fu'lān* (*GQ* 1:33–34; *KU* 74; Welch 1986, 400), or at least that the meaning of the “perfectly good and not infrequent” Arabic verbal noun *qur'ān* was subject to the semantic influence of Syriac *qeryānā* (Graham 1984, 365).<sup>1</sup> *Qeryānā* can signify not only the activity of reading but a scriptural passage that is assigned as a liturgical reading (*TS* 3716; Graham 1984, 365; Welch 1986, 400; Burkitt 1923, 5).<sup>2</sup> But *qeryānā* can also mean the Bible in general or specifically the Old Testament (*SL* 1409), thus forming an effective equivalent of Hebrew *miqra'*, whose meanings encompass scripture, the reading of scripture, and individual scriptural prooftexts (*DTTM* 832; e.g., *m. Nəd.* 4:3; see also *GQ* 1:32; Horowitz 1923, 67; Graham 1984, 366). Both the Syriac and the Hebrew cognates will have informed the way in which the Islamic scripture uses the noun *qur'ān* in three distinct though interrelated senses: (i) the activity of recitation, (ii) the total corpus of revelatory proclamations delivered by Muhammad, and (iii) an individual proclamation belonging to this corpus (Watt 1970, 135–136; Graham 1984, 369; Welch 1986, 401). While two other early Qur'anic self-designations, *dhikr* (e.g., Q 68:51–52, 81:27) and *tadhkirah* (e.g., Q 73:19, 74:54–55, 80:11–12; see under → *dhakkara*), highlight the Qur'anic proclamations' intended hortatory effect—namely, to remind their recipients of the divine judgement and to persuade them to act accordingly—the term *qur'ān* underscores the Qur'anic proclamations' quality of being “God's holy word to be recited in worship” (Graham 1984, 366).

Both *qara'a* and the verbal noun *qur'ān* are prominently attested from the early Meccan period onwards. While it is not always possible to privilege one of the three meanings just enumerated (see in more detail Graham 1984), each of the three categories is borne out by at least some passages that are sufficiently univocal. Thus, *qur'ān* as a verbal noun referring to the act of recitation—meaning (i) above—is on clear display in Q 75:17–18: “It is to us that its composition and recitation falls” (*inna 'alaynā jam'ahu wa-qur'ānah*), avers the divine voice and then goes on to instruct the Messenger to repeat what God recites to him: “when we have recited it, follow its recitation” (*fa-idhā qara'nāhu fa-ttabi' qur'ānah*), after which it will devolve upon God to supply “clarification” of what has been revealed (v. 19: *thumma inna 'alaynā bayānah*; see also under → *bayyana*). The same use of *qur'ān* to designate the act of recitation can be seen in Q 17:78, which bids the recipients to perform the “recitation at daybreak” (*qur'ān al-fajr*; see Rivlin 1934, 100–101), and 20:114, instructing Muhammad

1 Graham notes that in the case of a direct borrowing from Syriac, one would have expected the form *qiryān* (Graham 1984, 365, with n. 20).

2 Luxenberg infers from the link between *qur'ān* and *qeryānā* that “the Koran thus corresponds originally to the *lectionarium* (*lectionary*) still used in Western Christianity today as a liturgical book containing excerpts from scripture to be read aloud during the service” (Luxenberg 2007, 71). But even though *qeryānā* is sometimes, in passing, equated with a “lectionary” (e.g., El-Badawi 2014, 16; Neuwirth 2016a, 185), this does not seem to be entirely accurate: as substantiated by the references in the main text, a *qeryānā* is a scriptural reading or “lesson,” while a lectionary is a *ktābā d-qeryānē* (*TS* 3716; *FVQ* 234). Specifically in response to Luxenberg, one must insist that the Qur'anic proclamations primarily style themselves as a recitation of the celestial scripture, i.e., as a *qur'ān* of the celestial *kitāb* (e.g., Q 12:1–2) rather than a *kitāb* compiling *qur'āns*.

not to “rush the recitation before it has been completely conveyed to you” (*wa-lā ta’jal bi-l-qur’āni min qabli an yuqḏā ilayka waḥyuhu*; Graham 1984, 369–370).<sup>3</sup>

It bears repeating that despite the collocation of the verb *qara’a* with the noun *kitāb*, noted above, the activity of *qur’ān* is not invariably the oral reproduction of a written source. This is one reason why *qara’a* and *qur’ān* cannot consistently be rendered as “to read” and “reading.” For instance, Q 75:17–18, just cited, suggest that when the Qur’anic Messenger recites a Qur’anic revelation for the first time, he does so by way of reproducing a prior divine recitation rather than by way of reading out a written document. Q 87:6 too may hint that the Messenger’s inaugural recitation of a revelation is not mediated by writing (“We shall cause you<sup>s</sup> to recite, and you will not forget,” *sa-nuqri’uka fa-lā tansā*). Neither passage conclusively establishes the traditional view that Muhammad was illiterate, however, nor do they rule out that the Qur’anic proclamations may have been committed to writing already during Muhammad’s lifetime. When Q 29:49 says that the “clear signs” conveyed by Muhammad are, or are intended to be, lodged “in the breasts of those who have been given knowledge,” this could be an allusion to communal memorisation rather than merely to the recipients’ internalisation of the Qur’anic message.<sup>4</sup> Overall, the evidence is too scarce to allow us to decide whether the “recitation at daybreak” (*qur’ān al-fajr*, Q 17:78), which would surely have involved a reuse of previously revealed Qur’anic material, was based on memorisation, on transcripts of Muhammad’s inaugural proclamation of a given surah, or on both.

Despite the prominence of the first meaning of *qur’ān*—namely, the act of recitation—in the early Meccan surahs, there is no evidence for a gradual inner-Qur’anic evolution from *qur’ān* = the act of recitation, as per meaning (i), to *qur’ān* = what is being recited, as per meanings (ii) and (iii). Rather, from early on the term *qur’ān* also refers to the textual object of recitation. For example, the concluding couplet of Surah 85, vv. 21–22, affirms the supernatural origin of the preceding by saying that “it is a glorious recitation, // in a guarded tablet” (*bal huwa qur’ānun majīd // fī lawḥin maḥfūz*; see also under → *kitāb*). A structural parallel to Q 85:21–22 that also has the noun *qur’ān* occurs in Q 56:77–80: “It is a noble recitation (*innahu la-qur’ānun karīm*), // in a sheltered scripture (*fī kitābin maktūn*), // touched only by those who are pure, // a sending-down from the Lord of the world-dwellers.” Although Muhammad’s revelations are here traced back to a transcendent piece of writing, a celestial scripture (→ *kitāb*), their specific mode of conveyance and reception is oral and aural.

It is difficult to decide whether statements like Q 85:21 and 56:77 are to be construed in the second or the third meaning of *qur’ān* distinguished above, i.e., as referring to the entire corpus of revelations proclaimed by Muhammad or to an individual Qur’anic proclamation. In fact, the third meaning is unequivocally discernible only in a relatively small number of passages (Q 10:15.61, 13:31, 72:1; see also Radscheit 1996a, 86–87). The reason may be that the sense of a single Qur’anic proclamation adheres more consistently to the term → *sūrah*. There is, however, the danger that as a result of later semantic developments, scholars may subconsciously give preference to what Graham calls the “collective” sense of *qur’ān* even where the individual one is perfectly possible (e.g., Q 12:3; see Graham

<sup>3</sup> This first meaning of *qur’ān* remained operative even in early post-Qur’anic literature (Graham 1984, 373–374).

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Saqib Hussain for directing my attention to this verse.



1984, 369). It is noteworthy that despite the ultimate predominance of *al-qur'ān* as a title for the corpus of Muhammad's revelations, *qur'ān* in the archaic sense of an individual Qur'anic proclamation continues to occur in the *ḥadīth* literature (Graham 1984, 374–375). In interpreting specific occurrences of the term *qur'ān* in the Islamic scripture, therefore, it should be borne in mind that the applicable signification might be (iii) rather than (ii). One might add the comparative observation that the New Testamental employment of *graphē*, “scripture,” shows an ambiguity paralleling meanings (ii) and (iii) of *qur'ān*: *graphē* denotes both the entire corpus of the Hebrew scriptures as well as an individual scriptural passage (*TDNT* 1:751–754).

Like meaning (i), the second or “collective” sense of *qur'ān* is present from very early on. This is clearest in passages employing *al-qur'ān* with the definite article (“the recitation,” or perhaps “the Qur'anic recitations”) and without a preceding demonstrative (as in *hādihā al-qur'ān*, “this recitation,” at Q 12:3, which might in principle also refer to a specific Qur'an-proclamation; see Graham 1984, 371). Thus, Q 84:21 remonstrates that the addressees (who only figure elusively as “they” here) “do not prostrate themselves when the recitation is recited to them” (*wa-idhā qurī'a 'alayhimu l-qur'ānu lā yasjudūn*); Q 55:2 credits God with having “taught the recitation” (*allama l-qur'ān*); and the same usage recurs in a somewhat later Meccan passage, Q 76:23: “It was indeed we who sent the recitation down upon you<sup>5</sup>” (*innā nahnu nazzalnā 'alayka l-qur'āna tanzīlā*). In subsequent Meccan texts, use of *al-qur'ān* as a general appellation for Muhammad's revelations becomes dominant (e.g., Q 20:2, 25:32, 27:6, 73:4). From a certain point in time, probably first in Q 20:113 and 43:3, several verses qualify the noun *qur'ān* by the adjective *'arabī*, “Arabic,” highlighting that the revelations proclaimed by Muhammad are composed in a linguistic medium that differs from previous scriptural and parascriptural literature (see under → *'arabī*) and thereby makes God's revelations accessible to a wider audience (Chabbi 2020, 70).

The expression *al-qur'ān* continues to appear in Medinan verses (Q 2:185, 4:82, 5:101, 47:24, 59:21, 73:20).<sup>5</sup> In one case (Q 9:111, on which see Graham 1984, 372–373), *al-qur'ān* even figures in what seems to be a tripartite list of scriptures together with the Torah (*al-tawrāh*) and the Gospel (*al-injīl*). Even here, however, the term *al-qur'ān* is unlikely to express the notion of a closed corpus. Rather, *al-qur'ān* would most likely have designated the entirety of proclamations delivered by Muhammad up until a given time, and therefore a corpus that was in principle open to further additions as long as Muhammad was still alive. Despite the verses just referenced, it is noticeable that the bulk of occurrences of the term *qur'ān* and also of the verb *qara'a* are Meccan,<sup>6</sup> and no Medinan occurrence of the word *qur'ān* links it with the adjective *'arabī*. This could indicate that the concept of forming an oral recitation in Arabic became a less crucial aspect of the Qur'anic self-image as time went on. Still, recitation clearly remained part of the Qur'anic community's ritual (Q 73:20),<sup>7</sup> and the fact that much of the Meccan corpus continued to be in communal use in the Medinan period would have ensured that chronologically earlier statements remained known.

5 There are no occurrences of the word *qur'ān* without the definite article in the Medinan surahs.

6 There are only two Medinan occurrences of *qara'a*, both found in the insertion Q 73:20. But the verb *talā* remains frequent in Medinan texts.

7 See Watt 1970, 141, observing that “it is a fact that the word *qur'ān* is seldom used in the latest passages” (see also *ibid.*, 139–140). It is doubtful, however, whether this warrants Bell's hypothesis of a development from a *qur'ān* period to a *kitāb* period (a hypothesis that is presented and critiqued in Watt 1970, 137–141).



**qariba** tr. | to approach s.o., to come near s.th.

→ *ṭahara*

**qarraba** tr. | to bring s.o. near, to allow s.o. to come near; to sacrifice s.th.

**al-muqarrabūn** pl. | those brought near (to God)

**qurbān** | sacrifice

→ *jannah*, → *darajah*, → *dhabaḥa* (on *qarraba* in the sense of “to sacrifice” and on *qurbān*), → *ashraka*, → *azwāj muṭahharah*

**iqtaraba** intr. | to draw near

→ *ajal*, → *sā’ah*

**qarīb** | near

→ *sā’ah*, → *ashraka*

**qarār, mustaqarr** | abode, stable abode, dwelling place

**dār al-qarār** | the abode of stability

See under → *ard*; on *dār al-qarār*, see under → *ajal* and → *ākhir*.

**aqrada: ~ llāha qarḍan ḥasanan** | to give God a good loan

**qarḍ** | loan

Further vocabulary discussed: **ḍā’afa** tr. | to double s.th., to multiply s.th. **taṣaddaqa**

intr. | to be charitable, to make gifts of charity **qātala** tr./intr. | to fight (s.o.) **sabīl** |

way, path **zakāh** | alms **anfaqa** tr./intr. | to spend (s.th.) **jāhada** intr./tr. | to con-

tend (against s.o.) **māl** | wealth, possessions **nafs** | person, life

**Overview of Qur’anic usage.** In six Medinan verses, the divine voice counsels the Qur’anic addressees or the historical Israelites to “give God a good loan” (Q 2:245, 5:12, 57:11.18, 64:17, 73:20), which God will subsequently “multiply manifold” (Q 2:245, 57:11: *fa-yuḍā’ifahu lahu* ± <*aḍ’āfan kathīratan*>; see similarly 57:18 and 64:17). The motif tends to occur in connection with charitable giving. Thus, Q 57:18 calls those prepared to “give God a good loan” *al-muṣṣaddiqūn* and *al-muṣṣaddiqāt*, “men and women who make gifts of charity” (→ *ṣadaqah*), while Q 64:17 is preceded by a warning about the temptations emanating from property (Q 64:15) and the need for charitable spending (Q 64:16). In other cases, the loan motif is linked with militancy. This is clearest in Q 2:245, since the preceding verse urges the listeners to “fight on God’s path” (Q 2:244: *wa-qātilū fī sabīli llāhi*). The three remaining verses containing the loan metaphor combine both connotations, charity and militancy. Q 5:12 demands that the Israelites aid God’s messengers (*wa-’azzartumūhum*; see under → *ummī*), which is at least suggestive of activism; but the Israelites are in the same breath instructed to perform prayer and give alms (→ *zakāh*).

Q 57:11 is preceded by a call to “spend on God’s path” in v. 10, but the latter also includes a reference to fighting. Finally, in Q 73:20 the loan motif immediately follows commandments to perform prayer and give alms, but slightly earlier there is again a reference to “fighting on God’s path.”

**Loaning unto God and Prov 19:17.** The Qur’anic use of the loan motif, which forms part and parcel of the Qur’an’s frequent recourse to commercial metaphors (→ *ajr*, → *ḥisāb*, → *sharā*, → *kasāba*), is a resonance of the identification of charity with “lending unto God” in Prov 19:17 (Torrey 1892, 45; *CQ* 49; *BEQ* 446; Anderson 2013, 194–195, n. 18). Illustrating the impact of this Biblical statement, one of the hymns attributed to Ephrem explicitly compares alms and prayers to loans (Anderson 2013, 31–32, quoting Beck 1972b, no. 1:5–8), similar to the Qur’anic connection between loaning unto God, on the one hand, and prayer and alms, on the other, in some of the passages just reviewed, especially Q 73:20. Thus, the Qur’anic use of the loan metaphor is broadly continuous with the reception history of Prov 19:17.

As regards the Qur’an’s distinctive extension of the loan metaphor to fighting on behalf of God, as seen most clearly in Q 2:245, this could have resulted from the Qur’an’s general tendency to bracket almsgiving and militancy closely together. Thus, Q 57:10 connects “fighting” and “spending” (verb: *anfaqa*) on God’s path, while 73:20 displays an equivalent association between fighting and almsgiving (*zakāh*). More indirectly, charitable giving and fighting are coupled in the Medinan surahs’ frequent injunctions to “contend with your<sup>p</sup> possessions and your lives on God’s path” (Q 9:41: *jāhidū bi-amwālikum wa-anfusikum fī sabīli llāhi*; for other occurrences of the phrase, see Q 4:95, 8:72, 9:20.44.81.88, 49:15, 61:11; → *jāhada*). In other words, it may only have been in Qur’anic discourse that the loan metaphor migrated from the domain of giving up property to the domain of being prepared to give up one’s life.

### **qarīn | companion (demon)**

See under → *shayṭān* and also under → *khatama*.

### **qaryāh: umm al-qurā | the mother of settlements, the mother-town**

→ *rasūl*, → *‘arabī*, → *al-‘ālamūn*

### **qissīsūn pl. | priests**

→ *al-naṣārā*

### **qasaṭa intr. | to act unjustly**

→ *aslama*

### **aqsaṭa intr. (ilā, fī) | to be fair or equitable (to s.o.)**

#### **qisṭ | fairness, equity**

See under → *raḥmān*, → *zalamā*, and → *ma‘rūf*.

*qasā* intr. | to become hard (said of hearts)  
*ja'ala qāsiyatan* tr. | to harden s.th. (hearts)

Further vocabulary discussed: *qalb* | heart *shadda* intr. 'alā | to harden s.th. *nasakha* tr. | to cancel s.th., to abrogate s.th. *alladhīna fī qulūbihim maraḍ* | those in whose hearts is sickness *khatama* intr. 'alā | to seal s.th.

**Overview.** One of the metaphors forming part of the Qur'an's extensive range of expressions for the incapacitation and impairment of human hearts (→ *qalb*) is their hardness or divinely caused hardening (for a comprehensive study comparing the Qur'anic and Biblical functions of the notion, see Räsänen 1976). The general point is that those afflicted with hardened hearts are punishably unresponsive to God. Thus, Q 2:74 accuses the Israelites of having hardened hearts “like stones or harder yet.” Q 5:13 goes further by saying that it was in fact God who caused the Israelites' hearts to be hard (*ja'alnā qulūbahum qāsiyatan*) in retaliation for their covenant-breaking, in line with what seems to be the general Qur'anic doctrine that God will eventually penalise humans who persistently turn away from him by unalterably freezing them in unbelief and disobedience (see under → *ḍalla* and → *khatama*). In Q 10:88 Moses prays to God to harden the hearts of Pharaoh and his notables (*wa-shdud 'alā qulūbihim*) “so that they will not believe until they see the painful punishment,” a plea that subsequently turns out to be fulfilled in vv. 90–92 (Sinai 2019a, 249). Q 6:42–43 generalises the metaphor of hardened hearts (*qasat qulūbuhum*) to the earlier communities to whom God has sent messengers. According to Q 22:52–53, no previous messenger or prophet was exempt from the devil's attempts to interfere with his “wishes”; God, however, will “cancel out” (*nasakha*) what the devil “casts” (*alqā*) into the respective messenger's mind, and such Satanic attempts at tampering are in fact a divine test for “those in whose heart is sickness and the hard of heart,” the two expressions being ostensibly equivalent (→ *maraḍ*). Two further passages apply the metaphor of hardened hearts to contemporaries of the Qur'anic Messenger and make it particularly clear that being hard-hearted means being insufficiently receptive to God and his revelations: Q 39:22 contrasts “the hard of heart” (*al-qāsiyah qulūbuhum*) with those “whose breast God has opened up to self-surrender,” while Q 57:16 exhorts the believers that “it is time for their hearts to become submissive to God's reminding exhortation” (*a-lam ya'ni li-lladhīna āmanū an takhsha'a qulūbuhum li-dhikri llāhi*) and then asks them whether “the term has proven too long for them, so that their hearts have become hard (*fa-qasat qulūbuhum*).”

**Biblical background.** The expressions “hard of heart” and “to harden s.o.'s heart” are undeniably reminiscent of Biblical diction (*AHW* 178–180; Reynolds 2018, 268–269; for an overview of verses to do with hard-heartedness in the Hebrew Bible, see *TDOT* 7:427–429). The Pentateuchal Exodus narrative frequently attributes a hard or “heavy” heart to Pharaoh (and in one case to the Egyptian army following the Israelites into the sea), and sometimes God is explicitly identified as the cause of such hardening (Exod 4:21, 7:3.13.14.22, 9:7.12.34.35, 10:1.20.27, 11:10, 14:4.8.17; see Räsänen 1976, 52–56). These Biblical passages form evident parallels to Q 10:88, even if the Qur'an departs from the Biblical narrative by transforming God's hardening of the Egyptians' hearts into a request made by Moses. The Hebrew Bible also presents God as hardening the hearts of other non-Israelites (Deut 2:30, Jos 11:20), and in Rom 9:17–18 Paul infers from the case of Pharaoh the general proposition that God “has mercy on whomsoever he chooses” and “hardens whomsoever he chooses”

(see Räsänen 1976, 79–87). Q 2:74 and 5:13, which specifically target the Israelites, resonate with Biblical statements outside Exodus that ascribe obdurate hearts to the people of Israel (Ps 95:8, Isa 63:17, John 12:40). The explicit comparison of the Israelites’ hard hearts to stones in Q 2:74 resembles Ezek 11:19 and 36:26, where God announces that he will replace hearts of stone by hearts of flesh (AHW 180).

It is notable that the Peshitta renders many of the passages just rehearsed with the verbs *qashshī*, “to harden,” or *etqashshī*, “to be hardened” (Exod 7:3, 9:7.12.34, 10:1.20.27, 11:10, 14:4.8, Ps 95:8, Isa 63:17, Rom 9:18; see also Deut 2:30), thus employing cognates of the Arabic derivatives of *q-s-w* that figure in several Qur’anic passages. As Seidensticker notes, Arabic is capable of expressing hardness of the heart by roots other than *q-s-w*, such as *ṣ-l-b* (e.g., al-A‘shā: *ṣulb al-fu‘ād*; Ḥusayn 1983, no. 8:3). This further increases the likelihood that the Qur’anic preference for *q-s-w* harks back to Aramaic diction (AHW 178–180). One may add that in the Qur’an the root *q-s-w* only ever appears in connection with hearts. All of these observations, however, render it even more notable that the one Qur’anic passage that is closest to the Exodus trope of Pharaoh’s hardened heart, Q 10:88, does not use a derivative of *q-s-w*.

Overall, there are clear affinities between the handful of Qur’anic verses mentioning hard-heartedness and Biblical language. However, one must not overlook that God’s incapacitation of human hearts is in the Qur’an more frequently articulated by means of the metaphor of sealing someone’s heart, whose link to Biblical diction is less clear-cut (see under → *khatama*). By contrast, the formulation “to harden s.o.’s heart,” is limited to a mere two verses, Q 5:13 and 10:88.

### ***muqtaṣid* | moderate, middling**

See under → *ahl al-kitāb* and also under → *isrā’īl*, → *ummah*, and → *aslama*.

### ***qiṣāṣ* | retaliation**

→ *darajah*, → *kaffara*

### ***qaḍā* intr. *bayna (fī)* | to decide between s.o. (with regard to s.th.)**

***qaḍā amran* | to decide, decree, or settle a matter, to decide on (creating) s.th.**

→ *amr*, → *bayyana*

### ***taqaṭṭa’ū amrahum baynahum* | they became divided among themselves over their affair**

→ *zabūr*

### ***qa’ada* intr. | to remain sitting, to stay home and fail to participate in fighting**

→ *jāhada*

## *qalb* | heart

Further vocabulary discussed: *fu'ād* | heart *ulū l-albāb* pl. | those endowed with insight *sam'* | hearing *baṣar* | eyesight *faqīha*, *'aqala* tr./intr. | to understand (s.th.) *āyah* | sign *āmana* intr. *bi-* | to believe in s.th. *ankara* tr. | to reject s.th. *irtāba* intr. | to be in doubt *rayb* | doubt *dhikrā* | reminder, reminding exhortation *tadhakkara* | to heed God's hortatory reminders *wajila* intr. | to quake in fear *iṭma'anna* intr. (*bi-*) | to be or come to be secure (in), to be or come to be at peace (in) *ittaqā* tr. | to protect or guard o.s. against s.o. or s.th., to be wary of s.o. or s.th., to fear s.o. or s.th. (especially God) *taqwā* | fear of God *khashiya* tr. | to fear or be afraid of s.th. or s.o. *bi-qalb salīm* | with a sound heart *nazzala*, *anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down *awḥā* tr. *ilā* | to convey s.th. to s.o. *ṣadr* | breast *allafa* intr. *bayna* | to connect s.th., to reconcile s.th. *rabaṭa 'alā qalbihi* | to strengthen s.o.'s heart *ru'b* | terror *al-sakinah* | composure, tranquillity *hadā* tr. | to guide s.o. or s.th. *thabbata fu'ādahu* | to make s.o.'s heart firm *sharaḥa ṣadrahu* | to widen or open up s.o.'s breast *qasā* intr. | to become hard *maraḍ* | sickness (of the heart) *akinnah* pl. | covers *zāgha* intr. | to swerve *ghulf* pl. | uncircumcised, wrapped in foreskins *khatama* intr. *'alā* | to seal s.th. *ṭaba'a* intr. *'alā* | to seal s.th. *shadda* intr. *'alā* | to harden s.th. (hearts) *azāgha* tr. | to cause to swerve *nafs* | soul, (vital) self *hawā* | desire

**Overview:** *qalb*, *fu'ād*, *lubb*. The main Qur'anic word for “heart” is *qalb*, a term whose frequency has been found to increase in the Medinan period compared to the Meccan one (AHW 89). A second Qur'anic word that is, like *qalb*, used both for the heart as an organ and the heart as an inner mental faculty is *fu'ād*, which is limited to Meccan surahs.<sup>1</sup> There does not seem to be a principled semantic difference between the two expressions (AHW 91–92, 112–114); both regularly figure together with the senses of sight and hearing,<sup>2</sup> and in early poetry, too, they appear in similar thematic contexts (AHW 62–63, 112–114). Nonetheless, *fu'ād* would likely have had a more poetic stylistic valence (AHW 102–108). One may also note that Qur'anic verses articulating Biblical notions of the heart (on which see below) exclusively opt for the word *qalb*. A third term, *lubb*, is confined to the stock phrase *ulū l-albāb* (Q 2:179.197.269, 3:7.190, 5:100, 12:111, 13:19, 14:52, 38:29.43, 39:9.18.21, 40:54, 65:10).<sup>3</sup> While *lubb* is undoubtedly part of the same semantic field as *qalb* and *fu'ād*, it is uncertain whether it designates specifically the heart, despite being a cognate of Hebrew *lēb/lēbāb* or Syriac *lebbā* (AHW 133–134). Similar to other translators who eschew equating Qur'anic *lubb* with “heart” (e.g., Arberry, Paret, Asad, Jones), I therefore opt to render *ulū l-albāb* as “those endowed with insight,” in line with the epistemic contextual overtones of its Qur'anic occurrences.<sup>4</sup>

**The heart as the centre of cognitive and perceptive processing.** Like other ancient texts including the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, the Qur'an identifies the seat of conscious thought and processing with the heart rather than the brain (TDNT 3:605–614;

1 The singular *fu'ād* or its plural *afidah* appear in Q 6:110.113, 11:120, 14:37.43, 16:78, 17:36, 23:78, 25:32, 28:10, 32:9, 46:26, 53:11, 67:23, and 104:7.

2 On *qalb* + *sam'* + *baṣar*, see Q 2:7, 6:46, 16:108, 45:23; on *fu'ād* + *sam'* + *baṣar*, see Q 16:78, 17:36, 23:78, 32:9, 46:26, 67:23.

3 Judging by their mean verse length, the earliest ones of these verses are Q 38:29.43.

4 In early poetry, *lubb* can also occur in connection with love; see AHW 134–137.

*TDOT* 7:412–434; see also Bauer 2017, 14–15; for a detailed treatment of the heart in early Arabic poetry and the Qur’an, see *AHW*). This cognitive dimension of the heart can be seen, for instance, in the frequent collocation of the heart with the senses of hearing (*al-samʿ*) and sight (*al-baṣar*; Q 2:7, 6:46, 16:78.108, 17:36, 23:78, 32:9, 45:23, 46:26, 67:23; see also 7:179 and 22:46), which is evidently meant to function as a list of basic human perceptive and rational abilities. The heart’s prominent cognitive dimension in the Qur’an is also indicated by verses collocating *qalb* with the verb *faḥiḥa*, “to understand” (Q 6:25, 7:179, 9:87.127, 17:46, 18:57, 63:3; see McAuliffe 2002, 408–409), or with its synonym *ʿaqala* (Q 22:46; see also 59:14). It is however important to appreciate that the kind of understanding at stake in these passages is not intellectual comprehension in general but specifically the ability to apprehend divine revelations and signs (singular: → *āyah*). The heart is thus the mental faculty by which humans come to espouse and internalise core religious truths—or fail to do so. Thus, in Q 5:41 the grammatical subject of “to believe” (→ *āmana*) is “their hearts” (*wa-lam tuʿmin qulūbuhum*; on the heart and belief, see also Q 49:7.14 and 58:22 and *AHW* 69–72), and according to Q 16:22 the hearts of those who do not believe in the hereafter are in a state of rejection (*munkirah*; → *ankara*). In between the states of belief and denial, hearts can also harbour doubt (noun: *rayb*, verb: → *irtāba*; see Q 9:45.110, 24:50).<sup>5</sup>

**The heart as the faculty of religious insight.** The heart’s connection with religious insight is also manifested by the fact that Qur’anic references to the heart display a peculiar association with the root *dh-k-r*, signifying exhortation by and about God (→ *dhakkara*). According to Q 50:37, “it”—meaning probably God’s obliteration of earlier generations, mentioned in the preceding verse—comprises “reminding exhortation (*dhikrā*) for anyone who has a heart (*li-man kāna lahu qalbun*), or who will lend an ear and be a witness,” and various verse endings assert that “those endowed with insight” (*ulū l-albāb*) will “heed God’s hortatory reminders” (*tadhakkarā*; see Q 2:269, 3:7, 13:19, 14:52, 38:29, and 39:9; see also 38:43, 39:21, and 40:54, all of which employ the noun *dhikrā*, “reminding exhortation,” and 65:10).<sup>6</sup> Other passages declare that in response to God being mentioned (*dhukira*) or to “God’s reminding exhortation” (*dhikr allāh*),<sup>7</sup> human hearts will “quake in fear” (*wajila*), “come to be secure” or “at peace” (*iṭmaʿanna*), “soften” (*lāna*), “rejoice” (*istabshara*), or “become submissive” (*khashaʿa*; see Q 8:2, 13:28, 22:35, 39:23.45, 57:16). By contrast, the hearts of the unbelievers will recoil in disgust (*ishmaʿazza*; Q 39:45).<sup>8</sup> Q 22:32 and 49:3 connect the heart with the virtue of fearing God, *taqwā* (→ *ittaqā*). A link between the heart and the emotion of eschatological fear in particular (which will then motivate someone to engage in charitable giving) is also evident in Q 23:60, praising those “who give what they give, their hearts quaking in fear because they will return to their Lord (*wa-qulūbuhum wajilatun annahum ilā rabbihim rājiʿūn*).”<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere too

<sup>5</sup> See also *AHW* 72, who additionally references Q 2:118.

<sup>6</sup> For other verses containing derivatives of the root *dh-k-r* and the noun *qalb*, see Q 5:13, 17:46, 18:28.57, 39:22, 45:23.

<sup>7</sup> The genitive construction *dhikr allāh* in Q 13:28, 39:22–23, and 57:16 might also be deemed equivalent to the temporal clause *idhā dhukira llāhu* in Q 8:2, 22:35, and 39:45 (see under → *dhakkara*).

<sup>8</sup> See also Q 22:54: “those who have been given knowledge” believe in God’s revelations, “and their hearts become humble before it” (*fa-tukhbita lahu qulūbuhum*).

<sup>9</sup> The fear at stake here is prospective. By contrast, Q 24:37, 40:18, and 79:8 mention the heart in connection with fear on the day of judgement itself.



the human heart emerges as the seat of the characterial dispositions with which humans are expected to confront God: Q 50:33 promises paradise to those who “fear (*khashiya*) the Merciful despite his being hidden and come [to him] with a heart trustingly turned [towards him]” (*man khashiya l-rahmāna bi-l-ghaybi wa-jā’a bi-qalbin munīb*),<sup>10</sup> and those escaping eschatological punishment as well as Abraham in particular are said to “come” to God “with a sound heart” (Q 26:89: *man atā llāha bi-qalbin salīm*; 37:84: *idh jā’a rabbahu bi-qalbin salīm*).

The heart’s function, therefore, has not only cognitive aspects but affective ones as well: the proper way of receiving divine truth goes beyond theoretical assent and involves specific emotional responses and dispositions, which also have their locus in the heart (see Bauer 2017, especially 2, 10, and 14–16). These affective and characterial aspects of the heart do not seem to be envisaged as an alternative to the rational grasp of religious truths, but rather appear as something that complements, envelops, steadies, and deepens the heart’s cognitive espousal of core beliefs. Thus, even humans who are already convinced of God’s existence and power may still desire their heart to find additional reassurance, or to “come to be secure” or “at peace” (*iṭma’anna*), through divinely wrought miracles: Abraham and the disciples of Jesus justify their request to witness God resurrect the dead or send down a table from heaven by the wish that their hearts may thereby “come to be secure” (Q 2:260: *li-yaṭma’inna qalbī*; 5:113: *wa-taṭma’inna qulūbunā*); and in Q 3:126 the Qur’an’s divine voice claims to have sent angels to reinforce the Medinan believers in battle so that “through it your hearts may come to be secure” (*li-taṭma’inna qulūbukum bihi*; see also Q 8:10). Of these passages, at least the scene involving Abraham (Q 2:260) intimates an explicit distinction between belief, which Abraham claims to possess, and his heart’s “coming to be secure,” which he aims to achieve by observing an act of divine resurrection. The same sequence of belief and fortification is reflected when the disciples profess their belief in Q 5:111 and then go on to express their desire for peace of heart in 5:113.<sup>11</sup> Such reassurance of the heart is perhaps best understood as someone’s pre-existing belief in God taking on a particularly firm and unwavering quality, as a believer becoming confirmed in his antecedent commitment to God, by virtue of some act of divine grace.<sup>12</sup> This understanding also fits Q 16:106, which condemns apostates but excepts those who only abandon their faith under coercion while their hearts continue to be “secure in belief” (*wa-qalbuḥu muṭma’innun bi-l-īmāni*).

**The heart as the faculty of receiving divine revelation.** Given the heart’s crucial role in attaining religious insight and cultivating the proper affective stance towards God, it is not surprising that the revelations that God “sends down” (→ *nazzala*) to the Qur’anic Messenger are specifically said to be conveyed to his heart (Q 2:97, 26:193–194). A somewhat different scenario is implied by Q 53:10–11, which first assert that God “conveyed to his servant what he conveyed to him” (*fa-awḥā ilā ‘abdihi mā awḥā*; → *awḥā*) and then adds that the Messenger’s heart (here: *fu’ād*) “did not invent lies about what he saw” (*mā kadhaba l-fu’ādu mā ra’ā*). At least according to the most straightforward reading of the

10 On the meaning of *bi-l-ghayb* here, see under → *al-ghayb*; on the meaning of *anāba*, see CDKA 276.

11 Reading this passage in parallel with Q 2:260, God’s question to Abraham—“Do you not believe?” (*a-walam tu’min*)—may be deemed to correspond to Jesus’s appeal in Q 5:112, in response to the disciples’ request, to “fear God, if you are believers.”

12 See also the remarks on Q 9:118 under → *tāba*.

passage,<sup>13</sup> the heart is not the actual recipient of revelation here, given that the revelations in question are cast as a visionary experience, as something that is “seen” (Q 53:11.12.13.18) and impinges on the Messenger’s sense of sight, *al-baṣar* (Q 53:17). But the Messenger’s heart does seem to be the faculty responsible for processing such revelatory visions and for translating them into truth-apt propositions. Once again, the heart emerges as the crucial human faculty in encountering God.

**The heart and the interior dimension of personhood.** Apart from being the organ of religious insight, the heart, like the breast (→ *ṣadr*), represents the inner dimension of human personhood, in contrast to people’s exterior utterances and actions (see also *AHW* 10). Three Medinan verses juxtapose what people insincerely say “with their mouths” or “with their tongues” and what is in their hearts (Q 3:167, 5:41, 9:8, 48:11). God, however, knows (*‘alima*) what is in people’s hearts (Q 4:63, 8:70, 33:51, 48:18; see also 2:204, 8:24, and 9:64), just as he knows what is in their souls and breasts (→ *nafs*, → *ṣadr*). Against the background of God’s unrestrained access to people’s inner lives, a Medinan verse (Q 33:5) reassures its recipients that “there is no wrongdoing in any mistakes you may have committed” regarding the prohibition of equating adoptive fathers with real fathers. Instead, what matters are only “the intentions of your hearts” (*mā ta’ammat qulūbukum*). Q 2:225 similarly stresses that God will only take the addressees to task for “what their hearts have accrued” (*mā kasabat qulūbukum*) rather than for “the idle swearing of oaths.” The heart is thus the locus of conscious agency, of weighing what one is to do, and a vital determinant of the true character and merit of any outward action.

**The heart as the seat of human sociability.** The heart is moreover presented as the seat of human sociability and fellow-feeling. God has “connected” or “reconciled your hearts, and by his grace you have become brethren” (*fa-allafa bayna qulūbikum fa-aṣbaḥtum bi-ni’matihi ikhwānan*), the believers are reminded in Q 3:103, and two other verses similarly speak of a connection (*allafa*) between human hearts (Q 8:63, 9:60).<sup>14</sup> The opposite of connected hearts are divided ones: “you<sup>s</sup> consider them a unity, but their hearts are divided” (*taḥsabuhum jamī’an wa-qulūbuhum shattā*), Q 59:14 says about the believers’ opponents. The heart’s interpersonal dimension is also discernible in verses employing the synonym *fu’ād*. In a prayer that Abraham utters on behalf of his Meccan descendants, he asks God to “make people’s hearts incline towards them” (Q 14:37: *fa-j’al afidatan mina l-nāsi taḥwī ilayhim*).<sup>15</sup> According to Q 28:10, when Moses’s mother abandoned him on the Nile (Qur’anicallly, *al-yamm*), her heart “became void” (*wa-aṣbaḥa fu’ādu ummi mūsā fārighan*), meaning perhaps that she was exclusively preoccupied by worries about her son (Ṭab. 18:166–168) or that she was consumed by fear and anguish (Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī

13 Namely, if one considers the subject of *mā ra’ā* to be the “servant” from v. 10 (who is identical with “your<sup>p</sup> companion” from v. 2) rather than the heart. This reading is in my view decisively supported by the fact that at least for the occurrences of *ra’ā* in vv. 12, 13, and 18, it is clear that the grammatical subject is the Qur’anic Messenger. See also *AHW* 83–84.

14 At Q 9:60, *al-mu’allafah qulūbuhum*, “those whose hearts are [to be] reconciled,” are listed as one of the groups deserving gifts of charity (see under → *zakāh*). The expression is generally understood to refer to persons whose loyalty to the Muslim community needed to be ensured by means of special payments (see the overview in *SQ* 522–523; e.g., Ṭab. 11:519–523 and *Zam.* 3:60; see also Watt 1956, 348–353, and *AHW* 71). In view of Q 3:103 and 8:63, it is conceivable that the “connections” in question are those tying the hearts of the believers to one another (rather than to, say, the cause of Islam). Perhaps the rationale for including *al-mu’allafah qulūbuhum* among the recipients of charity is merely that gifts of charity may be disbursed in the service of what one might call social cohesion, whatever the specific historical circumstances (which are quite likely unrecoverable).

15 Note that the root *h-w-y* in the sense of desire is otherwise associated with the soul (→ *nafs*).

1981, 24:229, and, with a slightly different emphasis, Zam. 4:485; see also the overview of various possibilities in *SQ* 948).<sup>16</sup>

**God acts on the human heart.** Q 28:10 continues by saying that Moses’s mother almost disclosed or betrayed him (*in kādat la-tubdī bihi*) “had God not strengthened her heart to make her one of the believers” (*law-lā an rabaṭnā ‘alā qalbihā li-takūna mina l-mu’minīn*). This exemplifies another Qur’anic topos linked to the heart, namely, God’s exercising of a direct emotional effect on it (see McAuliffe 2002, 408). Other passages mentioning divine action upon human hearts also employ *qalb*: God casts (*alqā, qadhafa*) terror (*al-ru’b*)<sup>17</sup> in the hearts of the unbelievers (Q 3:151, 8:12, 33:26, 59:2), but he strengthens (*rabaṭa ‘alā*) the hearts of believers (Q 8:11 and 18:14; cf. 28:10, just discussed). Q 48:4 describes what appears to be a similar experience of divine fortification by saying that God has “sent down (*anzala*) composure (→ *al-sakīnah*) into the believers’ hearts so that they might increase in belief in addition to their [existing] belief.”<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein, Q 64:11 speaks of God’s guidance of the believers’ hearts (*wa-man yu’min bi-llāhi yahdī qalbahū*), while Q 57:27 maintains that God placed tenderness, mercy, and *rahbāniyyah* (on which see under → *al-naṣārā*) in the hearts of Jesus’s followers. Yet despite the conspicuous switch from *fu’ād* to *qalb* in Q 28:10, it is not the case that the term *fu’ād* is absent from passages asserting God’s fortification of human hearts, as shown by the expression *thabbata fu’ādahu*, “to make s.o.’s heart firm” (Q 11:120, 25:32).<sup>19</sup> An alternative expression for God’s bracing of human hearts would seem to be the phrase “to widen or open up s.o.’s breast” (*sharaha ṣadrahu*; e.g., Q 20:25 and 94:1), which almost always takes God as the grammatical subject (→ *ṣadr*).

**Incapacitation of the heart.** A very pronounced feature of the Qur’anic discourse about the human heart is its multifarious terminology for the heart’s incapacitation and diminished operation (*ERCQ* 127–130). The relevant scriptural passages all employ *qalb*. Those who are unreceptive to God’s signs and revelations are described as hard (*q-s-w*) of heart (Q 2:74, 6:43, 22:53, 39:22, 57:16; → *qasā*), as possessing hearts that are diseased (→ *marāḍ*), or as “separated by covers from” (*fī akinnatin min*) the preaching of the Qur’anic Messenger (Q 41:5).<sup>20</sup> Hearts can be characterised by swerving (Q 3:7 and 9:117, using the verbal noun *zaygh* and the verb *zāgha*), be guilty of sin (*āthim*; Q 2:283), be under “locks” (*aqfāl*; Q 47:24), or be covered with rust (Q 83:14). Two Medinan verses, Q 2:88 and 4:155, quote the Israelites as claiming that their hearts are “wrapped in foreskins” (→ *ghulf*), reflecting a Biblical trope chastising the Israelites for their uncircumcised hearts. The senses of hearing and sight too are sometimes described as impermeable to divine exhortation (see under → *amiya*), and the connection between both sets of metaphors is confirmed by a verse contrasting literal blindness with blindness of the heart (Q 22:46; see also *CQ* 47 and *AHW* 182–183, noting two Syriac parallels).

16 On voidness of the heart, see also Q 14:43 (describing the confused state of those raised for the final judgement), a connection also made in Zam. 4:485 and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī 1981, 24:229.

17 See also n. 27 below.

18 Cf. Q 9:26.40, 48:18.26, which mention God’s “sending down” of “composure” onto his Messenger and on the believers without singling out their hearts as its receptacles.

19 Other objects of *thabbata* are a group’s “feet” (*aqdām*; Q 2:250, 3:147, 8:11, 47:7), or simply the Qur’anic believers or the Messenger as such (Q 8:12, 14:27, 16:102, 17:74).

20 Note that Q 22:53 combines “those in whose hearts is sickness” (*alladhīna fī qulūbihim marāḍ*) and “the hard-hearted” (*al-qāsiyah qulūbuhum*) to form an apparent pleonasm.

Equally striking is how frequently the Qur'an attributes the incapacitation of human hearts to God: it is God who "sets a seal upon" (→ *khatama* 'alā, *ṭaba'a* 'alā) hearts, puts "covers" (*akinnah*) on them (Q 6:25, 17:46, 18:57), or hardens (*ja'ala qulūbahum qāsiyatan, shadda 'alā qulūbihim*) them (Q 5:13, 10:88). God causes human hearts to be negligent of his hortatory reminders (Q 18:28: *man aghfalnā qalbahu 'an dhikrinā*), he "turns them away" (*ṣarafa*; Q 9:127), and he is the one who causes hearts to swerve (*azāgha*; Q 3:8, 61:5). At first blush, such language has seemingly unavoidable deterministic or predestinarian implications. However, as explained in more detail elsewhere, closer inspection reveals this to be questionable (→ *khatama*).

**The heart and the vital self (*nafs*).** The heart, in sum, is the faculty by which—at least if it is working properly—humans prove themselves receptive to God, while a defective heart is one that is closed off from God and impervious to his signs and revelations. What makes a heart dysfunctional, therefore, is its deficient response to being addressed by God. The manifold varieties of human egoism, by contrast, are attributed to the soul or vital self (→ *nafs*), and their existence appears to be taken for granted as a necessary concomitant of the human psyche. It is true that one must "restrain the soul from desire" (*wa-nahā l-nafsa 'ani l-hawā*, Q 79:40) in order to merit entry to paradise. Yet the fact that the soul continually brings forth egoistic appetites and urges, whose enactment may easily implicate an agent in sinful behaviour, does not as such indicate any intrinsic characterial corruption, and the Qur'an's rich vocabulary for incapacitated and malfunctioning hearts has no counterpart with regard to the *nafs*. Although the Qur'an does not explicitly describe the relationship that obtains, or ought to obtain, between the heart and the soul (AHW 195), two verses imply that it is a malfunctioning heart that leaves someone at the mercy of unbridled desires (Q 47:16: *ulā 'ika lladhīna ṭaba'a llāhu 'alā qulūbihim wa-ttaba'ū ahwā'ahum*; 18:28: *man aghfalnā qalbahu 'an dhikrinā wa-ttaba'a hawāhu*): since desires (*h-w-y*) are associated with the *nafs* (see Q 2:87, 5:70, 53:23, 79:40), the two verses just adduced suggest that it is the heart that is ultimately understood to be responsible for restraining the impulses of the soul or vital self.

**The Qur'anic notion of the heart compared to poetry.** As demonstrated elsewhere, Qur'anic statements about the soul or vital self (→ *nafs*) exhibit notable continuity with the way in which the latter figures in pre-Islamic poetry. One might accordingly expect a similar link to hold with regard to the Qur'an's understanding of the heart. Yet here, any similarities are counterbalanced if not outweighed by important differences. It is true that the Qur'anic collocation of the noun *qalb* with the verb *iṭma'anna*, "to be or come to be secure or at peace," has parallels in poetry: Zuhayr's Mu'allaqah praises the one "whose heart has reached a state of secure righteousness" (*man yufdi qalbuhi ilā muṭma'inni l-birri*; DSAAP, Zuhayr, no. 16:56; cf. AHW 53 and Arberry 1957, 117), and another poem by Zuhayr includes a scene in which a noble steed is beaten "until the back of his head was at peace, yet his heart and his muscles were not at peace" (*wa-nadrībuhu ḥattā ṭma'anna qadhāluhu wa-lam yaṭma'inna qalbuhi wa-khaṣā'iluh*; DSAAP, Zuhayr, no. 15:19; see also Jacobi 1971, 188). But the phraseological parallel formed by the link of *qalb* and *iṭma'anna* only highlights the absence of any reference to the notion of belief, which in the Qur'an is closely linked to tranquillity of the heart (see above). In the first Zuhayr quotation, the heart's coming to be secure in righteousness (*birr*) has some pertinence to Qur'anic invocations of the heart's coming to be secure or at peace in belief. But what is being steadied and deepened in Zuhayr is not the human relationship with God but interpersonal rectitude.

This is of course in line with the fact that the system of values expounded in pre-Islamic poetry, unlike that of the Qur'an, is not centred on God.

By way of a contrastive foil to the Qur'an, it may be useful to attempt a more general overview of the heart's function in surviving pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. Two primary contexts stand out: on the one hand, interpersonal bonds and, on the other hand, fear and courage.<sup>21</sup> First, the heart is prominently associated with love and erotic attraction, especially in the amatory opening sections of poems (*AHW* 43–44 and 207–235; for some examples, see *DSAAP*, Zuhayr, nos 14:1 and 15:1; Ṭarafah, no. 13:9; al-Nābighah, no. 7:6; cf. Jacobi 1971, 15–16, 36–37, 45).<sup>22</sup> Bound by love and longing, the heart can even resist and disobey ('aṣā) its owner (Farrāj and Shākir 1963–1965, 43 and 196 = Abū Dhu'ayb, nos 2:5 and 25:2, and al-A'shā Maymūn in Ḥusayn 1983, no. 2:13, all of which are cited in *AHW* 257; see also *AHW* 253–254). Yet the heart is also understood to be capable of resolutely extricating itself from erotic entanglements (Lyll 1918–1924, no. 105:1). The heart is the seat of other kinds of intersubjective attachment as well: not only does it harbour longing for bygone loves and grief for the dead (e.g., Lyll 1918–1924, nos 38:4, 54:7, and 68:1–2, the latter of which uses *fu'ād*; Lyll 1913, 'Abīd, no. 9:1; see *AHW* 44 and 261), but it also experiences maternal solicitude (Lyll 1918–1924, no. 97:8, utilising *fu'ād*). When one poet declares that his heart is “mournfully estranged from” his tribe (*anna l-fu'āda nṭawā minhum 'alā ḥazanī*; Lyll 1918–1924, no. 66:1), this suggests that the heart is vital to the ties connecting a person to his tribal group. At the same time, the heart is capable of harbouring emotions that disrupt and undermine interpersonal attachment, like hatred and rancour (Lyll 1918–1924, no. 27:13, using *fu'ād*; other examples are given in *AHW* 45).

Secondly, the heart is associated both with fear for one's own safety (e.g., Lyll 1918–1924, no. 96:21; Lyll 1913, 'Abīd, no. 1:26; for further examples, see *AHW* 44–45 and 262) and with the overcoming of such fear (*AHW* 46). As we just saw, the loving heart can defy its owner. Yet in connection with the theme of fear and courage, poets will boast of their hearts' ready compliance: “wherever I go, my heart (*lubbī*, variant: *qalbī*) accompanies me, and I urge it on with firm resolve” (*DSAAP*, 'Antarah, no. 21:79; cf. Arberry 1957, 183, translating a variant that has *amr* instead or *ra'y*). In the *Lāmiyyat al-'arab* attributed to al-Shanfarā, the poet lists “a bold heart” (*fu'ād mushayya'*; *AHW* 46 and 264) together with his sword and bow as his three trusty companions (*EAP* 1:148).<sup>23</sup> The heart's role as the seat of valour and firm resolve is furthermore evident in a verse by Ṭafarah glossing “the coward” (*al-habīt*) as someone who “has no heart” (*lā fu'āda lahu*), presumably meaning someone lacking the ability to conquer his fear (*DSAAP*, Ṭafarah, no. 19:22; cf. Jacobi 1971, 184; see also *AHW* 46).<sup>24</sup> A bold heart enables its owner to exercise effective self-control, and poets accordingly boast of the “earnest striving” of their “noble heart” (*jaddu lubbin aṣīlī*; Lyll 1918–1924, no. 59:3) or of possessing a “keen heart” (*qalb ḥadīd*; Lyll 1918–1924, no. 27:26). Not unlike the Qur'anic supposition that the intentions of human agents emerge from the heart (see Q 33:5), the heart is the place where choices are made and where the ethical value of alternative courses of action is weighed: “whenever

21 For a much more detailed taxonomy, see *AHW* 43–63, covering poetry up until the Umayyad period.

22 For another example, see Lyll 1918–1924, nos 50:2 and 54:3, the former of which employs *fu'ād* rather than *qalb*.

23 On the question of this poem's authenticity, see, e.g., *EAP* 1:139–140 and el Masri 2020, 24.

24 Seidensticker assigns this verse both to the thematic category of the intellect (*AHW* 52), which seems a doubtful classification to me, and to that of courage (*AHW* 46).



two ways of action are intertwined in your heart (*fu'ād*), choose the one that is seemlier and more honourable (*fa-'mid li-l-a'affi l-ajmalī*)” (Lyall 1918–1924, no. 116:16, attributed to ‘Abd Qays ibn Khufāf).

The above digest of some principal contexts in which poetry evokes the heart is clearly not devoid of some tangible intersections with the Qur’an: the heart as the bearer of maternal solicitude recalls the reference to the heart of Moses’s mother in Q 28:10, while the heart’s implied role in upholding tribal ties is reminiscent of verses like Q 3:103 that speak of a mutual connection (verb: *allafa*) of hearts. Yet on the whole, one is struck by the observation, unsurprising though it may be, that pre-Islamic poetry consistently lacks the Qur’an’s overriding focus on the heart as the faculty by which humans enter into a relationship with God. Conversely, it is salient that the Qur’an contains no instances in which the heart is connected with erotic love, grief, rancour, or courage, which between them account for a majority of pre-Islamic verses evoking the heart, even if there is some overlap between poetry and the Qur’an in linking the heart to fear (*AHW* 64–66).<sup>25</sup> There is accordingly a rather considerable disjuncture between the heart’s functions and representation in poetry and in the Qur’an. One may say that the Qur’an transforms the heart from a mental faculty that is primarily concerned with interpersonal relationships and self-possession in the face of fear into a faculty that is primarily bound up with religious insight and with adopting the right emotional stance towards God. In particular the Qur’anic tendency to bond references to the heart with cognitive or epistemic language does not seem to have strong parallels in pre-Islamic poetry, even if ‘Abīd ibn al-Abraṣ highlights that “trying to instil wisdom has no benefit, unless the hearts are disposed to receive it” (*wa-lā yanfa’u l-talbībū // illā sajiyyātu mā l-qulūbi*; Lyall 1913, ‘Abīd, no. 1:19–20; *EAP* 2:38–39; see also *AHW* 51–52).<sup>26</sup> To highlight another contrast, even though both poetry and the Qur’an mention the heart in connection with fear, the poetic hero is meant to conquer his fear, while the Qur’an emphatically prizes awe vis-à-vis God and his revelations (Q 8:2, 22:35, 23:60): the right kind of fear is to be cultivated, not suppressed.<sup>27</sup>

**Biblical aspects of the Qur’anic notion of the heart.** The Qur’an’s appraisal of the human heart as the inward forum of humans’ relationship with God, which forms such a conspicuous contrast to pre-Islamic poetry, has a distinctly Biblical flavour (see also *AHW* 176–186). The similarity is best showcased by means of a florilegium of Biblical verses. In Deut 6:5, the Israelites are famously charged to “love the Lord your God with all your heart,

<sup>25</sup> See Q 3:151, 8:2.12, 22:35, 23:60, 24:37, 33:10.26, 40:18, 59:2, 79:8 (almost all of which are quoted in *AHW* 64–66).

<sup>26</sup> I follow Seidensticker in reading *sajiyyātu* in the nominative rather than the accusative (a reading also allowed by Jones). My translation of *al-talbīb* follows Jones, whereas Seidensticker renders the term as “grasping somebody by the collar” (cf. the entry on *labbah*, “the middle of the breast,” in *AEL* 2643). Regarding the link between the heart and cognitive language, one may observe that in the extensive corpus of 931 references to the heart in early poetry up until the Umayyad period that has been analysed by Seidensticker, only two pre-Islamic and two further *mukhaḍram* passages (out of a respective total of 68 and 57 relevant passages) fall into the thematic category of the intellect (*AHW* 57), and even the assignment of some of these could be questioned (see the catalogue in *AHW* 51–52; cf. also the further comments in *AHW* 176). By far the majority of the pre-Islamic material (61.8%) belongs to the thematic category of love.

<sup>27</sup> The expression “the right kind of fear” is to be stressed here, for the Qur’an at least sometimes operates evident lexical distinctions between fear as a religious virtue, on the one hand, and fear in a neutral or negative sense, on the other: for example, the verb *wajjila*, “to quake in fear,” occurs in depictions of religious awe (Q 8:2, 22:35, 23:60, arguably also 15:52–53), while *ru’b*, “terror,” is always used in a punitive or at least ominous sense (Q 3:151, 8:12, 18:18, 33:26, 59:2). However, no such distribution is evident for the generic verb *khāfa*, “to fear.”



and with all your soul, and with all your might,” a commandment subsequently quoted in all of the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 22:37, Mark 12:30.33, and Luke 10:27). Other Biblical passages reinforce the message that one is to search after, love, and serve God and fulfil his statutes and ordinances “with all your heart and all your soul” (e.g., Deut 4:29, 10:12, 11:13, 26:16; see also Josh 22:5, 1 Kgs 2:4, and 2 Kgs 23:3; see *TDOT* 7:430–431) and that one’s heart must not “turn away from God” (Deut 29:17). Joshua commands the people to “put away the foreign Gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel” (Josh 24:23); Samuel urges them to serve God “with all your heart” (1 Sam 12:20.24); and Solomon too invokes God’s faithfulness and mercy towards “your servants who walk before you with all their heart” (1 Kgs 8:23). Nonetheless, in his old age Solomon’s wives “turned away his heart after other gods” (1 Kgs 11:2.4.9). The shortfallings of other Judaeen kings are also noted with reference to the heart: for instance, about Jeroboam of Israel it is said that “his heart was not whole (*šālēm*) with the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father” (1 Kgs 15:3), while the heart of Asa, by contrast, “was whole with the Lord all his days” (1 Kgs 15:14; see also 1 Kgs 8:61, 11:4; 2 Kgs 20:3; 1 Chr 29:19; 2 Chr 15:17). The Psalmist gives thanks to God “with all my heart” (Ps 9:2), and the righteous is said to have “the law of God in his heart” (Ps 37:31). God’s people have removed their heart from the Lord, Isaiah charges (Isa 29:13, quoted in Matt 15:8 and Mark 7:6; see also the quotation in the *Didascalia*, in Vööbus 1979, 114). Jesus declares the “pure in heart” blessed, for “they will see God” (Matt 5:8).

Contrasting ancient pagan and ancient Jewish views of the human person, Peter Brown writes that according to the latter, a believer “confronted God not as a soul committed, for a time, to the necessary if thankless task of bringing order to an alien body, but rather as the possessor of a ‘heart,’ that is, of a hidden core of the self, that could respond to or reject the will of its Creator.” According to the Biblical tradition, the crucial dualism that defines the human condition is not between body and soul but rather between two orientations of the heart and of the whole person governed by it: the heart might harden, “clenched in a state of mute rebellion to God’s will,” or it “might open itself fully” to God and “respond without reluctance” to him (Brown 1988, 35). Brown’s pithy characterisation holds just as true for the Qur’an as for the Bible. To be sure, the Biblical conception of the heart is multifaceted and encompasses further aspects beyond mediating the human relationship to God, such as forming humans’ vital centre and the general seat of human cognition and emotions (see again the overview in *TDOT* 7:412–434). There are also some notable disparities between Qur’anic and Biblical diction related to the heart. For example, the Deuteronomistic phrase “with all your heart and all your soul,” establishing a close link between the heart and the soul, has no counterpart in Qur’anic usage, which generally speaking keeps the heart and the soul or *nafs* functionally distinct (see above and under → *nafs*). Nonetheless, the prominent role that the Bible accords to the heart in articulating the relationship of humans to God is undeniable; and given that this is also the foremost function of the heart in the Qur’an, it is highly likely that this aspect of Qur’anic anthropology bespeaks the impact of Biblical notions on the Qur’anic milieu, even if specific features of the Qur’an’s understanding of the heart are pertinently juxtaposed with pre-Islamic poetry as well.

The claim that the Qur’anic conception of the heart, unlike that of the soul or vital self (*nafs*), is to be placed against a Biblical background is further supported by a significant number of concrete phraseological parallels. When the Qur’an speaks of God’s “hardening” of people’s hearts (→ *qasā*) or has the Israelites claim that their hearts are “wrapped in fore-

skins” (→ *ghulf*), these expressions can be directly correlated with Biblical language, and the same applies to the two Qur’anic verses praising those who approach God *bi-qalbin salīm*, “with a sound heart” (Q 26:89 and 37:84), an evident parallel of the Hebrew phrase *bə-lēb/lēbāb šālēm*, “with a whole heart” (e.g., Isa 38:3; for further references, see → *aslama*; cf. also verses like 1 Kgs 15:3.14, quoted above). The Qur’anic statement that God “tests what is in your<sup>p</sup> hearts” (Q 3:154: *wa-li-yumaḥḥiṣa mā fī qulūbikum*) echoes the Biblical trope that God is the one who tries or searches the hearts (Ps 7:10; Jer 17:10; 1 Chr 28:9; Rom 8:27; 1 Thess 2:4; Rev 2:23).<sup>28</sup> The general proposition that God knows the contents of human hearts (e.g., Q 4:63) is of course also Biblical (1 Kgs 8:39; Ps 44:22 and 139:23; Luke 16:15; Acts 1:24 and 15:8; see *TDOT* 7:425–426 and *TDNT* 3:613; see also *CQ* 45). Finally, the contrast between what people say “with their mouths” or “with their tongues” and what is in their hearts (Q 3:167, 5:41, 9:8, 48:11) is perhaps redolent of Isa 29:13 and its quotation in Matt 15:8 and Mark 7:6. As intimated earlier, all of these Biblically charged Qur’anic statements about the heart use the word *qalb*. It may accordingly be suggested that pre-Islamic Arabophone Christians and Jews would also have employed *qalb*, rather than *fu’ād*, when rendering Biblically based tropes about the heart into Arabic.

**Do animals have a heart?** By way of an addendum, it is worth noting that two of the poetic verses cited above attribute a heart, in the sense of a mental faculty rather than simply a physical organ, to animals (Lyll 1918–1924, no. 97:8, referring to an antelope, and *DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 15:19, referring to a horse). Comparable passages attributing a heart to animals are lacking in the Qur’an, reflecting the latter’s much more anthropocentric portrayal of the animal kingdom in comparison to poetry (see Ambros 1990, 293). Intriguingly, a similar absence of references to animal hearts has been observed in the Hebrew Bible (*TDOT* 7:412, noting some exceptions).

### ***qalā’id* pl. | ritual necklaces hung on sacrificial animals or animals marked out thereby (?)**

→ *dhabaḥa*

### ***aqāma* tr. | to perform or observe s.th.**

See under → *ṣallā* and also under → *injīl*.

### ***qawm* | people**

See under → *ummah*. Prepositional syntagms beginning with *li-qawmin* (e.g., Q 6:97: *li-qawmin ya’lamūn*) are discussed under → *faṣṣala*.

### ***qawwām ‘alā* | maintaining s.o., taking care of s.o.**

→ *darajah*

<sup>28</sup> The trope is also reflected, for instance, at several junctures in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, which describes both Christ and God as the one who searches or tests hearts (*mā’esh/bāḥar lebbawātā*; Vööbus 1979, 93, 163, 182, 234).

## *qiyāmah*: *yawm al-~* | the day of resurrection

Further vocabulary discussed: *yawm al-dīn* | judgement day *aḥyā* tr./intr. | to bring (s.th. or s.o.) to life or back to life, to revive (s.th. or s.o.)

Both Meccan and Medinan passages frequently designate the resurrection as *yawm al-qiyāmah* (e.g., Q 2:85.113.174.212, 3:55.77.161 etc., 39:15.24.31 etc., 41:40, 68:39, 75:1.6). This is so even if in the early Meccan surahs, *al-dīn* and *yawm al-dīn* are considerably more frequent (→ *dīn*<sup>1</sup>), the only early Meccan passages employing *yawm al-qiyāmah* being Q 68:39 and 75:1.6. *Qiyāmah* is a loanword from Christian Aramaic, whereas Jewish usage consistently speaks of the “vivification of the dead” instead (JPND 186, FVQ 244).<sup>1</sup> Of course, there are also Qur’anic verses stressing that God will “revive the dead” (e.g., 42:9, 46:33, 75:40; → *aḥyā*, → *ba’atha*).

## *taqwīm* | constitution (?); posture (?)

Further vocabulary discussed: *ṣūrah* | shape, form *ṣawwara* tr. | to shape s.o., to endow s.o. with a shape (specifically, humans) *radda* tr. | to return or bring back s.o. or s.th.

**The meaning of *taqwīm* in Q 95:4.** According to the early Meccan passage Q 95:4, God created or creates man “in the best *taqwīm*” (*fī aḥsani taqwīm*). It is not unreasonable to understand Q 95:4 in light of the chronologically later parallels 40:64 and 64:3, which say that God “shaped you<sup>p</sup> and gave you beautiful shapes” (*wa-ṣawwarakum fa-aḥsana ṣuwarakum*). This would support glossing *fī aḥsani taqwīm* as *fī aḥsani ṣūrah*, “in the best shape” (thus the traditions cited in Ṭab. 24:510–512).<sup>1</sup> From this vantage point, God’s creation of man *fī aḥsani taqwīm* might be rendered “in the best constitution.”

But it may be that Q 95:4 reflects a more specific idea. The Biblical scholar Ludwig Koehler once proposed that the Biblical term *ṣelem*, “image,” in Gen 1:26 (“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness”; see also under → *istakhlafa*) refers to humans’ upright posture (Koehler 1948). The same understanding of Gen 1:26–27 is already found in the Greek Bible translation of Symmachus, who says that man was created *orthios*, “upright, standing” (Schreiner 1993, 136; see also Salvesen 1991, 2–3 and 6–7, who inter alia notes a reference to man’s upright posture in *Gen. Rab.* 8:11). Irrespective of whether this captures the original sense of Gen 1:26, it is worth considering whether humans’ erect posture might not be the meaning of the Qur’anic *taqwīm* in Q 95:4, which is in fact how an exegetical dictum cited by al-Ṭabarī construes the word (Ṭab. 24:512–513).<sup>2</sup> This inter-

1 Jeffery maintains that the *qiyāmah* must be loaned from Christian Palestinian Aramaic rather than Syriac, but there are at least some cases in which Syriac, too, employs *qiyāmtā* for the resurrection (SL 1363). A quantitative assessment of relative frequency of usage in Syriac vs Christian Palestinian Aramaic would require more detailed examination of primary sources than seems to have been undertaken so far.

1 On *ṣūrah* and *ṣawwara*, see in more detail under → *istakhlafa*.

2 ‘Adī ibn Zayd, in his poem on creation, highlights that God “saw” Adam *tamma wa-tadalā*, which Dmitriev translates as “to be perfect and standing upright” (Dmitriev 2010, 360 and 363). This would obviously serve my present argument, though it is possible that *i’tadala* is merely a pleonasm of *tamma* here and has only the general sense of “to be symmetrical or proportionate.”

pretation is naturally complemented by the conjecture that *taqwīm* is standing in for some other derivative of the root *q-w-m*, due to exigencies of rhyme, such as *qiyām*, “standing” (Q 51:45), or, even more appropriately, *qāmah*, “stature, posture, height” (not attested in the Qur’an). An analogous case of such “cognate substitution” (Stewart 2009, 20–25) occurs in Q 105:2, where *taḍlīl* is used in lieu of *ḍalāl* (Müller 1969, 46–50; Stewart 2009, 21). In fact, Müller argues that yet another instance of cognate substitution is found in the verse preceding Q 95:4, where *amīn* would seem to be employed in the sense of *āmin* (“secure”; Müller 1969, 54–58). Interestingly, there are no other instances of the second-form verb *qawwama* or its verbal noun *taqwīm* anywhere else in the Qur’an. Despite all of these considerations, however, and everything that will be said below, the initial interpretation of *fī aḥsani taqwīm* above as having the more general sense of “in the best constitution” rather than “in the best posture” cannot be ruled out.

**Q 95:5 and human decrepitude in old age.** Q 95:4 must evidently be read together with its continuation in the following verse, 95:5. The latter proclaims that after God created man in the best *taqwīm*, he “reduces him to the lowest of the low” (Q 95:5: *thumma radadnāhu asfala sāfilīn*). This is almost certainly a reference to human decrepitude in old age (thus, e.g., Ṭab. 24:513–514 and *PP* 188–189), an interpretation that is particularly compelling in view of other Qur’anic statements that speak of those who are “reduced” or “returned” (*radda*, the same verb that also appears in Q 95:5) to senility in their old age (Q 16:70 and 22:5: *wa-minkum man yuraddu ilā ardhali l-‘umuri li-kay lā ya‘lama ba‘da / min ba‘di ‘ilmīn shay’an*; see also 36:68 and 40:67, cited in *KK* 514). Also helpful for a contextualised understanding of Q 95:4–5 is a passage by Jacob of Sarug. It contrasts the marvellous nature of the human body that God has created with its subsequent decomposition in death, resulting from Adam’s transgression of God’s command not to eat from the forbidden tree (Mathews 2014, 20–31, ll. 51–150). Q 95:4–5 do not, of course, expressly refer to Adam and his primordial act of disobedience. Yet the contrast that the Qur’anic couplet sets out between the immanent perfection of the human body and its eventual decay and dissolution resembles the passage by Jacob, thus lending further support to the view that Q 95:5 is about old age and death.

There is, however, a counter-argument to this geriatric line of interpretation of Q 95:5 that emerges from reading 95:4–5 together with 96:6: “except for those [or ‘not so those’] who believe and do righteous deeds; they will have their rightfully earned wage (→ *ajr*).” Taking this together with vv. 4–5, one is apt to conclude that v. 5 must refer to posthumous perdition in hell rather than to old age and death. Yet Q 95:6 may well be a later insertion (e.g., *PP* 185 and 189) that induced (or perhaps was itself predicated on) reinterpretation of v. 5 as referring to damnation. To be sure, the double hypothesis that Q 95:5 is about old age and that 95:6 is a secondary addition does give rise to the question of how one is to understand the hypothetically original train of thought that would result from removing v. 6, a train of thought leading from old age and death (v. 5) to the allegedly manifest character of the eschatological judgement in v. 7: “So what, then, makes you dismiss the judgement as a lie?” (*fa-mā yukadhdhibuka ba‘du bi-l-dīn*). Yet the worry that this transition might be a *non sequitur* is allayed by another parallel from Jacob of Sarug, who teaches that the demise of a human individual foreshadows and draws attention to the eventual dissolution of the world as a whole (Mathews 2014, 46–49, ll. 315–354). Jacob thus gives us a discursive trajectory leading from individual death to the end of the world and thereby also to God’s eschatological judgement. In light of this, it stands to reason that a direct transition

from Q 95:5, understood to refer to physical decrepitude, to a warning about God's final judgement in 95:7 would not have sounded abrupt to the Qur'an's late antique audience.

Assuming, therefore, that Q 95:5 does refer to the natural deterioration of human faculties over time, one may note that early Arabic poetry takes a similarly bleak view of old age as the Qur'an. Particularly interesting is a verse by Labīd in which the poet describes himself as "walking slowly and seeming to bend forward (*rāki'*) every time I [try to] stand up [straight] (*kullamā qumtu*)" (*EAP* 1:85 = 'Abbās 1962, no. 24:13). Here, stooping figures as the hallmark of old age, in contrast with the poet's unsuccessful attempts to recapture the straight posture of his youth, which is, notably, expressed with a derivative of the root *q-w-m*. This poetic parallel lends further plausibility to the proposal that Q 95:4, in saying that humans were created in the best *taqwīm*, is concerned specifically with God's bestowal of an upright posture, which is progressively lost as humans age. It also deserves to be appreciated that Q 95:5 represents old age in terms of the metaphor of being brought low, expressed by the root *s-f-l*. This heightens the reader's sense that the root *q-w-m* as employed in Q 95:4 conveys erectness and standing up.

***mustaqīm: al-ṣirāṭ al-~* | the straight road**

→ *ṣirāṭ*, → *sabīl*

***qayyada tr. li-* | to assign s.o. to s.o.**

→ *shayṭān*

# k

**takabbara/istakbara** intr. | to deem o.s. great, to behave haughtily

→ *sajada*, → *istaḍ'afa*, → *afsada*, → *kafara*, → *mala'*, → *malak*

**kataba** tr./intr. | to write (s.th.)

**kataba** tr. 'alā | to impose s.th. upon s.o., to prescribe s.th. to s.o.

**kataba** tr. li- | to foreordain s.th. for s.o., to decree s.th. for s.o.

→ *kitāb*

**kitāb** | writing, piece of writing, writ; written record, record book;  
scripture; decree, written decree

**umm al-kitāb** | the mother of the scripture, the mother-scripture (meaning  
either the celestial archetype of earthly scriptures or the Qur'an's  
unequivocal core)

Further vocabulary discussed: *āyah* | sign; sign-pronouncement *faṣṣala* tr. (li-) | to set out s.th. or expound s.th. in clear detail (for s.o.) *qur'ān* | recitation 'arabī | Arabic *muṭahhar* | purified *lawḥ mahfūz* | guarded tablet *tadhkirah* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation *ṣuḥuf* pl. | written sheets, writings, written records *al-tawrah* | the Torah *al-injīl* | the Gospel or the Christian Bible *nazzala, anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down **kataba** tr./intr. | to write (s.th.) **kataba** tr. 'alā | to impose s.th. upon s.o., to prescribe s.th. to s.o. **kataba** tr. li- | to foreordain s.th. for s.o., to decree s.th. for s.o. *waffā* intr. | to fulfil one's obligation(s) *taṣḍīq* | confirmation *zabūr* | writ, writing, written record *ṣaddaqa* intr. *bi-* | to hold s.th. true, to declare s.th. to be true, to believe in s.th. *faḍl* | favour

The noun *kitāb* in the general sense of “writing” or “writ” is attested already in pre-Qur'anic poetry (*KU* 67; e.g., Qabāwah 1987, 153, no. 3:1; Lyall 1918–1924, no. 105:7–8).<sup>1</sup> Building on this basic sense of the word, the Qur'an employs the noun *kitāb* to denote the concept of revealed scripture, a fundamental component of Qur'anic self-descriptions and of the Qur'an's general vision of divine engagement with humanity. Qur'anic invocations of “the scripture” have close counterparts in Jewish and Christian diction (see Künstlinger 1928, 239–241,

<sup>1</sup> As Horovitz correctly points out, the occurrence of the word *kitāb* in the Mu'allaqah of Zuhayr, where it would appear to refer to a divine record of human deeds, must be suspected of being due to later Islamic revision or expansion. See also Sinai 2019b, 20–22.



and below). Like other core concepts of the Qur'anic world-view, such as the idea of divine "guidance" (see under → *hadā*), the Qur'anic notion of scripture must therefore be placed against the background of the Biblical tradition. This continuity should not, however, lead one to overlook the distinctive features of the Qur'anic understanding of scripture, which the present entry will try to extract. The noun *kitāb* also figures in the collective term → *ahl al-kitāb*, "the scripture-owners," an umbrella category for the Jewish and Christian recipients of previous scriptural revelations that is treated elsewhere.

**The two main senses of *kitāb* in the Qur'an.** Very broadly, two principal Qur'anic usages of the noun *kitāb* may be distinguished, a celestial one and an earthly one.<sup>2</sup> First, the term *kitāb* can refer to a transcendent book located in close proximity to God and uniting two distinct functions. On the one hand, it serves as a comprehensive repository, or a *kitāb* in the sense of a "written record," of God's knowledge and decrees, in line with the early Meccan assertion that God has "enumerated everything in a written record" (Q 78:29: *wa-kulla shay'in aḥṣaynāhu kitābā*; see also 11:6, 18:49, 23:62, 27:75, 35:11, 50:4; cf. also 36:12 and 54:52–53, formulating the same idea without employing the word *kitāb*). On the other hand, this celestial book functions as the archetype or source of the Qur'anic revelations.<sup>3</sup> Thus, Q 41:3 claims that the "signs" or "sign-pronouncements" (singular: → *āyah*) contained in the heavenly scripture have been "expounded as an Arabic recitation so that people might know" (*kitābun fuṣṣilat āyātuhu qur'ānan 'arabiyyan li-qawmin ya'lamūn*; see under → *fāṣṣala*, → *qara'a*, and → *'arabī*). This notion, too, is in evidence from the early Meccan period, since Q 56:77–79 posits that the "noble recitation" revealed to Muhammad is contained in, and therefore derived from, a "sheltered scripture" (*kitāb maktūn*) handled only by "those who are pure" or "purified" (*lā yamassuhu illā l-muṭahharūn*), presumably angels (see under → *malak*). This archetypal celestial scripture must, moreover, be identical with the "guarded tablet" (*lawḥ mahfūz*) in which the Qur'anic recitations are stored according to the early Meccan couplet Q 85:21–22. Another early Meccan expression of the same idea is Q 80:11–16. The passage declares that "it"—presumably, the proclamations conveyed by Muhammad—is a "reminder" (*tadhkirah*; → *dhakkara*) set down in "sheets" (*ṣuḥuf*; see further below) that are "honoured, elevated, purified," which sheets are in turn said to be in the hands of "scribes" (*safarah*) who are "noble" (*kirām*). Like the "pure" or "purified" ones from Q 56:79, the noble scribes from 80:15–16 would seem to be angels (cf. Q 82:11, which applies to ostensibly angelic agents of surveillance the same attribute *kirām* also used in 80:16).<sup>4</sup>

2 An overview of how premodern Islamic exegetes and modern Western scholars have understood the numerous Qur'anic uses of the word *kitāb* is provided in Goudarzi 2018, 16–95. For a comprehensive study of the semantics of the noun *kitāb* and the consonantal root *k-t-b* in the Qur'an, see Madigan 2001, proposing a unitary interpretation of the term *kitāb* "as a symbol for God's knowledge and authoritative will" (Madigan 2001, 107).

3 On the Qur'anic notion of the celestial scripture, see, e.g., Sprenger 1869, 2:286–297; Grimme 1895, 72–75; GQ 1:80; Pedersen 1914, 114–115. A detailed review of pertinent scholarship is provided in Goudarzi 2018, 56–70 and 81–82. As Goudarzi shows, when scholars speak of the celestial scripture as an "archetype" or "source" of earthly revelations (e.g., Nöldeke 1892, 51, referring to the Qur'an's "celestial textual original" or *himmlischen Originaltext*), this harks back to the Arabic term *aṣl*, which is employed to describe the relationship between the Qur'an and the celestial "mother-scripture" in the medieval commentary tradition (Goudarzi 2018, 27–29; e.g., Ṭab. 20:546–547 = on Q 43:4). The term "archetype" was first employed by Hubert Grimme (Goudarzi 2018, 63; Grimme 1895, 72–73).

4 Ben-Shammai objects that this equivalence between an archetypal celestial *kitāb* and the *ṣuḥuf* of Q 80:13 as well as the *lawḥ* of 85:22 "can hardly be sustained without the support of Muslim exegetical tradition" (Ben-Shammai 2013, 9); but it seems reasonably safe to me that Q 56:77–79 (which has the word *kitāb*), 80:11–16,

To be sure, it is not inconceivable that the two functions just enumerated—that of a universal divine register and that of an archetype of the Qur’anic revelations—could devolve upon two different celestial books.<sup>5</sup> However, it seems more economical to suppose that they are in fact performed by one and the same *kitāb* (Sinai 2006, 118–120), a view that is also anticipated in the premodern exegetical tradition (Goudarzi 2018, 30–31). Particularly strong support for considering God’s universal record and the celestial archetype of scriptural revelations to be one and the same entity is supplied by the fact that both the archetype of the Qur’anic recitations and God’s universal record are designated as *umm al-kitāb*, “the mother of the scripture”: according to Q 43:4, “it”—namely, the “Arabic recitation” (*qur’ān ‘arabī*) mentioned in the preceding verse—“is in the mother-scripture with us, sublime and wise” (*wa-innahu fī ummi l-kitābi ladaynā la-‘aliyyun ḥakīm*),<sup>6</sup> while Q 13:39 says that “God erases and sets down what he wills; with him is the mother-scripture” (*yamḥū llāhu mā yashā’u wa-yuthbitu wa-‘indahū ummu l-kitāb*; see also under → *ajal*). The *umm al-kitāb*, then, is both “the source of every scripture” (*aṣl kull kitāb*), as al-Zamaksharī glosses the expression (Zam. 3:357, on Q 13:39; cf. similarly Zam. 5:425, on Q 43:4),<sup>7</sup> and the ultimate register of all events whose future portions God is free to manipulate at will.<sup>8</sup> Incidentally, in the Medinan verse Q 3:7 the expression *umm al-kitāb* conveys a very different meaning, referring to those portions of the Qur’anic corpus that are not beset by interpretive ambiguity (see under → *bayyana*).

The second main Qur’anic usage of the term *kitāb* is as a label for earthly scriptures that originate from the celestial archetype by way of divine revelation. Thus, the Qur’an speaks of “the scripture of Moses” (*kitāb mūsā*; Q 11:17, 46:12; cf. Syriac *ktābeh d-mūshē*, Mathews 2020, 18–19, l. 1939) or “the scripture brought by Moses” (Q 6:91: *al-kitāb alladhī jā’a bihi mūsā*), meaning the Torah (→ *al-tawrah*). The revelations conveyed by Muhammad, too, are referred to as a “scripture” in their own right (e.g., Q 2:89, 6:92.155, 46:30). This application of *kitāb* to earthly scriptures is already seen in the early Meccan verse Q 68:37, which challenges those refusing to believe in the Qur’an’s eschatological message by asking them whether their views are supported by “a scripture in which you study” (*am lakum kitābun fihī tadrusūn*; cf. also the early Meccan statement Q 37:157). Moreover, when Q 37:117 says that God gave “the

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and 85:21–22 are very closely related. Q 85:22 has a reading variant that construes *maḥfūz* as a nominative rather than a genitive, and therefore as an attribute of *qur’ān* rather than of *lawḥ* (MQ 10:373; MQQ 8:109–110). This is grammatically feasible. Similar grammatical ambiguity is found in Q 56:77–78 (*fī kitābin maktūn*) and 80:11.13–14 (“No, it is a reminder! // . . . // [Contained] in sheets honoured, // elevated, purified”). Yet in the latter instance, the adjectives *mukarramah*, *marfū’ah*, and *muṭahharah* must for contextual reasons be construed as attributes of the “sheets” (*ṣuḥuf*) rather than of the “reminder” (*tadhkirah*). On the premise that the three early Meccan passages at hand are closely related, it seems logical to extend the same construal to Q 85:22 and 56:78.

5 This is at least implied in Jeffery’s distinction between “*kitāb* as heavenly book” and “*kitāb* as Scripture” (Jeffery 1952, 17).

6 Even though grammatically the true predicate here is *la-‘aliyyun ḥakīm*, I am inclined to understand Q 43:4 to convey, first, that the Qur’anic recitations are derived from or inhere “in” the celestial scripture (cf. the use of *fī* in Q 56:78, 80:13, and 85:22) and, secondly, that they are sublime and wise. By contrast, Paret 2001 envisages that Q 43:4 might be saying that the “Arabic recitation” received by Muhammad is reckoned to be “sublime and wise” in the “mother-scripture,” understood to be a universal record of all things.

7 Al-Zamaksharī is here echoing early exegetical traditions like those compiled in Tab. 20:546–547, such as Qatādah’s alleged gloss on Q 43:4 that the *umm al-kitāb* is “the source of the scripture and its totality” (*aṣl al-kitāb wa-jumlatuhu*).

8 There is exegetical disagreement as to whether God’s “erasing” and “setting down” is tantamount to changing the mother-scripture itself or simply amounts to adjusting some other book or books in accordance with the unchanging mother-scripture. See Tab. 13:562–563. I consider it more likely that the point of Q 13:39 is to say that God wields complete control over the mother-scripture.

clear scripture” (*al-kitāb al-mustabīn*; see under → *bayyana*) to Moses and Aaron, this may also intend the Torah rather than the celestial mother-scripture.<sup>9</sup>

According to Mohsen Goudarzi, the Torah and the Qur’an are in fact the only two earthly scriptures to which the Qur’an accords the title *kitāb*, by virtue of their unique quality of being comprehensive records “imparting *historical* and *legal* knowledge” (Goudarzi 2018, 94). Specifically, Goudarzi’s two-*kitāb* hypothesis means that the → *injīl* (usually understood to be the Gospel) does not occupy the rank of a fully fledged *kitāb*. The argument is rigorous and sophisticated, and it is certainly striking that Q 4:136 lists only two scriptures, one sent down upon Muhammad (*al-kitāb alladhī nazzala ‘alā rasūlihi*) and another one “sent down before” (*al-kitāb alladhī anzala min qablu*), rather than referring to Muhammad’s scripture and two previous ones (Goudarzi 2018, 110–111). A two-*kitāb* scenario is also implied by other passages, such as Q 6:91–92, 11:17, and 46:12.30. On the other hand, Q 2:285 and also 4:136—which latter was just partially cited—speak of God’s “scriptures” (*kutubihī*) in the plural rather than in the dual, thus contravening what one might have expected on the two-*kitāb* hypothesis.<sup>10</sup> These references to “scriptures” in the plural do not conclusively disprove the two-*kitāb* hypothesis (see Goudarzi 2018, 159–161), but they do make it attractive to consider alternative solutions for the singular reference to “the scripture sent down before” the Qur’an (*al-kitāb alladhī anzala min qablu*) in Q 4:136, especially given the allusion to a plurality of divine “scriptures” (*kutub*) later on in the verse. Thus, one might insist that Q 4:136 does not need to be understood as providing an exhaustive list of pre-Qur’anic scriptures and that it may well limit itself to juxtaposing the Qur’an with the most prominent predecessor scripture, that of Moses (of which the Qur’anic → *injīl* is perhaps to be considered a divinely mandated re-edition, as explained in the respective entry). The plural *kutub* later in Q 4:136 might then be understood to include the *injīl* as well.

**Celestial and terrestrial scriptures in pre-Qur’anic traditions.** Both of the main denotations of Qur’anic *kitāb* have ample pre-Qur’anic antecedent. To commence at the most general level, the Qur’anic employment of *kitāb* as a descriptor of earthly scriptures is reminiscent, for instance, of passages from the New Testament like Matt 21:42 and 26:54 or John 7:38.42, which invoke “the scripture” (*hē graphē*) or “the scriptures” (*hai graphai*), meaning the Hebrew Bible; a *graphē* can also be an individual scriptural passage (for much more detail on the Greek term, see *TDNT* 1:751–761).<sup>11</sup> The Peshitta renders these verses with cognates of the Arabic noun *kitāb*, namely, the singular *ktābā* or the plural *ktābē*, a usage that is also found in subsequent Syriac literature (e.g., Beck 1970a, no. 2:1557). Rabbinic texts, meanwhile, speak of “the holy scriptures” (*kitbē ha-qodesh*; e.g., *m. Yad.* 3:5

9 God’s “giving” of “the scripture” to Moses recurs in a string of later verses, such as Q 2:53.87 or 41:45.

10 See also Q 66:12, according to which Mary believed in God’s “scriptures.” Historically, of course, one would have expected Mary to have been familiar with only one divinely revealed scripture, the Torah, and even the ministry of her son would only have brought the number up to two. It is conceivable that the plural *kutub* in Q 66:12 is simply an echo of the credal passages cited in the main text. On the other hand, it should be noted that there is also the reading variant *kitāb* in the singular here, allegedly to be identified with the *injīl* (MQ 9:533; MQQ 7:180). But a singular reading could of course also intend the Torah. Perhaps the most likely hypothesis is that an original singular, asserting Mary’s faithfulness to the ancestral Israelite scripture, was read as a plural due to assimilation of Q 66:12 with 2:285 and 4:136.

11 Similar references to “the scripture” also occur in the Septuagint; see, e.g., 1 Chr 15:15, stating that the ark of the Lord was carried “according to the scripture,” *kata tēn graphēn*. This qualification is not found in the Hebrew text. See also the same phrase at 2 Chr 30:5 (where it renders Hebrew *kakkātūb*).

and 4:6; see *TDNT* 1:751 and Kasher 1988, 548) while additionally insisting that Moses did not only receive a “written Torah” (*torah she-bi-ktab*) but also a concomitant “oral Torah” (*torah she-ba-‘al peh*), understood to encompass the extra-scriptural tradition compiled in the Mishnah and other rabbinic works (Jaffee 2001, especially 126–152). To the Biblical “scripture,” then, the Qur’an adds a second earthly *kitāb* consisting in the corpus of revelations granted to Muhammad.

As regards the Qur’an’s application of the term *kitāb* to a celestial register-cum-archetype, the notion of a transcendent ledger has precursors going back as far as ancient Mesopotamia, including the Hebrew Bible, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament, and rabbinic literature (Jeffery 1952, 9–10; Paul 1973).<sup>12</sup> Most pertinent to the Qur’an are the heavenly tablets that figure throughout the *Book of Jubilees* (VanderKam 1989) and contain normative commandments (e.g., *Jubilees* 3:10–11, 3:31, 4:5, 4:32, 6:17, 32:28–29), God’s ordainments regarding the future course of history (see *Jubilees* 16:3, 23:32, 24:33, 32:21), and retrospective assessments of the religious and moral merit of human individuals (*Jubilees* 19:9, 30:19–20, 30:22).<sup>13</sup> Heavenly tablets likewise appear briefly in *1 Enoch* 81:1–2 (according to which Enoch finds them to contain “all the deeds of humanity”), 93:2, 103:2, and 106:19 (Charlesworth 1983, 59, 74, 83, 87). Obviously, the heavenly tablets from *1 Enoch* and *Jubilees* are particularly reminiscent of the “guarded tablet” (*lawḥ mahfūz*) mentioned in the early Meccan verse Q 85:22; but the comprehensive character of the heavenly tablets in *Jubilees* (encompassing commandments, past history, future decrees, and moral verdicts) also matches the similarly comprehensive content that was argued above to be attributable to the Qur’an’s celestial *kitāb*. At the same time, the general Qur’anic notion of a heavenly *kitāb* also resonates with rabbinic conceptions of the pre-existent Torah, identified with the primordial wisdom of Prov 8:22–31 (Urbach 1987, 1:287; Hamerton-Kelly 1973, 19–20).

A final pre-Qur’anic parallel worth noting in the present context concerns the expression *umm al-kitāb* (the “mother-scripture” or “source-scripture”), which has an intriguing twin in a metrical homily by Ephrem. After elaborating in some detail how all human utterances and actions are unfailingly recorded in preparation for the final judgement, Ephrem declares that it is in fact in God’s mind that they are inscribed (Beck 1970a, no. 3:121–124): “The record book [of God] is his mind; in it everything is contained. // The mother of books (*emmā d-seprē*) is his thought; in it he has written and keeps writing.” Even though the “books” (*seprē*) to which Ephrem alludes here are not the Biblical scriptures but rather the records of deeds that will play a role at the last judgement (see below), the expression *emmā d-seprē* is clearly redolent of the Qur’anic *umm al-kitāb*, and both invoke the metaphor of motherhood in order to describe some entity as the origin and source of something else (cf. Beck 1970a, no. 3:381–386, inter alia describing justice as “the mother of punishments,” and the translator’s note on Beck 1970a, no. 3:123). The parallel, compelling though it is, should not however be taken to entail that the Qur’an, too, understands the mother-scripture to be identical with the divine mind, given that the celestial scripture is described in concrete and objectifying terms as

12 As noted by Horovitz (*KU* 67), *b. Meg.* 16a designates the idea of a celestial record of human actions with a cognate of Arabic *kitāb*, namely, as a “writing that is up above” (*ktab she-la-ma‘lah*). For other rabbinic references, see Paul 1973, 350–351.

13 On the content of the heavenly tablets in *Jubilees*, see generally García Martínez 1997. I am grateful to Dominik Markl for drawing my attention to this chapter and for sharing with me a paper comparing the conceptions of revelation in the Qur’an and *Jubilees*.

a “guarded tablet” (Q 85:22: *lawḥ mahfūz*) or as written sheets in the “hands of scribes” who are “noble and pious,” again meaning angels (Q 80:15–16).

***Kitāb as the verbal noun of *kataba*, “to write.”*** A certain number of Qur’anic occurrences of the word *kitāb* do not straightforwardly fit under the two rubrics just outlined. In many of them, *kitāb* would primarily seem to function as the verbal noun derived from *kataba* and to refer simply to the act of writing or its end product, a writing or writ, similar to the way the word is used in pre-Islamic poetry. Thus, in accordance with the basic lexical meaning of the verb *kataba*, “to write” (e.g., Q 24:33; see Madigan 2001, 117–118), a *kitāb* can be a human piece or instance of writing, such as the letter sent by Solomon to the queen of Saba’ in Q 27:28–29 or the legal document, most likely a marriage contract, mentioned in Q 24:33 (on which see Crone 1994a, 3–6). In a more figurative usage, the word *kitāb* can designate an individual divine decree (e.g., Q 15:4) or an authoritative divine commandment or prescription (Q 4:24). In these latter cases, the Qur’an also employs corresponding verbal locutions (see in more detail Madigan 2001, 107–117): God’s determining of future events or the allocation of rewards and punishments can be expressed by saying that he “has written” (*kataba*) a specific outcome “against” or “for” somebody (e.g., Q 3:154, 7:156, 9:51, 59:3), and *kataba* + acc. + ‘*alā* (“to impose s.th. upon s.o., to prescribe s.th. to s.o.”) is also a frequent manner of conveying that God has imposed a certain behavioural prescription (e.g., Q 2:178.180.183.216.246). In so far as such individual divine ordinances and prescriptions are presumably contained in, documented by, or based on the celestial *kitāb* (Goudarzi 2018, 269–271), they have a clear link to the first of the two primary meanings outlined above, and it is at least sometimes appropriate to translate *kitāb* in this sense as a “written decree” rather than just a “decree” (e.g., Q 13:38: *li-kulli ‘ajalin kitāb*, “for every term there is a written decree”; see under → *ajal*).

**The display of record books on the day of judgement.** A specific thematic context in which the word *kitāb* occurs is God’s final judgement of the resurrected. This motif, too, goes back to the early Meccan period. Thus, in Q 69:19.25 and 84:7.10 the term *kitāb*—whose basic meaning here is “writ” or “written record”—denotes individual registers of good and evil human deeds that the resurrected receive in their right hand or, ominously, in their left hand (see also under → *ḥisāb*). These individual registers of good and bad deeds, which recur in the later Meccan surah Q 17 (Q 17:13–14.71), should probably be understood as transcripts drawn from God’s universal *kitāb*, as alluded to in Q 78:29. Q 83, also early Meccan, envisages two collective eschatological registers, one for the righteous and one for the sinners, rather than individual transcripts (Q 83:7.9.18.20). Apart from Q 17:13–14.71, later Meccan passages tend to speak of collective rather than individual eschatological inventories. Q 45:28 seems to posit registers specific to each human community (singular: → *ummah*), although the following verse, 45:29, then refers simply to “our”—i.e., God’s—*kitāb*. According to Q 18:49 and 39:69 it is “the *kitāb*”—probably God’s universal record book itself—that will be presented at the judgement (*wuḍī‘a l-kitābu*).

In the background of this motif of the eschatological display of individual or collective record books stand Dan 7:10 and Rev 20:12, mentioning the opening of “books” (Biblical Aramaic: *siprīn*, Greek: *biblia*, Peshitta: *seprē*) in preparation for the last judgement. The motif resonates in subsequent Syriac literature like metrical homilies by or attributed to Ephrem (Beck 1970a, no. 2:585–588, no. 3:138, and no. 5:332–335). A homily by Jacob of Sarug describes how every one of the resurrected will publicly read out his or her own



sins from a singular “book” or “register” (*seprā*; Bedjan 1905–1910, 1:719, ll. 15–18). This recalls the *kitāb* mentioned in Q 18:49 and 39:69. What is notable, though, is how the Qur’anic use of the term *kitāb*—encompassing as it does both a universal divine register in addition to any further registers, collective or individual, that might be deployed on the day of judgement as well as the celestial archetype of all earthly scriptures and the revelatory manifestations of this archetype in human history—unifies meanings that in Syriac are distributed between the words *ktābā/ktābē*, referring to the Biblical scripture or scriptures, and *seprā/seprē*, referring to the eschatological registers from Dan 7:10 and Rev 20:12. The Qur’anic understanding that these different records and scriptures are all identical with or manifestations of one and the same celestial mother-scripture has considerable conceptual elegance.

**Two alternative early Meccan terms for the concept of scripture: *ṣuḥuf* and *zūbur*.** Despite the use of the word *kitāb* for God’s comprehensive record book in Q 78:29 and the reference to an archetypal heavenly *kitāb* in Q 56:77–78,<sup>14</sup> other early Meccan passages express the notion of scripture not with the word *kitāb* but with the plural *ṣuḥuf* (see generally NB 50; KU 68–69; GQ 2:24; CQ 23; FVQ 192–194; Ben-Shammai 2013). Its singular *ṣaḥīfah*, which does not occur in the Qur’anic text, and the plural forms *ṣuḥuf* and *ṣaḥā’if* are attested in poetry (DSAAP, ‘Antarah, no. 27:2; Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī 1927–1974, 22:358, l. 7; Ben-Shammai 2013, 5–7), on which basis Ben Shammai infers that a *ṣaḥīfah* is “a sheet of pliable material, such as parchment or papyrus, which can be rolled up—hence, a scroll.” Some early Meccan passages employ the word *ṣuḥuf* in meanings that approximate those that are elsewhere in the Qur’an expressed by the noun *kitāb*. For instance, Q 53:36–37 refer to *ṣuḥuf mūsā // wa-ibrāhīma lladhī waffā*, “the writings of Moses // and of Abraham, who fulfilled his obligation.”<sup>15</sup> The *ṣuḥuf* at hand must be a textual corpus that is in some fashion connected with Abraham and Moses (though not necessarily in the sense of having been authored by or transmitted from them). The verses following Q 53:36–37 helpfully go on to provide a summary of the principal teachings attributed to these *ṣuḥuf*, namely: individual eschatological accountability (Q 53:38–42), God’s supremacy, including his power to resurrect the dead (Q 53:43–49), and God’s chastisement of sinful collectives in the past (Q 53:50–54; see generally Gibb 1962, 272–280; Sinai 2011a, 16–18; PP 661–666 and 671). The “writings of Moses and Abraham,” in other words, contain the same message as the Qur’anic revelations,<sup>16</sup> a parallelism that is further stressed by the conclusion of the passage (Q 53:56): “This is a warning like the ancient warnings” (*hādḥā nadhīrun mina l-nudhuri l-ūlā*). The principal point emerging from Q 53:36–56—namely, that the Qur’anic proclamations are imparting the same kerygma as an earlier corpus of writings associated with Abraham and Moses—is also made, more succinctly, in Q 87:18–19, which maintain that “this” (i.e., the Qur’anic revelations’ basic message and/or the eschatological preaching of the immediately preceding verses) is “in” (i.e., corresponds to or parallels)

14 See also the oath by “a *kitāb* written down” (*wa-kitābin maṣṭūr*) in Q 52:2. In this regard, Neuwirth cites the oath by “the pen and what is written down” in Q 68:1 (*wa-l-qalami wa-mā yaṣṭurūn*) and makes a plausible case that 52:2 intends the celestial scripture (PP 693–694). Goudarzi considers the Torah a possible candidate as well (Goudarzi 2018, 307).

15 Q 53:37 is most likely an allusion to Abraham’s readiness to offer up his own son as a sacrifice to God; see Q 37:102–107 and, less transparently, 2:124. See also PP 662.

16 Cf. especially Q 53:38 (*allā tazīru wāziratun wizra ukhrā*, “that no one will bear anyone else’s burden”) and the identical phrasing in 6:164, 17:15, 35:18, and 39:7. As Gibb points out, this has a parallel in Gal 6:5 (“For all must carry their own loads”; see Gibb 1962, 274). But cf. also 4 Ezra 7:104–105 (Charlesworth 1983, 540).



“the ancient writings, // the writings of Moses and Abraham” (*inna hādihā la-fī l-ṣuḥufi l-ūlā // ṣuḥufi ibrahīma wa-mūsā*).

Ben-Shammai has proposed that Q 53:36–37 and 87:18–19, among other passages, are employing *ṣuḥuf* as an approximate equivalent of Syriac *gelyonē*, whose singular *gelyonā*, like Arabic *ṣaḥīfah*, can mean “scroll” but also “apocalypse” (Ben-Shammai 2013, 12–15; on the Syriac word, see *SL* 236). Yet nothing about Q 53:36–56 and 87:18–19 suggests that the writings in question are specifically apocalyptic in nature and that the “writings of Moses and Abraham” refer to literature like the *Apocalypse of Abraham* rather than to the Biblical canon, however diffusely conceived.<sup>17</sup> Instead, as we saw above, the ancient writings of Abraham and Moses are portrayed as containing the core teachings of the early Meccan Qur’an. It seems much more likely, therefore, that Q 53:36–56 and 87:18–19 simply anticipate the later Qur’anic motif that the corpus of revelations proclaimed by Muhammad is a “confirmation (*taṣḍīq*) of what precedes it” (e.g., Q 10:37; → *ṣaddaqa*), the object of such confirmation being in particular “the scripture of Moses” (*kitāb mūsā*; Q 46:12; see also 46:30) or “the scripture brought by Moses (*al-kitāb alladhī jā’a bihi mūsā*; Q 6:91–92). The “*ṣuḥuf* of Moses and Abraham,” in other words, may well refer to some form of the Biblical canon, notions of which may have been blurred in the early Meccan period but would presumably have encompassed a basic awareness that the Bible had something to say about Abraham and Moses, and also that parts of it were believed to have been revealed to the latter.

Some sort of equivalence between the plural *ṣuḥuf* and the singular *kitāb* is also plausible for Q 80:13–16 (already referenced above), where it is declared that the “reminder” or “reminding exhortation” (*tadhkirah*) brought by Muhammad is contained in, or derived from, “honoured writings” or “honoured sheets” (*ṣuḥuf mukarramah*) that are “elevated” and “purified” and located in the hands of noble “scribes” (*safarah*)—in short, that Muhammad’s revelations are descended from a celestial scriptural archetype to which only angels have access. The record book or books utilised and “spread out” at the last judgement, too, are called *ṣuḥuf*, which might simply be rendered “sheets of writing” in this context (Q 81:10: *wa-idhā l-ṣuḥufu nushirat*). Finally, in one early Meccan passage the Qur’an’s adversaries are accused of requesting “sheets of writing spread out” (Q 74:52: *bal yurīdu kullu mri’in minhum an yu’tā ṣuḥufan munashsharah*). This may reflect that Muhammad’s opponents demanded textual proof for the sort of claim put forward in Q 87:18–19 that “this”—namely, the content of Muhammad’s revelatory preaching—“is in the ancient writings.” Alternatively, the opponents to which Q 74:52 alludes were demanding to witness the fulfilment of the prophecy made in Q 81:10 that at the eschatological judgement record books would be “spread out” (see under → *asāṭir al-awwalīn*).<sup>18</sup> In the later Meccan surahs, the word *ṣuḥuf* falls into desuetude, the only exceptions being Q 20:133 (referring to *al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*) and 98:2 (referring to Muhammad’s recitation of “purified *ṣuḥuf*”). Both passages are almost certainly echoes or quotations of the early Meccan verses Q 87:18, which has *al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā*, and of 80:13–14, which combines *ṣuḥuf* and *muṭahharah* (cf. Goudarzi 2018, 308–309).

<sup>17</sup> This is not to overlook that certain aspects of the Qur’anic Abraham narratives, for instance, have parallels in the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (see, e.g., Sinai, forthcoming b).

<sup>18</sup> A further option, suggested to me by Mohsen Goudarzi, is that the opponents demanded that Muhammad “bring down” a physical book from heaven, a polemical challenge quoted in Q 17:93.

Another term first appearing in the early Meccan period that can convey the approximate sense of “scripture” is the plural *zabur*. Like the consonantal roots *ṣ-h-f* and *k-t-b*, the root *z-b-r* expresses the idea of writing, and the basic meaning of the singular → *zabūr* is a piece of writing or a writ. Qur’anic occurrences of *zabūr* and *zabur* are reviewed in more detail in a separate entry, but in the present context two early Meccan instances of *zabur* deserve to be noted. First, in Q 54:52 the word conveys the idea of a divine record book: “Everything they have done is documented in written records” (*wa-kullu shay’in fa’alūhu fī l-zabur*). This use of *zabur* parallels that of *kitāb* in Q 78:29 (*wa-kulla-shay’in ahṣaynāhu kitābā*, “We have enumerated everything in a written record”). Secondly, Q 26:196 announces that what Muhammad preaches is “in the writings of the ancients” (*wa-innahu la-fī zaburi l-awwalīn*). This is evidently the same claim that Q 87:18–19 makes by using *al-ṣuḥuf al-ūlā* instead of *zabur al-awwalīn*. Interestingly, the following verse, Q 26:197, then adds the rhetorical question, “Was it not a sign for them that the learned ones among the Israelites (→ *banū isrā’īl*) know it?” It seems that learned Israelites—i.e., Israelites/Jews who are textually versed—are assumed to be in a position to confirm that the Qur’anic revelations are paralleled by the ancient writings mentioned in Q 26:196 (cf. 53:36–37 and 87:18–19 as well as the later Meccan verse 20:133) or perhaps even that the Qur’anic revelations are announced by them (cf. the latter passage Q 7:157). Assuming that the primary canon of Jews, whatever their particular confessional profile, is the Hebrew Bible, Q 26:197’s reference to what appear to be contemporary Israelites is compatible with the view that the ancient writings mentioned in Q 26:196 and 87:18–19 allude to the Biblical scriptures rather than to a separate corpus of apocalyptic literature (even if it is admittedly difficult to say anything certain about the composition of the scriptural canon of the “learned Israelites”).

**Concluding observations on the lexicon of the early Meccan surahs and their relationship to the rest of the Qur’an.** Overall, the early Meccan employment of *ṣuḥuf* and *zabur* just examined discloses an interesting dialectic of continuity and discontinuity in relation to chronologically later portions of the Qur’an. On the one hand, the early Meccan surahs unmistakably evince the three pivotal components that inform the general understanding of scripturality found throughout the Qur’an, namely: the notion of a celestial record book, the derivation of the Qur’anic revelations from a transcendent archetype, and the claim that the Qur’anic proclamations are continuous with an earlier body of scriptural revelations. There is thus significant thematic continuity in the Qur’anic concept of scripture from the early Meccan period onwards. On the other hand, in articulating these ideas the early Meccan surahs show a noticeably wider degree of terminological variance than later Meccan and Medinan texts, which almost always prefer the term *kitāb* over *ṣuḥuf* or *zabur*, while the singular of *zabur*, *zabūr*, becomes more narrowly associated with David and the Psalms (see, e.g., Q 17:55 and 21:105) and ceases to apply to the transcendent register that it evokes in the early Meccan verse Q 54:52 (see under → *zabūr*). A similar observation may be made apropos of the singular use of the noun *lawḥ*, “tablet,” in Q 85:22 in order to designate ostensibly the same entity—namely, a heavenly archetype of the Qur’anic proclamations—for which subsequent revelations standardly employ the word *kitāb*: whereas the wording in Q 85:22 is still strongly suggestive of some connection with the heavenly tablets from *Jubilees* (see above), chronologically later Qur’anic proclamations clothe the same basic conception in diction that is more distinctively Qur’anic, thus obscuring the likely genealogical link.

The resulting impression is that compared to later Meccan and Medinan texts, the early Meccan surahs display both a higher degree of lexical variance among themselves and a certain measure of lexical discontinuity with the remainder of the Qur'an. In support of the latter observation, one may note further expressions that are by and large limited to early Meccan surahs, namely, *dīn* in the sense of "judgement" (→ *dīn'*), references to "the name of your<sup>s</sup> Lord," *ism rabbika* (→ *ism*), and use of → *ṣaddaqa bi-*, "to believe in," in lieu of → *āmana bi-*, which becomes the habitual choice in later surahs. Lexical discontinuity between the early Meccan surahs and the rest of the Qur'anic corpus might give rise to the hypothesis that the early Meccan ensemble of texts, or some portion of it, has a different author than the remainder of the Islamic scripture, a proposal recently made by Tommaso Tesei (Tesei 2021). But notwithstanding Tesei's confidence in the matter, it is far from clear which amount of terminological, stylistic, and even doctrinal change would be incompatible with single authorship; the manner in which historians of philosophy are wont to distinguish the early Wittgenstein from the late one certainly gives pause in this regard. One must also not lose sight of the fact that the lexical discontinuity between the early Meccan surahs and the rest of the Qur'an is far from total; for example, we saw above that the term *kitāb* is not absent from early Meccan texts (Q 52:2, 56:77–78, 78:29), and other key Qur'anic terms, such as the noun *qur'ān*, are likewise attested already in the early Meccan corpus (e.g., Q 56:77, 73:4, 75:17–18, 84:21, 85:21). Moreover, even a characteristically early Meccan expressions such as *ṣaddaqa bi-*, "to believe in," has isolated recurrences outside the early Meccan corpus (Q 39:33, 66:12), and an equivalent observation holds for the plural *ṣuḥuf* (see above) and for → *zabūr* and its plural *zūbur* (e.g., Q 17:55, 23:53).

However one stands on the question of single authorship, there is accordingly good reason to assume that the early Meccan surahs were the starting point out of which the rest of the Islamic scripture developed. This explains both why terminology that comes to be dominant in later periods of the Qur'an can already have a nascent presence in the early Meccan proclamations and why distinctively early Meccan language can make an occasional comeback in later surahs. Specifically with regard to the topic of the present entry, such a developmental scenario yields an eminently plausible evolutionary movement from lexical variance to greater lexical standardisation (notably, from the concurrent use of *kitāb*, *ṣuḥuf*, and *zūbur* to an almost exclusive use of *kitāb* alone). The early Meccan surahs, then, permit us to catch sight of the starting point of a process of terminological standardisation that unfolded over the course of the Qur'an's genesis.<sup>19</sup>

The observations made in the course of this section also illustrate the difficulties faced by the principal alternative to an evolutionary scenario of the Qur'an's origin, namely, by a documentary hypothesis according to which different parts of the Qur'an—e.g., different groups of surahs—originated as separate collections that were only at a later point compiled into a unitary scriptural corpus. I take it that in order to be entitled to posit such independent source documents, the latter would need to be characterised by a high

19 Whether and in what regard such lexical standardisation is connected with similar developments in the doctrinal domain is a separate question. The Qur'an's basic scripturology certainly seems fairly consistent between the early Meccan and later surahs, despite the terminological developments just noted. But there may well be significant developments in other branches of Qur'anic theology. Note, for example, that the early Meccan verse Q 53:13 might be understood to evoke a "descent" (*nazzlah*) of the deity itself (see under → *nazzala*), which has no parallels in later portions of the Qur'an.

degree of cleanly distinguishable stylistic, lexical, and theological idiosyncrasy. However, this is only partially what one finds when examining the Qur'an in concrete detail. To be sure, it is certainly feasible to specify various stylistic, lexical, and doctrinal characteristics that by and large converge to partition the Qur'anic corpus into a number of palpably more homogeneous surah clusters, for which conventional scholarship employs such labels as "early Meccan" or "Medinan."<sup>20</sup> Yet it is equally striking that Qur'anic surahs also exhibit many stylistic, phraseological, and theological features that are common to more than one such textual class, albeit perhaps at different frequencies (e.g., Sinai 2015–2016, 73–74). The occasional reappearance of → *ṣaddaqa bi-*, "to believe in," outside the early Meccan surahs is one example for this. Another randomly chosen illustration is provided by formulaic statements that God is "a bestower of favour (*faḍl*) upon the people" but that "most" of them "are not grateful" (Q 2:243, 10:60, 27:73, 40:61: *inna llāha/rabbaka la-dhū faḍlin 'alā l-nāsi wa-lākinna aktharahum / akthara l-nāsi lā yashkurūn*; cf. 12:38 and see Bannister 2014, 220–221).<sup>21</sup> The formula is mostly later Meccan but has one Medinan occurrence in Surah 2, thus spanning the Meccan-Medinan divide that is nonetheless a well-established taxonomic line across the Qur'an. The pervasiveness of such phraseological imbrication between different surah clusters is much more easily explained by an evolutionary model, which allows for a gradual fading in and out of stylistic and lexical features over time, than by a documentary hypothesis.

***katama* tr. | to conceal s.th.**

→ *ahl al-kitāb*, → *wāthaqa*

***kawthar* | abundance**

See briefly n. 11 under → *mathānī*

***kadhhaba* intr. *bi-* | to dismiss s.th. as a lie**

***kadhhaba* tr. | to dismiss s.o. as a liar**

***kadhhaba* intr. | to be guilty of dismissing divine revelation as a lie**

Further vocabulary discussed: *ḥizb* | faction, party; (gentile or scriptureless) people or nation; troop *āyah* | sign *ṣaddaqa* intr. *bi-* | to hold s.th. true, to declare s.th. to be true, to believe in s.th. *āmana* intr. *bi-* | to believe in s.th. *kafara* intr. *bi-* | to repudiate s.o. or s.th.

The verb *kadhhaba* has two general usages in the Qur'an. *Kadhhaba* + acc. is "to declare s.o. to be a liar," "to dismiss s.o. as a liar" (e.g., Q 2:87, 3:184, 6:33, 54:9, 91:14). Used with a prepositional object rather than a direct one (*kadhhaba bi-*), the verb means "to dismiss s.th. as a lie," for instance, the eschatological judgement (Q 74:46, 82:9, 83:11,

<sup>20</sup> See also the comments in the preface to this book.

<sup>21</sup> On *faḍl*, see under → *an'ama*.

107:1).<sup>1</sup> When used elliptically, without either a prepositional object or an accusative one, *kadhhaba* has the general sense of being guilty of rejecting divine revelation as untrue, as in Q 40:5: “Before them the people of Noah and subsequent peoples (singular: → *hizb*) were guilty of dismissing divine revelations as a lie” (*kadhhabat qablahum qawmu nūhin wa-l-aḥzābu min ba’dihim*). From a diachronic perspective, the things that are dismissed as a lie in the early Meccan surahs are God’s post-resurrection judgement, paradise, and divine punishment in general (e.g., Q 69:4, 82:9, 83:11, 92:9, 107:3), but also the manifold favours or blessings that God has bestowed on humans (Q 55:13.16.18 etc.) and God’s signs (Q 54:42, 78:28; → *āyah*). Especially the accusation of dismissing God’s signs as a lie continues to be frequent in chronologically later Meccan and Medinan verses (e.g., Q 2:39, 3:11, 5:10.86, 6:21.27.39 etc., 7:36.37.40 etc., 8:54, 10:17.73.95, 17:59, 21:77). As illustrated by Q 75:31–32 and 92:6.9 (*wa-ṣaddaqa/wa-kadhhaba bi-l-ḥusnā*, “he held the fairest [reward] to be true” or “dismissed it as a lie”), the initial antonym of *kadhhaba bi-* in the Qur’an is → *ṣaddaqa bi-*, “to hold s.th. true, to declare s.th. to be true.” However, in later Meccan and Medinan texts the predominant term for an individual’s commitment to core religious truths comes to be not *ṣaddaqa bi-* but → *āmana bi-*, “to believe in s.th.” In so far as *kadhhaba bi-* is opposed to *āmana bi-*, it has considerable semantic overlap with → *kafara bi-*, “to repudiate s.th.”

**Biblical precursors.** The Qur’anic notion of dismissing a divinely sent warner as a liar has a close parallel in Ephrem’s sermon on Jonah and Nineveh, where the king of Nineveh addresses his people with the words (Beck 1970b, no. 1:731–732): “Who would call a prophet proclaiming [God’s] punitive wrath (*rūgzā*) a liar (*daggālā*)?” The king’s question evokes the New Testamental concept of “lying prophets” or “false prophets” (Greek singular: *pseudoprophētēs*, rendered in the Peshitta as *nbīyā daggālā*, *nbīyā d-daggālūtā*, or *nbīyā d-kaddābūtā*), of whom Jesus warns in Mat 7:15 and whose appearance at the end of the world he predicts in Matt 24:11.24 (see also Mark 13:22, Luke 6:26, Acts 13:6, 2 Pet 2:1, 1 John 4:1, as well as Rev 16:13, 19:20, and 20:10). Anxiety about false prophets, of course, goes back to the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Jer 23:9–40, Ezek 13). Thus, when the Qur’an presents Muhammad or his message as objects of the verb *kadhhaba*, the weight of the accusation is perhaps not merely that Muhammad is not being believed but rather that he is being rejected as a pseudoprophet in the Biblical sense, with all its concomitant undertones of vigorous moral condemnation: pseudoprophets, after all, are not simply unreliable but are likened to “ravenous wolves” in “sheep’s clothing” (Matt 7:15). It must be added that this is not necessarily to say that Muhammad’s opponents themselves understood him to be a pseudoprophet along Biblical lines, only that the Qur’anic proclamations polemically cast their opponents as perversely mistaking God’s chosen warner for the polar opposite.

## *kursiyy* | throne

→ *malik*

<sup>1</sup> See also Q 95:7, which is more difficult to parse (Birkeland 212–216; *PP* 189–190). In Q 25:19 *kadhhaba* takes both a direct object and a prepositional one (*fa-qad kadhhabūkum bi-mā taqūlūna*, “they dismissed you as liars regarding the things you said”). On the spectrum leading from categorical denial about the resurrection to doubts about it to a lack of concern with it, see also under → *ashraka*.

**akrama tr. | to honour s.o.**

→ *jannah*

**karh: ṭaw'an wa-~an | willingly or (literally: and) by force**

→ *ard*, → *sajada*

**kasaba, iktasaba tr. | to acquire or accrue s.th.**

Further vocabulary discussed: *jazā* tr. | to recompense s.o., to reward or punish s.o.  
*jazā'* | recompense, requital *waffā* ditr. | to pay s.th. to s.o. in full; to repay s.o. for s.th. in full

Many Qur'anic verses, both Meccan and Medinan, use the verb *kasaba* (e.g., Q 2:79.81.134 etc., 52:21, 83:14) and occasionally also *iktasaba* (e.g., Q 2:286, 24:11) in a sense that would seem to approximate “to do, to perform, to perpetrate,” with *'amila* serving Muslim exegetes as a handy paraphrase (Torrey 1892, 27–28; e.g., Ṭab. 2:169).<sup>1</sup> The literal meaning of *kasaba* and *iktasaba*, however, is to acquire or to gain material goods, perhaps chiefly in the sense of acquiring one's livelihood through labour (Bravmann 1972, 108–109), and there are at least some Qur'anic verses that clearly require this literal sense. A particularly obvious one is Q 2:267 (“O believers, spend some of the good things you have acquired,” *yā-ayyuhā lladhīna āmanū anfiqū min ṭayyibāti mā kasabtum*), but the same interpretation may also be valid for Qur'anic assertions that the sinners will not benefit (*mā aghnā 'anhum / lā yughnī 'anhu*) from “what they have acquired” (*mā kānū yaksibūn / mā kasabū / mā kasaba*; see Q 15:84, 39:50, 40:82, 45:10, 111:2; Torrey 1892, 28).

The Qur'anic use of *kasaba* and *iktasaba* generally displays a very marked predominance of nominalised relative clauses such as *mā yaksibūn* (Q 2:79), *mā kānū yaksibūn* (e.g., Q 6:129, 7:96, 9:82.95, 83:14), *mā kasabū* (e.g., Q 2:202.264, 3:155, 4:88, 6:70, 42:34), or *mā kasabat / mā ktasabat* (e.g., with → *nafs* as the grammatical subject, as in Q 2:281.286, 3:25.161, 6:70, 52:21, 74:38, among others). The fact that such formulations do not explicitly specify what is being “acquired” creates some ambiguity as to the nature of the object in question. This opens up space for a unitary translation of *kasaba* or *iktasaba* as referring to the acquisition of some this-worldly or other-worldly benefit that is entailed by an individual's action. Thus, Boneschi would, for instance, render *waylun lahum mim mā yaksibūn* in Q 2:79 along the lines of “Woe to them on account of what they have accumulated [in terms of worldly profit]!” (Boneschi 1955, 24). But there is good reason to assume that in cases in which *kasaba* and *iktasaba* do not obviously relate to the acquisition of material goods, as in Q 2:267, their objects are in fact actions rather than the benefits resulting from these actions (Bravmann 1972, 112–113). This is most compellingly shown by a small number of verses in which *kasaba* or *iktasaba* do figure with an explicit object that clearly signifies an action, as in Q 4:111, 6:120, and 24:11, where the object is *ithm*, “sin, misdeed,”

<sup>1</sup> Given that Q 2:286 uses *kasaba* and *iktasaba* directly in parallel, the two verbs are reasonably considered to be synonymous (Torrey 1892, 29).



or 4:112, where it is *khaṭīʾah*, “error, sin” (see also Q 2:81: *man kasaba sayyiʾatan*; 6:158: *kasabat . . . khayran*; 10:27: *alladhīna kasabū l-sayyiʾāti*).<sup>2</sup>

There is thus no way around the observation that at least some Qurʾanic verses employ *kasaba* and *iktasaba* as verbs whose grammatical object is an action, and consequently use them in the sense of “to do, to perform, to perpetrate”—notwithstanding the fact that other verses evince the literal, and presumably basic, meaning *kasaba* = “to acquire.” The link between these two usages is illuminated by Bravmann’s contention that a metaphorical usage of the root *k-s-b* is already attested in early Arabic poetry (Bravmann 1972, 109–110). Thus, a short poem by al-Aʾshā describes somebody courageously preparing for battle as “leaving off bad acquisition” (*al-tārīku l-kasba l-khabītha*; Ḥusayn 1983, no. 71:4).<sup>3</sup> Bravmann contends that by “acquiring” heroic deeds, the pre-Islamic hero contributes to building a “heritage of glory” that is passed on to the next generation, to be cultivated and augmented further (Bravmann 1972, 104–106).

Bravmann’s claim that the Qurʾan’s pervasive use of *kasaba* and *iktasaba* with actions as their objects is related to a pre-Islamic understanding “that actions represent the possessions of the acting person” (Bravmann 1972, 113) is persuasive. At the same time, the expression may be considered part and parcel of the system of “commercial-theological” concepts pervading the Qurʾan (Torrey 1892; → *ajr*, → *ḥisāb*, → *sharā*, → *aqraḍa*, and cf. Q 2:16 and Mark 8:36). If one recognises that the Qurʾan shares such metaphors with earlier monotheistic traditions (Rippin 1996, 133; see also Anderson 2009), the Qurʾan’s recourse to the notion of righteous action as acquisition recalls the New Testamental assertion that accumulating a treasury (*thēsaurizō*) in heaven is superior to gathering earthly riches (Matt 6:19–21; see also Luke 12:33–34; for a more extensive analysis, refer to Anderson 2013, 123–126). By performing righteous or evil actions, humans accrue positive or negative entries in their moral ledgers with God that will yield eschatological (or, in some case, earthly) recompense (similarly *KK* 22), as expressed by a relatively great number of verses collocating *kasaba* or *iktasaba* with derivatives of *j-z-y*—namely, the verb *jazā*, “to requite, to recompense,” and the noun *jazāʾ*, “recompense, requital” (e.g., Q 5:38, 6:120, 9:95, 10:27.52, 45:14.22)—or with → *waffā*, “to pay s.th. to s.o. in full, to repay s.o. for s.th. in full” (Q 2:281, 3:25.161). Rendering *kasaba* and *iktasaba* as “to accrue” permits a unitary translation regardless of whether reference is to the acquisition of material goods, on the one hand, or the performance of actions that are subject to moral valuation and therefore to eschatological reward and punishment, on the other.

### ***kashafa* tr. | to lift or remove s.th.**

→ *rijz/rujz*, → *ʾadhhaba*

### ***kawāʾib* pl. | maidens full of bosom**

→ *ḥūr*

<sup>2</sup> One might of course try to argue that *sayyiʾ* and *khayr* are sufficiently unspecific to refer to unwelcome or welcome outcomes; but it seems preferable to construe these verses along the lines of Q 4:111.112.

<sup>3</sup> Bravmann also adduces Lyall 1918–1924, no. 54:25, where Bravmann argues *kasb al-khanā* is equivalent to *al-kasb al-khabīth*, and DSAAP, Imruʾ al-Qays, no. 5:8.

***al-ka‘bah* | the Ka‘bah**

→ *bayt*, → *ḥarrama*

***kufu‘, kuf* (variant: *kufuw*) | equal in rank**

→ *allāh*

***kafara* tr. | to be ungrateful to s.o.; to be ungrateful for s.th.; to repudiate s.o.**

***kafara* ditr. | to be ungrateful to s.o. for s.th.**

***kafara* intr. *bi-* | to repudiate s.o. or s.th.**

***kafara* intr. | to be ungrateful; to be a repudiator**

***alladhīna kafarū, al-kāfirūn, al-kuffār* pl. | the repudiators**

***kufīr* | ingratitude; repudiation**

***kufṛān* | ingratitude**

Further vocabulary discussed: *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *shakara* intr. (*li-*) / tr. | to be grateful (to s.o., namely, God), to be grateful for s.th. *āmana* intr. *bi-* | to believe in s.th. *āmana* intr. | to be a believer *āyah* | sign *kadhhaba* intr. *bi-* | to dismiss s.th. as a lie *kadhhaba* tr. | to dismiss s.o. as a liar *ni‘mah* | grace, benefaction *istakbara* intr. | to deem o.s. great, to behave haughtily *fasaqa* intr. (*‘an*) | to sin or transgress (against), to act immorally *dīn* | judgement *yawm al-dīn* | judgement day *al-muttaqūn* pl. | the God-fearing *al-ladhīna āmanū, al-mu‘minūn* pl. | the believers *alladhīna ashṛakū, al-mushrikūn* pl. | the associators *al-yahūd, alladhīna hādū* pl. | the Jews *al-naṣārā* pl. | the Christians

***Kafara* = “to be ungrateful.”** The basic meaning of the Arabic verb *kafara* + acc. is “to conceal” (cf. Ṭab. 1:262), which subsequently developed into the meaning “to be ungrateful for s.th.” or, if used without an object, simply “to be ungrateful” (*ERCQ* 119–120; *AEL* 2620; Ullmann 1970, 261–268). The sense of ingratitude is attested in early poetry (e.g., *DSAAP*, ‘Antarah, nos 8:3 and 21:68; Lyall 1918–1924, no. 5:7, cited in *KU* 59–60; see also *GMK* 232) and is still operative in some Qur’anic occurrences. For example, Q 21:94 announces that a believers’ efforts “will not be met by ingratitude” (*fa-lā kufrāna li-sa‘iyihi*), and 3:115 says with respect to believing and righteous members of the scripture-owners (→ *ahl al-kitāb*) that “they will not be treated ungratefully” by God for the good they have done during their earthly lives (*wa-mā yaf‘alū min khayrin fa-lan yukfarūhu*). Interestingly, such an eschatologically tinged use of *kafara* + acc. in the sense of “to treat s.o. with ingratitude” has a close parallel in a verse by the Christian poet ‘Adī ibn Zayd, who evokes a “day on which a servant [of God] will not be treated ungratefully for what he has stored up” (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 8:17: *yawma lā yukfaru ‘abdun mā ddakhkhar*). Other Qur’anic instances in which *k-f-r* conveys ingratitude are Q 27:40 and 76:3, which oppose *kafara* or the adjective *kafūr* to *shakara*, “to be grateful,” or *shākīr*, “grateful” (similarly Q 2:152, 14:7, 16:112, 21:94, 26:19, and 31:12; see *KU* 60 and *ERCQ* 120–124).

***Kafara* as the antonym of *āmana*, “to believe.”** In many cases, however, the Qur’an employs the verb *kafara* as an antonym of → *āmana*, “to believe,” rather than of *shakara*

(*ERCQ* 124–127 and Waldman 1968, 446). This second meaning is particularly prevalent where *kafara* takes a prepositional object introduced by *bi-* rather than an accusative object. To be sure, it is not *a priori* impossible that *kafara bi-* with God as its oblique object (Q 2:28, 4:150, 16:106, 67:6) might mean “to be ungrateful to God.” Yet in phrases like *kafara bi-āyāti llāhi* (e.g., Q 2:61, 3:4.19), *kafara* can hardly signify anything other than “to reject, to disbelieve,”<sup>1</sup> and this conclusion is even more obvious for verses which oppose *kafara* to *āmana* (e.g., Q 2:26.85.91.121).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, there are Qur’anic passages that couple *kafara* with the verb → *kadhhaba bi-*, “to dismiss s.th. as a lie, to dismiss s.o. as a liar”—the objects of such dismissal being God’s signs (singular: → *āyah*), the day of judgement, or God’s messengers (Q 2:39, 5:10.86, 9:90, 22:44.57, 23:33, 29:68, 30:16, 39:32.59, 57:19, 64:10, 84:20–22, 85:19; see Waldman 1968, 444–445). These passages further establish that *kafara* expresses an attitude of denial and disavowal.

The present work translates *kafara* in this second sense as “to repudiate,” in order to reflect the fact that it is not simply derived from its antonym *āmana* by means of a negating prefix, as the English verb “to disbelieve” is negatively derived from “to believe.”<sup>3</sup> “To repudiate” also brings out the performative valence that *kafara* can clearly have, as shown by Q 40:84: when God’s punitive might will finally become manifest, those who previously rejected God’s messengers will expressly “repudiate” the beings they used to “associate” with him (*wa-kafarnā bi-mā kunnā bihi mushrikīn*; see also Q 35:14). It should be noted despite the general rule that *kafara* in the sense of “to repudiate” takes a prepositional object in the Qur’an, there are a few instances in which *kafara* + acc., too, would seem to refer to repudiation of God rather than ingratitude towards him. Two cases in point are Q 11:60.68, where quite a few translators feel that it is contextually more appropriate to understand *inna ‘ādan/thamūda kafarū rabbahum* to mean “‘Ād/Thamūd repudiated [or ‘disbelieved in’ etc.] their Lord” rather than “‘Ād/Thamūd were ungrateful to their Lord” (Bell 1937, Arberry 1955, Jones 2007, Droge 2013, Zirker 2018). The same interpretation is plausible for Q 54:14, where Noah is described as *man kāna kufir*, “someone who was repudiated.”<sup>4</sup>

1 See also Q 2:90, where *kafara* takes the prepositional object *bi-mā anzala llāhu* (“what God has sent down”), which in the next verse (Q 2:91) as well as in 42:15 forms the prepositional object of *āmana*.

2 This antonymy of *kafara* and *āmana* is also reflected in the so-called Constitution of Medina, where the participle *kāfir* figures as the opposite of *mu’min*, “believer” (Lecker 2004, § 15).

3 For instance, the conventional rendering of *alladhīna kafarū* as “the unbelievers, those who do not believe” etc. runs into trouble at Q 2:6, since it fails to signal that the underlying Arabic is not identical with the verse-concluding *lā yu’minūn*, “they do/will not believe,” even though the two expressions are of course largely synonymous. Regarding the choice of “to repudiate,” cf. al-Ṭabarī’s gloss of *kufir* with *juhūd* at Ṭab. 1:262. See also Smith 1991, 112, who remarks that *kafara* “means not to disbelieve but rather to reject: it too [like the verb *aslama*, ‘to surrender oneself’] is active, *engagé*.”

4 The verse may, however, involve a play on both meanings of *kafara*, in so far as it speaks of God’s recompense (*jazā*) *li-man kāna kufir*, perhaps conveying that God gratefully rewards Noah in contrast to the ungrateful rejection he suffered from his people. Al-Jallad notes that the extra-canonical prayer known as *Sūrat al-Khal’* also employs *kafara* in the sense of “to repudiate” with a following accusative (Al-Jallad and Al-Manaser 2021, 120): according to some sources, the third verse of this text runs *wa-nuthnī ‘alaka wa-lā nakfuruka wa-nu’minu bika*, “We praise you and do not repudiate you and believe in you” (see Anthony 2019, 72). However, the final *wa-nu’minu bika* is not present in all attested versions of the prayer, and Anthony’s edition in fact omits it (presumably on the logic that both the preceding and the following verse each contain two verbs in the first person plural, all of which govern a direct object rather than a prepositional one). Yet if the verse in question is confined to *wa-nuthnī ‘alaka wa-lā nakfuruka*, then the translation “We praise you and are not ungrateful to you” is perfectly viable.

In expressing the opposite of religious faith or belief by a word that is etymologically unrelated to its antonym *āmana*, Qur’anic Arabic differs from New Testamental Greek, which uses *apistia*, corresponding to phrases like *lā haymānūtā* or *ḥasīrūt haymānūtā* in the Peshitta (e.g., Matt 13:58, Mark 6:6, Rom 3:3, 1 Tim 1:13; see also the survey of Greek usage in *TDNT* 6:204–205). As we shall see below, this use of *kafara* is likely to be due to semantic interference with its Aramaic cognate. The development happened prior to the Qur’an: a recently discovered Safaitic inscription contains the line *h ‘sy nṣr-h m-kfr-k*, which Al-Jallad argues means, “O Jesus [cf. Qur’anic *‘īsā*], help him [namely, the author of the inscription] against those who deny you” (Al-Jallad and Al-Manaser 2021, 112). As Al-Jallad remarks, the fact that *kfr* here takes a direct object rather than a prepositional one is noteworthy. It ties the inscription to Arabic *kafara* + acc., “to be ungrateful to s.o.” (e.g., Q 2:152: *wa-shkurū lī wa-lā-takfurūn*, “And thank me and do not be ungrateful to me”), while the invocation of Jesus makes it nonetheless quite plausible that the inscription employs *kfr* to express a lack of belief rather than ingratitude. Although the precise *terminus ad quem* of Safaitic epigraphy is unclear, the inscription indicates that the crucial step in the semantic development of *kafara* from ingratitude to unbelief occurred well before the Qur’an, and took place to the north of what was to become the Qur’an’s milieu of emergence.

The preceding observations establish that it is translationally appropriate to distinguish two broad senses of *kafara*, “to be ungrateful” and “to repudiate.” Nonetheless, the verb *kafara* should not be treated as a downright homonym. For the antonyms of each of the two meanings of *kafara* distinguished above—namely, *shakara* and *āmana*—are organically conjoined in Q 4:147 (see also 2:172): “Why should God punish you if you are grateful and believe?” Belief in God and gratitude towards him would appear to be intimately interlinked, and the semantics of *kafara* should accordingly be understood to interweave the cognitive aspect of repudiation or unbelief and the ethical one of ingratitude.<sup>5</sup> This is confirmed by Q 16:72, which combines the accusation of “believing in what is void” (*a-fa-bi-l-bāṭili yu‘minūna*) with that of being ungrateful for God’s grace (*wa-bi-ni‘mati llāhi hum yakfurūn*): while the prepositional object *bi-ni‘mati llāhi* (on which see under → *an‘ama*) makes it preferable to construe *kafara* in the sense of ingratitude here, the verb’s close proximity to *āmana* primes the recipient to think of repudiation and unbelief as well. Hence, the phrase *wa-bi-ni‘mati llāhi hum yakfurūn* in Q 16:72 is perhaps best rendered in a hybrid fashion, along the lines of “they ungratefully repudiate God’s grace.” Most likely, the cognitive and ethical connotations of *kafara* are also simultaneously present when the Qur’an describes Iblīs as being “one of those guilty of *kufr*” (*mina l-kāfirīn*; Q 2:34, 38:74): when Iblīs refuses to prostrate himself to God and instead “behaves haughtily” (*istakbara*), he clearly manifests a lack of proper gratitude towards God but at the same time also reveals himself to be the prototype of everyone who subsequently “repudiates” God. Thus, even when translating *āmana* and *kafara* as “to believe” and “to repudiate” (or more traditionally, “to disbelieve”) one must not understand this to entail that either word may be reduced to denoting purely intellectual acts of propositional assent and denial; rather, they encompass affective and actional dimensions as well (see Waldman 1968, 447 and 453–454, and under → *āmana*). This is well illustrated by the semantic proximity between

<sup>5</sup> See the remarks in el Masri 2020, 9–10, insisting that the two broad senses of *kafara*, which he describes as “ethical” and as “epistemic,” are interlinked and may be viewed as jointly rooted in the verb’s supposedly basic significance of covering. However, I would take issue with his construal of Q 73:17 in this context, where *yawman* is more plausibly understood as the direct object of *tattaqūn* than of *kafartum*.

the verbs *kafara* and *fasaqa*, “to sin, to act immorally,” which is highlighted by Izutsu (*ERCQ* 157–162; see, e.g., Q 2:99). The fact that the two meanings of *kafara*—ingratitude and repudiation—are intertwined also accounts for the difficulty, noted above, of deciding whether Q 11:60.68 use *kafara* + acc. in the former or the latter sense.

**Arabic *kafara* and Aramaic *kpar*.** The occurrence of *kafara bi-* in the sense of “to disbelieve in, to negate, to repudiate” corresponds neatly to Syriac *kpar b-*, which can also mean “to be ungrateful” (*TS* 1797–1798; *SL* 644–645). Thus, in a Syriac martyr text a Zoroastrian convert to Christianity is asked why he would “reject” or “repudiate” his ancestral religion (Bedjan 1890–1897, 2:576, l. 6: *da-b-dēn dīlan kpar*; for the context, see Becker 2009, 322). The link between Qur’anic *kafara bi-* and Syriac *kpar b-* was pointed out as early as Jeffery (*FVQ* 250), though the connection does not seem to have been registered by most scholars of the Qur’an.<sup>6</sup> In rabbinic texts, too, Hebrew *kāpar bə-* and Aramaic *kpar b-* can signify a denial of religious truths (*DTTM* 661–662; *DJBA* 597). For example, a liturgical poem in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic has its three protagonists—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, whom King Nebuchadnezzar tried to force to worship a golden statue according to Dan 3—declare, by way of a refrain, that “we will not repudiate” (*anan la kaprin b-*) the Mosaic commandment not to take other gods beside God (Sokoloff and Yahalom 1999, 120–124 = no. 13:8.16.24.32.40.48). Even though *kafara* is certainly a native Arabic word, it consequently stands to reason that its Qur’anic use to refer to unbelief is due to semantic interference by its Aramaic cognate. The same phenomenon is also encountered in the case of the *kafara*’s contrary → *āmana*, “to believe,” and is linguistically referred to as a loanshift: semantic change under the impact of another language (Cole 2019, 408, and Cole 2020, 616). Hence, and contrary to Izutsu, the employment of *kafara* to mean unbelief does not form an independent inner-Qur’anic development (*GMK* 21–23).<sup>7</sup> Whether the main impetus of the word’s semantic evolution is more likely to be Jewish (*KU* 60) or Christian (*FVQ* 250) is difficult to decide with much certainty; it seems quite conceivable that its extension in meaning was spurred by convergent stimuli among Arabophone Jews and Christians.

It is worth noting that the use of *kafara* = “to repudiate” with an accusative object that is attested by the Safaitic inscription discussed above as well as, probably, by Q 11:60.68 and 54:14 suggests that the impact of Aramaic *kpar* on Arabic *kafara* may have unfolded in two stages. First, Arabic *kafara* was hitched to the notion of religious repudiation or unbelief that was an established sense of its Aramaic (or specifically Syriac) cognate. Secondly, where this newly available sense of Arabic *kafara* was at play, the verb’s syntax increasingly came to replicate that of the Aramaic, or specifically Syriac, construction *kpar b-*. The emergence of the prepositional usage may also owe something to the fact that *kadhhaba* = “to dismiss as a lie, to deny”—which the Qur’an joins with *kafara* as early as Q 84:22—likewise takes a prepositional object. Against the background of this hypothetical

6 See also Gallez 2009 with further Syriac prooftexts. As far as I can see, Gallez does not acknowledge Jeffery, but I have only had access to this article through the digital version available at <http://www.lemessieetsonprophete.com/annexes/kfr.htm> (accessed 2 June 2021).

7 Izutsu’s view is also difficult to reconcile with the fact that occurrences of *kafara* = “to repudiate” are found already in very early Qur’anic verses, such as Q 90:19, which would leave very little time for any organic semantic evolution within the Qur’an. The existence of an established Aramaic semantic background to Qur’anic *kafara* = “to repudiate” provides a much more satisfactory explanation for the word’s early appearance in the Islamic scripture.



two-step development, the Safaitic invocation of Jesus documents the initial stage, in which the Safaitic verb *kfr* had already begun to express the meaning of doctrinal repudiation or of unbelief while still retaining its “original Arabic syntax” with an accusative object (Al-Jallad and Al-Manaser 2021, 120). As for Q 11:60.68 and 54:14, which appear to show the same combination of traits (*kafara* in the sense of unbelief, accusative object), they are best classed as residual archaisms.

**Absolute usage of *kafara*.** From early on, the Qur’an displays an absolute usage of *kafara*, without the preposition *bi-*. Such absolute or intransitive occurrences of *kafara* are normally treated as an elliptical variant on *kafara bi-*, in which the object of disbelief or repudiation (namely, God and/or his revelations) is omitted as self-evident. From this perspective, one would naturally translate absolute *kafara* as “to be an unbeliever” or “to be a repudiator,” a strategy that is highly plausible, for instance, for Q 88:23 (“except for him who turns away and repudiates,” *illā man tawallā wa-kafar*). This assumption has recently been questioned in a carefully argued article (Cole 2020): while not disputing the usual understanding of *kafara bi-*, Cole proposes that simple *kafara* and its participle *kāfir* can express a range of different meanings that must be teased out by contextual analysis. However, there are good reasons to retain the customary elliptical construal of absolute *kafara*. Rendering simple *kafara* as “to be a repudiator” does not generally produce translations that are contextually inappropriate. Equating the meaning of simple *kafara* with *kafara bi-* is also supported by the parallel cases of → *āmana bi-*, “to believe in,” or → *kadhhaba bi-*, “to dismiss as a lie,” both of which also occur in an absolute form (*āmana*, *kadhhaba*) that is reasonably construed as an ellipsis of their full prepositional version (see also under → *aslama*). Thus, when *kadhhaba* occurs without a prepositional object, as in Q 92:16 or 96:13, this almost certainly stands in for *kadhhaba bi-l-dīn*, “to dismiss the judgement as a lie” (e.g., Q 82:9, 107:1), or *kadhhaba bi-yawmi l-dīn*, “to dismiss the day of judgement as a lie” (e.g., Q 83:11, 74:46), etc.

**“The repudiators” as a collective term.** In the Qur’an, absolute occurrences of *kafara* frequently, and again from an early point in time, take the form of collective references to *al-kāfirūn* (e.g., Q 71:26, 74:10, 76:4, 86:17), *al-kuffār* (e.g., Q 13:42, 57:20,<sup>8</sup> 83:34.36), and *alladhīna kafarū* (e.g., Q 84:22, 85:19, 88:23, 90:19), all of which may be rendered synonymously as “the repudiators” (Reuschel 1996, 143–156).<sup>9</sup> These repudiators form the communal opposite to “the God-fearing” (*al-muttaqūn*; → *ittaqa*) and “the believers” (*alladhīna āmanū*, *al-mu’minūn*; → *āmana*). In line with the semantic influence of Syriac on Arabic *kafara*, the active participle *kāfir* and its plurals in Qur’anic Arabic act as approximate equivalents of Syriac *kāporā* (plural *kāporē*), “infidel, pagan, apostate” and also “ingrate” (*TS* 1800; *SL* 642), and perhaps also of Hebrew *kōpēr* (*KU* 60; *DTTM* 661). For example, when Ephrem, in his *Hymns against Heresies*, announces his intention to confute “the repudiators” (*kāporē*; Beck 1957b, no. 3:1), the similarity to Qur’anic polemics against the *kāfirūn* is palpable.

The Qur’anic category of the “repudiators” is reasonably viewed as co-extensive with that of the “associators” (*al-mushrikūn*, *alladhīna ashtrakū*; → *ashraka*), a group of pagan

<sup>8</sup> In this verse, the plural *al-kuffār* is often glossed as meaning “farmers” (Cole 2020, 619; Galadari 2022, 41). However, I can see no compelling reason to deviate from the standard meaning “repudiators” at Q 57:20. Translations that render the word as “unbelievers” in this verse include Bell 1937, Paret 2001, or Jones 2007. Given that the standard meaning does not engender any incongruity, it ought to be retained.

<sup>9</sup> Q 80:42 has the plural *al-kafarah*.



opponents accused of worshipping deities other than Allāh (see generally *QP* and also *HCI* 66–72). This equivalence entails that “the repudiators” should not invariably or even primarily be supposed to function as a general category encompassing anyone who falls short of Qur’anic standards of correct belief. Rather, in many if not most instances, “the repudiators” is a polemically coded way of picking out a particular group defined by specific beliefs and rituals, the Meccan pagans, just as the contrary category of “the believers” usually refers to a particular community as well that is accordingly listed alongside the Jews (→ *al-yahūd*, *alladhīna hādū*) and the Christians (→ *al-naṣārā*; e.g., Q 5:69). The concreteness of the Qur’anic use of the label “repudiators,” which contrasts with Ephrem’s more abstract employment, is also manifest in so far as the Qur’an normally treats the “repudiators” as distinct from Jews and Christians, who are often grouped together as the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*; e.g., Q 2:105.109, 3:64.65.69.70–72.75.98.99 etc.), “those who were given the scripture” (*alladhīna ūtu l-kitāba*), or the like (e.g., Q 2:101.121.144–146, 3:19.20.23.100 etc.).

The inherent generic force of the category of “the repudiators” does however sometimes reassert itself. This is the case in a small number of verses that speak of unbelieving scripturalists (Q 2:105, 59:2.11, 98:1.6; cf. 5:78 and 9:29, and see *HCI* 75, n. 55). Here, repudiation or unbelief is envisaged as a general human phenomenon that may be found beyond the ranks of the pagan Meccan associators and among self-professed adherents of prior divine revelations. Nonetheless, being a Jew or a Christian does not *per se* identify someone as a repudiator, for Q 2:62 and 5:69 clearly posit that there may be Jews or Christians who “believe in God and the final day and do righteous deeds” (see also under → *aslama*). The “scripture-owners” thus occupy an ambiguous intermediate position on a spectrum reaching from “the believers” *par excellence* (namely, the Qur’anic community) to “the repudiators” *par excellence* (namely, the pagan associators).

***kaffara* tr. ‘an | to absolve s.o. of s.th.**  
***kaffārah* | expiation, atonement**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *ajr* | wage *tajāwaza* intr. ‘an | to overlook s.th. *qiṣāṣ* | retaliation *ḥurum* pl. | being in a state of ritual consecration *fidyah* | ransom, compensation, redemption**

**God absolves (*kaffara ‘an*) the believers of their evil deeds.** A recurrent Qur’anic trope stresses that God will “absolve” (*kaffara ‘an*) the believers or the God-fearing of their evil deeds (*sayyi’āt*). Such promises occur already in two Meccan passages, Q 29:7 and 39:35.<sup>1</sup>

1 *CQ* 21–22 raises the possibility that the present wording of Q 29:7 and 39:35 could be the result of Medinan revision. The proposal implicitly rests on the assumption that the Qur’anic use of the verbal locution *kaffara ‘an*, in view of its Hebrew background (see below), is most likely to have arisen in a Medinan context, marked by the Qur’anic believers’ encounter with a Jewish community. But even though the frequency of *kaffara ‘an* in Medinan surahs and its relative rarity in Meccan ones do give pause, at least Q 39:35 does not at first sight stand out as a potential addition. One might surmise that both Q 29:7 and 39:35 originally employed, not *kaffara ‘an sayyi’ātihim*, but *tajāwaza ‘an sayyi’ātihim*, “to overlook their evil deeds,” which is found in another Meccan verse, Q 46:16 (see below). This is however difficult to verify or falsify in any conclusive fashion. Although a more detailed examination of the literary context of Q 29:7 and 39:35 would be welcome, it seems provisionally advisable to avoid placing too much reliance on the presupposition that Jewish notions and traditions could only have entered Qur’anic diction in the Medinan period.

In the former verse, the divine voice declares that “those who believe and do righteous deeds we shall absolve of their evil deeds (*la-nukaffiranna ‘anhum sayyi’ātihim*) and recompense according to the best of what they have done (*wa-la-najziannahum aḥsana lladhī kānū ya‘malūn*),” while Q 39:35 assures the believers that God will “absolve them of the worst of what they have done” (*li-yukaffira llāhu ‘anhum aswa’a lladhī ‘amilū*) and “recompense them with wage according to the best of what they have done” (*wa-yajziyahum ajrahum bi-aḥsani lladhī kānū ya‘malūn*; → *ajr*). Medinan surahs too reiterate frequently that God will absolve the Qur’anic believers (Q 2:271, 3:193, 195, 5:12, 65, 8:29, 47:2, 48:5, 64:9, 65:5, 66:8), or those who eschew major sins (Q 4:31: *in tajtanibū kabā’ira mā tunhawna ‘anhu*), of their wrongdoings.<sup>2</sup> Also germane is the Meccan verse Q 46:16, which states that God will “accept” from the denizens of paradise “the best of what they have done” (*nataqabbalu ‘anhum aḥsana mā ‘amilū*) and “overlook their evil deeds” (*natajāwazu ‘an sayyi’ātihim*). Instead of the formulation *kaffara ‘an* we here encounter the ostensibly equivalent locution *tajāwaza ‘an*. Overall, the contextually appropriate rendering of *kaffara ‘an* is “to absolve” or perhaps more literally “to efface, to blot out,” bearing in mind that the Arabic root *k-f-r* may have conveyed the notion of concealment to the Qur’an’s addressees (→ *kafara*).

Qur’anic *kaffara* has been connected to the Biblical verb *kipper* (CQ 21–22 and FVQ 250; see already BEK 90).<sup>3</sup> Qur’anic *kaffara* is always employed with God as the grammatical subject, whereas its Biblical counterpart is often predicated of human individuals, such as Moses or a priest, in which case its meaning is “to make atonement” for someone or something (e.g., Exod 32:30 and Lev 15:15).<sup>4</sup> It is this use of *kipper* that is operative in the elaborate rituals of sacrificial atonement described in several Pentateuchal passages (TDOT 7:296–300). But there are also Biblical instances in which the agent of atonement is the deity himself, causing many translators to render *kipper* “to forgive” here (e.g., Ps 64:4 and 78:38, Deut 21:8, and Ezek 16:63; see TDOT 7:300–301 and NIDOTTE 2:691). It is noteworthy that the Peshitta does not translate such passages by a derivative of *k-p-r* but instead tends to employ *ḥassī*, making Syriac an unlikely intermediary. A similar use of *k-f-r*, with God as the grammatical subject, is found in a Sabaic inscription (CIH, no. 539, ll. 1: *ykfrn ḥb-hmw*, “he will forgive their sins”; see Mordtmann and Müller 1896, 287). Whatever the precise discursive filiation, Qur’anic statements involving the verb *kaffara* consistently underscore that it is God alone who leniently remits and disregards the sins of those who have proven themselves to be committed believers; the Qur’an does not present God’s remission of human sins as consequent on particular acts of cultic atonement (an observation also made in TDOT 7:289). Q 5:12, addressed to the Israelites, does identify performance of prayer, almsgiving, and belief in God’s messengers as preconditions for God’s absolution or effacement of sins. But the net implication is still merely that divine absolution is contingent upon the intactness of the Israelites’ general relationship to God, of which regular prayer and almsgiving are external manifestations.

**The noun *kaffārah*.** A somewhat different emphasis emerges from three verses in Surah 5, which employ the noun *kaffārah*, “expiation,” “atonement.” Here, the Qur’an does appear to prescribe specific acts that will effect expiation for certain transgressions, at least two of which are of a ritual nature (breaking oaths, perhaps understood to have been sworn

2 Specifically on the redemptive efficacy of almsgiving and charity, see under → *ṣadaqah*.

3 On the Hebrew word, refer to HALOT 493–494, TDOT 7:288–303, and NIDOTTE 2:689–710.

4 For an overview of the verb’s use with direct and prepositional objects, see TDOT 7:290–291.

by God, and illicit hunting during the pilgrimage season). Even so, none of the stipulated acts of expiation themselves involve sacrifices or other cultic performances. Rather, they are all charitable in nature, with the exception of fasting, provided as an alternative for those unable to afford other manners of atoning. Specifically:

- If somebody foregoes retaliation (*qiṣāṣ*), it will be a *kaffārah* “for him” (Q 5:45). The transgression that is thereby expiated is not identified (cf. also Q 4:92).
- The *kaffārah* for broken oaths is specified to consist in feeding ten poor people, clothing them, freeing a slave, or, if the delinquent does not have sufficient means (*fa-man lam yajid*), a fast of three days (Q 5:89).
- The offence of intentionally killing game while being in a state of ritual consecration for the pilgrimage (*wa-antum ḥurumun*) is to be compensated (*fa-jazā’un . . .*) by equivalent livestock from the offender’s property or by undertaking the *kaffārah* of feeding the poor or fasting (Q 5:95).

It is therefore accurate to say that “*kaffārah*, in its Qur’ānic conception, is obtained without the help of a blood sacrifice, unlike the levitical system, where the means of expiation is usually blood” (Chelhod 1978, 407). Yet the Qur’anic noun *kaffārah* is nonetheless convincingly identified as an Arabisation of rabbinic Hebrew *kapparah* (BEK 90; JPN 220; FVQ 250; see also HCI 213–214, n. 89, and, on the noun *kapparah*, DTTM 662). The word accordingly constitutes one of various pieces of circumstantial evidence revealing that the Medinan Jews were familiar with at least some rabbinic concepts, traditions, and practices (→ *al-yahūd*). Assuming that the addressees of Surah 5 had first-hand exposure to Jewish ritual, they may further have associated the Arabic word *kaffārah* with the Hebrew word *kippur*, used mainly in *yom ha-kippurim*, “the Day of Atonement,” especially given that the latter is a fast-day and that both Q 5:89 and 5:95 mention fasting as a valid mode of ritual expiation. At the same time, the morphology of *kaffārah* may also owe something to the fact that in Arabic the noun pattern *fa‘ālah* can designate “an instrument . . . by means of which something is done, regularly and constantly” (Wright 1974, 1:176–177). The term *kaffārah* would accordingly have connoted a means of expiating or atoning for certain transgressions (a sense that in Q 2:184.196 is expressed by *fidyah*; cf. Q 37:107). Taken by themselves, Q 5:45.89.95 accentuate human rather than divine agency in achieving absolution for one’s lapses. Yet the Qur’an’s addressees would certainly have heard the term *kaffārah* in Surah 5 against the background of the use of *kaffara ‘an* in earlier and contemporary surahs, as outlined above. Hence, the focus on particular human acts of expiation for specific transgressions in Q 5:45.89.95 is complemented by the Qur’an’s general stress on God as the agent of absolution or remittance of sins.

As intimated, there are additional passages in the Qur’an that stipulate expiatory procedures similar to those described in Surah 5 (Q 2:184.196, 4:92, 58:3) but do not employ the noun *kaffārah*. The rationale for the choice of the latter term in Surah 5 may well have been to function as an explicit signal that the Qur’an is articulating an understanding of atonement contrasting with what was perceived to be the Jewish One.

***kufuw* (variant of *kufu’* or *kuf’*) | equal in rank**

→ *allāh*

***kallaḡa* ditr. | to charge s.o. with s.th.**

→ *nafs*

***kull* | every**

On *kull(-u/-i/-a) shay'in*, see under → *qadīr* and specifically on *tafṣīlan li-kulli shay'in / tafṣīla kulli shay'in* under → *faṣṣala*. On *kull(-u/-i/-a) nafsīn*, see → *nafs*.

***akanna* tr. | to conceal s.th.**

→ *ṣadr*

***akinnah* pl. | covers**

On verses claiming that the hearts of the Qur'an's opponents are "under covers" or have had covers placed on them by God, see under → *'amiya*, → *ghulf*, and → *qalb*.

***kāhin* | soothsayer**

→ *jinn*

***k-h-y-ʿ-ṣ* (surah-initial letter sequence)**

→ *'-l-r*

***kāda* intr. (*li-*) | to plot or scheme, to devise or execute a plot or scheme against s.o. or for the benefit of s.o.**

***kāda* tr. | to devise or execute a plot or scheme against s.o., to try to outwit s.o.**

***kayd* | cunning, guile, cunning scheming**

→ *makara*

# I

## *malak*

Though the word is often associated with the root *l-l-k*, look up alphabetically under *m-l-k*.

## *lubb: ulū l-albāb* pl. | those endowed with insight

→ *qalb*

## *laḥiqa* intr. *bi-* | to join s.o.

→ *ummah*

## *lisān* | tongue; language; reputation

→ *‘arabī*

## *la‘alla* + subordinate clause | so that

Further vocabulary discussed: *āyah* | sign *tafakkara* intr. | to reflect *‘aqala* tr./intr. | to understand (s.th.) *ittaḡā* tr. | to protect or guard o.s. against s.o. or s.th., to be wary of s.o. or s.th., to fear s.o. or s.th. (especially God) *shakara* intr. (*li-*) | to be grateful (to s.o., namely, God) *tadhakkara* intr. | to heed God’s hortatory reminders *ihṭadā* intr. | to be guided *raḥima* intr./tr. | to have mercy (upon s.o.) *aflaḥa* intr. | to prosper *faṣṣala* tr. *li-* | to set out s.th. or expound s.th. in clear detail for s.o. *bayyana* tr. *li-* | to clarify s.th. to s.o.

In post-Qur’anic Arabic, *la‘alla* (followed by a personal suffix or a noun) means “maybe, perhaps” (AEL 3011). This use of *la‘alla* is not absent from the Qur’an, as shown, for instance, by Q 80:3 (*wa-mā yudrīka la‘allahu yazzakka*, “Who knows [literally, what causes you to know]? Perhaps he will purify himself”) and a small number of further verses (see Q 11:12, 18:6, 21:111, 26:3.40, 33:63, 42:17, 65:1).<sup>1</sup> Yet in many other Qur’anic verses, such as Q 2:21 (“O people, serve your Lord, who has created you<sup>p</sup> and those before you, so that you might be God-fearing,” *la‘allakum tattaqūn*) or 26:129 (“And do you<sup>p</sup> erect buildings so that you will remain forever?,” *la‘allakum takhludūn*), *la‘alla* patently introduces a consecutive subordinate clause that specifies an intended consequence or result rather than primarily serving to express uncertainty or

<sup>1</sup> Note especially the explicit references to not knowing (*in adri, lā tadri*) that precede *la‘alla* in Q 21:111 and 65:1.

doubt. Thus, *la'allakum tattaqūn* in Q 2:21 is appropriately glossed as *li-tattaqūhu* or the like (thus Ṭab. 1:387), and English translators arguable ought to render *la'alla* in such cases as “so that” (Jones 2005, 243–244; see also Retsö 2003, 43 and 59, n. 127, and Wild 2006b, 144).<sup>2</sup> Al-Ṭabarī adduces a verse of poetry in support of such a consecutive usage of *la'alla*, and in fact employment of *la'alla* in the sense of “so that” can also be seen in ancient Arabic poetry that is transmitted outside the literary genre of Qur'anic exegesis (*EAP* 1:130–131; Nöldeke 1863, no. 3:5). We are therefore confronted with an archaic feature of Qur'anic grammar here. Early interpreters of the text were well aware of it, considering that equivalent glosses of *la'alla* as *li-kay*, “so that,” are found already in the commentary of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (e.g., Muqātil 2002, 1:93, on Q 2:21, and *ibid.*, 2:338, on Q 12:46).

It should be noted that in the vast majority of cases where *la'alla* introduces a consecutive subordinate clause, it precedes a verse-final verb in the second or third person plural of the imperfect (e.g., *tattaqūn/yattaqūn, tashkurūn/yashkurūn, tahtadūn/yahtadūn*). This suggests that the Qur'an's consistent verse-final preference for *la'alla* + indicative over *li-* + subjunctive was in part motivated by the aim of maintaining a rhyme in *-ūn* (Jones 2005, 243). This need not have been an instance of poetic licence (on which see Stewart 2009) but could simply have been a matter of exercising preference among two linguistically permissible and semantically equivalent constructions, only one of which produced the desired verse-final assonance. The situation is slightly complicated by a small number of verses that have *wa-la'allakum/-hum* + verb in verse-final position and in a context in which one might otherwise have expected simple *la'allakum/-hum* + verb, without preceding *wa-*. The clearest example is Q 7:174: “Thus do we expound the signs *wa-la'allahum yarji'ūn*.” Here, the presence of *wa-* would seem to have the consequence of turning what could otherwise have been parsed as a consecutive subordinate clause into a main clause. If so, then *la'alla* will need to be rendered as “perhaps,” its standard meaning when used to modify a main clause: “Thus do we expound the signs; perhaps they will return.” Alternatively, one might simply treat *wa-* as redundant (thus Droge 2013, 103).<sup>3</sup>

Verse-final *la'alla* clauses often signal the kind of attitude that divine benefactions, revelations, and signs (→ *āyah*) are meant to engender among their recipients, such as reflecting (*la'allakum tatafakkarūn, la'allahum yatafakkarūn*; e.g., Q 2:219.266, 7:176, 16:44) and understanding (*la'allakum ta'qilūn*; e.g., Q 2:73.242, 6:151, 12:2), fearing God (*la'allakum tattaqūn*; apart from Q 2:21, see 2:63.179.183, 6:153, 7:171; → *ittaqa*) and being thankful to him (*la'allakum tashkurūn, la'allahum yashkurūn*; e.g., Q 2:52.56.185, 3:123, 5:6.89, 14:37, 30:46, 45:12), heeding his hortatory reminders (*la'allakum tadhakkarūn, la'allahum yatadhakkarūn*; e.g., Q 2:221, 14:25, 16:90, 28:43.46.51, 51:49; → *dhakkara*), or

2 Jones is critical of the “ingenious efforts by some Arab grammarians and commentators to combine the meaning ‘perhaps,’ with which they were perfectly familiar, with ‘so that,’ which was obsolete by the time they wrote.” However, it is not impossible that even where *la'alla* introduces a consecutive clause, it might add a tinge of uncertainty or pessimism; see also below.

3 Other verses have *wa-la'allakum/-hum* + verb in the prefix conjugation immediately after a subordinate clause introduced by *li-*. Thus, Q 16:14, 28:73, 30:46, 35:12, and 45:12 all end in ± <*wa->li-tabtaghū min faḍlihi wa-la'allakum tashkurūn*, and see also 2:150.185, 7:63, 16:44, 40:67. In most of these cases, it is contextually possible that the conjunction *wa-* serves to coordinate *la'alla* with the preceding *li-* clause, in which case a verse like Q 45:12 would mean “so that you might seek some of his favour and that you might be grateful” (thus, with some differences in diction, Droge 2013, 338). At Q 7:164 (*qālū ma'dhiratan ilā rabbikum wa-la'allahum yattaqūn*), one might understand the *la'alla* clause to be coordinated with the adverbial accusative *ma'dhiratan* and translate, with Droge: “They said, ‘As an excuse to your Lord and so that they might be God-fearing’” (Droge 2013, 103; modified).



receiving his guidance (*la'allakum tahtadūn, la'allahum yahtadūn*; e.g., Q 2:53.150, 3:103, 21:31, 43:10; → *hadā*). Other *la'alla* clauses specify the soteriological outcome of adopting the right stance towards God and his Messenger, namely, receipt of God's mercy (*la'allakum turhamūn*; e.g., Q 3:132, 6:155, 7:63.204) and prospering (*la'allakum tuflīhūn*; e.g., Q 2:189, 3:130.200, 5:35.90.100, 7:69), not only in this world but especially in the world to come (see under → *aflaha*). Finally, even though the distinction between *la'alla* as a conjunction introducing a subordinate clause and as the opening modifier of a main clause is generally clear, it may not be inappropriate to read a note of pessimistic uncertainty into verse-final *la'alla* clauses as well, given that the Qur'an explicitly laments that most people (*akthar al-nās, aktharuhum*) “do not believe,” “are not thankful,” “do not understand,” or “do not have knowledge” (e.g., Q 2:100.243, 5:103, 6:37, 44:39, 52:47).

Verse-final *la'alla* clauses have been surmised to be functionally equivalent with verse closers that combine a verb like → *faṣṣala*, “to expound,” or → *bayyana*, “to clarify,” with a prepositional syntagm introduced by *li-qawmin*. An example for the latter is “We have expounded the signs for people who know” (Q 6:97: *qad faṣṣalnā l-āyāti li-qawmin ya'lamūn*), which is defensibly taken to have the sense of “We have expounded the signs so that people might know” (see Madigan 2001, 100–101, and under → *faṣṣala*).

***la'ana* tr. | to curse s.o.**

***la'nah* | curse**

→ *ghaḍība*

***lamḥ: ka-~ al-baṣar, ka-~ bi-l-baṣar* | like the glance of an eye**

→ *amr*, → *sā'ah*

***lāmasa* tr. | to touch s.o.**

→ *ṭahara*

***alhā* tr. ('*an*) | to divert s.o. (from s.th.)**

→ *dhakara*

***lawḥ: ~ maḥfūz* | guarded tablet**

→ *qara'a*, → *kitāb*

***lawwāmah* | full of blame, given to gratuitous complaining**

On the oath by “the soul full of blame” (*al-nafs al-lawwāmah*) in Q 75:2, see under → *nafs*.

***laylat al-qadr* | the night of foreordainment**

→ *amr*

# m

*mattaʿa* tr. (*ilā ḥīn*) | to grant s.o. enjoyment (until a certain time)

*tamattaʿa* intr. *ilā ḥīn* | to enjoy o.s. until a certain time

*matāʿ* (*ilā ḥīn*) | enjoyment (until a certain time)

→ *ajal*, → *ʿadhdhaba*

*mathal* | similitude, likeness, example; exemplar; characterisation, saying

Further vocabulary discussed: *imām*, *ummah*, *uswah* | model, exemplar *ḍaraba*

*mathalan* | to put forward or make use of a similitude, saying, or characterisation

*āyah* | sign *ʿibrah* | lesson *hadā* tr. | to guide s.o. *aḍalla* tr. | to lead s.o. astray

**Overview.** Cognates of the Arabic word *mathal* are standard terms to refer to parables, similitudes, sayings, and proverbs in Hebrew (*māšāl*) and Aramaic (*matla*; HALOT 648; TDOT 9:64–67; DJBA 721; TS 2250–2251; SL 869; Buhl 1924a, 1–2).<sup>1</sup> Like its cognates, the Qurʾanic term *mathal* has a considerable semantic range (Hirschfeld 1902, 83; Zahniser 2004, 9). In Q 43:56, the word refers to a warning example, and a few verses on, in 43:59, it is said that God made Jesus a *mathal* for the Israelites, which may mean a positive exemplar, in line with other verses that make similar statements about Abraham and Muhammad (Q 2:124, 16:120, 33:21, 60:4.6, employing the terms *imam*, *ummah*, and *uswah*). In many cases, however, the meaning of *mathal* is best captured by the English equivalents “similitude” or “likeness,” reflecting the fact that the Qurʾan uses *ka-mathali* as a complex preposition in the sense of “like” (e.g., Q 57:20, 59:15.16). Thus, the famous “Light Verse” Q 24:35 explicitly introduces itself as putting forward a “similitude” (*mathal*) for God’s light.<sup>2</sup> Many Qurʾanic *amthāl* (which are surveyed in Hirschfeld 1902, 83–97; Buhl 1924a; BEQ 426–438; Zahniser 2004) are concise comparisons or similes rather than narratively articulated parables. However, the latter are not absent either, as demonstrated by Q 18:32–44 and 36:13–29 (on which see Buhl 1924a, 5–7; BEQ 433–434; Zahniser 2004, 10–11).<sup>3</sup>

**Phraseology.** The noun *mathal* standardly figures as the accusative object of the verb *ḍaraba*, literally, “to strike” (Sister 1931, 115–116; Mir 1989, 207–208; CDKA 167–168). However, *ḍaraba* does not necessarily express the initial act of devising or inventing a

1 On rabbinic parables see, e.g., Teugels 2019, including an extensive review of previous scholarship; on parables in the Gospels, see, e.g., Snodgrass 2018.

2 As noted elsewhere (→ *allāh*), the fact that the Light Verse presents a similitude for God’s light does not imply that the verse’s opening claim that God is “the light of the heavens and the earth” is itself figurative.

3 Zahniser also points to Q 68:17–34, which lacks the term *mathal* but nonetheless makes the relationship of historical correspondence explicit enough in v. 17 (“we put them to the test as we put to the test the owners of the garden”).

similitude or saying but merely denotes the act of making discursive use of a *mathal*; at least at Q 43:58, it is clear that the correct translation of *ḍaraba* is “to raise s.th.,” namely, a point in the debate (Mir 1989, 207). In view of this, it is preferable to render *ḍaraba mathalan* not as “to coin a similitude” but rather as “to put forward a similitude,” “to make use of a similitude,” “to relate a similitude,” etc. The grammatical subject of *ḍaraba mathalan* is often God himself, but humans too can play this role (Q 2:26, 13:17, 14:24.25.45, 16:74.75.76.112, 17:48, 18:32.45, 22:73, 24:35, 25:9.39, 29:43, 30:28.58, 36:13.78, 39:27.29, 43:17.57, 47:3, 59:21, 66:1.11). Functionally, Qur’anic *ḍaraba* + *mathal* corresponds to rabbinic *mashlu* (plural verb) + *mashal* (noun), “they put forward a parable” (see McArthur and Johnston 1990, 111).

Frequent introductory formulae for Qur’anic similitudes are *mathalu X ka-Y*, literally, “the likeness of X is as Y” (Q 10:24, 11:24, 14:18.26, 24:35, 48:29) or, involving a slight redundancy, *mathalu X ka-mathali Y*, “the likeness of X is as the likeness of Y” (Q 2:17.171.261.264.265, 3:59.117, 7:176, 29:41, 62:5; Sister 1931, 114–115). The two formulae are equivalent and can in most cases be rendered “A similitude for X is that it is like Y.”<sup>4</sup> One may note a distant resemblance to the first two components of the standard introductory formulae of rabbinic parables (see McArthur and Johnston 1990, 115–118), as illustrated by *m. Sukkah* 2:9: “[i] They put forward a parable (*mashlu mashal*). [ii] To what is the matter similar?” The Qur’anic opening *mathalu X* resembles component (i) in identifying the literary genre of the following, while Qur’anic *ka-Y* or its variant *ka-mathali Y* resemble component (ii) in explicitly invoking the notion of similarity and comparability.

***Mathal* in the sense of “saying” or “characterisation.”** Beyond the focal meaning of a similitude, some Qur’anic verses apply the term *mathal* to a warning example of divine punishment or a paradigm of pious behaviour, or more generally a type (Buhl 1924a, 10; e.g., Q 14:45, 25:39, 43:56.57, 66:11). The word *mathal* here shows considerable referential overlap with other Qur’anic terms, such as *āyah* or *‘ibrah* (Sister 1931, 116). In such cases, the word *mathal* still retains the connotation of a relationship or correspondence between two phenomena (for instance, between the believers and the wife of Pharaoh; Q 66:11), although the two relata are now located at different moments of historical time rather than being taken from different semantic domains, as in ordinary similes that might, for instance, connect a religious claim to a natural phenomenon (e.g., Q 2:261–262.264.265).

Sometimes, however, the word *mathal* does not appear to hinge on any comparative link at all (Zahniser 2004, 9), e.g., in Q 47:3, where a contrastive statement about the repudiators (who “follow what is vain”) and the believers (who “follow the truth”) is labelled a *mathal*. In such instances, the term signifies nothing more than a pithy expression of the essential character of a group or an individual, i.e., a saying or characterisation (Buhl 1924a, 10–11). This is also the case for Q 16:60 (on which see also under → *ism*), which lays down that “to those who do not believe in the hereafter belongs an evil characterisation (*mathal al-saw’*) and to God belongs the loftiest characterisation (*li-llāhi l-mathalu l-a’lā*)” (cf. Q 30:27)—meaning, in slightly less clunky English, that the former are to be typified as wicked while of God one must only say the best. Similarly, a slightly later verse in the same surah, Q 16:74, admonishes the addressees not to “relate *amthāl* for God” (*fa-lā taḍribū*

<sup>4</sup> At Q 3:59 (*inna mathala ‘isā ‘inda llāhi ka-mathali ādama*), it would be more idiomatic to translate simply “In relation to God, Jesus is like Adam,” since the verse holds that both were created in the same fashion, by divine fiat.

*li-llāhi l-amthāla*). Given that the previous two verses criticise those who are ungrateful for God's grace and venerate beings other than him (Q 16:72–73), Q 16:74 is likely not discounting the use of figurative or excessively anthropomorphic language with regard to God (contrary to Hirschfeld 1902, 89–90) but is merely taking issue with the enunciation of theological claims that are deemed indefensible from the Qur'anic perspective (similarly Buhl 1924a, 11). Finally, Q 17:48 and 25:9 condemn the Qur'anic opponents on account of their recourse to “similitudes” or “sayings” (*al-amthāl*) for Muhammad, in both cases after complaining about the opponents' contention that he is “a man bewitched” (*rajul mashūr*). *Amthāl* that are not adduced by God, then, can simply be inadequate human attempts at conceptual categorisation. Here, too, the meaning of *mathal* is best glossed as “saying” or “characterisation.”

#### The discriminating effect of divine *mathals* according to Q 2:26, 29:43, and 74:31.

The Qur'an contains several explicit comments on God's recourse to similitudes and its communicative purpose (e.g., Q 2:26, 14:25, 29:43, 30:58, 39:27, 74:31, 59:21; see BEQ 430). Two verses quote the repudiators as asking, “What did God intend by employing this [namely, a preceding statement] as a *mathal*?” (*mādhā arāda llāhu bi-hādhā mathalan*), and then go on to highlight that by means of the *mathal* in question God will both guide (*hadā*) and lead astray (*aḍalla*; Q 2:26 and 74:31). In Q 2:26, the word *mathal* can be understood to refer to a genuine similitude, since the preceding segment of the verse holds that God is not ashamed to invoke “a gnat or what is above it.” This may allude to Qur'anic comparisons involving a fly or a spider in Q 22:73 and 29:41 (KK 15). But no comparative dimension at all is present in Q 74:31 (on which see also under → *bayyana*), since here the *mathal* at hand consists merely in the preceding statement, in 74:30, that the number of the guardians of hell-fire is nineteen. The feature common to the use of *mathal* in Q 2:26 and 74:31, therefore, is not the aspect of comparison, which is otherwise fundamental to many Qur'anic occurrences of *mathal*, but rather the notion that a divine statement may be purposefully designed to elicit different responses from believers and unbelievers and thus to discriminate between them (see under → *balā*).<sup>5</sup> This idea is also present in Q 29:43, according to which the similitudes (*amthāl*) related by God are understood “only by those who are knowledgeable,” although here, as in 2:26, the word *mathal* does involve a comparative dimension as well, given that an earlier verse, 29:41, likens those serving deities other than God to spiders weaving frail webs. As Buhl points out, the discriminating effect that a *mathal* has according to Q 2:26, 29:43, and 74:31 resembles the function that Mark 4:11–12 and Matt 13:13–16 attribute to the parables of Jesus (Buhl 1924a, 3). It may be submitted, therefore, that especially the non-comparative use of *mathal* in Q 74:31 is only explicable by positing that the word *mathal* also served as the Arabic designation for New Testamental parables.

### *tamāthīl* pl. | images

→ *ab*

<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Buhl maintains that the sense of *mathal* at Q 74:31 is merely that of a description or characterisation (Buhl 1924a, 10). This is not impossible in view of occurrences like Q 16:74 and 47:3, referenced above. However, it arguably fails to take into account the explicit comments on guidance and leading astray in Q 2:26 and 74:31.

***al-majūs* pl. | the Magians**

See briefly under → *ḥūr*, → *ashraka*, → *al-ṣābiʿūn*, and → *al-naṣārā*.

***maḥā* tr. | to erase or delete s.th.**

→ *ajal*

***madda* tr. | to spread s.th. out**

→ *ard*

***madda* tr. *fī* | to reinforce s.o. in s.th.**

***madda* intr. *li-* | to give s.o. reinforcement**

→ *hadā*

***al-madīnah* | the town**

→ *ard*, → *hājara*

***mārid*, *marīd* | defiant**

→ *shayṭān*

***maraḍ*: *alladhīna fī qulūbihim* ~ | those in whose hearts is sickness**

***marīḍ* | ill, sick**

Further vocabulary discussed: *qalb* | heart *bi-qalb salīm* | with a sound heart *al-ladhīna āmanū*, *al-muʿminūn* pl. | the believers *al-munāfiqūn*, *alladhīna nāfaqū* pl. | the hypocrites *alladhīna kafarū*, *al-kāfirūn*, *al-kuffār* pl. | the repudiators *al-ladhīna ashtrakū*, *al-mushrikūn* pl. | the associators

Although the adjective *marīḍ*, “sick,” always has a literal meaning in the Qurʿan (e.g., Q 2:184.185.196; see also under → *amiya*), the noun *maraḍ*, “sickness,” only ever occurs in a metaphorical sense, signifying sickness of the heart (e.g., Q 2:10, 5:52, and 8:49; see McAuliffe 2002, 407–408; → *qalb*). The opposite of suffering from a sick heart is to “come to God / one’s Lord with a sound heart” (*atā llāha/rabbahu bi-qalbin salīm*), an expression found in Q 26:89 and 37:84 (see under → *aslama* and → *qalb*). There is precedent in Christian literature for a metaphorical encoding of the contrast between belief and unbelief, or belief and deficient forms thereof, in terms of health and sickness (CQ 47; Ahrens 1935, 164), but none of the parallels adduced by Ahrens attribute sickness specifically to the heart (for a brief review of Ahrens’s evidence, refer to AHW 181–182). When early Arabic poetry speaks of a “sick heart” (*qalb saqīm*; Lyall 1918–1924, nos 38:4 and 57:10), this is not a metaphor for dysfunctionality but merely for the poet’s yearning for his past beloved (see also AHW 182 and the extensive catalogue of references *ibid.*, 208–211).

In the Qur'an, the phrase "those in whose hearts is sickness" serves as a liminal category designating persons who are neither fully inside nor fully outside the Medinan community of believers (*alladhīna āmanū*, *al-mu'minūn*; → *āmana*), thus bearing a functional resemblance to the term "the hypocrites" (→ *al-munāfiqūn*). Both expressions are coupled in Q 8:49 and 33:12.60. Like the hypocrites, "those in whose hearts is sickness" are, for instance, accused of defeatism (Q 5:52) and an aversion to fighting (Q 47:20), suggesting that the two expressions may to some degree be synonymous (thus also *AHW* 73). The sick of heart have a rancorous disposition, says Q 47:29, and other verses associate sickness of the heart with being prone to succumbing to temptation and doubt (Q 22:53, 24:50, 74:31). In Q 2:8–16, "those in whose hearts are sickness" are faulted for disingenuously professing belief (Q 2:8.14) while also being criticised for openly defying the authority of the Qur'anic Prophet (Q 2:13), remarkably in the same passage. This apparent tension, and the wide range of complaints made against the sick of heart more generally, probably reflects the fact that "the hypocrites" and "those in whose hearts is sickness" function as overspill categories for those inhabitants of Medina who could neither be considered fully committed believers nor were readily identifiable as repudiators (*alladhīna kafarū*, *al-kāfirūn*, *al-kuffār*; → *kafara*) or associators (*alladhīna ashtrakū*, *al-mushrikūn*; → *ashraka*). This necessarily ill-defined, liminal group would have encompassed a range of stances, extending from explicit dissent at one end to public conformity with the Qur'anic religion despite private misgivings at the other end. It is possible that such dissenting and lukewarm segments of the Medinan population were quantitatively quite significant, at least towards the beginning of the Prophet's activity there.

### ***masaha* intr. bi- | to wipe s.th.**

→ *ṭahara*, → *al-masīh*

### ***al-masīh* | Christ**

#### **Further vocabulary discussed: *masaha* intr. bi- | to wipe s.th.**

*Al-masīh* is a conventional Qur'anic epithet for Jesus, whose full Qur'anic name three verses give as *al-masīhu 'īsā bnu maryama*, "al-masīh Jesus, the son of Mary" (Q 3:45, 4:157.171), but who is also referred to simply as *al-masīh*, as in Q 4:172 or 9:30.<sup>1</sup> *Al-masīh* obviously reflects the Syriac title *mshīhā*, "the Messiah, the anointed one," which renders Greek *christos* (*CQ* 24–25; *FVQ* 265–266). Within the morphological structure of Arabic, *masīh* is formed like a regular passive verbal adjective, such as *qatīl*, "killed," with the corresponding first-form verb presumably being *masaha* bi-, "to wipe s.th." (Q 4:43, 5:6, 38:33).<sup>2</sup> Despite its potential semantic analysability, however, the expression *al-masīh* appears to be little more than a

1 The most frequent version of Jesus's name is *'īsā bnu maryama* (e.g., Q 2:87.253, 5:46.78.110.112.114.116).

2 It is true that in the Qur'an *masaha* takes a prepositional rather than a direct object, while the passive meaning of *fa'īl* adjectives is normally limited to those derived from transitive verbs (Wright 1974, 1:136). But note that *AEL* 2713 has *masahahu*, "to anoint s.o. or s.th. with oil." Durie 2018, 161 maintains that "the form of *masīh* does not fit into any productive Arabic nominalization pattern," but notwithstanding the foregoing qualifications this is an overstatement. It seems perfectly viable to parse *al-masīh* as having the literal meaning "the one who



fossilised title in the Qur'an that does not convey any properly messianic expectations of the sort that imbue the New Testament title *christos* (Robinson 2003b, 12–13; Durie 2018, 157–164; see also *QP* 310–311). The fact that *al-masīh* can be followed by the matronymic “son of Mary” without an intervening “Jesus” (see Q 5:17.72.75) further heightens the impression that it behaves largely like an alternative proper name for Jesus; although *al-masīh* may formally be described as a *laqab* or “descriptive epithet,” which “would normally have a recognizable meaning” (Durie 2018, 161), there is no clear Qur'anic evidence to confirm that the Qur'an's addressees did in fact connect the title *al-masīh* with the verb *masaḥa*, “to wipe,” which is only employed in the context of regulating the ablutions to be performed before prayer (Q 4:43, 5:6). Translationally, this state of affairs is best conveyed by rendering *al-masīh* as “Christ” rather than as “the Messiah” or “the anointed one,” seeing that in ordinary English usage “Christ” has come to function as a semantically opaque quasi-surname of Jesus (thus also Stewart 2021, 54–56).

The epithet *al-masīh* entered Arabic prior to the Qur'an: it is reported that *'abd al-masīh*, “servant of Christ,” was a pre-Islamic proper name (*KU* 130). This is confirmed by a Nabataeo-Arabic inscription from the region around Najrān (Robin et al. 2014, 1125). Moreover, the title *ms<sup>h</sup>*, “Messiah,” features in Epigraphic South Arabian inscriptions by the Christian king Abraha (Sima 2004, 25; Robin 2015a, 153–154, 164, 169).

***massa* tr. | to touch s.o.**

→ *ṭahara*

***miskīn* | indigent**

→ *zakāh*

***mukth*: 'alā ~ | in an abiding manner**

→ *furqān*

***makara* intr. (*bi-*) | to plot or scheme, to devise or execute a plot or scheme against s.o.**

***makara* tr. | to plot s.th.**

***makr* | cunning, guile, cunning scheming**

Further vocabulary discussed: *kāda* tr./intr. | to devise or execute a plot or scheme (against s.o.), to try to outwit s.o. *kayd* | cunning, guile, cunning scheming *ḡalama* tr. | to injure or harm s.o. or s.th.; to wrong s.o.

***Makara* and *kāda*.** Various Qur'anic passages describe both humans and God as being engaged in cunning plotting and scheming (see also Reynolds 2020, 188–190). The two

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has been anointed.” As the main text explains in what follows, the salient fact is simply that the Qur'an does not exhibit any interest in or awareness of this potential construal.

expressions used are, first, *makara* or its verbal noun *makr* (e.g., Q 6:123.124, 7:99.123, 12:31.102, 16:26.45.127, 27:70, 34:33, 71:22) and, secondly, *kāda* or its verbal noun *kayd* (e.g., Q 3:120, 12:5.28.33.34.50.52, 20:60.64.69). Despite minor differences in usage,<sup>1</sup> the two words seem to be essentially synonymous, since both are said by the lexicographical tradition to signify recourse to ruses, guile, deceit, and artifice (*AEL* 2638–2639 and 2728). Where *makara* and *kāda* are employed with a note of moral condemnation, they frequently refer to actions that defy God or pose a threat to those believing in him. Examples are Q 10:21, speaking of *makrun fi āyātīnā*, “scheming with respect to (or against) our signs,” and the partial doublet Q 16:127 and 27:70, enjoining the Messenger not to be sad and distressed in the face of the “scheming” of his opponents (*mimmā yamkurūn*).

**God’s superiority over human cunning.** Qur’anic references to human plotting often serve to make the point that God can and will bring to naught even the most devious human schemes, in the interest of protecting those who are faithful to him. Thus, Abraham’s compatriots “devised a plot against him, yet we brought them low” (Q 21:70 and 37:98: *wa-/fa-arādū bihi kaydan fa-ja’alnāhumu l-asfalīn*); Joseph prays to God to “avert” from him the guile of the Egyptian women to safeguard him from temptation (Q 12:33: *wa-illā taṣrif ‘annī kaydahunna*), a plea that God fulfils (v. 34: *fa-stajāba lahu rabbuhu fa-ṣarafa ‘anhu kaydahunna*); and God shields a pious anonymous Egyptian from unspecified evil plots that were reportedly hatched by Pharaoh and his entourage (Q 40:45: *fa-waqāhu llāhu sayyi’āti mā makarū*). More generally, God “reduces to feebleness the repudiators’ plotting” (Q 8:18: *wa-anna llāha mūhinu kaydi l-kāfirīn*) and he “does not guide the plotting of those who are treacherous” (Q 12:52: *wa-anna llāha lā yahdī kayda l-khā’inīn*). Similarly, God “led astray” the guileful plotting of the enigmatic “owners of the elephant” (Q 105:2: *a-lam yaj’al kaydahum fi taḍlīl*), which perhaps exemplifies the divine protection under which other verses place the Meccan sanctuary (Q 28:57, 29:67). God’s superiority over all human cunning is also underscored elsewhere: for instance, in Q 77:39 the divine speaker threatens “the deniers” (*al-mukadhdhibūn*) with the day of judgement and then challenges them, “If you have any cunning devices left, then try to outwit me with them” (*fa-in kāna lakum kaydun fa-kīdūn*).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, it is not only human cunning over which God is superior: Q 4:76 exhorts the believers to fight “the allies of the devil, for the devil’s cunning is weak” (*fa-qātilū awliyā’a l-shayṭāni inna kayda l-shayṭāni kāna ḍa’īfā*). The general motif of God’s superiority over human plotting and cunning is Biblical (e.g., Ps 2:1–6, 21:12–13).<sup>3</sup>

**Divine cunning.** The verbs *kāda* and *makara* do not invariably imply moral condemnation; as al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī puts it, they fall into praiseworthy and blameworthy types (al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 2009, 728 and 772). Thus, in Q 21:57 it is the stringent monotheist Abraham who declares to his compatriots, “I shall outwit your idols” (*la-akīdanna aṣnāmakum*; note the recurrence of *kayd* in v. 70). Most interesting are a number of

1 For instance, transitive *kāda* takes as its accusative object the prospective victim, as in Q 21:57 or 77:39, while transitive *makara* takes as its accusative object the plot hatched, as in 16:45; see *CDKA* 243 and 257.

2 See also Q 14:46, using the root *m-k-r*. Other *kīdūni/kidūni* challenges occur in Q 7:195 and 11:55; they are uttered by human messengers rather than by God, yet the messengers’ confidence is of course predicated on their faith in divine assistance. For other affirmations that evil scheming will come to naught or fall back on its originator or originators, see Q 35:10.43, which speak of *wa-lladhīna yamkurūna l-sayyi’āti* and *makr al-sayyi’*. See also Q 40:25.37 (in the context of the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh) and 52:42.46, all of which have *k-y-d*.

3 The relevance of Ps 2 was pointed out to me by Saqib Hussain.

passages that go so far as to describe God himself as practising guile and cunning. Thus, Q 7:99 asks whether “the inhabitants of the settlements” (*ahl al-qurā*) felt safe against “God’s scheming” (*makr allāh*), and in Q 12:76 the divine voice states that “we engaged in scheming on behalf of Joseph” (*ka-dhālika kidnā li-yūsufa*),<sup>4</sup> an affirmation that concludes multiple recurrences of the roots *k-y-d* and *m-k-r* throughout Surah 12 (for *k-y-d*, see also vv. 5, 28, 33, 34, 50, 52; for *m-k-r*, see vv. 31 and 102). Their overall effect is to highlight how God’s plan will ultimately win out over all human intrigue (see Qureshi 2017, 165). Two other verses characterising God in terms of the root *k-y-d* are the doublet Q 68:45 and 7:183, according to which God is playing the long game in dealing with those denying his signs or revelations: “I will grant them respite; my cunning is firm” (*wa-umlī lahum inna kaydī matīn*).

The sense in which the Qur’an presents God as practising guile and artifice is best illuminated by a cluster of passages that refer to divine scheming as part of bipartite statements in which a human offence is followed by a divine response in kind.<sup>5</sup> For example, in Q 86:15–16, the divine speaker ominously asserts that “they”—who in v. 17 turn out to be the repudiators (*al-kāfirūn*)—“are engaged in scheming, // and so am I” (*innahum yakīdūna kaydā // wa-akīdu kaydā*), and a similar sequence is found in Q 52:42, even though the divine response is here framed in the passive (*am yurīdūna kaydan fa-lladhīna kafarū humu l-makīdūn*, “Or do they intend to have recourse to cunning schemes? It is the repudiators who will be cunningly outwitted”). Employing *makara* rather than *kāda*, Q 3:54 says about the Israelite adversaries of Jesus and his disciples that “they schemed and God schemed; and God is the most expert schemer” (*wa-makarū wa-makara llāhu wa-llāhu khayru l-mākīrīn*), while Q 8:30 applies a variant of the same formulation to contemporary repudiators (*wa-yamkurūna wa-yamkuru llāhu wa-llāhu khayru l-mākīrīn*). Both verses are Medinan and echo the Meccan verse Q 27:50, reporting of certain members of the people of Thamūd, who planned a nocturnal assault on God’s messenger Ṣāliḥ (v. 49), that “they schemed and we schemed” (*wa-makarū makran wa-makarnā makran*); as v. 51 goes on to add, “the outcome of their scheming” was that Thamūd were divinely obliterated. Other Meccan passages evincing the same sequence of human *makr* countered and outdone by divine *makr* are Q 10:21, which accuses humans of “scheming against our signs” (*idhā lahum makrun fī āyātīnā*) and then declares that “God schemes more swiftly” (*qulī llāhu asra’u makran*), and Q 13:42 (*wa-qad makara lladhīna min qablihim fa-li-llāhi l-makru jamī’an*, “those before them”—namely, before Muhammad’s audience—“engaged in scheming, but all scheming belongs to God”).

The passages just rehearsed yield two important observations. First, God’s recourse to guile and cunning is presented as a proportionate response to antecedent human misdeeds. Contrary to what one might initially think, therefore, expressions such as *makr allāh*, “God’s scheming” or “God’s cunning” (Q 7:99), do not give rise to problems of theodicy: God is merely portrayed as beating human schemers at their own game.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, and related to this, the context often makes it clear that God’s scheming is a

4 Note the ambiguity of *kāda li-*, which in Q 12:5 means “to plot against s.o.,” as opposed to v. 76 (CDKA 243).

5 In addition to the following material, see also under → *nasiya* for a similar sequence in which a negative human action entails a divine response in kind. See also Q 17:8 (*wa-in udtum ‘udnā*). For a positive case of divine response in kind (if humans turn back to God in remorse, God will turn to them), see under → *tāba*.

6 Unlike passages of the *makarū-makarnā* type and its variants, Q 68:45 and 7:183 (“I will grant them respite; my cunning is firm”) do not explicitly accuse God’s opponents of engaging in guileful plotting by applying to

byword for the punishment that he will unexpectedly inflict on the sinners. Thus, prior to the assertion that “all scheming belongs to God” (Q 13:42), the Qur’an underscores that God’s judgement cannot be altered and that he is “quick to reckon” (v. 41: *sarī’u l-ḥisāb*). Similarly, in the immediate vicinity of Q 10:21’s declaration that “God schemes more swiftly” than humans we find a reminder that God’s “messengers” (*rusul*; singular: → *rasūl*)—which must here designate angelic overseers—“write down the schemes you hatch” (*inna rusulanā yaktubūna mā tamkurūn*). This suggests that God’s “scheming” is tantamount to the final judgement at which all human transgressions will be reviewed and duly avenged.

The fact that the Qur’an generally depicts divine guile and cunning as a proportionate punitive response to antecedent human misdemeanours is particularly interesting in view of an allegedly pre-Islamic poem cited in the *Kitāb al-Aghānī* that bemoans how “the deity (*al-ilāh*) targeted with his plotting (*bi-kaydihi*)” both the mythical people of Iram (on which see *KU* 89–90) and the poet’s own people (Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī 1927–1974, 3:108, ultimate line; Sinai 2019b, 37). However one judges the authenticity of the passage, it fits in with a wider trend in pre-Islamic poetry, according to which God (*allāh* or *al-ilāh*) is an ambivalent and occasionally destructive figure who can capriciously crush humans irrespective of any considerations of moral culpability, like the impersonal forces of fate or devastating time (*al-dahr*) with which Allāh is sometimes equated (Sinai 2019b, 33–39 and 63). By contrast, the Qur’an stresses that God “does not inflict wrong on even a tiny speck” (Q 4:40: *inna llāha lā yazlimu mithqāla dharratin*; cf. 21:47), and equivalent denials that God might do wrong are frequent (e.g., Q 3:108.117.182, 8:51, 9:70, 50:29; see under → *ḡalama*). If indeed one can trust the poem just quoted to document that the notions of divine plotting and scheming are pre-Qur’anic, then the Qur’an reorients them in a manner consistent with its overall emphasis on divine justice.

***makkana* tr. *fī*, *makkana* intr. *li-* . . . *fī* | to establish s.o. on/in s.th., to give s.o. power over s.th.**

***makkana* tr. *li-* | to establish s.th. for s.o.**

Further vocabulary discussed: *al-arḍ* | the earth; the land *ista’mara* tr. *fī l-arḍ* | to settle s.o. on the earth *askana* ditr. | to let s.o. dwell somewhere *bawwa’a* tr. *fī l-arḍ* | to give s.o. an abode in the land / on earth *istakhlafa* tr. (*fī*) | to appoint s.o. as a deputy (over s.th.) *amkana* tr. *min* | to give s.o. power over s.o.

A cluster of mostly Meccan verses remind the Qur’anic hearers that God has established or settled humans, or specific individuals like Joseph, “on the earth” or “in the land” (*makkana* + acc. *fī l-arḍ*: Q 6:6, 7:10, 22:41; *makkannā li-* . . . *fī l-arḍ*: Q 12:21.56, 18:84, 28:6; see also Q 18:95 and 46:26). While most occurrences of *makkana* have the prepositional complement *fī l-arḍ*, Q 28:57 refers to God’s establishment of a sacred precinct on behalf of the Qur’anic Messenger’s audience (*a-wa-lam numakkin lahum ḥaraman āminan*). Yet here, too, the verb *makkana* designates God’s gift of a particular geographical place or

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them a derivative of *k-y-d*. Yet it is nonetheless clear that God’s cunning is a punitive reaction to the antecedent denial of his signs by his prospective victims.

space as a human homestead.<sup>1</sup> The expression *makkana fī l-ard* would appear to have considerable semantic overlap with formulations like *ista'mara* + acc. *fī l-ard*, “to settle s.o. on the earth” (Q 11:61), *askana* + acc. *l-arda*, “to let s.o. dwell in the land” (Q 14:14),<sup>2</sup> *bawwa'a* + acc. *fī l-ard*, “to give s.o. an abode in the land” (Q 7:74; cf. also 10:93, 12:56, and 22:26; see CDKA 45), and → *istakhlafa* + acc. *fī l-ard*, “to appoint s.o. as a deputy over the earth/land” (which also occurs in Q 24:55). The general trope of God’s establishment of humans “on the earth” or “in the land” that he has created ties in with the Qur’an’s wider presentation of the earth, which is treated in detail elsewhere (→ *ard*).

It is possible that *makkana fī l-ard* connotes a conferral of power and authority over the earth or a specific part of it (as put forward in CDKA 257–258). After all, Q 8:71 employs the fourth-form verb *amkana min* to refer to God’s granting of power or superiority over the believers’ foes. There is, moreover, Q 12:56, which describes God as having “established Joseph in the land, enabling him to settle down in it wherever he wanted” (*wa-ka-dhālika makkannā li-yūsufa fī l-ardi yatabawwa'u minhā haythu yashā'u*), a statement found in the immediate wake of Joseph’s proposal that the king of Egypt make him the overseer over the country’s storehouses. *Makkana fī l-ard* could accordingly be felt to convey Joseph’s progression to a position of considerable authority here. On the other hand, the same expression *wa-ka-dhālika makkannā li-yūsufa fī l-ardi* occurs already earlier on in the story of Joseph, in Q 12:21. At this point in the narrative, Joseph has been bought by an Egyptian master who contemplates adopting him and who orders his wife to “give him a generous lodging” (*akrimī mathwāhu*). Although Joseph’s “establishment in the land” is surely indicative of his comfortable prospects in this verse, there is no sense yet that he has advanced, or might reasonably hope to advance, to a position of administrative or political influence in Egypt.

### ***mala'* | assembly; community leaders, notables *al-mala' al-a'lā* | the assembly on high**

Further vocabulary discussed: *alladhīna kafarū*, *al-kāfirūn*, *al-kuffār* pl. | the repudiators *millah* | religious teaching *dhikr* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation *istakbara* intr. | to deem o.s. great, to behave haughtily *istaḍ'afa* tr. | to deem or treat s.o. as weak, to oppress s.o., to press s.o. hard *mutraf* | affluent *al-ardhalūn* pl. | the dregs (of society)

According to the classical dictionaries, the noun *mala'* (on which see generally Chabbi 2020, 549 and 621–622) means an assembly as well as the nobles or chiefs gathered in it (AEL 2729; al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 2009, 776). The Qur’an consistently employs it as referring to a plurality of persons (e.g., Q 2:246 and 38:69, where *mala'* is the subject of plural

1 This is not prima facie the case for Q 24:55, which promises the believers that God will “establish for them their religion, the one with which he is pleased” (*wa-la-yumakkinanna lahum dīnahumu lladhī rtaḍā lahum*). It is nonetheless possible that this verse, especially when read against the background of the Qur’anic employment of *makkana* in general, conveys an undertone of spatial settlement, of God’s → *dim* being established in a particular place.

2 See also the imperative *uskunū l-arda*, “dwell in the land,” that is addressed to the Israelites in Q 17:104.

verbs, and 7:66.75.88.90, 11:27, and 23:24.33, where it is the antecedent of the plural relative pronoun *alladhīna*). Ambros accordingly glosses the term as the “leading members of a community, esp. (but not necessarily) when assembled for a political purpose.” As Ambros notes, Q 11:38 describes how members of the *malaʾ* of Noah’s people pass by him (*kullamā marra ‘alayhi malaʾun min qawmihi*) while he is constructing the ark, that is, without a formal meeting being held (CDKA 258).

**Qur’anic notables past and present.** Only one Qur’anic passage mentions the term *malaʾ* in connection with the Qur’an’s contemporary unbelievers or “repudiators” (→ *kafara*). This is Q 38:6–8, according to which the repudiators’ notables (v. 6: *al-malaʾ minhum*, referring back to *alladhīna kafarū / al-kāfirūn* in vv. 2.4) urge their compatriots to remain steadfast to their gods (*wa-ṣbirū ‘alā ālihatikum*) and maintain that the Qur’anic Messenger’s monotheistic preaching (cf. v. 5) is something unheard of “in contemporary religious teaching” (v. 7: *mā samīnā bi-hādhā fī l-millati l-āakhirati*; → *millah*). According to v. 8, the same notables also take offence at the notion that it is the Qur’anic Messenger who should have been singled out among them (*min bayninā*) to receive and disseminate God’s reminding exhortation (*al-dhikr*; → *dhakkara*; see also Q 54:24, where a very similar objection is attributed to the tribe of Thamūd). The *malaʾ* at hand thus come across as invested in upholding the religious status quo and as contesting the Messenger’s claim to be specially endowed with divine authority, perhaps because this threatened their own pre-eminence.

Otherwise, occurrences of the word *malaʾ* are limited to historical narratives: when Noah is sent to warn his people, their *malaʾ* or notables resist his preaching (Q 7:60, 11:27.38, 23:24), and the same holds for the messengers Hūd (Q 7:66), Ṣāliḥ (Q 7:75), and Shuʿayb (Q 7:88.90). An anonymous messenger who is mentioned in Q 23:31–41 also encounters opposition from the notables of his people (v. 33). Notables are furthermore placed in the company of rulers, whom they serve as councillors: Pharaoh confers with his *malaʾ* when confronted by Moses (Q 7:103.109.127, 10:75.83.88, 11:97, 23:46, 26:34, 28:20.32.38, 43:46); the Egyptian king in the story of Joseph too consults his notables about the meaning of the dream that Joseph will go on to interpret for him (Q 12:43); and the queen of Sabaʾ seeks the advice of her notables regarding a letter that she has received from Solomon (Q 27:29.32), while Solomon challenges his notables to bring him the queen’s throne (Q 27:38). A link between a people’s *malaʾ* and the institution of kingship also emerges from Q 2:246, which has the notables of the Israelites demand of “a prophet of theirs” that he appoint a king for them, a scene corresponding to the request that the Israelite elders make of Samuel in 1 Sam 8:4–5.

The Qur’an tends to depict earthly notables in unequivocally negative terms, articulating their hostility to various messengers by means of the formulaic phrase “The repudiating / haughty notables of his people said . . .” (Q 7:66.75.88.90, 11:27, 23:24: *qāla l-malaʾu lladhīna kafarū/stakbarū min qawmihi*; 23:33: *qāla l-malaʾu min qawmihi lladhīna kafarū*). Pharaoh and his notables are the grammatical subject of *istakbara* (“to deem o.s. great,” “to behave haughtily”) in two further verses (Q 10:75 and 23:46). The notables figure virtually exclusively in scenes involving public speaking: they wield power through public oratory, or rather their elevated social status manifests itself in a prerogative to speak out. For example, the *malaʾ* are the grammatical subject of the verb *qāla*, “to say,” in Q 2:246, 7:60.66.75.88.90.109.127, 11:27, and 23:24.33. By contrast, in settings involving institutions of centralised rulership, such as the story of Solomon and



the queen of Saba', the notables tend to speak only after having been addressed by the respective sovereign (Q 12:43–44, 26:34, 27:29.32.38; see also 28:38), indicating their subordinate position.<sup>1</sup>

**The Qur'anic notables and socio-political stratification.** Qur'anic references to notables tie in with other allusions to political, social, and economic stratification in the communities that the Qur'an reports to have been rebuked by divinely mandated warners. Thus, Q 23:33 says that the notables opposing an anonymous messenger were granted a life of affluence (v. 33: *atrafnāhum fī l-ḥayāti l-dunyā*), and Q 7:75 recounts how the “haughty notables” of the people of Šāliḥ (*qāla l-mala'u lladhīna stakbarū min qawmihi*) speak to “those who were oppressed, those who were believers among them” (*li-lladhīna stud'ifū li-man āmana minhum*) and question Šāliḥ's God-given authority. Further occurrences of the verbs *istad'afa* (“to oppress”) and *istakbara* and of the descriptor *mutraf*, “affluent” (the passive participle of the verb *atrafā* that occurs in Q 23:33) as well as the disparaging characterisation of Noah's followers as the “dregs” of society (Q 11:27: *arādhilunā*, 26:111: *al-ardhalūn*) by Noah's people in general or, more specifically, by their notables (Q 11:27: *al-mala'u lladhīna kafarū min qawmihi*) all contribute to establishing the theme of a tangible socio-economic differential between those who oppose various earlier messengers and those who follow them (see in more detail under → *istad'afa*). Considering that the opponents of previous messengers transparently channel some of the main objections that were encountered by the Qur'anic Messenger himself, it would appear legitimate to infer, especially in view of Q 38:6–8, that the opposition to Muhammad's preaching similarly emanated from Mecca's political and social elite and that an assembly of tribal chiefs called the *mala'* was an actual institution in Muhammad's Mecca (Lammens 1924, 74–75; Peters 1994b, 16–17 and 417 with n. 47).

**The heavenly assembly.** Finally, just as the Qur'an portrays human rulers like Solomon as surrounded by their *mala'*, so it presuppose the existence of a heavenly or “highest” assembly, *al-mala' al-a'lā* (Q 37:8, 38:69), who seem to include the angels to whom God announces his intention to create humans (Q 38:71; see also DTEK 84–86).<sup>2</sup> This idea of a heavenly council or assembly has well-known Biblical precedents (e.g., 1 Kgs 22:19–23, Ps 82:1, and Job 1:6 ff.) and goes back as far as Mesopotamian and Ugaritic literature (Smith 2001, 41–53). The expression *al-mala' al-a'lā* (“the assembly on high”) in particular has reminded scholars of the rabbinic term *yeshibah shel ma'lah*, the “academy on high” (Horovitz 1919, 163; on the rabbinic notion, see *EJ* 1:353–354). However, unlike the rabbinic tradition the Qur'an does not suggest that the heavenly council is engaged in the study of scripture: given the inner-Qur'anic parallels, the heavenly council is to be understood as having a royal rather than scholarly ambience. A more pertinent Talmudic parallel, also referenced by Horovitz, is therefore *b. Sanh.* 38b, citing Rabbi Yoḥanan's dictum that God “does not act unless he consults (*nimlak*) with the members of the household on high (*ḥamalya shel ma'lah*).” On the protection of the heavenly council against eavesdropping demons, see under → *jinn* and also → *shayṭān*.

1 This is not universally the case; see Q 7:109 (and again in 7:127).

2 Cf. the partially overlapping ways in which the angels phrase their objection to God's creation of humans in Q 2:30 and in which Pharaoh's notables press for action against Moses in 7:127. Eichler suggests that the heavenly council may not be confined to angels, just as Solomon's retinue included humans and jinn (Q 27:38–40) as well as, apparently, birds (Q 27:20–28; see DTEK 86).

**malaka: mā ~t aymānuhum** | what their right hands possess

→ *darajah*

**mālik** | possessor, owner

See under → *malik* and also n. 25 under → *malak*.

**malak** | angel; angels

Further vocabulary discussed: *rasūl, mursal* | messenger *jinn* coll. | demons, jinn *kafara* ditr. | to be ungrateful to s.o. for s.th. *kafara* intr. *bi-* | to repudiate s.o. or s.th. *khalada* intr. | to remain forever, to be immortal *iblis* | Iblis, the devil *al-shayṭān* | the devil, Satan *‘aṣā* tr. | to disobey s.o. *istakbara* intr. *‘an* | to deem o.s. too great to do s.th. *fitnah* | trial *tawaffā* tr. | to take s.o. from life (said of God, the angels, or death) *afsada* intr. *fī l-ard* | to wreak corruption on earth *qaddasa* intr. *li-* | to declare s.o. (namely, God) to be holy *quddūs* | holy *istaghfara* intr. *li-* | to ask for forgiveness for s.o. *‘arsh* | throne *shafa’a* intr. (*‘inda, li-*) | to intercede (with s.o., on behalf of s.o.) *shafā’ah* | intercession *alladhīna ashrakū, al-mushrikūn* pl. | the associators *shafī’* | intercessor *adhina* intr. *li-* | to give permission to s.o. *adhina* intr. *li-* | to give permission to s.o. *idhn* | permission *ṣallā* intr. *‘alā* | to say blessings over s.o. *ṣaff* | rank, row *al-rūḥ* | the spirit *sā’iq* | usher, someone driving someone else on *khazanah* pl. | keepers, guardians *ḥāfiẓ* | (angelic) watcher *ḥafiẓa* tr. | to watch over s.o. *kitāb* | written record, record book *nazzala, anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down *rūḥ al-quḍus* | the holy spirit *qalb* | heart *iṭma’anna* intr. (*bi-*) | to be or come to be secure (in), to be or come to be at peace (in) *bushrā* | glad tidings *bashshara* tr. (*bi-/anna/bi-anna*) | to give glad tidings to s.o. (of s.th. / that . . .) *tābūt* | ark, chest, casket *āyah* | sign *al-ghayb* | the hidden

**Overview.** The Qur’anic word *malak*, “angel” (plural: *malā’ikah*),<sup>1</sup> corresponds to Hebrew *mal’āk*, “messenger,” which the Septuagint renders by Greek *angelos*. In the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, *mal’āk* and *angelos* designate not only superhuman agents on behalf of the deity (e.g., Gen 16:7 or Hos 12:5) but also human messengers commissioned by other humans (e.g., Gen 32:4, Job 1:14, or Luke 9:52; see DTEK 83). A Qur’anic *malak*, by contrast, is invariably a supernatural intermediary between God and humans rather than a “messenger” in a neutral functional sense, for which the Qur’an uses the words *rasūl* or *mursal*, applicable both to angelic messengers (as in Q 22:75 and 35:1) and to human ones (see under → *rasūl* and also Burge 2008, 52).

In addition to acting as emissaries, Qur’anic angels serve God in many other capacities that will be surveyed in the sections that follow, including as keepers of paradise and guardians of hell, as attendants on the day of eschatological judgement, and as overseers tasked with recording a human individual’s good and bad deeds. The considerable importance that angels have in the Qur’an is illustrated by three Medinan verses (Q 2:177.285, 4:136) that list angels among the entities or phenomena in which members of the Qur’anic

1 At Q 69:17 and 89:22, *malak* is used not as a singular but as a collective (CDKA 244).

community must believe, together with God himself, the “final day,” God’s messengers, and his scriptural revelations. Qur’anic angels remain almost always an anonymous collective (*DTEK* 85), although two passages cite the name of Gabriel, in one case together with Michael (Q 2:97–98, 66:4),<sup>2</sup> while another verse (Q 2:102) speaks of two Babylonian angels called Hārūt and Mārūt (see in more detail under → *jinn*).<sup>3</sup>

The Qur’an evidently presupposes considerable familiarity with Jewish and Christian angelological lore (on which see, e.g., Muehlberger 2013 and Ahuvia 2021). However, as will be argued below, a distinctive—albeit not entirely unparalleled—trait of Qur’anic angels consists in the fact that unlike humans and the *jinn* (→ *jinn*) they are not endowed with the ability to disobey God’s orders, i.e., seem to lack free will: the Qur’an consistently depicts angels as mere instruments of God rather than as independent moral subjects confronted by a genuine choice between right and wrong. This contrasts with Jewish and Christian narratives about angelic disobedience. Such stories include the tradition, based on Gen 6:1–4, that prior to the Noachian flood lustful angels mated with human females, as reported in *1 Enoch* 6–9 (see generally Reed 2005 and concisely *QP* 183–193), and accounts of the primordial banishment of the erstwhile angel Satan due to his defiance of God (see Ri 1987, Western manuscript group, ch. 3:1–7). Although the latter story is retold in the Qur’an, the Islamic scripture recasts the devil as a demon or *jinni* (see under → *shayṭān*), meaning that he no longer constitutes a case of properly *angelic* disobedience.

**Etymology.** The word *malak* is widely considered to have its immediate precursor in Classical Ethiopic *mal’ak* (plural *malā’akt*, resembling Arabic *malā’ikah*) in Western scholarship (*NB* 34; *DTEK* 83; *FVQ* 269–270; for an epigraphic attestation in a quotation of Ps 35:5, see Robin 2019b, 124). An origin in Syriac *mal’akā* has also been suggested (Mingana 1927, 85; see also *CDKA* 244). Against such extra-Arabic etymologies, Boneschi has vigorously argued in favour of an inner-Arabic derivation of *malak* from *ma’lak*, itself derived from the root *’l-k* (Boneschi 1945). *Ma’lak*, he maintains, first became *mal’ak* by metathesis (Boneschi 1945, 109) and then dropped its glottal stop altogether; and in line with some other words conforming to the morphological pattern *mafal*, Boneschi contends that the original meaning of *ma’lak/mal’ak* would have been “something or someone sent,” i.e., both “message” and “messenger” (Boneschi 1945, 110). Even Boneschi, however, does not dispute that the fact that the word *malak* came to refer specifically to a celestial messenger is due to Judaeo-Christian influence (Boneschi 1945, 111). Somewhat similarly, Robin holds that *mal’ak/malak* is originally Arabic and then underwent semantic realignment leading from “messenger” in general to “angel” in particular (Robin 2019b, 122–124).

Ethiopic *mal’ak* and also Syriac *mal’akā*, like their Hebrew and Greek equivalents but unlike the Qur’anic word *malak*, can designate both celestial and human agents (Leslau 1991, 303; *SL* 764). The exclusively celestial reference of Qur’anic *malak* also contrasts with *ml’k* in Epigraphic South Arabian, denoting a royal emissary (Robin 2019b, 122). Both

2 Both Q 2:98 and 66:4 mention Gabriel, and the former also Michael—read *mikāl* by some of the canonical readers (cf. *JPND* 158–159 and *KU* 81), though there are miscellaneous variants like *mikā’il*, *mikā’il*, and *mika’il* (*MQ* 1:159–161 and *MQQ* 1:92–93)—in relatively close proximity to God’s “angels” (*malā’ikah*). Although Gabriel and Michael are not unequivocally identified as angels, their traditional status as archangels in the pre-Qur’anic tradition (see, e.g., Schäfer 1975, 20–23; cf. also Mathews 2009, 44–45, ll. 329–330) makes it likely that Q 2:98 and 66:4 are picking out one or two particularly prominent or high-ranking angels. See also Blankinship 2020, 79–80.

3 The names *hārūt* and *mārūt* are ultimately derived from those of two of the seven “bounteous immortals” created or fathered by Ahura Mazda according to Zoroastrian tradition (*KU* 146–148; *QP* 195).

in Ethiopic and in Epigraphic South Arabian, moreover, the underlying root *l-'k* of the noun *mal'ak* or *ml'k* continues to be productive (e.g., *la'aka* or *l'k*, “to send”; see Leslau 1991, 303, and Robin 2019b, 121, as well as Burge 2008, 52–53). Boneschi has assembled extra-Qur'anic evidence showing that various derivatives of the Arabic root *'l-k* were indeed used to denote the sending and conveying of messages (Boneschi 1945, 108); but the Qur'an itself does not contain any other derivatives of either the roots *'l-k* or *l-'k*. It is in fact doubtful that Muhammad's audience would have associated the word *malak* with either of these two roots: as Burge has astutely noted, the Qur'an finds it necessary to spell out that God has made the angels messengers (*rusul*; Q 22:75, 35:1; cf. also 2:98), which indicates that the word *malak* did not reliably convey the idea of messengership to the Qur'anic addressees (Burge 2008, 53).<sup>4</sup> In sum, Qur'anic *malak* is distinguished from its non-Arabic cognates and parallels by being confined to angels as a species of supernatural agents and intermediaries and by lacking a readily apparent Arabic derivational context (see also Bowersock 2013, 94).

The preceding observations are best explained by positing that *malak* either entered the Arabic language as a loanword or that the inner-Arabic derivation proposed by Boneschi ceased to be an item of common linguistic awareness once the word *malak* had been assigned the rather specific role of functioning as an Arabic equivalent of Hebrew *mal'āk*, Greek *angelos*, Syriac *mal'akā*, or Ethiopic *mal'ak*. Both scenarios differ from the development of a word like the native Arabic verb → *kafara*, which under the impact of its non-Arabic cognates underwent a secondary process of semantic expansion from ingratitude to repudiation yet did not shed its original association with ingratitude. In any case, the adoption of the word *malak* into Arabic in the sense of a celestial messenger most likely occurred well before the Qur'an, since the plural *malā'ik* is found in a potentially authentic poem attributed to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt (Schulthess 1911a, no. 25:16.32, corresponding to al-Saṭlī 1974, no. 10:16.32; on the poem, see also Seidensticker 2011b, 47–49).<sup>5</sup> It is pertinent in this regard that in post-Biblical Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic *mal'ak*, *angelos*, and *mal'akā* had all become increasingly limited to their theological sense of emissaries sent by God, i.e., to angels in the conventional sense (e.g., Bowersock 2013, 93; see, for instance, *DTTM* 786, *DJBA* 676–677, and *DJPA* 308). It stands to reason that when Jewish or Christian ideas and narratives began to be articulated in Old Arabic, this progressive semantic confinement was also imprinted on Arabic *malak*, whether or not it had previously carried the wider meaning of “messenger” in general.

**The general nature of Qur'anic angels.** Angels are created by God (Q 37:150, 43:19; see also 35:1). Their usual dwelling place would seem to be in heaven (Q 53:26: *wa-kam*

4 Post-Qur'anic lexicographers, however, do recognise that the noun *malak* is semantically connected with the dispatching of a messenger or a message. Thus, al-Azharī maintains that *malak* was contracted from *mal'ak* (which is itself assumed to go back to *ma'lak*, as also maintained by Boneschi), and he explains that the root *'l-k* connotes the sending of a message (*al-ma'lukah* = *al-risālah*; see al-Azharī [1964–1976], 10:273, 370, and cf. *AEL* 81–82 and Boneschi 1945, 108). For late (fourteenth-century) evidence of an awareness that the root of *malak* is really *l-'k*, see al-Fayyūmī [1977?], 19, glossing *la'aka* as *arsala* (noted in *AEL* 3007). Bowersock maintains that there was an Arabic verb *al'aka*, “to send,” but does not provide a reference (Bowersock 2013, 93). See also Boneschi 1945, 109, who considers *al'aka* to be a denominative verb derived from *mal'ak*. According to *AEL* 81, *al'iknī* means “be my messenger, bear my message” (and also, according to some, “send me”). On the etymology of *malak*, see also Burge 2008, 51–52.

5 Note that v. 36 of the poem calls the angels by the entirely un-Qur'anic expression “disciples of the deity” (*talāmīdhāt al-ilāh*), which supports authenticity.

*min malakin fī l-samāwāti . . .*, “How many angels are there in the heavens . . .”),<sup>6</sup> and they can be invisible to the eyes of ordinary mortals (Q 9:26.40, 33:9).<sup>7</sup> God has equipped the angels with wings, “two, three, or four at a time” (Q 35:1: *mathnā wa-thulātha wa-rubā’a*; on various interpretive questions raised by this statement, see Burge 2008, 58–62). The trait of possessing wings, enabling the angels to “circulate between the world below and the world above” (Robin 2019b, 70), reflects a widespread feature of late antique Christian iconography (Martin 2001) that ties in with references to winged seraphim or cherubim in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ez 10 and Isa 6:2; see *DTEK* 121), even if the New Testament itself does not represent angels as winged (e.g., Matt 28:2–3).<sup>8</sup> The angels’ wings are also mentioned in a poem attributed to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt referenced above (Schulthess 1911a, no. 25:35–37 = al-Saṭlī 1974, no. 10:35–37). This confirms that this particular aspect of post-Biblical Christian angelology, like others, may be assumed to have been current in the Qur’anic milieu.

Despite their wings and their potential invisibility, the default appearance of angels on earth is humanoid: “had we made him”—namely, the Qur’anic Messenger—“an angel, we would have made him a man (*rajul*),” i.e., endowed him with the appearance of an ordinary human, Q 6:9 affirms. Perhaps one is to understand that angels can exist in two different states of aggregation, as it were: a celestial one involving wings and invisibility to the human eye, and a state of manifestation to humans, in which they appear by and large like humans themselves (see also Burge 2012, 57). It is worth highlighting that Q 6:9, by virtue of employing the word *rajul*, additionally implies that angels are male. This corresponds to Biblical assumptions (e.g., Matt 16:5) and helps make sense of the Qur’anic polemic against belief in female angels (Q 17:40, 37:149–153, 43:16–19, 53:27–28; see also *DTEK* 102). A particular aspect of the angels’ humanoid appearance—namely, their possession of hands—is corroborated by Q 6:93, according to which the angels “stretch out their hands” for the wrongdoers when these latter are in the throes of death (*DTEK* 121). Moreover, it must be on account of the angels’ anthropomorphic appearance that Abraham initially mistook the divinely sent “messengers” (*rusul*) dispatched to him for ordinary humans, only realising their supernatural—i.e., angelic—status when his guests declined the food offered to them (Q 11:69–70 and 51:26–28; see below and Sinai 2020a, 282–283).<sup>9</sup> The generally humanoid shape of Qur’anic angels also emerges from the fact that the female friends of Joseph’s Egyptian mistress so admire him that they exclaim, “This is no human but a noble angel!” (Q 12:31).

The Qur’anic scene recounting Abraham’s fearful realisation that he is hosting angelic guests is underpinned by the general assumption that celestial beings like angels do not ingest material nourishment, a view already expressed in Judg 13:16 and Tob 12:19 (Reynolds 2010a, 94–95; see also Goodman 1986 and Kugel 1998, 342–345). Elsewhere, too, the Qur’an reflects the notion that eating food is a trait of human agents, as opposed to divine

6 See also the counterfactual in Q 17:95: “If there were angels on earth, walking about at peace . . .”

7 These references hinge on the plausible assumption that the “hosts invisible to you” (*junūd lam tarawhā*) whose assistance in battle is here retrospectively announced to the addressees are in fact angels. This seems very likely in view of the parallels Q 3:124–125 and 8:9.12. See also the discussion in *DTEK* 91–92.

8 On the Biblical cherubim and seraphim, see *TDOT* 7:307–319 and 14:223–228. Note also that according to Dan 9:21, Gabriel is capable of flight.

9 See also Q 19:17, describing how “the spirit,” on whom see below, appeared to Mary in the shape of a human, *bashar*.



or angelic ones (Q 5:75, 21:7–8, 25:7.20). That angels do not require nourishment does not however imply that the Qur’an understands them to be immaterial, even if there is ancient precedent for such a view.<sup>10</sup> After all, the Qur’an does not seem to consider even God himself to be immaterial in the strict sense of not being located in space (→ *allāh*).<sup>11</sup> But the Qur’an does hint that angels live forever: according to Q 7:20, the devil promises Adam and Eve that eating from the prohibited tree will might make them “angels or immortal” (*an takūnā malakayni aw takūnā mina l-khālidīn*; → *khalada*; cf. Luke 20:36).<sup>12</sup> The material constitution of angels is nowhere specified, but the Qur’an does say that the jinn, and the jinni Iblīs or the devil (*al-shayṭān*) in particular, were created from fire (Q 7:12, 15:27, 38:76, 55:15; → *jinn* and → *shayṭān*). While the angels and the jinn must not be conflated, it is possible that the Qur’anic understanding of the angels, too, is that of beings fashioned from a particularly subtle kind of matter (*DTEK* 120–121). That the angels are made of light rather than fire, as posited by the post-Qur’anic Islamic tradition, is not supported by any unequivocal scriptural prooftexts (Chabbi 2020, 207), although it would perhaps accord with the fact that a number of Qur’anic passages imply that God himself is luminous (→ *allāh*).

**Are angels capable of disobeying God?** A number of Qur’anic passages stress that angels in general, and the angelic guardians of hell in particular (on whom see below), “do as they are commanded” (Q 16:50, 66:6: *yaf’alūna mā yu’marūn*; see also 21:27: *wa-hum bi-amrihi ya’malūn*),<sup>13</sup> “do not disobey God” (Q 66:6: *lā ya’ṣūna llāha*), and “do not deem themselves above serving him” (Q 7:206, 21:19: *lā yastakbirūna ‘an ‘ibādātihi*; see also 16:49: *wa-hum lā yastakbirūn*). Angels, it appears, are invariably obedient to God (see already al-Māturīdī 2005–2007, 1:83; cf. Chittick 1989, 312) and from this perspective lack free will.<sup>14</sup> Unsurprisingly, when God orders the angels to prostrate to the newly created Adam, they obey (e.g., Q 7:11, 15:28–30), the only exception being Iblīs or the devil, who is however explicitly identified as a jinni (Q 18:50) rather than an angel (→ *shayṭān*). It may be objected that the prooftexts just collated presuppose that it must at least be conceivable for angels to disobey God, since otherwise there would be no reason to praise them for obeying him (al-Māturīdī 2005–2007, 1:84). But the point of underscoring the angels’ unflinching obedience to God may be less to exalt their moral merit for its own sake than to hold them up as exemplars to be emulated by the Qur’an’s human addressees (cf. *DTEK* 104), despite the latter’s ingrained capability for evil. The Qur’an, in any case, elides any reference to fallen or disobedient angels. This is exemplified not only by casting Iblīs or the devil as a jinni but also by Q 2:102 (see also under → *jinn*), where the ancient trope of illicit angelic instruction in sorcery (cf. *1 Enoch* 7:1, 8:3 = Charlesworth 1983, 16) is reformulated

10 For a link between independence from physical nourishment and incorporeality, see, e.g., *Testament of Abraham* (Recension A) 4:9, according to which “all the heavenly spirits are incorporeal and neither eat nor drink” (Charlesworth 1983, 884; the passage is cited in Goodman 1986, 170).

11 That there is no necessary contradiction between corporeality and having no need of food is illustrated by early Muslim thinkers like Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, who understood God to be a body yet devoid of digestive functions (van Ess 2018, 611).

12 It is not obvious how this is to be reconciled with Q 28:88 and 55:26–27, according to which everything other than God is perishable or will perish. But one might perhaps draw a distinction between being perishable in principle and perishing in fact.

13 I assume that Q 16:50 applies only to the angels, mentioned at the end of the preceding verse.

14 For a different reading, see Mir 1987, 14: angels “possess freedom of the will, but their nature is so pure and good—they are ‘the pure ones’ (56:79)—that they do not disobey God (66:6).”



in such a way as to relegate the angels to mere instruments by which God orchestrates a moral testing or trial (*fitnah*; → *fatana*) of humans, thereby eliminating any suggestion of angelic insubordination or rebellion (*QP* 194).

The impression that the Qur’anic angels are not autonomous moral subjects in their own right but mere instruments of God is also heightened by the fact that they can on occasion abruptly drop out of Qur’anic narratives. Thus, in the Medinan retelling of the stories of Zechariah and Mary, the protagonists are first addressed by angels but then go on to address God directly (Q 3:39–41, 3:45–47; *DTEK* 82). Similarly, some Qur’anic retellings of the story of Lot attribute the destruction of his people and Lot’s deliverance to God’s angelic emissaries (Q 15:58–60, 29:32–34, 51:32–35), while others identify God himself as the agent (Q 7:83–84, 21:74, 26:170–173, 27:57, 37:134–136, 54:34; *DTEK* 81).<sup>15</sup> The act of taking a human from life (verb: *tawaffā*) is also interchangeably attributed to angels and to God himself (see below).<sup>16</sup>

Despite the existence of Jewish and Christian lore about fallen or disobedient angels, the Qur’an’s presentation of the angels as invariably obedient to God is not without precedent. *Genesis Rabbah* contains a dictum to the effect that angels are not “governed by the inclination to evil (*yēšer ha-ra’*)” (*Gen. Rab.* 48:11), and Augustine of Hippo maintains that those angels who remained innocent of the devil’s primordial rebellion against God were rewarded with “a certain knowledge by which they would be secure of their eternal stability and their assurance of never falling” (Muehlberger 2013, 43–56, citing 44 = Augustine, *Enchiridion* 9:28).<sup>17</sup> In addition, Jacob of Sarug describes God’s creation of the angelic hosts singing his praise in a way that makes them seem almost like liturgical automata (Mathews 2009, 30–33, ll. 199–204, ll. 211–212, ll. 216–220). For comparative purposes, the Qur’an may be viewed as carrying a quasi-Augustinian vision of the angels’ moral fixity back to the very moment of their creation, by removing even the idea of a primordial act of angelic rebellion. It is admittedly unlikely that the Qur’an is directly or indirectly dependent on Augustine; but the parallels just adduced illustrate that the position that angels are inherently incapable of falling away from God was an available option to late antique thinkers, thus further increasing the probability that this is indeed what the Qur’an is affirming in the verses cited above. Against this background, the reservations that the angels voice against God’s plan to create man, whom they correctly predict to wreak corruption (→ *afsada*) on earth and to shed blood (Q 2:30), may be understood as a narrative reflection on the merits of two different classes of beings: one reliably virtuous and devoted to serving God yet devoid of free will, the other endowed with the dual capacity for good and evil. The underlying theme of rivalry between angels and humans

15 The same alternation is already observable in Biblical narrative (*EJ* 2:150; *TDOT* 8:319–320). For example, Hagar is found and addressed by the “angel of the Lord” (Gen 16:7–12), but she then responds by addressing God himself (Gen 16:13); and initially it is the “angel of the Lord” who appears to Moses (Exod 3:2), while in what follows Moses converses with God (Exod 3:4 ff.). See also Judg 6:11–18 or Gen 22:1.11.15.

16 Commenting on the latter case, Welch invokes the concept of “corporate personality,” developed in Biblical studies, which he proposes to apply to “several cases in which certain actions for which God is held to be ultimately responsible are sometimes said to be performed by certain of his agents, while in other contexts the same actions are said to be performed by God himself” (Welch 1977, 192; see also Zahniser 1989, 19, noting Q 3:45–47 as a case in point).

17 A different theoretisation of angels is articulated by Evagrius of Pontus, who understood “all rational beings—angels, demons, and human beings—as inherently impermanent, mutable in their nature” (Muehlberger 2013, 31; see in more detail *ibid.*, 32–43).

is also present in rabbinic literature, where the angels can similarly feature as denouncers of human sinfulness (Schäfer 1975).

**The angelic liturgy and angelic intercession.** The roles carried out by angels in the Qur'an are multifarious. To begin with, the angels are continuously engaged in performing a heavenly liturgy, indefatigably singing God's praise and prostrating to him (Q 2:30, 7:206, 13:13, 17:49, 21:20, 39:75, 40:7, 41:38, 42:5). Qur'anic references to the heavenly worship of the angels are ultimately continuous with Isaiah's vision of seraphim encircling God on his throne and glorifying him (Isa 6:1–3; cf. Rev 4:8). Isa 6:3—according to which the angels exclaim, “Holy (*qādôš*, Peshitta: *qaddîsh*), holy, holy is the Lord of hosts”—is to be compared in particular with Q 2:30, according to which the angels “declare God to be holy” (verb: *qaddasa li*-).<sup>18</sup> The triple acclamation from Isa 6:3 is furthermore reflected in the divine epithet *quddûs*, “holy,” employed in Q 59:23 and 62:1 (see under → *qaddasa*). The celestial worship of the angels clearly forms a model for human worship of God (*DTEK* 104).<sup>19</sup> The Qur'an here reflects the idea, current in late antique Judaism and Christianity, that human worshippers imitate an angelic liturgy or even that they are invisibly joined by angels (Muehlberger 2013, 176–202; Ahuvia 2021, 118–142).

Q 42:5 maintains that the angelic liturgy incorporates the angels' pleading with God to forgive “those on earth” (*yastaghfirûna li-man fî l-arḍi*). A similar statement is found in Q 40:7, according to which the angels carrying and surrounding God's throne (*'arsh*) intercede on behalf of the believers (*yastaghfirûna li-lladhîna âmanû*). This is followed by an extensive quotation of the angels' prayer for divine forgiveness (Q 40:7–9; see O'Shaughnessy 1973, 206–207, and under → *malik*). The idea of angelic intercession on behalf of humans, which the Qur'an expresses by the verb *istaghfara*, has ancient precursors (e.g., Job 33:23–24, 1 *Enoch* 40:5–6 = Charlesworth 1983, 32, and *Testament of Dan* 6:2 = Charlesworth 1983, 810; see *DTEK* 97 and Schäfer 1975, 28–30 and 62–64). From early on, however, the Qur'anic proclamations are committed to denying that on the day of judgement anyone might benefit from intercession (*shafā'ah*, verb: *shafā'a*) with God (e.g., Q 2:123, 254, 40:18, 74:48; on *shafā'ah* in the Qur'an and early poetry, see generally Riad 1981). This stance responds to the fact that the Qur'an's pagan opponents, the “associators” (*alladhîna ashrakû, al-mushrikûn*), cast the intermediary deities worshipped by them as intercessors with the supreme deity Allāh (see under → *ashraka*). To this, the Qur'an opposes the claim that God alone is humans' sovereign judge and the only true intercessor (*shafī'*; Q 6:51, 70, 32:4): no one will have his or her eschatological sentence mitigated because God's verdict is swayed by the intervention of some third party.

It follows that when Q 40:7–9 or 42:5 portray the angels as pleading on behalf of humans, this should not be understood to credit them with any ability to influence and change God's decisions. Q 53:26 says as much by insisting that angelic intercession is only effective if undertaken with divine permission: “How many angels are there in the heavens whose intercession is of no benefit (*lā tughnī shafā'atuhum shay'an*) until God gives permission (*ya'dhana*) to whom he wills and pleases.” Other verses (Q 2:255, 10:3, 20:109, 34:23) also collocate the root *sh-f-'* with the verb *adhina*, “to permit,” or with the noun *idhn*, “permission” (cf. also Q 19:87 together with Riad 1981, 48–49). Like Q 53:26, 40:7 applies this general

18 For examples of how Isa 6:2–3 resonate in a particular late antique Syriac text (namely, Jacob of Sarug's homily on creation), see Mathews 2009, 32–33, l. 219, and *ibid.*, 38–44, ll. 279–285 and ll. 301–302.

19 For a direct juxtaposition of human and angelic worship, see Q 41:37–38.

line of thought specifically to angels, by maintaining that the latter only intercede on behalf of the believers, to whose eschatological deliverance God is presumably committed anyway. The angels' intercession is therefore above all a manifestation of their conformity with God's will (*DTEK* 96–97), and when God permits them to intercede on behalf of someone this presumably reflects that the individual in question has to all intents and purposes already passed divine scrutiny (similarly Bowker 1966, 72). This also emerges from Q 21:28, according to which the angels (whom v. 26 calls God's "honoured servants") "only intercede on behalf of those with whom he"—i.e., God—"is pleased" (*wa-lā yashfa'ūna illā li-mani rtadā*). In general, the angels surrounding God serve as a sort of celestial echo chamber of the deity (*DTEK* 95), as when they are said to join God in saying blessings over (→ *ṣallā 'alā*) the believers and the Prophet (Q 33:43.56) and in cursing unrepentant unbelievers and apostates (Q 2:161, 3:87).<sup>20</sup> The angels, in other words, "are not actors, only extras"; they merely form "an impersonal choir similar to classical theatre" (*DTEK* 95 and 85). Plausibly, the Qur'anic insistence that angelic intercession is subject to divine permission or the like reflects "a situation in which many people did believe in the efficacy of angelic intercession," to which the Qur'an reacted by seeking "to control that belief within the sovereignty of God" (Bowker 1966, 71). But as Bowker also shows, the Qur'anic tendency to control and restrict intercession is itself continuous with earlier tendencies.<sup>21</sup>

**Eschatological functions of the angels.** All of the Qur'anic references to a celestial worship of the angels just surveyed are later Meccan or Medinan, perhaps reflecting the emergence or consolidation among Muhammad's followers of new forms of communal worship that Neuwirth conjectures to have occurred during the later Meccan period (*SPMC* 149–153 and 175–176; Neuwirth 2010, 459–471). By contrast, in the early Meccan surahs the angels are primarily mentioned in eschatological contexts, in keeping with the early Qur'an's predominant kerygmatic concern with the resurrection and the last judgement (see generally Sinai 2017a). Thus, Q 89:22 affirms that at the end of the world "your<sup>s</sup> Lord and the angels will come in ranks" (*wa-jā'a rabbuka wa-l-malaku ṣaffan ṣaffā*). This eschatological arrival of the angels may be contrasted with the New Testamental prediction of the coming of the "Son of Man," rather than God the Father, together with the angels (Matt 16:27; *DTEK* 103 and Sinai 2017a, 246, n. 109; cf. also Dan 7:9–10). The angels' eschatological standing in rows is also mentioned in two other early Meccan passages, both of which likewise employ derivatives of the root *ṣ-ḥ-ḥ*, Q 37:1–3 (see *HCI* 88–89) and 78:38.<sup>22</sup> It deserves to be noted that Q 78:38 names the angels together with "the spirit" (→ *al-rūḥ*), a pairing also found in the early Meccan passages 70:4 and 97:4 (and once more in the later Meccan verse 16:2). The angels' eschatological appearance is further alluded to in a number of later Meccan and Medinan verses (Q 2:210, 6:158, 16:33, 25:22.25, 34:40, 69:17). In one case the motif combines with the theme of the angels' worship around the divine throne (Q 39:75). As emerges from Q 2:210, 6:8.158, 16:33, and 15:7–8, the end of the world is in fact the only

20 For two other passages in which the angels are performing the same echoing role, see Q 3:18 and 4:166.

21 Bowker establishes that attempts to restrict the power of intercession with God, to subject intercession to God's ultimate sovereignty, or to deny it altogether can already be glimpsed in Jewish literature (Bowker 1966, 75–82; see, e.g., 4 *Ezra* 7:102–115 = Charlesworth 1983, 540–541 and *y. Bēr.* 9:1, 13a = ed. and trans. Guggenheimer, 614). This leads Bowker to conclude that "the ambiguity in the Qur'an about intercession is not simply the result of Muhammad attempting to counteract a well-established belief and practice" but is "also the result of a hesitation which already existed" (Bowker 1966, 82). I owe my awareness of Bowker's article to Rachel Dryden.

22 The root *ṣ-ḥ-ḥ* can have martial connotations, as demonstrated by its occurrence in the Medinan verse Q 61:4, and this may also be an aspect of the scene sketched in 37:1–3, 78:38, and 89:22.

occasion on which humans may expect a public sighting of angels, as opposed to the private encounters experienced by individuals like Abraham or Mary.

The angels do not only surround God on the occasion of the final judgement but also perform a number of auxiliary tasks. The involvement of angels with the posthumous fate of humans begins with the latter's death, for it is angels who are often said to take individuals from life (→ *tawaffā*; see Q 4:97, 6:61.93, 7:37, 8:50, 16:28.32, 32:11, 47:27; see *DTEK* 104–110 and also *KK* 142),<sup>23</sup> even if the same act is also frequently ascribed to God himself (Q 3:55.193, 5:117, 6:60, 7:126, 10:46.104, 12:101, 13:40, 16:70, 39:42, 40:77) and once to death in the abstract (Q 4:15). The general idea resembles a Talmudic passage according to which deceased humans, both righteous and sinful, will be met by several contingents of ministering angels or of “angels of destruction” (*b. Kētub.* 104a; *DTEK* 113). Following the resurrection, humans are presented before the divine judge by an usher or *sā'iq*, who may also be assumed to be an angel (Q 50:21; see *DTEK* 109).<sup>24</sup> After the righteous have passed muster, it is angels who welcome them to paradise (Q 16:32, 21:103, 39:73) and attend to them therein (Q 13:23). Moreover, Eichler plausibly argues that the “men” (*rijāl*) who according to Q 7:46 are positioned on the barrier between the saved and the damned are in fact angelic guardians controlling access to paradise (*DTEK* 113–114). And just as there are “keepers” (*khazanah*) of paradise (Q 39:73), so there are keepers of hell (Q 39:71, 40:49, 67:8; see also *DTEK* 113). That Medinan verses explicitly identify the guardians of hell as angels (Q 66:6, 74:30–31; on the latter, see Sinai 2017c, 73–75), rather than demons, is notable (*DTEK* 110) and surely serves to underscore that no domain is outside God's control. References to God's angelic prison guards and executioners also permit the recounting of exchanges between them and the damned, which highlight the hopelessness and guilt of those consigned to hell (see Q 39:71–72, 40:49–50, 67:8–11; *DTEK* 111).<sup>25</sup>

**The angels as agents of surveillance.** Another important, and ultimately also eschatologically oriented, role of Qur'anic angels is to aid God's comprehensive monitoring and recording of all human actions, good or bad. When serving in this capacity, the angels are sometimes described with the participle *ḥāfiẓ*, “watcher” (plural: *ḥafazah* or *ḥāfiẓūn*; see Q 6:61, 82:10, 86:4). The corresponding verb *ḥafīẓa*, “to watch over s.o.,” occurs in Q 13:11, according to which everyone is attended by “followers in front of him and after him, who watch over him by God's command” (*lahu mu'aqqibātun min bayni yadayhi wamin khalfihi yaḥfazūnahu min amri llāhi*). It is vital to underscore that the Qur'an's angelic watchers are not guardian angels of the kind described, for instance, in Ps 91:11–12 (see Schäfer 1975, 27–28 and 60–62) but rather “celestial police officers” who “continuously minute the behaviour of those humans with whose surveillance they have been tasked” (*DTEK* 87). As Q 10:21 puts it, “our messengers record in writing all of your schemes” (*inna*

23 The only passage that explicitly mentions an “angel of death” (*malak al-mawt*) is Q 32:11; all other verses attribute the taking of humans from life to an indistinct plurality of angels or divinely commissioned “messengers” (*rusul*).

24 Cf. Q 39:71.73, according to which the repudiators and the God-fearing “are driven” (*sīqa*) to hell or to paradise. Q 19:86 has the active *nasūqu*, in the divine voice (“we drive the evildoers to hell”). See also Q 75:30 with the corresponding verbal noun *masāq*.

25 Also relevant is Q 43:77, where the inhabitants of hell address a figure called *mālik*. Given the material surveyed in the main text, this must also be an angel. The verse presupposes that *mālik* is subordinate to the divine “Lord”; as Eichler notes, he is “not an independent ruler of hell, but rather a servant of Allāh” (*DTEK* 111). Lange 2016b, 89–91, proposes to read *yā-malaku* (“O angel!”) rather than *yā-māliku*. More elusive is Q 96:18, where the divine voice threatens the sinner with calling forth *al-zabāniyah* (see *CDKA* 120 and Lange 2016b; cf. the early poetic parallel in *EAP* 1:97–98 and 100, which is however unlikely to be pre-Qur'anic).

*rusulanā yaktubūna mā tamkurūn*; see also Q 43:80). The idea is fully attested already in the early Meccan period. Thus, according to Q 86:4 everyone has a watcher appointed over him or her (*in kullu nafsin lammā ‘alayhā ḥāfiẓ*), while Q 82:10–12 elaborates: “Set up over you<sup>P</sup> are watchers (*wa-inna ‘alaykum la-ḥāfiẓīn*), // noble ones, recording in writing (*kirāman kātibīn*), // who know what you are doing.”<sup>26</sup> Q 50:17–18, which narrowly falls outside the early Meccan surahs, depicts how a human cannot utter a word “without a ready observer being by his side,” probably to record everything in preparation for the final judgement (v. 18: *mā yalfiẓu min qawlin illā ladayhi raqībun ‘atīd*). It stands to reason that the universal register book that will be consulted at the eschatological judgement and the individual register books that will be handed over to each human (see under → *kitāb*) are the products of the activity of these recording angels (DTEK 89). It is noteworthy that at Q 50:4 the divine voice claims to be in possession of a “watchful record” (*kitāb ḥāfiẓ*), thus employing the same root ḥ-f-ẓ that also describes God’s surveillance angels.

The Qur’anic surveillance angels bear a general resemblance to the rabbinic idea that every person is accompanied by two ministering angels, one good and one evil (*b. Shabb. 119b*; *b. Bēr. 60b*, both of which are already noted in DTEK 87–88; see also Urbach 1987, 1:159–161, and Schäfer 1975, 61–62). Although these angels do not invariably seem to be responsible for recording an individual’s deeds, two Talmudic dicta state that they will “testify against” a person (*b. Hag. 16a* and *b. Ta’an. 11a*).<sup>27</sup> The idea that angels are active as divinely commissioned informers is also found in *1 Enoch* 100:10 (Charlesworth 1983, 81–82) and *Jubilees* (= VanderKam 1989) 4:6. *1 Enoch* 104:7 (Charlesworth 1983, 85) specifically threatens the sinners that “all your sins are being written down every day” (similarly *1 Enoch* 98:7–8 = Charlesworth 1983, 78–79; see Schäfer 1975, 30–31, who also references *Jubilees* = VanderKam 1989, ch. 30:20–22).

**An angelic or quasi-angelic being as the conveyor of the Qur’anic revelations (e.g., Q 81:19).** The Qur’anic proclamations are beholden to the by then centuries-old assumption that divine revelations are relayed by angelic or quasi-angelic intermediaries (a view exemplified, for instance, by *Jubilees* = VanderKam 1989, ch. 1:27 or Gal 3:19; see *EJ* 2:154). Thus, already the early Meccan verse Q 81:19 describes Muhammad’s revelatory pronouncements as “the speech of a noble messenger (*rasūl karīm*).” This likely refers to a superhuman intermediary rather than to Muhammad, given that Q 81:20–21 characterise the “noble messenger” as being close to the incumbent of the heavenly throne (v. 20: *dhī quwwatin ‘inda dhī l-‘arshi makīn*, “endowed with power near the one on the throne, firmly established”) and as enjoying special authority in the celestial realm (v. 21: *mutā‘in thamma amin*, “obeyed there, trustworthy”). That the Qur’an occasionally applies the term *rasūl* to angelic rather than human messengers was already noted above, and the profile emerging from Q 81:19–21 certainly fits a superhuman being much better than Muhammad (Bell 1934, 149–150; Fossum 1993, 149; *PP* 301). Muhammad himself, it would seem, is introduced

26 In line with the ascribability of angelic actions to God himself that was noted earlier, other verses cast God himself as exercising direct oversight over all humans (e.g., Q 11:57, 42:6, 84:15). The same applies to the act of recording human actions in writing: “We record in writing what they have accomplished and the deeds they have left behind (*naktubu mā qaddamū wa-āthārahum*), and we have added everything up in a clear ledger (*wa-kulla shay’in aḥṣaynāhu fī imāmin mubīn*),” Q 36:12 says. See also Q 78:29 (*wa-kulla shay’in aḥṣaynāhu kitābā*).

27 I owe my awareness of these passages to Urbach 1987, 1:161 and 2:756–757. Interestingly, both statements are followed by an alternative view according to which it is the limbs of a deceased that will testify against him, an idea that also has Qur’anic parallels (Q 24:24, 36:65, 41:20–23).



only in Q 81:22, where the discourse shifts to “your<sup>P</sup> companion” (*ṣāhibukum*) and then continues by attributing to this companion a vision of the angelic emissary mentioned in vv. 19–21 (v. 23: *wa-la qad ra’āhu bi-l-uḥuqī l-mubīn*, “he saw him on the clear horizon”).<sup>28</sup> Such a quasi-angelic reading of Q 81:19 is also substantiated by the later Meccan statement Q 42:51, according to which one of the manners in which God communicates with humans is by “sending a messenger,” who is then with God’s permission going to “convey” to the human recipient at hand “what he [God] wills” (*aw yursila rasūlan fa-yūḥiya bi-idhmihi mā yashā’u*).<sup>29</sup>

Other verses implying a quasi-angelic conveyor of God’s revelations call the mediating figure “the spirit” (→ *al-rūḥ*). Thus, the early Meccan passage Q 26:192–195 and the later Meccan verse Q 16:102 declare that the Qur’anic proclamations are “brought down” (→ *nazzala* or *nazala bi-*) by “the trustworthy spirit” (Q 26:193: *al-rūḥ al-amīn*) or “the holy spirit” (Q 16:102: *rūḥ al-quḍus*). Moreover, a closely interrelated triplet of verses affirms that God causes “the spirit” to descend upon whom he wills or that God has inspired the Qur’anic addressee with “a spirit” (Q 16:2, 40:15, and 42:52; see in more detail under → *amr*). It deserves to be noted that one of these references to the spirit, in Q 42:52, comes directly after the allusion to God’s communication of revelations by means of a superhuman *rasūl* or emissary in Q 42:51 that was cited above. In the developed prophetology of the later Meccan period, the superhuman “emissary” conveying God’s revelations to Muhammad, who appears as early as Q 81:19, is therefore identified as “the spirit.” Determining the nature of the Qur’anic spirit is not straightforward (see in more detail under → *rūḥ*), since some passages seem to depict the spirit as an aspect or quality of God himself that is “breathed” into Adam (Q 15:29, 32:9, 38:72) and Mary (Q 21:91, 66:12), while elsewhere the spirit appears to be an independent figure acting in conjunction with the angels (Q 70:4, 78:38, 97:4). In any case, whatever the precise relationship of the spirit to God, it is important to note that the spirit is never expressly said to be one of the angels (Rahman 2009, 95–96). The closest the Qur’an comes to asserting specifically *angelic* mediation of Muhammad’s revelations is the Medinan verse Q 2:97, which identifies the one who “brings down” revelations upon Muhammad’s heart (*nazzalahu ‘alā qalbika*) as Gabriel, whom Jews and Christians traditionally consider to be an archangel.<sup>30</sup>

28 The problem of identifying the “noble messenger” of Q 81:19 is admittedly complicated by the fact that the verse has a doublet in Q 69:40, which also runs *innahu la-qawlu rasūlin karīm*. But in Q 69:40, the statement that “it”—perhaps the Qur’anic revelations in general—is the “speech of a noble messenger” contrasts with a denial that “it” is the speech of a poet (*shā’ir*) or of a soothsayer (*kāhīn*); since poets and soothsayers are human figures, Q 69:40 is therefore most naturally read as applying the descriptor “noble messenger” to a human rather than to an angel. Moreover, in Q 44:17, too, the expression “noble messenger” (*rasūl karīm*) is clearly attached to a human figure, Moses (Bell 1934, 150, n. 10; Welch 1983, 26). This human understanding of the term “noble messenger” cannot, however, be easily carried over to Q 81:19, due to the characterisation put forward in vv. 20 and 21 (against Williams 2008, 134–136). Bell and Welch seek to neutralise the difficulty that vv. 20–21 pose to a human identification of the “noble messenger” in v. 19 by questioning that vv. 20–21 are original to their context, but the text does not exhibit any evident redactional seams (see Bell 1934, 150, n. 10, and Welch 1983, 26). There is little choice, then, but to conclude, however unsatisfactorily, that Q 81:19 and 69:40 employ an identical phrase in different meanings, the one to refer to an angelic messenger, the other to a human one.

29 Q 42:51 enumerates a total of three different modalities of revelation: God may speak to a human by “conveying” something to him (*wahyan*) or “from behind a veil” or, finally, by having recourse to a mediating messenger.

30 That the spirit is at least functionally comparable to the angels also emerges from comparing Q 19:17 (God causes his spirit to appear to Mary) with the later Medinan retelling of the scene in Q 3:42 ff., where Mary is addressed by “the angels.”



**Other functions of Qur’anic angels.** The remaining angelic functions can be treated more summarily. The early Meccan verse Q 97:4 alludes to a special night during which “the angels and the spirit” descend to earth in order to transmit God’s decrees or commands to the created order (→ *amr*). In addition, angels are said to fortify believers in this world (Q 41:30–32). A number of Medinan verses remind the believers in general or Muhammad in particular of angelic assistance in battle or an otherwise dangerous situation (Q 3:124–127, 8:9–14, 9:26.40, 33:9). Some of these verses explicitly underscore the angels’ invisibility (Q 9:26.40, 33:9) while others cast the angels’ impact in psychological terms: “God only intended it [the preceding promise about angelic assistance] to serve as good tidings ± <for you<sup>p</sup>> and so that your hearts might ± <thereby> come to be secure (*iṭma’anna*)” (Q 3:126, 8:10: *wa-mā ja’alahu llāhu illā bushrā* ± <lakum> *wa-li-taṭma’inna qulūbukum* ± <bihi>). It can accordingly be argued that the point of the angelic assistance proclaimed in the verses just listed, too, is to engender inner fortification of the believers rather than to produce an outwardly verifiable impact (*DTEK* 91–93, who also notes 2 Kgs 6:16–17 as a possible parallel). Moreover, God has in the past dispatched angels in order to transmit glad tidings (*bushrā*, verb: *bashshara*) to Abraham (e.g., Q 11:69, 29:31), Zechariah (Q 3:39), and Mary (Q 3:45) and also to punish the sinful compatriots of Lot (e.g., Q 15:57–77, 29:31–35, 51:31–37). Another Qur’anic allusion to a past angelophany is found in Q 2:248, according to which the Israelites were promised by an anonymous prophet (presumably corresponding to the Biblical Samuel) that the ark (*al-tābūt*) they would be given was to be carried by angels (see *DTEK* 82, speculating that this may reflect the representation of cherubim on the ark of the covenant according to Exod 25:18–20 and 37:7–9).

**The Qur’anic pagans and angels.** Qur’anic polemics against Muhammad’s pagan adversaries, the so-called “associators” (*al-mushrikūn*, *alladhīna ashrakū*), imply that they too deployed the concept of angels. Specifically, they appear to have cast some of their deities as female angels (Q 17:40, 34:40–41, 37:150, 43:19, 53:27; see also under → *ashraka*), an idea that is not completely unheard of in late antiquity (Horsley and Luxford 2016, 144–145; Ahuvia 2021, 138–139).<sup>31</sup> The Qur’an, by contrast, rejects any kind of angel worship, in keeping with its understanding that angels are mere instruments of God who are entirely subordinate to their divine master. In the Qur’anic milieu, angel worship does not seem to have been the exclusive preserve of pagans, since one passage also associates it with the scripture-owners (Q 3:80; see *DTEK* 98). This fits the traces of angel veneration that can be discerned in rabbinic and Christian texts (Schäfer 1975, 67–72; Cline 2011, 137–165). Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that the notion of angelic intermediaries was not confined to Jews and Christian in the Qur’anic context. Pagan recourse to the concept of angels is not unprecedented, as shown by Greek inscriptions from Roman Asia Minor invoking a “divine *angelos*” or “angelic divinity” (*theiō angelō* or *theiō angelikō*), who may have functioned as an intermediary figure between mortals and the supreme deity (Cline 2011, 47–76, and Horsley and Luxford 2016). One may of course entertain the possibility that passages like Q 17:40, which protest against the Qur’anic opponents’ view that the angels are female, are to be read in such a way that it was not the opponents themselves who deployed the concept of angels: perhaps Muhammad’s adversaries were simply speaking of

<sup>31</sup> Horsley and Luxford discuss a pagan Greek inscription from Roman Asia Minor that features a female angel (*tēs angelou*). Ahuvia draws attention to a passage by the Jewish liturgical poet Yannai and a parallel in *Gen. Rab.* 21:9 according to which angels are or can turn into females.

female deities and it is the Qur'an's own voice that identifies these female deities as angels erroneously conceived (thus Welch 1979, 740)? Nonetheless, Qur'anic verses reporting a polemical request that Muhammad appear together with an angel (see below) establish that the idea of angels did form part of the associators' own vocabulary (see *QP* 57–58 and *HCI* 68–69), and additional considerations in favour of the same supposition are discussed elsewhere (see under → *ashraka*).<sup>32</sup>

As just intimated, a second context in which the Qur'anic pagans are depicted as employing the notion of angels is in confronting Muhammad's claim to transmit divine revelations. As we saw earlier, several Qur'anic passages suggest that Muhammad's revelations were relayed by an angel or at least a quasi-angelic intermediary. The associators seem to have accepted the idea of revelation-bearing angels at least for the sake of argument, since they are portrayed as expecting that someone purporting to convey divine revelations would either himself be an angel or would be associated with one.<sup>33</sup> Thus, Muhammad's antagonists, like those of Noah and other messengers, object to one another that he is obviously nothing but "a mere human like yourselves" (*illā basharun mithlukum*; Q 21:3; see also Q 11:27, 14:10–11, 23:24.33, 26:154.186, 36:15); they incredulously ask whether God has sent "a human as a messenger" (*a-ba'atha llāhu basharan rasūlā*; Q 17:94); and they complain to Muhammad that no angel has been "sent down upon him" (*unzila 'alayhi/ilayhi*), "has come with him," or the like (Q 6:8, 11:12, 15:7, 17:92, 23:24, 25:7), thus reprising the objections that were reputedly voiced against previous messengers (Q 41:14, 43:53; see in general Hawting 2011 and *QP* 102–124). The complaint that Muhammad "eats food and goes around the marketplaces" (Q 25:7.20; see also 21:7–8) is rooted in the same expectation of a verifiably angelic messenger, since the Qur'anic milieu seems to have inherited the ancient view that angels do not eat (see above). Against this, the Qur'an avers that God's messengers, whose task it is to warn human recipients and to recount God's "signs" (singular: → *āyah*) to them, are "from among" (*min* or *min anfus*) their addressees (see under → *rasūl*). This postulate has an evident ethnic dimension: a prophet-like messenger of God must be native to the community addressed by him and speak their language (Q 14:4). Yet it also encompasses the notion that a prophet-like messenger who is to address humans must himself be human and "eat food" (Q 6:130, 7:35; see also Q 14:11, 18:110, and 41:6 as well as 5:75, 21:7–8, and 25:7.20; cf. Radscheit 1996a, 72). "I do not say to you that I am an angel (*innī malakun*)," both the Qur'anic Messenger and Noah tell their opponents in Q 6:50 and 11:31, respectively.

If the Qur'an itself claims that Muhammad's revelations reached him through some form of supernatural intermediary who, minimally, exhibits considerable similarity to an angel, why is this claim never invoked in direct response to the opponents' demand that Muhammad be associated with an angel (see already Bell 1934, 149)? Most likely, what Muhammad's opponents were really demanding, in expecting divine revelations to be conveyed by angels, was "something *they* could see and hear and possibly talk to" (Rahman 2009, 97). The point of contention, then, was less about the specific mechanism of revelatory communication than about miraculous evidentiary confirmation accessible

32 Eichler holds that the pagans' contention that their goddesses were angels was only an apologetic response to Muhammad's preaching (*DTEK* 101–102 and also 99–100). But this view still accepts at least that the associators themselves spoke of their deities as angels.

33 Crone frames this assumption in semantic terms: to the associators, "*rasūl* seems always to have meant an angel in a religious context" (*QP* 109–110).

to a general public. Thus, Q 17:90–93 enumerates assorted miracles and extraordinary achievements allegedly demanded by the Qur’anic adversaries (including the request that Muhammad “cause the heaven to fall down upon us, as you<sup>s</sup> have claimed”), and in Q 25:21 the opponents are quoted as demanding not only a descent of the angels but also to see God himself. Thus parsed, the opponents’ objections would not have been convincingly answered by insisting that the Qur’anic revelations were indeed conveyed by an angelic or quasi-angelic being who was however acting in a publicly unverifiable manner directly upon Muhammad’s heart (Q 26:194; see also 2:97), just as Zechariah or Mary reportedly had private encounters with angels (Q 3:39.42.45).

More effectively, Q 6:8 and 15:8 therefore respond that the request that humans are to believe despite lacking direct and publicly accessible empirical confirmation is precisely the point: if God were to provide truly incontrovertible confirmation of Muhammad’s claim by sending down a being that is indisputably identifiable as an angel, then “the matter would have been settled” (Q 6:8: *la-quḍīya l-amru*) and humans would “have no further respite” (Q 6:8: *thumma lā yunẓarūn*; 15:8: *mā kānū idhan munẓarīn*) to mend their ways, meaning that the window of opportunity for conversion and repentance would have closed once and for all.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, as Q 6:9 adds, had God made Muhammad an angelic messenger, he would have “made him a man,” that is, he would have made him appear like an ordinary human, just as the angels sent to Abraham appeared like ordinary men. The general assumption underlying both responses is that humans are bidden to heed God’s call precisely in the absence of any overwhelming empirical display of the deity’s existence and power, simply in light of the abundant “signs” (singular: → *āyah*) that God has provided in the natural world and throughout history. Conversely, to believe in God only when faced with his crushing punitive power is too late and accordingly devoid of any merit (Sinai 2019a, 248–249). From the Qur’anic perspective, it is therefore conceptually inevitable that God must have recourse to spokespersons who are, or appear to be, comparatively ordinary, i.e., who are not endowed with abilities and achievements that radically and indubitably surpass those of their addressees.<sup>35</sup> For instance, just as Muhammad disavows any claim to being an angel, his authority is said not to be predicated on access to “God’s treasures” or on clairvoyant knowledge of “the hidden” (→ *al-ghayb*; Q 6:50 and 11:12.31). It is thus because a messenger must not miraculously stand out that human addressees are sent a messenger “from among” (*min* or *min anfus*) themselves (see under → *rasūl*). Conversely, it would have been appropriate for God to dispatch an angel as his public spokesperson only if the earth were trodden not by humans but by angels (Q 17:95).

***malik, malīk* | king**  
***mulk* | kingship, rulership, reign**  
***malakūt* | kingdom, kingship**

<sup>34</sup> See also Q 25:22, which similarly suggests, by employing the eschatologically laden qualifier *yawma’idhin*, “on that day,” that the day on which the adversaries will see the angels is the day of judgement.

<sup>35</sup> A different reasoning is found in Q 6:111: the obduracy of Muhammad’s adversaries is such that even if God were to orchestrate all sorts of stupendous miracles, such as “sending down the angels to them” or causing the dead to speak, the opponents “would not believe, except if God willed it” (*mā kānū li-yu’minū illā an yashā’a llāhu*).

Further vocabulary discussed: *ātā* tr./ditr. | to give s.th. (to s.o.) *‘arsh, kursiyy* | throne  
*al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ* pl. | the heavens and the earth *al-mala’ al-a’lā* | the assembly  
on high *khazā’in* pl. | treasures, stores *khalīfah* | deputy, vicegerent *mālik* | pos-  
sessor, owner *yawm al-dīn* | judgement day

**Overview.** While the Qur’an recognises the phenomenon of earthly rulership and king-  
ship (e.g., Q 2:246–247, 5:20, 12:43.50.54),<sup>1</sup> it is God who is “the true king” (Q 20:114,  
23:116: *al-malik al-ḥaqq*). Other verses applying the word *malik*, “king,” to God are  
Q 59:23, 62:1, and 114:2,<sup>2</sup> while Q 54:55 has the variant *malik*. Being the ultimate sov-  
ereign of the cosmos, God confers earthly kingship upon whom he wills (Q 2:247, 3:26:  
*wa-llāhu yu’tī mulkahu man yashā’u*; see also 2:251.258, 4:54, 12:101, all of which combine  
God as the subject of *ātā*, “to give,” with the object *mulk*) and strips it away from whom  
he wills (Q 3:26: *wa-tanzī’u l-mulka mimman tashā’u*). God is, accordingly, the “owner of  
kingship” (Q 3:26: *mālik al-mulk*), i.e., the supreme source and bestower of all rulership  
and royal authority. Just like earthly kings, the divine king is seated on a throne (*‘arsh*; e.g.,  
Q 7:54, 9:129, 10:3, 11:7, 13:2, 20:5, 23:116, 39:75, 85:15; see generally O’Shaughnessy 1973).  
According to one verse—which exceptionally refers to the divine throne with the word  
*kursiyy* (FVQ 249; cf. Aramaic / Syriac *kūrṣyā*)—God’s throne “encompasses the heavens  
and the earth” (Q 2:255: *wasi’a kursiyyuhu l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa*), meaning the totality  
of creation (see under → *al-arḍ*).<sup>3</sup> Also like an earthly monarch, God is surrounded by a  
royal court, the “assembly on high” (→ *al-mala’ al-a’lā*), comprising angels who are said  
to carry and surround his throne (Q 39:75, 40:7, 69:17; see O’Shaughnessy 1973, 206–207)  
and to be engaged in performing a celestial liturgy (e.g., Q 42:5; see under → *malak*). Many  
other aspects of the Qur’an’s depiction of God have royal connotations as well (Rippin  
2006, 227–228), such as references to God’s control over cosmic “treasures” or “stores”  
(*khazā’in*; e.g., Q 6:50, 11:31, 15:21–22, 17:100; cf. the earthly context of the term in 12:55).  
The fact that the Qur’anic God appoints and deposes his “deputies” (*khalā’if*, singular:  
*khalīfah*) on the earth, too, can be understood as a royal trait (see under → *istakhlafa* and  
Schenzle 2017, 132–133).

As counterparts to the abstract nouns “kingship” and “kingdom,” the Qur’an employs  
both *mulk* and *malakūt*. The former word is frequent and occurs both in a worldly context  
(e.g., Q 2:102: *mulk sulaymān*, “the reign of Solomon”)<sup>4</sup> and a theological one (e.g., to God  
belongs “kingship over the heavens and the earth,” *lahu/li-llāhi mulku l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍi*;  
Q 2:107, 3:189, 5:17.18.40.120, 25:2, 85:9, and elsewhere). By contrast, *malakūt*—a loanword  
from Aramaic (FVQ 270–271; van Putten 2020b, 70)—is only found in four verses, twice  
in the expression “the kingdom of the heavens and the earth” (Q 6:75, 7:185: *malakūt al-*  
*samāwāti wa-l-arḍi*) and twice in the statement that God holds “kingship over everything”  
(Q 23:88 and 36:83: *bi-yadihi malakūtu kulli shay’in*; see also under → *qadr*). *Malakūt kull*  
*shay’* seems to be a variant of the more common *mulk al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*,<sup>5</sup> whereas  
the expression *malakūt al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ* at Q 6:75 and 7:185 may highlight the cosmic

1 Sometimes *al-mulk* would seem to be used in the general sense of rulership rather than specifically kingship;  
see Q 12:101 and perhaps also 4:54.

2 Van Putten 2020b, 70, identifies *malik* as a likely Aramaic loanword.

3 Both *‘arsh* and *kursiyy* are also applied to earthly thrones (Q 12:100, 27:23.38.41.42, 38:34).

4 On Q 2:102, see in more detail under → *jinn*.

5 The only verse that combines *bi-yadihi* with *mulk* rather than *malakūt* is Q 67:1.

scope of God's domain of kingly rule ("kingdom") rather than the fact of his exercise of royal authority over it ("kingship").<sup>6</sup>

**Q 1:4: "king" (*malik*) or "possessor" (*mālik*)?** For Q 1:4, the Islamic tradition records different readings of the consonantal skeleton of the Qur'an's standard recension. Most printed editions have *mālik yawm al-dīn* ("owner of the day of judgement"), traced back to 'Āṣim and al-Kisā'ī. The remaining canonical readers, by contrast, are reported to have read *malik*, "king" (MQQ 1:7; Ibn Mujāhid 1972, 104; al-Dānī 1930, 18).<sup>7</sup> Al-Zamaksharī endorses the reading *malik* on account of Qur'anic parallels (Zam. 1:115). This general line of argument in favour of *malik*, already found in Ibn Mujāhid (see Ibn Mujāhid 1972, 104), is cogent. Thus, Q 40:16, speaking of the day of judgement, poses the rhetorical question, "To whom belongs the kingship (*al-mulk*) today?," to which the answer is, "To God, the only one, the mighty one." The notion of God's kingship (*al-mulk*) on the day of judgement is moreover attested in Q 6:73, 22:56, and 25:26, making it likely that Q 1:4 expresses the same idea.<sup>8</sup> As we saw above, moreover, the epithet "king" (*malik* or, in one case, *malik*) is predicated of God in further verses, even though these do not, like Q 1:4, employ the title in an explicitly eschatological context. There is one verse that applies to God the participle *mālik*, namely, Q 3:26, which could be adduced in support of the 'Āṣim and al-Kisā'ī reading of Q 1:4 (Ibn Mujāhid 1972, 104). However, the word there occurs as part of the phrase *mālik al-mulk*, "the owner of kingship," where *malik* would hardly be feasible; and the basic point made in Q 3:26, too, is in any case that God is invested with ultimate kingship.

In sum, *malik yawm al-dīn* is undoubtedly the preferable variant for Q 1:4 (thus also Khademalsharieh 2020, 355–359). Al-Zamaksharī maintains that the meaning of this genitive construction (literally, "the king of judgement day") is adverbial: God is king *on* judgement day (Zam. 1:116), just as four verses referenced above state that "on the day" of judgement kingship is exercised by God (Q 6:73: *lahu l-mulku yawma* . . . ; 22:56: *al-mulku yawma'idhin li-llāhi*; 25:26: *al-mulku yawma'idhini l-ḥaqqu li-l-raḥmāni*; 40:16: *li-mani l-mulku l-yawma*). It deserves to be noted that at least two of the three verses describing God's throne as surrounded or carried by angels also occur in an eschatological context (Q 39:75, 69:17).<sup>9</sup> The statement that God is "the king on judgement day" in Q 1:4 thus accentuates that God's kingly rule, although a constant fact of cosmic existence, finds its ultimate manifestation and consummation at the final judgement.

**Biblical and ancient Arabian background.** The idea of divine kingship is an entrenched part of the Biblical tradition, drawing on ancient Near Eastern culture more generally (e.g., Ps 47:3.7.8, 93:1; see TDOT 8:346–375; NIDOTTE 2:956–965; Caird 1980, 178–182).<sup>10</sup> The New Testament uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven" (*hē basileia tōn ouranōn*) to refer

6 For a brief discussion of the scene introduced by Q 6:75, see under → *allāh*.

7 On the meaning of *mālik*, see al-Tha'labī 2015, 2:417–418, who also presents the opinion that the word has the same meaning as *malik*, a view that would make the two variant readings under consideration semantically equivalent. However, the fact that the opposing view, according to which the two words are not in fact synonymous, is set out last, in greater detail, and based on named authorities would seem to convey that al-Tha'labī, quite reasonably, finds it more persuasive.

8 There are further verses that ascribe *al-mulk* to God, e.g., Q 67:1 or, frequently, "the kingdom of the heavens and the earth" (e.g., Q 2:107 and 3:189).

9 As noted in O'Shaughnessy 1973, 207, Q 40:7 too has at least eschatological undertones, because the passage "mentions the reward and punishment that are the outcome of the judgement."

10 On the kindred idea of divine lordship, see under → *rabb*.



to the impending reign of God (e.g., Matt 3:2, 4:17, 5:3; see in much more detail *TDNT* 1:564–593, including a discussion of the relationship between *basileia tōn ouranōn*, *basileia tou theou*, and *basileia* in the absolute in 1:581–583). This supplies a clear precursor for the palpable eschatological connotations that God’s kingship (*mulk*) has in various Qur’anic passages. Even closer to the Qur’an’s diction are New Testamental mentions of the “kingdom of God” (*hē basileia tou theou*; e.g., Acts 14:22, Rom 14:17, 1 Cor 4:20), especially in their Syriac rendering (Peshitta: *malkūteh da-llāhā*; cf. Arabic *malakūt*). The coming of God’s kingly reign (*basileia*, *malkūtā*) is also an integral part of the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:10 and Luke 11:2), and God’s kingship figures as a vocative in the Great Doxology (*kurie basileu epouranie*, “Lord, celestial king”; Metzger 1985–1987, 3:112–113).

The application of royal language to God seems to have been current in late antique Arabic. For instance, a poem transmitted under the name of Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt likewise calls God a “king” (*malik*; Schulthess 1911a, no. 25:29 = al-Saṭṭī 1974, no. 10:29; on the likely authenticity of this poem, see the verdicts compiled in Seidensticker 2011b, 47–49). Specifically the variant *malik* (used in Q 54:55) occurs in a poem from the *dīwān* of Muhammad’s contemporary al-A’shā Maymūn: “And you know that the human soul will meet its death in whatever manner its creator, the King (*al-malik*), has ordained for it” (Ḥusayn 1983, no. 3:54). The same term is also found in another verse by al-A’shā, describing a monk engaged in “prayers to the King” (*ṣalawāt al-malik*; Ḥusayn 1983, no. 5:63).<sup>11</sup>

### ***millah* | religion, religious teaching** ***millat ibrahīm* | the teaching of Abraham**

Further vocabulary discussed: *dīn* | religion, religious worship *ḥanīf* | fervently devoted to worshipping God *al-mushrikūn*, *alladhīna ashrakū* pl. | the associators *mala'* | community leaders, notables *alladhīna kafarū*, *al-kāfirūn*, *al-kuffār* pl. | the repudiators *ākhir* | final; contemporary *tabi'a* tr., *ittaba'a* tr. | to follow s.th. or s.o. *'abada* tr. | to serve s.o. or s.th., to worship s.o. or s.th. *da'ā* tr. | to call upon s.o. *mansak* | rite

***Millah* in the Qur’an.** There are two Qur’anic terms that approximate the modern concept of “religion,” *dīn* and *millah*. The former is dealt with elsewhere (→ *dīn*<sup>2</sup>). As for *millah*, it appears in two main contexts. First, a string of verses speaks of *millat ibrahīm*, “the *millah* of Abraham” (Q 2:130.135, 3:95, 4:125, 6:161, 16:123; 22:78 has “the *millah* of your father Abraham”; → *ab*). These passages are mostly Medinan, although it remains to be ascertained whether Q 6:161 and 16:123 are integral to the Meccan surahs containing them

<sup>11</sup> There is also the opening verse of a poem attributed to al-Khansā’: “Nothing endures except for the face of our king” (*lā shay’a yabqā ghayra wajhi malikīnā*; Cheikho 1896, 48). Its pertinence could certainly be questioned on account of its similarity to the Qur’anic statement that “the face of your glorious and venerable Lord will endure” (Q 55:27: *wa-yabqā wajhu rabbika dhū l-jalāli wa-l-ikrām*). On the other hand, a poem attributed to ‘Adī ibn Zayd similarly asserts the persistence of God’s “face”: “Nothing endures against doom (*al-manūn*) except for the face of the praiseworthy creator” (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 92:1). The terminological concatenation of *wajh* and *baqiya* with regard to God may consequently be a genuinely pre-Qur’anic motif; Brockelmann accordingly denies that the line attributed to al-Khansā’ can be summarily dismissed as a mere restatement of Q 55:27 (Brockelmann 1922, 108).



or alternatively form later insertions.<sup>1</sup> The expression *millat ibrahīm* tends to be followed by two further qualifications, both of which pertain to Abraham: the adverbial accusative → *ḥanīfan*, whose purport would seem to be something like “fervently devoted to worshipping God,” and the clause *wa-mā kāna mina l-mushrikīn* (→ *ashrakā*), “he did not belong to the associators” (Q 2:135, 3:95, 6:161, 16:123; 4:125 only has *ḥanīfan*). However Abraham’s *millah* is to be construed in precise terms, it appears to be closely bound up with his unbending commitment to monotheism.

The second principal group of *millah* verses are a number of Meccan passages referring to the *millah* of collectives who are presented as opposed to the Qur’an’s own theology. For instance, according to Q 38:2–7—which judging by Surah 38’s relatively low mean verse length (*HCI* 115) has an excellent claim to being the earliest Qur’anic occurrence of the word *millah*—the notables (v. 6: → *al-malaʿ*) among the “repudiators” (vv. 2.4: *alladhīna kafarū, al-kāfirūn*) protest that the Qur’anic Messenger “makes the gods into one god” (v. 5: *jaʿala l-ālihata ilāhan wāḥidan*) and that this is something unheard of “in the contemporary *millah*” (v. 7: *mā samīnā bi-hādḥā fī l-millati l-ākhirati*).<sup>2</sup> The “contemporary” or “last *millah*” here is sometimes taken to refer to Christianity (see, e.g., the traditions collected in Ṭab. 20:21–22 or Andrae 1932, 98). Yet the alternative view that the “contemporary *millah*” is the religion of Quraysh (Ṭab. 20:22–23) is undoubtedly preferable, as the passage’s context strongly suggests that the *millah* in question is the one to which the notables adhere themselves. Approximations like “contemporary religious teaching” or “contemporary religious belief” would seem to do justice to the expression’s contextual purport, seeing that the disagreement concerns the conflict between the Messenger’s insistence that there is only a single deity (v. 5) and his opponents’ devotion to a plurality of gods (v. 6).<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, too, the word *millah* describes the religious orientation of those who reject the preaching of God’s messengers or of those from whom the pious “Companions of the Cave,” whose story is told in Surah 18, are hiding: Q 7:88–89, 14:13, and 18:20 all evoke the threat or, depending on the speaker, the fear that believers or divinely commissioned messengers will be forced to “return” (←*w-d*) to the *millah* of their adversaries. It is worth highlighting that in all these latter verses, *millah* carries a possessive pronoun in the plural (*fī millatinā/millatikum/millatihim*). The Medinan verse Q 2:120, according to which “the Jews and Christians will not be satisfied with you<sup>s</sup> until you follow their *millah*,” builds on these Meccan references to the *millah* of religious adversaries.

1 Neuwirth considers Q 6:161 to be a Medinan addition and contemplates that the same might apply to 16:123 (Neuwirth 2016b, 195). There are certainly Medinan insertions in the vicinity of the latter verse, namely, Q 16:114–115.118 (Sinai 2019c, 130–131; see also Neuwirth 2007, 301).

2 The standard Qur’anic antonym of *ākhir* is *awwal* (e.g., 56:49, 57:3, 79:25, 92:13). In accordance with the literal meaning of *awwal*, “first,” it can mean “primordial” or “ancient,” as in → *asāṭir al-awwalīn*, “writs of the ancients” (e.g., Q 6:25, 8:31, 16:24, 83:13), while the literal meaning of → *ākhir* is “final.” But on occasion, either term appears to function merely as the negation of the other one. Thus, when Q 28:70, 53:25, 79:25, 92:13, and 93:4 describe the pre-eschatological world as *al-ūlā*, in contrast to *al-ākhirah*, the point must be that the present world is non-final, rather than to present it as primordial; after all, it is God who is, strictly speaking, *al-awwal* (Q 57:3). Similarly, when Q 38:7 speaks of *al-millat al-ākhirah*, we should probably understand *ākhirah* to mean simply “non-ancient,” “non-primordial”: the point is not that the *millah* at hand is the final one, but simply that it is contemporary or recent.

3 The preceding does not entail that Meccan paganism was predominantly a matter of belief rather than of ritual practice. However, the fact that the existence or non-existence of deities other than Allāh could become such a source of heated controversy between the Qur’anic community and their pagan contemporaries surely demonstrates that Qurashī paganism involved at least some commitments that are appropriately described as doctrinal. If the take on *millah* developed in the present entry is correct, then the term’s application to Meccan religion picked out these doctrinal components, even though they may well have been secondary to ritual aspects.

Of particular interest is the Meccan passage Q 12:37–38, which interweaves the two usages of *millah* just distinguished. In v. 37, Joseph declares that he is forsaking “the *millah* of a people who do not believe in God and who repudiate the hereafter” (*innī taraktu millata qawmin lā yu’minūna bi-llāhi wa-hum bi-l-ākhirati hum kāfirūn*), employing *millah* with reference to the religious orientation of those rejecting monotheism. Joseph then continues by affirming, in v. 38, that he is instead following “the *millah* of my fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; it does not befit us to associate anything with God” (*wa-ttaba’tu millata ābā’i ibrahīma wa-ishāqa wa-ya’qūba mā kāna lanā an nushrika bi-llāhi min shay’in*). Joseph’s genealogical identification of his own *millah* may foreshadow the more concise phrase *millat ibrahīm*: if Q 6:161 and 16:123 really are Medinan insertions, then Surah 12’s evocation of “the *millah* of my fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” would subsequently have become condensed into the more succinct *millat ibrahīm*. Note also that Q 12:38, like most of the *millat ibrahīm* verses catalogued above, mentions Abraham’s *millah* in close proximity to the root *sh-r-k*, describing the illicit partnering (*shirk*) of God with other beings (→ *ashraka*), while Q 12:37 explicitly characterises the *millah* rejected by Joseph in terms of disbelief in God and the hereafter. Q 12:37–38 thus reinforces the impression that the term *millah* has a strong doctrinal aspect: the difference between the *millah* Joseph rejects and the patriarchal *millah* he endorses hinges on the rejection of *shirk* and belief in God and the last judgement.

***Millah* as “religion.”** In all the verses surveyed, it would not be patently incongruous to translate *millah* as “religion,” and a number of modern scholars maintain that *millah* and *dīn* are more or less synonyms (*GQ* 1:20, n. 2; *KK* 30).<sup>4</sup> A similar equation of the two words is also found in the premodern exegetical tradition (e.g., al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 2009, 773). The two terms nonetheless exhibit certain peculiarities of usage (see, again, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī 2009, 773). For example, *dīn* can appear in a genitive construction with God, yielding *dīn allāh*, “God’s religion” (Q 3:83, 24:2, 110:2), whereas the Qur’an always associates a *millah* with a human individual, such as Abraham, or with a human collective. Thus, there is no Qur’anic attestation of *millat allāh* or, conversely, of *dīn ibrahīm*.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps more importantly, both nouns also tend to collocate with different verbs: *millah* has a noticeable propensity to combine with *ittaba’a*, “to follow” (Q 2:120, 3:95, 4:125, 12:38, and 16:123), whereas there is only one instance in which a verbal derivative of the root *t-b-‘* governs *dīn* (Q 3:73: *man tabi’a dīnakum*, “he who follows your religion”).<sup>6</sup> By contrast, *dīn* frequently occurs in proximity to the verbs ‘*abada*, “to serve, to worship,” and *da’ā*, “to call upon,” and its usage in early Arabic poetry supports construing *dīn* specifically as religion in the sense of communal practices (→ *dīn*<sup>2</sup>). Just as the meaning of *millah* seems to pivot on the

4 The position put forward in *GMK* 228–229 is more nuanced: on the one hand, Izutsu concedes that the two terms may sometimes be employed synonymously; yet on the other hand, he posits that *millah* focuses on religion as an objective communal reality (“a formal system of creeds and rituals which constitutes the principle of unity for a particular religious community and works as the basis of its social life”; *GMK* 228) while *dīn* can mean religion as personal faith (*GMK* 226–229). But the latter claim is questionable (see under → *dīn*<sup>2</sup>); and as I argue in the main text, the Qur’anic usage of *millah* tends to pick out specifically the credal or doctrinal aspect of religion, while its ritual dimension is more obviously bound up with the term *dīn*.

5 But note that *dīn* and *millah* both share the characteristic of combining with possessive suffixes that refer to humans (for *dīn*, see, e.g., Q 2:217, 3:24–73, 5:54–77, 40:26, 49:16, 109:6; for *millah*, see the occurrences of *fī millatinā/millatikum/millatihim* noted above).

6 Wilfred Cantwell Smith notes that in every case in which the Qur’an uses the word *millah*, “the reference is to someone following the *millah* of someone else” (Smith 1991, 294). Although not all occurrences of the word are explicitly governed by the verb *ittaba’a*, this is a valid thematic generalisation.

doctrinal or credal dimension of religion, so that of *dīn* is focused on acts of worship (‘*b-d*) and supplication (*d-‘-w*) expressing one’s cultic allegiance to a particular deity. At the risk of imposing too neat a distinction, it is tempting to propose that *dīn* is primarily religion *qua* something that is done while *millah* is primarily religion *qua* something that is believed. As we shall see below, the putative etymology of the word *millah* helps understand how this semantic state of affairs may have come about.

Despite the preceding suggestion, however, one must not overlook that the figure of Abraham—whose *millah* is mentioned in a number of Qur’anic verses (see also under → *ḥanīf*)—is associated not only with monotheistic belief but also with concrete ritual practices, specifically, with the pilgrimage rites linked to the Meccan Ka’bah (e.g., Q 22:26–29; see under → *hajja*). Accordingly, the reference to Abraham’s *millah* in Q 2:130 follows directly upon a passage in which Abraham and his son Ishmael not only pray that their descendants might surrender themselves to God but also ask God to “show us our rites” (singular: *mansak*, on which see under → *dhabāḥa*; Q 2:128). These rites are presumably the cultic practices to be performed at the Meccan sanctuary, whose foundation at the hands of Abraham and Ishmael is recounted in Q 2:127. Hence, when Q 2:130 extols the *millah* of Abraham, it is contextually possible that the latter evokes not only monotheistic belief but also the faithful adherence to certain rituals linked to the Meccan sanctuary that God is assumed to have taught to Abraham. If this is correct, then the degree to which *dīn* and *millah* foreground different dimensions of human religiosity should not be overstated. After all, it is clear that the Qur’an generally supposes that right belief is closely linked with certain behavioural manifestations, such as prayer and almsgiving (see under → *āmana*). This general perspective explains why a verse like Q 6:161 would seem to establish such a close link between *dīn* and *millah* (GMK 229): “Say, ‘My Lord has guided me to a straight road—by way of a right *dīn* (*dīnan qiyaman*), the *millah* of Abraham, fervently devoted to worshipping God (*millata ibrahīma ḥanīfan*); he did not belong to the associators (*wamā kāna mina l-mushrikīn*).” Two other verses that combine a reference to the *millah* of Abraham with the word *dīn* are Q 4:125 and 22:78, thus reinforcing the impression that in their Qur’anic usage the two terms are at least on a path to synonymity.

**Cognate terminology in Christian and Jewish usage.** Having thus ascertained the broad contours of how the word *millah* functions in the Qur’an, we may turn to the question of its provenance, which will also help to refine our understanding of the word further. As earlier scholars have noted (BEK 44; GQ 1:146, n. 3; NB 25–26; KU 62–63; FVQ 268–269), it is etymologically likely that Arabic *millah* is descended from Syriac *melltā* (SL 775) or Jewish Aramaic *milta* (DJBA 668–669; DJPA 305), both of which have the basic meaning “word” (and also, in Syriac, “the Word” = *ho logos*). Jeffery asserts that *milta* can be “used figuratively for the religious beliefs of a person” and that *melltā* is “used technically for religion” (FVQ 268–269), but he fails to produce any evidence in support of this. In fact, Nöldeke and Horowitz expressly remark on the discrepancy between the meaning of the Qur’anic term and its likely Syriac predecessor (GQ 1:146, n. 3; NB 25–26; KU 62–63).

A Syriac usage that exhibits pertinent resemblance to the Qur’anic one is however identified by Ahrens. He observes that three places in Acts remark on the spread of “God’s word” (*ho logos tou theou*, Peshitta: *mellteh d-allāhā*) or “the word,” here meaning the Christian message (Acts 6:7, 8:4.14; CQ 33). In fact, further New Testamental prooftexts can be added. For instance, Acts 2:41 reports that some of Peter’s hearers “eagerly received his word (*ton logon autou, mellteh*) and believed and were baptised.” The statement is noteworthy

because here the “word” being preached is characterised through a possessive reference to a human individual rather than to God, similar to the Qur’anic phrase *millat ibrahīm*, “the *millah* of Abraham.”<sup>7</sup> The usage highlighted by Ahrens is not limited to Acts, and there are many further passages in the New Testament where “the word of God” or “the word of the Lord” refer to the Christian message (*TDNT* 4:114–117). Thus, Luke 5:1 describes how a crowd was pressing in on Jesus “to hear the word of God (*ton logon tou theou*, Peshitta: *melltā d-allāhā*),” while in 1 Thess 2:13 Paul thanks God for the fact that when his readers “received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God’s word (*logon theou*, Peshitta: *melltā d-allāhā*), which is also at work in you believers.”<sup>8</sup> Ahrens also points out that elsewhere in Acts, Greek *ho logos tou theou* or *tou kyriou ho logos* are rendered as *sbartā d-allāhā*, “God’s gospel” (Acts 12:24), or *haymānūteh d-allāhā*, “God’s faith” (Acts 19:20). This reinforces the impression that Syriac *melltā* can refer to a religious kerygma or teaching. Moving beyond the New Testament, one may point to a statement at the end of the biography of Narsai in Barḥadhbəshabbā’s *Ecclesiastical History*, according to which Narsai would not quickly “grow weary from didactic discourse” (*melltā d-mallpānūtā*; see Becker 2008, 85, and for the Syriac Nau 1913, 630, l. 8). That the usage seen in Acts continued in subsequent Christian discourse is demonstrated by the Syriac version of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, according to which the Christians who were scattered abroad after the martyrdom of Stephanus “did not yet dare proclaim God’s word to the gentiles” (Wright and McLean 1898, 62, l. 9 = book 2:1:8; the Greek original has *tou tēs pisteōs metadidonai logou*; see Eusebius 1926–1932, 1:106–107). The Syriac *Didascalia Apostolorum* too refers to “him who speaks to you (*mmallel lāk*) the word of God (*melltā d-allāha*)” (Vööbus 1979, 37, l. 5).

**From Syriac *melltā* to Arabic *millah*.** In sum, there is good evidence that Syriac *melltā* can mean kerygmatic or didactic religious discourse. As we saw above, the Qur’anic term *millat ibrahīm* may similarly be understood to refer to a patriarchal religious teaching. Hence, the Syriac cognate of *millah*, used to refer to the Christian teaching, does indeed form a credible precursor.<sup>9</sup> It is in any case entirely conceivable that Arabic *millah* underwent an independent semantic development that diverged from the meaning or meanings of its ancestor term.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, no credible occurrences of *millah* in pre-Islamic poetry have yet been identified.<sup>11</sup> Still, the possibility that the Qur’anic employment of *millah* reflects semantic developments that precede Muhammad should not be ruled out

7 For the contrasting usage, see, e.g., Acts 19:10, which has *ton logon tou kyriou* = *melltā d-māryā*, or Acts 4:4.29.31, 6:2.4, and 8:25, as well as some of the quotations that follow in the main text.

8 *Melltā d-allāhā* can also render Greek *rhēma theou*, as in Luke 3:2, where it refers to the divine call received by John the Baptist (see further *TDNT* 4:113 and 4:116–117).

9 Juan Cole associates Qur’anic *millah* with *melltā* in the sense of a cosmic or metaphysical divine *logos*, whom Christians identified with Christ (Cole 2019, 409–410). This strikes me as unwarranted in light of Qur’anic usage.

10 A hypothetical Manichaean usage is surmised in BeDuhn 2015, 271, who proposes that Mani may have employed Aramaic *milita/melta* “in his discussion of various ‘religions,’ where his translators used *dēn* or *nomos* or *ekklēsia*.”

11 Horowitz points out that the term *millat allāh* does appear in some poetry cited in Ibn Hishām’s *sīrah* (*KU* 63), but the authenticity of the *sīrah*’s poetry is too uncertain in order to adopt a default attitude of considering it to be contemporary with Muhammad. However, if it were possible to pinpoint an occurrence of *millat allāh* in poetry credibly dated to the first Islamic decades, this would at least provide circumstantial evidence that the term was current in the pre-Qur’anic period: given that it does not appear in the Qur’an, its potential usage in early poetry would not be explicable as a mere imitation of Qur’anic diction.

(GQ 1:146, n. 3). One might speculate that Arabophone Christians could have rendered “God’s word” (Greek: *ho logos tou theou*, Syriac: *melltā d-allāhā*), in the sense of the Christian message, as *millat allāh*, even if this latter phrase is not attested in the Qur’an. This may have led to Arabic *millah* acquiring the general meaning “religious teaching, religious doctrine,” as inferable from the Qur’an. Positing that the developmental step leading from a conjectured Christian phrase *millat allāh* to a general acceptance of *millah* = “religious teaching” preceded the Qur’an would help explain the fact that the Qur’an does not exclusively associate the term *millah* with Biblically based monotheists but also attributes a *millah* to its pagan opponents.

**An alternative account: *millah* and Hebrew *milah*, “circumcision”?** An alternative derivation of the Qur’anic word *millah* has been proposed by Angelika Neuwirth (Neuwirth 2016b, 195; Neuwirth 2017, 540–541), who would trace the word back to *milah*, “circumcision,” in rabbinic Hebrew (DTTM 774). Given that the etiology of the ritual of circumcision is intimately associated with Abraham (Gen 17), Neuwirth’s conjecture tallies well with Medinan references to the *millat ibrahīm*. The hypothesis nonetheless fails in view of the fact that the Qur’an refers to a *millah* not only of the Jews but also of the Christians (Q 2:120) and furthermore attributes a *millah* to those who resist the Qur’anic doctrine of radical monotheism and eschatological piety. An additional difficulty consists in the absence of any unequivocal Qur’anic reference to the ritual of circumcision. Finally, the verb *ittaba’a*, “to follow,” which takes *millah* or *millat ibrahīm* as its object in several verses, is not suggestive of the performance of circumcision.

***mamnūn*: *ghayr* ~ | rightfully earned**

→ *ajr*

***umniyyah* | wish**

→ *ummī*

***manāt* | Manāt**

→ *ashraka*

***mahada* tr./intr. | to spread (s.th.) out**

***mahd*, *mihād* | s.th. spread out**

→ *arḍ*, → *khalaqa*

***mā’* | water**

→ *khalaqa*

***amāta* tr./intr. | to cause (s.o.) to die**

→ *ahyā*

### ***mūsā* | Moses**

See inter alia the remarks on Moses under → *isrāʿīl*, → *allāh*, → *āyah*, → *rasūl*, → *qasā*.  
For a more detailed and systematic treatment of the Qurʿanic Moses narratives, refer to Schmid, forthcoming a, and Pregill, forthcoming.

### ***māl* | wealth, possessions**

On the expression “to contend (*jāhada*) with one’s possessions (*amwāl*) and lives (*nufūs*),” see under → *jāhada*, → *sabīl*, and → *aqraḍa*.

### ***māʾ* | water**

→ *khalaḡa*

### ***māda bi-* | to make s.o. sway**

→ *arḡ*



# n

## **n** (surah-initial letter)

→ ʾ-l-r

**nabbaʿa** tr. *bi-/ʿan* | to announce s.th. to s.o., to give to s.o. tidings of s.th.  
**nabaʿ** | tiding, tidings

See under → *nabiyy* and also under → *bayyana*, → *ḥikmah*, and → *al-ghayb*.

**nabadha** tr. | to cast s.th.

→ *ahl al-kitāb*

**nabiyy** | prophet

**nubuwwah** | prophethood

Further vocabulary discussed: *rasūl* | messenger **nabbaʿa** tr. *bi-/ʿan* | to announce s.th. to s.o., to give to s.o. tidings of s.th. **nabaʿ** | tiding, tidings *dhurriyyah* | offspring *khātam al-nabiyyīn* | seal of the prophets *ummah* | community *najjā* tr. | to deliver s.o. (said of God) *bashshara* tr. (*bi-/anna/bi-anna*) | to give glad tidings to s.o. (of s.th. / that . . .) *andhara* intr./tr./ditr. | to utter a warning, to warn s.o., to warn s.o. of s.th. *al-nabiyy al-ummī* | the prophet of the scriptureless *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *arsala* tr. | to send s.o.

**Overview, etymology, and relationship to the Arabic root *n-b-*** While the primary Qurʿanic title for Muhammad is “God’s Messenger” (*rasūl allāh*) or simply “the Messenger” (→ *rasūl*), another important epithet applied to him, almost exclusively in Medinan texts (see already *BEḲ* 42), is *al-nabiyy*, “the Prophet” (e.g., Q 5:81, 8:64.65.70, 9:61.73.113.117, 33:1.6.13.28.30 etc.). *Nabiyy* is patently an Arabisation of Hebrew *nābîʿ*, Aramaic/Syriac *nbīyā*, or Ethiopic *nabiyy* (*BEḲ* 42–43; *KU* 47; *FVQ* 276). Given this link, it is all the more striking that almost none of the major “written” prophets of the Hebrew Bible, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, figure as Qurʿanic prophets, or even figure at all in the Qurʿan, the single exception being Jonah (Wensinck 1924, 169–170; O’Connor 2019, 199–200).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> But note that some passages do assume the existence of Israelite prophets as a collective (*al-nabiyyīn*, *al-anbiyāʾ*, *anbiyāʾ allāh*): Q 2:61.91, 3:21.112.181, 4:155. That these Israelite prophets are not identical with those Israelite personalities who are expressly named as prophets, such as David or Solomon (see below), is clear from the fact that the pertinent verses accuse the Israelites of killing the prophets in question, a claim never repeated (and unlikely to have been tacitly presupposed) with regard to David, Salomon, etc.

Muslim lexicographers derive the word *nabiyy* from the consonantal root *n-b-*' (*AEL* 2753), which is presumably the root underlying Hebrew *nābîʿ* as well (*TDOT* 9, 130–132; see also van Putten 2018, 99, and van Putten 2022, 172). It is true that the traditional lexicographers' inner-Arabic derivation of the Qur'anic term directly from the root *n-b-*' ignores the strong likelihood that we are dealing with a loanword. Yet the association of *nabiyy* with the root *n-b-*' may be quite early, in so far as it accords with the reading variant *nabī'* instead of *nabiyy*, attributed to Nāfi' (see, e.g., *MQQ* 1:65 and *MQ* 1:115 on *Q* 2:61, and *MQQ* 1:191 and *MQ* 1:348 on *Q* 2:247), which has been classed as an archaism (van Putten 2022, 171–173). Moreover, some Qur'anic verses employ the verb *nabba'a* ("to announce, to tell") and the noun *naba'* ("announcement, tidings") to refer to acts of prophetic proclamation or the contents thereof (Bijlefeld 1969, 11 and 15; Ahrens 1935, 128)—an observation that is consistent with the hypothesis that an assumed link between *nabiyy* and *n-b-*' was operative already among the Qur'an's original addressees. Thus, in *Q* 78:2, *al-naba' al-'aẓīm*, "the mighty tidings," refers to the eschatological judgement; in *Q* 26:69, Muhammad is instructed to recount "the tidings of Abraham" (*naba' ibrahīm*); in *Q* 15:49,51, he is commanded to "announce" (*nabbi'*) that God is compassionate and merciful and to "tell them" (*nabbi'hum*) about the angelic guests of Abraham; and *Q* 34:7 describes Muhammad as "a man telling you<sup>p</sup> (*yunabbi'ukum*) that, when you have been completely torn to pieces, you will be created anew." One of the connotations that Muhammad's hearers would have connected with the title *nabiyy* may therefore well have been that of a divinely empowered "teller" or "tidings-bearer," roughly in keeping with a later lexicographer's statement that a *nabiyy* is called such because "he gives tidings of God" (*anba'a 'ani llāhi ta'ālā*; al-Jawharī 1979, 74). The fact that the Qur'anic text has been shown to display a general awareness of etymological connections (el Masri 2020, 29–31 and elsewhere) adds to the cogency of the suggestion just made.<sup>2</sup>

***Nabiyy vs rasūl.*** Many Qur'anic protagonists, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, or Jesus are termed both a *nabiyy*, "prophet," and a *rasūl*, "messenger."<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, traditional Muslim exegesis maintains that the two words are not in fact synonymous (Bijlefeld 1969, 12–14; O'Connor 2019, 205–206). Prophecy is generally understood to constitute the wider category of the two and is linked with the receipt of a religious law, while messengership is associated with public preaching. Whether this particular way of framing the distinction is fully borne out by the Qur'anic data is questionable; but one may nonetheless observe some salient patterns in the way the term *nabiyy* tends to be employed that distinguish it from the Qur'anic usage of *rasūl*, even if some exceptions will have to be noted further below. The issue is also treated in much more detail in a recent dissertation by Andrew O'Connor (O'Connor 2019) that should be consulted alongside the present entry.

(i) First, in a significant number of passages the word "prophet" is conspicuously confined to figures of Biblical or Israelite history (*KU* 48). A good illustration for this tendency is Surah 19, in the course of which the following figures are labelled prophets: Jesus

<sup>2</sup> This is not to say that inner-Arabic etymologisation will be indiscriminately appropriate. For instance, it is doubtful whether Jesus's title → *al-masīh*, "the Christ," is Qur'anically understood to derive from the verb *masaha* rather than being taken as a quasi-surname.

<sup>3</sup> According to Bijlefeld 1969, 17, Abraham is only designated as a prophet; but as he later acknowledges, *Q* 9:70 seems to imply that he was a messenger, too (Bijlefeld 1969, 26, n. 110). This is in keeping with the fact that Abraham's biography as retold in the Qur'an conforms in many respects to the standard elements of a Qur'anic *rasūl* narrative.

(v. 30), Abraham (v. 41), Isaac and Jacob (v. 49), Moses (v. 51), Aaron (v. 53), Ishmael (v. 54), and Idrīs (v. 56), whose identity is elusive but whom the Qur’anic hearers may well have located against a Biblical or Israelite horizon (*KU* 48).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the catalogue of those whom God gave prophethood (*al-nubuwwah*) in Q 6:83–89 encompasses a plethora of Biblical figures (Radscheit 1996a, 71–72): Abraham (v. 83), Isaac, Jacob, Noah, David, Solomon, Job, Joseph, Moses, Aaron (v. 84), Zechariah, John (the Baptist), Jesus, Elijah (*ilyās*; v. 85), and finally Ishmael, Elisha (*al-yasa’*), Jonah, and Lot (v. 86). Medinan verses present partly identical lists: Q 4:163 enumerates Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the descendants of Jacob (→ *al-asbāt*), Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, Salomon, and David as prophets, while 33:7 has Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. (The latter two verses also preface their lists with the Qur’anic Messenger himself, on which see below.) Further stray references to Biblical figures or collectives as prophets or as having been endowed with prophecy are Q 2:246 (where Samuel figures as an anonymous prophet of the Israelites), 3:39 (John the Baptist), 17:55 (David), 29:27 (the descendants of Abraham, including Isaac and Jacob), 37:112 (Isaac),<sup>5</sup> and 45:16 (the Israelites). Moreover, Medinan verses accuse the Israelites of “killing the prophets” (Q 2:61.91, 3:21.112.181, 4:155; see Reynolds 2012), further bearing out a close link between prophecy and the Israelites.<sup>6</sup> Finally, while some of the most important Qur’anic heroes are envisaged both as prophets and as messengers, it is noteworthy that at least some of the figures just referenced are never said to be messengers, namely, Isaac, Jacob, Job, David, Solomon, Zechariah, John (the Baptist), and Idrīs (for a helpful table, see O’Connor 2019, 204).<sup>7</sup>

(ii) Complementing the previous point, it is stated that prophecy runs in family lines, by way of being a hallmark of the descendants or “offspring” (*dhurriyyah*) of Adam, Noah, and Abraham (Q 19:58, 29:27, 57:26). In so far as Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Mary’s father ‘Imrān are “descendants of one another” (*dhurriyyatan ba’duhā min ba’din*; Q 3:34), the phenomenon of prophecy emerges as genealogically tied to one particular strand of humanity, namely, the Israelites and their patriarchs (see Bijlefeld 1969, 17, 18, 25, and also Durie 2018, 133). This genealogical aspect of prophecy is not disrupted by the fact that Medinan passages cast Muhammad as a prophet, for Q 14:37 depicts the Meccans (and therefore also Muhammad) as Abrahamites.

(iii) From early on, Muhammad is categorised as a messenger (see Q 21:25, 25:7.27.30, 44:13, 69:40),<sup>8</sup> even if this is not pervasive and it is only in the Medinan period that he

4 This assumption would be strengthened if the name is ultimately to be derived, via Syriac, from the Greek name Andreas (*JPND* 175–176; *FVQ* 51–52).

5 The verse belongs to a Medinan insertion; see *HCI* 94–95.

6 However, Q 2:87, 3:183, and 5:70 make the same accusation by using *rasūl/rusul*; see further below.

7 This is well expressed by Bijlefeld 1969, 17: “Not every prophet is an apostle’ is indeed a thesis which has full Qur’anic support.” O’Connor countenances the possibility that Q 4:164 might implicitly apply the title of messengers to the Biblical figures listed in the previous verse, which include David and Solomon (O’Connor 2019, 204). However, it is entirely conceivable, and arguably preferable, to consider Q 4:163–165 to rest on a distinction between prophets and messengers: v. 163 asserts that God has granted revelatory inspirations to a certain list of prophets, including David and Solomon, while v. 164 then adds that God has also made revelations to certain “messengers whom we told you<sup>8</sup> about before (*min qablu*) and messengers whom we have not told you about.” Especially in view of the phrase *min qablu*, which is best construed as referring to chronologically prior Qur’anic texts, it seems more likely that the messengers referred to in vv. 164–165 are a different group of people than the prophets listed in v. 163. For the opposite construal, taking prophets and messengers to be synonymous here, see O’Connor 2019, 209, n. 67.

8 On Q 69:40, see n. 28 under → *malak*.

becomes “the Messenger” *par excellence*. By contrast, the Meccan surahs virtually never call him a *nabiyy*, although two passages, Q 6:112 and 25:31, imply that the opposition encountered by him links him to previous prophets (Bijlefeld 1969, 15).<sup>9</sup> As noted above, it is only in Medinan surahs that Muhammad is routinely called a “prophet,” and one Medinan verse, Q 33:40, even elevates him to the rank of the “seal of the prophets” (*khātam al-nabiyyīn*), likely implying the finality of Muhammad’s prophetic mission (see under → *khatama*). Muhammad’s status as a prophet thus emerges only very gradually over the course of the Qur’an’s emergence, whereas his status as a messenger is established at a much earlier point.

(iv) Some of the customary Qur’anic tropes that adhere to the term *rasūl* are noticeably absent in connection with the term *nabiyy*. For instance, messengership is understood to be an emphatically ecumenical phenomenon: every community (*ummah*) has its messenger who comes to deliver a final warning before God unleashes his devastating punishment (see under → *rasūl*). Even though Q 7:94 does say something similar about prophets (“We have not sent any prophet to a settlement without seizing its inhabitants with misery and hardship”), making prophets appear functionally equivalent to messengers, such statements are not otherwise found about prophets in the Qur’an (Bijlefeld 1969, 20). Secondly, explicit calls to obedience are always coupled with Muhammad *qua* messenger, not *qua* prophet (Bijlefeld 1969, 22).<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, while it is categorically stated that God will “deliver” (verb: *najjā*) and “aid” (*n-ṣ-r*) his messengers (Q 6:34, 10:103, 12:110, 40:51; see also 2:214 and 30:47), prophets who, unlike Noah and Abraham, are not simultaneously messengers can apparently be killed by their opponents, at least according to a string of Medinan verses that accuse the Israelites and the scripture-owners of doing so (Q 2:61.87.91, 3:21.112.181.183, 4:155, 5:70, on which see Reynolds 2012). By contrast, the Qur’an conveys the overall impression that messengers “must triumph in order to manifest on earth the triumph of God” (Bijlefeld 1969, 22).<sup>11</sup>

The preceding generalisations are nonetheless disrupted by individual verses evidencing a partial conflation of the concepts of the prophet and the messenger in the Qur’an (O’Connor 2019, 207–210; but see already Wensinck 1924, 172). A prime exhibit in this regard is Q 7:94, which opens a verse group offering concluding comments on the narrative cycle occupying vv. 59–93 of the surah. First, as already highlighted, v. 94 presents the role of a prophet in terms that are otherwise typical of messengers, and indeed a later verse in the same concluding passage shifts back to speaking of the “messengers” that have come to the settlements destroyed by God (v. 101, noted in O’Connor 2019, 208). Secondly, the narrative cycle preceding v. 94 features not only Noah and Lot but also Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shu’ayb; in so far as v. 94 makes a general statement about God’s sending of prophets, it anomalously, but undeniably, suggests that Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shu’ayb fall under the category of prophecy as well (O’Connor 2019, 207–208), thereby contradicting Horowitz’s claim that the Arabian figures Hūd, Ṣāliḥ, and Shu’ayb are never categorised as prophets (*KU* 48; see also Watt 1970, 28, and Durie 2018, 132). Other verses in which O’Connor has plausibly detected an assimilation of the concept of the prophet to that of the messenger are Q 2:213,

9 Both verses overlap in stating that God has “appointed an enemy for every prophet” (*ja’alnā li-kulli nabiyyin ‘aduwwan*).

10 The only verse that has both *nabiyy* and the verb *aṭā’a* is Q 33:1, but here it is Muhammad—addressed by “O Prophet”—who is commanded not to obey the repudiators.

11 On Q 2:87, 3:183, and 5:70, which speak of a killing of *messengers* rather than *prophets*, see below.

ascribing to “the prophets” the function of “bringing good tidings” (→ *bashshara*) and “warning” (*andhara*), which are more standardly associated with messengers (O’Connor 2019, 209). And even in Surah 19, one of the foremost corroborating texts in favour of a close link between the Qur’anic notion of prophecy and Israelite history, two verses pair the terms *nabiyy* and *rasūl* as double epithets, giving the impression of substantial semantic overlap: of both Moses and Ishmael it is said that “he was a messenger, a prophet” (*wa-kāna rasūlan nabiyyā*; vv. 51 and 54). A similar sense can be gleaned from Q 25:31, already adduced as a rare Meccan suggestion to the effect that Muhammad’s experience of opposition conforms to the category of prophecy: after the preceding verse reports how “the messenger”—most likely, Muhammad—will on the day of judgement complain that his people have shunned “this *qur’ān*,” v. 31 then shifts to the term *nabiyy*: “Thus have we appointed an enemy from among the evildoers for every prophet” (*ja’alnā li-kulli nabiyyin ‘aduwwan*). Q 43:6–7, too, presents the function of a *nabiyy* in terms reminiscent of a *rasūl* (O’Connor 2019, 214).<sup>12</sup> Finally, in Q 2:87, 3:183, and 5:70 the accusation that the Israelites or the scripture-owners are guilty of killing God’s *prophets* (cf. 2:61.91, 3:21.112.181, 4:155) is varied to the charge of killing God’s *messengers*.

Some degree of conflation of the category of the prophet with that of the messenger, or perhaps the operation of a mutual force of conceptual attraction between them, is therefore undeniable. Yet the observations collated under (i) through (iv) above, even if muddied by some exceptions, seem solid enough to enable us to discern a Qur’anic concept of prophecy that is distinct from that of messengership. Prophecy is a multi-generational divine engagement with one particular strand of humanity, the Israelites and their patriarchs, whereas messengership is a universal human phenomenon generating moments of crisis: any community that is in flagrant breach of its religious and ethical obligations will be sent a warner before God will unleash his punishment, with the messenger’s coming forcing “a split into two opposing factions, one rejecting him and his message, the other accepting him in faith and obedience” (Bijlefeld 1969, 26). A particularly interesting manifestation of the presuppositions attaching to the concept of prophecy is Q 7:157–158, a Medinan insertion describing Muhammad as “the prophet of the scriptureless” (*al-nabiyy al-ummī*), whose ministry marks the extension of prophecy beyond the Israelites and their descendants, the Jewish and Christian “scripture-owners” or *ahl al-kitāb* (see under → *ummī*). The point of such a statement would be difficult to understand had there not been, in line with (i) above, a tacit assumption that prophecy was hitherto the prerogative of the *ahl al-kitāb*. Once again, however, one encounters a tendency for the concepts of prophecy and messengership to exercise semantic attraction upon each other, since Q 62:2 makes a very similar claim to 7:157–158 by employing the term *rasūl* rather than *nabiyy*: God has sent “among the scriptureless (*fī l-ummiyyīna*) a messenger from among them (*minhum*), who will recount his signs to them (*yatlū ‘alayhim āyātihi*) and purify them and teach them the scripture and wisdom, even if they were previously in manifest error.” We are here faced with a confluence of both concepts in the person of Muhammad: the reference to the recounting of God’s signs and the emphasis on the Messenger’s hailing “from” his audience are standard messenger tropes (→ *rasūl*), while the casting of Muhammad’s audience as

12 Cf. Q 36:30–31, which overlap with 43:6–7 in the use of *istahza’a* and *ahlaka*, but have *rasūl* instead of *nabiyy*; see also the Meccan verses 6:10, 13:32, 15:11, 18:106, 21:41, 25:41, 36:30, and 40:83, which have *istahza’a* or another derivative of the same root and *rusul*.

those parts of humanity who have not so far received scriptural revelation, rather than as his *ummah* or *qawm*, assume that until now there has obtained a particular link between prophecy and the *ahl al-kitāb*.

**Qur’anic references to prophecy and messengership from a diachronic perspective.**

The interplay between the conceptual distinctness of the Qur’anic notions of prophecy and messengership, on the one hand, and their mutual attraction, on the other, may be further illuminated from a diachronic perspective (see O’Connor 2019, 212–215). To begin with, the idea of human messengers of God is not only more frequent in the Meccan Qur’an but also surfaces chronologically earlier, as demonstrated by multiple occurrences throughout Surah 26 as well as by Q 69:10.40, 73:15–16, and 91:13 (*KU* 48; O’Connor 2019, 211 and 250–251). In so far as many Qur’anic prophets are also classed as messengers, this time lag already goes some way to explaining the conceptual pull operating on the Qur’anic notion of prophecy towards partial assimilation to the idea of messengership. Such a confluence would have been further encouraged by the possibility of construing the word *nabiyy* as a divinely commissioned “tidings-bearer,” as noted above. And indeed, of the three putatively earliest Qur’anic surahs that invoke the notion of prophecy, two (Q 43:6–7 and 25:31, on both of which see above) effectively employ the term *nabiyy* as a synonym of *rasūl*.

The third text at hand, however, is Surah 19, which very much lays the groundwork for subsequent associations of prophecy with the descendants of Abraham. This Abrahamite-Israelite connotation of the concept is then consolidated in a number of later Meccan verses, such as Q 45:16 (the Israelites are given prophecy, *al-nubuwwah*), 17:55 (a general statement about some prophets being preferred over others, with David as an example), 29:27 (prophecy runs among the offspring, *dhurriyyah*, of Abraham), and the catalogue of prophets in 6:83–89. Even so, another late Meccan verse, Q 7:94, reverts to deploying the term *nabiyy* in a manner that seems entirely replaceable by *rasūl*. It may be conjectured that the latent Biblical connotations inhering in the term *nabiyy*, perhaps due to its similarity with cognate terms in Hebrew and Aramaic, are particularly likely to be sidelined when it figures as an object of the verb *arsala*, “to send,” resulting in the term *nabiyy* operating in the capacity of a near-synonym to *rasūl*, as in Q 7:94 and 43:6. In these cases, the fact that *arsala* habitually collocates with *rasūl* or *rusul* (e.g., Q 2:151, 4:64.79, 5:70, 9:33, 13:38, 14:4, 17:77, 26:27, 73:15) may conceivably have led to the semantics of *r-s-l* overwriting those proper to the term *nabiyy*.

**najas | filth**

See under → *ṭahara* and also under → *jāhada*.

**najjā, anjā tr. | to deliver s.o. (said of God)**

→ *nabiyy*

**tanājā intr. | to talk to one another in private, to engage in intimate conversation**

→ *ma’rūf*



**najāh** | salvation

→ *furqān*

**naḥara** intr. | to perform an animal sacrifice

→ *dhabaḥa*

**andād** pl. | equals, rivals

→ *ashraka*

**nādā** tr. | to call out to s.o.

→ *jannah*

**andhara** intr./tr./ditr. | to utter a warning; to warn s.o.; to warn s.o. of s.th.

**mundhir, nadhīr** | warner

**nadhīr** | warning

See under → *bashshara* and also, briefly, under → *dhakkara*.

**tanāza'a** tr., **tanāza'a** intr. **fī** | to quarrel about s.th.

→ *amr*

**nazala** intr. **bi-** | to bring s.th. down

**nazlah** | descent, an act of descending

→ *nazzala*

**nazzala, anzala** tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down

Further vocabulary discussed: **awḥā** tr. **ilā** | to convey s.th. to s.o. **awḥā** intr. **ilā** | to convey revelations to s.o. **nazala** intr. **bi-** | to bring s.th. down **sabab** | rope, cord; pathway, conduit **kitāb** | scripture **ḥikmah** | wisdom **qur'ān** | recitation **sūrah** | surah **dhikr** | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation **al-tawrāh** | the Torah **al-injīl** | the Gospel or the Christian Bible **sulṭān** | authority **āyah** | sign **bayyīnah** | clear sign, clear proof **hudā** | guidance **nūr** | light **furqān** | salvific divine instruction **rizq** | provision **amanah** | security, a sense of security and calm **sakīnah** | composure, tranquillity **malak** | angel **rijz** | punishment **nazlah** | descent, an act of descending **ātā** ditr. | to give s.th. to s.o. **'allama** ditr. | to teach s.o. s.th. **al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ** pl. | the heavens and the earth **'araja** intr. | to ascend **ma'ārij** pl. | stairs **raqiya** intr. | to ascend **jumlatan wāḥidatan** | as a single whole, all at once

**“Sending down” in the Qur’an: overview.** To “send down” (*nazzala, anzala*) is a frequent Qur’anic designation for the transmission of divine revelations, a process also described by the verb → *awḥā* + acc. *ilā*, “to convey s.th. to s.o.” or, when used intransitively, “to convey revelations to s.o.” (*KU* 67).<sup>1</sup> Both roots, *n-z-l* and *w-ḥ-y*, have now been the object of a monograph-length study that this entry has no ambition to replace (Loynes 2021). Whereas *awḥā* can on occasion be applied to communicative acts in which both parties are non-divine (Q 6:112, 19:11), *anzala* and *nazzala* are confined to human-divine interaction (*GMK* 153; Wild 1996, 138). Usage of the latter two terms often collocates with the adverbial phrase “from heaven,” *min al-samā*’ (e.g., Q 2:22.59.164, 4:153, 5:112.114). Heaven is, of course, also where the Qur’an places God (Q 67:16–17; see Wild 1996, 141–142, and Loynes 2021, 24). *Nazzala* and *anzala* thus designate a movement originating in the divine realm.

In line with this, God often features as the explicit subject of *nazzala* or *anzala*. Angels can however play the role of proxy subjects mandated by God (Q 2:97, 16:102, 26:193–194, 29:34; see Loynes 2021, 25–27), in which case *nazzala, anzala, or nazala bi-* (Q 26:193) are best translated as “to bring down.” The Qur’anic Messenger’s opponents sometimes challenge him to “bring down” (*tunazzil*) a scripture from heaven (Q 4:153, 17:93), but especially Q 17:93 makes it clear that the Qur’an rejects the view that a mere human being might be capable of this (see also Q 6:93 and Loynes 2021, 28–29). In the Qur’an, initiating transitive movement from heaven to earth is therefore a divine prerogative. In fact, the Qur’an seems to consider the celestial realm to be entirely out of bounds to humans (as well as to demons, whose attempts to overhear the deliberations of the heavenly council are invariably thwarted; see under → *jinn*). It is true that the Qur’anic retelling of the story of Dhū l-Qarnayn or Alexander the Great (Q 18:83–102) can be understood to suggest that the protagonist of the narrative travelled along pathways or conduits (singular: *sabab*) traversing the dome of the sky (see van Bladel 2007 and under → *samā*’). However, access to these pathways merely facilitates Dhū l-Qarnayn’s displacement from one place on the earth to another. As further discussed below, the Qur’an is sceptical of the possibility that a human might ascend to the celestial realm proper and bring down a revelation.

Recurrent objects of divine communication by means of “sending down” are revelatory or quasi-revelatory phenomena such as “the scripture” (→ *al-kitāb*, e.g., Q 2:174.176, 3:3, 4:105.113.140), wisdom (→ *al-ḥikmah*; Q 4:113), the corpus of recitations promulgated by

1 I am persuaded by Simon Loynes’s argument that no clear semantic difference between *anzala* and *nazzala* may be discerned in Qur’anic usage (Loynes 2021, 21–23). Some premodern Islamic scholars posit that *nazzala* has a processual connotation that *anzala* lacks (Seker 2019, 27–28; see, e.g., Zam. 1:526, on Q 3:3), but others maintain the two verbs’ semantic equivalence (Leemhuis 1977, 21, with n. 5). In favour of the latter position, note that Q 3:3 describes God’s revelations to Muhammad with the verb *nazzala* while Q 18:1 employs *anzala*. The phraseology of both verses is otherwise similar, in so far as both share the accusative object *al-kitāb* and a prepositional phrase with *‘alā* that designates the Qur’anic Messenger, although Q 3:3 additionally involves a reference to earlier revelations that is absent from 18:1. For a meticulous linguistic study that seeks to establish, based on a comprehensive and meticulous survey of the Qur’anic data, that there are at least minor semantic differences between a causative verb *anzala* and factitive *nazzala*, see Leemhuis 1977, 20–36. For instance, Leemhuis proposes that if the object that is made to descend is “cooperative,” then an occurrence of *anzala* is more likely than *nazzala* (Leemhuis 1977, 25–26). Leemhuis also adduces some examples for what he considers to be the durative, as opposed to momentary, character of *anzala*, though he admits that this is often difficult to verify (Leemhuis 1977, 27–29). Virtually everything that Leemhuis says is duly hedged (e.g., Leemhuis 1977, 36: “the borderline between factitive and causative must be seen as rather vague and overlappings may certainly occur”). Nonetheless, I find it difficult to resist an overall sense that his attempt to explicate why specific verses employ *nazzala* or rather *anzala* is at times an exercise in *ex post facto* rationalisation.

Muhammad (*al-qurʾān*; e.g., Q 2:185, 5:101, 17:82, 20:2, 25:32), a → *sūrah* (Q 9:64.86.124.127, 47:20), reminding exhortation (*al-dhikr*; e.g., Q 15:6.9, 38:8; → *dhakkara*), the Torah (→ *al-tawrāh*) and the Gospel or Christian Bible (→ *al-injīl*; e.g., Q 3:3.65.93), authority (→ *sultān*; e.g., Q 3:151, 7:33, 22:71),<sup>2</sup> signs or “clear signs” (*āyāt bayyināt* or simply *bayyināt*; e.g., Q 2:99.159, 6:37, 29:50), guidance (*hudā*; Q 2:159), light (*nūr*; Q 4:174, 7:157, 64:8), and salvific divine instruction (→ *al-furqān*; Q 3:4, 25:1; see also 2:185). The corresponding verbal noun *tanzīl* is often found in self-referential surah introductions (e.g., Q 20:4, 32:2, 39:1, 40:2).<sup>3</sup> But God’s sending down is not confined to revelations and includes manifold other favours (*min faḍlihi*; Q 2:90) and “good things” (*min khayrin*; Q 2:105, 28:24), such as rain (e.g., Q 2:22.164, 8:11, 29:63; see also under → *allāh*), provision (→ *rizq*; Q 10:59, 45:5), manna and quails (Q 2:57, 7:160, 20:80), the heavenly table demanded by Jesus’s disciples (Q 5:112–115), clothing (Q 7:26), iron (Q 57:25), different kinds of livestock (Q 39:6), and a sense of security (*amanah*; Q 3:154) and composure (→ *sakīnah*; Q 9:26.40, 48:4.18.26) in situations of military peril. Angels (*al-malāʾikah*, singular: → *malak*), too, are among the entities sent down by God (e.g., Q 6:8.111, 15:8, 16:2) and can act as invisible allies in battle (Q 9:26 and 33:9; see also 9:40). The things that God sends down, then, are normally divine revelations or divine benefactions, although in Q 2:59 God is said to send down “punishment” (→ *rijz*) “from heaven” (see also Q 29:34), while Q 24:43 similarly presents God’s sending down of hail as potentially harmful (Wild 1996, 143).

**Divine descent in the early Meccan verse Q 53:13.** The Qur’an’s characteristic dual employment of derivatives of *n-z-l* to denote both revelatory and natural phenomena (cf. the double use of *anzala* in Q 16:64–65) begins to coalesce already in early Meccan passages: according to Q 78:14, God “sent down” water from rain clouds, while Q 97:1 speaks of revelatory sending down. An incipient parallelism between vertical movements in the domains of nature and revelation may be discerned in Surah 53, whose opening oath evokes the setting of “the star,” most likely, the Pleiades (*wa-l-najmi idhā hawā*; e.g., Ṭab. 22:5–7; see in much more detail Hussain 2020), while subsequent verses (vv. 4–18) describe two visionary experiences that are expressly described as a “descent” (v. 13: *nazzlah*). The supernatural being that is the object of these two visions, quite possibly God himself,<sup>4</sup> is said to have first been positioned high above and then to have approached the Messenger in order to convey revelations to him (vv. 6–10). Both the astronomical phenomenon referenced in the surah opening and the revelatory experience detailed thereafter thus proceed from heaven to earth. Hence, within its surah context the succinct allusion to the setting of a star or asterism in v. 1 serves to exemplify the general possibility of vertical movement, and therefore also communication, between what is above and what is below. This supports the surah’s claim that the Qur’anic Messenger has indeed been privileged with the receipt of authentic revelation. Although the natural phenomenon at hand, the setting of a star or asterism, is not described by a derivative of *n-z-l* here, the passage does foreshadow the developed cosmic-revelatory parallelism that comes to be enshrined in the Qur’an’s mature employment of *nazzala* and *anzala*.

2 As noted in Wild 1996, 143, references to the sending down of divine authority tend to be negative.

3 The Qur’an contains no occurrences of the fourth-form verbal noun *inzāl*.

4 In support of the contention that the object of the Messenger’s vision here is God rather than an angel, see Sinai 2011a, 7–9, with some references to previous scholarship on the topic. A contrary view is argued in Hussain 2020, 126–131.

### Partial synonyms of “sending down” and the spatial connotations of *nazzala/anzala*.

Many occurrences of *nazzala* or *anzala* would appear to be to some degree interchangeable with other verbs. For instance, “the scripture and wisdom” (→ *kitāb*, → *ḥikmah*) are not only sent down (Q 4:113), but also “given” (*ātā*; Q 4:54; see also 2:269, 31:12, and 38:20), “taught” (*allama*; Q 2:129.151, 3:48.164, 5:110, 62:2), and “conveyed” (verb: → *awḥā*; Q 17:39, 18:27, 29:45, 35:31), while “the recitation” (→ *al-qur’ān*), too, is both said to be sent down and to be conveyed by inspiration (Q 6:19, 12:3, 20:114, 42:7).

As has been pointed out above, however, what sets *nazzala* and *anzala* apart from these partial equivalents is a connotation of spatial descent that places God above and the human recipients of his revelations and blessings below (Wild 1996, 141–145). In divine acts of “sending down,” the ordinary boundary traversing the Qur’an’s two-tiered cosmos composed of “the heavens and the earth” (*al-samāwāt wa-l-ard*; Q 2:33.107.116.117 etc.; → *ard*, → *samā*) becomes permeable to allow for a wide-ranging array of divine interventions in the terrestrial world. On occasion, the Qur’an implies that God’s governance of the world involves not only descent but also ascent (verb: *’araja*) back to God. Thus, according to Q 70:4, “the angels and the spirit ascend to God” (*ta’ruju l-malā’ikatu wa-l-rūḥu ilayhi*; see under → *rūḥ*) on a cosmic staircase or ladder (*ma’ārij*; Q 70:3; see JPND 210; Horovitz 1919, 175–176; PP 438), presumably after having executed whatever tasks they have been dispatched to perform below; and according to Q 32:5, God “directs [his] commands (*yudabbiru l-amra*) from the heaven to the earth, upon which [i.e., after their fulfilment] they ascend [back to him] (*thumma ya’ruju ilayhi*)” (see under → *amr*). It is thus God who controls the cosmic circuit of descent down from heaven and reascent back to it; God knows not only “what enters the earth and what comes forth from it” but also “what descends from heaven and what ascends to it” (*mā yanzilu mina l-samā’i wa-mā ya’ruju fihā*; Q 34:2, 57:4).

It is important to stress that the Qur’anic God himself is generally understood to remain in heaven (Loynes 2021, 24–25).<sup>5</sup> In this regard, Qur’anic theology forms a clear contrast with a Christian author like Jacob of Sarug, who expressly says that God “came down (*nḥet*) from on high” (Mathews 2020, 48–51, ll. 2178–2179, 2185, 2197; cf. also Mathews 2014, 34–35, ll. 197–198, or Kollamparampil 2010, 224–225, l. 346).<sup>6</sup> A possible exception to the prevalent Qur’anic scenario of God remaining above is the early Meccan verse Q 53:13 (see above), where the term “descent” (*nazlah*) may well describe a theophany, meaning that reference would be to a “descent” of the deity himself. But apart from this exceptional passage, it is the notion of divine sending down that accounts for the possibility of divine-human interaction in the Qur’an, without requiring “direct and unmediated contact between a human being and the deity” (Wild 1996, 146).<sup>7</sup>

**Revelatory descent vs prophetic ascent.** The Qur’an’s far-reaching generalisation of the notion of divine sending down, ranging from rain to revelation, seems currently unprecedented, even if Aramaic renderings of the Bible—namely, the Peshitta and *Targum*

5 Following Wild 1996, 141, Loynes observes that the Qur’an generally assumes a motion “of God sending things down, not one of God descending.”

6 Like Jacob, the Qur’an says that God created Adam with his hands (see Q 38:75 and under → *allāh*); but unlike Jacob, this is not presented as an act of divine descent or self-humbling.

7 Ruling out such unmediated contact would seem to be the point of Q 42:51, according to which God might speak to a human “by [directly] conveying [revelations]” (*wahyan*), or “from behind a veil,” or by means of an angelic “messenger” (*rasūl*), who will then pass God’s revelation on to the human addressee in question.

*Onqelos*—can speak of God “sending down rain” (*aḥḥet . . . meṭrā*; Gen 2:5; see also Gen 7:4; cf. *SL* 910). It is certainly not self-evident that divine revelations must necessarily be conveyed in a top-down movement, given that early Jewish and Samaritan traditions depict an alternative paradigm that has prophetic figures like Enoch or Moses ascend to heaven and receive a celestial book or at least communicate its contents to other mortals (Widengren 1950, 35–37 and 46; *QP* 119–123). The Qur’an’s opponents were demonstrably familiar with this idea of a human displacement to the heavenly realm, for they are quoted as demanding that Muhammad “ascend to heaven” (*tarqā fi l-samā’i*) and “bring down” (*an tunazzila*) a scripture “upon” (*‘alā*) them (Q 17:93 and similarly 4:153; *QP* 122 also draws attention to Q 6:35, 15:14 with the verb *‘araja*, 38:10 with the verb *irtaqā*, and 52:38). Such notions of prophetic ascension are not endorsed by the Qur’an, and it is presumably in disagreement with them that the Qur’anic proclamations are adamant that scriptural revelations are invariably “sent down” by God (Fossum 1993, 157–158; see also *QP* 123).<sup>8</sup> The disparity between the Qur’anic paradigm of revelatory descent and the alternative one of prophetic ascent is even clearer if one accepts Angelika Neuwirth’s argument that Q 17:1 does not assert an ascent of the Qur’anic Messenger to heaven, along the lines of the later Islamic *mi’rāj* tradition but merely Muhammad’s translocation to the site of the Jerusalem temple (*SPMC* 227–233, 239).<sup>9</sup> The contrast between these two opposing paradigms—one of divine revelations travelling downwards, the other one of humans travelling upwards—is thrown into linguistic relief by the fact that in the Qur’an’s own voice it is generally God who figures as the grammatical subject of the verbs *nazzala* and *anzala*, while in the opponents’ challenges in Q 4:153 and 17:93 the subject of *nazzala* is the Qur’anic Messenger. The general theological upshot of the Qur’anic paradigm of revelatory descent is that agency in the process of revelation is fully confined to the deity (*QP* 122): “The overall message is that the only way in which humans can gain divine knowledge is by God sending it down.”

**Is God’s sending down of the scripture equivalent to its conveyance to humans?**

It is usually assumed that when the Qur’an says that God “sent down” scripture or “the recitation,” this is tantamount to the actual transmission of divine revelations to Muhammad or other human recipients (see the literature review in Loynes 2021, 2–9). This supposition has recently been questioned by Simon Loynes. Through a careful inner-Qur’anic argument, Loynes seeks to show that the Qur’an assumes a two-stage model of the revelatory process (Loynes 2021, 50–62). This two-stage scenario of revelation resembles the traditional Islamic view that at first the entirety of the Qur’anic corpus was sent down to the “lowest heaven,” whence specific Qur’anic passages were then transmitted to Muhammad at different times of his prophetic ministry (e.g., Ṭab. 3:188–192). The gist of such a two-stage model is a principled distinction between an initial “sending down” of the celestial scripture by virtue of which its content becomes “potentially available to prophets and mankind” (Loynes 2021, 50), and the subsequent communication of specific parts of this sent-down scripture to Muhammad or some other prophet, by virtue of which the celestial scripture becomes *actually* available to human addressees.

<sup>8</sup> As noted earlier, Dhū l-Qarnayn seems to be portrayed as travelling along heavenly conduits or “cords”; but he does not bring down a revelation.

<sup>9</sup> For two alternative voices, see Busse 1991 and Fossum 1993, 157.

Notwithstanding the elegance of Loynes’s hypothesis, there remain strong reasons to retain the standard equation between God’s sending down of the celestial scripture and its actual conveyance to some human addressee. Most importantly, a considerable number of verses addressing the Qur’anic Messenger collocate *anzala/nazzala* + *kitāb* or *qur’ān* with ‘*alayka*, “upon you<sup>S</sup>,” or *ilayka*, “to you<sup>S</sup>.”<sup>10</sup> Thus, at Q 25:32 the Qur’anic opponents are alleged to pose the question, “Why has the recitation not been sent down upon him (*law-lā nuzzila ‘alayhi l-qur’ānu*) as a single whole (*jumlatan wāḥidatan*)?” It seems safe to infer from this that God’s sending down of the Qur’anic corpus is identical with, rather than merely a precondition for, the act of conveying revelations to a specific human addressee. Sending down, in other word, is not envisaged as a one-off event that prepares the ground for the actual transmission of revelations at a subsequent point in time but rather as an ongoing process involving the actual, albeit incremental, delivery of consecutive revelatory instalments to the Qur’anic Messenger.

The claim that the sending down of the Qur’anic revelations is envisaged as an ongoing process is not refuted by the fact that many references to God’s sending down of revelations employ perfect forms of the verbs *anzala* and *nazzala* (e.g., *nazzalnā* or *anzalnā*) rather than imperfect forms (such as *nunazzilu*, as in Q 17:82). The perfect also occurs with regard to God’s sending down of rain (e.g., Q 2:22, 6:99, 29:63, 43:11), which is quite obviously not a one-time event but rather a recurrent phenomenon. As has been previously shown, the Qur’an’s use of the perfect must not automatically be equated with employment of the past tense (Reuschel 1996; on the sending down of rain specifically see *ibid.*, 155–156). A much graver difficulty for a serial or consecutive understanding of the sending down of the Qur’anic revelations, and arguably the strongest evidence supporting Loynes’s two-stage scenario, is the fact that three Qur’anic passages from different chronological periods appear to date the sending down of the Qur’anic revelations, of “the clear scripture,” or simply of “it” to a specific night or month (Q 2:185, 44:3, 97:1). One solution would be to read such statements as ingressive or inchoative, that is, to construe them as pertaining to the commencement of the Qur’anic revelations.

***tanazzala* intr. | to descend**  
***tanazzala* intr. *bi-* | to bring s.th. down**  
 → *amr*, → *jinn*

***nasakha* tr. | to cancel s.th. out, to abrogate s.th.**  
 See briefly under → *āyah* and → *qasā*.

***nusuk* | animal sacrifice**  
***mansak* | rite**  
 → *dhabaḥa*

<sup>10</sup> See Q 3:3,7, 4:105, 5:48, 7:2, 13:1, 14:1, 16:64,89, 20:2, 29:47,51, 38:29, 39:2,41, and 76:23; see also 6:7 and the use of *n-z-l* in conjunction with ‘*alā qalbika* in 2:97 and 26:193–194. For *nazzala/anzala* + *kitāb/qur’ān* + ‘*alayhi* / ‘*alā rasūlihi*, see Q 4:136 and 25:32. Q 2:231 and 21:10 have *anzala* + *kitāb* with the second person plural ‘*alaykum* or *ilaykum*.



*nasiya* tr./intr. | to forget (s.th. or s.o.)

Further vocabulary discussed: *dhakara* tr. | to remember or mention s.th. or s.o. *dhakkara* tr. (*bi-*) | to remind s.o. (of s.th.) *al-shayṭān* | the devil, Satan *fiṭrah* | creaturely disposition, creaturely constitution *āyah* | sign *rabb* | lord *ghafala* intr. *'an* | to be heedless of s.th.

**The Qur'an on human forgetfulness.** A range of Qur'anic passages bemoan or presuppose the human tendency to “forget” (*nasiya*) God or vital religious truths, especially the day of judgement (e.g., Q 9:67, 20:115.126, 25:18, 32:14, 36:78, 38:26, 39:8, 45:34). Reflecting this basic assumption of Qur'anic anthropology, the communal prayer that concludes Surah 2 pleads with God not to “take us to task if we have been forgetful or have made mistakes” (*lā tu'ākhidhnā in nasīnā aw akhṭa'nā*; Q 2:286). This discourse of human forgetfulness forms the negative counterpart to the Qur'an's frequent references to human remembering (→ *dhakara*) and divine reminding (→ *dhakkara*): humans being oblivious creatures, they stand in permanent need of having their attention drawn to that of which they would otherwise fail to be mindful. Some verses attribute human forgetting to the agency of the devil or → *shayṭān* (Q 6:68, 12:42, 18:63, 58:19). This is particularly salient when Q 12:42 is compared to its Biblical counterpart Gen 40:23, where the act of forgetting Joseph is attributed only to Pharaoh's chief cupbearer rather than to any superhuman cause.<sup>1</sup>

In parallel with the general human tendency to be forgetful of God, however, the Qur'an also posits that humans have an innate “creaturely disposition” (*fiṭrah*) towards monotheism (Q 30:30; see under → *ḥanīf*). This presumably explains why many Qur'anic passages bespeak the assumption that its addressees will be, or at least ought to be, receptive to divine reminders and be able to recognise assorted cosmic and historical data as “signs” (singular: → *āyah*) pointing to a unique, omnipotent, and merciful divine creator. Human existence thus plays out a conflict between two contrary dispositions or orientations, one finding its fulfilment in turning towards God and the other inclining humans towards oblivion of God. The fundamental demand imposed on every human agent is to assert the former over the latter, whatever the religious milieu that he or she has contingently been born into.

This universal liability to be judged by the standard of rigorous monotheism is foregrounded with particular force in the much-discussed passage Q 7:172–173 (on whose reception history see Gramlich 1983): every human may be regarded to have prenatally recognised God as his or her Lord (*rabb*) and to be consequently bound by an express personal commitment to monotheism; the fact that one's forefathers may have worshipped beings other than God will not count as an excuse, and no one can validly claim to have been ignorant or “heedless” (*ghāfilīn*) of his or her divine Lord (see under → *rabb*). While the verb *nasiya* does not figure in this passage, it does contain the verb *ghafala*, which is close in meaning and like *nasiya* recurs throughout Surah 7: just as humans must not “forget that of which they have been reminded” (Q 7:165; see also the earlier instances of *nasiya* in Q 7:51.53), so they must not neglect or “be heedless” of God's signs (Q 7:136.146; for

<sup>1</sup> One verse, Q 2:106, exceptionally casts God as a cause of forgetting, though the context is very specific: God may choose to “abrogate” (*nasakha*; see also Q 22:52) some of his signs or cause them to be forgotten; yet he will unfailingly replace them by something equal or better.

further occurrences of *ghafala*, see 7:172.179.205). Q 7:205, the surah's penultimate verse, caps off its repeated allusions to remembering and forgetting by enjoining remembrance of God through silent invocation, employing both *dhakara* and *ghafala* in opposition: "invoke your<sup>5</sup> Lord in your soul (*wa-dhkur rabbaka fi nafsika*), humbly and in fear, without raising your voice, in the mornings and in the evenings, and do not be one of the heedless (*wa-lā-takun mina l-ghāfilīn*)."<sup>2</sup> The core challenge with which humans must grapple, then, is to keep present to their minds a truth with which they are innately familiar but which nonetheless continually threatens to slip their minds.

**Divine forgetting.** By contrast with humans, God never forgets, as Q 19:64 and 20:52 categorically assert. It is only an apparent contradiction of this affirmation that a number of verses evoke an action-response sequence according to which human forgetfulness of God or of God's judgement will entail God's forgetting of humans: "they have forgotten God, so he has forgotten them" (Q 9:67: *nasū llāha fa-nasiyahum*; see also 7:51, 20:126, 32:14, 45:34).<sup>3</sup> Such retaliatory disregarding of unbelievers and sinners is not an unwitting slip of memory on God's part but rather a deliberate consignment to oblivion, amounting to God's refusal to grant the individuals in question any further aid or forgiveness. Q 59:19 contains a striking escalation of this action-response sequence: "Do not be like those who forgot God, upon which he caused them to forget themselves" (*wa-lā takūnū ka-lladhīna nasū llāha fa-ansāhum anfusahum*). As explained elsewhere (→ *dhakara*), the Qur'an's stress on divine omniscience and its concomitant denial of unwitting divine forgetfulness may also help explain why the Qur'an, by contrast with a significant number of pre-Qur'anic inscriptions, is virtually devoid of pleas that God might "remember" certain human individuals or groups: God's awareness of human actions and, indeed, of their secret thoughts and emotions is presumed to be all-encompassing and indiscriminate, though of course its consequences may well be punitive rather than benign.

**Biblical antecedents.** The Qur'anic assessment that humans are beings essentially disposed to be forgetful of God recalls Biblical statements in which forgetting God and his past acts of deliverance is deemed a "willful, culpable act" (*TDOT* 14:673). Thus, in Deuteronomy the Israelites are warned against forgetting "the things that your eyes have seen" (Deut 4:9), against forgetting their covenant with God (Deut 4:23), and against forgetting God himself, "who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (Deut 6:12; see also Deut 8:14). As other verses make clear, forgetting God is equivalent to failing to keep his commandments (Deut 8:11) and to worshipping other Gods (Deut 8:19). Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, too, the Israelites are commanded to "remember and not forget" (Deut 9:7; see also Deut 25:19) or accused of having forgotten or "not remembered" God (e.g., Deut 32:18, Judg 3:7 and 8:34, 1 Sam 12:9, 2 Kgs 17:38, Ps 106:13.21). As just illustrated, in many Biblical verses the crucial truth that must not be forgotten is God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian servitude, his subsequent covenant with them at Sinai, and the resulting obligation not to worship other deities. By contrast, some Qur'anic verses identify the pivotal fact that must not slip people's mind with the eschatological judgement (Q 7:51, 32:14, 38:26, 45:34): in line with the paramount significance of eschatology

2 The root *dh-k-r* is even more frequent throughout Surah 7 than *nasiya* and *ghafala*; see, e.g., Q 7:2.3.26.

3 For similar sequences in which a human offence is followed by a divine response in kind, see under → *makara* and Q 17:8 (*wa-in 'udtum 'udnā*). For a positive case (if humans turn back to God in remorse, God will turn to them), see under → *tāba*.

throughout the Qur'an, the Deuteronomistic orientation towards a seminal past event, the Sinaitic covenant, is replaced by an orientation towards the eschatological future. But the difference should not be overstated. Thus, when Isa 51:13 voices the accusation that “you have forgotten the Lord, your Maker,” this is similar in tone to the Qur'anic complaint that man is apt to “forget his own creation” or createdness (*nasiya khalqahu*) in Q 36:78. A more specific similarity is exhibited by Hos 4:6, which resembles Qur'anic verses like Q 9:67 in casting divine forgetting as a punitive response to human forgetting: “and since you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.”

***ansha'a* tr. | to produce s.th., to bring s.th. forth**

→ *khalaqa*

***anshara* tr./intr. | to resurrect (s.o.)**

***nushūr* | resurrection**

→ *ba'atha*

***nuṣub* | sacrificial stone**

→ *dhabaha*

***al-anṣār* pl. | the helpers**

→ *ummah*, → *rasūl*, → *al-'ālamūn*, → *hājara*

***al-naṣārā* pl. (sg. *naṣrānī*) | the Christians**

Further vocabulary discussed: *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *alladhīna āmanū*, *al-mu'minūn* pl. | the believers *al-yahūd*, *alladhīna hādū*, *hūd* pl. | the Jews *al-ṣābi'ūn* pl. | converts (to Manichaeism?) *al-majūs* pl. | the Magians *alladhīna ashrakū*, *al-mushrikūn* pl. | the associators *al-injīl* | the Gospel or the Christian Bible *banū isrā'īl* pl. | the Israelites *al-masīḥ* | Christ *ibn* | son *al-tawrah* | the Torah *rūḥ* | spirit *walad* | offspring *ashraka* intr. (*bi-*) | to be an associator, to venerate associate deities, to attribute associates to God *ikhtalafa* intr. (*fī*) | to disagree, to fall into disagreement (about s.th.) *ḥizb* | faction, party *kitāb* | scripture *mīthāq* | covenant, treaty; the act of concluding a covenant or treaty *millah* | religion, religious teaching *qīssīsūn* pl. | priests *ruhbān* pl. | God-fearers, bishops *aḥbār* pl. | rabbinic scholars *rahbāniyyah* | the institution of the episcopate (“God-fearingness”) *rahmah* | mercy *taqwā* | fear of God *rasūl* | messenger *ṭā'ifah* | faction, group *ummī* | scriptureless, not hitherto endowed with a scriptural revelation

**Overview of Qur'anic usage.** The Qur'an often designates Jews and Christians jointly as “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*), but they can also figure under separate names (see

also under → *al-yahūd*). The Qur’anic term normally equated with the Christians is *al-naṣārā*, which is limited to the four Medinan surahs 2, 5, 9, and 22 (Q 2:62.111.113.120.135.140, 5:14.18.51.69.82, 9:30, 22:17), while Q 3:67 employs the corresponding singular *naṣrānī*. In three cases (Q 2:62, 5:69, 22:17), the *naṣārā* appear in lists of religious communities, comprising “the believers” (*alladhīna āmanū*), the Jews (*alladhīna hādū*), the enigmatic → *ṣābi’ūn*, and—uniquely in Q 22:17—the “Magians” (*al-majūs*) and the associators (*alladhīna ashrakū*; → *ashraka*). Other verses mention the *naṣārā* together with the Jews (*al-yahūd*, occasionally shortened to *hūd*; Q 2:111.113.120.135.140, 5:18.51.82, 9:30; cf. Griffith 2011, 306–307; → *al-yahūd*), and the Qur’an hints that there is tension and antagonism between the *naṣārā* and the Jews (see especially Q 2:113).<sup>1</sup> Q 5:47 would seem to use the expression “owners of the Gospel” (*ahl al-injīl*; → *injīl*) as a synonym for *al-naṣārā* (who are mentioned in v. 51).

There is no Qur’anic equivalent of the term “Christian” (nor, indeed, of the term “Jew”) in the Meccan period (QP 241–243).<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the Meccan surahs evince considerable familiarity with aspects of Christian lore and eschatology, and the explicit disavowal of Christian teachings about Jesus’s divine sonship and the Trinity in the Medinan surahs is already foreshadowed in some Meccan passages (Q 19:35–36, 43:59.64, and perhaps also 21:91; for more detail, see under → *rūh*). As regards Judaism, there are Meccan references to the Israelites (→ *banū isrā’īl*), some of which even seem to locate them in the present rather than just in the Biblical past (Q 26:197, 27:76, 46:10). Overall, it is therefore not tenable to take the absence of explicit references to Jews and Christians in the Meccan surahs to indicate a lack of acquaintance with both religions. More likely, the phenomenon is due to underlying polemical objectives (HCI 178).

**The etymology and meaning of *naṣārā*.** The fact that the *naṣārā* tend to be paired with the Jews, are associated with the *injīl*, and are quoted as saying, “Christ (→ *al-masīh*) is God’s son (*ibn*)” (Q 9:30) all accord well with the standard assumption that *naṣārā* is the general Qur’anic term for Christians. Etymologically, *naṣārā* is likely derived from the Syriac plural *naṣrāyē*, with the Arabic singular *naṣrānī* being in turn a back-formation from *naṣārā* (KU 144–145; FVQ 281), although a direct derivation of Arabic *naṣrānī* from Greek *nazarēnos* is perhaps not impossible either. As previous scholars have noted (e.g., KU 145; de Blois 2002, 1–2; Gnlika 2007, 27–34; Griffith 2011, 302–303), the adjectives *nazarēnos* and *nazōraios*, “of Nazareth,” are applied to Jesus at various places in the New Testament Gospels (Matt 2:23; Mark 1:24, 10:47, 14:67, 16:6; Luke 4:34, 24:19; John 19:19). The plural, meanwhile, occurs in Acts 24:5, where Paul is accused of being “a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (*prōtostatētēn . . . tēs tōn nazōraiōn haireseōs*; Peshitta: *rēshā . . . d-yūlpānā d-nāṣrāyē*). “Nazarenes” is here employed as an outsider’s name for the Christian community, namely, for the followers of the man from Nazareth; the label’s potentially pejorative resonance is expressly noted by Jerome (de Blois 2002, 2, n. 6; Griffith 2011, 303). Both usages—to wit, of the singular as an epithet for Jesus, and derived from this, of the plural as an appellation for Jesus’s followers—have counterparts in the Babylonian Talmud: Jesus is given the attribute *ha-noṣri*, “the Nazarene” or “of Nazareth” (e.g., *b. Bēr. 17b* and *b. Sanh. 103a*, on which see Schäfer 2007, 25–33 and 135–136), while at *b. Ta’an. 27b* the

<sup>1</sup> At Q 5:14, God’s covenant with the *naṣārā* contrasts with the preceding mention of his covenant with the Israelites in vv. 12–13. Q 5:82 groups the Jews together with the associators and opposes both to the *naṣārā*.

<sup>2</sup> Q 6:146 and 16:118 do mention *alladhīna hādū*, but both verses are Medinan insertions (Sinai 2019c).

plural *noṣrim* would appear to designate the Christians in general (for a detailed review of the pertinent rabbinic passages, see Pritz 1988, 95–107).<sup>3</sup> As Pritz notes, it is probable that more Talmudic occurrences of the words *noṣrim* fell victim to censorship (Pritz 1988, 95; see also Schäfer 2007, 131–144). Tertullian, too, confirms that “Nazarenes” was the general Jewish designation for Christians (de Blois 2002, 2–3). In Syriac, *naṣrāyē*—unlike the much more common Christian self-designations *mshūhāyē* and *krīstyānē* (corresponding to Greek *christianoī*, whose emergence as a collective appellation for Jesus’s disciples is already noted in Acts 11:26)—can occur in speech reported from non-Christians, possibly under the influence of Acts 24:5 (de Blois 2002, 8–10; Griffith 2011, 303–304; see also *KU* 145–146).

A different and more restricted use of the collective “Nazoraeans” is found in the Christian heresiographers Epiphanius and Jerome, who employ the term as a label for groups of Christians deemed heretical on account of their continued adherence to the Jewish law (de Blois 2002, 2–4; see also the testimonies assembled in Klijn and Reinink 1973). Modern scholars often call such groups “Jewish Christians.” Although the Nazoraeans in particular may well be a construct (Luomanen 2005), it has been suggested that the Qur’anic *naṣārā* should be understood in light of this heresiographical usage and may accordingly be Jewish Christians (thus de Blois 2002, 1–16) rather than Nicene Christians (thus Griffith 2011). One way of highlighting this possibility, which the present work does not adopt, would be to translate Qur’anic *naṣārā* as “Nazarenes” rather than as “Christians” throughout (Gnilka 2007). It bears noting that the question of the reference of the Qur’anic term *naṣārā* is not identical with the broader problem, debated in a host of scholarly publications, whether Jewish Christianity may have persisted until the emergence of the Qur’an and may have influenced Qur’anic theology (a claim argued, for instance, in *QP* 225–314, with ample references to prior scholarship).<sup>4</sup> It would be quite possible to maintain both (i) that the term *naṣārā* does indeed designate Christians in general, rather than specifically Jewish Christians, and (ii) that the Christians encountered by the Qur’an included—yet were not confined to—Jewish Christians, whose beliefs might accordingly have had some influence on Qur’anic doctrines.

**The *naṣārā* in ancient Arabic poetry.** The question of the denotation and connotations of the word *naṣārā* is at least to some degree illuminated by its occurrences in pre-Islamic poetry (*KU* 144; see also *KU* 57 with another verse that is discussed under → *ḥanīf*), even though the prooftexts hitherto identified are relatively few and can be ambiguous or of uncertain authenticity. For instance, al-A’shā Maymūn lauds a patron by saying that “petitioners circumambulate his doors as the *naṣārā* circumambulate a church with icons (*ka-ṭawfi l-naṣārā bi-bayti l-wathan*).” The word *wathan* (see under → *dhabaḥa*) can hardly carry its ordinary meaning “idol” here,<sup>5</sup> and is probably employed in an extended sense to refer to any figurative representations or statue that plays a role in religious ritual, including

3 The way in which de Blois proposes to understand *b. Ta’an. 27b* (where fasting on Sundays is discouraged “because of the *noṣrim*”) is not compelling. According to de Blois, the statement suggests that *noṣrim* here “does not simply mean ‘Christians,’ but refers to some particular sect who, unlike the main stream of Christians, regarded Sunday not as a feast day, but as a day of fasting” (de Blois 2002, 3). However, it is just as possible that the point of the utterance is the need to avoid any unusual displays of piety on Sundays that could be misconstrued as attributing undue sacrality to the Christian day of worship.

4 One obstacle to this conjecture, readily acknowledged by de Blois and Crone, is the lack of direct evidence for Jewish Christians in pre-Islamic Arabia, contrasting with much better evidence for the presence in Arabia of various forms of Nicene Christianity. But see *QP* 226–228 and 277–281.

5 See Lyall 1918–1924, 1:882, where the use of the term is curtly dismissed as a “mistake” (*ghalaṭ*).

perhaps Christian icons (see also Cheikho 1912–1923, 226). The main reason for the poet’s choice of the term *wathan* may be metre and rhyme. Similarly, al-A’shā presumably applies the word *bayt* (“house”) to what would conventionally be called a church or a chapel. Another occurrence of the word *naṣārā* is found in a poem from the *Mufaḍḍaliyyāt*, credited to Jābir ibn Ḥunayy and reporting how an enemy tribe mocks the poem’s kin, the Christian Taghlib, by claiming that their lances are “the lances of Christians (*rimāḥu naṣārā*),” which “do not penetrate to the blood” (Lyll 1918–1924, no. 42:21, also cited in Cheikho 1912–1923, 225; see also Lichtenstadter 1940, 192, pointing out the textual variant *rimāḥu yahūdīn*).<sup>6</sup> There is also a poem ascribed to Ḥātim al-Ṭā’ī, cited in the *Kitāb al-aghānī* and by the geographer Yāqūt, which would seem to employ the verb *tanaṣṣara* in the sense of “to convert to Christianity” (Wüstenfeld 1866–1870, 4:353; cf. Jamāl 1990, no. 68:6; the verse is also cited in Cheikho 1912–1923, 225).<sup>7</sup>

It is worth noting that there are no pre-Islamic attestations of the word *masīḥī* (‘Alī 1968–1973, 6:585–586), which only became a common term for “Christian” at a much later date (Fiey 1993, 970). By contrast, *naṣārā*, despite the comparative paucity of its attestations in poetry, would seem to have been in use prior to the Qur’an. It would not be convincing to posit that the poetic prooftexts just surveyed employ the word *naṣārā* in order to refer specifically and exclusively to Jewish Christians, rather than to the Nicene Christians with whom pre-Islamic speakers of Arabic were undoubtedly familiar. After all, the poem credited to Jābir ibn Ḥunayy is not speaking of the lances of some hitherto unidentified Jewish Christian community, but is referring to the lances of the tribe of Taghlib (who were Christian but hardly Jewish Christians, given that they were converted by the monophysite Aḥudemmeḥ; see Trimmingham 1979, 173–174). The wide range of the religious communities listed especially in Q 22:17 points in the same direction: if the Qur’an really did utilise the word *naṣārā* to designate Jewish Christians in particular, we would have expected this list to contain an additional term for gentile Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

***Al-naṣārā as an outside designation?*** Can we assume that the word *naṣārā*, even at the time of the Qur’an, retained an “anti-Christian ring” (Griffith 2011, 314), in line with Acts 24:5? This seems difficult to square with the very positive assessment of the *naṣārā* in Q 5:82–85. But the weaker claim that the term *naṣārā* had the connotation of being a label applied by outsiders, just like “the Jews” (→ *al-yahūd*), is conceivable. The customary assumption that al-A’shā was a Christian is open to doubt (Jockers 2010), and even the Jābir ibn Ḥunayy poem, though reportedly composed by a Christian author, deploys the word in the context of a scornful utterance attributed to non-Christian foes. Also relevant is the fact that the Christian community of al-Ḥīrah seem to have primarily self-identified as *‘ibād*, “servants,” namely, of God or Christ (Toral-Niehoff 2010, 326 and 334) rather than as *naṣārā*.

Since the term *naṣārā* is confined to Medinan surahs, it is possible, though not amenable to positive proof, that the Medinan Jews employed the word as the Arabic equivalent of

6 Horovitz (*KU* 144) also quotes a line credited to ‘Adī ibn Zayd, preserved as a prooftext cited in the *Tāj al-‘Arūs*, that refers to “Christian men” (*rijāl naṣārā*) burnishing a statue with gold at Easter (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 31). There is nothing improbable about this citation, but its probative force is undoubtedly compromised by the fact that it is not part of an integral poem.

7 The *Kitāb al-aghānī* has the variant *tanaḍḍara* (Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī 1927–1974, 17:381).

8 We would, in other words, have expected Q 22:17 to form a parallel to the inscription of Kartir, as interpreted in de Blois 2002, 5–8, where “Nazarenes” and “Christians” figure side by side.



rabbinic *noṣrim*. Although this would not require the word *naṣārā* as such to be derived from Hebrew *noṣrim*, such a hypothetical Medinan Jewish usage might form part of the immediate backdrop to the word's appearance in the Qur'an.<sup>9</sup> It is true that Q 5:14.82 speaks of "those who say, 'We are *naṣārā*'" (*alladhīna qālū innā naṣārā*), which could indicate that the term was perceived at least as a credible Christian self-designation (QP 243–244); but the two occurrences in question may simply be a stylistically motivated periphrasis of *al-naṣārā*, in line with the Qur'an's marked penchant for referring to a fair number of other religious groups, too, by means of relative clauses, such as *alladhīna āmanū* for *al-mu'minūn* ("the believers"), *alladhīna ashrakū* for *al-mushrikūn* ("the associators"), *alladhīna ūtū l-kitāb* ("those who were given the scripture") for *ahl al-kitāb* ("the scripture-owners"), *alladhīna kafarū* for *al-kāfirūn* ("the repudiators"), and *alladhīna hādū* for *al-yahūd* ("the Jews").<sup>10</sup>

There is no explicit Qur'anic evidence warranting the hypothesis that the Qur'an's hearers would have linked the words *naṣrānī* and *naṣārā* to the town of Nazareth, although this etymology is well-known in the post-Qur'anic Islamic tradition (see, e.g., McAuliffe 1991, 95–98). However, at least for some of the Quran's original addressees the link could have simply gone without saying.

**A profile of the Qur'anic *naṣārā*.** What, then, are the main doctrinal and other features emerging from Qur'anic verses mentioning the Christians (see also Griffith 2001)?<sup>11</sup> We already saw that they are associated with the *injīl*, or "Gospel" (Q 5:47), originally given to Jesus (Q 3:48, 5:46.110, and 57:27). As argued elsewhere (→ *injīl*), the Qur'an could be employing the word *injīl* as a proper name of sorts for the entire Christian Bible rather than just for the New Testament, since there is no unequivocal evidence that the Qur'an considers the Christians to possess a bipartite scriptural canon made up of the Torah (*al-tawrah*) together with the *injīl*. Doctrinally, the Christians are portrayed as maintaining that "Christ (*al-masīḥ*) is God's son" (Q 9:30) or, alternatively, that "God is Christ, the son of Mary" (*inna llāha huwa l-masīḥu bnu maryama*; Q 5:17.72).<sup>12</sup> Q 5:73 explicitly alludes to Christian Trinitarianism, which is polemically assimilated to tritheism, namely, a belief in three distinct deities: "Guilty of repudiation are those who say that God is one of three" (*la-qad kafara alladhīna qālū inna llāha thālithu thalāthatin*).<sup>13</sup> Trinitarianism is also reflected in Q 4:171, where the "scripture-owners"—who are here ostensibly limited to the Christians—are reminded that Jesus is "only God's messenger and his word, which

9 Other Qur'anic terms, too, are likely to have originated in the language of the Medinan Jews, such as → *ummī* ("scriptureless") or → *al-sakīnah* ("composure, tranquillity"). See also see under → *al-yahūd*.

10 In support of this, note the frequency of such relativistic periphrases prior to Q 5:14 (namely, in vv. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11) and 5:82 (e.g., in vv. 78, 80, 82). Verse 82 itself is particularly replete with them, containing not only *alladhīna qālū innā naṣārā* but also *alladhīna āmanū* and *alladhīna ashrakū*.

11 For a detailed analysis of how this material is treated by Islamic exegetes, see McAuliffe 1991.

12 Neither Q 5:17 nor 5:72 contains the word *naṣārā* (although they do figure in v. 14), but it is overwhelmingly likely that they are being referred to, given their express mention in Q 9:30.

13 For a different reading of Q 5:73, see Griffith 2007, 100\*–108\*, taking *thālithu thalāthatin* to be a calque on the Syriac epithet *tlitāyā*, "the treble one," applied to Jesus Christ due to his being characterised in various ways by the number three (e.g., by virtue of having spent three days in the grave). Given the phrase *thāniya thnayni* ("as one of two") in Q 9:40, it is undeniable that *thālithu thalāthatin* has the numerical sense "one of three." This is admitted by Griffith himself, although he proposes that the phrase could still simultaneously echoes the epithet *tlitāyā* (Griffith 2011, 317). See also the critique of his reading of Q 5:73 in QP 265–266, which I find persuasive (despite disagreeing with Crone's contention that the Qur'anic Christians considered Mary to be a member of the Trinity, on which see below in the main text).

he cast unto Mary, and his spirit (*rūḥun minhu*),<sup>14</sup> upon which the addressees are commanded, “Do not say ‘three,’” followed by an affirmation that God is one and has no progeny (*walad*). Incidentally, although the accuracy of extant heresiographical accounts of the beliefs allegedly held by various groups of Jewish Christians is uncertain, it is doubtful that Jewish Christians would have been content to identify the “son of Mary” as God’s offspring and as belonging to a divine trinity. This militates against identifying the Qur’anic *naṣārā* with Jewish-Christian Nazarenes (Griffith 2011, 314–315). Despite the considerable amount of speculation involved in reconstructing Jewish-Christian Christologies, therefore, the Qur’an’s admittedly fragmentary information about the Christology of the *naṣārā* is compatible with mainstream Nicene Christianity.<sup>15</sup>

Although the Christology attributed to the Qur’anic *naṣārā* mostly approximates mainstream Christian doctrines, at least as these may have been perceived by outsiders, there is one respect in which one detects a radical discrepancy between the two. Q 5:116 famously seems to identify the third member of the Christian Trinity besides God and Jesus with Mary rather than the Holy Spirit: “And when God said, ‘O Jesus, son of Mary, did you say to the people, “Take me and my mother as two gods besides God” (*a-anta qulta li-l-nāsi ttakhidhūni wa-ummi ilāhayni min dūni llāhi*)?’ He said, ‘Glory be to you! It does not behoove me to say something to which I have no right.’”<sup>16</sup> Yet instead of taking this passage at face value and of attempting to locate a Christian group who might have been understood or misunderstood to be operating with a trinity composed of God, Jesus, and Mary (thus de Blois 2002, 13–15, and also *QP* 262–276),<sup>17</sup> it has more convincingly been suggested that Q 5:116 involves a polemically motivated degree of distortion or caricature (Griffith 2011, 318; Reynolds 2014, 52–54), by casting the evident fact that Christians pray to Mary as manifesting their propensity towards illicit deification.<sup>18</sup> In fact, the Qur’an presents Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus as instantiating a general pattern that is exhibited

14 For a justification of the decision to render *rūḥun minhu* as “his spirit” rather than “a spirit of/from him,” see n. 9 under → *rūḥ*.

15 De Blois draws attention to the Elchasaites, whom the heresiographer Hippolytus portrays as believing in a “son of God,” forming a trinity of sorts together with God and a female “Holy Spirit” (de Blois 2002, 14–15; see also Klijn and Reinink 1973, 114–115). However, as de Blois himself is aware, the Elchasaitic “Holy Spirit,” female though she may be, is not identical with Jesus’s earthly mother Mary (see also the further discussion of the Spirit being described as Jesus’s heavenly “mother” in *QP* 267–271). A succinct overview of the various ways in which Jewish Christians conceived of Christ is provided in *QP* 246–259. Against the naive assumption that Jewish Christians considered Jesus to be a mere human, Crone calls attention to the importance of “host Christology,” according to which a pre-existent heavenly and perhaps even divine being came to take up residence in the human Jesus on the occasion of his baptism, thereby potentially elevating him to superhuman or divine status. Specifically on the Christology of the so-called Ebionites, refer to Häkkinen 2005, 265–272.

16 On the meaning of *min dūni llāhi* here, see Ambros 2001, 11. The expression is also briefly discussed under → *ashraka*.

17 See in particular *QP* 271–273, cataloguing evidence that there were indeed Christians who believed Mary or her body to be “from heaven.”

18 According to Q 5:75, Jesus and Mary were mere humans who “ate food” (see *QP* 263). This, too, could be taken to be aimed at opponents who divinised Mary. But alternatively, Q 5:75 may simply be articulating the charge that Christians incongruously pray to and venerate a woman who was a mere mortal. Thus construed, there is not necessarily an implication of doctrinally explicit deification here, only one of unseemly cultic practices. It is true that the insistence that Jesus and Mary “ate food” in Q 5:75 comes in the wake of a rejection of Trinitarianism in v. 73 (“Guilty of repudiation are those who say that God is one of three”). This does engender the impression that Q 5:75, like 5:116, is envisaging a Christian Trinity composed of God, Jesus, and Mary (*QP* 265–266). Nonetheless, I find it plausible to assume that the Qur’an is simply not interested in acknowledging, and engaged in polemically obfuscating, any distinctions that a mainstream Christian would make between Trinitarianism and Mary worship.

not only by the Christians but also by the Jews, who are both accused of turning a human individual into the “son of God” (Jesus in the Christian case, Ezra in the Jewish case; see *HCI* 201) and of venerating their religious leaders as “lords besides God” (*arbāban min dūni llāhi*; Q 9:30–31; see also 3:64). As Q 9:30 summarily puts it, Jews and Christians “imitate what was said by earlier repudiators” (*yuḍāhi’ūna qawla lladhīna kafarū min qablu*). On this reading, the Qur’anic text does not supply evidence that Christians in its environment actually considered Mary to be divine; rather, the Qur’an is driving home the message that the seeming intricacy of Christian dogma is merely another variant on the perennial human susceptibility to blur and distort rigorous monotheism.

The Qur’an considers the Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus to deviate from the latter’s explicit teaching: Jesus stereotypically commands his audience to “serve God, my Lord and your<sup>p</sup> Lord” (Q 5:72.117; see also 3:51, 19:36, and 43:64),<sup>19</sup> with Q 5:72 adding a warning that associationism, *shirk* (verb: → *ashraka*), will lead to eschatological perdition. The theme of Christian unfaithfulness to Jesus is also echoed in Q 19:37 and 43:65 (on which see *HCI* 177 and 186, n. 87), where an appeal by Jesus to serve God alone is followed by the declaration that subsequently “the factions (singular: → *ḥizb*) disagreed among themselves” (*fa-khtalafa l-aḥzābu min baynihim*), just as there had previously been disagreement (verb: *ikhtalafa*) about the Mosaic scripture (e.g., Q 11:110, 41:45: “We gave Moses the scripture and there was disagreement about it,” *wa-la-qad ātaynā mūsā l-kitāba fa-khtulifa fihi*).<sup>20</sup> To be sure, neither Q 19:37 nor 43:65 involves explicit mention of the *naṣārā*; but the reason for this may simply be that the term *naṣārā* is confined to the Medinan period while Q 19 and 43 are Meccan. In any case, the diagnosis of factionalism is best read as the Qur’an’s perception of late antique doctrinal strife between various Christian churches.

Like the Israelites or the Jews, the Qur’an accuses the Christians of failing to adhere to the covenant (*mīthāq*) that God has imposed on them, even though the charge is cast in more measured language with regard to the Christians than the Jews (cf. Q 5:14 with 5:12–13 and 4:155–161, on all of which see in more detail under → *wāthaqa*). Also like the Jews, the Qur’an portrays the Christians as supremely confident of being in the exclusive possession of religious truth and, consequently, as demanding conversion: “The Jews and the Christians will not be satisfied with you [namely, the Qur’anic Messenger] until you follow their religious teaching (→ *millah*),” says Q 2:120, while 5:18 alleges that the Jews and the Christians claim that “we are God’s sons and his beloved ones” (see in more detail under → *allāh*). The Jews and the Christian dismiss one another as having “no ground to stand on,” according to Q 2:113. Hence, when Q 2:111 reports that “they say, ‘Only Jews and Christians will enter the garden,’” or when 2:135 states that “they say, ‘Be Jews or Christians so that you may be guided,’” this should be understood to mean that the Jews

19 Q 19:36 is not expressly framed as said by Jesus, even though the latter is mentioned in v. 34. But it is nonetheless likely that the entire couplet consisting of Q 19:35–36 should be construed as an utterance by Jesus, given that 43:64, which is virtually identical with 19:36, does occur in the wake of the direct speech marker *qāla*. The only verses in which the phrase “God, my Lord and your Lord” is *not* associated with Jesus are Q 11:56, 40:27, and 44:20; but unlike the utterances attributed to Jesus, the phrase does not function as the object of ‘*abada*, “to serve,” here. This exclusive association of the composite expression “to serve” + “God, my Lord and your Lord” with Jesus is justifiably viewed as distancing Jesus from Christian deification of him, a point made much more overtly in Q 5:116–117. For another case in which a Qur’anic verse is to be understood as direct speech despite the absence of an introductory speech marker, as would seem to be the case in Q 19:35–36, see 89:27–30 (spoken by God at the final judgement).

20 For more on *ikhtalafa* and related verbs, see under → *ummaḥ*, → *bayyana*, and → *ḥizb*.

claimed salvation and guidance to be exclusive to themselves while the Christians made an equivalent claim on behalf of their religion. Nonetheless, despite the Qur'an's criticism of core Christian doctrines, two verses promise the Christians, as well as the Jews and the → *ṣābi'ūn*, eschatological reward if they “believe in God and in the final day and do righteous deeds” (Q 2:62 and 5:69).<sup>21</sup> Salvation, then, appears to be in principle available to members of religious communities other than the Qur'anic “believers.”<sup>22</sup> One must add, though, that it is far from clear whether a Christian who continues to uphold the divinity of Jesus or to reject Muhammad's prophecy satisfies the Qur'anic understanding of what it means to “believe in God” (see also under → *aslama*).<sup>23</sup> Overall, the Medinan surahs portrays the Christians, like the Jews, as a distinctly mixed bag (see under → *ahl al-kitāb*), although one passage (Q 5:82–85) evinces a far greater degree of sympathy for the Christians than the Jews.

**Qur'anic glimpses of Christian ecclesiastical structures (Q 5:82, 9:31.34, 57:27).** A small number of verses seem to allude to Christian leaders or dignitaries, thereby providing glimpses of how Christian ecclesiastical structures may have been viewed in the Qur'anic environment. Thus, Q 5:82, which lauds the Christians for being more amicably disposed to the Qur'anic believers than the Jews and the associators, notes that there are *qissīsūn* and *ruhbān* among the Christians. The former word is clearly derived from Syriac *qashshishā*, meaning not only “elder, presbyter” but also “priest” in general (*KU* 64; *FVQ* 239–240; Zellentín 2016, 273–274; cf. Ethiopic *qasis*). The word was also loaned into Sabaic, as demonstrated by an inscription from 548 CE by the Christian Ḥimyarite king Abraha, which commemorates the restoration of the dam of Mārib (Sima 2004, 27–28; *CIH*, no. 541, l. 67). *Ruhbān*, meanwhile, literally means “fearers,”<sup>24</sup> presumably of God. The word also occurs in Q 9:31.34, where the “God-fearers” (*ruhbān*) are paired with the Jewish *ahbār*, namely, rabbinic scholars (*KU* 63; *FVQ* 49–50; Zellentín 2016, 267–271): the Jews and Christians have adopted their *ahbār* and their *ruhbān* as “lords besides God” (*arbāban min dūni llāhi*), the text charges (Q 9:31), and both groups are condemned for “unjustly consuming people's possessions” and for “barring [people] from God's path” (Q 9:34; cf. 4:161). Finally, Q 57:27 uses the abstract noun *rahbāniyyah*, which one might literally render as “God-fearingness.” According to one plausible syntactic construal, the verse declares that God placed (*ja'alnā*) in the hearts of Jesus's followers (*alladhīna ttaba'ūhu*) tenderness (*ra'fah*), mercy (→ *rahmah*), and *rahbāniyyah*. The latter then becomes a topic of further comment: “they originated it (*ibtada'ūhā*); we did not prescribe it for them (*mā katabnāhā 'alayhim*)—rather, [the only thing we prescribed for them was / they only introduced *rahbāniyyah* as a manner of] desiring God's satisfaction (*illā btighā'a*

21 See also Q 3:113–114, 5:66, and 7:159, recognising that the scripture-owners or “the people of Moses” (i.e., the Israelites) include a community that “stands upright,” is at least “moderate” or “middling,” or is endowed with right guidance. See also Q 3:199, acknowledging that some of the scripture-owners “believe in God and what was sent down to you<sup>p</sup> and what was sent down to them,” as well as 2:253, 3:110, and 35:32.

22 On how Q 2:62 and 5:69 might be reconciled with verses like 3:85 (“Whoever desires a religion other than *al-islām*, it will not be accepted from him, and he will be one of the losers in the hereafter”), see under → *aslama*.

23 An equivalent question may be posed with regard to Q 3:64, inviting the scripture-owners “to a word common between us and you,” consisting in serving only God, associating nothing else with him, and not taking each other “as lords besides God.” It seems at best uncertain that conventional Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus would qualify as passing this test.

24 That *rahība*, *yarhabu* means “to fear” in Qur'anic Arabic is well supported (see *CDKA* 117). Thus, in Q 2:40, 7:154, and 16:51, the verb is effectively a synonym of → *ittaqa*.

*riḍwāni llāhi*.)” However, the followers of Jesus “did not properly observe” the *rahbāniyyah* instituted by them (*fa-mā ra’awhā ḥaqqā ri’āyatihā*).<sup>25</sup>

Both in the Islamic exegetical tradition and in modern Western scholarship, the Qur’anic *ruhbān* have generally been understood as monks (McAuliffe 1991, 263–284; *KU* 64; Beck 1946; Griffith 2003). This fits the word’s occurrence in pre-Islamic poetry, which depicts the figure of the *rāhib* or “God-fearer” as engrossed in devotion and supplications to God (*DSAAP*, Imru’ al-Qays, no. 48:37 = *EAP* 2:69–70; *DSAAP*, Imru’ al-Qays, no. 65:2), evokes the light emanating from his solitary dwelling (*DSAAP*, Imru’ al-Qays, no. 48:37.66 = *EAP* 2:69–70 and 82–83; *DSAAP*, Imru’ al-Qays, no. 52:20), and associates him with writings (*DSAAP*, Imru’ al-Qays, no. 65:2) and with celibacy (*DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 7:26).<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, Holger Zellentin, building on Emran El-Badawi, has persuasively argued that the Qur’anic *ruhbān* should not be equated with monks but rather ought to be identified with bishops, even if some of the latter may well have been monks and celibate (El-Badawi 2013; Zellentin 2016, 271–284). For one, the way in which Q 9:31.34 parallels the *ruhbān* with the *aḥbār* suggests that the former are understood to be the Christian equivalent of the latter, which would make the *ruhbān* communal leaders rather than monks or hermits *per se* (even though Christian “holy men” did of course perform communal leadership functions too). Moreover, Q 57:27 would seem to presuppose that there is a proper and Qur’anicly acceptable manner of practising *rahbāniyyah* or “God-fearingness”; and the fact that God is explicitly said to have placed *rahbāniyyah* in the hearts of Jesus’s followers (at least if *rahbāniyyah* is, with Beck 1946, 18–20, construed as a third object of *ja’alnā* in Q 57:27) also suggests that the Qur’an views *rahbāniyyah* with a degree of sympathy, like the two preceding objects, tenderness (*ra’fah*) and mercy (*rahmah*). Such a positive view would be difficult to make sense of if celibacy were a dominant component of *rahbāniyyah*, since by the Medinan period the Qur’anic proclamations had certainly come to endorse marriage as a normal and unproblematic aspect of human existence.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the contention that the Christians have taken their *ruhbān* as “lords besides God” also maps rather well onto the Christian view that the bishop deserves to be honoured like God because he “sits for you

25 For a discussion of the syntax of the verse, see Beck 1946, 17–24, who convincingly treats *rahbāniyyah* as a third object of *ja’alnā*. *Illā* is often read as an *istithnā’ munqaṭi’* or “discontinuous exception” here (on the grammatical concept, see Wright 1974, 2:335–337; see also the discussion of Q 18:50 under → *shaytān*). Thus, for instance, Zam. 6:53, with the gloss *wa-lakinnahum ibtada’ūhā btighā’a riḍwāni llāhi*. Alternatively, the verse may be read as saying, “They invented it of their own accord; we only prescribed it for them as a manner of desiring God’s satisfaction” (thus Sinai 2018a, 28), which would imply at least a conditional divine mandate for *rahbāniyyah*. Given that the exegetical tradition equates *rahbāniyyah* with monasticism and celibacy, it is unsurprising that this latter construal is not popular among Muslim commentators, but see Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī 1981, 29:247, who explicitly notes the viability of construing the verse as an *istithnā’ muttaṣil*. Beck prefers an *istithnā’ munqaṭi’*. But in favour of an *istithnā’ muttaṣil*, implying that God did prescribe *rahbāniyyah* at least in an attenuated or conditional sense, as a way of striving for divine favour, one can appeal to the likely status of *rahbāniyyah* as one of the three virtues that God is said to have placed in the hearts of Jesus’s followers. This suggests that *rahbāniyyah* is not a completely arbitrary human invention.

26 See also the overview of poetic reflections of monks and monastic life in Schmid, forthcoming b, ch. 1, noting synonyms of *rāhib*.

27 But see Sinai 2017a, 231–232, for a possible echo of an early Qur’anic praise of carnal abstinence. Two further considerations adduced by Zellentin are the following: (i) There is sufficient evidence for an association of bishops with fear of God to permit one to understand why the Qur’an might call them, or at least include them under the rubric of, “God-fearers,” *ruhbān*. (ii) The juxtaposition of *ruhbān* and *qissīsūn* in Q 5:82 can be viewed as paralleling the bipartite structure of ecclesiastical leadership described in the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, where the bishop functions as the head of a council of “elders” (*qashshishē*). The *qissīsūn*, therefore, may not be priests in general but rather subordinate clergy operating under episcopal oversight.



in the place of God Almighty” (Vööbus 1979, 103). Finally, there is indirect evidence that the institution of the episcopate was known in the Qur’anic milieu, since the presentation of Muhammad’s authority and function in the Medinan surahs appropriates aspects of the way in which Christian texts construct the figure of the bishop (Sinai 2018a).

Seeing that by the time of the Qur’an bishops were increasingly drawn from the ranks of monks (Zellentin 2016, 276 and 277), leading to the “appropriation of monastic charisma by the institutional church” (Rapp 2005, 137), it cannot be taken for granted anyway that the hearers of the Qur’an would have made a clear-cut distinction between both groups. Rather, Qur’anic references to the *ruhbān* and *rahbāniyyah* may be rooted in the perception that it is a characteristic feature of Christianity to expect its communal leaders (whatever their precise institutional status) to be endowed with manifest fearfulness of God—notwithstanding the fact that Christians did not, according to Q 57:27, fully and properly live up to this ideal of *rahbāniyyah*, or “God-fearingness,” an assessment also implied by the accusations proffered in Q 9:31.34. A similar perception of Christianity as being marked by ostentatious fear of God manifests itself in the fact that Christians in the Sasanian empire were called “fearers” (*tarsāgān*) in Pahlavi (Pines 1968).<sup>28</sup> Moreover, in Christian literature from the second century onwards, Christians are described as the “God-fearers” *par excellence*, a descriptor that “carried an implicit or explicit denial that anyone else, particularly the Jews, could also claim the epithet” (Lieu 1995, 501). Of course, the Qur’anic proclamations themselves accord a prominent position to the virtue of God-wariness (*taqwā*; → *ittaqā*). It may nonetheless be deliberate that in referring to Christian “God-fearers” (*ruhbān*) or “God-fearingness” (*rahbāniyyah*), the Qur’an employs words that are derived from a different consonantal root than its own dominant terminology for fearing God: *rahbāniyyah* is not simply *taqwā* but something different, more ambiguous, and more distinctly Christian, and perhaps also something more institutionally concrete.

**Jesus causing an Israelite schism (Q 61:14): the Qur’anic account of Christian origins?** Despite the Qur’an’s evident awareness of animosity between the Jews and the Christians, the Islamic scripture depicts Jesus as a “messenger” (→ *rasūl*) sent to the Israelites rather than to humanity at large (Q 3:49, 61:6; see Bijlefeld 1969, 26, n. 107; Goudarzi 2018, 331–335; Goudarzi 2019, 427). According to Q 61:14, Jesus’s preaching caused the people of Israel to break apart into two “factions” (singular: *ṭā’ifah*; see CDKA 176), a believing group (who included Jesus’s disciples, the *ḥawāriyyūn*) and an unbelieving or “repudiating” group, who eventually suffered some sort of defeat.<sup>29</sup> It may appear as if the Qur’an

28 Nöldeke and P. J. de Menasce posit that the word *tarsāg* was initially applied to God-fearing ascetics and then secondarily extended to all Christians (Nöldeke 1900, 163), whose “representative *par excellence*” the ascetic was (Pines 1968, 144, summarising de Menasce). Pines himself accepts that there is a link between Arabic *rāhib* and Pahlavi *tarsāg*, but maintains, against Nöldeke and de Menasce, that “it is conceivable that, in translating the Pahlavi term which denoted Christians in general, the Arabs restricted its meaning and applied it only to monks.” However, Zellentin’s work should make us cautious to accept it as axiomatic that *rāhib* means “monk” *tout court*, understood to be conceptually opposed to the laity. That is, non-Christian Arabs may feasibly have viewed Christian anchorites and ascetics as “God-fearers” *par excellence*, who embodied to a particularly palpable degree the general and ostentatious preoccupation with fearing God—Qur’anically speaking, the habitus of *rahbāniyyah*—that was felt to characterise Christianity as such, without therefore assuming the clear-cut dichotomy between monks and laypersons that seems self-evident from within Christianity.

29 For use of the word *ṭā’ifah* with regard to Jews and Christians, see also Q 6:156, which maintains that prior to the Qur’anic revelations the celestial scripture had only been sent down upon “two factions” (*innamā unzila l-kitābu ‘alā ṭā’ifatayni min qablinā*). The two factions in question must be the Jews and the Christians. But it would obviously be unwarranted to make the automatic assumption that the term *ṭā’ifah* always means Jews or Christians; it clearly doesn’t at Q 7:87.



is here describing the emergence of Christianity as resulting from an Israelite schism. This would form an arresting contrast with the standard view that mainstream Christianity is a movement that mostly drew its converts from outside the people of Israel. Such apparent downplaying of gentile Christianity and the impression that by casting Jesus as a messenger to the Israelites the Qur'an is casting Christianity as an inner-Israelite phenomenon has been marshalled in favour of the claim that the Qur'anic understanding of Jesus betrays an influence of Jewish Christianity (*QP* 232–236).

But the inference is questionable, given that the Qur'anic portrayal of Jesus as a messenger sent to the Israelites and followed by Israelites (albeit not by all of them) is explicable within the framework of the Qur'an's general prophetological assumptions (thus also Goudarzi 2018, 334–335), according to which a human messenger of God is normally dispatched to a specific people, in most cases his own people (Q 10:74 and 30:47) or at least a people whose language the messenger commands (Q 14:4).<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the fact that according to Q 61:14 the preaching of Jesus caused the people of Israel to disintegrate into a believing and an unbelieving *tā'ifah* has a perfect counterpart in the impact of the messenger Shu'ayb sent to Madyan (Q 7:87), who likewise brought about a split of his people into a believing faction and an unbelieving one (Goudarzi 2019, 434). Q 61:14 therefore narrates the ministry of Jesus in precisely the way in which one would expect it to be imagined based on the Qur'an's general prophetology.

By way of casting further doubt on a Jewish-Christian reading of Q 61:14, one might feel like adding that the verse simply accords with the basic historical fact that Jesus's original preaching was addressed to his fellow Israelites (e.g., Matt 15:24) and that Christianity did in fact originate from within Judaism, whatever the later importance of gentile conversion. However, the Qur'an is actually not very explicit about the link that obtains between Jesus's original disciples (*al-ḥawāriyyūn*) and his believing followers, who are mentioned in Q 61:14, and the present-day group called *al-naṣārā*, who do not figure in 61:14; it is not self-evident that from the Qur'anic vantage point the latter are straightforwardly identifiable as latter-day members of one and the same religious community as the former. It is, admittedly, alluring to view Q 61:14's reference to a victory of the believing Israelites who rallied around Jesus over their opponents as an allusion to the ascendancy of Christianity over Judaism; but the verse could simply refer to some sort of immediate divine intervention rescuing the believing Israelites from their enemies, a motif familiar from other prophetic narratives in the Qur'an. In sum, it is not certain that Q 61:14 is the Qur'an's account of Christian origins, in the sense of explaining how the present-day community identified as *al-naṣārā* first came into being.

The upshot, in any case, is that while the Qur'an undeniably understands the initial followers of Jesus to have been Israelites, it is far from certain how far this explicitly Israelite categorisation may be assumed to extend beyond the time of Jesus. The Qur'an may well be taking for granted that the ranks of the original followers of Jesus were subsequently

<sup>30</sup> The objection is acknowledged, but not in my view resolved, in *QP* 233–234. A similar argument may be had regarding the fact that the Qur'an depicts Jesus as having "confirmed" the Torah (Q 3:50, 5:46, and 61:6). Even though he is also said to have abolished some of its prohibitions (Q 3:50), this idea "would have been alien to gentile Christians," Crone says (*QP* 245). But rather than telling us something about the views of Jesus current in the Qur'anic milieu, this understanding of Jesus may simply reflect the Qur'an's general prophetology, according to which later messengers or prophets confirm earlier ones (Q 3:81–82), and specifically the claim that the Qur'anic revelations "confirm" earlier ones and therefore deserve to be recognised in turn by the contemporary Israelites or scripturalists (e.g., Q 2:41.91.97, 3:3, 4:47, 5:48).

swollen by vast numbers of ethnic non-Israelites; or the Qur'an may be understanding the first *naṣārā* to have been non-Israelites who wilfully adopted a creed that, from the Qur'anic perspective, turns Jesus's own preaching upside down (see Q 5:72.117). Hence, Q 61:14 does not entail that it is warranted to take the collective term "the Israelites" (→ *banū isrā'īl*), when applied to contemporaries of the Qur'anic Messenger (as, e.g., in Q 2:40.47.122), to encompass not only Jews but also Christians (against *QP* 237–244). There is, accordingly, at least a question mark over the conjecture that the Qur'an reflects interaction with a type of Christians for whom a claim to genealogical descent from the people of Israel was an integral part of their self-definition. Hence, although the textual evidence is not entirely without ambiguity,<sup>31</sup> it does appear that the only overarching Qur'anic rubric that explicitly groups together both contemporary Jews and contemporary Christians is the concept of the "scripture-owners" (→ *ahl al-kitāb*), a category that seems to be original to the Qur'an. What present-day Jews and Christians are envisaged as sharing, then, is not ethnic descent but rather their possession of and commitment to a textual deposit of prior divine revelations, even if this textual deposit is the legacy of God's revelatory engagement with the ancient Israelites in particular.

The Qur'an's understanding of Jesus as an Israelite messenger has the important upshot that from the Qur'anic vantage point the moment at which God's full revelatory engagement with humans expands beyond the people of Israel is not the ministry of Jesus but rather that of Muhammad. To be sure, the Qur'an does speak of earlier envoys sent by God to what are presumably non-Israelite peoples, such as Ṣālih to Thamūd (e.g., Q 26:141–159), but unlike Muhammad these earlier non-Israelite messengers did not apparently relay properly scriptural revelations. By contrast, the Medinan surahs unequivocally cast Muhammad as God's prophet to the scriptureless (*al-ummiyyūn*; → *ummī*), i.e., to that part of humanity who fall outside the two "factions" (cf. Q 6:156) making up the "scripture-owners." Muhammad is the divinely appointed "messenger from among" the hitherto scriptureless, who will "purify them and teach them the scripture and wisdom, even if they were previously in manifest error" (Q 62:2; cf. 7:157–158). In fact, some Medinan verses (Q 3:20, 5:15.19) suggest that Muhammad's divinely intended constituency is not limited to those not yet endowed with scriptural revelations but includes the "scripture-owners"

31 Some of the evidence that Crone adduces in favour of the contrary position relies on the post-Qur'anic Islamic tradition, which is hardly conclusive in the matter at hand. Thus, if one discounts later exegesis, Q 27:76 ("This *qur'ān* recounts to the Israelites most of that about which they disagree") does not unequivocally establish that the Israelites contemporary with Muhammad encompassed Christians. Instead, Q 27:76 could simply allude to inner-Jewish disputes rather than to arguments between Jews and Christians. Note that the Qur'an clearly considers religious disagreement or *ikhtilāf* to be a universal human phenomenon (e.g., Q 10:19, 16:92) and implies that inner-Israelite disagreement arose already in the wake of Moses (Q 11:110, 41:45, 45:16–17). Nor is the hypothesis that the Qur'an considers contemporary Christians to be Israelites supported by Q 5:72. The verse denounces those who say, "God is Christ (*al-masīh*), the son of Mary," and then proceeds to remind the audience that Jesus himself commanded the Israelites to "serve God, my Lord and your Lord." Crone asks, "Why does the Messenger envisage Jesus as saying this to the Israelites rather than the Christians?" (*QP* 238–239; cf. also Goudarzi 2019, 427). But quite obviously, the Qur'an here simply respects the historical fact that the full consolidation of a Christian community postdates the ministry of Jesus. Thus, Q 5:72 condemns Christian belief in the divinity of Jesus by adducing what is, according to the Qur'an, the basic message expounded by Jesus in his historical (namely, Israelite) context. Nothing about the passage accordingly necessitates the inference that the Israelites addressed by Jesus include Christians. Moreover, the fact that some Qur'anic passages mention the Jews and Christians in tandem, as in Q 5:18 (*QP* 240), simply manifests a Qur'anic tendency to undermine the "scripture-owners" by portraying their two branches as given to analogous errors (see *HCI* 201). See also Goudarzi 2019, 427, who argues that the Israelite identity of contemporary Christians may be inferred from Q 2:120–122 (which I also do not find compelling).

as well. This makes Muhammad a much more universal prophet than all his Qur’anic predecessors, despite the fact that the Qur’an does not therefore call for a global missionary endeavour whereby all of humankind would eventually come to be absorbed into the Medinan *ummah* (see under → *al-‘ālamūn*).

***na‘ama* tr. | to bestow grace upon s.o.**

→ *an‘ama*

***an‘ama* intr./tr. ‘*alā* | to bestow grace or a benefaction upon s.o., to bestow s.th. upon s.o.**

***ni‘mah* | grace, benefaction**

Further vocabulary discussed: *al-rahmān* | the Merciful *ajr* | wage *na‘ama* tr. | to bestow grace upon s.o. *faḍl* | favour *faḍḍala* tr. ‘*alā* | to favour s.o. over s.o. *āyah* | sign *razaqa* ditr. | to provide s.o. with s.th. *mathal* | similitude, likeness, example; exemplar; characterisation, saying *fī sabīl allāh* | on God’s path *fitnah* | trial *balā’* | test *nasiya* tr./intr. | to forget (s.th. or s.o.) *kufr* | ingratitude; repudiation *kafara* intr. *bi-* | to repudiate s.o. or s.th. *ankara* tr. | to fail to recognise s.o. or s.th.; to reject s.th. *dhakara* tr. | to remember or mention s.th. or s.o. *shakara* intr. (*li-*) / tr. | to be grateful (to s.o., namely, God), to be grateful for s.th. ‘*amila ṣāliḥan* | to do righteous deeds

*Ni‘mah, faḍl, āyah.* The Qur’an consistently portrays God as giving more than he owes, a trait that is accentuated by the frequent divine name “the Merciful” (→ *al-rahmān*). The motif even governs the Qur’anic treatment of eschatological reward or wage, which one might instead have expected to be preoccupied with notions of equity and justice (see in more detail under → *ajr*). God’s generosity is also foregrounded in statements about God’s bestowal of *ni‘mah*, the subject of the present entry.<sup>1</sup> I shall mostly translate the word as “grace,” even though “benefaction” is arguably just as adequate and has the advantage of not suggesting misleading parallels from Christian theology (such as the idea of salvation by divine grace alone, *sola gratia*). “Benefaction” rather than “grace” is perhaps the preferable choice when the noun *ni‘mah* refers to something done by one human to another, as in Q 26:22 and 92:19, though in contrast to early Arabic poetry such a human-on-human employment of the word is the exception in the Qur’an. The corresponding verb is usually *an‘ama* in the fourth form. The early Meccan verse Q 89:15 (on which see also under → *balā’*) unusually has *na‘ama* in the second form; it is plausible to treat this latter verb as a synonym of *an‘ama*, but *na‘ama* might also be credited with a distinctive connotation of “pampering, spoiling” (CDKA 271; cf. AEL 3035). In the Qur’an, the grammatical subject of *an‘ama* is virtually always God; in one case—namely, the second occurrence at Q 33:37—it is Muhammad.

<sup>1</sup> On the variant spelling of *ni‘mah* either with a *tā’* or a *tā’ marbūṭah* and its implications for the textual history of the Qur’an, see van Putten 2019.

The meaning of *ni'mah* intersects with that of *faḍl* (here rendered as “favour”), and a number of verses employ both words, or alternatively the noun *ni'mah* and the verb *faḍḍala* (“to favour s.o.”), in a mutually reinforcing capacity (Q 2:47.122, 3:171.174, 16:71, 49:8). Distinctive of *faḍḍala*, and probably also of *faḍl*, is the implication of preferment and a resulting state of inequality among the recipients of God’s blessings (see in more detail under → *darajah*). For instance, at Q 2:47.122, after exhorting the Israelites to remember God’s grace, the divine voice tells them that “I have preferred you over the world-dwellers” (*anni faḍḍaltukum ‘alā l-‘ālamīn*).<sup>2</sup> *Ni'mah*, by contrast, would seem to signify primarily the voluntary and generous conferral of something that is desirable and apt to help the beneficiary flourish. Both *ni'mah* and *faḍl* may to some degree be considered Qur’anic counterparts to the Hebrew Bible’s use of the Hebrew root *h-n-n* and to Greek *charis* in the New Testament (e.g., *TDOT* 5:22–36, *NIDOTTE* 2:203–206, *TDNT* 9:359–415), though the theological concepts these words express—e.g., when Paul speaks of justification by grace, as in Rom 3:24—must not therefore be conflated with Qur’anic ideas. Incidentally, the word *ni'mah* figures in the poem on the creation of the world that is attributed to the Christian ‘Adī ibn Zayd (al-Mu‘aybid 1965, no. 103:2; see Dmitriev 2010, 353–355), which purports to retell “how the God of creation caused his grace to become visible to us (*abdā ilāhu l-khalqī ni'matahu fīnā*) and made his primordial signs known to us (*wa-‘arrafanā āyātihi l-uwalā*).”

A third Qur’anic term whose meaning and behaviour shows some overlap with *ni'mah* and *faḍl* is → *āyah*, “sign,” as illustrated by the co-occurrence of *ni'mah* and *āyah* in Q 2:211 and 31:31 (and also in the verse of poetry just cited). For example, Q 31:31 categorises the fact that God has endowed humans with the ability to traverse the sea by means of ships both as an act of grace (*ni'mah*) and as playing the role of a sign (*āyah*). What is distinctive of the term *āyah*, in contrast to *ni'mah* and *faḍl*, is the idea that a given phenomenon conveys, or ought to convey, certain doctrinal truths about God, such as his power and his claim to gratitude.

**The panoply of divine grace.** Benefactions can be conferred from one human upon another (Q 26:22, 33:37), but in reality all benefactions and acts of grace come from God (Q 16:53: *wa-mā bikum min ni'matin fa-mina llāhi*). In fact, God’s benevolence surpasses precise quantification: “if you<sup>p</sup> try to number the grace of God, you will never arrive at calculating its sum total” (Q 14:34, 16:18: *wa-in ta’uddū ni'mata llāhi lā tuḥṣūhā*). Accordingly, the range of phenomena that the Qur’an subsumes under the category of divine grace is considerable. Q 35:3 appeals to the addressees to remember God’s grace and then reminds them that he is the creator who sustains and provisions humans “from the heaven and the earth” (cf. also Q 16:114). According to Q 16:72.81, God’s grace includes the fact that he has endowed humans with spousal relations and progeny, that he has provided them with “good things” (*wa-razaqakum mina l-ṭayyibāti*; → *razaqa*), that he has created shade and places of refuge for them, and that he has given them clothing that protects from heat and functions as armour. Q 31:31, as we saw, mentions ships, while Q 29:67 refers to God’s grace immediately after highlighting his establishment of the Meccan sanctuary. Q 19:58 concludes a cycle of narratives whose protagonists include Mary and Jesus, Abraham,

2 Cf. also Q 5:20, where Moses reminds the Israelites of the grace that God has bestowed upon them and the fact that he “gave you what he did not give to anyone else among the world-dwellers.” The verse does not, however, make use of *f-d-l*.

and Moses by saying that “those are the ones upon whom God bestowed grace” (*ulā’ika lladhīna an’ama llāhu ‘alayhim*), suggesting that being chosen to act as a prophet is also an instance of divine grace. In accordance with this, the divine voice calls Jesus “a servant upon whom we bestowed grace and whom we made an exemplar (→ *mathal*) for the Israelites” (Q 43:59). The Israelites themselves are also singled out as recipients of God’s grace: for instance, God gave them prophets and made them kings (Q 5:20; see also 2:40.47.122). The Israelites’ deliverance from Pharaoh, too, was an act of divine grace (Q 14:6), as was the rescue of Lot and his family (Q 54:35). Other individuals or collectives within humanity at large who are said to have received divine grace are Joseph and his family (Q 12:6), Moses (Q 28:17), Jonah (68:49), Muhammad (Q 52:29, 68:2, 93:11), and the Qur’anic believers, whom God has protected in battle and assisted against their enemies (Q 3:174, 5:11, 33:9) and whom he has transformed from erstwhile foes into brothers (Q 3:103).

While the preceding reminiscences of divine grace first and foremost allude to this-worldly blessings, God’s grace can also be referenced in an eschatological context, though this is less frequent in the Qur’an. At Q 37:57, one of the inhabitants of paradise credits his salvation to “the grace of my Lord,” and at 4:69 the phrase “those upon whom God has bestowed grace” (*alladhīna an’ama llāhu ‘alayhim*) seems to serve as a general label for those who will be rewarded with paradise. According to Q 3:171, those who have been “killed on God’s path” (v. 169: *alladhīna qutilū fī sabīl allāh; → sabīl*) are already in God’s presence and rejoice in his grace and favour (*yastabshirūna bi-ni’matin mina llāhi wa-faḍlin*).

**God’s grace and human gratitude.** Passages like Q 3:171 show that God’s bestowal of grace can respond to prior human merit: it is clear that God’s grace here is a reward for facing mortal danger in battle on behalf of one’s religious allegiance. A similar nexus figures in Q 54:35, which presents God’s deliverance of Lot both as an act of grace and as compensation “for those who are grateful” (*ka-dhālika najzī man shakar*), namely, for those who are grateful to God.

Yet divine grace is not invariably a reward. Q 39:49 criticises those who self-confidently credit their receipt of some divine benefaction or grace to their own “knowledge”; rather, the verse continues, it is a “trial” (*fitnah*; see under → *balā*). Similarly, Q 14:6 describes God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery as both an act of grace (*ni’mah*) and as containing a test (*balā*; see under → *balā*). Divine grace, just like divine favour (*f-ḍ-l*), can thus serve to ascertain, rather than reward, an individual’s moral merit, by bringing to light how he or she reacts to the bounty generously granted by God (see also under → *darajah*). An improper response to divine grace, as Q 39:8 makes clear, would be to “forget” (→ *nasiya*) one’s antecedent imploration to the Lord, to recognise false deities, and to display ingratitude (*kufṛ*) to God. Other passages also condemn those who ungratefully repudiate (verb: → *kafara*) or fail to recognise (verb: → *ankara*) God’s blessings and benefactions (Q 14:28, 16:72.83, 29:67).<sup>3</sup> One passage hints that when God “changes” or takes away a benefaction that he has granted to a certain people, this must be due to some prior misstep of the recipients (Q 8:53, on which see *KK* 190; cf. Q 13:11).

The appropriate response to divine benefactions, by contrast, is to remember (verb: → *dhakara*) them, as different groups of addressees are charged (Q 2:40.47.122.231, 3:103, 5:7.11.20.110, 14:6, 33:9, 35:3, 43:13), and to be grateful (*shakara*) for them (see Q 5:7,

3 See also Q 17:83 and 41:51, where it is “turning away” (*a’raḍa*) that is disapproved.

16:114.121, 27:19, 46:15, all of which combine derivatives of *n-‘-m* and *sh-k-r*).<sup>4</sup> It is worth underscoring Izutsu’s insight that the Qur’an’s evident assumption that bestowing a benefaction (*n-‘-m*) upon someone gives rise to a claim on the recipient’s gratitude (*sh-k-r*) is manifestly continuous with the ethos of pre-Islamic poetry (e.g., *DSAAP*, ‘Antarah, no. 21:68, and Jacobi 1971, 83), even though the Qur’an transfers the principle from the human plane to that of human interaction with God (*GMK* 232–233).<sup>5</sup> One early Meccan verse, Q 93:11, charges the Messenger to tell others about God’s grace (*wa-ammā bi-ni‘mati rabbika fa-ḥaddith*), that is, to broadcast it to the world. True gratitude to God, one gathers, is more than a private mental state. From among the Qur’anic verses combining the roots *n-‘-m* and *sh-k-r*—which post-Qur’anic thinkers condensed into the concept of “thanking benefactors” (*shukr al-mun‘im*; e.g., Reinhart 1995, 112–123)—it is worth singling out the prayer formula that is identically quoted in Q 27:19 and 46:15: just like Solomon in the former verse, so in the latter verse people in general are admonished to pray, “My Lord! Urge me to be grateful for your grace, which you have bestowed upon me and my parents, and to do righteous deeds with which you are pleased” (*rabbi awzi‘nī an ashkura ni‘mataka llatī an‘amtā ‘alayya wa-‘alā wālidayya wa-an a‘mala ṣāliḥan tarqāhu*; see also under → *ṣāliḥ*). The prayer shows that the fitting way of showing one’s gratitude for divine benefactions involves not just speech acts but also moral behaviour.

### *na‘īm* | delight, bliss

→ *jannah*

### *nafakha* intr./tr. (*fī*) | to blow (s.th.) (into s.th.)

→ *rūḥ*

### *nafs* | soul, (vital) self; person, life

Further vocabulary discussed: *dhāqa* tr. | to taste s.th. *kallafa* ditr. | to charge s.o. with s.th. *jāhada* intr./tr. | to contend (against s.o.) *māl* | wealth, possessions *qaddama* tr. | to accomplish s.th. previously *akhkhara* tr. | to neglect to do s.th.; to fail to accomplish s.th. *sawwā* tr. | to endow s.th. or s.o. with an even or uniform shape *zalama* tr. | to injure or harm s.o. or s.th.; to wrong s.o. *tanaffasa* intr. | to breathe *rūḥ* | spirit *nafakha* tr. (*fī*) | to blow s.th. (into s.th.) *zawwaja* tr. | to pair s.o. or s.th. up; to divide s.o. or s.th. up into kinds *akhfā* tr. | to conceal s.th. *asarra* tr. | to conceal s.th. *akanna* tr. | to conceal s.th. *ṣadr* | breast *qalb* | heart *hawiya* tr., *ishtahā* tr. | to desire s.th. *ṭawwā‘a* tr. *li-* | to suggest s.th. to s.o., to prompt s.o. to do s.th. *sawwala* intr. *li-* | to persuade s.o. *sawwala* tr. *li-* | to persuade s.o. of s.th. *waswasa* intr. | to whisper *al-shayṭān* | the devil, Satan *istakbara* intr. | to deem o.s. great, to behave haughtily *lawwāmah* | full of blame, given to gratuitous

4 Another verse combining these roots is Q 54:35, briefly discussed above; but here God’s bestowal of a benefaction follows upon the human display of gratitude rather than giving rise to it.

5 See also Reinhart 1995, 108–110, and Reinhart 2002, 57–58, building on Bravmann 1972, 199–212.



complaining *ammārah bi-* | perpetually commanding s.th. *hājah* | (feeling of) need *ḍāqa* intr. | to become straitened, tightened, or narrow *tāba* intr. (*ilā llāh*) | to repent, to turn to God in repentance (said of humans) *tāba* intr. *‘alā* | to turn to s.o. in forgiveness (said of God) *hawā* | desire *iṭma’anna* intr. (*bi-*) | to be secure, to be at peace (in s.th.) *faqiha*, *‘aqala* tr./intr. | to understand (s.th.) *āmāna* intr. *bi-* | to believe in s.th. *ankara* tr. | to reject s.th. *irtāba* intr. | to be in doubt *ṣabara* tr. | to restrain s.th. (namely, one’s soul)

**Overview of the three senses of Qur’anic *nafs*.** Although some Qur’anic occurrences of the noun *nafs* can be understood in more than one meaning, one may in general distinguish the following three uses of the word.<sup>1</sup>

(i) As discussed in more detail below, *nafs* can pick out certain aspects of the interior dimension of human personhood. When used in this capacity, *al-nafs* is customarily translated as “the soul,” although “the lower self” or “the vital self”<sup>2</sup> is often more apposite. At least by way of an interpretive stepping-stone, it is not out of place to compare it to the Platonic *epithymētikon* (*Republic* 439d), the “appetitive” part of the human soul that ought to be ruled by reason with the aid of the soul’s “spirited” part. Somewhat similarly, the Qur’an and pre-Islamic poetry associate the *nafs* with a range of appetitive and aversive mental phenomena that human agents must strive to restrain and keep in check in order to assert their commitment to ethical or religious values and principles.

(ii) Secondly, *nafs* can designate the entire living human person (Blachère 1948, 75–76). This signification applies, for instance, in Qur’anic passages speaking of the killing of a *nafs* (Q 2:72, 5:32, 6:151, 17:33, 18:74, 20:40, 25:68, 28:19, 33; see also 5:45), in the assertion that “every person” or “everyone” (*kullu nafsin*) “will taste death” (Q 3:185, 21:35, 29:57; → *dhāqa*), or in the affirmation that God “charges no person beyond his or her capability” (Q 2:286, 6:152, 7:42, 23:62: *lā yukallifu llāhu / lā nukallifu nafsan illā wus’ahā*; cf. 65:7).<sup>3</sup> Another verse in which *nafs* means “person” or “human life” is Q 2:155, according to which God will test the believers “by fear and hunger and loss of possessions and lives and fruit (*wa-naqṣin mina l-amwāli wa-l-anfusi wa-l-thamarāti*).” The same applies to the phrase *jāhadū bi-amwālihim wa-anfusihim*, “to contend by means of their possessions and their lives” (e.g., Q 4:95; → *jāhada*, → *aqrada*). As Blachère and Homerin have persuasively argued, this second category should also be deemed to include eschatological statements like Q 82:5, asserting that on the day of judgement “a person” (*nafs*)—meaning “every person” (Blankinship 2020, 69–70)—“will come to know what he/she has previously accomplished and failed to accomplish” (*‘alimat nafsun mā qaddamat wa-akhkharat*; see under → *qaddama*). That *nafs* here signifies “the person held responsible for his or her beliefs and actions” rather than the soul is substantiated by Q 75:13 (*yunabba’u l-insānu yawma’idhin bi-mā qaddama wa-akhkhar*), a parallel to 82:5 that employs *al-insān*, “man,

1 For a general overview that has also formed my own starting point, see CDKA 272, but note that Ambros combines senses (i) and (ii). For an ambiguous example that can perhaps be construed according to either meaning (i) or (iii), see Q 13:11: “God does not change what is in a people until they change what is in themselves / what is in their souls (*mā bi-anfusihim*).” A fivefold taxonomy of the meanings of *nafs* in the Qur’an is developed in Picken 2005, 106–107.

2 My use of “vital self” as an approximate equivalent of *nafs* draws on Blachère 1948, 71–72, who employs paraphrases like *principe vital* and *âme végétative*.

3 The latter phrase has been compared to 1 Cor 10:13 (Rudolph 1922, 16; BEQ 451).

the human being” (Homerin 2006, 84; see also Blachère 1948, 73, and *AHW* 143–144). A further passage in which *nafs* clearly has the sense of “person” is Q 91:7–8: “By the human person and that which has given it an even shape (*wa-nafsīn wa-mā sawwāhā*) // and has instilled it with its wickedness and fear of God!”<sup>4</sup> Lastly, when four verses remind the addressees that God has created them *min nafsīn wāḥidatin* (Q 4:1, 6:98, 7:189, 39:6), namely, from Adam, this too is best rendered “from a single person” rather than “from a single soul” (thus also Blachère 1948, 75, and Homerin 2006, 84). It is presumably based on the same insight formulated by Blachère and Homerin that Asad 1980 almost always renders the universal quantifier *kullu/kulli/kulla nafsīn* as “every/any human being” and that Paret’s German translation usually opts for “everyone” (see, e.g., Q 3:30.185 in Paret 2001; similarly Droge 2013, who usually has “every/each person” or “everyone”).<sup>5</sup> By contrast, when Arberry or Abdel Haleem translate *nafs* in verses like Q 3:30 or 82:5 as “soul” (Arberry 1955 and Abdel Haleem 2010), they risk encouraging an unwarranted understanding of Qur’anic eschatology according to which God’s judgement and ensuing rewards and punishments befall disembodied souls. As illustrated by Q 82:5, briefly examined above, *nafsūn* in the indeterminate nominative singular can have a similar quantifying function to *kullu/kulli/kulla nafsīn*; it occurs principally in universal negations,<sup>6</sup> where it too is best understood as “any person.” Thus, “no person” or “no one” is “charged beyond his capacity” (*lā tukallafu nafsūn illā wus’ahā*; Q 2:233),<sup>7</sup> and on judgement day “no one will give satisfaction for anybody else” (*lā tajzī nafsūn ‘an nafsīn shay’an*; Q 2:48.123).<sup>8</sup>

By way of adding some comparative support for this second sense of *nafs*, an equivalent use of the word in the sense of “life” or “person” is attested in early Arabic poetry (*AHW* 142–143); and Sabaic *nfs*, too, has been argued to mean “person” rather than “soul” (Jamme 1988, 43; see also Jamme 1972, 77).<sup>9</sup> A poetic occurrence of *ilā kulli nafsīn* that evidently means “to everyone” is found at the end of al-Shanfarā’s *Qaṣīdah Ṭā’iyyah* (Lyall 1918–1924, no. 20:34; *EAP* 1:204), despite the fact that the immediately preceding verse employs *nafs* in the sense of “soul.” It is also worth drawing attention to a verse that Seidensticker cites from a poem attributed to Zuhayr, which underscores the ephemerality of people’s “lives

4 The two following verses, Q 91:9–10, may be translated thus: “He who purifies it will surely prosper (*qad aflaha man zakkāhā*) // and he who sullies it will surely be reduced to destitution (*wa-qad khāba man dassāhā*).” On *khāba*, see *AEL* 819; on *dassā*, the translation of which is conjectural, see *CDKA* 98. On *qad*, refer to the brief comment under → *aflaha*. Instead of a literal rendering of the anaphoric pronouns in *man zakkāhā* and *man dassāhā* (“he who purifies it,” “he who sullies it”), one might consider a reflexive translation: “he who purifies himself,” “he who sullies himself.” This is supported both by the fact that *nafs* is well attested as a reflexive pronoun in the Qur’an, as explained under (iii) in the main text, and by the similarity between Q 91:9 and 87:14 (*qad aflaha man tazakkā*, “he who purifies himself will prosper”).

5 On such a rendering, a verse like Q 3:30 is to be translated: “On the day when everyone will find brought forth the good he/she has done and the evil he/she has done . . .” (*yawma tajidu kullu nafsīn mā ‘amilat min khayrin muḥḍaran wa-mā ‘amilat min sū’in*).

6 For cases in which indeterminate *nafsūn* without a preceding *kull* does not feature in negative sentences, see Q 59:18, 81:14, and 82:5 (cited earlier on in the main text). One is tempted to equate this usage with *kullu nafsīn*, which is in fact how Q 81:14 and 82:5 are glossed in *Jal.* 2086 and 2090.

7 As shown by verses like Q 2:286, cited further above, this particular claim is more frequently expressed in the active, with God as the grammatical subject and *nafs* figuring in the accusative.

8 Once again, Paret 2001 consistently has *niemand* (“no one, anyone”), while Asad 1980 has “no human being.” See also the structure *wa-mā kāna li-nafsīn an . . .* in Q 3:145 (“No person will die except by God’s permission,” *wa-mā kāna li-nafsīn an tamūta illā bi-idhni llāhi*) and 10:100.

9 I owe both references to <http://sabaweb.uni-jena.de/SabaWeb/Suche/Suche/SearchResultDetail?idXLemma=2005&showAll=0> (accessed 1 April 2021), where particular occurrences can be found. Some of these resemble the reflexive use of Qur’anic *nafs* that is described under (iii) below.

and possessions” (*nufūsum wa-amwālulum*; see *DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 20:2): as noted above, the same combination of the plural forms of *nafs* and *māl* is also found in many Qur’anic verses, especially in connection with exhortations to “contend” (→ *jāhada*) on God’s path (Q 2:155, 3:186, 4:95, 8:72, 9:20.41.44.81.88.111, 49:15, 61:11).

(iii) Lastly, *nafs* in combination with a possessive suffix can appear in reflexive (“one-self”) and reciprocal (“one another”) structures, such as “to wrong o.s.” (→ *ḡalama nafsahu*; e.g., Q 2:54.57.231, 3:117.135, 4:64.97.110, 37:113), “to kill one another” (*qatalū anfusahum*; Q 2:54.85, 4:29.66), “to expel one another” (*akhrajū anfusahum min diyārihim*; Q 2:84), or to do something “for o.s.” or “on one’s own behalf” (*li-nafsihi*; e.g., Q 30:44: *wa-man ‘amila ṣāliḡan fa-li-anfusihim yamhadūn*, “those who do righteous deeds prepare a smooth resting-place for themselves”). As illustrated by the last example, formulations involving this reflexive use of *nafs* often serve to give pointed expression to the fundamental Qur’anic contention that the consequences of virtuous or vicious actions will ultimately—that is, eschatologically—rebound upon the agent (see also under → *ḡalama*).<sup>10</sup> It seems likely that this third, reflexive sense of *nafs* grew out of the preceding two.<sup>11</sup>

**The *nafs* in relation to breath and blood.** The noun *nafas* (which is Qur’anicly unattested) means “breath,” and *tanaffasa* (see Q 81:18) is “to breathe” (Blachère 1948, 69; Calverley 1993, 880; Homerin 2006, 81). This invites the conjecture that *nafs* may at some point have meant the vital breath residing in a living person and departing him or her at the moment of death. However, while there is Qur’anic evidence for the notion that death supervenes when the *nafs* leaves the body (Q 6:93, 39:42), in the Qur’an the idea of a vital spirit is more closely associated with the noun → *rūḡ*, which God is said to have “breathed into” (*nafakha fi*) Adam (Q 15:29, 32:9, and 38:72).<sup>12</sup> A line from a poem attributed, perhaps uncertainly, to al-Samaw’al ibn ‘Ādiyā depicts the *nafs* as something that “pours forth” on the edges of sword-blades or spear-heads (*tasīlu ‘alā ḡaddi l-ḡubāti nufūsunā*), suggesting that the *nafs* was connected not with the breath but rather with blood (Smith 1894, 40, n. 1; Blachère 1948, 72, n. 3; ‘Alī 1968–1973, 6:137; for the verse, see, e.g., al-Khaṡib al-Tibrīzī 2000, no. 16:11, and Arberry 1965, 30–31, v. 11).<sup>13</sup> A *ḡadīth* report, also cited by ‘Alī, in which *nafs sā’ilah* clearly means “blood” may be seen as evidence that this connotation persisted into the post-Qur’anic period (see, e.g., Abū ‘Ubayd 1994, 253 = no. 190). A similar tie with human blood applies to the cognate term *nepeš* in Biblical Hebrew: as Lev 17:11 puts it, “the *nepeš* of the flesh is in the blood” (see also Deut 12:23), and the *nepeš* may accordingly be summarised as “the life force coursing through the blood of humans and animals” (see Smith 1894, 40, and Homerin 2006, 82; for more detail

<sup>10</sup> Other cases of reflexive *nafs* include Q 2:110.223.272, 6:104, 9:35, 10:108, and 73:20. See also the *mā/ in . . . illā anfusahum* structures in Q 2:9 (*wa-mā yakḡda’ūna illā anfusahum*, “they only deceive themselves”), 3:69, 4:113, and 6:26. Two other verses in which *nafs* simply functions as a reflexive are Q 3:28.30: “God warns you about himself” (*wa-yuḡadḡhirukumu llāhu nafsahu*). The reflexive use of *nafs* is also found in early Arabic poetry, e.g., *DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 16:57 (*wa-man lā yukarrim nafsahu lā yukarrami*).

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Q 12:53, which would seem to slide from meaning (iii) back to (i): “I do not claim myself to be innocent (*wa-mā ubarrī’u nafsī*); indeed, the soul/self perpetually commands what is evil (*inna l-nafsa la-ammāratun bi-l-sū’i*).” Similarly, Q 16:111 combines meanings (ii) and (iii): “On the day when every person (*kullu nafsīn*) will plead for himself/herself (*‘an nafsihā*), and every person (*kullu nafsīn*) will be fully repaid what he/she has done” (see also *CDKA* 272).

<sup>12</sup> See also Q 21:91 and 66:12, where it is Mary into whom God breathes his spirit, which describes the conception of Jesus.

<sup>13</sup> See also the discussion in *AHW* 159–160, who adds another proof-text yet is sceptical about positing a close link between the *nafs* and blood.

on the Biblical term, see *TDOT* 9:497–519 and *NIDOTTE* 3:133–134). The *nepeš* can also represent specifically “the desires and inclinations of animals and humans” (*NIDOTTE* 3:133; see, e.g., Jer 2:24 and Prov 23:2), corresponding to the appetitive connotations of the Qur’anic employment of *nafs* noted under (i) above (see already Calverley 1993, 880). Unlike the Biblical *nepeš*, however, it is only human agents to which the Qur’an would seem to ascribe a *nafs*. As will be argued below, the Qur’anic *nafs* is more likely to be linked to the conception of the human soul or vital self that is enunciated in pre-Islamic poetry than to Biblical precursors.

**No immaterial soul in the Qur’an.** An unfortunate drawback of rendering *nafs* in the first sense above as “soul,” rather than “vital self,” is that it invites readers to associate the Qur’an with a Platonistic understanding of humans as dualistically constituted of a material body and an immaterial soul capable of disembodied existence. While such a Platonising conception of the human soul had a strong influence on late antique Christian thought (see generally the contributions to the second part of Marmodoro and Cartwright 2018), there is no unequivocal Qur’anic support for it (Rahman 2009, 17).<sup>14</sup> The fact that, as noted above, a human individual’s demise occurs when he or she “gives up” his or her vital self (*nafs*; Q 6:93, 39:42; see also 9:55.85) does not as such imply that it is a disembodied *nafs* who is the vehicle of humans’ posthumous existence. After all, the Qur’an emphasises that God’s resurrection of humans involves a “clothing” of bones with flesh (Q 2:259: *wa-nzur ilā l-‘izāmi kayfa nunshizuhā thumma naksūhā laḥman*; cf. Ezek 37:1–14), just as God clothes bones with flesh when a human being is first brought into existence (Q 23:14: *fa-kasawnā l-‘izāma laḥman*; on the resurrection as a revivification of bones, see also 36:78–79 and verses like 37:16.53). There is no explicit Qur’anic evidence that the *nafs* that is surrendered at the moment of death is capable of existence outside a body.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly inconclusive is another potential piece of evidence in favour of a Platonising understanding of the Qur’anic afterlife. This is Q 81:7, which in the context of the end of the world and the last judgement appears to evoke the moment “when the souls will be paired” (*wa-idhā l-nufūsu zuwwijāt*). Some Muslim interpreters understand this statement to mean the pairing of souls with bodies at the moment of resurrection (e.g., Ṭab. 24:144–145; see also *SQ* 1480–1481). This could be understood to imply that human souls are at least in principle separable from bodies. Even so, Q 81:7 would nonetheless make it unequivocally clear that the afterlife is experienced by human individuals who are constituted of a soul and a body. It is equally conceivable, though, that Q 81:7 announces a subdivision of the resurrected into groups or “kinds” (*zawj* in the singular) who have accumulated similar moral merit and therefore face the same eschatological fate (Homerin 2006, 83–84; see also Ṭab. 24:141–144).<sup>16</sup> On this interpretation, the meaning of *nufūs* in Q 81:7 is not “souls” but “persons,” yielding the translation like “when [all] persons will be subdivided into different kinds.”

14 On the question of whether the Qur’an may be read as positing a general distinction between material and immaterial spheres of existence, see under → *al-ghayb* and → *allāh*.

15 Q 2:154, 3:169, and 36:26–28 intimate that certain meritorious individuals may be granted access to paradise before the day of judgement (see also under → *ākhir*). However, given the evidence surveyed previously and below in the main text (including the fact that the Qur’an depicts paradise as involving appetites, designated by derivatives of the roots *sh-h-w* and *h-w-y*; e.g., Q 21:102), one must assume that the individuals in question enter paradise in an embodied or re-embodied state rather than as disembodied souls. Most likely, it is, exceptionally, understood that they will be resurrected prior to the general resurrection at the end of the world.

16 For *azwāj* in the sense of eschatological “kinds,” see Q 56:7.

**The functions and operations of the human *nafs* or vital self.** What does the Qur'an permit us to infer about the functions and activities of the human *nafs* in sense (i)?<sup>17</sup> In the first instance, the *nafs* is something hidden: humans, including the Qur'anic Messenger, may conceal (*akhfā*, *asarra*, *akanna*) the contents of their souls (Q 2:235, 284, 3:154, 5:52, 12:77, 33:37),<sup>18</sup> yet God “knows what is in your souls” (Q 2:235, 11:31, 17:25; see also 2:284 and 5:116), just as he knows what is in people's “breasts” (singular: → *ṣadr*; e.g., Q 3:154;) or hearts (singular: → *qalb*; e.g., Q 4:63). More specifically, the soul or vital self emerges as the mental faculty giving rise to desires, cravings, and appetites. Several verses connect the *nafs* with the verb *hawīya*, “to desire,” or its corresponding verbal noun (see also under → *tabī'a*). Thus, Q 2:87 and 5:70 accuse the Israelites of dismissing God's messengers as liars or killing them “whenever a messenger came to you with something that your souls did not desire (*bi-mā lā tahwā anfusukum*)” (for other instances linking *nafs* and *h-w-y*, see Q 53:23 and 79:40).<sup>19</sup> Other verses employ the plural of *nafs* as the grammatical subject of *ishtahā*, a synonym of *hawīya* (Q 21:102, 41:31, 43:71; cf. *AHW* 155). Significantly, all of the latter three passages describe how the pious in paradise will enjoy everything “that their souls desire,” implying that human subjects do not shed their vital selves in paradise or in hell.<sup>20</sup> The fact that the inhabitants of paradise continue to feel soul-cravings that are however immediately satisfied while the damned are deprived of such gratification (see Q 34:54, threatening that the damned will be denied access to “what they desire”) suggests that the possession of a vital self by the inhabitants of paradise and hell is an integral precondition of whatever joys or punishments the afterlife may hold.

That humans retain their souls or vital selves in the afterlife is particularly noteworthy since the appetitive promptings of the *nafs* can clearly lead pre-eschatological humans to violate moral principles or the prohibition of venerating other beings than God. Thus, according to Q 5:30 one of the sons of Adam—in Biblical terms, Cain—was “prompted by his soul to kill his brother” (*fa-ṭawwa'at lahu nafsuhu qatla akhīhi fa-qatalahu*), and in Q 20:96 the enigmatic al-Sāmīrī attempts to excuse his production of a calf-shaped idol for the Israelites by saying that “my soul persuaded me to do it” (*wa-ka-dhālika sawwalat lī nafsī*; for other occurrences of *nafs* + *sawwala*, see Q 12:18, 83; on *sawwala*, refer to *CDKA* 142). A third verb used for the soul's morally dubious promptings is *waswasa*, “to whisper”: “We created man (*al-insān*) and we know what his soul whispers to him (*wa-na'lamu mā tuwaswisu bihi nafsuhu*), for we are closer to him than his jugular vein,” the divine voice asserts in Q 50:16. Significantly, both *sawwala* and *waswasa* are also used with the devil or Satan (→ *al-shayṭān*) as their grammatical subject (Witztum 2011, 134–136; see Q 7:20, 20:120, 47:25, and also, though more enigmatically, 114:4–5): it appears that the *nafs* constitutes the primary breach in human psychology through which the devil carries out his attempts to lead humans astray. That the *nafs* is an ethical liability

17 See also *AHW* 154–157.

18 See also Q 58:8 with the formulation “they say in their souls. . . .” In Q 7:205, *wa-dhkur rabbaka fī nafsika* would seem to mean a quiet manner of invoking God that is not readily audible (→ *dhakara*).

19 But see Q 14:37, where the root *h-w-y* in the sense of desire is associated with the heart (*fu'ād*).

20 See also the occurrence of *ishtahā* in Q 52:22, 56:21, and 77:42 (also eschatological but without specifically mentioning souls). I consider it to be less probable that the point of these verses is to say that the blessed will enjoy everything that their souls desired when they were still alive. Could the fact that Q 21:102, 41:31, and 43:71 use a different verb to refer to the soul's desires in the afterlife than many verses speaking of the soul's desires in this world indicate that in paradise the appetitive operations of the *nafs* are somehow transformed? This seems unlikely, seeing that the verb *ishtahā* figures in a this-worldly (and disapproving) context in Q 16:57.



is confirmed by its association with envy (Q 2:109), greed (Q 4:128, 59:9, 64:16), arrogance (Q 25:21: *la-qadi stakbarū fī anfusihim*), and gratuitous complaining (Q 75:2: *wa-lā uqsimu bi-l-nafsi l-lawwāmah*).<sup>21</sup> Q 3:154 says about a group of the Qur’anic addressees that “their souls rendered them anxious, causing them to make untrue conjectures about God” (*wa-tā’ifatun qad ahammathum anfusuhum yazunnūna bi-llāhi ghayra l-ḥaqqi*). It is not unexpected, therefore, that the *nafs* is described as “perpetually commanding evil” (Q 12:53: *inna l-nafsa la-ammāratun bi-l-sū’i*).

Nonetheless, it does not appear that all promptings originating from the *nafs* are intrinsically evil (thus also *AHW* 155). Thus, Q 12:67 reports Jacob’s precautionary advice to his sons to enter what seems to be the capital city of Egypt by different gates, rather than by the same one, and 12:68 calls this counsel a mere “feeling of need (*ḥājah*) in Jacob’s soul that he satisfied” (*ḥājatan fī nafsi ya’qūba qaḍāhā*).<sup>22</sup> Similarly, there is not necessarily anything blameworthy about the fear that Moses feels “in his soul” according to Q 20:67 when confronting the Egyptian sorcerers (*fa-awjasa fī nafsihi khīfatan mūsā*), even if God subsequently encourages him not to be afraid (v. 68). In fact, one passage entails that the feelings of disquietude and restlessness to which the *nafs* may give rise, far from being religiously corruptive, as in Q 3:154 (see above), may psychologically dispose someone to repentance: Q 9:118 describes the anguish felt by three unnamed contemporaries of the Qur’anic Messenger who apparently failed to participate in a military excursion (see the remarks on *khallafa* under → *istakhlafa*) by saying that “their souls became straitened (*wa-dāqat ‘alayhim anfusuhum*),<sup>23</sup> and they thought that the only refuge from God was towards him; then he turned towards them in compassion so that they might repent (*thumma tāba ‘alayhim li-yatūbū*)” (see also *AHW* 144 and under → *tāba*). It stands to reason that the urges emanating from the *nafs* are not evil in themselves, but simply acquire this value if and when they conflict with and are allowed to override higher-ranking moral or religious precepts. It is accordingly crucial to keep one’s soul or vital self in check. This applies even to the Qur’anic Messenger, whom Q 35:8 instructs not to let his soul feel regret for those whom God has led astray (*fa-lā tadhhab nafsuka ‘alayhim ḥasarātin*).

The *nafs*, then, is the part of the human psyche from which selfish urges and impulses well up. A moral agent must critically assess these urges and, if needs be, contain and repress them: in order to merit paradise, one must “restrain the soul from desire” (*wa-nahā l-nafsa ‘ani l-hawā*, Q 79:40), meaning, presumably, from those desires that the moral conscience identifies as illicit. Yet as just highlighted, the urges, apprehensions, and desires springing from the soul can at times be morally indifferent or even salubrious. What distinguishes those leading a moral and pious life from those failing to do so is not that

21 Probably under the influence of a prominent stream in traditional Islamic exegesis (see Tab. 23:469 or *SQ* 1446), Mir and Homerin interpret the phrase *al-nafs al-lawwāmah* in Q 75:2 as someone’s “blaming self” or conscience” (Mir 1987, 36; Homerin 2006, 83). But there is no other Qur’anic verse suggesting that the *nafs* might function as the human conscience, and given what other passages have to say about its activity the *nafs* seems singularly ill-equipped to play such a role. Moreover, at least some Qur’anic occurrences of the verb *lāma* or the reciprocal *talāwama* (Q 5:54, 12:32, 14:22, 68:30) carry the sense of gratuitous or petty fault-finding that is also found in poetry (e.g., *DSAAP*, Ṭarafah, no. 4:69, on which see Jacobi 1971, 79–80; the translation in Arberry 1957, 87 has “to scold”). For a poetic verse in which the soul is explicitly described as blaming its owner, see below. Blachère interprets Q 75:2 to refer to “the *nafs* that will blame itself on judgement day for not having accumulated more works towards its salvation during life on earth” (Blachère 1948, 73).

22 On *ḥājah* in this sense, see *CDKA* 79 and → *ṣadr*. For a verse of poetry that links *ḥājah* in the sense of a feeling of need or longing with the heart (*fu’ād*), rather than the soul, see Lyall 1918–1924, no. 96:2.

23 On *q-w-q*, see under → *ṣadr*.



the former are exempt from selfish soul-promptings but rather that they exercise effective control over them (see again Q 35:8, which portrays even the Qur’anic Messenger as engaged in the quintessentially human business of keeping one’s soul in check). In line with the Qur’an’s generally pessimistic anthropology (*HCI* 165–166), there is little evidence that the desires and promptings of the soul can undergo permanent reform or alteration: it is the *nafs* in general that is said to “command evil” (Q 12:53), or to engender selfish and potentially immoral urges, rather than merely the *nafs* of some humans to the exclusion of others. As we saw earlier, even the resurrected are assumed to be endowed with vital selves or souls, underscoring the extent to which the Qur’an presents the *nafs* as an inseparable component of the human experience. To be sure, there is one Qur’anic passage that makes reference, in an eschatological context, to “the soul that is secure” or “at peace” (Q 89:27: *yā-ayyatuḥā l-nafsu l-muṭma’innah*), a formulation that some Muslim exegetes reasonably gloss as meaning a soul that “is secure in belief” (*al-muṭma’innah bi-l-īmān*; e.g., Muqātil 2002, 4:692; see also Ṭab. 24:398).<sup>24</sup> The verse implies the possibility of a lasting transformation of the *nafs* from an unruly part of the human psyche that is constantly at risk of disrupting a person’s moral and religious aspirations to a faculty that is fully in harmony with his or her ethical values and theological convictions. Yet given other Qur’anic statements about the human soul, the transformation that Q 89:27 designates with the verb *iṭma’anna* is probably envisaged as occurring only at the eschatological stage, in the sense that it is only upon entering paradise that the *nafs* will finally be subdued and made one with the rest of the human person. Alternatively, the meaning of *nafs* in Q 89:27 could well be the human person in its entirety—i.e., the second of the three meanings listed above—rather than specifically the soul or vital self (thus Asad 1980: “O thou human being that hast attained to inner peace!”).

**Vital self and heart (*qalb*).** The relationship between the soul or vital self (*nafs*) and the heart (→ *qalb*) deserves further comment. Although both are associated with the breast (for the heart and the breast, see, e.g., Q 3:154 and 22:46; for the soul and the breast, cf. Q 12:68 with 40:80 and 59:9), one can discern a general functional distinction between them. As detailed elsewhere (→ *qalb*), the heart is frequently combined with cognitive or epistemic terminology, such as understanding (*faqīha*, *‘aqala*), believing (*āmana*), rejecting (*ankara*), or doubting (*irtāba*). This is almost never the case for the *nafs*, which fits the observation that the latter is primarily the wellspring of human desires, urges, aversions, and quasi-instinctual apprehensions and anxieties. An exceptional case in which the *nafs* is associated with cognitive terminology is Q 27:14, according to which the Qur’an’s opponents deny God’s signs “despite the fact that their souls were certain of them” (*wa-stayqanathā anfusuhum*; see also *AHW* 154). But the point here would seem to be that the opponents’ minds are so perverted that they ride roughshod over even their own souls’ disposition to assent to God’s signs; the verse polemically inverts the ordinary psychological situation in which an agent struggles to assert his moral and religious values over the wayward leanings of his *nafs*.<sup>25</sup> At least ordinarily, it is not the soul but the heart that forms the faculty by which humans come to comprehend God’s signs and revelations and to enter into a relationship

24 The argument in favour of this gloss is the connection between belief (*āmana*, *īmān*) and being secure or at peace (*iṭma’anna*, *iṭmi’nān*) that is clearly exhibited by Q 2:260, 13:28, and 16:106.112.

25 See also Q 30:8, which could be construed as asking whether the opponents “have not reflected in their souls” (*a-wa-lam yatafakkarū fī anfusihim*) on God’s creation of the heavens and the earth. But the sense could also be, “Have they not reflected on themselves?”—namely, on the abundant benefits that God has showered

with him (see, e.g., Q 26:89 and 37:84 with the expression, “to come to God / to one’s Lord with a sound heart”; → *qalb*). It is also relevant to note that the Qur’an exhibits a wide range of expressions for the malfunctioning of the human heart (detailed under → *qalb*), which implies a strong distinction between the heart’s right and wrong operating. Such terminology has no counterparts with respect to the *nafs*: the *nafs* has one intrinsic mode of functioning, rather than a right one and a wrong one; it inevitably gives rise to self-centred desires and appetites, whether in sinners or in the virtuous.

**The *nafs* as depicted in pre-Islamic poetry.** As the remainder of this entry will show, pre-Islamic poetry depicts the *nafs* and its operations in broadly similar terms, forming an important aspect of continuity between the Qur’an and those strands of ancient Arabian notions of the human psyche that are articulated in poetry (see also the overview of poetic evocations of the *nafs* in *AHW* 145–153). For example, the prominent Qur’anic link between the soul and desire (*h-w-y*) is paralleled by a verse from the corpus of ‘Antarah (*DSAAP*, ‘Antarah, no. 2:20), in which the poet boasts of his nobility and asserts that he does not “follow the desires of the contentious soul” (*lā atba’u l-nafsa l-lajūja hawāhā*; see also *AHW* 150). We see here the same theme of human agents needing to uphold the ethical values in which they are invested (which are not, of course, theocentric ones as in the Qur’an) against the inclinations of their unruly and wayward vital selves. The same phraseological link underpins a verse by ‘Adī ibn Zayd, demanding that the soul’s desire be kept in check (*wa-da’i l-nafsa ‘an hawāhā*; al-Mu‘ayyid 1965, no. 9:26; see *AHW* 150).<sup>26</sup> The soul also appears as the seat of internal agitation (*humūm*; cf. the use of the verb *ahamma* in Q 3:154, cited above) and as a source of “complaints about matters that fill it with disquiet” (*aḥādītha nafsin tashtakī mā yarībuhā*; *DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 8:2; see Jacobi 1971, 88). Moreover, by virtue of being the seat of the human instinct of self-preservation, the soul can pose a threat to the poet’s ability to conform to the heroic value system he is expected to uphold: the Mu‘allaqah of Ṭarafah explicitly associates the soul with fear (*khawf*; *DSAAP*, Ṭarafah, no. 4:40; see Arberry 1957, 85, and *AHW* 147, including further material), and according to other poems the soul “loathes” (*kariha*) death and charging into battle (*DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 3:44; Lyall 1918–1924, no. 91:2; see also *AHW* 149),<sup>27</sup> and it “blames” (*lāma*) its owner for actions imperiling his safety or comfort (Farrāj and Shākīr 1963–1965, 754 = al-Burayq, no. 6:1; cf. the Qur’anic oath by “the soul full of blame,” *al-nafs al-lawwāmah*, in Q 75:2).<sup>28</sup> In battle, men’s souls “come up between their collar-bones” (Lyall 1913, ‘Āmir ibn al-Ṭufayl, no. 23:5: *idhā mā nufūsu l-qawmi ṭāla’ati l-thughar*; see also *AHW* 161), which recalls similar depictions of mortal fear in the Qur’an (Q 33:10, 40:18, 56:83, 75:26).<sup>29</sup> At the same time, just as the Qur’an on occasion presents the operations of

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on humans. This would be in line with the meaning of *tafakkara fī* in Q 3:191 and the claim in 51:21 that there are divine signs “in yourselves” (*fī anfusikum*).

<sup>26</sup> A verse attributed, perhaps correctly, to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt (Schulthess 1911a, no. 55:28 = al-Saṭlī 1974, no. 11:28) combines *h-w-y* not with the *nafs* but with the *qalb* (*AHW* 48; on the problem of the verse’s authenticity, see Seidensticker 2011b, 62–63).

<sup>27</sup> I am assuming that the second verse refers to the souls of the warriors and not to those of their horses, who are also mentioned.

<sup>28</sup> Although the context is slightly opaque, it seems that the act for which the poet’s soul blames him—namely, to cover the body of someone whom he believes to have been unjustly slain, and thereby to claim responsibility for exacting vengeance on behalf of the victim—is understood to be objectively noble but risky, meaning that the soul cannot be said to function as the poet’s moral conscience here.

<sup>29</sup> Q 33:10 has *balaghati l-qulūbu l-ḥanājira*, “the hearts reached the throats,” the context being an earthly battle. Q 40:18 employs a variant of the phrase to convey the fear of the resurrected on the day of judgement. Q 56:83

the soul as morally salubrious, so poetry can cast the soul's urges and desires as conducive to performing the duties of a heroic warrior. Thus, 'Antarah says that a victory in battle "cured" (*shafā*) the "malady" (*saqam*) of his soul, adding the proviso "if it were possible for the soul to be cured." By slaughtering his enemies, we may explicate, the poetic hero has satisfied his soul's thirst for blood and vengeance; yet the soul will inevitably go on generating further desires and yearnings demanding satisfaction in their turn (*DSAAP*, 'Antarah, no. 15:1, and al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī 1992, 101; on the general link between "curing the soul" and vengeance, see *AHW* 152–153).<sup>30</sup>

The preceding makes it clear that it is vital for a tribal warrior to exercise critical control over his soul, that is, to give reign only to those of its desires and aversions that are compatible with the ethical code he is striving to embody, while conflicting appetites and dislikes must be suppressed. "The soul complains about what has befallen it" (*wa-tashakkā l-nafsu mā ṣāba bihā*), Ṭarafah says,<sup>31</sup> and then goes on to exhort his soul to "remain steadfast (*fa-ṣbirī*), for you originate from a people who are steadfast" (*DSAAP*, Tarafah, no. 5:34; see also *AHW* 148 and under → *ṣabara*).<sup>32</sup> In his Mu'allaqah, Ṭarafah reminisces about "many a day on which I restrained my soul in the throng of battle" (*wa-yawmin ḥabastu l-nafsa 'inda 'irākihā*; *DSAAP*, Tarafah, no. 4:99).<sup>33</sup> 'Antarah too boasts of his ability to "steadfastly restrain" (*ṣbartu*) his soul, which will "stand firm when a coward's soul is given to yearning" (*tarsū idhā nafsu l-jabbāni taṭalla'u*; *DSAAP*, 'Antarah, no. 13:8).<sup>34</sup> The same verse describes the poet's soul as privy to his own knowledge that he will not be able to escape whatever doom may be apportioned to him (*ṣbartu 'arifatan li-dhālīka*, referring back to v. 7). Yet it is not certain that the soul is always capable of such unflinching acceptance of the misery, hardship, and danger besetting human existence. In asserting control over one's soul, one may therefore need to have recourse to self-deceit: another poem by 'Antarah accuses his soul of having "lied" to him in holding out the prospect of a tryst with a certain woman, and he consequently tells himself to "lie" to his soul in turn (*kadhabatka nafsuka fa-kdhibanhā*; *DSAAP*, 'Antarah, no. 23:6). Here, a human agent's relationship to his soul is represented on the model of interpersonal conflict and deception.<sup>35</sup> The need to exercise steadfast control over (*ṣabara*) one's soul, especially in battle, also features in

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may evoke the moment when a dying person's soul "reaches the throat" (*idhā balaghati l-ḥuḷqūm*). Although the grammatical subject is unspecified, the feminine verb suggests that the intended subject is *nafs* rather than *qalb*. The same holds for Q 75:26: *idhā balaghati l-tarāq(-iya)*, "when it [the soul] reaches the collar-bones."

<sup>30</sup> See also *DSAAP*, 'Antarah, no. 21:78, describing how the poet's soul was "cured" and its "malady," *suqm*, healed when his victorious advance in battle was cheered on by his brothers-in-arms; see al-Khaṭīb al-Tibrīzī 1992, 184–185, and the translation in Arberry 1957, 183. For a case in which similarly incurable (*sh-f-y*) rancour and blood-thirst are associated with the heart (*fu'ād*) and "the breasts," see Lyall 1918–1924, no. 27:13.15. In Lyall 1918–1924, nos 38:4 and 57:10, the poet's "sick heart" (*qalb saqīm*) functions as a metaphor for his yearning for his past beloved.

<sup>31</sup> For another verse linking the *nafs* with a derivative of *sh-k-w*, see *DSAAP*, al-Nābighah, no. 8:2, cited earlier in the main text.

<sup>32</sup> For another instance in which the poet addresses his soul, see Lyall 1913, 'Āmir ibn al-Ṭufayl, no. 11:11: "Cut short your exultation (*aqilli l-mirāḥa*); I do not fail to carry out my purpose."

<sup>33</sup> Arberry translates "Many's the day I've braced myself . . ." (Arberry 1957, 89).

<sup>34</sup> On *ṣabara* + *al-nafs*, see also al-Mu'ayyid 1965, no. 16:34.

<sup>35</sup> On lying to the soul, see also a famous line in a poem attributed to Labīd ('Abbās 1962, no. 26:22): "Lie to the soul when you speak to it; telling the soul the truth is to hold hope in contempt." Although the poem is not likely to be pre-Islamic (Montgomery 1997, 250–252; Imhof 2004, 82–103), the verse and the glosses around it assist in understanding the notion at stake: one must deceive one's soul about the hardship and danger one is likely to encounter, as the soul's ability to strive would otherwise be impaired. On the soul as itself peddling lies, see 'Abbās 1962, no. 2:1: "My view is that the soul is obstinate (*lajjat*) in deceitful hope (*fī rajā'in mukadh-*

Zuhayr (*DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 7:5) and presumably forms part of the conceptual background against which the Qur'an employs the same phrase *ṣabara nafṣahu*, "to steadfastly restrain one's soul" (Q 18:28). In early Islamic poetry, and to a residual degree also in the Qur'an (see in more detail under → *ṣabara*), the virtue of steadfastness (*ṣabr*) is therefore the ability to keep one's soul in check.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, an unchecked soul may cause its owner to commit moral transgressions, just as Cain is prompted by his soul to kill his brother (Q 5:30): a poem by al-Nābigah alluding to a man's compact of non-aggression with a snake casts the protagonist's violation of their agreement in terms of "being made to deviate by a soul deviating from what is right" (*jārat bihi nafsun 'ani l-ḥaqqi jā'irah*; *DSAAP*, al-Nābigah, no. 15:10; see also *AHW* 151, quoting another verse that casts the soul in a similar role).

In sum, the Qur'anic conception of the *nafs* displays significant intersection with pre-Islamic poetry. The situation is very different with regard to the Qur'anic notion of the heart (*qalb*), which shows a considerable imprint of Biblical ideas and language (→ *qalb*). The overall understanding of the human psyche underlying the Qur'an thus synthesises concepts and diction associated with two very different literary traditions. This genealogical assessment, however, must not be mistaken for a verdict of inconsistent eclecticism. On the contrary, the Qur'an's conflictual model of human psychology, which pits two different mental faculties against one another, is organically integrated with the Qur'an's general stress on moral struggle in pursuit of eschatological reward.

***nafa'a* tr./intr. | to benefit or profit s.o.; to be of benefit or profitable  
*manfa'* | benefit**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *ḥajj* | pilgrimage *min dūn allāh* | besides God; instead of God *'abada* tr. | to serve s.o. or s.th., to worship s.o. or s.th. *da'ā* tr. | to call upon s.o. *ḍarra* tr. | to harm s.o. *shafā'ah* | intercession *dhikrā* | (hortatory) reminder, reminding exhortation**

**The beneficial nature of God's creation.** Many Qur'anic passages underscore that the world and the creatures populating it operate in a way that "benefits" (*nafa'a*) humans or bestows "benefits" (*manāfi'*, singular: *manfa'*) upon them (Q 2:164, 219, 13:17, 16:5, 23:21, 36:73, 40:80, 57:25). This exemplifies the far-reaching anthropocentrism of the Qur'anic portrayal of the earth (see in more detail under → *ard* and also under → *āyah*). A similar utilitarian focus is extended to the Meccan pilgrimage (Q 22:28, 33): the ritual of the → *ḥajj* is not merely an act of obedience that is owed to God (cf. Q 3:97) but rather is in some sense advantageous and profitable to human worshippers. In part based on such statements, a strand of the later Mu'tazilite school inferred that God invariably takes the course of action that is maximally beneficial to humans, whether in matters to do with their ultimate salvation or to do with their this-worldly existence (e.g., Gimaret 1990, 434–435; see also *ibid.*,

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*dhibī*), // even though it has gathered experiences [to the contrary]; if only it were guided by experience (*law taqtadī bi-l-mujarrabī*)."

<sup>36</sup> See also Q 12:18, 83, both of which have Jacob tells his sons that "your souls have persuaded you of something" (*bal sawwalat lakum anfusukum amran*) and then recommends having recourse to steadfastness instead (*fa-ṣabrun jamīlun*). For a verse of early Arabic poetry in which steadfastness is associated with the heart, see *EAP* 1:35 (v. 11). But note that v. 10 speaks of the soul; perhaps the two are treated as largely equivalent here.

449). The Qur'an's attention to the ubiquitously beneficial nature of the cosmos continues a line of thought going back at least as far as the second-century Christian writer Theophilus of Antioch, who observes that what he terms the "resurrection of seeds and fruits" occurs "for the benefit (*eis tēn chrēsin*) of mankind" (*Ad Autolyicum* 1:13 = Theophilus 1970, 16–17).

**The unprofitability of worshipping deities besides God and the theme of eschatological profit.** There are two further thematic contexts in which the root *n-f-'* has a strong presence. First, the Qur'an criticises the veneration (verb: → *'abada*) or invocation (verb: *da'ā*) of beings "besides" or "instead of" God (*min dūn allāh*, on which see Ambros 2001, 11–13)—of beings, that is, who are said to be neither capable of benefitting (*nafa'a*) nor of harming (*darra*) people or even themselves (e.g., Q 5:76, 6:71, 10:18.106, 13:16, 21:66, 22:12–13, 25:3.55, 26:73; see also 20:89). As Ahrens recognised long ago (*CQ* 46; cf. *BEQ* 445), the Qur'an here continues a well-established Biblical trope, the futility or unprofitability of idol worship (*TDOT* 6:144–147). Thus, 1 Sam 12:21, Isa 44:9–10 and 57:12, and Jer 2:8.11 and 16:19 all stress that idols do not "profit" (Hebrew: *hō'il*) their worshippers. In the Qur'an, the formulaic conjunction of *n-f-'* and *ḍ-r-r* also occurs as part of an idiom for powerlessness (e.g., Q 7:188, 48:11).

Secondly, a cluster of Qur'anic occurrences is specifically concerned with the issue of what will and will not be beneficial or profitable to humans on the day of judgement: humans will not benefit from wealth or children (Q 26:88, 60:3); they will not benefit from any intercession (*shafā'ah*) or at least from intercessors who are not authorised by God (Q 2:123, 20:109, 34:23, 74:48); people will be unable to benefit one another (Q 34:42); believing only at the point at which God's punishment begins to unfold will be of no benefit (Q 6:158, 32:29, 40:85); the sinners will derive no benefit from their excuses (Q 30:57, 40:52); and the fact that the wrongdoers are partners-in-punishment will not benefit them (Q 43:39). On the positive side, humans will derive soteriological benefit from truthfulness (Q 5:119); and a number of early Meccan verses stress the profitability of God's reminding exhortation (*al-dhikrā*; see under → *dhakkara*) as relayed by Muhammad, presumably intending its utility on the path to salvation (Q 51:55, 80:4, 87:9). That belief is beneficial or profitable is also asserted in Q 10:98. This Qur'anic theme of soteriological benefit and the risk of lacking it might remind one of Matt 16:26: "For what will it profit humans (*ti gar ōphelēthēsetai anthrōpos*) if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?" (cf. Mark 8:36 and Luke 9:25).<sup>1</sup>

### ***anfaqa* tr./intr. | to spend (s.th.)**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *razaqa* ditr. | to provide s.o. with s.th. *rizq* | provision *zakāh* | alms *ṣadaqah* | gift or act of charity *waffā* tr. *ilā* | to repay s.th. to s.o. in full**

Various Qur'anic passages, both Meccan and Medinan, urge Muhammad's listeners to "spend" (*anfaqa*) from what God has "provided (*razaqa*) for" them (e.g., Q 2:3.254, 4:39, 8:3, 13:22, 14:31, 28:54, 35:29, 36:47, 42:38). "Spending" is thus synonymous with charitable giving, also referred to by the terms → *zakāh*, "alms," and → *ṣadaqah*, "gift/act of charity."

<sup>1</sup> For other New Testamental references to "benefit" in religious matters, see 1 Cor 13:3, Gal 5:2, and Heb 4:2 and 13:9.



While the use of *ṣ-d-q* in relation to charity is almost exclusively a Medinan phenomenon (excepting Q 12:88), the two terms → *zakāh* and *rizq*, “provision,” are already well represented in the Meccan layer of the Qur’an. Not only were the possessions disbursed in charitable spending originally bestowed by God, but whatever the believers spend during their earthly lives will ultimately be “fully repaid” (*waffā*) to them in the hereafter (Q 2:272: *mā tunfiqū min khayrin yuwaffa ilaykum*; similarly 8:60; see under → *ajr*). The Qur’an thus envisages an ideal sequence of divine provision, charitable human spending, and compensatory divine restitution as part of God’s eschatological reward. For further comments relevant to the verb *anfaqa*, see the entries just cross-referenced and under → *aqraḍa*; for the phrase “to spend on God’s path” (*anfaqa fī sabīli llāhi*), see under → *sabīl*.

***al-munāfiqūn, alladhīna nāfaqū* pl. | the hypocrites  
*nifāq* | hypocrisy**

Further vocabulary discussed: *alladhīna āmanū, al-mu’minūn* pl. | the believers *al-ladhīna kafarū, al-kāfirūn, al-kuffār* pl. | the repudiators *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *qātala fī sabīl allāh* | to fight on God’s path *anfaqa* tr./intr. | to spend (s.th.) *alladhīna fī qulūbihim maraḍ* | those in whose hearts is sickness

Much of the Qur’an is pervaded by the dichotomy of believers and repudiators (→ *āmana*, → *kafara*), with the recipients of previous scriptural revelations—namely, Jews and Christians (see under → *ahl al-kitāb*)—forming a third group whom Medinan passages sometimes align with the former (Q 2:62, 5:69), sometimes with the latter (Q 2:105, 98:6). Also in the Medinan surahs, the antithesis between believers and repudiators is further blunted by a fluid intermediate category of persons who appear to be nominal members of the Qur’anic community yet whose religious commitment is judged to be insufficient in various regards (Sinai 2015–2016, 58–59). The most frequent label for them is “the hypocrites” (*al-munāfiqūn*, e.g., Q 4:61.88.138 etc., 8:49, 9:64.67–68.73.101, 29:11; less frequently, *alladhīna nāfaqū*, see Q 3:167 and 59:11). The corresponding verbal noun *nifāq* occurs in Q 9:77.97.101.

**Qur’anic of *munāfiq* and Ethiopic *manāfəq*.** It is conventional to render *al-munāfiqūn* as “hypocrites.” The word has long been assumed to be derived from the Classical Ethiopic noun *manāfəq*, “heretic, schismatic, hypocrite,” and the verb *nāfaqa*, which can mean “to have doubts, be unbelieving, be a heretic” (*NB* 48–49; *KU* 64–65; *CQ* 41–42; *FVQ* 272; on the Ethiopic words, see Leslau 1991, 388). Brockett objects that the occurrence of the word in pre-Qur’anic Ethiopic literature remains to be confirmed (Brockett 1993, 562). However, the general link of the Ethiopic root *n-f-q* with the notions of division, factionalism, and half-heartedness is attested by a significant number of derivatives (Leslau 1991, 388), whereas in Arabic this meaning is confined to the verb *nāfaqa* (*AEL* 3036). This state of affairs is well explained by the standard hypothesis of borrowing from Ethiopic into Arabic.

*Al-munāfiqūn* = “the hypocrites.” Brockett also proposes that the Qur’anic significance of *munāfiqūn* is best rendered by “dissenters” (Brockett 1993, 562), while Ahrens prefers “waverers,” noting that this is one of the possible meanings of Ethiopic *nāfaqa* (*CQ* 42). The customary translation “hypocrite” does however capture well that the Qur’an takes the



*munāfiqūn* to task for insincere utterances and behaviour. It is true that the *munāfiqūn* are sometimes also presented as explicitly challenging the believers or the Qur’anic Prophet (Q 8:49, 33:12), but the imputation could be that such views are voiced in private.<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, the hypocrites are portrayed as paying lip service to the authority of the Qur’anic Prophet and as participating in prayer, yet are alleged to do so disingenuously (Q 63:1, 4:142); they are condemned for making excuses to justify their reluctance to “fight on God’s path” (verb: *qātala fī sabīl allāh*; see Q 3:167 and 33:13–14) and for dismissing the believers as having been misled by “God and his Messenger” (Q 33:12, similarly 8:49); and they are criticised for being miserly (Q 9:67), meaning presumably an unwillingness to undertake the charitable “spending” (→ *anfaqa*) that is demanded in Q 2:3.195.215.219.261–267 etc. The hypocrites are moreover reprimanded for fraternising with the repudiators (Q 4:139) and with the scripture-owners (Q 5:52, 59:11), thereby violating the demand that the Qur’anic believers observe a degree of social segregation from these rivalling groups (e.g., Q 3:28, 4:144, 5:51.55.57, 8:72–75, 9:23, 60:1–9).

“**Those in whose hearts is sickness.**” Possibly an alternative expression for the hypocrites is the phrase “those in whose hearts is sickness” (*allādhīna fī qulūbihim maraḍ*; → *marad*). Minimally, both expressions serve as liminal categories subsuming those who are neither fully within nor fully outside the Qur’anic community. They thereby supplement and stabilise a dichotomic contrast between believers and repudiators, by accommodating those aspects of the Medinan Qur’an’s social context that were not easily classifiable as either belief or repudiation yet could be viewed as having some degree of affinity with either—consisting, for instance, in the mere display of certain outward features of belief or in continuing to maintain significant social relations outside the Qur’anic community. At the same time, the Medinan Qur’an exhibits a certain tendency to collapse the liminal category of the hypocrites back into the fundamental antithesis of believers and repudiators, by assimilating the hypocrites with the negative pole of this opposition (Q 4:140, 9:68.73, 33:1.48.73, 48:6, 66:9, 74:31).<sup>2</sup> Arguably, this shifting nature of the category of hypocrisy manifests the tension resulting from the Qur’an’s proclivity to impose dichotomic concepts on a heterogeneous social reality.

**A Meccan occurrence?** Although virtually all references to the hypocrites are found in Medinan surahs, the term also occurs in the Meccan verse Q 29:11, following an indictment of those who disingenuously profess belief in v. 10 that shows significant phraseological overlap with Q 2:8. It cannot of course be ruled out in principle that a prominent Medinan concept might already have made a first appearance prior to the hijrah. Nonetheless, it is also conceivable that Q 29:10–11 are a later rider added to the promise of divine reward for the believers in Q 29:9, designed to clarify that the mere speech act of professing belief is not in itself soteriologically sufficient.

### ***naqada* tr. | to violate s.th. (e.g., a treaty or covenant)**

→ *wāthaqa*

<sup>1</sup> For a succinct attempt at contrasting the Qur’anic employment of *al-munāfiqūn* with the concept of hypocrisy in the New Testament and later Christian literature, see Sinai 2015–2016, 59, n. 36.

<sup>2</sup> See also Q 59:11, which describes the hypocrites as “brothers” of “the repudiators from among the scripture-owners.”

**intaqama** intr. *min* | to exact retribution from s.o.

**intiqām: dhū** ~ | exacting retribution

→ *allāh*, → *ghaḍība*

**ankara** tr. | to fail to recognise s.o. or s.th.; to reject s.th.

**al-munkar** | what is rejected, what is reprehensible

Further vocabulary discussed: **kafara** intr. *bi-* | to repudiate s.o. or s.th. **jaḥada** intr.

*bi-* | to deny s.th. **ʿarafa** tr. | to recognise s.th. or s.o. **al-maʿrūf** | what is recognised to be right

The verb *ankara* (on which see Leemhuis 1977, 62) can mean not recognising another person as familiar (Q 12:58, 15:62, 51:25), but other verses use it to designate active rejection of God’s message (Q 13:36, 16:22.83, 21:50, 23:69, 40:81; on 16:22, see under → *qalb*), making it at least a partial synonym of verbs like → *kafara*, “to repudiate,” or *jaḥada*, “to deny.” In both capacities, *ankara* is the contrary of *ʿarafa*, “to recognise,” as shown by Q 12:58, 16:83, and 23:69. The most frequent form of *ankara* is the passive participle *munkar*, “rejected, reprehensible,” which in a number of verses contrasts with → *maʿrūf*, literally “recognised.”

**minhāj** | custom

See briefly under → *aslama* and → *al-yahūd*.

**nahar** | river, stream

→ *arḍ*, → *jannah*

**nahā** tr./intr. *ʿan* | to forbid (s.o.) from s.th.; to restrain (s.o.) from s.th.

→ *maʿrūf*

**anāba** intr. (*ilā llāh*) | to entrust o.s. to God, to turn or return to God

→ *tāba*

**nūr** | light

→ *allāh*

**al-nār** | the fire (of hell)

→ *jahannam*

**al-nās** | the people

See under → *al-ʿālamūn* and also under → *ummaḥ*.

# h

***habaṭa* intr. | to descend, to go down**

→ *jannah*

***hajara* tr. | to shun, avoid, forsake, or abandon s.th. or s.o.**

→ *rijz/rujz*, → *hājara*

***hājara* intr. | to emigrate**

***alladhīna hājarū, al-muhājirūn* pl. | the emigrants**

Further vocabulary discussed: *hajara* tr. | to shun, avoid, forsake, or abandon s.th. or s.o. *āmana* intr. | to be a believer *alladhīna āmanū* pl. | the believers *al-madīnah* | the town *akhraja* tr. | to expel s.o., to drive s.o. out *jāhada fī sabīl allāh* | to contend on God's path *al-anṣār* pl. | the helpers *murāgham* | place of withdrawal or refuge *istaḍ'afa* tr. | to deem or treat s.o. as weak, to oppress s.o., to press s.o. hard *kharaja* intr. | to go out or forth

**Overview and pre-Qur'anic attestation.** The root *h-j-r* occurs in the Qur'an in the first-form (transitive) verb *hajara*, “to forsake, abandon, shun” (Q 4:34, 19:46, 25:30, 73:10, 74:5; see also under → *rijz/rujz*),<sup>1</sup> and in the third-form (intransitive) verb *hājara*, “to leave one's abode, to go forth, to emigrate.” Qur'anic occurrences of *hājara* (which are succinctly reviewed in Crone 1994b, 353–355) are almost entirely limited to Medinan surahs, though as noted below the active participle of *hājara* is employed in a seminal Meccan verse, Q 29:26.

The verb *hgr* in the intransitive sense of “to migrate,” corresponding to Arabic *hājara*, appears already in a Safaitic graffito, ASWS 73 (Al-Jallad 2015a, 224; Al-Jallad 2016, 97; Lindstedt 2019), and a proof-text for the root *h-j-r* in pre-Qur'anic Arabic poetry is provided by a poem attributed to al-Muraqqish al-Akbar, in which the speaker describes having “left” his people (*hajartuhum*; Lyall 1918–1924, no. 50:11). But such precursors demonstrate merely the relatively inconsequential fact that the consonantal root *h-j-r* predates the Qur'an. By contrast, the core features of the Qur'an's distinctive notion of emigration on God's path, involving the idea that genuine commitment to God is proven by leaving behind one's home and embarking on militant collective action, cannot currently be derived from concrete antecedents, though as we shall see Abraham's departure to the

<sup>1</sup> *Hajara* also figures in Q 23:67, but it is suggested that the verb may here have the sense of vain talk; a reading variant *ahjara*, likewise glossed as pertaining to unseemly speech acts, is also recorded (see Ṭab. 17:84–86 and, on the variant, *MQQ* 4:218–219 and *MQ* 6:190–191).

Promised Land constituted one important ingredient.<sup>2</sup> The concept most likely arose over the course of the Qur'an's emergence. This is also supported by the idea's nearly complete absence from the Meccan surahs.

**The notion of emigration in the Medinan surahs.** Many Medinan passages refer collectively to “the emigrants” (*al-muhājirūn*, Q 9:100.117, 24:22, 33:6, 59:8; 4:100 has *man yuhājir fī sabīli llāhi*) or “those who emigrate / have emigrated” (*alladhīna hājarū*; see Q 2:218, 3:195, 8:72.74.75, 9:20, 22:58).<sup>3</sup> The term is clearly an accolade, and there are a significant number of verses in which emigrating and believing (→ *āmana*) are closely linked, giving the impression that emigration is a crucial manifestation of true faith (Q 2:218, 8:72.74.75, 9:20, 33:6, 60:10; see also Crone 1994b, 354). Passages employing the verb *hājara* do not explicitly specify “that emigration must go to a particular place, be it in Arabia or elsewhere, in order to count as *hiğra*” (Crone 1994b, 366). Still, a handful of verses—which admittedly do not employ *hājara*—associate the community of believers with a settlement referred to as *al-madīnah*, “the town” (Q 9:101.120, 33:60, 63:8), and one verse appears to identify the town in question as Yathrib (Q 33:13). The latter name also appears in the so-called Constitution of Medina (Lecker 2004, § 1). It is thus *al-madīnah* or Yathrib where the Qur'anic “emigrants” dwell after having been “expelled” (verb: *akhraja*) from their previous abode (Q 2:191, 3:195, 8:30, 9:40, 22:40, 59:8, 60:1.8–9), though the question whether the Qur'anic understanding of emigration necessarily requires movement to Yathrib/Medina remains to be examined in more detail below.

In Medina itself, the post-emigration Qur'anic community seems to have had a two-tiered structure, dividing into new arrivals and Yathrib's native population. Thus, Q 8:72.74 distinguish those who believe (*alladhīna āmanū*), emigrate, and “contend” (→ *jāhada*) “on God's path (→ *sabīl*),” on the one hand, from those who have “sheltered and helped” them, on the other. Elsewhere, the latter are more concisely labelled “the helpers” (*al-anşār*; Q 9:100.117), a title also applied to the disciples of Jesus (Q 3:52, 61:14). But despite the apostolic precedent, the gradient of merit must have been clearly slanted in favour of the emigrants, who had proven their loyalty to God and his Messenger by paying the price of exile. That the emigrants were perceived as a separate group within the wider Medinan community of believers, considered to form a quasi-tribal unit among themselves, is confirmed by the Constitution of Medina, according to which the Medinan community was composed of “the emigrants from Quraysh” (Lecker 2004, § 3) in addition to various indigenous Medinan tribes, catalogued in §§ 4–11. In contrast to the Qur'anic verses just cited, however, the Constitution does not explicitly subsume these native tribes under the overarching rubric of “the helpers.”<sup>4</sup>

Q 8:72.74 illustrate that Medinan references to emigration are sometimes coupled with references not only to believing but also to “contending” (*jāhada*) or fighting “on God's path” (see also Q 2:218, 8:75, 9:20; for *hājara* + *jāhada*, see also 16:110).<sup>5</sup> Also telling

2 This is not to overlook that the main contours of Qur'anic militancy in general bear resemblance to aspects of the Biblical tradition (HCI 192–196).

3 The temporal valence of *alladhīna hājarū* (“those who emigrate” or “those who have emigrated”), like that of similar expressions (e.g., *alladhīna ẓalamū*, *alladhīna fasaqū*), is not simply determined by the presence of the suffix conjugation but must be assessed based on context; see Reuschel 1996, 144–145. Q 16:41.110 are probably Medinan insertions; see Neuwirth 2007, 300–301.

4 But note the verb *naşara* and the verbal noun *naşr* in §§ 15, 18, 25, 45, 48, 54, 55.

5 Q 16:110, though found in a Meccan surah, is Medinan (see also Neuwirth 2007, 301).

is Q 22:58, pledging divine provision to “those who emigrate on God’s path and are then killed or die” (*alladhīna hājarū fī sabīli llāhi thumma qutilū aw mātū*; see also Q 3:195). The implication is that emigration was not just an escape to safety and freedom from harassment, but was in itself tantamount to putting one’s life at stake. Hence, to emigrate was accompanied by, and perhaps increasingly inseparable from, a religiously grounded commitment to engage in militancy against the Meccan unbelievers and associators (*HCI* 188–196). The need to fight the unbelievers is itself presented as a response to prior victimisation, namely, the fact that the Medinan emigrants were “expelled from their homes” (*ukhrijū min diyārihim*; Q 3:195, 22:39–40, 59:8). Q 2:191 permits the inference that the place from which the emigrants and the Qur’anic Messenger were originally expelled is Mecca, in line with the standard Islamic narrative of origins (*HCI* 49–50), although the verse speaks of “expulsion” rather than of “emigration.” But it is clear that emigration was not just a one-off event and that it continued after the Messenger and his adherents first reached Medina or Yathrib: Q 4:97–100, discussed below, document that the expectation that believers in the Qur’anic revelations would emigrate remained operative throughout the Medinan period. The same follows from Q 60:10, which holds that believing women who have emigrated to Medina, apparently after the initial influx of Qur’anic believers, must not be returned to their previous home. The Qur’anic notion of emigration is thus not limited to the Messenger’s initial relocation from Mecca to Yathrib, as might be suggested by the customary later fashion of referring to “the” hijrah. In fact, the expression “the hijrah” (*al-hijrah*) does not occur in the Qur’an at all (as noted in Crone 1994b, 354).

**Q 4:97–100 and the question whether emigration necessarily entails relocation to Yathrib.** Q 59:9 stresses the affection that is felt by the original inhabitants of the Qur’anic community’s present “abode” (*al-dār*) for those who have “emigrated towards them” (*yuhīb-būna man hājara ilayhim*). But statements combining *hājara* with the preposition *ilā* (“to”) are otherwise very rare in the Qur’an.<sup>6</sup> This could, of course, simply reflect the understanding that acts of emigration are self-evidently directed at joining the Prophet’s community in Yathrib. But the lack of explicit specification does leave open the alternative that the link between the act of emigration and any particular destination might be a much looser one. By way of support for this alternative interpretation, one might cite the initial segment of Q 4:100: “He who emigrates on God’s path will find the earth to contain many a place of refuge and to be wide (*yajid fī l-arḍi murāghaman kathīran wa-sa’atan*).” According to Muslim lexicographers, *rāghama* + acc. is “to leave, abandon, forsake, or separate o.s. from s.o.” (*AEL* 1113),<sup>7</sup> and it appears that the Qur’an here concedes that there are many places to which believers may legitimately emigrate, meaning that moving to Yathrib is not “intrinsic to the Qur’anic conception of emigration” (thus Crone 1994b, 366). But Q 4:100 continues as follows: “And he who goes forth from his house, emigrating to God and his Messenger (*wa-man yakhruj min baytihi muhājiran ilā llāhi wa-rasūlihi*), and is then overtaken by death—God will be liable for his wage. God is forgiving and merciful.” In this second half of Q 4:100, the reference to emigration “to God and his Messenger” suggests that the act of

<sup>6</sup> The only other case apart from Q 4:100, discussed in what follows, is 29:26 (on which see the final section of the entry), where Abraham announces his intention to emigrate “to my Lord.” But there is of course no reason to assume that the implied destination here is Yathrib.

<sup>7</sup> On the noun *murāgham* itself, see *AEL* 1114.

emigration is indeed perceived as closely linked with joining the community governed by “God and his Messenger.” How are the two parts of the verse to be reconciled?

As in other cases, it is helpful to look at context. Q 4:100 caps off a brief verse group beginning in Q 4:97, whose basic theme would seem to be the eschatological fate of those who die before managing to emigrate. According to v. 97, such people will in the hereafter proffer the excuse that they had been “oppressed on earth” (*kunnā mustaḍʿafīna fī l-arḍi*), to which it will be replied: “Was God’s earth not wide enough (*a-lam takun arḍu llāhi wāsiʿatan*) such that you could emigrate on it?”<sup>8</sup> Verses 98–99 mitigate this harsh pronouncement by allowing that those who were truly unable to leave may be pardoned by God after all. The first part of Q 4:100 then guards against an overly generous application of this proviso by reminding the recipients that even if there are obstacles preventing someone from joining the Qur’anic *ummah* in Yathrib, those who find themselves in a social milieu in which the worship of beings other than God is rife may still be able to depart to some other place than Yathrib. The second part of Q 4:100 then goes on to consider those who do actually set out for Yathrib yet are overcome by death on the way. The entire passage thus proceeds along an ordered sequence considering various scenarios falling short of successful emigration “to God and his Messenger”: some people may not be able to leave at all; others may be able to leave, but not for Yathrib; yet others may be able to leave for Yathrib, but do not succeed in reaching it alive. The important thing to take away, though, is that the implied gradation between these different situations entails and confirms that the ideal outcome is one in which emigration does indeed end with arrival in Yathrib. This is hardly surprising, for the Prophet’s community would naturally have acted as a focal point attracting those who were sufficiently invested in the Qur’anic kerygma in order to extricate themselves from their native social context. That this is indeed the default paradigm is also corroborated by Q 60:10, which prohibits the believers from sending back believing women “who have come to you<sup>p</sup> as emigrants” (*idhā jāʿakumu l-muʿminātu muhājirātīn*): the natural destination of emigration is Yathrib, where emigrants would join a community led by God’s Messenger. As the second half of Q 4:100 intimates, this would bring them into uniquely close proximity to God himself: to emigrate to Medina is not just to join Muhammad, but to emigrate “to God” as well (Q 4:100: *muhājiran ilā llāhi wa-rasūlihi*). By contrast, any other destination of emigration will at most afford a provisional haven of safety (Q 4:100: *murāgham*) where “oppressed men, women, and children” (Q 4:98: *al-mustaḍʿafīna mina l-rijāli wa-l-nisāʾi wa-l-wildāni*) are able to escape religious persecution.

The Qur’anic understanding of emigration is therefore ideally and paradigmatically departure to the Medinan community presided over by God and his Messenger. Yet the latitude that Q 4:100 leaves for emigrating to other places is not insignificant: it would have facilitated important post-Qur’anic developments in the usage of *hājara* and its derivatives—namely, their use to designate the movement of fighters to garrison cities outside Arabia and the fact that the title “the emigrants” (*al-muhājirūn*) became an important early post-Qur’anic self-designation of the Arab conquerors, as reflected both by Islamic sources and by Greek and Syriac ones (Crone 1994b; Lindstedt 2015). Other facets of the Qur’anic use of *hājara* would have lent further support to this post-Qur’anic extension of

8 The noun *saʿah* in Q 4:100 must hark back to *wāsiʿatan* in 4:97. In line with my translation of Q 4:100 above, *saʿah* thus refers to the wideness of God’s earth rather than to the abundance of divine provision found therein (as one might infer from other occurrences of *saʿah*, such as Q 4:130). This is clearly recognised in CDKA 289.



the concept: the strong association of emigration with militant “contending” and also, as we shall presently see, the suggestion made in one verse in particular that emigration amounts to imitating Abraham’s archetypal abandonment of his idolatrous people.<sup>9</sup>

**Abraham’s emigration in Q 29:26.** Although virtually all references to emigration are datable to the Medinan period, there is one likely Meccan instance of the concept in Q 29:26, where Abraham declares, after having been delivered by God from his idolatrous compatriots (Q 29:24), that he will “emigrate to my Lord” (*innī muhājirun ilā rabbī*; see *HCI* 180–181). The verse raises the possibility that the Qur’anic community would have viewed its eventual relocation from Mecca to Medina as re-enacting Abraham’s migration to the Promised Land (rather than, as might perhaps have been expected, as a re-enactment of the Israelite Exodus). Quite possibly, the diction of Q 29:26, which came to determine the way in which the Medinan proclamations reference the believers’ departure from Mecca, builds on earlier traditions. Thus, Gen 12:4.5 describes Abraham’s departure from his home with the verb *yāšā’*, “to go out, to depart” (Peshitta: *nfaq*; Septuagint: *exerchomai*), as does *Gen. Rab.* 39:7.8, and Philo of Alexandria repeatedly describes Abraham’s departure from his homeland as an act of *apoikia* or emigration (see Philo, *On Abraham* = Lanzinger 2020, §§ 66, 68, 72, 77, 85, and the separate treatise Philo devoted to the topic: *On the Migration of Abraham* = Niehoff and Feldmeier 2017). The use of *hājara* in Q 29:26 may consequently echo Hebrew *yāšā’* or one of its various equivalents in other ancient languages. Interestingly, at least one Qur’anic verse, Q 4:100, similarly employs the most obvious literal equivalent of Hebrew *yāšā’* in Arabic—namely, *kharaja*—in connection with *hājara* (*man yakhruj min baytihi muhājiran ilā llāhi wa-rasūlihi*, “he who goes forth from his house, emigrating to God and his Messenger”). While Q 4:100 does not mention Abraham, its use of *hājara* together with the preposition *ilā* and God as the propositional object recalls the phraseology of Abraham’s statement in Q 29:26 (*innī muhājirun ilā rabbī*). By way of a final remark on Q 29:26, it is noteworthy that the verse specifies that Lot “believed” Abraham, thus prefiguring the Medinan surahs’ recurrent association of emigration and belief.

***hadā* tr./intr. | to guide (s.o.)**  
***ihṭadā* intr. | to be guided**  
***hudā* | guidance**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *ṣirāṭ* | road *sabīl* | way, path *ḍalla* intr. (‘an) | to go astray (from s.th.) *aḍalla* tr. | to lead s.o. astray *āmana* intr. (bi-) | to believe in; to be a believer *kafara* intr. bi- | to repudiate s.o. or s.th. ‘*amiya* intr. | to be or become blind *marāḍ* | sickness *mustaqīm* | straight *al-shayṭān* | the devil, Satan *tabī’a***

<sup>9</sup> Crone 1994b seeks to “propose a history of the concept of *hiğra* in which the classical notion [namely, emigration from Mecca to Medina at the time of the Prophet] is the outcome of an evolution rather than its starting point” (Crone 1994b, 353). By contrast, my reading of the Qur’anic data largely endorses the view that the Qur’anic meaning of *hājara* is what Crone calls the “classical” one (even if it is important to note that the Qur’an envisages emigration as an ongoing reality rather than a one-off act datable to 622 CE). Nonetheless, I do not find it overly puzzling how the Qur’anic notion of emigration could have developed into the early Islamic understanding of the concept examined by Crone—namely, “emigration from Medina and other parts of Arabia to garrison cities in the conquered lands after the Prophet’s death” (Crone 1994b, 352)—before a more narrowly Qur’anic understanding of emigration re-established itself in classical Islam.

tr. | to follow s.th. or s.o. *āyah* | sign *kitāb* | scripture *andhara* tr. | to warn s.o. *samī'a* tr. | to hear (s.th.) *shā'a* tr./intr. | to wish or will (s.th.) *ummah* | community *balā* tr., *ibtalā* tr. | to assess, test, or try s.o. *sharaḥa ṣadrahu* | to widen or open up s.o.'s breast *islām* | self-surrender or self-dedication (to God) *ẓallām li-* | (guilty of) wronging s.o. *ẓalama* intr. | to do wrong *kafara* intr. | to be ungrateful; to be a repudiator *anāba* intr. (*ilā llāh*) | to entrust o.s. to God; to turn or return to God *zāda* ditr. | to increase s.o. in s.th. *alladhīna fī qulūbihim maraḍ* | those in whose hearts is sickness *sakīnah* | composure, tranquillity *madda* tr. *fī* | to reinforce s.o. in s.th. *madda* intr. *li-* | to give s.o. reinforcement *qarīn* | companion (demon)

The notion of divine guidance, which frequently involves the metaphor of a divinely ordained road (→ *ṣirāṭ*) or path (→ *sabīl*), is a pivotal Qur'anic concept from the early Meccan period (e.g., Q 37:118, 53:30, 68:7, 87:3, 90:10, 93:7) through to the Medinan one (e.g., Q 2:108.142.213, 3:101, 4:44.51.88.98.115.137.143.167). The immediate conceptual network in which it is enmeshed also includes its opposite, the notion of human straying (→ *ḍalla*) and divine leading astray (*aḍalla*). More generally, the contrast between guidance and straying belongs together with a number of other conceptual oppositions by which the Qur'an encodes human existence in pervasively polar terms, especially belief (→ *āmana*) and “repudiation” (→ *kafara*). Guidance and being astray can also be metaphorically represented by sightedness and blindness (→ *'amiya*) or by health and sickness of the heart (→ *marāḍ*).

**Guidance in pre-Qur'anic poetry and the Biblical tradition.** In pre-Islamic poetry, derivatives of *h-d-y*—whose original Qur'anic pronunciation may have differed from their classical one<sup>1</sup>—occur in the context of guidance, orientation, and tracking in the desert (GMK 144–146, citing a verse from the *Lāmiyyat al-'arab* attributed to al-Shanfarā, found in *EAP* 1:152–153, and another verse from the *dīwān* of 'Abīd corresponding to Lyall 1913, 'Abīd, no. 21:12).<sup>2</sup> Poetry can also employ the root *h-d-y* to connote leadership in a military context (Lyll 1894, 138 = v. 62 of the Mu'allaqah of al-Ḥārith ibn Ḥillizah; cf. Arberry 1957, 225; see also Labīd in 'Abbās 1962, no. 3:3). Such a usage is already found in a Safaitic inscription (Al-Jallad 2015a, 281 = SIJ 293). The Qur'an occasionally employs derivatives of *h-d-y* in a non-religious sense that is continuous with such pre-Islamic uses (see Q 4:98, 6:97, or 16:16).<sup>3</sup> It is nonetheless doubtful whether the core Qur'anic metaphor of divine guidance may simply be credited to “the Arab experience of living in the desert” (Durie 2018, 126). Rather, it is tangibly continuous with a prominent Biblical theme, in so far as the Qur'anic employment of *hadā* maps onto Hebrew *nāḥâ*, Syriac *dbar*, and Greek *hodēgeō* (TDOT 9:311–318; TDNT 5:42–114). This continuity is exemplified by Ps 5:9 (briefly noted in Sperl 1994, 220): “O Lord, guide me (*nḥēnī*, Peshitta: *dbarayn*, Septuagint: *hodēgēson me*) in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me.” Biblical recourse to the notion of guidance may be further illustrated by Exod 15:13 (“In your steadfast love you guided the people whom you redeemed”), Ps 77:21 (“You guided your people like a flock at the hand of Moses and Aaron”), and Isa 58:11 (“The Lord will

1 Van Putten 2017 argues that the third-person singular verb *hadā* was pronounced *hadē* while the noun *hudā* without nunation was realised as *hudē* (see especially van Putten 2017, 63 and 70).

2 For further verses, see Lyall 1918–1924, no. 44:4 = *EAP* 2:140; Lyall 1919, no. 15:6; Geyer 1892, no. 23:11; *DSAAP*, Imru' al-Qays, no. 4:18.

3 See n. 6 below.

guide you continually”), and additional comparative material can be adduced for the metaphor of God’s path or road and its straightness, expressed by the adjective *mustaqīm* (see under → *ṣirāṭ*). Given that there had been Arabophone Christians for centuries before the Qur’an, it is distinctly likely that a religious use of Arabic *hadā* predates the Islamic scripture.<sup>4</sup> Unequivocal evidence for this hypothesis is admittedly lacking, but a Biblically informed religious employment of *h-d-y* could be reflected by a verse from the *dīwān* of the Christian ‘Adī ibn Zayd that states, in the context of describing how the Lakhmid king al-Nu‘mān contemplated the ephemerality of his power, that “being guided entails thoughtful contemplation” (*li-l-hudā tafkīr*).<sup>5</sup>

**Divine guidance in the Qur’an.** Although the scope of the present entry does not permit a comprehensive review of the 268 Qur’anic verses containing derivatives of the root *h-d-y*, central aspects of the Qur’anic notion of divine guidance deserve comment. Two points in particular stand out. First, humans are inescapably reliant on God’s guidance if they are not to go astray: “Praise be to God who has guided us to this; we would not have been guided had God not guided us” (*al-ḥamdu li-llāhi lladhī hadānā li-hādhā wa-mā kunnā li-nahtadiya law lā an hadānā llāhu*), the blessed will say according to Q 7:43. Similarly, when Abraham contemplates the rising and setting of various heavenly bodies, culminating in his discovery that the only being deserving of worship is “the one who created the heavens and the earth” (Q 6:75–79, citing v. 79), this is described not as an autonomous exercise of Abraham’s innate intelligence but rather as an instance of divine guidance. As Abraham himself confesses in Q 6:77, “If my Lord does not guide me, I shall be one of those who go astray” (see Lowin 2006, 123–124 and 128–132).

Secondly, and corresponding with this inescapable human need for God’s guidance, the Qur’an frequently underlines the objective and abundant availability of such guidance. When Adam is expelled from paradise, God announces to him, his mate, and their nemesis the devil or Satan (→ *al-shayṭān*), “If [subsequently] guidance comes to you<sup>p</sup> from me, those who follow my guidance (*fa-man tabi‘a hudāya*) will have nothing to be afraid of and will not know grief” (Q 2:38; see also 20:123). Such divine guidance takes the form of divine revelation but also of sundry manifestations or “signs” (singular: → *āyah*) of God’s power and benevolence in the natural world (see also *HCI* 172–174). Thus, God has arranged the earth in accordance with the needs of humans “so that they might be guided” (Q 21:31: *la‘allahum yahtadūn*; cf. 16:15 and 43:10);<sup>6</sup> God gave “the scripture”

4 A link between *hadā* and specifically Christian usage is already posited in *CQ* 42, although Ahrens fails to acknowledge the notion’s substantial precedent in the Hebrew Bible.

5 Al-Mu‘ayyid 1965, no. 16:27. The verse has variants, e.g., *li-l-hudā tabṣīr* and *li-l-hudā tadhkīr*. To be sure, it is not made explicit that the source of guidance is here envisaged to be God, but Andrae plausibly understands this to be presupposed (Andrae 1926, 46). There is also a poem attributed to Labīd that speaks of God guiding humans “on the paths of the good” (*man hadāhu subula l-khayri htadā*) and of his sovereign power to lead people astray (*wa-man shā‘a aḍal* [*sic*]; ‘Abbās 1962, no. 26:3). However, it is not certain that Labīd’s poem is really free from the impact of Qur’anic diction, even if Brockelmann is more confident (Brockelmann 1922, 115).

6 Immediately before the metatextual clause *la‘allahum yahtadūn* / *la‘allakum tahtadūn* (“so that they/you<sup>p</sup> may be guided”) that concludes Q 16:15, 21:31, and 43:10, all three verses state that God has provided humans with pathways (*subul*) on the earth. Should one accordingly understand *ihtadā* to refer to literal orientation on the surface of the earth here? Q 6:97 (God has “made the stars for you<sup>p</sup> so that you may be guided by them, in the darkness [prevailing] on land and at sea,” *wa-huwa lladhī ja‘ala lakumu l-nujūma li-tahtadū bihā fī ḡulumāti l-barri wa-l-baḥri*) demonstrates that the Qur’an can in principle utilise the root *h-d-y* in such a non-religious sense. The same goes for Q 4:98, describing oppressed men, women, and children as “not being guided to any way” (*wa-lā yahtadūna sabīlā*), which must be a metaphor for the impotence of their situation rather than for religious deviance. Nonetheless, metatextual → *la‘alla* clauses normally evoke a desirable religious response or its

(→ *al-kitāb*) to Moses, the objective being again that humans “might be guided” (*la’allahum yahtadūn*; Q 23:49; see also under → *la’alla*);<sup>7</sup> and Muhammad too is sent “to warn (*li-tundhira*) a people to whom no warner has come before, so that they might be guided (*la’allahum yahtadūn*)” (Q 32:3; cf. 7:158).<sup>8</sup> Another source of guidance from which humans may derive religious insight is God’s punitive obliteration of past communities (Q 20:128, 32:26), whose remains are presumed to be available to empirical inspection and thus constitute “signs” of divine retribution. Hence, the Qur’an presents God’s guidance as freely and generously available to humans, as something that is writ large across both nature and history; it is no esoteric and rarified gnosis accessible only to a select few.

**Two senses of “to guide” (*hadā*).** While many Qur’anic verses suggest or presuppose that humans are in principle capable of understanding and accepting God’s guidance in its various garbs, the Qur’an also bespeaks an acute awareness of the fact that many people reject whatever divine guidance they encounter (e.g., Q 7:193, 198, 10:43, 27:81, 28:56). Reflecting this, the Qur’an employs the verb “to guide” (*hadā*) in two slightly different senses. On the one hand, the word can articulate that humans in general, or some particular human collective or individual, have been presented with God’s objective guidance in nature or revelation, which they may well fail to embrace. An example for this usage, which one might call “presentational,” is Q 41:17: “And as for Thamūd, we guided them, and they preferred blindness over guidance; and the thunderbolt of the degrading punishment took them for what they had been accruing.”<sup>9</sup> An impersonal equivalent of *hadā* in this first, presentational sense is the phrase “guidance (or the guidance) has come to you<sup>P</sup>/them” (*jā’akum/jā’ahum hudan/al-hudā*; Q 6:157, 10:57, 17:94, 18:55, 34:32, 53:23), which can be coupled with an explicit indication of God as the source of guidance, in the form of the prepositional complement “from your<sup>P</sup>/their Lord” (*min rabbikum/rabbihim*; Q 6:157, 10:57, 53:23).<sup>10</sup> Secondly, and more frequently, “to guide” (*hadā*) is used as a success verb implying an individual’s subjective acceptance of whatever objective guidance he or she might encounter in the cosmos or in history (e.g., Q 93:7). Such subjective human assent to divine guidance can be reported very explicitly, as in Q 72:13: “when we listened to the guidance (*sami’nā l-hudā*), we believed in it (*āmannā bihi*).” It can also be expressed by the

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reward (e.g., Q 3:123, 130, 132, 200, 6:42, 51, 65, 69 etc.). Furthermore, all other occurrences specifically of *la’allahum tahtadūn* / *la’allahum yahtadūn* (Q 2:53, 150, 3:103, 7:158, 23:49, 32:3) have a religious significance. It therefore stands to reason that Q 16:15, 21:31, and 43:10 too use *ihtadā* to evoke divine guidance. Still, Q 16:16 then goes on to shift to what is clearly a secular sense of *ihtadā*: God has provided humans with landmarks (*‘alāmāt*), “and they are guided by the stars” (*wa-bi-l-najmi hum yahtadūn*). Thus, Q 16:15, 21:31, and 43:10 seem to be deliberately playing on the double sense of *h-d-y*. The same may be true for Q 20:10, according to which Moses hoped to find “guidance” at the fire he spotted in the distance. The narrative is best read as implying that Moses was seeking mundane guidance yet found divine one.

7 On Moses’s receipt of “the scripture” and guidance, see also Q 2:53, 6:154, 17:2, 28:43, 32:23, 40:53–54.

8 For other verses associating the Qur’an, the Torah (or “the book that Moses brought”), and the Gospel with the provision of divine guidance (*hudā*), see Q 2:185, 5:44, 46, 6:91, 46:30, 17:9, 27:92, and 41:44 (cf. also 7:52). The Mosaic tablets are also said to convey divine guidance (Q 7:154). There are further statements describing God’s revelations, and specifically his revelations to Muhammad, as providing guidance (e.g., Q 10:57, 16:64, 89:102, or 27:1–2, 76–77). A fuller survey is provided in Rahbar 1960, 95–96 and 365–371.

9 For other verses that use *hadā* in this sense, see Q 76:3, 90:10, and probably also 87:3.

10 Note that statements of the form “there has come to you<sup>P</sup> / to them (*jā’akum/jā’ahum*) . . .” also take many other subjects than guidance, for instance, “a scripture” (*kitāb*; Q 2:89), “a messenger” (*rasūl*, e.g., Q 2:101), “reminding exhortation” (*dhikrūn*; e.g., Q 7:63), “knowledge” (*al-‘ilm*; e.g., Q 3:19), or “the truth” (*al-ḥaqq*; e.g., Q 10:76). In such cases too we encounter a prepositional complement specifying God as the source, such as “from your<sup>P</sup> Lord” (*min rabbikum*) or “from us” (*min ‘indinā*).

eighth-form verb *ihṭadā* (Rahbar 1960, 355). Although the latter’s literal meaning is “to be guided” (e.g., Q 6:97), there are cases in which it is best rendered as “to allow o.s. to be guided,” as in the repeated affirmation that God “knows best those who allow themselves to be guided” (*wa-huwa a’lamu bi-l-muḥṭadīn*; Q 6:117, 16:125, 28:56, 68:7; see already Ahrens 1935, 84, pointing inter alia to Q 21:41).<sup>11</sup>

**The theological counterfactual “had God willed” (*law shā’a llāhu*) and the problem of predestination.** As we saw earlier, many humans reject God’s guidance. Some passages suggest that this general state of affairs is divinely willed: “had God willed” (*law shā’a llāhu*; see also under → *shā’a*), he could have produced universal assent to his guidance (Q 6:35.149, 13:31, 16:9, all of which couple *law shā’a/yashā’u* ± <*allāhu*> with the roots *h-d-y* and *j-m-*; see also 10:99 and 32:13) or could have made humans “a single community” (→ *ummatan wāḥidatan*; Q 5:48, 11:118, 16:93, and 42:8).<sup>12</sup> In the verses just referenced, the theological counterfactual *law shā’a llāhu* may simply be taken to convey the claim that God has deliberately refrained from ensuring unfailing human conformity to his moral and religious demands, which would have given rise to a world with no genuine ethico-religious choices (Rahbar 1960, 80). Instead, one may go on to say, God has created a world in which humans are being “tested” (→ *balā, ibṭalā*) for their religious and moral decisions (e.g., Q 21:35, 23:30, 47:31, 68:17, 76:2), as a result of which some will earn paradisiacal reward while others will incur eternal perdition.<sup>13</sup> Such a reading steers clear of predestinarianism, that is, of the claim that God has inscrutably assigned one lot of humans to heaven and another one to hell, without delegating to them any control over their eschatological outcome. In other words, the view just sketched would permit one to evade the difficult and perennial question of how God could fairly reward and punish humans for actions over which they have no control.<sup>14</sup>

Yet predestinarianism or divine determinism seems more difficult to avoid for other Qur’anic statements. For instance, Q 16:93 says: “Had God willed (*wa-law shā’a llāhu*), he would have made you<sup>p</sup> a single community; but he leads astray whom he wills (*man yashā’u*) and guides whom he wills” (cf. Q 42:8). In fact, the assertion that God “guides whom he wills” (*yahdī man yashā’u*), just cited as part of Q 16:93, recurs multiple times throughout the Qur’an (see, with occasional variants, Q 2:142.213.272, 6:88, 7:155, 10:25, 14:4, 16:93, 24:35.46, 28:56, 35:8, 39:23, 42:52, 74:31; cf. also 6:39). Like in Q 16:93, it is often coupled

11 For an occurrence of *ihṭadā* in pre-Islamic poetry, see *DSAAP*, Ṭarafah, no. 13:9 (cf. Jacobi 1971, 36), where it is applied to the poet’s lover “letting herself be guided” by her amatory ties to the poet.

12 For a comprehensive survey of the Qur’anic use of *law shā’a llāhu*, refer to Rahbar 1960, 79–82 and 344–346. Occurrences of *law shā’a* ± <*llāhu/rabbuka/l-rahmān*> not listed in the main text are Q 2:20.220.253, 4:90, 6:107.112.137.148, 10:16, 16:35, 23:24, 25:45, 41:14, 43:20.

13 In Q 32:13, the divine voice declares that “had we willed, we would have provided everyone with guidance; but [instead] my word has come true, that I will fill hell with the jinn and humans all together (*wa-lākin ḥaqqa l-qawlu minnī la-amlā’anna jahannama mina l-jinnati wa-l-nāsi ajma’in*)”; similar wording appears in Q 11:119. Given that the Qur’an is clear that at least some individuals will make it to paradise, the word *ajma’in* in these two passages simply cannot mean that God has resolved to consign *all* humans and jinn (whom the Qur’an considers to be moral subjects) to perdition. See also Rahbar 1960, 81.

14 For a late antique manifestation of the Kantian intuition that “ought implies can,” see Ephrem’s concise question against astral determinism, “If there is no freedom (*ḥērūtā*), then why is there reproach (*marshūtā*)?” (Beck 1957b, no. 5:8). Such considerations do not of course amount to a compelling refutation of theological predestinarianism. For example, a prominent strand of post-Qur’anic theology, the Ash’arite school, is adamant that God is simply not answerable to human conceptions of fairness (e.g., Frank 1983, 210–214).



with the counterpart that God “leads astray whom he wills” (Q 6:39, 7:155, 13:27, 14:4, 35:8, 74:31).<sup>15</sup> The repeated emphasis that God guides and leads astray “whom he wills” does have a predestinarian look, making it a serious possibility that the Qur’an teaches God’s assignment of guidance and going astray to be due to an arbitrary and inscrutable divine decree (e.g., Andrae 1932, 51–53). The same impression arises from Q 6:125, which highlights God’s involvement in the inner process of a subject’s acceptance or rejection of divine guidance: “whom God wants to guide, he opens up his breast to self-surrender (*fa-man yuridi llāhu an yahdiyahu yashraḥ ṣadrahu li-l-islāmi*), and whom we wants to lead astray, he makes his breast narrow and constricted” (cf. 39:22; → *aslama*).

On the other hand, a predestinarian reading of the Qur’an does render it puzzling why the Islamic scripture should be so concerned to highlight that God does not “inflict wrong on his servants” (e.g., Q 3:182: *laysa bi-ḡallāmin li-l-‘abād*; see under → *ḡalama* and → *shā’a*), that he is the “best judge” (*aḡkam al-ḡākimīn*; Q 11:45, 95:8), or that he can plausibly and legitimately be asked to judge justly (Q 21:112: *uḡkum bi-l-ḡaqqī*). There is, furthermore, a considerable amount of evidence to the effect that the Qur’an does not in fact suppose the gift of divine guidance—understood as that which disposes an individual towards subjective acceptance of whatever objective guidance he or she encounters in the world or in history—to be independent of human merit (Rahbar 1960, 67–85 and 91–96). For one, the Qur’an frequently reiterates that God “does not guide the people who are wrongdoers/repudiators/sinners” (*lā yahdī l-qawma l-ḡālimīn/kāfirīn/fāsiqīn*; Q 2:258.264, 3:86, 5:51.67.108, 6:144, 9:19.24.37.80.109, 16:107, 28:50, 46:10, 61:5.7, 62:5, 63:6), and other verses make the same point that unbelief and moral vices disqualify someone from receiving divine guidance (e.g., Q 4:137.168, 39:3, 40:28; see Rahbar 1960, 91 and 356–358). Tellingly, two verses vary the *yahdī man yashā’u* formula by saying that “God leads astray whom he wills and guides to himself who turns to him (*wa-yahdī ilayhi man anāb*)” (Q 13:27, similarly 42:13).<sup>16</sup> The obvious implication is that those whom God *wills* to guide are those who *deserve* to be guided, by virtue of having turned to God. Elsewhere, too, the gift of divine guidance or increase in such guidance are made consequent upon prior belief (e.g., Q 2:213, 4:175, 18:13, 64:11; see the conspectus in Rahbar 1960, 92–93 and 360–362, and below). The fact that God is *in principle* sovereign in deciding whom he will and will not guide does not mean that he will *in fact* withhold his guidance from those deserving it, or irresistibly thrust it upon those who have hitherto shown themselves to be recalcitrant to God’s signs. As noted elsewhere, the Qur’anic understanding of how divine omnipotence intersects with human agency crucially hinges on the domain of the potential and counterfactual rather than on what God does in actual fact (see under → *shā’a*).

**God “increases in guidance” those who allow themselves to be guided.** According to Daud Rahbar, the Qur’an’s “consistent position” is that “whoever shows willingness to be guided, God increases him in guidance; and whoever defies God stubbornly, God condemns him as hopeless and increases him in error” (Rahbar 1960, 82). The quotation illustrates the theological importance of the notion of divinely granted “increase” (verb: *zāda*) of belief or unbelief. For instance, regarding those “in whose heart is sickness”

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Rom 9:17–18: God “has mercy on whomsoever he chooses (*hon thelei*; Peshitta: *man d-ṣābē*)” and “hardens whomsoever he chooses” (Boyd 1923, 154; Thyen 1989, 212–213; Reynolds 2020, 195–196).

<sup>16</sup> On the meaning of *anāba*, see CDKA 276.



(*alladhīna fī qulūbihim maraḍ*; → *marāḍ*) it is stated that “God has increased their sickness further” (*fa-zādahumu llāhu marāḍan*; Q 2:10); the “Companions of the Cave,” whose story is told in Surah 18, were “young men who believed in their Lord, and we increased them in guidance (*wa-zidnāhum hudā*)” (Q 18:13); and in a particular battlefield situation, God is said to have sent down → *al-sakīnah* (“composure, tranquillity”) into the hearts of the believers “so that they might increase in belief together with their [existing] belief (*li-yazdādū imānan ma’a imānihim*; Q 48:4; cf. also 74:31).<sup>17</sup> In more general terms, the Qur’an teaches that “God increases in guidance those who allow themselves to be guided” (*wa-yazīdu llāhu lladhīna htadaw hudan*; Q 19:76 and with the same wording, albeit in a different syntactic order, 47:17). Regarding the contrary of guidance, a prayer uttered by Noah asks God to “increase the wrongdoers in being astray” (*wa-lā tazīdi l-zālimīna illā ḍalālā*; Q 71:24; cf. also 71:28). An alternative formulation for such increase in error would seem to be the declaration that God will “reinforce” (*madda*) some people “in their transgression, letting them wander about in confusion” (Q 2:15: *yamudduhum fī ṭughyānihim ya’mahūn*; see also 19:75, which has *madda li- . . . maddan* in the same sense of reinforcing someone in going astray).<sup>18</sup> All of these references to divinely caused confirmation in guidance or straying are suggestive of a feedback loop between humans and God, whereby incremental human steps towards belief and guidance will be matched by incremental divine assistance and fortification, whereas those who habitually persist in rejecting God’s guidance will ultimately become locked into such rejection and be deprived of the ability to mend their ways (see also the passages discussed under → *khatama*). One particular mechanism in this feedback loop, serving to cement the error of those who have turned away from God, is the assignment of companion demons (singular: *qarīn*) to evildoers (see under → *shayṭān*).

### ***hady* coll. | offerings**

→ *dhabaḥa*

### ***hādhā, hādhīhī* | this**

→ *dhālika*

### ***hāda* intr. | to espouse Judaism**

### ***alladhīna hādū, hūd* pl. | (the) Jews**

→ *al-yahūd*

<sup>17</sup> See also Q 8:2 (when the believers hear God’s signs recounted to them, this will “increase them in belief,” *zādathum imānan*) and 9:124–125 (the true believers will be “increased in belief,” *fa-zādathum imānan*, by a divine revelation, whereas those in whose heart is sickness will be “increased in filth in addition to their [present] filth,” *fa-zādathum rijsan ilā rijsihim*).

<sup>18</sup> See also Q 6:110, 7:186, 10:11, and 23:75, sharing 2:15’s verse closer *fī ṭughyānihim ya’mahūn*.

***hawīya* tr. | to desire s.th.**

***hawā* | desire**

→ *nafs*, → *qalb*, → *tabi'a*

***muhaymin* (or *muhayman*) ('*alā*) | trustworthy; entrusted with authority over s.th.**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *āmana* tr. | to render s.o. secure    *ṣaddaqa* tr. | to confirm or corroborate s.th. or s.o.    *kitāb* | scripture**

**In Q 59:23.** The term *muhaymin* occurs twice in the Qur'an, in the Medinan verses Q 5:48 and 59:23. In the latter case, the word figures in a string of divine epithets (→ *ism*), which inter alia call God *al-mu'min al-muhaymin*. *Mu'min* must mean “granter of security here” (cf. especially the meaning of → *āmana* in Q 106:4). *Muhaymin*, meanwhile, is derived from Syriac *mhaymnā* (or conceivably from its equivalent in some other form of Aramaic), a passive participle of the verb *haymen* and meaning “trustworthy, faithful, loyal” (NB 27; FVQ 273–274; cf. SL 719–720; see also DJBA 644). *Al-mu'min al-muhaymin* therefore describes God as the “trustworthy granter of security.” Horovitz notes that the statement that YHWH is a “faithful God” (*hā'el hanne'emān*) at Deut 7:9 is rendered *allāhā mhaymnā* in the Peshitta. In view of this direct precursor, there is a strong case for reading the consonantal ductus *m-h-y-m-n* as the passive *muhayman* (JPND 225–226), which is attested as a variant reading for Q 5:48 (MQ 2:285; MQQ 2:215). A hypothetical shift from *al-mu'min al-muhayman* to *al-mu'min al-muhaymin* could be readily accounted for in euphonic terms.<sup>1</sup> As a divine epithet, *muhaymin* is also found in a brief *rajaz* poem attributed to Umayyah ibn Abī l-Ṣalt (Schulthess 1911a, no. 25:29 = al-Saṭlī 1974, no. 10:29; see Seidensticker 2011b, 47–49).<sup>2</sup>

**In Q 5:48.** The second Qur'anic occurrence of the word is found at Q 5:48, according to which the revelation vouchsafed to Muhammad “confirms what precedes it of the scripture” (*muṣaddiqan li-mā bayna yadayhi mina l-kitābi*; → *ṣaddaqa*, → *kitāb*) and is *muhayminan* (or, according to the variant reading cited above, *muhaymanan*) '*alayhi*. It is not unreasonable to conjecture that *muhaymin* might simply be an approximate equivalent of *muṣaddiq* here. Such a pleonastic understanding is already part of the early Islamic exegetical record (see Ṭab. 8:489–490) and has also found favour among Western scholars (NB 27; JPND 225; KK 122–123). However, considering that in Q 5:48 *muhaymin* or *muhayman* takes the preposition '*alā*, rather than *li-*, as the preceding term *muṣaddiq*, it is also possible that *muhaymin/muhayman* implies the stronger claim that the Qur'an does

1 After raising the pertinence of a passive reading, Horovitz nonetheless dismisses it because of the neighbouring *al-mu'min*. His rationale would seem to be that a succession of two active participles with similar roots is more likely than an active one followed by a passive one. However, this is precisely why a textual development \**al-mu'min al-muhayman* > *al-mu'min al-muhaymin* is easily imaginable. On the other hand, there is no compelling reason either to rule out that the Arabised version of the divine epithet *mhaymnā* was assimilated to the immediately preceding word *mu'min* already when the verse was proclaimed for the very first time.

2 For another occurrence, less likely to be authentic, see Schulthess 1911a, no. 24:3 = al-Saṭlī 1974, no. 74:3, which combines *muhaymin* and *qayyūm*. Cf. Seidensticker 2011b, 47.

not merely confirm previous scriptures but also stands in judgement over them—in other words, that it is “entrusted with authority over” (*mu’taman ‘alā*) them, as early Muslim scholars gloss the expression under discussion (Ṭab. 8:487–489). Especially if one opts for the passive reading *muhayman*, this interpretation has the virtue of agreeing very closely with Syriac phraseology, since *haymen* + acc. + *‘al* means “to entrust s.o. with s.th.” (SL 341). This non-pleonastic, climactic understanding, according to which the attribute *muhayman* has a meaning going beyond *muṣaddiq*, is moreover in line with other verses in which the Qur’anic proclamations stake out an explicit claim to playing the role of an ultimate arbiter regarding the meaning and content of Jewish and Christian scripture (→ *ṣaddaqa*).

# W

**wabāl amrihi** | the bad consequences of one’s conduct

→ *amr*, → *dhāqa*

**wāthaqa** tr. | to conclude a treaty or covenant with s.o.

**mīthāq** | covenant, treaty; the act of concluding a covenant or treaty

**akhadha mīthāqahu** | to take a covenantal pledge from s.o., to impose a covenant on s.o.

Further vocabulary discussed: *‘ahd* | agreement, contract, treaty, covenant *‘ahida* intr. *ilā (an)* | to impose an obligation or obligations on s.o. (to do s.th.) *‘āhada* tr. (*‘alā*) | to conclude an agreement, contract, treaty, or covenant with s.o. (entailing a commitment to do s.th.) *awfā* intr. *bi-* | to fulfil or keep s.th. (e.g., a treaty or covenant) *naqaḍa* tr. | to violate s.th. (e.g., a treaty or covenant) *ishtarā bi-. . . thamanan qalīlan* | to sell s.th. for a small price *banū isrā’īl* pl. | the Israelites *ajr* | wage *waffā* ditr. | to pay s.th. to s.o. in full; to repay s.o. for s.th. in full *fī sabīl allāh* | on God’s path *al-tawrah* | the Torah *al-injīl* | the Gospel or the Christian Bible *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *al-naṣārā* pl. | the Christians *bayyana* tr. (*li-*) | to clarify s.th. (to s.o.) *katama* tr. | to conceal s.th. *nasiya* tr. | to forget s.th. *sami’nā wa-‘aṣaynā* | we hear and disobey *amānah* | trust, entrusted good

The Qur’an repeatedly conceptualises the relationship between God and humans in terms of an agreement, covenant, or treaty, expressed by the terms *‘ahd* and *mīthāq*. In this, the Qur’an resembles Biblical literature (*TDOT* 2:253–279; *NIDOTTE* 1:747–755), though as we shall see below the Qur’anic understanding of such covenants or agreements between God and humans has distinctive features. Before turning to the principal aspects of the Qur’anic notion of divine-human covenants, some general remarks on the semantics of the word *‘ahd* and *mīthāq* are in order.

**The terms *‘ahd* and *mīthāq*.** The noun *‘ahd*—whose consonantal root *‘-h-d* (on which see *CDKA* 196) also underlies the verbs *‘ahida ilā*, “to impose an obligation on s.o.” (e.g., Q 2:125, 20:115),<sup>1</sup> and *‘āhada* + acc., “to conclude an agreement, contract, treaty, or covenant with s.o.” (e.g., Q 2:177)<sup>2</sup>—is attested already in the early Meccan verse Q 70:32 and

1 By contrast, Q 7:134 and 43:49 have *‘ahida ‘inda*, “to enter into an agreement, contract, treaty, or covenant with s.o.” As Ambros remarks (*CDKA* 196), the formulation could also be construed as transitive (“to enter into an agreement or covenant with s.o. to do s.th.”).

2 Q 2:100 has *‘ahadū ‘ahdan*, “they concluded an agreement, contract, treaty, or covenant.” As Ambros explains (*CDKA* 196), *‘ahdan* could either be a direct object or a *maf’ūl mutlaq*.

in its somewhat later doublet 23:8. Both laud those who “respect goods entrusted to them and agreements made by them” (*wa-lladhīna hum li-amānātihim wa-‘ahdihim rā‘ūn*) and accordingly apply the word *‘ahd* to contracts or compacts between two human parties. This interhuman employment recurs in Q 17:34, admonishing the addressees to fulfil contracts or agreements (*wa-awfū bi-l-‘ahdi inna l-‘ahda kāna mas’ūlā*). But Meccan surahs also exhibit a theological employment of *‘ahd* to refer to an agreement or covenant between God and humans, as shown by appeals to fulfil (*awfā bi-*) or not to violate (*naqaḍa*) “the covenant with God” (*‘ahd allāh*) in Q 6:152, 13:20.25 and 16:91, or not to “sell the covenant with God for a small price” in Q 16:95 (*wa-lā tashtarū bi-‘ahdi llāhi thamanan qalīlan; → sharā*).<sup>3</sup> This theological usage of the word *‘ahd* persists in the Medinan Qur’an, as illustrated by Q 2:27, threatening “those who violate God’s covenant after concluding it” (*alladhīna yanquḍūna ‘ahda llāhi min ba’di mīthāqihī*; see below), or 2:40, where the divine voice urges the Israelites (*→ banū isrā’īl*) to “fulfil the covenant with me, and I shall fulfil the covenant with you” (*wa-awfū bi-‘ahdī ūfi bi-‘ahdikum*).

The meaning of *‘ahd* overlaps with that of *mīthāq*, which is likewise found already in Meccan surahs (Q 13:20.25, perhaps also 7:169), though less frequently than in Medinan ones. As Q 5:7 shows (*wa-dhkurū nīmata llāhi ‘alaykum wa-mīthāqahu lladhī wāthaqakum bihi*), a *mīthāq* is the means or product of the activity described by the verb *wāthaqa* + acc., “to conclude a treaty or covenant with s.o.”: “And remember God’s grace upon you<sup>p</sup> and the covenant he has concluded with you.” The close semantic relationship between *‘ahd* and *mīthāq* is illustrated by the phrase *alladhīna yanquḍūna ‘ahda llāhi min ba’di mīthāqihī* (“those who break God’s *‘ahd* after its *mīthāq*”), initially found in the Meccan verse Q 13:25 and subsequently reprised in the Medinan one 2:27. Here, *‘ahd* would seem to refer to a covenant in the abstract, *qua* a set of obligations to be kept, while *mīthāq* denotes the act of entering into such a covenant. By contrast, in Q 13:20 (*alladhīna yūfūna bi-‘ahdi llāhi wa-lā yanquḍūna l-mīthāq*, “those who fulfil God’s *‘ahd* and do not violate the *mīthāq*”) the two words figure in an essentially synonymous capacity. One infers that *mīthāq* can mean, first, a contract, treaty, or covenant and, secondly, the action of concluding it (thus also CDKA 283–284). Like the word *‘ahd*, *mīthāq* can apply to treaties or covenants between human parties (Q 4:21.90.92, 8:72).

**Key aspects of divine-human covenants in the Qur’an.** Q 2:40, cited earlier, enunciates that human covenants with God are reciprocal: “fulfil the covenant with me, and I shall fulfil the covenant with you” (*wa-awfū bi-‘ahdī ūfi bi-‘ahdikum*).<sup>4</sup> What this means is that humans are bidden to respect certain behavioural and/or doctrinal norms, in return for which God will grant them a set reward. Thus, the Medinan verse Q 48:10 promises, apropos of the believers’ pledge of allegiance to the Qur’anic Messenger, that “anyone who fulfils what he has covenanted to do vis-à-vis God (*wa-man awfā bi-mā ‘āhada ‘alayhu llāha*) will receive a great wage (*→ ajr*).” Conversely, Q 9:75 mentions those who have “covenanted with God (*man ‘āhada llāha*), ‘If he grants us some of his favour, we shall make gifts of charity and be righteous (*la-naṣṣaddaqanna wa-la nakūnanna mina*

3 For other Meccan verses in which *‘ahd* plays a theological role, see Q 19:78.87 (and perhaps also 20:86). On *awfā*, see Leemhuis 1977, 55, 75–76.

4 See also Buhl 1924b, 101 (who maintains that some Qur’anic verses show a unilateral rather than reciprocal employment of *‘h-d*), and the corrective remarks by Rudi Paret in *KK* 172 and 196 (on Q 7:134 f. and 9:7).

*l-ṣāliḥīn*).” Here, the covenantal link is one according to which God’s bestowal of worldly resources is expected to elicit virtuous human behaviour. If, however, the latter fails to materialise (Q 9:76), divine punishment will ensue (Q 9:77–78). Divine-human covenants or contracts thus revolve around a responsive nexus between human righteousness in the present world and divine requital in the hereafter.

The reciprocity of obligation implied by divine-human covenants ties in with the Qur’an’s frequent assertions that God will “pay in full” (*waffā*) the wages that humans deserve (Q 3:57, 4:173: *fa-yuwaffihim ujūrahum*; see in more detail under → *ajr*). The link that the Qur’an establishes between the metaphor of a divine-human covenant and commercial notions such as buying and selling is particularly explicit in Q 9:111. The passage, which is again Medinan, affirms that “God has purchased from the believers their lives and their possessions in exchange for the garden being theirs: they fight on God’s path (→ *sabīl*), killing and being killed, by way of a promise that is binding on him in the Torah (→ *al-tawrāh*), the Gospel (→ *al-injīl*), and the Qur’anic recitations (*al-qur’ān*; → *qara’a*).” The verse then goes on to pose the rhetorical question, “Who fulfils covenants more sincerely than God (*wa-man awfā bi-’ahdihi mina llāhi*)?” It is arguable, therefore, that in the Qur’an a covenant between God and humans bears greater similarity to a commercial contract than to the ancient Near Eastern suzerainty treaties that formed the template for Biblical conceptions of God’s covenant with the Israelites (*TDOT* 2:267–269; *NIDOTTE* 1:747–748). The quasi-commercial nature of divine-human covenants in the Qur’an is particularly manifest in so far as they are to a significant degree predicated, either explicitly or implicitly, on an entailment between individual merit and individual reward. As illustrated by Q 9:111, the rewards or punishments in question are first and foremost eschatological (cf. Q 2:85 and 13:20–25), even if a group’s repeated transgression of their covenant with God may also have this-worldly consequences for the respective collective as a whole: the Israelites were burdened with onerous prohibitions (Q 4:160–161), while the Christians were afflicted with enmity and hatred (Q 5:14). Still, in view of the eschatological dimension at play, it appears that even when God enters into a covenant with a human collective like the Israelites (e.g., Q 2:83) or the Christians (Q 5:14), the contract at hand is ultimately one with human individuals, who will be eschatologically punished or rewarded according to their personal track record rather than being accountable for the corporate track record (Firestone 2011, 409–410). As God informs Abraham, “My covenant does not extend to those who do wrong” (Q 2:124: *lā yanālu ’ahdī l-ṣālimīn*), thereby rejecting Abraham’s supplication on behalf of the entirety of his descendants and insisting on the crucial importance of individual righteousness (cf. also Q 37:113 and see Sinai 2009, 139–142).

Notwithstanding the mutuality of divine covenants with humans, it is God as the superior party of the compact who must initiate them. This is thrown into relief by the substantial number of Medinan verses employing the phrase *akhadha X mīthāqa Y* (Q 2:63.83.84.93, 3:81.187, 5:12.14.70, 57:8) or, equivalently, *akhadha X mīthāqan min Y* (Q 4:21.154, 33:7), where X is God and Y some human party, such as the ancient Israelites (cf. also Q 7:169; see Firestone 2011, 405). At least in some cases, the force of *akhadha X mīthāqa Y* is not adequately expressed by “X concluded a covenant with Y,” since this could suggest an agreement that is fundamentally voluntary and uncoerced. This, however, is clearly not the case in Q 2:63.93 and 4:154, where God dictates his covenantal terms to the Israelites by menacingly raising Mount Sinai over their heads (*WMJA* 161; *BEQ* 303–304; Obermann



1941, 34–37; Hartwig 2008; Graves 2015). In view of this, it is preferable to render *akhadha X mīthāqa* Y along the lines of “X took a covenantal pledge from Y” or “X imposed a covenant on Y.”

Concrete groups with whom God is said to have concluded a covenant (*mīthāq*) include the Israelites (see Q 2:63.83.84.93, 5:12–13, 5:70), who also figure under the more general umbrella term “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*; see Q 4:153–155 and cf. 3:187), the Christians (→ *al-naṣārā*; Q 5:14), “the prophets” (Q 3:81, 33:7), and the Qur’anic community (Q 5:7, 57:8).<sup>5</sup> Some of these passages give details about the contents of the covenant in question. Thus, according to a passage reminiscent of the Biblical Decalogue, the Israelites were required not to worship anyone but God, to treat their parents and various socially marginalised groups kindly, to pray, to give alms, not to shed blood, and not to expel one another from their dwellings (Q 2:83–84). A partially overlapping list of Israelite covenantal obligations, including prayer and almsgiving as well as believing in and aiding God’s messengers, is found in Q 5:12. At least some of these expectations, such as the injunction to serve God alone (Q 2:83), are unmistakably norms by which the Qur’an considers all humans to be bound anyway: at least to a degree, then, the imposition of a covenant on the Israelites only explicates certain pre-existing and universal religious and moral expectations on the part of the deity. More specific to one particular subgroup of humans but still imbued by a universal horizon is Q 3:187, which says that “those who were given the scripture,” who may be the Israelites here, were obliged to “make” the scripture “clear” (→ *bayyana*) “to people” (*li-l-nāsi*) and not to “conceal” (*katama*; see under → *ahl al-kitāb*) it. This would seem to task the Israelites with kerygmatic outreach towards the rest of humanity. Outright accusations of covenant-breaking (*naqḍ*) tend to be reserved for the Israelites (Q 5:12–13) or the Jews (Q 4:155–161),<sup>6</sup> even if they can figure under the more general umbrella term “scripture-owners” in this context (Q 4:155).<sup>7</sup> With regard to the Christians, the Qur’an employs only the somewhat milder accusation that they “forgot part of what they had been reminded of” (Q 5:14: *fa-nasū ḥaḥḥan mim mā dhukkūrū bihi*), a phrase that the previous verse, Q 5:13, already applied to the Israelites (cf. also Q 6:44, 7:165, 18:57; see generally under → *nasiya*). As regards the prophets, they are said to have been covenantally obliged to believe in and aid subsequent divine messengers confirming them (Q 3:81). This is probably an indirect manner of insisting that the *followers* of such earlier prophets are expected to do likewise (cf. Q 5:12), entailing specifically an obligation to acknowledge Muhammad.

An important aspect of the Qur’anic understanding of divine-human covenants, therefore, revolves around the failure of the Jews and Christians to live up to their covenantal obligations, obligations that the Medinan community of Qur’anic believers is now called upon to honour in a more successful manner (Q 5:7, 57:8). In Q 5:7, the contrast with the unreliability of the Israelites in particular is strongly foregrounded by the Qur’an’s

<sup>5</sup> Depending on how one construes the pronouns in Q 57:8, the latter verse might also be read as saying that it is the Qur’anic Messenger who, acting as God’s representative, imposes a covenant on the believers (*wa-qad akhadha mīthāqakum*).

<sup>6</sup> Q 4:160 has *alladhīna hādū*.

<sup>7</sup> For generic condemnations of breaking covenants with God, see Q 2:27 (though this is a prelude to the extensive litany of Israelite transgressions that follows in vv. 40 ff.) and 13:20.25. For other descriptions of Israelite infractions of their covenant with God that do not use the verb *naqada* or its corresponding verbal noun, see Q 2:85.93, 3:187, and 5:70. Q 8:56 alludes to covenant-breaking by contemporary allies of the Qur’anic Messenger.

attribution of the formula *sami'nā wa-ata'nā*, “we hear and obey,” to the believers. The utterance forms a marked contrast with the Israelites’ alleged response *sami'nā wa-ʿaṣaynā*, “we hear and disobey,” upon being charged with God’s covenant (Q 2:93; see in more detail under → *sami'a*). While the Qur’an’s perspective here is patently supersessionist, the Islamic scripture nonetheless displays an unmistakable propensity to universalise the Biblical notion of covenant. This is manifest not only in the mostly universal content of the covenantal obligations imposed by God, as seen earlier, but comes to the fore with particular clarity in two passages that depict a divine covenant with all of humankind rather than with a restricted subset thereof: Q 33:72 and 7:172–173, to be discussed in the final paragraphs of this entry.

**God’s universal covenant with all of humankind.** Q 33:72, which is compositionally prominent due to being part of the surah’s final two verses (together with v. 73), has the divine voice aver that “we offered the trust (*innā ʿaraḍnā l-amānata*) to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, and they declined to carry it and were afraid of it; and man has carried it. [Yet] he is guilty of wrongdoing and ignorance.” Although the verse employs the term *amānah* (“trust, entrusted good”; cf. Q 2:283, 4:58, 8:27, 23:8, 70:32) rather than one of the two common Qur’anic words for “covenant,” *ʿahd* or *mīthāq*, the passage does read like a covenanting scene in which humans, contrasting with the most imposing entities in nature, fearlessly—and perhaps over-ambitiously—consent to bearing the burden of moral responsibility, a burden that entails both an ultimate reckoning and the prospect of eternal bliss in paradise. This understanding is also supported by the fact that the word *amānah* is at least twice found in close proximity to *ʿahd* (Q 23:8, 70:32), allowing it to function as a partial synonym of the latter. Hence, the message of Q 33:72 would seem to be that the fact that pre-eschatological humans are subject to constant divine testing (see under → *balā*) of their moral and religious probity is a state of affairs to which these human agents can and ought to regard themselves as having given primordial consent.

The scene alluded to in Q 33:72 bears a certain resemblance with *Sifre Deuteronomy*, no. 343 (Hammer 1986, 352–353). This rabbinic parallel recounts how God, before giving the Torah to the people of Israel, undertook a whistle-stop tour of “all the nations,” including the children of Esau, the Ammonites, the Moabites, and the Ishmaelites, in order to offer the Torah to them. However, all of them declined upon being apprised of the various prohibitions contained therein. Only the people of Israel, the tradition holds, accepted the Torah “with all its explanations and details.” Like Q 33:72, the eventual recipients of God’s covenant are here placed in a more universal context of refuseniks, the difference being that the Qur’an casts the recipients of God’s covenant as humankind in general, as a result of which the refuseniks that provide the contrastive foil must be non-human beings rather than other human communities.

A second universalising treatment of divine-human covenants is found in Q 7:172–173, where God elicits from the future descendants of the “children of Adam” a prenatal confession that God is their Lord (see in more detail under → *rabb*). As Dirk Hartwig has compellingly argued (Hartwig 2008), this scene contrasts with the immediately preceding retelling of God’s covenant with the Israelites in Q 7:171: the Mosaic covenant is, as it were, cut down to size, not by being superseded, along Christian lines, but rather by being placed against the background of an even earlier and more universal pact that God has concluded with all humans who will ever tread the earth. Hence, irrespective of concrete historical acts of divine covenanting with particular subgroups of humanity like the Israelites, the

Qur'an ultimately considers all humans to be bound by a quasi-covenantal set of obligations towards God and to be destined to be judged accordingly.

**wathan | idol**

→ *dhabaḥa*

**wajila intr. | to quake in fear**

→ *qalb*

**wajh | face**

→ *allāh*, → *jahannam*, → *aslama*

**awḥā tr. ilā | to convey s.th. to s.o.**

**awḥā intr. ilā | to convey revelations to s.o.**

**wahy | s.th. that is conveyed, the act of conveying s.th.**

Further vocabulary discussed: *shayṭān* | devil *samā'* | heaven *amr* | command *qalb* | heart *al-ḥawāriyyūn* pl. | the apostles *malak* | angel *arḍ* | earth *andhara* tr. | to warn s.o. *bashshara* tr. | to give glad tidings to s.o. *qur'ān* | recitation *naz-zala*, *anzala* tr. | to send s.th. down *anbā' al-ghayb* pl. | the tidings of the hidden *zabūr* | writ, writing, written record

**W-h-y as intimate or encrypted communication.** As emphasised already by Izutsu, the Qur'anic meaning of the root *w-h-y* may be illuminated by a number of prooftexts in early Arabic poetry. The most interesting one occurs in a poem from the *dīwān* of 'Alqamah, where a male ostrich who is conversing with his wife after a long absence is said to be "conveying something to her" (*yūḥī ilayhā*) by uttering sounds unintelligible to the poetic narrator (*DSAAP*, 'Alqamah, no. 13:26; *GMK* 158–159 and Loynes 2021, 68–69). Other poems compare the half-obliterated traces of deserted camp sites to mysterious writing (*wahy*, plural: *wuḥiyy*), charged with meaning yet nonetheless undecipherable to an illiterate observer ('Abbās 1962, no. 51:2, discussed in *GMK* 159–160; see also *DSAAP*, Zuhayr, no. 15:5; cf. the overview in Loynes 2021, 63–68). Izutsu infers that the noun *wahy* and the verb *awḥā* refer to communication that is "accompanied by a sense of secrecy and mysteriousness" (*GMK* 153; see also *GMK* 158, 160). One manner in which this might be further refined is by saying that the root *w-h-y* characterises acts of communication that do not involve the utterance of ordinary and readily transparent human speech, be it because the message transmitted is encoded in animal sounds or because it is encoded in writing. The prime Qur'anic example supporting this position would be Q 19:11, also cited by Izutsu, where the dumbstruck Zechariah "conveys" to his people, presumably by gesticulating, that they are to "glorify God in the morning and in the evening" (Q 19:11: *fa-awḥā ilayhim an sabbihū bukratan wa-'ashiyyā*; see *GMK* 161 and Loynes 2021, 73–74). Evidently, Zechariah too is unable to rely on ordinary human speech.

Yet the hypothesis that *w-h-y* relates to communication by means other than ordinary human speech, however compelling at first sight, would be inappropriate for Q 6:112. The verse declares that the human and demonic “devils” (sg. → *shayṭān*) whom God has appointed as enemies of his prophets “convey embellished speech to one another, in delusion” (*yūhī ba‘ḍuhum ilā ba‘ḍin zukhrufa l-qawli ghurūran*).<sup>1</sup> Even though the “devils” mentioned here include jinnis as well as humans, the word *qawl* makes it clear that they are not envisaged as communicating with one another in writing, by gestures, or using some other substitute for ordinary speech. More convincing, perhaps, is the supposition that the use of *awḥā* is here predicated on the assumption that the “devils” stand in a relationship of close intimacy to one another (however much they are contributing to one another’s religious and moral downfall). Such an understanding would be able to appeal to other Qur’anic passages that depict intimate conversations (*n-j-w*) as a locus of opposition against the Messenger (e.g., Q 58:7–10). It may be suggested, therefore, that the semantic stress of the root *w-h-y* is not so much on the opaqueness of the communicative medium as such but rather on the fact that the communicative event in question is not readily decipherable or, indeed, interceptable by outside observers who are not the intended recipients. The core meaning of *wahy* and *awḥā*, then, would be intimate, esoteric, or encrypted communication, a point also made by Simon Loynes (Loynes 2021, 63–88, equating *w-h-y* with “esoteric communication”). This would explain very well why, as we shall presently see, the Qur’an frequently applies the root to acts of divine inspiration and revelation. Moreover, in favour of the suggestion that the basic sense of *w-h-y* is intimate and esoteric communication, by whatever means, one may note that the verse by ‘Alqamah explicitly compares the male ostrich’s conversation with his wife to the “gibberish” (verb: *tarāṭana*) of “the Romans” (*al-rūm*). The interaction between the two birds is thus likened to human speech, albeit in a language that is as incomprehensible to the poet as animal sounds. Accordingly, the verse’s point is not so much that ostriches communicate in a manner that is categorically different from human language but rather that they communicate in a language that is meaningless to the poet even though it patently does carry meaning for the communicating parties—just as writing clearly does carry meaning even if the poet is unable to decipher it. All of this supports the contention that the root *w-h-y* relates to acts of communication that are encrypted in such a way as to exclude eavesdropping bystanders.<sup>2</sup>

***W-h-y* and divine revelation.** The Qur’anic employment of the root *w-h-y* differs from the poetic prooftexts referenced above in so far as the sender or originator of the act of communication in question is usually God rather than another human. Sometimes *awḥā* describes how God governs the behaviour of non-human animals or entities: according to Q 16:68, God “conveys to the bees that they are to make homes on mountains, in trees, and in buildings” (*wa-awḥā rabbuka ilā l-naḥli ani ttakhidhī mina l-jibāli buyūtan wa-mina*

1 For another case of *w-h-y* communication between “the devils,” though without an express reference to spoken language (*q-w-l*), see Q 6:121, where *awḥā* is perhaps best rendered as “to prompt,” as in 99:5 (see below): the believers are warned that “the devils prompt their allies to dispute with you<sup>p</sup> (*wa-inna l-shayāṭīna la-yūḥūna ilā awliyā’ihim li-yujādilūkum*); and if you<sup>p</sup> obey them, you will indeed be associators.” It is possible that this refers to an inward incitation to evil by malevolent demons (→ *jinn*, → *shayṭān*) rather than to communication between humans.

2 The obvious way in which to apply this understanding to Q 19:11, cited above, would be to say that Zechariah’s gestures will naturally have been situationally geared to his addressees, who were of course familiar to him.

*l-shajari wa-mimmā ya'rishūn*), and Q 41:12 says that God “conveys to every heaven its command” (*wa-awḥā fī kulli samā'in amrahā*). Humans can be the recipients of similar divine promptings, which are probably not to be understood as involving a fixed wording but rather as a direct communication of God’s will (GMK 161), just as God can have a direct emotional impact upon the human heart (e.g., Q 28:10; see in more detail under → *qalb*). Thus, God “conveys” to the disciples of Jesus the command “to believe in me and in my messenger” (Q 5:111: *wa-idh awḥaytu ilā l-ḥawāriyyīna an āminū bī wa-bi-rasūlī*). Similarly, Moses is prompted to cast down his rod (Q 7:117: *wa-awḥaynā ilā mūsā an alqi 'aṣāka*), whose subsequent transformation into a snake then constitutes one of his confirmatory miracles vis-à-vis Pharaoh, while Noah is instructed by God to build the ark “under our eyes and as conveyed by us” (Q 11:37 and 23:27: *iṣna'i l-fulka bi-a'yūnīna wa-wahyīnā*). There are further instances in which *awḥā* refers to a divine prompt suggesting a specific course of action or to divine advice pertaining to a certain situation (see Q 7:160, 10:87, 11:36, 12:15, 20:77, 26:52.63), and the recipients of such situation-specific divine inspiration are by no means only prophetic figures like Moses but also include Moses’s mother (Q 20:38–39, 28:7). In one case, divine prompting is addressed to the angels (*al-malā'ikah*; Q 8:12), who are told to fortify the believers in battle, and in another case it is addressed to the earth (*al-arḍ*), who will, on the day of judgement, quake, bring forth the dead, and “tell her tidings” (Q 99:1–4) “because your<sup>s</sup> Lord prompted it to do so” (Q 99:5: *bi-anna rabbaka awḥā lahā*).

Most important in the Qur’an, however, are arguably those cases in which God conveys to a human addressee not just a certain course of action but rather a message to be passed on to a wider audience (cf. GMK 179). That God’s conveying of some communicative content to an individual human may be an intermediary step in reaching out to a wider group of recipients is very clear, for example, at Q 10:2, where the divine voice poses the rhetorical question why “the people” are astonished that “we conveyed to a man from among them that he should warn the people and give glad tidings to the believers” (*an awḥaynā ilā rajulin minhum an andhiri l-nāsa wa-bashshiri lladhīna āmanū*). Similarly, in Q 6:19 the Qur’anic messenger is bidden to declare, “This recitation was conveyed to me so that I might warn you<sup>p</sup> with it” (*ūḥiya ilayya hādḥā l-qur’ānu li-undhirakum bihi*). There are, accordingly, many Qur’anic verses in which *awḥā* functions as a general term for the transmission of divine revelation to humans. This makes *awḥā* an approximate equivalent of → *nazzala* and *anzala*, “to send down,” although the two terms have distinct connotations: *awḥā* highlights the privacy and intimacy of revelatory communication prior to the public dissemination of God’s message at the hand of Muhammad and his predecessors, while the spatial imagery inherent in *nazzala* and *anzala* emphasises that revelation involves a transition from the divine to the human domain. In any case, even in instances in which *awḥā* might defensibly be rendered as “to reveal,” it remains entirely appropriate to translate the verb as “to convey” or—if used intransitively—as “to convey revelations.” For instance, in Q 3:44, punctuating a narrative about Mary, the divine voice affirms, “This belongs to the tidings of the hidden that we convey to you<sup>s</sup>” (*dhālika min anbā'i l-ghaybi nūḥīhi ilayka*; see similarly 11:49 and 12:102),<sup>3</sup> and Q 4:163 addresses the Qur’anic Messenger by saying, “We have conveyed revelations to you<sup>s</sup> (*innā awḥaynā ilayka*) as we conveyed revelations (*awḥaynā*) to Noah and to the prophets after

3 Q 11:49 is briefly discussed under → *asāṭir al-awwalīn*.

him; and we conveyed revelations to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, the descendants of Jacob (→ *al-asbāt*), Jesus, Job, Jonah, Aaron, and Salomon; and to David we gave a writing (→ *zabūr*).” The noun *waḥy*, meanwhile, can either designate the content of what is conveyed in an act of divine revelation (e.g., Q 53:4: “it is only something conveyed,” *in huwa illā waḥyun yūḥā*) or the act of revelatory conveyance as such, as in Q 20:114 (“Do<sup>s</sup> not make haste with the recitation before it has been completely conveyed to you,” *wa-lā taʿjal bi-l-qurʾāni min qabli an yuqḏā ilayka waḥyuhu*) and 21:45 (“Say, ‘I am only warning you<sup>p</sup> according to what has been conveyed to me,’” *qul innamā undhirukum bi-l-waḥyi*). This use of *w-ḥ-y* as a byword for divine revelation may very well be a Qurʾanic innovation, the theological retooling of a term that was not originally associated with divine-on-human communication.

***mawaddah* | affection**

***wadūd* | affectionate, loving**

→ *al-raḥmān*

***waritha* | to inherit s.th.**

***awratha* ditr. | to bequeath s.th. to s.o.**

→ *arḏ*, → *ahl al-kitāb*

***wazara* tr. | to carry s.th.**

See n. 16 under → *kitāb*.

***wasat*: *ummaḥ* ~ | a middle community, an intermediate community**

→ *al-ʿālamūn*

***waswasa* intr. | to whisper**

→ *shayṭān*, → *nafs*

***tawāṣā* intr. *bi-* | to charge one another with s.th., to urge one another to do s.th.**

→ *maʿrūf*

***waʿada* tr. | to promise or pledge s.th.; to give s.o. a promise or pledge**

***waʿd* | promise; pledge**

***waʿīd* | (threatening) pledge**

Further vocabulary discussed: ***rajā* tr. | to hope for s.th.; to expect s.th.** ***raḥmah* |**

mercy ***al-yawm al-ākhir* | the final day**



**The verb *wa'ada*.** *Wa'ada* is “to promise,” but as Ambros notes (*CDKA* 291), the things that are promised in the Qur’an may be either desirable (e.g., Q 8:7 or 38:53) or threatening, such as the eschatological judgement (e.g., Q 51:5; see in more detail under → *din*<sup>1</sup>, → *jan-nah*, and → *jahannam*). In those instances where the ominous connotations of the verb are predominant, “to pledge” will provide a more fitting rendering—just as the verb *rajā* needs to be rendered “to hope” when it takes a non-threatening object, like God’s mercy (*rahmah*, on which see under → *rahima*; Q 2:218, 17:57, 39:9), but might defensibly become “to expect” when it takes an object that is predominantly menacing, like the final day (→ *al-yawm al-ākhir*; Q 29:36) or meeting the divine judge (e.g., Q 10:7.11.15).<sup>1</sup>

**The nouns *wa'd* and *wa'id*.** The verbal noun *wa'd* occurs both with desirable and threatening objects, but its apparent variant *wa'id* is consistently menacing (Q 14:14, 20:113, 50:14.20.28.45). *Yawm al-wa'id* (Q 50:20) is accordingly “the day of the [eschatological] pledge, the day that has been pledged.” *Wa'id* is much less frequent in the Qur’an than *wa'd* and only one of its occurrences (Q 20:113) is not in rhyme position.

***wa'aḏa* tr. | to admonish s.o.**

***maw'izah* | admonition**

See under → *hikmah* and → *dhakkara* and also under → *injil*.

***wa'ā* tr. | to consider s.th. attentively**

→ *dhakkara*

***waffā* tr. *ilā* | to repay s.th. to s.o. in full**

***waffā* ditr. | to pay s.th. to s.o. in full; to repay s.o. for s.th. in full**

***waffā* intr. | to fulfil one's obligation(s)**

***awfā* intr. *bi-* | to fulfil or keep s.th. (e.g., a treaty or covenant)**

→ *ajr*, → *anfaqa*, → *ḥisāb*, → *ṣadaqah*, → *kasaba*, → *kitāb*, → *wāthaqa*

***tawaffā* tr. | to take s.o. from life (said of God, the angels, or death)**

**Further vocabulary discussed: *malak* | angel**

The verb *tawaffā* (which can also be employed in the passive, “to be taken from life,” e.g., in Q 2:234.240 or 22:5) generally refers to the final termination of life in death, even if the word can also be applied to the temporary interruption of conscious life in sleep, in so far as the latter may be assimilated to death (Q 6:60, calling God “the one who takes you at night,” *huwa lladhī yatawaffākum bi-l-layli*, and also 39:42; see Zahniser 1989, 19–20). For a study of the semantics of *tawaffā*, with special reference to Q 3:55 and 5:117 and including a brief

<sup>1</sup> More difficult are two verses in which the accusative object of *rajā* are both God and the final day (Q 33:21, 60:6). Here, the hopeful mood of the context permits translating *man kāna yarjū llāha wa-l-yawma l-ākhirā* as “who places his hope in God and the final day.” Nonetheless, “who expects [to meet] God and the final day” is equally feasible.

review of previous scholarship, see Zahniser 1989. Like some scholars before him, Zahniser emphasises the verb’s connotation of completion and fullness, and at one point suggests the rendering “to take or complete someone in death” (Zahniser 1989, 18). However, as Zahniser goes on to note, there are several passages in which *tawaffā* designates a life that has, from the viewpoint of ordinary human expectations, been prematurely cut short (e.g., Q 13:40, 22:5, 40:67; see Zahniser 1989, 20–21). He reconciles the two considerations by observing that “when a person’s life is taken by God or His angels in death, it is a complete life, even if, when measured by the usual span of human life, it is short” (Zahniser 1989, 23). On the angels as those who take humans from life, see under → *malak*.

***waqūd* | fuel**

→ *jahannam*

***waqr* | heaviness**

→ *‘amiya*

***waqā* ditr. | to protect or guard s.o. against s.th.**

→ *ittaqā*

***ittaqā* tr. | to protect or guard o.s. against s.o. or s.th., to be wary of s.o. or s.th., to fear s.o. or s.th. (especially God)**

***ittaqā* intr. | to be God-fearing**

***al-muttaqūn* pl. | the God-fearing**

***taqwā* | fear of God**

Further vocabulary discussed: *waqā* ditr. | to protect or guard s.o. against s.th. *al-nār* | the fire (of hell) *khashiya* tr., *khāfa* tr. | to fear or be afraid of s.th. or s.o. *khashiya* intr., *khāfa* intr. | to be afraid *khawf* | fear *ashrāt* pl. | signs, portents *al-sā‘ah* | the hour (of the resurrection)

**Basic meaning and syntax.** The eighth-form verb *ittaqā* + acc. refers to guarding or protecting oneself against some danger or harm (*AEL* 3059; see also al-Farāhī 2002, 253–258). The verb’s basic sense emerges very clearly from one of the poetic prooftexts cited by Izutsu (*GMK* 235–236), taken from the Mu‘allaqah of ‘Antarah: the poets’ comrades “seek protection against the [enemies’] spears by me” (*yattaqūna biya l-asinnatah*; *DSAAP*, ‘Antarah, no. 21:71), meaning that the poet acts as a shield between his friends and their foes. This general significance of *ittaqā* is morphologically expected, given the reflexive or medial sense that is often expressed by the eighth verbal form (Wright 1974, 1:42): the first-form verb *waqā* + acc. + acc. is “to protect or guard *someone* against s.th.” (e.g., Q 16:81), while *ittaqā* + acc. is “to protect *oneself* against s.th.”

A particularly striking illustration of the relationship between *waqā* and *ittaqā* is provided by Q 2:24 in comparison with 66:6. In the latter verse, the believers are called to

“protect/guard yourselves and your families (*qū anfusakum wa-ahlikum*) against a fire whose fuel are people and stones,” while Q 2:24 enjoins people to “protect/guard yourselves (*fa-ttaqū*) against a fire whose fuel are people and stones.” Since Q 66:6 adds a second non-reflexive object of protection to the addressees themselves, namely, their families (*wa-ahlikum*), it expresses “to protect/guard o.s. against s.th.” by *qū anfusakum* rather than by simple *ittaqū*, as found in Q 2:24. The parallel thus demonstrates the basic equivalence between *ittaqā* and *waqā nafsahu*.

Another Qur’anic occurrence that sheds valuable light on the semantics of *ittaqā* is Q 39:24, referring to the one who, on the day of resurrection, “seeks protection against the evil punishment by means of his face” (*man yattaqī bi-wajhihi sū’a l-’adhābi*). Here, *ittaqā* behaves similarly to the introductory quotation from ‘Antarah, since it takes a prepositional object introduced by *bi-*, referring to some instrument by means of which one attempts to fend off a danger, and also a direct objective in the accusative, referring to the menace against which one seeks protection: whereas ‘Antarah’s companions are shielded from danger by their heroic companion, in the Qur’an the sinner destined for hell has no other shield left than his own face (*GMK* 236–237).

**Overview of Qur’anic usage.** In the Qur’an, that which people are bidden to guard themselves against or to be wary of (*ittaqā*) is most often God (e.g., Q 2:189.194.196 etc., 26:108.110.126 etc., 65:1.2.4.5 etc., 71:3), less frequently the fire of hell (*al-nār*) or the day of God’s eschatological reckoning (e.g., Q 3:131, 73:17). What one might call inner-worldly objects of wariness, such as other humans, are almost completely absent.<sup>1</sup> Both Meccan and Medinan verses sometimes employ *ittaqā* without an explicit accusative object (e.g., Q 2:21, 5:65, 6:155, 7:96, 92:5), but it is contextually appropriate to suppose that here, too, what is intended is guarding oneself against God or his eschatological punishment. This stance, designated by the noun *taqwā*, forms a core Qur’anic virtue, which is indicated by the fact that the term *al-muttaqūn*—i.e., “those who guard themselves” against God, or, more conventionally, “the God-fearing” (see below)—from early on serves as a collective label for those who merit paradise (e.g., Q 51:15, 52:17, 54:54, 68:34, 77:41, 78:31) and who are heedful of the Qur’anic proclamations (e.g., Q 69:48).

As Izutsu observes, guarding oneself against God involves emotions of concrete fear and dread, seeing that verbs meaning “to fear, to be afraid,” like *hashiya* and *khāfa*, often seem to function as approximate synonyms of *ittaqā* (*ERCQ* 195–200; Ohlander 2005, 141–145; see also Sinai 2017a, 228). For instance, Q 24:52 promises eschatological reward to those who obey God and his Messenger and who “are afraid of God and guard themselves against him” (*wa-yakhsha llāha wa-yattaqīhi*), while Q 31:33 calls the people to “guard yourselves against your Lord (*ittaqū rabbakum*) and fear a day (*wa-khshaw yawman*) on which no father will be able to give satisfaction on behalf of his child nor any child on behalf of his father.” The intimate link between *taqwā* and fear is also obvious in Q 39:16, which after alluding to the hell-fire that will engulf the damned continues: “That is what God employs to frighten his servants (*dhālika yukhawwifu llāhu bihi ’ibādahu*) [thereby warning

1 Unusually, Q 3:28 speaks of the believers protecting or guarding themselves against the unbelievers: the believers are not to take the unbelievers as allies over other believers, “unless you<sup>9</sup> are protecting yourselves against a fear occasioned by them” or perhaps “against a danger emanating from them” (*illā an tattaqū minhum tuqātan*; cf. *awajasa khifatan min X* in Q 11:70 and 51:28: “to feel fear against X”). It is interesting that even here the unbelievers do not figure as the direct object of the believers’ wariness. The reason may be that believers are of course meant to be exclusively wary of God.

them:] ‘O my servants, guard yourselves against me (*yā-‘ibādi fa-ttaqūn!*)!’<sup>2</sup> Attempts to paraphrase *taqwā* primarily in terms of “mindfulness or consciousness of God,” however carefully argued (e.g., Lamptey 2014, 145), accordingly risk underplaying a crucial facet of the notion.<sup>3</sup> Rather than sharing the modern intuition that fear is a negative and harmful emotion, a cultural drift diagnosed already by William James (James 1902, 97–100), the Qur’an deems fear to be an entirely appropriate and potentially transformative response to the divine (see Sinai 2017a, 228; *HCI* 165–166).

At the same time, *ittaqa* is probably not fully equivalent to, say, *khashiya* and presumably has a strong connotation of ensuring one’s own protection by having recourse to specific self-protective measures, in line with the poetic prooftext cited above and with the equivalence of *ittaqa* with *waqa nafsahu* that is entailed by Q 2:24 and 66:6. Hence, *taqwā* has a distinct behavioural content and is not reducible to a mere inward state.<sup>4</sup> In view of this, the quality designated by *taqwā*, the verbal noun corresponding to *ittaqa*, is best defined as an attitude of fearful wariness of God as the eschatological judge (see generally Andrae 1926, 84–93, and Andrae 1932, 49, 60–61), a habitus of scrupulously guarding oneself against the danger of damnation by avoiding sin and worship of false deities. God-wary conduct, it must be added, also encompasses positive acts like prayer (→ *ṣallā*) and almsgiving (→ *zakāh*). This is shown most clearly by the elaborate catalogue that the Medinan verse Q 2:177 puts forward of the hallmarks of the *muttaqūn*; but a link between guarding oneself against God and charitable giving is already evidenced by the early Meccan verse Q 92:5 (*man a’tā wa-ttaqā*).<sup>5</sup>

In a turn of thought that might at first sight seem paradoxical, those who properly guard themselves against God will have “nothing to fear” from God’s future judgement (Q 7:35: *fa-mani ttaqā wa-aṣḥa fa-lā khawfun ‘alayhim wa-lā hum yaḥzanūn*, “those who guard themselves [against God] and act righteously have nothing to be afraid of and will not know grief”; Ringgren 1951, 17).<sup>6</sup> It is through soteriological anxiety that one may, ultimately, become one of the saved who, once admitted to paradise, will have no more reason to be soteriologically anxious.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, it is God, the one against whom one must guard oneself during one’s earthly life, whom believers may expect to “guard” or “protect” (*waqa*)

2 I assume that *dhālika* is here used anaphorically, to refer back to the preceding (see under → *dhālika*). The parenthetical addition is inspired by Paret 2001.

3 It must be noted that Lamptey herself concedes that *taqwā* involves “even fear of God” (Lamptey 2014, 145). I would prefer to say that it primarily consists in such fear. Rendering of *taqwā* as “God-consciousness” would seem to go back to Asad 1980.

4 I owe the insight that *taqwā* crucially involves concrete actions and behaviours to Karen Bauer, who has kindly commented on a draft version of this entry and who may develop the point at hand in a forthcoming publication.

5 It is not straightforward to determine whether conjunctions of the form “X and Y” imply that X and Y have a properly semantic connection (e.g., by virtue of being full or partial synonyms) or whether the link between X and Y is a non-semantic (e.g., doctrinal, normative, or empirical) one; see n. 2 in the introduction. Q 92:5 by itself thus does not provide clear evidence whether “guarding oneself” and charitable giving are intertwined conceptually or only at the normative level (in the sense that both are required for entry to paradise). For a similar case, see under → *ṣāliḥ*.

6 The phrase *lā khawfun ‘alayhim wa-lā hum yaḥzanūn* is a frequent verse closer; see, e.g., Q 2:38.62.112 etc., 10:62, 46:13. For a striking Syriac parallel in Ephrem, see Beck 1957a, *On Paradise*, no. 7:23: *lā it lhon ṣeptā d-lā it lhon ḥashshā // lā it lhon qenṭā . . .*, “They will have no worry, for they will have no grief. // They will have no fear. . . .”

7 Hence, in so far as *lā khawfun ‘alayhim* is surely meant to describe the state of the God-fearers in the eschatological future, the verse does not give rise to any logical contradiction, despite its paradoxical appearance (*pace* Ringgren 1951, 17).

them against eschatological punishment (Q 2:201, 3:16, 3:191: *wa-/fa-qinā* ‘*adhāba l-nār*; on God as protector, either in the hereafter or in the present world, see also 40:7.9.45, 44:56, 52:18.27, 76:11).<sup>8</sup> Conversely, those guilty of worshipping deities besides God or of sin will have no protector (*wāqin*) against (*min*) God (Q 13:34.37, 40:21). A number of passages employing the verbs *khashiya* or *khāfa* explicitly contrast fear of God with illegitimate fear of humans (Q 2:150, 3:175, 5:3.44, 9:13, 33:37; *KK* 400). Thus, properly fearing (*khashiya*) God also involves an absence of fear towards anything else (Q 33:39). A similar stress on exclusive wariness of God would seem to be conveyed by four verses ending with a divine commandment to “guard yourselves against me” (Q 2:41, 16:2, 23:52, 39:16: ± <*wa-iyāya*> *fa-ttaqūn*).

Overall, then, *ittaqā* and *taqwā* mean to be exclusively wary of the divine judge and fearfully to protect oneself against him by means of a range of concrete this-worldly actions and behaviours, in the hope of thereby meriting divine protection on the day of judgement. As we have seen, *ittaqā* with a following accusative is often translatable as “to protect or guard o.s. against s.th.,” as in Q 2:24. This would naturally suggest rendering intransitive *ittaqā* as “to protect oneself” (e.g., Jones 2007 on Q 2:2.21; see also *CDKA* 294: “to protect o.s., to be wary”) or as “to guard oneself” (thus generally Droge 2013). But rendering the noun *taqwā* as “guarding oneself” or the like can be awkward, which makes “fear of God” an attractive alternative. Moreover, rendering intransitive *ittaqā* as “to fear God” and *taqwā* as “fear of God” has the additional advantage of bringing out the concept’s affinity with Biblical notions of fearing God, which are discussed in the following section.

**Biblical background.** From a genealogical perspective, the Qur’anic use of *taqwā* may be suggested to be an Arabisation of the Biblical concept of *yir’at YHWH*, “fear of the Lord” (e.g., Isa 11:2–3 or Prov 1:7), corresponding to Greek *phobos theou* and Syriac *dehlteh d-māryā* (Alexander 2002, 194; on the fear of God in Biblical and post-Biblical Jewish and Christian texts, see, e.g., *TDOT* 6:290–315; *NIDOTTE* 2:527–533; *TDNT* 9:189–219; Lieu 1995; Becker 2009, 311–317 and 329–330).<sup>9</sup> Like Qur’anic *taqwā*, the Biblical notion of fearing God is not simply “elementary fear” but rather equivalent to “reverence and submissive recognition” (*TDNT* 9:201; for a similar observation regarding ancient Mesopotamian religion, see *TDOT* 6:299). Thus, and again similar to Qur’anic *taqwā*, fearing God is not limited to a mental state but manifests itself in one’s moral and ritual conduct: when the Israelites are commanded to “fear the Lord your God,” this is followed by the commandment “to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, // and to keep the commandments of the Lord and his decrees” (Deut 10:12–13; see *NIDOTTE* 2:529–530). A particularly noteworthy comparandum to the pivotal role that the Qur’an accords to the virtue of *taqwā*, moreover, is the importance of eschatological fear (*dehlā*) in Syriac homiletic literature such as Ephrem and Jacob of Sarug, who articulate a type of eschatologically minded piety that has a high degree of similarity to the Qur’an (Andrae 1926, 127–129; Andrae 1932, 68–71; Sinai 2017a, 233). The frequent references to fear of God in two sixth-century Syriac martyr texts produced in the Sasanian Empire (Becker

<sup>8</sup> Note in particular the sequence of *ittaqā* and *waqā* in Q 52:17.18.

<sup>9</sup> Particularly noteworthy is Becker’s observation that in the Peshitta “a diverse range of terms in the New Testament are rendered by the Syriac root *d-h-l*, thus causing a focalization on one term, as we see in the Peshitta Old Testament” (Becker 2009, 314).

2009) show that the concept continued to be an important facet of Syriac-Christian piety until close to the Qur'an's period of emergence. It is noteworthy that the term *dehltā* here comes to function as a "category of piety," an approximate equivalent of our modern category of "religion" that is applied not only to Christians but also to Zoroastrianism, termed "the fear of the magi" (Becker 2009, 309; see also the striking plural usage *dehlātā*, translated as "religions," in Becker 2009, 324). Fear of God also figures in other texts and genres of Syriac literature, such as monastic writings (Becker 2009, 331–332) and the *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Zellentin 2016, 283–284).

***Ittaqā* and *taqwā* in pre-Qur'anic poetry.** It does not appear that the employment of Arabic *itraqā/taqwā* as an approximate Arabic equivalent of the Biblically based notion of fearing God is a Qur'anic coinage, since both are already attested in pre-Islamic poetry. Izutsu argues that pre-Islamic occurrences of these terms generally have a non-religious sense, as in the verse from 'Antarah cited at the beginning of the entry. But while Izutsu manages to show that *itraqā* could carry a non-religious meaning in pre-Qur'anic Arabic, a sufficient number of poetic occurrences that are not obviously later Islamic fabrications do employ the verb and also the noun with God as its object (Brockelmann 1922, 115; Sinai 2019b, 48–50). For example, Aws ibn Ḥajar addresses a tribe whom he considers to have breached a covenant, "Are you not fearful of [or on your guard against] God?" (*a-lā tattaqūna llāha*), and another poet advises his son, "God (*allāh*)—fear him [or 'guard yourself against him']" (*fa-ttaqihi*) and honour vows to him" (Geyer 1892, no. 38:7; Lyall 1918–1924, no. 116:3). The use of Arabic *itraqā/taqwā* to express the idea of fearing God therefore predates the Qur'an, which casts doubt on Izutsu's assessment that a verse from the *dīwān* of Zuhayr that employs *taqwā* in a religious sense is exceptional (GMK 235; for the verse, see DSAAP, Zuhayr, no. 17:35). One might also note in this regard that pre-Islamic poetry describes Christian anchorites and ascetics as "God-fearers" (singular: *rāhib*, plural: *ruh-bān*), though the word used derives from a different consonantal root than *w-q-y* (DSAAP, al-Nābighah, no. 7:26; DSAAP, Imru' al-Qays, no. 48:37.66 = EAP 2:69–70 and 2:82–83; DSAAP, Imru' al-Qays, nos 52:20, and 65:2).<sup>10</sup>

**The continuing importance of eschatological fear in the Medinan surahs.** Both Izutsu and Ohlander posit that the "intense eschatological coloring" that the concept of *taqwā* possesses in the early Qur'anic surahs gradually faded away until the term became in effect equivalent with a general notion of piety (GMK 239; Ohlander 2005). This is questionable (cf. Lange 2016a, 55–56). It may be granted that later Qur'anic texts, especially Medinan surahs, often deploy *itraqā/taqwā* without dwelling on the eschatological terrors awaiting the sinners. Instead, injunctions to fear God occur in connection with general exhortations to serve God or legal prescriptions (e.g., Q 2:21.179.183). Nonetheless, it is doubtful whether the fact that the notion of *taqwā* is "broadened to include legal, moral, cultic, spiritual and even rather quotidian concerns" (Ohlander 2005, 150) must indicate a lessening of the eschatological anxiety originally bound up with the concept. Moreover, the fire of hell and the divine judgement do explicitly figure as objects of *taqwā* in some Medinan verses (Q 2:24.48.123.281, 3:131). The fact that *itraqā* often appears without an object in Medinan passages (e.g., Q 2:21.179.183.187) could well be abbreviatory: especially if we assume earlier Qur'anic proclamations to have continued

<sup>10</sup> But see the verse endings of Q 2:40.41 and 16:51.52, indicating that there is some semantic overlap between *rahība* and *itraqā*.



to circulate within the Medinan community (*HCI* 150–153), formulaic exhortations to be God-fearing would have been perfectly sufficient to conjure up the unsettling eschatological imagery of the early surahs.

It would be a mistake, therefore, to assume that the Medinan surahs' interest in concrete behavioural prescriptions must be symptomatic of a slackening of eschatological tension. Indeed, the very fact that the verb *ittaqā* continues to be so prevalent in Medinan surahs indicates that the opposite is true: in the later Meccan and Medinan surahs, the word appears to have come to serve as a shorthand reminder of the eschatological concerns that ultimately sustained the moral and religious praxis of the Qur'anic community. That eschatological concerns continued to animate the Qur'anic proclamations is moreover supported by Q 47:18, a Medinan verse maintaining that the “portents” (*ashrāt*) of the “hour” of resurrection (→ *al-sā'ah*) have come to pass. This statement reveals the same imminent eschatological expectation that can be discerned in the early Meccan verse Q 54:1 (*iqtarabati l-sā'atu*), thereby showing a basic eschatological continuity across the Qur'an's entire period of gestation (see in more detail under → *sā'ah*).

***ittaka'a* intr. | to recline**

→ *jannah*

***tawakkala* intr. 'alā | to rely upon s.o., to entrust o.s. to s.o.**

→ *āmana*, → *ṣabara*

***walad* | offspring**

→ *ashraka*, → *al-naṣārā*

***tawallā* intr. ('an) | to turn away (from s.o.), to turn one's back (to s.o.)**

→ *tāba*, → *dhakkara*, → *ashraka*

***tawallā* tr. | to take s.o. as an ally or close associate**

→ *shayṭān*, → *ghaḍība*

***waliyy* | close ally, friend, associate; next of kin; patron; client, adherent, protégé**

***mawlā* | patron; client, protégé; distant relative**

***walāyah* | close association, friendship; patronage**

Further vocabulary discussed: *al-anṣār* pl. | the helpers    *al-ṭāghūt* | false gods

**The senses of *waliyy*.** Given the general association of the root *w-l-y* with proximity and adjacency, the basic meaning of a *waliyy* would seem to be a close friend, ally, or associate

(CDKA 296).<sup>1</sup> As Ambros notes, the relationship obtaining between two persons of which one is said to be a *waliyy* of the other may be symmetrical. This is clearly the case at Q 41:34, which talks about turning a former enemy into a *waliyy ḥamīm*, best translated “a warm friend/ally.” Q 17:33 employs *waliyy* to mean the next of kin who is entitled to exact blood vengeance for somebody who has been unjustly killed. It is almost certainly also in the sense of a close relationship between equal parties—i.e., friendship—that Q 8:72 speaks of *walāyah* between the emigrants and those who have aided them (called *al-anṣār*, “the helpers,” in Q 9:100.117).

But in many Qur’anic cases in which A is said to be the *waliyy* of B, A is “superior to, i.e., more powerful than B, so that a translation ‘patron’ may appear to be called for” (CDKA 296). Following Ambros, an obvious case in point is statements describing God as a *waliyy*, such as Q 2:257, which contrasts God as the patron of the believers (*allāhu waliyyu lladhīna āmanū*) with the false gods (→ *al-ṭāghūt*) who are the patrons of the repudiators (*wa-lladhīna kafarū awliyā’uhumu l-ṭāghūtu*). Similarly, Q 18:44 presents God as the only remaining source of *walāyah*, “patronage.” At Q 19:45, by contrast, Abraham expresses his fear that his father will become a *waliyy* of the devil; Ambros is surely right that the correct translation here is “client” or “adherent,” which is to say that the relationship is asymmetrical in the opposite sense of Q 2:257: the *waliyy* is not more but rather less powerful than his counterpart. Hence, the question whether the relationship is symmetrical or asymmetrical, and if the latter in what way, will need to be determined based on contextual observations.

**Mawlā.** The usage of *mawlā* largely corresponds to that of *waliyy*. Thus, God is called the believers’ *mawlā*—i.e., “patron”—in Q 2:286, 3:150, and elsewhere. Q 44:41 warns of a day “when no *mawlā* will be of any avail to a *mawlā*”; the relationship between the two *mawlās* in this verse could either be symmetrical (“when no ally will be of any avail to another”) or, perhaps more likely, asymmetrical (“when no patron will be of any avail to a client”; thus CDKA 297). Three verses have the plural *mawālī*. Q 33:4–5 declares that adopted sons are not “your<sup>P</sup> real sons” and ought to be called “after their fathers”; if the latter are unknown then they are to count as “your brethren in religion and your<sup>P</sup> *mawālī*.” Since reference is to dependants, “clients” is contextually feasible here, though an asymmetrical rendering—“friends, associates”—would be more congruent with the allusion to brotherhood in religion. More specific are Q 4:33 and 19:5, where the plural *mawālī* seems to refer to relatives that might under certain circumstances be entitled to inherit from a deceased person but who are distinct from his children. “Distant kinsfolk” or perhaps “relatives who are otherwise unspecified” (by virtue of not falling under a more precise label, such as “parent,” “child,” etc.) would seem to be an adequate English equivalent in these two places. Presumably, it is the aspect of kinship—i.e., of some kind of genealogical proximity—rather than that of distance that accounts for the fact that a derivative of *w-l-y* is being used.

**Rabbinic parallels for the idea that God is the only true patron.** As shown by some of the foregoing quotations, the Qur’anic proclamations frequently insist that God is the only true patron of humans and that other patrons will be of no avail, in particular on the day of judgement (e.g., Q 32:4, 34:41, 44:41, 45:10.15). Given that the terms *waliyy* and

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., *waliya*, “to be near,” at Q 9:123. The meaning of the second- and fifth-form verbs *wallā* and *tawallā* revolves around turning, either towards something or away from something. See in more detail CDKA 295–296.

*mawla* are also applied to relations between humans, such statements express the exclusive allegiance that humans owe to God in terms of the social relation of clientship. This motif is foreshadowed in Palestinian rabbinic literature, undoubtedly reflecting the important role that ties of patronage and clientship played in late antique society. For example, the Jerusalem Talmud reports one Rabbi Yudan to have said that “[a being of] flesh and blood has a patron (*paṭron*)” who will look after his client if the latter is arrested or brought before a court; yet when someone is about to be thrown into a fire, like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (cf. Dan 3:13–30), or into a lions’ den, like Daniel (cf. Dan. 6:11–29), the only one capable of extending effective protection is God (*y. Bər.* 9:1, 13a = ed. and trans. Guggenheimer, 611–614). In other words, when push comes to shove, the only patron upon whom one may rely is God, in contrast to all other ostensible sources of security and protection. Similarly, *Genesis Rabbah* cites an interpretation of Gen 17:8 (“And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land . . .”) attributed to the same Rabbi Judan, according to which God promised Abraham that if his children were to accept God’s divinity, God would be “their God and patron (*paṭron*); if not, I will not be their God and patron” (*Gen. Rab.* 46:9). Slightly earlier in the same chapter, at *Gen. Rab.* 46:3, Abraham worries that people might not continue to flock to him if he undergoes circumcision, upon which God reminds him that it is sufficient for Abraham that he, God, is his patron (*paṭron*) and, indeed, that the same applies to the entire world. Several further instances in which God is described as a “patron” are found in liturgical poetry in Jewish Palestinian Aramaic: a poem that dramatises the dispute from Dan 3 between King Nebuchadnezzar, on the one hand, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, on the other, repeats the refrain that “we have a patron” (*it lan paṭron/ paṭrin*) who does not “slumber or sleep” (Sokoloff and Yahalom 1999, 120–124 = no. 13:4.12.36.44; see also no. 13:15.20.28.29); another poem, linked to the Ninth of Av and to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple, says that “our patron was angry with us” (Sokoloff and Yahalom 1999, 160 = no. 22:6); and in yet another composition the statement “There is no patron,” uttered by the Biblical figure of Haman, functions as a general expression of unbelief in God (Sokoloff and Yahalom 1999, 206, no. 33:22). Clearly, in the Palestinian Jewish tradition references to God as the supreme “patron” (cf. Latin *patronus* and Greek *patrōn*) of the Israelites and indeed of all humans were fairly current at one stage (see also Sokoloff and Yahalom 1999, 43).

It is true that Qur’anic affirmations that God is the only true *waliyy* or *mawla* tend to have an implicitly or explicitly eschatological slant that is not salient in the rabbinic parallels just cited. In both cases, however, there is the idea, first, that humans are faced with a plethora of potential patrons to whom they might appeal for protection (including both false deities and more powerful mortals) and, secondly, that it would be a fatal mistake to place one’s ultimate trust in anyone but God. Consequently, when the Qur’an frames its demand for exclusive human allegiance to God in terms of the social institution of patronage, it is quite possibly deploying an established motif of religious discourse in the Biblical tradition rather than merely theologising a certain aspect of Arabian tribal society (although it is almost certainly doing the latter, too).

It may be provisionally suggested that the trope of God as the supreme patron is more prominent in the rabbinic tradition than in the Christian one, even though Christian saints and holy men were certainly cast as patrons (e.g., Brown 1971). Indeed, one wonders whether Jewish references to the deity as the patron of the people of Israel do not have a polemical subtext: while Christians seek help from a multitude of saintly patrons, our

patron is God himself.<sup>2</sup> The hypothesis that casting God as a patron is a discernibly Jewish trope undoubtedly stands in need of further investigation.<sup>3</sup> Yet if it proves correct, then the Qur’anic motif of God as the only truly dependable patron of humans would constitute a noteworthy parallel to the Qur’an’s polemical notion of “associating” (verb: → *ashraka*) other beings with God, which likewise has a rabbinic background: both notions would exemplify a Qur’anic uptake of rabbinic motifs prior to the hijrah, thus confirming the claim propounded elsewhere that already the milieu of the Meccan surahs was marked by a certain Jewish presence (see under → *isrā’īl* and → *al-yahūd*).

2 For an occurrence of the word *paṭron* in Palestinian Jewish Aramaic poetry that is closer to the Christian notion of saintly patronage, i.e., patronage as a role played by eminent humans, see Sokoloff and Yahalom 1999, 338 = no. 68:21–22): “God gave us three patrons,” namely, Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.

3 One potential Syriac parallel that I have happened to come across is the statement that Jesus is “the protector (*msatṛrānā*) and guardian (*mmaṭṛrānā*) of his saints” (Bedjan 1890–1897, 6:135, l. 13, cited in *SL* 797). However, this passage is less explicit than the Jewish material just surveyed in comparing the protection offered by God to the social institution of clientship.

# y

**yatīm** | orphan

→ *zakāh*

**yahyā** | John

See briefly under → *isrāʿīl*.

**yad** | hand

**ʿan yad** | without resistance

On Qurʿanic statements about God’s hand or hands, see → *allāh*; on *ʿan yad* in Q 9:29, see briefly under → *jāhada*.

**y-s** (surah-initial letter sequence)

→ ʿ-*l-r*

**yamīn**: *mā malakat aymānuhum* | what their right hands possess

→ *darajah*

**al-yahūd**, **alladhīna hādū**, **hūd** pl. (sg. *yahūdī*) | the Jews

Further vocabulary discussed: *al-naṣārā* pl. | the Christians *banū isrāʿīl* pl. | the Israelites *al-nār* | the fire (of hell) *āmana* intr. *bi-* | to believe in s.th. *al-yawm al-ākhir* | the final day *al-rāsikhūn fī l-ʿilm* pl. | those firmly grounded in knowledge *hāda* intr. | to espouse Judaism *alladhīna āmanū*, *al-muʿminūn* pl. | the believers *alladhīna ashrakū*, *al-mushrikūn* pl. | the associators *alladhīna kafarū*, *al-kāfirūn*, *al-kuffār* pl. | the repudiators *ahl al-kitāb* | the scripture-owners, the (previous) recipients of scripture *al-tawrah* | the Torah *ḥarrafa al-kalīma ʿan mawāḍiʿihi* | to shift words from their places *ashraka* tr. (*bi-*) | to associate s.o. (namely, a partner deity) with s.o. (namely, God), to venerate s.o. as a partner deity *mīthāq* | covenant, treaty *khalāq* | share *rabbāniyyūn* pl. | rabbis *aḥbār* pl. | rabbinic scholars *ummī* | scriptureless, not hitherto endowed with a scriptural revelation *minhāj* | custom *kaf-fārah* | expiation, atonement *ṣadaqah* | gift or act of charity *samiʿnā wa-ʿaṣaynā* | we hear and disobey *maghlūl* | fettered *mathal* | similitude *al-injīl* | the Gospel or

the Christian Bible *zabūr* | writ, writing, written record *nazzala* tr. | to send s.th. down, to bring s.th. down

**Overview of the Qur’anic portrayal of the Jews.** The Qur’anic presentation of the Jews (for an overview of which see Rubin 2003a) is complex and terminologically multifaceted. As observed by previous scholars (e.g., BEK 15, KU 144 and 153), Meccan surahs contain no explicit references either to Jews or Christians (→ *al-naṣārā*) and confine themselves to mentioning the “Israelites” (→ *banū isrā’īl*) and to alluding to those to whom God has “given the scripture before” (Q 28:52) or the like (→ *ahl al-kitāb*). In the Medinan corpus, however, Jews and Christians do feature. References to the Jews in particular are often polemical, as illustrated by the contrast between Jewish hostility and Christian affability towards the believers in Q 5:82 or the complaint about sundry objectionable Jewish statements in 4:46. Like the Christians, the Jews are depicted as insisting on their exclusive entitlement to salvation and divine guidance (Q 2:111.135; see also 2:94 and 62:6) and on being the “sons” or “children” of God (*abnā’ allāh*) and “the ones beloved by him” (*aḥibbā’uhū*; Q 5:18, on which see under → *allāh*). At the same time, the Jews are said to dismiss the Christians as having no ground to stand on and to be dismissed by them in their turn (Q 2:113). That the Qur’an deems the Jews to be guilty of unfounded eschatological optimism may be inferred from Q 2:80 and 3:24, according to which the Israelites or “those who were given a portion of the scripture” say that “the fire [of hell] (*al-nār*) will only touch us for a number of days.”<sup>1</sup> A salient characteristic of the Jews, as presented in the Medinan Qur’an, is their being subject to a complex edifice of dietary prohibitions (Q 6:146; see Gräf 1959, 43–44)—prohibitions that are cast as a divine punishment for prior misdeeds (Q 4:160–161, 6:146, 16:118; Zellentin 2013, 144–154).<sup>2</sup> But despite the Qur’an’s generally negative portrayal of the Jews, the Medinan verses Q 2:62 and 5:69 presuppose the existence of Jewish believers “in God and the final day” (*man āmana bi-llāhi wa-l-yawmi l-ākhirī*), while Q 4:162 mentions Jews who are “firmly grounded in knowledge” (*al-rāsikhūna fī l-‘ilmi minhum*) and who believe in the revelations imparted to Muhammad.<sup>3</sup>

**The Qur’anic terminology for “Jews.”** The Qur’an’s nomenclature for Jews includes the plural *al-yahūd* (Q 2:113.120, 5:18.51.64.82, 9:30), whose corresponding singular is *yahūdī* (Q 3:67), and the abbreviated form *hūd* (Q 2:111.135.140), which only appears under very specific grammatical circumstances (namely, as the predicate of *kāna*, in the indeterminate accusative). More frequent than either *al-yahūd* or *hūd* is the circumlocution *alladhīna hādū*, “those who have espoused Judaism” (Q 2:62, 4:46.160, 5:41.44.69, 6:146, 16:118, 22:17, 62:6). Rather than being a potential reference specifically to converts, *alladhīna hādū* simply exemplifies the Qur’anic proclivity for designating various religious communities by means of relative clauses containing a plural verb, such as *alladhīna āmanū* for *al-mu’minūn* (“the

1 According to two dicta cited in *m. ‘Ēd.* 2:10, the judgement of the wicked in hell will only last twelve months or as long as the time between Passover and Pentecost (Mazuz 2014, 70–71). See also *m. Sanh.* 10:1, according to which “all of Israel have a share in the world to come,” and under → *khalāq*.

2 See also Q 3:93, according to which “Israel” (→ *isrā’īl*, namely, the patriarch Jacob) imposed some food taboos on himself “before the Torah was sent down.” Note that Q 6:146 and 16:118 are later Medinan additions to Surahs 6 and 16; see Sinai 2019c.

3 The phrase “those firmly grounded in knowledge” also occurs in Q 3:7, on which see under → *bayyana*.



believers”), *alladhīna ashrakū* for *al-mushrikūn* (“the associators”), or *alladhīna kafarū* for *al-kāfirūn* (“the repudiators”). To all intents and purposes, *alladhīna hādū* can therefore be treated as equivalent with *al-yahūd*. The verb *hāda* is presumably denominative and means “to espouse Judaism,” although Q 7:156 employs it together with the preposition *ilā*, “to,” in the contextual meaning of turning or returning to God. This is likely a play on words, seeing that Q 7:156 reports a first-person statement uttered by Israelite contemporaries of Moses (CDKA 280–281; see also KK 175–176). *Al-yahūd* and its circumlocution *alladhīna hādū* lack the historical depth of the term “Israelites” (*banū isrā’īl*), in so far as they invariably designate present-day Jews (KU 91, 153), whereas references to the Israelites can have both a historical and, less frequently, a contemporary application (see under → *isrā’īl*).

*Yahūd* and its singular *yahūdī* were established Arabic words prior to the Qur’an. They occur in pre-Islamic poetry (Margoliouth 1924, 73; KU 153–154; Lichtenstadter 1940): ‘Urwah ibn al-Ward alludes to “the religion of the Jews,” *dīm al-yahūd* (Nöldeke 1863, no. 13:1); Imru’ al-Qays evokes the stability, apparently proverbial, of a “Jewish building,” *bunyān al-yahūdī* (DSAAP, Imru’ al-Qays, no. 40:7); and ‘Abīd ibn al-Abraṣ mentions Jewish sailors (Lyll 1913, ‘Abīd, no. 8:6).<sup>4</sup> *Yhd* also appears in Safaitic inscriptions (Al-Jallad 2015a, 354; Al-Jallad 2021, 40\* and 42\*–44\*). Etymologically, *yahūdī* is descended from Hebrew *yəhūdī*, perhaps via Aramaic; most likely, it is from *yahūdī* that *yahūd* was then secondarily derived by dropping the *nisbah* ending (KU 154). Both Hebrew *yəhūdī* and its Greek equivalent *ioudaios* have an ethnic-geographic significance throughout much of ancient literature, up until at least the second century BCE, and in such cases should be translated as “Judaean” rather than as “Jew” or “Jewish” (Cohen 1999, 69–106; Mason 2007). Yet by the time we reach pre-Islamic poetry, *yahūd* and *yahūdī* surely mean “Jews” and “Jew” or “Jewish.” This is no doubt reflective of non-Jewish, specifically Christian, usage: building on New Testamental references to *hoi ioudaioi*, “the Jews,” and similar language (e.g., John 2:6.13.18.20 or 5:1.10.15.16.18), late antique Christians routinely speak of the “Jews,” often in a harshly polemical vein, as illustrated by miscellaneous Christian homilies and writings directed “against the Jews,” e.g., by Jacob of Sarug (Albert 1976; Popa 2019). By contrast, it is unlikely that pre-Qur’anic Jews would have called themselves “Jews,” even factoring in our far-reaching lack of reliable knowledge about Arabian Judaism (see below). In rabbinic literature, the word *yahudi* does not generally function as a self-designation, a role that is normally reserved for the collective “Israel” (e.g., *m. Sanh.* 10:1). Where Talmudic literature does refer to “the Jews” (*yhuda’e*), the statements in question are often attributed or addressed to gentiles (see *b. Giṭ.* 56a; *b. Bat.* 58a; *b. ‘Abod. Zar.* 26a and 70a; *y. ‘Abod. Zar.* 5:4, 44d, with the variant *yuda’e* = ed. and trans. Guggenheimer, 448–449; for a selection of prooftexts, see DJBA 528 and DJPA 236–237).

It may therefore be conjectured that just as the Qur’an calls the Christians by what may well be an outsider’s appellation (namely, → *naṣārā*, literally “Nazoraeans”), a key term by which the Qur’an refers to Jews is likewise an external label—more specifically, a label resonant with Christian polemics, whose impact on the Qur’anic portrayal of the Jews is discernible in other respects, too (Reynolds 2010b and 2012). The poetic prooftexts catalogued above are certainly formulated from the perspective of gentile outsiders. There are, admittedly, potential flies in the ointment: a tomb inscription in Nabataean Aramaic from 42–43 CE describes the deceased as *yhwdy’*, although this may mean “the Judaean”

4 See also Kowalski 1914, no. 7:5.

rather than “the Jew” (Hoyland 2011, 93–94); and three Ḥimyarite inscriptions (including *CIH*, no. 543) call God the “Lord of the Jews” (*rb-yhd*, *rb-hd*, or *rb-hwd*; Robin 2000, 57; Robin 2003, 115–117; Robin 2004, 884–885; Gajda 2009, 228–230, 232, and 247), while another inscription (Ḥaṣī 1) reserves a cemetery for the exclusive burial of “Jews” (*’yhdn*; see Robin 2003, 125–126; Robin 2004, 885–886; Gajda 2009, 236, 243, and 247). But it is often uncertain whether the authors of monotheistic Ḥimyarite inscriptions, even when expressing evident sympathy and respect for Judaism, saw or wished to style themselves as fully fledged Jews (whatever that might have meant in fifth- and early sixth-century Yemen), and this may well apply to the authors of the “Lord of the Jews” inscriptions.<sup>5</sup> As for the cemetery inscription Ḥaṣī 1, it was clearly intended to address both Jews and non-Jews, which would have made it appropriate to have recourse to “the Jews” by way of an external label. In any case, the Qur’an, by speaking not only of the “Jews” but also of the “Israelites” or *banū isrā’īl*, utilises the Arabic equivalent of the rabbinic self-designation “Israel” as well. It is striking that Ḥimyarite inscriptions display the same terminological duality, evoking not only the “Lord of the Jews” (see above), but also the “people” (*s<sup>2</sup>b*) of Israel (*ys<sup>3</sup>r<sup>1</sup>l*; → *banū isrā’īl*).

**Jews, Israelites, and “scripture-owners.”** The overlap between Qur’anic statements about the “Jews,” the “Israelites,” and the “scripture-owners” (→ *ahl al-kitāb*) makes it difficult to treat the three categories in separation from one another. For instance, all three groups are, unsurprisingly, associated with receipt of the Torah (→ *al-tawrah*; e.g., Q 3:93, 5:43–44, and 5:65–66.68); both the Israelites and the Jews are linked with prophets (Q 2:246 and 5:44), whose unjust killing is in turn blamed not only on the Israelites (Q 2:61.87.91, 5:70) but also on the scripture-owners (Q 3:112 and 4:155);<sup>6</sup> and the accusation of “turning words from their places” (*yuḥarrifūna l-kalima ‘an mawāḍi’ihī*), a resonance of Christian allegations of Jewish misinterpretation of the Old Testament (Reynolds 2010b, 196–200), is levelled against the Jews in Q 4:46 and 5:41 and against the Israelites in 5:13. Such intersections are best accounted for by the standard view that the Qur’anic Jews are latter-day descendants of the Qur’anic Israelites, while the “scripture-owners” encompass both Jews and Christians. It is certainly noticeable that “the Jews” frequently figure together with, or in opposition to, the *naṣārā*, “Christians” (Q 2:62.111.113.120.135.140, 3:67, 5:18.51.69.82, 9:30, and 22:17),<sup>7</sup> and that the presentation of both groups displays a tendency towards constructing parallelistic patterns (*HCI* 201). In Q 9:30 both Jews and Christians are indicted for mistaking a human being for being “the son of God,” namely, Jesus in the case of the Christians and Ezra (*’uzayr*) in the case of the Jews.<sup>8</sup>

5 A further problem in interpreting the divine epithets *rb-yhd*, *rb-hd*, or *rb-hwd* is that, as Robin notes, *rb* = “lord” is not actually Sabaic and may be an Arabic borrowing (Robin 2003, 115, 116–117).

6 The identity of the collective addressed or referred to in Q 2:61.87.91, 3:112, and 4:155 must be contextually inferred. Q 2:61.87.91 come after addresses to the Israelites in vv. 40 and 47 and a renewed reference to them in v. 83, while Q 3:112 continues on from the reference to the scripturalists in v. 110. As for Q 4:155, it follows a reference to the scripture-owners in v. 153. The accusation of killing the prophets also occurs in Q 3:21.181.183, but there the identity of the addressees is even more elusive, although the allusion to a covenant (*‘h-d*) imposed by God in 3:183 does point to the Israelites (cf. Q 2:40).

7 Exceptions are Q 4:46, 5:41.44.64, 6:146, 16:118, 62:6. However, Q 5:41.44 are contextually complemented by 5:47, commenting on the “owners of the Gospel,” *ahl al-injīl*. Q 5:64 opens, “And the Jews say” (*wa-qālātī l-yahūd*), a phrase whose other occurrences in the Qur’an (Q 2:113, 5:18, 9:30) are accompanied by statements ascribed to the Christians.

8 Since Ezra is not described as God’s son in rabbinic sources, there is considerable debate about the underlying logic of this Qur’anic accusation as well as on the question whether *’uzayr* really is the Biblical Ezra. See, for instance, *KU* 127–128; *BEQ* 413; Newby 1988, 59–61; *QP* 203–216.

**A tentative profile of the Jews of the Ḥijāz.** The Qur'an's engagement with Judaism, whether under the label of the "Jews" or that of the "Israelites," raises the issue of the historical reality behind the Qur'anic text. According to the Islamic tradition, it was only after the hijrah, in Yathrib/Medina, that the early Islamic community came into close contact with Jewish tribes. This tallies with the observation that explicit mentions of "the Jews" are limited to Medinan texts and that some Medinan surahs, such as Q 2:40–123 or 62:5–8, exhibit a much higher degree of polemical interest in the Jews or the Israelites than any part of the Meccan Qur'an. However, Meccan statements affirming that the Israelites, or some among them, do or would acknowledge the truth of the Qur'anic revelations (Q 17:101, 26:197, 46:10) indicate that Jews were not absent from the Meccan milieu (Zellentin, forthcoming; see also under → *isrā'īl*). In addition, the hypothesis that Jewish interlocutors had a certain presence in the Meccan environment accords well with some facets of the Meccan surahs' theology that are more easily situated against a Jewish background than a Christian one. The most important one of these is the polemical notion of an illicit "association" (verb: → *ashraka*) of other beings with God, a concept that is ultimately traceable to rabbinic sources. A rabbinic provenance may also hold for the Qur'anic tendency, likewise seen already in the Meccan period, to envisage the relationship between God and humans as one of patronage, even if this is for the time being less certain (see under → *waliyy*).

Irrespective of whether one confines a significant Jewish presence to the Qur'an's Medinan context or extends it to the Meccan one as well, the scarcity of archaeological remains poses a problem. It is true that a small number of inscriptions (some of which are in Hebrew script) suggest a Jewish presence in parts of the Ḥijāz, mostly Hegra and Dedan, as early as the first century CE. Yet no Jewish or hypothetically Jewish inscriptions have been unearthed in Mecca or Medina or in Khaybar, another important site of Jewish settlement according to the Islamic tradition (Hoyland 2011). This could be seen as grounds to doubt the traditional supposition that the Qur'an's anti-Jewish polemics are to be historically situated against the backdrop of the Qur'anic community's escalating conflict with the Jews of Medina (Reynolds 2010b, 201–202). On the other hand, the lack of overtly Jewish inscriptions in Medina or Khaybar is also explicable by positing that the Jews of the Ḥijāz were "a community mostly made up of Arab converts" who were "substantially integrated within Arabian society and barely in touch with non-Arabian Jewish communities, and possessing a relatively low level of Jewish education" (Hoyland 2011, 111). The Jews of the Ḥijāz would accordingly have been a community "who knew the principal Biblical tales and rabbinic legends and essentials of Jewish ritual (as featured in the Qur'ān) but were minimally inducted in high Jewish culture and in limited contact with the wider Jewish world" (Hoyland 2011, 114). By contrast, some scholars have tended, partly on the basis of data from post-Qur'anic Islamic sources, to consider the Qur'anic Jews to have been fully conversant with the mature rabbinic tradition as documented and codified in the Mishnah and the two Talmuds (e.g., Mazuz 2014, but see already BEK 46–62). Yet it is hardly self-evident that late antique Arabian Jews must have been wholly or exclusively rabbinic (Hughes 2020).

The only solution to the problem is to attempt to glimpse some of the beliefs and practices of the Jews who were present in the historical context of the Medinan surahs by relying primarily on inner-Qur'anic evidence. Pursuant to this approach, whose basic

validity was recognised as early as Hirschfeld (*BEK* 50–51),<sup>9</sup> a number of Medinan passages turn out to display remarkably specific resonances of rabbinic traditions, though these arguably do not reach a degree that would render Hoyland’s scenario untenable. Perhaps most obviously, the Qur’an contains many narratives that bear significant affinity with midrashic lore. Select examples, to which many others could be added, are the account of God’s dispute with the angels prior to the creation of Adam in Q 2:30–33 (*HCI* 148–150); the story of Abraham’s destruction of the idols of his father in Q 21:58–67 and 37:88–96 (*WMJA* 121–123; *BEQ*, 135–136; see also Sinai, forthcoming b); the Qur’anic account of Pharaoh’s conversion when faced with his imminent death by drowning in Q 10:90–92 (Sinai 2019a); and the claim that the Israelites were cowed into accepting God’s covenant (*mīthāq*; see under → *wāthāqa*) because God threateningly raised Mount Sinai above their heads (Q 2:63.93, 4:154, 7:171; see *WMJA* 161; *BEQ* 303–304; Obermann 1941, 34–37; Hartwig 2008; Graves 2015). Q 10:90–92, among other passages, shows that such midrashically tinged material is not limited to Medinan surahs,<sup>10</sup> which confirms that some familiarity with midrashic traditions must be posited already for the Meccan period.

Beyond such narrative parallels, the Medinan Qur’an is distinguished by an additional degree of acquaintance with specific aspects of rabbinic language and ritual practice. This acquaintance is best explained by positing that the Ḥijāzī Jews with whom the Qur’anic community interacted (*HCI* 196–197) did indeed have a basic degree of familiarity with rabbinic traditions. Medinan reflections of rabbinic language include the following cases:

- Q 5:32 has been identified as paraphrasing a passage from the Mishnah (*m. Sanh.* 4:5; see *WMJA* 102–103; *BEQ* 459; Pregill 2021).
- The Medinan affirmation that some people have “no share in the hereafter” (*lā khalāqa lahum fī l-ākhirah*; Q 2:102.200 and 3:77) echoes a frequent rabbinic turn of phrase (→ *khalāq*).
- The Qur’an calls the leaders of the Jews *rabbāniyyūn* and *aḥbār* (Q 3:79, 5:44.63, 9:31.34), expressions that are unmistakably derived from rabbinic titles for religious scholars (*WMJA* 48–49, 51–52; *BEK* 51; *KU* 63–64; *JPND* 197–198 and 200–201; *FVQ* 49–50 and 137–138; Newby 1988, 57–58; Zellentin 2016, 267–271): the former from the reverential address “our teacher” (*rabbān*; *DTTM* 1444), the latter from the title “fellow, colleague” (*ḥabēr*; *DTTM* 421–422).<sup>11</sup>
- Other items in the lexicon of the Medinan Qur’an that have clear rabbinic antecedents and are most likely drawn from the language of the Medinan Jews comprise → *ummī*, “scriptureless”; *minhāj*, “custom” (Q 5:48), stemming from Hebrew *minhag* or Aramaic *minhaga* (*BEK* 89; *JPND* 225; *FVQ* 273; see also under → *aslama*); *kaffārah*, “expiation,”

9 Hirschfeld had far less reason than contemporary historians to be suspicious of the reliability of extra-Qur’anic traditions, and he proceeds accordingly.

10 But note that the version of God’s raising of Mount Sinai in Q 7:171 may form part of the surah’s Medinan stratum, seeing that its parallels Q 2:63.93 and 4:154 are all Medinan. See also Hartwig 2008, 192–193.

11 Unlike Geiger and Horowitz, Newby interprets *rabbāniyyūn* to mean “rabbinites,” “a term of self-description by the Geonim and the usual Karaite word used to refer to the majority group of Jews, the followers of rabbinic precepts” (Newby 1988, 57). This is however difficult to square with Q 5:44.63, where the *rabbāniyyūn* must be Jewish leaders rather than an entire strand of Judaism. Jeffery, meanwhile, argues that the immediate origin of *rabbāniyyūn* is Syriac rather than rabbinic.

“atonement” (Q 5:45.89.95), an Arabisation of rabbinic Hebrew *kapparah* (→ *kaffara*); and → *ṣadaqah*, “gift of charity, act of charity,” going back to Hebrew *ṣādāqâ*.

Parenthetically, the fact that the Medinan Qur’an would seem to preserve traces of a specifically rabbinic lexicon is compatible with the hypothesis that the Jews of Medina, or of the Ḥijāz more generally, spoke a language that was not too far removed from Qur’anic Arabic yet included terms and phrases that were derived from Hebrew or Jewish Aramaic. This would be in line with Hoyland’s conjecture of an advanced stage of cultural integration.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from Qur’anic vestiges of rabbinic language, there are also some aspects of Medinan law that are closely related to rabbinic ritual practice:

- The criterion for determining the time of daybreak on fast-days that is advanced in Q 2:187—namely, the ability to distinguish visually between black and white—resembles advice given in the Mishnah (*m. Bər.* 1:2; *WMJA* 87; *BEK* 77; *BEQ* 459).
- The licence to perform one’s ablutions before prayer with soil, should water be unavailable (Q 5:6; see also under → *ṭahara*), matches a practice recommended in the Babylonian Talmud, at *b. Bər.* 15a (*GQ* 1:199; see also *WMJA* 86).
- The dispensation to shorten prayers while travelling if there is reason to fear an attack by unbelievers (Q 4:101) corresponds to the Mishnaic permission that someone who “travels in a place of danger” may recite a shortened prayer (*m. Bər.* 4:4; see also *b. Bər.* 29b; *WMJA* 85–86; Rivlin 1934, 110–111).

Such similarities are best accounted for by supposing that in the historical milieu addressed by the Medinan surahs there was an observance of certain basic elements of rabbinic law. The most likely carriers of such practices are the Medinan Jews, given that the parallels just listed are confined to the Medinan Qur’an.

Three additional observations round out the profile of the Ḥijāzī Jews that may be inferred from the Qur’an. First, at least one Medinan passages directed against the Jews would seem to be predicated on a cross-lingual pun that requires at least some knowledge of Hebrew among contemporary Jews: the utterance *sami’nā wa-‘aṣaynā* (“We hear and disobey”), ascribed to the Israelites or Jews in Q 2:93 and 4:46, is phonetically close to, and likely a polemical inversion of, the Israelites’ statement *wə-šāma’nū wə-‘āšimū* (“We will hear and do [it]”) in Deut 5:27, expressing their willingness to carry out God’s commandments (→ *sami’a*). Secondly, a recent study has made a compelling case that Q 5:64’s allegation that the Jews say, “God’s hand is fettered (*maghlūlah*),” reflects a liturgical poem, or *piyyuṭ*, on the Roman destruction of the Second Temple by the Palestinian poet El’azar berabbi Qallir (or Qillir), apparently active in the first half of the seventh century CE (Lowin 2019; on the poet, see Münz-Manor 2019). Thirdly, the similitude (*mathal*) that compares “those who have been made to carry the *tawrāh* and then failed to carry it” to “a donkey carrying tomes” in Q 62:5 may draw on an image already found in rabbinic literature (see under → *tawrāh*).

12 On the other hand, two reports transmitted by al-Wāqidi about Muhammad’s Medinan decade depict the Jews of Khaybar and of Medina as speaking a non-Arabic language called *al-yahūdīyyah*, which one might understand to mean a dialect of Aramaic (Gil 1984, 205–206, citing Jones 1966, 1:392; see also Jones 1966, 2:461), though others have considered this to refer to a dialect of Arabic (see the overview in Robin 2015b, 73–74). A salubrious warning against appealing to this narrative motif as linguistic evidence is found in Schöller 1998, 212–214.

There is, consequently, considerable evidence to support the contention that the Jews of the Ḥijāz were familiar with a certain range of rabbinic traditions extending beyond midrashic stories; that they are likely to have had some knowledge of Hebrew, perhaps mediated through scriptural readings in the context of communal services; and that they were not beyond the reach of contemporary liturgical developments in Palestine. Nonetheless, the Qur’anic data does not permit the more confident conclusion that “the Medinan Jews were Talmudic-Rabbinic Jews in almost every respect” (Mazuz 2014, 99). It certainly gives pause that the Medinan surahs reflect some awareness of Biblical literature, in so far as they reference the Torah (→ *al-tawrāh*), the Gospel (→ *al-injīl*), and what seems to be the book of Psalms (see under → *zabūr*), yet name neither the Mishnah nor the Talmud.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it is impossible to rule out that some of the beliefs and practices of the Medinan Jews might have diverged from the rabbinic tradition as it presents itself to us in the Mishnah and the two Talmuds. For example, in Q 4:153 the “scripture-owners” are said to challenge the Qur’anic Messenger to “bring down upon them a scripture from heaven” (see also under → *nazzala*).<sup>14</sup> It would not be far-fetched to infer from this verse that some of the Medinan scripturalists were acquainted with traditions about the celestial ascension of certain exceptional humans that are found, for example, in the *hēkalot* literature.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, the exceptional presence of a close parallel to a particular Mishnaic statement in Q 5:32 clearly does not, without further argument, warrant the assumption that the Medinan Jews had the detailed command of the entire Mishnah, let alone of Talmudic literature, that one would expect, say, of scholars active at the same time in the Jewish academies of Mesopotamia.<sup>16</sup>

**yawm:**

***al-* ~ *al-ākhir* | the final day**

~ *al-dīn* | judgement day

~ *al-qiyāmah* | the day of resurrection

~ *a’idhin* | on that day

→ *ākhir*, → *dīn*<sup>1</sup>, → *qiyāmah*

13 As discussed elsewhere, it is possible that the plural → *mathānī* found in the Meccan verses Q 15:87 and 39:23 has its ultimate etymological origin in Hebrew *mishnah* or the latter’s Aramaic equivalent *matnīta* (WMJA 57–58; NB 26; FVQ 257–258). In its Qur’anic usage, the word certainly does not refer to the Mishnah; but the presence of the term in the Qur’anic text could be adduced as circumstantial evidence that Arabophone Jews in the Qur’anic milieu used a hypothetical singular *mathnāh* to render Hebrew *mishnah*.

14 A variant of the same request, this time explicitly mentioning the concept of ascension (*tarqā, ruqiyy*), occurs in Q 17:93, although the opponents there are not identified as scripturalists and may be conjectured to be the Messenger’s pagan opponents. See also QP 121.

15 For an attempt to discern in the Qur’an hints of what from a rabbinic vantage point are non-normative Jewish beliefs, see QP 203–216, exploring inter alia the possibility that Q 9:30 (“The Jews say, ‘uzayr is the son of God’) reflects Jewish angel veneration (see also QP 93).

16 However, see Pregill 2021, arguing that the Qur’anic author was acquainted with the Mishnaic context of *m. Sanh.* 4:5.





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- HALOT = Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. 1994–2000. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 5 vols (continuous pagination). Leiden: E. J. Brill.
- HCI = Nicolai Sinai. 2017. *The Qur'an: A Historical-Critical Introduction.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Jal. = Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī. 2008. *Al-Mufaṣṣal fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm al-mashhūr bi-Tafsīr al-Jalālayn.* Edited by Fakhr al-Dīn Qabāwah. Beirut: Maktabat Lubnān Nāshirūn.
- JAOS = *Journal of the American Oriental Society.*
- JQSA = *Journal of the International Qur'anic Studies Association.*
- JJS = *Journal of Jewish Studies.*
- JNES = *Journal of Near Eastern Studies.*
- JPND = Joseph [sic] Horowitz. 1925. "Jewish Proper Names and Derivatives in the Koran." *Hebrew Union College Annual* 2: 145–227.
- JQS = *Journal of Qur'anic Studies.*
- JRAS = *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.*
- JSAI = *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam.*
- JSS = *Journal of Semitic Studies.*
- KK = Rudi Paret. 1977. *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz.* 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- KU = Josef Horowitz. 1926. *Koranische Untersuchungen.* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.
- m. = Mishnah (followed by an abbreviation of the tractate title, largely as per *SBLH<sup>2</sup>* 131–132, followed by chapter and section). English translation: Herbert Danby, trans. 1933. *The Mishnah.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. Note: references follow the Hebrew text of the Bar Ilan Responsa database (<https://www.responso.co.il/default.aspx>).
- MQ = 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Khaṭīb. 2002 / 1422 AH. *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt.* 11 vols. Damascus: Dār Sa'd al-Dīn.
- MQQ = Ahmad Mukhtār 'Umar and 'Abd al-'Alī Sālim Makram. 1988. *Mu'jam al-qirā'āt al-qur'āniyyah.* 2nd ed. 8 vols. Kuwait: Dhāt al-Salāsil.
- MW = *The Muslim World* (formerly *The Moslem World*).
- NB = Theodor Nöldeke. 1910. *Neue Beiträge zur semitischen Sprachwissenschaft.* Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner.
- NIDOTTE = Willem A. VanGemeren, ed. 1997. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.* 5 vols. Carlisle: Paternoster Press.
- PP = Angelika Neuwirth. 2011. *Der Koran. Vol. 1: Frühmekkanische Suren: Poetische Prophetie.* Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen.
- Q = Qur'an (standard or 'Uthmānic recension according to the Ḥafṣ 'an 'Āṣim reading; quoted by surah and verse according to the Kufan verse division).
- QP = Patricia Crone. 2016. *The Qur'anic Pagans and Related Matters.* Edited by Hanna Siurua. Leiden: Brill.
- RAH = Julius Wellhausen. 1897. *Reste arabischen Heidentums.* 2nd ed. Berlin: Georg Reimer.
- SBLH<sup>2</sup> = *SBL Handbook of Style.* Second edition. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2014.
- SI = *Studia Islamica.*
- SL = Michael Sokoloff. 2009. *A Syriac Lexicon: A Translation from the Latin, Correction, Expansion, and Update of C. Brockelmann's Lexicon Syriacum.* Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns; Piscataway: Gorgias Press.
- SPMC = Angelika Neuwirth. 2014. *Scripture, Poetry and the Making of a Community: Reading the Qur'an as a Literary Text.* Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies.
- SQ = Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Maria M. Dakake, and Joseph E. B. Lumbard, eds. 2015. *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary.* New York: HarperOne.
- t. = Tosefta (followed by an abbreviation of the tractate title, largely as per *SBLH<sup>2</sup>* 131–132, followed by chapter and section). English translation: Jacob Neusner, trans. 1977–1986. *The Tosefta.* 6 vols. New York: Ktav Publishing House.
- Ṭab. = Abū Ja'far Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. 2001 / 1422 AH. *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī: Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān.* Edited by 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī. 26 vols. Cairo: Dār Hijr. Abridged English translation of the commentary on Surah 1 and parts of Surah 2: Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī. 1987. *The Commentary on the Qur'ān.* Vol. 1. Translated by John Cooper. Oxford: Oxford University Press and Hakim Investment Holdings.

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- TDOT = G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds. 1974–2018. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. 16 vols. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company. Original German version: G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds. 1970–2016. *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*. 10 vols. Stuttgart: Verlag W. Kohlhammer.
- TS = Payne Smith, Robert. 1879–1901. *Thesaurus Syriacus*. 2 vols (continuous pagination). Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- WMJA = Abraham Geiger. 1902. *Was hat Mohammed aus dem Judenthume aufgenommen?* 2nd ed. Leipzig: M. W. Kaufmann. English translation: Abraham Geiger. 1898. *Judaism and Islām: A Prize Essay*. Translated by F. M. Young. Madras: M.D.C.S.P.C.K. Press.
- WZKM = *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*.
- y. = Palestinian or Jerusalem Talmud (followed by an abbreviation of the tractate title, largely as per *SBLH<sup>2</sup>* 131–132; quoted by chapter and section as well as folio number). Edition and translation: Heinrich W. Guggenheimer, ed. and trans. 2000–2015. *The Jerusalem Talmud*. 17 vols. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Zam. = Maḥmūd ibn ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī. 1998 / 1418 AH. *Al-Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq ḡhawāmiḍ at-tanzīl wa-‘uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta’wīl*. Edited by ‘Ādil Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Mawjūd and ‘Alī Muḥammad Mu‘awwad. 6 vols. Riyadh: Maktabat al-‘Ubaykān.
- ZDMG = *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*.

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# ENGLISH INDEX OF QUR'ANIC TERMS

Line-opening verbs are distinguished by “(v.)” in parenthesis, thus marking the difference between, for instance, the noun “command” and the verb “to command.” In some cases of ambiguity, I also identify nouns and adjectives by “n.” and “adj.,” respectively. Line-opening expressions that are commonly used with the definite article (e.g., “the hereafter”) are followed by “the” in brackets. For more detailed grammatical information regarding the Arabic expressions, see the main dictionary. As explained in the section “How to Use This Book,” for some important Qur’anic terms I include common translations that I do not endorse, such as “unlettered” and “illiterate” for *ummī* (which in my view is more adequately translated as “scriptureless”) or “upright” and “of pure monotheistic faith” for *ḥanīf*. The point of this ecumenical policy is to enable readers to use the present dictionary alongside existing translations of the Qur’an.

- abandon (v.) | *hajara, aslama*  
 abandon o.s. to God (v.) | *aslama*  
 abiding (adj.): in an ~ manner | ‘*alā mukth*  
 able: to be ~ | *qadara*  
 abode: stable ~ or place | *qarār, mustaqarr* ~ of stability | *dār al-qarār*  
 abode: the final or last ~, the ~ of the hereafter | *al-dār al-ākhirah*  
 abomination | *rijs, fāḥishah*  
 Abraham | *ibrāhīm*  
 abrogate (v.) | *nasakha*  
 absent: to be ~ | *ghāba*  
 absolve (v.) | *kaffara ‘an*  
 abundance | *kawthar*  
 accomplish (v.), accomplish previously (v.) | *qaddama*  
 account (n.): a calling to ~ | *ḥisāb* to call to ~ | *ḥāsaba*  
 accrue (v.) | *kasaba, iktasaba*  
 accursed | *rajīm*  
 acquire (v.) | *kasaba, iktasaba*  
 acquit of (v.) | *kaffara ‘an*  
 act in s.o.’s stead (v.) | *khalafa*  
 adherent (n.) | *waliyy, mawlā*  
 adjudicate (v.) | *ḥakama*  
 administer (v.) | ‘*amara*  
 admonish (v.) | *dhakkara, wa‘aḏa*  
 admonition, admonishment | *dhikr, dhikrā, tadhkirah, maw‘iḏah* to heed God’s ~s | *tadhakkara*  
 adorn (v.) | *zayyana*  
 affair | *amr*  
 affection | *mawaddah*  
 affectionate | *wadūd*  
 afflict (v.) | *fatana*  
 affliction | *fitnah*  
 affluence: to spoil by ~ | *atrafa* spoil by ~, affluent | *mutraf*  
 age: maidens of the same ~ | *atrāb*  
 agreement | ‘*ahd* to enter into an ~ | ‘*ahida* to conclude an ~ | ‘*ahada*  
 Allāh | *allāh*  
 Allāt | *allāt*  
 all-sufficient | *ghaniyy*  
 alluring: to cause to appear ~, fair, or desirable | *zayyana*  
 ally (n.) | *waliyy* to take s.o. as an ~ | *tawallā*  
 almighty | *jabbār, ‘azīz*  
 alms | *zakāh*  
 alter (v.) | *baddala*  
 al-‘Uzzā | *al-‘uzzā*  
 ambiguous | *mutashābih*  
 ancient | *awwal* writs, scribblings, or tales of the ~s | *asāṭir al-awwalīn*  
 angel, angels | *malak*  
 anger | *ghaḏab* to be angry | *ghaḏiba*  
 animal sacrifice | *nusuk* to perform an ~ | *naḥara*  
 animal: land ~ | *dābbah*  
 animate beings | *anām*  
 announce (v.) | *nabba‘a*  
 apostles (the) | *al-ḥawāriyyūn*  
 appear: to cause to ~ fair, alluring, or desirable | *zayyana*

appoint (v.) | *ja'ala*  
 appoint as a deputy or vicegerent (v.) | *istakhlafa*  
 approach (v.) | *qariba*  
 Arabic | 'arabi not speaking ~ (adj.) | *a'jami*  
 Arabophone: non-~ | *a'jami*  
 archetype of scripture | *umm al-kitāb*  
 ark | *tābūt*  
 arrogant: to be ~ | *takabbara, istakbara*  
 ascend (v.) | 'araja, raqiyah, irtaqā  
 ascertain (v.) | *balā, ablā, ibtalā*  
 assemble (v.) | *hashara*  
 assembly | *hashr, mala'* the ~ on high | *al-mala'*  
*al-a'lā*  
 assess (v.) | *balā, ablā, ibtalā, fatana*  
 assign (v.) | *qayyaḍa*  
 associate (n.) | *sharik, waliyy* to take s.o. as a  
 close ~ | *tawallā*  
 associate (v., especially other beings with  
 God), be an associator (v.) | *ashraka* the  
 sin of associating other beings with God,  
 associationism | *shirk*  
 association: close ~ | *walāyah*  
 associators (the) | *alladhīna ashrakū, al-mushrikūn*  
 assurance | *sakinah*  
 astray: to go ~ | *ḍalla* to lead ~ | *aḍalla* being or  
 going ~ (n.) | *ḍalāl, ḍalālah*  
 atone for (v.) | *kaffara 'an*  
 atonement | *kaffārah*  
 attain (v.) | *adraga*  
 attentive: to consider ~ly | *wa'ā*  
 authority | *sultān*  
 authority: entrusted with ~ | *muhaymin* (or  
*muhayman*)  
 avoid (v.) | *ijtanaba, hajara*  
  
 back: to bring or send ~ | *radda*  
 be afraid (v.) | *khashiya, wajila*  
 be afraid of God (v.) | *ittaqa*  
 Bedouin (the) | *al-a'rāb*  
 being (n.): all ~s | *al-'ālamūn*  
 believe (v.), be a believer (v.) | *āmana, ṣaddaqa*  
 believers (the) | *alladhīna āmanū, al-mu'minūn*  
 beloved ones | *aḥibbā'*  
 benefaction | *nī'mah*  
 benefit (n.) | *manfa'*  
 benefit (v.) | *nafa'a*  
 bequeath (v.) | *awratha*  
 besides | *dūna* + gen., *min dūni* + gen.  
 best | *aḥsan, ḥusnā*  
 bestow (v.) | *razaqa*  
 bestow grace or a benefaction (v.) | *an'ama, na'ama*  
 Bible: the Christian ~ | *al-injīl*  
 blame (n.): full of ~ | *lawwāmah* (feminine)  
 blaze (of hell) | *jaḥīm, sa'ir*  
 bless (v.) | *bāraka* to be ~ed | *tabāraka*  
 blessings (granted by God) | *ālā'*  
 blind (adj.) | *a'mā* to be or become ~ | 'amiya  
 ~ness | *amā*  
 bliss | *na'im*  
 blot out (v.) | *kaffara 'an*

blow (v.) | *nafakha*  
 body | *badan, jasad, jism*  
 book | *kitāb* people of the ~ | *ahl al-kitāb*  
 boundary: God's boundaries | *ḥudūd allāh*  
 bounties (granted by God) | *ālā'*  
 bow (v.) | *raka'a, sajada*  
 breast | *ṣadr* to widen s.o.'s ~ | *sharaha ṣadruhu* his  
 ~ became straitened or tightened | *dāqa ṣadruhu*  
 bring (v.) | *atā bi-*  
 bring back (v.) | *radda*  
 bring down (v.) | *nazzala, anzala, nazala bi-*  
*tanazzala bi-*  
 bring forth (v.) | *ansha'a*  
 build (v.) | *banā*  
 burden (n.) | *iṣr*  
 burning (n.) | *hariq*  
  
 call out (v.) | *nādā*  
 call upon (v.) | *da'ā*  
 cancel out (v.) | *nasakha*  
 capitulate (v.) | *istaslama*  
 carry (v.) | *wazara*  
 casket | *tābūt*  
 cast (v.) | *nabadha*  
 certainly | *qad*  
 characterisation | *mathal*  
 charge (v.) | *kallafa*  
 charge one another with s.th. (v.) | *tawāṣā bi-*  
 charitable: to be ~ | *taṣaddaqa*  
 charity | *zakāh* gift or act of ~ | *ṣadaqah* to make  
 gifts of ~ | *taṣaddaqa*  
 chastise (v.) | 'adhhaba, 'āqaba  
 chastisement | *'adhāb*  
 chest | *tābūt*  
 choose (v.) | *iṣṭafā*  
 Christ | *al-masīh*  
 Christians | *naṣārā*  
 circumambulate (v.) ~ | *ṭāfa, ṭaṭawwafa*  
 clarify (v.) | *bayyana*  
 clear | *bayyin, mubīn, mubayyin, mustabīn* ~ sign,  
 ~ proof | *bayyīnah* ~ speech | *bayān*  
 to make ~, to clarify (v.) | *bayyana*  
 cleave to s.th. (v.) | 'akafa 'alā  
 client | *waliyy, mawlā*  
 cling to s.th. (v.) | 'akafa 'alā  
 cold: excessive, bitter, or biting cold ~ | *zamharīr*  
 come near (v.) | *qariba*  
 command (n.) | *amr*  
 command (v.) | *amara* perpetually ~ing s.th. |  
*ammārah bi-*  
 commit a sin (v.) | *ajrama, fasaqa*  
 community | *ummah*  
 companion, companion demon | *qarīn*  
 compassionate | *raḥīm*  
 compel (v.) | *ittakhadha sukhriyyan*  
 compeller | *jabbār*  
 compensation | *fiḍyah*  
 compensation: tributary ~ | *jizyah*  
 composure | *sakinah*  
 conceal (v.) | *akhfā, asarra, katama, akanna*

concealed: to be ~ | *ghāba*  
conclude (v.): to conclude an agreement, contract, treaty, or covenant | *'āhada, wāthaqa*  
conduct (n.) | *amr*  
conduit | *sabab*  
confirm (v.) | *ṣaddaqa* ~ing (adj.) | *muṣaddiq*  
confirmation | *taṣdiq*  
conjecture (n.) | *ẓann*  
connect (v.) | *allaḥa*  
conscious: to be ~ of God | *ittaḡā* ~ness of God, God--ness | *taḡwā*  
consecrated, in a state of ritual consecration, in the consecrated state of a pilgrim | *ḥurum* (pl.)  
consecration: to quit the state of ritual ~ | *ḥalla*  
consequences: the bad ~ of one's conduct | *wabāl amrihi*  
consider attentively (v.) | *wa'ā*  
constellations (of stars) | *burūj*  
constitution | *taqwīm*  
consult together (v.) | *i'tamara*  
consultation | *shūrā*  
contemptible: more/most ~ | *ardhal*  
contend (v.) | *jāhada*  
contract (n.) | *'ahd* to enter into a ~ | *'ahida* to conclude a ~ | *'āhada*  
conversation: to engage in intimate ~ | *tanājā*  
converts (to Manichaeism?) | *ṣābi'ūn*  
convey (v.), convey revelations (v.) | *awḥā* s.th. that is conveyed, the act of conveying s.th. | *wahy*  
cord | *sabab*  
corrupt (adj.): to become ~ | *fasada*  
corrupt (v.) | *afsada*  
corruption | *fasād* to cause ~ | *afsada* to cause ~ and mischief on earth | *'athā fi l-arḡ muṣidan*  
council: the high or highest ~ | *al-mala' al-a'lā*  
course of action | *amr*  
covenant (n.) | *'ahd, mīthāq* to enter into a ~ | *'ahida* to conclude a ~ | *'āhada, wāthaqa* to impose a ~ on s.o. | *akhadha mīthāqa* + gen.  
covenantal pledge: to take a ~ from s.o. | *akhadha mīthāqa* + gen.  
cover (n.), covering (n.) | *ghishāwah* ~s | *akinnah*  
create (v.) | *bara'a, khalaqa, faṭara* to re~ | *a'āda l-khalqa*  
creator | *badī', bārī', khāliq, fāṭir*  
creatures (the) | *al-bariyyah*  
criterion | *furqān*  
cry (n.) | *ṣayḥah*  
cultivate (v.) | *'amara*  
cunning (n.) | *kayd, makr*  
curse (n.) | *la'nah*  
curse (v.) | *la'ana*  
cursed | *rajīm*  
custom | *sunnah, shir'ah, minḥāj*

dark-eyed maidens | *ḥūr*  
darkness | *ẓulumāt*  
day: judgement ~ | *yawm al-dīn* the final or last ~ | *al-yawm al-ākhir* the ~ of resurrection | *yawm al-qiyyamah* on that ~ | *yawma'idhin*

deaf | *aṣamm* to be ~ | *ṣamma*  
decide (v.) | *faṣala, qaḏā*  
decision, decisive intervention | *amr*  
decision, decisive success or victory | *fath*  
deck out fair (v.) | *zayyana*  
declaim (v.) | *rattala*  
declare inviolable, sacred, or forbidden (v.) | *ḥarrama*  
decree (n.) | *qadar, qadr*  
decree (v.) | *kataba, qaddara, qaḏā*  
dedicate o.s. to God | *aslama*  
dedication (v.): self~ to God | *islām*  
deed: to do righteous ~s | *aṣlaḥa, 'amila l-ṣāliḥāt, 'amila 'amalan ṣāliḥan*  
deeds: wondrous ~ | *ālā'*  
defiant | *mārid, marīd*  
definite in meaning | *muḥkam*  
delay (v.) | *akhkhara*  
delete (v.) | *maḥā*  
deliberate (v.) | *i'tamara*  
delight (n.) | *na'im*  
deliver (v.) | *najjā, anjā*  
deliverance | *furqān*  
delivery (of a message) | *balāgh*  
demon | *jānn* ~s | *jinn*  
deny (v.) | *jāhada, kadhdhaba*  
deputy | *khalīfah* to appoint as a ~ | *istakhlaḥa*  
descend (v.) | *tanazzala, habaṭa*  
descendants of Jacob (the) | *al-asbāṭ*  
descendants | *dhurriyyah*  
descent | *nazlah*  
desirable: to cause to appear ~, alluring, or fair | *zayyana*  
desire (n.) | *hawā*  
desire (v.) | *hawīya, ishtahā*  
detail (n.): to explain, expound, or set out in ~ | *faṣṣala*  
determine (v.) | *qaddara*  
devil | *shayṭān* the ~ | *iblis, al-shayṭān* footsteps of the ~ | *khuṭuwāt al-shayṭān*  
devote o.s. to God (v.) | *aslama* someone who ~s himself to God | *muslim*  
devoted: ~ to God | *ḥanīf, muslim*  
devoted: to be ~ to s.th. | *'akafa 'alā*  
devotion (v.): self~ to God | *islām*  
die (v.): to cause to ~ | *amāta, tawaffā*  
difficulty | *ḥaraj*  
direct (v.) | *dabbara*  
disagree (v.) | *ikhtalafa*  
disappear from sight (v., said of a heavenly body) | *afala*  
disbelieve (v.) | *kafara*  
discern (v.) | *balā, ablā, ibtalā*  
disciples of Jesus (the) | *al-ḥawāriyyūn*  
discord | *fitnah*  
discourse | *ḥadīth*  
dismiss as a lie or as a liar (v.) | *kadhdhaba*  
disobey (v.) | *'aṣā*  
dispute (v.) | *jādala*  
disquieting (adj. qualifying "doubt") | *murīb*  
dissension | *fitnah*



distant (in time or space) | *ba'īd*  
distant relative | *mawlā*  
distinct: to make ~ | *faṣṣala*  
distinction | *furqān*  
distinguish (v.) | *faraqa, farraqa, faṣṣala*  
distort (v.) | *ḥarrafa*  
distress (v.): to be ~ed on account of | *ḍāqa bi-* + gen. *dhar'an*  
divert (v.) | *alhā*  
divide (v.) | *faraqa* to become ~d | *tafarraqa, taqaṭṭa'ū amrahum baynahum*  
division: to introduce ~s into one's religion | *farraqū dīnahum*  
do beforehand (v.) | *aslafa*  
double (v.) | *ḍā'afa*  
doubt (n.) | *rayb, shakk* to be in ~ | *irtāba* cause of ~ | *ribah*  
dower | *ajr*  
drive out (v.) | *akhraja*  
dry land | *al-barr*  
duty | *farīdah*  
dwell: to let ~, to cause to ~ | *askana*  
dwelling place | *qarār, mustaqarr*

earned: rightfully ~ | *ghayr mammūn*  
earth | *arḍ* to cause to be swallowed up by the ~ | *khasafa l-arḍa bi-*  
Eden | *'adn*  
elect (adj.) | *mukhlaṣ*  
elect (v.) | *iṣṭafā*  
elevations | *a'rāf*  
emigrants (the) | *alladhīna hājarū, al-muhājirūn*  
emigrate (v.) | *hājara*  
endow with an even or uniform shape (v.) | *sawwā*  
endow with measure (v.) | *qaddara*  
endowed with power | *qadīr*  
endure steadfastly (v.) | *ṣabara 'alā*  
enemy | *'aduww*  
enjoin (v.) | *amara*  
enjoy (v.) | *tamatta'a*  
enjoyment | *matā'* to grant ~ | *matta'a*  
entice (v.) | *fatana*  
entrust o.s. to God (v.) | *anāba*  
entrust o.s. to s.o. (v.) | *tawakkala 'alā*  
entrusted good | *amānah*  
entrusted with authority | *muhaymin* (or *muhayman*)  
equal in rank | *kufu', kuf, kufuw*  
equals | *andād*  
equitable: to be fair or ~ | *aqsaṭa*  
equity | *qisṭ*  
erase (v.) | *maḥā*  
establish (v.) | *ja'ala, shara'a, aqāma, makkana* ~ed practice, custom, or manner of proceeding | *sunnah, shir'ah, minhāj*  
eternal: to persist ~ly | *khalada* ~ life | *khuld*  
even (adj.) | *sawiyy* to endow with an ~ or uniform shape | *sawwā*  
evenness | *sawā'*  
every | *kull*  
evil: to do ~ | *ajrama* ~doer | *mujrim*

exalt o.s. (v.), become ~ed (v.) | *'alā* to be ~ed | *ta'ālā*  
example | *mathal*  
excellent: most ~ | *aḥsan, ḥusnā*  
except for | *illā*  
exchange (v.) | *baddala, istabdala*  
execute (v.) | *dabbara*  
exemplar | *uswah, ummah, imam, mathal*  
exemplary custom | *ummah, imām*  
expect (v.) | *rajā*  
expel (v.) | *akhraja*  
expiation | *kaffārah*  
explain in detail (v.) | *faṣṣala*  
explain in various ways (v.) | *ṣarrafa*  
explanation | *ta'wīl*  
expound in detail (v.) | *faṣṣala*  
eye (n.) | *'ayn* wide-~d maidens | *'īn* maidens with lustrous or dark ~s | *ḥūr*  
eyesight | *baṣar*

fable: ~s of the ancients, ancient ~s | *asāṭir al-awwalīn*  
fabricate (v.) | *iftarā*  
face (n.) | *wajh*  
face God in self-surrender (v.) | *aslama wajhahu li-llāh / ilā llāh*  
facing one another | *mutaqābilūn*  
faction | *ḥizb, shī'ah, tā'ifah*  
fair: to be ~ or equitable | *aqsaṭa* ~ness | *qisṭ*  
fair: to cause to appear ~, alluring, or desirable | *zayyana*  
faith: someone of pure monotheistic ~ | *ḥanīf*  
faith: to have ~ | *āmana* the ~ful | *alladhīna āmanū, al-mu'minūn*  
false gods | *al-ṭāghūt*  
falsehood | *ifk*  
far-fetched | *ba'īd*  
father (n.) | *ab*  
fault (n.) | *ḥaraj*  
favour (n.) | *faḍl*  
favour (v.) | *faḍḍala*  
favours (granted by God) | *ālā'*  
fear (n.) | *rahbah*  
fear (n.): to quake in ~ | *wajila*  
fear (v.) | *khashiya*  
fear (v.): God-~ers | *ruhbān* God-~ingness (used to designate the Christian episcopate) | *rahbāniyyah*  
fear God (v.) | *ittaqa* those who ~, the God-fearing | *al-muttaqūn* fear of God | *taqwā*  
fervently devoted to God | *ḥanīf*  
fettered | *maghlūl*  
fight (v.) | *qātala*  
filth | *rijs, najas*  
final | *ākhir* the ~ abode | *al-dār al-ākhirah* the ~ day | *al-yawm al-ākhir* the ~ state of things | *al-ākhirah*  
fire (of hell) | *jahīm, nār, sa'ir*  
firm (adj.), firmly crafted | *muḥkam*  
firm (adj.): those ~ly grounded in knowledge | *al-rāsikhūn fi l-'ilm*

firm (adj.): to make ~ | *thabbata*  
 first | *awwal*  
 fixed | *musammā*  
 fleeting: what is ~, the ~ life or world | *al-‘ājilah*  
 flow (v.) | *jarā*  
 foe | *‘aduww*  
 folk: of the common ~ | *ummī*  
 follow (v.) | *khalafa min ba‘di* + gen., *tabi‘a*, *ittaba‘a*  
 footsteps of the devil (the) | *khuṭuwāt al-shayṭān*  
 forbid (v.) | *ḥarrama*, *nahā* ~den | *ḥarām*,  
*muḥarram*, *ḥurum* (pl.), *ḥijr*  
 force (n.): willingly or by ~ | *ṭaw‘an wa-karhan*  
 forefather | *ab*  
 foreign | *a‘jamī*  
 foreordain (v.) | *kataba*  
 foreordination: the night of ~ | *laylat al-qadr*  
 forget (v.) | *nasiya*  
 forgiving (v.) | *ghafara* forgiving | *ghafūr*  
 forgiveness | *tawbah*, *ghufrān*, *maghfirah* to ask  
 for ~ | *istaghfara* to turn in ~ (said of God) | *tāba*  
 form (n.) | *ṣūrah*  
 forsake (v.) | *hajara*  
 fortify (v.) | *‘ayyada*, *rabata‘alā*  
 forward (v.) | *qaddama*  
 free from any needs or wants | *ghaniyy*  
 freeing of a neck (= manumission of a slave) | *taḥrīr*  
*raqabah*, *fakk raqabah*  
 freeman, free person | *ḥurr*  
 friend | *waliyy* to take s.o. as a ~ | *tawallā* ~ship |  
*walāyah*  
 fuel (n.) | *waqūd*  
 fulfil (v.) | *ṣadaqa*, *ṣaddaqa*, *awfā bi-* to ~ one’s  
 obligation or obligations (v.) | *waffā*  
 fuse (v.): an act of fusing together, ~d together | *ratq*  
 futile: in a ~ manner | *bāṭilan*

garden | *jannah*  
 gather (v.) | *ḥashara* ~ing (n.) | *ḥashr*  
 gazelle-eyed fair maidens | *ḥūr*  
 Gehenna | *jahannam*  
 gentile | *ummī*  
 give (v.) | *ātā*  
 give insight (v.) | *aṭla‘a*  
 give more (v.) | *zāda*  
 give permission (v.) | *adhina*  
 give s.o. an abode (v.) | *bawwa‘a*  
 give up (v.) | *aslama*  
 glad tidings | *bushrā* to give or bring ~ | *bashshara*  
 bringer or bearer of ~ | *mubashshir*, *bashīr*  
 glance (n.) | *lamḥ* like the ~ of an eye | *ka-lamḥ*  
*al-baṣar*, *ka-lamḥ bi-l-baṣar*  
 glorify (v.) | *sabbaḥa*  
 Glory be to . . . | *subḥāna*  
 go down (v.) | *habaṭa*  
 go out, go forth (v.) | *kharaja*  
 God | *allāh* ~’s boundaries or limits | *ḥudūd allāh*  
 God: ~-fearers | *ruhbān* ~-fearingness (used  
 to designate the Christian episcopate) |  
*rahbāniyyah*  
 God: ~-wariness, fear of ~, ~-consciousness | *taqwā*

god: false ~s | *al-tāghūt*  
 Goliath | *jālūt*  
 good things | *tayyibāt*  
 good: to cause to appear ~, alluring, or desirable |  
*zayyana*  
 good: to put in ~ order | *aṣlaḥa*  
 good: what is ~, what is recognised to be ~ |  
*al-ma‘rūf*  
 Gospel (the) | *al-injīl*  
 grace (n.) | *fadl*, *ni‘mah* to bestow ~ | *an‘ama*  
 grant enjoyment (v.) | *matta‘a*  
 grateful: to be ~ | *shakara*  
 grave (adj. qualifying “doubt”) | *murīb*  
 great: to deem o.s. ~ | *takabbara*, *istakbara*  
 grounded: those firmly ~ in knowledge | *al-rāsikhūn*  
*fi l-ilm*  
 group (n.) | *shī‘ah*, *tā‘ifah*  
 guard (v.) | *waqā* to ~ o.s. | *ittaqā*  
 guarded tablet | *lawḥ mahfūz*  
 guardians | *khazānah*  
 guidance | *hudā*  
 guide (v.) | *hadā* to be ~d | *ihādā*  
 guile (n.) | *kayd*, *makr*

hand | *yad*  
 hard: to become ~ | *qasā*  
 harden (v., tr.) | *ja‘ala qāsiyatan*, *shadda ‘alā*  
 harm (n.) | *adhā*  
 harm (v.) | *ḍarra*, *ḍalama*  
 hasten (v., intr.): what ~s away, the world that ~s  
 away | *al-‘ājilah*  
 hatred | *baghdā‘*  
 haughty: to behave haughtily | *takabbara*, *istakbara*  
 hear (v.) | *sami‘a* ~ing (adj.) | *sami‘* ~ing (n.) |  
*sam‘*  
 heart | *qalb*, *fu‘ād* with a sound ~ | *bi-qalb salīm*  
 those in whose ~s is sickness | *alladhīna fī*  
*qulūbihim marād*  
 heaven | *samā‘*  
 heaviness | *waqr*  
 heed (v.) | *dhakara* to ~ God’s reminders |  
*tadhakkara*, *iddakara*  
 heedless: to be ~ | *ghafala* ~ness | *ghaflah*  
 heights | *a‘rāf*  
 hell | *jahannam*  
 hellfire | *jaḥīm*, *nār*, *sa‘īr*  
 help (v.) | *‘azzara*  
 helpers (the) | *al-anṣār*  
 hereafter (the) | *al-ākhirah*  
 hidden: to be ~ | *ghāba* the ~ | *al-ghayb*  
 hide (v.) | *akhfā*, *asarra*  
 high: to rise ~, to make o.s. ~ | *‘alā*  
 holy | *muqaddas*, *quddūs*, *ḥarām*, *muḥarram* to  
 declare s.o. to be ~, to proclaim s.o.’s holiness |  
*qaddasa* the ~ spirit | *rūḥ al-qudus*  
 honour (v.) | *akrama*  
 hope (v.) | *rajā*  
 host (n.) | *ḥizb*  
 host: the highest ~ | *al-mala‘ al-a‘lā*  
 hour (especially hour of resurrection) | *sā‘ah*

houris | *hūr*  
 house | *bayt*  
 human beings, humankind | *al-ins*  
 humiliation | *khizy*  
 hypocrisy | *nifāq*  
 hypocrites (the) | *al-munāfiqūn, alladhīna nāfaqū*  
  
 Iblīs | *iblis*  
 idol | *ṣanam, wathan*  
 idolaters (the) | *alladhīna ashtrakū, al-mushrikūn*  
 idols (the) | *al-tāghūt*  
 ill | *marīḍ*  
 illiterate | *ummī*  
 images | *tamāthīl*  
 immoral: to act ~ly | *ajrama, fasaqa*  
 immortal: to be ~ | *khalada* to make s.o. ~ |  
     *akhlada* ~ity | *khuld*  
 implausible | *ba'īd*  
 impose an obligation (v.) | *'ahida, kataba*  
 improbable | *ba'īd*  
 impurity | *rijs*  
 In the name of God, the truly Merciful | *bi-smi llāhi*  
     *l-raḥmāni l-raḥīm*  
 incite (v.): perpetually ~ing to s.th. | *ammārah bi-*  
 increase (v.) | *zāda*  
 indecency | *fāḥishah*  
 indigent | *miskīn, faqīr*  
 indistinguishable | *mutashābih*  
 inform (v.) | *aṭla'a*  
 ingratitude | *kufr, kufrān*  
 ingurgitation: the ~ tree | *shajarat al-zaqqūm*  
 inhabit (v.) | *'amara*  
 inherit (v.) | *warītha*  
 injure (v.) | *zālama*  
 injustice: inflicting ~ | *zallām*  
 insight: those endowed with ~ | *ulū l-albāb*  
 instead of | *dūna* + gen., *min dūni* + gen.  
 institute (v.) | *shara'a*  
 instruction: salvific divine ~ | *furqān*  
 intend (v.) | *arāda*  
 intercede (v.) | *shafa'a*  
 intercession | *shafā'ah*  
 intercessor | *shafī'*  
 interdiction: sacred ~s | *ḥurumāt*  
 intermediate community | *ummah wasaṭ*  
 interpretation | *ta'wīl*  
 interval: at ~s | *'alā mukth*  
 intimate (adj.): to engage in ~ conversation | *tanājā*  
 inviolable | *ḥarām, muḥarram, ḥurum* (pl.) to  
     declare to be ~ | *ḥarrama* ~ precinct | *ḥaram*  
 invisible: the ~ | *al-ghayb*  
 invocation | *dhikr*  
 invoke (v.) | *dhakara*  
 Ishmael | *ismā'īl*  
 Israelites (the) | *banū isrā'īl*  
  
 Jacob: the descendants of ~ | *al-asbāṭ*  
 Jesus | *'isā*  
 Jews (the) | *alladhīna hādū, al-yahūd*  
 jinn | *jinn* ~i | *jānn* ~-possessed | *majnūn*  
 John | *yahyā*

join (v.) | *laḥiqa*  
 join (v.): an act of ~ing together, ~ed together | *ratq*  
 journey (v.) | *sāra, sāḥa, ḍaraba*  
 Judaism: to espouse ~ | *hāda*  
 judge (v.) | *hakama*  
 judgement | *dīn* ~ day | *yawm al-dīn*  
 just (adj.): to be ~, to act ~ly | *'adala*  
 justice | *'adl, qisṭ*

Ka'bah (the) | *al-ka'bah*  
 keep up prayer (v.) | *aqāma l-ṣalāh*  
 keepers | *khazānah*  
 kill (v.) | *qatala, amāta*  
 kind (n.) | *zawj* to divide up into ~s | *zawwaja*  
 king | *malik, malīk* ~dom, ~ship | *mulk, malakūt*  
 knowing, knowledgeable | *'alīm*  
 knowledge: those firmly grounded in ~ | *al-rāsikhūn*  
     *fī l-'ilm*

lame | *a'raj*  
 land (n.) | *arḍ* dry ~ | *barr* ~ animal | *dābbah*  
 language | *lisān*  
 last | *ākhir* the ~ abode | *al-dār al-ākhirah* the ~  
     day | *al-yawm al-ākhir*  
 lasting home | *qarār*  
 layer (n.): in ~s | *ṭibāqan*  
 leave behind (v.) | *khallafa*  
 lesson | *'ibrah*  
 letter sequences (at the beginning of surahs) |  
     ~*-l-r* etc.

lewdness, lewd act | *fāḥishah*  
 liar: to dismiss as a ~ | *kadhhaba*  
 lie (n.) | *ifk*  
 lie (n.): to dismiss as a ~ | *kadhhaba*  
 life, person | *nafs*  
 life: to bring to ~, to bring back to ~ | *ahyā* the  
     proximate ~, this ~, the present ~ | *al-ḥayāh*  
     *al-dunyā*  
 lift (v.) | *kashafa*  
 light (n.) | *nūr*  
 lighten (v.) | *khaffafa*  
 like one another | *mutashābih*  
 likeness | *mathal*  
 limit: God's ~s | *ḥudūd allāh*  
 listen (v.) | *istama'a*  
 loan (n.) | *qarḍ* to give God a good ~ | *aqraḍa llāha*  
     *qarḍan ḥasanan*  
 lord | *rabb*  
 love (v.) | *aḥabba* ~d ones | *aḥibbā'*  
 loving (adj.) | *wadūd*  
 low: ~er, ~est | *ardhal*

mad, madman | *majnūn*  
 maiden: gazelle-eyed fair ~s | *hūr* wide-eyed ~s |  
     *'īn* ~s of the same age | *atrāb* ~s full  
     of bosom | *kawā'ib*  
 maintain (v.) | *'amara*  
 maintaining s.o. (adj.) | *qawwām 'alā*  
 make (v.) | *ja'ala*  
 make pathways (v.) | *salaka subulan*  
 make things clear (v.) | *bayyana*

manageable: to make ~ | *dhallala, ja'ala dhalūlan*  
 Manāt | *manāt*  
 manifest (adj.): to be ~ | *tajallā*  
 manumission of a slave | *tahrīr raqabah, fakk raqabah*  
 matter (n.) | *amr*  
 meaning (n.): definite or unequivocal in ~ | *muḥkam*  
 measure (n.) | *qadar, qadr* to endow with ~ | *qaddara*  
 menstruation | *maḥīd*  
 mention (v.) | *dhakara*  
 merciful | *raḥīm* the Merciful | *al-raḥmān*  
 mercy | *raḥmah* to have ~ | *raḥima*  
 message | *balāgh*  
 messenger | *rasūl, mursal*  
 middle community | *ummah wasaṭ*  
 middling | *muqtaṣid*  
 mighty | *jabbār, 'azīz*  
 mindful: to be ~ of God's revelations or signs, to bear God's revelations or signs in mind | *tadhakkara*  
 mindful: to be ~ of God | *ittaqa* ~ness of God | *taqwā*  
 mischief: to make or cause ~ | *aḥsada* to cause ~ and corruption on earth | *'athā fi l-arḍi mufsidan*  
 model (n.) | *uswah, ummah, imām*  
 moderate | *muqtaṣid*  
 monasticism | *rahbāniyyah*  
 Moses | *mūsā*  
 mother: the ~ of settlements, the ~-town | *umm al-qurā* the ~-scripture, the ~ of the scripture | *umm al-kitāb*  
 motion: to set in ~ | *sayyara*  
 multiply (v.) | *dā'afa*  
 mustering (n.) | *ḥashr*  
 mute (adj.) | *abkam*

name (n.) | *ism*  
 named | *musammā*  
 narrow (adj.) | *ḍayyiḡ*  
 nation | *ummah, ḥizb, qawm*  
 native | *ummi*  
 near | *qarīb* to come ~ | *qariba* to bring ~, to allow to come ~ | *qarraba* those brought ~ (to God) | *al-muqarrabūn* to draw ~ (intr.) | *iqtaraba*  
 neck (= slave) | *raqabah* the freeing of a ~ (= manumission of a slave) | *tahrīr raqabah, fakk raqabah*  
 necklaces: ritual ~ | *qalā'id*  
 need (n.), feeling of need | *ḥājah*  
 need (n.): free from ~s | *ghaniyy*  
 needful | *faqīr*  
 neglect (v.), neglect to pay (v.) | *adā'a*  
 neglect to do s.th. (v.) | *akkhara*  
 next of kin | *waliyy*  
 night of foreordination, night of glory, night of power (the) | *laylat al-qadr*

obligation: to impose an ~ | *'ahida, kataba*  
 observe (v.): what can be ~ed | *al-shahādah*  
 observe or perform prayer (v.) | *aqāma l-ṣalāh*  
 offerings | *hady*  
 offspring | *dhurriyyah, walad*

off-repeated verses or utterances | *mathānī*  
 once: all at ~ | *jumlatan wāḥidatan*  
 opinion | *ẓann*  
 oppress (v.) | *istaḍ'afa*  
 ordain (v.) | *qaddara*  
 ordainment | *qadar, qadr*  
 order: to put in good ~ | *aṣlaḥa*  
 ordinance | *fariḍah, kitāb*  
 originator | *badi'*  
 orphan | *yatīm*  
 outcome: ultimate ~ | *ta'wīl*  
 overlook (v.) | *tajāwaza 'an*  
 owner | *mālik*

pair (n.) | *zawj*  
 pair (v.) | *zawwaja*  
 palace | *miḥrāb*  
 parable | *mathal*  
 paradise | *al-jannah*  
 partition (n.) | *ḥijāb*  
 partner, partner deity | *sharik*  
 party | *ḥizb*  
 path | *sabīl, ṣirāṭ*  
 pathway | *sabab*  
 pathway: to make ~s | *salaka subulan*  
 patience | *ṣabr*  
 patient: to be ~ | *ṣabara*  
 patron | *waliyy, mawlā*  
 pay in full (v.) | *waffā*  
 peace | *salm, silm, salām*  
 peace: to be or become at ~ | *iṭma'anna*  
 pebble: storm of ~s | *ḥāṣib*  
 pelt (v.): to ~ with stones | *rajama* deserving to be ~ed with stones | *rajīm*  
 penalty | *jazā'*  
 penitent, ever-penitent | *tawwāb*  
 people | *ḥizb, nās, qawm*  
 perform prayer (v.) | *aqāma l-ṣalāh*  
 perform the pilgrimage (v.) | *ḥajja*  
 perhaps | *la'alla*  
 period of time | *ummah*  
 permission | *idhn*  
 permit (v.) | *aḥalla* ~ted | *ḥalāl, ḥill* to be ~ted | *ḥalla*  
 perpetually commanding s.th. or inciting to s.th. | *ammārah bi-*  
 persecution | *fitnah*  
 person | *naḥs*  
 persuade (v.) | *sawwala*  
 pervert (v.) | *ḥarrafa*  
 Pharaoh | *fir'aun*  
 piety | *birr*  
 pilgrim: in the consecrated state of a ~ | *ḥurum* (pl.)  
 pilgrim: to quit the ~ state | *ḥalla*  
 pilgrimage | *ḥajj, ḥijj* to perform the ~ | *ḥajja*  
 pillar | *amad*  
 place where a ritual is performed | *mash'ar*  
 pledge (n.) | *wa'd, wa'id*  
 pledge (v.) | *wa'ada*  
 plot (n.) | *kayd, makr*  
 plot (v.) | *kāda, makara*

poet | *shā'ir*  
 polluted | *jumub, najas*  
 polytheists (the) | *alladhīna ashrakū, al-mushrikūn*  
 poor | *miskīn, faqīr*  
 portents (of the world's end) | *ashrāt*  
 possess (v.) | *malaka*  
 possessed (by demons or jinn) | *majnūn*  
 possessions, wealth | *māl*  
 possessor | *mālik*  
 postpone (v.) | *akhhara*  
 posture (n.) | *taqwīm*  
 pour forth (v.) | *afāḍa*  
 power (n.): to have ~ | *qadara* endowed with ~ |  
*qadr* the night of ~ | *laylat al-qadr*  
 powerful | *jabbār, 'azīz*  
 powerless | *ḍa'if* to deem or treat as ~ | *istad'afa*  
 practice (n.): customary or established ~ | *sunnah,*  
*shir'ah, minhāj*  
 praise (n.) | *ḥamd* ~worthy | *ḥamīd, maḥmūd*  
 praise (v.) | *ḥamīda*  
 pray (v.) | *ṣallā*  
 prayer | *ṣalāh* to perform or keep up ~ | *aqāma*  
*l-ṣalāh*  
 prefer (v.) | *iṣṭafā*  
 prepare (v.), make preparations (v.) | *qaddama*  
 prescribe (v.) | *kataba*  
 prescription | *fariḍah, kitāb*  
 present: the ~ life | *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā*  
 preservation | *ḥifẓ*  
 press hard (v.) | *istad'afa*  
 price | *thaman*  
 priests | *qissīsūn*  
 produce (v.) | *ansha'a*  
 prohibit (v.) | *ḥarrama* ~ed | *ḥarām, muḥarram,*  
*ḥurum* (pl.), *ḥijr*  
 prohibition: sacred ~s | *ḥurumāt*  
 promise (n.) | *wa'd*  
 promise (v.) | *wa'ada*  
 prompt (v.) | *ṭawwa'a*  
 proof | *burhān*  
 prophet | *nabiyy* ~hood | *nubuwwah*  
 prosper (v.) | *aflaḥa*  
 prosper (v.): to let ~ | *aṣṣalāh*  
 prostrate (v.): to ~ o.s. | *sajada*  
 prostration: place of ~ | *maṣjid*  
 protect (v.) | *waqā* to ~ o.s. | *ittaqā*  
 protection: to seek ~ | *ista'ādha*  
 protégé | *waliyy, mawlā*  
 provide (v.) | *razaqa*  
 provision | *rizq*  
 proximate: the ~ life | *al-ḥayāh al-dunyā*  
 psalms: a collection of ~, a book of ~ | *zabūr*  
 punish (v.) | *'adhhaba*  
 punishment | *jazā', rijz, rujz, 'adhāb*  
 purchase (v.) | *ishṭarā*  
 pure | *ṭahūr* to be or become ~ | *ṭahara/ṭahura*  
 purify (v.) | *zakkā, ṭahhara* to ~ o.s. | *tazakkā,*  
*ṭaṭahhara* purified | *muṭahhar* purified  
 spouses | *azwāj muṭahharah*  
 put forward a similitude (v.) | *ḍaraba mathalan*

quake in fear (v.) | *wajila*  
 quarrel (v.) | *tanāza'a*  
 rabbis, rabbinic scholars | *aḥbār, rabbāniyyūn*  
 radiant: be ~ (v.) | *tajallā*  
 rancour | *ghill*  
 rank (n.) | *darajah, ṣaff*  
 ransom (n.) | *fidyah*  
 reach (v.) | *adraka*  
 reassurance | *sakinah*  
 recitation | *qur'ān*  
 recite (v.) | *talā, qara'a*  
 reckoning (n.) | *ḥisāb* to subject to ~ (v.) | *ḥāsaba*  
 recline (v.) | *ittaka'a*  
 recognise (v.) | *'arafa* what is ~ to be good or right |  
*al-ma'rūf*  
 recognise (v.): to fail to ~ | *ankara*  
 recompense (n.) | *jazā'*  
 recompense (v.) | *jazā*  
 reconcile (v.) | *allafa*  
 recount (v.) | *talā*  
 recreate (v.) | *a'āda l-khalqa*  
 redemption | *fidyah*  
 reduce (v.) | *radda*  
 reflect (v., intr.) | *tadabbara, tafakkara*  
 refuge, place of refuge | *ma'wā, murāgham*  
 refuge: to seek ~ | *ista'ādha*  
 reign | *mulk*  
 reinforce (v.) | *madda*  
 reject (v.) | *ankara* what is ~ed | *al-munkar*  
 rejoice (v.) | *istabshara*  
 relative (n.): distant ~ | *mawlā*  
 relenting, ever-relenting | *tawwāb*  
 religion | *dīn, millah*  
 rely upon (v.) | *tawakkala 'alā*  
 remain forever (v.) | *khalada*  
 remain sitting (v.) | *qa'ada*  
 remember (v.) | *dhakara, tadhakkara*  
 remembrance | *dhikr, dhikrā, tadhkirah*  
 remind (v.) | *dhakkara*  
 reminder, reminding exhortation | *dhikr, dhikrā,*  
*tadhkirah* to utter ~s | *dhakkara* to heed  
 God's ~s | *tadhakkara*  
 remove (v.) | *adhhaba, kashafa*  
 repair (n.): to keep in good ~, to bear responsibility  
 for keeping in good ~ | *'amara*  
 repay in full (v.) | *waffā*  
 repeat (v.): verses or utterances to be ~ed, utterances  
 that are oft-~ed | *mathānī*  
 repent, turn in repentance (v.) | *tāba*  
 repentance | *tawbah, tawb*  
 repentant, ever-repentant | *tawwāb*  
 reply (v.) | *ajāba, istajāba*  
 reprehensible: what is ~ | *al-munkar*  
 reprieve (v.) | *akhhara*  
 repudiate (v.) | *kafara*  
 repudiation | *kufr*  
 repudiator: to be a ~ | *kafara* the ~s | *alladhīna*  
*kafarū, al-kāfirūn, al-kuffār*  
 reputation | *lisān*

requital | *jazā'*  
 requite (v.) | *jazā*  
 resembling one another (adj.) | *mutashābih*  
 resistance: without ~ | *'an yad*  
 resolve (n.) | *amr*  
 respond (v.) | *ajāba, istajāba*  
 resting place | *qarār, mustaqarr*  
 restrain (v.) | *ṣabara*  
 restrain from (v.) | *nahā 'an*  
 restraint: self-~ | *ṣabr*  
 restrict one's worship to God alone (v.) | *akhlāṣa l-dīna/dīnahu li-llāh*  
 resurrect (v.) | *ba'atha, anshara*  
 resurrection | *ba'th, qiyāmah, nushūr*  
 retaliate (v.) | *'āqaba*  
 retaliation | *qiṣāṣ, 'iqāb*  
 retribution | *'adhāb, 'iqāb, qiṣāṣ*  
 retribution: to exact ~ | *intaqama* exacting ~ (adj.) | *dhū intiqām*  
 return (v.) | *radda*  
 return to God (v.) | *anāba*  
 reveal (v.) | *nazzala, anzala, awḥā*  
 revelation | *tanzīl, waḥy* to convey ~s | *awḥā*  
 revive (v.) | *aḥyā*  
 reward (n.) | *jazā', thawāb*  
 reward (v.) | *jazā*  
 right (adj.): to put ~ | *aṣlaḥa*  
 right (adj.): what is ~, what is recognised to be ~ | *al-ma'rūf*  
 right hand | *yamīn*  
 righteous | *ṣāliḥ aṣlaḥa*: to be ~ | *ṣalaḥa* to act ~ly, to do ~ deeds | *aṣlaḥa, 'amīla l-ṣāliḥāt, 'amīla 'amalan ṣāliḥan*  
 righteousness, righteous conduct | *birr*  
 rightfully earned | *ghayr mamnūn*  
 rise high (v.) | *'alā*  
 ritual (n.): place where a ~ is performed | *mash'ar*  
 ritual necklaces | *qalā'id*  
 ritual observances | *sha'ā'ir*  
 rivals | *andād*  
 river | *naḥar*  
 road | *ṣirāṭ*  
 roast (v., intr.), be roasted (v.) | *ṣaliya*  
 roof | *saqf, samk*  
 rope | *sabab*  
 row | *ṣaff*  
 rulership | *mulk*  
  
 Sabians | *ṣābi'ūn*  
 sacred | *ḥarām, muḥarram, ḥurum* (pl.), *muqaddas*  
 to declare to be ~ | *ḥarrama* ~ precinct | *ḥaram* ~ rites or interdictions | *ḥurumāt*  
 sacrifice (n.) | *dhibḥ, qurbān, nusuk*  
 sacrifice (n.): place of ~ | *maḥill*  
 sacrifice (v.) | *dhabāḥa, qarraba, naḥara*  
 sacrificial animals | *budn*  
 sacrificial stone | *nuṣub*  
 safe (adj.): render ~ (v.) | *āmana*  
 safeguarding (n.) | *ḥifẓ*  
 safety, sense of safety | *amanah*

safety: salvific ~ or security | *salām*  
 salvation | *najāh, furqān*  
 salvific divine instruction | *furqān*  
 salvific safety or security | *salām*  
 sanctuary | *miḥrāb*  
 Saul | *ṭālūt*  
 save (v.) | *najjā, anjā*  
 saying (n.) | *mathal*  
 scheme (n.) | *kayd, makr*  
 scheme (v.) | *kāda, makara*  
 scholars | *ahbār*  
 scorching (n.) | *saqar*  
 screen (n.) | *ḥijāb*  
 scribbling (n.): ancient ~s | *asāṭir al-awwālīn*  
 scripture | *kitāb* people of the ~, ~-owners | *ahl al-kitāb* ~less | *ummī* mother of the ~ | *umm al-kitāb*  
 sea | *baḥr*  
 seal (n.) | *khātama*  
 seal (v.) | *khatama, ṭaba'a*  
 sect | *ḥizb*  
 secure (adj.): to be or become ~ | *iṭma'anna*  
 secure (adj.): to render ~ | *āmana*  
 security, sense of security | *amanah*  
 security: salvific ~ or safety | *salām*  
 seduce (v.) | *aghwa*  
 see (v.) | *abṣara, ra'ā* in order to be ~n by people | *ri'ā'a l-nās*  
 seeing (adj.), having eyesight (adj.) | *baṣīr*  
 seek (v.) | *ibtaghā*  
 self, vital self | *nafs*  
 self-restraint | *ṣabr*  
 self-sufficient | *ghaniyy*  
 self-surrender to God, self-submission to God | *islām*  
 sell (v.) | *sharā, ishṭarā*  
 send (v.) | *arsala*  
 send ahead (v.), send forward (v.) | *qaddama*  
 send back (v.) | *radda*  
 send forth (v.) | *ba'atha*  
 separate (v.) | *faraqa*  
 servant | *'abd*  
 serve (v.) | *'abada*  
 serve for wages (v.) | *ajara*  
 set (v., said of a heavenly body) | *afala*  
 set in motion (v.) | *sayyara*  
 set out in detail (v.) | *faṣṣala*  
 settle (v., tr.) | *ista'mara*  
 settlement | *qaryah* the mother of ~s | *umm al-qurā*  
 sew (v.): an act of ~ing together, ~ed together | *ratq*  
 shape (n.) | *ṣūrah*  
 shape (v.) | *ṣawwara*  
 share (n.) | *khalāq*  
 shift (v.) | *ḥarrafa*  
 show (v.) | *arā*  
 shun (v.) | *hajara*  
 sick | *marīḍ*  
 sickness | *marād* those in whose hearts is ~ | *alladhīna fī qulūbihim marād*  
 sight | *baṣar*  
 sign, sign-pronouncement | *āyah*



signs (of the world's end) | *ashrāt*  
 Sijjīn | *sijjīn*  
 similitude | *mathal* to put forward a ~ | *ḍaraba mathalan*  
 sin (n.): to commit a ~ | *ajrama, fasaqa* ~ner | *mujrim*  
 sincere: to be ~ | *ṣadaqa*  
 single out (v.) | *akhlaṣa*  
 sit down upright (v.) | *istawā*  
 sit (v.): to remain ~ting | *qa'ada*  
 situation | *amr*  
 sky | *samā'*  
 slaughter (v.) | *dhabaḥa*  
 slave (n.) | *raqabah* (literally, "neck"), 'abd the freeing of a ~ | *tahrīr raqabah, fakk raqabah*  
 smelt (v.) | *fātana*  
 so that | *la'alla*  
 sojourn (n.) | *mustaqarr*  
 Solomon | *sulaymān*  
 son | *ibn*  
 soothsayer | *kāhīn*  
 sorcerer | *sāhīr*  
 soul | *nafs*  
 specified | *musammā*  
 speculation | *ẓann*  
 speech: clear ~ | *bayān*  
 spend (v.) | *anfaqa*  
 spirit (n.) | *rūḥ* the holy ~ | *rūḥ al-quḍus*  
 spoil by affluence (v.) | *atrafa* ~t by affluence | *mutraf*  
 sport: for ~ | 'abathan  
 spouse | *zawj*  
 spread out (v.) | *basata, dahā, ṣaṭaha, ṭahā, farasha, madda, mahada* something that is ~ | *mahd, mihād*  
 stable abode, stable place | *qarār, mustaqarr, dār al-qarār*  
 stairs | *ma'ārij*  
 stay (v.): place to ~ (n.) | *qarār, mustaqarr*  
 stay at a place (v.) | 'amara  
 stay home (v.) | *qa'ada*  
 steadfast: to be ~ | *ṣabara* ~ness | *ṣabr*  
 stone (v.) | *rajama* deserving to be ~d | *rajīm*  
 store up (v.) | *qaddama*  
 stores (n.) | *khazā'in*  
 storm of pebbles | *ḥāṣīb*  
 straight: the ~ road or path | *al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*  
 straighten o.s. (v.) | *istawā*  
 straiten (v.): his breast became ~ed | *dāqa ṣadruhu*  
 stray (v.) | *ḍalla* to let or cause to ~ | *aḍalla* ~ing (n.) | *dalāl, ḍalālāh*  
 stream (n.) | *nahar*  
 strengthen (v.) | *ayyada, rabaṭa 'alā*  
 strive (v.) | *jāhada*  
 struggle (v.) | *jāhada*  
 subject (v.) | *dhallala, ja'ala dhalūlan, sakhkhara*  
 submission to God, self-submission to God | *islām*  
 submissive: to make ~ | *dhallala, ja'ala dhalūlan*  
 submit o.s. to God (v.) | *aslama* someone who ~s himself to God | *muslim*  
 subservient: to make ~ | *dhallala, ja'ala dhalūlan, sakhkhara*

substitute (v.) | *baddala, istabdala*  
 succeed (=follow; v., tr.) | *khalafa min ba'di* + gen.  
 success: decisive ~ | *fath*  
 successor | *khalīfah*  
 suddenly | *baghtatan*  
 sufficient, self~, all~ | *ghaniyy*  
 suggest (v.) | *tawwā'a*  
 support (v.) | 'azzara  
 surah | *sūrah*  
 surely | *qad*  
 surplus, surplus property | 'afw  
 surrender (=capitulate; v., intr.) | *istaslama*  
 surrender (=give up, abandon; v., tr.) | *aslama*  
 surrender (n.): self~ to God | *islām*  
 surrender o.s. to God (v.) | *aslama* someone who ~s himself to God | *muslim*  
 sustenance | *rizq*  
 swallow (v.): to cause s.o. to be ~ed up by the earth | *khasafa l-arḍa bi-*  
 sway (v.) | *māda*  
 swerve (v.) | *zāgha* to cause to ~ | *azāgha*  
 tablet | *lawḥ* guarded ~ | *lawḥ mahfūz*  
 taboo | *ḥijr*  
 take from life (v.), take in death (v.) | *tawaffā*  
 tales of the ancients | *asā'ir al-awwālīn*  
 talk to one another in private (v.) | *tanājā*  
 tamper with s.th. (v.) | *harrafa*  
 taste (v.) | *dhāqa* to cause to ~, to let ~ | *adhāqa*  
 teach (v.) | 'allama  
 teaching (n.) | *ḥadīth*  
 teaching (n.): religious ~ | *millah*  
 tear apart (v.) | *fataqa*  
 temple | *bayt*  
 temptation | *fitnah* to lead into ~ | *fatana*  
 term (n.) | *ajal*  
 terror | *ru'b*  
 test (n.) | *balā'*  
 test (v.) | *balā, ablā, ibtalā, fatana*  
 testimony | *shahādah*  
 that (demonstrative pronoun) | *dhālika, tilka*  
 this (demonstrative pronoun) | *hādihā, hādhihi*  
 threat, threatening pledge | *wa'id*  
 throne | 'arsh, kursiyy  
 tidings | *naba'* to give ~ | *nabba'a*  
 tidings: glad ~ | *bushrā* to give or bring glad ~ | *bashshara* bringer or bearer of glad ~ | *mubashshir, bashīr*  
 tight (adj.) | *ḍayyiq*  
 tighten (v.): his breast became ~ed | *dāqa ṣadruhu*  
 time (n.): period of ~ | *ummah*  
 time (n.): point of ~, a certain moment in ~ | *ḥīn*  
 tongue | *lisān*  
 Torah (the) | *al-tawrah*  
 torment (n.) | 'adhāb  
 torment (v.) | 'adhābaha  
 touch (v.) | *tāmasa, massa*  
 towers | *burūj*  
 town | *madīnah, qaryah* the mother~ | *umm al-qurā*  
 tranquillity | *sakīnah*  
 transgress (v.) | *fasaqa*

transmission (of a message) | *balāgh*  
 travel (v.) | *sāra, sāha, daraba* enable to ~ (v.) |  
*sayyara*  
 treasures (n.) | *khazā'in*  
 treaty | *'ahd, mīthāq* to enter into a ~ | *'ahida* to  
 conclude a ~ | *'ahada, wāthaqa*  
 trial (n.) | *fitnah*  
 tribe: the ~s of Israel | *al-asbāt*  
 tribute, tributary compensation | *jizyah*  
 troop | *hizb*  
 true: to hold, deem, or declare to be ~ | *šaddaqa bi-*  
 to cause to come ~ | *šaddaqa*  
 trust (n.) | *amānah*  
 trustworthy | *muhaymin* (or *muhayman*)  
 try (v.) | *balā, ablā, ibtalā*  
 turn about (v., tr.) | *šarrafa*  
 turn away (v., tr.) | *šadda, šarafa*  
 turn away, turn one's back (v., intr.) | *a'raḍa, tawallā*  
 turn in repentance, turn in forgiveness (v., intr.) | *tāba*  
 turn or return to God (v., intr.) | *anāba*  
  
 unbelief | *kufī*  
 unbeliever: to be an ~ | *kafara* the ~s | *alladhīna*  
*kafarū, al-kāfirūn, al-kuffār*  
 uncircumcised | *ghulf*  
 unclean | *junub, rijs, najas*  
 understand (v.) | *'aqala, faqīha*  
 unequivocal | *muhkam*  
 ungrateful: to be ~ | *kafara*  
 uniform (adj.): to endow with a ~ or even shape |  
*sawwā*  
 unjust | *ẓallām*  
 unjust: to act ~ly | *qasaṭa*  
 unlettered | *ummī*  
 unseen: the ~ | *al-ghayb*  
 upright (in faith) | *ḥanīf*  
 urge (v.) | *amara*  
 urge one another to do s.th. (v.) | *tawāṣā bi-*  
 usher (n.) | *sā'iq*  
 usury | *ribā*  
 utterances-to-be-repeated | *mathānī*  
  
 vain: in ~ | *bāṭilan*  
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# INDEX OF ARABIC TERMS ARRANGED ACCORDING TO THE ENGLISH ALPHABET



Terms are listed strictly according to the English alphabet, disregarding *alif*, *‘ayn*, and all diacritics. Page numbers in bold indicate entries that have the word in question in the main heading. Page numbers in ordinary roman typeface reference other entries. Verbs are generally listed without prepositions or other linguistic information that is contained in the main dictionary. Some Arabic expressions that are commonly used with the definite article (e.g., *al-injil*) are listed both with and without the article for maximum accessibility. Finally, four entries of the dictionary contain excursuses, which are listed at the end of the present index.

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# INDEX OF QUR'ANIC VERSES

This index has no ambition to be comprehensive, and it includes only those Qur'anic verses and passages that form the subject of substantial comment or analysis in their own right. By contrast, verses that are referenced or cited simply or primarily because they exemplify a given term or expression are not taken into account. To illustrate this policy, the index does not list the many Qur'anic occurrences of the verb → *jāhada* (“to contend”) that figure in the respective entry; but the index does include Q 9:29, which is treated in some detail in the final section of the article on → *jāhada*. The upshot is that readers interested in a specific Qur'anic verse that employs terminology analysed in this dictionary—such as Q 2:96, which mentions “the associators” (*alladhīna ashrakū*)—cannot rely on the present index to supply an exhaustive list of where the verse in question figures throughout the book. In such cases, readers will therefore need to go directly to the entry on → *ashraka*, “to associate,” in the main dictionary (potentially via the previous two indices).

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